



(S//SI) Letter to the Editor: Linguists Needed for GWOT 'Microlects'

FROM: the editor
Unknown
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(S) The following letter is in response to the article ['GWOT Language Forums' Strive to Overcome Shortage of Capacity in Key Languages](#) :

Comment:

(S//SI) As an aside to some of the issues raised in the article, let me note from firsthand experience that CT targets often are very capable multi-linguists, and may come at us from way out in left field. For example, there is a sizeable number of ethnic Arabs living in the Czech Republic. Many of these individuals came to communist Czechoslovakia on scholarships -- usually as engineers -- married local women and settled down. Most of them are very fluent in Czech, but not the literary Czech that foreigners learn, but "street Czech" that poses a host of comprehension problems for the uninitiated.

(S//SI) In similar fashion, I have personal knowledge of a Palestinian operative residing in Switzerland -- he speaks fluent Swiss German, which is about as far from standard German as is Quebec French from the Parisian variety. How many people do we have in our Swiss German pool? Finally, consider the case of the Levantine (Syrian-Lebanese) community in Haiti. After multiple generations of only incomplete assimilation, they have developed a hybrid of Levantine Arabic and Haitian Creole -- too Creole for Arabists to understand, too Arabic for Creolists. What strategies do we have for dealing with similar isolated "microlects" such as this one?

-- [REDACTED]

(U//FOUO) [REDACTED] SID Senior Language Advisor, responded as follows:

Craig,

(S//SI) You bring up a point that's worth thinking about. The short answer is that we don't have a strategy for dealing with "microlects," and I'm not sure what one would look like. Since it's probably not possible to catalogue microlects, and impossible to predict which ones will be of interest, our best bet would probably be to cultivate multilinguists with regional (Dutch-German-Swiss German) or cross-language family (Czech-Arabic-Swahili) skill. Are we going to be able to get the mix right all the time? No. But it might give us a better chance.

(U//FOUO) Editor's note: Readers, do you have some thoughts on this topic? If so, please post your comments on the [SID today Blog](#).

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