

## VAMPIRE ACADEMY

### Background on the Aazh Naamori Language

1. What was your starting point for creating the ancient language for the series?

We started with the vocabulary available in the *Vampire Academy* book series by Richelle Mead. While that was the jumping off point, there was a lot more required to work all of it into a fully functioning language, so that was where we interfaced with production.

2. What were the initial conversations with the creative team like and what were your key objectives when creating the language?

Initially we tried to reconcile what we had in the books, what production was interested in, and where we could inject our own creativity. The setting is Eastern Europe, and we wanted to have something that fit into that region, but was entirely distinct—that is, not a language that was directly related to any Slavic or Romance language, but one which had clearly been influenced by the languages around it. We also wanted something that sounded good on screen. The result struck a good balance and fit the setting well.

Additionally, we were quite excited to be able to create a writing system for the language. That's not something we always get to do, but when we do, we really relish the opportunity. The system we created for Aazh Naamori is perhaps the most striking we've done, and fits the universe quite well. We were delighted that the art department ran with it and ended up using it quite a bit.

3. How deep did you go with the vocabulary, sentence structure, grammatical rules, etc?

In order to have a language that can handle significant translation, the grammar has to be fully fleshed out. We created grammatical patterns for all types of sentence structures—from basic sentences like “the vampires are fighting” to complex sentences that have embedded structures like “the vampire who challenges the winner and fights with dignity will be honored.” The vocabulary we have created so far is largely dictated by the translations needed for show dialogue and

background texts. Some words are basic and created by putting sounds together that feel good for a certain meaning, like *voozh* for “wind.” Once we had a solid set of basic words, we were able to use opportunities to expand the vocabulary in creative ways, like extending the meaning of *zron*, whose basic meaning is “circle”, to also mean “family.” By adding the word *man*, meaning “source,” to *zron*, we created the compound *manzron* which means “bloodline” (literally “family source”). The vocabulary is perhaps the most fun part of creating the language and is where the language will continue growing as we keep working on the show.

4. After you built the basics needed for the show, how easy is it to build from there moving forward?

The grammar is the difficult part; the vocabulary is the long part. Once the grammar is in place, it’s relatively simple, albeit time consuming, to come up with all the vocabulary we’ll need. It’s especially challenging for a language created in a modern setting, as the vocabulary requirements are much more extensive than those needed for a medieval setting, for example. For a modern setting, we need all those words to form the roots of the language, plus the additional vocabulary for modern technology—and we have to decide what source to draw from, whether from its own origins, or from other languages.

5. Do you use any other ancient languages to draw from in terms of etymology? We heard that there were aspects of Spanish and French infused in it?

Though Aazh Naamori is a language isolate, it has borrowed throughout the centuries from various languages: Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Greek, Latin... Modern words may even come from English. The bulk of the lexical sources are original, but it’s always fun to hear a borrowing one will recognize pop up here and there.

In terms of the sound, Aazh Naamori has nasal vowels like French; a palatal series like Russian; long vowels like Hungarian; and an *r* that behaves in most respects like the *r* of Spanish.

6. How do the both of you work together to create a language?

Since Jessie and I live together, working together is easy. Since our first project, Freeform's *Motherland: Fort Salem*, we've worked together on three movies, four TV shows, a music album, and our own web series, so we've gotten into a real groove. When we start our work day, we sit next to each other and divvy up the work of the grammar or of lexicon creation, and come together for the difficult stuff. Speaking personally, I've created a lot of languages and done a lot of work in Hollywood on my own, and while I am very proud of the work, the work Jessie and I do together outstrips it. I think what we've done for *Vampire Academy* may be our finest work to date.

7. How long did it take to create?

We were first contacted about working on *Vampire Academy* in June 2021, and we started delivering translations in August. However, a language is never *done*. There is always vocabulary to create, and so the language continually expands. In fact, it expanded this very weekend, as we tackled a brand new song translation request.

8. How did the actors learn the language? Were you on hand for pronunciation etc for the actors? Did you hear how easily they took to it?

We worked with two of the actors before filming started, but the bulk of the work happened as the show progressed. Since we couldn't be on set, we made sure that every single line of the series was recorded on .mp3 so the actors could hear exactly how they're supposed to be pronounced. Then they take it from there!

1. Good morning
2. Good evening
3. How are you?
4. How is your Guardian training coming along?
5. How are your studies at St. Vladimir's?
6. Our friendship is forever.
7. Shall we go out with the non-Royals tonight?
8. I don't understand why my parents became Strigoi.
9. How did I end up in a love triangle?

10. I can't wait to watch *Vampire Academy* on Peacock this September.