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Geographical Language and the Ocean Rodeo

As a lifelong surfer I subscribe to a geographical linguistic form considered sacred to an endemic social culture that lives and breathes by the intensity of the ocean. I cannot speak for the entire surfer community, however, it's clear my surfing experiences have shaped my language characteristics as well as my preferences in literature.

My appreciation for God's magnificent creation of the sea began when I was a **grom** (young-surfer). As the son of surf shop owners, the beach and the lure of the ocean were the ethos that defined my personality and my inspiration to thrive in a dynamic liquid environment. As a permanent fixture in the **lineup**, the older locals took me in as their younger brother. I was mesmerized by their deep respect for the earth, the ocean, and their amazing understanding of how tides, swell direction, and certain winds create epic surf conditions. I began to emulate their passionate, creative ability to articulate surf sessions while maintaining a constant state of reverence for the sea.

The locals profound respect became my own and was portrayed by my dedication to surgically-harnessing the liquid pulses of energy we call waves. The energy for each wave, unique in intensity and origin, had traveled hundreds and even thousands of miles to our shores. Their welcome arrival is greeted by grateful surfers anxious to replenish the **stoke** within our being as if every wave is manna for the soul and essential to our existence.

As a young surfer, my literary inspiration came through the articles and full color spreads in Surfer and Surfing magazines. I lived vicariously through these pioneers of the surf world, traveling to distant, isolated Indonesian coral-fringed-utopias. The rush of inexplicable chicken-skin enveloped my body as a feast of turquoise freight trains came to life smoking across the reef and transforming my imagination. Their figurative analogies were unbelievably surreal and came alive through language and imagery. The physical responses they evoked were impossible to ignore.

As I traversed high school, absences accumulated because of my zealous quest to surf daily. My fondest memories of attending high school are of surf sessions and how hot the young ladies were. It was during this period that I became painfully aware that the sharp chiseled features of my youth weren't going to be enough to capture their attention. I needed to utilize the power of language in order to summon a vast reservoir of intriguing conversation, which included a balance of humor, compliments and charm. The frequency with which I applied these language skills enabled me to quickly become a journeyman at developing lasting friendships with these amazing young women. Gratefully, some still write to me and I continue to enjoy these lasting friendships despite over a decade of incarceration.

The amazing memories that I have accumulated from a life well lived represent countless hours of acculturation with men and women of diverse cultures. Surfing in Hawaii, Mexico, and throughout our great state of California has not only given me access to their indigenous languages, it has inspired me to implement some of theirs into my own. One fond memory while in Hawaii was a brief interaction with one of the locals. It seemed clear to me where the best place to sit in the lineup while waiting for waves, however, I approached a local and asked him, "Hey bro, where's the best surf?" The sun-worn local Hawaiian replied with his regional linguistic pidgin dialect in traditional island style, "*Hey bra, check-em out for free, peel 'in off the reef leff an right. It da-kine today haole boy, chance-em braddah*" (hao-le/ haulē, Hawaiian for member of the white race). I responded with gratitude and made my way to an adjacent **peak** (a-frame-wave) closer to the Honolulu Harbor entrance as it appeared to be a production line **barrel**, too mesmerizing and hollow to resist. After what seemed to be an hour of getting **piped** and throwing fear into the shoulder of this left with roundhouse-off-the-top, under-the-lip-redirectional-**hell-snaps**, I made my way back to the same local laying on the army cot watching the waves. As I approached him while expressing my thanks, he quickly cut me off squawking "*You crazy haole boy, sharks every place right there bra.*" He further explained to me that the fishing boats returning from their day of fishing leeched fish blood from their decks creating a chum trail and a swarm of sharks next to the wave I had just surfed. It's funny, the whole time I was out there, I just had that feeling the landlord of the sea was watching me. As a man who appreciates diversity of cultures, this and other cultural experiences have impacted me such that I

integrate some of their language into my own vocabulary, just as I have with surf-linguistics.

As I have transitioned twice from living in a society of surfers to the punitive culture of prison, I have managed to suppress surf-language for a style developed through years of acculturated oppression within California prisons. This micro-linguistic form represents decades of interracial communicative respect, indicative of large populations of convicts enclosed in hermetic, hostile environments. The culture shock of incarceration on California prison yards and being greeted by resident convicts is always memorable. As a Scandinavian-Californian, the white population is quick on the scene to greet me. Introducing themselves either by their “handles” like “Cue-ball, Irish, Kick, or Tiny,” or choosing to use their first or last names as their chosen introduction. Most, if not all, also tell you in the same breath where they are from using abbreviations like Dago for San Diego, or acronyms like O.C. for Orange County.

As a prisoner serving life without the possibility of parole, I have found that adaptation to such unforgiving, hostile, and unique linguistic societies prove the human spirit, as well as the ability to adopt language style, are quite malleable. Though language learned in the almost thirty years I spent in a community of surfers no longer seems relevant to my life now, I still relish in occasional reflections with a handful of my incarcerated surfer peers when we periodically relive our former lives as *watermen*.

My life of personal experiences is now enhanced by years of personal growth, in prison higher education through Coastline and California State Los Angeles, writing thesis-driven-essays, studying complex philosophical theories, expressing myself in personal narratives, synthesizing newly learned knowledge with my peers on the prison yard, improving myself with self-help classes, and living a purpose driven focused life. My personal choice of pursuing higher education, rather than wasting some of the best years of my life and living irresponsibly, has quickened my mind to a more intellectual and fulfilling form of language indicative of a University level student. Thanks to the skilled teaching, critiquing, and patience of our unique combination of talented professors from C.S.U.L.A., I am progressing even further as a college level writer.

These experiences as a surfer, as an undergrad, a writer, and as a human being have enabled me to utilize the unique life I have lived, the language forms I have adopted, and the literature I have read into an evolutionary learning perspective. I feel my exposure to these life experiences combined with intellectual growth has not only changed me as a person, it has changed what I once considered possible in life, and I’ve accomplished this within an environment normally not conducive with educational harmony.