

Change Thy Name Is English: Teaching the Evolving Nature of the English Language to Promote Diversity, Inclusivity, and Equity in Writing



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Welcome and Agenda

- Introduction and Research Foundations
- Development of the English Language
- Discipline Specific Language and the Influence of Global Events
- Principles of Inclusive Language
- Email and Electronic Communication
- Discussion, Recap, Resources, and Questions





Introduction and Research Foundations



Session Description



- Educators know the English language continually evolves as it has from Chaucer and Shakespeare to modern English. Instructors also understand that field-specific language changes with increased understanding and knowledge.
- However, some students maintain that inclusive writing caters to “political correctness.” Instructors must communicate and model that appropriate and effective written and verbal expression and even rules of grammar and punctuation will always change and evolve.
- This session will examine and model how all instructors regardless of their subject area can leverage their professional understanding of the dynamic nature of English to help students become more inclusive writers and develop skills to adapt to lifelong linguistic changes.

Learning Outcomes



Participants in this session will:



Examine the natural progression of the English Language as it applies to teaching inclusive, appropriate, and effective communication.



Discuss how to frame conversations about inclusive language as part of the natural development of English;



Share specific examples from subject areas and fields that demonstrate natural changes to English over time, including increased inclusivity; and



Apply the concepts from the session to specific scenarios faculty may encounter when teaching inclusive writing.

Research Foundations

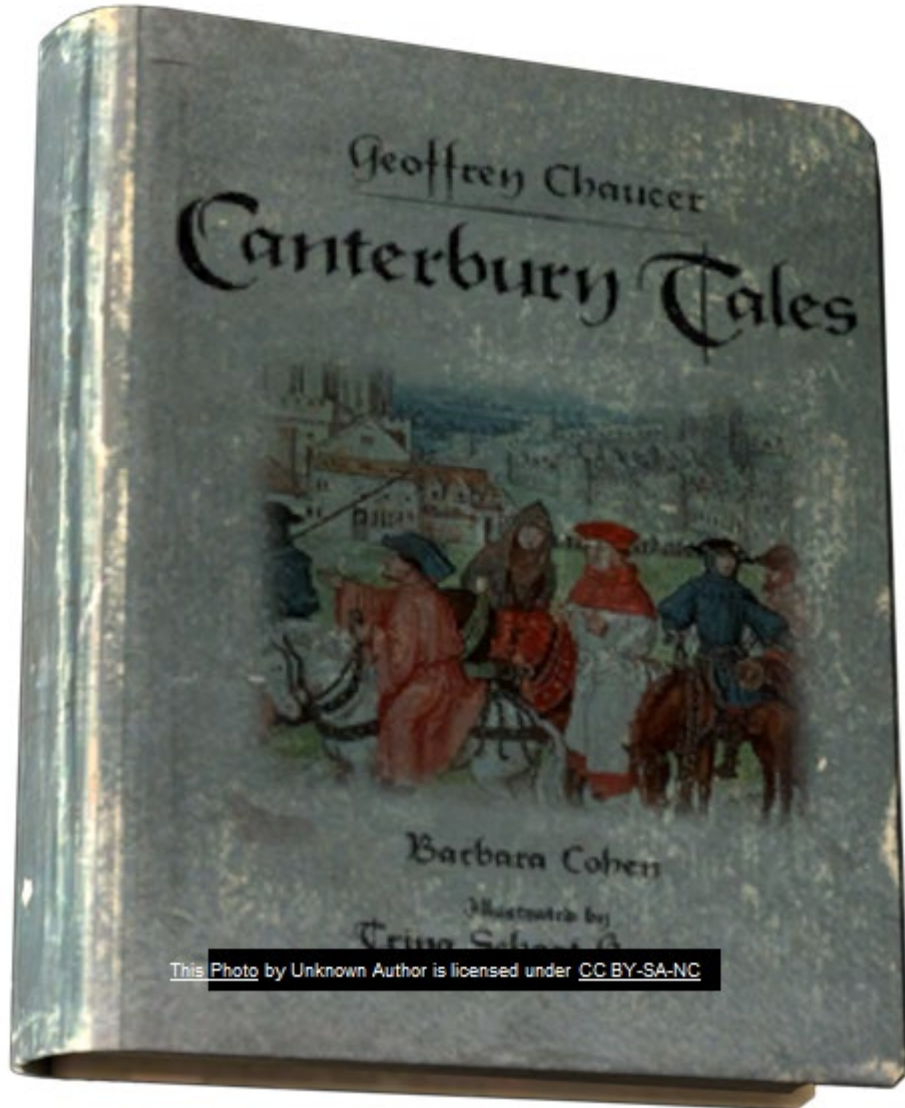
Alder-Kassner (2019) concludes when instructors share professional knowledge of writing, then teaching and learning become more effective and inclusive.

Johnson, et. al. (2020) conclude that even informal interactions with faculty influence how students understand diversity, equity, and inclusion topics, including the use of language.



The Development of the English Language

Singular “they” - Not an Innovation of Recent Decades



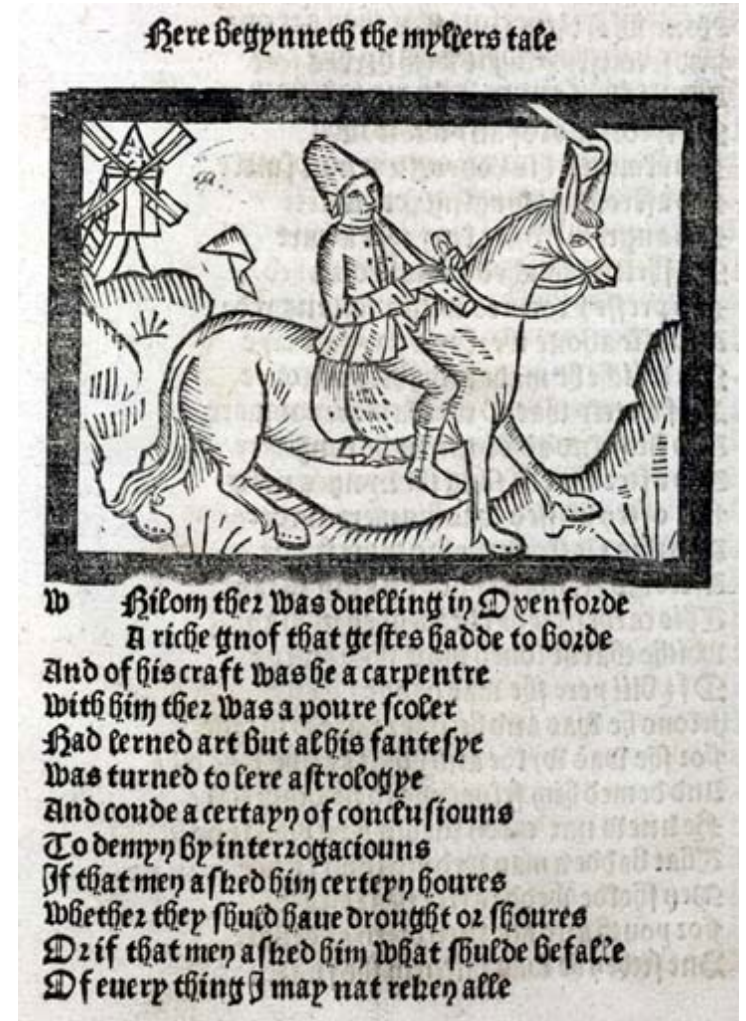
- “In adopting **they** with singular reference, we are simply following a long-established convention of the English language” (Eagleson, 1994, p. 89).
- The Pardoner’s Prologue” from *The Canterbury Tales*, “And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame, / They wol come up and offre a Goddés name” [“And whoso findeth him out of such blame, / They will come up and offer in God’s name”] (Chaucer, 1395, as cited in Benson, 2008, p. 79).

It Happened Before

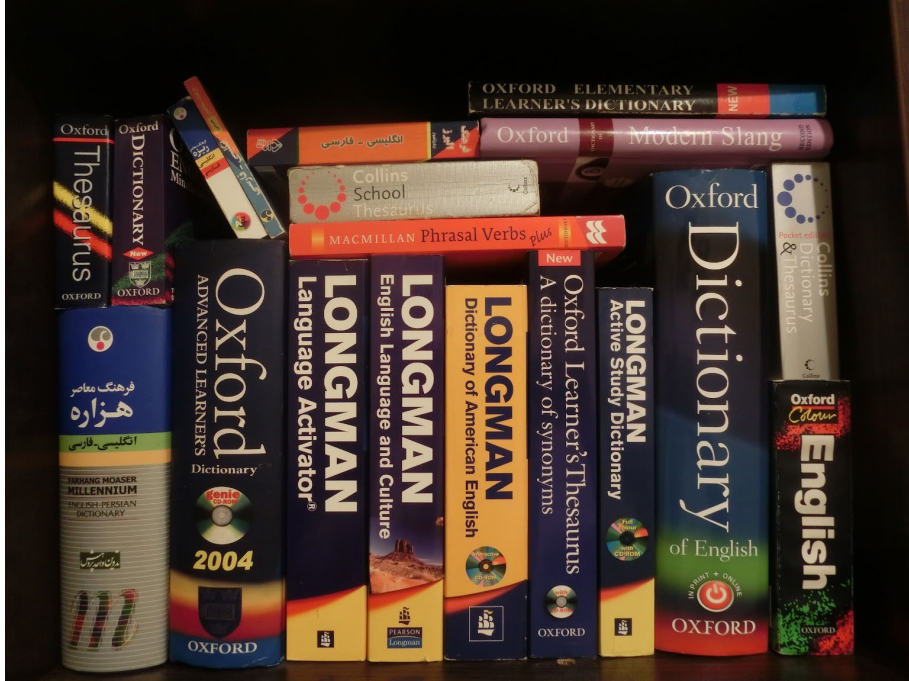
Singular
thou, thee, thy

Plural
ye, you, your

- Through the late Middle Ages, **you** gradually ousted **thou**.
- By the end of the 17th century, **you** was used as a pronoun for the second person singular and plural.
- “It has been the sole form for the singular and the plural for three centuries” (Eagleson, 1994, p. 91) .



What the Dictionaries Say



The Oxford English Dictionary (2d ed. 1989):

They

2. Often used in reference to a singular noun made universal by every, any, no, etc., or applicable to one of either sex (= 'he or she').

Their

3. Often used in relation to a singular sb. or pronoun denoting a person, after each, every, either, neither no one, everyone, etc. Also so used instead of 'his or her', when the gender is inclusive or uncertain

What the Dictionaries Say

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961):

They: 1b: used with an indefinite singular antecedent.

Themselves

3: used with a singular antecedent that is indefinite or that does not specify gender.

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1987):

They: 3: (used with an indefinite singular antecedent in place of the definite masculine **he** or the definite feminine **she**).

Usage: Long before the use of generic **he** was condemned as sexist, the pronouns **they**, **their**, and **them** were used in educated speech and in all but the most formal writing to refer to indefinite pronouns and to singular nouns of general personal reference.... Such use is not a recent development, nor is it a mark of ignorance.



Singular “they” in Literature



William Shakespeare: *Much Ado About Nothing*:
“God send everyone their heart's desire” (1598, p. 3).

William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair*:
“A person can't help their birth” (1847, p. 484).

Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:
“But how can you talk with **a person** if **they** always say the same thing?” (1865, Ch.12).

George Bernard Shaw: *Village Wooing*:
“Nobody would ever marry if they thought it over” (1933).



Discipline Specific Language and the Influence of Global Events

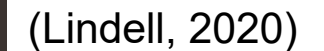


How 9/11 Changed the English Language

- 9/11 (led to 8888, 7/7, 1/6)
- Severe clear
- First responder
- Ground Zero
- The Pile
- The Pit
- WTC
- Patriot Day
- Homeland
- Security/Securing the Homeland
- Terror Alert
- War on Terror
- Forever War
- Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)
- Islamophobia
- Waterboarding
- GITMO
- 9/11 related illness (Kelly, 2021)



(Kelly, 2021)



Use Interdisciplinary Examples

Entomological Society of America Discontinues Use of Gypsy Moth, Ant Names

Change marks launch of ESA effort to review, revise problematic insect common names

[Better Common Names Project | Entomological Society of America \(entsoc.org\)](https://www.entsoc.org/better-common-names-project/)



(Better Common Names Project, 2021)

Explore Changes in Professional Fields



- Google's Initiative to Make
- APA Inclusive Language Guide
- Language More Inclusive in Open Source Projects
- IBM's Words Matter Project
- ASWF Inclusive Language in Technology
- Society of Human Resources Management
- Public Relations Society of America
- The Center for Association Leadership
- Healthline Media Conscious Language Guide
- Cigna Diversity and Inclusion
- The United Nations
- National Police Association
- International Fire Chiefs Association



Principles of Inclusive Language

What is inclusion ?

Inclusion is an accepting environment.

Everyone is respected

Differences are applauded and appreciated.

Inclusion is an institutional or organizational culture and practice.

People with different backgrounds are accepted, welcomed, and treated with respect as equals.

Excellence in Inclusion

What does inclusion look like at its best?

According to AACandU (2005), excellence in inclusion includes a focus on both intellectual and social development.

Meaningful use of organizational resources to enhance student learning. An academic environment that challenges students to achieve academically

Every faculty member and student contributes to learning and development.

Recognize and appreciate the cultural differences learners bring to their own educational experience and the learning of other students.

Leverage diversity in a way that increases and enhances student and institutional development.

What does inclusion look like?

A sense of belonging

People feel respected and valued for who they are.

An actionable mind-set

People feel valued and important.

Buy in for the institution or organization's mission.

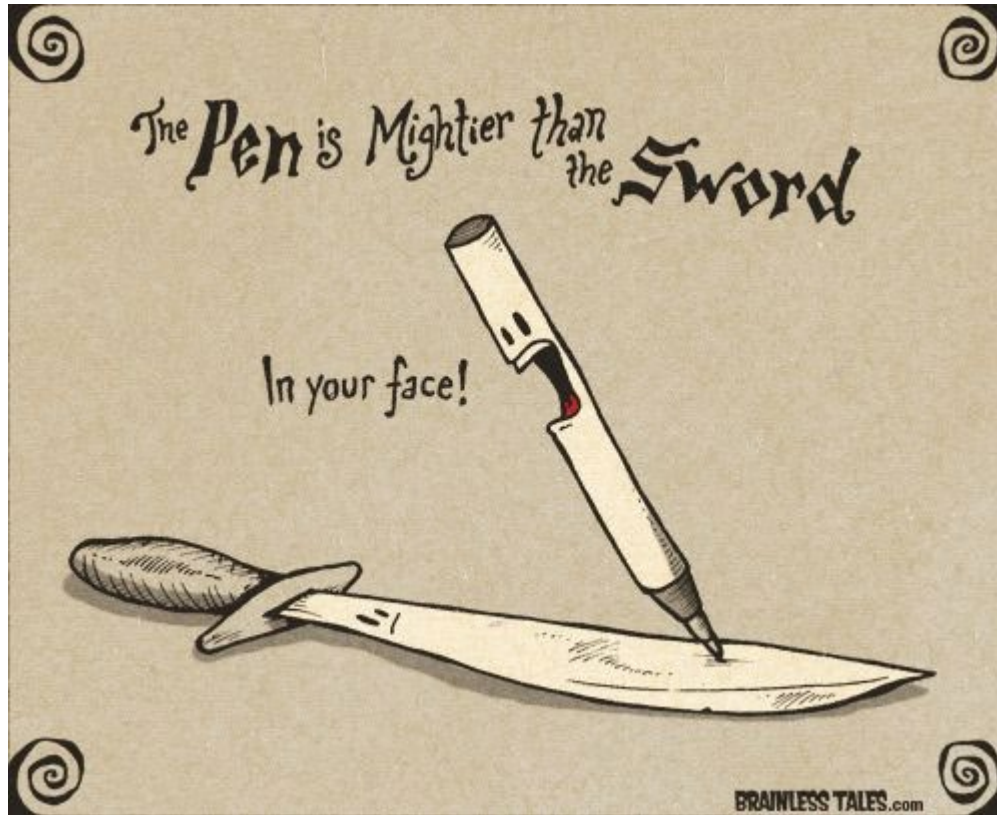
May contribute to higher performance and satisfaction.

Increase motivation from a sense of belonging.



Email and Electronic Communication

Email--The Power of Words



Email--Do As I Do

STUDENT LIFE

Writing Good Emails Despite Anger or Frustration: Think Before You Send



June 3, 2020 | Barbara Green, MA, MS

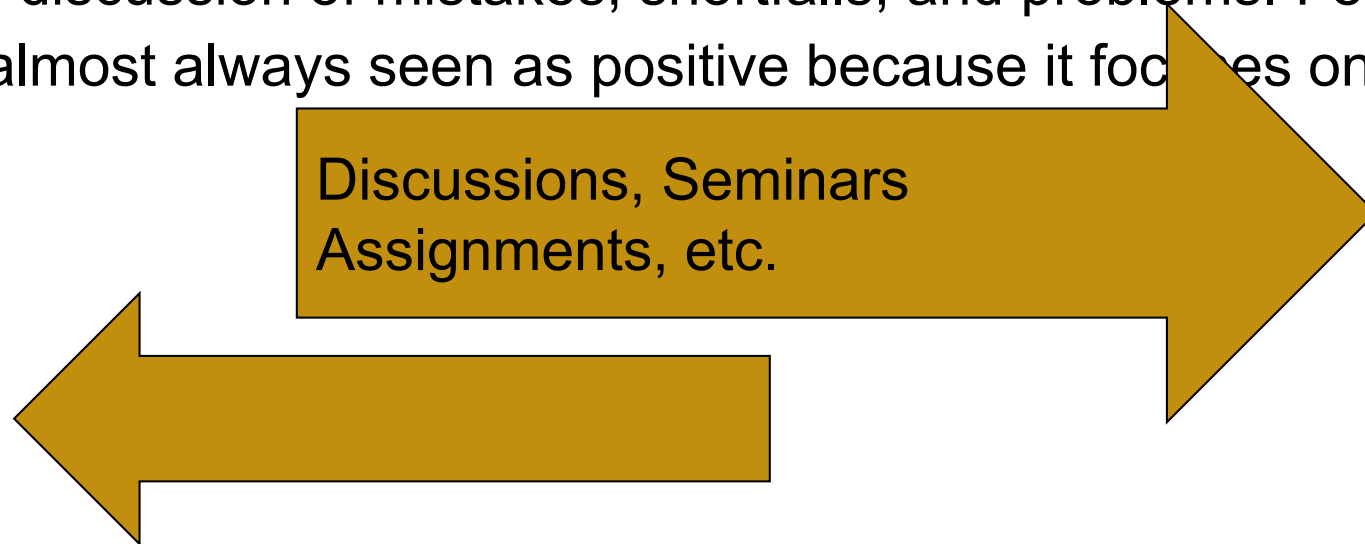
<https://www.purdueglobal.edu/blog/student-life/email-writing-skills-when-angry/>



To Feedback Or to FeedFORWARD--That is the Question

According to Goldsmith (2015):

It can be more productive to help people be “right,” than prove they were “wrong.” Negative feedback often becomes an exercise in “let me prove you were wrong.” This tends to produce defensiveness on the part of the receiver and discomfort on the part of the sender. Even constructively delivered feedback is often seen as negative, as it necessarily involves a discussion of mistakes, shortfalls, and problems. FeedForward, on the other hand, is almost always seen as positive because it focuses on solutions — not problems.





Discussion, Recap, Resources, and Questions

Discussion and Recap



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Questions?

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