

Encouraging Language Students to Contribute Inflection Data to Wiktionary

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Idea: Use Wiktionary to help foreign language students

- Languages such as Polish have very complex inflection systems. It can be very difficult to both choose the correct rule then correctly apply it (i.e., change a vowel and/or soften a consonant when necessary).
- Users have been populating the English Wiktionary with conjugation and declension data for many languages. Perhaps this data can help students verify that they have applied inflection rules correctly.

	pers.	singular			plural	
		m	f	n	personal m	f / n / non-personal m
infinitive		mieszkać				
present tense	1st	mieszkam			mieszkamy	
	2nd	mieszkaś			mieszkaście	
	3rd	mieszka			mieszkają	
past tense	1st	mieszkałem	mieszkałam		mieszkałiśmy	mieszkałyśmy
	2nd	mieszkałeś	mieszkałaś		mieszkałiście	mieszkałyście
	3rd	mieszkał	mieszkała	mieszkało	mieszkałi	mieszkały

mieszkać: verb "to live"

	singular	plural
nominative	pies	psy
genitive	psa	psów
dative	psu	psom
accusative	psa	psy
instrumental	psem	psami
locative	psie	psach
vocative	psie	psy

pies: noun "dog"

Case	Singular				Plural	
	Personal and animate masculine	Inanimate masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Personal masculine	Neuter Feminine Non-personal masculine
Nominative	czarny		czarne	czarna	czarni	czarne
Vocative	czarny		czarne	czarna	czarni	czarne
Genitive	czarnego		czarnej	czarnej	czarnych	czarnych
Dative	czarnemu		czarnemu	czarnemu	czarnym	czarnym
Accusative	czarnego	czarny	czarne	czarną	czarnych	czarne
Instrumental		czarnym		czarną	czarnymi	czarnymi
Locative		czarnym		czarnej		czarnych

niebieski: adjective "blue"

Note: The authoritative (i.e., correct) complete inflection data for some languages (including Polish) is freely or cheaply available. This discussion is directed at those languages without inexpensive authoritative grammar sources.

Challenge: Current Wiktionary interface may discourage students from making corrections and/or additions

- Users must learn MediaWiki template syntax to update inflection data (both general MediaWiki template syntax and the syntax of the specific templates in use).
- Example: The template below contains all the necessary information to generate the conjugation table for *mieszkać* `{{pl-conj-ai-am,asz|mieszka}}`
- Concern: Students busy studying won't take the time to learn template syntax and, therefore, won't contribute.

Proposal: Build custom interface to simply lookup and update of inflection data

(Proposed application would display Wiktionary's inflection data using different interface)

Access:

- Provide simple means for students to enter foreign characters
- Make suggestions when words misspelled
- Allow lookups of inflected words

Note: University of Pittsburg maintains web site with similar features for Polish. Site does not permit user updates.

Update:

- Allow users to modify single entries in inflection table without using template syntax
- Allow advanced users to use templates where convenient

Discussion:

- Which languages will potentially benefit from the proposed interface?
- Is the inflection data in Wiktionary accurate enough to be used as an educational resource?
- Will simplified access to inflection data hinder learning (e.g., make students lazy)?
- Will simplifying the update process increase or decrease the amount and quality of inflection data?
- Which features will be most important in attracting student use?
- On what platforms should we build application (stand-alone, web application, iPhone, etc.)?

Need both

1. Sufficiently complex inflection system and
2. Lack of more authoritative recourses

Currently under study

Will students rely on "easy" lookup instead of memorizing rules?

There will be more contributors; but they will be less experienced