

Is Rad a Word?

Nobody asked but ...

It is too easy to examine an anecdote, and then make grandiose generalizations from it. Isn't there a dear cost for exploiting such couplings? Doesn't TANSTAAFL apply inexorably? The first cost is to risk the value of your reputation for credibility. The foremost long term cost may be the opportunity cost in failing to seek more precise knowledge. Today I was with a group that was in danger of reaching consensus on the idea that our language was deteriorating, and the blame lay primarily with youth. Then several stories were shared to show the overwhelming presence of the problem. But then several inputs were added to counter the anecdotes, so we drifted toward a greater probability — that language is constantly changing, sometimes looking distressed or appearing immortal.

How many people today sound like Shakespeare? The thing is that language sounds like whomever is speaking it, and therefore there are billions of manifestations of communication. Just as Shakespeare was unique, so are all humans unique — but the fact likely remains that 99.9% of humans are lesser communicators than Shakespeare was. This is not a sign that language is deteriorating — only that Shakespeare is not still alive. The alternate evidence of his words being with us daily, more than 400 years later, is worth noting. And this is not a sign that language advances at all times.

It was observed that an Internet game, **WordScapes**, now accepts the word “rad” (short for “radical?”). It is ironic that “radical,” itself, is a mishmash from earlier languages referring to various forms of roots, vegetable that is. Originally, I think it meant fundamental, but now it seems to mean departing from the fundamental.

Well, the main fact is that “rad” means whatever its users (senders and receivers) find practically useful.

— Kilgore Forelle