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Wild and Whirling Words:

The Invention and Use of Klingon

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According to the 2006 edition of the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the world's 'largest fictional language' is Klingon. Though the book acknowledges that there is no way of knowing how many speakers the language actually has, it nonetheless asserts that 'there is little doubt' that Klingon is the 'most widely used language of its kind'. The appropriateness of the listing, of course, depends on what other languages 'of its kind' there may be and, perhaps more fundamentally, on what 'kind' of language Klingon is.

Klingon is a constructed language tied to a fictional context, rather than a constructed language like Esperanto (see Chapter 2) or a reconstructed one like Modern Hebrew (see Chapter 8) intended for use among speakers in everyday circumstances. Klingon started out as

nothing more than a few lines of dialogue in a film, and, once devised, owes its current shape as much to the practicalities of moviemaking as it does to careful design, and its place in the record book—deserved or not—to the phenomenon known as *Star Trek*. Arika Okrent, in her very informative and clever book, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, asserts that 'Klingon is a solution to an artistic problem, not a linguistic one' (2009, 282), intended to enhance the fiction of *Star Trek* by more fully realizing the speech of those populating the imagined universe of the films and television shows that make up the *Star Trek* franchise. In a sense, then, in the case of Klingon, necessity was the mother of invention.

Origins

Klingon is a language devised for the Klingons, a fictional race of humanoids sometimes allied with but more often in conflict with members of the United Federation of Planets in *Star Trek* movies, television programmes, video games, and novels. Klingons first appeared in 'Errand of Mercy' (23 March 1967), an episode of the original *Star Trek* television series, in 1967. In a later episode that same year, 'The Trouble with Tribbles' (29 December 1967), the fact that Klingons spoke their own language was first noted (one character boasts that half of the inhabitants in their quadrant of the galaxy are learning to speak 'Klingonese'). Other than character names (and the word 'Klingon'), however, no 'Klingonese' was ever spoken in the original *Star Trek* television series, which stopped producing new episodes in 1969.

After a ten-year hiatus, the series re-emerged on the big screen with the premiere of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979). The first several lines of dialogue in the film are spoken by a Klingon captain in a language never heard before, translated in subtitles. Before his fleet of ships mysteriously vanishes, within the first few minutes of the film, the captain barks out half a dozen or so commands (subtitled) and also gives what is presumably a description of his fleet's circumstances

(not subtitled, and difficult if not impossible to make out under the English dialogue going on at the same time).

These first words of 'Klingonese' were created by James Doohan, the actor who played the character Montgomery Scott (Scotty) in the series. His goal was to make a language that would not sound like any on Earth. According to Mark Lenard, who played the Klingon captain in the film, Doohan recorded the lines on a tape, and Lenard then listened to the tape and wrote down the recorded lines in a transcription useful to him in learning the dialogue. How closely the lines actually spoken on film resemble those spoken by Doohan is not known. It is also not known what sort of grammatical structure, if any, Doohan had in mind.

Klingons next appeared in the third *Star Trek* film, *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984). For this film, writer and executive producer Harve Bennett decided that the Klingons should speak their own language—at least when talking with one another. Bennett hired linguist Marc Okrand to devise the dialogue. This would be Okrand's second language assignment for *Star Trek*. Two years earlier, he devised four lines of Vulcan dialogue for *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, also written and produced by Bennett.

Unlike 'Klingonese', the language of the Vulcans—another humanoid race, but one allied closely with inhabitants of the Earth—had been heard in the original television series, as well as in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. On television, individual Vulcan words were used from time to time, most often uttered by Mr Spock, the most well-known Vulcan in the series. The words, presumably created by the writers or producers of the episodes in which the words were used, were mostly based on English phonology, that is, on sounds and sound combinations found in English. For example, some Vulcan words in the episode 'Amok Time' (15 September 1967, written by Theodore Sturgeon) are *ahn-woon* 'type of weapon', *koon-oot-kal-if-fee* 'marriage' or 'challenge', and *kroykah* 'halt!' The main exception to English phonological patterns is in names of female Vulcans, such as *T'Pau*

and *T'Pring*; these forms begin with the consonant cluster /tp/, which is structurally unacceptable in English.

By comparison, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* contains quite a bit of Vulcan dialogue in a scene in which Mr Spock undergoes a ritual known as Kolinahr. In this scene, the Vulcan 'masters' conducting the ritual speak only in Vulcan. When it was filmed, however, the actors were speaking English. The filmmakers later decided to replace the English dialogue with Vulcan, and did so, not by reshooting the scene, but by dubbing in dialogue that would match the English lip movements (lip-syncing) for parts when the speaker was on screen and would simply not sound like English for parts when the speaker could not be seen.

Using this lip-syncing technique, for example, the last word in the Vulcan salute *Live long and prosper* became *moz-ma* (first syllable rhymes with English *doze*), with the bilabial articulation of the two Vulcan /m/'s matching that of the English /p/'s, and the tongue position of Vulcan /z/ matching that of English /s/. The conversion also involved introducing sounds such as velar fricatives (similar to the /ch/ in German *Bach*) whose production does not involve parts of the speaker's mouth (lips, teeth, tongue tip) visible when the speaker is on camera.

In *Star Trek II*, Okrand used the same technique to replace four lines of English dialogue with four lines of Vulcan dialogue. The goal, again, was to have non-English sounds appear to be spoken by the characters who had actually spoken English. Some of the phonetic features of the Vulcan in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* were incorporated (including the velar fricatives) so that the languages in the two films would sound somewhat alike, but there was no attempt to assign meaning to individual words or impose any sort of grammatical structure.

When it came time to devise dialogue for the Klingons for *Star Trek III*, however, the goal had shifted from simply non-English-sounding verbiage to creating an actual language. In discussing how the language

would be used in the film, Bennett and Okrand agreed that the best way to make the language sound real was to make it real—to devise phonological and grammatical systems and to make use of a consistent vocabulary. The script indicated which lines spoken by Klingons were to be in English and which in 'Klingon', translated in subtitles. (The script referred to the language as 'Klingon', and this usage replaced the earlier 'Klingonese'.)

The plan, at this point, was not to create a 'full' language, but only what was necessary for the film—that is, just enough vocabulary and grammar for the lines marked as being in Klingon. This assignment was expanded to include Klingon versions of all the lines of English dialogue to be spoken by Klingon characters (when addressing other Klingons) so that if, during filming, someone thought a scene might be improved by having the character speak Klingon rather than English, the line would be instantly available. Even with the English lines included, however, the number of words and grammatical structures to be created was limited. Again, the motive for inventing Klingon, piecemeal as that invention has been, was artistic, but at the same time very practical. Klingon has developed lexically and grammatically as people needed it to develop for their particular artistic projects, first film and television, later translations of major works of world literature (see Appendix 5).

The language was to be the same as that heard in the original television series (even though that consisted of character names only) as well as in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (words and phrases), so all of the sounds and syllable types associated with the earlier 'Klingonese' were incorporated into the new Klingon. To expand the phonetic inventory, there were two potentially conflicting guiding principles, the first calling for creativity, the second for pragmatism: (1) the language was an alien (outer-space) language, so it should not sound like a human language; (2) the language was to be spoken by human actors without benefit of electronic enhancement, so the dialogue had to be possible for a human being to pronounce (and to memorize).

The linguistic structure of Klingon

The syllabic structure of the language in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, at least those parts that are audible, is basically CV(C), that is, a single consonant sound followed by a single vowel, as in the nouns *cha* 'torpedoes' and *po* 'morning', and perhaps followed by another single consonant, as in the verb *nep* 'lie' and the noun *veng* 'city', so this became the syllable type for Klingon, essentially without exception, even as the vocabulary of Klingon has expanded into thousands of words.

The relatively small number of vowels and consonants originally created (there were very few words in the film, so not many sounds) was expanded. To keep the phonology pronounceable by English-speaking actors, most of the additional sounds were also in English. To keep the language from sounding like English, a number of non-English sounds were added, such as /tlh/ in the verb *Sutlh* 'negotiate'. 'To produce this sound,' Okrand writes, 'the tip of the tongue touches the same part of the roof of the mouth it touches for **t**, the sides of the tongue are lowered away from the side upper teeth, and air is forced through the space on both sides between tongue and teeth' (1985, 15). There were also some velar and uvular consonants included because the script described the Klingon language as 'guttural' (even though the language had not yet been devised at the time the script was written). A glottal stop (actually quite common in spoken English, for instance, in place of /t/ in *mitten* and *kitten*) is frequently the syllable-final consonant (much less common in most English dialects), as in the exclamation *Qo'* 'I refuse' and the verb *ra'* 'order, command', giving the language its choppy quality.

To lend the phonology an alien feel, certain common patterns found in human languages were skewed. For example, the voiceless stop /t/ is made by placing the tip of the tongue on the alveolar ridge, just above the teeth, as in English; its voiced counterpart, rather than the alveolar /d/ in English, is a palatal stop (transcribed as /D/). So syllable-final

consonants in the verbs *jot* 'be calm' and *joD* 'stoop' are not merely unvoiced and voiced alternants of otherwise identical sounds (as /t/ and /d/ are in *pot* and *pod*), but even more significantly distinct sounds. There are two velar fricatives—the /H/ of the verb *liH* 'introduce', which sounds like the coda in German *Bach*, and the /gh/ of *ghagh* 'gargle', which is a voiced alternant of /H/ (neither of which is available in English)—and a velar nasal (English /ŋ/ as in *song*), which can appear in a syllable coda (as it can in English), for instance, in the noun *ghong* 'abuse', but also in the syllable onset as in the verb *ngu'* 'identify' (as it cannot in English). There are, however, no velar stops (voiceless /k/ and voiced /g/ in English), which English speakers would expect, and this absence contributes to the un-English-like sound of the language. There is no sound in Klingon that does not occur in any number of natural languages, but the particular inventory of sounds is unique to Klingon.

Several arbitrary decisions were made about the sounds of Klingon. One was that the sound /k/ was avoided as being associated, at least at the beginning of words or names, with aliens or outer space: *Flash Gordon*'s *Kala* and *Klytus*, *Superman*'s *Krypton* and *kryptonite*, even *The Simpsons*' *Kang* and *Kodos*. These last two names were probably a nod to *Star Trek*, whose writers also used /k/ for this association (*Kang* and *Kodos*, along with *Kaylar*, *Kloog*, *Korob*, *Kelvans*, *Kalandans*, and others). The presence of /k/ in *Kirk*, the name of *Star Trek*'s principal human protagonist, of course, shows that the connection of /k/ to alien is not absolute.

Unfortunately, /k/ had already been established as part of the language in the name *Klingon* itself as well as in the names of all of the male Klingon characters in the original *Star Trek* series (such as *Kor*, *Koloth*, and *Kahless*). To keep to the self-imposed avoidance of /k/, Okrand posited that all of the names previously transcribed with *k* were Earthlings' mishearings of Klingon sounds unavailable in the inventory of English consonants: the first sound in the name *Kor* is really a uvular stop, made farther back in the mouth than the velar /k/;

the word *Klingon* begins with a lateral affricate, the /tlh/ of *Sutlh*, not a /kl/ cluster. Thus, the name represented in English as *Klingon* is actually *tlhIngan*.

A transcription system had to be developed so that the language could be written down for the actors in a way that would help them learn their lines. For the most part, letters in this system were given their usual English value (*b* is pronounced like the first letter in the English word *boy*, *ch* as in *church*, etc.). Most non-English sounds were indicated by capital letters (*H* is a voiceless velar fricative, *Q* is a voiceless uvular affricate) or by letter combinations (*gh* is a voiced velar fricative, *tlh* is a voiceless lateral affricate). Note that these letter combinations did not represent consonant clusters (like /sp/ in *spill* or /st/ in *cast*), but single consonant phonemes, however difficult for an English speaker to articulate. Capital *I* was to indicate the /ɪ/ sound in *bit* (not that in *machine* or *dine*), lower-case *q* represented a voiceless uvular stop, and an apostrophe indicated a glottal stop. The resulting system, while far from elegant—a system could have been devised with no upper-case letters and no need to be careful about upper- vs lower-case *q*—nonetheless served its purpose as a pedagogical tool.

The grammar of Klingon was also designed to make the language seem unusual (to a speaker of English, anyway). For example, the basic word order of Klingon is OBJECT—VERB—SUBJECT. Thus, *The officer sees the child* is *puq legh yaS* in Klingon, while *The child sees the officer* is *yaS legh puq* (Okrand 1985, 59). This pattern was chosen not because it is the English order in reverse, but because this particular order is one of the least frequently found in natural languages. As with sounds, any given grammatical feature of Klingon can probably be found in some language or other, but the collection is unique. Every attempt was made to keep Klingon from resembling any other language. That said, one cannot help but be influenced by what one knows, so phonological or grammatical features of some Native American languages or Southeast Asian languages—the languages with which Okrand was

most familiar—worked their way into Klingon, but, for the most part, not by design.

Stay tuned for further developments

Lines of dialogue to be spoken by Klingon characters in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* were composed on the basis of these phonological and grammatical principles and linguistic influences. If a particular vocabulary item or grammatical feature was not needed in any of the lines, it simply was not created. The choice of what sounds should come together (given the phonological patterns described earlier) to become a specific word was totally arbitrary (unless it happened to occur in the original motion picture). Later, in producing *The Klingon Dictionary* (1985), Okrand would regularize some features of word structure, for instance, pronoun prefixes, case suffixes for nouns, mood and aspect suffixes for verbs, a suffix for ordinal numbers, etc. (Okrand 1985, 162–8).

The dialogue was transcribed in the newly devised system, and these transcripts, along with tapes of Okrand pronouncing the lines, were sent to Paramount Pictures in Hollywood, where the movie was to be filmed, to be distributed to the actors. When filming actually began, for the most part, Okrand was on the set to coach the actors when they were to speak Klingon. The filmmakers were attentive to the language and checked with Okrand after each scene was filmed to see if the actors said their lines correctly. In the interest of saving time (and money), if an actor said a word or line incorrectly, but it still sounded enough like Klingon and did not conflict with anything filmed earlier, it was considered acceptable. Since, at this time, no one other than the filmmakers had heard the language, errors were easily tolerated and, in fact, were instantly incorporated as features—both phonological and grammatical—of the language. On the other hand, if a line were mispronounced in such a way that it did not sound like Klingon, the scene would be shot again.

Weeks later, the film went into post-production and was put into its final form. This process affected the Klingon language in two ways. First, it was decided that some of the lines filmed in English should be changed to Klingon. (None of the Klingon equivalents for English dialogue spoken by Klingon characters that had been prepared in advance was used during the filming.) The actors would dub in Klingon lines to match the English lip movements on the film, just as had been done with Vulcan for earlier features. This time, however, the new lines had to match, not only lip movements, but the phonology that had been devised for the language. Thus, for instance, English *animal* became Klingon *Ha'DIbaH*. Second, some of the subtitles had been changed, so that, for example, a line originally having the subtitle 'I told you, engine section only' (meaning 'I told you to target only the engine section of the ship you were to fire upon') now had the subtitle 'I wanted prisoners'. The phrase (and subtitle) 'engine only' remained in the film elsewhere, so homophony was introduced (the words for 'only' and 'want' came to be pronounced identically, *neH*). New words and new grammatical features were invented and incorporated into the now growing language as a result of the post-production process.

After work on the film had been completed, but before the film premiered, Okrand began writing a book that was to contain a description of the film's language, including a grammatical description and a list of all of the vocabulary in the film. It became clear that if the contents were limited to the words and phrases actually heard in the film, the book would seem incomplete, leaving out descriptions of certain basic grammatical features, for example, simply because no sentence in the film happened to make use of them. Similarly, had the vocabulary in the book been limited to what was heard in the film, it would have been a very short list. To add some heft, Okrand devised additional grammatical features and created a great deal of additional vocabulary just for the book. Nevertheless, the description of the

grammar of the language was more like a sketch—many potential features were not included simply because they had not yet been invented—and there were only about 1,500 words.

The book was originally to appear at the same time the film came out, but its initial publication was delayed. This turned out to be fortunate since the book, as originally written, did not include any of the post-production additions and changes. The delay allowed time for revision, so when the book, *The Klingon Dictionary*, finally did appear at the tail end of 1984, the language it described matched what was heard in the film, a few typographical errors notwithstanding. This conformed to fan expectations, as many fans of *Star Trek* (Trekkers or Trekkies) are picky about facts and tend to take a canonical view of costume, language, technology, etc. presented in the films, television series, or products associated with them. If the motive for inventing Klingon in the first place was more or less instrumental, inventing more Klingon became important to the *Star Trek* brand, which is why Paramount Pictures, which holds the copyright to both editions of *The Klingon Dictionary*, saw publishing it as an opportunity not to be passed up. *Star Trek*®, we are reminded on the copyright pages of the dictionary and subsequent books about Klingon, is a registered trademark of Paramount Pictures (see Appendix 1).

Klingon vocab

From what they have seen of Klingons on the big and small screens, many assume that the core Klingon vocabulary reflects Klingon obsessions with war and honour, and certainly *The Klingon Dictionary* includes many terms that serve the stereotype: *bach* 'shoot', *boQDu'* 'aide-de-camp', *chun* 'innocent', *chuQun* 'nobility', *Doghjey* 'unconditional surrender', *Dup* 'strategy', *ghIm* 'exile', *ghIpDIj* 'court-martial', *Hay'* 'duel', *HIv* 'attack', *jey* 'defeat', *joS* 'rumour, gossip', *lay'* 'promise', *luj* 'fail', *may'* 'battle', *mIy* 'brag', *nawlogh* 'squadron', *nur* 'dignity', *ngIv*

'patrol', *ngor* 'cheat', *pIch* 'fault, blame', *pujwI'* 'weakling', *qeH* 'resent', *qu'* 'fierce', *Qoj* 'make war', *QuS* 'conspire', *ra'* 'order, command', *ruv* 'justice', *Sun* 'discipline', *Suv* 'fight', *tIch* 'insult', *tuHmoH* 'shame', *vaQ* 'aggressive', *vuv* 'respect', *web* 'disgraced', *wIh* 'ruthless', *yay* 'victory', *yot* 'invade', *'Ip* 'vow', and *'urmang* 'treason'.

However, the dictionary also includes more general and sometimes surprisingly domestic terms: *bang* 'loved one', *butlh* 'dirt under fingernails', *chIS* 'white', *chuS* 'noisy', *DaQ* 'ponytail', *Du'* 'farm', *gogh* 'voice', *ghu* 'baby', *Hagh* 'laugh', *Hu* 'zoo', *jIl* 'neighbour', *juH* 'home', *loch* 'moustache', *lut* 'story', *megh* 'lunch', *mu'* 'word', *mu'ghom* 'dictionary', *mu'tay* 'vocabulary' *mu'tlhegh* 'sentence', *nIQ* 'breakfast', *noSvagh* 'deodorant', *ngav* 'writer's cramp', *nger* 'theory', *pab* 'grammar', *puq* 'child', *qej* 'grouchy', *qempa'* 'ancestor', *Qe'* 'restaurant', *Quj* 'play a game', *rejmorgh* 'worrywort', *rewbe'* 'citizen', *Saj* 'pet', *SoSnI'* 'grandmother', *taQ* 'weird', *tIv* 'enjoy', *tlhaQ* 'funny', *tlhogh* 'marriage', *vem* 'awaken', *vuD* 'opinion', *wIch* 'myth', *wIj* 'farm', *yob* 'harvest', *yuch* 'chocolate', *IH* 'handsome', and *u'* 'universe'.

Codifying Klingon

The Klingon Dictionary provides a very elementary grammar of the language, and it would be impossible to outline many of the word-formative or syntactic rules implied by recent work in Klingon here (see Appendix 5), but it will help explain the language to mention a few of the most basic grammatical features. Klingon resembles agglutinative languages, among which are many Native American and Southeast Asian languages familiar to Okrand. In agglutinative languages, meaning can be added to words in accumulations of affixes on a base, often allowing many more prefixes, infixes, or suffixes in a word than are allowed in English. In Klingon, a verb base can be encrusted in a prefix and as many as nine suffixes! There are nine types of verb suffix, and a word can include only one suffix of each type; and while

a word need not include suffixes of all types, those it does include occur in type order.

So, a very complex Klingon verb might take the form PREFIX-VERB BASE-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9. A less complex verb might take the form PREFIX-VERB BASE-1-7-9, as in *jIqIp'eghpu"a'* 'Did I hit myself?', where the prefix *jI-* is pronominal (not a pronoun but functioning like one) and *qIp* is the base, with serial suffixes *-egh* 'myself', *-pu'* (perfect aspect, indicating completed action), and *-'a'* (indicating a "yes/no" question). Again, it is impossible to form the verb **jIqIp'a'pu'egh*—the suffixes (9-7-1) are in the wrong order. This very rigid system is alleviated somewhat by verb suffixes called *lengwI'mey* 'rovers', which can occur in any suffix position except the final one and indicate various kinds of negation and emphasis.

Nouns work in much the same fashion as verbs, with five suffix types and no rovers. There are no adjectives in Klingon; adjective meanings are attached to verbs. So, in English you are **ruthless**, whereas in Klingon you **are ruthless**. Adverbs of manner occur at the beginning of a sentence, except *jay'* 'intensely', which occurs at the end of a sentence and can serve the function and carry the force of an expletive. It would be difficult to imagine Klingon language without an expletive, and it is surely no surprise to discover that 'cursing is a fine art among Klingons' (Okrand 1992, 178).

New demands for (and on) Klingon

The Klingon language remained static—that is, unchanged—for several years until Bennett hired Okrand once again to create Klingon dialogue for the fifth film in the *Star Trek* series, *The Final Frontier*, released in 1989. While in *Star Trek III* most of the Klingon dialogue was in the form of short exclamations or commands, in *Star Trek V* there were actual conversations. Rather than again starting virtually from scratch, Okrand relied on what was known about the language,

that is, whatever was recorded in *The Klingon Dictionary*. To accommodate the film's dialogue, new vocabulary and new grammatical features were added. The same was done for *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, released two years later.

In the meantime, Paramount launched the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in 1987. A Klingon, Worf, was a regular character, and, as the series went along, more and more stories involved Klingons and their culture—and their language. The first bits of Klingon language heard on the series were not based on Okrand's work, but after a while, some writers made use of *The Klingon Dictionary*—at least for vocabulary—and occasionally some consulted with Okrand himself.

Discourse, dialects, and writing

In 1992, *The Klingon Dictionary* was reissued. The new edition included an addendum with additional grammatical information as well as another 180 or so words, mostly—but not entirely—material that had been created for *Star Trek V* and *Star Trek VI* or based on plot elements in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. It also provided some unexpected information about pragmatic dimensions of Klingon, though, admittedly, very little information. For instance, until the new edition, we had not known of *-oy*, the noun suffix that expresses endearment, so that *SoS* 'mother' becomes *SoSoy* 'mummy/mommy' and *be'nI'* 'sister' becomes *be'nI'oy* 'sis'. Okrand notes that 'The suffix usually follows a noun referring to a relative … but it could also follow a noun for a pet and means that a speaker is particularly fond of whatever the noun refers to. It is strongly suggested that non-native speakers of Klingon avoid this suffix unless they know what they are getting into' (1992, 174). Klingons, though socially aggressive, do not tolerate what they see as *Doch* 'rude'.

By this time, Klingon was moving beyond its place as a language restricted to films and television programmes. Basing their studies on

The Klingon Dictionary, people interested in the language were starting to learn it, either individually or in groups coming together for that purpose. The contents of the dictionary were being analysed, discussed, committed to memory, and put to use. Language classes were organized, and a journal devoted to the language (*HolQed*, literally 'linguistics', published by a group of Klingon devotees known as the Klingon Language Institute) first appeared in 1992.

As interest in Klingon seemed to expand, and as Klingon stories and characters continued to play a role in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the subsequent television series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek: Voyager*, Okrand added to the canon of recorded Klingon, principally in two other books: *The Klingon Way: A Warrior's Guide* (1996), a collection of Klingon proverbs (in English and Klingon) with commentary, and *Klingon for the Galactic Traveler* (1997), an examination of dialects, specialized vocabulary, idioms, and slang. This third book includes a vocabulary list of over 600 new words (including words that had been heard in various television episodes even though not created by Okrand).

With the creation of vocabulary beyond what was needed in the films, the choice of what sounds were used for what words sometimes became a little less arbitrary and a little more capricious than was originally the case. Some of the vocabulary in the original dictionary, and a not insignificant amount of vocabulary developed since then, is based on puns and other wordplay (for an interesting parallel, see Chapter 4, pages 102–3). For example, *Hat* (which sounds somewhat like English *hot*) means 'temperature'; *'om* means 'resist', based on the ohm, a unit of electrical resistance; *mon* is 'smile', as in Mona Lisa; *qogh* is '(outer) ear', based on Van Gogh; *Das* is 'boot' (based on the movie *Das Boot*, which influenced the design of the bridge of the Klingon ship in *Star Trek III*); and the word for 'joke' is *qID* (resembling English 'kid').

The transcription of Klingon used in *The Klingon Dictionary* and all other publications by Okrand, as well as by students of the language, is

the same as the one originally devised for the actors, including the use of capital letters for certain (mostly non-English) sounds. In the motion pictures and television programmes, when written Klingon is shown, it is written in special characters. These characters, however, have never been matched up with the spoken language. That is, the written form of the language is not a syllabary, an alphabet, or any other known type of writing—it is artwork. Some efforts have been made, notably by the Klingon Language Institute, to map Okrand's transcription to characters that closely resemble those seen in the films and on television on a one-on-one basis (a specific character for 'a', another for 'b', and so on), but virtually all of written Klingon other than on-screen is in Okrand's romanized alphabetic form.

From the outset, Harve Bennett and Okrand had agreed that the best way to make Klingon sound real was to make it real. Over the years, that 'reality' expanded beyond phonology and grammar designed to serve particular fictional purposes in television and film into imagined historical and sociolinguistic aspects of the language. Noting that 'All Klingons are not alike', Okrand arrived at a natural conclusion: 'By the same token, all Klingons do not speak alike' (1997, 7). Klingon, that is, *tlhIngan Hol* 'Klingon language' in the works collectively known as *Star Trek*, developed from an earlier version, reflected in myths and rituals at the foundation of Klingon culture, known as *no' Hol* 'ancestors' language (Okrand 1997, 11–13).

Throughout its history, *tlhIngan Hol* comprises regional and social dialects. As the American linguist Walt Wolfram puts it, 'Languages are invariably manifested through their dialects, and to speak a language is to speak some dialect of that language' (1991, 2). Klingon could not be a 'real' language without observing metalinguistic principles like this one. As one might expect of a very hierarchical culture, Klingon has a standard variety, *ta' tlhIngan Hol* 'Emperor's Klingon' or *ta' Hol* 'Emperor's language' against which other varieties are judged: 'the more any given dialect differs from that of the emperor, the more inferior it is considered' (Okrand 1997, 14). A language so bound to

tradition and prestige must be enriched, supplemented, and even covertly challenged by *mu'mey ghoQ* 'fresh words' or slang and, we are told, 'Except in formal situations, the speech of younger Klingons is apt to contain a fair amount of slang' (Okrand 1997, 142). The 'reality' of Klingon is in the extent of its *chab* 'invention', of the gradual filling in of its linguistic structures and sociolinguistic contexts.

As the *Guinness Book of World Records* announced, Klingon is an unusually successful invented language, but in a very restricted sense, for, as Okrent observes, 'it is possible for an invented language to succeed even if it has no useful features at all'. Klingon 'has no mission: it wasn't intended to unite mankind or improve the mind or even be spoken by people in the real world. But it suited the personal taste of a certain group of people so well that as soon as they saw it, they fell in love, clamored for more, and formed a community that brought it to life' (Okrent 2009, 263). It may not have been intended to be spoken by real people, but it could be spoken by some of the especially enthusiastic ones. 'How many speakers are there?' Okrent asks. 'It depends on your definition of "speaker" ' (2009, 272), as well as on what 'kind' of language Klingon is. And while Klingon may have been 'brought to life' by a 'community', is it a 'speech community', with the emphasis on 'speech'?

Who speaks Klingon?

In 'Just a Touch' (22 April 2004), an episode of the popular American hospital serial *ER*, one of the show's main characters, Abby (played by Maura Tierney), during her internship on the psych ward, is confronted by a man who suddenly speaks what most of us would hear as guttural gibberish. Abby answers in the same guttural gibberish, after which she explains to her surprised superior that she speaks a little Klingon. Nothing more was explained about what Klingon is or who speaks it. The episode's writers apparently considered it common knowledge among *ER*'s worldwide audience. *ER* is fiction, but truth is

often at least as strange as fiction. In May 2003, the real-world Multnomah County Hospital in Portland, Oregon, advertised for an interpreter fluent in Klingon. 'We have to provide information in all the languages our clients speak,' said Jerry Jelusich, a procurement specialist for the County Department of Human Services, which serves about 60,000 mental health clients (quoted from a story originally on CNN.com, but no longer available there; see http://www.606studios.com/bendisboard/showthread.php?11516-Qapla-!-Hospital-seeks-Klingon-speaker).

Klingon is an artificial language adjunct to a fiction (or several serial fictions, the television episodes and films): it was not designed for real human communication, and it has no native speakers. However, some people, especially *Star Trek* fans, began to use it for fun, mainly in written communication on the Internet. Yens Wahlgren (2004) considers the Klingonist community as a linguistic market in the sense developed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991); in that market, knowledge of Klingon endows a *Star Trek* fan with sub-cultural linguistic capital. Wahlgren estimates that thousands of people worldwide have studied Klingon, but observes that it is hard to determine how many are fluent, for '"fluent" is hard to define in a community with no native speakers as reference. Lawrence Schoen [director of the Klingon Language Institute (see Appendix 5)] estimates that between 20 and 30 people could be considered fluent. With a more stringent definition [of fluency] it might be as few as ten' (2004, 11).

If there is a group of people—however small—who are bilingual speakers of Klingon, can it be considered a speech or language community, that is, a group that shares not only a common language but also common patterns of use and attitudes with respect to that language? According to Patrick (2004, 580) the term *speech community* has been used for entities as different as, on one hand, large geographically bounded urban communities and, on the other, the members of a court jury. Do Klingonists share linguistic characteristics such

that they also fit somewhere on this speech community continuum or are they, in fact, not a sociolinguistic group at all?

What follows describes the characteristics of the average Klingon speaker on the basis of an Internet survey designed by Judith Hendriks-Hermans as the basis for her Master's thesis (1999), supervised by Sjaak Kroon at the University of Tilburg, and posted on various Klingon and *Star Trek*-related sites. The questionnaire is composed of three parts, in which respondents provided personal information, described their relationship to Klingon, and indicated their attitudes toward the language. In total, 109 people responded, 79 of whom identified as Klingon speakers. This level of response may not be enough to build a profile of the average Klingon user, but most of this survey's findings are corroborated by those of an earlier web survey conducted in Sweden, with 604 respondents (Annernäs 1996), and an interview study with nineteen advanced Klingonists by Wahlgren (2004).

The majority (77%) of the 79 Klingon speakers were male. Their average age was 31.5 years, ranging from 15 to 55. As to ethnicity, 70.9% identified as Caucasian; other ethnicities mentioned (somewhat unhelpfully) were Human, Celtic, Latin, Klingon, Jewish, and Apache. About half of the Klingon-speaking respondents were married. Although most of them lived in the United States (65.1%), they came from all over the world—for instance, from Canada (12.8%), Germany (7.3%), England, and the Netherlands (both 2.8%)—and mainly (64.6%) lived in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants. A large majority (70.9%) had post-secondary educations, and their professions included information technology and computers (32.9%), other technical professions (10.1%), and a variety of other occupations (24%), such as civil servant, teacher, and actor, while 21.5% were students. Almost all were proficient in English, whereas between 10% and 20% had mastered German, French, or Spanish. The majority's first language was English (78.5%), which was also the main language used at home (81%) and at work (86.1%). As many as 19% used artificial

languages other than Klingon, including science-fiction languages like Romulan or Fremen, but also Volapük and Esperanto (see Chapter 2), Lojban, and, in two cases, self-invented artificial languages.

The Klingon speakers discovered their language via *Star Trek* (63.3%), friends (12.7%), or the Klingon Language Institute on the Internet (6.4%). Klingon speakers learned the language via books (53.2%) and tapes (2.5%) produced by Marc Okrand, the Klingon Language Institute (20.2%), both (7.6%), or friends (13.9%). Most respondents had studied Klingon for from one to four years (51.9%); as a result, 94.9% could speak Klingon and nearly as many (84.8%) could understand it when it was spoken to them. Klingon readers amounted to 81%, whereas 73.4% could write in the language.

It might come as no surprise that use of Klingon in everyday life was rather limited: 46.8% (oral) and 43% (written) used it less than once a month; the scores for more than once a week were 22.8% (oral) and 15.2% (written) and for every day were 13.9% (oral) and 17.7% (written) respectively. In real numbers of Klingonists, then, only around 20 wrote or spoke the language daily, which matches Lawrence Schoen's estimate and Arika Okrent's, too (see Okrent 2009, 273).

Respondents reported writing Klingon mainly to practise Klingon grammar, or to read or write messages, usually on the Internet. Oral Klingon is used most at occasions where Klingon speakers, *Star Trek* fans, or both meet. Respondents said they use Klingon because it is fun to speak (96.2%) and because they are *Star Trek* fans (65.8%). Respondents judged their proficiency in oral Klingon as average (41.8%); in written Klingon, they rated themselves as average (24.1%), pretty good (19%), and very good (13.9%). The motives for using Klingon, unlike the motives for its invention, are not practical, but they are in a sense artistic: speaking or writing at least a bit of Klingon figures significantly in some fan performance of *Star Trek*, a sort of living fan fiction.

Apart from using the same language, a language community shares common patterns of language use and attitudes to that language.

The survey showed that most Klingon-speaking respondents considered their native language easier to use and a better means of communication than Klingon, yet 63.3% wanted their (future) children to learn both languages. About one third thought Klingon the more beautiful of their two languages, and a bit more than a third considered both languages equally beautiful. As many as 70% of all 109 survey respondents hoped that Klingon would flourish, gaining more speakers and becoming more popular. The number of people who really expected Klingon to flourish, however, was (well) below 50%. Furthermore 66.1% thought Klingon would survive only as a *Star Trek*-related hobby for a very limited group of people, i.e., the *Star Trek* fans that use Klingon as 'a way of becoming a super trekkie' as one respondent expressed it.

A Klingon speech community: myth or reality?

Can the group of Klingon users surveyed be considered a sociolinguistic group? On the basis of these survey results, we can conclude that, if there is a Klingon speech community, it is very small indeed. Most people who use Klingon belong to a subgroup of Trekkies, i.e., the most die-hard fans that live for *Star Trek* (as opposed to simple Trekkers who are just fans of *Star Trek*; see Gibberman 1991, 117). Since the survey was only sent to Klingon or *Star Trek*-related addresses on the Internet, all respondents were in one way or another related to Klingon or *Star Trek*, mainly as fans. On the basis of interviews with Klingonists, some of whom are also Trekkies, Wahlgren concludes that a bit of Klingon can build sub-cultural capital among the *Star Trek* fan community, but too much proficiency actually erodes that capital, since 'ordinary' *Star Trek* fans perceive Klingon speakers as weird, or at least 'a little strange'.

The survey, then, amounts to a profile of *Star Trek* fans who may also speak Klingon. Unless the *Star Trek* phenomenon persists, casual Klingon (that spoken or written less than once a month, or more than

once a week but less than daily) will die out. Speaking Klingon, like wearing *Star Trek*-inspired costumes, collecting *Star Trek* paraphernalia, or visiting *Star Trek* conventions, supports fan group solidarity, but a fan group is by no means the same thing as a speech community, and members of that group certainly do not use Klingon frequently enough or well enough for the group to count as a speech community.

The story may be different with 'professional' Klingon users, who are interested in the language per se, such as members of the Klingon Language Institute and some of the respondents in Wahlgren (2004), who might continue to use and develop the language as a hobby even after the *Star Trek* phenomenon has passed. It remains to be seen whether the language is strong enough in terms of linguistic structure, degree of codification, number of speakers, and social embedding to survive. With the Klingon Language Institute's journal *HolQed* as a forum for scholarly discussion of Klingon, the Institute's online journal written wholly in Klingon, and various other Klingon language projects (see Appendix 5)—who knows what the future holds—there is certainly very sophisticated use of Klingon among a small cadre of speakers and a motive for continuing codification of Klingon grammar.

While hard-core Klingonists may not depend on interest in *Star Trek* to fuel their interest in Klingon language, they have depended on Okrand to make new, canonical words. Wahlgren notes, 'Marc Okrand has invented most words for Klingon and when the Klingonists need a new word they have to ask him' (2004, 21). As Okrent puts it, 'Klingonists are strict about language authority … No one but Okrand can introduce new vocabulary. And no dispute about grammar or usage is considered settled until Okrand has spoken' (2009, 279). This is no way to run a real language: in a real language, the speech community has authority over that language (see Appendix 1). If Klingonists succeed in maintaining Klingon, they will eventually do so without Okrand's help, and that will be the point at which viability of the putative Klingon speech community will be tested.

Okrent recalls that 'in 1999, the satirical paper the *Onion* ran a story under the headline "Klingon Speakers Now Outnumber Navajo Speakers". This is absolutely not true, but it would have been true had they picked nearly any other Native American language' (2009, 272). Klingon is an already endangered language, and it isn't yet fully developed for real-world conversational use! It could easily die on the vine. How many speakers of a language are required for it to be a going concern? Conversations among those at the Klingon Language Institute conference (or *qep'a'*) that Okrent attended were sometimes spontaneous, and 'it's amazing that spontaneous conversations happen at all', but too often those trying hard to converse resorted to PalmPilot dictionaries of Klingon.

There were, however, telling exceptions: 'I saw that later, as we walked over radiating sidewalks to a Mexican restaurant for the opening banquet, when I witnessed Captain Krankor and his girlfriend holding hands and chatting in Klingon, sans PalmPilots' (Okrent 2009, 273). You can bet that Captain Krankor, whose real name is Rich, is a Trekkie; the girlfriend, Agnieszka, has recently translated the *Tao Te Ching* into Klingon (see Appendix 5). It doesn't take many people to make a speech community, and a small speech community is at least a pure speech community. Captain Krankor and Agnieszka might be Klingon's Adam and Eve, chatting in their brand new language, walking hand in hand on the road from Eden to Babel.

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