Formal Language Essay, Research Paper

Formal Language vs. Informal Language: A Comparison

Formal and informal language affects us everyday. To some people, the differences are very subtle, and the need to use a more formal style or vocabulary is non-existent. As a society the type of language that is used, whether it be formal or informal, is directly dependant on the culture and customs that are the most prevalent. In the age of television and the Internet, the need to communicate to the audience at its level has degraded the level of formality needed in order to speak. Although the increasing amount of informality used has greatly impacted society s standard language, it has left the professional world virtually unaffected. The art of speaking formally is fading fast. However, it is important to remember that even though society s goal is to communicate to the masses as easily as possible, there is still a need to hold onto some formality within society s language skills.

When learning a foreign language, one of the first things learned is the difference between speaking to one s peers and elders. In French, Spanish and Japanese these formal tones are brought out in the language s verb and noun forms. For instance, French has a special form, tu, which is used for dealing with people that are peers who are on the same professional and age levels. Meanwhile, the vous form is reserved for speaking to socially important people and those who are older than the speaker. The Japanese language is similar to French in that when speaking to familiar people and friends, the chan ending is added onto a person s name to bring out the familiarity. The chan form is obviously an informal ending much like English-speaking people use terms of endearment like honey or dear . However, while English-speaking people may not be offended by the use of terms of endearment, to use chan would be very insulting unless the relationship was understood by both people to be on an informal basis. To contrast the level of informality that is used in the United States, in England it is uncommon and possibly offending to use a person s first name until a comfortable relationship has developed between two people.

In days gone past the formal setting in the education system in the United States greatly resembled that of England. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to call teachers by nicknames. As an example, in almost every American high school there is at least one teacher that is known by a nickname rather Mr. or Mrs. Doe. Even though this is acceptable to the teacher and their students, it leaves a residue that can imply that the nicknamed teacher is one of the students and does not require the same amount of respect that other teachers may demand. Therefore students perceive from an early age that respect is not important in school and also that school is an informal place compared to going to church. If students are learning informality at school for eight hours per school day and at night their parents consistently reinforce it in their attitudes, it is not hard to find at least one source where informality is taught to be acceptable. The film and television industry unintentionally compounds this inherent lack of respect by portraying teachers as fools and the almost constant use of derogatory language when a teacher is being spoke of.

Television and the movie industry have directly affected the shift into the use of informal language. Both have goals to communicate to massive numbers of people, while attempting to speak in a way that even the average person can understand without a large vocabulary or a great amount of education. Due to these goals not only does society hear informal language constantly, but it also reads it in print everyday. For example, the Minot Daily News is a major newspaper in North Dakota, however it does not take its coverage seriously. On average, a single day s paper contains more than ten spelling errors, at least five grammar errors, and many more that go unseen by the reader s eye. This may seem to be insignificant or even a grammatically clean newspaper, but it only further reinforces the acceptability on informal language in a professional setting. For some unknown reason, while society is pounded by informal language the commercial, governmental and medical fields have not deteriorated even though these people are still surrounded and impacted by informal language all the time.

The underlying reason for the standard of formality on the job has remained unchanged, may be because of society s view on these people. While a teacher is seen as a person who can be dealt with informally, it is rare that a doctor would be treated with the same respect as the teacher would be. Writers are stereotyped as being very formal and linguistic people even though they still watch the same television programs as the person who works in the textile mill. The difference being is that doctors and writers are perceived by society to perform and communicate at higher standards than society as a whole. This can be because these professionals usually carry more sophisticated degrees of education than the whole of society and that the type of education received is very formal and professional. The formality used in business and medicine is a sign of respect to both parties. When looking at how many problems that society faces, it is a reasonable question to ask how many of them could be solved by either using formal language properly to show respect.

Overall the increasing use of informal language may not be changed or slowed in the future. However, more emphasis needs to be placed on the need within society to use a more formal language. Everyone is responsible in relaying this message and enforcing so that as a society the inherent respect that is given when using formal language is not lost. Respect to one s peers is very important in every culture and formal language use is one effective way for it to be given. Therefore, while society is pushed into more generalized sense of being, it needs to realize that in order to function it must better the lines and rules of formal and informal language.