

Does Plain English Matter?

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:8 August 2013

Abstract

This paper analyzes some new techniques in the field of communication skills by using Plain English. English is one of the world's most important languages. English has got its special significance in international, social, cultural as well as political activities. English continues to be the standard language in the world. It allows people to share and contribute from present to future, from local to global, from country to continent, etc. In today's business world, English is no longer viewed as a foreign language. It is the global means of communications. Most of the people need English for communication purpose like business administration, judiciary, media, medicine, science and technology etc. So, we have to improve the language skills like speaking, listening, reading and writing as much as we can. Plain English should, I believe become an accepted part of Plain dealing between consumers businessmen, between citizens and the state etc .

Key Words: Ye, Shalle, Playne, Englische, Plainness.

Introduction

Simplicity is the order of the day. There was the time when communication was full of clichés, unfamiliar words and weak phrases. But today technical and professional terms are used with precision and care. Therefore communication becomes effective as well as significant now-a-days.

What is Plain English?

First of all let's understand what is meant by Plain English? Is it anything more than a slogan? Plain English is a generic term for communication in English that emphasizes clarity, brevity, and the avoidance of technical language – particularly in relation to official government or business communication. Undoubtedly, Plain English is a woolly term since no formula can genuinely measure the Plainness of a document. I would like rather describe Plain English than define it.

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In my view, Plain English refers to “The writing and setting out of essential information in a way that gives a co-operative, motivated person a good chance of understanding it at first reading, and in the same sense that the writer meant it to be understood” (Cutts,4). This means pitching the language at a level of sophistication that suits the readers and using appropriate structure and layout to help them navigate through the document. The goal is to write in a way that is easily understood by the target audience: clear and straight-forward, appropriate to their reading skills and knowledge, free of wordiness, cliché and needless jargon. It often involves using native Germanic words instead of those derived from Latin and Greek .

Cicero argued, “When you wish to instruct, be brief; that men's minds take in quickly what you say, learn its lesson, and retain it faithfully. Every word that is unnecessary only pours over the side of a brimming mind.”(The Orator xxiii, 76-79). Cicero writes that the Plain style is not easy. While it may seem close to everyday speech, achieving the effect in formal discourse is a high and difficult art: "Plainness of style seems easy to imitate at first thought, but when attempted, nothing is more difficult."

Plainness

Plainness does not mean the absence of all ornaments, only the more obvious ones. Cicero recognizes what Aristotle had already pointed out, that a well-turned metaphor or simile can help us see a relation we had not recognized. In fact, he makes use of metaphor and simile to teach us what the Plain style is all about: “... although it is not full-blooded, it should nevertheless have some of the sap of life so that, though it lack great strength, it may be, so to speak, in sound health.... Just as some women are said to be handsomer when unadorned... so this Plain style gives pleasure when unembellished.... All noticeable pearls, as it were, will be excluded. Not even curling irons will be used. All cosmetics, artificial white and red, will be rejected. Only elegance and neatness will remain” (The Orator, xxiii, 76-79).

A Literary Tradition

Shakespeare parodied the pretentious style, as in the speeches of Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. The Plain or native style was, in fact, an entire literary tradition during the English Renaissance, from Skelton through Ben Jonson and including such poets as Barnabe Googe, George Gascoyne, Walter Raleigh, and perhaps the later work of Fulke

Greville. In addition to its purely linguistic Plainness, the Plain Style employed an emphatic, Pre-Petrarchan prosody (i.e. each syllable either clearly stressed or clearly unstressed).

Birth of Plain English

People have been using Plain English since a long time. Writers of 14th century made use of it. Geoffrey Chaucer says, “Which ye shalle here in playne Engliche” (Kanwar, I/1.9). From 17th Century, the Protestants tended to favour a simple style in their writing and speaking. They called it Plain English.

Role of Plain English

Plain English makes our interaction effective as well as clear. It is important that it receives of the message must be able to decode what we transmit. This is possible when we both i.e. sender as well as receiver, know symbols and words we use. We must be careful while we select words and the construction of sentences. A person, who knows between 2000 to 3000 English words, can easily communicate with others.

Below is given a table where some examples of the Plain alternatives for difficult words are given. No one will forbid from using them but judicious use of the alternatives will help us to be shorter and more conversational.

Don't use	Use
As consequence of	Because
Ascertain	Find out
Accede	Agree/Grant/Allow
Apprise	Tell or Inform
Alleviate	Ease/Reduce/Lessen
Attain	Reach
Attribute	Earmark
Accede	Allow/Agree/Grant
Additional	Extra/ More

Accustomed to	Used to
Accordingly	So
Acquaint yourself	Find out/Read
Acquaint yourself	Find out/Read
Advices	Instructions/Informations
Address	Deal with/Consider/Tackle
Aggregate	Total
Constitute	Form /Make
Calculate	Work out/Decide
Cease	Stop / End
Commence	Begin/Start
Consequently	So
Category	Group
Cognizant of	Know about/Aware of
Component	Part
Concerning	About
Deduct	Subtract/Take off/Take away
Deem	Consider/Treat As
Endvour	Attempt/Try
Due to the fact that	Because
Dwelling/Domicile	Home/Property
Desist	Stop
Despite the fact that	Because
Determine	Decide
Dispatch	Send
Discontinue	Stop
Disburse	Pay
Expenditure	Spending
Expiration	End
Envisage	Imagine
Entitlement	Right

Equitable	Fair
Erroneous	Wrong
Expedite	Speed up
Furnish	Provide
Facilitate	Help
Henceforth	From now on
Herewith	With this
Hypothecate	Earmark
If this is the case	If so
Impart	Pass on
Incidence	Rate of occurrence/how often
In lieu of	Instead of
In order to	So
Not more than(ten)	At least ten
Notwithstanding	Even If

Dose Plain English Work?

Research shows that documents carefully crafted in Plain English can improve reader's comprehension. In an American study of instructions given by word of mouth to juniors, the Plain versions improved comprehension by 14 % points, from 45% to 59% (Cutta, 15). In a further study the same instructions were given in both speech and writing. Juniors understood the Plain versions 'almost fully', said the researchers (Cutts, 15).

In the U.K, Plain English commission tested the Time Share Act (a law rewritten in Plain English) with 90% senior law students in 1994. Nine out of 10 preferred the Plain version to the language used in the Act. Performance also improved. On one key question, 94% got the correct answers when working with the rewritten version, while only 48% did so with the original language of the Act. These offer most convincing arguments in favour of the benefits of Plain English (Cutts, 15).

Some Major Guidelines for the Use of Plain English

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Let's focus on the implementation of certain guidelines concerning on different areas such as given below:

Style and Grammar

- Use an average sentence length 15 to 20 words in writing.
- Use words your readers are likely to understand.
- Use only as many as words you really need.
- Use active voice unless there is a good reason for using passive voice.
- Use clear, crisp, lively verbs to express the actions in your writing.
- Use vertical lists to break up complicated text.
- Use minimum cross-reference.

Preparing and Planning

- Plan before you write.

Organizing the Information

- Organize the information or material in such a way that helps reader to grasp the important information early and thoroughly.
- Organize the different way of setting your information.

Management of Writing

- Manage colleagues' writing carefully and considerately to boost their morale and effectiveness.

Plain English for Specific Purposes: e-mails, instructions and legal documents

To take much care with the simplicity of language while doing an e-mail.

To devote much effort to produce lucid and well-organized instructions.

To apply Plain- English techniques to legal documents such as insurance policies, car-hire agreements, laws and wills etc.

Layout

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To use clear layout to present your Plain words in an easily accessible.

Conclusion

Plain English expresses ideas clearly. It is easier to read and understand. On the other hand, Formal English is designed to impress the listener or reader. Plain English always makes a reader to understand clearly the information it carries. Hence we should not forget the real significance of Plain English or what is plain in language to us may not be plain in language to others. A language is like a rainbow having several colours, each merging into another. Similarly what is plain today may be difficult after a hundred years from now onwards because patterns of usage, readers' prior knowledge, and readers' expectations will all change over time.

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