A Grammar of Ayeri

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DOCUMENTING A FICTIONAL LANGUAGE

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Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource

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Glossing Abbreviations

1	First person	NN	Noun
2	Second person	NOM	Nominative
3	Third person	NPST	Near past
A	Agent	P	Patient
ACC	Accusative	PST	Past
AN	Animate	PT	Patient topic
AT	Agent topic	PTCP	Participle
GEN	Genitive	REL	Relative
INAN	Inanimate	RPST	Remote past
INDF	Indefinite	SBJ	Subject
LOC	Locative	SG	Singular
M	Masculine	TOP	Topic
NMLZ	Nominalizer	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when the first thing people look for on my website is often the grammar, incomplete as well as partially inaccurate and outdated as it may be.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, p.c.).[1] This is to say that previous attempts of writing a full-fledged grammar of Ayeri have been incomplete due to 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 LaTeX, combined with using GitHub as a version control system, maintaining and editing will become faster, more transparent, and more elegant, since LaTeX operates on plain text files, and version control helps in keeping track of changes over time.

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[1] ꤲꤲꤲꤲꤲ *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.

0 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:

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[1] A lot of the text here is taken from the blog article, "Happy 10th Anniversary, Ayeri!" (Becker 2013).

(1) *Ayevhoi   agiaemaesim   coyaielieðamavir   vhaieloyaŋaiye.*
     Ay-evhoi   agia-ema-esim   coyai-el-i-eðam-avir   vhai-el-o-yaŋa-iye
     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   layaiyạin   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.'

The word ꬉ꒐ꔋ *pinam* 'bed' was only (re-)introduced on October 24, 2008. 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 familiar really 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 3rd-person referents: originally, every 3rd-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 are spelled as ⟨Vi⟩ instead of modern ⟨Vy⟩.
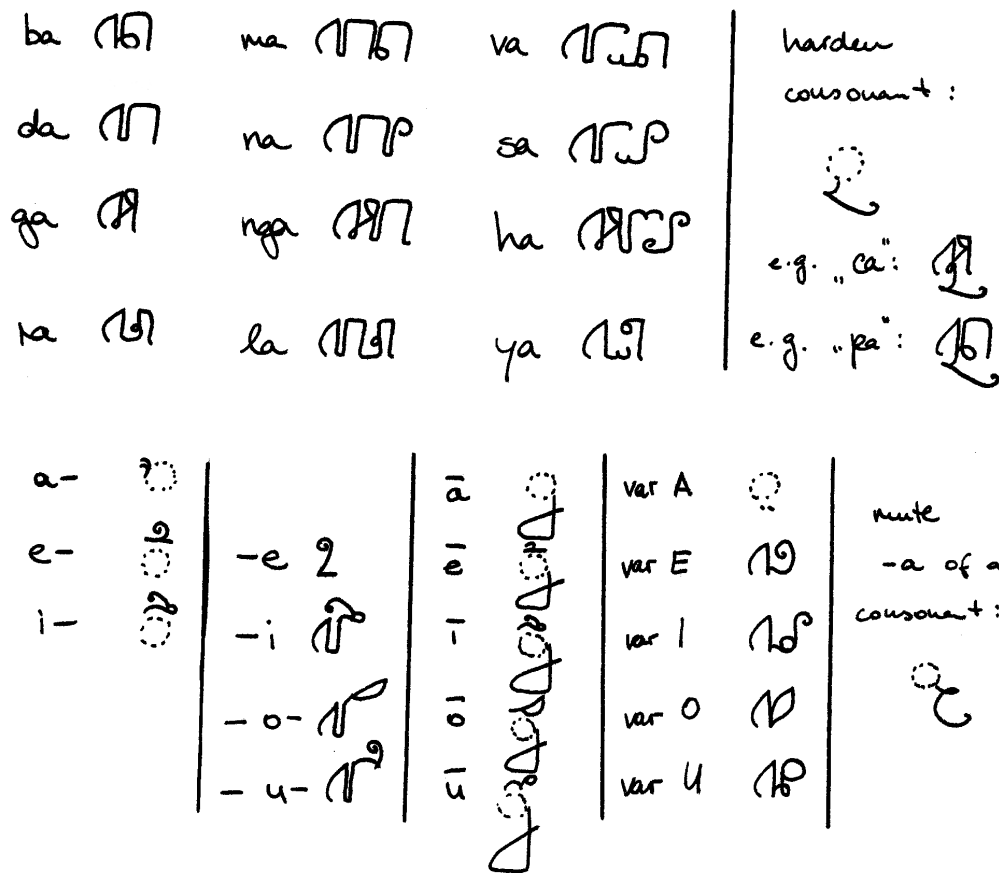
Figure 0.1: First design for an Ayeri script (February 9, 2004)

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; Figure 0.1 shows a draft dated February 9, 2004. However, since 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" here 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.

Figure 0.2: First draft for Tahano Hikamu (March 25, 2005)

Another important date in the history of Ayeri is 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 worked on 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 form 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.[2] This renewed attempt at documentation has been started with the intention to right those wrongs.

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[2]   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.

1 Phoneme Inventory and Phonotactics

This chapter will present charts depicting the phoneme inventory of Ayeri, give an analysis of the phonotactics of Ayeri's dictionary entries and also describe stress patterns.

1.1 Phoneme Inventory

Consonants

At 17 consonants – /ʔ/ and /w/ only occur marginally –, Ayeri has a fairly mid-sized inventory. Table 1.1 shows the full chart. The affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are allophones of /tj, kj/ and /dj, gj/, respectively.

Vowels

Ayeri has a very basic five-vowel system:

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

(4)　a.　ᴇᴎᴩ *ming* [mɪŋ] 'can, be able',

　　　b.　ᴂ2ᴣ *enya* ['ɛnja] 'everyone',

　　　c.　ᴂᴚᴣ *agon* ['agɔn] 'outer, foreign', and

　　　d.　ᴨᴣᴩ *pakur* ['pakʊr] 'ill, sick'.

/ə/ is a marginal phoneme and only occurs in the tense prefixes ᴂ: *kə-* 'ɴᴘsᴛ', ᴇ: *mə-* 'ᴘsᴛ', ᴦ: *və-* 'ʀᴘsᴛ', as well as in the prefix ᴇ: *mə-* 'some, whichever'. Otherwise, [ə] occurs as an allophone of /e/ in final unstressed position, e.g. in the word ᴂᴣ *mine* ['minə] 'affair, matter, issue'.

Ayeri also possesses a number of diphthongs, these are: /ai aːi ei ɔi ʊi au/. Furthermore, the vowels [i e o u] may be long: [aː eː iː oː]. This is lexicalized

Table 1.1: Consonant inventory

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

Table 1.2: Vowel inventory

	Front	Center	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	(ə)	o
Back		a	

in a few words, for example: ཨི་ཟཱ *nīsa* 'wanted', ᨷᩈᩦᩈ *pasīsa* 'interesting', ᨠᩁᩮᩢ *arēn* 'anyway, however', ᩃᩮᩁ *lēra* 'whore', and ᨶᩰᩁ *nōn* 'wish'. Otherwise, long vowels result from two same vowels next to each other, for instance:

(5) ᨠᩡ *aja-* 'play' + ᩋᩢ *-an* 'NMLZ' → ᨠᩣᩁᩢ *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, ᩈᩦᩁᩣ *sinā* 'of which, about which', as in the following example:

(6)
Le	*turayāng*	*taman*	*sinā*		*ang*	*ningay*
Le	tura-yāng	taman-Ø	si-Ø-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 ᩈᩦᩁ *sina* 'which.GEN':

(7)
tamanang	*ledanena*	*nā*	*sina*	*koronvāng*
taman-ang	ledan-ena	nā	si-na	koron-vāng
letter-A	friend-GEN	1SG.GEN	REL-GEN	know=2SG.A

'the letter of my friend which you know'

1.2 Phonotactics

For the purpose of statistical analyis, only the following parts of speech have been considered: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, adpositions, conjunctions, and numerals. Verbs have been notably ignored as 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 for syllabification and stress, which depend on the inflection
of the verb stem:

Table 1.3: Syllabification of inflected verbs

Suffix	*ca-* 'love'	*gum-* 'work'	*babr-* 'mumble'
-ay (1SG)	cáy	gu.máy	ba.bráy
-va (2SG)	cá.va	gúm.va	ba.brá.va
-yam (PTCP)	cá.yam	gúm.yam	bá.bryam

Since pure prefixes and suffixes like ᰰᰭᰩᰪ *sitang-* 'self-' or ᰗᰭᰩᰪ *-ikan* 'much,
many' do not constitute independent words either, they also have been omitted
from statistical analysis.

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