

# LIKE SPINNING PLATES

Creating the Dothraki Language *in medias res*

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## Background

The Dothraki people are a race of nomadic warriors and hunter-gatherers in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy book series. Their language, *Lekh Dothraki*, was developed by David J. Peterson for *Game of Thrones*, HBO's adaptation of George R. R. Martin's series.

## Dothraki Names

Figure 1: Sample Dothraki Names from the Song of Ice and Fire Book Series

| Name         | Pronunciation | Name        | Pronunciation |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| Drogo (m.)   | [ˈdro.go]     | Mago (m.)   | [ˈma.go]      |
| Cohollo (m.) | [ko.ˈhol.lo]  | Jommo (m.)  | [ˈdʒom.mo]    |
| Qotho (m.)   | [ˈqo.θo]      | Irri (f.)   | [ˈi.ri]       |
| Rakharo (m.) | [ˈra.xa.ro]   | Jhiqui (f.) | [ˈʒi.kwi]     |
| Fogo (m.)    | [ˈfo.go]      | Jhogo (m.)  | [ˈʒo.go]      |

## Sample Texts

All from *A Game of Thrones* (1996), pg. 490, Bantam Spectra mass market reissue:

- ◆ "Khalakka dothrae *mr'anha!*" she proclaimed in her best Dothraki. *A prince rides inside me!*
- ◆ "Khalakka dothrae!" she shrieked. *The prince is riding.*
- ◆ "Rakh! Rakh! Rakh haj!" they proclaimed. *A boy, a boy, a strong boy.*

## Heads and Dependents

**Phrasal Head:** The element of a phrase which triggers agreement, in systems with agreement patterns, and the element that assigns case to its dependents. Essentially, what the phrase is "about". For example, in a noun phrase, the noun is the head (italicized: "the *man* I saw", "*cats*", "three big *jars* of jam").

**Dependent:** An often non-essential part of a larger phrase. Also called a modifier. In the following phrases, the dependents are italicized ("*big* cats", "for *big* cats", "care for *big* cats", "I care for *big* cats", "that I care for *big* cats", "Tim knows I care for *big* cats").

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Figure 2: Samples of Various Orderings of Heads and Dependents

## Nouns and Adjectives:

|    |                       |              |              |           |
|----|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| NA | <i>pájaro enojado</i> | /bird angry/ | "angry bird" | (Spanish) |
| AN | angry bird            | /angry bird/ | "angry bird" | (English) |

## Adposition and Noun:

|      |                   |              |              |            |
|------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Prep | <i>de Tokyo</i>   | /from Tokyo/ | "from Tokyo" | (French)   |
| Post | <i>Tōkyō kara</i> | /Tokyo from/ | "from Tokyo" | (Japanese) |

## Verbs and Direct Objects:

|    |                       |              |                  |           |
|----|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------|
| VO | <i>napisal knigu</i>  | /wrote book/ | "wrote the book" | (Russian) |
| OV | <i>libro scripsit</i> | /book wrote/ | "wrote the book" | (Latin)   |

## Determiners and Nouns:

|    |                  |            |            |           |
|----|------------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| DN | <i>al-kitaab</i> | /the-book/ | "the book" | (Arabic)  |
| ND | <i>bok-en</i>    | /book-the/ | "the book" | (Swedish) |

## Nouns and Possessives/Genitives:

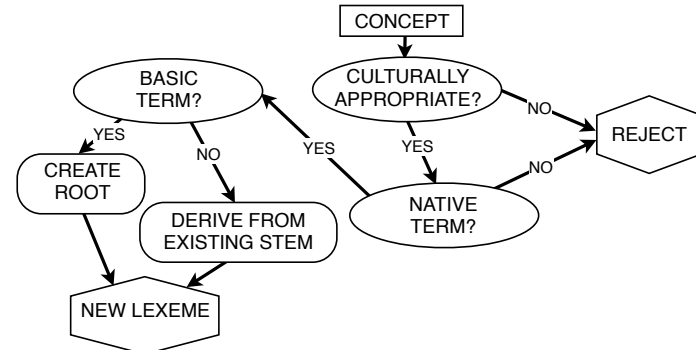
|    |                     |                |               |         |
|----|---------------------|----------------|---------------|---------|
| NG | <i>kāren Daudà</i>  | /leg-of David/ | "David's leg" | (Hausa) |
| GN | <i>David's been</i> | /David's leg/  | "David's leg" | (Dutch) |

## Nouns and Relative Clauses:

|    |                          |                    |             |           |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|
| NR | <i>uomo che ho visto</i> | /man CP I've seen/ | "man I saw" | (Italian) |
| RN | <i>gördüğüm adam</i>     | /I-saw man/        | "man I saw" | (Turkish) |

## Workflow

Figure 3: A Modified (Albeit Wonky) Version of the Workflow Flow Chart



[www.dothraki.com](http://www.dothraki.com)

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**"Fake" Language**

*A Proposed Taxonomy of Language Types*

**Fictional Language:** A language that is supposed to exist, within a given context (e.g. a fictional setting), but which does not, in fact, exist in the real world. Examples: Languages from George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*—including Dothraki before its creation in 2009; the Telmarine language from the Narnia books, etc.

**Constructed Language:** A language consciously created by one or more persons in the real world for various reasons (artistic, philosophical, religious, personal, etc.). Examples: Dothraki (post-2009), Kelen, Okuna, Esperanto, Sindarin, Rikchik, etc.

**Natural Language:** A language created unconsciously (for the most part) by a community of users in the real world and evolved by regular use over a period of years. Examples: English, Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, Sranan, Japanese, Moro, etc.

**Real Language:** A language that exists in the real world, whether natural or constructed. (Note: A constructed language, though real, may exist in varying states of completion.) Examples: Dothraki (post-2009), English, Moten, Lakota, ASL, etc.

**Fake Language:** A bit of language-like material that's intended to either look like or in some way mimic one or more of the properties of a real language. Examples: Asemic writing, the muted-trombone speech of adults in *Peanuts* cartoons, profanity glyphs (e.g. @%#&!), the "language" of the *Codex Seraphinianus*, etc.

**Dead Language:** A language that was once spoken by a regular community of speakers which is no longer spoken, whether preserved or not. Examples: Latin, Sanskrit, Ancient Greek, Middle Egyptian, etc.

**Reconstructed Language:** A language which linguists suppose to have existed, but for which no primary sources have been found. Examples: Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Polynesian, Proto-Austronesian, Proto-Semitic, etc.

**Potential Language:** Any language whose description is full enough that the system has the *potential* to be spoken, but which is not currently spoken by a community. This grouping includes fully described dead languages and fully described constructed languages. Examples: Latin, Sanskrit, Old Hebrew, Slovianski, etc.

**More Information on Dothraki and Other Constructed Languages**

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Official Dothraki Blog    | <a href="http://dothraki.com/">http://dothraki.com/</a> |
| Dothraki Fan Site         | <a href="http://dothraki.org/">http://dothraki.org/</a> |
| David J. Peterson         | <a href="http://dedalvs.com/">http://dedalvs.com/</a>   |
| Language Creation Society | <a href="http://conlang.org/">http://conlang.org/</a>   |

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**References and Resources**

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*Other language samples retrieved either from instructional materials or dictionaries on hand, or from memory/personal knowledge. Special thanks to Jonathan Moore for help retrieving some of the quotations used in this presentation.*

