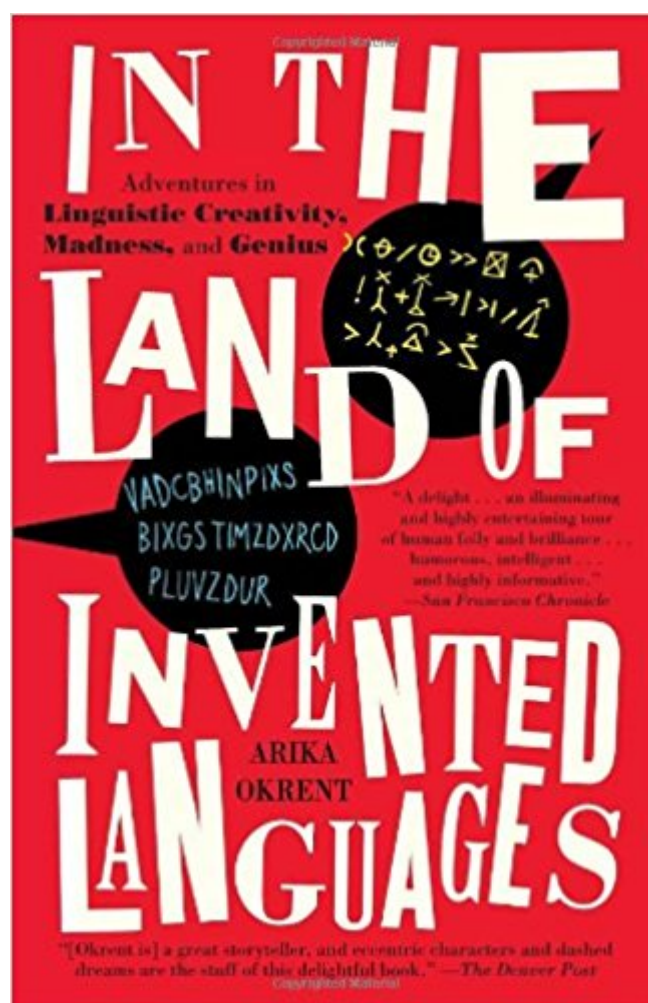


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In The Land Of Invented Languages: Adventures In Linguistic Creativity, Madness, And Genius



Synopsis

Here is the captivating story of humankind's enduring quest to build a better language and overcome the curse of Babel. Just about everyone has heard of Esperanto, which was nothing less than one man's attempt to bring about world peace by means of linguistic solidarity. And every Star Trek fan knows about Klingon. But few people have heard of Babm, Blissymbolics, Loglan (not to be confused with Lojban), and the nearly nine hundred other invented languages that represent the hard work, high hopes, and full-blown delusions of so many misguided souls over the centuries. With intelligence and humor, Arika Okrent has written a truly original and enlightening book for all word freaks, grammar geeks, and plain old language lovers.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Efforts to make language simpler, clearer, less divisive and more truthful have backfired spectacularly, to judge by this delightful tour of linguistic hubris. Linguist Okrent explores some of the themes and shortcomings of 900 years worth of artificial languages. She surveys philosophical languages that order all knowledge into self-evident systems that turn out to be bizarrely idiosyncratic; symbol languages of supposedly crystalline pictographs that are actually bafflingly opaque; basic languages that throw out all the fancy words and complicated idioms; rigorously logical languages so rule-bound that it's impossible to utter a correct sentence; international languages, like Esperanto, that unite different cultures into a single idealistic counterculture; and whimsical constructed languages that assert the unique culture and worldview

of women, Klingons or chipmunks. Okrent gamely translates to and from these languages, with unspeakably hilarious results, and riffs on the colorful eccentricities of their megalomaniacal creators. Fortunately, her own prose is a model of clarity and grace; through it, she conveys fascinating insights into why natural language, with its corruptions, ambiguities and arbitrary conventions, trips so fluently off our tongues. (May 19) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Hats off to Okrent, who expertly exposes the history, culture, and preoccupations of this insular tribe who live among us. She rescues language inventors, or conlangers, from the oddball bin—utopianists all, they’re the first biotechnologists, trying to leapfrog evolution and improve human life. They’ll thank her but everyone else will, too, for finally making sense of the conlangers’ discontents.”—Michael Erard, author of *Unbabel: Slips, Stumbles, and Verbal Blunders, and What They Mean*—“A lively, informative, insightful examination of artificial languages—who invents them, why, and why most of them fail. I loved this book.”—Will Shortz, Crossword Editor, New York Times—“Linguist Okrent explores some of the themes and shortcomings of 900 years worth of artificial languages. Okrent gamely translates these languages with unspeakably hilarious results, and riffs on the colorful eccentricities of their megalomaniacal creators. Fortunately, her own prose is a model of clarity and grace; through it, she conveys fascinating insights into why natural language, with its corruptions, ambiguities and arbitrary conventions, trips so fluently off our tongues.”—Publishers Weekly, starred review—“Arika Okrent is a linguist whose fascination with the ‘faded plastic flowers’ in the ‘lush orchid garden of languages’ is recounted to delightful, often comic effect in *In the Land of Invented Languages*. ... Okrent’s style is eminently suited to her approach, which is at once serious and playful, exemplified by her marvelous, snappy opening sentence: ‘Klingon speakers ... inhabit the lowest possible rung on the geek ladder.’”—Pittsburgh Post-Gazette—“The author...examines a variety of would-be languages and related philosophical tenets (there are no pure ideas, all signs depend on conventions) in a rigorously linguistic way. And yet her book is a pleasure to read. It shows how language systems connect, or don’t connect, with people.”—New York Times—“Anyone who has felt the lure of words, odd grammatical systems or the potential connections between human thought and speech, is likely to enjoy this book just as much as I did.”—Locus—“In the Land of Invented Languages is a delight to read. It’s humorous, intelligent, entertaining and highly informative. And it’s a great

source of knowledge about human languages and why they exasperate some people - because they are not perfect. But neither are we." — San Francisco Chronicle "Okrent is a professional linguist and relates the place of these artificial languages in the confusion of human languages. She is also a great storyteller, and eccentric characters and dashed dreams are the stuff of this delightful book." — Denver Post From the Hardcover edition.

This is, without a doubt, the most fascinating book I've ever read about invented languages. To be honest, it's the only book I've ever read about invented languages. But that doesn't detract from the book's power. If you're like me and you're fascinated by human languages, don't miss the chance to read this book. If you speak multiple languages, but have never learned a made-up language, you'll be absolutely enthralled by it. The efforts by humans to create "the perfect language" and to overcome the shortfalls and vices of natural human languages prove to be forever quixotic. As the author discovers, the "flaws" and irregularities in human language actually make them more, rather than less, functional. It's also interesting to see how relative the idea of "the perfect language" has been throughout human history. Can you create an ideal language by inventing a precise classification for everything on earth? By basing it on mathematics? By creating symbols that perfectly represent abstract ideas? Can a language like Esperanto be perfect, even if it is very male-centric? Okrent delivers a very readable, entertaining venture into the world of "con langs." You won't be disappointed.

"A zippy trip through the history of man's attempts to overcome the curse of babel." Esperanto is the most commonly spoken artificial language and it is even sung at Esperanto congresses. There were many other artificial languages developed at the turn of the century (some quite bizarre) but the effort fell out of vogue with the intellectuals when English became the dominant international language with the solidification of the British Empire. A snippet tells of the survival of Simplified English in some foreign broadcasts (limited words and no passive voice). The book gains feeling during the sometimes blissful history of Semantography despite Karl Bliss' grumpy disappointment with the successful use of his symbols (retermed Blissymbolics) to teach children afflicted with cerebral palsy (as opposed to use as an ideographic universal language transcending words). Loglan ends in a split with the birth of its "illegitimate" (according to Brown) child language of Lojban which survives trademark legal battles between Loglan's Brown and Lojban's Bob and Nora LeChevalier (Brown's ex-wife married Bob in a Lojban ceremony). Brown also invented a boardgame "Careers" (marketed by Parker Brothers) where winning is based on reaching monetary,

fame and happiness point goals. Loglan was supposed to be based on logic to test the Whorfian premise that language limits thinking, so shouldn't Star Trek switch character names between Spock and Whorf? Klingon is the only invented language to retain trademark status (mainly because no one wants to fight the Paramount lawyers). Laadan has words that sound like proper nouns in P. C. Hodgell's Kencyrath series (like rathom and ramimeth). Tolkien developed several languages with proto-language history as the defining quality of his fantasy races in his latter Lord of the Rings. The appendix lists 500 invented languages which is indicative of the lure of linguistics and the imagination.

The first and last chapters are not that bad, but too much of the middle is boringly detailed biography of people, only peripherally dealing with invented languages. Great title, but doesn't reflect the book.

As a language creator who came to the current social group a little later into its existence, this book provides provides two beautiful facets. First, it offers a history-not in depth, but more than be found elsewhere, certainly- and also a view of conlanging from a particularly eloquent outsiders perspective. I am both a conlanger and an Esperanto speaker, so seeing her treatment of these two similar but different states was quite amusing. I loved reading about bliss, and finally finding out what was up with the whole loglan vs lojban thing! All in all, a fantastic book for anyone interested in the history and social perception of conlangs and those who create and speak them! I absolutely recommend it.

The author describes invented (or artificial) languages like Klingon, Esperanto, Blissymbolics, Loglan-Lojban etc. from a personal viewpoint. She tells about the people involved in the creation and use of these languages and includes her own experience with the languages, in some of which she invested much effort, and hence the book is more subjective than comparable treatises. Apart from numerous projects of languages for international understanding, some languages were constructed in order to be used in books and films. They must play a credible role as languages of fictitious peoples and civilizations. Klingon is one example of this kind of languages, originating in 1984, but there are both earlier and later examples. Klingon was created for the Star Trek television shows and films. It now has its own community of users. Languages for fiction are not particularly simple. Because they represent civilizations different from human civilizations, the vocabulary and grammar are different from human languages. The author also devotes some chapters to Loglan

and Lojban, languages of logic. These represent an effort to create a nearly perfect language based on logic. Loglan was continued as Lojban because of copyright reasons. Lojban is still developing, but it is very difficult to use. By the way, an author of a language falling out with his followers about his rights to the language is a recurring theme in the book. This book is a useful update for those familiar with the field of 'interlinguistics' and an entertaining introduction for those new to the subject.

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