Acronyms, Idioms, And Slang – The Evolution Of The Essay, Research Paper

Acronyms, Idioms, and Slang: the Evolution of the English Language. Although the English language is only 1500 years old, it has evolvedat an incredible rate: so much so, that, at first glance, the average personin America today would find most Shakespearean literature confusing withoutthe aid of an Old-English dictionary or Cliff’s Notes. Yet Shakespear livedjust 300 years ago! Some are seeing this is a sign of the decline of theEnglish language, that people are becoming less and less literate. As R.Walker writes in his essay “Why English Needs Protecting,” “the moral andeconomic decline of Great Britain in the post-war era has been mirrored bya decline in the English language and literature.” I, however, disagree. Itseems to me that the point of language is to communicate to express someidea or exchange some form of information with someone else. In this sense,the English language seems, not necessarily to be improving or decaying,but optimizing becoming more efficient. It has been both said and observed that the technological evolutionof a society tends to grow exponentially rather than linearly. The same canalso be said of the English language. English is evolving on two levels:culturally and technologically. And both of these are unavoidable. Perhapsthe more noticeable of the two today is the technological evolution ofEnglish. When the current scope of a given language is insufficient todescribe a new concept, invention, or property, then there becomes anecessity to alter, combine, or create words to provide a needed definition. For example, the field of Astro-Physics has provided the English languagewith such new terms as pulsar, quasar, quark, black hole, photon, neutrino,positron etc. Similarly, our society has recently be inundated with amyriad of new terms from the field of Computer Science: motherboard, harddrive, Internet, megabyte, CD, IDE, SCSI, TCP/IP, WWW, HTTP, DMA, GUI andliterally hundreds of others acronyms this particular field is notoriousfor. While some of these terms, such as black hole and hard drive, are justa combination of pre-existing words, many of them are new words altogether. To me it seems clear that anything that serves to increase the academicvocabulary of a society should be welcomed, although not all would agree. For example, many have accused this trend of creating an acronym foreverything to be impersonal and confusing. And, while I agree that there isreally no need to abbreviate Kentucky Fried Chicken, it does become tiringto have to constantly say Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) or TransferControl Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) when they are both used sofrequently when dealing with computers on a network. Not only is it futilefor one to reject these inevitably new additions to our language, one woulddo oneself well to actually learn them. The cultural evolution of English is not as distinguishable, norseemingly as necessary, as the technological evolution of English, yet itexists nonetheless. It is on this level that the English language hasprimarily been accused of being in a state of decline, specifically by theincorporation of “slang” into mainstream language. But Webster’s Dictionarydefines slang as: 1: language peculiar to a particular group: as a: ARGOT b:JARGON 2: an informal nonstandard vocabulary composedtypically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words, andextravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech.

In this sense, much of what is commonly thought to be proper English can besaid to be slang. When the U.S. declared its independence from England, oneof the things scholars did was change the spelling of certain English words:colour was changed to color, theatre to theater, etc. In addition, Americanshave, over time, given new names for certain things: what we call a trunk(of a car), the English call a boot; what we call an apartment, the Englishcall a flat, etc. But because they have been in use for so long, they areno longer considered to be slang words. R. Walker writes, “if slang andjargon are fixed in the language, a process begun by their addition to thedictionary, it helps to make them official.” It seems then, that a word isslang only if it has not yet been accepted, that it is instead a candidatewhose initiation into the English language is determined by popular opinionand time. Slang in America today, while varying from region to region, has onemajor theme in common it is short. And while history has shown that mostof it will die never making official “word” status to be replaced by newslang words, some of it will stay. The word dis (short for disrespect), forexample, has become a popular word used by more than just Generation X.What’s interesting, however, is that even the nature of current everydayprose has begun to shorten: it is more direct and to the point. As anexample of older-style writing, Stephen Jay Gould, in his essay “Countersand Cable Cars,” writes: Consequently, in San Francisco this morning, I awoke beforesunrise in order to get my breakfast of Sears’s famous eighteenpancakes (marvel not, they’re very small) before the morningcrush of more amenable hours rendered the restaurant uninhabitableon Berra’s maxim. This piece, while cleverly phrased, has a wordiness to it that would rarelybe found in the average present-day essay. This is not because writers oftoday have smaller vocabularies than essayist of yesteryear (although theymight), but rather because there is a much simpler way of saying exactlywhat Gould said. Ever since my very first English class, I have been toldthat, as a writer, it is my job to get the reader’s attention, for I havesomething I wish them to read. Furthermore, as a writer, it is also my jobto communicate clearly to my audience. In this respect, why choose one wordthat is fairly uncommon (amenable) when other less ambiguous words could beused. This is not to say that writers should cater to the lowest commondenominator the everyday reader should still be held responsible fordeveloping a reasonable vocabulary. Nevertheless, when a writer uses morewords than are necessary to convey accurately his/her message, he/she hasis doing their message an injustice. Thus, in the writing of today therecan generally be seen a more direct, seemingly less ambiguous tone anddirection (save for the uneducated). The days when it was looked uponfavorably to write in great length and use as many “big” words as werepossible is over. That style, albeit elegant, does not suffice in thisfast-paced society. Acronyms, idioms, and slang are constantly in themaking, providing new, quicker ways for people to convey ideas and exchangeinformation. English, in the coming century, will inevitably come to focusmore on the actual message than the package it is delivered in. It followsthen, that what be developed in the children of the future, more thananything else, is their ability to think; to formulate a thought worthy ofsharing. For, no matter what shape the English language takes in comingyears, what will never change is the desire and need our of society tocommunicate.