



# A ;- ) AT THE PAST AND FUTURE OF ENGLISH

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## INTRODUCTION

IT IS ALWAYS WITH a certain amount of wry, knowing amusement that we turn to the thoughts of people from the past remarking on the future (that is, our present). It is similar to how slightly older children view slightly younger children. They were so innocent then, those thinkers of the past! Look at what they thought computers could do, what language could be! How adorably naïve! Not like us, we who have put away our childish things.

Of course, the science fiction of our present may someday seem as pathetically misconceived as that of the past. So, too, will many of our current ideas (and, alas, much of our current scholarship<sup>1</sup>) on such future-forward topics as technology, the internet, and even the way in which new forms of communication (e.g., email, text messaging, social media) have affected our language.

Consider, then, “Machinery and English Style,” an essay written by Robert Lincoln O’Brien in a 1904 volume of the *Atlantic Monthly*. O’Brien discusses the manners in which the typewriter, dictation, shorthand, and

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<sup>1</sup> Not yours, of course. Everyone else’s.

the telegraph (new technological shifts of his time) negatively affected the English language. Like much of what is written about technology, this essay was rapidly outdated and, now, just over a century later, can only really be viewed as an archeological relic. Yet, perhaps because of its obsolescence, the essay is a fascinating read today. In it, and in our presentist reaction to it, we can glean understandings applicable to modern discussions of technology and language.

## I.

### A FAMILIAR RING

O'Brien's complaints about newfangled communication technology ruining traditional language and culture will likely ring familiar<sup>2</sup> to many readers of our present time. These are the same complaints that many of our contemporaries<sup>3</sup> express concerning new (to us) technologies like computers and cell phones and new forms of communication like email and text messaging. Textspeak,<sup>4</sup> netspeak,<sup>5</sup> chatspeak,<sup>6</sup> lolspeak,<sup>7</sup> hashtags,<sup>8</sup> emoticons,<sup>9</sup> emoji,<sup>10</sup> gifs,<sup>11</sup> memes,<sup>12</sup> niche memes,<sup>13</sup> flops.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Also potentially ruining traditional language: the use of questionable phrases like “ring familiar,” which appears to be a combination of the idioms “ring true” and “have a familiar ring.” The idiom “ring true” likely originates from the concept of testing the authenticity of a coin by sound. Nancy M. Kendall, “True and False,” *Christian Science Monitor* (March 19, 2003). [www.csmonitor.com/2003/0319/p22s01-hfgn.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0319/p22s01-hfgn.html). The verb construction “ring familiar” is not related to the truth-determining “ringing” of the “ring true” idiom, but instead borrows the grammatical construction and adds it to the meaning from “have a familiar ring,” referring to a recognizable sound denoting familiarity.

<sup>3</sup> Not you, of course. Everyone else.

<sup>4</sup> Lara L. Eller et al., *Instant Message Communication and its Impact upon Written Language* (2018), [www.researchgate.net/publication/267419817\\_Instant\\_Message\\_Communication\\_and\\_its\\_Impact\\_upon\\_Written\\_Language](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/267419817_Instant_Message_Communication_and_its_Impact_upon_Written_Language).

<sup>5</sup> D. Crystal, *Language and the Internet 2* (2006).

<sup>6</sup> Abigail J Rovner, *Chat Reference and Chat Speak. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree* (April 2005), [cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:7172ba38-17c5-4422-a17f-08f4b3f50731](http://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:7172ba38-17c5-4422-a17f-08f4b3f50731).

<sup>7</sup> Jordan Lefler, *I can has thesis? a linguistic analysis of lolspeak* (2011) (LSU Master's Theses), [digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses/1271](http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/1271); Beata Bury & Adam Wojtaszek, *Linguistic Regularities of LOLspeak*, 14 *Sino-US English Teaching* 30 (2017), [www.researchgate.net/publication/317200039\\_Linguistic\\_Regularities\\_of\\_LOLspeak](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/317200039_Linguistic_Regularities_of_LOLspeak).

<sup>8</sup> Michele Zappavigna, *Searchable talk: the linguistic functions of hashtags*, 25 *Social Semiotics* 274-

Email begat direct message begat tweet<sup>15</sup> begat snap<sup>16</sup> begat . . . what, exactly? How can we understand the state of language today – or at any time – when language is constantly evolving?

O'Brien's critique of new (to him) rhetorical trends influenced by the technologies of his time is, at times, almost embarrassingly familiar. O'Brien lauds the telegraph for its ability to push speakers towards brevity in communication, incentivizing "the periodic sentence, the clean-cut sentence, the readily understood sentence."<sup>17</sup> Commentators of our time have made similar statements regarding Twitter and its 280-character (formerly 140-character) message limit as contributing to a renewed focus on brevity.

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91 (2015); Julia Turner, *#InPraiseOfTheHashtag*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 2, 2012), [www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/magazine/in-praise-of-the-hashtag.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/magazine/in-praise-of-the-hashtag.html); Vyvyan Evans, *#language: evolution in the digital age*, The Guardian (June 26, 2015) [www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/jun/26/hashtag-language-evolution-digital-age](http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/jun/26/hashtag-language-evolution-digital-age).

<sup>9</sup> Tyler Schnoebelen, *Emotions Are Relational: Positioning and the Use of Affective Linguistic Resources* (dissertation). [stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fm335ct1355/Dissertation\\_Schnoebelen\\_final\\_8-29-12-augmented.pdf](http://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fm335ct1355/Dissertation_Schnoebelen_final_8-29-12-augmented.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Eric Goldman, *Emojis and the Law*, 93 Washington L. Rev. (forthcoming 2018), [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3133412](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3133412).

<sup>11</sup> Amanda Hess and Katy Waldman, *Will Words Soon Be Replaced by GIFs? A Debate in Words and GIFs*, Slate (May 11, 2015). [www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon\\_valley/2015/05/11/are\\_gifs\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_communication\\_will\\_they\\_replace\\_words.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2015/05/11/are_gifs_the_future_of_communication_will_they_replace_words.html).

<sup>12</sup> Kim Zetter, *Humans Are Just Machines for Propagating Memes*, Wired Magazine (Feb. 29, 2008), [www.wired.com/2008/02/ted-blackmore/?currentPage=all](http://www.wired.com/2008/02/ted-blackmore/?currentPage=all); Olivia Solon, *Richard Dawkins on the internet's hijacking of the word 'meme'*, Wired Magazine (June 20, 2013), [www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-06/20/richard-dawkins-memes](http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-06/20/richard-dawkins-memes).

<sup>13</sup> Taylor Lorenz, *'Niche Memes' Are the Secret Clip Art Diaries Teens Are Posting on Instagram*, Daily Beast (Dec. 5, 2017). [www.thedailybeast.com/niche-memes-are-the-secret-clip-art-diaries-teens-are-posting-on-instagram](http://www.thedailybeast.com/niche-memes-are-the-secret-clip-art-diaries-teens-are-posting-on-instagram).

<sup>14</sup> Taylor Lorenz, *Teens Are Debating the News on Instagram*, Atlantic Monthly (July 26, 2018). [www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/07/the-instagram-forums-where-teens-go-to-debate-big-issues/566153/](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/07/the-instagram-forums-where-teens-go-to-debate-big-issues/566153/).

<sup>15</sup> Brandon Smith, *The Beginner's Guide to Twitter*, Mashable (June 5, 2012), [mashable.com/2012/06/05/twitter-for-beginners/](http://mashable.com/2012/06/05/twitter-for-beginners/).

<sup>16</sup> Larry Magid, *What Is Snapchat and Why Do Kids Love It and Parents Fear It? (Updated)*, Forbes (May 1, 2013), [www.forbes.com/sites/larrymagid/2013/05/01/what-is-snapchat-and-why-do-kids-love-it-and-parents-fear-it/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/larrymagid/2013/05/01/what-is-snapchat-and-why-do-kids-love-it-and-parents-fear-it/).

<sup>17</sup> When explaining the utility of brevity, it is always beneficial to repeat your point three times.

ty and clarity in communication.<sup>18</sup> O'Brien's mechanical explanation of shorthand should be quite familiar to anyone who has encountered the abbreviations, acronyms, and other forms of shortened communication that are now endemic in our increasingly digital society. (In a certain light, a Kim Kardashian reaction gif is simply an updated S.O.S. sent in Morse code.)

O'Brien's earnest paean to punctuation is particularly interesting, in that he is likely both correct and incorrect regarding the role of punctuation in language today (and in the "today" of his time). O'Brien writes:

It seems clear that, as our language has progressed, more and more dependence has been placed on the punctuation. It has done more work; delicate shades of meaning have been conveyed by the visual image which the punctuation itself makes. This tendency, then, is in process of checking, so far as the telegraph operates to affect present-day usage. When the wires slight punctuation<sup>19</sup> they do rhetorical form an injury for which nothing can atone.

It is not improbable that new communication trends like the use of dictation may have influenced English speakers of O'Brien's time to eschew formal punctuation. Similarly, new technologies (e.g., mobile phones) and new forms of communication (e.g., Twitter) have likely changed the ways we use punctuation today. If the telegraph's role in incentivizing people to use slightly fewer punctuation marks was an "injury for which nothing can atone," I shudder to think of how O'Brien would react to our current use of punctuation ;-)

However, the fact that technologies like the telegraph or the cell phone have changed the role of punctuation does not diminish the importance of punctuation itself. O'Brien's initial statement is still correct: Punctuation is important. In fact, its importance is increasing, not decreasing, as our language progresses. Today, punctuation can play new roles in communication, perhaps most notably through emoticons which use typographical symbols to convey new meanings through images. One could argue that O'Brien was actually quite prescient when he noted the "delicate shades of

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<sup>18</sup> [www.wsj.com/articles/brevity-is-the-soul-of-twitterwhy-change-1445296521](http://www.wsj.com/articles/brevity-is-the-soul-of-twitterwhy-change-1445296521); [www.theguardian.com/technology/commentsfree/2017/sep/27/brevity-soul-twitter-280-characters](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/commentsfree/2017/sep/27/brevity-soul-twitter-280-characters).

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps in the same way as O'Brien slighted the comma that should have followed this phrase.



meaning . . . conveyed by the visual image which the punctuation itself makes.” To say that ;- ) conveys less meaning than a properly placed semi-colon is to unfairly dismiss the capacity of human beings to find new and creative ways to communicate meaning.

New technologies are only one factor influencing the development of language, but they are perhaps the most visible and easily identifiable factor. As O’Brien writes, “In every age since written language began, rhetorical forms have been to a considerable extent influenced by the writing materials and implements which were available for man’s use.” Certainly, one can accept that communication technologies can shape the way language develops. This, however, has far greater implications than simply that technologies can cause rhetorical trends.

## II. LANGUAGE AND REFERENCE

### *A. The Ship of Theseus*

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis<sup>20</sup> posits that the unique structure of a language shapes or determines the manner in which a native speaker understands and interacts with the world. This theory generally appears in conversations on bilingualism, translation, and difficulties or benefits of intercultural communication. However, it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to extend this hypothesis to different forms of language, not separated by nationality or history, but by time. Compare O’Brien’s English language, as exhibited in this *Atlantic Monthly* essay, with the English language of a modern-day thirteen-year-old child, as exhibited in the comments section on YouTube. Would growing up with native fluency in the English of the late 1800s shape a person’s perceptions to be radically different than those of a person whose mother tongue was the English of the early 2000s? If so, what, if any, are the implications for how we should

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<sup>20</sup> This is the common term describing the general body of thought concerning linguistic relativism. Perhaps appropriately, it is a somewhat inaccurate moniker that, despite its inaccuracy, has become the de facto name for the topic. (Sapir and Whorf never co-authored anything of note, and neither referred to linguistic relativism as anything so insubstantial as a “hypothesis.”) E.F. Konrad Koerner, *The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis: A Preliminary History and a Bibliographical Essay*, 2 J. Linguistic Anthropology 173 (Dec. 1992).

think about, develop, and regulate the new communication technologies that shape our language today and in the future?

Moving even further afield, we can press on with this analogy of discrete time-based languages (the English of 2000 vs. the English of 1800) and dip a toe into the waters of philosophical inquiry. New technologies like the telegraph or the cell phone may change the way language develops, and languages may change so much that the language of one time (say, the English of 2000) is entirely different from the language of another (the English of 1800).

Naturally, the first problem that arises is how to determine the threshold at which the English of 2000 (*E2*) is an entity distinct from the English of 1800 (*E1*). This is essentially a classic Ship of Theseus<sup>21</sup> identity question. How much can a language change its fundamental parts before it is no longer itself? A sentence written in English that includes an emoji would likely be considered by most to still be a sentence in English. But what of a string of emoji without a single word? A sentence that includes an internet acronym is likely still a sentence in English imho.<sup>22</sup> What of a sentence written entirely in shorthand? Is “writing” in emoji fundamentally different from writing shorthand? One could argue that both emoji and shorthand are forms of abbreviated speech, in which meaning is conveyed through direct reference to English words. However, especially with emoji, it is also possible that the very form of the communication changes the meaning of the messages being conveyed. If so, which language is the speaker speaking? How do we interpret languages (or quasi-languages) like emoji in matters of law<sup>23</sup> and governance?

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<sup>21</sup> This is an ancient thought experiment in which a ship, presumably belonging to Theseus, slowly has all of its component parts replaced. The original ship is surely the ship of Theseus. If one single plank on that ship is replaced with a new plank, is the ship still the ship of Theseus? Or is it a new ship? After every single component part has been replaced with new parts, is the ship (that is now composed entirely of new parts) still the ship of Theseus? If no, at which point does the amalgamation of new and old parts no longer qualify as the ship of Theseus?

<sup>22</sup> The acronym “IMHO” means “in my humble opinion.” Alexis Madrigal, *There Is Only One Thing IMHO Can Mean*, Atlantic Monthly (May 2, 2018). [www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/05/there-is-only-one-thing-imho-can-mean/559481/](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/05/there-is-only-one-thing-imho-can-mean/559481/).

<sup>23</sup> Goldman, *Emojis and the Law*, note 10 above.

*B. Translation Problems*

Now, let us assume *E1* and *E2* are different enough to constitute two different languages. If there is a point at which the English language at different times becomes so different that each language can be considered a distinct entity, then the same translation problems occur as between speakers of different languages. The difference between *E1* (English in 1800) and *E2* (English in 2000) is not so great as the difference between *E1* and, say, *F1* (French in 1800). However, this may not always be the case, especially over longer periods of time.

If we (speakers of *E2*) wish to critique the language of the past (*E1*) or change the language of the future (*E3*), it seems logical that we must first establish that it is possible for an *E2* speaker to understand *E1* and *E3*. Otherwise, it would seem at best misguided to say that an *E2* speaker could speak intelligently about *E1* or responsibly guide the development of *E3*. The question then is: Can an *E2* speaker understand *E1* (or *E3*)? Can a person speaking the English of O'Brien's time understand the language spoken in our time? Or the language that will be spoken in another century after us?

Some philosophers argue that there can be no true understanding between speakers of different languages. W.V. Quine frames this problem as the "inscrutability of reference."<sup>24</sup> Quine argues that it is fundamentally impossible for a speaker of one language to truly understand anything said in another language. This phenomenon occurs because it is impossible to determine if you are correctly understanding the connection between any word spoken by a speaker and the objective thing the speaker is referring to when saying the word.

(For example, Chinese speakers traditionally use the word "qing" to refer to shades that English speakers would refer to as either "green" or "blue." One can imagine a scenario in which a Chinese speaker refers to an object as having a "qing" color. An English speaker looking at the same object might see it as "blue." The English speaker then, would likely assume that "qing" and "blue" were words that referred to the same color. This assumption would yield an inaccurate translation.)

References can only be understood in the context of the speaker's

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<sup>24</sup> See generally Willard Van Orman Quine, *Word and Object* (1960).

background language and ontological understanding of the world. Because we are each limited by our own background language and ontological commitments, it is impossible for anyone to fully understand references in another language.

This inscrutability of reference extends not only to speakers of different languages but also to speakers of the same language, who still have no way to determine if they are using the same words to refer to the same things. (Assume you and I both speak English.<sup>25</sup> If I say the sky is blue, you have no way of knowing that what I understand as “blue” is the same hue that you understand to be “blue,” despite the fact that we speak the same language.) So, an *E2* speaker might not understand speakers of *E1* or *E3*, even if all three speakers appear to be speaking a form of English, because speakers of these three languages may use the same words to refer to different things, based on their own background languages and ontological commitments. Thus, there is no way to objectively determine if, for example, a “wink” is the same as ;- ) is the same as 🙄.

And yet, communication does manage to occur,<sup>26</sup> even in the face of this inscrutability. Quine does not believe that communication is impossible. Rather, we communicate by recognizing that spoken references are relative and reliant on the speaker’s language and understanding of the world. Accepting that, we can come to shared agreement on meaning. For example, it may not be possible to know if two people think of the same shade when they say “blue.” But both can agree that the word “blue” can be used to refer to the color of the sky.

Ludwig Wittgenstein theorized that language should be understood in pragmatic terms. Perhaps his most famous dictum on language is simply: “Meaning is use.” That is, the meaning of a word (or an emoji) is not some abstract notion that exists independent of context. Instead, “For a large class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word “meaning,” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”<sup>27</sup> For our purposes, we can say that an *E2* speaker need not understand the abstract value of any word (or emoji) spoken by a speaker of *E1*

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<sup>25</sup> If you do not, then I hope Google Translate has done a good job with this essay.

<sup>26</sup> Sometimes, even in law journals!

<sup>27</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

or *E2*. What is important is understanding (or attempting to understand) the way in which the words are used.

Therefore, even if we believe that time (and technological shifts) can change a language so drastically that it becomes functionally a different language, we can still seek to understand the language of other times. We can at least do this to a great enough extent that we can thoughtfully comment on the language of the past and perhaps attempt to influence the development of the language of the future. To do so, we must keep in mind that languages are not abstract entities, but rather relative and contextual, with meaning derived from use.

### *C. Moving Forward*

O'Brien criticizes the English language of his time and what he believes to be harmful trends in the development of the English of the future. We often do the same today. To thoughtfully comment on the language of another time (including the technologically-influenced language of the future) we must accept that we will never fully understand that other language.

O'Brien critiques what he believes to be negative changes to language brought on by technology. One could argue that conceptualizing *E2* and *E1* as fundamentally different languages merely serves to highlight the dangers of accepting technologically-driven language changes. The argument goes something like this: Assume *E2* is a new language that grows out of *E1*. Also assume that speakers of *E2* perceive and interact with the world based on *E2*. If one believes that how people perceive and interact with the world matters, then it is important to ensure that *E2* is a language that supports positive perception and interaction. If *E2* grows out of *E1*, then it is likely that changes in *E1* will later be reflected in the development of *E2*. Thus, if a person has an opportunity to influence changes in *E1* (say, by writing an article critiquing a new paucity of punctuation), then that person has a responsibility to do so – for the good of the future *E2*-speaking society. Therefore, commentators like O'Brien are justified in criticizing the ways in which new technology changes the language of their times.

However, this line of reasoning is based on a faulty premise<sup>28</sup>: that it is possible to direct the development of *E2* by perpetuating or preventing changes in *E1*. An *E1* speaker cannot understand *E2*. An *E1* speaker and an *E2* speaker, despite both appearing to speak English, are actually speaking two entirely different languages. If *E1* and *E2* are entirely different languages, it is possible that an *E1* speaker would have no way of knowing how to intentionally direct the development of *E2*. Furthermore, even if an *E1* speaker were to determine how to influence particular results in *E2*, the *E1* speaker would not know what linguistic features in *E2* would create the kind of language that would support positive perception and interaction. What is beneficial for *E1* may not be what is beneficial for *E2*. For example, focus on proper punctuation (*p*) may be a feature in *E1* that supports positive human perception and interaction in the *E1*-speaking society. However, in *E2*-speaking society, *p* may actually be a negative feature (perhaps because it disincentivizes new, creative forms of expression like the use of emoticons).

The language of the past and the language of the future can only be understood in relation to their contexts. So it is not necessary to prove that an *E2* speaker can understand *E1* or *E3*. For Quine, the *E1*/*E2*/*E3* distinction does not matter. References are always inscrutable, even for speakers of the same language. Thus, a person attempting to evaluate the language of the past or the future does not need to prove that she can understand either language. Instead, she must try to contextualize both languages and understand the ways in which the social framework of the time may have impact on the languages and the ways in which people speak them.

### III.

#### CHANGE AND NEWNESS

Throughout the essay, O'Brien waxes nostalgic for a form of the English language that likely did not even exist in his day, and possibly never quite existed.

If I seem to exaggerate the effect of these agencies, or to overrate the part which they play in the development of present-day usage,

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<sup>28</sup> It is actually based on many faulty premises, but who has the time?

## *A ;- ) at the Past and Future of English*

I can only plead in extenuation the priceless heritage of English speech which it is ours to conserve. It is not the vanguards of the on-coming forces, but the richness of the treasures behind the citadels that give importance to such a survey. Wider than Britain's Empire and our great stretches of territory is the dominion of the English tongue, rich with the spoils of its honorable conquest. Its words and forms have been gathered, alike from the patois of savages<sup>29</sup> and the languages of every civilization, old and new. Certainly there can be no such thing as trifles and no considerations deserving to be called unimportant among the influences which affect in any degree the growth and permanency of our English, with its comprehensive and elastic vocabulary, and the splendid richness of its rhetorical forms.

There is no harm in loving one's own language, just as there is no harm in loving one's own country. However, in love and loyalty to both, one must take caution to not fall prey to the temptation of nostalgia. A language (like a country) is constantly evolving. The "priceless heritage of English speech" that O'Brien refers to was not a static entity, even in his day. It was a "heritage" of language, a history of change. To respect and protect that language, then, is to also respect and protect its capacity to change – even if that change means more emoticons and fewer semicolons.

There is no reason why linguistic changes wrought by technological shifts should be necessarily less legitimate than linguistic changes caused by centuries of British imperialism. O'Brien lovingly describes English as a language that incorporated cultural influences from various British territories and from other civilizations. He does not similarly praise the incorporation of influences from technology. However, what is new technology (or "machinery") but a shift in culture? To put it another way, technological change is important, in linguistics or otherwise, because it reflects a change in society.

In "Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society," Jack Balkin writes:

Instead of focusing on novelty, we should focus on salience. What elements of the social world does a new technology make particu-

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<sup>29</sup> The non-ironic use of this term is an example of how language evolves and how that evolution can sometimes be for the better.

larly salient that went relatively unnoticed before? What features of human activity or of the human condition does a technological change foreground, emphasize, or problematize? And what are the consequences for human freedom of making this aspect more important, more pervasive, or more central than it was before?<sup>30</sup>

It is unwise to dismiss out of hand, linguistic changes related to new technologies. What is salient about new technologies, including communication technologies, is what the technologies reveal about new shifts in culture and society.

For example, one could argue, as O'Brien does, that the popularization of the telegraph caused a shift in the English language towards deprioritizing punctuation. What is really interesting, though, is what the popularization of the telegraph reveals about globalization at the turn of the twentieth century. Or perhaps what is interesting is the shift in public information access, as people expected news stories delivered faster and from greater distances. In this context, then, using less punctuation could be seen as a positive change reflecting the democratization of information access and communication.

It ultimately does not matter if the new technology we are debating is the telegraph or Telegram,<sup>31</sup> the controversial encrypted mobile messaging app. What matters is not so much that a new technology is new, but rather, what the new technology tells us about society and how it is changing. This is important to remember when discussing the impact of technology on language, but it is also important for technology law discussions.

O'Brien analyzed the impact of new technology through the lens of rhetoric. Lawyers and legal scholars analyze the impact of new technology through the lens of the law. Linguists use a linguistic lens. Philosophers, a philosophic one. What is common in each of these approaches is that language is the *sine qua non* of all of these fields. The language we share (if one believes it to be possible to share a language) is of paramount importance

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<sup>30</sup> Jack Balkin, *Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society*, 79 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 1 (2004).

<sup>31</sup> Howard Wen, *What is Telegram and is it secure?*, CSO Online (May 18, 2018), [www.csoonline.com/article/3273344/privacy/what-is-telegram-and-is-it-secure.html](http://www.csoonline.com/article/3273344/privacy/what-is-telegram-and-is-it-secure.html).



to every single conversation for scholars and practitioners<sup>32</sup> in each of these fields. This means that essays like O'Brien's (criticizing new changes in language) will continue to appear in magazines, on websites, and through whatever new forms of information sharing develop in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The typewriter, telegraph, dictation, and shorthand all affected the way the English language developed. So too will computers, mobile phones, text messaging, email, social media, and so on. What is interesting is not any particular technology in and of itself, but rather what the technological shift reveals about our society and the way we perceive and interact with our constantly-evolving language. The English language of today is not the same as the English language of O'Brien's time, and it will not be the same as the English language as spoken by denizens of the future.

It is difficult to foretell how language will change or how any particular change in language may reflect on society. A technologically-influenced change in language may be good; it may be bad. Regardless, the change serves as a barometer for changes in society at large. One should take caution in criticizing new linguistic changes and the new technologies that drive them. Such criticism may be simply the defensive reaction of a person speaking a language that is dying.

The language of today is not the same as the language of the future. The technology of today will not be the technology of the future. The society of today will not be the society of the future. When we reject new changes to language, what we are really objecting to is the unavoidable truth that all things pass, eventually. One day, the language we speak will no longer exist in any recognizable form. Our society will no longer exist as it does today. It is tempting, when faced with the prospect of mortality, to hold onto the belief that the larger societal structures we are part of (languages, cultures, countries) will continue to endure.

Perhaps this is the real reason why every new change in language, technology, or society is quickly met with strong resistance and cries that

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<sup>32</sup> With the exception of philosophy, as it cannot be said with a straight face that there exist any non-scholarly philosophy "practitioners."

*Tiffany Li*

the new change is ruining the traditions of old. It is the same reason why the older children sneer at the younger ones – a gesture of strength thinly masking a wistful longing to return.

*GB*



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## MACHINERY AND ENGLISH STYLE

BY ROBERT LINCOLN O'BRIEN

IN every age since written language began, rhetorical forms have been to a considerable extent influenced by the writing materials and implements which were available for man's use. This is a familiar observation in studies of the past. Is it not, then, time that somebody inquired into the effects upon the form and substance of our present-day language of the veritable maze of devices which have come into widely extended use in recent years, such as the typewriter, with its invitation to the dictation practice; shorthand, and, most important of all, the telegraph? Certainly these agencies of expression cannot be without their marked and significant influences upon English style.

Were the effects of these appliances limited to the persons actually using them such an inquiry would not be worth making. Commemoration odes will never be composed by dictation, — *Paradise Lost* to the contrary, — nor will the great pulpit orator prepare his anniversary sermons, having in view their transmis-

sion by submarine cable. However generally modern novelists and playwrights may avail themselves of the assistance of a stenographer, it seems certain that the saner and nobler literature of the world will always be written in more deliberate, and perhaps old-fashioned ways, by mechanical methods in which there has been little change from Chaucer to Kipling.

But, unfortunately, no man writes to himself alone. The makers of the popular vocabulary decree to a great extent the words which the recluse of the cloister must select. If the typewriter and the telegraph, for mechanical reasons purely, are encouraging certain words, certain arrangements of phrases, and a different dependence on punctuation, such an influence is a stone whose ripples, once set in motion, wash every shore of the sea of literature. Every rhetorician hastens to acknowledge that the most he can hope to do by his art is to reflect the best usage of the day, of which he is little more than an observer.

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Robert Lincoln O'Brien (1865-1955) was a journalist working in Washington, DC when he wrote the article reprinted here for the October 1904 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Granting, then, that the only effects of these mechanical agencies worth noticing come from their reflex relation to popular habits of expression, I purpose to trace some of the influences which the telegraph exercises in the choice of words and in rhetorical forms. A similar study of the various schemes of abbreviated writing derives an added importance from the fact that a universal shorthand has long been one of the dreams of orthographic reformers. While the immediate realization of this need not be feared, who can safely assert that some system may not suddenly be flashed before the public so simple and complete as to compel the attention of an utilitarian age? The effects upon literary style of all existing shorthands permit of accurate analysis. I shall also advert to some of the effects of the dictation habit which the typewriting machines have brought into vogue, to the inevitable failure of the graphophone as an agency of composition; and, incidently, chiefly as an illustration of how mechanical trifles are modifying modern English, I shall allude to some of the not inconsiderable effects of the newspaper headline.

Let us turn to shorthand first, because it is a possible agency of composition, rather than of transmission. For purposes of illustration, take the Phillips Code, which is the shorthand of the telegraphers:—

ak	acknowledge
akd	acknowledged
akg	acknowledging
akm	acknowledgment

iw	it was
ix	it is
iwr	it was reported
ixr	it is reported
iwx	it was expected
ixx	it is expected

At this second appearance to take the oath  
*At ts second aprc to tk t oath*  
of the presidential office  
*f prl ofs*  
there is less occasion for an extended address  
*tr is les oca fo an xtd-ed ads*

than there was at the  
*tan tr ws at t*  
first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail,  
*fs. Tn a statement smw in detail,*  
of the course to be pursued  
*f course to b pursued*  
seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the  
*semd fitting & prp. Nw, at t*  
expiration of four years, during  
*expiration o fr ys, dur*  
which public declarations have been  
*wh pu declarations hbn*  
constantly called forth on every  
*constantly cld fh on ey*  
point and phase of the great contest which  
*pnt & phase f gt contest wh.*  
still absorbs the attention  
*still asbs t atn*  
and engrosses the energies of the nation,  
*& engrosses t energies f nation,*  
little that is new could be  
*lit tt is nu cd b*  
presented.  
*ptd.*

Here is a system of natural shorthand, based on the English alphabet and, therefore, very easy to learn. Many hurried writers, in their own memoranda, or in rough-draft composition, and especially college students taking notes, make "wh" for "which" and "t" for "the." This system is merely a codification of such abbreviations. By it they are put into a strait-jacket. Its followers learn from the code book what short cuts are safe, and where complications would ensue. It thus standardizes natural abbreviations.

This, and every scheme of shorthand ever devised, offers to carry a long phrase, provided it is in frequent use, more cheaply, or with fewer strokes, than the short phrase which is unfamiliar.

To illustrate: S-c-o-t-u-s stands for the "Supreme Court of the United States," a sign obviously made from the initials of the words represented, just as "Potus," makes "President of the United States." While Scotus thus stands for six words, it is impossible to have "s. c.," its first two letters, stand alone for "Supreme Court," because those letters are wanted for South Carolina. "Supreme Court" by itself is not abbreviated. The

"Supreme Court of the United States" is. Hence it comes to pass that the reporter who writes in code can truthfully say, as one did to me recently, "When I am in a great hurry to rush off a dispatch I always write 'the Supreme Court of the United States,' but if I have plenty of time I say simply 'the Supreme Court.'"

Fancy a system of universal shorthand in which a little effort made many words, and a greater effort fewer. This would be analogous to the long and the short haul clause of our Interstate Commerce Law. It is deemed contrary to public policy to let the railroads carry freight cheaper from Albany to Buffalo than from Albany to Syracuse; it would be equally adverse to literary policy to have any system of written expression in popular use which so discriminated in favor of the long haul. And yet every system of shorthand virtually does this. And shorthand is about as old as the art of writing. Words of most frequent use get the shortest signs. The others are not much abbreviated, but in regular systems of shorthand are "written out," as stenographers say when every sound is expressed in phonographic terms. A single stroke in Ben Pitman's stenography will make "in the first place." Similarly, t-nr-t, made without lifting the finger, is "at any rate;" t-nr-t contains all the consonant sounds of "at any rate." The vowels, of course, are of no consequence. Any less conventional phrase which might be needed to introduce a sentence could only be expressed by much greater effort. Such an arrangement puts a tremendous premium upon the inordinate use of the already overworked phrases.

There are cases in the code where the effort, or the charge, is the same for the long as for the short haul, a condition not quite so unfavorable to literary felicity. With the same number of letters, for example, written as a single word, we may say Secretary, or Secretary of State. One is "s-e-y" and the other "s-o-s," — Sey Hay or Sos Hay. Similarly, it makes no difference in effort whether we write

Sey Shaw or Sot Shaw, although Sot Shaw conveys the full official title of our nation's finance minister.

It may, perhaps, be of interest to know that while ours is a growing language, this is not a growing code. The telegraph companies forbid their operators to extemporize code words, or to use any which are not in the standard list. This rule has grown out of sad experience. Some years ago, when diplomatic complications with Italy were uppermost in the public mind, a press association sent out along its wires one night the notice of a newly coined code sign. The instructions said that the five words, "Baron Fava, the Italian Ambassador," would henceforth be written "d-a-g-o." This was rather easy to remember! But the one pupil who was absent from school the day the concert exercises were given out made himself felt in this instance. He allowed the untranslated code to slip into a prominent newspaper the next morning which announced that "a dago" had done certain things which other equally reputable newspapers were at the same time attributing to the personal representative of the august sovereign of Italy. No more emergency measures have been permitted.

In another way this premium which every scheme of shorthand puts upon the conventional forms of speech may be represented. Popular manuals of architecture tell us that in building houses there is great difference in cost between the use of stock sizes of door and window frames and of those which have to be cut out on special order. So it is with shorthand in cutting out literary forms. To be original is very wasteful of effort. An observant New England clergyman once told me that an extremely bright man in his Divinity School class, who always composed his sermons in shorthand, had in later years attracted attention because of his painful use of conventional terms and phrases. This took away much of the charm from what might otherwise have been an agreeable style. While this

experience may not be that of all who compose in this medium, that it would be the natural tendency of a universal shorthand can hardly be doubted.

While nobody would look for Addisonian passages in the stock market reports which are telegraphed over the country, the dreary monotony of their phrases furnishes something of a foretaste of the reign of abbreviated writing. In the market code the word "Hume" means "Holders unwilling to make concession." What mortal man would ever write "holders *disinclined* to make concessions," when so slight a change would involve such an amount of extra work? In short, the five pages of the market code contain about all the forms of expression and varieties of language ever seen in these market reports.

*Shah*, for example, means "shade higher," and *sog* means "the stock of grain on hand."

Among the many "apostrophes to labor," the all-conqueror, there should be reserved some little recognition of what we owe in our English style to the fact that the efforts involved in written and in spoken expression run along side by side at so even a ratio. Such exceptions as "through" with one syllable, and "deify" with three syllables, and fewer letters, are rare. In the main, product in writing corresponds with effort, and before we give favoring ear to any new system of abbreviated writing we should assure ourselves that this condition is retained.

The effects of the telegraph upon present-day literary forms are much more direct than those of shorthand, for, while only a few persons compose in the latter medium, a large share of the reading matter of the modern world is written by persons who necessarily have in view at the time its transmission over electric wires. The limitations of the telegraph thus vitally affect what the present age is reading. Nor are their relations to literary form less distinct than those of shorthand.

Textbooks in rhetoric discuss learnedly the principles which should govern our

choice as between the rugged old Saxon words, made familiar in earliest childhood, and the longer ones of classic origin. Rhetoricians explain that, while in general the simplest words are the best, we should be chiefly governed by the effect which we aim to produce. But so far as I have been able to see, they pay no heed, as a practical agency affecting choice in the modern world, to the greater adaptability of the long word for telegraphic transmission, and hence of its liability to encroach upon the field of the simpler Saxon in popular usage, and so in the mental habits of the time.

There are two reasons for preferring the big word in telegraphing,—its greater accuracy and its economy from a pecuniary point of view. The latter consideration does not amount to much, since wires are often leased by the hour, and publications which are willing to pay for an extensive telegraphic service would not bother with petty differences of cost any more than any reader would think, in sending a message to New York, of the more specific information which could be conveyed for a quarter through the medium of ten long words.

But errors in transmission are the constant dread of the extensive user of the telegraph. Half-unconsciously he comes to prefer those words which experience teaches him go through safely. He may not be aware that this influence is operative, when he decides to write "superintendent" instead of "head," or "overseer" instead of "chief," because of the fewer chances that either of these long words will be confused at any point in the journey with something varying in perhaps a single letter. The long word throws out more life-lines. A slight mistake in its transmission does not vitiate its meaning.

The story is familiar of the New York commission merchant who telegraphed his factor: "Cranberries rising. Send at once 50 barrels, per Simmons," meaning by way of a certain Mr. Simmons who was the New Orleans agent. In a few

days a consignment arrived from the Southern factor, but with the plaintive suggestion that not another barrel of persimmons could be had for love or money in the entire state. The courts were not in this instance asked to decide whether the cost of an attempt to corner the market could be charged to the telegraph company for failing to take note of the "constructive recess" between per and Simmons.

Most jurymen would have said that the New York merchant was little less than idiotic to use a word so clearly open to error. So would the journalist be guilty of contributory negligence if he failed, after long experience, to make some selections in recognition of so obvious a danger. He will not, for example, send the word "prevision," because somebody who handles the word on its journey would be almost sure to change it to the more familiar "provision." Whenever two words are thus closely alike, one in common use and the other rare, only the former can with thorough safety be sent by telegraph. The wires are thus constantly shrinking the popular vocabulary, hastening the retirement of words of the less useful sort. Of all the pres and pros and ins and uns, the word of less familiar use is the one liable to be transformed to its already overworked rival. To the word that hath uses shall be given is a principle of the wires, applied with a vengeance. The writer who tried to be so fastidious as to describe a person by wire as "unmoral," would have as the reward of his pains at the other end of the line the ordinary term "immoral." Subjunctive moods, implying something contrary to reality, drop out in the same way. The writer who desires to convey this notion must do it in some less delicate way.

Only one operator among a considerable number needs to change from a less to a more familiar word, and it never gets back. Moreover, a word need fail but one time in ten to become objectionable to careful writers. So important is this

subject that the latest editions of Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary* contain a section on the most common telegraphic errors. The author cites the importance of unraveling this class of mistakes as one of the greatest uses of a classification of words by the groups of letters with which they end rather than by their initials.

The noun "cant," this book shows, may be made "tenant" without any change whatever except in the spaces between the dots and dashes of the first letter. How much safer the longer word "jargon," or, better still, "hypocritical speech," would in these circumstances be! It is not important to discuss these errors here, more than to allude to this recognition by the dictionary-makers of the important place in modern life of the telegrapher's eccentricities.

This agency, then, encourages big words and the overworked words. Its tendency is thus against the widening of the popular vocabulary, a misfortune too patent to need comment. It is an axiom of the rhetoricians that the power to express many and various shades of thought and feeling rests on the possession of a large and well-managed vocabulary. Many of our words already have so many meanings as to be subject to constant misinterpretation. It has been argued that half of the petty disputes of mankind may be traced in the last analysis to a different understanding of the language involved in the issue between the disputants. Examples of this are familiar.

But a greater effect of the telegraph on rhetorical forms arises from its relation to punctuation. Only the most obvious stops can be depended on; hence, one accustomed to this method of transmission learns to put sentences into such shape that they punctuate themselves, avoiding forms which could be completely overturned in sense by neglect of a period or by its conversion into a comma. The adverbial phrase at the beginning of a sentence is especially dangerous, because it so readily adapts itself to the end of the sentence before, with results that may be



amusing or amazing. It is always safer to have sentences begin directly, and even abruptly, with the noun which is their subject. Much of the graceful elision of one sentence into the next is lost by this requirement. Where each sentence stands out as distinct as a brick the literary passage will have the aspect of a brick wall.

Lest these should seem plausible but unsupported theories I will compare some actual narration which has gone over the telegraph lines or the cables, with prose composed when no such requirement was in view. *Collier's Weekly*, for February 6, 1904, presented the first cable message from Mr. Frederick Palmer, its correspondent in Japan, and a writer of more than ordinary grace and polish. His dispatch consisted of fifteen sentences.

These begin as follows:—

The Nation is  
It seems  
There is  
If troops are being moved  
It is not  
Their movements do  
The government is  
All these preparations are  
There was never  
If transports or troops are being  
All partisanship has been  
No word is obtainable  
War preparations proceed  
Such unity of preparation and control is un-  
exampled  
It is as if.

Not a single sentence here begins with an adverbial or adjective phrase. The only two sentences that begin with anything but the subject plain and direct are those having an adverbial clause, "if troops are being moved" in one, and "if transports or troops are being concentrated" in the other. In neither of these could the adverbial phrase be attached to the preceding sentence. If it could have been Mr. Palmer would not have sent it.

In George Bancroft's account of the battle of Lexington nearly half of the sentences, by actual count, begin with a

qualifying phrase of some sort. Here are a few of them:—

On the afternoon of the day  
In the following night  
A little beyond Charlestown Neck Revere was  
At two in the morning, under the eye of  
the minister and of Hancock and Adams,  
Lexington common was.

I have before me an Associated Press dispatch from Seoul consisting of three hundred words compressed into eleven sentences. Every one, except the last, begins squarely with its subject. Let us contrast this abrupt, uniform, monotonous method of narration with some exceedingly familiar sentences of another sort, and think what the telegrapher's objection to them would be.

"With all his faults — and they were neither few nor small — only one cemetery was worthy to contain his remains. In that temple of silence and reconciliation" —

An adverbial phrase which you will notice could grammatically be attached to the preceding sentence just as well.

"Where the enmities of twenty generations lie buried, in the Great Abbey, which has during many ages afforded a quiet resting-place, etc. — This was not to be.

"Yet the place of interment was not ill chosen.

"Behind the chancel of the parish church of Daylesford, in earth which already held the bones" —

Please notice how the conversion of the comma after Daylesford into a full stop would make two entirely grammatical sentences, as follows:—

"Yet the place of interment was not ill chosen behind the chancel of the parish church of Daylesford.

"In earth which already held the bones of many chiefs of the house of Hastings was laid the coffin of the greatest man who has ever borne that ancient and widely extended name."

It is clear that Macaulay's prose would be badly twisted on the wires. He sometimes, to be sure, writes a considerable



passage in crisp, short, periodic sentences. This is a part of his art, to show the rapid movement of events. But he would have dreaded to be tied down to such a style always.

So marked a difference in the manner of stringing sentences together between that employed by Macaulay and Bancroft, on the one hand, and by two present-day correspondents on the other, I maintain, is not altogether due to the varying literary standards of these writers, but is in part accounted for by the conditions under which they severally write. In the lines which I have quoted Bancroft and Macaulay could trust their punctuation absolutely; their obscurest comma had the strength of Gibraltar. Mr. Palmer and the Seoul correspondent, in their painful loneliness on the other side of the globe, were deprived of all those consolations which faith in punctuation marks can give.

It seems clear that, as our language has progressed, more and more dependence has been placed on the punctuation. It has done more work; delicate shades of meaning have been conveyed by the visual image which the punctuation itself makes. This tendency, then, is in process of checking, so far as the telegraph operates to affect present-day usage.

When the wires slight punctuation they do rhetorical form an injury for which nothing can atone. From earliest childhood catch phrases have been familiar in which the meaning depended wholly on the location of a comma. Important cases have gone to the courts hanging on the punctuation of a tariff bill. The most discussed regulation of liquor traffic in Massachusetts to-day is known as the "Semi-colon" Law.

The English language is peculiarly rich in its connective parts of speech. These give the skillful writer an opportunity for the widest play of his art, in expressing the most delicate shades of conjunctive and disjunctive relation. Much of this is endangered by the wires. For example, the use of "and" and "but" as

the first words of sentences, while ordinarily not desirable, on occasions suggests a relation for which there is no ready substitute.

It is rather hard to give specific illustrations where the meaning of an "And" which begins with a capital does not approximate to that of an "and" in the middle of a sentence, and separated from what precedes it by a comma. The most that we can say in these cases is that one form is better than the other.

"Your fathers, where are they? And do they live forever?"

How much better it is to have this second question stand off from the first as it does when made a new sentence and not a coördinate part of the preceding one. Of the thirty-one verses of the first chapter of Genesis, King James Version, twenty-nine begin with "And," following a period. Such illustrations show that "and" and "but," usually interior words, may be needed at the beginning of a sentence, a practice which the wires discourage. A writer dependent on them would feel safer to convey this conjunctive relation in some other form, necessarily by more blunt methods. Because the usual place of "and" and "but" is in the middle of a sentence the telegraph inclines to keep them there. It would thus send language into ruts which are already too deep.

The telegraph, it should be remembered, performs some good services for English style. The periodic sentence, the clean-cut sentence, the readily understood sentence are at a premium on the telegraph. It thus serves clearness and force rather than elegance.

The invention of the typewriter has given a tremendous impetus to the dictating habit, especially among business men. The more ephemeral literary productions of the day are dictated, sometimes to a stenographer for transcription, and often directly to the machine. In either case the literary effects of the dictating habit are too manifest to need elaboration. The standards of spoken

language, which in the days of the past stood out in marked contrast with the terseness and precision of written composition, giving rise to the saying that no good speech ever read well, have crossed over to the printed page. This means not only greater diffuseness, inevitable with any lessening of the tax on words which the labor of writing imposes, but it also brings forward the point of view of the one who speaks. There is the disposition on the part of the talker to explain, as if watching the facial expression of his hearers to see how far they are following. This attitude is not lost when his audience becomes merely a clicking typewriter. It is no uncommon thing in the typewriting booths at the Capitol in Washington to see Congressmen in dictating letters use the most vigorous gestures as if the oratorical methods of persuasion could be transmitted to the printed page.

The graphophone has been long enough before the public to make very clear its limitations. It is useful in transcription, but worthless in composition, and unless radically amended will always be useless. In its present form it is used at the National House of Representatives and among the court reporters, who read their stenographic notes into it; girls, with sounders over their ears, and playing the keys of the typewriter, turn the records into printed form. They regulate the speed exactly as they wish to write. In this respect it is ideal.

But the failure of the graphophone for composition arises from the unwillingness of a human being to be left behind in a race. The waxen wheel begins to spin; the person dictating must either keep pace with its rapid rotations, or bring it to a standstill. Such a race is not an invitation to careful thought or accurate utterance. Of all the devices to encourage verbosity and carelessness, this is without doubt the worst that has ever been invented. The graphophone is, therefore, not one of the present-day agencies modifying English style; but the rea-

son for this is that it does not have the chance.

One other agency shows how trifles in mechanism may still have an influence on English usage. My attention was called to this not long ago by a serious editorial in the literary supplement of a substantial newspaper, discussing whether the word "tie-up" had obtained a sufficient footing in the language to be permissible. It was at the time of the coal strike, and some purist had objected to the prevalent use of the word. This editorial took the other view, giving as a weighty reason that the word was indispensable in making headlines, and so had earned a place for itself in English usage.

The headline writer enjoys in effect a form of poetic license. His constant study is to present the most salient and attracting feature of a dispatch in a series of words which may be spelled in perhaps twenty-two letters. It is letters, rather than words, that count with him, and he also has to give a special rating to M's and W's. When a leading newspaper recently changed its type, cutting its number of headline letters down to twenty, its veteran employees in this department narrowly escaped becoming maniacs; their whole mental machinery was completely disarranged; they were compelled to look at everything in the world at an angle of twenty twenty-seconds.

The chase for a great deal of meaning with a few letters has led to the revival of some words which would otherwise have gone into complete disuse. Dr. Hornaday tried vainly to get the New York newspapers to say Zoölogical Park instead of "Zoo" when he began to give them material about it. They said that "Zoo" was essential in headlines, and by implication what was useful there could not be wholly tabooed elsewhere. It was the old story of the camel's head under the tent, to use a figure suggested by zoological parks. "Sans" as a preposition is doubtless gaining some headway because of this need. "Wed" is a great headline word.

## *Machinery and English Style*

“Jap,” just now, for a Japanese seems destined in this way to be pushed toward general use. And the public reads the headlines; their influence is contagious. So is that of most of the mechanical agencies of the present day.

If I seem to exaggerate the effect of these agencies, or to overrate the part which they play in the development of present-day usage, I can only plead in extenuation the priceless heritage of English speech which it is ours to conserve. It is not the vanguards of the on-coming forces, but the richness of the treasures behind the citadels that give importance

to such a survey. Wider than Britain's Empire and our great stretches of territory is the dominion of the English tongue, rich with the spoils of its honorable conquest. Its words and forms have been gathered, alike from the patois of savages and the languages of every civilization, old and new. Certainly there can be no such thing as trifles and no considerations deserving to be called unimportant among the influences which affect in any degree the growth and permanency of our English, with its comprehensive and elastic vocabulary, and the splendid richness of its rhetorical forms.

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