SILLY LINGUISTICS

THE MAGAZINE FOR LANGUAGE LOVERS

A linguistic mystery of Japan

regarding the Utsuro-Fune



THE PRESENT PERFECT'S HIDDEN WORK

THE CONTROVERSY OVER CONTRONYMS

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This week's page numbers are in Japanese!

NOD, SMILE, AND HOPE FOR THE BEST;

but don't forget the linguistic analysis of it all



By Neda Stefanović

A few nights ago, on a snowy evening that didn't allow us to be too picky about the place we were meeting up at, as long as it was nice and warm, a couple of my friends and I could finally start our long-awaited girls' night. The white wine we were drinking made us chatty and open about different topics, but the unnecessarily loud music made it much more difficult to follow all the stories we wanted to share with each other. I personally prefer to think that we were annoyed by the loudness because we really missed each other, rather than because we are getting older and more irritable. We had a great night despite the unforeseen difficulties, but this experience made me think about different linguistic phenomena... as a night out tends to do, with every young and normal individual, I guess.

Like every other old friends' group, we like to reminisce and go over the same events and topics that we have already gone over multiple times before, as it never hurts to add another new and improved point of view to them. When we were retelling familiar stories, I didn't really notice that it was hard to hear my friends, presumably because my brain was filling in the gaps for me, due to the common ground we all shared. If they were starting a new story, they would immediately fill us in with all the essential details loud and clear, so if I missed a part of a sentence here and there, I could still maintain the whole picture in order to give feedback. However, if I missed the beginning of a story, and especially if it happened after I had already asked them to repeat themselves a few times, it could get me into a linguistically interesting position.

It is a tricky game of guessing, as well as of confidence in your processing skills, to figure out whether you need to stop your friend and ask them to start over, or whether you can figure out the characters, plot, and details as the story unravels, in order not to disrupt their passionate and enthusiastic first version of it. It's easier if you know what you are missing and can simply ask "who?" or "where?", but it is a little bit harder if you need to ask "...what?", especially after they are well over a third or even a half of their story. So sometimes you just nod, smile, and hope for the best. I absolutely do not practice nor recommend giving opinions or advice if your experience of listening went like this, however! You need to come clean; or sneakily ask all the main questions as follow-ups in order to do that.



In situations like this, it is helpful if your friends are not maintaining eye contact the whole time, so that you don't need to adjust your expression from one second to another. It also helps if the person talking to you is expressive enough to give you cues about how you are expected to react. Their body language and gestures can also help in figuring out the literal meaning of the sounds they are making, which you maybe are not hearing quite well.



After I started to realise the ways in which I was trying to recover information without having my friends constantly repeat themselves, I began taking some kind of metalinguistic mental notes of the processes I was experiencing. I could relate these processes to different linguistic phenomena, and I felt as if I had gained an unusual insight into them through this common experience.

Phonetics was never my primary area of interest, but I do find the cognitive aspect of each linguistic domain interesting, as well as the interface between semantics, syntax, pragmatics, and phonetics. I was intrigued by the way delayed auditory processing was taking place. A few times, I noticed how my brain held onto the melody of a sentence that initially made no sense to me, until a gesture or a word I recognised helped me retroactively fill in all the blanks and hear the meaningful sentence from the beginning, loud and clear, in my head. It was impressive to realise first hand how all the different language domains work together, and what a sensitive and deeply intertwined network our mind is.

This reminded me of situations we have probably all experienced: the times when we ask “what?”, and a second later realise that we did hear and understand it the first time; we just needed an extra moment to process it. A similar thing probably happens with filler words, which we use just to buy ourselves some extra time to process the question or the context and figure out what our contribution to the conversation will be. The situation that this article is about is a bit more complex than that, though, because the mind searches both backward and forward for information that could help it build a richer context and more easily recover the auditory part it has missed.

It was interesting to think about the way these linguistic and cognitive domains and processes interact. It reminded me of the experience of trying to process a foreign language: leaning on phrases you recognise, contextual cues, body language, and the limited vocabulary you share with the person you are listening to. The processing of our native language probably isn’t that different, with the major difference being that this process is more natural and subconscious. We probably hear what we hear loud and clear far less often than we realise, but the vast linguistic material, familiarity with melodies and phrases, and awareness of context help us immensely in processing what we have heard.

This situation also reminded me of linguistic analyses I came across about how individuals on the spectrum learn to read and express connotation, which doesn’t always come as naturally to them as it does to neurotypical individuals. I felt as if I was trying to figure out what particular facial expressions or gestures meant from very

limited context, and trying to mirror them before I fully understand them. Once again, I was reminded of how much more exhausting certain processes can be for some of us, while coming completely naturally to others, and how much we can learn about both the differences and similarities between individual cognitive processes.

In addition to that, I also wondered how similarly helpful mirroring techniques are in language and psychology. If we mirror another person's reactions and expressions, it is assumed that we can more easily figure out what they are feeling. We use mirroring techniques when we repeat the sounds of a new language we are learning, and we would probably use them, for example, if we moved our lips in the same way we are seeing while trying to lip-read. It is interesting to consider whether this situation combines the two: whether, by mirroring an expression, we can gain better insight into the pragmatic context, which can help us connect the sounds we are hearing with the syntactic structures we know and the semantic meanings these structured sounds are trying to convey.

I am not currently able to fully understand or explain the connection between this experience and all the areas of linguistic research I have mentioned. However, it was inspiring to be reminded of how deep and mysterious the bonds between different parts of cognition and language processing are. This was also an important reminder of how a common experience, perceived metalinguistically, can help sharpen our intuitions in linguistic problems we didn't have a first hand experience with, and reveal new points of linguistic interest. More broadly, it reminded me of how intertwined different experiences can be, and how we can often find points of intersection and common ground even with things that initially seem completely unfamiliar.



THE GENDER OF DEATH

HE, SHE, OR IT – WHO'S COMING FOR US ALL?

By Joana Atanasova



Photo by Jacob Mejicanos on Unsplash

If you've ever studied another language and wondered why a table is feminine in French but masculine in German, congratulations — you've already discovered that grammar can be both arbitrary and deeply poetic. But few words reveal the oddities of grammatical gender quite like *death*. In some languages, death is a *lady*; in others, it's a *guy with a scythe*; and in a few, it's blessedly *none of the above*.

How a culture genders death tells us a lot about how it imagines dying — whether as a cosmic nurturer, a relentless hunter, or just an inevitable "thing" that happens after too many energy drinks.

When Death Wears a Dress

Let's start with the elegant ladies of mortality. In most Romance languages, death is a woman.

- **Spanish:** *la muerte*
- **Italian:** *la morte*
- **French:** *la mort*
- **Portuguese:** *a morte*

Even **Russian** joins the club with *смерть (smert')* — another she. It's as if the entire European continent collectively agreed that if death must exist, at least let her be fabulous.

This linguistic femininity isn't just grammatical. Culturally, death often appears as a woman: think *La Muerte*, the glamorous skeleton saint of Mexican folklore, or *La Mort*, the pale muse of countless French poets who made dying sound like a chic Parisian pastime.

There's symbolism here. Across many traditions, women are linked to creation and the cycles of life. So when death is feminine, she isn't necessarily cruel — she's nature's way of keeping the cosmic recycling bin tidy. As the saying might go in some parallel universe: "Behind every great birth is a patient lady with a scythe." Or rather, now you finally understand why it's always your mother who says "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it!"

In Spanish-speaking cultures, death's femininity even makes her approachable. *La muerte* isn't just an ending; she's a companion, a familiar face at the fiesta. Mexicans famously throw her a party once a year for *Día de los Muertos*, proving that nothing says "I respect you" quite like sugar skulls and mariachi music, as she is going to be the one who eventually will escort you into the afterlife.

When Death Wears a Beard
Elsewhere, death is masculine — and often much less cuddly.

- **German:** *der Tod*
- **Greek:** *ο θάνατος (o thanatos)*
- **Hebrew:** *מוות (mavet)*
- **Arabic:** الموت *(al-mawt)*

When death is a man, he tends to be less nurturing and more… *management material*. Think of the **Grim Reaper**: tall, skeletal, cloaked in black, and punctual to the minute. He's not here for emotional closure; he's here for efficiency. And apparently German.

This male personification goes way back. The ancient Greeks gave us **Thanatos**, the god of death — handsome, winged, and utterly professional about his job. No drama, no tears, just paperwork and eternal rest. Next!

Later Christian and European traditions kept the masculine vibe, turning death into the ultimate authority figure — the one boss who never accepts a resignation.

Linguistically, a masculine death often mirrors a cultural attitude that treats dying as a battle: something to fight, to defeat, or to heroically delay. If death is *he*, then life is a competition. You can almost imagine *der Tod* checking his watch impatiently while you beg for "just one more season" of your favorite show.

When Death Refuses to Pick a Side
Then there are the lucky languages that don't bother with gender at all. English, Finnish, Mandarin, and Japanese live blissfully free of grammatical grammar.

In English, *death* is just *death* — an equal-opportunity existential crisis. But even without grammatical gender, we can't resist assigning one in art and literature. Sometimes death is the *Grim Reaper* (male), sometimes *Lady Death* (female). We just can't leave a good archetype alone and our brain's understanding of biology overwhelms us.

In **Finnish**, *kuolema* is genderless, which fits a culture known for quiet stoicism and not overcomplicating things, death is an event that just happens and life goes on. In **Mandarin** and **Japanese**, 死 *(sǐ / shi)* is similarly neutral — no costumes, no scythes, just a simple word for "that thing that happens eventually."

What Grammar Does to Our Brains

Does the gender of *death* actually change how people think about dying? Linguists have argued about this for decades. The **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis** — the idea that language shapes thought — suggests it might.

Experiments have shown that speakers of gendered languages often describe objects with adjectives that match the gender of the word. For instance, Spanish speakers might call *la muerte* "mysterious" or "gentle," while German speakers describe *der Tod* as "cold," "stern," or "inevitable." Apparently, grammar can make you subconsciously imagine your demise in a different outfit.

It's not that speakers believe death literally *is* a woman or a man — but grammar quietly nudges the imagination. Over time, those nudges add up to entire cultural mythologies that shape traditions surrounding the event.

So… Who's Really Knocking on the Door?

Whether death is a she, a he, or an it, one thing's certain: everyone gets a visit. But how we picture that visitor — seductive or skeletal, compassionate or corporate — says more about the culture of the people imagining it than about death itself.

Languages with feminine death often portray her as cyclical, inevitable, even beautiful, in a dark and macabre way. Masculine death tends to be distant, powerful, and final, something you can stand against and fight. Genderless death? Just practical. No drama, no symbolism — just the end of the line, thank you for your time and on to the next one.

And maybe that's the real lesson. Death isn't waiting in a cloak or a dress. It's hiding in the tiny quirks of our grammar, quietly reminding us that even in something as universal as dying, humanity can't resist a bit of personality.

After all, in the great linguistic debate of "he, she, or it," death — like any good celebrity — somehow manages to be all three.

BY PATRICIA SYNER

The Controversy over Contronyms

The English language is the sea which receives tributaries from every region of the world.
Ralph Waldo Emmerson

Homonyms are words that can multiple meanings, but have you heard of contronyms? What, you may wonder, is a contronym? Is it even a real word and from what region of the world did it originate? There is great controversary associated with this word. The subject of its meaning and its origin has sparked quite a few lively debates in communities dedicated to the analysis of our marvelous language. Even though the concept has been around since the 1960s, they still appear to be somewhat of an enigma wrapped in ambiguity.

First of all, how do you spell this interesting word? Is it Contronym or Contranym? While both are acceptable, only the latter spelling is recognized by MSWord. Even the correct terminology for this mysterious word can often be unclear. It also masquerades as a Janus Word, an enantionym, an antagonym or even an auto-antonym.

Why is it referred to as a Janus word? Janus[1] was the Roman God of doorways, beginnings, transitions, and time. He had two faces, one looking toward the past and one toward the future, and that is also where we get the word January and janitor. So, in simple language, Contronyms (or Contranyms or Janus Words) are basically two-faced or a word with two distinct and opposite meanings.

[1] https://www.britannica.com › topic › Janus-Roman-god

They are similar to homonyms but the meanings are opposing. One word. Two opposite meanings. Not ot be confused with antonyms which are two separate words.

The term "contranym" was first formulated in 1962 by a man named Jack Herring. By bisecting the word into two parts, we can see that “contra” is Latin for against or contrary; and the second part “onym” is a Greek word which means name.

There are literally hundreds of contronyms in the English language, and many you use every day without realizing it. Like the word “literally.” When using the word “literally” just now, did I mean actually there are hundreds, or was I speaking figuratively? Contronyms can often function as their own antonym. That is why they are often referred to as auto-antonyms. There are many words with double opposite meanings. If you tell someone you are planning a trip, do they think you are planning to stumble? Probably not, but reading the word in context, you should be able to determine the correct meaning.

In baseball you can strike the ball (hit it square on) or you can strike out, which means you failed in your endeavor. You can clip papers together with a paper clip or you can spend the afternoon clipping coupons. You can run extremely fast or

hold fast to your beliefs. You can bound off into the horizon like a kangaroo or you can be snow bound and not able to bound anywhere.

Sometimes you must choose your words carefully so their meanings will not be misconstrued. If you tell someone you hope they are finished, I hope you are referring to the current task they have undertaken to complete and not referring to their eminent demise! On a similar vein, execute is also a contronym, as you can execute a task (start) but the auto-antonym of execute could be construed as a crime.

You can throw out the trash. But you can also throw out an idea. You can dust furniture to remove dust or dust donuts by adding sprinkles. It is often tricky to use contronyms in writing unless you are certain the correct meaning will be gleaned from the context in which it is situated. And now I must bid you aloha, which could mean either hello or goodbye, and it is up to you to figure out the correct meaning.

BY LAURA RIKONO

The Present Perfect's Hidden Work

What Loki teaches better than a grammar textbook

I've decided to understand the present perfect. Don't get me wrong, I know how it works. After all, I use it all the time: "You've been playing *Subnautica* since 6 am. Go outside, you gremlin. Have you even brushed your teeth today? Never have I seen someone so allergic to soap!"

Parenthood clearly brings it out.



I've also been teaching this tense for fifteen years, and it is quite a difficult one to impart. Go and ask any ESL teacher about it and watch them crumple inside. Students whose L1s don't have it, which turns out to be quite a few, tend to stare in polite bewilderment when I explain the nuance between "I have been to Paris" and "I went to Paris in 1998". We end up having conversations like this:

Me: It's for things that started in the past and are still ongoing, like "I've lived here for ten years".

Student: But you live here now, so it should be "I am living".

Me: It's also for things that happened recently, such as "I've just had lunch with a friend".

Student: But that's finished now, it should be the simple past.

Me: It's for past actions with present relevance, like "I've read that book".

Student: How does remembering something make it relevant?

Clearly a very astute student.

In trying to work out what makes the present perfect tick — and also so difficult to teach — I went and looked at some of the research...and oh boy, is there a lot of research. The key takeaway is that it typically develops over time down a distinct trajectory: marking results -> marking any past action with present relevance -> marking past time. German's Perfekt, for instance, has travelled pretty far down this path, largely replacing the Präteritum in everyday speech. American English also shows signs of change, with the simple past increasingly appearing in contexts where British English favours the present perfect.

Let's look at some practical examples. Consider the line from *Lilo & Stitch*: "You ruined everything." As a British English speaker, when confronting the alien responsible for blowing up my house and wrecking my family's hopes and dreams, I'd have said "You've ruined everything." But Lilo's not wrong as the accusation works well, perhaps because the context — she is seething and on the run from the social worker — makes it abundantly clear that Stitch's past action is still having an effect in the present. In other words, that little 've isn't doing much work, so it can be dropped.

Let's look at another movie quote, one that's been stuck in my head since I started thinking about this topic. It's from an early scene in *Thor Ragnarok*. Loki, having just come hurtling through a magic portal to slam onto the floor, bellows, "I have been falling for thirty minutes!" You can *feel* his rage. If he'd said, "I was falling for thirty minutes!" it would be a dull retrospective told thirty years later. But when he utters the line, he hasn't even stood up yet, so where is he supposed to source the emotional distance required for the plodding past continuous?

Such a sharp and visceral use of the present perfect also emerges in the line from *A Knight's Tale*: “You have been weighed, you have been measured, and you absolutely have been found wanting.” Count Adhemar receives this judgement whilst on his backside, having just been unhorsed in a tournament, meaning the delivery needs to be active, painful and inescapable. One might say the tense has been weaponised.

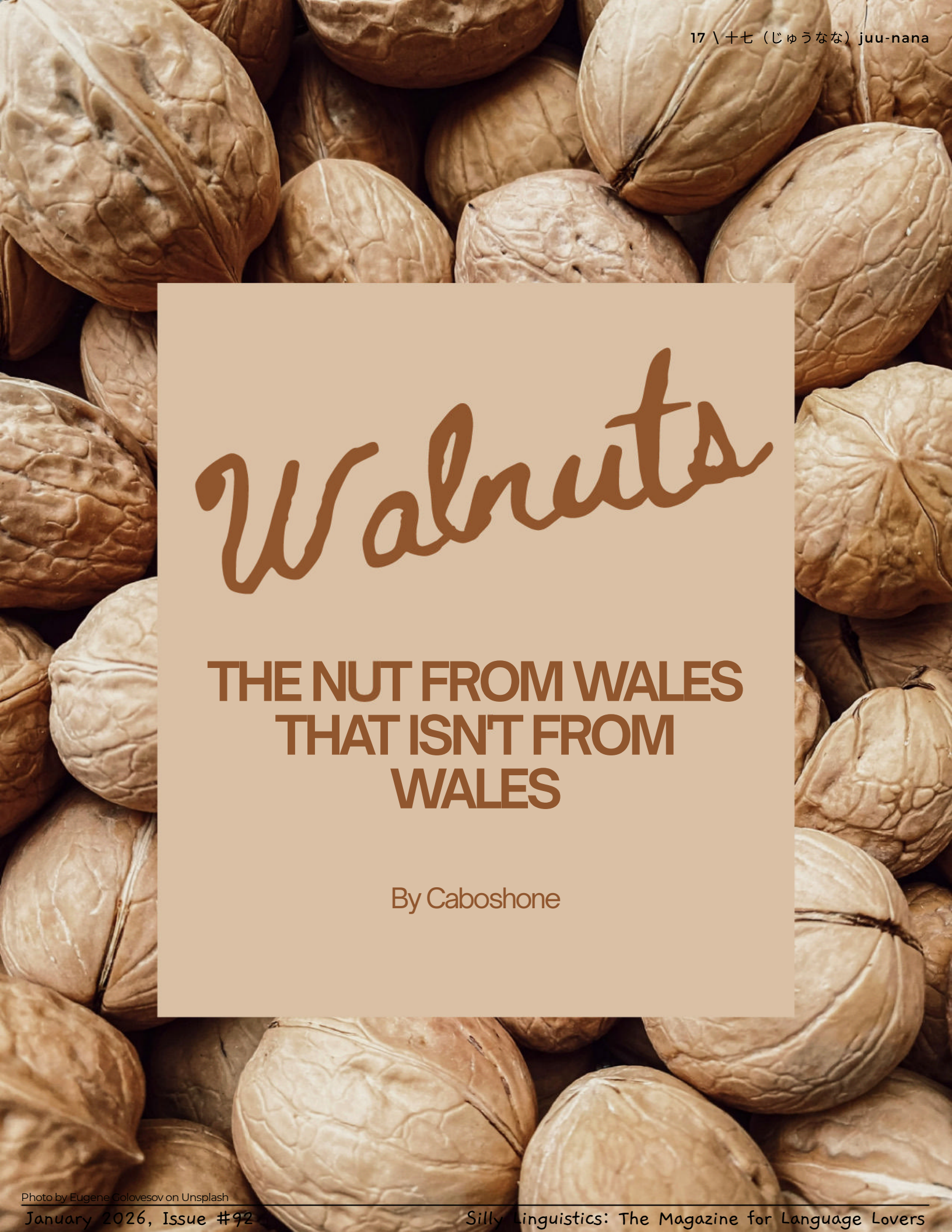
A more playful deployment emerges in this line from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*: “We’ve had one, yes. But what about second breakfast?” It’s quick and easily missed, but there’s definitely a wheedling present perfect lurking behind Pippin's smirk. The emotional nuance is there: tucked inside his gracious acknowledgement of his current state of having-recently-eaten-one-breakfast is the implication that this entitles him to another meal.

The present perfect can also perform quieter work, such as when emphasising things like identity, vulnerability or accumulated experience. Take Blanche Dubois’ line in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.” Take away the have and her emphasis on her present vulnerability would fade, making it autobiographical. Such a vibrant summary of a life lived also appears in this line from *Blade Runner*: “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe.”

In defining Roy Batty, these incredible experiences highlight the unbridgeable gulf between replicants and humans.

That brings us to the openness and vulnerability emerging in the line from *Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* by W. B. Yeats (if I may make such a bold leap from dystopian sci-fi to Romantic poetry): “I have spread my dreams under your feet.” Thanks to the present perfect, we know that those dreams still lie there, alive and exposed, awaiting a response. Will they be trampled or trodden on softly?

And perhaps therein lies the reason for the difficulty in teaching this tense. The present perfect can reach beyond simple time and action to signal our emotional state and inner world, showcasing our frustration, rage, manipulation, identity and vulnerability. We should perhaps not be so surprised when grammar textbooks struggle to teach a tense that lends itself so readily to poetry.



Walnuts

THE NUT FROM WALES THAT ISN'T FROM WALES

By Caboshone

Photo by Eugene Golovesov on Unsplash

If you had to guess based on spelling alone, where would you guess Walnuts came from?

Perhaps like Hazelnuts — which come from the Hazel tree — you've guessed that an elusive Wal tree must exist out there somewhere for them to fall from? Or perhaps — like Brazil Nuts, which unsurprisingly come from Brazil — you've guessed that Walnuts must come from the oft-unspoken of micro-nation of Wal? As sad as I am to confirm this, there is in fact, no such tree as a Wal tree from which Walnuts could fall. But, even if we do know that there is also no such nation, that second guess happens to be more accurate than any doubting readers might have first thought.

While the nation of Wal does not exist, there *is* the nation of *Wales*, which certainly sounds similar enough for consideration. One Google search to confirm it, and we should be just about done! But alas, though Walnuts are able to grow on the British Isles, including Wales, they did not originate there and the name "Walnut" predates the establishment of mainstream Walnut cultivation in the Isles.

So, how is Wales relevant then?

In early history (3rd century BCE), now modern Southern Germany, there existed a Gallic tribe called Volcae [IPA:ˈwɔɬ.kae], likely named for the Proto-Celtic "*wolkos*", meaning 'hawk'. Over time, the Germanic culture solidified, spreading through the North of the country and beyond, forming a unified peoples with a unified language: Proto-Germanic.

As unified as this people was, distinguishing the Volcae — still resident in the lower country — was easy and obvious, adapting their name to the Proto-Germanic pallet as *'Walh-',* carrying with it the meaning of 'foreigner'/'neighbouring peoples' and extending this meaning to all neighbouring peoples, regardless of association (or lack thereof) with the Volcae tribe.

This continued into the expansion of the Roman Empire and it's influence, leading to the association of "*Walh-*" gradually shifting from meaning 'neighbouring peoples' to Romans specifically as the Angles, Saxons and Jutes migrated into the British Isles during the 6th Century. In this way, the presence of the Britons — a Romanised Celtic people whom the Germanic tribes found on their arrival — skewed the meaning of "*Walh-*" towards referring to Romans in particular.

As these tribes expanded inwards on the Isles, the Britons — or "*Walh-*" as they would have been labelled — were pushed further and further out of what is now England and Scotland, and into — you've likely guessed it at this point — *Wales*, the country's past and present exonym coming into focus at last.

Though even back then, the Welsh people did not refer to themselves in that way — quite obviously, who would dub themselves forever 'foreign' voluntarily? — instead preferring "*Kymry*", meaning 'together country', which still persists in modern times as *Cymru*, the endonym for Wales and name of their language internally.

From here, the people of what would become modern day Wales, underwent multiple nominative shifts: from Cambria (a Latinisation of Kymry), to Cumberland (an Old English twist on the same) to — eventually — Wales, a return to form (if one could call it that) for the most historic exonym in use.

So, much like how humans cannot be traced back to modern day Monkeys — despite our relations — the word 'Walnut' cannot be traced back to 'Wales', though they do both share a common ancestor, the proto-Celtic word for 'hawk'. So, how about it? Shall we engage in a cheeky Appeal to Tradition fallacy and hope calling it a Hawknut catches on?

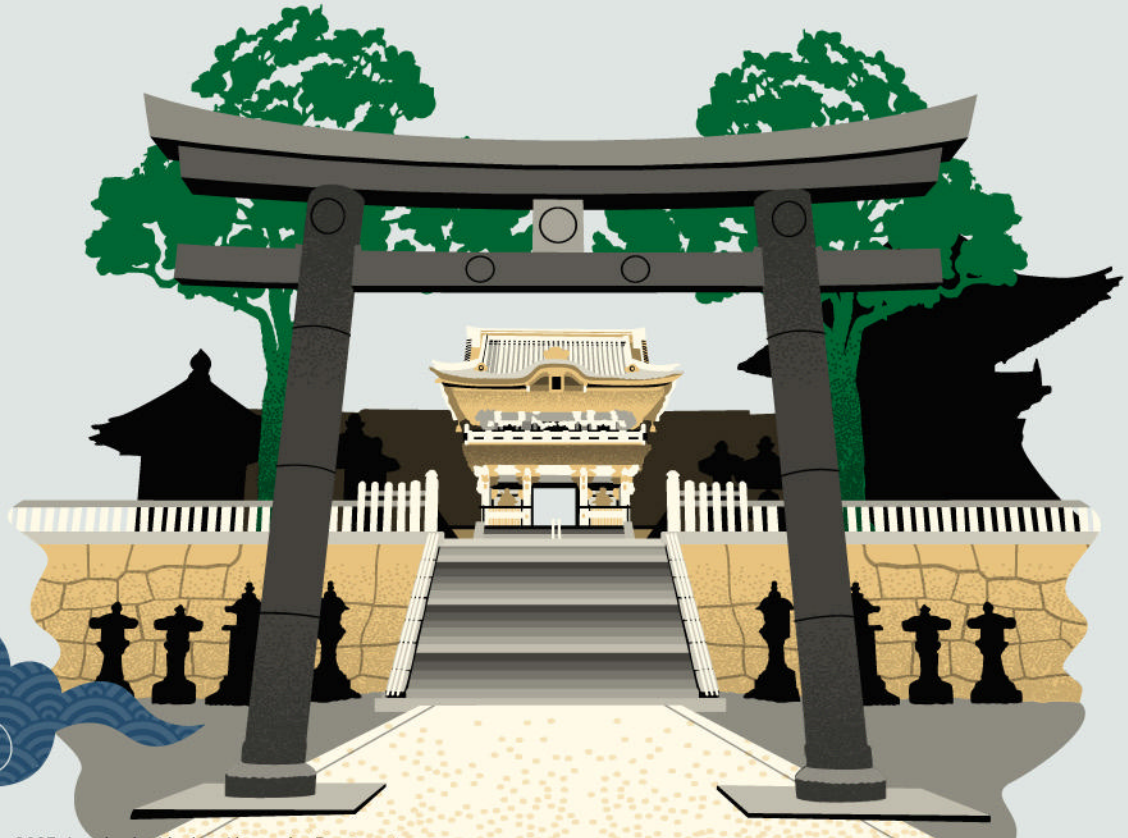
... Probably not. But not at least next time you enjoy a Walnut, you'll know it's named after Britons confused for Romans confused for Celts who had probably never even seen a Walnut in their lifetime (until those pesky Romans came along)!

If this piqued your interest, please take a look at the video about this topic by the Polish Youtuber *Ciekawostki językoznawcze,* which inspired this article!

A LINGUISTIC MYSTERY OF JAPAN

Regarding the **Utsuro-Fune**

By Linden Alexander Pentecost



Written in early December 2025. Art also by Linden Alexander Pentecost.

Imagine that you are a Japanese fisherman in the early 1800s, at a time when Japan had very little contact with the outside world. Out at sea, but not far from the shore, you spot a strange object floating on the sea. This object is roughly spherical, the lower part of the object is clad in some kind of metal plating, whilst the upper part of the object appears to be made of wood, but also has incredible glass or crystal windows that enable the vessel's occupant to see out.

Inside the craft is a very short woman, only 4.92 feet tall, with red hair and pinkish skin, she is aged perhaps around 18 years old. She does not look ethnically Japanese. Whilst her red hair might imply she is European, or a visitor who somehow found their way to Japan from Russia - her pink skin, the unknown language she spoke, the symbols on the inside of the craft, and the craft itself - all make her somewhat Caucasian appearance unlikely to be closely tied with Europeans or with Russians.

This is the story of the "Utsuro-Bune" or **Utsuro-Fune**, which is from Japanese うつろ **utsuro** - "hollow", and ふね - **fune** - "boat". It happened in 1803 in the eastern coast of Japan, and is a documented event, although, like all things pertaining to UFOs or USOs (USOs = unidentified submerged objects), it is difficult to make head or tail of what actually happened.

Of course, there will always be innumerable ways to explain away such events. But let's assume that this event was real. And let's assume that this mysterious woman was not a redheaded, pink-skinned Russian visitor, and that she *might* have come from somewhere else. And I am not saying we should assume she came from Outer Space, but rather that we should study the event without trying to fit it into an explanation that can't explain it.

The craft that the woman was in, the **Utsuro-Fune**, can be described as a UFO and perhaps as a USO, making this event an early account of such a craft, before the hype around UFOs that began in the 1940s. There are in fact many accounts of UFOs from before the 1940s, but often these crafts were not described in the same futuristic technological forms as we commonly imagine them today. For example, the **Utsuro-Fune** is described as being made in part, of wood and crystal. There are even accounts of UFOs that appeared like flying airships or even ships. It appears that these objects tend to reflect the technology and peoples own perceptions of the time.

One really strange example is the flying ship of Clonmacnoise in Ireland, where apparently, a sailing vessel, but flying, dropped its anchor and snagged it on the Clonmacnoise church. Other historic accounts in Ireland also mentioned "flying ships" from the Middle Ages. Strange, huh?

In terms of the linguistics - there are two things about the **Utsuro-Fune** which I would like to draw attention to. Firstly, the redheaded, pink skinned 18 year old lady, was reported to have spoken in an unknown language. Now, this could easily be put down to that the local Japanese fishermen not being able to identify European languages, including for example Russian. But, what if, for instance, she was speaking in some more-profoundly unknown language, a language that came from *somewhere else?*

Secondly, I have to discuss the symbols which were on the *inside* of the vessel. The accounts of the **Utsuro-Fune** state that the inside of the vessel was covered in unknown writing - a fact that makes it perhaps more plausible that the redheaded woman was also speaking an unknown language, connected to that writing. One of the symbols on the inside of the vessel appears to resemble symbols on the Korean flag and the Chinese "I-Ching", whilst other symbols on the inside of the vessel appeared to resemble alchemical symbols. This would seem to imply that the written language on the inside of this vessel had some symbolic correspondences to symbolic, and magical language, used by *known* cultures. Some examples of these symbols are included in the artwork below. They are copied from the actual symbols as recorded in historic accounts of the **Utsuro-Fune**, namely from how the vessel was drawn by the Japanese artist Nagahashi Matajirou.



*Art below: an artistic depiction by the author of the 18-year old lady who was travelling inside the **Utsuro-Fune**, with 6 of the symbols from the writing inside the craft, as drawn originally by Nagahashi Matajirou, to the right of the woman in the art below. Note that the second symbol from the top somewhat resembles symbols on the Korean flag and also Chinese "I-Ching" symbols. Whilst there are also similarities between the other symbols and alchemical symbols, the similarities are far from being exact. The art below is unrelated to other art I have published in other Silly Linguistics issues and elsewhere, including other art depicting redhaired and blonde women.*

So, conclusions and my own views:

Well, there isn't much to be able to conclude scientifically here. But, accounts of other beings in ships, speaking different languages - with symbols upon their ships, and also accounts of mysterious hieroglyphs at archaeological sites, do appear here and there throughout studies of unusual craft and ancient history. The woman in the **Utsuro-Fune** being somewhat Caucasian-looking, and the fact that some of the writing resembled symbols known to human cultures, would seem to imply that, if she *was* from someplace else, that her people and language may have had some connection to known human cultures.

The other thing is, the idea of a redheaded woman, on a mysterious craft traversing the seas, links into a much vaster subject about ancient seafarers and sea-connected peoples with red, or blonde hair. Take for example the Sikhirtya known to the Nenets people, the Sikhirtya being described as coastal, pale-skinned blonde people, who I discussed in another Silly Linguistics article this year. Or take for example the *Patupaiarehe*, a mysterious people known to the Maori in New Zealand, the *Patupaiarehe* were said to be red or blonde haired people, sometimes of short stature, who do not like sunlight, and who tend to only appear to humans when it is misty.

There are legends of similar mysterious people in the Americas, and of course in Europe, such as the "elves". My own research has also gone down a path of finding many mythological and many, many linguistic similarities between some of these places where these legends occur. Take for example the similarity between Finnish *vene* - "boat", and Quechua *wampu* - "boat", and the similarity of both these words to Japanese ふね - **fune** - "boat" (from an older form, likely *puna- or similar). I do not ask my readers to see this as linguistic proof, but it is an interesting example.

I have discussed other aspects to this subject, to potential linguistic, mythological, and archaeological links in other publications. The idea of mysterious ships traversing the sea, to lands which lie beyond the reach of our ordinary perception, is also not something *unusual* in my own studies of ancient language and of mythology, and I have discussed all of these things (including with regard to languages, "Seafaring Finns", other mythology and with regard to Tolkien's "Valinor" and many other things) in a lot of detail in other publications, although I have never discussed the **Utsuro-Fune** before now.

So, if the story of the **Utsuro-Fune** is real, perhaps the woman in the boat ties into these aforementioned cultures, and linguistic and archaeological themes in some way.

I do not ask my readers to believe in these things - but I am suggesting that these aspects of mythology, and the story of the **Utsuro-Fune,** are far from being explainable as isolated imaginings - on the contrary, they lead us into a very real, mysterious set of subjects, which flows throughout the mythology, archaeology and languages of multiple continents. In parts of Scotland the mysterious “Finns”, “Finnmen” and “Finfolk” are also arguably connected to this – as I have implied many times before. Whether we consider these things as being “real” in the strictest sense is another matter. But they certainly make for an interesting subject.

I hope that this article was an interesting read. I was originally going to write about Scanian for the next Silly Linguistics article, but, I ended up writing so much about Scanian recently that it became cumbersome to try and fit it into a smaller article for Silly Linguistics. You can nevertheless read this recent work on Scanian in my article titled: *81: New remarks on Scanian language, Proto-Norse, Bronze Age symbolic language& Gutnish, 19/11/2025,* the link to which is:
https://www.bookofdunbarra.co.uk/website-articles-78-96/81-new-remarks-on-scanian-language-proto-norse-bronze-age-symbolic-language-gutnish-19-11-2025
I do, nevertheless, plan on writing a different article about different aspects of Scanian for Silly Linguistics, which will I hope be published in Silly Linguistics in the nearish future.

This article is dedicated to the mysterious woman of the ***Utsuro-Fune***



Thanks for reading Silly Linguistics issue #92

We hope you enjoyed it!

Send any questions or comments you might have to magazine@sillylinguistics.com

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