A SURVEY OF THE OFFICIALESE AND THE ADVOCATE FOR PLAIN LANGUAGE USE

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ABSTRACT
The officialese in English which is the style of writing in the official proceedings in our work places has been found to contribute in no small measure to the snail speed development of our society. This was established through the delays in the movement of files in the offices, uneasy flow of communication and the different definitions by different scholars of the officialese. Some of these definitions include: coded, bookish, stylish, difficult, classic and ambiguous. Sources of these definitions are in the main paper from which this abstract is made. This paper therefore aims at advocating the use of plain language which ascribes human to officers before the public and also devoid of rough characteristics in the definitions above.

Keywords: Officialese, bureaucratic language, plain language, communication

INTRODUCTION
The officialese or civil service English or language of the administrator is one kind of language used in a work situation. It is one of the varieties of English which is referred to as “Register” since register is generally defined as language in situation. The situation in question is civil service in particular and all other official institutions. It dwells on the work of officialdom.

The Concept of Officialese
The officialese in English according to Anyanwu (1999:253-254) is the language of official communication in the government services which dwells on letter writing, memoranda, technical reports, directives, circulars, notices, minutes etc. The author says that the officialese connotes measured language that sometimes has a legal implication in view. It is also called cold, impersonal and bookish language. The Chambers Dictionary defines the officialese as “stilted wordy and stereotyped English alleged to be characteristics of letters and documents”. The New Websters Dictionary of the English language defines the officialese as ‘stilted’, long winded, often obscure language characteristics of government forms and documents. Oxford Dictionary states that the officialese pertains to documents full of confusing officialese. Macmillan Dictionary defines the officialese as derogatory term for language that sounds official. The definitions above are in the style of that offered for ‘journales’ by the Advanced Learners Dictionary, as “writing characteristics of bad journalism, careless, lasting or vulgar writing”. We shall therefore, make some analogous statements between the journalese and the officialese. In the first place, the above definitions are evaluative and therefore subjective instead of being descriptive and objective. They do not represent the perspective adopted in the present investigation which is to attempt a descriptive analysis of “officialese” in terms of a neutral interpretation. The term officialese derives from the term ‘official’ which is a corresponding term for civil service. Consequently, officialese will be construed in the first instance as the language associated with civil servants, just as journalese is the language associated with journalism. While writing on the concept of journalese, Crystal and Davy (1969) observe that to say that it is the language of newspaper writing does not clarify matters. This is because apart from news items we find such things as competition, advertising, reviews, editorials, imaginative
writings of various sorts and much more, all of which are not linguistically homogeneous but can be considered under different varieties of English. These observations are patently applicable to officialese.

Elements of Officialese
The officialese takes an established and edited body to operate; that is, there has to be a body like the civil service, public service, government parastatals and institutions to use register or officialese. The officers involved are the administrators whose duty it is to write and disseminate information, give directives, write reports, do draft, write memos, briefs etc. There are audience, responses and actions which could call for orientation, demonstration, reinforcement of orders, establishment of new business ventures, etc.

Characteristics of Officialese
The officialese has its diction, structure, audience and tone. The officialese is stilted and coded. It maintains a high level of politeness even as very serious matters are being treated. The diction of officialese depends on the particular motivation. According to Anyanwu (1999) the officialese utilizes standard structure of English in loose, periodic and mixed sentential styles. There is a greater interaction on presupposition, which is previous knowledge of event by interlocutors. The officialese exists to a great extent on pre-made policies, decisions and agreed upon messages. Remarkably of the characteristics is that bureaucratic actions are produced in the name of High Authority. So the language is highly dignified or stately.

There are four main characteristics of the officialese:
1. Matter-of-factness
2. Terseness
3. Objectivity
4. Dignity

The above characteristics of bureaucratic language have been described by some critics of this variety of language as: dry as dust, complicated, impersonal and traditional (Renkema 1977, 1981). The bureaucratic language is clustered with rough characteristics.

Uses of the Officialese
On the functions of officialese, J. Renkema (1981) states as follows:
That the officialese can refer to three different kinds of language, namely:

1. Legal language
2. Political language
3. Bureaucratic language

He says that it is not possible to make clear distinctions between these types of language use but that there are some differences in their functions.
The dominant function of legal language is to formulate judicial regulations in such a way that they are unambiguous. The communication function of legal language is diminished when someone finds loopholes in the law. Therefore legal language has to be very precise. Here, for example, precise is not the same thing as ‘easy to read’.

Political language, however, has quite different functions, which could be described with some simplification as trying to win an election on the one hand, and formulating compromises on the other hand. So political language has to be rather persuasive, wordy and diplomatic.

A dominant function of bureaucratic language is to be informative to many readers in explaining legal points to citizens and providing substantive resources for political discussions. So, this kind of language use has to be factual. The purpose of this language is to elicit action so it has to be rather concise without drawing attention to the language itself.

Furthermore, the legal points and data for political discussion are not products of personal feelings, but have to be seen as the output of an official body, rather than a group of people, hence the objectivity of the language. Some of the functions mentioned above could also apply to legal or even political language,
though they are not dominant in this kind of language use. This paper is concerned with bureaucratic language, otherwise called the officialese.

**Styles of Officialese**

Galina Goumovskaya

Official documents are written in a formal or matter-of-fact style of speech. The style of official documents or officialese as it is also called, is not homogeneous and is represented by the following sub-styles, or varieties as noted by Galina Goumovskaya (www.eng.i.september.ru2007039.htm):

1. The language of business documents,
2. The language of legal documents,
3. The language of diplomacy,
4. The language of military documents

Like other styles of language, this style has a definite communicative aim and accordingly has its own stylistic means.

Galina says that the main aim of this type of communication is to state the conditions binding two parties in an undertaking. These parties may be:

a) The state and the citizen,

b) A society and its members

c) Two or more enterprises or bodies (business correspondences or contracts);

d) Two or more governments (parts or treaties)

xe) A person in authority and a subordinate (orders, regulations, authoritative directions);

f) The board and the assembly or general meeting (due process acts, minutes), etc.

In other words, the aim of communication in this style of language is to reach agreement between two contracting parties. Even a protest against violations of statutes, contracts, regulations, etc, can also be regarded as a form by which a normal cooperation is sought on the basis of previously attained concordance. The most general function of officialese predetermines the peculiarities of the style. The most striking, though not the most essential feature, is a special system of click, terms and set expression by which each sub-style can easily be recognized; examples: I beg to inform; I beg to move; I second the motion; provisional agenda; the above mentioned; hereinafter named; on behalf of; private advisory; Dear Sir, we remain, your obedient servants etc. The vocabulary of the officialese is characterized not only by the use of special terminology but by the choice of lofty (bookish) words and phrases as illustrated thus: plausible (possible); to inform (to tell); to assist (to help); to cooperate (to work together); to promote (to help something develop); to secure (to make certain); inquire (to ask); to proceed (to go or to start); other varieties of the official language have their special nomenclature which is conspicuous in the text and therefore easily discernible. The common feature of all the styles is the use of abbreviations.

**Officialese and Plain Language**

There is a popular criticism of the language of official communication. Derogatory terms for this type of language include “Government-speak” and “Government directs” (Massie, 2008) and (Auld, 2008). Lobbying organizations criticize official language for the detrimental impact it has on people. The low income tax Reform Group (2009) campaigns against “badly expressed” information where the consequences include people underpaying tax and thus being subject to penalties. The criticisms also come from within government. The UK Cabinet Office (2003:12) describes people in official institutions as using “a particular style, that is opaque to the public”. The local Government Association, a membership organization for local government, publishes an annual list of words in official communication which it feels are impenetrable to the public and should not be used. Such words include; Percuniary, Remuneration, disciplinary action and so on.

The response to these concerns is long standing and officially accepted that official communication should be written in plain language. Sir Ernest Gowers, a senior civil servant, was commissioned by the Treasury in 1948 to write advice for officials on improving their language, titled Plain Words (Gowers,
1960:4). Cameron (1995:72) states that a plain language in official communication for the public has been “official policy” since this time and it is still preferred today. The Civil Service looks for plain language competence when it is recruiting without applying it at work. If you are considering a career in the government Economic Service you should note that individuals who cannot explain economics in plain language to non-economists are considered “impotent” (Civil Service, 2010). The UK Office of the Parliamentary Counsel’s guidance for legislative drafting, often considered the most obscure language that comes from official organizations, states that clarity is a principle of good drafting, and that clarity involves using plain language (Office of a Parliamentary Counsel, 2008:1). Yet plain language is not always used in official communication; it does not even seem to be the norm. Advocates of plain language note that, although they believe they have won the battle to convince people of the concept, plain language has not been embedded into everyday practice (Example Kimble, 1992:3); Plain English Campaign (2010b).

Plain language advocates say that the failure to embed plain language into official language lies with the writers. Eagleson (1991:370) states: “the hesitation or tardiness to practice plain English bespeaks a real problem with professionals”. Redish (1985:133) and Kimble (1992:22) both suggest a range of reasons relating to why writers of official communication do not change their ways such as habit, lack of knowledge of good models to follow, time and budget pressures. Boleszczuk (2009:10) similarly suggests that lawyers stick to legal language because that is whereby they feel comfortable. Interestingly, these arguments are similar to those reasons people give as to why others keep using non-standard varieties of spoken English though they are stigmatized as incorrect, “a lack of industry, intelligence and even common sense” (Niedzielski and Preston, 2000:102). From language attitudes research, we know that for the contrast between standard and non-standard spoken English, people may have more complex motivations to continue to use language varieties other than those they advocate for (Milroy and Gordon (2003:132). If we want to understand why official communication continues to be written instead of in officially accepted plain language, we need to look more closely at what people think about plain language.

The Plain Language

Plain language is essentially a type of prescription (Cameron, 1995:21). Plain language campaigners and official organizations state that official communication is better if it is plain. There is a remarkable consensus about what plain language is (Cameron, 1995:65). Similar advice can be found in a variety of different sources; key recommendations include write shorter sentences, use the active and not the passive voice, use vocabulary that your readers understand (example Cutts, 1986:9; Plain English Campaign).

Plain language is often associated with particular commercial organizations. In the UK perhaps the most well-known is the Plain English Campaign, founded in 1979 with a shredding of official documents in Parliament Square (Plain English Campaign, 2010a). There is also the Plain Language Commission, established by Martin Cutts in 1994, who had co-founded the Plain English Campaign (Plain Language Commission, 2010). Both have accreditation schemes, whereby organizations may pay to have documents or websites accessed and amended to meet the ‘crystal mark’ or ‘clear English standard’ for plain language. There is a certain amount of squabbling between these two organizations, Cuts for example has written articles about links between the Plain English Campaign’s awards and their commercial activities or about the failure of their accreditation scheme (Cutts, 2007a; Cutts, 2007b). The plain language idea has also been taken up by many official and commercial organizations – through using the accreditation schemes (Cutts, 2007a; Cutts, 2007b). The European Commission (2010) for example has its own English clear writing guide, containing plain language recommendation.

One movement that is not usually connected with plain language but perhaps should be is ‘easy-read’. Easy-read publications are designed originally for people with mild learning difficulties but are often also recommended for people whose first language is not English, or who have lower literacy skills (Transmedialink, http://www.transmedialink.co.uk/home-2/our-services/easy-read-2, retrieved 3 August 2010). Easy read documents often look very different from other official communications, plain or not,
because they have a specific layout: in particular, each idea in a text is accompanied by a picture designed to visualize the idea being expressed in words (K. International, 2008-10). The actual language of easy-read documents is however plain language the same recommendations are made as to how it should be written and easy-read guidelines draw on and refer to plain language guidelines (example Mencap, 2008, Information for all, 2004). Like plain language, easy-read seems to have been largely accepted by official organization, as evidenced by the publication of the party’s election manifestos for 2010 in easy-read. Unlike plain language it is conceptualized as an alternative format for official communications, not a replacement. Producing official easy-read documents is managed under a framework for translation, (K. International, 2008-10). As a whole, the format is seen as connected with a specific audience, people with learning difficulties, campaign for by charities representing that audience. It is interesting that the same plain language could appear in two different movements, perhaps our first indication that plain language can be related to a range of different social values. This area would be worth exploring in further detail, but the language of easy-read is essentially plain and for that reason has been included in this study without further comment.

The aims of plain language are not only more complex than they first appear, they are in service to broader social objectives. Plain language makes the organization change its language in order to communicate with the public (Maher, 1998:35). Opeibi (2008:2210) describes the use of plain language as where human interests take precedence. This is therefore, a particular construction of the role of official organization in society. Sir Ernest Gowers (1960:29) states that original guidance for officials to write plainly contains the maxim “Be short, be simple, be human”. Plain language is about making the Government more like the public, more human, rather than a faceless, distant institution. Gowers emphasises that writing in a friendly style is about officials being servants of the public (Gowers, 1960:197, 16). Current European Commission advise on clear writing explicitly recommends leaving out details of commission procedure (in the aim of conciseness) as this otherwise reinforces the image of the Commission “as a bureaucratic and distant institution” (European Commission, 2010:4). Plain language is not just about making official communication more comprehensible. It is also supposed to carry particular social connotations to construct officials as friendly, accessible and in service to the public. The motivations for plain language go beyond even this construction of a state in service to the public. It is about a public right to information. Cameron (1995:28) describes plain language as part of a democratic ideal that the public have a right to understand the information available from official institutions. There have been similar connections with plain language in other countries Piehl (2008:154) describes how in Finland the push for plain language in public institutions relates to an interest in achieving “democracy and social equality”. This ideology behind plain language may relate to the current incarnation of the plain language movement having arisen from the consumer movement revived interest in plain language started in the private sector under pressure from the concept of consumer rights (Redish, 1985:128; Eagleson, 1991:362). The Thatcher Government gave significant moment to recasting citizens as consumers of public services (Clarke et al, 2007:128). So the same concept of consumer rights could have carried over into plain language in the public sector. Cameron (1995:222) argues that plain language manipulates by claiming to be un-manipulative it presents itself as simply about getting a message across in a more understandable way, but in fact it is the instrument of particular social positions (Barnes, 106:109). An idea that plain language improves official communication is therefore an idea that it improves it in specific ways.

Throughout history plain language has represented itself as an idea about using language clearly but this has related to particular ideological positions. The seventeenth century plain system movements is largely motivated by scientific developments and the idea that language should provide clarity to communicate scientific discovery (Davis, 1999:77). Like today, plain language is presented to imply the best way to get the message across (Adolph, 1968:7). Today this actually carries broader ideals about values. The values however were different values of neutrality and precision, where today they are about accessibility and humanity. This may explain why seventeenth century plain style was actually very different from today’s plain language. It was “more nominal, more impersonal, more technical” (Adolph, 1968:248). These are things which plain language movements today explicitly denounce. In the 1930s George Orwell raised
concerns about unclear official language. There was a link to today’s position in that he saw official language as being distant to real usage and the real people, but the concern was that this was deliberately obscuring the message, official language being used to manipulate people (Milroy and Milroy, 1991:44).

In the 1930s, the core ideal behind pressure for plain language was honesty. Even today, a democratic ideal behind pressure for plain language is honesty. Today, a democratic ideal of accessibility is only part of the story. Plain language joins up with other movements for language change, such as calls for gender neutral language (Cuts, 1996). Plain language is not and never has been, just about understanding information. It has always been in service to broader aims.

CONCLUSION

The officialese has been surveyed by defining it from different scholars’ perspectives. The elements of officialese are also established and on this, the paper is able to find out that established and edited organizations, institutions, (political, legal and education), public and civil services use the form of officialese in written mode for communication purposes. Also, the characteristics of officialese, its functions and style are surveyed. The qualities of the officialese have been ex-rayed in this paper and an advocate made for simplicity and plainness of language use in the official places to carry the public along with the trends in the society. In fact the plain language adopts the maxims of Grice in his cooperative principles which emphasis; be short, be simple, be human, make the government more like the public language wise not autocratic master.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The definitions of the officialese are enough to make us think of joining the plain language advocate and practice it in work places including the university institutions. It is seriously important to adopt the style the maxims of Grice have advised earlier. Language is power, progress, development and also the only way of interaction that is word base.

REFERENCES