

# Fictional Language Use and Cultural Assumptions

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# Background

- Numerous fictional languages have been created and developed:
- Klingon (Star Trek), Elvish (Lord of the Rings), Dothraki (Game of Thrones)
- Doesn't this alienate the audience?

# Goals

- Why would someone go to the trouble of making a fictional language?
- Do people read cultural traits from the languages they hear?
- If so, how does that mechanism work?

# Method

- Survey of University of Wyoming students
- Free response and adjective pairing questions
- 3 Languages tested
- Languages were not revealed until after the survey was completed
- Supplement with review of newspaper articles

# Languages



Language A



Language B



Language C

# Languages



Language A: Old English



Language C: Elvish



Language B: Klingon

# Results for Old English

- Strong geographic associations
- Multiple comparisons with living languages
- Germanic ties
- Beowulf
- Old/ Non-industrial

# Results For Klingon

- Very few comparisons with other languages
- Associated with primordial/primitive/savage/tribal characteristics
- Language characterized as harsh and difficult to speak



# Results For Elvish

- Moderate comparisons with other languages (most frequently Italian)
- Associated with poetry
- People described as very spiritual and artistic
- Was categorized more uniformly in all categories than any of the other languages

# Categorization & Stereotyping

- Eleanor Rosch: Categories are formed with most prototypical examples at the center and are surrounded by peripheral members that share some but not all characteristics.
- Fiske and Neuberg: Category-based processes used before attribute-oriented processes. Categorization provides a wealth of information at little cognitive cost.

# Phonological Basis

- Phonology: The sounds that make up a language
- Rolled “r”s are artistic
- Syllabic Structure: CV, VC, CVC
- Shared sounds

# Conclusion

- People do attribute cultural characteristics to the languages they hear
- This process comes from categorization and stereotyping
- Draw on linguistic similarities/dissimilarities with languages they are already familiar with

# References

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