

*Skroth Reference Grammar and
Lexicon*

by David J. Peterson

Introduction

The Others (or White Walkers) are a mysterious race of deathless beings that few living humans in Westeros have seen. They speak in a language unknown to any mortal being, but are capable of using language. My goal was to capture the icy intimidation of the language as heard by the characters in the book.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D.J.P.', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

David J. Peterson

1. Skroth Description

Guiding Principles:

- In designing a language for the Others (called *Skroth*, after the word in the language for "ice"), my paramount concern is trying to match the description we get in the prologue to *A Game of Thrones*, the bulk of which is found in the quote below:

The Other said something in a language Will did not know; his voice was like the cracking of ice on a winter lake, and the words were mocking.

It would seem that to produce the other-worldly effect described in the book, two things are called for: (1) manipulation of the speech of the actors voicing the Others; and (2) a language which lends itself to that manipulation. My goal is to provide the postproduction team with the latter, as well as comment on the former.

My inspiration for the sound of the language—and what I'm trying to imitate as best I can with natural speech sounds—is the cracking of ice. If one takes an ice cube and cracks it, what I notice is that there are two states the ice cube undergoes. First, it's silent, and while one applies pressure, one can hear the faintest sounds from within foretelling the eventual breakage. Second, there's the break itself, which is much louder, comparatively, and noisy (there are several staccato cracking sounds that occur individually, which, when combined, produce the cracking sound characteristic of ice breaking).

In order to reproduce this, first I decided to maximize the voiceless sounds in the language, and minimize the voiced ones. Voiced sounds are sounds like vowels as well as *b*, *d*, *m*, *n*, etc. While I have included the two nasal sounds *m* and *n* and two vowel phonemes, these should be devoiced to the extent possible, and should sound breathy. The purpose behind this is to emulate the sound of ice, which, even while breaking, is voiceless, in the sense that there is no active articulator present like human vocal cords.

Second, I've separated the sounds into two types: "smooth" sounds and "cracking" sounds. That is, I have a set of sounds that correspond to the state of ice when it's unbroken (or about to be broken), and a set of sounds that correspond to the breaking of ice. By sequencing these, I figure we can get as close as possible to simulating the sound of breaking ice with spoken language.

That said, there will still be some work to do with the end result. I like very much what's been done already, and it's close to what I was imagining the sound would be

like. I think once the dialogue is ready and recorded, the same processes can be applied to the lines as have been used already (it sounds to me like reverb has been added, plus some layering). All in all, it will sound menacing, but will also be fluent and plausible for a language.

Phonology:

- The phonetic inventory of the Skroth Language is listed below:

Consonants

| | Labial | Dental | Alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Uvular | Glottal |
|---------------------|----------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------|---------|
| Stops | p ^h | | t ^h | | k ^h | | |
| Affricates | | | ts ^h | tʃ ^h | kx ^h | | |
| Fricatives | f | θ | s | ʃ | x~χ | | h |
| Nasals | m | | n | | | | |
| Approximants | | | ɹ | | | ʀ | |

Vowels

| | Front | Central | Back |
|-------------|-------|---------|------|
| High | i, y | i | |
| Mid | e | ə | o |
| Low | | | a |

- The symbols listed in the tables above are phonetic symbols. These will be used to *transcribe* words of the Skroth Language, but not to *write* them. To write them, I've devised a romanization system that relies solely on an ASCII keyboard. That system is described below:
 - ◉ The following sounds will be written using the same letter as their phonetic symbol: *f, s, h, m, n, i, e, o* and *a*.
 - ◉ The sound [p^h] (like the "p" in English "pot") will be spelled *p*.
 - ◉ The sound [t^h] (like the "t" in English "tot") will be spelled *t*.

- The sound [k^h] (like the "c" in English "cot") will be spelled *k*.
- The sound [ts^h] (like the "ts" in the shortened version of the English expression "what's up" that's colloquially spelled "tsup") will be spelled *ts*.
- The sound [tʃ^h] (like the "ch" in English "chalk") will be spelled *ch*.
- The sound [kx^h] (no English equivalent) will be spelled *kkh*.
- The sound [ʃ] (like the "sh" in "shell") will be spelled *sh*.
- The sound [θ] (like the "th" in "thin") will be spelled *th*.
- The sounds [x] or [χ] (like Scottish "loch") will be spelled *kh*.
- The sound [ʀ] (kind of like the "r" in French "rouge") will be spelled *r*.
- The sound [i] (like the "e" in "chicken") will be spelled *i*.
- The sound [ə] (like the "a" in "sofa") will be spelled *a*.
- The sound [y] (like the "u" in French "rue") will be spelled *u*.

Romanization and Pronunciation:

- I tried to come up with a romanization system that was as simple as possible and used no diacritics. The result is that the language may look a bit simpler to pronounce (for an English speaker) than it actually is. Below I've detailed the entire spelling system, and given some advice on pronouncing the letters:
 - *A, a*: In stressed positions and at the end of a word this is pronounced like the "a" in "father"; in unstressed positions, it's pronounced like the "a" in "sofa". This alternation should occur more or less naturally in English speakers.
 - *Ch, ch*: Pronounced like the "ch" in "chalk". As with all stops in Skroth, it should be pronounced with a *lot* of aspiration; almost breathy-voiced.
 - *E, e*: Pronounced like the "e" in "get".

- **H, h**: Pronounced like the "h" in "hop". This sound is *always* pronounced, even if it comes at the end of a syllable or a word. The only cases in which it is *not* pronounced is when it occurs in the digraphs or trigraphs *kh, sh, th, kkh,* and *ch*.
- **I, i**: In stressed positions and at the end of a word this is pronounced like the "i" in "machine"; in unstressed positions, it's pronounced like the "e" in "chicken" or "women". This alternation should occur more or less naturally in English speakers.
- **K, k**: Pronounced like the "c" in "cot". As with all stops in Skroth, it should be pronounced with a *lot* of aspiration; almost breathy-voiced.
- **Kh, kh**: Pronounced like the "ch" in the German pronunciation of "Buch". In English, this sound is commonly used with onomatopoeic words associated with disgust, like "blech!" or "ich!" To pronounce it correctly, put your tongue in position to pronounce a "k", but release it slowly; allow the air to pass through the constricted space. The result should be a sound like white noise.
- **Kkh, kkh**: This is the sound *k* followed by the sound *kh*. It doesn't occur in English, but by way of analogy, *t* is to *ts* as *k* is to *kkh*. To pronounce it, start with a *k* like you would for any other word beginning with *k*, and then release the back of your tongue *very slowly*, all the while expelling a lot of breathy air. Allow the frication like you have in *kh* to find full voice.
- **L, l**: This sound doesn't occur in English as a separate phoneme, but it's easy enough to learn. Consider the "l" in "clean". It's quite a bit breathier than the "l" in "lean", for example. Try slowing down your pronunciation of "clean"—see if you can hold the word right after you pronounce the "c" and before you get into "lean". It should sound very breathy and light. That's the *l* sound we're going for. Try putting it at the beginning of a word and in between vowels. Pronounce it with a lot of breath.
- **M, m**: Pronounced like the "m" in "matter".
- **N, n**: Pronounced like the "n" in "never".
- **O, o**: Pronounced like the "o" in "bow".
- **P, p**: Pronounced like the "p" in "pot". As with all stops in Skroth, it should be pronounced with a *lot* of aspiration; almost breathy-voiced.

- **R, r:** Pronounced like the "swallowed" French "r". It's pronounced far back in the throat, and should sound almost like a rolling growl. This should lend itself well to manipulation.
- **S, s:** Pronounced like the "s" in "sad".
- **Sh, sh:** Pronounced like the "sh" in "shack".
- **T, t:** Pronounced like the "t" in "top". As with all stops in Skroth, it should be pronounced with a *lot* of aspiration; almost breathy-voiced.
- **Ts, ts:** Pronounced like the "ts" in the shortened version of the English expression "what's up" that's colloquially spelled "tsup". This sound can occur at the beginning of a word. Just like a *t*, though, this should be pronounced with a lot of aspiration and a lot of breath.
- **Th, th:** Pronounced like the "th" in "thin" (*never* like the "th" in "that").
- **U, u:** For maximum authenticity, this vowel should be pronounced like the "u" in French "rue", which sounds like our "ee" sound in English (as in "meet"), but with the lips completely rounded. A somewhat close approximation would be the so-called "long u" sound in English "mute". If the true French "u" isn't possible, the English "long u" will do.
- **Consonant Clusters:** There will be clusters like *kr* and *tr* and *klr*, and so forth. Think of French when producing these clusters. Listen to native pronunciations of French words like "trois", "croire", "apprendre", and the like. When I pronounce these, it's almost like one part of my tongue is forming the main consonant, and the back part is forming the "r".

Stress:

- Stress is obligatorily on the first syllable of every word. Stress is accompanied by a slight lengthening of the vowel which should be audible.

Morphosyntax:

- My idea for the Skroth language spoken by the Others is that it's a creolized form of some of the old languages of the north (for example, the ancestor to the Old Tongue, the modern version of which is still spoken beyond the Wall). The morphosyntax will be similar to the surrounding languages, but not identical (it will have been

simplified initially, and then built up as the years passed). Furthermore, all the words will have been transformed to fit the unique phonology of the White Walkers (see the first section entitled Guiding Principles). That said, the language will be predominantly head-final (like the surrounding languages), but will have adopted a V2-like structure, using an adverb, rather than a conjugated verb, to separate the subject and object. Objects, however, can be promoted ahead of the subject, and both can be *demoted* for purposes of topicalization and deemphasis, respectively. The result will be a language that is light-weight and functional—perfectly suited to a race of deathless warriors that do little but obey an unseen force and kill.

2. Skroth Reference Grammar

Pronouns

| | Singular | Plural | |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| | | Inclusive | Exclusive |
| First Person | <i>has</i> | <i>shakha</i> | <i>lihas</i> |
| Second Person | <i>shakh</i> | <i>lishakh</i> | |
| Third Person | <i>kros</i> | <i>likros</i> | |
| Predicate Marker | <i>kha</i> | | |

Substantives

Indefinite/Definite

| | Indefinite | Definite |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Vowels | <i>trefa</i> | <i>trefas</i> |
| Stops | <i>shak</i> | <i>shaks</i> |
| Approximants | <i>thar</i> | <i>thars</i> |
| Fricatives | <i>sif</i> | <i>sifs</i> |
| | <i>hath</i> | <i>haths</i> |
| | <i>kkhas</i> | <i>kkhasa</i> |
| | <i>chash</i> | <i>chasha</i> |
| | <i>nakh</i> | <i>nakhsa</i> |
| | <i>roh</i> | <i>roha</i> |
| Nasals | <i>an</i> | <i>ansa</i> |
| Affricates | <i>askrats</i> | <i>askratsa</i> |

Verbs

Conjugation

Verb Conjugations

| Aspect | Realis | | Irrealis | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Unmarked | Past | Future | Speculative |
| Imperfective | <i>skar</i> | <i>skar fash</i> | <i>res skar</i> | <i>krom skar</i> |
| Perfective | <i>skars</i> | <i>skars fash</i> | <i>res skars</i> | <i>krom skars</i> |