

LING 115
Linguistic Typology and
Constructed Languages

Syllabus

Spring 2015
W 1:15–4:00pm, Science Center 104

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	and by appointment

Course Description

Humans have long been driven to duplicate and manipulate the properties of natural language to create new languages for the purposes of enhancing works of fiction, for aiding human communication, or even for pure intellectual curiosity. In this course, students will explore this drive through development of their own constructed languages, guided by rigorous study of the typology of patterns observed in real human languages. Topics to be covered include phoneme inventories, phonological rules, morphological classification, syntactic structure, language change over time, dialectal variation, and writing systems. Students will also apply their knowledge of linguistic typology to critically assess the design of existing constructed languages such as Esperanto and Klingon.

Prerequisites: LING 1 or 45, or permission of the instructor. The prerequisite can be satisfied by displaying sufficient knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet. Specifically, you should know all of the symbols for the phonemes and major allophones of English and be familiar with the symbols for commonly encountered non-English sounds, such as front round vowels, trills, retroflexes, uvulars, etc. You should also have a basic understanding of the geography of the vocal tract.

Readings

available from the bookstore:

Arika Okrent. 2009. *In the Land of Invented Languages*. Spiegel & Grau. ISBN #0385527888.

Mark Rosenfelder. 2010. *The Language Construction Kit*. Yonagu Books. ISBN #098447000X.

available from Moodle or elsewhere:

Marc Okrand. 1992. *The Klingon Dictionary*. Addendum ed. Pocket Books.

Geoffrey Pullum. 1991. *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax*. University of Chicago Press.

Justin B. Rye. 1993/2011. Learn *not* to speak Esperanto. <<http://www.xibalba.demon.co.uk/jbr/ranto/>>.

Other individual readings will be assigned periodically.

Grading

Your grade for the course is calculated as a weighted combination of your attendance and class participation (20%), homework assignments (40%), class presentations (30%), and final project write-up (10%).

Homework is generally assigned on a Wednesday and due the following Wednesday, so you should usually have a full week to work on it. Homework is due at the beginning of class. Late homework will not be accepted under any circumstances. To compensate for this strict policy, your lowest homework grade is dropped when computing your overall homework average.

There are two main types of grades you may receive on an assignment. Some of your assignments (or portions of assignments) will be graded primarily with a coarse measure of completion and correctness as outlined by the following five-tiered scale:

✓+	perfect or nearly so: every portion of the assignment is complete; the prose is grammatical and coherent, and uses terminology appropriately and correctly; there may be a few minor errors, but no major errors
✓	very good: every major portion of the assignment is complete; the prose is generally grammatical and coherent, and uses terminology appropriately and correctly; there may be multiple minor errors and/or a few major errors
✓–	fair: most of the assignment is complete, but a few minor portions may be missing; the prose is sufficient, but may have flaws in grammar, logic, or terminology; there may be multiple major errors, but a basic understanding of the material is still apparent
✗	unsatisfactory: major portions of the assignment may be missing; the prose is insufficient, or may have many flaws in grammar, logic, or terminology; there may be multiple major errors based on basic misunderstanding of the material
0	not handed in

The remainder of your assignments will be graded with a fine-grained measure of completion and correctness based on normal letters grades and grade points (A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, and F = 0.0), with the standard modifiers + (one-third of a grade point higher) and – (one-third of a grade point lower). In addition, intermediate grades using parentheses or a slash may be used, giving the following correspondence between letter grade and grade points:

A+	4.33
A(+)	4.17
A	4.00
A(–)	3.83
A–	3.67
A/B	3.50

B+	3.33
B(+)	3.17
B	3.00
B(–)	2.83
B–	2.67
B/C	2.50

C+	2.33
C(+)	2.17
C	2.00
C(–)	1.83
C–	1.67
C/D	1.50

D+	1.33
D(+)	1.17
D	1.00
D(–)	0.83
D–	0.67
D/F	0.50

You may discuss homework assignments with other students, but you must write up your own homework, in your own words, listing the names of all students you worked with.

Your homework should be either neatly written or (preferably) typed in a reasonable font (e.g., 10–12pt font). Please, do not submit spiral-bound paper with ragged edges! Staple (rather than paper clip or fold) multiple pages together. Be sure to put your name on every page in case they get separated.

Whether you hand-write or type your assignments, leave sufficient physical space on the page for me to write feedback on your work. In particular, your assignments should be double-spaced (so I can make short, interlinear comments), with at least 1-inch margins (for slightly larger comments), using only one side of the paper (so that more substantial comments can be written on the back).

I will accept emailed electronic submissions in place of paper hardcopy. Electronic submissions must be sent to me by the same deadline (i.e., the start of the class in which they are due). Be sure that I will be able to open the file you send and that it will appear the same on my computer as it does on yours. The best way to do guarantee this is to send a PDF (there are many free PDF conversion tools for Windows, and Mac OS X has a built-in convertor in the print screen).

Class Participation

Because this is a seminar, you should fully contribute in significant ways to every class discussion. Be prepared to provide interesting, relevant, and useful questions, reactions, and opinions at all times. In particular, an important part of this course is the creative workshop aspect, so you are expected to provide regular feedback to your classmates on their work. Simply showing up to class is not sufficient.

Presentations and Final Project

The final project is a full, descriptive grammar of a constructed language of your design. More details about the requirements for the write-up will be given as the course progresses, but expect the final work to be rather large and involved, since you will be working on it throughout the semester. In addition to the final write-up, you will give periodic in-class presentations about 10–15 minutes long summarizing recent updates to your final project constructed language, with brief discussion of the more interesting details. These presentations should be accompanied by a handout/write-up mirroring and supplementing the content of the presentation.

Academic Integrity

I take the issue of academic integrity very seriously, and I have zero tolerance for dishonesty in my courses. Please give full respect to me, yourself, your college, and the larger academic endeavor by adhering to common sense standards of ethical academic behavior. Do not present someone else's work as your own, and do not allow someone else to present your work as their own. Even unintentional plagiarism is unacceptable. Give your submitted assignments the care and attention necessary to guarantee that fair and accurate credit is given to all sources at all times. Suspected lapses in your academic integrity will be pursued to the full extent of College policy, including referral to the College Judicial Committee.

Exams

There are no exams for this course.

Tentative Schedule

Jan.	21				conlanging, IPA review
	28	Okrent Ch. 1–7, Rosenfelder p. 7–27	A–C	HW#1 due	sound systems
Feb.	4	Okrent Ch. 8–12, Rosenfelder p. 28–53		HW#2 due	phonology
	11	Okrent Ch. 13–17	A	HW#3 due	phonology (cont'd)
	18	Okrent Ch. 18–22, Okrand Ch. 1, Rye §A–D	B	HW#4 due	Esperanto and Klingon sounds
	25	Okrent Ch. 23–26, Pullum Ch. 19 (skim Rosenfelder p. 99–162, 260–269)	C	HW#5 due	words
Mar.	4	readings listed on HW#6		HW#6 due	linguistic typology in popular media
		<i>—spring break, no class—</i>			
	18	Rosenfelder p. 54–71	A		morphosyntax
	25	Rosenfelder p. 72–85	B	HW#7 due	morphosyntax (cont'd)
Apr.	1	Rosenfelder p. 86–98	C		morphosyntax (cont'd)
	8			HW#8 due	morphosyntax (cont'd)
	15	Okrand Ch. 2–4, Rye §G–M	A	HW#9 due	Esperanto and Klingon morphosyntax
	22	Rosenfelder p. 163–191	B	HW#10 due	writing systems
	29	Rosenfelder p. 192–207 (skim Rosenfelder p. 208–259)	C	HW#11 due	language change, dialects
May	13	FINAL PROJECT due by 5pm			

Readings are to be read before the class session they are listed for. Other readings not listed above may also be assigned from time to time. Members of groups A, B, and C will present individual updates on the latest progress of their conlangs on the indicated dates.