Bááru the Language

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Introduction

The challenge gives just a week to draft a language, observing certain constraints. The setting is real-world, though if I like the results Bááru will end up in my conworld, likely as my first urban language, preparing for the city story challenge.

I'm cheating a bit: I did a language called Bááru for an earlier 48-hour speed challenge on the ᴢʙʙ. I think (I'm not checking) that the only things that have survived are the name of the language, lots of long vowels, the high tone (but not the associated phonology), the use of inflecting focus particles, and the idea that the language was spoken in one of the early agricultural societies, possibly by a subjugated population. So I don't think I'm cheating too much.

Given that this is a speedlang there are going to be enormous gaps, but I'll do what I can.

1 Typological overview

Bááru has a fairly large phonological inventory. By a noncritical count, there are 29 consonants, including prenasalised plosives, two implosives, and four labiovelars (counting **w**). There are five vowels, with a length contrast and a high tone. Syllables are simple, mostly ᴄᴠ.

It has a highly synthetic morphology, especially in verbs, though modal distinctions are mostly drawn periphrasically (or at least are not discussed here); there's a touch of fusion in the verbal agreement prefixes, but not really anywhere else, except for some prosodic funny business.

Constituent order is mostly head-final, with one or two possible exceptions (notably, the transitivity marker seems to be a prefix, but is presumably a head). As is typical of head-final languages, there's case-marking (though only four cases are distinguished by explicit markers) and a variety of deverbal forms, including converbs.

Typologically noteworthy features include the unusually articulated locative phrases (§6) and the inflecting focus particles (§7).

2 Phonology

2.1 Consonants

Table 1 gives the consonants.

Some consonants are debatable. **ndz**, **ɟ**, **ɲ**, and **ŋm** have a curiously restricted distribution:

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labiovelar	Glottal
Nasals	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	ŋm	
Plosives	p b mb ɓ	t d nd ɗ	ɟ	k g ŋg	kp gb	ʔ
Affricates		ts dz ndz				
Fricatives		s				h
Flap		r				
Lateral		l				
Glides			j		w	

Table 1: Consonant phonemes. The orthographic conventions I adopt mostly follow the IPA, except I don't superscript prenasals or flag digraphs in any way, and I use **r** instead of ɾ.

- They all occur as a result of the initial consonant mutation (**§2.5**). For example, intransitive **walí** *eat* corresponds to transitive **ŋmalúús** *feed*; note that if the **ŋm** here were underlying we would expect nasal harmony to yield **ŋmanúús**, the **l** becoming **n**. [1]

- All also occur in transitive verbs with no corresponding intransitive; we can assume that these also result from mutation.

- **ŋm** surfaces when **gb** is subject to nasal harmony.

- With few exceptions, they otherwise occur only after short vowels, a distribution that suggests they might be underlying clusters.

- Some exceptions involve **ɟ**-initial nouns, which can become **ɲ**-initial as a result of nasal harmony (**§2.6**); these include especially the very common **ɟóm** *person,* as well as compound nouns built with it. Note that initial **ɟ** is invariant in contexts where one might expect mutation, maybe the unattested **ɲɟ**.

- **ŋm** can also surface when **gb** is subject to nasal harmony.

- The only other exceptions are the occurrences of **ŋm** in the common word **ŋmáwá** *mother,* the interjection **ŋméé** *and then?,* and the two ideophones **ŋmààméʔ** *a giant is standing up* and **òŋmòòɗe** *that's a really big pile of food.* (It may be significant that in both ideophones **ŋm** occurs alongside harsh-voiced vowels.)

The distribution of **ʔ** is even more limited. It occurs only word-finally, and only surfaces before pause (**§2.9**).

Incidentally, there's no reason to doubt the phonemic status of **ᵐb** and **ⁿd**: they occur word-initially in contexts where there's no reason to suspect mutation, and also occur freely after long vowels. They also reduplicate as individual consonants.

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[1] How close I came to making the Bááru word for *feed* a false friend of Manus, Father of the Abyss!

2.2   Vowels

The vowels are **i**, **e**, **a**, **o**, and **u**, which can occur long, with no change in quality. (Long vowels will be written doubled.)

The high vowels are usually close to their canonical values, though can tend towards [ɪ ʊ] before a nasal or a prenasalised plosive and when next to **r**.

The mid vowels tend towards [ɛ ʌ], with **o** rounding under the influence of a neigbouring labial or labiodental or a rounded vowel in the following syllable.

a is central, about [ɐ], though it will front to æ before a palatal consonant.

2.3   Tone and phonation

The standard phonology distinguishes a high tone and a low tone, though only the high tone is active in the phonology. I'll register this asymmetry by marking the high tone with an acute accent, and leaving the low tone unmarked.

Tone carries a fairly high functional load.

Bááru tones are fairly stable, but there are a few things worth mentioning.

- In underlying forms, each syllable has a consistent tone; which is to say, you never get underlying contours, even on long vowels.

- High tones can spread onto a following syllable. The spread is often complete when the vowel in that syllable is an epenthetic copy vowel (and in that case I'll transcribe with a high tone), otherwise the result is a falling tone (which I won't transcribe). In both cases, though, spread is blocked if the syllable after that has a high tone.

- When syllables with high tones meet across a morpheme boundary, you get downstep, which lowers high tones until the next—well, actually, I'm not sure (tone group? breath group?), I'll have to come back to this when I understand tone/intonation better.

  Here's an example:

  (1)   **úꜜmbóósawáʔ**

ú-	n-	bóó	-s	-aw	-áʔ
1s>3pl	tr	*sleep*	caus	3i.pl.abs	pfv

  "I put them to sleep"

  The high tones supplied by the agreement prefix and the root end up on adjacent syllables, and must be separated by downstep. And as you can see, I'll transcribe the downstep with a superscripted down arrow ꜜ.

  This rule *isn't* triggered by what look like adjacent high tones within a root such as **jábá** *rain*; this is actually one high tone that's linked to two syllables.

- There's one anomaly. The 3iv.pl.dat pronoun combines the pronoun base **pir**ó̗, with a floating high tone, with the dative marker **-óó**. For whatever reason, the floating tone can't move to the pronoun's first syllable, so there's nowhere to land. The simplest thing happens: the floating tone deletes, there's no downstep, and the result is **piróó**.

Ideophones allow a further contrast—some low-toned vowels are spoken with harsh phonation. I mark this with an acute accent.

2.4   Phonotactics

Syllables are consistently CV, except that many words are vowel-initial, and there's an occasional intonation-phrase-final glottal stop (§2.9).

This constraint does not govern roots or stems, though. We've already seen one example, ɟám *person*. But Bááru morphology ensures that such a stem will never surface without a final vowel, if need be an epenthetic copy vowel.

2.5   Consonant mutation

Certain initial consonants can undergo a process of mutation. This occurs primarily, and somewhat differently, in two contexts: in transitive verbs, and in the agreement markers on alienably possessed nouns. To explain these patterns we might posit earlier particles, possibly ŋ (at least in the case of verbs); I'll transcribe these hypothetical particles as ɴ in glossed examples. **Table 2** gives the details.

Plain	Mutated	
	After V	*After* V:
m	m	ɓ
p	mb	mb
b	mb	ɓ
mb	mb	mb
ɓ	ɓ	ɓ
n	n	ɗ
t	nd	nd
d	nd	ɗ
nd	nd	nd
ɗ	ɗ	ɗ
s	ndz	ndz
s	ɟ	ɟ
r	nd	ɗ
l	nd	ɗ
l	n	n
c	ndz	ndz
z	ɟ	ɟ
ɟ	ɟ	ɟ
j	ɲ	ɲ
ŋ	ŋ	ŋ
k	ŋg	ŋg
g	ŋg	ŋ
ŋg	ŋg	ŋg
kp	mb	mb
gb	mb	ɓ
w	ŋm	ŋm
h	m	m
h	ŋ	ŋ
∅	ŋ	ŋ

Table 2: Consonant mutations.

2.6   Nasal harmony

Voiced pulmonic plosives, not including the prenasalised ones, can convert to homorganic nasals under the influence of a preceding nasal consonant, again not including the prenosalised one. (**Table 3** sets out the affected consonants.) It does not matter how many other segments intervene, or what segments intervene, and no other segments are affected; notably, vowels do not become nasal.

Input	Output
b	m
d dz l	n
ɟ	ɲ
g	ŋ
gb	ŋm

Table 3: Consonants affected by nasal harmony.

The triggering nasal must be within the same phonological word as the affected plosive, and, moreover, nasals in prefixes do not affect plosives in the stem—with the partial exception that the *1pl.*OBJ agreement marker **-li** becomes **-ni** after the *2pl.*SUB marker **mi-**; and incorporated objects can affect plosives in the verb.

Nasal harmony is ordered after the consonant mutations described above, with occasionally counterintuitive consequences. A nasal that is just the result of mutation will not trigger harmony; **ŋmalúús** *feed* (from **walí** *feed*), mentioned above, is an example. Mutation can also obscure a nasal consonant that nonetheless does trigger harmony, as in the following example:

(2)   **uuɓíísimeeɲiirá?**

uu-	N-	míí	-s	-baa	-igi	-ir	-á?
1PL>3S	TR	*fall*	CAUS	DEIC	REST	IV.ABS	PFV

"We dropped it back (down) there"

Both the distal deictic suffix **-baa** and the restorative suffix **-igi** have their plosives become nasals under the influence of the root-initial **m**, which, however, surfaces as **ɓ** because of mutation.

2.7   Hiatus resolution

Allophony heads off some potential cases of vowel hiatus; remaining cases are handled in two ways.

First, sequences of two short vowels can often be resolved via coalescence; **Table 4** gives the details. You'll see that **a** cannot coalesce with a distinct preceding vowel. Otherwise, the result is always a long vowel; it is rounded if either input is; and its height is negotiated between the two vowels.

Second, when coalescence can't work, a glide is inserted. The glide is determined by the preceding vowel, a **w** after a rounded vowel and a **j** otherwise.

First	Second vowel				
vowel	*i*	*e*	*a*	*o*	*u*
i	ii	ee	–	oo	uu
e	ii	ee	–	oo	uu
a	ee	ee	aa	oo	oo
o	uu	oo	–	oo	uu
u	uu	oo	–	oo	uu

Table 4: Vowel coalescence.

2.8 Epenthesis

There is no consonant epenthesis, unless you count the insertion of glides to break up vowel sequences.

Vowels are sometimes inserted to break up consonant clusters or to follow an otherwise word-final consonant. It's always possible to insert an echo vowel, a copy of the vowel in the previous syllable. That vowel's length is ignored, though it's tone is often inherited (though not if there is a high tone in the following syllable).

2.9 The glottal stop

The glottal stop occurs only under very particular circumstances: a word final **-V́ʔ**, occurring before pause, which alternates with **-V́ː** in other prosodic contexts. This is found in just three contexts:

- On focus particles; e.g. **míʔ**~**míí** NEG:3II.S.

- On the perfective suffixe **-áʔ**~**áá**.

- On vocative nouns; e.g. **gbáʔ** *child!* (from **gba** *child*).

Note that for the purposes of hiatus resolution, the V́ʔ sequence is treated as a long vowel whether or not it is realised as such.

3 Nouns

Nouns are very simple, if you don't have to pluralise anything.

3.1 Gender and plural-marking

The noun class and plural-marking system is a bit complex. There are five grammatical genders, corresponding to five agreement patterns on verbs, adjectives, and focus particles. But there's reason to suppose that this system of five genders overlies and earlier system of noun classes. And it's these older noun classes, not the current genders, that seem to interact with plural marking.

Take the class of nouns referring to nonstraight or nonrigid things of one salient dimension (snakes, many fish, rivers, roads…). A good number of such nouns have a singular form in **-ii** or **-igala**, and have plurals in **-uli** or **-iguli**;

many of the others have plurals in **-li** or **-guli** (with some variations). And a very large proportion of these nouns are in gender III (the one you might think of as masculine).

A bit more generally, we can say that a noun's grammatical gender is often predictable from the following factors:

- Nominalising morphology—each noun-forming formative is specified for grammatical gender.

- Semantic class—like floppy long things, or rigid flat things (which are mostly gender I).

- Phonological analogy—for example, otherwise uncategorisable nouns in **-i** have a tendency to be of gender II (which you might think of as feminine).

Among the salient classes of nouns are those that refer exclusively to adults of some particular gender, with gender now understood in social rather than grammatical terms. These *don't* correspond to old noun classes, and don't predict pluralisation strategies very well, but in general words referring exclusively to *taw* end up in gender I, words referring exclusively to women end up in gender II, and words referring exclusively to men end up in gender III.

(I've just referred to *taw*. Most societies in this world recognise a third gender category, for which I adopt the Nǒaḥaa word. I don't have near enough worldbuilding done to tell you much about this, I'm afraid.)

Contrasted with plural-marking, dual-marking is remarkably simple: you suffix the noun's plural form with **-o**.

3.2 Case

There are four marked cases, given in **Table 5**.

Case	Marker
ergative	**-ɗe**
dative	**-óó**
genitive/locative	**-iki**
instrumental/ablative	**-su**

Table 5: The marked cases.

It will be convenient when talking about verbal morphology to refer sometimes to a verb's "absolutive" argument, but I think it would be misleading to say that Bááru has a true absolutive case, given that it is nowhere marked; though pronouns maybe complicate the picture, see §3.3.

All four cases have uses marking both core arguments and adjuncts of various sorts. I'll address these uses as they arise in other parts of this document (or not, if I don't have time).

3.3 Pronouns

There are various agreement paradigms, which I'll give when they're relevant. Here I've just got the free pronouns, of which there are two sets, given

in **Table 6**; you use the second set when there's a case-marker, the first set otherwise. (In fact it wouldn't be crazy to take pronoun choice as a basis for distinguishing between case-markers and postpositions in Bááru.)

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	oro	iloo	ili
1 + 2	–	ábájoo	ábá
2	gboo	wájoo	wájá
3ɪ	daa	dawóó	dawá
3ɪɪ	dii	diwóó	diwí
3ɪɪɪ	dzuu	dzujóó	dzujú
3ɪᴠ	pili	piróó	pirí
3ᴠ	pee	péjoo	pééjé

(a) Caseless.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	mbaa	gidzo	gidz
1 + 2	–	sííjo	síí
2	ani	wijo	wii
3ɪ	da	dáájo	dáá
3ɪɪ	di	dííjo	díí
3ɪɪɪ	dzu	dzúúwo	dzúú
3ɪᴠ	pili	piró	piró
3ᴠ	pe	péjo	péj

(b) Case-bearing.

Table 6: Free pronouns.

The combination of the case-bearing pronouns with the case markers is thoroughly regular. As you might suppose, there are several cases in which the dative marker **-óó** triggers downstep. This is trickiest with the 3ɪᴠ.ᴘʟ pronoun, which has a floating high tone; that high tone has nowhere to go, so it deletes, but you still get downstep: **pirˈóó**.

Maybe it is worth mentioning that the use of pronouns is quite limited. Normally cross-referencing on the verb is all the mention you'll get of pronominal subjects and objects, and much the same is true with possessors and the complements of postpositions. Moreover, the use of pronouns as case-marked adjuncts is very limited, all but restricted to the use of the ablative with an *according to* sense (like **mbaasu** *in my opinion*).

3.4 Possession

There's a distinction between alienable and inalienable possession, marked in part by the suffixes that occur on possessed nouns to show agreement with the possessor, given in **Table 7**. The patterns are consistent with the consonant mutations that take place in transitive verbs, and I suppose I'll gloss them as if a surreptitious particle **ɴ** is present in alienable possession constructions.

Like this:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	ro	lo	li
1 + 2	–	boo	ba
2	wo	woo	we
3ɪ	da	dawo	daw
3ɪɪ	di	doo	diw
3ɪɪɪ	dzu	dzoo	dzuj
3ɪᴠ	pi	piro	pir
3ᴠ	pee	poo	peej

(a) Inalienable possessors.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	ndo~ɗo	no	ni
1 + 2	–	mboo~ɓoo	mba~ɓa
2	mbo~ɓo	ŋmoo	ŋme
3ɪ	nda~ɗa	ndawo~ɗawo	ndaw~ɗaw
3ɪɪ	ndi~ɗi	ndoo~ɗoo	ndiw~ɗiw
3ɪɪɪ	ɟu	ɟoo	ɟuj
3ɪᴠ	mbi	mbiro	mbir
3ᴠ	mbee	mboo	mbeej

(b) Alienable possessors. Where alternate forms are given, the second is used after long vowels.

Table 7: Possessor agreement suffixes.

(3) **wériiki óndzééku ɟu**

wéri	-iki	óndééku	-N-	-dzu
*Wedi:*ɪɪɪ	ɢᴇɴ	*hatchet*	ᴀʟɪᴇɴ	3ɪɪɪ.ꜱ.ᴘᴏꜱꜱ

"Wedi's hatchet"

You'll notice that the possessor is in the genitive case.

Inalienable possession differs both because it does not require ɴ and because the agreement suffixes are dropped when the possessor is represented by an overt noun or pronoun. Thus we could have:

(4) **wériiki ŋmáwá**

wéri	-iki	ŋmáwá
Wedi	ɢᴇɴ	*mother*

"Wedi's mother"

The possessor is still in the genitive case.

The agreement suffixes return when there's no overt possessor, which is common (much more common than an overt pronominal possessor):

(5) **ŋmáwádzu**

ŋmáwá	-dzu
mother	3ɪɪɪ.ꜱ.ᴘᴏꜱꜱ

"his mother"

I so far don't have anything very interesting to say about which nouns will be possessed inalienably. Close relatives count, as do parts, including many body parts. But that's all I know so far.

3.5 Deixis

Bááru has a paradigm of four deictic suffixes that can be used on nouns with a demonstrative sense (cf. §4.5 for their use on verbs). They're given in Table 8.

Deictic	Marker
proximal	**-ni**
distal, up	**-tsa**
distal, down	**-iko~-ko**
distal	**-baa**

Table 8: Deictic (demonstrative) suffixes.

This is the only way in which Bááru grammaticalises definite reference, and you'll often see a deictic suffix where other languages might use a definite determiner. Sometimes distal **-baa** is used as sort of a default determiner, but usually the distinctions of proximity and elevation are maintained.

3.6 Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are built simply, by adding the inalienable possession prefixes to the stem **bú** (plural form **bújú**, presumably from **úbú** *head*). These are treated like regular verbal arguments—there's no reflexive marking on the verb. But note that grammatically they are third person (and gender IV) regardless of the person of the antecedent, which really is treated as a possessor.

In true reflexives, you'll normally use the singular form of **bú**, even with a plural possessor. The plural is most often used with a reciprocal sense, though pluractional and distributed senses are also possible.

3.7 Conjunctions

Conjunctions are formed by listing nouns, and following all but the first with the clitic **gaa** (which is subject to nasal harmony triggered by the preceding noun). Like this:

(6) **gbeeka ŋmáwánawaŋaa karúkáárú éɟeetlálisalaawa**

gba	-ika	ŋmáwá	-daw	=gaa	karúkáárú	é-	N-	sa-
child	PL	*mother*	3I.PL.POSS	*and*	*completely*	3S>3PL	TR	STAT*(1)*

etáli	-sale	-aw
forget	STAT*(2)*	I.PL.ABS

"He forgets the children and their mother completely."

[*5*MOYD*1163*]

There are complications. Bááru agreement is obstinately syntactic. When agreeing with a conjunction, that means agreement is (only) with the first conjunct. Here the results are not too bad, because the first conjunct is at least plural; though notice that agreement is with a gender-I object, ignoring the gender-II mother.

If you simply swap the conjuncts, you get singular gender-II agreement:

(7) **ŋmáwá gbeekadigaa karúkáárú eɟeetálisalii**

ŋmáwá	gba	-ika	-di	=gaa	karúkáárú	e-	N-	sa-
mother	*child*	PL	3II.S.POSS	*and*	*completely*	3S>3S	TR	STAT*(1)*

etáli	-sale	-i
forget	STAT*(2)*	II.S.ABS

"He forgets the mother and her children completely."

In cases like this it's common to pluralise the first conjunct to secure the semantically appropriate number agreement:

(8) **ŋmáwééka gbeekadiwigaa karúkáárú éɟeetálisaliiwi**

ŋmáwá	-ika	gba	-ika	-diw	=gaa	karúkáárú	é-	N-
mother	PL	*child*	PL	3II.PL.POSS	*and*	*completely*	3S>3PL	TR

sa-	etáli	-sale	-iw
STAT*(1)*	*forget*	STAT*(2)*	II.PL.ABS

"He forgets the mother and her children completely."

4 Verbs

The Bááru verb has a good number of layers, but taken on its own each layer is fairly straightforward. (Maybe because I haven't yet had much time to play with them.) I'm going to run through the layers from the inside out, as I currently understand things.

4.1 -us

There's a not-fully-productive suffix **-us** (with an allomorph **-s** after long vowels) that has a couple of important uses.

Most often, you'll use it to derive transitive (causitive) verbs from unaccusatives. (Since these are transitive, they also require the mutating prefix **N-**.) This is how you get **mbíís~ɓíís** *drop* from **míí** *fall*, for example.

There are some idiosyncracies, none very surprising. For example, **walí** *eat* is transitive, but can form a causative with this suffix, namely **ŋmalúús** *feed*, just as in many languages there are idiosyncratic *eat → feed* causatives.

This suffix has another use specifically with stative verbs. The result has a sort of durative inchoative sense, and is still unaccusative. For example, stative **bóó** *sleep* yields **bóós**, which describes someone as being not yet asleep, but almost, and falling asleep. (So some Bááru **ubóósa** would mean about the same as **I'm fading**, for some English speakers.)

I suppose there could end up being exceptions, but so far it looks like all stative verbs that can form a quasi-inchoative with **-us** can also form a causative; hence there's also **mbóós~ɓóós**.

There's an important aspectual difference between the two uses of **-us**: intransitive **bóós** is durative, while **mbóós** is punctual.

4.2 Reduplication

Many verbs can undergo partial reduplication to produce a verb with iterative or pluractional meaning, or in cahoots with the vagorative prefix (§4.7).

The reduplication can be either CV or CVCV, depending on the verb. The template requires long vowels to shorten. Tones on the reduplication base spread to the corresponding syllable. For example, **walí** *eat* produces **walíwálí**. (It's because this is tone spreading rather than tone copying that the intervening syllable also gets a high tone.)

In transitive verbs, reduplication takes place before consonant mutation, but it follows suffixation of **-us**: **ŋmanúús** *feed* reduplicates to **ŋmalúwálúús**, not to **ŋmalúŋmalúús** or **ŋmalíwálúús** or **ŋmalúŋmálúús** or anything else. Semantics is also a bit of a guide here: **ŋmalúwálúús** is *feed repeatedly,* not *cause to repeatedly eat.*

4.3   Valency suffixes

In addition to the somewhat odd **-us**, there are a handful of valency-adjusting suffixes. These apply *after* reduplication, as revealed, sometimes a bit subtly, by semantics. For example, **ŋmalíwálíti**, using the productive causative **-ti**, actually could mean *caused to repeatedly eat,* if anyone wanted to say that.

You'd most often use the productive causative with verbs that can't take **-su**, though there are some verbs that can take either and some that must take both. Like, from **hoɗeɗo** *be broken* you can make **hoɗeɗoos** *be creaking and ready to break,* but for the causative you need to go all the way to **moɗeɗoosoti** *let fall into ruin.*

It's true that the productive causative a bit more invites interpretation as an indirect causative, but the details are subject to a fair bit of lexical variation.

There's also probably two applicatives (one strictly benefactive, one usually instrumental or locative, though again with lexical variation). I'm not sure whether or how these should be able to co-occur with the productive causative. And I have yet to settle on phonological forms for these suffixes.

4.4   Incorporated objects

There's object incorporation, but I'm not nearly ready to talk about it. Suffice it to say that an incorporated object goes immediately before any reduplication. It can happen that a verb with an incorporated object is still transitive, and in that case it's entirely possible that it will be the incorporated noun that undergoes initial consonant mutation.

One use of incorporation is to allow possessor-raising:

(9) **ŋmáwáɗe gabu emboomoŋiŋiitajáʔ**

ŋmáwá	-ɗe	gabu	e-	N-	boom-	gi-	giit	-a	-áʔ
mother	ERG	*baby*	3s>3s	TR	*back*	REDUP	*tap*	I.S.ABS	PFV

"Mother taps her baby on the back."

[*5*MOYD*1158*]

Incidentally, **boom** *back* is a suppletive form corresponding to the noun **bedzík**, used only when incorporated. This sort of suppletion is characteristic of body part terms, but is not otherwise common.

There's also an antipassive prefix **mé-** that seems to go in the same morphological slot as incorporated objects.

Both **mé-** and any nasal-including incorporated objects will trigger nasal harmony in the remainder of the verb—unlike any prefixes that attach before them.

Here are some contrasting examples:

(10) a. **wériɗe íbí eŋmalísu**

    wéri -ɗe íbí e-   N- walí -su
    Wedi ERG *snake* 3S>3S TR *eat* III.S.ABS

    "Wedi is eating snakes"

   b. **wériɗe ííbíwalí**

    wéri -ɗe e-   íbí- walí
    Wedi ERG 3S.SUB *snake*   *eat*

    "Wedi is snake-eating"

   c. **wériɗe eméwaní**

    wéri -ɗe e-   mé-   walí
    Wedi ERG 3S.SUB ANTIPASS *eat*

    "Wedi is eating"

(Aside: but I'm a bit inclined to think that, idiosyncratically, **walí** will be able to derive an intransitive verb in **-us**, namely **walúús**, and this will just mean *eat*.)

4.5 Deictic suffixes

Verbs can take the same deictic suffixes as nouns (cf. **Table 8**). They generally characterise the location or destination of the event or of its patient (if it's got one), often though not always with a resultative significance.

4.6 The restorative suffix

This is used what the event reported by the verb restores its patient to a prior state or location or something, and is marked with **-igi**.

These quite naturally occur with the deictic suffixes just given, and there's one irregular form: the combination of distal **-baa** with restorative **-igi** yields **deegi** rather than the expected **daajigi**.

4.7 Inner aspect

We've already seen some aspect-marking: the restorative, the iterative (or pluractional), and hints of lexical contrasts in durativity. Here we get a bit of a paradigm (which is set out in full in **Table 9**).

Here we are dealing with suffixes, prefixes, and (if you believe in such things) circumfixes, the last involving bits that don't have any obvious independent meaning. Moreover, the prefixes, as well as the initial bits of circumfixes, will immediately follow the transitivity marker **N** whenever it is present, meaning that they regularly undergo mutation, in some cases in an irregular way.

I'll start with the suffix **-ii~-uu**.

Aspect	Prefix	Mutated prefix	Suffix
Punctual	–	–	-ii∼-uu
Resumptive	gi-	ŋi-	-ii∼-uu
Inceptive	pii-	mii-	-uu
Durative	–	–	-mbe
Vagorative	ulu-	mulu-	–
Frustrative	héé-	méé-	-he∼-se
Stative	sa-	ɟa-	-sale

Table 9: Inner aspect.

When it follows any of the suffixes described so far, it gets its **-uu** allomorph, which (irregularly) replaces any preceding vowel. Otherwise, when the suffix occurs directly after the verb stem, the choice of allomorph is highly lexical and ideosyncratic, by which I mean in part that I haven't decided yet what governs it.

When **-ii∼-uu** occurs without an aspect prefix, the result is punctual aspect.

Now, some verbs have what you might think of as inherently punctual meanings—like **tsóóp** *sneeze*, for example. These verbs don't really need the help of the punctual suffix.

More often, you'd use this suffix when the described event would normally be thought of as extending over a duration, and you're backgrounding or even denying that duration. (So you might actually be able to make sense of a form like **tsótsóópuu** REDUP-*sneeze*-PUNC, a bunch of sneezes coming as it were all at once.)

A punctual verb will almost always be perfective ([§4.9](#)), though there are exceptions. Perhaps by extension of an *all at once* sense, the punctual is sometimes used almost as a mirativity marker (though usually in collaboration with further expressions of mirativity):

(11) **gámáá! emajanuuwi gíí**

gámáá	e-	maja	-ni	-uu	-i	g	-íí
MIR	3S.SUB	*come*	-PROX	*PUNC*	III.S.ABS	FOC	3II.S.FOC

"Oh! She's coming!"

The lack of perfective marking on the verb here alerts the listener that the person has not already arrived, and also that something must be up with the punctual suffix.

The resumptive aspect makes use of the same **-ii∼-uu** morphological bit, with the same allomorphy and morphophonological behaviour, but couples it with a prefix. This prefix is **gi**, which might remind you of restorative **igi**; you can think of them both as meaning *again, back*, but differing in semantic scope.

Here's a pair of examples to illustrate the difference:

(12) a. **íbí uuɓíísikuuɲisuwáʔ**

íbí	uu-	N-	míí	-s	-iko	-igi	-su	-áʔ
snake	1PL>3S	TR	*fall*	CAUS	DEIC	REST	III.S.ABS	PFV

"We dropped the snake back (down)"

b. **íbí uuŋimíísikuusuwá?**

íbí	uu-	N-	gi-	míí	-s	-iko	-uu	-su
snake	1PL>3S	TR	RESUM*(1)*	*fall*	CAUS	DEIC	RESUM*(2)*	III.S.ABS

-áʔ
PFV

"We dropped the snake (down) again"

I guess I should mention that the resumptive can have a *still* sense, or a *went back to doing that* sense, not just an *again* sense, depending on context. This *still* sense is especially common when the verb is imperfective, as in the following example:

(13) **iiŋimétutumuusu**

ii-	N-	gi-	mé-	tu-	tu	-baa	-uu	-su
2S>3S	TR	RESUM*(1)*	ANTIPASS	REDUP	*give*	DIST	RESUM*(2)*	III.S.ABS

"Keep giving him things over and over again in the future!"

[*5*MOYD*1153*]

(I've cheated a bit, since Bááru so far doesn't have a dedicated imperative, or in fact any way of encoding modality. This is just a second person imperfective with an intended future interpretation. Also I haven't said anything about ditransitives—in Bááru, the two objects of a ditransitive are on a par, so, for example, either one can be eliminated in an antipassive.)

The inceptive uses a prefix **pii-** and also a suffix **-uu**. This **-uu** does not alternate with an **-ii** allomorph, but interacts with other verbal suffixes in the same way as does the **-uu** allomorph of the **-ii~-uu** suffix; I'm pretty sure the question of whether this is in some sense the same suffix (or morpheme, or morphome, or bit) can only be settled deep inside someone's theory. Anyway the **pii-...-uu** combination yields an inceptive sense. (Not an inchoative. You mostly get an inchoative sense from stative verbs by adding the perfective aspect, nothing fancier than that.)

It can look like this:

(14) **íbí uumiiwalíjuusuwá?**

íbí	uu-	N-	pii-	walí	-uu	-su	-áʔ
snake	1PL>3S	TR	INC*(1)*	*eat*	INC*(2)*	III.S.ABS	PFV

"We started eating the snake"

The durative, vagorative, and frustrative are all normally used of events being conceived of as stretched out in time.

The plain durative is used to call attention to the fact that the reported event has a duration. You wouldn't normally use it in a neutral report of something that everyone would expect to take time, except that the durative marker is all but obligatory when you actually mention how long the event took (for atelic durations, I mean).

If you really want to emphasise that something took way too long, you could probably iterate this suffix once or twice.

You'll use the frustrative when something has terminated without reaching it's intended or natural end point; it's notable in part because it's composed of two morphological bits neither of which can be assigned an independent meaning.

The vagorative (google tells me that *vagor* is Latin for *wander, roam, stray*) is used to give the event being described an aimless or wayward character. It's not actually in the same 'slot' as the other aspect suffixes as I've mentioned, since on occasion you'll find it being used along with the inceptive. Maybe like this:

(15) **uuwulupiidíímímuuwawáʔ**

uu-	ulu-	pii-	díímí	-baa	-uu	-aw	-áʔ
1PL.SUB	VAG	INC*(1)*	*play*	DEIC	INC*(2)*	I.PL.ABS	PFV

"We went off and played"

This construction would be all the more appropriate if the play in question were a bit naughty, of course.

(Aside: Bááru was supposed to have venitive and andative morphology of some sort, but for now it looks like the deictic suffixes are taking over that job.)

4.8   Absolutive agreement

After the aspect suffixes you often find suffixes agreeing in gender and number with the verb's patient (internal object), if it has one; **Table 10** gives the details. The suffixes are similar to those that mark agreement on adjectives, though with slightly different plural forms. Unlike the agreement prefixes, these distinguish a dual number.

	Singular	**Dual**	**Plural**
Gender I	a	awo	aw
Gender II	i	iwo	iw
Gender III	(s)u	(s)ujo	(s)uj
Gender IV	l	ro	r
Gender V	e	ejo	ej

Table 10: Absolutive agreement.

There's a bit of morphophonology with the gender III ('masculine') forms. These have an **s** that drops after most consonants—except that rather than drop, **t**, **d**, and **h** convert to **ts**, **dz**, and **s**.

Now, I said these mark agreement with the verb's patient, not necessarily with its object. You'll also get agreement with the subjects of unaccusative verbs, as in the most recent example. I'll refer to the agreed-with argument, when there is one, as absolutive, and gloss accordingly, though of course it's only the ergative case that gets marked explicitly.

Now, there are languages where the distinction between unaccusative and unergative verbs is a bit negotiable—some, or even many, intransitive verbs can be used both ways, depending maybe on semantic nuance. Bááru is not like that: an intransitive verb is lexically classified as either unergative or unaccusative, and it will remain in its class even when context, or even aspect-marking, might imply it should change. (So, in that most recent example, the verb ends up seeming a bit agentive, mostly due to the inceptive aspect; the verb is still unaccusative as far as Bááru syntax is concerned.)

There's another tricky point (until I change my mind about this). Agreement in Bááru is obstinately syntactic, and syntactically speaking the first- and

second-person pronouns are not fully specified for gender. Quite likely when a person uses a verb with a first-person patient, they'll know which of Bááru's grammatical genders is semantically most appropriate. Nonetheless, the verb won't (necessarily) agree with that gender. Instead, first- and second-person pronouns consistently trigger gender I agreement (suggesting that gender I is the default gender, though maybe only among animates, if Bááru syntax assumes that speech act participants are animate).

4.9 The perfective

The perfective aspect is marked with the suffix **-áʔ**. It's use is complicated, of course, and so are its interactions with everything else that's going on, aspect-wise. But for now I'll have to skip all that.

4.10 Subject and object agreement

Table 11 gives the details of Bááru's agreement prefixes. There's minor fusion in some forms, a floating high tone marking third person plural objects, and the 3sprefix **e** becomes **j** before a vowel, but the system is mostly regular.

Subject	Object						
	INTR/3S	3PL	1S	1PL	1 + 2PL	2S	2PL
1S	u	ú	–	–	–	un	uwi
1PL	uu	úú	–	–	–	uun	uuwi
1 + 2PL	ugii	ugíí	–	–	–	–	–
2S	ii	íí	ijaa	iigi	–	–	–
2PL	wi	wí	wijaa	wigi	–	–	–
3S	e~j	é	jaa	egi	esii	en	ewi
3PL	woo	wóó	wowaa	woogi	wosii	woon	woowi

Table 11: The agreement prefixes, occupying the first slot in the verbal template.

You'll notice that agreement is strictly accusative, despite the case-marking patterns and gender/number agreement with the verb's absolutive argument (when it has one).

Perhaps it is worth pointing out that all the forms that agree with an object always occur before the transitive archimorpheme **N**.

Agreement in Bááru is actually more complicated than **Table 11** can show. There's a general rule that a noun phrase can control agreeement in person on only one agreement target, and focus particles take priority. This means that when the subject or the object—or, it turns out, the predicate or the sentence as a whole—is overtly focused, the verb will be unable to agree in person with one of its core arguments. In these cases, what you get instead is default third-person agreement.

To illustrate, here's the **example 11**, but with a second-person subject:

(16) **gámáá! emajanuuwa gawíí**

gámáá	e-	maja	-ni	-uu	-a	g	-awíí
MIR	3S.SUB	*come*	*-PROX*	*PUNC*	I.S.ABS	FOC	2PL.FOC

"Oh! You're coming!"

The focus particle **gawíí** agrees in person, number, and gender with the subject, and it gets all these things right. The verbal prefix, however, sees to agree with a third person subject—that's the rule that only one agreement target can truly agree in person. Also, the verb agrees as with with a gender I absolutive argument, but this is just a fall-back, required because the subject is grammatically ungendered, and implies nothing about the semantic gender of the person being addressed.

5 Verbal nouns

I'm just teasing, I'm only going to tell you about one sort of verbal noun, and will have very little to stay about it.

The suffix **-wálú** can be applied to a verb stem that includes, potentially, any affixes that would appear inside the inner aspect affixes. Notably, this includes any incorporated object, as well as valency morphology, and the deictic and restorative suffixes, but does not include any of a verb's usual agreement morphology. Any object of the underlying verb, if it is not incorporated, must take the dative case. The verb's subject is normally PRO, whether controlled by a matrix subject or a free variable; though it is also possible to give a subject, in the ergative case (regardless of the underlying verb's transitivity), and mark the verb with the prefixes for alienable possession, including the mutating **N**.

A **-wálú** nominal can be case-marked, and when case-marked can be used as an adverbial—a sort of converb. Here's an example in which the dative case is used to derive a purpose converb:

(17) **akí ꜛgáláwatsajóó póꜛwálúꜛwóó uutajatsa**

akí	gáláwa	-tsa	-óó	pó	-wálú	-óó	u-	utaj	-tsa
tree	*dog*	DIST:*up*	DAT	*hit*	NMLZ	DAT	1S.SUB	*climb*	DIST:*up*

"I'm climbing up to hit that possum"

[*5*MOYD*1162*]

6 Postpositions and their friends

The phrases you might think of as postpositional can get pretty complicated. Here's an example to show you the sort of thing that's coming:

(18) **dakaajúl utséŋe otíí suu jawa awéé**

dakaajúl	utséŋe	otíí	suu	jawa	awéé
clothes	*rope*	*point*	*hanging.from*	*swaying*	LOC.COP

"The clothes are hanging, swaying, from the rope"

[*1992*TRIPS*37*]

Here there's a sequence of three elements playing what you might think of as the role of an adposition: **otíí suu jawa**. Now these are in fact all distinct parts of speech, and only **suu** is genuinely a postposition. (I'll call **otíí** a spatial classifier and **jawa** a posture adverb.) So we have a few things to talk about.

You'll notice I've snuck in a locative copula, **awéé**. To be honest, I haven't thought at all about nonverbal predicates yet, so for the time being **awéé** is really just a placeholder. (And for the time being, it's an *uninflecting* copula.)

Also, early on I made the decision to write the verb complex using polysynthetic orthography (I mean without spaces). There's some justification for this, in that nasal harmony operates across most of this complex (though that criterion would put a space between the aspect and agreement prefixes and everything else), and some bits of the complex undergo distinctive, plausibly word-internal, morphophonology. But I haven't done near enough work, on prosody especially, to really justify that choice.

That's relevant here because it's a bit tempting to make Bááru's postposition complexes polysynthetic (spaceless) as well. For now I'm going to hold back, but maybe when I've played with things more and understand the prosody better I'll change my mind; fair warning.

6.1   Postpositions proper

Table 12 gives a partial list.

Postposition	With 3PL agreement	Glosses
ee	éé	at or by (a place), next to, (allied) with
indzú	íꞌndzú	from (a place), by (an agent), due to (a cause)
iti	ítí	along, traversing, according to
ŋede	ŋéde	towards, aiming at, for (a beneficiary)
oku	óku	on, supported by, held up by
suu	súú	hanging from, attached to
unéé	úꞌnéé	by means of, with, during, throughout

Table 12: Some postpositions.

The complement of a postposition does not get marked for case.

Rather than a pronominal complement, postpositions usually take an agreement prefix. These look a lot like the object agreement that occurs on verbs; details are in **Table 13**. You'll see that a third person singular complement does not trigger overt agreement; this means that it's common for Bááru postpositions to look intransitive. **Table 12** gives a partial list.

	Singular	Plural
1	aa-	gi-
1+2	–	sii
2	ni-	wi
3	∅	ó́

Table 13: Postposition agreement. **Table 12** shows the effect of the 3PL floating tone on the postpositions.

Postpositions can be used directly with nominal complements:

(19)   **aboŋ iihúwá ee awéé**

aboŋ   iihúwá   ee   awéé
man   *campfire*   LOC   LOC.COP

"The man is by the fire."

[*1992*TRIPS*38*]

6.2   Spatial classifiers

I wish I had a better name for these. When they occur with a postposition,
it's natural to think of them as classifiers associated with the postposition's
complement, and even though they can occur without an overt complement
they are not nouns (for example, they don't take plural or case marking). But
many of them can also be used, reduplicated, as adverbs, which maybe is not
behaviour you'd especially associate with classifiers, and many can also be used
as suffixes deriving nouns.

Anyway, these words pick out the salient aspect of the complement of a
postposition. Typically they foreground shape, orientation, and stability or mo-
tion. They follow the complement noun, if it is not omitted, and are unin-
flectable. **Table 14** gives some examples. **Table 12** gives a partial list.

Classifier	Gloss
ɗii	a container
dzaa	flat and underfoot, slanted
gbuudi	large and moving
ígál	a line or boundary
kii	an enclosure, whether or not covered
ósó	flat and stable, underfoot
otéé	a point, especially a point of stability, leverage, or suspension
tsaja	flat and moving, small
túú	flat and stable, overhead
umé	flat and vertical
úú	a volume

Table 14: Spatial classifiers.

Here are a couple of examples:

(20) **nájánana tsoogbé ꜜtúú suu awéé**

nájánana	tsoogbé	ꜜtúú	suu	awéé
spider	*roof*	*flat.overhead*	*hanging.from*	LOC.COP

"The spider is on the ceiling"

[*1992*TRIPS*07*]

Some combinations of prepositions with spatial classifiers have idiomatic
non-spatial meanings; for example, **otéé…oku** can mean *depend on (a person)*.
But I haven't yet pursued that issue very far.

6.3   Posture adverbs

These can occur in other contexts, though usually reduplicated. In locative
phrases they can either precede or follow the postposition. They characterise
the posture and stability of the figure. **Table 15** gives some examples.

Here's an example:

Adverb	Gloss
aɟé	standing
áwáɗi	spread out
dzomo	squatting
gege	leaning
maŋe	sitting
píkí	teatering, precarious, on tiptoes
sawa	swaying, hanging

Table 15: Posture adverbs.

(21) **utajul káháŋá umé gege oku awéé**

utajul	káháŋá	umé	gege	oku	awéé
ladder	*wall*	*flat.vertical*	*leaning*	*on*	LOC.COP

"The ladder is leaning against the wall."

[*1992*TRIPS*58*]

6.4 Relational nouns?

There are some nouns that are frequently used with extended or metaphorical senses in locative phrases, and you might think of these as relational nouns. Here's an example using **méjé** *face*:

(22) **úgúma pasígáliki méjé gboodi oku awéé**

úgúma	pasígál	-iki	méjé	gbuudi	oku	awéé
boat	*river*	GEN	*face*	*large.moving*	*on*	LOC.COP

"The boat is on the river"

[*1992*TRIPS*11*]

It's true that some such words maybe be on their way down a grammaticalisation path, but there's not really good reason to distinguish a separate class of nouns. Here, the syntax is just that of inalienable possession, nothing at all surprising.

6.5 Locative complements

Nothing much changes when a locative phrase is used as the complement of a verb, for example **tu**, a verb of caused location (meaning something like *put, place*, but also, with a somewhat different syntax, *give*):

(23) **eɓojo sowa úú suu úndusujowá?**

eɓo	-j	-o	sowa	úú	suu	ú-	N-	tu	-sujo	-áʔ
fish	PL	DUAL	*water*	*volume*	*in*	1S>3PL	TR	*put*	III.DUAL.ABS	PFV

"I put two fish in the water."

[*5*MOYD*1157*]

7 Focus

I don't have time to work out this system in any detail, but here's a sketch. If you happen to speak Lavukaleve, some of this (maybe a bit too much of it) will

be familiar.

The idea is that you have four or so inflecting focus particles—one a negative polarity item, one that's used in polar questions, and a couple with typical focusing meanings analogous to *even, also* and *only*. I'll stick with the *even, also* one, which is just **g-** plus the agreement suffixes given in **Table 16**.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	uwáʔ	agijóʔ	agíʔ
1 + 2	–	asijóʔ	asíʔ
2	aníʔ	awijóʔ	awíʔ
3ɪ	áʔ	awóʔ	awáʔ
3ɪɪ	íʔ	iwóʔ	iwíʔ
3ɪɪɪ	úʔ	uwóʔ	iwíʔ
3ɪᴠ	aráʔ	arejóʔ	aréʔ
3ᴠ	éʔ	ejóʔ	ejéʔ

Table 16: Focus particle agreement.

The focus paradigm is very regular in one respect: all forms end in a high-toned vowel and a glottal stop (though phrase-finally what you get is a long high-toned vowel, cf. **§2.9**). It would be reasonable to suppose a distinct morphological bit, or maybe a prosodic requirement, present with all focus particles, and not strictly speaking a part of the agreement paradigm itself.

A focus particle takes a complement, which it follows. When possible, it agrees with that complement, or some constituent of that complement. Here are the main patterns.

- If the complement is a nominal, the focus particle agrees with that nominal.

- If the complement is the ᴠᴘ, the focus particle agrees with the object (and this is interpreted as predicate focus).

- If the complement is a full clause, the focus particle agrees with the subject (and this is interpreted as sentence focus).

- Otherwise, the focus particle shows default 3ᴠ.s agreement.

I mentioned one important issue above. When a focus particle agrees in person with some nominal, nothing else can agree with that same nominal in person; in particular the verb can't. So if a first- or second-person subject or object is focused, the verb will agree with it as if it were third-person. (**Example 16** gave an example of this.) Agreement in number and gender is not affected, however.

Predicate and sentence focus require further comment. They're not distinguished by the position of the focus particle, which will generally be clause final regardless. They differ just with respect to the argument that the focus particle agrees with—it agrees with the object for predicate focus, and the subject for sentence focus. **Example 24** illustrates the difference.

(24) a. **ununííhí**

un-   ɴ- nííhí
1s > 2s ᴛʀ *know*

"I know you" (neutral focus)

b. **unííhí ganí?**

u-	N-	nííhí	g	-aní?
1s>3s	TR	*know*	FOC	2s.FOC

"I *know you*" (predicate focus)

c. **enenííhí guwá?**

en-	N-	nííhí	g	-uwá?
3s>2s	TR	*know*	FOC	1s.FOC

"I know you!" (sentence focus)

As you might have noticed, it's impossible to express predicate focus with an intransitive verb—since the focus particle can't agree with the object if there's no object. There are probably going to end up being multiple strategies for dealing with this, but one of them at least will involve a causativised verb with a reflexive object. Like this:

(25) **búro umbóósóló**

bú	-ro	u-	N-	bóó	-s	-l	g	-ará?
self	1s.POSS	1s>3s	TR	*sleep*	CAUS	IVS.ABS	FOC	3IV.S.ABS

"I'm *sleeping*" (predicate focus)

8 The challenge

Okay, that's that. Now to summarise how I've met the requirements of the challenge.

There's nasal harmony: voiced plosives can be converted to homorganic nasals by a nasal earlier in the word (**§2.6**).

There are a handful of marginal phonemes, **ndz**, **ɟ**, **ɲ**, **ŋm**, and, most interestingly, **ʔ** (**§2.1**).

There's prenasalisation, analysed as such in conformity with the CV syllable structure of the language and a few other subtleties (**§2.1**, again).

The focus particles and the way they interact with verbal agreement (**§7**) I think satisfies that requirement.

There are oodles of aspect distinctions (see especially, but not only, **§4.7**).

You'd probably analyse some of the inner aspect markers as two-part morpheme, if you believe in such things, for example the frustrative, marked by **héé...he~se** (**Table 9**). (Aside: for what it's worth these could instead be analysed as idioms whose bits are highly grammaticalised. Also, I'd planned for some combinations of postposition and spatial classifier to have idiomatic senses, but I ran out of time, except for the one example **otéé...oku** *depend on (a person)*.)

5 Minutes of Your Day sentences: **example 13**, **example 23**, **example 9**, **example 17**, **example 6**.

Topological Relations sentences: **example 20**, **example 22**, **example 18**, **example 19**, **example 21**.

I think that's it. (No bedtime story.)