EPISODE 28

LANGTIME CHAT

CONLANGING THROUGH IMPOSTER SYNDROME

ART & ANXIETY

CONLANGING IS ONE OF MY HAPPY PLACES.

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I love to create!

I love linguistics!

CONLANGING IS ONE OF MY HAPPY PLACES.

AND YET...

THE FUN—THE BEAUTY—OF IT ALL CAN GET LOST IN THE DETAILS.

THREE OF MY BIGGEST HURDLES ARE...

(1)IMPOSTER SYNDROME

(2)OVERTHINKING

(3)ME BEING IN CHARGE

HURDLE 1: IMPOSTER SYNDROME

FROM THE OUTSIDE…

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I've done the things I needed to do to be in the place I am today.

FROM THE OUTSIDE…

I've done the things I needed to do to be in the place I am today.

Other people have validated I've done the things!

FROM THE OUTSIDE…

I've done the things I needed to do to be in the place I am today.

Other people say I'm doing great!

FROM THE INSIDE…

I feel small.

FROM THE INSIDE...

I feel small.

I feel like people must not be able to see the real me if they think I'm doing great.

FROM THE INSIDE...

I feel small.

I feel like people must not be able to see the real me if they think I'm doing great.

I feel like, at any moment, it could all burst when they realize I don't actually belong.

FROM THE INSIDE...

It's like the chorus of Radiohead's "Creep" is on repeat in my head.

FROM THE INSIDE…

It's like the chorus of Radiohead's "Creep" is on repeat in my head.

But I'm a creep

I'm a weirdo

What the hell am I doin' here?

I don't belong here…

AND THAT LEADS TO THE SECOND HURDLE.

HURDLE 2: ANXIETY AND OVERTHINKING

BECAUSE I THINK I DON'T BELONG...

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I question everything. EVERY. LITTLE. DECISION.

BECAUSE I THINK I DON'T BELONG...

I question everything. EVERY. LITTLE. DECISION.

And I'm talking everything from work and professional things to personal life and social media.

BECAUSE I THINK I DON'T BELONG...

I question everything. EVERY. LITTLE. DECISION.

And I'm talking everything from work and professional things to personal life and social media.

I worry so much about what other people are going to think or how they'll react that I end up stalling.

MOST PEOPLE NEVER SEE THIS.

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I am very good at wearing my public mask. (I think a lot of empaths and introverts are.)

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I am very good at wearing my public mask. (I think a lot of empaths and introverts are.)

In my head, I'm almost constantly running circles around myself, making sure I see all the flaws before other people do.

THAT CREATES A DIFFICULT WORKING SITUATION.

THAT CREATES A DIFFICULT WORKING SITUATION. WHAT MAKES IT WORSE IT IS THE THIRD HURDLE.

HURDLE 3:
ME BEING IN CHARGE

NO DEADLINES?!

NO DEADLINES?!

Deadlines mean I have to be finished questioning all my decisions by a particular time.

NO DEADLINES?!

Deadlines mean I have to be finished questioning all my decisions by a particular time.

No deadlines means I just keep going.

NO SPECIFIC GOALS?!

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Not only is there no end point, but there are no goals for me to meet other than to make myself happy.

NO SPECIFIC GOALS?!

Not only is there no end point, but there are no goals for me to meet other than to make myself happy.

And that means I get stuck in a loop of making decisions followed by questioning them followed by changing them followed by…

BUT LIKE I SAID AT THE BEGINNING, CONLANGING IS ONE OF MY HAPPY PLACES.

AND SO I HAVE THESE BRAVE MOMENTS WHERE I COME UP WITH AN IDEA FOR A CONLANG TO PURSUE.

ZHWADI

A MOMENT OF HOPE IN A WORLD OF DESPAIR...

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In August 2019, I was really struggling. And for some good reasons.

A MOMENT OF HOPE IN A WORLD OF DESPAIR...

Trump was president, and people seemed filled with rage and hate.

A MOMENT OF HOPE IN A WORLD OF DESPAIR...

Trump was president, and people seemed filled with rage and hate.

I had survived a really awful academic year and was getting ready to face a new one without much hope.

A MOMENT OF HOPE IN A WORLD OF DESPAIR...

That particular day, I was really upset by it all but then remembered a song.

"IMAGINE" BY JOHN LENNON

Imagine there's no heaven. (It's easy if you try.) No hell below us; above us, only sky. Imagine all the people livin' for today.

Imagine there's no countries. (It isn't hard to do.) Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion, too. Imagine all the people livin' life in peace.

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one.

Imagine no possessions. (I wonder if you can.) No need for greed or hunger… a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people, sharing all the world.

AND THAT GAVE ME AN IDEA.

AND THAT GAVE ME AN IDEA.

What if I imagined a community of humans that did just that? That lived as one? That cared for the whole? That saw beauty in their world?

SO I SET AN INTENTION.

SO I SET AN INTENTION.

Create a language of beauty—a language whose very words make me find joy in the little things around me. A language full of whimsy and delight. A language just for me.

SO I SET AN INTENTION.

Create a language of beauty—a language whose very words make me find joy in the little things around me. A language full of whimsy and delight. A language just for me.

A language to help me recapture my *joie de lire*.

AROUND THE SAME TIME...

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I had just finished working with David on Méníshè for *Motherland: Fort Salem*.

AROUND THE SAME TIME…

I had just finished working with David on Méníshè for *Motherland: Fort Salem*.

And I was inspired to try some new things on my own.

NEW THINGS TO TRY

▸ Evolve a language from a proto-form.

▸ Incorporate noun classes.

I SET TO WORK.

I SET TO WORK.

I got out a special notebook just for this project.

I SET TO WORK.

I got out a special notebook just for this project.

I made notes. I made outlines for some evolutionary stages of the language. I had ideas for root words and jotted them down.

AND THEN...

AND THEN...

My brain took over.

AND THEN...

My brain took over.

Life took over.

AND THEN…

My brain took over.

Life took over.

I closed my notebook and didn't look at it again for two years.

LIFE UPHEAVED ME.

LIFE UPHEAVED ME.

I needed to find my ground again as everything around me was in motion and unsettled.

LIFE UPHEAVED ME.

I needed to find my ground again as everything around me was in motion and unsettled.

I reached for that notebook and very (*VEEEERY!*) slowly started writing down more solid ideas.

WHAT I HAVE SO FAR

SPEAKERS/WORLD

My (human) speakers essentially live in southern Missouri (which is where I grew up) in an alternate version of Earth.

SOUNDS

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▸ The sound changes are organized into different stages of language development:

    ▸ Stage 1: noun classes and number marking, along with early compounds

    ▸ Stage 2: case marking, early derivations

    ▸ And so on…

SOUNDS

Demarcating the sound changes like that makes it so I know how to best combine forms to match how the language would have sounded at the time.

ORGANIZING THE DICTIONARY

I'm quite proud of my dictionary.

ORGANIZING THE DICTIONARY

I've broken down all the basic roots into semantic categories to better track what roots I have and how I want them organized into a proto vocabulary.

Zhwadi Basic Roots by Semantic Category

Category	No. of Roots
Appearance	0
Body Terms	27
Category	1
Communication	0
Community	1
Construction	0
Emotion	0
Fauna	1
Flora	3
Insects	0
Interaction	4
Meals	0
Motion	1
Structure	1
Terrain	7
Time	2
Tool	1
Weather	5
	54

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For the categories at zero, I have lists of words I want as roots that I just haven't created forms for yet.

ORGANIZING THE DICTIONARY

Each of those categories is broken down into an alphabetized lists of roots with their meaning.

BODY TERMS

*__aasa__ "mouth (inside)"

*__af__ "breath"

*__aiza__ "body"

*__ba__ "lip"

*__brai__ "elbow, knee"

*__diəɹ__ "arm"

*__əəz__ "hand"

*__ənka__ "stomach"

ORGANIZING THE DICTIONARY

Every Zhwadi dictionary entry is organized around the proto root because it is a language with noun classes.

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The entries are organized in the method David uses but with some added features.

*auʃ | ²oʃ

osh, ozh·ī [ˈoʃ] *auʃ «WEATHER» (n.SK) {00} wind; **dim·osh, dimozh·ī (dimosh)** [diˈmoʃ] *diəma- *auʃ (n.NI) {00} breeze; **ip·osh, ipozh·ī (iposh)** [iˈpoʃ] *ipə- *auʃ (n.IC) {00} freezing wind, biting wind (e.g. wind capable of causing frostbite); **z·osh, zozh·ī (zosh)** [ˈzoʃ] *əzu- *auʃ (n.FI) {00} smoke

The entries have standard features, like labels for noun class, lexical category, register/politeness...

*auʃ | ²oʃ

osh, ozh·ī [ˈoʃ] *auʃ «WEATHER» (n.SK) {00} wind; **dim·osh, dimozh·ī (dimosh)** [diˈmoʃ] *diəma- *auʃ (n.NI) {00} breeze; **ip·osh, ipozh·ī (iposh)** [iˈpoʃ] *ipə- *auʃ (n.IC) {00} freezing wind, biting wind (e.g. wind capable of causing frostbite); **z·osh, zozh·ī (zosh)** [ˈzoʃ] *əzu- *auʃ (n.FI) {00} smoke

But they also have proto-at-this-stage forms as a part of the headword (for now, Stages 1-4).

*auʃ | ²oʃ

osh, ozh·ī [ˈoʃ] *auʃ «WEATHER» (n.SK) {00} wind; **dim·osh, dimozh·ī (dimosh)** [diˈmoʃ] *diəma- *auʃ (n.NI) {00} breeze; **ip·osh, ipozh·ī (iposh)** [iˈpoʃ] *ipə- *auʃ (n.IC) {00} freezing wind, biting wind (e.g. wind capable of causing frostbite); **z·osh, zozh·ī (zosh)** [ˈzoʃ] *əzu- *auʃ (n.FI) {00} smoke

And they also have a semantic category for any basic root meaning in guillemets.

*auʃ | ²oʃ

osh, ozh·ī [ˈoʃ] *auʃ «WEATHER» (n.SK) {00} wind; **dim·osh, dimozh·ī (dimosh)** [diˈmoʃ] *diəma- *auʃ (n.NI) {00} breeze; **ip·osh, ipozh·ī (iposh)** [iˈpoʃ] *ipə- *auʃ (n.IC) {00} freezing wind, biting wind (e.g. wind capable of causing frostbite); **z·osh, zozh·ī (zosh)** [ˈzoʃ] *əzu- *auʃ (n.FI) {00} smoke

For any root that shifts in one stage but not another, I only indicate the forms when they differ.

*faisə | ²fezə | ⁴feza

feza [ˈfe.za] *faisə «INTERACTION» (v) {00} to put, to place; *eza* [ˈe.za] *faisə (post.) at, around, near (see also **haiza**)

ORGANIZING THE DICTIONARY

On the English side, I indicate the basic root for every entry so I know where to find the full information.

A

arm (n.) jer (*diəɹ)

anthill (n.) mevol (*faul)

around (prep.) eza (*faisə)

at (prep.) eza (*faisə)

NOUN CLASSES

Every root belongs to a "natural" noun class and is unmarked when used in that meaning.

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Extensions are then marked.

Being marked by its natural noun class prefix can actually change its meaning.

NOUN CLASSES

yanu "bone" [STONE class]

NOUN CLASSES

yanu "bone" [STONE class]

kra- "STONE class-marker"

NOUN CLASSES

yanu "bone" [STONE class]

kra- "STONE class-marker"

krayanu "fossil" [STONE class]

NOUN CLASSES

yanu "bone" [STONE class]

kra- "STONE class-marker"

krayanu "fossil" [STONE class]

megyanu "marrow" [DIRT class]

NOUN CLASSES

kra "stone" [STONE class]

NOUN CLASSES

kra "stone" [STONE class]

chakra "malleable metal" [GRASS class]

ikra "stalactite, stalagmite" [ICE class]

rokra "gemstone, lode, mica" [DAY class]

NOUN CLASSES

Zhwadi has 11 noun classes that are marked as prefixes.

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These are largely based on look and feel.

NOUN NUMBER

Zhwadi has 5 plural markers that also class nouns based on how they're perceived in the plural.

NOUN NUMBER

▸ group (in the collective, animate sense)

▸ mound, hill (typically found in piles)

▸ group, set (in the generic, inanimate sense)

▸ well (expands to fill space)

▸ ivy (grows over time)

NOUN NUMBER

Speakers can choose to make distinctions based on the chosen plural form.

NOUN NUMBER

anilū "cloud" [SKY class]

NOUN NUMBER

anilū "cloud" [SKY class]

an- "SKY class marker"

ilū "down (feathery down)"

NOUN NUMBER

anilū "cloud" [SKY class]

aniluwī "clouds" [WELL plural] = clouds growing across the sky

anilūkū "clouds" [GROUP/SET plural] = clouds as distinct shapes/units in the sky

NOUN NUMBER

ma "cloud" [SKY class]

This is the older root meaning "cloud" that was reinterpreted to specifically refer to dark and/or storm clouds.

anilū "cloud" [SKY class]

aniluwī "clouds" [WELL plural] = clouds growing across the sky

anilūkū "clouds" [GROUP/SET plural] = clouds as distinct shapes/units in the sky

NOUN CASES

Noun cases are a later development.

Verbs grammaticalized as postpositions, and a handful of those further grammaticalized as case markers.

NOUN CASES

Because these are later, they phonologically interact with stems in different ways than the other inflections.

I'm still working on those sound changes, but here's a potential preview of where I might be going…

*pəilə "person"	Singular	Plural
Nominative	pela	pelya
Accusative	pelam	pelyam
Genitive	pelto	pelyato
Dative/Locative	pelaz	pelyez
Instrumental	peljo	pelyajo

THAT'S IT FOR NOW

I'm still on nouns and haven't made it to the wonders of the verb, but I definitely have some plans.

THESE ARE ALL THINGS I'M PROUD OF.

BUT MY HURDLES ARE STILL THERE.

BUT MY HURDLES ARE STILL THERE.

I'm working through them, one conlang decision at a time.

BUT MY HURDLES ARE STILL THERE.

That's not to say every day is a good one. Some days all I do on Zhwadi is change a single sound of one root… only to change it back again.

BUT MY HURDLES ARE STILL THERE.

And yet, on the good days, I can see that I like what I've started—especially when I see entries I've forgotten about, and I'm like, "Ooh, how fun!"

BUT MY HURDLES ARE STILL THERE.

And yet, on the good days, I can see that I like what I've started—especially when I see entries I've forgotten about, and I'm like, "Ooh, how fun!"

Those moments remind me to try to step out of my own way as I continue creating.

I CONLANG TO CREATE MOMENTS OF JOY . . .

IN BETWEEN MOMENTS OF SELF-DOUBT.

IN THE END, IT'S BEAUTIFUL TO SEE IT ALL COMING TOGETHER.

JESSIE'S FIVE RULES OF CONLANGING

#1: HAVE FUN

#2A: BE CHOOSY

#2B: DON'T WORRY ABOUT MAKING EVERY DECISION A "CREATIVE" ONE

#3: REMEMBER YOUR CONLANG IS YOURS

#4: DON'T BE AFRAID TO REVISE, BUT BE CHOOSY ABOUT REVISIONS

#5: REMEMBER THAT NO LANGUAGE IS "PERFECT" OR "COMPLETE"

STAY GRAMMAR AND HAVE FUN CONLANGING!