Ute Reference Grammar
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Studies in Anthropological Linguistics

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Editor

Gunter Senft
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen

Volume 3
Ute Reference Grammar
by T. Givón
To the memory of Sunshine Cloud Smith
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Preface

This is the first of a three-volume set describing the Ute language – grammar, texts, and dictionary. All three volumes are much revised and expanded renditions of the three-volume description (1979, 1980, 1985) produced during my work on the Ute Language Project for the Southern Ute Tribe. From the start, we knew we faced an emergency, with the language rapidly approaching extinction. This motivated the frenetic pace of our work in the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in descriptions that were somewhat flawed and incomplete. I have been struggling to undo the damage ever since.

Many people contributed to the Ute Language Project in various way and at different times. First and foremost are the charter members of the Ute Language Committee for the Southern Ute Tribe, 1976–1985: Lorraine Cloud Baker, Edna Russell Baker, Annie Bettini, Fritz Box, Frances Buck, Pearl Casias, Julius Cloud, Mollie Buck Cloud, Neil Buck Cloud, Ralph Nash Cloud, Bertha Burch Groves, Martha Burch Myore, Eva Taylor O’John, Georgia McKinley Pinnecoose, Sunshine Cloud Smith, Euterpe Taylor, LaVeta Vigil.

Many other tribal members contributed their knowledge of words, phrases and stories during the early years of the project: Renee Cloud Baca, Naomi Red Bajarano, Levy “Dusty” Baker, Eddie Box, Sr., Kenneth Burch, Ernestine Burch, Annabelle Eagle, Jack Frost, Lillie Frost, Stanley Frost, Essie Kent, Isobel Kent, Vida Baker Peabody, Harry Richards, Mellie Baker Santistevan, Darlene Frost Vigil, Daisie Watts, John Williams, Sr. Others helped me over the years as I worked to expand and refine my understanding of the language and the culture: Everett Burch, Bradley Hight, Alden Naranjo, Jr., Dorothy Frost Naranjo, Douglas Remington.

One person should perhaps be singled out for his role in initiating the Ute Language Project, in supporting me with advice and encouragement during the early years of the project, and in otherwise making my life on the Rez as rewarding, enjoyable and mind-blowing as it has been for the past thirty-eight years – the late Leonard Cloud Burch, long-time Chairman of the Southern Ute Tribal Council. Together with long-time tribal attorney, the late Frank “Sam” Maynes, and the Superintendent of the Ute Agency, the late Raymond DeKay, Leonard guided me through the thickets and booby-traps of life on the Rez, nudging me gently, forgivingly and by example towards a better understanding of what this enterprise was all about.

I am indebted to three friends for their patience and encouragement: Zarina Estrada Fernández, Pam Munro, and Marianne Mithun. Describing the language of other people, especially an endangered language of tenacious, patient survivors such
as the Utes, requires an equal measure of tenacity and patience, the latter of which I cannot claim to have matched. For better or worse, I fell in love with the country, the language and the people thirty-eight years ago, and have been in love ever since. I will remain ever in the debt of the Ute people for allowing me access, however frustratingly limited at times, to a beautiful country, a beautiful language, and the tantalizing vision of a beautiful, fast receding way of life.

T. Givón
White Cloud Ranch
Ignacio, Colorado
September, 2010
In the summer of 1975 the Southern Ute Tribal Council authorized the start of the Ute Language Program. Our language had been retreating slowly, our young had ceased to learn and use it. Unless something was done soon, we felt, the Ute language was in grave danger of disappearing from the face of the earth. No people can maintain their cultural identity without a language, the vehicle of their thoughts, dreams and aspirations. If we are to remain Ute, we must protect our language from dying out, we must help it regain its rightful place in our lives, and in the hearts and minds of our people, especially our young.

Our first task was to gain an accurate description of the language as it is, meaning an alphabet, a dictionary, a grammar book and a story collection. On such a description we could then base any further work of teaching and maintaining the language. This book represents the first tangible results of our Ute Language Program. It is the product of cooperation between our Ute Language Committee and our tribal linguist, and I would like to congratulate them all on their efforts, dedication and fine work.

This book is just the beginning, it is not a final product. We hope that it will stimulate discussion, debate, and the interest of our people in our Ute language. We hope that it will draw comments, corrections and suggestions, so that it may become a firm foundation upon which we can build further; so that the next edition of this book may be a more complete one.

We would like to share the work we have done here with our brothers and sisters of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the Northern Ute Tribe. We all speak the same language, we are the same people, and ultimately our language should be written as one language for the entire Ute nation; so that it may live in the hearts of our children and their children after them, just as it lived in the hearts of our fathers and their fathers before.

Leonard C. Burch, Chairman
Southern Ute Tribal Council
Ignacio, Colorado
September 1979
This is our new book of the Ute language. The way it is to be spoken rightly has never been written down before. Now our language can be looked at, written and read. We have stopped speaking Ute to our children. For this reason our language is in danger of dying out, it may go away from us.

We would very much like to have our language written down, so that the young ones will learn it, so that other Utes will see it and come to know it, so that some day they too may write it like this, so that the way the Ute language should be spoken will never be forgotten.

This one is only the first book we have put together, others will follow. Other Utes love the language too, so we hope they will find this book to their liking.

There are few speakers of our language left now, and some day they will not be walking the earth any more. This is why we must write it down, so that our language will not be lost. For this reason, we have written this book.

Ute Language Committee
Southern Ute Tribe
Ignacio, Colorado,
August 1979
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Ute, Numic and Uto-Aztecan

Ute belongs to the northern division of Uto-Aztecan, a language family that spans the distance from the Rocky Mountains to the Popocatepetl volcano south of Mexico city. Within Northern Uto-Aztecan, Ute belongs to the Numic sub-family, the northernmost branch. And within Numic, Ute is part of the cluster of closely related Southern Numic languages. The Numic sub-family is divided into three main branches:

- **Northern**: The Shoshone cluster
- **Central**: The Northern Paiute cluster
- **Southern**: Chemehueve, Kawaisu, Southern Paiute, Ute

Anthropologists suggest that the Numic people spread from south-eastern California in two waves. The northern and central branches began their spreading as far back as 2,500 years ago, first going north to the western fringes of the Great Basin (today’s eastern Oregon and western Nevada); then perhaps 1,000 years later spreading east across the Great Basin through Nevada, western Utah and southern Wyoming. One Shoshone group, Comanche, made it all the way to the Llano Estacado of west Texas.¹

The migration of the Southern branch from California is more recent, probably within the last 1,000 years. Two groups, Chemehueve and Kawaisu, are still in southern California. The Southern Paiute and Ute went up the Colorado river to the Grand Canyon region, from where some of the Southern Paiute proceeded north up the Kaibab Plateau of present-day Utah. Others went further up the Colorado and the San Juan rivers, from whence some So. Paiute reached as far as Blanding in present-day southeastern Utah. The Utes migrated the farthest, up the rivers and into the Colorado Rockies and the mountains of eastern Utah. Thus, while the Northern Paiute and Shoshone clusters are distinct languages, Ute, Southern Paiute, Chemehueve and

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Kawaisu can be considered closely-related dialects of the same language, with separation depths of 500-to-1,000 years.

At the time of early contact with the encroaching Spanish and Anglo settlers, beginning ca. 1600AD, about seven Ute bands roamed the mountains of western Colorado and eastern Utah. Their approximate ranges were:

i. Northern bands:
   - **Uintah**: The north-eastern corner of Utah, including the Uintah and Wasach ranges and the lakes of the Wasach front.
   - **Yampa (‘iya-paa)/White River**: The North-eastern corner of present-day Colorado around the drainage of the White and Yampa Rivers.

ii. Central bands:
   - **Grand (Pariyu-Núuchí)**: Around western-central Colorado’s Grand Mesa, Grand Valley and the Colorado river.
   - **Tavi’wachi/Uncompagre (‘aka-páa-gharuru)**: Western Colorado’s Uncompagre Plateau, the western slopes of the San Juan range and the drainage of the Uncompagre and Gunnison rivers and further east.

iii. Southern bands:
   - **Weeminuchi (Wúgama Núuchí)**: South-Western corner of present-day Colorado and south-eastern corner of present-day Utah.
   - **Moghwachí**: Southern drainage of the San Juan Range extending into No. New Mexico.
   - **Capote (Kapuuta)**: North-western New Mexico around Chama, Tierra Amarilla, Colorado’s San Luis Valley and the upper drainage of the Rio Grande’s north fork.

The dialect boundary that divides the Northern from the Central and Southern Ute bands involves primarily phonology (pronunciation), and to a lesser extent lexicon. Regular visits among the bands, cross-marriages, ceremonial exchange and war-time alliances kept dialect differences among the Ute bands to a minimum.

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2. From Jefferson et al. (1972). Given the hunting-and-gathering culture of the Utes, the home ranges of the bands were rough approximations. The band names given here were not necessarily their native names, but often designations by outsiders, mostly by Spanish explorers.
The two southern-most bands, Capote and Moghwachi, borrowed some agricultural practices from the Spanish in northern New Mexico sometime after 1,600AD, with lexical borrowing of names of domestic animals and crops, some of which spread later to the other bands. The early borrowing of horses from the Spanish was a transformative cultural event, greatly increasing the Utes’ mobility in hunting and warfare. Still, Ute culture on the whole remained a remarkably resilient hunting-and-gathering adaptation, and significant foreign cultural impact did not begin till the American expansion to the West after the Civil War.

The name *Ute*, designating both the people and their language, is not native, and its origin is unclear. It is first found in Spanish documents as *Yuta*. The Utes’ self-designation harks back to *níúčí* ‘person’, thus *níúchí-u* ‘the people’, with the language being referred to as either *níúčí* ‘of the people’ or *níu-ʼapaghapi* ‘the people’s speech’. Currently, the Utes occupy three separate federally-recognized reservations:

- Uintah-Ouray (No. Ute) in northeastern Utah, comprising the Uintah, Taviʼwachi/Uncompagre and White River/Yampa bands.
- Southern Ute in southwest Colorado, comprising the Capote and Moghwachi bands.
- Ute Mountain in southwest Colorado and southeast Utah, comprising the Weeminuchí band.
1.2 Earlier sources

One of the earliest sources where Ute language materials, albeit rather limited, can be found is the report of the 1776 Spanish expedition led by two Franciscan padres, Fr. Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Fr. Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, into Ute territory of both western Colorado and eastern Utah (Warner ed. 1976). Ca. 25–30 Ute vocabulary items are interspersed in the report, primarily person and place names. The informal Spanish transcription of the Ute sounds makes some of the items hard to decipher, but the phonological differences between the southern and northern dialects can already be discerned, in particular the homorganic consonant-nasal clusters characteristic of the northern dialect. On the whole, neither the two padres nor their lay companions were interested in the language or culture of the people they were purporting to proselytize.³

The first extensive ethnographic and linguistic description of Ute and many other Numic dialects from present-day Utah, Colorado and Nevada is found in the

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³ In this, their attitude contrasts sharply with that of a fellow Franciscan who undertook to describe Nahuatl, the southern-most outpost of Uto-Aztecan, two centuries earlier (Molina 1571).
voluminous manuscripts left by the great Western explorer John Wesley Powell. Designated presciently as Southern Numa (Southern Numic), extensive lexical, grammatical and ethnographic material from two northern dialects of Ute – Uintah and Yampa/White river – as well as closely-related Southern Paiute from the Kaibab and Kanab areas are found in Powell’s manuscripts. While the transcription and spelling used by Powell are less than ideal, the materials as he wrote them are easily accessible to someone who knows Ute. What is more, they reveal the keen sensibilities of a natural-born linguist.

Somewhat disappointing are the Ute materials left by Edward Sapir, based on 6 weeks of elicitation work with a single Uintah speaker. Dating from 1909, Sapir’s Uintah materials pre-date his discovery of the phonemic principle. His transcribed Uintah texts, published only in 1930–31, are thus over-burdened with predictable phonetic detail, as well as with great variation in the rendition of the same lexical and grammatical items. His transcriptions also lack inter-morphemic cuts and inter-lineal glosses. The overall result is that morphological information is often obscured or misrepresented in Sapir’s Uintah materials. Further, the traditional Uintah texts collected in 1909 predate the field availability of recording machines. As a result, clauses were elicited one by one with long interruptions for writing and preliminary analysis. The grammar of natural, fluent narrative is thus badly mis-represented in Sapir’s Uintah texts.

Lastly, very useful Ute language materials can be found in James Goss’s work on the Southern Ute reservation in the early 1960s (Goss 1961, 1962, 1972). These materials focus on lexicon and phonology, with the former being more useful. At the time of his Ute language work, Goss practiced then-fashionable ‘deep’ generative phonology.


5. Sapir’s Uintah texts from 1909 were published as part 2. of Sapir (1930–1931), which focused primarily on Southern Paiute. The latter materials are much more extensive and of higher quality, though the transcription still suffers from over-phoneticization and other drawbacks found in the Uintah materials. Sapir designated So. Paiute as “a Shoshone language”, a considerable retreat from John Wesley Powell’s apt designation as “Southern Numa” (Southern Numic). Around that time, Sapir also published a 4-page linguistic description of Ute (Sapir 1910). Paradoxically, the data collected by the dilettante adventurer John Wesley Powell are much more accessible to today’s linguist (let alone Ute speakers) than the data published by the great Edward Sapir.

6. Reference-marking devices (anaphoric zeros, pronouns, demonstratives, articles and full noun phrases), tense-aspect modal marking of the verbs, and inter-clausal connectives (adverbials, conjunctions) are extremely sensitive to referential and thematic continuity (see chs 6,7,8,17,18). Most of Sapir’s clauses take the fully-expanded form of the paragraph-initial or chain-initial clause.
positing ‘underlying’ lexical representations that did justice neither to the synchronic surface phonetics nor the rule-governed phonology of Ute. Following the precedent set by N. Chomsky and M. Halle, Goss’s Ute phonology is an attempt – probably unintended – to represent historically-older forms as the ‘underlying’ ones, deriving the current ‘surface’ forms by ordered rules that, to quite an extent, recapitulate the diachronic order of sound changes.7

1.3 What is grammar?

The bulk of the information about a language and how it is used in communication is distributed in two main repositories:

- lexicon (dictionary): the inventory of words and their meanings
- grammar: how words are combined into meaningful utterances

The lexicon is the mental repository of relatively stable, communally-shared concepts about the world. By ‘relatively stable’ we mean that the current meaning of ‘chair’, ‘woman’, ‘horse’, ‘mountain’, ‘needle’, ‘blue’, ‘eat’ or ‘desire’ is not likely to change from one minute (or hour, or day, or year) to the next. By ‘communally shared’ we mean that members of the same speech community assign the same meanings to the same words.

By ‘world’ we mean first the external world of concrete entities – objects, persons, geographic features, natural phenomena, flora, fauna and artefacts. But the lexicon is also a repository of concepts about states, events and actions in which entities may partake. The lexicon also contains concepts of the social-cultural world, such as kin and social relations, institutions, customs, rules and laws, politics, religion, art, music, etc. Lastly, the lexicon also contains concepts about the psychological world, such as wish, intent, desire, love, hate, knowledge, memory, belief, thinking, grieving, speaking, etc.8

The sound code of the lexicon and the grammar are both codes. That is, they are systems of conventional signs. The lexical code is more concrete, obvious and arbitrary, being made out of, most commonly, speech sounds. Thus the fact that English

7. See Chomsky and Halle (1968). Further Ute ethnographic materials may be found in Kroeber (1901), Mason (1910), Stewart (1942, 1948) and Jorgensen (1972).
8. The relative stability and the communal sharing of the word meanings are, of course, a matter of degree. Words do change their meaning over a time. And different sub-parts of a speech community – family, clan, tribe, village, city, county or state/nation – exhibit different degrees of shared meaning.
God is coded in Spanish as Dios, in Hebrew as Elohim, in Arabic as Allah and in Ute an Níaú-maroghoma-pugatu doesn’t impinge on the fact that those sound sequences represent roughly the same – or similar – concept.9

The grammatical code is much more complex and abstract, and in some sense is less arbitrary. At its most basic and concrete, grammar is fashioned out of the combination of four major coding devices:10

(1) **Primary grammar-coding devices:**
   a. **Morphology:** the small affixes attached to lexical words
   b. **Intonation:**
      • clause-level melodic contours
      • word-level stress, tone or melodic contours
   c. **Rhythmics:**
      • pace and length
      • pauses
   d. **Sequential order:** rules that govern the order of words and morphemes as they are combined into longer utterances

These concrete coding devices combine in coding clauses (‘sentences’). The clause is the basic unit of language-coded information processing and communication.

While it is relatively easy to perceive and understand the **semiotic relation** between lexical words and the concepts they code, the relation between grammar and what it codes is more complex and abstract. Roughly, grammar codes two major functional domains:

- **event/state information** about who did what to whom when where and how, a relatively concrete domain; and
- **discourse pragmatics**, a more complex and abstract domain pertaining to the communicative context in which event/state information is transacted in connected discourse.

Event/state information, like the lexicon, is about the external, social-cultural or psychological world. Discourse pragmatics, on the other hand, is about the **communicative processes** itself – about the sequencing of information in connected discourse, or the communicative interaction between the speaker and hearer.

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9. Cross-cultural sameness or similarity of concepts and word-meanings is again a matter of degree.
10. Grammar also includes various more-abstract elements, such as constraints and government-and-control rules.
The entire combinatorial system of language as a tool of communication is organized as three hierarchic levels:

(2) **Language as a hierarchic combinatorial system:**
   a. *words*, coding concepts;
   b. *clauses*, coding events or states where lexical words are combined;
   c. *multi-clausal discourse*, where clauses are combined into larger chunks of coherent communication such as clause-chains, paragraphs, episodes or whole texts.

The hierarchic, combinatorial relation between lexical words, event/state clauses and multi-clausal discourse, and the privileged role of grammar in coding multi-clausal coherence, may be illustrated with the following simple example. Consider first the set of lexical words in (3) below:

(3) **Lexical words:**

- eventually
- police
- conclude
- dancer
- drive
- insane
- director
- proposition
- lewdly
- shoot
- gun
- smuggle
- theater
- night
- before

We understand the meaning of these words regardless of the clauses in which they may be embedded.

With the addition of appropriate grammatical morphology, we can combine the lexical words in (3) into coherent simple clauses, as in (4) below (with the grammatical morphemes bold-faced):

(4) **Propositions (clauses):**

   a. Eventually *the* police concluded that [...]
   b. [**Someone**] drove *the* dancer insane.
   c. *The* director propositioned *the* dancer lewdly.
   d. *The* dancer shot *the* director with a gun.
   e. *The* dancer smuggled *the* gun into *the* theater *the* night before.

We understand the meaning of these isolated clauses regardless of the discourse context in which they are embedded – provided of course that we understand the meaning of their component words and the function of the grammatical morphemes.

With proper adjustment of the grammatical morphology and the application of other syntactic rules, we can now combine the five simple clauses in (4) into the coherent multi-clausal discourse in (5):
Multi-clausal discourse:

a. Eventually the police concluded that,
b. having been driven insane
c. by the director’s lewd propositioning,
d. the dancer shot him with a gun
e. which she had smuggled into the theater the night before.

Now, if we were to re-order the connected clauses in (5) without re-adjusting their grammatical structure, the resulting discourse, as in (6) below, would be incoherent:

(6) c. By the director’s lewd propositioning
b. having been driven insane
d. the dancer shot him with a gun
a. eventually the police concluded that
e. which she had smuggled into the theater the night before.

Some of the incoherence of (6) is of course due to the new order itself: Events have their own real-world coherent order. Normally one aims a gun and presses the trigger before one shoots the gun, and the victim falls dead only subsequently. But if we now re-adjust the grammatical form of the clauses in (6), the re-ordered sequence may yield a coherent – if different – discourse, as in (7) below:

(7) c. Because he propositioned her so lewdly
b. and thus drove her insane,
d. the dancer shot the director with a gun, which,
a. as the police eventually concluded,
e. she had smuggled into the theater the night before.

What this simple-minded example demonstrates is that it is the communicative coherence requirements of multi-clausal discourse, rather than the event semantics of isolated clauses, that motivate our specific packaging of the same event/state clauses into different grammatical forms.

1.4 What is a reference grammar?

1.4.1 Mental vs. descriptive grammar

What was said in the preceding section about lexicon and grammar pertains to these two core components of human communication as mental entities, i.e. systems of knowledge and processing embedded in the speaker-hearer’s mind. A reference grammar does not pretend to be a description of the speaker-hearer’s mental grammar. Rather, it more modestly aspires to describe the regularities found in the
speaker-hearer’s observed acts of communication. In such an endeavor, the linguist collaborates with the speakers in producing a systematic description of their speech behavior.

1.4.2 Descriptive vs. pedagogic grammar

A reference grammar is descriptive rather than pedagogical. It presents information about the grammar in a sequence and manner that, hopefully, make it easier to understand grammatical structures consciously and analytically. It is not a teaching grammar, nor a school textbook. It does, however, aspire to represent accurately all the information about the grammar that can subsequently be the basis for writing teaching materials. A descriptive grammar is thus a prerequisite to a pedagogical grammar.

1.4.3 Synchronic vs. diachronic grammar

Like the lexicon, grammar is always in the midst of change. While communally such change may be slow and gradual, it produces considerable – if sometime subtle – usage variation among speakers, as well as within the speech of the same speaker. Language change is a sub-conscious, spontaneous, ever-present natural phenomenon that happens on the fly during communication. A reference grammar, by necessity, overemphasizes the uniformity of grammatical usage within the speech community. But since change is always ongoing, today’s synchronic grammar bears the unmistakable footprints of the protracted diachronic changes that brought it – over years, decades, centuries and millennia – to its current state. While our Ute reference grammar is primarily a synchronic description, it takes a conscious account, whenever possible, of the diachrony of various grammatical sub-systems. It thus conforms to the proposition that synchronic states of grammar, irregular and baffling as they may seem, find their best and most coherent explanation in the sequence of diachronic changes that brought them into being.11

1.4.4 Literacy and spoken language

Language is fundamentally a spoken instrument of communication. In cultures that have a long tradition of literacy, there is a considerable difference – in pronunciation, lexical usage and grammar – between the spoken and written varieties. Most often, the spoken dialect(s) are more progressive and innovative, while the written dialects are

11. For the theoretical arguments that justify these innocuous assertions, see Givón (1971, 2009).
more conservative. Writing systems, in particular, are often historical, representing the way words used to be pronounced long ago.

In a traditional small-scale society whose language has not been committed to writing till recently, the descriptive linguist has it both easier and harder. Easier because s/he can represent in a written form the pronunciation and grammar of the language the way it is spoken now. Harder because the people may be literate and educated in a different language, and are thus accustomed to another writing system and literary tradition.

In writing this description of Ute grammar and its companions text collection and dictionary, I have strived to represent the spoken language of the tribal elders who contributed their time, knowledge and love of their language to this enterprise. In a traditional oral society, the language of older people, particularly story-tellers and orators, is the closest we have to a 'literary dialect'. But it is still a natural oral language, with all its unedited spontaneity, variability and beauty. While committing the language to writing may make it seem more streamlined and rule-bound, I hope its wild beauty still shines through.

1.5 The data

The work culminating in this reference grammar is the result of 35 years of study of the Southern dialect of Ute, primarily on the Southern Ute Reservation in and around Ignacio, Colorado. The initial work was carried out while I was the director of the Ute Language Program for the So. Ute Tribe from 1976 to 1985. The speakers who contributed the information were primarily tribal elders between the ages of 60 and 85. Their contributions involved direct elicitation sessions with relatively few speakers, recorded texts contributed by a much larger group, and commentaries by the entire group during meetings of the Ute Language Committee over nine years.

The information developed during the first 10 years of work in the Ute Language Program was published by the So. Ute Tribe in three successive volumes – a dictionary, a reference grammar and a text collection. Subsequently, I continued to study the language on my own, working with individual speakers and studying the collected texts. This volume, the first of a three-volume series, is a revised, corrected and expanded version of our original Ute Reference Grammar from 1980.

For necessary reasons of presentation, many of the illustrative examples cited throughout the book are based on clause-level elicitation, a communicative artifact. Such examples were, however, constructed by analogy with examples found

in natural text. And whenever possible, they were supplemented or superceded by examples from our Ute texts.

1.6 Intended audiences and uses

While being a description of the southern dialect of Ute, this book is applicable to all dialects, with obvious adjustments, primarily for the sound system, for the northern dialect. Cross-band differences, even within the same reservation, tend to be exaggerated, and represent natural cross-communal variation. Some of the variation is due to the recent narrowing of the communicative sphere and the shrinking of the speakers pool. On the Southern Ute reservation, no more than ca. 50 fluent speakers remain, most of them over 65 years old. The speaker pools in Ute Mountain and Northern Ute are larger but shrinking. If the language is to survive, minor usage differences must be ignored, perennial resentments must be put aside, and efforts by the three Ute tribes must be pooled.

This book is intended, at least potentially, for four disparate audiences. First, for Ute speakers who wish to think about their language more consciously and systematically. Second, for younger Ute people who wish to learn about the Ute language. Third, for language teachers and teaching-materials writers, as reference book and guide in the preparation of Ute teaching materials. And lastly, for linguists interested in learning about a beautiful language. It would be only natural that some of the intended audiences find themselves less well-served than others. All a linguist can do is keep trying. Implicitly, this book may also be used as a gentle introduction to grammar, and how to write grammatical descriptions.

1.7 Organization of the book

We open with a description of Ute phonology (sound system) and orthography (ch. 2). We then follow with a chapter on word classes and word structure (ch. 3), a prerequisite to both the dictionary and grammar. The next cluster of chapters deal with the structure of simple clauses, beginning with the description of predicate types, verb classes, participant roles and grammatical relations (ch. 4). A diachronic chapter follows, reconstructing the history of the Ute case-marking system (ch. 5). The next three chapters describe the core grammar of simple clauses, noun phrases and verb phrases: the tense-aspect-modality and negation system (ch. 6), the grammar of referential coherence (ch. 7), and the grammar of larger noun phrases (ch. 8).

Several subsequent chapters deal with the structure of complex clauses. Chapters 9, 12, 13, and 17 deal with various types of subordinate clauses. Chapter 10 deals
with de-transitive voice, and ch. 11 with the diachrony of passive clauses. Chapter 14 describes the grammar of non-declarative speech-acts (questions, commands).

A description of possession clauses (ch. 15) and comparative clauses (ch. 16) follows. Chapter 18 furnishes an overview of clause chaining in connected discourse, already introduced in various earlier chapters (6,7,8,12,17). Chapter 19 deals with lexical derivation, a process relevant to both the grammar and the dictionary. And the short ch. 20 lists some of the common interjections and set expressions.

1.8 Abbreviations of grammatical terms

These abbreviations appear primarily in upper case (capitals) in the inter-lineal glosses of Ute examples, or in phrase-structure tree diagrams. The meaning and use of the term are amply explained and illustrated in the relevant chapters.

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>ANT</td>
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<td>genitive, possessor (case)</td>
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<td>HAB</td>
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<td>HORT</td>
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<td>immediate (aspect)</td>
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<td>INAN</td>
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<td>INCEP</td>
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<td>inclusive</td>
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<td>INVIS</td>
<td>invisible</td>
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<td>IRR</td>
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<td>locative (role)</td>
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<td>NEG</td>
<td>negative (mode)</td>
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<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominal, nominalizer (suffix)</td>
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<td>NP</td>
<td>noun phrase</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>object (case)</td>
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<td>OWN</td>
<td>possessive-reflexive</td>
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<td>PAR</td>
<td>participle (aspect)</td>
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<td>PART</td>
<td>partitive</td>
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<td>PASS</td>
<td>passive (voice)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAT</td>
<td>patient (role)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERF</td>
<td>perfect, anterior (aspect)</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>plural (number)</td>
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<td>POSS</td>
<td>possession</td>
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<td>P</td>
<td>post-position</td>
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<td>PP</td>
<td>post-positional phrase</td>
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<td>PRED</td>
<td>predicate (case)</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>question (speech-act)</td>
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<td>QU</td>
<td>quantity (question)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RECIP</td>
<td>reciprocal (voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RED</td>
<td>reduplicated, repetitive (aspect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFL</td>
<td>reflexive (voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL</td>
<td>relative marker, relative clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REM</td>
<td>remote (aspect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>singular (number)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 2

Sound system and orthography

2.1 Preliminaries

This chapter describes the sound system and orthography of Ute. It is not intended as a complete phonology, which should include at the very least:

- the inventory of all speech sounds used in the language;
- the phonological processes (rules) that apply to the sounds in all phonetic and morphemic environments.

Of these two, our aim here is for a reasonably complete – if not fully technical – phonetic description of the speech sounds (phonemes) of Ute and their articulation, together with the most common predictable variants (allophones) of those sounds.\(^1\) Of necessity, some phonological processes will also be noted. However, a truly coherent description of the phonology of the language above and beyond the surface phonetic facts should probably be a historical one.\(^2\) This is because the current sound system of Ute, like those of other languages, reflects past – and still ongoing – phonological changes that have followed each other over the centuries. A full historical phonology of the language is, however, outside the scope of this book.

This chapter also describes and explains the practical orthography (alphabet) we have adopted. Where this orthography diverges from the most common practices of academic linguistics, such deviations were undertaken in the interest of simplifying keyboard use and dispensing with excessive diacritic marks above and below the letters.\(^3\) In this connection, one may as well note that members of the three Ute tribes are

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1. A fuller, more technical phonetic description of Ute, including acoustic phonetics, may be found in Oberly (2008).
2. This observation often goes unacknowledged. Thus, for example, Chomsky and Halle’s (1968) *Sound Pattern of English* was, implicitly but obviously, a recapitulation of the historical phonology of English, recast as ‘synchronic’ ordered rules.
3. For earlier and less-clement versions of this orthography, see Givón (1979, 1980, ed. 1985).
all literate in English, and that a measure of orthographic carryover from English to Ute is both unavoidable and desirable.

2.2 Vowels

2.2.1 Vowels and their pronunciation

Vowel sounds are typically open and resonant, with no narrow obstruction of the airstream at the point of articulation. They are produced, typically, with the vocal cords vibrating, although Ute also has silent (de-voiced, whispered) vowels in some contexts. Basic Ute vowels can be characterized in terms of three articulatory features:

- Point of articulation;
- tongue height;
- lip rounding.

Table 2.1 below presents the basic vowels of Ute, with phonetically-predictable variants (allophones) given in square brackets. For vowels, the frontal point of articulation is, roughly, at the palatal level; the central point of articulation is at the palatal-velar level; and the back point of articulation is at the velar level. Back vowels are typically rounded, unless otherwise indicated. Front and central vowels are typically un-rounded, unless otherwise indicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>point of articulation</th>
<th>front</th>
<th>front-rounded</th>
<th>central</th>
<th>back-unrounded</th>
<th>back</th>
<th>tongue height</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i/ (high front vowel)</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>[i]</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>ο</td>
<td></td>
<td>[o]</td>
<td></td>
<td>mid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/æ/</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the space below, Ute vowels – including their predictable variants (allophones) – are described in order, and examples of Ute words that include the various vowel sounds are given. Whenever possible, pronunciation hints from English, Spanish or other languages may be given.

/i/ (high front vowel)

This vowel is pronounced roughly like the English vowel is ‘see’, ‘please’ or ‘Louise’. However, it can be either long or short (see further below). It may be found in Ute words such as:
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(1) sí-gyarű ‘grey’ (inan.)
    kani-gyatű ‘home owner’
    mii-puchĩ ‘a small one’
    ‘uni-hi ‘doing/living’
    piischi-u ‘children’

/u/ (high back rounded vowel)

This vowel is pronounced roughly like the English vowel in ‘fool’ or ‘shoot’, and can be either long or short. It may be found in Ute words such as:

(2) túu-kwarů ‘black’ (inan.)
    kamuchĩ ‘hare’
    núuchi-u ‘(Ute/Indian) people’
    kůcu-puku ‘cow’

/u/ (high back unrounded vowel)

This vowel does not exist in English, but is the most common vowel in Ute, where it can be either long or short. In may be found in Ute words such as:

(3) túu-‘ay ‘it is good’
    ‘uh ‘yes’
    karů-‘napů ‘chair’
    tůpyuchĩ ‘rock’
    káa-pûga ‘(s/he) sang’
    karûki ‘(s/he) is getting up’

[i] (high central vowel)

This vowel is a predictable variant (allophone) of the high-back-unrounded vowel [u], and is not indicated in our orthography. It is pronounced as in the unstressed English vowel in words such as ‘parrot’, ‘pellet’, ‘pesticide’, ‘gamut’, or ‘bazaar’. It is typically, but not consistently, found when the basic vowel /u/ is unstressed and follows a frontal or palatal consonant, as in:

(4) ‘átu-maykh- ‘saying well’
    sá-gha-rů-mu ‘white’ (an., sg.)
    ‘umů-su-ga ‘and (as for) you’
    tůi-yů ‘deer’ (obj. form)

/a/ (low central vowel)

This vowel is pronounced roughly like the English vowel in ‘father’, ‘car’, ‘John’ or ‘top’, and can be either long or short. It may be found in Ute words such as:

(5) sá-gharu ‘white’ (inan.)
    ‘aka-gharu ‘red’ (inan.)
    mamachĩ ‘woman’
    máamchi-u ‘women’ (more than two)
    táa-ta’wachi-u ‘men’ (more than two)
[e] (mid front vowel)  
[æ] (low front vowel)  

These two vowels are two versions of a predictable variant of the vowel /a/, and neither is marked in our orthography. Younger speakers often use the variant [e], as in the English words ‘bait’ or ‘late’ or ‘get’. Older speakers most commonly use the variant [æ], as in the English words ‘cat’, ‘nap, or ‘man’. The phonetic environment that most commonly conditions this variant of /a/ is proximity of the glide /y/ or the front vowels /i/ or /ø/.  

(6) phonetic variant underlying phonemic version  
  kani-gyætu ‘home owner’ /kani-gya-tu/  
  sinaævi ‘wolf’ /sinaa-vi/  
  ‘ini-kyæ-tu ‘made’ /’ini-kya-tu/  
  ‘æ-qaræ ‘yellow’ (inan.) /’a-qa-ru/  
  ‘ura-’æy ‘is’ /’ura-’ay/  

/ø/ (front mid rounded vowel)  

This vowel was probably, historically, a predicted variant of [o], but that situation has been reversed, so that /ø/ is now the more common (unmarked) vowel and [o] its predictable variant (‘allophone’) in a restricted set of environments. This vowel is not found in English, but can be found in French words such as feuille (‘leaf’) or German words such as Köln (Cologne). It may be seen in Ute words such as:  

(7) pe’ø-kwa-tu ‘book’  
  ‘ø-a-qa-ru ‘yellow’ (inan.)  
  ‘ø-vi ‘bone’  
  moche-pu ‘facial hair’, ‘moustache’  

[o] (back mid vowel)  

This vowel is the predictable, less-frequent (marked) variant of /ø/. It is pronounced roughly as in the English words ‘door’, ‘floor’, ‘four’ or ‘more’, but can be either long or short. It appears only before or after the back consonant sounds [gh], [q] or [qh], as in the Ute words:  

---  

4. The distribution statement of [q]/[qh]/[gh] vis-a-vis [o] is somewhat circular, since one of the two conditioning environments of [qh] and [gh], both predictable variants of /k/, is the phonetic environments [o]- or –[o]. While this may be a problem for theoretical phonology, it will not concern us here.
(8) toghoy-aq ʰ ‘it is good’, ‘thanks’
togho-a-vj ʰ ‘rattle-snake’
qhoq ʰ ‘bull-snake’
‘agh-o-chi ʰ ‘dish’
‘aqho-tu ʰ ‘thick’ (inan.)

Since the two variants [o] and /ə/ are so strikingly different to both the ear and the palate of English speakers, we have elected to mark both in our Ute orthography.

2.2.2 Short vs. long vowels

Ute vowels can be either short (single vowel) or long (double vowel), and the difference is significant for meaning and must be marked in the writing system. The difference between long and short vowels is independent of whether the vowels are stressed or not. In some cases, one gets minimal pairs marked solely by vowel length. In others, just a phonetic contrast. Thus consider:

(9) short vowel | long vowel
---|---
whca-y | whcāa-y ʰ ‘swirling’
māy-ka | māay-ka ʰ ‘found’, ‘saw’
sā-gha-r̥ | sāa-gha-r̥ ʰ ‘raw’
piwa-n | piśchi-u ʰ ‘boys’
tūka-y | tū-u-a-t̥ ʰ ‘good’
po’m-kwa-tu | ‘bone’
‘uru | ‘úu-pa ʰ ‘that-a-way’ (invis.)

2.2.3 Stressed vs. unstressed vowels

Ute vowels are either stressed or unstressed, and one vowel in each lexical word must be stressed. The obligatory word-stress can appear in only two possible positions in the word:⁵

- second vowel of the word (most common pattern; unmarked)
- first vowel of the word (less common pattern; marked)

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⁵ This description applies to simple words. The situation of compound words, made out of two or more lexical stems, is a bit more complex. The primary word-stress is defined on first lexical stem in the compound, but the second (or third) may be also carry one word-level stress, albeit somewhat reduced. This situation is reminiscent of the stress-reduction rules of English compounds. In only one exceptional word – muraká-chi ʰ ‘white person’ – is the stress placed on the third syllable. This may be due to early borrowing from Spanish (americano). Some speakers have regularized the stress on this word to the more common second-vowel position – murúka-chi.
Examples of both patterns are:

(10) **second-vowel stress** | **first-vowel stress**
---|---
'tá-ų-ų-n' 'my upper arm' | 'á-ų-ų-n' 'now I…'
'tę-ų-ų-n' 'my hind quarter' | 'té-ų-ų-n' 'my thigh/lap'
págu | págu 'trout'
suíwa | 'straight out'
pùka | 'persistently'
máam-chi-ũ | máam-chi-u 'women'
sí-gwa-chi | 'hawk'
pùku | 'horse'
'bó-ví' | 'bone'
qhoq | 'bull-snake'

toghóy 'straight', 'good' | qhoq 'bull-snake'

In some of the minimal pairs above, the two words are clearly semantically related. In some cases, minimal pairs marked by stress are the result of a morphological process – first-syllable reduplication – that has subsequently undergone simplification. Thus consider:

(11) **simple form**: pùníkya '(s/he) sees'
**old reduplicated form**: pù-pùníkya '(s/he) sees all over the place'
**new reduplicated form**: pùníkya '(s/he) sees all over the place'

The stress alternation in (10), above, between ‘woman’ (second-vowel stress) and ‘women’ (first vowel stress) is likewise due to plural formation by first-syllable reduplication.

Since the second-vowel stress pattern is, by a wide margin, the most common one in the language, and since there are only two possible patterns, our Ute orthography marks only the more exceptional (marked) pattern, that of first-vowel stress, leaving the more common second-vowel stress unmarked.6

### 2.2.4 Silent vowels

In some environments, either phonological or grammatical, Ute vowels may be de-voiced, silenced or whispered. The origin of this feature was probably purely phonetic, and the most common environments are still those of unstressed or de-stressed vowels at the

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6. This follows, in the main, the convention used in Spanish, where the stress is left unmarked when it falls on the second-from-last vowel of the word, and is marked only when it falls elsewhere, the much less frequent case(s). Spanish word-stress placement is, up to a point, a mirror image of the Ute pattern.
word-final or, less commonly, word-initial position. This is most conspicuous with nouns, as in:

(12) **voiced vowel**                      **silent vowel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptional word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Underlying pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pukú-n</td>
<td>'my horse'</td>
<td>púku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaní-vaa-tú</td>
<td>'at the house'</td>
<td>kání</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pachá-n</td>
<td>'my shoe'</td>
<td>pácha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mamá-chí-u</td>
<td>'(two) women'</td>
<td>mama-chí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuká-ñapu-vwa-n</td>
<td>'on the table'</td>
<td>tuka-ñapu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tumá-pí</td>
<td>'food' (obj.)</td>
<td>tumá-pí</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Older speakers still whisper such silent vowels, so that one can, when listening carefully, tell which vowel is being whispered. It is clear that one could not dispense with writing the underlying vowel when it is silent, since it is still lurking there, and may come back to life.

Another phonetic environment where vowels can become de-voiced is in unstressed syllables beginning with a voiceless consonant (k,p,t,s,ch), or with a nasal (n,m) or a glide (w). In the case of nasals and glides, the silent vowel most commonly appears as a whispered [h]. Thus consider:

(13) **nuka-y**        'dancing'     **mama-kwa-nhka-pu** 'Beardance'
| pagha-ñí           | 'walking about' | pagha-ñh-kyá            'walked about' |
| puníkya             | 'seeing'        | pu-púnh-kyá             'seeing here and there' |
| wú-whchaay          | 'swirl on and on' | whcaay                  'swirl' |
| nukwi               | 'flowing', 'running' | pää-nhkwi-tú           'river' |

In many cases, no variant is available to help us recover the identity of the underlying whispered vowel. In such cases, we use the letter [h] to mark the whispered vowel in our orthography.

The voiced vs. silent vowel contrast is used massively and systematically in one important grammatical context – to mark the distinction between the subject (also predicate and citation form) and non-subject (object, indirect object, possessive) forms of the noun and its modifiers. The subject/predicate form for most nouns has a

---

7. Ute vowels nowadays are most commonly either stressed, unstressed or silent. There is probably a good argument that the language used to have three degrees of stress on vowels, much like English: primary stress, secondary stress and un-stressed. The latter became the reduced vowel (schwa) in English. In Ute, it became de-voiced. The situation is more complex in compound words.
silent final vowel, the non-subject form the fully voiced vowel. With nouns that have no inherent suffix, the last vowel of the stem shows the variation. Thus consider:

(14) a. **Subject:**
    'iča káni tůw'atů 'this house is good'
    this/subj house/subj good/pred

b. **Predicate:**
    'iča-ara káni 'ura-ľay 'this is a house'
    this/subj-be house/pred be-imm

c. **Object:**
    'ičáy kaní 'ástiľ '(I) want this house'
    this/obj house/obj want

d. **Indirect object:**
    káni-naagh-tukh 'uru ýŋga-půga '(s/he) entered into the house'
    house/obj-in-to the/obj enter-rem

e. **Possessed:**
    káni ýŋruwa-pů 'the house's door'
    house/gen door-suf/subj

Most Ute nouns come with a suffix, and it is the word-final suffix vowel that displays the voicing variation:

(15) a. **Subject:**
    'áapa-chi 'u 'avatu-mů 'that boy is big'
    land-suf/subj the/subj big-an

b. **Predicate:**
    'ínľ-ara 'áapa-chi 'ura-ľay 'this (one) is a boy'
    this/subj-be boy-pred be-imm

c. **Object:**
    'áapa-chi 'uway půnikya-půga '(s/he) saw the boy'
    land-suf/obj the/obj see-rem

d. **Indirect object:**
    'áapa-chi-wa wůska-půga '(s/he) worked with the boy'
    land-suf/obj-with work-rem

e. **Possessed:**
    'áapa-chi kaní 'the boy's house'
    boy-suf/gen house/subj

Since the subject noun in Ute is often left unexpressed, and since the optional subject and object suffix pronouns on the verb are identical, the final vowel voicing distinction plays a potentially important role in disambiguating clauses. Thus compare:
(16)  a. **Subject**: mama-chǐ punikya-pugay-u
    woman/subj see-rem-3s/obj
    ‘the woman saw him/her’

    b. **Object**: mama-chǐ punikya-pugay-u
       woman/obj see-rem-3s/subj
       ‘s/he saw the woman’

In our Ute orthography, silent vowels are underlined.

2.3 **Consonants and their pronunciation**

Consonants are typically more closed and less-sonorous articulations, as compared to vowels. In Ute, they can be defined by three main articulatory features:

- **Point of articulation**: the stationary point along the palate, upper teeth or upper lip at which the moving part – either the tongue or the lower teeth or lip, makes a full or partial closure of the air stream;
- **Voicing**: whether the glottis – voice box – does vibrate (voiced) or does not vibrate (voiceless) during the articulation of the consonant;
- **Other manners of articulation**:
  - **Degree of closure**: whether the closure at the point of articulation is complete (stop), or partial (fricative), or both in order (affricate).
  - **Nasalization**: Whether the air stream goes out only through the oral cavity, (oral consonant), or also simultaneously through the nasal cavity (nasal consonant), i.e. with the epiglottis held open.
  - **Gliding**: Whether the tongue is moving toward or away from the point of articulation during the articulation (glide).

Both nasal and glide consonants in Ute are voiced by default.

Table 2.2. below lists all Ute consonants according to their articulatory features. Consonants that are predictable variants (allophones) are given in square brackets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>position of articulation</th>
<th>labial</th>
<th>dental</th>
<th>palatal</th>
<th>velar</th>
<th>uvular</th>
<th>glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voiceless stop</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>[q]</td>
<td>'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiceless fric.</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>[kh]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[qh]</td>
<td>[h]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced fric.</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
<td>[gh]</td>
<td></td>
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