



Real Communities for Invented Languages. Dothraki and Klingon on the Web

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Are invented languages used outside their domain? Nowadays, some languages created for TV series are widely used for creating new messages by fans on the web. In this paper, two of these languages, Klingon and Dothraki, are analyzed in their use in forums and in fictions written by fans for entertainment purposes. We will argue that users of these languages may constitute what sociolinguistics call a community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), which seems to be a more proper label than the traditional speech community.

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1. What are invented languages?

This paper deals with the use of some invented languages created for entertainment outside their original domain, in order to ascertain whether their users constituted a speech community similar to natural languages. In this respect, our hypothesis is that the use of the label ‘speech community’ is misleading when referring to users of invented language, whereas it will be more appropriate to refer to them as members of a community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), as it will be argued in the final section of this paper.

However, a preliminary question arises in defining the object of our research, that is what linguists include within the label “invented languages”: indeed, many labels have been proposed through the years to investigate slightly the same entities, by focusing the attention on one aspect of the other of the process or purpose of language invention. In the literature, it is possible to distinguish between general labels such as “invented” or “imaginary” languages, and labels focusing on the origins and motivations under the creation of the different languages.

The term “invented languages” firstly appeared in Bausani’s (1974) book, and it was used as a general cover term for a variety of languages further classified based on their functions (holy vs.

not-holy use), and secondly for their purpose or scope (social communication vs. artistic aims). It appears that this label covers a broad range of languages, but without specifically opposing natural and non-natural languages. Conversely, Albani & Buonarroti (2011) uses the term “imaginary languages” in their comprehensive catalogue of all “non-natural languages”, by explicitly denying the use of the term “invented”. For the authors, the main point to be emphasized is that there are some languages that have been created but not actually used in the real world, whereas other languages (e.g., Modern Hebrew) might be invented but they are recognized as part of the linguistic repertoire of a specific speech community.

A different distinction is introduced by Lo Bianco (2004) when he divides all languages in three categories, that is “a priori”, “a posteriori” and “adapted or modified natural languages”. In this interpretation, the focus is cast neither on the division between natural and invented languages nor in the opposition between oral and written linguistic systems. In his definition, Lo Bianco considers as relevant only the origins of the invented languages, which in case of a priori languages are completely “from scratch with new symbols, signs or other elements devised to represent essential concepts. The new symbols and signs of the language, whether written or spoken, are then classified according to principles of some kind, usually a design logic the inventor considers critical to the communication problem he or she is trying to redress” (Lo Bianco 2004: 8).

Other common terms are “artificial languages”, which can easily include all planned languages such as Esperanto, and “constructed languages”, ConLang. The latter is today one of the most common words to identify invented languages and their creators (that is, the conlangers) united in the “Language Creation Society, with many online groups and associations. However, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the label “ConLang” can be furthermore divided into AuxLang (e.g. Esperanto), ArtLang (Klinton) and Engineered Language (e.g. Toki Pona). The difference among the three categories lies in the motivation originating the creation of these languages, which can be educational, artistic or of testing the capacity of the linguistic system. However, to a certain extent, the label ArtLang is very close to the definition of invented languages firstly proposed by Bausani (1974) when he speaks of languages invented for not-holy but artistic purposes.

In this paper, the label “invented languages” is used as a more comprehensive term to include all possible sources of language invention. In particular, with this label there is no aprioristic distinction between natural and artificial languages with respect to their origin or linguistic structure, thus appearing to be a more general label free from metalinguistic prejudice from the researcher. In this respect, the purpose of this paper will be to see how these languages are actually used by people for communicating in different contexts. In particular, as previously stated, we ask if it is possible to define the speakers of these languages in sociolinguistic terms as part of proper speech communities. Indeed, it is important to carefully reflect on the labels we used, in particular in scientific research: labels help to identify phenomena as belonging to different categories, and each of them will include and emphasize different aspects of similar phenomena, as it happens, for instance, for term ‘sociolinguistics’ itself (cf. Hymes 1972). Furthermore, by using data coming from different and under-investigated languages it will be possible to test the actual range of applicability of the labels themselves.

After this introduction to the world of invented languages, the paper is organized as follows: a second section specifies the history of the invented languages we are dealing with, that

is Klingon and Dothraki; the third section presents the analysis of the use of these languages in online communities. Finally, in the fourth section a possible sociolinguistic interpretation of these phenomena is discussed, by arguing whether these online communities could be identified as speech communities or as communities of practice.

2. Klingon & Dothraki

Two of the most popular invented languages today are Klingon and Dothraki, even if for different reasons. As Okrent (2010: 282) pointed out, Klingon has been invented as “a solution to an artistic problem, not a linguistic one”, and the same applies to Dothraki: the purpose behind their invention is to enhance the realism of their fictional series, that is *Star Trek* and *Game of Thrones* respectively. Moreover, from an ethnolinguistic perspective, these two languages refer to populations with similar characteristics: both Klingons and Dothrakis are warriors with concepts of clan, leadership and strength as their central lifestyle. There are important differences in the ethnic characteristics of the two populations, the obvious one being the fact that Klingons are imagined that as the prototype of alien invaders, whereas Dothrakis are represented as barbarians but still humans. The cultural characteristics of both populations are reflected in the languages and how they were created. For instance, Klingon needed to sound as alien as possible, at least to a western Anglophone audience. Conversely, Dothraki had to sound harsh and exotic.

Of the two invented languages, Klingon is the oldest one. The first appearance of Klingons dates back to 29th December 1967 in the episode *The trouble with tribbles*: Klingon were not yet represented with their characteristic forehead but they were already pictured as fierce and proud warriors. Through all episodes of *The original series*, Klingon did not talk in any invented language. Only in 1979, the first word in ‘Klingonese’ was created by actor James Doohan, who played Montgomery Scott, better known as Scotty: the few words were recorded on tape by Doohan and then performed on screen by Mark Lenard, who played a Klingon commander (Okrand et al. 2011: 113). These first instances of Klingon are mostly single monosyllabic words with a CV(C) structure (Okrand et al. 2011: 116) with many ‘harsh’ sounds such as ejectives, occlusives and gutturals. The phonology of Klingon remains characterized by velar, uvular and glottal stops as it appears in the first grammar and vocabulary of Klingon as developed by Mark Okrand (see Okrand 1985, 1992) for the third *Star Trek* movie, *The search of Spock*. The main deal was to create a non-human sounding language, whilst being pronounced by human actors on screen. Klingon shows an agglutinative morphology, with 5 types of noun suffixes and 9 types of verb suffixes; verbs may also present prefixes expressing subject, object or a combination of the two (e.g., *qa.legh* “I see you”, *cho.legh* “you see me”, Okrand 1992). The syntax of Klingon presents the OVS order, which occurs also in imperative sentences like command (e.g., *So’wI’ yIchu* “cloaking device – engage it > Engage the cloaking device!”, Okrand 1992). As remarked by Okrent (2010: 279), the canonical word order is modified in ceremonial domains like toast giving, which follows an OSV structure. In the 1992 first edition Klingon Dictionary some pragmatic norms are also provided, for instance concerning the use of honorifics. In 1992 it was also published the first number of the journal *HolQed* (literally, “linguistics”) devoted to discuss the Klingon language: the journal is still published today under the supervision of the Klingon Language Institute (KLI), who was founded in the same year, and who still provides language

certificates of basic, intermediate and advanced Klingon after a language test (see Okrent 2010: 292-3). In 2018 a Klingon course is made available on Duolingo.

Dothraki has been created by the linguist David J. Peterson for the HBO adaptation of the novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin: the first episode of the fantasy drama *Game of Thrones* was aired on 17th April 2011. Since the first episode, the audience meets this population of nomadic horse warriors living in a large steppe area. Their culture is centered on horses, which are represented almost everywhere on houses, weapons and ornaments: the name of the population itself means “those who ride”, and *dothralat* is the verb “to ride”. Another central notion is the *khal* “leader - king”, from which are derived the words *khaleesi* “queen, wife of a khal” and *khalasar* “a horde loyal to a single khal” (Peterson 2014: 87). About 50 Dothraki words appear in the first three books: most of them are proper names, but the list also contains the words *khal* and its derivatives, *dothrak/dothrae* “I ride / you ride”, but curiously not the word for “horse” *hrazef* (Peterson 2015: 89). Starting from these 50 words, and from the cultural indications provided in the books, Peterson built the phonology, the grammar and, finally, the first lines of dialogues in Dothraki (Peterson 2015: 90-96). Following the success of the TV series, Dothraki acquired more fans on social media, especially on Twitter and in dedicated forums or webpages, one of which managed by Peterson himself (www.dothraki.com). In 2014 a conversational language course was distributed along with a CD with exercises. Unlike Klingon, Dothraki is not listed as a Duolingo online language course, having been preferred at the beginning of 2019 by the other invented language of the *Game of Thrones* series, the noble High Valyrian.

3. Method and data

As Gobbo (2005) points out, the Internet is a socializing medium that could help to increase the vitality of invented languages, even if this is not a condition *per se*. Indeed, groups of fans of Klingon and, before that, Tolkien’s Elvish were already present before the diffusion of the world wide web. Conversely, Dothaki developed mainly on the web and through social media, also thanks to the activity of its creator David Peterson, who is an active user of Twitter.

For the purpose of this analysis, we will consider online use of Dothraki and Klingon in two specific environments: fanfiction writings and discussions in forums dedicated to these two languages. These two online environments may be said to represent two different communicative settings: on the one hand, fanfictions are mostly produced by fans for entertainment and, although appreciated, feedback from other users is not necessary and sometimes it limits to a general cherish of the idea of the novel. Forums, on the other hand, are essentially based on discussion and exchange of ideas among different users, who might be classified by the server itself according to their level of expertise generally measured as the number of interactions and the time spent since subscription to the forum.

It appears that the two settings are quite different from a sociolinguistic point of view. Indeed, fanfictions may be compared to monologues, whereas forums are more similar to dialogues. Moreover, it is worth noting that both settings do not provide any information about the writers: indeed, anonymity is guaranteed by nicknames, but that results in the impossibility for the researcher to collect basic sociolinguistic information such as sex and age of the writers, to know if their first language is English, and, more important for our purposes, their level of competence in the invented language. This latter information could sometimes be inferred by the level of

expertise assigned to a user in forum, but it is not as simple as it seems: in fact, if it goes quite linear that the moderators have a good level of competence in the invented language, but for all the other users this remain difficult to define. This state of affair limits a possible sociolinguistic analysis, but it does not prevent a general analysis of the use of invented languages in online settings *per se*.

Data have been collected from the website fanfiction.net, and from the two official dedicated forums for each language. Fanfiction.net collects all fan-made stories on different TV shows, films and books; it also allows us to search stories basing on rating, theme, and characters involved other than by language. It is worth noting that neither Dothraki nor Klingon are included among languages to be selected. For this reason, we decided to follow different criteria to select a corpus of 20 fanfictions equally divided between the two TV shows *Game of Thrones* and *Star Trek*. We select English as the main language and we try to filter the results by characters in order to raise the possibilities to encounter instances in the two invented languages. A level of expertise in the invented language was assigned to each author, based on their self-declarations in their profile or at the beginning of the fiction; in one case, it was necessary to contact the author directly and ask for more information about her knowledge of the invented language.

For Dothraki, we search for the 10 most popular *Game of Thrones* fanfictions involving the character of Daenerys Targaryen, who is, among the other titles, the *khaleesi* (leader) of the Dothraki. However, since she is one of the most popular characters of the series, the output offer was quite messy and it may alter the perception of the effective use of the invented language. For this reason, the decision was made to search for fanfictions starring both Daenerys Targaryen and Khal Drogo, her husband and former leader of the Dothraki before his death. Among the fictions, only 5 presented lines in Dothraki at various levels of accuracy, whereas in the remaining cases the authors limited to highlight that a different language is used by explicit that, for instance, the Khal is speaking in his own language, or by using italics for his lines of speech. We will consider these cases in the following section 4.1. It is also worth noting that the fictional character of Daenerys is a non-native speaker of Dothraki: this issue is randomly represented in fanfictions describing her first year among Dothraki, and representing the struggle of a learner of a foreign language and in particular the harsh phonetics of Dothraki, an issue also addressed later in the show itself.

For Klingon, we consider both *Star Trek* fanfictions from the series *The next generation* (originally aired from 1987 to 1994) by specifying Worf as one of the characters of the story, and fictions from the recent series *Discovery* (first aired in 2017 and still ongoing) by selecting as characters the two main Klingons appearing in the show, that is Voq and Kol. Unfortunately, even if Klingon is spoken a lot during the show, no fictions related to *Discovery* contain explicit use of the language: authors sometimes specify that the characters are speaking in Klingon but they do not provide any instances in that language, apart from the personal names of the characters. Conversely, the situation is much more interesting in popular fanfictions of the old series *The next generation*: authors often insert Klingon words such as typical objects (e.g., *bat'leth* “double-sided scimitar”) and proper names (e.g., *Qo'nos*, Klingons' home planet). Instances of extended use of Klingon appear in 3 fictions in both dialogues and quoted speech, as we will soon analyze.

We add to fanfictions' data instance coming from forums dedicated to Dothraki and Klingon. Data from the Dothraki forum presents different sections: a “for beginners” part, a special

session for requesting translations from English in Dothraki (and not *vice versa*), and a section containing language updates such as new words, transcriptions and so on. It was decided to select only those posts involving a discussion of more than 3 conversational turns and at least two users for three months, from October to December 2018. About 810 posts on 104 different topics have been read and classified according to the topic, the number of users involved and their level of expertise as assigned by the forum itself (i.e., newbie, advanced, expert). As for Klingon, in the online forum one main section includes requests of translations, especially from English to Klingon (e.g., wedding vows, sentences, etc.) but also of Klingon instances found online. A section of the forum also includes topics related to Klingon language and culture. The most interesting section is the one devoted to Klingon-only conversations: around 650 users are involved in this section, with more than 11769 posts in 1636 topics, with or quite often without English translations. In the example quoted in 4.2, instances of translation requests will be presented: these examples have been selected because of the high level of proficiency of users involved, or at least of one of them, thus almost representing conversations between experts and learners of a new language. Furthermore, translations show the great metalinguistic awareness of users in discussing unspecified or less specified details of the invented language, thus contributing to increasing its vocabulary and grammar.

4. Invented languages online

4.1 Fanfictions

As we have said, only a few fictions presented long instances in the two target invented languages. The authors produced original parts in either Dothraki or Klingon, without simply copying from the lines of the TV shows. However, the level of accuracy is quite different among the different texts. For instance, in (1) the author tries to introduce a full discourse in Dothraki, but what he/she really creates is a mixed language in which Dothraki is mixed with English names; an English translation of the full text is also provided by the author at the end of the chapter.

(1) “Gods and monsters” by MakeYourBodyaCanvas – chapter 1

Illyrio made his way down the steps and greeted the Khal with opened arms. “*Athchomar tat ato haji vichomer! Great Khal, ishish anha present anna honored guests, Viserys ki house Targaryen, jin third ki mae name, jiin rightful king ki Andals akka First ki Mahrazhi. Akka mae sisters, Eerika akka Daenerys ki house Targaryen*”.

[Respect to one that is respectful! Great Khal, may I present my honored guests, Viserys of house Targaryen, third of his name, the rightful king of the Andals and the First Men. And his sisters, Eerika¹ and Daenerys of the house Targaryen]

In this case, it is clear that the author uses fixed formula in Dothraki (e.g., the greeting *Athchomar tat ato haji vichomer!* “Respect to one that is respectful!”) and to personal pronouns (e.g., *anha* “I”). However, other linguistic elements are completely ungrammatical: for instance, *jin* “this” is used as a third person singular possessive, and the adverb *akka* “also, even” is used as a conjunction. It appears that the author lacks a real knowledge of Dothraki, and he/she insists on

¹ In the fiction, which a product of the fantasy of the single author, it is imagined the presence of an original character, Eerika, in a “what if” scenario of the whole original novel.

code-mixing to sound like Dothraki while providing a text that doesn't need an overt translation to be understood.

A similar strategy of code-switching between the invented language and the main language of the novel, is also present in (2), in which the same message is repeated twice, first in Klingon and then in English. It is also interesting to note the author's accuracy in respecting Klingon orthography, as well as other grammatical rules: this seems to confirm that the author has a high level of proficiency in the invented language, up to the creation of new sentences not previously uttered in the TV show.

(2) "Dominion" by Kehlan – chapter 10

(a) Moments later a return message came from the captain of the Endeavour. «nIteb Qob qwaD jup 'e' chaw'be' SuvvI – A warrior does not let a friend face danger alone!»

(b) «hIja' hoD» Kargan said, subsiding, «Yes, Captain.» He knew that in his current mood, the captain was capable of carrying through on this threat and he had no desire to die just yet.

The example quoted in (3) is interesting since it imagines a non-native speaker of Klingon, thus justifying the need for translations that come as part of the novel.

(3) "Fathers and Sons" by Rowena Zahnrei – chapter 1

«Mr. Sendak,» Ambassador Alexander Rozhenko called to his aide. «Nuq 'oH rep'e'?» [...]

Spotting the chronometer at last, Sendak responded in halting Klingon, «Uh... It's, uh, wa'maH Hutvatlh rep.» He winced. «I think. That's nineteen hundred hours, right sir?»

Alexander laughed and clasped his aide's narrow shoulder. «It is, indeed, Your pronunciation is improving, Zacharie»

The author shows a typical example of a learner of a new language who tries to answer to a frequent formula *Nuq 'oH rep'e'* "what time is it?": the answer is correct (Dorn & Okrand 1993), but the speaker immediately asks the native for confirmation. From the same fiction, the examples in (4) show how the invented language could be integrated in the novel without providing explicit translation but by letting the meaning of the words emerging from the context.

(4) "Fathers and Sons" by Rowena Zahnrei – chapter 10

(a) "Words," Ko'Rek spat. "True Klingons speak through actions! If you were a true Klingon, instead of a Federation urwI pujwl'-" Worf stepped forward and grabbed Ko'Rek by the throat. "You dare call my son a traitor!"

(b) "And where is the honor in killing a soft, cringing BIHnuch like you?" he said, poking the ambassador's rounded belly.

In (4a) the Klingon expression *urwl pujwl'* literally means "weaking traitor" and its meaning is specified in Worf's answer and violent reaction. In (4b) it is again the presence of a gesture to disambiguate the meaning of the word *BIHnuch*, with a 3rd person plural pronoun *BIH* followed by the noun *nuch*, which literally means "coward": the insult is probably to be intended in the sense that a fat Klingon is a non-fighting Klingon, and thus a coward (cf. De Candido 2014). It is worth noting that in both cases the code-mixing is used to introduce a negative word in

Klingon: that is, if you want to insult someone you do it in your mother language, which for these characters is Klingon. It comes without saying that this use of code-mixing between English and the invented languages presupposes a high level of competence in both codes.

The instances presented here from fanfictions show the different levels of expertise of the writers in the target invented language. It appears that more expert speakers use them without an overt translation, by letting the meaning of words and expressions to be inferred by the reader from the context and the non-verbal communication described in the action. In all the examples, though, the presence of invented languages contributes to the realism of the stories, thus fulfilling their artistic-ludic purpose.

4.2 Forum discussions

Different from fanfactions, in the forum communities dedicated to Dothraki and Klingon it could be easily inferred the level of proficiency of the users: indeed, in many cases, expert users choose nicknames in the invented language, and the status of their accounts contain the indication of 'advanced' or 'expert' users; furthermore, beginners often declare their low level of proficiency at the beginning of their posts. Thus, it is possible to have three possible interactions: (a) between a non-expert and an expert speaker of the invented language; (b) among different expert speakers; (c) among experts and non-experts. The first and last case is usually represented by a translation request moved from a non-expert speaker to the community, with an expert (or semi-expert) speaker providing a translation later on discussed by other experts for its correctness. The dialogue quoted in (5) from the website Klingon Imperial Forum provides an example of this kind of interaction.

(5) A translation request turns into a cultural discussion

01 Kuragh: Hello! I am a fan-fiction writer working on a story about a civil war within the empire. I was wondering if there exists a Klingon word for the concept of a crusade, a noble quest to somewhere distant that requires a lot of effort to get to. I would assume that it originated in the early days of Klingon space exploration - I envision all of the Great Houses building carrier ships and loading their best warriors onto them for a long voyage to some distant star system that they want to conquer. Any help that you can offer would be much appreciated.

02 De'vID In Klingon for the Galactic Traveler, around p.48, it talks about the language used to describe missions. The word for a mission is Qu', and missions usually have names like targh Qu' "Operation Targ". I'd suggest getting that book and reading that section for background for your story.

I'm not aware of a specific term for a crusade (something like a grand mission, or series of missions), but it's easy enough to describe one using known terminology. In Klingon, there is an augmentative suffix which makes a noun into a more important or greater form. To use an example, mIv means "helmet", while mIv'a' means "crown".

So Qu"a' would mean something that's like a mission or quest [sic], but much greater in significance, possibly like a crusade. Another possibility is to use the adjectival verb quv "be honored, be honorable". The Klingon High Council, for example, is called the yejquv in Klingon (yej means "council").

03 Kuragh Thank you, De'vID, that's extremely useful and informative. [...]

In the example quoted in (5), the discussion starts with the user Kuragh, a semi-expert speaker of Klingon how it is possible to deduce from his profile, looking for a translation for the word “crusade” to appear in a fanfiction he is writing. The expert speaker De’vID quickly offer a solution by using existing vocabulary and regular grammatical derivational suffixes; moreover, he offers a reference to one of the manuals of Klingon language and culture, the *Guide for the Galactic Traveler* (see Okrand 1997).

Conversely, the dialogue in (6) presents an example of discussion among language experts of Dothraki in order to find a correct translation for the verb “to rain”.

(6) A translation for the verb “to rain”

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 01 Ingsve | We don't seem to know how to express impersonal expressions in Dothraki. For example the subject in the sentence "it is raining". |
| 02 Qvaak | Yeah. I <i>think</i> I touched on that earlier in the thread - if I got my linguistic lingo right, that is. I think that impersonal expression thing is (also) called avalency. In pro-drop languages the sentences like this have often nothing but the verb, "It is raining." is in finnish "Sataa." and in spanish "llueve." As dothraki is not a pro-dropper, we might expect a dummy subject as in english. I'm not sure, though, if a language even really always needs to have avalent verbs, you might go with "rain is falling", "the weather is getting cold", "the atmosphere was quiet".. |
| 03 Valeklost | I've forgotten to paste my tweets with David about this, I'm sorry.

His Tweets: "There are no weather verbs, like "piovere" ["to rain", in Italian], in Dothraki. Instead, you use the noun with a passive verb e.g. "Eyel nem athasa"." "In Dothraki, you can't have an impersonal subject with "need", in any case." "I'd probably say "Adakhat nem zigeree" for "One needs to eat" or "It's necessary to eat"." At the end it's simpler say "people need to eat" or "you need to eat" |
| 04 Qvaak | Aight. "Rain is caused to fall" it is then. I guess that's one question answered there. |

The three users involved in the discussion are all expert of Dothraki, as it is possible to deduce from their profiles; Qvaak was also the inventor of a possible writing system for Dothraki, which it has none. In the dialogue in (6), it is important to note how after a brief discussion, one of the users opt for asking directly to the highest possible authority, which is the creator of the language himself, David Peterson. Calling the main authority of the language (i.e., its creator) represents a strategy used to determine whether a grammatical rule applies or not in the process of evolution of the invented language from its original vocabulary and domains of use. In the quoted example, the discussion and the involvement of the language creator helps in fixing a lack in the grammar of Dothraki concerning the use of weather verbs and, more generally speaking, the use of impersonal subjects.

Therefore, forums show instances of real use of these invented languages concerning both cases of language acquisition and of language variation and change up to discussion within the community of users, sometimes with the direct intervention of the main creator of the language. That means that these languages constantly increase their vocabulary and specify their grammar when a specific problem, lack of words or grammatical rule arises. Every possible modification is

discussed among experts and it could be integrated in the language itself or the language may expand the applicability of previous morphological or syntactic rules.

5. Discussion: Communities of practice for invented languages

The examples presented in the previous section have shown how Dothraki and Klingon are actively used outside their original TV shows. This means that a large community is interested in using these languages at least for artistic purposes (e.g., to add realism in novelizations), and that they usually discuss the structure of these languages to new domains of use. However, it remains unclear if these communities of users constitute what sociolinguistics call a speech community.

Indeed, the notion of speech community is usually applied to “real” languages, both existing and death languages, but it remains a very controversial label for various reasons we will briefly explore here. It is difficult to find in the sociolinguistic literature a universally accepted definition of speech community, because it implies a preliminary definition of ‘community’ with both linguistic and non-linguistic criteria, as it has been pointed out by scholars working in the ethnography of communication (e.g., Saville-Troike 2003: 15). As Wardhaugh (2005) explains, in fact, if speech communities are defined solely upon the basis of linguistic criteria, then such a definition is guilty of circularity and categories other than just language need to be considered.

The father of sociolinguistics, William Labov, states that “the speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage” (Labov 1972: 120-1). Labov’s definition, however, presumes a society based on consensus, in which the values of the middle classes are shared with lower classes. An opposite point of view was proposed by Milroy & Milroy (1997) and result in the so-called conflict model, according to which there are distinct divisions existing between unequal social groups in society, maintained by language ideologies, which result in conflict (Mullany 2007: 85). The Milroys also introduce the notion of social network as an alternative model to the more ambiguous speech community, and more useful to correlate with linguistic variable in a quantitative paradigm in analyzing sociolinguistic variation. Network approaches relate basically on determine the strength of a network which is related to language change: i.e. the density of the network determine the possibilities for a language change to occur or not within that social network, with the densest networks being more likely to maintain vernacular forms (Mullany 2007: 87).

What these definitions have in common is that they presume that language is an integrated part of what defines the community. An alternative notion to both speech community and social network is the one of community of practice (henceforth, CoP), firstly proposed by educationalists like Lave & Wenger (1991), and then brought to sociolinguistics by the works of Penelope Eckert (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992). In a CoP language is interpreted as a form of practice individuals share. Wenger (1998: 73) highlights the three criteria of a CoP: mutual engagement, a joint negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire. He then proposes 14 other indicators to recognize the formation of a CoP (Wenger 1998: 125-6). According to Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999), the most important difference between a CoP and a speech community is how membership is constructed (see also Meyerhoff 2002): in a CoP membership is an active internal construction within the group, given the fact that an individual could be more peripheral or more central, whereas in a speech community membership is something externally defined and not subject to

internal discussion within the community itself, as it happens in some of the cases previously discussed.

In this respect, it appears that users of invented languages like Dothraki and Klingon could be defined as members of a CoP, more than of a speech community. Indeed, membership to the group is constructed and negotiated in forums, with more active and expert members being at the core of the community and newbies at its peripheral. Moreover, even if members of these CoPs could speak different languages, they all agree on the same linguistic repertoire with English as the lingua franca, and the invented language, either Dothraki or Klingon, as the other language to be used within the community. Finally, the use of invented languages in fanfictions testify that the users took part in a shared enterprise, as it is overtly discussed in forums, that is basically for artistic and recreational purposes. These uses outside the specific domains for which these languages have been created also increase the vocabulary and, in some cases, also the grammar of the languages themselves (see example 6).

7. Conclusions and further perspectives

In this article we have explored how two invented languages created for popular TV shows are being used outside their original domain in online communities of fans, both as part of novelizations in order to increase the realism of the fiction, or as part of an overt discussion on language by groups of users. These discussions both include language experts, beginners of the language, and in some cases also the creators of the languages themselves. By applying the sociolinguistic notions of speech community and CoP, we have argued that the latter could better explain the status of these invented languages and their users, at least in online environments. However, it is worth remarking that Dothraki and Klingon are historically different, since the latter has been represented for almost 30 years (see also Wahlgren 2004). While Dothraki does not seem to be developing a speech community, perhaps it might be the case that Klingon could lead towards the creation of a proper speech community, in sociolinguistic terms. An important step in this direction is, for instance, the growing enthusiasm for Klingon associations outside the US, and the recognition of Klingon as a proper language to be added to automatic translation systems (e.g., Microsoft Translator) and with dedicated online courses (e.g., Duolingo).

The present study has proposed a qualitative analysis of spontaneous productions in two invented languages for artistic purposes. Further studies may give a quantitative analysis of the use of invented languages online, perhaps with a sociolinguistic perspective aiming at investigation variation in the use of these languages with respect to the L1 of their speakers. Perception tests on language attitudes associated with the use of invented languages could also help the research on this topic, especially in regards to the relationship between emergence of stereotypes and the phonetics and phonology of languages. Another growing field of application of invented languages is also within the classroom: in this respect, invented languages are used to help pupils, even at a very young age, developing their metalinguistic awareness on language structures and on language rules from the phonological to the morphosyntactic level (cf. Sanders 2016).

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