

Introduction: “All Names Are Letters”

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Popular culture, in all its diverse forms, is a product of human creativity, expression, and innovation. Popular culture focuses on cultural artifacts. Everything we consider as popular culture, including music, literature, film, fashion, sports, language, and more, is created by humans. These cultural artifacts are the result of human thought, imagination, and effort. We use symbols and texts to convey our authentic interactions and interpretations of objective reality, which includes nature and one another. Thus, popular culture is an example of our co-constructing a subjective reality, as popular culture is subjective and culturally dependent. What is considered popular culture varies across different societies and over time. The concept of "popularity" itself is shaped by the beliefs, values, and tastes of human communities. Popular culture is not static. It constantly evolves and changes as humans create, adapt, and reinterpret cultural elements. This dynamic nature allows popular culture to remain relevant and reflective of societal shifts.

In essence, the idea that all popular culture is constructed by humans emphasizes the agency and creativity of individuals and communities in shaping the cultural landscape. It also highlights the power of culture to influence and reflect the collective consciousness of society, making popular culture a vibrant and ever-evolving aspect of human existence. Humans, as creators of popular culture, have the power to influence and impact society. Cultural products can shape opinions, beliefs, behaviors, and social norms. They can also serve as a mirror that reflects the collective consciousness of a given time and place. As a form of expression, popular culture serves as a means for individuals and communities to communicate their ideas, emotions, identities, and experiences. Through popular culture, people express their creativity and connect with others who share similar cultural touchstones.

¹ As an experiment, this introduction was written with the generative AI program from OpenAI, ChatGPT, to demonstrate the extent to which this computer program has learned how to read and write in the constructed language that is modern English. You can see our entire conversation at chat.openai.com/share/fbc4b70a-f514-45d6-9829-93584e6ec920. It was then fascinating to see how the Microsoft Word AI interacted with and corrected ChatGPT's grammar, as Microsoft deemed some of ChatGPT's academic flourish unnecessary.

Thus, popular culture is often intertwined with cultural identity. The choices people make in terms of what they consume and create in popular culture can reflect their individual and group identities. It is a way for people to assert and celebrate their cultural heritage and values. Popular culture fosters shared experiences and a sense of belonging among individuals and communities. It provides a common cultural language through which people can relate to each other, share stories, and engage in cultural dialogues.

In the diverse tapestry of popular culture, one thread has emerged over the decades as a testament to human creativity and linguistic innovation: constructed languages, often referred to as "conlangs." These meticulously crafted linguistic creations have transcended their humble origins in literature, film, and gaming to become a dynamic force in contemporary popular culture. This special issue is dedicated to unraveling the intricate web of constructed languages, shedding light on their profound influence and multifaceted impact on our global society.

Constructed languages are far more than just a means of communication; they are cultural artifacts and a reflection of the complex interplay between imagination, language, and culture. Through the pages of this issue, scholars, linguists, enthusiasts, and aficionados delve into the fascinating world of conlangs through in-depth exploration and critical analysis of constructed languages, their evolution, and their profound effects on the realms of literature, film, television, gaming, art, and more.

Constructed languages, or conlangs, matter for popular culture for a multitude of reasons, as they play a significant role in shaping and enriching various forms of entertainment and artistic expression. According to ChatGPT, here are some key reasons why conlangs matter for popular culture:

1. **World-Building:** Conlangs are essential tools for world-building in literature, film, and gaming. They contribute to the creation of immersive and believable fictional worlds by adding depth and authenticity to the cultures and societies depicted. For example, J.R.R. Tolkien's Elvish languages add a layer of cultural richness to Middle-earth in "The Lord of the Rings."
2. **Cultural Identity:** Conlangs are often used to represent and explore cultural identity. They provide a means for authors, filmmakers, and creators to express the uniqueness of fictional or imagined cultures. Conlangs, like Klingon from "Star Trek," have become iconic symbols of the cultures they represent.

3. **Fan Engagement:** Conlangs have a dedicated fanbase, and they can serve to engage and captivate fans. Fans often learn and use these languages, fostering a sense of community and participation within fan communities.
4. **Inclusivity and Diversity:** Constructed languages can help promote inclusivity and diversity in popular culture. Creators can use conlangs to incorporate underrepresented languages and cultures, thereby broadening the representation of various linguistic and cultural groups.
5. **Linguistic Innovation:** Conlangs are a testament to human linguistic creativity. They provide a platform for linguistic experimentation and innovation. Creators often develop entirely new grammatical structures, writing systems, and phonologies, expanding the possibilities of human language.
6. **Artistic Expression:** Conlangs are an art form in themselves. They offer creators a unique medium for artistic expression and exploration. The creation of conlangs requires attention to detail, creativity, and linguistic expertise, which can be a form of artistry.
7. **Language Learning:** Conlangs can be used as tools for language learning. Learning a constructed language, like Esperanto or Dothraki, can be an engaging and enjoyable way to acquire language skills. This adds an educational dimension to the use of conlangs in popular culture.
8. **Economic Impact:** Popular culture products featuring conlangs often achieve commercial success. The presence of a well-developed conlang can increase the marketability and global appeal of books, films, and games, contributing to the economic success of these industries.
9. **Cross-Cultural Communication:** Conlangs can facilitate cross-cultural communication and understanding. By exploring the intricacies of constructed languages, people from different cultural backgrounds can find common ground and foster mutual appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity.

In conclusion, conlangs are not mere linguistic curiosities; they are powerful tools that shape the narratives, characters, and immersive worlds in popular culture. They contribute to the richness and authenticity of storytelling, promote diversity and inclusivity, and serve as a source of artistic innovation and creativity. For all these reasons, conlangs matter significantly in the realm of popular culture, making them a fascinating and integral part of our entertainment landscape.