



conlanging

THE ART OF CRAFTING TONGUES

A documentary about inventing languages by Britton Watkins

The art of language construction is currently undergoing a renaissance, as popular culture embraces language as an important detail in world-building for fantasy, sci-fi, and other entertainment genres. The popularity of constructed languages is evidenced by the fact that the word “conlang” was recently added to the Oxford English Dictionary. Yet, despite the universal nature of language, few people know about the process of language construction, the people who engage in it, or its long history. Shockingly, no one has done a documentary feature about conlanging before—this is the first.

In the pre-Internet decades, many individuals engaged in the activity of language construction for years without knowing that anyone else had the same interest. This is all changing, however, and this “secret vice” (as Tolkien dubbed his engagement in the hobby) is coming out of the closet, so to speak. Our film covers its trajectory out of clandestine notebooks and hush fireside chats into the very public and celebrated collective artistic repertoire of humankind.

This feature-length film covers the world of constructed languages in an engrossing, fun, fast-paced but also educational way. Interviews with well-known Hollywood actors who have spoken constructed languages onscreen are intercut with scenes from their films and comments from the people who developed the languages.

A rough sketch of the narrative arc starts with an intro into to the Hollywood conlanging universe which so many of us know and love, followed by a short section on the thousand-year history of the art form. The middle of the film contains an overview of the wide variety of personalities engaging in the practice, and the film ends with a section on why conlanging is important. Compelling personal stories as well as creative visual storytelling and intercutting keep audiences interested in this subject they often know nothing about.

Many people, academics and the general public included, often question why we should care

about “fake” languages when there are numerous others in the world that are threatened by more dominant, often colonial, tongues. In reality, research is beginning to show that constructed language community-spawned technologies and best practices can be leveraged in preserving and resurrecting endangered ones. This project also documents how the art of language construction leads to furthering understanding of language in general, which is why numerous universities and colleges around the world are beginning to incorporate courses on conlanging into their curricula.

About the filmmakers

Britton Watkins, Conlanging's director, co-wrote and co-produced the feature film *Senn* (2014), which is now streaming on Hulu and Amazon. Britton is both a creator and a learner of constructed languages. Josh Feldman, cinematographer and editor, was the co-writer and director of *Senn*.

Our production team also includes many other well-known language creators, namely: 1) David J. Peterson, professional language creator and constructor of Dothraki and Valyrian for the television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-), as executive producer; 2) David Salo, the translator and developer of Tolkien's Elvish languages for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003), as executive producer; 3) Christine Schreyer, University of British Columbia, creator of the Kryptonian language for *Man of Steel* (2013) as executive producer; 4) Paul R. Frommer, creator of the Na'vi language for *Avatar* (2009), as associate producer; and 5) Marc Okrand, creator of the Klingon language for *Star Trek* (1984-), as associate producer.

The film was released in August 2017 along with a 50 minute long bonus feature of related clips not seen in the film.

Film Review: Conlanging (EXCERPTS)

ON JULY 27, 2017 BY SARAH SHULIST

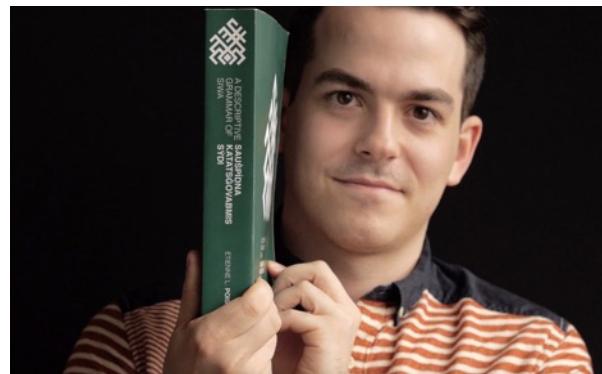
This past weekend, I was lucky to be able to attend the premiere of the documentary film *Conlanging: The Art of Crafting Tongues*. For those unaware, “conlang” is short for “constructed language”, so “conlanging” would be the verb form, because of course it needs a verb form. In contrast to natural languages, which develop in social groups without a large scale plan by a single creator (or a few creators), conlangs are consciously developed for various purposes. I will cut to the chase in my review here: this movie is fantastic. If you are in any way a language nerd, it is amazing. If you are some other kind of nerd, I think it would also be amazing.

The film traces the history of constructed languages, which dates back to the 11th century or so. I was fascinated to learn that the first known (incomplete) conlang was developed by a relatively anonymous nun, who was subsequently followed by some well-known luminaries in philosophy, like Sir Thomas More. From the beginning, the filmmakers establish a thread of examining what motivates people to create languages, and this human focus is what gives the examples weight beyond the fun language nerdery.

On the other hand, several language creators found something profound in this craft because they were able to give voice to the profound difference that they felt, to a sense of self that was indescribable using the limited tools of socially developed and agreed upon tongues. One of the most powerful expressions of this view comes from a young trans man who found not only honesty, but also safety and secrecy, in a language his abusive parents could not access.

In sum: The film should be available to order in August, and if you are interested in language, in diverse arts, or in how people see the world through multiple lenses, you should buy it. If you teach in a linguistics or anthropology department, you should get your library to buy it, and you should show it to your intro classes. **It does a better job articulating what is fascinating, exciting, and fun about linguistics than just about anything I've come across.**

<https://anthropologyas.wordpress.com/2017/07/27/film-review-conlanging-warning-may-nerd-splode/>



TOP: Jason Momoa (*Game of Thrones*)

High resolution photos available at
<http://conlangingfilm.com/com/press>

One Liner

A deep dive into the hidden world of constructed languages (Dothraki, Klingon, Esperanto) and the fascinating people who make them.

Synopsis

Conlanging, The Art Of Crafting Tongues is the first feature documentary about the global phenomenon of constructed languages and the extraordinary people who invent them. From languages like Klingon and Dothraki in blockbuster productions, to the diverse personalities engaging in the practice today, to its relevance in education and even efforts to save dying languages — there's much more to conlanging than almost anyone might imagine.

The art of language construction is currently undergoing a renaissance, as the emergence of the Internet empowers its communities and popular culture embraces it as an important detail in world-building for sci-fi and fantasy. This revelatory film tells the rich story of passions that have expanded far beyond Tolkien's "secret vice."

Genre: Documentary, Independent

Director: Britton Watkins

Country: USA

Run Time: 92 minutes

Technical Specs: Filmed digitally, exhibited in 1080p and 2K formats

Website:

<http://conlangingfilm.com.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/conlangingfilm/>

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