

CLINT EASTWOOD

THE **GOOD,**
THE **BAD** AND THE **UGLY**

1. Motivations for this lecture

- How can *is* ever lead to *ought*? If linguistics describes how things are, what are the conditions under which knowledge of linguistics can have any impact on what should be done?
- Implicit argument: if you knew more, then you would be more tolerant.
- The core value of the humanities is the study of human values.
- How do we reconcile the claim that all speakers have full knowledge of their dialect with the act of correcting their writing?
- How can people of good will continue to complain of the decadence and degeneration of language?

2. From *blessedquietness.com*, some excerpts from **The degeneration of the English language**

Much has been written about the fact that the English language reached its peak during the century in which the Authorized Version was produced. Since that time our language has degenerated in two notable ways.

First, the meaning of words has been debased. The downward course of human civilization has pulled many words down from their lofty definitions into the mire of modern speech.

Second, men have attempted to cover this degeneracy by attaching noble words and terms to ignoble things and actions.

The man is putting forward two arguments. Both involve linguistic change, and both explicitly put forth a moral position. He addresses the second argument first:

Americans are so intent upon flattering themselves and exalting their

positions (see Isaiah 14:12-15) that they can no longer call things by their right and proper names. What is mundane and common is renamed in order to sound valuable or impressive.

Here are some examples that he provides:

In front of the manufactured house is not a used car but a pre-owned vehicle. At the curb are not garbage cans but waste receptacles. These have not been put out for the trash collector or garbage man but have been readied for retrieval by the sanitation engineer, not to be hauled to the dump but to be transferred to the sanitary landfill.

...

The business trip doesn't turn out too well and Henry loses his employment opportunity. This is not as bad as it used to be, for he was

not fired but he simply had his employment terminated. This was not because of poor sales but due to an account shortfall.

This goes on and on.

This is the degeneration of language. Words are robbed of their meanings as men seek to make vain and empty lives significant by elevating the normal to the desirable, and thus perverting the language.

No thinking man could possibly have any confidence in a Bible written by modern man, for modern man, in the language of modern man. This is a generation which has no reverence for words, their meanings, or their usage.

The other way in which the language has degenerated is through the fall of words from the nobility of their original meanings into the base and improper use made of them by modern man.

Of those English words which have changed their meaning since 1611, all have taken a turn for the worse. We never find a word acquiring a higher meaning.

He gives a long list of examples like these:

Villain meant a servant of a villa, which is a country farm house. The house has kept its good name, but the poor quality of the worker has degraded his name.

In like manner a **parasite** was, in Greece. the one entrusted with the care of the sacred granary, containing corn for the service of the gods. Because such a man so often became a thief, taking that which he was supposed to guard, the word has fallen to its current usage.

An **apology** once stood for a defense, but because man's defenses of himself are usually so poor the word has come to mean "Excuse me,

please.”

He discusses curses and swear words:

There are no curse words left in our language. The television and movie industry is left to take the most vile words and repeat them dozens of times in order to gain ”dramatic effect.” Where a simple ”damn” once stirred the nation (*Gone with the Wind*), now nothing can make Americans blush.

Damn is a clean word and a noble Biblical term. It is what God will do to all those who reject His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. By reducing this word to common slang, Satan has taken the stinging force out of the gospel presentation.

Hell is a place of burning, fiery torment, awaiting those who are damned. It has been tossed about as an epithet for so long now that

no one takes it seriously.

...

If we must learn some new words and gain a proper education in grammar in order to read the Book of Books produced at a time when our language was at its peak, let us do so. May we climb the heights in pursuit of absolute truth rather than sit carelessly in the depths of modern relativity.

3. Here is a second discussion of language degeneration, also viewed from a Christian context:http://www.0095.info/en/index_theses_en_95onesentencethesesagainste_thedegenerationofhumanlangua.html

- First, what seems to be a statement (or claim) of fact:

Investigations of ancient languages show that they were more complex in earlier times and became simpler over time. The follow-

ing holds for ancient Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chinese, and Native American languages.

- Then something that is a bit harder to view as a fact:

For as far back as we can see, early human languages were able to communicate more information with fewer words than is the case with modern languages.

- And then a conclusion:

Also, more precise formulations were possible with these languages. This contradicts the evolutionary idea of development from simple beginnings to greater complexity.

- The argument is spelled out in more detail:

It has turned out that the idea of development of human language from primitive beginnings to a more sophisticated state is not up-

held by the evidence. The languages of so-called aboriginal natives are not the least bit primitive. They are highly complex, in most cases much more complicated than our European languages. . .

The complex structures of Old Sumerian, Old Akkadian and Old Egyptian contrast impressively with the, in some cases, comparatively very simple morphological structures of the modern languages spoken in Europe today. Whereas Akkadian, for instance, had thousands of synthetic verbal forms, modern German has a comparatively small inventory of forms (1). The term “synthetic verbal forms” designates linguistic forms comprising a single word and requiring no further auxiliary verbs (e.g., have, be, want to, may) to complete or complement their meaning.

- And then the conclusion, which bears directly on a traditional religious interpretation:

The biblical report tells us that all of the people living after the great flood spoke a single language. As they began to spread abroad, they said to one another, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole Earth.” As a punishment for this hubris, God then confused their language and scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the Earth, no longer understanding one another (3).

4. A similar sentiment from an entirely separate culture:

Writer and film director Nagathihalli Chandrashekar on Tuesday expressed concern over degeneration of language and culture. “It is sad to see a State where knowledge of language such as Kannada is being

viewed with a commercial sense. We are asked about the material benefits that knowledge of Kannada would earn,” he said.

Speaking after receiving S.V. Parameshwar Bhat award here, Mr. Chandrashekar said knowledge of a language that connected the culture and ethos of the land could not be equated in commercial terms. “You cannot treat everything with profit and loss angle. It is a sign of degeneration,” he said.¹

5. Mark Halpern focuses on the Humean (David Hume) gulf between the positive and the normative (the *is* and the *ought*). Speaking about an article by Geoffrey Nunberg:

Nunberg made the two classic objections to prescriptivism. The first

¹<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/degeneration-of-language-worries-filmmaker/article1169872.ece>

is the scientific objection: laws of nature are involved here, and those trying to influence linguistic events without knowledge of linguistic laws are simply demonstrating their ignorance and making fools of themselves. Nunberg likened them to landscape gardeners trying to stop or modify the processes of plate tectonics. But if the “frantic efforts” of the gardeners “to keep Alaska from bumping into Asia” are ridiculous, is it not equally silly for geologists to tell landscape gardeners that they must not presume to pollard a lime tree, or put in a fishpond, without deferring to the experts on plate tectonics?

The second is the egalitarian objection: the prescriptivists are attempting to foist their own linguistic practices, which are usually the practices of the educated, affluent, fortunate members of society, on the less educated and affluent members.

Halpern accepts the authority of linguistics to describe what *is*, but reserves

the prerogative of deciding what *ought to be*:

Yes, we know this; we do not contend that the rules we propose for the sake of clarity and richness of communication were handed down from on high. They are ordinary man-made rules, not divine commandments or scientific laws (although many have support from historical scholarship), and we agree that they, like all man-made things, will need continual review and revision. But these facts are no more arguments against laws governing language usage than they are against laws governing vehicular traffic. Arbitrary laws – conventions – are just the ones that need enforcement, not the natural laws. The law of gravity can take care of itself; the law that you go on green and stop on red needs all the help it can get.

Rephrasing slightly, he continued:

Descriptive grammarians suppose that language is language take an entity with its own laws of development, or natural some natural course, if only destiny, and that prescriptive grammarians outsiders are trying to interfere with would cease to the course of that natural meddle with destiny. Nunberg objects it? to the prescriptivist approach on two grounds: it is futile, since language will follow its natural destiny despite all the efforts of the prescriptivists; and it is somehow wrong – immoral? unethical? – to try to interfere, even though the attempt must be futile. But neither Nunberg nor any other linguist has offered any evidence for either of these points.

6. The linguist might pose a stronger position: *Everything* we say or write now was once an error, a mistake, a violation of the elder generation's standards. Everything. 'I' was once a mistake: 7,000 years ago it was *ek*, a few thousand years later it had taken on a suffix, and the 'g' had voiced (in Germanic): *egan*.

The *an* was dropped, and then the *g* in English. (Then, of course, the Great Vowel Shift changed the vowel quality as well.) *were* comes from an earlier form with *z* rather than *r*.

The argument is this: *everything* changes, even the words you love the best. You may keep on loving them, but even the mountains are the result of destructive earthquakes; the Grand Canyon is beautiful, but also the product of millions of years of erosion. Accept it that change is what life is about.

7. From February 23, 2014:

Time now for a public service announcement from our contributor and first-person-singular-pronoun policeman Bill Flanagan of VH1:

I know it sounds snobby to point this out, but in the last 10 or 15 years, millions of intelligent English-speaking people have become flummoxed by when to use “I,” and when to use “me.” You hear it all the time:

Are you coming to the movie with Madonna and I?
Won't you join Oprah and I for dinner?
The Trumps are throwing a party for Barack and I.
It's embarrassing!

At least people who mess up the other way – “Goober and me are going to town” – sound folksy, colloquial, down-to-Earth. But people who say “I” when they should say “me” sound like they are trying to be sophisticated and they're getting it wrong.

Clearly our grade schools have let us down. So for those of you who missed it the first time, here's the simple rule:

If you are writing or speaking a sentence with a list of names, including the first person pronoun, and you are not sure whether to say I or me, take out the other names. That will tell you.

“Are you going to the movie with Betty, Veronica and ...?”

“Me.” Because you would not say, “Are you going to the movie with I?”

And if it’s “Are you going to the movie with me?” it’s also got to be “Are you going to the movie with Betty, Veronica and me.”

“Curly, Larry and who? are going to jail?”

“Curly, Larry and I are going to jail.” Because you would say “I am going to jail,” not “Me am going to jail.” Unless you are Tarzan. (And very few of us are.)

Okay, that’s all I wanted to say. “I” and “me.” Let’s preserve that one small fragment of our civilization.

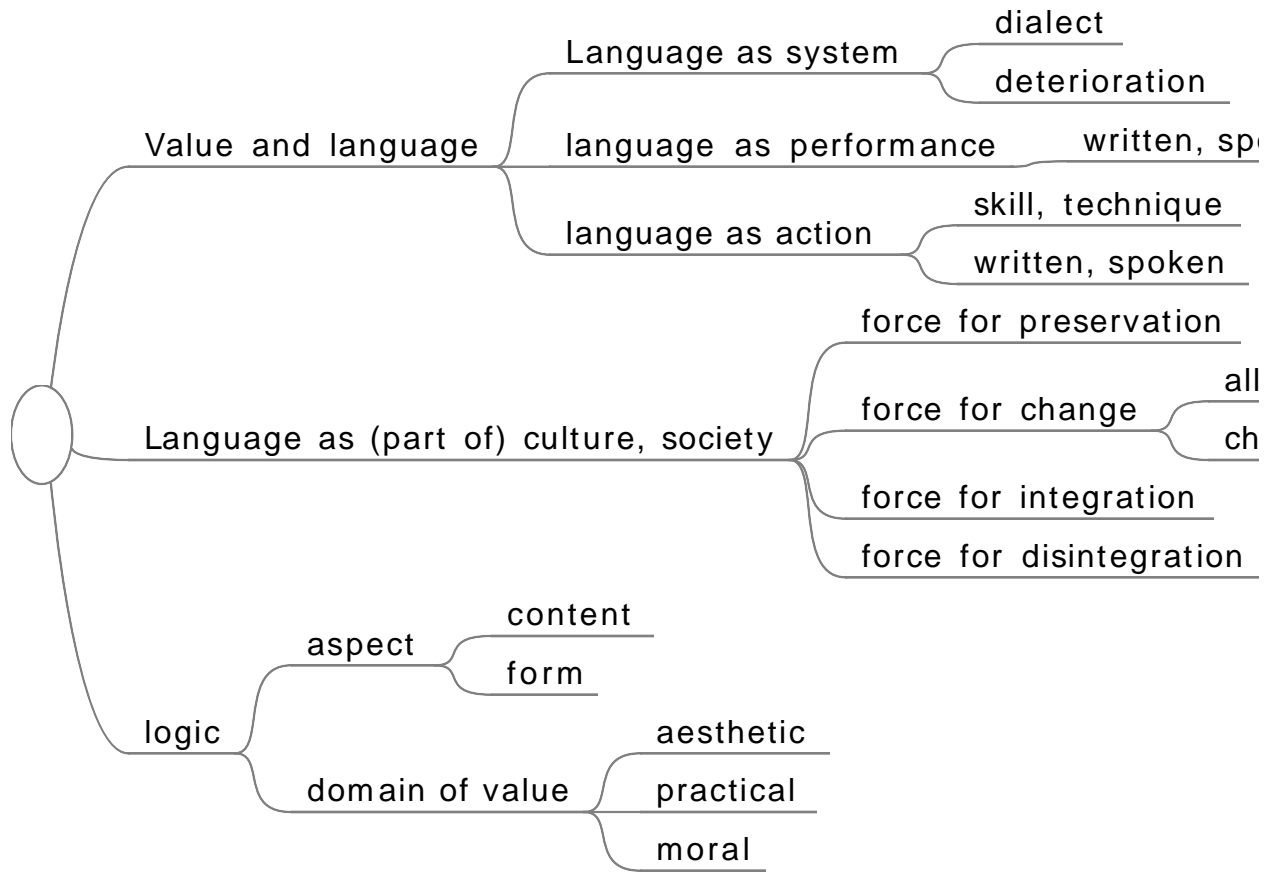
Silly? Etymology:

Old English **gesælig** *happy, fortuitous, prosperous* (related to **sæl** "happiness"), from Proto-Germanic ***sæligas** (cf. Old Norse **sæll** *happy*, Old Saxon **salig**, Middle Dutch **salich**, Old High German **salig**, German **selig** *blessed, happy, blissful*, Gothic **sels** *good, kindhearted*), from PIE ***sele-** *of good mood; to favor*, from root ***sel-** (2) *happy, of good mood; to favor* (cf. Latin **solari** *to comfort*, Greek **hilaros** *cheerful, gay, merry, joyous*). This is one of the few instances in which an original long *e* (ee) has become shortened to *i*. The same change occurs in *breeches*, and in the American pronunciation of *been*, with no change in spelling. [Century Dictionary]

The word's considerable sense development moved from *happy* to *blessed* to *pious*, to *innocent* (c.1200), to *harmless*, to *pitiable* (late 13c.), *weak* (c.1300), to *feeble in mind, lacking in reason, foolish* (1570s). Further tendency toward *stunned, dazed as by a blow* (1886) in knocked silly, etc. *Silly season* in journal-

ism slang is from 1861 (August and September, when newspapers compensate for a lack of hard news by filling up with trivial stories). *Silly Putty* trademark claims use from July 1949.

<http://www.etymonline.com/>



Bad

Things can be bad (or good) in three ways: they can offend **esthetically**, **practically** or **morally**.

This can be due to the **form** or the **content** of the expression: but form/content is a gradient dimension, not a sharp categorical difference.

Ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Ugly and superficially
offensive

Practical

Ineffective

Moral

Blasphemous, hateful,
destructive, evil, hurtful,
or pernicious

Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective
use of
language

Blasphemy,
hateful racial and
ethnic labels

Annoying
music;
bubblegum.

Inciting to buy
big cars, Nike
shoes, and
general
mindlessness;
lack of ideas.

Contributing to
the decay of
political
discourse

Content

Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective use of language

Blasphemy, hateful racial and ethnic labels

Annoying music; bubblegum.

Inciting to buy big cars, Nike shoes, and general mindlessness; lack of ideas.

Contributing to the decay of political discourse

Content

Swearing, obscenities, profanities

Using emotionally charged words in an emotionally charged way and emotionally charged context.

Central conceptual fields:

American English:

Excrement, sex, religion.

French: excrement, sexual body parts and activities particular to them

Canadian French: sacraments of the Catholic church

québécois

baptême - "baptism"

câlîce (calice) - "chalice"

calvaire - "Calvary"

ciarge (cierge) - "votive or Paschal candle"

ciboire - "ciborium" or "pyx", the receptacle in which the host is stored

crisse (Christ) - "Christ"

maudit - "damn"

ostie (hostie) - "host"

sacrament (sacrement) - "Sacrament"

tabarnak (tabernacle) - "tabernacle"

Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective
use of
language

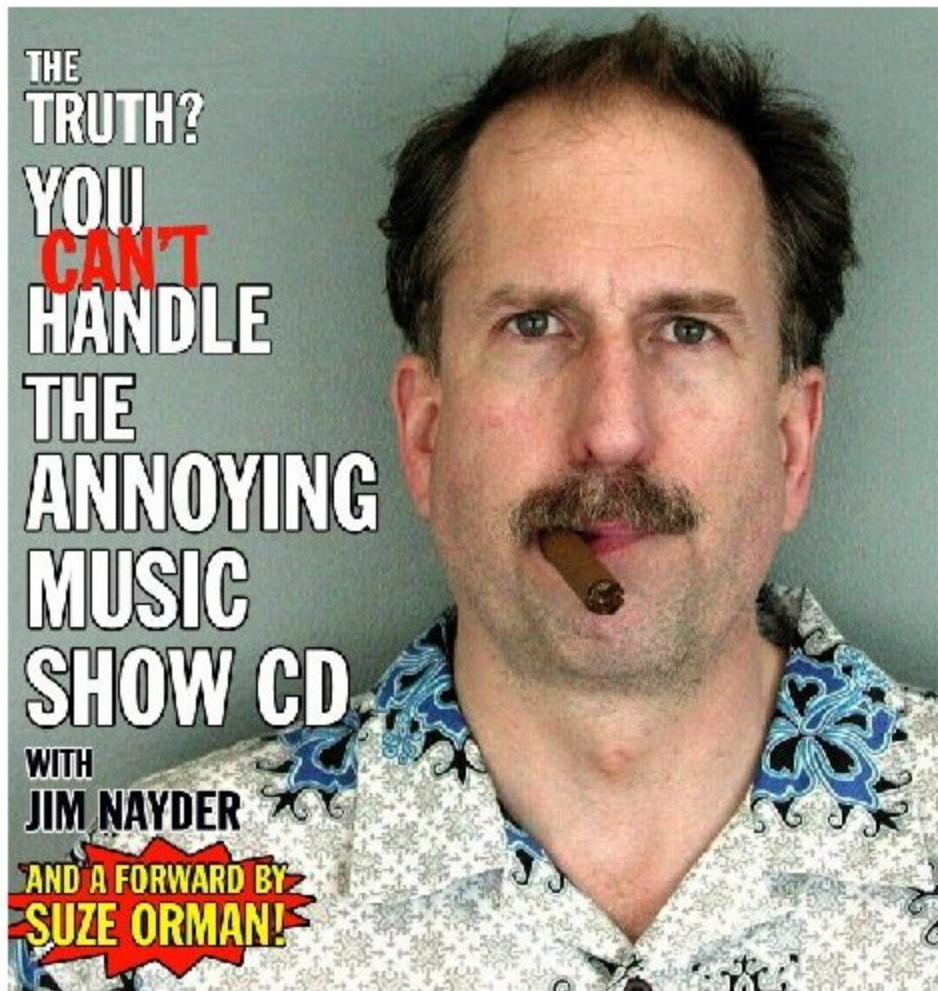
Blasphemy,
hateful racial and
ethnic labels

Annoying
music;
bubblegum.

Inciting to
buy big cars,
Nike shoes,
and general
mindlessness;
lack of ideas.

Contributing to
the decay of
political
discourse

Content



I've chosen songs over plain text just for the fun of it.

Bubblegum

Ohio Express:

Bubblegum music

Yummy, Yummy, Yummy

Françoise Hardy:

Doigts

Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective
use of
language

Blasphemy,
hateful racial and
ethnic labels

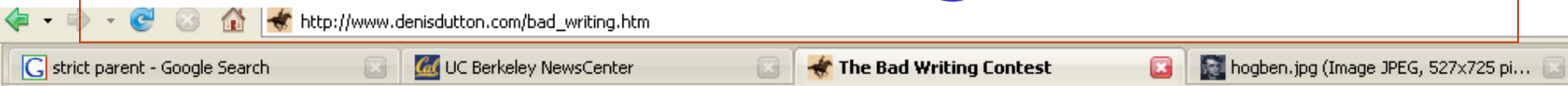
Annoying
music;
bubblegum.

Inciting to
buy big cars,
Nike shoes,
and general
mindlessness;
lack of ideas.

Contributing to
the decay of
political
discourse

Content

The Bad Writing Contest



The Bad Writing Contest

Press Releases, 1996-1998

The *Philosophy and Literature* Bad Writing Contest ran from 1995 to 1998. For background on the contest, click [here](#).

1998

We are pleased to announce winners of the fourth Bad Writing Contest, sponsored by the scholarly journal *Philosophy and Literature*.

Judith Butler

The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure,



Judith Butler

and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.



Homi Bhabha

If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to ``normalize" formally the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality.



Fredric Jameson

The visual is essentially pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination; thinking about its attributes becomes an adjunct to that, if it is unwilling to betray its object; while the most austere films necessarily draw their energy from the attempt to repress their own excess (rather than from the more thankless effort to discipline the viewer).



Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective
use of
language

Blasphemy,
hateful racial and
ethnic labels

Annoying
music;
bubblegum.

Inciting to
buy big cars,
Nike shoes,
and general
mindlessness;
lack of ideas.

Contributing to
the decay of
political
discourse

Content

Bad practical use of language

This category refers to use of language whose *content* is ineffective. No matter how you spiff it up, edit and translate it, it is ineffective – but not evil – by virtue of its very content.

There are ideas that are being expressed, so to speak, but they are ideas of no fundamental value.

Example?

Effective advertising for worthless products and ideas.

Need I say more?

Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective
use of
language

Blasphemy,
hateful racial and
ethnic labels

Annoying
music;
bubblegum.

Inciting to
buy big cars,
Nike shoes,
and general
mindlessness;
lack of ideas.

Contributing to
the decay of
political
discourse

Content

Blasphemy and hateful ethnic and racial epithets

“There are certain well-defined and narrowly limited classes of speech, the prevention and punishment of which have never been thought to raise any constitutional problem. These include **the lewd and obscene, the profane, the libelous, and the insulting or "fighting words"** those which by their very utterance **inflict injury** or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace. It has been well observed that such utterances are no essential part of any exposition of ideas, and are of such slight social value as a step to truth that any benefit that may be derived from them is clearly outweighed by the social interest in order and morality.”

Supreme Court decision: Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire 1942

Cohen v. California 1971

- The Supreme Court redefined fighting words as only those "**personally abusive epithets which, when addressed to the ordinary citizen, are, as a matter of common knowledge, inherently likely to provoke violent reactions.**" The Court reasoned that because Cohen's statement was not an insult directed toward a particular individual, it could not be regulated as fighting words.

Fighting words:

Words intentionally directed toward another person which are so nasty and full of malice as to cause the hearer to suffer emotional distress or incite him/her to immediately retaliate physically (hit, stab, shoot, etc.). While such words are not an excuse or defense for a retaliatory assault and battery, if they are threatening they can form the basis for a lawsuit for assault.

Specific ways to be bad

Aesthetic

Practical

Moral

Form



Swearing

Ineffective
use of
language

Blasphemy,
hateful racial and
ethnic labels

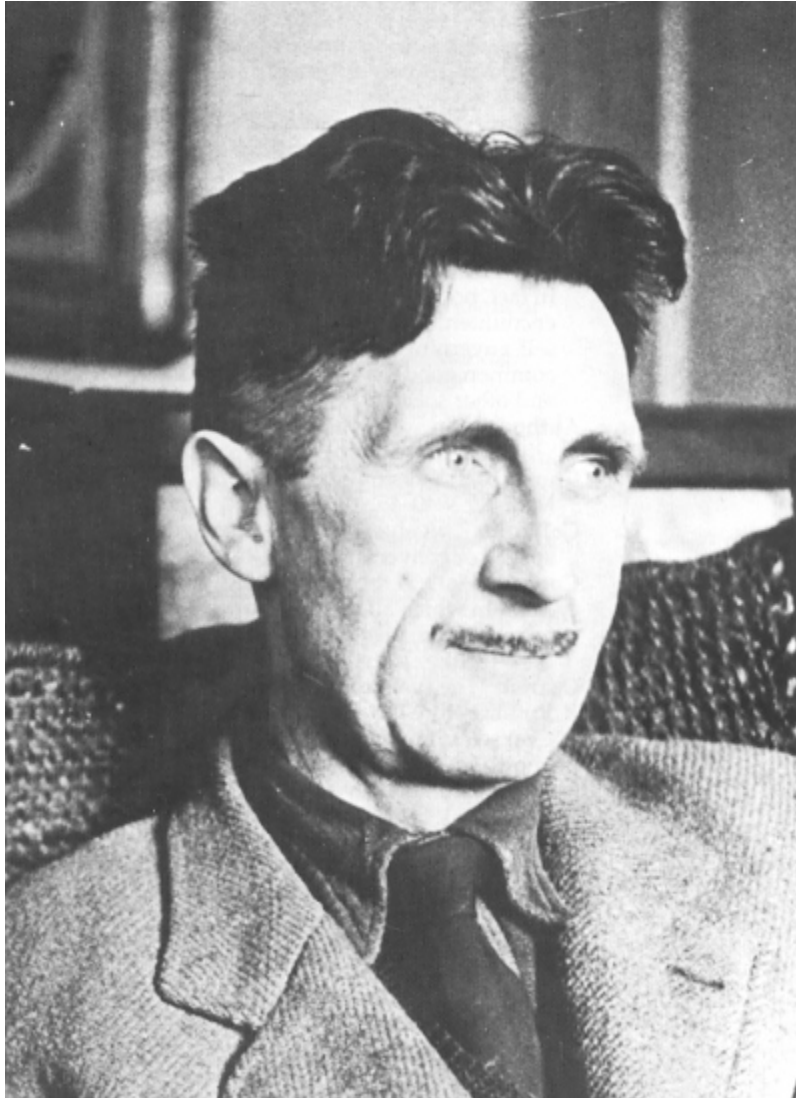
Annoying
music;
bubblegum.

Inciting to
buy big cars,
Nike shoes,
and general
mindlessness;
lack of ideas.

Contributing to
the decay of
political
discourse

Content

George Orwell

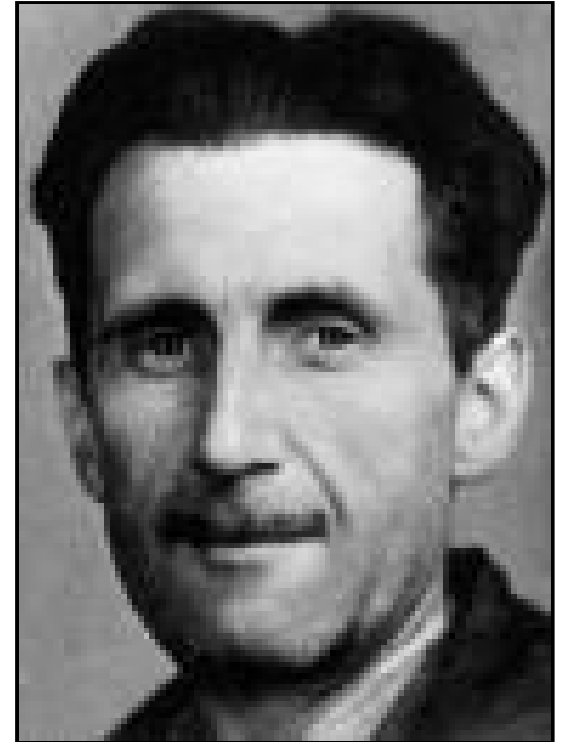


Eric Arthur Blair (1903-1950)

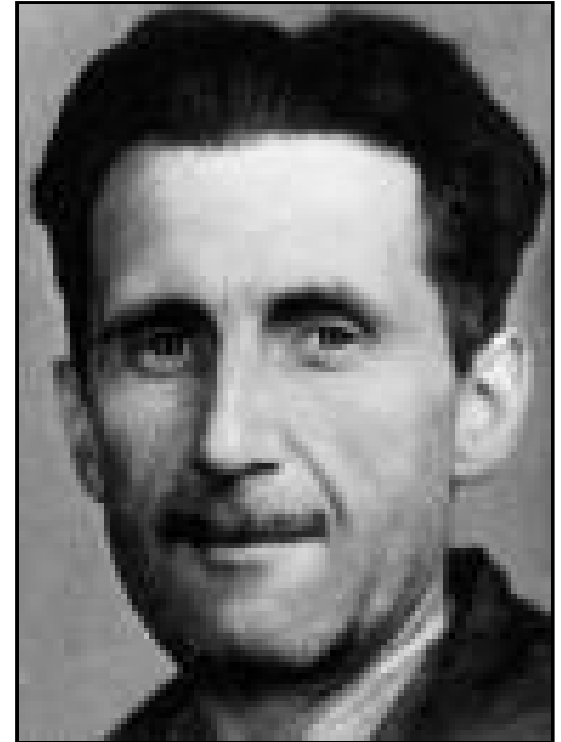
Politics and the
English Language

1946

It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible.

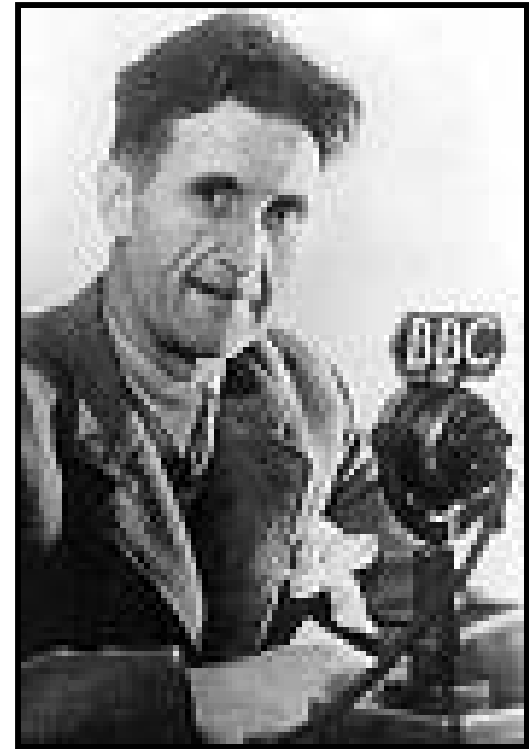


If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step toward political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.



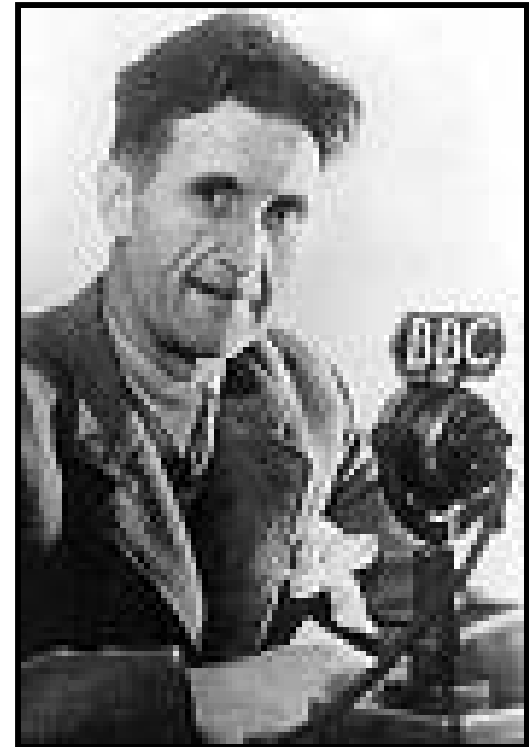
The first is staleness of imagery; the other is lack of precision.

As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the



Blair/Orwell's 3 linguistic pet peeves:

- Dying metaphors
- Operators or verbal
false limbs
- Pretentious diction



The words *democracy, socialism, freedom, patriotic, realistic, justice* have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any



Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different...Other words used in variable meanings, in most cases more or less dishonestly, are: *class, totalitarian, science, progressive, reactionary, bourgeois, equality.*



“When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases –*bestial atrocities, iron heel, bloodstained tyranny, free peoples of the world, stand shoulder to shoulder* – one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: ...when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them....A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine.”

Modernizing *Ecclesiastes*

9:11

I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.



Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

Actually...

- GOD'S WORD® Translation (©1995)
I saw something else under the sun. The race isn't won by fast runners, or the battle by heroes. Wise people don't necessarily have food. Intelligent people don't necessarily have riches, and skilled people don't necessarily receive special treatment. But time and unpredictable events overtake all of them.

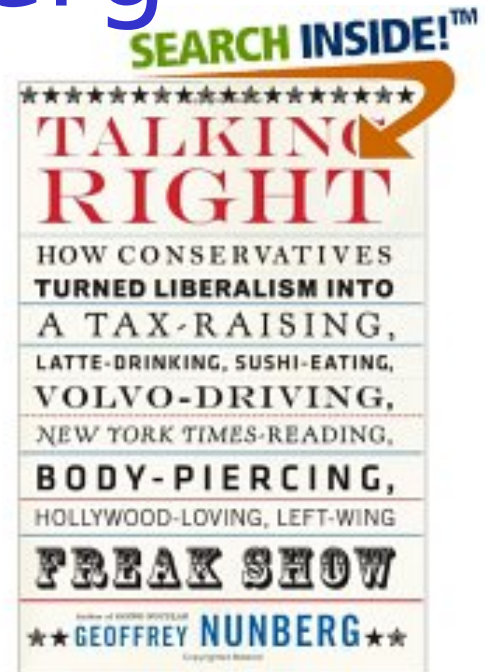
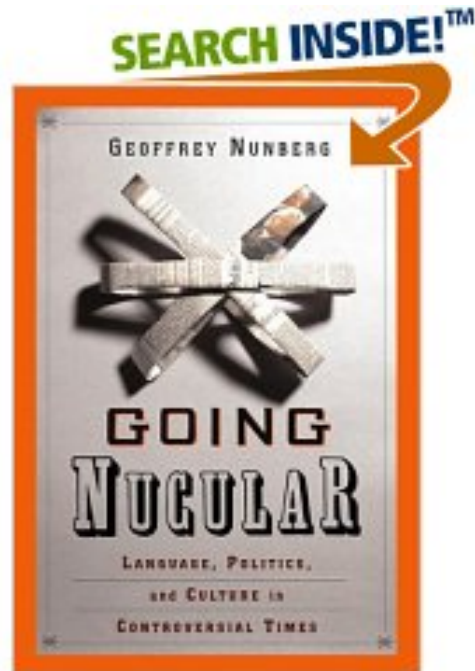
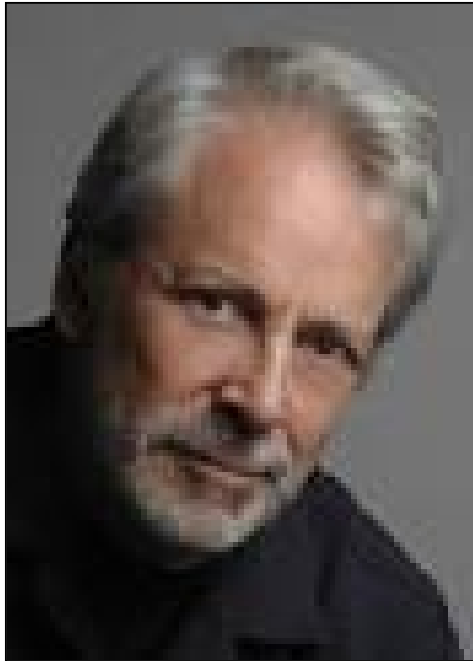
- (i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- (ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- (iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- (iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- (v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- (vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Critique of Orwell

“Why did Orwell's prophecies fall flat? W.F. Bolton offers a book-length explanation, and a great deal more of value, in *The Language of 1984: Orwell's English and Ours*. The short answer to the question, of course, is that Orwell knew very little about language; his writings on the subject were composed mostly of his private tastes, social prejudices, selective observations. seat-of-

“While Orwell's ignorance of language study will come as no surprise to linguists, this chance to understand his tremendous influence on the attitudes of the general public and the literary community is extraordinarily important.”

Geoff Nunberg



The L-word: Ronald Reagan 1988

- After all, the incumbent and the Stealth candidate at the top of the liberal ticket are so alike they could be twins.
[Laughter] The two Stealth candidates went to law school together. They're still very good friends. And what they have most in common these days is a healthy fear and understandable terror of America's least favorite word. You know the word. It's the “L” word.
[Laughter]

The L-word: Ronald Reagan 1988

Now, some people think I shouldn't be using the “L” word. They say I'm labeling them. Well, I gave the matter some thought. What should we call those people who oppose the death penalty, who support policies that hand out weekend furloughs to convicted murderers, who support laws that make it easier for a criminal to own a gun than law-abiding citizens who want to protect their homes and children? As I say, I thought about it. And then I decided that if the label fits they ought to wear it, because we all know that what these men believe is not what you believe, not what I believe, not what the people of Maryland believe, and not what the American people believe.

Reagan's 1988 Convention speech

And virtually all this change occurred, and continues to occur, in spite of the resistance of those liberal elites who loudly proclaim that it's time for a change. They resisted our defense buildup, they resisted our tax cuts, they resisted cutting the fat out of government and they resisted our appointments of judges committed to the law and the Constitution

Lakoff on framing in political language

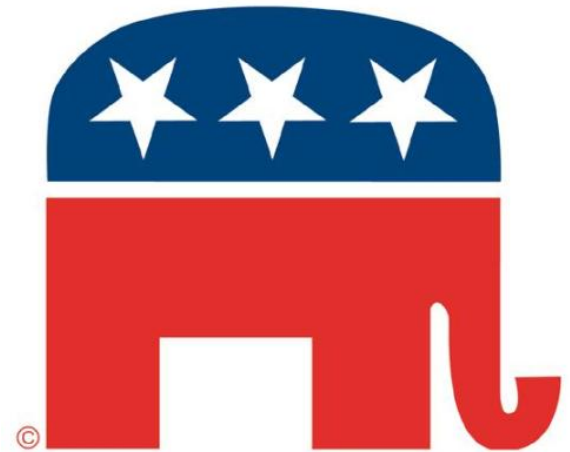
Interesting discussion; I will
just touch on it today.

George Lakoff: UCBerkeley and Rockridge Institute



Language always comes with what is called "framing." Every word is defined relative to a conceptual framework. If you have something like "revolt," that implies a population that is being ruled unfairly, or assumes it is being ruled unfairly, and that they are throwing off their rulers, which would be considered a good thing. That's a frame.

Lakoff's models: Nurturant parents vs. strict fathers



Nurturant parents vs. strict fathers

Nurturant parent view? The world is basically good and can be made better and that one must work toward that.

- Children are born good; parents can make them better. Nurturing involves empathy, and the responsibility to take care of oneself and others for whom we are responsible.
- On a larger scale, specific policies follow, such as
 - governmental protection in form of a social safety net and government regulation,
 - universal education (to ensure competence, fairness),
 - civil liberties and equal treatment (fairness and freedom),
 - the promotion of an economy that benefits all.

Lakoff's strict father model

The conservative worldview, the **strict father model**, assumes that the world is dangerous and difficult and that children are born bad and must be made good.

The strict father is the moral authority who supports and defends the family, tells his wife what to do, and teaches his kids right from wrong. The only way to do that is through painful discipline.

Once grown, the self-reliant, disciplined children are on their own. Those children who remain dependent should be forced to undergo further discipline or be cut free with no support to face the discipline of the outside world.

Tax relief: Lakoff

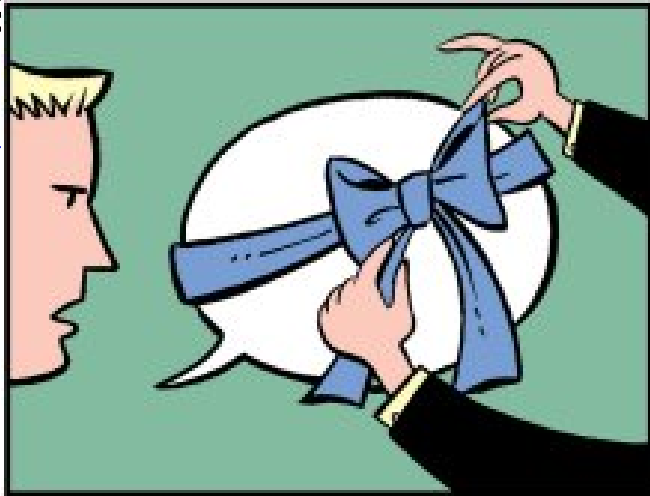
The phrase "Tax relief" began coming out of the White House starting on the very day of Bush's inauguration. It got picked up by the newspapers as if it were a neutral term, which it is not.

First, you have the frame for "relief." For there to be relief, there has to be an affliction, an afflicted party, somebody who administers the relief, and an act in which you are relieved of the affliction.

The reliever is the hero, and anybody who tries to stop them is the bad guy intent on keeping the affliction going. So, add "tax" to "relief" and you get a metaphor that taxation is an affliction, and anybody against relieving this affliction is a villain. (Lakoff)

Words as euphemisms, Euphemisms as moral blinders

- Greek euphemismos, from euphemos auspicious, sounding good, from eu- + pheme speech, from phanai to speak. circa 1681.
- The substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant; also : the expression so substituted



Torture: When a word matters

The French are still reliving torture as a policy during the Algerian war (1954-1962).

In 2001, Jacques Massu and his deputy, Paul Aussaresses (head of 10th Parachute Division and his secret service director), acknowledged the death of 3,000 prisoners and the torture of many more.

Le général Jacques Massu est décédé le 26 octobre, à l'âge de 94 ans, à son domicile, dans le Loiret. ... Massu a commandé les forces françaises à Alger en janvier 1957, et a mené (et militairement gagné -mais politiquement perdu) la "Bataille d'Alger," en cautionnant l'usage de la torture -ce qu'il a finalement regretté en juin 2000, déclarant au *Monde* que "la torture n'est pas indispensable en temps de guerre", et considérant comme une "avancée" la reconnaissance et la condamnation par la France de la pratique de la torture en Algérie, désavouant ainsi certains de ces officiers, comme le général (à l'époque capitaine) Paul Aussaresses, qui ont justifié cette pratique par les "nécessités de la lutte antiterroriste".



French prosecutors throw out Rumsfeld torture case

Fri Nov 23, 2007 12:27pm EST

[Post Your Comments](#) | [All Comments](#) ▶

[✉ Email](#) | [🖨 Print](#) | [↶ Share](#) | [🔗 Reprints](#) | [📄 Single Page](#) | [👍 Recommend \(4\)](#) [-] Text [+]



1 of 1

[Full Size](#)

PARIS (Reuters) - The Paris prosecutors' office has dismissed a suit against Donald Rumsfeld accusing the former U.S. defense secretary of torture, human rights groups who brought the case said on Friday.

The plaintiffs, who included the French-based International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and the U.S. Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), said Rumsfeld had authorized interrogation techniques that led to rights abuses.

The FIDH said it had received a letter from the prosecutors' office ruling that Rumsfeld benefited from a "customary" immunity from prosecution granted to heads of state and government and foreign ministers, even after they left office.

It said in a statement it was "astonished at such a mistaken argument" and said customary immunity from prosecution did not exist under international law.

The suit was filed in October during a visit to France by Rumsfeld.

RELATED NEWS

- ▶ [Sales pitch, rights concerns as Libyan minister visits U.S.](#)
03 Jan 2008
- ▶ [U.S. court rules rights groups may protect sources](#)
02 Jan 2008
- ▶ [Sri Lanka president's office meddled in probe: experts](#)
19 Dec 2007
- ▶ [Secret detention system in Pakistan exposed: report](#)
18 Dec 2007
- ▶ [U.N. envoy urges Iraq to join](#)

The Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq hit the headlines in April 2004 when details of physical abuse and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers were made public, badly damaging the reputation of the U.S. military. Former prisoners at the U.S. detention camp in Guantanamo Bay are suing Rumsfeld and 10 military commanders, alleging torture and violations of their religious rights during their detention there. The CCR and FIDH filed suits in Germany in 2004 and 2006 in an attempt to have Rumsfeld tried for rights abuses.

Groups Tie Rumsfeld to Torture in Complaint

By [DOREEN CARVAJAL](#)

Published: October 27, 2007

PARIS, Oct. 26 — Several human rights organizations based in the United States and Europe have filed a complaint in a Paris court accusing former Defense Secretary [Donald H. Rumsfeld](#) of responsibility for torture.

The group, which includes the International Federation for Human Rights, the French League for Human Rights, and the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York, made the complaint late Thursday and unsuccessfully sought to confront Mr. Rumsfeld as he left a breakfast meeting in central Paris on Friday.

Jeanne Sulzer, one of the lawyers working on the issue for the human rights groups, said the complaint had been filed with a state prosecutor, Jean-Claude Marin, saying he would have the power to pursue the case because of Mr. Rumsfeld's presence in France.

Similar legal complaints against Mr. Rumsfeld have been filed in other countries, including Sweden and Argentina. German prosecutors dismissed a case in April, saying it was up to the United States to investigate the accusations.

And now, the Question...

- Is it a linguistic trick, or a means to avoid one's conscience, to create new words with no connotations or associations so that we can avoid the T-word?

Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

1. The Attention Grab
2. Attention Slap
3. The Belly Slap
4. Long Time Standing
5. The Cold Cell
6. Water boarding

Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

1. **The Attention**

Grab: The interrogator forcefully grabs the shirt front of the prisoner and shakes him.

Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

2. **Attention Slap:** An open-handed slap aimed at causing pain and triggering fear.

Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

3. The Belly Slap: A hard open-handed slap to the stomach. The aim is to cause pain, but not internal injury. Doctors consulted advised against using a punch, which could cause lasting internal damage.

Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

4. **Long Time Standing:** This technique is described as among the most effective. Prisoners are forced to stand, handcuffed and with their feet shackled to an eye bolt in the floor for more than 40 hours. Exhaustion and sleep deprivation are effective in yielding confessions.

Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

5. The Cold Cell

The prisoner is left to stand naked in a cell kept near 50 degrees.

Throughout the time in the cell the prisoner is doused with cold water.

6. Water-boarding

The prisoner is bound to an inclined board, feet raised and head slightly below the feet. Cellophane is wrapped over the prisoner's face and water is poured over him. Unavoidably, the gag reflex kicks in and a terrifying fear of drowning leads to almost instant pleas to bring the treatment to a halt.

Source: ABC News, citing unnamed CIA sources.
<http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/Investigation/story?id=1322866>

Question

- Is it a linguistic trick, or a means to avoid one's conscience, to create a new word with no connotations or associations so that we can avoid the T-word?

Conclusion

1. There is a widespread sense that language can and does degenerate.
2. Knowledge of what *is* (positive knowledge) is always helpful in clarifying statements of what *ought* to be.
3. Use of language is a skill that can be developed.
4. It is pointless (and unhygienic) to spit in the wind.