



## Invented, Created and Constructed Languages

There are approximately 6500 languages spoken on our planet today, with regional variations and dialects not included. So why on earth would anyone bother create a new one? “Because we don’t live on planet earth and need our own language!” the Na’vi will call. “Because ours makes us prideful, wild and exotic!” the Dothraki will grunt. However, there are many different reasons for people to invent languages. If we move from constructed fictional (or alien) languages to the politically motivated creation of languages, such as Modern Hebrew or Rumantsch Grischun, things may soon become more controversial.

In this book club we will first read some introductory literature in order to gain an overview of language evolution and ask: hasn’t language always been invented at some point in human history? Secondly, we will get to know more about ‘conlangs’ (constructed languages) and the community of ‘conlangers’, or language geeks who design new languages just for fun, to communicate with one another, or even as a therapeutic practise. Thirdly, we will read about interlinguistics and Esperanto, the world’s most famous constructed international auxiliary language that was planned to “find some means of overcoming the natural indifference of mankind” and “unite all nations in a common brotherhood”. This fascinating project failed in the sense that Esperanto never became the universal second language it was dreamt to be. In spite of this, to this day there remains Esperanto-speaking diasporas in more than one hundred countries (and a million people have signed up for learning Esperanto on Duolingo). But could Esperanto ever become a world language given the fact that its roots are thoroughly European? Is global English as the lingua franca still easier to learn than Esperanto? Could a perfect world language ever exist? What are the deficiencies of planned languages in comparison to natural ones? We can discuss these and more questions in our third group meeting. Other suggestions on literature and topics to discuss are of course welcome.

**Suggested Literature** (books marked in blue should be read by all participants):

*1st meeting – language and language evolution:*

- Bybee, Joan. *The Evolution of Grammar. Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World.* 1994.
- **Crystal, David. *How Language Works. How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die.* 2007.**
- **Deutscher, Guy. *The Unfolding of Language. An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention.* 2006.**
- Jackendoff, Ray. *Foundations of Language. Brain, Meaning, Grammar, Evolution.* 2002.
- Pinker, Steven. *Words and Rules. The Ingredients of Language.* 2000.

*2nd meeting – conlanging literature:*

- Adams, Michael. *From Elvish to Klingon. Exploring Invented Languages.* 2011.
- Cheyne, Ria. *Created Languages in Science Fiction.* In: *Science Fiction Studies.* 2008.
- **Okrent, Arika. *In the Land of Invented Languages. Esperanto Rock Stars, Klingon Poets, Loglan Lovers, and the Mad Dreamers Who Tried to Build a Perfect Language.* 2009.**
- Peterson, David J. *The Art of Language Invention. From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves, the Words Behind World-Building.* 2015.

*3rd meeting – interlinguistics and Esperanto:*

- **Blanke, Detlev. *Internationale Plansprachen. Eine Einführung.* 1985.** (chapter 4 on Esperanto)
- Hauptenthal, Reinhard (ed.). *Plansprachen. Beiträge zur Interlinguistik.* 1976.
- Janton, Pierre. *Einführung in die Esperantologie.* 1993.
- Knapp, Karlfried, and Christiane Meierkord (eds.). *Lingua Franca Communication.* 2002.
- Mattusch, Max Hans-Juergen. *Vielsprachigkeit: Fluch oder Segen für die Menschheit? Zur Fragen einer europäischen und globalen Fremdsprachenpolitik.* 1999.
- Sakaguchi, Alicja. *Interlinguistik. Gegenstand, Ziele, Aufgaben, Methoden.* 1998.
- **Schubert, Klaus (ed.), in collab. with Dan Maxwell. *Interlinguistics. Aspects of the Science of Planned Languages.* 1989.**
- Tonkin, Humphrey (ed.). *Esperanto, Interlinguistics, and Planned Language.* 1997.

*Possible 4th meeting – Swiss language politics and the implementation of Rumantsch Grischun; other planned/controlled/fused or standardized languages (depending on the participants' interests)*

- Coray, Renata. *Von der Mumma Romontscha zum Retortenbaby Rumantsch Grischun. Rätoromanische Sprachmythen.* In: *Bündner Monatsblatt (Cultura alpina).* 2008.
- Coray, Renata. *Rumantsch Grischun. Sprach- und Machtpolitik in Graubünden.* In: *Annalas da la Societad Retorumantscha.* 2010.
- Grünert, Matthias. *Romanischbünden. Sprachförderung in der Diskussion.* In: *Babylon.* 2011.