

Overview of Yaghnobi Grammar

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Brian Bird

INTRODUCTION

Yaghnobi is classified as a North-East Iranian Language. It is spoken by approximately 12,500 people in a number of villages spread throughout central and north-west Tajikistan. Yaghnobi is a descendant of Sogdian, an east Iranian language of the middle Iranian period which was spoken between the 4th and 10th centuries in Central Asia.

Yaghnobi is listed as an endangered language in the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered languages, but a recent survey concluded that the vitality of the language is strong. My observations are in accord with this conclusion since it appeared that most children were learning and using the language at home and in the village community.

The language is highly mixed with Tajik. Out of a spoken corpus of 7585 words, containing 1020 distinct words and affixes, 360 are identical with Tajik words. An additional 80 words are phonetically very similar to Tajik which gives a total of 480 words, or 47% of the lexicon that appears to be borrowed. (These are mainly nouns and set phrases.)

BASIC CLAUSE STRUCTURE

Basic word order is SOV

- (1) *kut man a- kan*
dog I PAST- bite
S O V
'A dog bit me.'

Adjectives precede nouns:

- (2) *man xun -i fov kut a- ven -im*
I dream -CASE **black** dog PAST- see -1SG
ADJ N
'I saw a **black** dog in a dream.'

Genitives precede nouns:

- (3) *safar karim -i tup a- nos*
 Safar Karim -CASE ball PAST- take
 N -GEN N
 ‘Safar took **Karim's** ball.’

There are both prepositions and postpositions:

- (4) *ax tji maktab a- vov*
 he **from** school PAST- come
 Prep N
 ‘He came **from** the school.’

- (5) *zambur -i istal -i rugah -i fur -ak ast*
 bee -CASE table -CASE **above** -CASE fly -Part have
 N -GEN Post -LOC
 ‘A bee is flying **above** the table.’

(6)

Verb morphology

Present tense

Verbs have a person suffix but no tense prefix

Present / future	singular	plural
1 st person	<i>-om-ift</i>	<i>-im-ift</i>
2 nd person	<i>-ift</i>	<i>-s-ift</i>
3 rd person	<i>-tji</i>	<i>-oft</i>

- (7) *ax har piron -tji*
 he donkey sell -3SG.PRES
 ‘He sells donkeys.’

Past tense

Verbs have an *a-* prefix and a different set of person suffixes.

Past tense	singular	plural
1 st person	<i>-im</i>	<i>-im</i>
2 nd person	<i>-i:</i>	<i>-si:</i>
3 rd person		<i>-or</i>

- (8) *xar a- piron* *-im*
 donkey PAST- sell -1.PAST
 ‘I sold donkeys.’

Aspect

Imperfective aspect is formed using a nominal suffix on the verb with the copula *ast* ‘have’ as an auxiliary. Sentence (9) shows present tense and (10) shows past with past form of ‘have’ as an aux.

- (9) *man maktab -i jav -ak ast*
 I school -CASE go -Part AUX.PRESENT
 ‘I am **going** to the school.’

- (10) *karim -i tir -ak xoj*
 Karim -CASE go -Part AUX.PAST
 ‘Karim **was going**.’

GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS

The system is split on aspect.

Verb marking

In perfective clauses

Person suffix on verb corresponds to S argument in person and number.

- (11) *yaik -t maktab -i a- jav -or*
 girl -P school -CASE PAST- go -3PL
 S V
 ‘The girls went to school.’

In imperfective clauses

There is no person or number agreement.

- (12) *mox tfi pijon yor -ak ast*
 we from yesterday look -Part AUX
 S V
 ‘**We have** been watching since yesterday.’

Nominal marking

S and O marking in perfective clauses

O arguments that are animate and specific are marked with the CASE suffix *-i*.

- (13) *kut safar -i a- xifoi:*
dog Safar -CASE PST- bite
S O
'The dog bit **Safar**.'

Inanimate O arguments are not marked.

- (14) *zuta ax **tup** a- deh*
boy that **ball** PAST- hit
S O V
'The boy hit that **ball**.'

Non-specific O arguments are not marked.

- (15) *man i: **naxfir** a- deh -im*
I one **deer** PAST- hit -1
S O V
'I shot a **deer**.'

S and O marking in imperfective clauses

The S argument is marked.

- (16) *malim -t -i ark -i kar oĵ*
teacher -P -CASE work -CASE do AUX
S V (light verb construction)
'The **teachers** were working.'

The S argument is even marked on inanimate objects.

- (17) *sank -i harra -i vi -ak ast*
stone -CASE rolling -CASE begin -Part AUX
S V (light verb construction)
'A **rock** is starting to roll'

The S argument is even marked on non-specific S arguments.

- (18) *i morti -ji xar -i yor -ak -f ast*
 One man -CASE donkey -CASE look -Part -3SG have
 S O V
 'A man is taking care of the donkey.'

The O argument is also still marked if it is specific and animate.

- (19) *safar -i xar -i tijoq -i -pi deh -ak -f ast*
 Safar -CASE donkey -CASE cane -CASE -with hit -Part -3S have
 S O OBL V
 'Safar is hitting the donkey with a cane.'

Some deictics have case forms

The forms in the row or column labeled case function just like nouns that are marked with *-i*.

Pronouns	Singular		Plural	
	unmarked	CASE	unmarked	CASE
1st Person	<i>man</i>		<i>mox</i>	
2nd Person	<i>tu</i>	<i>taɣ</i>	<i>ɟumox</i>	
3rd Person	<i>ax</i>	<i>av-i</i>	<i>ax-tit</i>	<i>aw-tit-i</i>

Near demonstratives	Singular	Plural
	<i>if</i> 'this'	<i>if-tit</i> 'these'
CASE	<i>it, id</i> 'this'	<i>it-titi</i> 'these'
	<i>nihef</i> 'this very'	<i>nihef-tit</i> 'these very'
CASE	<i>nihed, nihet, niheti, nihipti</i> 'this very'	<i>nihe-titi</i> , 'these very'

Far demonstratives	Singular	Plural
	<i>ax</i> 'that'	<i>ax-tit</i>
CASE	<i>aw</i> 'that'	<i>aw-tit</i>
	<i>nahax</i> 'that very', <i>na</i> (shortened form)	<i>nahax-tit</i> 'those very'
CASE	<i>nahaw</i> 'that very'	<i>nahaw-tit</i> 'those very'

Oblique marking

Oblique nominals are marked with the –i suffix regardless of aspect.

Location

- (20) *rufka kuti -i fun -om -ift*
pen box -**CASE** put -1S.PR -PR
'I put the pen **in** the box.'

Recipient

- (21) *if sutur -t -i vef tifar*
this sheep -P -**CASE** grass give
'Give grass **to** these sheep.'

Purpose

- (22) *ax i: sutur -i nos -ak -i baxfa jaynob a- fav*
1Per a sheep -**CASE** take -Part -**CASE** for Yaghnob PST- go
'He went to Yaghnob **to** get a sheep.'

Genitive

- (23) *mojin -i ovoz yuf -im kar a- kun*
vehicle -**CASE** sound ear -1S deaf PAST- do
'The sound **of** the car made my ears deaf.'

Word Order

Grammatical relations are often not apparent from verb marking, nominal marking, or context and are resolved by word order.

- (24) *safar -i xar -i tijoq -i -pi deh -ak -f ast*
Safar -CASE donkey -CASE cane -CASE -with hit -Part -3S have
S O OBL V
'Safar is hitting the donkey with a cane.'

- (25) *xar -i safar -i lakat -i -pi deh -ak -f ast*
donkey -CASE Safar -CASE hoof -CASE -with hit -Part -3S have
S O OBL V
The donkey is hitting Safar with its hoof.

Word order is flexible when the O argument is the only marked argument.

- (26) *av -i kut a- xifoġ*
he -CASE dog PST- bite
O S V
'The dog bit him.' (lit: 'Him the dog bit.')