

Intro to the Create a Language Clinic

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INTRODUCTION

You want to create your own language? Excellent! Welcome to Language Geekdom, Brother or Sister Geek. The secret password is Skayl-sharga; the secret handshake is thumb and first three fingers in a fist, pinkie extended, hook pinkies, press knuckles together, and shake three times; and your Skayl-sharga Pin is in the mail. (No, not really.)

In fact, creating your own language is not some mind-bending exercise in complexity. It's a lot of fun. If you're a novelist or scriptwriter, an RPG gamer, game designer or DM, the master of a secret society (think Illuminati), or someone with a burning desire to be different while avoiding the pain of tattoos and body piercing, it can also be useful.

Writers and screenwriters of fantasy, science fiction, and some categories of romance (futuristic, and fantasy romance come immediately to mind) frequently find themselves in need of a language or three to add color and depth to their worlds, to present concepts that don't exist in English (or the language in which they're writing), or to add another layer of conflict to a story.

RPG gamers, DMs and game designers can use languages to embed secret warning messages into scrolls, tomb entries, and other goodies. (And frankly, from a DM perspective, telling players in your language what horrible thing is going to happen to them if they open that tempting door or ancient tome, and then watching them open the door or book anyway because they didn't

bother to read the language handout you so thoughtfully provided in the previous session, is even more fun than rolling dice for wandering monsters.)

Secret societies can use their invented languages to take over the world (I did NOT say that.)

And of course, the being-different-without-pain-and-bleeding thing is self-explanatory.

This is great stuff, creating languages. I like languages. A lot. I love creating them. And in my early days of language geekdom, I went overboard and did massive vocabularies along with everything else.

Being a full-time writer now, I don't have the time to write a new dictionary or five (because I tend to have lots of worked-out languages in each of my worlds), just so that I can use a few words and sentences at critical junctures in my novels.

So I've created a series of techniques that allow me to create unique working languages that fit the cultures and species I've developed in the least possible time. I insist that the languages I create for my stories are actual working languages, however, and not just jumbles of letters tossed into the text in the hopes that they'll look alien. Readers (and not just linguists) can tell the difference between letter salad and a foreign language, and when you finish this clinic, you'll know the difference, too.

I can add as few or as many frills to these languages as I want, from detailed written language systems to large vocabulary lists to associated pidgins, slangs, and historical antecedent languages, but I can also throw together a fully-functional language skeleton in about an hour if necessary.

When you're finished with this clinic, you'll also have built at least one working spoken language of your own – and you will also have the tools to create written languages and

invented alphabets, dictionaries that actually make sense, and other goodies to add to your language if you choose to use them. If want to go all the way with your language and create a full vocabulary so that you and your friends and family can speak in your language, well, I'll make sure you'll know how to do that, too.

But please don't take over the world.

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