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Consonants of Cherokee Language

We spell the consonants of the Cherokee language

d, g, h, k, l, m, n, s, t, ts, w, y, '

' = *glottal stop*, a cessation of breath deep in the throat

Common syllable-initial combinations:

gwa, kwa, hla, hna, hwa, hya, sga, sgwa, sda

Consonants - Contrasts

d and t – d lacks aspiration (*h* puff of air)

dili ‘skunk’ tili ‘chestnut’

g and k – g lacks aspiration

goga ‘summer’ koga ‘crow’

Some spelling systems spell

unaspirated d = t and aspirated t = th

unaspirated g = k and aspirated k = kh

Consonants - Contrasts

l and hl

Tsilogi' a. 'I' m hoeing.'

agihlogi 'my aunt'

n and hn

Hinagi. 'Pick it [flexible] up.'

Hahnega. 'Wrestle.'

w and hw

Wesa 'cat'

Hwena. 'Go away.'

y and hy

Sigwoya 'Sequoyah'

wahya 'wolf'

Stop Sounds d, t, g, k

Mostly as in English, but closer relationship between d and t, between g and k.

d

dagwalela ‘car’

dagsi ‘turtle’

t

ta'li ‘two’

tuya ‘bean’

g

gadu ‘bread’

gihli ‘dog’

k

kanesa ‘box’

koga ‘crow’

Lateral, nasals, glides l, m, n, w, y

Mostly as in English, except in consonant combinations hl, hn, hw, hy, gw, kw.

l	m	n
lolo locust	ama 'water'	nuna 'potato'
gali'eliga	Meli 'Mary'	nvhgi 'four'
w	y	h
wesa 'cat'	yvwi 'person'	hawiya 'meat'

The letter s

Pronunciation according to dialect.

s in Eastern dialects has /sh/ sound.

siyo 'hello' sogwu 'one' selu 'corn'

s in Western dialects has /s/ sound of English.

osiyo 'hello' sagwu 'one' selu 'corn'

The letter ts

Pronunciation according to dialect.

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

Tsalagi ‘Cherokee’ tso’i ‘three’ tsisdu ‘rabbit’

ts is spelled *j* in Western writing systems.

Jalagi ‘Cherokee’ jo’i ‘three’ jisdu ‘rabbit’

Syllables

The syllables are arranged in alphabetical order following the work of Elias Boudinott and Rev. Samuel A. Worcester in the Cherokee Phoenix in 1828.

The lines of syllables are arranged in the order of the consonants.

D a

S ga **Q** ka

T ha

W la
hla

J ma

Q na **t** hna

T gwa
kwa

U sa **Q** s

L da **W** ta

Q dla **L** tla

G tsa

G wa
hwa

Q ya
hya