

Fiat Lingua

Title: A Reference Grammar of Yaatláw, Language of the
Lałláw People

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MS Date: 05-06-2024

FL Date: 10-01-2024

FL Number: FL-00009D-00

Citation: Penny, Jake & Wronkovich, Miles. 2024. "A
Reference Grammar of Yaatláw, Language
of the Lałláw People." FL-00009D-00, *Fiat
Lingua*, <<http://fiatlingua.org>>. Web. 01
October 2024.

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A Reference Grammar of Yaatláw, Language of the Łaṭláw People

Introduction: Yaatláw and the World of the Łaṭláw

Yaatláw is a language constructed by Jake Penny and Miles Wronkovich starting in August 2021. It is broadly inspired by a number of natural language areas, but began as a first collaboration between us, drawing on our personal interests in linguistics. It is the most developed conlang either has made to date, and combines some of the charms of early conlanging with significant research and revision.

The Łaṭláw people, speakers of the Yaatláw language within our conworld, live in a temperate rainforest, not unlike those found in the Pacific Northwest, southern Chile and Ireland. They inhabit an area sandwiched between the sea and a mountain range. The mountains are rich in iron, which the people have recently learnt to smelt. Most Łaṭláw people live in settlements of between a few hundred and a few thousand people close to the rivers and along the coast- for the Łaṭláw, fishing is a primary food source. As such, they are adept sailors and the more adventurous of them have been known to sail to far away lands where they don't speak the Yaatláw language.

Phonology:

If we are being honest with the reader, Yaatláw came about without any sort of real plan. Born in a GoogleDoc that has been copied many times over not unlike this one, its phonology and structure came about mostly as a compromise of the aesthetic preferences of its two creators. At the time there was a lot of excitement about the possibilities of tone and analytic languages, and this was the fruit of that moment in the LTS bubble, before Let's Have a Bouba made it its whole personality.

The Phonemes of Yaatláw

The phonemes of the modern Yaatláw language are as follows:

	labial	alveolar		retroflex	palatal	velar	glottal
		central	lateral				
Nasals	m	n			ɲ	ŋ	
Stop	p, b	t, ts, d	tʎ	ʈʂ	tɕ, dʒ	k	ʔ
Fricatives	f	s	ʎ	ʂ	ɕ		
Approx.	w		l		j		

		front	central	back
Close	Oral	i i:		u u:
	Nasal	ĩ	ĩ ĩ:*	ũ
Open	Oral		a a:	
	Nasal		ã ã:	

Tone: high (V́) and low (V̀)

*note that the close central vowels occur exclusively with high tone.

The maximum syllable structure is (N)C(A)V(V₂)T where N is a nasal consonant, A is an approximant and V₂ is a non-syllabic vowel, either a glide (/w, j/) or a non-syllabic /ɹ/. T represents the obligatory tone on every syllable. The optional nasal N is always homorganic in terms of place of articulation with the following consonant (for how this works with the retroflex series see the section on allophony); it does not occur with the glottal stop /ʔ/.

A cluster may not consist of two approximants in sequence, although at syllable boundaries this may occur:

sunayyi 'respect (n.)' /sù.nǎj.jì/

cháwyi 'sea urchin' /tʃáw.jì/

The labiovelar approximant /w/ also only occurs word initially or in V₂ position in native words:

waká 'orca' /wàkà/

plaw 'scallop' /plàw/

An example of a maximum syllable would be the word for amulet, romanized as 'gyua' which in IPA would be rendered /ŋkjùǎ/, or [ŋjùǎ]. We know, <g> for /ŋg/ was a choice.

Allophony

Voicing

As the above example demonstrates there is a degree of allophony in Yaatláw with regards to voicing, and this also occurs with place of articulation for alveolar sonorants. Obstruents are typically unvoiced, although voicing is phonemically contrastive for three pairs, /b/ and /d/ being much more common than /dz/:

pá	'mountain'	/pá/	[pá]
ba	'to be dark'	/bà/	[bà]
tuu	'to help'	/tù:/	[tù:]
du	'to bear'	/dù/	[dù]
tʃuu	'coal'	/tʃè:/	[tʃè:]
džu	'pack' (n.)	/dzù/	[dzù]

Additionally, following nasals, as occurs only word initially, they take their voiced counterparts. This is reflected in the romanisation in line with the contrastively voiced series.

mbyí	'song'	/mpjí/	[mbjí]
ndláwkíí	'basket'	/ntłǎw.kí:/	[ndʒǎwkí]
ńzí	'head'	/nɛí/	[nʒí]
géłą	'ignorance'	/ŋkíłǎ/	[ŋgíłǎ]

Sonorant Allophony

The other case of allophony in Yaatláw occurs with the sonorants /n/ and /l/. The retroflex nasal [ŋ] only occurs in combination with a following retroflex obstruent, and as such should be considered a reflex of the alveolar /n/:

njaysí	'drawing' (n.)	/nʃàjsí/	[ŋdʒàjsí]
nji	'to do'	/nʃì/	[ŋdʒì]

A similar process occurs with the alveolar lateral /l/ which following a retroflex fricative assimilates in place of articulation:

shláv	'line' (n.)	/ʃláv/	[ʃłáv]
nzhluu	'to sail'	/nʃlù:/	[ŋʒłù:]

Allophonic variation in consonants is summarized in the following table:

	bilabial	alveolar	retroflex	palatal	velar	glottal
Nasal	m	n~ɲ		ɲ	ŋ	
Plosives	p~b b	t~d d			k~g	ʔ
Affricates		ts~dz, tʃ~dʒ	ʈʂ~dʒ	tɕ~dʒ dʒ		
Fricatives	f~v	s~z, ʃ~ʒ	ʂ~ʐ	ç~ʝ		
Approx.	w	l~ʎ		j		

Another case of allophony is when /u/ follows palatal obstruents, where the vowel fronts to /ɨ/ or to a more pronounced /y/. This is however not reflected in the romanization.

kitśú	'macaque'	/kitɕú/	[kitɕɨ ~ kitɕy]
ńźúú	'bruise'	/ɲɕú:/	[ɲɕɨ: ~ ɲɕy:]

Tone

Yaatláu has two phonemic register tones. The following minimal pairs illustrate this difference:

tśú	'peak (of mountain)'	/tɕú/
tśu	'to choose'	/tɕù/
bikú	'to rush'	/bikú/
biku	'(black) bear'	/bikù/
ífúy	'bat' (mammal)	/ʔifúj/
ífuy	'mushroom'	/ʔifùj/
ifúy	'enjoyment; happiness'	/ʔifúj/

The above triad has lead to the following saying in Yaatláu:

guy ifú ifúylj yaą ifuylj
 [ɲgùj ʔifú ʔifújlj jǎ: ʔifújlj]
 bats and mushrooms bring happiness

In the case that an affix leads to a HHH sequence, e.g. klááshá 'heal' -kú 'agentive', the second high tone lowers: klááshákú 'healer'. As the example demonstrates, long vowels are considered a single unit in this system.

Loan Words

Loan words ending in consonants other than glides will take a paragogic /a/ in most cases.

The Yaatláw vowel space can be split into roughly four regions, and as such mid vowels in loanwords are reinterpreted as either a sequence of low vowel /a/ and an off-glide or long vowels may simply show up pronounced closer than in the source language.

Something to be aware of is that due to the lack of coda consonants in Yaatláw, a coda liquid followed by a stop may be reinterpreted as a stop followed by a liquid or a lateral affricate.

Tone in Yaatláw is quite predictable in many cases, and as such tone may be rendered based simply on the most common tone following a consonant, or used to resemble the pattern of the source word.

Romanization:

tʰ <tl>, t <hl>, ʃ <(n)l>, dʃ <dl>, ŋ <ng>, ŋg <g>, j <y>, ʔ <'>*

*The glottal stop is only written as <'> intervocalically. Word-initially the glottal stop is assumed before vowels.

	palatal		retroflex	
	voiceless	voiced	voiceless	voiced
fricatives	ś	ź	sh	zh
affricates	tś	dź	ch	j
palatal	ń			

Tone:

Tone	High (´)	Low (unmarked)

Romanization:

Oral	front	mid	back
high	i ii		u uu
low		a aa	

Nasal	front	mid	back
high	ɲ	ɳ ɳɳ	ŋ
low		ɳ ɳɳ	

Yaacháy, the Yaatláw Proto-Language

Yaatláw was created using a proto-language and then evolved to its current state. This language within the conworld is referred to as Yaacháy, or the 'first voice/language'. Since making Kongwa, a sister language to Yaatláw, it seems more appropriate to refer to the Yaacháy family.

The phonemes of Yaachay are as follows:

Cons	bilabial	alveolar	post-alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal
stops	p b	t d			k g	
fricatives	f v	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
affricates		ts dz	tʃ dʒ			
nasal	m	n				
approx		l		ʎ		

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Mid		ẽ	
Open		a	

The maximum syllable structure was C{ʎ, l}VV. Where consonant-lateral clusters form, the preceding consonant is never a lateral also. All combinations of vowel pairs were allowed; in the case where a series of three vowels would be formed an epenthetic ʎ~j may be inserted, although this is not always followed, especially if a long vowel may be reduced instead.

Sound Changes:

1. Vowel Hiatus Resolution

This is a series of sound changes relating to how vowels in hiatus are realised. They are summarised in the table below, though they took three stages described in the subsequent rules.

	_a	_i	_u	_ẽ
a_	a:	aj	aw	ã
i_	i̯a	i:	uj	ĩ
u_	u̯a	uj	u:	ũ
ẽ_	ẽ:	ãj	ãw	ẽ:

a. Hiatus to Lengthening: $V_i V_i \rightarrow V_i:$

Identical adjacent vowels are realized as long vowels.

NB: in a similar but not identical change, the sequence $\tilde{e}a$ preserves its length distinction, in line with other combinations ending with /a/.

b. Nasal Schwa Assimilation: $V\tilde{e} \rightarrow \tilde{V}$

Nasal schwa will induce nasalization onto a preceding vowel and then be lost.

c. Diphthongisation:

All remaining sequences of vowels are treated as diphthongs, with the second vowel becoming non syllabic. As part of this the nasal schwa lowers before a high vowel, and its nasality spreads across the diphthong.

2. Schwa Assimilation: $\text{ə} > [V +\text{nasal } \alpha] / [V] _$

Schwa assimilates in quality, other than nasality, to a preceding vowel, regardless of intervening consonants.

3. Initial Semivowels:

In initial position the sequences $i\grave{a}$ and $u\grave{a}$ become ja and wa , to better match the CV pattern which predominates in Yaatláw.

4. Tonogenesis:

Unvoiced obstruents produce a high tone on a following vowel, regardless of if there is an intervening approximant. In the absence of these marked high tones, there is an assumed low tone.

5. Lateral devoicing:

When the glottal fricative $/h/$ is followed by a lateral approximant, $/l/$ or $/\lambda/$, the two consonants assimilate in lateral quality and frication to the lateral voiced fricative $/\text{h}^l/$

6. Lateralisation lenition: $\lambda \rightarrow j$

Across the board, the lateral palatal approximant loses its lateral quality.

7. Lateral spirantisation: $[+coronal, -continuant] [lateral] \rightarrow [lateral affricate]$

Coronal plosives and affricates take on the lateral quality of a following approximant, becoming lateral affricates.

8. Palatalisation

Sibilants and $/n/$ fully palatalise, becoming alveo-palatal sibilants and true palatal $/\eta/$ when they merge with a following $/j/$. $/n/$ also palatalises to $/\eta/$ before $/i/$.

9. Post-Alveolar Retroflexion:

The already post-alveolar sibilants back even further to dissimilate from their alveo-palatal counterparts.

10. Initial Nasalisation:

Initial nasalised schwas lose their syllabicity and instead become realised as a homorganic nasal to the following consonant. This produces a series which looks like prenasalised consonants and initial geminate nasals.

11. Geminate Nasal Backing:

The geminate nasal series produces a backing of place of articulation, such that m: become n, n: become ɲ and ɲ: became ŋ.

12. Schwa shift:

The nasal schwa dissimilated based on its tone, producing a contrast between /ĩ/ and /ã/. If you are reading this looking for sound changes, do not use this to justify this

13. Return of the Voiced Stops:

Sequences of nasals and the lateral approximant /l/ become voiced stops. In theory this should have gone through a stage where a voiced stop was inserted between the nasal and the lateral, but who has time for that?

14. Glottal fricative fortition:

The glottal fricative will fortify to a stop in all environments.

15. Glottal stop prosthesis:

Vowel initial words gain an initial glottal stop. This is not indicated in romanisation.

Grammar Notes:

Yaatláw follows the VOS word order, similar to Malagasy but cross-linguistically uncommon. More specifically the language is broadly prepositional, using a variety of locative verbs, follows a noun-genitive and noun-possessive pattern and has relative clauses following the nouns they modify.

The aim for this language was for it to be broadly analytic. There are a limited number of affixes, especially for nouns, but these are generally easily distinguishable from the base word, the only change occurring being tone patterns. Verbs are more strictly analytic and isolating, making use of auxiliary verbs, also called ‘particles’, and occurring in serial verb constructions. Yaatláw is best described as dependent marking.

The Yaatláw Verb:

Yaatláw verbs act as predicates without the use of copulae *mya* (past) and *táñi* (non-past).

Táñi *kia tíaku.*

[A] salmon is a fish.

Páátsu *tíaku.*

[The] salmon jumps.

These copulae can be used to indicate future and past tense, but this is more usually done through the use of aspectual marking using auxiliary verbs.

Táñi *páátsu kia.*

The fish will jump.

Mya *páátsu kia*

The fish jumped. (at an earlier time)

Kaw *páátsu kia.*

The fish jumped. (and the action is complete)

Other aspectual and modal distinctions are marked through auxiliary verbs in a similar fashion. The remaining aspects are presented below. The imperfective aspect highlights an action that is ongoing or continuous.

Yu *shaąfê ífuylj yąsú.*

The woman is gathering mushrooms.

The inchoative and terminative aspects mark the beginning state and final state of an action.

Ishí shaqáfé ífuyli yású.

The woman is starting to gather mushrooms.

Kúchu shaqáfé ífuyli yású.

The woman is finishing gathering mushrooms.

The iterative aspect marks a verb in the habitual sense or that an action occurs over multiple instances

Fa shaqáfé ífuyli yású.

The woman usually gathers mushrooms / gathers mushrooms often.

The imperative and prohibitive moods govern commands only differing by polarity, the imperative in the positive while the prohibitive in the negative.

La baqatu mvyé maa!

Hide under the tree!

Tsaw baqatu mvyé maa!

Don't hide under the tree!

The compound *nzhua nji* expresses what we have called a hortative mood. It can be used with or without pronouns to express a range of things which ought to be done, and combined with the imperative and prohibitive to express stronger commands:

Nzhua nji baqatu mvyé maa tsi.

You should hide under the tree.

Nzhua nji baqatu mvyé maa fulu!

Let's all hide under the tree!

Nzhua nji baqatu mvyé maa.

One should hide under the tree; it's good to hide under trees.

La nzhua nji baątu mvyé maa tsi!

You must hide under the tree!

Tsaw nzhua nji baątu mvyé maa tsi!

You mustn't hide under the tree!

The conditional and potential moods govern actions that might occur depending on the relationship to another action or circumstance, the conditional needing to be while the potential may stand alone. The optative and dubitative moods govern some irrealis circumstances, where the optative details wants and desires while the dubitative details doubts or reservations.

Tlua séeé wala.

The boy may be strong (if...).

Nday séeé wala.

The boy can be strong.

Chí séeé wala.

The boy wants to be strong.

Shu séeé wala.

The boy doubts he is strong.

The lexical sources for many of the aforementioned aspects and moods can be found in the table at the end of the verb section.

Other Verbal Marking:

The valency of the verb may be decreased through the passive, using the auxiliary verb *nzhua* 'to suffer'.

Uńj ngéla chaba.

The girl hates geese.

Nzhua uńj ngéla.

The geese are hated.

The auxiliary verb *guy* ‘to take’ can be used/interpreted in one of two ways: either as a causative to increase the valency of the verb by one or as a resultative, to mark the result of the action; the latter is the way *guy* is understood when used derivationally.

Áypa ngé.
The goose floats.

Guy áypa ngé chaba.
The girl makes the goose float.

Kaw ɸú ngé
The goose laid eggs.

Kaw **guy** ɸú ngé.
The goose was made to lay eggs.

Verb Negation:

Negation of verbs in Yaatláw is done primarily through a combination of a transitive auxiliary verb and the light verb *nji* meaning ‘to do’, but this has been semantically eroded. The auxiliary verb *faa* ‘to miss’ indicated that something was not done involuntarily, through inability or inopportunity. As such the construction “*faa nji V*” means “to not V involuntarily”.

Kj mvyé nua tsáw
The newt is wriggling under the rock

Faa nji kj mvyé nua tsáw
The newt is not wriggling under the rock.

The prohibitive mood is expressed with the verb *tsaw* ‘avoid’, which can be considered the companion to *la* ‘go’ which marks the imperative.

La náa shii.
Eat (the) eel!

Tsaw náa shii!
Don’t eat (the) eel!

Serial Verb Constructions:

Yaatláw can use serial verb constructions to form new words. Some of these patterns are more frequent than others, and are outlined below

Verb 1	Verb 2	
verb of motion	yąą 'follow'	To move through somewhere for the sake of it
verb of motion	sá 'use	To go through somewhere to somewhere else.
tų'á 'hunt'	action verb	to plan to do something; to do something with determination/good reason
ichay 'hunt'	action verb	to do something sparingly, specifically out of necessity; to do something in reverence

Verbal Marking Summary:

Form	Use	Root
TENSE		
mya	past copula	*m/la 'to be downstream'
táñi	non-past copula / general future	*tani 'to be upstream'

ASPECT		
kaw	perfective / general past	*gau 'to stand'
yu	imperfective	*iu 'to come'
ishí	inchoative	*ijǎ 'to be born'
kúchu	terminative	*kud̄zu 'to die'
fə	iterative	*vǎ 'to return'
MOOD		
la	imperative	*la 'to go'
tśaw	prohibitive	*d̄z̄lau 'to avoid'
tlua	conditional	*dlua 'to say'
ndáy	potential	*ǎtai 'to know'
chí	optative	*t̄jǎ 'to want'
shu	dubitative	*zu 'to doubt'
nzhua nji	hortative	*ǎzua ǎd̄zi 'to be done'
OTHER VERB STUFF		
guy	resultative	*ǎgui 'to take'
nzhua	passive	*ǎzua 'to suffer'
faa	negative	*vaa 'to miss'
plá	similative	*pula 'stain'
DEVERBATIVE PARTICLES AND AFFIXES		
-kú	agentive	*kuunu 'man'
-*i	nominaliser	*i (goes back to proto-lang)

The Yaatláw Noun:

Pronouns:

	Singular		Plural	
	Form	Root	Form	Root *lĕ
1 (+ speaker -listener)	fu	*vu	fulu	*vulĕ
2 (-S + L)	tíi	*dʒli	tíilj	*dʒlilĕ
3 (-S -L)	hlá	*hla	hlála	*hlalĕ
4 (+S +L) (inclusive we)	péé	*pĕĕ	pééla	*pĕĕlĕ

Yaatláw has eight pronouns, with half of these being regularly derived plural forms. The four base forms follow a traditional 1st 2nd 3rd person split, while the 4th person is what is otherwise known as an inclusive we in that it refers to both the speaker and the listener, as well as anyone else. Because of this, *fulu* is used as an exclusive we as the 1st person does not include the listener. The 4.PL pronoun *pééla* emphasizes the plurality of the 4th person, and is thus used to refer to everyone in a more general way.

Pronouns in the subject position are optional.

Possession:

Possession in Yaatláw distinguishes between alienable and inalienable possession. For an inalienable possessed object, the possession comes before the possessor in simple, direct apposition. For an alienable possessed noun, the verb “grasp” (*nú*) has become grammaticalized as a genitive preposition, which comes before the possessed noun.

mvyé kúunu → the man’s foot (attached to his body)

nú mvyé kúunu → the man’s foot (detached from his body)

Directions and Locative Cases:

There are a number of ways of expressing position in time and space in Yaatláw.

The most basic way is using the spatial locative **tsáw** and the temporal locative **yaa**, the latter also functioning as a comitative. These particles precede the location of the event being described.

Átá **tsáw tláy** kúúnu

The man swims **in the river**.

Átá **yaa kupú** kúúnu

The man swims **at night**.

The Conditional and the Locative

In place of these locative particles, when flagging a clause which conditions the primary verbal construct (i.e. is related to the main clause but is not part of it) you should use the conditional particle, which replaces these case markers:

Tlua sáw síyj átá kúúnu

If/when it rains(,) the man swims.

When this is not a conditional or hypothetical situation a construction using *sekaw* 'time' as a pronoun is employed. It functions as a pronoun which can then be modified by a verb:

Átá **yaa səkaw sáw síyj** kúúnu

The man swims when it rains.

Direction Marking

In Yaatláw body parts were grammaticalized into direction marking, both as nouns and grammaticalized into prepositions which function similarly to case particles.

Direction Nouns

Body parts are used to indicate direction in Yaatláw. As they arise from inalienable nouns they simply precede the noun that is being described:

yadi ya - the front of the house

fua ya - the inside of the hole

Direction nouns are outlined in the table below:

Root	Direction	Origin
ʉtla	back , behind	buttocks
yadi	front	chest
ifj	(be)side	shoulder
kúni	up / over	crown (of head)
mvyé	down / under	foot
hláy	out (side)	skin
fua	in (side)	heart

Local Cases

Local cases in Yaatláw express the ideas of 'to', 'from' and 'through' as they appear in English as prepositions. In Yaatláw they function as cases in themselves, meaning that they do not need another case unlike the nouns above.

paa - ablative

The noun 'mouth' *paa* was grammaticalised into the ablative, equivalent in English to 'from'.

la **paa tsúkí** - to go away from the clan.

úlu - allative

The allative marks movement towards a location.

du sá plá faw nízí **úlu pá tsi** - you ride **towards the mountain**

bəw - perlative

The perlative indicates the thing through which someone or something moved. It is derived from the word 'stomach'

Guy yəq **bəw maamaa** lələ hlá.

They lead the people **through the forest**.

Other Case Marking:

Yaatláw uses particles to distinguish between other roles nouns can play in the sentence outside of possession or locative/lative relationships. An indirect object or a benefactor of an action is marked using *tuu* 'to help'.

Kaw shú kia **tuu** áw fu
I gave the fish to the puffin.

Kaw shəqəfé ifuyli **tuu** kləta fu kúúnu.
The man gathered mushrooms for my brother.

Yaatláw also distinguishes between the instrumental 'with' (using X) and comitative 'with' (alongside X). The former is marked using *sá* while the latter is marked using *yəq*.

Adi **sá** klama yəqú.
The man walks with a stick. (using it as a cane)

Adi **yəq** klama yəqú.
The man walks with a stick. (holding it in his hands)

A similative marker is also used to mean ‘as a..., like...’ and can be used with both nouns and stative verbs. It is derived from *pula* ‘stain’ and heavily used in a derivational manner as well.

plá ndzú → ‘like honey’ = ‘to be yellow’

plá síí → ‘like something sharp’

Demonstratives:

	English	Form
Proximal	“this”	śẹ
Medial	“that”	mi
Distal	“that there yonder / over there”	nlika

Demonstratives in Yaatláw contrast three degrees of distance: proximal, or close to the speaker; medial, or far from the speaker; and distal, or very far from the speaker. These are **always** used with classifiers.

tsuy si śẹ
fern CL.short.plant this
“this fern”

sufu maa mi
fir CL.tall.plant that
“that fir”

fáwfi chẹ nlika
mastutake CL.edible.mushroom distal
“that there yonder mastutake”

Questions

Questions in Yaatláw take two forms depending on the kind of question. Polar questions use the structure Verb-Negative-Verb, for example:

kaw shaąǵé faa shaąǵé kuy'ééfilj yaşúlu
 PERF collect NEG collect maitakes women
 Have the women collected the maitake mushrooms?

mya faa mya ichua
 be.downstream NEG be.downstream village
 Is the village downstream?

Other questions use question words, which occupy the same place in a sentence or phrase that the part of speech they replace takes. For example:

ndáy tluatlaakú nátá
 know commander who
 Who knows the commander?

ndáy áw waká.
 know puffin orca
 The orca knows the puffin.

shú klá tuu nátá chaba
 give flower BEN who girl.
 Who does the girl give the flower to?
 (or 'to whom does the girl give the flower if you want to be like that I guess)

shú klá si tay tuu kia chaba
 give flower CL.stem one BEN fish girl
 the girl gives the fish a flower.

mama klu, chíplj yu títsaw sílj sayshu péé.
 mum VOC, why IMPERF look.for berries still inclusive.we
 Mum, why are we still looking for berries?

sáw sayshu chífua sílj mama síyj, guy buusų yu títsaw (sílj)
 fall still want berries mum rain, CAUS wet IMPERF look.for berries
 (because) mum still wants berries, (so) we are looking for (them).

The sentences do not align neatly because of the correlative construction *sáw* (reason) *síyí*, *guy buusu* (effect). but if you look at the movement of the adverb *sayshu* 'still' you can see *chíplí* 'why' occupies the same space within the general word order, at the beginning of a phrase. As a head-initial language, this is an especially prominent position within the language.

Basic forms	Yaacháy (Proto-)Roots	Yaatláw	
		Form	Pronunciation
person (who; whose*)	*nlatē	ńatá	/nàtá/
non-person (what)	*plē	plé	/pí/
Derived forms	Derivation pattern	Form	Pronunciation
location (where)	*jli 'flow' + *plē 'what'	shlíplí	/ʃlíplí/
time (when)	*gau 'stand' + *nlatē 'who'***	kawtá	/kàwtá/
reason (why)	*tjīā 'want' + *plē 'what'	chíplí	/tʃíplí/
extent (how)	*hēm̄lu 'bulge' + *plē 'what'	éba	/ʔíbà/
manner (how)	*plē 'what' + *isu 'path'	pláysú	/plájsú/
One [of] (which)			

*Yaatláw has two kinds of possession, which both use the basic question words *ńatá* 'who' and *plé* 'what'. Inalienable possession is marked simply using word order (possessed-possessee), and so the form of 'who' and 'whose' in this case is the same:

Táni pua kúú sé ńatá.
 COP.non-past child CL.human this who?
 Whose is this child?

Alienable possession uses the genitive particle *ńu*:

Táni ńu tēkla áta sé ńatá.
 COP.non.past GEN net CL.flat.things this who?
 Whose net is this?

Word order in Yaatláw is very important, as if we shift the order of the sentence the meaning changes:

Táñi náatá pua kúú sẹ
 COP.n-past who child CL.human this?
 Who is this child?

** The sun and moon for Yaatláw speakers are both animate ‘persons’ and so this derivation follows that cultural understanding of time.

Relative Clauses

Relative clauses in Yaatláw can optionally occur either with the use of a subordinate pronoun and classifier.

Depending on animacy, the externally headed relative clauses are marked with one of two subordinating pronouns: *núatá* (*nú* “to grasp/GEN” + *natá* “who”) for animate heads and *núpẹ* (*nú* + *plẹ* “what”). A classifier is used in order to express the relationship between the modifying relative clause and the head. Note that a classifier can be used with no accompanying noun to convey an indefinite meaning.

núpẹ níw ẹtlú tíaku
 what CL.long.thin catch salmon
 the one (long thin thing) that catches salmon.

tẹkla áta ẹtlú tíaku
 net CL.flat catch salmon
 the net that catches salmon.

núatá bi kaw náa fyíw
 who CL.shellfish PERF eat mold
 the one (shelled-creature) that ate mold

tlátáńíkú kúú kaw náa fyíw
 shaman CL.human PERF eat mold
 the shaman that ate mold

Fa mvi yashú matj tsaw yatlá kúu cháy nátlá.
 ITR win woman live in tent CL.human most praise
 The most praised woman who lives in a tent is successful

Ngéé nú chilj hlá kúunu kúu kaw kyuféé ya maa tay tuu mama
 steal GEN eggs 3SG man CL.human PERF built house CL.building one BEN
 mom
 The man who built a house for his mom is stealing her eggs

Numbers

Number	Root	origin	Number	Root
1	tay	'thumb'	7	nday kaypí
2	nzé	'pair'	8	asé kaypí
3	wita	'knuckle'	9	mita kaypí
4	kuy	'finger(s)'	10	guy kaypí
5	chu	'hand'	11	nju kaypí
6	kaypí	'fist'	12	nzáypí

Number	Root	Number	Root
6	kaypí 'fist'	72 (2×36)	nzáfya
12	nzáypí	144 (12 ²)	káwtlú 'catch of fish'
18	witaypí	216 (6 ³)	ichua 'village'
24	kuypí	288 (2×144)	nzáwtlú
30	chuapí	1296 (6 ⁴)	tsúkí 'clan'
36 (6 ²)	áfya 'canoe'	1728 (12 ³)	súlj 'school of fish'

Numbers in Yaatláw are seximal, or base-6. The words for ‘one’ to ‘six’ are partially derived from terms relating to hand gestures. For example, *nzê* ‘two’ is a ‘pair’ (of fingers), five is a ‘hand’ (*chu*) and six is a ‘fist’ (*kaypí*), directly inspired by a closed fist as one way of marking 10 in Chinese hand gestures.

To form numbers not of multiples of six a prenasalized variant of the numbers 1-5 is employed. This is derived from a reduced form of **λãã*, ‘follow’, which also became the comitative particle “*yãã*”.

Multiples of six are were historically compounds of the form ‘two six’, though these have since reduced, i.e. *nzáypí* ‘twelve’ 10_6 . Powers of six were derived from other lexical roots: 100_6 (36) from canoe, 1000_6 (216) from village. Specific words for powers of 12, like *káwtlú* ‘catch of fish’ (144) and *súlí* ‘school of fish’ (1728) arose from the regional use of base 12 in counting fish, but their use is generally limited to this cultural sphere.

Like Malagasy, the order of the digits in a number in Yaatláw are ordered from smallest to largest. In other words, the number 3235_6 (743_{10}) is expressed as $5 + 6 \times 3 + 36 \times 2 + 216 \times 3$, rather than the reverse.

	×1	×2 *ese	×3 *uita	×4 *gui	×5 *ju
6^1	kaypí	nzáypí	witaypí	kuypí	chuapí
6^2	áfya	nzáfyá	witáfya	kúafya	chúafya
6^3	ichua	nzíchua	witaychua	kiichua	chuy
6^4	tsúkí	ndzúkí	witsúkí	kutsúkí	chutsúkí

Stative Verbs and ‘Adjectives’

In Yaatláw, adjectival relationships can be expressed by following a noun with the plain form of a stative verb. To express an equative relationship these stative verbs must precede the noun they are describing.

Tsuy tsuy. → A/The fern is green.

Shaqǎǎ tsuy si tsuy kúúnu. → A/The man collects a green fern.

Adjectives also can inflect for a comparative form as well as a superlative form, both arising from verbs. The comparative form is derived from the verb *umaw* “to exceed” while the superlative is derived from the verb *cháy* “to be first,” which some examples given below:

wala kú *śéǎ* “the strong boy”
 kúúnu kú **umaw** *śéǎ* “the stronger man”
 yaşú kú **cháy** *śéǎ* “the strongest woman”

Correlative Conjunctions:

Yaatláw uses correlative conjunctions in places where simple apposition does not sufficiently express the relationship between two phrases.

Resultative:

guy sáw X áypa Y lit. ‘drop x and y will float’

This takes the place of single word conjunctions as are used in English, where we might be able to say X, so Y. It is also useful to note that this typically sets up the two clauses as occurring one after another. In the case that two things happen at one, Yaatláw speakers may be more likely to use the circumstantial below.

Guy sáw hlía plaatú su sǎtsú mama **áypa** lawtsí saw paşala.
 drop slip crush beehive mum float leave fly bees.
 Mum accidentally crushed a beehive, so bees flew out.

Contrastive:

A number of these expressions came about through early agricultural metaphors, and as such the following segment varies based on the outcome.

although x, but y → guy tlii ... tsuy nji [POS] / kúchu nji [NEG]

tsuy → “to sprout, to be green” yields a positive result

kúchu → “to die” yields a negative result

To compare with English again, you could just use a conjunction like ‘but’ in this situation in translation but Yaatláw requires both elements.

Guy tlii kaw sáw kúúnu **tsuy nji** káwla may.
Although the man fell, he got back up.

Guy tlii kaw sáw kúúnu **kúchu nji** ishí gúy kí
Although the man fell, he started to bleed.

Circumstantial:

Sáw X síyj, gúy buusq Y

Fall rains of X, get wet Y

This construction is a little unusual as rather than occurring just at the beginning of each phrase, the construction effectively wraps the first clause similarly to a circumfix, although all the parts are independent. It conveys that in the circumstances of the first clause, Y is the best or only course of action. It is similar to the idea of ‘in the case of X, Y’ in English.

Sáw uñj nú ya may mama hlá **síyj**, **guy buusq** ishí ngéé nú chilj hlá kúúnu
fall hate GEN house self mom 3SG rain, CAUS wet be.born steal GEN eggs 3SG
man

Because his mom hated her house, he began to steal her eggs

Classifiers:

Classifiers observe quite general usage in Yaatláw. Not only do they come between nouns and demonstratives and numerals, but also are required between nouns and following modifiers other than particles, which while still transparent in meaning have for the most part taken on grammatical function. For example:

Kaw shąąfẹ́ **ifuy chẹ́ nzẹ́ witaypǵ** kúúnu

The man gathered twenty mushrooms.

Kaw shąąfẹ́ **ifuyǵ chẹ́ sẹ́** kúúnu

The man gathered these mushrooms.

Kaw shąąfẹ́ **ifuyǵ chẹ́ ráykǵ** kúúnu

The man gathered white mushrooms.

Classifier List

The following is an extensive but not complete list of classifiers in Yaatláw.

- áta (leaf) - flat objects: nets; sheets of paper, fabric or bark

tẹ́kla áta ẹ́tlú tíaku

net CL.flat catch salmon

the net that catches salmon.

- bi (shell) - shellfish, crustaceans, snails, beetles, turtles
- chẹ́ (<Chanterelle mushroom 'chẹ́nẹ́') - edible mushrooms; words

Within Laṭláw culture writing is attributed first to shamans who would use mushroom based concoctions to communicate with spirits; what they saw was first drawn and then this drawing and interpretation led to the writing system as it is today.

Kaw shąąfẹ́ ifuyǵ chẹ́ sẹ́ kúúnu

The man gathered these mushrooms.

- ẹ́sa (patch) - small areas, sentences, small collections of things, algae

This is an extension of the 'mushrooms are words' metaphor mentioned above.

- fyá (wing) - birds and bird-like animals
- hláw (roe) - small round things, e.g. berries

tlá fífyi ébu'úbu **síí** maa paṣsáá shaṣfẹ **hláw**.

They saw a tree with a lot of maqui **berries** and stopped to collect **them**

- hlúy (< webcap mushroom (Cortinarius) 'hlúhíj') - psychoactive or other kinds of fungi and flora considered taboo to ingest; other dangerous things
- isú (path) - paths, methods, ways of doing things, choices
- kúú (< kúúnu 'man') - humans
- lasu (tail) - fish, lizards, salamanders, sea snakes, newts
- lu (from *hulu) - holes, wounds
- maa (tree) - plants taller than humans, buildings
- maṣ (pot) - containers, especially those that are full ; large volumes of liquid

Mya ląma fua **ya maa** gufų **nualą maṣ** mi

(Someone) found that pot in the black house.

- ndza (fly) - insects, irritating things
- ngay (day) - days
- níw (to be long) - long, thin things
- nua (rock) - big round things
- nzẹ (pair) - pairs of things
- níí (head) - mammals, frogs and toads, land reptiles

hláychú níí tsuy yaṣ **tsáw lasu** tsuy

green frog and green newt

- pú (night) - nights; performances, orally told stories; hunts

The night has special significance to Yaatláw speakers due to the tradition division of daytime and nighttime activities. As such, performances, stories and hunts which would have been done traditionally at night are counted as such, rather than using *sẹ*, as is done in other cases.

- sẹ (sun) - times and durations (hours, minutes)
- si (stem) - plants shorter than a human
- tláy (river) - natural processes, systems, abstractions(?)
- tsú (peak) - mountains, large areas

- tsúa (bark) - pages, texts, chapters

Tree bark is the usual writing surface in Yaatláw culture.

- wa (drop) - small volumes of liquid
- yi (seed) - powders, particulates, dust motes

Nominal Morphology Summary:

Form	Use	Root
PARTICLES		
plá	similative	*pula 'stain'
ńu	genitive	*nʌu 'to grasp'
yąą	comitative; temporal locative	*ʌǎǎ 'to follow'
tsáw	spatial locative	*tsau 'to sit'
tuu	dative / benefactive	*duu 'to help'
sá	instrumental	*saǎ 'to use'
guy	resultative	*ǎgui 'to take'
paa	ablative	mouth
úlu	allative	anus
bąw	perlative	stomach
AFFIXES		
*-lǎ	plural (animate)	*lǎ 'people'**

DERIVATIONAL AFFIXES		
-fi	used in names of mushrooms	*hivui 'mushroom'
-pua	diminutive	*'bua 'child'
*ǎ-	indicates products	*mʌa PAST.COP

A Yaatláw Phrasebook

Greetings

Shú(lu) klu! Hello my friend(s)!

Shl̩tsa! Good morning!

Kaw fa! Good evening!

(La tsáw) pláysú tláypúa? How are you?

La shíw (fu) I'm good!

Táytlá! See you!

Ípu faa Ípu baw? Are you hungry?

Ípu baw (fu) I'm hungry.

Special Occasions

Shíbaa! Happy new moon!

Chuulu sáyshí shíw ngay! Happy birthday!

Chí fa náa kia tláychúafi! Happy new year!

Polite Noises

Ngakála	Yes
Ē	Yes (casual)
Fakála	No
Fa	No (casual)
Aá! (rising tone)	Oh!/Excellent!
Chí ẹtlú tsi tuu shídu fu.	Thank you! (very formal)
Chí ẹtlú tsi.	Thank you!
Chítlúy	Thanks!

Introducing Yourself

Nzhua chí ndáy Maytla.	My name is Maytla.
Ndáy faa ndáy daw Yaatláw?	Do you speak Yaatláw?

Romantic Slay

Átá yąą úlu tsi fu I love you.

Chí faa chí káwnu may tsáw fu? Will you marry me?