

**UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
RIO PIEDRAS CAMPUS
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

Instructor: Dr. Alicia Pousada

Course Title: Language in Science Fiction / Fantasy

Course Number: INGL 3017

Number of Credit Hours: 3

Course Description: This interdisciplinary course is dedicated to the exploration of language and linguistics in science fiction / fantasy (SFF) literature, including language as a determiner of worldview (Whorfian theory), invented languages, and language as a literary device in the genre of SFF. The course will utilize novels, short stories, television programs, and movies to explore some of the basic foundations of speculative literature and linguistics.

Course Objectives: By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. understand some of the basic foundations of the fields of speculative literature and linguistics
2. identify and critique basic fallacies related to language and linguistics in works of science fiction/fantasy;
3. demonstrate how the Whorf hypothesis regarding linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity underlies much of science fiction/ fantasy writing;
4. describe a number of invented languages and other means of communication in popular works of science fiction/fantasy;
5. explain how language is utilized as a literary device in the genre of science fiction/fantasy;
6. construct a language suitable for use in a work of science fiction/fantasy and translate a brief literary excerpt into that language;
7. develop personal language awareness and an inquisitive and thoughtful attitude toward the intersection of language and literature;
8. enhance their appreciation of speculative literature as a genre
9. research and write critical reaction papers
10. demonstrate knowledge of research sources (both traditional and electronic)

In addition, students will be able to:

11. contribute in an effective form to the inclusion of fellow students with special needs in the classroom;
12. make the necessary accommodations to include fellow students with special needs in group activities.

Course Outline:

- Week 1 **General introduction to course**—review of syllabus; explanation of assignments and final project; link between language and science fiction / fantasy; need to include linguistics among the sciences that SFF draws upon; language as a mechanism for solving humanity's problems; SFF as a laboratory for exploring linguistic issues
- Reading:
Rosenfelder, Mark. (2008). *The language construction kit*. <http://www.zompist.com/kit.html> .
Video excerpts from: *Star Wars*, *Dune*, *Starman*
- Week 2 **Nature of human language**-- how it differs from animal communication; how human languages vary; what we might expect of languages used by other species; what would be required for interspecies communication to take place; notion of exolinguistics
- Readings:
Handouts on characteristics of language & culture
- Nunberg, Geoff & Wasow, Tom (20xx.) An Overview.
<http://www.lsadc.org/info/ling-fields-overview.cfm>
- Hockett, Charles. (1955). How to learn Martian.
Astounding Science Fiction (May), 97-106.
- Video excerpts from: Star Trek series (*STNG*: “The big goodbye”; *Enterprise*: Vox sola”)
- Week 3 **Whorf hypothesis**—Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf’s thinking in relation to Native American languages; linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism; appearance in SFF; relationship between cultural characteristics of species and types of languages they speak (Elvish, Klingon, etc.)
- Readings:
Kay, Paul & Kempton, Willett. (1984). What Is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis? *American Anthropologist*, 86 (1), 65-79.
Klingon Language Institute at: <http://www.kli.org>
(About Klingon, Sounds of Klingon, Writing Klingon, Klingon Phrases, New Klingon Words)

Audio tape: Conversational Klingon & video excerpt from: Star Trek Next Generation: "Sins of the father"

Weeks 4-5

Language as part of social engineering in science fiction; *The Languages of Pao* (Vance), 1984 (Orwell), *Brave New World* (Huxley), *Babel-17* (Delany); language control as criterion for dystopias

Readings:

Vance, Ch. I-X

Vance, Ch. XI-XXI

Assignment #1: Written critical reaction to Anthony Burgess' invented language (Nadsat) in *The Clockwork Orange* (due last class of Week 6)

Weeks 6-7

Language & gender in speculative literature--

Suzette Hayden Elgin's *Native Tongue*; importance of linguists in future societies; creation of a woman's language (Láadan); role of language in feminist literature; how language acquisition theory is interpreted in SFF

Readings:

Elgin, Ch. 1-12

Elgin, Ch. 13-24

Handouts on structure and vocabulary of Láadan

Weeks 8-9

Language as the basis of fantasy worlds—J.R.R. Tolkien as philologist and historical linguist; Tolkien's Middle-earth languages; how the constructed languages led to the writing of the narrative

Readings: Excerpts from *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien)

Handouts on Quenya (Elvish)

Excerpt from Noel, Ruth S. (1980). *The languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Video excerpt from "TLOR: The Fellowship of the Ring"

Final project (Phase 1): Sound system for your constructed language due last class of Week 9

Week 10-11

Other ways in which language issues are resolved in science fiction / fantasy; universal translators; telepathy; empathic communication; sign language; bilingual interpreters; problems presented by time travel; talking robots and androids

Readings:

Excerpt from: Ursula Le Guin's *Left hand of darkness*.
Excerpt from: Robert Heinlein's *The moon is a harsh mistress*.

Video excerpts from Star Trek series (STNG: "Darmok" and STNG: "Loud as a whisper")

Assignment #2 : Written critical reaction to metaphoric language used in STNG: Darmok episode (due last class of Week 11)

Week 12-13

How language functions as literary device; the role of language in developing setting, characterization, plot, theme, conflict, point of view, etc.; how good speculative writers utilize language to enhance plausibility; the linguistic structure of science fiction stories

Readings:

Handouts on structure of short stories and novels and different types of SFF (utopias vs. dystopias)

Excerpt from Samuel Delany's *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*

Final project (Phase 2): Preliminary word list for your constructed language due last class of Week 12

Week 14

Review of common linguistic myths perpetuated by science fiction / fantasy literature; how to spot them; why they occur; "hard" vs. "soft" SFF

Final project (Phase 3): Preliminary grammar for your constructed language due last class of Week 14

Week 15

Conclusion of course;

Final project (Phase 4): Final version of your constructed language (with brief literary text translation) due last day of class

Teaching Strategies: Lecture, discussion, active fieldwork

Note: Those students who receive services from Vocational Rehabilitation should communicate with the professor at the beginning of the semester to plan the reasonable accommodation and the necessary equipment according to the recommendations of the Oficina de Asuntos para las Personas con Impedimento (OAPI) of the office of the Dean of Students. In addition, those students with special needs that require some type of assistance or accommodation should communicate with the professor.

Resources and Equipment Required:

Required texts:

- Elgin, Suzette Hayden. (1985). *Native Tongue*. London: Women's Press.
- Vance, Jack. (1958). *The languages of Pao*. New York: Ace Books.

Supplementary readings: provided by professor

Internet access

Methods of Evaluation:

- Weekly readings from the assigned books and articles and active participation in class discussions of these readings. (20%)
- Two brief written critical reactions to materials provided by professor (40%)
- Final written project [constructing a scifi/fantasy language & brief translation of literary excerpt] (40%)
- Differentiated evaluation of students with special needs

Grading System: A, B, C, D, F.

Bibliography: (utilized for preparing class)

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<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2004/20040329/grammarian.shtml>
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- Carter, Raphael. (1994-2003). The Darmok dictionary. Accessed at:
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- Gerrold, David & Niven, Larry. (1971). *The flying sorcerers*. New York: Ballantine Books.
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- _____. (1973). *Time enough for love*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- _____. (1997). *The moon is a harsh mistress*. New York: Orb Books.
- Hockett, Charles. (1955). How to learn Martian. *Astounding Science Fiction* (May), 97-106.
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- Post, Jonathan Vos. (1997). Me human, you alien: How to talk to an extraterrestrial. In *The handbook of UFO contact*. New York: William Morrow & Co.
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