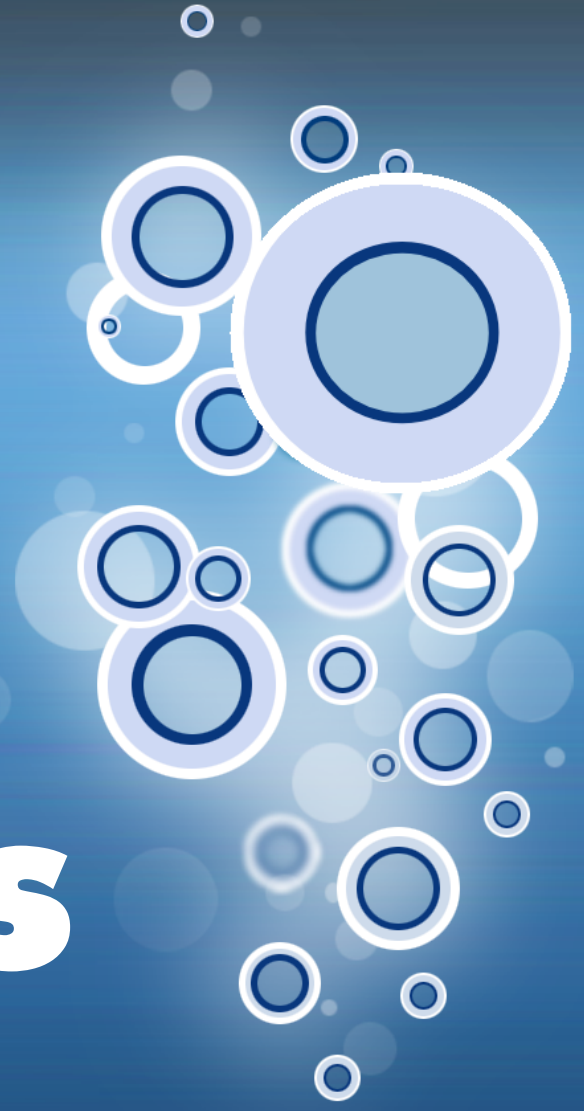


Building Realistic Fake Languages



@NextLevelBanana

About Me

Language nerd.

BA in linguistics.

Formally studied: 7 or 8.

Constructed: 0.5.

About You

Creating a new people.

Want them to be cool.

No time to go full Tolkien.

**What
is
language?**



A language...

Can express anything

Uses arbitrary symbols

Can be spoken or signed

Is learned by children

Changes over time

Language layers

Sounds (phonetics)

Words (morphology)

Sentences (syntax)

Conversations (discourse)

Meaning (semantics)

If nothing else,

**Make
the
Sound
System**



Sound system:

1a. Pick 8+ consonants.

1b. Pick 3+ vowels (a, i, u).

(consider alien biology!)

2. Pick a syllable.

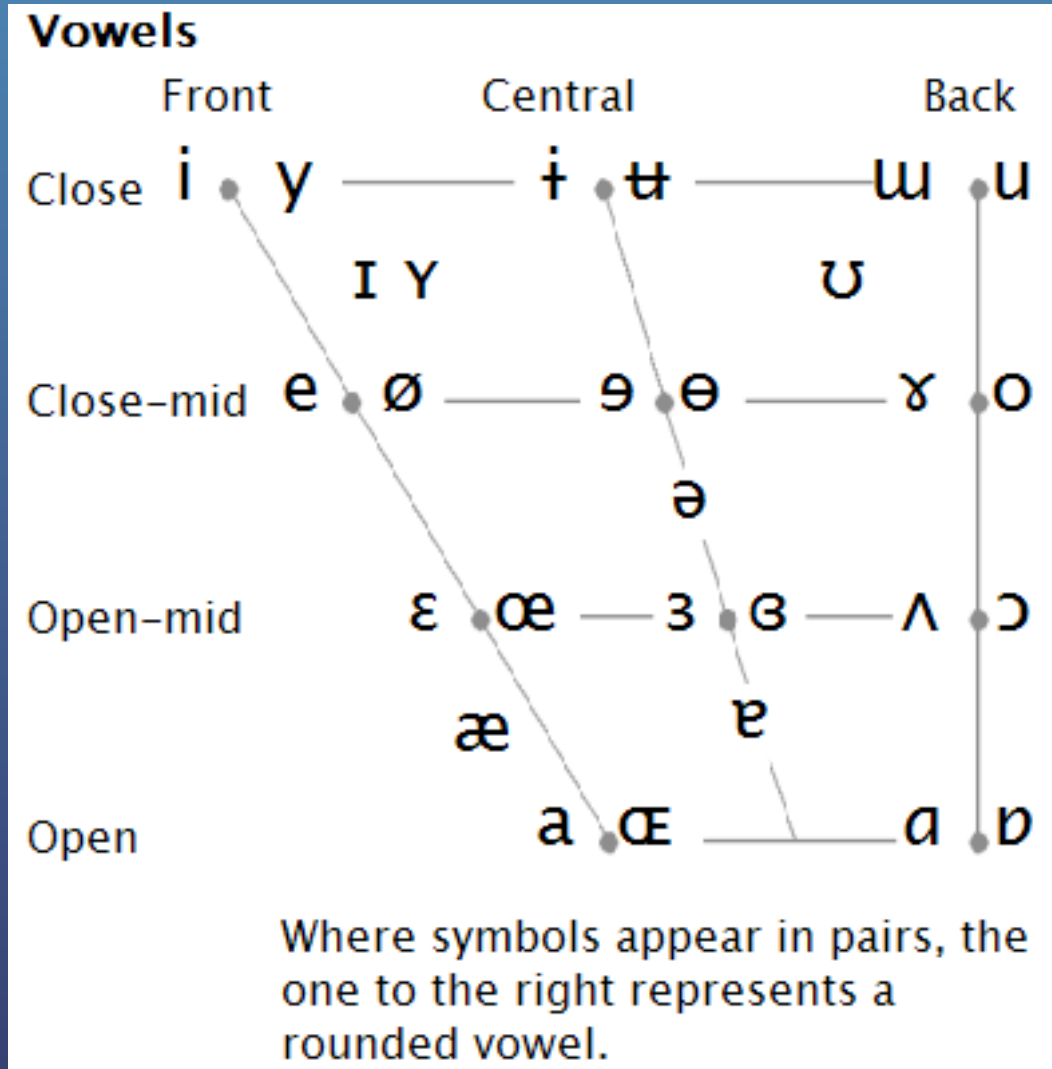
3. Add constraints.

Consonants!

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ			ɾ					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɽ		ɽ̡					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Clicks	Voiced implosives	Ejectives
⦿ Bilabial	ɓ Bilabial	ʼ Examples:
Dental	ɗ Dental/alveolar	pʼ Bilabial
! (Post)alveolar	ɟ Palatal	tʼ Dental/alveolar
≠ Palatoalveolar	ɡ Velar	kʼ Velar
Alveolar lateral	ɠ Uvular	sʼ Alveolar fricative

Vowels!



Spanish

	Labial		Dental		Alveolar	Palatal		Velar	
Nasal	m				n	ɲ			
Stop	p	b	t	d		tʃ	j	k	g
Continuant	f		(θ)		s	(ʎ)		x	
Lateral					l	(ʎ)			
Flap					r				
Trill					r				

Squamish

		Bilabial	Alveolar			Postalveolar	Velar		Uvular		Glottal
			simple	affricate	lateral		plain	labialized	plain	labialized	
Stop and affricate	plain	/p/	/t/	/tʰs/		/tʃ/	/k/	/kʷ/	/q/	/qʷ/	/ʔ/
	ejective	/pʰ/	/tʰ/	/tʰsʰ/	/tʰʰ/	/tʃʰ/	/kʰ/	/kʷʰ/	/qʰ/	/qʷʰ/	
Fricative			/s/		/ʃ/		/xʷ/	/χ/	/χʷ/		
Nasal and approximant	plain	/m/	/n/		/l/	/j/	/w/			/h/	
	glottalized	/m̥/	/n̥/		/l̥/	/j̥/	/w̥/				

Squamish

31

(Skw̓xwú7mesh)

(Xúmis)



Vancouver

95

(K'emk'emeláy)

Signed languages

1. Pick handshapes.
2. Pick locations.
3. Pick movements.
4. Pick non-manual modifiers.

2. Pick a syllable.

V

CV

VCC

(C)CV(C)(C)

(Can r, n, etc be syllabic?)

3. Add constraints.

- at word head or tail
- before/after vowels
- only in foreign words
- common clusters

Bonus: Make some morphemes.

(That is, a sound cluster that has a meaning.)

Use them in names!

Want more? Next,

**Swear
with
Care**



Don't

Make new English
euphemisms (frak, tanj)

Go on forever (“God blind
me!”, “Eternal damnation!”)

Instead

1. Make a few morphemes with your sound system.
2. Use as interjections.
2. Make euphemisms.
3. Translate them if you want to make a point.

Cursing inflicts

Awe

Fear

Disgust

Hatred

Depravity

Taboo Categories

Sex

Excretion

Religion

Death/infirmity

Disfavored groups

What is sacred?

Gods?

Nature?

Social order?

Equality?

Bilingual?

Swear in the mother tongue.

Want more? Next,

Language Reveals Power



Power Shows in:

Terms of address/pronouns
Formal/informal syntax
Which language is used
Who can interrupt

Language Reflects Culture



Know the groups.

What are the groups?

Which ones do your characters belong to?

How might they talk amongst themselves to signal unity?

Tl;dr

Use a **sound system**
to give good names.

Use **curses**
to show what they value.

Use **politeness**
to show who has power.

Use **markers**
to show group identity.

Writing Systems



Writing is tech.

Alphabet

Abjad

Syllabary

Logographic system

Questions?



Further Reading

How Language Works

David Crystal

The Art of Language Invention

David J Peterson

Steven Pinker, Deborah Tannen

The Signs of Language

Ursula Bellugi and Edward Klima