Language Construction 101: Vocabulary generation

Introductory session

Sai Emrys

David J. Peterson

2nd Language Creation Conference

Prep

- Linguists, raise your hands!

- Form groups of up to 3-4 people

- Say hello. They won't bite unless you ask nicely.

What you've got

One Bag o' Duplo © ™ ® .

- (2x2) x 10. Colors = 3x, 2x, 2x, 1x, 1x, 1x
- (4x2) x 4. Colors = 2x, 1x, 1x
- (6x2) *or* skinny (4x2) x 1
- 3 weird pieces

    Total: 18

We said it'd be "hands on"…

Represent the following sentence with the materials you have:

"I should've read it the first time!"

green text = activity

Introduction

- Vocabulary is arbitrary

- … but systematic!

1. Basics

- Language expresses content

- Languages have atoms ("words")

- This workshop focuses on "content words"

- We assume a naturalistic spoken language

- … but your kink is OK!

2. Culture

Q: Languages without culture?

A: No!

2. What culture?

1. *Species?*
2. *Era?*
3. *Planet / universe?*
4. *Region?*
5. *Tech?*

Answer these questions with your group.
Write it down.

3. Phonology

- Sounds, letters, glyphs, signs, etc.
- We use "sounds" today.
- Q: What does a word look like?
- A: Phonotactics
  - Random word generator   Too random
  - System   Over-representation
  - What "feels right"   Unconscious calque

9

3. Sound symbolism

- Yes, they're real
- Onomatopœias are not universal
  - Fit the phonology & phonotactics
  - *Bark, bow-wow, uau uau, qui-qui ri-qui-qui*
- But they *are* systematic per language
  - *Glean, sheen, shine, shimmer, glimmer, glitter*
  - Bootstrapping method
- Patterns
  - *Wishy-washy, oopsy-daisy, righty-tighty lefty-loosey*

3. Duplo symbolism

Make the following words using 2 categories of blocks:

Shiny   Angular   Intelligent
Bright   Round   Stupid

4. Derivation

1. Compounds   Mailbox, huntsmen
2. Reduplication Lalau, matata, kamehameha
3. Affixation   Re-de-$!ing-fine-d
   Pre, suf, in, circum, supra
1. Zero-derivation   Hunt (v), hunt (n)
1. Back formation   Truck driver (n)
   > Truck drive (v)

5. Borrowing

- Transculturation
  - Different time, place, tech, names, etc
- Some borrowed words adapt better than others

Make a sentence with a "borrowed word" or two

6. Semantic space

- "Core" words tend to be shorter and simpler
- You get to choose what level is "core" – viz. semantic primes
- Make up words in clusters, not randomly
- Easy way to do phonaesthetics too!

7. Noun Classes

- Form based
  - *ajo, puerta*
- Semantics based
  - *palmos, palkÿz, palmal*
- Concept-driven creation
  → Words will create themselves!

15

And now, a closing challenge

-Represent all of the following words simultaneously , using some of the things we've done so far.

Category: speech

talk (v.)	microphone
narrate	dictate
story	narrator
speech	voice
say	tongue

The take-home message

- All languages have a culture
- Elements can be arranged in *lots* of different ways to make words
- Make words in semantic clusters
- Systems are better *and* easier than doing it randomly

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Applied session

Donald Boozer

Sai Emrys

David J. Peterson

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Prep

- Get back into yesterday's groups. Sit somewhere new so that you have new neighbors.

- Send someone to pick up your bag w/ the notes in it.

- Say hello again.

What you've got (write it down)

ke	toru	sadaze
la	luma	endugo
si	emi	kelari
on	ade	sedunti
ur	temba	mentak
et	kisto	drosronk
ner	redan	sprelsits
sil	eltu	nogobe
tos	ondis	adumbaste
kup	izura	erilin
kibe	tungo	

The challenge (look familiar?)

-Represent all of the following words simultaneously , using some of the things we've done so far.

Category: speech

talk (v.)	microphone
narrate	dictate
story	narrator
speech	voice
say	tongue

And one more…

Do all of these with the same set of words – simultaneously.

1. "Yesterday, I created a language with 17 words for cat."
2. "Spirited spirits spirited spirits."
3. "This could also be a translation challenge."