

# I Make Languages (and you can too)

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AIM, IRC, LJ, Skype etc: [saizai](#)



There's a **paper**, too!

Read it, it's good.

<http://conlang.org/26c3.pdf>

CC by-nc-sa (slides too)

Do cool stuff for free;

credit & tell me.

# The plan

**Overview** (~10 min)

What?

Why?

**Interactive demo!** (~30 min)

Conlanging by (crowd) committee :-)

**Q & A** (~10 min)

**Workshop** (room B04) right after this

**Conlang = Constructed Language**

A language

For human use (... or maybe aliens)

Made intentionally

# Artlang = Artistic language

Aesthetics first

Naturalistic (usually)

Part of a fictional culture (often)

... or a whole language family

Never really “finished”

Guess the language!

Just shout the answer

Ready?

# Artlang: Quenya

ᑏᑏᑏ ᑏᑏᑏ ᑏᑏᑏ ᑏᑏᑏ:

A star shines upon the hour of our meeting.

“Elvish” in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*

One of them. Also: Sindarin, Telerin, Doriathrin...

Books written for the language, not vice versa

Stereotypically *pretty*

soft, liquid, long sounds

Inspiration for *lots* of artlangers

# Auxlang = Auxiliary Language

Neutral

Easy to learn

“Simple”

Creole-ish

Proselytized

~Finalized first

Point is to speak, not create

Highlander syndrome



# Auxlang: Esperanto

La abeloj havas felon, sed ili ne taŭgas por karesi.

Bees have fur, but they're no good for petting.

100k~2M speakers

~1k native speakers!

Very Eurocentric :(

# Engelang = Engineered language

also: philosophical language, logical language

Systemically **radical**

**Overt design** goals

top-down design

**Rare**

Each one **different**

# Engelang: Lojban

cmalu je melbi ke nixli ckule

a pretty little girls' school

Super complex grammar

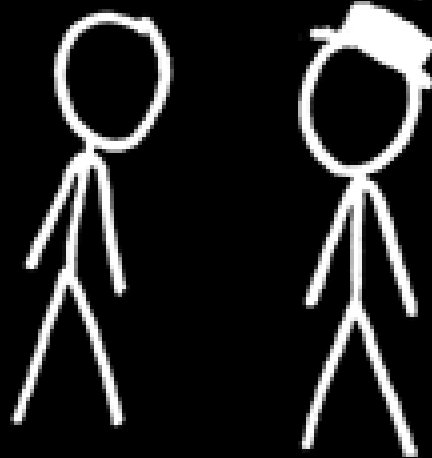
but ultra precise!

can be precisely vague too: e.g. “co'e” means “foo”

Computer-parsable

da'i ganai do crebi'o la lojban  
gi le se cusku be do cu mulno  
pavysmu je logji

.i .ie ku'i cusku fi  
le prenu klesi poi  
certu la lojban



Learn Lojban! Tomorrow 18:30-20:00 @ B04

# Me: Gripping language

2-person only

touch-based

ask me later for a demo

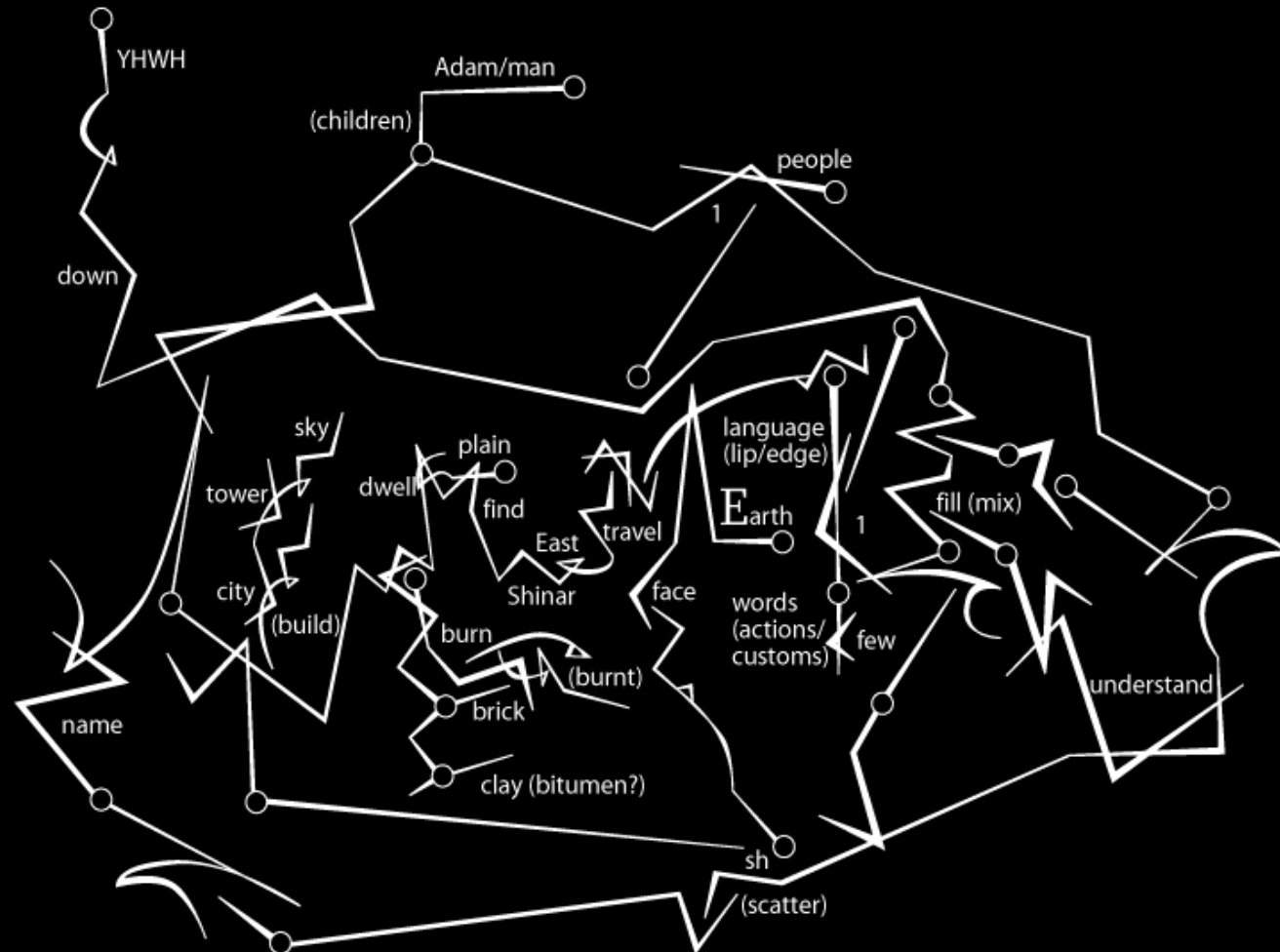
undetectable

metaconversational

<http://000024.org/conlang/gripping.html>

# Me: Non-linear writing systems

e.g. Schuyler Duveen's *Ouwi* (.org):



# How do I **start**?

## Scope

names? phrases? full language?

## Genre

art, aux, enge, etc

## Aesthetic / Goals

phonaesthetics, conculture, priorities, spec, etc

## Defining feature(s)

insert cool hook here?

optional – most artlangs don't really have one

# Fiat lingua!

We're going to make a (tiny) language together.

I ask questions, you shout answers.

Ready?



# Genre / Aesthetic / Goals

*A priori* naturalistic artlang for humans.

What's our æsthetic?

- a) pretty
- b) harsh
- c) weird

Any twists / other ideas to add?

# Step 1: Phonology

What sounds?

[phonetic] inventory

# Step 1: Phonology

## What goes in a syllable?

phonotactics

a) CVN

Toki Pona: mi lon pimeja. waso ike li tawa sike lon lawa mi. pipi jaki li moku lili e noka mi. mi wile e pini.

b) CCVC

English\*: Stan had a sly tree with a thwarted dream.

\* Extremely simplified. Is really  $C^3VC^5$  e.g. “strengths”.

# Step 1: Phonology

What “sounds the same”?

/phonemic/ inventory

English: /p/ = [p] or [p<sup>h</sup>]

sound change rules

English aspiration: [p<sup>h</sup>it] vs [spit]

# Step 2: Orthography

## How do we write this down?

Map sounds to written symbols, ish

... or maybe sound + meaning, à la Chinese

most are irregular (google “ghoti”)

writing changes slower than speech

Make a font? (bonus points!)

Go browse <http://omniglot.com>

For now: Romanization.

# Step 3: Morphology

## How do pieces form words?

Isolating: just simple words

Toki Pona: o weka e nimi namako

Synthetic: put a bunch of stuff together

German: Rindfleischetikettierungsüberwachungs-  
aufgabenübertragungsgesetz

# Step 3: Morphology

## Synthetic

Agglutinating: pieces are distinct

we broke, I broke, I break, we break

Turkish: kır**d**ık, kır**d**ım , kır**ı**yor**u**m, kır**ı**yor**u**z

Fusional: pieces multitask

Spanish: romp**i**mos, romp**í**, romp**o**, romp**e**mos

# Step 3: Morphology

Other

Templating: apply regex

Arabic: **kitābun** “book”, **maktabun** “library”, **katabtu** “they wrote (pl. fem.)”



# Step 3: Morphology

## a) Isolating

Chinese: 我汉语说的太不好

Wǒ hàn yǔ shuō de tài bù hǎo.

## b) Agglutinative

Japanese: 私たち食べたくなかった。

Step 4: Make some words!

# Step 5: Syntax

Where do words go in a sentence?

Basic Word Order:

- a) **SOV** – Japanese: 男は犬を見た
- b) **SVO** – English: The man looked at the dog.
- c) **VSO** – Hawaiian: Ua nana ke kane i ka 'īlio.

Step 6: Finish that sentence!

# Step 7...N,000,000: **Revise**

**Languages change** over time

proto-Foolang? hillbilly Foolang?

You think of cool **new tweaks**

The old stuff is now “ungrammatical”

You've got **gaps**

How *do* you handle subordinate locative clauses in middle voice anyway?

# Use & Publish

**Write** some stories in it

Traditional: The Babel Text (Genesis 11:1-9)

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech...

Artsy: North Wind and the Sun, other poems

Hardcore: Make your own

**Document** it online

Do a **Conlang Relay**

like “Telephone” / “Chinese Whispers”

... but translating to a new language at each step

# Resources

CONLANG mailing list @ Brown

Zompist Bulletin Board (ZBB)

Omniglot

Sarah Higley – *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language*

Thomas Payne – *Describing Morphosyntax*

Arika Okrent – *In the Land of Invented Languages*

More in the paper!

<http://conlang.org/26c3.pdf>

Want more?

[conlang.org](http://conlang.org)

[podcast.conlang.org](http://podcast.conlang.org) (subscribe!)

[conference.conlang.org](http://conference.conlang.org)

[library.conlang.org](http://library.conlang.org)



# Shameless plugs

## Need a conlang made?

e.g. for a game, novel, film, TV, etc

[http://conlang.org/jobs/hire\\_us.php](http://conlang.org/jobs/hire_us.php)

## Join the Language Creation Society!

nonprofit, conferences, podcast, etc

<http://conlang.org/members.php>

Also, we could really use audio/video editors:

<http://conlang.org/jobs>

# I do other stuff too

A03, 12/30 16h-18h: Meditation for hackers

Talk to me about:

cognitive neuroscience, empathy

P2P botnets, thin steganographic crypto filesystems

social apps & games for smart people

email me for beta access (deploying in a couple months)

Ruby/Rails development

sign language music

etc.

Me: <http://saizai.com> [ccc@saizai.com](mailto:ccc@saizai.com)

I <3 feedback

[http://bit.ly/conlang\\_talk](http://bit.ly/conlang_talk)

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AIM, IRC, LJ, Skype etc: [saizai](#)

Workshop: B04, after this

The end!

OK, so I lied.

The following slides are from previous iterations of this talk. I left 'em in just in case I might want to use them later. You might find them interesting.

# Artlang: Klingon

HAḌḌYṆ PVEṆX

Give me your opinion!

Marc Okrand for *Star Trek*

Definitely not pretty

Naturalistic... ish

all its features happen, just rarely

Klingon Language Institute has an annual exam

# Artlang: **Teonaht**

Niffodyr tweluanrem letteuim an.

The gods have retractable claws.

Sally Caves, aka Prof. Sarah Higley

Spoken by flying cat-people (feleonim)

Idiosyncratic spelling (e.g. ht = [θ])

also a custom orthography, but it's not fontified :(

# Auxlang: **Neo Patwa**

Do-pela din-tinta na cidya, ta makan pwason.

Two blue birds ate fish.

Jens Wilkinson

More international vocabulary

↑ = Tok Pisin, Hindi, Spanish, Japanese & Mandarin

Fairly new; few speakers

in very high competition w/ other new auxlangs



# Engelang: Iṭkuîl



On the contrary, I think it may turn out that this rugged mountain range trails off at some point.

John Quijada (v2: Ilaksh)

Maximum information density

Precise

Expresses unusual details

e.g. whole system for 3d pointer words

# Philosophical lang: Toki Pona

o weka e nimi namako

Omit needless words.

Sonja Elen Kisa

Minimalist – ~123 words total

Dada-Zen philosophy

“friend” = jan pona (person good); “bad friend” = ?

Like Newspeak, but happy

# Partially con-

**Korean** writing (*Hangul*)

created & instituted by king overnight

Modern **Hebrew**

was dead for centuries, then back-derived

**Signed Exact English** (*SEE*)

combination of English grammar & ASL vocab

French ?

regulated by l'Académie française (... or they try)

etc

# *A posteriori* conlang

Derived from existing language(s)

alt-historic

“What if Japan invaded Scotland?”

accessibility

“My audience already knows romance languages...”

laziness

“Why bother making a new grammar?”

# *A priori* conlang

Made up **from scratch**

philosophical / logical

“Etymology = ontology”

personal aesthetic

“Qapla' sounds cool”

do something new\*

“No verbs!”

\* a natlang's already done it, except worse (ANADEW)