

Issues of Language

Our beliefs about language and our attitudes toward language:
Justified or not?

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Studying Language

Does studying language lead us to modify these in significant ways?

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Writing

A language must have a written form in order to count as a language.

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Writing

A language must have a written form in order to count as a language.

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Some languages are better than others

- French is a clearer and more logical language than English or German
- English is a simpler language than German or Greek

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Language and thought

Eskimos don't have a general word for "snow" therefore they can't think abstractly.

The English word order:
subject – verb – object
reflects the order of thought

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Language and thought

People who say
“Nobody ain’t done nothing”
can’t think logically

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Language and thought

People who say
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can’t think logically

?

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Genes and language

It’s easier to learn Chinese if your ancestry
is Chinese

You can almost always recognize Jews and
Blacks by the way they talk

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Spelling/Writing

Writing is more perfect than speech

Correct spelling preserves a language

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Children learn language

By imitating their parents

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Children learn language

By imitating their parents

?

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Everyone should learn to
speak/read/write “standard
English”

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Everyone should learn to
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?

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Everyone should learn to
speak/read/write “standard
English”

Possibly this is true for social reasons.

But it is not true for linguistic reasons: there
is no respect in which non-standard dialects
are linguistically “inferior” to the standard
dialect.

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Language Education

Dialect based?

English first?

<http://www.englishfirst.org/>

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But surely one language per
country is “normal”?

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But surely one language per
country is “normal”?

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Is it really “normal”?

How many languages? 6,000 +/-

How many countries? 200 approx.

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Is one language per country cheap?

Maybe.

No translation, no bilingual education,
books, magazines etc. in only one language

But do you want to live this way?

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Cultural heritage

What's the value of preserving it?
(Note \$ spent teaching “American history”:
Pilgrims etc. etc.)

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Would it even work?

What is the BEST way to introduce students
to written and spoken English?

Assumption of “English first” – “English
only”.

Evidence – controlled studies suggest this is
not the best way.

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Cost of failure

Must be measured not just in \$

..but in cost of wasted opportunities for
people, educational failures, severe under-
achievement

..ultimately \$ costs – prisons, welfare

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International Relations

Would improve if everyone spoke the same
language?

Northern Ireland

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Puerto Rico as a state source: English First

Facts About Puerto Rico Statehood

As a state, Puerto Rico would have the 25th highest population of any state and would send six or seven Congressmen to Washington as well as two Senators. The House is limited to 435 Members, so a state of Puerto Rico would cost at least six states one Congressman each.

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Language

Fully 90% of Puerto Rico's high school graduates do not speak English well.

As a state, Puerto Rico could make Spanish its only official language (as it did in 1990) and require the rest of the United States to adapt to them. That could cost \$2-3 billion each year in language translation costs alone based on the costs Quebec imposes on Canada.

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Income

- Puerto Rico's per capita income of \$8,509 is less than one third of the US average, and about one half that of Mississippi, the poorest state.
- The average monthly per capita income in Puerto Rico would be \$709 per month.

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Money continued

- In Puerto Rico, 50% of families have incomes of less than \$10,000.
- In the United States, 67% of families have incomes of \$25,000 or more.
- Amount of expected income to the U.S. Treasury from individuals in Puerto Rico because of the Earned Income Credit: \$0.
- Percentage of Puerto Ricans on the island who receive food stamps in 1989: 43.5%
- Amount of expected increase in welfare payments annually to Puerto Rico as a state: \$3 billion.

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Deaf people communicate:

By writing, by reading lips, and by spelling out English with their fingers

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Deaf people communicate:

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ASL

- As a language.
- Does it satisfy a foreign language requirement?

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Cost to students and education

- 1. Hearing students cannot learn ASL to satisfy the foreign language requirement
- 2. Deaf students who have learned English cannot count ASL as their second language. I.e. they must take e.g. German or Spanish (in a class designed for hearing learners!) in order to qualify as speaking 2 languages.

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Boston University

Dispute right now:

<http://www.bu.edu/asllrp/fl/>

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Conclusions

- People (including us) hold a wide variety of views/opinions about language.
- While some of these may be more or less well-founded, many of them certainly are not.

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Conclusions

- Before signing on to these views, we need to reason from what we know about language based on scientific study. If common views do not match the conclusions we reach from careful investigation and reasoning, we need to think twice before accepting commonly held opinion.

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Course Evaluations

1. You are evaluating the LECTURES. The recitation sections are separately evaluated. (Next Monday)

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Course Evaluations

2. Contrary to what you might think, we really do read the evaluations and take the comments into account in future versions of the course. So please give specific comments and suggestions.
3. We need a volunteer to deliver the completed forms to the TEC!

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Last recitation sections, last lecture

- Will be reviews for the final exam.
- So please come prepared with your questions.

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