SBS Community Classroom
Spring 2022

Learn the Klingon Language for your Next Vacation on Qo'noS

March 7-April 4, 2022, Mondays 5:30-7:30 PM
Location: The Loft Cinema
Modality: In-person*
Natasha Warner, Department of Linguistics

pe'vIl Supaw'jaj! (Welcome! Literally: May you all arrive forcefully.)
'a'ghen nataSa warner jiH. (I am Professor Natasha Warner.)
tlhIngan Hol wIghoj. (We learn the Klingon language.)

Course description:
In this course, we will learn a little of the Klingon language, from the (unfortunately fictional) *Star Trek* universe. We will also learn about the principles Marc Okrand used to create the Klingon language, including how he made it in some ways like a human language, and in others different from a typical or even possible human language. We will learn some Klingon pronunciation and grammar and a little bit of introduction to linguistics, and then we'll see how much we can understand of some of the Klingon language used in *Star Trek*. We'll also learn a few good insults in Klingon, like how to say "Your ship is a garbage scow," as well as useful phrases like "Where do you keep the chocolate?" We'll explore how learners of Klingon here on Earth have taken the language further, for example by translating pop songs and Shakespeare into Klingon. Join us and prepare for your next vacation on Qo'noS, the Klingon homeworld. Qapla'! (Success!)

Instructor:
I completed my B.A. in German and Japanese at the University of Minnesota in 1991 and my Ph.D. in Linguistics at UC Berkeley in 1998. I held a position as a postdoctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute in the Netherlands for three years before joining the faculty at the University of Arizona in 2001. My research is divided into two areas: the acoustics and perception of spontaneous speech, and language revitalization of a dormant Native American language. For the first, I study the messy way people talk when they're talking fast in casual conversation, where they leave out a lot of the sounds and even whole words. For example, in one of my group's recordings, a speaker pronounced "gonna hafta" with just two syllables (sort of "got.tuh"), and in another, a different speaker pronounced "Friday night" as one syllable, something like "freh..." stretched out in time. And yet these fast, "sloppy" pronunciations sound fine if you hear them in context, and are not hard to understand if you're hearing your native language. What's amazing is that this is actually how we communicate information. For language revitalization, I work with the Mutsun community of California, a Native American community from near San Juan Bautista CA, to try to help them learn their heritage language (Mutsun) and teach it in their community. The last person who learned Mutsun fluently as a child passed away in 1930, but there are a lot of written records of the language. There is more information at https://nwarner.faculty.arizona.edu/

I am also a total Trekkie, and have been since high school. My favorite series is either Voyager or Discovery, despite the lack of much Klingon language usage in Voyager. There is a connection between Klingon and Mutsun, which I'll explain in class.

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*Modality: the plan is for this course to be entirely in-person. However as we all know too well now, life is not predictable, and neither are pandemics. If the pandemic gets much worse, if the Loft has to close, or if I catch Covid, we may have to move to online for some period.

Recommended reading:
Okrand, M. (1992). *The Klingon Dictionary: The Official Guide to Klingon Words and Phrases*. Simon and Schuster. (Do not get the original 1985 edition, there's an extra chapter in the later edition.)

Conference presentation slides by Rebecca Starr and colleagues, available on course website.

Please download the app "**tlhIngan Hol boQwI'**" (Klingon language assistant) for your phone or tablet, as it's the best Klingon dictionary around, and also easy to use. Searching the app store on "tlhIngan Hol boQwI'" or "Klingon dictionary" should find it (for free).

Various online resources are available through the course website. We will view some of them in class, and others are just there for you to use outside class.

Course schedule:
March 7:
Klingon phoneme inventory and pronunciation: parts of the vocal tract, articulation of sounds, pronunciation practice, syllable structure constraints, basic phrases. There's an assumption built in that the human vocal tract and the Klingon vocal tract are basically the same shape, with the same articulators (e.g. tongue and roof of mouth are basically the same shape). This certainly makes it easier to hire actors in southern California to play Klingons…. The Klingon phoneme inventory (roughly, the set of sounds that are used in the language) has some similarities to human languages, but is actually pretty unlikely for a human language. There are several characteristics of the phoneme inventory that don't tend to occur in human languages. Okrand (the creator of Klingon) did this on purpose to make the language more alien, even though all of the sounds in Klingon do occur in some human language. We'll cover which of Klingon's sounds occur in what human languages of the world and we'll learn to pronounce everything. Klingon syllable structure is pretty restricted, which is not unusual for human languages. It's a little less restricted than Japanese syllable structure, close to how restricted Korean syllable structure is. We'll see how linguists find patterns like these in languages.
Handout: Klingon phoneme inventory

March 14:
L1-L2 phonetic influence (influence of the first language categories on pronunciation of the second language), and surprising results for Klingon names in the Trek series. Word structure (morphology): Klingon pronouns are pretty challenging for English speakers. The main focus

of this week will be pronouns and verb suffixes. You can make an amazing number of Klingon words from one word using suffixes! This is not so different from quite a few human languages (Turkish, Finnish, Japanese, quite a few Native American languages), and the Klingon pronoun prefixes are only slightly more difficult than Latin verb endings.
Handout: Pronouns
Recommended reading: Chapter 4 of the grammar at the start of the dictionary

March 21:
Basic word order: Klingon word order in a basic normal sentence is Object first, then Verb, then Subject (OVS). If we were to take the English sentence "I see dogs" and put it in that order, we would have "dogs see I." This is one of the linguistic in-jokes of Klingon language, since OVS is the least common basic word order among human languages. The focus for this week is wrapping our heads around the order of words in basic sentences, and then moving on to parsing some actual sentences of Klingon from the Discovery series and the singer Warrior Woman's translation of pop songs into Klingon.
Recommended reading: Chapter 6 of the grammar at the start of the dictionary

March 28:
Klingon (as well as human) sociolinguistics: We will discuss how opinions in human society led to the portrayal of Klingons and their language, and how that has changed over the decades of the Star Trek franchise. We will also discuss differences in Klingon language within their (fictional) society, and how language usage and pronunciation show a speaker's identity. Then we will turn to bilingualism and language learning, particularly in the context of immigration and travel between Klingon and non-Klingon planets, and compare to our own experiences with generational language shift and bilingualism in human societies. Also more practice parsing sentences.
Recommended reading: Starr et al. slides

April 4:
Relationship to language revitalization in the real world: learning of conlangs (constructed languages) and learning of heritage languages. Okrand's work on Mutsun as well as on Klingon. Introduction to the Mutsun language revitalization program. Writing your own sentences in Klingon. Klingon and Human Language Technology, and the issues of Trek's Universal Translator. Applications of linguistics. Any last questions you have.

Homework and project:
I am providing 4 completely optional no-pressure homework "assignments" and instructions for an equally optional final project. These are just for fun if you want more practice. Obviously I will not be grading them, but I'll be happy to discuss them with you or provide answer keys if you want.