

## Using Sources

**Time:** One class period

### Required Materials

- Each student should have a copy of Using Sources guidelines (for reference; included below)
- Each student should have a copy of Using Sources Worksheet (included below)
- 5-6 copies of each of the articles (included below).

*NOTE: The articles come from an issue of QC Voices focused on Bad Writing. They reflect the course topic, but also reflect the quality of writing that students can reasonably be expected to emulate. Any articles will do, though. If possible, make the articles available to students ahead of class so students who may read more slowly have time to familiarize themselves with the language and ideas in the articles. The articles are formatted roughly the way student essays should be, with MLA-style citations and Works Cited pages. This is meant only to reinforce MLA style rather than the style used by QC Voices.*

### Description of Activity

This activity focuses students on ways to use sources in their essays, prompting them to consider the purposes behind employing a specific method in context.

The lesson begins with the class going over the brief, “Using Sources” reference sheet (15 minutes). This introduces the three concepts of Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Quoting.

After organizing into small groups, students practice identifying these different strategies in a professional essay (15 minutes). By working in small groups, students can share ideas and less confident students have support. The instructor can visit the groups to answer questions, measure progress, and provoke further discussion.

Next, the groups work together to create guidelines to help them decide how to use a source (15 minutes). For example, if you’re focusing on a specific word or phrase, a quote will highlight that the best (obvious, but useful for students to identify). Or, paraphrasing retains your “voice” and shows off your understanding of a complicated subject in a way that quoting does not.

The class ends with a class discussion in which all the guidelines are put in a class-wide document (works best in a classroom with a computer/projector, but you can always write guidelines on the board and students can take pictures or the instructor can email a transcribed copy later) (remaining class time).

Assigning chapter 2 or 3 from Graff's *They Say, I Say* afterward works well.

## Using Sources

There are (generally) three ways to make use of sources in an essay: Quoting, Paraphrasing and Summarizing. Each method has strengths and should be used purposefully to emphasize the reason you are using your source.

Below are general guidelines regardless of whether you quote, paraphrase or summarize:

- Source material *cannot make your arguments for you*. Source material *can back up your points or provide material for you to argue against*; therefore, you will typically introduce source material and comment on how it helps you prove your point. Source material is useless without commentary to provide context and meaning.
- Choose important or significant information that effectively relates to or supports your points.
- Remain faithful to the meaning of the source material that you include in your paper.
- Cite appropriately.

### Quoting

Using an author's language word-for-word (verbatim).

- Use quotation marks around the author's words.
- Use a signal or identifying phrase around the author's words.
- Add an in-text (parenthetical) citation at the end of the quotation and include the source on the Works Cited page.

### Paraphrasing

Putting an author's specific ideas in your own words.

- Use a signal or identifying phrase that tells who and what you are paraphrasing
- Use your own words when paraphrasing. In most cases, avoid using any of the same wording that the author used unless you put a key term in quotation marks.
- Add an in-text (parenthetical) citation at the end of the quotation and include the source on the Works Cited page.

### Summarizing

Condensing an author's ideas to a more succinct statement.

- Use a signal or identifying phrase that tells who and what you are summarizing
- Use a quick description of the main points of the passage
- Use your own words and phrasing. In most cases, avoid using any of the same wording.
- Add an in-text (parenthetical) citation at the end of the quotation and include the source on the Works Cited page.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### On your own

1. Select and read **one** of the *Revisions* articles. Circle all the citations in the piece so that you will be able to quickly refer to them.
2. For each citation, indicate in the margin whether the author quoted, paraphrased, or summarized the source. If sentence(s) blend methods, indicate all the methods used. Remember, if a quotation or paraphrase contains the information in the introduction, it may not include a citation.

**In your group**

1. Discuss the citations you identified. Come to a group consensus regarding what strategy is used for each citation.
2. Identify the strengths of each method of using sources. What is emphasized in each method? (it may help to do both this step and the next step in tandem).
3. Create guidelines for when you should quote, paraphrase, or summarize.

Method	Strengths	When to use
Quoting		
Paraphrasing		
Summarizing		

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\*You may use the the space below for additional space\*

Bree Zuckerman

*Badvocacy: When Attempts to Change the World Go Awry*

“Save Darfur” ... “Out of Iraq and into Darfur” ... “Blood Diamonds” ... “Conflict Minerals.”

These are slogans and catchphrases familiar to those of us concerned with human rights and social justice, coined by advocacy organizations that try to achieve political change by raising public awareness about and motivating concrete actions on particular issues. Due to the nature of their project—which is to reach as wide an audience as possible—the writing tends to be hyperbolic, imbued with a sense of urgency and impending disaster, favoring the use of pithy refrains and snappy phrasing. After all, the catchier the message, the more likely it is that people will take notice. The problem is that in trying to be captivating, they often privilege taglines over analysis and tend to oversimplify complex and messy issues. Such strategies risk actually making situations worse rather than better, leading to the moniker *badvocacy*, or bad advocacy—the kind that may begin with good intentions but can lead to damaging outcomes.

A prime example is the Save Darfur Coalition, a network of religious organizations and other non-profits that tries to raise awareness about the conflict (genocide, as they see it) in Darfur. It features a store on its website where visitors can purchase advocacy attire or other paraphernalia, and it has helped to inspire a cottage industry of Save Darfur products, from t-shirts and bracelets to pet-food dishes and an unfortunate thong. This emphasis on raising awareness tends to result in a focus on efforts such as boycotts,

divestment campaigns, hunger strikes, events on college campuses, and rallies in Washington, D.C.

The *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, though not affiliated with an advocacy organization, is nonetheless engaged in a similar kind of awareness-raising project. His columns tell stories of suffering individuals in faraway places in order to stir up compassion among audiences at home; he views this strategy as the most likely way to propel people to action. In an interview with *Outside Magazine*, Kristof discusses the need for human rights advocates to engage in better marketing tactics, arguing that “women have been raped when it could have been avoided and children have died of pneumonia unnecessarily—because those stories haven’t resonated with the public” (Kristof, “Nicholas Kristof’s Advice”). In a column in which he laments what he perceives to be a public insufficiently moved by the conflict in Darfur, he suggests that in fact too much context may be harmful to the advocacy effort. He cites an experiment in which participants were less likely to donate money to a starving child in Mali when her plight was contextualized within the larger structural problem of poverty rather than when her story was told as an individual tale of suffering (“Save the Darfur Puppy”). Kristof’s particular kind of writing is motivated by a drive to raise awareness as the primary objective—and at all costs—which he uses as a justification for hyperbole and oversimplification.

So what is the problem with badvocacy? How much harm can anti-genocide underwear do? In the best case scenario, not much. Examples such as the thong or the recent Fast for Darfur campaign, set to begin on Eid—the day on which Muslims break their Ramadan fast—might reveal a surprising level of insensitivity, or at least naiveté, but neither are likely to bring about any direct policy change. However, at its worse, badvocacy

can lead to harmful policy or unintended consequences, which is a critique that can be leveled at Save Darfur and Kristof's efforts. Military intervention was a key demand of the Save Darfur movement from its inception (hence the slogan, "Out of Iraq and into Darfur"), putting the movement's organizers at odds with many of the humanitarian organizations on the ground in Darfur. As David Rieff points out in a *Los Angeles Times* column, the establishment of a NATO-enforced no-fly zone over Darfur, advocated by both Save Darfur and Kristof, would have endangered the operations of the aid organizations that fly food, personnel, and supplies around Darfur (where roads are often impassable), using planes that can appear nearly identical to those used by the Sudanese government ("Good vs. Good"). Moreover, coercive intervention would have likely intensified violence, which had already begun to decline after its peak during 2003-2004, and would have severely restricted the humanitarian operation that has been vital to the lives of thousands of Darfuri civilians.

The shrill cries of the Save Darfur lobby prompted the US House of Representatives to pass a resolution stating that genocide was underway in Darfur, while the UN, after careful research by the Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, concluded that the Sudanese government "has not pursued a policy of genocide." This assessment is supported by a number of academics who have argued that, rather than genocide, the war in Darfur is best explained as a set of conflicts over land tenure relations, regional politics, and local government reforms that disenfranchised some groups while privileging others (see de Waal, Mamdani, Marchal, and Tubiana). Moreover, the categories of Arab and African did not historically exist in Darfur as politically salient, fixed racial identities (de Waal and Mamdani). The debate about genocide also had unintended and negative consequences



within Sudan. As one senior UN official told me, it galvanized hardliners and sidelined moderates within the Sudanese government, jeopardizing relationships that UN officials working in Khartoum had carefully cultivated over time.

In addition, according to Sudan expert Alex de Waal, the urgency with which the Save Darfur advocacy movement called for immediate action hampered the success of the 2006 peace negotiations, of which he was an observer. As de Waal recounts in *Prospect* magazine:

Abdel Wahid al-Nur, founding chairman of the largest [rebel] group, the Sudan Liberation Movement, is a political ingenue, catapulted into the international spotlight and flattered by his instant celebrity status....In the final session of the peace talks in May 2006, Abdel Wahid demanded that the US provide guarantees “like in Bosnia.” He wanted an intervention and wouldn’t sign without one. I was there, and my heart sank as I realised that international Darfur activists were not only refusing to make the case for the peace deal that was on the table, but some were actually phoning to tell Abdel Wahid and his colleagues not to sign—because of those missing “guarantees.” It was an imperfect agreement, but with Abdel Wahid’s signature it represented the beginning of a solution. When Abdel Wahid refused to sign, the agreement was doomed and the conflict resumed. (“Why Darfur”)

After the conclusion of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), the Save Darfur movement pushed for the urgent deployment of UN peacekeepers despite the fact that there was no effective peace to keep. However, as de Waal argues, the hurried mission actually led to an underprepared force that did not have an adequate understanding of the

ways in which the conflict, violence, and character of the armed groups had evolved since the signing of the DPA (“Darfur and the Failure”).

Kristof has received criticism for his Darfur coverage for distilling a complex set of conflicts over land, resources, and political power into an oversimplified moral narrative of good versus evil. As African Studies professor Mahmood Mamdani rightly points out in his scathing critique of Kristof in the *London Review of Books*, the effect of journalistic writing has been “both to obscure the politics of the violence and position the reader as a virtuous, not just a concerned observer...where a group of perpetrators face a group of victims, but where neither history nor motivation is thinkable because both are outside history and context.”

Returning to Kristof’s example of the hungry child in Mali, one might (though Kristof does not) go further to suggest that the story of individual suffering in Africa resonates with Westerners because they have been exposed mostly to representations of suffering and poverty in Africa that are disconnected from a critical understanding of poverty in the context of global economic inequalities and the legacy of colonial exploitation; reproducing stereotypes of suffering Africans allows them to feel good about their own charity. Thus, by feeding into these stereotypes, bad advocacy might be preventing the very kinds of solutions that could begin to address the structural causes of conflict and poverty. Making Darfur a household name accomplishes nothing if the newfound awareness simply reproduces narratives that portray Africans as helpless victims in need of being “saved” by the West rather than as agents capable of political action with clear and creative ideas about how to solve social and political problems in their own countries. The problem, it seems, is not one of awareness in the hearts and minds of compassionate Western publics, but the challenge

that has bedeviled politicians, humanitarians, and academics alike: the messy and highly political question of how to end a civil war and address the often intense post-war violence that follows.

There are countless examples of how writing can help to achieve positive social and political change. However, writing that tries to change the world for the better might actually be doing more harm than good if, in a quest to raise awareness above all else, context and complexity fall by the wayside. In writing to market or sell their cause through snappy taglines that obscure messy power relations and complicated histories, some advocacy organizations are, in effect, creating uninformed consumers who might then push for disastrous, or at the very least ineffective, policies, since civil wars have rarely, if ever, successfully ended through policymaking in Washington, D.C. Overly simplistic conceptualizations of complex problems, while they may sell t-shirts and motivate people to attend rallies, may also lead to detrimental “solutions.”

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Eva M. Fernández

Did writing propel humans to become the dominant species on Earth?

Thinking about (beneficent or malevolent) human planetary domination brings to mind the anthropocentric doctrine of the ancient Greeks. A chorus in *Antigone* describes it memorably: “Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man” (Sophocles) So great is *anthropos*, the chorus continues, that he’s got the power to cross the sea, to plow the earth, and to tame the wild beasts, among other things. “Speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould a state” are identified as important qualities driving greatness. (Writing is conspicuously absent from that list.)

More recently, philosopher Daniel Dennett has discussed why language is “one of the great cranes of evolution” key to human domination of the planet. Dennett cites an incredible statistic: humans (plus their livestock and pets) take up about 98% of the total vertebrate biomass—compared to 0.1% when agriculture began to develop, some 10,000 years ago (MacCready 5). According to Dennett, language provides the base for our spectacular success in planetary take-over: language permits “the reliable transmission of semiunderstood formulas, recipes, admonitions, techniques.” Essentially, what makes *anthropos* so great is our phenomenal ability to use language to transmit ideas over vast spans of space and time, with unparalleled precision. (Note again the absence of writing.)

How does this transmission of ideas actually work? Since I already brought her up, consider *Antigone*’s story. By burying her dead brother, she challenges a decree by King Creon, but not without triggering tragic consequences (Sophocles). Creon sentences

Antigone to death by entombment in a cave, where she commits suicide; Antigone's suicide drives her boyfriend Haemon to death by his own sword, and Haemon's suicide provokes Eurydice—Creon's wife, Haemon's mother—to kill herself. We can learn about Antigone by going to a performance, reading the play, or watching the film, and the messages about civil disobedience and the consequences of the abuse of power come across as crisply now as they might have during Sophocles' lifetime. In this case, writing ensured the persistence of the story through time. But information transmitted over time need not be written or widely known or even important: you might know a great deal about that relative you have never met who played drums for an Elvis impersonating band, or about that friend of your sister's who married rich and became a young widow under mysterious circumstances. Information uptake (from books, websites, live experts) also empowers ordinary persons to learn about extraordinary things: photosynthesis, acoustic phonetics, planetary takeover tactics. The involvement of writing, though frequent (and highly advisable, especially for the more complicated topics), is somewhat optional.

In fact, transmitting knowledge is possible (and swift, and highly efficient) because of the specificity afforded us by our linguistic competence. The visual arts and music come close to helping us transmit information, but works of art invite interpretations that are sometimes not true to the original intent (so information uptake is not reliable), and encoding thoughts using art or music requires expertise beyond the competence of ordinary people. Admittedly, some works of art convey very specific narratives. One of my favorites is Botticelli's depiction of the story of *Nastagio degli Onesti*, from the tales of *The Decameron*. Gazing at the hair-raising images on the three panels hanging in *El Prado*, I have come up with many stories about the phantasmagorical chase, stories that don't come

close to Boccaccio's delightfully grotesque narrative. The same lack of specificity applies to musical compositions. Even riffs evocative of exact ideas resist unique interpretations, as, for example, the first few bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, "da-da-da-dum, da-da-da-dum": "Death is knocking at your door"? "You've got another thing coming"? "V for Victory"?

I have hinted that language—and not writing—is behind human planetary domination, but why not writing? Because writing is subsumed under language; to understand this, we need more specificity about what we mean by writing (and what we mean by language). Writing turns out to be a highly ambiguous word; it could refer to a profession, artistic composition, written lettering, or text. For our purposes, writing is the systematic representation of language using visual marks; the reader is encouraged to ponder whether any of those other senses of writing make for a more compelling way to think about planetary domination (Coulmas 115).

And what is language? Language is the abstract mental system we humans use to connect ideas with signals. As such, language facilitates communication, even though language is not communication itself (think how many times you have said something that fails to get your message across, or how many times you have conveyed a message without uttering a word; think also Botticelli or Beethoven). Nor is language thought itself (think about coffee, for example, and you will invoke non-linguistic thoughts about its aroma, texture, and taste), though language is a terrific way to get one's thoughts expressed in the real world—and to manipulate thoughts consciously. Two parts of this definition of language might be unfamiliar: notice the claim of species-specificity (no other animals have

a language quite like ours), and notice that language is described as a property of the mind (the brain, really).

Given such a way to think about language, writing is but one type of signal or encoding medium for language; another such signal is speech. Despite their common source, writing and speaking differ in some important respects (Crystal 5). Speech has temporal limitations, so it permits little conscious planning or revision; not so for writing, which can be premeditated, carefully crafted, and heavily edited. Speech prompts spontaneous responses from the hearer, while writing does not allow the reader comprehension checks, clarification queries, or expressions of disbelief (not in any way that the writer will notice). Another difference between speech and writing lies in their origins. Speech, the default encoding medium for language, is determined by our species-specific biology (our highly specialized vocal tract), evidence of which begins to appear in the fossil record of archaic *Homo sapiens*, around 500,000 years ago (Fitch 789). Writing, in comparison, has existed for only 5,000 years, invented by the Sumerians for the very unexciting purpose of keeping agricultural records (Sampson, 1985). The mechanics of speech have not changed for millennia, and are identical for all spoken languages. Writing, in contrast, has undergone significant transformations as it has been refined by scribes, and varies substantially between languages.

Both speech and writing encode thoughts via language, but their physical properties bear little resemblance to either the thoughts or the linguistic units they represent. Let's illustrate this with an example of a sentence (and its accompanying thought), written and spoken:<sup>2</sup>

Creon had it coming.



Your mental language processing mechanisms decode each signal almost instantaneously, letting you in on what I think about Creon's loss. Both signals contain enough information (visual or acoustic-phonetic) to help you recover the linguistic units that make up my sentence: the content words, the function words, the inflectional morphology, and the syntactic relations between them.

Both signals are far-removed from the thought they carry, and from the linguistic units they bear. The writing consists of 16 letters (plus a period), taking up about 96 square millimeters of space on the page. The speech consists of some 1280 milliseconds of continuous phonation interrupted by silence or high-frequency noise in a couple of places, with a fundamental frequency starting out at 220 Hz gradually declining to 85 Hz at the creaky end of the utterance. Both signals indirectly reflect the phonological form of the sentence, but only the written signal indicates word boundaries, and neither signal shows syntactic relations. (And yet the syntax is crucial: Coming it had Creon makes no sense, because you can't compute the syntactic relations between the words.)

The digital revolution promises (or threatens) advanced flexibility for information transmission over space and time, compared to regular speech or writing. Innovations like video mashups blur standard distinctions between writing and speech, and remind us that language (and not just speech, or not just writing) underlies our powerful ability to encode and decode thoughts, pass on our expertise, and comfort—or destroy—one another. As for the person who uses this amazing skill for evil purposes, the chorus in *Antigone* rightly proclaims: "Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts!"



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Bree Zuckerman

## Your Data Is Not Your Own

I'm sorry to say, but none of the status updates or comments or notes or chats or emails you've ever written on Facebook are yours. You might have the ability to delete them from your wall or inbox, but that doesn't mean they're gone. Rather, Facebook—and by extension any number of third-party “partners”—own them, for eternity, if they so choose. There's a reason why Facebook, a company that does not turn a profit, was valued at a mind-boggling 50 billion dollars. It's worth is in its network, and its network is comprised of our information, which is really bits of our lives.

Columbia University law professor and Free Software Foundation lawyer Eben Moglen explains at a recent talk, “[Zuckerberg] has to a remarkable extent succeeded with a very poor deal: namely, I will give you free web hosting and some PHP doodads and you get spying for free, all the time....It's a terrarium for what it feels like to live in a panopticon built out of web parts” (“Freedom in the Cloud”). The same goes for other free services, such as Gmail, Google calendar, or any other “cloud” computing service (that is, those in which users' data is stored on servers and is accessible from any computer with an Internet connection). And as Moglen points out, the privacy we should be concerned with is not just the one or two things you don't want other people to find out; it is the bits and pieces of data collected from free email clients, social networking sites, Internet search engines, wireless services, together with our credit or debit card purchases, which when combined, provide an unsettlingly detailed picture of our habits and lives.

The data that is culled from these sources is sold to data warehouses where it is aggregated and then resold to anyone who wants to buy it. Often this means marketers, which results in more junk mail, in both your inbox and mailbox. But if this doesn't concern you, there are more serious implications, such as how employers and insurers are increasingly using this data to make important decisions about prospective and current employees and customers. Employers can purchase data as part of a background check and insurance companies are increasingly using it to rate customers' health and likely longevity in order to make decisions about policy costs and offers.

In addition, not only do banks sell data, but they buy it, too. Those "special offers" that find their way to people in financial trouble don't hit their targets by accident; they're the product of careful data mining and customer profiling to determine who is most likely to take on new debt. Credit bureaus such as Equifax have been selling personal financial profiles that include name, address, social security number, education, marital status, and consumer habits to banks for years. Many sub-prime mortgage offers came from banks marketing these loans to people who were profiled through data mining and then targeted for the predatory loans.

While personal privacy and freedom from unwanted spying is one side of this issue, another is political freedom. Consider the role of social media in the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Whether or not the uprisings would have happened without social media, it is nonetheless indisputable that they were widely used by protest organizers. However, while Twitter and Facebook were used as a kind of virtual public square, they are most definitely not public spaces, which would require that their infrastructure is not owned and controlled by a private company that also owns the centralized servers that store all the

information (Tufeki 22). University of Maryland, Baltimore County professor and social media scholar Zeynep Tufekci likens it to a shopping mall, where the buildings and walkways are owned by a private corporation. Even though it may feel like a public space, it is in fact entirely private, and as a result free speech is only as free as the mall owner decides it is. Likewise, governments can block Internet access by pressuring the corporations who provide it, and activists must hope their online data is not being shared by governments with more sinister motives than marketing. As Moglen puts it, “there are a lot of Egyptians whose freedom now depends upon their ability to communicate with one another through a database owned for profit by a guy in California who obeys orders from governments who send orders to disclose to Facebook.” (“Why Political Liberty”). So, beyond the privacy implications discussed earlier, there are questions not just about freedom of speech, but about how the vast repositories of information on social networking services might be useful to an interested government. And here I’m not just talking about the governments of Egypt or Tunisia, but our own. Even as the Obama administration has praised the role of the Internet in the Egyptian uprising in January of this year, the United States Department of Justice subpoenaed Twitter for information on WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and four other individuals, including Icelandic MP Birgitta Jónsdóttir. We only know about this case because Twitter notified its users of the subpoena, which implies that other social media sites like Facebook could have also been subpoenaed but simply chose not to notify their users.

One of the many things that this backlash against WikiLeaks demonstrates is that the Internet is in fact not as free and open as we often assume. It did not take long for corporations to respond to the outrage over WikiLeaks by denying hosting services

(Amazon) and payments (PayPal, Visa, and MasterCard) to the organization. While the architecture of the Internet nonetheless allowed WikiLeaks to continue operating through mirror sites and alternative payment arrangements, this openness is something that we cannot take for granted and need to defend. This means clearly understanding which technologies are genuinely designed to encourage creativity, freedom, and control over our own information and which ones allow for their restriction based on the whims of corporations and governments.

While I argued earlier that we, as individuals, should be concerned about privacy, the same might be argued regarding states, which was indeed the way the uproar about WikiLeaks was framed. However, as Tufekci and others have argued, democratic governments don't have the same rights to a public and private self as individuals do, and when they are lying to the people they are supposed to represent, it is the duty of a free and independent press to shine a light into these dark corners. This fundamental foundation of democratic government is laid out in the 1971 Supreme Court case upholding the right of the *New York Times* to publish the Pentagon Papers. In his opinion, Justice Stewart urged the government to avoid secrecy for its own sake: "When everything is classified, then nothing is classified, and the system becomes one to be disregarded by the cynical or the careless, and to be manipulated by those intent on self-protection or self-promotion. I should suppose, in short, that the hallmark of a truly effective internal security system would be the maximum possible disclosure, recognizing that secrecy can best be preserved only when credibility is truly maintained." Stewart's opinion is worth quoting at length, in light of the extreme rhetoric demonizing WikiLeaks and calling for Assange's head.

It is ironic that governments vigorously defend their privacy—in many cases defined as the right to lie to citizens—while we are giving up ours for free. What this means is that we need to defend an Internet with a decentralized architecture controlled by users and not corporations or governments. Such an Internet will allow for anonymity and privacy; it will ensure that activists who leverage web technologies for the purposes of defending their rights, holding governments accountable to their people, and struggling for better societies are able to do so to their full potential without depending on the good graces of corporations who in turn depend on the good graces of governments. However, even for those who are not interested in the activist potential of the Internet, consider that we expect privacy in many aspects of our lives, from our intimate relationships to our consultations in doctors' offices; why not demand the same online?

There are some alternative technologies under development, including an open source version of Twitter called identi.ca that does not store users' data on a centralized server, and Diaspora, which is an alternative to Facebook, currently in Alpha version. Finally, Moglen recently announced the Freedom Box project, which aims to leverage the original peer-to-peer architecture of the Internet so that information is not stored on a centralized server owned by a third party. Rather, the Freedom Box is a "plug server," or small personal server only a few square inches in size that runs a free, open source operating system. It allows for anonymity and privacy because any data is stored on the user's own computer, which she can store, encrypt, or delete at her own choosing.

I want to end by saying that I'm not arguing from the position of a privacy purist. I have Gmail, Facebook, Twitter, Dropbox, and Evernote accounts. I use apps on my smart phone that I know are gathering data about me, and while I often use the search engine



Scroogle, which strips away the identifying information that Google saves, I sometimes get lazy and use the convenient Google search box in my browser's toolbar. However, the more I learn, and the more I begin to consider just how much valuable information I am giving away, the more I am slowly changing my habits. As Moglen points out, convenience comes at a cost—a cost which I am increasingly unwilling to pay.

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Raymond Pun

## The Rise of Cyberfeminism 2.0 in Iran?

As the digital revolution pervades the world, the exchange of feminist thought and gender politics among cultures has increased exponentially. The term *cyberfeminism* is ambiguous and often difficult to define as a “single theory or feminist movement” but it could be viewed as a “range of theories, debates, and practices about the relationship between gender and digital culture” (Daniels 101). Here, I examine how the Internet has incubated cyberfeminist thought and inspired internal feminist movements in Iran. I draw on two cases—blogs and Internet dating service sites—to address how the cyberworld is emerging as an important vehicle for Iranian women to pursue a more active role in expressing their choices, rights, and freedoms.

According to some, the rights of Iranian women are restricted in various aspects of the public sphere; many women feel unable to publicly challenge and address social barriers for fear of ostracism or punishment by their government. After the revolution of 1979, the Iranian government reintroduced and reinforced strict theocratic laws and regulations. Although the government encourages young women and men to obtain higher education, some women still feel that their civic rights are undermined (Raghavan).

However, with the expansion of the Internet and social networking technologies, Iranian women increasingly use online devices, accessed in the private sphere, to express their feelings more openly and to challenge notions of patriarchy. In this way, the Internet could be said to allow participants to express their concerns more freely; the “absence of

the physical body in electronic space and the anonymity this offers have a liberating effect on repressed social identities as 'electronic technology' becomes 'a tool for design of freely chosen identities' (Nourai-Simone 61). For Fereshteh Nourai-Simone, the Internet can reveal a glimpse of the world by "opening a new horizon for dialogue, self-expression, and dissident voices" for those who are unable to express their concerns in a "controlled society under theocratic rule" (62). With the advent of web 2.0 technologies, more people are recreating, reinforcing, and sharing their social identities and interests with others, as "the Internet is a medium of empowerment that bypasses traditionally imposed gender identity, roles, and images of subordination" (62). As blogs continue to grow in number, some women use this new forum to discuss domestic affairs, male-female relations, gender boundaries, and other "taboo" topics (70).

Within the Iranian blogosphere—or "Weblogistan" as it is sometimes called—women can use pseudonyms to write social, political, cultural, and literary critiques and discourses in Farsi. "Through bold narration in their blogs, [women] unveiled 'the hidden woman,' suppressed by the traditions of Iranian society, and reveal first-hand information about themselves which had never been told publicly" (Amir-Ebrahimi 91). With this exchange of ideas, according to Nourai-Simone, "a growing number of young women [are] choosing their own spouses rather than accepting their parents' choice. More women are not marrying, and a majority looks at work or career as the way to further independence" (Nourai-Simone 75). Some anonymous female bloggers also express their personal discontent regarding their marriages and dress codes (Nazila). Blogging is a common activity among many societal groups and continues to serve as a medium for self-expression and exchange of resources and ideas for women.

Internet dating sites may also create a comfort zone for some Iranian women. In Iran, men and women are physically segregated; interaction between the sexes such as casual dating is highly restricted. With the rise of cyberdating services, women can meet men online, overstep constructed boundaries, and find potential suitors. Members of the Islamic Republic also give their approval for cyberdating services because it serves as a matchmaking site (Collins 51) These services include muslimmatch.com, shaadi.com, and salaamlove.com and subscriptions substantially increase each year on these sites (51). According to Charlotte Collins, “[Internet agencies such as cyberdating services] empower Muslim women to put forward candidates for parental approval instead of relying wholly on their families to select their future husbands” (51).

The Internet can help generate opportunities for Iranian women to share ideas on social behaviors and their experiences. Some women use these opportunities to address and counter aspects of gender inequality or social barriers they feel have obstructed their rights. The Internet and social media tools have had a profound impact on the exchange of discourses and ideas, and the cyberworld may continue to inspire and galvanize new digital movements for women to confront and address gender boundaries.

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### Language Variation and Change: Why We Shouldn't Fear the Inevitable

In the well-known Cingular commercial about “my BFF Jill” a mother complains to her tween-age daughter about her excessive texting. The daughter responds to the mother in what we call “text speak” while subtitles, corresponding to the series of acronyms and abbreviations the daughter is using, appear at the bottom of the screen. Witty and successful, this commercial represents how many people perceive the younger generation of English speakers (and writers) in this country and pokes fun at a very real fear: just how much can technology affect the language we speak and write? These concerns often manifest as intolerance and rejection of modern language forms. People concerned about the effect of technology on language appeal to arguments involving misspellings and the lack of proper grammar, and they advocate the protection of the English language from impurities that will tarnish it and dumb it down. These arguments usually receive a lot of attention and support, and strangely, these concerns transcend any and all educational boundaries. Many people, it seems, are concerned about the modern state and fluctuation of language. Many people, that is, except for linguists (or at least this linguist). Those whose very job it is to study language are not losing sleep over the fate of English and its portended demise. Why? Because linguists recognize that language change is completely normal. In my last *Revisions* piece I wrote that Ramón Menéndez Pidal, a famous Spanish philologist, described language as a river whose current we constantly attempt to suppress (5). In other words, language change, like a river's current, is normal and unavoidable.

The standardization of modern languages has suppressed a lot of language change. If we look back at texts written before the standardization of modern languages (circa 1500) we find huge differences in the spelling, grammar, and lexicon of different writers of the same era. Regardless of the perceived threat to the integrity of language, the linguistic changes that we are witnessing are no different from the changes that the so-called pure English language has undergone in the past. English has borrowed many words and expressions from many languages throughout history; sometimes large numbers of words were borrowed from a specific language as a result of periods of cultural contact with speakers of other languages. For example, the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 brought an inundation of Norman French words and expressions. This is just one of many historical periods during which the English language was shaped by the cultural needs of its speakers. In fact, it's ironic, in my opinion, to think that we are trying to preserve the "purity" of the English language when it is by no means pure to begin with: the amount of borrowed words in English indicate that it was historically a linguistic Casanova.

These modifications and additions, however, are not unique to English; they exemplify diachronic and synchronic linguistic processes that are common among many of the world's languages. These changes have been documented for centuries, and they represent the cultural and communicative needs of a society. It would be unrealistic, then, to expect that new technological advances and the need to communicate about new technology would yield different linguistic results today. Technology has always influenced language, and today's language is richer because of this influence. For example, the invention of the automobile not only brought with it the need for numerous new lexical



entries, it also gave us many idiomatic expressions we still use today such as “driving me crazy” and “around the bend.”

Many people who advocate for the protection of the English language appeal to the fact that the increased rate and speed of technological developments presents a completely different linguistic landscape and an unknown threat that we have nothing to compare to historically. Indeed, the technological innovations and the consequent addition of lexical entries are much more noticeable today than they ever have been. According to *Webster's New World Dictionary's* language monitoring program there are approximately 2,000 examples a month of new words and phrases such as *google*, *friend* (a new verb that has virtually the same sense as the existing, old verb *to befriend*, which isn't used in the Facebook context, perhaps because it's so old) and *unfriend*, which was the *New Oxford American Dictionary's* 2009 Word of the Year.

Most importantly, purist arguments for the protection of language from the perceived massacre by today's youth are mostly based on anecdotal evidence and are not empirically sound. They are often motivated by personal and biased intentions and are grounded in a purist mentality that is exclusionary and historically inaccurate. It doesn't take long, for example, to find the hundreds of blogs where concerned parents try to decipher their children's text messages and complain about the imminent decay of written English. But it's not just parents; it's also academics. In Italy, scholars at the University of Bari warn against the possibility of the development of a hybrid SMS language spoken by today's youth. To date, I have not found any peer-reviewed linguistic study that demonstrates evidence of anything like this happening soon. Similarly, in France, politicians argue that 40,000 students failed their Baccalaureate exam (the exam they have

to pass to graduate from high school) due to spelling errors attributed to French “text speak.” If they could demonstrate that texting affects grammar, then maybe their argument would carry more weight, but in order to come to such conclusions one would have to at least do a longitudinal study comparing the pass-fail rates today to those before 1992 when the first text message was sent. These issues are also not unique to today’s youth. Did the baby boomers forget that they too had a lingo? Doesn’t every generation have its jargon and slang?

One of the few empirically-sound linguistic studies conducted on the effect of texting and language among today’s youth suggests that we have nothing to be worried about. At the 2006 Linguistics Society of Canada and United States Annual Meeting, sociolinguistics professor Sali Tagliamonte presented her findings from a study on the writing of 70 Canadian adolescents. She argues that the adolescents in her study demonstrate an ability to manipulate different registers in their writing. In other words, although these kids may write text messages like “idk I wntd 2 go hm ASAP, 2C my M8s again,” they wouldn’t use the same written language in an essay or a class assignment. Tagliamonte’s finding reminds me of an analogy I once heard during a talk by University of California San Diego (and former Hunter) professor Ana Celia Zentella. Professor Zentella equates registers to clothing. She explains that we have many different types of clothes for many different social contexts, and our decision of which outfit to wear is dependent on that context. For example, we wouldn’t wear a wedding dress to the beach in the same way we wouldn’t wear a bikini to a wedding. Inasmuch as there are appropriate and inappropriate settings for a bikini and a wedding dress, we use different registers in our oral and written language depending on a variety of social and contextual factors. The context, including the topic, the interlocutors,

the setting, etc., shapes the way we speak and write. I don't use the same language when I write my Twitter or Facebook updates as when I write my dissertation. In the same way, the word choice and punctuation in my text messages depends on many factors: did I already reach 160 characters? To whom am I writing? Will this message be ambiguous if I abbreviate?

The ability to manipulate and effectively use different registers is not evidence of linguistic erosion; it is quite the opposite. Always speaking or writing as though one were in an academic setting all the time is just as infelicitous as speaking or writing informally in formal contexts. Having command of different registers is evidence of a complex repertoire of linguistic skills. Don't get me wrong—I'm not advocating linguistic anarchy. I'm all about compartmentalization, and I believe we should not condone the categorical use of either formal or informal registers.

Why, you ask, am I so adamant about defending these linguistic impurities and bad-speak? I knew the moment I saw the call for papers for *Revisions* that there would be a handful of submissions "uncritically championing" the protection of language and/or "absolutely rejecting" technology due to its purported linguistic repercussions. As a linguist, I feel that it is my duty to provide another perspective to this debate. I was especially motivated by Ferdinand de Saussure's seminal (and posthumously published) book on general linguistics. In his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, Saussure, considered the father of modern linguistics, warns that "no other subject has fostered more absurd notions, more prejudices, more illusions, or more fantasies" than linguistics, and that "it is the primary task of the linguist to denounce them and to eradicate them as completely as possible" (15).

As a functionalist linguist I believe that the social, cultural, and communicative needs of the speakers shape the language they speak. However, I also believe that in the same way that we shape language, the language we speak shapes us; it is a fundamental part of our identity. As a result, we need to acknowledge, accept, and maybe even embrace the fact that language changes. That's the norm. Trying to stop it from changing is both futile and ill-founded.

There is a small caveat that I have failed to address up to this point. Although I'm painting a somewhat idealistic vision of language change, there are linguistic changes that are, in my opinion, unfortunate. Of the world's approximate 6,000 languages, every two weeks one of these languages vanishes (Kenneally 101). At this rate some of the world's languages face a greater risk of extinction than any currently endangered bird or mammal. The extinction of a language is a huge loss; when a language is no longer spoken, the cultural and linguistic knowledge encoded in that language are lost forever<sup>4</sup>. Languages like English, however, are not at all in danger of becoming extinct. In fact, it is estimated that there are more non-native speakers than native speakers of English, making English the second most widely spoken language in the world (behind Mandarin). Ironically, although many of the concerns about language maintenance and decay are about some of the most standardized and codified languages in the world (e.g. French, Spanish, English, etc.), it is often at the expense of these languages that many endangered languages have been lost. In other words, it is because languages like English are becoming more and more widespread that languages like Aka-Bo, Gaagudju, and Eyak—last spoken in Alaska in 2008—are lost. The paradox, thus, is that the languages that many people are most concerned about protecting are, in fact, those that need the least protection.



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