OPINION PAGES

QUOTES OF THE SEMESTER

"Tom Osborne is God."
— Tom Junod, writer for GQ magazine, at the start of his nine-page profile of the Nebraska head football coach

"Luck? We don't need luck."
— Husker quarterback Scott Frost, as he ran onto the field before Nebraska's 19-0 loss to Arizona State

"Never pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel and paper by the ton. They always get the last word."
— Andy Abboud, executive director of the Nebraska Republican Party, on the media

"Now he has cooties."
— Daily Nebraskan editorial, on 6-year-old Johnathan Prevette, who was suspended from school activities because he kissed a female classmate on the cheek

"That's a little cocky, but I tend to like a little cocky."
— Nebraska Women's Basketball Coach Angela Beck, on Brooke Schwartz's show of confidence in icing the Huskers' win over Iowa

"We went from the penthouse to the outhouse overnight."
— Charlie McBride, NU defensive coordinator, on Nebraska's loss to Texas

"If men could get pregnant, family planning would be a sacrament."
— Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, in support of abortion rights

"I feel really fired up about being a Christian, but mostly when it's convenient."
— Geoff Moore, songwriter and musician, on Christianity

"You can access the Unabomber's 35,000-word anti-technology manifesto on the World Wide Web. ... Irony is a harsh mistress."
— The Deep End, by cartoonist Chad Strawderman

"To be honest with you, I never wanted to play football. I wanted to be a trash man."
— Former NU running back Mike Rozier, after a street shooting almost killed him in his hometown of Camden, N.J.

"If I had known that my four offspring would be spit on, their belongings destroyed — that they would be physically and verbally abused because they had a 'nigger-lover' for a mother, I wouldn't have done the exercise."
— Former Iowa elementary schoolteacher Jane Elliot, on her decision to teach her students a lesson in racism with her now-famous "blue eyes/brown eyes" experiment

"Teaching is the same thing as comedy, but teachers have to do six shows a day, and don't get paid as well."
— Comedian Kevin Mattran, on his decision to give up teaching high school to go on the road

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MEHSLING'S VIEW

GUEST VIEW

Slang is language, too

Editor's note: This guest column, which appeared in The Badger Herald at the University of Wisconsin, was written by senior education major John Lemke and is reprinted here courtesy of U-Wire.

I've been spending the last few weeks in front of a computer monitor, probably raising my risk of getting cancer exponentially. As I was trying to properly cross all the "t's" for one particular paper, I came upon a profound realization: By its nature, standard English is elitist and prejudiced; it is a form of intolerance and hate.

Creating a prescribed norm for language further stratifies socioeconomic divisions and widens cultural gaps. Not only is the concept of "proper language" ambiguous, but also contradictory to reason.

Among the illegible comments, my TA scratched across my last paper was the suggestion that my choice of words be more becoming of a "professional" paper. The data and ideas were fine, but my choice of words apparently gave the impression that I wasn't a professional. Lord knows we must demonstrate awareness of the distinctions between standard, substandard, colloquial, slang and vulgar language before our ideas can be considered. What is it about word choice that makes ideas good or bad? Creating a standard form of language makes it neither more expressive nor more logical than any other dialect or lexicon. This means that any linguistic prescriptions are based solely on social judgment, not reason or science. To make my paper sound "more professional" would be to deny my background to please a group of so-called superiors. That sounds like elitism to me. Ironically, that was the topic of my paper.

The poor and the non-white have been particularly damaged by such language stratification. The correct form of the American English derives from the language used by political leaders and the upper

> *"What is it about word choice that makes ideas good or bad?"*

socioeconomic classes.Latin-sounding words are deemed scientific and clean, while Anglo-Saxon counterparts are dirty and vulgar.

When children of less-privileged linguistic backgrounds enter school, they are corrected when using dialects different from these. Many children are punished for using particular four-letter words, which have somehow been deemed intrinsically evil. I've tasted the bitter flavor of Palmolive for utterances made as a child. There is no linguistic reason why "genitalia" should be considered acceptable while "dick" is forbidden. It is no wonder why our society is so silently prejudiced when our schools brainwash kids into believing in a moral value of our language.

Black English has probably suffered the greatest amount of prejudicial ignorance from language purists. Critics of the dialect have tried to equate Black English with lesser intelligence and lazy articulation. Some have gone as far as to claim Black English's characteristics are proof of genetic inferiority. The truth is that a child will speak whatever language he or she is exposed to, regardless of genetic makeup. There is also evidence that Black English speech rhythms originate from indigenous languages of Africa. The idea that one's articulation is lazy is ridiculous, because the "Queen's English" (probably the most pompous prescription of language) has omitted r's from words since the 16th century. In spite of all this evidence, our society is subtly biased against blacks who speak Black English dialects because of our inherent belief that there is a "correct" usage of language.

The concept of making a national language, let alone a national dialect, reeks of stupidity. As far back as 200 B.C., societies have tried to correct and standardize language usage. Over 2,000 years ago, the Greek grammarians at Alexandria tried to restore their language to that used by Homer centuries earlier. The Moslem Arabs tried a similar "purification process" 700 years later. Both miserably failed. The reason for this is simple: language evolves in spite of man. The original version of "Beowulf" was written in English. Of course, no one would understand it now as Old English has turned into Middle English, which has turned into our current language. Words that were considered slang in the past are considered standard now.

Examples include dwindle, blimp and sandwich. In fact, the word "slang" itself has evolved from a French word meaning "to scold." Linguist Otto Jespersen best summed up the idea of dialect superiority with the following: "We set up as the best language that which is bound in the best writers, and count as the best writers those that best write the language. We are therefore no further advanced than before."

It is critical that Americans realize the subtle prejudices they have been conditioned to hold through the concept of "Standard English." Language preference is just a form of silent intolerance and propagates racism just as much as the Ku Klux Klan. We spend a lot of time discussing the importance of celebrating diversity in our lives, so why not do so in our language? Stop using those annoying Latin plural endings on words, such as formulae, cacti, and larvae. Use double negatives and "incorrect" conjugations in your next writing assignment on purpose. Most importantly, reflect on how you judge people based upon the language they use.

Until we learn to tolerate differences as simple as the language that we use, our society remains silently prejudiced.