Two studies

Online questionnaire survey posted through conlang mailing list
    Sound systems of conlangs
    Use of sound symbolism

Experiment on language attitudes
    Evaluations of conlangs and natlangs

Creating conlang sound systems

- Ease of pronunciation
- Aesthetics/beauty
- Realism/naturalism
- Linguistic theory
- Other languages
- Sound symbolism

Name your fictional character

https://www.flickr.com/photos/danielferencak/8717400979 [Creative commons license]

1. Atlan

2. Ilahja

3. Erosan

4. Rrul'ghargop

5. Gorx

(cf. Elsen 2008: p. 97)

Sound symbolism: hypothesised systematic relationship between sound and meaning

Examples:

Language	'Small'	'Large'
English	teeny, wee, itsy-bitsy	humongous
Spanish	chico	gordo
French	petit	grand
Greek	/mikros/	/makros/
Japanese	/tʃiisai/	/ookii/

(Hinton, Nichols, & Ohala 1994; Ohala 1994: p. 326)

Examples: "Small" vs "big"

Dothraki: 'naqis'   'zhokwaʿ

Itlani: 'kilikit'   'gidanitʿ

Moten: 'pleg'   'tunaʿ

Egeldish: /sɪnɛ/   /gon/

Celestial: 'bexogio'   'gexogio'
            (small size relation)   (large size relation)

Attitudes towards languages in public debate

Evaluations often reflect common stereotypes or focus on specific sounds

Quick Twitter survey:

'Ugly language': German, Dutch, French, Chinese, Arabic, Danish, …

'Beautiful languages': Italian, Spanish, French, Chinese, Japanese …

→ Conlangs?

Factors contributing to attitudes towards languages

First language(s) of listener

Number of second languages of listener

Level of familiarity with language

Methodology

109 participants (100 data sets used)

24 languages (nine constructed languages)

Rated on 7-point Likert scale

Traits: pleasant, friendly, educated, peaceful/aggressive, familiar/strange, natural/artificial

Optional: Name of language or region

The languages

NATURAL LANGUAGES (NATLANGS)

- English
- French
- Mandarin
- Sherpa
- Finnish
- Tok Pisin
- Hindi
- Welsh
- Arabic
- Russian
- Dutch
- Inupiatun
- Spanish
- Xhosa
- Hawaiian

CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGES (CONLANGS)

- Castithan
- Celestial
- Dothraki
- Egeldish
- Esperanto
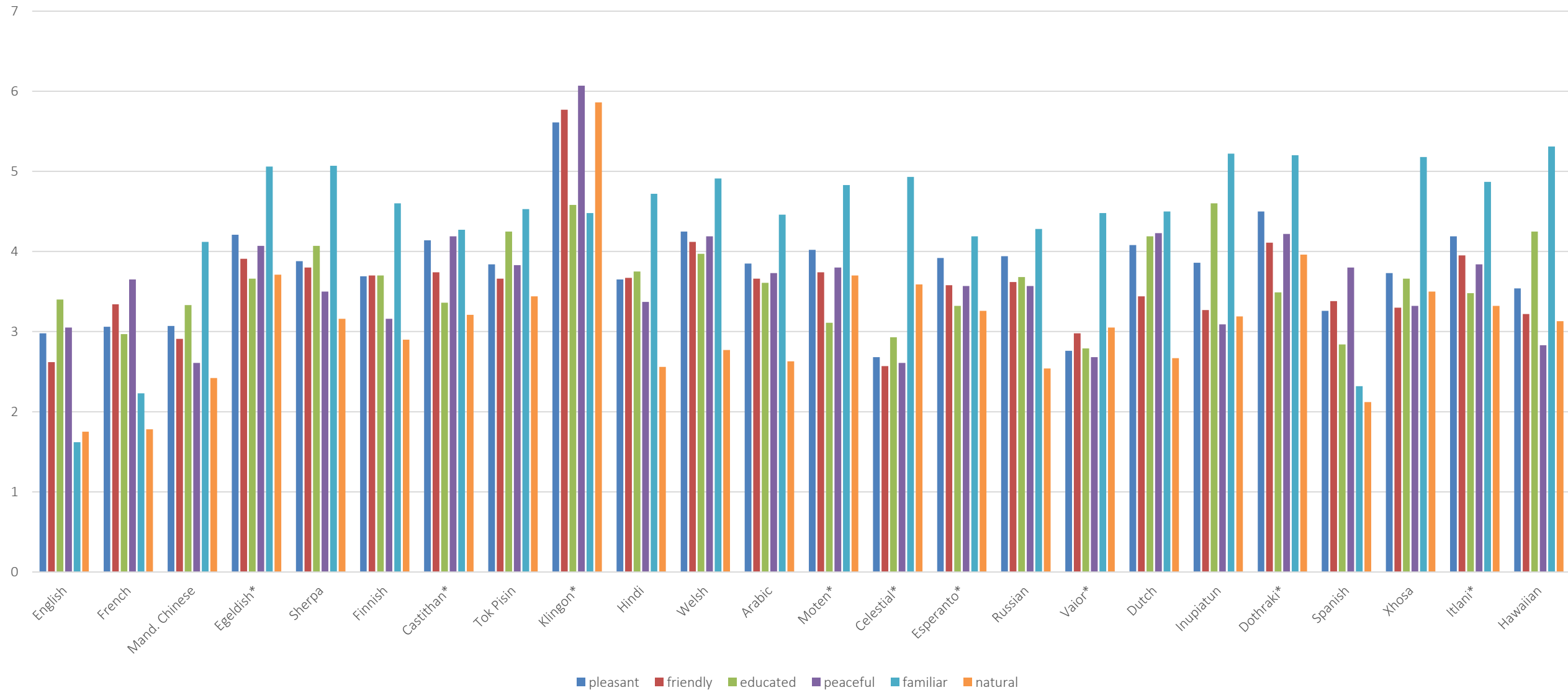- Itlani
- Klingon
- Moten
- Vaior

Methodology

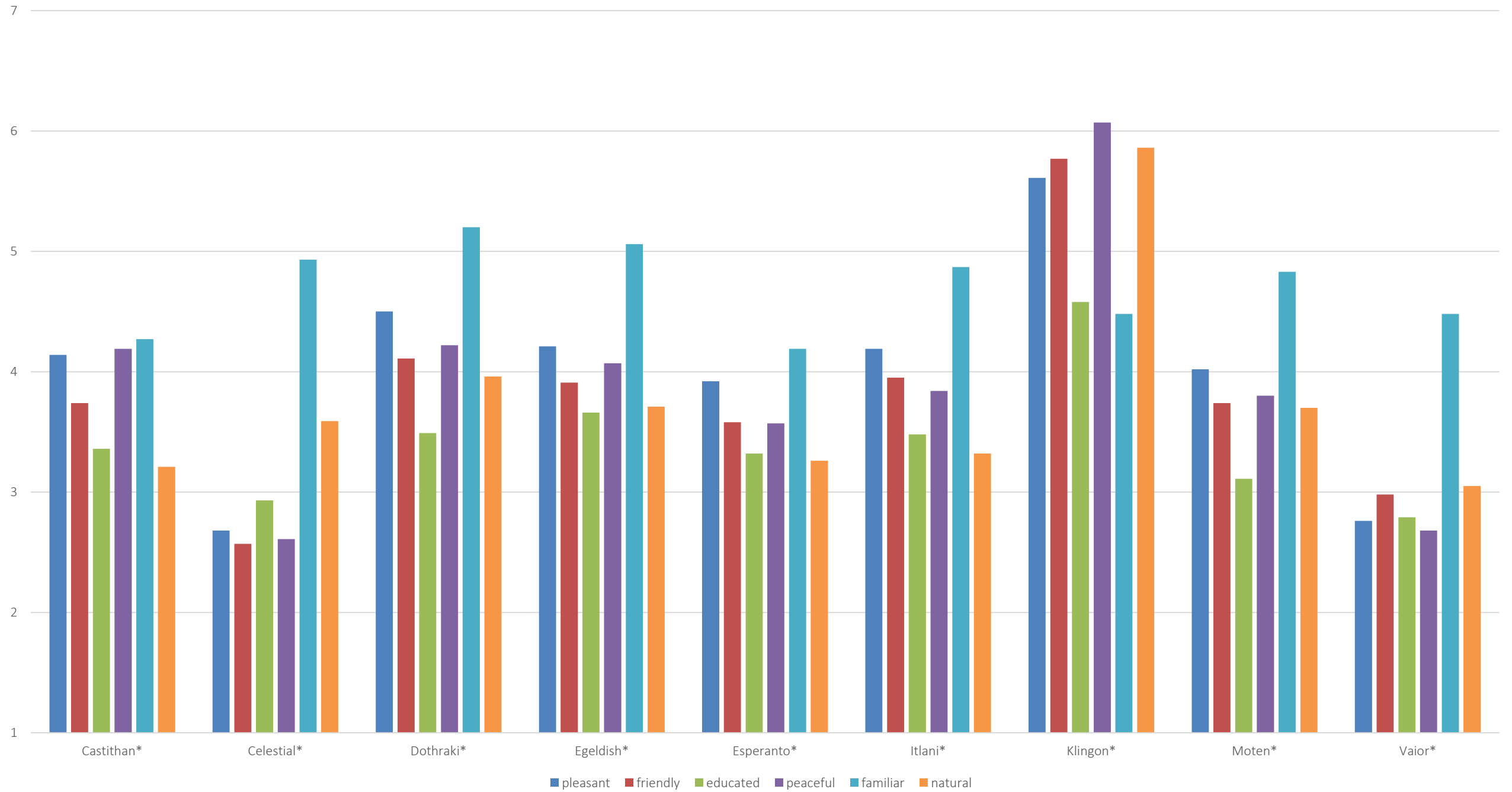Data collected at World Science Fiction Convention in London in 2014

Diverse and international audience, but no control of, e.g. L1 background, L2 knowledge & proficiency, etc

Overview results

pleasant   friendly   educated   peaceful   familiar   natural

Conlangs

Level of familiarity

Most familiar sounding languages:
1. English
2. French
3. Spanish
4. Mandarin Chinese
5. Esperanto*

Least familiar sounding languages:
1. Hawaiian
2. Inupiatun
3. Dothraki*
4. Xhosa
5. Sherpa

Familiarity in relation to other traits

Least familiar sounding languages:

1. Hawaiian
2. Inupiatun
3. Dothraki*
4. Xhosa
5. Sherpa

Least educated sounding languages:

1. Hawaiian

2. Inupiatun

Dothraki*:

Least pleasant, friendly, peaceful, natural

Familiarity in relation to other traits

Most familiar sounding languages:

1. English
2. French
3. Spanish
4. Mandarin Chinese
5. Esperanto*

Pleasant:

English

French

Mandarin Chinese

Educated:

French

Spanish

Natural:

English

French

Spanish

Mandarin Chinese

Friendly & peaceful:

English

Mandarin Chinese

Other traits

Least natural sounding languages:

1. Klingon*
2. Dothraki*
3. Egeldish*
4. Moten*
5. Celestial*

Between 3 to 4 conlangs were also among the bottom 5 of the following traits:

Pleasant

Friendly

Peaceful

Influence of L1

L1 categories:
    L1 English only (n=68)
    L1 English and another language (bi-/multilingual) (n=6)
    L1 not English (n=26)

Significant only for selected languages and on some traits
    No specific pattern for languages or traits

Influence of L2 knowledge

L2 categories
  No L2s (n=4)
  1-3 L2s (n=38)
  4-9 L2s (n=52)
  10 or more L2s (n=6)

Significant for a number of languages on a number of traits
  General tendency: The groups with more L2 knowledge
  tend to evaluate the languages more favourably.

Problems

Groups were unbalanced

Unknown level of proficiency in L2

Information on language/region was optional

Each language heard only once
   influence of speech sample, speaker, recording

Thank you

išpiħyitaheku

Dankó   ianita ua   dārenai

Terliud!   ikwandar   ajjha

shuþa ya ye

ḳũto vũḻa   ma/kuvus

ñāntari   dasan haşiriyorum

texeki

tsuu   Korrisk

lótta

nislɑnkatɛ

náj   tankei

manimo

singzi   delan   sjum-van

mipìùtha' ith   taglam

piukim mpu

aglía tanhl

ne'ksemma   san athchomari

santari

sonyaru   renmei

Tashi sa, majara   zikki

Himspja sabaňk   Fw yn dîol letê Cw

Sí la öçkek síuthta

kseleln   degjaa

sölhem

The end.

Thank you

Moten: davi|zo   **Egeldish**: nɪslɑnkɑtɛ   **Itlani**: Sonyaru

Dothraki: san athchomari (th = [θ]; ch = [tʃ]; "much respect"; the writers decided Dothraki wouldn't have a word for "thank you")

Celestial: ianita ua (exact meaning: good emotion communication [verb perfective present tense]—2d person accusative)

References & bibliography

Adams, M. (2011). *From Elvish to Klingon. Exploring Invented Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beinhoff, B. (2013). *Perceiving identity through accent: attitudes towards non-native speakers and their accents in English*. Peter Lang.

Cheyne, R. (2008). Created languages in science fiction. *Science Fiction Studies* 25/3, 386-403.

Dewaele, J. M., & McCloskey, J. (2014). Attitudes towards foreign accents among adult multilingual language users. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, (ahead-of-print), 1-18.

Elsen, H. (2008) *Phantastische Namen*. Tuebingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Hinton, L., Nichols, J. and Ohala, J.J. (eds) (1994) *Sound Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kang, O., & Rubin, D. (2014). 11 Listener Expectations, Reverse Linguistic Stereotyping, and Individual Background Factors in Social Judgments and Oral Performance Assessment. *Social Dynamics in Second Language Accent*, *10*, 239.

McKenzie, R. M. (2008). Social factors and non-native attitudes towards varieties of spoken English: a Japanese case study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *18*(1), 63-88.

Meyers, Walter E. (1980). *Aliens and Linguists*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.

Ohala, J.J. (1994) The biological bases of sound symbolism. In Hinton, J., Nichols, J. and Ohala, J.J. (eds), 325-347.

Okrent, A. (2010) *In the Land of Invented Languages: A Celebration of Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius*. Random House LLC.