Duskaran Language Handbook

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Introduction

Overview

Duskaran emerged over some eight hundred years from the linguistic necessity of survival. The *Stellar Horizon* carried two peoples. The settlers, some thousands of them in cryogenic stasis, were African. Most came from East Africa: they belonged to many peoples and already used Swahili as their common language. A minority came from West Africa and spoke Hausa. The crew, a few hundred, was Asian: Chinese officers and engineers who spoke Mandarin, and Filipino ratings who spoke Tagalog. English was the working language between crew and settlers, and between people and the ship systems. Nobody spoke it at home.

Three facts explain the language that followed.

- **Swahili was already a common language.** After landfall it was the speech of almost everybody, and it supplied about seven words in ten.
- **The others learned it as adults.** Hausa speakers, the crew and their families dropped the noun classes and the verb inflection and kept the words. The same thing happened on Earth in the reduced Swahili of traders and newcomers. Duskaran grammar is the result: verbs that do not change, particles for tense, and old prefixes frozen on the nouns (*matunda*, *mwalimu*, *kuja*).
- **English had one function, and it ended.** When the ship stopped working, English had no more use. It left the words that were tied to the work.

Hausa, Mandarin and Tagalog survive in special fields and in names. Duskarans call their language Creole. A linguist of Earth would call it a restructured Swahili.

The language reflects its speakers' priorities: water, wind, survival, and community. Its phonology accommodates communication during storms, its vocabulary encodes practical knowledge, and its structure allows rapid information exchange in life-threatening situations.

Phonology