Basic Hittite Grammar

This is a summary of grammar focusing on the empire period (Neo-Hittite), Older forms are largely ignored.

The nature of sibilants in Hittite is uncertain. The script used to write Hittite words, taken over from Akkadian, utilises only signs which, in Akkadian, are used to indicate š or z. Signs involving s or other sibilants are not borrowed. (Except of course for writing Sumerograms and Akkadograms). That means we do not know for certain how the Hittites read the phoneme we read as š in Akkadian. Evidence from transcription of Hittite names in other scripts is ambiguous. Works on Hittitology reflect its origins by writing it as a shin.

Nouns

Adjectives typically precede the noun and agree in gender, case and number. Adjective case endings are the same as noun ones. Hence, unless otherwise indicated, what is said below for nouns, applies to adjectives also.

Hittite distinguishes a common gender in which masc. & fem. fall together and a neuter. Neuter nouns show a distinct ending in the nominative and accusative, but otherwise endings are the same for common and neuter.
The case endings are:

	Sing	Plural
Nominative common	š	e/u/aš
Accusative common	n	uš
Nom.acc. neuter	-,n	-,a,i
Ergative neuter	anza	anteš
Genitive	aš	aš
Dative-Locative	i/e/ya/ai	aš
Ablative	az	az
Instrumental	it	it

Strictly speaking, an "ergative" language is a language that marks the subject of an intransitive sentence and the object of a transitive sentence the same way. That means that there has to be a separate way of marking the subject of a transitive sentence. This is called the ergative case. Hittite is not a true ergative language, as the use of an ergative case occurs only with neuter nouns. The term "split ergative" is sometimes used for cases such as Hittite.
A separate dative occurs only in old texts. Otherwise the dative has the same forms as the locative. The locative goes by various names; terminative, allative. It indicates the end point of movement while the ablative indicates the starting point i.e "from".
Instrumental conveys "by means of".

The nature of the stem of a noun can introduce peculiarites. The relevant issue is the ending of the stem.
 i and u stem adjectives tend to change their ending to (a)y and aw respectively in the plural and oblique cases.
n stem nouns. Where the stem ends in "an", some forms drop the a in oblique cases. Neuter nom-acc forms do not add an extra n but have the simple stem.
t stem nouns. Where the t is followed by an š, this is commonly written –z(a). The a is a requirement of the cuneiform script, not of the grammar.
r/n stem. The stem of these nouns ends in r in the nom.-acc. and in n in the other cases.

Verbs

Hittite has two conjugations: -mi and -hi (in later texts these may be confused); two voices: active and medo-passive and two tenses: present-future and preterite. There are also imperative forms.

In finite verb forms there are distinctions of number but not of gender. Once again the presence of stems ending in various consonants or vowels can complicate the expression of the form.

Verbal endings

Present-future

	Active			Medio-passive	
	mi	hi		mi	hi
Sg 1	mi	hi		hahari/hari/ha	hahari/hari
2	ši/ti	ti		tati/ta	tati/ta
3	zi	i		tari/ta	ari/a
Pl 1	weni/wani	weni/wani		waštati/wašta	waštati/wašta
2	teni	teni		duma/dumari	duma
3	anzi	anzi		antari/anta	antari/anta

(NB In the plural forms there is no distinction between mi and hi.)

	Active		Medio-passive	
	mi	hi	mi	hi
Sg 1	un/nun	hun/ahhun	hahat(i)	hahat(i)
2	š/t/ta	š/ta/šta	tat(i)/ta	at(i)/tat
3	t/ta	š/ta/šta	tat(i)/ta	at(i)
Pl 1	wen	wen	waštat	
2	ten/tin	ten/tin	dumat	dumat
3	ar/ir	ar/ir	antat(i)	antat(i)

Imperative

	Active		Medio-passive	
	mi	hi	mi	hi
Sg 1	(a)llu	allu	haharu/haru	haharu/haru
2	-/i/t	-/i	hut(i)	hut(i)
3	du	u	taru	aru
Pl 1	weni	weni		
2	ten/tin	ten/tin	dumat(i)	dumat(i)
3	andu	andu	antaru	antaru

There are verbs which take medi-passive endings but have an active meaning (cf deponent N verbs in Akkadian). When accompanied by –za (see below), some medio-passive verbs are reflexive. In the plural some are reciprocals. Some are passive but a more common way of expressing the passive is the participle plus a form of the verb "to be".
What is given here as an "imperative" paradigm has been constructed by combining 1ˢᵗ and 3ʳᵈ person precatives and cohortatives (cf Akkadian) with 2ⁿᵈ person imperatives.

Verbal nouns.

The verbal substantive takes the ending -war or -atar depending on the verb. It represents the action of the verb as a noun. In other words it can normally be translated by the English gerund (the –ing word). It takes case endings.

The infinitive has a number of forms: -wanzi, manzi and anna. Though there is no distinction in form it can function as either an active or a passive infinitive e.g "to give" or "to be given". It can commonly be translated with an English infinitive and often has connotations of purpose.

The supine ends in –wan. It is always accompanied by the verbs dai "to put" or tiya "to step, arrive, enter". The meaning is "begin to do something", "be ready/willing to do something".

The participle also takes case endings. The form is –ant + case ending. With transitive verbs it is a passive participle (cf. Akkadian stative and verbal adjective). With intransitive verbs it may act as an active participle. It can function as an adjective, a predicate or, standing by itself, as a noun.

Verbal Modifiers

-ah(h)- added to the stem of an adjective or adverb forms a verb meaning to make something or declare something what the adjective or adverb denotes.

-eš- added to the stem of an adjective forms a verb meaning to be/become what the adjective denotes.
-nu- added to the stem of a verb turns it into a causative.
-šk- added to the stem of a verb forms an iterative.
-annai- added to the stem of a verb forms a durative.

Hittite uses a number of words as preverbs which modify the sense of the verb eg anda "into", appan "back, again". Other words may occur between the verb and its preverb.

Enclitic pronouns

One of the initially strange aspects of Hittite is the use of clause initial enclitic pronouns and particles. If the clause does not have an appropriate word to begin the clause, a clause conjunction is used (generally nu). To this may be attached various pronouns or other particles. The order of these is fixed; not all slots are necessarily filled but once a slot is filled, another pronoun or particle of the same position may not be used.

The order is: 1) Initial word or clause conjunction 2) direct discourse marker (wa(r)) 3) dative-accusative of 1st and 2nd plural + dative 3rd plural * 4) 3rd nominative and accusative § 4) dative and accusative singular pronouns # 5) reflexive pronoun (za) 6) "local particles".

*In the ist and 2nd person the dative and accusative of the enclitic pronoun are the same. Only the 3rd person has a separate dative form.
The paradigm is:

1st acc,-dat. pl.   naš
2nd acc,-dat. pl.   šmaš
3rd dat. pl.   šmaš

§ The paradigm is   Sing   Pl
Nominative common   aš   at
Accusative common   an   aš
Nom-acc. neuter   at   at

Since the above 3rd person pronoun covers the accusative function, the 3rd person form in this paradigm is only dative. The 1st and 2nd person forms can either accusative or dative.

                                Sing.
1st   mu
2nd   ta
3rd   ši

In effect what happens is that 3rd person pronominal subjects and pronominal direct or indiredt objects that occur in a clause are placed as enclitics at the beginning of the clause.
An occasional feature in some late Hittite texts is the repetition of pronouns from slot 3 after slot 4.

Local Particles

-kan. There is very little certainty about the meaning. Perhaps it has nuances of a starting or end point for an action ("there","hence", "hither") conceived in spacial or temporal terms.
-san. This seems to imply proximity, whether physical or conceptual, usually, but not always, produced by movement.

-apa. This usually denotes physical contact of one object with another and may have developed into denoting a terminative sense.

-asta. Maybe this denotes passage from one domain into another.

The particle –pat.

This particle does not belong to the clause initial particles and may be attached to many different words. When attached to nouns it has an anaphoric sense i.e. 'the aforementioned'. With verbs it has the meaning "likewise". Thus it serves to associate the word with something previously mentioned. It can also have particularising or restrictive functions, so that X-pat conveys "particularly X", "X himself".

Enclitic Possessive Pronouns

These attach to the noun and are then followed by the case endings. Both the noun and the pronoun are declined. (A final n on a noun root may assimilate to the beginning of the pronoun.) They may take different forms depending on whether they are attached to singular or plural nouns.

First plural pronouns are not attested.

Singular Nouns

Case	1st sing	2nd sing	3rd sing	2nd pl	3rd pl
Nom. c.	miš	tiš	šiš	šmiš	šmeš
Acc. c.	min	tin	šin		šman
N.-A. n.	mit	tit	šit	šmet	šmet
voc.	mi				
Gen.	maš	taš	šaš		
Dat.-loc.	mi	ti	ši	šmi	šmi
Inst.		tit	set		šmit

Plural Nouns

Nom. c.	miš	tiš	šeš	šmeš	
Acc. c.	muš	tuš	šuš		šmuš
N.-A. n	mit		šet		
Gen	man				
Dat. loc.		taš			šmaš

Other pronouns

ka- this
apa- that
The paradigm may be illustrated by the forms with ka-. The only deviation for apa- is the form apat for sing. nom.-acc. neuter.

	Sing	Pl
nom. com.	kaš	ke, kuš, keuš
acc. com.	kun	kuš, ke
nom.-ac. neuter	ki, ke	ke, ki
gen.	kel	kinzan, kedaš
dat. loc.	kedani	kedas

abl.	kez(za)	
inst.	kedanta, kidanda, ket	

The ablative and instrumental forms are used for both singular and plural

The interrogative and relative pronoun

	Sing	Pl
Nominative common	kuiš	kueš
Accusative common	kuin	kueuš
Nom-acc. neuter	kuit	kue
Genitive	kuel	
Dative-locative	kuedani	kuedaš
Ablative	kuez/kuezza	

Note also the indefinite pronoun with forms such as kuiški and kuitki.

Postpositions

Instead of prepositions, Hittite has postpositions.

Conjunctions

Clauses are often begun by the nu-. Alternatively the first word of the clause may have an enclitic -a (after a consonant) or –ma (after a vowel) attached to the first word, signifying a change of topic or a contrast.

Another enclitic conjunction, attached to the first word is –a (after a consonant) or –ya (after a vowel). It links actions which are seen as parallel but not consecutive. The latter are denoted by a new clause beginning with nu-. a/ya can also be used to link individual words.

Orthography

Just like Akkadian, Hittite cuneiform commonly uses Sumerograms but it uses Akkadograms as well.

When reading Hittite words, we have great difficulty distinguishing from the spelling which of the various cognate voiced and unvoiced sounds are meant (eg d and t, g and k). Hence dictionaries commonly put voiced and unvoiced alternates together.

The convention in transliteration is to put Hittite words in lower case italics, Akkadian words in upper case italics and Sumerian words in plain upper case.

The Hittite script marked other foreign words, particularly Luwian ones, by placing two diagonal wedges before them (Glossenkeil). In the accompanying vocabulary I have placed an asterix before such words. Luwian is a language cognate to Hittite which seems to have been used particularly in western and southern Anatolia.