

CREATING A KENSIW WRITING SYSTEM

In making an alphabet for the Kensiw language using the Thai script, decisions regarding which Thai symbols or graphs to use were based on the principle of using symbols which most closely represent the value of the symbol in the Thai language. This was done to minimize the number of symbols that would have reassigned values in the Kensiw writing system. This principle also helped to simplify the alphabet for the Kensiw, making it easier for a reader to transfer reading skills between the two languages. For the Kensiw features that differ from Thai, adjustments were made to the Thai script.

Kensiw Vowels

Kensiw vowels differ from Thai in that there are additional features which Thai does not have, specifically, additional vowel heights, contrastive nasalization and no contrastive vowel length. The additional height distinctions in Kensiw are in the mid position between close-mid and open-mid in the front, central and back positions. This means Kensiw has the vowel / e / between the Thai front vowels, ɛ- and ɛ-, the central vowel / ə / between the Thai ɛ̄ and ɛ̄- and / ʌ / between the Thai vowels ɛ̄- and ɛ̄, and the back vowel / o / between the Thai vowels ɔ̄- and ɔ̄. Some creative uses of existing Thai orthographic symbols as well as a Pali dot were used to differentiate these contrasting heights in the front, central and back vowels.

| | FRONT | CENTRAL | BACK |
|-----------|-------|---------|------|
| close-mid | ɛ̄ | ə̄ | ō |
| mid | e | ə | o |
| open-mid | ɛ | ʌ | ɔ |

Table 17 Vowel Heights Unique to Kensiw (Shaded vowels differ from Thai)

Kensiw Vowel Heights

The maitaikuu, ɛ̄, was used in combination with ɛ- and ɛ̄- to represent the mid tongue height of / e / and / o /. For the front mid vowel, / e /, the maitaikuu 'fits' nicely as it is perceived by the Kensiw speakers to be the closest

realization of this sound in Thai, even though it is a short vowel in Thai. Thus, in a closed syllable, it is written as เ็ as in ตีเข็ก ti'jek 'to sleep'. The back mid vowel / o / is found in both closed and open syllables. Since the Kensiw speakers perceive this sound in closed syllables as similar to the inherent Thai vowel / o / it is written as Thai would write the inherent vowel: ตย /toh/ 'to balance'. For the open syllable, the เ็ is combined with โ , to form เ็อ , as in ถามโโป ?am'po/ 'sharp tooth pain'.

For the central vowels, the Kensiw central mid vowel / ə /, or schwa, closely resembles the schwa found in Thai so the symbols เ-อ (for open syllables) and เ็-ย (for closed syllables) were used, e.g. เดอ /də/ 'but' and เด็ย /təh/ 'bald'.

The close-mid vowel / ɜ / (as in the English word 'bird') is perceived by the Kensiw speakers to be closer in value to the central close vowel / ʉ / than to the central mid schwa and the / ʌ / (as in the English word 'but') is lower than the schwa. The decision was made to use the Thai symbol เ-อ for the schwa and create variations from this symbol to represent the / ɜ / and / ʌ /. To represent the central close-mid vowel / ɜ /, which only occurs in closed syllables, the Pali dot was added to the เ-อ graph, making the new symbol: เ-เ as in เเ็ย /ɜh/ 'to trim'. The reason for choosing the Pali dot is that it has been used successfully in Northern Khmer and other Mon-Khmer languages to mark height distinction between vowels. In this case, it is showing the tongue height is higher than the schwa.

To make the symbol for the / ʌ /, the symbol was constructed as a composite from two Thai vowels, the เ- / ε / and the เ็ / ə /. The resulting composite is เ็เ as in เ็เฉ็ฉ /hʌʌ/ 'freshwater'. This combination conveys the sense of being both a central and an open-mid position, appropriately symbolizing / ʌ /, a central mid-open vowel. This composite graph has been used in other languages as well.

| IPA | Open \$ | | |
|-----|---------|---------|---------------|
| ɛ | มาง | ma'ŋɛ | 'mangostee' |
| e | | — | |
| ɛ | มาบ | ma'be | 'woman' |
| ɯ | ซีเกาะ | su'kɔʔ | 'dust' |
| ɔ | เขอมา | gɔ'ma | 'feverish' |
| ɔ | เดอ | 'dɔ | 'but' |
| ʌ | แกอนาต | kʌ'nat | 'comb' |
| ɔ | จามไป | jam'pɔ | 'to mix' |
| o | ไล้เข้ง | lo'jɛŋŋ | 'baby rattle' |
| ɔ | จอ | 'sɔ | 'to plane' |

| IPA | \$-ʔ | | |
|-----|----------|----------|-------------------|
| ɛ | ฮาปะ | ha'pɛʔ | 'backpack basket' |
| e | เย๊ะ | 'jeʔ | 'I' |
| ɛ | แะ | 'weʔ | 'cry' |
| ɯ | บลิ | bɔ'liʔ | 'leg' |
| ɔ | กาเค๊ะ | ka'tɔʔ | 'skin' |
| ɔ | เคะนาข้ง | tɔʔ'nagŋ | 'to kick' |
| ʌ | แะชะ | sʌʔ'sɔʔ | 'nerve' |
| ɔ | โอะ | 'ɔʔ | 'older sibling' |
| o | ฮาไ้ชะ | ʔa'jɔʔ | 'small' |
| ɔ | ฆาเยาะ | ga'jɔʔ | 'back' |

| IPA | Closed \$ | | |
|-----|-----------|--------|---------------|
| ɛ | บืเตว | buiɛw | 'water' |
| e | ติเข็ก | ti'jek | 'to sleep' |
| ɛ | ปีแซง | pi'seŋ | 'banana' |
| ɯ | ฮึฮ | 'ɦuh | 'here' |
| ɔ | เจ็ฮ | 'jɔh | 'to trim' |
| ɔ | เค็ฮ | 'təh | 'bald' |
| ʌ | แฮ็ล | 'hʌʌ' | 'fresh water' |
| ɔ | โฆ็ส | 'jɔs | 'liver' |
| o | ทฮ | 'toh' | 'to balance' |
| ɔ | ฮอ็ส | 'ɦɔs | 'fire' |

Table 18 Orthography Examples of Kensiw Vowel Heights

Kensiw Nasal Vowels

Kensiw has contrastive nasalization that Thai does not have. Since the consonant graphs used to write Kensiw are of the middle or low class Thai consonants, it was believed that the ๓ from the high class consonants could be used to mark nasalization, e.g. ๓ฮ้า 'hǎ 'to forbid', ๓ฮาว 'sǎw 'large bat', ๓ฮาวว้า 'wǎwǎ? 'turtle'. This consonant graph was chosen over a diacritic to be written in combination with the nasal vowel for several reasons. One, the vowel graphs are already extensive in number and two, the consonant graph maintains a linear order which is easier to learn than diacritics which are non-linear. In addition, the consonant graph does not detract from looking like Thai. For many Thai speakers today, Thai words beginning with ๓ are nasalized even though nasalization is non-contrastive in Thai. This factor also contributed to the choice of ๓ as a marker of nasalization.

| | FRONT | | CENTRAL | | BACK | |
|------------|-------|----------------|---------|----------------|------|----------------|
| close | ĩ | ๓ ^๓ | ũ | ๓ ^๓ | ū | ๓ _v |
| near-close | ĩ | ๓ ^๓ | | | | |
| close-mid | ẽ | ๓ ^๓ | | | õ | ๓ ^๓ |
| mid | ẽ | ๓ ^๓ | | | õ | ๓ ^๓ |
| open-mid | ẽ | ๓ ^๓ | ã | ๓ ^๓ | õ | ๓-๓ |
| open | | | ã | ๓-๓ | | |

Table 19 Kensiw Nasal Vowels

Kensiw Vowel Length

Kensiw has no contrastive vowel length, so the long vowel symbols are used for both the stressed and unstressed syllables as well as for the pre-syllable. Kensiw does have glottal final closed syllables, which contrast, with both open syllables and other consonant final stopped syllables. For these glottal final syllables, the short vowel symbol is used to denote the vowel height and position as well as a final glottal consonant.

| IPA | ๕-๖ | Example | | |
|-----|-----|----------|----------|-----------|
| e | เีะ | เยีะ | 'jeʔ | 'j' |
| ə | เีะ | กาเคีะ | ka'təʔ | 'skin' |
| o | เีะ | เตะนาขัง | təʔ'naxŋ | 'to kick' |
| ʌ | แีะ | แะชชะ | sʌʔ'sɔʔ | 'nerve' |
| o | โีะ | ฮาเีะ | ?a'joʔ | 'small' |

Table 20 Glottal Final Vowels Unique to Kensiw

The decision to use the short vowels only for syllables ending in a glottal was based on the reader's reaction to the use of the short vowel symbols in the minor syllables and the presyllables. Initially, the presyllables and minor syllables were written using short vowels while major syllables were written using long vowels, e.g. มะเีง /ma'ŋe/ 'mangosteen'. This was meant to reflect the stress-timing where the major syllable always has primary stress, resulting in a perceived lengthened vowel. However, the reader associated the final glottal stop inalienably with the vowel quality when reading short Thai vowel symbols. As a result, the vowel symbols were changed so that long vowels were used in all syllable types and short vowels used in glottal final syllables only, e.g. มะเีง /ma'ŋe/ 'mangosteen' and ฮาเีง /ha'pɛʔ/ 'backpack basket'. This change increased the reader's fluency and acceptance of the symbols used for the vowels.

Kensiw Consonants

For Kensiw consonants that are the same as the Thai consonants, the Thai symbol for the consonant was used. For the Kensiw consonants that are not the same as Thai, the consonants were matched with a Thai symbol that has (or has had in the past) the same point and manner of articulation. The Kensiw consonants that differ from Thai consonants are two voiced plosives, /j/ and /g/, one nasal, /ɲ/, two fricatives, /ɸ/ and /ɣ/ and a set of pre-stopped nasals, /bm/, /dn/, /ɲn/ and /gŋ/.

The voiced palatal /j/ and velar /g/ plosives and the palatal nasal /ɲ/ are not currently found in spoken Thai. In these cases, the Thai symbol that was

chosen historically bore the same features as the Kensiw consonant. As a result, ผ was assigned to / ʃ /, e.g. ผิ่ว /'juɔc/ 'to wade', พ was assigned to / g /, e.g. พาร 'gas' 'large healed wound' as both of these are proposed to have been voiced plosives historically. Likewise, ญ was assigned to / ɲ /, e.g. พญู '๓๖' 'coconut' because its proposed historical value was / ɲ /.

Kensiw has two fricatives, / ʃ / and / ɣ /, that are not found in the Thai language. The Thai symbol ฟ / f / was chosen to represent / ʃ /, e.g. เฝิฟ /'ʔɛʃ/ 'to blow through the fist', due to its similarity in point and manner of articulation. The จ was chosen to represent / ɣ /, e.g. เตจ็จ /ʔɛ'ɣck/ 'teapot', because / ɣ / is the Kensiw pronunciation of / ɹ / found in Malay words that have been borrowed.

Kensiw Pre-stopped Nasals

The pre-stopped nasals, / b̥m /, / d̥n /, / ɲ̥ / and / g̥ɲ / contrast with / m /, / n /, / ɲ / and / ŋ / in the syllable final position, resulting in the need to distinguish between these consonants in the orthography. Initially the unaspirated stops were used, i.e. บ , ด , ณ and ง , to represent the pre-stopped nasals. However, the reader was unable to decode the word. The reader rejected the use of unaspirated stops because she perceived the pre-stopped nasals as nasals. Likewise, when the single nasal symbols ม , น , ญ and ง were used, this resulted in confusion between words that contrasted, for example, /-b̥m/ and /-m/. The next alternative was to use the plosive symbol along with the nasal symbol to represent the pre-stopped nasal. This alternative created a problem in decoding the syllable breaks correctly. For example, the combination บม was read as the Thai syllable / bom /, following the rules for the inherent vowel [o]. The final solution was to write the pre-stopped nasals as a consonant cluster with a *garand*, ̣ , written above the oral stop, e.g. บ̣ม , ด̣น , ณ̣ญ and ง̣ representing / b̥m /, / d̥n /, / ɲ̥ / and / g̥ɲ /, respectively. By placing the ̣ above the plosive, the reader can recognize the consonant cluster as the representation of the pre-stopped nasal. This solution clearly shows the contrast between a simple nasal and a pre-stopped nasal in the same environment and will also prevent incorrect decoding of the syllable boundaries.

| IPA | Thai Symbol | Example | | |
|-----|-------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| b̥m | บ̣ม | ตาบ̣มเก็บ̣ม | tabm 'kebm | 'molar teeth' |
| d̥n | ด̣น | เกด̣น | 'kɛdn | 'to write' |
| ɲ̥ | ณ̣ญ | บาลอญ̣ญ | ba'ʔ/ɲɲ | 'green' |
| g̥ɲ | ง̣ | ปาปาง̣ | pa'pagɲ | 'wild cat' |

Table 21 Pre-stopped Nasals

Consonant Clusters

Consonant clusters found in Kensiw are symbolized in the same manner as the Thai clusters. Kensiw has a few more consonant clusters ending in / w / than Thai does, i.e. / pw, bw, tw, gw, hw, mw, and lw /. See Table 22 Kensiw Consonant Clusters for a full listing of the clusters and their symbols.

| IPA | Thai Symbol | Example | | |
|------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| pw | ปว | ไปจ | 'pwɔc | 'too short' |
| pr | ปร | กาวา ฅาเป็รึบ | ka'waw ja'pɛp | 'humming bird' |
| pl | ปล | แปดปลัด | pat'plit | 'blink rapidly' |
| bw | บว | บวอช | 'bwɔs | 'to be naive' |
| tw | ตว | กาลโหดว | ka'ɬwɔc | 'to pick' |
| tr | ตร | ตราช้ง | 'tɾaŋ | 'to be clear sighted' |
| kw | กว | ลองกวาช | loŋ'kwɔs | 'galangal' |
| kr | กร | แกช | 'kɾeɬ | 'matches' |
| k ^h w | คว | ควา | 'k ^h wa | 'to pinch off bits' |
| k ^h r | คร | ชูเบ็ด ครีจ้ง | hu'bet 'k ^h ɾuŋ | 'herb for cystitis' |
| gw | ฉว | ฉวาช | 'gwah | 'curry sauce' |
| sr | ชร | แซ็ดโหด | sa't'ɬɔt | 'to sniff' |
| hw | ฮว | ฮวอช | 'hwɔs | 'missing tooth' |
| mw | มว | อีหมาะ | hi'mwā? | 'to cover' |
| lw | ลว | บ้เตว ลวอก | bu'tɛw 'lwɔk | 'water full of garbage' |

Table 22 Kensiw Consonant Clusters

Kensiw Tone

Kensiw is not a tonal language though it does have a small number of words that have a contrastive high tone and a normative pitch or mid-tone, e.g. kap 'to bite' versus káp 'to be deaf and dumb'. The mid-tone is unmarked; the high tone is marked by maitree, ̃, as in กาบ 'to bite' and ก้าบ 'to be deaf and dumb'.



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