Constructing Linguistic Reality: The Yggur Language

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The Czech writer Michal Ajvaz presents the mysterious “Yggur” language in a fragment of an unfinished fantasy story by a deceased mathematician embedded in his novel *Lucemburská zahrada*. In addition to several pages of dialog written in Yggur, the novel contains some glosses and a partial grammar sketch of the language allegedly found by the mathematician’s widow scribbled on the backs of receipts, flyers, and pizza boxes. Although these materials are incomplete, it is possible to decipher about 90% of the text written in Yggur and sort out its structure.

The present study examines Yggur as a linguistic object, showing that it behaves remarkably like a full-fledged language. This is achieved by analyzing the phonology, morphology (including inflection, derivation, and compounding), syntax and lexicon of the language. Additional comparisons with “real” languages are also brought to bear, such as the Zipfian (1949) distribution of words in the 632-word corpus of dialog, types of linguistic categories represented, as well as the presence of syncretism and morphological ambiguity. It can be argued that Ajvaz has created, in miniature, a fully functional language that could well survive as a vehicle of human communication if only it had some speakers. This design and implementation of a constructed language is striking in that it deviates from the constructed languages usually found in fiction, which tend to contain features that are unknown in natural human languages (Conley & Cain 2006). In a very real sense, Ajvaz has constructed a linguistic reality in this novel.

Ajvaz, Michal. 2011. *Lucemburská zahrada.* Brno: Druhé město*.*

Conley, Tim & Stephen Cain. 2006. *Encyclopedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages.* Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

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