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'Buzz Words' Can Confuse Reader

EVEN if English, as spoken and written in the United States, is our native language, an up-to-date dictionary is a handy thing to have around. Besides new words that are introduced frequently, new and sometimes peculiar meanings are given to old words.

Oklahoma City officials announced the other day that an additional one cent "temporary" sales tax is urgently needed to repair the city's infrastructure. Up to that point a lot of us citizens had not noticed that the city had one. How did it get broken? What does it do when it is in operating condition?

My dictionary says an infrastructure is the underlying foundation or basic framework of a system or organization, with a second meaning of permanent installations required for military purposes. In the sales tax campaign, infrastructure refers to streets, bridges, sewer systems and water distribution.

Another buzz word that bobbed up recently is psychohistory. The item where it was used explained that the

word refers to "a marriage of psychology and history," an odd match even in these days of strange relationships.

The writer went on to say that it was a quest for human motives behind historic events but that if you had 30 psychohistorians in a room you might find 30 different ideas about what psychohistory is. That was a foggy clarification.

In this year of 1984 when George Orwell predicted widespread use of "doublespeak" perhaps we ought to be cautious about quick acceptance of "buzz words."

In his book titled "1984," published in 1949, Orwell used doublespeak as a mythical language forced on people by the government, full of euphemisms, exaggerations, lies and "double-think" phrases to hid real messages. Examples include "War is peace," "Freedom is slavery," and "Ignorance is strength."

Washington bureaus are pretty good at introducing doublespeak

phrases into our language. Tax increases are called "revenue enhancers," redistribution of wealth is provided for in numerous "entitlement programs," and a personnel director might be called a "director of human resources planning."

Many of us have supposed that English is the official language of this nation, but it isn't. A bill calling for a constitutional amendment to make it so is pending in Congress.

Purists have been fighting an uphill battle to expand precise use of the English language. Slang, commercial and technical phrases, federalese, and local idioms catch on more rapidly.

Just imagine what it would be like with Congress delegating authority to a federal bureau of language to write official definitions of words, not overlooking political effects.

Then contemplate the Supreme Court of the United States ruling on the constitutionality of those definitions in the light of civil rights and freedom of speech!