

Dothraki Language Tour

Note: The audio files in this section can be found in the "Tour" folder inside the "Audio Files" folder.

Thanks for taking the time to review my Dothraki language proposal. I realize that a grammar and lexicon exceeding a hundred pages may be a bit much to ingest, so in this tour I'd like to showcase the highlights of my Dothraki language proposal (codename Nonindulgence), and show you just why you should choose it. Throughout, you may want to refer to the Dothraki grammar and lexicon to get a better understanding of the various Dothraki words and phrases used herein.

Throughout this tour, I've employed the same notation strategy as is used in the grammar and dictionary. Specifically, words from my Dothraki proposal are ***bolded and italicized***. Words that come directly from George R.R. Martin's books (and whose spellings haven't been altered) are underlined.

There are four concepts that characterize my Dothraki proposal: Faithfulness, Authenticity, Quality and Ease of Use. Below I've explained in detail just how each of these contributes to the end result: A fully-functional, elegant and extraordinary Dothraki language proposal.

Faithfulness

Existing Vocabulary

In constructing the Dothraki language, I've tried to create a fascinating language that looks and feels like the small snippets and phrases we see in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Fire & Ice* series. My goal, first and foremost, has been to create a language whose words would look and sound familiar to readers of the *Fire & Ice* books.

To that end, every Dothraki word that appears in each of Martin's books appears in my proposal. Some have been respelled (see *Ease of Use*), and some whose meanings were opaque have been given actual definitions, but all are present.

In addition, the varying forms of common words have informed the construction of my Dothraki proposal. Consider all the terms found in the books with the common sequence "dothra":

Dothrak: In Vaes Dothrak (book 1, page 29)¹

Dothraki: Name of the Dothraki people and language (book 1, page 30)

Khalakka dothrae mr'anha: "A prince rides inside me" (book 1, page 490)

Vaes Dothrak: The Dothraki capital (book 1, page 29)

It was Martin's goal to make it look as if there were some sort of systematicity behind the fictional Dothraki language. I took it as my goal to supply that systematicity.

¹ I'm using the paperback edition published by Bantam Spectra, 2005.

Using this small example, the common element here is dothra. To figure out more, let's look at one example closely. Consider the phrase Khalakka dothrae mr'anha, "A prince rides inside me." Based on the fact that khal is "chief" and khalakka is likely "prince" (the two words look related and refer to the Dothraki chain of command), dothrae is likely the verb (Martin speaks English, whose word order is Subject, Verb, Object. Most beginning language creators mirror the systems of their native language, making it likely that the middle word in Khalakka dothrae mr'anha is the verb), and thus we can deduce that dothrae means, at the very least, "he rides".

At this point, we've learned something interesting. It would seem that Martin was trying to imply that the words for "to ride" and the Dothraki people themselves are related. Knowing how important horse riding is in the fictional Dothraki culture, now we can put the pieces together.

In my proposal, then, *dothralat* becomes the infinitive form of the verb "to ride", which is conjugated regularly: *dothrak* "I ride", *dothrae* "he/she/it rides", *dothrash* "I rode", etc. The regular way to form a noun meaning "one who does *x*", where *x* is a verb, is to add *-k* to verbs ending in a vowel, and *-ak* to verbs ending in a consonant. As *dothra*, the stem of *dothralat*, ends in a vowel, you add *-k* and get *dothrak*, "rider". The regular nominative plural of *dothrak* is *dothraki*, and there you get the word for the Dothraki people: The riders.

Now *Vaes Dothrak* has an explanation, as well. If we take *vaes* as a word for "city" or "capital", appending *dothrak* to it turns it into a phrase whereby the noun *vaes* is being modified by the adjective *dothrak*, giving us "The Dothrak City".

How, one might wonder, does one posit that the word *dothrak* in *Vaes Dothrak* is an adjective? Here again, we have direct evidence from Martin's books. On page 490, we have the phrase, "Rakh! Rakh! Rakh haj" which is translated in the text as, "A boy, a boy, a strong boy!" It seems that rakh then must be "boy" (as it is in my proposal), leaving haj for "strong". Crucially, if this analysis is accurate, the phrase rakh haj has the adjective following the noun. As languages rarely allow variability regarding the order of adjectives and nouns, it's safe to assume that the order of adjective and noun in Dothraki is Noun–Adjective, lending support to the interpretation that dothrak in *Vaes Dothrak* is, indeed, an adjective.

This is a small sample of the type of analysis I've done with the extant vocabulary of Dothraki found in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Fire & Ice*.

Word Forms

Another important aspect of really bringing the Dothraki language to life is creating new words that fit. A fan of Martin's *Fire & Ice* series should hear the new Dothraki words and think, "Yes, that's appropriate"—or, even better, "Gosh, I don't

remember reading that word. I'll have to go back and check to see which book it's in." The idea is to give the impression that there *was* a fully fleshed-out language that the words in the books were taken from. In order to achieve that aim, defining the phonological character of the existing Dothraki vocabulary is paramount.

In creating my Dothraki proposal, I started first with the existing vocabulary from the first four books. Those words I've treated as canon. From this original set, I derived a phonology, and also derived a set of parameters by which new words can be created.

For example, here are a set of male Dothraki names from the books:

Drogo, Fogo, Haggo, Ihogo, Mago

It doesn't take very much work to see that *Hogo*, *Vago* and *Loggo* would also be good Dothraki names. Identifying the form, though, allows one to get creative. Take the Dothraki name *Ogo* (from the book). By identifying the common ending *-o* (which one may call a name marker, or one may simply identify as a common ending for male names), one can posit a stem *og-*. This stem, then, occurs as a word in my Dothraki proposal: *ogat* "to slaughter" (e.g. a cow or sheep). The ending *-o* doesn't have any special meaning, of course, but one can see a relationship between *Ogo* and *ogat*, and see that the name's origin is something like "one who slaughters" or "the slaughterer" (originally probably a profession title, but perhaps here used more metaphorically to refer to one's prowess on the field of battle).

In addition, the many other words present in the *Fire & Ice* series suggest a basic structure for words in Dothraki. Take, for example, the following words:

arakh: a scimitar-like edged weapon

hrakkar: lion

rhaesh: land

shierak: star (in shierak qiya, "bleeding star", or "comet")

vaes: city (in Vaes Dothrak, the Dothraki capital)

Here we have five words all referring to nouns. All of them are disyllabic (with the exception of shierak which is trisyllabic), and all end in a consonant. George R. R. Martin is an American English speaker, and the way an American English speaker most often pronounces foreign-looking words that end in a consonant is by stressing the last syllable (try it out for yourself). This helped to inform the stress system present in my proposal, and also helps the reader understand the "rhythm" of the Dothraki snippets present in the various *Fire & Ice* books.

Based on observations such as this one, I've been able to coin words that look like they fit with those already coined by Martin. For example, you'll find a number of words in my proposal that are of the same form as those above:

oleth: back (of an animal) [wrf.mp3](#)
graddakh: filth
khaor: waist
chiorish: baby, babe (pet name for a woman)
fiez: rope

And these, of course, represent only one of the many patterns used to build Dothraki words. The result is a vocabulary that should look and sound familiar to readers of Martin's *Fire & Ice* series.

Authenticity

Verisimilitude

The thing that separates an authentic-looking created language from a fake one is its ability to mimic the intricacies of real world languages without appearing unnaturally quirky. The way I achieve this is by making use of *principled irregularity*, or, as I refer to it, natural irregularity.

For example, I've posited two noun classes for my Dothraki proposal: the animate and inanimate class. (Think of a noun class as, for example, masculine and feminine in Spanish or French.) In general, animate nouns (those that are alive and move around) are in the animate class, and inanimate nouns (those that are objects, or aren't alive) are in the inanimate class, as shown below: [reg.mp3](#)

Animate		Inanimate	
<i>achrak</i>	"tracking hound"	<i>chare</i>	"ear"
<i>adra</i>	"turtle"	<i>darif</i>	"saddle"
<i>chiori</i>	"woman"	<i>elain</i>	"seed"
<i>gaezo</i>	"brother"	<i>fikh</i>	"tusk"
<i>mahrazh</i>	"man"	<i>shrane</i>	"beard"

Above, dogs, turtles and people are all living, breathing, animate things, and so they're animate nouns. Conversely, ears, saddles, seeds, tusks and bears are *not* living,

breathing, animate things, and thus they're inanimate. In an unnatural language, there would be no question about what is and is not animate. In a realistic language, though, things don't always work out that way. Consider the following data from Dothraki shown below: [irr.mp3](#)

Animate		Inanimate	
<i>ashefa</i>	"river"	<i>afis</i>	"fly"
<i>chaf</i>	"wind"	<i>enta</i>	"infant"
<i>feshith</i>	"tree"	<i>eshina</i>	"fish"
<i>hoyalasar</i>	"music"	<i>hlefo</i>	"gelding"
<i>shekh</i>	"sun"	<i>zafra</i>	"slave"

Flies, infants, fish, horses and people (slave are human, of course) are certainly animate enough—certainly more so than rivers, wind, trees, music and the sun. What's happening here? How does this system work?

Many language creators are able to identify that languages in the real world often possess irregularities, and some of them try to replicate the types of irregularities they see in their own languages. If such a one had created a system like this one, they might have taken a random set of ordinarily inanimate nouns and made them animate, and vice versa. That, however, is not how real world languages work, and it's not how my Dothraki proposal works.

Take, for example, the animate column in the table above. The sun is not a living, breathing, animate entity the way a human being is. In Dothraki culture, though, both the sun and the moon are revered as deities (this is mentioned explicitly in Martin's books), and are, as such, personified as human beings. Thus in the Dothraki language, both the words for the sun and the moon are treated as animate nouns. The word "tree" many might actually classify as animate in the first place, so it's inclusion here is only debatably irregular, but trees, and many entities that seem to move and possess a kind of life of their own are treated as animate. This is the case with "wind" and "river". As for *hoyalasar*, "music", the ending *-asar* began as a collective marker used with groups of people or animals. As such, all words with the ending *-asar* (such as *khalasar*) were treated as animate. *Hoyalasar*, then, is a collection of *hoyali*, or "songs". Even though this is inanimate, it has a traditionally animate ending, and, as such, is *grammatically* animate.

In the inanimate column, many natural languages (and many cultures) treat small uncountable animals as inanimate. This is why "fly" is inanimate. Similarly, "fish"

to the Dothraki are much like grass: they exist as a mass to be collected and consumed by people. Thus, they are inanimate. A gelding is seen as something less than animate (certainly less animate than a stallion), and is treated as inanimate. The same is true of infants. Infants are not seen as human until they're able to ride a horse, and as such are inanimate (note that infants who die are reborn again, not taken to the afterlife, as they are not yet truly Dothraki). As for slaves, the Dothraki keep many, and look on them as less than human, and so they're treated as inanimate nouns.

In natural languages, irregularity always has an explanation, even if it's been lost or obscured by the passage of time. The same *must* true of a good created language if its goal is to be taken for a natural language.

Uniqueness

A good naturalistic created language must appear to be *like* a natural language without copying an existing one. My Dothraki proposal does just that: It looks like a language that could exist on Earth, but it copies no language.

Many ideas (phonological, morphological and syntactic) from many languages helped to inform the unique system that is Dothraki, among them (in alphabetical order): Arabic, English, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Japanese, Latin, Mongolian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili and Turkish. But which of these languages does Dothraki resemble? Not a one.

Here are some of the features of the Dothraki language (with, for the reader's benefit, a list of languages which share that feature in parentheses):

- SVO main clause word order (*Arabic, English, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili*)
- VSO embedded clause word order (*none*)
- N-Adj. order (*Arabic, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Swahili*)
- Case-marked nominals (*Arabic, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Latin, Mongolian, Russian, Turkish*)
- Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Allative and Ablative cases only (*none*)
- Singular and plural number only (*English, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Japanese, Latin, Mongolian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Turkish*)
- Noun classes (*Arabic, Greek, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Swahili*)
- Default-to-left stress system (*none*)
- Geminate consonants (*Arabic, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Japanese, Latin, Mongolian, Turkish*)
- Initial, medial and final consonant clusters (*English, Russian*)
- Four vowel system (*none*)
- Vowel harmonic affixes (*Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Mongolian, Turkish*)

- Prepositions, not postpositions (*Arabic, English, Greek, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Swahili*)
- Prefixes, suffixes, and circumfixes (*none*)

In addition, there are many features of my Dothraki proposal that are entirely unique. Take, for example, the passive. In a language like English, the passive is formed by combining a finite verb form (the copula) with a non finite verb form (the passive participle), as shown below:

The man eats an apple. (*Active*) > The apple is eaten. (*Passive*)

In effect, then, the passive is marked on the verb. Most languages do something similar (sometimes with an affix, sometimes with a different verb form, etc.). My Dothraki proposal, however, does something unique. Below is an active Dothraki sentence (a translation of the above):

Mhrazh adakha qazer. (*Active*) [pas.mp3](#)
 /man-NOM. eat-3sg.PRES. apple-ACC./
 "The man eats an apple."

To form the passive, nothing is done to the verb at all. Instead, the subject noun phrase is modified, marking it, in a way, as the subject of a passive clause, as shown below:

Qazer nem adakha. (*Passive*)
 /apple-NOM. PASS. eat-3sg.PRES./
 "The apple is eaten."

And, indeed, the particle forms a unit with the noun phrase, as shown below:

Qazer dahaan nem ki mhrazhi adakha. (*Passive*)
 /apple-NOM. green PASS. OBL. man-GEN. eat-3sg.PRES./
 "The green apple by a man is eaten."

The same spot is used for what are often called modal auxiliaries in English or modals in other languages, as shown below:

Mhrazh ish adakha qazer. (*Active*)
 /man-NOM. IRR. eat-3sg.PRES. apple-ACC./
 "The man might eat the apple."

And these modals can even be used as passive markers:

Qazer ishim adakha. (Passive)

/apple-NOM. IRR.-PASS. eat-3sg.PRES./

"The apple might be eaten."

All of this is done without changing the verb, or inflecting any sort of tense on a satellite auxiliary.

The overall result is a highly-efficient, unique linguistic system, the likes of which has never been seen before—which is precisely what the goal should be when designing a language for a fictional society in a fictional universe. Dothraki is not a pale imitation of Mongolian, a relexification of Arabic, or a pastiche of various Native American languages: Dothraki is Dothraki.

Quality

An Argument Against Concatenation

Many, many created languages (and, likely, many of the proposals you'll see) suffer from an over reliance on concatenation in the creation of form and meaning. It seems logical enough to take discrete parts and create wholes from them. We see instances of this in many languages, for example:

report (verb) + -er (doer of verb) = reporter (one who does reports)

Encouraged by real world examples such as these, many language creators find it simpler to replicate the practice indefinitely, turning every possible element of a language into a discrete unit. Such languages are often reducible to lists such as those below:

A = noun A

B = noun B

C = noun C

-D = nominative

-E = accusative

-F = plural

-G = possessive

Thus, you get words that are great strings of linguistic chunks (A+B+C = word ABC), and sentences that are great strings of words (Unit D + Unit E + Unit F = sentence DEF).

This approach has been employed successfully by languages like Esperanto—international auxiliary languages intended to be easy to use. Unfortunately, many language creators attempting to create natural languages (those that would appear to be from the real world) utilize the same approach. The result may be simple and clear, but it is, nevertheless, hopelessly unrealistic, and, in a nutshell, poor art.

Of course, concatenation does crop up even in natural languages. My Dothraki proposal has constructions like English "reporter", for example:

hile "dig (verb)" + *-k* (doer of verb) = *hilek* "digger (one who digs)"

It also, however, has plenty of constructions that are not quite so simple. Take, for example, noun cases. In linguistics, the nominative form of any noun is commonly taken as basic—the part to which other elements are added. Below are some examples of the nominative and accusative forms of Dothraki nouns: [nma.mp3](#)

Noun	Nominative Form	Accusative Form
man	<i>mahrazh</i>	<i>mahrazhes</i>
falcon	<i>nheshi</i>	<i>nheshies</i>
hand, arm	<i>qora</i>	<i>qoraes</i>

These work as expected: the nominative form is basic, and the accusative form adds something to the nominative form to derive something new. The nouns below, though, don't play by the rules:

Noun	Nominative Form	Accusative Form
glove	<i>hlaka</i>	<i>hlak</i>
beard	<i>shrane</i>	<i>shran</i>
pear	<i>sovi</i>	<i>sov</i>

Not only does the accusative form not add anything new to the nominative: it takes something *away*. The notion of addition by subtraction is hard to conceive of, let

alone justify, if one operates under the assumption of concatenative morphology. And yet, constructions like this one abound in real world languages.²

Another faulty assumption of concatenation is that elements will be discrete with discrete meanings, and that combining a set of elements is tantamount to combining their meanings. In my Dothraki proposal, as in every natural language in the world, this is not always the case.

Consider the verb paradigm, for example. Below are a couple conjugated forms of the verb *dothralat*, "to ride":

dothralat "to ride"

dothrak "I ride"

dothrae "you (sg.) ride"

dothraki "we ride"

A standard account of the facts presented above might look something like this: the stem is *dothra-*, the infinitive is *-lat*, the first person marker is *-k*, the second person marker is *-e*, and the plural marker is *-i*. In a standard concatenative language, one might expect something like *dothraei* for "you (plu.) ride", and, upon learning that there is a negative form of each verb, that tacking on a negative suffix would produce the negative form. That, however, is not the case. Consider the forms below:

dothrao "you don't ride"

dothrok "I don't ride"

dothrae "you (plu.) ride"

dothroki "we don't ride"

These forms challenge a standard concatenative analysis. For example, *dothra-* can no longer be the stem of "ride", since it appears as *dothro-* in the first person negative forms. Perhaps, one might argue, that's simply the negative stem, which means "not ride". Why, then, does it not appear in *dothrao*, "you don't ride"? And what happened to the second person marker *-e* in *dothrao*, and the plural marker in *dothrae*?

Of course, nothing happened to them, as the markers themselves are only used *with* certain verb forms; they do not *mark* anything, as such. So rather than overburdening the user of the language with an abundance of markers, what we have in the Dothraki verb paradigm are a series of uniquely identifiable verb forms: First person is easily distinguished from second and third; positive is easily distinguished from negative, etc. In a language that doesn't allow for pro-drop, this is all that's really necessary. Consider the comparatively sparse English verb paradigm below:

² Consider the following from Russian: *kniga* "book (nominative)" > *knig* "book (genitive)".

"to jump"	Present		Past	
Tense	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
First Person	<i>jump</i>	<i>jump</i>	<i>jumped</i>	<i>jumped</i>
Second Person	<i>jump</i>	<i>jump</i>	<i>jumped</i>	<i>jumped</i>
Third Person	<i>jumps</i>	<i>jump</i>	<i>jumped</i>	<i>jumped</i>

And yet we do just fine, and don't bother if "jump" is third person plural or second person singular, or if the "-s" in "jumps", for that matter, marks a third person present singular verb or a plural noun.

By employing strategies such as those detailed above, I've created a language that's not only "foreign-sounding", but is actually realistic—something that one could very well encounter in the real world. Many of the proposals you'll see, I'll wager, might *sound* interesting, but in the end, will turn out to be little more than jigsaw puzzles. And just as a jigsaw puzzle of the *Mona Lisa* is not a work of art, neither is a poorly constructed (albeit "foreign-sounding") language worthy of admiration.

Metaphor

Many created languages operate under the assumption that the meaning of a word or a phrase or a sentence is simply a matter of counting up the meaningful chunks, combining the meanings, and calculating the sum. In real world languages, this doesn't work.

Consider, for example, conceptual metaphor. Many think of metaphor as a synonym for flowery language. In fact, it's rather commonplace, and is foundational to natural language as we know it.

Time is a notoriously nebulous concept. If you think about it, time is barely a "thing" at all. We perceive its passing as we see things and people age, and we think and talk about it a lot, but, like gravity, it has no substance: we simply know that it *has* to exist. It's difficult to talk about something so abstract, so what real languages do is treat time *as if* it were a concrete entity. Thus, in English, we can "have" time, "spend" it, "lose" it, "waste" it, etc. In many ways, we conceptualize time as money, as money is something we have a lot of direct, physical experience with in our culture.

To create a realistic Dothraki language, then, the task of the language creator is to identify what it's like to *be* Dothraki—to understand what they have direct experience with, what is most important to them—and then to allow that to inform the creation of metaphor in the Dothraki language.

One important difference between the Dothraki and dwellers in an industrialized society, for example, is their access to and everyday interaction with animals (wild, tame, and livestock). One natural feature of many real world languages is different vocabulary items for animal body parts vs. human body parts (consider "snout" vs. "mouth" or "nose"). The Dothraki have a number of paired items that refer either to a human body part or the corresponding animal body part. A partial list is given below: [ani.mp3](#)

Body Part	Human Term	Animal Term
buttocks, posterior	<i>ager</i>	<i>choyo</i>
mouth/nose	<i>gomma/riv</i>	<i>hoska</i>
belly, stomach	<i>gango</i>	<i>torga</i>
back	<i>irge</i>	<i>oleth</i>

Such lists are fairly commonplace in the world's language (though such vocabulary items usually fall out of use in industrialized society, or one of the terms becomes the common term, with the other shifting meaning, etc.). These terms have their proper place, and are used appropriately most of the time, but what Dothraki speakers can do is use the animal terms with humans as an insult.

Below, for example, is a common way to say, "Be quiet!":

Chakas!

/be.silent-COMM.INF./

"Quiet!" (Literally, "Be silent!")

And that's fine; it conveys the message. But if one is *really* annoyed, one can say the following:

Acchakas hosk!

/silence-COMM.INF. snout-ACC./

"Shut your mouth!" (Literally, "Silence your snout!")

In English, we don't really have a way to adequately describe how offensive this is (something close might be, "Shut your hole!"). Essentially, the insult derives from the comparison the speaker is making between the addressee and an animal. Presumably, the main difference between humans and animals is self-restraint (well, that and

conscious thought). Given the proper setting, the implication that a Dothraki warrior doesn't know when—or how—to control himself is grounds for combat.

Another example of how metaphor works in my Dothraki proposal is a word like *athvezhvenar*. This word comprises several "chunks", and you can actually break them down and figure out what each one means:

vezh = stallion

-ven = -like (thus, *vezhven* is "like a stallion", or "stallion-like", or "stallion-esque")

ath- -ar = the quality of

So, literally, *athvezhvenar* is "the quality of being stallion-like". That, however, does not adequately capture what the meaning of this word is, or how it is used. In Dothraki culture, horses are revered, and stallions are considered to be the epitome of what it means to be a great horse. A great stallion, among other things, is mature, strong, loyal, fearless and courageous (and, of course, male).³ Unlike comparing a human to a wild animal, or, worse, a tame animal, like a sheep or a pig, comparing a human to a stallion is considered to be a great compliment—and one not lightly bestowed. As a result of the nebulous nature of this term, though, the word *athvezhvenar* has various translations: courage, fearlessness, heroism, strength, loyalty. Only context can determine how it (or its adjectival form *vezhven*) is to be understood.

The key point here, though, is that the meaning of the word can't be derived from the sum of its parts. Indeed, if one imagines the Dothraki language seven or eight hundred years down the line (by which time the Dothraki may have become "civilized", accustomed to city life, no longer nomadic...), the connection between the word *athvezhvenar* and horses may have been lost completely, just as it's rather opaque how the word "courage" in English ultimately derives from the word "heart" (by way of French).⁴

I mentioned before that conceptual metaphor is foundational to natural language. A language devoid of metaphor would be of little use to human beings (for example, just what would "on" mean in "Turn the lights on"—or "turn", for that matter?). This is why I've devoted considerable time and energy to the development of the various guiding metaphors present in the Dothraki language and culture. When a language creator ignores this crucial facet of language, the result is worse than the absence of metaphor. Why? Because the resulting language will tacitly *assume* the metaphors of the creator's own language (e.g. English). In a very real way, then, what

³ The Dothraki in Martin's books seem to be notoriously misogynist. While I don't approve personally, that misogyny is reflected in my Dothraki language proposal.

⁴ French *cœur* is "heart", and *-age* is a nominal suffix meaning something like "stuff", so "courage" is literally "heart stuff".

the creator has produced is a phonologically-distinct, morphologically-alien version of the real language they speak at home on a day-to-day basis—in which case, for this project, the actors may as well be speaking gibberish, since it would be about as linguistically interesting as the alternative.

Ease of Use

Flexibility

Many language creators have become enamored of romanization systems. Those populating the internet feature all kinds of characters with diacritics like *ë* and *ł* and *í* and *đ* and *ṭ* and who knows what else. Often enough, these letterforms are used to represent rather commonplace sounds, or sounds that might be represented more simply.

In my Dothraki proposal, I've had the actors in mind from the start. My goal was to create a romanization system that's simple, phonetic, and recognizable. The system I've developed resorts to no extra diacritics, and no unrecognizable characters: The whole thing can be typed on a standard keyboard. After all, the only ones likely to *see* the Dothraki language are those involved with the project. Why bother with a complex system when all that's needed is a simple system that clearly and unambiguously conveys the content?

It's for that purpose that I've changed the spellings used in Martin's books in several places. The system he uses is inconsistent, at best. Even for an English speaker, it's unclear how the sequence "jh" should be pronounced—especially when "j" is used by itself, as well. While keeping his system in mind, I've designed a romanization system that's 100% regular (there will never be any question about how a given letter is to be pronounced), and immediately recognizable to those familiar with the Roman alphabet.

But that's not all. Understanding that there may be Moroccan actors who need to use Dothraki, I've also developed two additional possible transcription schemes which might be more familiar to them: One based on Arabic (bearing in mind the local variety, Darija), and another on French (the Lingua Franca of Morocco).

Finally, as the resulting Dothraki may still be a bit difficult for an actor to pronounce, regardless of his/her country of origin, I've developed a system for simplifying the pronunciation of Dothraki considerably. The result will still sound similar to actual Dothraki, but may be a lot easier on the actors.

Below is a summary of each of these four systems. The first column is the sound itself in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The second column is that sound represented in the standard romanization system I've developed for Dothraki. The third column is the simplified variant of the standard. The fourth column is the French-inspired transcription system, and the fifth is the Arabic-inspired transcription system (note: for vowels in the Arabic-inspired transcription system, I'll use *raa* as the carrier of diacritics).

Dothraki Transcription

IPA	Standard	Simplified	French	Arabic
[a]	A, a	A, a	A, Ä, a, ä	ا, رَءَا
[b]	B, b	B, b	B, b	ب
[tʃ]	Ch, ch	Ch, ch	Tch, tch	چ
[d]	D, d	D, d	D, d	د
[e]	E, e	E, e	E, È, Ê, e, è, ë	ا, رَءَا
[f]	F, f	F, f	F, f	ف
[g]	G, g	G, g	G, Gu, g, gu	گ
[h]	H, h	H, h	H, h	ح
[i]	I, i	I, i	I, Î, i, î	ي
[dʒ]	J, j	J, j	Dj, dj	ج
[k]	K, k	K, k	K, k	ك
[x]	Kh, kh	K, k	Kh, kh	خ
[l]	L, l	L, l	L, Ll, l, ll	ل
[m]	M, m	M, m	M, Mm, m, mm	م
[n]	N, n	N, n	N, Nn, n, nn	ن
[o]	O, o	O, o	O, Ö, o, ö	و
[p]	P, p	P, p	P, p	پ
[q]	Q, q	K, k	Q, q	ق
[r], [r]	R, r	R, r	R, r	ر
[s]	S, s	S, s	S, Ss, s, ss	س
[ʃ]	Sh, sh	Sh, sh	Ch, ch	ش
[t]	T, t	T, t	T, Tt, t, tt	ت

IPA	Standard	Simplified	French	Arabic
[θ]	Th, th	Th, th	Th, th	ث
[v]	V, v	V, v	V, v	ف
[w]	W, w	W, w	W, w	و
[j]	Y, y	Y, y	Y, y	ي
[z]	Z, z	Z, z	Z, z	ز
[ʒ]	Zh, zh	Zh, zh	J, j	ژ

In addition, to talk a bit about the simplified system, I've allowed for great flexibility in how Dothraki is pronounced. For example, what's written as *i* can be pronounced like the "i" in "machine", or the "i" in "kid", or even the "e" in "chicken". And even though Dothraki lacks the letter (and sound) [u], the letter *o* can be pronounced freely as either a true "o" (as the "oa" in "boat"), or a more open "o" (as the "o" in "tore"), or even the "u" in "put" or the "oo" in "boot". These distinctions make no difference in *meaning*; merely in pronunciation choice, or perhaps dialect.

Additionally, many of the consonant clusters can be simplified with the basic effect coming across on screen. For example, if an actor finds the doubled (or geminate) consonants difficult to pronounce, they can all be simplified to single consonants (this change is reflected in the simplified system automatically). Additionally, many of the odd consonant combinations (e.g. *rh* or *hr* or *mr*) can be simplified entirely (the difference between *rh/hr* and *r*, for example, is negligible on screen), or broken up with vowels (so if *mra* is difficult to pronounce, an actor can substitute *mara*).

Finally, so that actors don't have to actually learn the stress patterns of Dothraki, stress can be marked with an acute accent in the standard and simplified transcription systems. This is entirely optional, though, and might be done just as well with bolding, italics, underlining, all caps, or any other system used to give prominence to a given syllable.

So that you can see these different systems in action, below is a Dothraki sentence transcribed using each system detailed above. The sentence means, "The valiant man hopes to kill his foolish enemies with his bare hands". Here's how it would look in Dothraki: [trn.mp3](#)

IPA: [mah.ˌrɑʒ ˈveʒ.ven za.ˈlak ad.dri.ˈvat ˈdoz.ge ˌto.ki ma ˈqo.ra.so.a ˌme.ni]

Standard: *Mahrāzh vezhven zalak addrivat dozge toki ma qorasoa meni.*

Stressed (Stan.): *Mahrázh vezhvén zalák adrivát dózge tóki ma qórasoa méni.*

Simplified: *Marazh vezhven zalak adrivat dozge toki ma korasowa meni.*

Stressed (Sim.): *Marázh vezhvén zalák adrivát dózge tóki ma kórasowa méni.*

French: *Mahraj vèjvenne zalak adrivatte dozguè toki ma qorassoä mèni.*

Arabic: مَحْرَاژْ قَرَّظِينْ زَلَاكْ أَدْرِيفَاتْ دَوْزْجَةْ تَوْكِيْ مَا قَوْرَسُوَةْ مَنيْ-

Furthermore, Dothraki itself is fairly flexible. As a case language, the order of elements in a Dothraki sentence can be jumbled up fairly freely without the meaning changing. In fact, such juggling is done by Dothraki speakers themselves to emphasize (or deemphasize) certain elements of a sentence (e.g. any noun phrase can be dragged to the front of a sentence to emphasize it).

In short, my Dothraki proposal is extremely flexible. Whatever needs to be done, it can do it, without exception.

Simplicity

The best part of the entire proposal is this: The complexity of my variant of Dothraki is *only* complex for the user (i.e. the one doing translation). For the actors, the language will be as simple as reading the lines on the script (and that I've tried to make as simple as possible), and for the script writers, all they need to do is ask me, "Translate this", and it'll be translated. The Dothraki footprint, so to speak, will be all but nonexistent. Nothing regarding the Dothraki language will put the actors, writers or directors to any extra work, but the end result—the spoken elements heard on screen—will be superior to anything else that's ever been done with a created language on film or television.

Summary

Throughout this tour, I've tried to make a case for my Dothraki proposal. To sum it up in a few words, though, my Dothraki proposal is *exactly* what will be best for this show: a unique, realistic, complex and fascinating language that is true to Martin's work, simple for actors to use, and impossible for fans to resist. Please take some time to explore the language in detail in the attached grammar and lexicon and listen to the attached sound samples. Thanks very much for your time.