

ʔaʔa-FaM

A Reference Grammar of the Narish Language

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Foreword

ʔaʔa-FAM is a constructed language spoken on the fictitious Nareland island.

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Part I

Grammar

Chapter 1

Phonology

1.1 Consonants

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Fortis	$p^h \sim \widehat{p\phi}$	$t^h \sim \widehat{ts}$	$c \sim \widehat{c\zeta}$	$k \sim \widehat{kx}$	$q \sim \widehat{q\chi}$	$ʔ$
Lenis	$p \sim b$	$t \sim d$				
Fricative	f	s	$\zeta \sim$	$x \sim$	$\chi \sim$	$h \sim$
Approximant		l	j	w		
Nasal	m	n				
Rhotic		$r \sim$	$\mathfrak{r} \sim$	\mathfrak{r}		

Table 1.1: Phonemic Consonant Inventory

1.2 Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i (i:)		u (u:)
Mid		\mathfrak{a}	
Open		a (a:)	

Table 1.2: Phonemic Vowel Inventory

1.2.1 Phonotactics & Allophony

$i(:) \rightarrow e(:) / _j$

1.2.2 Epenthetic schwa

1.3 Prosody

Stress, in the form of elevated pitch and volume, is placed on the first non-schwa vowel of the word, after the first root radical, on a long vowel immediately preceding the first radical, or on certain morphemes that carry stress.

nemiwi	[nə'miwi]	first non-schwa vowel of word
parse	['parsə]	first non-schwa vowel of word
iFaam	[i'fa:m]	vowel after first radical
FanaS	['fanas]	vowel after first radical
aaNiW	['a:niw]	long vowel preceding radical
iLaasak	[i.la:'sak]	presence of stress-carrying morpheme (imperative affix -ak)

1.4 Morphophonemics

1.5 Orthography

ʔaʔa-FaM has two recognized orthographic conventions, both based on the Latin alphabet. Both conventions use marked letterforms to indicate which part of a word are part of the underlying root and which are grammatical markers. The precise manner in which they're marked is the major point of difference between the two orthographic styles.

By and large, both orthographic conventions attempt to use the most intuitive representation of a given phoneme. There are very few differences between the conventions. Fortis and lenis stops are written using the typical voiceless and voiced symbols, respectively, in both systems. The labial fricative is written as ⟨f⟩ and the dorsal fricative as ⟨h⟩. The rhotic is, of course, written as ⟨r⟩. The palatal approximant is written as ⟨j⟩, except when adjacent to an ⟨i⟩ within the same word, in which case it is written as ⟨y⟩. The other phonemes are written with their usual IPA characters in both conventions, except for /ʔ/, which is dealt with differently depending on which convention one is using.

1.5.1 Formal writing style

The formal writing conventions make use of small-caps letterforms to highlight roots. In addition, it uses the glottal stop character to indicate the glottal stop phoneme, using the capital glottal stop character ⟨ʔ⟩ when the glottal stop is part of a root radical (for instance, in the word ʔaʔa) and the lowercase glottal stop character ⟨ʔ⟩ otherwise (such as in the suffix -(e)ʔ).

1.5.2 Informal writing style

The informal writing conventions, also known as “texting script”, is the orthography used in the majority of day-to-day communication. Rather than using small-caps letterforms, it uses true capital letters for roots. It also uses ⟨ʔ⟩ for the glottal stop, with no difference between capital and lowercase. While these differences could be considered less aesthetically pleasing, they result in an ASCII-compatible script, which makes this writing style far easier to use in most messaging apps and computer interfaces. Texting-style ʔaʔa-FaM also allows for several shorthand abbreviations that tend not to be used in more formal style.

Chapter 2

Morphology

2.1 Underlying roots

The majority of lexical items are produced by

2.2 Derivational morphology

ʔaʔa-FaM allows for words to be altered syntactically and semantically using a rich set of morphological operations, divided into two categories based on their concatenation.

2.2.1 Primary derivation

Primary derivation refers to the non-concatenative morphology of stems. These operations are for the most part not productive, and not all roots have a corresponding stem with each of these patterns. They may not stack, i.e. a stem may only be inflected by one pattern at a time.

2.2.2 Secondary derivation

Secondary derivation refers to the exclusively suffixing operations that may be applied to stems in addition to primary derivation. Unlike primary derivation, these suffixes may be stacked freely.

2.2.2.1 -uru - 'to be'

Rather than using a verbal copula, nominal and adjectival phrases are derived into verbs with the meaning 'to be X' or 'to have characteristic X' with the -uru affix.

- (1) ha KNUT inFiSuru.
Knut is a baby.

Adjectives and determiners may still modify a noun that has been turned modified into part of the verb, resulting in these words serving a semi-adverbial function in these cases.

- (2) ha KNUT li BaCa inFiSuru-li
REF.M Knut which small baby-COP-INT
'Which little baby is Knut?'

	<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Example</i>	
1.	ΘaΘ	Abstract noun	JaB	good fortune (cf. <i>JaBa</i> ‘good, fortunate’)
2.	ΘiiΘ	Transitive verb	FiiS	to give birth to (cf. <i>Fanas</i> ‘person’)
3.	ΘiyaΘ	Unaccusative verb	KiyaL	to be poured out (cf. <i>KarLi</i> ‘water’)
4.	iΘaaΘ	Unergative verb	iNaAM	to eat (cf. <i>Niim</i> ‘to eat (smth.)’)
5.	Θ ₁ iΘ ₁ iyaΘ ₂	Causative of unaccusative	KiKiyaL	to pour (smth.) out (cf. <i>KiyaL</i> ‘to flow out’)
6.	aaΘiΘ	Causative of unergative	aaNiM	to feed (cf. <i>iNaAM</i> ‘to eat’)
7.	ΘaΘa	Attributive	saFRa	hot (cf. <i>saFR</i> ‘heat’)
8.	ΘanaΘ	Person of X	KanaJ	author (cf. <i>KiiY</i> ‘to write (smth.)’)
9.	ΘurΘi	Object	NurMi	food (cf. <i>iNaAM</i> ‘to eat’)
10.	ΘarΘi	Liquid noun	QarFi	coffee (cf. <i>iQaaF</i> ‘to drink coffee’)
11.	iΘuΘa	Place of X	iHuTa	night (cf. <i>HaTa</i> ‘dark’)
12.	mΘiΘ	Tool/instrument	mRiQ	weapon (cf. <i>RaQ</i> ‘pain’)
13.	inΘiΘ	Diminutive	inFiM	word (cf. <i>FaM</i> ‘language’)
14.	ΘuliΘ	Body part	BulIT	head (cf. <i>iBaaT</i> ‘to understand’)
15.	ΘuΘu	Animal	cuMPu	kangaroo (cf. <i>iCaAMP</i> ‘to jump’)
16.	ΘasiΘ	Long, slender object	NasiRK	icicle (cf. <i>NuRKi</i> ‘snowball’)
17.	ΘajuΘa	Flat object or surface	DajuLa	mirror (cf. <i>Diil</i> ‘to stare at’)
18.	ΘidiΘ	Loose, granular mass	widiW	sugar (cf. <i>WaWa</i> ‘sweet’)
19.	aΘiΘu	Closed/natural container	aBiRDu	bird’s nest (cf. <i>BURDu</i> ‘bird’)
20.	ΘimiΘu	Open/unnatural container	QimiFu	coffee mug (cf. <i>aQiFu</i> ‘coffee pot’)
21.	ΘuΘi	Color	KuWi	green (cf., <i>KajuWa</i> ‘leaf’)
22.	uΘiΘi	Experiential	uNiMi	hungry (cf. <i>NaMa</i> ‘satisfying’)
23.	ΘuuΘ	People group, land of X people	NuuRK	Nords, Norse, Norway (cf. <i>NaRKa</i> ‘cold’)
24.	ΘaΘia	Nationstate	FRaNCia	France (cf. <i>FRUUNC</i> ‘Franks’)

Table 2.1: Primary derivation patterns

2.2.2.2 *-ila* - ‘there is’, ‘to have’2.2.2.3 *-ara* - wishes and greetings2.2.2.4 *-iri* - ‘to make’2.2.2.5 *-ana* - person2.2.2.6 *-ini* - diminutive2.2.2.7 *-ari* - ‘to become’, ‘to cause to be’2.2.2.8 *-inala* - ‘to make X-er, to increase’2.2.2.9 *-lat* - ‘measured in’, ‘comprising’

When describing a quantity of something, often one may desire to use a particular noun as a measure of another. While many languages (English included) turn the measured substance into an adpositional phrase modifying the measure word as the head, in ʔaʔa-FaM one turns the measure word into an adjective modifying the substance being measured using the suffix *-lat*. For instance, *KimiLu* ‘glass’ becomes *KimiLulat* ‘a glass of’ in *KimiLulat MaHi* ‘glass of milk’

This suffix is not used with numbers themselves, however, which can be prepended onto noun phrases like determiners without being adjectivalized.

- (3) *pars bar aKiLulat KarLi Kiil.*
pars bar aKiLu -lat KarLi Kiil
 3.MED three bottle-MEAS water drink
 ‘He drank three bottles of water.’

2.2.2.10 *-aki* - ‘made/comprised of’

When one thing is constructed from/comprised of a particular material, one can indicate this by taking the noun of the material in question and turning it into an adjective using the suffix *-aki*—for instance, *RuRKDi* ‘wood’ becomes *RuRKDiaki* ‘wooden’.

- (4) *nas Majuwaaki iFuSairi*
nas Majuwa -aki iFuSa -iri
 1SG playing_card-made_of house-make
 ‘I’m building a house of cards.’

2.2.2.11 *-s(e)* - ‘the ... one’

Used to nominalize adjectives in contexts where the head is known or obvious.

- (5) A: *mi li MasiH Niime? kajli?* (‘Which ice cream bar do you want to eat?’)
 B: *CaKLas nas kaj!*
CaKLa -s nas kaj
 chocolate-NMZ 1SG want
 ‘I want the chocolate one!’

Unlike equivalent periphrastic constructions from other languages (such as English’s ‘the chocolate one’), this derivation can only be applied to bare adjectives, and thus cannot be applied to relative clauses or strings of adjectives.

2.2.3 Compounding

2.2.4 Gender

Certain lexical items may be inflected to convey the gender of its referent. On certain words, namely *-ara* greetings, gender marking is obligatory.

- un* Feminine gender
- aj* Masculine gender
- uj* Explicitly non-binary
- an* Gender-neutral, agender

2.3 Inflectional morphology

2.3.1 Verb finals

Verbs that are either not declarative, or not the head of the matrix clause, must be marked based on their purpose in the sentence. These verbs may appear in subordinate clauses, as converbs, serial verbs, or finite non-declarative head verbs.

- \emptyset Declarative verb
- (*e*)₂ Connective
- li* Interrogative
- ak* Imperative
- tu* Relative
- uc* Subordinate

Declarative verbs are unmarked, finite, and modally neutral.

Connective verbs may be either finite or non-finite. They work in conjunction with the head verb to describe concurrent or subsequent actions, or to modify the meaning of the verb clause with auxiliary verbs.

- (6) a. *naswi KajuLa tui FiiL -ami -2 dak*
 1EX water_surface on_surface_of notice-REFL-CVB can
‘We could see ourselves in the water surface.’
- b. *nas bu NuWu RiiQ -e2 LaW daw iCaan*
 1S that possum hit CON up towards climb
‘I’m climbing up to hit that possum.’

2.3.2 Evidential modality

ʔaʔa-FAM has a four-way distinction within its evidentials that distinguishes direct witness with reportative, inferential, and internal/assumed speech. These affixes typically appear on the head verb, but may also be used on even non-finite verbs.

	Function	Example	Translation
\emptyset -	Direct Witness	iNaAM	<i>‘they’re eating’</i>
<i>ir</i> -	Reportative	iriNaAM	<i>‘they’re eating, they said’</i>
<i>hwa</i> -	Inferential	hwaiNaAM	<i>‘they’re eating, judging by the smell’</i>
<i>qaa</i> -	Internal/Assumed	qaaiNaAM	<i>‘they’re probably eating, it’s around dinner time’</i>

Table 2.2: Evidential modality affixes

- (7) *FanaSaj irMaLaurutu iNaAMe2 jaa.*
FanaSaj ir- MaLaurutu iNaAMe2 jaa
 man REP-ill:COP:REL eat:CON indeed
‘The man, who I was told was sick, was eating after all.’

In the above example, the evidential attaches to and scopes over only the relative clause *'FanaSaj MaLaurutu'*, leaving the matrix clause unmodified.

2.3.2.1 *ir-* Reportative speech

Information that has been obtained through the retelling by a secondary party is marked with *ir-*. The speaker may not have been present to witness the event themselves, and are relying completely on hearsay.

- (8) *bu yaT was barariʔ ir- Riit*
 DEM.DIST shot DEM.PROX:NMZ three:become:CVB HSY-end
'He's done that trip three times.' (speaker heard from someone else)

2.3.2.2 *hwa-* Inferential speech

If the speaker hasn't observed an event themselves and is interpolating from current circumstances, they may use *hwa-* to mark this.

- (9) *MuHu wa PLaS fit hwa- Niiw*
 cow DEM.PROX place at INFER-died
'The cow was seemingly killed here.' (speaker noticed signs of struggle)

2.3.2.3 *qaa-* Internal/Assumed speech

Verbs can also be marked for whether the speaker has no concrete evidence or report of the event, but may still assume that said event happened because of a gut instinct, tendencies, routines, or assumptions about the world.

- (10) *inFiS qaa- isaaJ*
 children INTER-sleep
'The children are probably asleep by now.' (uttered late at night)

2.4 Pronouns and determiners

	<i>Nonplural</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Speaker-only</i>	nas	naswi
<i>Addressee-only</i>	mi	miwi
<i>Inclusive</i>	nemi	nemiwi

Table 2.3: Discourse participant pronouns

	<i>Determiner</i>	<i>Pronoun</i>
<i>Proximal</i>	wa	wase
<i>Medial</i>	par	parse
<i>Distal</i>	bu	buse
<i>Interrogative</i>	li	lise
<i>Relative</i>	kun	kunse

Table 2.4: Determiners and demonstrative pronouns

Chapter 3

Syntax

3.1 Verb stacking

3.2 Auxiliary verbs

3.2.1 *usnak* - hortative

from WeSiiN → usin + -ak → usnak

encodes a sort of imperative function so doesn't really take -ak suffix

3.2.1.1 Exhortative

let's do X, c'mon

3.2.1.2 Subjunctive?

in subordinate clauses, smth like "would do X"?

3.2.1.3

3.3 Subordinate clauses

Full verb phrases may be nominalized and act as an argument of another predicate.

3.3.1 Relative clauses

Relative clauses are a type of subordinate clauses that describes a referent's states or actions. They are internally headed, always verb-final, and the relative determiner *kun* is used to mark the head of the clause, i.e. the thing that is being described.

- (11) *FanaS iLaas-tu SaJauru*
person walk-REL sleepy:COP
'The person who walked home was sleepy.'

Clauses with a single argument do not require that the head is marked, as the argument is assumed to be the head by default. Still, the verb itself can be marked to describe the realization or performance of the action.

- (12) *inFiM kun iMaaw-tu naswi Diil*
children REL play -REL 1P.EX look
'We watched the playtime that the children were having'

In high-valency clauses, *kun* becomes more pertinent. The most agentive argument (subject) is considered to be the head of the phrase, but may still be marked for emphasis.

- (13) a. *(kun) FanaS iFuSa daw fit iLaastu nas Fiil*
REL person house to in walk:REL 1S see
'I saw the person who walked into the house.'
- b. *FanaS kun iFuSa daw fit iLaastu nas Fiil*
person REL house to in walk:REL 1S see

‘I saw the house that the person walked into.’

- c. *FanaS iFuSa daw fit kun iLaastu nas Fiil*
 person house to in REL walk:REL 1S see

‘I saw how the person walked into the house.’

An alternative to using a determiner is simply to topicalize a given constituent. Only noun phrases may be relativized through topicalization; the relative verb may not be periphrastically topicalized (i.e. left-dislocated), as this introduces major syntactical ambiguities.

Due to the syntactic constraints of certain secondary derivations, they cannot inflect relative NPs directly.

- (14) *CuSu iFaaMTu-uru
CuSu iFaaMTu kuns -uru
 cat jump:REL REL.PN-COP
‘it’s a talking cat.’

3.4 Comparative constructions

from-comparative, marks standard (to which is compared)

- (15) a. *PuMu FanaS fun MaNTa-uru*
 rabbit person from big -COP
‘The rabbit was bigger than a person.’
- b. *TaN nemi buse fun JaL -ila*
 TOP QUAL STD MRK
 time DU.IN DIST:PN from many_things-have
‘We have more time than them.’

3.5 Animacy hierarchy

- 0 Natural Forces
- 1 Pronouns (1 > 2 > 3)
- 2 Speakers of ?a?a-FaM
- 3 Non-speakers of ?a?a-FaM
- 4 Higher-order animals (mammals, octopus, intelligent creatures)
- 5 Body parts, tools, any inanimate object used for acting upon something
- 6 Lower-order animals (insects, mollusks, fish, worms, etc.)
- 7 Plants
- 8 Inanimate objects
- 9 Abstract concepts

Table 3.1: Animacy hierarchy in nominals

3.6 Causative constructions

?a?a-FaM has several different strategies when it comes to causative constructions, depending on the nature of the predicate in question. Some of these are morphological in nature, while others more periphrastic.

3.6.1 -ari for nominal and adjectival predicates

Simple nominal and adjectival predicates are turned into causatives using the translative suffix *-ari*. If the predicate in question would be expressed with *-uru* in its non-causative form, *-ari* is likely appropriate for the causative.

- (16) a. *QarFi SaFRa-uru*
 coffee hot -COP
'The coffee is hot.'
- b. *QarFi nas SaFRa-ari*
 coffee 1SG hot -TRANSL
'I heated up the coffee.'

When used with only one argument, verbs ending in *-ari* are assumed to have a null subject and the argument serving as the unaccusative object. This results in *-ari* also serving as 'to become' (the reason for its being glossed as 'translative') as well as 'to cause to be'.

- (17) *QarFi SaFRa-ari*
 coffee hot TRANSL
'The coffee got hot.'

3.6.2 Valency-increasing verb patterns

Which pattern is used to form the causative of a predicate depends largely on the nature of the intransitive form of that root. There are two different potentially valency-increasing patterns that can be used for verbs: the $\Theta_{ii}\Theta$ and the $aa\Theta_i\Theta$. The exact effect of each of these valency-increasing operations depends on the individual root; their behavior can differ.

For verbs that would be agentive ambitransitives in English, such as 'to eat', generally the behavior is rather straightforward: the $\Theta_{ii}\Theta$ form turns the verb into a straightforward transitive, and the $aa\Theta_i\Theta$ form serves as a causative of the intransitive.

- (18) a. *nas iNaam*
 1SG eat\INTR
'I was eating.'
- b. *nas kurKi Niim*
 1SG cookie eat\TR
'I ate a cookie.'
- c. *nas inMiM aaNiM*
 1SG parent_child\DIM eat\CAUS
'I fed my daughter.'

It's worth noting that object of the transitive verb cannot be included as the object of the causative verb; the causative verb can still only have two arguments.

- (19) **nas inMiM kurKi aaNiM*
 1SG parent_child\DIM cookie eat\CAUS

To express this notion, a periphrastic causative would be required.

Other types of verbal paradigms make this causative relationship less obvious and use these roots in other ways. For instance, for some roots the intransitive form is unaccusative or passive in nature. In these cases, the transitive form behaves as a causative:

- (20) a. *nas wan ManaM iNaaw*
 1SG POSS parent_child death\INTR
'My mother died.'
- b. *nas ManaM Niw*
 1SG parent_child death\TR
'I killed my mother.'

For these roots, the $aa\Theta_i\Theta$ form means the same thing as the $\Theta_{ii}\Theta$ form, but while the $\Theta_{ii}\Theta$ form implies a successfully completed action, the same implication is not present for the causative form.

- (21) *nas ManaM aaNiW*
 1SG parent_child death\CAUS
'I tried to kill my mother' (and she may or may not have died).

For many of these roots, the intransitive is identical in meaning to a 'passive' use of the transitive with an omitted subject; whether there is any noticeable difference between these depends on the verb.

- (22) *nas wan Manam Niiw*
 1SG POSS parent_child death\TR
'My mother was killed.'

Unergative verbs

3.6.3 Periphrastic causatives

In addition to the morphological causatives above and their aforementioned limitations, ʔaʔa-FaM has a periphrastic causative that can scope over a wider variety of predicates. This periphrasis is expressed through a serial construction using the verb *weSiin* 'to effect, to cause' followed by the description of the caused predicate.

- (23) *nas weSiin , QarFi mi KiiL*
 1SG bring_about coffee 2SG drink
'I caused you to drink coffee.' (lit., 'I brought it about, you drank coffee.')

Insert stuff about causatives and directness here.

Chapter 4

Semantics and pragmatics

4.1 Phatic expressions

Phatic expressions in ʔaʔa-FaM are all in some way related to the nouns they are derived from, suggesting an emphasis on acknowledging the addressee's current or upcoming actions. The addressee may respond with the same expression back, even if it does not apply to the original speaker in any way, or respond in kind with a more suitable expression.

The obligatory gender marking is a means of expressing your gender identity in an unintrusive manner.¹

FaSanara (from *FaS* 'life') is a catch-all greeting, suitable for any time of day.

saJanara (from *saJ* 'sleep') is similar in use to "good night", but is only used if the person is going to bed, not just leaving for the night.

YaTanara (from *yaT* 'travel not of one's own power or volition') is used to wish someone a pleasant trip where the person is not directly in control of their means of transportation, e.g. on public transport, a plane, or as a passenger in a car. To contrast, if the person has direct control over their travel, e.g. by walking or driving a car, one would rather use **PLaSanara** (from *PLaS* 'movement').

4.2 Name determiners

In ʔaʔa-FaM, when a name is used referentially (that is, pointing out a particular entity named that), the name must be preceded by a naming particle—*ha* for male names and *fu* for female names (derived from former personal pronouns that have now been replaced by demonstratives in other contexts). More recently, *na* has been innovated as a gender-neutral alternative (this new *na* being unrelated to the former first-person determiner).

These determiners are only required when the name in question is serving a referential function, so they are not necessary when referring to the name itself as a concept (such as in 'My name is ...' constructions) or in direct address.

- (24) a. *ha KARL-la fu JANNE iLaaF*
'Karl & Janne are in love.'
b. *pars KARL baj iMaaH*
'His name is Karl.'
c. *KARL, iWaaBak!*
'Karl, come back!'

4.3 Idiomatic expressions

CuMPu CuMPuuru = no shit, preaching to the choir

¹The real reason is that as Beth once ended a conversation with "sayonara", Knut noticed some coincidental similarities with the word *saJ* 'sleep' and the affix -un to indicate feminine gender, with the -ara reanalyzed as a phatic/optative marker of sorts.

Part II

Dictionary

Part III

Example Texts & Translations

