

words words words



- technology is increasing the study of linguistics as it pertains to individuality
- we can apply modern technology to the writings of history's great minds
- words are powerful tools to excavate people's motivations



# lets do this

Look at the picture. How would you describe the picture to someone who couldn't see it? Try to describe the picture in a way that someone you didn't know could imagine exactly what it looks like just by your description.

Once you are ready to describe the object, begin writing. You will have 5 minutes to write your description of the picture. Try to write continuously about what you see. Do not use abbreviations and try your best to spell correctly. Once you begin, write about your thoughts and feelings as they occur to you. Don't stop, just write, write, write.

<http://www.secretlifeofpronouns.com/exercise/Bottle/>



# formality v immediacy

- immediacy
  - here and now
  - small words, present tense, lots of personal pronouns
- formality
  - stiff, humorless with a pinch of arrogance
  - big words
  - high rates of articles, nouns, numbers, prepositions
  - few I words, verbs, discrepancy words and common adverbs.

# formal writers

- more concerned with status and power
- less reflective
- drink and smoke less
- more mentally healthy
- less honest with self and others
- as we get older, we write more formally



# Steven Pinker

- Language is not just a window into human nature but a fistula: an open wound through which our innards are exposed to an infectious world. It's not surprising that we expect people to sheathe their words in politeness and innuendo and other forms of doublespeak.



# James Pennebaker

The Secret Life of  
Pronouns





# Twitter

- seems silly, until you join.
- [www.analyzewords.com](http://www.analyzewords.com)

“Suffering becomes beautiful when anyone bears great calamities with cheerfulness, not through insensibility but through greatness of mind.”

*–Aristotle*

- AN ACCIDENT!

A Happy Accident!

# and now for the green...

- why is it that telling about a traumatic event decreases the impact on a person's health?
- a research project in which Dr. Pennebaker added pronouns and articles, only because he could.
- and then he discovered that the shortest most forgettable words are the most revealing



# emotional writing

- boosts immune function
- drops blood pressure
- reduces feelings of depression
- elevates daily mood

# why does this work?

- does repeatedly experiencing trauma lessen its impact?
- does it help us move traumatic experience into the finished business column?
- is it the creation of a coherent story?

“He is richest who is content with the least, for content is the wealth of nature.”

*-Socrates*

# define terms

- pronouns: i, you, we & they
- articles: a, an, the
- prepositions: to, for, over



# more than one reason

- writing creates changes in
  - thinking patterns
  - emotional responses
  - brain activity
  - sleep and health behaviors
- it is an individualized effect



# LWIC

- linguistic inquiry and word count (luke)
- specially created word count program
- more information, more accurate

# function words

- the more the change in the use of function words, the more their health improved
- processed unconsciously
- social words!
  - I am placing it on the table.

# trauma writing results

- those who most benefited from the trauma writing exercise
- used more positive emotion words, but did use a moderate number of negative emotion words as well.
- an increase of cognitive words over the experimental period, most notably the small insignificant pronouns



“Bend and you will be whole.  
Curl and you will be straight.  
Keep empty and you will be filled.  
Grow old and you will be renewed”

*–The Tao Te Ching*

# do this....

- share your trauma
- if you are repeatedly telling the tale again and again with no change, or have written about it,
  - start over with writing and
    - how would a detached narrator tell it?
    - is there another way to describe what happened?



# three things

- accentuate the positive parts of the upheaval while acknowledging the negative ones
- construct a story over days of writing
- function words, use them

“This too shall pass.”

*–Peggy Etheridge, as far as I know*

“In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.”

*–Fred Rogers*

# the narcissistic I

- Most commonly used word in english language
- used more by followers and the honest
- highest in status uses these words the least. the lower in status, the more they use I
- drops in the use of 'I-words' are a powerful tell that a threat is about to be carried out (j.pennebaker)

# good grades

- high rates of articles and concrete nouns
- high rates of big words
- low rates of auxiliary and other verbs (especially present tense)
- low rates of personal and impersonal pronouns



\*#@\*\$#!)\*%\$@

- research indicates that cuss words help us bear pain better.
- really.
- so CUSS away

“I’m a nice person. Very down to earth.  
Drama-free. Hard worker. Caring. Honest.  
Sympathetic. Supportive. Intuitive. Inquisitive.  
Curious. I’m not superficial. I don’t keep  
superficial relationships. Got great friends and  
a good life.”

*–Juan, 27, male*

“The people who know me best consider me to be a warm-hearted, generous friend, independent, resourceful, but a bit stubborn at times.”

*–Mirah, 34, female*

# Mirah

- doesn't trust herself
- women use more function words, especially I words
- women use more auxiliary verbs and cognitive words
- formal thinker
- analytical thinker





# Juan

- men use more articles and nouns
- analytical thinker



# words indicate analytic thinking

- exclusives: but, without, except
- negations: no, not, never
- causal words: because, reason, effect
- insight words: realize, know, meaning
- tentative words: maybe, perhaps
- certainty: absolutely, always
- quantifiers: some, many, greater

# words indicate a storyteller

- high use of personal pronouns, especially third person pronouns
- past tense verbs and conjunctions
- especially with and together