Should There Be Standard English Everyone Must Adhere To Essay, Research Paper

Should there be “Standard English” which everyone must adhere too?

There bees a controversy underway; should language be completely standardized? The defense of good, “standard”, English is that it helps communication, that it is perhaps even a sine qua non of mutual understanding. (Simon, 89) However, it is hard to deny those who deviate from achieving both highly verbal and stylistic forms of communication. Smitherman sho did some bad stuff in her work even though it did not completely mimic the standards. In John Simon’s “Why Good English Is Good For You”, and Geneva Smitherman’s “White English in Blackface, or Who Do I be?, we are exposed to contrary views. To be effective language needs a framework, which imitates a universal standard, however the standard should incorporate malleable components allowing authors stylistic approaches to be present without altering overall clarity.

Language is not universal. Therefore, was language intended to highlight cultural differences? Some would consider this phenomenon a curse upon mankind. As illustrated in the book of Genesis, the story “Tower of Babel”, is an intriguing tale about the origin of language diversity. In the King James Version we are told that “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. Soon pride fills the hearts of men, and they are misled into trying to build “a city and a tower, whose top may reach the heaven.” The Lord Jehovah is said to have come down to earth and punish the men who challenged his omnipotence. With his infinite wisdom, He proceeded to “confound their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” (Haugen, 33) In this story it can be seen that language diversity was initially a curse laid upon men, crumbling the towers of Babylon, not allowing man to reach the heavens, thereby limiting communication.

Those who devote their lives to learning and teaching language have challenged the curse proposal. They claim people can not understand one another because they are scattered. When barriers of time and distance separate men, their languages deviate. (Haugen, 37) Due to varying environmental, social, and cultural influences many times the “mother-tongue” deteriorates into second-class dialects throughout the generations. A parent’s language is taught to their offspring. Even at this early stage we begin to recognize what a standard is. There is crossfire of mutual criticism and correction within a close-knit social group. As children, we all have felt the taunts that were directed at us when we deviate from the accepted norms of speech. Children are cruel in applying laughter and ridicule to those who speak “differently”. (Haugen, 37). We have been taught to depict class, educational, and cultural differences through our speech. Therefore, to ensure language differences are not used for discriminatory purposes should we standardize our English?

John Simon supports this statement in “Why Good English Is Good For You.” He equates bad language to air pollution; he believes they are both unhealthy contributions to our environment. To those who appreciate language, bad English can be as offensive as picking your nose in public. (Simon, 92) He believes that the ability of a person to communicate without using a proper form is cheating. This problem, caused by “under-paid/trained teachers, big classes, little assistance, and poor aptitude tests”, are causing a great danger which will eventually lead to the loss of good comprehensible English.

Is English soon going to be lost to the ignorant? Simon believes English is impoverished by classes full of strangers to the culture. They are changing the standards to incorporate their personal needs, which is destroying the language. However, he emphasized that many non-standard English-speaking parents want their children to learn correct English to get ahead in the world. (Simon, 96). Therefore, he insists a framework must be taught in schools. A framework stressing grammar, syntax, and pronunciation, must be taught and tested in schools because parents are not capable of doing their jobs at home. Rules and regulations are necessary to ensure clarity. Without a skeleton how can one create something that is able to stand? Once rules are internalized personal style can be encouraged. Once one has a grasp on good English they are able to implement their individual style which “makes language flavorful, pungent, and alive.”

However, this would be hard to achieve if the children’s parents were, say, militant blacks of the Geneva Smitherman, sort, who execrate Standard English as a weapon of capitalist oppression against the poor of all races, colors, and religions. (Simon, 96). But does Geneva Smitherman really say that in “White English in Blackface, or Who do I be?” Smitherman argues that Standard English is not fair to those of other cultures, “not only cause we don’t know the rules, but it ain’t even our game.” She stresses that the differences in black and white English do not signify aptitude differences, but rather emphasize prejudices and biases. It is unfair to judge an African-American upon white English standards, because even though they don’t appear to be fundamentally different, they are entirely different lingo’s altogether. (Smitherman, 100) She emphasizes that Black English’s approach is just as verbal, coherent, and stylistic. Therefore, how can one’s interpretation of standard language be imposed upon others in a world of inherent cultural differences and a country that prides itself on democracy and equality?

America is a melting pot. People speaking various languages have come here and tried to adopt the “American norms”, especially in the unification of a common language. Language, however, can be seen as part one’s personality, a form of behavior that has its roots in our earliest experiences. (Hauger, 40) According to Brother Frantz Fanon, “there are climbers, ‘the ones who forget who they are,’ and in contrast to them ones who remember where they came from.” Smitherman is afraid of those who forget who they are which may result from Simon’s imposing of standards in day-care centers for all children in underprivileged homes. The question she concludes with is, “not I am vs. I be, but WHO I BE?” She is afraid that in the mist of standards, minorities may feel pressured to give up their identity in order to conform to social norms, which would be the only means for social mobility.

Is their then no hope for a compromise? Must language be so rigid that it becomes mechanical, or so diverse that the majority will not be able to comprehend it? Haugen offers numerous solutions including “assimilation by force, assimilation by percept, segregation, or bi-linguilism”. (Haugen, 40) America even though spotted with numerous colors has come to form its own mosaic of American culture with English being the standard language for communication. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage distinct rules and regulations since there is one official language. We must all learn to communicate with each other efficiently which would be impossible with everyone steadfast in their own biases about English. Americans, even new citizens, must remember they have come here and are part of a new culture, and as a citizen it is their obligation to learn how to communicate within this new society. However, learning to abide by rules does not relinquish one’s right and ability to emphasize their cultural individuality. Language is an organic object, which invites creativity. With the framework in place, it is then the author’s responsibility to add his stylistic impressions. Any author, even with imposed standards, has the ability to answer Smitherman’s question “Who I Be”; therefore the real question should be then “Do I Really Want to Reveal Who I Be?” Language can easily be shaped once the necessary infrastructure has been put in place.