A sketch grammar of Awd

ironicallytrue

For the 11th CDN speedlang challenge

2022

1. Introduction

Awd is a conlang created (as the title above suggests) for the 11th CDN speedlang challenge, hosted by Miacomet. The process of making it has been rather rushed but very enjoyable. Due to certain external constraints I haven't managed to do as much as I would've liked, but hopefully I'll continue to work on the language further ahead.

While working on Awd, I tried to stray away from what I would normally have done, in both phonology and grammar — in particular, I went for pretty different noun inflection than I usually do. I also think my discourse particles are pretty neat — it's the first time I've worked this much on them.

I hope noone will hate me for a certain notational sin I've committed in this document. Also, I swear I did not steal the noun classes from mareck. If she says I did she is lying.

2. Cultural background

The *Ark* are a people who live in the basins of the River *Quoh*. The culture is primarily agricultural, although fishing is also common on the coast. They trade extensively with the neighbouring cultures — the *Awksiv* to the north and west, the *Estil* to the east, and the *Isret* across the *Orvig* Sea to the south.

ark means 'people'

Each town typically has an *ortesk*, who heads an *atseg*. Individual towns are largely independent from each other, although some towns are governed by the *atseg* of a larger neighbouring town. Villages are technically governed by nearby towns, but in practice are often fairly independent. Most of the *atseg* are further under the rule of one of the *atseg geti*, the councils of the cities *Srottiv*, *Esqu*, and *Astekag*. Some of the outer towns are independent or ruled by the *Awksiv* or the *Estil*.

an atseg is a sort of town council

Awd is the main language of administration in the region. There are two major dialect groups — *Awd serolt* in the east and *Awd ţigt* in the west. Apart from these, many people, especially on the periphery of the region, speak *Oksiv* or *Hidil*. Merchants typically also know varying levels of *widi eweh*, a lingua franca based on Awd with heavy influence and loaning from the neighbouring languages.

oksiv and hidil are the languages of the awksiv and estil. their native names are uccibu and serin

All of the aforementioned languages are written in the Awd script. The script is semi-alphabetical, but has many logographic elements for common words and grammatical elements. A brief explanation of how it works is given in section 4.

3. Phonology

3.a. *Inventory and distribution*

Awd has six phonemic vowels, given in table 1. /ю/ is typically a half-rounded backing-opening diphthong [iǫ], although some speakers have a backing or front unrounded diphthong [ią ~ ię]. It does not appear in affixes or after /q/. /e/ is a mid-high front vowel [e]. It and /i/ rarely appear in suffixes. /o/ is a near-high or mid-high rounded vowel [ʊ ~ o]. /ë/ is a mid-low front-central vowel [ɛ]. It never appears in roots except as a reduction of /e/. /a/ is a weakly rounded back vowel [ɒ], although it may be more strongly rounded in the vicinity of another rounded segment like /o/ or /w/.

	Front	Back
High	i	ю
Mid	e	o
High	(ë)	a

Table 1: Awd vowels

Consonants, given in table 2, are somewhat more complicated. There are eleven to fourteen phonemic consonants, depending on how one counts them, as /m n r/ may be
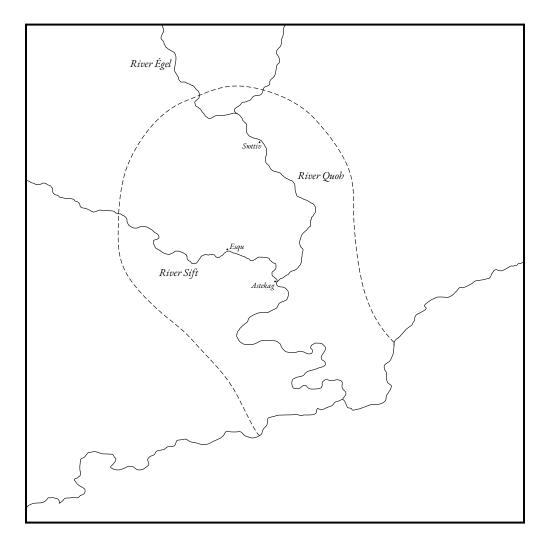
Figure 1: Basins of the Rivers Quoh, Égel, and Sift. The dotted line indicates the region where a majority of people speak Awd. The three largest cities in this region are marked.

considered as marginally phonemic. This is elaborated on in §3.1.1.

		Labial	Coronal	Velar
Stop	Plain		t	q
	Glottal	b	ʔ	k
Cont.	Strong	f ~ v	d ~ r	h ~ s
	Weak	w ~ m	l ~ n	g ~ y

Table 2: Awd consonants

/q/ is usually a rounded velar stop [kʷ] and never appears after a consonant. It is unrounded before a consonant. /t/ is almost always a dental stop, but in eastern dialects it may be affricated before /i ю/.

/b k/ are weakly glottalised stops [ɓ ʼk], while /ʔ/ is a glottal stop [ʔ]; these three phonemes only appear in content words, and /b/ can only occur as the first consonant in a root.

/v/ is a labial fricative [v], devoiced to [f] next to voiceless consonants. /d/ is typically [r] next to /o a/ and after /ю/, and [d] otherwise; but see §3.1.1.

/h/ is a glottal or velar fricative [h ~ x]; it is fortited to [s ~ ɕ] before /i ю e ë/ and next to a consonant.

/w l/ are usually velarised approximants [w ɫ], but [m n] next to glottal consonants. /g/ is typically a velar sonorant [ɣ ~ ɰ ~ ŋ] before vowels, but a palatal approximant [j] before /i ю e ë/. It is deleted in the coda, lengthening the preceding vowel.

3.a.i. *Marginal phonemes*
[m n] appear as allophones of /w l/ next to glottalised consonants. However, they also appear in prefixes and kinship terms, where [w l] do not appear. Similarly, /d/ is always [d] in kinship terms, even when [r] would be expected. Hence, they are arguably phonemic, as the phonetic realisation cannot be predicted from phonological environment alone.

/ë/ is also a marginal phoneme, albeit one that is clearly phonemic and simply limited in how contrastive it is. It only contrasts with /i e/ in a few suffixes, such as *-e* /ë/ vs *-i* /i/, which are the 1st person and inanimate endings for class I verbs.

3.a.ii. *Romanisation*
/e/ is written as *é* in affixes, while /ë/ is written as *e*. /q ʔ/ are written as *qu ṭ*. All other sounds are written the same as the symbols used above.

3.b. *Morphophonology*
The rules given below include both morphologically-conditioned rules and sandhi, which is non-morphological metaphonemic positional alteration of sounds.

Roots are unspecified for the height of the vowel. Almost all roots have either *i* or *o*, which are lowered to *e* and *a* in certain formations.

/i ю/ are deleted in CVC roots after a strong prefix; otherwise, they and /e o/ reduce to /ë a/. /w/ becomes /v/ when not next to a vowel. /b/ merges with /v/ after a vowel, and /k/ with /ʔ/ between two. Except in strong prefixes, /i o/ become /g w/ after a vowel, while /ю/ becomes /g/ after a front vowel and /w/ after a back one. /e ë a/ merge to /e/ before /o/ and /a/ before /i ю/. In all other cases, vowels are deleted after a preceding vowel.

4. Orthography
The Awd script is typically written with a brush on parchment or carved into stone. It is used widely by the Awd as well as the neighbouring peoples. A sizeable minority of the populace is fully literate, and most people can read it to some extent.
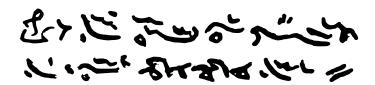
Figure 2: An example of the Awd script.

As mentioned before, the script is partially alphabetic. There is a base letter called the *get* denoting the first letter of the root, a modifier called the *irok* marking the vowel, and glyphs called *tav* for the other consonants of the root. These same glyphs are also used in spelling out particles and affixes. The *get* will be transliterated using capital letters for convenience.

There are six *get*, five *tav*, and three *irok*, given in fig. 3. Further distinctions for the *get* can be made by adding marks above them, left of the *tav*; these roots vary widely and are often ad hoc, although various area-specific conventions exist.

Outside a root, the *tav* may be placed up and down, but some level of left to right linearity is retained. Words themselves are similarly semi-linear — a word may be written under the previous one instead of to its right, if this would save space. This is typically less common in inscriptions.

Apart from this system, there are a large number of logographic symbols called *haw*: roughly twenty to thirty non-lexical items, such as pronouns, numerals, particles, and derivational morphemes; and dozens of common lexical items such as the words for 'to be', 'person', and 'day'. These are often simplifications of *get* or whole words, or ideograms, but many have arbitrary forms. There is no exact number of *haw*, as they are unstandardised and vary by location. A complete explanation of this system is beyond the scope of this work, but some can be seen in the example of the script in figure 2, an inscription honouring Vastak the Wise, *ortesk* of Esqu.

Table 3: Letters of the Awd script

5. Morphology

5.a. *Inflectional morphology*

Awd has fairly little inflectional morphology. Nouns are marked for the person and number of the possessor, whereas verbs are marked for the person of the subject and four evidentials.

The person markings are based on pronouns. These are given in table 4. Nouns have three classes: class I, which are by default unpossessed; class II, which are by default possessed; and class III, which cannot be possessed. Verbs similarly have two classes: class I or passive, and class II or active.

Class I and II have similar endings in both nouns and verbs, also given in table 4. For class I, the 1st person ending is *-qu* after vowels for nouns and *-e* other-

	Sg.	Pl.	Ending
1	qui	aqu	∅, qu, e
2/3 an.	de	are	d (t)
Inan.	i	eg	∅, i

Table 4: Awd pronouns and poss./agn. endings

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wise, while the inanimate ending is -∅. For class II, the inanimate ending is *-i* and the 1st person ending is *-∅*. In both, the 2nd and 3rd animate ending is *-t* after voiceless consonants and *-d* otherwise. Class III nouns have no endings as they cannot be possessed.

Evidentiality is marked by suffixes and stem changes. Reported and uncertain speech has the suffix *-ag* and lowering of the root vowel in root verbs; inferred speech has the suffix *-él* and reduction of the vowel; and mocking speech doubles the root vowel with *g* inserted between front vowels and *h* between others; thus, *kiw* becomes *kigiw* and *ṭove* becomes *ṭohove*. However, *ю* is doubled to *юho*, not *югю*.

5.b. *Derivational morphology*

Almost all derivation morphology is prefixing for bound morphemes and head-initial for compounds; the only productive exception is the locative suffix *-it*. Most affixes can be used for both nouns and verbs, with related meanings.

Possessive compounds   In these, the first element a possessed object or a verb, while the second is is possessive or agentive and marked by *-it*. The meaning can be literal or idiomatic, as seen in the examples below. A special case of these compounds is when the possessor is a pronoun, such as in 3 and 4; in this case, the head is unmarked. This is used for contrastive focus of the possessor/agent, and when used as a modifier compounds.

(1)   *hor govit*

    hor   gov   - it
    water   fruit - LOC

    "juice or pulp of a fruit"

(2)   *wid rokit*

    wid   rok   - it
    speak   person - LOC

    "reasoning, logic (lit. 'that which is spoken by a person')"

(3)   *vюs quigt*

    vюh   qui - it
    arm   1SG - LOC

    "*my* arm (not yours)"

(4)   *vюs tegt*

    vюh   de   - it
    arm   2/3ANSG - LOC

    "*your/their* arm (not mine)"

Descriptive compounds   These have an attributive second element which descriptively modifies the head; this modifier may be marked as possessed, according to the person and animacy of the head. The modifier can itself be a compound as well.

(5)   *hor ṭov*

    hor   ṭov
    water   heat

    "hot water"

(6)   *égel wiquo*

    é - gel   wiquo
    PL - rock   number

    "several rocks"

(7)   *bil kiw osrokit*

    bil   kiw   osrok - it
    question ask   child - LOC

    "question asked by a child"

6.   Syntax

Verbs are typically placed at the beginning of a clause, although they can be preceded by a topicalised noun. Objects tend to go after the subject, but this is not a hard rule.

(8)   *Vigr aquaralt wiquo.*   — 5MOYD #1643

    ví - gid   á - quaralt   wiquo
    STAT - stand   PL - student   number

    "Some of the students are here."

(9)   *Wid mogov rak quigt.*   — 5MOYD #1641

    wid - ∅   mo - gov   rak   qui - it
    take - 1   each - fruit   see   1SG - LOC

    "I took each fruit I saw."

6.a.   *Copular sentences*

There are several copular verbs: ∅ ~ *h* 'be', *vigd* 'be here', *irok* 'seem like', *gideh* 'there exists', and *bi* 'what is'. Their uses are exemplified below.

(10)   *Dosroki.*

    ∅ - d   osrok - i
    be - 2/3AN   child - INAN

    "You're a child."

(11)   *Widehe ю, niiiw, biél??*   — 5MOYD #1636

    wideh - e   ю   niw   bi   - él
    think - 1   QUOT   PTCL   be.what - INF

    "I thought, 'Oh god, what could it be?'"

(12) *Sid, irakag ark ṭi quosit.*   — 5MOYD #1625

sid	irok	- ag	a -	rok	ṭi	quosit
PTCL	*seem*	*- REP*	*PL -*	*person*	*other.side*	*river*

"Probably they were foreigners, I do not know."

(13) *Sigides rok kiw quigt.*

si -	gideh	rok	kiw	qui	- it
NEG -	*∃*	*person*	*ask*	*1*	*- LOC*

"I didn't ask anyone."

6.b. *Discourse particles*

There are several particles which can appear in a sentence to link together utterances or as fillers. In both cases, they do not modify the meaning of the sentence itself. There are three main types of discourse particles: expletive particles, connective particles, and structural particles.

Expletive particles   These include exclamations and filler words. The former typically express strong emotions, while the latter are used when the speaker is uncertain, or unwilling to say something. Common ones are *niw* 'oh god; aaa; aii', *sih* 'noo; dammit; argh; yeah?; no?', *egi* 'huhh?; whaa? (both confusion and denial)', *geh* 'ehh; so uhh' (used especially when the speaker is reluctant to say something), *ṭem* 'uh; hm; well (used when thinking)', *sid* 'I dunno', and *ho* 'wow; haha'.

(14) *Gehhh, nivigag govd...*

geh	nivig	- ag	gov	- d
PTCL	*lose*	*- REP*	*pendant*	*- 2/3AN*

"So uhh, I lost your pendant..."

(15) *Egi?? siiih, kewii???*

egi	sih	kewi
PTCL	*PTCL*	*why*

"Whaa?? nooo, whyy???"

Connective particles   These are used to refer back to a previous utterance. Some examples are *ю* 'so; thus', *ṭi, i-* 'and then', *id* 'now (at the point being discussed)', and *lif* 'but; yet; even then'.

(16) *Ťov hol, ю movig.*

ṭov	hol	- ∅	ю	mo -	vig
burn	*food*	*- 1*	*PTCL*	*INTS -*	*leave*

"The food started to burn, so I left quickly (to put the fire out)."

(17) *Ho, sihahald?*

ho	si -	hahal	- d
PTCL	*NEG -*	*cook:MOCK*	*- -2/3AN*

"Hah, you can't even cook?"

(18) *Qui, ivig, ю wi nihol; wigotl, it sift sih? ṭi nisfet.* — 5MOYD #1640

qui,	ivig	ю	wi	nihol	wigotl	id	sift	sih	ṭi
1SG	*arrive*	*PTCL*	*some*	*eat*	*be.tired*	*PTCL*	*be.evening*	*PTCL*	*PTCL*

nisfet
sleep

"Me, I arrived there and ate some food; I was tired, and it was evening, yeah? so then I went to bed."

Structural particles These are used to mark the information structure of the utterance. Some examples are *rak*, used to introduce examples, *wo*, which marks important new information, *vi*, which marks contrastive focus, and *ga*, which is used when referring back to a known element.

(19) *Rolt wo widi ṭegit. De vi kewi?*

rolt	wo	widi	ṭegit	de	vi	kewi
study	*PTCL*	*language*	*next.year*	*2/3AN*	*PTCL*	*what*

"I'm studying a language next year. What about you?"

(20) *Geh, rolt rak sewюqu. Ga widi kewi?*

geh	rolt	rak	sewюqu	ga	widi	kewi
PTCL	*study*	*PTCL*	*maths*	*PTCL*	*language*	*what*

"Uh, I'm studying, like, maths. What language are you studying?"

7. Lexicon

(h) *v. i* to be

-(e)w *suf. forms verbal nouns*
non-productive

ю *ptcl.* so, thus

юr *n. i, adv.* this, here

tisk *v. ii* to lead, rule

ortesk *n. i* leader; head of a town council

quá- *pre. forms agentive nouns*
triggers vowel lowering

quoh *n. ii* river

ṭi quosit *n. iii* foreign land

bi *v. i* to be what?; is it?

bil *n. ii* question

sevil *n. ii* confusion

vi *ptcl. marks contrastive focus*

ṭi *v. i* cross

ṭi *n. iii* other side

ṭi *ptcl.* and then

i-, gi- *pre.* back, again

ṭegit *adv.* next year; next time

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ṭesift *adv.* tomorrow

ṭem *ptcl.* hmm

ṭɪol *n. ii* grain

seṭɪol *n. ii* grain
mass noun

ṭov *n. i* heat

ṭov *v. i* to burn
intransitive

ṭov *v. ii* to burn
transitive

kiw *v. ii* to ask

kewi *n. ii, ptcl.* how; why; what

ví- *pre. forms stative verbs*

vig *n. iii, adv.* (that which is) alone; loneliness

vig *v. i* go, leave; abandon

nivig *v. ii* lose

ivig *v. ii* arrive; return

veg *num.* one

vɪoh *n. ii* arm

rak *v. ii* to see; know

irok *v. i* to seem, smell, be heard, sound like

de- *pre. marks optatives*

rok *n. i* person

osrok *n. ii* child

rolt *v. ii* to learn, study

rolt *v. ii* to know

serolt *n. iii* study

quaralt *n. i* student

se- *pre. forms collective nouns and frequentative verbs*

si, si- *ptcl.* no, not

sid *ptcl.* I dunno

sift *v. i* (of the sun) set; for it to be evening

sift *n. iii* (whole) day

seft *v. i* to wear out

aseft *v. i* (of an action) to end, finish

hol *n. ii* food

hal *v. ii* to cook

nihol *v. ii* to eat

hor *n. iii* water
in general, or part of a water body

haw *v. ii* to draw; to write

mo- *pre.* each, every (on nouns); *forms intensive verbs*

wid *n. ii* language

wid *v. ii* to speak

wideh *v. i* to think

wiquo *n. iii* number; several

wi- *pre.* some, a bit

sewɪoqu *n. iii* mathematics

weh *v. ii* to trade

eweh *n. iii* trade

wo *ptcl. marks new information*

moqu *n. ii* cow

wal *n. i* water
in a container or otherwise ownable

ni- *pre. verbal prefix*
mainly class II

nem *n. ii* god

niw *ptcl.* oh god

nisfet *v. ii* sleep

lot *v. ii* to flee

nóh- *pre.* away from

na- *pre. forms dual nouns and reciprocative verbs*
non-productive for nouns

get *n. iii* big, strong, powerful; a long time; (literary) a year

git *v. i* to honour, glorify, praise

gest *n. ii* inscription; edict

gel *n. i* rock; good; strong

gid *v. i* to stand

gideh *v. i* for there to exist

vígd *v. i* to have come; to be present

ví+gid

gotl *v. i* (of a resource) to end, run out

gotl *v. ii* to die

wigotl *v. ii* to be tired

gov *n. i* fruit

gov *n. ii* pendant

ga *ptcl. refers back to old information*

gal *n. i* do, put, make; go