

Re: If you were to design a language, how many vowels and consonants would you use?

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- *From:* Nathan Sanders <nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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In article

<f82d2a4e-7871-498a-b8d3-b838051dd534@xx>, "Jens S. Larsen" <jens_s_larsen@xxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Ross Clark:

Some people find the lack of a clear-cut criterion for "language/dialect" disturbing. But to say "All languages are really the same language" does not seem to me like a solution.

If we have no objective means of telling one language apart from another,

Who says we don't have such means? Is someone is a different person from me, this his language is a different language from mine. I guarantee that some statistically significant difference can always be found between any two persons' speech, whether it's in voice quality, speech rate, distribution of syntactic constructions, lexical item frequency, etc.

Now, whether his language is mutually intelligible with mine, or provable related to mine, or considered the same language by our government, those are totally orthogonal issues.

In common parlance
a language is the spoken form of an orthography,

Then common parlance is idiotic, since it means any language with no written form isn't a language.

Re: If you were to design a language, how many vowels and consonants would you use?

Some people have suggested that the big languages that are taking over the world are doing so on the basis of superior intrinsic qualities, but I see very little evidence for this.

How do you prefer to look at it, then? If the differences between different languages are not intrinsic qualities, why do we need to posit more than one?

Ross isn't questioning the existence of intrinsic qualities in general. He's questioning whether *superior* intrinsic differences are the cause of languages "taking over the world", and indeed, whether intrinsic qualities can even be measured by their superiority at all.

Nathan

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