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Introduction

Auf halbem Weg des Menschenlebens fand ich mich in einen finstern Wald verschlagen, Weil ich vom rechten Weg mich abgewandt. Wie schwer ist's doch, von diesem Wald zu sagen, Wie wild, rauh, dicht er war, voll Angst und Not; Schon der Gedank' erneuert noch mein Zagen. Nur wenig bitterer ist selbst der Tod; Doch um vom Heil, das ich drin fand, zu künden, Sag' ich, was sonst sich dort den Blicken bot. Nicht weiß ich, wie ich mich hineingewunden, So ganz war ich von tiefem Schlaf berückt, Zur Zeit, da mir der wahre Weg verschwunden. Doch bis zum Fuß des Hügels vorgerückt, Der an dem Ende lag von jenem Tale, Das mir mit schwerer Furcht das Herz gedrückt, Schaut' ich empor und sah, den Rücken malehm der Planet, der uns auf jeder Bahn Gerad zum Ziele führt mit feinem Strahle.

How many people can read the above paragraph? This is the opening to *Die Göttliche Komoedie (The Divine Comedy)* by Dante Alighieri, and for those who don't recognize it, the language is German. If you've had some schooling in German, maybe a couple of years in high school, or spent some time in Germany, you might be able to read the paragraph, or at least some of it. If you've picked up German from watching old war movies, you might be able to pick out a few words. Even if you speak no German, you should be able to pick out the German words that are closely related to their English counterparts, such as Angst (Fear).

Unless you are fluent in German (either from being born and raised in Germany or from many years spent studying the language) chances are you may not be able to determine what all the words mean. You might be able to get the gist of what is being said from what words you do know, but if you were asked to translate the paragraphs into English, could you do it?

Language is probably one of the greatest of Human inventions and probably one of the oldest. There are over 7,000 distinct languages spoken on Earth, and over 39,000 alternate language names and dialects (not counting Klingon, Tolkien's Elvish, and other science fiction and fantasy languages). Language allows Humans to effectively communicate with one another (when two people speak the same language) or can lead to embarrassing or even dangerous situations (when two people don't speak the same language). We use it to order pizza, write love letters, make laws, or seal international treaties. Language has also caused wars and allowed people to be exploited and manipulated because they did not know the local language or dialect. Language both divides people and brings people together.

In the fantasy world, as in real life, the ability to communicate effectively with those around you is an important part of a PC's daily life. Through language, a PC can barter for magic items, negotiate terms for their next mission, or plead with a dragon to not become its next meal. However, the current rules for the Speak Language skill do not allow for the reality of language. A single skill point represents the ability to fluently speak, read, and write any given language. While this allows for speedy game play, the intricacy (and reality) that different languages or dialects offer is lost with the current system. A 1st-

level non-Human PC with an 18 Intelligence score has the ability to be fluent in both reading and speaking six languages! This is great for the PC, but it can be a pain for the GM who now has to assume that the party can understand everything the antagonists he throws at the party are saying. (And with 6 languages known by one PC, they already know nearly a third of the languages listed in the SRD! With a decent racial mix in a party of four PCs it's possible that the PCs can speak, read, and write fluently in half of the languages in the SRD!)

This book sets out to adjust the rules on language. We offer an optional rule for the Speak Language skill that adds some realism to the skill, and still allows for ease of game play. We include skill descriptions and three new feats for languages. We also provide some alternate ways to liven up the Speak Language skill, even if you choose to not use the optional rules we present. In addition, we have included two prestige classes that are designed to be used specifically with our optional Speak Language rules.

Optional Speak Language Rules

Language, and the learning of language, often requires years of study. Some people are gifted linguists, while others struggle to speak their native language so that others can understand them. In fantasy this reality doesn't exist. You either speak a language (fluently) or you don't. Except for barbarians and a few races, everybody is literate (that would be a wonderful state of affairs – even in the 21st Century, more than 30 million people in the United States are functionally illiterate¹). With minimal effort on a PC's part, gaining a level and expending one skill point, they can quickly become bilingual, trilingual, or even hexalingual. This ability to be fluent in so many languages removes an entire aspect of play from the game. There is no confusion when asking the locals for directions to the haunted cemetery, no misinterpretation from overhearing a group of Gnolls plotting to ambush your party. These suggested rules not only make the game more realistic, they open up the possibilities for new adventures and characters.

A New Twist on an Old Skill

The first step to fixing the language dilemma is to separate the existing Speak Language skill into two separate skills: Speak Language and Read/Write Language. The second step is to create a new stat for each character called Native Language. The final step is to have characters purchase ranks in each of the new skills for each language to show their degree of knowledge in that language.

Language Skill Changes

1. Two skills are needed to accommodate the use of language as a skill: Speak Language and Read/Write Language. The number of ranks a character has in each skill represents that character's ability to fluently speak or read and write the chosen language. Characters with 20 or more ranks in any one language are considered fluent in that language. Fluency in a language provides benefits other than just speaking, reading, or writing the language. A PC who is fluent gains a +2 skill bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Forgery, Gather Information,

¹ National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) website – <http://nces.ed.gov/NAAL/index.asp>

- Intimidate, and Sense Motive skill checks when dealing with creatures whose Native Language the PC is fluent in.
2. The key ability for both skills is Intelligence and both skills are trained only. See the Speak Language and Read/Write Language skill descriptions below.
 3. Characters do not automatically know Common.
 4. At character creation, a player determines what the character's Native Language is. The Native Language is determined by the race of the character. For example, if Jill creates an Elven character, then the Native Language for that character is Elven. If a character is of mixed heritage (Half-Elf, Half-Orc), the player selects one language (either by choosing randomly, or based on character background) to be the Native Language. If Dan creates a Half-Elf character, he would have to choose between Common and Elven for his characters Native Language; he couldn't use both as his Native Language.
 5. Each character purchases ranks in Speak Language and Read/Write Language to represent the fluency of the character in that language.
 - a. For the Native Language, the character will automatically receive a number of ranks equal to the characters' Intelligence attribute score in both Speak Language and Read/Write Language. In the case of illiterate characters, such as barbarians, the character will only receive ranks in Speak Language.
 - b. The character may learn a number of additional languages equal to his/her Intelligence Modifier.
 - c. The character receives a number of skill points to spend on the additional languages equal to his/her Intelligence attribute score. These points may only be spent on languages, and can be spent to improve the characters' Native Language skills as well.
 6. Spells that affect a characters ability to speak or read another language, such as *comprehend languages* or *tongues* are altered to read that the targeted creature becomes fluent (has 20 ranks) in the language of the creature touched. This fluency conveys the same skill synergy as being non-magically fluent.

Example: John is creating Gharn Deepvein, a 1st level Dwarven fighter. Gharn has an Intelligence of 14, giving him an Intelligence modifier of +2. Since Gharn is a Dwarf, his Native Language is Dwarven, so John places 14 ranks in Speak Language: Dwarven and 14 ranks in Read/Write Language: Dwarven. Gharn's total skill in Dwarven is 16 (14 ranks +2 for his Intelligence modifier). Gharn has an Intelligence modifier of +2, so he can learn 2 additional languages. Gharn gets a number of points equal to his Intelligence attribute score (14) to spend on these additional languages. John knows Gharn will spend a lot of time with Humans, so he decides to spend 5 points on Speak Language: Common and 5 points on Read/Write Language: Common. With his remaining 4 points, John decides to go for something unusual, and spends all 4 points on Read/Write Language: Abyssal. If he chooses to, John may also spend any of his other skill points during character creation on increasing Gharn's existing language skills, but he cannot add any other languages unless his Intelligence modifier increases.