

# When is an affix not a morpheme? Minor syllables in Kayah Li

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The Kayah Li\* phonological word is the structure of those lexical items which are neither analyzeable compounds; truly polysyllabic morphemes like hōsophō 'airplane', nínè 'real'; nor suspect polysyllabic morphemes like donē 'recount legends' (where the first syllable may or may not recur in dōdē 'hold out, offer in the hand' and domé 'show'). This structure may be abbreviated as:

1)        t        T t  
          |        | |  
      c v C C V v

Upper-case elements are required, and lower-case are optional; lower-case elements stand for subsets of the possible realizations of their upper-case counterparts. CCV is main syllable; post-main syllable v is a suffix. T= /á/ high, /ā/ mid, /a/ (unmarked) low-level, /à/ low-falling. This paper will consider the pre-main syllable element symbolized cv above, which I will call presyllable (another possibility would have been the term 'minor syllable' used in much Mon-Khmer linguistic literature). We will ignore suffixes, which are quite rare. Presyllables are common, and fall into two types:

a. ?i- may have only high or low-level tones (not mid or low-falling). The underlying tone of the presyllable undergoes dissimilation

before main syllables having high, low-level or low-falling tones (i.e., any but mid). Examples with dissimilation are: ʔíbe 'speak', ʔithá 'a plow'; with underlying tone not dissimilated: ʔínē 'to fart', ʔilū 'the Kayah New Year festival'.

b. Cə- has low-level tone exclusively. C = p t k. The presyllable's vowel copies that of the following main syllable at slower tempos and tends towards true [ə] at faster tempos.

Thus presyllables are phonologically dependent on their associated main syllables, not only in being unable to occur alone, but also in having their phonological realization partially determined by features of the main syllable: tonal features in the first type, vocalic features in the second.

At least one presyllable is an independent morpheme: tə- 'one', like the other numerals, combines with any Classifier. E.g. təpɿɔ 'one (seed, eye, button etc.)', təbō 'one (neck, ladder, rope etc.)', təphre 'one (person)'.

The next best cases of morphemically autonomous presyllables are kə- and pə- when prefixed to certain verbs with directional meaning. The following examples illustrate using the verb thɛ 'ascend' and its prefixed derivatives as directional complements to preceding head verbs phjá 'take' and jò 'extend'.

base verb: ʔa phjá the 's/he picks it up'

Sbj moves: ʔa phjá kəthe 's/he takes it and goes up'

orientational: ʔa jò pəthe 's/he raises it/holds it raised'

The following paradigm may be constructed, including all items that fit the syntactic/semantic categories even when they do not include the 'right' prefixes.

2)

<u>gloss</u>	<u>base verb</u>	<u>Sbj moves</u>	<u>Orientalional</u>
go up	the	kəthe	pəthe
go down	lɛ	kəlɛ	tālɛ
fall	tā	ʔ	tālɛ
go out	the	kəthe	pəthe
go in	nō	kənō	pənō
go nearby	thō	kəthō	-
go across	rē	kərē	pərē
arrive	tò	-	-
go curving	təka	-	-
move from home	hē	-	pəhē 'ahead'
[no verb]	-	-	kəkhjā 'backwards'
move towards	ka	-	-
home			
go	cwá	-	-

Main syllable khjā in kəkhjā 'backwards' corresponds to no verb, but occurs in the Localizer khjā ~ békjhjā 'in back of, behind' (most Localizers are noun-related), and the Verb Particle khjāsé 'back again, in response'.

As for the type ?i-, the following word pairs suggest a true derivational function, the pattern being N+?i+V with a general meaning 'N for the purpose of V':

ché 'sew'; sé ?iché 'sewing machine' (sé 'large machine')

klē 'chop keeping contact'; jò ?iklē~jò klē 'chopping block' (jò 'at the base of')

phō 'chop, pound'; kũ chu ?iphō 'foot-operated tilt hammer for pounding rice' (kũ chu 'mortar')

sē 'split with a wedge'; tǎthá ?isē 'a wedge'

dé 'dip up (water)'; thāl ?idé kū 'water hole' (thāl 'water', kū 'hole')

A second group has only ?i- + verb, forming names of tools; as if words originally belonging to the preceding group had omitted the initial noun.

mũ 'to hammer, strike'; ?imũ 'a stick (for beating)'

thá 'to plow'; ?ithá 'a plow'

ci 'cut with scissors'; ?íci 'scissors'

pɔ 'thresh'; ?ípɔ 'a hammer'

dū 'sweep'; ?idū 'broom'

And possibly ?íkwa 'stick, switch', if related to kékwa 'be in half', təkwa 'one half' (via '(half>) piece of branch, stick').

Note that not all tool names are formed in this way (e.g. lwá 'saw', bú 'to saw', tənè 'hoe', təcē 'sickle'). There is also one noun/verb pair

with no prefix on either: kwā 'axe; to chop down'.

ʔí- may also be prefixed to phē 'father', mō 'mother', and phō 'grandfather', restricting the meaning to one's blood kin, where the unprefixed forms may apply either to blood kin or to an unrelated older person being addressed as elder kin out of respect: ʔíphē 'my father', ʔímō 'my mother', ʔíphō 'my grandfather'.

It seems reasonable to use the term 'prefix' for kə- pə- ʔi- ʔí- above. Are all Kayah Li presyllables prefixes? There are difficulties. An affix may be characterized as an element that is both phonologically dependent and morphemically autonomous; i.e., having specifiable semantic and syntactic features. But Kayah Li tends not to combine those two characteristics in a single item. The presyllables listed above are not typical: most presyllables have less or no morphemic autonomy. Conversely, securely autonomous morphemes, even bound forms, tend to be full syllables--not phonologically dependent. Put another way, Kayah Li words that contain affixes are either too much like single morphemes or too much like compounds.

Each phonologically-defined type of presyllable, besides the fairly autonomous morphemes already listed, also includes numerous instances of lower autonomy. The more autonomous items above satisfied two criteria:

a) affiliation with a group of prefixed forms having a common semantic element (instruments, motion verbs, kin terms).

b) existence of unprefixed counterparts (or, occasionally, counterparts with a different prefix) having reasonably relatable semantics.

I will now list items whose autonomy is UNCLEAR, satisfying a) but not b), and OBSCURE, satisfying neither a) nor b).

ʔí- UNCLEAR

body movements or functions: ʔícha 'jump', ʔílò 'bathe', ʔíchʌ 'urinate', ʔínē 'to fart', ʔíbe 'speak', ʔívī 'to whistle; to scratch [as chicken]', ʔírō 'to sing', ʔíʔu 'to crow'.

ʔi- OBSCURE

Nouns: ʔíthw 'post', ʔíbe 'bamboo shoot', ʔíja 'flesh', ʔíje 'howdah', ʔilū 'the Kayah New Year festival', ʔitē 'what?', ʔikē 'shawl, blanket', thāʔíphrè 'whiskey', ʔithé 'Crataeva' (Thai *phàk kùm*, a plant with edible sour leaves; perhaps related to təthé 'centipede?'), ʔíkhu 'earth, the world' (khu 'on the upper surface of' [Localizer])

Verbs: ʔílò 'to plant (seeds)', ʔikhré 'to winnow', ʔiché 'to tell', ʔíʔe 'dirty', ʔipiê 'narrow', síʔichē afraid (sí 'heart', chē 'hurt'), ʔíphri 'buy', ʔihí 'to spin (thread)', ʔichá 'pound in a mortar' (chá 'hit with the fist'), ʔíkò 'jab with stg curved' (kò 'chop hole in log with axe'), ʔíla 'call animal by clucking sounds', ʔíkhu 'to wind, as thread on a spool' (homophonous with

'earth, the world' above; khu is the Classifier for spools of thread).

tə- UNCLEAR (tə- is the most common presyllable)

Directional: təva 'encircling', təka 'curved, hooked, in a curving path', təlwá 'past', təphā 'out of the way', təja 'past going in opposite directions'.

Of these, təva 'encircling' is a verb; the rest are members of a class of directional verb particles which also includes unprefixing items (vɔ 'circumventing', rwá 'along, following') and one with optional prefix kə- (bé ~ kəbé 'across'). təka 'curved' occurs optionally unprefixing in sí təka ~ sí ka 'dishonest' ('heart' + 'bent'), and may be related to ka 'move towards home' if the latter originally meant 'return, turn around'.

Undesirable personal qualities: təmwī 'crazy', təklw̃ 'stunted', təro 'timid', təké 'dwarfed', təklē 'lazy', təkhrō 'stupid', təkhwa 'speechless'.

Animals: təchē 'elephant', təci 'binturong', təchɔâ 'slow loris', təklí 'tortoise', təthé 'centipede', tənī 'bee', təkhwá 'lizard', təmɛ 'tusk (of pig)'.

tə- OBSCURE

The following is just a sample (listed verbs first, then nouns): təpē 'kick stg', təkli 'gnaw', təlū 'roll stg up', təné 'steep', təcá 'cool', təcā 'tight', təkhā 'yawn', təplo təpjā 'hurry', təphé 'cotton', təkō 'box', təpwī 'longan' (a fruit), təcǎ

'anything', təmò 'sun'. There are close to two dozen more.

Isolated pair: təne 'think about' (with Noun argument), ne 'think that' (with clausal argument)

kə- OBSCURE

kəjē 'person', kəlō 'hill', kədó 'lid' (dó 'a wall, to enclose'), kəne 'almost', kəʔō 'noisy, deafening', kəlwa 'slanted', kəsé 'itch', kəjō 'move, shake', kədó 'dirty (water)', kərē pē 'umbrella', kətha 'magic' (ultimately from Indic *gatha* ).

pə- OBSCURE

pəhó 'onion', pəkū 'Sgaw Karen', pəkhrō (possibly a particular Karen group, possibly just a couplet of the foregoing), pəcʌ 'to gossip', cō pəriə 'sharp-pointed', pətí and pətəə both 'small', pəlwī 'cool (air)', pənè 'buffalo'.

If we imagine a scale of morphemic autonomy, it is clear that the majority of occurrences of presyllables as defined thus far fall towards the zero end of the scale. The following item, of different phonological shape belongs at the opposite end of the scale, being if anything too autonymous to be prefix.

?a is the unmarked third person pronoun (singular/plural not distinguished; there are two other third person pronouns that are more restricted in occurrence). What I take to be the same item (or a closely related, homophonous item) occurs in various prefix-like constructions, listed below. In these it has only some of the phonological characteristics of a prefix: it is



unstressed, at or near low-level pitch, and its vowel quality approaches [ə]. On the other hand at slower speech tempos it retains the vowel quality [a] and does not exhibit vowel harmony with the following syllable. It has two functions with Bound Nouns (i.e. those requiring a co-constituent).

1) A certain type of classifier (Bound by definition, requiring a numeral co-constituent) may function as head of compound nouns; for instance *plɔ* 'classifier for small round things' appears in *ké plɔ* 'eggplant seed', *bése plɔ* 'eye' (*bése* 'face'), *mi plɔ* 'light bulb' (*mi* 'fire'). The modifier position in such compound nouns may also be occupied by *ʔa-*; thus with *plɔ* we have *ʔaplɔ* 'a seed, its seed'. The following examples first gloss the morpheme as classifier, then give several examples of its occurrence in compound nouns, then its occurrence with *ʔa-*:

*po* clf for enclosures; *kúphe po* 'fireplace, hearth' (*kuphe* 'ashes and dirt'); *pù po* 'cattle pen', *thé po* 'pigpen', *chā po* 'chicken coop'; *ʔapo* 'finial of New Year's pillar; its cage'

*be* clf for winged, winglike or flakelike things; *rū be* 'silver coin'; *ʔabe* 'a round flat thing' (of coin or *bī so* 'dried fermented bean' only)

*tù* clf for sheaves; *bó tù* 'sheaf of rice' (*bó* 'growing rice'); *ʔatù* 'a sheaf'

*plē* clf for ears of grain; *bó plē* 'ear of rice'; *ʔaplē* 'id.'

*phē* clf for branches; *so phē* 'branch', *khru phē* 'small firewood'; *ʔaphē* 'branch'

It would not be quite accurate to describe this ?a- as derivational. It does not derive (ordinary) nouns from classifiers, since these classifiers, when appearing in compounds like m i p l o 'light bulb', already overlap with nouns with no assistance from a prefix. In ?a p l o 'seed', ?a- is effectively a stand-in for any ordinary noun, functioning only to make the whole construction a Free element. Like any Bound morpheme, these classifier-related nouns require a co-constituent, and ?a- is merely the most colorless such co-constituent. Its function is to allow the Noun to occur as a Free form without adding any other semantic specificity.

2) ?a- functions similarly with some other Bound nouns. phē 'male' (distinct from the Free noun 'father') occurs in compounds such as hē phē 'Chinese man', phē twà 'handsome man', pù phē 'bull', chā phē 'cock'; with ?a- we have ?a phē 'the male one' (of some previously mentioned animals). mò 'female; mother' shows the same pattern: chā mò 'hen' (chā 'chicken'), ?a mò bē 'the yellow one (hen, previously mentioned)'. Many names of plant parts fall under this heading, occurring either with a species name, the general word for 'plant', or with ?a-. E.g. with se 'fruit': kése 'eggplant', sōse 'fruit', ?a se 'a fruit, its fruit'. Other examples include ?a t ʌ 'tuber', ?a mò 'trunk', ?a ché 'thorn', ?a le 'leaf', ?a r w i 'root', ?a l o 'core, heart', and possibly ?a k l w i 'seed (for planting)'.

Is this prefix ?a- truly distinct from the pronoun ?a? On the one hand, ?a- is unlike any (other) pronoun in its noun-forming function as just described. On the other hand these ?a- compounds retain an anaphoric flavor in the many cases where ?a+N occurs in a context that contains a possible antecedent for ?a (this anaphoric flavor is reflected by the gloss 'its fruit' given above for ?ase). Cf. the following case of təʔā 'ginger' followed several clauses later by ?atʌ 'its rhizome, the rhizome':

- 3) phjá pòsé təʔā / təʔā ʔo t(h)ō me hú tē /  
 take again ginger ginger exist finish do like what  
 cwá chó pòsé təʔā / təʔā ma təmjō ma  
 go plant again ginger ginger be.so one-kind be.so  
 hé ʔitē [5 clauses] ʔā nʌ chó pòsé phjá pòsé  
 call what this PTC plant again take again  
ʔatʌ

\*-tuber

'[they] also took ginger/they had ginger, and then what?/[they] went and planted the ginger/ginger is a kind of, what do you call it?' [5 clauses on the Thai word for 'ginger' elided] 'this, they also planted [it] and took its rhizome/the rhizome'. (396.3)

Here it would not be unreasonable to see ?a- in ?atʌ 'tuber, rhizome' as referring back to təʔā 'ginger', hence the possible gloss 'its rhizome'. But the following example, otherwise very similar, does not allow such an analysis:

- 4) chāmò                      bē    ʔo   nā   be /chāmò                      lɔ  
 chicken-female yellow exist two CLF chicken-female black  
 ʔo   sō   be /ʔāmò                      bē    jo   cwá á   tɔbe  
 exist three CLF \*-female yellow fly go    PTC one-CLF  
 There are two yellow hens and three black  
 hens; one of the yellow ones has flown away.  
 Here ʔāmò bē does NOT mean 'its yellow mother',  
 or even 'its yellow female'. I am not prepared to  
 give a conclusive analysis of this matter, but the  
 following seems relevant.

If examples like ʔatʌ 'the rhizome' and ʔāmò bē 'the yellow one' do in fact display a sort of anaphoricity, it is better seen as anaphoric or quasi-anaphoric function of the ENTIRE WORD ʔatʌ, ʔāmò rather than of ʔa- alone. A similar quasi-anaphoric function of common nouns is found in English examples like *That spruce tree is in bad shape; the trunk is riddled with carpenter ants.* This quasi-anaphora is possible with any common noun, and is not a feature of a special grammatical category pronoun.

Thus ʔa- is morphemically highly autonomous and phonologically dependent, but its phonological dependence is partial, certainly less than that of Cə- and ʔi-.

To sum up, there is a discrepancy between the phonological category presyllable and the morphosyntactic category affix. With the vagueness of boundary between the presyllables that are morphemically autonomous and those that are not, the temptation is to call all of them prefixes. After all, perhaps additional lexical data will reveal further common-meaning groupings; and even if a given presyllable is

fully obscure in the modern language, perhaps it once was an autonomous morpheme.

The latter hypothesis can sometimes be confirmed by etymology. The prefix in ʔíthw 'post' is hi 'house', judging by the cognate hi thw in the closely-related Western Kayah Li. The prefix in ʔíkhu 'earth, world' is probably he 'earth, dirt', supported by the Western equivalent he khu 'earth, world' (the second syllable is a Localizer noun meaning 'on the upper surface of').

On the other hand etymology can also complicate the picture. The prefix in ʔíbe 'speak' is probably hé 'call, say' (be 'impinge, affect', a very common result expression); cf. Western Kayah hé be 'speak'. Perhaps the following also have the same source: ʔírō 'sing', ʔívī 'whistle', ʔíʔu 'to crow', ʔíché 'tell', ʔíla 'call animal by clucking sounds'. If these etymologies are valid, the fact that these verbs of oral action can be grouped with other ʔi- words under 'body movements' is at best a very recent innovation, and at worst a figment of my analysis.

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\*Kayah Li, also known as Kayah, Red Karen, and Karenni, is a language of the Karen branch of Tibeto-Burman, spoken in Kayah State of Burma and adjacent parts of Thailand. Data in this paper, representing the Eastern dialect area of Kayah Li, were recorded in 1983-84 and 1987-88 in Mae Hong Son province, Thailand. My research was supported by two grants from the U.S. Department of Education: a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad grant and a Fulbright-Hays Advanced Research award.