

Re: unnatural languages

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- *From:* hrrubin@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Herman Rubin)
 - *Date:* 15 Mar 2007 15:43:01 -0400
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In article <1173929457.442038.57900@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, Peter T. Daniels <grammatim@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Mar 14, 5:43 pm, hru...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Herman Rubin) wrote:

In article <1173824361.678668.201...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, Peter T. Daniels <gramma...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Mar 13, 3:48 pm, hru...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Herman Rubin) wrote:

BTW, algebraic notation can be applied to ordinary language. Variables are linguistic entities, which can substitute for anything, and have rigid rules. Euclid could, and did, use variables for geometric objects, but variables for anything else had not yet been invented.

Applications of logical systems to human language were tried -- Generative Semantics, Montague grammar -- and were soon abandoned.

One can try too hard to achieve what cannot yet be done.

I was not suggesting replacing language, but adding the capabilities of "algebraic notation" to language. This is partly done now, but clumsily and in too limited a

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manner. We use such terms as gizmo, doohickey, whatamajig; these are used as variables. We also say, "From place A to place B." this is linguistic use of variables, and we could replace "A" by "Q" and "B" by "RsT". If we had a few dozen places to keep track of, or people, we could use variables for notation. We can even use variables for verbs or adjectives. THIS is the suggestion, and it can be done early.

It is of course part of every human language. It needs no "adding" from "algebraic notation."

It is? Why could not the Greeks use it?

The first use of variables for numerical quantities seems to be around 300 CE. For several variables, it was the late 16th century. For more than numbers and geometric objects, 18th century. The use of strings, rather than single letters, or single letters with subscripts or superscripts, 20th century. As other than pronouns, likewise.

Why are they not used in elementary school arithmetic? When introduced in algebra or "prealgebra", they are made to seem mysterious, and to frown on the use of more than the smallest number possible. No, they are not used enough, and not early enough.

You might also find Jakobson's notion of "shifters" worth looking at.

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This address is for information only. I do not claim that these views are those of the Statistics Department or of Purdue University.
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