

ORTHOGRAPHY

Several non-Abenaki writers have undertaken to express the sounds of Western Abenaki on paper for English or French readers, notably Father J. A. Maurault, John Dyneley Prince, John P. Harrington, Frank G. Speck, Edward Sapir, Truman Michelson, and A. Irving Hallowell. The writing systems which they developed are as numerous as the writers.

Three Abenaki writers have published works in Western Abenaki, namely, Pïal Pol Wzôkihlain, Joseph Laurent, and Henry Lorne Masta. The influence of Wzôkihlain is apparent in the writings of Laurent and Masta. All three taught school at Odanak, and the literate Abenakis whom I have known used personal orthographies which tended to follow the system of either Laurent or Masta under whom they studied. This means that there is no one orthography generally accepted by either linguists or Abenakis today, but those who speak the language can read either Laurent or Masta with understanding.

I am keenly aware that people do not like to give up familiar orthographies, but I believe the language will be best served in the long run by the best writing system. For this reason I have used a phonemic orthography which will be serviceable to linguists and departs only slightly from the orthographies of Laurent and Masta. It uses one character for each distinctive sound and contains no silent letters. The points at which it differs from that of the native writers are:

1. The letter *u*, which both Laurent and Masta used interchangeably with *w* after *g* or *k* and before a vowel, has been eliminated in favor of *w*.

2. The letter *c* is used instead of *ch*, because it is the usual phonetic symbol for the sound and to eliminate any tendency to read *ch* as two sounds--*c* plus *h*.

3. I add *C* and *J*, sounds that have limited distribution in two dialects and are not distinguished by the native writers.

4. The schwa vowel (unaccented *e*) is written wherever it is heard or can be recognized by a lengthening of the preceding consonant. The native writers had a tendency not to write it.

5. The mid-low back unrounded nasal vowel, which has had several solutions, is here represented by *ô*. Wzôkihlain's underlined *o* has sometimes been mistaken by

printers for an italic letter. Prince's oⁿ is not a unitary symbol and increases the likelihood of error in typing and proofreading. Masta's 8 is an eyestopper suggesting either the numeral 8 or, to students of the old Jesuit documents, the omicron upsilon ligature used for French ou, pronounced like English u or w. Wzôkihlain used ô in one publication and was followed by Laurent.

6. Masta's use of y for the semivowel is preferred to Laurent's i.

7. The tense consonants p, t, k, c, s are distinguished from the lax consonants b, d, g, j, z throughout. The native writers distinguished the lax consonants generally between vowels and at the end of words but seldom at the beginning of words or in clusters.