



Basic Letters, Words, Sentences

Letters

The Tibetan letters in the most basic case are arranged from left to right. The pronunciation of each letter depends on the position. If the letter is alone, the letter is pronounced with an ending A, as in: ། NGA. NGA also is the word *I*. An example of another letter that also as standalone ends with A is །, NA. ། is also the word *when*.

Syllables and Words

If you now combine the two letters together forming a syllable, in this case the first one keeps the main pronunciation ending with A, while the other one loses the ending A. Thus: ། is pronounced NANG, not NANGA. NANG means *inside*. You could add more letters to the syllable, and the syllables then form words. The so called hanging dot, ' (called a TSEK) is used to separate syllables, not necessary words. Words are formed from one or more syllables. A simple example of this is །, NANG-PA, the last letter is PA. To be more specific you need to find a so-called **root letter**, and this letter is the basic letter where the pronunciation starts. In this case, the root letter was །.

ལ is used to build new words and objects from existing words so it is a very common ending letter in a word. །, NANG-PA means *insider*. Expect to see many words ending with the ། particle. In this case །, *inside* became །, *insider* or *Buddhist*.

In Tibetan, we express a specific vowel by placing a special marker either above or beneath the letter. For example, to write something like 'NI', we write: ། NI; note the top-level mark, called KIKU.

Sentences

The order of Tibetan sentences is typically *subject-object-verb*. In many cases, it also helps to read the sentence starting from right going to left to correctly understand the sentence. There are many words for 'is', of which the following one is used in sentences related to 'I': ། YIN. Again we have the KIKU marker for the 'i' vowel, and in this case we introduced the letter ། (YA), and the KIKU turned this to ། (YI). Finally the ། at the end becomes N, as ། was the root letter. In cases of vowels, it is very easy to find root letters, just look for letters that have the vowel ornament.

Building a Sentence

Now we are ready to build a sentence using the characters, words and vocabulary introduced:

ང་ནང་པ་ཡིན། NGA NANG-PA YIN, *I am a buddhist*. Note that 'am' is at the end, 'I' is in the beginning, and the attribute to 'I', 'insider' or buddhist is second to 'I'.

The statement ends with a vertical stroke marker, །, called a SHE. Note that this is not the same as a dot in English, to terminate sentences, it's rather an indication of a natural break in the sentences expressed, so in some cases it's equal to a comma, or a semi-colon, explanation mark, and so forth.

In verses the beginning and end of a verse is marked with a །.

Exercise:

ཡིན་པ་ means *being* (the པ་ makes ཡིན་ to a thing). How do you translate the following simple sentence? ང་ཡིན་པ་ཡིན།

Conclusion

This was a very simple introduction to the Tibetan language. There are 30 characters, some of these are placed in front of the actual root character, or on top of it, or below, or behind the root letter. Each case creates various forms of pronunciation rules. However, this introduction should give you enough understanding to know how the Tibetan characters, words, and sentences operate.

