Violence hurts more than women

MUGWUMP

by Greg LeBlanc

Every 18 seconds, a woman is a victim of violence, says a recently released World Health Organization (WHO) report. That's a stunning and surprising statement, in more ways than one, and it also raises a lot of questions.

First, what is violence? The experts have a hard time pinning down the limits of psychological, sexual, or physical abuse. Does it begin with a punch, a push, or a nudge? Does it start with a threat, an insult, or a shout?

Secondly, although it is true that many women have seen violence in their lives, so have children, the elderly, and men. This is not a unidirectional problem with a simple solution.

Violence happens to all kinds of people: rich and poor, hetero and homosexual, both genders and all ages. It is caused by patriarchy, poverty, and/or psychological predisposition. And its too rarely reported or dealt with when it does happen.

But a few things are clear. Seldom is a stranger the source of violence.

Domestic violence is more common than people think, with most abusers being relatives or acquaintances of the victim. The home is not a sanctuary, and because of this it deeply affects families and especially children, making it a perpetuating problem. It is also far too widespread, even in the 'developed' world.

The WHO report gave some staggering figures on the rates of violence against women. In Canada, one fifth of women have suffered violence in their life, which is bad enough. Comparatively, nearly three in four Ethiopian women have experienced it. Though poverty is definitely a source of the difference, there is much more at play.

Cultural values, levels of education and the creation and enforcement of laws are also important. The independence of a woman is a factor, both economically and educationally, but views toward violence need to change. Many of the respondents to the WHO survey stated that a man is justified in resorting to violence under certain circumstances.

Obviously, that is a perspective that needs to change. But so is the view that violence is a problem faced mainly by women. Yes, women are not as physically strong as men and are especially vulnerable during pregnancy. Yet men are victims too.

The majority of studies and reports about violence carry within them the standard view that domestic violence is of a man against a woman or child, not questioning the underlying cultural assumption. Even the media usually treats violence against men by women as comical or non-threatening. Men suffer much violence and not just from other men; at home, a heated argument can lead to either side striking out. Men may also be more embarrassed to talk about it than women because of social stigmas.

Children and the elderly are also victims, and are especially vulnerable and have little way of protecting themselves. Family and caregivers who don't know how to deal with stress, discipline or authority will often turn to violence as an answer, thinking that spanking or shaking will not seriously hurt the victim.

Although society has come a long way to address domestic violence, we are still far from a solving this terrible problem.

The legal system needs to change; it cannot simply deal with a problem as individualistic as violence in a 'cookie cutter' way. Each case is different, and should be addressed and solved differently. The legal system should only administer justice after it takes the time to understand how and why violence happens, and from there see what repercussions are just.

Education is key in showing people that violence is not acceptable and that there are alternatives. Victims should also not accept violence. Although children have little to protect them, adults can report the incident, and make attempts to change or leave the relationship.

Economics and inequality need to be properly dealt with. Violence is more prevalent among the poor because of the overwhelming stress they feel by not being able to 'make ends meet.' Also, men need to treat women as equals, and women should expect nothing less.

Ultimately, violence is everyone's problem, so everyone has to work at solving it together. Only when we all agree that it is unacceptable, will we have violence beat.

December senate report: SOS & more

by your student Senators

The Fredericton Senate met last Tuesday, November 29. This was the first meeting for newly elected undergraduate Senator Louise Lockhart. It was marked by discussion of several key matters, including an update on UNB's finances, revisions to the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), and several academic policy revisions.

The new questions for the SOS are being finalized by a Senate committee. The survey we now use, both online and in paper format, was developed several decades ago. The revisions should make the survey more relevant to UNB's current course offerings. A new proposal would see one formative survey (to improve the course) conducted mid-term, and another summative survey (for instructor assessment) conducted at the end of the term. Do you think this is a good idea? How would you like to see the survey changed? Send us an email and let us know. In the meantime, don't forget to complete any online surveys you have for this term, by visiting http://sos.unb.ca. Today is the last day to complete them!

Dan Murray, UNB's VP Finance & Corporate Services, presented to Senate a report on UNB's finances. The report is online at http://www.unb.ca/vpfin/reports.html (choose "2005 Annual Report to the Senate"). It contains a good deal of information relating to UNB's tuition environment, enrolment management, spending priorities of the university, and lots more. Be sure to check it out; UNB is now beginning to enter the budget planning for next year.

Several academic policy changes are before the Senate Academic Policy & Procedures committee. Student Senators are looking for feedback on the following: currently, only one reading day is planned between the last day of classes and the first day of exams. University regulations require only one day, but do you think there should be a longer reading period to give you time to prepare for exams on the first day of the exam period? If so, let us know. We want to hear from you.

Do you want to learn more about Senate? Check out http://www.unb.ca/secretariat, the website for UNB's Secretariat. That office deals with both Senate and the Board of Governors, and the site can inform you about what each body deals with, how students are represented on them, and what matters are currently under consideration.

If you have comments on any other academic matter at UNB, or if you notice something that you would like to see changed, contact one of your Student Senators: Jill O'Reilly, SU VP Academic (academic@unb.ca); Melanie Henry (melanie.henry@unb.ca); Louise Lockhart (louise.lockhart@unb.ca); Nick Ouellette (nick.o@unb.ca); Erin Powe (erin.powe@unb.ca); and Lyle Skinner (lyle.skinner@unb.ca).

In defence of the English language

by Robyn Maler
The Fulcrum
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OTTAWA (CUP) -- English is the language of international media, commerce, and science. It has the fastest growing population of speakers, and its teachers are sought after in every corner of the globe. So why does everyone knock my native tongue?

I'm sick of the snide assertion that English is an inherently "easy" language to learn and its insulting implication: that its speakers are therefore less intelligent than speakers of a more "difficult" language, like Russian or German. Languages cannot be declared "easier" or "harder"—they are simply different.

All languages use syntax and semantics differently to express the same complex grammatical relations; English is no different.

English may superficially appear to have a simpler grammar because, for instance, it no longer uses inflections (which came from German) to mark tense, aspect and case. English also dropped distinctions of grammatical gender. And in case you were upset about that, note that in languages where grammatical gender persists, it not only adds nothing to the semantic content of nouns, it can also be confusingly random. For example, in German, the word "Mädchen" (girl) takes the neutral determiner, "das," instead of the feminine one, "die."

But English uses other tools. We now utterly depend on a tricky formula for auxiliaries and word order. And our preposition-heavy language—full of arbitrary and idiomatic word-choice—can trip up even the most seasoned second-language learner.

Moreover the density in English of phrasal verbs—like "put off" (procrastinate), "put away" (send to jail), "put down" (kill, insult), "put up" (provide overnight accommodation), and "put up with" (tolerate)—are not rule-based and therefore must be learned by rote.

Most of this boils down to the old philosophical debate over whether language influences the way we view the world or whether it is solely a vehicle for the communication of our observations.

And while neuroscience, linguistics and philosophy have a long way to go before deciding definitively how language is represented in the brain, which properties of language are universal, and whether language truly does shape the way we view the world, it's widely agreed that language learning is accomplished by innate neural mechanisms common to humans of every race.

Even if you don't buy into Chomskian theories of universal grammar, you must concede that babies, regardless of ethnic origin, are capable of learning the language they are exposed to.

Another favourite proclamation of alarmists is that English has been "tainted" by slang, neologisms, and poor pronunciation. But people have been decrying language change for hundreds of years, and yet no language has decayed into unintelligibility; language change simply reflects constant and invariably harmless shifts in pronunciation and cultural relevance of words.

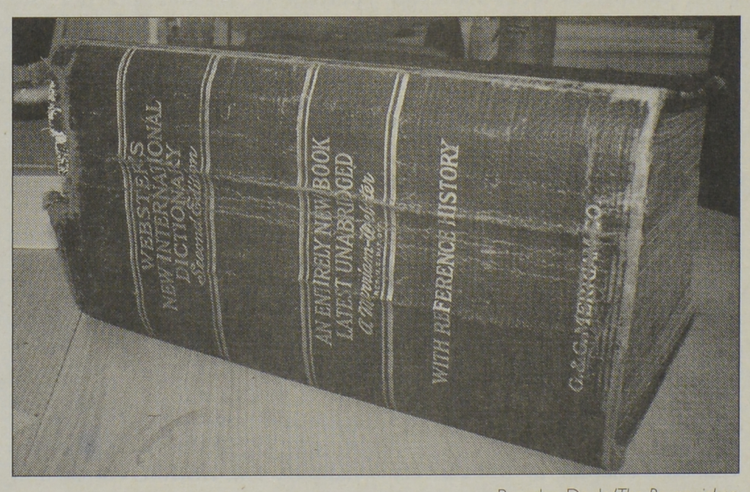
To put change in perspective, it helps to realize that French, Italian and Spanish—languages now considered beautiful and prestigious—were once the bastard children of Latin.

Unfortunately, what usually motivates people to make value judgments about a language or a dialect is the social status of its speakers. I have heard many people naively declare, for instance, that French is more "difficult" than English; but would they say the same if they were asked to compare Tony Blair's English with the French spoken by a rural Ontarian?

All so-called comparisons are heavily biased, if not governed, by the perceived prestige and social status of the speakers. They reflect a judgment about the level of education and intelligence of the language's speakers, rather than a judgment about the so-called difficulty of the language.

Why, then, do non-native speakers of English attempting to learn English seem to have higher success rates than do English native speakers attempting to learn a second language? The answer lies mostly in English's socio-economic benefits. The prospect of a better-paying job and more opportunities for social advancement strongly motivate many people from less-advantaged countries or cultures to learn English. And for millions of immigrants to Britain and North America, learning English is a prerequisite for employment and integration into the community.

So the next time someone tells you how "easy" English is, just smile. You belong to a language community with a rich and vibrant history, and you can use words like "google" and "douchebag." They're just jealous.



Brendan Doyle/*The Brunswickan*

You may not need a dictonary as hefty as this one when reading this article, but it couldn't hurt.

Canadian citizens bear electoral responsibility

Dear Editor:

Thank goodness, we are into an election. A moment to uphold our civic tradition to allow our voice heard in our great federal system. This is a rare opportunity given to us only so often to see that inefficient governing bodies be removed from the hallways of parliament. Now, I hope that people will go outside, put the cynicism away for an hour and drop a ballot in that coveted sealed box on election day.

We, the students, the electorate of tomorrow can only go so far as to educating our peers at Fredericton High School, by organizing and participating in Student Vote, a means of holding a mock election parallel to the real deal. However, it is the citizenry of today that must be active and question if the candidate deserves their vote. To make an informed choice based off the record of the individual and the party they stand behind.

To those who issue complaints about the corruption in all parties, I ask if that is really the case, especially if we keep changing them on a regular basis, every eight to 12 years or so. The issue is our complacency; when it comes to voting, not keeping politicians honest and not changing it up often enough. It's like an old Hindi proverb, when translated states that the servant can not steal without the master's consent.

Same in this case, the master, being the electorate has done a poor job keeping their public servants in line and as such end up complaining about bad treatment that we in some sense deserve. Let us remove this "sense of entitlement," (forgive the pun) and sense of accepting mismanagement. Think where the vote is going: does the party you choose have a record worth running on, or one plagued with scandal?

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The Brunswickan

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The Brunswickan, in its 139th year of publication, is Canada's Oldest Official Student Publication.

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We are a founding member of the Canadian University Press, and love it so. We are also members of U-Wire, a media exchange of university media throughout North America.

We publish weekly during the academic year with a circulation of 10,000.

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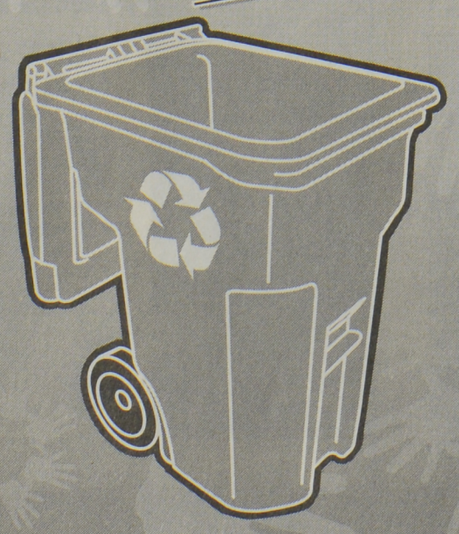
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