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Complete Grammar of the Yajéé Language

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1 Introduction

The Yajéé [jā.ɕé:] language is spoken by the Yajé people on the islands of Hamar and Hegüü, in the Western Sea, called Neyá'aa by the Yajé. Yajéé is descended from Proto-Yajéé, an earlier language originally spoken in the Yajé urheimat of Hamar. The Yajé are voyagers and have explored many of the islands in that area, but at the point of modern Yajéé, they have only established permanent settlements on these two islands. The Yajé have been in constant contact with the Faazngge people on the mainland through a diaspora community there, and have inherited a significant number of loanwords from them. Many words referring to nomadic lifestyles or desert and steppe flora and fauna come from these mainlanders.

I began working on Yajéé as part of the CDN Speedlang Challenge 7 in October 2020, and it is the first fleshed-out conlang of my conworld Leyet.

To anyone who reads this, please send me any comments and critiques you may have. I am always trying to get better at conlanging. Thank you!



Figure 1: Current Distribution of Yajéé Speakers

1.1 Abbreviations

Gloss	Name
1	first person
2	second person
A	atelic
ACC	accusative
AUX	auxiliary
CAUS	causative
CESS	cessative
CONV	converb
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
DIST	distal
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperfective
INC	inceptive
IRR	irrealis
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
NOM	nominative
PART	partitive
PASS	passive
PERF	perfective
PL	plural
PROX	proximal
PUR	purposive
Q	question
S	stative
SG	singular
SUB	subordination
T	telic
VN	verbal noun

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2 Phonology

2.1 Phonemic Inventory

	Labial	Coronal	Retroflex	Dorsal	Glottal
Stops	p	t	ʈ	k k ^w	ʔ
Affricates		tʃ			
Fricatives		s	ʂ		h
Approximants	w	r l	ɭ	j	

	Front	Back
High	i y	u
Mid	e ø	o
Low	a	

	Front	Central	Back
Mid	ẽ ø̃	ã	õ
Low	ã		

2.2 Allophony

- Unvoiced stops /p, t, tʃ, ʈ, k, k^w/ voice to [b, d, dʒ, ɖ, g, g^w] between voiced segments.
- /r/ is phonetically a tap [ɾ] between vowels and a trill [r] in all other environments.
- Vowels occurring before nasals are slightly nasalized, but not as strongly as the phonemic nasals.
- Velar, coronal, and retroflex stops do not occur before [i, e, ẽ] except in loanwords.
- Labialized velars only occur before rounded vowels and [õ].
- Laterals do not occur between vowels or finally, except in loanwords.

2.3 Orthography

Yajéé has no native writing system. Its romanization is entirely phonemic, though it does take some phonetic considerations into account.

- The palatals [tʃ, ɕ] are romanized as <ch, j>.
- Voiced consonants, though not phonemic, are romanized as <b, d, j, ɖ, g, gw> [b, d, ɕ, ɖ, g, g^w].
- Retroflex consonants [ɬ, ɖ̠, ʂ, ɭ] are romanized with an underdot <ṭ, ḍ, ṣ, ḷ>.
- Labialized velars [k^w, g^w] are romanized with a following w <kw, gw>.
- Rounded front vowels [y, ø] are romanized with diaereses <ü, ö>
- Schwa [ə̃] is romanized with diaeresis <ë>.
- Nasal vowels [ẽ, ø̃, ə̃, õ, ã] are romanized with ogoneks <ę, ֆ, և, ֈ, ։>.
- High tones are marked with acute accents according to their realization rather than their melody, see 2.4 for examples.
- When a morpheme ending in a nasal comes in contact with one beginning with a consonant, the nasal will assimilate to the place of articulation of the following consonant.
- Long vowels are marked by doubling.

2.4 Pitch Accent

2.4.1 Underlying System

Yajéé’s underlying pitch accent system is as follows. The representations shown here are phonemic, and their true phonetic forms will be discussed in 2.4.2.

Every morpheme is assigned one of three pitch patterns. In an unmarked word, no accent is assigned to any syllable, leaving all syllables low.

- | | | |
|-----|----------------|---------------------------|
| (1) | maay | kwüyisër |
| | /maːj/ | /k ^w y.ji.sõr/ |
| | “still, again” | “blood” |

In a low-marked word, a single syllable is marked with a high tone, while the other syllables remain low.

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|------------|
| (2) | ṭayár | ṭáseir |
| | /ṭa.jár/ | /ṭá.se.ir/ |
| | “to exist, there be” | “four” |

In a high-marked word, a single syllable is marked with a very high tone, and the other syllables remain low¹. An initial syllable will never be high-marked.

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|----------|
| (3) | chínár | tóbós |
| | /tʃi.nár/ | /to.pós/ |
| | “king, chief, ruler” | “alive” |

There are some words that do not fit any of the established patterns, with features such as multiple marked tones or a triple high tone on the marked vowel², but the historical processes that went in to producing these rare forms are subject for another article.

When two morphemes combine to make a compound or an inflectional form, this causes the marking to shift or change.

When an unmarked morpheme is in combination with any other morpheme, it simply takes on the marking of the other morpheme and the location of marking remains on the marked morpheme.

- | | |
|-----|------------|
| (4) | imbimár |
| | imbi-már |
| | steal-CESS |
| | “stole” |

When two low-marked morphemes come into contact, they collapse into a single high-marked word with its marking occurring in the location of the marking in the second morpheme.

¹While this analysis is straightforward, it does leave the caveat that the preceding tone is roughly the same pitch as the marked tone, and this is noted in the romanization. See 2.4.2

²not as interesting as it sounds; realized phonetically as three high tones in a row, with the final high tone on the marked syllable

- (5) pisambágáş
pisambá-gáş
game-ACC
“(I hunted) a game animal”

If one of the two morphemes involved in this process is high-marked, then the marking of the other morpheme is lost entirely, as high-marked is the highest pitch a regular word can reach. However, if the high-marked morpheme occurs first, the marking of the second morpheme will determine the location of the high-marked tone.

- (6) chinarágáş
chinará-gáş
king-ACC
“(She went towards) the king”

2.4.2 Surface Forms

The three different types of marking each have their own rules which allow one to correctly discern the tonal melody of a given phrase. Within this, the higher the marking, the less variation in differing phonetic contexts, with the melody of an unmarked word varying wildly when bordering different types of words. By this principle, the lower tone marking strategies are more similar to each other than either is to a phrase containing a high-marked word.

The full list of rules for determining a phonetic realization from a phonemic one is given in the following table:

I.1	All marked tones receive high tone
I.2	Marked tones will spread to an adjacent vowel in hiatus
II.1	The syllable preceding a high-marked syllable receives high tone
II.2	A syllable immediately following a high-marked syllable receives low tone
II.3	When preceding a high tone, a low tone must become mid
III.1	The final unmarked syllable of a marked word becomes mid provided that it is followed by an unmarked word and preceded by another unmarked syllable (blocks rule III.2 in the unmarked word, can be blocked by external factors, not terribly relevant here)
III.2	If not previously assigned a tone, the initial syllable in a low-marked or unmarked word takes a mid tone
IV.1	If low tone, a final long vowel is phonetically a short vowel followed by a glottal stop
IV.2	Between two non-low tones, downstep occurs from the first
IV.3	Any syllables still unassigned are given low tone

To illustrate these rules, let's look at a few example phrases, and see if we can find some noticeable patterns between them.

- (7) Lees Mododa
 /le:s mo.to.ta:/
 “Joy, daughter of Tree”

As you can see, this word has no phonemic tones. However, both words begin with a mid tone due to historical remnants of an earlier initial stress system (rule III.2) and downstep from that point (rule IV.2). Finally, an unmarked final long vowel will be realized as [Vʔ] (rule IV.1), leading to a phonetic realization of:


- (8) [lē:s mō.dòdàʔ]

A more complex example:

- (9) chérinasoo siḍaa
 /tʃé.ri.na.so: si.ta:/
 “on our friend”

For this type of phrase, one must be more methodical. A general rule is that tone assignment extends outward from marked tones, so in this case, where it appears we need use of rule III.2 again, we first must examine the environment, where we can find that it is prime for rule III.1, where an initial mid tone is moved to the final unmarked syllable of a preceding marked word, given that the penultimate syllable is also unmarked. This change occurs due to remnants of secondary stress placement inherited from Yajée’s ancestor, which moves the mid tone in order to lengthen the downstep from the mid tone to the end of the word/phrase, aiding in pronounceability.

This rule blocks rule III.2. Rules such as these are implemented in order by Roman numeral (I-IV) followed by Arabic numeral (1-3), where appropriate. All this together in conjunction with rules IV.1 and IV.2 will give the following phonetic realization:

(10)  [tʃé.rĩ.nà.sōʔ sì.dàʔ]

A final example:

(11) Chérii Chínáraḍaa Yaha Yahámarāḍaa
 /tʃé.ri: tʃi.ná.ra.ʔa: ja.ha ja.há.ma.ra.ʔa:/
 “Advisor of the King, Watcher son of the Motherland³”

For such a lengthy phrase (assuming whoever is uttering it doesn’t also add additional case marking, vocative particles, honorifics, or anything else), one unfamiliar with the language may need to take this step by step to avoid sounding like a foreigner (the Faazngge to the north have a strong accent characterized in part by their tendency to apply rule III.2 to every word).

In category 1, all the marked tones must receive high tone (rule I.1).

In category 2, the preceding tone to the high-marked syllable must be high as well (rule II.1) and the final syllable preceding that must be mid (rule II.3). This is why these rules are applied in this order, because otherwise rule II.3 would not be necessary before II.1, and there would be a low tone rather than a mid tone in this location. II.2 is also applied, requiring that the syllable after the high-marked tone is given low tone.

In category 3, rule III.1 applies to the final syllable of **Chínáraḍaa**, and rule III.2 applies to **Yahámarāḍaa**.

Finally, rules IV.1 and IV.2 are applied to give the final realization of:

³This man was the principal advisor to king Kaṅow, second king of the Yajé. See 10.4

(12) [tʃé.ɾĩʔ tʃí.ná.rà.dǎʔ jà.hà jǎ.há.mā.rà.dǎʔ]

Two words also take special rules, **chéga** (“subordination particle”) and **na** (“to believe, irrealis auxiliary”):

Chéga is realized as **chega**, phonemically low but phonetically mid initially, when following a word which ends in a high tone.

Na⁴ is polar in its tone marking, and so will take the tone opposite of the following syllable in a phrase (**na** vs **ná**, **ni** vs **ní**). In its inceptive form **niba**, this process is still only realized on the stem **ni-**, and so the polarity will pass through the second syllable and be marked on the first (**niba** vs **níba**).⁵

In addition, some discourse functions also can affect tone/pitch. In a declarative statement, light downstep occurs across the whole phrase, in addition to all the other tone rules. In a question, this is less pronounced, and upstep can often be heard nearing the end of the phrase.

2.5 Phonotactics

Yajée’s phonotactics are defined as:

CV^TN/S#

- C = any consonant
- V = any vowel
- ^T = tone (marked or unmarked)
- N = any nasal consonant
- S = consonants other than stops⁶ or laterals
- / = separates word-final syllables (right) and other syllables (left)
- # = word boundary

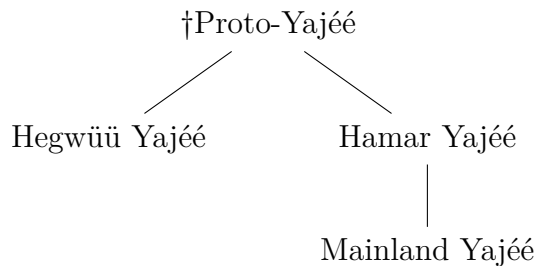
⁴Note: This only applies in its auxiliary form. When used lexically, **na** is phonemically unmarked.

⁵This is because **niba** used to be three syllables, so the two forms were **níbaǎǎ** and **nibǎǎǎ**. When the third syllable was lost, it lowered the tone on the preceding syllable, leading to the two modern forms **níba** and **niba**.

⁶glottal stop is allowed

3 Dialects

Yajée has three major dialects, which all descend from Proto-Yajée (though they are of course similar enough to be classified as a single language, or you'd be reading three grammars right now). The Hamar and Hegwüü dialects are very similar, having diverged from each other around 300 years ago, though their close proximity keeps them rather similar and they experienced areal effects such as the development of the pitch accent system. The Mainland dialect is relatively divergent, having split from Hamar Yajée about 100 years ago, but has changed rapidly since then due to contact with other language families and relative isolation. All examples in this grammar are written in the Hamar dialect, unless otherwise specified.



3.1 Hegwüü Dialect

The Hegwüü dialect is more conservative than the Hamar dialect, maintaining old word final nasals and nasal-stop clusters (but not plain final stops).

(13) rɔmoo, em Hamar Yajée

(14) rɔmon, emb Hegwüü Yajée

However, it also has a couple sound changes absent in Hamar Yajée, such as diphthongization of long vowels and backing of /a/ to [ɑ].

(15) [mū:r], [rīgàw] Hamar Yajée

[mō̄:ɹ], [rīgàw] Hegwüü Yajée

3.2 Mainland Dialect

Mainland Yajée is more closely related to Hamar Yajée, and it could essentially be considered a daughter language of Hamar Yajée, as it has undergone all the changes Hamar Yajée has undergone.

Mainland Yajée has a few grammatical alterations, such as the addition of the question particle (see 9.2) and the heavy use of the passive voice to topicalize arguments (see 6.2), which is quite pervasive and continues to become more common as it falls more and more out of use in the island dialects.

In addition, a number of sound changes have taken place, such as the complete loss of long vowels, diphthongization of vowels in hiatus, loss of final /r/, loss of glottals, and voicing of fricatives intervocalically.

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------|----------------|
| (16) | sayée, nios, ye'ir, písam | Hamar Yajée |
| | sayé, nyos, yey, písam | Mainland Yajée |

And of course there are plenty of lexemes only used in one dialect or another, and some semantic drift allows for different usages of various words.

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (17) | rɔmoo | Hamar Yajée |
| | “brother” | |
| | rɔmon | Hegwüü Yajée |
| | “friend, buddy, pal, brother” | |
| | rɔmo | Mainland Yajée |
| | “brother” | |
| (18) | “to ride” | |
| | kwúna | Island Yajée dialects |
| | wíde | Mainland Yajée |

4 Nominal Morphology

Yajéé nouns inflect for case, and receive no marking for number or gender/class. However, direct objects do make a distinction between animate and inanimate nouns (see 4.1, accusative and partitive cases).

Nouns have a stem vowel which may be accompanied by a consonant in cases other than the nominative. Because of this, dictionary entries for nouns show both the nominative and oblique stems. The oblique stem is also what speakers defer to when creating new derivations.

Thus, the basic noun template is stem.NOM or stem.OBL-CASE

4.1 Case

Yajéé nouns inflect for six cases, the Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Dative, Partitive, and Locative.

Nominative	-
Accusative	-gáʂ
Genitive	-ɖaa
Dative	-mëʂ
Partitive	-somáʼ
Locative	-soo

Nominative: The nominative case is used for the subjects of transitive verbs, the experiencers of intransitive verbs, and the copula subject.

(19) He tá isesomáʼ.

he tá ise-somáʼ
see.PERF 1SG.NOM PROX.DEM-PART

“I saw him/her”

(20) Öree chimáá.

öree chimáá
go.IMP boy.NOM

“The boy is going.”

- (21) Ṭayér Yahégwüü chérinasoo siḍaa.
 ṭayér Yahégwüü chérina-soo si-ḍaa.
 exist.PERF Hegüüan friend-LOC 1PL-GEN
 “The Hegüüan (person from Hegüü) was our friend.”

Accusative: The accusative is used to mark inanimate direct objects of transitive and ditransitive verbs. It is also used in nouns in postpositional phrases, when the preposition indicates a type of motion or change in state.

- (22) Püşimár kada’aḍaa modogáṣ.
 püş-imár kada’a-ḍaa modo-gáṣ
 stab-CESS spear-GEN tree-ACC
 “He stabbed the tree with a spear.”

- (23) Rajimbimár ła lüümíí sidagagáṣ táḍaa par.
 rajimb-imár ła lüümíí sidaga-gáṣ tá-ḍaa par
 fall-CESS one.NOM raindrop.NOM face-ACC 1SG-GEN onto
 “One raindrop fell on my face.”

Genitive: The genitive is used to mark possessors, comitatives, and instrumentals.

- (24) Ná ’o chínáraḍaa ureeyuugáṣ mijesomá’.
 ná ’o chínára-ḍaa ureey-uu-gáṣ
 AUX.IRR.IMP woman.NOM chief-GEN manipulate-VN-ACC
 mije-somá’
 DIST.DEM-PART
 “The chief’s wife may be manipulating him.”

- (25) Ƙachíbádár tá Hamaragáṣ chínáraḍaa.
 ƙa-chíbádár tá Hamara-gáṣ chínára-ḍaa
 T-go.PERF 1SG.NOM Hamar-ACC chief-GEN
 “I went to Hamar with the chief.”

- (26) Paree, wõne şii kwümahegwünedúúgáš heriaḁaa mijeḁaa!
 Paree wõne şii kwümahe-gwüned-úú-gáš heria-ḁaa
 Paree can NEG A-ride-VN-ACC thing-GEN
 mije-ḁaa
 DIST.DEM-GEN
 “Paree, you can’t ride that thing!”

Dative: The dative is used to mark indirect objects of ditransitive verbs, as well as benefactives.

- (27) Lür rudusomá’ pun chimámomëş iseḁaa.
 lür rudu-somá’ pun chimámo-mëş ise-ḁaa
 give fruit-PART man.NOM son-DAT PROX.DEM-GEN
 “The man gave his son some fruit.”

- (28) Rös şebída kwongwosomá’ támëş is eyii.
 rös şebída kwongwo-somá’ tá-mëş is
 hunt.PERF yesterday pig-PART 1SG-DAT PROX.DEM.NOM
 eyii
 be.all
 “They all hunted the pig for me yesterday.”

Partitive: The partitive refers to a portion or indefinite amount of a noun, and marks animate direct objects of transitive and ditransitive verbs. It also marks reintroduced agents in passive constructions.⁷

- (29) Imbimár pundasomá’ rudusomá’ sigáš ’e.
 imb-imár punda-somá’ rudu-somá’ si-gáš ’e
 steal-CESS man-PART fruit-PART 1PL-ACC from
 “Some guys stole some fruit from us.”

⁷Though this is rare, as Yajéé uses word order to topicalize referents. Speakers of Mainland Yajéé have a notable tendency to use the passive voice where word order would usually be preferred. See 3 and 8.3

- (30) Püšimár şegwúú tá isesomá’.
 püš-imár şegwúú tá ise-somá’
 stab-CESS tomorrow 1SG.NOM PROX.DEM-PART
 “I will stab him tomorrow.”

- (31) Azé o tazómé. Mainland Yajée
 a-zé o ta-zómé
 see-PASS.IMP woman.NOM 1SG-PART
 “I’m watching a woman.”

Locative: The locative indicates location in space and time, and it is used with postpositions that have more specific meanings of these concepts. It also marks the copula complement.

- (32) Sayí kwon aanayesoo.
 sayí kwon aanaye-soo
 sleep.IMP pig.NOM ground-LOC
 “The pig sleeps on the ground.”
- (33) Ümi řásasoo sigaye’ir poy.
 ümi řása-soo sigaye’ir poy
 stand group-LOC be.large.IMP before
 “He was standing before a large group.”
- (34) řayár ’aa tářaa resasamuurosoo.
 řayár ’aa tářaa resasamuuro-soo
 exist.IMP father.NOM 1SG-GEN dead.man-LOC
 “My father is a dead man.”

4.2 Noun-Forming Derivations

Suffixes are attached to the oblique stem of nouns, and sometimes are accompanied by other changes.

The prefix **ha-** (or **he-** when preceding a word beginning in a high vowel) creates a noun meaning “place of X” where X is the original noun or verb.

- (35) a. mar - mother; Hamar - motherland
b. kwüü - be new; Hegwüü - new land
c. heri - life; haheri - field

The suffix **-:** forms names of languages from ethnic group names⁸

- (36) a. Yajéé⁹

The augmentative creates a larger, older, or more powerful noun, or a more intense verb. Its form is realized as the accusative stem of the original lexeme in the nominative stem, and **-a** in the oblique stem.

- (37) ya - voyager; Yajé, Yajéá-
a. ka - knife; kada', kada'a- - sword, spear
pitata - to be old; pidada - to be old (from *pitata-a, to be very old)

The suffix **-muur** forms nouns from verbs, where the new noun is the expected object of the verb.

- (38) a. resas - to bury; resasamuur - dead person

The prefix **ya(')**- creates the agent noun of a verb. When preceding a vowel-initial word, it is realized as **ya'**- (which can morph to **ye'** preceding a high vowel), but before a consonant initial word, the glottal stop is replaced with a high tone on the following syllable (this may only be realized in the oblique stem if the oblique stem contains a voiced stop).

⁸This affix has an interesting etymology, from the Proto-Yajéé word **ma** “to be heavenly” or “to be inspired.” The Yajé believe language to be a spirit which bestows its power on speakers to distinguish them from the animals (which also causes some pretty harsh Yajé ethnocentrism).

⁹note: the form **Yajé** is from an augmentative **ya'kea**. Without this, the ethnic name would be Ya (but the oblique stem would be **Yajé-**, this is why suffixes are applied to the oblique stem).

- (39) a. Yahégwüü - person from Hegwüü
b. ha - to watch; yaha, yaháje- - watcher
c. ir - to hunt; ye'ir - hunter

5 Pronouns

	1		2	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nominative	tá	si	ni	lö
Accusative	tágáş	sigáş	niğáş	löjigáş
Genitive	táđaa	siđaa	niđaa	löjiđaa
Dative	támëş	simëş	niimëş	löjimëş
Partitive	tasómá’	sisomá’	nisomá’	löjisomá’
Locative	tásoo	sisoo	nisoo	löjisoo

There are no third-person pronouns, but the demonstratives **is** (proximal) and **mi** (distal) are frequently used as proximate and obviate pronouns, respectively.

(40) Lür kada’agáş mijemëş.

lür kada’a-gáş mije-mëş
 give spear-ACC DIST.DEM-DAT

“I gave the spear to him.”

As you can see in the above example, the first-person singular pronoun **tá** is omitted. This is rather common in Yajéé. Despite having no person agreement, pronouns are frequently omitted in the nominative and less frequently as objects (accusative/partitive/dative cases). The pronouns themselves are then used to emphasize the argument.

For example, if asked what one did with a friend’s knife, one might respond with simply, “**Lür.**” This is because the listener already knows that the speaker would be the subject of any action regarding the knife, and that the knife, being the thing talked about, would be experiencing the action, and thus the third person pronoun is not necessary to clarify.

6 Verbal Morphology

Yajéé verbs inflect for aspect and valency, with no overt marking for tense or mood, and with no person agreement.

Similar to nouns, verbs have two stems used for different purposes, the imperfective (S_i) and perfective (S_p) stems. The imperfective is used to express the imperfective aspect¹⁰, as well as in combination with the valency changing operations, and the perfective is used to express the perfective aspect, as well as in combination with the other aspect markers and the verbal noun.

Because the two stems are not always predictable from each other (and because consonants can appear in combination with other markers), the dictionary entries for verbs include the imperfective, cessative (if applicable), and perfective forms. Some verbs do not have a separate imperfective and perfective stem due to sound changes collapsing them together, and so must be discerned from context.

6.1 Aspect

Yajéé verbs conjugate for four aspects: the Imperfective, Perfective, Cessative, and Inceptive.

Perfective	S_p
Imperfective	S_i
Inceptive	S_p -iba
Cessative	S_p -imár

Yajéé verbs are also defined according to their telicity. A verb is either telic, atelic, or stative. For example, a verb like “go” would be considered atelic because it has no defined start or end point, “hit” would be telic because it happens in a clearly defined space of time, and “stand” would be stative because it does not represent a change, but rather a state which a person is in.

However, these are simply the base form, as complex verb phrases will often demand a verb of one class have a function of one of the other classes. This can be resolved using various prefixes which change the telicity of a verb to better fit the verb phrase.

¹⁰see 6.1

These prefixes attach to the lexical verb in an auxiliary construction.

Telic to Atelic	ii-/in-
Stative to Atelic	kwümah(e)-
To Telic	l(a)-
To Stative	kwún(a)-

These affixes are clearly related to some separate lexemes, as the telicity system is a relatively recent innovation.

ii	along, about, around
kwümiṇah	to grow, to develop
la	one, once
kwúna	to sit

Telic to atelic:

- (41) Püšimár ’obasomá’.
 püš-imár ’oba-somá’
 hit-CESS woman-PART
 “He hit a woman.”
- (42) Iipüš ’obasomá’.
 ii-püš ’oba-somá’
 A-hit.PERF woman-PART
 “He hit women.”

Stative to atelic:

- (43) Ṭaṇaoso tá.
 ṭaṇaoso tá
 be.on.fire.IMP 1SG.NOM
 “I am on fire.”
- (44) Kwümaheḍaṇaoso tá.
 kwümahe-ḍaṇaoso tá
 A-be.on.fire.IMP 1SG.NOM
 “I am cooking.”

To telic:

- (45) Kənow.
 kənow
 be.strong.IMP
 “He is strong.”
- (46) Łagənow muurogaş.
 ʎa-gənow muuro-gaş
 T-be.strong.IMP thing-ACC
 “He lifts something.”

To stative:

- (47) Rajem pundasomá'.
 rajem punda-somá'
 kill.IMP man-PART
 “She kills a man.”
- (48) Kwúnarajem.
 kwúna-rajem
 ST-kill.IMP
 “She is a killer.”

As you can see from the above example, changing a dynamic (telic or atelic) verb to a stative one often results in a predicative nominal, where the complement is an agentive of the lexical verb. This is usually preferred to the standard predicative nominal construction in such a situation.

Because of the nature of the cessative and inceptive, a stative or atelic verb will always be telic in these forms, and so do not require the telic prefix.

Because of the differences between the classes, the different classes of verbs realize the aspectual forms as different grammatical properties.

	Stative	Atelic	Telic
Perfective	Stative	Perfective	N/A
Imperfective	Gnomic	Imperfective	
Inceptive	Inchoative	Inceptive	Defective
Cessative	N/A	Cessative	Perfective

Thus, it is clearer to use the grammatical categories when discussing morphology, but when discussing usage, these realizations are far more convenient.

Stative: A stative verb expresses the state of the referent, or a quality it has at the time of reference. This contrasts with dynamic verbs (atelic and telic verbs), which express an action or a change of state. Adjectival verbs are always in this form or the gnomic form when used attributively.

(49) Kwúne şa eyii pun pidaje aanayesoo.

kwúne şa eyii pun pidaje aanaye-soo
sit.PERF day.NOM be.all man.NOM be.old.PERF ground-LOC

“The old man sits on the ground every day.”

Gnomic: The gnomic form of a stative verb expresses a general truth about a referent. This is used most commonly with adjectival verbs to express unchanging qualities, but can also be used with regular verbs to express a permanent state a referent is in.

(50) Hedqsoo wqna mo sigaye’ir muurogaş Yajéádaa.

hed-qsoo wqna mo sigaye’ir muuro-gaş
watch-IMP.CONV know.IMP tree.NOM be.tall thing-ACC

Yajéá-đaa
Yajé-GEN

“The tall tree knows the affairs of the Yajé and watches.”

Inchoative: The inchoative form of a stative verb expresses the beginning of a state.

(51) ’Eméeyqsoo heri kwüü řanaosüiba haheri.

’eméey-qsoo heri kwüü řanaosü-iba haheri
return-IMP.CONV life.NOM be.new burn-INC field.NOM

“As the field started to burn, new life returned to it.”

Perfective: The perfective form of telic and atelic verbs expresses an action viewed as a single unit, rather than as a process. It can also express the perfect. It is marked with the bare perfective stem in atelic verbs and the cessative suffix in telic verbs.

- (52) Ö̈r şegwúú kwongwo-somá’
 ö̈r şegwúú kwongwo-somá’
 eat.PERF tomorrow pig-PART
 “I will eat some pork tomorrow.”

- (53) Ṭaṇagaje’imár wagwomodosómá’ ’aa Leesidaa.
 ṭaṇagaje’-imár wagwomodo-sómá’ ’aa Leesidaa
 cut-CESS moa-PART father.NOM Lees-GEN
 “Lees’s father cut open a moa.”

Imperfective: The imperfective form of telic and atelic verbs describes an action as ongoing, habitual, or continuous. It views the action as a process within which the frame of reference lies.

- (54) Qr şii chimáá.
 qr şii chimáá
 eat.IMP NEG boy.NOM
 “The boy is not eating.”

Inceptive: The inceptive form of an atelic verb expresses the beginning of an action.

- (55) Hedümeer isesomá’ chíriba.
 hed-ümeer ise-somá’ chír-iba
 watch-PERF.CONV PROX.DEM-PART run-INC
 “Because he was being watched, he started to run.”

Cessative: The cessative (or terminative) form of an atelic verb expresses the end of an action.

- (56) Rajimbümeer rüsiba kwongwosomá’
 rajimb-ümeer rüs-iba kwongwo-somá’
 kill-PERF.CONV hunt-CESS pig-PART
 “He stopped hunting when he killed the pig.”

Defective: The defective form of a telic verb expresses an action that was nearly carried out, or ‘almost’ done.

- (57) Rajimbiba Parenesomá’ wagwómo kwümahegwúne chéga.
 rajimb-iba Parene-somá’ wagwómo kwümahe-gwúne chéga
 kill-INC Paree-PART moa.NOM A-sit.PERF SUB
 “Paree was almost killed by the moa he rode.”

6.2 Valency-Changing Operations

Yajéé verbs conjugate for active, passive, and causative voice. However, due to rampant argument dropping and a relatively free word order, the passive is hardly used, except in Mainland Yajéé (see 3 and 8.3).

These forms use the imperfective stem of a given verb, and aspect is instead marked directly onto the suffix, meaning that both the passive and the causative have separate forms for the four aspects.

The passive and the causative are limited to certain forms of verbs. Stative verbs do not take the passive by nature, and they must receive the telic or atelic prefix (whichever is more appropriate) to be used in the causative¹¹.

	Perfective	Imperfective	Inceptive	Cessative
Passive	-asé	-así	-asíiba	-asímár
Causative	-ṇah	-ṇeh	-ṇehiba	-ṇehimár

¹¹Mind here that, as mentioned earlier, a stative verb in the inceptive will be grammatically telic, and thus not need the telic prefix.

(58) Ƙazí wa anayeda amodozo. Mainland Yajée

ƙ-a-zí wa anaye-ɗa amodo-zo
 T-see-PASS.PERF bird.NOM ground-GEN forest-LOC

“A moa was spotted in the forest.”

(59) Kwümaheɗaɗaosoɗeh kwongwosomá’.

Kwümahe-ɗaɗaoso-ɗeh kwongwo-somá’
 A-be.on.fire-CAUS.PERF pig-PART

“The pig was burned/caused to be on fire.”

6.3 Nonfinite Forms

Yajée verbs also feature four nonfinite forms for use in auxiliary constructions and clause chaining: a verbal noun and three converb forms. These forms use the perfective stem of a given verb, though a small subset of common verbs have an irregular third stem for the nonfinite forms (ex: **lür** > **lur-**, **ha** > **hed-**)

Converbs	
Imperfective	-ɗsoo
Perfective	-ümeer
Purposive	-ɗmëŋ
Verbal Noun	-uu

Converbs are used to link clauses together. They replace conjunctions such as ‘and,’ ‘while,’ ‘because of,’ ‘in order to,’ etc. A converb clause is expected to have the same topic as the main clause (though that argument may or may not have the same grammatical role) unless otherwise specified (see also 8.3).

Imperfective: The imperfective converb expresses that the converb clause is completed at the same time, or in conjunction with, the main clause.

- (60) Resesqsoo rajimbimár tá aanayesoo.
 reses-qsoo rajimb-imár tá aanaye-soo
 dig-IMP.CONV fall-CESS 1SG.NOM ground-LOC
 “While I was digging, I fell on the ground.”

Perfective: The perfective converb expresses that the converb clause was completed before the action of the main clause.

- (61) 'Eméeyümeer hamodogáš 'e ojeriba tá.
 'eméey-ümeer hamodo-gáš 'e ojer-iba tá
 come.back-PERF.CONV forest-ACC from work-INC 1SG
 “After returning from the forest, I begin to work.”

Purposive: The purposive converb expresses that the main verb was carried out in order to complete the action of the main clause.

- (62) Ṭṭaṇaosüqmës ooraasé wayesomá'.
 ṭṭaṇaosü-qmës ooraasé waye-somá'
 cook-PUR.CONV scale.IMP fish-PART
 “I scale the fish in order to cook it.”

The verbal noun is used to turn a verb into a noun meaning ‘the act of verbing.’ It is also the form the lexical verb takes in an auxiliary construction (see 7.2).

- (63) chíruu enureeyuu
 “the act of running” “bravery, courage”

- (64) Wqna chibadárúúgáš löjidaa.
 wqna chibadár-úú-gáš löji-ḍaa
 know.PERF go-VN-ACC 2PL-GEN
 “I can go with you.”

6.4 Irrealis

Many modal meanings are expressed using auxiliary verbs. These are noted in the lexicon, as all these verbs also have lexical functions outside of their auxiliary usage. However, I feel the irrealis is important enough to address in this grammar. The irrealis mood is expressed with the auxiliary **na** “to believe” (see 2.4 for information on **na**’s polar tone). This creates a hypothetical, potential, or otherwise uncertain scenario.

- (65) Ná řegwúú rüsuugáş wayesomá’
ná řegwúú rüs-uu-gáş waye-somá’
IRR.AUX.IMP tomorrow hunt-VN-ACC fish-PART
“I might go fishing tomorrow.”

6.5 Verb-Forming Derivations

When nouns are made into verbs, the perfective stem is usually inferred based on expected vowel alternations and the original noun’s oblique stem.

The prefix **řiga-** creates a verb of which the original noun is the expected object.

- (66) a. kada - spear; řigagada - to sharpen
b. wes - thought; řigawes - to think
c. ye’ir - hunter; řigaye’ir - to be a hunter¹²

The prefix **řana-** creates a verb reflecting the action that the noun traditionally undertakes, essentially the opposite of **řiga-**.

- (67) a. ka - knife; řanaga - to cut
b. oso - fire; řanaoso - to burn, to cook

¹²This meaning is archaic, though it is still used this way considerably in Mainland Yajéé. The verb is now used most often to mean ‘be big/large/great.’

7 Modifiers

7.1 Adjectives

When used predicatively, adjectives function exactly like stative verbs.

- (68) Enuraay pun.
enuraay pun
be.brave.IMP man.NOM
“The man is brave.”

When used attributively, adjectives are simply juxtaposed with the head noun, but they do still take verbal morphology. This can often express specific natures of an attribute where a relative clause would be used in many other languages.

- (69) Ooraasé wayesomá' kwüü.
ooraasé waye-somá' kwüü
scale.IMP fish-PART be.new
“I was scaling a new fish.”

- (70) Merimár 'o leesimár.
mer-imár 'o lees-imár
leave-CESS woman.NOM be.happy-CESS
“The woman who is no longer happy left.”

7.2 Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs take the aspect and voice marking of the clause. In an auxiliary construction, the lexical verb takes the form of the verbal noun in the accusative case, as if it were the direct object of the auxiliary (though a true direct object can still take its normal marking in these situations). The lexical verb is generally placed in the topic position, with the true topic immediately after, though this is not a hard rule.

- (71) Ná şa is ıchibadárúúgáš Hamaragáš tá.
ná şa is ıa-chibadár-úú-gáš
AUX.IRR.IMP day.NOM PROX.DEM.NOM T-go-VN-ACC
Hamara-gáš tá
Hamar-ACC 1SG.NOM
“I may go to Hamar today.”

8 Constituent Order

8.1 Noun Phrases

Most noun phrases in Yajée are rigidly head-initial. Noun-Adjective, Noun-Genitive, and Noun-Determiner.

- (72) a. höy táđaa - my hand
b. höy sigaye’ir - a big hand
c. höy mi - that hand

However, numerals occur before their head nouns.

- (73) siwar höy - two hands

It should also be noted that Yajée discourages long noun phrases, and more than one adjective per noun is highly unlikely. Once mentioned, noun phrases are severely reduced to the bare noun, pronoun, or are inferred from context, dropped entirely.

8.2 Adpositional Phrases

Yajée uses postpositions, occurring after their dependent noun phrases. Depending on if the postposition indicates motion, a noun will either take the accusative (motion) or the locative (no motion).

- (74) a. sidagagáš táđaa par - onto my face
b. pundasoo poy - in front of the man

8.3 Verb Phrases

Yajée is rigidly verb initial, a verb will always be the first word in a clause. However, what comes after it is much more variable. Argument order can be best described as VTX, where V is the verb, T is the topic, and X is any other argument. Generally the more salient an argument is, the closer to the verb it will appear.

When a new referent is introduced, it usually is topicalized and is then pushed further back in the clause in each subsequent mention as it becomes old information.

- (75) a. Lööree Hamaragáš 'o - It's to Hamar that the woman is going.
b. Lööree 'o Hamaragáš - It's the woman who is going to Hamar.

In more specific clause types, the verb order is slightly different, but all clauses still begin with a verb.

In a converb clause, the converb clause will come first, followed by the main clause. As mentioned briefly in 6.3, the topicalized argument in each clause will be the same unless otherwise specified, regardless of whether it has the same grammatical role in both clauses. This means that more often than not, one clause will contain all the relevant arguments, and the other clause's arguments will be assumed based on their structure in the first clause.

- (76) Rajimbòmëš iirigewimár pundasomá'.
rajimb-òmëš ii-rigew-imár punda-somá'
kill-PUR.CONV A-strike-CESS man-PART
"I beat the man in order to kill him."

8.4 Relative Clauses

Relative clauses occur after their head nouns and are followed by the particle **chéga** (or **chega**, see 2.4). Yajée tends to not subordinate any arguments other than the topic and the subject, as its verb initial word order discourages long noun phrases.

- (77) Öriba rudusomá' pun ha tá chega.
ör-iba rudu-somá' pun ha tá chega
eat-INC fruit-PART man.NOM see.IMP 1SG.NOM SUB
"The man I see is starting to eat some fruit."

9 Syntactic Structures

9.1 Negatives

Negative clauses are formed with the negative particle **şii**, which occurs just after the verb. In Proto-Yajéé, this word meant ‘never,’ and was used to intensify a negative verb. However, through Jespersen’s Cycle, only **şii** remains in the modern language.

- (78) Ṭayér şii wa modosoo.
ṭayér şii wa modo-soo
exist.PERF NEG bird.NOM tree-LOC
“The bird isn’t in the tree.¹³”

9.2 Questions

Questions always take the irrealis. Some pitch changes apply (see 2.4), and in Mainland Yajéé, there is a particle **é** (island Yajéé **ehér**) ‘to ask,’ which occurs after the main verb and marks questions even without the irrealis.

- (79) Ní chibadárúúgáš Hamaragáš?
ní chibadár-úú-gáš Hamara-gáš
IRR.AUX.PERF go-VN-ACC Hamar-ACC
“Did you go to Hamar?”

- (80) Wõne é izezomá? Mainland Yajéé
wõne é ize-zomá
know.PERF Q PROX.DEM-PART
“Do you know him?”

¹³You may notice how there is no difference between the marking of a predicative nominal and a locative copular construction. This must be resolved by context. In the few cases where it is still ambiguous, the locative argument will be fronted, as this is not allowed in predicative nominals.

10 Semantic Fields

10.1 Kinship

The Yajé have a strong patrilineal tendency in their society, and their Omaha-type kinship system reflects that. Same-sex siblings of one's parents are referred to as one's mother and father, their children are referred to as one's siblings, and one's mother's brother's children are referred to as one's uncles and mothers.

Mother	mar
Father	'aa
Sister	nios
Brother	rɔmoo
Mother's Brother	wiha
Father's Sister	tómaa

10.2 Number System

Yajé has a base-twenty number system with a sub-base of five. Numerals agree with nouns in case.

One	ɭa
Two	siwar
Three	ɬás
Four	ɬásair
Five	höy
Ten	chí'
Twenty	pun

To form larger numbers, roots are compounded to each other starting with the higher base. Each number has an initial and a final form used in these compounds (if occurring in between two numerals, a number takes its initial form, with consonant voicing if three, four, ten, or twenty).

Initials:

Two		siwara-
Three		ṭása-
Four		ṭásaire-
Five		höye-
Ten		chí'e-
Twenty		punda-

Finals:

One		-y
Two		-siwar
Three		-ḍás
Four		-ḍásair
Five		-höy
Ten		-chí'
Twenty		-bun

Numerals occurring before the roots “two”, “ten”, and “twenty” feature raised final vowels.

- (81) a. seven - höyisiwar
 b. thirteen - chí'édás
 c. twenty-six - pundahöyey
 d. thirty - pundechí'
 e. forty - siwarebun

10.3 Loanwords

Yajée has experienced a significant influx of loanwords from the Faazngge people on the mainland, whose language is Andva. These people are steppe dwellers and are rather experienced on horseback, so many words for these activities and that environment come from their language.

Because of the different phonotactics, many words undergo repair strategies such as epenthesis, or they break some of the distribution rules of phonemes (see 2.2).

- (82) a. AV faas “horse” - YJ páás

- b. AV kakle “land, area” - YJ káke “steppe”
- c. AV wit’ee “to go” - Mainland YJ wíde “to ride”
- d. AV khwō “chair, seat” - YJ kwó “saddle”

10.4 Personal Names

Names of Yajé individuals include both a given name and a patronymic, that is, a name that says who one’s father is. The patronymic is formed as ‘father’s.name-GEN.’ This makes it quite easy to spot a Yajé in a foreign land, as his/her last name will always include the suffix **-ḍaa**.

Given names are usually formed from culturally important qualities or significant objects, but many people are called by their trade, coming before their given name.

- (83) Lees Mododa
- “Joy, daughter of Tree”

These significant qualities have considerable overlap between the genders, making names such as **Wes** ‘thought’ very common with all individuals, as wit and intelligence is such a desirable characteristic in Yajé culture.

Some given names are formed from the (now archaic) habitual of verbs, thus ending in **-aay**.

- (84) Enuraay
- “Brave”

In certain high-ranking occupations, individuals may reject family ties in order to show their allegiance to the Yajé, taking the last name Yahámarada.

- (85) Chérii Chínáradaa Yaha Yahámarada
- “Advisor of the King, Watcher son of the Motherland”