

Ideas for Fantastic ((un)real) Speech

Pertti Palo

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Land acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge and honor the Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, and Shawnee people, on whose ancestral homelands we are today and/or on whose ancestral homelands I have worked on this presentation.

Housekeeping and Warnings

- ▶ I want to keep this a safe space of mutual respect.
- ▶ The organisers told me that I should tell you, that I will swear during this presentation.
- ▶ Personally, I find it more important to give you a content warning concerning topics such as colonization, oppression, pejoratives, etc. which may or may not come up depending on where the conversation takes us.

- ▶ Please feel free to ask questions at any point.
- ▶ There will also be time for discussion and questions afterwards. I do not intend to fill the full hour with just me talking.

Outline

- ▶ Yesterday: Borrowing a Language 101
- ▶ Today: Ideas for Fantastic ((un)real) Speech
 - ▶ Housekeeping and warnings
 - ▶ Who am I and why am I here?
 - ▶ Dragons and Bird people
 - ▶ Speech and magic
 - ▶ Some food for thought

Who's this guy?



- ▶ Pertti Palo
- ▶ I've got a couple of degrees loosely speaking in engineering.
- ▶ I've also got a PhD in Phonetics.
- ▶ I have obviously not ever collected articulatory data on a live dragon, but I have spent a lot of time learning how to think about speech production and articulation.

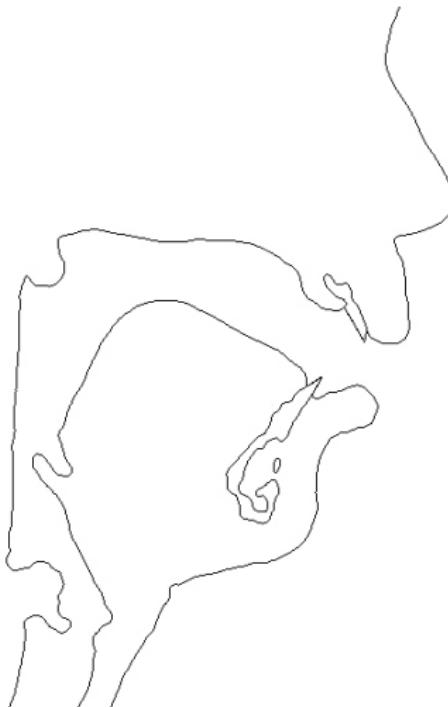
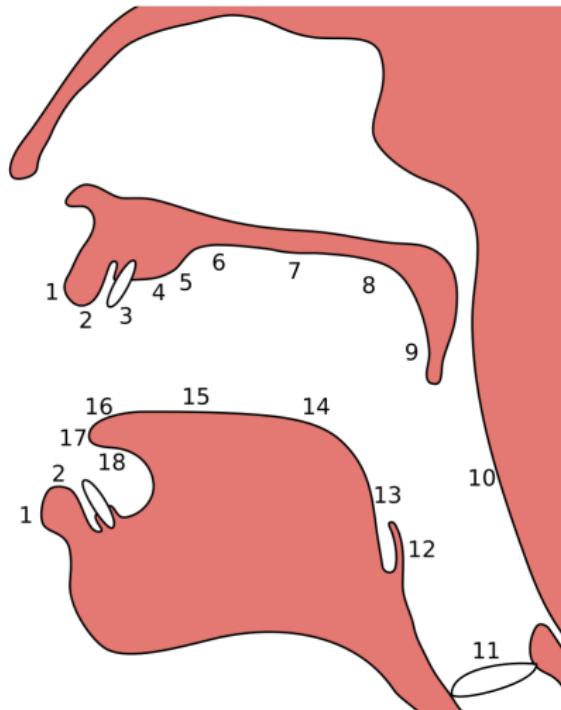
What lead me here?

- ▶ I can no longer tell if LotR or interest in speech and language came first in my life.
- ▶ I am not a text linguist but rather a phonetician and a speech researcher.
- ▶ Besides a speech researcher with 20+ years of experience, I've been an RPG enthusiast for 30+ years.
- ▶ Recently I've also started training as an oral storyteller which has some interesting connections with RPGs but also with science.

Dragons and bird people

Dragon speech: Let's first talk about humans

- ▶ Have you ever considered how humans produce speech?



Picture on the left by user ish shwar on Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 3.0), picture on the right by me (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Dragon anatomy

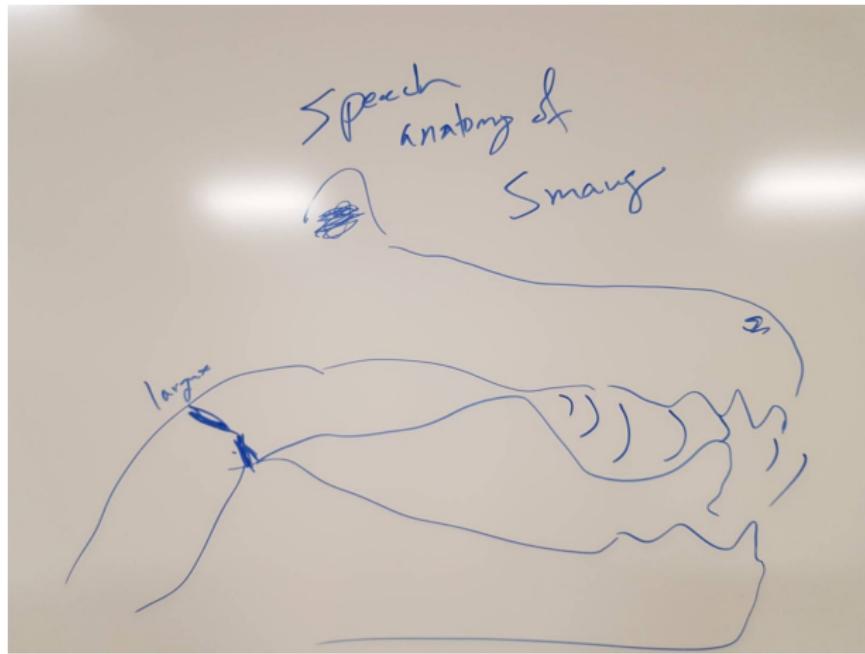
- ▶ Have you ever considered how a huge thing like a dragon – let's say Smaug – could sound like a human?
- ▶ Smaug is a lot larger than a human with wildly different neck and mouth anatomy.



Picture by David Demaret via Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Maybe dragons are voice actors?

- ▶ Mouth is still too large,
- ▶ but like Colette told us in the previous panel you can alter that with the tongue.



Picture by Prof Steven Lulich via my phone (CC BY-SA 3.0).

If not voice actors what then?

Maybe mind speech?

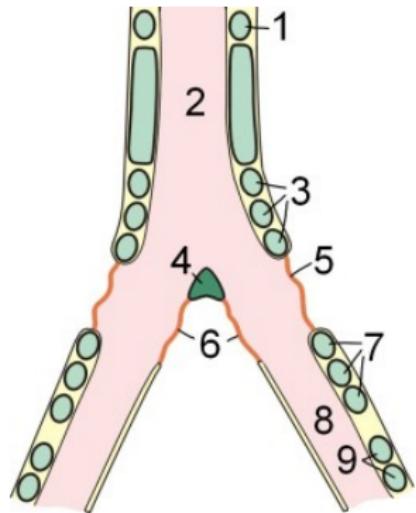
- ▶ Maybe it's mind speech? But how's that produced and what are the rules?
 - ▶ Is the range sight only?
 - ▶ Or something like regular sound carrying distance?
 - ▶ Is it actually illusion?
 - ▶ Or 'just' a magic spell-like ability to produce sound at will? In which case a dragon could potentially produce any sound.
- ▶ Even if it is mind speech how about the roar?

But maybe it's acoustic speech?

- ▶ Maybe it is acoustic speech after all but just not produced by the same system they use for breathing and eating?
 - ▶ So what is this organ like?
 - ▶ Something like whale sonar?
 - ▶ Some magical thing that lives in the dragon's mouth?

Bird people

- ▶ Have you ever considered how a small thing like a parrot can sound like a human?
- ▶ Birds don't have the same vocal anatomy as humans do.



Picture by Uwe Gille via Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Speech and magic

Speech and magical power in the real world: Swearing

- ▶ A lot of swear words are taboo because they are perceived as curses or perceived to evoke power: Damn, hell, helvetti, perkele and so many more.
- ▶ So are words magical? How? Why? And what consequences would this have?
 - ▶ Do they need to be spoken to become magic?
 - ▶ Power of true names: How exact do you need to be?
 - ▶ Would a translation of a magic name do?
 - ▶ Is rythm important internally or externally? Is the rythm relevant to only mages but not to non-mages?
 - ▶ Is breath control the key to magic?
- ▶ And just randomly: How about magic being tied to something that needs to be artificially embedded in your vocal tract?

Some food for thought

Topics that are interesting and require care

- ▶ Speech and language minorities:
 - ▶ Minority languages
 - ▶ Prestige and non-prestige accents
- ▶ impairments, social challenges, and shibboleths that don't really matter in intelligibility
 - ▶ Stuttering
 - ▶ Finnish /r/

Some ideas to play around with

- ▶ Whistled languages, languages spoken with musical instruments
- ▶ All the different ways of conveying meaning: tone, vowels, consonants, voice quality which leads to:
- ▶ 'Weird' sounds – sounds that are less common (in English):
 - ▶ Kargyraa, khöömei, European overtone singing
 - ▶ clicks, and generally the whole of what IPA covers these days, let alone what X-IPA covers
- ▶ Synthesised voices in sci-fi and why not fantasy too.

Keeping it all together

- ▶ Don't go over the top.
- ▶ Use things that make sense to you, which also have a role in the story.
- ▶ The role maybe one of creating atmosphere but can also be something more involved.
- ▶ Humans are very curious. It is easy to make things attractive to us by including a partial or open ended description of something. Speaking of which:

More interesting stuff to embed in a setting

- ▶ Music
- ▶ Song
- ▶ Mouth Music
 - ▶ Imitating instruments
 - ▶ Imitating animal sounds

Thank you!

Let's talk!

Acknowledgements

- ▶ Again, the people who's ancestral land we are on.
- ▶ Wikipedia.
- ▶ All the good folk mentioned in passing and whose pictures I've borrowed.
- ▶ Copyrighted work remains the property of the legal copyright holders.