

## Nineis

Nineis (*nineis*, ‘our language’) is a spoken language presented by Formor Immington for the 2021 ‘Speedlang 11’ event. It has been claimed to be of Afroasiatic affiliation, mostly on typological grounds, though this is broadly disputed, as it also shares traits with the Mayan languages.

## Phonology

### Consonant Phonemes

		Bilabial	Coronal	C. Sibilant	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Nasal		m	n					
Stop	Implosive	ɓ <b’>	ɗ <d’>				ɠ <g’>	
	Voiced	b	d	ɗz ~ z <z>	ɟ ~ ɗʝ <j>		g ~ ɣ <g>	
	Plain		t		c ~ tʃ <c>	k	q	ʔ <’>
	Ejective		t’	tʂ’ <z’>	c’ ~ tʃ’ <c’>			
Fricative		f		s	ʃ <š>		χ <x>	h
Approximant			l		j <y>	w		

Implosives, ejectives, and uvulars have a limited distribution, appearing in verb stems, nouns, and adverbs, but not in pronouns nor morphological affixes.

The fricative allophones of *z* and *g* are only present intervocalically and word-finally, while the dorsal and sibilant realizations of the palatals are in free variation. Sibilant realizations seem to be particularly common in younger speakers and female speakers, perhaps owing to the general instability of dorsal palatal stops. When pronounced as dorsal, the non-glottalized stops *c j* are sometimes lightly affricated [c̠ç̠ j̠ʝ̠].

### Vowel Phonemes

	Front	Central	Back
Rounding Diphthong	eɤ <eu>	aɤ <au>	
Closing Diphthong	eɪ <ei>	aɪ <ai>	oɪ <oi>

Close	i		u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

Diphthongs are neutralized with their corresponding vowel-approximant sequences when an affix beginning in a vowel is added, but they can be shown to be different from VC sequences in a few ways. For one, they do not form an additional mora like syllable-final consonants do. Additionally, syllables with a diphthong and a syllable-final consonant are possible, but only one consonant can be present in the coda, indicating that diphthong off-glides are not considered consonants. Diphthongs can also contrast with vowel-vowel sequences across syllable boundaries, in which case the hiatus is indicated by an interpunct here. Notably, the native writing system (q.v.) has its own symbols for the diphthongs, so interpuncts are not required.

### Syllable Structure and Morae

The basic structure of the syllable is (C(C))V(C). Onset clusters follow somewhat of a sonority hierarchy but can be organized into a few categories:

Non-glottalized stop + fricative, e.g., *gsau* ‘a type of deer’

Fricative + stop, e.g., *fqoqo* ‘scraped; made a furrow’

Non-glottalized stop + stop, e.g., *zb’ei* ‘gold’

Fricative + fricative, e.g., *šhab* ‘floated’

Non-glottalized stop or fricative + approximant, e.g., *gle* ‘swallowed’

Non-glottalized stop or fricative + nasal, e.g., *knef* ‘wing’

And the anomalous *ml-*, only known from the root  $\sqrt{mle}$  ‘be sweet’.

The moraic character of a word determines its accented syllable, and some morphological categories and processes require a specific mora count. A C(C)V, V, or VC syllable consists of only one mora, but a C(C)VC syllable consists of two morae.

### Prosody

Nineis has predictable stress according to mora count. Stress is placed on the second-to-last mora in a word. This means that words ending in a closed syllable with a non-null onset, C(C)VC, will be stressed on the final syllable, and other words will be stressed on the penultimate syllable.

### Morphology

#### Verbal Morphology

The most basic element of the verb is the root, but in order to be conjugated, the root must be modified into a stem of at least two morae. For a basic verbal meaning, an already bimoraic root can be kept as a stem, or a monomoraic root can be augmented by reduplication, epenthesis, or specific affixes consisting of one consonant. Other affixes augment the root into a stem that expresses a change in valency.

#### Basic verb stem augments

Augment	Root Pattern	Stem Pattern	Root Example	Stem Example	Meaning
Reduplication	C(C)V → VC →	CVC(C)V VCVC	*qai → *oc' →	qaqai- oc'oc'-	'tell' 'strike'
Epenthesis	CV → VC →	VCV VCV	*lau → *uz →	alau- uzu-	'be old' 'give birth'
Suffixed -b	C(C)V →	C(C)Vb	*šha →	šhab-	'float'
Suffixed -z	C(C)V →	C(C)Vz	*mle →	mlez-	'be sweet'
Suffixed -l	C(C)V →	C(C)Vl	*cei →	ceil-	'return'
Prefixed y-	VC →	yVC	*ab' →	yab'-	'stand'

#### Valency-changing verb stem augments

Augment	Root Pattern	Stem Pattern	Root	Stem Example	Meaning
Prefixed wV-	C(C)V → C(C)VC → VC(V <sub>2</sub> ) →	wVC(C)V wVC(C)VC wVC(V <sub>2</sub> )	√mle √den √oc'	wemle- 'be very sweet' weden- 'give all of' woc'- 'beat (up)'	intensive, pluractionality
Infixes -s-	C(C)V → CCVC → CVC → VC → VCV <sub>2</sub> →	C(C)V <sub>s</sub> V CCV <sub>s</sub> VC C(V) <sub>s</sub> VC V <sub>s</sub> CV V <sub>s</sub> CV <sub>2</sub>	√mle √xšu' √den √oc' √oga	mlese- 'make sweet' xšusu'- 'make (s.o.) pull' dsen- 'make (s.o.) give' osc'o- 'make (s.o.) hit' osga- 'clean' (trans.)	causative, factitive
Infixes -c-	C(C)V → CCVC → CVC → VC → VCV <sub>2</sub> →	C(C)V <sub>c</sub> V CCV <sub>c</sub> VC C(V) <sub>c</sub> VC V <sub>c</sub> CV V <sub>c</sub> CV <sub>2</sub>	√mle √xšu' √den √oc' √oga	mlece- 'become sweet' xšucu'- 'be pulled up' decen- 'be given' occ'o- 'be struck' ocga- 'bathe'	passive; inchoative of stative; reflexive, middle voice
Suffixed -m-	C(C)V → C(C)VC →	C(C)V <sub>m</sub> C(C)VCV <sub>m</sub>	√mle √den	mlem- 'be found sweet' denem- 'give (sth.) to'	Applicative

	VC → VCV <sub>2</sub> →	VCVm VCV <sub>2</sub> m	√oc' √oga	oc'om- 'strike for' ogam- 'be found clean'	
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From the stem, verbs are conjugated for assertative, inferential, subjunctive, and imperative moods, and for perfect and imperfect aspects in the former two moods. Person and number of the subject are also encoded by agreement affixes.

The aspect prefixes are:

	Before a vowel	Before a consonant
Imperfect	y-	a-
Perfect	∅-	∅-

The terms 'perfect' and 'imperfect' properly refer to actions that are or are not completed. These often map onto past and nonpast and perfective and imperfective, but the imperfect aspect is also used for a similar meaning to the English perfect progressive, or any action that has not completed, even one begun in the past.

Suffixes encode mood and person-number agreement. The assertative agreement suffixes are also used as bound pronominal agreement in other constructions.

		Assertative	Inferential	Subjunctive	Imperative
Singular	1st	-nei		-nu	
	2nd	-ci	-aca	-cu	-ei
	3rd	-∅	-af	-u	
Plural	1st	-ni		-nu	
	2nd	-cuni	-acun	-cunu	-i
	3rd	-oi	-afun	-funu	

The difference between assertative and inferential mood is one of evidentiality; inferential is used for actions that the speaker did not observe, but has inferred has happened, or occasionally one that they were told by someone else occurred (especially if they are not sure). As such, it is usually used for actions with past meaning, even if they are morphologically imperfect.

Questions are asked in the mood that the speaker assumes the interlocutor would answer in: if they were asking about something they thought their interlocutor had experienced, they would use the assertative, but if they thought the interlocutor had only inferred the answer, they would use the inferential.

*Cei-ili uczuaca tebe yeu unob'?*

cei-ili ∅-u<c>zu-aca tebe yeu u-nob'

return-ADV PRF-bear<PASS>-2SG.INF village PROX 3SG-inside

'[Tell me] again, were you born in this village (ST 52)?'

In this sentence, since the interlocutor would not remember their own birth, the speaker phrases the question in the inferential mood.

## Nouns

Nouns do not distinguish any categories of noun class or case, and number is not morphologically marked, though agreement affixes distinguish singular and plural.

Nouns are marked for the person and number of their possessor with prefixes equivalent to the suffixes marking agreement on verbs.

## Nominal agreement prefixes

	Singular	Plural
1st	no-	ni-
2nd	ci-	cni-
3rd	u-	fni-

## Independent Pronouns

Unbound pronouns include the 1st and 2nd person independent pronouns and proximal and distal demonstratives, which can also be used like 3rd person pronouns. They are not inflected for any categories of case.

	Singular	Plural
1st	in	nux
2nd	aci	cuni

Prox.	yeu	heini
Dist.	ise	funi

## Adverbs

Adverbs are mostly indeclinable, underived words, although some participle-like adverbs are derived from verbs with the suffix *-ili*. Among the adverbs are the negation particle *ni* ‘not’ and a class of discourse particles which describe the context of a clause within an utterance rather than the action itself; for example, *cei-ili* can mean ‘again’, in that a described action happened again, or it can be a request to answer a question again, or to emphasize that something is being said again, much as in English.

*Cei-ili uczuaca tebe yeu unob’?*

cei-ili ∅-u<c>zu-aca tebe yeu u-nob’

return-ADV PRF-bear<PASS>-2SG.INF village PROX 3SG-inside

‘[Tell me] again, were you born in this village (ST 52)?’

## Syntax

Word order in Neneis is broadly verb-initial, with most clauses being VSO. Word order is quite important, as nouns and pronouns are not inflected for any cases that would indicate their role in the sentence. Adverbs can be fronted before the verb.

Relative clauses are placed after the noun they modify without a marker of relativization. Resumptive pronouns are used when the noun described is not the subject of the absorbed clause. The equivalent of adjectival description is done using an imperfect stative verb following the noun.

*Biq liwo denemci ise in.*

∅-biq liwo den-em-ci ise in

PRF-be\_lost book give-APPL-2SG DIST.SG 1SG

‘I have lost the book you gave me (ST 186).’

## Possession and Relational Nouns

Possession is expressed by placing the possessed thing after the possessor with the appropriate possessive prefix on the possessed noun. For 1st- and 2nd-person possessors, the independent pronoun is usually omitted, but it can be retained for emphasis.

*Xšucu'oi awat uslol adaunoi leic'unob'.*

∅-xšu<cu>' -oi awat u-slol a-daun-oi leic' u-nob'

PRF-pull<PASS>-3PL oak 3SG-root IMPF-be\_strong-3PL ground 3SG-inside

'The strong roots of the oak tree were pulled [from] within the ground (ST 77).'

*Aclom in nod'omo.*

a-clom in no-d'omo

IMPF-be\_black 1SG 1SG-cat

'My own cat is black (ST 40).'

Postpositions are used quite similarly, and most of them are transparently nouns, though some are only used as relational nouns.

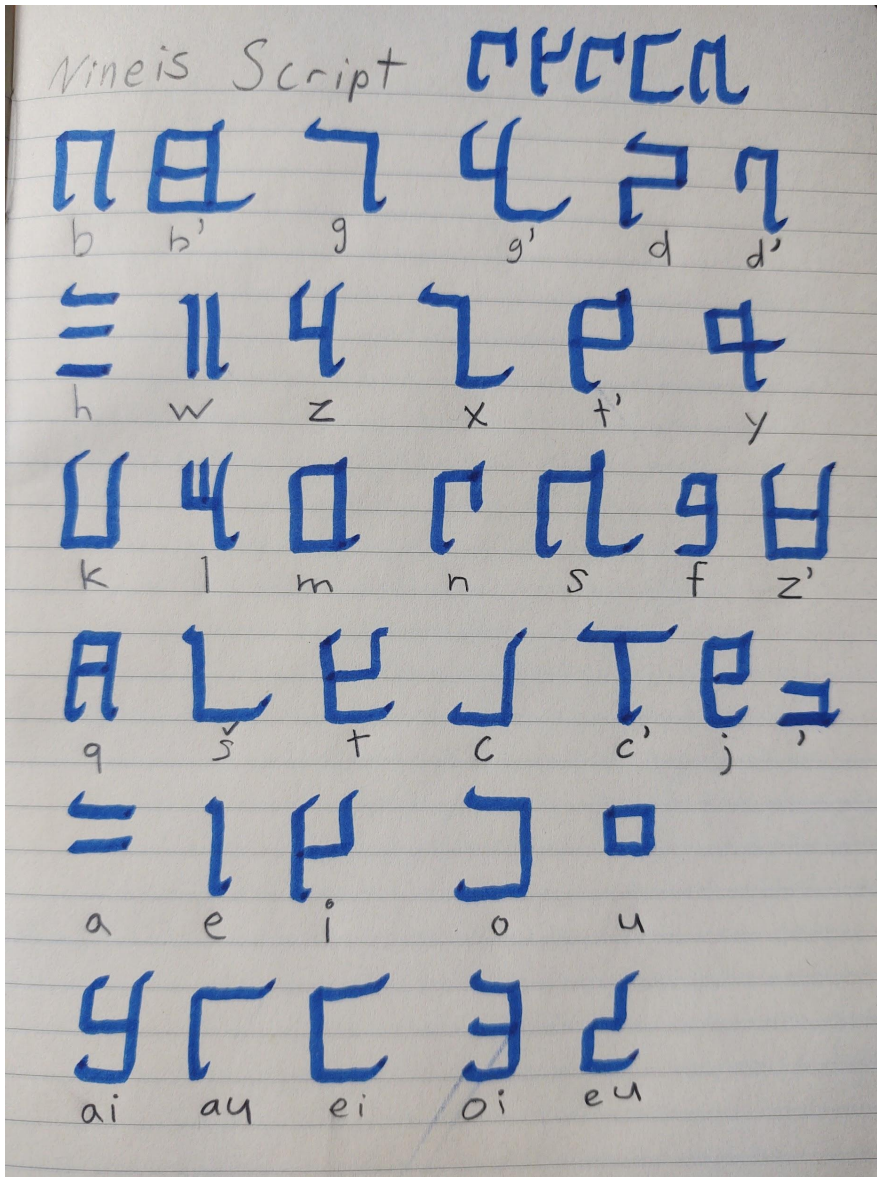
*Ayab'alkasa az'az'a uxei.*

a-yab' alkasa a-z'az'a u-xei

IMPF-stand palace IMPF-dazzle 3SG-opposite

'A wonderful palace stands on the opposite side (ST 38).'

Writing System



Besides the Latin orthography used in this study, Nineis has also been written in an indigenously invented script created in the early 20th century, but it has not received widespread use, and it has declined more recently. Like the Latin orthography, it is an alphabetic script written from left to right, but it has some individual signs more suited to the language where the Latin orthography uses diacritics or digraphs.

Vocabulary

Abbreviations

adv. - adverb



appl. - applicative

caus. - causative

fact. - factitive, causative of stative

intrans. - intransitive

n. - noun

pass. - passive

relat. - relational noun, used as a postposition

s.o. - someone

stat. - stative, and adjective-like verb

sth. - something

trans. - transitive

vbwz. - verb root (German *Verbalwurzel*)

ab' - *vbwz.* to stand; *yab'* stand, be standing, be upright; be there, exist in a place (of buildings, plants, tall things); *asb'a* prop up, support; help onto one's feet (caus.); *acb'a* stand up, rise; come into being; *ab'am* support (a cause, leader)

ac' - *vbwz.* to take; *ac'a* take, pick up, grab, seize; *acc'a* pass.

alkasa - *n.* palace, mansion; fortress, citadel; by extension, any grand old building or ruin

awat - *n.* oak, oak tree, oak wood

biq - *vbwz.* to go missing, escape; *biq* be lost, go missing; (of a prisoner, etc.) escape, run away; *biqim* appl.

boqo - *n.* gourd, squash

bet' - *vbwz.* to speak; *bet'* speak, talk; *webet'* chatter, prattle

bšel - *n.* seed

b'alam - *n.* any medium-sized spotted wild cat (jaguar, cheetah, leopard)

b'au - *n.* the Sun

b'el - *vbwz.* to choose; *b'el* choose, select, decide on; *b'elem* rule over, control; decide for (appl.)

cei - *vbwz.* to return; *ceil* to return, come back (intrans.); *cesei* return, bring back (caus.); *cei-ili* returning, coming back; again, once more; discourse particle indicating a request to remind someone of something

clom - *vbwz.* to be black; *clom* be black, be dark; *closom* darken, blacken (trans.); *clocom* become black, darken, char (intrans.); *clomom* be dark according to (s.o.), be too dark for (s.o.); *clomili* unfortunately; indicates the speaker is unhappy about something

c'eb' - *n.* frog, toad, amphibian

c'ec'ol - *n.* (physical) head; brain, thoughts

c'eil - *n.* a kind of small, catlike arboreal carnivorous mammal with a striped tail; olingo, cacomistle, viverra, civet

c'ol - *n.* shadow

daun - *vbwz.* to be strong; *daun* be strong; *wadaun* be very strong; *dasaun* make strong, strengthen (fact.); *dacaun* become strong, be made strong; *danaum* be considered strong according to (s.o.)

den - *vbwz.* to give; *den* give (trans.); *weden* give completely, give all of; *dsen* caus.; *decen* pass.; *denen* give (sth.) to (appl.); *denili* generously

d'omdom - *n.* (also spelled d'omd'om) kitten, kitty

d'omo - *n.* cat, feline

fc'eul - *n.* finger, toe

fti - *vbwz.* to open; *ftil* be open; *ftisi* open, open up (trans.); *ftici* be opened (pass.), become open; *ftim* appl.

fqo - *vbwz.* to scrape; *fqoqo* scrape, make a furrow; *wofqo* plough a field; *fqoco* be scraped (pass.); acquire a scrape or laceration in one's skin

gle' - *vbwz.* to swallow; *gle'* swallow, gulp; *wegle'* gulp down, devour; *glece'* pass.

gsau - *n.* a certain type of deer, with reddish fur

knef - *n.* wing (of a bird, insect, etc.)

leic' - *n.* earth, ground, soil

liwo - *n.* book

mle - *vbwz.* to be sweet, in taste or smell; *mlez* stat.; *wemle* be very sweet; *mlese* fact.; *mlece* become sweet; *mlem* be considered sweet by (s.o.); *mle-ili* sweetly, kindly, fortunately

ni - *adv.* no, not

neis - *n.* tongue, language; speech, gossip, hearsay

nob' - *n.* insides, middle, interior (relat.)

oc' - *vbwz.* to strike, hit, beat; *oc'oc'* strike (trans. or intrans.); *woc'* beat, beat up; strike down; *osco'* caus.; *occo'* pass.; *oc'om* appl.

qai - *vbwz.* to tell; *qaqai* tell, recount (a story); *qasai* caus.; *qacai* pass.; *qaim* inform (s.o.)

sdei - *n.* chest, trunk, torso

slol - *n.* root, root vegetable

šheil - *n.* fur

tebe - *n.* village, town

uz - *vbwz.* to bear, give birth; *uzu* give birth (to, trans. or intrans.); *wuz* give birth to (used with multiple objects); *uczuz* be born; *uzum* provide (s.o.) with progeny, offspring, an heir

xei - *n.* (area) opposite, across some boundary from (sth.), adjacent to (relat.)

xšu' - *vbwz.* to pull, pluck; *xšu'* to pull up, pluck out, pick, remove (trans.); *xšusu'* caus.; *xšucu'* pass.

zb'ei - *n.* gold

z'a - *vbwz.* to dazzle *z'az'a* dazzle, flash brightly (intrans.); be marvelous, amazing; *z'aca* become marvelous; *z'am* be dazzling, marvelous according to (s.o.); *z'a-ili* amazingly, extremely, marvelously