

# Syntax

RNA journal submits articles to Wikipedia

*their first Wikipedia article, mostly from a technical aspect (explaining syntax) rather than as a style guide. In the field of molecular biology, wiki technology*

Friday, December 19, 2008

The scientific journal RNA Biology will require authors of articles in a new section on RNA families to submit summaries of their work to Wikipedia, Nature News reports.

Since 2007, the RNA family database (Rfam) has been synchronized with Wikipedia, so that editing Wikipedia alters the database. A small core group of scientists updates the entries in Wikipedia, but a long tail of scientists and other Wikipedians have contributed as well. Due to the scientific nature of the entries, vandalism has not been a large problem, according to Sean Eddy, a computational biologist at the Janelia Farm Research Campus of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Ashburn, Virginia.

"The novelty is that for the first time it creates a link between Wikipedia and traditional journal publishing, with its peer-review element," Alex Bateman from the Rfam database told Nature News. This way, scientists are encouraged to submit to Wikipedia, while they are rewarded with a citable publication in a peer review journal (which in turn drives their funding). In the interview with Nature, the journal's editor expressed her hopes that other journals would adopt the model.

The new Wikipedia entry will be peer reviewed separately before it is published on Wikipedia. The first article in the new journal section will deal with SmY RNA, a family which now has its own Wikipedia article. According to the online version of the article, it was submitted on November 21, 2008, and accepted five days later. The Wikipedia article was moved from the userpage of one of the co-authors to the article section one day before submission.

In an accompanying editorial, the new Associate Editor-in-Chief of the new section, Paul P. Gardner, explained: "...A Wikipedia entry is usually among the top few hits from a Google search with a molecular biology keyword. Therefore, we would like to ensure that the RNA relevant information in Wikipedia is both reliable and current. We think that this track will provide an important mechanism by which time will be spent by experts to improve the record."

The author guidelines for this new section contain a mini-guide for the scientists to publishing their first Wikipedia article, mostly from a technical aspect (explaining syntax) rather than as a style guide.

In the field of molecular biology, wiki technology is increasingly being used. For example, two biochemists and Wikipedians, Professor William J. Wedemeyer and Tim Vickers, MSc, PhD, hosted a Wikipedia workshop last Tuesday at the American Society for Cell Biology Annual Meeting.

The Wiki approach is not met with undivided enthusiasm; last March, 250 scientists wrote a petition in the magazine Science to ask GenBank to allow community annotation of its DNA sequences, but their request to 'Wikify' GenBank was denied.

In an e-mail to Wikinews and on the Nature website, Prof. Wedemeyer called the new initiative a "promising method for outreach, connecting the scientific world with the public that usually pays for the research," by "centralizing public outreach in the widely read Wikipedia." He said that the initiative "seems likely to be effective."

## Elvish, Klingon and Na'vi: Constructed languages gain foothold in film

*"It's got a perfectly consistent sound system, and grammar, orthography, syntax"*. Frommer explained the direction given to him before creating the language

Monday, December 28, 2009

The release of the movie Avatar, written and directed by James Cameron, has generated increased interest in the field of constructed language, also known as conlang. Cameron asked American linguistics professor Paul Frommer to develop a language spoken by the extraterrestrial people in the film known as the Na'vi.

Author J. R. R. Tolkien developed Elvish languages for his literary series The Lord of the Rings. The Elvish language was featured in scenes of The Lord of the Rings film trilogy, directed by Peter Jackson.

The Klingon language (tlhIngan Hol) was developed by linguist Marc Okrand, initially for use in the 1984 film Star Trek III: The Search for Spock. Okrand drew inspiration from Klingon lines spoken by actor James Doohan in the film Star Trek: The Motion Picture; Doohan portrayed character Montgomery Scott in the Star Trek series. A dictionary for Klingon developed by Okrand, The Klingon Dictionary sold over 300,000 copies.

Klingon became quite popular and has developed a usage among Star Trek fans. The Klingon Terran Research Ensemble in the Netherlands created an opera in Klingon. The play Hamlet by William Shakespeare was translated into Klingon. A German Trekkie who goes by the moniker Klenginem posted videos to YouTube where he raps songs he translated into Klingon by musician Eminem. Klenginem has been cited recently in pieces on constructed language in The New York Times, ABC News Nightline, and National Public Radio. "You know your alien language has taken off when a German guy translates rap songs into it," said National Public Radio of Klenginem.

Linguistics professor Frommer received his PhD degree from the University of Southern California (USC), and subsequently shifted his focus into the business arena. He returned to USC to teach at the Marshall School of Business. Cameron tasked Frommer with creating an entire language for the Na'vi people.

In an interview with Geoff Boucher of the Los Angeles Times, Frommer voiced hope that the language would continue to be used separate from the movie, as Klingon has. "I'm still working and I hope that the language will have a life of its own," said Frommer. The Na'vi language created by Frommer contains over 1,000 words, as well as a structural system and rules format for usage. Frommer told Vanity Fair that the language was fairly developed, commenting, "It's got a perfectly consistent sound system, and grammar, orthography, syntax".

Frommer explained the direction given to him before creating the language, "Cameron wanted something melodious and musical, something that would sound strange and alien but smooth and appealing." The Avatar writer-director provided Frommer with approximately three dozen words of the Na'vi language he used in his scriptment for the film. "That was the starting point. Probably the most exotic thing I added were ejectives, which are these sorts of popping sounds that are found in different languages from around the world. It's found in Native American languages and in parts of Africa and in Central Asia, the Caucasus," explained Frommer. Cameron and Frommer worked together for four years developing the language.

The linguistics professor relied on inspiration provided by Cameron, and avoided drawing upon influences from Elvish, Klingon, and the international auxiliary language Esperanto. Sample words in the Na'vi language include "Uniltìrantokx" (oo-neel-tih-RAHN-tokx), meaning "Avatar", and "tireaioang" (tee-REH-ah-ee-o-ahng), which means "spirit animal". Maclean's reported that fans of Avatar were anxious for more instructive material from professor Frommer about the language in order to learn how to speak it with others that appreciated the film. "The response has been quite remarkable and totally unexpected. I never thought there'd be this level of interest. But I really don't think of Na'vi as a competitor to Klingon. If it does develop

a following, that would be quite wonderful," said Frommer of the response to the language from Avatar fans.

The Na'vi language is itself a minor plot point in the film Avatar. The character Jake Sully portrayed by Sam Worthington endeavors to learn the language while living on Pandora. A botanist portrayed by actress Sigourney Weaver instructs a scientist played by actor Joel David Moore on how to become conversational in the language.

Zoe Saldana, the actress behind warrior princess Neytiri in Avatar, picked up the Na'vi language faster than her fellow cast members. "Zoe owned the language and everyone had to match her, even her accent," said Cameron. Saldana remarked that the most difficult part about acting in the film was speaking in English with the accent of the Na'vi people. Cameron touted the rich nature of the Na'vi language in publicity for his film. "We wanted to 'out-Klingon' Klingon. The best sci-fi movies immerse the audience in that world until it doesn't seem alien to them," said Cameron to USA Today.

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