

Pullum (1989) acknowledges the widespread dissemination within academia, especially to undergraduate students, of the factoid relating to Eskimos and their many words for snow, calling the narrative ‘piffle’. Pullum (1989) credits Laura Martin as the vanguard in attempting to dissipate the myth in the early 80s. The myth was apparently germinated in 1911, with a rather inoffensive comment about differences between languages in whether certain phrases are preferentially expressed derivationally or with atomic lexemes. The myth sparked, however, after Whorf’s repetition and exaggeration of Boas’ earlier 1911 comments. From there the myth snowballs, but the larger point is to realise that such factoids take on a life of their own, especially in the presence of scholarly laziness and irresponsibility, even after direct refutation.