From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages

Michael Adams

From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages

Michael Adams

From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages Michael Adams

From the Elvish language Tolkien invented for denizens of Middle Earth to the science fiction lingo spoken by the Klingons in Star Trek, writers have always endeavored to create new forms of expression, not only in the English language, but in languages that exist only in their own imaginations.

Now, in From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages, a group of leading linguists offers a lively investigation of all manner of invented languages. Each chapter focuses on a different language, or group of languages, and explores the origins, purpose, and usage of these curious artifacts of culture. We learn about the new languages invented to enhance the experience of video and online games, from the complexities of Gargish, the language of gargoyles in Ultima VI, to Simlish, the emotionally expressive language of The Sims, and 1334, the entirely exclusionary and satirical language of international gamers. We also learn about the futuristic languages, Newspeak and Nadsat, invented by George Orwell and Anthony Burgess in their dystopian novels 1984 and A Clockwork Orange, and many more. The book explores all aspects of invented languages--their unique grammar, vocabulary, and usage--and includes fascinating analysis of sample dialogues and expressions. Written by experts in their fields, chapters cover such topics as International Auxiliary Languages, Invented Vocabularies, Literary "Nonsense," and Language Reconstruction and Renewal. It's all "maj" (good) as the Klingons would say, or "doubleplusgood," as a "duckspeaker" in Orwell's 1984 might observe.

For anyone wanting to understand more fully the intricacies and attractions of invented languages, From Elvish to Klingon offers the most thorough study of the subject available today.

From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages Details

Date   : Published October 27th 2011 by Oxford University Press
ISBN   : 9780192807090
Author : Michael Adams
Format : Hardcover 294 pages
Genre : Humanities, Linguistics, Nonfiction, Language

Download and Read Free Online From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages Michael Adams

From Reader Review From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages for online ebook

Matthew says

First the good comments: I absolutely love the subject material. Each chapter explores a different category of "invented language," whether it be the aesthetic genius of Elvish or the political ramifications of universalized languages. I come out of this book with a much deeper appreciation for the beauty, potential, and fun of language.

Now the downside: I am a language nerd and I still found a chapter or two a bit tedious. Perhaps this is because every section of the book felt so isolated from the other sections. If I was interested in the topic, I'd fly through a chapter. If not, then I had to force myself through it twice -- once in the chapters and second in the extended appendices. Yikes.

This read and felt like a collection of academic essays. Was there really no way to bring all these topics under one, organized structure? Was there no way to bridge section to section or have an overall arc or consistency? Hmm.

Sidenote, I'm thrilled D'ni found a mention. And I have to say, this book was like a megaphone for my more nerdy qualities. I kept bringing up the book in my conversations with friends. If they didn't my enjoyment of linguistics before, they sure know it now.

Overall a good read -- definitely worth it, if you're a fan of linguistics.

Phil Mc says

Fascinating and surprisingly detailed tour through a range of invented languages from Esperanto to Newspeak. The title is perhaps misleading as this has greater academic weight and thoroughness than might be expected; although at times this depth wanted for some graphical representation of complex ideas to allow the discussion to unpick what was interesting free of exhaustive an exhausting lists of features (e.g. The affixes of early IALs).

Matthew says

Lots of fun, and not overly technical (if you skip the large paragraphs of examples of phrases in Klingon, Sindarin, or Esperanto). My favorite chapter was the one on gaming languages. As a complete noob, who knew such a thing existed? Again... couldn't all that time spent gaming be spent more productively? As someone who has dabbled with music notation reforms, the practical information about what happens to a language once it's been invented was interesting as well. Interesting format of a collection of essays (Michael Adams should be listed as "editor," btw), each with an appendix by the editor commenting or elaborating on some aspect of the topic. Worthwhile.

Jenna (Falling Letters) says

I did not read the entire book, but used the essay on Tolkien's invented languages for an undergrad paper I recently wrote. That essay was well-written and informative; it had a scholarly manner that I honestly wasn't expecting in this sort of 'popular' book. If you are a Tolkien fan I recommend the essay included in this anthology!

Kathryn Lane says

This is a very, very good book. I've been reading many books about Klingon, and this is one of the first ones to approach it from a linguistic / English Language at University level approach, rather than a quick snippet. Well worth a read as the analysis is comprehensive and factually accurate.

Agatha says

This book is an interesting series of essays on the nature of invented languages and the social and cultural implications of such inventions; it includes chapters on Esperanto, Tolkien's Elvish, the Nadsat of *A Clockwork Orange*, Klingon, and the inventions of modern Irish and Scottish writers like James Joyce. A good choice for anyone interested in the nature and origins of languages

Stewart says

Languages interest me, not just those languages spoken by millions or billions of people, but languages invented for specific purposes, not necessarily spoken by anyone. "From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages," a 2011 book by Michael Adams, is a fun tour of these invented languages.

The book examines languages like Esperanto, created to be a world language and to promote world peace. Esperanto was invented in 1887 by L.L. Zamenhof, who was fluent in several languages. Although it never became a widespread international auxiliary language, it is spoken by several hundred thousand people around the world.

Several languages were invented for literary fiction. Among the most famous are Newspeak in George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" and Nadsat for Anthony Burgess' "A Clockwork Orange." Although there are fewer than 40 Newspeak words in Orwell's 1949 dystopian novel, several of them entered English: Newspeak, unperson, doublethink, doublespeak, not to mention Orwellian. Burgess mixed Russian and English for the slang of the hoodlums in his dystopian novel of 1962. Some of the words have humorous effect, especially if one is familiar with Russian. Thus, golova' (head) becomes gulliver – with its Swiftian flavor – and xorosho' (good) is rendered horrorshow.

Orwell and Burgess were knowledgeable about language, but J.R.R. Tolkien was a professional linguist and he invented languages (and grammar and etymology) that pervade his "Lord of the Rings" trilogy of 1954-55. Welsh, Finnish, and Latin were influences on the structure and vocabulary of these languages.

The worldwide cinematic and TV phenomenon that is Star Trek featured recurring nonhuman species such as the Vulcans, Romulans, Cardassians, and Klingons. For the last species, a Klingon language was invented; it

is considered the largest fictional language on Earth. The Klingons appeared in "Star Trek III: The Search for Spock" of 1984.

"For this film, writer and executive producer Harve Bennett decided that the Klingons should speak their own language – at least when talking to one another," Michael Adams writes. "Bennett hired linguist Marc Okrand to devise the dialogue. This would be Okrand's second language assignment for 'Star Trek.' Two years earlier, he devised four lines of Vulcan dialogue for 'Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,' also written and produced by Bennett."

Now, you can buy a Klingon-English dictionary (I have one in the language section of my home library) and visit the Klingon Language Institute online. You can also find a Klingon translation of "Hamlet."

Adams' book also tackles languages for computer games; revitalized languages such as Irish, Welsh, Hawaiian, and Hebrew; and the literary inventions of James Joyce in "Finnegan's Wake."

For someone interested in languages, invented or otherwise, Adams' book is a pleasure to read.

Chris Fellows says

The title of this book leads the reader to expect it will be similar to Arika Okrent's "In the Land of Invented Languages", but it covers that particular territory rather more superficially and casts its net a good deal wider. It covers both instances of linguistic invention that fall short of inventing a whole language (such as Newspeak, Nadsat, and various Joycean lexifabricographical framjamkinisations) and the opposite case where linguistic invention is applied to extending an existing natural language with a limited vocabulary.

Being an edited book, rather than a single author one, the quality of the chapters was uneven, but I liked them all. The one on computer game languages misses an opportunity by failing to notice how much the currency of Sindarin has been extended by 'Lord of the Rings Online' (I am sure the number of people who recognise the phrase 'mae govannen' has increased many-fold since this game came out.)

For me, the high points were the discussion of Tolkien's languages (the chapter hits a good middle ground between what you might find in a biography and the full Sindarin grammars and suchlike available online); of the Russian-based teenage slang in 'A Clockwork Orange'; and of the political and cultural problems that arise when nationalist enthusiasts try to 'bring back' a moribund language. This last made me aware of a lot of problems I had not previously thought about. For example, the predominantly rural and aging native speakers of languages like Hawaiian or Breton usually speak languages heavily permeated with loan words anathema to the educated young enthusiasts and are likely to be unwelcoming of an alien new 'standard' that tries to iron-out local variations.

Dr. Andrew Higgins says

This is a very well written book with a really good survey of the development of constructed and auxiliary languages like Volapuk and Esperanto. There is a big focus on Tolkien's languages (well explained) and Klingon. Adams also includes chapters on James Joyce and revitalized language like Modern Hebrew, Cornish and Irish, His chapter on language developed for computer games (going all the way be to the Gargish of Ultima 6) brings ones back. Good appendices on each language with excellent bibliography for follow-up. Very useful in my studies. Adams also wrote Slayer Slang - A Buffy the Vampire Lexicon.

Highly recommend -got me think about spending more time with my own secret vice!!!

Kamal says

The book is ambitious in scope and yet still comprehensive in execution. It does have the tendency to venture away from the strict discussion of artificial languages, but only in order to demonstrate how much the political language revival moments (Hawaiian, Welsh, Cornish, Breton, etc.) have in common with Klingon and Esperanto. Totally worth reading for those who want an academic analysis of constructed languages and the people who speak/use them.

Victor says

Perhaps the nerdiest book I've read in a long time. Which means of course that I loved it. Also, directly responsible for rekindling the always likely-to-burst-into-open-flame voracious disgusting gluttony of Tolkien book consuming that I'm currently engaged in (there are five books by or about Tolkien on my nightstand presently. And that's counting LOTR as one book.)

Rich Daley says

Invented languages hold a deep fascination for me, and this book covers every kind: IALs like Volapük and Esperanto, fictional languages like Quenya and Klingon, invented English like Nadsat or the language of Finnegan's Wake, and revitalized ancient languages like Hebrew and Cornish.

There was a lot of stuff in here I didn't know and I feel much more educated about invented languages, especially the political side of revitalizing language and the reasons why people might not want to let English dominate everywhere.

It's a pretty hard read, though. It's basically a collection of academic papers (including one of Adams's own), each with an "Appendix" written by Adams on a tangential subject. The papers are presented in their entirety which means they are littered with citations and contain perhaps far more detail than is necessary for a light read.

Simon says

A mixed bag of essays on invented languages. Here are brief rundowns on the essays, and a general comment after that:

1. The Spectrum of Invention (Michael Adams). A kind of introduction to some of the conceptual issues that arise in thinking about invented languages. I found this mostly frustrating for its breeziness.

2. Confounding Babel: International Auxiliary Languages (Arden Smith). An excellent, serious account of the attempts to create languages to facilitate communication either worldwide or in some restricted part of the world. It gives a clear and wonderful account of the early (17th century) attempts at "real characters" (i.e. languages that would encode, through their radicals and methods of lexical construction) some metaphysical view on the order of being. Also strong on Volapuk (umlaut on the u) and Esperanto.

3. Invented Vocabularies: The Cases of Newspeak and Nadsat (Howard Jackson). Weak, and rather boring, account of the languages or vocabularies of _1984_ and _A Clockword Orange_. Tries to examine the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in this context but doesn't really make anything of it. A lot of unnecessary detail (e.g. number of average Nadsat words per page in _ACO_).

4. Tolkien's Invented Languages: (E.S.C. Weiner and Jeremy Marshall). A thorough and scholarly account of the Elvish languages in Tolkien (and a little on the non-Elvish ones too). Some parts were very interesting, and they certainly make you gasp in astonishment at Tolkien's achievement. But a lot of this is not of much interest unless you are really into morphology.

5. 'Wild and Whirling Words': The Invention and Use of Klingon (Marc Okrand, Michael Adams, Judith Hendriks-Hermans, Sjaak Kroon). A mish-mash of sociology (who speaks Klingon and why), morphology, and the material constraints on the invention and development of Klingon imposed by the needs of the TV and movie products for which it was developed. Not that interesting.

6. Gaming Languages and Language Games (James Portnow). Some pseudo-philosophical reflections on language-games and descriptions of various languages associated with video games. Not very interesting.

7. 'Oirish' Inventions: James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Paul Muldoon (Stephen Watt). The analyses of bits of Joyce were sometimes interesting but often seemed to get somewhat unmoored from the text. Ultimately, annoying lit crit stuff that made me grind my teeth.

8. Revitalized Languages as Invented Languages (Suzanne Romaine). An absolutely riveting account of the perils and the prizes associated with attempts to revive languages, including Hebrew, Hawaiian, Breton, Irish, Cornish, and Maori, and a few others. Heartbreaking, really. In many cases, the attempts to revive a language are middle-class and hegemonic, further alienating the dwindling numbers of traditional speakers, who are, of course, doomed anyway.

To each of these chapters, the editor, Michael Adams, adds an appendix, usually not very interesting supplementary material (e.g. reviews of _A Clockwork Orange_, in the appendix to chapter 3).

My biggest disappointment was over the failure of the book to engage, anywhere, with the question of what a language is. This is a topic that is very rarely addressed, but seems to me difficult and interesting. It would have been particularly appropriate here, since if one is looking at invented languages, one is clearly presupposing something about what a language is (i.e. whatever it is that is invented). Most philosophers, I suspect, would say that a language is a set of lexical items and syntactic rules (interpreting syntax very broadly here to include all formal structures such as phonology, morphology, etc. as well as grammar). And this seems to be the implicit understanding in this book of what a language is, since the inventors in question seem generally to invent vocabularies and syntactic principles. But in spite of the appeal of this account of what a language is, it has the implausible consequence that the addition to a language of a single new word produces a new language (this follows from the principles governing the identities of sets). Although of course languages change, and become different, it does not follow from this that they change into other, or different languages, any more than a piece of fruit that ripens, and hence becomes different, becomes a

different piece of fruit. Whatever a language is, a plausible theory ought to allow that a single language can undergo change. I don't know what the answer to this problem is; but it ought to have been at least addressed in a book like this.

Rich says

This book comprises several essays by different authors, each dealing with "invented languages." The term is used quite broadly, to include not only J.R.R. Tolkien's languages that he devised or the Klingon tongue, but international languages like Volapük and Esperanto, the lingo found in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *A Clockwork Orange*, gaming languages such as Leet, and even the particular uses of language found in James Joyce and other Irish writers, concluding with "revitalized" languages such as Modern Hebrew and Hawaiian.

It's quite the tour, but the reader needs to know that this is not a popularized treatment written in an engaging style (think Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*). The essays are fairly academic, and a knowledge of or at least a real interest in linguistics will be helpful in following the discussions. The essay on James Joyce, et al. is probably the most abstruse of the lot.

Eight appendices round out the book, the most interesting to me being the one on the question of whether an invented language can be owned (as in trademarked or copyrighted). Each chapter has a reading list at the end. Three and a half stars really, but I'll round it up to four because of the variety of languages treated and the intrinsic interest (to me) of the subject, despite the essays being somewhat drier than I might have liked.

Nikki says

This book is along the same lines as Arika Okrent's In the Land of Invented Languages, but features multiple authors, and a slightly broader interpretation of invented languages, including Joyce's linguistic games. Most of the essays are reasonably interesting, but the one on Joyce had me totally lost — I haven't read Joyce, and didn't know he was considered particularly linguistically inventive. Lacking the context, that particular essay was just… well, rather boring, for me. (In my defence, my degree didn't cover much more recent than Shakespeare, except when I did Tolkien or themed courses that dipped into contemporary novels to show the development.) The section on Orwell and Burgess' use of language to convey their dystopian worlds was more interesting, though a bit obvious for someone who has actually read those books.

I did love the essay on Tolkien's work; I've always admired the sheer amount of work he put into his invented languages, and the way the world he created was made for those languages, and that they had a whole history and evolution within his world. Very few people, if any, have matched that in terms of creating a language for the pleasure of it and creating a way for other people to enjoy it.

The most personally interesting topic for me was about the revival of declining languages like Gaelic, Breton, Hawaiian… Of course, I've been trying to learn Welsh (albeit that's on pause while I learn more Dutch to help communicate while I'm staying with my wife), and I'm very aware that it's a very artificial way to learn. I don't have any regular contact with native speakers, and honestly, I think I only know one or two native speakers in my circle. It doesn't surprise me that there's a generational gap in many of these languages, and that that raises questions of authenticity, and whether that really counts as connecting with a

real Welsh identity. It seems from the coverage here that Welsh is more successful than Breton and such, in that it isn't discussed in as much detail, except to note that school Welsh is becoming a standard which is swallowing local dialects.

Arika Okrent's book — which is frequently quoted here — is definitely both more accessible and more in-depth, though that in turn doesn't do much with Elvish, as I recall, and definitely doesn't look at revitalising languages like Breton and Gaelic. If the essays I picked out sound appealing, then it's worth getting, but the other ones weren't as interesting.

Originally posted here.