# Executive Summary

*The 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 two 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, and show you what makes it unique. Throughout, you may want to refer to the Dothraki Reference 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.

## *Statement of Purpose*

When a language creator sits down to create a language, the creator must have a set of over-arching goals for the language—a schema against which the language can be measured to determine if the endeavor has been a success or a failure. In bringing to life the Dothraki language of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Fire & Ice* series, I've had four main goals in mind against which I'd like my proposal to be measured:

1. Quality: To produce the highest quality, most realistic language possible.
2. Fidelity: To produce a language that would fit the extant Dothraki vocabulary and the Dothraki culture as perfectly as possible.
3. Clarity: To produce a language that's user-friendly and maximally flexible.
4. Totality: To produce a complete language: a finished product that is ready to use.

To the best of my ability, I believe I've achieved these four goals. Below I'll explain just how it was done.

## 1. *Quality*

The various types of created languages that exist have different goals. Some languages are formed based on a strict system of logic, and so must adhere to that system. Others try to be as simple as possible, so that they're easy to learn. Still others

try to be beautiful, and must match a set of specific aesthetic criteria in the mind of the creator. A naturalistic language, though, has one goal: to fool a linguist.

A well-designed naturalistic language should never for a moment cause a linguist to think, "Well, *this* is obviously fake," or, "This is far-fetched." If presented with data from a naturalistic created language, a linguist should be thinking, "Huh. I wonder what language family this is from? I don't see any recognizable cognates. It must be an isolate of some kind…" Put simply, a naturalistic created language should be indistinguishable from a real world natural language.

In order to achieve the level of authenticity required by a naturalistic language, I've employed my characteristic method of organic conlanging to *grow* the Dothraki language. I mentioned this in my cover letter, but I'm glad to be able to show you exactly how it works here.

Let's start with an example from a language we know: English. If we take a modern word like "silly", we can come up with a reasonable definition ("non-serious, comical, absurd, etc."), and probably come up with a lot of one-word equivalents in other languages. It would be easy, then, to coin a random word and say, "This Dothraki word means 'silly'." Language, however, is not that simple.

Take our example "silly". It derives from an old participle *gesælig* which originally meant "blessed". Over time the *ge-* was dropped, and its meaning started to shift. Those who are blessed are, speakers reasoned, innocent, and so it came to be used to mean "innocent". The most innocent humans that exist are children, and children are often helpless, and so the word eventually came to be used to mean "helpless" or "hapless". *Adults* who are helpless, though, aren't to be excused (unlike children, who can't help themselves). An adult who is helpless is…well, silly. And that's how a word that originally meant "blessed" came to mean what it means today.

Real world languages have thousands of examples just like this one. The analogical progression and metaphorical expansion of meanings like this over hundreds of years is the hallmark of human language. Since a language creator doesn't have the benefit of hundreds of years and thousands of speakers, that progression has to be simulated.

This is where my organic process comes into play. Take a word like ***qoy***, "blood". I coined this word based on the form qiya used in *A Clash of Kings* (qiya means "bleeding", so I derived a regular process whereby if a word like ***qoy*** means "blood", then ***qiya*** will mean "to bleed". Some other examples: ***nhazhi*** "sap" > ***nhezha*** "to ooze sap"; ***thom*** "juice" > ***thima*** "to ooze juice", etc.). Originally, it simply meant "blood", and nothing more.

Then I began to grow the word's evolution. The Dothraki use the expression "Blood of my blood" frequently. That's easily translated as ***qoy qoyi***, but what does it mean? "Of my blood" means "related"—of the same blood—whence bloodrider, which is translated literally as ***dothrakhqoyi***, or "rider of (my) blood".

Now imagine that this word is used over fifty or hundred years. Pretty soon the "related" part might pass out of mind, as it's repeated over and over. At this point, reanalysis (or, another way to think of it, a mutation) may occur. Perhaps ***qoyi*** in "bloodrider" doesn't mean "related", but "important" or "central", as the Khal's bloodriders are his most important warriors. If a significant group of speakers come to believe that, they might coin new words, like ***asqoyi***, "a word of blood", which is "an oath" or "a promise", or, in other words, the most important word one can say. And if a footprint by a campfire or a bloodstain on an arakh becomes a the most important piece of evidence in a case, then perhaps a ***shoqoyi***, or "mark of blood", becomes the word for "evidence" or "proof".

Celestial proof, which the Dothraki believe in, comes in the form of omens: great signs in the sky like comets. Thus, a crucial flash of light, an ***assikhqoyi***, becomes an omen. And just as the intensity of these omens is great, so is the intensity of a fight between neighbors or brothers, which comes to be known as a fight of blood, or a ***lazhqoyi***. And finally, as a dispute or fight has to do with combat, perhaps a tool that has a use in and out of combat will develop a specific word for the *combat* version of the tool, and thus was coined ***kathqoyi***: a net with weighted, metal balls on the end used to snare enemy combatants in close-quarters combat.

And in just this manner, hundreds of years of linguistic evolution is accomplished in a human timeframe, and, improbably, the word for "weighted net" develops a semantic relationship with the word for "blood". A summary of the progression is shown below. qoy.mp3

| Step | Dothraki Word | Composition | Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | ***qoy*** | ***qoy*** "blood" | "blood" |
| *2* | ***qoy qoyi*** | ***qoy*** "blood" + ***qoyi*** "of (my) blood" | "Blood of my blood!" |
| *3* | ***dothrakhqoyi*** | ***dothrak*** "rider" + ***qoyi*** "of (my) blood" | "bloodrider" |
| *4* | ***asqoyi*** | ***ase*** "word" + ***qoyi*** "of blood" | "oath", "promise" |
| *5* | ***shoqoyi*** | ***sho*** "mark, smudge" + ***qoyi*** "of blood" | "evidence", "proof" |
| *6* | ***assikhqoyi*** | ***assikh*** "signal" + ***qoyi*** "of blood" | "omen" |
| *7* | ***lazhqoyi*** | ***lajo*** "fight" + ***qoyi*** "of blood" | "dispute" |
| *8* | ***kathqoyi*** | ***kade*** "net" + ***qoyi*** "of blood" | "weighted net" |

This process of linguistic analogy applies also to the grammar of a given natural language. A simple example from English is the "-er" suffix, originally reserved for the *human* performer of any given action, but whose usage we've extended to cover inanimate agents, as well, whence words like "computer", "mixer", "dryer", "auto-dialer", etc. Evidence of grammatical expansion such as this should be evident in any good naturalistic created language.

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, the masculine and feminine in Spanish or French.) In general, animate nouns (those that are alive and move around of their own volition) 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** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***achrak*** | "tracking hound" | ***chare*** | "ear" |
| ***adra*** | "turtle" | ***darif*** | "saddle" |
| ***chiori*** | "woman" | ***elain*** | "seed" |
| ***gaezo*** | "brother" | ***fikh*** | "tusk" |
| ***mahrazh*** | "man" | ***shrane*** | "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. One might think that that's the end of the story. 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** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***ashefa*** | "river" | ***afis*** | "fly" |
| ***chaf*** | "wind" | ***enta*** | "infant" |
| ***feshith*** | "tree" | ***eshina*** | "fish" |
| ***hoyalasar*** | "music" | ***hlefo*** | "gelding" |
| ***shekh*** | "sun" | ***zafra*** | "slave" |

Flies, infants, fish, horses and people (slaves 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?

In truth, there are numerous examples like this in real world languages (a couple quick examples: German has a masculine, feminine and neuter class, but *Mädchen*, "girl", is neuter rather than feminine, while *Lampe*, "lamp", is feminine rather than neuter; in Spanish, nouns that end in *-a* are feminine, yet there are masculine counterexamples, such as *el mapa*, *el programa* and *el problema*). To a child learning a language for the first time, irregularities such as these may seem random and unprincipled. In the history of a language, though, such diversions are examples of *principled irregularity*, which, in effect, is the only type of irregularity a real world language will display, and which should be emulated by a naturalistic language creator.

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 Mr. 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 its 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 (and singular). ***Hoyalasar***, then, is a collection of ***hoyali***, or "songs". Even though songs are inanimate, the word ***hoyalasar*** 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 grammatically inanimate.

The level of detail required to produce realistic results like those I've mentioned here is significant, but for a language for a living, breathing people like the Dothraki, I feel the effort was well spent. The result is that in addition to having a good *sounding* language to be able to use onscreen, the language itself is also of extremely high quality and should be able to fool any linguistic (well, at least until they see the word ***arakh*** or the name ***Khal Drogo***).

2. *Fidelity*

In order for a Dothraki language to be serviceable, it must fit the perceptions of the fans of the *Fire & Ice* books. To do this, the language must first use all existing Dothraki vocabulary—that's a given. Next, the sound patterns of the language must fit the existing sound patterns present in the extant Dothraki vocabulary. Finally, the semantics of the language must fit the general Dothraki aesthetic developed by Mr. Martin. This is what I did to meet these goals.

First, all the extant Dothraki vocabulary was borrowed straight in. I had to implement a couple spelling changes (to make things a bit more transparent), but aside from that, everything is in: ***arakh***, ***khalasar***, ***ko***, ***shierak***, etc.

Next, the sound patterns. The Dothraki language proved to be an interesting challenge because the creator couldn't simply create something that sounded "cool" or "foreign". Rather, the creator had to create something that matches the current vocabulary.

To do so, I did two things. First, *every* sound I used in my Dothraki proposal is present in the extant Dothraki vocabulary (save ***ch***, which I added for the sake of a balanced phonology). Second, the new words had to look Dothraki, which meant that I had to use the extant vocabulary as a model. For example, here's some of the extant Dothraki vocabulary:

arakh: a scimitar-like edged weapon
hrakkar: lion
rhaesh: land
shierak: star (in shierak qiya, "bleeding star", or "comet")
vaes: city or nation (in Vaes Dothrak, the Dothraki capital)

Above 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. 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). Mr. Martin knew this, I'm sure, and relied on it when creating Dothraki vocabulary. 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 Mr. Martin. For example, you'll find a number of words in my proposal that are of the same form as those above: wrf.mp3

***oleth***: back (of an animal)
***graddakh***: filth
***khaor***: waist

***chiorish***: baby, babe (pet name for a woman)
***fiez***: rope

The result is that the Dothraki I've created sounds like it served as the basis for the Dothraki in the *Song of Fire & Ice* series.

In addition to the sounds of Dothraki, the language itself—the words, the expressions, the metaphors—all had to match the Dothraki aesthetic Mr. Martin created in his books. In the books, the Dothraki appear "savage", but this is because they're hunters, gatherers and warriors. They have a kind of disdain for civilization, and are very close to the natural world. In addition, they have a special relationship with their horses. All of this is reflected in my Dothraki language proposal.

Here's an example from Dothraki to illustrate the above. Many natural languages (if not most) have a separate set of vocabulary items for human body parts as opposed to animal body parts. In English, we see the vestiges of such a system in our vocabulary ("snout" as opposed to "nose", for example), but the productiveness of these distinctions has been lost, as our culture has become industrialized. These distinctions should still be present and active for the Dothraki, though, and they are in my proposal, as shown below. ani.mp3

| Body Part | Human Term | Animal Term |
|---|---|---|
| buttocks, posterior | ***ager*** | ***choyo*** |
| mouth/nose | ***gomma/riv*** | ***hoska*** |
| belly, stomach | ***gango*** | ***torga*** |
| back | ***irge*** | ***oleth*** |

Of course, if these vocabulary items are *present*, why not have fun with them?

In ordinary discourse, one can refer properly to an animal's mouth as ***hoska*** and to a human's mouth as ***gomma***. In Dothraki, though, one can use the animal term for specialized insults. Below is a common way to say "Be quiet!": qui.mp3

***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.

A different example of the use of metaphor 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).[1] 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.

I've taken the time to create vocabulary items like this that occur all throughout my Dothraki proposal. The vocabulary encompasses their keen understanding of nature; their belief that honorable actions take place under the open sky; the importance they place on strength and respect; and their notorious disdain for sheep. To see some of these in action, I invite you to look at the Dothraki Phrasebook. It's a collection of Dothraki sayings I've compiled to give you a sense of how the Dothraki culture is reflected in their language. All in all, the flavor of my Dothraki proposal should appear familiar to any fan of *A Song of Fire & Ice*.

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[1] The Dothraki people tolerate a certain level of misogyny in their culture, and while *I'm* not misogynist, that misogyny should be reflected in the Dothraki language.

*3. Clarity*

The system detailed above may sound complex and difficult to master, but I've made pains to make the language and its exposition as explicit as possible. Undoubtedly, the amount of information present in my proposal is daunting (all told, it's well over three hundred pages), but I've done what I've done to eliminate possible confusion, and to provide a foolproof reference for writers, directors, actors and translators.

One concern I've taken as paramount is the ability of the actors to *speak* Dothraki. While Dothraki's phonology is unique, it's not overly complex (in places, it's rather forgiving). I've also created a phonetic romanization system (one grapheme = one sound) so that there should never be a question about how a given word is pronounced. Bearing in mind the naturalistic constraints I chose to operate under, I've done my best to produce a language that won't give anyone any headaches.

To that end, I invite you to look at the Accents in Dothraki document I've provided. In addition to pronunciation information (and, of course, information on how to speak with a Dothraki accent), I've provided a series of alternate transcription systems—including one which uses the Arabic script. Whatever the actor's background, I can produce a set of lines they will be able to read and produce as fluently as is appropriate.

Finally, the Dothraki language itself is rather flexible. There is no "one right way" to say anything. If the director decides he doesn't like quite how something is phrased, it can easily be changed around. Below is an example of the same sentence said six different ways (in English, "Yesterday, I killed a man with my arakh"): sen.mp3

1. ***Oskikh anha addriv mahrazhes m'arakhoon anni.***
2. ***Anha addriv mahrazhes m'arakhoon anni oskikh.***
3. ***Mahrazhes anha addriv m'arakhoon anni oskikh.***
4. ***Oskikh anha atthas mahrazhes m'arakhoon anni.***
5. ***Anha atthas m'arakhoon anni mahrazhes oskikh.***
6. ***Oskikh m'arakhoon anni anha atthas mahrazhes.***

The purpose in making the language so flexible is twofold: First, to give the director and writers options; second, to make the language easy to use. The Dothraki language should be an added bonus for this production, not an unwanted headache.

*4. Totality*

There is more in my Dothraki proposal than was necessary to translate the dialogue for the pilot—much more. While it won't be necessary for the pilot, per se, it should simplify the future of the Dothraki language. Aside from vocabulary, the Dothraki language as it is should be able to handle any dialogue from future episodes;

all one needs is my materials and the ability to use them effectively. This was important to me in designing the language and creating my proposal, as I didn't want for there to be a situation where I (or another translator) would be forced to go back and change something based on a new development—or worse, to have to generate, on the fly, a brand new grammatical construction that hadn't been encountered in the pilot.

The comprehensiveness of my proposal ensures the security of the Dothraki language. It ensures that the language will be the same across all episodes, present and future, and the detailed information about the expansion of the language ensures that future additions won't change the character of the language.

In addition, a full and complete proposal such as mine will allow producers, writers, directors, etc. to generate media *beyond* the pilot. For example, in the pilot, no Dothraki speaker ever actually says "hello" or "goodbye". Those who want to hear something in a new language, though, commonly ask, "How do you say 'hello'?" Or, "How do you say 'goodbye'?" Or, "What's the word for 'cat'?" With my proposal, there will be answers to these questions—in fact, there already are ("hello" is ***m'athchomaroon***, often shortened to ***m'ath***; "goodbye" is ***fonas chek***; and "cat" is ***havzi***). With all the language information there, one can easily provide viewers with information about the language: handy vocabulary, common greetings and expressions, fun facts about the language, the best way to threaten someone who's grabbed the same woman as you, etc. Such projects are easily accomplished with a full and complete language, and afford directors, producers and writers with one thing that's often hardest to come by: Options.

*Conclusion*

What I've tried to provide you with here is a window to the possibilities my Dothraki proposal provides. The Dothraki language I've created is fully functional, complete, and has the Dothraki spirit at its core. I thank you for reading through this introduction, and invite you to peruse the rest of my proposal at your leisure—or, as Illyrio would say, ***k'athzalari***. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me during the review process.