<u>The Literate Elite</u>
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     Technology has had a great influence on virtually every aspect of American life. One of the most obvious to me, as an educator, has been the affect that certain techno-tools have had on our language and the use of it. We hear the elderly generation bemoan the loss of the ability to write in cursive, but that is not due to technology. While it may be argued that the use of a typewriter or keyboard has eliminated the need to write, the underlying cause may be the lack of a perception that cursive writing is still needed.

     The affect of technology on language, however, goes much deeper and is progressing at an ever increasing rate. Beginning with reading on electronic devices, we can easily understand the obsolescence of the printed dictionary. When a word is encountered with which the reader is not familiar, all that the reader need do is to hover a mouse over the word and a definition pops up. The definition offered is limited to the proper variant for the context of the sentence, never addressing the multiple uses and meanings that the word may have.

     With the advent of the cell phone, it was a short hop to the addition of text messaging. Of course, the messaging App was equipped with spell-checking, and most of the corrections did not require approval by the typist, leading to an often hilarious insertion of an unintended word in the message itself. The user, however, had less of a struggle with spelling. Reading, however, was still required. The next advance was to add voice recognition to the text messaging App. The user didn't need to type the message at all. He just spoke into the microphone and the App would transmogrify it into text. It is well within reason that this function be moderately short-lived. In the near future, the spoken message will not be converted to text. Instead, an audio file of the message, as dictated, will be sent to the recipient, who will obviously revel in hearing the message spoken in the voice of the sender.

     Consider these advances in conjunction with the prevalence of instructional videos, whether they be in the classroom or a website. There is no longer a need to read an instruction manual on how to install a garbage disposal. Just watch the on-line video. Change a tire? Change spark plugs? Install a light fixture over your front door, or a ceiling fan in the living room? There's a video for that. Learn a history lesson? Organic Chemistry? Help with your Physics Homework? A quick search of the internet will

provide you what you need. Do you want to find out where the outlet mall is? There's no need to read a map. All that is necessary is punching in the name of the store on the App, and a computer voice will guide you there. With some systems, you don't even need to type in the name. Just say the name of the store and the computer lady will take you there.

Even in the literary world, technology is having its affect. Working on your term paper? Writing a book? You no longer need to type your manuscript. There are programs that will take your spoken word and translate it into print. There are other programs that will check your grammar. There are even programs to edit the content of your story, assuring proper flow and continuity.

Each of these convenient advances may be contributing to the unintended consequence of the loss of the ability to communicate in either writing or print.

Should the trend proceed along the current pathway, our population will become divided into those who can read and those who cannot. I posit that, because somewhere along the line, we need to acknowledge the fact that someone, somewhere, has to be the one entering that pop-up definition in the electronic reader. Someone has to be writing the script for the instructional video. Someone needs to be writing code for the voice-recognition and spell-checking software.

The obvious end-point is that we will have a population composed of the tech-dependent and the tech-dominant: The literate and the illiterate.

"So what?" You may ask. Life for the general population will be easier.

The answer to the question lies in the general human propensity for one group to become ostensibly superior to another. In the past, that elitist group has even created real barriers to those in the lower class who wish to transition to the elite class. Doing so maintains the status of the elite group. Furthermore, if the Literary Elite are the ones writing the explanations for everything, there will be the temptation to use that power to shape the socio-political views of the illiterate.

Remember, it was not that long ago that some states passed laws making it illegal and punishable by fines and jail time for someone to teach certain others to read and write.

Developing a class of the Literate Elite. dominating the illiterate masses, is not beyond conceivability. In truth, it is on the near horizon.