

How to create your own language

- To keep things concrete and not too open-ended, you're going to work towards translating the following couple of sentences, in steps:

That small fox has crawled into the dark hole. If it becomes hungry, the fox will soon eat some chickens.

Step 1: Roots (Content Morphemes)

- Roots are the elements that carry conceptually contentful meanings, as opposed to more abstract grammatical meanings. They lie at the core of all lexical words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and some adpositions)
- They are sometimes found standing free as words on their own, and sometimes as subparts of a larger word.
- Start by coming up with equivalents of the following roots in your language. For this you'll need to make some decisions about the phoneme inventory—feel free to use or adapt one of the inventories I've handed out. Be adventurous!
- If any of your roots have more than one syllable, you should also decide which syllable is stressed. Does your language have a consistent stress pattern, or is stress lexically determined and unpredictable? You decide!

Root in English	Root in your language
small	
fox	
crawl	
dark	
hole	
become	
hungry	
soon	
eat	
chicken	

Step 2: Function Morphemes

- Function morphemes convey grammatical meanings. They can be free-standing words, in which case we call them by various names depending on category (article, auxiliary, adposition, particle, etc.); alternatively they can be affixes (prefix, suffix, infix, circumfix).

- Come up with function morphemes for the following concepts in your language (again, use the phoneme inventories provided for inspiration while building these). Bear in mind the following things:
 - Languages vary in the inventory of function morphemes they have. Not all languages have articles corresponding to *a* or *the*, for example. If you think you don't want your language to have a given type of function morpheme, just leave the space blank.
 - If you want to get really advanced, maybe add some types of function morpheme that English doesn't have, and therefore don't appear in the English passage at all, but will appear when you translate the passage.
 - For each function morpheme, you have to make a decision about (i) whether it's a free morpheme or an affix; and (ii) whether it comes before or after its associated root—if it's an affix, is it a prefix or a suffix (or an infix or a circumfix, if you feel adventurous)? If it's a free morpheme, is it to the left of the associated root (head-initial) or to its right (head-final)?

Function Morpheme	English Equivalent	Equivalent in your language	Free morpheme or affix?	Before or after associated root?
Distal Demonstrative	that			
Perfect Aspect	have (+ Past participle)			
Allative adposition/case	into			
Definite article	the			
Conditional complementizer	if			
3 rd person singular present verb marker	-s			
3 rd person neuter subject pronoun	it			
Future tense	will			
Indefinite quantifier	some			
Noun plural marker	-s			

Step 3: Other Word-Order Decisions

- Adjectives **before** or **after** the noun?
- Adverbs **before** or **after** the verb?
- Basic order of Subject, Object, and Verb:
 - SVO
 - SOV
 - VSO
 - VOS
 - OVS
 - OSV

Step 4: Get Translating!

- Now translate the passage into your language, trying your best to stay consistent with the language design decisions you made in the preceding sections.
- If you want to get really advanced, you might want to think about whether your language has any phonological rules that apply when certain sounds are forced together by the syntax and morphology.
- If you've decided to include some affixes amongst your function morphemes, you'll be putting your roots together with some morphology for the first time as you translate, making for some internally complex words. Does adding affixes in this way change the stress pattern of the word in your language, or not?
- You can translate into the space immediately below, but it might be easier if you do it on a separate piece of paper (enabling you to flick back and forth within this handout as you do so).

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