

LING 80K Constructed Languages: From Elvish to Esperanto

Syllabus (as of tbd)

1 Administrative Information

INSTRUCTOR:

Pranav Anand
E-mail: panand@ucsc.edu
Office hours: tbd and by appointment

COURSE/TEACHING ASSISTANTS:

TBD
E-mail: tbd
Section: tbd
Office hours: tbd

LOGISTICS:

Website: Canvas
Prerequisites: none.
General education: This course fulfills the Textual Analysis general education requirement.

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 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 (writing 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. We will look at several extant examples of constructed languages, but, in addition, we as a class will collaboratively build our own language (a “classlang”) to more fully understand the kinds of decisions language creators face and how they go about making them.

No previous work in linguistics is presupposed.

2 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:

- How to describe the attested sound inventories, word formation, and syntactic structures in natural languages as well as the relative frequencies of various patterns
- How constructed and natural languages are similar and different in these terms
- What aesthetic, ethical, and political goals have motivated the creation of constructed languages.
- How these constructed language creators connect their goals to the form of the languages they make.

3 Schedule

This course is comprised of 43 units, organized into five modules: historical overview (4 units), sound (12 units), grammar (12 units), language exploration (15 units, 3 per language), and conclusion (1 unit). The course requires 150 hours of work. For the first three modules, each unit is 4 hours of work, consisting of the following sections, with expected time commitments in [...] brackets:

- a 15-20 minute video [½ hr]
- a reading assignment, and possibly a video watching assignment [1 hr]
- a comprehension quiz [½ hr]
- a concrete conlang exercise [½ hr]
- an assignment to add to our classlang [½ hr]
- review and preparation [1 hour]

For the fourth module, each unit is part of a series of structured language learning exercises (slide shows and short quizzes), each comprising 7.5 hours of work. The fifth and final module will require you to translate a short story from our language (4.5 hours of work).

Here's a simple summary of the above breakdowns.

- Module 1: 4 [4 hr] units [16 hrs]
- Module 2: 12 [4 hr] units [48 hrs]
- Module 3: 11 [4 hr] units [44 hrs]
- Module 4: 5 [7.5 hr] language courses [37.5 hrs]
- Module 5: 1 [4.5 hr] translation exercise [4.5 hrs]

Note that 150 hours of work translates to 15 hours/week for an academic year course and 30 hours/week for a summer course. The above chart means that the first module of the course is roughly 1 academic week's worth of work, and the second and third are each roughly 3 academic weeks' worth, as is the combination of the fourth and fifth.

Below is a more detailed breakdown of the class schedule.

3.1 Module 1: Introductions

- 1: Introduction to Conlanging
 - Reading: Bianco (2004), *Conlanging* 0:00-0:30
 - Exercise: Elvish/Dragonish language creation exercise, pt 1
 - Classlang: “Classlang dreams” poll and comment
- 2: The conlang impulse and community.
 - Reading: Peterson, Introduction. *Conlanging* 0:30-1:00
 - Exercise: Elvish/Dragonish language creation exercise, pt 2
 - Classlang: “What type of classlang?” poll and comment
- 3: The internationalist program
 - Reading: “Konstrui Pli Bonan Lingvon (To Build a Better Language)”, Sam Dean, The Verge

- Exercise: A quick course in Esperanto
- Classlang: “Classlang backstory” poll and comment
- 4: A quick tour of Englangs
 - Reading: n/a
 - Exercise: Laadan dictionary search
 - Classlang: “Classlang goals” poll and comment

3.2 Module 2: Phonology

- 5: Basic Consonant Sounds
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 1
 - Exercise: Valyrian consonants
 - Classlang: “Consonant associations” poll and comment
- 6: Basic Vowel Sounds
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 1
 - Exercise: Dothraki vowels
 - Classlang: “Vowel associations” poll and comment
- 7: Inventories
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 1
 - Exercise: Making an odd vowel inventory
 - Classlang: “Beautiful words” poll and comment
- 8: Syllable Shapes
 - Reading: Rosenfelder, pp. 40-50
 - Exercise: Dothraki syllables
 - Classlang: “Word association” poll and comment
- 9: Other Vowels
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 1
 - Exercise: Volapuk vowels
 - Classlang: “Pick your vowels” poll and comment
- 10: Other consonants
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 1
 - Exercise: Klingon consonants
 - Classlang: “Pick your consonants” poll and comment
- 11: Exotic sounds
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 1
 - Exercise: Vuzox consonants
 - Classlang: “Pick your consonants” poll and comment

- 12: Sound symbolism
 - Reading: Marshall (2011)
 - Exercise: Explore our favorite words
 - Classlang: “Syllable types” poll and comment
- 13: Sound change
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 3
 - Exercise: Elvish through the ages
 - Classlang: “Looking back at our goals” essay
 - Live Meeting: 1 hour teleconference discussion at TBD to discuss word shapes for the classlang
- 14: Elvish: merging sound change and world change
 - Reading: *Elvish as she is spoke*
 - Exercise: Elvish through the ages
 - Classlang: “Choose your own word” task
- 15: Writing systems
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 4
 - Exercise: Hieroglyphics walkthrough
 - Classlang: “Check our words” task
- 16: Writing systems
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 4
 - Exercise: Devanagari walkthrough
 - Classlang: “Make more words” task

3.3 Module 3: Grammar

- 17: Basics of Morphology
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 2
 - Exercise: Esperanto lexical classes
 - Classlang: “Make more words” task
- 18: Noun Morphology
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 2
 - Exercise: Klingon nouns
 - Classlang: “What should nouns show?” poll and comment
- 19: Verb Morphology
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 2
 - Exercise: Esperanto verbs
 - Classlang: “What should verbs show?” poll and comment
- 20: Morphological case

- Reading: Rosenfelder, pp. 59-71
- Exercise: Volapuk cases
- Classlang: “What kinds of case?” poll and comment
- 21: Introduction to Syntax
 - Reading: Rosenfelder, pp. 71-79
 - Exercise: English vs. Japanese
 - Classlang: “What kind of headedness?” poll and comment
- 22: More syntax
 - Reading: n/a
 - Exercise: Experimenting with noun orders
 - Classlang: “What kind of NP?” poll and comment
- 23: Syntax: complex cases
 - Reading: n/a
 - Exercise: Experimenting with verb orders
 - Classlang: “What kind of VP?” poll and comment
- 24: Agreement
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 2
 - Exercise: Klingon agreement
 - Classlang: “What kind of agreement?” poll and comment
- 25: Other interesting morphemes
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 2
 - Exercise: Laadan speech act particles
 - Classlang: “Any other bits?” poll and comment
 - Live Meeting: We will meet live for 1 hour to review the morphology and syntax of our language
- 26: Morphological choices and language goals
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 2
 - Exercise: Noun class
 - Classlang: Simple classlang sentences practice
- 27: Syntactic choices and language goals
 - Reading: Peterson, ch. 4
 - Exercise: word order impressions
 - Classlang: More classlang practice

3.4 Module 4: Language tours

In this section, you will explore 5 languages in more depth. 3 of these are required (Esperanto, Modern Hebrew, and Klingon), but you can choose 2 of 10 others (Dothraki, The Gripping Language, Ithkuil, Kelen, Laadan, Lojban, Na'vi, Quenya, Toki Pona, and Valyrian). For each language, we have constructed a sequence of 3 units (each 2 hours of work), introducing the language with increasing complexity. At the end, you will be asked to write out a very short paragraph in the language and then provide some final assessments about your impressions of the language (1 hour of work).

- 28-31: Language #1
- 31-34: Language #2
- 34-37: Language #3
- 37-40: Language #4
- 40-43: Language #5

3.5 Module 5: Conclusion

In this final unit, we will discuss questions about language ownership and finishing a language. There is no reading or exercise in this unit, but you will be asked to translate a 3-6 sentence story from our classlang into English (roughly 4.5 hours worth of work).

- 44: Conclusions
 - Reading: n/a
 - Exercise: n/a
 - Classlang: Translation exercise

4 Requirements

This course has 5 requirements:

- video lecture
- readings
- assignments (60% of grade)
- a take home final (due tbd; 25% of grade)
- participation (15% of grade)

4.1 Video Lecture

Each unit in the course begins with a video lecture that synthesizes the concepts in the reading and sets up the exercise for the unit. Throughout the video, there may be short comprehension questions to assess your understanding.

4.2 Readings

This course has two obligatory books:

- Arika Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages: A Celebration of Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius*. Spiegel & Grau: 2010.
- David J. Peterson, *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves, the Words behind World-Building*. Penguin: 2015.

There is also one optional book:

- Mark Rosenfelder, *The Language Construction Kit*. Yonagu Books: 2010.

All of these are available at the bookstore. In addition, as indicated above, the course will also require additional supplementary articles/book extracts will be available on Canvas (on the “Readings” page). I will draw from the required reading for the online assignments.

4.3 Online Assignments

Each unit will feature an online assignment to assess comprehension of the lecture and assigned readings. The assessment will consist of multiple choice and matching questions principally, but may feature short answer questions. Assessments are designed to be completed in one 1 hour sitting, but you will have 3 days to complete each assessment.

There are 44 assessments, but I will drop your lowest 4, and hence use your 40 highest scores in computing your grade. Each of these will be worth 1.5% of your grade, for a total of 60.0%. Late assignments will not be accepted. **Moreover: You fail the course if you miss more than 5 assignments.**

4.4 Participation

Your participation grade is 15% and is determined across how actively you are involved in the intellectual life of the class (classlang exercises, live meetings, and office hours).

As part of participation, we will have two 1 hr live meetings for the whole class, one on TBD and the other on TBD. These will focus on our class language, but you are more than welcome to raise issues as well. The meetings will be conducted via Zoom. Information on using Zoom is available on the Canvas coursesite (under “Logistics”).

4.5 Final

The final will be a summative exercise, asking you to integrate your newfound knowledge to more precisely critique a constructed language. The final will consist primarily of short essays (under 700 words). It will be due at the end of the scheduled exam block for this course, TBD, and the prompts for the essays will be given one week before, on TBD.

5 Expectations about communication and deadlines

I will communicate with you via Canvas. On my end, I promise to post all the assigned readings, assignments, slides, and any updates promptly. On yours, I expect you to enable whatever settings allow you to receive Canvas updates most efficiently. My advice is that you route everything to non-digest email as well as check the Canvas page for this course daily, but making sure that you receive my updates promptly is your responsibility. I will have an assignment to test that you have the requisite settings on Canvas.

6 Getting Help: Office hours and section

Because this course is online, it is important to me that we create as many opportunities for you to talk with us. We will accomplish this in two ways:

- Office hours: I and the TA will have office hours every week. The times of these are listed on the syllabus and Canvas. For these, you can either come in person or chat with us on the week's Google Doc (see Canvas). No need for you to come in!
- Section: The TA will also hold two optional weekly sections via Zoom. These are also listed at the top of the syllabus and on Canvas.

If neither of these is a workable option for you, please email us. We are happy to accommodate reasonable requests.

7 DRC Accommodations

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. At this time, we would also like to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. We encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

8 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.

8.1 Matters of Etiquette

In this class, we treat each other with respect and compassion. That means we do not show annoyance at someone else's confusion, nor laugh at people's questions (unless intended).

If you feel like you're being systematically marginalized, please let one of us know. I can get a bit blind with so many people and I often can't see in the back. Regardless where you are sitting, it is never my intention to keep students from discussion!

Finally, a brief word about email: I try to respond to email as quickly as possible, but I have a life outside this classroom. Here are my promised response latencies: a) during the week, 24 hours; b) during the weekend, by Monday morning. That means, in particular, that I will guiltlessly file away hurried questions to me on Thursday evening or Friday morning. I'm sorry to be so harsh, but I found out the hard way that otherwise I'm besieged with messages while trying to eat breakfast.