

Inventing Languages: Linguistics for Language Construction

ENGL 21500 / LING 39800

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Invented languages (also known as constructed languages, or “conlangs”) are language systems that are intentionally created for a specific purpose. Familiar examples include languages invented for fictional worlds, such as Dothraki (*Game of Thrones*), Na'vi (*Avatar*), Elvish (*Lord of the Rings*) and Klingon (*Star Trek*), as well as languages invented for international communication by real speakers, such as Esperanto and Interlingua. This course begins by briefly exploring the history of invented languages and the various purposes for which such languages have been designed and put to use. Throughout the remainder of the course, students will learn the major properties of natural human languages as relevant for understanding invented languages and for creating new invented languages. Using examples from typologically diverse languages, we will explore the major subsystems that make up natural human languages: sounds, words, grammar, meaning, and cultural context. Throughout the semester, students will work on an individual project in which they construct their own rudimentary language system and write a linguistic description of it.