

On losing language

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With the current progress in AI tools, it is possible for me to input a jumbled mess of words into a bot and it perfectly understands me. Many a times I have seen people trying to communicate on e-mail use chatbots to frame their sentences. It seems that one need not be proficient in writing at all. Is it not much more efficient to just “think” of a bunch of words and let the machine complete your thought? It is not uncommon to see skills which are easily automated by machines to become extinct into oblivion. Certainly, there is no use of the skill of writing code on punchcards for an ENIAC machine right?

What I am seeing is automation of something much more essential - it is the automation of language. I would say language is one of the most distinctive features of humans as compared to other life forms. Language is expression. Language is how I can tell the outside world what I think, what I feel. It is language which provides interpretability of this world. But if this sophistication’s usage in “everyday life” decreases, then so will the ability of manipulating language. This is essentially a call to the destruction of thought and reason. It turns people into objects, for they are no longer in the position to say for themselves, to express for themselves. This observation motivates me to hold on to my humanity by learning languages. Each language which I learn is like being born again, seeing the world with an alien perspective. As I slowly grow fluent in a language, that alien world finally becomes a part of myself. To be human is to think, to speak, to read and to write.

The dangers of losing language have been quite nicely demonstrated by George Orwell in his 1984, where the party goes to great lengths to eradicate normal English (or oldspeak) and replace it with a new language, newspeak. Newspeak slashes down words and expressions from the standard English language. It is geared towards the party’s ideology in such a manner that it lacks the power to express anything else. A person born in a newspeak speaking family is biologically incapable to oppose the party. Such is the importance of language. Learning language is a weapon against being deceived. Learning language is becoming human once again.