

Re: Why does some culture's language become replaced but others don't?

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- *From:* Adam Funk <a24061@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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On 2008-07-31, LEE Sau Dan wrote:

Adam> I know that it's a commonly held axiom among pure linguists
Adam> that written language is an entirely different thing from
Adam> language (=speech) ... but we (who have never spoken to each
Adam> other) are communicating using a written medium that *seems*
Adam> to be based on the same language faculty as speech, with
Adam> basically the same syntax and lexicon (with different
Adam> frequency distributions, of rcourse).

No. Spoken English is not written English. They differ in syntax as well as lexicon.

I certainly don't think they are *exactly* the same, but that they are closely related. My writing and speaking lexica mostly overlap. I doubt that there are any syntactic constructions that I use in writing but not in speech. (Any two speakers of the "same language" probably don't have exactly the same lexical and syntactic frequencies.)

Adam> Otherwise, it's a most remarkable coincidence that it's
Adam> possible to read "artful literature" (nice expression) out
Adam> loud so that it sounds like speech. ;-)

You can read it out aloud, but it may not sound like natural speech.

Not exactly, but I think we use the same language functions to hear and understand natural speech, planned oration, and literature read aloud.

e.g. an academic paper usually employs passive voice very frequently. How often do you do that in natural speech? Do you tend to use long sentences with nested relative clauses in speech?

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I definitely agree that the frequencies differ. Personally, I try to avoid using the passive voice in writing without a good reason, but in general, that's a good example of what I mean: the construction exists in speech but is much more frequent in writing; the same is true of nesting a relative clause.

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The generation of random numbers is too important to be left to chance. [Robert R. Coveyou]

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