

Finwol

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I present a language I constructed called Finwol, a clipping of English “final world” and a compound of the Finwol words meaning the same. Finwol is an isolating *a posteriori* language that represents one possible syncretism of major world languages.

1. Background and Motivation

Finwol was originally conceived under the working name Final-World as an *a posteriori* international auxiliary language designed with features from multiple of the world’s dominant languages. This would allow anyone speaking any of these languages to have some advantage when learning Finwol.

1.1. Context, Significance, and Inspiration

The conception of this constructed language idea came from our class activity on Esperanto, the most successful practically constructed language. One major criticism of Esperanto was that it was too Eurocentric, with a grammar that too closely resembles English and vocabulary that derives mainly from Romance languages. In order to make a truly international auxiliary language, I looked beyond the languages spoken in Europe.

Finwol was intended to in Esperanto’s footsteps as an *a posteriori* international auxiliary language, basing itself on the languages which are dominant in international affairs in recent times. These have traditionally been English and French, so I planned to focus the core of my language on these two. However, there are also major contributions from the regionally dominant Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese, with sprinklings from other languages. With a global set of language features, people from all over the world can learn Finwol relatively easily to communicate across language gaps.

This language is created with people from all cultures and all walks of life in mind: a flourishing linguistic ecosystem must involve as many people as possible. However, the more urgent use of the language will be in international business and politics. Within this context, Finwol seeks to minimize linguistic confusion and promote simple, efficient communication. The features of the language will be designed with an understanding of the current world cultures, as well as simplicity.

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Over time, as I continued to develop the language, my focus shifted away from being an auxiliary language and more toward being a fun, artistic language. I learned about languages like Loglan, which used several of the same techniques I did, but its overbearing syntax made it hard for even “fluent” speakers to form sentences. I knew that in today’s constructed language community, it would be extremely difficult for a language like Finwol, especially because its haphazard, *a posteriori* nature, to genuinely take off and develop a community of enthusiasts. I would instead continue my plan and build a language that was fun for me. Only when I felt confident it could stand on its own would I encourage speakers to form a community around it. After all, the simple rules of Finwol were designed for easy learning and communication. It is a language formed by diffusion of all languages, so the global inspirations are a major source of inspiration for the details of Finwol.

1.2. Language Details and Planned Features

To create this language, I planned to research language interaction and evolution, especially on the linguistic patterns of pidgins. I wanted Finwol to sound like a possible organically produced pidgin of the major world languages. I will then polish this pidgin into a language that is complete, as well as simplify the vocabulary and grammar to make the language easy to learn. Like Esperanto, there may be a suffix indicating part of speech and one suffix for plurality. I can expand this to a larger collection of grammatical cases.

One feature Finwol may have is a deference for technical terms in the language they are currently dominant in. For example, the common name for plants and animals will match closely their Latin scientific forms. Cultural-specific concepts will follow the language of the culture in which they originated. This not only makes the language more universal and more widely accepted in niche circles, it will also make it easier to add loanwords.

2. Phonology

Presented are the phonemic inventory and phonotactic rules for Finwol.

2.1. Phonemic Inventory

Consonants

		Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Velar	Glottal
Stops	<i>Vcl.</i>	p		t		k	
	<i>Vcd.</i>	b		d		g	
Fricatives	<i>Vcl.</i>		f	s	ʃ	x	h
	<i>Vcd.</i>			z	ʒ		
Nasals		m		n		ŋ	
Liquids				l			
Glides					j	w	

Vowels

		Front	Central	Back
High		i		u
Mid		e, ε	ə	o
Low		a		

Finwol lacks affricates and diphthongs and has a much smaller vowel set than English. This rather simple phonology allows for easy learning and less ambiguity.

Finwol encourages a broad array of allophones to allow people of different native languages to communicate in Finwol. For example, /l/ can be realized by [l] or by any rhotic. Voiced and voiceless consonants are distinguished not only by voicing but also by aspiration: voiceless consonants are aspirated.

2.2. Phonotactics

Finwol's syllables follow a (C)V(C) syllable structure. There are no consonant clusters in Finwol. In addition, V or VC syllables appear only in word-initial or word-final positions. To account for this, Finwol has several phonotactic repair mechanisms such as epenthesis and consonant deletion. In general, loanwords that are shorter and more formal will be repaired with epenthesis. Likewise, longer and less formal words tend to be repaired through deletion.

Only nasals can act as coda consonants.

3. Morphosyntax

Finwol is an isolating language, which places limitations on morphological and syntactic design decisions.

3.1. Morphology

Finwol has a weak word class distinction. Any word in any open lexical class can be **converted** to a word in another class. This parallels natural conversion processes in English. For example, ['ba.lu], meaning 'blue' in Finwol, can also refer to a subgroup of blue items in a larger group ('the blue ones').

Compounding is also prominent in Finwol, as demonstrated by the name of the language. When compounding a modifier (adjective) and a noun, the modifier goes first in the compounded form and is separated from the noun by the genitive marker [zi]. Over time they may be contracted down to only the first syllables of the component words if doing so does not interfere with comprehension of other words.

3.2. Syntax

Finwol is a rather isolating language; the exceptions are compound words and '-s' after a noun to mark whether it is plural. Nouns have 4 cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative), each with its own modifying particle after the noun.

Verb Tense	Particle
Past	[dɛ]
Future	[wal]

Verbs are not inflected based on the number of the noun, but they do have particles for past and future tense. Present tense is denoted by a lack of particle.

Noun Case	Particle
Nominative	[i]
Accusative	[do]
Genitive	[zi]
Dative	[ta]

Finwol is head-initial in relative placement of particles, but adjectives may come before or after the nouns they modify. All adjectives have a genitive particle following them.

Case markers for nouns and adjectives are optional but highly recommended and should be in common use. The word order is generally SVO, but if case markers are used then words may be reordered for poetic purposes.

Imperative mood is indicated by [u] preceding the verb in a similar manner to case markers. Likewise, to form a question (done with subject-auxiliary inversion in English), precede the verb with [xe] and end the sentence with a rising tone.

Finwol has one indefinite ([ə]) and one definite article ([ɛ]). They are optional, used for emphasis or to aid language learners whose native tongues have articles. In more formal contexts they are omitted.

4. Sample Passages

bobə i dɛ il to sətolas dejipula

Bob NOM PST go to store yesterday

“Bob went to the store yesterday.”

The second example is adapted from Act IV, Scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The line in the play ends with “Run away, I pray you!”, but I have yet to figure out the syntactic representation for this in Finwol.

ma, hi i dɛ zu molut a mi. u kulan faw!

mother 3SG NOM PST do death to 1SG IMPER run(SG) away

“He has kill’d me, mother: Run away!” (adapted from *Macbeth*)

5. Reflection

When designing a phonological system for Finwol, I wanted a simpler phonology that was still able to adapt as many existing words as possible. The most prominent example of this was the allophonic combination of all the liquids ([r], [ɹ], [ɻ], and so on) into the single /l/. This made the language simpler to learn and to adapt to different original languages, but it also introduced even more idiosyncrasies and inconsistent pronunciation rules than today’s English has. This was intentional: I wanted to combine simplicity and chaos together in this language.

I began choosing phonemes by consulting the phonology for each of the languages I was basing my language’s core vocabulary on, such as English (International Phonetic Association [IPA], 1999, pp. 41-42) and French (IPA, 1999, pp. 78-79). I then choose those sounds that were shared among several of the languages. Then I planned out some allophones and added phonemes like /ʒ/, /ɛ/, and /ə/ to better accommodate them. There was a significant match between Phoible’s top sounds (Moran & McCloy, 2019) and the ones I used for Finwol. Even so, I ended up with an average consonant inventory and a large vowel inventory, as measured by WALS’ standards (Maddieson, 2013a; Maddieson, 2013b). To sum, I had to sacrifice some simplicity to better represent the diverse vowel sounds I wanted to.

When coming up with words, I began thinking a little of the grammar and vocabulary choices also. I wanted to express modification with auxiliary words, not by changing the word

itself or adding a suffix. In my examples, /mi/ represents the first-person singular pronoun, and it is the same whether as subject or object; /me/ means “more” and can modify nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Which languages to pull from I mostly decided on a whim, like /'zo.lo/ after the vigilante Zorro or /mi/ a callback to Esperanto. I tried to choose languages that best related to the word culturally, such as the word for desert from Arabic (Sahara desert), or months from English/Latin. /ku/ as freezer was a sort-of pun, combination of “cool” in English and a Chinese character meaning storehouse, a component of the word for ice-storage freezer. These design choices reflected a desire to produce a language that is a simplified mishmash of several major languages.

To develop the phonotactics of Finwol, I considered the minimal pairs I created when developing my phonology. I noticed that most of my words were short, with none reaching 3 syllables, and the syllables were mostly CV, with some CVC. I made these preliminary decisions in Phonology I to avoid syllables that were too complex. However, I knew that the words themselves might grow long because of my limited syllable set. I wanted not to make a perfectly easy language (as seen with the seventeenth-century philosophical languages and the languages Volapuk and Esperanto, there are many ways to mess this up), but instead to make a language that just isn't too hard, containing linguistic features in a small portion of languages that will make it hard to learn. For the phonotactics, my main design choice was to avoid consonant clusters because, as we have seen in our class activity, there are many languages that do not feature them.

Another major choice was whether to make the initial consonant required or optional. Ultimately, I decided that because in many of the languages I was basing Finwol on, the word began with a vowel, it would be convenient and realistic to incorporate words that began with a vowel instead of deleting all initial vowels. Because this was a difficult choice to make, my plan was to make onset-less syllables much less common than their onset-consonant counterparts.

I took inspiration from some of the languages we studied in class. /ε/ in my language is an optional definite article, something that I took from Loglan's optional articles. This allows speakers of different languages to choose whether to use it. Another possibility is that the use of the article could be circumstantial, necessary in some situations but not others. I also took inspiration from the Esperanto poem *Ho, mia kor'* (Zamenhof, 1887/1889, part II), where the last vowel in *koro* is dropped for poetic reasons. I decided to have a similar system in my language, and also convey formality with CV/CVC words created by vowel epenthesis as opposed to those created by consonant deletion (V or VC syllables). I wanted longer words with onset-less syllables to be considered improper compared to CV or CVC syllables. I found it difficult also to think of examples for the restriction of onset-less syllables in the middle of a word because most of the words were short.

Another pattern I found myself making was epenthesis on an unstressed syllable by adding /ə/ as the nucleus. From my experience, this is common in English, and I would like to look more into whether this is the case in other languages as well, or if they handle epenthesis differently. In addition, in languages like English, the unstressed /ə/ is often deleted to form consonant cluster: I wonder if the same may happen in Finwol as the result of organic language evolution in the community.

One significant change I made at this point was to allow only nasals to be syllable codas: I was inspired by languages like Chinese and Japanese in which this is the case (Taylor & Taylor, 2014, pp. 23, 258). In my earlier phonology report, I had a word that ended in /x/. This change invalidates a minimal pair between /x/ and /ŋ/, but there is a simple solution: create another minimal pair that differ in syllables /xV/ and /ŋV/. The minimal pair I created (which you can see in the lexicon) is [xe] (yes-no question particle) and [ŋe] ('annoy').

The lexicon of Finwol was so difficult to come up with because I was spoiled with choice from the languages I drew from. My *modus operandi* tended to be to consider if a specific cultural context of a word was dominant and to borrow from that culture's language (an example would be ['sa.la]). If there was no such obvious candidates, I would look at the English word and French translations and decide if they seemed like a fitting candidate. This was how most of my words were formed. Sometimes if both English and French felt inadequate, I would also check out the translations to some other languages and decide on some mishmash between the sounds I found in common and which I associated with the word. For example, ['a.wa] was a combination of the English *water*, the French *eau*, and the Latin *aqua*. It was a flowy sound that I thought fit well. Lastly, I threw in some words that were in-jokes for myself, such as [ju] (from Greek root *eu-*), [oj] (from English exclamation *oi*), and ['zo.lo] (from Spanish *zorro*). I believed that if a word sounded vaguely familiar to me, it was likely to be understood among people who spoke different languages. Yet my language is very English-centric too. I took the idea of America as a melting-pot and extended it to the whole world's languages all melting together. So there is a bit of natural chaos and inconsistency here.

I also realized after building my lexicon that there were a few phonemes from my phonology I report missing from my lexicon. This indicates a bias in the phonemes I chose to use for the lexicon. I am critical of the word-creation process I described, and I am considering the contexts in which the less-common phonemes would appear in Finwol. I may even remove some phonemes, such as merging [x] and [h]. (In my explorations I was fascinated to find that the Spanish "j", which I had learned as /h/, was actually pronounced /x/, (Martínez-Celdrán et al., 2003, p. 255) which made me wonder how much the separation between the two was necessary.)

When deciding which derivational morphological processes to include in my language, I considered the morphologically isolating nature of Finwol. As a result, I did not want to focus on affixes. I thought of the sort of broken grammars people of different linguistic and cultural

background would use to communicate with one another. Conversion seemed a natural part of that process that I wanted to include in my language. I wanted to make the distinctions between nouns, verbs, and adjectives rather fluid, and I drew upon my experience with English to describe conversion process examples. I realized, however, that I did not have enough verbs and adjectives in my lexicon to work with, so I added a few afterward. I had a lot of fun coming up with compound words, but I had some trouble translating these concepts back to the English gloss. One another difficulty I had was figuring out the stress patterns of the compound words. I never created a stress system for Finwol, relying more on the natural stress of the languages I borrowed from. This is something I will continue to think about as I build my language. Finally, I was a little worried about phonotactic issues with compound words (word-final syllables becoming word-medial), but I figured that epenthesis would come to the rescue if necessary. Overall, developing the morphosyntax of Finwol helped me become more immersed in the language and bring more of it to life.

After completing the morphology, I was still not satisfied with the lexicon. The words are too unrecognizable as coming from a single source language. Instead, I had blended words from different languages to appeal to some morpheme identification in as many people as possible. James Cooke Brown used this technique for Loglan (Brown, 1960, p. 55); however, it proved not very effective for our class members to learn the words. Instead, it would feel more natural if the words more closely corresponded with words in individual origin languages. In addition, words should be longer. Because of the limited phonemic inventory and phonotactic restrictions, there are fewer possible syllables. Therefore, the morphemes and words themselves should be longer. Mandarin Chinese, for instance, despite its tonal system, has very limited phonotactic possibilities, so in the absence of written characters to distinguish morphemes, there are many homophonic morphemes. As a result, there was pressure for Chinese to develop more compound words. (Taylor & Taylor, 2014, pp. 29-30) Finwol has compound words, but unlike Chinese, most Finwol morphemes are longer than one syllables. This reduces ambiguity between different words.

I planned Finwol to be morphologically isolating from the beginning, as this was one of the patterns found across pidgin languages. (Sebba, 1997, p. 45) I was inspired by Japanese's extensive set of syntactic particles that communicated case, time, mood, among others (Chino, 2005, pp. 11, 89, 167), to include a set of particles for Finwol as well. Many of the choices I made here were based on making it easy for new speakers to I debated whether to include noun cases or restrict the syntax to a less flexible word order, but I decided to keep noun cases because they are easier for people coming from a language that uses a different word order to keep using their native word order and gradually shift to SVO. On the other side, English speakers can start off as SVO and gradually add case markers to the nouns. In most other concepts, I deferred to English grammar, as I had envisioned English being the core of Finwol.

I briefly considered what an orthography for Finwol would be like. It would certainly use the Latin alphabet like English and French do, as most major languages are either written in Latin script or have a standardized romanization scheme. At first I wanted it to be incredibly chaotic and unpredictable as a nod to English's own inconsistent spelling rules, where words from different etymologies would have different spelling patterns. But I realized that this would go against the nature of Finwol as a simple language for the world to use. The best bet would probably be to have an easy-to-learn phonemic writing system, but I would lose some of the charm and chaos of English. I'm unwilling to do that. Maybe I will add it in the future.

Finwol's vision was a global auxiliary language that mimicked natural language-content phenomena with English at its core. As my ideas grew, I began to move away from creating an auxiliary language for the moment. I knew that it would require a lot of effort to have a language like this take off, and I wanted to be proud of it myself first before putting it out into the world. Regardless, a focus on learnability and flexibility was pervasive throughout the design of Finwol. I am happy with what I was able to make out of it and hope to continue making further progress on it in the future.

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APPENDIX: Lexicon

Particles

Word	Meaning
(1) [dɛ]	Past tense
(2) [do]	Accusative case
(3) [ɛ]	Definite article
(4) [ə]	Indefinite article
(5) [i]	Nominative case
(6) [ta]	Dative case
(7) [u]	Imperative mood
(8) [wal]	Future tense
(9) [xe]	Yes-no question
(10) [zi]	Genitive case

Basic Words

Word	Gloss
(1) [a]	'to' (indirect object)
(2) ['a.wa]	'water'
(3) [an]	'year'
(4) ['ba.lu]	'blue'
(5) ['de.ji]	'day'
(6) ['de.zi]	'desire'
(7) ['fa.fə]	'five'

(8) [ˈfæn.tə.zi]	'fantastic' (not real)
(9) [faw]	'far'
(10) [ˈfi.til]	'future'
(11) [he]	'uncertain agreement'
(12) [hi]	'he'
(13) [il]	'go'
(14) [ju]	'best'
(15) [ki]	'life'
(16) [ku]	'freezer'
(17) [ˈku.pa]	'guilt'
(18) [ˈku.lan]	'run'
(19) [loŋ]	'dragon'
(20) [lun]	'moon'
(21) [ma]	'mother'
(22) [ˈmas.kə]	'mask'
(23) [ˈme.le]	'sea'
(24) [me]	'more'
(25) [ˈmɛ.si]	'thank you'
(26) [mɛ]	'May'
(27) [mi]	'I/me'
(28) [ˈmo.lut]	'death'
(29) [nən]	'none'
(30) [nɛn]	'nine'

(31) [no]	'no' (exclamation)
(32) [ɲe]	'annoy'
(33) [oj]	'you' (informal, optional)
(34) [ol]	'alcohol'
(35) ['pu.la]	'past'
(36) ['sa.la]	'desert'
(37) ['sa.lə]	'salad'
(38) [sam]	'psalm'
(39) [san]	'without'
(40) [saŋ]	'blood'
(41) [sə.'to.las]	'store'
(42) ['so.lo]	'loner'
(43) [to]	'to' (directional)
(44) [tu]	'you' (formal)
(45) ['zo.lo]	'fox'
(46) [ʒu]	'do'

Derived Words

Word	Gloss
(1) ['ba.lu.'saŋ]	'hypoxia'
(2) ['ba.lu]	'the blue things'
(3) ['de.ji.'pu.la]	'yesterday'
(4) ['de.zi.ol]	'alcoholism'

(5) ['fan.tə.zi.'me.le]	'mirage'
(6) ['fan.tə.zi]	'fantastic things'
(7) ['fi.til]	'the future'
(8) ['ju.ki]	'best life'
(9) ['ju.ol]	'fine wine'
(10) [ma.'de.zi]	'motherly instinct'
(11) [ma.'ku.pa]	'feeling inadequate to raise a child'
(12) ['me.le.'sa.la]	'open ocean'
(13) ['sa.la.an]	'drought'
(14) [san]	'people in poverty'
(15) [saŋ.'so.lo]	'only child'
(16) ['so.lo.'ma]	'single mother'