

Word Order, Grammatical Number, Case System, Pronouns and Simple Verbs of Tokcir

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1.0 Introduction

This essay is third in a series designed to bring newcomers to the NGL project up to date on the basics of the language and to serve as a reference material for experienced group members. As you can see from the title of this essay, it is an eclectic work of somewhat loosely-connected topics.

In order to support its modular design, and just as a matter of arbitrary principle, certain basic themes can be found as a constant throughout the basic Tokcir grammar, which forms the topic of this essay. One is flexibility. Tokcir is a very flexible language and there are usually a number of different ways of getting at the same thing. The other is that most forms of grammatical marking are usually non-obligatory, producing unmarked, "generic" forms. NGL generally requires any forms adding to the Tokcir base language to preserve the existence and usability of generic, unmarked forms. So, for example, although Tokcir has a three-way case distinction for nouns and the three-way number distinction, it is always optional to add endings for case and number. Because case marking is optional, Tokcir has a default word order from which grammatical role can be inferred if case is not marked. However, where case is marked, Tokcir allows free word order.

2.0 Word Order

Tokcir is a SVO language, that is, all things being equal its preferred word order in sentences is subject first, then verb, then direct object. If we mark the indirect object D (for Dative case), the actual word order is SDVO. That is, the indirect object tends to default to following the subject and preceding the verb.

However, Tokcir also has a nominal case system which, when employed, permits basically free word order. The Tokcir case system is normally employed to resolve ambiguities, and for topic fronting (bringing important information that the speaker wants to emphasise to the front of the sentence). When the Tokcir fixed word order is obeyed, marking case is optional and may be omitted (and, in the existing literature, tends to be omitted). When the word order is violated, case marking is mandatory for the out-of-order element and for any other element that becomes ambiguous.

3.0 Grammatical Number

Tokcir has a three-way number distinction, and in addition, the requirement for the existence of generics creates a fourth number, the generic, which enfolds and contrasts the other three.

The three numbers of Tokcir are the singular, the paucal, and the plural. The singular and the

plural do not require much discussion, except to note that because of the existence of the generic number, the singular and plural tend to be contrastive. The singular tends to automatically imply one out of more than one, and singles that one out from other possibilities. The plural carries the connotation of "many", and tends to be inclusive, frequently carrying the connotation of "all".

The paucal requires a little more explanation. The word "paucal" means "few". The paucal number can be employed when you literally want to indicate more than one but not many. It also contrasts from many, picking a small number out from a possible larger set. Finally, its implications tend to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

You will see a little more about how the numbers work in practise when we discuss pronouns (section 5.0).

The generic number has a number of uses. What it means depends on context. It can be used in place of singular, paucal or plural when that information is clear from context. It can be used to refer to something that is a mass, or something that is numberless. It can also be used to refer to singular things that are unique. Take the example of God. In the translating the Hebrew scriptures into Tokcir, one is faced with two real options... use singular verb agreement or generic. In this case it makes a difference. If you use singular verb agreement, it implies that there are other Gods, because the singular is contrastive and tends to imply the existence of many to pick one out of, as a consequence of the existence of the generic. So, according to the ideology of the text, the correct number to use for verb agreement is the generic, because God is unique and therefore numberless (no "many" to contrast "one" from).

The use of number in verb agreement is beyond the scope of this essay, at least in part because that topic comes under the auspice of verb systems and as of the time of this writing no single verb system has yet been selected for Tokcir (there are several candidates), and one of those candidates does not actually mark verbs to agree for number (while the other two have obligatory marking for person and optional marking for number and actually permit pronoun dropping; they share the same system for this). The TVS/PVS system is, however, most briefly outlined in section 6.2.

It is possible to mark nouns for number. How this is done differs slightly depending on whether case is marked or not. Here are the endings for number marking when case is not marked:

-0	-	generic
-(e)m	-	singular
-(e)r	-	paucal
-(e)s	-	plural

All number markers are suffixes. If the marked noun ends in a consonant the e is used, otherwise if the noun ends in a vowel the e is omitted. Here and everywhere, -0 means no ending.

4.0 Case System

Tokcir has a Nominative-Accusative rather than Ergative-Absolutive case system. Tokcir has three cases, the nominative (N), the accusative (A), and the dative (D). There is no genitive, ablative or vocative cases. There is, however, and "ablative of agent" used with the passive voice. It is made by preceding the noun phrase with the preposition {wi'} and explicitly marking the head noun with the dative case. If you don't understand the concept of case you are strongly urged to go do some reading, but in a nutshell, the nominative is used for the subject of the sentence, the accusative for the direct object, and the dative for the indirect object. Tokcir case endings, as we have said above in section 2.0, are optional. They may be employed at any time, but are typically employed when the sentence word order is non-fixed, i.e., something other than SDVO. When the word order is non-fixed, case marking is obligatory on any noun out of its usual position, and on any other noun whose role is ambiguous. Case endings contain both case and number. The following chart cross-indexes case with number to give the proper ending to use.

	generic	singular	paucal	plural
N:	-om	-mom	-rom	-som
A:	-ac	-mac	-rac	-sac
D:	-ad	-mad	-rad	-sad

All case endings are suffixes.

5.0 Pronouns

Tokcir has one pronoun set which is *essentially* official, and a competing one proposed with the VTT verb system by Gerald Koenig, which would likely be adopted in place of the existing Tokcir pronoun set were VTT adopted as Tokcir's official verb system. I will not go into details about the VTT pronoun set, if you want further information, see Gerald Koenig's writekit, which can be found on the NGL Central Repository page at http://www.geocities.com/ngl_repository/writekit.htm or by Google groups search (try search term "NGL writekit"). I will limit myself to discussion of the official pronoun set, which I will take the liberty of speaking about as if it were the only one in existence, since I have already alluded to the existence of the VTT set.

Tokcir pronouns, unlike those of the VTT set, do not carry any gender information. If you want to carry gender information with the pronoun, you may prefix the pronoun with {ma-} for male or {fa-} for female. However, this is almost never done. For the most part, gender simply is not referred to. What is obligatory is number, person and case. Because case is obligatory, whenever you employ a tokcir pronoun you must know and accurately mark its case (meaning that you cannot get out of understanding and being able to use case in order to work in Tokcir, even if you always use fixed word order).

A Tokcir pronoun has three "positions" and, unless generic number, three letters. A pronoun is constructed thus:

[number][person][case]

With four number, three persons and three cases, this gives 36 pronouns.

Numbers:

generic: 0-
singular: m-
paucal: r-
plural: s-

Persons:

first: -o-
second: -a-
third: -e-

Cases:

N: -m
A: -c
D: -d

Person is the only element here we have not already discussed; if you are not familiar with the concept it is necessary to do some reading, but in a nutshell, the first person is I/we, the second person is you/y'all, and the third person is he/she/it/they. As an example of how to construct pronouns, and to illustrate the use of paucal number, since the paucal has a special meaning for first person pronouns (inclusive/exclusive "we") here are all the first person pronouns:

	generic	singular	paucal	plural
N:	om	mom	rom	som
A:	oc	moc	roc	soc
D:	od	mod	rod	sod

Meanings in the singular:

mom - I
moc - me
mod - to me

Meanings in the nominative:

om - I/we (deliberately vague)
mom - I (definitely only me)
rom - we exclusive (use of paucal number deliberately excludes the person addressed.
So if I'm taking to you and refer to "we" with {rom}, I mean we but not you)
som - we inclusive (includes the person being addressed)

Second person (you/y'all) forms are made by substituting a or o; third person (he/she/it/they) by substituting e.

6.0 The Tokcir Generic Verb

Tokcir's base verb system is utterly simple, and most reminiscent of languages such as Mandarin. Basically it is just a naked verb. No subject-verb agreement of any sort, no marking for aspect, mood or tense, nothing. Aspect, mood and tense can be referred to obliquely by using general vocabulary morphemes and sticking them in the sentence to give the basic idea. Otherwise, the verb is completely dependent on context for these aspects of its meaning.

6.1 Verb Systems

There are three verb systems proposed with Tokcir, and one has not been selected yet. They differ from each other significantly, and while some kinds of partial blending would be possible and in fact do occur, they in general have to be mutually exclusive and in fact essentially only one of the three can eventually be adopted in the fullest sense. We have been going through an extensive evaluation phase. All three have attestation in the Tokcir literature. Until one is chosen, devotees of the Tokcir project should have at least a passing familiarity with all three.

An exposition of all three verb systems would dwarf the current length of this document. However, a short description of each will be included along with links you can follow to learn more.

6.1.1 TVS (Traditional Verb System)

TVS was invented by Jack Durst and is the oldest of the three, hence Jack's practise, generally taken up, of referring to it as "traditional". It is written into some early learning materials on the language and has an extensive appearance in the later literature. TVS works by adding an ending to the verb that works kind of similar to the Tokcir pronoun in that it is composed of "letter variables", each position corresponding to a kind of information about the verb which is chosen by assigning a different letter to that position. This makes highly compact and information-dense inflectional endings. TVS makes marking the verb for person and number obligatory (-0 for generic ending) and then adds an optional three-letter inflection for mood, tense and aspect.

Further information:

I have written a summary at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NGL/message/49>

Google searches may turn up further info.

6.1.2 VTT (Vector Time Tense)

VTT, by Gerald Koenig, is probably best described in the creator's own words and I will not attempt to go into too much detail here. Suffice it to say that VTT is an ambitious and imaginative program to situate actions in time using a vector visualisation, as an extension of VST, Vector Space Tense, as prepositional and adverbial system Jerry was developing (this does not really do VXT justice, though). VTT works through isolating particles which ordinarily precede the verb. In practise, VTT has been used almost exclusively with the naked generic Tokcir verb, with no subject-verb agreement for number or person. VTT comes with its own unique proposal for a pronoun set. VTT has only a small body of literature compared to the others, and unfortunately no major compositions by Jerry Koenig himself.

Further information:

Jerry Koenig's Writekit:

http://www.geocities.com/ngl_repository/writekit.htm

Google searches will turn up *copious* essays on VXT.

6.1.3 PVS (Proposed Verb System)

Stephen DeGrace's contribution to the verb system debate. PVS takes up TVS's person and number endings and makes subject-verb agreement for person and number obligatory, so like TVS, PVS tends to encourage a lot of subject pronoun dropping. However, PVS does not use the Mood-Tense-Aspect inflection of TVS. Instead it proposes a system of helper verbs. Mood is contained in the choice of helper verb, and moods can be combined by using more than one modal helper. Aspects are constructed by using strings of helpers (more complex aspects are possible with longer chains, but in general single helpers are used and chains almost never get longer than two or three helpers), or aspect suffixes. Voice is also contained in helper choice. Tense is a property which only helpers may inflect for. Just as PVS borrows TVS's person and number inflections, TVS tends in practise to borrow elements from PVS, especially to construct the passive voice. PVS has a very extensive literature, possibly more extensive than that of TVS, so numerous examples can be found, although older examples preserve archaic forms as PVS has been changing over time.

Further information:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NGL/files/PVS-Related%20Documents/PVS.html>

6.2 TVS/PVS "Tokcir Native" Person and Number Inflection

The following inflectional system is agreed upon by TVS and PVS and not inimical to VTT, and so will be included in this essay. This "NVS", or "Native Verb System" could be employed with the generic tense (see 6.0). When employing NVS it is common to drop subject pronouns, as occurs in languages with strong conjugational systems such as Spanish or Latin. The persons and numbers recognised are the same as for pronouns, and the inflections used are taken directly from the pronoun system. When using strict PVS or TVS or mixing the two, using an ending for person and number on the verb is *obligatory*.

<i>number:</i>	<i>generic:</i>	<i>singular:</i>	<i>paucal:</i>	<i>plural:</i>
1st person:	-o	-om	-or	-os
2nd person:	-a	-am	-ar	-as
3rd person:	-e	-em	-er	-es

All verbal conjugational endings are suffixes.