

TALK SHIFT

HOW LANGUAGE KEEPS CHANGING



TextProject
Background Builders

English Stole These Words

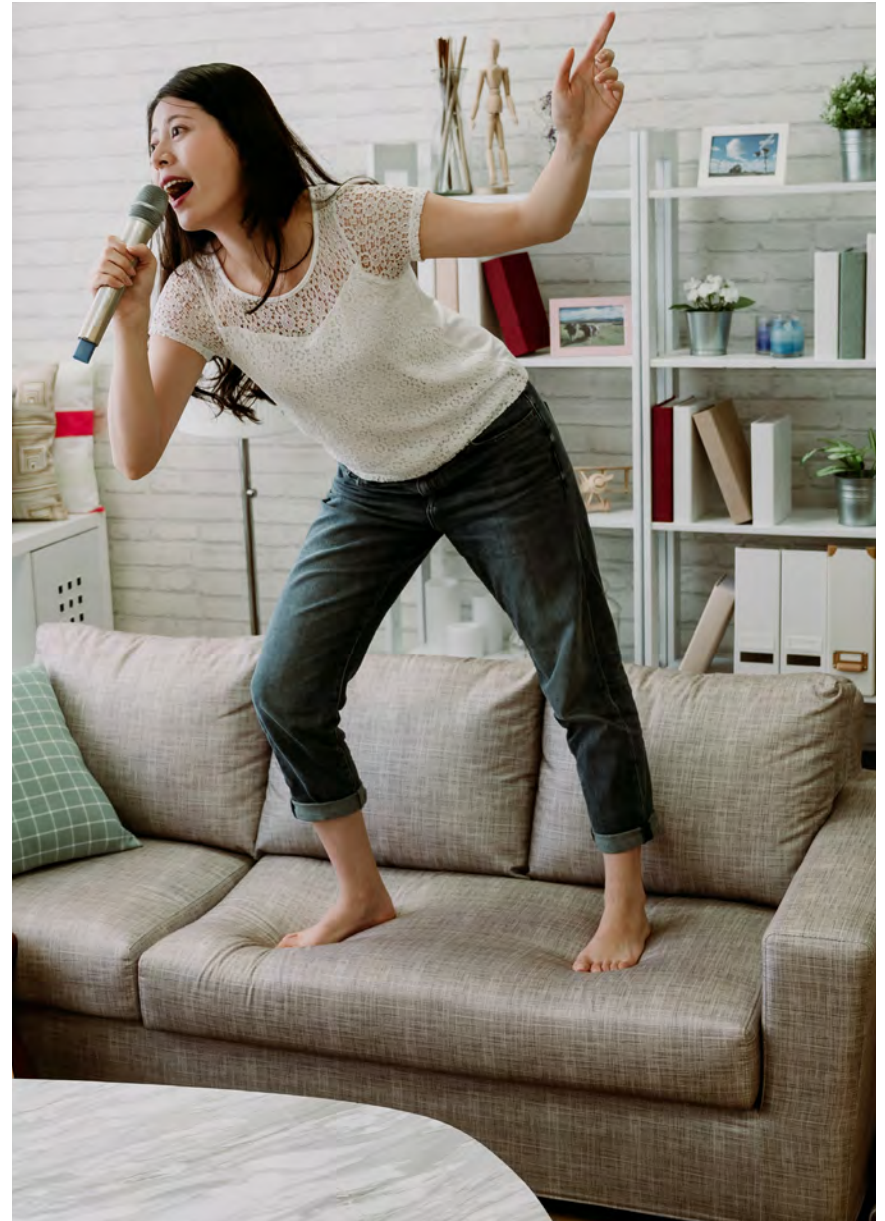
English doesn't have all the answers. Sometimes we discover an experience or idea that our language just doesn't have a word for. So what do we do? We borrow the word from another language.

Ever been to kindergarten? That's a German word meaning "children's garden." Germans invented these schools for young children, and we took their word for it.

Have you ever done karaoke—singing while a machine plays instrumental music? That's Japanese for "empty orchestra." Japan invented it in the 1970s, so we borrowed it. Japan also gave us tsunami, meaning "harbor wave." Japanese people lived with these waves for centuries and needed an exact word for them. When we saw them, we had no word—so we took theirs.

When you do algebra, you use an Arabic word. A thousand years ago, Arab mathematicians were way ahead of Europe in math. Europeans didn't just borrow the word—they learned an entire mathematical system from Arabic scholars.

When English doesn't have the right word, we borrow one—and that makes English richer. Languages carry knowledge, and when they share, they make each other better.



Karaoke is Japanese. English gets stronger every time it borrows a word from another language.



Surfers have a whole language just to describe moments like this one. Sunset + perfect waves + sick moves = 'firing.'

The Special Language of Surfers

When people share a hobby, sport, or interest, something special happens. They create their own language. Gamers, dancers, skateboarders, musicians—every group takes regular words and gives them brand- new meanings. Why? When something matters deeply, you need exact words to describe it.

Surfers are a perfect example. Walk up to a group and you might hear: “That set was firing! I got totally barreled but then ate it on the closeout. So gnarly!” Translation? The waves were great, the surfer rode inside the curl of a wave, then wiped out when the wave crashed. It was awesome.

Surfers take everyday words and give them special meanings. “Barrel” isn’t just a container anymore—it means riding inside a wave tube. “Glassy” doesn’t just mean “like glass”—it means perfectly smooth water. “Sick” means amazing. “Shred” means surf really well. “Ate it” means wiped out.

Your friend group does this too—regular words that mean something special only to you.

Your Brain on Two Languages: A Superpower

If you speak more than one language, your brain is doing something amazing—even when you don't realize it.

Here's what scientists discovered: Bilingual brains are constantly working out. Every time you talk, your brain picks which language to use and holds back the other one. It's like doing push-ups for your brain all day long.

But here's what's really cool: When you speak two languages, you see the world in two different ways. Take the Spanish word *sobremesa*—it means the time you spend at the table after eating, just talking and hanging out with family. English doesn't have one word for this!

Or the Swedish word *fika*—a coffee break ritual where you pause to sit down with people and just be present. There's also the German *Fernweh*—a longing to travel and explore, literally “distance pain.”

Every language captures ideas and feelings that others can't quite express. Every language you speak makes the world richer. That's not just useful. That's a superpower.



There's a Spanish word for just hanging at the table after dinner with family and friends: *sobremesa*. English doesn't have one word for it—but speakers of Spanish do!

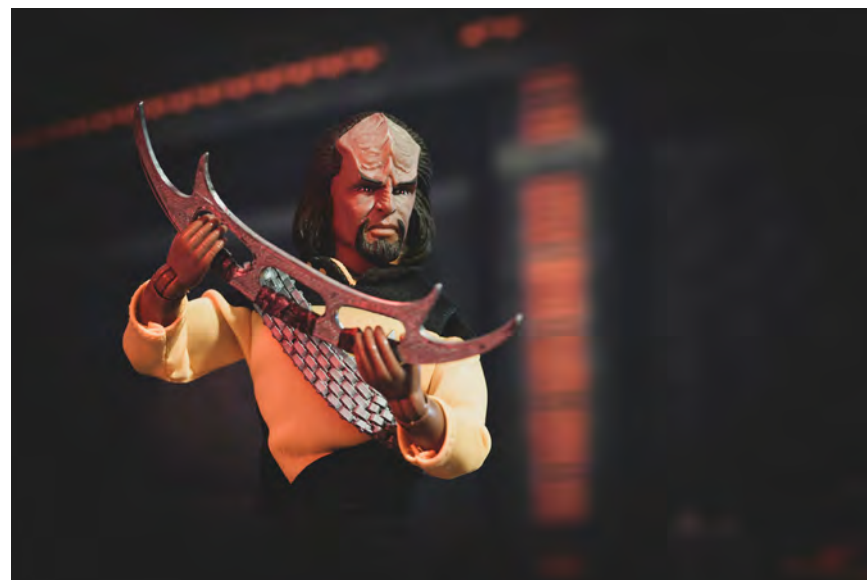
The Fake Language That Became Real

In 1984, a TV show called Star Trek needed a language for their alien warriors called Klingons. The show hired a linguist named Marc Okrand to create a few words. But Okrand did something unexpected.

Okrand invented a complete language with its own grammar rules, alphabet, and thousands of words. It sounds harsh and mean because Klingons are fierce warriors. When a Klingon says “**Qapla!**” they’re wishing you success in battle and “**nuqneH**” means “What do you want?”—not exactly a friendly hello!

Here’s where it gets wild. Fans started learning Klingon. People took classes. They wrote songs and poetry. Some fans even raised their kids speaking Klingon at home.

A language that was totally made up became real because people used it. This connects to endangered languages. When people stop speaking a language, it dies. But when people use a language—even one invented for TV—it comes alive. Languages aren’t just words on paper. They’re alive when people speak them.



The Klingon Alphabet

a	b	ch	d	e	gh	h
i	j	l	m	n	ng	o
p	q	q	r	s	t	tlh
u	v	w	y			

A fake language invented for a TV show in 1984 became completely real—just because fans started speaking it.



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