

Course Syllabus

Ling 80K: Invented Languages: From Elvish to Esperanto

(as of 07.26.19)

1. Administrative Information

Instructor:

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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.

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 has two parallel threads. In the thematic (or learning) thread, you will learn about existing conlangs. In the classlang thread, you will work on concrete language construction tasks, including helping to build our class language (a classlang). In the organization for the course, I'll list these threads together, but keep in mind that, in general, the classlang thread is worth much more than the learning thread, pointwise.

3.1 Learning Thread

The Learning Thread is comprised organized into eight thematic groups: historical overview and tour, basic sounds , sound symbolism and change, words, syntax, a language tour, and conclusion (1 unit).

This course is an intensive 5-credit course, equal to 150 hours in a conventional classroom setting (including the time you spend preparing, studying, and completing homework assignments).

For the most modules, each unit consists of the following (with recommended times):

- 1-3 videos, each followed by a brief comprehension quiz [1/2 hr]
- a reading assignment, and possibly a video watching assignment [1 hr]

The second to last module is made up of a series of structured language learning exercises (a running tutorial interspersed with short quizzes). The interesting features of 3 languages (Toki Pona, Laadan, and Lojban) is very quickly presented. Each language should take roughly 2-3 hours to work through.

The final module will require you to translate a short story from our language (4.5 hours of work) and reflect on the classlang (1-2 hours of work); this module comprises the final for the course.

3.2 Classlang Thread

Beyond the material you will be learning, in each week of the course you will be asked to do some combination of the following activities:

- learn about and comment on an existing conlang [30 min]
- a concrete conlang exercise [1 hr]
- a series of assignments to add to our classlang [1 hr]

In addition, we will have three classwide discussions about our evolving classlang, with dates to be decided. You are required to participate in one of these meetings.

4 Requirements

This course has 6 graded requirements:

- participation (10% of grade)
- classlang assessments (10% of grade)
- language explorations (10% of grade)
- comprehension assessments (20% of grade)
- weekly activities (20% of grade)

- final translation/exercise (30% of grade)

The points for each assignment are already calculated in accordance with this distribution. Keep in mind that the comprehension assessments are frequently only a few points, and that the other parts of the course are worth considerably more.

4.1 Video Lecture

Each unit in the course contains a series of video lectures that synthesize the concepts in the reading. Most of them are followed by short comprehension questions to assess your understanding. Treat these videos like class lectures – find a distraction free space and take notes.

4.2 Readings

This course has three 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.
- Mark Rosenfelder, *The Language Construction Kit*. Yonagu Books: 2010.

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

Finally, we will watch a recent movie about language construction at the start of the course. You can watch this video either through Amazon Prime or the [UCSC library](#)

(Links to an external site.)

4.3 Participation

Your participation grade is 10% and is determined across how actively you are involved in the intellectual life of the class (classlang exercises, online discussions, live meetings, and office hours).

As 3% of participation, we will have three 1 hr live meetings for the whole class, dates and times 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.

As 3% of participation, you will be asked to post comments to our online discussion group (roughly weekly).

Finally, I will ask you each to complete one online experiments during the session, for a total of 1% of your grade. These will be no more than 60 minutes each; more information about this is available on Canvas (under "Experiments").

4.4 Classlang assessments & Language Explorations

You will be asked to add to our classlang roughly weekly. These assignments are separate from the video/reading quizzes. They will be worth 10% of your grade. Your explorations of existing conlangs will be 10% as well.

4.5 Comprehension Assignments

Each unit will feature assignments to assess comprehension of the lecture and assigned readings. The assessments will consist of multiple choice and matching questions principally, but may feature short answer questions. Assessments are designed to be completed in at most a one 1 hour sitting. These questions will

amount to roughly 20% of your grade.

4.6 Weekly Activities

In addition to comprehension quizzes, you'll have more open-ended tasks each week (e.g., looking in dictionaries online and thinking through the implications or doing translations). These will be worth 20% of your grade.

4.7 Final Response

The final response will be a summative exercise, asking you to integrate your newfound knowledge to more precisely critique a constructed language. The final will consist of a final translation exercise and a short essay (under 700 words).

4.8 Late Work Policy

No late work will be accepted for this course. Because this is an online course, the material covered in quizzes is presented right after it is due, which means that there is no possibility of making that work up. However, the workload is pretty evenly distributed across the quarter, so if you happen to miss a small assignment, it will likely not be a huge deal.

I do, however, view not completing several assignments as something like not coming to class regularly. **To ensure that we start this quarter at the right pace, I will administratively delete anyone who has not turned anything in by Tuesday, August 6th.** I know this is pretty strict, but I really want to make sure that we all have a reasonable expectation about the course workload.

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, 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.

6 Getting Help: Office hours

Because this course is online, it is important to me that we create as many opportunities for you to talk with us. I and the TAs have virtual office hours throughout week. If none 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/academicintegrity>. 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.

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.