

Orthographic System

For the purposes of writing Loven we decided to create a practical orthographic system which could be used by both linguists and laymen. There is in fact an indigenous Loven writing system which was used in the 1920s and 1930s, a fact which is not widely known. However, it is rather complex, having several hundred distinct signs, and we have not sought to reintroduce its use at this time. The indigenous script is discussed further below, after this section. For practical reasons we decided to use a version of the Vietnamese alphabet so that anyone can type Loven on available typewriters and wordprocessors, and because knowledge of Vietnamese is widespread in southern Laos.

The letters we use and the sounds they represent in IPA are as follows:

Orthography				Phonetic					
p	t	c	k	q	p	t	c	k	ʔ
b	d	j	g		b	d	ʃ	g	
m	n	ñ	ng		m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
v/u	l	r	y		ʋ~w	l	r	j	
		x	h				s~š~x	h	
	i	ɯ	u		i	ɨ	u		
	ê	ɛ	ô		e	ə	o		
	e	â	o		ɛ	ʌ~ɑ	ɔ		
		a				a			

Short vowels are indicated with a háček (ˇ) over the vowel. There are also five diphthongs:

ie	ɯɛ	uo	ie	ɨə	uo
ia		ua	ie~ia		uo~ua

In some cases the various Loven sources are confused as to whether the form in question has a diphthong or a long monophthong, or it may not be clear whether the correct values are *ie* / *uo* or *ia* / *ua*. Ferlus' (1969-70) notes

appear to reliably distinguish these vowels, so we adopt his values for these generally. One should also note our spelling rules:

- the glottal stop is always written *q*
- the palatal fricative is always written *x*
- the labial approximant is written *v* initially and *u* word finally

Basically words in Loven can have one or two syllables. However, in disyllabic words the vowel of the first syllable (or 'minorsyllable') is never stressed, it has no phonemic quality, and can be omitted completely. Hence it is possible to treat these syllables as consisting of one or two consonants only, i.e. (from Ferlus 1971:390)

monosyllabe	CV	<i>sɛ</i>	« écouter »
monosyllabe	CVC	<i>pɛh</i>	« cueillir »
disyllabe	CCV	<i>kɛ</i>	« corde »
disyllabe	CCVC	<i>lpɛh</i>	« piler »

For phonotactic and/or expressive reasons native speakers will often insert a vowel into the first syllable, usually a schwa or *a* which can be short or long. Most commonly the vowel is inserted between two oral stops, and least often when a stop is followed by *r* or *l*. We have adopted the rule of writing this vowel, using *ɔ*, always when a stop is followed by another stop or *x*. Otherwise we do not write the first syllable vowel in disyllabic words. eg.

<i>khak</i>	'money'	<i>kɔbǎng</i>	'bamboo shoot'
<i>khvít klâm</i>	'alarmed'	<i>kɔcêt</i>	'kill'
<i>klañ</i>	'braid rope'	<i>kɔdiam</i>	'onion, garlic'
<i>kměñ</i>	'firewood'	<i>kɔjep</i>	'centipede'
<i>kraq</i>	'old (person)'	<i>kɔpɔu</i>	'buffalo'
<i>krdong mǎt</i>	'eyebrow'	<i>kɔqǒk</i>	'cough'
<i>krbuay</i>	'crested (bird)'	<i>kɔtau</i>	'sugarcane'
<i>krqak, krak</i>	'crow'	<i>kɔthũn</i>	'bullet, ammunition'
<i>kywɔl</i>	'wind (n.)'	<i>kɔxôh</i>	'lung'

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