## Inventing a language for naming people and places

*"My name is Alice, but-"*

*"It's a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently; "What does it mean?"*

*"Must a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.*

*"Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "my name means the shape I am -- and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost."*

from *Lewis Carroll*, "Through the Looking Glass"

Despite Humpty Dumpty's comment, Alice could not be just any shape -- her name actually summons forth an image of someone who is simple and proper, according to surveys conducted to determine the impressions people have of different names. All names have perceptions attached to them.

Etymologically speaking, Alice's name is from the Greek for "truth". Most American and European names have become simple labels, their original meanings forgotten. How many people realize that a name like *Jeffrey Henning*, if translated literally, means "Godfriend Meadowlark"? Meanwhile, Indian names like "Dances With Wolves" (to take a bad example) wear their etymologies on their sleeves.

If you are fascinated by the origins of names, then you will be happy to learn that a naming language is one of the most useful types of model languages to create -- and one of the easiest, making a great first language for the hobbyist. A naming language can be less complex than other model languages, since it does not need a detailed grammar and since it can get by with a small vocabulary: with just 150 words (revealed below), you can generate millions of names for imaginary people and places. Once you've read this issue, you'll be able to create two or three naming languages in as little as a half hour, though you'll end up fascinated by your creations and will spend many more hours on them.

To begin creating any type of model language, you must be able to create words in that language. To create words, you need to understand sounds, meaning, sound change and so forth. This issue will introduce you to the basic aspects of language; subsequent issues of **Model Languages** will explore each one in more depth.

## Language change

The vocabulary of languages is constantly changing, as technology changes and as our understanding changes. Twenty years ago no one talked of faxes, PCs or being on-line. No one had heard of perestroika. Things were still groovy, nizza, happening. Besides adding and retiring words, languages put new spins on old words: *gay* now primarily refers to "homosexuality", not "happiness"; *liberal* now is almost a curse, referring to "favoring governmental power" when it once meant "favoring governmental power to promote social progress". These word changes are not surprising. Any of us can look over the linguistic landscape of our lives and see how the terrain has changed. If you project this forward a thousand years, it is easy to see how the shape of a language's vocabulary will go through major upheaval.

It's harder to see that the grammar of the language, the way we put words together, will change too. While saying *hopefully* is still frowned upon, it is no longer viewed as completely ungrammatical. The pronoun *them* is often used to refer to one person, rather than the plural it is formally meant to refer to; in casual conversation and

writing, *them* is now the gender-indifferent alternative to *he* or *she* (incidentally, as it was four hundred years ago, before pedantic grammarians -- yes, *them* -- stepped in). Looking a thousand years out, other grammatical distinctions will have been leveled, revealing new horizons behind them.

Finally, it can be hard to realize that the very sounds we use for words change. It's not hard to believe the occasional word changes, such as knowing that *cup board* is now pronounced *cupboard*, the [p] sound having assimilated to the following [b]. It is harder to believe that English words that now begin with [p] and date from Indo-European all began with [b] in Indo-European times. Such systemic changes, where a sound changes throughout the entire vocabulary, happen gradually.

To imagine how it happens, think of a dialect, such as the Bostonian's "idear about whether the cah is pahked in Hahvahd yahd". Sound changes systematically when these dialectal differences become emulated and become the new accepted pronunciations. Imagine an alternate universe where JFK served out 8 years as the U.S. President, and was succeeded by 8 years of RFK, who was followed by 8 years of Teddy (it had to happen in some universe!). No doubt in that universe the Bostonian accent became American English's new standahd.

Basic sound changes do not happen suddenly like earthquakes buckling the landscape, but gradually like water eroding a shoreline. Language change is for the most part slow, since change is on the whole discouraged. The whole point of language is for people to be able to make themselves understood to each other, and this happens best in an environment where the language changes no faster than the land at the water's edge.

Language change is important because it shows the best way for you to invent a model language -- by making changes to an existing language (whether natural or a model).

### An ancestral language -- the grandmother tongue

Every person alive today has or had a mother. Similarly, every mother tongue spoken by all these people had an ancestral language that it evolved out of. Even Proto-Indo-European, the reconstructed ancestor language of hundreds of European and Indian languages, had an ancestral language it evolved out of: Nostratic, which some linguists hypothesize was also the ancestor to five other proto-languages. Since Nostratic itself is most likely descended from another language, records of the first language are no more knowable than records of Adam.

The ramifications for the language modeller are that the language he or she creates should not spring fully armed from the head of Zeus like Athena, but should derive from its own parent language. Most model languages are unknown orphans, when a pedigree would not have been hard to provide. Tolkien is one of the few modelers to actually create an ancestor tongue, which he used to derive many different Elvish languages for *The Lord of the Rings*, of which the best known are Quenya and Sindarin.

"Wait a minute," you might be thinking, "are you saying that to create a model language I first have to create another model language? Where does that language come from? When does it end?" Tolkien again provides the best example; he created root words in a *proto-language*; he imagined that the elves would have reconstructed their ancestral language, much as Europeans reconstructed Indo-European. Proto-

languages are elaborate hypothetical constructions and, as hypotheses, are fuzzy around the edges: nothing but the bones of an extinct dinosaur, while the exact color of its flesh can never be known. A proto-language, therefore, can be a simpler form of model language.

The benefit of creating a proto-language is that it makes it easier to create sister languages to the model language you are chiefly interested in (what, more languages?!), enabling you to formulate new words based on regularly sound changes (more on this in it a minute). It also makes it easier to coin words in your desired model language, providing a rich system of root words to use to derive new words. So creating a proto- language can save you time.

The easiest way to save time on your first model language is to use an existing language as the proto-language. I once worked on a science fiction story set aboard a colony whose original settlers had been 20th- century Italians and Spaniards, who -- through centuries of living together -- had created a new, simpler language. By using Italian as the ancestor language, with many borrowings from Spanish, I not only made it easier to create a new language but I taught myself some Italian and Spanish as well!

If you are writing about a story that has taken place in the last 10,000 years and is set in Europe or India, you might even use Proto-Indo- European as the ancestral language for your languages. Check out *The Roots Of English* by Robert Claiborne for an easily readable discussion of Indo-European roots, or check out the appendix to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, published by Houghton Mifflin; both works are biased in emphasizing those roots from which English words descended, but make good starting points for devising a language.

### Sound

To create your language, you need to decide which sounds you want speakers to distinguish. Basically, while it would be easy to think that the sound [t] is exactly the same, [t] actually describes a range of sounds, all closely approximating one another. The way you position your tongue when saying [t] will vary depending on what other sounds you say before or after it, but we both articulate [t] similarly enough to recognize it as the same thing.
There is no objective reference that says a language must have any particular sound. For instance, Old English did not distinguish between the sounds [f] and [v] or [s] and [z]. The plural of [hoof] was pronounced [hoovz] but it was not until later times that speakers treated the \f\ sound in the singular as different from the \f\ sound in the plural. In Old English times, there could be no word [vat] different from [fat] -- such a distinction was just not made. Gradually, the sounds came to be heard as distinct.

So when creating the sounds of your language, you need to realize that they will only approximate English sounds, not exactly match them, and might not reflect distinctions currently made in English. The [hw] sound in *whale* might be regarded by your speakers as the same as the [w] sound in *wail* (yes, they are different sounds, but you might have to listen closely as you pronounce them to tell the difference).

You can certainly include in your language sounds that are not part of English, say the French vowels, typically pronounced with the lips rounded, or the expectorating [kh] of Hebrew and Yiddish, let alone the clicking sounds of the Hottentots and Bushmen. However, you should refrain from having too many unusual sounds in your language; you want your readers to be able to pronounce your words without too

much difficulty. Simply having regular sounds combined in unique ways (e.g., *sretan*, or *tsedet*) will be enough to convince them it is a unique language anyway.

Languages are very strict about how sounds are combined. English, for instance, allows words to begin with [sn-], but never [zn-]. The rules English uses could fill pages, but as a modeler you want to just hint at complexity. You may want to have a combination that is unusual in English and make it frequent in your language: for instance, have some words begin with [sr-], [kn-], [kth-], [tl-], but here again restraint is the order of the day.

As you specify how sounds can be combined, you may want to outline valid syllables. Your language might only allow syllables of CVC (Consonant+Vowel+Consonant) or just CV or VC. Some languages, like Japanese or Korean, have very strict limits on how syllables can be formed, making it possible to list all the valid syllables of the language. But where Hawaiian allows just 162 different syllables, Thai has 23,638 syllables.

Two languages can have the exact same consonants and vowels and yet sound very different, depending on the syllable patterns and on the frequency of the consonants and vowels. You may want to list the sounds that occur most often. By paying rigorous attention to this when developing the proto-language, you can relax a little more during creation of the descendant language, which will carry on many of the same frequency patterns, though applied to different sounds as the sounds change.

Many languages have very simple vowel systems. Eskimo-Aleut has just three vowels (the smallest number ever observed), while Spanish and Japanese each has five vowels. The typical language has between 5 and 7 vowels, but Indo-European languages usually have more; English has 12, and German has 14. The African language Khoisan has the record with 24 vowels.

Languages have been observed to have anywhere from six consonants (Rotokas) to 95 (Khoisan), with an average of 22.8 consonants. The typical language has twice as many consonants as vowels. The most common consonants include [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], [g], [gh], [f], [s], [sh], [rn], [n], [ng], [gng], [w], [l], [r], [j] and [h].

For a great discussion of the sound structure of languages, check out *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* by David Crystal.

### Sound change

Over time, sounds gradually change in certain circumstances. John F. Kennedy, like many Bostonians, would drop his last [-r] from words like [car], while adding an [-r] to *Cuba* [cubar] and *idea* [idear]. As alluded to before, had enough Americans adopted this, it would have been considered a regular sound change and many other words might have undergone this change. Or listen to the dialect of Brooklyn, where [bird] becomes [boyd], for instance; someday all English speakers might pronounce [ir] as [oy]. No doubt, through the rise of one dialect in Old English, the sound [sk] was gradually becoming [sh].

Over great periods of time, these changes become more pronounced. Literally and figuratively.
Here are some common ways consonants evolve into one another:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| b <---> gw | b <---> p | b <---> v | ch <---> kw | d <---> g | d <---> t | d <---> th | f <---> p | f <---> v | g <---> d |
| g <---> k | g <---> w | g <---> y | g <---> z | gu <---> gw | gw <---> b | gw <--- >d | gw <---> g | gw <---> gu | gw <---> k |
| gw <--- >ku | gw <---> kw | gw <--- >v | gw <---> y | gw <---> zh | h <---> hy | h <---> k | h <---> s | h <---> y | hv <---> hw |
| hw <--- >hv | hw <---> kw | hw <--- >p | k <---> g | k <---> gw | k <---> h | k <---> kw | k <---> s | k <---> th | kh <---> kw |
| ku <---> gw | ku <---> kw | kv <---> kw | kw <---> ch | kw <---> gw | kw <---> hw | kw <--- >k | kw <---> kh | kw <---> ku | kw <---> kv |
| kw <---> p | kw <---> sh | kw <---> t | l <---> r | p <---> *- | p <---> b | p <---> f | p <---> hw | p <---> pf | pf <---> p |
| r <---> l | s <---> h | s <---> k | sh <---> kw | t <---> d | t <---> th | t <---> z | th <---> d | th <---> k | th <---> t |
| v <---> b | v <---> f | v <---> gw | v <---> w | w <---> g | w <---> v | y <---> *- | y <---> g | y <---> gw | y <---> h |
| y <---> z | z <---> g | z <---> t | z <---> y | zh <---> gw | | | | | *- (lost) |

This list is not meant to be all inclusive, just representative of changes that occurred in Indo-European.

Likelihood Of Sound Change

# Of IE Languages Where IE Initial Consonant Changed

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| gh | 12 | kw | 11 | d | 4 | l | 1 |
| gw | 12 | g | 9 | s | 4 | r | 1 |
| gwh | 12 | w | 9 | p | 3 | m | 0 |
| bh | 11 | k | 7 | t | 2 | n | 0 |
| dh | 11 | b | 4 | y | 2 | | |

You can use the above table as a rough guide to determine which consonants are more likely to undergo change. It is not representative of all languages, being an analysis of 12 languages descended from Proto-Indo-European and showing the number of languages where the consonant in the word-initial position changed. The languages analyzed were Armenian, Avestan, Common Germanic, Greek, Hittite, Latin, Lithuanian, Old Church Slavonic, Old Irish, Old Persian, Sanskrit, and Tocharian.

The nasals, [n] and [m], are fairly stable, as are the liquids [l] and [r]. The stops [p], [t] and their voiced counterparts [b] and [d] change in only a third of the languages. All aspirated consonants changed in every language analyzed, being markedly unstable; [k] and [g] and their glide forms [kw] and [gw] were also more likely to change than not.

Sound changes actually vary by position, with a sound change applying to different places -- the [s] might become [h] at the beginning of a word, [k] in the middle of a word and [z] at the end of a word (though this is an extreme example). For

simplicity's sake, you may just want to apply the same changes regardless of position.

Besides these phonetic changes, there are often "environmental" changes in words, where sounds change because of the sounds they are near. The following examples illustrate the major types of sound change.

**Assimilation**

**Regressive** or **anticipatory**, a sound is influenced by the following next sound: English [cupbord] became [cubbord]; the word *assimilation* is itself an example: Latin *adsimula-re* became *assimula-re*, since [ad-] regularly assimilated to [as-] before the [s] sound.

**Progressive**, a sound is influenced by a preceding sound

**Coalescent** or **reciprocal**, when two neighboring sounds influence one another: *don't you* becomes pronounced [donchu]

**Dissimulation**

sound moves away from the pronunciation of neighboring sound: French *marbre* became English *marble* as the second [r] became dissimilar from the first.

**Split**

a sound becomes regarded as two distinct sounds, such as Old English \s\ compared to Modern English \s\ and \z\ (Old English's failure to distinguish between the sounds is one of the reasons many Modern English words are written with 's' when [z] is pronounced)

**Metathesis**

two sounds change places, *third* from Old English *thridda*

**Elision**

sounds are omitted (elided) in rapid speed, often dropping a consonant from a cluster of consonants: [cubbord] became [cubord]; elision specifically refers to loss of an unstressed vowel or syllable: *elementary* becomes pronounced [elementry] when the final schaw sound is elided.

**Loss**

a sound disappears from the language altogether, as the velar fricative, a variant of /h/ (and the final sound of Scottish *loch*), did in English, with only a vestige remaining in English spelling: the common silent 'gh' of English words like *light, night, sight,* which were once pronounced [likht], [nikht] and [sikht].

**Haplology**

the loss of a sequence of sounds because of similarity of neighboring sounds: should this ever be called *haplogy* it will have undergone haplology itself.

**Syncope**

the loss of medial sounds, as *boatswain* lost the [t] sound as it was shortened to *bosun* ([bosun] is the correct pronunciation of *boatswain*, by the way, never [bo-*tswa*-n]).

**Apocope**

the loss of final sounds, as in the silent 'e' in words like *love* and *hate*; of course, the silent 'e' used to be pronounced.

**Liaison**

introduction of a sound between words, as in French when the silent final consonant of a word is pronounced when the next word begins with a vowel.

**Prothesis**

introduction of an extra initial sound, as occurred in Spanish and Old French, which frequently inserted an [e] sound before an initial [sp]: for instance, Latin *specia-is* became Old French *especial.*

**Epenthesis**

introduction of extra medial sound, as Old English *bre-mel* became Old English *braembel*.

You can quickly generate more than one language by inventing different sound change rules for each language. So perhaps the Dilbertian [d] becomes [t] in Dogbertian, whereas it becomes [th] in Dinobertian. Or take a look at how the names James, John and Katherine have evolved in seven different languages:

| Source: *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **English** | James | John | Katherine |
| **French** | Jacques | Jean | Catherine |
| **German** | Jakob | Johann | Katharina |
| **Italian** | Giacomo | Giovanni | Caterina |
| **Spanish** | Jaime | Juan | Catalina |
| **Swedish** | Jakob | John, Johan | Karin, Katarina |
| **Yiddish** | Dzheymz | Yohan | Katerine |

Names vary idiosyncratically and do not always evolve according to the regular sound changes that affect other words. Thus the English towns of *Luton* and *Leyton* are -- despite their differences -- both derived from the same word, *Lygetun*, "farm by the river Lea" (the river Lea, incidentally, may either mean "bright one" or may represent the name of a river god, *Lugus*).

Names get shortened frequently; for instance, *Johann*, *Giovanni* and *Yohan* all indicate that there used to be an [a] sound after before the [n] in *John* and that the silent [h] in *John* used to be pronounced, and still is in German, Swedish and Yiddish.

## Spelling

When inventing your own language, you can go all out -- inventing your own alphabet or even hieroglyphs to accompany it. You can have spellings that represent scholarly thinking about how the word derived, so that the word sounding like [gramilt] is actually spelled 'kramillid', for instance, because lexicographers believe the word [gramilt] used to be pronounced [kramillid]. You can invent new symbols or use old symbols to represent sounds, so that 'pra@t!so>r' is pronounced... oh, never mind.

Or, you can spare users of your language a lot of difficulty; you can strive for a system of spelling that is phonetic. Since learning a new language is difficult enough, this is the course I recommend. Yes, I'm hooked on phonics.

Be warned, however, that even a phonetic representation can present difficulties, if you yourself are mistaking English spellings and conventions for actual pronunciations. For instance, if you were representing English phonetically, you might think that you could specify that the plural was regularly formed by adding [-s] to the end of a word. While this is true for [cat], it is not true for [dog], whose plural is actually pronounced [dogz]; [church], for its part, has a plural of [churchez]. So make sure your phonetic spelling really describes the sound you want.

One problem with phonetic spelling is that words are pronounced differently in different circumstances: the word *a* can be pronounced [ei] or as [@] (schwa), *and* can be pronounced [@nd], [@n] or [n], depending on whether or not the speaker is placing emphasis on them.

While you can use special characters for sounds, it will be easier on your readers if you transcribe them using conventional letters. The letter 'h' is great for forming digraphs; you might say that 'rh' represents a trilled [r] sound, or that 'mh' might be an aspirated [m] (sounding similar to [v]), or that 'dh' represents the voiced *th* in *then*, while 'th' represents the unvoiced *th* in *thin*.

Your spelling may even reflect a regular sound change of the language. For instance, in German, the final 'b' in a word sounds like [p], the final 'd' like [t], and the final 'g' like [k], so 'Korb' is pronounced [korp], 'Band' [bant] and 'Tag' [tak].

### Words

Once you have created sounds, you can begin generating words. Words are nothing more than sounds arbitrarily linked to meanings. Onomatopoeia refers to sounds that are imitative, such as *arf*, *bark* or *bow-wow* for the sounds a dog makes. Most words are not onomatopoetic. Tolkien once remarked that he found *cellar door* to be an incredibly beautiful series of sounds, though the meaning was not worthy of it. So don't slave over matching sounds to words. If you spend all your time thinking about the exact sound each word should have you'll never flesh out your vocabulary.

### Grammar

It can make learning new words somewhat easier if they have to follow specific patterns depending on parts of speech. Your language might require the root form of all verbs to end in [-r] and all nouns might end in a vowel.
A naming language does not need a complex grammar. The only grammatical decision you really need to make is how to form compound words: should the modifier proceed or follow the word being modified. Assume you have a language with the word *kwan* for "dog" and *kooz* for "house". Does the phrase *kwan kooz*, then, mean "doghouse" or "house dog"?

### Proper names

Many common names were formed from surprisingly few elements. If you coin just 150 words in a model language, you will be able to generate millions of distinct names.

I analyzed about 300 common English and European names to come up with the following tables of common meanings underlying these names.

| Adjectives for proper names | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| bear-like | beloved | bitter | blessed | brave |
| chief | compassionate | constant | desired | divine |
| eagle-like | earnest | falcon-like | famous | flowering |
| fortunate | fox-like | free | hallowed | happy |
| industrious | laughing | lion-like | loyal | manly |
| mighty | noble | northern | patriotic | peaceful |

| powerful | praiseworthy | prayerful | protecting | pure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ready | sharp | shining | small | strong |
| strong-willed | swift | valiant | victorious | war's |
| wealthy | wise | wolf-like | worthy | young |

### Nouns for proper names

| | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| arrow | battle | bearer | brightness | counselor |
| crown | defender | dweller | earth | farmer |
| father | fighter | forest | gate | gift |
| giver | God | guardian | hammer | harvester |
| healer | helper | home | horse | keeper |
| laurel | leader | lily | lover | maid |
| man | pearl | people | protector | rock |
| rose | ruler | runner | smith | son |
| spear | staff | steward | stranger | stronghold |
| sword | traveler | twin | warrior | wolf |

You can use these tables to generate names in the following ways:

- adjective1: "Pure" (*Katherine*)
- adjective1 + adjective2: "Noble and Shining" (*Alberta*)
- adjective1 + noun1: "Chief Protector" (*Howard*)
- noun1 + noun2: "Elf Ruler" (*Avery*)
- adjective1 + adjective2 + noun1: "Noble, Brave Warrior" (*Gunther*)
- adjective1 + noun1 + noun2: "Strong Warrior Twin"
- adjective1 + adjective2 + noun1 + noun2: "Young Bear-like Battle Hammer"

You can use these tables to generate almost all the names you need. Theoretically you could use these tables to generate 6.3 million names.

Feel free to use a few elements that you like in many different names; for example, "famous" in Anglo-Saxon was represented by *hroth* and is contained in the following names: *Rodney* ("famous"), *Robert* ("famous brightness"), *Roland* ("most famous of the land"), *Roderick* ("famous ruler"), *Rudolph* ("famous wolf") and *Roger* ("famous spear"). *Roger*, incidentally, was spelled *Hrothgar* in Old English, and is the name of the beleaguered king in *Beowulf*.

You can easily flesh out the above tables to better represent the culture of the people who will speak your model language. For instance, islanders would not name people after wolves and foxes, but after predators peculiar to their locale, such as sharks and octopuses. Their names would reflect people's relationship to the sea: sailors, divers, swimmers and beachcombers. The tools they would refer to would not be swords and spears, but tridents and hooks. The adjectives they would use would likewise reflect their environment: unsinkable, seaworthy and foamy.

If you want to add additional words to these tables, check out the etymologies of real names; one good source is *The Baby Boomer's Name Game* by Christopher Andersen, which includes a basic etymological dictionary of 2,500 common names.

# Place names

The names of people and places are intimately related. For instance, *Winslow* (a town in Buckinghamshire, England) is named after *Wine* (an Old English name meaning "friend") and means something like "Wine's hill", "Wine's burial mound" or perhaps even "Wine's estate at the burial mound". In turn, *Winslow* is a man's first name and means "from Winslow". Many place names become first or last names in this way, and these in turn might inspire new place names; some other town of Winslow might be named after a fellow named Winslow -- and so it goes.

Most names refer to a natural feature, such as a river, a hill or a forest, or to a man-made construction, such as a fort, a road or a burial mound. Place names are very seldom taken from an event that may have happened there, such as a battle or a coronation, but do sometimes take names from recurring events -- a field where people are regularly executed or married (I'll refrain from comparing these activities!) might have a name like the Hangingfield or the Weddingfield. For instance, the village of "Kingstone" is not likely to be so named because some king drew a sword from a stone there, but rather because many monarchs have been coronated there (or stoned there, depending on the kingdom's traditions!).

Place names in the British Isles tend to be formed from 50 basic root meanings, which are given below. These 50 meanings can be combined to give 2450 different names, and can be combined to form millions more when combined with names involving people (e.g., *Boston*, "Botwulf's stone"; the ending is not -*ton*, "town", but -*ston*).

| Source: Adapted from *Dictionary of Place Names in the British Isles*, by Adrian Room | |
|---|---|
| **Meaning** | **English/irish/welsh word element** |
| abbey | Abbey- |
| bridge | Pont-, -bridge |
| castle | Castle |
| church | Eccle(s)-, Kil(l)-, Kirk-, Llan-, -church |
| cottage | -cot |
| dwelling | -wich, -wick |
| enclosure | Lis-, -wardine, -worth |
| estate | -land |
| farm | -ton, -by |
| field | -field |
| ford | -ford |
| fort | Caer-, -b(o)rough, -burgh, -bury |
| fort(old fort) | -caster, -c(h)ester |
| fort(ring fort) | Rath- |
| height | Ard- |

| | |
|---|---|
| highland | Blaen-, -head |
| hill | Bryn-, Dun-, -don |
| hilltop | Pen- |
| holy place | -stead, -stede, -stow |
| home farm | -hampton |
| homestead | Bally-, -ham(stead), -hampstead |
| island | Ennis-, -ey |
| lake | Loch- |
| meadow | Clon- |
| monastery | -minster |
| moor | -more, -moor |
| mountain peak | Ben- |
| new | New- |
| pass | -gate |
| people of | -ing(s) |
| place | Stock-, Stoke- |
| pond | -mer(e) |
| port | Port-, -port |
| resort | -ville |
| river mouth | Aber-, Bel(la)-, Inver-, -mouth |
| riverside | -side |
| rock | Carrick- |
| secondary settlement | -stock, -stoke, -thorpe |
| stone | -ston(e) |
| stream | -b(o)urne, -well |
| town | Ballin(a)- |
| tree | -tree, -try |
| upper | Auchter- |
| valley | Glen-, Strath-, -dale |
| valley (narrow) | -combe |
| valley (wooded) | -den |
| village | Tre- |
| wood | Rhos-, Ros-, Ross-, -wood |
| wooded angle of land | -shot(t) |
| woodland | -ley, -le, -leigh |

Place names can be formed from combinations of the affixes listed above and from other place names and proper names:

- affix1 + affix2: "New Town" (*Newton*)

- affix1 + affix2 + affix3: "New Town on the Moor" (*Newtonmore*)
- affix1 + affix2 + placename: "New Town in Mearns [a county]" (*Newton Mearns*)
- placename1 + affix1: "Newton-of-the-Abbey" (*Newton Abbot*)
- placename + propername: *Newton Stewart* [after William Stewart]
- propername + placename: "Hynca's Enclosure" (*Hinxworth*)

Often when you analyze a place name, you will find that a river runs through it: *Exeter* (from *Exchester*) means "fortification on the river Exe", *Exmoor* is "moorland along Exe", *Exmouth* is at the mouth of Exe, while *Exwick* is a "farm by the Exe".

*Exe* itself means simply "water", from the British Celtic *isca*. (This may seem boring, but *isca* is part of "the water of life" that entered English -- through Scottish Gaelic -- as *whiskey*!) Many names of rivers, mountains and other features of the landscape come from general words. Imagine an Englishman pointing to a river and asking, "What do you call that?" The native Celt might have simply said *teme*, "river", since to him or her it was "*the* river", the prominent river in the area and hence not in need of its actual name in typical conversation. And thereby a noble river such as the Thames would have been christened.

To create the name of a city on a river then, you'll have to name the river first -- and that name might derive from another language, as the Thames shows.

Place names often incorporated terms from other languages. For instance, the Celtic city of *Eborakon* -- meaning "place of Eburos (the yew man)" -- had its name Romanicized to *Eburacum*. This name was meaningless to the invading Saxons, who Anglicized it as *Eofor* ("boar", which had a similar sound) and appended *wi-c* ("dwelling place"), to give it the name of *Eoforwi-c*. When the Vikings invaded, they misconstrued *wic* as *vi-k* (which meant "bay" and was inappropriate to the inland city but stuck anyway); since *Eofor* was meaningless to them, there was no pressure to keep the first syllables recognizable, and the name was gradually shortened to *Jarvik*. This in turn was later shortened to *York*, the name as it stands today and as it may stand until the city is invaded again. York's name was not directly affected by the fall of England to the Normans, the only conquerors not to leave their mark on it. If the Normans' ancestors, the Vikings, had had as little effect on the city's name, York's modern name might very well be *Everwick*.

The history of the name *York* reveals five waves of occupation (Celtic, Roman, Saxon, Viking, English) and so tells a lot about the fortunes of the city. While you do not want to go into as much detail for each name in your own imaginary world, this history is worth creating for the most important place names. To rival the history of York, you'd have to invent five model languages!

In the same way you're best prepared to write a poem if you studied a lot of poems, you're best prepared to coin a place name by studying how other people have coined place names. To this end, I definitely recommend reviewing an etymological dictionary like *Dictionary of Place Names in the British Isles*, which covers over 4,000 place names. Each name tells a story, as the name of York shows.

### Example - quickly create your own naming languages

The following quick sketch of three languages -- Nagada, Makata and Negasi -- will show you how you can quickly create your own naming systems.

The consonants of Nagada are [b], [d], [g], [s], [m], [n], [l], [r] and [h]. The vowels are [a], [e] and [u]. The vowels differ greatly in frequency: [a] is used about twice as often as [e], which is used slightly more often than [u]. All syllables in Nagada follow the form CV (Consonant+Vowel).

The language of Makata is descended from Nagada and showed the following sound changes: [b] > [p], [d] > [t], [g] > [k], [m] > [n] and [n] > [m].

The language of Negasi went through different changes from Nagada. The only consonantal change was that of [d] > [t] > [s]. Vowels changed depending on the syllable they appeared in:

| Vowel | First syllable | Final syllable (if more than 1 syllable) |
|---|---|---|
| [a] | [e] | [i] |
| [e] | [u] | [a] |
| [u] | [a] | [o] |

For instance, the Nagada word *naba* became *nebi* in Negasi.

All words in the three languages are spelled phonetically. All three languages put the modifier before the word being modified (e.g., "doghouse" means "the house for dogs").

Here are the root words of Nagada and how those words appear in Makata and Negasi.

| | Nagada | Makata | Negasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| "bearer" | ba | pa | be |
| "beloved" | naba | mapa | nebi |
| "blessed" | luma | peta* | lami |
| "divine" | luma | luna | luna* |
| "giver" | ge | ke | gu |
| "healer" | dala | tala | seli |
| "lily" | hama | hana | heni |
| "pearl" | rele | rele | rula |
| "shining" | dube | tupe | saba |
| "swift" | sahu | sahu | seho |

There was not room in this short introduction to cover borrowing or meaning change or any of the other factors that can override direct descent from a parent language, and I will give only one example here: Negasi borrowed *luna* from Makata to distinguish between the meanings of "divine" and "blessed", which were both reflected by the single word *luma* in Nagada. Makata, for its part, coined the word *peta* for "blessed" to distinguish between the two concepts.

Based on these words, here are some common names in the three languages.

|  | Nagada | Makata | Negasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| "blessed pearl" | Lumarele | Petarele | Lamirula |
| "divine healer" | Lumadala | Lunatala | Lunaseli |
| "swift healer" | Sahudala | Sahutala | Sehoseli |
| "lily giver" | Hamage | Hanake | Henigu |
| "pearl bearer" | Releba | Relepa | Rulabe |

The above table assumes the meanings of the names were kept current (like Indian names like "Dances With Wolves") rather than fossilized. If the meanings were instead forgotten, then the Makata and Negasi forms would have been shaped simply by changing the sounds of the words. So Nagada *Lumarele* would be Makata *Lunarele*, rather than *Petarele*.

If I was actually going to use these names in a story, I would spend much more time refining them to develop an affinity between the sound of a name and the character I wanted to represent. However, taking the words as they are can provide insights into the imagined people. I think *Lumarele* is a great name for an island princess, and I can picture *Sahudala*, the impotent witch doctor who wants her hand in marriage, but the name of her jealous sister *Hamage* carries with it the stench of lilies, rather than their sweet aroma...