

Hittite Spelling

Hittite was written in a cuneiform script which was developed for writing Sumerian and later Akkadian. The cuneiform script was not well-suited for rendering Hittite so determining the actual pronunciation of Hittite words from their cuneiform spellings is often difficult.

There were four types of cuneiform ‘syllabary’ signs:

V CV VC (few) CVC (very few)

If the word contains only open syllables with short vowels then there is no problem:

hayasa (place) ḥa-ya-ša

But very few words in Hittite are like this. If a syllable closed (has a coda), then unless there was a specific CVC sign, it had to be written either CV-VC, if the appropriate VC sign existed, or CV-CV with a spurious vowel.

kar-ga-mis Carchemish kar-ga-miš

andan in (adverb) an-da-an

If a *cluster* of consonants occurs (3 in the middle of a word or 2 at the edge), then a spurious vowel *had* to be written, since cuneiform possessed no way of writing a consonant *without* a vowel:

dluki long da-lu-ki

walh-mi I strike wa-al-ha-mi

Another problem in Hittite spelling comes from the representation of the labiovelars k^w . This sound was lacking in Akkadian and Sumerian so there was no symbol for it. It had to be written as ‘k’ with ‘u’ either before or after it

ek^w -mi I drink e-ku-mi

The cluster problem and the k^w problem could even occur together

nek^wt -s night ne-ku-ta-as

Also, although /e/ and /i/ were separate sounds in Hittite, the syllabary did not always contain signs for Ce or Ci in every instance. In these cases the scribes substituted Ce for Ci or vice versa.

Long Vowels and Scriptio Plena

It is also thought that Hittite contrasted *long and short vowels*, although the contrast was obscured because (probably), short vowels were lengthened when they were both accented and in open syllables. (The very same rule occurs in Modern Italian).

To write a long vowel the scribes used spellings known in philology as *scriptio plena* (full writing), sometimes also called *plene* spelling

CV-V- for an open syllable

<i>sarā</i>	up (adverb)	sa-ra-a
<i>hūmantēs</i>	all nom. pl.	ḫu-u-ma-an-te-eš
<i>lē</i>	not	li-e
<i>sēr</i>	above, for, on	se-ir

CV-V-VC for a closed syllable

<i>uwēr</i>	they came	ú-e-ir
<i>pāun</i>	I went	pa-a-un
<i>ārs</i>	it arrived	a-ar-aš

However, the scribes were not consistent in using *scriptio plena*. Often they left it out. So the *absence* of *plene* spelling doesn't *guarantee* that a vowel was short.

Generally speaking, if syllable in a word has *plene* spelling at least 10% of the time, we usually assume this is not an accident and that it was long. Less than 10% could just be spelling errors on the part of scribes.

Also, there were some (although quite few) CVC cuneiform signs. If there was one available, then if the scribe wrote CV-VC this could mean short — in which case the scribe just forgot to use the special CVC sign — *or* it could be a *plene* spelling.

Also there was no way to write accent or stress using cuneiform. There is abundant but indirect evidence that Hittite words had accent much like in PIE, but we have to infer indirectly where accent was in a word by looking at vowel length and syllable type, both of which have to be inferred indirectly from the spelling.

Similar problems affect the interpretation of Mycenaean Greek, which was also written in a syllabary (Linear B) not particularly well suited for the phonology of the language.

Sumerian and Akkadian in Hittite inscriptions

Sumerian and Akkadian were the languages of learning in the ancient Near East. Hittite scribes frequently interspersed Hittite words with words written in Sumerian and Akkadian.

There were three types of Sumerian or Akkadian spellings in Hittite

1. *Sumerograms/Akkadograms*. The Sumerian/Akkadian ‘ideogram’ (symbol denoting a whole word) would be used in place of a Hittite word with the same meaning, often with Hittite inflectional ending added onto the end of the ideogram.

In transcribing Hittite cuneiform the Sumerian and Akkadian signs are written in all capitals. The signs are denoted by the pronunciation of the word in the source language. Sumerian is written in Roman and Akkadian in italics.

LUGAL	king	<i>hassu-s</i>	ŠUM	name	<i>lāman</i>
IZI	fire	<i>pahhur</i>	ABI	father	?
GUŠKIN	gold	?	GAL	great, large	<i>salli-</i>
MUŠ	snake	?	U	Storm God	<i>tarhunna-</i>
GÍR	knife	?	GÌR	foot	<i>pada-m</i>
GE ₆	dark; night	<i>dankui-, išpant-</i>			

Accent marks and subscript numbers are used on Sumerograms when there is more than one sign in the syllabary for the letter sequence or two words with different meanings were pronounced the same.

For some words we do not know the Hittite pronunciation because the Sumerogram is always used instead.

2. *Determinatives*. Sumerian (and rarely Akkadian) signs were prefixed to other words to show that the word in question belonged to a certain class of objects.

DINGIR	god	<i>siuna- ~ siuni-</i>
LÚ	person	<i>pisna-s</i>
DUG	vessel	?
GIŠ	wood, tree	<i>taru-</i>
ÌD	river	<i>hapa-</i>
SAL	woman	?
URU	city	<i>happiriya</i>

In transcriptions the determinatives are written in superscript all caps.

3. *Inflectional markers and postpositions.* Sometimes instead of the Hittite inflectional endings or postpositions the scribes would write the corresponding ones in Sumerian or Akkadian.

ḪI.A	plural
MEŠ	plural
ANA	dative
ŠA	genitive
QADU	accompaniment ('with')
-YA	my
-KA	your
-ŠUNU	their

Sample Old Hittite Text

Hittite Laws 10.

takku LÚ.U₁₉.LU-an kuiski hūnikzi t-an istarnikzi nu apūn
 person-ACC any injures makes-ill and him-ACC

sāktāizzi pēdi-ssi-ma LÚ.U₁₉.LU-an pāi nu É-ri-ssi
 treat place-his-but person gives and house-his

anniskezzi kuitmān-as lāzziatta mān-as lazziatta-ma
 works while recovers when recovers-but

nu-sse 6 GÍN KÙ.BABBAR pāi LÚ.AZU-ya kussan apās-pat pāi
 and 6 shekels silver gives magician-DAT -EMPH give

If someone injures someone so that he causes him to become sick, he shall treat him and shall give a person in his place, and he (the latter) shall work in his house until he gets well. When he gets well, he (the perpetrator) shall give six shekels of silver, and he himself shall also pay the physician's fee.

Hittite Verbs

Present Active

☞ Hittite *mi*-conjugation present active \cong PIE primary active endings

<i>mi</i> pres. act.	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	3pl
PIE	*-m-i	*-s-i	*-t-i	*-men	*te	*nt-i
Proto-Anat.				*-u _{en} -i	*-ten-i	*-(ó)nt-i
Hittite	-m-i	-s-i	-z-i	-wen-i, -wan-i	-ten-i, -tan-i	-anz-i

<i>hi</i> pres. act.	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	
PIE	*-h ₂ é-i _h	*-th ₂ é-i	? *-é-i	?	?	
Proto-Anat.	*-Ha-i	*-ta-i	*-e	*-u _{eni}	*-teni	☞
Old Hittite	-hhe					
Hittite	-hhi	-ti	-i	-weni	-teni	

☞ Hittite *hi*-conjugation present active \cong PIE primary *middle* endings with *-i in sg.
PIE primary *active* endings (with *-i) in pl.

	<i>ēs-</i> to be	<i>ek^w-</i> to drink	<i>sākk-</i> to know	<i>ār-</i> to arrive
1sg	<i>ēs-mi</i>	<i>ek^w-mi</i>	<i>sak-hi,</i> <i>sag[gah]-hi</i>	<i>ār-hi</i>
2sg	<i>ēs-si</i>	<i>ek^w-si, ek^w-ti</i>	<i>sāk-ti</i>	<i>ār-ti</i>
3sg	<i>ēs-zi</i>	<i>ek^w-zi</i>	<i>sākk-i</i>	<i>ār-i</i>
1pl		<i>ak-weni,</i> <i>eku-wani</i>	<i>sekk-ueni</i>	<i>ēr-weni</i>
2pl	<i>ēs-teni</i>	<i>ekuw-teni</i>	<i>sak-teni,</i> <i>sek-teni</i>	<i>ar-teni,</i> <i>ēr-teni</i>
3pl	<i>as-anzi</i>		<i>sekk-anzi</i>	<i>ar-ānzi</i>

Preterite Active

☞ Hittite *mi*-conjugation present active \cong PIE secondary active endings, *except* in the 3pl where it the same as the *hi*-conjugation

<i>mi</i> pret. act.	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	3pl
PIE	*-m	*-s	*-t	*-men	*-te	
Proto-Anat.					*-ten	
Hittite	-un, -nun	-s	-t[a]	-wen	-ten	☞
later Hittite		-t[a]				
<i>hi</i> pret. act.	1sg	2sg	3sg			
PIE	?*-h ₂ e	-th ₂ e	*-t			*-er-s
Proto-Anat.	*-Ha/*-Hu	*-ta	*-st, *-t	☞	☞	*-(é)
Hittite	-hhun	-ta	-s ~ -ta			-ir, -ēr

☞ Hittite *hi*-conjugation preterite active \cong PIE *perfect/stative* endings in the 1sg, 2sg, and 3pl

1pl and 2pl are the same as in the *mi*-conjugation

The 3sg has developed as special -s ending, although an allomorph -ta is used after stem that ends in -s and, sometimes, other dental consonants.

The 2sg and 3sg forms eventually became confused with each other.

	<i>ēs-</i>	<i>ek^w-</i>	<i>sākk-</i>	<i>ār-</i>
	to be	to drink	to know	to arrive
1sg	<i>es-un</i>	<i>ek-un</i>	<i>sag[gah]-hun</i>	<i>ār-hun</i>
2sg	<i>ēs-ta</i>	<i>eku-tta</i>	<i>sak-ta</i>	
3sg	id.	<i>eku-tta,</i> <i>euk-ta</i>	<i>sak-ta,</i> <i>sakk-is</i>	<i>ar-as, ār-sa</i>
1pl	<i>ēs-wen</i>			<i>ēr-wen</i> <i>ar-wen</i>
2pl	<i>ēs-ten</i>		* <i>sek-ten</i>	
3pl	<i>ēs-er</i>	<i>eku-ir</i>	<i>sekk-ir</i>	<i>ar-ir, er-ir</i>

Present Middle

- ☞ Hittite *mi*-conjugation present middle \cong PIE primary middle endings (? with **-r*)
 In all categories a form with *-ri* appears to be an optional variant (except in the 1pl and 2 sg, which have *-ti* instead).

<i>mi</i> pres. mid.	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	3pl
PIE	*-h ₂ e-(r)	*-th ₂ e	*-t-o-(r)	*-med ^h h ₂	*-d ^h h ₂ ue	*-nto, *-ro
Proto-Anat.	*-Ha	*-to	*-to	? *-u ₂ esto	*-tu ₂ o, *-tumo	*-(o)nto
Hittite	-ha, -(h)hari	-ta, -ta-ti	-ta, -ta-ri	-wasta, -wasta-ti	-tuma, -tuma-ri	-anta, -anta-ri

<i>hi</i> pres. mid.	1sg		3sg			3pl
PIE	*-h ₂ é-r	☞	*-ó-(r)	☞	☞	☞
Proto-Anat.	? *-Ha-r		*-ó, *-óri			
Hittite	-(h)hari,		-a, -ari			

- ☞ Hittite *hi*-conjugation present middle \cong PIE primary ‘stative-middle’ endings
 The chief difference is that the 3sg has no *-t*
 It has been hypothesized that the absence of *-t* defined a type of middle inflection with intransitive stative meanings (e.g. ‘be sitting’)

Preterite Middle

- ☞ Hittite *mi*-conjugation preterite middle \cong Hittite *mi*-conjugation present middle with *-t* < Proto-Anatolian **-d*. (*-t* is occasionally replaced by *-ti*).
 Once again the 2sg and 3sg endings have fallen together

<i>mi</i> pret. mid.	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	3pl
Proto-Anat.	*-Ha-d	↘	↙			
Hittite	-(h)ha-t(i)	-ta, -ta-t(i)		-wasta-t	-tuma-t	-anta-t(i)

<i>hi</i> pres. mid.			3sg			
Proto-Anat.	☞		*-ó-d	?	☞	☞
Hittite		-a-t(i)	-a-t(i)			
		-ta-t				

- ☞ Hittite *hi*-conjugation preterite middle is more or less identical to the *mi*-conjugation preterite middle, except for the 3sg which again has no *-t*.

☞ The 2sg is either identical to the 3sg, following the pattern for the preterite, and so also lacks the *-t-*, or it is (approximately) identical to the *mi*-conjugation (*-ta-t* option), following the pattern of the rest of the categories except the special 3 sg form.

Hittite			PIE		
conj.	tense	voice		type	voice
<i>mi</i>	present	active		primary	active
<i>hi</i>	present	active	(<i>in sg.</i>)	primary	middle with <i>*-i</i>
<i>mi</i>	past	active		secondary	active
<i>hi</i>	past	active	(<i>1sg, 3pl</i>)	perfect-stative	—
<i>mi</i>	present	middle		primary	middle with or without (<i>*-r</i>)
<i>hi</i>	present	middle		primary	middle without 3sg <i>*-t-</i>
<i>mi</i>	past	middle	<i>appears derived from the present middle in Hittite and</i>		
<i>hi</i>	past	middle	<i>so has no clear PIE source — Anatolian innovation?</i>		

☞ Hittite *hi*-conjugation has as a distinguishing characteristic either PIE middle or perfect/stative endings.

☞ It lacks 3sg **-t-* in its middle forms, making it look like the so-called PIE imperfective ‘middle-stative’ verbs (e.g. ‘be sitting, be lying’), which were not perfective, but *did* express states.

☞ Where the *hi*-conjugation does have endings that look PIE active endings, namely in the plural of the present active and the 1pl, 2pl and (partly) 2sg of the past active, it may have simply taken these over through a mixing of conjugation types.

☞ It remains quite controversial whether:

- a. the Hittite *mi/hi* system developed from the ‘classical’ reconstruction of the PIE verb (as introduced in class), *or*
- b. vice versa, *or*
- c. both the Hittite system and the ‘classical’ PIE reconstruction are independent developments from some even more archaic proto-system

