Aramteskan
The Language of Scent in Real and Constructed Languages

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Language & Scent

1. Scent typology in real languages
2. Scent in constructed languages
3. Our approach to scent in the construction of the Aramteskan language in Shadowscent

Bridging the gap between typology and creative language construction
Project team

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Interests include: Language documentation and description, gesture, language construction

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Interests include: Holistically researched fantasy worlds
Scent in real languages

Some languages have a richer scent lexicon than English (Majid & Burenhult 2014)

Even see the encoding of scent in grammar: e.g. scent classifier in Cha'palaa (Floyd, San Roque & Majid, 2018)

But scent doesn’t feature frequently: e.g. no scent based evidentials (Aikhenvald 2004)

English makes use of source-based references and hedonic valence (e.g. ‘yuck’) (Poulton 2020)
Scent in constructed languages

Similarly, scent in constructed languages rather neglected.

Note: as with real languages there is a gap in the discoverability of descriptive literature.
Scent in constructed languages

Some attempts to conceptualise how a language would function with scent as the modality

- David Weber's *Honor Harrington* series. Medusans use sound, gesture and scent (ref.)
- Charles Sheffield *Summertide* insectoid pheromones (ref.)
- Doomship by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson, the aliens (T’worlies) communicate through smells.
- Colin Kapp, The Old King’s Answers, scent glands on the feet

see also: conlang LISTSERV discussions in 2012, 2011, 2001
NASALO

Lexicon by Sissel Tolaas (mid-2000s) ~2500 words

MUQSUN = corn; lemon
MUQUN = raw fruits
MEETAN = old graveyards and old bones in the earth
PASSLO = ardent; burning; fervent; passionate
PLIISH = Polish shops
SQU’IJIA = simple but appetizing
Language construction and world building

a creative approach to enriching worldbuilding
(Sanders and Schreyer 2020; Coon 2020).

Aramteskan is an a priori natlang aiming to emulate
typologically observed patterns of natural languages

But also creatively diverges, exhibiting ‘weak naturalism’
(Peterson 2020; 261)
Language construction and world building


Constructing a language is a creative approach to enriching worldbuilding, creating depth even when the whole language is not used directly (Sanders and Schreyer 2020; Coon 2020)
Aramteskan

- Scent-focused grammatical features
  - Smell vocabulary
  - Scent-focused nominals
  - Scent-prominent evidential system
  - Scent-focused metaphors

- Other features not discussed today:
  - Time-depth of ~500 years (phonology and grammar)
  - Pronominal system evolved gender distinctions
  - Base-five counting system
  - Regional dialect differences

More about Aramteskan on Superlinguo and (hopefully soon!) Fiat Lingua
Smell vocabulary

**gatmar** (gat-mar) v.t. to smell something deeply without knowing what it will smell like; to inhale irresponsibly.

**gukmar** (guk-mar) v.t. to smell something bad, often unintentionally, and then feel disgust.

**nelmar** (nel-mar) v.t. to smell something faintly, often on a breeze.

**nosnar** (nos-nar) v.t. to smell something slowly for a long time because it has a pleasant smell, e.g. burying one’s nose in a bouquet of flowers.

**rashmar** (rash-mar) v.t. to smell something by wafting the scent to your nose with your hand.

**sugmar** (sugmar) v.t. to smell cautiously, as though unsure of what the scent will be, to sniff.

**toshmar** (tosh-mar) v.t. to smell something that you remember but can’t immediately place.
Scent-focused evidentials

Aramteskan verb structure:
[Subj] [Obj] Tense(Asp) (Neg)Root adverb particle

Particles include interrogative, optative and dubitative, as well as the following evidentials:

nal  Evidential (smell)
kan  Evidential (other sense)
bith  Reported speech (from bitos, ‘to say’)


Scent-focused nominals

Nominals (non-animate) are primarily scent-focused, with a derivational suffix to make them object focused:

*lirpa* ‘rose scent’

*lirpayya* ‘rose’

*asmeb* ‘smell of dark’

*asmebto* ‘darkness’ (historical morpheme, mostly fossilised)
Scent-based metaphors

Rykirgaal lednish pegmyt irahbalu pur traalnaalzen byt
Riker-go ladnesh pagmith erahbailu pur trol-nolzin bith
Riker’s heart plight eternal-acc conc pst.nose.towards RS

‘When Raikur’s heart faced the eternal plight’

faced is lit. ‘nosed’

spatial and temporal orientation focuses on the nose.
Typologically-driven language construction

Using typology to inform language construction can allow for exploration of linguistic possibilities beyond documented typological barriers.

Language construction provides an opportunity for a creative application of linguistic expertise.
References


Majid, A., & Burenhult, N. (2014). Odors are expressible in language, as long as you speak the right language. *Cognition*, 130(2), 266-270.


nulmur smer delas ral
Scents keep you!

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