One Year On

The Journal celebrates its first birthday

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The Editor writes …

Dear readers,

Late again, but it's here. As you can read on pp. 8-9, the *Journal* has now been running for over a year, and though you might ask me, "How does that feel?", I'm not really sure if I could give a satisfactory answer. On one hand, it feels strange that for twelve months now I've been editing this magazine, and indeed, writing for it; it doesn't fully feel like it's been such a large part of my life for such a long time. On the other hand, it feels a bit odd that there was once a time when there was no such thing as the *Conlanger.com Journal*, or a time when no-one – myself included – was really sure if it would work. I'm not sure if all of that really makes sense, but hopefully you get my point …

I think I need, above all else, to thank everyone who's helped to ensure that the *Journal* has kept running, by submitting articles and so forth. I've said it before, but without you I doubt the magazine could ever have succeeded. And thanks also to Aszev, owner of Conlanger.com and Conlanger BBoard administrator, who I believe I've never really mentioned here but has certainly played a major role in allowing the *Journal* to be associated with his site (without this association, I doubt it would exist in any form) and in hosting the files.

Once again, I've had a not-entirely-unwelcome problem in producing this issue: too much content. A number of articles originally slated for inclusion in this edition have now been moved onto the next, though there is still plenty of (I believe) quality content left. One notable absence is, again, the lack of an Editor's Script Pick feature in this issue, as was also the case in Issue 6 (January/February). Finding conscripts that satisfy both the conditions of æsthetics and are more interesting than a simple table of graphemes, basic rules on their combination and a few example texts is not easy: I went into much more detail about the sort of things I'm interested in in featured scripts in the January/February issue itself. It may be that I decide not to keep Editor's Script Pick articles as a regular feature instead, devoting the space to more general pieces and including conscript articles only sporadically when the material is available.

Finally, I'd like to apologise for the late running of this issue. I was doing exams for the first two weeks of June, and never intended to work on the magazine during that period, but that doesn't excuse the fact that I've taken five weeks since to get this issue published despite not having any major distractions. Hopefully, however, this edition is all the better for the extra time spent on it.

Happy reading,

Curlyjimsam

Curlyjimsam,
July 2007.

Featured Conlang – Sindarin

The Editor reviews **J.R.R. Tolkien**'s famous work.

In a past poll on the Conlanger Bulletin Board (still accessible at www.conlanger.com/cbb/viewtopic.php?t=46), members overwhelmingly rejected the epithet 'father of modern conlanging' for renowned author J.R.R. Tolkien, but nevertheless seem to widely accept 'that he has certainly contributed a lot' to the hobby. It seems to be an undeniable fact that numerous conlangers will claim that their first constructed languages were inspired by Tolkien's works.

Tolkien himself, of course, needs little introduction, especially to those who have been in the conlanging community for some time. His Elvish language Sindarin, the focus of this article, ranked fifth on the most popular conlang pages on Langmaker (www.langmaker.com) in 2005, and fourth and second in 2004 and 2003 respectively. But it is Quenya, Tolkien's other 'major' Elvish language and a relative of Sindarin, that overall seems better known. Quenya ranked first on Langmaker every year from 2003-5, and is currently fourteenth in terms of page views in the wiki format of the site. On Google, Quenya returns slightly more search hits: 693,000 to 641,000 to Sindarin (for comparison, the auxlang Esperanto gets some forty-one million hits, whereas Mark Rosenfelder's Verdurian returns only 23,900). So why have I chosen to review Sindarin, rather than its sister-language?

Put simply, I like it more. Both conlangs (or at least, what we know of them) are excellent, but Sindarin strikes me as the better of the two (though I will freely admit that there are other conlangers who I believe have created even better works, whom I won't name here). Additionally, on Helge Kåre Fauskanger's excellent Ardalambion site (www.uib.no/people/hnohf/), my main resource for information on Tolkien's languages the page for Sindarin is almost three times longer than that for Quenya, which gives me more information to work with. Finally, if Sindarin is indeed less well known, that seems all the more reason to bring it some more well-deserved attention.

So, to the language itself. Tolkien wins appreciation points from me early on because the language has a proper *history*. This was very important to Tolkien, and according to Ardalambion's page on Primitive Elvish, Sindarin's ancestor, 'he seem[ed] to have been immensely attracted by the grand vision of an entire language family growing, changing, evolving, branching out in various directions'. This 'branching out' of course resulted in Sindarin's relatives: Quenya, of course, but also less well known languages such as Telerin (the language of the sea elves) and Nandorin (Green-elven) (Sindarin itself is also known as 'Grey-elven' or 'the noble tongue'; Quenya is 'High-elven' or 'the ancient tongue'). This in itself was utilised by Tolkien to add to Sindarin's realism, in the form of loan words and calques. In this manner, the Sindarin names *Turgon* and *Aegnor* are simply 'Sindarised' pronunciations of Quenya *Turukáno* and *Aikanáro*, and *Galadriel* is what the name *Altariel* would have been the hypothetical word from which it 'descended' undergone the sound changes to Sindarin rather than those to Quenya. I think Tolkien deserves credit for this manner of 'name translation', especially as he was careful to make use of more than one method and even

to introduce certain inaccuracies in the system, so that for example the name *Fëanor* is a compromise between Quenya *Fëanáro* and the 'correct' Sindarin form *Faenor*. Irregularities like this help to add to the realism of the language, as not dissimilar anomalies do of course occur in real-life languages.

But, all things considered, these are fairly minor details. Even viewed entirely synchronically, Sindarin still has plenty of interesting aspects, many of which are far more obvious to the casual eye than its history.

The language's morphology is heavily dependent on phonological mutations, and this is immediately obvious when one compares different forms of a single word. The basic phonemic distinctions are not particularly interesting, although I have personally always been quite fond of the three-way vowel length distinction (short, long – marked with an acute accent – and super-long, occurring when long vowels are stressed and marked with the circumflex). When mutations are considered, however, the sounds of the language become very much more complex.

The basic distinction made by Sindarin nouns is singular/plural, with an earlier dual form having dropped out of use by the time of *The Lord of the Rings*. (A genitive article does exist, but it is not always used.) Furthermore, a 'class plural' also exists, a nice touch by Tolkien whereby *-ath* (or occasionally another suffix) is used to, in Tolkien's words, 'embrac[e] all things of the same name, or those associated in some special arrangement or organization'. The use of *-ath* is not always as easy as simply adding the suffix to the end of the word, but it comparatively tame next to the morphology of usual plurals. Although the basic rules behind the vowel alternations used here are quite simple, once every vowel and diphthong and every set of exceptional cases are considered, there is a lot of information to take in (this is, in fact, another example of diachronics being used to great effect in the 'final' form of the language). Sindarin's plural forms are not necessarily recognisable for those of us used to other methods of marker number: *barad*, 'tower', becomes *beraid*; *gwaun* 'goose' becomes *guin*; *nogoth* 'dwarf' becomes *negyth*, etc. Another interesting feature of Sindarin nouns is the use of at least one ending to show possession by a separate entity: *-en* 'my', though similar possessive pronominal suffixes can be assumed to exist.

To further complicate matters, the language also has a complex system of initial consonant mutations, inspired by Welsh, to which Sindarin was deliberately meant to be similar to in 'linguistic character'. There are five sets of such mutations, termed (though not all by Tolkien himself) soft, nasal, mixed, stop, and liquid. The availability of information on these mutations varies, based on their prominence in actual use. These mutations make the use of the language far more complex than would otherwise be the case – to give an example from the Ardalambion grammar, the word *saew* has the meaning 'poison', but 'the poison' is not **i saew* as one would expect if the mutations were not understood, but rather *i haew*. To further complicate matters, *haew* on its own has the completely separate meaning of 'habit' – with the definite form 'the habit' being *i chaew*. This are just two examples of the soft mutation, though there are countless more. These mutations are of course simply the result of historical sound changes, but said changes have caused further complications within the system – one might expect the definite form of *Golodh* 'Noldo' (a member of the Noldor clan of elves) to be *i 'olodh*, based on mutations like *galadh* 'tree' > *i 'aladh*. In fact, the form is *i Ngolodh*,

because whilst the historical form of words like *galadh* already began with *g*, the primitive form of *Golodh* began with a nasal+stop cluster: *ñg*. This is just one of many touches which contribute to the realism of the language.

Of course, Sindarin has more word classes than just nouns. Adjectives and verbs are also present. The former of these do not provide anything of particular interest to the experienced conlanger, particularly not beyond that which has already be covered in regards to nouns (with which they share some attributes), though this in no ways means they are badly done.

The language's verbal system, however, provides a wealth of yet more richly detailed and inspiring features. This is despite the fact that very little is known *absolutely* for certain – much of the information listed on the Ardalambion grammar 'must remain tentative at this stage' and Fauskanger doesn't deny that '[t]he details can certainly be argued'. Separate from the main article, the site devotes a monumental *twenty-eight thousand words* simply to detailing the processes by which the system as it is currently understood was worked out from Tolkien's writings. To put this in perspective, that is nearly two-thirds of the length of the main grammar. The fact that so much can be written about the verbal system alone I feel is worthy of another few dozen appreciation points – as it is so difficult to be very sure about very much, this suggests to me that Tolkien must have created an immensely rich and detailed system in the first place. As with nouns, there is no space here to give anything more than a brief overview of this system, but it is certainly an interesting one. Verbs come in two main classes (derived and basic – the former derived from a primitive stem with the addition of one of a number of endings, and the latter from the stem directly), with a number of different forms – infinitives; imperatives; gerunds; past, present and future tense forms; active, perfective active and passive participles – and endings for number and person. As well as the two main classes, there is also a 'mixed' conjugation that share features of both, and several irregular verbs – again adding to the language's realism, and again the product of its history.

Although the language certainly has a very rich morphology, syntactic details are noticeably absent from Ardalambion's grammar of the language (and, indeed, of Tolkien's other languages). This need not necessarily mean that Tolkien did not much consider syntax – the site may simply have omitted this information, or it may be difficult to extra much for certain from the available texts. However, even if Tolkien did not think too much about his language's syntactic information, we must be careful not to judge him too harshly for this. Whilst a conlang created today ought rightly be heavily criticised if explicit syntax is all but absent, we must remember that syntax within the wider study of language has risen to prominence comparatively recently, and Tolkien cannot be blamed too harshly for concentrating on morphology and phonology alone.

In conclusion, therefore, our knowledge of the Sindarin language is far from complete – we do not have full access to Tolkien's notes, and in any case the language (as with much Tolkien's work) was frequently revised and never truly finalised, making analysis of the language all the more difficult. However, from what we know of it, Sindarin seems to be an excellent example of a well-done conlang. This can perhaps only be expected from someone of Tolkien's profession: he was, of course, a philologist. But regardless of this, the language fully deserves all the recognition it gets – if not more.

Happy Birthday!

As the very first issue of the *Journal* was released in June 2006, that officially means that this edition, Issue 8 (June/July 2007), marks one year of the magazine's publication. This article will celebrate the successes of this year (there have been failures as well, of course, but we can gloss over them for the moment!), and describe some of the ways in which the *Journal* has changed and developed in that period.

The idea for the *Journal* can actually be traced back as far as November 2005, where the current Editor first made the suggestion for a Conlanger.com magazine on the CBB message board. The idea didn't take off at the time, but was brought back to attention again by the Editor in April 2006. This time, with the help of other CBB users – Sectori played a large role, for which thanks is due – the ideas for the *Journal* and its very first issue gradually took form over the next two months.

However, the then monthly publication took a while to finalise itself into the format we know today. It wasn't until Issue 4 (September/October 2006, the first bimonthly issue) that today's precise layout became standardised – before, it would vary subtly from issue to issue, the most obvious difference being the use of an entirely different font (Microsoft Sans Serif rather than Arial) in Issue 3, which was published in August 2006. Issue 4 was a major stepping stone for other reasons: the 'Script of the Month' feature was renamed 'Editor's Script Pick', as the former title was misleading now that the *Journal* had ceased to be published on a monthly basis, and the recurring ConCommentary (taken from Rik Roots' blog) and Colin the Conlanger story features appeared for the first time. Issue 4 was also the first issue in which the current featured script did not feature in the lettering of the name of the publication on the front cover.

The *Journal* has had many successes during its first year – of which the greatest have to be being published in the first place and actually getting beyond its first issue, which was never a given, a point that can be emphasised by looking at other attempts at produce a regular conlanging magazine which have consistently failed to get off the ground. This makes the fact that it is still going today all the more noteworthy, and hopefully many readers are of the opinion that it should keep going for as long as possible. Given that there still seems to be a certain demand to help with contributing to the *Journal*, there's little reason to suspect people are losing interest entirely. The *Journal* so far has featured numerous different conlangs, both of CBB members and those already well known in the wider conlanging community, of which Qatama, Ayeri, Alurhsa, Toki Pona, Proto-Drem, Etora and Yuiyo have respectively taken pride of place in each of the last seven issues. A number of constructed scripts have also been featured, and other memorable articles include the interview with number collector Janko Gorenc in Issue 1 and the advice from cartography expert HandsomeRob on creating maps for conworlds using the Fractal Terrains program in Issue 5, amongst others. ►

Perhaps the *Journal*'s greatest honour came in January 2007, when the Editor was awarded the 'Special Award for Services to Conartistry' by the members of the Zompist Bulletin Board (www.spinnoff.com/zbb). Although this was an individual award, it nevertheless can be seen to represent recognition of the *Journal* as a whole, and of all those who had contributed – and, indeed, continue to do so – over the months. The magazine has received acknowledgment from other parts of the conlanging community as well, for example it is mentioned in relation to Janko Gorenc on the links page of famed conworld Ill Bethisad (www.bethisad.com/links.htm), been bookmarked on del.icio.us, and been mentioned on the website of the auxlang Europan (europan.blogg.de) and the Słowczyzna blog (slowczyzna.blog.onet.pl).

It's also interesting to look at how things have changed in the world independent of the *Journal* during the last year. Even within the Conlanger.com community, things have moved on somewhat from twelve months ago, as the following graph of CBB membership illustrates (numbers are given for the first day of each month):

Membership of the CBB, 2006-2007
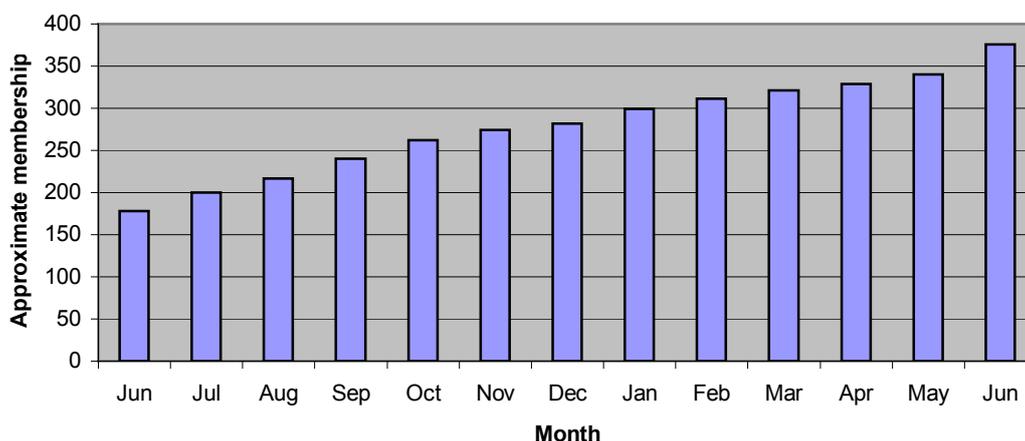
In the past twelve months, Conlanger.com has also celebrated its own first birthday (on August 4th 2006, marked in *Issue 3* of the Journal), and the CBB has grown in terms of forums and content as well as members (now catering directly for conworlds in the same forum as conworlds and for both conlangs and natlangs in the 'Teach and Learn' forum for instance) and members have taken part in the first CBB reconstruction relay from October 2006 to March 2007. In September 2006 the CBBfr forum (www.conlanger.com/cbbfr) was set up for French speakers to discuss conlangs in their own language, and Conlanger.com chief Aszev produced a popular 'introduction to romlangs' (www.conlanger.com/whatrom.html) in December 2006, which has doubtless been of help to numerous conlangers in helping them to produce their own Romance languages.

In conclusion, it has been an interesting and varied, but ultimately successful, year for the *Conlanger.com Journal* and the conlang community as a whole. Many *Journal* readers and contributors have doubtless achieved a lot in their conlanging work, perhaps some of it partially due to some of the articles featured on these pages. So, to finish this article: happy birthday to the *Journal*, and may this year become the first of many in its history!

Uk Babamak'U'Kaz Wu

Or **This Is My Language**. An overview of **Curlyjimsam**'s principal conlang, Vixen.

It had always been my intention that from time to time I would cover my own creations in the *Journal*, and this goes back to the very first issue where the Greater Sunian alphabet was the featured script, although this was as much due to the problems in finding another suitable script as anything else. However, the early issues of the magazine coincided with me beginning a major revision of almost every aspect of my conworld, and since then very little has ever been in a suitable state to be publicly presentable. (The Greater Sunian script is an example – it has been renamed 'Greater Atlian' and revised so as to be barely recognisable, but is still very much in the 'rough notes' form rather than one I would want to openly release.) However, Vixen, my oldest, most worked-on and hence most revised constructed language, is finally starting to re-approach a state of usability, and it seems worth giving a preview of it here – I tend to 'officially' launch the language with a full grammar or set of lessons as soon as possible on one or more of the conlanging forums.

Vixen's native name is *Viks'ba*. The *Viks* element refers to the Vixen people, and is also found in *Viksór* (pronounced /viksur/, but usually written 'Vixor' in English), the name of the country where the language is spoken. (For reference, Vixor, or the Vixor, is located to the south of the continent of Ninibia – roughly real-life Aphrodite Terra – on the planet Venus in my 'Alternate Solar System'.) Recently, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the similarity to the English word 'vixen', and may eventually decide that 'Viksen' is an acceptable alternative spelling for the name of the language.

The language has a relatively long real world history, going back at least eight years to its earliest form, of which sadly no remaining details exist. The earliest surviving form of the language dates to November 2001, and though it is very sketchy and has little in common with the language as it stands today, it can nevertheless be seen as an important 'building block' in the language's development. (One element which has survived in a slightly modified from that earliest version is the plural marker, originally *-t* or *-ed* and currently *-'d*, pronounced /d/ or /æd/.)

That version was the language's direct basis for several years, as details were added periodically as required but rarely overtly changed once incorporated into the grammar or lexicon. In June 2005, however, I decided that the language in its then-current state was a poor reflection of my conlanging abilities, and restarted from scratch. For a few months the language was quite fluid, particularly in terms of its phonology, though it eventually stabilised in a basically usable form, although I never made any major attempts to gain public recognition for it due to the appalling state of the official grammar document – it made sense to me, but that wouldn't necessarily have been the case for anyone else without a good deal of work.

▶

But there was still one major problem. Vixen still did not have any diachronics, something I had come to value highly in my languages particularly as I had begun to want to create related tongues. After several months of attempting to solve this problem by working backwards, I eventually decided – in May of last year, just as the first issue of the *Journal* was taking shape – to embark on a second complete revision of the language, this time tracing it through three thousand years of history starting from 'Proto-White-Vixorian' (which, incidentally, I have no intention of ever releasing publicly – that's not what proto-languages are for, in my opinion). Shortly after beginning the second revision it was extended to cover the whole of my conworld and all of its many languages, although many of them had in fact been formally put to one side awaiting modification at the time the first revision started and not touched since. Once again, the language was quite fluid in its early stages, largely because of the effects of the greater revision of the world as a whole, but eventually stabilised, growing steadily over the months whenever I could get the chance to work on it.

It would be foolish to talk of 'starting' the article now, but as I move onto describing the internal workings of the language, it seems to make sense to begin, as is traditional, with the phonology and orthography. For the most part, the sounds of the language are unextraordinary. With the exception of the retroflex-palatal series which was thrown into the language with the first revision to distance it from English and of which I have now become quite fond, and the phoneme written *hs* (currently /ɧ/, present in the language for as long as I can remember), most of the consonants wouldn't look out of place in a 'typical' European language. The six vowel phonemes are /æ ɑ e o i u/ <*æ a e o i u*>, though the exact realisation varies depending on dialect (/æ/ is historically a schwa, and realisations today vary from [æ] to [ɛ] to [ə] and even [ɨ]). The vowels historically had long forms, transliterated into the Roman alphabet with an acute accent, of which only *á é ó* (pronounced /ɑ i u/) are frequent in writing today. (Recently I have toyed, for reasons I won't go into here, with the idea giving the speakers of Vixen larger mouths than Earth humans, which would possibly mean introducing more sounds into the language as a greater number of distinctions can be made – as this would about to a third major revision in two years, in terms of phonology and lexicon if less in terms of grammar, it may be best to simply ignore this idea for the present).

This is just one example of the irregularities of the language's spelling system. I dislike using rigid 1:1 phoneme-grapheme correspondences too frequently, especially in languages which like Vixen have had a written form for centuries or even millennia (Diffian, one of Vixen's direct genetic ancestors, was reduced to writing as much as 2200 years ago). This is to me one of the advantages of the language having diachronics, in that it allows me to create realistic irregularities in the orthography with a historical basis. Other irregularities include certain letters not being pronounced in certain positions (e.g. *æ r l h* or consonantal *i u* when final) and certain sounds which can be written in more than one way (/š ž ñ/ can be written either *sj zj nj* or *ś ź ń*, usually dependent on their historical development). A third set of irregularities (there are several others) which is not due to Vixen's own history is the use of standardised transliterations of loanwords which may not correspond directly

to pronunciation, e.g. the word *komputer* loaned from English is pronounced in a way which would otherwise be written something like *kampyutæ*.

As related to the original versions of the language, it is interesting to see how the phonology and orthography have turned out. My original aim was to produce a language which sounded quite harsh, with lots of voiced plosives and fricatives, for example. This somewhat got lost in later versions, but unintentionally as the result of sound changes the current incarnation does indeed have words like *bág* ('new, young; modern'), *ádag* ('old'). Many of the striking features of the current revision never existed in older forms, for example the prevalence of acute accents, which in some cases make the language look disturbingly like a younger sister of Hungarian or Halyihev's Alurhsa, or the high frequency of initial *w* and *y*, again due to the results of sound changes. Although this was not planned, I nevertheless feel the result only adds to the 'flavour' of the language, as diachronics so often mysteriously manage to do perhaps far better than languages without any history. As previously mentioned, I have also become quite fond of the retroflex-palatal series introduced into the second revision of the language; I find it difficult now to imagine Vixen without digraphs like *dj* and *sj* (or, if I feel like it, *dy* and *sy*) which were entirely absent from its original incarnation.

All this, of course, refers only to the Roman transliteration which I use of Vixen's own alphabet, although said transliteration is intended to represent the actual letters used by Vixen speakers as best as possible. For those who are interested, the basic letters of this alphabet are as follows:

□	Ú	Ϻ	⅃	ή	I	Ť	ó	⋔	Ᵽ	É	Ϛ	⊓
m	g	k	p	l	d	t	b	f	v	s	hs	n
Ц	Ƨ	v	⊥	∈	Γ	⊂	⊤	×	+	∪	∧	
ź	h	ń	r	z	ś	i	æ	u	e	o	a	

The symbol transliterated *j*, representing a shift from a coronal to a palatal consonant, actually takes the form of a diacritic similar to the Roman acute accent, and is not a letter in its own right. Thus for example *dj* is written í and *zj* ´∈. As the letters for *l* and *t* already have such accents to help the reader disambiguate them from similar letters (such as *n* and *æ*), the accent in these cases is simply written twice. This diacritical is also used to show a preceding *y* on vowels (a preceding *w* is written with a diacritic ˇ; when no vowel follows these sounds they are written with the letters for *i* and *u* respectively). A symbol like the Roman macron is used to show aspiration on plosives and historical length on vowels; this is omitted on long vowels preceded by *w* or *y*. Vixen also has a highly detailed punctuation system, more complex than even that used by languages like English, for which would take too long to go into any detail here. I should note, however, the symbol ·, a raised dot, which is used to mark certain morpheme boundaries where no word break is present. This accounts for the rather high frequency of the apostrophe, which is used to transliterate it, in Vixen texts written in the Roman alphabet. I must admit that I myself sometimes find the apostrophe rather ugly if used too frequently, and for this reason occasionally make use of alternatives such as the pipe (|), the centre-dot (·) and the hyphen (-).

This is an ideal point to move onto the grammar of the language, as it is the odd agglutinating nature of Vixen contributes further to these marks'

frequency. The term 'word', as used in relation to English, is of little meaning in Vixen, as many Vixen 'words' are in fact more like English phrases, incorporating (for example) nouns, adjectives and adpositions stressed as a single unit. Inflections (perhaps better viewed as clitics) come at the end of such phrases. An example is the phrase *djig'géb'id'dju'd*, 'with every wise king', which can be parsed as 'king-wise-all-with-PL' but is pronounced as a single unit, with primary stress on the first syllable as is the case for all Vixen 'words'. In one form, this goes back to some of the earliest versions of the language, where adjectives followed their nouns and were 'attached' to them in writing with a hyphen, although it did not achieve its current form until the first revision.

The aforementioned 'inflections' are fairly basic, with only a singular/plural distinction for nouns and a simple four-aspect distinction for verbs, plus an antipassive and (for certain verbs) an imperative marker. Earlier incarnations of the language were more complex in this area – although nouns never inflected for anything other than number, verbs at one time could take several different affixes, although they were still less morphologically complex than (for instance) French. My original intentions with this version of the language were to keep a level similar to this, although the effects of my sound changes simplified the morphology of Diffian and its successor, Common Old Vixen, rather more than I would have wanted at first. (That said, using sound changes to completely destroy a word's paradigm is one of my favourite parts of conlanging.) The four aspects marked on verbs today, with their markers as used with most verbs, are the imperfective (unmarked), the perfective (-*'z*), the inceptive (-*'dav*) and the completive (-*'du*). These are basically pronounced as expected, although an epenthetic /æ/ is inserted in speech after consonants. The use of /z/ in the perfective goes back to its being found in the past tense markers of an early form of the language. Of course, given the nature of heads and dependents being collapsed into a single word it could be argued that certain adverbs, postpositions and other particles are in fact a form of 'inflection'.

The language has several productive derivational affixes; some of which are separated from the word they modify with the morpheme boundary marker) and some of which are not. (Originally the morpheme boundary marker was always used, but I found the overload of apostrophes to be rather distasteful). This explains why the name of the language is *Viks'ba*, with the marker, but the name of the country is *Viksór*, without it. There are supposed to be various rules governing which sort of affixes take the marker and which do not, though I must admit I am not entirely sure what these all are and have so far largely used my intuition. Names of people and places tend to be written as single units, however, and morphemes which change their pronunciation dependent on which sounds they are next to and those which are transparently related to words which can stand alone usually take the marker.

Going back to before the first revision, Vixen has had quite (some would say very) strict syntactic rules. One of the defining features of the language for me is that speakers do not have much scope for varying the order of words in their sentences. The language is SOV in most clauses (it is in fact ergative, although without casing marking on nouns and with all nominal arguments normally preceding the verb this is often not immediately

obvious), and adjectives and other dependents and modifiers must follow their heads in very specific orders, which I imagine would cause significant problems for non-native speakers. I could go into some detail on various grammatical structures, born from nights of systematically going through *The World Atlas of Language Structures* and *Describing Morphosyntax*, but I feel this would be tedious in this format, and readers would be advised to wait until the official grammar is released if they are interested in such information. Although I am pleased with the way the language has turned out as a whole, and it is suitably 'unique', I think most of these individual features are on their own unremarkable. Possible exceptions to this include the use of the normal (additive) plural as an 'associative' plural, so that for example *Gébanu'd* ('Gibanu-PL') is translated as 'Gibanu and those associated with him' or 'Gibanu et al.', or the distinction between inalienable and alienable possessive postpositions (so *rék'u'njis*, 'my flesh', but *rék'u'mak*, 'my meat [from an animal]').

The language so far has quite a large lexicon, created from roots going back to Common Old Vixen and ultimately to Proto-White-Vixorian. Although in many cases I have attempted to keep the words produced by the sound changes as close as possible to those of the earlier versions of the language, the difficulties in predicting how a word will turn out after three thousand years from a list of changes you have not yourself memorised mean that many or most words are quite different from their original forms, but I do not think this is a major problem; there is no reason why I should attempt to keep words sounding the same. The language's numbers one to ten are as follows: *a, ázúk, té, ihso, íta, zjid, zjiba, gád, ga, ád* – note the unusual use of the length marker on *u* and *i* respectively in the words for 'two' and 'five': these sounds are pronounced /uw/ and /ij/. Ordinals are produced using the prefix *vá'-*, which is possibly unique in having no less than three pronunciations (for historical reasons): /vɑ/ before consonants, /ž/ before *i* and /v/ before other vowels. 'third' is irregular, being *vá'dé* rather than the expected **vá'té*. A 'distributive' form also exists, formed with the prefix *á'-*: *á'ihso*, for example, means 'four each'.

Vixen also has a full complement of colour terms, to be precise there are eight basic colour words plus three derived forms. (Some of today's 'basic' terms were derived forms in earlier versions of the language, but sound changes have meant this is no longer obvious.) The basic terms are *tsi* 'black', *obad* 'white', *ńavak* 'red', *igás* 'yellow', *khæźik* 'green', *zjébi* 'blue', *igásédjz* 'brown', *ńavakæźifi* (<k> pronounced /s/) 'purple'. These combine to produce *tsi'obad* 'grey', *ńavak'obad* 'pink' and *ńavak'igás* 'orange'. Note than in the derived forms the basic terms must go in the order shown, so **obad'tsi*, **obad'ńavak* and **igás'ńavak* are not used.

This article has obviously not covered every detail about Vixen, but I hope it has given a nice – if somewhat lengthy – preview. I intend to start working on a presentable version of the complete Vixen language as soon as possible, and hopefully it will be finished soon enabling readers to peruse it at their leisure should they wish to find out more about the language. Alternatively, I shall be willing to answer any questions you might have by email (curlyjimsam@aol.com) or by PM on the CBB or ZBB message boards ('Curlyjimsam').

ConCommentary

Rik Roots's column.

Space eagles

Originally posted at rikfiles.blogspot.com on March 23rd, 2006; adapted.

Reading a thread started by Eddy the Great on the ZBB got me thinking about how a creature could evolve to survive both on planets and in space.

On planets, the creature will need all the adaptions associated with living on land, for example: skeletal and protective structures; locomotive features; energy capture, storage and digestion systems; metabolic control and excretion systems; an internal mass transit system; some form of reproductive strategy.

There will need to be a reason for creatures to venture into space. There's no food out there, no potable water. So the only reasonable possibility (to me) seems to be that the creature is either escaping something on the planet, or is aiming to get somewhere better. Which seems to suggest that we're dealing with a twin planet system (two planets orbiting each other around a common point, which in turn orbits the star), or perhaps a system where three (or six) similar sized planets are locked in similar orbits around a star each roughly at the lagrange points of the other planets. To be exotic, we could go with a combination option.

So, let's start with something that I'll call a space eagle. Big, birdlike, but definitely not a bird. They evolved in a star system that had four similar sized planets (say between Mars and Earth size) in a lockstep orbit around their star, two of the planets circling each other and the other two at the lagrange points to the binary (no, it's not a stable setup, but then we only need it to last for say twenty million years or so to allow the evolution to develop and refine our space cadets).

Now we need a way to get our space eagle into space. From Earth's surface you need to be going slightly faster than 11 km/s to escape the planet's gravity well. On Mars the space eagle could soar into space if it were going faster than around 5 km/s. The only way I can think of an organism achieving such speeds is through some sort of organic space gun. Let's imagine a plant-like organism that's developed a gun-like mechanism for launching its seeds into space. Then our proto space-eagles come along and co-adaptive evolution five million years down the road leads to a plant – I'll call it gunweed – that will launch an eagle into space alongside its own seeds.

Whatever planet we're launching from, our eagle is going to need some protection against air friction. Let's say our gunweed provides this through the seed's outer layers. So, plant grows seed, waits for eagle to burrow into seed, then completes the growing process and launches seed into space.

▶

Now, if the space eagle stays inside the seed it should be relatively safe in space (if it is in deep hibernation) until just before the seed hits the next planet. We'll assume that the evolutionary deal between gunweed and space eagle is that the gunweed gets seed and eagle into space, but it's the space eagle's job to get the essential part of the seed safely to the surface of the next planet. So the space eagle needs to 'hatch' as the seed nears the next planet.

At this point, the space eagle needs some sort of locomotive system – farts could do it. Gas could be generated from food stored in the seed (which the space eagle could eat before breaking the seedcase). Once outside the seedcase, the space eagle needs to be impermeable (except when it's farting) – to maintain body pressure and prevent water loss, so maybe a structure of interlocking feathers with a tough outer coating of oils and waxes.

Radiation is going to be a bugger. I assume the space eagle is going to develop some sort of sensory apparatus to warn it that a solar flare is on its way, then it can use the bulk of the planet that it's orbiting to hide between during the radiation storm. The alternative would be to have plates of subcutaneous lead, or filigrees of lead across the feathers, but that would be too much weight to launch. A really efficient way to clean up free radicals in the body would be fairly essential, together with especially effective ways of dealing with the resultant tumours. Another option is to just let the older space eagles die of cancer.

What next? Wings, with parachute-like properties, to get through the new planet's atmosphere. We'll assume that the space eagle has enough fart to get it into some sort of low geostationary orbit, after which it's just a case of losing speed and altitude slowly enough to allow for re-entry without excessive incineration.

Then all that's left to do is navigate passport control, declaring the ready-to-germinate remnants of the seed if necessary, and it's *Welcome to Your New World! Breed! Grow Gunweed! Be Happy!* Until it's time for the next space voyage …

ConCommentary is a regular column by conlanger Rik Roots, with articles taken from his blog ('The Rik Files') at rikfiles.blogspot.com. Rik would welcome your take on his opinions; if there is anything in his articles readers would like to comment on they are invited to email the Editor at curlyjimsam@aol.com.

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On Cases – Part Three

"Latives and essives, etc., oh my!" – Sectori completes his series of articles.

This should be the easy article for everyone, as the cases it covers are easy as well. Sorry, by the way, about missing the last issue.

The lative and essive cases are *prepositional cases*. The prepositional cases express ideas that in English we would use prepositions for, e.g. 'in', 'from', 'out of', 'to', etc. The vast majority of these cases are formed using the roots *lative* and *essive* and prefixing a Latin function word or preposition (taking into account such assimilations as *ad+l-* to *all-* and *in+l-* to *ill-*). Perhaps its best to illustrate these with examples:

The **allative** case, from Latin *ad* ('to, towards'), expresses motion towards something. Some simple examples: *I went to the store*; *he came to my house*; *throw the rock at me*. The allative case is used in both Finnish and Hungarian, as well as a number of other languages including Turkish, Lithuanian, and Manchu. The proto=language from which my conlangs Dhâna and Vyaskar evolved featured an allative case (and contrasted it with an ablative; see below).

The **ablative** case, from Latin *ab* ('out of, away from'), expresses motion away from something. Some simple sentences: *I came out of the room*; *he walked away from me*; *get out of here*. The ablative case is used as such in a number of languages, including Finnish, Hungarian, and Estonian. In addition, Latin provides a perfect example of the case stretching that I was talking about in the last article, basically using the ablative as a dumping ground for random prepositional functions.

The **lative** case (yes – no prefix) expresses general motion, often (but not always) towards something. The lative occasionally collapses the above two (and any other) lative cases into it. Dhâna, one of my conlangs, collapsed the allative and ablative that originally existed in its ancestor language into a single lative case which expresses all motion (clarified by prepositions). In natlangs, the lative exists in Finnish and Turkish, among others.

The **adessive** case expresses location nearby (lit. location 'towards'). The adessive exists in (three guesses) Finnish and Hungarian, among other languages. Like many of the essive cases, the relation between the root and the prefix and the actual meaning of the case is a bit obscure, but with some rationalization, it works.

The **abessive** case expresses absence (lit. location 'away from'), like English *without* or *-less*. The abessive exists, as before, in Finnish (although not in Hungarian) and Estonian, among others. The name of the abessive case is even odder to rationalize than the adessive, but it still makes some sense, after a bit of thought.

The **inessive** case, from Latin *in* ('in, at, on, into'), expresses location within. Naturally, it exists in Finnish and Hungarian, as well as Estonian. The inessive is probably the most basic of the essive cases, and very similar to the

locative case in its general meaning (although remember, the locative is often extended to other prepositions as well).

Does that make sense? I certainly hope so. I'm a bit tired at the moment. Don't feel limited by these examples: you can just as easily build your own case from these roots with any Latin function word (or one from another language, if you feel that Latin doesn't quite cover everything).

The Amazing Adventures of
Colin the Conlanger
Instalment IV: The Verb Factory (1)

By Curlyjimsam

"Today," said A, the leader of the LangGang, "we have a very important mission."

They were in the Gang's top-secret underground base. Colin the Conlanger, the Gang's latest recruit, knew this as result of the sign saying 'The LangGang: Top-Secret Underground Base' on the front door. Apparently by accident, the interior of the base closely resembled a typical kitchen.

"You always say that our missions are very important," said B, the only definitively female member of the Gang, though there was no hint of genuine annoyance in her voice.

"That's because they *are* always very important," said A, who was dressed entirely in black and completed this slightly frightening effect with a pointed black beard. Unfortunately said slightly frightening effect was utterly ruined by the appearance of the other four members of the Gang, who were all slightly less frightening than your average bar of soap.

"So what is it?" said D, a thin youth who looked like he had spent most of his life pointedly avoiding ever going anywhere near a bar of soap. "What's this important mission?"

"There's a problem," replied A, "at the verb factory."

B, D and E (who was the size of a baby elephant and looked about as mobile as a very heavy rock buried under a large pile of sand) looked around at each other, clearly concerned. Colin said, "The what?"

"I would have thought," said A, "that the name 'verb factory' would give things away somewhat, C."

C was Colin's official LangGang codename. "They make verbs?" he guessed. He quite enjoyed creating verbs himself. Getting them ready prepared from a factory seemed like sacrilege akin to the use of word generators.

"Well done," replied A, in a tone that strongly suggested that although Colin was right he was not in fact particularly impressed with his intellectual abilities at all, though there was no malice in his voice. "Now, I think we'd better stop wasting time and get going."

On his only previous mission with the Gang, Colin and the rest had got from place to place with some sort of odd teleport device in the possession of A. This time, however –

"We're going to use our nearby convenient cross-continental portal," said B, cleverly finishing off the narrator's sentence. "It's just a few hundred yards away from the entrance to the base."

The Gang walked to the portal on foot; E was remarkably mobile though all of them struggled to keep up with A striding purposefully on ahead, apparently not realising that he was still in his slippers (which, admittedly, were nevertheless coloured black).

The nearby convenient cross-continental portal appeared to take the form of a large hole in the ground, or at least that was where A stopped and waited for the other members of the Gang to turn up. Colin looked down into the hole, which in no way helped to shed light on the situation. In fact, it did practically exactly the opposite, as the hole seemed unnaturally black, as if light was somehow mystically prevented from getting very far into it. Then A took what looked like an ordinary television remote control from his pocket, entered a four-digit number, and jumped. The other members of the LangGang followed.

Colin would normally have regarded jumping into a mysterious black hole as a bad idea, for obvious reasons. On this particular occasion, however, as his companions didn't seem to have any particular aversion to doing so and Colin had not considered the possibility that is was actually part of a ridiculously overblown and slightly pointless plan designed to result in his death (which it wasn't), he too bent his legs, closed his eyes, and jumped. He then realised that, in his anxiety, he had not jumped far enough to actually land in the hole. Instead, remembering horribly his first attempts to learn to swim, in which he had managed to almost drown not only himself but nearly everyone else in the pool including the lifeguard, he gradually lowered himself into the pit (his legs rather oddly seemed to disappear in the blackness), and then let go of the side.

At first he was under the impression that nothing had happened. Then he realised that he still had his eyes closed, and opening them once more realised he had been wrong. Something had happened, clearly, because he was now standing in the middle of a large hall that had all the signs of a place used for making things to be sold.

"Nice to see we're all in a hurry," said A, who had apparently been waiting rather impatiently for Colin's arrival. "OK –"

Colin cut across him, which in retrospect may not have been the wisest things to do, but at the time he was so concerned with making a good impression he failed to realise he wasn't really managing it. "Sorry. I –"

"It's your first time, you weren't sure what to do, blah blah blah. We've got no time for explanations just now, C, we've got important matters to be getting on with."

"Can we get on with them, then?" asked D, sounding slightly annoyed.

"Yes, yes," said A. "Well, as you know – there's a bit of a problem …"

The fact that things weren't going as well as he had hoped seemed to have subconsciously affected him in some way, and any outsider would have got the distinct impression that he was only making things worse. This wasn't done on purpose, of course, though if you want to imagine that *A is secretly*

evil for something to do, you are of course completely free to do so. You are also completely wrong.

"Shall I explain?" asked B helpfully. "You don't seem to be doing too well?"

"As you have no idea what's going on, one might possibly think that you have no qualification to do that whatsoever!" snapped A.

"Calm down, sir," said E in a deep voice. "It's no good getting angry."

"But she –"

"Looking around," said B reasonably, "I think it's quite clear what's happening."

Colin looked around. He could see several large pieces of machinery, a few blue-clothed workers, and what looked – impossibly – like strings of letters flying out of the machines and into large buckets. He wondered if the letters might be the problem, but as the workers seemed to be treating them as perfectly normal occurrences this seemed unlikely to be the case. The things B found quite clear and the things Colin found quite clear seemed quite clearly to be somewhat different.

"Look," continued B, apparently noticing Colin's confusion though by the looks of dawning comprehension on the faces of the other LangGang members no-one else shared it, "the orthography converters are malfunctioning!"

"Correct!" announced A, apparently slightly put out that he had not been able to make this grand declaration himself. "Now don't you think we ought maybe to get going?"

He set off at a jog in the direction of the nearest set of machines, his coat tails flying out behind him in a manner reminiscent of a vampire in a hurry. Colin, still trying earnestly to prove himself, followed close behind, which merely had the negative effect of him nearly tripping over A's coat several times. The rest followed behind at a significantly more leisurely pace.

As they got closer to the machines, Colin noticed that the things he had thought were strings of letters were, in fact, strings of letters, or perhaps more accurately strings of IPA characters. They stopped walking, and A immediately began to inspect the machine right in front of him, running his hands over the nozzles from which the strings of words were being ejected.

"What –?" Colin breathed.

"Verbs," answered D in a low voice from behind him. "The purpose of the verb factory is to generate verbs and their conjugations for lazy conlangers. The factory receives orders from the conlangers in question, specifying as much as they can be bothered to about what they want their verb system to be like, then the workers put the specifications through the main verbal generators" (he motioned towards three massive machines at the far end of the hall, each the size of a double-decker bus) "and the conjugators, just here, and then collect the verbs produced in these buckets."

"But these orthography converter things –?"

"Aren't working, no. There's supposed to be something in the nozzles of the conjugators which –"

"Stop blabbering, we've got work to do." A had finished his inspection of the machine and had turned to face the rest of the Gang. "The machines aren't properly converting the basic IPA forms of the verbs into native orthographies as they come out. Now personally I think real conlangers ought

to be quite capable of coming up with verbal conjugations themselves, not alone the simple task of converting from IPA to their own orthographies, but unfortunately one of the tasks the LangGang was first set up to perform was sorting out this sort of thing, so …"

"Don't you think we ought to be getting down to work, sir?" asked E, presumably as A seemed to be wasting as much time as all of the others had so far put together in his diatribe.

"Yes, yes, I was getting to that … Anyway, what we need to do is get to work on fixing the converters, whilst someone checks for verbs which should have been converted but haven't before they get sent off – the workers here are pretty useless, perhaps not surprising as most conlangers don't exactly pay high commissions for their verbal conjugations no matter how lazy they are, you could hardly say they're typically hugely well-off and they tend to spend all their spare money on books and things – well, the workers don't pay the slightest bit of attention to whether the verbs are coming out as they're supposed to, we didn't have a clue about it until some guy in Sweden complained this morning …"

Colin thought A was never going to stop talking, but then B said, "I'll check the output," and he found himself being deployed to a machine on the other side of the hall with a small screwdriver-like device and a bag of paperclips.

"Hello," he said politely to the worker immediately next to the machine, who was watching the streams of verbs shoot into his bucket with a blank look on his face. "I think I'm supposed to be doing something to the machine."

"Oh," said the worker in a bored tone. "Are you?"

"Yes," replied Colin. "I suppose I'd better start doing it. What does the machine do, exactly?"

"Tense-aspectual conjugator, innit?" said the worker, without looking up from his bucket. "Perfect verbs, this one."

Colin looked down at the verbs in the bucket, which seemed to float around like a great, strangely ordered, alphabet soup. Though a conlanger himself, he had to admit he wasn't particularly impressed. As far as he could make out, the perfect verbs were nothing more than a crudely done clone of the perfect paradigm in Latin.

"If these are perfect, I'd hate to see what the imperfect ones are like," he joked, kneeling down to take a closer look at the nozzles he was supposed to be working on.

"Imperfect verbs are just over there, if you want them," said the worker, pointing to another machine to Colin's left without looking up.

"I'm supposed to be working here, sorry," replied Colin. He had to admit that he had no idea what he was supposed to be doing, but as A didn't seem to be in a particularly good mood as it was he didn't want to risk annoying him further. He glanced over at D, who was working on another machine a dozen yards or so away, and appeared to be prodding his screwdriver up the nozzle. Colin copied him. To his horror, the effect was not what he had hoped for. The stream of verbs had stopped shooting out, the machine seemed to have started smoking, the nozzle was getting larger and larger, and Colin had the distinct impression that it was about to explode …

To be continued …