

<i>aranabumbi</i>	to make someone go to write
<i>arabunambi</i>	to go to cause someone to write

Manchu verbs have many forms to express aspect, tense, and mood and can distinguish many shades of meaning. The forms will be pointed out in the reading selections.

Weak differentiation between parts of speech: There is no sharp distinction between nouns and adjectives. Adjectives, participles, and demonstrative pronouns can all function as nouns or modifiers.

Lack of prepositions: Instead of prepositions Manchu has suffixes and postpositions.

Formation of phrases and sentences: The general rule in a Manchu sentence is that that which modifies precedes that which is modified.

- The object comes before its governing verb: *bithe arambi* 'to write a letter.'
- The modifying noun precedes the noun it modifies: *gurun i ejen* 'the leader of the country.'
- As modifiers, adjectives, participles, and demonstrative pronouns precede the noun: *sain bithe* 'a good book,' *gisun sara niyalma* 'a person who knows the language,' *tere gisun* 'this language.'
- Converbs precede the finite verb which comes last in the sentence.

Foreign language influence: The traditional Manchu language contains many words of Turkic and Mongolian origin. Turkic loan words probably came through Mongolian, because most of these words also occur in Mongolian and because Mongolian was the primary cultural contact for the early Manchu speakers. Nicholas Poppe estimates that 20 to 30 percent of the entire Manchu vocabulary are words of Mongolian origin.³⁵

Standard Manchu adopts many Chinese words without change; for example, *gung* 'duke' or *wang* 'prince' from Chinese *gong* 公 and *wang* 王. It may do so even when a native Manchu word exists; for example, using *funghūwang* 'phoenix' from Chinese *fenghuang* 鳳凰 instead of *garudai*. In other cases a slight change may occur, as in *ginggulembi* 'to honor' from Chinese *jing* 敬. Some words are ancient loan words; for example, *fi* 'brush' from Chinese *bi* 筆, *fafun* from *fa* 法, *dulefun* from *du* 度. Words starting in *r* or ending in *m*, *l*, or *t* are foreign; e.g., Tsewang Raptan, a personal name.

³⁵ Nicholas Poppe, *Introduction to Altaic Linguistics* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965): 160–61.

The Manchu script

Manchu is written from top to bottom, with lines following from left to right. For punctuation, Manchu uses two kinds of markers, two dots to indicate a strong break (similar to a period) and one dot to indicate a weaker pause (similar to a comma). A series of parallel nouns—often names of people or places—are quite reliably separated by a dot, but otherwise punctuation is inconsistent, leaving the reader well advised to not rely too heavily on it for understanding the text.

Writing peculiarities: Writing conventions differ depending on the type of document and the time of the writing. Not only are there differences between Old Manchu (OM), Standard Manchu (SM), and Sibe or modern Manchu (MM), even documents within the same category may exhibit differences. Some documents contain numerous writing errors, suggesting that the particular writer was no longer thoroughly familiar with the language. In general, however, the differences are not dramatic and pose no great difficulties, though they add to the challenge presented by what already is a "less than perfect" alphabet.

- When the letter *i* follows a vowel, it is doubled, written with two long strokes in Old and Standard Manchu. In Sibe it is written like the initial *i*. When *o* is followed by a double-stroke *i*, it is *oi*, not *ūi*. The combination *ūi* exists only in final position.
- The letters *f* and *w* are distinguished only when followed by the vowels *a* or *e*. For these cases *f* is written with a long stroke. Because there are no words with the combination *wi*, *wo*, and *wu*, the short-stroke *f* (i.e., *w*) is used for *fi*, *fo*, and *fu*. Some Sibe texts follow the above SM rules, others distinguish the letters *f* and *w* regardless of which vowel follows.
- The letter *n* has a dot only when occurring before a vowel. There is no dot before consonants. A final *n* looks like a final *a*, but it cannot be confused with that letter because a final *n* is always preceded by a vowel. In Chinese loanwords the final *n* may be marked with an underdot if there exists an identical Manchu word; e.g., *han*, Manchu word for 'emperor'; or *han* 漢 as a Chinese loanword.
- When *i* is followed by another vowel, a *y* is inserted, e.g., *biya*. When *u* is followed by another vowel, *w* is inserted, e.g., *suwe*.
- There are two forms (front and back, or hard and soft) for the letters *d* and *t*. The front letters are used before vowels *e* and *u*, and the back letters before back vowels and before neutral vowel *i*. A dot distinguishes the letters *t* and *d*. Because the kind of consonant—front or back—determines whether the following vowel is *e* versus *a*, or *o* versus *u*, no dot is necessary for the vowels in this case.

- Front *k* and *g* precede front and neutral vowels (*e*, *i*, *u*), while back *k* (*q*) and *g* (*ɣ*) precede back vowels. Therefore, a dot is not needed to mark the following vowels *e* or *u*. If a dot is present, its function is to distinguish front *g* from front *k*, or back *g* (*ɣ*) from back *k* (*q*).
- Note that in the syllables *ke*, *ge*, and *he* the front consonants *k*, *g*, and *h* do not include the first tip or “tooth.” In the syllables *ka*, *ga*, and *ha*, however, the first tooth is part of the back consonant.
- When *k* occurs at the end of a syllable (either at the end of the word or before another consonant), the following rules apply: Back *k* (*q*) with two dots is used when the letter is preceded by *a*, *o*, *ū*, *u* (but not *ku*, *gu*, *hu*, or *hū*), or *te* (but not *e*). Front *k* is used when the letter is preceded by *ku*, *gu*, *hu*, *hū*, or *e* (but not *te*). Though these rules may be difficult to remember, they only pose a challenge when writing Manchu. Recognizing the letter is rarely a problem.
- In Standard Manchu mid-position *k* has two teeth with two dots on the left side. In modern Sibe *k* also has two dots, but only one tooth.
- Printed and handwritten letters differ somewhat. Prominent in many handwritten texts are the long rounded tails of the final *e*, *a*, and *n* instead of the square printed version.

Printed final *a* ㄥ; handwritten final *a* ㄥ

Printed final *n* ㄣ; handwritten final *n* ㄣ

Printed final *e* ㄨ; handwritten final *e* ㄨ

Tables of alphabet symbols

Table 1: Vowels

	standing alone	initial position	middle position	final position
<i>a</i>	ㄥ 1	ㄥ 2	ㄥ 3	ㄥ ㄥ 4
<i>e</i>	ㄨ 5	ㄨ 6	ㄨ ㄨ 7	ㄨ ㄨ ㄨ ㄨ 8
<i>i</i>	ㄨ ㄨ 9	ㄨ 10	ㄨ 11	ㄨ ㄨ 12
<i>o</i>	ㄨ 13	ㄨ 14	ㄨ 15	ㄨ ㄨ 16
<i>u</i>	ㄨ 17	ㄨ 18	ㄨ ㄨ 19	ㄨ ㄨ ㄨ ㄨ 20
<i>ū</i>	ㄨ 21	ㄨ 22	ㄨ 23	ㄨ 24
<i>ai</i>	ㄨ 25	ㄨ 26	ㄨ 27	ㄨ 28
<i>ei</i>	ㄨ 29	ㄨ 30	ㄨ 31	ㄨ 32
<i>ui</i>	33	ㄨ 34	ㄨ 35	ㄨ 36
<i>oi</i>	37	ㄨ 38	ㄨ 39	ㄨ 40
<i>ūi</i>	41	42	43	ㄨ 44

Box 4. ㄥ after all consonants except *b* and *p*; ㄥ after *b* and *p*. Example *amba* ᡠᡠᡨᡠᡳ

Box 7. ㄥ after *k*, *g*, *h*, and front *d* and *t*, two consonant series that have dots for their own identification.

Box 8. ㄥ after *t*, ㄥ after *k*, *g*, *h* (*x*), ㄥ after *b* and *p*.

Box 9. ㄥ as genitive case marker.

Boxes 15, 16, 19, 20. Mid-position and final *u* and *o* are incorporated into letters of circular shape *k*, *g*, *h* (*x*), *b*, and *p*. For examples see Table 4.

Boxes 19 and 20. The letter *u* without a dot occurs after *k*, *g*, *h* (*x*), and *d* and *t*, i.e., the two consonant series that use dots for their own identification.

Box 26. When the letter *i* follows a vowel, it is doubled, written with two long strokes.

Boxes 38–39. When *o* is followed by a double-stroke *i*, it is *oi*, not *ūi*.

Box 44. The combination *ūi* exists only in final position.

Table 2: Consonants

	initial	middle	final	
<i>n</i>	ㄋ	ㄋ ㄣ	ㄋ	Before a vowel mid-position <i>n</i> has a dot. Before a consonant mid-position <i>n</i> has no dot. Final <i>n</i> has a dot only in certain words of Chinese origin.
<i>k</i> (<i>q</i>)	ㄑ	ㄑ ㄣ	ㄑ	Before <i>a, o, ū</i> . Before a consonant mid-position <i>k</i> has two dots. Before a vowel mid-position <i>k</i> has no dots. Final <i>k</i> is preceded by <i>a, o, te, ū, u</i> (but not <i>ku, gu, hu, hū</i>).
<i>g</i> (<i>γ</i>)	ㄑ	ㄑ		Before <i>a, o, ū</i> .
<i>h</i> (<i>χ</i>)	ㄑ	ㄑ		Before <i>a, o, ū</i> .
<i>k</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ	ㄑ	Before <i>e, i, u</i> . Occurs after <i>ku, gu, hu, hū</i> , or <i>e</i> when followed by a consonant. Final <i>k</i> is preceded by <i>i</i> or <i>e</i> but not <i>te</i> .
<i>g</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		Before <i>e, i, u</i> .
<i>h</i> (<i>x</i>)	ㄑ	ㄑ		Before <i>e, i, u</i> .
<i>b</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ	ㄑ	
<i>p</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		
<i>s</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ	ㄑ	
<i>š</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		

Consonants (continued)

	initial	middle	final	
<i>t</i> (back)	ㄑ	ㄑ ㄣ	ㄑ	Before <i>a, o, ū, i</i> . Before another consonant <i>t</i> is written as ㄑ .
<i>d</i> (back)	ㄑ	ㄑ		Before <i>a, o, ū, i</i> .
<i>t</i> (front)	ㄑ	ㄑ ㄣ	ㄑ	Before <i>e, u</i> . Before another consonant <i>t</i> is written as ㄑ .
<i>d</i> (front)	ㄑ	ㄑ		Before <i>e, u</i> .
<i>l</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ	ㄑ	
<i>m</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ	ㄑ	
<i>c</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		
<i>j</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		
<i>y</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		
<i>r</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ	ㄑ	Initial <i>r</i> occurs only in foreign words/names.
<i>f</i>	ㄑ ㄑ	ㄑ ㄑ		Before <i>a</i> and <i>e</i> the letter <i>f</i> is written with a long stroke. Before <i>o, u, i, ū</i> a short stroke is used (<i>w</i> does not occur before these vowels).
<i>w</i>	ㄑ	ㄑ		Occurs only before <i>a</i> or <i>e</i> .
<i>ng</i>		ㄑ	ㄑ	

Table 3: Symbols for transcribing Chinese words

initial	middle	final	alone	Norman	Hauer	Chinese	
ᠬ	ᠬ			k'	k'	開	Before <i>a, o</i> .
ᠬ.	ᠬ.			g'	g'	蓋	Before <i>a, o</i> .
ᠬ。	ᠬ。			h'	h'		Before <i>a, o</i> .
ᠮ	ᠮ			ts	z'	采	Before <i>a, e, o, u</i> .
ᠮᠢ	ᠮᠢ	ᠮᠢ	ᠮᠢ	ts	z'e	詞	Before <i>i</i> .
ᠮᠠ	ᠮᠠ			dz	z	祖	Before <i>a, e, o, u</i> .
		ᠮᠢ	ᠮᠢ	dz	ze	子	Before <i>i</i> .
ᠮ	ᠮ			ž	j	熱	Before <i>a, e, o, u</i> .
ᠮᠠ	ᠮᠠ	ᠮᠠ	ᠮᠠ	ži	ji	日	Before <i>i</i> .
ᠮᠠ。	ᠮᠠ。	ᠮᠠ	ᠮᠠ	jy	j'i	知	Before <i>i</i> .
ᠮᠠ。	ᠮᠠ。	ᠮᠠ	ᠮᠠ	cy	c'i	吃	Before <i>i</i> .
ᠮᠠᠢ	ᠮᠠᠢ	ᠮᠠᠢ	ᠮᠠᠢ	sy	se	四	Before <i>i</i> .
ᠮᠠᠢ	ᠮᠠᠢ	ᠮᠠᠢ	ᠮᠠᠢ	ši	ši	石	Before <i>i</i> .

Though the letters *s* and *š* are part of the regular Manchu alphabet, in combination with *i* they transcribe Chinese characters with the pronunciation of *si* and *shi*.

Table 4: Writing conventions and peculiarities

Because the letters *b*, *p*, *k*, *g*, and *h* (*x*) do not include the tooth at the bottom, some vowels are incorporated into the circular shape of the letter. This is not so for the letters *k* (*q*), *g* (*γ*), and *h* (*χ*) which do include the bottom tip. The letter *p* follows the same rules as *b*.

	initial	middle	final			initial	middle	final
<i>ba</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>ka</i> (<i>qa</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>be</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>ga</i> (<i>ya</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>bi</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>ha</i> (<i>χa</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>bo</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>ko</i> (<i>qo</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>bu</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>go</i> (<i>yo</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>ke</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>ho</i> (<i>χo</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>ku</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>kū</i> (<i>qū</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>ki</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>gū</i> (<i>γū</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>ge</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	<i>hū</i> (<i>χū</i>)	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ
<i>gu</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ				
<i>gi</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ				
<i>he</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ				
<i>hu</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ				
<i>hi</i>	ᠪ	ᠪ <u>Not</u> ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ				