

Report on the activities of the Loglan Institute, 2019

Randall Holmes

April 6, 2019

Loi, hoi Raban! (Hi, everyone!)

This is an annual report on the activities of TLI. I haven't done one recently, and there **is** a state of the language to report, though things are not very active.

1 An inventory of our intellectual assets and activities

The small conversation group in Second Life continues to meet most weeks, meaning someone is trying to say things in the language (and also things are being said about it in English). A daunting project which no one has seriously undertaken would be to edit the vast transcripts of the SL sessions since 2008, extracting such things as new words and interesting snippets of Loglan conversation.

I have been working on the parser, but I would say at this point that I am basically finished, mod the question of the status of one large innovation which I will discuss below. The last major adaptation of the parser was the separation of the phonology from the grammar. The latest version does a complete pass checking for resolution into phonetically possible Loglan “words” then does a grammar pass which is mostly independent of phonetic considerations. This separation of levels appears to avoid certain kinds of subtle bugs.

An important feature of the parser which I would like to remind you all of is that it does admit strictly phonetic parsing: it understands Loglan text

written without breaks except for comma-marked pauses where an actual audible pause is taken to occur. I call this mode “phonetic transcript”; it removes the need for the rather eccentric pronunciation guides used by JCB in our original sources.

I want to call attention to the fact that you can use the parser online in your browser:

https://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/loglan.org/holmes_stuff/parserpage.html

is the URL. Thanks to `trinket.io` for making this possible!

Thanks to James Jennings for continuing to manage the `www.loglan.org` website (which I have mostly mirrored on my computer at Boise State). This site and the mirror conserve our historical intellectual assets, Notebook 3, Loglan 1, the dictionaries and other Loglan publications. It can be noted that a while back I worked on a revised version of Loglan 1 embodying my proposals to fix various points in the language: this can be seen at http://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/loglan.org/holmes_stuff/Loglan%201%20editing%20project/Loglan1/index.html for those who are interested. I believe it is mostly finished, but I should revisit it!

My personal Loglan page is at

https://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/loglan.org/holmes_stuff/cefli.html, a good place to look for current developments.

Also, thanks to Valerie Poluchar for continuing to harbor the loglanists list!

The dictionaries, like the parser, are under continuing revision. My latest versions are at http://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/loglan.org/holmes_stuff/Peter%20Hill%20dictionary%20project/E-to-L-RDC.html and http://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/loglan.org/holmes_stuff/Peter%20Hill%20dictionary%20project/L-to-E--RDC.html. These are made easier to update by Peter Hill’s dedicated software for building HTML Loglan dictionaries. The latest exciting development is that there is a new effort to upgrade the dictionaries and put them in a standard format, led by the Loglanist Torrua Nuva (with advice from Peter Hill, I believe). He has been hunting down lots of minor defects in the dictionary entries.

I have been working for several years on a reference grammar, still admittedly untidy, reflecting the views I take in the implementation of my parser. This can be viewed here: https://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/loglan.org/holmes_stuff/reference_grammar_proposed.pdf Like the parser (which it tracks), this is largely finished for the moment.

Another asset we have is Alex Leith’s novella A Visit to Loglandia, which I have revised to the extent that I can parse the whole thing (in a couple of hours). This can be seen on my Loglan page.

Thanks to the Swedish poet Laura for letting me post my translations of some of her poems. English poetry presents lots of interesting challenges for the Loglan translator! (These can be found on my page).

A Dutch masters student in logic, Laura Molenaar, wrote a thesis on Loglan! The title is “Quine and Loglan: the Influence of Philosophical Ideas on the Creation of a Logical Language”. She can be contacted at laura.s.molenaar@gmail.com.

When I list all of our assets, it looks rather respectable! And I am partially satisfied to serve as the curator of a largely dormant intellectual project. This is not to say that I would not enjoy it if it were to be revived by new interest into a more active language community.

2 The way the language looks

The language as currently implemented in my parser and the latest dictionaries is quite close to 1989 Loglan. There are various differences, some glaring, some subtle. In this section, we will talk about obvious differences, and in some cases about the motivations. My guiding light here is the sort of thing I actually had to edit when parsing the Visit.

Loglan names are treated a little differently. We use the insight of Steve Rice that the “Linnaean” constructor of 1989 Loglan is best viewed as a *foreign name* construction, with nothing in particular to do with biological nomenclature. This allows the tension between phonetic and original spelling of names to be resolved. If we give Einstein a Loglan name, it is **la Ainctain**, with proper Loglan phonetic spelling. If we want to preserve the German spelling, we use **lao Einstein**. The letters **qwx** no longer appear in Loglan at all, so a name with these letters in it must be a foreign name marked with **lao**.

To explain the phonetic rules for borrowed predicates to the parser, it was necessary to develop a precise definition of the Loglan syllable (though syllables are certainly mentioned in our founding documents, there is actually no formal definition!) We then imposed the requirement that Loglan names resolve into syllables. This has had effects on a few names. We require that all continuants (consonants pronounced as vowels) be doubled, so **Rrl** not **Rl** and **Suznn** not **Suzn**. This has forced corrections of the spelling of names. The definition of syllable does not allow three consonants at the end of a syllable. This can often be corrected by making one consonant into a

continuant, as in **Hollmz, Marrks**.

We use a completely different implementation of strong quotation. A strongly quoted sequence of arbitrarily formed “words” is obtained by prefixing **lie** and separating the blocks of alien text with **y** (this is how multiple blocks of text are handled in the last version of Linnaean names). “War and Peace” becomes **lie War y and y Peace**. Other alien text constructions also use this device: the predicate **sao ice y cream** incorporates the English term for a delicious dessert into Loglan. Bill Gober allowed the **y** to be left unexpressed in Linnaeans; we require that it be written in all contexts where we use it (though in some contexts there is the alternative of double-quoting the alien text and not expressing the **y** in writing: **sao “ice cream”** means the same thing and is pronounced in the same way).

Acronymic predicates were a serious irritation in late 1989 Loglan. We backed up and thought about it and decreed that acronyms are *names*. This means that they are introduced with **la** and end with a pause. We further required an initial marker **mue** on acronyms used as units of measurement, and also require that they end with a pause. We rule out multiletter pronouns. This has the virtuous effect that a sequence of letterals appearing as pronoun arguments to a predicate do not have to be separated by pauses: our view in all of this is that the use of letters as pronouns is far more important than their use in acronyms or indeed as names of letters. If we want to consider DNA as determining a predicate, **mela DaiNaiZa** does it.

We have solved the false name marker problem completely. **La Laplas** is indeed the name of a French mathematician. The key to the solution (already partially implemented by Bill Gober in proposals in the matter of serial names) is that any name with a false name marker in it must appear marked (with **la** or another word signalling a following name). Unmarked vocatives have been ruled out entirely, whether or not the name contains a false name marker. There are some rather subtle rules to avoid difficulties when a name marker is not actually followed by a name: these can be handled by style rules such as “always pause after a predicate name”; the exact rule is that one should pause after a vowel as soon as is practical after such a use of a name marker. If a situation arises where the left boundary of a following name word cannot be determined, the parser will notice and report error. This was much easier to test because we developed a phonetic transcript mode in our parser.

APA connectives such as **efa**, “and then”, and the commoner and more important IPA connectives such as **irau**, present a phonetic and grammatical

difficulty which is resolved by requiring that such words end with an explicit pause (shown by an actual comma in writing) or with the suffix **-fi** without the need of a pause. This is an example of a situation which we found in some other cases, where a problem in the grammar was not detected by earlier arrangements because it was actually at the lexicographic level. The difficulty is distinguishing between an APA word followed by an argument and the initial A word followed by a modifier phrase beginning with the PA component. The IPA words are common in Loglan text in general, and the APA words are not rare in the text of the Visit, so I have preserved the option of a hard pause rather than always requiring the novel **-fi**.

The phenomenon of pause/GU equivalence has been eliminated. Pauses have no grammatical effect except when they break words, with one exception: sentence initial **no** is treated differently by the parser in some cases if followed by a pause, but in all such cases the semantics is the same: the issue is whether the entire sentence or the first argument is negated, and the effect on the meaning is the same (we do not agree with Steve Rice on the meaning of negative arguments, but with clear statements in Loglan 1, though in all other respects we love his textbook).

There are some tweaks to sentence structure. A sentence beginning with a tense word and a predicate is not an imperative but an observative: **Nacrina** means “It is raining!” not “Get rained on!”. We take seriously the statements in Notebook 3 that one argument occurs before the predicate (in NB3 it is admitted that this is not enforced in the grammar, but stated that that is the intention). We require that in a standard SVO sentence the subject part contains no more than one argument without a case tag. An SOV sentence is implemented with a new particle, S **gio** O V. This proved to be useful in avoiding unintended parses in the Visit: where an error in one sentence leaves dangling arguments, we want a parse error rather than the arguments being taken up as initial arguments of a following sentence. In the gasent construction **ga** V O **ga** S, we require that the S contain exactly one untagged argument or all arguments (indeed all terms) in the sentence. When more than one argument appears in such a gasent after the second **ga**, every argument before that **ga** has to be reinterpreted in its relation to the verb as each new argument appears.

There are other changes in the grammar, particularly to the exact behavior of right closers, which look nontrivial (and in fact are) in terms of the way the formal grammar is put together, but which should allow essentially the same utterances as 1989 Loglan under normal circumstances.

There are some genuine novelties. To help avoid the need for multiple **guo**'s closing an abstract description, we provide additional paired constructions **lepo(za/zi/zu) . . . guo(za/zi/zu)**, giving a more precise ability to close nested descriptions as desired without the need for multiple **guo**'s. There is a similar arrangement for subordinate clauses, probably desitned for less use.

My last innovation, which is sufficiently significant that I maintain a version of the parser without it, is a subtle modification of the treatment of argument lists taking advantage of the idea that the subject of a sentence contains no more than one unmarked argument. When parsing a list of arguments after a predicate, the parser will stop if it sees that the next argument can be the subject of a sentence. That is, **Na lepo la Djan kamla mi prano** means, “When John comes, I run”, not the imperative “When John comes to me, run!”. This can be overridden by the use of the particle **gaa**, the “large subject marker”. **Na lepo la Djan kamla mi gaa prano** has the indicated imperative meaning. There are more examples of this construction given in the reference grammar. My view is that it will frequently reduce the need for closers on complicated subjects, and where a very complicated subject with what looks like a trailing argument **is** intended, the word **gaa** is itself a very effective closer. In LIP, pausing solidly after **kamla** changes the meaning from the imperative meaning to the declarative meaning; this is an example of pause/GU equivalence, which we no longer admit.

We have made other adjustments of detail, but on the whole our intentions have been conservative. We inherited a language with some difficulties, and we believe we have made it work. The language should be mostly recognizable to a speaker of 1989 Loglan, if such a creature exists.

3 A request of the membership

I am essentially done with the parser and the reference grammar. I would like to have some process of ratification of these things as embodying 2019 Loglan by the membership. The Academy I constituted in 2013 seems to be unresponsive at the moment, though ratification by that group would meet my goal. I am willing to proceed less formally. A general poll of the participants to the effect that they accept the new materials as primary would support my efforts to arrive at a stable position! And perhaps my statement

that I am basically done with parser and grammar revisions unless I get more input driven by actual use of the language will encourage participants to take a look at the way things stand!

An experimental measure of how close or far the version of Loglan embodied in my parser is from 1989 Loglan can be made by examining the transcripts generated by parsing the Visit. I have through most of the text preserved the original text as well as the revisions I had to make to parse it.

I am open to informed objections to changes I have proposed, too. The exact things I have done are embodied in the parser (if you can divine something from PEG notation); the parser source does also have comments. The reference grammar explains the same things in English.