

Ku’ah-íbéh

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A brief introduction:

Ku’ah-íbéh is a language created for speedlang 22, hosted by maru.the.mareck (greetings, Marecka maruensis). It is spoken by a few million nomadic pastoral people from the semi-arid/subtropical country of Tus Ku’ah, on the continent of Igalta. It is related to [dqj ka gyrr](#) (which was originally meant for speedlang 16, but, alas, not finished in time). Ku’ah-íbéh is not a prestige language, and most speakers are fluent in [dqj ka gyrr](#) as well. The language name itself means “plains’ speak”.

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I. Phonology

a. Phoneme inventory

1. Classical analysis

Figure 1: Classical Consonant System ¹		Labial	Coronal			Dorsal	
			Dental	Sibilant	Palatal	Velar	Guttural
Nasal		/m̥/ <m>	/n̥/ <n>			/ŋ̥/ <ng>	/N/ <n'>
Stop	Voiceless	/p/	/t/	/ts/ <c>	/tɕ/ <ch>	/k/	/ʔ/ <q> ²
	Voiced	/b/	/d/	/dz/ <z>	/dʒ/ <zh>	/g/	/G/ ~ ɣ <gh>
Continuant		/ʋ/ ~ β <ph ~ bh>	/θ/ ~ ʈ ~ r <th ~ l ~ r>	/s/ ~ z <ss ³ ~ s>	/ç/ ~ j <sh ~ j>	/x/ ~ χ ~ w <h ~ w>	/h/ ~ fi <h' ~ ' > ⁴

Figure 2: Vowels	Front	Central	Back
Constricted	/j/ [i] <i>	/w/ <y>	/ɰ/ [u] <ú>
Close	/i/ <i>	/i/ <y>	/o/ <u>
Mid	/e/ <é>	/ə/ <e>	/o/ <ó>
Open	/a/		/ɔ/ <o>

Figure 3: Diphthongs	-ɪ	-ī	-ʊ
a-	<aj>		<au>
e-	<ej>		
ə-	<ej'>	<ey'>	<eu'>
o-	<oj>		<ou>

All diphthongs and vowels may also be preceded with a semi-vocalic /j/ or /w/, forming triphthongs and diphthongs respectively.

¹ More on this on the next page

² Except in word boundaries that do not form liaison. More on this in [c. Phonotactics](#) and [e. Orthography](#).

³ In most cases, but <s> in certain contexts. More on this in [e. Orthography](#).

⁴ With certain exceptions. More on this in [e. Orthography](#).

2. Alternate analysis of consonants

Figure 4: Alternative analysis		Labial	Coronal			Dorsal	
			Dental	Sibilant	Palatal	Velar	Guttural
Nasal	Voiced	m	n		ɲ	ŋ	ɴ
	Voiceless	ɱ	ɳ		ɲ̥	ŋ̥	
Stop		p	t	ts	tɕ	k	ʔ
Continuant t	Voiceless	ɸ	θ	s	ɕ	x	h
	Voiced	β	ɹ ~ r	z	j	w	ɦ

Another plausible explanation for the consonants argues that voiced nasals and continuants are not just intervocalic allophones of their voiceless counterparts. This has merit because in isolated words, there are indeed minimal pairs. However, in the classical analysis, these are explained with λ and λ (more on this in [c. Phonotactics](#)). This analysis also argues that the voiced and voiceless stops are allophones of each other—such that voiceless stops are voiced intervocalically, and intervocalic voiceless stops are analysed as geminates. This document will use the classical analysis for the sake of simplicity.

c. Phonotactics

1. Syllable Structure

The syllable structure in Ku'ah-íbéh is:

CV(C) word initially;
 (C)CV(C) otherwise;
 and # λ (C)-...-(C) λ on word boundaries;

where C is any consonant; V is any vowel (including di- and triphthongs); and λ and λ are monophthongs (not including syllabic consonants). Syllabic consonants can only be found in syllables without a coda.

Lambda and barred lambda are phonemes that are silent when the word is isolated. Although silent, they still affect phonological processes (such as intervocalic voicing). When a word is not isolated, there is a chance of liaison—where λ or λ may be pronounced based on the semantic background. Two words that are related to each other and adjacent to each other (for example, an adjective and the noun it modifies) would cause λ or λ to be pronounced, unless it causes two adjacent identical vowel sounds. In isolated form, λ and λ are marked in (parenthesis).

2. Forbidden sequences

Consonant clusters are allowed in every position except for word-initially and finally. However, there is one exception to this— λ and λ may come with an accompanying consonant, which is always pronounced. However, in quick informal speech, it is not. The maximum cluster length is three consonants, and all clusters must have at least one stop. Apart from these, there are no other forbidden sequences.

d. Allophony

The phonemes of *ku'ah-ibéh* exhibit some amount of allophony, which are listed in the pages below.

1. Gemination

- Two consecutive nasals or continuants are pronounced voicelessly in all cases, but with no length difference as a singular phoneme. For example:
 - (i)ssa /λs-sa/ [sa] *you (sg)*;
 - sa /sa/ [sa] *your (sg)*;
 - (i)s'a /λ-sa/ [za] *barley*;
 - (a)nné'i' /λn-ne.hj/ [ŋe.i] *sibling*⁵.
- Two consecutive stops are lengthened, except for the glottal stop (which retains its value). In certain dialects, the geminate stop may be ejective or aspirated, especially word-finally. For example:
 - tsit(e') /tsit-λ/ [tsit] *grass*;
 - tsitt(e') /tsit-tλ/ [tsitt] *to sing*;
 - tsiqq(e') /tsiʔ-ʔλ/ [tsiʔ] *to stab, to harm; (reflexive/passive/middle) to be hurt*.

2. Nasals and continuants

- Nasals and continuants are voiced intervocalically—including silent λ and λ. For example:
 - (i)s'a /λ-sa/ [za] *barley*;
 - isa /ɪ.sa/ [ɪza] *to count, to calculate, (reflexive/middle) to do maths*;
 - zoni /zɔ.nɪ/ [zɔ.nɪ] *palm (of a hand)*;
 - (o)ni /λ-nɪ/ [nɪ] *they (plural)*.
- Word finally, /θ/ is always pronounced [ɰ].
- /N/ nasalises any vowel before and after it, and is typically recognised as [ɲ] or [ɲ̃].

3. Dorsals

- When voiced, /h/ takes the articulation of the next vowel, but non-syllabic and breathy-voiced. For example:
 - h'a /ha/ [ha] (*onomatopoeic, often duplicated*) *laughter*;
 - é'a /eha/ [e̞a] *they/he/she*⁵ (*pronoun for one human*);
 - (ó)h'a /λ-ha/ [a̞] *plural marker*;
- Gutturals and word-final velar trigger vowel shifts /j ɪ e a ɨ ə w ʊ/ → [ɪ e æ a ə ɐ ʊ o] before and after. These shifts may occur beyond word boundaries. For example:
 - qí /ʔj/ [ʔɪ] *air, gas, wind*;
 - (i)béh /λ-bex/ [bæχ] *to speak*;
 - ku'ah-ibéh /kʊhaxibex/ [ko̞aχɪbæχ] *plains' speak (language name)*;
- Word finally, velars are pronounced as uvulars, and the voiced guttural stop is always pronounced as [Ɂ]. For example:
 - (i)sqak /λs-ʔak/ [sʔaɁ] *street, alley*;
 - nakwagh /na.kwag/ [nakwaɁ] *to be in possession of, to possess (spiritually)*.

⁵ The speakers of *ku'ah-ibéh* are androgynous and do not have biological sex.

4. Vowels

1. When followed immediately by another vowel, constricted vowels /j u w/ after a consonant weaken to [Cⁱ C^s C^w]. C^s also the same vowel shifts as gutturals, but only for the vowel after. Orthographically, <ý> → <ʻ> if and only if this doesn't cause any double apostrophes to form (otherwise, it stays the same). For example:
 - a. cí-akse /tsi_ˌak.sə/ [ts'ak.sə] *used tool*;
 - b. k'-óha /ku_ˌoha/ [k^so_ˌaa] *they (livestock or crop)*;
 - c. ganú-éni /ga.nu_ˌe.ni/ [gan^weni] *free money*;
2. When λ or λ = /ə/ is triggered, and an adjacent phoneme is another vowel, it is pronounced [e] and romanised <è>, except when the adjacent vowel is /e/, in which case nothing happens. For example:
 - a. nalè-óha /na.lə_ˌoha/ [n_ˌaleo_ˌaa] *their (inanimate)*;
 - b. nale-éni /na.lə_ˌe.ni/ [n_ˌaləeni] *its (inanimate) money*;

e. Orthography

Below are just a few orthographical (romanised) standards. *Ku'ah-ibéh* also has its native writing system, which will be covered in **a later chapter**.

- A hyphen is used where liaison is triggered.
- Apart from in dictionary entries and where liaison is triggered, λ and λ are never written.
- All continuants are not written twice when they are geminated, except:
 - /s/ is written as <ss> when there is a phonemic doubling, except word initially.
 - /h/ is written as <hh'> when doubled, but only word-initially (in cases with /λh-/).
- Continuants, when pronounced voiced, take on their voiced form <v r s j w ʻ>, except:
 - word initially, a single voiced /h/ (due to λ) is written <h'>.
 - word initially, a single voiced /s/ is written <sʻ>
- Otherwise, phonemes are romanised as per values within <angled brackets> in [Figures 1, 2, and 3](#).
- Going forwards, all non-bracketed texts in *ku'ah-ibéh* are in romanisation.

II. Morphology

The next chapter will focus on the noun and verb morphology of ku'ah-íbéh. The language has various grammatical quirks, including extensive non-concatenative verb morphology, and a distinct lack of tense.

a. Noun Classes

Ku'ah-íbéh has a system of noun classes that impacts clause formation and syntax. This extends to a system of counting classifiers.

Figure 5: Noun classes	Definition/examples	Classifier(s)
I. Deities, sacred objects	Gods, anything seen as sacred	(ú)gha
II. People	People	lu
III. Bodily parts/objects	Body parts (organs), other unalienable objects and concepts	nal
IV. Domesticated animals, crops	Pets, livestock, a few crops	ken(e) - animals sal - crops
V. Wild living things	Any other living thing, including plants	cyn' - animals gus - non-animals
VI. Objects	Everything else	(e)hnga

For the sake of further discussion, noun classes I and II fall under the first animate class (ANI1); III and IV fall under the second (ANI2); and V and VI fall under the inanimate class (INAN).

b. Pronouns

Ku'ah-íbéh has a system of pronouns, with only base and possessive forms. They differentiate by person, number, and animacy (for third-person).

Figure 6: Pronouns	Basic (Pn.)		Possessive (Pn./Adj.)	
	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	naj	(i)s'u	nan(e)	s'uw(e)
2	(i)ssa	(a)squl	sas(e)	'ur(e)
3.ANI1	é'a	é'a-óha	ha'(e)	ha'è-óha
3.ANI2	ký	k'-óha	ke	kè-óha
3.INAN	nal	nal-óha	nal(e)	nalè-óha

c. Adjectives and modifiers

In *ku'ah-ibéh*, adjectives and other modifiers (such as possessive adjectives) come before the words they describe, and always trigger liaison. They can also modify verbs, using the particle *thuw* before the adjective.

Possessive adjectives are used in the same way, and are placed before the noun they modify as well. They also always trigger liaison. Unlike in *dqi ka gyrr*, possessive pronouns are used in all cases of possession, not just inalienable. Possessives can also be used as standalone pronouns, similarly to something like “mine” in English.

d. Background on Tense, Aspect, and Mood

Unlike the related language *dqi ka gyrr*, *ku'ah-ibéh* is almost wholly tenseless, with only a few recorded suppletive forms. However, there are many aspects that give time reference points.

Stem alternation is a historical process in *ku'ah-ibéh* which used to be productive, and gave tense distinctions to certain verbs (often described as “active”). However, it is no longer productive after a series of hypercorrection regularly added aspect particles to every verb with tense inflections except in certain fixed . The phonological effects of stem alternation is still present, but it is no longer productive.

e. Particles

1. Aspect

There are 5 aspect markers in *ku'ah-ibéh*: *(y)ri*, *naj*, *h'ó*, *cin*, and *kijýri*. Of these, three are shared with *dqi ka gyrr*.

Particle	Original meaning	Aspect	Equivalent in English	
<i>(y)ri</i>	finished/completed	Perfect	Simple past	V-ed
<i>né</i>	to be (LOC)	Imperfect	Past progressive	was V-ing
<i>h'ó</i>	to begin	Inchoative	Near future	going/just started to V
<i>cin</i>	to come/to go	Prospective	Future	may/will V
<i>kijýri</i>	finished (intense)	Discontinuous	No longer present	used to V

All particles are placed before the verb they modify. Multiple particles can modify the same verb, and the order in which they are placed is based on the speaker's discretion (slightly different meanings for each order).

2. Mood

There are also five moods in ku'ah-ibéh, with particles all placed before the verb they modify and any aspect particles.

The first one is the conditional, which marks generally hypotheticals and things that might happen. It is formed with the particle *kwa*, which on its own is also used as a verb indication ability and conditionality.

Another mood is the obligatory, which indicates that the speaker is obliged to do something (similar to the *devoir* in French). This is formed with the particle *(u)bhim*, which is also used as a verb by itself meaning “to need”.

The imperative mood is marked with the particle *cin* meaning “to go”, which is also used for the potential/future aspect.

Another important mood particle is *n'akak*, marking for the inferential. This essentially means that the speaker is not sure if what they say is/will be true, and is often used along with the particle *cin* to cement the future tense and differentiate from the imperative.

Finally, negation acts as a mood in ku'ah-ibéh. It is formed with the particle *yn*, which is also used as a non-existence adjective (similar to “no” in English).

Figure 8: Moods	Particle
Conditional	<i>kwa</i>
Obligatory	<i>(u)bhim</i>
Inferential	<i>n'akak</i>
Imperative	<i>cin</i>
Negation	<i>yn</i>

f. Stem Alternation

As mentioned before, stem alternation is no longer a productive process in ku'ah-ibéh. However, certain “active” verbs retain alternations along with aspect modifications in different tense/aspects. Perfect, imperfect, and discontinuous aspects receive the past alternation, while prospective and inchoative aspects receive the future alternation.

Only one vowel within the verb is marked. In polysyllabic verbs, this vowel is marked with an underline in dictionaries.

Figure 9: Vestigial stem alternation in ku'ah-ibéh		
Original vowel	Past	Future
Front	central + <i>n'</i>	back
Central	back + <i>n'</i>	<i>w</i> + back
Back	back + <i>n'</i>	<i>w</i> + back
Vowel + <i>n'</i>	vowel	<i>j</i> + vowel

g. Phasal Polarity

Phasal polarity (terms such as already, still, not yet, no longer) are marked as a particle after a verb. The word meaning already is *zanhé*, and the word meaning still is *ghóran'*. These are combined with the negative particle *yn* before the verb to form the negative forms “not yet” and “no longer”. An answer to a question may contain just the phasal polarity particles, or the particles with negation. A full sentence is not needed in these cases.

III. Syntax

a. Regular Sentence Structure

Ku'ah-ibéh has a direct-inverse sentence structure. This means that in certain cases, the location of the subject and direct object in a sentence are flipped. In the case of *ku'ah-ibéh*, the inverse construction happens when the animacy of the object is greater than that of the subject (ANI1 > ANI2 > INAN).

In normal situations (S > O), the direct sentence structure is:

S V O;

However, if the subject is less animate than the object, a particle *azém* is added to the end of the construction and the location of subject and object is flipped, known as the inverse structure:

O V S *azém*;

For example, “the horse kicked me” would be written as:

naj	ri	tan'	thaki	zém
1SG	PERF	kick.PST	horse	INV

The inverse construction is used most commonly in casual speech and ultra-formal literature. In between, it is typically more advisable to use the passive voice or the causative voice (with a deity).

b. Other Voice Construction

These valency changing operations are often used in *ku'ah-ibéh*, especially when the subject is less animate than the object.

1. Passive Voice

The passive voice (in English, O be V by S) in Dqi Ka Gyrr is expressed with the particle *ichal*. The sentence structure is:

O *ichal* S V.

For example, the sentence “the horse kicked me” could be written as:

naj	ichal	thaki	ri	tan'
1SG	PASS	horse	PERF	kick.PST

In cases without a specified agent, it may be omitted and create this structure: O *ichal* V. This would be similar to the sentence “he was kicked”.

2. Causative Voice

The causative voice is constructed similarly, with the particle <égu>. The structure is:

S égu O V (IO);

It would be similar to the English sentence “S made O V (IO). When used in a way to avoid the inverse construction, the subject is a deity of nature. For example:

eriru	égu	laki	ri	tan’	naj
god	CAUS	horse	PERF	kick.PST	1sg

In this sentence, *eriru* is a god of livestock. Their name is used as a filler and the sentence effectively means “the horse (inexplicably) kicked me”.

The causative voice is also used in many constructions to increase the valency of many stative verbs without a divalent analogue.

3. Middle Voice

In *ku’ah-ibéh*, middle voice is used when the subject and the object are one, with volition ranging in between an active and passive construction. It is similar, but not exactly identical to a reflexive. The middle voice structure is:

S V h’ó;

There is no good translation in English, but it would be somewhat similar to “S V (itself)”. For example:

nalè-óha	garepho	ri	an’ema	h’ó
3.PL.POSS	face-hair	PERF	cut.PST	MID

This sentence has the same meaning as “they cut their beards” in English, but if directly translated, would be something more like “their beards cut (themselves)”, or a combination of “their beards cut” and “their beards were cut”.

c. Serial Verb Construction

In *ku'ah ibéh*, verbs can be strung together in a single clause to create extensive compounding. This usually indicates temporal serialisation (one action after another) or a relation between the verbs, but can also be used in other situations such as to describe two concurrent actions. Serial verb constructions always trigger liaison. A sequence of verbs must be in the same aspect and mood, which is marked at the very beginning. It may be interrupted by the object of a transitive verb which is part of the sequence.

d. Possession

Probably work on this one as well!

e. Relative clauses

Wow ok this one is a big missing here will have to do

IV. Lexicon Showcase

I SWEAR I WILL WORK ON THIS WITH HASTE VERY VERY SOON

V. Translations

(1) sémtha-yri cin-emra ak-ehnga núr yn-èstak yn ítí h'i "naj n'akak cin eks sine-ítí!"
dog-PERF go-enter one-CL inn NEG-see NEG smth say `1SG IMP PRSP open
DEM-smth"

"A dog entered one inn, didn't see anything, and said 'I might be going to open this thing!'"

- SMOYD #1948

(2) nane-nhèra ni sí ho
1SG.POSS-cat have black color

"My cat is black." (lit. my cat has black color)

- Zephyrus #40

(3) h'ùra ri ni oshè-aran' warawa
here PERF have some-person shout

"Some of the people shouted." (lit. here were some people shouted)

- Zephyrus #12

(4) mel-ijèsh n'akak cin nóth-éksus é'a zón'il
provincial-head INFR PRSP give-exit 3SG prison

"My opinion is that the governor will grant him a pardon." (lit. I think that the provincial chief might be going to give him and let him exit prison)

- Zephyrus #213

(5) [suroshé] ri chebha-éksus réssa shagh nalè-akél
god.thunder PERF tear-exit ground tree 3SG.INAN.POSS-root

"The strong roots of the oak trees were torn from the ground." (lit. The god of thunder and storms tore and made exit the ground the roots of the tree)

- Zephyrus #77

VI. Writing System

Finishing this may very well imply the death of my central nervous system.