

2. Phonology

The consonant phonemes of Lau are as follows:

Table 1. Consonants

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Velar	Labialised velar	Glottal
Stops		<i>t</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>k^w</i>	<i>ʔ</i>
	<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>g^w</i>	
Fricatives	<i>f</i>	<i>s</i>			<i>h</i>
Nasals	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ŋ</i>		
Laterals		<i>l</i>			
Flaps		<i>r</i>			
Semivowels	<i>w</i>				

Note that /h/ is realised as [h] by coastal speakers, but as [s] by some of the mainland Lau. /w/ is pronounced as [ŋ^w] by the northern Lau, but simply as [w] by the southern Lau (Fox 1974:205).

The vowels of Lau are as follows:

Table 2. Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>i ī</i>		<i>u ū</i>
Mid	<i>e ē</i>		<i>o ō</i>
Low		<i>a ā</i>	

Vowel length is phonemic in Lau. Pairs distinguished by vowel length include:

<i>ma</i>	‘and’	<i>mā</i>	‘eye’
<i>ari</i>	‘call out’	<i>āri</i>	‘tie firmly’
<i>bula</i>	‘turn’	<i>būla</i>	‘keel of canoe’
<i>koko</i>	‘old’	<i>kokō</i>	‘grandparent’
<i>fufu</i>	‘swell’	<i>fūfū</i>	‘spider’
<i>nini</i>	‘shrub sp’	<i>ninī</i>	‘a pair’