

Complete Grammar of the Tùñí Language

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Version 1

1 Introduction

The Tùñí language is spoken by the Íafùl people deep in the mountains. Little is known about them.

I began working on Tùñí as part of the CDN Speedlang Challenge 11 in March 2022, and it will soon be worked into my conworld Omnia.

To anyone who reads this, please send me any comments and critiques you may have. I am always trying to get better at conlanging. Thank you!

1.1 Abbreviations

Gloss	Name
1	first person
2	second person
DIR	direct evidential
IMP	past imperfective
INDIR	indirect evidential
PAST	past perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
SG	singular
VIS	visual evidential

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2 Phonology

2.1 Phonemic Inventory

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasals	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Stops	p b	t d	c ɟ	k g	
Fricatives	f	s	ʃ		h
Liquids	ʋ	r ɾ ɽ	j	w	

Table 1: Consonant Phonemes

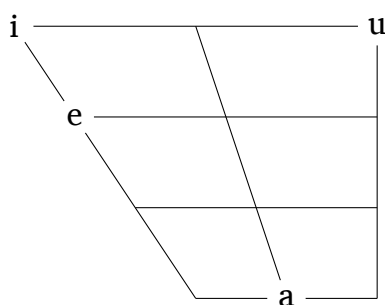


Figure 1: Vowel Phonemes

All vowels can be either low, mid, high, or falling tone, and can be nasalized, though nasalized vowels only occur word finally.

In addition, Tùñí also has the diphthongs /uə/ /oe/ /iə/ /ie/ /iu/ /əi/.

The phoneme /j/ is only found in a single suffix: **-jhá**, the marker for noun class 7 (see 3.1).

2.2 Orthography

Tùñí has no native orthography (I wanted to do the script, and I might still, but I couldn't get it done in time), and it is romanized as follows:

- Low, mid, high, and falling tones are written with a grave accent, no marking, an acute accent, and a circumflex accent, respectively.
- Nasalized vowels are written with a tilde.

- /j/ /ɟ/ are romanized as <y> <j>.
- /ŋ/ /ɲ/ are romanized as <ñ> <ng>.
- /v/ /r/ /ʎ/ /ɻ/ are romanized as <v> <r> <l> <rr>.
- /uə/ /iə/ /iu/ /əi/ are romanized as <ua> <ia> <iu> <ai>, and tone is always marked on the first vowel, as that is always the syllabic vowel.
- All other phonemes are their IPA symbols.

2.3 Tone

All words in Tùñí have an associated tone melody. This tone melody can be any of M, HL, H, MH, HH, LHL, HLH, and LHLH, where H is high tone, M is mid tone, and L is low tone. In a root, only M, HL, and H are possible, but the rest occur regularly in compounds. Tone melodies attach their final tone to the final vowel in a word. Ex: H tone **kùráh** ‘to see’, HL tone **kúràl** ‘shepherd’¹

When in a compound, two tone melodies come together that form a disallowed tone melody, they will contract into one of the allowed tone melodies.

After the tone melodies are placed on their respective syllables, the remaining syllables will have their tone realized according to these two rules:

- If the preceding syllable is mid tone, the syllable will become mid.
- Otherwise, all remaining syllables are low.

There is also one tone sandhi rule: If two words both marked HL occur next to each other, the second word’s tones all will be spoken low.

- (1) a. *dây* ‘then’
 b. *îl* ‘but’
 c. *îl dầy* ‘but then, signals a digression from the topic’

2.4 Phonotactics

Tùñí words all have a CVC syllable structure. Any consonant besides /h/ can be found initially, and only liquids can serve as syllable codas. Diph-

¹Omnia doesn’t have sheep, but shepherd is the best translation regardless.

things also only appear word-initially, or in the initial position of the second part of a compound.

2.5 Morphophonology

Tùńí nouns and verbs are not readily separable from each other, as they use the same basic set of roots to form words. Roots are unmarked for any tone, and when realized in certain forms will take tone and often a suffix as well.

- (2) a. tuni ‘root: speaking’
- b. kura ‘root: seeing’
- c. cepu ‘root: running’
- d. jisu ‘root: cutting’

When formed into either a noun or a verb, roots must take one of the transitivity markers for verbs, or the noun class markers for nouns.

- (3) a. tũńíh ‘to speak’
- b. kurã ‘to gaze’
- c. cepũ ‘to run’
- d. jìsú ‘knife’
- e. jìsùrr ‘predator’

Adverbs and particles do not usually fall into the root-template system, but are already realized for tone in their most basic forms.

3 Nominal Morphology

3.1 Noun Class

Tùní nouns all fall into one of 13 noun classes, which in addition to being used to derive new nouns from roots, carry certain animacy roles according to their position on the hierarchy. These roles are manifested in discourse functions (see 6).

1	human adults, spiritual things, and natural wonders	HL-l
2	human children, slaves, and certain higher animals	-ríh
3	most animals	HL-rr
4	bugs, worms, etc.	-yĩ
5	trees	H-gùr
6	other plants	HL-v
7	mountains and things relating to mountains	-jhá
8	other inanimates, languages, ethnic groups	H
9	body parts which come in pairs	-mú
10	other body parts	H-rràv
11	other pairs	HL-y
12	diminutives	full reduplication
13	abstractions	ngíh

Table 2: Noun Classes

Nouns higher on the list are considered more animate than those lower on the list, and are more likely to be salient in a discourse.

3.2 Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1st	tì	yã
2nd	cíy	súh
3rd	péh	úa

Table 3: Personal Pronouns

First person pronouns are highest on the animacy hierarchy, followed by second person pronouns. Third person pronouns match the animacy of whatever noun they are referring to.

3.3 Possession

Possession is marked with the postposition **gâl**.

- (4) **tì gâl rrìní**
“my house”

4 Verbal Morphology

4.1 Transitivity Markers

Roots in Tùñí can take one of two transitivity markers to form verbs.

Intransitive		M + nasalization
Transitive		H-h

Table 4: Transitivity Markers

In some cases these two can produce semantically different verbs, but these are rare, and in most cases the two words differ only in their transitivity. The principal argument of the intransitive verb is always identical to the subject of the corresponding transitive verb, whether that subject is an agent, patient, experiencer, etc. This means that rather than the transitivity markers creating a pair ‘to kill’ and ‘to die’, they create a pair ‘to kill (*something*)’ and ‘to kill (*no patient expected*)’; **mùrrúh** and **murrû**, respectively.

4.2 Evidentiality

Every Tùñí clause must contain an evidential marker. These are words which denote how the speaker obtained the information expressed in the clause.

Visual		kûr
Direct		vě
Indirect		ôerr

Table 5: Transitivity Markers

The visual marker is used when the speaker witnessed an event occur. Despite making sense logically, this is rarely used in the first person, using the direct marker instead. In fact, many speakers will only use the visual in the first person for a mirative meaning, as it distances oneself from the action.

(5) **Péh ñàté kûr jìsúh fûw.**

péh ñàté kûr jìsúh fûw
3SG *meat* VIS *cut* PAST

“He cut the meat (and I saw him do it).”

(6) **Dây tì kûr àiréh fûw.**

dây tì kûr àiréh fûw
then 1SG VIS *leave* PAST

“Then I left (I couldn’t believe it either).”

The direct marker is used when the speaker experienced the event in a way other than visually, such as doing it themselves, hearing it happen, or another sensory experience.

(7) **Péh ñàté vĕ jìsúh rrĩ.**

péh ñàté vĕ jìsúh rrĩ
3SG *meat* DIR *cut* IMP

“He was cutting the meat (I could smell it from the other room).”

The indirect marker is used when the speaker is inferring that the event happened from context or evidence surrounding the event, or when they heard it from someone else. It can also be used to distance the speaker from an event, such as when telling a story.

(8) **Péh ñàté ôerr jìsúh fûw.**

péh ñàté ôerr jìsúh fûw
3SG *meat* INDIR *cut* PAST

“He cut the meat (he must’ve, since he served it to me later).”

(9) **Úa tírùrr òerr kùráh fûw.**

úa tírùrr òerr kùráh fûw
3PL *bird* INDIR *see* PAST

“They saw a bird (and they told me about it).”

(10) **Dây péh rríní ôerr àiréh fûw.**

dây péh rríní ôerr àiréh fûw
then 3SG *house* INDIR *leave* PAST

“Then he left the house (telling a story).”

4.3 Serial Verb Constructions

Tùńí frequently has multiple verbs in a single clause, forming what could be called Serial Verb Constructions, or SVCs. These are distinct from clause chaining processes or auxiliary verbs because they only use a single evidential marker, which is a marker of clause status.

The most common SVC is one where the agent is shared by both verbs, and the two verbs encode motion. In such a clause, the first verb expresses a co-event of the motion (such as manner, cause, etc.) and the second expresses the path of the motion. Both verbs may encode the motion, or only one. Tùńí readily colexifies both MOTION + PATH and MOTION + CO-EVENT combinations.

(11) **Tì cepũ rrìní v̄ àiréh f̄w.**

tì cepũ rrìní v̄ àiréh f̄w
1SG run house DIR leave PAST

“I ran out of the house.”

Another common SVC is one where the two verbs share both the agent and the patient, and also another third argument which is most often an instrument, a comitative argument (effectively another agent), or an indirect object.

(12) **Péh jìsú ngùbáh ñàté ôerr jìsúh.**

péh jìsú ngùbáh ñàté ôerr jìsúh
3SG knife grasp meat INDIR cut

“She is cutting meat with a knife.”

(13) **Péh péh gâl vùsèl bùyéh ñàté ôerr jìsúh.**

péh péh gâl vùsèl bùyéh ñàté ôerr jìsúh
3SG 3SG POSS friend be.beside meat INDIR cut

“She is cutting meat with her friend.”

A third common type of SVC is a resultative. Both verbs will share the agent and the patient, the first verb expresses the effect of the action, and the second verb expresses the cause.

(14) **Únàr yã tírùrr mùrrúh vĕ ìenáh fûw.**

únàr yã tírùrr mùrrúh vĕ ìenáh fûw
anyway 1PL *bird* *kill* DIR *hit* PAST

“Anyway, we beat the bird to death.”

5 Constituent Order

5.1 Verb Phrases

The standard verb phrase order is SOV, with evidentials coming immediately before the verb, and tense markers immediately after.

In a SVC of motion, the form is

S V1 O Evidential V2 Tense.

In a SVC with third argument, the form is

S Argument3 V1 O Evidential V2 Tense

In a resultative SVC, the form is

S O V1 Evidential V2 Tense

5.2 Noun Phrases

In a noun phrase, the head is final, so the orders would be Adjective-Noun, Genitive-Noun, Determiner-Noun.

(15) *tì gâl rrìní* ‘*my house*’

(16) *má rrìní* ‘*this house*’

5.3 Adpositional Phrases

Tùní has a small number of postpositions, as most are expressed via SVCs, but the few that remain follow their dependent nouns.

(17) *péh gâl kúràl* ‘*its shepherd*’

6 Discourse Functions

In a discourse, animacy becomes a major player in the structure of clauses, and a variety of markers are employed to facilitate the flow of conversation.

6.1 Noun Incorporation

Noun incorporation in Tùñí can be accomplished one of two ways: by raising an argument, or by lowering an argument. The former is done with the purpose of emphasizing an argument in the discourse, which often involves moving it from an oblique role into the role of patient. This can only be done to raise a noun from classes 1 and 2, or a 1st or 2nd person pronoun. It is done by placing the noun one wishes to emphasize in the role of patient and moving what was once the patient in between the evidential and the verb, making its combination with the verb similar to a compound verb.

For example, given the phrase from example 13,

(18) **Péh péh gâl vùsèl bùyéh ñàté ôerr jìsúh.**

péh péh gâl vùsèl bùyéh ñàté ôerr jìsúh
3SG 3SG POSS *friend* *be.beside* *meat* INDIR *cut*

“She is cutting meat with her friend.”

We may wish to raise the phrase ‘*her friend*’ to the role of patient. This would mean we would move **ñàté** and the SVC construction would no longer be necessary, as the clause consists only of an agent and a patient now.

(19) **Péh péh gâl vùsèl ôerr ñàté jìsúh.**

péh péh gâl vùsèl ôerr ñàté jìsúh
3SG 3SG POSS *friend* INDIR *meat* *cut*

“She is cutting meat with her friend. (lit. she is meat-cutting her friend)”

We could also emphasize ‘*she*’ in a similar way, eliminating the possessive construction this time.

(20) **Péh vúsèl bùyéh péh ôerr ñàté jìsúh.**

péh vúsèl bùyéh péh ôerr ñàté jìsúh
3SG friend be.beside 3SG INDIR meat cut

“She is cutting meat with her friend. (lit. she is meat-cutting her with a friend)”

While this sounds strange in English, this is perfectly natural to a Tùñí speaker (and speakers of Yucatec Maya as well, the inspiration for this feature).

The second method of noun incorporation is similar to the first type, but is used to background an argument in the discourse, often when an argument is just salient enough to not be omitted. This is done simply by moving the argument into the preverbal position. If the argument is a patient, then the new clause will no longer have a patient, and thus the verb will become intransitive. Sticking to the same example as before:

(21) **Péh péh gâl vúsèl bùyéh ôerr ñàté jisũ.**

péh péh gâl vúsèl bùyéh ôerr ñàté jisũ
3SG 3SG POSS friend be.beside meat INDIR cut

“She is cutting meat with her friend. (lit. she is meat-cutting with her friend)”

6.2 Discourse Markers

There are also a variety of discourse markers one may use to aid in the flow of information in a discourse. Rather than simply list them out, a sample discourse is given here with some examples, as well as instances of the noun incorporation from above:

(22) **Dây síh fũ tì ôerr vinũ rrĩ.**

dây síh fũ tì ôerr vinũ rrĩ
then surely yesterday 1SG INDIR walk IMP

“So I was walking yesterday.”

- (23) **Tì vinũ rríní ôerr ùatùnúh rrĩ, yè kurã.**
 tí vinũ rríní ôerr ùatùnúh rrĩ yè kurã
 1SG walk house INDIR go.toward IMP 2SG see
 “I was going back home, you know?”
- (24) **Ìu tí tírùrr ôerr kùráh fûw.**
 ìu tí tírùrr ôerr kùráh fûw
 and 1SG bird INDIR see PAST
 “And I saw a bird.”
- (25) **Îl dâý ñù tí dîrr òerr kùráh fûw.**
 îl dâý ñù tí dîrr ôerr kùráh fûw
 but then also 1SG rabbit INDIR see PAST
 “Come to think of it, I also saw some rabbits.”
- (26) **Únàr tírùrr, ñù, tírũ tí gâl kùrárràv òerr ùatùnúh fûw.**
 únàr tírùrr ñù tírũ tí gâl kùrárràv ôerr ùatùnúh
 well bird also fly 1SG POSS face INDIR go.toward
 fûw
 PAST
 “Anyway, the bird, uh, flew right at my face.”
- (27) **Ìu dâý péh ôerr tí gâl kùrárràv ginẽ fûw.**
 ìu dâý péh ôerr tí gâl kùrárràv ginẽ fûw
 and then 3SG INDIR 1SG POSS face scratch PAST
 “And it scratched my face too!”
- (28) **Ìu dâý tí vinũ rríní kûr ùatùnúh fûw, má ngùbáh.**
 ìu dâý tí vinũ rríní kûr ùatùnúh fûw má ngùbáh
 and then 1SG walk house VIS go.toward PAST this grasp
 “And then I just went home, I guess.”

In the first sentence, this speaker's turn in the discourse begins with **dây** 'then', which signals the beginning of a turn or a shift in topic. The speaker also is saying he/she was walking home is given knowledge. The speaker expects the listener to know that of course he/she was walking home that day, so the particle **síh** 'surely' is used.

In the second sentence, the speaker finishes the phrase with **yě kurã** 'you see', to check the listener's comprehension at this point.

In the fourth sentence, the speaker digresses to another topic, marked with **îl dâý** 'but then'.

Subsequently, the speaker moves back to the original topic with the particle **únàr** 'well', and when he/she cannot come up with the words or the ideas, **ñù** 'also' is used as a filler word.

The following sentence starts with **ìu dâý** 'and then', which is used when listing events in a list. You can also see that the phrase 'my face' has been backgrounded in the discourse, making the verb intransitive and moving **tì gâl kùràrràv** to the preverbal position.

The final sentence also begins with **ìu dâý**, and the speaker expresses his/her surprise at the course of events by using the visual evidential in a mirative sense. The speaker ends the turn with **má ngùbáh** 'with this', to signal that his/her turn is over, and he/she wishes for the other party to respond.

7 Example Sentences

- (29) **Yùríh àikú vĕ aikũ, ìu íafùl péh ngùbáh kínùl vĕ àiréh.**

yùríh àikú vĕ aikũ ìu íafùl péh ngùbáh kínùl vĕ
quickly time DIR pass, and people 3SG grasp world DIR
àiréh
leave

“Time passes quickly, and with it people pass away. 5MOYD 1637”

- (30) **Yè tì kùr busày rĕlĕh fûw.**

yè tì kùr busày vĕ rĕlĕh fûw
2SG 1SG VIS money DIR steal PAST

“You have stolen my money! 5MOYD 1627”

- (31) **Yǎ kúràl pìfá vĕ gùngáh.**

yǎ kúràl pìfá vĕ gùngáh
1PL shepherd bread DIR make

“We shepherds make bread. 5MOYD 1629”

- (32) **Tì rríní ìu yúfàl vĕ sìpéh fûw.**

tì rríní ìu yúfàl vĕ sìpéh fûw
1SG house and relative DIR remember PAST

“I remembered our village and the relatives. 5MOYD 1616”

- (33)

îuy àikú ñíñèy ôerr ralí fûw
two time clothes INDIR dry PAST

“The clothes have dried in two minutes. 5MOYD 1573”