



CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGE COURSE

Klingon Grammar 1

A ten-chapter grammar of tlhIngan Hol, from sounds and spelling to clauses and numbers.

10 Chapters

Philip Osztromok

Generated with Claude

Contents

Chapter 1	The Warrior's Tongue	2
Chapter 2	Sounds and Spelling	7
Chapter 3	Nouns	12
Chapter 4	Verbs and Prefixes	17
Chapter 5	Pronouns and Sentences	22
Chapter 6	Verb Suffixes	27
Chapter 7	More Verb Suffixes	31
Chapter 8	Questions and Commands	36
Chapter 9	Joining Sentences	41
Chapter 10	Numbers and Time	45

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · The Warrior's Tongue

Klingon is the language of an invented warrior people from the *Star Trek* universe, but it is also a real, fully described language that people learn, speak and translate into. It is a useful case study: it was designed to be unlike any language on Earth, so it shows what the ideas from Introduction to Linguistics look like when they are pushed to unfamiliar places. In this course you will learn how it is built, from its sounds up to its sentences.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

Klingon (*tlhIngan Hol*) is a constructed language with its own sounds, its own word-building rules and an unusual word order, and it is regular enough to learn as a system.

Where Klingon Comes From

The Klingons first appeared in the original *Star Trek* television series in the 1960s, but they had only a few invented words. When the third film, *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), needed Klingon dialogue, the linguist **Marc Okrand** was hired to create a language that could be spoken convincingly by actors. He worked out the sounds and grammar and published them in *The Klingon Dictionary* (1985). Later books and further *Star Trek* productions added vocabulary.

The language took on a life of its own among fans. The **Klingon Language Institute**, founded in the early 1990s, publishes a journal and holds an annual meeting for learners, and the language has been used for translations, poems and even an opera. Remember the point from Introduction to Linguistics 8: once people use a constructed language, it begins to grow.

An A Priori Language

Linguists divide constructed languages by where their material comes from. An **a posteriori** language draws its words and grammar from existing languages; an **a priori** language is built from scratch. Esperanto (the planned language from Introduction to Linguistics 8) is a posteriori: most of its words come from Romance and Germanic languages. Klingon is a priori, and Okrand designed it to sound harsh and to be awkward for English speakers on purpose.

	ENGLISH	ESPERANTO	KLINGON
Origin	natural, evolved	planned (Zamenhof, 1887), from European words	planned (Okrand, 1984), built from scratch
Purpose	everyday communication	neutral international language	a convincing alien language for a fictional culture
Word order	subject–verb–object	subject–verb–object (flexible)	object–verb–subject
Word building	some prefixes and suffixes	regular, many affixes	regular suffixes in fixed order

Reading and Writing Klingon

In the fiction, Klingon is written in its own script, *plqaD*. In practice almost everyone, including Okrand's dictionary, writes it with the Latin alphabet. This course does the same. The Latin spelling has one catch: **capital and lower-case letters are different sounds**, not decoration. The language has more sounds than the Latin alphabet has letters, so the spelling re-uses upper-case letters for extra sounds.

```
# two different sounds, two different letters
q  (a back-of-the-mouth k)      Qapla'   (success)
Q  (a different, harder sound)  Qo'noS   (the Klingon homeworld)

# the capital I is a vowel (an "i" sound); the lower-case i is not used
tlhIngan  (Klingon, the people)    HoI    (language)

# the apostrophe is a real consonant, a pause in the throat
Qapla'    nuqneH
```

You can't change the case of a letter without changing the word. Writing *qapla'* for *Qapla'*, or *tlhingan* for *tlhIngan*, is a spelling error, much like writing *bat* for *pat*. The exact values of the letters are the subject of Chapter 2.

Your First Phrases

Here are some phrases to learn by sight now. You don't need to analyse them yet; each one will be taken apart in later chapters.

KLINGON	MEANING	NOTE
<i>nuqneH</i>	"what do you want?"	used as a greeting; short and abrupt, as befits a Klingon
<i>Qapla'</i>	"success"	said as a farewell or good luck wish
<i>majQa'</i>	"well done"	praise
<i>qatlho'</i>	"thank you"	
<i>HIja'</i>	"yes"	
<i>ghobe'</i>	"no"	the ending <i>-be'</i> is a form of negation (Chapter 7)
<i>jlyajbe'</i>	"I don't understand"	useful for a learner
<i>tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'?</i>	"Do you speak Klingon?"	the final <i>-a'</i> makes it a yes/no question (Chapter 8)
<i>Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam</i>	"Today is a good day to die"	the most famous Klingon saying

Note that Klingon has no word for "please" in the polite European sense, and no separate word for "hello": *nuqneH* is a blunt request for business. The language reflects the culture it was designed to belong to.

WATCH OUT: KLINGON IS NOT A CODE FOR ENGLISH

Klingon is not English with swapped words. Word order, word building and even the idea of what a verb marks are different. Translating word for word produces nonsense, so treat each chapter's grammar as a new system rather than a disguise.

How This Course Is Organised

The ten chapters move from the bottom up: sounds and spelling (Chapter 2), nouns (3), verbs and the prefix system (4), pronouns and simple sentences (5), the verb suffixes (6 and 7), questions and commands (8), joining sentences (9), and numbers and time (10). Every Klingon example is shown with a word-by-word gloss so that you can see how each word is built. At the

end of each chapter, the Klingon words and forms used are listed so you can check them against Marc Okrand's *The Klingon Dictionary* or the online dictionary at the Klingon Language Institute.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Match each Klingon phrase to its meaning: (a) *Hlja'*; (b) *ghobe'*; (c) *qatlho'*; (d) *jlyajbe'*; (e) *Qapla'*. The meanings are: no, success, I don't understand, thank you, yes.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain the difference between an a priori and an a posteriori constructed language, and classify Klingon, Esperanto and Toki Pona (use only what you can work out: Toki Pona is a tiny language of about a hundred and twenty words designed to express simple thoughts). Then say why changing *Q* to *q* changes a word.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Using only the phrases in this chapter, write a short exchange in which one person greets another, asks whether they speak Klingon, gets a "no", says they don't understand, and says goodbye with good luck. Copy every letter carefully, keeping the capitals and apostrophes.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 1 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Klingon** = *tlhIngan Hol*; created by Marc Okrand, first described in *The Klingon Dictionary* (1985)
- **A priori** language (built from scratch), unlike Esperanto (a posteriori)
- Written here in Latin letters; *plqaD* is the fictional script
- **Case matters:** *q* and *Q* are different sounds; *l* is a vowel; ' is a consonant

- Phrases: *nuqneH*, *Qapla'*, *majQa'*, *qatlho'*, *HIja'*, *ghobe'*, *jlyajbe'*

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 2 takes the spelling apart: which sounds each letter stands for, how syllables are built and where the stress falls, with a pronunciation drill.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Sounds and Spelling

Chapter 1 said that Klingon spelling uses capital letters for extra sounds. This chapter takes the system apart. It uses the vocabulary of phonetics from Introduction to Linguistics 2 (place and manner of articulation, voicing, IPA symbols) and the ideas of syllables and allowed sequences from Introduction to Linguistics 3. The sounds were chosen by Marc Okrand to feel unfamiliar to English speakers, but every one of them occurs in some natural language.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

Klingon has 21 consonants, a glottal stop and 5 vowels. Several letters are two characters long (*ch*, *gh*, *ng*, *tlh*), and capital letters are separate sounds.

The Consonants

Some Klingon consonants match English and need no explanation. Others are new. The table lists all of them, with an approximate English guide and the IPA symbol.

LETTER	APPROXIMATE SOUND	IPA	EXAMPLE
b, l, m, n, v, w, y	as in English	b, l, m, n, v, w, j	<i>majQa'</i> , <i>nuqneH</i>
p, t	as English, with a puff of air	p, t	<i>Qapla'</i>
j	as English <i>j</i> in <i>jam</i>	ᵈʒ	<i>majQa'</i>
ch	as English <i>ch</i> in <i>chair</i>	ʈʃ	
ng	as English <i>ng</i> in <i>sing</i> ; it can start a word	ŋ	<i>tlhIngan</i>
r	a rolled or tapped <i>r</i> , as in Scots or Hungarian	r	
H	the rasping <i>ch</i> of Scots <i>loch</i> or German <i>Bach</i>	x	<i>HIja'</i> , <i>nuqneH</i>
gh	the voiced version of H: a rasping sound like the French or Dutch throaty <i>r</i>	ɣ	<i>ghobe'</i>
D	like <i>d</i> but with the tongue tip curled back	ɖ	<i>Dajatlh</i>

LETTER	APPROXIMATE SOUND	IPA	EXAMPLE
S	like <i>s</i> or <i>sh</i> with the tongue tip curled back	ʂ	<i>Qo'noS</i>
q	a <i>k</i> made further back, at the uvula	q	<i>nuqneH</i> , <i>qatlho'</i>
Q	the uvular stop released with friction, like <i>q</i> followed by a rasp	q̠χ	<i>Qapla'</i>
tlh	a <i>t</i> and an <i>l</i> said in one breath, with air escaping at the sides of the tongue	t̪ɬ	<i>tlhIngan</i>
'	a catch in the throat, as in the middle of <i>uh-oh</i>	ʔ	<i>Qapla'</i>

Compared with English, the two big differences are the extra places of articulation (the uvular *q* and *Q*, the curled-back *D* and *S*) and the sideways *tlh*. Welsh has a similar sound in *Llan-*, and Nahuatl has one in its *tl*, so nothing here is impossible for a human mouth.

Letters That Are Really Two Characters

Four letters are written with two or three characters, but each stands for one sound and is one letter for alphabetical order: *ch*, *gh*, *ng* and *tlh*. The alphabetical order is:

```
# the Klingon alphabet, with digraphs counted as single letters
a b ch D e gh H I j l m n ng o p q Q r S t tlh u v w y '

# counting letters (not characters) in a word
tlhIngan  = tlh + I + ng + a + n      = 5 letters  (8 characters)
Qapla'    = Q + a + p + l + a + '    = 6 letters
```

The language has no letter *g* or *h* on its own, so *gh*, *ng* and *tlh* can never be misread as two separate letters.

The Vowels

There are five vowels, and each has one sound regardless of position. They are close to the vowels of Spanish, Japanese and Esperanto.

LETTER	APPROXIMATE SOUND	IPA	EXAMPLE
a	as in <i>father</i>	ɑ	<i>Qapla', majQa'</i>
e	as in <i>bed</i>	ɛ	<i>ghobe'</i>
l	as in <i>sit</i>	ɪ	<i>HIja'</i>
o	as in <i>go</i> (without the glide)	o	<i>Hol</i>
u	as in <i>too</i>	u	<i>nuqneH</i>

A vowel followed by *w* or *y* at the end of a syllable is pronounced as a diphthong (a glide). The same letters before a vowel are ordinary consonants, as in the *y* of *jIyajbe'*. The vowel *l* is written with a capital so that it can't be mistaken for a lower-case *l* in sans-serif type, which is why lower-case *i* isn't used.

Syllables and Stress

The phonotactics of Klingon are strict: **every syllable begins with a consonant**, followed by a vowel, and then by one or more consonants at most. Words that look as if they begin with a vowel, in some romanisations, begin with a glottal stop. Syllables are therefore easy to find: break before each consonant that is followed by a vowel.

```
# syllables: consonant + vowel (+ final consonants)
```

```
tlhIngan    = tlhI . ngan
```

```
Qapla'      = Qap . la'
```

```
qatlho'     = qa . tlho'
```

```
majQa'      = maj . Qa'
```

```
HIja'       = HI . ja'
```

```
nuqneH      = nuq . neH
```

```
jIyajbe'    = jI . yaj . be'
```

Stress in Klingon is predictable: it falls toward the end of the word's main part, so that suffixes added afterwards are not stressed (so the stress in *qatlho'* lands on the last syllable, *-tlho'*). You'll hear that Klingon sounds clipped and forceful. That impression comes from the consonants and the strict syllables, not from stress.

WATCH OUT: KLINGON IS NOT PRONOUNCED LIKE ENGLISH

The most common mistakes are pronouncing *q* and *Q* alike (both as an English *k*), saying *H* as an English *h*, and reading *I* as a long English "eye". A learner who makes these changes will be understood in many cases, but only after the listener corrects them. Train the hard sounds early: *q*, *Q*, *H*, *gh*, *tlh*.

Pronunciation Drill

Say each word aloud, slowly, then at speed. Take care over the capitals and the apostrophes, and put a very short stop at every '.

nuqneH	Qapla'	majQa'	qatlho'	HIja'
ghobe'	jIyajbe'	tlhIngan	HoI	Qo'noS

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Count the letters (not characters) in each word, treating *ch*, *gh*, *ng* and *tlh* as single letters: (a) *nuqneH*; (b) *qatlho'*; (c) *ghobe'*; (d) *jIyajbe'*; (e) *Qo'noS*.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Divide each word into syllables: (a) *tlhIngan*; (b) *qatlho'*; (c) *jIyajbe'*; (d) *Heghlu'meH*. Check that every syllable starts with a consonant and contains one vowel.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Sort the consonants *H*, *gh*, *q*, *Q*, *tlh*, *D*, *S*, *ng*, ' into those that exist in standard English and those that don't. For each one that doesn't, name a language you know (or have met in the course) with a similar sound, using the comparison table in Introduction to Linguistics 2 where helpful.

CHAPTER 2 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Consonants:** b ch D gh H j l m n ng p q Q r S t tlh v w y and the glottal stop ' '
- **Digraphs** *ch gh ng tlh* are single letters
- **Vowels:** a e l o u; capital *I* is a vowel
- *q* ≠ *Q*; *H* is a rasp (like *loch*); *gh* is its voiced partner; *D* and *S* are curled back
- **Syllable:** starts with a consonant, then a vowel, then final consonants
- Suffixes after the root are not stressed

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 3 begins the grammar with nouns: noun roots, the five types of noun suffix, and the plural markers for beings, body parts and everything else.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Nouns

Klingon words are built by adding suffixes to a root, one after another. This is the **agglutinative** pattern described in Introduction to Linguistics 4, the same one you met in Hungarian. A noun is a root plus up to five suffixes, and the suffixes always come in a fixed order. Klingon has no articles (no *the* or *a*) and no grammatical gender.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A Klingon noun is a root followed by suffixes of Type 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, always in that order, and any type may be left out.

Noun Roots

The root is the bare noun. Several roots from this course so far, and a few new ones:

ROOT	MEANING	KIND
<i>Duj</i>	ship	thing
<i>Hol</i>	language	thing
<i>puq</i>	child	being
<i>yaS</i>	officer	being
<i>Suvwl'</i>	warrior	being
<i>tlhIngan</i>	Klingon	being
<i>ghop</i>	hand	body part
<i>qam</i>	foot	body part

Two nouns placed together make a compound in which the first modifies the second, as in *tlhIngan Hol* "Klingon language".

The Five Types of Noun Suffix

TYPE	JOB	SUFFIXES
1	size and affection	- <i>'a'</i> (big), - <i>Hom</i> (small), - <i>oy</i> (dear)
2	plural	- <i>pu'</i> (beings who use language), - <i>Du'</i> (body parts), - <i>mey</i> (everything else)
3	qualification	- <i>qoq</i> (so-called), - <i>Hey</i> (apparent), - <i>na'</i> (certainly, definite)
4	possession and "this/that"	the thing owned is not a language-user: - <i>wlj</i> my, - <i>llj</i> your, - <i>Daj</i> his/her, - <i>maj</i> our, - <i>raj</i> your (plural), - <i>chaj</i> their; the thing owned is a language-user: - <i>wl'</i> my, - <i>ll'</i> your, - <i>ma'</i> our, - <i>ra'</i> your (plural) (- <i>Daj</i> and - <i>chaj</i> are shared); - <i>vam</i> this, - <i>vetlh</i> that
5	syntax (what the noun does in the sentence)	- <i>Daq</i> at/in, - <i>vo'</i> from, - <i>vaD</i> for, - <i>mo'</i> because of, - <i>'e</i> topic

You use only the suffixes you need, but those you use keep the order: Type 1 before 2, 2 before 3, and so on. That fixed order is the same *rule of rank* that governs the verb suffixes (Chapters 6 and 7).

Type 2: Three Plurals

Klingon chooses a plural by what the noun refers to, which is more than English requires. The English plural -s works for everything; Klingon asks whether the noun names a being that can use language, a body part, or anything else:

root + plural suffix

puq	+ pu'	=	puqpu'	children	(beings who use language)
yaS	+ pu'	=	yaSpu'	officers	
ghop	+ Du'	=	ghopDu'	hands	(body parts)
qam	+ Du'	=	qamDu'	feet	
Duj	+ mey	=	Dujmey	ships	(everything else)
HoI	+ mey	=	HoImey	languages	

Klingon also leaves the plural off when a number makes it clear, much as Hungarian does (*három ház*, not *három házak*). The numbers one to five are *wa'*, *cha'*, *wej*, *loS* and *vagh*, and the number comes before the noun: *wej puq* "three children".

Type 4: Possession and "This/That"

Possession is a suffix, as in Hungarian. Klingon has two sets of possessives, chosen by what is owned: one for things that cannot use language (*Dujwlj* "my ship") and one for beings that can (*puqwl'* "my child"). Compare:

	ENGLISH	HUNGARIAN	ESPERANTO	KLINGON
my ship/house	my house	<i>házam</i>	<i>mia domo</i>	<i>Dujwlj</i>
your	your house	<i>házad</i>	<i>via domo</i>	<i>Dujllj</i>
his/her	his house	<i>háza</i>	<i>lia domo</i>	<i>DujDaj</i>
this	this house	<i>ez a ház</i>	<i>ĉi tiu domo</i>	<i>Dujvam</i>

Type 5: What the Noun Does

Type 5 suffixes play the part that prepositions play in English, and that case endings play in Hungarian. They attach to the noun, at the end:

Qo'noSDaq	=	Qo'noS + Daq	on/at Qo'noS (the homeworld)
Qo'noSvo'	=	Qo'noS + vo'	from Qo'noS
yaSvaD	=	yaS + vaD	for the officer
Dujmo'	=	Duj + mo'	because of the ship

Building a Full Noun

Suffixes stack up in rank order. A noun with a plural, a possessive and a locative:

#	root	+	Type 2	+	Type 4	+	Type 5	
puq	+	pu'	+	wI'	+	vaD	=	puqpu'wI'vaD
child		plural		my		for		"for my children"
Duj	+	mey	+	vetlh	+	Daq	=	DujmeyvetlhDaq
ship		plural		that		in		"in those ships"

Read such a word from the left: the root first, then each suffix in turn, with the last suffix saying what the noun does in the sentence.

WATCH OUT: THE ORDER IS FIXED AND THE CASE STILL MATTERS

puqwl'pu' is wrong: the plural (Type 2) must come before the possessive (Type 4), so the word is *puqpu'wl'*. Also keep the capital letters: *-wlj* and *-wl'* have a capital *l*, and *-Du'* and *-Daq* have a capital *D* (the curled-back sound), while the suffixes *-pu'* and *-mey* are lower case.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give the plural of each, choosing the right suffix: (a) *Suvwl'* (warrior); (b) *ghop* (hand); (c) *Hol* (language); (d) *tlhIngan* (Klingon); (e) *Duj* (ship). Say why a number such as *cha'* (two) makes the plural suffix unnecessary.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Build the Klingon noun for each (in (e) the thing owned is a language-user, so use the matching possessive form): (a) "my ship"; (b) "their children"; (c) "that officer"; (d) "from Qo'noS"; (e) "for our warriors". Present each as root + suffixes first, then written together.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Break each word into root and suffixes, and give each suffix's type number and meaning: (a) *yaSpu'chaj*; (b) *Dujmeywlj*; (c) *Qo'noSDaq*; (d) *puqpu'vetlh*. Then explain why *Dujwjmey* would be rejected as a word, even if the spelling were corrected.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 3 QUICK REFERENCE

- Noun = root + suffixes in the order **Type 1, 2, 3, 4, 5**; no articles, no gender
- **Plurals:** *-pu'* beings who use language, *-Du'* body parts, *-mey* everything else

- **Possession:** -wlj -llj -Daj -maj -raj -chaj (thing owned not a language-user); -wl' -ll' -ma' -ra' (thing owned a language-user); **this/that:** -vam -vetlh
- **Type 5:** -Daq at/in, -vo' from, -vaD for, -mo' because of, -'e' topic
- Numbers come before the noun; with a number the plural may be omitted
- Two nouns together: the first modifies the second (*tlhIngan Hol*)

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 4 turns to verbs. A Klingon verb carries a prefix that marks the subject and the object together, and you will learn to read the full prefix table.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Verbs and Prefixes

A Klingon verb carries more information in its beginning than an English verb does. It starts with a **prefix** that tells you who is doing the action *and* who or what it is done to, both in one syllable. It then ends with suffixes (Chapters 6 and 7) that add ideas such as ability, completion or negation. This chapter is about the prefix.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A Klingon verb is prefix + root + suffixes, and the prefix names both the subject and the object. The same root with a different prefix is a different sentence.

Verb Roots

A verb root is the bare action. It carries no tense, and nothing in the root says who does it. A few roots to work with:

ROOT	MEANING	TAKES AN OBJECT?
<i>legh</i>	see	yes
<i>Sam</i>	find	yes
<i>Sop</i>	eat	yes
<i>jatlh</i>	speak, say	yes
<i>yaj</i>	understand	yes
<i>Hegh</i>	die	no

Klingon verbs have no tense. The root *legh* means "see", "saw" or "will see", and the time comes from context or from a time word. Aspect (finished or ongoing) can be shown by a suffix, which you will meet in Chapter 6.

Prefixes With No Object

When there is no object, because the verb doesn't take one or because none is mentioned, the prefix marks only the subject:

SUBJECT	PREFIX	WITH <i>HEGH</i> "DIE"
I	<i>jl-</i>	<i>jlHegh</i>
you	<i>bl-</i>	<i>blHegh</i>
he, she, it	none	<i>Hegh</i>
we	<i>ma-</i>	<i>maHegh</i>
you (plural)	<i>Su-</i>	<i>SuHegh</i>
they	none	<i>Hegh</i>

The third person, "he/she/it" and "they", has **no prefix at all**, so the bare root *Hegh* can mean any of them. Context, or a pronoun or noun in the sentence, tells you which. A prefix-less form is a form with a *zero prefix*, a concept you met as a zero morpheme in Introduction to Linguistics 4. (When a plural third-person subject acts on a singular object there is a separate prefix, *lu-*; this course keeps to singular subjects there.)

Prefixes With an Object

When the verb has an object, the prefix is chosen by the *pair*: who does it, and to whom. The table below covers the combinations used in this course. Read down for the subject and across for the object.

SUBJECT ↓ / OBJECT →	ME	YOU	US	HIM, HER, IT	THEM
I	–	<i>qa-</i>	–	<i>vl-</i>	<i>vl-</i>
you	<i>cho-</i>	–	<i>ju-</i>	<i>Da-</i>	<i>Da-</i>
he, she, it	<i>mu-</i>	<i>Du-</i>	<i>nu-</i>	none	none
we	–	<i>pl-</i>	–	<i>wl-</i>	<i>DI-</i>

The dashes mark combinations that don't occur: you can't "see me" with *I* as the subject, because that would need a reflexive form (a separate construction). The full table also has

columns and rows for "you (plural)" and "they"; you will meet them as they are needed.

```
# same root, different prefix, different meaning
vIlegh      vI- + legh      I see him/her/it/them
qalegh      qa- + legh      I see you
cholegh     cho- + legh     you see me
Dalegh      Da- + legh     you see him/her/it
mulegh      mu- + legh     he/she/it sees me
Dulegh      Du- + legh     he/she/it sees you
wIlegh      wI- + legh     we see him/her/it
DIlegh      DI- + legh     we see them
```

Decoding a Known Phrase

You met *tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'*? in Chapter 1. Now it can be taken apart:

```
tlhIngan Hol   Da - jatlh - 'a'
Klingon language you→it speak yes/no question

# "Do you speak the Klingon language?"
# Da- = you do it to an object (here the language); -'a' makes it a question

jIyajbe'      = jI- + yaj + -be'
                I      understand not          "I do not understand"
```

Notice that the object, *tlhIngan Hol*, comes first and the verb after it. The next chapter explains why.

A Comparison: Hungarian

Marking the object on the verb is not unique to Klingon. Hungarian does something similar, with one set of endings when the object is definite and another when it is not, and a special ending for "I ... you":

MEANING	HUNGARIAN	KLINGON
I see it	<i>látom</i>	<i>vlegh</i>
I see you	<i>látlak</i>	<i>qalegh</i>

MEANING	HUNGARIAN	KLINGON
I see (no particular object)	<i>látok</i>	(a verb with no object, with <i>jl-</i>)

The difference is where the information goes: Hungarian puts it in a suffix at the end of the verb, while Klingon puts it in a prefix at the front. English has no equivalent and uses separate pronouns: *I see you*.

WATCH OUT: THE PREFIX NAMES BOTH PEOPLE, IN A FIXED ORDER

qalegh is "I see you" and *cholegh* is "you see me". Mixing up subject and object reverses the meaning, so learn the prefixes as pairs. Also remember the case: *Du-*, *Da-* and *DI-* begin with a capital *D*, and *pl-*, *vl-* and *wl-* have a capital *I*, so *dalegh* or *wilegh* would be misspellings.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Build the Klingon verb for each, using *leg* "see", *Sam* "find", *Sop* "eat": (a) "I see it"; (b) "you find it"; (c) "he sees me"; (d) "we eat it"; (e) "I find you".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Say who does what to whom in each: (a) *cholegh*; (b) *qaSam*; (c) *DIlegh*; (d) *blHegh*; (e) *Dulegh*. Then explain why the bare form *Hegh* could mean four different things in English.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Compare Klingon and Hungarian: match *látom*, *látlak* and *látok* with Klingon forms or with an explanation of what Klingon does instead. Then say in one sentence what is the main structural difference between the two languages' ways of marking the object.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 4 QUICK REFERENCE

- Verb = **prefix + root + suffixes**; no tense
- **No object**: *jl-* I, *bl-* you, none = he/she/it/they, *ma-* we, *Su-* you (plural)
- **With object**: *vl-* I→it, *qa-* I→you, *Da-* you→it, *cho-* you→me, *mu-* he→me, *Du-* he→you, *nu-* he→us, *wl-* we→it, *Dl-* we→them, *pl-* we→you, *ju-* you→us
- A third-person subject with no object, or a singular third-person subject, has **no prefix** (a zero prefix)
- Hungarian marks the object on the verb too, by endings instead of prefixes

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 5 puts the pieces together into sentences. You will meet the pronouns, the object–verb–subject word order, and the way Klingon says "to be" without a verb "to be".

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Pronouns and Sentences

You now have nouns (Chapter 3) and verbs with prefixes (Chapter 4). This chapter fits them together into sentences. The surprise is the word order: Klingon puts the object first, then the verb, then the subject. This is one of the rarest orders in the world's languages.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A Klingon sentence is **object – verb – subject**. "The warrior sees the officer" is, word for word, "officer sees warrior".

Pronouns

Klingon pronouns are separate words, and they distinguish more than English does. Two of the third-person pronouns are for beings (people) and one for things:

PERSON	KLINGON	ESPERANTO	ENGLISH
I	<i>jIH</i>	<i>mi</i>	I
you	<i>SoH</i>	<i>vi</i>	you
he, she	<i>ghaH</i>	<i>li, ŝi</i>	he, she
it	<i>'oH</i>	<i>ĝi</i>	it
we	<i>maH</i>	<i>ni</i>	we
you (plural)	<i>tlhIH</i>	<i>vi</i>	you (all)
they (beings)	<i>chaH</i>	<i>ili</i>	they
they (things)	<i>bIH</i>	<i>ili</i>	they

Klingon *ghaH* does not mark gender: it means both "he" and "she". The distinction Klingon makes is between beings and things instead. Esperanto and English make the opposite choice. Because the verb prefix already says who the subject and object are (Chapter 4), the pronouns are often unnecessary. They are used for emphasis or contrast: *jIH* "I (myself)", *SoH* "you, and not

someone else".

Object – Verb – Subject

The pattern is the same for every sentence with an object. Compare the word orders of several languages, using the types from Introduction to Linguistics 5:

ORDER	LANGUAGE	"THE WARRIOR SEES THE OFFICER"
SVO	English, Esperanto	warrior sees officer
SOV	Japanese	warrior officer sees
VSO	Irish, Welsh	sees warrior officer
OVS	Klingon	officer sees warrior

OVS is genuinely rare among natural languages. A few languages of the Amazon basin, such as Hixkaryana, are reported to use it, which was part of Okrand's reason for choosing it: it sounds alien without being impossible.

```
# object + verb + subject
yaS      legh      SuvwI'
officer  sees      warrior      "The warrior sees the officer."

puq      legh      yaS
child    sees      officer      "The officer sees the child."

Duj      vIlegh    jIH
ship     I-see     I          "I see the ship." (jIH adds emphasis)

tlhIngan Hol  vIjatlh
Klingon language  I-speak      "I speak Klingon."

# with no object: verb + subject
Hegh      puq
          "The child dies."
```

The singular third-person verb has no prefix (Chapter 4), so in *yaS legh Suvwl'* the bare root carries no information about who does what. The word **order** does the work: the first noun is the object and the last is the subject. This is why Klingon, which has a prefix system for the first

and second person, relies on position for the third. Reversing the nouns reverses the meaning: *Suvwl' legh yaS* is "the officer sees the warrior".

Saying "To Be"

Klingon has no verb "to be" for identifying things. Instead, a noun is followed by a pronoun, and the pair means "X is Y":

```
# noun + pronoun = "pronoun is noun"
SuvwI'      jIH      I am a warrior.
tlhIngan    maH      We are Klingons.
yaS         ghaH     He/she is an officer.
Duj         'oH      It is a ship.
SuvwI'      SoH      You are a warrior.
```

Qualities work differently, because in Klingon a quality such as "good" is a **verb**, "to be good". It takes the usual prefix, and the subject follows it:

```
jIQaQ      = jI- + QaQ      I am good
bIQaQ      = bI- + QaQ     you are good
QaQ Duj    The ship is good. (verb + subject)
QaQ jajvam This day is good. (compare Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam)
```

That is the structure of the famous saying you met in Chapter 1: *Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam* is "in order to die" followed by "is good" and "this day".

WATCH OUT: THE WORD ORDER IS FIXED AND ENGLISH INSTINCTS WILL FIGHT IT

Putting the subject first, as in English, reverses the sentence: *Suvwl' legh yaS* means the officer sees the warrior, not the other way round. Learners also try to find a verb for "is" and a word for "a"; Klingon has neither, so use the noun-plus-pronoun pattern for identity and a verb for quality.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Translate into Klingon, using the words in this chapter: (a) "I see the ship"; (b) "The officer sees the child"; (c) "The child dies"; (d) "I am a warrior"; (e) "We are Klingons".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Translate into English and explain the word order of each: (a) *puq legh Suvwl'*; (b) *Suvwl' legh puq*; (c) *Duj 'oH*; (d) *QaQ Duj*; (e) *tlhIngan Hol vIjatlh*.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Take the English sentence "The warrior sees the child" and write it in each word order: SVO, SOV, VSO and OVS. Then explain why third-person Klingon sentences depend on word order more than first- and second-person ones.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 5 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Pronouns:** *jiH* I, *SoH* you, *ghaH* he/she, *'oH* it, *maH* we, *tlhIH* you (plural), *chaH* they (beings), *biH* they (things)
- Pronouns are optional because the verb prefix shows the subject; used for emphasis
- Word order: **object – verb – subject**; with no object, verb – subject
- Third-person verbs have no prefix, so word order shows who does what
- **"X is Y"** = noun + pronoun: *Suvwl' jiH*, *tlhIngan maH*
- **Qualities are verbs:** *ji/QaQ* "I am good", *QaQ Duj* "the ship is good"

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 6 is the first of two chapters on verb suffixes: ability, intention, completion, continuing action, and how several suffixes stack up on a single verb.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Verb Suffixes

Klingon has no helping verbs such as *can*, *must*, *started to* or *has*. Where English adds a word, Klingon adds a suffix to the verb. A single verb can end up carrying a whole phrase's worth of meaning. This chapter introduces the main suffixes and the rule that governs their order; Chapter 7 completes the set.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A verb is prefix + root + suffixes. The suffixes come in nine ranked groups, and when you use more than one, they must appear in rank order: group 1 before group 2, and so on.

The Suffix Groups

Marc Okrand divided the verb suffixes into nine groups ("types"), numbered by the position in which they appear. This chapter covers the first seven in outline:

RANK	IDEA	SUFFIXES
1	reflexive, reciprocal	- <i>egh</i> (oneself), - <i>chuq</i> (each other)
2	need, will, readiness	- <i>nIS</i> (need to), - <i>qang</i> (be willing to), - <i>rup</i> (be ready to), - <i>beH</i> (be prepared for), - <i>vIp</i> (be afraid to)
3	change, resumption	- <i>choH</i> (begin to, become), - <i>qa'</i> (resume, again)
4	cause	- <i>moH</i> (cause to)
5	indefinite subject, ability	- <i>lu'</i> (one, someone; Chapter 7), - <i>laH</i> (can, be able to)
6	degree of certainty	- <i>chu'</i> (perfectly), - <i>bej</i> (certainly), - <i>ba'</i> (obviously), - <i>law'</i> (it seems)
7	aspect	- <i>pu'</i> (has done), - <i>ta'</i> (has accomplished), - <i>taH</i> (is doing, continuing), - <i>ll'</i> (is progressing)

Groups 8 and 9, and the "rover" suffixes that do not belong to a numbered group (such as -*be'* and -*qu'*), are the subject of Chapter 7.

Using One Suffix

Most verbs carry one suffix at a time. Remember that the prefix (Chapter 4) comes first and names the subject and object:

prefix + root + suffix

vIlegh	I see it	
vIleghlaH	I can see it	(ability, group 5)
vIleghnIS	I need to see it	(need, group 2)
vIleghpu'	I have seen it	(aspect, group 7)
vIleghtaH	I am seeing it	(continuing, group 7)
vIleghchoH	I begin to see it	(change, group 3)

DaSop	you eat it
DaSopnIS	you need to eat it
DaSopqang	you are willing to eat it

There is no tense in Klingon (Chapter 4). *-pu'* means the action is finished and *-taH* that it is in progress, but neither says *when*: *vleghpu'* can be "I saw it" or "I have seen it". Time words supply the rest.

Stacking Suffixes: The Rule of Rank

When a verb needs more than one suffix, you pick the groups you need and write them in group order. The result is a long word that is built, not memorised:

vIleghnIS	vI- + legh + nIS	I need to see it
vIleghnISpu'	vI- + legh + nIS + pu'	I needed to see it / have needed to
vIjatlhlaH	vI- + jatlh + laH	I can speak it
vIjatlhlaHpu'	vI- + jatlh + laH + pu'	I have been able to speak it
vIjatlhchoHlaH	vI- + jatlh + choH + laH	I can begin to speak it

Read each word from the left. After the prefix and root, every suffix adds one idea, and the ranks (2, 3, 5, 7) rise as you go. Writing *-pu'* before *-laH*, for example, breaks the rule, because aspect (rank 7) must be last. The strict order is the same idea as the fixed noun-suffix order in Chapter

3, and it is one of the main features that make Klingon agglutinative in the sense of Introduction to Linguistics 4.

A Cause and a Change

Two of the suffixes change the meaning of the verb more deeply. *-moH* adds a causer: *yaj* "understand" becomes *yajmoH* "make understand", i.e. "explain". *-choH* marks the start of a change: with a state verb such as *QaQ* "be good" it gives *QaQchoH* "become good". Because these are higher in rank than ability and aspect, they come first: *yajmoHlaH* "can explain".

Comparison: Hungarian

Hungarian also adds a suffix to the verb where English uses *can*, and the order of parts is similar:

MEANING	ENGLISH	HUNGARIAN	KLINGON
I see it	I see it	<i>látom</i>	<i>vllegh</i>
I can see it	I can see it	<i>láthatom</i>	<i>vlleghlaH</i>

In both Hungarian and Klingon the ability is a suffix added to the root. The two differ in that Hungarian puts the person ending at the very end, while Klingon puts the person information at the front, in the prefix, so that the suffix is last.

WATCH OUT: THE ORDER IS BY RANK, NOT BY MEANING

It can feel natural to put suffixes in the order of the English words, but Klingon ignores that. "I needed to be able to see it" is not built from the English word order: the ranks (*-nIS* 2, *-laH* 5, *-pu'* 7) fix it. Keep the capitals too: *-nIS* has a capital *I* and *S*, *-laH* and *-taH* end in a capital *H*.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Build the verb for each, using *legH* "see", *Sop* "eat", *Sam* "find", *jatlH* "speak": (a) "I can see it"; (b) "you need to eat it"; (c) "I have seen it"; (d) "I am willing to find you"; (e) "I can speak it".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Take each word apart into prefix, root and suffixes, give the rank of each suffix, and translate: (a) *vlleghnIS*; (b) *DaSampu'*; (c) *vljatlhlaHpu'*; (d) *qaSamqang*; (e) *yajmoHlaH*.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Put the suffixes *-pu'*, *-laH*, *-nIS* and *-choH* in the correct order after the root *legH* (with the prefix *vl-*), translate the result, and explain why *vlleghpu'laH* would not be allowed. Then give the Hungarian equivalent of "I can see it" and say what it shares with the Klingon.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 6 QUICK REFERENCE

- Verb = prefix + root + suffixes in **rank order** (nine groups)
- **2:** *-nIS* need, *-qang* willing · **3:** *-choH* begin/become, *-qa'* resume · **4:** *-moH* cause
- **5:** *-lu'* indefinite subject, *-laH* can · **6:** *-chu'*, *-bej*, *-ba'*, *-law'* certainty
- **7:** *-pu'* perfective, *-ta'* accomplished, *-taH* continuing, *-ll'* progressing
- No tense: aspect says finished or in progress, not when
- Hungarian also uses a suffix for "can": *láthatom* ~ *vlleghlaH*

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 7 finishes the verb suffixes: the indefinite subject *-lu'*, negation *-be'*, the suffixes that turn verbs into nouns and clauses, and the special suffixes that stand outside the rank system.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · More Verb Suffixes

Chapter 6 covered the suffixes of groups 1 to 7. This chapter finishes the system: the indefinite-subject suffix *-lu'* (group 5), the honorific (group 8), the eleven group 9 suffixes that turn a verb into a noun or a clause, and the **rover** suffixes, including the negative *-be'*, which do not have a fixed place. With these you can take apart every word of the phrases from Chapter 1.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A verb takes at most one suffix from each of the nine groups, in group order, with group 9 last. A rover suffix (*-be'* "not" and its relatives) can go after the root or after any suffix except one from group 9, and it negates what is before it.

The Whole Order at a Glance

GROUP	IDEA	SUFFIXES
1	reflexive, reciprocal	<i>-'egh</i> , <i>-chuq</i>
2	need, will, readiness	<i>-nIS</i> , <i>-qang</i> , <i>-rup</i> , <i>-beH</i> , <i>-vlp</i>
3	change, resumption	<i>-choH</i> , <i>-qa'</i>
4	cause	<i>-moH</i>
5	indefinite subject, ability	<i>-lu'</i> , <i>-laH</i>
6	certainty	<i>-chu'</i> , <i>-bej</i> , <i>-ba'</i> , <i>-law'</i>
7	aspect	<i>-pu'</i> , <i>-ta'</i> , <i>-taH</i> , <i>-ll'</i>
8	honorific	<i>-neS</i>
9	syntax	<i>-wl'</i> , <i>-ghach</i> , <i>-'a'</i> , <i>-jaj</i> , <i>-pa'</i> , <i>-vIS</i> , <i>-DI'</i> , <i>-chugh</i> , <i>-mo'</i> , <i>-bogh</i> , <i>-meH</i>
rovers	no fixed place	<i>-be'</i> (not), <i>-Qo'</i> (negative command), <i>-qu'</i> (emphatic), <i>-Ha'</i> (reverse, wrongly)

Because a verb takes no more than one suffix from a group, *-lu'* and *-laH* (both group 5) can't be used together on one verb.

No Stated Subject: *-lu'*

The suffix *-lu'* means that the subject is unspecified, like English "one" or "someone". With a third-person object, the verb needs no prefix:

Hegh	he/she/it dies	
Heghlu'	Hegh + lu'	one dies, someone dies
legh	he/she/it sees it	
leghlu'	legh + lu'	someone sees it

-lu' is not a passive: the object stays an object, and the subject is simply left unspecified. If the object is a first or second person, the prefix that appears is the one that would otherwise mark that person as the subject, which is an oddity you can look up when you need it. This is the first half of the phrase *Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam*, analysed at the end of the chapter.

Rovers: *-be'* and Friends

Klingon says "not" with a suffix on the verb, not with a separate word like English *not* or Hungarian *nem*. You have already met it in *jlyajbe'* "I don't understand" and *ghobe'* "no". Because *-be'* is a **rover**, it can follow the root or any suffix (but not a group 9 suffix), and it negates what comes before it. Moving it changes the meaning:

vIjatlh	I speak it	
vIjatlhbe'	I do not speak it	
vIjatlhlaH	I can speak it	
vIjatlhlaHbe'	vI- + jatlh + laH + be'	I cannot speak it
vIjatlhbe'laH	vI- + jatlh + be' + laH	I am able not to speak it
vIjatlhbe'laHbe'	vI- + jatlh + be' + laH + be'	I am not able not to speak it

English needs extra words to separate these meanings; Klingon carries the difference in the order of the suffixes. The other rovers work the same way: *-Qo'* negates a command (Chapter 8),

-qu' makes the verb emphatic, and *-Ha'* reverses the action or does it wrongly.

Respect: *-neS*

Group 8 has a single suffix, the honorific *-neS*, which shows respect for the person addressed or spoken about. It sits after the aspect suffixes and before any group 9 suffix. It is the nearest Klingon comes to the formal address systems of Chapter 7 of Introduction to Linguistics (German *Sie*, Hungarian *Ön*), and unlike them it is optional and attached to the verb.

Group 9: Nouns and Clauses

The eleven group 9 suffixes say what role the verb plays in the sentence. They come last, and no rover can follow them.

JOB	SUFFIXES
makes a noun	<i>-wl'</i> "one who does it"; <i>-ghach</i> "the act or ability of doing it"
sentence type	<i>-'a'</i> yes/no question (Chapter 8); <i>-jaqj</i> wish ("may ...")
makes a clause	<i>-meH</i> purpose; <i>-bogh</i> relative clause; <i>-chugh</i> "if"; <i>-pa'</i> "before"; <i>-vIS</i> "while"; <i>-DI'</i> "as soon as"; <i>-mo'</i> "because"

Verb to Noun: *-wl'*

Adding *-wl'* to a verb gives "one who does it". It also explains a word you have used since Chapter 3:

VERB	+ <i>-wl'</i>	HUNGARIAN	ESPERANTO
<i>suv</i> fight	<i>Suvwl'</i> one who fights, warrior	<i>harcos</i> (from <i>harc</i>)	<i>batalanto</i>
<i>legH</i> see	<i>legHwl'</i> one who sees, observer	<i>látó</i> (<i>lát-ó</i>)	<i>vidanto</i>
<i>jatlh</i> speak	<i>jatlhwl'</i> one who speaks, speaker	<i>beszélő</i> (<i>beszél-ő</i>)	<i>parolanto</i>

Hungarian and Esperanto make doer nouns with a suffix too (*-ó/-ő* and *-anto*), as in the word-building of Introduction to Linguistics 4. A noun made this way takes the usual noun suffixes of

Chapter 3, so *Suvwl'pu'* is "warriors". Chapter 3 treated *Suvwl'* as a root; it is in fact a built word, so a noun can hide a verb inside it.

Purpose: *-meH*

The suffix *-meH* turns a verb into a purpose clause, "in order to ...". The clause comes before the main sentence. The rest of the clause suffixes (*-bogh*, *-chugh* and so on) are the subject of Chapter 9.

```
# the famous saying, taken apart
```

```
Heghlu'meH      QaQ      jajvam
```

```
Hegh-lu'-meH    QaQ      jaj-vam
```

```
die-(one)-in order to   is good   day-this
```

```
# group 5 (-lu') comes before group 9 (-meH), as the order requires
```

```
# "In order for one to die, this day is good" = "Today is a good day to die."
```

The sentence has a purpose clause, then the verb *QaQ* "is good", then its subject *jajvam*: the verb-then-subject end of the object–verb–subject pattern of Chapter 5. It is a short, complete grammar lesson in one line.

WATCH OUT: THE NEGATIVE GOES AFTER, AND NOT AFTER GROUP 9

English speakers reach for a word *not* before the verb. In Klingon the *-be'* is part of the verb, placed after the part it negates. And it can't follow a group 9 suffix: *Heghlu'meHbe'* is not a word. Also, *-be'* negates verbs; negating an identity sentence such as *Suvwl' jIH* ("I am a warrior") needs a different pattern, which this course does not cover.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using *vllegh* "I see it" and the suffix *-laH* "can", write the Klingon for: (a) "I do not see it"; (b) "I can see it"; (c) "I cannot see it"; (d) "I am able not to see it"; (e) "I am not able not to see it". Say what moves, and what stays the same, between (c) and (d).

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Using *-wl'*, make the Klingon noun for "one who eats" (*Sop*), "one who finds" (*Sam*) and "one who understands" (*yaj*). Then make the plural of each, using the right plural suffix from Chapter 3, and give the Esperanto equivalent of "one who eats".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Take apart *Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam* word by word, giving the group number of every suffix. Then explain why *Hegh-meH-lu'* and *Heghlu'meHbe'* would not be allowed.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 7 QUICK REFERENCE

- At most **one suffix from each group**, in group order 1 to 9
- **Group 5:** *-lu'* indefinite subject (not a passive), *-laH* can
- **Group 8:** *-neS* honorific · **Group 9:** *-wl'* doer noun, *-ghach*, *-a'*, *-jaj*, *-meH* purpose, *-bogh*, *-chugh*, *-pa'*, *-vIS*, *-DI'*, *-mo'*
- **Rovers:** *-be'* not, *-Qo'* negative command, *-qu'* emphatic, *-Ha'* reverse; after the root or any suffix, never after group 9; they negate what precedes them
- *-laHbe'* "cannot" against *-be'laH* "able not to"
- *Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam* = *Hegh-lu'-meH* (groups 5, 9) + *QaQ* + *jaj-vam*

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 8 covers questions and commands: yes/no questions with *-a'*, question words, the imperative prefixes, the negative command with *-Qo'*, and how to answer.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Questions and Commands

So far every sentence has been a statement. Speakers also ask and order, and Klingon marks both with machinery you already know: a suffix for the question, a special set of prefixes for the command, and the rover -Qo' for "don't". This chapter also uses the verb order from Chapter 5, because Klingon question words do not move to the front the way English ones do.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A yes/no question is the ordinary sentence with -'a' on the verb. A question word sits where the answer would sit. A command uses its own prefixes (*yl-*, *HI-*, *pe-* and others).

Yes/No Questions: -'a'

To ask a yes/no question you take the statement unchanged and add -'a' to the verb. The suffix belongs to group 9, so it is the last suffix on the verb and no rover can follow it (Chapter 7).

tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh	You speak Klingon.	
tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'	Do you speak Klingon?	(Chapter 1)
DIboQnIS	We need to assist them.	
DIboQnIS'a'	DI- + boQ + nIS + 'a'	Do we need to assist them?
vIleghlaH	I can see it.	
vIleghlaH'a'	Can I see it?	

The ranks are respected: in *DIboQnIS'a'* the need suffix (group 2) comes first and the question suffix (group 9) last. Compare how other languages do the same job. English changes the word order (*Do you speak ...?*) and Hungarian uses intonation or a particle. Esperanto puts the word *ĉu* at the front, and Japanese puts *ka* at the end. Klingon is the odd one out in making the question part of the verb.

Answering

The answers are the words you learned in Chapter 1: *HIja'* "yes" and *ghobe'* "no". You can also answer by repeating the verb, positively or negated with *-be'*:

tlhIngan Hol Dajatlh'a'?	Do you speak Klingon?
HIja'.	Yes.
ghobe'.	No.
tlhIngan Hol vIjatlhbe'.	I do not speak Klingon.

Question Words

Klingon question words are separate words. The surprising rule is that a question word doesn't move to the front of the sentence, as English *who* and *what* do. It stays **in the place where the answer would go**, and only the adverbs (where, when, why, how) go first, where an adverb would go in a statement.

KLINGON	MEANING	ESPERANTO	HUNGARIAN
<i>nuq</i>	what	<i>kio</i>	<i>mi</i>
<i>'Iv</i>	who	<i>kiu</i>	<i>ki</i>
<i>nuqDaq</i>	where	<i>kie</i>	<i>hol</i>
<i>ghorgh</i>	when	<i>kiam</i>	<i>mikor</i>
<i>qatlh</i>	why	<i>kial</i>	<i>miért</i>
<i>chay'</i>	how	<i>kiel</i>	<i>hogyan</i>
<i>'ar</i>	how many, how much	<i>kiom</i>	<i>mennyi</i>

The word *nuqDaq* is *nuq* with the locative suffix *-Daq* from Chapter 3, which is "at what", and *nuqneH* in Chapter 1 is *nuq* "what" followed by *neH* "want": a question with no extra marking. Because there is a question word, there is no *-a'*: the suffix is only for yes/no questions.

Now use the word-order rule. *'Iv* can stand in the object slot or the subject slot, and the slot tells you which:

object + verb + subject; the question word fills the slot being asked about
<i>'Iv</i> qIp object = who "It hits whom?" (Whom does it hit?)

qIp	'Iv	subject = who	"Who hits it?"
nuq	Dalegh	object = what	"What do you see?"

This is a direct result of the object–verb–subject order. In English, *who* and *what* both go to the front and the word order of the rest changes; in Klingon the sentence keeps its shape and the question word simply replaces the missing piece.

Commands

A command is addressed to "you", so Klingon has a separate set of prefixes for it. They mark the person addressed together with the object, as in Chapter 4:

ADDRESSEE	OBJECT	PREFIX	EXAMPLE
you (one)	none, or it	<i>yl-</i>	<i>ylQong</i> "sleep!"; <i>yllaD</i> "read it!"
you (one)	me	<i>HI-</i>	<i>HIlegh</i> "look at me!"
you (one)	us	<i>gho-</i>	
you (one)	them	<i>tl-</i>	
you (several)	none	<i>pe-</i>	<i>peQong</i> "sleep!" (to several)

There is no tense and no pronoun in a command, as in English. The word order is the same as in a statement, so the object, if named, comes first: *Duj yllegh* "look at the ship!" The suffixes of Chapters 6 and 7 can be used too: *ylQongqa'* is "go back to sleep!", with the group 3 suffix *-qa'*.

Don't! The Rover -Qo'

A negative command does not use *-be'*. It uses the rover *-Qo'*, which is used in the same way (after the verb or a suffix, never after group 9):

<i>yIQong</i>	Sleep!	
<i>yIQongQo'</i>	<i>yI-</i> + <i>Qong</i> + <i>Qo'</i>	Don't sleep!
<i>yIQongqa'</i>	<i>yI-</i> + <i>Qong</i> + <i>qa'</i>	Go back to sleep!

in a statement, *-Qo'* means refusal, not a command

vIlon	I leave it	
vIlonQo'	I refuse to leave it	(indicative: the subject refuses)

WATCH OUT: QUESTION WORDS STAY PUT, AND -'A' IS ONLY FOR YES/NO

Putting 'lv or nuq at the front out of habit changes who does what: qlp 'lv and 'lv qlp are different questions. Also don't add -'a' to a sentence that already has a question word, and don't use -be' for a negative command: it must be -Qo'.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Turn each statement into a yes/no question, then write a short and a full answer: (a) *DaSopnIS* "you need to eat it"; (b) *vlleghlaH* "I can see it"; (c) *tlhIngan Hol Dajath* "you speak Klingon". Explain why the -'a' must come last.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Translate: (a) 'lv qlp; (b) qlp 'lv; (c) nuq Dalegh. Then say in what way the Klingon placement of *who* and *what* differs from English, and give the Esperanto and Hungarian words for "who".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Write the Klingon for: (a) "Read it!" (*laD* "read"); (b) "Sleep!" (*Qong*); (c) "Don't sleep!"; (d) "Go back to sleep!"; (e) "Look at me!" (*legH*); (f) "Sleep!" said to several people. Which prefix does each use?

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 8 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Yes/no question:** add *-a'* (group 9, last); answer *Hlja'* / *ghobe'*
- **Question words:** *nuq* what, *'lv* who, *nuqDaq* where, *ghorgh* when, *qatlh* why, *chay'* how, *'ar* how many
- A question word takes the place of the answer; adverbs go first; no *-a'* with a question word
- **Command prefixes:** *yl-* (none/it), *Hl-* (me), *gho-* (us), *tl-* (them), *pe-* (several)
- **Don't!:** *-Qo'*, not *-be'*

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 9 joins sentences: clauses with *-bogh*, *-chugh*, *-pa'*, *-vIS*, *-DI'* and *-mo'*, and the conjunctions that link whole sentences.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Joining Sentences

A language that could only make single sentences would not get far. Klingon joins ideas in three ways: conjunctions that link nouns or whole sentences, group 9 suffixes that turn a verb into a clause ("if", "because", "before"), and the suffix *-bogh* that builds a relative clause ("the person who ..."). You have already met the group 9 suffixes *-meH* and *-wI'* (Chapter 7); this chapter completes the set.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

A clause is a whole sentence with a group 9 suffix on its verb. It can go before or after the main sentence (except the purpose clause with *-meH*, which goes first), and the order of words inside it is the usual object – verb – subject.

Conjunctions

Klingon has one set of conjunctions for joining **nouns** and a different, mirror-image set for joining **sentences**. The noun conjunctions follow the nouns they connect:

MEANING	BETWEEN NOUNS	BETWEEN SENTENCES
and	<i>je</i>	<i>'ej</i>
and/or	<i>joq</i>	<i>qoj</i>
either ... or	<i>ghap</i>	<i>pagh</i>
but		<i>'ach</i>

nouns: the conjunction follows the nouns

yaS SuvwI' je the officer and the warrior

sentences: the conjunction stands between the clauses

jISop 'ej jItlhutlh I eat and I drink

jISop 'ach jItlhutlhbe' I eat, but I do not drink

Compare Esperanto, which has the single word *kaj* for both jobs, and Hungarian *és*. Klingon's two sets make it clear at once whether a noun or a sentence is being joined.

Subordinate Clauses

A group 9 suffix on a verb makes the whole clause depend on another. You have the full set already in the table of Chapter 7; here are the ones not yet used, each with a worked example:

SUFFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE	TRANSLATION
-pa'	before	<i>jltlheDpa', HlboQ</i>	Before I depart, assist me.
-vIS	while (used with - <i>taH</i>)	<i>lumtaHvIS, pagh ta'</i>	He accomplishes nothing while he procrastinates.
-DI'	as soon as	<i>jlmej chocholDI'</i>	As soon as you approach me, I leave.
- chugh	if	<i>DaSamlaHchugh, DaSuqlaH</i>	If you can find it, you can take it.
-mo'	because	<i>bl'llmo', qavoq</i>	Because you are sincere, I trust you.

Look at one example closely. *DaSamlaHchugh* is built from the prefix *Da-* (you → it), the root *Sam* "find", the group 5 suffix *-laH* "can" and the group 9 suffix *-chugh* "if": ranks 5 then 9, as Chapter 7 requires. Nothing can follow *-chugh*, and a rover such as *-be'* would have to come before it. The suffix *-mo'* exists as a noun suffix too ("because of", Chapter 3); the same letters work in both places, and the word it is attached to tells you which.

Where does the clause go? A subordinate clause may stand before or after the main clause, but a purpose clause with *-meH* always goes first (Chapter 7). English has the same freedom: *If you can find it, take it* and *Take it if you can find it*. Esperanto uses separate words (*se* "if", *ĉar* "because", *antaŭ ol* "before"), and Hungarian also uses words (*ha*, *mert*, *mielőtt*). Klingon packs the same information into the verb.

Relative Clauses: **-bogh**

A relative clause says which person or thing you mean: "the person *who sells the pet*". In Klingon the verb takes *-bogh*, the clause keeps the ordinary object – verb – subject order, and the **head**

noun (the person or thing being described) sits where it would in that clause. Which noun is the head is shown by placing the optional noun suffix *-e'* on it:

```
chuS   Saj   ngevboqh   ghot'e'  
is noisy   pet   sells   person
```

```
# the clause is "Saj ngevboqh ghot" = the person who sells the pet  
# the whole phrase is the subject of chuS: "The person who sells the pet is noisy."
```

```
chuS   Saj'e'   ngevboqh   ghot  
is noisy   pet   sells   person
```

```
# here the head is "Saj", the object of the clause:  
# "The pet that the person sells is noisy."
```

Both sentences contain the same words. The difference is which noun carries *-e'*, and so which noun is being described. In English you would change the pronoun (*who*, *that*) or the order; Klingon uses a single suffix on the head noun.

WATCH OUT: THE ORDER INSIDE A CLAUSE IS STILL OBJECT – VERB – SUBJECT

It is tempting to put the subject first, as in English "the person sells the pet". In Klingon the clause *Saj ngevboqh ghot* has the object first. Relative clauses are also easy to misread when their words could belong to the main sentence, so look for the *-boqh* to find where the clause ends.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Take apart these clauses, giving prefix, root, suffixes (with group numbers) and meaning: (a) *jtltheDpa'*; (b) *DaSamlaHchugh*; (c) *bl'Ilmo'*; (d) *chocholDI'*. In (d), what do the prefixes *cho-* tell you?

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Build the Klingon clause for: (a) "if I can see it" (*legh*); (b) "because you see me"; (c) "as soon as we find it" (*Sam*); (d) "while I eat" (*Sop*, using *-taH* as well as the "while" suffix). Then join "I eat" and "I drink"

(*tlhutlh*) with a conjunction, and join "officer" and "warrior" with a conjunction.

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Translate *chuS Saj ngevbogh ghot'e'* and *chuS Saj'e' ngevbogh ghot*, and explain exactly what is different between them. (Words: *chuS* be noisy, *Saj* pet, *ngev* sell, *ghot* person.)

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 9 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Noun conjunctions** (after the nouns): *je* and, *joq* and/or, *ghap* either/or
- **Sentence conjunctions**: *'ej* and, *qoj* and/or, *pagh* either/or, *'ach* but
- **Clause suffixes** (group 9): *-pa'* before, *-vIS* while (with *-taH*), *-DI'* as soon as, *-chugh* if, *-mo'* because, *-meH* purpose (first)
- **Relative clause**: verb + *-bogh*, the head noun optionally marked *-'e'*; order inside the clause is still object – verb – subject
- Nothing follows a group 9 suffix; a rover must come before it

COMING NEXT

Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 10 is the last chapter. It covers numbers and counting, expressions of time, and some idioms and proverbs, followed by a recap of the whole course and pointers to the follow-up courses.

Klingon Grammar 1

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Numbers and Time

The last chapter fills two gaps in the grammar: counting, and saying when something happens. Klingon has no tense (Chapter 4), so time is carried by words, which makes these words more important than in English. The chapter ends with a recap of the whole course and a look at what to learn next.

THE IDEA IN A BOX

Klingon counts in tens, building big numbers by attaching a multiplier suffix to a digit. Time is expressed by adverbs and by number-plus-suffix words that start the sentence.

Numbers

The ten basic digits are separate words, and Klingon has a word for zero:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>pagh</i>	<i>wa'</i>	<i>cha'</i>	<i>wej</i>	<i>loS</i>	<i>vagh</i>	<i>jav</i>	<i>Soch</i>	<i>chorgh</i>	<i>Hut</i>

Ten is not a separate word: it is the multiplier **-maH**, attached to a digit. A multiple of ten is the digit with **-maH**, and the larger power comes first when you build a number:

# multipliers:	-maH 10	-vatlh 100	-SaD 1,000	-netlh 10,000	-bIp 100,000	-'uy' 1,000,000
wa'maH	10	(1 x 10)				
cha'maH	20	(2 x 10)				
wa'maH wa'	11	(10, then 1)				
chorghmaH Soch	87	(8 x 10, then 7)				
wa'vatlh	100	(1 x 100)				
cha'vatlh wejmaH vagh	235	(2 x 100, 3 x 10, 5)				

The pattern is regular, so nothing has to be memorised beyond the digits and the multipliers. Compare Hungarian (*tizenegy* "eleven", *nyolcvanhét* "eighty-seven": tens first, then units) and Esperanto (*okdek sep*); Klingon puts the larger part first, as they do, and not "seven and eighty" as in German.

Other forms use suffixes: *-DIch* makes an ordinal (*loSDIch* "fourth") and *-logh* counts times (*wa'maH cha'logh* "twelve times"). A noun after a number does not need its plural suffix, as in *raS DIghor* "we broke the tables" (the plural *raSmey* is also allowed).

Time

Time words are adverbs, and adverbs open the sentence, with time adverbs before other adverbs (Chapter 5). The most useful ones:

KLINGON	MEANING	BUILD
<i>DaH</i>	now	
<i>DaHjaj</i>	today	<i>DaH</i> "now" + <i>jaj</i> "day"
<i>wa'Hu'</i>	yesterday	<i>wa'</i> one + <i>-Hu'</i> days ago
<i>wa'leS</i>	tomorrow	<i>wa'</i> one + <i>-leS</i> days from now
<i>cha'Hu'</i>	two days ago	<i>cha'</i> + <i>-Hu'</i>
<i>wejleS</i>	three days from now	<i>wej</i> + <i>-leS</i>

The pair *-Hu'* and *-leS* works for any number, which is why Klingon needs no separate words for "the day after tomorrow". *DaHjaj* is mostly used as a time stamp; for "today" as the subject or topic of a sentence, Klingon uses *jajvam*, "this day", as you saw in *Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam*. Esperanto's *hodiaŭ*, *hieraaŭ* and *morgaŭ* (Introduction to Linguistics 7) are single words; Klingon builds the same ideas from a number and a suffix.

```
wa'leS   ghaytan   nujatlh
tomorrow probably they-us-speak           They will probably speak to us tomorrow.

# the time adverb comes first, then the other adverb, then the verb:
# nu- is the prefix "they do it to us" (Chapter 4)
```

A Native Saying

Klingon's own idioms are as blunt as its greetings. One is a comparison, *'IQ rav rur*, "he is as sad as a floor": literally "he is sad; he resembles a floor". It shows the usual building blocks: *'IQ* "be sad" and *rur* "resemble" are verbs (qualities are verbs, Chapter 5), and *rav* "floor" is the object.

Course Complete: What You Have Covered

CHAPTER	TOPIC	KEY IDEA
1 The Warrior's Tongue	origin and writing	an a priori language by Marc Okrand; case matters in the spelling
2 Sounds and Spelling	phonology	21 consonants and 5 vowels; <i>q/Q</i> , <i>H</i> , <i>tlh</i> ; consonant-first syllables
3 Nouns	noun suffixes	five ordered types: size, plural, qualification, possession, syntax
4 Verbs and Prefixes	verb prefix	one prefix names subject and object together
5 Pronouns and Sentences	syntax	object – verb – subject; "to be" with noun + pronoun; qualities are verbs
6 Verb Suffixes	suffix groups 1–7	at most one suffix per group, in rank order
7 More Verb Suffixes	groups 5, 8, 9 and rovers	-lu', -be', -wl', -meH; rovers move and change meaning
8 Questions and Commands	sentence types	-'a'; question words stay in place; yl-, Hl-, pe-; -Qo'
9 Joining Sentences	complex sentences	conjunctions, clause suffixes, -bogh relative clauses
10 Numbers and Time	counting and time	-maH and other multipliers; -Hu' and -leS

Klingon is a useful test case for the ideas in Introduction to Linguistics: it is agglutinative like Hungarian (Introduction to Linguistics 4), its object–verb–subject order is the rarest of the word orders in Introduction to Linguistics 5, and its community shows that a planned language grows once people use it (Introduction to Linguistics 8).

Where to Go Next

The planned follow-ups are **Klingon Basic Conversation 1**, which applies this grammar to dialogues, and **The Story of Klingon**, on how and why the language was made. The wider constructed-languages course **Constructed Languages** places Klingon alongside Esperanto, Tolkien's languages and others. For a deeper reference, Marc Okrand's *The Klingon Dictionary* and the Klingon Language Institute remain the authorities; check any form in this course against them before relying on it.

WATCH OUT: THIS COURSE IS A LEARNER'S INTRODUCTION, NOT THE DICTIONARY

Klingon is a living language with a continuing set of official and community decisions. Treat the vocabulary and the suffix lists here as a reliable starting point, and look up anything you plan to use.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write the Klingon for: 11, 20, 87, 100, and 235. Then read *loSmaH jav* and *wejvatlh chorgh* as numbers, and form the ordinal "fifth".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Translate *wa'leS ghaytan nujatlh*, and explain the prefix *nu-* and the position of each word. Then give the Klingon for "two days ago" and "three days from now", and say why Klingon needs no separate word for "the day after tomorrow".

 [View solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Build and gloss a sentence of your own that uses at least five features from the course, for example: "If I can speak Klingon, I am a warrior." Show the prefix, root, suffixes with group numbers, the word order, and name each feature used.

 [View solution](#)

CHAPTER 10 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Digits:** *pagh wa' cha' wej loS vagh jav Soch chorgh Hut*
- **Multipliers:** *-maH 10, -vatlh 100, -SaD 1,000, -netlh 10,000, -blp 100,000, -'uy' 1,000,000*; larger powers first (*chorghmaH Soch = 87*)
- **Ordinal** *-Dlch*; **times** *-logh*; a noun after a number needs no plural
- **Time:** *DaH* now, *DaHjaj* today, *N-Hu'* days ago (*wa'Hu'* yesterday), *N-leS* days from now (*wa'leS* tomorrow)
- Time adverbs open the sentence, before other adverbs

COURSE COMPLETE

That is the end of *Klingon Grammar 1*. A combined PDF of all ten chapters is in the course's [pdfs](#) folder. *Qapla'!*