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## Editor's Picks

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### Arts & Humanities

Na'vi, Klingon and Newspeak: IUB doctoral student to teach class on constructed languages

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Dec. 17, 2014

by Bethany Nolan

John Scott can pinpoint the exact moment he fell in love with constructed language.



Doctoral student John Scott will teach a class on constructed languages at the Collins Living-Learning Center in the spring.

"I was 14, at Boy Scout camp, when I was first introduced to Dungeons and Dragons," he said. "I quickly fell into the role of dungeon master, but was dissatisfied with the settings of the game. I wanted a richer, deeper experience."

So he crafted his own language, a cross between Turkish and Gothic, which he eventually furnished with an alphabet, words and names for specific locations within his gaming world.

Fast forward two decades: Scott, who's now a doctoral student in IU's Department of Second Language Studies, will teach a class on constructed languages at the Collins Living-Learning Center in the spring.

Often created as a layer of realism for fictional worlds in books, games or films, constructed languages are consciously devised. They can even be created for linguistic experimentation or, in the case of Esperanto, to ease human communication.

Scott's syllabus includes Na'vi from the 2009 film "Avatar;" Barsoomian from the Edgar Rice Burroughs' book series about the inhabitants of Mars; Lingua Ignota, the mystical language created by a 12th century German abbess; Newspeak, the fictional language in Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four;" and Dothraki and High Valyrian from HBO's "Game of Thrones" series based on George R.R. Martin's books. And, of course, no language course would be complete without readings about Elvish and Klingon.

"You can have all these worlds and these cultures, but it's when you start giving people a language that they start seeming real," Scott said, adding with a chuckle, "Real enough that people start speaking Klingon, anyway."

As part of the course, students will learn about different types of language. Then, as a final project, the class as a whole will create the framework for its own language, including explanations of their language's sound system; writing conventions; root words, suffixes and intonation; and a lexicon of between 2,000 and 3,000 of its most frequently used words.

For Scott, teaching the course will bring his own personal language experience full circle.

"I'm really looking forward to this class," he said. "It's going to be a hands-on way to learn about language and linguistics in a very fun context."

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