of this kind of usage like the word "defense." Since 1947, the US government has changed the name of the "Department of War" to "The Department of Defense". Thus the US government does not engage in war anymore, it "defends." Take the term "conservative." Conservative is supposed to be a good thing-small government, free enterprise and encouragement of individual initiative. A true conservative like Robert Taft would turn over in his grave to see what has been called "conservative" by most Republican administrations in recent times: controlling thought, controlling expression, attacking civil liberties, attacking individual rights and increasing the intervention of the state in the economy.

The use of euphemistic language-a tool to "protect" Americans from facing the truth-has gotten worse with every generation. A case in point: the term "Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)". It is a condition in combat when a fighting soldier's nervous system has reached its absolute peak and the soldier has flashbacks, nightmares and anxiety as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the war. In the First World War the condition was called shell-shocked. Simple, honest and direct language. Almost sounds like the gun themselves.

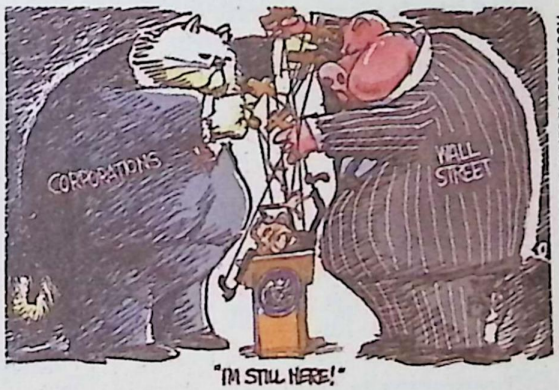
Then a whole generation went by and there came the Second World War. The condition was called battle fatigue. Four Syllables now, takes a little longer to say and doesn't seem to hurt as much.

Then in the Korean War, the very same condition was called operational exhaustion. It's eight syllables now and the humanity has completely been squeezed out of the phrase. Sounds like something that will happen to your car.

It was not enough. In the Vietnam War, the same condition was given the name Post-traumatic stress disorder. Still eight syllables but now a hyphen is added. And the pain is completely buried under jargon. "I bet you if we'd still be calling it shell-shock, some of those Vietnam veterans might have got the attention they needed at that time," said George Carlin, legendary American comedian, writer and social critic. But the soldiers who came back from the war never got it. "One of the reasons for that is the language that takes the life out of life," said Carlin.

Sometime during your lifetime sneakers became running shoes. Doesn't anyone walk wearing them? False teeth became dentures. Medicine became medication. The dump became the landfill. Used cars became pre-owned vehicles. The poor used to live in slums. The economically disadvantaged now occupy substandard housing in the inner cities. They are broke; they don't have 'a negative cash flow'. They are broke because management wanted to 'curtail redundancy in the human resources area' so they are no longer 'viable members of the workforce'. The CIA does not kill anymore it neutralises. The US military did not torture prisoners in Iraq, they used enhanced interrogation techniques. The Pentagon actually measured nuclear radiation in something they called "sunshine units" until public ridicule made them change it to Strontium Unit.

"People have been fooled by the system that if you change the name of the condition, you can actually change the condition," Carlin said ironically. "It has gotten so bad that I fear any day now they will call a rape victim an unwilling sperm recipient." No more deaf or blind people. They are hearing or visually impaired. No one is stupid anymore. They have a learning disorder. Or they are minimally exceptional. How would you like that to be told about your child?



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Noam Chomsky in an interview with David Barsamian said, "My book, *Pirates and Emperors*, takes its title from a rather nice story by St Augustine in his City of God. St Augustine describes a confrontation between King Alexander the Great and a pirate whom he caught. Alexander the Great asks the pirate, "How dare you molest the sea?" The pirate turns to Alexander the Great and says, "How dare you molest the whole world? I have a small boat, so I am called a thief and a pirate. You have a navy, so you're called an emperor." St Augustine concludes that the pirate's answer was elegant and excellent and that essentially tells the story. Retail terrorism directed against our interests is terrorism; wholesale terrorism carried out for our interests isn't terrorism."

This is by all means corruption of thought by language. "But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought," wrote Orwell. "A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation even among people who should and do know better... There is a long list of flyblown metaphors which could be got rid of if enough people would interest themselves in the job."

Well, if you are not worried about getting *a pink slip* from your editor, go right ahead. ■