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**Constructing Languages:  
Applied Seminar DE-Cal - Ling 98/198  
SPRING 2006**

**Units:** 0-2 (see below)

**When:** TBD, 1-2 hr/week (see below)

**Where:** TBA

**Facilitator:**

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

4th yr. CogSci

email: conlangs@saizai.com

URL: [http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs\\_decal](http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs_decal)

Office hours: Office? What office?

If you want to talk to me in person outside of class, do so before or after class (hopefully I'll be there early most days). If that doesn't work, contact me and we'll arrange something.

**Sponsoring Professor (second year running!):**

Leanne Hinton, Chair, Linguistics Dept.

**Synopsis:**

Constructed languages (conlangs) - 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 be about designing your own language, mostly from the bottom up. We will work on a class language together, using ideas from various students, as you create (or continue to work on) your own languages at home (and discuss them in class). The class will *not* cover the history or theory of conlangs, nor formal linguistics, except as necessary. The main focus will be on actually getting "into it" – starting from day one – and learning what you need as you go.

If you are interested in these more in-depth topics, talk to me. There is plenty of material available, including some videos from the previous year's class, and books in the library.

No linguistic background is necessary for this class, though it will certainly be useful. Likewise, reading through the reader will be very useful (especially for those new to conlanging), as will be reading the recommended text, though these are both optional.

This class will be run in a manner fairly different from last year's Conlangs DE-Cal – less intense, and more hands-on. Last year's was closer in scope to a full Ling 1 or Ling 101 class.

Returning students *MAY* take this class for credit again, but will need to do a new final project, or an expansion to their previous year's. Talk to me if this applies to you.

### **Timing:**

This class will generally meet two hours a week. If the enrollment of students interested in taking 2 units is too low, then this will be reduced to one hour a week.

On a side note: I am graduating in May, and obviously won't be around to teach the class any more after that. If you are interested in taking over from me, please let me know.

If you have knowledge of linguistics or conlangs, you are very much welcome to teach some of the classes in my stead – using my notes if you like (and can decipher them).

### **Grading:**

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

To get 1 unit: Show up most of the time – enough for me to know your name when they ask me whether or not you passed. That's it.

To get 2 units: Attend class regularly, and do the final project (which you'll be doing the work for over the course of the semester anyway) at a level that shows effort. Again: simple.

*(How to get a NP grade: don't show up to class a lot; don't turn in the final project, or turn in work that's clearly BS; plagiarize; lie; etc. You know how. Don't. I will give a grade of "incomplete" for honest students who simply haven't finished the work [or want more time to do it]; I will NP you without compunction if you are dishonest.)*

If, for whatever reason, you want fewer units than you qualify for – e.g. 1 if you're doing the final project, or 0 for anyone – we can do that. You do need to decide relatively early on in the semester how many units you want (e.g. before the add deadline); it is difficult to change later on.

### **Goals: What you should get out of this class**

On finishing this class, you will be well on your way to having your very own language. Obviously, it is not possible to get something that complex "finished" in one semester, but you'll have started.

If you've done the final project, then you will probably have done even more on your language – complete 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 want 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. If you don't have one and aren't already very familiar with introductory linguistics concepts, get one.

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### **Course Website / LJ Community**

This course's website is [http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs\\_decal](http://www.livejournal.com/~conlangs_decal) (same as last year). 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, you can post under a different account, or simply identify yourself by legal name only on the (screened) signup form.

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](#). Also has a huge amount of other links and resources.
- <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 diffiuct, 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](#)
- <http://students.washington.edu/jaspax/conlang.htm> - Conlanger's Manifesto, by David Peterson
- <http://www.valdyas.org/apologia.html> - Apologia pro Imaginatione, by Boudewjin Rempt

### *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 Tolkein'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

- <http://www.ptialaska.net/~srice/solresol/intro.htm> - Solresol

#### *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
- <http://metafont.latex.free.fr/> - METAFONT / L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X tutorial

#### **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*, 4<sup>th</sup> 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, I can probably give you some pointers for where to get more. In any case, just Google it.

One more text I strongly recommend for this class is Thomas E. Payne's *Describing Morphosyntax*. It is very well written and very useful, but does assume at least a rudimentary knowledge of linguistics. If you know basics, or are up for a challenge, buy it and read it. With some simple translation, it's practically a manual for how to make a conlang grammar, and gives you a good idea of the breadth of options available just from what natural languages are known to do.

#### **Assignments**

There is only one – optional for those taking 1 unit, required for those taking 2.

*Reminder: Don't plagiarize. Really.*

## The Final Project / Research Paper

You have three standard options, the first being strongly recommended. I am very much open to suggestions if you want to do something different that is substantially similar in difficulty and related to the class.

Do remember to START EARLY. You can do this very easily if you just do it as we go.

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 work 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 intended scope (although it need not have a multi-thousand-word vocabulary, etc.), and should NOT be simply a code for another language. (Obviously, it need not be a full working language at the time of writing this paper.)
4. The phonetic inventory should preferably be drawn from within the IPA, and all aspects should be described in ways any linguist would be able to understand. If you want to make it layperson-understandable, that works also.
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.

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### **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.

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.

### **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