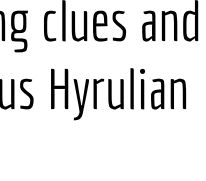




The Linguistics of Zelda

Examining the possible conlang clues and
linguistic history of the various Hyrulian
civilizations



About Me

- “Librarian gamer”
 - Lore wikis, D&D, game lore & language
 - Twitter: @BDipitous
- Conlanger since 2016
 - Tεkrɪd
 - Almost Home (<https://anchor.fm/banner-studios>)
 - Ju-Klɪb
(https://docs.google.com/drawings/d/1VnR4FZhnjIzKa6GrKLRyafF5vsxebRW_MjqVGefpVR/c/edit?usp=drivesdk)
 - 2nd conlang for another Banner project (b/c why not?)
- Zelda fan since about 2000
 - Happy 35th to the series!



Research Question

What is the linguistic history of the Hyrulian peoples, and how does it relate to the established Zelda timeline?

I am not the first to look into the linguistics of *Zelda* games, but to my knowledge each study on the subject focuses on one specific language or aspect of a game.

I'm hoping to provide a broader view of the linguistic data available in the series as a whole (and perhaps inspire similar studies for other franchises).

Two-Fold Focus

- Development of Hylian over time
 - Compare the designs, placement, & use of each variation of the Hylian alphabet, the “common tongue” in the game worlds
 - Collect and analyze each bit of linguistic data I could find in the *Zelda* series
- Languages “of the Wild”
 - Closely examine the utterances of the various species in *Breath of the Wild* to see what, if any, unique linguistic traits each race shows
 - Gerudo
 - Goron
 - Hylian
 - Korok
 - Rito
 - Sheikah (ancient and contemporary)
 - Zora

Disclaimers

- I recognize these languages & cultures are created for player enjoyment & immersion. Also, it is clear that any overarching “lore” or “world history” is simply made up as each game is released. The video game developers clearly had no grand “scheme” for the entire Zelda franchise.
- Regardless, for this project I’m operating under the assumption that the game world, as presented in official materials, is a true, living world with unique cultures that change over time.
- Although each game is carefully localized, and a lot could be learned by looking at the way different languages interpret things in the game world, I will be focusing on the English version of each game.

Outline

- Literature Review
- Zelda Timeline
- Hylian Scripts
 - Plus Hylian morphemes & existence of non-Hylian languages
- Languages “of the Wild”
- Sources/Further Research

Literature Review

- Numerous translation projects
 - One example:
https://www.reddit.com/r/conlangs/comments/1twqfc/translation_challenge_the_legend_of_zelda/
- Many studies on the various writing systems & languages
 - Fairly comprehensive article:
<https://ancworlds.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/the-writing-systems-of-the-legend-of-zelda/>
 - Older article on Hyrule's writing systems:
<https://www.glitterberri.com/hyrule-historia/writing-systems-of-hyrule/>
 - Breath of the Wild Gerudos:
<https://strategicdilemma.tumblr.com/post/158480149376/an-observed-and-obviously-incomplete-grammar-of>
- Fan-made conlangs
 - Istana-Hutan (Hylian):
<https://www.deviantart.com/istana-hutan/art/Introduction-to-the-Hylian-language-546553794>
 - Sarinilli (Hylian): <https://www.deviantart.com/sarinilli/gallery/39317194/the-hylian-language-project>
 - Kasuto.net (Hylian): <http://www.kasuto.net/language.php?main=language/language.html>
 - Nina-Kristine Johnson (Gerudo, inspired by *Ocarina of Time*): <http://va-eheniv.conlang.org/gerudolang1.html>

Zelda Timeline

*Attentive readers may note that the timeline shown here differs slightly from the one found in *Hyrule Historia*. The timeline can be interpreted in a number of ways, and may change depending on new discoveries that have come to light and on the players' imaginations. —*The Legend of Zelda Encyclopedia*, 2018

TRADITIONS & HISTORY

To better know the world of *The Legend of Zelda*, it is crucial to know about Hyrule's creation, its history, the connections between its eras, the chosen hero, Zelda and the goddess Hylia, the chosen hero, Zelda and the goddess Hylia, and the battle of good and evil that seems doomed to be repeated.

The diagram on the right shows the connected timelines of seventeen key stories in the *Zelda* series (the details of each story begin on page 217). Following the events of *Ocarina of Time*, the timeline was divided into three distinct paths. This section presents the history of Hyrule using this chronology as a foundation.



Ocarina of Time takes place over seven years and serves as a fork in the path of Hyrulean history.

THE HERO IS DEFEATED

The Seven Sages seal away Ganon, King of Evil.
Imprisoning War.

A Link to the Past (#3)
King of Evil Ganon revives, then is exterminated. The Triforce returns to Hyrule Castle.

Link's Awakening* (#4)

Oracle of Seasons & Oracle of Ages (#7)
The Triforce splits.

A Link Between Worlds (#16)
Lorule invades Hyrule. The Triforce returns to Hyrule's Sacred Realm.

Tri Force Heroes (#17)
The royal family uses the Triforce. Prosperity gives way to decline, with Hyrule reduced to a small, regional power.

The Legend of Zelda (#1)
Ganon returns but is defeated. The hidden Triforce of Wisdom is located.

The Adventure of Link (#2)
The ancient Princess Zelda returns. The hidden Triforce of Courage is found.

A Creation.
Skysword Sword (#15)
Emergence and sealing of the Demon King. Goddess Hylia reborn as Zelda. Master Sword is forged.

Banishment of the Twili. Sacred Realm is sealed. Kingdom of Hyrule founded.

The Minish Cap (#11)
Four Swords born from the Maiden of Peace legend. The one and sealing away of the demon Vaati.

Four Swords (#9)
Revival of Vaati, sealed once again by the Four Swords.
Hyrulean Civil War.

Ocarina of Time (#5)
Ganondorf, King of Thieves, enters Sacred Realm. The Triforce splits. Ganondorf transforms into Ganon, the Demon King.

CHILD TIMELINE: GANONDORF'S PLOT IS STOPPED

Majora's Mask (#6)
Twilight Princess (#12)
Ganondorf, King of Thieves, is banished to the Twilight Realm. The Twili invade the kingdom of Hyrule. Ganondorf returns but is defeated by Link.

Four Swords Adventures (#10)
Ganondorf is reincarnated as Demon King Ganon. The demon Vaati returns but is defeated. Link seals away Ganon using the Four Swords.

ADULT TIMELINE: GANON IS SEALED AWAY

The Wind Waker (#8)
Ganondorf is revived and defeated by Link. The Triforce is united. Hyrule is washed away. Its people set out for a new land.

Phantom Hourglass (#13)
Kingdom of Hyrule is founded in a new land.

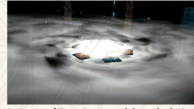
Spirit Tracks (#14)
Demon King Malladus is revived and then defeated. Lokomoo guardians return to the heavens.

BotW

READING THE TIMELINE



Titles set in places other than the kingdom of Hyrule (releases not included).
Titles set in the kingdom of Hyrule.
Events of the same era.
See the next page for a more in-depth explanation of the events of the timeline.



In *Ocarina of Time*, Ganon is sealed away by the Seven Sages, including Princess Zelda.



A new age dawns in Spirit Tracks.

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Hylian Scripts

- Nintendo Wiki
 - Ordered & labeled by game release
 - First Hylian Script from *A Link to the Past*, not *Skyward Sword*
 - I'll use this labeling system to avoid (too much) confusion
- Zeldapedia
 - Labels (mostly) more aware of in-game timeline
 - Ancient Hylian Alphabet from *Skyward Sword*
 - Zeldapedia seems to be merging (or is merged) with Zelda Wiki
- Zelda Wiki
 - Distinguish between various timeline eras
 - No labels given to different writing systems

First Hylian Script

- Mudoran
 - Book of Mudora used to translate the “ancient language of the Hylian” (*A Link to the Past*)
- Logographic Hylian
 - *Link's Awakening*



Second Hylian Script

- “Old” Hylian Syllabary
 - Used freely by (almost) all common inhabitants (*Ocarina of Time* & *Majora’s Mask*)



Third Hylian Script

- “New” Hylian Syllabary
 - Started in *Minish Cap*, replaced by 2nd script, returns as an “ancient language” in *Wind Waker*, *Four Swords Adventures*, *Phantom Hourglass*, & *Spirit Tracks*
 - Also some gravestones in *Twilight Princess*?



Fourth Hylian Script

- Hylian (Latin) Alphabet
 - Common & ancient writing *Twilight Princess*
 - Ancient writing in *Skyward Sword*?



Fifth Hylian Script

- Ancient Hylian Alphabet
 - Common & ancient in *Skyward Sword*



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
𐄀	𐄁	𐄂	𐄃	𐄄	𐄅	𐄆	𐄇
I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
𐄈	𐄉	𐄊	𐄋	𐄌	𐄍	𐄎	𐄏
Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
𐄐	𐄑	𐄒	𐄓	𐄔	𐄕	𐄖	𐄗
Y	Z						
𐄘	𐄙						

Sixth Hylian Script

- An Altered Ancient Hylian Alphabet?
 - Common writing system in *Link Between Worlds*, *Tri Force Heroes*, & *Breath of the Wild*



A	B	C	D	E	F	(D) G	H
△	∪	⊖	⊗	⊘	⊙	⊚	⊛
I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
⊜	⊝	⊞	⊟	⊠	⊡	⊢	⊣
Q	(F) R	S	(J) T	U	V	(E) W	X
⊤	⊥	⊦	⊧	⊨	⊩	⊪	⊫
Y	(O) Z						
⊬	⊭						

Hylian Scripts Timeline

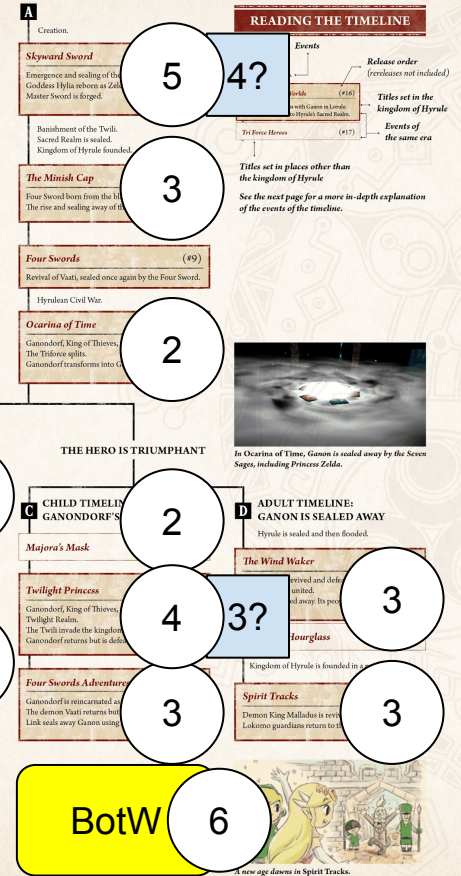
- Appearance of each script by "release number"
 - 1 = Mudoran/Logographic
 - 2 = "Old" Syllabary
 - 3 = "New" Syllabary
 - 4 = Latin Alphabet
 - 5 = Ancient Alphabet
 - 6 = Altered Ancient Alphabet

- Implications
 - Alphabet(s) soon gave way to syllabaries
 - Alphabet returns in most timelines
 - Writing systems switch between "ancient"/"magic" groups & "common" people

TRADITIONS & HISTORY

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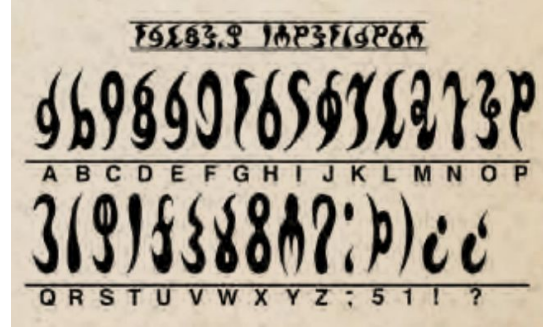
Morphemes Unique to Hyrule

- Baba: hostile flora (deku baba, mini baba, boko baba, etc.)
- Blin: goblin-like creatures (moblin, miniblin, big blin, bokoblin, etc.)
- Boko: related to forests (boko stick, boko baba, bokoblin, etc.)
- Deku: related to plants/forests (Deku Tree, deku shrub, deku baba, etc.)
 - Another form of “boko”?
- -fos: anthropomorphic (lizalfos, dinolfos, stalfos, wolfos, etc.)
 - Related to *voe* from the Gerudo in *Breath of the Wild*? (prob. coincidence)
- -mol-: snake or worm (Moldorm, Lanmola, Twinmold, Swamola, Molduga, etc.)
- -mos: living statue (beamos, armos, etc.)
- Stal-: living skeleton (stalfos, stallord, staltula/skulltula, stalhound, stalhorse, etc.)
- -tula: spider-like (skulltula/staltula, skullwalltula, etc.)

Source: Zelda Wiki, “Community: Glossary” page (<https://zelda.gamepedia.com/Community:Glossary>)

Other Non-Hylian Languages

- Gerudo
 - Alphabet appeared in *Ocarina of Time* & briefly in *Twilight Princess*
 - Alphabet (unchanged) & spoken terms in *Breath of the Wild*
- Minish
 - Ancient tongue of the tiny Minish people (*Minish Cap*)
 - Non-native must eat a “Jabber Nut” to learn and speak it
- Sky Writing
 - Sky Characters found and collected for the ancient Sky Book (*Twilight Princess*)
 - Ancient language of the Oocca, a sky-dwelling race
- Zoran
 - Can’t read Zoran Script unless you’re a Zora (*Majora’s Mask*)
 - Similar phenomenon with some Goron writing



Languages “of the Wild”

- A study of the various linguistic cultures in *Breath of the Wild* (which seems to have more linguistic clues than any other *Zelda* title)
- Opportunity for “field research” in a video game!
- Peoples in *Breath of the Wild*
 - Gerudo
 - Goron
 - Hylian
 - Rito
 - Sheikah
 - Zora

General Observations

- There seem to be certain linguistic properties that are distinctive in each culture, but these features seem more prominent for characters & places with more significance in the game's story.
 - Every humanoid civilization has at least one name that ends in "son"
- The civilizations with the most "distinctive" names tend to be furthest away from the contemporary (Ancient Sheikah monks) and humanoid (Koroks).
- Place names sometimes follow observed local conventions, but just as often do not. (not clear who named all the places)
- Blending of linguistic nomenclature is perhaps a result of open borders
 - Hyrule in *BotW*, more than any other time, is an untamed, open land with marked roads that connect settlement to each other, regardless of species.

Gerudo

- Female desert warriors
- Spoken dialogue
 - Sarqso: Thank you
 - Sav'otta: Good morning
 - Sav'aaq: Good day
 - Sav'orq: Goodbye
 - Sav'orr: Good night
 - Sav'saaba: Good evening
 - Vasaaq: Welcome
 - Vaba: Grandmother
 - Vai: Woman
 - Vehvi: Child/Baby/Daughter?
 - Voe: Man
 - Vure: Bird



Gerudo (cont.)



- Names

- Follows clues from conversation words (VCV & VCCV, esp. “VCa,” “VCo,” or “VCu”)
- Urbosa, Riju, Dorah, Pyra...but also Lashley, Pearle, Ripp, Teake

- Place names

- Toruma Dunes, Karusa Valley, Rutimala Hill, Cliffs of Ruvara

- Unique script on signage, monuments, & banners

- Consistent references to “Gerudo,” “Brilliant,” “Vigilant,” “Desert Flower,” & “Desert Sun”
- Throne Room:
 - “We stand vigilant, in the desert sun. We are brilliant over everyone.”
 - “Gerudo. A resilient desert flower, facing the sun’s gaze. Gerudo grows brilliant, while others fade.”
 - “Vigilant in the sun growing brilliant. Gerudo never outdone.”
- Elsewhere: “Gerudo there is no strife. Gerudo like water we flow with life.” “Gerudo an unblemished desert flo[wer.]”

Goron



- Casual rock people (all male?)
- Names
 - More hard consonants (d, g, k, n), VCV clusters, but also ground-related references
 - Daruk, Bladon, Tanko, Volcon...but also Dugby, Heehl, Pyle, Tray
- Place names
 - Isle of Rabac, Darunia Lake, Golow River, Goro Cove
- Unique words/phrases
 - “goro” (also “brother”), occasionally punctuating the end of statements (a bit like moogles from Final Fantasy?)
 - “goron shoulder,” some sort of chronic condition? (only mentioned by one)
 - “rock roast,” a favorite food of Gorons, rock & magma shaped like a huge piece of meat on the bone



Hylian

- Most common group
- Names
 - Link (knight), Zelda (princess), King Rhoam Bosphoramus Hyrule (unique royal names?)
 - Everything from Agus to Eryck to Jules to Nobo to Sophie to Zyle



Korok

- Mischievous, (usually) small forest creatures
- Names
 - 1-2 syllables, usually simple, “cute” names
 - Chio, Daz, Hestu, Maca, Pepp, Zooki...but also Walton
- Place Names
 - None?



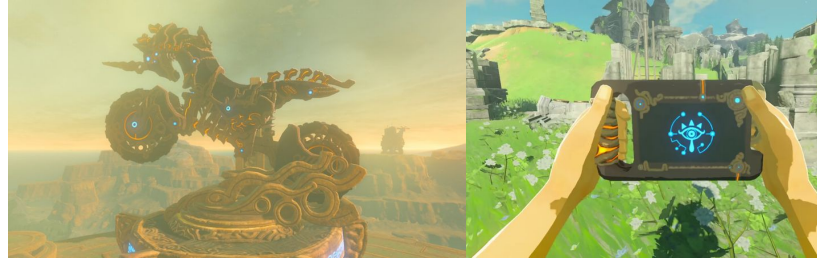
Rito



- Bird people
 - In other *Zelda* games (*Wind Waker*), the Rito evolved from the fish-like Zora, this connection is not made clear in *Breath of the Wild*, however.
- Names
 - More “Vli” or “Cli” endings
 - Revali, Cecili, Saki, Kaneli...but also Frita, Gesane, Kotts, Mimo
- Place names
 - Lake Totori, Dronoc’s Pass, Corvash Peak, Komali Bridge



Ancient Sheikah



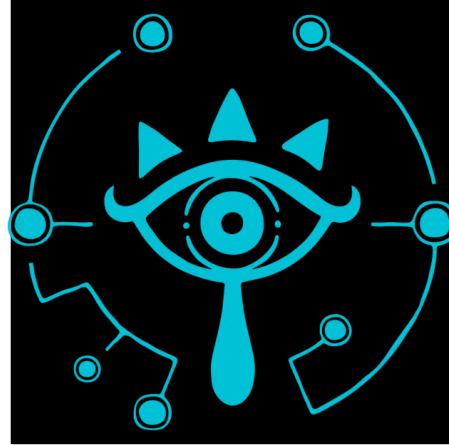
- Developed advanced technology, now seen as “ancient”
 - Ancient Sheikah script frequently decorates their works
- Names
 - 2-part names, apostrophes (glottal stops?), double vowels (“aa”), etc.
 - Far more consistent, but they were all the same class/type (monk)
 - Oman Au, Akh Va’quot, Kayra Mah, Maag No’rah, Tah Muhl, Voo Lota



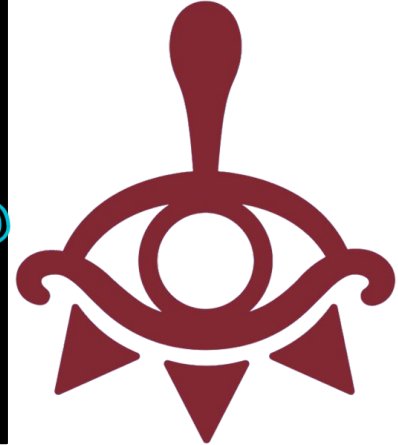
A	B	C	D	E	F
G	H	I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X
Y	Z	-	!	.	?
0	1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	

Sheikah

- Hylians with a unique heritage/tradition
 - Opposite: Yiga
- Names
 - No clear linguistic properties, similar to Hylian
 - Claree, Impa, Koko, Ollie, Purah, Robbie, Symin, Trissa
- Place names
 - Kakariko Village (name of general Hylian town in previous games)



Sheikah



Yiga



Zora



- Fish people
- Names
 - Very few unique traits, although some older names tend to use more VCV clusters with “o” & “u” (such as Muzu, Ruto, Ruta, and Tolo)
 - Bazz, Dorephan, Mipha, Jiahto, Ledo, Mei, Sidon, Seggin, Tumbo
- Place names
 - Ruto Precipice, Upland Zorana, Toto Lake, Mikau Lake, Polymus Mountain



Some General Takeaways

- It can be challenging to separate “in-game”/“in-world” logic with the logic of the game’s developers.
- The *Zelda* series in particular, though coming short of full, official conlangs, has been experimenting more with linguistic identities over the years.
- The data shown in this presentation alone is (and has been) enough to inspire fan-made conlangs to support the given linguistic & cultural cues.
- What other games or series could be explored in this way?
 - “Field research” (walking around, exploring, talking to NPCs, etc.)
 - “Historical research” (looking at in-game lore/history, official publications, etc.)

Image/Data Sources

- Personal “field research” (esp. in *BotW*), “historical research” (*Hyrule Historia*, *Zelda Encyclopedia*, *Art & Artifacts*)
- Zelda Wiki
 - <https://zelda.gamepedia.com/>
- Zeldapedia
 - <https://zelda-archive.fandom.com/wiki/Zeldapedia>
- Nintendo Wiki
 - [https://nintendo.fandom.com/wiki/Nintendo Wiki](https://nintendo.fandom.com/wiki/Nintendo_Wiki)

Opportunities for Further Research

- Look at this linguistic data in non-English languages (esp. Japanese)
- Closer studies on the development of each group of people (I focused on *BotW* here)
- *Breath of the Wild* sequel!!! (when it releases)
- What else have *Zelda* fans discovered?





Thank You!

Any questions?

