

The Ethnocentricity of Good English

Computer Ethics and Communication

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The concept that a person's intelligence is directly proportional to that person's grammatical eloquence is ludicrous. In John Simon's *Why Good English is Good for You*, he bases his argument on why proper English is important on the proposed fact that a person's psyche is molded by their ability to speak it, directly targeting minorities and people of lower socioeconomic status in the process. This proposition is archaic, offensive, and most of all ignorant. I have spoken English all my life, and while being well versed in the English language is an important skill, the effect it has on thought is most definitely not an adequate measure of a person's intelligence.

John's main argument in this paper is that the English language is slipping into turmoil from insufficient education on the intricacies of the English language and because of this, society is as well. John states that if good English is taught to the underprivileged and the poor that "...the situation could improve enormously" (Simon 1981). This is essentially blaming the social stratification present in the current society on the fact that the underclass cannot speak proper English, which is preposterous. If the English language was at the "...high level of excellence" as John suggests, then such a division in the English language and our society would have never occurred (Simon 1981). The excellence of proper English would have already merged the division in society. The purpose of language is to communicate ideas between people therefore minimizing the stratification. Proper English was developed in this stratification and so cannot be the solution because it does not cater to the needs of both sides equally.

John directly associates language with one's thoughts and behavior. He describes it as an "...undercurrent—beneath what is going on" indicating its importance (Simon 1981). While I will admit that knowing proper English does affect the way thoughts are processed in the brain, it

is not required to be an intelligent person. A person may be intelligent and not use proper English. Foreign scholars who learn English may speak it improperly but still their minds are sound and ideas are beneficial to society. There is nothing special about the English language that makes it a conductor of intellectual thought. A language that can only be effective when being spoken at its highest form is not at a high level of excellence.

John has a mental image about how the world is divided into people and poets. This essentially boils down to the question of who does language belong to? If language belonged to, and was controlled by the poets and the scholars, like John purposes, then a vast swath of people would be denied a say in its construction and modification. This implication does not foster social unification in any way. Quarantining the responsibility and control of language on any one group will always create an impossible divide. The people who utilize the language every day, do not need or want the unambiguous language which the poets have contrived. The art of language has its place, but not in controlling the entire language. A sculpture has no more control over the molecular structure of his marble, then a poet to his language.

Correct English stems from a broken society not a utopian vacuum. Forcing Standard English on the lower class will not undo centuries of human oppression. In an age where communication occurs at such a rapid rate, having a language that is optimized unambiguous and exact communication is not ideal. This is a problem that is seeded in a place deeper than language. While communication is integral to fixing these issues, standard English will do society no favor, if their ideals are conflicting. The divide will be there regardless of if there is a distinction between whom and who.

References

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