

Beginning Tibetan

TIBE 1003 - 1503 Online Course

(3 Credits)

Nepal: Tibetan Language

This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from term to term.

Course Description

Tibetan language is an important tool of communication to study and understand the Tibetan diaspora and Tibetans in Tibet, as well as Himalayans along the Tibetan borderlands. The primary objective of the online Introductory Tibetan language course is for students to develop oral skills that will allow them to communicate with members of different Tibetan communities. The students learn modern standard Lhasa dialect, which is customarily used (at least as a lingua franca) by both Tibetans within Tibet and in exile, as well as by the many Himalayan peoples who have had a Tibetan-language education. Reading and writing skills are also introduced, since students are required to be able to read and write names and terms written in Tibetan script and/or scholarly transliteration (i.e. the Wylie system), even if their orthography and spelling remains a challenge.

By the end of this course, students should be able to converse in beginning Tibetan in the context of interacting online with teachers and language partners, and to understand grammatical basics of the language and the ways it diverges from their native language. Students should gain the ability to employ Tibetan in appropriate cultural contexts (for example, using the honorific forms when speaking with elders).

Language classes will take place for six weeks online. All written materials are studied directly in Tibetan script and not in a phonetic system. Vocabularies, grammar, sentence structures and tenses are effectively introduced in lessons thoughtfully planned around topics most relevant to daily lives. Besides Tibetan script, students are expected to use Wylie (most broadly accepted system of Tibetan transliteration into Roman script).

Courses are delivered via an e-learning environment and live video calls with instructors and conversation partners. Resources for this course include video and audio lectures, live classes via video calls, PDF handout material, invitations to participate in online discussion boards, and prompt feedback on quizzes and exams.

This course exposes students to basic colloquial Tibetan vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures, with an emphasis on enabling students to gain oral proficiency. This course aims to prepare students to put their language skills to practical use during an immersive program in Nepal, and/or in other situations in Tibetan-speaking communities.

Through a combination of online formal classes with head instructors and oral training with one-on-one Tibetan conversation partners, students can expect to achieve the necessary skills to carry on a simple conversation in modern Tibetan. The Tibetan script is introduced in the first three days of class and thereafter all written materials will be studied directly in Tibetan and not in a phonetic system. All quizzes, assignments and examples given online will be written in this Tibetan script.

The course consists of three components: grammar study, conversational practice with language partners and interactive “language boost” sessions.

- **Language Class:** Native Tibetan instructors teach selected points of grammar as well as expressions useful in daily life. From the very first day onwards the students will be introduced to the fascinating world of Tibetan grammar and Tibetan grammatical categories which are quite special (even unique). For example, in the Tibetan language letters have genders, and verbs are conjugated according to the presence or absence of volition, and whether one has direct versus inferential evidence, etc. Students memorize vocabulary lists in addition to submitting digital homework (one hour/five days a week). Students are required to learn the grammatical structures in order to be able to take 2 quizzes a week in which the new vocabulary and the grammar will be assessed.
- **Conversation Partner Class:** A precious 1:1 online learning situation with trained native-speaker conversation partners allows the students to practice the material introduced in class as well as to talk about topics of their individual interest. These classes, in which as little English as possible is used, will help the student to thoroughly train and digest the grammar as well as manifold vocabulary.
- **Language Boost:** These sessions are especially designed to augment language partner and grammar study classes through a variety of small-group web-based activities. Vocabulary reviews and sentence pattern drills revise previously introduced words and grammar structures through repeated application and usage. ‘Mill and trade’ and language games are designed for students to actively utilize their language learning through online interactions with other students and teachers.

Language Levels and Placement

Students are placed into appropriate language course levels based on a Tibetan proficiency exam at the beginning of the program.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the *Beginning Tibetan* language course, students should be able to:

- Converse in elementary Tibetan in the context of interacting online with teachers and language partners
- Understand grammatical basics of the Tibetan language and the ways the language diverges from their native language
- Employ Tibetan in appropriate cultural contexts (for example, using the Honorific forms when speaking with elders)

Course Requirements

Methodology

Each week entails grammar and vocabulary teaching sessions, drills, and sessions with conversation partners. There will be a mid-term and final exam.

Useful Texts

Oertle, Franziska. (2019) *Bod skad snying po. The Heart of Tibetan Language*. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA).

Textbook: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EYKEpix2PNnvUfIFil5wpqYlgk_imJqP/view.

Book of exercises: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HMHulfDxpPO22ogpayRYPi8PHKFh5qsP/view>.

Audio recordings: <https://www.franziska.in/the-audios>

Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo. (1993) Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House.

Goldstein, Melvyn. (2001) *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*.

Berkeley: University of California Press. Available in Indian edition.

Goldstein, Melvyn. (1984) *English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available in Indian edition.

Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library (THDL) Tibetan to English Translation Tool.
<http://www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php>.

For online usage, as well as instructions to download offline version.

Tournadre, Nicholas & Sangda Dorje. (2003) *Manual of Standard Tibetan: Language and Civilization*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

Daily Class Schedule

- We have online Tibetan language class interchanging with a conversation partner class or drill every day from Monday through Friday. Schedules will be set up depending on the time zones of enrolled students, prioritizing morning classes.
- Each class begins with a review session. Students are drilled and each and every student is invited for active participation, which ensures each student's attention in the class.
- Quiz is conducted twice every week for constant assessment of the level which each student is at. The subsequent classes are then planned and structured accordingly.
- Students are given daily assignments. They may request help from conversation partners to complete the assignments. After assignments are submitted, they receive them back the following day with feedback and corrections. Since the pace of language class is pretty fast, prompt feedback ensures much needed prompt removal of any doubts or confusions to be able to move forward to new chapters.
- Teaching assistants are available online from Monday through Friday should the students have any question regarding Tibetan language.
- Students take a mid-term exam midway through the course and a final exam at the end of the course.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Instructors evaluate each student's performance based on the following criteria. Final grades are assigned by the Academic Director in consultation with the language instructors on the basis of each instructor's evaluation, each student's own self-evaluation and the Academic Director's observation of each student.

Methods of Evaluation

Grammar (10%)

Grammar is an integral part of any language. It governs the composition of word order, conjugation, tenses etc. Grammar is evaluated by going through students' homework, test papers and speech.

Vocabulary (10%)

New vocabularies are introduced with the introduction of every new lesson. Some vocabularies are given more importance than others based on how often the vocabularies are used in daily lives and in the class. Students are also expected to acquire more vocabularies from conversation partners, homestay families and books and practice them.

Comprehension (10%)

Students are graded based on their ability to comprehend statements or questions and to answer or carry on the conversation accordingly.

Pronunciation and Fluency (10%)

Native pronunciation is not expected. However, students' pronunciation should be clear and comprehensible to classmates and others. Fluency is also taken into consideration.

Motivation and Attitude (10%)

Students are expected to be positive and enthusiastic towards the host culture and language class, and to be positive, encouraging and helpful to their classmates as well.

Attendance (10%)

Students are expected to attend all classes. If students get sick, have an important appointment, or have network issues they need to inform the teacher or re-schedule the class.

Language Use during Conversation Partner & Drill Class (10%)

Students must use Tibetan as much as possible during one-on-one sessions with conversation partners and interactive online drill activities.

Tibetan script (10%)

Reading and writing/typing.

Progress (20%)

Students' progress is evaluated based on homework, quizzes and exams.

Oral proficiency interviews are conducted at the end of the term to provide a measurement of students' overall linguistic progress.

Grading Scale: The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
Below 64	F

Expectations and Policies

Class attendance is mandatory and unexcused absences will reduce the language grade (see attendance policies in the front matter of the syllabus). For online classes, this means being digitally present on the class platform promptly and for the entire duration of the class.

Show up prepared. Be online on time, have your assignments completed and points in mind for clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

Have assignments completed on schedule and done according to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

Ask questions in class. Teachers are highly respected in Nepal and among Tibetan and Himalayan peoples. Your polite and engaged behavior is expected.

Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Respect differences of opinion (classmates', teachers'). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

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