

Latin: The '5 for the Price of 1' Language?

Throughout much of my life, I've been surrounded by language enthusiasts: a sister who has long dabbled in learning various languages for the fun of it; a good friend who got her Master's degree in linguistics; a co-worker who is a Latin buff.

Regrettably, I never caught the language itch. And the two languages which I did study have now pretty much disappeared from my memory.

Many Americans, it seems, are like myself. According to a [new study](#) produced by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, more than 75 percent of Americans speak English alone.

In pondering these numbers, I had to ask: have we brought this dearth of language skills upon ourselves?

This question was particularly provoked by [an article](#) I recently came across in *The Stamford Advocate*, a local Connecticut newspaper. The article described the stellar success of Ms. Ana Koltypin's high school Latin course, which recently produced several students who achieved perfect scores on the National Latin exam.

As the article goes on to explain, Latin programs like Ms. Koltypin's have been in decline in recent years. This decline is driven both by funding priorities and greater interest in other, more modern languages.



That last fact is ironic, particularly since knowledge of Latin lays the groundwork for many of these same modern, more popular, languages. According to *The Stamford Advocate*:

“Latin is the mother of five other languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian. It provides the basis of 60 percent of the words in English.”

Because of this, Ms. Koltypin notes that learning Latin allows students to start “tapping into five languages by studying just one.”

If we want today’s students to experience the [physical and mental benefits](#) long associated with learning other languages, might we take a shortcut to those benefits by teaching them the “5 for 1” language of Latin?