

[Last Modified: 11/15/04 5:29PM PST]

Constructing Languages DE-Cal - Ling 98/198 SPRING 2005

Units: 2 or 3 (see below)

When: MWF 4-5pm

Where: TBA (Small classroom, pref. w/ desks & whiteboard)

Max enrolled students: 25.

However, dropins, waitlisted people, audits, and random visitor-folk [even non-UC students] are welcome to come by anyway. I'll trim the official list down to 25 or so around the third week of class, to account for class-shopping periods. I may be willing to extend this limit, given sufficient interest & classroom availability.

Facilitator:

 [saizai](#) - Sai Emrys (just call me Sai)

3rd yr. CogSci / Music (?)

email: conlangs@saizai.com

URL: http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs_decal

Office hours: Office? What office?

Sponsoring Professor:

Leanne Hinton, Chair, Linguistics Dept.

Synopsis:

Constructed languages - a.k.a. "artificial languages", etc - include a wide variety of languages. Esperanto, Klingon, Quenya, Loglan / Lojban, Signed Exact English, proto-Indo-European, and many many others are all conlangs. Arguably, this list includes Received English, Korean, and Turkish as well.

This class will focus on the history and variety of conlangs, as well as specific issues related to the actual construction of a language, such as orthography, vocabulary generation, modes, metaphor, aesthetics, originality, translation, internationalization, logic, Sapir-Whorf testing, universals testing/breaking, etc. We will also cover some of the more common stumbling blocks to creating a language, such as unconscious patterning after one's native language. It will be tailored to the interests and linguistic background of the students.

No linguistic background is necessary for this class, though it will certainly be useful.

Grading:

This is a variable-unit, pass / no pass class. There is no difference between the 98 and 198 versions; choose whichever you prefer.

There will be a midterm paper and final paper for all students, as well as regular homework; this and attendance will be the only grading criteria. Show up, do the work, and you'll pass.

(How to get a NP grade: don't show up to class a lot; don't turn in essays, or turn in work that's clearly BS; plagiarize; etc. You know how. Don't.)

Do not expect this to be a "fluff" class, however; if you have no linguistics experience, then a lot of the material we go over will be new to you, and you will need to learn it (this is of a level similar to Ling 5). It's not quite as in-depth in that respect, but remember, you will be *creating a language* using these ideas. ;-)

To earn 3 units, there will be an optional final project / research paper. Details are below.

Goals & What you should get out of this class

On finishing this class, you will be prepared to make your own languages, as well as to better appreciate the diversity of languages in general. You will know about the history of constructed languages, relevant bits of formal linguistics, and will probably have formed opinions about the various controversies associated with this topic. You will know a lot more about some topics in linguistics than people who have only read about them, and will be very well prepared for advanced classes in linguistics. Of course, you will probably also know a lot about the topics you choose for your papers. ;-)

If you've done the final project, then you will probably have created your very own language, with its own phonology, morphology, syntax, and all the rest. You will have had some experience translating from English to your new language, including the Babel text.

Now, what other class can give you **that** to take away from the experience?

Linguistic Background

This is not a class on introductory linguistics. However, it *is* a class with no linguistics knowledge prerequisite. If you know nothing about modern formal linguistics, you will probably need to take more time to read up on basics, such as the IPA, the meanings of basic terminology such as phone, phoneme, morpheme, syntax, etc., and anything else you don't understand. We will cover some of this in class, but mainly from a perspective of use and application rather than theory and description.

You will probably find an introductory text on linguistics, such as *Language Files* or *Contemporary Linguistics*, very useful.

Course Website / LJ Community

This course's website is http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs_decal . You will need a LiveJournal (LJ) account; these are free and easy to create - visit <http://www.livejournal.com/create.bml> to do so. The account under which you post to the community must have your legal name (whatever Cal thinks it is) associated with it. If you already have a LJ account, which you don't want to have identified with your legal name, then post under a different account, or make a locked post to the community (visible only to other members) introducing yourself.

If you have any problem with this requirement, please talk to me.

All course material (inasmuch as possible) will be posted to the LJ community, so it would be in your best interests to monitor it. You might also benefit from it as a discussion forum, and a place to have your work peer-reviewed (and give your own rants/raves to others).

Some other useful sites

General Conlangs Sites

- <http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs> - the general-purpose LJ  [conlangs](http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs) community
- <http://listserv.brown.edu/archives/conlang.html> - "the" conlang mailing list, hosted by Brown U.
- <http://www.langmaker.com> - [Conlang Profiles at Langmaker](#)
- <http://www.omniglot.com> - Omniglot, a guide to writing systems (natural and onstructed)
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conlangs> - the Wikipedia entry for Conlangs

Theory & Essays

- <http://www.eskimo.com/~ram/essays.html> - Essays on language creation by Rick Morneau, including [Lexical Semantics of a Machine Translation Interlingua](#) (most of these are general-audience; LSoaMTI is a bit more difficult, but doesn't *require* an excessive linguistics background to understand)
- <http://www.nkuitse.com/conlang/glosses/> - "How to make good glosses", by Paul Hoffman
- <http://www.langmaker.com/backissu.htm> - Model Languages newsletter, by Jeffrey Henning
- <http://www.livejournal.com/users/saizai/352316.html> - an incomplete list of posts by myself ( [saizai](#)) about various design ideas, particularly [On the Design of an Ideal Language](#)

Linguistics Sites

- <http://www.rosettaproject.org> - [the Rosetta Project](#) - a free online database of every documented human language

- <http://www.ling.hf.ntnu.no/ipa/full/> - a click-to-hear chart of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
- <http://cassowary.free.fr/Linguistics/cxschart.png> (PNG image) or <http://www.theiling.de/ipa/> (text) - how to write the IPA in plaintext (using CXS, the Conlang-modified X-Sampa method)
- <http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/Index.htm> - a, um, glossary of linguistic terms. Pretty straightforward.

Specific Conlangs' Sites

- <http://www.geocities.com/eastonde/conlib.html> - a very long (1100+) list of conlangs with links to websites describing them
- <http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf> - [Ardalambion](#), probably the best resource on JRR Tolkien's conlangs
- <http://www.kli.org> - the [Klingon Language Institute](#)
- <http://www.lojban.org> - Lojban/Loglan
- <http://home.inreach.com/sl2120/Ithkuil/> - Ithkuil, by John Quijada
- <http://www.esperanto.net/> - Esperanto

Language-creation resources

- <http://www.zompist.com/kit.html> - [the Language Construction Kit](#)
- <http://www.angelfire.com/ego/pdf/ng/lng/how/index.html> - "How to create a language", by Pablo David Flores
- <http://kwet.sourceforge.net> - Kwet (by Paul Hoffman), a rules-based random word generator

Reader/Syllabus:

I'm a student, and like "poet", that abbreviates to "po". I can't afford to print out syllabi - or other reading materials - for a classful of people. For that matter, neither can the linguistics department. I will make a reader available at one of the copy stores near campus; buy it if you want hard copies. Everything in it will be available either directly from a library book or online at the URL above. (Presumably, if you're reading this, you already know that.)

The online version ~~may~~ will be more current than the printed one, and will always take precedence. I will tell you if I update anything in the reader after its print date, of course.

Texts / Reading materials:

I strongly recommend that you have at least one good introductory linguistics textbook. The one I used for Ling 100 was *Contemporary Linguistics*, 4th ed. There are others. Get one if you don't already have it.

The reader will have its own table of contents; take a look there. In addition to that, there will be some items I want you to look up online, to read or research or work on. If you're interested in any of the items we go over briefly during class,

Assignments

All major assignments should be submitted online, by posting publicly to the course's LJ community. You can submit them in paper form also, if you prefer.

However, please treat them as you would any other serious work. The LJ community is a forum for feedback and publication; expect to get commentary on it both by your classmates and unaffiliated people. Impress them. ;-)

*Reminder: Plagiarism **will not be tolerated**. We have ways of telling whether you do so. Give credit for everything you borrow or copy, whether it be ideas, words, or quotations; submit your own work; etc. You are welcome to play off of someone else's post(s), but if you want credit for something, it must be entirely your own original work.*

Homework

Homework will be on the outline, and discussed in class as it comes up. Pre-HW is due on the day of the first lecture on that topic; Post-HW is due on the day listed. They're grouped together to make it easier to understand what goes with what.

I won't give letter grades on the day-to-day homework, but you will need to turn it in (since it's part of your overall passing grade). I will check whether or not you did it on time.

This homework is primarily for your own benefit. It includes incremental language design, exercises to help you understand linguistic principles, etc., so not doing it will make it harder for you to keep up.

Most regular homework - as opposed to the papers, project, etc. - will be posted as a screened-comment entry to the LJ community. Post your answers as a comment; nobody except me will be able to see them.

Midterm Paper

Choose a topic relevant to the class, and talk about it. This can be a review of research, a presentation on some subject that isn't scheduled to come up in class, original constructions, etc. Please confirm your topic with me before starting.

Some suggestions:

- Find a linguistic feature or two - from a natural or constructed language or any other source - that is significantly different from those of the language(s) you already know. Figure out how it works, and try to figure out how you would implement it in your conlang.

- Find a well fleshed-out and internet-published conlang - **not** one of the five or so major ones, like Esperanto, Klingon, Ido, Quenya, etc. - and do a review of it. Try to learn it as much as you can, and write up what you think about it, how good a job you think it does at the goals it tries to achieve and at how you think a language ought to be, etc. Consider this a sort of academic version of a movie or art review / critique.

Final Paper

This is a longer version of the midterm paper, on a DIFFERENT topic or a MAJOR extension to the midterm. Again, the range of topics is very broad, as is the style or type of paper; again, confirm first. We will discuss this more as the time approaches.

Final Project / Research Paper for 3 units' credit

This should be a **significant** production. You have three standard options, the first being strongly recommended.

I am very much open to suggestions. Be aware that since this is the one and only deciding factor in whether you get two units or three, it is a SERIOUS assignment. START NOW. You cannot create a language overnight, but you can create one over a couple months. I will help with feedback about potential topics, etc., but all your work must be your own. This is equivalent to a major term paper. Submit something that you will be proud to have your name on.

If you decide to do a final project, be sure to consult with me **very** early on. Tell me what you intend to do, why, and how. Keep me apprised of how it's going. If you choose something other than Option 1, make sure I approve it FIRST.

Option 1: Create your own language

You read that right: you will create an entire language, including all parts of grammar that we talk about in class.

I realize that this is probably an intimidating concept for you. It's really not as hard as you might think, and the homework that we'll be doing over the course of the class will go over all aspects of language design; you will essentially be building it as we go. Of course, your early work will probably be revised several times by the time you are ready to submit the final revision.

There are a few boundary criteria for this project. When you are out on your own as a conlanger, even these will disappear, but for now, here are your limits:

1. Your language must be geared towards human use. Any literate person in the world should be able to learn and use your language. (This does NOT mean that it need be an auxlang!)

2. Your language MAY NOT BE like either a) English, or b) your native language, if other than English. I *will* push you to break away from your default assumptions about how a language can or should work.
3. Your language must be a full working language in scope (although it need not have a multi-thousand-word vocabulary, etc.), and should NOT be simply a code for another language.
4. The phonetic inventory should be drawn from within the IPA, and all aspects should be described in standard linguistic form.
5. You will have to translate a few sample phrases and short samples from English, most prominently, the [Babel Text](#), from Genesis 11:1-9 - more [here](#). This is NOT a "literal" translation; I will be looking for something that translates the essence of meaning into a form that is more appropriate for your language.

Within these five criteria, you will have considerable leeway. Do whatever kind of language you want; choose any typology, morphology, etc., as you like. Create a novel orthography. Create a language that uses a primary modality other than speech. BE CREATIVE!

Option 2: Modular Systems

For this variation, you will create only certain parts of a language - e.g., an orthography.

The criteria are the same as above where applicable (minus the translation), however:

1. You will have to compensate for reduced scope by a major increase in the amount of detail, originality, and creativity you give to those parts you do.
2. Since they are not in the context of a full language, you will need to make them modular - provide explicit ways for yourself others to use your systems as part of a full language, how they can be integrated with, etc.
3. Your systems **MUST BE ENTIRELY NEW**. No rehashes, no slightly-different versions of something you've seen elsewhere. The point of this option for a final project is for use in the case of your thinking up some very new, very original way of doing something. This is a much stronger criteria than for Version 1.

Option 3: Research Project

If you have an idea for something else you'd like to do that would be equivalent in scope and amount of work to the previous two, come up with a plan and tell me about it.

This is a fairly open-ended option, but you will have to convince me that it is indeed equal. Possible ideas could include conducting original, scientific research; writing a major paper on a topic of your choosing; etc. Talk to me.

Schedule:

The schedule is TENTATIVE, and listed separately. I may change things around, add new topics or remove them as time and interest dictate, etc. You will be expected to have done readings for a particular topic before it is brought up in class; I'll make sure you have a week's notice for that.

One important side effect of this is that You The Student can change the schedule, if you have input on what you'd prefer we talk about, what not, and when. 15 weeks is a fairly long time, yes, but there can be a *lot* of material to cover. Inevitably, we will have to skip or gloss over some topics. Let's try to make the best use of the time we have.

Paper due dates are firm. If you have a reason why you can't submit something on time, talk to me immediately. If you think you can make a better submission if given extra time, submit what you have (on time), and submit the better version when it's done.

Credits

Leanne Hinton, for agreeing to sponsor this class. Yay!

[David Peterson](#), for suggesting Leanne Hinton as my advisor, recommending various other resources, and his extensive collaboration and help on the course design, homework, etc.

 [ged](#), for more resources