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DOCTORATE IN PHILOLOGY**

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

**FROM FICTION TO FUNCTION. THE USE AND INFLUENCE OF DOTHRAKI AND  
HIGH VALYRIAN CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGES IN THE GAME OF THRONES  
FANDOM**

**-SUMMARY-**

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## SUMMARY

In recent times, constructed languages, also known as “conlangs”<sup>1</sup>, have transcended their origins in fiction to capture the interest not only of dedicated fans but also of language enthusiasts worldwide. Within the expansive narrative of the HBO television series “Game of Thrones”, the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages have emerged as prominent examples of the fascination and influence exerted by constructed languages. This research delves into the intriguing domain of these linguistic creations, examining their evolution, usage, and the noteworthy phenomenon of their adoption beyond the fictional realm by a subgroup of the “Game of Thrones” fandom known as “The Languages of a Song of Ice and Fire Discord”. Members of this cyber community actively participate in the learning and teaching of Dothraki and High Valyrian on their servers. The objective of our research is to closely examine the activities centered on constructed languages within this online group. We aim to collect data from the digital sphere through methods such as capturing print-screens. However, we are equally interested in exploring any involvement related to Dothraki and High Valyrian by other members of the fandom. This could include activities like content creation on dedicated “Game of Thrones” forums, blogs, or applications, interactions with David Peterson, the linguist and conlanger behind the construction of Dothraki and High Valyrian for the HBO series, or various discussions concerning these languages across social media platforms like Facebook. It is noteworthy that members of this online community actively engage in both learning and teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian within their respective server spaces.

Constructed languages, or conlangs, refer to languages intentionally devised for specific purposes, whether for artistic expression, fictional universes, or even as experimental linguistic projects. These languages are meticulously crafted, constructed from the ground up, often with their own grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics. They provide a means of communication within the context of a fictional world, lending authenticity and depth to the narrative and the cultures portrayed. In the interest of embracing this terminology and promoting its widespread acceptance, given its inclusion in the online Cambridge Dictionary, we shall maintain its consistent usage throughout the entirety of our research manuscript. The concept of constructed languages is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, various individuals and communities have created artificial

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<sup>1</sup> **Conlang** – an artificial language, for example one invented for a film, TV series or book (e.g., *He is a conlang expert, who invented Dothraki for “Game of Thrones”*).  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conlang>, accessed on 12.07.2023

languages, ranging from philosophical languages like John Wilkins' Real Character and Gottfried Leibniz's *Characteristica Universalis* to auxiliary languages like Esperanto and Interlingua. However, it is in recent times that the prominence and popularity of constructed languages have reached new heights. In the realm of popular culture, constructed languages have found a niche, captivating audiences and spurring dedicated fan communities. From the linguistically complex Elvish languages in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth to the alien tongues in science fiction series, such as Klingon from the "Star Trek" universe, these constructed languages have become integral to the immersive experiences enjoyed by fans. Moreover, the advent of the internet and digital platforms has facilitated the dissemination and active usage of constructed languages beyond their original fictional contexts. It is within this landscape that Dothraki and High Valyrian have emerged as noteworthy examples. Developed by linguist David J. Peterson for the HBO "Game of Thrones" fantasy television series, these languages have garnered substantial attention and engagement from fans worldwide. The intricate world-building of George R.R. Martin's novels, combined with Peterson's linguistic expertise, has resulted in the creation of linguistically rich and culturally resonant languages that extend far beyond the pages and screens they were initially crafted for. In our interview, Peterson states that, 'the languages are expansions of ideas created by George R.R. Martin. While Martin didn't create full languages, he created language-like elements utilized in his Song of Ice and Fire book series. For Dothraki this comprised 56 names and words, and a handful of sentences. These elements demonstrated a number of grammatical features I was determined to incorporate into the language, as well as a consistent phonological structure. [...] Technically speaking, Dothraki and High Valyrian are a posteriori languages (languages created using previously existing material), but the material is so sparse, they are perhaps better analyzed as a priori languages' (see full Interview in the Annexes). This dissertation focuses on the unique phenomenon surrounding Dothraki and High Valyrian, shedding light on the development, usage, and real-world adoption of these constructed languages. Through an investigation into their linguistic frameworks, cultural influences, and the communities they have attracted, our goal is to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on constructed language. Furthermore, we seek to enhance our comprehension of the complex interplay between fiction, language, and culture. In doing so, we endeavor to offer insights into the real-world adoption and utilization of these languages by specific members within the "Game of Thrones" fandom, thus addressing our research inquiries.

## **The Practicality and Relevance of This Investigation – Background and Context**

This research on the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages holds significant importance and offers valuable insights into the realm of constructed languages and their impact on popular culture. By exploring these languages within the context of the “Game of Thrones” universe, this investigation brings forth new evidence and sheds light on existing literature, contributing to a deeper understanding of constructed languages and their evolving role in both fictional and real-world contexts. One key aspect that distinguishes this research is the incorporation of firsthand data obtained through a personal interview with David J. Peterson, the linguist responsible for developing Dothraki and High Valyrian (see Annexes, Interview). This interview provided valuable insights into the creative process, linguistic decisions, and cultural influences that shaped these languages. The incorporation of Peterson’s expert commentary enhances the authenticity and reliability of this investigation, offering distinctive viewpoints and addressing knowledge gaps that might have been inaccessible at the outset of the research. Furthermore, this investigation goes beyond existing literature by drawing upon a corpus of language data specifically collected and analyzed for this purpose. The corpus comprises dialogues, texts, and linguistic samples from the “Game of Thrones” TV series, allowing for an overview of the linguistic features, structures, and usage patterns of Dothraki and High Valyrian. This empirical approach adds a novel dimension to the research, providing concrete evidence and enhancing the credibility of the findings. By combining the insights gained from the interview with Peterson and the analysis of the collected corpus, this research sheds new light on the intricate nuances of Dothraki and High Valyrian. It delves into the grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and cultural implications of these languages, offering a better understanding thereof that extends beyond mere speculation or theoretical analysis. Moreover, this investigation addresses the broader implications of the real-world adoption and usage of Dothraki and High Valyrian. By examining the emergence of active language communities and the linguistic creativity demonstrated by learners, this research uncovers the social dynamics and transformative potential of constructed languages in contemporary society. It explores the motivations and experiences of individuals who actively engage with these languages, highlighting their impact on identity, community formation, and cultural expression. Overall, this investigation serves as a valuable contribution to the existing literature on constructed languages and their impact on popular culture. By bringing together new

evidence from primary sources, including the insightful interview with David J. Peterson, and analyzing a dedicated corpus of linguistic data, this research expands our understanding of Dothraki and High Valyrian, as well as the broader phenomenon of constructed languages. It sheds light on the complex interplay between fiction and reality, language and culture, and paves the way for further exploration in this fascinating field.

### **Research Problem and Objectives**

The research problem at the heart of this investigation centers on the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages within the “Game of Thrones” fictional universe, which emerged as a relatively new and intriguing topic at the outset of our research, in 2017. The primary concern was to understand the significance and potential impact of constructed languages, going beyond the initial assumption that they were mere gibberish or superficial linguistic creations. The objectives of this research were twofold. Firstly, it aimed to delve into the linguistic and cultural depth of Dothraki and High Valyrian, exploring their construction, grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and the cultural inspirations behind them. By uncovering the intentional design choices made by linguist David J. Peterson, the objective was to demonstrate that these constructed languages were not arbitrary collections of sounds, but rather intricately developed linguistic systems rooted in cultural context. Secondly, this investigation sought to explore the real-world adoption and usage of Dothraki and High Valyrian beyond the fictional context of the “Game of Thrones” TV show. At the outset, the popularity and longevity of these languages after the conclusion of the series were uncertain. Hence, the aim was to meticulously monitor and scrutinize the evolution and application of these languages in the post-series era, closely investigating their prevalence within digital communities, language acquisition platforms, social media networks, and pertinent domains. This objective involved investigating the motivations of individuals who actively learn, speak and teach these languages, the linguistic creativity demonstrated by learners, and the impact of constructed languages on identity formation, community building, and cultural expression in the real world. Throughout the course of the research, a rich body of evidence was gathered, including linguistic data from the “Game of Thrones” series, insights from the interview with David J. Peterson, and observations of language communities and online interactions. This extensive data collection enabled a thorough analysis of the research problem and the fulfillment of the stated objectives. Ultimately, this research serves to dispel misconceptions about constructed or fictional languages,

demonstrating that they are not mere gibberish, but rather carefully crafted linguistic systems with cultural significance. By examining the post-Game of Thrones development and usage of Dothraki and High Valyrian, this investigation contributes to the understanding of constructed languages' enduring impact beyond their original fictional context. It sheds light on the motivations and experiences of learners, the transformative potential of constructed languages, and the intricate interplay between fiction, culture, and language in contemporary society. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the cultural significance of constructed languages does not inherently correlate with the magnitude of their user base or the prevalence of proficient speakers, contrary to our earlier assumptions that were proven inaccurate.

### **Preliminary and Conclusive Hypotheses: from Speculations to Final Conclusions**

The hypotheses formulated in this research have been built upon the initial supposition that constructed languages, such as Dothraki and High Valyrian, are not mere gibberish but can function like natural languages, akin to Spanish, French, Dutch, German, etc. This preliminary hypothesis, formulated during the initial stages of the research, was based on early data collected from online platforms such as Facebook and Wattpad. These data provided indications of limited interactions and conversations taking place in Dothraki and High Valyrian among “Game of Thrones” fan communities. The hypothesis suggested the potential for these languages to evolve beyond casual usage, as fans gained a deeper understanding of their linguistic intricacies. Consequently, it seemed reasonable to assume that a substantial fan base corresponded to a significant number of active Dothraki and High Valyrian speakers. However, as highlighted by Peterson in our interview, our supposition proved to be flawed. We inadvertently fell into the assumption that the size of the “Game of Thrones” TV show fan base equated to the number of individuals fluent or aspiring to become fluent in Dothraki and/or High Valyrian. Through further investigation, however, we obtained evidence that completely invalidated this assumption. In the subsequent section, we will elaborate on our hypotheses with greater intricacy:

**Hypothesis 1:** Dothraki and High Valyrian possess the inherent capacity to evolve into fully functional and widely utilized languages within the community of “Game of Thrones” enthusiasts, attaining a level of renown akin to that of Esperanto or Klingon. This hypothesis posits that Dothraki and High Valyrian have transformed into fully fledged languages, actively and fluently used by a substantial number of “Game of Thrones” fan members. While initial

data from Facebook and Wattpad only provided glimpses of limited interactions, this hypothesis suggests that as the research progressed, a more extensive and robust usage of these languages would be discovered. It anticipates that fan communities have embraced Dothraki and High Valyrian as living languages, capable of conveying complex thoughts and engaging in meaningful conversations, akin to natural languages. This inclination is notably reinforced by the valuable resources of Peterson's "The Art of Language Invention" (Peterson, 2015) and "Living Language – Dothraki" (Peterson, 2014), two significant language learning tools that provide substantial aid in comprehending and acquiring these languages. Regrettably, this singular hypothesis was formulated during the preliminary stages of our research, driven by the belief that the two constructed languages would achieve a degree of popularity proportional to the overwhelming success of the "Game of Thrones" TV show. However, with the passage of time and extensive research, we must now humbly acknowledge that this was an unfounded assumption in hindsight.

**Hypothesis 2:** The dynamics of popularity and usage surrounding Dothraki and High Valyrian may have undergone a transition across various online platforms over time (e.g., transitioning from Facebook to Discord, among others). Consequently, the fluctuating nature of these shifts hindered our ability to track the language activity of fans on the aforementioned online platforms, leading to a temporary lapse in data retrieval. Significantly, it is crucial to avoid misinterpreting this circumstance as evidence of fans' waning interest in language acquisition or their discontinuation of language-related interactions on the social media platforms we had been monitoring. This hypothesis recognizes the dynamic nature of online communities and proposes that the popularity and usage of Dothraki and High Valyrian within the "Game of Thrones" fandom may have migrated to alternative platforms beyond the initial ones scrutinized. The observation that some of the Facebook pages followed during the research period stopped generating content suggests a possible migration of fan engagement to different online spaces. Subsequently, we discovered, albeit belatedly in the course of our research, that such a scenario unfolded with regards to both of the languages, Dothraki and High Valyrian. Fans transitioned from Facebook to Discord, establishing a dedicated community of enthusiasts focused on the study and appreciation thereof. According to Peterson, 'the main forum for fans of the *Song and Ice and Fire* languages, as far as I know, is Discord. There is one main Discord called the *Languages of Ice and Fire Discord*, and it has 803 members at the moment (many



aren't super active). [...] They are far more interested in High Valyrian than Dothraki' (see full Interview in the Annexes). To conclude, this hypothesis suggests that by exploring a variety of platforms and online communities, a better understanding of the current usage and popularity of Dothraki and High Valyrian can be achieved.

**Hypothesis 3:** According to hypothesis 3, building upon the findings of the interview with David J. Peterson and the analysis of collected data, it is hypothesized that the enthusiasm for learning and advancing Dothraki and High Valyrian among "Game of Thrones" fans has experienced a gradual decline. This decline may indicate a shift in focus within the constructed language community, with language enthusiasts and creators potentially diverting their attention towards the development of their own languages rather than further engagement with Dothraki and High Valyrian. Furthermore, individuals may opt to immerse themselves in the exploration of other constructed languages, delve into the complexities of different conlangs, or discontinue their active involvement with constructed languages entirely. This hypothesis builds upon insights gained from the interview with David J. Peterson, as well as the analysis of collected data on Facebook, Wattpad, and "Game of Thrones" dedicated forums and blogs, indicating that the enthusiasm for learning and developing Dothraki and High Valyrian among fans of the "Game of Thrones" TV shows might have declined over time.

In light of our investigation and the interview conducted with language creator David Peterson, it is imperative to acknowledge the initial naivety and lack of substantial arguments supporting our first three hypotheses at the inception of our research. Initially, we held the belief that the immense popularity of the "Game of Thrones" TV show upon its release would be mirrored in a comparable level of enthusiasm and adoption of the constructed languages associated with it. The observation of language activity on particular Facebook pages, where users interacted using Dothraki and High Valyrian (e.g., isolated words or certain phrases, such as in Dothraki "M'athchomaroon" ("Hello!" – lit. "With respect!"); "Athchomar chomakaan!" ("Hello!" - to a non-Dothraki, singular) (lit. "Respect to one that is respectful!"); "Anha dothrak chek" – "I'm fine" (lit. "I ride well"); High Valyrian examples: "Aria kōz dāri ohīlvoso sēntas" (English translation: "Arya killed the evil king with a dagger"); "Ñurha sētera izugiliks" (English translation: "My spells will be feared"); "Vēzos hūrā jēdār ilzi" (English translation: "The sun and moon are in the sky") further reinforced our assumption that we were witnessing the early stages of language acquisition, prompting us to collect data accordingly. However, over the course of

several years, we gradually recognized a decline in user activity and an absence of updates on certain Facebook pages for extended periods, spanning, say, two to four years. In hindsight, it is evident that our initial hypotheses were grounded in naivety and perhaps undue optimism. With the benefit of current research progress, we concur with Peterson's perspective that, 'they're just languages, after all. They're not trying to do anything deliberately complicated or non-human like Lojban or Ithkuil or UNLWS. This really isn't a linguistic question: It's a question of popularity. It's impossible to say what will or won't be popular. The simplest evidence of that is how many people believe that Dothraki and Valyrian are popularly-used constructed languages and how wrong they are' (see full Interview in the Annexes). Therefore, at this stage of our research, we acknowledge the inadequacy of our initial hypotheses and the need for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics surrounding the popularity and usage of Dothraki and High Valyrian. Through the integration of insights derived from primary sources, linguistic analysis, and scrutiny of diverse online communities, our endeavor is to formulate a more intricate and well-informed hypothesis. This hypothesis aims to shed light on the genuine dynamics of fan involvement, language learning and teaching constructed languages. It implies that while Dothraki and High Valyrian had some impact on the constructed language landscape, their fan interest may have waned, leading to a shorter lifespan of active engagement. The viability of this final hypothesis might have seemed credible had we concluded our research inquiry at that juncture. However, after seven years of research, arriving at the previously mentioned conclusion — that interest and enthusiasm among "Game of Thrones" fandom members for Dothraki and High Valyrian had waned to the point of near oblivion — proved unsatisfactory for our research objectives. It is important to acknowledge that prolonged research endeavors do not always yield positive or conclusive outcomes. Occasionally, investigations lead to results that are less than desirable, and in such instances, acceptance, discussion, and possibly leaving room for future exploration become necessary.

Nevertheless, our commitment to this investigation persisted and, the passage of time in this case, yielded beneficial insights. In the latter phase of our inquiry, we uncovered a notable shift: a significant portion of "Game of Thrones" fandom members had transitioned from Facebook to Discord, finding the latter platform more conducive and suitable for language learning activities. Thus, they opted to continue their language learning and teaching pursuits on that platform. Our understanding of the research question expanded significantly when we engaged with another key

figure in our investigation, Reuben Hayslett, also known as Khal Tihi in the Dothraki community. As an active participant in “The Languages of Ice and Fire Discord” cyber community and a proficient Dothraki speaker, Hayslett provided valuable insights into the language activities and interests of fans. Through his contribution, we gained access to an entirely different hub dedicated to constructed language activity, offering a fresh perspective on our research inquiry. At this stage, we developed a fourth hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4:** the enthusiasm among the “Game of Thrones” fandom members for learning and teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian had not entirely dissipated. Instead, they had shifted to a different online platform that facilitated enhanced language-learning activities, fostered community building, and encouraged the cultivation of group identity. With these new findings, our research outcomes underwent significant revision.

### **Preliminary Remarks on Methodology**

In this section, we provide an overview of the methodology employed in our research, outlining the key considerations and approaches that underpin the investigation of the Dothraki and High Valyrian constructed languages. Additionally, our investigation transcends the boundaries of the screen, delving into the vibrant landscape of the “Game of Thrones” digital fandom, and the linguistic engagements displayed by fans across various online platforms. These virtual hubs, including Facebook and Discord, provide fertile ground for our analysis to thrive and uncover satisfactory outcomes.

### **Research Approach**

Our research adopts both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, characterizing it as an observational and descriptive investigation. Furthermore, the observational method stands as one of our most relevant means to collect data, and subsequently examine and eventually validate our hypotheses, given that our research will exclusively unfold in the digital environment. Furthermore, this approach enables longitudinal analysis, allowing for the observation of consistent language behavioral patterns over extended periods, encompassing months or even years, which aligns closely with the scope of our study. At the outset, given the multi-methodological framework of our research, we plan to utilize both covert and overt observational techniques. The covert method involves accessing diverse online groups within the “Game of

Thrones” fandom, observing their language-related engagements, capturing data through print-screen methods, analyzing our observations, and validating our hypotheses accordingly.

The second observational method we will employ is the overt participation approach, characterized by its transparent nature, where actions are openly conducted without concealment. In this phase, we will engage with two key individuals: David J. Peterson, the linguist and conlanger recognized for creating the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages for the HBO TV series “Game of Thrones”, and Reuben Hayslett, a notably active and involved member of the fandom. Moreover, our scholarly investigation will involve a survey aimed at members of the fandom, which will be distributed by Hayslett, who oversees the Discord servers. Additionally, we will employ an academic research survey, which serves as a method and corresponding investigative tool comprising a series of written questions, arranged in a logical and psychologically organized manner. This research strategy emphasizes transparency, ensuring that fandom members are thoroughly informed about the researcher’s identity, the study’s nature, and the rationale for their involvement in the survey.

### **Data Collection**

The primary wellspring of data for this research study emanates from a diverse array of sources, encompassing the “Game of Thrones” TV series itself. Within the series, captivating monologues and dialogues in Dothraki and High Valyrian lay the foundation for our analysis. Complementing this, two personal interviews, conducted with the esteemed language creator, David J. Peterson, and one of the “Game of Thrones” fandom’s subgroup members, Reuben Hayslett (known as Khal Tihi, in the “Song of Ice and Fire Languages” online community), furnish us with profound insights into the language construction process, development, the fans’ engagement with these languages, and their experiences in learning and teaching Dothraki and/or High Valyrian. Moreover, our research endeavors extend to the digital realm, drawing upon an array of supplementary materials collected from Facebook, Wattpad, and “Game of Thrones”-dedicated forums and blogs, including fan-generated content, posts, comments, and discussions. The vibrant online milieu continues to manifest through meticulously gathered print-screens of diverse online content shared by the “Game of Thrones” fans. Additionally, Discord introduces a new dimension to our dataset, offering fresh data that will significantly support our fourth hypothesis.

## **Data Analysis**

Due to the multifaceted nature of our investigation, the analysis of the gathered data integrates a variety of methodologies. This analysis aims to identify patterns, trends, and subtleties present within the corpus, illuminating the diverse ways in which constructed languages, particularly Dothraki and High Valyrian, are manifested within the digital sphere. Through a methodical and rigorous examination, we seek to interpret the underlying motivations, preferences, and behaviors of members within the “Game of Thrones” fandom as they interact with these languages across various online platforms. By employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative analytical methods, we scrutinize the data to extract insights regarding the frequency, context, and socio-cultural implications of language usage, both online and offline. Moreover, our analysis seeks to identify emerging themes that underscore the dynamic interplay between fictional narratives, fan participation, and linguistic behaviors in influencing digital conversations. As we embark on this analytical journey, we remain steadfast in our dedication to unraveling the complexities of language dynamics within the “Game of Thrones” fandom, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on online sociolinguistics and digital culture. Utilizing the multi-methodological approach described above, we are poised to examine a longitudinal dataset covering approximately six and a half years, from September 2017 to March 2024.

## **Ethical Considerations**

In embarking on any research endeavor, ethical considerations must be given careful consideration. Our research methodology prioritizes ethical standards, as our interviewees will be provided with an “Interview Consent Form”. This form allows individuals to make an informed decision about their participation after reviewing the provided information. Additionally, before participants engage with the questions in the Academic Research Survey, they will encounter a preamble section containing detailed information about the researcher’s identity, the survey’s significance, its objectives, and how participants’ responses will be utilized. Furthermore, the survey questions will be systematically organized, commencing with basic inquiries regarding participants’ demographics, such as gender, age, location, and profession, followed by more detailed queries related to our research focus. Each question will offer multiple-choice options,

with participants always having the option to select “Prefer not to say”. Moreover, the survey ensures complete anonymity to encourage participants to respond candidly. The range of answer options is extensive to ensure that participants do not feel excluded in any way. For example, in the gender category, we will include the “non-binary” option to acknowledge the diverse identities within our participant pool. In conclusion, considering all the aforementioned aspects pertaining to the ethical conduct of our investigation, we confidently affirm that it adheres to ethical standards from all perspectives.

### **Limitations**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations and potential biases associated with the chosen methodology. One significant limitation lies in the potential challenge of accessing our target demographics, especially if they operate within closed networks. Moreover, employing the covert observational method means the researcher relinquishes control over external variables, such as the extent of engagement in discussions related to constructed languages and the frequency of interactions among members of the fandom. This presents constraints, particularly when dealing with small sample sizes. Essentially, the researcher adopts the role of an observer within the group under scrutiny, discreetly monitoring and recording social interactions without detection.

From a sociological standpoint, overt observations are susceptible to a significant challenge known as the “Hawthorne Effect”. This phenomenon has the potential to influence the outcomes of research endeavors by impacting participants’ behavior once they become aware of being studied. Essentially, the “Hawthorne Effect” describes how individuals alter their behavior when they know they are being observed, a phenomenon known as reactivity (see Gillespie, 1991). While it is unlikely that our research will encounter this challenge, given that our participant observation method primarily takes place online and does not directly influence other participants, there remains a risk. The overt method presents fewer ethical challenges and offers practicality and the opportunity to gauge people’s opinions and preferences. However, it also carries the risk of the “Hawthorne Effect” and may encounter difficulties in contacting and securing interviews with desired participants who may decline participation even if approached.

Regarding the academic research survey, which falls under the overt participant observation research methodology, there is a possibility that only a limited number of individuals may choose to participate. Moreover, there is a risk of encountering the “Hawthorne Effect” here,

too, wherein respondents' answers may not authentically represent their true behavior or opinions. Furthermore, there is a potential for the academic research survey posted on Discord to be disregarded entirely.

### **Structure of the Paper**

This dissertation is structured into six main chapters, each comprising various subchapters. As we approach the end of the paper, we present a summary of our "General Conclusions", which encompasses the primary research findings, delineates scholarly contributions, suggests avenues for future research, addresses limitations, and offers concluding remarks. Furthermore, an "Annexes" section is incorporated, containing a personal interview with linguist and conlanger David J. Peterson, another interview conducted with a member of the "Game of Thrones" fandom subgroup, known as "The Song of Ice and Fire Languages Discord", Reuben Hayslett (recognized by his Dothraki alias, Khal Tihi), an "Academic Research Survey" administered on Discord, our corpus containing print-screens from Facebook and Discord, and a concise "Glossary" featuring Dothraki and High Valyrian terminology. The subsequent sections offer a brief outline of the organizational structure and content within each chapter.

### **Chapter I – Introduction**

This chapter introduces the practicality and relevance of the investigation, presenting the research problem, objectives, preliminary and conclusive hypotheses, preliminary remarks on methodology, limitations of the study, and a summary. Its aim is to acquaint the readers with our research focus, introduce the term "conlang" for the first time and elucidate its relevance to our investigation. Furthermore, it outlines the scope of our dissertation, which centers on the distinctive features of Dothraki and High Valyrian constructed languages. We aim to delve into their development, usage, and real-world application by examining their linguistic structures, cultural influences, and the communities they have engendered. Our objective is to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge on constructed languages. Additionally, we aim to enhance our understanding of the intricate relationship between fiction, language, and culture. Through this exploration, we seek to provide insights into the adoption and utilization of these languages by specific segments of the "Game of Thrones" fandom, thereby addressing our research questions.

Lastly, it provides an overview of the entire dissertation by outlining each chapter and offering a concise summary of its contents.

## **Chapter II – Literature Review**

This chapter commences with an exploration of the historical background of constructed languages. It then transitions into a brief section where we differentiate between artificial languages and constructed languages, along with a concise discussion on the taxonomy of artificial languages. The chapter examines the purpose and functions of constructed languages, alongside their appeal and associated challenges. Additionally, it provides a succinct overview of the widely recognized Esperanto language before delving into examples of constructed languages within literary contexts. Following this, the chapter touches upon the concept of “suspension of disbelief”, a pertinent theoretical framework in the realm of fiction. Furthermore, it outlines significant instances of constructed languages in cinematic contexts, including notable examples such as Na’vi from “Avatar”, Klingon from “Star Trek”, and Dothraki and High Valyrian from “Game of Thrones”. This discussion briefly touches upon their linguistic characteristics, encompassing lexicon, grammar, and pronunciation, particularly in the case of Dothraki and High Valyrian. Furthermore, this section explores the construction process and evolution of these two constructed languages, drawing upon insights from our personal interviews with David J. Peterson and Reuben Haylsett. Within these interviews, they provide their perspectives on various aspects including the popularity of Dothraki and High Valyrian, fan engagement with these languages, fan-generated creativity contributing to their ongoing development, and the impact of fandom involvement on the evolution and refinement of these conlangs. Due to the meticulous construction of Dothraki and High Valyrian for the “Game of Thrones” television series, which includes extensive speeches in these languages, we found it essential to allocate a separate sub-section within this chapter for the discourse analysis of Daenerys Targaryen’s speeches in both Dothraki and High Valyrian. This decision was made considering her fluency and frequent use of these languages throughout the series. Therefore, this section focuses on a case study that examines the multilingual discourse and diplomatic strategies employed by Daenerys Targaryen, a central character in the “Game of Thrones” television series, focusing on her use of the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study aims to uncover the linguistic influence exerted by Daenerys in her quest for power and influence within the fictional realm of Westeros. By analyzing her multilingual abilities, this sub-chapter investigates how Daenerys navigates linguistic and



cultural barriers to form alliances, establish connections, and assert authority. Through an exploration of the linguistic aspects of her diplomatic efforts, this sub-chapter highlights language's role as a potent tool for persuasion, negotiation, and cultural mediation in complex sociolinguistic contexts. The study's findings significantly contribute to our understanding of multilingual diplomacy and its portrayal in popular culture, emphasizing language's pivotal role in shaping political discourse and interpersonal relationships. We conclude this chapter by providing an overview of the theoretical framework guiding our hypotheses and perspectives on the use of constructed languages in fictional and real-world contexts. This section outlines the theories, concepts, and methodologies employed throughout our investigation and discusses their relevance to our research objectives. This sub-chapter presents a literature review detailing the assumptions that inform our perspectives on the use of constructed languages in both fictional and real-world settings, utilizing various theoretical frameworks. Our research aims to delineate the distinct differences between the use of constructed languages in fiction, particularly fictional worlds, and their use in reality, drawing on theories proposed by prominent proponents of fictional, possible, and plural worlds such as Frege, Russell, Noolan, Plantinga, Currie, or Lewis. The first part of our study explores different perspectives on the application of the possible worlds framework, arguing against its relevance to our research topic based on scientific rationale. In the second part of our investigation, we delve into the theories developed by Currie and Lewis concerning the concept of truth in fiction and plural worlds. Following this, the third part prioritizes Lewis's counterpart theory over Currie's transworld identity theory, seeking to align fundamental aspects with our research questions. Key concepts such as "world-boundness of individuals", "trans-world individuals", "counterpartness by acquaintance", and "transworld identification" are elucidated with examples.

### **Chapter III – Methodology**

This chapter delineates the research methodologies utilized in our study, furnishing thorough explanations along with pertinent illustrations and the justification for their adoption. Given that our data gathering predominantly took place in the digital milieu, encompassing online social platforms, such as Facebook and Discord, a mobile application called Wattpad, and forums centered on "Game of Thrones", where fandom members engage in varied discussions, interactions, and share user-generated content, including texts, narratives, and artwork, this chapter

describes the research design, including both qualitative and quantitative aspects, categorizing it as an observational and descriptive inquiry.

#### **Chapter IV – Data Analysis and Findings**

This chapter conducts a thorough examination of the extensive dataset acquired through the methodological strategies outlined in the preceding section. It serves as the platform where raw data transforms into valuable insights, allowing us to explore the intricate dynamics of language utilization within the “Game of Thrones” fandom. The analysis endeavors to identify patterns, trends, and subtleties ingrained within the corpus, elucidating the diverse ways in which constructed languages, particularly Dothraki and High Valyrian, manifest in the digital sphere. Through a meticulous and systematic review, this segment of the paper aims to decode the underlying motivations, preferences, and behaviors of “Game of Thrones” fandom members as they interact with these languages across various online platforms. Employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative analytical methods, we thoroughly scrutinize the collected data to extract information regarding the frequency, context, and socio-cultural implications of language usage, both online and offline. Furthermore, this chapter serves as a conduit for identifying emerging themes, illustrating the interaction between fictional narratives, fan involvement, and linguistic practices in shaping digital discourse. As we undertake this analytical endeavor, we remain dedicated to unraveling the complexities of language dynamics within the “Game of Thrones” fandom, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on online sociolinguistics and digital culture, as discussed in this chapter. Utilizing the multi-methodological approach outlined in the preceding section, this chapter houses a longitudinal corpus obtained over approximately six and a half years: from September 2017 to March 2024.

#### **Chapter V – Discussion of Findings**

After presenting the gathered research data and outlining the resulting outcomes, this chapter aims to engage in a discussion of the findings. Beginning with an examination of findings on Facebook, followed by those on Wattpad and specific “Game of Thrones” forums and websites, the subsequent exploration focuses on results from Discord. Additionally, perspectives from David Peterson and Reuben Hayslett on language activity within the “Game of Thrones” online fandom are integrated. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the analysis identifies

patterns, trends, and subtleties within the corpus, particularly highlighting the presence of constructed languages like Dothraki and High Valyrian in the digital milieu. Various questions, including demographics, motivations for language learning, linguistic backgrounds, online engagement patterns, offline interactions, and future language acquisition intentions, are addressed. Subsequently, findings from each online platform investigated are discussed, and outcomes from the research survey are analyzed, supplemented by insights from interviews with Peterson and Hayslett (Khal Tihi) regarding fandom enthusiasm for learning Dothraki and/or High Valyrian.

## **Chapter VI – The “Game of Thrones” Digital Fandom**

This chapter examines the digital fandom surrounding “The Song of Ice and Fire” on Discord, focusing on the intricate interplay of identity, community, and media engagement within online fan communities. Drawing upon definitions and key concepts of fandom, as well as insights from scholars, this chapter investigates fan typologies and societal perceptions, highlighting diverse classification methods. Furthermore, it delves into the dichotomy of “Good Taste” versus “Bad Taste” in media content consumption, analyzing how individuals are perceived based on their media affiliations. With a specific focus on “The Song of Ice and Fire” digital fandom, the research explores identity construction and cyber identity within this online community. Through discussions on user motivations for learning and teaching Dothraki and High Valyrian on Discord, this segment of the chapter uncovers the multifaceted reasons driving fan engagement in language learning endeavors. Insights from personal interviews with linguist David Peterson and Reuben Hayslett (Khal Tihi), a prominent member of the fandom, provide depth to our understanding of fan motivations and experiences. Moreover, this chapter highlights the complexity of digital fandom spaces, revealing the diverse array of motivations shaping fan engagement within online social platforms.

**General Conclusions:** This section provides an overview of the primary research findings, significant insights, scholarly contributions, and potential avenues for future research. Additionally, it addresses limitations and offers concluding remarks, presenting reflective insights on the study.

**Bibliography:** The bibliography section furnishes a thorough compilation of the references and sources cited throughout the thesis.

**Annexes:** This segment comprises the interviews with David J. Peterson conducted on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2023, and Reuben Hayslett (Khal Tihi), conducted on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024. Additionally, it encompasses the academic research survey accessible on the Discord servers from March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, to March 27<sup>th</sup> 2024, the dataset collected from Facebook and Discord, consisting of print-screens, and a concise glossary containing Dothraki and High Valyrian terminology gathered from various sources.

