

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Essay Presented By

Raymond E. Gnat

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Subjects Discussed In This Essay

Conrad, Joseph, 1857 – 1924
Joseph, Nez Perce Chief, 1840 – 1904, Oratory
Nez Perce Indians – Wars, 1877
Seattle, Chief, 1790 – 1866, Oratory
Speeches, addresses, etc., Indian – United States
Indians of North America – Government Relations
Indians, Treatment of – United States

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

I WILL BEGIN WITH A QUIZ ----- NAME THE PERSON I'M ABOUT TO DESCRIBE

Born in 1857 into a Polish aristocratic family in Russian Poland (now Ukraine). His mother died when he was eight; eleven when his father died.

He served in the French Merchant Navy and was a Master Mariner in the British Merchant Marine.

He did not begin to write until he was about thirty-five.

In 1923, at the height of his career, he visited the United States. In 1924 he died at the age of sixty-seven in England.

He was not the first foreigner to write books in English. He is regarded as one of the greatest novelist in English.

The name of this author? [Pause for audience response]
Yes—Joseph Conrad.

Born: Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski.

However, English was not his second language. As a teenager he was fluent in French – speaking it without an accent. In his twenties, he picked up English, his third language, and spoke it with a heavy accent.

But, I digress.

This evening I would like to discuss three items regarding American Indian oratory. First, Chief Joseph's surrender speech. Second, Chief Seattle's plea to visit ancestral burial grounds. And lastly, the term "As long as the grass grows and the rivers run."

Chief Joseph's Surrender Speech

The Nez Perce War of 1877 began in June when bands of Nez Perce Indians refused to move from their ancestral home in the Wallowa Valley of Oregon to a distant reservation. Facing forced removal, this group of about 800 men, women and children (including about 200 warriors) and hundreds of horses made a remarkable flight southeast through Montana and then back north across Yellowstone Park.

This conflict attracted national attention and newspaper coverage.

Over the next five months, the Indians travelled more than 1,000 miles and escaped from several army forces while trying to reach refuge in Canada. The Indians stopped to rest near the Bears Paw Mountains in Montana, 40 miles from the Canadian border, thinking that they had shaken off their pursuers. But Col. Miles led his troops in a rapid march of over 200 miles to catch the Indians. Joseph and his weary band were among those that surrendered after a five-day battle.

At this final battle along Eagle Creek, the Indians under a flag of truce offered to surrender. It was early in the day when General Howard sent two friendly Nez Perce scouts named George and Captain John into the besieged camp to meet with Joseph and try to negotiate a surrender.

When the scouts returned, scout Arthur Chapman acted as interpreter. Charles Erskine Scott Wood, 2nd Lieutenant, aide de camp and acting adjutant to General Howard, was present with pencil and paper ready to record any dictation that might be given.

Lt. Wood stated in a magazine article written seven years later that on the return of the two scouts, old Captain John with his lips quivering and his eyes filled with tears delivered the words of Chief Joseph:

“Tell General Howard I know his heart. I am tired of fighting. Looking Glass is dead. Too-hul-hul-sote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say yes or no. He who led the young men is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food; no one knows where they are - perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever.”

With these preliminary negotiations having taken place earlier in the day, Joseph came to surrender later in the day.

Thomas A. Sutherland, reporter for the *Portland Standard* was present and described the following scene that took place on October 5, 1877. The sun was dipping to the level of the prairie, when Joseph came slowly riding up the hill directly to General Howard whom he recognized. He dismounted and with an impulsive gesture he straightened his arm toward General Howard, offering his rifle. Howard motioned Joseph to Col. Miles and the later received his rifle – the token of surrender.

Howard's official report to the Secretary of War, written soon after his return to the Headquarters of the District of the Columbia in Portland, included Chief Joseph's reply. This reply was printed within a very short time by newspapers in Helena, Montana and Bismarck, North Dakota. It appeared in the November 17th issue of *Harpers Weekly*.

Chief Seattle's Plea

Chief Seattle was born about 1786 in the Puget Sound area of the present state of Washington. He was present when George Vancouver visited the area in 1792 on the British ship *HMS Discovery*. Over six feet tall, he was dubbed "The Big One" by early Hudson Bay traders. He was a prominent figure among his people. He was recognized for his leadership of six allied tribes - as a warrior - and for his skill as an orator. He welcomed and aided early white settlers and was eager to do business with them. Seattle's efforts to participate meaningfully in the creation of a new community and blend his people's future with the settlers' fell victim, however, to land hunger and the desire of many

influential whites to keep their people separate from the native population. This, however, did not lessen Seattle's friendship and loyalty.

Chief Seattle recognized that in the course of a single generation the country his people had held for millennia was destined to change hands. Smallpox epidemics and other infectious diseases had wiped out most of his tribe. He feared that his people were on the verge of extinction.

Isaac Ingalls Stevenson was the Governor and Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Washington Territories.

On March 11, 1854 Seattle gave a speech at a large outdoor gathering in Seattle. Governor Stevens happened to be in the area investigating the murder of some settlers.

On the occasion of the December 27, 1854 to January 9, 1855 Port Eliot Treaty Council meeting, Stevenson brought greetings from President Franklin Pierce and explained that the U. S. Government wished to purchase land and settle the native people on reservations.

Thirty three years later, Dr. Henry Smith published a 1,200 word speech in the *Seattle Sunday Star* of October 29, 1887. In flowery Victorian language Chief Seattle purportedly thanked the white people for their generosity, **demanding that any treaty guarantee access to native burial grounds**, and made a contrast between the God of the white people and that of his own. Smith noted that he had recorded but a fragment of the speech.

Dr. Henry A. Smith was a physician, poet, legislator and early settler of Seattle. In 1852 he and his mother travelled from Wooster, Ohio to Portland, Oregon in a wagon train. They speculated on land that they hoped would be a terminus for the rumored transcontinental railway. He was said to have known the local Indians well and had some command of the local language. In the 1890's, Smith's railroad dream bore fruit with the arrival of the Great Northern Railway.

The formulation of the speech is possibly as much Smith's as Seattle's. We can however assume that it contained at least the essence of Seattle's words.

Frederick James Grant's *History of Seattle, Washington* published in 1891 contained a reprint of the newspaper text.

In 1929, Clarence B. Bagley's *History of King County, Washington* reprinted Grant's version with some additions.

In 1931 Bagley published an article in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* titled *Chief Seattle and Angeline* (Chief Joseph's daughter) in which he reprints the speech by Smith with some variations and adds a last sentence.

In 1931 Roberta Frye Watt published a much-altered version in her book *Four Wagons West: The Story of Seattle*.

In 1932 John M. Rich reprinted the Bagley version in a pamphlet titled *Chief Seattle's Unanswered Challenge*.

In 1969 William Arrowsmith, a professor of Classical Literature modified the Victorian English of the 1887 Smith

version for a documentary aired by ABC. He put the text into more current speech patterns without changing the essence of the speech.

Tom Perry heard Arrowsmith read his 1969 version and with permission used the text as a basis for a new fictitious speech that included about 20% of the Arrowsmith version and included Chief Seattle's name. Perry was writing a TV script for a Southern Baptist Convention film on pollution and ecology titled "Home." It was televised in 1972. He later stated that he should have used a fictitious name instead of Chief Seattle. The film Producer left Perry's name off the credits, crediting the speech to Chief Seattle. The Producer also altered, for religious reasons, the text to read: "God loves all people" instead of "Your God hates red people." Posters, with the speech, were sent to over 18,000 viewers who requested it and glibly began the confusion we have today.

This version became very popular and is acknowledged as an impressive ecological text in its own right. But we must at the same time disclaim authorship by Chief Seattle. The text does not represent the mind of the old Chief, but the mind of a sensitive euro-American worried about our ecological situation and the general dualism of our culture.

This version of the speech formed the basis of a popular children's book published in 1993 by Susan Jeffers titled "*Brother Eagle, Sister Sky; A Message from Chief Seattle.*"

Yet another version appeared at the Spokane World Fair of 1974. A speech attributed to Chief Seattle was displayed in the U. S. Pavilion that again was different in style and wording.

Reprints of various versions of the speech were included in anthologies, text books, curriculum materials, quoted on TV, from the pulpit, and popular magazines not only in the U. S. but around the world. The speech was manipulated for religious, political and environmental causes. Few reprints of the speech cited a primary source. Although at least three “authentic” versions of the speech are in print, all derive from Smith’s translation.

All of these versions are similar enough to indicate that they all emanated from one speech. But the various versions reflect a change of attitudes. From a positive and friendly feeling towards whites toward a less friendly and sometimes a resentful attitude. In the original version the natural environment played only a secondary role but was revised to concentrate almost entirely on environmental issues and the white man’s irresponsible dealings with the natural world and even the attitude toward God.

Considering the questions raised and the ensuing, hopefully fruitful discussions generated, does it really make any difference today whether the speech in question actually originated with Chief Seattle in 1855, or with Dr. Smith in 1887 or with Ted Perry in 1972? I’ll leave that for you to ponder.

“As Long As the Grass Grows and the Rivers Run”

The Iroquois Confederation of six Native American nations was formed between the years 1200 and 1500, well before European contact. The French, Swedish, Dutch and British all vied with each other to control the valuable fur trade with the Indians.

A 1613 Dutch treaty with the Onondagas contains the phrase: “as long as the grass is green.” Over the years, treaties and councils covered such matters as trade, settlement, and the resolution of episodes of violence between Colonial settlers and the Iroquois Confederacy. By 1676, The Iroquois Confederacy had formed a treaty with England called the Covenant Chain. An actual silver chain symbolized the white man’s ship and the Iroquois canoe linked to the Tree of Peace. These treaties often contained language similar to:

As long as the sun shines upon the earth,
As long as the waters flow,
As long as the grass grows green,
Peace will last.

England dealt with the Iroquois as a sovereign nation.

The Iroquois Confederacy expanded their influence from their original base in upstate New York to as far west as Illinois and as far south as Kentucky and West Virginia. They found this necessary because their strength had been diminished due to battles with the Colonists and the loss of life due to Smallpox and other epidemics. The fatality rate for Native Americans was as high as 80 – 90 percent. The result was a dramatic drop in tribal populations.

The Covenant Chain broke down when representatives of the different English colonies could not agree among themselves on a common position to take when meeting with representatives of the Iroquois Confederacy.

After the Revolution in 1776, John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress and in 1783, George Washington, both regarded the Native Americans as separate but equal nations. Indian Treaties were equated with all other international treaties.

The U. S. government used treaties as one means to displace Indians from their tribal lands; a mechanism that was strengthened with the Removal Act of 1830.

As the 19th century began, settlers poured into the backcountry of the coastal South and began moving west. Since Indian tribes living there appeared to be the main obstacle to westward expansion, settlers petitioned the federal government to remove them. Earlier, Presidents Jefferson and James Monroe had argued that the Indian tribes in the Southeast should exchange their land for lands west of the Mississippi River, but they did not take steps to make this happen.

In 1814, Major General Andrew Jackson defeated the Creeks and destroyed their military power. He forced upon the Indians a treaty whereby they surrendered to the United States over twenty-million acres of their traditional land.

In 1830, President Jackson convinced the U. S. Congress to pass the Indian Removal Act. Federal officials were sent to negotiate removal treaties with the southern tribes, many of whom reluctantly signed. Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi began to pass laws to extend the states' rule over the Indians in their territory. These laws did away with the tribe as a legal unit, made Indians subject to state taxes, denied them the right to vote, to bring suit or testify in court. Indian Territory was divided up, to be distributed by state lottery.

However, federal treaties and federal laws gave Congress, not the states, authority over the tribes. Jackson ignored this, and supported state action.

The Cherokee Nation challenged the Georgia laws in court. The U. S. Supreme Court ruled that Indian tribes were indeed sovereign and immune from Georgia laws. Angered, Jackson is said to have exclaimed: "John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it."

Jackson's instructions to an army major sent to talk to the Choctaws and Cherokees put it this way:

Say to my Choctaw children, and my Chickasaw children to listen ... say to the chiefs and warriors that I am their friend... but they must ... remove ...to the lands I offer them ...there, beyond the limits of any State, in possession of land of their own, which they shall possess as long as Grass grows or water runs. I am and will protect them and be their friend and father.

The hundreds of treaties negotiated with the Indians were formal agreements between two sovereign nations.

Prior to 1815 the Indians negotiated treaties from a position of some power; for the tribes had the option of allying with either the U. S. or the British. The young American nation was concerned with bare survival for many years and needed the support of the Indians, or at least their assurance against hostility.

When the war of 1812 ended and the British withdrew, the tribes lost much of their bargaining leverage and negotiations became increasingly one sided. The lack of skilled interpreters and failure to translate the treaty into the language of both parties are factors never present in international treaties. Despite broken promises, these treaties remain binding legal links between the tribes and the federal government. The crux of the problem lies in the different interpretations of these treaties.

Jackson's removal policy can only be properly understood when seen as part of a broader process: the political and economic conquest of frontier regions by an expanding nation. National expansion was justified on the grounds of strategic interest (to preempt settlement by other powers) and in the name of opening valuable land to settlement and development. Expansion necessitated the removal of native peoples.

My lack of legal training will not deter me from attempting to explain to you the difference between a treaty and a contract.

Treaties are agreements binding for all time. In a court of law, agreements are not considered binding. Only contracts can be enforced in a court of law. If treaties were recognized as an international treaty between two or more independent nations – the practical question remains as to who would enforce the ~~decision~~^{treaty}.

The phrase **“as long as the grass is green and the rivers run”** and other similar phrases, are commonly known as a perpetuity clauses. It was routinely inserted in the treaties Europeans made with Indians. Its inclusion may reflect the European expectation that Indians were indeed “vanishing” as a result of battles and the high mortality rates of infectious diseases. It was anticipated that the Indians would not survive to reap the long-term benefits of easily made promises to provide food, goods and money and to protect them from attack by other tribes and white settlers.

In order to end on a lighter note, I would like to read you a quote of Will Rogers, American humorist, entertainer, and a Cherokee.

“A government treaty gave Cherokees their land as long as the grass grows and the water flows, but when they discovered oil, they took it back because there was nuthin’ in the treaty about oil.”

Thank you for your attention.