

Re: American as creolish [was] Re: Baltic Is Gothic

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From: Douglas G. Kilday (*fufluns_at_chorus.net*)

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[soc.culture groups deleted to please Usenet police]

"Marko Rauhamaa" <marko@pacujo.net> wrote ...

> "Douglas G. Kilday" <fufluns@chorus.net>:
> > "Marko Rauhamaa" <marko@pacujo.net> wrote ...
> > > *Maybe. Based on the observation of my children and their friends, I*
> > > *think most language evolution originates in small children's*
> > > *simplifications and misunderstandings.*
> >
> > *Adults were using <got> as a "verb on its own right" in printed matter*
> > *six or seven decades ago.*
>
> *Which in itself in no way refutes the conjecture about the children's*
> *language and language evolution. What you do notice is that the children*
> *first pick up regularities and only later learn the irregularities. The*
> *present-tense verb "have - got" is anomalous especially since the*
> *auxiliary has eroded into a barely audible single consonant.*

Didn't Roger Brown (or someone of that ilk) demonstrate in the Fifties that children first learn *irregular* forms such as "I went", then go through a phase in which they produce regular forms such as "I goed", then return to the use of the irregular forms which they learned? How do you propose that children "first pick up regularities" without any prior knowledge of the language? Forming "regular" preterits, participles, and plurals in English requires non-trivial knowledge of phonotactics (not to mention the ability to recognize "words"). Until they have some significant experience with the language, children have no knowledge-base on which to produce "regular" forms. The regularizing phase can only begin *after* this knowledge-base has been acquired.

> > *I pointed out "If you don't knock what you don't got, you gotta knock*
> > *what you *do* got," i.e. condemn your own attributes. [...] Of course,*
> > **writing* this way incurs the ire of prescriptive schoolteachers.*
>
> *It's terrible how the brains of children are cleansed of tradition and*
> *culture with bastardizations like these:*
>

- > *And if that mockingbird won't sing,*
- > *mama's going to buy you a diamond ring.*
- >
- > *instead of:*
- >
- > *And if that mockingbird don't sing,*
- > *mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring.*
- >
- > *Otto Jespersen made a big deal out of the purported impact of*
- > *children's simplifications and generalizations on linguistic change*
- > *and neglected to explain why language was not already simplified into*
- > *the ground millennia ago, since hundreds of generations of children*
- > *have been teething on it.*
- >
- > *First of all the evolution is relatively slow because in the end most*
- > *children do learn all the quirks of the adult language.*
- >
- > *My belief is that when the simplification goes too far, the language*
- > *becomes difficult to understand (too many homonyms, too little*
- > *redundancy). To counter that, the language community automatically*
- > *introduces redundancy with formal tokens. Consider for example the*
- > *introduction of the articles as the case endings disappeared or the word*
- > *"teardrop", which is used where the simple "tear" would be too*
- > *ambiguous.*

Do you have concrete evidence that "teardrop" was deliberately introduced to counter ambiguity felt by speakers? (Boo–hoo–hoo, I'm from (sob!) the Northern Tear of New England!) What about "raindrop"? (It's raining in Scotland. – What's rei(g)ning in Scotland?) I think your theory puts the cart before the horse. Why do we bother with "lukewarm" water when "luke" water would be unambiguous?

- > *Similarly, the Proto–Indoeuropean had turned personal pronouns into*
- > *conjugation endings. The conjugation endings then atrophied, and French,*
- > *among others, was forced to redundantly repeat the personal pronouns*
- > *before the verbs. But in French, the redundant personal pronouns*
- > *themselves atrophied almost to the point of prefixes, and the French*
- > *language has begun the next round of redundant pronouns: "Moi, je*
- > *pense".*

Latin (and to our knowledge PIE) already used "redundant" nominative personal pronouns for emphasis and contrast. In French, formerly emphatic expressions became "normal", driving out the old expressions with no separate pronouns. New emphatic expressions had to be constructed, since language is largely a tool for grabbing attention. Through frequent use, the emphasis of any expression is devalued, and the expression is ripe for replacement. This sort of change is not a matter of speakers being forced into redundancy by phonetic atrophy, but of their choosing emphatic expressions over "normal" ones to grab attention (and the linguistic community determines how much is *_too_* much, treating over–zealous emphasers like the boy who cried wolf). Terminal phonetic atrophy

follows the loss of expressions which have been weakened into understatement by devaluation; it does not _precede_ it.

- > > *This theory of massive impact of children on language has joined*
- > > *phlogiston and vitalism in the dustbin. One might as well argue that*
- > > *most geological change results from erosion. We all stand on dry land,*
- > > *do we not?*
- >
- > *Whatever the relative importance of erosion in shaping the landscape, I*
- > *believe erosion does happen -- or was erosion thrown into the dustbin as*
- > *well?*

Erosion does happen, but other processes are surely at work, or everything would have been worn down to base-level long ago.