Chesh Kafo: Constructing a Language

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Abstract: Constructing a language from a prompt: When constructing a language for a film or book, it is essential to begin with a concept which we can build upon. Here, Dr. Mythili Menon provided a short science fiction prompt. From this I began to work on filling in the gaps of the backstory to create a concept with an alien race that would require use of an intelligible language.

Phonemes, morphemes and syntax: The first step in designing a language is to select sounds. The story requires that both humans in an alien body and vice versa should be able to quickly pick up their respective foreign language. This means that they will need similar respiratory anatomies so that they do not both need to completely relearn all new sounds. Limiting ourselves to human sounds we can easily begin creating words and designing morphologies based on the culture created for the alien race, and eventually compiling a dictionary of words and rules.

Results: The results of these considerations is Hachesh, the language of the Heb. They are a nomadic and scientific people, ideas that are present in their language. For example, consonant sounds may only travel forward across a word, and movement toward something is vital to the Heb and their creation of words and ideas.

Summary: The creation of a language brings out some of the deeper insights into language and culture. What we may consider foreign, alien, brutish or “uncivilized” is deeply rooted in the sounds and concepts readily adopted by western languages. These become apparent when working in reverse: creating a language from a culture and ideas.

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