

Tagwoqti – A Speedlang

Tim Foster/Secondus2/MerlinMusic

Phonology

Tagwoqti's Phonemic Inventory

Tagwoqti has the following consonant and vowel inventories:

Table 1 – Consonants of Tagwoqti. Romanisation shown in angle brackets.

	Labial	Coronal	Velar	Labiovelar	Glottal
Voiceless stop		t	k	k ^w <kw>	ʔ <q>
Voiced stop	b	d	g	g ^w <gw>	
Implosive stop	ɓ	ɗ			
Nasal	m	n			
Fricative		s z			
Approximant		ɹ l			
Trill		r			

Table 2 – Vowels of Tagwoqti. Romanisation shown in angle brackets

	Front	Back rounded	Back unrounded
Close	i	u	ɯ
Mid	ɛ <e>	ɔ <o>	ɤ <ɣ>
Open	a		ɑ
Diphthong	ai	au	ɑɯ

NB - For ease of typing, I will refrain from continuing to use the lowering diacritic for the mid vowels, as they merely demonstrate the typical realisation of these vowels, rather than marking a phonetic distinction between vowels.

Phonotactics

Both syllables and morae are important concepts in Tagwoqti. A syllable has the following structure:

(C₁)N/V(C₂)

Where C₁ is any consonant other than /ʔ/, V is any vowel, C₂ is one of /ʔ/, /n/ and /ɹ/ and N is a syllabic consonant nucleus of either /n/ or /ɹ/.

Words are composed of iambic feet which are counted from the left (beginning) of the word, such that only the last syllable may be unfooted, and the second of each pair of syllables (each even-numbered syllable) is stressed. Primary stress goes to the second syllable of the first foot in a word, with subsequent even-numbered syllables getting secondary stress.

Stressed syllables are produced with higher volume than unstressed ones, and must be composed of two morae. This means that they must either end with a coda consonant, or have a nucleus which is a diphthong, or a phonetically long vowel or long syllabic consonant. Note that there is no phonemic length distinction in vowels, but there can be a phonetic distinction conditioned by stress.

Unstressed syllables are restricted to being only one mora in length, meaning any coda consonants will be lost in unstressed syllables. Unstressed syllables which phonetically contain a diphthong must reduce this to a monophthong as below:

/ai/ > /e/

/au/ > /o/

/aʊ/ > /ɤ/

Example:

[o'wa: bɹ'ni: ze'dɤ:bihw: u'gʷan]

Ogwa! Bɹni zedɤpiɹsw ukwan

Ogwa! Bɹni zed-ɤ-piɹsw ukwa-n

EXCLM PRON.NOM catch-REA-MASC.SING.TERM PRON.GEN-DAT

“Aha! I have (finally) caught you” (sentence 133)

As can be seen from the example, vowels are lengthened in stressed syllables, and coda consonants, such as the /ɹ/ in /zedɤpiɹsw/ are lost in unstressed syllables, triggering the realisation of /s/ as [h].

Many consonants in Tagwoqti are subject to regular lenition intervocalically. These lenition processes are as follows:

- /p/ [b]
- /t/ [d]
- /k/ [g]
- /kʷ/ [gʷ]
- /b/ [v]
- /d/ [ɹ]

- /g/ [∅]
- /g^w/ [w]
- /s/ [h]

Note, consonants are still considered intervocalic if they are preceded by a coda consonant that is elided due to stress rules.

Further regular sound changes occur when coda consonants interact with the onsets of following syllables. The following table shows the realisation of the three possible coda consonants, depending on the quality of the following consonant:

Table 3 – Realisations of codas in Tagwoqti

Following consonant	Coda		
	ʔ	ɟ	n
t	t	ɟ	n
k	k	ɟ	ŋ
k ^w	k ^w	w	ŋ
b	b	ɟ	m
d	d	ɟ	n
g	g	ɟ	ŋ
g ^w	g ^w	w	ŋ
ɓ	b	ɟ	m
ɗ	d	ɟ	n
m	m	ɟ	m
n	n	ɟ	n
s	t	s	n
z	d	z	n
ɟ	ɟ	ɟ	ɟ
l	l	l	l
r	r	r	d

These rules of liaison hold as long as the syllable following the coda is unstressed. If this requirement is met, the liaison can even occur across word boundaries. Note, the only circumstances in which /ʔ/ is realised as [ʔ] are at the end of a word or before a syllable without an onset. In all other positions, it simply changes the length or, as in the case of /s/, the phonation, of the consonant.

Example:

[pɯ'ga: si ga'sitte ta'wottien]

Pwuka si gansiqte Tagwoqtien?

Pwuka si gans-iq-te Tagwoqti-en?

PRON Q talk-IRR-FEM.SG.NPAST Tagwoqti-DAT

Do you speak Tagwoqti?

One result of the realisation of coda glottal stops is that the only surface level difference in a word where a stressed syllable has either no coda or a coda glottal stop is the relative lengths of the vowel and the following consonant.

Example:

[na'mɿ:bɿ]

namɿpɿ

nam-ɿ-pɿ

steal-REA-MASC.SG.RPAST

“he stole”

[na'mɿbbɿ]

namɿqbɿ

mechanical.handle

“mechanical handle”

Rounding Harmony

Rounding is typically a feature of a root in Tagwoqti. Rounded roots can contain labiovelar consonants and back, rounded vowels, while unrounded roots cannot contain these sounds. Some rounded roots do not contain any labiovelar consonants or back vowels, but still trigger rounding harmony on suffixes. These are indicated by a superscript w at the beginning of the root in the wordlist. For example, the pronoun ^wmala. Such roots commonly contain labial consonants.

Unrounded roots can contain plain velar consonants, and unrounded back vowels. Rounded roots cannot contain these sounds, with the exception of /w/, which can occur in rounded roots, but not after any rounded consonants or vowels. This is because some sources of /w/ in Tagwoqti were syllabic consonants, which became /w/ after the formalisation of the root rounding feature.

While disharmonic roots, containing both rounded and unrounded segments are rare, they do exist. In these cases rounding spreads rightwards from any rounded segment, affecting all velar stops and back vowels. These roots still trigger rounding harmony on suffixes.

Prefixes do not trigger any rounding harmony, but are not affected by the rounding feature of the root they attach to.

Suffixes and prefixes that obey rounding harmony are generally written in this grammar with the unrounded back vowels.

Examples:

[bɛ'le: na'dɻ:bɻ su'nu:gu]

bɛle natɻpɻ sunuku

bɛle nat-ɻ-pɻ sunu-ku

man.SG.NOM eat-REA-MASC.SG.RP rice-ABL

“The man ate some of the rice.”

[mi'sa:zo re'wo:bo ne'le: si'pe:gu kʷo'hən]

misazo regwopo nele siqpekʷ kwosan

miqsazaun regw-o-po nele siqpe-kʷ kwosa-n

Mr.Jones make-REA-MASC.SG.RP knife.ABS wood-ABL son.GEN-DAT

“Mr. Jones made a wooden knife for his little boy.” (adapted from sentence 93)

Note the masculine singular recent past affix can be either -pɻ or -po depending on the rounding quality of the verbal root, and the ablative suffix can similarly be -kʷ or -ku.

Nouns and Pronouns

Gender

Nouns in Tagwoqti have either masculine or feminine gender. Gender is covert, and there are no particular sounds or segments that associate with gender. However, gender triggers agreement on demonstratives and verbs. Some Tagwoqti pronouns can trigger either masculine or feminine agreement, depending on whom they refer to. This is not the case for other human nouns that cannot be used pronominally.

Number

There is a semantic split between human and non-human noun phrases in Tagwoqti which determines the morphology and behaviour of nouns. Only nouns with human or personified referents can be marked for number. These nouns have a singular-dual-plural number distinction. All nouns, whether human or not, trigger number agreement on verbs, which only distinguishes singular from plural.

The plural can be formed by:

1. Changing the initial vowel
2. Reduplicating the first syllable

- Adding one of the suffixes -ga, -bu, -biɣn and -ɖɣn

The dual is formed by adding the suffix -sa to the plural

Example:

Table 4 – Forms of the noun “bele” (man) in Tagwoqti

	Plain	Genitive
Singular	bele	bela
Plural	bile	bila
Dual	bilesa	bilasa

Case

Nouns in Tagwoqti take case inflections to mark their roles in an utterance. The case marking paradigms differ between human noun phrases and non-human noun phrases. Human noun phrases have an unmarked nominative case and cannot take ergative marking, while non-human nouns have an unmarked absolutive case.

All nouns in Tagwoqti have two basic forms: an unmarked nominative or absolutive form, and a genitive that is derived from the unmarked form either by a vowel change, or by the suffix -a. All other cases are formed by adding further endings to the genitive form of the noun.

The specific case roles are shown below:

Table 5 – Case roles in Tagwoqti

Role	Human nouns	Non-human nouns
Agent	Unmarked (nominative)	Ergative -laɹ
Patient/Theme	Dative -(e)n	Unmarked (absolutive)
Recipient/Benefactor/Goal/Location		Dative -(e)n
Possessor	Genitive	
Source/Material/Instrument/Cause/Part	Ablative -kuw	
Companion/Associate/Additive	Comitative -ze	

Indefiniteness Marking

Indefinite nouns have a suffix which agrees with number (singular-plural) for human nouns. However, this does not occur if the noun is incorporated into a verb. Additionally, if the noun is a part of a larger mass or group, then the partitive case is used instead of indefinite marking.

Table 6 – Indefinite marking in Tagwoqti

	Human nouns	Non-human nouns
Singular	-mi	-mi
Plural	-men	

Pronouns

Pronouns in Tagwoqti are an open class, and are difficult to distinguish from nouns. When they behave as pronouns, their meaning may shift. For example, the noun “sɣzi” means a toddler or very young child. However, as a pronoun it can refer to older girls all the way up to the beginning of puberty. Most, but not all, pronouns also have nominal meanings.

Pronouns do not behave regularly in respect to negation. For example, “sɣziga”, the plural of “sɣzi” cannot be used as a pronoun. It simply refers to a number of toddlers.

Pronouns also differ from regular nouns in gender agreement. Unlike other nouns, pronouns do not have fixed gender agreement, as many pronouns are not sex-specific.

Pronouns are typically sensitive to the relations between the speaker and the listener. Perhaps the most important distinctions are whether the interlocutors are related, and their relative ages.

Examples:

[tela: kabn: segɣ:bu sobo: ka dedi: lele:ete:]

Tela, kapn segɣɣu sopo ka dedi lelegete.

Tela, kapn seg-ɣ-pu sopo ka dedi le-leg-e-te.

NAME PRON know-REA-MASC.SG.NEG.NPAST boy REL PRON RED-discuss-REL-FEM.SG.NPAST

“Tela, I don’t know who you’re talking about.”

Here, the use pronoun “kapn” shows that the speaker is the father of the listener, while the pronoun “dedi” shows that the listener is either his younger sister or daughter. If we were to reverse the relationship, so that a daughter is saying the same thing to their father, the sentence would read:

Tela, dedi segɣtu sopo ka tata lelegete.

Note, the pronoun “dedi” has remained the same, as this can be used in both the first and second persons. However, the pronoun “kapn” has been switched to “tata” which is typically used by children to address their father, but not the other way around.

Verbs

Construction

Verbs in Tagwoqti mark various distinctions in various ways. An important distinction in Tagwoqti is the perfective-imperfective distinction. Every Tagwoqti verb has a perfective and an imperfective form. Sometimes these are completely different, suppletive forms. In other cases, the imperfective can be formed by reduplicating the first syllable of the perfective form.

Other distinctions that are marked on the verb stem are realis-irrealis and pluractionality.

The realis-irrealis distinction is marked in a regular morphological fashion. The standard /C(ɣ/o)/ verb ending is switched to a /Ciʔ/ ending in irrealis verbs. Irrealis verbs occur:

- In negative statements
- In unreal conditions
- In questions
- In complement clauses
- In imperatives and commands

Pluractionality is sometimes suppletive, as with the perfective-imperfective distinction, but in other cases it is marked by an infix /ma?/, which occurs before the last consonant of the verb.

Example:

Table 7 – Forms of the regular verb “natʏ” – to eat/drink/consume

	Realis perfective	Realis imperfective	Irrealis perfective	Irrealis imperfective
Singular	natʏ [na'dɣ:]	nanatʏ [na'na:dɣ]	natiq [nadiʔ]	nanatiq [nana:di]
Pluractional	namaqtʏ [na'mat:ɣ]	nanamaqtʏ [na'na:mady:]	namaqtiq [namat:i]	nanamaqtiq [nana:madiʔ]

Gender, Number, Tense, Aspect and Negation

Verbs must agree with their subject (the nominative or ergative argument) in both gender and number. This agreement occurs on a suffix that also encodes tense, aspect and negation. These affixes are shown below:

Table 8 – Gender-number-tense-affix suffixes on Tagwoqti verbs

	Masculine singular	Masculine plural	Feminine singular	Feminine plural
Non-past	-pi	-pe	-te	-te
Non-past negative	-pɯ	-pɯn	-tu	-tɯn
Recent past	-pɣ	-pɣn	-tɣ	-tan
Distant past	-ɹapi	-ɹape	-ɹate	-ɹate
Past negative	-me	-men	-da	-dan
Terminative	-piɯsw	-peɯsw	-tiɯsw	-teɯsw

These various tense-aspect-negation meanings combine with the perfective-imperfective distinction in the root to convey a wide array of distinctions. These are described below:

Table 9 – Tense-aspect-negation meanings in Tagwoqti

	Perfective	Imperfective
Non-past	Future/Stative	Present habitual/present continuous
Distant past	Distant past perfective	Past habitual
Recent past	Recent past perfective	Past continuous
Terminative	Do something finally (that has been planned/predicted) / do something for the last time / do the last (OBJ)	Be finishing doing something
Non-past negative	Future negative	Present negative
Past negative	Past perfective negative	Past imperfective negative

Copula

Copula sentences, linking noun phrases together use a suppletive set of non-inflecting copulas, with fewer tense-aspect distinctions than most verbs. These are shown below:

Table 10 – Forms of the copula in Tagwoqti

	Singular	Pluractional
Non-past	na	lo
Non-past negative	pi	atin
Past	da	loko
Past negative	dabw	seteɹ

For encoding of location, a far more regular locative copula, “masʁ” is used.

Syntax

Word order in Tagwoqti is typically SVO. However, SOV order can also occur if the direct object is non-specific and not important to the discourse. In this case, the object also loses any case marking and indefiniteness marking. In some ways, this resembles noun incorporation.

Numerals, relative clauses, and demonstratives go after the noun, while possessors come before it.

Relative clauses

Relative clauses are constructed by placing a relativiser that agrees with the relativised noun in gender and number directly after the relativised noun, and by marking the verb as relative by switching the standard /C(ʁ/o)/ ending to /Ce/. Relative verbs do not have a realis-irrealis distinction.

Table 11 – Relativisers in Tagwoqti

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	ka	na
Plural	ke	ne

Example:

[ta'da: na de'ɯ:ze na ki'di: so'soɬoto:]

tata na dedyze na kiti soɬoto

tata na dedyze na kiti sor-sort-o-to

PRON COP.SG.NPAST sister-COM REL.FEM.SG berry RED-collect.PLUR-REA-FEM.SG.RPAST

“He is with my sister, who has been collecting berries.”

Relative verbs can also be used when focussing an agent. As focus typically comes at the end of a sentence in Tagwoqti, relative clauses can be used to move an agent to the end of the sentence as a copular complement.

Example:

[madɯ: ka name:bɣ kimi: da pahu:]

madɯ ka namepɣ kimi da Pasu!

madɯ ka nam-e-pi kimi da Pasu!

person REL.MASC.SG steal-REL-MASC.SG.RPAST berry COP.SG.PAST NAME

“It was Pasu who stole the berry!”

(Literally, “the one who stole the berry is Pasu”)

Sentences like this have become so commonplace, that the dummy noun “madɯ” and the copula can be dropped, yielding:

[ka name:bɣ kimi: pahu:]

Ka namepɣ kimi Pasu!

Ka nam-e-pi kimi Pasu!

REL.MASC.SG steal-REL-MASC.SG.RPAST berry NAME

“It was Pasu who stole the berry!”

Here, the only verb form is a relative verb, but this sentence can be understood as a standalone utterance. This is an example of insubordination.

Dialogue

The following is a dialogue between a woman named Pasojkwō, her nephew Teben, her niece, Tela and their father, Tusar. They are preparing for a feast or celebration of some kind.

Pasojkwō:

[o'wa: bɔ'ni: ze'dɔ:diɦw: u'gʷan]

Ogwa! ʔɔni zedɔtɔsw ukwan

Ogwa! ʔɔni zed-ɣ-tɔsw ukwa-n

EXCLM PRON.NOM catch-REA-FEM.SING.TERM PRON.GEN-DAT

“Aha! I have (finally) caught you” (sentence 133)

Teben (joking):

[ra'wu: tu'du:lobi:]

ragwu tutulopi

ragwu tu-tulo-pi

PRON RED-be.ashamed-MASC.SG.NPAST

“I feel ashamed of myself!” (sentence 175)

Pasojkwō:

[ma'lakʷ kabn: ba si ma'sippi su'gʷu:]

malaq kweli ba si masiqpi sukwu

malaq kapn ba si mas-iq-pi sukwu

PRON father actually Q LOC-IRR-MASC.SG.NPAST where

“Now, where is your father?”

Teben:

[ta'da: na de'ɔ:ze na ki'di: so'soɔtodo:]

tata na dedɔze na kiti soɔsoɔtoto

tata na dedɔze na kiti sor-sort-o-to

PRON COP.SG.NPAST sister-COM REL.FEM.SG berry RED-collect.PLUR-REA-FEM.SG.RPAST

“He is with my sister, who has been collecting berries.”

Pasojkwō:

[le'gw: si pu'rippi so'lauhe]

lekw si puriqpi solauhe

lekw si pur-iq-pi solau-he
PRON Q return-IRR-MASC.SG.NPAST time-which

“When will he be back?”

(Entering) Tusa:

[su'la: tu'rx:diɦw: na'nai bu'lo:de]
Sula turɣtiɦsw. Nanai bulote.
Sula tur-ɣ-tiɦsw. Nanai bul-o-te.
PRON arrive-REA-FEM.SG.TERM NAME be.happy-REA-FEM.SG.NPAST

“You finally got here! Nanai will be pleased.”

Pasoɣkwo:

[ne'ge: su'la: si'sittoɦa:de na'naian: si'gi: ba si ma'sitte su'gʷu: te'la: sɣ'zi: si so'do:do ki'di:mi ba'lan]
Neke. Sula siqsiqtoɦate Nanaian. Siki ba si masiqte sukwu? Tela, sɣzi si sortoto kitimi balan?
Neke. Sula siq-siq-t-o-ɦate Nanai-a-n. Siki ba si
mas-iq-te sukwu? Tela, sɣzi si sort-o-to kiti-mi bala-n?
Yes. PRON RED-be.empty-REA-FEM.SG.DPAST Nanai-GEN-DAT PRON actually Q
LOC-IRR-FEM.SG.NPAST Tela PRON Q collect.PLUR-REA-FEM.SG.RPAST berry-INDEF PRON.GEN-DAT

“Yes, I’ve missed Nanai, where is she now? And Tela, have you picked some berries for us?”

Tela:

[naze: sodo:do kʷiu kidi:mi ke damallebe: sobo: gʷa namɣ:bi kimi: ka lazan kʷeɦe:pi mozan logʷo po memammɣtan]
Naze sortoto kwiu kitimi ke damaɦlepe. Sopo gwa namɣpi kimi ka lazan kwedeɦe:pi mozan. Lokwo po memaɦmɣtan.
Naze sort-o-to kwiu kiti-mi ke
damaɦl-e-pe. Sopo gwa nam-ɣ-pi kimi ka lazan
kwed-e-pi moza-n. Lokwo po me<maɦ>m-ɣ-tan.
PRON collect.PLUR-REA-FEM.SG.RPAST many berry-INDEF REL.MASC.PL
be.delicious-REL-MASC.PL.NPAST PRON but steal-REA-MASC.SG.RPAST berry REL.MASC.SG most
be.big-REL-MASC.SG.RPAST PRON.GEN-DAT PRON then laugh<PLUR>-REA-FEM.PL.RPAST

“I collected lots of delicious berries. But he stole the biggest berry for her. Then they laughed (at me)”

Tusa:

[tela: kabn: segɣ:bw sobo: ka deɦi: lele:ete:]
Tela, kapn segɣpw sopo ka dedi lelegete.
Tela, kapn seg-ɣ-pw sopo ka dedi le-leg-e-te.
NAME PRON know-REA-MASC.SG.NEG.NPAST boy REL PRON RED-discuss-REL-FEM.SG.NPAST

“Tela, I don’t know who you’re talking about.”

Tela:

[ka name:by kimi: pahu:]

Ka namepy kimi Pasu!

Ka nam-e-pi kimi Pasu!

REL.MASC.SG steal-REL-MASC.SG.RPAST berry NAME

“It was Pasu who stole the berry!”

Table 12 – The nominal and pronominal meanings of the pronouns used in the dialogue

	Nominal meaning	Pronominal meaning
ɓɓni	generous person, gift-giver	1 st person pronoun used by adults when speaking to younger members of their extended family
ukwa	member, follower	2 nd or 3 rd person pronoun referring to a child that is a member of the speakers family but not necessarily a direct descendant
ragwu	a young boy	1 st person pronoun used by children when speaking to family members
maloq	a sweet fruit	2 nd or 3 rd person gender-neutral pronoun used when speaking to younger family members. Used to show affection.
tata	informal word for father (dad)	2 nd or 3 rd person pronoun used to refer to a father or grandfather.
leku	younger brother	Person-neutral pronoun used to refer to a younger brother
sula	older sister	Person-neutral pronoun used to refer to an older sister
siki	friend	A 2 nd or 3 rd person gender-neutral pronoun referring an adult who is not a direct relative
szzi	-	2 nd or 3 rd person pronoun for a toddler or a young girl up to the beginning of puberty. Can be seen as patronising as girls get older. Can be used for older male children, but only to tease or insult.
bale	family	A 1 st person inclusive plural pronoun used to refer to related people.
naze	beautiful woman	A feminine first-person pronoun used by children. Older speakers using this pronoun are frowned upon as frivolous.
sopo	boy	A masculine 2 nd or 3 rd person pronoun used to refer to a boy from outside the family.
mozo	girl	A feminine 2 nd or 3 rd person pronoun used to refer to a girl from outside the family.
lokwo	-	2 nd or 3 rd person plural pronoun for children outside the family.
kapn	father	A masculine 1 st person pronoun used by men addressing their children
dedi	younger sister	A person-neutral pronoun used to refer to a younger sister or daughter. Only used to refer to a daughter when in private.