

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
မ	g	see comment-	rarely used except as part of diphthong / <i>ua</i> /	mother	မယုမ	mua
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

ឋ	t ^h	t in the word ‘take’	aspirated	drink water	ត្រូវ បាយ	o ³ t ^h yay ³
ន	n	same as English		seven	នួន នយ	nwo nay ¹
ត	p	p in the word ‘spin’	unaspirated	small; little we	តូច តយ	pa ¹ tee pɛ ¹
ត	p ^h	p in the word ‘put’	aspirated	take father	តាយ តែ	p ^h yay p ^h ɛ ³
ម	m	same as English		mother	មាយ	mɔ̃
ឌ	d	same as English		give	ឌាយ	dyay
ប	b	same as English		put in	បញ្ចូល	bay ¹ nɔ̃ ³
រ	r	same as English		good	រយ	a ¹ rya
យ	j	y in the word		lack of	យ	yo ¹
ល	l	same as English		enough; ample	លម្អិត	lerba ³
វ	w	same as English		already cooked	វ	wo ³
ថ	θ or ʃ	th in the word ‘this’	see comment below ^c	you (plural) heart	ថ្ម ថ្មនយ	thee ³ thɛplaw ¹
ហ	h	same as English	also used to show that a vowel is breathy/heavy sounding	come speak	ហយ ហន	hya ³ haybɛ ¹
វ	v	same as English		I	វ	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	wa	a diphthong; begin with	not in English	go	၂ဟဟ	jawə

		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:

- 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	ငံတၢၢ်
sharp	t ^h ya ³	ငံတၢၢ်
pig	t ^h ya	ငံတၢၢ်
sour	shyay ¹	ဆၢၤ
chicken	shyay ³	ဆၢၤ
ten	shyay	ဆၢၤ

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 ឆ្មួ
We welcome you to America!	pɛ¹ ɛ¹-mɔ̃-shu thee³ də A¹may¹-ree-ka¹	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ យុចកន់ ឆ្មួ ឆ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ
We're every happy you've come!	thee³ hya³ bee-ye³ raw pɛ¹ the-kru³ nya¹-zaw	ឆ្មួ យុច ណែ ណែ ណែ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ
Are you sleepy?	the-o¹-myay³ hɛ³	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?
Are your (pl) heads dizzy/motion sick?	a¹ mu¹ thee³ kʰu¹-klaw hɛ³	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?
WHO/HOW ARE YOU?		
What is your name?	nɔ̃¹ mwɪ¹ na u³-pe³?	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?
My name is _____	va³ mwɪ¹ na _____	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ -----
How old are you (sing)?	nɔ̃¹ o¹-haw ba-na-tay³	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?
Where did you (sing) just come from?	nɔ̃¹ o¹ bee-tay³ hja³	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?
How are you (sing)?	nɔ̃¹ o¹-mɔ̃¹-o¹-rya hɛ³	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?
I am well (in heart).	o¹-mɔ̃¹-o¹-rya¹ prɛ	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ
I am physically well.	o¹syo¹-o¹prya³ prɛ	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ
Are you (plural) hungry?	thee³ the-ay¹-dee³ hɛ³	ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ ឆ្មួ?

Are you (plural) thirsty?	thee ³ the-o ³ -t ^h ye ³ hɛ ³	ឆ្ងល់ ឆ្ងល់ហើយ ឬអ្វី?
Do you want to go to the bathroom?	thee ³ the-zu ¹ juə də daw ³ klaw ³ hɛ ³	ឆ្ងល់ ឆ្ងល់ទៅ បារាយ ឧប ឧត្តិកល្យាណ ឬអ្វី?
COMING & GOING VOCAB		
Let's go!	pɛ ¹ juə haw pɔ	ទៅ បារាយ ឬទី ទៅ!
Will you come with me?	na ¹ juə kuə ³ va ³ hɛ ³	តើអ្នក នឹង មក ជាមួយ ខ្ញុំ ឬអ្វី?
Do you want to go?	na ¹ the-zu ¹ juə kuə ³ hɛ ³	តើអ្នក ចង់ទៅ បារាយ ជាមួយ ឬអ្វី?
I'm going home/leaving now.	va ³ ka ¹ haw də hee ¹	ខ្ញុំ ទៅ ឬទី ឧប ឬខ្លួន
I'm leaving.	va ³ ka ¹ haw	ខ្ញុំ ទៅ ឬទី
May I help you?	lɔ ¹ ma ¹ -juə na ¹ hɛ ³	តើអ្នក ត្រូវការ ជំនួយ ឬអ្វី?
What curry have you eaten? (more natural way of greeting)	na ¹ ay ¹ ee ¹ -thwi ee ³ -tay ³	តើអ្នក បាន បរិភោគ អ្វី?
Where are you (plural) going?	thee ³ juə bee-tay ³	ឆ្ងល់ បារាយ ទៅ ណា?
We will come get you at _____ o'clock	pɛ ¹ hya ³ ɛ thee ³ bee (3) mu ³	ឆ្ងល់ បារាយ ទៅ ឆ្ងល់ ម្សិល ម៉ោង --- ម៉ោង
SCHOOL VOCAB		
Do you like school?	t ^h ya ¹ -ho ³ ma ¹ a ¹ mo hɛ ³	តើអ្នក ចូលចិត្ត ទៅ បរិស្ថាន ការសិក្សា ឬអ្វី?
Do you have a problem?	tɛ ¹ -pya-tɛ ¹ -s ^h ɛ ³ o ¹ hɛ ³	តើអ្នក មាន បញ្ហា ឬអ្វី?
If you have a problem, please tell me.	tɛ ¹ -pya-tɛ ¹ -s ^h ɛ ³ kee ¹ o ¹ he ³ ro ³ k ^h ya-the-do ³ hay-s ^h o ³ -re va ³ nee	តើអ្នក មាន បញ្ហា ឬអ្វី តើអ្នក ត្រូវ ប្រាប់ ខ្ញុំ ឬអ្វី ទាល់តែអ្នក បាន ឮ ឬអ្វី ទៅ
You can take (this) home.	je ³ ro na ¹ p ^h yay-ka ¹ də hee ¹ ma ¹ a ¹ -nee	អ្នក អាច យក (នេះ) ទៅ ផ្ទះ ឬអ្វី បាន

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)	may ¹ plee ³ may 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	ឆកឆឆព្រា\ ឆឆឆឆឆឆឆឆឆ ឆឆ
CHURCH VOCAB		
Bible	lee ¹ -ja ³ -s ^h ε ³	ល្បឿននិទ្ទេស
sing song	ee ¹ -ro ³ lee ¹	ខ្សែច្រនក់ ល្បឿន
church	tɛ ¹ jaw-bε ³ ho ³	គម្ពុជនិគ័យម្ពុជ
worship/pray	jaw-bε ³	និគ័យ
bus	mee ¹ -t ^h yay ³ lɔ	រថភ្នំយាយ
Will you (singular) go to church?	nay ¹ juwə jaw-bε ³ ɛ ³	តើអ្នក និហយ និគ័យ ម្ពុជ?
God	jaw-ma ¹ -rya ¹	និគ័យព្រហ្ម
Jesus Christ	Yay ¹ -shu K ^h ree	ហ្វីស្ត គ្រីស្ទ
QUESTION WORDS		
Qmarker Word—this word acts like a question mark at the end of a sentence	hɛ	ម្ពុជ?
Where?	bee-tay ³	ឆេត?
Who?	u ³ -pay ³	អ្នក?
What?	ee ³ -tay ³	ឆេត?
How?	p ^h u-tay ³	តើដូចម្តេច?
When?	bee-k ^h ε ³ -tay ³	ឆេតអ្នក?

PRONOUNS		
I/me	va ³	វា
you (singular)	naɿ ¹	នុយ៉ែ
you (plural)	thee ³	ទ្រូ
we	pɛ ¹	ធប្មែ
they	ɛ ¹ thee ³	ខ្លីទ្រូ
he/she/it	a ¹ or ɛ ¹	ឱ or ខ្លី
--- to him/her/it	lu ³	លួត្រី
VERBS (can be placed one after another i.e. brought = take-come-give)		
come	hya ³	ហុហន្ត
go	juə	និហល
follow	kruo ³	ករុប្រូ
take	p ^h yay	ពិហឺ
give	dyay	ឧហឺ
bring	p ^h yay-hya ³	ពិហឺហុហន្ត
put	bay ¹ (or) dya ¹	កន្តី / ឧហន្ត
keep/save	bay ¹ -duo (or) dya ¹ duo	កន្តីឧហន្ត / ឧហន្តឧហន្ត
make/do	maɿ ¹	ធប្មឺ
help	maɿ ¹ -juə	ធប្មឺនិហល
run/walk	klya ¹	កល្យហន្ត

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	នុំ ³	នុំ
stand up	ka ¹ -t ^h aw ¹ (or) ee ¹ -t ^h aw ¹	ក្រឡើង / ឡើង
sit down	o ¹ -nya ³	ចុះ

by Khu Hte Reh November 2009