

Re: Academic/scientific journals in Esperanto?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-03/2254.html>

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Date: 03/16/05

Date: Wed, 16 Mar 2005 18:39:51 GMT

Seán O'Leathlóbhair wrote:

>

> *Peter T. Daniels wrote:*

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>>>

>>> *Peter T. Daniels wrote:*

>>>> *Seán O'Leathlóbhair wrote:*

>>>>>

>>>>> *but possibly of a new Manx language rather than the old one. I expect*

>>>>> *that the same applies to Hebrew, there are surely native speakers of*

>>>>> *Hebrew alive today but is it the same language as the old Hebrew?*

>>>>>

>>>>> *Define "same" ...*

>>>>

>>>> *A good question. I don't know if there is a standard answer.*

>>>>

>>>> *Most languages evolve over time and hence in a sense a language today*

>>>>

>>>> *not "most"*

>>>>

>>>> *I put "most" in case someone came back with an obscure language that*

>>>> *(they claimed) remained constant over time. I did not want to get into*

>>>> *any irrelevant disputes about that subject. I would regard "Most X are*

>>>> *Y" to be true even if in fact "All X are Y".*

That is uncooperative, in terms of Grice's Conversational Postulates.

When you say "most" but mean 'all', the reader has to try to figure out

what loophole you're leaving yourself.

>>> *may be significantly different from the language of the same name from*

>>> *a century before even if there were a substantial numbers of native*

>>> *speakers for the entire period.*

>>>>

>>>> *over one century, not "significantly" different. How much trouble do you*

>>>> *have understanding your grandparents?*

>>>>

>>>> *So make it a few centuries or a millennium. Can you understand Beowulf*

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Only very rarely would people five generations apart find themselves conversing — I recently gave the example of the Queen Mum and Harry or Wills's kids, which due to her extreme longevity would represent a considerable extreme — so whatever "pressure" against language change there may be wouldn't have to keep stages mutually intelligible for more than a century and a half or so.

> *(without lots of study)? Anyway, significantly different does not necessarily mean incomprehensible. Can you not distinguish the speech of your grandparents and your children? Significant change is just the first step towards incomprehensibility.*

Define "significant" ... this is fun ...

>>> *For languages and dialects, the usual test is mutual comprehensibility but I am aware that it can be difficult to apply. Even when it is possible to apply it, it may give answers quite different from the traditional ones.*

>>>

>>> *So, we could try a mutual comprehensibility test for points in the history of a single language. Of course, there would be the additional problem of finding the historical speakers. But with this test, would you expect a resurrected speaker of ancient Hebrew to understand a modern speaker? Ditto Manx?*

>>

>> *No, and why not? respectively (given that Manx lasted into the 20th century).*

>

> *For Manx, it would depend on how good the reconstruction was. I don't know, it was a genuine question. Just because Manx survived into the 20th century, it does not mean that we necessarily have good records and did a good job of reconstructing it. Do we have voice recordings?*

I would assume the BBC has a huge library — wasn't the Last Speaker quite a celebrity?

>>> *As for dialects, we would often get answers different from traditional usage. Old English would be a different language to modern English and not just a different stage in one language.*

>>>

>>> *But what I had in mind was a vaguer notion. Is there a smooth continuous evolution of the language as may have happened if it did not experience death and rebirth? Or is there a very large discontinuity?*

>>

>> *The latter.*

>

> *As I would have expected.*

>

>>> *Suppose a linguist unfamiliar with the language was presented with lots of material in date sequence but with the large gap masked. Would he be able to deduce that something unusual had happened to the language*

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- > > > *or would it appear as plausible gradual evolution.*
- > >
- > > ??
- >
- > *There is a question mark missing from the end of that but otherwise I*
- > *think that it is a clear question. It is a suggested thought*
- > *experiment to determine if ancient and modern Hebrew can be considering*
- > *a single language. Take many samples of ancient and modern Hebrew,*
- > *sort them chronologically but disguise the large gap when the language*
- > *was dead. Give these samples to a linguist unfamiliar with Hebrew (*)*
- > *and ask for comments. Would he come back and say that something very*
- > *strange happened to the language between samples 1000 and 1001? Or*
- > *would he say, it seems to be a typical example of language evolution?*
- > *If the latter, we could reasonably say that ancient and modern Hebrew*
- > *are different periods in the evolution of one language. If the former,*
- > *it may be better to regard them as different, though related, languages.*

It looks like you're not familiar with the history of Hebrew. It has never been a dead language, has never gone out of use; it was the second language of every literate Jew and used for international communication among Jews on every imaginable topic for at least 1500 years when it was no one's first language.

But already Mishnaic Hebrew (found in the Mishna and in Ecclesiastes, the last book of the Hebrew Bible to be written) is quite different from Classical Hebrew; the inherited tense system was no longer used, and the tenses are in a more Aramaic mode (and Aramaic itself exhibits influence from Iranian and Greek).

Ben Yehuda's revival of Hebrew in Palestine was done by non-native speakers of Hebrew not speaking their native language around their children. They used Hebrew vocabulary and morphology, but (philologists in those days paid little attention to syntax) not syntax, including the uses of the aspects; so Modern Hebrew has basically SAE grammar ("Standard Average European," Whorf's term).

- > (*) *The probable non-existence of such a linguist is why this is merely*
- > *a thought experiment rather than a potential real experiment.*
- >
- > > > *Do you know Crystal's book: The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English*
- > > > *Language? In what sense is he using "language" in the title? Is he*
- > > > *claiming that Old, Middle and Modern English are one language? Is he*
- > > > *claiming that all the many dialects are one? Or is he just claiming*
- > > > *that they have a common origin and there are continuous links between*
- > > > *them?*
- > >
- > > *Define "a language."*
- >
- > *Well I was trying to off load that question onto Crystal. Do you know*
- > *that book? What do you think he means by "The English Language"?*

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I never managed to read much of that book, since it's all about English (but a useful reference work). But surely he tells you near the front what he means? You'd do better to try his brand-new History of English (I don't know the title).

And his *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* is far more rewarding.

> *The following is merely my amateur guess.*

>

> *I do not suppose any perfect, objectively testable definition is possible. Also, the definition probably has to depend on the context.*

> *Here is a narrow and broad definition.*

>

> *Narrow: Take one speaker of the language in question. Anyone that he*

> *can communicate with is a speaker of the same language. They must be*

> *able to discuss a wide range of subjects but a few miscommunications*

> *and some accustomisation are acceptable. I know that this is not*

> *perfect. Firstly, the answer may depend on your selection of test*

> *speaker. Secondly, my use of "few" and "some" are too vague.*

>

> *Broad: All the descendants of some single language (narrow sense),*

> *ideally with demonstrable continuous links, even if not all members are*

> *mutually comprehensible. I imagine Crystal's use in that book title*

> *was something like that.*

Bzzzt. It's not a question linguists deal with. The difference between "language" and "dialect" is purely political.

> *Can some expert pop in and help us here?*

No.

--

Peter T. Daniels

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