

A Grammar of Ayeri

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DOCUMENTING A FICTIONAL LANGUAGE

by Carsten Becker

Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource

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Ayeri is a fictional language spoken by fictional people in a fictional setting, and as such is not related to any naturally existing languages. It is thus not to be confused with *Azeri*, a Turkic language spoken in Azerbaijan and its surrounding countries. Ayeri's vocabulary is entirely a priori, this means, no real-world languages have been used specifically as sources of vocabulary. Due to the language's sound and spelling aesthetic being inspired by Austronesian languages, it is not surprising if overlaps with existing words in those languages happen accidentally.

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⚙️ <https://github.com/carbeck/ayerigrammar/>
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Glossing Abbreviations

I	First person	M	Masculine
2	Second person	N	Neuter
3	Third person	NEG	Negative
A	Agent	NMLZ	Nominalizer
ACC	Accusative	NN	Noun
AGTZ	Agentizer	NOM	Nominative
AN	Animate	NPST	Near past
AT	Agent topic	P	Patient
CAUS	Causative	PL	Plural
DAT	Dative	PROG	Progressive
F	Feminine	PST	Past
FUT	Future	PT	Patient topic
GEN	Genitive	PTCP	Participle
HAB	Habitative	REL	Relative
IMP	Imperative	RPST	Remote past
INAN	Inanimate	SBJ	Subject
INDF	Indefinite	SG	Singular
INS	Instrumental	SUPL	Superlative
LOC	Locative	TOP	Topic
LOCT	Locative topic	VB	Verb

Preface

This is my latest attempt to write a grammar of Ayeri, a fictional language which I have been developing since December 2003. Getting to work on grammar writing again was triggered by a growing dissatisfaction with not having a central place of documentation, when the first thing people look for on my website is often the grammar, incomplete as well as partially inaccurate and outdated as it may be. In addition to that, there was a seminar on fictional languages at the University of Tübingen, Germany, in the summer semester of 2016 (Buch 2016). Ayeri was one of the languages that was chosen for students to explore and evaluate.

The student group who worked on Ayeri came to the conclusion that its documentation is severely lacking in the description of basic elements and assumptions, since whole chapters of the grammar had been missing to date (Boga et al. 2016: 12).¹ This is to say that previous attempts of writing a full-fledged grammar of Ayeri have been incomplete due to loss of enthusiasm and creeping neglect.

Although the *Ayeri Grammar* has so far been lying dormant for five years, I have written a whole number of blog articles detailing various grammatical issues (Becker 2016: Blog). These articles have been taken into consideration here. This grammar writing attempt is thus not only a transferral to a different typesetting system, but constitutes an extension to previous formal documentation as well.

I hope that by transferring my previous grammar writing from LibreOffice to L^AT_EX, combined with using GitHub as a version control system, maintaining and editing will become faster, more transparent, and more elegant, since L^AT_EX operates on plain text files, and version control helps in keeping track of changes over time.

Carsten Becker
Marburg, July 18, 2016

¹  *Kutānas-ikan* ‘thanks a lot’ to Bella Boga, Madita Breuninger, Thora Daneyko, and Martina Stama-Kirr for their hard work on making sense of my published materials in spite of information being scattered all over the place, as well as their providing me with the presentation concluding their group work.

o Introduction

In December 2003, the idea for a new fictional language was born, an idea that turned out to stick with me for over 10 years now.¹ At that time, my seventeen years old self was still fairly new to this whole making-up languages business, read things about linguistics here and there, and was not shy to ask questions about terminology (and, looking at old mails, a little impertinently teenager-like so), for example on *Conlang-L* and the *Zompist Bulletin Board*. One thing seemed to catch my interest especially: syntactic alignments other than the NOM/ACC of the few languages I was familiar with, that is, German, English, and French. Apparently this curiosity was big enough for me to grow bored with my second fictional language, Daléian (declared ‘quite complete’ after maybe half a year of work or so), and to start something new from scratch in order to put newly acquired knowledge to test.

I had read about “trigger languages” on *Conlang-L* and wanted to try my hands on making my own. I cannot remember how long it took me to come up with a first draft of an Ayeri grammar, however, I do remember having been told that a good language cannot be made in a summer. Of course, I still did not really know what I was doing then, even though I thought I had understood things and authoritatively declared “this is how it works” in my first grammar draft when things sometimes really do not work that way. But at least an interest had been whetted.

In order to illustrate the various stages from the beginnings to current Ayeri, I went through some old backups contemporary with the very early days. Here is a sentence from the oldest existing document related to it, titled “Draft of & Ideas for my 3rd Conlang”—the file’s last-changed date is December 14, 2003, though I remember having started work on Ayeri in early December. I added glossing for convenience and according to what I could reconstruct from the notes. This uses vocabulary and grammatical markers just made up on the spot and for illustrative purposes; little of it actually managed to make it into actual work on Ayeri:

¹ Most of the text here is taken from the blog article, “Happy 10th anniversary, Ayeri!” (Becker 2013) with some slight rephrasings and extensions.

- (1) *Ayevhoi agiaemaesim coyaielieðamavir vhaieloyaŋaiye.*
 Ay-evhoi agia-ema-esim coyai-el-i-eðam-avir vhai-el-o-yaŋa-iyē
 3SG.AN-SBJ read-VB-SBJ.AN book-NN-AN-INDF-P bed-NN-INAN-ON-LOC
 ‘He reads a book on the bed.’

According to the grammar draft of September 5, 2004, this would have already changed to:

- (2) *Ang layaiyain mecoyalei ling *pinamea.*
 Ang laya-iy-a-in me-coya-lei ling *pinam-ea
 A.SBJ read-3SG.AN₁-a₁-SBJ INDF.INAN-book-P.INAN top.of bed-LOC
 ‘He reads a book on the bed.’

A word for ‘bed’—𐄓𐄔𐄕 *pinam*—was only (re-)introduced on October 24, 2008, however. In the current state of Ayeri, I would translate the sentence as follows:

- (3) *Ang layaya koyaley ling pinamya.*
 Ang laya=ya.Ø koya-ley ling pinam-ya
 AT read=3SG.M.TOP book-P.INAN top.of bed-LOC
 ‘He reads a book on a/the bed.’

As you can see, quite a bit of morphology got lost already early on, especially the overt part-of-speech marking (!) and animacy marking on nouns. Also, prepositions were just incorporated into a noun complex as suffixes apparently. Gender was originally only divided into animate and inanimate, but I changed that at some point because only being really familiar with European languages, it felt awkward to me not to be able to explicitly distinguish ‘he’, ‘she’, and ‘it’.

A feature that also got lost is the assignment of thematic vowels in personal pronouns to third-person referents: originally, every third-person referent newly introduced into discourse would be assigned one of /a e i o u/ to disambiguate, and there was even a morpheme to mark that the speaker wanted to dissolve the association. Constituent order was theoretically variable at first, but I preferred SVO/AVP due to familiarity with that. Later on, however, I settled on VSO/VAP. Also, I had no idea about what was called “trigger morphology” on *Conlang-L* for the longest time—essentially, this referred to the Austronesian, or Philippine, alignment. I am not claiming that I know all about it now, just that due to reading up on the topic, I have a slightly more informed understanding now. Orthography changed as well over the years, so ⟨c⟩ in the early examples encodes the /k/ sound, not /tʃ/ as it does today; diphthongs were spelled as ⟨Vi⟩ instead of modern ⟨Vy⟩.

What was definitely beneficial for the development of Ayeri was the ever increasing amount of linguistics materials available online and my entering university (to study literature) in 2009, where I learned how to do research and also had a lot of interesting books available at the library.

One of the things people regularly compliment me on is Ayeri's script—note, however, that Tahano Hikamu was not the first one I came up with for Ayeri. Apparently, I had already been fascinated with the look of Javanese/Balinese writing early on;² Figure 0.1 shows a draft dated February 9, 2004. However, the letter shapes in this draft looked so confusingly alike that I could never memorize them. About a year later, I came up with the draft in Figure 0.2. What is titled “Another Experimental Script” there is what would later turn into Tahano Hikamu, Ayeri's ‘native’ script. According to the notes in my fictional language ring binder, the script looked much the same as today about a year from then, but things have only been mostly stable since about 2008.


An important date in the history of Ayeri was when I decided to set up an improved website for Ayeri that would include a blog. The idea was that this way, I could more freely write on whatever detail I currently interested me in Ayeri, outside of the constraints of the Grammar. Thus, *Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource* launched on March 1, 2011. Being able to write short articles, however, probably also led to neglecting work on the actual formal reference grammar, which had been lying dormant from January 2011 on. This was always on the premise that I would eventually include the information from blog articles in the grammar. However, juggling such a big document had always felt daunting, so I let laziness take the better part of me eventually as enthusiasm gradually subsided.³ This renewed attempt at documentation has been started with the intention to right those wrongs.


I hope that by now it should be clear which kind of a fictional language Ayeri is: a personal, artistic language—or *artlang* in community parlance. Thus, my goal in creating Ayeri is not to propose yet another international auxiliary language, like Esperanto. It is also not my goal to make it as logical as possible, like Lojban. Neither is it my goal to engineer it towards certain underlying premises, for example, to reach a maximal amount of information density, like Ithkuil, or to get by on as few different words as possible, like Toki Pona. It is also not a ‘what-if’ language in the sense of “What could the modern language of Old Irish speakers transplanted to Australia look like?” or “Latin piped through Athabascan sound changes.”

² Compare, for instance, the charts in Kuipers and McDermott (1996). The Wikipedia articles on either script contain a number of images depicting the scripts in use, both current and historic.

³ Let me add to my defense, however, that I also worked on my B.A. thesis in 2013 and my M.A. thesis in 2016, which required several months of preparation each and thus left me largely unable to work much on Ayeri.

Figure 0.1: First design for an Ayeri script (February 9, 2004)

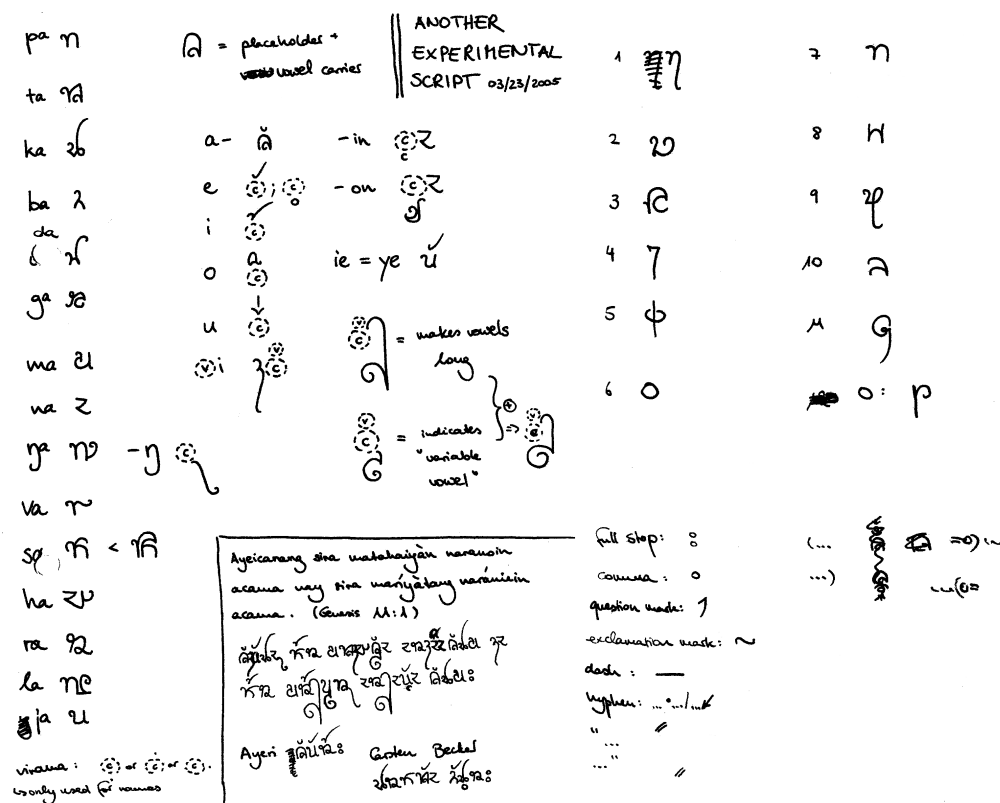
ba	𐀀	ma	𐀁	va	𐀂	harden consonant:  e.g. "ca": 𐀃 e.g. "pa": 𐀄
da	𐀅	na	𐀆	sa	𐀇	
ga	𐀈	nga	𐀉	ha	𐀊	
ra	𐀋	la	𐀌	ya	𐀍	

a-	𐀎	𐀏 𐀐 𐀑 𐀒 𐀓	𐀔 𐀕 𐀖 𐀗 𐀘	𐀙 𐀚 𐀛 𐀜 𐀝	var A 𐀞 var E 𐀟 var I 𐀠 var O 𐀡 var U 𐀢	mute -a of a consonant: 
e-	𐀎					
i-	𐀎					
-e	2					
-i	𐀑					
-o	𐀒					
-u	𐀓					

Ayeri is rather an attempt to create an artificial language for personal enjoyment and intellectual stimulation by creating a feedback loop between reading up on linguistics and actively devising rules for a fictional language accordingly, to see how things work within the frame I created, or to try and see whether certain ideas work together at all when combined, and to better understand why they do or do not. Ayeri will only ever be as perfect as miniature models of things can be, since it has not grown organically from millenia of human interaction, and I cannot and will never know about each and every aspect of language myself, in spite of continued curiosity about these matters. Nor will it be possible for me to replicate all the fascinating twists and irregularities that natural languages normally entail. The ultimate goal in my work on Ayeri is, I suppose, to make it emulate natural languages to at least some degree of depth and complexity.

In writing this grammar, I hope that I will find a good balance between applying

Figure 0.2: First draft for Tahano Hikamu (March 23, 2005)



linguistic theory to already existing materials and ideas, and going forth to create rules for aspects of the language that have so far been neglected, often due to my not being aware of them. In my opinion, the split between being able to apply methods of linguistics to what has grown over the course of more than a decade on the one hand, and discovering and developing new aspects of the language on the other is what makes Ayer an interesting piece of “informed nonsense,” as a colleague of mine once put it.

Errors are all mine. If my English is not always fully idiomatic, you find that I got my terminology wrong, or not all aspects of the language or its description are equally well worked-out—which are all very likely events—I ask you to bear with me. For one, English is not my native language, and second, I put up the grammar on GitHub in the hope of making it easier to fix and extend things through patches.⁴ This also means that you can file an Issue there in case of issues if you feel inclined to do so. Criticism is always welcome as long as it is constructive.

⁴ See <https://github.com/carbeck/ayerigrammar/>.

1 Phonology

This chapter will present charts depicting the phoneme inventory of Ayeri and describe the various commonly encountered allophones of both consonants and vowels. Following this, a detailed statistical analysis of the words found in a number of translated texts from 2008 to 2016 as well as dictionary entries up to July 2016 will produce insights into Ayeri's phonotactics. Some notes on stress patterns and intonation will close the chapter.

1.1 Phoneme Inventory

1.1.1 Consonants

At 17 consonants, Ayeri has a “moderately small” inventory, according to Maddieson (2013a). Figure 1.1 shows the full chart of consonant phonemes.

Regarding allophony, /tj kj/ and /dj gj/ are usually realized as [tʃ] and [dʒ], respectively, except if a homorganic nasal /n/ or /ŋ/ is preceding: for instance, ႳႳႳ *ankyū* /'aŋkju/ ‘really’ is realized as [ʔaŋkju], not as *[ʔaŋtʃu] or *[ʔantʃu]. It is important to note, however, that besides this synchronic palatalization process leading to [tʃ] and [dʒ] as *allophones*, there is also a diachronic one in parallel here—or the diachronic process is still ongoing. For example, there is no way to predict whether ႳႳႳ *cuna* ‘original, initial’, ႳႳႳ *panca* ‘finally, eventually’, and ႳႳႳ *vac-* ‘like’, or ႳႳႳ *jaraṇ* ‘pilgrimage’, ႳႳႳ *aja-* ‘play’, and ႳႳႳ *nui-* ‘pour’ have /tj/ or /kj/, /dj/ or /gj/, respectively, unless we consider the clues given by the conservative native spellings of the respective words.¹ We can rather assume two sound changes, (1) tj, kj → tʃ, and (2) dj, gj → dʒ, leading to the *phonemes* /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ in the present-day language.

¹ Actual scribes would typically err in cases where the merger is complete, so this strategy would, in fact, be of limited use in the real world.

Figure 1.1: Consonant inventory (divergent orthography in pointed brackets>)

	Bilabials		Labiodentals		Alveolars		Palatals		Velars		Glottals	
Plosives	p	b			t	d			k	g		
Affricates					tʃ <c>	dʒ <j>						
Nasals		m				n				ŋ <ng>		
Fricatives			v		s						h	
Taps/Flaps						r						
Approximants					l		j <y>					

The plural marker ၵ -ye is commonly contracted to [dʒ] when a case suffix beginning with a vowel follows:²

- (4) a. ဘဉ်းယံ *nyānyēang* → *nyānjang* [ˈnjaːndʒaŋ] ‘persons’ (person-PL-A);
 b. ခွဲယံ *netuyēas* → *netujas* [neˈtudʒas] ‘brothers’ (brother-PL-P).

The plural marker may also contract before the locative marker ၵ -ya and the dative marker ၵ -yam, basically for dissimilation:³

- (5) a. ခ်းယံ *nivayēya* → *nivajya* [niˈvadʒja] ‘at the eyes’ (eye-PL-LOC);
 b. မိယံ *maviyēyam* → *mavijyam* [maˈvidʒjam] ‘to the sheep’ (sheep-PL-DAT).

Dissimilation of the sequence ၵ -yaya is attested in my translation of Kafka’s short story “Eine kaiserliche Botschaft,” where the relative pronoun ၵ *siyaya* appears transcribed as *sijya*:

As far as morphophonology is concerned, the relative pronoun complex *sijya* ‘in/at/on which.LOC’ is interesting in so far as it is a contraction of **siyaya* ‘REL-LOC-LOC’ that I introduced here [...] Since this feature does not occur in previous texts, let’s assume it’s an acceptable variant. (Becker 2012: 12)

The contraction happens “only if both parts are grammatical suffixes” (12), however, so the environments this contraction may appear in are effectively limited to relative pronouns combining locative and locative, or locative and dative marking.

The word ဂုယံ *lajāy* ‘student’ is special in that it is the only word with ဂ [dʒa] so far. Presumably it is derived from the verb ဂုယံ *laya-* ‘read’ with the agentive suffix ၵ -*maya*, except the shortening of the suffix—with or without compensatory lengthening of the final vowel of the modified word stem—was applied irregularly, possibly via **ဂုယံ* **layāya*. The regular form ဂုယံ *layamaya* means ‘reader’.

Lastly, /h/ may be realized as [ç] before front vowels, and as [x] before back vowels:

- (6) a. တံ *tabi* [ˈtaçi] ‘favorable’;
 b. ခံ *babo* [ˈbaxo] ‘loud’.

While vowels become long when two identical vowels come into succession, consonants do not geminate but are treated like a single consonant:

² The customary romanization uses ⟨c⟩ and ⟨j⟩ for allophonic cases of [tʃ] and [dʒ] as well.

³ ခ -*ea* also occurs as an allomorph, so that ၵ -ye + ခ -*ea* → ခ -*yēa*.

- (7) a. တပ်တပ် *tavvāng* [ta'va:ŋ] 'you get' (get=2SG.A),
 b. ညှပ်တပ် *disyyang* [di'sjaŋ] 'I fasten' (fasten=1SG.A).

With diphthongs, the sequence /V₁.j/ is treated as though it were /Vj.j/, so the double /j/ simplifies to just a single /j/; however, the vowel remains lax in spite of being phonetically in an open position now:

- (8) ပေါက်ပင် *tipuyya* [ti'pu.ja] 'on the grass' (grass-LOC).

1.1.2 Vowels

Figure 1.2: Vowel inventory (divergent orthography in pointed brackets>)

	Front	Center	Back
High	i, i: ⟨ī⟩		u, u: ⟨ū⟩
Mid	e, e: ⟨ē⟩	ə ⟨ə, e⟩	o, o: ⟨ō⟩
Back		a, a: ⟨ā⟩	

Ayeri's vowel system distinguishes five qualities, as shown in Figure 1.2; Maddieson (2013c) classifies this as "average." Length, however, is also a factor, and there are five diphthongs as well, as we will see below. At $\frac{17}{5}$, the consonant–vowel ratio is 4.25, which Maddieson (2013b) again classifies as "average," although Ayeri finds itself at the upper end of the tier.

The lax vowels [ɪ ɛ ɔ ʊ] occur as allophones of their tense counterparts /i e o u/ in closed syllables, for example:

- (9) a. နိုင် *ming* [mɪŋ] 'can, be able',
 b. အားလုံး *enya* ['ɛn.ja] 'everyone',
 c. ပြင်ပ *agon* ['a.gɔŋ] 'outer, foreign', and
 d. နာကျင် *pakur* ['pa.kʊɾ] 'ill, sick'.

/ə/ occurs marginally in the tense prefixes န : *kə*- 'NPST', မ : *mə*- 'PST', ပ : *və*- 'RPST', as well as in the prefix မေး : *mə*- 'some, whichever'. Otherwise, [ə] acts as an allophone of /e/ in final unstressed position, for instance, in the word အခင်း *mine* ['minə] 'affair, matter, issue'.

Ayeri also possesses a number of diphthongs, these are: /ai ei ɔi ʊi au/, spelled ⟨ay⟩, ⟨ey⟩, ⟨oy⟩, ⟨uy⟩, and ⟨au⟩. Furthermore, there are long equivalents of the short vowels: /i: e: a: o: u:/; in romanization, long vowels are marked with a macron ⟨̄⟩ over the letter. Long vowels are lexicalized in a few words, for example:

- (10) a. ṇṣa *nīsa* ‘wanted’, pasisa ‘interesting’;
 b. arēn ‘anyway, however’, lēra ‘whore’;
 c. lā ‘tongue’, yāng ‘he’ (he.A);
 d. nōn ‘will, intention’; and
 e. babūan ‘barbarian’.⁴

Otherwise, long vowels result from two same vowels next to each other, for instance:

- (11) aja- ‘play’ + -an ‘NMLZ’ \rightarrow ajān ‘game, play’.

Morphophonologically, long vowels also occur in double-marked relative pronouns where the agreement marker for the relative clause’s head has been omitted, for instance, sinā ‘of which, about which’, as in the following example:

- (12) *Le turayāng taman sinā ang ningay*
Le tura-yāng [taman-Ø]₁ si-Ø₁-na ang ning=ay.Ø
 PT.INAN send=3SG.M.A letter-TOP REL-PT.INAN-GEN AT tell=1SG.TOP
tamala vās.
tamala vās
 yesterday 2SG.P

‘The letter which I told you about yesterday, he sent it.’

This is to disambiguate it from the plain genitive-marked relative pronoun ṣina ‘which.GEN’:⁵

- (13) *tamanreng ledanena nā sina koronvāng*
taman-reng [ledan-ena nā]₁ si-na₁ koron-vāng
 letter-A.INAN friend-GEN 1SG.GEN REL-GEN know=2SG.A

‘the letter of my friend which you know’

As pointed out in (10c), the word lā ‘tongue’ ends in a long vowel, so the question is what happens when a case suffix beginning with a vowel is appended. To avoid a hiatus, a glide /j/ may be inserted, so both of the following renditions are possible:

⁴ I have gone years without /u:/, but it has always seemed slightly odd to me to lack a vowel in that position when all other vowels can be long. Therefore, babūan ‘barbarian’ and its adjective babū ‘barbarian (adj.)’ were coined as prankayē —things ‘that you put in specifically to make things fit’, another new coining this decision resulted in.

⁵ A variant which combines the allomorphs of the relativizer and the genitive case marker in the opposite way also exists: $\text{s-} + \text{-ena} \rightarrow \text{ṣena}$.

- (14) a. *Aku lāas!*
 Aka-u lā-as
 swallow-IMP tongue-P
 ‘Shut up!’
 b. *Aku lāyas!*
 (idem)

With diphthongs—as described above—, /ɪ/ coalesces with a following /j/ to /j/, but the initial vowel will not become tense, thus:

- (15) ၵိပူယ tipuyya [ti'pu.ja] ‘on the grass’ (grass-LOC).

Moreover, /u/ is commonly realized as [w] when followed by a vowel, for example in ဘွာကယာ *huākaya* ['wa:kaja] ‘frog’ or ရွာ *rua-* [rwa] ‘have to, must’. [w] may also be an allophone of /uj/, as in ၵာသွယ် *adauyi* [a'dawi] ‘then’, ၵာသွယ် *edaui* [e'dawi] ‘now’, or နေကွယ် *nekuyi* ['nekwi] ‘eyebrows’. The negative suffix -oy is also commonly contracted to [w] before a diphthong:

- (16) မိန့်ဝှာယ *mingoyay* → *minguay* [miŋ'wai] ‘I cannot’ (can-NEG=ISG.TOP).

1.2 Phonotactics

For the purpose of this statistical analysis, most of the available translations into Ayeri from late 2008 to July 2016 have been used as a text corpus;⁶ example sentences from various blog articles have also been added, as well as dictionary entries for all nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, adpositions, conjunctions, and numerals if they were not prefixes or suffixes.⁷ Borrowings have been deleted if they could not

⁶ These texts are: A Medieval Neighborhood Dispute (2015), A Message from the Emperor (2012), Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2011), The Beginning of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (2014), Conlang Christmas Card Exchange 2008/09 (2009), Conlang Holiday Card Exchange 2010/11 (2011), Conlang Relay 15 (2008), Conlang Relay 17 (2010), Conlang Relay 18 (2011), The First Two Chapters from Saint-Exupéry’s *Le Petit Prince* (2013), The Four Candles (2010), Honey Everlasting (2014), LCC4 Relay (2011), The Lord’s Prayer (2015), The North Wind and the Sun (2016), The Origin of the Wind (2009), Ozymandias (2011), Please Call Stella ... (2008), Psalm 23 (2013), The Scientific Method (2014), The Sheep and the Horses (2012), Sugar Fairies (2011), The Upside-Down Ice Skater (2009). The texts can be accessed from Becker (2016: Examples).

⁷ This section updates and extends a previous analysis of the phonological makeup of dictionary entries (Becker 2010). The previous study had its focus on gathering frequency statistics for word generation, however, we want to know about words generally here.

reasonably be words in Ayeri. Altogether, the corpus comprises 5,500 words, which is a very small figure for such a study, but there are only so many texts available unfortunately. Words may occur more than once.

Among the dictionary entries, verbs have notably been ignored, since verb stems alone do not constitute independent words—they are always inflected in some way, so that they may end in consonants or consonant clusters that independent words cannot end in. This also has repercussions on syllabification and stress, which depend on the inflection of the verb stem:

Figure 1.3: Syllabification of inflected verbs

Suffix	<i>ca-</i> ‘love’	<i>gum-</i> ‘work’	<i>babr-</i> ‘mumble’
- <i>ay</i> (1SG)	cáy	gu.máy	ba.bráy
- <i>va</i> (2SG)	cá.va	gúm.va	ba.brá.va
- <i>yam</i> (PTCP)	cá.yam	gúm.yam	bá.bryam

For the purpose of gathering statistics on phonemes, the words from translated texts were converted to IPA first. Fortunately, this is rather easy as Ayeri’s romanization is very straightforward. Syllable breaks have also been inserted semi-automatically.

1.2.1 Number of Syllables per Word

First, let us see how many syllables words commonly have (see Table 1.1). The higher the syllable count, the more likely it is for them to be compounds or inflected words.

Table 1.1: Frequency of words with different numbers of syllables (n = 5500)

Segment	Count	Percentage
2 syllables	2277	41.40 %
3 syllables	1393	25.33 %
1 syllable	1201	21.84 %
4 syllables	547	9.95 %
5 syllables	74	1.35 %
6 syllables	8	0.15 %

Two-syllable words make up the bulk of the sample, which is not surprising since 1,072 entries (55.43 %) in the dictionary subsample are disyllabic: most of Ayeri’s roots are disyllabic. Unsurprisingly, most monosyllabic words are function words like the ones cited below. In the following, I will quote a few examples for each number of syllables per word:

- (17) a. ၼံ ၵ ang (AT),
 နဲ nay ‘and’,
 ရီ rua ‘must’;
 b. ပါနီ datau ‘normal’,
 ဒုနာ nasay ‘near to’;
 c. ၼံဝဒၼ် avanyāng ‘he sinks’ (sink=3SG.M.A),
 တိၼ်တၼ် tovaley ‘a cloak’ (cloak-P.INAN);
 d. ဃံၼ်ၼ် binyanveno (corner.beautiful, a place name),
 မိၼ်မိၼ် mitanena ‘of the palace’ (palace-GEN);
 e. ဃုၼ်ဃုၼ် haruyamanas ‘a beating’ (beat-PTCP-NMLZ-P),
 နီၼ်နီၼ် sungkorankibas ‘geography’ (science.map);
 f. နီၼ်နီၼ် kaytomayanena ‘of righteousness’ (righteous-NMLZ-GEN),
 နီၼ်နီၼ် nasimayajang-ben ‘all followers’ (follow-AGTZ-PL-A=all).

Table 1.2 shows the frequencies of syllable types by position in a word. It is important to note here that phonemes which consist of more than one segment—affricates, diphthongs, and long vowels—have been counted as only one of C (consonant) or V (vowel), respectively. The following subsections will elaborate on which sounds the Cs and Vs correspond to. Moreover, it is important to note that medial syllables have not been further distinguished by position in the word for the sake of this analysis, so anything between the second and the fifth medial syllable is treated the same. It would furthermore be possible to calculate the frequencies of one syllable type following the other, however, no such calculations have been carried out here.

In all positions, CV is the most common syllable type, followed by CVC. With a very big margin, V is the next most common syllable type, which is also most common in initial syllables and least common in monosyllabic words. The cases with only a few attestations are the following:

- (18) a. Initial CVCC:
 လီၼ် linktang /liŋk.'taŋ/ ‘they try’ (try=3PL.M.A),⁸
 လီၼ် silvnang /silv.'naŋ/ ‘we see’ (see=1PL.A);
 b. Final CCCV:
 မိၼ် migryo /'mi.grjo/ ‘flourishes’ (flourish-3SG.N),
 နီၼ် subryo /'su.brjo/ ‘ceases’ (cease-3SG.N);
 c. Single V:
 အီၼ် ay /a/ ‘I’ (1SG.TOP).

Table 1.2: Frequency of syllable types per word (n = 5500)

Type	Initial	Medial	Final	Single	Total
CV	2896	1974	2109	578	7557
CCV	55	24	46	32	157
CCCV	—	—	2	—	2
CVC	761	610	1902	298	3571
CCVC	29	10	85	9	133
CVCC	2	—	—	—	2
V	488	95	67	2	652
VC	68	28	88	282	466
Total	4299	2741	4299	1201	12540
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

The medial and final VC cases may seem like an oddity, but they are mostly due to the previous syllable ending in /ŋ/, with that syllable also containing a lax vowel, which means that this syllable must be closed. An alternative explanation would be to assume that /ŋ/ is ambisyllabic, or actually /n.g - ŋ.g/, but realized as [ŋ]. The high number of single-syllable VC is due to ၵၵ ang ‘AT’, which alone appears 255 times in the sample (4.63% of all words, 21.23% of monosyllabic words, 90.43% of monosyllabic VC words).

1.2.2 Phonemic Makeup of Initial Syllables

The statistics in the following sections have been gathered from the IPA conversions of translated texts and dictionary entries mentioned above. The transcribed words have been split into syllables and then the collected contents of each position group were written into separate plain text files, one each for:

- all initial syllables of polysyllabic words,
- all medial syllables of polysyllabic words,
- all final syllables of polysyllabic words, and
- all monosyllabic words.

Monosyllabic words are both initial and final syllables at the same time; they have been counted separately for the purpose of this analysis. Onsets, nuclei and codas have been matched by regular expressions; the command line tools `grep`, `sort`, and `uniq` were used to aggregate all occurring variants for each syllable segment as well as their absolute frequencies:⁹

(19) C = (? : t f | d ʒ | [p t k b d g m n ŋ v s h r l j w])
 V = (? : [a e] : ? ɪ | a u | [i e a o u] : ? | [ɪ ɛ ɔ ʊ ə])

As we have seen above (Table 1.2), CCV syllables only make up 1.28% of initial syllables, insofar it is no surprise that consonant clusters all appear at the bottom of Table 1.3. There also seem to be combination patterns in that initial clusters exist for all plosives plus /r/, and almost all bilabials plus /j/, with the exception of /bj/, however, /nj/ is added to the group instead. Combinations with /w/ only occur for /b/, /r/, and /s/, which do not share an obvious connection. Syllables without a consonant filling the onset position are marked with ‘Ø’; these numbers correspond to the VC and VCC rows in Table 1.2.

⁸ The verb stem is found in the dictionary as ၵၵ linka-, with a final -a, and thus is possibly an entry changed at a later point, or the example from the text (Sugar Fairies) chosen here contains an error.

⁹ However, `sort` was unable to handle all IPA characters, so `sed 'y/ɛɪɔʊə:ʃʒŋ/EIɔU@:SZN/'` had to be used to compensate by transcribing everything into X-SAMPA.

Table 1.3: Frequency of onsets in initial syllables (n = 4299)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	556	12.93 %
s	488	11.35 %
t	432	10.05 %
m	418	9.72 %
k	380	8.84 %
n	375	8.72 %
p	334	7.77 %
b	231	5.37 %
d	172	4.00 %
v	164	3.81 %
l	159	3.70 %
r	134	3.12 %
j	126	2.93 %
g	111	2.58 %
h	99	2.30 %
tʃ	30	0.70 %
pr	27	0.63 %
nj	27	0.63 %
kr	8	0.19 %
br	8	0.19 %
tr	6	0.14 %
dʒ	4	0.09 %
gr	3	0.07 %
w	2	0.05 %
sw	1	0.02 %
rw	1	0.02 %
pj	1	0.02 %
mj	1	0.02 %
bw	1	0.02 %

Table 1.4: Frequency of nuclei in initial syllables (n = 4299)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
a	1847	42.96 %
i	1011	23.52 %
<i>i</i>	802	18.66 %
<i>ɪ</i>	209	4.86 %
e	705	16.40 %
<i>e</i>	523	12.17 %
<i>ɛ</i>	164	3.81 %
<i>ə</i>	18	0.42 %
u	260	6.05 %
<i>u</i>	228	5.30 %
<i>ʊ</i>	32	0.74 %
o	227	5.28 %
<i>o</i>	188	4.37 %
<i>ɔ</i>	39	0.91 %
a:	109	2.54 %
aɪ	88	2.05 %
eɪ	40	0.93 %
e:	4	0.09 %
ɔɪ	3	0.07 %
ʊɪ	1	0.02 %
o:	1	0.02 %
i:	1	0.02 %
e:ɪ	1	0.02 %
aʊ	1	0.02 %

Perhaps most striking about the nuclei of initial syllables presented in Table 1.4 is that plain vowels occur most frequently. As mentioned above, lax vowels are counted here as allophones of tense ones as their distribution is complementary and are listed here for the sake of completeness. This is the reason why the plain vowels are presented as grouped with their allophones in this table as well as in subsequent ones. Long vowels and diphthongs find themselves below the 5% threshold, and the words with single occurrences are:

- (20) a. ကွယ် *kuysān* ‘comparison’,
 b. ဝဉ် *nōn* ‘will, intention’,
 c. ဝဉ် *nīsa* ‘wanted’,¹⁰
 d. နှိပ် *sēyraya* ‘will overcome’ (FUT-overcome-3SG.M),
 e. နီဆ် *sautan* ‘cork’.

As the diphthong [e:i] only occurs due to allophony, it should not be counted as a phoneme for the purposes of this analysis. On the other hand, the same could be said for a lot of cases of [a:] included here—this caveat applies to all nouns derived from verbs ending in *-a* with the very common nominalizing suffix ခ် *-an*, as exemplified in (11) above. Similarly, the 18 instances of /ə/ reported here are mostly from tense prefixes also mentioned above, for instance, မသိ *məkoronay* ‘I knew’ (PST-know=1SG.TOP).

Initial-syllable codas (Table 1.5) are far less diverse than consonant onsets: there are only 10 attested segments in comparison to 28 for onsets (not counting empty codas of C(C)V syllables, which constitute the majority by a large margin), and the only two cluster attested are /ŋk/ in the word လိက် *linktang* ‘they try’ (try=3PL.M.A), and /lv/ in the word လိပ် *silvnang* ‘I see’ (see=1PL.A). There only being two incidences of a CC cluster is very probably an effect of the small sample size. Furthermore, the only unvoiced single coda consonants attested are /s/, /h/, /t/, /tʃ/ and /k/, the latter two only once, /h/ twice:

- (21) a. မသိ *mehvāng* ‘you are supposed to’ (be.supposed.to=2SG.A),¹¹
 လိပ် *rohtang* ‘they bite’ (bite=3SG.M.A);
 b. မိပ် *mutva* ‘you rub’ (rub=2SG.TOP),
 ပတ် *patlay* ‘cousin’;
 c. မိပ်-မိပ် *sik-sik* ‘tits’;
 d. လိပ် *vacvāng* ‘you like’ (like=2SG.A).

¹⁰ ဝဉ် *nīsa* and ဝဉ် *nōn* are both related to ဝဉ် *no-* ‘want, plan’.

Table 1.5: Frequency of codas in initial syllables (n = 4299)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	3441	80.04 %
n	298	6.93 %
ŋ	243	5.65 %
r	129	3.00 %
l	88	2.05 %
m	74	1.72 %
s	20	0.47 %
t	2	0.05 %
h	2	0.05 %
tʃ	1	0.02 %
ŋk	1	0.02 %
lv	1	0.02 %
k	1	0.02 %

1.2.3 Phonemic Makeup of Medial Syllables

The onsets of medial syllables (Table 1.6) show properties very similar to those of initial syllables. The order of most common consonants may differ here—for example, the most common onset is /r/, not Ø or /s/—, but there are no restrictions on consonants to appear in this position, with the exception of /ŋ/ for reasons stated above (see section 1.2.1). Regarding initial clusters, there are further attestations for plosive plus /r/ (except for /kr/). As for clusters with /j/, the only one with a bilabial is /bj/, but the set is extended to /sj/ and /kj/. For clusters with /w/, only /sw/ and /kw/ occur here, while attestations for /bw/ and /rw/ as in initial-syllable onsets are lacking. This does not mean that those combinations are not principally possible in this position, however.

As with onset consonants, vowel nuclei of medial syllables (Table 1.7) do not show significant differences compared to those of initial syllables either. /a/ is more common here, and /o/ and /u/ switch places. Instead of /e:ɪ/, there is an attestation of /u:/ (see footnote 4), for which there is more reason to be counted as a phoneme than for /e:ɪ/. The sequences /i:/ and /uɪ/ also only occur once and twice, respectively, namely in the following words:

¹¹ The dictionary entry for the verb is *ḡ mya-*, so this may be an instance of my changing a word in the dictionary with the old one staying in the text (The Four Candles).

Table 1.6: Frequency of onsets in medial syllables (n = 2741)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	123	4.49%
r	343	12.51%
n	260	9.49%
j	233	8.50%
t	222	8.10%
d	213	7.77%
k	189	6.90%
s	170	6.20%
m	169	6.17%
l	149	5.44%
v	148	5.40%
h	147	5.36%
p	119	4.34%
g	92	3.36%
b	89	3.25%
tʃ	20	0.73%
dʒ	15	0.55%
tr	11	0.40%
dr	8	0.29%
pr	7	0.26%
w	6	0.22%
sj	2	0.07%
br	2	0.07%
sw	1	0.04%
kw	1	0.04%
kj	1	0.04%
bj	1	0.04%

Table 1.7: Frequency of nuclei in medial syllables (n = 2741)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
a	1480	53.99%
i	480	17.51%
<i>i</i>	387	14.12%
<i>ɪ</i>	93	3.39%
e	254	9.26%
<i>e</i>	206	7.52%
<i>ɛ</i>	48	1.75%
o	194	7.08%
<i>o</i>	119	4.34%
<i>ɔ</i>	75	2.74%
u	120	4.38%
<i>u</i>	101	3.68%
<i>ʊ</i>	19	0.69%
a:	110	4.01%
aɪ	51	1.86%
ɔɪ	33	1.20%
eɪ	5	0.18%
e:	5	0.18%
aʊ	5	0.18%
ʊɪ	2	0.07%
u:	1	0.04%
i:	1	0.04%

- (22) a. ကုန်စည် *pasīsa* ‘interesting’;
 b. ကိရိတ် *puluyley* ‘a mirror’ (mirror-P.INAN),
 မီးခိုး *tipuyya* ‘on the grass’ (grass-LOC).

The word in (22a), ကုန်စည် *pasīsa* ‘interesting’, is rather transparently constitutes a causative derivation of the verb ကုန် *pasy-* ‘wonder, be curious, be interested’, essentially meaning ‘making one wonder/curious’—the causative suffix -*isa* can as well be used to derive adjectives with a causative or resultative meaning. Nonetheless it should count as a lexeme in its own right, since it possesses idiomatic meaning.

With medial-syllable codas (Table 1.8) again, sonorants and /s/ make up the largest number of consonants in this position; /t/ and /g/ only occur once each in

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	2093	76.36 %
n	313	11.42 %
ŋ	193	7.04 %
r	48	1.75 %
m	39	1.42 %
s	32	1.17 %
l	21	0.77 %
t	1	0.04 %
g	1	0.04 %

¹² The word for ‘money’ is ကံနီ *pangis*, so (23a) is probably a compound, albeit not a fully transparent one. The word for ‘change’ is တီး *tila-*, and there seems to be a nominalizing -*an*. Ayeri allows noun–verb compounds to have a nominalized verb in the second position in spite of it being the head—noun–noun compounds mostly come in head-initial order—probably due to an avoidance of placing a derivative suffix in the middle of a word. Possibly, what happened after all is that တီးလံ *tilān* underwent metathesis to *တီးလံ **itlān* to match the rhyme of ကံနီ *pangis*. *ကံနီတီးလံ **pangisitlān* then underwent irregular haplology (and shortening of the nominalizing suffix) to ကံနီတီး *pangitlan*.

Table 1.9: Frequency of onsets in final syllables (n = 4299)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage	Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	155	3.61%	pr	7	0.16%
j	1101	25.61%	kj	6	0.14%
n	528	12.28%	hj	5	0.12%
r	398	9.26%	bj	5	0.12%
t	268	6.23%	tw	4	0.09%
s	244	5.68%	sw	4	0.09%
l	238	5.54%	sj	4	0.09%
k	199	4.63%	kw	3	0.07%
d	184	4.28%	kr	3	0.07%
m	154	3.58%	br	3	0.07%
v	144	3.35%	vr	2	0.05%
h	128	2.98%	rw	2	0.05%
p	115	2.68%	nw	2	0.05%
g	103	2.40%	tʃ	1	0.02%
dʒ	73	1.70%	rj	1	0.02%
b	73	1.70%	nj	1	0.02%
tʃ	52	1.21%	mw	1	0.02%
vj	26	0.60%	grj	1	0.02%
pj	22	0.51%	dv	1	0.02%
dʒj	17	0.40%	dr	1	0.02%
tr	10	0.23%	brj	1	0.02%
w	9	0.21%			

are attached. Even though single-segment onsets are strongly preferred, Cr, Cw, and especially C(C)j seem to be generally permissible.¹³

Nuclei of final syllables (Table 1.10) do not bear striking differences to nuclei in other positions. /a:/ comes out second here due to the common nominalizer ʔan, which lengthens the vowel of verb stems ending in /a/, as demonstrated in (11). /aɪ/ is also fairly common here as it is the topic-marked first-person pronoun/pronominal clitic; for the same reason, /a:ɪ/ occurs a number of times—the

¹³ The sequence /sj/ poses difficulty here as there are examples for /Vs.jV/ as well as for /V.sjV/, and I cannot tell for sure if there is a strict rule in operation. It seems that /V.sjV/ is more likely to occur when the second syllable is stressed, whereas /Vs.jV/ is more likely to occur when the first syllable is stressed. Ayeri's own Tahano Hikamu orthography would not show the difference either, since /sja/ is spelled ʒ either way, and there is no heeding morpheme breaks in placing the diacritic. /Cs.jV/ will be /C.sjV/ in any case, since Ayeri avoids final consonant clusters if possible, see Table 1.2.

Table 1.10: Frequency of nuclei in final syllables (n = 4299)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
a	2408	56.01%
a:	316	7.35%
o	411	9.56%
o	298	6.93%
ɔ	113	2.63%
i	289	6.42%
ɪ	147	3.42%
ɨ	142	3.30%
aɪ	254	5.91%
u	207	4.82%
u	155	3.61%
ʊ	52	1.21%
e	209	4.85%
ɛ	127	2.95%
ə	81	1.88%
ɐ	1	0.02%
eɪ	103	2.40%
ɔɪ	42	0.98%
a:ɪ	23	0.54%
ʊɪ	14	0.33%
aʊ	14	0.33%
e:	5	0.12%
i:	3	0.07%
u:	1	0.02%

vowel-lengthening rule applies here as well, so its status as a phoneme is marginal. All instances of /e:/ in the sample are from the word *arēn* ‘anyway, however’; all evidence for /i:/ is from *sirī* ‘due to which’ (see section 1.1.2). The only evidence for /u:/ in the sample is from *babū* ‘barbarian (adj.)’.

Table 1.11: Frequency of codas in final syllables (n = 4299)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	2224	51.73 %
n	899	20.91 %
ŋ	651	15.14 %
s	244	5.68 %
m	225	5.23 %
l	34	0.79 %
r	21	0.49 %
k	1	0.02 %

The list of coda consonants in final syllables (Table 1.11) is very slightly more restrictive than even that of coda consonants in medial syllables (see Table 1.8), since the only non-sonorant attested is /k/, which only occurs in *sik-sik* ‘tits’ again, which—besides being a vulgar term, thus maybe slightly more dispositioned to allow for deviating phonotactics—looks quite like onomatopoeia, possibly for the sound of sucking.¹⁴

1.2.5 Phonemic Makeup of Single Syllables

Onsets of single syllables (Table 1.12) appear to be the least varied category. Still, none of the basic set of consonant morphemes (see Figure 1.1) is missing—the frequency order is just completely different from the other onsets surveyed, not merely a mix of initial and final syllables. Consonant clusters with /j/, /w/ and /r/ exist here as well. Combinations with /j/ are only present for /m/ and /n/, while /r/ again combines with plosives; /w/ combines with /n/ and /r/ at least, which we have already seen in final-syllable onsets (see Table 1.9). Whereas /mj/ has only occurred once in initial-syllable onsets so far (see Table 1.3), it occurs a few more times here, all in the word *mya* ‘be supposed to’, which is very commonly used as an unconjugatable modal particle.

¹⁴ Kroonen (2013: 489–490) identifies PGmc **sūgan-*, **sūkan-* ‘to suck’ as an iterative of PGmc **sukkōn-*, **sugōn-* ‘to suck’ and reconstructs PIE **souk-neh₂-*. However, he does not say anything about the Germanic word being onomatopoeic in origin.

Table 1.12: Frequency of onsets in single syllables (n = 1201)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	284	23.65%
n	231	19.23%
s	147	12.24%
j	144	11.99%
k	51	4.25%
v	48	4.00%
m	46	3.83%
l	44	3.66%
t	41	3.41%
d	33	2.75%
r	26	2.16%
h	23	1.92%
mj	16	1.33%
p	13	1.08%
tʃ	9	0.75%
g	9	0.75%
nj	8	0.67%
rw	7	0.58%
b	7	0.58%
pr	5	0.42%
dʒ	3	0.25%
tr	2	0.17%
nw	1	0.08%
ŋ	1	0.08%
kr	1	0.08%
br	1	0.08%

A consonant onset that can only be found in monosyllables is /ŋ/,¹⁵ in ၵာန -*ngas* ‘almost’, a quantifier suffix that has managed to sneak in due to being marked as an adverb in the dictionary, since it can modify a verb:

- (24) *Apayeng-ngas.*
 Apa-yeng-ngas
 laugh=3SG.F.A=almost
 ‘She almost laughed.’

Here, ၵာန -*ngas* modifies the verb complex like any other adverb:

- (25) *Apayeng baho.*
 Apa-yeng baho
 laugh=3SG.F.A loudly
 ‘She laughs loudly.’

However, whereas ခဵု *baho* ‘loud’ is treated as a separate unit in terms of intonation, ၵာန -*ngas* is unstressed and binds to what it follows:

- (26) a. ၵာနၵာန ၵာန *Apayeng-ngas*. [apa'jɛŋas];
 b. ၵာနၵာနခဵု *Apayeng baho*. [apa'jɛŋ 'baxo].

As with onset consonants of monosyllabic words, nuclei of this syllable type are the least diverse group again (Table 1.13). One segment that is notably absent is /aʊ/, and the marginally phonemic /e:/ is not present either. By having /a/, /aɪ/, /a:/ at the top, monosyllabic words behave similar to final syllables of polysyllabic words (see Table 1.10), however, the order of the most common vowels bears more similarities to that of initial and medial syllables (see Tables 1.4 and 1.7). The very uncommon /o:/ features twice in this group, namely in two instances of the word ခဵု *nōn* ‘will, intention’.¹⁶

Like the other syllable segments of monosyllabic words, coda consonants (Table 1.14) as well show the lowest degree of variety among all the coda consonants of the various syllable classes discussed so far. The order is basically the same as that of final-syllable codas (see Table 1.11), though /ŋ/ supersedes /n/ and there is some attestation of final /h/. As noted above, the prevalence of /ŋ/ is due to the

¹⁵ At least according to the analysis chosen here, see section 1.2.1 for an explanation.

¹⁶ Ayeri used to have ခဵု -*on* as a nominalizer beside ခဵု -*an*, however, it was not very productive and has long fallen out of use. ခဵု *nōn* is thus, in fact, originally a nominalization of ခဵု *no-* ‘want, plan’.

Table 1.13: Frequency of nuclei in single syllables (n = 1201)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
a	568	47.29%
aɪ	171	14.24%
a:	140	11.66%
i	113	9.41%
<i>i</i>	65	5.41%
<i>ɪ</i>	48	4.00%
e	104	8.66%
<i>ɛ</i>	65	5.41%
<i>ɐ</i>	34	2.83%
<i>ə</i>	5	0.42%
o	45	3.75%
<i>ɔ</i>	30	2.50%
<i>o</i>	15	1.25%
u	20	1.67%
a:ɪ	14	1.17%
ɔɪ	10	0.83%
i:	6	0.50%
eɪ	5	0.42%
ʊɪ	3	0.25%
o:	2	0.17%

Table 1.14: Frequency of codas in single syllables (n = 1201)

Phoneme	Frequency	Percentage
Ø	612	50.96%
ŋ	377	31.39%
n	105	8.74%
s	58	4.83%
m	36	3.00%
l	6	0.50%
h	4	0.33%
r	3	0.25%

agent-topic marker ႁႃ *ang* (see section 1.2.1). /h/ only occurs in the interjections ႁႃ *ah!* and ႁႃ *āh!*, so its status as an actual phoneme in this position is marginal at best.

1.2.6 Cross-Syllable Consonant Clusters

Table 1.15: Frequency of cross-syllable consonant clusters (n = 1270)

Interval [%]	Consonant cluster
0.00 ... 0.09	g.t, h.t, h.v, k.s, l.n, lv.n, m.bj, m.d, m.dʒ, m.l, m.n, m.pr, m.r, n.dv, n.g, n.h, n.w, ŋ.dʒj, ŋ.kw, ŋ.m, ŋ.n, ŋ.rj, ŋ.t, ŋk.t, r.b, r.dʒ, r.g, r.l, r.m, r.sj, r.tʃ, r.v, s.dʒ, s.h, s.l, s.n, s.p, s.v, t.v, tʃ.v (0.08%).
0.10 ... 0.24	l.bj, m.br, m.t, n.s, ŋ.b, ŋ.h, ŋ.p, ŋ.w, r.dʒj, r.pj, s.dʒj, s.m, t.l (0.16%); l.dʒ, l.p, m.k, n.sj, ŋ.dʒ, ŋ.g, ŋ.s, r.pr (0.24%).
0.25 ... 0.49	m.v, r.s, s.r (0.31%); n.r, s.t (0.39%); m.pj, n.dʒj, r.d (0.47%).
0.50 ... 0.74	ŋ.kj, ŋ.v, r.k, r.n (0.55%); l.b, l.t, ŋ.r (0.71%).
0.75 ... 1.00	r.p, r.t (0.87%); l.vj (0.94%).
1.0 ... 2.4	m.j (1.18%); ŋ.l (1.34%); n.tʃ (1.50%); n.dʒ (2.13%); n.v (2.28%); l.j (2.36%).
2.5 ... 4.9	m.p (2.52%); s.j (2.60%); n.l (2.91%); l.v (3.15%); m.b (3.23%); ŋ.k (3.78%).
5 ... 9	n.t (5.28%); n.d (6.85%); ŋ.j (7.32%); r.j (8.98%).
10+	n.j (25.35%).

Since a table detailing every combination with its absolute and relative frequency would be too large here, Table 1.15 gives the attested combinations ordered by brackets. As can be expected, bilabials cluster mostly with bilabials (83/112 purely bilabial CC combinations = 74.11%), alveolars with alveolars (317/948 = 33.44%), and velars with velars (59/207 = 28.51%). However, at least for alveolars and velars, the score is even higher with /j/: 52.64% and 44.93%, respectively. /j/ is also the most common second consonant overall, at 47.8% of all consonant clusters; /n.j/ is the most common cluster at a total of 25.35%. Alveolars provide the highest variety of both first and second consonants, with 6 different phonemes making up 74.65% of C₁, and 8 different phonemes making up 28.74% of C₂.

Labiodentals and glottals occur least frequently, on the other hand: There is only one cluster with /v/ as a first consonant, namely, /lv.n/ (0.08%). For /h/, there are two, which are /h.v/ and /h.t/ (0.16%). Altogether, however, there are 97 combinations in /v/ (7.64%)—most commonly /l.v/ (3.15%) and /n.v/ (2.28%)—while there are only 4 in /h/ (0.31%): /n.h/, /s.h/, and twice /ŋ.h/.

At 924 first consonants (72.76%), the nasals /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/ make up the largest group going by manner of articulation, followed by the tap /r/, which appears 175 times (13.78%) as the first consonant. For second consonants, approximants constitute the largest group at 669 combinations (52.68%), followed by 387 pairs with plosives second (30.47%).

1.3 Notes on Prosody

1.3.1 Stress

Ayeri uses dynamic accent, that is, stress is based on differences in the loudness of syllables, among others.¹⁷ Which syllable is stressed depends on a mix of which position in a word a syllable occupies and the phonemic shape of it. In fact, English, which also has phonemic stress in pairs such as *record* /'rekərd/ (noun) and /rɪ'kɔrd/ (verb) that Ayeri lacks, does a similar thing (examples adapted from Halle 1998: 552):

- (27) *admire* /æd'maɪər/ — *admirable* /'ædmərəbl/ [English]
carnivore /'karnɪvɔr/ — *carnivorous* /kar'nɪvərəs/
ignore /ɪg'nɔr/ — *ignorant* /'ɪgnərənt/

Stress does not stay at fixed intervals in these words and they even change their sound structure a little, but there are a number of variables which can nonetheless be formally described and applied here (564–565).¹⁸ To demonstrate how word stress moves around in Ayeri, the complete declension paradigm for *ṣ̣ niva* ‘eye’ is presented in Figure 1.4.

It may appear that in the table above, stress is always on the penultimate syllable, which is indeed the case for most forms quoted there, but compare the superficially unmarked form *ṣ̣ niva*, which is disyllabic with stress on the first (= penultimate) syllable, to the agent and patient singular forms, *ṣ̣ nīvāṅ* and *ṣ̣ nīvās*, respectively. These are also disyllabic, however, they are stressed on the second (= ultimate) syllable. Similarly, compare the agent and patient plural forms to each other: the agent plural form *ṣ̣ nivajang* is trisyllabic and has its main

¹⁷ For a discussion of terms, see Kager (2007), for instance.

¹⁸ Halle (1998) takes a generativist approach rather than a more modern Optimality-Theory based one like Kager (2007) does, who only deals with fixed-stress systems in this introductory article, though Halle’s article is still informative. Simplifying a lot, English essentially tries to construct trochaic feet from the right edge of the word. If the last syllable’s vowel is not light, it is skipped and stress moves to the antepenultimate syllable; this process is recursive for words with multiple feet, although some suffixes introduce irregularities in rule application.

¹⁹ Final-syllable stress is possible as well, also in the plural.

Figure 1.4: Declension paradigm for Ayeri ṣṣ *niva* ‘eye’

	Singular		Plural	
TOP	<i>ní.va</i>	‘the eye’	<i>ni.vá.ye</i>	‘the eyes’
A	<i>ni.vǎng</i>	‘eye’	<i>ni.va.jǎng</i>	‘eyes’
P	<i>ni.vǎs</i>	‘eye’	<i>ni.vá.jas</i>	‘eyes’
DAT	<i>ni.vá.yam</i> ¹⁹	‘to the eye’	<i>ni.vá.jyam</i>	‘to the eyes’
GEN	<i>ni.vá.na</i>	‘of the eye’	<i>ni.va.yé.na</i>	‘of the eyes’
LOC	<i>ni.vá.ya</i>	‘at the eye’	<i>ni.vá.jya</i>	‘at the eyes’
CAUS	<i>ni.va.í.sa</i>	‘due to the eye’	<i>ni.va.jí.sa</i>	‘due to the eyes’
INS	<i>ni.vá.ri</i>	‘with the eye’	<i>ni.va.yé.ri</i>	‘with the eyes’

stress on the third (= ultimate) syllable, while the equally trisyllabic patient plural form ṣṣ *nivajas* is stressed on the second (= penultimate) syllable again.

It should have become clear that even though the basic form ṣṣ *niva* has first-syllable stress, *ni* will not necessarily carry stress across the whole paradigm. It should also have become clear that the basic algorithm to determine stressed syllables in Ayeri has something to do with counting syllables from the right edge of a word, although some complications need to be factored in. The following sections will try to describe these formally.

Analysis of Stress Patterns in Disyllabic Words

The basic foot in Ayeri is a trochee, and for the most part it does not matter whether the syllable is open or closed, or whether there are complex onsets or codas, or no onsets or codas at all:²⁰

- (28) a. $\acute{x} \quad \times \quad ||$
 ba - ri ‘pithy, striking’
- b. $\acute{x} \quad \times \quad ||$
 sa - yan ‘hole, cave’
 sem - ba ‘comb’

²⁰ In the following, a syllable will be marked by ⟨x⟩ and receives an acute accent ⟨´⟩ when carrying primary stress, a grave accent ⟨>`⟩ when carrying secondary stress, and no accent when unstressed. Feet are marked by horizontal lines ⟨|⟩; the end of a word is marked by two horizontal lines ⟨||⟩.

- c. \acute{x} \times ||
 bri - *ba* ‘grace’
 ba - *brya* ‘(he) mumbles’
 a - *gu* ‘chicken’

It can be deduced from words with more than two syllables that stress assignment is trochaic. Stress assignment furthermore runs from right to left, so that in a word with more than two syllables, the last two syllables form a full foot:

- (29) a. \times | \acute{x} \times ||
 ba - *ba* - *lan* ‘target, goal’
 jar - *ma* - *ya* ‘pilgrim’
- b. \acute{x} \times | \acute{x} \times ||
 ho - *ra* - *ma* - *ya* ‘sinner’
 ya - *ma* - *na* - *ti* ‘causer’

In the case of (29b), the stressed syllables of the first foot bear secondary stress while those of the second foot bear primary stress. Complications, then, come in the form of syllables ending in /ŋ/, containing a long vowel, or containing a diphthong, or a combination of those features. Ayeri does not have syllables that contain a diphthong and also end in /ŋ/, though, since consonant codas after a diphthong are largely avoided.²¹ Since the presence or the absence of a certain element that is suspected to have an effect on stress assignment is a yes–no decision, we can make a matrix of binary features:

Figure 1.5: Types of heavy syllables

	[+ DIPH, – ŋ]	[– DIPH, + ŋ]	[– DIPH, – ŋ]
[+ LONG]	++	++	++
[– LONG]	+	+	–

The feature matrix above (Figure 1.5) shows the various kinds of syllable types that we will now see have a manipulative effect on trochaic stress assignment. These syllable types can be considered ‘heavy’ in that they attract stress and thus modify the regular assignment of stress to every other syllable from the right edge of a word. For the time being, we will only test their effects on disyllabic words as the most common type. As will be shown in the following example, heavy syllables in ultimate positions attract stress while quasi-regular results are produced when they are in penultimate position and the ultimate syllable is not heavy:

²¹ It might thus be possible to alternatively analyze diphthongs in /v/ as /Vj/ sequences, essentially.

- (30) a. \times $\acute{\times}$ ||
 ma - *tay* ‘summer, wet season’
 pa - *dang* ‘mind; heart, mood’
 ka - *nāy* ‘I marry’ (marry=1SG.TOP)
 bras - *yāng* ‘he bathes’ (bathe=3SG.M.A)
 na - *rān* ‘word; speech’
- b. $\acute{\times}$ \times ||
 kār - *yo* ‘strong’
 key - *nam* ‘humans, people’
 kan - *ka* ‘mind; heart, mood’

Unfortunately, there are no disyllabic examples for the feature sets [+LONG, -DIPH, +η] and [+LONG, +DIPH, -η] in the first syllable (syllables of the type /C(C(j))V:η/ or /C(C(j))Vη/). If there were, they would group with (30b).

So far, we have only looked at heavy syllables combined with regular/light ones. In the following case, however, another property of heavy syllables will become apparent: long syllables outweigh those containing a diphthong or ending in /η/. They are essentially superheavy, which is why some of the fields in Figure 1.5 are marked with two plus signs. The following examples show what happens when heavy syllables are combined with other heavy syllables. Let us start by examining the various combinations possible between [-LONG, +DIPH, -η] and the elements from the [+LONG] row (31a), and the possible combinations between [-LONG, -DIPH, +η] and the [+LONG] row (31b).

- (31) a. \times $\acute{\times}$ ||
 bay - *hāy* ‘I govern’ (govern=1SG.TOP)
 say - *lyāng* ‘he sails’ (sail=3SG.M.A)
 kay - *vān* ‘container’
- b. \times $\acute{\times}$ ||
 kong - *āyn* ‘we enter’ (enter=1PL.TOP)
 keng - *vāng* ‘you notice’ (notice=2SG.A)
 lang - *-vā* ‘in the most tiresome way’ (tiresome=SUPL)

We can see here that these words have primary stress invariably on the last/long syllable in spite of a heavy syllable preceding in the examples in (31b). The question then is, however, what happens if we invert this order. This is more problematic than it sounds, however, as initial [+LONG, +DIPH, -η] and [+LONG, -DIPH, +η], as well as final [-LONG, +DIPH, +η] do not occur, insofar there will only be one possible combination here—the reverse pattern of $\eta\acute{\times}\times$ or *lang-vā* ‘in the most tiresome way’ from (31b) above, also compare with (30):

- (32) \acute{x} \times ||
 cā - *nang* ‘love’ (love-A)

There is only one one pattern possible here, which is very little to make a point, however, other words following this syllable pattern, like ᠨᠠᠷᠢᠭ *nāreng* ‘rather’, for example, behave in the same way. A long syllable has precedence over other kinds of heavy syllables, so ᠨᠠᠭ -*nang* does not take away stress from ᠴᠠ *cā*- as one might expect from the examples in (30a). Another question is what happens if we pit elements from the [\pm LONG] rows against another feature combination of the same row. As above, we will start with the [- LONG] row:

- (33) a. \times \acute{x} ||
 bay - *tang* ‘blood’
 b. \times \acute{x} ||
 pang - *lay* ‘goddess’

In the case of examples for [+ LONG] pattern combinations, we need to keep in mind again that initial [+ LONG, + DIPH, - ɳ] and [+ LONG, - DIPH, + ɳ] are not attested, so again, there will only be one possible combination of two syllables with a long vowel:

- (34) \grave{x} \acute{x} ||
 mā - *sāy* ‘I traveled’ (PST-travel=ISG.TOP)

Combining two long syllables with each other will result in both being stressed, which is otherwise avoided in Ayeri, as we will see later. Moreover, the following patterns emerge if we combine each pattern with itself; the combinatorial restrictions mentioned above apply again, of course:

- (35) a. \times \acute{x} ||
 kay - *vay* ‘without’
 dang - *reng* ‘bell’ (bell-A.INAN)
 b. \grave{x} \acute{x} ||
 bā - *mā* ‘parents, mom-and-dad’

As demonstrated in (31), the last heavy syllable will receive primary stress, except if two long syllables collide, in which case the first long syllable will receive secondary stress.

To summarize the above findings:

1. Ayeri assigns trochaic stress from the right edge of a word. A foot thus consists of two syllables, of which the first is stressed.
2. Syllables ending in /ŋ/ or ones containing a diphthong are considered heavy. They attract stress and take it away from a preceding stressed syllable if the following syllable is not stressed already.
3. Syllables containing a long vowel are considered superheavy and override both light and heavy syllables in attracting stress, since long vowels cannot be unstressed.
4. Primary stress is assigned to the last stressable syllable, or otherwise the last heavy syllable. In the rare case of two long/superheavy syllables after another, the first syllable receives secondary stress and reduces in duration.
5. Secondary stress is assigned to syllables that are eligible for word stress but which are not in the final foot.

Analysis of Stress Patterns in Trisyllabic Words

So far, we have only considered all the possible combinations of two heavy and light syllables. Doing the same for all combinations of three and more syllables would be possible, though the list of examples were to become even longer. Since the feature pair $[\pm \text{DIPH}, \pm \eta]$ behaves the same way throughout and both features are in complementary distribution, we need not test iterations of them separately, but can subsume them under the label $[\pm \text{HEAVY}]$. The parameters that need testing, then, are $[\pm \text{HEAVY}]$ in combination with $[\pm \text{LONG}]$. There are 4 possible outcomes for these two features, which in the case of three syllables leads us to $(2 \times 2)^3 = 64$ theoretically possible combinations. For this reason, I want to point out just a few cases, since the general rules sketched out above still apply.

First, let us look at $[+ \text{HEAVY}, - \text{LONG}]$ combined with $[- \text{HEAVY}, - \text{LONG}]$ in all positions (Figure 1.6). Finding words that fit the respective permutations is not too much of a problem, especially in cases where there is only one heavy syllable.

It becomes clear from Figure 1.6 that the rules stated at the end of the previous section (p. 38) also hold in the case of trisyllabic words whose syllables alternate short syllables based on the $[\pm \text{HEAVY}]$ feature: *prantanley* (ပုဏ္ဏတန်လီ), *ralanghay* (ရလင်္ဂဟဲ), *kaybunay* (ကျပ်ပွဲနဲ), and *panglay-kay* (ပင်္ဂလဲယဲ) receive final-syllable stress since this is their last heavy syllable. The first syllables of *taykondam* (တဲယိကံဃ) and *maykongas* (မဲယိကွန်ဂဲ), on the other hand, lose the secondary stress they would normally be assigned as two stressed syllables after another are normally avoided; the requirement of long syllables to not be unstressed does not come into effect here. *taykondam* is

Figure 1.6: Stress patterns for [+ HEAVY, – LONG] in trisyllabic words

–H –H +H	<i>prantanley</i>	x x x	‘question’ (question-P.INAN)
–H +H –H	<i>sarayya</i>	x x x	‘(he) bows’ (bow-3SG.M)
+H –H –H	<i>taykondam</i>	x x x	‘break (n.)’
–H +H +H	<i>ralangbay</i>	x x x	‘thumbnail’
+H –H +H	<i>kaybunay</i>	x̣ x x	‘by the way’
+H +H –H	<i>maykongas</i>	x x x	‘harbor’ (harbor-P)
+H +H +H	<i>panglay-kay</i>	x̣ x x	‘a few goddesses’ (goddess=few)

also an example for the rule that even if a syllable is not heavy, the last syllable that can be assigned stress will receive primary stress.

Carrying out the same analysis as above and moving the feature [+ LONG] through the various positions, we receive the results depicted in Figure 1.7.²² Since long syllables override stress of both light and heavy syllables as pointed out above (p. 38), the example words in this chart contain both of these syllable types. It was not too hard finding examples for all the slots in this case either, except that words with two long syllables in succession are rather rare. Still, only the case of three long syllables must remain unattested.²³

Figure 1.7: Stress patterns for [± HEAVY, + LONG] in trisyllabic words

–L –L +L	<i>peraysān</i>	x x x̣	‘paste’
–L +L –L	<i>raypānya</i>	x x̣ x	‘at the stop’ (stop-LOC)
+L –L –L	<i>nōneri</i>	x̣ x x	‘deliberate, intentional’
–L +L +L	<i>mə-cān-cān</i>	x x̣ x̣	‘whatever fling’ (whatever=fling)
+L –L +L	<i>sānisān</i>	x̣ x̣ x̣	‘copula; clutch (n.)’
+L +L –L	<i>lēāyon</i>	x̣ x̣ x	‘manwhore’
+L +L +L	—	—	—

Again, we can see that long syllables attract stress, in that the final syllables of ပုရယ် *peraysān* and ရှေးရယ် *sānisān* are stressed even though the penultimate syl-

²² For more precision, modifications will be made to the symbols given in footnote 20: let a double acute (ˆˆ) denote superheavy syllables with primary stress, and a double grave (˘˘) denote superheavy syllables with secondary stress.

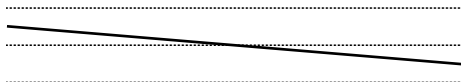
²³ It would be possible to construct a word with three long syllables if the habitative suffix -asa did not delete the vowel at the end of the verb stem if there is one. မှီရယ် *māsāy* ‘I traveled’ (PST-travel=ISG.TOP) would then become *မှီရယ်ရယ် **māsāsāy* ‘I used to travel’ (PST-travel-HAB=ISG.TOP) instead of the actual form မှီရယ် *māsasāy*; the verb stem is ရယ် *asa-* ‘travel’.

²⁴ Whenever this happens, the fallback is likely to be a mix of German and English, since those are the languages I am most familiar with.

detailed gradations, but for the time being, I will only try to briefly describe those that are most prominent.

Statements

Regular statements have a gradually falling pitch contour based around an average pitch height, not deviating considerably on both ends:

- (38) 
- Ang gihayo Pintemis minganeri-hen yona.*
 Ang giha-yo Ø=Pintemis mingan-eri=hen yona
 AT blow-3SG.N TOP=North Wind ability-INS=all 3SG.N.GEN.
 ‘The North Wind blew with all of his might.’

Yes-no questions

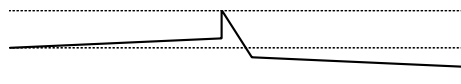
Since Ayeri does not use a particle or word order to mark closed questions as such, intonation is used to mark the difference from a regular statement. To achieve a strong contrast to statements, questions exhibit gradually rising intonation:

- (39) 
- Ang gihayo Pintemis minganeri-hen yona?*
 Ang giha-yo Ø=Pintemis mingan-eri=hen yona
 AT blow-3SG.N TOP=North Wind ability-INS=all 3SG.N.GEN.
 ‘Did the North Wind blow with all of his might?’

‘Wh-’ questions

Unlike English, Ayeri marks open questions with an in-situ question word. Open questions are thus marked by the question word causing a sharp rise and fall in the overall contour of the question. The first half of the clause has the rising contour of a question, the second half has gradually falling pitch.

(40)



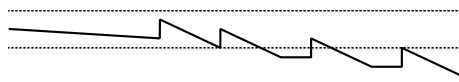
Ang engyo mico sinya luga toya sam?
 Ang eng-yo mico sinya-Ø luga toya sam
 AT be.more-3SG.N strong who-TOP among 3PL.N.LOC two

‘Who was the stronger of the two?’

Lists

List statements have the general gradual downward slope of statements, but the individual items can nonetheless be marked by a pitch rise on the primary accent of each item.

(41)



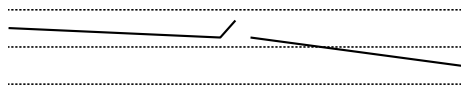
Le vacyeng seygo, disu, betay nay vasa.
 Le vac-yeng seygo-Ø, disu-Ø, betay-Ø nay vasa-Ø
 PT.INAN like=3SG.F.A apple-TOP, banana-Ø, berry-Ø and nut-Ø

‘She likes apples, bananas, berries and nuts.’

Complement and Relative Clauses

Complement clauses are characterized by the short spike at the end of the preceding main clause followed by a short break which together signal the beginning of a new syntactic unit within the context of the current sentence, which is broadly similar to list statements. Otherwise, statements with complement clauses as well bear the overall downward-sloping contour of statements.

(42)



Ang manga rantong, engyo mico sinyāng.
 Ang manga ran-tong, eng-yo mico sinya-ang
 AT PROG argue=3PL.N.A, be.more-3SG.N strong who-A

‘They were arguing who is stronger.’

Relative clauses, on the other hand, do not receive special prosodic marking, but are treated the same as other basic sentence types. They display a continuous downward slope if part of a statement, or a continuous upward slope if part of a question:

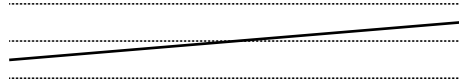
(43) a.



Lugaya asāyāng si sitang-naykonyāng kong tova-ya.
 Luga-ya asāya-ang si sitang-naykon-yāng kong tova-ya
 pass-3SG.M traveler-A REL self=wrap=3SG.M.A inside cloak-LOC

‘A traveler passed who had wrapped himself into a cloak.’

b.



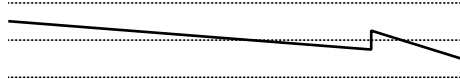
Adareng asāyās si le ninyāng tova?
 Ada-reng asāya-as si le nin-yāng tova-Ø
 that-A.INAN traveler-P REL PT.INAN wear=3SG.M.A coat-TOP

‘Is that the traveler who wore the coat?’

Contrast

Ayeri uses a kind of topic system for highlighting constituents in a clause by morphosyntactic means, but this is still different from emphasis on semantic grounds, for example when the speaker wants to highlight a semantic difference in the same syntactic position, as in the following example, which presents a possible answer to the question posed in (43b):

(44)



Adareng asāyās si le nin-yāng kegan.
 Ada-reng asāya-as si le nin-yāng kegan-Ø
 that-A.INAN traveler-P REL PT.INAN wear=3SG.M.A hat-TOP

‘It is the traveler who wore the *hat*.’

We can see here a spike towards the end of the utterance where the word *kegan* ‘hat’ is placed. This word receives extra stress for contrast with *tova* ‘coat’, which is what the other person had asked about.

2 Writing System

In the previous chapter, example words were given in Ayerī's script, ၵဃၢ်ၵုၵ်း *Tabano Hikamu*, wherever possible. Thus, it seems advisable to include a description of Ayerī's native writing system here as well. Literally, ၵဃၢ်ၵုၵ်း *Tabano Hikamu* means 'Round Script' (script round), which is an old formation based on the word ၵဃၢ်: *tahan*- 'write' that stuck. The current word for 'script' is ၵဃၢ်ၵုၵ်း *tabanan* 'writing'. Tahano Hikamu was originally named thus because of an earlier draft for a script that never made it very far beyond the drawing board and which was a lot more angular, or ၵဃၢ် *binya*, see Figure 2.1a.¹

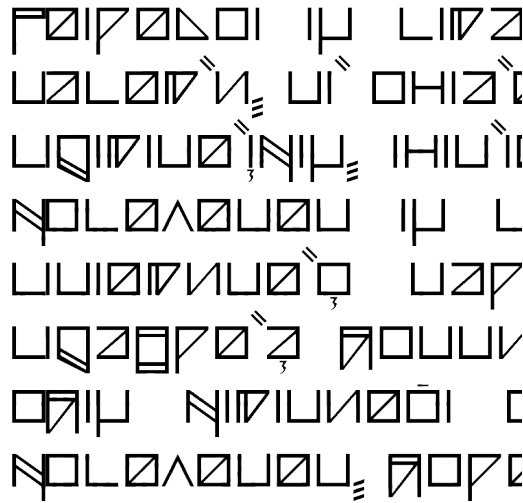
As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ayeri's prosody strongly emphasizes the syllable as a unit. Thus, it is not a surprise that Ayeri's native script, Tahano Hikamu, is an alphasyllabary like the Brāhmī-derived alphabets of India and Southeast Asia (Salomon 1996; Court 1996). This means that its

system is based on the unit of the graphic “syllable” [...], which by definition always ends with a vowel (type V, CV, CCV, etc.). Syllables consisting of a vowel only (usually at the beginning of a word or sentence) are written with the *full* or *initial vowel signs* [...]. But when, as is much more frequently the case, the syllable consists of a consonant followed by a vowel, the vowel is indicated by a diacritic sign attached to the basic sign for the consonant [...]. (Salomon 1996: 376)

For Tahano Hikamu, the definition that a syllable consisting only of a vowel is written with an initial vowel sign is only true under certain circumstances, as we will see below. Moreover, Brāmī scripts are often characterized by conjuncts of clustered consonants which may become quite large and sometimes behave in an idiosyncratic way. Consonant conjuncts like Devanāgarī त्व <tva> ← त <ta> + व <va> or idiosyncratic conjuncts like क्ष <kṣa> ← क <ka> + ष <ṣa> are not known in Tahano Hikamu, however. Tahano Hikamu also does not know subscript notation for consonant clusters and special diacritics marking coda consonants like in Javanese (Kuipers and McDermott 1996: 478–479). This does not mean, however, that final consonants are simply omitted in writing, since closed syllables are reasonably common enough

¹ Unfortunately, there is no documentation surviving that I know of.

Figure 2.1: Tahano Hinya and Hikamu



(a) Old and aborted draft: Tahano Hinya



(b) Ayeri's native script: Tahano Hikamu

to warrant indicating them. Thus, like in the Sumatran scripts, there is “a special mark to eliminate the vowel of the previous syllable, thereby leaving a consonant in a syllable-final position.” (Kuipers and McDermott 1996: 476) That is, there is a diacritic that marks the absence of an inherent vowel. With regards to Indian scripts, it is referred to as *virāma*; the Ayeri name is ᨆᨗᨑᨗ *gondaya* ‘extinguisher’.

Another difference from Brāhmī-family scripts is that all basic vowels have unique graphemes; vowel length and diphthongs in [ɪ] are indicated by dedicated diacritics. Like in Kharoṣṭhī—another historically important ancient script of India—initial vowels are not represented by unique graphemes but they are all written like post-consonantal diacritics with the grapheme for initial ⟨a⟩ as a basis, ᨆ (Salomon 1996: 377). The ᨆ on ᨆ is understood as a diacritic as well, however, namely for /a/, which is why it is indicated in the table below as ᨆ ⟨Ø⟩ for no intrinsic sound value; its native name is ᨆᨗᨑᨗ *ranyan* ‘nothing’.² Similar to the Javanese script, Tahano Hikamu puts diacritics not only below or above consonant bases, but also before them. This, however, is not limited to vowel graphemes as in Javanese (Kuipers and McDermott 1996: 478).

² I will give the native names of graphemes here, but will refer to them by their English names for clarity in the running text.

2.1 Consonants

Tahano Hikamu is mainly based on consonant bases that are modified by diacritics. Since the vowel /a/ is so highly frequent in Ayeri, it is also the vowel that is *inherent* to every consonant grapheme if not further modified by vowel diacritics. Consonant letters are simply referred to as *pa*, *ta*, *ka*, ... Figure 1.1 displays all the main consonants. The customary collation is—similar to the IPA table—roughly grouping the letters according to their sound value by anteriority (front → back) and sonority (low → high). The script is monocameral, that is, there is no distinction between capital letters and minuscule letters as in the Latin, Greek, Cyrillic, Georgian, and Armenian alphabet. It is also written in lines from left to right.

Figure 2.2: The consonant graphemes of Tahano Hikamu

/pa/	/ta/	/ka/	/ba/	/da/	/ga/
ᠠ	ᠲ	ᠬ	ᠪ	ᠳ	ᠭ
/ma/	/na/	/ŋa/	/va/	/sa/	/ha/
ᠮ	ᠨ	ᠩ	ᠪ	ᠰ	ᠬ
/ra/	/la/	/ja/	/Ø/		
ᠷ	ᠯ	ᠵ	ᠯ		

What is interesting about ᠩ <nga> is that even though before, /ŋ/ was treated strictly as a coda consonant in the previous chapter, it is in fact treated as an onset consonant in writing if a vowel is following:

- (45) ᠠ + ᠩᠰ
 /pa/ /ŋis/
 ᠠᠩᠰ *pangis* /paŋ.is/ ‘money’

Tahano Hikamu knows a few ligatures. First of all, when two ᠨ <na> are in succession, they will form a ligature ᠨᠨ <nana>:

- (46) ᠨ + ᠨ → ᠨᠨ
 /na/ /na/ /nana/

This is distinct from conjuncts like in Devanāgarī et al., though, since the unmodified sound value will still be /nana/, not */nna/, so the inherent vowel of each ᠨ

⟨na⟩ is not deleted, and each 𑌵 ⟨na⟩ retains the ability to be modified by diacritics. Tahano Hikamu also has a few ligatures of the kind you would find in Brāhmī scripts, however:

- (47) a. 𑌵𑌃 ⟨kwa⟩ ← 𑌵𑌃 ⟨ka⟩ + 𑌵𑌃 ⟨va⟩,
 b. 𑌵𑌃𑌃 ⟨tsa⟩ ← 𑌵𑌃𑌃 ⟨ta⟩ + 𑌵𑌃𑌃 ⟨sa⟩, and
 c. 𑌵𑌃𑌃𑌃 ⟨ksa⟩ ← 𑌵𑌃𑌃𑌃 ⟨ka⟩ + 𑌵𑌃𑌃𑌃 ⟨sa⟩.

These conjunct letters are, however, not normally employed by Ayeri. Figure 2.3 shows all additional consonants, added to write other languages. Individual languages may adapt the sound values slightly to fit their own purposes.

Figure 2.3: Additional consonant graphemes of Tahano Hikamu

/fa/	/wa/	/tsa/	/za/	/ʃa/	/ʒa/
𑌵	𑌵	𑌵𑌃	𑌵𑌃	𑌵𑌃	𑌵𑌃
/ɕa/	/ksa/	/kwa/	/xa/	/ɣa/	
𑌵𑌃	𑌵𑌃𑌃	𑌵𑌃𑌃	𑌵𑌃	𑌵𑌃	

2.2 Vowels

As mentioned above, vowels are written as diacritics that are added to consonants. In principle, every consonant has two slots for vowels, a primary one atop it, and a secondary one below it. Vowels added to consonants in the primary slot delete their inherent /a/:

- (48) 𑌵 → 𑌵
 /pa/ /pe/

Figure 2.4 gives the primary vowel graphemes. Of the vowel graphemes given there, only 𑌵 ⟨ə⟩ is not used in Ayeri. 𑌵 ⟨au⟩ is the only diphthong for which a dedicated grapheme exists, even though its occurrence is rather limited. The independent vowel graphemes are used at the beginning of words or inside words when there is no other way to spell the vowel, which is occasionally the case for secondary vowels. Secondary vowels are vowels that are not parts of diphthongs, but follow the vowel of a syllable directly. They are attached underneath a consonant base, for example:

Figure 2.4: Primary vowel graphemes of Tahano Hikamu

	/i/	/e/	/a/	/o/	/u/	/ɔ/	/au/
Diaritics							
Independent							

$$(49) \quad \text{ɸ} \rightarrow \text{ɸ}^{\text{ˆ}} \rightarrow \text{ɸ}^{\text{ˆ}}_{\text{ˆ}}$$

$$\quad \quad \quad /ja/ \quad \quad /je/ \quad \quad /je.a/$$

In fact, the principle that every consonant base with its diacritics represents one syllable is slightly violated here, which is also the reason why secondary vowels very occasionally need to be spelled as independent vowels, for example when the secondary vowel is long, as in the word *ruān* ‘duty’:

$$(50) \quad \text{r}^{\text{ˆ}} \rightarrow \text{r}^{\text{ˆ}}_{\text{ˆ}} \quad \left(\text{r}^{\text{ˆ}}_{\text{ˆ}} \right)$$

$$\quad \quad \quad /ru/ \quad \quad /rwa:/ \quad \quad /ru:a/$$

Example (50) uses a diacritic, , to indicate length. If is put directly under *ru* (the diacritic moves down where it is not in the way), the syllable will incorrectly spell /ru:a/ instead of the intended /rua:/. This is because diacritics modify consonants and primary vowels, but there is no way to modify a secondary vowel directly. Figure 2.5 gives a list of secondary vowels corresponding to that of primary vowels above. The vowels as well are just referred to by their sound value; ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’, ‘superscript’ and ‘subscript’ or ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ may be chosen to disambiguate their positions; the native names may use *iray* ‘high’ and *eyra* ‘low’ to disambiguate, so *e iray* denotes the superscript ⟨e⟩ diacritic while *e eyra* denotes its subscript counterpart.

Figure 2.5: Secondary vowel graphemes of Tahano Hikamu

/i/	/e/	/a/	/o/	/u/	/ɔ/	/au/

As a further exception, those consonants bases with a descender (, ,) move the primary vowel to the secondary slot by default while indicating the vacancy of the primary slot with a dot; this is mainly done to avoid crossing the ascender of the consonant with a vowel diacritic:

$$(51) \quad \text{ㄱ} \rightarrow \text{ㄱ} \rightarrow \text{ㄱ}$$

/ka/ /ka.i/ /ki/

If the primary vowel slot were not silenced by the ◊ diacritic, it could reasonably be assumed that the consonant is not losing its inherent /a/ and the vowel underneath the consonant indicates a secondary vowel, spelling /CaV/. If, however, a secondary vowel is *actually* added, primary and secondary vowels will be assigned the regular primary and secondary slots, respectively, again:

$$(52) \quad \text{ㄱ} \rightarrow \text{ㄱ}$$

/ki/ /ki.e/

2.3 Diacritics

We have already encountered two diacritics, one for lengthening the primary vowel of a syllable and one for deleting the inherent vowel of a consonant. Tahano Hikamu comes with a lot more diacritics, however, which undergo non-trivial positioning and repositioning rules. As vowels are primarily superscripts, diacritics are primarily subscripts, so in the following I will first describe subscript diacritics; then preposed diacritics, which Ayeri also has a number of, both as graphemes in their own right and as allographs of other subscript diacritics; and lastly, superscript diacritics.

2.3.1 Subscript Diacritics

Figure 2.6 shows the bottom-attaching diacritics. The ‘large diacritics’ cause the secondary slot of consonants to move down below the diacritic. ‘Small diacritics’ can attach in this place as well as secondary vowels, as does the homorganic nasal diacritic ◊ in this diacritic-fraught example:









$$(53) \quad \text{ㄱ} + \text{ㄱ} \rightarrow \text{ㄱ}$$

/tʃa:n/ /pu'lu/ /,tʃa:mpu'lu/

ㄱ *cāmpuluy* ‘heterosexual’

It also needs to be noted that diacritics like ◊ are applied to words as a whole, not stopping at morpheme and syllable borders, so even though *toryeng* ‘she sleeps’ may be a composed form (ㄱ: *tor*- ‘sleep’ + ㄱ: *-yeng* (=3SG.F.A)) and syllabifies as /tor.'jen/, the spelling is not *ㄱ:ㄱ: as one might expect, but ㄱ:.

Figure 2.6: Bottom-attaching diacritics of Tahano Hikamu

Native name	Function	Example
Large diacritics		
 <i>tupasati</i> 'long-maker'	Lengthens the primary vowel of the syllable	<i>pa</i> → <i>pā</i>
 <i>ya eyra</i> 'low ya'	⟨ya⟩ following another consonant, also across syllables. Marks palatalization of ⟨ta⟩, ⟨da⟩, ⟨ka⟩, and ⟨ga⟩ in Ayeri.	<i>ara</i> → <i>āṛa</i> <i>arya</i> ; <i>ta</i> → <i>ṭa</i> <i>ca</i>
 <i>ringaya</i> 'raiser'	Palatalizes a consonant (not used in Ayeri)	<i>ta</i> → <i>ṭa</i> / <i>t̪a</i> /, / <i>t̪a</i> /
 <i>ulangaya</i> 'breather'	Aspiration or frication of a consonant (not used in Ayeri)	<i>ta</i> → <i>ṭa</i> / <i>t̪a</i> /, / <i>θa</i> /
 <i>raypāya eyra</i> 'low stopper'	Glottal stop coda or glottalization of a consonant (consonant letters with ascenders; not used in Ayeri)	<i>ka</i> → <i>ṭka</i> / <i>kaʔ</i> /; <i>da</i> → <i>ṭda</i> / <i>dʔa</i> /
Small diacritics		
 <i>gondaya</i> 'extinguisher'	Deletes inherent /a/ of consonant, e.g. in consonant clusters or closed syllables	<i>para</i> → <i>pra</i> , <i>ra</i>
 <i>vināti</i> 'nasalizer'	Indicates a homorganic nasal or nasalizes the vowel, depending on language/context	<i>pada</i> → <i>pāṇa</i> / <i>panda</i> / or / <i>pāda</i> /
 <i>kusangisāti</i> 'duplicator'	Indicates a geminated or otherwise double consonant	<i>pala</i> → <i>palla</i>

Even though the primary position for small diacritics is underneath consonants, the diacritic deleting the inherent vowel, ◌◌, very commonly also appears after a consonant letter at the end of words:

- (54) ယ နီမရေ ဟံဂ် ၂ နာရ်ယေ။
 Ya nimreng pangan narānyena.
 Ya nim-reng pangan-Ø narān-ye-na
 LOCT appear=3SG.INAN.A end-TOP word-PL-GEN
 ‘It appears at the end of words.’

This strategy is advantageous since Tahano Hikamu leaves very little to no space between individual words: ယနီမရေဟံဂ်၂နာရ်ယေ။

2.3.2 Prepended Diacritics

Example (53) leads us directly to the next class of diacritics—ones that are prepended to the consonant letter, either because they are simply placed there or because of allography. Let us first list those diacritics that appear in front of consonants obligatorily (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Obligatorily prepended diacritics of Tahano Hikamu

Native name	Function	Example
၃◌ ဂ်လန်ကံ လေတန်- kusang ‘double- sound’	Marks a diphthong with /ɪ/	ဂ် pe → ဂ် pey
၃◌ ဖိလံယာ တီလံယာ ‘changer’	Marks raised vowels (i.e. umlaut; not used in Ayeri)	ဂ် po → ဖိဂ် /pø/
၃◌ ဖိယံယာ ဟိယံယာ ‘roller’	Marks retroflex consonants (not used in Ayeri) ³	တံ ta → ဖိတံ /tʰa/

As Figure 2.7 shows, the only obligatorily prepended diacritic that Ayeri uses is the one that marks diphthongs, ၃◌. However, there are also a number of diacritics that are also obligatorily prepended to consonants, but do so as context-sensitive allographs (Figure 2.8). The selection of the variant diacritics is not random or up to the aesthetic eye of the writer (even though the device itself is certainly a matter of aesthetics), but it is governed by rules. The prepended forms listed in Figure 2.8 are thus triggered

³ In a Tahano Hikamu orthography I devised for English once, ၃◌ was used for /ə/, as in the NURSE vowel in American English: နုး nurse.

Figure 2.8: Allographically prepended diacritics of Tahano Hikamu

Native name	Function	Example
၁ ^၀ တွ- pasati marin 'anterior long-maker'	Lengthens the primary vowel of the syllable	နွ sya → နွ syā, န na → န nā
၂ ^၀ ယာ- ya marin 'anterior ya' လံယာ- ringaya marin 'anterior raiser'	⟨ya⟩ following another consonant, also across syllables. Also used as an allograph for the palatalization proper diacritic.	န na → နယာ nya န /s ^h a/ → နယ /s ^h i/
၁ ^၀ လံယာ- ulan- gaya marin 'anterior breather'	(Pre-)Aspiration or frication of a consonant (not used in Ayeri)	က nga → က လံယာ /ŋ ^h a/; တ ta → တ လံယာ /t ^h a/

1. when there is no stem or bowl for the regular subscript diacritic to attach to, which is the case for န ⟨na⟩, က ⟨nga⟩, လံ ⟨va⟩, and က လံ ⟨wa⟩:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 (55) \quad \text{a. } \text{န} \rightarrow \text{နလံ} & \text{c. } \text{လံ} \rightarrow \text{လံလံ} \\
 & \text{/na/} \quad \text{/na:/} \qquad \text{/va/} \quad \text{/va:/} \\
 & \text{b. } \text{က} \rightarrow \text{ကလံ} & \text{d. } \text{ကလံ} \rightarrow \text{ကလံလံ} \\
 & \text{/ŋa/} \quad \text{/ŋa:/} \qquad \text{/wa/} \quad \text{/wa:/}
 \end{array}$$

2. when a large subscript diacritic would be added after another large subscript diacritic—this position can only be filled in once, so further large subscripts are prepended:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 (56) & & + \text{၁} & & + \text{၂} & & + \text{၁} & & + \text{၁} \\
 & \text{တ} & \rightarrow & \text{တ၁} & \rightarrow & \text{တ၁၂} & \rightarrow & \text{တ၁၁၂} & \rightarrow & \text{တ၁၁၁၂} \\
 & \text{/ta/} & & \text{/t^ha/} & & \text{/t^hja/} & & \text{/t^hji/} & & \text{/t^hji:/}
 \end{array}$$

The order of diacritics follows the logic of the respective language's phoneme inventory, so if there are, for example, retroflex consonants and both dental and retroflex consonants can be aspirated, retroflexion would be marked first,

then aspiration. If there is a palatalization distinction on top of this, the diacritic would be added after aspiration.

When adding large diacritics to stemless consonants, they are prepended from the beginning, as we saw in (55), and just like in (56), this principle continues:

$$(57) \quad \begin{array}{ccccccc} & + \text{ၵ} & & + \text{ၶ} & & + \text{ၷ} & \\ \text{ၵ} & \rightarrow & 2\text{ၵ} & \rightarrow & ၶ2\text{ၵ} & \rightarrow & ၷၶ2\text{ၵ} \\ /na/ & & /nja/ & & /nja:/ & & /nja:ɿ/ \end{array}$$

3. with consonants directly following ၵ ⟨na⟩, to avoid a clash with its swash:

$$(58) \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} \text{ၵ} & + & \text{ၶ} & \rightarrow & \text{ၶၵ} & (* \text{ၵၶ}) \\ /na/ & & /pa:/ & & /napa:/ \end{array}$$

An exception to this exception occurs, however, when the consonant is not directly following. In this case, no reordering happens, only ၵ ⟨na⟩ *may* reduce its descender in size to accommodate the following prepended diacritic:⁴

$$(59) \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} \text{ၵ} & + & \text{ၷ} & \rightarrow & 2\text{ၷ} & (? \text{ၵၷ}) \\ /na/ & & /paɿ/ & & /napaɿ/ \end{array}$$

4. in other cases where a clash of subscript diacritics needs to be avoided:

$$(60) \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} \text{ၶ} & + & \text{ၶ} & \rightarrow & \text{ၶၶ} & (* \text{ၶၶ}) \\ /di/ & & /pa:/ & & /dipa:/ \end{array}$$

Alternatively, the following solution is also permissible:

⁴ The font I am using here is designed so that the reduced combination looks nicer, but if unreduced, ၵ ⟨na⟩'s swash is not so long as to cross the descender of ၷ either.

$$(61) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} \text{ငါ} & + & \text{ပ} & \rightarrow & \text{ငါပ} \\ /di/ & & /pa:/ & & /dipa:/ \end{array}$$

When two long syllables follow each other, as in *bāmā* ‘mom-and-dad’, one of the length diacritics should definitely be pulled to the front:

$$(62) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} \text{မ} & + & \text{မ} & \rightarrow & \text{မမ} & (? \text{မမ}) \\ \text{or:} & & & & & \\ \text{မ} & + & \text{မ} & \rightarrow & \text{မမ} & \\ /ba:/ & & /ma:/ & & /ba:ma:/ \end{array}$$

2.3.3 Superscript Diacritics

Ayeri’s standard position for diacritics is below consonants, but sometimes it is nicer to put them on top, especially for the letter ခ ⟨na⟩ due to its swash, as well as for ဖ ⟨va⟩ since the space below its flag is empty otherwise, thus not providing much of a visual connection. The only diacritic that is normally attaching at the top of consonants is that for the glottal stop—we have already encountered its subscript allograph earlier. Since Ayeri’s phoneme inventory does not possess a phonemic glottal stop or glottalization, this diacritic is not used in Ayeri. The list of superscript diacritics is given in Figure 2.9.

While the subscript position is preferred in case of a primary vowel, it may be necessary to attach both a superscript diacritic and a vowel sign above a consonant. In this case, the consonant-modifying diacritic is placed first and the vowel diacritic on top of it.

2.4 Numerals

Ayeri uses a number system based on units of 12; there is a character for zero, so the system is positional, like the Hindu–Arabic digits used by the Latin alphabet. The numbers from 1 to 12 are shown in 2.10.

2.5 Punctuation and Abbreviations

...

Figure 2.9: Superscript diacritics of Tahano Hikamu

Native name	Function	Example
◌် ခွပ်လိက် <i>gondaya</i> <i>ling</i> ‘upper extinguisher’	Deletes inherent /a/ of consonant, e.g. in consonant clusters or closed syllables	ၚာ <i>vara</i> → ၚာ <i>vra</i> , ၚာ <i>var</i>
◌် နီလိက် <i>vināti</i> <i>ling</i> ‘upper nasalizer’	Indicates a homorganic nasal or nasalizes the vowel, depending on language/context	နာ <i>naka</i> → နံ <i>nanka</i> /naŋka/ or /nāka/
◌် နီလိက် <i>ku-</i> <i>sangisāti ling</i> ‘upper duplicator’	Indicates a geminated or otherwise double consonant	နာ <i>pana</i> → နံ <i>panna</i>
◌် ရပ် <i>raypāya</i> ‘stopper’	Glottal stop coda or glottalization of a consonant (not used in Ayeri)	တ <i>ta</i> → တံ <i>/taʔ/</i> ; ဆ <i>sa</i> → ဆံ <i>/sʔa/</i>

Figure 2.10: The consonant graphemes of Tahano Hikamu

0	1	2	3	4	5
e	12	0	12	7	9
6	7	8	9	A	B
O	A	H	5	a	6

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