

GWY SŬh.ḡḡḡḡ D\$4ḡVḡ

The Sounds and Writing of Cherokee

The Sounds and Writing of Cherokee

D, R, T, ḡ, Ḣ, i

Cherokee language is written in the alphabet and in the Cherokee Syllabary. Alphabetic writing of Cherokee takes several forms according to who is writing and when they are writing. Pay close attention to the way that the sounds below are represented in alphabetic writing. Follow our system of alphabetic writing throughout the course. The Cherokee language sounds are also written with the Cherokee Syllabary. Cherokee genius Sequoyah (ḢḢḢ) saw what newly arrived Americans and Europeans were doing and he created a syllabic writing system for the Cherokee language. No writing system completely represents the stream of speech. Do not mistake writing for language. Writing is a robust technology for representing language; it is not itself language.

1. Vowels: The vowels of Cherokee are *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and *v*. These vowels and example words are presented below.

a The Cherokee *a* vowel is a low central vowel. The Cherokee *a* has approximately the value of the first vowel in the English word *father*.

ata	DW	young woman	ama	DḢ	water
ayohli	DḢC	child	ahnawo	DḢḢ	shirt, cloth
ayvwi	DBḢ	person	alasulo	DWḢḢ	shoe
ayvwiya'i	DBḢḢT	Indian	asano	DEZ	dress
agehya	DḢḢ	woman	asulo	DḢḢ	pants
asgaya	DḢḢḢ	man	ada	DL	wood
agehyutsa	DḢḢḢ	girl	atsila	DḢW	fire
agayvlige'i	D\$BḢḢT	old woman	adanhdo	DLḢV	heart
atsutsa	DḢḢ	boy	ahuli	DḢḢ	drum
aditohdi	DḢVḢ	spoon	adela	D\$W	money
ahyelsdi	DḢWḢḢ	knife	awohali	DḢḢḢ	eagle
atelido	DḢḢV	dish, plate	akwsdo	DTḢV	pillow
alsdayhdi	DWḢḢḢ	food			
ani	DḢ	strawberry			

e The Cherokee *e* vowel is a mid front vowel. The Cherokee *e* has approximately the value of the Spanish *e*. The Cherokee *e* has approximately the values of the vowels in the English words *bet* and *bait*.

edoha RVḢ She is walking.

GWY ʒʉh.ʒʉdʒ Dʒʒʉdʒ

The Sounds and Writing of Cherokee

egwa	RT	big
elisdi	RPʉdʒ	it seems that

i The Cherokee *i* vowel is a high front vowel. The Cherokee *i* has approximately the value of the Spanish *i*. The Cherokee *i* has approximately the values of the vowels in the English words *bit* and *beet*.

iga	Tʒ	day	inada	TʉL	snake
igada	TʒL	some	inage'i	TʉPT	forest
iya	Tʉ	pumpkin			
sogwu	ʒʉ	once upon a			
iyuwakdi	Tʒʒʉdʒ	time			

o The Cherokee *o* vowel is a mid back or low back vowel. The Cherokee *o* has approximately the value of the vowels in the English words *boat* and *bought*.

odalv'i	ʒʉPT	mountain	osda	ʒʉL	good
ogana	ʒʒʉ	ground hog	osigwu	ʒʒʉ	all right, just
ohla	ʒʒ	soap			fine

u The Cherokee *u* vowel is a high back vowel. The Cherokee *u* has approximately the value of the Spanish *u*. The Cherokee *u* has approximately the value of the vowel in the English word *boot*.

udali'i	ʉLPT	his wife	ulogili	ʉʒʒʒ	cloud
usdayvhvsgi	ʉʒʒʒʒʒʒʒʒ	his wife	unegvha'i	ʉʒʒʒʒʒ	blanket
ugaloga	ʉʒʒʒ	leaf	unvdi	ʉʒʒ	milk
uguku	ʉʒʒ	hoot owl	usdi'i	ʉʒʒPT	baby
uhyehi	ʉʒʒ	her	usv'i	ʉRT	night
		husband	uwetsi	ʉʒʒʒ	egg
utsedsdi	ʉʒʒʒʒʒ	possum	uwoduhi	ʉʒʒʒʒ	pretty
utsiya	ʉʒʒʒ	worm	uyo'i	ʉʒʒ	bad
ugta	ʉʒʒʒ	seed			

v Cherokee includes the vowel *v*. This vowel is a mid central slightly nasalized vowel. The Cherokee *v* has approximately the value of the vowel in the English word *bun*.

vv	ii	yes
----	-----------	-----

GWY ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ ᏃᏍᏗᏍᏗ

The Sounds and Writing of Cherokee

2. Consonants: The consonants of Cherokee are *d, t, g, k, h, l, m, n, s, w, y, tl, ts,* and ' (*glottal stop*). These consonants and example words are presented below.

d Approximately like the English *d*.

dagwalela	ᏃᏍᏗᏍᏗ	car	digohwelodohdi	ᏃᏍᏗᏍᏗ	pencil, pen
dagsi	ᏃᏍᏗ	terrapin	dikwayodi	ᏃᏍᏗ	pepper
dalala	ᏃᏍᏗ	woodpecker	dohiyu	ᏃᏍᏗ	really,
Daligwa	ᏃᏍᏗ	Tahlequah			very
didehlohwasgi	ᏃᏍᏗᏍᏗ	student			

g Approximately like the English *g* in the word *good*.

gadu	ᏍᏍᏗ	bread	gatohga	ᏍᏍᏗ	tail
gagama	ᏍᏍᏗ	cucumber	gelisgi	ᏍᏍᏗ	pie
gahlgwogi	ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ	seven	gihli	ᏍᏍᏗ	dog
gahltsode	ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ	house	gogi	ᏍᏍᏗ	summer
galuysdi	ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ	axe	gohweli	ᏍᏍᏗ	paper
ganihli	ᏍᏍᏗ	bed	go'i	ᏍᏍᏗ	oil, grease
gasgilo	ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ	chair	goksdi	ᏍᏍᏗ	cigarette

h Approximately like the English *h*.

hawiya	ᏍᏍᏗ	meat	hisgi	ᏍᏍᏗ	five
hadi	ᏍᏍᏗ	no			

k Approximately like the English *k*.

kahwi	ᏍᏍᏗ	coffee	kanesa	ᏍᏍᏗ	box
kamama	ᏍᏍᏗ	butterfly,	kawonu	ᏍᏍᏗ	duck
		elephant	koga	ᏍᏍᏗ	crow
kalsetsi	ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ	sugar, candy	kwana	ᏍᏍᏗ	peach
kananesgi	ᏍᏍᏗᏍᏗ	spider			

l Approximately like the English *l*.

lolo	ᏍᏍᏗ	locust, cicada
------	------------	----------------

GWY SŬH.ĀĀĬ DS4ĀVĬ

The Sounds and Writing of Cherokee

m Approximately like the English *m*. The Cherokee *m* is infrequent.

kamama	ᏓᏁᏁ	butterfly, elephant
ugama	ᏐᏁᏁ	soup

n Approximately like the English *n*.

nihi	ᏃᏁ	you	nvda	ᏃᏏ	sun, moon
nokwsi	ᏃᏁᏏ	star	nvghi	ᏃᏁᏏ	four
nuna	ᏃᏁ	potato	nvya	ᏃᏁ	rock

s Approximately like the English *sh* of *show*, but always spelled 's'.

sogwu	ᏁᏁ	one	sikwa	ᏁᏁ	pig
sali	ᏁᏁ	persimmon	sogwili	ᏁᏁᏁ	horse
sdeyada	ᏁᏁᏁᏁ	rope	sonela	ᏁᏁᏁ	nine
selu	ᏁᏁ	corn	sudali	ᏁᏁᏁ	six
sgohi	ᏁᏁᏁ	ten	svgta	ᏁᏁᏁ	apple

t Approximately like the English *t*.

ta'li	ᏁᏁ	two	tuya	ᏁᏁ	beans
tawodi	ᏁᏁᏁ	hawk	tvhga	ᏁᏁ	house fly

ts The Cherokee *ts* may have the sound of *ts* in the English word *boots* or it may have the sound of *j* in the English word *junk*.

Tsalagi	ᏁᏁᏁ	Cherokee	tso'i	ᏁᏁ	three
Tsalagi Uwet'i'i	ᏁᏁᏁ	North Carolina	tsola	ᏁᏁ	tobacco
	ᏁᏁᏁᏁ		tsulvhwisdanehi	ᏁᏁᏁᏁ	worker
tsisdu	ᏁᏁᏁ	rabbit		ᏁᏁ	
tsisgwa	ᏁᏁᏁ	bird			
tsitaga	ᏁᏁᏁ	chicken			

w Approximately like the English *w*.

wadulisi	ᏁᏁᏁᏁ	bee, honey	walosi	ᏁᏁᏁ	frog
wahga	ᏁᏁ	cow	wesa	ᏁᏁ	cat
wahya	ᏁᏁ	wolf			

GWY SŪH.ĀĀI D\$4ĀV.I

The Sounds and Writing of Cherokee

y Approximately like the English y.

yansa	ᎠᎵᎠ	buffalo	yvgi	ᎠᎵ	fork
yona	ᎠᎵ	bear			

' The apostrophe ' represents a glottal stop. The glottal stop is the closing in the throat at the middle of the English word *uh-oh*.

ayvwiya'i	ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ	Indian
tso'i	ᎠᎵ	three

3. Consonant Combinations: Some of the more common consonant combinations are presented here. Keep in mind that the consonant combinations of Cherokee will be different than the consonant combinations found in English.

gw	sogwu	ᎠᎵ	one				
	egwa	ᎠᎵ	big	sd	sdeyada	ᎠᎵᎵ	rope
					goksdi	ᎠᎵᎵ	cigarette
sgw	tsisgwa	ᎠᎵᎵ	bird		ahyelsdi	ᎠᎵᎵᎵ	knife
					alsdayhdi	ᎠᎵᎵᎵᎵ	food
hl	ayohli	ᎠᎵᎵ	child	tsh	atsutsa	ᎠᎵᎵ	boy
	gihli	ᎠᎵᎵ	dog	(the <i>h</i> is not written)	tsunela	ᎠᎵᎵ	eight
					tsuhga	ᎠᎵᎵ	flea
hn	ahnawo	ᎠᎵᎵ	shirt, cloth	tsg-, tsgw-	tsgoya	ᎠᎵᎵ	bug
hy	agehya	ᎠᎵᎵ	woman		tsgwisdi	ᎠᎵᎵᎵ	a lot, many
	wahya	ᎠᎵᎵ	wolf				
hw	tsulvhwisdanehi	ᎠᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵ	worker				
	gohweli	ᎠᎵᎵᎵ	paper				