

LESSON 1 CONTENTS SOUNDS AND LETTERS

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Additional vocabulary for lesson one not included in the sound chart

VERB ROOTS

pé	food
mówjye:	roast
sí'y	play

NOUN ROOTS

?émuli	black
mímwete	all by yourself
?ú:ti	acorn
já	name
já:	sky

OTHER

móye	that one
hó:!	all right, okay

INTRODUCTION

The materials in these lessons are written in a phonetic alphabet, which has one main rule: Every sound has only one letter, and every letter makes only one sound, or for short: One letter, one sound.

These materials are written in the same orthography that Russell Ultan used for his dissertation and other materials (with minor exceptions - see below). We decided on this because many Konkow people are already familiar with that writing system. Also, people can access his materials online at the [California Language Archive](#).

There are minor ways the transcriptions you see here will differ from Ultan's system:

- Ultan uses a raised dot • to represent *vowel length* (see below); for simplicity of typing and copying, we use a colon : instead.
- Ultan uses apostrophes above letters to represent *glottalized consonants*. Since most people can't type letters that way, we put the apostrophe just after the letter instead, as in **c'**, **p'**, **t'**, **k'**.
- Ultan uses capital letters to indicate sounds that change. Here you will see (w) - in parentheses - when that sound becomes something else.

PART 1 VOWELS

An example of the difference between the Konkow phonetic alphabet and English would be the way *vowels* are written. Most of the *vowels* use the same letters as English, but in English the letters can stand for various different sounds, whereas the same letter in Konkow will always stand for the same sound.

a The English letter "a" can sound like the "a" in father, or fan, fate, or alone. The Konkow letter **a** always sounds like the "a" in father. You can listen to this vowel on the website, in the Konkow word for "fire": **sá**

e The English letter "e" can sound like the "e" in pet, female, cafe, ; or if there are two of them, peek - or it can even be silent, like in shore. The Konkow letter **e** always sounds most like the "e" in pet. Listen to the *vowel* on the website in the Konkow word for "black": **?émuli**

i The English letter “i” can sound like the “i” in pin or pine. The Konkow letter “i” sounds part way between the vowel sound in pin or peek. Listen to the last vowel in the Konkow word for “black” on the website. **ʔémul*í***. Or the first vowel in the word for “all by yourself.” **mímwete**

o The English letter “o” can sound like the “o” in snow, or in hop, or if there are two of them, balloon. The Konkow letter “o” is always like the “o” in snow. Listen to the vowel in the Konkow word for “coyote” **héno** on the website.

u The English letter “u” can sound like the “u” in hula, or put, or hut. The Konkow letter “u” is always like the one in hula. Listen to the vowel in the Konkow word for “acorn” **ʔú:ti**.

English uses 5 vowel letters to stand for over a dozen different vowel sounds! So the phonetic rule “one letter, one sound” means that different letters other than **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, and **u** have to be used to represent a few other vowels sounds.

y The most difficult one to get used to is a *vowel* sound that is not used in English. It’s a vowel that sounds sort of like a “u” but with the lips spread apart. Ultan represents that sound with the letter “**y**”.

Listen to this vowel in the Konkow word for “and”, **ʔákym**. It may be hard to get used to recognizing or pronouncing this sound, and also to using “y” to represent it – but pretty soon it will come easily to you.

ə The last vowel in Konkow is very rarely used. It is sort of like the “a” in English “alone”. It is represented in Konkow with an upside-down e – that is, “**ə**”. The linguistic name for this letter is “schwa”. Listen to this sound in the Konkow word for “pine burr” or “pine cone”, **kəlkəli** or “raccoon”, **ə:k’a**.

PART 2 VOWEL LENGTH AND STRESS

There are two more things to say about vowels. One thing is “*vowel length*.” Sometimes the vowel is held just a little bit longer than other times. The “*long vowel*” can actually mean something other than the same word with a short vowel.

As you have seen in some of the examples so far, we represent a long vowel with a colon after the vowel, as in the word for “acorn”: **ʔú:ti**.

Listen to a short vowel in contrast to a long vowel, by listening to these two words on the website: “name” **já**, and “sky” **já:**.

The other thing to mention is the accent marks you’ve been seeing on our example words. A vowel with an accent mark just sounds a little higher than the rest of the syllables in a word. Usually it’s the first syllable that’s highest; it has “*primary stress*.” When a word has three or more syllables, there will be another high syllable, but not quite as high as the first; that’s called “*secondary stress*.”

Listen to the Konkow words “river” **séwi** river and “cricket” **c’ýk’èti** for examples.

In English we have a tendency to put the *stress* on the second *syllable* rather than the first. It is important to pay attention to the Konkow *accent marks*, because otherwise our English-speaking background may lead us to pronouncing the words wrong.

PART 3 KONKOW CONSONANTS

We don't need to go over all the consonants. They follow the same "one letter, one sound" principle as the *vowels* do and most of them sound like what we would expect the letters to stand for. But we will go over several sets of consonants that are very different from English.

b, d IMPLOSIVES

If you listen to the sample words with **b** and **d**, they are noticeably different from English "b" and "d". Sometimes we make those sounds in a joking or derisive way – try saying "duh" mockingly, and maybe you'll use an implosive. (They are not mocking sounds in Konkow, though!) These sounds are called "*implosives*" because to make them, you make a bit of a vacuum in your mouth before you release the **d** (or **b**), so that upon release the air flows momentarily into your mouth rather than out (it implodes).

"salt" **bá** and "man or person" **májdj** are examples you can listen to on the website.

t', c', k' and **p'** GLOTTALIZED CONSONANTS

These *consonants* have a little "catch" in them when they are released. When you make a regular "t" or "k" sound, your tongue closes off the air stream for a moment before you release it into a *vowel*. But a *glottalized consonant* also closes the airstream off at the vocal cords at the same time, and the vocal cords also have to open up at the same time or just after the tongue is released. That makes the little popping sound or catch.

Here are examples you can listen to on the website.

t'óje	bring something
c'íc'i	rib
k'úmi	roundhouse
p'ó:t'i	feather

j There is nothing unusual about this sound, actually. It's just how it's written! Remember that the letter **y** is used for a vowel, so the sound that sounds much like the English y in "yay" has to use a different letter. The letter Ultan chose is "j", which is used in the official International Phonetic Alphabet. Just like using the **y** for the vowel, you'll just have to get used seeing a **j** for this sound! Listen to "young man" **jémpo** on the website for an example.

? GLOTTAL STOP

You will often see this letter that looks like a question mark. It actually marks the momentary stoppage of all sound. We use it all the time in English without noticing it - but it is noticeable in a few words, such as in “uh-uh!” (a way of saying “no”.) That dash in the middle is the *glottal stop*. The glottis is the hole going through our adams’ apple where the air goes in and out for breathing and speech. It has a set of vocal cords that are usually open when we speak, to let the air through - but they can close tight in the middle of a word like “uh-uh!” In Konkow, glottal stops occur in the middle of many words, but also at the beginning of words, where they seem unnoticeable. But if a word comes before a word beginning with a glottal stop, then you can hear that it is there.

For example, **?a** is ‘say’; and **sam?a** is ‘so it is said.’

Consonants

Stops/Restricted- beginning of a syllable				
Voiced imploded	bilabial	b	English doesn't have these sounds	bá salt
	alveolar, apical	d		majdy person
Voiceless glottalized	bilabial	p'		níkjàp' my husband
	alveolar, apical	t'		k'èt' older sister
	palatal	c'		c'íc'i rib
	velar	k'		níkk'àn with me
	glottal stop	ʔ	as in "uh'oh"	káʔa father's father
Unrestricted				
Voiceless plain	bilabial	p	p as in "pet"	pém food
	alveolar, apical	t	t as in "tent"	tútu son, child
	velar	k	k as in "kept"	pándak bow
Spirants (fricative)	alveolar, apical	s	s as in "said"	hés friend
	glottal	h	h as in "help"	c'áh tree
Nasals	bilabial	m	m as in "make"	wénem it's medicine
	alveolar, apical	n	n as in "need"	ník'ùl my father
Lateral	alveolar, apical	l	l as in "lay"	kóle boy, child
Semivowels	bilabial	w	w as in "when"	mówjye:n roast
	palatal	j	as in "yay"	móye that one

Vowels

High Front	i	ee as in "key"	súmujdi on the sugar pine nuts
High Central Unrounded	y	o as in "do" without rounding lips	sí'y play
High Back Rounded	u	u as in "bamboo"	húmpu doorway
Mid	e	e as in "hay"	k'úse rival
Mid central	ə	a as in "alone" or "sofa"	kálikeli pineburr
	o	o as in "snow"	héno coyote
Low	a	ah as in "rah"	míma: you two
Elongated vowel length	:	o as in "slope"	hó:! all right, okay
short/long vowel example		jà name	jà: sky

Other Symbols

Primary stress	é	<u>e</u> as in "fr <u>e</u> edom" or <u>a</u> as in "coll <u>a</u> pse"	séwi river
Secondary stress	ò	<u>ò</u> as in "b <u>à</u> ckb <u>ò</u> ne"	c'á:c'ambými backbone

SOUND CHART

The sounds of the Konkow language are shown on the chart on the previous page. They are grouped into consonants and vowels and further grouped how they are pronounced. When possible, an example is given to show a similar sound in English. Examples of Konkow words which use all the sounds are also give. These will be used later on in this lesson. You may notice that there are a few sounds that are not present in English like the imploded and glottalized consonants. There is also a glottal stop which may occur on its own, and a semi colon used to distinguish long vowels. We also use stress marks to show where to put the accent on vowels.

EXERCISE 1

The activities below will help you learn and practice some of the unfamiliar sounds of Konkow. Connect the Konkow letter to the sound it makes in English.

i	e as in “hay”
y	u as in “bamboo”
u	o as in “bow”
e	ee as in “key”
ə	ah as in “rah”
o	o as in “sew”
a	y as in “do” without rounding lips
:	a as in “alone” or “sofa”

EXERCISE 2

Listen to 15-25 words of your choice on the maidu.org website and write the English translations of any words that you think has the **y**, **k'** and **o:** sounds below.

y	k'	o:
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____	10. _____

EXERCISE 3

Write the Konkow word next to its English translation below. If you don't already know these words in Konkow, search for them on the website maidu.org. Listen to them, then try to write them down using the writing system above.

seed _____	play _____
acorn soup _____	person _____
log raft _____	older sister _____
bat _____	food _____
pine cone _____	friend _____
arrow _____	tree _____
fire _____	river _____
All right! Yes! _____	cricket _____
blanket _____	rib _____
raccoon _____	roast _____
cocoon rattle _____	father's father _____