

Re: Plausibility Check

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- *From:* Nathan Sanders <nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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In article <1153153729.568023.198060@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, "DJensen" <i_m0nk@xxxxxxx> wrote:

Sorry, I was typing from the ur-Rosetta perspective originally. Not so much "which phonemes could collapse in the future" but "which will likely have collapsed by the time Rosetta (the descendent language) is in use, and thus not appear in the alphabet?"...

Just because a language has changed doesn't mean that the writing system will automatically be updated. If the writing system your proposing will have been in existence for a while, it's quite likely that much of it would reflect an older stage of the language rather than the modern stage, unless the culture undergoes a concerted spelling reform. Consider English, for example: "rough" and "snuff" rhyme, but aren't spelled the same because originally, they didn't rhyme, and the spelling reflects the older pronunciation.

An interesting concept, at least. Which tend to change more often, vowels or consonants?

Some languages have relatively stable consonants over time, but shift vowels a lot (English), others have the reverse (Polynesian and Slavic languages). And of course, a language can switch back and forth, changing consonants for a while then the vowels, or even both at the same time.

Instead of trying to anticipate possible types of changes, you might be better off just actually deciding what changes you want to have happened, and go from there. Some common types of sound change you can use to really shake up the look of a language over time would be:

palatal mutation: major shifts in place and/or manner of articulation (such as k > ts) before (high) front vowels

syncope: deletion of word-medial, unstressed vowels (high vowels tend

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to be more susceptible than low vowels)

epenthesis: insertion of a vowel to break up a consonant cluster, or a consonant to break up a sequence of dissimilar vowels; usually an unmarked sound: a, schwa, i, glottal stop, t

vowel shift: lots of ways this can work (raising, lowering, centralization, fronting, rounding, etc); see the various shifts in the history of English (and in modern dialects) for good examples

apocope: deletion of word-final sounds, especially consonants and unstressed vowels

lenition: weakening of consonants, especially between vowels; typical weakening includes: voiceless > voiced; geminate > singleton; stop > fricative > approximant > deletion; often can occur as a chain shift

You can start with a "pure" form of your language, with a well-defined simple phonological system, then throw in ten or so changes (especially ones that can take advantage of previous changes to create new phonemes or merge old ones). Pick a period of time in the history where the writing system would have been created (say, well after the third change, and before the sixth, but while the fourth and fifth were still underway), and go from there. Depending on how transparent or opaque you want the writing system to be with respect to the modern language, you would move it closer to or farther from the present.

For ideas on sound changes, you can just look at some random samples of histories of various languages to see what has happened to them, and pick and choose whatever sound changes look interesting to you (and could apply to the set of phonemes you have).

Nathan

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