

# Old Besokian

## *Translation Guide*

Congratulations on acquiring this handcrafted translation guide! You will be translating from Old Besokian, an a priori conlang spoken in what would correspond to our early Bronze Age, as a literary variety common to all Besokian-speaking cultures. I will try to keep it as brief as possible and only give the details you actually need to translate the torch (which, fortunately, aren't that many); this guide is split into two parts, 1) the Phonology, which should give you a quick intro to Besokian syllable structure and the writing system, and 2) the Morphosyntax, which should cover the rest. You will find a brief lexicon and an annotated table of Besokian glyphs as separate documents.

### *1 The phonology*

Old Besokian is fairly straightforward in most respects, including phonotactics. Its phoneme inventory contains 13 consonants and ten vowels (see the table below). CV, VC, and CVC are the only permitted syllable patterns, and most words follow a CVCV(CV)C (but keep a look out for exceptions!).

The Besokian writing system tries to imitate this pattern. It has two sets of glyphs, alphabet-like independent consonant signs, which are used for the first onset in a word, and abugida-like (part-)syllable signs, each denoting a VC couplet (including one 'pure' vowel sign without a consonant). There are seven base forms of VC glyphs; each can be modified by a vertical line to change the consonant, giving a total of 14 consonants (including <h>, see below), and by a horizontal line to shorten the vowel. Long vowels are more common in the Besokian lexicon (short vowels appearing mostly in longer derived forms), and the base form of a glyph always expresses a long vowel. Vowel quality is indicated by diacritics; a full chart of all glyphs and diacritics can be found in the appended table.

Longer text are written in continuous boustrophedon. The first line usually begins right-to-left, turning to left-to-right in the second, and so forth, with no spaces between words. Uncommonly for boustrophedon, letters remain unreversed (e.g., <k> is always open to the right, <h> to the left). Sentences are separated by long vertical lines; a new paragraph will always start over from right to left, irrespective of the previous line's direction.

You might want to start your transliteration by annotating each line for reading direction; determining word boundaries might need some trial and error. Your most important clue to look out for are C glyphs, which appear almost exclusively at the beginning for words; there some very rare cases of VC.CV sequences where a C glyph is required medially—you might want

to have a look at the lexicon beforehand to know which words to look out for. Also bear in mind that words can, and frequently do, extend over line breaks. <c>, finally, only appears word finally (see also below), and this is a hard phonological rule, so whatever follows a <Vc> glyph must be a new word.

### The Consonants

	<i>Labial</i>	<i>Coronal</i>	<i>Dorsal</i>
<i>Plosive</i>	<b>	<t>, <d>	<k>, <g>
<i>Fricative</i>	<f>	<s>, <sh> /ʃ/	
<i>Nasal</i>	<m>	<n>	
<i>Approximant</i>	<w>		
<i>Tap</i>		<r> /ɾ/	
<i>Lateral</i>		<l>	

### The Vowels

	<i>Front</i>		<i>Back</i>	
	<i>Long</i>	<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>	<i>Short</i>
<i>High</i>	<î> /i:/	<i> /i/	<û> /u:/	<u> /u/
<i>Mid</i>	<ê> /e:/	<e> /e/	<ô> /o:/	<o> /o/
<i>Low</i>	<â> /a:/	<a> /a/		

/t/ and /k/ are regularly aspirated. /k/ loses its aspiration in final position; this is given a separate glyph in Besokian orthography, usually transliterated as <c>.

The aspirant /h/, present in an earlier stage of the language, has been lost in Old Besokian, but the glyphs for <h> and <Vh> are retained in the writing system. Feel free to ignore the <h> glyph; <Vh> has in theory become equivalent to the pure vowel sign, but in some cases the resulting hiatus is resolved by merging the vowels. You will only encounter these three cases in the torch:

ehu > i      ohe > o      eha > e

(Technically speaking, hiatus resolution is also dependent on stress, but I will spare you the details.)

## 2 The morphosyntax

Like its phonotactics, Old Besokian grammar is very straightforward and should hopefully not prove the source for a lot of trouble. There is virtually no morphology—no number coding, no agreement—and no word classes (although I will for simplicity use terms like ‘verb’ and ‘noun’ in this introduction). The lexicon translates most items with a mix of English nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc., so it will be up to you to decide which meaning best fits the context.

### 2.1 Word order and argument structure

Word order is fixed quite rigidly and always follows this template:

C — V — OBJ — SUBJ — ADJ

- C     Complementizers and conjunctions
- V     The predicate. The first word in most clauses, should usually be translated with a verb.
- OBJ   Internal arguments: direct object, indirect object, argument PPs
- SUBJ   External argument, the subject
- ADJ   Adjuncts to the verb phrase; anything else.

Internal arguments usually appear in the order PP — IND OBJ — DIR OBJ; prepositional phrases appearing this close to the ‘verb’ generally directly modify its meaning, so in (1).

- (1) *mîlûd tesh nâlac*  
       speech by     hand  
       ‘to speak with one’s hands’

PPs appearing outside the V—SUBJ bracket almost universally scope over the clause as a whole, thus to give spatial or temporal information.

### 2.2 The noun extension, *î-* and *îr-*

Nominal modifiers can either precede or follow the noun; numerals and determiners generally precede, adjectives and possessors follow. Certain short adjectives follow the noun directly, so in (2), but most will take the adjunct marker *î-*, so in (3). *î-* can denote a single modifier (3a) or introduce a longer phrase (3b); where exactly this phrase ends is indicated only by context. You might want to initially translate *î-* as ‘such that’, as suggested in (3b).

(2) *nâlac- nîn*

arm- long

‘a long arm’

(3) a. *nâlac î- nûrûkân*

hand ADJ lazy

‘a lazy hand’

b. *nâlac î- tûlûren tûnîmin*

hand such.that protect village

‘the hand protecting the village’

A similar element is *îr-*, which expresses possession or a similar relation:

(4) *nâlac îr- êtin*

hand POSS I

‘my hand’

(5) *nâlac î- ’tanîterân*

*nâlac î- ata- nîterân*

hand ADJ- NEG- colourful

‘a pale hand’

Importantly, both *î-* and *îr-* are treated as separate words in Besokian writing. This is relevant especially for *î-*, which is always expressed by a separate vowel sign and does not form a VC glyph with the following consonant. There is, again, one notable exception to this: When *î-* attaches to a word with an initial vowel (which is very rare but does occur), the vowel will be elided and *î-* attaches directly (5). In this case, *î-* will form a VC unit with the following consonant. As with consonant clusters, you might want to have a look at the lexicon first and see which V-initial words you should look out for.

There are a few other prefixes I should warn you about; unlike *î-* and *îr-*, they are treated as part of the word they modify, so their vowels may merge with the following consonant. The most important ones are *kô-* and *shê-*; they derive in agent noun, so *kônâlac* ‘worker’ from *nâlac* ‘hand’. Theoretically, *kô-* is feminine and *shê-* masculine, with *kô-* considered the default, but you can essentially ignore gender coding in the torch. The third important prefix is *ata-*, denoting negation, so in *atanîterân* ‘pale’ from *nîterân* ‘colourful’. The only suffix to worry about is *-or*, which denotes something particularly large or great.

*3 Finis*

I think that should be everything you need to know to translate the torch (and I think I made it sound a lot more complicated than it actually is). And if I've forgotten anything, I am sure the repercussions will be hilarious.

Good luck!