THE EFFECT OF JOURNALISM ON MODERN AMERICAN WRITING

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE MEET THE PRESS

When William Caxton introduced the printing press to England five centuries ago, he could not have anticipated its importance to the American way of life. In 1476 democracy was still a Greek legend and America was an undefined and troublesome obstruction between Europe and the far East.

Printing unlocked the most formidable barrier between social classes and made the humble serf heir to a treasure that had belonged to aristocracy for six or seven thousand years. Early literature and language had been preserved with engraved tablets and manuscript books that were both rare and expensive. English use of the printing press insured the distribution of classical learning and the preservation of scientific research. Indirectly, printing facilitated popular education which created a sound basis for representative government. By 1640 more than twenty thousand different books had been printed in England in the common vernacular, and education joined hands with the industrial revolution to create a massive and influential middle class.

Soon after the introduction of printing, English speech emerged from a collection of dialects to a national language

that, eventually, was understood throughout the island. The Anglo-Saxon language had some thirty thousand words. Modern dictionaries contain more than five hundred thousand words and phrases, many of which would have been lost had preceding generations depended on oral speech and engraved manuscripts to record communication.

The momentous transition from printing books to printing daily newspapers has been characterized by ingenuity and controversy. The first American newspapers were expensive, small-scale imitations of English newspapers; yet the thirty-seven papers in circulation before the revolution are given credit for helping unite the colonists and for crystallizing the issues that provoked the war. After 1830, cheap paper and fast printing made mass circulation possible, and American newspaper publication has increased until the United States now leads all other countries in the printing of newspapers. There appears to be no reliable count of the number of weekly papers that are published; but in 1955, Americans purchased 55,072,480 daily newspapers.[1] Almost every phase of American life has been influenced by periodicals, but the impression of journalism is nowhere so conspicuous as on American literature and language.

American language was born of English parents in the score of years following the American revolution. In the

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[1] Collier's 1956 Year Book, edited by Wm. T. Couch (New York, 1956), p. 493.

beginning the new speech was little more than an imitation of the mother tongue. However, the Atlantic Ocean, War of 1812, rugged hills, and vast forests intervened in the social intercourse of the two countries. And in the isolation created by geographical distance and historical conflict, a new culture developed which reflected the ruggedness of the pioneer life as well as the ingenuity of the people who had declared that "the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill."[2] Evidence is conclusive that they have fulfilled their impudent promise: "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds."[3]

Their descendants are the complacent recipients of a political union, financial empire, and national idiom. That idiom is a record of the daily activities of North American men and women; and like native art, music and literature, American language expresses the national character.[4] Only recently have scholars turned in impressive numbers to study and record this language. Before the first World War, at

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[2]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," American Poetry and Prose, Vol. II, edited by Norman Foerster (Boston, 1947), p. 484.

[3]Ibid., p. 493.

[4]P. Aronstein, "On Style and Styles in Language," American Speech, IX (December, 1934), 250.

least a score of men had published books on it, but most of the early lexicographers were laymen who worked individually rather than with institutions of learning.[5]

America's position as a world power has created a new interest at home and abroad in American traditions while the expansion of American commerce has extended the English language to all parts of the globe. These conditions have created a "wider and deeper interest in our national variety of speech," and linguists have at last considered it important "to determine the New World tendencies in the handling of the English language."[6] When H. L. Mencken first published The American Language in 1919, he presented without apologies evidence of a free and vigorous language.[7] As journalist, editor, and satirist, Mencken has compiled two supplements which combine with the original volume to explain, at least partially, the copious and diffuse style that has been claimed most often as the distinguishing characteristic of western talk and writing.

Linguists now recognize the language as worthy of research, and reliable volumes have been published by A. G. Kennedy, G. P. Krapp, Sir William Craigie, C. C. Fries, and other contemporary scholars. In recent years, a number of doctoral dissertations have been written in the field of

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[5]Louise Pound, "Research in American English," American Speech, V (June, 1930), 362.

[6]Ibid., pp. 362 f. [7]Ibid., p. 363.

American English. Numerous dictionaries devoted to American English have been printed recently, the most complete studies being the Dictionary of American English completed in 1944 and the Dictionary of Americanisms printed in 1951. The Council of Learned Societies is financing a Linguistic Atlas of American English which will be a study of dialect phenomena. The seven hundred thirty-four maps of New England speech habits have been published already. Several periodicals have columns devoted to aspects of American language, and in 1925 American Speech was founded to publish current linguistic research.

All who study the language are impressed with its vitality and flexibility, its verbal ingenuities and erratic syntax, and most especially with its extensive vocabulary. An understanding of the idiom is necessary for establishing effective regulatory standards; therefore, students of language are tracing the vernacular through prisons, baseball parks, and opera houses since every facet of American life has contributed its jargon and speech patterns.

Newspapers and magazines have made a tremendous impact on the language. How the language of the press becomes the language of the street is a problem for psychologists. Of more concern to students of language is an understanding of journalistic style since periodicals are circulated in almost every home and a surprising number of American writers have had journalistic training. Almost every trend

in American speech has been recorded and many have been innovated by newspapers and magazines.

Language moves like a rushing stream, past one-room hovels and rambling estates, collecting new sources of life from brawny laborers and emaciated professors. The shore is lined with reporters who combine the native sounds with their own inventions and fling them like thistles in the west wind. Throughout the continent, makers of literature, listening for the murmurs and clatters of American life, hear both the natural current and journalistic fancies. Their impressions are recorded in books which become a collection of vulgar and refined expressions accumulated from people of all ages and all countries, and the language found in modern American literature is a mosaic of bustling cities, feudal castles, and rustic countrysides.

This paper is an analysis of the relationship between journalism and formal literary usage in America. It is the purpose of this study to define and illustrate characteristics of modern journalese and to make a comparison of standards of correct usage advocated by recent textbooks in English composition and journalism. Particular attention will be given to diction, structure and length of sentences, capitalization, abbreviation, and punctuation. The conclusion will be a brief evaluation of modern journalism, a succinct resumé of its impact on modern language and literature, and a simple prediction of future tendencies in

journalistic and literary language. And to give a better perspective to the analysis of journalism and American English, the paper begins with a description of the American linguistic heritage.

Most of the English vocabulary has been borrowed; yet it has been borrowed largely from within the Indo-European family, the original source of its native words.[8] The etymology of many common words is likely to include more than one foreign source. Candy was borrowed from the French, who derived it from the Arabic qand, "sugar." Arabs trace their word to the Persians. Originally, it must have come from India because it is closely related to a Sanskrit word meaning "fragments of crystallized sugar." Such an excursion in time and geography can be followed with numerous common American words.[9]

That a language could be derived from such varied sources is remarkable. However, the language is even more remarkable than the processes by which it is assimilated. Although a vast majority of English words have foreign origins, the English language is both consistent and

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[8]Charlton Laird, The Miracle of Language (Cleveland, 1953), p. 97.

[9]James Bradstreet Greenough and George Lyman Kittredge, Words and Their Ways in English Speech (New York, 1901), pp. 128 f.

distinctive and will not accept any neologism that strikes a discordant note with the native idiom.[10]

Like the vocabulary, English grammar and syntax have evolved gradually and from varied sources. Every language spoken in Great Britain in the forty generations of recorded history has contributed to the English grammar and vocabulary. Changes in the language have been so radical that modern students approach the literature of Alfred the Great as if it were written in a foreign language.[11]

When the Romans invaded Britain in 55 B. C., they found the island occupied by Celts. A second Roman invasion which was made a century later began an occupation which lasted until the early fifth century. Some four hundred Latin words have been found in the Old English vocabulary which contains only twelve words of Celtic origin.[12] In the middle of the fifth century, West Germanic tribes had infiltrated the island, bringing with them the dialects that formed the basis of Old English. Beginning in the late eighth century and continuing for some three hundred years, Britons were attacked by Scandinavian troops. These people, referred to also as Vikings and Danes, existed on

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[10] Ibid., pp. 147 f.

[11] Leonard Bloomfield, An Introduction to the Study of Language (New York, 1914), p. 195.

[12] Stuart Robertson, The Development of Modern English (New York, 1938), pp. 42 f.

the island as social peers with the Anglo-Saxons. Because of the intimacy of their relationship and the similarity of their basic dialects, the Scandinavians made a larger contribution to the language than the servile Celts or the imperious Romans. The Scandinavians gave to the English language a part of its grammatical structure as well as a fair number of common words, including the pronoun they and its inflected forms.

After the Norman invasion in 1066, Britons were united to the continent in commerce and fashions.[13]

> The Normans found English a synthetic, highly inflected language like Greek, Latin, and Modern German, but when they had finished putting their imprint upon it, it was an analytic language, with rapidly disappearing inflections, like Modern French. Grammatical gender and transposed word order were succeeded by natural gender and the normal word order of present-day English.[14]

For over two hundred years, French was the official language of English literature, religion, and government. However, common people never learned French and continued to speak to each other in native English. As might be expected in a bilingual society, French words and phrases were absorbed in the English language, but most of the new words pertained to the complex society. Face and palm are the only parts of the body named by the French; second is the only numeral.[15]

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[13]Laird, op. cit., p. 38.

[14]Margaret M. Bryant, Modern English and Its Heritage (New York, 1948), p. 53.

[15]Robertson, op. cit., pp. 45 f.

Near the close of the fourteenth century a written language developed which became the standard speech. This East Midland dialect was used by Chaucer and is the basis of modern English.

From 1500 to 1625 English men of letters turned their attention to the classics. The Renaissance movement left a number of Greek and Latin words in the English vocabulary. Actually, Latin had a more direct influence than Greek during this period, and evidences of the Latin style--antithesis, alliteration, and far-fetched similes--are found in most of the literature. Conservatives fought the classical vocabulary or "inkhorn terms" because of their obscurity. Both Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney praised the pure English language and enriched their vocabularies with homely English words. The Latinists triumphed for a time; and through their borrowing, the English language acquired a number of words which are almost indispensable today, e.g., industry, maturity, excursion, admiration, exist, education. The Greeks contributed such words as emphasis, chaos, climax, system, and crisis. Because of an unprecedented interest in scholarship, the language grew and was enriched by imitation of other languages and by development of its own resources. Shakespeare was typical of the trend toward individuality in usage and employed among other devices the functional

shift[16] which is such a pronounced characteristic of American journalese.

The King James version of the Bible--to become a profound influence on the language--was completed in 1611. The edition was based on John Tyndale's translation, completed almost a century earlier, and is an outstanding example of almost pure English diction. "The simplicity, dignity, beauty, and strength of the Bible place it in the forefront of English prose writing and make it the greatest single force in the prose style of the last three centuries."[17] Puritans of the seventeenth century focused their attention on religious discussions, filling the common speech with an unprecedented number of biblical expressions. The words had existed before this period; they had even been used in common speech but never to this extent.[18]

The language brought to America was the language of Shakespeare and Milton and the King James Bible. In the eighteenth century while English merchants and soldiers were still counting the cost of American ingenuity to English honor and gold, English scholars began watching fearfully to see if the new spirit of independence would corrupt the mother tongue. Grammarians, annoyed with individualists,

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[16]Bryant, op. cit., pp. 69-76.

[17]Ibid., p. 75.

[18]Greenough and Kittredge, op. cit., p. 129.

clamored for a permanent form of the language which was not to be corrupted; and having defined their terms, they began to establish Latin grammar rules as the governing body of the English language and themselves as the judiciary.[19]

In compiling his Dictionary before the Revolution, Samuel Johnson denounced the American tendency to invent new expressions. He attempted to free the English language of "colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations"; and his contemporaries were careful to repress imagination and strive for polish, wit, and epigram. Nevertheless, the obstinacy of the New England puritans, the faith of a few radical scholars and the ingenuity of the American pioneers kept eighteenth-century neatness and correctness of style from crossing the Atlantic.[20]

> With the War of the Revolution came a new and aggressive patriotic spirit bringing a wish for an independent national language as well as an independent national government. The fervent apostle of the independence was Noah Webster.[21]

In 1828 Webster published An American Dictionary of the English Language in which he introduced new spelling and pronunciation. He believed that differences in the social and political structures of the two countries as well as differences in environment made separate languages inevitable.

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[19]Bryant, op. cit., pp. 77-79.

[20]Greenough and Kittredge, op. cit., pp. 122-124.

[21]Pound, op. cit., p. 360.

Webster's efforts to establish an American language met with considerable dissension at home as well as abroad. A critic who signed his name "Aristarcus" protested in a series of articles printed in The England Palladium. The following excerpt is typical of his criticisms:

> A language, arrived at its zenith, like ours, and copious and expressive, in the extreme, requires no introduction of new words. On the contrary, it is incumbent on literary men, to guard against impurities, and chastise, with the critical lash, all useless innovations. The decline of taste, in a nation, always commences, when the language of its classical authors is no longer considered as authority. Colloquial barbarisms abound in all countries, but among no civilized people are they admitted with impunity, into books; since the very admission would subject the writer to ridicule, in the first instance, and to oblivion, in the second.
>
> Now in what can a Columbian dictionary differ from an English one, but in these barbarisms: Who are the Columbian authors, who do not write in the English language, and spell in the English manner, except Noah Webster, junior, Esq.? The embryo dictionary, then, must either be a dictionary of pure English words, and, in that case, superfluous, as we already possess the admirable lexicon of Johnson, or else must contain vulgar, provincial words, unauthorized by good writers, and in this case, must surely be the just object of ridicule and censure.
>
> If the Connecticut lexicographer considers the retaining of the English language as a badge of slavery, let him not give us a Babylonish dialect in its stead, but adopt, at once, the language of the Aborigines.[22]

The article was concluded with the cryptic observation:

> But if he will persist, in spite of common sense, to furnish us with a dictionary, which we do not want, in return for his generosity, I will furnish him with

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[22]Leon Howard, "Towards a Historical Aspect of American Speech Consciousness," American Speech, V (April, 1930), 301.

> a title for it. Let, then, the projected volume of foul and unclean things, bear his own Christian name, and be called Noah's Ark.[23]

Leon Howard has made a study of the barbarisms which the critic berated, such as caucus, lengthy, to wait on, spry; and he declares that all the words on the lists of Americanisms were used earlier in England except caucus and lengthy and that these two words are now considered necessary as well as correct. "Thus one must reach the conclusion, that in one case at least, an early defense of pure English rests neither on a comprehension of linguistic tradition nor upon a sympathetic contact with language development."[24] In trying to account for the early attacks on the linguistic movement Howard suggests:

> The solution will more probably be found in a further study of the connection between linguistic self-consciousness and early American politics. It is reasonably certain that the super-sensitiveness of political affairs at that time stimulated language consciousness, and there is reason to suppose that this phase of national self-consciousness assisted in drawing the fine political lines characteristic of that decade.[25]

Regardless of scholarly criticism,

> . . . the plain people supported Webster's scheme for the emancipation of American English heartily enough, though very few of them could have heard of it. The period from the gathering of the Revolution to the turn of the century was one of immense activity in the concoction and launching of new Americanisms, and more of them came into the language than at any time

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[23] Ibid., p. 304.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 305.

> between the earliest colonial days and the rush to the West. . . . Despite the economic difficulties which followed the Revolution, the general feeling was that the new Republic was a success, and that it was destined to rise in the world as England declined. There was a widespread contempt for everything English, and that contempt extended to the canons of the mother tongue.[26]

In the beginning, as now, there were levels of language. Early American writers adhered generally to British usage. Perhaps the intellects of the early time were too fully clothed in British traditions to feel the immediate influence of the new environment. At any rate, Joseph Worcester's Comprehensive and Explanatory Dictionary of the English Language, which advocated British usage, rivaled Webster's dictionary for authority.[27]

Because of its highly developed idiom, American literature is distinguished by a heterogeneous style. Only in perspective can one isolate tendencies in expression; and American literature, like American language, is still young. Except for periods of intense nationalism, there have been few deliberate attempts to devise a style that is different from the British emphasis on "thought and constructive understanding."[28] Differences in American and British literature are subtle, for the two countries share an

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[26]H. L. Mencken, The American Language (New York, 1938), p. 12.

[27]Pound, op. cit., p. 360.

[28]George Philip Krapp, The English Language in America, Vol. I (New York, 1925), p. 275.

identical linguistic heritage. As their environment and history have differed, their national characters have changed; consequently, the expression of their individual desires and impressions have changed. George Krapp thinks that the predominating American style

> . . . rests not upon a basis of structural organization, but is more a matter of points, of successive brilliant moments, of verbal ingenuities and surprises. It is a restless, rapid, animated style, a sparkling if not a profound style.[29]

There will always be American writers who prefer the British style just as there are British writers who employ the characteristics ascribed to American writers.

> Formal structure in all modern English writing tends to be replaced by more lightly moving qualities, and so far as the comparison between British and American writing is concerned, perhaps it may be said that the latter has only traveled a little faster than the former.[30]

The problem of early American writers seems to have involved the difficulty of combining native themes with European style. Their principle of imitation was a sound one; however, in their immaturity, they failed to transmute as they imitated.[31] Classic American writers followed, in most instances, "the central tradition of classical English literature," and the two styles that have been isolated as being peculiarly American have remained generally on the lower levels of literary expression. When literary artists

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[29] Ibid. [30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 287.

have resorted to differences in grammar and vocabulary their variations have been inadvertent.[32] Although critics are divided in their opinions of what is the suitable language for literature, many of them agree that one of the most important contributions that American writers have made to literature is the literary style inspired by the vernacular. Although the more decorous writers ignored the Jacksonian exaggerations, traces of vigorous literate speech are found in several of the early classical writers.

> It achieved its first stunning success in Huckleberry Finn, but Emerson, in making friends with the terms of everyday life and labor, at least shook hands with this mode--an original gesture in the generation which preceded Mark Twain's.[33]

Disparity in literary and everyday vernacular was obviously a problem to many of the early classical writers. One of the earliest writers of dialect was James Russell Lowell, who, like Emerson, served for a time as editor of a periodical.

> Lowell's linguistic convictions are clearly against conventionalized literary language. He believed that the language of literature should be fired with a vitality and vibrancy which must be kept aglow in literature, not quenched in grammar books. . . . Lowell, approving the language used by Shakespeare, counted him fortunate in that he wrote at the beginning of the modern period of the English language. His medium was an uninhibited young language which

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[32] Ibid., pp. 290-295.

[33] Morton Cronin, "Some Notes on Emerson's Prose Diction," American Speech, XXIX (May, 1954), 112.

> logicians and grammarians had not yet shackled with proscriptive and prescriptive rules in an attempt at standardization.[34]

Literary history has yet to determine the most distinctly American writers; yet critics have pointed out several men in every period who have evoked the wrath of purists by expressing their thoughts in a language consistent with the vigorous, intense life of American people. The writers discussed in this paper are by no means the only literary men who have influenced the language; they have been selected because they are more or less typical of the linguistic rebels of their age.

In almost every instance, the linguistic rebels have had journalistic training. The recurrence of journalism in the biographies of those writers who have violated classical usage appears too consistent to be completely accidental. Krapp says that of all the early American writers, no one deviated so far from the English tradition of letters as Whitman.[35] Whitman's poetry amply illustrated his theory that language

> . . . is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground. Its final decisions are made by

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[34]Jayne Crane Harder, "James Russell Lowell: Linguistic Patriot," American Speech, XXIX (October, 1954), 181.

[35]Krapp, op. cit., pp. 293-294.

> the masses, people nearest the concrete, having most to do with actual land and sea.[36]
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> It is plain, however, that the whole story of American style has not been told when one has taken account of the classics of American literature. . . . There is an Americanism of expression strongly colored and highly flavored, racy of the soil and of the people. It has manifested itself, however, on levels different from those on which Emerson and Longfellow and all the other traditionally great writers of America have moved.[37]

Cultivated style may be said to result from a careful examination of approved literary models. Informal style is an expression of intimate associations with everyday life and contains the warmth and vigor of immediate experience. No single style is adequate for present society since various occasions demand different degrees of formality. Obviously, the distinguishing characteristics of American language are more prevalent in compositions transcribed in informal style than in letters modeled after classic traditions. Because familiar composition is sometimes incorporated in formal literature, familiar American style is significant.[38]

A large number of scholars agree with Harold Whitehall's statement that the language of America, like its politics and society, has been controlled by middle-class

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[36]George Philip Krapp, Modern English (New York, 1909), p. 328.

[37]Krapp, The English Language in America, I, 295.

[38]Ibid., pp. 295-297.

people.[39] Perhaps this emphasis on the common man incited writers of the homespun philosophy to choose a language that was neither grammatical nor literate and to begin their criticisms of politics, society, religion, and life in general. Although the writers of slang, in contrast to the writers of vigorous literate speech, have been rewarded more often in money than in literary fame, the American public has maintained an irresistible attraction for the comic treatment of familiar subjects.[40]

"The first successful exponent of reluctant rustic wit appeared in the character of Major Jack Downing in the letters contributed to newspapers by Seba Smith."[41] These letters, which appeared first in the Daily Courier of Portland, Maine, in 1830, received immediate popularity and were later collected and published as a volume, My 30 Years out of the Senate.[42] The author of the Major Downing letters is remembered now only by literary historians, but he began a tradition, the literary treatment of serious affairs in a whimsical, irreverent manner. His spiritual successors include Hosea Biglow, Josh Billings, Petroleum V. Nasby, Artemas Ward, and more recently, Peter Finley Dunne and

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[39] H. L. Mencken, The American Language, Supplement I (New York, 1945), pp. 152 f.

[40] Krapp, The English Language in America, I, 324.

[41] Ibid., p. 325.

[42] Ibid., p. 326.

Wallace Irwin. Many newspapers continue to print columns of homespun philosophy clothed with illiterate spelling and bad grammar, but the extravagance of portrayal causes the life span of the characters to be brief.[43]

A second style of hyperbolical oratory and picturesque exaggeration moved from daily life to literature with much encouragement from journalism. The Ohio boatman of 1810 and the plainsman of 1815 were already expressing themselves in terms that would have been offensive and unintelligible to a Briton. Before long, traces of the dialect were seen in American literature; and within a century a linguistic style peculiar to the western hemisphere was visible in a distinctly national literature.[44]

> From 1814 to 1861 the influence of the great open spaces was immediate and enormous, and during those gay, hopeful and melodramatic days all the characteristics that mark American English today were developed--its disdain of all scholastic rules and precedents, its tendency toward bold and often bizarre tropes, its rough humors, its not infrequent flights of what might almost be called poetic fancy, its love of neologisms for their own sake.[45]

This language is nowhere so prominent as in the literature of the west, and a study of the words provides an insight into the nature of the people who extended American boundaries. Their vocabularies mirror

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[43] Ibid., pp. 326-327.

[44] Mencken, The American Language, pp. 133 f.

[45] Mencken, The American Language, Supplement I, p. 228.

> . . . the struggle for existence against inestimable odds, the westward migrations over uncharted mountains and plains, the fight for land, the savagery of relations with the red man. . . . Frontier language reflects optimism, the spirit of conquest, exploitation, godlessness, antagonism toward restraint, rugged individualism. The frontiersman combined coarseness and strength, industry and resourcefulness, courage and hospitality, a dominant individualism and a sense of justice. Above all, he was practical. He adapted himself to his surroundings and controlled his environment to suit his needs. This required acuteness, inquisitiveness, inventiveness. . . courage, enterprise, ingenuity--these were qualities which benefited everyone. . . . Another side of the frontier personality was the buoyancy and exuberance which minimized the building of a great nation. The pioneer's tall talk and toasts silenced the cries of the timid ones and boosted the morale of the men who created the America of today from the wilderness of yesterday.[46]

The exaggerations were originally intended to magnify the courage of the timid ones:

> Outside the little circle of firelight and comparative warmth, of food and drink and human fellowship, lay not only the tortures of darkness and storm, but the savagery of wild beasts, the pestilential breath of fire-breathing dragons, and the stealthy evil of demoniac creatures like Grendel, super-human in their powers, or yelling red-fiends in America according to some leagued with Satan himself. Small wonder that the puny mortals destined to combat such foes not only metaphorically girded up their loins but warmed their insides with alcohol, and bolstered up their spirits with narratives of their own great achievements.[47]

Even though their exploits have not been recorded in an epic masterpiece like Beowulf or Chanson de Roland, their

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[46]Merton Babcock, "The Social Significance of the Language of the American Frontier," American Speech, XXIV (December, 1949), 256-263.

[47]Dorothy Dondore, "Big Talk," American Speech, VI (October, 1930), 53.

spirit has been amply recorded in the humorous literature of the Mississippi Valley.

> "Whoo-oop! bow your neck and spread, for the kingdom of sorrow's a-coming! Hold me down to the earth, for I feel my powers a-working! whoo-oop! I'm a child of sin, . . . don't attempt to look at me with the naked eye, gentlemen! When I'm playful I use the meridians of longitude and parallels of latitude for a seine, and drag the Atlantic Ocean for whales! I scratch my head with the lightning and purr myself to sleep with the thunder! When I'm cold, I bile the Gulf of Mexico and bathe in it; when I'm hot I fan myself with an equinoctial storm; when I'm thirsty I reach up and suck a cloud dry like a sponge; when I range the earth hungry, famine follows in my tracks! Whoo-oop! Bow your neck and spread! I put my hand on the sun's face and make it night in the earth; I bite a piece out of the moon and hurry the seasons; I shake myself and crumble the mountains! Contemplate me through leather--don't use the naked eye! I'm the man with a petrified heart and biler-iron bowels! The massacre of isolated communities is the pastime of my idle moments, the destruction of nationalities the serious business of my life! The boundless vastness of the great American desert is my inclosed property, and I bury my dead on my own premises!"[48]

> Such are the varied forms in which frontier tall talk manifests itself. Nevertheless, whether the frontiersman expresses himself by means of profane and abusive epithets, daring and barbarous conceits, in the exalted style of the epic, or whether he indulges in the bombastic absurdities of the political demagogue, he is actuated by the same desires for novelty at all costs, satisfaction of limitless ego, and the mastery of man and nature.[49]

This extravagance of expression, which began around the camp fires, was "borrowed eagerly by the humorous writers, and especially by those who performed regularly in the

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[48]Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (New York, 1911), p. 22.

[49]William F. Thompson, "Frontier Tall Talk," American Speech, IX (October, 1934), 199.

newspapers."[50] Many of the vulgar expressions forced themselves into relatively good usage when the stump speakers described with eloquence America's traditions and potentialities. The fantastic slang words and turns of phrase were quoted by newsmen, and no amount of literary criticism could purify the extravagant vocabulary. "The newspaper was enthroned, and belles lettres were cultivated almost in private and as a mystery."[51]

After the Civil War, Edward S. Gould, William D. Whitney, and Richard Grant White led a formidable campaign to purify the American language. In 1867, Gould published his Good English, which was an attack on the unqualified inventors of language. The first on his list of the ignorant were "the men generally who write for the newspapers."[52] Whitney described the controversy over usage in Language and the Study of Language.

> The low-toned party newspaper is too much the type of prevailing literary influence by which the style of speech of our rising generation is moulded. A tendency to slang, to colloquial indulgence, and even vulgarities is the besetting sin against which we, as Americans, have especially to guard and to struggle.[53]

The purists were tireless in their efforts, but they gained little except the support of certain eminent American literati and the entire school of grammarians. The natural

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[50] Mencken, The American Language, p. 137.

[51] Ibid., p. 139.

[52] Ibid., pp. 164 f.

[53] Pound, op. cit., p. 360.

progress of the language was hardly impeded by their efforts. At the peak of their campaign, new Americanisms were coined which enjoy wider popularity than their essays on usage. In 1867 American speech acquired wire-puller and to strike oil and several years later, boom and to boom.[54]

As can be seen in the earlier history of the language, the quarrel between traditional grammarians and advocates of current usage is an old one. In both England and America, there is a tendency toward dictionary worship. The fact that the movement is stronger in America than in England is believed to be the influence of the middle class who are most concerned about correctness in speech. Nevertheless, the real nature of language has been demonstrated forcibly in the New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, which was completed in 1928 after forty-four years of research. This tremendous lexicographical achievement, reprinted as the Oxford Dictionary in twelve volumes, is a meticulous study tracing as far back as 1100 the etymology of every established word in the English language. The morphological changes and variant spellings illustrate the evolutionary process of language.

> Perhaps the New English Dictionary has done more than anything else to help weaken the great love for authority in language and to establish the proper

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[54]Mencken, The American Language, pp. 167 f.

> respect for usage, for what is actually happening in the language.[55]

Conflict over language is pronounced in the criticisms of modern American writing, for recent authors have deviated from the classical interpretations of the correct and appropriate language for literature. Impressionists and realists, like modern journalists, have written in colloquial language when their subjects required it. Since these innovations in literary language are considered by many to be America's most significant contribution to literature, the source of the new tradition is a pertinent consideration. Tendencies in modern writing are said to have begun in the nineteenth century. Since Whitman's time, more than half of the writers whose works are collected in volumes on American literature have had experience in journalism, and all the writers who have made a serious impact on literary language have been trained journalists.

Early in the nineteenth century, American speech was humorously recorded in newspapers and magazines. Many of the dialect writers contributed to the richness of idiom and literary vitality by preserving this early link between spoken and written American speech. Devices of the early humorists--"anticlimactic sentences, misquotations, incongruous predicates, neologisms, malapropisms"--were

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[55]Bryant, op. cit., pp. 80 f.

wielded by Mark Twain into a form of art.[56] Although Twain's exact position in the field of literature is still controversial, a number of critics would agree with Hemingway's statement that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn."[57] Certainly, it was Twain who helped make popular the non-literary prose style that characterizes much contemporary American writing. Throughout Huckleberry Finn, one is confronted with the "same simplicity of rhythm, vocabulary, and sentence structure" that Hemingway employs for "crispness, clarity, and a wonderful freshness."[58]

A second journalist, Stephen Crane, is Twain's closest rival for the paternity of modern American prose writing; and it is to him that Carl Van Doren traces the new school of literature. The unquestionable leader of the present movement is Hemingway, who like Crane began his writing career very young as a reporter. His style, asserts Philip Young, is unquestionably the most famous and influential prose style of our time.[59] Even though his devices have been imitated by a horde of young writers who attach no meaning to the violence and simplicity of his words,

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[56]Louis C. Jones, "Half-Horse, Half-Alligator," American Speech, XIII (April, 1938), 137.

[57]Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway (New York, 1952), p. 159.

[58]Ibid., p. 160.

[59]Ibid., p. 144.

> . . . many serious writers have learned from him, among other things, the values of objectivity, of honesty, . . . and something of how to write a hard and clean prose style. . . . He has helped to purify our writing of sentimentality, literary embellishment, padding, and a superficial artfulness.[60]

This rather colloquial and non-literary prose style is characterized by simplicity of diction and sentence structure.

> The words are chiefly short and common ones, and there is a severe and austere economy in their use. The typical sentence is a simple declarative sentence, or a couple of these joined by a conjunction; there is very little subordination of clauses.[61]

Even American poetry has been influenced by journalistic habits. Randall Jarrell makes this comment about the language of modern poetry:

> . . . a great emphasis on connotation, "texture"; extreme intensity, forced emotion--violence; a good deal of obscurity; emphasis on details, on the part rather than on the whole; experimental or novel qualities of some sort; a tendency toward external formlessness and internal disorganization.[62]

Two journalists, Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost, have been prominent in the movement to incorporate the speech and speech rhythms of daily life in poetry. Following their example and the tradition of the new age, imagist poets have "vowed to use the language of ordinary speech, and always the exact word."[63] They paint images with exact particulars

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[60] Ibid., p. 174.

[61] Ibid., pp. 174-175.

[62] Foerster, op. cit., p. 155.

[63] Young, op. cit., p. 155.

and substitute for vague generalities, a hard, clear, and concentrated language.[64]

The list of journalists who have contributed to American literature is a long one.[65] Perhaps when the mass of printed material has been reduced to a body of literature representative of this age, literary historians will see more clearly the effect of journalism on modern literature. The rustic and hyperbolical styles encouraged by newspapers a hundred years ago have already declined; and the present objective, concise, and simple style is likely to be tempered. But the shadow of the masthead will always be visible in the literature and the language of this age. In order to understand the impact of journalism on American literary styles and speech habits, one must consider the aspects of journalese and compare the stylistic techniques of journalistic and literary composition.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Edwin H. Ford, "The Art and Craft of Literary Journalists," An Outline Survey of Journalism, edited by George Fox Mott (New York, 1940), p. 296.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED

> The U. S. Press has broken free from some of the outdated taboos and cliches that still keep news-writing stilting along behind the racy spoken word. But many still survive. The late, great Editor William Rockhill Nelson barred the word *snake* from his Kansas City *Star* because he thought readers couldn't take it at the breakfast table. Colonel Bertie McCormick has let some of his simplified-spelling decrees lapse (*fotograf* has been compromised into *photograf*), but his Chicago *Tribune* still uses *monolog*, *tho*, *frate*.[1]

Much news copy is written under the pressure of deadlines, but all journalistic violations of formal usage are not accidental. Most of the informal expressions are deliberate attempts to attract and hold the attention of careless and indifferent readers. *The AP Writing Handbook* emphasizes that reporters must be able to write colloquial American English.[2]

Any discussion of journalistic language is, of necessity, general and incomplete. There are as many styles as there are reporters, but recurring tendencies in the language of periodicals have been classified as journalese.

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[1] *Time*, LII (October 11, 1948), 64.

[2] *The AP Writing Handbook* (New York, 1951), p. 14.

The second edition of Webster's New International Dictionary (1934) defines journalese as that style of English featuring the "use of colloquialisms, superficiality of thought or reasoning, clever or sensational presentation of material, and evidences of haste in composition." Some newspapers will employ few of the devices illustrated in this chapter; and some magazines, especially those of a literary nature, may not have any of these characteristics. Within the last decade, readability campaigns conducted by wire services and educational institutions have made startling changes in the newsman's language. Nevertheless, traces of journalese can be found in the vocabulary of almost every American, and a number of journalistic inventions will probably be recorded in the dictionaries for this generation. However, an examination of journalism textbooks will show that schools of journalism are concerned with eliminating the flagrant violations of good usage that appear in some American periodicals.

The copy reader must arouse the interest of the reader by a headline which must be printed in a limited space. For this reason, headlines are composed of words that may be short, ambiguous, or even exaggerated. If a naturally short word cannot be found, a clipped form is readily supplied so that headline English would puzzle any foreigner and many natives.

> The favorite verbs of the newspaper copy-desk are those of three letters, e.g., to air, (which serves to indicate any form of disclosure) to cut, to net, to set, to bar, to aid, to map, to nab, to hit, to rap, to vie, and to ban. It has revived an archaism, to ire, and has produced to null from to nullify by clipping. Gassed is always used in place of asphyxiated. To admit is used as a substitute for to confess, to acknowledge, to concede, to acquiesce and to recognize. . . . A few of the headline verbs are of five letters, e.g., to claim, to photo, to blame, to quash, to speed and to score, and some are even of six letters, e.g., to attack, to debunk, to battle, but that is only because the researchers of the copy-desk Websters have not, as yet, discovered shorter synonyms. Their preference, after their three-letter favorites, runs to four-letter verbs, e.g., to best, to cite, to curb, to flay, to loom, to lure, to name, to oust, to push, to quit, to rule, to spur and to void, and among them, as among the nouns, their first choice is for those of onomatopeic tang.[3]

Journalistic clipping is responsible for ad, confab, duo, exam, gas, isle, mart, photo, and quake. Nationalities have been shortened to Jap, Russ, Serb, Swede, Turk, Norse. Many of the shortened forms have powerful connotations, e.g., Nazi, red, and hun. Short compound words have become convenient substitutions for longer words, phrases, and clauses, e.g., clean-up, fire-bug, come-back, and pre-war.[4] An exhibition of radio equipment becomes a mike show, and an automobile driver who after striking someone with his car flees from the scene of the accident instead of remaining to give aid is succinctly titled hit-and-run driver or hit-runner. According to the terminology of the newspapers, an

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[3]Mencken, The American Language, p. 199.

[4]Ibid., p. 183.

expert in aviation or sports is an ace; a request a plea; an explosion or criticism a blast; a concerted effort a drive; a ruling order an edict; and a criminal a felon. Any official is likely to be called a head, and money taken in a robbery is almost certain to be described as loot. Arms stands for disarmament; mecca for favorite resort; rite for funeral; parley or talk for conference; scribe for writer or reporter; session for convention; solon for legislator; title for championship; tot for child; and troth for engagement. Criminals are nabbed; appointees are okehed or rapped; speakers are booked; undesirable people are ousted, shunned or quashed.[5]

Some verbs are formed by adding -ize and -en to nouns and adjectives. To expertize and to backwardize are both listed in the Oxford Dictionary as journalistic inventions.[6] Other verbs are made by substituting nouns or adjectives in their original forms or in their abbreviated forms. Nouns are made into adjectives as in these color names taken from a newspaper: dusky blue, jungle green, midnight grey, myrtle green, and town navy.[7] Some of these noun-to-verb shifts have been used so extensively that dictionaries list both

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[5]Maurice Hicklin, "Scribes Seek Snappy Synonyms," American Speech, VI (October, 1930), 110-112.

[6]Mencken, The American Language, p. 193.

[7]Fort Worth Star Telegram, July 15, 1950, p. 16.

classifications for the word: "Miss Stinetoof has authored a couple of juveniles"[8] and "Churchill says Europe periled."[9] Not infrequently, one finds adjectives acting as verbs, e.g., "Government moving to ready public for total mobilization";[10] "Vandals dirty fresh varnish";[11] ". . . ideas that do not square with its own";[12] and "Phone strike idles 3,000,000."[13] Quite often, words that were originally nouns appear as verbs: "Three knifed in argument at football game";[14] "Waltari peoples his pages with predestined characters";[15] and "Town jails three pickets in phone strike."[16]

Several different types of functional shifts occur in this selection from a feature story:

> . . . some portion of the same ironized blood as the doughty frontiersman's could conceivably trickle into

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[8]The Dallas Morning News, August 12, 1950, Part III, p. 2.

[9]Ibid., October 15, 1950, Part I, p. 2.

[10]Fort Worth Star Telegram, November 14, 1950, p. 6.

[11]The Dallas Morning News, November 8, 1950, Part III, p. 1.

[12]Ibid., August 22, 1950, Part I, p. 1.

[13]Ibid., November 10, 1950, Part I, p. 1.

[14]Ibid., November 25, 1950, Part I, p. 14.

[15]Fort Worth Star Telegram, November 18, 1950, Part II, p. 11.

[16]The Dallas Morning News, November 18, 1950, Part I, p. 1.

> the slender San Antonio oilman through two generations of family. . . . certainly much of the spunk that snarled defiance at Santa Anna oozed out in Fred. . . . His acquisitions and business acumen have lifted him with a sort of hydraulic jack propulsion from minus zero to plus a lot more.[17]

Emma Ousley has made a study of functional shift in English as it has occurred in Old English, in poetic language, and in present-day writing. She comments on the prevalence of functional shift in many types of writing--fiction, essay, magazine, and newspaper--but it is her opinion that novels and essays generally limit their shifts to words that have already been accepted in standard English.[18]

> Then in the examination of various types of magazines these conclusions have been reached: first, in this heterogeneous grouping, Ladies' Home Journal, Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, Think, and Your Life, a few examples of functional shift were found, but the process was not freely employed; second, in this group of fashion magazines, Mademoiselle, Glamour, and Esquire, many examples of functional shift were found, particularly those not yet accepted in standard usage; third, in the news magazines, Newsweek, Time, and Life, there were numerous examples of functional shift, both standard words and substandard coinages.
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> By far the greatest amount of functional shift was found in the newspapers, especially in news stories, headlines, advertising, and sports stories. In general, the ordinary news story uses functional shift only occasionally, whereas the headline writers employ functional shift frequently to catch the eye of the

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[17] Ibid., October, 1950, Part I, p. 7.

[18] Emma Gene Ousley, "Functional Shift in English," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, North Texas State College, Denton, Texas, 1951, p. 86.

reader, and to fit a word into the space alloted for headlines.[19]

The practice of shifting words from one part of speech to another is an old device used to its fullest possible advantage by newspapers and magazines. Many of these functional shifts are temporary solutions to problems in headline space. Other substitutions have been repeated so frequently that they have become established usages and the new classifications have been recorded in the dictionaries. Although the shifts are annoying to purists and puzzling to foreigners, they are sources of variety and strength to the American language.

Despite frequent and harsh criticism from conservative linguists, reporters continue to invent new words or wrench the old ones to fit their ideas. Many of their concoctions have found their way into popular usage, and "we have come to back a horse or a candidate, to boost our community, comb the woods for a criminal, hop the Atlantic, and spike a rumor." To sportswriters we owe such expressions as crestfallen, fight shy, neck and neck, out of the running, side step, down and out, straight from the shoulder, caught napping, and off base.[20]

Fashion writers coin and distort words that are as evanescent as the fashions they describe, but their

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[19] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

[20] Albert C. Baugh, History of the English Language (New York, 1935), pp. 380 f.

expressions like their styles are not likely to endure more than one season. They use the suffix -ish in an infantile manner, e.g., tallish, stiffish, lowish, and stoutish. Respectable nouns and adjectives are transformed with final y's into childish terms, e.g., chiffony, tinselly, Japanesey, and Christmasy. There are scarflets, necklets, off-the-face hats, pulled-to-one-side-in-front collars, and into-the-autumn coats. Sassy jackets and snobbish fabrics are made for out-of-towners and five-to-niners so that they may go cocktailing, teaing, and week-ending. Colors have any number of names which appear to change annually. Blue has been called slate, aster, indigo, pansy, midnight, French, crayon, lapis, ice, stratosphere, stained glass, vista, peacock, cathedral, royal, china, navy, violet, and sapphire.[21] In an advertisement, The Dallas Morning News describes a dress:

> The tongue-in-check naivete of black and white gingham, its skirt a mobile, rippling froth of lace-edged flounces . . . the curved little bodice fitting as perfectly as a kid glove. For light-hearted festivity. . . a touch of frivolity to a sunny afternoon.[22]

One linguist comments as follows on the diction of advertising:

> The language of advertising, which entices and (or) menaces us from radio and magazine, from billboard

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[21]Dorothy Hughes, "The Language of the Fashion Sheet," American Speech, X (October, 1935), 191-194.

[22]The Dallas Morning News, May 12, 1956, Part II, p. 8.

> and public vehicle, would languish and quickly pass away if it were not sustained by an excess of unusual words and phrases, likewise appealing to the emotions or inducing a superficial kind of thinking ordinarily far removed from the realm of clear and accurate thought. The dictionaries are being combed for unusual words, the man of the street is watched for new and popular colloquialisms, and the more esthetic appeal of careful enunciation and colorful diction is ardently cultivated by the users of the English language who are employed to interest more and more buyers of cigarettes, soaps and sundries. Not even the most earnest purist or seeker after cultural security devotes more time or energy to the cultivation of the English language than does the artist in advertising English.[23]

Many trade names, which are the imaginative devices of American advertisers, are now used as common nouns, e.g., vaseline, cellophane, carborundum, pionola, kotex, victrola, uneeda, listerine, postum, and lux.[24]

> Of all the journalistic phenomena of our age, the magazine Time is linguistically the most interesting. Here for the first time is a popular medium of information whose editors are using the language so freely and boldly as to suggest conscious experiment. . . . Because of its popularity, any word which it introduces and uses consistently may be considered at least potentially a part of the language.[25]

Every issue of the magazine contains examples of its innovations which have been divided into the following classifications: "esoteric words; words more or less

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[23]Arthur G. Kennedy, English Usage (New York, 1942), p. 45.

[24]Mencken, The American Language, pp. 172 f.

[25]Joseph E. Firebaugh, "The Vocabulary of Time Magazine," American Speech, XV (October, 1940), 232.

obsolete, from English dialects; slang and barbarisms; blends; compounds; and words formed with prefixes and suffixes."[26]

Pundit (a learned expert or teacher) and tycoon (an industrial leader) are two foreign words that have been given new definitions and wide popularity by Time editors who appear determined to ignore old words when a new word can be invented. Pages of the magazine are filled with words that are not in any dictionary; however, these blends are generally self-explanatory. One of their most successful inventions, socialites, is now listed as part of the American language. They composed more than a score of words from cinema, e.g., cinemactor, cinemactress, cinemaddict, and cinemagazines.[27]

Their editors combined poll and politician to make pollitician and wrote booklegger for a purveyor of illegal books and subnapper for a kidnapper of submarines.[28] In the same year that cosmetician was coined, beautician appeared as a blend of beauty and physician, suggesting beauty doctor.[29] Both of these words are used extensively today. Since many of these blends are effective only in context, the words are used only for terse headlines or once in the

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Robert Withington, "Some Neologisms from Recent Magazines," American Speech, VI (April, 1932), 277 f.

body of an article[30] and most often are not incorporated into the standard body of language.

The practice of omitting hyphens whenever possible is one of the magazine's "most constructive linguistic contributions."[31] This principle of compounding words and writing them without hyphens has been used in the German language for a long time. Onetime, oldtime, and longtime are examples of Time's compound words. Reporters are referred to as newshawks, newsmen, and newsmongers. On their pages one may read accounts of a hoaxmistress, oilman, and Nobelman (winner of a Nobel prize). To Time editors, Mae West was America's sweethot. When a wrestler's wife attacked Referee Jack Dempsey for giving her husband an unfavorable decision, Time described the spectacle: "She screechscratched Referee Dempsey into a corner."[32]

The etymologies listed in the Dictionary of American English indicate that many of the words which are of American origin can be traced to the less dignified authors and to magazines.[33]

> By indulging the neologistic license of marrying any two words whose union promises to be fruitful, the benefactors of the language, who gave us flabbergast, chortle, cattalo, et al., were employing a method of

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[30]Firebaugh, op. cit., p. 237.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., pp. 238-241.

[33]John Kouwenhoven, "American English and American History," American Speech, XIV (April, 1939), 87.

> augmenting speech as old as language itself. . . the fad of blending words is enjoying a popularity which, for prolificacy and cleverness of linguistic device, has scarcely been equaled by any other type of verbal invention.[34]

If a neologism appears to supply a deficiency in the language or to be especially apt for the expression of some special idea, the new word will become a part of the language regardless of scholastic criticism.[35] Editors "can give neologisms currency, but they cannot give them more than an ephemeral vitality, unless the public decrees that they shall live."[36]

The reporter frequently resorts to hyperboles for effect and variety. These exaggerated and somewhat careless figures of speech reflect the exuberant, middle-class spirit of the United States. Although most slang expressions are soon forgotten, a number of them have been accepted as a permanent part of the language. Every profession, indeed every community, has its own metaphors; but most of the slang expressions which have enjoyed wide circulation have been originated by the wits of the newspapers and theaters. In 1933, W. J. Funk of the Funk and Wagnalls Company listed the ten most fecund inventors of slang. All but one of the

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[34]Lester V. Berry, "Newly Wedded Words," American Speech, XIV (April, 1939), 1.

[35]Eric Partridge, Usage and Abusage (New York, 1942), p. 209.

[36]Withington, op. cit., p. 209.

men were connected with newspapers and magazines. Walter Winchell, one of the big ten, introduced lohengrined, Renovated, Adam and Eveing, infanticipating, baby-bound, and storked.[37] T. A. Dorgan substituted applesauce for nonsense; cheaters for spectacles; chin music for talk; and dogs for feet. Mencken's allusion to the South as the Bible Belt has been repeated for several years.[38]

Any popular magazine and newspaper will contain a number of slang expressions. Comics, sports, fashions, and theatrical pages are fertile sources for slang. Helen Tysell believes that much of the slang of the comics is derived from expressions that have already been established, e.g., gyp joint for restaurant which overcharges; tough mug for ugly face; slewfoot for detective; boiler for old car; and dome for head. One finds expressions like one grand, smacker, dough, balmy, dizzy, coo coo, sap, to rib, to salt down (to put in prison), to blot out, to bump off, to sock, to wallop, to mooch, and to scram. The popularity enjoyed by these expressions indicates that the comic pages give currency to many archaic and obsolete words that might otherwise be forgotten or confined to small geographical

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[37]Mencken, The American Language, p. 289.

[38]Elizabeth Lee Buckingham, "Menckeniana," American Speech, VII (October, 1931), 76.

areas.[39] Most recently the comic pages have achieved some degree of sophistication and now portray adventures of such esteemed characters as doctors and judges.

> If you have any lingering doubt that the Funnies serve as grammar, speller, and style book of the vulgate, listen to a few street-corner conversations or ask a school teacher or two about the language problems with which she has most frequently to deal. You will be convinced, I am sure, that if the English of the comic cartoon does not direct the speech habits of the common people, it at least crystallizes and gives currency to popular tendencies, thereby playing a material part in the Americanization of the English language.[40]

A recent textbook in journalism states that the audience of the sports page is "keenly alive to a picturesque, provincial and waggish vernacular."[41]

> Does the sports writer revel in slang? He certainly does. But here, once more, close scrutiny dispels the popular belief that the sports page is a hodgepodge of trite, vulgar and cheap-Jack expressions meaningless to the uninitiated. Only in a story produced by an amateur will you find such "silly symphonies" as these: banged the apple. . . lammed the pill. . . split the ozone.
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> Worn-out slang and breezy colloquialisms belong to quite different families. . . . However, there is touch and go in the statement that "the southpaw pitched airtight ball," whereas "the left-handed pitcher, threw the ball so well that his opponents were unable to strike it" is laborious and flavorless. "A hard uppercut to the jaw and a left jab to the belt line" is certainly preferable to "a severe blow administered to the face and another, with the left hand, to the region of the stomach." Such phrases as "struck out," "kicked

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[39] Helen Trace Tysell, "The English of the Comic Cartoon," American Speech, X (February, 1935), 52.

[40] Ibid., p. 54.

[41] Carl Warren, Modern News Reporting (New York, 1951), p. 349.

> goal," "won the toss," "a birdie," "a love set" and "knockout" clarify rather than corrupt sports writing. They are, in fact, perfectly proper terms used for explicit situations.[42]

Curtis D. MacDougall, professor of journalism and author of a textbook for advanced reporting, thinks

> Newspapers have not contributed as much as one might expect to the coinage of new words, but they have helped exhaust the effectiveness of a large number through indiscriminate repetition. Among these are the following:
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> blunt instrument
> bolt from a clear sky
> brutal crime
> brutally murdered
> cannon fodder
> cheered to the echo
> clubber
> crime wage
> cynosure of all eyes
> death car
> fatal noose
> feeling ran high
> gruesome find
> grilled by police
> hot seat
> infuriated mob
> man hunt
> moron
> mystery surrounds
> news leaked out
> police drag nets
> political pot boiling
> probe
> quiz[43]

Bradley states that future historians of language may well label the present age "The Period of Variety." The modern taste in style is to avoid all monotony of diction. If an object or action must be repeated, then a new name must be devised.[44] Like many other journalistic tendencies, needless variations have been modified; but the sports page is still a lesson in verbal gymnastics. The classic example

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[42] Ibid., pp. 349 f.

[43] Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York, 1948), p. 176.

[44] Henry Bradley, The Making of English (London, 1931), p. 228.

is probably the article quoted from the New York Times of Sunday, October 13, 1929:

> Yesterday. . . in football several surprising reverses occurred. Yale, playing in the first game in the new stadium of the University of Georgia. . . fell before the Southern eleven by 15-0. . . . At the Polo Grounds, Fordham surprised by triumphing over New York University. . . by 26 to 0. In other games Notre Dame conquered Navy, 14 to 7. . . Brown toppled Princeton, 13 to 12; Nebraska subdued Syracuse, 13 to 6; Harvard defeated New Hampshire, 35 to 0; Ohio State edged out Iowa, 7 to 6; Columbia overwhelmed Wesleyan, 52 to 0; Army turned back Davidson, 23 to 7; Colgate submerged Michigan State, 31 to 0; Pennsylvania beat Virginia Polytechnic, 14 to 6; Chicago scored a 13 to 7 victory over Indiana, and Northwestern blanked Wisconsin, 7 to 0; Tulane humbled Mississippi A. and M., 34 to 0, while Richmond repulsed Johns Hopkins, 21 to 7. . . Michigan bowed to Purdue, 30 to 16; Missouri whitewashed Missouri State, 13 to 0, and Lafayette shut out Manhattan College, 23 to 0.[45]

Instead of writing that a team was defeated or that it won the contest, sports writers consciously vary the verb to pummeled, trounced, licked, nipped, downed, belted, whacked, swamped, torpedoed, shellacked, trimmed, edged out and scores of other action words. Carl Warren has taken phrases at random from recent sports stories that illustrate the sports style. Various champions and teams are reported to have clicked off pars like clockwork; put his challenger into a deep freeze; flipped six touchdown passes to set an aerial record; exerted a steady last-half drive to edge out;

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[45]J. R. Schultz, "Varying the Verb," American Speech, V (October, 1929), 26.

survived a stretch duel; and turf-breezed to an easy three-length victory.[46]

Exaggerations are an old American custom. Nevertheless, as the public becomes more scientific and more sophisticated, accuracy becomes more important. New standards of writing insist that genuine emotions need no eloquent descriptions. Thus, reporters are encouraged to be honest with their readers except for classifying all brides as either beautiful or attractive. At one time reporters wrote almost entirely in superlatives; now the best journalistic writing contains few adjectives. It is obvious, of course, that a number of newspaper people have not mastered this linguistic temperance.

Book reviews, which are printed regularly in most newspapers and in many magazines, are examples of language that has become ineffective by thoughtless repetition and exaggeration. According to mediocre journalists, almost all books are admirably done, beautifully finished, deeply human, deeply moving, and highly original with a remarkable depth of insight, feeling for character, and an epic quality. Triplet adjectives inform prospective readers that the book is clear, precise, and illuminating; complete, convincing, and poignant; detailed, scientific, and yet completely readable; entertaining, sympathetic, and

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[46]Warren, op. cit., pp. 348 f.

informative; lucid, informative, and interesting. Fascinating, amazing, delightful, interesting, and remarkable are especially overworked.[47]

When a reviewer expresses a disparaging opinion, he writes that the book is academic, amateurish, banal, careless, commonplace, conventional, disappointing, elementary, hackneyed, immature, inaccurate, inferior, insipid, irritating, mediocre, melodramatic, naive, obvious, over-done, partisan, pedantic, second-rate, slipshod, strained, superficial, tabloid, trite, trivial, unconvincing, uncritical, uneven, unsatisfactory, vague, weak.[48]

Few reporters resort to the lifeless language employed by all courteous people who tell their hostesses that the evening was delightful, but a number of them choose words without any feeling and try to bring their copy to life with spasmodic punctuation, numerous superlatives, and trite expressions.

> Almost lifeless language artificially stimulated is common in all sorts of writing that is paid for by the inch or line. Here is a specimen taken from a recent newspaper: "Armed to the teeth and headed for an unknown destination, A. K. of Colorado will head for the silent places this morning in search of the elusive jack rabbit."[49]

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[47]Wilson O. Clough, "The Book Reviewer's Vocabulary," American Speech, VI (February, 1931), 180 f.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Sidney Cox, The Teaching of English (New York, 1928), pp. 114 f.

Dean is an example of a dignified word that has been misused by journalists until its meritorious connotation has been weakened.

> Once it meant a definite thing, ecclesiastically or academically or even in military use. Now it is becoming but the newspaper-writer's superlative, of every application. A notion of unspecified and unofficial superiority is attached to it, but a superiority merely bestowed by the writer, who tomorrow will bestow it on someone else. It does not seem possible that any one country can afford so many persons of distinction as are deans of American literature and deans of painting and deans of history and archeology and hair-dressing and deans of dry-point etching.
>
> It is not only men and women who have the title, for here in a magazine, below a picture of an old wooden cottage, appears, "The dean of frame houses in New England."[50]

Because language is useful in commerce, an increasing emphasis has been placed on the journalistic and advertising style of writing and speaking. Journalism is concerned primarily with the immediate effects of language; consequently, some very questionable linguistic practices have developed.[51]

> Indeed, as a result of this growing emphasis upon the immediate effects of language, there are nowadays two fairly distinct schools of writers--and speakers--, namely, those who employ the highly impressive style of the journalistic writer to produce immediate results both good and bad and those who prefer the more conservative style of the purveyor of sound and thorough thinking. And so the language that one uses should

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[50]Margaret Lynn, "Deltas and Deans," American Speech, VI (October, 1930), 59 f.

[51]Arthur G. Kennedy, Current English (Boston, 1935), p. 2.

> be judged both as to the effectiveness with which it expresses thoughts and emotions and also to the impression that it makes upon other people.[52]

The most serious charges then that are brought against journalistic writing are offenses that might be committed by any writer. Reporters would do well to follow Krapp's suggestions for testing good English. Does it accomplish its purpose? Does it shock the prejudices or traditions of the reader? Does it give a clear and definite impression of the thought? Is it satisfactorily expressive?[53]

This does not mean that reporters must suppress their imaginations and write dull, lifeless copy. On the contrary, they must develop their imaginations as well as their feeling for words because

> . . . good English is language that mints with the image and superscription of the speaker or writer an exchangeable symbol of a fresh discovery. Good English is English with heart in it, with fists in it, with a sigh in it, with a gritting of teeth or a setting of jaws in it, with a grin or a smile in it. It is the language that has cost something. Life has been spent; it is there in the words and phrasing.[54]

Read the classics, the Bible, the Elizabethan dramatists;

> . . . and you will feel the sap of eager, struggling, unquenchable vitality charging all the language, whether it is grave or gay, thwarted or triumphant. Read Carlyle or Emerson or Thoreau, read Hardy or Conrad or D. H. Lawrence, and, different as you will find them, you will always find a man, a life, a

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[52] Ibid., p. 3.

[53] Krapp, Modern English, p. 334.

[54] Cox, op. cit., pp. 116 f.

> fight--with victory and defeat--and a seeking, shaping will behind the design of syllables in every paragraph. For good language is a record of daring, struggling, suffering, triumph, and honest confession of bewilderment and bafflement.[55]

Newspaper language is not always bad. Reputable city papers are written in a direct, straightforward style with a close relationship between the language and the subject matter. Inexperienced editors and reporters sometimes produce copy that is bombastic or otherwise inadequate; nevertheless, their faults are not greater than those of the second-rate author who achieves a literary style at the expense of directness and sincerity.[56] This chapter is not intended as another literary condemnation of newspapers and magazines, nor is it a tabulation of all the errors committed in journalistic periodicals. This part of the study is rather a summary of the types of vulgate and colloquial English which appear most often in newspapers and magazines with possible explanations for their currency and with an estimation of their value to standard English.

Rudolf Flesch believes that American newspapers have made vast improvements in their use of the language.

> Fifty or a hundred years ago--even thirty years ago--reporters wrote flowery prose, embellishing their facts with choice adjectives; interlarding their stories freely with their own opinions, observations, and random thoughts. They strove for beautiful

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Krapp, Modern English, pp. 284 f.

> writing, thoughtful phrasing, words rather than facts. Even today, this is still true in most parts of the globe. Lean, factual reporting is something that has developed only recently--and mainly in the United States.[57]

In the following chapter the new theories of journalistic writing will be described and then compared with the theories and mechanics of composition taught in college English courses.

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[57]Rudolf Flesch, How to Make Sense (New York, 1954), p. 87.

CHAPTER III

THE SPORTATORIUM AND THE IVY TOWER

> The word man has meant an adult human male for more than a thousand years. It is standard English. Only recently has a good guy been an approved male; formerly, if a guy was not a piece of rope or wire it was a person who looked like a scarecrow. Guy, in the sense of man, is not acceptable standard English because its effectiveness in that sense is limited; it carries associations with nonstandard situations which are part of its meaning. In its newer, vaguer sense the word has not become part of the established body of standard English which can be relied on to maintain a relatively constant meaning.[1]

Conflict over usage in language probably began when two people first tried to talk together. Certainly, the disputes have increased as men have moved closer together and as they have spent more time communicating with each other. Because of the complexity of present society and the differences in personal temperaments and abilities, no one standard of language appears to be sufficient. And reporters must grapple with the problem of finding expressions that are informal and interesting yet stable and current. Since large numbers of people subconsciously pattern their speech habits after the language of

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[1]Robert M. Gorrell and Charlton Laird, Modern English Handbook (Englewood Cliffs, 1956), p. 454.

newspapers, journalistic standards of language are a pertinent consideration to all students and teachers of English.

Because every editor has individual linguistic preferences, an exhaustive study of the language of American newspapers is almost impossible. However, a better understanding of newspaper language and mechanics of composition can be obtained by comparing journalistic and formal theories of writing. This chapter is a comparative analysis of journalistic and college English and theories of diction, sentence structure and length, paragraph structure and length, capitalization, abbreviation, and punctuation.

For this study, style sheets were chosen to illustrate radical and conservative tendencies in newspaper writing. To construct a fairly accurate picture of the major trends of American journalism, style books were examined from the three major press associations,[2] three newspapers,[3] and one textbook.[4] Fifteen journalism

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[2]The Associated Press Style Book (New York, 1953).
International News Service Style Manual (New York, 1950).
United Press Style Sheet (New York, 1956).

[3]Campus Chat Stylebook (Denton, 1952).
The Dallas Morning News Stylebook (Dallas, 1956).
Detroit Free Press Style Book (Detroit, 1943).

[4]Ronald E. Wolseley, Exploring Journalism (New York, 1949), pp. 588-595.

textbooks[5] were analyzed for the summary of journalistic theories in writing, and three of the most recent handbooks in English composition[6] were used as the basis for defining standard usage.

Since people scan newspapers, reading many of the articles only once and some not at all, the reporter clamors for attention by framing his narrative in vigorous language.

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[5]George L. Bird, Article Writing and Marketing (New York, 1951).
Chilton R. Bush, Newspaper Reporting of Public Affairs (New York, 1951).
Rudolf Flesch and A. H. Lass, The Way to Write (New York, 1949).
Robert Gunning, The Technique of Clear Writing (New York, 1952).
Olin Hinkle and John Henry, How to Write Columns (Ames, 1952).
William Hall, Reporting News (Boston, 1936).
John Paul Jones, The Modern Reporter's Handbook (New York, 1949).
Curtin D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York, 1948).
Helen M. Patterson and Grant Milnor Hyde, Writing and Selling Feature Articles (New York, 1949).
Michael Simmons, Writer's Handbook of Basic Journalism (New York, 1947).
Walter A. Steigleman, Writing the Feature Article (New York, 1950).
Howard B. Taylor and Jacob Scher, Copy Reading and News Editing (New York, 1951).
A. Gayle Waldrop, Editor and Editorial Writer (New York, 1955).
Carl Warren, Modern News Reporting (New York, 1951).
Wolseley, op. cit.

[6]Norman Foerster, J. M. Steadman, Jr., and James B. McMillan, Writing and Thinking (New York, 1952).
Gorrell and Laird, op. cit.
John C. Hodges, Harbrace College Handbook (New York, 1956).

The scholarly piece may be reread several times with careful consideration to its shades of meaning. Because approximately 75 per cent of the American population has not graduated from high school,[7] the daily newspaper must be written in a language that is easily understood by truck drivers, school teachers, and scientists. The tired manufacturer wants to know quickly and simply what government officials are planning in Washington and how new legislation will affect him and his business. Conciseness in newswriting is a natural result of contemporary life and thinking, and simplicity is a concession to the enlarged audience who have learned to read but who do not yet have a literary background. Because this is the age of science, objectivity in recording the events of the day is almost second nature. A journalism textbook summarizes the predicament of modern newspapers: they "are written in a hurry to be read in a hurry."[8]

The factual, simple, and idiomatic writing that is called journalistic is described at length in The Modern Reporter's Handbook, which anticipates extended use of the new techniques.

> The reporter who earns his salt in the future will have to know how to write short, clear sentences and have a bright, "human" style. Already newspapers,

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[7]Wolseley, op. cit., p. 199.

[8]Ibid., p. 197.

> press associations, and radio stations are doing something about readability. They are making reader-interest surveys and training their staff members in the fundamentals of "plain talk." Press associations are shifting their writers back and forth between their news and radio rooms to help them develop a single, clear style that will be equally interesting and understandable on the radio and in the newspaper.[9]

The author of the text emphasizes that it is not enough to write a story that can be understood; one must write so that he cannot be misunderstood. The old claim that reporters and editors lack time to clean up garbled writing is invalid. By proper training, the reporter will choose words that are both accurate and effective.[10]

According to the Flesch theory, a passage of prose is easily understood when there are no more than one hundred fifty syllables per one hundred words. Scientific journals are difficult to read because one hundred word samples contain an average of fifty-four affixes. Magazines such as Reader's Digest contain thirty-seven and the comics, twenty-two.[11] Style books for newspapers and press associations are consistent in advocating the use of words that are readily and easily understood. They all contain warnings similar to the one in the Detroit Free Press: "Use words which everyone can understand without running to a dictionary. Avoid that impulse to use a word which you

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[9]Jones, op. cit., p. 4.

[10]Ibid., pp. 8 f.

[11]Wolseley, op. cit., pp. 198 f.

yourself have just looked up in the dictionary."[12] This concentration on short, simple words has been harshly criticized by some of the linguists who insist that word choice should be determined by style and rhythm rather than by formula and prejudice. "The short word is not always to be preferred to the long, nor is it always the more efficacious. The short word is not always the more familiar of the terms at one's disposal."[13] According to Goldberg, a writer should no more think in terms of words than would a musician think in terms of a single note, for sentences, like melodies, are composed of phrases. The derivation or length of a word is not a valid consideration since the right word is the one that fits into the specific combination to achieve the exact effect intended by the writer.[14]

The three English texts do not mention the length of words although there are numerous passages on diction in each book. The fact that this aspect of diction is not discussed indicates that English professors do not consider length an important consideration in selecting words. Both English and journalism books contain warnings against trite expressions and careless choice of words. Even though errors in journalistic diction are still numerous, the

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[12] Detroit Free Press Style Book, op. cit., p. 3.

[13] Isaac Goldberg, The Wonder of Words (New York, 1938), p. 360.

[14] Ibid., p. 363.

emphasis in journalism classes and texts on avoiding clichés and words of dangerous or unfavorable connotations is almost certain to have an effect on newspapers. One journalism text declares, "Words are a social heritage. They are the common coin of our culture, and to misuse words, to cheapen or degrade them, is to reduce social wealth. Words should be used for their exact meaning."[15]

The style manual of the International News Service, like those of the other press associations, contains a warning against trite expressions and clichés:

> Even the man in the street does not use them. . . . Policemen don't always "rush to the scene" and sheriffs do not always conduct "sweeping investigations."
>
> It is doubtful if a city ever "buzzed with curiosity" and it is hard to visualize a "bone of contention."
>
> Use of such expressions testifies that the writer is immature or lazy. Simplified writing is harder than the other kind.[16]

The same manual reminds the reporter to

> Beware of "emotional" words and phrases which imply either condemnation or praise by the news service. . . . "smashing," "dashing," "long, flaming front," "blasting," etc. are overused and often unwarranted. Use them only when they have actual meaning to the story. In other words, sparingly.[17]

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[15]Taylor and Scher, op. cit., p. 49.

[16]International News Service Style Manual, op. cit., p. 15.

[17]Ibid., p. 22.

The English texts agree that "exactness of wording is insurance against misunderstanding and unpleasant consequence."[18]

> Nearly all trite expressions were once striking and effective. . . . What you may not know is that ineffective use has made them trite. They are now stock phrases in the language. . . .
>
> To avoid trite phrases you must be aware of current usage. Catch phrases and slogans pass quickly from ephemeral popularity into the Old Words' Home.[19]

Newspaper editors believe that

> Adjectives are trouble makers on two accounts. They tend to produce editorialized writing and they detract from the strength of other words in a sentence. Replace them with verbs, not the fancy members of the verb family like participles and gerunds, but the garden variety, the verbs that denote action.[20]

Beginning journalists are told that

> Superfluous adverbs, though not so numerous as unnecessary adjectives, are nonetheless the mark of the lazy and careless writer. Obviously it's unnecessary to say that a building is wholly or entirely completed or that it is totally or completely destroyed.[21]

One can hardly imagine freshman composition classes counting words or syllables, but all three of the English handbooks contain warnings about wordiness. The Harbrace College Handbook states that the "exact word or expression says all that is necessary, neither too little nor too

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[18]Gorrell and Laird, op. cit., p. 307.

[19]Hodges, op. cit., p. 243.

[20]Jones, op. cit., p. 14.

[21]Wolseley, op. cit., p. 212.

much."[22] The Modern English Handbook ends a discussion on diction by saying, "Word economy is not sparing words; it is putting them to work."[23]

The controversy over slang will be more difficult to resolve, for newspaper and magazine editors have generally cast their ballots for the theory described in a text:

> Quick to junk antiquated nouns, the journalist also is alert for new "name" words. These he may discover in slogans, comic strips, popular songs, movies, radio programs, political controversies, and the specialized slang of various occupations. For examples of relatively new expressions, consider superman, sourpuss, drip, drool, blackout, carry a torch, doodler, blitzkrieg, all-out aid, and others. Used with discrimination, such words add pungency to writing intended to be read and understood.[24]

Although newspapers and magazines vary in the amount of slang per column, with the cheaper periodicals far in the lead, the attitude of the wire services is to use only those slang words with a pungent quality and to avoid those that are trite and tasteless. The style manuals for the press associations are in accordance with the principle stated by the Detroit Free Press which "in headline and text aims at being lively and interesting--but it wants to be well-mannered, too. A too flippant or vulgar tone may undermine reader confidence."[25]

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[22]Hodges, op. cit., p. 248.

[23]Gorrell and Laird, op. cit., p. 248.

[24]Wolseley, op. cit., pp. 208 f.

[25]Detroit Free Press Style Manual, op. cit., p. 6.

An English professor writing for American Speech remarked, "Slang is more useful, and therefore more valuable, than English in the same way as a copper cent is more used than a gold double-eagle."[26] English textbooks agree that "slang and jargon should be used sparingly if at all in standard speech and writing. . . . Slang is the sluggard's way of avoiding search for the exact, meaningful word."[27]

Another questionable literary device used extensively by reporters and copyreaders is alliteration. Advertising has capitalized on the poetic device. "Very naturally, it spread from advertisements to the style of journalists, and from there to the style of modern prose generally."[28] A book on editorial writing states, "Alliteration continues to be a powerful weapon of editorial writers. Its follow-through is effective when it underlines ideas with a sting and sense."[29] Even though newspaper editors agree that the device can be overdone, few of them actually condemn the practice as do the English handbooks. The Harbrace textbook thinks that the average reader is offended by careless

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[26]Edmund Hearn, "A Blurb for Slang," American Speech, IV (October, 1928), 95.

[27]Hodges, op. cit., p. 203.

[28]Eugene S. McCartney, "Alliteration on the Sports Page," American Speech, XIII (February, 1938), 30.

[29]Waldrop, op. cit., p. 190.

repetition of alliteration. "Good prose has rhythm, but it does not rhyme."[30]

Journalists have definite prescriptions for sentence structure and length. Sentences written for newspapers should be

> . . . terse, telegraphic. They express one complete thought--and only one--in compact and compelling English. They open with the most important idea or fact first; hence, they usually start with the subject, continue with the verb and close with the object. . . .
>
> The journalist fashions his words into simple, declarative sentences. He uses few periodic or balanced sentences and seldom involves himself or his reader in long complex or compound-complex sentences. He believes that good prose as well as good poetry should consist of "the best words in the best order." To shorten a sentence, he substitutes a single word for a phrase or clause. Or, if he finds one sentence too cumbersome, he breaks it into two to promote emphasis and clarity.
>
> Journalistic sentences are bright as well as brisk. They have a crackle and snap seldom to be found in other writing. How is this achieved? The newspaperman and magazine writer vary the structure of successive sentences, frequently beginning them with different parts of speech. They use key words sparingly, that is, in the same sentence. When they start a new sentence, they choose a word different from that with which the previous sentence opened or closed. They begin important sentences--the lead for example--with important words, shunning articles, prepositions, adverbs.[31]

The author of a journalism textbook explains that

> It is difficult to get tangled in a short piece of string. Likewise, the chances of thoughts becoming involved are fewer when they are expressed in brief sentences. Instead of running to the complex and

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[30]Hodges, op. cit., p. 206.

[31]Wolseley, op. cit., pp. 205 f.

> compound, the news writer should keep to simple sentence structure as a rule.[32]

International News Service offers this advice to its writers:

> Avoid the clumsy, unnatural dependent clause. And avoid use of conjunctive clauses in lead sentences, such as those beginning with "while," "as," "after," etc.[33]
>
> Do not clutter up sentences with dependent clauses. Make new sentences of them, but make the sentences flow. . . . A long series of short, choppy sentences becomes monotonous and to resort to this device would produce a remedy worse than the ill. Be sure that each sentence is clear and that together they all read smoothly.[34]

The Detroit Free Press Style Book stresses that reporters must

> Get away from the long, compound sentences. . . . Short sentences do not mean dull ones. You can still get variety of expression, even though you hold to an average of 18 to 20 words in your sentences. . . . Some sentences might achieve a desired effect in only a half-dozen words. Others might run slightly longer. But there is absolutely no need for sentences of 40-50 words. Give one idea--place a period--then put across another idea.[35]

English composition books criticize the frequent use of short sentences, advocating subordinate constructions for subordinate thoughts.[36] The authors of Writing and Thinking

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[32]Hall, op. cit., p. 84.

[33]International News Service Style Manual, op. cit., pp. 6 f.

[34]Ibid., p. 11.

[35]Detroit Free Press Style Book, op. cit., p. 4.

[36]Foerster, Steadman and McMillan, op. cit., p. 356.

declare that a series of short independent statements should be used only for special effect, "Maturity in thinking normally produces an abundance of subordination, with the important elements standing out forthrightly in main clauses."[37]

> If a writer pays careful attention to the need for subordination, parallelism, and emphasis. . . . he will have short sentences and long sentences; simple, compound, and complex sentences; loose, periodic, and balanced sentences.[38]

Like most English texts, the Harbrace College Handbook approves of opening sentences with adverbs and adverb clauses, prepositional and participial phrases, and coordinating conjunctions.[39] However, English professors warn that departures from normal word order must be managed with skill. The Modern English Handbook states, "Deviations from usual word order produce special meaning, or special emphasis, or special weakness."[40] Another text condemns journalistic use of inversion: "Inversion, when it becomes a habit or is used trivially, loses its effect on emphasis and clarification and simply makes language formless--an increasing tendency in contemporary journalism."[41]

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[37] Ibid., p. 12.

[38] Ibid., p. 39.

[39] Hodges, op. cit., pp. 320 ff.

[40] Gorrell and Laird, op. cit., p. 219.

[41] William J. Grace and Joan Carroll Grace, The Art of Communicating Ideas (New York, 1952), p. 122.

Although English professors frown on journalistic conciseness and inversion, they agree with journalists that every sentence should be characterized by unity, clarity, and coherence. Journalists avoid subordination whenever possible while English professors consider it a "most valuable means of securing emphasis in the sentence."[42] Reporters, whose profession depends on reader interest and understanding, feel that American reading habits compel them to write in the telegraphic tempo of modern living.[43] Teachers of composition are also concerned with writing in a direct and effective style, but they believe that

> Purposeful language should not call attention to itself, should not mislead the reader; it should be clear, simple, exact, and appropriate; omitting nothing of importance, wasting no words whatsoever. Offensive misspellings, misleading punctuation, uncalled-for cleverness, inappropriate diction, monotony of construction, harsh combinations of sounds, and unnecessary words are distractions which lower the efficency of a communication.[44]

Differences between journalism and English are pronounced in the construction of paragraphs. Unlike paragraphs in books, which express a complete thought or idea, "each paragraph of a news story contains a single

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[42]Foerster, Steadman and McMillan, op. cit., p. 370.

[43]Wolseley, op. cit., p. 51.

[44]Foerster, Steadman and McMillan, op. cit., p. 34.

sub-topic. In other words, news writers paragraph their paragraphs."[45]

The author of a journalism text explains how paragraphs in newspapers are different from those in books.

> They are shorter, usually consisting of two or three sentences or four or five lines of typewritten material. For that reason they often lack a topic sentence. Yet they do not lack unity or coherence. . . .
>
> Short paragraphs are easier to read. Because newspaper and magazine columns are narrow, the eye has a shorter span to jump from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. Moreover, the mind can grasp a small unit of thought more readily than a large one. . . .
>
> Short paragraphs--often called block paragraphs--are easier to handle in the newspaper office. The copy-reader can edit them more quickly. Then, too, when deadline nears, the copy cutter may divide a last-minute story into several takes for different typesetters. This he may do more readily if paragraphs run from twenty-five to eighty words. Sometimes a paragraph must be removed because of space limitations or changes in make-up, or a new one must be inserted because of some later development. The make-up man's job takes less time if the paragraphs are one or two inches in length when set in type than if they run longer.[46]

The Modern English Handbook acknowledges the peculiar requirements of the newspaper for paragraphs but stresses that the practice of indenting every few lines is a questionable one when it occurs in ordinary writing.[47] The Harbrace College Handbook explains that paragraphs have two functions: to rest the reader's eyes and to develop new

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[45]MacDougall, op. cit., p. 166.

[46]Wolseley, op. cit., p. 204.

[47]Gorrell and Laird, op. cit., p. 152.

thoughts. Because of the second function, the writer considers each paragraph a unit of thought and organizes it around a central idea. The average paragraph in books and current magazines contains perhaps one hundred words.[48]

Paragraphs written under the direction of English professors are generally developed by explaining and illustrating a topic sentence; consequently, length is determined only by subject matter. In journalism classes, a lengthy paragraph will be divided in order to make the column more readable. Unlike the freshman English student, the sophomore reporter may begin a new paragraph for dramatic effect; for he has probably read the Flesch theory of paragraphing.

> The paragraph is what comes next in the series of pauses--comma, semicolon, colon, period, paragraph. Use it that way. Again never mind the textbooks. They will tell you that paragraphing is a mystical art, involving the recognition of mysterious units of ideas that must be separated by starting on a new line. Paragraphs <u>can</u> be used that way, but they don't have to. . . .
>
> Right in the middle of your thought, when you get to the climax, start on a new line. The way I did right now. It's effective, it's unconventional, it's dramatic. Why not do it from time to time? Why not stop for a climactic pause just when your reader least expects it? Ask any old-fashioned spellbinding orator whether that isn't a good way to make them listen.[49]

From observing the preceding conflict over principles of composition, one may agree with the writer of <u>Time</u> magazine that

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[48]Hodges, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 327.

[49]Flesch, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 122-124.

> In a sense, every newspaperman is bilingual. He speaks one language and often writes a quite different one. The dialect he writes is dictated by his paper's "stylebook." As papers, like people, are crusty with peculiarities, the regional variations of this newspaper lingo have to be learned by the men who write it. Except on chains, no two papers' rules are ever quite the same.[50]

Much confusion has been created by the various journalistic theories of capitalization. A number of American newspapers use what is called a "down" style of capitalization; that is

> . . . they capitalize only the definitive part of a proper name unless the generic portion comes first. This system is intended to avoid excessive capitalization, since newspaper accounts are, of necessity, crammed with titles and names. It is used only by practicing journalists working for newspapers. . . . The style used for most literary, social, and commercial purposes, however, is an "up" style.[51]

The extreme "down" style is illustrated in the sample style book taken from Exploring Journalism while a slightly modified "down" style is used by the Campus Chat. The press associations deviate from formal usage even though they consider their style more "up" than "down." In the "down" style the common word in the name of an organization, institution, building, or place is capitalized only when it precedes the distinguishing parts of the name. Thus the Chat writes Louisiana State university but University of Wisconsin, Rock river but Lake Michigan. However, The

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[50] Time, LII (October 11, 1948), 63.

[51] Gorrell and Laird, op. cit., p. 499.

Dallas Morning News and Associated Press capitalize the common term used as a part of the proper name in the body of a story, for instance, "The wreck occurred on Vine Street."

All the style books advocate capitalizing the names of political parties, but the Chat and the sample style book do not capitalize names of national, state, and city bodies, buildings, officers, boards, and courts. Unlike the sample style book, the Chat capitalizes Congress and Senate. The style books are consistent in capitalizing President and Chief Justice and branches of the United States military service. God and Bible are capitalized in every instance, but the Chat does not capitalize personal pronouns that refer to the Deity or such terms as heaven, hell, scripture, and gospel. The Associated Press writes Divine Father, Hades, Biblical, Scripture, but hell.

All the sources but the sample style book and the Chat insist on New Year's Day. These two sources advocate New Year's day, the Grand chorus, and the Victoria cross. The Chat and the Associated Press capitalize only the abbreviations of degrees, B. A. but bachelor of arts, while The Dallas Morning News capitalizes both B. A. and Bachelor of Arts.

This wide disparity in newspaper practices of capitalization appears to be the rule rather than the exception. In the preliminary examination made before this survey, fourteen style books were examined and none of them were in

complete agreement on the mechanics of writing. English handbooks are consistent in capitalizing all proper nouns with a reservation that when two or more proper adjectives modify a noun in the plural, the noun is not capitalized, i.e., Panama Canal, but the Panama and Suez canals.[52] The English handbooks warn against unnecessary capitalizing but accept none of the "down" style practices illustrated in this paper.[53]

Rules for using abbreviations in newspapers are equally confusing. None of these sources approve of substituting Xmas for Christmas in the body of a story; yet they all use standard abbreviations for states of the Union immediately preceded by geographical terms. Initials may be substituted for well-known alphabetical agencies and organizations in the second and subsequent references in a story. Except in the Chat, Senator and Representative become Sen. and Rep. when used with full names. Such titles as the Rev. and Atty. Gen. are regularly used with full names in most newspapers. In specific dates, all months containing more than five letters are abbreviated. For addresses, Associated Press abbreviates street, boulevard, avenue; but the other style books do not; however, all but The Dallas Morning News abbreviate points of the compass between a street number and

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[52]Foerster, Stedman and McMillan, op. cit., p. 216.

[53]Hodges, op. cit., p. 102.

a street name; for instance, 1220 W. Fry. Military titles are abbreviated in almost all newspapers. All of the style sheets approve of St. Louis, but only the Detroit Free Press and the sample style sheet recommend Ft. Worth and Mt. Pleasant. The Associated Press and the Detroit Free Press write Co. and Corp.

The English handbooks advise thus:

> In ordinary writing avoid abbreviations (with a few well-known exceptions), and write out numbers whenever they can be expressed in one or two words. . . . In ordinary writing spell out all titles except Mr., Messrs., Mrs., Mmes., Dr., and St. (saint, not street). Spell out even these titles when not followed by proper names.[54]

After proper names, Jr., Sr., Esq. may be abbreviated, but unlike newspapers, English handbooks separate the abbreviation from the name with a comma. Well-known organizations and government agencies are usually referred to by their initials: DAR, GOP, WAC. For dates or numerals, one can properly write: A.D., B.C., A.M., P.M., No., $.[55]

Except in writing ages, newspapers use Arabic numerals for all definite numbers after nine unless the number is the first word in a sentence, e.g., nine but 10. In all the style books but the Associated Press, examples for writing ages are equivalent to: Tommy Jones, 8; or Tommy Jones, 8-year-old son; but Tommy Jones was eight years old Sunday.

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[54] Ibid., p. 111.

[55] Ibid., p. 113.

Associated Press spells out numerical adjectives one through nine, e.g., three-year-old boy.

Journalists overcome much of the choppiness of their short sentences by omitting punctuation when clarity can be achieved otherwise. Because of short sentences, many commas that are advocated in formal writing are not necessary; consequently, journalistic punctuation is rarely ever formal. International News Service recommends, "Use commas sparingly, but always when necessary to meaning. Often--for parenthetical expressions like this one--the dash is better."[56] Most newspapers omit commas in a compound sentence if the clauses are short and the subject does not change. Omission of the comma before the conjunction in a series is still not accepted by all newspapers although various journalists have been dropping this comma for some time.

The Associated Press, which has begun writing vice president, commander in chief, sergeant at arms, has instructed its writers as follows: "The hyphen is one of the most overworked, improperly used punctuation marks. The hyphen should be used only to divide words, to form compounds, in some cases of abbreviation, for clarity, and in scores."[57]

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[56]International News Service Style Manual, op. cit., p. 19.

[57]The Associated Press Style Book, op. cit., p. 20.

Titles in newspapers are never underlined as in formal writing and the names of newspapers and magazines are not punctuated at all. The Chat omits quotation marks from song titles, but all the newspapers use quotation marks for book titles, plays, and motion pictures. Both journalists and writers of formal language seem to be using fewer quotation marks as apologies for colloquial English and slang. Most of the newspapers enclose nicknames which are accompanied by real names in parentheses rather than in quotation marks. The Detroit Free Press further violates formal usage by using asterisks for the ellipsis mark and by omitting the period after possessive abbreviations such as co's, corp's, and F. D. R's. Several of the newspapers omit the apostrophe in forming the plural of letters and numbers.

One of the English handbooks states that

> The trend today is to use more direct sentences and fewer punctuation marks. To punctuate sentences effectively, the student should be able to recognize the breaks between principal sentence elements, to remember the situations which conventionally require punctuation marks, and to decide when the meaning is affected by the use or omission of particular marks.[58]

One can surmise by the preceding comparison that newspaper standards of composition conflict somewhat with the principles taught in college English. Newspapers prefer simple diction arranged in terse sentences and paragraphs.

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[58]Foerster, Stedman and McMillan, op. cit., p. 168.

Capitalization is avoided in many instances; abbreviations are common; and punctuation is used only for clarity and effect.

Professors in college English courses stress that words must "precisely fit their contexts in meaning, attitude, and suggestiveness."[59] Complex sentences are used frequently to show the relationship of ideas, and paragraphs are specific units of thought rather than mere divisions of a composition. Conventional uses of capitalization and punctuation are taught not because the old method is the only method but because it is standardized and, therefore, more likely to be understood. Since college English students use formal as well as structural punctuation and since the longer sentences require more punctuation for clarity, the theme written for an English class contains more punctuation marks than the story written for a newspaper.

It is unlikely that college journalism and English composition will ever be taught from the same textbook even though the two courses have much in common. Apparently, journalistic compactness of expression has already made an impression on theories of composition. In the future some of the simplified mechanics of writing--capitalization, abbreviations and punctuation--may be accepted as standard English; in the meantime, one may hope that journalistic

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[59]Gorrell and Laird, op. cit., p. 47.

publications will accept a single pattern of deviating from the usage already standardized so that Americans will be required to master only two systems of reading and writing.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW OF THE MASTHEAD

The printing press manufactures books by setting the author's thoughts in typographical symbols, by fashioning the life which the author describes, and by popularizing techniques of writing. Literary historians are already speculating over the nature of the literature that will survive this generation while professors of English read the newest literary "blurbs" with apprehension. Everywhere, students of literature are wondering about the art that will be salvaged from the scientific and materialistic celerity of modern life.

The old schools of literature have decreased enrollments, for people who buy twentieth-century books do not have the leisure and patience or the literary background of Victorian ladies and gentlemen. The accepted style of the mid-twentieth century is an anonymous one which can be illustrated by this excerpt from John McNulty's "Jackpot" story in The New Yorker.[1]

> The Caffreys are substantial people in Wakefield. Mrs. Caffrey is the daughter of Grafton Kenyon, whose grandfather, William G. Kenyon, founded Kenyon's Department Store in 1856. It is the only department

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[1]Rudolf Flesch, The Writer's Book, edited by Helen Hull (New York, 1956), p. 318.

> store in Wakefield. Caffrey works in the family store. He is thirty-five and fair-haired, and looks like a photogenic football player. When he was at Providence College, from which he graduated in 1936, he did play some football. The Caffreys, who have two children--a seven-year-old daughter named Carol and a four-year-old son named Kenyon--live in a pleasant twelve-room house of two and a half stories. It is painted white and has a well-kept lawn on three sides.[2]

Rudolf Flesch says of this passage:

> . . . the most significant thing about it is that it has no personal style at all. It could have been written by anyone among thousands of today's writers who have learned how to do a good reporting job. . . . This style is not inferior to the personal styles developed by the great writers of the past. On the contrary: it is superior. It is superior because it can be learned, because it is more economical, and because it does its job by sticking to observable facts. . . . This is the crisp reportorial style hammered out by Hemingway and his followers, by The New Yorker, and by Time. It is admittedly journalistic writing--factual, simple, and idiomatic.[3]

To be sure, a number of critics are waiting for the new trend in writing to abbreviate itself to extinction. It is their opinion that like its past

> . . . the future of American literary style will doubtless be determined by respect for moderation, for tradition, for good workmanship, for a more dependable perfection in the difficult art of writing than can come from demonic seizures or from the rude simplicity that often accompanies vivid personal contacts.[4]

Obviously, to some readers the combination of literature and colloquial expression is a shocking one; however, it must be remembered that the periods of English literature generally considered to be the greatest, i.e., Chaucer and

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[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

[4]Krapp, The English Language in America, I, 327.

Shakespeare, are those with the strongest parallel between the language of literature and the language of speech. Students of Greek literature attribute much of the charm of the early classics to the intimate dependence of literary language on the spoken language. Both Molière and de Maupassant owe much of their power to naturalness. In order to write, man must be intimately acquainted with letters and life; but most especially, he must know "that form of the language which, above the language of books, is the most wonderful, the most dignified, the most worthy of respect, the flexible, subtle speech of men in the infinite relations of human life."[5]

By encouraging simplicity, directness, and objectivity, newspapers have helped create an American tradition in literature and language. Even though future generations will express their personalities in new styles of writing, the present techniques will not be forgotten. It is entirely possible that the linguistic and literary rebels of the twentieth century will be applauded posthumously for their courage in recording with complete honesty the age in which they lived.

But what is to happen to the American language? Can it survive the alterations made by every writer and reporter who wishes to invent his own terms? Will the public learn

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[5]Krapp, Modern English, p. 13.

one system of writing mechanics for formal use and another for deciphering every newspaper he wishes to read?

A brief comparison of any modern writing with a line of Old English will show that radical changes have been made already in the language.

> The language we speak is a fluid phenomenon, and if we allow it to become rigid, it has a way of holding us bound to the past. Change for the sake of change is neurotic; but equally so is resistance to change for the sake of maintaining in language the status quo.
>
> Language calls for the maintenance of a delicate equilibrium between the old, the obsolescent, and the new.[6]

American language deserves the right to grow, but it deserves even more the right to be understood.

> Like money, it is no fit medium for exchange unless it has sufficient currency so that he who gives the coin values it in roughly the same terms as he who receives it. And like money, it must have sufficient stability so that what is given today has approximately the same value tomorrow. Without stability we might never learn to speak, because the language could be changing faster than we were able to learn it; without currency, even if we learned to speak we could not communicate widely, because our medium of exchange would not be acceptable to enough others to make it usable. We understand each other only because large numbers of people over great areas of the earth have lived in mutual if unconscious agreement that certain words are symbols for certain meanings and not for other meanings; that strictly determined ways of handling these symbols reveal their relationships.[7]

Because language lives through people and not through grammar books and dictionaries, it changes with people's

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[6]Goldberg, op. cit., p. 337.

[7]Laird, op. cit., pp. 255 f.

lives and with their minds. Yet language can function only as long as it has stability, and the innovations that revitalize it also damage it.[8] Since linguists now properly understand the English language and the processes by which it grew, the incongruities that rob the language of its vitality are no longer necessary. However, the changes should be made by people who understand the national idiom and must be widely accepted or else the language will deteriorate into a collection of dialects. One can surmise that American language would likely profit by the unlikely marriage of English composition and journalism, for the linguistic influence of reporters appears to exceed that of English professors even though the mastery of idiom is more often found behind ivy-covered walls than behind the sports desk.

Newspaper antics and blunders have helped crystallize the feeling that much English grammar is antiquated and much of the spelling confused.[9] Occasionally, a journalistic neologism, functional shift, or slang expression will supply a need in the language and will become accepted as standard English. More often, these devices--like the clippings and hyperboles--have only a meteoric existence in the lower levels of writing and speaking. A comparison of various

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[8]Ibid., p. 256.

[9]Goldberg, op. cit., pp. 466 f.

newspapers indicates that most of the efforts of journalists to simplify spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have resulted in further confusion with each newspaper devising its own system of writing mechanics. One may only speculate on the possibility of a unified standard of journalistic capitalization, abbreviation, and punctuation; but one can be certain that as more emphasis is placed on honest thinking and writing, fewer linguistic contortions will appear in print.

Many of the earlier journalistic devices were for the purpose of arousing attention, and most of them have degenerated by thoughtless imitation. However, the technique of simplified writing is very likely to be expanded to almost all newspapers. The purpose of the readability campaign is to make the news understandable to a majority of American readers by phrasing common words in short, simple sentences and by using numerous specific verbs, personal references, and concrete terms. Newspaper editors are inclined to be realistic; therefore, when newspapers written in the style of English compositions can be read and understood by the American public, reporters likely will be required to modify their writing accordingly. In the meantime, many editors are striving to further simplify their copy in order to make the news understandable to the average American who has little more than an eighth grade education.

Because many schools of journalism and some editors are sensitive to the weaknesses in modern periodicals, young journalists begin their training with good grammar and acceptable usage. Almost before their names are placed on the class roll, freshmen journalism students are warned to avoid trite expressions and flowery words. And in every course, journalism professors denounce opinionated and subjective writing until students learn to present the evidence and allow the reader to form his own opinion.

The aspiring reporter is urged to attend college and study history, literature, economics, government, and science.[10] He is taught the power of words and the necessity for mastering language. "His knowledge of grammar and rhetoric, of philology and semantics, then, will become not something to treasure in itself but a fruitful means of contributing to the spiritual and intellectual democracy of contemporary life."[11]

When the young reporter is hired he finds that editors are no longer desperate for copy to fill their pages. Deadlines are troublesome; but stories are corrected and sometimes even rewritten; and if his paper is a progressive one, he will hear much about readability. He will be reminded on numerous occasions of his peculiar responsibility

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[10]Warren, op. cit., p. 2.

[11]Wolseley, op. cit., p. 215.

to democracy, for only with an informed public can a democracy function.

The American newspaper that is printed today or even the one that will be printed tomorrow will contain errors. It may be written to a certain extent in a style that contradicts the standards of English composition. Indeed if the daily newspaper is judged by literary standards, it will surely fail because its function is to inform and interpret rather than create and inspire. Unlike literature, it is not intended to be used for meditation or for memorizing; therefore, its phrasing is terse and simple rather than lofty and esthetic. If the rude simplicity and the colloquial expressions of journalists have corrupted artistic expression, the regrettable contamination may be forgiven when one considers the immense audience who have been enriched by the alloy.

Caxton's printing press has been multiplied and streamlined. It has recorded five generations of language and literature, and in a direct as well as an indirect way, it has fostered representative government. Yet the press cannot take full credit or censure for the nature of American language, literature, or government. Caxton's machine is only an instrument through which American people express their contempt for authority and their disdain for precedent. The press is a reservoir for culture and research, but above all, it is a tool for democracy.

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