Marcelo Miller's

Simple Guide to *Kwa'aar*

First Edition

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Introduction

Morning Meeting

The following is a transcript of a speech I delivered at a Morning Meeting at The Bay School of San Francisco in October 2025. Some elements have been modified very slightly to increase clarity.

Good morning. My name is Marcelo, I'm a senior, and, in case you fall asleep, I'll start with the most important concept in this presentation.

The German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Today, I'd like to dive into that quote and what it means to me.[1]

Growing up bilingual made language an important topic from an early age. I learned both English and Spanish at the same time, and used both equally.

This background made it easy for me to recognize the ubiquity of language. Regardless of which culture I was interacting with, language was the only real tool of communication. As I speak now, I'm using language, and without it, I wouldn't be able to convey any meaning to any of you.

That said, language is inherently limited. Every language has its strengths and weaknesses, and there are certain concepts that are impossible to express in any language. Anyone who has seen a Buzzfeed article about "ten German words with no English translation" (or similar) knows that English, like any other language, simply can't express everything.

Here's an example: there's a verb in Latin American Spanish, "apapachar," which comes from the Nahuatl word for squeezing or crushing. Loosely, it means to hug — not just physically, but with one's soul. When speaking English with my parents, "apapachar" would get grafted in, as it was often more precise than just the word "hug."

That kind of worked, but, despite having two languages at my disposal, I'm limited in communication. Some of my favorite feelings have no words I can attach: how can I describe summiting a Sierra pass? How can I describe watching the sun rise on the 29 bus?

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Proposition 5.6.

This issue becomes more annoying the more you think about it. At the most granular level, where everything brings a certain feeling, you begin to notice that you really can't describe anything exactly. You can get close, but only close. So it begs the question: how can we deal with the frustration of never having the right word?

The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi says that "words exist because of meaning," but he also recognizes the limits of language. He has an out-of-the-box answer to the problem: just abandon language altogether. "Where can I find a man who has forgotten words," he jokes, "so I can have a word with him?"[2]

Imagine me standing up here silently for eight minutes, no slideshow, just breathing into the mic. It really wouldn't make for a great presentation. So, obviously, we can't forget language as Zhuangzi imagines. What then? For me, the answer lies in conlanging.

"Conlang" is short for constructed language. Conlangs work just like any "real" (or natural) language, but they're completely manmade, not subject to the long evolution process every other language goes through. They're created for a wide variety of purposes. Some, like Esperanto, are made to aid in international communication. Others, like Na'vi, are made for TV shows or personal projects.

When I was younger, I spent hours developing scripts or ciphers, writing English down in them as a way of doodling. But it never occurred to me that I could create a full language until around freshman year. The prospect was daunting, but it excited me, and I decided to make my first try easier by basing my language off of Old English.

In retrospect, this was a big mistake. I didn't know anything about Old English, and most of my learning was done on the fly, through YouTube tutorials and sketchy online translators. Most importantly, though, I'd lost track of why experimenting with language was important to me in the first place: by basing my creation so heavily on an existing language, I was limiting my scope to within that language. In other words, any limits that Old English had would also end up in my language. I wasn't breaking free of limits at all.

By the time I realized this, I'd created a grammar system, a writing system, a counting system, everything short of vocabulary.

This discouraged me from trying again until, in Junior year, I got back into linguistics. I started learning about the philosophy of language, a field I grew to love. Reading works by philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein allowed me to think more

2 Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi. Chapter 26.

deeply about how people use words to convey meaning, and prepared me for my current project.

As my Senior Project, I'm giving conlanging another shot. This time, I aim to create a new language, one based on my personal world view and not on any existing language. It's been a while since I've done this, so the language is still in a very early stage. So far, I've created a system of sounds, rules for how they can be linked, and the roughest sketches of a writing system. I have a lot of reading to do before I make much progress, but I look forward to finishing. Once I do, I'll have something that's completely my own: an experimental language that allows me to pause, think, and look at the world in a completely different way.

So what now? After this, you'll go about your day like any other. You'll speak; you'll write; you'll think. And, in all this, you'll use language. You'll conform to its rules, and you won't even notice it. So I invite all of you to pause and consider this:

As long as we communicate, it's impossible to break the limits of language. But by letting ourselves play with something so ordinary, we can bend those limitations and create a world that approaches the fluidity of our minds.

Thank you.

Phonology

Phonetic Inventory

A language's phonetic inventory is essentially a set of rules that decide what noises a language can and cannot use. No language, regardless of how expansive it is, uses every noise that a human can possibly make, and so guidelines are necessary to formalize the sounds that make the cut.

The table below is a modified version of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) chart. The IPA is an effort to document every possible noise a human can make with their mouth, and to assign a unique character to each in order to help us to categorize and understand these sounds and the languages that use them.

The consonant chart appears below. However, it's hard to understand it without first understanding what a consonant is. Every consonant is formed by the buildup and release of air, which moves from the lungs and out the mouth. In all consonants, this air is obstructed on its way out by (wait for it) obstructors. However, we can change what the obstructors are and how air moves over them, which means we're able to have a great variety of consonants.

The X-axis of the chart describes the place of articulation— in other words, what you're using to stop the air before releasing it. As you move right, the obstruction occurs further back in the mouth. In bilabial consonants, your lips come together to stop the air; in alveolar consonants, your tongue makes contact with the front of the roof of your mouth; in postalveolar consonants, your tongue makes contact with the middle of the roof; and in velar consonants, the back of your tongue moves up against the very back of the roof. Try making some of these noises, paying attention to where your tongue is as you make them, and it might become easier to understand.

The Y-axis of the chart describes the manner of articulation— in other words, how the air is being obstructed. In plosive consonants, lots of air builds up and is released all at once, making big, explosive sounds; In nasal consonants, air is redirected out your nose; in trills, the air vibrates one or more of your obstructors as it moves past them; in fricatives, it simply moves over or between them, leading to softer sounds; and so on. Once again, try making these noises, this time paying attention to how the air is moving around the parts of your mouth.

Pulmonic consonants	Bilabial	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Velar
Plosive	p b	t d		k g
Nasal	m	n		
Trill	ʙ	r		
Fricative	ɸ β	s	ʃ	x ɣ
Approximant		ɻ		
Lateral approximant		l		

Next comes the vowel chart. Here, the X-axis helps us figure out where in the mouth the sound is coming from, and which parts of the mouth we need to reshape to make it. Kwa'aar only has front and back vowels, making it pretty easy to articulate them. The Y-axis tells us how open or closed our mouths have to be to make the sound. Try saying "eeeee" (i on the chart below), followed by "ahhhhh" (ɑ), and you'll get an idea of how openness affects the sound of your vowels.

Vowels	Front	Back
Close	i	u
Close-mid	e	o
Open	a	ɑ

Finally, we have… this thing. You're definitely familiar with the "w" sound, and so you'll know that it acts a little like a vowel and a little like a consonant. This being the case, it gets its own compartment. It's up to you whether this is a punishment or a reward.

Voiced labial-velar approximant
w

It can often be difficult to learn how to pronounce certain sounds in the IPA. I've tried to make Kwa'aar's sounds relatively easy for the average English or Spanish speaker, but there will be some difficulties regardless. To deal with these, I'd suggest looking at online tools that give examples of pronunciations. Wikipedia has an article and a pronunciation example for every IPA symbol, and the website ipachart.com makes it very easy to visualize the sounds as you hear them.

Phonotactics

If a language's phonetic inventory tells it which sounds to use and which not to use, its phonotactic constraints tell it how it can put those sounds together.

Below is a chart explaining the diphthongation rules for Kwa'aar, which are a lot easier to understand once you know what a diphthong is. A diphthong is a combination of two vowels that only takes up the space of one. Most English vowel sounds are diphthongs— you can tell because your mouth has to move to say the full vowel. Consider the word "I," or the vowel in the word "play." Both are just one syllable, but require you to glide between two vowels. That's what a diphthong is. (A monophthong is a vowel sound made up of just one vowel.)

In diphthongs, any combination containing /i/ is valid. Any diphthong that would end in /o/ instead ends in /u/.[3] Similarly, any diphthong that would end in /e/ instead ends in /i/.[4] When a syllable has no coda and contains a diphthong ending in /i/, the sound of the /i/ shifts towards /j/.

Diphthongs		First vowel					
		i	e	a	u	o	ɑ
Second vowel	i		/ei/	/ai/	/ui/	/oi/	/ɑi/
	e	/ie/					
	a	/ia/			/ua/	/oa/	
	u	/iu/	/eu/	/au/		/ou/	/ɑu/
	o	/io/			/uo/		
	ɑ	/iɑ/			/uɑ/	/oɑ/	

Now that we know which vowels we can put together, we have to figure out which consonants we can put together. Kwa'aar follows a $(C)^2V(C)^2$ structure, which means that a vowel is required in every syllable, and that every syllable may have up to two consonants at the beginning and two at the end. Consonants may not cluster if they're in the same priority level. Trills may not cluster, and they may only be used at

3 The exceptions to this rule are diphthongs containing /i/ and the diphthong /uo/.

4 The exceptions to this rule are diphthongs containing /i/.

the onset of a syllable. /w/ may only be used at the onset, and occupies a fifth priority, where it must come after any other consonant in the onset.

Consonant clustering priority (trills not shown)	Onset	Coda
First	p b t d k g	ɻ l
Second	ɸ β s ʃ x ɣ	m n
Third	m n	ɸ β s ʃ x ɣ
Fourth	ɻ l	p b t d k g

Grammar

Basic Word Order

Basic word order in languages consists of a subject (S), a verb (V), and an object (O), which can be configured differently depending on the language. Generally, English uses SVO order, which accounts for 42% of the world's languages (including Chinese and most European languages). In this order, the subject verbs the object.

Kwa'aar uses VSO order, which only accounts for 9% of the world's languages (including Arabic and Biblical Hebrew). This choice was made to emphasize the relationship between two objects instead of the objects themselves.

In English, for example, which uses SVO order, the subject (or doer) is emphasized. Think of the sentence "the boy ate the apple." Here the boy is the most important component, and receives the bulk of the attention.

Now imagine a sentence that places the verb before the subject, like this example from Kwa'aar: *mawoshelağ ni ba ni rau.* When translated to English, this means "the man saw the dog." However, a literal translation would be "saw the man the dog." Here, emphasis is placed on the action, seeing. The fact that the man is doing the seeing is secondary.

Nouns

Case and Number

Languages often use cases to clarify what the noun is doing in a sentence. It can sometimes be hard to visualize this, because English doesn't initially appear to use cases. For the most part it doesn't, but remnants of a case system can still be found in our pronouns. Consider the difference between the words "he" and "him." Even though they can refer to the same person, they are in different cases. "He" is in the nominative case, meaning that it is the subject of the sentence. Think of the phrases "he drank the water" or "he ate a grape." "Him," meanwhile, is in a different case: the accusative. The accusative case marks the object of the verb — in other words, it serves to identify what the action is being done to. Think of the phrases "I greeted him" or "the monkey bit him."

Kwa'aar uses these two cases just like English. However, they are encoded into every noun. Let's try this out with an example.

Let's say I wanted to translate the sentence "the woman walked the dog." Because Kwa'aar has a VSO word order, the verb comes first. We'll get to the specifics later, but for now we'll put the word for "walked" in:

Mapesheğei.
Walked.

Now we need to clarify the subject, or what specifically is doing the walking. This is where we can start encoding case. The word for woman is *ma*, and the woman is the subject. (Remember, she is walking the dog, not the other way around.) We encode the nominative case by adding *–a* to the end of our nouns. But we've run into a problem: *ma* already ends with a. To fix this, we can add l to the beginning of the suffix, turning it into *–la*. So now our sentence looks like this:

Mapesheğei ni mala.
The woman walked.

But the woman is walking the dog, so let's include that. The word for dog is *rau*, and we know that the dog is receiving the walking, so it's in the accusative case. This is clarified by adding the suffix *–o*. Again, we've run into the problem that *rau* already

ends in a vowel, but now we know how to fix this. Our suffix instead becomes *–lo*, and we can now complete our sentence:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

The process is the same with the other two cases.

The comitative case marks a companion — that is, a thing with which one is taking an action. Let's use our earlier example for this: *mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo* means "the woman walked the dog." However, if we wanted to say "the woman walked with the dog," we'd give *rau*, the dog, the comitative case: *mapesheğ ni mala ni raule*.

The locative case marks a location. Let's use our previous example again, though it may sound a little odd. We know how to say that the woman walked the dog, and that the woman walked with the dog. What if we want to say that the woman walked on the dog? Here, the dog is the location at which the action is occurring, and so it receives the locative case. This entails adding the suffix –(*l*)*u*, and so we'd say:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulu.
The woman walked on the dog.

For future reference, here's a quick summary of the grammatical cases in Kwa'aar: the nominative indicates that the noun is the subject; the accusative indicates that the noun is the object; the comitative indicates that the noun is a companion to the subject; and the locative indicates that the noun is the location of the action.

We now know how to encode for case in nouns. However, we're still leaving out the other part of the equation: number. In a similar situation to that of noun cases, English has a very simple number system. For countable nouns, we add the suffix –s to indicate that there are more than one.[5] This is called a plural, and is a type of grammatical number. (The singular is also technically a grammatical number.) While English stops at singular and plural, Kwa'aar has two other numbers. Unlike cases, these are relatively simple to explain.

The paucal indicates that there are some, but not many, of a noun. Though there's no set number that must be reached for a noun to be paucal, you can think of it this way: any time you would say "a few" or "a handful," instead make the noun paucal.

The greater plural generally indicates that there are many of something, more than are connoted by a simple plural. Some languages, for example, use a greater

5 Of course, there are exceptions (deer, geese, strata, etc.), but we won't worry about these.

plural form of "tree" to refer to a forest. In Kwa'aar, the greater plural, though not officially limited to this use, generally connotes infinity or a number large enough to be uncountable by humans.

Here's a quick summary of the grammatical numbers in Kwa'aar: the singular indicates that there is only one thing; the paucal indicates that there are a few things; the plural indicates that there are more than a few things; and the greater plural indicates that there are an uncountable number of things. Knowing that, let's get into encoding number.

As mentioned previously, we encode case onto nouns by adding a suffix. This suffix always ends in a vowel, either a, o, e, or u. Grammatical numbers also use suffixes, placed after the case suffix. These suffixes are just consonants, which makes it easy to add both case and number to a word.

The singular is the default, so, like a caseless noun, it remains unmarked. In our previous sentence, *mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo* ("the woman walked the dog"), both the woman and the dog are singular. There is only one woman and only one dog in the situation.

The paucal is marked by the suffix *–k*, which can turn into *–ik* if the noun already ends in a consonant. Applying this to our sentence would change it to this:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulok.
The woman walked the handful of dogs.[6]

The "k" sound was chosen for its similarity to the sound of a few things being shaken in one's hands. For example, if I have a few dice and I shake them together, it might make a noise a little like "klak klak klak."

The plural is marked by the suffix *–sh*. Like the paucal, this can be turned into *–ish* if the noun already ends in a consonant. Our sentence now looks like this:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulosh.
The woman walked the dogs.

The choice to use the "sh" sound for a plural was made in the same way as the choice to use "k" for the plural. Imagine a cascade of objects, like leaves or sand, sliding down a surface. You'd expect it to make a noise like "shhhhhh."

6 It's difficult to translate this sentence directly into English. We could simply say "the woman walked the dogs," but this gets rid of the idea that there are just a few of them. Even though this is what I might do if I were translating a work of prose, I've opted to include as much detail as possible to the detriment of legibility.

The greater plural is not marked by a suffix. Instead, it's marked by a circumfix, meaning that changes are made to both the beginning and the end of the base word. To indicate a greater plural noun, we keep the *–sh* from the simple plural and add it to the beginning of the word, essentially making the word have both a prefix and a suffix. If the word begins with a consonant, we change the prefix *sh–* to *shi–*. Though the woman in our sentence is probably already bogged down with her job, let's give her even more dogs by using the greater plural:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni shiraulosh.
The woman walked the horde of dogs.[7]

The dogs, no doubt, are tired of serving their dictator by this point. There are many more of them than there are of her, so, using the words we know, we can describe their rebellion like this:

Mapesheğ ni shiraulash ni malu.
The horde of dogs trampled [walked on] the woman.

With justice served, you, the reader, have earned this: a table detailing how to encode for case and number in nouns.

Nominal case and number encoding with example X		Case				
		None	Nominative	Accusative	Comitative	Locative
Number	Singular	X	X +(l)a	X +(l)o	X +(l)e	X +(l)u
	Paucal	X +(i)k	X +(l)a +k	X +(l)o +k	X +(l)e +k	X +(l)u +k
	Plural	X +(i)sh	X +(l)a +sh	X +(l)o +sh	X +(l)e +sh	X +(l)u +sh
	Greater plural	sh(i)+ X + (i)sh	sh(i)+ X + (l)a +sh	sh(i)+ X + (l)o +sh	sh(i)+ X + (l)e +sh	sh(i)+ X + (l)u +sh

7 Again, this sentence is difficult to translate, though slightly easier than the paucal, because English has many words for a massive quantity.

Determiners

Determiners are pretty simple. They are words that combine with nouns to tell you things about them. Examples in English include "my" or "your," which signal ownership and "this" and "that," which signal what's being referred to.

Kwa'aar's system of determiners is much simpler than that of English. The only two determiners are used to mark whether a noun is definite or indefinite. Definite nouns in English can be referred to as "this," "the," etc. Essentially, they're specific things that one can single out. If I tell you to look towards the rock, I imply that there's a specific rock I want you to look at. However, if I tell you to look towards a rock, I imply that any rock will do.

Let's go back to the woman walking the dog. In my previous sentences, I only used the definite article, *ni*. This makes sense, because I was referring to a specific woman and a specific dog:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

However, if I wanted to make my sentence less specific, I could simply use the indefinite article, "na":

Mapesheğei na mala na raulo.
A woman walked a dog.

Though Kwa'aar doesn't have words like "this" and "that," a similar effect can be achieved using the existing articles *ni* and *na*.

Determiners	
Article	Word
Definite	ni
Indefinite	na

Pronouns

The base pronouns in Kwa'aar are simple, existing for the first, second, and third persons (*vi*, *fei*, and *ma*, respectively). What makes them flexible is the speaker's ability to adapt them by encoding case and number— they are nouns, after all, and

are therefore subject to the same rules. The second person *fei*, for example, can be transformed into *feik*, meaning "you few." In a full sentence, it's possible to use pronouns like this:

Viwosheğ vila shimalosh.
I saw them [connotation of uncountability].

Here, the simple third person pronoun becomes a third person accusative greater plural pronoun, allowing the sentence to communicate a lot of information in very few words.

Some things to note: firstly, even though pronouns in Kwa'aar can carry cases and numbers in the same way as other nouns, they aren't preceded by any determiners. Secondly, as I'll go over in the next section (Verbs), Kwa'aar's verb-person agreement system makes pronoun use unnecessary and redundant in many situations. Thirdly, determiners are not used when referring to proper nouns.

Pronouns		
First person	Second person	Third person
vi	fei	ma

Verbs

Tense

Depending on who you're talking to, the word "tense" can mean very different things, even if it doesn't seem that way. Technically, grammatical tense is the property of a verb that situates it in time. However, we often hear about tense as "past perfect," or "future imperfect," or any number of other things. This is because, colloquially, tense refers to a combination of three things: tense, aspect, and mood (often abbreviated as TAM). We'll get to aspect and mood later, but for now we'll just focus on tense.

English has three tenses… maybe. Really, it has about two and a half. We can express things in the past, present, and future, but only the past and present tenses actually modify the words. If we want to use the future tense, we need to add an extra word (usually "will").

Tenses don't stop there, though. Because time is continuous, we can potentially situate verbs in any time we want. A language could theoretically have a tense that indicates that a verb happened exactly two minutes and thirty seconds ago. Similarly, a language could have a tense for verbs occurring before the birth of one's grandfather, or which will occur within the lives of one's dogs, or any number of other things.

If we consider all the possibilities, which are literally infinite, Kwa'aar's tense system is pretty limited. However, at six tenses, it's a fair bit more expansive than that of English. To explain them, let's start at what's familiar: the past, present, and future.

If you look back at the example sentences in the noun section, you'll notice that they're all in the past tense. In Kwa'aar, this is indicated by the suffix *–ğ*. Because every verb in Kwa'aar ends in a vowel, we don't have to bother with adapting this suffix to unruly words. We can simply slide it onto the end of each verb. Right now, if we continue to use the past tense, our sentence will look like this:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

Every other tense marker is the same: a consonant on the end of the base verb. The only exception is the present tense, which doesn't receive any marking, as it is the default. The future tense, the last one familiar to most English speakers, is marked by the suffix *–h*. Now that we've gone over the past, present, and future, we come to the

tenses that English doesn't have: the historical, the past hodiernal, and the future hodiernal.

The historical tense is pretty self-explanatory, indicating that an event or action is historical. In Kwa'aar, in addition to serving this purpose, the historical tense can be used when referring to events that occurred before the birth of the speaker. This tense is marked with the suffix *–s*. If I wanted to say that Moses walked in the desert, I might say:

Mapeshes Mosesa ni shisialush.
Moses walked in the desert [in history].[8]

The hodiernal tenses are used for verbs occurring within the same day. Essentially, the past hodiernal means "earlier today," and the future hodiernal means "later today." The past is marked with the suffix *–m*. The future is marked with the suffix *–v*. Though technically extending to the entire day, these tenses might be most commonly used to refer to events occurring since waking up or before going to sleep (i.e., within the day of the speaker as they perceive it). In English, these tenses are roughly equivalent to saying "earlier" or "later," so a sentence using the past hodiernal tense might be translated like this:

Mapeshemei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog earlier [today].

And a sentence using the future hodiernal might be translated like this:

Mapeshevei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman will walk the dog later [today].

Here's a simple table to refer back to if you get stuck:

8 Once again, this sentence is extremely difficult to translate accurately into English, because English has no historical tense, making any attempt sound awkward and stilted. This could be fixed by including glosses. However, in an effort to keep things simple, I've opted to translate directly into English as often as possible.

Verb tense markings with example Y	
Tense	Marking
Historical	Y +s
Past	Y +ğ
Past hodiernal	Y +m
Present	Y
Future hodiernal	Y +v
Future	Y +h

Aspect

Aspect is slightly different from tense, and much simpler. While tense situates a verb in time, aspect describes how that verb extends over time. In Kwa'aar and many other languages, grammatical aspects are limited to the perfective and the imperfective.

The perfective aspect marks an action as being a whole. You can see the perfective aspect in the previous examples:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

Here, the fact that the woman walked a dog is a whole action— that is, the perfective aspect implies that the action of walking started and ended. The example sentence is in the perfective aspect, and this combines with the past tense to create what many would call the past perfect tense.[9] The same sentence in the present perfect tense would be "the woman walks the dog"; in the future perfect, "the woman will walk the dog." In Kwa'aar, as in English, the perfective aspect is the default and, as such, is unmarked.

The imperfective aspect marks an action as being ongoing, habitual, etc. English doesn't have a general imperfective aspect, but we have specific ones. Think of the words "would," "used to," and "was." Kwa'aar, meanwhile, has a general imperfective aspect and no specific ones. Here, the imperfective aspect is marked with the suffix *–o*,

9 As mentioned above, the colloquial definition of "tense" is different from the technical definition in that it includes aspect and mood.

which can be turned into *–no* if the base verb ends in a vowel. This suffix comes after the tense suffix. If we want to express the example sentence in the imperfective, then, we'd say this:

Mapesheğotei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman was walking the dog.

Note that this sentence could also be translated as "the woman used to walk the dog," because of the lack of specific imperfective aspects.

Here's another reference table:

Verb aspect markings with example Y	
Aspect	Marking
Perfective	Y
Imperfective	Y +(n)o

Modality

Modality (or mood) indicates the speaker's attitude towards the action they're describing (the verb). Put simply, it indicates the mood of the speaker. In English, for example, I can tell someone that they must walk. Here, the action is walking, but the modal verb "must" indicates that my statement is a command. Alternatively, if I tell someone that they ought to walk, the modal verb "ought to" indicates that I'm simply making a recommendation, or a statement of what should happen.

Kwa'aar only has three moods: the indicative, the imperative, and the subjunctive. English has all of these and more, so they should be relatively simple to understand.

The indicative mood tells the listener that a statement is factual— that an action actually happened, is happening, or will happen. In English, the indicative mood isn't marked, and is instead the default. Statements like "I got kicked out of an IHOP" are implied to be true because they use the indicative mood. In Kwa'aar, our old reliable sentence *mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo* is in the indicative mood, because the verb *mapesheğei* is unmarked.

The imperative mood tells the listener that a statement is a command or a request. The English statement "get out of my IHOP" is a command, and therefore uses the imperative. In Kwa'aar, the imperative mood is marked by the suffix *–au*, which becomes *–nau* if the existing verb ends in a vowel already. This suffix is placed after tense, aspect, and valency markers. To put this into action, let's say I want to tell someone to look at a crow. Using the imperative mood, my sentence would look like this:

Feiwoshenau ni aaro.
Look at the crow.

(Note that the sentence lacks a subject, which would usually be the second-person nominative pronoun *feila*. This is because the verb *feiwoshenau* agrees with the second person, making a pronoun unnecessary. For more information on this, see the section on verb-person agreement below.)

The subjunctive mood is a bit of a wild card. Many languages (especially Spanish) use it when referring to hypotheticals, desires, emotions, etc.— in short, everything subjective. Different language families use it to indicate different states within the realm of subjectivity, and they use it with varying degrees of specificity. Kwa'aar uses the subjunctive mood when referring to hypotheticals and personal opinions. Additionally, it's in the nature of the subjunctive mood to only be used in dependent clauses, and not in independent clauses.

Things can get complicated here. Firstly, the speaker needs to be able to form dependent clauses using the converb. This will be explained later on, in the section dedicated to the converb. More importantly, though, the dual-use nature of the subjunctive can make it difficult to tell whether it's being used to mark a hypothetical or an interpretation. However, these issues can usually be cleared up with context.

Here's an example sentence:

Vipesheh mapeshehoiki ni bala.
I'll walk if the man walks.[10]

Let's go over this step by step. We begin with the verb *vipesheh*. The base is *peshe*, meaning "walk." The prefix *vi–* indicates that the verb is in the first person, and the suffix *–h* indicates that it's in the future tense, making the full meaning "I will walk." Although this is a single word, it counts as an independent clause. Next comes the dependent clause. We begin with the verb *mapeshehoiki*. The base is also *peshe*, but

10 Literally, "I will walk if the man will walk."

here we use the prefix *ma–* to situate it in the third person. Once again, *–h* is used to indicate the future tense. This is followed by *–oi*, which marks it as a subjunctive verb, and we end with *–ki*, the converb marker, which indicates that it's the beginning of a dependent clause. So now we have *vipesheh mapeshehoiki*: "I will walk if they [singular] walk." The sentence is rounded out with the clarification that *ni bala*, the man, is the subject of the dependent clause, and there we go: I'll walk if the man walks.

The previous example dealt with a case of the subjunctive being used to refer to hypothetical, but what if we want to use it for an interpretation or opinion? Here's what that would look like.

Vihe mapeshenonoiki ni bala.
I think that the man is walking.

Let's go through this again, albeit more quickly than last time. The verb *he* means "think," and the prefix *vi–* clarifies that it's in the first person, giving us an independent clause meaning "I think." Again, *mapeshe* is a third person form of *peshe*. We add the suffix *–no* to make the verb imperfect, clarifying that the walking is an ongoing action, and then follow the same process of subjunctivizing it and adding the converb marker.

Once again, here's a reference table:

Verb modality markings with example Y	
Mood	Marking
Indicative	Y
Imperative	Y +(n)au
Subjunctive	Y +(n)oi

Verb-Person Agreement

Verb-person agreement is the system by which verbs the person of the subject. This is present in English and in many other languages. Consider, for example, the verb "to be." Though this is a single word, it's modified depending on the person. In the first person, you might say "I am"; in the second person, you might say "you are"; and in the third person, you might say "he is."

I know you're probably tired of the woman walking her dog, but let's bring her back for this. Every sentence so far has been in the third person:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

Here, *peshe* is the base verb. By this point, we know what the suffix *–ğ* is doing there (marking the past tense), but we still haven't gone over the meaning of the prefix *ma–*. In the section on pronouns, I went over the three base pronouns: *vi* for the first person, *fei* for the second person, and *ma* for the third person. Once you remember these, verb-person agreement becomes very simple. Each pronoun is simply turned into a prefix to be applied to the verb, with *–n* added to the end of the prefix if the base verb begins with a vowel. Knowing this, we can say something like this:

Vipesheğei vi ni raulo.
I walked the dog.

You may have noticed the pronoun *vi* was used twice in the previous sentence: once as a prefix to make the verb (*pesheğ*) agree with the subject (*vi*), and once as the subject. This is redundant and unnecessary, but we can't remove the agreement from the verb, so we're instead left with the option to remove the subject altogether when it's a pronoun. This would lead to a simpler sentence:

Vipesheğei ni raulo.
I walked the dog.

Including a pronoun subject and a verb person prefix in a sentence is still grammatically correct, but, again, it's unnecessary.

The same shortening process (where the pronoun is removed) can be carried out for the second and third persons. In the second person, it works fine all the time, as it does in the first person. However, in the third person, it must be established who is being referred to. If I simply said *mapesheğei ni raulo* ("they [singular] walked the dog"), my listener would have no idea who they are. This must be clarified earlier for simplification to occur in the third person, just as you wouldn't refer to someone as "he" if your listener didn't know who specifically you were indicating.

Here, again, is a table:

Verb-person agreement with example Y	
Person	Marking
First person	vi(n)+ Y
Second person	fei(n) +Y
Third person	ma(n) +Y

Valency

Valency describes how many arguments a verb can take. (By "argument" I mean non-verbs in a sentence, specifically subjects, objects, and indirect objects.) Verbs in Kwa'aar are either intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, or impersonal.

Intransitive verbs take one argument: a subject, but no objects. Think of the verb "thought": I can say "the man thought," but to say "the man thought the tree" would be grammatically incorrect. In Kwa'aar, the verb for walking, *peshe*, is an intransitive verb.

Transitive verbs take two arguments: a subject and an object.

Ditransitive verbs take three arguments: a subject and two objects. In Kwa'aar, the only verbs that are ditransitive by default are those which describe giving.

Impersonal verbs take no arguments. Though English doesn't allow impersonal verbs, those who speak Spanish might think of the word *llovió*, which has no subject or object. Nevertheless, it can be treated as an independent clause.

Valency can be changed in a few ways. In Kwa'aar, these are passivization, causativization, and applicativization.

When a verb is passivized, it's turned from a transitive verb into an intransitive verb, or from a ditransitive verb into a transitive verb. Consider this example sentence:

Mamaineğ ni bala ni namo.
The man wanted the food.

Here, the verb *mamaineğ* ("desired") is transitive: it needs a subject that is desiring and an object that is desired. However, we can passivize the sentence by using the suffix –*u*, which can change to –*tu* if the verb already ends in a vowel. This suffix slots in after the tense and aspect suffixes, and before the modality and converb suffixes. Now our sentence looks like this:

Mamaineğu ni nama.
The food was desired.

The sentence has now been passivized. Suddenly, the original subject (in this case, *bala*, the man) is erased. The original object (*namo,* the food) takes its place. It becomes the new subject, which is also indicated by the change of its suffix from *–o* to *–a*.

Let's move on to our second operation, causativization. When a verb is causativized, it's turned from an intransitive verb into a transitive verb. Here, we'll use our regular example sentence, with the woman and the dog:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

In this sentence, the verb *mapesheğei* is already causativized, as indicated by the suffix *–ei*, which can change to *–tei* if the verb already ends in a vowel. If the verb weren't causativized, the sentence would look like this:

Mapesheğ ni raula.
The dog walked.

This is because the verb *peshe* ("walk") is intransitive by default. When we causativize it, we clarify what's causing the noun to take the action, thereby adding another argument. The original subject (*raula*, the dog) becomes an object, and the cause (*mala*, the woman) replaces it as the subject.

Our third and final operation is applicativization. When we use this operation, we increase the number of arguments a verb can take by one. This turns intransitive verbs into transitive verbs, and turns transitive verbs into ditransitive verbs. It signals that an action is being done in someone else's stead, and is marked by the suffix *–o*, which can become *–to* if the verb ends in a vowel. Let's use another example:

Makwağo ni bala ni malo.
The man talked in the woman's stead.[11]

Here, we turn the intransitive verb *kwa* ("speak") into a transitive verb. The woman, *ma*, who would have been the subject before applicativization, instead becomes the object. The thing doing the talking in her stead, the man, becomes the subject.

11 This is the most literal translation, but any number of things could be connoted depending on context. The man could be talking because the woman isn't present, or to speak up for her, or simply because he's not giving her a chance to get in a word edgewise, as men are prone to doing.

Note also that the applicative suffix can be used in conjunction with the causative suffix in certain cases. We'll return to our dog-walking example for this one. Right now, it looks like this:

Mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo.
The woman walked the dog.

But what if we want to say that the man walked the dog for the woman (in her stead)? In this situation, we keep the causative suffix *–ei*, and add the applicative suffix *–o*. Our new sentence looks like this:

Mepesheğeito ni bala ni raulo ni malo.
The man walked the dog in the woman's stead.

Here the woman, in whose stead the dog is being caused to walk, becomes an object placed after the dog, who is now being caused to walk by the man.

You've now learned how to change a verb's valency. Here's a reference table of the markings described above:

Valency changing operations with example Y	
Operation	Marking
Passivization	Y +(t)u
Causativization	Y +(t)ei
Applicativization	Y +(t)o

The Converb

Converbs are words that mark subordination. Examples in English include words like "because," "for," and "while." Although Kwa'aar doesn't have any function that achieves exactly this, it's able to mark clauses as subordinate with the use of the suffix *–ki*, which approximates the use of a converb.

Back in the section on modality, I used this example sentence:

Vipesheh mapeshehoiki ni bala.
I'll walk if the man walks.

In this sentence, the independent clause is *vipesheh*, and the dependent clause is *mapeshehoiki ni bala*. The use of the suffix *–ki* is what makes the clause dependent. If it weren't for this, the sentence would translate this way (more or less):

Vipeshseh mapeshehoi ni bala.
I'll walk the man walks.

The fact that the converb suffix is attached to the verb is intentional. Because the verb comes first in each sentence, the listener will know whether a clause is dependent or not in the first word.

TAM Master Table and Modifier Order

With verb modifiers fully explained, it may be useful to have some of the tables condensed. To that end, I've included a table below which combines the earlier tables found in the Tense, Aspect, and Modality sections.

Verb TAM (tense, aspect, modality)					
Verb tense markings with example Y		Verb aspect markings with example Y		Verb mood markings with example Y	
Tense	Marking	Aspect	Marking	Modality	Marking
Historical	Y +s	Perfective	Y	Indicative	Y
Past	Y +ğ	Imperfective	Y +(n)o	Imperative	Y +(n)au
Past hodiernal	Y +m			Subjunctive	Y +(n)oi
Present	Y				
Future hodiernal	Y +v				
Future	Y +h				

Also as a reference tool, I've included a list describing the proper order of verb modifiers below. These have been explained in previous sections, but separately, which may cause confusion.

1. Person

2. Base verb
3. Tense
4. Aspect
5. Valency
6. Mood
7. Converb

Other Grammar

Interrogatives

This section goes over different ways to form questions in Kwa'aar. Three primary options are available: the interrogative pronoun, the interrogative particle, and the interrogative verb.

Way back when I went over pronouns, I lied to you. *Vi*, *fei*, and *ma* aren't the only pronouns. There's also a fourth: *sa*, the interrogative pronoun. This pronoun is used when you want to identify which specific thing is doing an action. Examples in English include "which" and "who." Let's put this into practice:

Pesheğei sala ni raulo?
Who is walking the dog?[12]

What's happening here is pretty simple. As with any other pronoun, the interrogative pronoun *sa* is replacing the subject of the sentence. However, as with our other pronouns, we can insert the interrogative as a verb prefix and remove it from the rest of the sentence, like so:

Sapesheğei ni raulo?
Who is walking the dog?

The second way to form a question is by using *sai*, the interrogative particle. This is a marker that turns a statement into a yes-or-no question. Although English doesn't have an interrogative particle, it can achieve the same function by ending a statement with "right?" In Kwa'aar, we'd use the interrogative particle like this:

Sai mapesheğei ni mala ni raulo?
Is the woman walking the dog?

Note that the interrogative particle appears before the verb in a statement. This is part of a pattern that's common across languages, usually called "wh-fronting." In wh-fronting languages, interrogative words (like our interrogative particle) move to the very beginning of the sentence, no matter what else is in it. This is achieved when using the interrogative pronoun without needing to break existing grammar rules, because of Kwa'aar's system of verb-person agreement. It's also possible to wh-front without breaking rules when using the interrogative verb, which is coming up very

12 A more literal translation of this sentence is "what is causing the dog to walk?"

soon. However, the interrogative particle is a little weird, and so needs to be pushed to the beginning.

The third and final way to form a question is by using sane, the interrogative verb. This is a verb like any other, but it functions as the question itself. Once again, English doesn't have an interrogative verb, but it can end up at a similar place by saying something like "what are you doing?" Here's how the interrogative verb would be used in Kwa'aar:

Masane ni aar?
What is the crow doing?

To end the section, here's a table outlining the three interrogatives:

Interrogatives	
Function	Word
Interrogative pronoun	Sa
Interrogative particle	Sai
Interrogative verb	Sane

Detailed Word Order

Earlier in the text, I explained Kwa'aar's basic word order: VSO, or verb-subject-object. However, things are rarely this simple in actual speech. In addition to keeping track of where verbs, subjects, and objects go, we have to keep track of prepositions, numerals, adjectives, genitives, and so on and so on. This section should clear that up.

Although I hope to clarify what goes before and after what, I won't explain why this is the case. In essence, detailed word order is decided by a complicated system of universal principles that apply to every real language. I've tried my best to adhere to these principles. However, mistakes are inevitable because I don't really know what I'm talking about. That's the same reason why I've chosen not to explain these choices: I can't help you understand what I don't understand either. Here, then, is a very bare-bones guide to detailed word order.

Kwa'aar's numerals precede its nouns. Everything else comes after the noun, in this order: regular adjectives precede possessive adjectives, which precede demonstratives. Here's the same thing in list form. In any given situation:

1. Numeral
2. Noun
3. Adjective
4. Possessive adjective
5. Demonstrative

This applies to each individual noun phrase. With that done, we can move onto our next section.

Potpourri: Copulas, Verbalizers, Nominalizers, Adjectivizers, and Adverbializers

The copula is a verb that links a subject to a complement. For example, in the English sentence "Kermit is green," the copula is the word "is." Kwa'aar can achieve a similar effect, but it doesn't have a copula in the way English does. Instead, it turns the complement into a verb. To stay with our English example, this would look like "Kermit greens," meaning that Kermit occupies a state of greenness.

Kwa'aar turns non-verbs into verbs simply by treating them as verbs. The position of verbs at the very beginning of clauses, combined with the variety of prefixes and suffixes that are attached to them, ensures that there's no confusion as to whether or not something is a verb. Let's look at an example of this:

Makonge ni hela.
The idea is good.[13]

Here, the adjective *kong* (meaning good, suitable, appropriate, etc.) is treated as a verb: instead of putting it where it would go if it were an adjective (after the noun), we move it to the front and make it agree with the third person. There's one other change we make, which is subtle but important: because every verb must end in a vowel, and the base word *kong* ends in a consonant, we add *–e* to the end to make it conform further. Note, however, that adverbs cannot be verbalized.

Just as we can turn non-verbs into verbs, we can turn non-nouns into nouns through the process of nominalization, non-adjectives into adjectives through adjectivization, and non-adverbs into adverbs through adverbialization. Note again that adverbs cannot be nominalized or adjectivized, as is the case for verbalization.

13 Usually, I'd translate this sentence as "that's a good idea" or simply "good idea." However, I've translated as literally as possible to make the example clear.

Let's begin with nominalization. When nominalizing a verb, the prefix *wau–* is added. The resulting noun refers to the action described by the original verb. When nominalizing an adjective, the prefix *shau–* is added instead. The resulting noun refers to the quality described by the original adjective, or to an object with that quality. These prefixes don't interact with nominal case and number modifiers, except for the greater plural circumfix. In this case, the nominalizing prefix is treated as a part of the base noun.

On to adjectivization. When adjectivizing a noun, the prefix *sen–* is added. The resulting adjective refers to the quality of being like the original noun. When adjectivizing a verb, the prefix *wen–* is added. The resulting adjective refers to the quality of habitually taking the action, or of being full of the action.

These types of adjectivization are not the only ones, however. Nouns can be adjectivized by the possessive suffix *–i*, which becomes *–si* when the base noun already ends in a vowel. Note that this suffix is placed before case and number suffixes. If I wanted to describe a dog as my own using the possessive suffix, I'd say this:

Rausi.
My dog.

Finally, we come to adverbialization. When adverbializing a noun, the prefix *soi–* is added. The resulting adverb modifies its verb by implying that the action occurred in a way aligned with the behavior of the original noun. When adverbializing a verb, the prefix *woi–* is added. The resulting adverb modifies its verb by implying that the action occurred as if it had instead been the adverbialized action. When adverbializing an adjective, the prefix *shoi–* is added. The resulting adverb modifies its verb by implying that the original adjective applies to the way the action occurred.

All that was quite dense, so here it is roughly summarized in a table:

Morphological transformations with example Z		Process			
		Nominalization	Verbalization	Adjectivization	Adverbialization
Original part of speech	Noun		[zero derivation]	sen+ Z	soi+ Z
	Verb	wau+ Z		wen+ Z	woi+ Z
	Adjective	shau+ Z	[zero derivation]		shoi+ Z
	Adverb				

Orthography

Romanization

Just as English doesn't use many IPA symbols (despite having the noises they symbolize), Kwa'aar uses only the 26-letter Latin alphabet, with the addition of a 27th letter, ğ. This makes the language much easier to write on existing technology, and also makes it easier to read, as the letters are more familiar.

This is essentially a spelling guide for Kwa'aar. To see which sounds are symbolized by which letters, flip back to the earlier section on the language's phonetic inventory.

Note that bb, rr, and aa (the bilabial and alveolar trills and the open back unrounded vowel, respectively) are each a single sound.

Romanized pulmonic consonants	Bilabial	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Velar
Plosive	p b	t d		k g
Nasal	m	n		
Trill	bb	rr		
Fricative	f v	s	sh	h ğ
Approximant		r		
Lateral approximant		l		

Romanized vowels	Front	Back
Close	i	u
Close-mid	e	o
Open	a	aa

Romanized voiced labial-velar approximant
w

Lexicon

Nouns

Abstract Concepts

raa water.
she air.
he 1 thought; concept; trial of an idea. 2 daydream.
idis number.
wei introduction; greeting.
kwa speech.
kwakwa 1 excessively loud or frequent speech. 2 gossip. 3 sound made by ducks or other waterfowl.
kawei name.
nep life.
ne action.
ğonam 1 death. 2 dead organic matter; manure; fertilizer.
neda truth.
da 1 physical direction; cardinal direction. 2 mental direction; mental goal; the way which one is walking, in the confucian sense.

Human Occupations

leisi rancher; cattle rancher.

Human Inventions

idiskwa 1 calculator; abacus. 2 computer.
isidiskwa smartphone.

Human Habitation

fef smoke.
nam 1 food; sustenance. 2 fuel; electric charge.
ki fire.
eivem 1 ash. 2 evidence of habitation; evidence. 3 aftermath.
dau path; trail.
cha tea.

Humans and Body Parts

ma woman.
mama 1 older woman. 2 mother.
ba man.
baba 1 older man. 2 father.
pesh 1 foot; sole of the foot. 2 footstep; footprint. 3 evidence.
gom leg.
igom lower leg; calf muscle.
ogom upper leg; thigh muscle.
teide pelvis.
maud torso; abdomen.
pok 1 navel. 2 central point; most important point.
hes skin.
kleun 1 knee. 2 joint; point of movement.
ved ribcage; upper abdomen.
siush nail; claw.
au skin on the inside of the cheek.

Fauna and Fauna-specific Body Parts

aar crow; raven.
iewo 1 american robin. **2** one that is pervasive in one's life; one that is pervasive in culture beyond celebrity.
skarafi 1 steller's jay. **2** the less put-together of a pair.
daper 1 scrub jay. **2** the more put-together of a pair.
wisiu flycatcher.
kia hawk.
shuf soaring bird.
kwakwan mallard.
nakwa non-mallard duck.
vurr urban pigeon.
raakia osprey.
hu great-horned owl.
shiskhu barn owl.
gaur 1 sea lion. **2** one who jostles for space.
kiok sea otter.
kioknam clam; non-mussel saltwater bivalve.
ipau urban coyote.
rau non-working dog.
leisirau working dog.
twain kangaroo rat.
shesnaat domestic rodent.
kisis rattlesnake
shigir mountain-dwelling frog or toad, especially one with a high-pitched croak; mountain yellow-legged frog.
gir frog or toad with a high-pitched croak.
gur frog or toad with a low-pitched croak; bullfrog.
ranam fish, especially wild; trout.
usiesi banana slug.
mainul 1 gull. **2** one who begs despite not needing to.
iskia 1 hummingbird; anna's hummingbird. **2** one who is especially stubborn or belligerent despite or because of their small stature, age, or status.

Flora

shepi 1 wildflower dwarfed by altitude or wind. **2** one who remains spiritually, socially, or physically beautiful despite or because of hardship.
mir 1 sky pilot. **2** favorite person.
shango sticky monkeyflower.
deleni yarrow.

augağ 1 wild cucumber. **2** bad idea; poor choice.
pi flower.
vas tree.
vasva forest.
kush dune bunchgrass.
sam blackberry.
gaik stinging nettle.

Weather

slalan rain.
shaukikir warm or pleasant weather.

veu cloud.

Celestial Phenomena and Time

veno day; twenty-four hour cycle.
vei 1 daytime. **2** fair weather.
no 1 night. **2** darkness.

ren sun.
shoi moon.
stil star; extraterrestrial planet; meteor.

Geography and Geology

sia 1 glacial moraine. **2** sand dune; sand.
ğo land; earth; arable land.
niğo 1 california. **2** northern california. **3** the san francisco peninsula.
kli unvegetated potable snowmelt stream.

klo vegetated potable snowmelt stream.
lesh alpine meadow.
draa direction towards the ocean.
tam fully vegetated mountain.
kidraa direction away from the ocean.
stor fully unvegetated mountain.

Verbs

Abstract Concepts

ne to do; to take action.
maine to desire a physical or tangible thing.
hemaine to desire a non-physical or intangible thing, a state to be, or an event to happen.
he to think.
nei to be; to exist.
moske to love.

Movement and Activity

peshe to walk.
woshe to see.
kushie 1 to grasp in the hands. 2 to choke.
koko to shake within closed hands.
wisu to move somewhere; to go; to bring; to take.
ulge to drink.
name to eat.
kote 1 to bite. 2 to play dirty; to cheat; to use more force than expected.
hau to hear.
ğona to die.

Socialization

kwa to speak.
kwakwa 1 to speak excessively loudly or frequently. 2 to gossip.

Adjectives

Physical Qualities

bouba 1 round; bulbous. 2 fat.
oraa 1 large; expansive. 2 consequential; important.
ise 1 small. 2 inconsequential; unimportant.
kiki 1 angular; spiky. 2 skinny.

Mental or Abstract Qualities

baart lacking judgement; unable to function mentally; stupid.
kong 1 suitable; appropriate for the situation or interaction. 2 morally good or correct.
kikir (of weather) warm.

Adverbs

va yes; affirmative.

kri no; negative.

Afterword

The State of Kwa'aar

As you've no doubt seen, Kwa'aar has very few words, which makes it very difficult to express certain concepts. There are also small bits of grammar that remain unexplained, or that are illogical— not enough to necessarily stunt speech, but enough that a frequent speaker or a highly committed learner might notice. Certain complex sentence structures are impossible to form, and there's a lack of specificity in the case system, pronoun system, and in the interrogative system.

The lack of words can be fixed over time, and I plan to add more over time. My current short term goal is to be able to describe every concept in the Swadesh 100. (Note that this doesn't mean creating exactly 100 more words.) I'd also like to create more native adverbs (adverbs that aren't derived from other parts of speech) and many more adjectives.

I expect that the hardest issue to resolve will be the gaps in the grammar system. I'm far from a trained linguist, so I can't easily identify what needs fixing. This means that I'll likely only identify grammatical issues as I try to construct more and more complex sentences. I'm also concerned that the nearly exclusive use of prefixes and suffixes to attach meaning to words will lead to unnecessarily long words when compared to non-affix inflections. Words don't currently feel too long, but I can imagine it becoming an issue the more complex the grammar system becomes.

I'm not sure what to do about the current case system and its limitations, or about the interrogative system. The pronoun system can be fixed more easily, but will still take plenty of thought and experimentation. This is especially true when on the topic of grammatical gender and gendered pronouns. Whether or not to include either of these as features of Kwa'aar has been an ongoing topic of internal debate, but I've been teetering towards "yes" more and more lately, at least in the case of gendered pronouns. My current plan is to have male, female, and neuter gendered pronouns, but this may change.

Acknowledgements

This project, though still rough, was extremely involved. I couldn't have completed it without the help of many, many amazing people.

My fascination with language began with J.R.R. Tolkien's books, which led to my memorization of the Elder Futhark alphabet. I still know a fair bit of it today, ten years after I first came across it. It was also Tolkien's background in the study of Old English that inspired me to create my first language. Though I never finished it, it's the reason I embarked on my quest to create Kwa'aar.

When creating OE-GAE (that first conlang), I relied exclusively on online resources, some of which I'd like to acknowledge here. After all, it's Kwa'aar's predecessor, and deserves some recognition as the starting point. Much of my brainstorming for OE-GAE happened on anglish.org and on the Anglish Wiki. Further information on Old English was obtained through Old English Online, the websites of Stanford and Oxford, and Wikipedia.

Roxana Taquechel-Chaigneau probably deserves more thanks than anyone else in this section. Her class rekindled my passion for language and introduced me to the philosophy of language through the works of Jacques Derrida. In later communication, when I was just beginning to create Kwa'aar, she recommended I read David J. Peterson's book The Art of Language Invention, which became the most important source in the process. I can't thank her enough for her kindness, generosity, and knowledge.

My interest in the philosophy of language was further heightened by Sofia Mikulasek (Harvard '27), who chaperoned Bay's Water in the West immersive in the Summer of 2025. In addition to letting me (and many other students) grill her for hours on the couch, she recommended I read Ludwig Wittgenstein. Though I still haven't read the Blue and Brown Books (sorry!), I thoroughly enjoyed Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief and Philosophical Investigations. Both have made me a more careful writer, and have led to me thinking about language very differently from the way I did before. The discussions I had with Sofia, by which I mean the answers she gave to my many questions, have been very influential to me.

Even more influential was Robin Workman, a founding member at Bay from whom I was to learn in the second semester of my senior year. Comparative

Philosophy changed how I saw the world, and introduced me to many philosophers and philosophies which I still consider when making important decisions. Perhaps the most important of these to me are Confucianism and Daoism, the former of which was the initial inspiration for Kwa'aar. Without Ms. Workman's expertise, I might never have created it.

In the first stages of Kwa'aar's creation, I did a lot of research into language. Like in the creation of OE-GAE, the internet was my primary resource, and I relied very heavily on YouTube to lay the groundwork. Biblaridion and Artifexian are the two channels which I used the most, but I also took information from videos by Lichen the Fictioneer, NativLang, and Around the Campfire. Wikipedia was admittedly used somewhat often, and so I'd like to express my gratitude for its editors and their work. As I mentioned above, however, The Art of Language Invention was the most important piece of my research. It cleared up many concepts that would have taken me much longer to figure out otherwise.

Kwa'aar is a senior project, and so any acknowledgements section would be incomplete without thanking Katie Buono, my Senior Projects teacher for two semesters. Her patience, guidance, and genuine excitement kept me on track and focused. She is an excellent teacher and a very cool person, both inside and outside the classroom. I'd like to thank, by extension, the entire Senior Projects Department and my peers in both semesters of the course.

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Thanks most of all to my parents, without whom none of this would have been possible. My existence aside, they've provided me with my education, my language, and a large chunk of my personality and values, all of which shaped Kwa'aar. As I come to the end of high school, I find myself more grateful than ever for their guidance.

And to you, the reader: I hope you've gained something from this guide, if only a mild interest. *Peshekongau!*

Simple Guide to Kwa'aar, First Edition

This guide is set in Brill, a typeface notable for its legibility and for its ability to display every character in the International Phonetic Alphabet (among others). The titles are set in Cormorant Garamond.

This edition is digital.

Feimoskenau ni kwalosi!