



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 122

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### TOPICS

Ask an American: endangered languages; rednecks, dictionary versus thesaurus

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### GLOSSARY

**domain** – an area that one is responsible for; an area of knowledge or of one's work; the responsibilities that one has

\* Cleaning the house used to be women's domain, but now many men have that responsibility.

**to domesticate** – to train a wild animal so that it can live with or near humans

\* When were llamas domesticated?

**fragile** – easily broken; delicate; not strong or sturdy

\* Don't drop that box! It's full of fragile glasses.

**to erode** – to slowly destroy something over time, especially the surface of the land; to disappear slowly overtime

\* The beach is slowly being eroded by the action of the ocean's waves.

**to disrupt** – to interfere in a negative way; to make it difficult or impossible for something to continue

\* Our meeting was disrupted by the fire alarm.

**to mend** – to fix, especially by sewing

\* I need to buy some yellow thread so that I can mend these socks.

**to embody** – to represent an idea; to personify; to be an example of something

\* Humans' changing relationship with nature is embodied in the destruction of the Amazonian rainforests.

**landscape** – scenery; a view in nature; a wide view of everything that one sees from a particular place

\* Their home has large windows that look out at the beautiful, mountainous landscape.



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**revitalization** – the increase in strength, size, and life of something

\* As part of its neighborhood revitalization program, the city is building new homes and cleaning up the park.

**to enrich** – to make something better, fuller, richer, or more vibrant

\* Kimbo wants to enrich his children’s education by giving them music, dance, and art lessons.

**daunting** – intimidating; making one feel nervous or overwhelmed and unable to do something

\* Moving across the country to a place where you don’t know anyone can be daunting.

**reclamation** – the act of getting something back from another person or organization; the act of getting back what used to be yours but was taken away

\* Many Native Americans are asking for the reclamation of their lands in the Midwestern United States.

**apprentice** – an intern; a person who works with a professional for a short period of time to learn how to do a specific type of work

\* Earl plans to study in a cooking school for two years and then work as a chef’s apprentice for one year before opening his own restaurant.

**to be without recourse to** – to not be able to do or get something that would help one in a difficult situation

\* The young woman had to pay for her new home without recourse to a bank loan.

**redneck** – an impolite and insulting term used to refer to an uneducated, poor, and very conservative American who lives in the countryside

\* Most Americans think of rednecks as people who drive old pick-up trucks and wear cowboy hats.

**thesaurus** – a book that lists groups of synonyms, or words that have the same or similar meanings.

\* According to this thesaurus, synonyms for “happy” include joyous, glad, cheerful, and pleased.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **Custer's Last Stand**

“Custer’s Last Stand,” also known as “The Battle of the Little Bighorn” and “The Battle of the Greasy Grass,” was a “battle” (a fight between two groups of people with guns) between the U.S. Army and the Lakota-Northern Cheyenne “tribes” (groups of Native Americans) in 1876. The U.S. Army had been fighting “Indian Wars” against the Native Americans for years, and this was the most famous battle that the Native Americans won.

“Lieutenant Colonel” (a high position in the military) Custer and his “troops” (the people in the military who follow those with higher positions) were “marching” (walking militarily) along the Little Bighorn River. One morning, the “scouts” (people who walk faster than the larger group to see what is ahead) reported that there was a large Native American village ahead, and Custer decided to “attack” (fight against) it. However, the Native Americans had seen the troops’ “tracks” (signs left behind where people have been) and were “expecting” (waiting for) Custer’s arrival.

The Lakota and Cheyenne tribes had between 900 and 1,800 “warriors” (men who are trained to fight), and they were armed with guns, bows and arrows, and “clubs” (heavy objects used to hit people in the head). By the time Custer realized that he was badly “outnumbered” (there were more Native Americans than U.S. soldiers), it was too late. Custer and all of his troops were killed in less than one hour. Some people say that Custer “committed suicide” (killed himself) to avoid being “captured” (caught) and “tortured” (treated badly to produce a lot of pain), but historians do not know whether this is true.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast English Café number 122.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast English Café episode 122. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. If you go there now, you can download a Learning Guide for this episode, an 8 to 10 page guide to help you improve your English even faster. We also have some ESL Podcast special courses in daily and business English.

In this cafe, we're going to have another one of our Ask an American segments. We are going to listen to native speakers talking about what are called "endangered languages." They'll be speaking at native rate – at a normal speed. We'll listen to them, then go back and explain what they said, and then listen to them again. This gives you a chance to hear how English is spoken normally, but also gives you a chance to pick up some new vocabulary as we explain it. As always, we'll also answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our topic today is endangered languages. "To be endangered" means the same as being in danger; in this case, it means in danger of not existing, of what we may call "going extinct." When something is "extinct" (extinct), it no longer exists. "Dinosaurs are extinct on earth," there are no more dinosaurs – except my neighbor! If something is "endangered," that means that it could become extinct in the near future – that there is a danger that it will disappear. This is true for plants and animals; it's also true for languages. There are almost 7,000 languages in the world, but according to some scientists, almost half of these languages are endangered, meaning there's only a very small number, often old people who speak the language. The language is not being learned by the younger generation.

There was a recent report on the Voice of America on this topic, where they interviewed scientists – linguists – and asked them about endangered languages. No doubt one reason why languages are endangered is because certain languages, such as English, becomes so popular that everyone starts switching to that popular language.

Let's listen to one professor talk about what would happen, or what does happen when a language dies. When the last person who speaks a language dies, what



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dies with them? He's going to describe kinds of knowledge that we lose when a language dies. We'll listen, and then we'll go back and explain what he's saying. Don't worry if you can't understand every word. We'll explain it in a minute. Here we go.

[recording]

Vast domains of knowledge about meteorology, mathematics, weather cycles, plant and animal behavior, how to domesticate plants and animals exists, it is out there, it is fragile; it is very rapidly eroding.

[recording ends]

The professor begins by saying, "Vast domains of knowledge." A "domain" (domain), in this context, means an area, or a topic, or a field. On the Internet, you know, we use the word "domain name" to refer to the name of the website; our domain is eslpod.com. Here, "domain" means area of knowledge, a certain large topic. Some of the domains of knowledge that will be lost, according to this professor, involves meteorology, "meteorology" is the study of the weather; "mathematics," the study of numbers; "weather cycles," that is, the way that weather changes over time; "plant and animal behavior." In certain areas, in certain languages, we have certain terms and concepts for different plants and animals, and the way they behave – the way they act. Also lost would be knowledge about how to domesticate plants and animals. "To domesticate" means the opposite of wild; something that is "domesticated" is not wild. For example, you could have a dog, and the dog could be wild. He lives in the woods – he lives in the forest. A domesticated dog would be one that lived in the city, often with a family. So "domestication," which is the noun coming from "to domesticate," refers to plants and animals that are not just in the wild – they're not just out there – but you're able to, for a plant, get new plants. You are able to have a farm. Or for animals, you are able to have the animals reproduce – have babies – even though they are living with you.

All these domains of knowledge – meteorology, mathematics, weather cycles, plant and animal behavior, to domesticate plants and animals – all this knowledge "exists," the scientist says, "it is out there." When we say something is "out there," we mean it exists somewhere, not here but somewhere else. He describes this knowledge as being "fragile." When we say something is "fragile" (fragile), we mean that you can easily break it, or you can easily hurt it or harm it. We often when we are sending a package in the mail, and there's something inside that will break, you may put on the outside the package "fragile" so that the



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Post Office worker will handle it more carefully – will not throw it around. Of course, they will throw it around – it doesn't really do any good, but it makes some people feel better if they put the word "fragile" outside on the box.

Well, languages are fragile – endangered languages are fragile. This knowledge "is very rapidly eroding." To "erode" (erode) means to lessen – to become lower and lower, to become less and less. So if knowledge is "eroding," that means we are losing knowledge, and of course, by losing these languages, we are losing the way that other cultures think about the world, as expressed through their language. Let's listen again.

[recording]

Vast domains of knowledge about meteorology, mathematics, weather cycles, plant and animal behavior, how to domesticate plants and animals exists, it is out there, it is fragile; it is very rapidly eroding.

[recording ends]

In the United States, the languages that are most endangered are what we call "indigenous languages," the languages of the American Indian peoples. There are also the native languages of Inuit peoples in Alaska, as well as the native Hawaiian people. All these have languages that are in danger.

Another professor discusses why languages are so important for a community and a culture, how they help people in that culture, and why it's so important to keep languages, or, what he says, to revitalize language. Let's listen.

[recording]

For communities that have been socially disrupted, the language provides an avenue by which they can begin to mend and heal, because embodied in that language is a great deal of information about how we relate to each other and how we relate to our landscape. And so, language revitalization has been incredibly enriching; it's been daunting. Language loss is about social change; language reclamation is also about social change.

[recording ends]

This person begins by saying, "For communities that have been socially disrupted." "To disrupt" (disrupt) means to interfere, to stop something that is



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happening from continuing. “Disrupted” refers to someone coming in and stopping something from happening – someone interrupting the progress of something or the way something is working. So, communities that have been “socially disrupted” means that outside forces, other cultures perhaps, have come in and changed those communities.

For these communities, the language that they speak “provides an avenue (meaning a road – a way) by which they can mend and heal.” The words “mend” and “heal” mean something very similar; it is when something gets better. If you are sick and you get better, or if you break your leg, your leg will “mend,” it will “heal,” it will become healthy again. So, the language is “an avenue,” it’s a means that people in this culture, who may have had their culture “disrupted.” For example, if you are living on a small island in South Pacific and you’ve never seen anyone else, and then some people come and they land on your island, they will change your social system – the way that you live.

So, languages help us “mend and heal” these cultures, “because,” he says, “embodied in that language is a great deal of information about how we relate to each other.” When something is “embodied,” we mean that it is part of; you can’t separate it. So, an inseparable part of language is a “great deal (or a lot) of information about how we relate to each other” – how we communicate with each other. Also, “how we relate to our landscape.” In this case, “landscape” refers to your surroundings, your situation, the things and the people that are near you.

He continues, “And so, language revitalization has been incredibly enriching.” “To revitalize,” as a verb, means to put new life in something – something that is dead or dying, and then you do something that makes it come to life again – to become active again. Well, we’re talking here about revitalizing languages – languages that are endangered, that are dying; we come in and we try to save them. This process, he says, “has been incredibly enriching.” Something that is “enriching” (enriching) is something that makes you better – literally that makes you richer. Not just more money, but in this case, more culture, or saving valuable parts of a culture.

“Language revitalization” is when the government or organizations try to save a language. This is something that he describes as being very “daunting.” Something that is “daunting” (daunting) is something that is difficult, something that presents a lot of problems. “It is a daunting task” – it is a very difficult thing to do.



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“Language loss,” he concludes, “is about social change.” So, when a language dies, it changes the culture that it was part of. “Language reclamation is also about social change.” “Reclamation” comes from the verb “to reclaim,” which means to get back – something that was lost; you’re able to get it back. So once again, we’re talking about languages that are dying or dead, and we somehow bring them back to life. Let’s listen one more time to his description.

[recording]

For communities that have been socially disrupted, the language provides an avenue by which they can begin to mend and heal, because embodied in that language is a great deal of information about how we relate to each other and how we relate to our landscape. And so, language revitalization has been incredibly enriching; it’s been daunting. Language loss is about social change; language reclamation is also about social change.

[recording ends]

Finally, a professor from the University of California, Berkeley, describes how scientists, professors, governments, schools are trying to revitalize languages. She’s going to describe some of the things they do to help keep a language from dying. Let’s listen.

[recording]

One of them is the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program, which pairs the last speakers of, uh, native languages with younger members of the tribe who want to learn it. And we teach them, uh, the fundamentals of language immersion, and, um, they are supposed to spend 10 or 20 hours a week just living their lives together in the language, and without recourse to English.

[recording ends]

She begins by saying one of the programs is a “Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program.” The terms “master” refers to someone who’s an expert on something, an “apprentice” is someone who’s trying to learn how to do something. So if you, for example, are a tailor – you know how make clothes – you may have an “apprentice,” a younger person who wants to learn to make clothes themselves. That’s a “master-apprentice” relationship.





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So, in this program they “pair,” meaning they put together. “To pair” here means to take two people and put them together. They pair “the last speakers of native languages,” meaning the older people who are last ones that speak a language fluently, and they put them together with a younger member of the tribe, in the case of Native American or American Indian peoples. They call the group a “tribe,” a certain related group of Native Americans. They teach these students – these apprentices and the masters – “the fundamentals of language immersion,” in other words, some strategies and techniques for acquiring a language by living it. The master and his or her apprentice “are supposed to spend 10 to 20 hours a week just living their lives together in the language,” so, doing their daily things in the language. This, of course, is how many people acquire new languages, by going to other countries and living in the country. They have to use the native language “without recourse to English.” “To have recourse to something” means to be able to use something – some resource. So, if you say “without recourse to something,” you mean you can’t use that thing; in this case, they can’t speak English. Let’s listen one more time.

[recording]

One of them is the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program, which pairs the last speakers of, uh, native languages with younger members of the tribe who want to learn it. And we teach them, uh, the fundamentals of language immersion, and, um, they are supposed to spend 10 or 20 hours a week just living their lives together in the language, and without recourse to English.

[recording ends]

Many groups have been successful in revitalizing their language. In Hawaii, for example, the Hawaiian language is now more popular among young people, and that will help it from dying – from becoming extinct.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Camilo (Camilo) in Columbia. Camilo saw a movie recently, and he heard the phrase “redneck.” A “redneck,” which is spelled as one word (redneck), is a very informal term – an insulting term, an unkind thing to say about someone who lives in what we would call a “rural” area. “Rural” (rural) is the opposite of “urban,” which is in the city. So “rural” are areas that are outside of the main city, where there are farms and, perhaps, animals, and so forth.



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Well, “redneck” refers to someone who usually is white and lives in the “countryside,” in a rural area, often someone who works at a low level job. It’s often a term that is used in connection with people living in the southern United States, what we call “the South,” which would be states such as Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, North and South Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky. These are the states that “constitute,” or are part of the Deep South, and the term “redneck” is an insulting term. The idea is that a “redneck” is unsophisticated; he’s maybe also someone who is a bigot (bigot). A “bigot” is someone who doesn’t like other races; doesn’t like black people for example, or doesn’t like other religions or cultures.

The word “redneck” refers to the skin color. If you are a white person, you may, if you go out in the sun, get red skin if you have light colored skin. And since these are people who are working outside, in what we may refer to as “manual labor,” working with their hands, they would get a red neck from being in the sun all day.

Our second question comes from Xingrou (Xingrou) in China. Xingrou wants to know the difference between a “dictionary” and a “thesaurus.”

A “dictionary” is a book of words, usually listed “alphabetically,” meaning A is first, B is second, all the way to Z, in English. The dictionary contains many words, and has their definitions. It often has other information such as sample sentences and pronunciation of these words.

A “thesaurus” (thesaurus) is a book that contains a list of words that are related to other words, what we would call “synonyms” (synonyms). Those are different words with similar meanings. If two words are opposite in meaning, we call them “antonyms.” A “thesaurus” has a list of words, and words that are related to them. So for example, you look up the word “company” in a thesaurus – you want another word for “company” – it may say “business,” or “corporation,” or “firm,” or “organization.” Those are possible synonyms for the word “company.”

A thesaurus doesn’t have definitions; it has similar words. Not every word is in a thesaurus; of course, not every word is in all of the dictionaries, it depends of how big a dictionary you want to purchase!

If you have a question or comment for Café, we’d be happy to try to help you. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com). We can’t answer everyone’s questions, but we’ll do our best to answer as many as we can.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on the English Café.

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