Fiat Lingua

Title: An Essay on Naturalism in Conlangs

Author: Jeffrey R. Brown

MS Date: 10-09-2017

FL Date: 11-01-2017

FL Number: FL-00004A-00

Citation: Brown, Jeffrey R. 2017. "An Essay on Naturalism
in Conlangs" FL-00004A-00, *Fiat Lingua*,
<http://fiatlingua.org>. Web. 01 November
2017.

An Essay on Naturalism in Conlangs

Jeffrey Brown   (October 2017)

Overview

Too busy to read the entire paper? Here it is in one paragraph:

(1)   It is important to think about the intended audience of your conlang.
(2)   A polished conworld is a necessary part of a naturalistic conlang.
(3)   To produce a truly naturalistic conlang, all three aspects of the conlang must be tightly integrated with the conworld:
  (i)   Phonology
  (ii)   Lexicon
  (iii)   Grammar

Prologue

This paper is about naturalistic conlangs. What is meant by naturalistic is, "similar to a natural language." Of course, that is a matter of degree. How similar does a conlang have to be, to be called naturalistic? There is no standard.

Not every conlang is created to be naturalistic. Some are engineered to push the envelope: Can there be a language with no verbs? What would a language be like that maximized cogency and minimized ambiguity and illogicalness? Some are created to appeal to a large, or worldwide, audience as auxiliary languages: How should a language be constructed to maximize ease of learning and ease of pronounceability, and garner wide support? And a few are made to reify the unseen realms of one's heart; or as cathartic escapes from abusive relationships, a safe place to which to retreat from the tribulations of one's real life.

Naturalistic conlangs, though, are constructed as conceits of pure imagination. Often they are accompanied by rich fantasy worlds, with descriptions of imagined human (or humanoid)

cultures. That's what this paper deals with.

"You always write for an audience"

As a writer of fiction, I have learned quite a few lessons about writing for an audience. In one creative writing class, on the first day, the instructor asked, "Whom do you write for?"[1] Many of the students said, "I write for myself."

The instructor said, after polling the students, "You always write for an audience. If you are extremely lucky, about one quarter of your intended audience will read your novel. If you write for yourself, your audience is *you*. It's unlikely that anyone else will ever want to read your book, unless it's your mother or your husband or your wife."

A tremor of surprise rippled through the students. You could all but hear them thinking, "But… we're artists! Of course we write for ourselves, of course we have to create as our inner muse commands."

But the instructor was right. If you write for yourself, then you're writing a personal diary, even if it's a diary full of fiction. No future historian will ever read it; rather, your heirs will toss it away into the garbage dumpster, and it will be consigned to the detritus of the landfill, or the graveyard of the internet.

If you want something you create to be appreciated, whether visual art, music, poetry, literature, or a created language, then you ought to first ask yourself, "How can I create this work of art so that others will enjoy it? Who is my intended audience? What do they like?"

I know that some of you, who are reading this now, will reject this. You are doubtlessly thinking that great artists have frequently created art that was unappreciated by the hoi polloi, and yet those unappreciated artists are today held up as models who, through their perseverance,

---

[1] He probably didn't use "whom" – but I can't help it.

have achieved a well-merited success. But, those individuals are rare indeed. Even Shakespeare was concerned about how to fill the seats in the Globe Theatre. And those unappreciated artists who today are considered great, such as William Blake, were not discovered until years after their deaths. How many others' fine works disintegrated to dust in the unvisited stacks of libraries?

So, really, take a moment or two, right now, and ask yourself, "Who is the intended audience for my conlang?" The most reasonable answer, in my opinion, is, "Other conlangers," for who, but other practitioners of the art of conlanging, could ever appreciate your efforts, would ever take the time to read your grammar, to skim through your lexicon, to voice aloud your phonology, to puzzle through, word by phrase, your translation of the Babel Myth?

And most conlangers today are artlangers. They want a conlang to sound and feel naturalistic. They also want a well-developed conworld in which the fictive speakers of the language live and love and fight and die.

So, let's get to it.[2]

Bespoke Conlangs

There is an exception to the rule that the intended audience of a conlang is composed of other conlangers (if it is indeed anyone besides the author). That is a bespoke conlang. If you are the fortunate recipient of a contract under which you create a conlang as a work-for-hire, perhaps for a movie or a TV series, perhaps for a video game or a stage production, then you already know who your audience is. It's those people who signed that contract on the other line.

---

[2] Some of you may now be sardonically asking, "Who is *your* audience for this paper, you who claim that the intended audience must always be considered?" The answer is newer or younger or inexperienced conlangers. Those artlangers who've been conlanging for decades have already thought about all the things I'm going to mention in this essay. I'm writing down my thoughts and opinions here, however, so that those ideas are compiled together in a single place. In addition, I do have a somewhat different perspective on how the relationship between grammar and culture may be exploited to improve the naturalism of a conlang.

In this case, your job is simpler.[3] You create what they want. A language for nomadic, horse-mounted, violent barbarians? A language for space-faring warriors who prefer the honor of death over capture? A language that can be communicated through the semaphores of various masks? Whatever. Your "audience" – that is, your employers – tell you what they want.

This paper is not for you.

The Importance of Worldbuilding: Environment and Culture

Natural languages don't exist in a vacuum. People speak them. And those people have a culture.

To make a created language really come alive, you have to envision the people who speak it, the environment where they live, and how they interact with each other.[4] A major difficulty with this approach is that the creation of a fictive culture requires a great deal of time – even more time than creating a fully developed conlang. Where do the people live? In a jungle, on a prairie, on an island, in the mountains, in caves? What sort of flora and fauna surround them? Are there any predators or poisonous plants? What do they eat? Are they hunter-gatherers? Are they agrarian? How is the food prepared? In what sort of dwellings do they live? How are those dwellings constructed? Is it an individual, or family, or collective effort to build them? Are they nomadic? Do they live in villages? How large are the villages? Merely a single extended family, or bigger? Or maybe they live in cities? What form of economy do they have?

---

[3] Or possibly harder, depending on what sort of relationship you have with your employers.

[4] You will note that I am ignoring "xenolangs," those conlangs spoken by non-humans. I have never met any aliens, as far as I am aware, and I have no idea how they might communicate, neither physiologically nor cognitively. Most fictive non-humans, such as elves, dwarfs, or the beings who live on Pandora, are "humans in disguise." They are humanoid in appearance, they have human emotions so that they can evoke empathy from the audience, etc. An alien that looked like a giant cockroach and communicated like a cricket by rubbing its legs together, and whose favorite food was mammalian excrement, would not evoke the same sympathetic feelings. Who would even want to communicate with a giant disgusting bug? Once again, this ultimately is an issue of considering who is the intended audience for your language.

Bartering? Sharing? Buying and selling? How about marriage? Is it monogamous or polygamous, arranged or romantic? What are the marriage ceremonies like? What religious or spiritual beliefs do they have? Is there a special class of religious figures or clergy? How is the tribe or clan or city or nation organized? Is there a single leader, like a king? A hereditary council? A senate of elected representatives? What sort of morality does the culture hold up as a standard? Total honesty? The occasional white lie? Anything you can get away with without discovery? How are people punished who transgress? How are the sick or injured diagnosed and treated? What sort of funeral ceremonies do they have? How do they dispose of the bodies of the deceased? How do they react to foreigners? With welcome and kindness? Or do they enslave or kill them?

The questions go on and on. You could easily take a decade to create a fully developed conculture. The conlang is only one single aspect of the conculture. It may be the aspect on which you are concentrating your efforts, but without the other aspects of the culture to ground it, it is like a blind explorer without a compass.

To draw a comparison to fiction, the characters in most good novels have extensive backstories. The authors create these to help in the development of the characters and give them more depth. Much of that backstory never appears in the novel, but if it is needed, there is a treasure trove from which the author can draw for flashbacks or dialogue.

In a similar sense, developing a conculture for a conlang gives the language a realistic feeling. As an example, let us say that a young hunter comes across a young woman in the forest whom he does not know. He is attracted to her. What does he say? Can he even speak to her if he hasn't been introduced? If so, must he be formal in his speech? Can he presume that she is an equal? Or might she be of a lower or higher social rank or caste? Can the woman respond in the

same fashion? Or is there a difference in how one speaks based on the sex of the speaker and of the listener, or on other factors?

How can you even begin to write the first line of that dialogue if you can't answer those questions? And if you can't write a meaningful dialog, in as simple a social situation as that one, then how can your language ever feel naturalistic?

Using a "Ready-made" Fantasy World

One solution is to use as a fantasy world one that already exists. *Here is a completely novel idea:* Let's use a known culture, one that existed in the past, and with which the readers of the intended audience are familiar. If those readers are European, let's base it on the middle ages. There could be hereditary kings who rule over their subjects and to whom knights pledge their allegiance. People could fight with medieval weapons such as swords or bows or axes or catapults, as gunpowder has not yet been discovered. The world could be divided into regions or kingdoms, populated with slightly different cultures: perhaps a peaceful and pastoral hamlet, an extensive prairie over which horsemen keep the peace, a group of troglodytes renowned for their metalsmithy, and an evil place despoiled by black magic.

It sounds vaguely familiar, doesn't it? And consider how those readers had prior knowledge of the legends of King Arthur, as well as of the historical middle-ages in Europe, and how, therefore, Tolkien had to do relatively little worldbuilding. He didn't have to explain primogeniture, for example, nor what a coat of mail was, nor, even more basically, what an inn was for. How many pages would have been required to develop the same level of detail and familiarity if Tolkien's fictive world was entirely novel? What would have happened to the storyline? Would the plot have been buried under tedious explanation?

Either way, whether you use a "ready-made" fantasy world, or create your own *ex nihilo*,

it is this imagined realm, and the story of the characters who populate it, that will capture the imagination of your readers – that is, of your intended audience. Without a conworld in which to breathe, a conlang is an isolated and lonely creature, which cannot easily come alive in the minds of the audience.

Phonological Naturalism and Phonaesthetics

I am not going to say much about phonology. Others have written extensively about this already, and how the creation of an "old-lang," and the diachronic changes one would expect as the language evolved to its current state, inform and enrich the phonology of the language. *The Art of Language Invention* has a great description of this.

As for phonaesthetics, that's entirely subjective. In the real world, there is no relationship between the phonology of a language and the culture of the people who speak it.[5]

So, if you've been asked to create a "guttural language" for a culture of warriors, what do you do? If it's a bespoke conlang, then the answer is: You make it sound however the directors want it to sound. Otherwise, it depends… on your intended audience, of course. If you're creating a language for fairies, and your intended audience thinks that the speech of fairies is sweet and melodious, then create something that sounds sweet and melodious to those whose mother tongue is English. But, if your audience is other conlangers, then it makes no difference at all.

Your Conworld and Lexical Naturalism

Alright, let's now say you have a conlang under development. It's time to think about

---

[5] Despite the lies that were published in the 1930s, the French and the Italians are not actually lustful because of the rounded vowels in Romance languages, Germans are not cold and cruel because of the consonant clusters of their language, Jews are not drawn to dark thaumaturgy because of the back consonants of Hebrew. But you knew that already.

how the culture of your world affects the lexicon of the language. Clearly, anything that is important to the speakers ought to be represented by a word, or an expression, in the lexicon. I'm going to use Dothraki as an example (with apologies to David Peterson).

The speakers of Dothraki are horsemen. They depend on horses for warfare, for transportation, and even for food. Horses are extremely important to their culture, so there ought to be many words for all the different aspects of horses.

And indeed, in the Dothraki dictionary, we find nouns for horse, stallion, mare, pony, foal, filly; verbs for ride, mount, charge, travel, trot, canter, gallop; the colors of horses such as chestnut, dun, palomino; a few words for the tack for horses such as saddle, stirrup, reins; but where are the words for the anatomy of horses, such as hoof, pastern, withers, fetlock, flank, stifle?[6] Surely a people whose livelihood depended on the care and health of their horses would have words for their anatomy. How else could they describe which part of a horse was in need of attention due to injury? Or even which cuts were good to eat?

My presumption in this particular case is that, as a bespoke conlang, the audience for Game of Thrones does not greatly intersect the horsey set (who, I suppose, prefer to watch old Flicka reruns instead), so there is no great demand for this specialized vocabulary.

But for *your* conlang, you can't use that for an excuse. You need to consider the aspects of the environment of your "conspeakers" and make sure that the vocabulary exists for them to talk about their world. And not merely the physical environment, but the social environment as well.

Here are some ideas for you to start: What do they eat? Do they live in a paradise where

---

[6] I checked two Dothraki dictionaries: the one in *Living Language Dothraki* and the one at *dothraki.org*. David, upon his review of this essay, informed me that those words do, in fact, exist in the language. Regardless, I am leaving the example in! It's a great illustration of how a conlanger must think through the details of the conworld, and reflect them in the language; even though this particular example from Dothraki is spurious.

all they have to do is to stroll through the garden and pick ripe cherries and plums and pineapples? OK, fine, then you need words for those fruits. Do they harvest grains, such as wheat or maize or rice? Then, you need words for the grains, for the flour that is milled from the grain, for the implements they use to harvest and thresh it, for the seed stock that is retained for spring planting, for the weeds that reduce the yields, and for the various molds and insects that destroy the crop,… Or maybe they're hunters! Which animals do they hunt? What weapons do they use? Clubs, spears, arrows, traps, rifles? How is the animal gutted and cleaned? How is it butchered? What do they do with the furs? With the bones? How is the meat cooked? Are there names for the various dishes that one can prepare? Are there ovens, pans, pots, spits, skewers?

And that's just food. What about clothing? What about housing? What about dangerous animals and other natural threats?

And, after you create lexical entries for the physical environment, then you can start on the social environment. Yes indeed, the culture needs to be described for every stage of life, from birth, through childhood and puberty, to marriage, parenthood, maturity, and death. People talk about it all. In fact, if you reflect on it, in practically every culture, what people talk about the most, is… other people: How are your children? How are your parents? Who is sick? Who is working hard? Who is sweet on whom? Who is engaged to be married? Who died recently? Who is being fair and generous, and who is being mean and stingy?

You really want a naturalistic lexicon? Then don't spend your time translating the Babel Myth or folk tales. Write dialogues of gossip! Because people (all of us, unless we really make a point of avoiding it), gossip a lot about other people.

Here's a really simple dialogue I created for my first conlang, Temenia (not a very good conlang, I admit). If you can't represent something as simple as this, or the equivalent in your

conculture, then you need more words in your lexicon:

> — Juana, why are you sad?
> — It's because of Paco. I think he doesn't love me anymore.
> — Why?
> — Joey told me he went to a movie with Susanna, and that he saw them kissing!
> — Joey is such a liar! He wants you and Paco to break up, so that you'll go back to him.
> — Is that true, Mary? Or, are you saying it just so I won't be sad?
> — Of course it's true. I'm your friend.

OK. This dialogue is pretty lame. I know it.[7] Seriously, though, how are you going to create a realistic social conworld for your audience if you can't talk about jealousy and heartbreak? These are universal human emotions. One way or another, people will talk about them in whatever way is deemed acceptable by the social milieu. And as an artlanger, you need to consider how that works. Under what circumstances, and with whom, can a speaker gossip freely? Is it considered acceptable? Or is it met with disapprobation? (And even then, don't people gossip anyway?)

What I hope is clear to everyone, is that if a conlang's lexicon does not include words that refer to universal human experience, then it deviates from naturalism in that respect. Therefore, we can see that every naturalistic conlang should include nouns for "mother" and "father" and "baby," as well as verbs for "shit" and "piss" (which are not considered vulgar or taboo in all cultures).

Here's an example, from Beltös, my conlang-under-development. These people live in an area in which many snakes live. The snakes sometimes take up residence in people's homes. They don't like that. Especially if the snakes are poisonous.

In Beltös society there are people who specialize in the ridding of homes from snakes.

---

[7] And for this, my earliest conlang, notice how I unthinkingly imported Western culture into the dialogue: Why are Juana and Mary free to choose their own lovers? Why are they free to attend movies, for that matter, instead of being sequestered in their families' homes, behind high garden walls? – Oh, this dialogue is so bad it's humiliating. I know you can do better!

They are called "snake-catchers" in my translations, but that doesn't explain much. A dictionary entry that says something like:

íïžmas   snake-catcher   noun (category V)

doesn't describe the role of a snake-catcher in the society. Are they revered or looked down upon? How does one learn to be a snake-catcher? Is it a hereditary role? Or is one apprenticed? And how is it done? Is there a ceremony involved? Are there specialized implements used to drive the snakes away? And what happens to those snakes?

In the Beltös dictionary, when it is eventually completed, you will be able to find that a snake-catcher can be either a man or a woman; it is not a full-time vocation, but rather a role that is shouldered when needed; that it is a procedure that is done with a woven basket with a lid, a long Y-shaped stick, seedpod rattles and the burning of incense, as well as entreaties to the snakes to find a more suitable home.

That's a single example of the difference between a "dictionary-lexicon" and an "encyclopedia-lexicon." The dictionary-lexicon simply gives the correspondence of the conlang lexeme with the English (or other natural language) word, or words, that most closely corresponds to it. The encyclopedia-lexicon describes the entire knowledge-base of the people about the referent of that word.

If you are building a conworld, then your lexicon needs to do its part in describing it. It should be an encyclopedia-lexicon. The entries have to give not merely the denotation of the lexeme, but also how it is used in the cultural context, what it means emotionally and metaphorically.

As another example, the Hawaiian word "hula" means "to dance," but not exactly in the same way as in English (or French or German or Spanish…). "Hula" traditionally was part of a

public ceremony, not a social activity, and this is reflected in how the word is used.

A common phrase is " 'a'a i ka hula," which literally means "dare to dance," but it's not used in a literal sense. Rather, a friend might say this to you if you were hesitating to ask someone for a date. Its meaning is more like the American phrases, "Go for it!" or "Just do it!" And this is because "hula" implies to perform in public, which requires courage.

But, it's more complicated than that. Hawaiian uses reduplication as an intensive. Guess what the verb "hulahula" means.

It means, "to sacrifice an animal to the gods."[8] Why does it mean this? Because "hula" traditionally was part of a public ceremony with religious significance, the highpoint of which was animal sacrifice.

Do you still think that a simple lexical entry for "dance" would mean the same thing to a Hawaiian as to a European? That's why you need an encyclopedia-lexicon.

A final example of this is Wierzbicka's comparison of "scientific mice" versus "folk mice." The dictionary definition of a "scientific mouse" might say that it is one of various species of the genus *Mus*. That entry might contain a short anatomical description, and information about the environment that mice inhabit. But a definition of a "folk mouse" describes how people in the culture think about mice: That they are small and quiet and often live in people's homes; that they squeak, especially at night; that they like to eat the leftover crumbs of people's food, especially cheese; that they are afraid of cats, who like to catch them and sometimes eat them; that they leave little turds at the bottom of cabinets where food is stored; that you can buy traps to rid your home of mice, but those traps kill the mice (though maybe more humanely than how cats "play" with them).

---

[8] I bet you guessed wrong!

Do you want a truly naturalistic lexicon for your conlang? Then all of this folk knowledge has to go somewhere in it. Yes, it's a lot of work, but even that isn't enough…

Grammatical Naturalism and Avoiding Resemanticization

Some linguists believe that there is a relationship between a people's culture and the grammar of their language.[9] These effects are hard to tease out, because both cultures and grammars evolve, and not at the same rate. I'm not going to write a summary of this linguistic theory, and the justifications for it, but if you're interested there are many books written about cognitive linguistics and semantics. Some authors I recommend are George Lackoff, Anna Wierzbicka, Cliff Goddard, and Nick Enfield. (Not an exhaustive list by any means.)

Even if you don't ascribe to their theories, it would be worth your while to be familiar with them, so you can utilize their ideas, as desired, in creating the grammar of your conlang. One aspect of semantic theory is that there are "semantic primes" common to all human language, which appear as either lexemes or morphemes in every language. These are very basic words, such as: I, you, good, bad, big, small, live, die, not. If your conlang is missing any of these hundred or so semantic primes, you should ask yourself why. Perhaps there is a reason, and the nature of the conculture is such that that word would never be uttered. (Beltös, for example, has no equivalent for "not.") But the absence of any of these universal primes decreases the naturalism of your conlang. If there's a justification for that lacuna, that's fine, but if it's merely an oversight, oughtn't you fill the gap?[10]

Just as an experienced conlanger does not wish to create a "relex," that is, a relexification

---

[9] To be clear, by "relationship" is not meant a deterministic relationship, by which the thought of the speakers is limited by the grammar (as in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), nor is it implied that all aspects of the grammar are determined by the culture of the people. What is being posited is that there is an observable influence between culture and the grammar of a natlang, and that it can be exploited to augment the naturalism of an artlang.

[10] This is described here, under "grammatical naturalism," because many of the semantic primes are morphologized in natural languages, and likely will be represented as morphemes in your conlang.

of English (or some other natlang), we should all be careful to avoid a resemanticization, as well. Every culture has cognitive frames, by which the world is partitioned into conceptual categories. There are many ways to do this, none superior to the others. Don't merely import the cognitive frames of English into your conlang.

For example, Chinese grammar has classifiers by which measurable or countable nouns are categorized. The shape or type of the referent determines which classifier to use. Different classifiers are used to count people, animals, books, needles, etc. These distinctions are semantic. They define, in part, the conceptualization of the world by a Chinese speaker.

As another example, the use of honorifics in Korean and Japanese defines an important part of the social reality of the speakers of those languages. These can affect the pronouns used in various circumstances, and may have other effects on the evolution of those grammars.

The "low hanging fruit" of a naturalistic grammar is to consider the influence of the local topography. For example, in Yagua, an Amazonian language, there are verbal suffixes for "upstream" and "downstream." In Hawaiian, there are directional particles for "seaward "and "inland." The importance of the riparian or insular geography to daily life has an obvious impact on the grammar of those languages.

One of the pitfalls in using a dictionary-lexicon instead of an encyclopedia-lexicon is that it can lead to resemanticization, in which the words are arranged in a one-to-one correspondence with an English word. This, in turn, leads to calques for expressions which often make little sense in the conworld. The cognitive frames of English are simply overlaid onto the conlang and the conculture. This can destroy the naturalism of the conlang. (And, this is why it is far easier to "borrow" a fictive culture, as Tolkien did from the Arthurian legends.)

Full integration of the conlang with the conworld requires introspective thought about

how the people in that conworld perceive it. Is it hierarchical, mirroring the hereditary ranks or castes of society, and resulting in the conceptual ranking or merit of the various animal and plant species in that world? Is it an interconnected network, reflecting the complicated social roles that individuals have with their extended family relations, and the shifting of those roles as one matures and ages? Is it fraught with danger, where sudden death can occur by tossing a date pit accidentally through the heart of an invisible genie (as recounted in *One Thousand and One Nights*), or with a single misstep onto a hidden death adder?

Consider that world with death adders (those are not fictional snakes, by the way). Could that result in a grammar whose morphology distinguishes a sudden event from a gradual one?

Even the membership of parts of speech are not immune to cognitive frames. In English, "lightning" is a noun; but in Hopi, it's a verb. In the physical universe, of course, there are no parts of speech; lightning is a phenomenon of very short duration, whose manifestation is its appearance and behavior. As a noun, it cannot be used meaningfully with an arbitrary verb. Lightning does not chew; it does not meander; it does not lactate – perhaps it flashes or strikes or burns. As a verb, it is not meaningful with any other noun: Cats cannot "lightning" – nor dogs, nor windows, nor cacti. Those objects never "lightning." So, it seems entirely arbitrary – you can represent "lightning" either as a noun or as a verb with equal verisimilitude. But no! On a deeper level, the choice of part of speech reflects the underlying conceptual framework of the conworld you have created; and to maximize the naturalism of your conlang, you should consider those cultural factors when assigning the parts of speech to non-prototypical objects or actions.

Taxonomies are not universal between languages or cultures. In some languages, a seal is considered a type of fish, in others, a type of animal; in other languages, a bat is considered a type of bird, in others, a type of mammal. In fact, some anthropologists have claimed that a few

dialects of Ewondo, a Cameroonian language, do not even conceptualize taxonomy itself the same way as Europeans do. If the grammar of your conlang makes any sort of taxonomic distinctions, then it behooves you to think about how those taxonomies are conceptualized by the people of your world.

Using Beltös as an example once again, the word for "night" (digitën) is a verb, which also means to darken. Those quotidian periods of darkness are considered to be processes, not things. Durations of time in Beltös are not represented as non-prototypical objects, but rather as progressive or cyclical processes (as in Hopi and some other Amerindian languages).

Nevertheless, the connection between culture and grammar is tenuous. Not every grammatical feature is determinable from the culture, nor is the opposite true. Regardless, I do not believe that the relationship is non-existent, and therefore, I encourage you to consider it when creating the grammar for your conlang. The conworld does matter, and by careful consideration of how the culture will affect your grammar, you can enrich and deepen your conlang.

Conlang naturalism is not only about phonological diachrony. Grammar counts too.

Postscript

Many of you will recognize that much of what I have said is not original. That's true. Others have discussed these various aspects of conlang naturalism before me. What I have endeavored to do, is to pull together the various threads and ideas of what constitutes naturalism into one concise essay. If there is anything novel, it is that I have focused on the *necessity* of developing a detailed conworld, which I believe is a concomitant aspect of conlang naturalism.

The other final point is that it's clear that the degree of worldbuilding I seek represents a *huge* investment of time and effort on the part of the conlanger. I realize that most practitioners

of the art of creating language are not going to commit that much time. I have raised the bar of naturalism tremendously, much more than any person, including myself, should expect from others. Nevertheless, the difficulty of achieving a goal is no reason to lower the standard; rather it is a reason to accept, with humility, our limitations to single-handedly create a fully naturalistic language.

Frankly, I have not developed the culture of the Beltös people to the standard that this paper hoists up as an ideal. To some extent, this is due to my concern that if the conlang is too complicated and involuted, if it requires the lengthy reading of a detailed ethnography, it will never be learned nor appreciated by others, for to learn it well would require too much time and effort. Once again, it comes down to the audience: Even an audience of artlangers may not be willing to spend the time to study, learn, and appreciate a culturally naturalistic conlang. Finally, and humbly, I do not have the time, nor skill, to meet my own standard of perfection.