Conlang
Course Overview

1/11/16
What are we doing here?

• There are more than 6000 real languages to learn.
• It takes 2000 hours of instruction and practice to reach a basic level in a real language.
• It takes at least as much time to make up a conlang at a basic level.
• Is this really a worthwhile thing to do?
  – I hope some of you get hired by Hollywood.
Learning objectives

• Meta-linguistic awareness of the building blocks of human language from phonetics through discourse
• Meta-linguistic awareness of the types of meanings that are expressed by languages
• Language typology and universals
• Language policy (language in the real world)
• Sociolinguistic variation
• Language change and language families
• Practice with language technologies
• Practice with language documentation tools
Course Requirements

• Each class:
  – Reading assignments
  – Add to your conlang
  – Ten minute briefing on a conlang or a conlanging tool

• Three language technologies assignments
  – Talking clock
  – Morphological analyzer
  – Chat Bot

• Two language artifacts
  – Narrative or poem
  – Movie scene performance

• Final language description, texts, and lexicons
Your language

• Concept, world, people
  – But don’t get carried away with a strong Whorfian hypothesis unless you are as good as Orwell.
  – Don’t get carried away with uniting the Earth in peace under a common language.
• Should not be much like English
• Can be
  – For a fictional world (Earth or other)
  – For real use (sub-language or specialized language)
Your language

- Phonemes
- Prosody and stress
- Lexicon and morphology
  - lexicalization
    - what kinds of meanings are packed into words
  - grammaticalization
    - what kinds of meanings are packed into grammar
- Single clauses: grammatical encoding
- Sentence-level constructions
  - Framing
  - Information structure
- Noun phrase syntax and constructions
- Discourse structure
- Writing system
- Narrative structure
- Poetic structure
- Pervasive linguistic metaphors
- Etc.
Getting started

• Books by Mark Rosenfelder (zompist.com)
  – Language Construction Kit
  – Advanced Language Construction
  – Conlanger’s Lexipedia

• UCLA phonetics page
  – Browse everything on this list
    • http://phonetics.ucla.edu/index/sounds.html
Human communication puts a tiny piece of the universe in the common ground with the intent of getting the pictures in your heads to be the same.

You only actually say a tiny bit of what could be said. For example, you don’t need to mention which spiral arm of the galaxy the puzzle piece is in.
What does this sentence mean?

• Birds fly.
• Compare to:
  – Birds are flying.
  – Birds used to fly.
  – Birds ate my lunch.
  – The birds fly.
  – A bird flies.
As you become aware of what sentences really mean

- Keep in mind: each nuance of meaning cannot have its own morpheme.
  - English uses the plural morpheme for (at least) two things: plural number and generic

- Decide: which nuances of meaning will be expressed by morphemes in your language and which meanings will share morphemes.

- Try not to get carried away.
How to format your sentences

1. fwele barlato
2. fwe –le bar –la –to
3. bird –gener fly –hab –pres
4. birdkind habitually flies
5. Birds fly.

sentence or phrase
morphemes
gloss each morpheme
paraphrase in English
what do we normally say in English.

gener  generic
hab  habitual
pres  present tense
Tools for formatting sentences

• There are tools that help you manage glossed sentences.
  – Automatically make a dictionary
  – Automatically fill in the gloss for a word or morpheme you have used before

• Fieldworks
  – Doesn’t work on Macs
  – Takes a long time to learn
  – Can’t see enough data on each screen
  – Can’t search fast enough

• LingSync
  – Cloud based
  – Ending in April 2017
  – Didn’t like it better than Fieldworks anyway
So we will make our own tool

- I recommend a markup language
  - \item \gloss {4}
  - \{Bawi-ne & punika & tumbas & tiang.\}
  - \{pig-def & that & ov.buy & 1\}
  - \{I bought the pig.\}

- This is Balinese, not a conlang.
- The markup language is Stanford lingmacros for LaTeX.