11-823 Conlanging

Orality
Language differs without a written form
Orality and Literacy” Walter Ong
Socrates:
- Criticized the written form noting its inability to defend itself through dialog
Language differs without a written form

Orality and Literacy” Walter Ong

Socrates:

- Criticized written form noting its inability to defend itself through dialog
- (He wrote his argument down though)
“Speech Interfaces for Information Access by Low-Literate Users in the Developing World” PhD Dissertation, Jahanzeb Sherwani, CMU 2009

- Healthcare workers in rural Pakistan
- Low literacy, so speech should be better
- Not clear what language you should use
- (Always someone else's dialect)
Lessons Learned

- Low literacy users not good with bullet points
- Structured dialog is literacy dependent

So what should we do

- Low literacy people do learn
- They do remember things
- If it fits their culture/environment

Devise information as stories

- Related to local environment
So how do oral cultures remember
- Through speech

But speech is hard to remember, so
- Use rhymes and meter
- Use repetition
- Active voice
- Multi-adjective

Long Sagas are made to be remembered
- Homer's Odyssey, Beowulf, Mahabharata
Orality Factors (Ong)

- **Formulaic Styling**
  - Once upon a time,
  - 昔々 (mukashimukashii)
  - Rhythm, breathing, meter

- **Additive rather than subordinative**
  - X and Y and Z

- **Aggregative rather than analytic**
  - “sturdy oak tree”, “beautiful princess”

- **Redundant or copious**
  - “great big giant”
Orality Factors (Ong)

- **Conservative or Traditionalist**
  - The story had always been like this

- **Close to human lifeworld**
  - Close to real life, relevant to real world

- **Agonistically toned**
  - "combative" about battles, struggles
    - (car chases)

- **Empathetic and participatory**
  - Wise seniors, part of this culture
    - (cf jury system)
Homoestatic

- It’s hard to remember so remove irrelevant
- Ndewura Jakpa (17th founder of Ghana)
- Had 7 sons, but now only “had” 5 sons
- The story had always been like this

Situational rather abstract

- Few hypotheticals
- 1930s study in Uzbekistan/Kirghizia
- Syllogisms, self opinions, thought problems
Nursery Rhymes

- Still part of our oral culture
  - Long term spoken verse
  - Passed down through the ages
  - Rhymes, consistent
  - Though sometimes archaic
Ring-a-ring o' roses,
A pocket full of posies,
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down.
Ring-a-round the rosie,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes! Ashes!
We all fall down
Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye.
Four and twenty blackbirds,
Baked in a pie.
Nursery Rhymes

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of treacle,
[ Mix it up and make it nice, |
  That's the way the money goes ]
Pop! goes the weasel.
Oral Rhymes

- **Archaic fixed forms**
  - “four and twenty”
  - “posies”
  - “treacle”
  - “daily bread” (Lord's Prayer)

- **Archaic Grammar**

- **Meaning can be obscure**
Songs, Rhymes, Mnemonics

- **Songs as**
  - Stories (Ballads)
  - Histories
  - Instructions Information
    - Maize planting song
    - Alphabet song
    - Washing hands
Songs, Rhymes, Mnemonics

- Sayings/Mnemonics
  - Red sky at night, shepherd's delight
  - Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning

- Facts [sic]
  - In fourteen hundred and ninety-three
  - Columbus sailed the ocean sea

- Richard of York Gave Battle in Vain
- May I have a large container of coffee thank you
- Thirty days hath September ...
Culturally Appropriate

- Tamil planting songs
- Military marching songs
- Japanese Haiku warnings
- Sesame Street Songs
**Diglossia**

- **Distinction between formal/informal**
  - “High” form and “Vulgar” form
  - can have a prestige relation

- **Written forms usually “high” form**
  - Standardized (has wider audience)
  - May be less literal of actual spoken words
Diglossia

- **Speech/Writing**
  - Different distribution
  - Spoken form has more
    - first person, active forms
  - Written form has more
    - Third person, passive forms

- **Written form influences spoken form**
  - More standardized
  - Pronunciation: forehead, forecastle, botswain
  - Second person singular
Language Technologies

- **Writing** (2000-3000 years ago)
  - Only elite, mostly for taxes

- **Standardize writing** (Latin/Mandarin/Sanskrit)
  - More text beyond tax/laws/religion

- **Printing press** (Gutenberg 1450)
  - First press in England 1475
  - By 1500 >20m volumes printed

- **Plays** (1700s)
  - High German standardizations (cf Soaps)

- **Newspapers/pamphlets**

- **Letter Writing**

- **Typewriters**
The Second Orality ...

- **Radio, Television**
  - Broadcast to many
  - Causes standardization of spoken form

- **Telephone**
  - Allow wider communication
  - More immediate than letters

- **Email/short messages**
  - More colloquial, more immediate

- **Twitter**
  - Beyond written speech

- More people write now than 20 years ago
Socrates:
- Criticized the written form noting its inability to defend itself through dialog
Socrates:
- Criticized the written form noting its inability to defend itself through dialog
Siri tell me why you think the author named his character “Winston Smith”