
WORDS WEIGHTLESS WEAR WEIGHTS WE WEAR

Why do words, themselves man-made, arbitrary, and weightless, weigh us down?

We, as individuals, are thinking beings, which is to say we think. We think with words. These words, shape our understanding, perception, beliefs, feelings and actions, and therefore, our interactions. With words, we define, distinguish and identify the other, in turn defining ourselves. We depend on words for presenting the world to us as seen by them, shifting them from their original function of representing it, creating distance between what reality is and what we 'think' of it as. By attempting to put words to it, we have drawn distance to our own selves.

Who am I? What am I?

I am _____. I define who I am by filling this word with a blank, and then another- different attributes to who I am yet none, not even my name, conveys the essence of who I *really* am. Words help us identify characteristics and attributes, they give us labels that define who we identify with. I become that label and put myself in a box, limiting my knowledge of myself, and impacting my understanding of myself and that of others.

We are defined by the words we think with, hear and use. We are constantly connecting the dots, of our associations to make meaning. Our beliefs and feelings deeply condition our understanding of ourselves. They inform our actions and experiences, forming memories in the present for future scenarios. Yes, we are making memories constantly, but so are memories making us. Memories are always a product of the past. They enable us to operate from what we know. Memories, pre-condition us. We become prisoners to our memories such that we more often than not, have no room for the present. We respond to people in a way that our history has shown us or respond to relationships with unresolved trauma from the past. We are so caught up in the '*known*' that the unknown will always remain so, and the unknown is where we find vulnerability- an attribute that is popularly associated with being 'weak.' Although we are aware that with time, memories become distant and distorted, almost possessing a dreamlike character- yet we hold onto them dearly to make judgments of situations in the now.

We hold onto these words that make us. Words, whose original purpose was to help access the world. They were not nature's gift to mankind, but our own invention to orient ourselves. We

constructed words, yet now, we become their function. Our heartbeat per minute is lower than the frequency of words we engage with in some form or the other in the same time frame.

Think of it like this, we are spiders- spinning a web called language. We see its power and its impact. We see the might of what we've created, but instead of us staying in charge we let it organizes us, define us, and limit us. We forget that the spider is what spins the web, we forget that language is a man-made entity. Why have we given up control and become its construct instead? To answer this, we will need to first study, investigate and remind ourselves of what their intended purpose was, where they came from, what they made from, and whether are there any discrepancies or loopholes. Do all the pieces of this puzzle called language fit?

The intended purpose

Language evolved from simplifying images, whose first tasks were to strategize hunts and keep note of transactions with other homo-sapiens. We have always been social animals; we need others to survive. Language becomes an essential tool in this situation. It is a combination of signs and symbols used to make meaning and to communicate our needs, wants, and desires to people around us. To tell our stories, the story of our pasts, our histories, and to affirm our identities. Words help find answers to the questions of the human condition. They bring purpose. With this invention of language, we also invented the concept of cause and effect changing our observation of time from non-linear to linear, birthing the concept of a beginning and an end, and therefore history.

The Origin

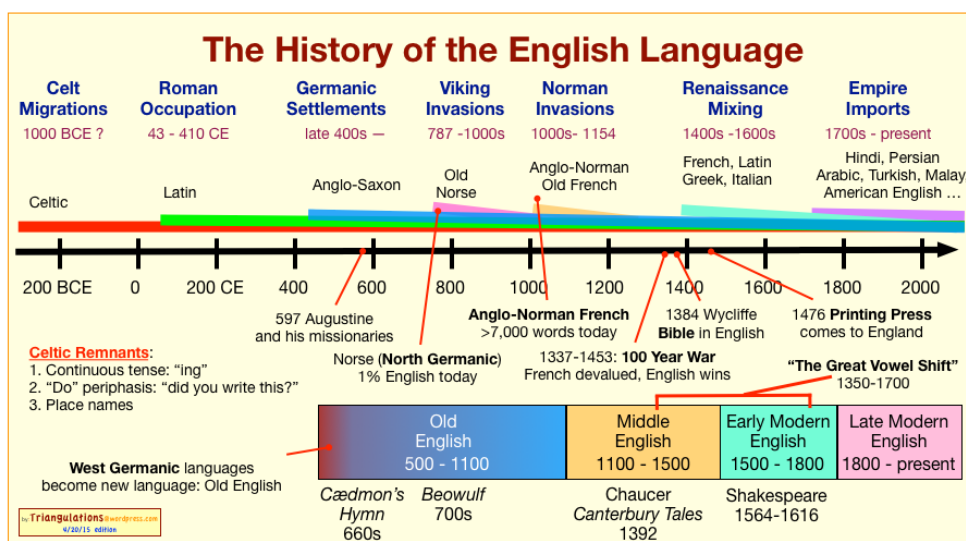


Fig 1.1 The History of the English Language

The English Language

A combination of lines and breaths of air form the alphabet, then their combination forms words, making meaning, then a combination of words in a structure forms sentences, making complex narratives. This forms the written and aural language. Linguistics, the study of language, structures these into 5 branches to help understand it. Here are the Oxford Dictionary definitions for each.

- Phonology- *'the study of the sound patterns that occur within languages'*
- Morphology- *'the study of how parts of words, create different meanings by combining with each other or standing alone'*
- Syntax- *'the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences'*
- Semantics- *'the branch of linguistics and logic concerned with meaning'*
- Pragmatics- *deals with language in use and the contexts in which it is used'*

The elements respectively are also representative of sounds and the alphabet, words and representation, associations, and context. How precise are these elements? How concrete is their history? How interconnected are they?

Analyzing the Elements: What is their story and are they connected to each other?

A a	B b	C c	D d	E e	F f	G g	H h	I i
a	bee	cee	dee	e	ef	gee	(h)aitch	i
[eɪ]	[bi:]	[si:]	[di:]	[i:]	[ɛf]	[dʒi:]	[(h)eɪtʃ]	[aɪ]
J j	K k	L l	M m	N n	O o	P p	Q q	R r
jay	kay	el	em	en	o	pee	cue	ar
[dʒeɪ]	[keɪ]	[ɛl]	[ɛm]	[ɛn]	[oʊ]	[pi:]	[kju:]	[ɑ:/ɑr]
S s	T t	U u	V v	W w	X x	Y y	Z z	
ess	tee	u	vee	double-u	ex	wy(e)	zed/zee	
[ɛs]	[ti:]	[ju:]	[vi:]	['dʌbəlju:]	[ɛks]	[waɪ]	[zɛd/zi:]	

Fig 1.2 The 26 Letters and their corresponding sounds (phonetics)

The written and spoken language is made up of 26 alphabets, and their corresponding sounds (Fig 1.2). It is interesting to note that the history of the alphabet (script) differs from the history of the English language.

While the evolution of the script has been traced the evolution of the sound has not. The sounds of the 26 letters have been derived from the first syllable of the words the images represented, yet we

do not know where they first came from. The theory that exists is based on the idea that the first spoken sounds were an imitation of nature.

The modern-day alphabet has evolved from abstracted drawings (which were our first medium of deciphering the world). Words come from images- pictograms like cave paintings or hieroglyphs- these images are already an abstraction of reality, and "texts are a development of images and their symbols signify nothing immediately concrete, but images." (Flusser 2002: 25)

These drawings were a representation of what we saw (Fig 1.3). This system of images (pictograms) became very extensive and has been simplified for ease of efficient communication over the centuries as appropriate to the residents of a community. The last row shows the modern Latin script which is the same as the English script, however, it is imperative to note they neither are the same languages nor does English come from Latin.

The letter 'A' was an abstraction of the image that represented a bull's head. And the letter 'B' comes from the image of a house, while the letter 'C' comes from the image of an arm.

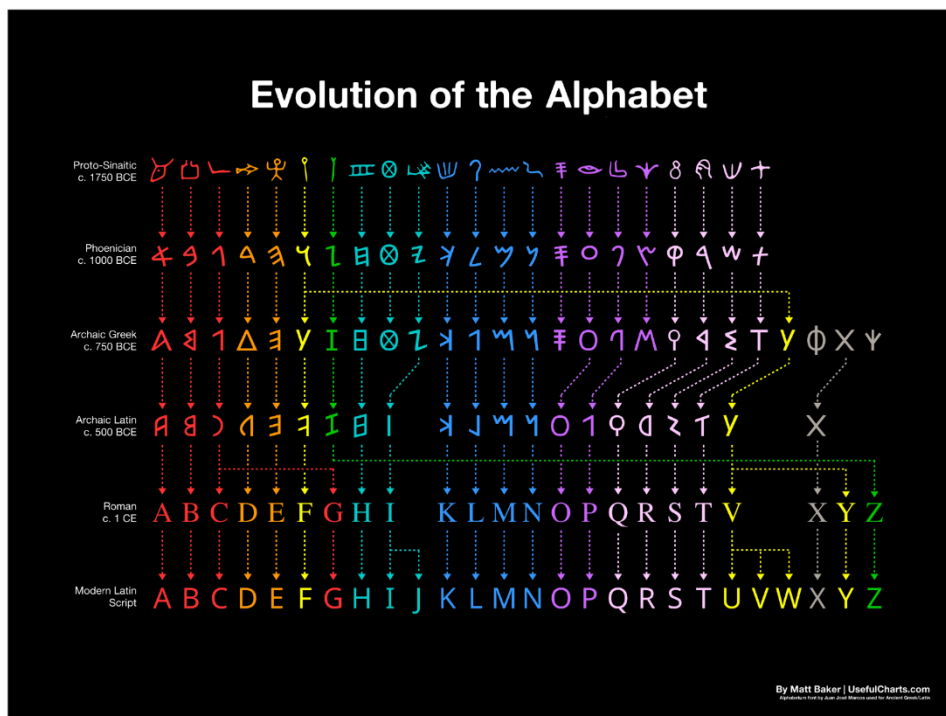


Fig 1.3 Evolution of the Alphabet

An interesting observation, the modern-day script of 26 letters is essentially a combination of 5 types of lines (Fig 1.4) and these lines could either form the alphabet as we know them or another set of signs – The Alternative Alphabet (Fig 1.5).

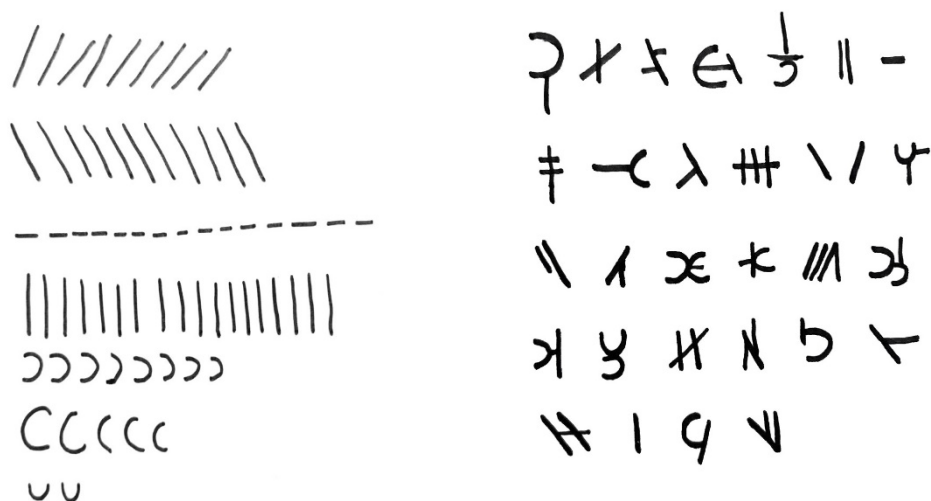


Fig 1.4 (Left) The 5 lines in their frequency of occurrence to construct the 26 letters

Fig 1.5 (Right) The Alternate Alphabet, a set of signs made using the lines in Fig 2.5

To conclude the observation and analysis of sounds and script: The elements (sound and form) that form an alphabet are not aligned, which is to say, they do not represent the same thing. When we string letters together, we get words, that become signs that represent an object.

However, as learned above, since none of the sounds align with their script when put together to form a word- they are but a random arrangement of alphabets corresponding with their sound. The word is random, its sound is random. Neither the word nor the sound *actually* represents the object. Shakespeare famously had Juliet observe, “What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet.” Since *any* thing is named anything then what we think we know of reality is merely an illusion.

Nature of Representation and The discrepancy in Structure

Flusser’s Theory of Media, explains how words (succeeding traditional images) have twice removed us from reality, proceeding to create their own universe, distinct from the one we existed in. They become everything we know, influencing our being. Saussure too says, “Language doesn’t reflect reality but rather constructs it.”

So how have our beings come to represent what words present?

(To represent is to depict, while to present is to introduce.)

This to me is the biggest discrepancy, and it lies in the very foundation that forms language. Words are almost meaningless then, irrelevant and redundant. We, give words their function and derive meaning from them. I think of Joseph Kosuth's, 'One and Three Chairs' and Magritte's 'Ceci n'est une pipe'. Both works question the nature of representation. Their works marked a significant shift not just in the world of art but that of thought.

In Kosuth's piece (Fig 1.6, Left) he puts three simple elements together – A photograph of a chair, an actual chair, and its language-based description (definition). All of these are representations of the same idea of Chair, yet they are not the same. They each have distinct properties and functions and are experienced and read in different ways. Similarly, in Magritte's piece (Fig 1.6, Right) he shows the visual representation of a pipe but says in words, that is not a pipe- questioning what we can see is a pipe. What is in a word and how really do they represent the world to us? How accurate are these words? In the case of both these works we ask, which is true – what does the word truly mean, and if it is not what we call it then what is it indeed? What happens when the word and its representation do not align? Who decides the meaning- we, humans. Words without our assignment of meaning mean nothing, they are simply sounds or marks. In Fig 1.7 and 1.8, the same idea is explored, questioning the alignment of the meaning of a word to our understanding/ feeling/ idea of it. Fig 1.7 brings in the history of the evolution of the alphabet- and uses their signs to write words, while Fig 1.8 uses food ingredients as a metaphor for the letters of the alphabet.



Fig 1.6 (Left) *One and Three Chairs*, Joseph Kosuth and (Right) *'Ceci n'est une pipe,'* Rene Magritte

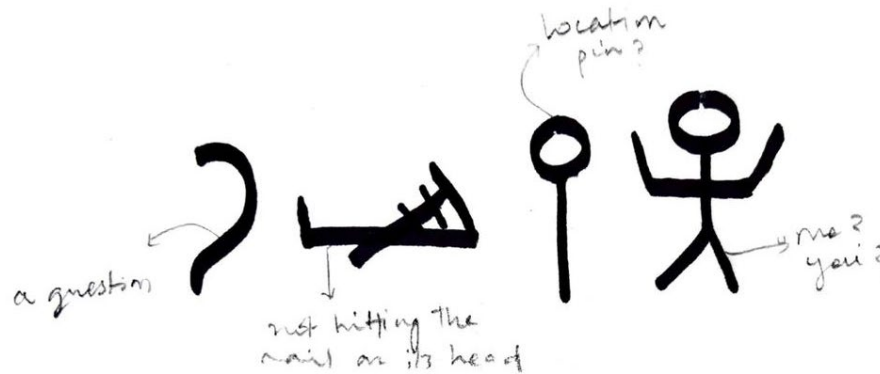


Fig 1.7 What is the meaning of life? Would rewriting letters of words in the modern lexicon, with their corresponding original scripts shed more light on what has defined these words as? Will this script represent and align with this representation? Perhaps, there is a reason for what was and what is now. Perhaps everything is connected, and this is the natural order of evolution. Following Flusser’s theory of media of removal from reality, if we take 2 steps back, would we become closer to experiencing reality?

Let's Make 'Love'

Recipe Instructions

<p>Ingredients:</p> <hr/> <p>2 large eggs</p> <hr/> <p>1/4 cup pitted olives, chopped</p> <hr/> <p>1 lemon, juiced and zested</p> <hr/> <p>2 tablespoons vinegar</p>	
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Instructions:

1. Fill a medium saucepan with water and bring it to a boil. Gently add eggs to the water and cook for 8 minutes.
2. Remove the eggs from the saucepan and place them in a bowl of ice water to cool for a few minutes. Peel the eggs and slice them into quarters.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, lemon zest, vinegar to make the dressing.
4. In a large mixing bowl, add the olives, and sliced eggs. Pour the dressing over the top and toss to combine.
5. Serve the salad immediately and enjoy the tangy, flavorful combination of lemon, olives, vinegar, and eggs!

Fig 1.8 What is love? Would making this word with its letter counterpart in food help us understand the word more? Would the process of making and eating it be as pleasurable and warm? Will it bring comfort?

Further, just as one letter represents many words (Y for Yellow, Yolk, Yatch), it can also represent multiple meanings, (polysemy). We by consistently associating a word with a particular meaning give it meaning (conventionalization) trapping ourselves in the web of language. It becomes incredibly difficult to break out of these associations and representations. Yet, with the same logic, words are ambiguous and arbitrary- with our metaphorical use, they evolve and shape-shift as in poetry, idioms, and metaphors. Why is it a struggle to acknowledge and read the multiple layers of meaning, moving past our primary associations and conditioning? (Fig 1.9)

Yearning yesteryears yashmaked yacht,
yelling your yearns,
yank yellowish yarns,
yashmak yacht yearning yin.

You yo-yo your yarn,
yelling 'yashmaked! yashmaked!'
you yang- you yin
you yellowish yolk.

Your youthful yearning yelping,
yelling you're you,
you yang- you yin
you yellowish yolk.

Yet you yank,
you yell, 'yashmacked! yashmacked!'

You yo-yo your yang
you yo-yo your yin,
yearning yesteryears yesterday.

Your yearning yaws your yacht
you yelp, yanking your yarns
yacht yaws,
yelling your yesterday's yearnings.

Yelling you're you,
you yang- you yin,
you yellowish yolk.

Fig 1.9 Yellowish Yolk, tautogrammatical poetry using constraint writing. Is this nonsense to you? Can you break out of your circle of word associations and word representations?

Words weightless wear weights we wear

Even though there is a major discrepancy in their foundation, we trust words to present the world to us. As illustrated above, how can we trust something that doesn't make any sense? How can we seek truth from something that isn't truthful itself? Words are our way of understanding the world. They enable us to grasp the environment, to materialize and mould our surroundings, they become our tools to seek answers to the human condition.

Words are the basis, like fire needed to cook. You can cook anything once you have a fire.

We see something and a thought occurs. This thought is a collage of our past interactions. Thoughts are composed of words. These words, shape our current and future beliefs/ feelings/ perceptions about the object in sight, we decide how to interact with it, or if at all we want to interact with it. As we experience this choice, we urge to put into words and express it, grasp it, and realize it, as if by experiencing it, it hasn't already been experienced. This expression/ urge becomes a memory and then this process is repeated over and over again, emphasizing the past.

Krishnamurthy, in his text, "Freedom from the Known," elaborates on the second-hand nature of human beings. He talks about how conditioned we are by our thoughts that are made up of things we have been told. We live on words. We are a bundle of memories, ideas, experiences, and traditions (all as experienced through words). He says the moment we conclude an experience or begin to examine it from the point of our knowledge, we are simply removing ourselves from the now and are only living things in terms of the old. Our responses to every experience are conditioned. Conditioned by words. Words as thoughts, feelings, emotions, communications, knowledge, behaviour, and experience.

We depend on others to teach us about the world, about truth, about life, about death, and about ourselves. We invite these gusts of words to hit our faces, in an attempt to find clarity and answers. We wonder about the human condition- what's the purpose of life? What's its meaning? Who am I? We are seeking so much that we allow layers and layers of words to accumulate between us and ourselves.

Can we pause for a moment? Can we take a step back? Can we re-direct words to being words and not as a crutch? Can we take the weight off? Can we recognize our conditioning? The toxic relationship we have created with words? Can we look beyond these layers? We have learned to walk and stand tall, point at the horizon, and exclaim, "Look, that's the horizon!" Yet, we let these words stop us from noticing all else that goes beyond it.

Our need to 'wordize' every aspect of our lives makes us nothing less than programmed robots. Thoughts obscure our experiences and understanding of ourselves as well as all that is around us. We look at things and people for what we *think* of them instead of what they *are*. Our thoughts, trigger fear, anxiety, insecurity, hurt, and hate just as much as they do peace, joy, happiness, and love. This previous sentence is enough proof to show their meaninglessness and meaning - the absurd nature of thought and how accustomed we are to putting everything into *words* (through the

act of thinking.)

Spira, explains our relationship with thought with a simple analogy of a screen that becomes blue when the sky appears in the film, yet this blueness never becomes a quality of the screen itself. These thoughts, pass, are temporary and never our essential nature- to hate or to love or to be jealous. Words are temporary and arbitrary, they are constructed by us, they are not us nor do we ever become them.

Our forgetting of the fact that language is a social construct, of the essential role it holds, of the fact that it existed to help us represent the world, invites confusion. Through my practice, I de-construct them till they appear only as lines and breath, mend them till they become aligned, render them meaningless to question their limited function in experience, push them to their limits to understand our limitations and challenge our conditioning. We look at ourselves through constructs and labels. These words, as we have seen in the course of history have great power- as to start wars, but also to bring peace. The tumultuous social structures that we are a part of are a result of our inward psychological structure of our relationship, with each other but also ourselves.

Why are we afraid of being by ourselves, *alone with our thoughts*, when thoughts are only passing clouds, they are made up of words that we have made?

Conclusion

While it is impossible to live without words and conditioning, we can be aware of their impact on us. We must be aware of our power to make and break language but also of our power to experience reality beyond language. Reality exists, just as much as I do. It is the only certain thing, that '*I am.*' We called ourselves human beings for a reason, we are being at all times, and at no time do we become nor do we un-become, yet with words we believe that there is a stage where we become- happy, successful, complete, enlightened.

My works are observations, notes, and experimental undertakings to understand and deconstruct the human condition as experienced through words. Through words as texts, videos, publications, and participatory installations, I investigate their elasticity and malleability, to highlight their meaningfulness while also rendering them meaningless to highlight our power. My research-based practice walks through the fields of philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, psychology, and conceptual art. This investigative research is strictly restricted to my language of thought- English.

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