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# **Enselvai: A Sketch of a Constructed Language<sup>1</sup>**

Jonathan Lipps

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<sup>1</sup> Modified from a paper written in 2003 to support a project for a course on the history of the English language at Stanford University, taught by Dr George H Brown.

## Introduction to Constructed Languages

There are about 7,000 languages currently in use around the globe, though that number has been rapidly shrinking due to onset of mass communication modalities and the need for once-isolated groups to communicate readily. From a modern perspective, this reduction is a good thing; since the days of Descartes and Leibniz, through to the more recent introduction of Esperanto by Lazarus Ludwig Zamenhof, there have been those who dream of a universal language, accessible to and learned by all. The 'miscommunication' or confusion present when confronting the language barrier, on the other hand, is seen negatively, since it stands in the way of commerce, or perhaps efficient administration of a political state.

Some view this line of thought with skepticism or unease. If the oft-oppressive steamrollers of global business or political homogenization pave the way to this linguistic utopia, what will become of the rich heritages of those, less linguistically fortunate, whose languages are slowly moved offstage, making way for an interminable *monolague*? Language and culture are inextricably intertwined, and the fervor with which some clamor for a universal tongue may simply veil a desire for a universal culture.

At the same time, no one would suggest (outside of a handful of ardent Classicists, maybe) that we artificially add languages back to the worldwide total. Languages can be constructed; but to insist that their use be adopted simply to increase linguistic diversity is absurd. Still, constructing a language is not therefore a laughable exercise. Linguistics professors might find the practice a worthy vehicle for explaining concepts, or for testing certain theories about 'natural' language. In actual fact, the field seems to be dominated rather by hobbyists or authors, who dream up fantastical tongues for the science-fiction realms which have sprouted, weed-like, in the wake of J.R.R. Tolkien's linguistically creative novels.

## Enaselvai

The motivations are not yet exhausted: I place myself in still another category, one that does not even attempt to relate a purpose for the development of a language. Constructed languages can be mere play, a joyful excursion into that most human of realms, but with a paintbrush rather than a magnifying glass. Here linguistic knowledge and exactness are beneficial, as a wide variety of brush styles are to a painter, but by no means necessary. Reflection on the workings of one's mother tongue provides the essential tools, however unlikely alone to produce a work of genius.

I fancy that when some artists look at a blank canvas sitting on the easel, the white square expands to become, for a time, the complete reality in which the artist works. Faced god-like with the moment of creation, there is an expectation and an exhilaration as the first broad strokes are made. With language it is the same—the first word to be written is the seed of another world, holding within it a thousand possibilities, each one in turn being solidified as a grammatical rule is hypothesized, or a declension imagined. Then, the first complete sentence forms fresh tracks in a silent, snowy landscape, where all is pristine, unsullied as yet by the vagaries of use and the requirements of practical communication. A language is formed, we can even say with artistic innocence, which

has not been used for power gains or to oppress the poor. Of course, it may be completely useless for all that, or nigh unpronounceable—but it can still be beautiful.

That beauty, ultimately, was my only aim when beginning to work on the constructed language Enaselvai, in 1999. And indeed, though I was then without, and still lack, extensive formal training in linguistics, the first forays into that unformed philological world were rapturous. They were, as one would expected, *more* rapturous than the subsequent, smaller modifications and additions made as time went on: the tenth word to be dreamed up was infinitely grander than the thousandth. Accordingly, the years have passed with the only additions to the lexicon being made whenever inspiration struck. It is time, however, to set forth some of the larger structures of the language, in an attempt to define it in a basic linguistic fashion and make the art of it, though incomplete like Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia*, available.

What follows is my attempt to briefly sketch, as exactly as I can with the linguistic knowledge I've accrued by accident over the years, the various facets of the Enaselvai language. Subsequent to this examination, I will provide a tiny subset of the lexicon, which has been used to form an example text in the language. This is the 'Babel Text' (from the biblical book of Genesis), which has come to be accepted as a standard, proof-of-concept first translation for constructed languages by enthusiasts. Finally, I'll say a few words about the Enaselvai writing system, and show an example of its use. (I will not, however, go into any detail there, because the writing system is for purely ornamental purposes and therefore clumsy).

Now, to the language.

## Enaselvai Phonology

Enaselvai has 21 basic sounds. They are as follows:

### Vowels:

*a* - as in 'father'

*e* - as in 'bed'

*i* - as in 'sit'

*o* - as in 'open'

*u* - as in 'true'

### Consonants:

*l* - as in 'melon'

*s* - as in 'song'

*r* - un-rounded and flapped, as in Spanish 'para'

*d* - voiced, with slight friction, like 'th' in 'the'

*w* - aspirated, as in 'where'

*v* - as in 'very'

*f* - as in 'father'

*p* - not aspirated, as in Spanish 'para'

*n* - as in 'no'

*m* - as in 'melon'

c - always hard, as in 'cut'  
 g - always hard, as in 'go'  
 y - intervocalic, as in 'you'  
 t - not aspirated, as in Spanish 'tema'  
 th - unvoiced, as in 'path'

The 21st sound is [h], which is never transcribed. All the vowels, it should be noted, are short vowels, and should be pronounced as in Spanish.

With regards to phonotactics, the only prohibitions are \*VVV and \*CCCC. In practice, CCC is extremely rare. Most words are simply ...(V)CVCV(C)... It is also the case that VV cannot occur, where V is the same vowel in both cases.

However, a word might begin with an initial V which is the same as the final V in the preceding word. It is in this instance that the sound [h] is inserted in pronunciation, much like the rule for pronouncing final *t* in French, to avoid a glottal stop.

Otherwise, VV occurs quite frequently, and in each case is to be pronounced as a glide. Clusters beginning with *i* therefore sound like they begin with *y*, and those beginning with *u* as though they begin with *w*.

Sometimes it is desirable to separate an occurrence of VV into two distinct syllables, so that it is not a glide. In this case, the diaeresis (¨) mark is used. To separate a diphthong beginning in *a*, *e*, or *o*, the mark is conventionally placed over the second vowel, as in *aë*, *eï*, *oä*. For diphthongs beginning in *i* or *u*, the mark should fall on the first vowel, for example *ïo*, *üa*.

The accentuation of Enselvai words is simple. Enselvai uses stress-based accentuation, and the accent is always placed on the penultimate syllable of the *root* form of a word (or the *ultima*, if the word is just one syllable). Knowing the root form is important: if a word has a one-syllable suffix added, the accentuation is 'persistent', and the accent is on the antepenult. For example, the word *edicavei* [help] is, with the accent optionally specified, *edicávei*. On the other hand, *edicaveima* [help me] is pronounced *edicáveima*. (But note that, as in classical Greek, the accent cannot be further away from the end of the word than the antepenult).

## Enselvai Syntax

The greatest difficulty posed by Enselvai syntax is the word order. Since Enselvai is an uninflected language, word order is of paramount importance. While English is basically SVO (Subject-Verb-Object), Enselvai is VSO (Verb-Subject-Object). Therefore, in the sentence *Silsi parto cim* [The man made a ring], *silsi* [he made] is the verb, *parto* [the man] is the subject, and *cim* [ring, a ring] is the object.

The VSO scheme describes the broad structure of a sentence. Of course, each part can be complex. There might be both a direct and an indirect object, for example, in which case the indirect object follows the direct object. Or, the subject might be a compound phrase, such as *parto statuvin tela* [the man standing over there]. In each case, the modifiers for a verb or noun will be as close as possible to the verb or noun. Thus: *Silsi parto statuvin tela cim* [The man standing over there made a ring].

Adverbs precede the verbs they modify. So in the sentence, *Celerat dramedi* [She runs quickly], the adverb *celerat* comes first.

Adjectives, similarly to Spanish, directly follow the nouns they modify. Example: *Silsi parto anon statuvin tela cim* [The strong man standing over there made a ring]. Adjectives have some loose agreement rules, which will be discussed under the Morphology section.

In English, prepositional phrases tend to come after the direct object of a sentence. In Enaselvai, the reverse is true. Example: *Gaedra serc thelasato espere* [I kissed a girl by the sea]. Here, *serc thelasato* [by the sea] precedes *espere* [a girl].

### Enaselvai Morphology: Verbs

Verbs are the heart of Enaselvai, and their privileged status is only accented by their position at the head of a sentence. There are two different verb conjugations (the First and Second) in use, which I will detail here. A verb in either conjugation can be inflected according to the dimensions of person, number, tense, voice, and mood. There are three persons (1st, 2nd, and 3rd), two numbers (singular and plural), seven tenses (the Present, Perfect, Imperfect, Simple Past, Pluperfect, Future, and Future Perfect), two voices (active and passive), and three moods (indicative, subjunctive, and imperative). A verb can also be in its infinitive form, which lacks the above distinctions.

Before I lay out the conjugation schemes, let us take a look at some useful preliminary information.

The Personal Endings, which are used in both conjugations, are as follows:

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
<u>1st Person</u> -a	-ae	
<u>2nd Person</u>	-u	-ue
<u>3rd Person</u>	-i	-ie

Many features of Enaselvai verbs, some which go beyond the grammatical categories listed above, are indicated via a verb prefix, which in writing is followed by an apostrophe ('). The verb prefixes are as follows:

- Conditional protasis prefix** - *le'*
- Conditional apodosis prefix** - *lea'*
- Reflexive prefix** - *se'*
- Subjunctive prefix** - *te'*
- Perfect prefix** - *la'*

At times, more than one prefix might need to be used simultaneously. In that case, the above list gives the precedence of the prefixes. For example, *Le'la'nuvie...* [If they have begun...].

Finally, we must mention two other particles: the **Imperfect Modifier**, which is an infix, *-an-*, and the **Passive Modifier**, which is also an infix, *-n-*.

Now to the First Conjugation. The dictionary form of the verbs in this class always ends in *-v-r*, *-y-r*, or *-w-r*, and is in fact the infinitive form. The entire verb without these last three characters is called the *stem*. The first character after the stem (i.e., *v*, *y*, *w*) is called the *theme consonant*. There are actually nine theme consonants—three for each tense scheme (past, present, and future). Each of the seven tenses actually uses a verb form from one of those three schemes. The following table gives the theme consonants for each tense scheme:

<u>Present</u>	<u>Past</u>	<u>Future</u>
-y	-m	-f
-v	-s	-t
-w	-l	-r

So, a verb like *vianwar* [to educate, teach] has three ‘principal parts’ depending on the tense scheme: *vianwar*, *vianlar*, *vianrar*. (So *vianlar* is the ‘2nd principal part’ of the verb *vianwar*). Notice that the *-a-* after the theme consonant is unchanged. These forms are used to conjugate the various tenses. Let us examine each in turn. I will use a variety of verbs to illustrate the different theme consonant sets.

### Present Tense (Present)

Active: *stem + theme consonant + personal endings*

Passive: *1st principal part + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>vianwar</i> [to train]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>vianwa</i>	<i>vianwae</i>	<i>vianwara</i>	<i>vianwarae</i>
<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>vianwu</i>	<i>vianwue</i>	<i>vianwaru</i>	<i>vianwarue</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>vianwi</i>	<i>vianwie</i>	<i>vianwari</i>	<i>vianwarie</i>

### Perfect Tense (Present)

Active: *perfect prefix + stem + theme consonant + personal endings*

Passive: *perfect prefix + 1st principal part + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>morwer</i> [to kill]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>la'morwa</i>	<i>la'morwae</i>	<i>la'morwera</i>	<i>la'morwerae</i>
<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>la'morwu</i>	<i>la'morwue</i>	<i>la'morweru</i>	<i>la'morwerue</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>la'morwi</i>	<i>la'morwie</i>	<i>la'morweri</i>	<i>la'morwerie</i>

### Imperfect Tense (Past)

Active: *stem + theme consonant + imperfect modifier + personal endings*

Passive: *2nd principal part + imperfect modifier + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>telwar</i> [to shout]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>tellana</i>	<i>tellanae</i>	<i>tellarana</i>	<i>tellaranae</i>

<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>tellanu</i>	<i>tellanue</i>	<i>tellaranu</i>	<i>teallaranue</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>tellani</i>	<i>tellanie</i>	<i>tellarani</i>	<i>tellaranie</i>

**Simple Past Tense (Past)**Active: *stem + theme consonant + personal endings*Passive: *2nd principal part + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>silver</i> [to do]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>silsa</i>	<i>silsae</i>	<i>silsera</i>	<i>silserae</i>
<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>silsu</i>	<i>silsue</i>	<i>silseru</i>	<i>silserue</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>silsi</i>	<i>silsie</i>	<i>silseri</i>	<i>silserie</i>

**Pluperfect Tense (Past)**Active: *perfect prefix + stem + theme consonant + personal endings*Passive: *perfect prefix + 2nd principal part + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>divor</i> [to eat]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>la'disa</i>	<i>la'disae</i>	<i>la'disora</i>	<i>la'disorae</i>
<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>la'disu</i>	<i>la'disue</i>	<i>la'disoru</i>	<i>la'disorue</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>la'disi</i>	<i>la'disie</i>	<i>la'disori</i>	<i>la'disorie</i>

**Future Tense (Future)**Active: *stem + theme consonant + personal endings*Passive: *3rd principal part + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>vuyer</i> [to see]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>vufa</i>	<i>vufae</i>	<i>vufera</i>	<i>vuferae</i>
<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>vufu</i>	<i>vufue</i>	<i>vuferu</i>	<i>vuferie</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>vufi</i>	<i>vufie</i>	<i>vuferi</i>	<i>vuferie</i>

**Future Perfect Tense (Future)**Active: *perfect prefix + stem + theme consonant + personal endings*Passive: *perfect prefix + 3rd principal part + personal endings*

	<b>Active</b>		<b>Passive</b>	
<i>savor</i> [to allow]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st Person</b>	<i>la'sata</i>	<i>la'satae</i>	<i>la'satora</i>	<i>la'satorae</i>
<b>2nd Person</b>	<i>la'satu</i>	<i>la'satue</i>	<i>la'satoru</i>	<i>la'satorue</i>
<b>3rd Person</b>	<i>la'sati</i>	<i>la'satie</i>	<i>la'satori</i>	<i>la'satorie</i>

All of the First Conjugation verbs follow these rules without exception.

Now, on to the Second Conjugation. Like First Conjugation verbs, these have three principal parts, and it is the 1st principal part which is the dictionary form of the verb. This principal part, for Second Conjugation verbs, always ends in *-d*. The verb *athed* [clean], however, is *not* the infinitive form. Thus, the principal parts of Second



Conjugation verbs are typically written like *athed-*, *athedr-*, *athedl-*, to show their incompleteness. The infinitive form adds *-um* to the 1st principal part, thus *athedum* [to clean].

The stem of a Second Conjugation verb is the 1st principal part without the final *-d*. Then, for *athed*, we can see the schema for each of the three principal parts—the verb ends in *-d-*, *-dr-*, *-dl-*, respectively. In this conjugation, there is just one set of these ‘theme sounds’.

Finally, while the verb prefixes remain the same, the imperfect modifier becomes *-n* for Second Conjugation verbs.

There should be no need for complete examples for each tense, but I will give the schemas along with one example each:

### **Present Tense (Present)**

Active: *1st principal part + personal endings*. Example: *saeda* [I go]

Passive: *stem + passive modifier + theme sound + personal endings*. Example: *nectandie* [They are owed]

### **Perfect Tense (Present)**

Active: *perfect prefix + 1st principal part + personal endings*. Example: *la'saeda* [I had gone]

Passive: *perfect prefix + stem + passive modifier + theme sound + personal endings*.  
Example: *la'nectandie* [They had been owed]

### **Imperfect Tense (Past)**

Active: *2nd principal part + imperfect modifier + personal endings*. Example: *saedrana* [I was going]

Passive: *stem + passive modifier + theme sound + imperfect modifier + personal endings*.  
Example: *mendrani* [it was being used]

### **Simple Past Tense (Past)**

Active: *2nd principal part + personal endings*. Example: *saedra* [I went]

Passive: *stem + passive modifier + theme sound + personal endings*. Example: *mendri* [it was used]

### **Past Perfect Tense (Past)**

Active: *perfect prefix + 2nd principal part + personal endings*. Example: *la'saedra* [I had gone]

Passive: *perfect prefix + stem + passive modifier + theme sound + personal endings*.  
Example: *la'mendri* [it had been used]

### **Future Tense (Future)**

Active: *2nd principal part + personal endings*. Example: *saedla* [I will go]

Passive: *stem + passive modifier + theme sound + personal endings*. Example: *mendli* [it will be used]

**Future Perfect Tense (Future)**

Active: *perfect prefix + 3rd principal part + personal endings*. Example: *la'saedla* [I will have gone]

Passive: *perfect prefix + stem + passive modifier + theme sound + personal endings*.  
Example: *la'mendli* [it will have been used]

All the examples given so far have been in the indicative mood. It is also possible to form commands in Enaselvai, thus utilizing the imperative mood. Each of the conjugations has a specific way of forming commands:

For second-person commands, both singular and plural, First Conjugation verbs follow the pattern: *stem + 1st principal part theme consonant + -ei*. For example: *Silvei!* [Do!]. The third person imperative (again both singular and plural) is *-eo*, as in *Silveo!* [Let it/them be done!].

Second Conjugation verbs simply add *-ei* or *-eo* to the 1st principal part to form the imperative. Thus: *Athedei!* [Clean!] and *Athedeo!* [Let it/them be cleaned!]

Note that the first person imperative, strictly speaking, does not exist in Enaselvai. Instead, to make exhortations, the future tense is used. For example, *Saedlae!* [Let's go!]

The subjunctive mood is indicated by the presence of the subjunctive prefix *te'*. Any finite verb form can be made subjunctive in this way. The subjunctive's use parallels that in Spanish and other Romance languages, for instance in purposes clauses, with verbs of wishing, hoping, etc... Example: *Tumada celerat te'erivi* [I hope he/she comes quickly].

Similarly, any finite verb may be made reflexive using the prefix *se'*. Reflexivity in Enaselvai refers only to those cases where the subject and the direct object are the same. Example: *Se'morli* [He killed himself].

The two conditional prefixes are used the form *if...then* clauses. The main verb in the 'if' clause I call the *protasis*, and the main verb in the 'then' clause the *apodosis*. The *protasis* takes the prefix *le'*, and the *apodosis* the prefix *lea'*. Thus the two halves are distinguished morphologically. Example: *Le'edicavuma lea'edicavamu* [If you help me, I'll help you]. Notice that even the *apodosis* in this example is rendered in the present tense—it is acceptable to use either the present or the future tense in Enaselvai, whereas the same case in English requires the future tense.

Finally, we must mention infinitives. As in many Indo-European languages, infinitives are used when verbs take other verbs as complements. *Desilya saedum* [I want to go], for example, has *saedum* [to go] in the infinitive. Infinitives are also used when the verb is treated as a noun, that is when it refers to the conceptual action of a verb. Example: *Vi morwer naivan* [Killing is bad].

**Enaselvai Morphology: Nouns**

Nouns in Enaselvai are very simple. Nouns have no gender, and only two cases (the 'definite' and 'indefinite' cases). Of course, they retain the distinction between singular and plural. Nouns may end in any vowel or consonant, but it is useful to note that nouns derived from verbs typically end in a vowel.

The standard lexical form (the ‘dictionary form’) of a noun is considered to be singular and indefinite. Plurality and definiteness are denoted by suffixes, which may be combined. With just these two suffixes and their contraction, we can exhaust all the possible inflections of Enaselvai nouns.

The plural suffix for nouns is *-th*. Thus the noun *espere* [woman] may be pluralized as *espereth* [women]. If the noun ends in a consonant, the suffix is *-ith*. So *par* [man] becomes *parith* [men].

The definite suffix is *-to*. The presence of *-to* is analogous to using the definite article ‘the’ in English. (Without it, a word is considered to be general, indefinite, or referring only to one entity). Example: *parto* [the man] vs *par* [man, a man].

If a noun should be both plural and definite, the suffix is *-sto* (or *-isto* if the noun ends in a consonant). This form is simply *-thto* modified for phonological reasons. Thus, we can form the sentence: *Erivie esperesto* [The women are coming]. Remember, as a remark on pronunciation, that adding any of these suffixes does not change the accented syllable, so *esperesto*, with the accent shown, is *espéresto*—the accent has ‘persisted,’ and falls on the antepenult.

### **Enaselvai Morphology: Adjectives and Adverbs**

Adjectives in Enaselvai have very little morphological character. Most adjectives derived from verbs end in *-n*, but there is no requirement that they do so. Adjectives, as has already been mentioned, follow the nouns they modify directly, and must agree with them in number. The dictionary form of an adjective is singular, and the plural suffix is the same as for the nouns: *-th* / *-ith*. Example: *esperesto vanith* [the good women].

Adjectives do not have to agree with nouns in terms of definiteness.

Adverbs have no morphology to speak of. It should simply be noted that most adverbs, due to their derivation, end in *-t*.

### **Enaselvai Morphology: Participles**

Participles are verbal nouns or adjectives. They can be formed very usefully from any finite verb. Since plurality will be indicated in the verb being modified via the person, there is no need for the participle to take the plural suffix. If it is being used substantively, however (as happens frequently in classical Greek), it should observe the rules for the definite suffix.

Example 1: *Macset respasie paristo thanodien* [The dying men breathed deeply]. In this example, *thanodien* is the (adjectival) participle, from the verb *thanod-* and the finite form *thanodie* [they are dying]. Notice that the present tense has been used, as is the case for all participle forms.

Example 2: *Macset respasie thanodiento* [The dying ones breathed deeply]. Here we can see the participle acting as a noun, representing ‘the dying ones,’ and making use of the definite suffix.

## Other Grammatical Notes

Some other features of the language, which do not fall strictly into the above linguistic categories, but are more important than bare vocabulary, are outlined briefly here.

**The Personal Pronouns:** Enaselvai has 8 personal pronouns, and they correspond very closely to their English equivalents (but Enaselvai does distinguish between 2nd person singular and plural):

*ma* [I], *mu* [you (s)], *mi* [he], *li* [she], *ni* [it], *mae* [we], *we* [you (pl)], *ye* [they]

Note that, while not an inflected language with regards to a grammatical gender, the personal pronouns do allow specification of the gender of animate subjects.

**Pronouns and the Direct Object:** When pronouns are used as direct objects, they can be appended to the verb that governs them. So, instead of writing *Edicavei ma* [Help me], we write *Edicaveima* [Help me].

**Possession:** Possession is indicated by the use of the preposition *em* (of, or belonging to a person or agent). ‘Of’ in general is translated, not by *em* but by *en*. *Em*, therefore, is used for personal possession. If used with the personal pronouns, it is usually conjoined (and in most cases contracted):

*ema* [my], *emu* [your], *emi* [his], *emli* [her], *emni* [its]  
*emae* [our], *emwe* [your (pl)], *emye* [their]

This compound can even be treated as a suffix. For example, *cir em ma* [my ring] can be written simply as *cirema* [my ring].

**Affirmation and Denial:** To respond affirmatively to a statement or a question, use *ei* [yes]. The opposite is *nai* [no]. It’s important to note that *ei* [yes] is used when the statement was correct, even if it was negative. So a question like “Didn’t you go to the store today?” would receive the response *ei* [yes] if I did *not* go to the store.

**Numbers:** Numbers are formed by stringing together numerals in base ten, joined with *-e-*. Thus, in *munedaremonetir* [4,247], *mun* is 4000, *dar* is 200, *mon* is 400, and *tir* is 7. (The rest of the basic numbers can be found in the dictionary.) Ordinalization is simple—just add *-es*. So *cir* [one] becomes *cires* [first].

**Conversivity:** Verbs can be made conversive (i.e., the action mutually affects or benefits the subjects) by adding the suffix *-se*. Example: *Edicasie* [they helped] becomes *Edicasiese* [they helped one another].

Let that suffice, therefore, for a brief introduction to Enaselvai grammar.

## Babel Text Lexicon

Here, in order to give a sample of the Enaselvai lexicon, is a list of all the 65 words that will be used in the Babel Text translation in the next section:

<i>ad</i>	for ( <i>ad</i> is a special particle denoting self-advantage)
<i>alen</i>	all, whole
<i>alten</i>	high, tall
<i>apo</i>	then
<i>arneriver</i>	to descend
<i>arnsaed</i>	to go down, descend
<i>asilan</i>	east
<i>aud</i>	to stop
<i>cam</i>	upon, on, across
<i>camnulayur</i>	to confuse
<i>cele</i>	stone
<i>cena</i>	which
<i>cir</i>	one
<i>comuve</i>	word, speech
<i>comuver</i>	to speak
<i>conad</i>	to plan
<i>descavor</i>	to discover
<i>disemed</i>	to scatter
<i>duel</i>	city
<i>eän</i>	with
<i>eära</i>	world
<i>ec</i>	now (introductory particle, not in the temporal sense)
<i>eco</i>	but
<i>ele</i>	this
<i>em</i>	of (possessive)
<i>en</i>	in, of
<i>ethnun</i>	race, people
<i>felon</i>	instead of
<i>ilaevar</i>	to understand
<i>incelu</i>	together, in common
<i>lad</i>	to say
<i>lairevar</i>	to burn, bake
<i>lamved</i>	to call, name
<i>las</i>	therefore
<i>ler</i>	in order to, so that
<i>lige</i>	glue
<i>los</i>	because
<i>med</i>	to use
<i>na</i>	and
<i>nuver</i>	to begin
<i>oltoyen</i>	impossible
<i>orthan</i>	sticky stuff (tar)
<i>panet</i>	completely, thoroughly
<i>par</i>	man
<i>rei</i>	by
<i>reservor</i>	to move
<i>roan</i>	plain

<i>secai</i>	star
<i>seled</i>	to build
<i>selendrin</i>	tower, building
<i>silver</i>	to do, make
<i>simil</i>	like, same
<i>staver</i>	to live, dwell
<i>taroc</i>	brick
<i>tela</i>	there, in that place
<i>telyer</i>	to have
<i>teron</i>	language, tongue
<i>tuwor</i>	to know
<i>unai</i>	no, not
<i>unailon</i>	nothing
<i>vanor</i>	god
<i>ver</i>	to be
<i>vuyer</i>	to see
<i>weth</i>	as, as though
<i>ye</i>	they

## Translation: The Babel Text

The familiar Babel Text, found in Genesis 11:1-9, is a rich yet curious story of humanity's attempt to perform a marvelous feat of engineering. God, apparently, is not happy with their progress and decides to humble them. It is very telling, given my comments earlier, that humanity's 'secret weapon' in the story is a universal language of the kind I described in the introduction to this paper. What statement the story is making about universal language is of course impossible to determine exactly, but at the least, the theme shows the appropriateness of this text for translation into a constructed language like Enaselvai.

Below is the translated text, verse by verse. With the aid of the lexicon fragment in the previous section, translation back into English should be straightforward. I have put the uninflected forms of verbs in brackets for clarification, and included the entire verse in English as well. The translation, incidentally, was done, given my own familiarity with Greek rather than Hebrew, from the Septuagint.

1. **Ec telsi eärato alen teron cir na comuve incelu.** [*Now, the whole world had one language and a common speech.*]
2. **Descasie** [descavor] **parith reservien** [reservor] **asilan roan en Sainar na stasie** [staver] **tela.** [*As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.*]
3. **Ladriese** [lad], **"Siltae** [silver] **tarocith na panet lairetaeye** [lairevar]."  
**Medrie** [med] **tarocith felon celeth, na medrie orthanith weth lige.**  
[*They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.*]
4. **Apo ladrie** [lad], **"Seledlae** [seled] **ad duel eän selendrin vin** [ver] **alten simil secaisto, ler te'turorae** [tuwor] **na unaï te'disemendlae** [disemed] **cam eärato alen."** [*Then they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."*]
5. **Eco arnerisi** [arneriver] **vuyer Vanor duelo na selendrinto alten cena selendrani** [seled] **rei paristo.** [*But God came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.*]
6. **Ladri** [lad] **Vanor, "Le'la'nuvie** [nuver] **silver weth ethnun cir comuvin** [comuver] **teronto simil ele, lea'ti** [ver] **unailon cena te'conandi** [conad] **silver rei ye oltoyen.** [*God said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.*]

7. **Arnsaedlae** [arnsaed] **na camnulafae** [camnulayur] **teronto emye ler unai te'ilaeviese** [ilaevur].” [*Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.*”]
8. **Apo disemedriye** [disemed] **Vanor est tela cam eärato alen, na audie** [aud] **seled duelo.** [*So God scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.*]
9. **Las lamvendri** [lamved] **Vavel los camnulami** [camnulayur] **Vanor tela teronisto em ethnunith alenith. Disemedriye** [disemed] **est tela cam eärato alen.** [*That is why it was called Babel—because there God confused the language of the whole world. From there God scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*]



## **The Writing System**

Enselvai, while it can, and normally does, use the Latin alphabet, has an ornamental or 'formal' script of its own. There is little reason to detail the working of the script here, but I will reproduce the Babel Text in that script without explanation, just to give some idea of it:



are currently about 1,000 words). Many of the words, as should be apparent from the examples, have some obvious derivation or other, from the (primarily Indo-European) languages I've studied. Having 'grown up', linguistically speaking, in that tradition, I suppose it is only natural that my 'basic' linguistic forms for words—those forms I have tried to capture aesthetically via Enaselvai—sound very Indo-European themselves. Greek and Latin influences are just the most apparent, no doubt due to the 'elevated' connotation those roots have for many Anglophones.

At the end of the day, Enaselvai will probably never have a single speaker. When it comes to creating words for every-day use, and ensuring that the language be actually speakable, motivation is certainly lacking. While I value linguistic precision to the extent I can, given what I know of the science, that precision, for me, only serves to make the art more artful—not more useful.

I do not expect that this paper will generate interest in learning or speaking Enaselvai. Rather, I hope that the description given here will inspire thinking about philology in general, about the limitless potential of words, and about how the language faculty truly is a marvelous and indispensable part of our existence. Finally, I hope that it will add to the evidence that *play* is possible in language, not just with words and phrases, but with the large linguistic structures themselves. This recreation gives rise to the realization that language, in a real sense, is not just humanity's greatest and most innovative tool, but also, as can be seen in the glorious details of all the world's languages (natural or otherwise), one of our most lasting forms of art.