

# Silly Linguistics

The Magazine for Language Lovers

**Fanakalo**

The Magic  
of First Words

*Whistled  
Languages*

**weTraitors**

**GRAMMAR NAZIS:**

Word Fascism Day-to-Day

**Part 3:**

Languages of **Italy**

**Modern Hebrew**





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# S is for... Substantiate

By Christopher Davy

Last time I wrote about “S is for...  
Scientific Study” (Issue 11). This  
time it is Substantiate. Why substantiate,  
you ask?

\*Ahem, clears throat in smug fashion.\*

Well, please allow me to...you vguessed  
it...substantiate.

\*Oh, I know, it's good isn't it?\*

Substantiate because this is what it's all  
about. This is what linguistics is all about.  
This is what language is all about. This is  
what communication is all about. This is  
what learning is all about. This is what  
progress is all about. No, I'm not bored of  
writing 'is all about'. This is what the S is  
for...Something System, IS ALL ABOUT!  
Substantiating.

But seriously, if you want to learn or  
progress at something. Anything. You've

got to substantiate it. Don't believe me...?

...You can see where this is going, right?...

Ok then, SUBSTANTIATE your reasoning as  
to why you don't believe me. As to why  
you don't have to/or think you won't have  
to substantiate it in some capacity? (Even  
if it's just with yourself.)

\*Chris takes a deep relaxing sigh and  
wallows in his own self-righteousness.\*

Chances are, at some point, someone is  
going to ask you why you are doing what  
you are doing. So basically, what I'm  
saying is, *if* you can justify *why* you are  
doing *what* you are doing, then I believe  
you can have more faith and confidence in  
*doing* what you are doing. As a result of  
this, you will ultimately have more  
success. At the very least I believe you will  
achieve serenity. Which, in itself, is  
something worth striving for.

If you can't substantiate what you are  
doing, then sooner or later I would say,

you are going to struggle. Which is why we can have so much conflict at times. Internally and externally. Because A LOT of substantiating is based on taste and personal opinion:

“Because I like it.”

Which at the same time *may* be based on fact:

“Because that’s the most logical way to do it.”

It’s always going to be a matter of juggling the subjective vs. objective. Now it may be *a fact* that you like something or believe in something, but what are you basing liking it on? Fact or taste? How did you come to accept it as fact? How did you come to like it? Or has it just always been that way and is now an established part of your comfort zone?

\*At this point we might unleash the demon.\*

Because these are considered pretty intrusive questions for a lot of people. Especially if you don’t know them; the questions or the people. But it’s more about *how* you ask the question. In this instance, I’ve just written the words. You applied the tone.

\*Hmmm interesting\*

When we reach this point of questioning, “Why?”, if we aren’t successful for whatever reason, we fail. We might not see the light at the end of the tunnel. We might not get the results we want. We might feel like giving up. We might not be satisfied with our substantiation, and when we reach this point of struggle, we may produce something that looks like this:

“What’s the point? I can’t do it. It doesn’t make any sense. I’m just not (insert superlative/some quality you think you lack here; stereotypically ‘good’) enough.”  
(Said in sulky, disheartened tone).

And if you are struggling when someone tries to ask why you are doing something. You might produce these responses:

“I just am, it’s none of your business.”

Or “I don’t know. My Mum does it this way. Shut up.”

Or [mute] (vacant expression)

We often apply some kind of quick fix. Some kind of defence mechanism. We snap. To get it over and done with quickly. But is it really substantiating why you are doing it? Yeah, kind of, but not really. It does solve the situation you are in and allows you to get on with your life and deal with the feelings later. But ahhhhh, those good old feelings, they’ll probably be there waiting. Waiting for next time.

(Side note – my version of Word doesn’t quite like the above sentences “We apply *some kind* of quick fix. *Some kind* of defence mechanism.” Hahahahahaha! It says “Consider using concise language.” Hahahahahaha! To that I say. Shut up Word you damn fool! I’ll do what I damn well want thank you!)

So, substantiating. How do you do that? Well, clearly in that last sentence I’ve already started for you. But essentially you scrutinise, (How? Why? When? Where? What? Which? Who? etc.), and then in answering all those questions, and any others that crop up along the way, you will have

hopefully substantiated your reason for doing... something. With... something that hopefully makes sense. Substantial sense. Something that satisfies the soul.

Taaah daaah!

Take this arena, for example, linguistics. Why do you want to learn a new, or get better at a language?  
“So, I can feel more comfortable and confident when I go on holiday in a foreign country.”

“Because I now have new family members that speak a different language to me. I need to be able to pretend that I want to get along with them.”

“Because there is a book that I want to read in the language it was originally written in.”

“So, I can order food in a foreign country and not kill myself, because I have specifically 247 food allergies.”

“Because I really like this music, but I don’t understand what they are singing.”

“Because there is a hottie that I want to chat to, but they only speak Cornish.”

“Because the voice in my head has gotten bored with my native language and accents. It wants to have some new friends.”

“Because if I don’t do this then the whole integrity of the space-time continuum will be compromised which could lead to the end of life as we know it!”

“Because it’s my life and I can do with it as a bloody well please.”

“Because my Nan now lives in Bulgaria and has a pet pig called Hristo. I just want to be able to say hello to Hristo in Bulgarian. Obviously, he won’t understand me if I don’t speak Bulgarian, will he?! He’s a Bulgarian pig.”

Your reasons are your own. If you are truly satisfied with them, then that’s a great start. If not, just spend some time working on them. When you’ve got your reason, use it. Use it to fuel your drive. You know it makes sense. I’ll give my substantiating answer as to what I do, and why, in a future article. And yeah, for the record it does begin with ‘S’. See If you can guess what it is. I’ll give you a clue, it’s not supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

Finally, if you really want to kick some ass... try breaking down the structure and etymology of the word substantiate.

Now I don’t know about you, but I think.

That. Is. *Satisfying*.

*Substantially, satisfying.*

Now if you can’t be bothered to think too hard, try to begin by breaking down the noun substance, into sub- (under) and -stance (standing). Or just have a look online, perhaps starting [here](#).\*

\*[https://www.etymonline.com/word/substantiate#etymonline\\_v\\_22271](https://www.etymonline.com/word/substantiate#etymonline_v_22271)

2 Please be aware that other ‘S’ words are available. Substantiate was used for climatic emphasis in the previous paragraph; for the reader’s entertainment. At no point do I, Chris Davy, take full responsibility for the wholehearted advocacy of a single ‘S’ word above all others. (Apart from maybe sandwiches.)