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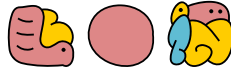
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Esafuni Lysigrams

An Overview of Their Design

Lysimachiakis

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1 Introduction

This document serves as a central place for documentation of lysigrams for my conlang, Esafuni. 'Lysigrams' is an affectionate term for the writing system I've been working on for the past few years. The name is a portmanteau of my alias, 'Lysimachiakis' (usually shortened to 'Lys' [lɪs] or 'Lysi' [ˈlɪsi]), and 'logograms.' The glyphs were designed to be fun and cute; the best descriptor might be 'glooby' (thanks mareck!), which is really just perfect. I've tried to use the lysigrams before with different conlangs, but I was never quite happy with how they turned out, I think mostly because the style felt like it clashed with those conlangs' morphophonologies. So, I'm trying again now with Esafuni!
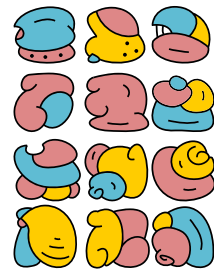
2 Design Philosophy

I have a few themes that I try to adhere to when designing any new lysigram so that it fits the general aesthetic. I call these 'rules' throughout this document, but I probably should be saying 'design philosophy,' as I do sometimes violate them from time to time, and really, they are more like guiding principles than anything.

1. Lines should be rounded; no sharp edges

2. Only red, blue, and yellow are permissible colors

3. When possible, two adjacent segments should not be the same color

4. Make use of Eyes, Toes, Tooth, Blep, and Folds

5. Toothed and Blepped glyphs must have a Plain counterpart

6. Blepping is impermissible when it would occur on a red background

Rule #1, Round Lines: While lines are generally quite rounded, sharp edges do occur. They are permissible at the top corners of glyph-shapes, though perhaps not overly common. They are also necessary for creating toothed glyphs. Otherwise, I generally try to keep it all nice and curvy and round. This helps with giving that glooby feel. Notice the roundness of **chombi** contrasted with the angular corner seen in **lęte**.

**chombi** 'heart'   **lęte** 'sugar; sweet taste'

Rule #2, RBY: I picked the pastel-like colors pretty early on in my conception of the lysigrams, and it's one thing that I think is strongly associated with their identity. I've experimented with adding a fourth color, like a variety of green or lavender, but I felt like it made the glyphs look too busy. Besides, I don't think it really added much; three seems sufficient enough. For those curious, the values of the three colors are: red (#de8787), blue (#5fbcd3), and yellow (#ffcc00).

la 'identity copula'   **fay** 'property copula'   **yǫ** 'color copula'
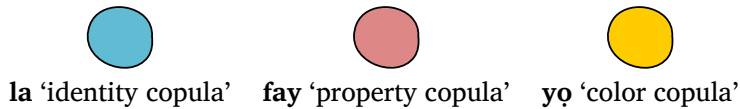
Rule #3, Dissimilation: This one is pretty straightforward. In order to help give each glyph more distinction, it felt necessary to restrict the adjacent colors. There are some uncommon cases of two adjacent glyph segments having the same color, but this is generally because there are a large number of adjacent segments, such that it wasn't possible to maintain this rule with only the three colors. There are an even rarer number of glyphs that have the same adjacent colors by design, but, again, these are quite rare. However, this rule *is* explicitly violated by a glyph derivation strategy to be discussed later on. Part of the reason I try to keep this rule is because I did have an early idea of classifying glyphs by their color patterns in clockwise order: 'ah, this lysigram is a blue-red-yellow-red.' I haven't really ended up using this idea much, but it may be a helpful distinction as I go about filling out this document. In the end, though, it just ended up being another characteristic visual of the lysigrams. Below, **lolo** shows a great example of proper Rule #3, while **pijade** shows bad adjacency.

lolo 'blanket; cloak'   **pijade** 'wolf'

Rule #4, Common Elements: In order to live up to my cutesy ideals, the lysigrams began to take on aspects that make them more readily personified and characterized. The earliest glyphs don't use them much, but as I designed more and more, it became increasingly common for the lysigrams to have (an) eye(s). Instead of them just being abstractions on a page, it really made them feel more like... well, like characters. They became like simplified cartoon characters, and to me amped up the charm factor. Once I settled on the presence of eyes, I stumbled upon what ended up being an excellent way to hugely expand the number of possible distinct glyphs: by adding 'mouths.' I settled on two[1] possible mouth-shapes: toothed, and blepped. 'Toothed,' predictably, refers to a toothy grin. It's a bit silly, and honestly a tad unsettling at times, but it allowed me to take one glyph and make another from it. **Mia** is a good example. Likewise, I made another variant, with a mouth with a little tongue stuck out, appropriately named 'blepped' forms, as seen in **vuy**. The jury's still out on how I am going to use these forms. My current thoughts are to use them for related-but-distinct words (like two different varieties of snakes, for example), or perhaps for homophonous forms (supplementing another homophony feature discussed later). We'll see. And lastly, some glyphs have 'toes,' little lines that jut out from the edge of a glyph inwards to give the impression of segmentation, as with feet, and some glyphs have 'folds,' little semi-curved lines in the middle of a glyph-segment that seem to give the sense that there may be fat or some other type of flesh that is folded over itself. Both can be seen in **ifį**. Toes and folds are not intended to be used for deriving new lysigrams, but they nonetheless help provide more characterization.

Mia 'Mia (name)'

įva 'to love (plat.)'

vuy 'to love (rom.)'

ifį 'table'
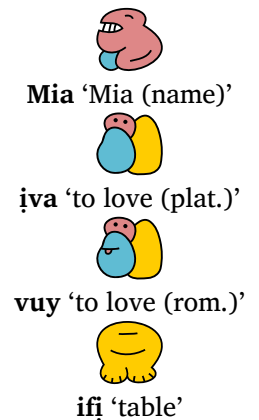
Rule #5, Plain: Because I intended toothing and blepping to be means of deriving new glyphs from old ones, by their very nature, there must be a plain glyph from which they are formed. You can see this with **įva** and **vuy** earlier. I think there are only a small handful of exceptions to this at the moment, those being lysigrams that I designed early, before I had solidified the idea of toothed/blepped forms. I may go back and design plain forms for those, or I may leave them in as exceptions. We'll see!

Rule #6, No Blep: This rule is a purely pragmatic extension of Rule #3: because blepping makes use of a red tongue, and because two adjacent segments cannot be of the same color, then it's pretty clear that blepping cannot co-occur with a base-red glyph segment. Simple!

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[1]Some of the earliest glyphs have what may be considered a third mouth-shape, 'open' or 'toothless,' but so far these haven't been used contrastively.

2.1 Deriving New Lysigrams

I've already discussed Toothing and Blepping, which as derivation strategies are pretty straightforward. I included them within the larger Design Philosophy section because I think their use-cases and the design considerations for their use are relevant for the macro-level lysigram, and are not applicable in all cases. For this section, I'd like to focus on two major derivational strategies for building new lysigrams.

Color Change: Changing the color schema of a glyph can be used to derive a new glyph. This is not the most common choice for derivation, and does not happen often. It is limited to lysigrams that have a maximum of two base colors in their pattern. When used, it is frequently iconic; that is, the color of the original glyph carried some semantic connection, and the change of color shifted it to a different semantic connection. Take a look at the figure to the right. Here, the glyph for **so** 'potable water' is blue due to blue's association with water. By changing the glyph color to red, we get **kẹmi** 'blood.' These are often culturally defined; as is common across cultures, water and blood are viewed similarly, as life-giving, flowing liquids, so the connection here in their expression via the lysigrams isn't too surprising.

so
'water'

kẹmi
'blood'

Hat Compounding: Compound glyphs can be made by taking one glyph and squishing it on top of another, which gives them their name 'hats.' Hats carry phonetic information, which isn't entirely consistent, but generally lets the reader know that the new glyph is meant to start with the same onset as the hat glyph. Some hats may carry more information than that, marking vowel nasalization, or even the first full syllable of the new glyph. Again, they're not consistent, and there isn't necessarily a hat for every onset. When forming compound glyphs like this, the main glyph that is donning the hat is called the 'body.' There are two main uses for hats.

Homophonous Hats: A phonetic hat can be used on a body that already had the same phonetic information in order to disambiguate homophonous. For example, take the figure below. We start with **a** = 'locative applicative.' Unfortunately for us, **a** can also mean the proximal demonstrative, which is sad because it doesn't have its own glyph. How then can we express that proximal? We would use an /a/ hat! Esafuni uses a squished **achi** 'baby animal' glyph as an /a/ hat. So adding an /a/ hat to a body already starting with /a/ indicates to the reader that the new glyph has the same exact phonetic reading as the body glyph, but has a different meaning.

achi $\longrightarrow$ +

a =

= **a**
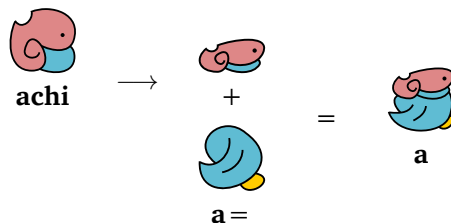
Derivational Hats: Unlike the purely phonetic homophonous hat constructions, derivational hats on a body result in the body retaining some of its semantic information, with the hat indicating the onset of the new, related word. In the example below, **ŋata** 'snake' is given the /z/ hat, derived from **zọ** 'small,' to make a new word **zabi** 'to flow; to slither.' The relationship here should be clear: the concept 'snake' is used together with the phonetic /z/ of **zọ** 'small' to let the reader know this is a word that begins with /z/ that has some association with snakes. The resulting word, of course, has more semantic breadth than just an association with snakes, but it's a starting point.

zọ $\longrightarrow$ +

ŋata

= **zabi**

3
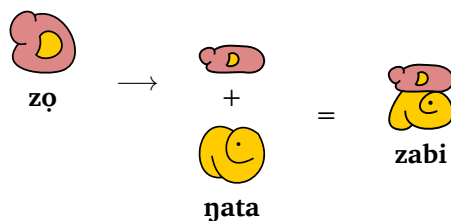
3   Assigning Meaning

There are three systems for assigning meaning to the lysigrams. First, some are **iconic**, meaning that their shape and form resemble the word they mean; so, for example, **ŋata** 'snake' is expressed with the glyph to the right because... well, it looks like a snake. Second, as noted before, some are formed by toothing or blepping a base glyph to give it a related meaning, or, more rarely, to indicate it is pronounced similarly to the base glyph. Lastly, and this is probably the most common, realistically, the bulk of the lysigrams are assigned without much direct connection between the glyph shape and the word meaning, or at least, the connection is far more tenuous than the iconicity seen elsewhere.

   To be honest, assigning meaning has been part of the challenge for me in actually keeping up with and using lysigrams. I have to balance creating new lysigrams *a priori* with deriving them from color changes and hats. I have to take shapes and forms that often lack overt iconicity and pick a concept for them to be connected to. The results aren't always satsifactory, but it's a work in progress. Additionally, as a long-time student of Japanese, I also have to actively step away from practices that would give the language too much of a Chinese aesthetic in terms of glyph composition and creation. I think I have been mostly successful in that, but it always looms at the back of my mind.

4   Wrapping Up

I still have a lot of work left to do on lysigrams, but my hope is that by formalizing my thoughts in this document, I'll make the process easier down the road. This document will end up forming the basis for my introductory remarks and materials as I compile a full dictionary of all of the lysigrams I've made. I currently have about four hundred made, and with the systems developed and expanded upon in this document, I have the mechanisms to easily double that number. I'm looking forward to working more on the lysigrams together with my continued work on Esafuni.

   Thanks for reading!