

10 ways to Create Words

For a Conlang dictionary

How to make a dictionary or build a lexicon for a constructed language (conlang)



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Before building a lexicon for your language, you need to cover these steps in the conlanging process:

Determine the Purpose of the language

Develop the Phonology of your language

Write a script for your language

Develop a grammar for your conlang

Check out this story for more details:

<https://medium.com/@latoucheluciano1/how-to-create-your-own-language-conlang-in-10-easy-steps-4a2afc64c210>

In this story, I talk about the entire process of creating a conlang while giving you examples with my own conlang — “Erythion”.

So — after you have all the grammatical rules down.

It's time to develop a lexicon — to build a vocabulary for your language.

Using loan translations

For Erythion, what I did was using Loan Translations from Latin and Greek — so essentially, for every word, I take a root word and adapt it to the spelling and scripting of my conlang.

For instance — for water, I would take the Latin word *Aqua* — and translate it into *aku* (↑)(ꝫ).

And then I would use specific suffixes.

For the plural form, I would add “-na”

So, *Akuna* for waters.

If I want to say “lake”, I would use the suffix “-so” to indicate a large body of water.

And if I want to turn it into an adjective like “aquatic” — I could use the suffix “-nari” to make the word *akunari*.

So, this root-based system is one way to create new words for your language.

But you have other options as well...

Compound words

You can use compound words... For example, in my conlang, *Kata* (↑✗✗) is tree and *Nipa* is book (65HHX) — I could have the word *Katanipa* meaning: ↑✗✗65HHX — wooden book.

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Illustration by the author

Semantic Shifts

You could do some semantic shifts as well. Like *Raku* (ರಕು) originally means “4” — but I could extend it to mean something like “Stable” — when describing a 4-legged object or furniture.

Onomatopoeia

Another thing you could do is take sounds in the real world and adjust them to the spelling and phonology of your language.

So, for my conlang, “tak” or *taktak* タクタク can mean

“Knock” or knocking. *rumpu* ルンプ can mean “Thunder”,

vauvau バウバウ can mean “Bark” and so on...

Affixation

You could use affixation to modify the meaning of a word

that’s already in your lexicon.

You can see there’s plenty of that in English. For instance, this

prefix “Ir” usually negates the base word.

So, you have “Regular” -> Irregular — “Responsible” ->

Irresponsible.

In the same way, the suffix “Less” usually transforms a word

into an adjective or adverb that means a lack or the absence of something.

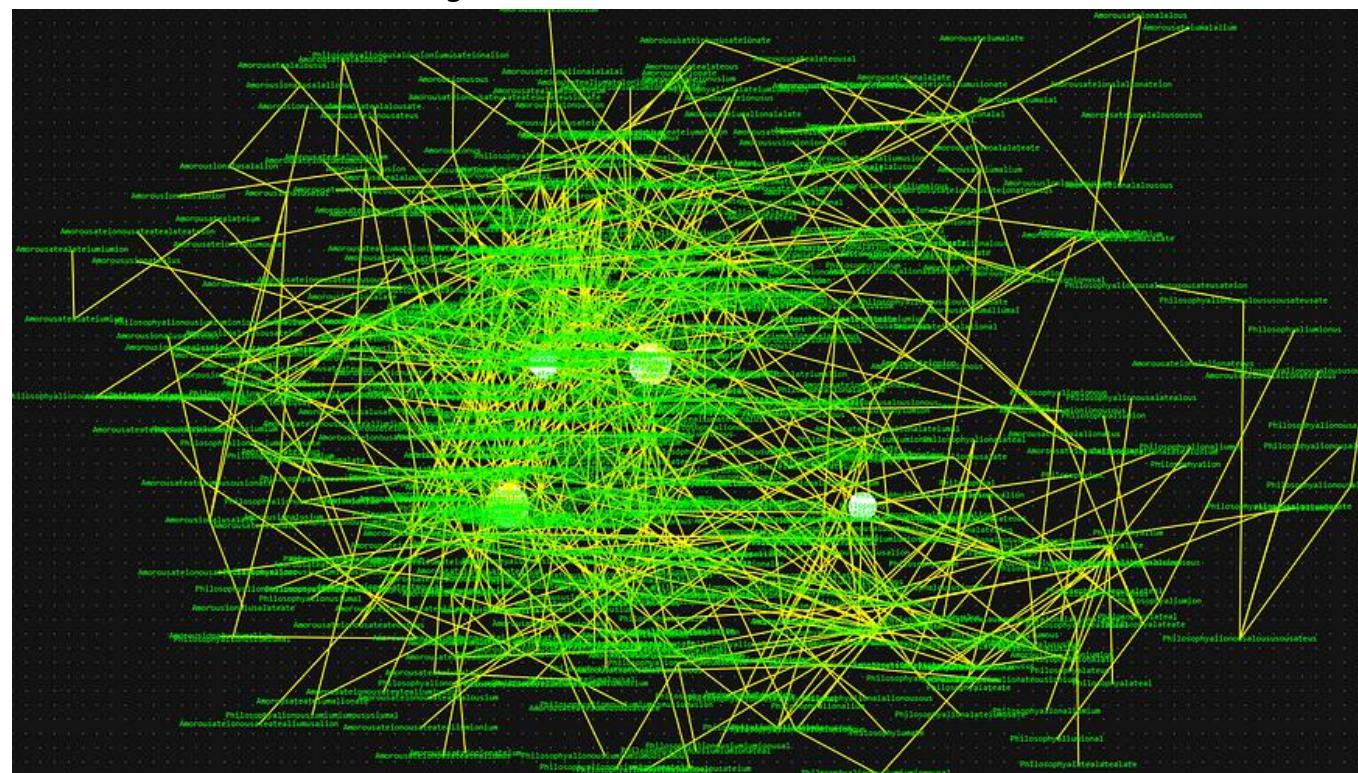
“Shirt” -> Shirtless

“Bottom” -> Bottomless

Semantics and Pragmatics

Now, you need to focus on the meaning of your words and the relationship between these words.

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Polysemy

You need to decide whether you’re going to have polysemy — that is whether the words of your language will have multiple meanings — or if every single word will stand for itself.

Like the word “Bat” in English can mean either a flying mammal or a piece of Sports equipment.

Synonymy

You also need to decide whether you’re going to have a single word for each idea you want to express — or are you going to have synonyms — like the words “Begin and Start” in English.

Antonymy

Are you going to have antonyms — which are words that have opposite meanings? Well, you kinda have to do that.

Because if you want to express certain ideas in a language — you kinda need to have the capacity to express the opposite of that.

Inflection vs Isolation

Now the question is, “How are you going to create these antonyms”? Are you going to have a separate word for that, or are you just going to alter the word?

Like the antonym of the word “Happy” — can be both unhappy and sad.

And the antonym of the word “Moral” can be both evil and immoral.

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