



FNEF

Tips & Tricks

ǰá'islakala Reading and Writing

from Haisla Language & Culture and
First Nations Education Foundation

The following are some tips on hearing the sounds and sound combinations of Haisla, so that you are able to speak, learn, and write-out the language more easily and accurately.

Velar Palatalizing

There is a class of sounds called “velar” which are written /k, g, x/. These sounds are pronounced slightly farther forward in the mouth than in English, which makes a following vowel sound like it has a /y/ before it: “kya, gya, xya”

Uvular Lowering

There is a class of sounds called “uvular” which are written /q, ḡ, ḳ̄/. These sounds are pronounced by touching the base of the tongue with the ‘uvula’, which is that dangling thing at the back of your mouth. These sounds have also an effect on vowels that come after them by ‘lowering’ them, or making them sound like they’re moving: for __i “qay, ḡay, ḳ̄ay”, for __u “qoh, ḡoh, ḳ̄oh”, for __a there’s no effect.

The palatalizing and lowering effects help us hear the difference between velar and uvular consonants.

k vs. q

If it sounds like “kya”, “kyu” or “kee”, you can tell it’s a regular /k/ because of the velar palatalization. If there’s no palatalization, then you know it’s /q/.

q vs. k

If there’s lowering ‘qay’, then it is for sure a /qi/, and not a regular /ki/. If there’s no lowering, then it’s /k/. If it sounds like ‘qoh’ then it’s /qu/ and not /ku/. If it sounds like ‘qa’, it’s /qa/ and not /ka/.

x vs. ḳ̄

If it sounds like “xya”, “xyu” or “xee”, you can tell it’s a regular /x/ because of the velar palatalization. If there’s no palatalization, then you know it’s /ḳ̄/.

ḳ̄ vs. x

If there’s lowering ‘ḳ̄ay’, then it is for sure an /ḳ̄i/ ‘and not a regular /xi/. If there’s no lowering, then it’s /x/. If it sound like ‘ḳ̄oh’ then it’s /ḳ̄u/ and not /xu/. If it sounds like ‘ḳ̄a’, it’s /ḳ̄a/ and not /xa/.

g vs. ḡ

If you hear palatalization "gya", it's a regular /g/, if there's no palatalization, it's a /ḡ/

ḡ vs. g

If there's lowering 'ḡay', then it is for sure an /ḡi/ 'and not a regular /gi/. If there's no lowering, then it's /g/. If it sounds like 'ḡoh' then it's /ḡu/ and not /gu/. If it sounds like 'ḡa', it's /ḡa/ and not /ga/.

Rounding

All of the back consonants have 'rounded' counterparts, which are written with a superscript w: /k^w, k^w, g^w, x^w, q^w, q^w, ḡ^w, ḡ^w/. These are different consonants in the minds of fluent speakers, even though they look similar in writing and are made at the same place in the mouth. The rounded consonants cover over the velar palatalization and the uvular lowering, so those tricks don't work with them.

Final Consonant Devoicing

There are two broad categories of consonants: voiced and voiceless. The voiced ones use your vocal folds and are consonants with more sound vibration. The voiceless ones are quieter, and do not have any voicing. For example: /p, t, k, q/ are voiceless, and /b, d, g, ḡ/ are voiced. At the end of words, all consonants are "devoiced", which means that they will sound like a -t, even if it really is a -d at the end.

Final Consonant Spirentizing

Voiceless consonants will also sound soft or hissing when they are at the end of a word. For example, náasnaq "mallard" at the end of a word sounds like a /x̃/. You can tell there isn't really a /x̃/ there, because when you add something to the end, it sounds like a /q/ again: náasnaqax̃i.

The Letters h and '

The letter h is found only at the beginning of words in Haisla. It has the same lowering effect that the uvular consonants do, as in /hímas/, which sounds like "hay'mas". The letter / ' / is called a glottal stop, which is just closing the air flow in the throat, like in the middle of 'uh oh' in English. The glottal stop also has the same lowering effect on vowels that come after it, just the uvular consonants and the /h/. Unlike the /h/, the / ' / can appear anywhere in a word.

Ejective vs. Plain Consonants

All of the voiceless consonants have an ejective pair. These pairs are /p p', t t', c c', ḡ ḡ', k k', k^w k^w, q q', q^w q^w/. You make an ejective by forcing more air out when you say that letter. The velar and uvular consonants still have the palatalization 'y' and the lowering 'oh' effect on vowels coming after them, whether they are ejective or not.