Introduction to Language and Technology

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**The Road to Reciprocity**

**Abstract:**

The roles that language and technology played in my life is and was relative to the way I communicated and expressed my thoughts with family, friends, and professional associates and acquaintances. I was always determined to gain knowledge through experiences and oral traditions. I learned the difference between being enlightened and experienced and the difference between retention and wisdom. This piece explores my journey through my first experiences with reading and writing, my mother’s influence on my education through the tradition of orality, my appreciation for the art of writing and my relationship with technology. I go on to discuss my acknowledgement for the ways technology granted me access to tons of information, allowed me to have an outlet for positive reinforcement and ways people can use it for ways to manipulate and deceive others. Finally, I point out the great respect I have for the bond between language and technology.

As far back as I can remember, I have always been fascinated with learning. As any child would be, I would imagine, I have always been curious about the world around me. I would always ask questions and when I didn't find the explanation logical enough, I asked more. Of course this would sometimes annoy my mother, but she would always explain to the best of her ability. Logic was very important to me because I never asked questions just to ask them. I've always asked questions in order to apply the information received to my own life. I was already searching for my purpose it seemed.

Before I fully learned how to read and write, I found myself being very elated by the thought of creation. I was interested in writing tools, but only truly understood their purpose when I went to school. I remember the day I learned how to write. My neighbor had come down with his two year-old son and showed my mother that his son was able to write his own name. My mother decided then and there that my sister and I would learn too. When I was around three years-old, my mother would make us write our names on paper. I didn't know how to hold the pencil on my own, so my mother would guide my small hands across the paper. I recall getting upset and frustrated when she wouldn't let me do it on my own. I did not have full control of my motor skills (well, when it came to writing anyway), and would often pull away from her grasp as she tried to teach me how to write. Eventually my mother let me attempt to write my name on my own. When I saw the letters flowing from my pencil and the idea that I was in control of this "art", the feeling was indescribable. I still have this feeling to this day.

While my mother was very involved in the early stages of my education, I wouldn’t say that we were a “traditional” family, though the definition of what a "traditional” family is has changed. She was a single mom and raised my sister and myself on her own while working two jobs to support us. She was very strict, but honestly, it wasn't too overbearing. We admired her positive spirit and since she knew we were watching, she led by example. She was well-invested in the tradition of orality. She believed in passing down knowledge and attempted to follow the ways of her own family. She was born and raised in The Bahamas and grew up on the island of Nassau, which is also the capital of the country. My mother’s parents took her and their other children to church every Sunday and instilled the teachings of the Christian faith in them. As the study of orality has proven, it indeed an apparatus of language and technology that is good for the soul. The language, in this case, was their unwavering faith in God, and the preservation of their spiritual vitality. Family was very important to my grandparents, and they believed it took a village to raise a child. My grandparents, especially my grandfather, always made sure that their children had respect for themselves, for others, and especially for the elders of the community. He was also known to stress the importance of quality education.

My grandmother was a housewife who raised nine children alongside my grandfather. She cooked, cleaned and took care of her children, which back then, was a common role for women to play at home. My grandfather owned a pool-cleaning business and many of his clients were the rich and famous citizens of The Bahamas. He worked hard at his job and brought money home for his family. They were comfortable with their roles and passed down their beliefs of a strong family unit to my mom and her siblings. My grandparents, if they were alive today, would credit a lot of their successes and will to persevere to their belief in God. To this day, my mother is a strong believer in Christianity and tries her best to live in a way that would make God pleased with her life. As I stated previously, orality is known to be linked with the preservation of one’s soul.

I assume my mother followed her dad’s footsteps because education was always something she emphasized. One thing she always recited was, "I can do a lot of things for my children, but I can't make them get an education. They would have to want and do that for themselves.” She valued it greatly, and because of this I valued it too. With her encouragement, I excelled in several areas of school. All throughout elementary school, I was placed in gifted classes up until high school where I was placed in advanced classes. I received several awards which included, "Student of the Year" and "Student of the Month". I've also received certificates for excellent progress in several subjects, mainly English, Spanish and social studies. I have no doubt in my mind that my mother would've been disappointed if I didn't accomplish a lot of the things I have. It's not that I was doing it for her, but I knew that it was something she would appreciate. It was my way of showing her that I listened and had respect for her approach on life.

Since education was the number one priority when I was growing up, television was a luxury. It definitely wasn’t something my mom left to raise her children. For the most part, the television was purely for entertainment, not an essential part a life as it has become for many people. Days we would come home from school, my mom made sure our homework was completed and our chores were done before we even considered turning on the television. I remember watching shows like *Family Matters,* and admiring the strong family values Carl and Harriette Winslow poured into their children. On the other hand, she allowed us to listen to music whenever we wanted to. I was introduced to a lot of 70s bands including The Chi-Lites, The Delfonics and The Stylistics. I envied the fact that those bands could sing with so much passion and emotion. I grew to love the pure and raw talent, especially since back then a lot of the music wasn’t completely remastered and digitized. Mom grew up in that era, so she would always play those bands at home. I especially enjoyed listening to music when I was doing chores or my homework. It calmed me and made the time spent doing assignments go by quickly. As an adult, music is still something I enjoy to get me through assignments and household chores. It has been permanently implemented into my domestic routines.

I spent a lot of time reading alone as a child. I quickly developed a large vocabulary. I would assume that reading as much as I did is what helped me. I spent hours upon hours reading all types of books and documents. I read manuals, guides, maps, textbooks, novels, biographies, auto-biographies, fiction, non-fiction and even the dictionary. I enjoyed reading *The Adventures of the Bailey School Kids,* by Debbie Dadey and Marcia Jones, *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, *Matilda* by Roald Dahl and many more. These books took me on adventures and for a while I could be outside of my element. I was an actress of sorts. For every lead character of a book, I imagined myself as them. I do believe that the secret to me developing an extensive vocabulary at a young age was the fact that I always kept my dictionary nearby. Whenever I read and came across a word I did not understand, I would immediately stop and find it in the dictionary. I would read the meaning several times and even look up synonyms to get a clearer understanding of the term in different contexts. I would then reread the passage and replace the unfamiliar word with one of the simpler synonyms. It would all make sense to me and I would then be able to apply the difficult word to my day-to-day writings and conversations.

As much as I respected the art of writing--especially when it came to some of my favorite books--when it came to speech or anything that involves oral communication, I honestly felt and still feel that I am not as proficient. When writing I feel much more confident and comfortable. I have always been nervous in front of large audiences and I sometimes found myself stumbling over words and even pronouncing some of them incorrectly. When you are speaking, there are many opportunities to forget significant details, your tone may be off, your confidence may seem low and people may even question your intellect. Writing, unlike speech, gives you the opportunity to utilize your skills to their fullest capacity, and even if there are significant details left out, you are given the opportunity and the time to go back and insert them. You may use words that may have otherwise slipped out of memory and explain relevant information with sufficient details. This helps greatly in that it doesn't make you come across as a person who doesn't know what they're talking about. You can embody confidence and intelligence through writing and connect with your audience on a higher plane.

As time went on, I worked constantly on becoming a good writer and I opened my own door to discovery and endless possibilities. When I was a pre-teen, my mother introduced myself and my sister to our first computer. It was both an exciting and intimidating experience for us. It was exciting because we knew that the computer, mainly the internet, held a world of possibilities and endless sources of information. It was intimidating because we didn't know where to start and what we would do with said information. Even though I had been working on my writing, the internet had way more information than I could have ever been able to produce or discover. At first, my mother told us that the computer would only be for assistance with school assignments and all other activities had to be monitored. For the first two years, we did just that, and then when my sister and I entered high school, we became aware of social media.

Social media, by way of the internet, exposed the good, the bad and the ugly of society. From braggers, to racists, "fronters" (people who put on an act for their audiences) and perverts, to the kind, caring and the helpful. Social media has brought many groups of people together who would have otherwise not been accessible to one another. It made communicating fairly easy and attainable to all types of people across the globe. In a way it has bridged the gap between communities and cultures. Many lives have been impacted negatively and positively due to social media. It uncovers the good people do and the bad, and whether we like it or not, we must admit that it changes our perspective of the world surrounding us. We learn a lot about other people's heritage and this can bring about discussions filled with knowledge and information. The internet allows us to follow up with current events, breaking news, political, economic, and social issues all while being able to discuss these things with various people from all walks of life.

For a while I used my social media pages to write creatively and share my pieces with other authors. Sometimes I get a thought and an inkling to write them down. I would just write. My thoughts would flow freely and I would just write. When I complete a writing, I post it on my page and tag some of my writer friends to see if they understood where I was coming from. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. At times I would have to explain what the focus of my writing was. I have revisited pieces that I have written months and even years ago and end up confused by what I read. This just shows to me that writing is indeed an art. It's a picture almost. Just how a camera or an artist captures an image in time, my mind captures thoughts and I write them down at that specific moment. I realize that my thoughts don't always have to make sense to me at all times, but what matters is that they once did.

While I did use social media for creative expression, I have realized that it can create a false sense of intelligence and pride. I thoroughly enjoy browsing news pages and reading the comment sections to see what people have to say about the articles. Online everyone is an expert. Everyone is a doctor, a judge a lawyer and a therapist. They seemingly always know what to say and oftentimes have a great explanation to back up their opinions. There is no doubt in my mind that the majority of these people are not wise, but merely recollecting information they once read on search engines such as Google. As Neil Postman described in his essay *The Judgement of Thamus*, King Thamus strongly believed that the technology of writing would give people a false sense of superiority. Thamus also believed that students who were taught this technology would just use reflection instead of using "internal resources". He felt as though people would just receive a lot of information without instruction, thus making them ignorant. This is exactly what I feel most people on social media rely on. They retain information, recite that same information and get it confused with wisdom. Naturally a lot of people wouldn’t doubt their credibility since we have come to trust technology more than our fellow man.

Since I’ve mentioned man putting more faith in technology than in each other, I would like to revisit another essay by Neil Postman entitled *From Tools to Technocracy*. In this essay Postman talks about technology taking precedence over systematic beliefs and world views. Postman mentioned a book by Frederick W. Taylor called *The Principles of Scientific Management*, where Taylor explains that human labor and thought is efficiency, but also that technical calculations are far more superior to human judgement. Taylor felt this way because humans are imperfect and subject to error. He felt that human judgement can be clouded by a lot of biases, vagueness and unnecessary complexity. Perhaps this is why people use the internet to paint a facade of who they really are and how they really think. They understand that in a world like ours, technology, for the moment, will alwaysappear to be the greater and more accurate force. The creator and has become the creation and the creation has become the creator.

I have come to understand that language and technology is an extremely important part of our lives. It gives us the ability to communicate with our audiences and express ourselves thoroughly, accurately and coherently. Language relates to the way we explicate our feelings towards social justices, the family structure and one of the main ways we keep the tradition of orality alive. Technology is the medium we use to emphasize our languages. I would say that there is a symbiotic relationship between both technology and language, and for this I respect the bond. Sometimes technology can take a front seat in the way we converse with one another and there are even times when we are fully dependent on it. I believe that there should be a healthy balance of traditional discourse and “enhanced” discourse. Regardless of what we may consider technology today, there was always, at some point in history, a time when language and technology co-existed and everything was seemingly fine.