

particular." Steingraber's "larger vision" begins in central Illinois and then moves beyond that starting point to the wider world.

At times, Steingraber misses opportunities to identify meaningful environmental action. For instance, she says she supports work in green chemistry—as Rachel Carson herself noted, much more research is needed to reduce drastically the use of synthetic chemicals in agriculture and to replace them (when needed) with biological agents for pest control—but she does not lay out the paths to pursue it. Also, she does not connect the dots with regard to the economic problem of externalizing costs (i.e., offloading the expensive downstream repercussions of flooding our world with poisons). Just at the point that she mentions green chemistry, she also notes the use of "air, water, and soil as a repository of noxious wastes." Right there she should have emphasized that deep economic restructuring entails requiring industries to internalize and account for the full and true costs of their products. Doing so would create enormous incentives for greater funding for green chemistry as well as green accounting. Profit and short-term strategies rule the roost, but why should they continue to do so? A final criticism: Steingraber does not take advantage of her "situated knowledge" in central Illinois that puts her at the

nexus of industrial agriculture and industrial production. Steingraber does acknowledge the enormous production of corn and soybeans for animal feed in the US, but again does not take it the next step to question this agricultural paradigm. Federal subsidies and farm policies favor this process to the detriment of soil and human health (too much beef consumption by the US. public). Moving to a model of whole farming as espoused by groups like the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition would reap tremendous benefits for soil, air, water, human health, and the vibrancy of local farming communities.

These critiques aside, Steingraber perceptively links our rampant use of petroleum for the manufacture of synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilizers with climate change. Very few authors have made this essential connection. The return to whole farming (among many other changes) has tremendous potential to help mitigate the ravages of climate change. Connections like these are crucial for greater awareness and to effect public policy changes.

As I write this review, I sit at my computer in a lovely cottage on the shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in northeastern Nova Scotia. I look out to the horizon, and I can hardly imagine a more pristine and beautiful vista. However, just thirty miles to the west, a pulp and paper mill is applying to dump

thousands of gallons of industrial wastewaters into the Gulf. The public outcry has been intense and comes from many quarters: tourism, fishing associations, local indigenous groups, and the public at large. This pulp mill has been operating for fifty years and has discharged tons of noxious emissions into the air and millions of gallons of toxic wastes into nearby waters. Meanwhile, in a classic case of environmental racism, a local indigenous Mi'kmaq community has lived with the terrible damage to their lives and livelihoods for two generations. They and other stakeholders have decided they've had enough and are organizing the largest resistance ever to these egregious and dangerous actions. Again: externalized costs.

These books invite readers to ask how much they are willing to pay for products like paper towels and toilet paper. How much do readers (as taxpayers) want to pay in public funds to clean up after the fact of environmental damage and environmental racism? Someone always pays. Who is it going to be? 🌱

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LISTEN UP

The Linguistics of Texting

An essay by Noelle McManus

In twelfth grade, I was bused off to a local college with the other members of my high school newspaper club. Tour guides ushered us inside a lecture hall, where we were to hear from the communications department head. He sidled into the room emptyhanded and straddled a folding chair. For the next twenty minutes or so, he treated us to an improvised speech about how our generation was ruining the English language.

"You text," he told us, as if it were a revelation. "You text and text and text and throw grammar out the window. Kids don't read anymore. They don't know how to spell." Slowly, he leaned back, a smug grin playing at his lips, and mentioned, "You know, if my daughters ever use that 'text speak' when messaging me, I refuse to respond until they type it *correctly*."

Correctly. What a word to use. I bit the inside of my cheek and continued to listen to this man tell us we were doing ourselves a disservice, refusing to use our brain power—in other words, allowing ourselves to become stupid. His lecture finished, he sent us away with a wave and a self-satisfied smile, clear that he had enlightened us to new avenues of thought. But all I could think of was how steadfastly I disagreed.

Many people fear that the changes in language fostered by texting will erode modern youth's capacity to communicate. This concern is not new; in fact, it has existed as long as language has.

To understand why such changes are natural, one must understand how our world came to have as many idioms as it does. Each individual language had a complex beginning. Speakers of Vulgar Latin, for instance, were looked down on by the educated scholars of the time, similar to how we young "texters" are viewed by many modern academics. These common speakers, however, did not sacrifice or lose their ability to communicate effectively, nor did their dialect bring about some kind of intellectual dark age. Instead, Vulgar Latin evolved into what we know today as the romance languages: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Catalan, and Romanian—beautiful, flowing tongues of love and poetry placed on lofty pedestals in American society.



Noelle McManus

This brings up another reality that may upset language primitivists: languages die. Latin is no longer in colloquial use.

Neither is Sanskrit, Old English, Ancient Greek, Aramaic, or a slew of others that gave birth to modern languages. These departures are nothing to mourn over. Of course the old languages were wonderful, and so are their legacies.

Now, how could any of this be related to today's "text speak"? Isn't sending a message like "lmk tm :)" only a corruption of English? An indication of laziness? All it is is a mess of misspellings and grammatical mistakes, right?

Wrong.

In reality, text speak has the complexities of a dialect. Its native speakers—young people like myself—are well-versed in its rules. After all, we can scarcely remember life before smart phones and internet; text speak, to us, is something fluid and poignant and *right*, useful in areas that Mainstream English is not. A reader can easily tell the writer's tone based on presence or lack of misspellings, excess of punctuation, usage of abbreviations, and other nuances that leave outsiders scratching their heads. For example, there now exists a divide between the formal case "you" and informal case "u." "I'm ready!!" clearly shows more excitement than "I'm ready" and "I'm ready." adds a layer of solemnity. Well-known acronyms like "lol" have almost taken on the role of punctuation to either diffuse any supposed seriousness or show passive-aggressiveness.

This oddly complicated way of writing didn't appear out of nowhere. It emerged to fulfill a need. Typed sentences on their own can do little to explain one's emotional state or feeling about a topic, both things that can be gleaned easily from face-to-face communication. Therefore, texting evolved to express as much feeling as necessary using as few letters as possible. Typed emoticons or emojis are not indolent placeholders for people who don't understand writing; they are replacements for the body language and tone of voice the bare written word lacks. Even paragraph breaks are utilized to simulate the pauses that would normally occur in spoken discussions.

And all that is only the tip of the iceberg. In truth, young people know text speak so well that many of us they have difficulty explaining how, exactly, we understand it. Like a native language, we find it quicker to read and comprehend than formal English. Its so-called “simplification” is merely an evolution.

Another dialect of English that has long been considered non-standard is African American Vernacular English (AAVE), popularly known as ebonics (a portmanteau of “ebony” and “phonics”). Its unique grammar and vocabulary has led some to see it as a lesser form of English. Though AAVE’s origins are not fully known, to me at least, it is generally accepted that it began as a mixture between southern American English and the various languages of creole people forcibly brought here to be slaves. What to some may seem like grammatical errors in AAVE actually follow specific rules. It is an “aspect heavy” linguistic variety, as opposed to mainstream English’s tense heaviness. Aspect is a focus on the progression and whole makeup of an event rather than the time or present of the event. Therefore, the sentence, “She been working,” means, “She had been working for a long period of time.” “She be steady working,” means, “She consistently and intensely works.” Emphasis also plays a critical role in imparting the meaning of a statement. “She been working,” for example, can be transformed to mean “She has been working” if emphasis is moved from *been* to *working*. These conventions and many others found in AAVE—including zero copula, which is shown when one says, “She at home,” rather than “She is at home” —have their roots in Caribbean creoles (stable languages that are a mash-up of earlier tongues), in which habitual verbs and omission of “to be” are common. Thus, AAVE is the result of a story that mainstream American English cannot tell, the product of centuries of enslavement and the culture and communication that burst through the cracks. Far from a “dumbing down” or regression from proper language, it is the very epitome of innovation and evolution.

Despite this fact, speakers of AAVE still struggle to be respected and taken seriously in academic fields. To this day, disproportionate numbers of African American children are needlessly placed in special education by teachers and staff who don’t understand the dialect’s intricacy or how it conveys thought. Yes, AAVE has a logical structure, but

many of us, even among educators, have not been taught that language is flexible—that a person’s dialect reflects much, much more than their intelligence. By contrast, an inability to accept and “read” the versatility of language speaks to a lack of intelligence.

Which brings me back to text speak. Though it isn’t an “ethnolect” like AAVE, it is still associated with a very specific group of people: young people. Its properties, which so many have gone to such great lengths to criticize, have existed in various forms throughout history. Text speak makes use of initializations (recorded in Ancient Greece and Rome), pictograms (most notable in storytelling cave paintings), and logograms (used in Chinese, Japanese, and certain Egyptian hieroglyphs).

I am, of course, biased. After all, my text messages are filled with abbreviations, run-ons, and fragments that would make any language purist feel ill. I can say with certainty, however, that while people love to be angry about language, what they seem to forget is that language adjusts itself to suit the needs of its speakers. It is not a static entity. Rather, as foundational linguist Edward Sapir stated in his 1921 book, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*: “Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.”

I’m 18 years old and about to begin my second year of college majoring in linguistics. I have much to learn. I know I must grow used to the never-ending complexities of academia: the need to stay quiet and listen, to respect those who came before you, and to trust in the word of your elders. Even so, I resent being told that the natural branching out of language is something to fear and prevent. I welcome text speak. I welcome AAVE. I welcome the transformation of my language. If, one day, English is a dead language, so be it. It will have been replaced by something the population needs even more. 📧

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