Don't Trust the Process(or)

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By Chase Coats

Let's be honest; we all want to fit in, and for a foreign writer, sometimes that can prove to be quite a challenge.

It should come as no surprise that writing is an area where non-native speakers seem to have the most anxiety.

Entering the business world, many wish they could hide their accent or any sign that English is their secondary language, and that's why software like Grammarly is appealing to so many!

Grammarly appeals to people who want their ideas to be heard, but don't want to be bothered with the nitpicking that can often make or break their writing or meaning. If you're unfamiliar with Grammarly, it's a program that prides itself on not just fixing minor mistakes, but improving one's writing as a whole by interacting with the user. Grammarly highlights detected errors and offers suggestions for corrections or substitutions, but ultimately it's up to the user to decide for themselves.

But does Grammarly allow someone still grappling with the language barrier the confidence to operate their software effectively?

What happens if what is highlighted goes beyond spelling and punctuation, and leans more towards the trickier laws of grammar or even word choice? For the non-native-speaker, a demographic that Grammarly boasts has benefitted from their services, Grammarly's suggestions can actually muddy up the voice in one's writing. To make matters worse, Medium.com reports that On average, Grammarly only finds 40% of errors in non-native-English.

The main area of concern lies in the program's thesaurus, which attempts to improve writers' word choice to make their work seem more eloquent. This would be one of the product's features that a foreign voice would hope to utilize, but reviews have shown that the suggested synonyms can either be archaic or just plain weird.

An example of this questionable word choice is best seen in Writing-Skills.com's review of Grammarly, where the word "plain" in "plain English" was the focal point. Rather than keeping the word "plain" (the software having deemed it too generic), Grammarly offered words like "basic" or "clear" as substitutions. For a foreign voice still trying to assimilate to a more Western way of speaking, these are the moments that defeat the whole purpose for using the software in the first place.

A writer must have the confidence to be able to know when Grammarly may have made a mistake, and for a non-native speaker already struggling with a transition between languages, this presents a real problem. As a product that claims to be a powerful tool for... foreign students...English language learners, and non-native-English-speaking professionals, Grammarly has the potential to fail those who truly need it most.