Invented Languages: From Elvish to Esperanto

Linguistics 80K (71230)
Summer 2017, MW 9:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Social Sciences 1, Room 161

1 Instruction Team

• Nick Kalivoda, Primary Instructor
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  Stevenson 256

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2 Course materials

Students are not required to purchase materials for this course. Readings will be posted on the course Canvas site. However, students may find the following book interesting and helpful:

• David J. Peterson, The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves, the Words Behind World-Building

3 Course description

This is a course about constructed languages, the languages that people deliberately devise, and the way those languages relate to (or differ from) natural languages, the languages that arise from the self-organizing nature of human communities. Constructed languages are well-known in science fiction and fantasy literature as ways of contributing to the fleshing out of a novel world, but the history and purposes of constructed languages is much more complex. Part of this course’s goal is to chart the various creations of these languages and understand what may unite and divide these forms of creation. We will focus on making clear in what ways the form of the language reflects the aesthetic, political, ethical, or interpretive intentions of the creators.
Our analysis of the form of these languages will be that of contemporary mainstream
generative linguistics, the modern science of language, which focuses on describing and
explaining universals and patterns of variation in languages of the world. Using the tools
of modern linguistics, we will analyze the properties of various constructed languages, and
use that analysis to make clearer the form-intention connection.

Finally, many constructed languages also come equipped with novel orthographies (writ-
ing systems) that are designed to enhance the intentions of the language creators. As with
the form of the language, we will explore how form and intention relate.

4 Learning outcomes

The overall aim of this course is to give you tools to understand the linguistics and extra-
linguistic features of constructed languages. Concretely, you should expect to learn:

1. How to characterize the structure of a language in the terms of modern theoretical
linguistics

2. How constructed and natural languages are similar and different in these terms

3. What aesthetic, ethical, and political goals have motivated the creation of con-
structed languages.

4. How these constructed language creators connect their goals to the form of the lan-
guages they make

In addition, we will be building a conlang as a class throughout the quarter. This will
culminate in a collaborative translation of a children’s book.

5 Requirements

This course has 4 requirements:

- attendance and participation (10% of grade)
- roughly bi-weekly reading quizzes, to be done on Canvas (7 quizzes, total of 35% of grade)
- a take-home midterm exam (assigned 8/16; due 8/21 by the beginning of class; 15% of grade)
- a take-home final (assigned 8/28, due 8/30 by the end of the day; 40% of grade)
6 DRC Accomodations

If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to the instructor in person outside of class (e.g., at office hours) within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY), or http://drc.ucsc.edu for more information on the requirements and/or the process.

7 Academic honesty

As always, the work you complete for this course must be your own work and must meet basic standards of honesty. Be sure and familiarize yourself with University policies and procedures related to Academic Integrity: https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_integrity. We will apply these policies very strictly.

8 Schedule

The following is an approximate schedule, possibly subject to revision.

- **Monday, 7/31.** Introductions: What is a language? What is a constructed language? Why are languages constructed? Historical overview.

- **Wednesday, 8/2.** The conlang impulse: the ideals, norms, and practices of conlangers; the nature of the conlang community; ownership and rights of constructed languages. Assignments due:
  - Read introduction to Peterson’s *The Art of Language Invention*
  - Reading Quiz 1 (on Canvas)

- **Monday, 8/7.** The internationalist program: history of universal language movements; how the ideals shaped conlangs. Assignments due:
  - “The emergence of linguistic conscience” (chapter in Roberto Garvía’s *Esperanto and its rivals: The struggle for an international language*)
  - Reading Quiz 2 (on Canvas)
  - Optional: check out Duolingo Esperanto course.

- **Wednesday, 8/9.** Sound structure: sounds of human languages; phonological markedness and ‘exotic’ sounds; constructed languages and phonological markedness.

  Writing systems: kinds of orthographies; aesthetic and linguistic considerations in choosing an orthography; modern constructed orthographies. Assignments due:
  - Chapter 1, “Sounds”, in Peterson’s *The Art of Language Invention*
• Monday, 8/14. Word and sentence structure: types of morphological systems; Esperanto and language accessibility; morphological gaps in conlangs. Intro to syntax. Assignments due:
  – Read Peterson’s chapter “Words”
  – Reading Quiz 4

• Wednesday, 8/16. Klingon day: Guest speaker Marc Okrand. Readings due:
  – Excerpt from *The Klingon Dictionary* by Marc Okrand.
  – “Who owns Klingon? Lawsuit draws battle over invented languages into court”
    Alan Yuhas, *The Guardian*


• Wednesday, 8/23. Historical Change: Language change in natural languages and conlangs; the case of Tolkien’s Elvish family.

• Monday, 8/28. Learning: how constructed languages are learned; native speakers of constructed languages. Language and mind: the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and its influence on the conlang community.
  – Short story due in class language.

• Wednesday, 8/30. Wrap-up. Presentations of conlang translations.