Asshai Reference Grammar and Lexicon
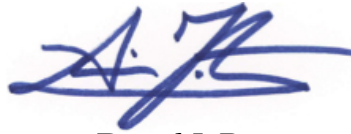
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Introduction

The Asshai'i are a mysterious people from the far east—often murmured about, but rarely seen or discussed directly in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Taking the various snippets of names and character descriptions from the books, I've created a language for the Asshai'i that both includes all the existing names and terms from the book, and suits the general Asshai aesthetic hinted out throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Regards,

David J. Peterson

1. <u>Asshai Language Description</u>

Phonology:

- The phonetic inventory of Asshai is listed below:

Consonants

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar		Palatal	Velar		Glottal
						Plain	Labial.	
Stops	p/b		t/d			k/g	k^w/g^w	ʔ
Fricatives		θ/ð	s/z	ɬ/ɮ	ʃ/ʒ	x/ɣ	$x^w/ɣ^w$	h
Nasals	m		n			ŋ	$ŋ^w$	
Approximants			r	l	j		w	

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i, iː/ĩ, ĩː		u, uː/ũ, ũː
Close Mid	e, eː/ẽ, ẽː	ə, əː	o, oː/õ, õː
Open Mid	ɛ, ɛː/ɛ̃, ɛ̃ː		ɔ, ɔː/ɔ̃, ɔ̃ː
Low		a, aː/ã, ãː	

- There are four diphthongs: *ay*, *aay*, *aw*, *aaw*.

- The symbols listed in the tables above are phonetic symbols. These will be used to *transcribe* Asshai words, but not to *write* them. To write them, I've devised a romanization system that should make the pronunciation fairly transparent. That transcription system is listed below:

  ◉ The following sounds will be written using the same letter as their phonetic symbol: *p, b, m, n, s, z, r, l, w, k, g, t, d, h, i, e, o, u* and *a*.

  ◉ The sound [ɬ] (kind of like the "lh" in "bellhop") will be spelled *lh*.

- ◉ The sound [ɮ] (no English equivalent) will be spelled *zlh*.

- ◉ The sound [ʃ] (like the "sh" in "shell") will be spelled *sh*.

- ◉ The sound [ʒ] (like the "s" in "leisure") will be spelled *zh*.

- ◉ The sound [θ] (like the "th" in "thin") will be spelled *th*.

- ◉ The sound [ð] (like the "th" in "this") will be spelled *dh*.

- ◉ The sound [j] (like the "y" in "yellow") will be spelled *y*.

- ◉ The sound [x] (like Scottish "loch") will be spelled *kh*.

- ◉ The sound [ɣ] (no English equivalent) will be spelled *gh*.

- ◉ The sound [ŋ] (like the "ng" in "sing") will be spelled *ng*.

- ◉ The sound [ʔ] (like the catch in one's voice in "uh-oh") will be spelled *'*.

- ◉ The sound [ɛ] (like the "e" in "bed") will be spelled *è*.

- ◉ The sound [ɔ] (like the "o" in "fort") will be spelled *ò*.

- ◉ The sound [a] (like the "a" in "father") will be spelled *à*.

- ◉ The labialized sounds [kʷ], [gʷ], [xʷ], [ɣʷ] and [ŋʷ] will be spelled as their base forms are with an extra *w* after it: *kw*, *gw*, *khw*, *ghw* and *ngw*.

- ◉ Long vowels will be written as doubled versions of the singular vowel (so [eː] will be written *ee*).

- ◉ Nasalized vowels will be written with a tilde above them. If a [-ATR] vowel (one with an grave accent) is nasalized, it will be written with a circumflex accent. Here are the nasalized vowels: *ã, ãã, ẽ, ẽẽ, ĩ, ĩĩ, õ, õõ, ũ, ũũ, â, ââ, ê, êê, ô, ôô*.

Romanization and Pronunciation:
- The simplest romanization system I could conceive makes use of diacritic marks. An alternate version of this romanization uses no diacritic marks, but some detail is lost (an *n* following a vowel marks a nasal vowel, and the distinction between [+ATR]

and [-ATR] vowels, which is important to the grammar, is lost). I'm going to describe the full system in detail below:

- ◉ *A, a*: Pronounced like the "a" in "sofa".

- ◉ *B, b*: Pronounced like the "b" in "bad".

- ◉ *D, d*: Pronounced like the "d" in Spanish "dead".

- ◉ *Dh, dh*: Pronounced like the "th" in "that" (*never* like the "th" in "thin").

- ◉ *E, e*: *Always* pronounced like the "a" in "gate"; *never* like the "e" in "get".

- ◉ *G, g*: Pronounced like the "g" in "goat" (never like the "g" in "genius").

- ◉ *Gw, gw*: Pronounced like the "gw" in "Gwendolyn".

- ◉ *H, h*: Pronounced like the "h" in "hop". This sound is *always* pronounced, even if it comes after another consonant, or at the end of a word. The only cases in which it is *not* pronounced is when it occurs in the digraphs *gh*, *kh*, *sh*, *th*, *dh*, *lh*, *zlh* and *zh*.

- ◉ *I, i*: Pronounced like the "i" in "machine".

- ◉ *K, k*: Pronounced like the "k" in "sky" (this sound features *no* aspiration. Aspiration is the puff of air that occurs in the "k" in "kite". Compare the "k" in "kite" and the "k" in "sky" [try holding your hand in front of your face when pronouncing both]. The Asshai "k" should always be pronounced like the "k" in "sky"; never like the "k" in "kite").

- ◉ *Kh, kh*: Pronounced like the "ch" in the German pronunciation of "Buch". In English, this sound is commonly used with onomatopoeic words associated with disgust, like "blech!" or "ich!" To pronounce it correctly, put your tongue in position to pronounce a "k", but release it slowly; allow the air to pass through the constricted space. The result should be a sound like white noise.

- ◉ *Kw, kw*: Pronounced like the "qu" in "queen".

◉ ***L, l***: Pronounced like the "l" in "love" (*never* like the so-called "swallowed" l in "filth"). In the case of *l* acting like a vowel, it should be pronounced just like the "ull" in "pull.

◉ ***Lh, lh***: This sound doesn't occur in English as a separate phoneme, but it's easy enough to learn. Consider the "l" in "clean". It's quite a bit breathier than the "l" in "lean", for example. Try slowing down your pronunciation of "clean"—see if you can hold the word right after you pronounce the "c" and before you get into "lean". It should sound very breathy and light. That's the *lh* sound. Try putting it at the beginning of a word and in between vowels.

◉ ***M, m***: Pronounced like the "m" in "matter".

◉ ***N, n***: Pronounced like the "n" in "never". In the case of *n* occurring between two vowels, it should be pronounced just like the "on" in "button".

◉ ***Ng, ng***: Pronounced like the "ng" in "sing". This sound *can* occur at the beginning of a word. It takes some practice, but it's doable. Try slowing down your pronunciation of the word "singing", and see if you can separate it into "si" and "nging".

◉ ***O, o***: Pronounced like the "o" in "bow"; *never* like the "o" in "port".

◉ ***P, p***: Pronounced like the "p" in "spike" (this sound features *no* aspiration. Aspiration is the puff of air that occurs in the "p" in "pike". Compare the "p" in "pike" and the "p" in "spike" [try holding your hand in front of your face when pronouncing both]. The Asshai "p" should always be pronounced like the "p" in "spike"; never like the "p" in "pike").

◉ ***R, r***: Pronounced like the "rr" in Spanish "perro". It's a nice trilled "r", so be sure to get the trill in there. In the case of *r* occurring between two consonants (or at the beginning of a word before another consonant), it should be pronounced like the "er" in "her", but trilled.

◉ ***S, s***: Pronounced like the "s" in "sad".

◉ ***Sh, sh***: Pronounced like the "sh" in "shack".

◉ ***T, t***: Pronounced like the "t" in "stake" (this sound features *no* aspiration. Aspiration is the puff of air that occurs in the "t" in "take". Compare the "t" in

"take" and the "t" in "stake" [try holding your hand in front of your face when pronouncing both]. The Asshai "t" should always be pronounced like the "t" in "stake"; never like the "t" in "take").

◉ **Th, th**: Pronounced like the "th" in "thin" (*never* like the "th" in "that").

◉ **W, w**: Pronounced like the "w" in "war".

◉ **Y, y**: Pronounced like the "y" in "yesterday" (<u>note</u>: Never occurs as a vowel).

◉ **Z, z**: Pronounced like the "z" n "zebra".

◉ **Zh, zh**: Pronounced like the "z" in "azure" or the "s" in "measure" (an analogy: *s* is to *z* as *sh* is to *zh*).

◉ **Zlh, zlh**: I won't lie: This is a rather difficult sound. This sound is to *lh* what *z* is to *s* and *zh* is to *sh*. It will only occur in between vowels in Asshai, and the romanization I've given is, I think, a good way to pronounce. Make as if you're going to pronounce *lh*, and then stick a *z* in before it. Try to maintain the buzz of the *z* while pronouncing *lh*.

◉ **′**: Pronounced like the catch in one's voices that occurs between "uh" and "oh" in the phrase "uh-oh". This sound will most often occur at the end of a word, and will sound like a dramatically foreshortened vowel. I've recorded some examples of words that end with this glottal catch; it should be fairly simple to imitate.

◉ **Long Vowels**: Doubled vowels are held for twice as long as ordinary vowels. Consider the "a" vowel in English "bat" and in English "bad". Notice how the "a" vowel in "bad" is considerably longer than the "a" vowel in "bat"? The same can be true of *any* vowel in Asshai. Such vowels are written with doubled characters (e.g. *a* is a short vowel and *aa* is a long vowel). It shouldn't require too much effort.

◉ **Nasal Vowels**: Undoubtedly, one has either encountered these in French, or heard someone imitating these vowels in French. A nasalized vowel is a vowel pronounced with a significant amount of air flowing through the nose. In English, we pronounce these quite naturally in words like "pan". Compare the vowel in "pan" to the vowel in "pat" (you might hold your forefinger under your nostrils to feel the warm air coming out). That distinction is made in many places in Asshai. The best way to produce it is to go over the top (same as in French).

Stress:

- Words that end in a consonant (including the glottal catch spelled with an apostrophe) are stressed on the last syllable. In case a word ends with a syllabic consonant, that syllable is ignored for the purposes of stress. If a word ends in a vowel, then one of the following things happens: (1) If there's a long vowel, it gets stressed; (2) if there are two long vowels, the second is stressed; (3) if there are no long vowels and an odd number of syllables, the antepenultimate syllable is stressed; (4) if there are no long vowels and an even number of syllables, the penultimate syllable is stressed.

Syntax:

- Asshai is a largely isolating language. In a sense, Asshai is SVO, but it features topic fronting and verb subject clitics, which can result in OVS word order, on occasion, or even OSV word order (even VSO or VOS word order). As an analytical language, word order is fixed, and rather than learning word paradigms, speakers learn sentence and phrase patterns. There are a fixed set of verb forms, but other than that, multiword expressions are used to achieve the various grammatical functions that many languages achieve morphologically. The language doesn't necessarily have adjectives, but the genitive construction can be used to create adjective-like expressions, as well as a number of expressions.

Words from the books:

Book Word	Notional	Proposed	Further Analysis
Melisandre	[ˌme.li.ˈsan.dre]	[ˌme.li.ˈsãdr]	*compound*
Nissa	[ˈnis.sa]	[ˈni.sa]	*intervocalic geminate*
Azor	[a.ˈzor]	[a.ˈzor]	*s > z*
Ahai	[a.ˈhai]	[a.ˈhəj]	*strict final glide*
R'hllor	[r.ˈɬor]	[r.ˈɬɔr]	*prefix + word (like Allah)*
Quaithe	[ˈkʷeiθ]	[ˈkʷeθ]	*tense mid vowel*
Asshai	[aʃ.ˈʃai]	[a.ˈʃəj]	*intervocalic geminate; final glide*

<u>Some Build Notes:</u> At some time before the modern state of the language, all geminates were simplified, resulting in a voicing distinction intervocalically. The changes that occurred to the language resulted in roots that were, for the most part, composed of a single trochaic foot. Thereafter, standard affixation must result in parseable feet. Substantives (nouns and verbs) have two stems: the "light" and "shadow" forms. The "shadow" form comprises an initial heavy syllable. For the most part, this heavy syllable

was lightened by the sound changes, but its effects can still be seen. The grammar of Asshai was inspired, in large part, by two of my languages (Njaama and Sheli), and also by American Sign Language and Japanese. In addition, Asshai is a vowel harmony language. It features an ATR vowel harmony system similar to a number of West African languages such as Igbo, whereby all vowels in a given word match in terms of their ATR feature. In this system, /i/ and /u/ are neutral, and the spread is blocked by glottal consonants (the same goes with the spreading of nasalization). Another sound change note: obstruents voice after voiced sounds, and an epenthetic stop is inserted between nasals and continuants (/nl/ > [ndl]; /nr/ > [ndr]; /ns/ [ndz]; /ŋx/ > [ŋgɣ]; /nθ/ > [ndð]; /nʃ/ > [ndʒ]); the nasal consonant later dropped off, producing nasalization in the previous vowel.

2. *Asshai Reference Grammar*

Pronouns

Declension

	Free	**Bound**	**Reflexive/Emphatic**
I (1sg)	*lèng*	*le/lè*	*lèr*
You (2sg)	*sung*	*su*	*sur*
S/he/it (3sg)	*òng*	*(n)o/(n)ò*	*òr*
We (1plI)	*shàng*	*sha/shà*	*shàr*
We (1plX)	*lêngânâ*	*lẽ/lê*	*lèèrà'*
You (2pl)	*sũngãnã*	*sũ*	*suura'*
They (3pl)	*ôngânâ*	*(n)õ/(n)ô*	*òòrà'*

Substantives

Light/Shadow

	Light Form	**Shadow Form**
Voiced Obstruents	*azor*	*asor*
	azo	*asona*
	azori	*asori*
Nasals	*omith*	*õmĩth*
	omi	*õmĩnã*
	omigwo	*õmĩgwõ*
Long/Nasal Vowels Monosyllabic Roots	*keemo'*	*keemona*
	fuu	*fuu*
	ẽvĩ'	*ẽvĩ'*
Voiceless Obstruents	*àpà*	*àpànà*
	apal	*apal*
	apazi	*apazi*

	Light Form	**Shadow Form**
Approximants/Glottals	*ahay*	*aahay*
	iri	*iiri'*
	oliga	*ooliga*

Verbs

Conjugation

Some examples (conjugated forms use 1ˢᵗ person bound pronouns)

Aspect	Realis		Irrealis	
	Unconjugated	Conjugated	Unconjugated	Conjugated
Imperfective	*kama'*	*kamadale*	*ãgãmã'*	*ãgãmãdãlẽ*
Perfective	*kãmãdã*	*kãmãdãlẽ*	*ãgãmãdã*	*ãgãmãdãlẽ*
Aorist/Command	*kama*	*kamale*	*ãgãmã*	*ãgãmãlẽ*

Aspect	Realis		Irrealis	
	Unconjugated	Conjugated	Unconjugated	Conjugated
Imperfective	*sòòdà'*	*sòòdàlè*	*âzôôdâ'*	*âzôôdâlê*
Perfective	*sòòdà'*	*sòòdàlè*	*âzôôdâ'*	*âzôôdâlê*
Aorist/Command	*sòò*	*sòòlè'*	*âzôô*	*âzôôlê'*

Aspect	Realis		Irrealis	
	Unconjugated	Conjugated	Unconjugated	Conjugated
Imperfective	*eghirdana*	*eghirdale*	*neghirdana*	*neghirdale*
Perfective	*ekhirdana*	*ekhirdale*	*nekhirdana*	*nekhirdale*
Aorist/Command	*eghir*	*eghirale*	*neghir*	*neghirale*

Number System (Base 8)

Cardinal~Ordinal

<u>1</u>: *shi~shii*   <u>6</u>: *khà~khàà*   <u>16</u>: *u òdhè~u òthèhi*

<u>2</u>: *u~uu*   <u>7</u>: *remu~rẽmũhi*   <u>17</u>: *u òdhèzhi~u òdhèzhii*

<u>3</u>: *tèzà~tèsàhi*   <u>8</u>: *òdhè~òthèhi*   <u>24</u>: *tèzà òdhè~tèzà òthèhi*

<u>4</u>: *azlha~alhahi*   <u>9</u>: *òdhèzhi~òdhèzhii*   <u>32</u>: *azlha òdhè~azlha òthèhi*

<u>5</u>: *kwilo~kwiilo'*   <u>10</u>: *òdhènu~òdhènuu*   <u>64</u>: *mòr~mòòrà'*

Modifying Clauses (Sample)

<u>Adjective-Like</u>

1. ***Padu lo shèm.***
   "Large house."
2. ***Padu raazi' li shèm.***
   "Large, spacious house."

<u>Genitive</u>

1. ***Nore lo shèm.***
   "King's house."
2. ***Maygi lo nore li shèm.***
   "Wise king's house."

<u>Relative Clause</u>

1. ***Theldale lo shèm.***
   "The house I saw."
2. ***Lèng theldana li shèm.***
   "The house I saw."