

Ballad of the RR

by Stephen Walter (Canada)
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(with apologies to anyone sensitive to national stereotyping, and to those many people whose languages I have misrepresented)

There is a place called Finland,
Far to the north they say,
In fact it's so far to the north indeed,
Sometimes there is no light of day.

They say the Finns play good hockey,
But I think that was in days of old,
Because in the recent Olympics
It was Canada that took the gold!

We even beat the Americans,
The men and women both.
If you mention this to them they are touchy,
And you will hear many an oath!

So why go to Finland, you wonder,
(It's something my wife sometimes asks),
"Rajalta Rajalle-Hiihto" is the answer,
Dear Skier, that is your challenging task.

On the ski trail the days are tiring,
And some are exceedingly long,
Your thoughts may frequently wander,
And sometimes you may burst into song!

This skier passed the time by thinking,
About what on earth he might do
To represent Canada
In this entertainment for you.

Now one of the problems you face
Out on the trail each day,
Is how to say "hello" to your friends,
Just what should you say?

First you must guess where they come from,
By the type of their skis and their dress,

Sometimes you can see their name badge,
But it's not always easy, I confess.

So let me lend some assistance,
I will be your guide
On how to talk to the others,
Some linguistic tips I'll provide.

For each of the RR countries,
Each with their tongues quite perverse,
I'll suggest some things you can say,
So that, dear skier, you can converse.

To the **Americans** you just say "Good morning"
In the nicest possible way.
If you want to be especially charming,
You can add "Have a nice day".

In **Canada** it's almost the same
Except to many words we add "eh",
So instead of what I just told you,
You'll say "Have a nice day eh".

Now the **French** eat and drink quite often,
At the service stations they will meet.
You can chat for a while as you sample
Some "Ate gastronomique".

*Avec les Français c'est facile,
On dit simplement "Bonjour".
Peut-être on prend un petit cognac,
Et puis on continue le tour.*

To the **Germans** and **Swiss** say "Guten
Morgen",
I'll explain more if I could,
But I'm afraid that's not possible
Because "Mein Deutsch ist nicht so gut".

Now **Dutch** is rather like German,
Except you must speak with a cough.
For example, when discussing their painters
Like Vincent, you must say "van Gogh!"

The **Italians** ski like they drive,
Rather crazy and often quite fast.
Take care if you meet them on a downhill
It's better just to let them pass.

When an Italian comes up behind you
He might say *ōBuon giorno signorō.*
But if you don't move fast enough
He'll add *ōUn poco piŕ presto, per favoreō.*

Now Italian is also useful at night,
You can quote from their opera.
When you're in the cabin trying to sleep through
the snoring,
You can announce *ōNessun dormaō.*

Next the **Slovenians**, who are a hard one!
What exactly do they speak?
Is it Serbo.. or Croat.. or some mixture,
Or perhaps even ancient Greek?

In fact it's Slovenian in Slovenia,
A language for me that's bizzare.
So to greet someone from Ljubljana
You have to say *ōDobre jutroō.*

Now the hot country of **Spain** ó
Where they learn to ski I don't know.
While the Finns go to Spain for the sunshine,
Perhaps the Spanish come here for the snow?

Most of these Spanish are from Barcelona,
Donde no se habla español pero Catalan!
I can say hello in Spanish,
But in Catalan I'm not sure I can.

So we'll have to use Spanish,
A choice that's not certain to please!
Esperamos que los Catalanos entienden,
Cuando digamos ōBuenos diasō!

Next we come to **England**,
And find a rather peculiar thing.
The RR names from England
Sound suspiciously like Finns.

With names like H≡m≡l≡ and Sieppi
I find myself quite confused.
It's not like the England I knew
With names like Smith, Jones, or Hughes.

So we'll postpone our greeting for Britain
And move on to another land.
We'll put Heidi and Marjatta with Finland

And hope they will understand.

To the **others** I owe my apologies,
Like the **Swedes**, the **Irish** and the rest,
There was not enough time to cover you all,
I really tried my best!

But there is one group I have left to the last
(They are the **Finnish** , after all!),
We need to thank them for this week
As our good times we recall.

They say that Finland's cold
(Although there is the Gulf Stream),
But it's in the hearts of its people
Where the real warmth is, it seems.

Now, to give you a Finnish greeting
I've studied hard and long.
I just have to hope, my friends,
That I don't get it wrong!

Because in Finnish it's almost impossible
To say something right for the mood,
You'll mix up your *ōaōs* with your *ōaaōs* and
your *ōyōs* with your *ōuōs*
And probably say something rude.

Even their spellings are funny!
So many vowels to include!
For instance you'll notice that Kuusamo
Has not one *ōUō*, but two.

So how can I say the things that I feel?
Please let me persist.
On your behalf I will offer a thought,
And then I will desist.

So my *ōFinish lineō* I have reached at last,
(I hope it comes our right),
ōKiitokja paljon, Suomiō,
And to you all ó *ōGOOD NIGHTō.*