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It All Started with Linguistics, but It's the Finish of Me

Elliott Canonge

This lecture is an undigested history of linguistics. In fact, most of it may be hard to stomach.

The beginning of linguistics is shrouded in mythology. Note: this last word is sometimes pronounced Morphology.

According to one myth, linguistics started with a girl named Lingua, who had a twin brother named Franka.

To show how scrambled mythology can get, it is said that these twins were hatched from a double-yolked egg. Note: etymologically, that is why small town males are called yokels.

Many insist that the egg from which these twins were hatched was a bird's egg. If so, that would account for present day pidgin English.

Linguistics is sometimes referred to with terms such as historical and comparative. Some students refer to linguistics with terms which are hysterical and comparatively unmentionable in mixed company.

People who study linguistics are called linguists. I note here a recent quote from an enlightened student who said, "Used to was I couldn't spell linguistics, now I are one."

There were very few linguists originally. Today, there are a few original linguists. Note: a linguist who is more original than his fellow linguists is called an aboriginal.

Early linguistic work was done on the walls of caves. This saved the expense of publishing. Note: this was the start of indoor European languages.

Since this was the dawn of civilization, the light was poor, and linguists seldom did their best. Today, most students still complain of being in the dark.

The ancient Greeks were famous as linguists. Whenever they talked they had a word for everything. In fact, present day students are still saying, "It's all Greek to me."

Early in life, the Greeks were exposed to linguistics, but it was seldom fatal. Note: with all this exposure, there is no record of a Greek epidemic, but there was mention of at least eight cases.

Homer was a great Greek linguist. He always started his descriptions in the middle so that he would never be far from either end.

Even the Roman Caesar had the heart of a linguist. As he conquered Gaul, he was making up linguistic problems. Note his Veni, vidi, vici.

The Egyptians were very poor linguists. Most of their stuff looked like hieroglyphics. They spent most of their time building the Sphinx, who is not particularly remembered for anything he said. The Egyptians were very busy building things. Like Egyptian mummies, they were usually pressed for time.

They also liked to build pyramids. No matter how big they were, they always managed to get to the point. Note: this art seems to have been lost with the Egyptians.

Nowadays, certain linguists are still building pyramids. They are called Pike's peaks.

Present day pyramids, however, start at the pointed end, get fatter in the middle and are flat on top. Note: this is not necessarily a description of present day linguists.

Looking ahead, we can only say that the future of linguistics promises much more of the same, which is a pretty dismal way to end a lecture.

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