

English needed to unite states

It was a scolding long overdue. Late last month, Marta Laureano stood in front of Judge Samuel C. Kiser, as he prepared to read his verdict. Laureano had been brought to court by her ex-husband who wanted permission to visit his 5-year-old daughter.

During testimony, Laureano's ex-husband had told the Texas state district court that the only English his daughter was learning was what he was teaching her. Ms. Laureano — born and raised in Mexico — admitted she used only Spanish at home.

When handing down his verdict, not only did Judge Kiser grant the ex-husband visitation rights, but he also ordered a teary-eyed Laureano to "start speaking some English" to her daughter.

"If your daughter starts first grade with the other children," Kiser told the sobbing mother, "and cannot even speak the language that the teachers and the other children speak, and she's a full-blood American citizen, you're abusing that child. You're relegating her to the position of a housemaid."

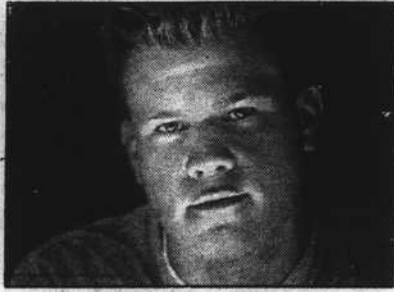
Hispanic groups were outraged. "The judge insulted people of Hispanic origin or any other race that speaks another language," said the editor of a Spanish-language newspaper in Amarillo.

Kiser has since apologized to those who found his words insensitive. But he said his order still stands.

No apology needed, your honor. Judge Kiser's lashing was exactly what was needed in America. It's too bad the slap didn't come from a higher court, but at least it signals an awakening.

For too long, we have pandered to the wants and demands and ignorances of those who cannot, and will not, speak the country's language. Last year, the IRS printed a half-million tax forms in Spanish. The cost: \$113,000. In Los Angeles County, \$125,000 was used to print election information in Vietnamese, Spanish, etc.

The federal government now



Jamie Karl

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spends \$254 billion on bilingual education each year, as millions of children in public schools are mandated to learn foreign languages.

Here at UNL, most students are required to take a non-English language class; some majors, like journalism, can require 16 or more credit hours in a single foreign language.

This forced bilingual learning is supposed to allow us "simple, uncultured" folk to communicate, in perfect harmony, with the increasing non-English-speaking masses of our multicultural population.

But the "intellectual elites" setting educational policy are never going to be able to keep up.

In 1993, the New York City school system heard 185 languages spoken throughout its hallways. In Fairfax County schools in northern Virginia, the students spoke in 187 different dialects. And one L.A. school claimed that over 60 different tongues are spoken in the homes of its students.

So what are we to do? Continue

to teach ourselves every form of gibber — from Muong to Pashto? Or do we finally wise up, and tell the newly immigrated and the culturally proud, "Speak English, or go the hell back to where you came from!"?

A group called "U.S. English," headed by folks whose native language isn't English, is currently lobbying Congress to declare English as the official language of the United States. The organization is being lauded by political powers, like Sen. Bob Dole, and is in the proposal stage of being made law.

Many states, like New Hampshire and Iowa, are taking their own initiative having recently passed English-language bills. (More progressive states have had such legislation for some time. Nebraska declared English its official language in 1920.)

None of this is coming too soon. Without such action, we will become the world's babble capital; current trends suggest that by 2050, there will be more than 43 million Americans who cannot speak English.

Fortunately, the message is getting across: There is no better way to break our national unity than by destroying our ability to talk with one another.

Here in America — a country of so many ethnicities, so many races and religions, so many cultural barriers — English is our only social adhesive. When a nation's people can no longer speak with each other, they resort to non-verbal communication, as they have done in the Balkans.

Americans have few obligations. The least new immigrants can do, no matter what their homeland, is learn how to communicate in their new national community.

If we are to remain one nation and one people, we need one common language.

Comprende?

Karl is a senior news-editorial major, and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Center conducive to creativity

As an undergraduate, struggling with nouns, verbs, and adjectives, I often pictured writing labs as cold, uncomfortable places filled with frightened students cowering before stern, unsmiling tutors who rapped their knuckles every time they made a grammatical mistake.

One of my undergraduate professors at Carleton College was famous for attacking papers with a hole puncher until they looked like a sieve. As a parting shot, he left a little note, "Your paper is full of holes!" Sometimes, he mailed these little gems back to students in Ziploc baggies.

Students in that class walked quickly past the Carleton writing lab, fearing the worst. Just the sound of that cold, mechanistic word "lab" was enough to make them think they might be the next experiment, held dangling above a literary Bunsen burner.

Fortunately, I have found that UNL's Writing Assistance Center, located on the first floor of Andrews Hall, has no resemblance to that hole-punching professor's teaching style.

The WAC here has comfortable chairs, smiling instructors, unmaimed students, and an enthusiastic associate coordinator.

I walked in there last week, trying to keep those painful hole-punching paper flashbacks at bay. I was instantly enveloped in a warm, relaxing atmosphere where students could settle down to Writing Without Fear.

The Writing Assistance Center accomplishes this minor miracle by refusing to concentrate solely on mechanics.

According to Sandy Yannone, an English department graduate student who accepted the associate coordinator position this fall, students gain more self-confidence as writers when writing instructors follow a holistic approach.

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Debra Cumberland

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The Writing Assistance Center's success is obvious by the sheer numbers of students who have flooded through its doors since its inception in 1990. The center averages about 60 students a week, from every department on campus.

"It's a cool, comfortable place where students can come in and work on their writing. They bring everything from poems and papers to dissertations," Yannone said.

Seven highly motivated instructors are also part of its appeal. "They are fabulous," said Yannone. "They do everything, from helping students get started, to brainstorming ideas and assisting with final edits."

The instructors I talked with enthusiastically embraced the Writing Assistance Center's philosophy.

"I really enjoy working here," said Jennifer Danes, a writing instructor and graduate student in English. "I especially like having regular appointments with students.

You get to know them, and what they are interested in working on in their writing."

Danes agreed with Yannone's views on grammar, noting that while grammar is a concern for some students, it's not the writing center's main focus.

In addition to undergraduates, both master's and Ph.D. students seek out the writing center.

"Oh, yes," said Danes, when I asked, "Lots of graduate students come in to work on their dissertations. It helps keep them on a regular schedule, and they want someone to respond to their writing."

ESL (English as a Second Language) students are also regular patrons.

Worawan Hemchayart, a graduate student from Thailand who is pursuing her doctorate in the Teacher's College, told me that she meets with her instructor each week.

"I heard about the center in my ESL class," she said. "It's very helpful. I want someone to look at my writing so that it goes more smoothly."

As if all these features weren't enough to send students racing to Andrews Hall, the Writing Center also publishes a chapbook of student writing every semester, along with a chapbook reading that is open to the public.

"We also have great snacks there," said Yannone.

The Writing Center is located at 129 Andrews Hall, and is open Tuesday through Friday. Evening hours vary so you should check beforehand.

Students can either walk in and make an appointment, or call 472-8803.

So come on down.

I'll be over there in the corner, working on my column.

Cumberland is a graduate student in English and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Our special guest

Rolin E. Lemmon

Violence to women victimizes men too

There was blood on the door when I came home from work.

Not a drop or a splash of blood, but a distinct human hand print. I could tell that there was some force behind the making of the print because of its absolute clarity.

Each individual swirl was finely pronounced, and I could make out the separate fingerprints and the thumb.

I had unlocked the door of my apartment every day for over a year and this was the first time I had ever had a reason to pause.

One out of four women in America will be the victim of sexual assault before the age of 25. But the prevailing attitude among men is that, "it won't affect me."

This is only true for those men who have no contact with women on any level. If you have no mother, no sister, no wife, no girlfriend and no female friends, then you are safe to assume that it has no bearing on your life.

I knew that the hand print was my wife's. The door had not been forced and I could feel that she was inside and something horrible had happened.

I was not prepared for what I found once I walked through the living room door.

My dearest one, my wife, was crouched in the corner of the room, trying to hide behind the living room chair like an alley cat caught in the headlights of a car.

Her hair was matted with leaves and dirt, her eyes swollen nearly shut like a prize fighter after a bad loss.

Her lip was split and the blood had dried into a trickle around her chin and neck.

The front of her shirt was torn away exposing her through the front of her jacket.

I shouted her name and ran to her.

How many times have you heard about violence against women and did not react?

When a prominent member of society is accused or convicted of rape, sexual assault or harassment, many men immediately look for justification. We don't want to see the problem as something more than an isolated incident.

When we, as men, ignore or downplay the violence that is caused or encouraged by our fellow men, we are all to blame.

She saw me coming toward her and screamed. She rose up, coming at me with the fury of the insane.

She had a knife in her hand, and was about to use it.

The first thing that I thought was that the knife wasn't one of ours. It was eight inches long, one of the cheap yet wicked blades normally found in hard rock souvenir shops.

I barely had time to block the blow that would have driven the knife into my chest.

I grabbed the hand holding the knife and wrestled her to the floor screaming, "It's me baby, it's me!"

I held her as tight as I could as she screamed and cried in my arms for what felt like years, but was really 30 minutes or so.

She sobbed and repeated over and over, "I thought they wanted to help, I didn't know. I thought they wanted to help, I didn't know."

"If you care about the women around you, don't allow the casual attitudes about rape, assault, and harassment to continue."

Rape and other violence toward women is a disease to the body of men as a whole. The disease cannot be cured if we do not see it.

Like a disease, they should be cut away from us.

We must not allow those who have abused the physical strength and advantages they possess to have access to our sympathy.

She had been alone at a rest stop a few kilometers out of town.

She normally took a short ride on her motorcycle after her classes to help clear her head after a long day of lectures.

It was ritual with her to stop and check her oil at that same rest stop every day. People often would stop and ask if she needed help.

This time when someone stopped, they didn't ask if they could help.

Two men jumped from their car, rushed her, knocked her down and dragged her into the woods.

For four hours she was beaten and raped repeatedly.

One of them finally became lazy or careless and dropped the knife I had avoided when I found her. She buried it hilt deep into the gut of one of the men.

While he lay screaming and his friend tried to help him, she was able to escape, probably with her life.

The despair, hopelessness and rage that I felt at that moment, as I held my broken and bleeding wife, is what I want to pass along to any man who has ever had a casual attitude about rape.

Until that moment I had been as indifferent as many men are. I had never fully realized the evil and the horror of such a crime.

I sat, sobbing and clinging to her, and I knew that my world would be forever changed.

For her and me, the healing would take a very long time, but nothing would ever erase the fear she carried with her — or the rage I always feel.

Men, as well as women, are victims of violence against women. Our very nature dictates that we protect and care for the people close to us.

If you care about the women around you, don't allow the casual attitudes about rape, assault, and harassment to continue.

Stop sweeping the issue away, stop supporting the people who want you to believe that they are concerned, but then turn and give their support to those who commit these vile acts.

Cut them away from our society, our sympathy, and our lives.

Lemmon is a junior education major.