

Names: Mapudungun, Mapuchedungun, Chedungun (from *mapu* ‘land’, *dungun* ‘speak, speech’ and *che* ‘person, people’).

Status: Mapudungun (M.) is a South American isolate with approximately 200,000 speakers. It is an endangered language, since intergenerational transmission is declining. Although officially unrecognised in Chile and Argentina, since the 2000s, M. has been taught in schools, universities, and especially in community-based organisations.

Grammar: A polysynthetic head-marking language with noun incorporation. Free word order. Words are formed by agglutination of lexical roots and suffixes.

Phonemic inventory: Mapudungun (M.) has six **vowels**: three high < *i*, *ü*, *u* >, two mid < *e*, *o* >, and one low < *a* >. Vowel *ü* represents a close central unrounded vowel. **Consonants** have six places of articulation: labial, dental, alveolar, palatal, retroflex, and velar. Stops and affricates occupy the six places < *p*, *t*, *t*, *tr*, *ch*, *k* > as do fricatives < *f*, *d*, *s*, *sh*, *r*, *g* >; nasals do not include a retroflex segment < *m*, *n*, *n*, *ñ*, *ng* >, laterals are dental, alveolar and palatal < *l*, *l*, *ll* > and there are two glides: labiovelar and palatal < *w*, *y* >.

Notes: fricatives *r* and *g* can also be realised as glides. Although, there is no voicing contrast in the language, *f* and *d* are often written as *v* and *z* to account for their voiced and unvoiced realisations in some dialects, respectively.

The *syllable* has the following maximum structure (C₁)V(C₂), in which C₁ indicates any consonant in initial position; V any vowel; and C₂ any consonant, except stops and affricates in final position.

Nouns are not inflected by gender or number: *narki* ‘cat’, *che* ‘people’, *mapuche* ‘Mapuche person’. *Pu* pluralises animate nouns: *pu narki* ‘cats’. Lexically gendered nouns can express male or female: *kushe narki* ‘old female cat’.

Derivational suffixes: *-fe* means ‘agent’: *küdawfe* ‘worker’; *-we* means ‘place ~ instrument’: *küdawwe* ‘workplace’, from *küdaw* ‘work’; *-ntu* ‘group of’: *kurantu* ‘group of rocks’, from *kura* ‘rock’.

Adjectives appear before the noun: *kurü narki* ‘black cat’. A partitive suffix *-ke* entails plurality: *kusheke che* ‘old women’.

Adverbs can be formed with *-kechi*: *ñochi* ‘slow’ » *ñochikechi* ‘slowly’: *Matukechi kimi*. ‘She learnt quickly’, from *matu* ‘quick’.

Demonstratives have three degrees: *tüfa* ‘this one’, *tüfey* ‘that one’, *tüye* ‘that one over there’. *-chi* adjectivises demonstratives: *tüfachi wentru* ‘this man’; *tüfeychi kimün* ‘that knowledge’. *Femün* ‘to do like that’ is a demonstrative verb (a.k.a. proverb): *femlan* ‘I did not do that’.

Personal and Possessive pronouns

	<i>iñche</i>	<i>eymi</i>	<i>fey</i>
<i>singular</i>	‘I’	‘you’	‘she/he’
	<i>iñchiw</i>	<i>eymu</i>	<i>feyengu</i>
<i>dual</i>	‘we’	‘you’	‘they’
	<i>iñchiñ</i>	<i>eymün</i>	<i>feyengün</i>
<i>plural</i>	‘we’	‘you’	‘they’
	<i>ñi x</i>	<i>mi x</i>	<i>ñi x</i>
<i>singular</i>	‘my <i>x</i> ’	‘your <i>x</i> ’	‘his/her <i>x</i> ’
	<i>yu x</i>	<i>mu x</i>	<i>ñi x engu</i>
<i>dual</i>	‘our <i>x</i> ’	‘your <i>x</i> ’	‘their <i>x</i> ’
	<i>iñ x</i>	<i>mün x</i>	<i>ñi x engün</i>
<i>plural</i>	‘our <i>x</i> ’	‘your <i>x</i> ’	‘their <i>x</i> ’

Personal pronouns can also express a meaning like “with someone”: *eymi iñchiw* ‘you and I’, *Rayen emu eymu* ‘Rayen and you’, etc.

Interrogatives: *chem* ‘what’, *chew* ‘where’, *chuchi* ‘which one’, *chumül* ‘when’, *iney* ‘who’, *tunten / chumten* ‘how many’, *chum / chumngechi*, ‘how’ etc. *Chum* can be verbalised: *Chumimi am?* ‘What happened to you?’ *Chumleymi?* ‘How are you?’

Verbs

Verbs are inflected with personal endings in singular (sg), dual (dl) and plural (pl) number, that also express mood and number.

	indicative	conditional	imperative
1 sg	-n	-li	-chi
2 sg	-ymi	-lmi	-nge
3 sg	-y	-le	-pe
1 dl	-yu	-liyu	-yu
2 dl	-ymu	-lmü	-mu
3 dl	-yngu	-le engu	-pe engu
1 pl	-iñ	-liyiñ	-iñ
2 pl	-ymün	-lmün	-mün
3 pl	-y engün	-le engün	-pe engün

Without any other suffix, verbs tend to have a perfective meaning: *tuwimi x* ‘you come from *x*’, *amuyimi x* ‘you went / have gone to *x*’, *nieymi x* ‘you have *x*’, etc.

Bipersonal endings A series of more complex endings can express transitive relations between two arguments: *pen* ‘I saw’; *peeyu* ‘I saw you’; *peen* ‘you saw me’; *peenew* ‘she saw me’, *peeymew* ‘she saw you’, etc. Third person can be left unmarked *x pin* ‘I said *x*’, or marked with *-fi*: *x pifiñ* ‘I told her *x*’, which can alter the basic meaning of some verbs.

	1 sg P	2 sg P	3 sg P
1 sg A	—	-eyu	-fiñ
2 sg A	-en	—	-fimi
3 sg A	-enew	-eymew	-fi

A = Agent, P = Patient

Non-personal endings Non-personal endings are nominalisers that form subordinate clauses. They can occur with possessive pronouns, which indicate the subject of the subordinate verb (except for *-lu*, in which case a personal pronoun is required)

-n is a type of infinitive: *ñi tuwün* ‘the place I come from’, *mi nienuñ ruka* ‘that you don’t have a house’.

-el is another infinitive for transitive verbs that focuses on the patient: *mi nieel* ‘that you have, the one you had’. With the future suffix, *-ael* is realised as *-al*

-fiel / -etew are infinitives for transitive verbs that focus on a known patient: *mi niefiel* ‘what you have’, *ñi nieetew* ‘that has them’ *-mum* indicates the place or location of an event: *chew ñi mülemum* ‘where I live’ *-am* indicates purpose: *chillkatuam* ‘to study’

-lu forms a relative clause that can modify a noun: *feychi che күdawkelu* ‘that person that works’. It can also form an adverbial adjunct: *Amulu iñche...* ‘when I went...’

Together with adverbs *petu* ‘still’, *wüla* ‘later’, they can form more fine-grained temporal expressions: *petu ñi күdawnon* ‘before I work’, *amulu wüla*, ‘after going’ etc.

Verbal suffixes A large set of verbal suffixes provide a wide array of grammatical meanings. They are attached between the root and the personal and non-personal endings:

-fu indicates that the event did not succeed as expected: *Amufuy* ‘She went (but something happened)’

-a, future: *Amuan* ‘I will go’. After *a*, the future form is realised as *-ya*: *Amulayan* ‘I will not go’

Negation is expressed by three allomorphs conditioned by mood: *-la* ‘indicative negative’, *-nu--no* ‘conditional and non-personal endings’, and *-kil* ‘imperative negative’: *amulayan* ‘I will not go’, *tuwlaymi x mew* ‘you don’t come from *x*’, *nienolmi x* ‘if you don’t have *x*’, *amukilpe* ‘don’t let him go’.

-lle confirms that an event is certain: *amulelley!* ‘she is going indeed’.

-rke indicates that the event is a surprise for the speaker: *akurkeymi!* ‘you arrived here!’

-wye situates an event prior to a subsequent one, equivalent to ‘already’: *akuwyyey ti antü*. ‘The sun has already come out’.

-pe indicates the action is proximate in time or space: *akupey* ‘she has just arrived.’ Combined with negation, it expresses doubt: *Akupelay?* ‘Has she perhaps arrived?’.

-ke indicates habitual action: *küdawken* ‘I work’, *chillkatuken* ‘I (usually) study’.

-tu indicates repetition of an event: *x pituy* ‘she said *x* again’; or change/restoration of a state: *nietun* ‘I got now’.

-ka indicates continuous or repeated action or state: *amukaiñ* ‘we went on, we continued going’.

-pa indicates that the event takes place near the speaker: *x pipapeyu*. ‘I came here to tell you *x*’.

-pu indicates that the action takes place away from the speaker: *x pipuyi* ‘You (sg) said *x* there’.

-me indicates movement away from the speaker: *küdawmey*. ‘He went to work there’.

-fem indicates immediate action: *tripafemi* ‘he got out immediately’.

-rume indicates that the action is sudden: *triparumey* ‘suddenly he got out’.

-we, with negation, refers to an event that has ceased: *niewelay x* ‘he no longer has *x*’.

-kantu indicates an action that is done playfully / for fun: *lefkantukey* ‘he usually jogs (= runs for recreation)’.

-falüw indicates a simulated action: *küdawfalüwi* ‘she pretended to work’.

-nge is a passive; that is, the patient becomes the subject and the agent is not mentioned: *elungey ran* ‘she was given money’.

-w indicates reflexivity: *küchawi* ‘she washed herself’; when involving several participants, it becomes reciprocal: *leli-wimün* ‘you all looked at each other’.

-ye pluralises the subject or the object: *amuyey* ‘several went’; *müleyey ruka* ‘there are several houses’.

-le (*-küle* after consonants) indicates that an activity is ongoing: *amuley* ‘he is going’; or a state: *üngümkülen* ‘I am waiting’.

-meke indicates that the subject is busy or occupied doing something: *küdawmekey* ‘he is occupied with work’.

-yaw (*-kiyaw/-kijaw* after consonants) indicates that the action is done in a circular motion or around something: *puruyawi* ‘she danced around’.

-nie indicates that the subject is keeping or maintaining a state of affairs: *kimnieeyu* ‘I know you’, *yeniefiñ* ‘I am carrying it’.

-künu indicates that some state has been maintained: *nürüfkünun* ‘I kept it closed’.

-fal indicates an action that is done in favour of someone: *dewmafali trariwe* ‘she had a woven belt made’.

-lel allows to have a new participant that is benefited by the action: *niefyu* ‘I have you’ vs. *nieleleyu* ‘I have it for you’.

-ñma allows a new participant to be understood as affected by the action: *weñeñ-mangeymi* ‘you were stolen something’, *ngillañmangen* ‘Something was bought from me’.

-ñmu indicates that the action is done to someone’s benefit or satisfaction: *iñmu* ‘She ate it all’, *nieñmuaymi!* ‘have this for your self!’

Particles and conjunctions

Several Discourse Particles indicate the speaker’s attitude toward what is being expressed. They have multiple meanings.

Affirmatives particles emphasise what is being said: *lle* ‘certainly’, *may* ‘yes’, *fey amfe* ‘so that’s is the case, for sure’; *fey lle may!* ‘that is for sure!’; *felelley may* ‘that is certainly the case’, etc.

Interrogative particles indicate that there is a question or that the speaker wants to know something: *chey ~ chi* ‘maybe’, *chew chi?* ‘where indeed’, *pe* ‘doubt’, *fey pe no?* ‘Isn’t it that?’

A negative particle can negate a noun or nominal phrase: *kimün no tüfa* ‘that is no knowledge!’, *eymi no amchi?* ‘Is that you?’

An evidential marker *rke* indicates that what is mentioned is a surprise to the speaker: *Trewa rke!* ‘Oh, a dog! (when noticing the dog)’

Some conjunctions are *welu* ‘but’, *kam* ‘or’, *ka* ‘and’, *x well y* ‘either *x* or *y*’. Pro-verb *femün* ‘to be like that’ can also function as a connector: *femlu...* ‘having done that...’.

Mapudungun:

A Concise Language Profile

Aldo Berríos Castillo, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.7488/era/7088>

<https://aldoberrios.cl>

aldo.berrios@gmail.com

Basic Vocabulary

Stems in verbs are separated by a hyphen - .

aku-n verb ‘to arrive here’

amu-n verb ‘to go’

antü noun ‘sun, day’

che noun ‘person’

chillkatu-n verb ‘to read, study’

dewma verb ‘to prepare, make’

dungu-n verb ‘to speak’

elu-n verb ‘to give’

kim-ün verb ‘to know’

kushe adjective ‘old (female)’

kura noun ‘rock’

kurü adjective ‘black’

kücha-n verb ‘to wash’

küdaw-ün verb ‘to work’

lef-ün verb ‘to run’

leli-n verb ‘to look at’

mapu noun ‘land’

matu adjective ‘fast’

narki noun ‘cat’

ngilla-n verb ‘to buy’

nie-n verb ‘to have’

nürüf-ün verb ‘to close’

ñochi adjective ‘slow’

pe-n verb ‘to see’

pi-n verb ‘to say’

puru-n verb ‘to dance’

ran noun ‘money’

ruka noun ‘house’

trariwe noun ‘woven belt or sash’

trewa noun ‘dog’

tripa-n verb ‘to go out’

tuw-ün verb ‘to come from’

üngüm-ün verb ‘to wait’

weñe-n verb ‘to steal’

wentru noun ‘man’

ye-n verb ‘to carry’