Constructed Languages:
From Elvish to Esperanto
Syllabus – Spring 2021

Basics

Instructor: Dr. Steven Foley (*them*)
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Virtual office:
> https://princeton.zoom.us/my/sfoley
> Meeting ID: 605 035 8713

Office hours:
> Wednesdays, 2:30–3:30 (EST)
> Fridays, 10:00–11:00 (EST)
> and by appointment

Class information

Course number: LIN 202
Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00–12:20 (EST)
Meeting details:
> https://princeton.zoom.us/j/91002961789
> Meeting ID: 910 0296 1789
> Passcode: 679530

Course description

This course is about constructed languages (those deliberately created for artistic or political purposes; think Elvish or Esperanto) and how they relate to or differ from natural languages (which arise spontaneously in human communities; think English or Ewe). By studying and analyzing variation in natural languages, we will learn to appreciate language constructors' aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical intentions. We will survey the history and properties of existing constructed languages, as well as collaboratively construct our own class language (our 'Classlang'), providing hands-on experience with language creation and diverse grammatical structures.

Online resources

Canvas website: [here](), `https://princeton.instructure.com/courses/2472`
Miro (online whiteboard): Invitation [here](),
`https://miro.com/welcome/00Svo3C1pfbryPJsCNmVWM5g3JvMI5hVvIluUbz2NkPH9eWELaToYDSmawWe9D6Q`

Evaluation components

Rubric: Your final grade will be broken down according to the following rubric.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS – 45%

These will include quizzes hosted on Canvas, short essay reflections on readings, and written responses to linguistic problem sets.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS & CLASSLANG COLLABORATION – 15%

Throughout the semester, the class will create our own constructed language, collaboratively deciding which grammatical properties it should have. Committees will be formed to give brief presentations arguing in favor of particular linguistic features and inspirations to include.

FINAL PAPER – 30%

The final assignment will be a grammatical description of the finalized Classlang, accompanied by a short translated text.

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE – 10%

Attendance and regular participation in lecture or office hours will round off your grade. To register your attendance, please enter your name in Zoom's chat window within the first ten minutes of class.

Grading Policy: I'll use the following categories & guidelines for grading. All decimal points will be rounded down.

CATEGORY	RAW SCORE	DESCRIPTION
A	93% – 100%	Excellent work that goes above and beyond expectations. Arguments are precise but concise. Contemplates alternative interpretations of the data, or predictions that follow from the endorsed conclusion.
A–	90% – 92%	Very good work that is well-formatted and has clear structure. Logical steps in argumentation are defended thoroughly. Exhibits some nuanced interpretations and reasoning.
B+	87% – 89%	Good work that might be in need of some editing, miss a few minor details, or concentrate on superficial arguments or phenomena.
B	83% – 86%	Fine work that meets all requirements, but without any nuanced argumentation. Some arguments may be underdeveloped, or lack total logical coherence.

B–	80% – 82%	Satisfactory work that meets all minimum requirements. Length is probably too short to fully develop ideas and arguments.
C+	77% – 79%	Unsatisfactory work which may (to varying degrees) be poorly edited, incomplete, or based on flawed understanding of the material at hand.
C	73% – 76%	
C–	70% – 72%	
D+	67% – 69%	
D	63% – 68%	
D–	60% – 62%	
F	below 60%	Less than half of the assignment is attempted.

Other policies & ground rules

Late work: I will accept one late assignment with a 10% grade penalty, a second at a 20% penalty, and a third at a 30% penalty. No further late assignments will be accepted. All late work must be submitted within two weeks of the original due date.

Extension policy: I will grant occasional extensions for due dates given a reasonable and timely request. You must negotiate an extension with me before the original due date of an assignment.

Participation: Your participation grade is based primarily on your contributions to in-class and online discussions, but one-on-one interactions with me (e.g., in office hours) can also count towards your participation grade.

While much of the material in this class will be covered through lectures, passive learning on its own is never sufficient. This means you should regularly share ideas and ask questions, and you are welcome to interrupt me during class. Don't be shy — everyone should feel welcome to offer their thoughts, including half-baked ones. Free association is always preferable to radio silence!

Email: If you have a question about course content, it's very likely that some of your classmates do too. For that reason, questions about course material will generally not be answered over email. Instead, bring them up in class or during office hours.

Feel free to email me, however, with logistical or more personal questions.

Collaboration: You are encouraged to discuss assignments with your classmates. However, each student must complete their own individual write-ups that do not plagiarize the work of any other student. Please indicate your collaborators, if any, at the top of any written work.

Academic integrity: I take academic integrity very seriously, and any misconduct (e.g., plagiarism, cheating, or letting someone else cheat) will be reported. Students should review Princeton's publication on academic integrity, which can be found at this link.

Should the University discipline committee determine that your work violates any portion of this policy, it will receive a grade of zero and may be reported to the deans. If you are unclear about whether something counts as honest work or not, please ask me.

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Readings

Readings will be drawn primarily from these sources, and will be posted in .pdf format on Canvas. Watch out for emails throughout the quarter announcing upcoming readings.

Adams, Michael. 2011. *From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages*. Oxford University Press: 2011.

Dawson, Hope and Michael Phelan (eds.) 2016. *Language files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. The Ohio State University Press.

Dryer, Matthew S. & Martin Haspelmath (eds.) 2013. The World Atlas of Language Structures Online. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. (Available online at http://wals.info.)

Foer, Joshua. 2012. Utopian for Beginners. *The New Yorker*, December 24 & 31 issue.

Lo Bianco, Joseph. 2004. Inventing languages and new worlds. *English Today*, 20(2), 8–18. Cambridge University Press.

Hostetter, Carl F. 2006. Elvish as She Is Spoke. In *The Lord of the Rings 1954–2004: Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder*, eds. Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull: 231–255. Marquette University Press.

Okrand, Mark. 1992. *The Klingon Dictionary: The official guide to Klingon words and phrases*. Simon & Schuster.

Okrent, Arika. 2010. *In the Land of Invented Languages: A Celebration of Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius*. Spiegel & Grau.

Payne, Thomas E. 1997. *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguists*. Cambridge University Press: 1997.

Peterson, David J. 2015. *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves, the Words behind World-Building*. Penguin.

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

Draft schedule

We'll aim to cover the following topics during this class, but not necessarily on the precise dates listed here. Keep an eye on Canvas for a more up-to-date schedule.

Week	Tues.	Thur.	Theme
I	2/2	2/4	*Introduction:* What are constructed languages (conlangs) and how do they differ from natural languages (natlangs)? What's the history of conlanging, and how can we classify conlangs based on their artistic, philosophical, or political purpose?
II	2/9	2/11	*Phonetics:* What speech sounds do we observe in natlangs? Which are the most common and why? How do conlangs use this pallet of sounds aesthetically or expressively?
III	2/16	2/18	
IV	2/23	2/25	*Phonology:* What sorts of grammatical rules govern the behavior of speech sounds?
V	3/2	3/4	*Morphology:* How are words structured? How do natlangs vary in the internal structural complexity of their words, and how have conlangs borrowed and adapted these patterns?
VI	3/9	3/11	*Lexicon:* How do words encapsulate meaning, and how can a conlang convey a mood or ideology through its lexicon?
VII	**No class**	3/18	*Morphosyntax:* How do natlangs tend to signal subjects and objects? What other kinds of grammatical meaning tend to be expressed through morphology?
VIII	3/23	3/25	*Syntax:* How do natlangs organize a finite set of words into an infinite array of sentences? To what extent have conlangs achieved naturalistic or alien syntactic grammars?
IX	3/30	4/1	
X	4/6	4/8	*Semantics & Pragmatics:* What principles determine the meanings sentences convey? Why have these aspects of language been less of a focus for conlangers?
XI	4/13	4/15	*Writing Systems:* What is the taxonomy of writing systems? Why do so many conlangs have their own unique scripts?
XII	4/20	4/22	*Acquisition:* What do we know about the few conlangs that have been acquired as a first language by children?
XIII	4/27	**No class**	*Conclusion:* What can we take away from the practice of conlanging as it relates to language, art, and society?