Michael Adams ed., *From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages,* Oxford University Press, 2011, vi+294 pp., $19.95 ISBN 9780192807090,

Reviewed by Ernest Davis

To begin with, the title is ill-chosen. First, by an unfortunate but unsurprising coincidence, another book on invented languages published this fall (authored by Stephen Rogers) uses *From Elvish to Klingon* as a subtitle. Second, as invented languages go, Elvish and Klingon are quite close together, at least in their external circumstances: They were both created by professional scholars of language for essentially aesthetic purposes, and they are both attributed to humanoid species in a supremely popular science-fiction/fantasy series.

The essays in this collection, by contrast, span a strikingly broad range. Of the seven essays after the introduction, only three deal with invented languages in the usual sense: an essay by Arden Smith on "International Auxiliary Languages" focusing on Volapük and Esperanto; an essay by E.S.C.Weiner and Jeremy Marshall on Tolkien's invented languages; and an essay by Mark Okrand and three other authors on Klingon. The remaining four deal with Newspeak and Nasdat, gaming languages, and word-play in Joyce, Beckett, and Paul Muldoon, none of which are actually languages; and on revitalized languages, which are not "invented" in anything like the same sense. The energetic editor has also written appendices for each of the articles, on a range of related topics: intellectual property rights in invented languages; a collection of comments on the invented languages in reviews of *LotR* (few) and of *A Clockwork Orange* (many)*;* and so on. The appendices on synthetic Scots and on neo-Latin and Linnaeus, in particular, are more interesting than most of the articles.

The most successful article, for my taste, was the article on gaming languages by James Portnow. Gaming languages are highly constrained because they must be integrated with the game, and because most players do not want to spend any time learning them. Portnow enumerates five principles for a successful gaming language: It must be rewarding to the novice, learnable in the context of the game, inessential to success in the game, appropriate to the imaginary creatures who speak it, and learnable by players who are playing at unknown intervals. Portnow discusses a number of gaming languages of different types — D'ni, Simlish, Al Bhed, etc. — some very successful, some expensive failures.

Moving from the fun of games to the tragedy of vanishing cultures and languages, Suzanne Romaine's article on revitalized languages is both fascinating and troubling. Romaine is the co-author, with Daniel Nettle, of *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages.* This article focusses on minority languages in Western Europe, such as Irish, Welsh, Breton, and Basque; indigenous languages in the Pacific, such as Hawaiian and Maori; and Hebrew. Her central theme in this article is the friction that the attempt to revitalize or preserve dead or endangered languages creates within the linguistic community itself. Again and again, conflicts of extraordinary bitterness and hostility have broken out over minutiae of vocabulary, orthography, and pronunciation. In

many cases, these linguistic divisions correspond to divisions within the community of ethnicity, dialect, or social and economic class. All sides are sincerely in pursuit of that mirage, "authenticity".

However, I found the article somewhat unsatisfying, because Romaine likes to find parallels but does not like to make distinctions. The history of modern Hebrew, for example, is very different from the other languages discussed here, for a number of reasons; in particular, unlike any of other revitalized language she discusses, it is the dominant language in its own nation. As far as I know, the preservation of Welsh is also substantially a success story. Romaine does not acknowledge, much less analyze, these kinds of differences. In another example, Romaine writes, "[T]he idea of a modern standard Hebrew … sprang from the mind of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda no less than Klingon did from the imagination of Mark Okrand." Of course, there is all the difference in the world between bringing up to date an existing language, with a large literature, a existing vocabulary of about 20,000 words (according to Romaine), and a large population that, though not native speakers, have learned the language from an early age; and making up a language from scratch. To equate the two is simply a barrier to understanding Ben-Yehuda's real accomplishment.

I found the other articles in the collection more pedestrian, more scholarly than novel or insightful. The article about Tolkien's languages — mostly Quenya, Qenya, Sindarin, and Gnomish — is full of technical detail about their linguistic features, about Tolkien's construction of them over time, and about their relation to actual languages. "Possessive pronouns [in Quenya] are expressed as suffixes to nouns," "Nasal infixion is a feature of Adûnaic," the Qenya word "pelekko" (axe) corresponds to the Greek "pelekus", that kind of thing. Whether the article would interest students of the languages or experts, I can't judge. It doesn't interest me. Like many writers on Tolkien's languages, the authors very much overestimate the degree to which the average Tolkien reader is interested in the languages as such. What interests most readers (me) about the languages is their impact on Tolkien's conception of Middle-earth and on the narrative; and in that analysis, of course, Shippey has set a very high bar.

I found only one significant mistake in the book, though that one I thought was strange: Stephen Watt spends a paragraph discussing Joyce's coinage of "Nobodaddy" (an irreverent name for God) without mentioning that it was originally coined by Blake.

One question that is not adequately answered, either here or in Arika Okrent's incomparably superior book *In the Land of Invented Languages,* is why so many people invest a large amount of time in learning Klingon, when, for the same effort, they could learn a real language that would put them in touch with a rich literature, culture, and population. My own conjecture, perhaps uncharitable, is that it has to do with mastery. If you study Klingon for some number of months, you can speak it as well as anyone in the world. No matter how many years you give to the study of Mandarin, you must live with the humbling realization that more than a billion people speak it with a better accent.