

# Language and Its Constant Change

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## An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

## Languages Constantly Change

**Lesson:** Fluency in language influences interpersonal, business and international communication.

**Level:** Low to high

**Subjects:** English, Language Arts, Foreign Language

**Related Activity:** Business and Economics, Home Economics

Noam Chomsky in *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, relates that Galileo “regarded the discovery of a means to communicate our ‘most secret thoughts to any other person with 24 characters’ (Galileo, 1632/1661, end of first day) as the greatest of all human inventions.” In this guide, The Washington Post Newspaper In Education program and KidsPost takes a look at language and the work of linguists.

Activities in this guide encourage students to consider the importance of language in interpersonal communication and international exchange and as a career option. In legal and policy matters, the work of a linguist can help speakers to understand past usage and its impact on current connotation and denotation as seen in “A Linguist’s Alternative History of ‘Redskin.’” Through a study of etymology, words enrich vocabulary, give insight into past cultures and help students to make their connections through language.

Washington Post articles, suggested activities, reproducibles, and other resources are provided in this guide.

### Background

Ancient languages are kept alive today in the roots of words we use daily (“orange,” “anger,” “shampoo”) while indigenous languages (Hawaiian, Kuruk,

Abenaki and Mohawk, in the U.S., for example) are struggling to survive. European children learn English as well as several other languages beginning in elementary school. With the introduction of technology, travel and mass communication, languages undergo change just as in the days of the great migrations and waves of immigration, but at a faster pace.

Heinrich Schliemann, who unearthed the ancient city of Troy, was a polyglot who was fond of quoting Charles V: “With every new language one acquires a new life”; for by the knowledge of the language of a foreign country we are able to get acquainted with its literature, its manners and customs ...” (from *The Greek Treasure*). World travelers and foreign language teachers have agreed with this perspective and promoted language acquisition.

As the U.S. population is predicted to be 24 percent Hispanic by 2050, a new perspective on learning a not-so-foreign language faces American schools, businesses and government. Some businesses today seek bilingual employees, some employees are required to gain language fluency. Some schools embrace language as enrichment, while others employ a strict English-only policy.

The Senate on Feb. 17, 2005, endorsed an initiative to get Americans to speak more languages. Its resolution noted that only 9.3 percent of Americans speak both their native language and another language fluently, according to the Census Bureau, compared with 52.7 percent of Europeans. “Year of Languages,” has been

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## In the Know

### Culture

The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, practices and behavior that depends upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations; the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group

### Etymology

The origin and historical development of a word, based on its earliest known use and changes in form and meaning.

### International

Of, relating to, or affecting two or more nations

### Language

The words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community; the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another.

### Linguist

Speaker of several languages or adept learner of several languages; student of or expert in linguistics [Late 16th century. Latin *lingua* “tongue”]

### Linguistics

The scientific study of language; the humanistic study of language and literature

### Multilingual

Expressed in several languages; having the ability to use several languages

### Philology

Literary study or classical scholarship. [Middle English *philologie*, from Latin *philologia*, love of learning, from Greek *philologi*, from *philologos*, fond of learning or of words: *philo-*, love + *logos*, reason, speech]

### Polyglot

Speaking, reading, or writing knowledge of several languages; a book, especially a Bible, containing several versions of the same text in different languages; mixture or confusion of languages.

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coordinated by the Virginia-based American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, a national advocacy group for language teachers on all levels.

**Read About Language**

Give students “Languages Constantly Change to Fit Our Needs and Interests,” a KidsPost article, published Jan. 17, 2006. Questions that may be discussed include:

- If all people once spoke the same language, what factors influenced the development of separate languages?
- What are the advantages of a universal language?
- What would speakers of other languages, from Arabic to Zulu, lose if English became the required international language?
- Would we ever want to have one language for the world’s population?
- Give an example of the flexibility of languages.
- In what ways, do dialect and regional differences add to story telling and “personality” of a country?

**What Is a Linguist?**

Give students “Meet a Linguist” and “Language Trees.” What does a linguist do? How does the analogy to a tree help explain the different languages that exist?

You may use the illustration on the handout and a copy of the Rosetta Stone to illustrate an aspect of the linguist’s work. When the same phrase is seen in different scripts can any connection be seen between the languages? How can having the same phrases or sentences in different languages help to decipher a language? When French soldiers found a stone tablet

in Egypt with three scripts, scientists had a key: The same message was written in hieroglyphics (used for important documents), demotic (the common script of Egypt) and Greek (the language of the rulers of Egypt during that period).

**Consider Etymology**

Two reproducibles based in etymology are provided: “Get to the Root” suggests a research of etymology and definition and consideration of the present connotation of words. The Word Study “An Egg-cellent Menu” introduces the etymology of words related to food.

**Career Speak**

Discuss with students the ways in which knowing more than one language helps a person professionally and personally. Knowing foreign languages can help one to get an interesting job. Industries in which knowledge of foreign languages are beneficial include advertising, marketing and finance, teaching, health care, real estate, services and tourism. International organizations and government jobs also need people who are fluent in languages. The need for more familiarity with other languages was demonstrated after Sept. 11, 2001. The Justice Department reported a backlog of documents and recordings to be translated related to terrorism investigations.

Students are likely to meet people who speak other languages at school, in their community and in media. They may one day meet foreign visitors, travel themselves, or even study abroad. Knowing a foreign language enables people to make the most of such opportunities. Foreign language study also

**The Latest Word**

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/languages/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/languages/)  
**News and Audio in 33 Languages**

BBC World Service provides the news in 33 languages, including Russian, Pashto, Urdu and Vietnamese. News alerts for breaking news as well as archived stories.

[www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/)  
**Today’s Front Page**

Front pages from every state and 38 countries available daily online. Go to the Archived Pages to compare front page coverage of a breaking news event in U.S. and international newspapers.

<http://sapir.ling.yale.edu/~elf/>  
**Endangered Language Fund**

The Endangered Language Fund sponsors scientific study of endangered languages, supports native efforts to maintain endangered languages and shares the texts of the native culture, prepares videotaped instruction in the language and supports next generations learning the language.

[www.asu.edu/clas/history/h-amindian/languagearticles.htm](http://www.asu.edu/clas/history/h-amindian/languagearticles.htm)

**Indigenous Language Articles & Papers**

Links to articles and research include L.A. Times science writer’s article, “The Impassioned Fight to Save Dying Languages”

[www.siliconvalleyslang.com/](http://www.siliconvalleyslang.com/)  
**Silicon Valley Slang**

Source of computer vernacular, most originating in California

[www.cms.mit.edu/games/education](http://www.cms.mit.edu/games/education)  
**La Periodista: The Photojournalist**

A MIT and Microsoft R&D project to teach Spanish to college students

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acquaints students with the geography, history, customs, and traditions of other countries.

Give students “Could You Repeat That, S’il vous Plait?” This activity is meant for more mature students. The reproducible, composed of excerpts from various sources, presents air disasters and recent policy changes. Ask students for reasons for English being the international language of aviation and the hazards of a limited knowledge of languages.

Teachers may use the excerpts to discuss the impact of globalization.

### What Does “Suspension” Mean?

Washington Post reporter T.R. Reid in this Dec. 2005 article relates the suspension of 16-year-old Zach Rubio from his Kansas City school. Before giving students the article to read, list the reasons a student may be suspended from your school. For what purpose does a school system suspend students? The following questions may be discussed after reading the article:

- Why was Zach Rubio suspended? Should he have been suspended?
- For what percent of the U.S. school-age population is Spanish the native language?
- What is bilingual education? What are the points made by advocates? By opponents? What do students believe is the best policy?
- Give examples of linguistic “collisions.” In what ways do these influence the actions of school systems, advertising and media?
- Did Lorenzo Rubio’s U.S. citizenship surprise students? Did this information change their view of the family situation and potential legal action?

### Linguistics and “Redskin”

Words to review before reading this article include “pejorative,” “judicious,” “agonistic,” “disparage,” “connota-

tion,” and “humiliating.” Smithsonian Institution senior linguist Ives Goddard (See “Meet the Linguist”) researched the history of the term “redskin.” Ask students to summarize the research findings of his linguistic search, to compare and contrast Goddard’s findings with those of Native American writer Suzan Shown Harjo, and to take a position on the issue of maintaining “Redskins” as the name of the Washington, D.C., football franchise.

### Other Activities

1. Should English be the second language taught to all non-native speakers? Before answering the question, provide an historic perspective on other languages that were once the prominent language — French and German, especially important in the academic and political worlds, or if one was to be considered an intellectual, Greek and Latin. If time allowed, groups could research the ascent and decline of these languages.

2. Have students research to find the five to ten languages spoken by the most people. Compare and contrast the different sources to determine which language is spoken by the most people. Complications in finding the answer:

- Who is doing the counting and how it is done in remote areas?
- Are native speakers only counted or native and secondary speakers?
- If the people who speak a language live in isolation are their numbers as significant as those speakers who have international or wide exposure?
- Do dialects and variations count as one or several languages, especially if the dialect cannot be easily understood by speakers of the other dialect (for example, the following Sino-Tibetan languages all use Chinese characters: Mandarin, Wu, Cantonese, Min Nan, Jinyu, Hakka and Xiang)?
- To what extent do political divisions influence count (for example,

Serbo-Croatian, depending on a study’s ethnic or political affiliation, may be one language or Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian languages)?

3. Observe and record the structure of the speech of a young child who is more or less just learning to talk. This may be a little sister or brother, other relative or neighbor. Use a tape recorder and/or written notes. Observe and record for at least one week and note what changes take place, if any. Are the changes consistent or not? Be specific.

4. Notice how body language varies from person to person; yet it tends to repeat itself in families and cultures. See if students can recognize certain ones in their families or cultural group and make a note of them. Students might interview family members about body language of older or deceased relatives. Are there family stories centered on mannerisms or speech?

5. Invite someone who has lived in Afghanistan, Iraq or another country to share the experience of acquiring another language and what foreign words they think will become part of the English language.



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# Languages Constantly Change to Fit Our Needs and Interests

Language might seem pretty easy. You've spoken it since you were about a year old, and long ago you reached the point where you could talk even as you think, or even before you think, which sometimes is a bad idea.

But language is really complicated, and every language is as complicated as any other. You may already know this if you are studying another language, but, if not, you'll soon realize it when you get to your first Spanish class.

That's where you'll learn, for instance, that "no problema" is not Spanish. It's a Spanish-like expression that English speakers like to use,

so English has to be flexible enough to pick it up and make it part of the language. Oops, all of a sudden English is a different language.

This happens all the time. Every day you're adding new words, new sentences and new expressions to describe everything from the Internet — "blog," "spam" — or your favorite story — "quidditch," "dementor." And, of course, you have to be able to talk to your friends: "Dude, I'm sooooo not into studying for this test. What a bummer."

Most linguists (scientists who study language) think that at one time all

humans spoke the same language. As people spread out, languages adapted to local conditions. For example, Brazilians didn't need a word for snow, and Norwegians didn't need a word for bananas. And until the last 200 years people in Norway and Brazil rarely spoke with one another.

So having different languages is natural. Some, like German and English, are closely related; others, including Navajo and English, are not. Figuring out how languages match up with one another

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— words, grammar, sounds — is one of the things linguists do.

For a long time, people have tried to give the world a universal language because they think it would help international understanding if everyone could talk to each other. The most famous attempt is a language called Esperanto, invented in the 19th century. It has dedicated followers but has never really caught on.

Yet linguists will point out that instant communications and rapid transportation might be doing today what scholars have never

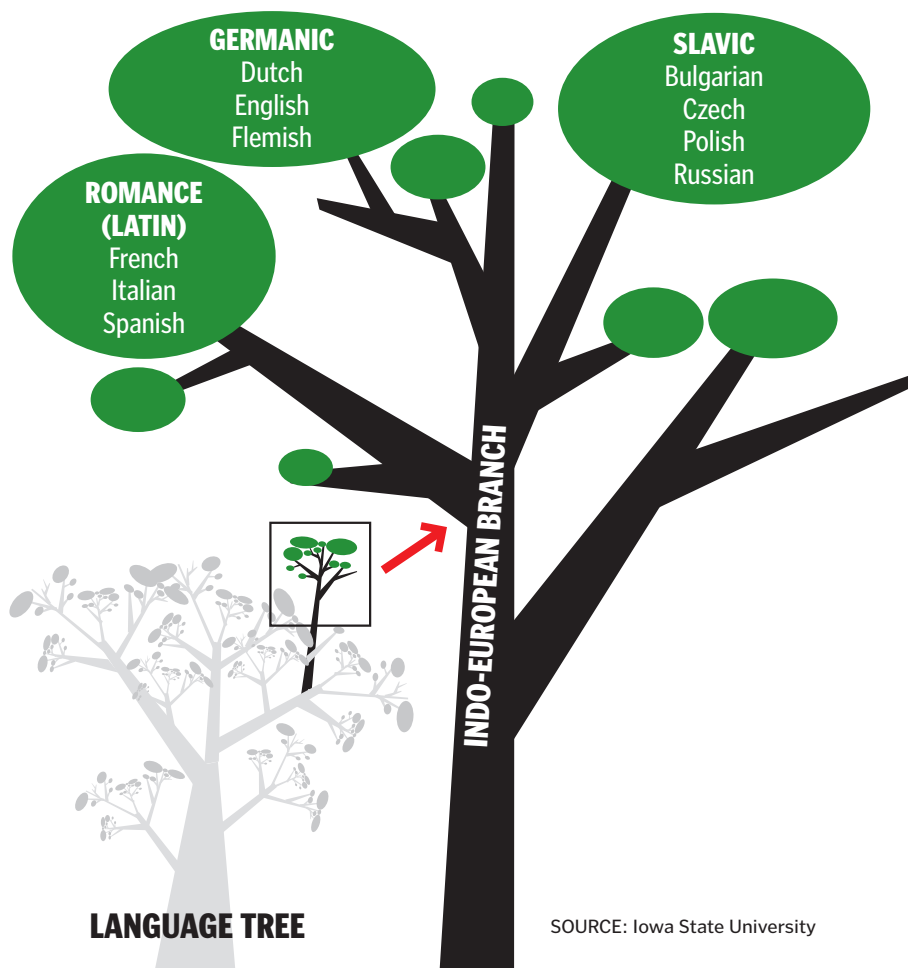
accomplished. Somewhere in the world, one language that's better for getting jobs or going to school overwhelms another one every few weeks, and the losing language dies.

You may not notice this in the United States, because English is the world's second most-spoken language (after Chinese). But it is becoming harder for other languages — native American languages, for instance — to survive.

So is English going to be the universal language? Maybe. Is this a good idea? What do you think?

— Guy Gugliotta

There have been many language branches throughout history. Here are some of the languages in the Indo-European branch.



## Web Words

[www.sciencefriday.com/pages/1995/Sep/hour2\\_090895.html](http://www.sciencefriday.com/pages/1995/Sep/hour2_090895.html)  
**Science Friday**

In "Origins of Language," broadcast Sept. 8, 1995, linguistics professors trace the history of language: "Some scientists say that language is the very thing that makes us human. But when did we first start talking and how did language evolve over the millennia into the diverse form of communication it is today?"

[www.pbs.org/speak/education/curriculum/high/aae/](http://www.pbs.org/speak/education/curriculum/high/aae/)  
**African American English**  
History lesson on PBS site includes video, discussion questions and background information.

[www.yourdictionary.com/library/experts.html](http://www.yourdictionary.com/library/experts.html)  
**Linguistic Wonders Series**  
Short, interesting stories of the etymologies of common words. Check out Dr. Language and Word of the Day on this site.

[worldwidewords.org/index.htm](http://worldwidewords.org/index.htm)  
**World Wide Words**  
A Cambridge University grad with a journalism background, Michael Quinion writes about etymology and answers readers' questions about usage of English words from a British perspective. He has written entries for the *Oxford English Dictionary* and several books including *Ballyhoo*, *Buckaroo*, and *Spuds*, published by the Smithsonian Institution Press.

[www.history.com](http://www.history.com)  
**The History Channel**  
Resources on this site include encyclopedias of English, American Indian, Semitic, Latin, Japanese and Hamito-Semitic languages.

# Get to the Root

Although most English words are based in Greek and Latin roots, other languages have generously contributed to the American vocabulary. During the Viking invasions of England in the ninth century, Norse words became part of the vernacular. Similarly, Arabic words became part of Spanish and French lexicons in the Moorish period and French colonialism. The English were further influenced by Indian culture and Hindi terms during their colonial presence in India. Explorers and settlers in North America, Australia and New Zealand learned words for the new plants, animals and places they discovered. Italians and Slavic immigrants contributed culture and musical and culinary words that we think of as American as pizza pie.

The following English words originated in other languages. Find the etymology and definition of each word.

## ETYMOLOGY AND DEFINITION

1. Algebra	
2. Anger	
3. Assassin	
4. Babel	
5. Broccoli	
6. Clone	
7. Cummerbund	
8. Dingoes	
9. Egg	
10. Eskimo	
11. Maestro	
12. Mississippi	
13. Opera	
14. Persecute	
15. Piano	
16. Polka	
17. Polyglot	
18. Robot	
19. Saber	
20. Shampoo	
21. Ski	
22. Spaghetti	
23. Staple	
24. Tobacco	
25. Vermicelli	

On the back of this paper, answer the following:

- In what way does each word enrich the vocabulary of English speakers?
- How does the current definition differ from the etymology?
- What connotation does the word now have?



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## Word Study

### *An Egg-cellent Menu*

In a country that recognizes National Potato Chip Day and Pickle Week, it is not surprising to find a veritable feast of words associated with food.

From Arabic, English got not only algebra and mosque, but also orange (*naranj*) and lemon (*laimon*). If not for Italian, children might not be told to eat their broccoli ("sprouts") and to finish their spaghetti ("small cord") and macaroni ("mixture of flour, cheese and butter").

As the Romans knew, health and pleasure were to be found in consuming produce fresh from the field. The root of fruit is the Latin word *fructus*, meaning "enjoyment" and the root of vegetable is the Latin verb *vegetare*, meaning "to enliven, quicken."

Anglo Saxon words provide us the main course of a meal. Meat was *mete* and fish was *fisc*.

Conquering armies impose their rules and bring new words as well as their culture. The Viking invasion of England brought the Norse word "egg." When someone figured out that adding cheese (*caseus* in Latin) and beating it together before putting the mixture over a fire yielded a tasty dish, an omelette (from the French word *amelette* that came from the Latin *lamella*, meaning "small plate") was born.

The French nobles who ruled England after the Norman Conquest already had a developed sense of the superiority of their cuisine. This attitude meant that the animal out in the field would retain its Anglo Saxon name, but once it was cooked and placed on the table before them, the French term would be used. The Old English derived "cow" became *buef*, the flesh

of "sheep" became *mutton*, the meat of the pig or hog became *porc* (from the Latin *porcus*), and *veau* was the delicate term for meat of a cow, bull, ox or steer.

Spices from the East added flavor to foods. Cinnamon is derived from the Greek word *kinna-momon* and Hebrew word *qinnamon*. From the East Indies came nutmeg (derived from the Latin word *muscus*, "musk") and the dry outer covering of the nutmeg yielded another spice called mace (*makir* by the Greeks). The Tamil word for soup and sauce gave us "curry." Journeys to the west also yielded new foods and words, including "chili" which the Spanish got from the Mexican name for the dried pod of a red pepper.

And what about the celebrated pickle and potato? The Dutch found a way to enjoy the cucumber and other foods after harvest, and named the delicacy *pekel*, from their word for "a spicy brine solution" for flavoring and preserving food. By 1400 the English had introduced *pikel* or *pekille* into their diet; it was a spicy sauce or gravy served with meat or fowl. Spanish explorers used the Haitian word for sweet potato (*patata* or *batata*) and introduced the world to potatoes.





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## Could You Repeat That, S'il vous Plait?

In November 1944 the U.S. hosted an International Civil Aviation Conference. Of the 54 nations which were represented, 32 signed an agreement to establish the International Civil Aviation Organization to "secure international cooperation on the highest possible degree of uniformity in regulations and standards, procedures and organization." English was voted the official language of aviation.

Recent concerns over the inadequacy of pilot and controller proficiency in English and its deadly repercussion resulted in ICAC action. Read the following excerpts from a Dateline broadcast and industry publications. What are the benefits of having one language for international aviation? Explain the complexities in requiring all pilots to use English. Provide comparable examples, past or current issues, of the necessity and challenges of international cooperation in our global society.

**2000: (VOICEOVER):** But in many cases controllers don't know there is a language barrier until something has gone wrong and by then, it's too late. Miscommunication between pilot and controller was cited as the contributing cause in the worst aviation disaster ever [before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania] when two 747s collided on the runway in the Canary Islands in 1977. Five hundred eighty-three died. And again, in 1996 when 349 died in a mid-air collision over India. And here in the US, 73 died in 1990 after a Columbian passenger jet literally ran out of fuel and crashed on Long Island. The Spanish speaking co-pilot apparently didn't know the word emergency, which would have led controllers to immediately clear the plane to land....

**(VOICEOVER):** The language problem goes beyond foreign pilots flying into the US. It can also be an issue with American pilots in foreign air space. And that's what happened in [the] mountains of Columbia in December of 1995. The language barrier between a Columbian air controller and an American Airlines pilot turned out to be a critical link in a deadly chain of events. ...

An investigation blamed pilot error, but sited the Colombian controller's poor English as a major contributing cause. So who's responsible for making sure pilots and controllers speak English well enough? The FAA has no authority over air travel outside the US. That job falls to ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization.

**(VOICEOVER):** But even if everyone did speak perfect English, they still wouldn't be speaking the same language. There's another problem with something called aviation English. Aviation English is the technical terminology of air travel, used by pilots and controllers the world over. Except the US uses

one set of phrases, and the rest of the world uses another. For example, in the United States, pilots are told to 'taxi into position and hold.' Overseas, they're told to 'line up wait.' It means the same thing. When they are told to circle, US pilots are instructed to 'make one 360.' Elsewhere, it's 'make an orbit.' Add to that, the problem of heavy accents and the fact that many pilots and controllers are speaking English as a second language, and you can see how easy it is, particularly when time is tight and the pressure is on, to make a small but potentially deadly mistake.

**NBC News Transcripts, DATELINE NBC (10:00 PM ET), Jan. 18, 2000, Tuesday**

**2003:** As of March 2008, all nations will be bound to provide personnel who are able to communicate in English for the accommodation of international flights. Pilots will be obliged to learn English and speak it in radiotelephony communications if they are not familiar with the language of the country where they are operating an aircraft.

Just to know aviation's phraseology will not be sufficient. Pilots and controllers will have to communicate in "plain language" as well, said Elizabeth Mathews, a consultant to ICAO and former director of the English language program at Florida-based Embry Riddle Aeronautical University.

The strengthened standards are the result of an initiative from India that led to a review of the linkage between inadequate English language proficiency and accidents. In 1996, 312 passengers and crew died in a midair collision over India between a Kazakhstan Ilyushin IL-76 and a Saudia Boeing 747. Investigators attributed the lack of English proficiency by the IL-76 flight crew as a causal factor. The crew did not understand the flight level to which they were cleared.

Language factors have played a role in 10 major accidents, five during the decade of the 1990s, according to ICAO. Some 33% of

747 passenger fatalities have been attributed to language-related causal factors between 1970-97. These included the 1977 collision of KLM and Pan American World Airways 747s at Tenerife; the IL-76-747 midair collision over India, and the 1997 crash of a Korean Air 747 at Guam.

• **"Who's Roger?" by James Ott**  
**Aviation Week & Space Technology,**  
**June 9, 2003**

**2005:** "Flight attendants for international airlines generally must speak a foreign language fluently. For their international flights, some of the major airlines prefer candidates who can speak two major foreign languages."

• **Occupational Outlook Handbook,**  
**U.S. Department of Labor**

NOTE: Neither the Occupational Outlook Handbook nor "Looking for a Career Where the Sky Is the Limit?" prepared by the Air Line Pilots Association, International, include knowledge of a foreign language, including English, as a requirement to be a pilot.

"Every day, around the clock and around the world, there is communication between air traffic controllers and flight crews. The few accidents, but too many close calls because of misunderstandings, has lead the International Civil Aviation Organization to establish a requirement that controllers and pilots shall reach an Operational Level (4) Proficiency in the English language by March 5, 2008. It is, therefore, the responsibility of all designated aviation personnel to learn the English language and the responsibility of each CAA or airline to determine the instrument to evaluate the proficiency of the employee.

ICAO's logical conclusion, a single language for communication, is logistically complex."

• **"Business and Management Practices"**  
**Air Traffic Management, December 2005**

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# Spanish At School Translates to Suspension

• Originally published Dec. 9 2005

By T.R. REID

Washington Post Staff Writer

Most of the time, 16-year-old Zach Rubio converses in clear, unaccented American teen-speak, a form of English in which the three most common words are “like,” “whatever” and “totally.” But Zach is also fluent in his dad’s native language, Spanish – and that’s what got him suspended from school.

“It was, like, totally not in the classroom,” the high school junior said, recalling the infraction. “We were in the, like, hall or whatever, on restroom break. This kid I know, he’s like, ‘Me prestas un dolar?’ [‘Will you lend me a dollar?'] Well, he asked in Spanish; it just seemed natural to answer that way. So I’m like, ‘No problema.’”

But that conversation turned out to be a big problem for the staff at the Endeavor Alternative School, a small public high school in an ethnically mixed blue-collar neighborhood. A teacher who overheard the two boys sent Zach to the office, where Principal Jennifer Watts ordered him to call his father and leave the school.

Watts, whom students describe as a disciplinarian, said she can’t discuss the case. But in a written “discipline referral” explaining her decision to suspend Zach for 1½ days, she noted: “This is not the first time we have [asked] Zach and others to not speak Spanish at school.”

Since then, the suspension of Zach Rubio has become the talk of the town in both English and Spanish newspapers and radio shows. The school district has officially rescinded his punishment and said that speaking a foreign language is not grounds for suspension. Meanwhile, the Rubio family has retained a lawyer, who says a civil rights lawsuit may be in the offing.

The tension here surrounding that brief exchange in a high school hall reflects a broader national debate over the language Americans should speak amid a wave of Hispanic immigration.

The National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic advocacy group, says that 20 percent of the U.S. school-age population is Latino. For half of those Latino students, the native language is Spanish.

Conflicts are bursting out nationwide over bilingual education, “English-only” laws, Spanish-language publications and advertising, and other linguistic collisions. Language concerns have been a key aspect of the growing political movement to reduce immigration.

“There’s a lot of backlash against the increasing Hispanic population,” said D.C. school board member Victor A. Reinoso. “We’ve seen some of it in the D.C. schools. You see it in some cities, where people complain that their tax money shouldn’t be used to print public notices in Spanish. And there have been cases where schools want to ban foreign languages.”

Some advocates of an English-only policy in U.S. schools say that it is particularly important for students from immigrant families to use the nation’s dominant language.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) made that point this summer when he vetoed a bill authorizing various academic subjects to be tested in Spanish in the state’s public schools. “As an immigrant,” the Austrian-born governor said, “I know the importance of mastering English as quickly and as comprehensively as possible.”

Hispanic groups generally agree with that, but they emphasize the value of a multilingual citizenry. “A fully bilingual young man like Zach Rubio should be considered an asset to the community,” said Janet Murguia, national president of La Raza.

The influx of immigrants has reached every corner of the country – even here in Kansas City, which is about as far as a U.S. town can be from a border. Along Southwest Boulevard, a main street through some of the older neighborhoods, there are blocks where almost every shop and restaurant has signs written in Spanish.

“Most people, they don’t care where you’re from,” said Zach’s father, Lorenzo

Rubio, a native of Veracruz, Mexico, who has lived in Kansas City for a quarter-century. “But sometimes, when they hear my accent, I get this, sort of, ‘Why don’t you go back home?’”

Rubio, a U.S. citizen, credits U.S. immigration law for his decision to fight his son’s suspension.

“You can’t just walk in and become a citizen,” he said. “They make you take this government test. I studied for that test, and I learned that in America, they can’t punish you unless you violate a written policy.”

Rubio said he remembered that lesson on Nov. 28, when he received a call from Endeavor Alternative saying his son had been suspended.

“So I went to the principal and said, ‘My son, he’s not suspended for fighting, right? He’s not suspended for disrespecting anyone. He’s suspended for speaking Spanish in the hall?’ So I asked her to show me the written policy about that. But they didn’t have one.”

Rubio then called the superintendent of the Turner Unified School District, which operates the school. The district immediately rescinded Zach’s suspension, local media reported. The superintendent did not respond to several requests to comment for this article.

Since then, the issue of speaking Spanish in the hall has not been raised at the school, Zach said. “I know it would be, like, disruptive if I answered in Spanish in the classroom. I totally don’t do that. But outside of class now, the teachers are like, ‘Whatever.’”

For Zach’s father, and for the Hispanic organizations that have expressed concern, the suspension is not a closed case. “Obviously they’ve violated his civil rights,” said Chuck Chionuma, a lawyer in Kansas City, Mo., who is representing the Rubio family. “We’re studying what form of legal redress will correct the situation.”

Said Rubio: “I’m mainly doing this for other Mexican families, where the legal status is kind of shaky and they are afraid to speak up. Punished for speaking Spanish? Somebody has to stand up and say: This is wrong.”

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# A Linguist's Alternative History of 'Redskin'

*Term Did Not Begin as Insult, Smithsonian Scholar Says, Activist Not So Sure*

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By GUY GUGLIOTTA

Washington Post Staff Writer

For many Americans, both Indian and otherwise, the term “redskin” is a grotesque pejorative, a word that for centuries has been used to disparage and humiliate an entire people, but an exhaustive new study released today makes the case that it did not begin as an insult.

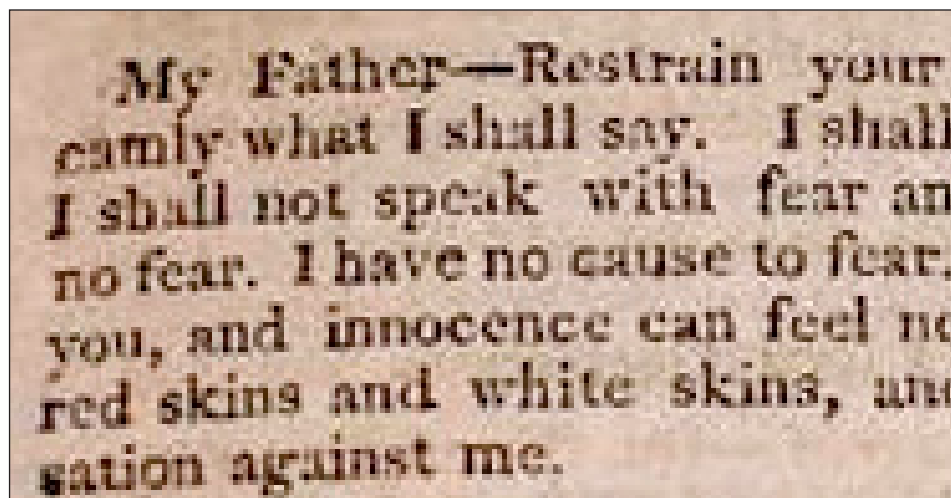
Smithsonian Institution senior linguist Ives Goddard spent seven months researching its history and concluded that “redskin” was first used by Native Americans in the 18th century to distinguish themselves from the white “other” encroaching on their lands and culture.

When it first appeared as an English expression in the early 1800s, “it came in the most respectful context and at the highest level,” Goddard said in an interview. “These are white people and Indians talking together, with the white people trying to ingratiate themselves.”

It was not until July 22, 1815, that “red skin” first appeared in print, he found — in a news story in the *Missouri Gazette* on talks between Midwestern Indian tribes and envoys sent by President James Madison to negotiate treaties after the War of 1812.

The envoys had rebuked the tribes for their reluctance to yield territory claimed by the United States, but the *Gazette* report suggested that Meskwaki chief Black Thunder was unimpressed: “Restrain your feelings and hear calmly what I say,” he told the envoys. “I have never injured you, and innocence can feel no fear. I turn to all red skins and white skins, and challenge an accusation against me.”

Goddard's view, however, does not impress Cheyenne-Muscogee writer



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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Suzan Shown Harjo, lead plaintiff for Native American activists who, for the past 13 years, have sought to cancel trademarks covering the name and logo of the Washington Redskins.

“I’m very familiar with white men who uphold the judicious speech of white men,” Harjo said in a telephone interview. “Europeans were not using high-minded language. [To them] we were only human when it came to territory, land cessions and whose side you were on.”

Goddard, aware of the lawsuit and Harjo’s arguments, said that “you could believe everything in my article” and still oppose current public usage of “redskin.”

Evidence cited by Harjo and others has pointed to a much harsher origin for “redskin,” but Goddard, a linguist who studies the Algonquian language of northeastern North America, casts doubt on much of it. “While people seem to be happier with the agonistic interpretation

of past events,” he said, “when you get on the ground, the real story is much more complicated and much more interesting.”

Reporting his findings in the *European Review of Native American Studies*, Goddard noted that the first appearance of the word was long thought to have occurred in a 1699 letter written by “Samuel Smith,” quoted in a 1900 memoir by his descendant, Helen Evertson Smith, titled *Colonial Days & Ways*.

“My father ever declar’dt there would not be so much to feare iff ye Red Skins was treated with suche mixture of Justice & Authority as they cld understand,” the purported letter said. Another part of the letter is quoted in the authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary* as the etymological origin of “redskin.”

When Goddard studied the letter, however, he concluded it was a fake: “The language was Hollywood. . . . It



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didn't look like the way people really wrote."

And it wasn't. In Evertson Smith's papers at the New-York Historical Society, Goddard found a first draft in her handwriting: "My father ever declared there would not be so much to fear if the Indians were treated with such mixture of Justice and authority as they could comprehend," the draft said. "Samuel Smith's" supposed letter, Goddard concluded, was "a work of fiction."

In fact, the earliest usages of "redskin" that Goddard tracked down were in statements made in 1769 by Illinois tribal chiefs involved in delicate negotiations with the British to switch loyalties away from the French.

"I shall be pleased to have you come to speak to me yourself," said one statement attributed to a chief named Mosquito. "And if any redskins do you harm, I shall be able to look out for you even at the peril of my life." The French used the phrase "peaux Rouges" — literally "red skins" — to translate the chief's words.

By this time the original colonial designations of "Christian" and "Indian" were giving way to "white," "red" and, with the increase in slave traffic, "black": "Color didn't originate with Indian-white relations but with slavery," said University of Connecticut historian Nancy Shoemaker. "It is slavery that makes color seem to be a way to organize people."

Like Goddard, Shoemaker said that by the end of the 18th century, Native Americans were using "red" to describe themselves and to assert their pride of being North America's original inhabitants.

And what had begun 100 years earlier as a reasonably amicable trading exchange, Shoemaker said, during the 1700s evolved into an increasingly tension-filled relationship, as rival European countries intrigued for Indian loyalties and Indians attempted to ward off waves of encroaching settlers.

Harjo argues that pejorative use of "redskin" grew from the practice of

offering bounties to anyone who killed Indians. Bounty hunters "needed proof of kill, but they had a storage problem," she said. "Instead of a body, they accepted the 'redskin' or the genitalia, or scalps."

But while such bounty proclamations were issued as early as the mid-18th century, Harjo acknowledged that she has not found an early instance of "redskin" in such a context.

Goddard, who calls Harjo's argument "an unfounded claim," said the first known public use of "redskin" in English occurred on Aug. 22, 1812, in Washington at a meeting between Madison and a group of visiting Indian chiefs.

Madison, worried about possible alliances between Indian tribes and the enemy British, delivered a long, stylized plea liberally sprinkled with the expressions "red people," "red tribes" and "my red children."

In response, Little Osage chief Sans Oreilles (No Ears) pledged loyalty despite provocations against his tribe and noted that "I know the manners of the whites and of the red skins." Then Sioux chief French Crow, making much the same argument, said: "I am a red skin, but what I say is the truth, and notwithstanding I came a long way, I am content, but wish to return from there."

Records of these exchanges, translated by Indian language interpreters into French and English and transcribed immediately, are included in an installment of the Madison papers published last year.

Goddard acknowledged it is impossible to know whether the chiefs said "redskin" in their own languages, but interpreters in many contexts and with many tribes in this time period treated the word as an expression that only Indians used. The same is true of "white-skin."

Three years after the Washington encounter, Black Thunder spoke at Portage des Sioux, and his use of "redskin" made its way into print, as did the words of other chieftains. Once in popular culture, the expression began

to lose its ceremonial context — even as it acquired the connotations that Native Americans have come to loathe.

An 1871 novel spoke of "redskinned devils." The Rocky Mountain News in 1890 described a war on the whites by "every greasy redskin." The Denver Daily News the same year reported a rebellion by "the most treacherous red skins."

Daniel Snyder, who owns the Washington NFL franchise, has said the team name will never be changed because "what it means is tradition, what it means is competitiveness, what it means is honor." He said, "It is not meant to be derogatory."

Papers submitted in the case against the football team documented humiliating movie references by Hollywood icons Eddie Cantor, Bob Hope, John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart and others. In *Northwest Passage*, Spencer Tracy, as a colonial explorer who hates Indians, importunes a subordinate to "Get a redskin for me, won't you?"

The final message, Shoemaker suggested, is that "even if the Indians were the first to use it, the origin has no relationship to later use. What happened at the beginning doesn't justify it today."



BY JONATHAN NEWTON — THE WASHINGTON POST

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