

This week I met a young woman who said she wanted to be a writer. How refreshing to hear a goal that involves using language.

More and more I notice that our use of the English language needs attention. The place to start is with the younger generation.

I have strong feelings about things like grammar, pronunciation, sentence structure, and that old standby, spelling. I can be quite fussy about it. I don't think it's an age thing because two people I know very well (OK, it's my husband and my father), both of whom are older than me, don't share the same passion for words. Quite regularly they will mangle a common name of a person or object and, when I interject with the correct word, they will both answer "same thing." Or my husband likes to say, "it doesn't matter as long as you get the drift of what I am saying."

Communication isn't just about someone getting the gist of what we are expressing. Language is much more complex than rudimentary efforts, effective as that can be if you are marooned on an island with someone who doesn't speak your language.

Have you noticed when you listen to the news on television or the radio how often they make errors in grammar and pronunciation? Maybe I am way off-base but, when someone is making a living using language as the main tool for his job, I think it is reasonable to expect some expertise. Apparently this is not a requirement.

I do a variety of things in my life and several of them include reading material that young people produce in the context of their course work. These are mostly people who are at the university level in their educational pursuits. I am constantly blown away by the lack of punctuation and spelling. Even more concerning is the limited vocabulary being used. What replaces descriptive language is abbreviations and phonetic spelling.

The texture and depth that full-blown language can create appears to be a dying art. What's more, when one questions the content, there is a shrugging of shoulders, followed by a look that says, "what's your point?"

As much as this is my pet peeve, I have to wonder if it really does make a difference? After all, all languages go through an evolution process. Old English and Middle English are unrecognizable in our era.

Well, it seems I am not alone in desiring the preservation of the language. Society's infrastructure of business, government, and social systems is expressing concern about finding workers equipped to succeed. Protectors of the language project that children who cannot speak, read or write in any useful way cannot compete in the modern world. More than that, there's a sense of loss that millions of children and youth will never know the sheer pleasure that comes from using language imaginatively and precisely. Their lives will be narrowed and impoverished as a result.

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