

CHAPTER TEN

OIRAT

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The ethnonym Oirat (*Oyirad*, Written Mongol **vUjirat**, Spoken Oirat *Öörd*) covers several groups of Western Mongols, originally probably belonging to the tribal confederation of the *Hoi-yin Irgen* ‘Forest People’, who until the thirteenth century lived south and southwest of Lake Baikal. After Chinggis Khan’s eldest son Jochi attacked the ‘Forest People’ (in 1206–7), the ancient Oirat moved to the steppes of the Altai region and adopted a fully nomadic way of life. In the fifteenth century their descendants emerged as a growing political power known as the Oirat Confederation. Under the rule of Toghon (c.1416–40) and his son Esen (1440–55) the Oirat expanded their territory from the Altai to the Ili (*Yili*) valley, claiming themselves to be the legitimate heirs of Chinggis Khan’s empire.

The Oirat reached their height of power under the rule of Ghaldan Boshokhtu (1670–97) and his successors Tsewangrabdan (1697–1727) and Ghaldantseren (1727–45), when the so-called Junghar (**Jaguv Qhar** ‘Left Hand’) Khanate was established in the Ili region, subsequently known as Jungaria (Dzungaria). Like the Eastern and Southern Mongols, the Oirat were ultimately subjugated by the Manchu, whose empire expanded to Jungaria in the middle of the eighteenth century. As a consequence of their complex political history, the Oirat are today dispersed over various regions, including not only Jungaria and Western Mongolia, but also Manchuria and the Kukurun region in Amdo (Qinghai). The Kalmuck in the Volga region also represent an Oirat diaspora group, though they have long functioned as a separate entity both politically and linguistically.

The ethnonym Oirat is often used in the combination *Dörben Oirat* (**Tuirbav vUjirat**), i.e. the ‘Four Oirat’, a somewhat vague concept which seems to have covered a different set of tribes at different times. Major tribes comprised by the ‘Four Oirat’ include the Torghut, Dörbet, Öelet, and Khoshut, but smaller tribes, such as the Khoit were also involved. In parallel with their common political history, all these tribes came to be comprised by a distinct and relatively uniform type of speech, which may be referred to as the Oirat language. As a manifestation of this linguistic uniformity, the Oirat monk Zaya Pandita *Oqtorghoin Dalai* (1599–1662) created in 1648 on the basis of the Mongol alphabet the so-called ‘Clear Script’ (*todo bicig* or *todorxoi üzüg*), upon which a new supradialectal written language, Written Oirat, was built. Linguistically, Written Oirat may be viewed as a more or less accurate normalization of the speech of the Western Mongols as it was in the mid-seventeenth century.

In the years 1650–62, Zaya Pandita and his followers translated into Written Oirat more than 200 Tibetan Buddhist scripts, including the *Altan Gerel* ‘the Golden Light’ and the *Medeetei medee-ügeyiki ilghaqci kemeekü sudur*, the equivalent of the Written Mongol ‘Ocean of Stories’ (*vUligar uv Talai*). Secular works about Tibetan medicine were also translated, and the Written Mongol block print version of the Geser Epos was transliterated into the ‘Clear Script’. Additionally, primary documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the biography of Zaya Pandita and several

histories of Oirat and Kalmuck khans, were also compiled. In spite of its subsequent decline, Written Oirat has been in use until recent times, though in official and educational functions it has been by and large replaced by Written Mongol (in China) and Cyrillic Khalkha (in Mongolia).

At the oral level, the Oirat language comprises a number of dialects, which are traditionally identified on a tribal basis. The most important tribal dialects of Oirat are: Bayit (*Bayd*), Dörbet (*Dörwd*), Jakhachin (*Zaxcn*), Khoton (*Xotn*), Khoshut (*Xoshud*), Minggat (*Mingghd*), Öelet (*Ööld*), Torghut (*Torghud*), and Uryankhai (*Urangka*). Most of these are today spoken in the Kobdo and Ubsu aimaks of Mongolia, where the number of Oirat is estimated to be c. 150,000 people. Further to the east in Mongolia there are other Oirat-related groups, which, however, have replaced their language by Khalkha. The main dialects on the Chinese side are Torghut and Khoshut, spoken by less than 130,000 people in northern Sinkiang (Bortala, Hoboksar, Tarbagatai, and Bayangol).

The numerically less significant Kukunor Oirat, also known as the 'Deed Mongols', are mainly of Khoshut origin, while the Manchurian Oirat represent traces of a relocated Öelet population. A section of Kalmuck who rejoined the rest of the Oirat in Jungaria in 1771 are today known as the 'New Torghut' (*Shin Torghud*). An Oirat dialect is also spoken by the so-called Sart Kalmuck, descendants of Öelet and Torghut who in 1880 emigrated from Jungaria to what is now Kyrgyzstan (Chelpek and Börü Bashi, east of Issyk Köl). Another Oirat dialect is spoken in Alashan (*Alshan*) League, western Inner Mongolia.

DATA AND SOURCES

There exists a vast literature on the history of the Oirat. A few titles relevant to the understanding of the ethnic and linguistic situation include those by I. Ya. Zlatkin (1964), S. A. Halkovic (1985), Hidehiro Okada (1987), and Junko Miyawaki (1990). The present state of the Jungarian Oirat is surveyed by Krystyna Chabros (1993).

The Oirat language has been studied in two rather different contexts: the philological context of Written Oirat and the linguistic context of the spoken dialects. The work on Written Oirat, as reviewed by J. R. Krueger (1975), has typically focused on analysing the documents extant in the 'Clear Script'. As examples of the many large and small text editions, the publication of an Oirat letter by Joseph Fletcher (1970) and the recent work on a Buddhist manuscript by N. S. Yaxontova (1999) may be mentioned. A major source of information for textological and lexicological studies is the citation dictionary of Krueger (1978–84).

Grammatical works on Written Oirat are less numerous, but a rather detailed analysis of the seventeenth-century Oirat language is given by Yaxontova (1996), from whom many of the examples in the present chapter are taken. Yaxontova (1997), like the earlier work of Pentti Aalto (1964), offers a more concise treatment of the language. Many of the early grammars of 'Kalmuck', notably that of A. A. Bobrovnikov (1849), are basically also descriptions of Written Oirat.

The first materials on Oirat spoken dialects, mainly word lists and phrases, were recorded and published by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars, including Nicolaes Witsen, Ph. J. von Strahlenberg, and P. S. Pallas. The actual foundation of the field was laid by G. J. Ramstedt, whose 'Kalmuck' dictionary (1935) contains data also from the Jungarian Oirat (Öelet). More recently, specifically Oirat dictionaries (without Kalmuck) have been published by Tsooloo (1988), Luntu (1998), and Choijingjab and Gereltu (1998). Oirat folklore was collected already by B. Ya. Vladimircov (1926). Later

text collections and folklore publications include those by Choijingjab *et al.* (1986) and György Kara (1987, cf. also Kara 1959).

On the grammatical side, several descriptions of the individual Oirat dialects, notably the monographs by Tsooloo (1965) and Wandui (1965), have been published in Mongolia. Selected dialectological topics are also treated in the papers of Luwsanbaldan (1967) and Sambuudorj (1998), as well as in the collective work edited by Sainbulag and Bulagha (1997). Recently, the study of Oirat dialects and folklore in Mongolia has been continued in the framework of a joint expedition of the Mongolian and Hungarian Academies of Sciences. Most of the materials collected by this expedition remain still unpublished.

In the present chapter, Written Oirat (WO) and Spoken Oirat (SO) are discussed in parallel. Diachronically, Written Oirat is best understood as a kind of Proto-Oirat, not far from Proto-Mongol (the ancestor of the dialects of Mongol proper), nor from the western dialects of late Middle Mongol. Spoken Oirat, by contrast, is a distinct and innovative group of modern dialects, taxonomically clearly separate from both Written Oirat and the modern dialects of Mongol proper. On the other hand, although no study of the issue has been made, the individual Oirat dialects are likely to be mutually close enough to allow intelligibility without difficulty. For the present purpose, Spoken Oirat, from which Kalmuck is excluded, may therefore be treated as a more or less uniform language.

SEGMENTAL PHONEMES

Unlike the Written Mongol orthography, the ‘Clear Script’ is phonemically adequate. Special letters, positional variants, and diacritic symbols are used to express features such as vowel quality, vowel length, and obstruent strength. It is true, some Written Mongol conventions, such as the use of a zero-value consonantal initial (**v**) before initial vowels, are retained in the ‘Clear Script’, but generally the written image can be automatically represented in terms of an unambiguous Romanized transcription (rather than a transliteration). Since this is also the conventional approach in Written Oirat studies, it will be followed below.

As far as vowel qualities are concerned, Written Oirat preserves the Middle Mongol system of the seven nuclear vowels *a e o ö u ü i*. Spoken Oirat (Table 10.1) has additionally the low front vowel *ä*, which is mainly the product of palatal umlaut, e.g. SO *xär* ‘alien’ < **kari*. Other original back vowels are also palatalized before an **i* of the following syllable, e.g. SO *mör/n* ‘horse’ < **mori/n*, SO *xüw* ~ *xöw* ‘share’ < **kubi*. Importantly, the vowel qualities in Oirat do not show any tendency of rotation. Breaking is also rare, observed only after palatal consonants and restricted only to Spoken Oirat, cf. e.g. **nigta* ‘dense’ > WO *niqta* > SO *nigt*, **cidör* ‘hobble/s’ > WO *cidür* > SO *cidr* ~ *cödr* ~ *cüdr*. On the other hand, Common Mongolic cases of prebreaking are present also in Written Oirat, e.g. **mika/n* ‘meat’ > WO *maxa/n* > SO *max/n*, **nidü/n* ‘eye’ > WO *nüdü/n* > SO *nüd/n*, also *nid/n*.

TABLE 10.1 SPOKEN OIRAT VOWELS

<i>u</i>	<i>ü</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>o</i>	<i>ö</i>	<i>e</i>
<i>a</i>		<i>ä</i>

In the initial syllable, all vowel qualities can occur as distinctively long (double). The long vowels are of a contractive origin. Secondary long front vowels were produced by palatal umlaut, e.g. **toxori-* ‘to go around’ > WO *toori-* > SO *töör-*. Diphthongoid sequences of the type **V(y)i* contain an orthographical hiatus (*y*) in Written Oirat, but in Spoken Oirat they are realized as long palatal vowels. Dialectally, diphthongoid pronunciation is also possible because of the influence of dialects of the Khalkha type, e.g. **ka(y)i-* ‘to look for’ > WO *qayi-* > SO *xää- ~ xai-*. The sequences **a(x)u* and **e(x)ü* are preserved in Written Oirat as *ou* resp. *öü*, while in Spoken Oirat they have been monophthongized, cf. e.g. **axula* ‘mountain’ > WO *oula* > SO *uul*, **tere* ‘that’ : obl. **texün-* > WO *töün-* > SO *tüün-*.

The short vowels of non-initial syllables are preserved as full segments in Written Oirat, but in Spoken Oirat (like in Kalmuck and Mongol proper) they have been reduced or lost, probably for reasons connected with the prosodic (accentual) patterns of the language. The reduced vowels, even when they are phonetically present, are probably best interpreted as non-phonemic, though the dialectal situation remains somewhat unclear. Correspondingly, the long vowels of non-initial syllables, as still observed in Written Oirat, are in Spoken Oirat manifested as what may be analysed as short (single) vowels, e.g. **imaa/n* ‘goat’ > WO *yamaa/n* > SO *yama/n*. Sequences of the types **V(y)i* and **A(x)U* preserve their diphthongoid character in Written Oirat, but in Spoken Oirat they are represented as monophthongs, e.g. **tologo(y)i* ‘head’ > WO *tologhoi* > SO *tolgha ~ tolxa*, **köbexün* ‘son’ > WO *köböü/n* > SO *köwü/n*. Other sequences of two originally different vowels are represented as long monophthongs in Written Oirat, e.g. **tariya/n* ‘field’ > WO *taraa/n* > SO *tara/n*, cf. also **biraxu* ‘calf’ > WO *bürüü* > SO *bürü*.

The vowel qualities in non-initial syllables are governed by vowel harmony. In Written Oirat, vowel harmony affects both short and long vowels, but in Spoken Oirat, because of the loss of the original short vowels as distinctive segments, only the shortened reflexes of the original long vowels are affected. An important difference between Written Oirat and Spoken Oirat is that the former has both palatal and labial harmony, while the latter has only palatal harmony, as in **jiluxa* ‘rein/s’ > WO *joloo* > SO *jola*. In Written Oirat, exceptions from vowel harmony are present in loanwords, e.g. WO *gelong* ‘monk’ (from Tibetan). In Spoken Oirat, exceptions are also conditioned by palatal umlaut, which has introduced front vowels into originally back-vocalic words. Harmonizing suffixes follow the original harmonic class of the stem, e.g. SO *ääl* ‘camp’ : instr. *ääl-ar* < **a(y)il-aar*, SO *öört-* ‘to come closer’ : caus. *öört.ul-*.

Apart from the low unrounded vowels **a *e*, labial harmony in Written Oirat affects occasionally also the high rounded vowels **u *ü* of non-initial syllables, e.g. **modu/n* ‘tree; wood’ > WO *modu/n ~ modo/n*, **mörgül* ‘praying’ > WO *mörgül ~ mörgöl*. Otherwise, the combinations of vowels occurring within a single word in Written Oirat follow the Proto-Mongolic and Common Mongolic patterns, cf. e.g. WO *yasu/n* ‘bone’, *ghurba/n* ‘three’, **temür > tömür* ‘iron’, *nüke/n* ‘hole’. The vowel **i* is harmonically neutral, cf. e.g. WO *ghuci/n* ‘thirty’, *ceriq* ‘army’, *shidar* ‘close’, *shine* ‘new’, *shikür* ‘umbrella’, *shiroi* ‘earth’.

In the consonant system, the only notable difference between Middle Mongol and Written Oirat is that the contrast between the front velars **k *g* and the back velars (uvulars) **q *gh* is more unambiguously phonemic in the latter. In particular, the front velars *k g* can freely occur before back vowels, as in **takiya* (Middle Mongol *taqiya*) ‘fowl’ > WO *takaa* > SO *taka*. In Spoken Oirat, the back velars are realized as fricatives, for which reason they are conventionally transcribed as *x gh* also for Written Oirat,

TABLE 10.2 SPOKEN OIRAT CONSONANTS

<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>ty</i>		<i>k</i>
	<i>ts</i>		<i>c</i>	
<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>dy</i>		<i>g</i>
			<i>j</i>	
	<i>s</i>		<i>sh</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>w</i>	<i>z</i>			<i>gh</i>
<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ny</i>		<i>ng</i>
	<i>l</i>	<i>ly</i>		
	<i>r</i>	<i>ry</i>		
			<i>y</i>	

e.g. **aka* ‘elder brother’ > WO *axa* > SO *ax*. Since the vowels of non-initial syllables are still preserved in Written Oirat, the contrast between *k g* vs. *x gh* is not possible in syllable-final position. Instead, the Written Oirat syllable-final occurrences of **g* (both front and back) are rendered with a special letter, conventionally transcribed as *g*, e.g. **kereg* ‘necessity’ > WO *kereq*, (**nitug* >) **nutug* ‘homeland’ > WO *nutuq*.

The Spoken Oirat consonant system (Table 10.2) shows several additional developments. Most importantly, the original sibilant obstruents **s* **c* **j* have been divided into two series: the palatals *sh c j* (before **i*) vs. the dentals *s ts dz* (before other vowels). In Spoken Oirat, the weak dental affricate **dz* has further developed into the continuant sound [z] (as in Buryat). Although Written Oirat shows no evidence of these developments, its two affricate letters (**c cz**) are conventionally transcribed as if they represented three separate phonemes (*c j z*). It may be noted, however, that no such convention is applied to the weak labial stop **b*, which is always transcribed as Written Oirat *b*, although in Spoken Oirat it is represented as *w* (labial spirant or glide) in intervocalic position.

Spoken Oirat also has a set of secondary non-affricate palatal consonants (*ty dy ny ly ry*), which represent the palatalized reflexes of the corresponding dentals (**t* **d* **n* **l* **r*) under the influence of a following **i*, as in **u(x)uli* ‘sparrow owl’ > SO *uuly*. For reasons not fully understood, but often apparently connected with the length of the preceding vowel, palatal umlaut was not active in these cases.

Phonetically, the weak stops and affricates (*b d dy j g*) in Spoken Oirat are most commonly realized as voiceless and unaspirated, though voiced realizations are also observed. The spirantized dental sibilant *z* is always voiced. The corresponding strong segments (*p t ts ty c k*) are normally also pronounced without aspiration, though aspirated realizations are common in the dialects spoken in the vicinity of Khalkha (Altai Oirat). Other Khalkha consonantal features spreading into Oirat include the dialectal restoration of the affricate pronunciation of the weak sibilant (*z* > *dz*) and the occasional spirantization of the strong front velar stop (*k* > *x*). It should be noted that morphological analogy in suffixes has generally levelled the distinction between *x gh* vs. *k g* in favour of *x gh*, as in the futurity participle marker **-kU* > SO *-x*, e.g. **ala-ku* ‘to kill’ > WO *ala-xu* > SO *al-x* vs. **kele-kü* ‘to say’ > WO *kele-kü* > SO *kel-x*. For the same reason, the connective consonant appearing between two (originally long) vowels at suffix boundaries is in Spoken Oirat synchronically always *gh*.

In a few lexical items, Oirat differs from Mongol proper with regard to the treatment of the Proto-Mongolic medial velar spirant **x* (< **x* & **p*). The word **dexel* ‘garment’

(> Mongol proper *deel*), for instance, is represented as (**depel* >) WO *debel* > SO *dewl*. The stem **erexü* ~ **erixü* ‘jaw’ (> Mongol proper *erüü* > *erü*) appears as **erügü/n* > WO *örgön* > SO *örgn*, while the word **möger.sü/n* ‘cartilage’ (> Mongol proper *mögrs/n*) appears as **möxer.sü/n* > WO *möörsü/n* > SO *möörs/n*. Such variation is apparently partly connected with Pre-Proto-Mongolic dialectal differences, but it may also be due to other factors (reading pronunciations of Written Mongol, secondary sporadic developments).

WORD FORMATION

Oirat retains the basic derivational and inflectional difference between nouns and verbs. Adjectives are formally not differentiated from other nominal parts of speech, cf. e.g. SO *sääxn* ‘beautiful; one who is beautiful; being beautiful’ > ‘beauty’ : abl. *sääxn-as* ‘from (the) beautiful (one); from (the) beauty’. The system of derivation follows the Common Mongolic pattern and may be illustrated as follows:

Denominal nouns: WO *.bci* > SO *.wc* [cover of], e.g. **xuruxu* > **xuruu* (normally **xurugu/n* > WO *xurughu/n*) : WO *xuruu.bci* ‘thimble’, SO *cik/n* ‘ear’ : *cik.wc* ‘ear muff/s’; WO *.bUr* > SO *.wr* [moderative], e.g. WO *xara* ‘black’ : *xara.bur* > SO *xar.wr* ‘blackish’; WO *.ci* ~ *.ci/n* > SO *.c* ~ *.c/n* [occupation], e.g. WO *em* ‘medicine’ : *em.ci* > SO *em.c* ‘physician’, WO *buu* ‘gun’ : *buu.ci/n* > SO *buu.c* ‘gunman’; *.KAN* > SO *.Kn* [diminutive], e.g. WO *ghaqca* ‘sole’ : *ghaqca.xan* > SO *ghaghts.xn* ‘only one’, WO *öndör* ‘tall’ : *öndör.kön* ‘rather tall’.

Deverbal nouns: WO *.dal* > SO *.dl* [action noun], e.g. WO *yabu-* ‘to go’ > ‘to act’ : *yabu.dal* > SO *yaw.dl* ‘action; manner’; WO *.lAng* > SO *.lng* [id.], e.g. *zobo-* ‘to suffer’ : *zobo.long* > SO *zow.lng* ‘suffering’; WO SO *.l*, e.g. WO *sedki-* ‘to think’ : *sedki.l* > SO *setk.l* ‘thought’; SO *.ml* [nomen descriptivum], e.g. SO *güü-* ‘to run’ : *güü.ml* ‘running’; WO *.UUr* > SO *.Ur* ~ (by liquid dissimilation) WO *.UUI* > SO *.Ul* [instrument, object of action], e.g. WO *tülki-* ‘to push’ : *tülki.üür* > SO *tülk.ür* ‘key’, WO *bari-* ‘to hold’ : *bari.uul* > SO *bär.ül* ‘handle’.

Denominal verbs: WO *.da-* > SO *.d-* [essive-translative], e.g. WO *yeke* ‘big; much’ : *yeke.de-* > SO *ik.d-* ‘to be(come) (too) much’; WO *.ji-* > SO *.z-* ~ *.j-*, e.g. WO *namur* ‘autumn’ : *namur.ji-* > SO *namr.z-* ‘to live in autumn camp’; WO *.la-* > SO *.l-*, e.g. WO *tusa* ‘benefit’ : *tusa.la-* > SO *tus.l-* ‘to help’; WO *.shi-* > SO *.sh-*, e.g. WO *aldar* ‘fame; name’ : *aldar.shi-* > SO *aldr.sh-* ‘to be(come) famous’.

Deverbal verbs: The causative suffixes appear as WO *.lGA-* > SO *.lG-* (after a long vowel element) ~ WO *.GA-* > SO *.G-* (after *l r*) ~ WO *.KA-* > SO *.K-* (after *b d s*) ~ WO *i.Ul-* > SO *.Ul-* (for stems ending in *i*) ~ WO */O.Ul-* > SO *.Ul-* (for stems ending in a vowel other than *i*) ~ WO */A.A-* > SO *.A-* (for certain lexically determined vowel stems), e.g. WO *sou-* ‘to sit’ : caus. *sou.lgha-* ‘to cause to sit’, SO *güü-* ‘to run’ : caus. *güü.lg-* ‘to make run’, WO *ghar-* ‘to come/go out’ : caus. *ghar.gha-* ‘to take out’, WO *bos-* ‘to rise’ : caus. *bos.xo-* ‘to raise’, WO *üze-* ‘to see’ : caus. *üzö.ül-* ‘to show’, SO *öört-* ‘to come closer’ : caus. *öört.ul-* ‘to draw closer’, WO *xura-* ‘to come together’ : caus. *xura.a-* ‘to collect’. Passives are formed by WO *.qda-* > SO *.gd-* ~ *.kd-* (after vowels) ~ WO *.da-* > SO *.d-* (after *l*) ~ WO *.ta-* > SO *.t-* (after consonants other than *l*), e.g. WO *sana-* ‘to think’ : pass. *sana.qda-* > SO *san.kd-*, WO *ol-* ‘to find’ : pass. *ol.do-* > SO *ol.d-*, WO *sonos-* ‘to hear’ : pass. *sonos.to-* > SO *sons.t-*. Other Common Mongolic voice suffixes are WO *.lca-* > SO *.lts-* for cooperatives, WO *.lda-* > SO *.ld-* for reciprocatives, and SO *.tsGA-* for pluritatives, e.g. WO *bayas-* ‘to be happy’ : coop. *bayas/u.lca-*, SO

üz- ‘to see’ : coop. *üz.lts-* (lexicalized meaning-) ‘to compete with one another’, WO *bulaa-* ‘to take away’ : recipr. *bulaa.lda-*, SO *cashk-* ‘to chirrup’ : recipr. *cashk.ld-*, SO *suu-* ‘to sit’ : plurit. *suu.tsgha-*. An aspectual feature is expressed by the iterative suffix SO *.lz-* (rhythmic action), e.g. SO *derw.lz-* ‘to wave’.

NUMBER AND CASE

Plural is marked by a variety of lexically and/or phonologically determined suffixes, the most productive of which is WO *.noghoud* ~ *.nughuud* (without vowel harmony) > SO *.nUd* (mostly with vowel harmony, added to stems ending in a vowel or *n*, more rarely other consonants), e.g. WO *xaan* ‘emperor’ : pl. *xaan.noghoud*, *kümün* ‘person’ : pl. *kümün.noghoud*, SO *culu/n* ‘stone’ : pl. *culu.nud*, *ööms/n* ‘sock’ : pl. *ööms.nüü*, *törl* ‘relative’ : pl. *törl.nud*. Related markers are WO *.OUd* ~ *.UUD* > SO *.Ud* (added to consonant stems) and WO *.mOUd* (colloquial) > SO *.mUd* (sometimes without vowel harmony, added to stems ending in *x l r*), e.g. WO *bicig* ‘scripture’ : pl. *bicig.öüü*, *nom* ‘book’ : pl. *nom.uud*, *ger* ‘tent’ : pl. *ger.möüü* > SO *ger.müü*, *uul* ‘mountain’ : *uul.mud*, *sewgr* ‘maiden’ : pl. *sewgr.mud*. The markers WO *.ciud* > SO *.cUd* ~ *.cUl* and WO *.nar* (often without vowel harmony) > SO *.nr* denote groups of persons or personified beings, e.g. WO *mongghol* ‘Mongol’ : pl. *mongghol.ciud*, SO *zaluu* ‘young’ : pl. *zaluu.cud* ‘youth’, *köksh/n* ‘old’ : pl. *köksh.cül*, WO *tenggeri* ‘god’ : pl. *tenggeri.nar*, SO *ax* ‘elder brother’ : pl. *ax.nr*.

Less productive plural markers include *.s* (after original vowel stems) and *.d* (replacing a final consonant, but secondarily also used with original vowel stems), e.g. WO *mese* ‘weapon’ : pl. *mese.s*, SO *yadu* ‘poor’ : pl. *yadu.s*, *baxn* ‘pillar (of tent)’ : *baxn.s*, WO *mergen* ‘sage’ : pl. *merge.d*, SO *xaan* ‘emperor’ : pl. *xaa.d*, *burxn* ‘buddha’ : pl. *burx.d*, *yamaa/n* ‘goat’ : pl. *yamaa.d*, *ner* ‘name’ : pl. *ner.d* (replacing original **nere.s*), note also *noxa* ‘dog’ : pl. *nox.d* (replacing original **noka.n*). The denominal suffix WO *.ci/n* > SO *.c/n* has the plural form WO *.ci.d* > SO *.c.d*, e.g. WO *shobou.ci/n* ‘falconer’ : pl. *shobou.ci.d*. Plural marking is never obligatory and is normally absent after numerals and quantifiers, e.g. WO *xamuq burxan* ‘all the buddhas’. On the other hand, double plural marking is commonly attested, often with WO *.moud* > SO *.mUd* as the second suffix, e.g. WO *nökür* ‘friend’ : pl. *nökü.d* : double pl. *nökü.d.moud*, SO *lam* ‘lama’ : pl. *lam.nr* : double pl. *lam.nr.mud*.

The basic nominal case paradigm in Oirat comprises the genitive, accusative, dative, ablative, instrumental, comitative, and possessive cases (Table 10.3, WO > SO). The shapes of the case endings in Written Oirat show a strong influence of Written Mongol. Colloquial forms identical with Spoken Oirat appear occasionally in late texts. In both Written and Spoken Oirat, most case endings have variants depending on whether the stem ends in an original obstruent (O), nasal (N), other consonant (C), single vowel (V), or double vowel (VV).

The unmarked basic form (nominative) functions in the sentence as a subject, indefinite (or unspecific) object, adnominal attribute, and nominal predicate. In enumerations of two or more syntactically equal nouns, only the last noun is marked for case, while the others remain unmarked, e.g. WO (pl. dat.) *xamuq burxan kigeed bodhi sadw.nar-tu mürügümüü* ‘[I] pray to all buddhas and bodhisattvas’. Stems ending in the unstable */n* normally lose this segment in the unmarked form when used as an object, but retain it in other functions, e.g. **usu/n* ‘water’ > SO *usn* : *us*. The segment is also lost in the marked accusative, instrumental, and possessive cases. In the ablative, a semantic differentiation

TABLE 10.3 OIRAT CASE MARKERS

	C	O	N	V	VV
gen.	/i-yin > -än		-i > -ä	-yin > -in	-yin > /gh-in
acc.	/y-i(gi) > -ig				/gh-i > -g
dat.	-dU > -d	-tU > -t			
abl.	eece > -As				> /gh-As
instr.	-yeer > -Ar			(-)beer > -Ar	> /gh-Ar
com.	-IUGAA > -IA				
poss.	-tAi > -tA				

seems to have taken place in some dialects between the stems with and without the unstable /n.

The genitive ending in Written Oirat is *-i* (written jointly with the stem) or *ni* (written separately) after stems ending in *n* (and /n), e.g. WO gen. *köböün-i ~ köböün ni nökö.d-töi* ‘with the son’s friends’. After vowels the ending is *-yin*, and after consonants *-iyin*, e.g. WO *eke-yin nere* ‘mother’s name’, *cidküür-iyin cerig* ‘the army of the devil’, *orcilong-iyin kürdü* ‘the wheel of samsara’. Diphthongoid sequences ending in *i* merge with the genitive ending, e.g. WO *toulai* ‘hare’: *toula-yin eber* ‘the horns of hare’. In Spoken Oirat, the genitive ending is *-A* or (Dörbet) *-ä* (without vowel harmony) after stems ending in *n*, e.g. SO (Dörbet), *narn-ä gerel* ‘the shine of the sun’, *temen-ä noosn* ‘the wool of a camel’; *-An* or (Dörbet) *-än* after other original consonant stems, e.g. SO (Dörbet) *ger-än üüdn* ‘the door of the tent’; *-in ~ -An* after secondary consonant stems (originally ending in a short vowel), e.g. SO *bugh-in ~ bugh-an ars* ‘the skin of a deer’; and */gh-in* after (original long) vowels, e.g. SO *ködä/gh-in* ‘of the countryside’. The genitive is often required by postpositions, e.g. WO *xaan-i dergede* ‘beside the emperor’, *amin-i tölöö* ‘for life’.

The accusative ending appears in the shapes WO *-i ~ -igi* after consonants or short vowels, *-yi ~ -yigi* after short vowels, and */gh-i* after long vowels or *ng*, e.g. WO acc. *xoni-i* ‘sheep’, *xura-i* ‘rain’, *aba-yigi* ‘father’, *yertüncü-i ~ yertüncü-yi ~ yertüncü-yigi* ‘world’, *amughulang-i* ‘peace’, *tolghoo/gh-i* ‘head’, *yadou/gh-i* ‘poor’. In Spoken Oirat, the ending is invariably *-ig* after consonants and *-g* after (original long) vowels, e.g. SO acc. *ken-ig* ‘whom’, *noxa-g* ‘dog’.

The dative (dative-locative) is marked by WO *-dU* > SO *-d* after original sonorant stems and WO *-tU* > SO *-t* after original obstruent stems (including stems ending in *r*), e.g. WO dat. *aqshin-du* ‘in a moment’, *yadou.noghoud-tu* ‘to the poor’, SO *ken-d* ‘to whom’, *dörwd.t* ‘to/among the Dörbet’. Apart from its basic adverbial functions, the dative expresses the agent of passive predicates, e.g. WO dat. + pass. conv. mod. *zobolong-du daru.qda-n* ‘being pressed by suffering’.

The ablative has in Written Oirat the invariable marker *eece*, used for both front-vocalic and back-vocalic stems and always written separately from the stem, e.g. WO abl. *aman eece* ‘from the mouth’. The corresponding colloquial ending is WO *-ees* (with the change **c > s*) > SO *-As* (after consonants) *~ /gh-As* (after vowels), e.g. SO *ar-as* ‘from behind; from the north’. Stems ending in the unstable /n have dialectally yielded the secondary suffix variant */n-As* > *-nAs*, which can also be used in etymologically to express a semantic difference, as in SO (Dörbet) *öör-as* ‘from a close distance’ vs. *öör-nas* ‘from recent times’. One of the functions of the ablative is to express the reference

point of comparison, e.g. WO *ene okin tenggeriyin okin eece mashi yeke ghayixamshiqtai bainam* ‘this girl is much more beautiful than a heavenly maiden’.

The instrumental is marked by the likewise harmonically invariable ending WO (-) *beer* (after vowels, often written separately from the nominal stem) ~ *-yeer* (after consonants), e.g. *selme-beer* ‘with the help of a sword’, *dura beer* ‘with love’, *modun-yeer* ‘[made] of wood’. The corresponding colloquial ending is WO *-AAR* > SO *-Ar* (after consonants) ~ */gh-Ar* (after vowels), e.g. WO *zam xaalgh-aar* ‘along the way’, SO *kürä/gh-ür* ‘in the monastery’, *bara/gh-ar* ‘by the silhouette’. A special variant in Written Oirat with no counterpart in the spoken language is *-VVR*, e.g. WO *kümün* ‘person’: instr. *küm-üür* (or *kümü-ür*).

The comitative is marked by WO *-lughaa* (after back-vocalic stems) ~ *-lügee* (after front-vocalic stems) > colloquial *-IAA* > SO *-IA*, and is most often used in combination with postpositions, such as *adali* ‘similar (to)’, *selte* ‘together (with)’, *xamtu id.*, *shidar* ‘apart (from)’, *sacuu* ‘equal (to)’, e.g. *tenggeri-lügee adali* ‘similar to a god’, *sumnus-lughaa selte* ‘together with a demon’. Since it expresses an action in which two agents take part on an equal footing, the comitative is frequently used with cooperative verbs, e.g. com. + coop. part. hab. *shumnus-lughaa temce.ldü-deg* ‘[he] fights with demons’. In Spoken Oirat, the harmonically alternating ending *-IA* (< **-IUxA*) is often replaced by the invariant shape *-lä* (< **-IUxAi*), e.g. SO *ken-lä* ‘with whom’, *yuum-lä* ‘with what’.

Because of the preservation of the comitative case in active use, the possessive case in WO *-tAi* (with four harmonic variants: *-tai* ~ *-tei* ~ *-toi* ~ *-töi*) > SO *-tA* ~ *-tä* is relatively rare in the function of an unambiguous adverbial case form. More often, it is attested in its original function as a denominal derivative category, e.g. WO *ölz.töi* ‘happy; with happiness’, SO *nidn.te* ~ *nidn.tä* ‘having eyes, with eyes’. In its derivative function, the possessive form can also appear with the alternative suffix WO *.tU* > *.t*, e.g. WO *xoro* ‘poison’: der. poss. *xoro.tu* > SO *xort* ‘poisonous’. The corresponding plural ends in WO *.tAn* > SO *.tn*, e.g. SO *önr* ‘large family’: *önr.tn* ‘those having large families’.

Two less frequent case-like forms are the directive in SO *-Ur* (after consonants) ~ *gh/-Ur* (after vowels) and the terminative in WO *-cagha* > colloquial *-cai* > SO *-tA*, e.g. SO dir. *ghol-ur* ‘towards the river’, *ger-ür* ‘towards the tent’, term. *öbdg-tsä* ‘(up) to the knees; knee-deep’. The directive function can also be expressed by the endings WO *-AAR* > SO *-Ar* (identical with the instrumental) ~ WO *-DAAR* (apparently dative + instrumental) ~ SO *-Ad*, e.g. WO *balghasu-daar* ‘towards the town’, SO *gal-ad* ‘in the direction of the fire’.

Double declension is rare in Written Oirat, with the exception of the regular inflected forms of possessive derivatives, e.g. WO poss. pl. dat. *kücü.tei.noghoud-tu* ‘for the powerful ones’. In Spoken Oirat, double declension is more frequent, both in colloquial speech and folkloric texts. Apart from the inflected forms of possessive derivatives, partial case paradigms can be built on the dative (dative + ablative) and the genitive (genitive + dative, ablative, comitative, possessive, directive), e.g. SO gen. dat. *ax-an-d* ‘at the brother’s place’, dat. abl. refl. *ger-t-äs-än* ‘from (their own) home’, poss. acc. *emäl.tä-g* ‘the one with a saddle’.

NUMERALS

The Common Mongolic numerals appear in Oirat as follows (WO > SO): 1 *nigen* > *nig/n* ~ *neg/n*, 2 *xoyor* > *xoyr*, 3 *ghurba/n* > *ghurw/n*, 4 *dörbön* > *dörw/n*, 5 *tabu/n* > *taw/n*, 6 *zurghaa/n* > *zurgha/n*, 7 *doloo/n* > *dola/n*, 8 *nayima/n* > *nääm/n*, 9 *yesü/n* > *yüs/n*, 10 *arba/n* > *arw/n*, 20 *xori/n* > *xör/n*, 30 *ghuci/n* > *ghuc/n*, 40 *döci/n* > *döc/n*, 50 *tabi/n* > *täv/n*, 60 *jira/n* > *jir/n*, 70 *dala/n* > *dal/n*, 80 *naya/n* > *nay/n*, 90 *yere/n* > *yir/n*, 100 *zuu/n* >

zuu/n, 1,000 *minggha/n* > *minggh/n*, 10,000 *tüme/n* > *tüm/n*. For higher numbers, the Tibetan loanwords *gbum* > *bum/n* ‘hundred thousand’, *saya* > *say* ‘million’, *byewa* ‘ten millions’, *dungshuur* ‘hundred millions’, *ter gbum* > *tirbum* ‘milliard’, *kraq kriaq* ‘hundred milliards’, *yeke kraq kriaq* ‘trillion’, are used. Intermediate numerals are formed by addition and multiplication, e.g. 12 *arwn xoyr*, 200 *xoyr zuu/n*.

Ordinals are derived in Written Oirat by the suffix *.dUGAAr*, e.g. WO *nige.dügeer* ‘first’, *nayima.dughaar* ‘eighth’. The same formative in Spoken Oirat is at least in some dialects used enclitically with no vowel harmony (and apparently with no vowel reduction), cf. e.g. (Jakhachin) *dörw=dughar sara* ‘the fourth month’. More commonly, Spoken Oirat has the typically Oirat ordinal suffix *.dkc*, which is often attached to an irregular stem variant, e.g. SO *ghuru.dkc* ‘third’, *dörä.dkc* ‘fourth’. Written Oirat retains the archaic ordinals in *.tAGAAr* for the numerals 3 to 5: WO *ghu.taghaar* ‘third’, *dö.tögöör* ‘fourth’, *tab.taghaar* ‘fifth’.

Oirat also has the Common Mongolic collectives in WO *.OUIA/n* > *.UUIA/n* > SO *.Ul/n*, the distributives in WO *.VVD* > SO *.Ad*, and the multiplicatives in WO */n.tA* > SO */n.t*, e.g. coll. WO *dörb.öüle/n* ‘four together’, dat. *axa düü dol.oula-du* ‘to all the seven brothers’, SO *ghurw.ul/n* ‘three together’, *dörw.ül/n* ~ *dör.ül/n* ‘four together’; distr. WO *ghurb.aad* > SO *ghurw.ad* ‘by threes’, WO *tab.uud* > SO *taw.ad* ‘by fives’, WO *dol.ood* > SO *dol.ad* ‘by sevens’; multipl. WO *nigen.te* > SO *nign.t* ‘once’, WO *ghurban.ta* ‘three times’. Exceptional formations are present in SO coll. *xoy.urn* ‘two together’, WO distr. *nij.eed* > SO *nej.ed* ‘one by one’, WO *xosh.ood* > SO *xosh.ad* ‘by twos’. Examples of lexicalized numeral derivatives are SO *gu.n.n* : *gu.n.jn* ‘three-year-old male : female cattle’, *dö.n.n* : *dö.n.jn* ‘four-year-old male : female cattle’.

PRONOUNS

The Oirat system of personal pronouns (Table 10.4, WO > SO) shows few idiosyncrasies. Most notably, Spoken Oirat (but not yet Written Oirat) has developed the special nominative *maa.nr* for the first person plural exclusive stem. More rarely, the form SO *maa.nus* is used in the same function. The corresponding oblique stem is normally SO *man-*, though *maan-* and *maa.nr-* also occur. The oblique stem of the first person singular pronoun is normally SO *nad-* (except in the accusative), though SO *nam-* is also attested, e.g. SO com. *nad-lä* ~ *nam-lä*.

The function of the third person pronouns is generally filled by the demonstratives, but Written Oirat also sporadically expresses the third person (both singular and plural)

TABLE 10.4 OIRAT PERSONAL PRONOUNS

		1p.		2p.
sg.	nom.	<i>bi</i> > <i>bii</i>		<i>ci</i> > <i>cii</i>
	gen.	<i>mini</i> > <i>mini</i>		<i>cini</i> > <i>cini</i>
	acc.	<i>namai</i> > <i>namäg</i>		<i>cimai</i> > <i>camäg</i>
	obl.	<i>nada-</i> > <i>nad-</i>		<i>cima-</i> > <i>cam-</i>
		excl.		incl.
pl.	nom.	> <i>maanr</i>	<i>bidan</i> > <i>bid</i>	<i>ta</i> > <i>taa</i>
	obl.	<i>man-</i> > <i>man-</i>	<i>bidan-</i> > <i>bidn-</i>	<i>tan-</i> > <i>tan-</i>

by the oblique stem *ima* of the original third person singular pronoun (*i : *ima-), e.g. WO *ghaqca cini amini aburaqsan bolun ima doloulayin amini doroyitoulxu boloqsan* ‘I saved only your life and I destroyed the life of those seven (others)’.

The basic demonstrative pronouns are (WO > SO) *ene* > *en* > (en) *ööin-* > (en) *ööü/n-* : pl. *ede* > *ed* : obl. *eden-* > *edn-* ‘this : these’ vs. *tere* > *ter* : obl. *töün-* > *t(er)ööü/n-* : pl. *tede* > *ted* : obl. *teden-* > *tedn-* ‘that : those’. The case declension follows the regular nominal pattern. Special colloquial forms attested occasionally in Written Oirat include WO instr. *öö/g-eer* ‘by this’ vs. *töö/g-eer* ‘by that’, cf. the regular WO inst. *öün-yeer* vs. *töün-yeer*. Related demonstrative derivatives are WO *ödii* ‘this much’ vs. *tödii* ‘that much’, *ende* ‘here’ vs. *tende* ‘there’, *eyi-* ‘to do like this’ vs. *teyi-* ‘to do like that’ : conv. mod. *eyin* ‘thus’ vs. *teyin* ‘so’, *eyimi* ‘this kind of’ vs. *teyimi* ‘that kind of’ (all with regular Spoken Oirat reflexes).

The basic interrogative pronouns are (WO > SO) *ken* > *ken* ‘who’, *you/n* > *yuu/n* ‘what’, *ali* > *äl* ~ *älk* ‘which’. Related interrogative words include *kezee* > *keze* ‘when’, *kedüü* ~ *kedüü* > *kedn* ~ *kedü* ‘how much; how many’, *xamigha* ~ *xamighaa* > *xamaa* ‘where’, *yamaaru* > *yamr/n* ‘what kind of’. The interrogatives often function as indefinite pronouns, especially in Written Oirat. The indefinite function can also be expressed by repeating an interrogative pronoun, or by juxtaposing two different interrogative pronouns, e.g. WO *xamighaa xamighaa* ‘somewhere’, *ali ken* ‘somebody; anyone’. In Spoken Oirat, the indefinite function is often emphasized by the particle *bolwc* ~ *bolwcgn* (formally the concessive converb of *bol-* ‘to become’), e.g. *kezee bolwcgn* ‘any time, whenever’.

The reflexive pronoun has the shape WO *öbör* ‘oneself’, colloquially also *eber*. The most commonly attested form is refl. *öbör-öön* ~ *eber-een* ~ *eber-yeen* > SO *ewr-än* ‘(by) oneself’, e.g. WO *ci eber-yeen od* ‘you, go yourself!’. The reflexive pronoun can sometimes replace the subject (of any person), e.g. WO *ebereen nücügün xocorji* ‘(he him)self stayed naked’.

POSSESSIVE SUFFIXES

Possessive suffixes, derived from the enclitically used genitive forms of the personal pronouns, are actively used in Spoken Oirat (Table 10.5). The third person suffix shows dialectal variation, with the variant *-i* prevailing in the Torghut and Uryankhai dialects and the variant *-n* in the Dörbet dialect. Examples: *mör/n* ‘horse’ : px sg. 1p. *mör-m* : 3p. (Torghut) *mör-i*, *ax* ‘elder brother’ : px sg. 2p. *ax-cn* : pl. 2p. *ax-tn*.

Instead of the fully grammaticalized possessive suffixes, Written Oirat uses the separately written pronominal genitives, which can either precede or follow their nominal headword. The third person singular pronominal genitive *inu* also survives in Written Oirat as a syntactic particle (> SO *-n*), which most often stands after the subject.

TABLE 10.5 SPOKEN OIRAT POSSESSIVE SUFFIXES

	sg.	pl.
1p.	<i>-m</i>	<i>-mdn</i>
2p.	<i>-cn</i>	<i>-tn</i>
3p.		<i>-i</i> ~ <i>-n</i>

The reflexive marker in Written Oirat has the shape *-been* after vowels and *-yeen* after consonants, with the additional colloquial variants *-AAn* and *-GAAn*. The same variants are used after the case endings (depending on the final segment of the ending) except in the dative, which has the complex suffix *-DAAn*. The basic reflexive form functions as an accusative or genitive, though these functions can also be expressed by the complex suffix *-you-ghaan* > *-yuu-ghaan*. In Spoken Oirat, the reflexive marker is *-An* after consonants and */gh-An* after (original long) vowels. In the genitive, the final *n* of the marker is dropped, yielding the complex suffix *-in-a* ~ *-An-A* after consonants and */gh-in-a* ~ */gh-in-ä* after vowels.

FINITE VERBAL FORMS

In Oirat (as in Buryat), the verbal forms of the imperative and indicative spheres show rather many mutual affinities. Most notably, both categories can (with certain limitations) be combined with the predicative personal endings. Also, some imperative forms can have temporal functions close to those of the indicative sphere. Morphologically, the finite paradigm is rich and comprises some ten imperative and five indicative forms (Table 10.6, WO > SO). Even so, the finite paradigm is complemented by predicatively used participles for additional temporal-aspectual distinctions. Most of the finite forms are Common Mongolic, but there are also a few specifically Western Mongolic forms.

The unmarked stem of the verb functions as the basic imperative for the second person singular and expresses a strict demand or categorical order, e.g. WO *ci selmebeer cabciji ala* ‘kill [him] by striking [him] with your sword!’, SO *axnrin säänin shulun ääld* ‘tell me quickly (who is) the best of the brothers!’. In Spoken Oirat, the basic imperative is often used when addressing people younger than the speaker. Phonologically, the basic imperative can be modified by adding an emphatically lengthened inetymological final vowel (*-A*).

A polite request directed at the second person plural is expressed by the benedictive, e.g. WO *ghazaa mör inu bügüdeer üzü-qtün* ‘all (of you), please look at the tracks

TABLE 10.6 OIRAT FINITE VERBAL MARKERS

	person	marker	
prec.	2p.	> <i>-i-</i>	+vx
vol.	1p. pl.	<i>-yA(A)</i> > <i>-yA</i> ~ <i>-i</i>	
opt.	1p. sg.	<i>-sU</i> > <i>-sU</i>	(+vx)
opt. exp.	1p.	<i>-sUGAi</i> ~ <i>-sai</i> > <i>-sä</i>	
ben.	2p. pl.	<i>-qtun</i> ~ <i>-qtAn</i> > <i>-tn</i> ~ <i>-tng</i>	
prescr.	2p.	<i>-AArAi</i> > <i>/gh-Arä</i>	
conc.	1/3p.	<i>-tUGAi</i> > <i>-tKä</i>	
perm.	3p.	<i>-gii</i> > <i>-g</i>	
dub.	1-3p.	<i>-OUzAi</i> > <i>-wUz</i> ~ <i>-wzä</i>	+vx
pot.	1-3p.	> <i>-mz</i>	
narr.	1-3p.	<i>-mUi</i>	
dur.	1-3p.	<i>-nAm</i> ~ <i>-nAi</i> ~ <i>-nAA</i> > <i>-n(A)</i>	+vx
term.	1-3p.	<i>-bA(i)</i> ~ <i>-bAA</i> > <i>-w(A)</i>	+vx
conf.	1-3p.	<i>-lAi</i> ~ <i>-lAA</i> > <i>-lA</i>	+vx
res.	1-3p.	<i>-Ci</i> > <i>-j(i)</i>	+vx

outside!’, SO *eej, taa ir-tng* ‘Mother, please come!’. In Spoken Oirat, the benedictive marker is often preceded by the pluritative suffix *.tsGA-*, e.g. SO *taanr suu.tsgha-tn* ‘you [many], please take a seat!’. In the Jakhachin dialect both the benedictive and the basic unmarked imperative can be followed by the enclitic particle =*juu*, which moderates the request or command, e.g. (Jakhachin) imp. *yob=juu* ‘please go’, ben. *yob-tn=juu* ‘please go (all of you)’. Still other shades of polite request or instruction directed at the second person (singular or plural) are expressed by the prescriptive and (in Spoken Oirat only) the precative, e.g. (prescr.) SO *caaghur naaghur ir-erä* ‘(please) come (both) over there and over here!’, (prec. sg.) *alsin jayaghan bod-i-c* ‘think about your future destiny!’, (pl.) *taa uu/gh-i-t* ‘you [many], please drink!’.

A wish, desire, or intended action of the first person plural is expressed by the volutative, e.g. WO *bi zuzaan oyidu oro-yo* ‘I wish to go/will go to a deep forest’, *ödügee bidan xoyor naadu-yaa* ‘now, let the two of us play!’, SO *eej, tand baralx-i* ‘I wish to meet/I will meet you, Mother’. In Spoken Oirat, the volutative can be followed by the interrogative particle =*uu*, suggesting that it is functionally close to an indicative future tense form, e.g. *mandlin säär deer uuldz-y=uu* ‘shall/may we meet in Mandal gully?’. A temporal function (future tense) with a modal connotation (wish or intention) is also involved in the optative, which normally refers to the first person singular, e.g. WO *modu buu unugha, bi öböröön buu-su* ‘do not cut the tree, I will myself come down’, SO *bi oda taanrt kel-sü* ‘I will tell you now’, (in an auxiliary construction:) *bi kelääd ög-sü* ‘I will tell you’ (or: ‘I am going to tell you’). The optative can also take the first person singular personal ending, e.g. opt. vx sg. 1p. *ög-sü-w* ‘I will give (it to you)’ (or: ‘let me give it to you!’).

A request or instruction directed at the third person (singular and plural) is expressed by the concessive and permissive, e.g. SO (conc.) *ax gertä xär-txä* ‘let (our) elder brother return home!’, perm. *kel-g* ‘he may say; let him say!’. In Written Oirat, the concessive is mainly attested in the auxiliary form conc. *bol-tughai* (of *bol-* ‘to become’), which is typically used after a futuritive participle, e.g. (part. fut. + conc.) *üyile buyannoghoudi edle-kü bol-tughai* ‘let them obtain (good) deeds and merit!’. This construction can also refer to the first person, as in WO *bi teyin ila-xu bol-tughai* ‘let me win completely!’.

Oirat has also the dubitative and potential forms, of which the dubitative in *-OUzAi > /gh-UzA ~ -zä* (also known as *dubitativus abhorrens*) expresses, in a negative sense, an undesirable action that will possibly take place, while the potential in *-mz* (also known as *dubitativus optans*, only in Spoken Oirat) expresses, in a positive sense, a desirable action that will possibly take place. Both forms can refer to all persons (both singular and plural), e.g. (dub.) WO *ende bidani araatan ala-xu bol-ouzai* ‘(it may happen that) a wild animal may kill us here’, SO *namrin budnd töör-wüz* ‘(make sure you) do not get lost in the autumn fog!’, (vx sg. 2p.) *ci geräsän gar-wzä-c* ‘you should not go out of your yurt’, (pot.) *towc, shilw xad-mz* ‘I wonder if I should attach the button and the button-loop’.

The finite indicative forms represent the present (present-future) and past tense ranges. In the present tense range, the principal form in Written Oirat is the narrative, which is not attested in Spoken Oirat, e.g. WO narr. *mürgü-müi* ‘[he] bows/will bow’. Written Oirat also preserves traces of the deductive, notably in the auxiliary ded. *bol/u-yu* ‘[it] is’. In colloquial texts, as well as in Spoken Oirat, the present tense range is dominated by the durative, e.g. WO *töüni dergede ülü od-nam* ‘[I] will not go to him’, SO *kökök shuwun jirgi-n* ‘the cuckoo chatters/will chatter’, *cikindki subsär shangn-nä* ‘[she] will be rewarded with a pearl for [her] ear(ring)’, (vx sg. 1p.) *bi mangdr yom-nä-w* ‘I am going to leave tomorrow’, (2p.) *malar yuugha ki-nä-c* ‘what will you do with your cattle?’.

In the past tense range, Oirat preserves the terminative, confirmative, and resultative forms in active use. The terminative expresses completed action and is the most frequent past tense form in Written Oirat, e.g. *bi xolo eece irebei* ‘I came from far away’, SO (term. interr. vx pl. 2) *ocxiin üzw= üü-t* ‘did you (many) see him come?’. In Spoken Oirat, the terminative is often accompanied by the enclitic particle =*l*, e.g. SO *düünr tüündän irw= l* ‘the younger brothers came to him’. The confirmative typically refers to a recently completed action witnessed by the subject, e.g. WO *edgeküi em öqci edegeelei* ‘giving [him] a curing medicine, [I] have cured him’, SO conf. vx sg. 1p. *un-la-w* ‘I have (just) ridden (a horse)’. A past action not observed by the subject is expressed by the resultative, e.g. WO *törö-ji* ‘[he] was born’, *ghar-ci* ‘[he] came out’, SO *engk+tör aawtä, enggn+ulan eejtä, erk+darx xattä genn+ulan baatr gej yow-ji* ‘there lived a hero, called Pure Red, whose father was Calm Power, whose mother was Peaceful Red, and whose wife was Powerful Târa Mother’.

PARTICIPLES

Oirat preserves the full Common Mongolic set of participles, though only the futuritive, perfective, and habitive participles are used actively in all the regular participial functions. The imperfective and agentive participles have only limited verbal use, though both are well attested as derivational forms in nominal functions (deverbal nouns).

The most frequently used participial form is the futuritive participle in WO *-xu(i) ~ -kü(i) > SO -x*, which occurs both in substantival (subject, object) and adjectival (attribute, predicate) functions, e.g. [subject] WO (with the particle *cu* ‘also’) *nere asaq-xui cu mashi cuxaq* ‘the asking of a name is also very rare’, SO *cinenin san-x burutä* ‘your thinking is wrong’; [object] (part. fut. acc.) WO *ebecinyeer ebedci kehte-küi-gi köböün üzeed . . .* ‘having seen [her] lying suffering of an illness, the boy . . .’, SO *xargld-x-ig ünnkär martla* ‘I really forgot the meeting (with you)’; [attribute] WO *kündülen üyiled-küi amitannoghoud* ‘living beings acting with respect’. In predicative usage, the futuritive participle is often (but not always) accompanied by an auxiliary verb (which can itself be in the same form), e.g. SO *kezedän baralx-x bol-x* ‘once I will come to an audience’. With the dative case ending, the futuritive participle functions as a quasiconverb expressing the temporal circumstances of the main action, e.g. (part. fut. dat.) *bär-x-d bülä, xar-x-d kiitn – ükrin ewr* ‘(it is) warm when touched, (and) cold when seen – the horns of an ox’ (riddle).

The perfective participle in WO *-qsAn > SO -sn* (in folkloric texts also *-ksn*) occurs most often in the attributive function, e.g. WO *müreni ekindü sou-qsan kümünnoghoud* ‘the men who (had) lived at the source of the river’, SO *kezeni uu-sn kiitn xar ärx* ‘the cool milk brandy that [I] drank/had drunk long ago’. In inflected forms it also has objective and adverbial (quasiconverbial) uses, e.g. WO part. perf. dat. *shinjile-qsan-dü* ‘when [he] studied [it]’, (part. perf. acc.) *eke mou zayaatani orondu unuqsan-i üzeed . . .* ‘[he] saw that (his) mother had fallen to the place (reserved) for those with a bad destiny and . . .’. As a nominal predicate (with or without a copula), the perfective participle functions as a past tense form (completed action), e.g. WO *augha kücünlughaa tögösüqsan nigen xaan bayi-qsan* ‘(there) was an emperor who was in possession of great power’.

The habitive participle in WO *-daq > SO -dg* has mainly attributive and predicative uses, e.g. [attribute] WO *zou-daq doqshin* ‘a biting beast; a beast that frequently bites’, [predicate] *mini nöküir xamuq yumayigi yoqtobeer ögüüle-deq* ‘my husband likes to say everything allegorically’. Since this form is temporally neutral, any temporal distinctions

have to be expressed in the copula, e.g. SO (part. hab. + term.) *amr mend jol-dg bol-wa* ‘[he] met with them (repeatedly) in peace and health’.

The verbal uses of the imperfective participle in WO *-AA* > SO *-A* (after vowels /*gh-A*) are extremely rare in Written Oirat, being confined to fixed phrases of the type WO > *ir-ee ödüi* ‘future’ (literally: ‘that has not yet come’). In Spoken Oirat, the form is more common, but is mainly used in the negative construction with =*goo* (negative past tense). When used with the auxiliary *bol-*, the imperfective participle expresses possibility, e.g. SO *jindj yow-a bol-w=uu* ‘was/is it possible to go far away?’.

The agentive participle appears in Oirat with both of its Common Mongolic suffix variants. The form (1) in WO *-AAci* > SO *-Ac* (after vowels /*gh-Ac*) forms fully nominalized and lexicalized actor nouns, e.g. WO *zura-* ‘to paint’ : part. ag. *zur-aaci* ‘painter’. The same is true of the form (2) in WO *-qci* > SO *-kc*, but at least in Written Oirat this form is occasionally attested in a verbal function, e.g. [nominal] WO *axa.la-* ‘to lead’ (literally: ‘to act as elder brother’) : part. ag. *axala-qci* ‘leader’, SO *ösk-* ‘to grow’ : part. ag. *ösk-kc* ‘(a person) who makes (something) grow’, [verbal] WO *maxa ideqci noxoi* ‘a dog that eats meat’.

CONVERBS

For the indication of subordinated predicates, Oirat has some ten converbial forms (Table 10.7, WO > SO). Rather exceptionally in the general Mongolic context, the perfective converb can in Spoken Oirat also occur as a finite predicate with no actual finite verb following. Otherwise, the converbs are used in their Common Mongolic functions.

The modal and imperfective converbs are often functionally more or less indistinguishable from each other, since both indicate an action that takes place simultaneously with (or shortly before) the main action, cf. e.g. (conv. mod.) WO *alixa xabsuru-n sögödc* ‘joining (his) palms, [he] knelt and . . .’, SO *arc-n, seksr-n täwna* ‘cleaning and shaking [it], he puts [it] down’, conv. imperf. WO *uyila-ji xaribai* ‘[he] left crying’, SO *näärl-j suu-j jirghwa* ‘living (and) celebrating, [we] were happy’. The perfective converb, by contrast, indicates an action that has clearly been completed before the main action, e.g. WO *tedeni üz-eed eyin kemen asaqbai* ‘[he] saw them and then asked’, SO *tsamtsich ir-äd ümsärä* ‘come and put on your shirt!’, (with a modal auxiliary) *big sons-od öglä*

TABLE 10.7 OIRAT CONVERB MARKERS

	marker	meaning
conv. mod.	<i>-n</i> > <i>-n</i>	‘by way of’
imperf.	<i>-Ji</i> > <i>-J</i>	‘while’
perf.	<i>-AA</i> d ~ <i>-VV</i> d > / <i>gh-Ad</i>	‘and then; after’
cond.	<i>-bAA</i> su > <i>-wAs</i> ~ <i>-ws</i> ~ <i>-wl</i>	‘if; when’
conc.	<i>-bA(A)cu</i> ~ <i>-bAci</i> > <i>-wc</i> ~ <i>-(w)Uc</i>	‘although’
term.	<i>-tAlA</i> > <i>-tl</i>	‘until’
contemp.	<i>-mAq</i> cA > <i>-mgts</i>	‘as soon as’
abtemp.	<i>-qsAA</i> r > <i>-sAr</i>	‘since; and then’
intent.	<i>-KAi</i> ~ <i>-KAA</i>	‘in order to’
succ.	> <i>-xAr</i>	‘as soon as’

‘they listened to the document’. The finite use of the perfective converb is particularly common in combination with the negative particle =UgO, e.g. SO *önän jowlng üzäd=ügö* ‘[he] has not experienced that kind of suffering’.

More specific temporal relations are expressed by the terminative, contemporal, and abtemporal converbs, e.g. (conv. term.) WO *yasunyeen cayi-tala soun* ‘sitting (there) until his bones turned white’, SO *önggin ghar-tl jülgj=wän* ‘[I am] polishing [it] until its colour appears’; (conv. contemp.) WO *ayiladxa-maqca ghadanaki doloon kümün ireed* ‘as soon as he reported [it], the seven persons who were outside arrived’; (conv. abtemp.) WO *ghasalangdu daruqdan uyila-qsaa* [. . .] *gharbai* ‘being pressed by sorrow, he cried [. . .] and went out’; SO *buughinan biltäg burghul-sar irdg* ‘he often comes waving the barrel of his gun’. In Spoken Oirat, functions close to the contemporal converb can also be expressed by the successive converb in -xAr (formally part. fut. com. instr.), as well as by two interrelated forms marked by the suffixes -nggUt resp. -nggA. Another feature of Spoken Oirat is that the terminative converb can take the possessive suffixes to express the subject, e.g. SO (conv. term. px sg. 1p.) *namäg yow-tl-m end suujä* ‘until I left [he] was sitting here’.

The Common Mongolic conditional converb in WO -bAAsU > SO -wAs (~ -bAs) is relatively rare in Oirat, e.g. WO *törö-böösü* ‘if [there] is born’, SO *ghurwn jamar yab-bas* ‘if [he] goes along the three ways’. More commonly, conditionality is expressed in Written Oirat by the quasiconverbial forms in -KU-lAA (formally part. fut. com.) ~ -KU-nAA (possibly part. fut. refl.), while in Spoken Oirat the suffix -wl (of the Khalkha type) is used, e.g. WO *xubcastai bol-xunaa xaani dergede irekü bölögee* ‘if [I] had clothes, [I] would go to the emperor’, SO *emeel bää-wl jandn* ‘if there is a saddle, (it is made of) sandal wood’. In the Jakhachin dialect, the complex suffixes -j-m ~ -j-gle-m ~ -j-gle-ym (apparently from res. -ji + conf. *ge-le* ‘have said’ + the copulas *yum* or *mön*) are used in the same function, often with personal endings, e.g. (px sg. 2p.) *ci yow-jgleym-c* (< *yow-ji+ge-le+yum=ci) ‘if you were to go’.

The concessive converb in -bAcu ~ -bAAcU ~ -bAcI > SO -wc ~ -(w)Uc has in Spoken Oirat often the expanded suffix -wcg ~ -(w)Ucg (with the final *=cu > =ci ‘also, even’, replaced by the typically Oirat particle =ci.g/n id.), e.g. WO *axa dolon jil yelbi sura-baci ese medebei* ‘although the elder brother learned magic for seven years, [he] did not (get to) know [it]’, SO *caasn nimgn bol-wucg, nomin degtr* ‘although the paper is thin, it is the book of the teaching’, (Dörbet) *sons-uc es sons-uc xama=güü* ‘whether you listen or do not listen, it does not matter’.

The intentional converb (with an analogy in Buryat) seems to be attested only in Written Oirat, e.g. WO *bughu al[a]-xai odlai* ‘[he] went to hunt deer’, *ecige eke xoyori eri-kei irebei* ‘[he] came (in order) to look for (his) father and mother’.

PREDICATIVE PERSONAL ENDINGS

One of the most diagnostic differences between Oirat and Mongol proper is that the former has, like other Western and Northern Mongolic languages, personal predicative endings, derived from the corresponding pronominal nominatives. The personal endings are only marginally attested in Written Oirat, indicating that they are a relatively recent innovation. On the other hand, the personal endings are disappearing in the modern Oirat dialects spoken in the vicinity of Khalkha, and for the most part their use may synchronically be characterized as facultative. The same is true of the possessive suffixes which can occasionally indicate the subject person of subordinated predicates (as in the terminative converb).

TABLE 10.8 SPOKEN OIRAT PREDICATIVE PERSONAL ENDINGS

	sg.	pl.
1p.	-w	-wdn
2p.	-c	-t
3p.		-Ø

The Spoken Oirat personal endings (Table 10.8) can appear after all finite indicative forms, certain imperative forms, as well as finitely used participles and nouns. The only form in which the personal endings (for the second person only) are obligatory is the precativ. In the finite indicative paradigm (as in the durative and terminative), the personal endings are always attached to the suffix variant containing a vowel. Example of a full personal paradigm: *id-* ‘to eat’: dur. sg. 1p. *id-nä-w* : 2p. *id-nä-c* : 3p. *id-n(ä)* : pl. 1p. *id-nä-wdn* : 2p. *id-nä-t*.

SYNTAX

Oirat follows the Common Mongolic pattern of sentence structure with a subject-object-verb (SOV) basic word order. Since clauses are linked with each other with the help of converbs and participles, conjunctions are largely superfluous. There are, nevertheless, a few copulative conjunctions well known also from other Mongolic languages, notably WO SO *ba* ‘and’, WO *kigeed* *id.* (formally conv. perf. **ki-xed* of **ki-* ‘to do’). Generally, the syntactic structure of Written Oirat is more complex than that of Spoken Oirat, and certain relatively complicated features like the passive are more common in Written Oirat. Written Oirat also incorporates considerable syntactic influence of Written Mongol.

Negation is expressed by a selection of Common Mongolic negative particles, used either prepositionally or postpositionally. Prepositional particles are WO *buu* ~ *bü*, SO *bitkä* ~ *bicke* ~ *bicge* ~ *bice* ‘do not’ (prohibition of imperative forms), WO *ülü* > SO *ül* (for finite forms and participles of the present tense range), and WO *ese* > SO *es* (especially for finite indicative forms of the past tense range), e.g. SO (neg. imp.) *setkl=c bitkä ebdur* ‘do not break your heart!’, WO (neg. part. fut.) *sayin kümün ügebeen ülü urbu-xu* ‘a good person does not betray his words’, (neg. term.) *ene zamdur ese ire-bei* ‘[she] did not come on this way’, SO (neg. part. hab.) *cerigtän es moril-dg bilü* ‘[he] did not go to his army’. Postpositional particles are WO *busu* ~ *bishi* > SO *b(i)sh* > =*w(i)sh* (negation of nominal identity) and SO *ugä* ~ *uga* ~ =*UgO* ~ =*goo* ~ =*güü* (negative noun), e.g. SO *xol=c bish*, *öörxn* ‘[it is] not at all far away, [it is] close’, part. hab. neg. *jewr-dg=goo* ‘stainless’ (literally: ‘that does not rust’).

Other syntactic particles include =*lAA* ~ =*l* (logical emphasis), =*c* (nominal emphasis), =*dAA* (predicative emphasis), =*shuu* (id.), =*UU* ~ *yUU* ~ =*ii* (interrogation), =*w* ~ =*b* (corrogration). In addition, the enclitically used pronominal genitives and/or possessive suffixes of the second and third person singular WO *cinu* : *inu* > *-cn* : *-n* are used in a variety of roles not yet fully understood (topicalization, determination).

LEXICON

The basic vocabulary of Oirat does not differ substantially from other Mongolic languages. As in the case of Written Mongol and Mongol proper, the translation of Buddhist

texts introduced a large number of Uighur, Tibetan, and Sanskrit technical loanwords into Oirat, especially into Written Oirat. However, relatively many Buddhist terms were translated word by word into native Oirat, cf. e.g. WO *altani züreken* ‘Golden Heart’ (Sanskrit *Suvarṇagarbha*), WO *xaani xarshi* ‘imperial palace, settlement’ (for Sanskrit *Rājagrha*, Written Mongol **Radzagriqe**).

Unlike most other Mongolic languages, Spoken Oirat has been rather heavily influenced by the Turkic languages of Jungaria and Western Mongolia, especially Kazakh, Kirghiz, and Uighur. Some populations today speaking Oirat, notably the Khoton, had originally a Turkic language, while other Turkic populations, such as the Tuva-related Altai Uryankhai, are bilingual in Oirat. Because of these contacts, Spoken Oirat has in its non-basic vocabulary several lexical idiosyncracies, many (though not all) of which have Turkic connections, cf. e.g. *örün* ‘morning’ (Khalkha **öglöö**), *asghn* ‘evening’ (Khalkha **oroi**), *xashg* ‘spoon’ (Khalkha **xalbag**), *kiilg* ‘shirt’ (also *tsamts* = Khalkha **tsamts**), *term* ‘wall of the yurt’ (Khalkha **xana**), *gharac* ~ *xaraac* (from *ghar-* ‘to go out’) ‘smokehole’ (Khalkha **toono**), *ulyr* ‘ptarmigan’ (Khalkha **xoilog**).

As an interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon it may be mentioned that the Oirat have traditionally had a special kind of women’s language, called SO *berlsn üg* ‘words for daughters-in-law’, today only used by a diminishing number of old women. The principal differences between the Oirat women’s language and regular dialectal speech are lexical. In some cases it is a question of lexical replacement because of taboo, e.g. *xäärxn* ‘the sacred one’ for *moghä* ‘snake’, *tääghn* ‘hound’ for *nox* ‘dog’. In other cases, synonyms are used for no immediately obvious reason, cf. e.g. *baran* ‘dark’ for *xar* ‘black’, *änggr* ‘reddish’ for *shar* ‘yellow’, *xad* ‘rock’ for *culu* ‘stone’, [phrase example:] *ciürg bään=ii-t* ‘are you strong’ for *sään bään=uu* ‘are you well’ (as a greeting in the sense ‘how do you do?’). Also, the initial consonant of certain words is changed to *y*, e.g. *shaghä* > *yaghä* ‘ankle bone’, *tend* > *yend* ‘there’, *shaar* ‘tea’ (originally ‘grounds of tea leaves’) > *yaar* (instead of *tsää* ‘tea’).

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