First communiqué regarding the language Jigwa

(anonymous)

Greetings. This is to inform you that a new constructed language is being developed; its name is Jigwa (pronounced "Jee as in Jeep" followed by "gwa as in Guam"). Jigwa is a compound word meaning "interlanguage" or "interlingua."

Jigwa uses only the lower-case letters of the Roman alphabet. All morphemes (root-words) are mono-syllabic. Each morpheme consists of 0 or 1 or 2 consonants, followed by a vowel or diphthong, possibly followed by "l" or "ng." Thus "i," "zing," and "stal" are possible Jigwa words, but "stro," "ik" and "m" would not be permissible words. These rules have been bent in a few cases to permit some a posteriori borrowings such as "skri" (= to write). No morpheme may begin with "l" or "ng," and as a result, Jigwa's morphemes are unambiguously self-isolating, and possible confusions between "l" and "r" or between final "n" and "ng" are eliminated.

The vowels and diphthongs are pronounced as follows: a as in "father," ae like the a in "bad," ai like the i in "fine," au like the ow in "cow," e as in "net," ei like the ay in "day," i as in "ski" and "machine," o as in "note," oi as in "boil," u as in "truth," and x represents the 'schwa' sound heard in "about, ago, stuff." The consonants and semi-vowels should be pronounced as indicated below:

ji-gwa grapheme	nearest English equivalent	target pronunciation		
b	as in 'boy'	voiced	not aspirated	bilabial
p	as in 'pill'	voiceless	aspirated	bilabial
j	as in 'jump'	voiced	not aspirated	affricate
ch	as in 'church'	voiceless	aspirated	affricate
d	as in 'do'	voiced	not aspirated	dental/alveolar
t	as in 'time'	voiceless	aspirated	dental/alveolar
v	as in 'van'	voiced	not aspirated	labiodental
f	as in 'fan'	voiceless	aspirated	labiodental
g	as in 'go'	voiced	not aspirated	velar
k	as in 'kick'	voiceless	aspirated	velar
z	as in 'zoo'	voiced	not aspirated	alveolar
s	as in 'so'	voiceless	not aspirated	alveolar
m	as in 'my'	voiced	nasal	bilabial
n	as in 'no'	voiced	nasal	alveolar
ng	as in 'ring'	voiced	nasal	velar
h	as in 'heat'	voiceless	velar/pharyngeal/glottal fricative	
sh	as in 'ship'	voiceless	postalveolar fricative	

r	as in 'run'	uvular trill/ alveolar trill/ approximant	
l	as in 'fall'	lateral approximant	alveolar
w	as in 'water'	semi-vowel	
y	as in 'yes'	semi-vowel	

Generally speaking, morphemes can begin with any of these 48 "initials": (no consonant), b, bl, by, ch, d, dr, f, fl, g, gr, gw, h, j, k, kl, kr, kw, m, n, p, pr, pw, r, s, sk, sl, sm, sn, sp, st, sw, sh, shk, shl, shm, shp, shr, sht, shw, t, tr, ts, tw, v, w, y, z. (It might be said that "ts" is a separate phoneme and deserves to be listed in the table above.) Morphemes can end with any of these 28 "finals": a, ai, au, ae, e, ei, i, o, oi, u, x, al, ail, aul, el, eil, il, ol, oil, ul, xl, ang, eng, ing, ong, oing, ung, xng. It is possible to create a basic vocabulary of about 1000 or 1100 sufficiently distinctive root-words. That should be an ample supply for "ordinary" communication. Phonemes and combinations which are not currently used can be added later if required to expand the vocabulary.

The vocabulary of Jigwa is being created in the following manner: a tentative list of concepts to be represented by morphemes has been created; a search has begun for suitable monosyllabic words representing these concepts. Words are borrowed from many languages (not limited to European tongues). If a suitable word to borrow cannot be found, a word is pseudo-randomly selected from the list of all possible morphemes. Words within the same category of meanings will be made as different-sounding as is practical, in order to reduce the possibilty of confusion. Experiments will be conducted to determine the adequacy of the vocabulary. Jigwa, like German and Chinese, will use compound words to expand the usefulness of its stock of morphemes.

The grammar of Jigwa is quite simple. There are no complex noun declensions, adjective inflections, or verb conjugations. There appear to be 11 part-of-speech categories: conjunction, copula, interjection, modifier, noun, numeral, particle, preposition, pronoun, suffix, verb. The syntax can be described as a hybrid of the word-sequence rules of American English and Mandarin Chinese, but with slightly fewer ambiguities thanks to more rigid rules and the use of certain structural particles.

Below is a list of some tentative Jigwa words, subject to possible revision in the future, and a few example sentences with their English and Mandarin equivalents. More information about Jigwa will be released later.

bi	[copula]	be/is/am/are/was/were {from English "be"}
chi	[verb]	eat {from Chinese "chī"}
gwa	[noun]	language
ha	[verb]	have, possess {from English "have," German "haben"}
i	[numeral]	one (1)
ji	[prep.]	between, among, inter-
kwi	[particle]	(placed after family name and before individual name)
ni	[pronoun]	you (singular) {from Chinese "nǐ"}
no	[modifier]	not, no, non- {from Spanish}
ta	[pronoun]	he/she, him/her (third person singular sentient)
wo	[pronoun]	I, me (first person singular) {from Chinese "wǒ"}
yang	[noun]	sheep {from Chinese "yáng"}

ta chi yangfle. (He/she eats mutton. Tā chī yángròu.)
wo no ha nidx chae. (I don't have your book. Wǒ méi yǒu nǐde shū.)
wodx ming bi do kwi jan. (My name is John Doe. Wǒde míngzì shì "John Doe.")

Why a universal language cannot be made of exclusively European material

by Jigwadx Jungdwei
(the Jigwa Central Team)

Hundreds of people have attempted to design an artificial language that would be suitable and attractive for world-wide use as a global interlingua, a planetary second language that would make the international exchange of information much easier and less costly than it currently is. Unfortunately, many of these projects have been somewhat lacking in imagination; the common approach seems to be to put a Spanish dictionary into an electric blender, perhaps add a Latin and Classical Greek dictionary, toss in a German and/or English vocabulary list, and then turn on the blender and puree the ingredients into a mush. Some of the ways in which these strictly European projects are not suitable for world-wide usage were spelled out in Rick Harrison's essay "Proposed guidelines for the design of an international auxiliary language." But the pan-European constructed languages have other fundamental shortcomings — for example, their vocabularies are well equipped to express the minutiae of European lifestyles, but lacking in words to discuss some of the fundamental tools and beliefs of other major cultures. Our goal here is to point out, in no uncertain terms, why we must vigorously oppose any and all constructed languages which claim to be suitable for global use but are made of entirely European materials.

One of the most common rationalizations for basing constructed languages entirely on European material is the notion that "all educated people have been exposed to the Latin and Greek roots used in modern commercial and technological communication." This is a shockingly chauvanistic and ignorant statement, and it is especially surprising when it comes from people who allegedly want to promote global brotherhood. For example, it is quite possible for a well-educated person in the Far East to be conversant with Putonghua (Mandarin), Cantonese, Korean and Japanese, and thus have access to as much news, reference data, literature, social interaction and commerce as anyone can handle — all without knowing a single word of the European languages. (Granted, the Japanese have promiscuously borrowed many words from English, thus trading away their birthright for a mass of pottage.) Indeed, written Chinese characters are also used in Korean and Japanese writing, making Chinese the most successful pasigraphy in world history. Likewise, there are places where a knowledge of Arabic, Hindi or Swahili and a couple of local languages qualify a person as "well-educated" and able to engage in any kind of commerce or research. And these languages do not often resort to borrowing words from the "International Scientific Vocabulary" of Latin and Greek roots that is so beloved by the designers of pan-European projects. The racist wet dream of global commerce and science being conducted entirely in European languages will undoubtedly be swept away as the Pacific Rim nations' economies continue to expand and their cultures begin to contribute more of their flavor to the global salad of lifestyles and the worldwide flow of information.

Another reason to avoid Euro-centrism in language design is that European languages are inherently inferior in many respects. For example, they often must resort to pariphrase or ambiguous hinting to express the various aspects of verbs; many non-European languages express verb aspect explicitly, concisely and precisely. (From reading their instructional materials, one gets the impression that the designers and adherents of Euro-clones don't even know what verbal aspect *is*. "Out of sight, out of mind" or "if European languages don't have it, no language needs it" must be their philosophy.) European grammars are heavily infested with complex and useless verb tense systems; if verb tense is so important, why is it so often discarded in newspaper headlines and telegrams, and why do so many people use the present tense when describing past experiences in casual conversation (e.g. "I'm walkin' down the street yesterday when this guy comes up to me and says...")? And how is it that so many of the world's languages manage to get along so well without any flexion of tense? And yet, despite the widespread evidence that tense is a useless complication, the designers of Euro-centric projects often copy the needless tense inflections of their native languages into their projects, and sometimes they concoct an even more elaborate system with

several dozen tense forms, perhaps tossing in a dash of mood and voice to further hinder potential students.

In a similar vein, European languages seem to be pre-occupied with singular vs. plural distinctions in nouns, with the accompanying irregularity that some nouns are "count" (they do have a plural flexion) and others are "mass" (they do not have a plural form). Yet, this supposedly necessary distinction goes out the window when compound words are formed: we say "book-shelf," not "books-shelf," and "ant-hill," not "ants-hill." This evidence from compounding in European languages, combined with the testimony of Chinese, Indonesian and other languages that generally do not make plural/singular distinctions, is usually ignored by the designers of Euro-centric projects; they add distinctions of number to their projects not because such distinctions are necessary, but because they are familiar. Familiar to Europeans, that is.

Some defenders of the Eurocentric projects who cling to these unnecessary complications assert that we are under-estimating the intelligence of people elsewhere in the world; we must think they are imbeciles if we don't want to subject them to useless inflections. Yet most of us only have to look in the mirror to find an example of someone who gave up on trying to learn a language because of its numerous flexions. And the frequent errors regarding the accusative case and adjectival concord that plague Esperanto-lando provide more ammunition for the firing squad which is taking aim at Euro-centric constructed languages. People will tolerate difficult and irrational features in natural languages because they get so much reward from learning a natural language, namely the ability to exchange information and transact business with many people. Constructed languages, especially in their early stages, don't offer much incentive to potential students; every unnecessary flexion will have the effect of repelling potential users of the language.

Language designers who cling to the absurdities of European languages are shooting themselves in the foot, condemning themselves to life in a prison of familiar but irrational grammatical functions and stagnant ways of mapping concepts to words. They cling to the rusting machinery of a crumbling empire.

Designing an Artificial Language — Morphology

by Rick Morneau

author's note: The following essay was originally published in the September 1991 issue of the Linguiça APA (Issue #9). I have made a few minor changes since then.

In this essay, I will discuss ways in which phonemes can be combined into morphemes (minimal units of meaning), and how morphemes can be combined into words. I will discuss morphology only in a very restricted sense; i.e., the *shapes* of words. I will not discuss inflectional morphology at all. And I will postpone the discussion of derivational morphology to my forthcoming essay on Lexical Semantics. As a result, this essay will be somewhat abstract.

Since the morphological rules of a language state how phonemes can be linked together to form morphemes, the morphology of a language will have a strong effect on how easy or difficult it is to pronounce. Fortunately or unfortunately, most people have difficulty with complex consonant clusters, and so words such as /mksjzptlk/ are not likely to be part of any language's lexicon (unless, of course, you're from the fifth dimension :-). Even clusters that some people consider simple can be quite a challenge to others. For example, most Indo-European languages allow consonant clusters within a single syllable. English examples of this are the "str" in "string", the "bl" in "blue", the "spl" in "splash", the "sk" in "skip", and the "pr" in "prune". Native speakers of most Indo-European languages have few if any problems producing these sounds, but others who study English find them quite difficult and many never master them. Keep this in mind when designing your artificial language (henceforth AL) if you want your language to appeal to as many people as possible.

A word can consist of one or more syllables. For the purpose of this discussion, a syllable is a vowel or diphthong optionally preceded by one or more consecutive consonants, and optionally followed by one or more consecutive consonants. Thus, for the vast majority of languages, a syllable has the form:

Jigwa Update
by Jigwadx Jungdwei

In early 1993, the shape of every Jigwa morpheme was described as (C)(C)V(F), with F = "l" or "ng." Subsequently, we decided to add another consonant to the list of finals, to increase the number of possible morphemes. A quick survey of the languages from which Jigwa borrows words revealed that *k, m, n,* and *s* were the most productive candidates. After considering possible problems with morphological ambiguity and difficult consonant clusters, it seems *m* is the least objectionable candidate. We decided to keep some of the already-existing morphemes beginning with *m*, even though this dilutes the self-isolating morphology to a small degree.

We are also bending the rules of morphology a bit to change the 'pronoun pluralizer' from *mxng* to *mxn*. This suffix can only be used with personal pronouns, so it does not really introduce any morphological ambiguity. The resulting plural pronouns are much closer to their Chinese equivalents now: *womxn* "we" (from wo^{3}men), *nimxn* "you [plural]" (from ni^{3}men), and *tamxn* "they" (from ta^{1}men). Another bending of the rules accomodates a series of words that end with -yen in Jigwa, borrowed from words that end in -ian in the pinyin system of romanizing Chinese words. An example is *dyen*, "electricity," from Chinese dian^4, cognate with Japanese denki and Vietnamese điên.

In early 1994, we added the vowels ö and ü for use in transcribing foreign names. We are still debating the best way to transcribe the growled approximant "r" that occurs in names such as Bert, Kirk, and Irma. This sound is quite different from the normal "r" of Jigwa, which is now defined as an alveolar or uvular trill. So, it would not be accurate to transcribe Kirk as "Krk" (as Loglanists do). Anyone having suggestions in this matter can send them to us c/o JPL.

Another change affects the 5 suffixes that were originally *zu, do, mi, pe, fa*. These suffixes indicate the intensity or concentration of something; for example, the word for 'water' plus *zu* would produce a word meaning 'saturated' or 'drenched'; 'water' plus *mi* would mean 'moderately moist.' *pe* has been changed to *shau*, and *fa* has been changed to *wu* (from Chinese shao^3 and wu^2, respectively). The other three suffixes will probably be changed, but we are still debating the possibilities. Anyone knowing of suitable morphemes from natural languages that we might borrow, please contact us.

The creation of Jigwa is proceding slowly; we have been required to research and discuss topics such as syntax, verb aspect, and lexical semantics. It may be true, as one language designer wrote, that creating a Euro-centric language project is "child's play," but we are finding that creating a truly original and world-worthy language requires a bit of effort.

While the entire vocabulary is still tentative and subject to change, we can offer a few items to whet the appetite. The conjunctions *wa* (and) and *au* (or) are from Arabic; *bx* (but) is ostensibly from English but and German aber. The demonstratives, all borrowed from Asian languages, are *na* (what? which?), *jx* (this), *so* (that), *mai* (each, every), and *mu* (no, not any). *si* (yes, indeed) and *no* (no, not) are from Spanish and can serve as modifiers or interjections. Numerals: *i* (1) from Chinese yi^1; *du* (2) from a variety of languages; *sam* (3) from Korean and Cantonese, cognate with Mandarin san^1 and Japanese san; *kwa* (4) from Spanish cuatro and English quad- as in quadrant; *fai* (5) from English five.

One particularly interesting grammatical particle is *kwi*, borrowed from a suggestion once made by Rick Harrison in the Conlang forum; in Jigwa, it is customary to give a person's family name, then *kwi*, then the individual's name; this reduces the confusion about name sequence that can occur when various cultures with different namimg customs interact. (Esperantists are in the habit of writing the family name in UPPER CASE letters, but this is inadequate because it cannot be spoken.) The particle *wx* flags a word taken from a foreign language: *wx pagoda, wx enchilada, wx angst*. Most foods and other culture-specific items will thus be able to keep their original names in Jigwa. (Many languages simply print the foreign word in italics, but this is inadequate because italics cannot be spoken. We do not have a high opinion of linguistic devices that can only exist on the printed page.)

As for the "open class" words — modifiers, nouns and verbs — we have a long list of tentative items, but we cannot begin to finalize them until the structure words are completed.

Journal of Planned Languages

Subscriptions: To receive the next 3 editions of JPL, send US $10 payable to Rick Harrison, Box 54-obsolete address USA.