

Re: 100 years from now ...

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2004-11/0326.html>

From: Polik (polik_at_rogers.com)

Date: 11/03/04

Date: Wed, 3 Nov 2004 01:43:22 -0500

"Sean O'Leathlobhair" <jwlawler@yahoo.com> wrote in message
news:d1835a57.0411010555.611540ca@posting.google.com...

> *Ruud Harmsen <realemailseesite01@rudhar.com> wrote in message*

> *news:<eg81o01b49grupuelbfdp2n118b0d6rgft@4ax.com>...*

>> *Thu, 28 Oct 2004 00:09:17 -0500: livermore_jesse@yahoo.com: in*

>> *sci.lang:*

>>

>> > *What do you think will happen to world languages 100 years from now?*

>> > *Will we (well, actually they) be all speaking English or do you think*

>> > *there is any future for a "planned language" like Esperanto?*

>>

>> *I think there will be far fewer languages than there are now, say one*

>> *hundred of them, but also more dialects. E.g. American and British*

>> *English will have grown apart into almost being separate language.*

>

> *I thought that US and UK English were converging. Many words which*

> *were previously thought to be American are now well accepted here e.g.*

> *"truck". American pronunciation is becoming more common, I hear*

> *"mall" with the US pronunciation more often than the older UK*

> *pronunciation, many Brits cannot remember whether the British*

> *pronunciation of "schedule" is "skedule" or "shedule". This would*

> *seem an unsurprising consequence of easier communication. It is no*

> *longer rare for UK and US speakers to hear each other.*

To be more specific, the western half of North America was populated relatively quickly and a relatively uniform variety of English spread with population movement. The end result is that Canadian English west of the French linguistic frontier and the western United States speak very similar English. This leads up to the peculiar situation that a Californian sounds more like someone from Winnipeg, Edmonton or Toronto than someone from New York, Houston or Atlanta.

Now, due to the all pervasive influence of Hollywood, the western variety of English is spreading eastward...a reverse of the original spread. Canadian English is going along for the ride as a prestige form of English.

>

- > *I expect that the point of maximum separation was some time around the*
- > *second world war. Contact between the countries has been much greater*
- > *since then which first slowed and now, I think, reversed the*
- > *divergence.*
- >
- > *Grammar differences are a bit more stubborn but, even there, I detect*
- > *the gradual adoption of previously US only uses here.*
- >
- > *Spelling is the most stubborn of all since, in this case, technology*
- > *is a conservative force. Once I set my spelling checker to UK mode, I*
- > *am discouraged from writing "color" etc.*

Canadian English retains the UK spellings. America used to make more changes, such as "thru" for "through" and "nite" for "night", but that is no longer the case.

An interesting counterpoint is that Harry Potter books were released in Canada using the UK version, but it was translated for the American market, both spelling and slang...a rather sorry state of affairs.

Lastly, Australia went the farther in spelling reform. For a while, the official of health was the Ministry of Helth. But, a spelling change in far-off Australia was insufficient to effect spelling in the rest of the English speaking world. It is a pity that America has not realized that. No American spelling is accepted outside of America. And China tried the same thing. But, no reformed Chinese graph is accepted outside of the People's Republic. China has since stopped reforming the graphs, but the earlier blunders remain.

- >
- > *Of course, other varieties of English could develop and diverge for*
- > *other reasons e.g. black English.*
- >
- >> *Assuming some form of English will be international language, would a*
- >> *book written in "future" English be comprehensible to us now?*
- >>
- >> *Of course. The King James Bible is still comprehensible, and so is*
- >> *Shakespeare, and even Chaucer. Why would language change suddenly*
- >> *become faster? Even 700 or 800 of language evolution doesn't make a*
- >> *language incomprehensible. Above 1,000 years it can become difficult,*
- >> *but not impossible.*
- >
- > *Shakespeare is easy enough to understand but Chaucer can be difficult.*
- > *Short passages may be easy but every now and then you hit something*
- > *that is odd or puzzling and some passages are unfathomable without*
- > *help or study.*
- >
- > *Old English (Anglo-Saxon) is harder to read without learning than*
- > *modern German or Dutch. But there is more than just language drift to*
- > *explain that.*
- >
- >> *We don't have problems reading stuff that was written 100 years ago,*

>> >*but someone from 1900 probably will not be able to understand much of*
>> >*what is being written/spoken today.*
>
> *But that is not the fault of the language. Many new things appeared*
> *between 1900 and 2000 and any language, whether natural or not would*
> *have had this problem. I expect that the next hundred years will be*
> *similar.*

There is another thing that we should consider. Literacy has slowed language change to a slow crawl. It is likely that English will barely change over the next 500 years, except for coining of new terms and borrowing of vocabulary.

Polik.

>
>> *Not at first, but after acquiring enough "world knowledge" from what*
>> *they read it will become easier.*
>
> *Yes, if I could be transported to 2100 and people still spoke English*
> *then I expect learning the new words would be the least of my*
> *problems.*
>
> *But 100 years is a long time and many things could change between now*
> *and then. English could fall out of favour in that time. An obvious*
> *rival is Mandarin but a language that is regarded as minor today could*
> *have taken over.*
>
> *Alternatively we may relapse into a more primitive state with poor*
> *worldwide communication and there will be no lingua franca but*
> *gradually diverging languages and dialects.*
>
> *The one bet that I would be willing to place is that a constructed*
> *language will not be the lingua franca. 100 years is not enough time*
> *for that to happen. It may be a language which has been deliberately*
> *modified (e.g. Bahasa Malaysia / Indonesia today) but not one that was*
> *created from scratch (e.g. Esperanto).*
>
> *Seán O'Leathlóbhair*