

Guide to Kayah Sounds; (24 Consonants; 9 Vowels)
Written in the order of the Kayah Alphabet

Kayah Consonants	Phonetic Symbol	English equivalent or Sounds Like:	Comment:	For Practice with a Kayah Person		
				English Example Word	Equivalent in Kayah	Word in semi-non-linguist Phonetics ^a
က	k	k in 'strike'	unaspirated ^b	stand up	ကဒုပဉ္စိ	ka ¹ t ^h aw ¹
ခ	k ^h	c/k in 'cool'	aspirated ^b	head	ခဠိကလုဠိ	k ^h u ¹ klaw
ဂ	g	see comment-	rarely used except as part of diphthong /ua/	mother	မယုမ	muə
င	ŋ	ng as in 'sing'	can also occur as the first letter in a word	language	ငယုဝ	ngo
စ	s	same as English	-rare usage	grape	စဠုဝဟဠိဠုဠိ	sa ¹ pyaythe ¹
ဆ	s ^h	s in the word 'sit' when given as a strong command 'Sit down!' -or sometimes 'sh' as in 'shoot'	aspirated	food-drink	ဆဠိဠိဆဠိဠိ	se ¹ -ay ¹ -se ¹ -o ³
ဇ	z	same in English		it's easy	ဇဠုဠိ	a ¹ zu ³
ည	ɲ	ny in nyet (Russian)	not in English inventory	five	ညယုဠိ	nya ³
တ	t	t in the word 'stork'	unaspirated	pretty	တုလ်ယုဝ	a ¹ two

្រ	t ^h	t in the word ‘take’	aspirated	drink water	ត្រ ្រហ្លឹម	o ³ t ^h yay ³
្ល	n	same as English		seven	ន្លប្រ ន្លយ៉ៃ	nwo nay ¹
្ឍ	p	p in the word ‘spin’	unaspirated	small; little we	ត្រត្រខ ត្រយ៉ៃ	pa ¹ tee pɛ ¹
្ណ	p ^h	p in the word ‘put’	aspirated	take father	ត្រហ្លឹម ត្រម៉ៃ	p ^h yay p ^h ɛ ³
្ត	m	same as English		mother	ម្រម	mɯə
្ថ	d	same as English		give	ឌហ្លឹម	dyay
្ទ	b	same as English		put in	ប្រម្រម្រ	bay ¹ nɯə ³
្ធ	r	same as English		good	ទ្ររហ្លឹម	a ¹ rya
្ន	j	y in the word		lack of	ហ្ល	yo ¹
្ប	l	same as English		enough; ample	ល្រហ្លឹម	lerba ³
្ផ	w	same as English		already cooked	ហ្ល	wo ³
្ព	θ or ʃ	th in the word ‘this’	see comment below ^c	you (plural) heart	ត្រ ត្រម៉ៃត្រយ៉ៃ	thee ³ thɛplaw ¹
្ភ	h	same as English	also used to show that a vowel is breathy/heavy sounding	come speak	ហ្ល ហ្លម៉ៃ	hya ³ haybɛ ¹
្ម	v	same as English		I	ហ្ល	va ³

၂	ɟ	j in the word judge		paper	၂ယုၼ်ကဵု	jay ¹ ba ¹
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Kayah Vowels	Phonetic Symbol	English equivalent or sounds like:	Comment:	English Example	Equivalent in Kayah	Word in Phonetics
ဧ	a	-the first sound of ‘a’ in the English alphabet like ‘a’ in ‘about’		he/she/it noisy happy	ဧ ဧကဵုဧၼ် ဧမယုဧ	a ¹ a ¹ -ka ¹ -aw ³ a ¹ mɔ ¹
ဣ	ə	-not in English, similar to ‘er’ in ‘her’ but drop the ‘r’ and let your mouth stay slightly open and relaxed		box one	ဣ ဣ	tə tə ¹
ဩ	i	‘ee’ in ‘beet’		cook	ဩဂီဩ	ee ¹ -p ^h o ³
ဩ	o	o in ‘robe’		drink	ဩ	o ³
ဩ	u	like ‘oo’ in ‘moot’ but with the lips spread slightly apart instead of rounded	not in the English inventory	fire burn fat	မဩဩ ဩမဩ	mee ¹ -u ³ a ¹ bu ¹
ဩ	ɛ	e in ‘pet’		invite/welcome they	ဩခဩ ဩဩဩ	ɛ-shu ¹ ɛ ¹ thee ³
ဩ	u	‘oo’ in ‘boot’		who?	ဩဩဩ	u ³ pay ³
ဩ	e	ay in pay		eat	ဩ	ay ¹
ဩ	ɔ	‘aw’ in ‘thaw’		promise	ဩဩယုဟဩ	awlyɑ ¹
ဟဟ/ဟမ	uə	a diphthong; begin with	not in English	go	၂ဟဟ	juə

		the /w/ sound (spread your lips) followed by /ə/	inventory; practice w/a native speaker	younger sibling	ဗျူကူ	ပျူခဲ
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^a **Non-Linguist Phonetics** This chart is written for those not familiar with the International Phonetic Symbols. Where it was too difficult to convey an English equivalent, phonetics was used. If you examine the chart, you should be able to figure out how those symbols are pronounced.

^b **Aspirated and Unaspirated Consonants:** on unaspirated consonants, you should not feel any release of air when you hold your hand in front of your mouth but with aspirated consonants, you will feel that slight puff of air

^c /θ/ ‘th’ or actually /s̺/ - these symbols are spoken as a /s̺/ by a native speaker when they are speaking unconsciously but due to the inability to write the sound /s̺/ in Burmese, /θ/ which is like the “th” sound in English has been written. As a result, it is now included in the Kayah inventory of sounds and is likely used as well. If you want to really speak Kayah more natively, try curling your tongue up and backwards just a tiny bit while saying the “th” sound. For example, try saying “*thawmaw*” which means “tree”. You will hear a slight whistle sound on the /th/ sound as you say it.

^d /x/ - this sound, though not part of the Kayah inventory of sounds, can be found in the words ‘uncooked rice’ /xə / or ‘hear’ /neexə/. First form the English word “hurt”. Notice that your mouth is slightly closed. Now say “hurt” but drop the final “t”, do not voice the “ur” and let there be friction up at the roof of your mouth. That is the sound of /x/.

SPECIAL FEATURES of KAYAH:

1. **Kayah is a TONAL language.** English speakers are not familiar with tone but it makes a huge difference to the meaning of a word. Two or three words may be spelled exactly the same but have different meanings depending on whether the syllable has a low tone (¹), mid tone (³) or high tone (not marked with a number).

Low tone: adjust your voice downward when you say the word

Mid Tone: adjust your voice at a mid range

High Tone: adjust your voice at slightly higher than the mid

Does it sound hard? It is! Practice the following examples with a Kayah speaker and see if you can hear the difference in the tones:

English Word	Phonetic	Kayah
climb	t ^h ya ¹	ငံတၢ
sharp	t ^h ya ³	ငံတၢ
pig	t ^h ya	ငံတၢ
sour	shyay ¹	ဆဟဲ
chicken	shyay ³	ဆဟဲ
ten	shyay	ဆဟဲ

2. **Breathiness:** written with two dots under the vowel /a / breathiness is a feature in the Western dialect of the Kayah language and can result in two words that are spelled the same having different meanings. The breathy word may sound a bit heavier to your ear. Note the following examples:

English Word	Phonetic	Kayah
husband	vɛ ¹	ဗဲၤ
bamboo	vɛ̃ ¹	ဗဲယဲၤ
letter	li ¹	လိၤ
the color red	lĩ ¹	လိယဲၤ

Most of the refugees speak Eastern Kayah so breathiness is not a factor but because the script is written based on the Western dialect, the spellings of words will contain breathiness.

Helpful English Words & Phrases	English Equivalent	Kayah
GREETINGS at AIRPORT		
Hello (to one person)	tɛ¹-rya-bɛ¹ nɔ̃¹	គុយទ្រៃ ណែ ណែ
Hello (to more than one person)	tɛ¹-rya-bɛ¹ thee³	គុយទ្រៃ ណែ ឆ្មា
We welcome you to America!	pɛ¹ ɛ¹-mɔ̃-shu thee³ də A¹may¹-ree-ka¹	ឲ្យទ្រៃ ទ្រៃយុចកន់ ឆ្មា ឧប ឲ្យឆ្មៃរាជរាជ
We're every happy you've come!	thee³ hya³ bee-ye³ raw pɛ¹ the-kru³ nya¹-zaw	ឆ្មា យុច កន់ហង្ស រាជ ឲ្យទ្រៃ ឆ្មៃរាជរាជ គុយទ្រៃ
Are you sleepy?	the-o¹-myay³ hɛ³	ឆ្មៃឲ្យឆ្មៃ យុច?
Are your (pl) heads dizzy/motion sick?	a¹ mu¹ thee³ kʰu¹-klaw hɛ³	ឲ្យ យុច ឆ្មា មន្តិកា យុច?
WHO/HOW ARE YOU?		
What is your name?	nɔ̃¹ mwɪ¹ na u³-pe³?	គុយទ្រៃ ឈ្មោះ គុយ ឆ្មៃ?
My name is _____	va³ mwɪ¹ na _____	ឆ្មៃ ឈ្មោះ គុយ -----
How old are you (sing)?	nɔ̃¹ o¹-haw ba-na-tay³	គុយទ្រៃ ឆ្មៃ ឆ្មៃ គុយ គុយ?
Where did you (sing) just come from?	nɔ̃¹ o¹ bee-tay³ hja³	គុយទ្រៃ ឲ្យ កន់ យុច?
How are you (sing)?	nɔ̃¹ o¹-mɔ̃¹-o¹-rya hɛ³	គុយទ្រៃ ឲ្យយុចឲ្យណែ យុច?
I am well (in heart).	o¹-mɔ̃¹-o¹-rya¹ prɛ	ឲ្យយុចឲ្យណែ ឲ្យ
I am physically well.	o¹syo¹-o¹prya³ prɛ	ឲ្យយុចឲ្យឲ្យណែ ឲ្យ
Are you (plural) hungry?	thee³ the-ay¹-dee³ hɛ³	ឆ្មា ឆ្មៃឆ្មៃ យុច?

pen	t ^h ye ³ -lee ¹ -bo ³ -	បំពង់ល្អខ្មាត
book	lee ¹ ba ¹	ល្អខ្មាត
school	thu-lee ¹ ho ³	ស្នាក់ល្អខ្មាត
student	thu-lee ¹ ho ³ p ^h u	ស្នាក់ល្អខ្មាតក្រី
teach	ee ¹ -thuo-ee ¹ -thya	ខ្ញុំស្នាក់ល្អខ្មាត
TIME RELATED VOCAB		
today	yee-ay ³ -tə ¹ -nyay ³	ហើយក្រី
tomorrow	shye-pa ¹ -ro ³	ក្រោយមិញ
yesterday	pa-hay-nu	មិញមិញ
day after tomorrow	shyay-s ^h o ³ -vee	ក្រោយមិញមិញ
before too long	nye ³ -tya ¹ -to ¹	មិញមិញមិញ
later-more than a few days	shyay-no-pa ³	ក្រោយមិញមិញ
shortly-in a few minutes	shyay- pa ³	ក្រោយមិញ
CLEANING VOCAB		
sweep floor	du ³ -plee ³ hee ³ -daw-ku ³	ខ្ញុំស្នាក់ មុខមិញ
make clean (heart)	ma ¹ y ¹ plee ³ ma ¹ y ¹ phue	មុខមិញមុខមិញ
wash/clean (i.e. dishes)	s ^h ee ³ -plee ³	ក្នុងមិញ
wash clothes	ee-shua ¹ -plee ³ hyay ¹ -ja ¹	ខ្ញុំស្នាក់ល្អខ្មាត មុខមិញ
take a bath/shower	ee ¹ -luə-t ^h yay ³	ខ្ញុំល្អមុខមិញ

dirty/not clean	a ¹ -ta ¹ -pro\ a mwɔ ³ plee ³ to ¹	ធុកធុទព្យា\ ធុដបយុធុធុល្ម គធុ
CHURCH VOCAB		
Bible	lee ¹ -ja ³ -s ^h ε ³	ល្មធុនិទ្ទកធុ
sing song	ee ¹ -ro ³ lee ¹	ឧ្យធុ ល្ម
church	tɛ ¹ jaw-bε ³ ho ³	គយុធុនិទ្ទកធុយុធុ
worship/pray	jaw-bε ³	និទ្ទកធុ
bus	mee ¹ -t ^h yay ³ lɔ	ដធុបហធុម្លយុធុ
Will you (singular) go to church?	nay ¹ juwə jaw-bε ³ ɛ ³	នុយុធុ និហយ និទ្ទកធុ យុធុ?
God	jaw-ma ¹ -rya ¹	និទ្ទកធុម្លយុធុ
Jesus Christ	Yay ¹ -shu K ^h ree	ហធុម្លកហធុ ឧ្យធុ
QUESTION WORDS		
Qmarker Word—this word acts like a question mark at the end of a sentence	hɛ	យុធុ?
Where?	bee-tay ³	កន្លែង?
Who?	u ³ -pay ³	អ្នក?
What?	ee ³ -tay ³	អ្វី?
How?	p ^h u-tay ³	ដូចម្តេច?
When?	bee-k ^h ε ³ -tay ³	ពេលវេលា?

PRONOUNS		
I/me	va ³	វា
you (singular)	nay ¹	នយ័
you (plural)	thee ³	ទ្រ
we	pɛ ¹	ធប័
they	ɛ ¹ thee ³	ឺទ្រ
he/she/it	a ¹ or ɛ ¹	ឺ or ឺ
--- to him/her/it	lu ³	លួ
VERBS (can be placed one after another i.e. brought = take-come-give)		
come	hya ³	ហួ
go	juə	និហ
follow	kruo ³	ករូបួ
take	p ^h yay	ពិហឺ
give	dyay	ឌហឺ
bring	p ^h yay-hya ³	ពិហឺហួ
put	bay ¹ (or) dya ¹	ហឺ / ឌហឺ
keep/save	bay ¹ -duo (or) dya ¹ duo	ហឺឌហឺ / ឌហឺឌហឺ
make/do	m̄ay ¹	មយ័
help	m̄ay ¹ -juə	មយ័និហ
run/walk	klya ¹	កលួ

to leave/exit	t ^h ay ¹ (or) t ^h ay ¹ -juə (or) t ^h ay ¹ -juə-kya ³ (or) t ^h ay ¹ kya ³ t ^h ay ¹ -klya ¹	ជ្រុំ / ជ្រុំលិច/ ជ្រុំលិចអោយ / ជ្រុំអោយ
enter	ណុំ ³	ទុក
stand up	ka ¹ -t ^h aw ¹ (or) ee ¹ -t ^h aw ¹	ឆ្លើយ / ឆ្លើយ
sit down	o ¹ -nya ³	ជួប

by Khu Hte Reh November 2009