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From Adam and Eve to the Klingons: What’s the Point of Invented Languages?

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From Adam and Eve to Klingons: What’s the Point of Invented Languages?

VINCENT KLING, FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
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Some Questions...

• Does anybody here speak other languages?
• Roughly, how many languages would you say there are in the world?
There are roughly 7,000 spoken languages in the world... (1)
Now, for the main Event...

- How many people are familiar with the term “constructed language” and why might it be different from something called a “natural language”?

- What are some assumptions you have about these two kinds of languages?

Department of Planned Languages and Esperanto Museum in Vienna, Austria
Time for a test!

A. B. C. D.
What’s trending...

A BRIEF “PEREGRINATION” THROUGH THE TRENDS OF CON-LANGS
The Holy and Enlightened

In the 1600’s, John Wilkins (a founder of the Royal Society) set out to create a language that would allow for easier learning than Latin and clearer communication of concepts. The system was based on a set of hierarchies like the system Linneaus devised for all animals, vegetables and minerals.
United we stand: The hunt for a perfect international auxiliary-

L. L. Zamenhof was born and raised in Poland during a time of high tension in Europe. Europe was on the brink of world War One. Zamenhof could feel this tension building and having grown up in an area filled with a diversity of languages, Zamenhof noted that Europe itself was (and still is) hugely divided by language. In order to ease the tensions of this linguistic conflict, Zamenhof set out to create a language that was easy, accessible and could bridge the linguistic divide.

Can you believe that around 2 million people speak this language and that it has around a couple thousand native speakers? Does that sound true or false to you?
As concepts such as the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis came into the world, conlangers began to see value in using language projects as ways of testing language itself. One such language that did this was Lojban. Designed to be culturally neutral while also being heavily logically systematized, Lojban makes ambitious claims (see tee shirt).
Towards the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, con-langs began to more widely embrace a new mode of language making: languages for fictional worlds. Writers like J.R.R. Tolkien began to invent languages like Elvish for the sake of creating worlds that fictional characters could live in (though in Tolkien’s case he created his fictional world purely as a platform for his languages). With the rise of television and movies, genres such as science fiction or fantasy began to take advantage of con-langs. Among these languages are of course \textit{Klingon} (Star Trek), \textit{Na’vi} (Avatar), and \textit{Dothraki} (Game of Thrones).

Along with entertainment in media, con-langs today are often created for fun (while also still also making serious efforts to produce many languages similar to the ones discussed previously). The con-lang community is a proud one that produces a multitude of different languages, often having contests to create new ones or work with others languages.
Klingon Literature

A BRIEF OVERVIEW BY ANDREW SHULL-MILLER
Important Dates:

1984- Star Trek III - The Search for Spock
1985- Klingon Dictionary
1992- Klingon Language Institute
Corpus of Klingon Literature

Dramatic Works

Plays

- Adaptation of a Christmas Carol
- Shakespearean Plays
  *Hamlet
  *Much Ado About Nothing

Opera

- Libretto for ‘u’, Klingon Opera - paq’batlh

Epic Poem

- Gilgamesh (KLI)

Ancient Chinese Philosophy

- Tao Te Ching (KLI)

Comic Books

- IDW Publishing’s “Blood Will Tell” series

Literary Magazine

- Catch-All Short-Form Works - jatmey (KLI)

Four Volumes
1995-1997, 1999

Sample Pieces:

Translations/Adaptations
- The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Tribble (I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly)
- Who is the Gunner? (Who’s on First?)
- vlHem tel (William Tell)

Originals
- Krankor
- The Voyages of Captain Krankor
- The Old Warrior Is Prepared to Die Honorably
- A Visit to the Moon Beings
- The Death of Commander
- A Daughter’s Revenge
Hamlet, Son of the Emperor of Kronos (1995)

PREPARED BY NICK NICHOLAS (DIALOGUE) AND ANDREW STRADER (POETRY)

SHAKESPEARE WAS A KLINGON!

IAMBIC PENTAMETER
Act I, Scene 5 - Ghost to Hamlet

’Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard

Province of Denmark, while I was sleeping in my group of fruit trees

A serpent stung me, so that the whole ear of Denmark

A serpent worm stung me, it was proclaimed. And the apparent ears of the Klingon homeworld

Is by a forged process of my death

Were definitely fooled by disgraced persons, when they reported the death

Rankly abus’d: but know, noble youth,

because they deliberately made false. Honorable warrior, know the fact:

The serpent that did sting thy father’s life

the one who stung your father now wears the father’s helmet

Now wears his crown

the so-called snake of days past.
Utnapishtim said to his wife:

"Humans deceive and will deceive you."

Come, bake pies for him and place them at his head.

And while he is lying, each day make a mark on the wall."

The first pie was completely rotten.

The second pie was becoming rotten.

The third pie was decaying.

The fourth pie was like fur.

The fifth pie became unsavoury.

The sixth pie was still sharp.

The seventh pie was baked.

Utnapishtim touched him and the man awoke.
Wedlock suits you. I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you.

Marriage is good for you. During our last meeting, I think that a cheb and a half had not yet increased your body, Watson.

Seven!

Only one cheb!

Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness.

It is true, I was wrong. But I definitely guessed the half. I definitely guessed a teensy half. And I observe that you are fulfilling the missions of a doctor again! You had not let me know that you wanted to transact that!

Then, how do you know?

But how do you know that?
pIth

The End
Work Cited

What This Talk Is and Isn’t about

ABOUT:
Physically published literary texts in the Klingon language.

NOT ABOUT:
HolQeD / Commentaries on the Klingon Language Itself
Novels in English about Klingons
Unpublished Works in Klingon, No Matter How Long
Format of Works Discussed

Two Explanations for Everything - in-universe and in real life

In-Universe Metafiction - “Scholarly Introduction”

Fictional scholars and/or translators
Fictional personas for IRL translators

Parallel Texts - English and Klingon

Footnotes/Endnotes
Much Ado about Nothing/ paghmo’ tln mÌS (2011)

DOGBERRY: Is our whole dissembly appeared?

Doghberl: naNev ghom Hoch. quSNaq Ma’.

DOGBBERI: Now all are gathered here. Obviously (lit. “he/she sits in a chair”)

VERGES: O! A stool and cushion for the sexton.

verjeS: ‘eH, ghItswI’vaN quS tlqem!

VERJESH: Ready! Bring chairs for the scribe!

SEXTON: Which be the malefactors?

ghItlhwI’: qatlh lupumlu’?

SCRIBE: Why are they accused? (pum = accuse; pub > puM = boil)

DOGBERRY: Marry, that I am and my partner.

Doghberl: va, Nargh NatsutsbejneSmeH Nargh wlpumMlI’ maH.

DOGBBERI: Hell, so that your honor will definitely drink tea, we’re in the middle of boiling tea.

VERGES: Nay, that’s certain. We have the exhibition to examine.

verjeS: teHMej. narghMej Nargh narghMe’chugh qama’meyvam.

VERJESH: Definitely true. The tea will definitely appear if the prisoners do not escape. (nargh = escape/appear; Dargh > Nargh = tea)
Why are the people starving?
Because those above them put heavy taxes on them
And eat up their grain.
That’s why the people are starving.

Why are the people difficult to rule?
Because those above them are meddlesome.
That’s why the people are difficult to rule.

Why are the people unconcerned about death?
Because those above them care too much about life.
That’s why the people are unconcerned about death.

It is better to disregard life
Than to exalt it too much.
The spirits of the dead
Go to the gates of Gre’thor
In lines of three
Fek’lhr inspects them,
One by one,
With his deadly glance.
Kahless, Kahless, Kahless!
Beware those eyes
For they will kill without a doubt.
When the eyes of death are upon him,
Light reflects off the bat’leth
Into Fek’lhr’s evil eyes.
His eyes are blinded for a while,
And Kahless enters Gre’thor
Unharmed and safe.