

A Partial Grammar and Dictionary of the Torfan Language

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Overview

The Torfan language is designed to sound human-like, but unfamiliar to speakers of English. The grammar is simple, regular, and modular, so that new dialogue can be created quickly and easily, as needed. Of course, please feel free to change anything here to fit your needs.

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I. Syntax/Morphology

Word order in Torfan is Subject-Object-Verb. This is the most common word order in human language, but will likely be unfamiliar to English audiences.

The subject of a sentence may be left out if it can be determined from context. “I” is often left out, because speakers are natural subjects of sentences.

So, the order of the words in the sentence “I hate him” would come out as “him hate”.

Verbal Morphology

Torfan is an agglutinative suffixing language, similar to Turkish and Japanese. This means that it uses various suffixes to change a word’s meaning and grammatical function, instead of using multiple words like English does. For example, *yam* ‘do’ cannot be a complete verb without adding the correct suffixes. So, ‘will not do’ is expressed by *yam + ve + ti = yamveti*.

Verbal Suffixes (in the order they should appear in a verb)

1. Causative: If someone is made to do something (like “I *made* him go”), the suffix ***for*** must be used. For example, ‘made go’ is expressed by *wen + for + ta = wenforta*.

2. Passive: If a sentence is passive (like “The man *was hated*”), then the suffix ***mir*** must be used. For example, ‘was hated’ is expressed by *ts’aku + mir + ta = ts’akumirta*.

3. Request/Wish/Demand: If a sentence expresses a request (like “please go”), the suffix ***kin*** must be used. For example, ‘please go’ is expressed by *wen + kin + ti = wenkinti*.

For a sentence that expresses a wish (like “I wish you would leave”), the suffix **kis** must be used. For example, “I wish you would leave” is *kudar wej̄kavi + kis + ti = kudar wej̄kavikisti*.

For a sentence that expresses a demand (like “Leave!”), the suffix **bal** must be used. “Leave!” would be *wej̄kavi + bal + ti = wej̄kavibalti*.

4. Tense (Present/Past/Future): All sentences must have tense. To make a sentence present-tense, **tai** is used if this suffix is sentence final. If another suffix follows it, *tai* becomes **te**. For past tense, the suffix is **ta**. For future tense, **ti**.

5. Negation: To make a sentence negative (like “I will not go”), the suffix **vai** is used if this suffix is sentence final. If another suffix follows it, *vai* becomes **ve**.

6. Statement and question particles (if / when / that / “question”)

To say something like “If I go...”, use the suffix **ma**, *wen + ti + ma = wentima*. For “when I go”, use **lau**, *wen + ti + lau = wentilau*. For “(I know) that I will go”, use **ħa**, *wen + ti + ħa = wentiħa*.

To make a sentence a question, use **si**. “Will I go?” is *wen+ti+si = wentisi*.

Nominal Morphology

If a word is the subject of the sentence, or occurs in a sentence with the verb *is*, it should appear in dictionary form.

For all other uses of nouns, one of Torfan’s five case markers should be used. Cases are suffixes that attach to nouns to denote the grammatical role of that noun in the sentence. For example, to make a noun the direct object of a sentence, you would add **ka** to the noun as it appears in the dictionary.

To make a noun *plural*, add **tan** to the dictionary form of the noun, then add the case marker after *tan*.

1. Direct object marker: To make a noun the direct object of a verb, add **ka** to the noun. So, for the sentence “I hate him”, the form you should use for “him” is *kutar + ka = kutarka*.

2. Indirect object/direction toward: To make a noun the indirect object (like “I gave the ball *to him*”), add **men** to the noun. So, “to me” would be *kusar + men = kusarmen*. Also, to say something like “I went *to the planet*”, add **men** to “planet”.

3. Possessive marker/direction from: To express ownership (like ‘s in English), use **ħa**. So, “my friend” would be *kusar + ħa t’orza = kusarħa t’orza*. Also, to say something like “I went *from the planet*”, add **ħa** to “planet”.

4. With (a person or instrument): To say something like “with something/someone”, add *di*. So, “with me” would be *kusar + di = kusardi*. This is also what you would use for something like “I killed him *with a sword*”.

5. Locative marker: To do something *at* a location (not to or from a location), use *lo*. “At/on the planet” would be *dəmp’a + lo = dəmp’alo*. Remember that “at the planets” would be *dəmp’a + tan + lo = dəmp’atanlo*.

II. Phonology and Pronunciation Guide

Nouns and verbs should all be pronounced with stress on the final syllable. For example, “*kudar weŋkavikisti*” should be pronounced “*kuDAR weŋkavikisTI*”. This is intended both to make the language sound more unusual to audiences, as well as to increase the intensity of the dialogue.

A. Consonants

- Most consonants are pronounced as they would be in English.
- ‘r’ should be pronounced like the trilled ‘r’ seen in Spanish *perro*
- ħ is pronounced like a strained h, somewhat in between the -ch in Scottish *loch* and the h- in English *hat*
- ŋ is pronounced similarly to the -ing in *running*
- A consonant with a ‘ after it (e.g. t’, k’, p’ ts’) is *ejective*, with a simultaneous constriction of the glottis at the back of the throat. These are pronounced somewhat like an emphasized final consonant in English *sit* [sit’], without a large puff of air, cf. aspirated consonants at the beginning of words English *top* [tʰap]
- ts’ is pronounced similarly to the final cluster in *cats* but with an ejective manner as described above
- ʃ is pronounced like the ‘sh’ in *shoe*
- ʒ is pronounced like the ‘s’ in *visual*

B. Vowels

- a as in “father”
- e ideally as in Spanish “pero”, but can instead be pronounced as in English “ache”
- i as in “meet”
- ideally as in Spanish “pero”, but can instead be pronounced as in English “boat”
- u as in “boot”
- ai as in “bite”
- au as in the second vowel in “about”
- ə as in the first vowel in “about”

III. Example dialogue (broken into meaning-chunks)

1. Sample Sentences

- a. dəmp'a-ka kusartam-p'a da-wenjkavi-bal
planet our get off
"Get off our planet!"
- b. hisar da-t'erm-vai
here belong.not
"You don't belong here!"
- c. hisar-p'a da-wenka-bal... zau da-yam-ve-ta-si
this.place leave... enough done
"Leave this place...haven't you done enough?"
- d. t'orva kusartam-p'a sa-me-kin
Torfa home is
"Torfa is our home!"

2. Shortened Versions

- a. dəmp'a kuts'ar da-wenjkavi
planet our get off
"Get off our planet!"
- b. hisar da-t'erm
here belong.not
"You don't belong here!"
- c. hisar da-wenka... zau da-yam-ve-ts'i
this.place leave...enough done
"Leave this place...haven't you done enough?"
- d. t'orva kuts'ar sa-me
Torfa home is
"Torfa is our home!"

Note that there isn't an established grammatical procedure for shortening words. Section 2 here is just an example of alterations that could be made on the spot to fit the needs of the dialogue. Easy methods of shortening include dropping verbal suffixes and eliminating words.

IV. A Brief Dictionary

Any additional words required can be made up on the spot, and should seamlessly integrate into the already-established grammatical system for Torfan.

Nouns

enemy--ənts'ak
food—ʃau
friend--t'orʒa
god--miza
home - t'orva
horn—gezak
Kree-- k'rijə
offworlder--dəmp'ə-vi
one—t'o
oppressor--əŋk'ar
peace--fleya
person/being: ku
place: hi
planet--dəmp'a
refuge/safety: t'ag
Skrull--ʃkrulə
star—ʒayar
war--ħat'ijaʃ
water—nak'ai

Verb stems (can also act as nouns)

belong--t'erm
demand--bal
die--vaimir
do—yam
drink—vaik'a
eat--vaiʃu
fly—ʒal
give--kin
go—wen
grow—dəgez
hate--ts'aku
hurt--mul
is--me
kill—kumul
know—miħal
leave--weŋkavi
live--milar
oppress--k'ar
own--p'at

see—miḥ
travel—zap'a
want—kis

Adjectives

bad—əŋḥa
big—dəm
long—wat'i
good—t'ormi
new—fer
old—vaifer

Pronouns/demonstratives

I--kucar
you--kudar
he/she--kutar
we--kucartan
you (plural)--kudartan
they--kutartan
this--sar
that--dar
that over there--tar
it--ti

Other (adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.)

here--ḥisar
there--ḥidar
over there/away--ḥitar
off--vi
enough--zau
quickly/right now--ts'u
and--nur
or--val