Overview of the Next Generation Language (NGL) Project

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1.   History

The NGL project was started on the electronic mailing list CONLANG by Julian Morrison. Its first members were recruited there, and the project at an early stage (some time in the late 1990s) was moved to a separate mailing list and mirrored on the USENET newsgroup alt.languages.artificial.ngl. The newsgroup was the major source of later recruitment. Both the usenet group and the mailing list were moderated by Jack Durst, a law and linguistics student in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA. Jack's enormous linguistic knowledge, energy and talent were a major driving force for the project for most of its life. At some point the server formerly hosting the mailing list had to be abandoned, and the list was moved to OneList. OneList was folded into eGroups and the NGL list successfully ported, although it was forced to change its name to NGL-project@egroups.com because eGroups had already had a list called "NGL".

After several years as a very active forum and having made much progress in developing the language, producing new compositions and new expansions and clarifying the basic grammar, the list fell silent in about 2000, as the most prolific members became increasingly wrapped up in their private concerns. At the same time, new contributors failed to come in to fill the gap despite some expressed interest, due in part to the very progress that made the project so unique and successful - there was a *lot* of material necessary to catch up on in order to be able to contribute, but materials necessary for new contributors to get up to speed with the project were scattered or non-existent. An effort to collect up the materials the project would need to grow was made, but never came to full fruition. So, the project languished for nearly two years, with no contribution for at least an entire year. During that period, eGroups was moved to Yahoo, and the eGroups list failed to port, causing the group's invaluable archives to be lost. At this time, the only source of old group archives is private collections and Google Groups searches. In early 2002, Stephen DeGrace, a prolific early contributor, curious about the old project, tried to find the old group on Yahoo and discovered that it did not exist anymore, but that the name NGL was free. Seeking to lay claim to this name for the future of the project should it revive, he started the new Yahoo Group NGL@yahoogroups.com.

Subsequent to the re-founding of the NGL list, old contributors started filtering back (largely due to the diligence of Carlos Thompson, another prolific early contributor, at seeking people out), and some potential new contributors became interested. Some new material was produced for the project, and it was at this point that the current effort to summarise and codify the existing progress was undertaken, so that new contributors may be more easily brought on board. What you are reading now is the beginning of that effort.

2.   Principles and Overview

The Next Generation Language project is a group effort to design an artificial language. Proposal, debate and ratification of all additions and changes to the language must take place on

the group's official forum, which has changed in the past but which is currently the Yahoo Group NGL@yahoogroups.com, available at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NGL. The group also has an Official Repository web site at http://www.geocities.com/ngl_repository which is under construction. The principles and practises of the NGL project are always evolving, but certain basic practises and principles can and should be identified and set down.

- NGL is a project to invent a language, which in 2000 we voted to name Tokcir.
- Tokcir is to be a "language of the future". That is, the society it is presumed to arise from and serve is assumed to be a modern or "post-modern" one. Hence it should be free of pre-modern baggage and reflect modern values, gender equality being only one obvious example, illogical irregularities being another. This is the first and most important principle in my reading of project creator Julian Morrison's intent, and the reason for the project's name of NGL.
- Tokcir is not an IAL (International Auxiliary Language) like Esperanto. Therefore, it does *not* have to attempt to consider internationalism or the politics of adoption and use in its construction. Furthermore, it does not have to be easy, simple, or completely regular, although according to the first principle that Tokcir is supposed to dispose of historical baggage, it should tend to reduce needless irregularity. Tokcir does not have to be designed with ease of L2 acquisition in mind.
- Tokcir must be speakable and understandable by humans. Therefore, it must obey language universals. In practise, this tends to mean that precedent is sought in human languages to determine what is and is not a usable feature.
- Tokcir is to be designed as a L1 first language. That is, we are to assume the existence of hypothetical L1 speakers of the language. L1 speakers of a language find the features of their native language easy and natural as a general rule, even when these features are deemed confusing and difficult by L2 speakers (second language learners). As long as language universals are obeyed, "difficulty", therefore, is not a sufficient argument against some feature, which it is assumed L1 speakers will not find difficult.
- The concept of NGL is modular design. Upon the base set early in the project are built "modules". Modules are bundles of General Vocabulary proposals, proposed official derivations for non-monomorphemic words, and proposed conventions having to do with some area of life or thought. The use of a module can be optional, but modules can apply for official status in the language, in which case they are subsumed into the core grammar. A great deal of modules already exist for areas such as math, information technology, sexual identity, sexual practises, linguistic style, time of day, colours, common animal names, country and ethnic group naming conventions, etc. There remains enormous room for growth in areas not covered by modules and in areas covered by modules that the module did not address, and if the change can be justified reasonably, modification to areas already covered *can* be discussed. The basic unit of any new proposal is the module. Before proposing a module, please do a search at Google Groups for any existing similar material to be sure of not making redundant proposals.
- The vocabulary should generally be considered non-modular, belonging rather to the General Vocabulary (see below for a short description of how proposals are made). General Vocabulary proposals can be made at any time, not just as part of a module.

New vocabulary a module needs, unless there is a compelling reason for it to be parochial to the module, should be coined in the form of General Vocabulary proposals if derivation form existing morphemes is not sufficient for the module's needs. Again, effort should be made not to make redundant vocabulary proposals. See the Shoebox Database (available on the Central Repository page) and look for synonyms or possible derivations of existing terminology that would produce synonyms before coining new words; as a general rule, the group will insist on accountability for the non-redundancy of new proposals.

- A final principle of the language, as was recently pointed out by Julian Morrison, is neutrality. Its forms should not unnecessarily be biased either against or in favour of "political correctness". In principle, all sorts of people will speak the language, and they will form the language to suit their needs. So while certian common-sense principles like gender, racial, and sexual equality are in a real sense embedded in the language as a "default" as part of the principle of getting rid of historical baggage, this last principle stands in the way of remaking Tokcir into a social engineering project. Tokcir should be "neutral" when it can reasonably be so.

Tokcir is a language designed with a modern society in mind. Modern societies are generally culturally characterised by a tremendous amount of diversity, fractionation, and polarisation. There would appear to be some emerging modern or post-modern social consensus, but that soical consensus is quite often to live and let live between complex factions which occasionally have rather pointed and divergent views, in stark contrast to the greater uniformity of less modern cultures. Because of this, Tokcir has to accomodate enormous diversity at the same time as it forms a stable bridge between very disparate groups within the hypothetical modern culture it serves. The principle of modernity leads to three basic design principles of the NGL project:

1) **Modularity (and flexibility):** In order to be as flexible as possible in terms of the commuities and strata of society Tokcir is capable of serving, the key to Tokcir is modular design. As much as possible, new material in the Tokcir language and especially linguistic conventions are in the form of "modules" which can be learned as per the speaker's needs and desires. In order to accomodate modularity and the flexibility it implies, Tokcir core grammar tries to be as flexible as possible, for example, mandating a fixed word order but also supplying optional case endings which can be used to form non-fixed-word-order sentences.

2) **Genericity:** Tokcir always tries to have a "generic option", unmarked forms, which have as broad a meaning as possible, narrowable from context or using other acepted morphemes and forms of the language. An example of this principle in action is the generic number (a "numberlessness" that can imply either whatever number is clear from context or else a state of numberlessness or number-irrelecance) we see in nouns and verbs, and the generic tense (similar concept relating to verb tense) we see in verbs. Genericity ensures that there is always a common base to enable disparate communities to communicate despite the flexibility permitted by the principle of modularity

3) **Neutrality:** While Tokcir *does* give the ability to be as ideologically biased as one likes in ones speech, in general Tokcir does not attempt to enable or privilege one ideology over another in its basic form, or attempts to set everyone on an even footing, the idea being to as

much as possible give very diverse viewpoints the ability to talk satisfactorily amongst themselves *and* with those of very different viewpoint by taking advantage of an inherent even-handedness we attempt to instill into the structure of the language itself. While certain modern consensus, such as the basic equality of the genders and races, are written in to the detriment of extremist viewpoints, in general we are attempting to create an efficient instrument of communication over a tool of social engineering.

In the early phases of the project, a certain framework for the appearance and character of the language was set down, and we have been building on that ever since. The remainder of these documents will focus on explaining that framework so that new contributors to the language can get up to speed. The remainder of this particular document shall be taken up with the practises of the projects' day-to-day work.

- As has been stated, all group work is carried out on the group's official electronic forum.
- Formerly, the Group Leader, Julian Morrison, essentially ruled on questions pertaining to the spirit of the project, or when not available, this was a concensus operation; now that Julian has returned to us and foresworn a proprietary interest in the further development of the language, such questions are a matter of consensus, although Julian's input in that area is still very much valued and respected. The Group Moderator rules on matters of group harmony (this literally moderatorial role has never come up, but the long and short of it is that this is simply the ordinary role of a "moderator" in an unmoderated public list, essentially, to maintain standards of peace, decorum, and civility if necessary). The Moderator has also historically maintained a unifying and stabilising role by making a personal point of commenting on *all* new proposals, modules, and compositions. The Moderator does not have a right of veto any greater than any other group member, but *does* have a right of comment, and it is ordinarily considered good manners to wait for the moderator to have a chance to comment before considering anything new to be accepted to the language. The previous Moderator was Jack Durst, but Jack's whereabouts and means of contact are currently unknon, and we are proceeding without him. The current List Owner is Stephen DeGrace, but as of 2002/04/04 that role is *de facto* and not confirmed. One group member keeps an official database of the current state of the official vocabulary, currently Stephen DeGrace is handling this job.
- The NGL Project uses government by consensus. We have found it necessary in the past to have some form of organisation as to what is and isn't officially a part of Tokcir, and yet too cumbersome a bureaucratic structure would have us consumed with political as opposed to linguistic debate and slow the development of the language intolerably. The solution which evolved on its own was for us to seek consensus and compromise on all matters. This is set down for the General Vocabulary Building rules on the NGL Repository web site, but all language building in the project *de facto* works by roughly the same principle. Some proposal is made. In order for it to have a chance to become part of Tokcir, it must be seconded by one other group member to show that it has support. Debate takes place in which we attempt to reach a consensus and compromise on the proposal. If, after debate, there are no outstanding objections, the new item is

considered accepted, and it takes the acceptance of another proposal the change or remove it. If consensus cannot be reached, after a suitable period of time where the proposal may have provisional life, wherein its author can attempt to demonstrate its efficacy, the proposal is put to a vote and either ratified or turned down.

- In general, while we readily accommodate disagreement, sometimes quite vigorous, we seek to ultimately operate in an environment which is mature, adult, and cooperative as opposed to adversarial, as only under such a regime can we have any hope of advancement.