

33. 言葉はどれほど人を傷つけるか(1)：構造理解

When one child says nasty things to another, the second child may feel bad and run to their parents. The adults tell the child to say back calmly to the other child, 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me'. The expression aims to teach the child to avoid physical fighting, to keep calm during stressful times, and to develop into a more resilient person. That was the intention of the expression when it was first recorded in the middle of the 19th century. Recently, however, the second half of the proverb has been altered to reflect a major change in society: the idea that words can hurt.

Unquestionably, the world is cruel. People have opinions and ideas that are different from our own, and they may say them in ways we do not like. As we deal with more diverse people, we must learn to cope with different viewpoints respectfully and productively. Moreover, having different beliefs is healthy for society. This is demonstrated in a famous quotation by Voltaire's biographer Evelyn Beatrice Hall; "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it". A strong democracy needs people who can express their different viewpoints powerfully. The theory is that the best ideas will surface and keep society healthy.
