APPENDIX.

AN ARGUMENT AND METHOD FOR DEEP ATTENTIVE READING

Today we are not encouraged to listen carefully, compassionately, or thoughtfully to each other. Our culture in the US doesn't provide many examples or opportunities to practice deep listening to those around us. Generally speaking, the way we interact on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, is a good example of this. We post something, collect "likes," and many call this being heard. But what does that act of being heard look and feel like to the listener? Do we even think in terms of *listening* when we think of those who like a social media post? What were the last three things you liked or interacted with on whatever social media platforms you use? Can you remember what those interactions were about? Are you sure? If you can't remember the details, or even the posts or tweets, then how can we say we've really listened to those messages, those people?

The title of this essay could also be called: *You can't skim a book if you want to really understand the argument*. A big reason for this is that a lot of what we tell each other may sound initially counter-intuitive, wrong, or opposed to what we've known to be true or correct. Others' ideas may just be hard to hear carefully because of what you already believe about, say, language and judgement and how strongly you feel about those beliefs. Our feelings about our beliefs often can get in the way of being open minded or listening carefully to others' ideas. I know, I work on this daily in my own life and teaching.

In fact, you may initially hear something else in my words than what I'm actually saying. For instance, when I say that standards of English when used in classrooms to grade are racist, what is your response? Do you think I'm saying that good grammar is racist? Many with particular views about language and race do, but I'm not saying that at all. These kinds of misunderstandings are quite natural, because you wouldn't believe what you do if you didn't have some good reasons or experiences to back up those ideas and because you likely have strong feelings about those beliefs. Therefore, if I said, "learning standard English in school is not vital to success in the business world," you might respond by disagreeing directly with that claim, too.

But why exactly are you disagreeing? Are you disagreeing because you've seen firsthand how Standard English is directly or indirectly vital to success in business settings? Have you really seen it? And if you have, how do you know that

your experiences are a good sample of all experiences in all business settings? How many business settings have you operated in that demonstrate this claim? What experiences do you have with English usage and business settings precisely? What experiences do you have, or have access to, that may actually disprove your ideas about the use of English in business settings? That is, can you imagine a world where success is not determined by how one uses a particular kind of English? Could we not be living in some version of that world?

In short, why do you think your experience and knowledge are enough to answer this kind of question? Why do we see what we want to see so often? Why is it so hard to see others' views and ideas of things as reasonable? The short answer is that we do a lot of fast thinking. Our judgements of many things, especially those that have emotions and other commitments of ours connected to them, are not made from facts. Well, they are always made from facts, but they are often just our *personal* facts. It's a mindbug[1] we all have. It's fast thinking.

OUR FAST THINKING AND MINDBUGS

We all do fast thinking all the time, much of the time out of necessity. We don't know enough about everything on which we have to make judgements and decisions, yet we still have decisions to make. The flaw in much of this reasoning, however, is that we usually don't have a lot of information to go on, and what we do have, we tend to overestimate its explanatory or supportive power. Numerous brain studies show that our brains use our initial beliefs and feelings about a topic to create a coherent story to back up our ideas about, say, the importance of learning "proper English." Psychology researchers have studied various versions of this judgement phenomenon. It's a system that our brains use to make fast judgements, ones that come to us quickly and copiously throughout each day.

One such judgement system is described by Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winning psychology professor from Princeton. In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman describes this judgement system as the "availability heuristic," or a system our brains use to make judgements about any number of things. Here's how he says it works: Our brains make decisions based on the information available to us or the information we can readily retrieve in our minds that relates to the question or problem at hand, and because this information is readily

1 I get this term, "mindbug," from chapter 1 of Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blind Spot*. In the chapter, the authors discuss visual mindbugs, memory mindbugs, and social mindbugs. Each mindbug is a different way for our brains to trick us or make flawed sense of complex data.

available to us, we bolster its strength as proof of our initial ideas—that is, having only this information in mind, we assume it is all we need to make a decision in the present case.

The availability heuristic reveals how our brains often substitute the question at hand with an easier, more accessible, question, one we are able to answer. So instead of answering, "how important is Standardized English to success in business settings?" Many of us answer a question like, "how important *do I see* Standardized English being in business settings?" The second question is more accessible to us, but it is not the same question initially asked.

Doing this substitution and thinking you have a good answer to a question like this is equivalent to turning on ESPN, watching several hours of sports programming about the NBA, then concluding that women do not play professional basketball. For all you know, women do not, but that's only because you don't have enough information in front of you. Your sample is limited and biased. There wasn't any coverage of the WNBA league when you watched, or you've never looked for it in the past.

The first question about Standardized English in business requires a lot more data to answer, as does the women and basketball question, and it is not wise to answer either question based solely on one's own experiences alone since the nature of the questions are broad-reaching and beg for a large amount of data that one person often cannot experience by themselves. Our own literacy narratives and what they might tell us are similar in nature. They are not what they too often appear to be. And so, you'd have to do a lot of research to find out the answer to questions like mine about the need or usefulness of a particular kind of English, or even questions such as: what did I learn about language in school, how did I learn it, and what does it tell me about myself and the world around me?

Now, technically speaking, the WNBA example is actually an illustration of what Kahneman identifies as the WYSIATI heuristic, another kind of fast thinking that causes errors in judgement. It is similar to the availability heuristic. Both mind bugs use limited information to make a decision. The WYSIATI or "What You See Is All There Is" heuristic occurs when you only take into account what you see, thinking mistakenly that what you see in front of you is all there is to consider when making the judgement you are currently trying to make.[2]

But we have more mindbugs. Our brains often look for information that confirms our initial hypothesis about our beliefs, like those around Standardized English and business settings. Some might call our initial beliefs—or the

2 Kahneman, 85–88.

ideas we search for evidence to confirm in our minds—*bias*, thus activating another system of judgement in our brains that leads to errors in judgement, "confirmation bias."[3] This typical judgement phenomenon has been researched extensively by psychology researchers. Shahram Heshmat, an emeritus associate professor from the University of Illinois at Springfield provides this coherent definition:

> Confirmation bias occurs from the direct influence of desire on beliefs. When people would like a certain idea or concept to be true, they end up believing it to be true. They are motivated by wishful thinking. This error leads the individual to stop gathering information when the evidence gathered so far confirms the views or prejudices one would like to be true.
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> Once we have formed a view, we embrace information that confirms that view while ignoring, or rejecting, information that casts doubt on it. Confirmation bias suggests that we don't perceive circumstances objectively. We pick out those bits of data that make us feel good because they confirm our prejudices. Thus, we may become prisoners of our assumptions.[4]

So not only do we need to slow down our thinking about what we believe yet have very little actual data to support, but we need to be on guard against confirmation bias, or the way our brains try to support our initial assumptions about certain ideas, such as our beliefs about language and the goodness of language standards, which in the process ignores other possible ideas, answers, and interpretations of our world and the people in it. We need to be careful that we don't just pick those details, ideas, and evidence that back up our initial ideas and ignore the details, ideas, and evidence that suggest contrary judgements and conclusions.

Confirmation bias and the availability and WYSIATI heuristics remind us to be careful and to slow down. We must be vigilant and not selectively hear what we want to hear. These judgement errors show us that we must be attentive to what we don't find initially appealing as we read something, like the text you

3 Kahneman, 80–81. For more about confirmation bias, see also Daniel Gilbert, "How Mental Systems Believe," *American Psychologist* 46, no. 2 (February 1991): 107–119, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.46.2.107. For a definition of confirmation bias, see Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. "confirmation bias," last updated October 9, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/science/confirmation-bias/additional-info#history.

4 Shahram Heshmat, "What Is Confirmation Bias," *Psychology Today*, April 23, 2015, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201504/what-is-confirmation-bias.

have in front of you, perhaps. Knowing how our minds are bugged is the first hurdle in being really attentive, the first hurdle to reading carefully and compassionately. It can also help us understand how our language and standards easily become racist.

As if these potholes in judgement weren't enough to guard against, we also have a lot at stake when it comes to language and arguments about language. If you are like most everyone else, you care about your identity. Part of who you are is how you talk, your language, and the particular system of symbols you use to communicate, make sense of the world, connect with others, and understand who you are. So, one might say that our beliefs about language are personal. They are emotionally charged. There is a lot at stake for each of us.

Our emotional responses, however, can get in the way of hearing other ideas carefully and attentively. Sometimes we call these emotional potholes in discussions or social settings "triggers"—that is, the ideas, words, and images that trigger a strong emotional response in some people. But it is usually never the trigger that is the problem. It's usually what made the trigger a trigger that is worth paying attention to.

Emotional triggers are actually helpful in attending to others more carefully and deeply. If we can notice our emotional responses to ideas, people, or their language, then we might better understand when our emotions halo onto the judgement we are making at the moment. This is called the "halo effect," and Kahneman discusses it in his book, too.[5] The halo effect occurs when people take their feelings (good, bad, or otherwise) about a person or idea and use them, usually unconsciously, to make a judgement on a new instance dealing with that person or idea.

In short, our previously charged emotions about a person or idea often affect our future judgements about that person or idea. This may be why many take it personally when I call standards for English racist. What they hear is me calling them racist. It feels like a personal attack, because the statement is easily wrapped up in other ideas that we each have stake in, that we care and feel deeply about. The idea of so-called "proper English" can be emotionally charged because our past emotions about people and ideas halo onto our present discussion.

What complicates many discussions, like those about race or language, are our attitudes and beliefs about race or language more generally. For instance, many linguists discuss our attitudes about language as "language ideology," or "a system of beliefs, assumptions, presuppositions, ideas, values, and attitudes

5 Kahneman, *Thinking*, 3–4.

about language."[6] Language ideology is a term used to identify something important about language: We all have beliefs (and feelings) about language, what it means to us, and what it signifies. When I use the word "ain't" in this book, some readers hear that as unintelligent or unschooled. Others don't. This is language ideology at work.

We use our ideas about language to make sense of language and other people. Our beliefs about language help us make judgements about what it means when we see or hear some people using language in particular ways and others using it in other ways. What makes discussions about language so difficult is that the topic of language and its standards are also wrapped up with emotionally-charged ideas and biases (prejudgements) that deal with the idea of language itself and other kinds of languages. These problems of fast thinking, mindbugs, and language ideologies are overlapping and make it hard for differently-minded people to engage compassionately and meaningfully with each other—that is, to mindfully attend to others' words.

If we all want to make the best decisions possible for us and those around us, then we need the most information possible. That means being open to other ideas and information. Being open minded is vital to healthy, good, and ethical decision making. This also means that we gotta do our research before we make decisions about things, and we have to deeply listen, attend to others' words. Thus, it is good for all of us to listen carefully, attentively, and compassionately to those with whom we may initially disagree, to be wary of how our emotions may be haloing onto our current thinking, to be careful that we do not simply confirm our original biases, and to search out information that helps us ask good questions and answer the real ones in front of us meaningfully and ethically—even if those answers make us uncomfortable.

DEEP ATTENTIVE READING

So when you find yourself feeling angry or irritated at others' words, say mine, you might pause and engage in a quick mental practice that can offer a way for you to separate what you know from what you feel, or to distinguish the details of my arguments from how they make you feel. That is, I think using an easy mindful reading practice, what I call *deep attentive reading*, can help you make sense of the ideas and concepts you encounter and your own reactions, biases,

6 Minglang Zhou, "Language Ideology and Language Order: Conflicts and Compromises in Colonial and Postcolonial Asia," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2017, no. 243 (2017): 100–101, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2016-0047.

and feelings about them, regardless of what conclusions you ultimately make about my argument or any argument you're reading.

What I'm proposing is one form of a common contemplative practice that can be found in various forms in a number of spiritual traditions on the planet, but I draw my inspiration from Christian and Buddhist traditions.[7] At those moments of concern or when you find yourself upset, angry, or even excited and joyful because of what you're reading—when you find yourself triggered—do the following:

1. Pause for at least ten seconds, and take three deep, slow breaths.
2. As you breathe, notice how you feel and where those feelings are located in your body.
3. Tell yourself: "I am feeling ____, but that feeling is separate from what I'm reading on the page."
4. Return to your reading.

This practice centers on the breath. It helps readers slow down, pause, notice our reactions to a text, locate those emotions, and separate them from our ideas in order to see both our emotions and ideas more clearly. This is not to suggest that our emotional responses are not important to our judgements; instead, it is to help us see when our emotions might be keeping us from understanding the fullness of our habits of language and the ways our emotions are part of our judgements. There is plenty of research and many cultural and spiritual traditions that use the breath to calm down, focus, and cultivate habits that help people do a range of things in mindful ways, ways that are self-compassionate. James Nestor's recent book, *Breath: The New Science of An Old Art*, offers some of that history and suggests practices that are worth considering.[8]

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7 For the Christian tradition of *lectio divina*, or "divine reading," see Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina - The Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2011); for Buddhist versions of contemplative practices that read or listen to the world and others, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step*; or Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987); for a range of contemplative practices applied to a range of disciplines in higher education, see Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2014); for a theoretical look at mediation and contemplative inquiry, see chapter seven of Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2009); for another version of a similar kind of deep attentive practice that is meant to address racial microaggressions in everyday life, see Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want To Talk About Race* (New York: Hachette Books, 2019), 175–176.

8 James Nestor, *Breath: The New Science of A Lost Art* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2020).

As you do this practice, do not try to figure out your feelings or emotions or even try to understand them too finely. Just notice them in a non-judgemental way. It is normal and okay to have whatever emotional reaction you do, but don't project the cause of those feelings away from you, although this is reflective work that you might do if you wish to pursue deeper thinking about these issues. For instance, if you wanted to do that deeper work, you might ask: Why do certain ideas, and even words, trigger me and make me so angry, upset, sad, or happy? Where did I get those ideas or information? How did I come to feel so strongly about such ideas or words? What makes the trigger a trigger for me here?

While this reflective work is important, it may be too much to do while also trying to hear and understand a text, like this book, carefully. If your purpose for reading something is to understand the argument on its own terms, then focus on trying to read and understand it rather than responding to all the ideas that may trigger you. That can come afterwards. Again, this is not easy reading. We don't usually practice listening to each other on the other's terms or listening to change ourselves. I often have a hard time doing this, but I find the pausing and noticing how I feel to be helpful and ultimately rewarding.

As you practice deep attentive reading, also resist the urge to make reasons for your emotional or other responses. That is, resist thinking things like: "Well, what he said here made me angry because . . ." or "I'm upset because he is wrong and isn't considering . . ." This kind of response mixes your intellectual response with your emotional one. It's easy at these moments to engage in mindbugs, that is, engage the availability or WYSIATI heuristics, confirmation bias, and the halo effect. To avoid them at this crucial mindful moment, resist making reasons for how you are responding to the text.

Try to view these emotions and thinking as if from a third-person perspective, or as if you are floating above them, just observing them happen. When I slow down my thinking, pause, and become more mindful of how I am feeling and what I am thinking, I become a more critical and compassionate reader, more able to engage meaningfully with what or who is in front of me.

We can never fully separate our emotions and thoughts, but if we want to understand an opposing argument, we have to be able to distinguish these two things from each other and work hard to not project them onto others and their words. Your anger is *your* anger, just as my anger is mine. It is my response to something I hear or see. And that's okay, but my anger, irritation, or emotions may have to do with other things than the strength of someone else's argument or the data they bring to bear on the question at hand.

I will have a very hard time knowing this without first pausing, noticing, and separating my feelings *about* what I hear from *what* is being said to me. I'm

sure we have all experienced times when we didn't like the truth presented to us because it was painful or it was costly or it made us realize that we were wrong or needed to change, yet it was the truth. It was only later when we had some distance from the initial contact with that truth that we were able to see that our emotional response was getting in the way of our acceptance of or engagement with the truth.

This also means you can have any kind of response possible to opposing ideas, people, or words. You don't have to be angry or upset. You might be curious or inquisitive. Disagreement does not have to mean a fight or a battle. It can mean a collaborative moment where we work together to understand each other. So, you might ask: How could someone who is trying hard to understand how language works and find ways toward a more peaceful world, someone who has done decades of research on this subject, come to these ideas in front of me? How can he think or be so different from me? You are not locked into your first emotional response, as important as it is to who you are, but it may not be necessary to who you might become.

More importantly, this reading practice is compassionate, critical, and difficult. Deep attentive reading is a practical way to read so that you can separate or detach your emotional responses to words and people from those words and people, at least long enough to hear the ideas distinctly. The practice is meant to help a reader attend deeply to other's words on the other person's terms, not yours, in order to discern what they are saying and what you are feeling about those ideas. This can help you better understand what they say and better understand your emotional responses to those ideas and words. This ultimately means you will better understand your own ideas, too.

Deep attentive reading is not asking you to ignore or put aside your emotional responses. Actually, it helps us pay attention to them, to get to know them, but not let them override or overly control our ability to sit compassionately with others' words, to attend to difficult ideas deeply on the other's terms. While all of our emotional reactions are human, valid, and normal, they can often shade or affect our intellectual responses to other's words and ideas. Deep attentive reading offers a way to pay attention to both.

Some might say that I'm saying that our emotions "get in the way" of our reasoning and logical natures, but that's only half true. By necessity, our emotions filter our reasoning and our logical responses. They give color or texture to our otherwise logical responses to things, the arguments we make about why we believe or judge things to be the way we see them. So we have both an emotional response and an intellectual one to our world for good reasons. And we can use both to help us make sense of things, to figure out the best, ethical, responsible, and sustainable answers to complex human problems.

I don't think it's wise to neglect our emotional responses to words, but it is important to distinguish between emotions and ideas. You might think of the practice of deep attentive reading as a way to separate how you feel about something you read from how you think about what you read in order to see how those two dimensions are related and might work together (or against each other).

It is in the separation of these two dimensions of our experience with others' ideas, words, and even bodies—one dimension that is mostly cognitive (what you think) and one mostly affective (how you feel)—that can help us make deeper sense of things, perhaps more compassionate sense of things. This kind of reading can help us treat others ethically and with the respect we all deserve as human beings. I know, this sounds like a weird way of reading, but it is only because our culture and society do not encourage us or offer many opportunities to pause consciously and notice our emotions and separate them from our ideas. Deep attentive reading can help you do this.