

Vvaiã

A Speedlang
by Ursa Subpar
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Introduction

Vvaiã was created for Miacomet's Speedlang Challenge 8 on the Conlang Discord Network. To conform to the challenge I employed the following features:

- **Quantity Distinction:** Consonants can geminate phonemically or lengthen phonetically. See [Consonants](#).
- **Glides/Semivowels may not contrast:** The inventory only contains one glide, /w/, to also conform to the Segments Phonology Challenge. See [Vowels & Semivowels](#).
- **Suprasegmental feature that isn't tone or stress:** Vvaiã is stress-isochronic, causing laryngealization on strings of unstressed syllables. See [Prosody & Laryngealization](#).
- **Open pronoun class:** Any word, of any part of speech, may act as a pronoun once it has been used as an antecedent. See [Pronouns](#).
- **Insubordination:** Subordinate evidentials evolved to lose their main clause, leaving subclauses with declarative meaning implied. See [Insubordination](#).
- **Asymmetrical Negation:** Evidentials and declaratives use different negation structures. See [Negation](#).
- **Mark indefinite noun phrases:** Vvaiã marks nouns for indefiniteness, but not definiteness. See [Articles](#).
- ❑ **Use infiniteness in declarative sentences:** Nouns can be marked for infiniteness, indicating general or mass nouns. This should be self-explanatory.
- ❑ **Make sentences with the same declarative construction on different parts of a sentence [...] you need to create a different construction on the same part of your sentence with the same construction on it without having to change the declarative construction in the sentences:** Declarative insubordination maintains its underlying structure in some forms of negative statements. See [Negation](#).
- ❑ **Use an inflection to make a declarative sentence:** Non-evidential declaratives inflect verbs to make gerundive nouns. See [Insubordination](#).

Further Tasks:

- **Document and showcase your language:** This document focuses on the constraints of the challenge, with explanations for how I imagine such features might have evolved. Some features outside the challenge are outlined where I feel it necessary for clarity.

- **Translate and gloss 5 example sentences:** I used syntax test sentences 89, 18, 8, 80, and 87 from Zephyrus on Discord. Sentence **87. The fire feels hot** is used as an example in the [Negation](#) section. The rest are at the end of the document in [Example Sentences](#).
- **Include an example showing 15 possible pronouns:** The [Pronouns](#) section contains a examples highlighting pronominal reference from various parts of speech.

Phonology

Consonants

	Labial		Alveolar		Dorsal		Glottal
	-Voice	+Voice	-Voice	+Voice	-Voice	+Voice	
Nasal		m		n			
Stop	p	b	t	d	k	g	
Fricative	f	v	s	z	χ <c>		h
Approximant				l		w	

I differentiate between geminates and long consonants. Geminate consonants are not considered separate phonemes from their plain counterparts, simply a doubling of the phone, so I don't include them in the inventory. Geminates are phonemic, resulting in minimal pairs like /bapa/ *grass*, and /bappa/ *to sing*. Long consonants are phonetic realizations; after a V-only syllable, a consonant will be lengthened to fill the prosodic space. Ex. /niĕkõ/ will be pronounced [ni.ĕk.kõ].

Stops cannot geminate at the beginning of a word, but a word-initial stop is pronounced as long if the final syllable of the previous word consists of only a vowel.

*/ttiba/

/diãõ tiba/ [di.ã.õt ti.ba]

Vowels & Semivowels

	Front		Back	
	-Nasal	+Nasal	-Nasal	+Nasal
High	i		u	
Mld-High	e	ẽ	o	õ
Low			ɑ <a>	ã <ã>

While vowels are often half long in stressed syllables and short in unstressed syllables, these realizations are purely phonetic. There are no phonemic long vowels, and no diphthongs in the modern form.

I would call /w/ a glide here, simply to specify that it behaves in all environments as a consonant and cannot be the nucleus of a syllable. It is the only glide in the inventory, so there is no contrast in rounding or point of articulation. It can be said to contrast with /u/ by length, but consecutive vowels are separated by hiatus, so /suwa/ [su.wa] and /sua/ [su.a] are a minimal pair, and distinct outside of rapid speech.

Phonotactics & Sound Changes

Proto form (C)(C)V(l)

Onset consonant clusters are allowed, nucleus vowels are required, coda /l/ is allowed

Consonant clusters simplify to geminates of the initial consonant

Word-initial geminates /b, g/ become /m, n/ & /p, t, d, k/ become /f, s, z, c/

/l/ codas metathesize with preceding vowels, except word-finally

/i/ and /e/ disappear from word-final CVI syllables, unless the preceding consonant is /w, c, h/

(C¹)(C¹)(l)V(l)

/pbālādel/ > /ppālādel/ > /ffālādel/ > /fflāādel/ > /fflāād/

Prosody & Laryngealization

Vvaiã employs a stress-timed rhythm, meaning there is a fairly consistent amount of time between consecutive stressed syllables, with unstressed syllables compressed to fit into the time interval. Each stressed syllable is considered to take up a longer amount of time than an unstressed syllable; therefore, a stressed syllable can be followed by up to two unstressed syllables without modification. If more than two unstressed syllables follow a stressed syllable, they will become laryngealized, with the effect spreading between stressed syllables. This serves to “weaken” the affected syllables, shortening them and speeding up the time spent between stressed syllables.

ffõzzikka nõi [ˈf.õ.z:i.k:a ˈnõi]

ffõzzikka ani [ˈf.õ.z:i.k:ə ʌnˈni]

No syllable types are treated as more or less “heavy” than others. A CCV syllable, CV syllable, or V syllable are considered the same weight when it comes to measuring stressed syllables and the intervals allowed between.

Nouns

Vvaiã has a relatively small class of nouns, resulting in heavy compounding. Compounds are usually head-initial, so adjectives follow nouns. The most animate or proximate actor in a compound often comes first, though some historic compounds are irregular.

/ffõzzikka/ n. sailor

ffõ-zzi-kka

lit. person-cart-water, in English “boat person”

Note: due to sound change, the modern word for *water* is /cca/. The word *sailor* predates this change, but newer compounds, and words beginning with *water* as the initial root will contain /cca/ instead.

/zzi/ is from the root word *wheel* which also came to mean *cart*; it has become part of many words related to travel, including /zzikka/ *boat*, /fãõzzi/ *shoe*, and /zziiã/ *horse*.

Nouns are stressed on the first syllable. When verbs or adverbs are nominalized, their stress moves to the first syllable, with some semantic exceptions.

Articles

Nouns are preceded by an article marking for indefiniteness and infiniteness. Definite nouns are unmarked. Infinite nouns, or mass nouns, should be marked with the article /mi/. When the /mi/ article is used with human nouns it is typically for people in general, or mankind.

	Human	Object
Singular	u	a
Plural	bãi	cu
Infinite	mi	mi

Pronouns

Historically Vvaiã strongly favored pronoun-dropping, marking both the subject and object of the verb with a fusional suffix; in the modern iteration personal pronouns have fallen completely out of use. The null pronouns are still considered to take up space in a sentence before the verb, making some order-changing operations extremely opaque.

Any word can now be used as a pronoun once it has been referenced, including the original noun as an unmarked definite, the root of a compound noun, a nominalized form of a referenced verb, a nominalized adjective previously used with the noun, or a complement linked to the original noun by a copula. Adjectives and verbs are nominalized by moving their stress to the first syllable. Many descriptors used in this way for subjects also gain the suffix -õl, used for objects use the suffix -lufe

kao ěfã a fisse õado aẽ-sia
man sad DEF coat new need-he>it
The sad man needs a new coat.

ěfã zzẽdo õmẽ
sad cold seems.COP
(The) sad (man) looks cold.

õmẽ omõka hafa lawa-wwa
seem.person money none has-he
(The one who) seems (cold) has no money.

a õado eddua pe-lẽ-sinã
DEF new nice be-COND-it
A new (coat) could be nice.

aẽ-õl **ccẽgõ-lẽ-wwa**
need-person freeze-COND-he
(The) needer could freeze.

aẽ-lufe **nelẽlo pe-lẽ-sinã**
need-subj purple be-COND-it
(The) needed (coat) could be purple

zziiãize **a** **bedda fãõzzi-wika** **dul-sia** **dudo** **acel**
DEF.donkey INDEF rabbit foot-POSS find.PST-3SG DEF.forest within
The donkey found a rabbit's paw within the forest

ize **wwel pe**
DEF.donkey.ROOT grey is
(The) donkey* is grey

wika **bumu pe**
0-POSS white is
(The) foot is white

acel nele pe
0-LOC dark is
(The) forest is dark

Jon **leo** **Ana,** **Su** **leo** **Mara** **ne** **cuodo** **el**
Jon and Ana Su and Mara take DEF.store LOC
Jon and Ana take Su and Mara to the store

ne-uõl **ccoto lõ**
take-people kind are
(the) takers are kind

ccoto lõ **lidu-võ**
kind are friends-1SG.POSS
(the) kind are my friends

lõ-õl **lõ** **lidu-võ**
are-people are friends-1SG.POSS
(the) are are my friends

ne-lufe **dugõ lõ**
taken-people happy are
(the) taken are happy

ne-lufe dugõ lõ a el baho
taken-people happy are to LOC go
(the) taken are happy to go to (place)

gua-wwã noko-tlõ
tell-3SG>3SG quick-ADJ
He tells her quickly

nokolõl ezibi pe
quick-OBJ correct is
(the) quick person is right

nokol-lufe lihube pe
quick-SBJ incorrect is
(the) to-quick person is wrong

Insubordination

Historically, indicative sentences required an evidential main clause to show whether the statement was inferential, sensed, reported, or direct knowledge.

fõvõ, a nnuu-wwã lia bã
I.it-saw, DEM came-he shore LOC
I saw it, that he came ashore.

As the language lost demonstrative pronouns, the dependant clauses of such sentences evolved into gerunds to maintain the sentence structure. Modern gerunds are thus marked the same way as possessed nouns.

fõ-võ nnuu-wiko lia bã
I.it-saw coming-his shore LOC
I saw his coming ashore.

Eventually, these main clauses began to be dropped when the speaker did not consider the source of the information important. The dependant clause remained a gerund.

nnuu-wiko lia bã
coming-his shore LOC

lit. *his coming ashore*, to mean *his coming ashore happened* or more recognizably, *he came ashore*.

Old evidential markers have evolved new copula verbs, and can be used to indicate that something *is fõ*, *feels nnẽ*, *seems õmẽ*, or *is said to be, ãkke*.

Negation

Evidential statements take a negation marker **ssa** in the main clause to indicate the speaker did not see, feel, or hear evidence of the statement.

ssa nnēccēmō ōssai ōsal pe
NEG I-sense-it fire hot is

I do not feel that the fire is hot.

But when the evidential is positive and the statement is negative, i.e the speaker saw evidence to the contrary, the verb in the subordinate clause moves to the beginning, and is preceded by the negative marker.

nnēccēmō ssa pe ōssai ōsal
I-sense-it NEG is fire hot

I feel the fire is not hot.

Without evidential markers, the negation particle stays at the beginning of the sentence to negate the null evidential, and the verb remains at the end of the sentence.

ssa ōssai ōsal-kati nnē
NEG fire heat-POSS feels

It does not feel that the fire is hot.

While if it is the statement itself being negated, rather than the evidential copula, the verb moves to the beginning of the clause.

ssa nnē ōssai ōsal-kati
NEG feels fire heat-POSS

It feels as though the fire is not hot.

Example Sentences

18. It's raining.

ēddōwiko
pour-POSS

The common phrase for “it’s raining” evolved from an evidential declarative, “I see it, sky is pouring water.” Once the evidential was lost it became the possessive, “sky’s pouring water.” Pronominal “sky” fell out of use, as did the object “water” as it was fairly uncommon for anything else to pour from the sky. The modern phrase is the possessive “its pouring,” **ēddōwiko**.

8. The sun shines brightly.

llawi ocubē udaiē
DEF.sun shines bright

In most cases adverbs and adjectives take the same form and can modify either nouns or verbs.

89. The little boy's father had once been a sailor.

wafa	kuse	sekāi-wwā	a	ffōzzikka	mmei	pi
boy	little	father-POSS	INDEF	sailor	previous	is.PST

I haven't worked out much of a past tense system, aside from main verbs undergoing vowel ablaut.

80. The spool of thread rolled across the floor.

oppāhhe	usāla	öffēhhō	baseō oō
spool	thread.ADJ	roll	over floor

A descriptive noun phrase like “spool of thread” would become thread-spool, or the noun spool modified by the verbalized noun thread. The noun thread would move its stress to the second syllable, and it would take position just after “spool” in the sentence.

Silly Nonsense

Given the sample sentences that Zephyrus gave me, I made a tongue-twister in English, and fiddled with the lexicon to make that same sentence a pangram in Vvaiā; that is, a sentence that contains every possible phoneme in the inventory.

The sun shines slightly on the sailor's spool of string
llawi ocubē nnevedo imu ffōzzikka oppāhhe-sia āgeti