

# Conlang

## Course Overview

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Lori Levin

[lsl@cs.cmu.edu](mailto:lsl@cs.cmu.edu)

Alan W Black

[awb@cs.cmu.edu](mailto:awb@cs.cmu.edu)

# What are we doing here?

- There are more than 7000 real languages to learn.
- It takes 2000 hours of instruction and practice to reach a basic level in a real language.
- It takes decades to document a dying language for posterity.
- Why are we spending our time making up new ones?

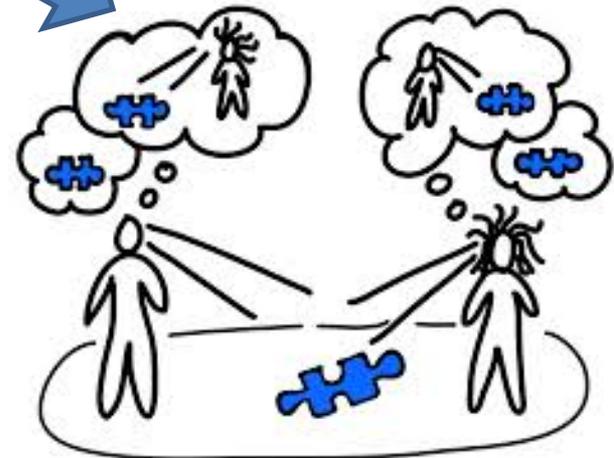
# The Universe



**Around seven seconds of  
puffed air**



Communication between sentient beings 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.



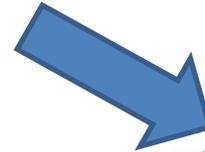
Search google images for "common ground"

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwii78KNsaTRAhUBWSYKHeprCxAQjRwIBw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.stefanomastrogiacomoinfo%2Fcommon-ground%2F&psig=AFQjCNGIgEKtGzB4SqzYI6iqQi7QyGEb8Q&ust=1483478189655154>

# The Universe



**Around seven seconds of  
puffed air**



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 you are in.



Search google images for "common ground"

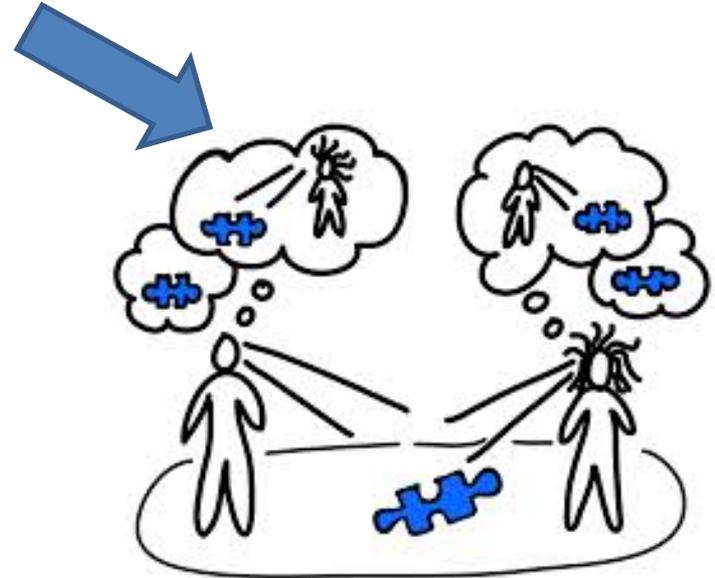
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# The Universe



Don't take anything for granted. Don't assume it has to be as it is in English.

Around seven seconds of puffed air



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<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwil78KNsaTRAhUBWSYKHeprCxAQjRwIBw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.stefanomastrogiacomoinfo%2Fcommon-ground%2F&psig=AFQjCNGIgEKtGzB4SqzYI6iqQi7QyGEb8Q&ust=1483478189655154>

# Learning objectives

- *Meta-linguistic awareness* of the types of meanings that are expressed by languages
- *Meta-linguistic awareness* of the building blocks of human language from phonetics through discourse that are used for expressing meanings
- Ability to operationalize knowledge about languages by implementing it as rules for producing speech, complex words, and conversations

# Course Requirements

- Each class:
  - Reading assignments
  - One student will prepare a ten minute briefing on a conlang or a conlanging tool
- Each week
  - A specific assignment to add to your conlang design and corpus
    - First assignment: design your world and basic feel of your language
    - Second assignment: select a set of phonemes
    - Etc.

# Course requirements

- Three language technologies assignments
  - Talking clock
    - Due in February: date to be announced
  - Morphological analyzer
    - Due in March: date to be announced
  - Chat Bot
    - Due in April: date to be announced

# Course Requirements

- Two language artifacts
  - A corpus of sentences
    - At least one hundred sentences
    - You make up these sentences to illustrate the basic vocabulary and grammar of your languages
    - Due in early March and revised continually through the semester
  - Narrative, poem, or movie scene
    - Must be performed with another person who has learned to pronounce your language
    - Due in late April

# Course requirements

- Final Portfolio
  - Corpus
  - Dictionary
  - Reference Grammar *or* Pedagogical Grammar
    - A reference grammar is a book written by linguists for linguists, describing the important properties of a language
    - A pedagogical grammar is a book written by fluent speakers for students learning the language

# Course Requirements

- January
  - Design world and culture
  - Phonemic inventory and phonotactics
- February
  - Time and/or numbers
  - Talking clock
  - Grammar and morphology
  - Hundred Sentences
- March
  - Morphological Analyzer
  - Speech Acts, non-literal language, conversation structure
  - Continue adding vocabulary and grammar
- April
  - Chatbot
  - Continue adding vocabulary and grammar
- May
  - Perform narrative, poem, song, movie scene, etc.
  - Hand in portfolio
    - Dictionary
    - Corpus
    - Reference Grammar or Pedagogical Grammar

# 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.

# Textbooks

- Books by Mark Rosenfelder ([zompist.com](http://zompist.com))
  - Language Construction Kit
  - Advanced Language Construction
  - Conlanger's Lexipedia

# First Assignment:

## Due Wednesday, January 25

- Browse the end of *The Language Construction Kit* (Rosenfelder) pages 191 to 240
  - This is an example of a reference grammar, which is what you will produce at the end of the semester (unless you produce a pedagogical grammar).
- Read *The Language Construction Kit* pages 7 to 26
- Write one to three pages about the beings who speak your language. You can focus on history, geography, landscape, or culture. Design some “hooks” for conlanging: something about them that will be reflected in their language.

# 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

- Hit a good balance on semantic decomposition:
  - Fly
    - move through air by.....
    - Air swim
  - Bird =
    - winged, feathered, warm-blooded biped
    - Sky mouse
- But don't do this for every word and every concept.

# 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.



- 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.