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“A man may take a drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”

I find this excerpt from *Politics and the English Language* to be a direct reflection of our society today. Back in the days of early America, the English language was very sophisticated and cordial. As time wore on, people began to shorten words and phrases, until all formality from the Old World was lost. Why bother using long, eloquent phrases to express one's opinion when your reply could be as short and simple as a 'Yes' or 'No'? We further butchered the English language when we came up with such sayings as “Yo, what up?” to say “Hello, how are you?” These foolish and inaccurate phrases somehow become ingrained in our minds and deemed acceptable. Our lack of structure in our language is then reflected in our writing and our thoughts.

Technology is also to blame for our lack of regard for proper grammar. With the increase in technology, Americans spend more and more of their time watching television, surfing the internet, or using online services such as myspace or facebook. Stimulating media such as books are pushed aside as we turn our attention to shows like Family Guy and South Park for entertainment. I believe it is safe to say that more people quote from those shows than from 1984. When leaving comments or messages on facebook and myspace, many students no longer feel the need to capitalize sentences correctly or use proper grammar. Our neglect for proper English grammar is then reflected in our reports, papers, and other written documents. The number of students who fall into this trend is quite shocking and alarming.

“There is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves.”

I find this excerpt from George Orwell’s *Politics* to again be extremely accurate when describing our modern society. In his essay, Orwell lists many common phrases that we use today, such as: Achilles’ heel, swan song, toe the line, and fishing in troubled waters. We use these phrases so often and so freely that the power behind their meanings has been lost. However, we continue to use these words and phrases. Why? The answer quite simply is because someone has already saved us the trouble of having to think of our own. To come up with new metaphors would take almost too much effort by today’s standards, as Americans grow ever lazier and more dependent on technology. We become so comfortable with these “ready-made phrases” that they basically “construct your sentences for you.”

There are also several phrases that we use today without really understanding their meaning, such as “take up the cudgels for”. Ask someone to give you a definition of the word cudgels, and most likely they will not be able to. Yet, because this metaphor has always been around, people continue to use it in their daily conversations. We may have general understanding of the phrase, or understand the appropriate situation in which to use it, but we do not really know what it means. On the other hand, people who abuse the English language often times use phrases and metaphors inappropriately. Their improper use of these metaphors is disheartening.

In order to restore life to the English language, these “worn-out” clichés need to be revised or, better yet, new ones need to be created. We also need to educate those who improperly use the English language to save our future generations from humiliation.

“A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?”

In this third excerpt from *Politics*, Orwell highlights several key questions a writer should ask at the end of each sentence. Unfortunately, it seems that many writers today completely disregard these questions and just write. A wonderful example of this comes from Francine Prose’s essay *I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read*. In Prose’s essay, she discusses several authors, Maya Angelou among them. In the prologue to Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* she writes: “I hadn’t so much forgot as I couldn’t bring myself to remember.” Her murky and turgid language makes it impossible for anyone to enjoy this book. The images are not clear and fresh, and the sentence itself is rather ugly.

I believe that all writers should sit back and ask themselves those questions above. “*What am I trying to say?*” – If the meaning of the sentence is not clear to the writer, than it is safe to say that no reader will understand it either.

“*What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer?*” - Word choice is key in writing. Incorrect word choice can cause readers to misconstrue the meaning of a sentence, which in turn can cause an entire book’s meaning to be lost.

“*Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?*” - Using stale and clichéd metaphors and phrases can cause a reader to quickly tire of a book. In order to hold someone’s interest, make the language bright and vivid so that it does leave a lasting effect.

“*Could I put it more shortly?*” - Writers need to be able to use a variety of sentence lengths in their writing. This keeps the book interesting. However, there are some

sentences which can be, and sometimes need to be shortened. The writer should never overflow the reader with information.

“Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?” – A question Maya Angelou should have asked herself several times. Readers should be entertained, not baffled.

In conclusion, Orwell brings up several excellent points in his *Politics and the English Language*. We are becoming lazy and severely butchering the English Language. We must correct this problem in order to save our future generations from failure.