The Shókë language

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Part I

Introduction

2 Goals

Shókë is a thought experiment to explicitly reconstruct language evolution following Guy Deutscher's *The Unfolding of Language* (occasionally referred to herein as *TUoL*). Another closely followed resource is David J. Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention* (TAoLI).

I don't define any linguistic terminology in this document; TAoLI or any introductory linguistic textbook will suffice as background.

The Old Shókë language is minimal, with a small paleolithic lexicon of nouns, verbs, and pointing words – onomatopoeic when possible. Syntax is unsophisticated isolating SOV. The Middle Shókë and New Shókë languages are artificial milestone-markings along the gradual path of change of the language over time, from (mild) agglutination to (mild) fusion.

The lexicon shown in this document is minimal – no attempt is made to make even a vocabulary which would get a person through even the most routine of days. In reality the language would have a bigger lexicon; one can think of this document as presenting a sample of it for discussion.

While I want to explore agglutination and fusion along with the formation of more complex grammar over time, in a strongly non-English/non-head-initial and ergative/absolutive context, I want to (perhaps unrealistically so) avoid "complex" grammar, e.g. what distinguishes Russian or Turkish from Bahasa Indonesia. There will be, for example, TMA markers for verbs but at no point do I intend to introduce words ten syllables long, or verb systems fully inflected for number, person, gender, tense, and so on.

While this is primarily a linguistic experiment – more *conling* than *artlang*, as it were – I choose to make things pleasant to my ear (although as of January 2023 Old Shókë comes off as a bit on the harsh side). Similarly, I'll actively avoid gender affixes, primarily because I simply choose to do so. Likewise, I dislike complex vowel systems, as in English and French. A great many natural languages get along quite fine with *aeiou* or *aiu* – I hope to see where simulated evolution of this constructed language goes with its *aeæiou* vowels.

3 Plan

- The sound system is a little different than English; it could be moreso. While I want the syntax to be very different from English (strongly head-final, with ergative-absolutive split), I don't want the sound system to be *maximally* different from English – but I could go a little farther.
- Strict CVC, with a few CV exceptions, feels artificially simplistic
- Flesh out Old Shókë lexicon
- Iterate on Old Shókë example sentences, with low to medium syntactic complexity
- Then develop Middle Shókë
- Then develop New Shókë
- Maybe develop one or more cousin languages which split off from Shókë at some point in time

Part II

Old Shókë

4 Phonology of Old Shókë

Consonants:

	Labial	Dental	Palato-alveolar	Velar
Oral Stop		*t, d*		*k, g*
Fricative		*th, dh*	*sh, zh*	*x*
Affricate			*ch, j*	
Nasal Stop	*m, n*			

The *t* and *d* are purely dental, as in Spanish.

I personally dislike *f* and *v*: their omission is plausible. The omission of *p* and *b* is implausible.

Vowels and syllabic liquids:

	Front	Central	Back
Close	*i*		*u*
Mid	*e*		*o*
	æ		
Open	*a*		

Alveolar glide	Alveolar lateral
r	*l*

It is to be noted that in Old Shókë, the liquids *r* and *l* do not play a consonantal role. They function exclusively as nuclei in onset-nucleus-coda structures (below). For example, to pronounce *mrm*, simply utter the English word *murmur* (with rhotic *r*) but leave off the final *ur*.

To do: A few, but not many, of these sounds are non-English. A bit more could be done in this direction.

4.1 Phonotactics

Syllables are primarily CVC, and secondarily CV or CVCVC.

To do: formulate other restrictions as they arise.

4.2 Stress

Stress in polysyllabic words is always on the penultimate syllable. In the title of this document we write *Shókë* for maximum clarity to the first-time reader; for internals of this document we will simply write *shoke*.

Stress across words in a sentence, I have not decided yet. But since Shókë is head-final I expect stress to land naturally on the heads.

5 Transcription of Old Shókë

This document uses the Roman alphabet exclusively in place of IPA, with the exception of *æ*. This is to avoid the reader misinterpreting *ae* as a dipthong.

The spelling *ch* is pronounced as in English *church*; the spelling *x* is as in Scottish *loch*.

Nothing is silent, including word-final *e*.

In example utterances, sentences will start with a capital letter; questions will be marked with a *?*, and exclamations will be marked with a *!*.

6 Morphology of Old Shókë

In this thought experiment, Old Shókë simply has not yet developed affixing or other word-building mechanisms. Utterances are built up using unmodified stock vocabulary words as building blocks, following a simple syntax (below). One of the primary developments of Middle Shókë and onward will be precisely the development of morphology.

That said, I am thinking of *sho* for singular *you* and *shosho* for plural *you*, and likewise for first and third persons – so perhaps where I'm going with this is that Old Shókë's morphology will consist of, at least, some duplicative affixing for plural markers.

7 Lexicon of Old Shókë

Xoj!	Wow!
Che!	No!

7.1 Negation and interrogation

che	no/not
dæ	question particle

Perhaps at this early stage of linguistic development, the separate question particle *dæ* would be superfluous – perhaps a falling tone and/or gesture would be sufficient to disambiguate a question from a statement – as Old Shókë would have been a oral-only language. Perhaps a separate negation particle would be more of a middle-Shókë development.

7.2 Pointing words

kæt	this
shox	that (near)
nozh	the other (far away)

7.3 Pronouns

First person:	*ke*	I/me	*keke*	we/us (exclusive of the addressee(s))
Second person:	*sho*	you (singular)	*shosho*	you (plural)
First+second:			*shoke*	we/us (inclusive of the addressee(s))
Third person:	*no*	he/she/him/her	*nono*	they/them

7.4 Nouns

chak	ash
jitjit	bird
….	blood
tok	bone
….	child
xæth	cloud
shama	day
kun	eye
kesh	fire
trmrk	fish
jidh	feather
zhæx	hair
dox	home
næth	leaf
xom	moon
zhizh	mosquito/fly
thothrk	mushroom
xoma	night
….	parent
shuk	person
tæsh	rain
gæch	root
trm	river
thoth	soil
meka	squirrel
koch	stone
sha	sun
dej	tooth
dhæm	tree
mrm	water
shish	wind

7.5 Verbs

mish	breathe
katrk	come
mrm-kætr	drink
gæm	eat

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shoxtr	give
trk	go
….	hear
….	run
….	see – eye something?
shem	sleep
shæx	speak
kætr	take
….	walk

7.6 Adjectives

mom	round
tet	flat
tik	sharp
...	good
...	bad

7.7 To do

Sources: Dolgopolsky; Swadesh; Wierzbicka's semantics primes

Nouns: *a-long-time a-short-time air animal back bark-(tree) belly boat body breast buffalo burn-(noun) caribou cloth creature dust ear east egg face family fat-(noun) father finger fingernail fish flood flour flower fog foot forest fruit goat grass ground hair hand head heart horn house husband ice island jungle/forest knee knife lake leather leg liver louse man meat month mosquito mother mountain mouth music name neck north nose part poison rope salt sand sea seed sheep side skin sky smoke snake snow someone something south spouse star stick storm tail tear/teardrop thread tongue tooth village war west wife wing woman wood wool word worm year*

Verbs: *be-born be-called be-(someone/something) be-(somewhere) bite blow can count cut die dig do fall fear feel fight float flow fly freeze grow-(in-ground) happen hit hold hunt kill know know-(how-to-do-something) know-(someone) laugh learn lie lie-(bed) live make move nurse play pull push read rub say scratch sew sing sit smell something spit split squeeze stab stand suck swell swim think throw tie touch-(contact) turn-(intransitive) vomit want wash wipe*

Adjectives: *all bad big black cold dead dirty dry dull-(knife) far few flat full good green hard heavy here kind left long many more much/many my/mine narrow near new old other red right*

rotten round same short small smooth soft some straight sweet thick thin true warm wet white wide yellow

Adverbs: *front in inside maybe now there very*

Prepositions: *above after around at before below to with*

Conjunctions: *and because if like/as/way*

Numbers: *one two three four five six seven eight nine ten*

Interrogatives: *how what when where who why*

7.8 Raw material

These match Old Shókë phonotactics:

```
mam   man   mat   mad   math  madh  mash  mazh  maj   mach  max   mak   mag   ma
mem   men   met   med   meth  medh  mesh  mezh  mej   mech  mex   mek   meg   me
mæm   mæn   mæt   mæd   mæth  mædh  mæsh  mæzh  mæj   mæch  mæx   mæk   mæg   mæ
mim   min   mit   mid   mith  midh  mish  mizh  mij   mich  mix   mik   mig   mi
mom   mon   mot   mod   moth  modh  mosh  mozh  moj   moch  mox   mok   mog   mo
mum   mun   mut   mud   muth  mudh  mush  muzh  muj   much  mux   muk   mug   mu
.     .     .     .     mrth  .     mrsh  mrzh  mrj   mrch  .     mrk   mrg   mr

nam   nan   nat   nad   nath  nadh  nash  nazh  naj   nach  nax   nak   nag   na
nem   nen   net   ned   neth  nedh  nesh  nezh  nej   nech  nex   nek   neg   ne
næm   næn   næt   næd   næth  nædh  næsh  næzh  næj   næch  næx   næk   næg   næ
nim   nin   nit   nid   nith  nidh  nish  nizh  nij   nich  nix   nik   nig   ni
nom   non   not   nod   noth  nodh  nosh  nozh  noj   noch  nox   nok   nog   no
num   nun   nut   nud   nuth  nudh  nush  nuzh  nuj   nuch  nux   nuk   nug   nu
.     .     nrt   nrd   nrth  nrdh  nrsh  nrzh  nrj   nrch  .     nrk   nrg   nr

tam   tan   tat   tad   tath  tadh  tash  tazh  taj   tach  tax   tak   tag   ta
tem   ten   tet   ted   teth  tedh  tesh  tezh  tej   tech  tex   tek   teg   te
tæm   tæn   tæt   tæd   tæth  tædh  tæsh  tæzh  tæj   tæch  tæx   tæk   tæg   tæ
tim   tin   tit   tid   tith  tidh  tish  tizh  tij   tich  tix   tik   tig   ti
tom   ton   tot   tod   toth  todh  tosh  tozh  toj   toch  tox   tok   tog   to
tum   tun   tut   tud   tuth  tudh  tush  tuzh  tuj   tuch  tux   tuk   tug   tu
.     trn   trt   trd   trth  trdh  trsh  trzh  trj   trch  trx   trk   trg   tr

dam   dan   dat   dad   dath  dadh  dash  dazh  daj   dach  dax   dak   dag   da
dem   den   det   ded   deth  dedh  desh  dezh  dej   dech  dex   dek   deg   de
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dæm    dæn    dæt    dæd    dæth   dædh   dæsh   dæzh   dæj        dæch   dæx    dæk    dæg    dæ
dim    din    dit    did    dith   didh   dish   dizh   dij        dich   dix    dik    dig    di
dom    don    dot    dod    doth   dodh   dosh   dozh   doj        doch   dox    dok    dog    do
dum    dun    dut    dud    duth   dudh   dush   duzh   duj        duch   dux    duk    dug    du
.      drn    drt    drd    drth   drdh   drsh   drzh   drj        drch   drx    drk    drg    dr
dlm    .      dlt    .      dlth   dlch   dlk           dlg        dl

tham   than   that   thad   thath  thadh  thash  thazh  thaj       thach  thax   thak   thag   tha
them   then   thet   thed   theth  thedh  thesh  thezh  thej       thech  thex   thek   theg   the
thæm   thæn   thæt   thæd   thæth  thædh  thæsh  thæzh  thæj       thæch  thæx   thæk   thæg   thæ
thim   thin   thit   thid   thith  thidh  thish  thizh  thij       thich  thix   thik   thig   thi
thom   thon   thot   thod   thoth  thodh  thosh  thozh  thoj       thoch  thox   thok   thog   tho
thum   thun   thut   thud   thuth  thudh  thush  thuzh  thuj       thuch  thux   thuk   thug   thu
thrm   thrn   thrt   thrd   thrth  thrdh  thrsh  thrzh  thrj       thrch  thrx   thrk   thrg   thr

dham   dhan   dhat   dhad   dhath  dhadh  dhash  dhazh  dhaj       dhach  dhax   dhak   dhag   dha
dhem   dhen   dhet   dhed   dheth  dhedh  dhesh  dhezh  dhej       dhech  dhex   dhek   dheg   dhe
dhæm   dhæn   dhæt   dhæd   dhæth  dhædh  dhæsh  dhæzh  dhæj       dhæch  dhæx   dhæk   dhæg   dhæ
dhim   dhin   dhit   dhid   dhith  dhidh  dhish  dhizh  dhij       dhich  dhix   dhik   dhig   dhi
dhom   dhon   dhot   dhod   dhoth  dhodh  dhosh  dhozh  dhoj       dhoch  dhox   dhok   dhog   dho
dhum   dhun   dhut   dhud   dhuth  dhudh  dhush  dhuzh  dhuj       dhuch  dhux   dhuk   dhug   dhu
dhrm   dhrn   dhrt   dhrd   dhrth  dhrdh  dhrsh  dhrzh  dhrj       dhrch         dhrk   dhrg   dhr

sham   shan   shat   shad   shath  shadh  shash  shazh  shaj       shach  shax   shak   shag   sha
shem   shen   shet   shed   sheth  shedh  shesh  shezh  shej       shech  shex   shek   sheg   she
shæm   shæn   shæt   shæd   shæth  shædh  shæsh  shæzh  shæj       shæch  shæx   shæk   shæg   shæ
shim   shin   shit   shid   shith  shidh  shish  shizh  shij       shich  shix   shik   shig   shi
shom   shon   shot   shod   shoth  shodh  shosh  shozh  shoj       shoch  shox   shok   shog   sho
shum   shun   shut   shud   shuth  shudh  shush  shuzh  shuj       shuch  shux   shuk   shug   shu
shrm   shrn   shrt   shrd   shrth  .      shrsh  shrzh  shrj       shrch  shrx   shrk   shrg   shr
shlm   shln   shlt   shld   shlth  shlch  shlk   shlzh  shlg       shl

zham   zhan   zhat   zhad   zhath  zhadh  zhash  zhazh  zhaj       zhach  zhax   zhak   zhag   zha
zhem   zhen   zhet   zhed   zheth  zhedh  zhesh  zhezh  zhej       zhech  zhex   zhek   zheg   zhe
zhæm   zhæn   zhæt   zhæd   zhæth  zhædh  zhæsh  zhæzh  zhæj       zhæch  zhæx   zhæk   zhæg   zhæ
zhim   zhin   zhit   zhid   zhith  zhidh  zhish  zhizh  zhij       zhich  zhix   zhik   zhig   zhi
zhom   zhon   zhot   zhod   zhoth  zhodh  zhosh  zhozh  zhoj       zhoch  zhox   zhok   zhog   zho
zhum   zhun   zhut   zhud   zhuth  zhudh  zhush  zhuzh  zhuj       zhuch  zhux   zhuk   zhug   zhu
zhrm   zhrn   zhrt   zhrd   zhrth  .      zhrsh  zhrzh  zhrj       zhrch  zhrx   zhrk   zhrg   zhr
zhlm   zhln   zhlt   zhld   zhlth  zhlch  zhlk   zhlzh  zhlg       zhl

cham   chan   chat   chad   chath  chadh  chash  chazh  chaj       chach  chax   chak   chag   cha
chem   chen   chet   ched   cheth  chedh  chesh  chezh  chej       chech  chex   chek   cheg   che
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chæm   chæn   chæt   chæd   chæth  chædh  chæsh  chæzh  chæj   chæch  chæx   chæk   chæg   chæ
chim   chin   chit   chid   chith  chidh  chish  chizh  chij   chich  chix   chik   chig   chi
chom   chon   chot   chod   choth  chodh  chosh  chozh  choj   choch  chox   chok   chog   cho
chum   chun   chut   chud   chuth  chudh  chush  chuzh  chuj   chuch  chux   chuk   chug   chu
chrm   chrn   chrt   chrd   chrth  chrdh  chrsh  chrzh  .      chrch  chrx   chrk   chrg   chr
chlm   chln   chlt   chld   chlth  chlch  .             .      chl

jam    jan    jat    jad    jath   jadh   jash   jazh   jaj    jach   jax    jak    jag    ja
jem    jen    jet    jed    jeth   jedh   jesh   jezh   jej    jech   jex    jek    jeg    je
jæm    jæn    jæt    jæd    jæth   jædh   jæsh   jæzh   jæj    jæch   jæx    jæk    jæg    jæ
jim    jin    jit    jid    jith   jidh   jish   jizh   jij    jich   jix    jik    jig    ji
jom    jon    jot    jod    joth   jodh   josh   jozh   joj    joch   jox    jok    jog    jo
jum    jun    jut    jud    juth   judh   jush   juzh   juj    juch   jux    juk    jug    ju
jrm    jrn    jrt    jrd    jrth   jrdh   jrsh          .      jrch   .      jrk    jrg    jr

xam    xan    xat    xad    xath   xadh   xash   xazh   xaj    xach   xax    xak    xag    xa
xem    xen    xet    xed    xeth   xedh   xesh   xizh   xej    xech   xex    xek    xeg    xe
xæm    xæn    xæt    xæd    xæth   xædh   xæsh   xæzh   xæj    xæch   xæx    xæk    xæg    xæ
xim    xin    xit    xid    xith   xidh   xish   xizh   xij    xich   xix    xik    xig    xi
xom    xon    xot    xod    xoth   xodh   xosh   xozh   xoj    xoch   xox    xok    xog    xo
xum    xun    xut    xud    xuth   xudh   xush   xuzh   xuj    xuch   xux    xuk    xug    xu

kam    kan    kat    kad    kath   kadh   kash   kazh   kaj    kach   kax    kak    kag    ka
kem    ken    ket    ked    keth   kedh   kesh   kezh   kej    kech   kex    kek    keg    ke
kæm    kæn    kæt    kæd    kæth   kædh   kæsh   kæzh   kæj    kæch   kæx    kæk    kæg    kæ
kim    kin    kit    kid    kith   kidh   kish   kizh   kij    kich   kix    kik    kig    ki
kom    kon    kot    kod    koth   kodh   kosh   kozh   koj    koch   kox    kok    kog    ko
kum    kun    kut    kud    kuth   kudh   kush   kuzh   kuj    kuch   kux    kuk    kug    ku
krm    krn    krt    krd    krth   krdh   krsh   krzh   krj    krch   krx    krk    krg    kr

gam    gan    gat    gad    gath   gadh   gash   gazh   gaj    gach   gax    gak    gag    ga
gem    gen    get    ged    geth   gedh   gesh   gezh   gej    gech   gex    gek    geg    ge
gæm    gæn    gæt    gæd    gæth   gædh   gæsh   gæzh   gæj    gæch   gæx    gæk    gæg    gæ
gim    gin    git    gid    gith   gidh   gish   gizh   gij    gich   gix    gik    gig    gi
gom    gon    got    god    goth   godh   gosh   gozh   goj    goch   gox    gok    gog    go
gum    gun    gut    gud    guth   gudh   gush   guzh   guj    guch   gux    guk    gug    gu
grm    grn    grt    grd    grth   grdh   grsh   grzh   grj    grch   grx    grk    grg    gr
glm    gln    glt    gld    glth   .      .             .      glch   .      glk    glg    gl
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8 Syntax of Old Shókë

Shókë is strongly head-final. In particular, word order is SOV.

The negative *che* and the interrogative *dæ* normally immediately precede the verb. However, they can alternatively start the utterance. For example, if one were to make it clear that the listener is going to be getting a question, or a *no*, one might start off saying *Che* … or *Dæ* … to set the tone, while going on to search for the right words to say.

8.1 TBW

To do: elaborate on. Simple SOV, and then … .

9 Examples of Old Shókë

To do: develop this a bit more and try to push the boundary of what's expressible this way.

Old Shókë	Gloss	Translation
Kæt xoma ke shem	This night I sleep	I will sleep tonight. Or, *Ke kæt xoma shem.*
Shoke trk mrm-kætr	We/us go water-drink	Let's go and drink water.
Ke no mrm shoxtr	I him/her water give	I will give him/her water.
Sho tik koch kætr kesh shoxtr	You sharp stone take fire make	Take the sharp stone and make fire (strike sparks)
Che che che che che … shoke nozh thothrk che *gæm*	No no no no no … we those mushroom(s) no/not eat	No no no no no … we are *not* eating those mushrooms.
Jitjit dhæm shem	Bird tree sleep(s)	The bird is sleeping in the tree.
…	…	…

Part III

Middle Shókë

Part IV

New Shókë

Part V

Endmatter

10 Colophon

This document was typeset in the Baskerville font using the [Quarto](#) publishing system.