

Now With New Improved Family-Therapy-Jargon-Generator

The reason I have been given the exhausting honour of editing an edition of the journal is because the Cragos like my straightforward style of writing. So I will resist the temptation to use this soapbox to rant and rave about one of my other hobbyhorses and concentrate on the question of simplicity of style.

Two American students recently wrote a simple computer program to generate gibberish — grammatical but meaningless sentences. They added a random assortment of computer-science jargon and submitted the result to the world conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics. The paper was duly accepted. It was sent to human reviewers but they apparently failed to make any comment, presumably feeling stupid because they could not understand it (*New Scientist*, 23 April 2005). This is not the first time such a hoax has slipped through to journal or conference level. It couldn't happen in family therapy, could it?

This news item particularly caught my eye as I had been thinking about writing a computerised Family-Therapy-Jargon-Generator. I probably won't, as my programming skills are crude and rusty. The words 'systemics', 'cybernetics' and 'informatics' could all be included, along with a large number of postmodernist, narrative, psychoanalytic and, of course, systems theory terms, without anyone feeling more queasy than usual.

My personal un-favourite word is 'epistemology'. Awkward enough, despite many repetitions, to slow down our reading pace, and with enough shades of meaning that it usually obscures more than it clarifies. Besides, when you say it with a Glasgow accent it sounds like the study of getting drunk.

It was largely this ugly and once-ubiquitous word that made me stop subscribing to this journal for a while somewhere in the 1990s. Maureen and Hugh Crago have since managed to make the journal readable again. How they managed this while remaining so patient and author-friendly is a mystery!

Perhaps I am arrogant, but I have always assumed that if something appears to be nonsense then it most likely is. This assumption is not normal, most people assume that anything containing a large number of convoluted sentences or very long words must be clever; perhaps not actually useful, but clever all the same. This phenomenon deserves a name so I have coined one: reverse floccinaucinihilipilification. I can't take credit (or blame) for 'flocci-nauci-nihili-pilifi-cation' as it does appear in good dictionaries meaning 'the action or habit of estimating something as worthless'. So the reverse is to

assume that something has meaning without evidence that this is actually the case. This assumption is common enough for some academics to base entire careers on it.

I also have a problem with *inging*. 'Inging' is another brand new jargon word of my own invention. It is not patented; you can use it if you like. Unlike many recent jargon words it does have a precise definition: 'To create a new and unnecessary word by adding an -ing suffix to a word previously lacking a grammatical -ing ending.' Inging would be a good example of itself but for the fact that 'ing' is not a word on its own. Inging is, however, a good example of bad-linguaging.

In this edition Brian Sullivan has a short 'prayer' for not taking theory too seriously, which you have no excuse for not reading, as we cut it down to only one page for those with short attention spans. This mischievous editorial is also a plea to not take ourselves too seriously. By coincidence, this theme, and that of simplicity in communication, is repeated in the interview with Russell Deal.

Disciplines such as family therapy, counselling, social work and *most* of psychology are dealing mainly with 'common sense' concepts involving behaviour, feelings, attitudes and human lives. Communication is central to our business, and hopefully we can communicate verbally with people of varying gender, age, ethnicity, intelligence, and so forth. Surely then we should be able to communicate with each other and even, dare I suggest, with the average educated layperson, without a fog of jargon and without endless repetition of the latest trendy clichés. These clichés seem to serve largely as a badge of membership in one club or other, or vaguely to the anarchic postmodernist nonclub, rather than adding information. I used to be postmodernist, post-structuralist and post-everything but I am post all that (if you work from home are you post-office?).

I hope you enjoy this edition of the journal. There is an awful lot more time and energy goes into each edition than I had realised! It is with great relief that I hand the reins (and whip) back to the incredible Cragos.

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Guest Editor

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