

Language Guide

Background

In its conculcultural setting, Tarrden is an acoustic exo-auxlang, deliberately designed to be very simple and regular, and make minimal assumptions about the physiology of the speakers. It was developed by the Akartans, an insectoid alien race, whose native languages relied on haptic (touch) and pheromonal (chemical) signalling. Akartans do not possess a vocal tract; like most species, they produce the sounds of the language using spiracles.

As Akarta became a hub for interstellar travel, Tarrden displaced the local Akartan languages, becoming an uncomfortable planet-wide lingua franca. Over time, a dialect of the language evolved that was better adapted for Akartan physiology. As expected, there are lexical and grammatical differences, but most notable is the extensive use of pheromones as an integrated second channel. Some haptic signals were fossilised as non-contact gestures, but most Akartans now refrain entirely from touching each other in public, and excessive gesturing is stigmatised as a feature of uneducated equatorial speech.

Following is a brief guide to the Akartans' dialect of Tarrden.

Orthography

The language has been transcribed in two signal streams: acoustic (top line) and pheromonic (bottom line). Humans can approximate the acoustic line by following similar pronunciation rules to Esperanto ('rr' is a single phoneme, pronounced as any trill). Symbols

in the pheromonic line indicate 'pheromemes': a release of volatile chemicals, timed to coincide with the corresponding acoustic syllable. Colours indicate which glands are involved in pheromeme production. Where different coloured symbols are written side-by-side, all are articulated simultaneously (the acoustic line may be shifted right to maintain syllable alignment). Same-coloured symbols cannot be coarticulated.

Grammar

- Basic word order is VSO.
- Verbs (and all other words requiring arguments) have a fixed arity, i.e. a verb cannot be both transitive and intransitive without a change in form. In general, every slot must be accounted for with an acoustic or pheromonal argument, or explicitly omitted via the *-en* suffix. The only exceptions to this are at the end of a sentence or immediately before the *k* particle, when any unfilled slots are implicitly omitted. The meaning of omitted slots is determined from context.
- Some words behave as free arguments. These words (or phrases formed from them, if they take arguments of their own), can appear to the right of a verb or preposition, among its core arguments, and contribute to its meaning. Prepositions, adverbs and evidentials often fall into this category.
- Conjunctions precede their arguments, e.g. "*ga X Y*" = "*X and Y*". An optional pheromone marker, +, is sometimes attached to the beginning of the second argument, especially if the first argument is particularly heavy, or the speaker is trying to prevent confusion.

- The **green pheromone stream** is used for anaphora. When a new referent is introduced, an Akartan will usually assign it a chemical signature automatically. For convenience, we transcribe these signatures using a letter of the alphabet as a placeholder (A, B, etc.), but in reality they consist of a rapid sequence of short-lived chemical releases, and this is how Akartans natively refer to each other and locations in their environment. In most cases, assignment is done by simply releasing the chemical signature the first time the referent is mentioned.
- The **blue stream** is another rapid-fire channel that encodes a relatively arbitrary set of grammatical features, including role-marking, some evidentiality, and emphasis.
- The **orange stream** was primarily used for marking social distinctions in the Northern hives, and now serves a similarly honorific role in speech. Commands, suggestions, and other impositions on an individual's freedom are usually also marked with this stream. The chemicals in this stream can take a second or two to disperse.
- The **red pheromone stream** is the least subtle, and signals danger. The scent lingers much longer than the other streams, and invokes an intense physiological response in nearby Akartans, preparing them for a fight-or-flight situation. Used with extreme delicacy, it can create an intense, exciting atmosphere during storytelling, building suspense and frightening the listener.
- The first argument of a verb may be filled by simultaneously articulating a pheromone signature. In this case, there will be no subject in the acoustic stream.

- The suffix *-en* can be used to omit unwanted/non-existent arguments. Attaching it to a verb, for example, skips the first free argument (usually the subject, unless the subject is indicated in the pheromone stream, in which case, the object).
- A recent trend with *-en* is to simultaneously name the omitted argument in the pheromone stream. In this case the argument is not really skipped, but transferred from the acoustic stream to the pheromone stream. Most Akartans find the acoustic modality cumbersome, so this approach is faster and more comfortable.
- Verbs and nouns may both take suffixes. Verbs are frequently inflected for aspect, but this is not obligatory.
- Relative phrases follow the noun they modify, and are preceded by the relativiser *dek*. The pheromone signature of the head noun's referent will usually appear somewhere within the relative clause to indicate what role it's playing; if not, it's assumed that one of the omitted arguments (usually the first) has the same referent.
- A common trick is to introduce a new referent with a headless relative clause. In this case, a pheromone signature is assigned on the relativiser, and, unless otherwise indicated within the clause, is understood to be the subject of the relative clause's verb. For example, "*dek-A ektorrik*" could be translated as "one who desires" (or simply 'desirer'), and introduces a new referent with the pheromone signature *A*.

Lexicon

NOTE: The incoming torch contained some very terran details, and concepts that depend on a human worldview. I've substituted these with appropriate in-universe analogues, and tried to provide extra context in the lexicon to guide you in selecting suitable replacements.

Acoustic Roots:

barragdiak (*tr vb*) Punish.

bebdi (*tr vb*) Control; manage; steer; operate.

bonpa (*n*) Information; knowledge; skills.

dek (*part*) Relativiser.

dekta (*prep2, free arg*) “*arg1* has motivation *arg2*”. A two-argument preposition that links something motivated to its motivation (usually an embedded sentence).

ekto (*tr vb*) Desire or yearn (for something nonessential).

ep (*tr vb*) Eat; drink; ingest.

ga (*conj*) And.

gabodat (*ditr vb*) Give; “*arg1* gives *arg2* to *arg3*”.

garrakganeb (*n*) War.

gok (*pro*) Generic pronoun. Usually carries a pheromone signature to precisely indicate the referent.

ipento (*tr vb*) Own; hold; possess (usually alienable).

k (*part*) General destructuring particle; similar to a verbal semicolon. Immediately closes as many open phrases as the speaker desires, omitting any unfilled argument slots, and allows the speaker to proceed in a way that would be ungrammatical in Standard Tarrden. The connection between the content before and after the particle is ambiguous and determined from context; the speaker may just be lazily skipping out of a deeply nested structure without bothering to finish the thought grammatically, or they may be starting a new sentence fragment that exists in a free argument relationship to the first. Evolved from mimicking the hesitation sound made by another species, usually immediately preceding a grammar error or some other disfluency.

ka (*conj*) Apposition marker; equates two nouns.

ket (*free arg*) Hypothetical mood. Often used to express conditionals, tagging both the protasis and apodosis.

nedeneb (*free arg*) Desperately; earnestly.

nepeg (*tr vb*) Learn; discover.

okton (*n*) [1] A deep cavern, hole or abyss. [2] A distant era, particularly anything before the fall of the Empire (metaphorical extension of [1]). Frequently used as a setting for fantastic stories of dubious veracity, much like English “long ago”/“once upon a time”.

non (*intr vb*) Be possible.

not (*free arg*) Irrealis certainty. A mood/evidential particle that marks a statement as being obvious/certain, even though it refers to a hypothetical, inaccessible or future event.

papanateb (*n*) Empire, usually referring specifically to the galaxy-spanning Xolfa Empire, immediately prior to its downfall.

patek (*n*) Time.

perreb (*intr vb*) Come into existence; start; commence.

pet (*prep, free arg*) Across the breadth of; spanning.

piboti (*tr vb*) Find; discover; stumble upon.

po (*tr vb*) Control, rule, reign.

rrokrrok (*free arg*) Thus; consequently; so.

rrototon (*n*) [1] The edible roots of a flowering water plant, which naturally contain an addictive narcotic compound. Used by the Xolfa both recreationally, and to suppress uprisings amongst their subjects. The potency of the root was enhanced through selective breeding by the Chehaleskoi. [2] Any highly desired or addictive object/substance (by metaphorical extension of [1]). [3] A benefit that comes with a risk (i.e. a 'double-edged sword'; by metaphorical extension of [1]).

Rrutnaati (*pr*) The name of a king.

tarrantarrek (*n*) [1] Sarantarek, a species of intimidating multi-headed war beast engineered by the Chehaleskoi for the Xolfa. Dragon-like in appearance; able to quickly regenerate lost appendages. It is implied that the Lernaean Hydra of Greek mythology was a failed attempt to deploy this unit on Earth. [2] A fierce or tyrannical ruler (metaphorical extension of [1]).

tearretko (*n*) Chehaleskoi, an alien species with white fur, bushy tails, and musteline appearance. Clever, charming, narcissistic, witty, promiscuous; adept in the biological sciences. Wiped out at the fall of the Empire.

teterrak (*intr vb*) [1] Change location or form. [2] Teleport using the Shifter network. [3] Be mysterious, unknowable or sinister. Akartans are natural engineers and have no concept of magic or enchantment; they recognise that seemingly fantastic events must have a mundane explanation. Occasionally however, if they're unable to explain something and have no way of deducing its inner workings, they will describe it as 'shifting'. This usage is a relic of their first encounters with Xolfa shifting technology, which seemed to defy the known laws of physics. The various meanings of this word are often punned on, especially in formulaic references to the time before the Fall.

Acoustic suffixes:

-en Omitted argument

-go Causative; introduces a new 'causer' argument slot in front of a verb's existing arguments.

-id Perfective aspect

-op Continuous aspect

-pot Collectively; multiple individuals considered as a mass

-rrik Durative aspect

Pheromemes:

△ Locative / temporal case

⊗ Evidential: known from lore

+ Optional marker for second argument of a conjunction

! Emphasis

∅ Omitted first argument

☞ Jussive/imperative mood

👑 Royalty honorific (the same mark historically used by hive drones)

⚠ Danger!!!