

Re: where do so many tenses come from?

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In article <[e0mpu5\\$3aci@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:e0mpu5$3aci@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)>, hruhin@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Herman Rubin) wrote:

In article <[ZhOWf.20177\\$dy4.12130@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:ZhOWf.20177$dy4.12130@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)>, John Atkinson <johnacko@xxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

And what is the "right" metric? Give me two languages A and B, and I'll guarantee you there's a metric in which $A > B$, and one in which $B > A$.

The appropriate metrics would be length of time needed to communicate equally clearly,

Which requires a definition of "clear communication" that can be applied across languages...

At minimum, this would require a complete, universal theory of semantics and pragmatics. Good luck finding that!

Having a large number of distinct phonemes is an advantage in speaking,

Not in every respect. The more phonemes you have, the more effort you have to expend to keep them distinct from each other. Speakers of a language like Hawai'ian won't care if their /p/ comes out a little bit voiced or a little bit aspirated, so speakers don't have to control their vocal cords as strictly every single time they say /p/; but in Hindi, such variation is phonemic and must be avoided to prevent potential misunderstanding.

Certainly, expending less effort is an advantage, no?

Hawaiian, and other Polynesian languages, are slower

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because of the lack of phonemes.

Claims like this should be backed up with citations of relevant research. Who has defined a cross-linguistic measure of "slowness" and shown that Polynesian languages are "slower" than other languages? I'd certainly be interested in reading their work!

Nathan

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