

Re: Plausibility Check

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Peter T. Daniels wrote:

Swiss radio broadcasts in Swiss dialect? That's surprising. What are the words that are much less different than "zwanzig tausend" and "zwei hundert tausend"?

Sloppily pronounced zwAenz(g) tuusig – zwEI hnr tuusig

Now you're wending back to the incredible ... no normal adult human has a vocabulary of 700 words, or of 7,000 words.

Milton may have used only 7000 different words in his writings (though I rather doubt that), but his writings are rather limited in subject matter.

I found those numbers on a website, quotes from one Craig: a farmer some centuries ago had a vocabulary of 700 words, Milton a vocabulary of 7,000 words, Shakespeare one of 21,000 words, 3,000 of them introduced by himself, mostly from Latin. Google for

"english in shakespeare's time" vocabulary size

open the site on Shakespeare vs. Bacon, and navigate it (will take you about half an hour to find all the quotes).

That, as is pointed out in histories of the OED, is a misleading figure: it turns out that if the collectors found an unusual word in Shakespeare, they didn't bother searching out earlier occurrences in lesser-known authors. He did use a lot of words, but he can't certainly be credited with inventing many of them. ("Incarnidine," sure — but books on S's language give exampl