

Spoken Vanduul in *I Held the Line*

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ABSTRACT: A new audio recording of the fictional Vanduul language appeared in a video, where one Vanduul spoke a previously unheard phrase. The official translation of the phrase has also been made public. This paper analyzes the recording, provides a phonetic transcription and speculates about the morphological implications of the new information.

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AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF SILENCE, new audio of spoken Vanduul could be heard at the CitizenCon event in 2023 (Roberts Space Industries 2023). At the end of the second day of the event, 22 October 2023, a video titled *I Held the Line* was shown, and right at the end a few words of the fictional Vanduul language could be heard (Star Citizen 2023, timestamp 26:05). The language was created by Britton Watkins for the Star Citizen computer game (Citizen n.d.). I have summarized all earlier instances of Vanduul and its structure in my two papers (Sipola 2016; Sipola 2017). This short paper will analyze the newest spoken line.

SPOKEN VANDUUL

In the video, three Vanduul can be seen walking through a circular door. At first, two enter and position themselves to guard both sides of the door. A third Vanduul walks between them, triumphantly raises his staff weapon, and utters the new short phrase (Star Citizen 2023). The audio is somewhat obstructed by the rhythmic action music playing in the background. For this reason, it is not entirely possible to make an accurate transcription.

26:05

[ˈrafik ˈtùl ˈgrafektar]

The onset of the first word could also be [gr] instead of [r], but the natural growl of the speakers makes it difficult to decide. The middle word [tùl] could have a lower tone, which I have indicated. The last syllable of the last word could also have some tonal characteristics, but, again, the growl makes it difficult to analyze. The stress falls on the first syllable in each of the three words. Not much can be said about the meaning of this phrase without outside information.

There has been an earlier attempt at transcribing and translating the audio (Jale 2023b). Although I disagree with the transcription, I appreciate the speculation. We actually have a confirmed translation for this phrase: “I rise, I take, I ascend” (Jale 2023a). Unfortunately, no public transcription has been made available.

ANALYSIS

We can be quite sure that the three words translate as follows: [rafik] ‘I rise’, [tùl] ‘I take’ and [grafektar] ‘I ascend’. There seems to be no common first person singular suffix. It is entirely possible that there is no verbal conjugation in the language, or that there multiple verbal categories that are conjugated differently. One possibility is that the basic verb [tùl] is irregular, especially as the meaning is a very basic action. Then the possible prefix [ra-] or [gra-] could indicate first person singular.

There is also a note to be made about derivational morphology. Both ‘rise’ and ‘ascend’ describe similar motion. The words [rafik] and [grafektar] start very similarly, especially if we interpret the first word as [grafik]. There could be a common root, and the act of ascension could be just a habitual or intensive version of this base root.

CONCLUSION

We still have very little knowledge about the Vanduul language. With this new audio recording, it is possible to speculate about its structure. However, more material with clear audio and context is needed to create any resemblance of grammar or even lexicon for the language.

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