

# ʔaʔaFaM

A Reference Grammar

Bethany E. Toma, Knut F. K. Ulstrup

15. November 2019



# Foreword

ʔaʔaFaM is a constructed language.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>I Grammar</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Phonology</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Consonants . . . . .	3
1.2 Vowels . . . . .	3
1.2.1 Epenthetic schwa . . . . .	3
1.3 Prosody . . . . .	3
1.4 Morphophonemics . . . . .	4
1.5 Orthography . . . . .	4
1.5.1 Formal writing style . . . . .	4
1.5.2 Informal writing style . . . . .	4
<b>2 Morphology</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Underlying roots . . . . .	5
2.2 Derivational morphology . . . . .	5
2.2.1 Primary derivation . . . . .	5
2.2.2 Secondary derivation . . . . .	5
2.2.2.1 <i>-uru</i> - ‘to be’ . . . . .	6
2.2.2.2 <i>-ila</i> - ‘to have’ . . . . .	6
2.2.2.3 <i>-ara</i> - wishes and greetings . . . . .	6
2.2.2.4 <i>-iri</i> - ‘to make’ . . . . .	6
2.2.2.5 <i>-ana</i> - person . . . . .	6
2.2.2.6 <i>-ari</i> - ‘to become’, ‘to cause to be’ . . . . .	6
2.2.3 Gender . . . . .	6
2.3 Inflectional morphology . . . . .	6
2.3.1 Verb finals . . . . .	6
2.3.2 Evidential modality . . . . .	6
2.4 Pronouns and determiners . . . . .	6
<b>3 Syntax</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Verb stacking . . . . .	7
3.2 Subordinate clauses . . . . .	7
3.2.1 Relative clauses . . . . .	7
3.3 Comparative constructions . . . . .	7
3.4 Animacy hierarchy . . . . .	8
3.5 Causative constructions . . . . .	8
3.5.1 <i>-ari</i> for nominal and adjectival predicates . . . . .	8
3.5.2 Valency-increasing verb patterns . . . . .	8
3.5.3 Periphrastic causatives . . . . .	9
<b>4 Semantics and pragmatics</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Phatic expressions . . . . .	11
4.2 Idiomatic expressions . . . . .	11

<b>II Dictionary</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Roots and Derived Words</b>	<b>15</b>
B—T . . . . .	15
F—M . . . . .	15
K—L . . . . .	15
PL—S . . . . .	16
Q—H . . . . .	16
S—J . . . . .	16
SL—S . . . . .	16
<b>Rootless Words</b>	<b>17</b>
Auxiliary Verbs . . . . .	17
Postpositions . . . . .	17
Pronouns . . . . .	17
Numbers . . . . .	17
Attitudinals . . . . .	17
<b>III Example Texts &amp; Translations</b>	<b>19</b>



**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	$\phi$	$s$	$\zeta \sim x \sim \chi \sim \text{h} \sim h$			
Approximant		$l$	$j$	$w$		
Nasal	$m$	$n$				
Rhotic		$r \sim \text{r} \sim \text{ɹ} \sim \text{ɻ} \sim \text{ɽ} \sim \text{ɽ} \sim \text{ɽ} \sim \text{ɽ}$				

Table 1.1: Phonemic Consonant Inventory

### 1.2 Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	$i \text{ (i:)}$		$u \text{ (u:)}$
Mid		$\text{ə}$	
Open		$a \text{ (a:)}$	

Table 1.2: Phonemic Vowel Inventory

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

## 1.4 Morphophonemics

## 1.5 Orthography

ʔaʔaFAM 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 palatal approximant is written using ⟨j⟩, and the rhotic is, of course, written as ⟨r⟩. 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 ʔaʔaFAM also allows for several shorthand abbreviations that tend not to be used in more formal style.

## Chapter 2

# Morphology

### 2.1 Underlying roots

### 2.2 Derivational morphology

ʔaʔaFam 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.

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Example</i>
ΘaΘ	Abstract noun	SaJ sleep (cf. isaaj ‘to sleep’) KaL rainfall (cf. KurLi ‘raindrop’)
ΘanaΘ	Person of X, Agentive noun	KanaJ author (cf. KiiJ ‘to write X’)
ΘarΘi	Liquid noun	QarFi coffee (cf. iQaaF ‘to drink coffee’)
ΘurΘi	Object noun	NurMi food (cf. Niim ‘to eat X’)
ΘidiΘ	Loose granular mass	WidiW sugar (cf. wawa ‘sweet’)
ΘasiΘ	Long slender object	BasiT hair (cf. BuliT ‘head’)
ΘuliΘ	Associated body part	BuliT head (cf. iBaaT ‘to understand’)
mΘiΘ	Instrument, tool	mRiW weapon (cf. RaQ ‘pain’)
iΘuΘa	Place of X/with X attribute	iHuJa night (cf. HaTa ‘dark’)
ΘiiΘ	Transitive verb	Fiis to give birth to (cf. Fanas ‘person’)
iΘaaΘ	Intransitive verb	iʔaaʔ to act stupidly (cf. eʔaʔa ‘dumb’)
aaΘiΘ	Causative verb	TBD TBD
ΘaΘa	Primary attribute	SaFRa hot (cf. SaFeR ‘heat’)
ΘuΘu	Animal	BuRKu dog (cf. BaRK ‘bark’)
ΘuuΘ	Country	FuuNS France (cf. FuNSu ‘frog’)
ΘajuΘa	Flat plane, surface	KajuLa Water surface (cf. KarLi ‘water’)

Table 2.1: Primary derivation patterns

#### 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’2.2.2.2 *-ila* - ‘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 *-ari* - ‘to become’, ‘to cause to be’

## 2.2.3 Gender

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

<i>-un</i>	Feminine gender
<i>-aj</i>	Masculine gender
<i>-uj</i>	Explicitly non-binary
<i>-an</i>	Gender-neutral, agender

## 2.3 Inflectional morphology

## 2.3.1 Verb finals

## 2.3.2 Evidential modality

## 2.4 Pronouns and determiners

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

Table 2.2: Discourse participant pronouns

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

Table 2.3: Determiners and demonstrative pronouns

## Chapter 3

# Syntax

### 3.1 Verb stacking

### 3.2 Subordinate clauses

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

#### 3.2.1 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.

- (1) *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.

- (2) *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.

- (3) 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.

### 3.3 Comparative constructions

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

- (4) 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.’

### 3.4 Animacy hierarchy

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

Table 3.1: Animacy hierarchy in nominals

### 3.5 Causative constructions

?a?afam 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.

#### 3.5.1 -*ari* for nominal and adjectival predicates

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

- (5) 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 ‘translatable’) as well as ‘to cause to be’.

- (6) *QarFi SaFRa-ari*  
 coffee hot TRANSL  
 ‘The coffee got hot.’

#### 3.5.2 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.

- (7) 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.

- (8) \**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:

- (9) a. *nas wan Manam iNaaw*  
1SG POSS parent\_child death\INTR  
‘My mother died.’
- b. *nas Manam NiiW*  
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.

- (10) *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.

- (11) *nas wan Manam NiiW*  
1SG POSS parent\_child death\TR  
‘My mother was killed.’

Unergative verbs

### 3.5.3 Periphrastic causatives

In addition to the morphological causatives above and their aforementioned limitations,  $\text{ʔaʔaFaM}$  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.

- (12) *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 ʔaʔaFAM 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.<sup>1</sup>

**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.

### 4.2 Idiomatic expressions

CuMPu CuMPuuru = no shit, preaching to the choir

---

<sup>1</sup>The 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**



# Roots and Derived Words

## B—T

### BiiT • v.tr.

1. to know *smth.*, to understand *smth.*  
mi iBaaRBe? kajuc nas BiiT  
'I know that you want to leave.'
2. to love *sme.* like a brother, to have a close platonic bond with *sme.*, to be best friends with *sme.*  
nas JanaB BiiTibi  
'I love my friends.'  
(NB: the subject is reversed from its use as 'to understand': mi nas BiiTibi means 'you understand me' but 'I love you'.)

### iBaaT • v.intr.

1. to know, to understand, to be in a state of knowing or understanding what is going on
2. (when used reciprocally) to love each other, to have a close platonic bond, to be the best of friends  
nemi iBaaTami  
'The two of us are thick as thieves.'

## F—M

### aaFiM • v.

to quote *sme.*

### aFiMu • n.

1. book
2. alphabet soup

### FaM • n.

language, speech, way of speaking

### FiiM • v.tr.

to say *smth.*, to speak *smth.*, to tell *smth.*

### iFaam • v.intr.

to talk, to speak, to chatter

### inFiM • n.

word

### inFiMini • n.

letter, character, symbol

### ?a?aFaM • n.

this language, ?a?aFaM

## K—L

### aKiLu • n.

container of water to be drunk from, glass, cup, water bottle

MARK se kaj men aKiLuila  
'Mark owned five water bottles.'

### iKaaL • v.intr.

1. (impersonal) to be a rainy day  
wajHuJa iKaaL  
'Today's a rainy day.'
2. (impersonal) to be raining  
imUNTa daw nas iJaaTe? kaj da buse fit iKaaL  
'I wanted to go to the mountains, but it's raining there.'

### KajuLa • n.

1. the surface of a body of water  
naswi KajuLa tui FiiLami? dak  
'We could see ourselves on the water's surface.'
2. puddle  
nas KajuLa daw tui iLaas  
'I stepped in a puddle.'
3. map  
par KajuLa SWuuTilali?  
'Is Switzerland on that map?'

### KaL • n.

humidity, wetness, dampness

iFuSa JaBauru, da LajuSa KaLila  
'The house is lovely, but the floors are damp.'

### KaLa • adj.

1. covered in water, saturated with water, wet, soaked

KaLa mLiS SaFRaariak  
'Warm up your wet shoes.'

2. fluid, liquid, melted

KasiL KaLa CurKLiila  
'The river was made of melted chocolate'

**KarLi • n.**

liquid water, fresh water, water not part of a  
body of water or stream, water served as a bev-  
erage

mi NaKa KarLiilali?  
'Do you have any cold water?'

**KasiL • n.**

1. river, stream  
2. stream or sprinkle of water, as from a faucet or  
tap

iSuNa BaBa KasiLila  
'The shower is low-flow'  
(lit., 'The shower has a mild stream')

**KuLi • adj., n.**

blue, the color blue

**KuLu • n.**

fish, fish-adjacent aquatic animal

**KurLi • n.**

the Earth, the globe

**PL—S**

**aaPLiS • v.**

to move *smth.* to a place

**aPLiSu • n.**

generic container, bin, box

**iPLaas • v.**

to be in a place

**PLasiS • n.**

line, row

**PLiis • v.**

to move oneself to a place

**Q—H**

**QasiH • n.**

snake

**QuHu • n.**

lizard, reptile

**S—J**

**isaaJ • v.**

to sleep

**saJ • n.**

sleep, the state of being asleep

**saja • adj.**

sleepy, tired, exhausted

**saJanara • int.**

may you sleep well, have a good night  
the gender affix *-an* may be substituted with a more  
apt affix.

**suliJ • n.**

the human back

**SL—S**

**aasLiS • v.**

to shut *smth.* inside a container or behind a door

**iSLaas • v.**

to be closed, to be locked

**mSLiS • n.**

1 key

2 passcode, PIN number

**SLasiS • n.**

zipper

**SLiis • v.**

to close, to shut, to lock

# Rootless Words

## Auxiliary Verbs

**dak** • *aux.*

can, to be able to, to be allowed to

**hwii** • *aux.*

not, no, don't, never

**jaa** • *aux.*

already, previously, by now

**kaj** • *aux.*

to want to, to be going to

**lit** • *aux.*

to very

**naw** • *aux.*

to stop

**tuuq** • *aux.*

must, to have to

## Postpositions

## Pronouns

## Numbers

## Attitudinals





### **Part III**

## **Example Texts & Translations**

