

1.1 Phonology

Kayah Li is a tone language, with some ‘tones’ including phonation; as well as pitch features. The initial consonant system is moderately complex, including a three-way contrast of voiced/voiceless unaspirate/voiceless aspirate for stops, and stop+liquid clusters. There are no voiceless sonorant or glottalized initials. There are no final consonants, and the rhyme system is fairly simple, consisting mostly of monophthongs and a few diphthongs.

The transcription is generally IPA for segments. Tones are marked with macron (\bar{x}) for mid level, acute accent (\acute{x}) for high level, grave accent (\grave{x}) for low falling, and no mark (x) for low level.

2.2 Initials

2.2.1 Simple Initials

	lab	den	alvpal	ret	vel	glot
voiceless unaspirated	p	t	c		k	(ʔ)
voiceless aspirated	ph	th	ch		kh	
voiced	b	d	(j)			
nasal	m	n			ŋ	
voiceless fricative		s				h
voiced continuant	w	l	(j)	r		

Notes on initials:

1. Aspirated stops and affricate are unit phonemes.
2. /c ch/ are alveopalatal affricates [tʃ tʃʰ]. /ch/ is occasionally realized with no stop component, as a slightly aspirated fricative [çʰ].
3. /j/ varies between standard palatal glide and voiced palatal fricative, also occasionally appearing as a slightly pre-nasalized alveopalatal affricate [ʰdz], especially in the Low Falling tone.

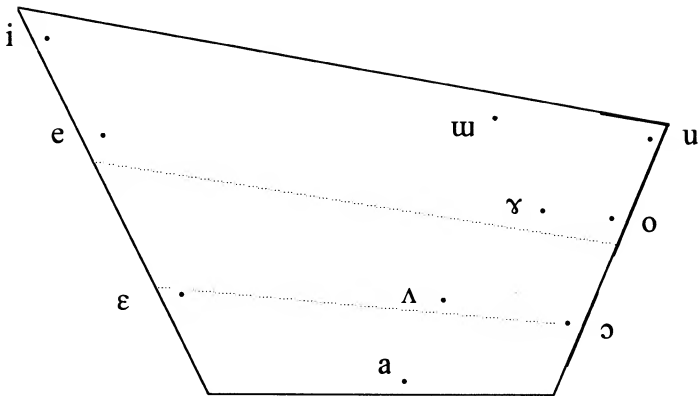
2.2.2 Cluster Initials

pl	phr
kl	KHR

In clusters, there is complementary distribution between aspiration and the l-r contrast; that is, the aspirated stop is only followed by r and the unaspirated stop is only followed by l. Either the aspiration feature or the choice of the following liquid may be treated as redundant. If such mutual determination is considered undesirable, there is one bit of evidence for choosing the l-r difference as fundamental: simple initials with aspiration

2.3 Rhymes

2.3.1 Simple Rhymes (the Vowel System)



Notes:

1. /i u/ are cardinal [i u].
2. /a/ is a low central [a].
3. /e o/ are slightly higher than cardinal. When unstressed, /e/ may lower. This is especially noticeable in the word /bé se/ ‘face’, which often sounds more like /bése/.

4. /ε ɔ/ are cardinal [ε ɔ]; /ε/ is not as low as the [æ] of Tai languages which is often transcribed as ‘ε’.

5. /u/ is a centralized high back unrounded vowel, more central than the similar vowel of standard Thai, but not a fully central [i].

6. /ɤ/ is a slightly centralized upper-mid back unrounded vowel, very similar to the /ɤ/ of Thai and Shan (which is often transcribed ‘ə’), and occurring almost exclusively in Thai or Shan loanwords.

7. /ʌ/ is a centralized version of cardinal [ʌ], similar to the English vowel often transcribed with the same symbol (the vowel of but, gum, hug etc.)

8. All vowels except /i u a/ are raised under the low-level and low-falling tones. /u/ is slightly lowered under the high tone.

9. The phonemic status of the three-way contrast /u ɤ ʌ/ is solid only in the high tone, cf.

dú	cut, slice	dɤ	at	dʌ	give
tuí	just now	tɤ	chest, box	—	
sú	wrong	sɤ	insert	—	
chú	kindle	—		chʌ	clear; ten
juí	shrink	—		jʌ	(a Verb Particle)

2.3.2 Compound Rhymes

wi wa we ja jo (ju)

The onglides /j- w-/ are usually closer to [ɛ] and [ɔ] respectively. There is at least one form /pja/ which may result from a fusion of /pe/ + /a/ (see 4.3.5).

/juu jo we/ are rare. The first occurs only in one word so far recorded: thā khjuu ‘the Salween river’. /jo/ similarly occurs only in the common word mjō ‘type, kind’ (from Shan/Burmese). /we/ is more common, but seems confined to Shan and Burmese loanwords, e.g.

cwe habituated; W[ritten] B[urmese] cwài stick fast in, adhere, use habitually, chronic.

pwe celebrate, festival; WB pwài id.






jwe small change; Shan jōj id. (cf. Thai jōj ‘break up into small particles’)

Note that the rhyme spelled ‘-wai’ in WB is pronounced [-wɛ] in modern Rangoon Burmese.

/wa/ occurs with all initials except /v/. /wi/ occurs with all simple initials except /v t n h Ø/. /ja/ occurs only after labial obstruents and simple (non-cluster) velars.

2.4 Tones

The first four tones listed below are major components of the tonal system, while the fifth is decidedly marginal.

mid		33
low level		11
low falling		21
high		55
high falling		52

Examples:

rē across	kō blow away
re all over, at random	ko general classifier
rè trellis	kò wear on head
tərə́ wax	kó do temporarily
cókəre ⁵² otter	chiko ⁵² shrimp

The forms given above are those found in isolation or before pause. — .