

- **Perceptual dialectology**
- **What makes a language or dialect ‘beautiful’?**

Background preparation:

- *Kaplan (2016), Ch 10, “The most beautiful language is French”, sections 10.1–10.2*

1. What's our myth this time?

- What's the goal of this chapter?

Kaplan (2016: 216):

- In this chapter, we will focus on aesthetic judgments of languages: the idea that a language itself (not just an artistic use of that language) can be beautiful or ugly.
- Along the way, we'll touch on similar descriptions of languages as especially pleasant, clear, or logical – essentially, any kind of broad, handwavy judgment about a language or dialect as a whole.

1. What's our myth this time?

- What's the goal of this chapter?

Kaplan (2016: 216, emphasis added):

- We will explore the factors that inform these judgments:
- To what extent are they a reaction to **intrinsic properties** of the language itself?
- To what extent are they related to the language's **historical and cultural associations**?
- To what extent are they affected by our **beliefs about the people** who speak the language?

2. Perceptual dialectology

- **Dialectology:**
- **Perceptual dialectology:**

2. Perceptual dialectology

- **Dialectology:** The linguistic description of *observed* variation within a language
- **Perceptual dialectology:** The study of how non-linguists *perceive* variation within a language—ex:
 - Where people think dialect boundaries are
 - What characteristics people think are different between dialects
 - How ‘correct’, ‘pleasant’, etc., people think different dialects are

2. Perceptual dialectology

- Example of a perceptual dialect map drawn by a college student in California
(Kaplan (2016: 217); from Fought 2002)
 - What *evaluations* do we see here?

2. Perceptual dialectology

- Kaplan (2016: 218):

- Many descriptions provided on these maps apparently relate to the way these dialects sound...
- However, many others seem to refer just as much to the people living in those regions as they do to their language: perceptual dialectology studies document people using terms like *hillbilly*, *cowboy*, *surfer*, *Ivy League*, and so on.
- What conclusion does Kaplan draw about the **basis** for people's impressions of a given dialect?

2. Perceptual dialectology

- Which dialects typically get rated as 'correct'?
- Which dialects are frequently rated as 'pleasant' by a given speaker?

2. Perceptual dialectology

- Which dialects typically get rated as 'correct'?
 - Dialects that are (perceived to be) similar to the 'standard' or 'prestige' dialect
- Which dialects are frequently rated as 'pleasant' by a given speaker?
 - The speakers's own dialect
 - Those dialects that are also rated as 'correct'

2. Perceptual dialectology

- A question to consider:

If people are often 'wrong' about dialect boundaries and differences, why study perceptual dialectology?

2. Perceptual dialectology

- If people are often 'wrong' about dialect boundaries and differences, why study perceptual dialectology?
 - Insight into **sociolinguistic variation**: Linguistic differences that are 'above' vs. 'below the level of conscious awareness' often pattern differently
 - Insight into **historical language change**: Knowledge about which varieties are seen as desirable or not may help explain (or predict) which path a language change follows (will follow)
 - General insight into how different groups of people in a society view one another

2. Perceptual dialectology

- What points has this discussion of perceptual dialectology raised for our further consideration of 'beautiful languages'?

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- Consider the four language clips posted to Sakai

For each language:

- Give it a score on the "beautiful" scale (Mentimeter)
 - Go to www.menti.com and use the code 9303 9366
- Jot down your impressions: What made you like or dislike this language?
- Do you know (or can you guess) what this language is?

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- Consider the four language clips posted to Sakai

Let's [view the results](#) on the "beautiful" scale

- Discussion:
 - What factors led you to like or dislike these languages?
 - Do you and your discussion group agree on what characteristics sound (un)pleasant?
 - Any connections to Kaplan's discussion in 10.2?

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

Aesthetic opinions of a language you don't speak are, necessarily, based on phonology and phonetics:

- What are the individual speech sounds?
 - Consonant and vowel inventories? (Kaplan?)
- What are the phonotactics (rules for sequences)?
 - Are there lots of consonant clusters? Lots of vowel sequences?
- What are the patterns of stress, tone, intonation?
- Any effect of the "familiarity" factor?

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- Consider the four language clips posted to Sakai:
Comments? Impressions?

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- Consider the four language clips posted to Sakai
 - Language #1: Irish
 - Language #2: Georgian
 - Language #3: Dutch
 - Language #4: Japanese

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- Kaplan notes that German is often considered to be an 'ugly' language
 - This is often blamed on the presence of velar and uvular fricatives such as [x] 'ch' and [ʁ] 'r'
- Kaplan argues that this value judgment against German is inconsistent
 - What are some reasons that she gives?

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- How do our four languages stack up?
 - Irish ([Wikipedia](#))

		Labial		Coronal		Dorsal		Glottal
		broad	slender	broad	slender	broad	slender	
Stop	voiceless	pʲ	pʲi	t̪ʲ	tʲi	k	c	
	voiced	bʲ	bʲi	ɡʲ	dʲi	g	ɟ	
Fricative/ Approximant	voiceless	fʲ	fʲi	sʲ	ʃ	x	ç	h
	voiced	w/v	vʲi			ɣ	j	
Nasal		mʲ	mʲi	ŋʲ	nʲi	ŋ	ɲ	
Tap				ɾ	ɾi			
Lateral				ɬʲ	ɬʲi			

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- How do our four languages stack up?
 - Georgian ([Wikipedia](#))

		Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Nasal		m ო	n ო				
Stop	aspirated	p ^h ჳ	t ^h თ		k ^h ქ		
	voiced	b ბ	d დ		g გ		
	ejective	p' პ'	t' ტ'		k' კ'	q' ~ q̂x' ~ x' ყ	
Affricate	(aspirated)		tsh ¹ ტ	tʃ ¹ ჭ			
	voiced		dz დ	dʒ ჯ			
	ejective		tʃ' ტ'	tʃ' ჭ'			
Fricative	voiceless		s ს	ʃ შ		x ² ხ	h ჰ
	voiced	v ვ	z ზ	ʒ ჯ		ɣ ² ჳ	
Vibrant			r რ				
Lateral			l ლ				

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- How do our four languages stack up?
 - Dutch ([Wikipedia](#))

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Velar/Uvular	Glottal
Nasal	m		n		ŋ	
Plosive	p b		t d		k g	(?)
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ	x ɣ	h
Rhotic			r			
Approximant	ʋ		l		j	

3. Characteristics considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly'

- How do our four languages stack up?
 - Japanese ([Wikipedia](#))

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Alveolo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Nasal	m	n	(ɲ)		(ŋ)	(ɴ)	
Stop	p b	t d			k g		
Affricate		(tʃ) (dʒ)	(tɕ) (dʑ)				
Fricative	(ɸ)	s z	(ɕ) (ʑ)	(ç)			h
Liquid		r					
Semivowel				j	w		

4. On 'logical' languages

- What languages have you heard described as 'logical' or 'illogical'? On what basis?

4. On 'logical' languages

- What languages have you heard described as 'logical' or 'illogical'? On what basis?
 - There has often been a tendency in Western culture to assume that a language's structure is more logical the more similar it is to Latin or Greek
 - There seems to be a tendency to assume that standard varieties are more 'logical' than non-standard varieties (remember Chapter 2...)

5. A beautiful language? — Quenya

- Quenya — J.R.R. Tolkien, developed 1910–1973
 - This is the archaic language of the Elves, who are noble, immortal, and beautiful
 - Tolkien reciting the Quenya poem ‘Namárië’, 1952 ([YouTube](#))

- Tolkien on Quenya:

Finnish, which I came across when I had first begun to construct a 'mythology' was a dominant influence, but that has been much reduced [now in late Quenya]. It survives in some features: such as the absence of any consonant combinations initially, the absence of the voiced stops *b*, *d*, *g* (except in *mb*, *nd*, *ng*, *ld*, *rd*, which are favoured) and the fondness for the ending *-inen*, *-ainen*, *-oinen*...

From a letter to W. R. Matthews, dated 13–15 June 1964, published in *Parma Eldalamberon* (17), p. 135; via Wikipedia, “Quenya”

5. A beautiful language? — Quenya

- Quenya consonant inventory ([Wikipedia](#))

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal	m	n		ŋ	
Stop	p b	t d		k g	
Fricative	f v	s	(ç)	x	h
Trill		r			
Semivowel	(m) w		j		
Liquid		l			

- Any velar or uvular fricatives here?
- Can we hear them in the poem?

6. An ugly language? — Klingon

- Klingon (*tlhIngan Hol*) — Marc Okrand, developed 1985–
 - This is the language of the Klingon Empire, which is an extremely warrior-like (enemy) culture in the Star Trek universe
 - Gowron's introduction to the "Star Trek: Klingon" video game (which included speech-recognition Klingon language training powered by DragonDictate) ([YouTube](#))
- Side note...you never know where a little linguistic knowledge will take you
 - Linguist List #[6-1729](#), 1995

6. An ugly language? — Klingon

- Inspiration for Klingon:
 - James Doohan (Scotty) invented a few lines for *Star Trek (I): The Motion Picture*
 - Okrand took that data as canon and developed a systematic phonology (and morphology and syntax) for the language
 - The phonological inventory is deliberately designed to be typologically strange (for a human language!)

6. An ugly language? — Klingon

- Klingon consonant inventory ([Wikipedia](#))

		Labial	Coronal		Postalveolar / palatal	Dorsal	Glottal
			central	lateral			
Plosive	voiceless	p /pʰ/	t /tʰ/			q /qʰ/	ʔ /ʔ/
	voiced	b /b/	D /d/				
Affricate	voiceless			ɬlh /tʰ/	ch /tʃ/	Q /qʰ/	
	voiced				j /dʒ/		
Fricative	voiceless		s /s/			H /x/	
	voiced	v /v/				gh /ɣ/	
Nasal		m /m/	n /n/			ng /ŋ/	
Trill							
Approximant		w /w/	r /r/	l /l/	y /j/		

- Are there any velar or uvular fricatives?
- Can you see why this inventory is unusual?
(Also, which consonant's absence is an in-joke!?)

6. An ugly language? — Klingon

- Does it *have* to be ugly?

6. An ugly language? — Klingon

- Does it *have* to be ugly?
 - Klingon Pop Warrior performs *che'ron 'oH parmaq'e'* (Love is a Battlefield)
([YouTube](#); start at 0:22)
 - Klingon Pop Warrior performs *taH tlqwIj* (My Heart Will Go On)
([YouTube](#); start at 1:56)

7. Conclusions

- Kaplan's conclusions include:
 - There may be some phonological/phonetic properties that are more likely to sound 'ugly'
 - But attitude toward the language's speakers, or their history/culture, may matter more
 - Likewise for languages deemed '(il)logical'
- It might be fun to investigate:
 - Do properties sound 'more ugly' to speakers of one language than to another?
 - Does an 'ugly' property sound less ugly to speakers of a language that uses it?