I am quite fond of both the I-language and E-language categories and believe that both are relevant to science. Chomsky would have you believe that E-languages are irrelevant to science, but I believe this is mistaken. However, I’m also not completely on board with Lewis’s view of the conventionality of language—this means that I am not willing simply to endorse his all-too-quick reply to the Chomsky-inspired I-language objection. (That would be Objection #12, if you’re counting.) Here is the lay of the land as I see it:

A. *Overriding Interest:* provide a scientific explanation of language that is predictively powerful and explanatorily adequate.

B. *Primary Question:* does the E-L approach, and in particular, the E-L approach of Lewis, provide any scientifically relevant support?

C. *The Negative Argument:*

P1. For Lewis’s account to be relevant, language must be conventional.

P2. Language is fundamentally internal and biological.

P3. Given (P2), language is not something we choose—it is something that “grows within us.”

P4. Given (P3), in no causal sense is it the case that our language could have been any different than it actually is, as this requires choice and we didn’t choose it.

P5. Lewis’s account requires that our language could have been different, as this is a necessary feature of his analysis of convention.

6. Given (P4) and (P5), language is not conventional.

C. Therefore, Lewis’s account of convention is not relevant.
D.  *Inadequate Response #1:*

P1.  (P4) is false because, quite clearly, we could have spoken another language had we been raised in a different language community.

P2.  If (P4) is false, the argument is unsound and must be rejected.

C.  The argument is unsound and must be rejected.

- **Problem:** This conflates *conventionality* with *contingency*. It is certainly true that it is a contingent truth that I speak English. I could have spoken any other language, had I been raised in a speech community that spoke it. However, while all conventions are contingent, not all contingency is conventional. In order to be conventional, there must be reasons production and common knowledge. Here, there is neither—I speak what I speak for reasons having to do with my biology. Consider an analogous argument: I could have had my blood pumped by a contraption installed in my youth; thus, it is conventional that my blood is pumped by my heart.

E.  *Inadequate Response #2:*

P1.  Chomsky helps himself to abstractions like English and Spanish in the course of his scientific work.

P2.  The only way that you can account for something external like English and Spanish is via conventional association with a community.

P3.  If you must use conventions to underwrite scientific use of English and Spanish, then Chomsky must acknowledge the scientific relevance of Lewis’s analysis.

C.  Lewis’s analysis is scientifically relevant.
Problem: Chomsky can account for English and Spanish causally using only I-languages and the fact that people hang out together in social groups. All you need to have a speech community that speaks English is a few English speakers for the data and normal biological development. You needn’t have any social construct given the presence of a perfectly explanatory biological construct.

F. Adequate Response #1:

P1. Some level of conventionality is at work in the way that words are introduced into the lexicon.

P2. Lexical semantics subsumes this, and is a part of the science of language.

C. Thus, you need to have conventionality figure into the scientific story.

G. Adequate Response #2:

P1. Conversational episodes are structured by conventional expectations concerning give-and-take, cooperation, information density, etc.

P2. Given (P1), convention is operative at the level of language use.

P3. Pragmatics is the study of language use and is a part of the science of language.

C. Thus, you need to have conventionality figure into the scientific story.