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### The Foolishness of Englishness

In the 1800's, English was spoken properly, with even the shortest of letters containing the most impeccable grammar and diction. Since then, the English language has deteriorated to a point such that many have touted it as the worst the language has ever been. But the reasons for this decline in refinement? In 1946, George Orwell, a novelist famed for his dystopian stories, wrote that "[the English language] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts." Orwell's point still holds true today, because of the nature behind these "ugly" words and the foolishness in cultural values.

To examine the interconnection between the foolishness of thoughts and the ugliness of language, one must first examine what makes these words "ugly". There are two types of words (or sentences) that can be described as "ugly and inaccurate". The first are words that are considered taboo or have taboo meanings, but are still used (mainly by narrow-minded high school students). These evolve with the shifting cultural values of the time. For example, back during the Harlem Renaissance, it was acceptable, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for Zora Neale Hurston to have written "'Ah can't stand black niggers'" (Hurston 141), something that would have caused the book to have been banned today. Usually, they denote meanings that are considered inappropriate or disgusting. These meanings may comprise what is considered by Orwell as "foolish thoughts", and they are one of the contributors to the "slovenliness of our language". The other type of word mainly comes in sentences, and these

sentences are the shorthand that has now become “texting language”. Abbreviations such as LOL and ROFL (which originally stood for “laughing out loud” and “rolling on the floor laughing”) have become so overused that they are often used in improper context, when the user may not actually been laughing at all. A bigger manifestation of the inaccuracies in our language involves entire conversations held in shorthand. Although the basic meaning of a sentence may be discernible, much of the actual English language behind it is removed. For example, a text that has the meaning “I need to know where you are tonight, by the way” may be sent via text as “I need 2 kno where u r tonite, btw”. Obviously, much of the actual substance behind the words has been removed, thereby reducing its ability to communicate, and thus its accuracy. This causes people to have “foolish thoughts”, as many entertainment websites show screenshots of people posting things such as “I’m board (I’m bored)” to their Facebook wall, and



The foolish thoughts of people have caused inaccurate language to become more common, in examples such as these.

then continuing to argue for its correctness. In essence, the foolishness of people’s thoughts is caused by the inaccuracies of their language, exactly as Orwell described it to be.

As for the other half of Orwell’s statement, that language “becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish”, many of the problems that the English language faces today are

because of the inherent foolishness in American cultural values. The most recent example was the controversy regarding 'Merica Day at Fort Collins High School, one of the smaller-scale representations of a larger problem for the English language. The American culture promotes patriotism, which seems to be most deeply engrained in the people in the South. Their dialect of English makes the word "America" sound more like "'Merica", especially when yelled with patriotic fervor. That has spread throughout the country, basically reducing the precision of the language. When one says "America", it denotes the country of the United States of America very objectively, while "'Merica" implies more of a subjective meaning. In a wider sense, the foolishness of the American culture has also caused the permutations of ethnic names, an inaccuracy of our language. In her commentary on this matter, writer Firoozeh Dumas recalls that "When [my cousin Farbod] moved to America, all the kids called him 'Farthead'" (Dumas), highlighting how words are changed after being Americanized. The Americanization, which is a direct consequence of the culture's foolishness, is a huge factor in how the language becomes "inaccurate". Another example of the intrinsic foolishness of American society is the preoccupation with sex. More and more, high school students have been having more sex, and it also shows in the language they use. Throughout the hallways, the f-word (which is a slang term for having sex) and slang terms for human genitalia have been on the rise. These words are commonly considered to be "ugly" words, words that should not be used in normal speaking or writing. However, some have integrated these words into their vocabulary to such an extent that they cannot finish a sentence without an "ugly" word. That goes to say that the foolishness and general decline of American cultural values have caused the ugliness and inaccuracy that afflicts the English language today.

What George Orwell expressed in 1946 is still valid 68 years later in 2014, because of the way that "ugly" words work and come to be, and also because of the foolishness that is interwoven in the cultural values of America. No matter what the different cultural values and "ugly and inaccurate" words are, they will always continue to exist in one form or another. Because the English language has already

gone down the path to arrive at this point, no amount of grammar lessons or dictionary memorizing will bring it back to what it was before (especially not dictionary memorizing, as new words such as “selfie” and “twerk” have been added to the dictionaries). The English language is caught in a downwards spiral, propelled by the foolish thoughts of the people and the inaccuracies of the language.

Works Cited

"I'm Board." LOLDamn RSS. N.p., 5 Sept. 2011. Web. 09 Mar. 2014.