

Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-06/msg00609.html>

- *From:* "Brian M. Scott" <b.scott@xxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Wed, 15 Jun 2005 14:42:38 -0400
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On Wed, 15 Jun 2005 16:47:33 +0000 (UTC), "David Wright Sr." <dwrightsr@xxxxxxxxxxx> wrote in <news:Xns96768221CAFA7nokvamli@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> in sci.lang:

[...]

> My primary professor had spent considerable time in the
> south of Germany and Austria and thus I found many years
> later that I could understand Germans from those areas
> much better than I could those from the north.

> I studied Russian at the Army Language School in a
> one-year intensive course. When I visited my old German
> professor, he said that I was speaking German with a
> distinct Slavic accent. He was very familiar with that
> because he had worked with displaced Slavs of all sorts
> in the post-war years.

[...]

> [...] while in Bloomington, my wife and I had two very
> close friends from California and spoke and talked with
> them daily for over two years. When they returned to
> California, they were kidded about the Southern accent
> that they had come home with.

> We lived in Arizona for three years and when returned to
> North Georgia where we currently live, everyone here
> spoke very funnily and we were told the same about the
> way we spoke. After a few months, everyone had stopped
> speaking that way and so did we.

> The point of all of this is to make my point that
> whenever a speaker of a language finds himself in a
> different linguistic environment, even when the
> languages are the *same*, he will adapt his linguistic
> habits to facilitate communication, because differences
> can impede understanding.

Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?

People differ greatly in the extent to which they unconsciously pick up the local accent. You apparently do so rather easily; I'm at the other extreme, picking up little or nothing unless I deliberately choose to do so. (This was also true when I was a child.)

Minor accent differences do not in fact greatly impede understanding, and people use speech for reasons other than communication. One's speech is part of one's identity, and preserving that identity may well seem more important than blending in or very slightly improving the reliability of communication.

[...]

> The major example to all of us is English, which contains
> a vast number of French words and expressions primarily
> due to the Norman conquest.

This is false. The great majority of borrowings from French are from long after the Conquest, with a peak in the second half of the 14th century.

> I suspect that even morphology and syntac as well
> semantics were also heavily influenced by these events.

Very little. The changes that differentiate Middle English from Old English were under way before the Conquest, and the areas in which they progressed most rapidly are for the most part areas with less French influence.

[...]

> I strongly disagree that such wholesale change occurs
> spontaneously.

You'd have a hard time finding a historical linguist who agreed with you, I think.

[...]

Brian

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• *Follow-Ups:*

◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**

◇ *From:* David Wright Sr.

◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**

Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?

◇ From: Ken Shackleton

• **References:**

- ◆ **Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**
◇ From: Ken Shackleton
- ◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**
◇ From: Bobby D. Bryant
- ◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**
◇ From: Ken Shackleton
- ◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**
◇ From: Neeraj Mathur
- ◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**
◇ From: David Wright Sr.
- ◆ **Re: Is language development evolutionary, or designed by the culture?**
◇ From: Nathan Sanders
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