

SILLY LINGUISTICS

THE MAGAZINE FOR LANGUAGE LOVERS

WELCOME TO *Cape Town*

*Exploring the English
language in South Africa*

**SAVE A LINGUIST,
LEARN A DIALECT**

*Embracing linguistic
diversity*

**S IS FOR
SURPASS**

*Create the mindset
for success*

**LIVIN' LA
VIDA LOCA**

*Code-switching
in pop culture*

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S IS FOR... *Surpass*

By **Chris Davy**



One of the most important things to remember when trying to learn something, or get better at something is that the whole point is to surpass yourself.

Whatever you are capable of right now, after practise and study, are you capable of extra? Of something you weren't capable of before?

But how do you achieve that? And how do you know if you are achieving that? How do you know if you are surpassing yourself?

Well, let's look at it like this. My whole 'S is for...' mnemonic based system is better known as S is for...Something.

Whilst you are alive, you are always doing something. Always. There isn't really such a thing as doing nothing. When we say that someone is doing nothing, what we might mean is that they are doing something that we think they shouldn't be doing; be it the actual thing they are doing, or just the style they are doing that something. Whatever it is, basically we don't like the way they are going about it.

"Oh whatever mate, you are doing nothing."

Something like that.

So, when it comes to learning, and here at Silly Linguistics we focus on language, and linguistics, obviously, what is the something you are doing to try and surpass yourself? What is the something that you are doing to try and improve? What is the something you are doing to learn more about language and linguistics?

Reading, writing, speaking, listening, drawing, watching films, listening to music? The number of possibilities is pretty endless.

The key point being that, you actually compartmentalise it like that. You are consciously compartmentalising the something you are doing as an attempt at trying to surpass yourself. You are recognising the effort.

If you don't recognise it like that, are you really able to surpass yourself?

If you aren't recognising you're failed attempts at surpassing yourself as failure, then aren't you just living in denial? Aren't you kind of just floating along hoping for the best? Thinking that all of sudden the penny might drop and everything within the realm of languages and linguistics is just going to click and make sense?

Surpassing yourself is an action.

It is a verb.

You have to do it.

You have to put in effort.

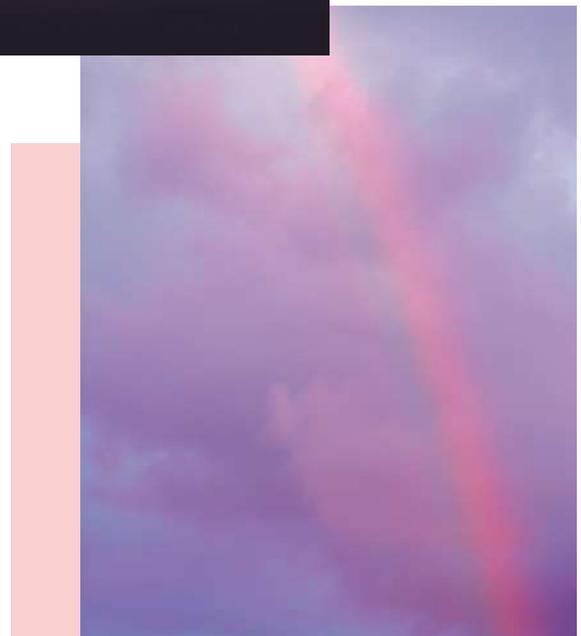
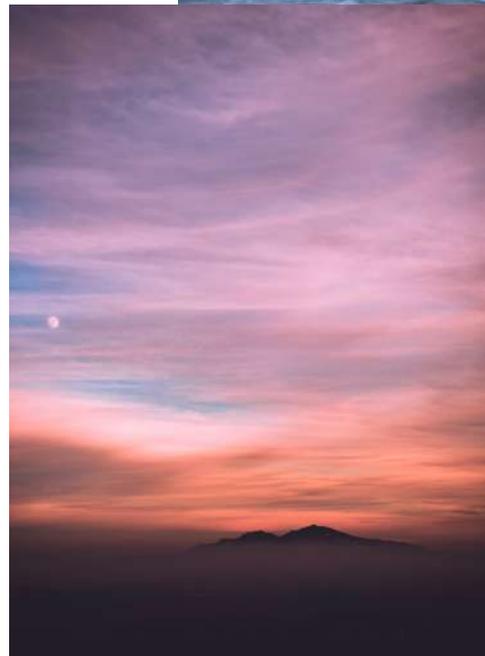
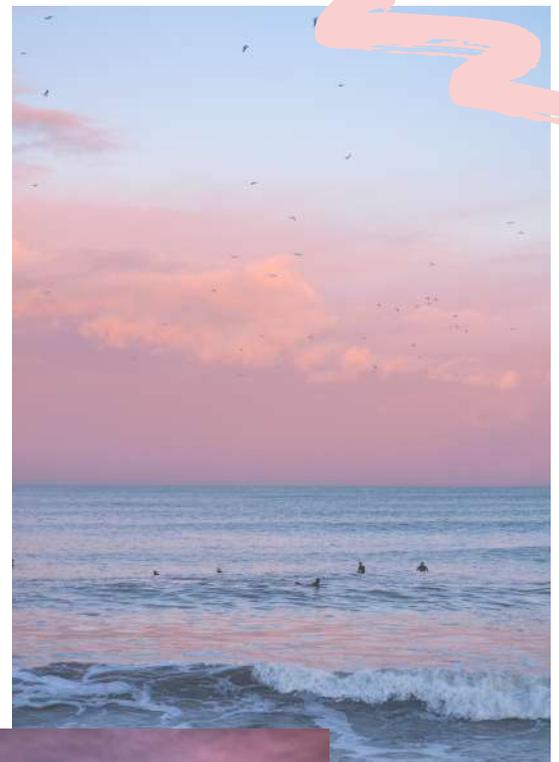
So, whilst you might not be able to go full pelt 100% of the time, because you risk suffering burnout, or you recognise that going fully pelt 100% of the time simply isn't sustainable; going full pelt and giving 100% of your effort is a concept and a real thing.

“
If you aren't getting the results you want, are you really giving all that you can?
”

Are you doing everything you can be doing to surpass yourself?

You don't have to consciously do it all of the time, but when you want to do it you definitely have to consciously do it.

Strive. Study. Surpass.



Photos by Aleksander Vlad, delfi de la Rua & Casey Horner on Unsplash



The Revitalisation of Modern Hebrew

By Gil Cohen

Photo by Josh Appel on Unsplash

How does one revitalize a language? Does one administer CPR to it? Do they blow air into the lungs of a language? Why would anyone want to do it, anyway? Language is a means of communicating ideas in your head to the person you're talking with, right? If so, shouldn't it be enough if people can speak the same language? Unfortunately, that's not always the case. As you may have read in my last piece (December issue, *Methods of Teaching Languages in Class*), sometimes people who immigrate to a new country speak different languages, and you need to have a common language which is one of the reasons Hebrew has been revitalized.

As learners of languages, we all know that learning a language creates a window through which we can look into the culture of the people related to that language. Sometimes, and for a variety of reasons, a community of speakers stops speaking their own language, and without it, they lose some of their own culture and identity. An example of this would be the Celtic languages and people (mostly) in Europe. Some of the languages have gone extinct (like Cornish), while other languages have had less and less native or second language speakers (like Irish and Welsh). Thanks to efforts as part of the Celtic revival, a variety of movements in the 19th and 20th centuries

that sparked a renewed interest in the Celtic culture, Cornish has been revitalized and is no longer an extinct language.

Ever since the Second Temple of the Jews had been destroyed in the year 70 AD and the exile of most Jews from the area of Erets Israel (the land of Israel), they had a common dream: returning to their homeland. Up until the 19th century, due to the political situation in the area, Jews couldn't immigrate to Israel. Since the destruction of the Second Temple (and actually sometime before that too) Hebrew hasn't been used as a spoken language, but as a liturgical language - i.e. Hebrew has gone pretty much extinct. It was not used for communication and children did not learn it at home or at school and etc. Nevertheless, in the 19th century, before Jews started immigrating to the land of Israel, Jews in Europe began using Hebrew as a literary language.

The Jewish diaspora was a worldwide phenomenon. Jews were everywhere: in pretty much every country in Europe, in North and South America, in Asia and in Africa. They have been in these places for centuries, and as a consequence, beside their Judaism, they were very different from one another. Their way of dress and what they ate were different and, surprise surprise, their culture and language, too! Jews in Europe mostly spoke the language of the country/area: English in England, French in France and German in Germany, but many Jews in Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish. Yiddish is a Germanic language written with Hebrew letters, that has been influenced by Hebrew, but is much closer to German.

So, when Jews started immigrating to the land of Israel, then a part of the Ottoman Empire, they were not very united as a people, because they did not speak the same language. One spoke French, another spoke Arabic and yet another spoke Yiddish. What do

you do? You need to find a common language, and which other language would be the common language if not Hebrew, the language of the bible? Thus, began the actual revitalization of Hebrew as a spoken language.

The most well-known person in the revitalization movement is Eliezer Ben Yehuda, who is often regarded as "the reviver of the Hebrew Language". Obviously, he wasn't the only one who revitalized Hebrew, but he was very influential: He published a newspaper in Hebrew in Jerusalem, HaZvi (lit. "The Gazelle"), he worked day and night to invent new words in Hebrew for concepts and objects that did not have a Hebrew equivalent (many of them are still used to this day) and raised the first native speaker of Hebrew in millennia, his first-born son. Even though his or his wife's native language wasn't Hebrew, he insisted that his children will be raised in a household in which only Hebrew was spoken.

There were many difficulties, as one would expect, such as people saying Hebrew was the sacred language of the bible and therefore it's sacrilege to use it for every day activities, like speaking. In addition, since Hebrew didn't have the prestige and status of other languages like French and German, many parents preferred to teach their children these languages instead of Hebrew. These languages would benefit them more in the future if they wanted to get a higher education, which at that time was not available in Hebrew. If you're the child or grandchild of an immigrant, I guess you'll find this familiar.

Nonetheless, little by little, Hebrew has become more and more popular, until it was being used everywhere: in newspapers, on the street, in official documents etc.. When the country of Israel was founded, Hebrew was chosen as its official language.



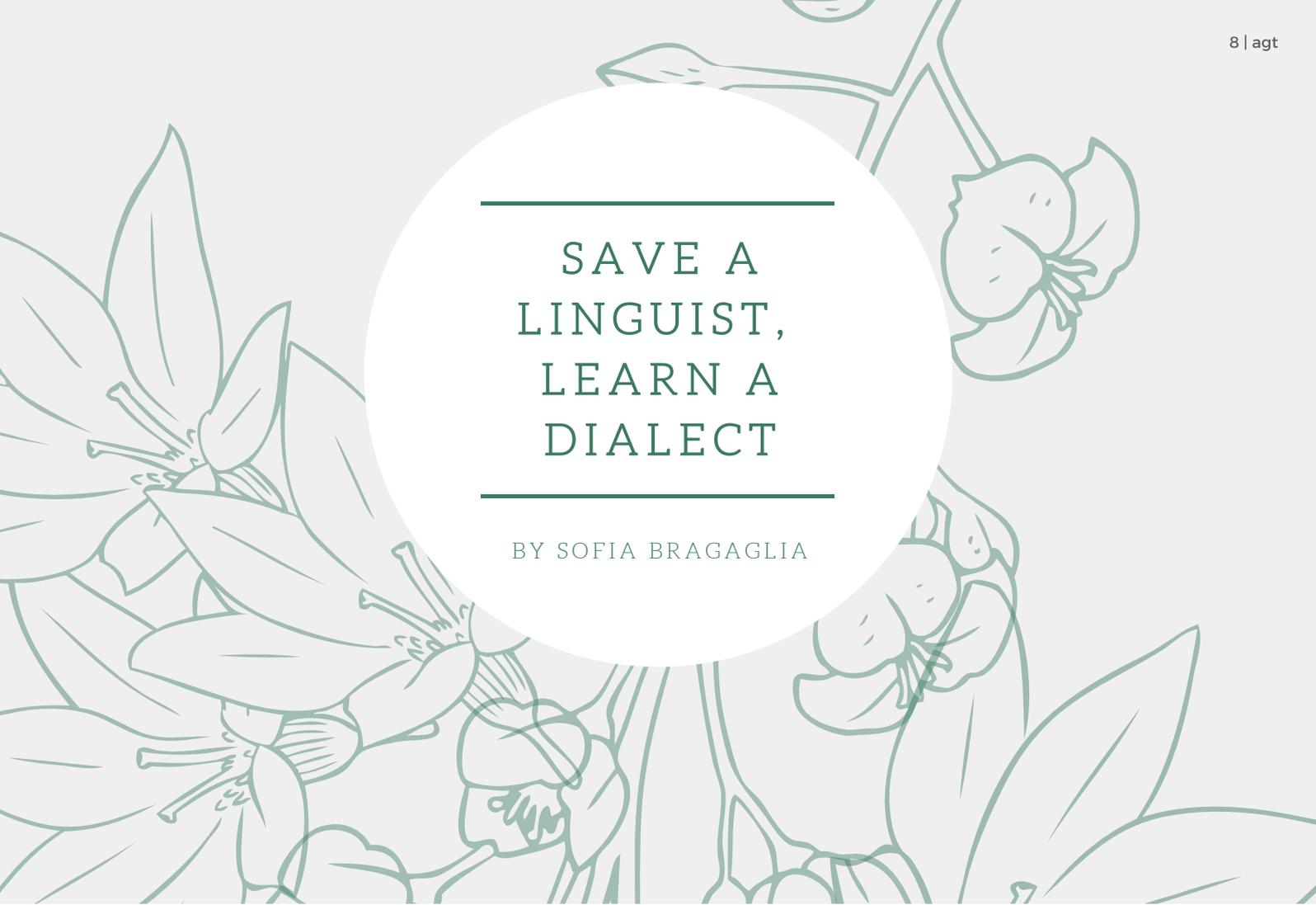


Nowadays, Hebrew is very much alive and non-extinct: there are millions of speakers (mostly in Israel, of course), there are many newspapers written in Hebrew, the universities in Israel teach mostly in Hebrew and songs, tv shows, movies and books are written in and use Hebrew. In contradiction to what many people think, Modern Hebrew and Biblical Hebrew are very different:

- They're pronounced in a very different fashion. Generally, Judaism is divided in two: Sephardic and Ashkenazi Judaism. Ashkenazi Jews are Jews that come from the area between France and Great Britain to Russia (or descendants of Jews that are originally from there), and Sephardic Jews are Jews that come from all other places: Asia, Northern Africa and Southern Europe. I won't get to the religious difference between these groups, but they pronounced (and still do) Biblical Hebrew in different ways. Therefore, when Hebrew was revitalized, in what fashion should it be pronounced? The Sephardic way or the Ashkenazi way? There were many contentions regarding this subject, but because the Sephardic pronunciation was closer to the Biblical Hebrew one, it was the desired pronunciation for Modern Hebrew. Nevertheless, many Jews had problems pronouncing the stops and vowels in the Sephardic fashion (because most of the revitalizers of Hebrew were Ashkenazi), so we got a mix of the two.
- Biblical Hebrew is without a doubt a Semitic language, while the question whether Modern Hebrew is a Semitic language is controversial. Ghilad Zuckermann, a famous Israeli linguist and revivalist, claims that Modern Hebrew is a hybrid Germanic-Slavic-Semitic language. While the morphology is very Semitic (see my previous pieces regarding Modern Hebrew morphology), there are many constructs that are very Yiddish-like or are a calque. For example, the Yiddish phrase for "how are you?" (which is pronounced very similarly to *wie gehts* in German), which literally means "how is it going?", has been calqued in Hebrew with *ekh/ma holekh?*, which literally means "how/what is going?". Consequently, the grammar and syntax of Modern Hebrew is very different than Biblical Hebrew's.

I, for one, can't really understand Biblical Hebrew, even after 11 years of mandatory bible classes in School, in which we read the stories and analyzed them. I believe that a Modern Hebrew speaker who encounters Biblical Hebrew for the first time will understand some words here and there, because after all, the languages are related, but they won't really understand it.

The revitalization of Modern Hebrew is a very interesting and complex subject, and I've just scratched the surface, so you are more than welcome to continue reading about it - and hey, maybe you'll revitalize the language of your ancestors!



SAVE A LINGUIST, LEARN A DIALECT

BY SOFIA BRAGAGLIA

Today I am going to talk about a very important linguistic phenomenon: dialects. Specifically, why they are important and why people should learn them.

I was born in a small Italian town and grew up with my parents and my grandparents. My grandparents were born in the 30s, a time when the Italian language was already standardised and used nationally, but not very widespread in smaller towns and in the countryside; so they grew up speaking their dialect. However, because of historical and political stances, they were taught that dialects were inappropriate and a symbol of low education. So, when I was around the house, they made a promise not to speak in what was, as a matter of fact, their native tongue.

However, if you have spoken a language (or, in this case, dialect) your entire life, chances are that you will keep the habit. So, while they usually talked to me in standard Italian, my grandparents often ended up interacting with each other using the local dialect even when I was around. That allowed me to pick it up – they would not let me use it, but there was nothing they could do to stop my linguistically-curious brain from absorbing their words. So I grew up, brokenly bilingual and convinced that my dialect, the native tongue of my land, was a low, undignified thing to use. I only ever used it around my family (who eventually gave up on trying to control my speech), but I never would have dreamed of using it outside my home.

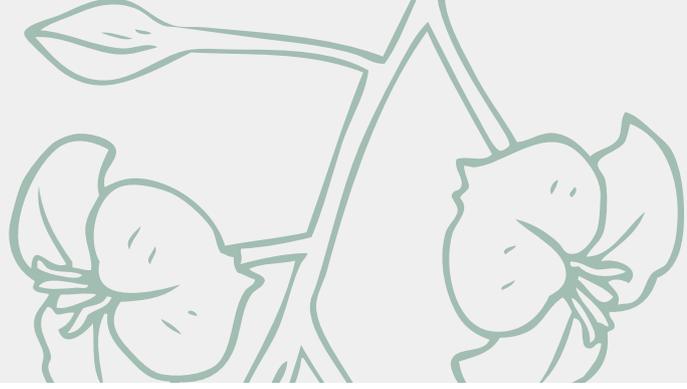


photo by Daniel Fazio on Unsplash

Now, many years later, I have ended up studying languages and linguistics academically. In English classes I have been taught Old and Middle English, while in Italian and Historical Linguistics classes I have been taught about...dialects. Now, you can imagine how silly I felt, having to study something that I could have known from my childhood and that I have always felt ashamed about. So I tried to pick my own dialect back up and became interested in the other ones spoken around the country.

Dialects are still used every day in many parts of Italy - however, they are bound to disappear if people keep raising the new generations the same way my family raised me. Why is it important to keep them alive?

First of all, dialects are an important source to trace down the history of a language. All the dialects in Italy have a common origin, which is Latin. However, through time, they started getting mixed with other languages, like French and Spanish, so even nowadays, one can find traces of these languages in the local dialects. Basically, a philologist's paradise.



Second of all, many local expressions and sayings have not been translated into standard Italian – and most of them are absolutely hilarious. I have lost count of how many times I have found myself talking to somebody from Milan, Naples or Palermo and had to bring a word or phrase from my native region into the conversation because the closest word in Italian just did not express properly what I wanted to say. One of the biggest examples of this is probably the word *freschin* or *freschino* – this is a word that is used in several regions in Northern Italy to express an unpleasant smell that comes from something that has not been washed or dried properly. Anyone who grew up in the north-eastern part of the country knows what this means – but there is no official translation for it in Italian! So all you can do is say “this smells of *freschino*” and then proceed to explain to your interlocutor what that means. This often leads to hilarious exchanges, in which the other person either asks question to understand the specific meaning of the word or tries to find an equivalent in their own dialect. Again, *freschino* is just an example, but there are hundreds of other cases which play out the same.

This kind of interaction is not just a moment of hilarity and possible misunderstanding, but truly a wonderful cultural exchange. It brings people together, encouraging them to tell stories about their language and the place they were born in.

Finally, a child who is brought up with both a standard language and a local dialect is pretty much naturally bilingual. This means that if said child goes on to study more languages when he is older, he will probably find it less difficult to adapt to different linguistic systems and structures.

So, everyone, learn your dialect – it will help save this wonderful heritage and you will get to add a new entry to the list of languages you know, which is always cool.

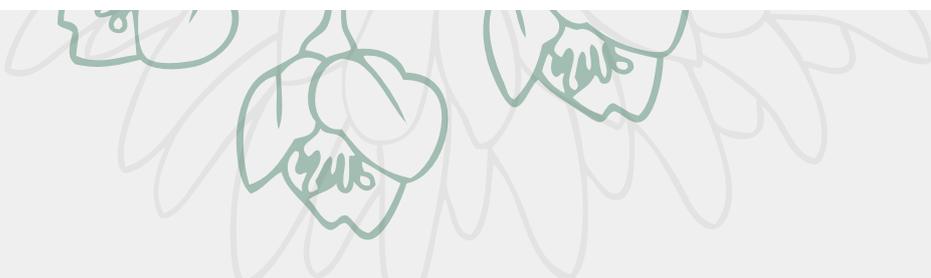




Photo by Paul Rysz on Unsplash

Chocolatine or Pain au Chocolat

By *Camille Masson*

When one thinks of the French language, they typically think of Paris, France, and fine food. However, there are many other places where French is used, namely in the Canadian province of Québec. However, there are important differences between Québécois French and European French that can be found in their idioms, phonetic inventory, and grammatical structures. For example, in Québécois spoken French can differ greatly from written French, as written French tends to be more “standard” and will usually follow the guidelines emitted by “L’Académie Française”.

Unfortunately, it is quite frequent for language learners to be unaware of these differences, and this can lead to confusion when the time comes for those learners to practice their French in Québec!

This year, I had the chance to meet one exchange student who was learning French, and a few exchange students from France. Through meeting these

students, I realized I needed to adapt my French for both the French learner, and for the students from France even though we both spoke the same language. This experience sparked my interest in sharing a few differences between Québécois French and European French. The differences I will write about here are only a few examples and may vary depending on the context of use. After all, people usually do not speak to their boss the same way they would speak to their friends!

Questions

In European French, one would say "Veux-tu partir?", which means "Do you want to leave?". In Québécois, the pronoun "tu" is repeated which results in "Tu veux-tu partir?". This means that in Québécois we see sentences like, "T'aimes-tu la tarte?", "Ça te tenterait tu?", "T'es-tu d'accord?" etc.

Anglicisms

Both European French and Québécois use words derived from English, and are called integral anglicisms. These occur when words taken directly from English and applied in French, such as "toaster" in Québec.

However, Québécois also uses other hybrids, semantics, morphological, syntactic and phraseological anglicisms.

- Hybrid anglicisms are created by borrowing an English word's meaning and form, and adding a French suffix. For example: "to customize" becomes "customizer"; "to check" becomes "checker".
- Semantic anglicisms are French words that are given a second meaning that it does not have in French. This primarily happens with words that have a similar form in both French and English, but have different meanings. For example, "change" in European French only means "to change", but it is often used synonymously with "monnaie" (coins of low denomination) in Québec.
- Morphological anglicisms are created by translating a word or expression directly from English to French when the meaning is already covered by a French equivalent. For example, a Québécois would say they are making an "appel longue distance" (long-distance call), while a European would say they are making an "interrurbain".
- Syntactic anglicisms are created when a structural form is taken from English and used in French. For example, "To make sense" would be "Avoir du sens (to have sense)" in European French. However, it is often changed for "Faire du sens" in Québec.

- Idiomatic anglicisms are created when an idiom is directly translated from English and is then used in French. For example, "Out of the woods" is "Ne pas être sorti de l'auberge" (not to be out of the hostel) in European French. However, if you directly translate "Out of the woods" from English to French you get "Ne pas être sorti du bois", which is the most commonly used version in Québec.

Contractions

Spoken Québécois is quite different from European

French. One of the most obvious differences are the contractions used in

- Québécois. Here are a few examples, their equivalent in France's French, and their translation in English.

"Chu" = "Je suis" = "I am".

As in "Chu fatigué" ("I'm tired).

"A" = "Elle" = "She".

As in "A veut manger" ("She wants to eat)

"Y" = "Il" = "He".

As in "Y veut manger" ("He wants to eat)

Vocabulary

Many words are used in both Québec and France, but with different meanings.

- "Écoeurant" is a great example of this. In Québec, it can both mean "disgusting" and "very good", but in France, it only means "disgusting". Another very controversial word is "Chocolatine" vs "Pain au chocolat", which is the subject of debate in France itself. In Québec, "Chocolatine" refers to a pastry made from puff pastry wrapped around chocolate, whereas "Pain au chocolat" refers to a loaf of bread with chocolate chips mixed in the dough. In some parts of France "chocolatine" is not used, and "Pain au chocolat" refers to the puff pastry. This is a heated subject in the francophone community with everyone arguing that they are saying it the "right way". However, I do not believe there is one universal and unique word, and instead you must simply adapt to your environment to make sure you get the right item from the boulangerie.

In conclusion, if you ever come to Quebec to learn French it is important to keep these regional differences in mind!

CODE SWITCHING IN FRENCH RAP BATTLES

By Valentin Pradelou

There are plenty of organized rap battles across the world, following some kind of a tradition started in United States (We can cite End of the weak, Freestyle Friday, wordup, and so on). With the birth of rap, based on hip hop and emerged in the 70's, the rap battles have slowly appeared, principally on the East Coast of the USA in the 1980's (as one of the first rap battles occurred in 1982). This kind of verbal jousting remains now a corner stone of the rap culture.

The goal in these competitions: make jokes (gently or nastily, more often the second choice) in order to mock your opponent, playing mainly on the poetry (rhymes, jokes, etc.) and also taking into account the more technical side (alliterations, assonance, quickness of speech, etc.). This verbal war sees a winner following his skills and his on-scene performance.



Picture by Jordon Conner on Unsplash



Picture by Alex wong on Unsplash

In France, the main organized competition of rap battles is called “Rap Contenders”. Started in 2010, there has been, to this day, 16 editions. Around 10 artists pledge, battle each other, and some judges decide who wins. The rappers with the highest amount of victories compete for the title, through one match.

This organized competition, although occurring exclusively in France, is the place where a lot of code switching occurs. As we have said, Rhythm and Poetry style of music, basis of rap battles, are based on hip hop, born in the USA. This multicultural context is obviously a breeding-ground for some code-switching.

We will see that many words are taken from the world of American sports (as Basketball, Football and so on), but we will see lexemes having other origins (Japanese for example). These competitions remain a tradition of the urban world, itself originating some forms of cryptic languages (Verlan in France, for example). We will see how this code switching occurs in the particular field of rap battles. This notion, defined by Gumperz[1], is the juxtaposition of utterances belonging to at least 2 linguistic codes into one discussion, text, sentence, and so on. It remains possible to consider some of the following utterances as “loanwords”. To Crystal[2], it is

a word taken from one language, and used into another. For example, French uses Baseball taken from the American English, as no French word is used.

We won’t propose an exhaustive study with all the utterances of code switching. However, we will try to provide the best examples showing how this phenomenon occurs, and try to explain why. The corpus I use here is only composed of Youtube videos taken from the channel simply called “Rap Contenders”. Each utterance I will cite is to be found in at least one of these videos.

Code-switching in stage names

Participants and organizers of this competition obviously have to choose a stage name. This is the first place of a big code-switching. We can cite: *Blackapar* (which means, in English “Black man aside”). It is also a pun as it recalls the French idiomatic expression *Blague à part* meaning “joking aside”). Of course, “black” has entered the pragmatic French language as some kind of a regular (but informal) nomination for black people, and remains a case of code switching. Here, the name clearly means “the end of a joke”, like the serious business is beginning.

[1] Gumperz, John J., 1982 : *Discourse strategies*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

[2] Crystal, David, 2008 : *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.



Picture by Jan Střecha & Taylor on Unsplash



One of the organizer's name is Stunner, and he claims his surnames are "the shadow boxer" and "the bad motherfucker". One of the co-organizer's stage name is Bad Sam and he calls himself the "bad ass". No need to translate here, but we can spot a certain desire to assert oneself. We can also cite the stage name Lawid (literally meaning "the weed", asserting a kind of closeness with marijuana).

In the field of Semantics, each word is composed with sense features called "semes". Here, we can suppose the seme of "virility" is clustering all the names above, as manliness is a strong element in the position of a traditional rapper.

However, we have other names arising some belonging to a music style like Jazzy Bazz, and we have an example of a code-switching implying Japanese: Gaïden. This stage name is a Romanized Japanese word meaning "side story". One of the battler's names is Saminem. It appears clear enough that a certain closeness to the rapper Eminem wants to be shown. In general, that remains some assertion of a proximity with the American rap culture. As we'll see in the following part of this article, Eminem remains a source of several code-switching utterances.

We even spot some phonological elements to cite. One of the contender's name is TZN, and the French pronunciation, following the canonic norms, should be /tezɛdɛn/. However, most people (himself as well) pronounce [tizɛn], which is closer to an American English pronunciation as the /t/ is pronounced [ti] and the /z/ is pronounced [zɛ].

Code switching based on the sports world

We will start by the simplest: "contenders" in the title of the competition and "battles" are clearly code switching utterances as they are traditionally translated in French by participants/concurrents and batailles/matches. Using loanwords in the title of the competition is clear; the American influence is strong and it is asserted so.

Then, in the "Rap contenders" competition, the best participant is called the MVP (most valuable player). In France, this acronym is essentially used in the world of Basketball. It appears that the NBA (Basketball Championship in the USA) is the origin of this word used in the "Rap contenders".

It becomes even clearer when such nouns as MIP (Most Improved Player) is to be found on some video comments. This acronym comes from the United States as well, as it is used in NBA or NHL, but not in France.

Related to the sports world, we also have the word "rookie" for a young rapper coming from the "draft", a special event where young rappers try to battle each other in order to pledge with the "Rap Contenders". "Rookie" and "Draft" are clearly taken from the American sports world, and it gives an idea about the others' words origins.

Previous words appear to have been taken from team sports, but we have one locution loaned from the combat sports world: "main event". In boxing, MMA, Catch (and even poker), we can find this main event referring to a match or a competition considered the best, among several other matches. It is also true for the "Rap Contenders" competition.

Each Rap Contenders' match is divided into "rounds" as it is used in the combat sports world. Of course, as for "black", "round" has entered French language as a regular lexeme to define one boxing temporal boundary. However, it remains an utterance of code-switching.

In case of a tie-game decided by the judges, the game is pushed into an "overtime". Here, the code-switching will be high, as any other sport in France call an overtime with the lexeme prolongation. Choosing "overtime" is a clear hint of a desire to assert a likeness to the American hip hop world, and the world of sports as well.

Other utterances

Apart from stage names and code switching taken from the sports world, I have found some other utterances. Thus, when a battle is not tight and one of the two rappers wins in an un-debatable way, it is called a "bodybag". Gentle metaphor to express a clear win. It is to be found in the terminology of English-speaking rap battles, explaining the code-switching once again.

Another word is used and loaned from the English-speaking rap field: "choke". It is used when a rapper forgets what he wrote, because of the stress or anything else. The French for "choke" should be *étranglement/s'étrangler*, however it has never been used. The most famous example of using the verb "choke" is maybe the "8 Mile" movie from Marshall Matters (known as Eminem), where this lexeme is often used as the main character forgets his lyrics. This movie also remains a cornerstone about rap movies, and especially rap battles movies.

In addition, one example couldn't be missed, as it is "ordinary" used in everyday life (only in an informal context allowing its utilization, of course): "fuck". Some rappers use this one in their battles, or

even in their presentation. For example, we have one presentation from the rapper Eff Gee which goes like this: Eff Gee de l'Entourage, Big up au wordup et fuck Filigrann !. By the way, we notice "Big up", clearly loaned from English and even stabilized in the regular French language as a locution to express some respect.

One last element seems interesting, which is not a clear case of code-switching, but it shows some English-speaking influence. In French, one says *présenter* to translate "to introduce somebody". In some videos, the organizers ask the battlers to introduce themselves with the French lexeme *introduire*, however the correct lexeme should be *présenter*. It is possible to see some English-speaking influence as it is not the correct French word used, but the word looking correct in English (as "introduce" is close to *introduire* in French).

Hence, many utterances are to be noticed, as we have seen. To my mind, there are several elements clustering all these examples. First, the will to assert oneself. This desire is related to a sort of "bad boy" attitude, against the law and the rules (with vulgarity or with some names as "Lawid"). However, we've found it in the musical affirmation as well with "Jazzy Bazz".

Then, we have the code switching related to sports world, which seems to assert a closeness to the American culture in which rap battles were born, and sports culture as well. We can suppose a closeness to glory as well (MVP, Main Event, for example).

All these utterances actually seem to follow the deep purpose of this competition: provide entertainment (also the case concerning sports) for viewers, and act like "bad boys" for the contenders following a tradition of the rap culture.

Thank you for reading!

Bae – Not an acronym

BY ROLF WEIMAR

Let's talk about acronyms. There is a story going around that "bae" comes from "Before All Else". There are similar stories like this and all of them are wrong.

Some say that "posh" comes from "Port Out Starboard Home" and "fuck" comes from "For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge" and so on. But these are wrong.

The problem with these explanations is that they lack evidence. Some words are derived from acronyms, like laser. And some common internet sayings are acronyms like lol, tmw (that moment when) and imo (in my opinion).

There is however, no evidence that "bae" came from an acronym. For a word to have come from an acronym, we would need to see some use of it written out in full. Like "That moment when..." or "In my opinion..." which later becomes "tmw..." and "imo..."

We don't see that here. Another problem with the acronym explanation is that acronym explanations often come way after the term has already been popular. That is, as the saying goes, putting the cart before the horse. For an acronym theory to be valid we need the phrase first. We need to see it in writing and then we need to see it starting to get shortened into an acronym.

Lack of evidence does not in itself kill a theory, but it makes a well evidenced and more likely explanation hold much more weight.

"bae" comes from Black American vernacular. It is derived from "baby" (could also be from "babe").

There are a few theories of how "bae" come to be and all of them have more evidence than the acronym story.

In Black American Vernacular (also called African American Vernacular English, or AAVE) words can become reduplicated. This means that part of the word gets doubled. So crazy becomes cray-cray, police becomes po-po and babe becomes bae-bae.

Once a word like cray-cray or bae-bae is established, it can change further by dropping the second syllable and become cray and bae respectively.

Another piece of evidence that it comes from the word "babe" is that people also write "bae" as "bay". In this tweet, we see "bae" written as "bay" "going to breakfast with my family....coming back home to work on my essay for nursing school n going out with my bay later. u?"

If it was an acronym, it would retain its spelling so people can decipher the acronym. An acronym is not useful if you don't use the same letters each time you use it. The spelling "bay" clearly indicates a pronunciation and connects the spelling to the sound of the first syllable of "babe".

The word "bae" (or "bay") was clearly established enough in the dialect of this person for them to use it in a tweet talking to someone else. The tweet talks about going out with someone, so even if you don't know what "bae" means, you could quickly figure it out as it has a connection with the word "babe" and that way the sentence is written, you can work out that "bae" is a person.

Another piece of evidence is the use of "bae" as a stand in for other meanings of "baby" such as "baby brother". Check out this tweet "And Max's bae bro was down with dude from Spic N Spanish. It's all too much!"

Once the word "bae" started being used as a stand in for "baby" it could have eventually evolved to mean "romantic partner" due to "baby" being used like that and once that happens, the sense of "romantic partner" could have pushed out other meanings.

This happens with a lot of words. "intercourse" used to mean "conversation" or "dealing with people". "Sexual intercourse" was invented as a euphemism for sex. That euphemism became so popular that to most people "intercourse" just meant sex and the other meanings were lost.

"sad" is another example. It used to mean "heavy".

Edmund Spenser (c.1552–1599)
his hand, more sad than lump of lead
John Mortimer (1656?-1736)
Chalky lands are naturally cold and sad.

Eventually someone used "sad" to refer to a "heavy heart" and that meaning dominated all the others until now we only think of bad feelings with the word "sad" and the other meanings are lost.

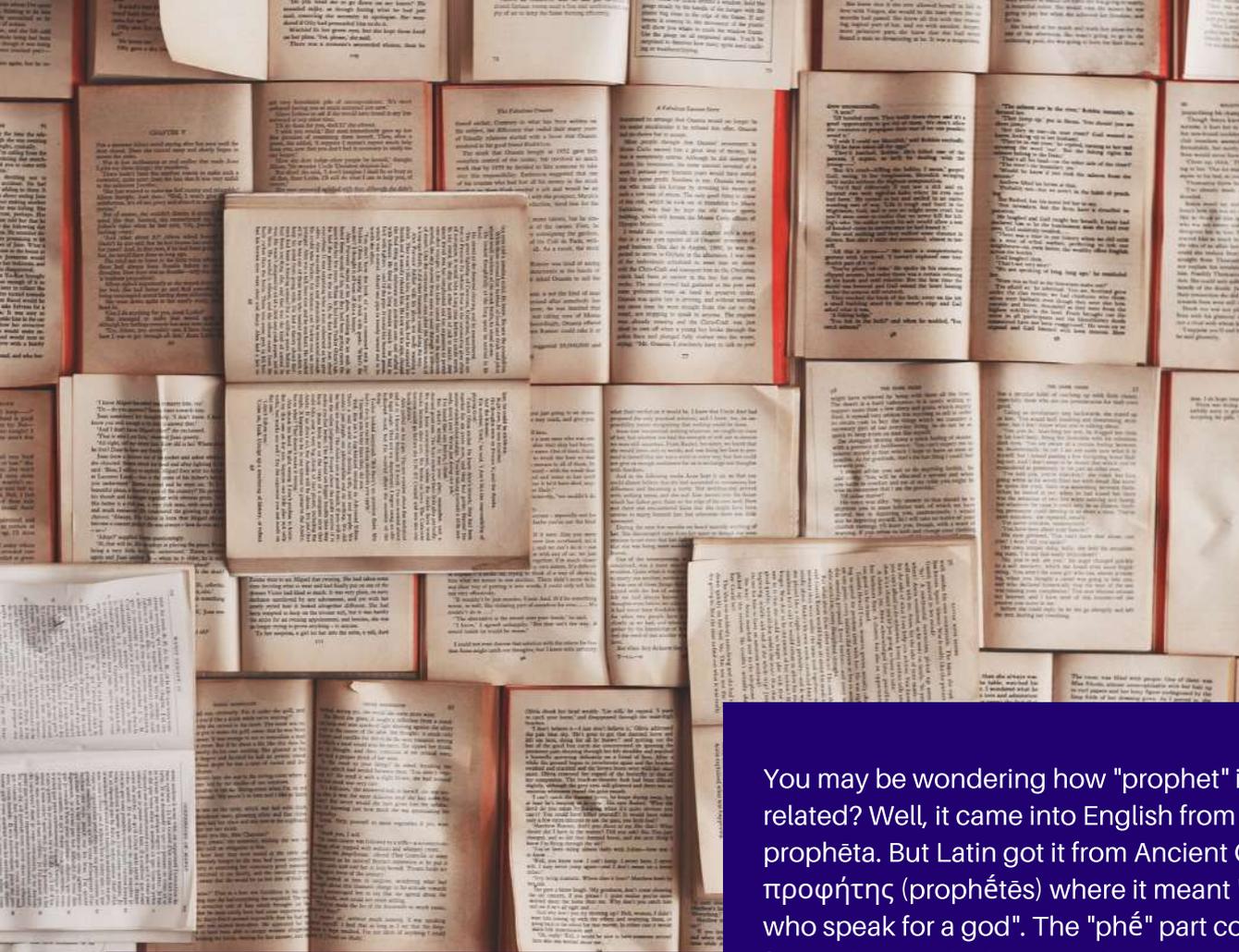
Timing is also an essential part of finding the most likely origin. If an acronym explanation comes along years and years after the word itself, it is likely to be bogus. From an article by Neal Whitman, I learned that "bae" has been in rap songs since 2005, whereas the acronym explanations came along many years later.

Another explanation is that the second syllable in "baby" could have changed due to a certain speech pattern in American English that changes the "ee" sound at the end of words into "ay" such as "It's gonna be may" from the Justin Timberlake song or "party" becoming "partay". So "baby" in turn became "babay".

There is an even simpler explanation though. "bae" could just come from people removing the last consonant from "babe".

And all of these explanations have evidence and use linguistics processes that we see happening elsewhere in language and they are all more plausible than the acronym explanation.

This article was a great help in writing this, check it out if you like:
<https://www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/dictionary/bae-watch-the-ascent-of-a-new-pet-name/>



How are "boon", "ban", "prophet" and "fame" related?

By Rolf Weimar

Photo by Patrick Tomasso on Unsplash

"boon" meaning "blessing, benefit" come from Old Norse "bón" where it meant "prayer" or "petition". This word ultimately comes Proto Indo European *b^heh₂- where it meant "to say". "ban" comes from Proto Germanic *bannaŋ where it meant "curse" or "forbid" and it too came from Proto Indo European *b^heh₂-

"fame" comes from Old French "fame" where it meant "celebrity" or "renown". This word came from Latin fāma where it meant "talk", "rumour" or "reputation". This word ultimately also came from Proto Indo European *b^heh₂-

You may be wondering how "prophet" is related? Well, it came into English from Latin prophēta. But Latin got it from Ancient Greek προφήτης (prophētēs) where it meant "one who speak for a god". The "phē" part comes from "phēmi" which means "I say", and you guessed it, that too comes from Proto Indo European *b^heh₂-. All of these are examples of semantic shift, which means that words change meaning over time. "boon" now means "benefit", but it used to mean "prayer" or "petition" which is usually something spoken.

"ban" is also derived from the Proto Indo European word "to speak" because when people were banned it usually was the result of spoken commands, as you can see in the Old English version of the word. "ban" comes from Old English "bannan" where it meant "to summon" or "to proclaim".

"prophet" is someone who speaks for a god, so the speaking connection is clear there. "fame" is quite interesting because it started out just meaning "reputation" or "rumour". Well, as people talk about someone, their reputation can grow, and as your reputation grows, you might eventually become famous. Word connections are all around us, and these are but a few of them.



Photograph by Norwegian Cruise Line

CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH

By Rolf Weimar

Linguists have given names to the three main pronunciation groups in South African English: Cultivated, General and Broad.

Cultivated South African English speakers have an accent closest to British RP. It is non rhotic and retains the diphthongs of English. In Cape Town this accent is spoken by those descended from British settlers, such as me. My mother's family comes from Britain. Her maiden name comes from Scotland, but one of her grandfather's was Irish.

General South African English speakers are those who have had much more contact and been more influenced by Afrikaans and Xhosa speakers. Their diphthongs have become monophthongised and many of the vowels have changed. Most Common speakers are native English speaker, although some Afrikaans speakers speak with this accent because of growing up in Cape Town and having extensive contact with native English speakers.

Broad South African English speakers are those that either are native Afrikaans or Xhosa speakers, live in an area with a lot of Afrikaans or Xhosa speakers, or have parents that are native Afrikaans and Xhosa speakers. If someone is a second or third language speaker of English, it is most likely they will have this accent.

Non native speakers of English

Afrikaans speakers and people of mixed race heritage (these people called themselves "Coloured" in South Africa) roll their R's in South African English. This is represented by IPA [r]. Xhosa and other native speakers of African languages round out the complexity of English vowels. Government [gʌvəmənt] becomes [gavament] in their accent.

I like bread

Cultivated South African English: [aɪ laɪk bɹɛ:d] (sometimes [d] and [t] become tapped [r])

General South African English: [a: la:k bɹɛ:d]

Broad South African English: [a: la:k bred]

I live in Cape Town which is the oldest city in South Africa. It is perhaps not surprising then that pronunciations vary a lot in Cape Town. There are three main languages spoken in Cape Town: English, Afrikaans and Xhosa.

Native English speakers are mostly found in southern Cape Town. Afrikaans speakers are concentrated in the north. Cape Town has the largest percentage of native English speakers in the whole country with 67.7% followed by Afrikaans at 22.5% and Xhosa at 2.7%. The city with the next highest percentage of native English speakers is Durban with 49.8% followed by Port Elizabeth with 33.2%.

ENGLISH "CH"

By Rolf Weimar

The sound "ch" in English has an interesting history. Original the sound was a "k" in Proto Germanic. The sound became palatalised in some words, which means that the sound is pronounced with tongue raised against the hard palate. This can often happen so a series of sounds are easier to say, such as "did you" becoming "di'jew". In IPA this would be [dɪdju:] becoming [dɪdʒu:]

A star indicates that the word is reconstructed. Linguists look at the oldest literature in Germanic languages and find connections between the languages. They can then theorise as to what the word was in the parent language.

Here are some Modern English words and the words they came from:

besech: Old English be + sēcan, Proto Germanic *sōkijana*

church: Old English ċiriċe, Proto Germanic *kiriċō

latch: Old English læċċan, Proto Germanic *lakkijana*

much: Old English miċel, Proto Germanic *mikilaz

watch: Old English wæċċan, Proto Germanic *wakjana*

The "k" sound did not palatalise in other Germanic languages and remained a "k", or palatalised at different times and changed into other sounds.

These are cognates, not translations. This means that the words listed here come from the same word in Proto Germanic. Cognates can often have different meanings.

English German Dutch Swedish

besech besuchen bezoeken besöka

church Kirche kerk kyrka

much michel mekel mycket

watch wachen waken väcka

English is one of the more divergent Germanic languages. It has very different pronunciations than the other Germanic languages and some of the divergence already happened in Old English. English was weird even back then.

HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE WRITING



Photo by Green Chameleon on Unsplash

*By Rolf Weimar
Photos by Green Chameleon and
MILKOVÍ on Unsplash*

Language is a marvelous thing. It allows us to communicate with those around us, to learn from them and collaborate. If someone comes up with an idea of how to do something they can teach that idea to others so the knowledge isn't lost and people can build on those ideas over time. Language is a strange thing though. We humans just pick it up from around us. Babies start babbling and soon enough they are making words and sentences.

For humans, language is an instinct. We just do it, like a bird flies. If you are born in a society and your peers and parents speak a language then you will learn it as you grow up. We still don't fully understand how this happens. Language is extraordinarily complex and babies just pick it up. There are theories that people are born with a generic sort of grammar called universal grammar which is set up once someone encounters the language of their surroundings.

Anyways, the point I am making is that language is a natural part of the world. It

develops over time and it is passed on to the next generation. This means that humans don't speak badly or well. They just speak. Just like a other animals exhibit their natural behaviour, speaking is our natural behaviour.

Now that we've covered that, we can discuss the matter at hand. Writing is a technology. It is something that was invented just like gunpowder or toothpaste. It has some sort of use in the world and requires knowledge to operate. A car is another example of a technology. It uses some sort of fuel which is combusted to produce force which drives pistons which drive the wheels of the car. You require training in the use of this technology. You can drive a car badly or well. Similarly with writing, you can write badly or well.

And here we have our first important point. Humans just speak. We speak for many reasons. We do it to elicit help, to share time with a friend or family, to engage in society and for lots of other reasons. Anthropologists have not been able to find a society that doesn't have language. Language is universal. It's what makes us human. Writing on the other hand is not universal. Only about 200 of the world's 6000 languages are written regularly.



Photo by MILKOVÍ on Unsplash

For those of us who grew up in a society that uses writing as part of every day life (which I would be surprised if it wasn't pretty much everyone reading this) language and writing seem interchangeable which can bring with it some problems. I was initially going to make this article just about spelling but as I started thinking about it I realised that it could be extended to writing in general. Writing is a technology that is used to record spoken language using marks on a page. The form these marks take is not really important. What is important is that there is a system to it.

The "s" sound in "sand", "sat", "soup" and so on is represented with the character "s". We are so used to just reading that we can forget that it's just lines and shapes on a page (or a computer screen). But the forms of the shapes are arbitrary. We could have a spelling system where "glr" is "mat" where "g" is the "m" sound, "l" is the "a" sound and "r" is the "t" sound.

Or we could have different characters or writing methods entirely as they do in Arabic, or the Chinese languages. Writing is a construct. This means it needs to be learned. You can make mistakes in it. If you don't cross your "t" or dot your "i" you are not writing correctly and others who have learned the system expect others to abide by the common method.

And this is where we come to spelling. Due to our general level of technological advancement language has become almost inseparable from writing. People see them almost as one and the same and I have tried hard here to show that they are different. This is important because failures in writing are merely a failure in education which can have many causes.

It doesn't mean the person is inarticulate or there is something wrong with them. Spelling is an important part of writing. In a writing system you have the base technology (such as a pen), then you have the system (in our case its an alphabet where sounds are individual letters, as opposed to Chinese languages where words are individual characters), then you have the characters (such as a, b, c, d) and finally the arrangement of those letters.

Spelling in a lot of languages is pretty simple. You have a mapping between a sound and character. Due to English's long and weird history our mapping has gotten very messy. We have "steak" and "great", but "meat" and "speak", all four with the "ea" sound. Once the mapping between an arrangement of letters and a word was standardised then it became easier for people to read.

You didn't have to sound the word out to work out what it meant. You are used to seeing the word "people" so you can register it quickly. If someone wrote "peepil ar torkin" you could probably work it out but it might take you a bit longer. Spelling correctly just means following the established standard and it has massive advantages.

It makes your writing look professional and it is much easier to read because other people who have learned the established standard are used to seeing correctly spelled words and will be able to process your writing much more quickly. However, just because it is an established standard does not in itself make it right (in the moral sense). It was not deemed the one and only way for humans to write by some higher power.

We must be careful to place it where it belongs which is among the other amazing things humanity has invented such as smartphones, cars, toothpaste and streaming online video. Viewed in this way, writing becomes interesting. It is an ever present reminder of the amazing breadth of human ingenuity. We can preserve words that were written down thousands of years ago.

But viewed in another way, writing can become a chain. Those who weren't taught well end up not conforming to the standard. They are derided and made fun of. Someone writes "for meal your" instead of "familiar" and people laugh and think they must have a few less brain cells. Our culture venerates writers and derides and shames those who do not live up to the standard. "Writing is only for those educated enough to use it", the culture seems to be saying.

Part of what got me into the language space in the first place was that I saw all this amazing stuff but I didn't feel enough was being done to show how cool it could be. We are all taught Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. We think "Wow, that's so cool". And then we can't spell a word and think "Am I capable of writing like the greats of old? Am I an idiot who can't put two words together?" You may be wondering why someone like me that has made a living from writing would be worried about their writing.

The truth is that I used to be one of those people. Language seemed to be something for other people. I never paid attention in English class. I was good at Maths and Science. I loved Computers. I even have a degree in Computer Science. I had taught myself German to connect with my German heritage. I also started learning about older languages like Old English. I started spending more time in the language community on Facebook. And then it all seemed to hit me at once.

I had been wrong, very wrong. This stuff is amazing. Why had I never seen it before? Maybe it would be trite to blame my teachers. Maybe it was my fault. Maybe I was lazy and didn't put the effort in. Or maybe both are true. Maybe I didn't put the effort in because I didn't feel welcome in that space. I went for speech therapy when I started school. Growing up people had a hard time understanding me.

I didn't try to connect with people. I just carried on with my own thing. But year by year I learned and grew. I became more confident. Maybe my bad experiences with language in the beginning made me eventually want to come back and show myself that I could actually be successful this time.

But I'm lucky. I'm lucky that I was confident enough to try again. Despite so many obstacles I never stopped writing. I wrote my first story at 8 and I just kept writing. Writing comes much more easily to me now. At the heart of it is I want to tell a story. I want to communicate and to connect not only with myself but also to those around me.

If you are feeling lost or scared or overwhelmed by writing (or anything else for that matter) don't make the mistake I made and keep it to yourself. Reach out and get help. If you are bad at spelling, you can practice. If you feel your sentences don't flow or you have trouble putting your ideas together into a narrative, you can practise.

Just remember that you already have everything you need. You are human and humans were born to communicate. Writing is just a tool, and you can learn to use that tool better. Not being able to write or spell well is no indication of what kind of person you are. You're already awesome!

THANKS FOR READING SILLY LINGUISTICS ISSUE #20

We hope you enjoyed it!

Send any questions or comments
you might have to

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Do also get in touch if you fancy
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