

Language Police: The State of the Language

Dedicated to Jim Lewinski, language arts teacher/North Side High School, to Steve Hollander/Assistant Professor and editor IPFW, and to William Safire/ popular language columnist for *The New York Times*

This paper is not about the languages that chimps, dolphins, elephants, parakeets, and/or any other birds, fish, or fowl may or may not speak. That might be a topic worthy of some future Quest paper. Neither is today's paper about the place of American English in the world. I refer those interested in that aspect to Quester George Mather's paper *The Romance of English: the world's new lingua Franca* (1991). And this paper is not essentially about language and the brain. I refer you to Quester Carl Bradley's paper *How Do We Learn and What Do We Really Know?* (2000).

Today's focus is on the State of the American English Language: How it is governed, how it is censored, and how it is changing. Warning: Parts of this paper may not be appropriate for all audiences; reader and listener discretion is advised.

And so, to begin:

Out of the Abyss they came...out of the roiling seas. Some on the stubs of fins. They sloshed through grit and shards of shells. They hauled their bulk out of the sea under skies dark with clouds of carbon. They tasted spewing ash. Yet they survived. Through ages of shifting landmasses and mountain meltdowns, they survived. Some took refuge in the trees. But one day, they climbed down. They stood on their own. Then, when the forests and jungles disappeared, they survived on the savannas where baobab trees grew pregnant with water. They made tools. And stored food. They lived in bands of family. He beat his chest to ward off threats from rumbles in the dark; she tended the fire. In

time...in time, something new...something entirely strange and new locked in. He found a voice, a way to express what he saw behind his eyes. He looked then at her, by the fire, and he said, “Got milk?”*

Got a brain

The brain is a mass of 100 billion neurons the consistency of Jell-O, weighing about 3.5 pounds. “In most mammals, the neocortex takes up 30 to 40 percent of the total brain mass...in humans it accounts for a whopping 80 percent, an area that packs roughly 100 million yards of axons and dendrites into a space the size and thickness of a formal dinner napkin.”¹

At birth, an infant’s throat is virtually identical to that of our ape ancestors with one direct passage to the lungs and another to the stomach. At three month of age, the larynx descends in the infant’s throat, providing “...enough room for the tongue to move forward and backward and to form all the vowel sounds we can make as adults.”²

During the time between 18 months of age and high school graduation, children acquire an average of 11 new words a day. On entering school, they have about 13,000 words and by graduation, a total of 60,000.³

“Beasts abstract not.” said philosopher John Locke. But Man does. He understands words on many levels. Man even gets it when the actual words have nothing to do with the message. Nobody, for example, calls EMS when somebody walks through the door. We understand the meaning of: My heart goes out to you; the wine has good legs; she had stars in her eyes; I smell a rat; and my personal favorite, The chair has the floor.

Got Censors

There is, to date, no actual word that, if spoken, will land you in jail. That isn't for lack of censors, however. They stand at the ready to challenge, fine, protest, burn in effigy, and generally rail against language and subjects they feel offend the sensibilities of the public.

Censors come in all manner of guises. One type deliberately obfuscates meaning; they plot to bamboozle and befuddle. The fields of business, finance, health care/insurance, the law, the military, and some say education are especially prone to clouded terminology. Such language qualifies as backdoor censorship because it intends to stymie readers. Who among us has not been bowdlerized by such phrases as *collateralized debt obligations*, *account facility limit*, *authentic answerability*, *worklessness* (unemployment) or *sector-specific benchmarking*?⁴ Wrestling meaning from such terms is like boxing with balloons.

In 1999, the Securities and Exchange Commission adopted the Plain English Rule (Rule 421 (d) under Regulation C) which set new standards for the front/back covers, summary, and risk factors for a prospectus. These rules call for:

- Short sentences
- Definite, concrete, everyday language
- Active voice
- Tabular presentation or bullet lists for complex material, whenever possible
- No legal jargon or highly technical business terms
- No double negatives .

The SEC aside, little has been done for the syntactic disambiguation of everyday life. Doublespeak, a word coined from George Orwell's terms *doublethink* and *newspeak* in the novel *1984*, is rampant. Take, for example, the word *firing* (of an employee). In

doublespeak, that term that could be a: RIF, headcount adjustment, downsizing, rightsizing, or realignment. We don't even blink at some of the doublespeak euphemisms anymore: *collateral damage* means bystander deaths; *preemptive war* means to invade a country so the invaded country won't invade the invading country first. In the military, a *freedom fighter* is some other country's *terrorist*, and *engagement* means *battle*. To think, *engagement* once meant *wedding bells* and *rings*.

There are censors who want to keep the airwaves clear of all those unambiguous Anglo-Saxon earthy words...the dirty words. We have grown used to the censor's bleeps on television. Evidently, there is the feeling that hearing censored words is morally damning but lip-reading them is not. Any 12 year old who can't figure out what was bleeped either hasn't read *Catcher in the Rye*, listened to any hip hop lyrics, or learned incidentally the meanings of the words *cuneiform*, *cupboard*, *fugues*, *shirtwaist*, and *shivaree* on his way to looking up the words heard on the street.⁵

In 1973, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) fined a radio station for violating public indecency statutes by playing George Carlin's routine "*The Seven Words You Can Never Say on TV.*"⁶ The U.S. Supreme Court (in FCC vs. Pacifica Foundation) held that the FCC had the power to determine what constituted indecency. The fine held. It was a real twist of fate or turn of the screw, so to speak, for Carlin's list to become adopted defacto as definition of what constituted indecency.

The *N-word* is perhaps the most emotionally-charged word in the language. Its use is the reason Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is among the nation's most-banned books. There is an unwritten law that some people may use the *N-word* and that everybody else must use the phrase *the N-word*. Most of us police ourselves not to use that word...nor

any of the other disparaging words describing various groups of people or ethnicities. Such usage is not *politically correct*.

What is vexing is that the word *niggard* is also considered inappropriate by some even though its meaning has nothing to do with race or color. *Niggard* has a Scandinavian origin and means *a miser*. The *N-word*, however, comes from the French *negre* for Negro and is defined as offensive slang for Negro. When words are censored just because they sound like other words that make people uncomfortable, there is cause for alarm in the kingdom.

Got Textbooks

Dozens of organizations censor books and movies including the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Motion Picture Guild, religious groups, ethnic groups, the political right, the political left, groups with disabilities, nutrition groups, and publishers of the nation's textbooks. In dealing with textbooks, it is first necessary to understand that the textbook industry is not about education, learning, or achievement. It is about money.

Today's textbooks are colorful, filled with maps, charts, diagrams, photos, sidebars, and CDs. Many could double as coffee table books. Most parents don't give much thought to the books beyond cost and perhaps the weight.

But, what's not in textbooks—what has been silently censored—was cause for Diane Ravitch's polemic book *The Language Police*, published in 2003. Ravitch exposes the way pressure groups restrict what goes into textbooks by sanitizing the language. In order to satisfy its role as social engineers for a happy, diverse culture that aims at equalizing butchers and bakers and candlestick makers and Protestants, and pipsqueaks and

Prohibitionists, and in order to make every child feel good about himself/herself with or without reason for today, yesterday, and tomorrow, schools have neglected their mission to educate, and textbook publishers have stifled freedom of expression. Her book ranks with such other jarring exposes as Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* and Ralph Nadar's *Unsafe at Any Speed*.

Ravitch, the Assistant Secretary of Education under President GHW Bush, member of the National Assessment Governing Board under President Bill Clinton, and Research Professor of Education at New York University, exposes a protocol of beneficent censorship.

The arbiters of political correctness on the left have joined with the fundamentalist guardians of morality on the right to foster a censorship apparatus that serves the political and social agendas of both, scorns the interests of students, and ensures that students will not be exposed to anything that might bother anyone, anywhere, for any reason.”⁸

Ravitch rails against publishers who abridge and rewrite literature. What mystifies her is that individual publishers have created their own preemptive rules for writers of textbooks so that special interest groups will find nothing to object about. It is censorship by default. *The Language Police* includes some 30 pages of the words, topics, and stereotypes publishers demand their writers not use, including the names of the publisher/s ascribing to each criterion. Among them are:

- Foods to avoid mentioning: bacon, gravies, candy, and corn chips
- Stereotypes to avoid: dumb athletes, skinny intellectuals, Irish policemen
- Stereotypes of women to avoid: mother running a vacuum cleaner, cooking
- Stereotypes of fathers to avoid: always driving the family car,
- Topics to avoid in textbooks: bodily functions, illegitimacy, nudity, situation ethics, winter holidays
- Topics to avoid on tests: abortion, AIDS, aspirin, birthday celebrations, junk bonds, pumpkins, and fossils
- Images to avoid for Persons who are older: Older people as meddlesome, unattractive, inactive, ill, feeble, or dependent; older people in rocking chairs,

knitting, napping, or watching television; older persons who are bitter, cantankerous, crabby, cranky, difficult.⁹

Through literature, most of us here learned to empathize with Iago's all-consuming jealousy, Romeo and Juliet's star-crossed love, and Arthur Dimmesdale's concealed guilt in *The Scarlet Letter*. We felt grief when the Old Man returned with nothing but the bones of his great fish. We gained an understanding of passion turned destructive as Ahab pursued his unrelenting quest for the great white whale.

Today we have vampires and Harry Potter instead of Othello *and* Ozymandias. As a society we have a radically altered cultural literacy. We no longer have a common background of literature. And, of the Classics that remain, Ravitch reminds us that textbook publishers have edited them for style, length, and word choice. What she most objects to is the sanitizing of literature. Silent censorship, she said, turned Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident* to thin gruel. The book, which is about rumor and mob psychology in the Old West, is on Ravitch's list of Classic Literature for grade 9. Some of the silent edits include:

By God was changed to *By gum*
A Goddamned rustler's bullet was changed to *a blasted rustler's bullet*
My God was changed to *Hey*
God was changed to *Well*.⁹

"In sooth, by Gods' blood, 'tis a wicked witch that this way comes."

Got Milk sanitized

If the opening paragraph of this paper had been sanitized—had been censored--using some of the same stringent protocols textbook publishers require, it would have read:

It was a dark and stormy night. They arrived at a special place. They found food to eat. Most of the time, they just hung out. Eventually, they could take long walks. She liked to make things while he spent time stirring the fire. One day, she looked at him and something clicked. Yes, something clicked inside her head. She opened her mouth, and she said, “Get milk.”

Got rules but got no laws

There is no governing body for American English words as there is in many countries. In France, the Academie Francaise has acted as the authority on the language since 1635 when Cardinal Richelieu established it. Members, the immortels, are like the Supreme Court for words and hold office for life.¹⁰ Recently the *Wall Street Journal* carried an article of the Academie’s difficulties in agreeing on a French word for the term *cloud computing*. After 18 months of angst, a physicist and one of the immortels said, “I think we can survive without the term.”¹¹ In the French language anyway, there is still no such thing as *cloud computing* because there is no word for it.

Linguists fall into one of two camps: The Prescriptivists and the Descriptivists. Those adhering to the rules of the past, the Prescriptivists, want commas and apostrophes to be appropriately placed; they want *sit and set* used correctly; they do not want infinitives to be split; they make invectives over sentences that end with a preposition. They turn apoplectic at hearing double negatives.

Descriptivists, however, have a more laissez faire attitude. After all, people do use *who* in place of *whom* without going blind or *like* for *as* without losing their hair. Descriptivists believe it is not the task of lexicographers to select only the good words of a language or the ones they like. If enough people are using a particular expression, they

feel it must be appropriate. “It’s me” is one such expression the Descriptivist would consider acceptable today while the Prescriptivist would accept nothing less than “It is I.”

Got Dictionaries

Anatole France defined a dictionary as “the universe in alphabetical order.” It is also a biography of individual words, a reference book, a grammar, and, ultimately, a graveyard where old words go to die. Instead of serving as censors of words, the dictionary validates terms and meanings. In the absence of laws about language, dictionaries, grammar books, and style manuals are our best resources for what is the standard.

The most sensational dictionary of the 20th Century was *Merriam-Webster’s Third New International* (1961). It included words like *irregardless* and *alright* and generated the kind of ire one sees in quarrels between pro-lifers and pro-choicers, between jihadists and Zionists, between the Red Sox and Yankees, even between the City and County Councils. “Never,” said Bergen Evans, “has a scholarly work of this stature been attacked with such unbridled fury and contempt.”¹²

The *Third* added about 100,000 new words but deleted about 150,000 obsolete terms. It ejected all proper nouns including biographical, geographical, mythological and literary names. But it was the descriptive policy toward language that turned the *Third* into a cultural donnybrook. It did not tell people how they should speak and write; it offered an objective report on how people did speak and write. It was the “bloodiest linguistic brawl of the Twentieth Century.”¹³

Got Grammar, syntax, style

Grammar concerns itself with the constructions, forms, and usages of words. Syntax deals with the relationship of words in sentences--the order or pattern that words take to make meaning. Style relates to the feeling-tone of a passage. In American English the basic pattern for a sentence is subject, verb, object. Then enter the modifiers (adjectives and adverbs), the conjunctions (coordinating and subordinating), the cases (nominative, objective, possessive), the clauses (dependent and independent), the tenses (including present, past, future, and the pluperfects), and the moods (indicative and subjunctive). Comes next the compound subjects and predicates, gerund, participle, and infinitive phrases and clauses, nominative absolutes, and cognate objects. It's easy to lose track.

Comes last is style--the line between fancy and plain, the atrocious and the felicitous. Consider the opening phrase of the Gettysburg address. E. B. White, grammarian and author, said Lincoln was close to the line, at least by our standards today, and, knowingly or unknowingly, was flirting with disaster when he wrote "Four score and seven years ago." ¹⁴

Had The President opened his sentence with *87 years ago*, he would have saved two words and made less of a strain on the listeners' powers of multiplication, but he would have got into his introductory sentence too quickly. Lincoln's ear must have told him to go ahead with *four score and seven*. By doing so, he achieved cadence while skirting the edge of fanciness. Suppose he had written, *In the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and seventy six*? His speech would have sustained a heavy blow.

Style is the hardest aspect of the language to censor which is no doubt a reason language police pass it by. You can deny Jimi Hendrix certain notes, and certain kinds of songs, but you can't change the way he strums that guitar.

Got Diagramming

Sentence diagramming is a visual interpretation showing the function and relationship of each word in a sentence to all the other words in that sentence. It surfaced in 1877 with publication of the book *Higher Lessons in English* by Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg, two grammarians.¹⁵ Diagramming has been in and out of vogue ever since.

That aside, one of the problems with grammar, and especially punctuation rules, is the lack of agreement among practitioners. Take the Harvard comma, for instance, also known as the Oxford comma and the Series Rule comma: There should be one less comma than the number of items in the series. For Prescriptivists, there will always be two commas for a series of three or 27 commas for a series of 28. It's predictable and right. Descriptivists, however, might see no need for the last comma, believing it to be an unnecessary interruption as in "My favorite colors are red, white and blue. Use of the Harvard Comma always solves problems with expressions like *eats shoots and leaves*. One comma leaves the meaning unclear. No comma or two commas clarifies meaning. The Harvard comma could also clear up the family tree of the apocryphal story of a speaker who thanked "My parents Ayn Rand and God."¹⁶

Grammatical misfortunes are a lot like wardrobe malfunctions. Nobody intentionally wants them. Among other linguistic sins, the double negative is particularly heinous: *I ain't got no shoes*. Eliminating the very coarse "ain't" leaves *I do not have no shoes*. If I do not have no (zero) shoes, then, logically I must have some shoes. Grammar, however, is not mathematics. *Ain't got no* is just plain wrong...today.

What confounds students is that professional writers, and particularly song writers, break the rules all the time. Take: *You ain't nothin but a hound dog*. The message would

not have been the same had Elvis gyrated to *You are not anything but a beagle*. Or what if Mick Jagger had screeched *I cannot get any satisfaction* instead of *I can't get no satisfaction*.

The same kinds of grammatical errors don't grate on us all. Each of us has language pet peeves. Some of us go on life-long campaigns to stomp out split infinitives. Some rant about dangling modifiers; others, about the plural for Bluetooth and deer. I personally don't like the word *nice* because it is bland and does not further a description. Evidently, my attitude about this word made an impression. A former student from the late 60s sent me a letter a couple of years ago. In it she said, "I know that when choosing an appropriate adjective to describe anything to anyone I would rather poke out both my eyes than settle for the decidedly non-descriptive –'nice.'" ¹⁷.

Peter Meister, professor of German at University of Alabama/Huntsville, another North Side graduate, and the son of former Quester John Meister, has a concern over a more esoteric aspect of the language: the If + Indicative tense (If she was there vs. If she were there):

No language is defective on its own terms....Every language is unable to do something that some other language can do. Relative to a language that can put *must* or *should* into the past tense, English is defective....Like anyone anywhere, we who love English have our shortcomings. *If + was* in the indicative isn't one of them. ¹⁸

Everywhere one looks there is cause for grammatical angst. Take, for example, President Mick's neck apparel here which you would probably describe as a yellow polka dot bow tie. Grammatically speaking, that is a most perplexing phrase. Consider:

- Is *polka dot* two words or one?
- If it's two words, what parts of speech are *polka and dot*?
- If *polka and dot* are adjectives, what does *dot* modify? Bow? (for a dot bow as in a blue flower?)

- If polka dot is one word, should it be written with a hyphen or as one word?
- Should there be a comma separating yellow from polka or polka-dot?
- Finally, is bow tie one word or two?

Ad infinitum. Such thorny conundrums are reason writers are driven to drink.

Got Dialects

Language Police squelch at such expressions as *y' all*, *y'uns*, and *youse*. In truth, these are merely Southern dialect forms of the second person (you) plural. Proper American English does not have a separate word for second person plural the way many other languages do. *Y'all* and others are attempts to rectify what is missing in the language. Although they are actually fairly good options, they are not considered standard English.

Some consider Ebonics a dialect; others, a language. It has been called Black English, Black Vernacular, African American English, African American Vernacular English, and Ebonics (a blend of ebony and phonics). Most agree that it is not standard American English. Not everybody agrees, however, that it's not appropriate. In 1990 the Oakland Unified School Board passed a resolution, declaring Ebonics to be the predominant primary language of Black children. It declared that Ebonics was not English but a “genetically based” member of the African Language Systems. Why the school board made such a sweeping—some would say bizarre—statement is perplexing, but it may have had more to do with an attempt to get additional funding for their English as a Second Language program than with a belief that Ebonics is a native African language.¹⁹ The consensus is that Ebonics is not going to get anybody into Harvard, the boardroom of Goldman Sachs, or the inner circle at Microsoft.

Got Technology

If you still dial a cell phone with your index finger, you can abandon all hope. The impact of technology with e-mailing, texting, Twittering, My spacing, Facebooking, blogging, googling, binging, and skypeing is overwhelming. Our language has permanently and unalterably changed.

I asked one of our grandsons, a 19-year-old college sophomore, to text me a message including the Pledge of Allegiance. Ensuing e-mails revealed we disagreed about the grammar. His response was:

You're seeming to have a problem wrapping you're head around when and when not to use grammatical conventions, but when you text it really doesn't matter it's the least amount of time you have to spend typing while still getting a point across so you use conventions when you feel you need them and leave them out when it saves time, really the way I'm typing this to you this will change depending on the complexity of what you're trying to say and who you're saying it to the more you know someone and text them the less formal you have to be and the less time it takes to convey any one idea essentially there are no rules or standards, just as long as you can convey what you want.

Asking why *god* was spelled in the lower case, he wrote:

because the idea of god is conveyed perfectly well as a lower case instead of the proper now God as the uppercase. Personally I wouldn't use it because it takes that much more time but that's probably a personal preference depending on the important of the idea being a proper now in contrast with the time it saves.²⁰

I am quite certain no English teacher taught that the capital G in the proper noun *God* was a personal choice or that punctuation, inventive spellings, and abbreviations were optional. What's telling about the message is that young people have simply dismissed the Prescriptivists AND the Descriptivists for their social communications. They have fired them in the interest of Time. And they are not apologizing.

Then there's texting, and there's Twitter. Texting is proving hazardous to our health. Last summer President Obama banned almost 3 million federal employees from texting while driving on the job. This week the federal government "banned texting for commercial bus and truck drivers as part of an effort to combat traffic deaths stemming from distracted motorists."²¹ Schools have also attempted to ban texting during class time, but it's hard to police. For the first time, laws may enter the language picture. They will regulate when you cannot text, however, as opposed to what you can or cannot say while texting.

As a name, Twitter is a silly-sounding word. At least the populace has opted for *tweeted* instead of *twitted* for the past tense. According to GLM, a social media website, *Twitter* was the top word of 2009 throughout the globe in print and digital media, followed by Obama, H1N1, and Hadron. There's even a non-word—2.0—in the top 10 words.²²

Unveiled in 2007, Twitter is different from other social media in that there is no expectation of reciprocity. Nobody expects an answer. Its parameters are set at 140 characters or what fits in a text message on a phone. Twitter is like a river of data rushing past. Clay Shirley, author of *Here Comes Everybody*, a book about social media, states that twitter helps define what is important by algorithmic authority: that is, "if all kinds of people are pointing at the same thing at the same instant, it must be a pretty big deal."²³

Although texting and Twittering are not yet universally accepted as good things, there is no indication they are going to go gently into that good night. Shades of Marshall McLuhan! In *The Medium is the Message*, McLuhan said the automobile is an extension of the foot. Today, the Blackberry is an extension of the brain.

Got Conclusion

In conclusion, the American English language is in a state of flux. The Prescriptivists and Descriptivists square off, vying for their particular take on the very words to include in dictionaries and the rules to follow in grammar and syntax while the language itself continues to gush through the streets and ooze under doors.

Punctuation, as a result of technology, has become situational: Use of capitals, commas, and periods is directly related to the time one has to write and the intended recipient of the communication. Censorship, in an increasingly diverse society, rears all its ugly heads under the banner of protecting and equalizing the people. The presence of censors is visible in the banning of books and the rating of movies and TV shows. Not so obvious is the presence of the silent censors who sanitize textbooks. Not so obvious is the manipulation of language to intentionally confound or obfuscate meaning.

There are those who make it their mission to enforce the practices they deem correct and right. These are the Language Police. They include teachers like Jim Lewinski, language columnists like William Safire, editors like Steve Hollander, and all the rest of us. Most of us feel our rules are the right ones. My 1958 rules are as unquestionably correct and pure as you feel your 1978 rules are. Yet, I'll wager those sets of rules don't always agree. Most of us don't want to see that today's Descriptivists are tomorrow's Prescriptivists. Things change. As 18th Century lexicographer Samuel Johnson said, "Any lexicographer who thinks his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay is simply deluded. To enchain syllables and to lash the wind are equally the undertakings of pride."²⁴

It is not possible to wrap a rope around our words. Johnson got it: gwtf (go with the flow).

Endnotes

*In 1993, the California Milk Processing Board (CMPB) hired Jeff Goodby of Goodby, Silverstein & Partners to create a new advertising campaign for milk. *Got Milk* was name of that campaign. The copywriter asked if Goodby really meant, "Do you have any milk?" Goodby said, "No, it's advertising, not a class in grammar." *Got Milk* is still one of most successful ad campaigns today.

1. Chip Walter, *Thumbs, Toes, and Tears*, 123.
2. *Ibid.*, 99.
3. Steven Pinker, *Words and Rules*, 3.
4. Sara Schaefer Munoz, "Crusader for Syntactic Disambiguation/Exprobrates Banks' Labored Locutions," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2009.
5. Jack Lynch, *The Lexicographer's Dilemma*, 240.
6. George Carlin's list of 7 words you can't say on TV include: sh*t, pi###, f*#k, cu*t, co**suc*er, m*t^er*u#k*r, T*t*
7. Anne C. Westwater, "Get This Alarming Book Just as Soon as You Can," www.textbookleague.org (in *The Textbook Letter*, Vol. 12, Number 4)
8. Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 171-202.
9. *Ibid.*, 114.
10. Of note: Membership in the *immortels* has included, among others: Valery Giscard d'Estaing, Alexandre Dumas, fils, Victor Hugo, Louis Pasteur, and Voltaire. In all, there have been 710 immortels (six of them women).
11. Max Colchester, "The French Get Lost in the Clouds/Over a New Term in the Internet Age," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 14, 2009.
12. David Lynch, 208.
13. *Ibid.*, 209.
14. E.B.White's comments on style of Lincoln's Gettysburg address are from *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, 77.
15. Kitty Burns Florey, *Sister Bernadette's Barking Dog*, 3.

16. Of note: There is lack of clarity even when only two words describe a thing. For example, consider: *brown and white cows*. How many kinds/colors of cows are there...one or two? Since cows come in more colors than brown, white, or brown and white (black, for instance), the brown and white is unclear. To clarify, writer should hyphenate as brown-and-white if he/she means one kind of cow that is two-colored. The same is true for other phrases such as macaroni and cheese or toast and jam. Although most consider mac 'n cheese to be one dish, such is not always the case. Prescriptivists need to know precisely what the writer intends.
17. From a personal letter to Dana Wichern from Suzy Jones, December, 2007.
18. From a personal letter to Dana Wichern from Peter Meister, December 2009.
19. Lynch, 265-268.
20. E-mail to Dana Wichern from Blake Platt, January 4, 2010.
21. "Texting banned for bus, truck drivers," *The Journal Gazette*, January 27, 2010.
22. Global Language Monitor, "Top Words of 2009," www.languagemonitor.com
23. David Carr, "Why Twitter Will Endure," *The New York Times* (Week in Review), January 3, 2010.
24. Lynch, 92.

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By
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