



The Kamakawi Writing System

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Introductory Remarks

Finally.

The Kamakawi writing system is a complex system, according to Tren Pehrson's writing system classifications (for more information, check out his website [here](#). I guarantee you, you will *not* be disappointed; his script are other-wordly). On this page, I'll attempt to explain the system in its entirety. The system itself must be attacked in different chunks, but I'm going to try to give a short run-down of the entire system in the following paragraph:

The Kamakawi writing system is a combination of several types of systems which work together to produce a single coherent system for transcribing the Kamakawi language. The oldest form of the system was a purely pictographic language, where glyphs were used to stand for words. As time wore on, this system was expanded, and reanalyzed. One of the byproducts of this reanalysis was a fully-functional syllabary. This syllabary can be used to spell any word in Kamakawi, but it is not always used to do so (though it is used for all borrowings, most notably those from **Zhyler**). Along with the syllabary is the older logographic system. Most logographs are used to indicate words, but some (e.g., those that make up the syllabary) are used for both the original words they were created to convey, and a phonemic string. These strings can be monosyllabic, disyllabic, or polysyllabic. In addition to logographs which denote content-type words, there are also functional glyphs, whose meaning is purely morphological. Finally, spellings are often unique, but may not always be so. A single word can consist of a glyphs from the syllabary,

Languages

Zhyler
Kamakawi Main
Kelenala
KNSL
Sathir
Njaama
Epiq
X
Gweydr
Sheli
Tan Tyls
Sidaan

Other Stuff

Swadesh List
SLIPA
Smiley Award

Petersonian
Wasabi
Megdevi
L.C. Notebook
LCC2 Relay
Book Reviews
Writing Guide
About Me
Contact...ME!?!?

Links, Anyone?

Language
Writing
Friends

Smile Today!

156749

Kiko ie Kimou,
4 o Tieyu'í, 2008

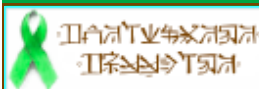
Fly Away Home



Scattered Tongues

This conlang site
belongs to David J.
Peterson.
List All | Random |
HQ
Prev | Next | Next 5

Next >>



logographic glyphs, morphological glyphs, or a mixture of the former. Finally (x2), there is a single determiner (a stroke beneath a glyph), which can be used to distinguish separate meanings of single glyphs. Finally (x3), there is yet another system imported from **Zhyler** used to write Kamakawi. That system can be found [here](#).

Wow. I guess that paragraph's a bit unruly... Oh well. That's the whole system in a nutshell. If you'd like the nutshell opened for you, proceed to each section below, and all will be revealed.

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General Principles

The Kamakawi writing system is composed of glyphs (called *iku* in Kamakawi) that all fit into an equally-sized square space (with an occasional ascender or descender). Some of the glyphs stand for strings of phonemes; others for words or concepts. When writing it, though, one *can* write in any direction: left to right, right to left, top to bottom, or bottom to top. As with Middle Egyptian, various directionalities battled it out, but in Kamakawi left to right and top to bottom won out. Top to bottom is considered the formal direction, and left to right the innovative (and somewhat more functional). All glyphs presented on this website are presented as if they were written from left to right, save where specified.

There are few punctuation marks, but those that exist are placed either to the left and right of a sentence (if written from left to right), or on the top and bottom of a sentence (if written from top to bottom). Usually there are no spaces between words, or between sentences. Since such things are customary in English, I may break that rule when presenting Kamakawi sentences on this website.

In addition to the above-stated punctuation marks, there are a couple that occur as diacritics below a given character. Aside from that, writing proceeds from the beginning to the end (either left to right, or top to bottom) without interruption.

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The Kamakawi Syllabary

The name of the Kamakawi syllabary in Kamakawi is *kavaka i oala*, or "Oral Writing". The syllabary is complete, and fully phonemic. This means that a word like *a'i*, "white", if it were to be spelled in the syllabary (and i

wouldn't, because it has its own glyph), would be spelled *a-hi*, just as *uvo* "dolphin", would be spelled *u-fo*. Without further ado, here is the syllabary:

	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>u</i>
—	✕	∨	∠	†	W
<i>p</i>	∇	∩	∃	⊔	⋈
<i>t</i>	⋈	∧	∠	□	⊕
<i>k</i>		∫	∞	∩	∩
<i>m</i>	⊔	⋈	∠	∩	∩
<i>n</i>	∩	∞	∠	∩	∩
<i>l</i>	↓	∞	∠	∩	∩
<i>f</i>	∩	∩	∠	∩	∩
<i>h</i>	∩	∞	∠	∩	∩

Most of the glyphs above can be used in isolation to mean something (recall that in the overall writing system of Kamakawi, the syllabary is what was developed *last*). Here's a list of those meanings:

- —
 - A: Used to spell the letter *a* in the Zhyler orthography.
 - E: Used to spell the letter *e* in the Zhyler orthography.
 - I: Used as the benefactive preposition. Also used to spell the letter *i* in the Zhyler orthography.
 - O: Used to spell the letter *o* in the Zhyler orthography.
 - U: Used to spell the letter *u* in the Zhyler orthography.
- *P*
 - PA: Used for the word "bowl". Also used to spell the letter *p* in the Zhyler orthography.
 - PE: Used for the word "there".
 - PI: Used for the word "pelican".
 - PO: Used for the word "outside", and for one type of genitive.
 - PU: Used for the word "to perform a task".
- *T*
 - TA: Used for the word "sand".

- TE: Used for the word "on top of". Also used to spell the letter in the **Zhyler orthography**.
- TI: Used for the instrumental.
- TO: Used for the number four.
- TU: Used for the word "bubble".
- **K**
 - KA: Used for the number two.
 - KE: Used for the word "tooth". Also used to spell the letter *k* in the **Zhyler orthography**.
 - KI: Used for the word "day".
 - KO: Used for the word "here".
 - KU: Used for the word "aloe plant".
- **M**
 - MA: Used for the word "mom".
 - ME: Used for the word "wet sand". Also used to spell the letter *m* in the **Zhyler orthography**.
 - MI: Used for the word "butterfly".
 - MO: Used for the word "swallow" (the bird).
 - MU: *Not used*.
- **N**
 - NA: Used for the word "tongue". Also used to spell the letter *n* in the **Zhyler orthography**.
 - NE: Used for the word "seagull".
 - NI: *Not used*.
 - NO: Used for the number three.
 - NU: Used for the word "wood".
- **L**
 - LA: Used for the word "spear", and as a positive answer to a negative question.
 - LE: Used for the word "because".
 - LI: Used for the word "to get". Also used to spell the letter *l* in the **Zhyler orthography**.
 - LO: Used for the word "root".
 - LU: Used for the word "flash of light".
- **F**
 - FA: Used for the words "seed" and "dad".
 - FE: Used for the number six.
 - FI: Used for the words "lightning" and "if".
 - FO: Used for the word "conch shell".
 - FU: Used for the word "to blow out air". Also used to spell the letter *f* in the **Zhyler orthography**.
- **H**
 - HA: Used for the word "river". Also used to spell the letter *h* in the **Zhyler orthography**.
 - HE: Used for the word "to begin".
 - HI: Used for the word "coral".
 - HO: In combination with a **line determinative**, used for the word "man".

- HU: Used for the word "brow".

The *kavaka i oala* is used in the following situations:

- Spelling words of foreign origin (usually words borrowed from **Zhyler**).
- Spelling out a word whose phonetic value isn't known (e.g., for children in school, or for those learning the language).
- Spelling certain words in Kamakawi (not all words have glyphs to represent them).
- As a default writing system for other languages, or for Kamakawi when glyphs aren't being used, for whatever reason.

That will just about tell you everything you'll need to know about the syllabary. To learn about other parts of the Kamakawi writing system, read on!

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Polysyllabic Glyphs

In addition to a **syllabary**, the Kamakawi orthography makes extensive use of a system of polysyllabic glyphs that are, essentially, whole words. This combined with the syllabary and the other elements mentioned elsewhere is the full Kamakawi writing system, known as *kavaka o fuvupo*, or "The Ancestral Script". The system is something of a mix between Middle Egyptian and Japanese in the way it works. There are words that are spelled out fully with the **syllabary**, and words that are represented with a single glyph. In addition, there are certain words that mix the two systems in various ways.

The polysyllabic glyphs of Kamakawi don't look any different from the glyphs of the **syllabary** (aside from the fact that many are more complex) so it's up to the writer and reader to memorize the glyphs wholesale. Unfortunately, it's neither practical nor simple to list *every* polysyllabic glyph in Kamakawi, so the best I can do is give you some examples. Below is a small picture which, if clicked, will take you to a much larger picture of all the bisyllabic glyphs of Kamakawi. The bisyllabic glyphs are some of the most common, and, in many cases, some of the most transparent. Many of the glyphs are combinations of the individual syllabic glyphs that comprise them, though there are a number that are totally unrelated (or partially related). Click on the picture to go to an interactive table with more information (if you just want to see a picture of the table, click [here](#)). You may also download this table as a .pdf by clicking [here](#)):





In addition to bisyllabic glyphs, there are plenty of glyphs for words with three or more syllables. Given the number of possible polysyllabic words though (thousands), and the number of glyphs, putting them into tabular form stretches the limits of practicality. Their number is many, though, and their importance is undeniable. You can see examples of polysyllabi glyphs all over this site, as well as within a few of the other sections on this page.

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Morphology

Some (though not all) of the morphological elements of Kamakawi have special glyphs associated with them. In this section, I will try to list them all as quickly and painlessly as possible.

First, let's take a look at **tense morphology** (for more information on tense go [here](#)). One or more of these glyphs will usually begin a sentence, and give the reader an idea about the status of the subject of the sentence:

𠄎 𠄏 𠄐 𠄑 𠄒 𠄓 𠄔 𠄕

Here's what we have here, in order: (1) the present tense/switch-subject marker (either silent or *a*); (2) the past tense marker *k*-; (3) the marker that tells us the subject is new, but not new to the discourse *ae*; (4) the same subject marker *e*; (5) the plural/same plural subject marker *u*; (6) the negative subject marker and general negator *oku*; (7) the irrealis marker *ua* and (8) the future tense marker *male* (itself a simple bisyllabic glyph).

Next are the directional valence markers:



In order, these are the passive, causative, applicative and inchoative markers of Kamakawi (for more information on how these work, go [here](#)) As you can see, the markers have a theme. I'm tempted to put a smiley here...

Very quickly, here are the marks used for partial reduplication:



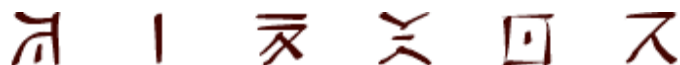
The first is a prefix, the second a suffix. When an entire word is reduplicated, its glyph(s) is/are simply doubled.

Here are a whole host of random prefixes in Kamakawi:



In order: (1) a rare *a-* that indicates something like similitude; (2) the negative prefix *ku-* (like the "un-" in "unbelievable"); (3) the terminative prefix *ne-* (shows up in a variety of places); (4) the part-to-whole prefix *i* (the same glyph is used for the object marker); (5) the reversive prefix *fi* (like the "un-" in "unwind"); and (6) the prefix *he-*, which you'll recognize from the [syllabary](#), which indicates inception.

Now for some suffixes:



In order: (1) the frequently used abstract suffix *-kV* (vowel is the same as the previous vowel in the word); (2) the doubling suffix *-ka*; (3) the feminine suffix *-ne* (it gets used sometimes); (4) the oft-used diminutive suffix *-(k)i* (the *k* is used when the suffix is added to a word that ends in *i*); (5) the waxing suffix *-lamu* (changes to *-lanu* if the last consonant before the suffix is added is *m*); and (6) the masculine suffix *-o*.

Next, a trio of infixes:



These are: (1) the agentive infix *-li-*; (2) the interruptive infix *-lu-*; and (3) the pejorative infix *-wV-*.

Infixes are well and good for spoken languages, but not so much for the written Kamakawi language, since it's composed of glyphs. So here's how

it works. If the infix needs to be inserted into a mono-glyphal word, it's added as a prefix. If it can be inserted as a true infix, though, it is. Here's an example of the former and the latter:

The first word is *nevile*, "one who gives", and the second is *nilima*, "one who mixes". As you can see, in the first, the *-li-* infix appears as a prefix, and in the second, it appears in its actual position. The same goes for the other two infixes.

Last but not least, some miscellaneous glyphs:

The leftovers are: (1) the *take-* suffix (specialized meanings; frequently used derivational prefix); (2) the exclamatory *ima*; (3) the genitive *o* (the other genitive markers are written as they sound; this is the only one that has a special glyph); and (4) the resumptive particle *ho*.

Finally, the following suffixes have been borrowed from **Zhyler**, and have "glyphs", in a way:

The first is the *-tí* suffix. The accent mark means it attracts stress. The *-tí* suffix is used for titles (an honorific). Next is the *-tiá* suffix, which is used for inanimate agents (used with some **Zhyler** inventions). Finally, we have the *-ká* suffix (for those keeping track, that's four possible *-ka* suffixes). This is used with human agents, and is slowly but surely replacing *-li-* as the standard way to mark an animate agent.

And, that should do it! If you know these, you should be able to maneuver your way around Kamakawi's morphology. Huzzah!

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The Kamakawi Number System

The Kamakawi number system is fairly simple, if you're familiar with the base 10 number system (like that used in English). Essentially, Kamakawi has glyphs for the numbers 0 through 10, and then thereafter, numbers are created more or less as they are in English. Below you'll find a table listing the digits 0 through 9, the major 10's (10, 100 [ten squared], 1,000 [ten cubed] and 1,000,000 [ten to the sixth]). Below the glyph for 10 is the glyph for 20, to show you how, for example, 20, 30, 200, 4,000, 5,000,000, etc. are

formed (you just put the non-singular number before the relevant 10's glyph, and you're set). Here's the table:

0		5		10	
1		6		20	
2		7		10 ²	
3		8		10 ³	
4		9		10 ⁶	

The names of the numbers are as follows:

0. <i>kakulu</i>	5. <i>moko</i>	10. <i>mou</i>
1. <i>ape</i>	6. <i>fe</i>	20. <i>kamou</i>
2. <i>ka</i>	7. <i>upe</i>	100. <i>kapa</i>
3. <i>no</i>	8. <i>tala</i>	1000. <i>mele</i>
4. <i>to</i>	9. <i>paka</i>	1000000. <i>hoka</i>

In order to add a number in the 1's column to a number greater than 10, the word *oi*, "and", is used. Since it's a single glyph, the result is something like this: 11 = 10+1; 5,234 = 5 1,000+2 100+3 10+4. Here's the number 349 in the Kamakawi script:



In running text, in order to avoid confusion, a writer *may* (though is not obligated to) use the number symbol before a number to indicate that the glyphs that follows aren't non-number words, or glyphs from the syllabary as the case may be. This symbol is essentially equivalent to the # sign in English:



That's about all there is to the number system of Kamakawi.

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Punctuation and More

The Kamakawi writing system has some punctuation, though not much. As much of the cadence can be inferred from the position of the subject-status markers (they just seem to work that way nicely), there's not as much need for an elaborate punctuation system like the one used in English (which itself, is hopelessly inadequate; English needs *much* more than it's got!). For general punctuation, there are three symbols: the full stop, the introductory mark, and the question mark:



The question mark surrounds questions, just as the full stop surrounds non-questions. The introductory mark can be used as a colon or semi-colon as is used in English (or sometimes a comma; it depends on the sentence), or it can be used as sentential punctuation for emphasis (say, surrounding a title [though usually those are simply set off in some way]). When the script is being written from top to bottom, the introductory and question marks are flipped 90 degrees, so that they are parallel to the bottom edge of the paper.

In addition to these, there are quotation marks, used exclusively for speech. Quotation marks surround quotations, much as they do in English, and they look like this:



Quotation marks undergo no change when the script is written vertically.

The last bits of punctuation are determinatives, and they are pictured below:



The first acts similarly to a cartouche in Middle Egyptian. By placing two dots before any glyph (or below each glyph in a string), the writer indicates that the glyphs in question are meant to be read as a name (*very* handy for a language such as this one). Pictured above is the word *maka*, which means "crab", but with two dots under it, it's the name *Maka*. [Note: For more information about **names in Kamakawi**, click [here](#).]

The second mark, which I refer to as the line determinative, is placed below a single glyph, and it lets the reader know, essentially, that the glyph is what it looks like it is. In practice, it simply distinguishes the meaning of a given glyph that is used for more than one concept. For example, the glyph above on the right is *ho* in the **syllabary**. Without the line determinative, it means nothing, and is simply a glyph that stands for the syllable *ho*. If one places the line determinative below the glyph, however, the meaning of the glyph changes, and it stands for the word *hopoko* Kamakawi for "man". If one is to read or write Kamakawi fluently, one

must simply memorize where the line determinative is used, and where it isn't. Most of the time it's predictable, but sometimes it's simply used to distinguish one word from another (similar to certain uses of the accent mark in Spanish [cf. *tu* vs. *tú*; *si* vs. *sí*; *mas* vs. *más*, etc.]).

Armed with this information, you can go about writing and reading pretty much any Kamakawi text (well, provided you know what the glyphs mean and how the language works). The only other noteworthy item for this section is that formal texts are often done up as a kind of box, usually written from top to bottom (though with a left-to-right orientation [i.e., the glyphs are written as if they were traveling from left to right (this becomes important when one is using passives, causatives, etc.)]). If you'd like to see an example of a box text, you can check out the **Kamakawi Babel text** by clicking [here](#).

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How Glyphs Are Built

Each glyph was created via one of several different methods. This section will briefly illustrate each method, and give an example or two.

The Drawing Method

The first method is simply the *drawing* method. That is, you have a thing and the glyph that refers to it is a pictorial approximation of it. Some of these are simple (as with the first glyph below, *hi*, "coral"), some are schematic (as with the second, *te*, "on top of" [the wedge element is on top of the block element]), and others are more involved (e.g., the third glyph below, *iki*, "chicken").



The Syllabic Method

The *syllabic* method entails combining two or more of the glyphs from the **syllabary** into a new glyph, à la **Devanagari conjunct consonants**. Some combinations are very straightforward (cf. glyph 1, *toi*, "some"); some have been modified so that they may be written more easily (cf. glyph 2, *ula* "parent"); and some are rather complex (cf. glyph 3, *tiviki*, "mouse"). [Note There's that's preventing the glyph that represents *toi*, for example, from representing *ito*, other than mere convention. So while the pronunciation of many of the glyphs created via the syllabic method is fairly predictable it is important to remember that that is not always the case.]



The Combined Method

The *combined* method combines elements of the previous two methods. Some, for examples, are drawings with syllabic elements super-imposed (cf. glyph 1, *ka'a*, "crow"), or graphic elements super-imposed (cf. glyph 2 *alama*, "sand crab" [note: *ta* means "sand"]).



The Modified Method

The *modified* method takes one glyph and modifies in a particular way to produce a new glyph. Some of these modifications produce predictable results, while others do not. One common method is to take a glyph for one word and either invert it (cf. glyph 1 *late*, "rust", the inverted version of *moka*, "metal") or turn it on its side to produce a similar or related word (cf. glyph 2, *laumi*, "to lie down", the a reclining version of *hopoko*, "man"). Another example is to add a stroke somewhere on the glyph to produce a related word (cf. glyph 3, *keoni*, "sea lion", which is simply the glyph for *eini*, "seal", with a line through the neck). This latter method is how many name glyphs are produced (go [here](#) for more information).



The Determined Method

The *determined* method involves the use of one of a few old determinative that are no longer necessarily productive in Kamakawi. These determinatives group certain glyphs together into semantic/interactional categories. I've listed several examples below of three of these categories (1) the "good" category characterized by a circle (the three glyphs are *meliki*, "beauty"; *loana*, "to be appreciated"; and *fule*, "to need"); (2) the "bad" category characterized by a line drawn through another glyph (the three glyphs are: *fula*, "to be disappointed"; *leve*, "to ache"; and *itu*, "to be hurt"); and (3) the "land" category characterized by two straight lines drawn beneath either an existing glyph or a new glyph (the three glyphs are: *ele* "sky"; *ta'a*, "bark"; and *a'iki*, "coral reef").



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My Top Ten

You probably have never wondered what my ten favorite Kamakaw glyphs are, but I have! And so, out of curiosity, I compiled this list of my top ten Kamakawi glyphs. If it accomplishes nothing else, it will, at least allow me to display ten more glyphs. It was difficult to choose, but I've chosen, and so I shall live with the choice. Here they are: my top ten favorite Kamakawi glyphs:

Number 10!



This is the glyph for *ielou*, "whale". It looks like a whale, doesn't it? I've always found it to be a rather fetching whale. He has charm.

Number 9!



This is the glyph for *nule*, "bridge". Of the *nu* series, this is my favorite. It's not quite as complex as *nune*, "humpback whale", but it's just cool enough.

Number 8!



This is the glyph for *opeku*, "trouble". I'm not sure I remember how this one works... It might be a combination of *o*, *pe* and *ku*, but I'm not sure how... Looks like some kind of crazy horse, though. That's cool!

Number 7!



This is the glyph for *iele*, "clay". The *ta* glyph is one of my favorites, and *m* is a nice variation of it. This is kind of like *me* to the max. The stroke down kind of forms an *i*, the first sound of *iele*. The rest is just wet sand: the second cousin of clay.

Number 6!



This is the glyph for *uvo*, "swordfish". I love fish. They look outstanding, especially like fish that jump. This is one of those.

Number 5!



This is the glyph for *leta*, "wing". I'm not sure what type of bird I was thinking of, but this glyph is kind of funky. It's crunkalicious!

Number 4!



This is the glyph for *oyo*, "complain". The glyph for *io*, "dove", was one of my early favorites, and this one is an embellished version of *io*.

Number 3!



Man, now *that* is a egret! Can't nobody tell me that ain't no egret! I take one look at this glyph, and I go and hide my egret treats, for fear that he gon up and steal the whole lot of them—and *that's no lie*. (Oh, and the Kamakaw word is *le'o*.)

Number 2!



So, I really hope that this looks like a bird of paradise (*pinia*). I spent more than an hour on this thing, trying to get it to look *just* right. And for some reason now I think it looks pretty good. It looks like I think it ought to, and that makes me happy.

And now, finally, time for the number one glyph of the bunch!

Number 1!



This is glyph *kala*, which means "to talk". Appropriate? Whatever it is, I think it looks pretty cool. It has half of a *la*, the long stick one would expect for *ka*, and the glyph for a tongue. The part below the left half of what looks like *na* is, I believe, decoration. I rather like it. That's a corporate logo if I've ever seen one!

And there you have it: my personal top ten. Hurrah!

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Conclusion

This writing system is probably my favorite creation ever (or, at least, so far). It'll have to duke it out with **Crazy Coyote** for number one, but it's certainly my favorite writing system. If you use a Mac, and you're interested, I can e-mail you the font (it's a .suit file), but otherwise, be on the lookout for the latest version of the Conlang Unicode Font, which will have the Kamakawi writing system on it. Thanks for reading this fa (unless you skipped directly to this comment, in which case, I must ask why? Conclusions are so boring...).

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This page can be viewed in **glorious color** or **sleek black and white!**

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