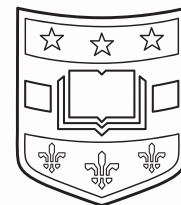


Ling 148 The Linguistics of Constructed Languages



Dr. Nick Danis, nsdanis@wustl.edu

Washington University in St. Louis

<https://www.nickdanis.com/syllabi/fa2021-ling148>

Description

What's "wrong" with English, or French, or Chinese, or any one of the 6,000+ languages spoken natively by humans today? Why invent a language like Esperanto to be a common tongue among all people, or invent a "calculus of thought" to "perfectly" express pure meaning? Why is it hard to sound romantic while speaking Klingon? What are the benefits of Lojban's attempt to rid the world of confusion and ambiguity?

This course explores the design of and motivation for constructed languages from a modern linguistic point of view. Constructed languages are those that are the result of some conscious and deliberate design rather than ones occurring naturally. We will explore the different motivations for language construction, from the desire to create a "perfect language", to fictional worldbuilding, to fostering global harmony. In characterizing the different types of invented languages, students will develop familiarity with the basic tools of linguistic theory, focusing on phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Languages analyzed in detail include Klingon, Esperanto, Heptapod B, Lang Belta, Lojban, Dothraki, Valyrian, Elvish, and various philosophical languages.

Course Info

Course Number	L44 Ling 148
Semester	Fall 2021
Time	Tues/Thurs 10-11:20am
Location	Busch 14
Office	January 206 / Zoom
Office Hours	TBD
Homepage	Canvas

Goals

Throughout this course, students will:

- Explore and evaluate motivations for inventing new languages
- Compare and contrast invented languages to natural human languages
- Characterize and analyze the types of existing invented languages

- Become familiar with the fundamental tools of modern linguistic theory

Special covid-related policies

This course is taught in person, meaning all lectures occur live, in person, in the scheduled time and place. Lecture recordings, if made, will not be available by default, but this may change.

Required Materials

There are no required textbooks. All readings will be made available as PDFs on [Canvas](#). That being said, a fair amount of material comes from the following books, and you are encouraged to seek out the full books if you are looking for more detailed coverage:

- Arika Okrent (2009). *In the Land of Invented Languages*. New York: Spiegel & Grau. 342 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8129-8089-9 (ILIL)
- Michael Adams (2011). *From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages*. New York: Oxford University Press. 294 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-280709-0 (FEtK)
- Mark Rosenfelder (2010). *The Language Construction Kit*. Yonagu Books. 292 pp. ISBN: 978-0-9844700-0-6 (LCK)
- David J. Peterson (2015). *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves, the Words Behind World-Building*. Penguin Publishing Group. 306 pp. ISBN: 978-0-14-312646-1 (ALI)

Grade

The grade breakdown is shown below.

Category	Pct
Weekly Responses	30%
Participation	20%
Writing Prompts	50%

Weekly Responses

Each week, there are a series of questions based on the assigned readings. These are (usually) due at Wednesday at midnight, as the submissions will be incorporated into Thursday's class. (On weeks with holidays, make sure you check Canvas for the due dates.)

Participation

In addition to being expected to participate in class, there are a number of graded participation assignments. These include surveys and occasional group work. All details will be given on Canvas.

Writing Prompts

There are 3 short writing prompts, and one final paper. The writing prompts are due the first Sunday of each month, at midnight. Details are given on Canvas. Each is worth 50 points.

The final paper is worth 100 points, and is due during finals period. However, you are encouraged to read the description for the final paper and get a head start, especially if you wish to incorporate material from books, movies, or television shows.

Letter grades

Letter grades are assigned based off the following scale. Numerical grades are **not** rounded.

$100 \geq A+ \geq 98$	$80 > C+ \geq 77$
$98 > A \geq 93$	$77 > C \geq 73$
$93 > A- \geq 90$	$73 > C- \geq 70$
$90 > B+ \geq 87$	$70 > D+ \geq 67$
$87 > B \geq 83$	$67 > D \geq 63$
$83 > B- \geq 80$	$63 > D- \geq 60$

If you are taking this class pass/fail, you must receive at least a C- (70%) to pass.

If you believe there has been an error in grading, I am happy to discuss it with you. However, you must bring it up to me within one week of the graded assignment being returned to you. After this, the grade is considered final.

Late policy

Unexcused late work incurs a 5% penalty per day late. If you anticipate a problem submitting work on time, please email me **before the due date** and we can work something out.

Schedule

The exact schedule is likely to change as the semester progresses. Please see [Canvas](#) for all up-to-date readings and assignment due dates.

Date	Topic	Languages
8/31/2021	Natural vs Constructed	Esperanto
9/2/2021		
9/7/2021	Real-world Motivations	Esperanto, Volapük
9/9/2021		
9/14/2021	Fictional Wor(l)dbuilding	Dothraki, Elvish languages, Klingon
9/16/2021		
9/21/2021	Constructing a Language	Dothraki, Klingon
9/23/2021		
9/28/2021	Alien & “Inhuman” Languages	Klingon
9/30/2021		
10/5/2021	Extreme Regularity	Esperanto
10/7/2021		

Date	Topic	Languages
10/12/2021	NO CLASS	
10/14/2021	Form Over Function: Star Wars	
10/19/2021	Language and Thought	Heptapod B
10/21/2021		
10/26/2021	Logic & Ambiguity	Loglan/Lojban
10/28/2021		
11/2/2021	Philosophical Languages	Language of John Wilkins
11/4/2021		
11/9/2021	Language Change & Evolution	High Valyrian
11/11/2021		
11/16/2021	Writing Systems	Elvish languages
11/18/2021		
11/23/2021	Nativization & Revitalization	Esperanto, Lang Belta, Modern Hebrew
11/25/2021	NO CLASS	
11/30/2021	Old and Mysterious Conlangs	Lingua ignota, Voynich manuscript
12/2/2021		
12/7/2021	Meaning and Metaphor	Tamarian
12/9/2021		

Academic Integrity

This course adheres to the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#), and takes cheating and plagiarism very seriously. All work completed online must be done alone unless instructed otherwise, and no resources not approved by the instructor may be used during exams.

ADA Compliance

Washington University is committed to providing accommodations and/or services to students with documented disabilities. Students who are seeking support for a disability or a suspected disability should contact Disability Resources at 935-4153. Disability Resources is responsible for approving all disability-related accommodations for WU students, and students are responsible for providing faculty members with formal documentation of their approved accommodations at least two weeks prior to using those accommodations. I will accept Disability Resources VISA forms by email and personal delivery. If you have already been approved for accommodations, I request that you provide me with a copy of your VISA within the first two weeks of the semester. Please see more information at <http://cornerstone.wustl.edu>.

Sexual Assault Resources

The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations (e.g., no contact order, course changes) to students who are victims of relationship or sexual violence, regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. If you need to request such accommodations, please contact the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP) at rsvpcenter@wustl.edu or 314-935-3445 to schedule an appointment with an RSVP confidential, licensed counselor. Information shared with counselors is confidential. However, requests for accommodations will be coordinated with the appropriate University administrators and faculty. Please see more information at <https://students.wustl.edu/relationship-sexual-violence-prevention-center>.