

PANDUNIA, A GLOBAL CONTACT LANGUAGE

Constructed language, worldlang

Pandunia is a constructed language that has isolating grammar and globally representative vocabulary. It is meant to be an international auxiliary language (or auxlang, in short). Pandunia has been in the making for several years. It started off from collaboration between two conlangers, Risto Kupsala and Jens Wilkinson. Both of them had been creating their own languages previously. Today Pandunia has a small community of users, discussion groups and a web site.

Pandunia as a worldlang

Pandunia is a worldlang (Pandunia 2012). According to the Wikipedia, "A worldlang is a type of international auxiliary language (or auxlang) that derives its roots, phonology, and possibly grammar from different language families around the world, typically including several most widely spoken languages of the world (Worldlang 2017)." This definition is in stark contrast to the traditional auxlangs, like Esperanto and Interlingua, which derive their vocabulary and structure from selected languages of the Western part of the world. The traditional Western auxlangs are in fact *zonelangs* even though they have global ambitions.

In a way, all auxlangs compete against each other, because it would be most resource efficient to instate just one global common second language, which is the goal of all auxlangs. On the other hand, people are capable of mastering several languages, so there can be multilingualism also in the world of auxiliary languages. Possibly there will be regional auxlangs in the future just like there are regional languages in the world today.

So Pandunia was not created as a reaction against the old Western auxlangs. Rather it was born as a consequence of the globalization of the world. For the makers of Pandunia, it is only natural that the world language, as the term itself implies, is derived from a wide variety of the languages of the world.

Three qualities for success

According to Steve Rice (Rice 2007), an auxiliary language (i.e. auxlang) needs three qualities to succeed: learnability, sloppiness and being cool.

Learnability refers to the relative ease of how the auxlang can be learned. Typically constructed auxiliary languages are easier to learn than natural languages because the former offer less things to be learned: less rules, less exceptions to the rules, less vocabulary and less social variation.

Sloppiness refers to the human look and feel of the language that helps people to believe that it's not just a pretend language. There is an attested bias against constructed languages. Some people despise them or feel uncomfortable because they look fake or oddly unreal. Sloppiness is required to avoid the so called uncanny valley, the air of fakeness that disciplined and systematic language design creates. A sloppy language feels more natural and thus more credible.

Being cool refers to qualities that make people interested and even fascinated about the language. In other words, coolness means some kind of attraction. For Steve Rice, cool languages are somehow "exotic" and they are different from the "boring" mainstream. Obviously, it is a subjective view. One can imagine other reasons why someone would get attracted to a given auxlang, such as ideology, literature, music, meetings and the community as a whole.

I would relabel and redefine the three qualities for success as follows:

1. Usability: The ease of learning and comfortability of use.
2. Credibility: The feeling that the language is real and can be taken seriously.
3. Attraction: Internal and external factors that differentiate the language positively.

Overview of the grammar of Pandunia

Structurally Pandunia is an isolating language. An isolating language is a type of language that uses supplementary words, word order and context to create meaning, rather than inflection and affixes. So in Pandunia every word is an undivisible unit while, for example, in Esperanto most words can be divided into a root and one or more affixes. As an isolating language Pandunia lacks many features that are essential parts of the grammar of other auxlangs: affixes, conjugated person, tense and mood, inflected number and gender, elision, part of speech marking. Considering that the previously listed grammatical features are highly variable from language to language, it is probably better for a global contact language to do without them.

Of course, Pandunia is not the first of its kind among auxlangs. Already so called "rational Latin" by G. W. Leibniz and *Latino sine flexione* by Giuseppe Peano had isolating grammar, as did *Interglossa* by Lancelot Hogben. Interestingly, all of them were inspired by an idealized but incomplete understanding of Chinese, the most widely spoken isolating language of the world.

The following example sentence shows some of the main features of the grammar of Pandunia:

Mi ge papa gang yem dai suba yem na hotel kafe kan.

Word-by-word: I 's father just eating big morning eating at hotel coffee shop.

Translation: My father just ate a big breakfast in the hotel cafeteria.

Some things to note:

- The structure of *mi ge* (my) is analytic.
- Number and definiteness are not marked. Here we may assume that everybody has just one father, who would eat just one breakfast in just one certain cafeteria.
- The first instance of the word *yem* (eating) functions as a verb, whereas the other is part of a compound word in *suba yem*.
- The time reference, recent past, is set by the particle *gang* alone. Also it is this particle, which marks the line between the subject and the predicate.
- The word orders are subject-verb-object, and modifier-modified.

Vocabulary of Pandunia

The root vocabulary of Pandunia consists entirely of loan words. Words are selected with a comparative method, which aims for finding words that are shared by many languages regardless of geography. Therefore it's often impossible to trace the origin of a given word to only one language.

In the previous example, the words *papa*, *hotel* and *kafe* are more or less global. The compound word *kafe kan* is close to Turkish *kahvehane* and Hindi *kofīkhānā*, but in fact the latter part, *kan*, comes from Japanese! The word *dai* is known to Japanese and Chinese alike. Particle *ge* is specifically from Cantonese and *gang* is from Mandarin. The word *suba* has its roots in Arabic, but probably Wolof *subba* and Urdu *subah* are closer references. Finally the preposition *na* could be from Russian or Portuguese, but its range of use points rather toward Lingala and Kikongo.

One could ask, is there any sense to mix words from so diverse sources. But why not? All of them are international words in some part of the world, be it Europe, East Asia, South Asia, Africa or in several of them. Though European vocabulary has spread across the world, it has permeated many languages only on the surface. There are other international vocabularies that have had a more profound effect centuries earlier. On the other hand, all languages are products of their time. Both Esperanto and Interlingua were created during the European colonial period, so it's not surprising that they are European through and through. Pandunia, on the other hand, was created in the period of globalization.

Evenly international vocabulary is a differentiating factor that sets Pandunia apart from other auxlangs. There are other worldlangs but none of them have gone as far as Pandunia in internationalization. For example in Lingwa de Planeta, which is probably the most popular auxlang of the worldlang type currently, a great majority of words are still European. Pandunia has adopted words evenly from Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. It is hoped that this gesture will attract people from everywhere to learn and use Pandunia.

References

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