H14058: Make Your Own Language: Linguistics and Conlanging
Class Syllabus

Instructors

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Course Description

This class will cover the basic process of turning your idea for a constructed language (or conlang) into something with a real grammar and vocabulary. We'll also be looking into some of the linguistic concepts underlying languages. As part of the course, you can make your own conlang!

At-home Exercises

Each class day is associated with an optional exercise based on the content covered that day. The purpose of these is to give you more practice working with the concepts and a way to get feedback on your conlang as you develop it. If you wish to get feedback, please email your submission as a .pdf or .doc to H14058-teachers@esp.mit.edu before the following class.

If you already have a conlang in progress, feel free to send what you have!

Course Schedule

1	7/11/20	**Getting Started** • Introduction to the course • What types of conlangs exist? • Establishing your conlang's goals and purpose • Putting your conlang in context • Language families and sound changes *Exercise:* Come up with an idea for a conlang of your own. Identify the type of language, characteristics (e.g. naturalistic or non-naturalistic), intended audience, and your goals. If desired, generate the outline of a conworld to go with your language, possibly including a language tree.
2	7/18/20	**Phonology** • International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) • Tones • Phonotactics *Exercise:* Get comfortable reading and using IPA. For example, practice converting sentences in the languages you know into IPA. Fill out an IPA chart with the phonemes that you intend to use and the allophones that they will represent (this may change as you develop your language). Determine some phonotactic rules for your conlang.

3	7/25/20	**Morphology and Syntax** • Derivational morphology types • Word order • Negation *Exercise:* Choose a morphological type for your language. If applicable, generate a few affixes. Determine sentential word order and negation properties.
4	8/1/20	**Writing Systems and Orthography** • Shallow vs deep orthography • Diacritics • Alphabets, abjads, abugidas, syllabaries, logographic systems *Exercise:* Decide which writing system you would like to use and your orthography. (This may change as your language develops.)
5	8/8/20	**Grammar** • Noun and verb inflections • Table of correlatives • Semantics • Pragmatics *Exercise:* Fill out a table of correlatives. Come up with some idioms and conversational patterns.
6	8/15/20	**Lexicon and Continued Development** • Semantics • Word lists to translate (e.g. Swadesh list) • Generating new works or translating existing works *Exercise:* Start developing your lexicon and using your new language! Try translating the Swadesh list for starters.

Recommended Readings and Other Resources

A. Books about linguistics
   1. Mark Rosenfelder, *The Language Construction Kit*
   2. David J. Peterson, *The Art of Language Invention*
   3. J.C. Catford, *A Practical Introduction to Phonetics* (1988)
   4. R.L. Trask, *Historical Linguistics* (1986)
   5. Bernard Comrie, ed., *The World's Major Languages* (1987)
   6. Geoffrey Sampson, *Writing Systems* (1985)
   7. C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (1960)
B. Web resources
   1. IPA charts (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8e/IPA_chart_2018.pdf)
   2. Conlang subreddit (www.reddit.com/r/conlangs)
   3. Swadesh list
   4. Conlang Syntax Test Cases
   5. Zompist (www.zompist.com/kit.html)
   6. Universal Language Dictionary
   7. PolyGlot

8. Index Diachronica
9. World Atlas of Language Structures (wals.info)
10. Conlang Atlas of Language Structures (cals.info)
11. Lingvo.info
12. Greenberg's Linguistic Universals

C. YouTube channels
1. Artifexian - world building, conlangs
2. NativLang - linguistics
3. David Peterson - conlangs, linguistics
4. LangFocus - linguistics
5. The Ling Space - linguistics
6. Tom Scott - linguistics, programming, others
7. The Virtual Linguistics Campus - linguistics
8. Xidnaf - linguistics