

Xõópríf

[ħǿ:βóφ]—a constructed language

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1 Summary

Xõópríf is a conlang designed for humanoid creatures with no tongue, teeth, or nose. It is spoken by approximately 70,000 people on the fictional island of ISLAND, located off the coast of Papua New Guinea.¹

This document contains a full grammar of the Xõópríf language, as well as several example texts and some cultural information about Xõópríf society.

¹Based on the real Karkar Island.

2 Phonology

Lacking most of the vital speech organs, the only possible consonant sounds are bilabials, pharyngeals/epiglottals, and glottals. The tongue is used for producing most vowels, but I have hypothesized² that a human with no tongue could still clearly distinguish at least four vowels by opening the mouth less or more and rounding the lips.

2.1 Phonological inventory

Consonants:

| | bilabial | | | implosive | laryngeal |
|-----------|----------|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| | voiced | tenuis | ejective | | |
| stop | b | p | p' | ɓ | ʔ |
| fricative | β | ɸ | ɸ' | | ħ |
| trill | ʙ | ɓ | ɓ' | | |

Vowels:

| | unrounded | rounded |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| close-mid | ɘ | ɵ |
| open-mid | ɜ | ɛ |

Vowels can be phonemically initially voiceless (/hə/), initially breathy-voiced (/hə̤/), long (/ɜ:/), and high-toned (/ɘ́/). Rising and falling tone are underlying /ə́/ and /ə̤́/ respectively. A bimoraic (long or rising/falling) vowel that contains a low tone (i.e. not high and long) can also have creaky voice (e.g. /ɜ̤́/).

2.2 Orthography

Consonants:

| | bilabial | | | implosive | laryngeal |
|-----------|----------|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| | voiced | tenuis | ejective | | |
| stop | b | p | p' | ɓ' | ʔ |
| fricative | v | f | f' | | x |
| trill | br | pr | pr' | | |

Vowels:

| | unrounded | rounded |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| close-mid | i | u |
| open-mid | e | o |

The grapheme <h> represents /h~h/ after a voiceless consonant and /h~h/ after a voiced consonant. When it occurs syllable-initially, <h> is used for /h/ and <g> for /h/. Long vowels are doubled, an acute accent (é) is used for high tone, and an <h> after a vowel is used for creaky voice. (This is never ambiguous due to the syllable structure.)

2.3 Phonotactics

The syllable structure is (C)(C)(H)V(C).

A null onset is not allowed (though a glottal stop sounds like one). In complex onsets, the first C must be a stop other than /b/ and the second must be a fricative of the same voicing.

The H is either /h/ or /h/ (which are not included in C). When preceded by another consonant in the same syllable, it must match in voicing and is realized as [h] or [h].

Ejectives, trills, and the glottal stop cannot occur in the coda. A coda consonant followed by an onset consonant with the same manner of articulation fully assimilates to the following consonant, resulting in a geminate consonant (e.g. /pəβ.hə/ [pəh:ə]). This can occur across morpheme and word boundaries. As this is a synchronic phenomenon, it is not noted in the orthography.

The nucleus may be any of the following (written phonetically and then in the orthography):

²I have not tested this hypothesis.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|----|------|------|------|
| à | á | â: | á: | â(:) | ã(:) |
| e | é | ee | éé | ée | eé |
| | | â: | â(:) | ã(:) | |
| | | ẽ | éẽ | ẽé | |

Rising and falling tone vowels are typically lengthened. Diphthongs are prohibited.

3 Morphology

3.1 Inflectional morphology

3.2 Derivational morphology

4 Syntax

4.1 Word order

Xõópríf is, in general, strongly head-final.

5 Culture

5.1 Calendar

The Xõópríf calendar is lunisolar.

5.2 Kinship

The Xõópríf people use an Iroquois-style kinship system.

5.3 Loanwords

Being located in Papua New Guinea, Xõópríf borrows loanwords from the native languages Waskia³ and Tok Pisin. During the periods of German colonization prior to World War I and Japanese occupation during World War II, it also acquired several loanwords from these languages.

Adapting words to Xõópríf's phonology is, to put it lightly, a tricky task.

6 Examples

7 Proto-Xõópríf

The lexicon was derived from an extensive set of Proto-Xõópríf roots followed by a series of sound changes. This process is no longer productive.

7.1 Roots

Proto-Xõópríf has four distinct sets of roots. The first are referred to as “basic roots,” and they generally encode either a very wide variety of basic ideas or a grammatical concept. They are invariably monosyllabic and sometimes even consist of a single phoneme. “Grammatical roots” are similar but are separated for reasons of semantics, as they evolved into grammatical forms in Xõópríf. “Secondary roots” can be polysyllabic and generally refer to more specific, complex concepts. They can also be derived from basic roots. Finally, “compound roots” are formed by combining basic and secondary roots to create a derived meaning. Sound changes that result from combining roots are generally unpredictable.

³http://www-01.sil.org/pacific/png/pubs/928474531047/Waskia_Dictionary.pdf

Roots are compounded in a head-final manner—that is, the root that comes first modifies the root that comes second.

7.1.1 Basic roots

*həp'

word, expression, name, label

*β'əə

tool, system, machine, device, procedure

*ʎφ'əβ

person, human, someone, body

7.1.2 Grammatical roots

*ʎə (from *ʎφ'əβ *person*)

animate nominalizer

*pə:

inanimate nominalizer

*φəφ'

abstract nominalizer

*ə

plural number marker

*ʒ

augmentative marker

*ə

diminutive marker

*β

nominative case marker

*ʎp'β

ergative case marker

7.1.3 Secondary roots

7.1.4 Compound roots

*həp'β'əə (from *həp' *word* + *β'əə *tool*)

language

7.2 Sound changes

The phonology of Proto-Xōóprif was similar to that of Xōóprif, but it had in addition a series of pharyngealized stops and fricatives (b', p', β', φ') as well as a voiced pharyngeal fricative (ʎ). Most pharyngeals (except h) were lost in Xōóprif. In addition, Proto-Xōóprif lacked the implosive /b/, tones, and creaky voice.

Tonogenesis in Xōóprif involved a “tone harmony” process that will be referred to several times in this section. In this process, a vowel without any inherent tone—the “target vowel”—acquires the tone of the “trigger vowel,” which is defined as the previous vowel in the word if there was one or the following vowel otherwise. The trigger vowel defaults to i (/i/) if no other vowels are present. If the trigger vowel carries a contour tone, the closer end of the contour is used to determine the target vowel’s level tone; for instance, /pâpə/ becomes /pâpâ/, but /pəpâ/ becomes /pâpâ/.

A vowel is epenthesized when an otherwise illegal consonant cluster would occur in Xōóprif. If it can be inserted in multiple places to fix the illegal syllable, the one that results in a minimal number of syllables, then a maximal

number of open syllables, favoring closed syllables closer to the beginning of the word, will be chosen. The vowel matches the quality of the trigger vowel and undergoes tone harmony to determine its tone; it is always short.

The +creaky vowel quality only applies when possible (to vowels with +rising, +falling, or +low+long). An explanation of the high and low tone qualities:

| | | | |
|--------|--------|------|--------------|
| - | - | | (harmony) |
| +high1 | - | é | (+high) |
| +low1 | - | è | (+low) |
| - | +high2 | ě(:) | (+rising) |
| +high1 | +high2 | é: | (+high+long) |
| +low1 | +high2 | ě(:) | (+rising) |
| - | +low2 | ê(:) | (+falling) |
| +high1 | +low2 | ê(:) | (+falling) |
| +low1 | +low2 | è: | (+low+long) |

Sound changes apply in the order given. Sound changes grouped with a brace to the left apply simultaneously and are mutually exclusive.

Lenition I

| | | | | |
|---------------------|---|--------------------|---|-----|
| b, p | → | v, f | / | V_V |
| VC[+pharyngealized] | → | V[+high2] | | |
| C[+pharyngealized] | → | C[-pharyngealized] | / | V_V |
| C[+glottalized] | → | C[-glottalized] | / | V_V |

Tonogenesis

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|--|----|
| V | → | V[+high1] | / | C[+pharyngealized]C ₀ _ | |
| V | → | V[+low1] | / | C[+fricative+voice]_ | |
| V | → | V[+creaky] | / | _ɿ | |
| { | VC[-cont] | → | V[+high2] | / | _C |
| | VC[+cont] | → | V[+low2] | / | _C |
| V ₁ | → | V[+creaky] | / | #C ₀ _C ₀ V ₁ | |

Loss of pharyngealized series

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---|--------------------|---|--------------------|
| ɿ | → | ʔ | / | V_V |
| b, ɿ | → | ɓ | / | _V |
| ɿ | → | h, ɦ | / | C[-laryngeal]_ |
| ɿ | → | ∅ | | |
| V[+rounded] | → | V[-rounded] | / | C[pharyngealized]_ |
| C[+pharyngealized] | → | C[-pharyngealized] | | |

Deletion

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---|---|------------------------------------|-------|
| V | → | ∅ | / | C[+stop±voice]_C[+fricative±voice] | |
| V | → | ∅ | / | C[-glottalized]_C[+glottal+cont] | |
| C[+cont+voice] | → | ∅ | / | V ₁ _V ₁ | |
| { | C ₀ | → | ∅ | / | C_# |
| | C | → | ∅ | / | V_# |
| | V | → | ∅ | / | VC_# |
| | C ₀ | → | ∅ | / | VC_V# |
| V[-long] | → | ∅ | / | _# | |

Consonant coalescence

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|----------------------|---|--------|
| {p, φ, β, b}? | → | p', φ', β', b | | |
| C[+stop]C[+trill] | → | ∅C | / | _#, C_ |
| C[+trill]C[+stop] | → | ∅C[-stop+fricative] | / | _#, C_ |
| C[+laryngeal]{b, p, p', β} | → | β, φ, φ', b | / | _#, C_ |
| C[+fricative]C[+stop] | → | C[-fricative+trill]∅ | / | _#, C_ |

Lenition II

| | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|-----|
| β | → | ∅ | / | V_V |
| β | → | β | / | V_V |
| β' | → | β | / | V_V |

Vowel coalescence⁴

| | | |
|--|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| $V_1[\pm\text{close-round}]V_2[\pm\text{close-round}]$ | \rightarrow | $V_1[+\text{long}]\emptyset$ |
| $V_1[\pm\text{close-round}]V_2[\pm\text{close-round}]$ | \rightarrow | $V_2[+\text{low1+creaky}]\emptyset$ |
| $V_1[+\text{close}\pm\text{round}]V_2[-\text{close}\pm\text{round}]$ | \rightarrow | $V_1[+\text{high2}]\emptyset$ |
| $V_1[-\text{close}\pm\text{round}]V_2[+\text{close}\pm\text{round}]$ | \rightarrow | $V_1[+\text{low2+creaky}]\emptyset$ |
| V_1V_1 | \rightarrow | $V_1:$ |
| V_1V_2 | \rightarrow | $\emptyset V_2$ |

Word-initial fortition

| | | | | |
|--|---------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| $\beta, \phi, \phi', \text{h}, \text{h}, \text{h}$ | \rightarrow | $b, p, p', \text{h}, \text{h}, ?$ | / | $\#_V$ |
| \emptyset | \rightarrow | ϕ | / | $\#_V[+\text{close}]$ |
| \emptyset | \rightarrow | β | / | $\#_V[-\text{close}]$ |

Vowel neutralization⁵

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---|-----------|
| $V[-\text{close}]$ | \rightarrow | $V[+\text{close}]$ | / | $_\#$ |
| $V[+\text{long}]$ | \rightarrow | $V[-\text{long}]$ | / | $_C_0\#$ |

Tone sandhi

| | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|---|---------------------------|
| $V[+\text{rising}]$ | \rightarrow | $V[+\text{high}]$ | / | $V[+\text{rising}]C_0_$ |
| $V[+\text{falling}]$ | \rightarrow | $V[+\text{low}]$ | / | $V[+\text{falling}]C_0_$ |

8 Lexicon

Abbreviations:

| | | | |
|----|---------------|-----|-------------------|
| PX | Proto-Xóóprif | n. | noun |
| Wa | Waskia | vi. | intransitive verb |
| TP | Tok Pisin | vt. | transitive verb |
| De | German | | |
| Jp | Japanese | | |

xóóprifi (from PX *hɛp'ɪ'ɛə language)

language, Xóóprif

| | | |
|-----|----------|---------------|
| PAU | xóóprifi | xóóprifií'p'í |
| PL | xóóprifi | xóóprifií'p'í |
| AUG | xóóprifi | xóóprifií'p'í |
| DIM | xóóprifi | xóóprifií'p'í |

péé'u (from PX *ɸ'ɛβ person)

person

| | | |
|-----|-------|-----------|
| | NOM | ERG |
| PAU | péé'u | péé'ōōp'o |
| PL | péé'ũ | péé'ōōp'o |
| AUG | péé'ĩ | péé'ēēp'e |
| DIM | péé'i | péé'ip'i |

⁴When two vowels coalesce, the tone of the resulting single vowel (if not specified in the rule) can be determined by concatenating the tones of the morae of each vowel and taking the first two. For example, high + low = falling, high + rising = falling, rising + (anything) = rising, low long + (anything) = low long, etc. The resulting vowel is creaky-voiced if and only if the first vowel is.

⁵The shortening of a rising or falling tone vowel results in a low or high tone vowel respectively.