Cherokee syllabary

Cherokee	
Type	Syllabary
Languages	Cherokee language
Time period	1820s[1]-present
Parent systems	none • Cherokee
ISO 15924	`Cher, 445`
Direction	Left-to-right
Unicode alias	Cherokee
Unicode range	U+13A0–U+13FF [2]
Note: This page may contain IPA phonetic symbols.	

The **Cherokee syllabary** is a syllabary invented by Sequoyah, also known as George Gist, to write the Cherokee language in the late 1810s and early 1820s. His creation of the syllabary is particularly noteworthy in that he could not previously read any script. He first experimented with logograms, but his system later developed into a syllabary. In his system, each symbol represents a syllable rather than a single phoneme; the 85 (originally 86)[1] characters in the Cherokee syllabary provide a suitable method to write Cherokee. Some symbols do resemble the Latin, Greek and even the Cyrillic scripts' letters, but the sounds are completely different (for example, the sound /a/ is written with a letter that resembles Latin D).

Description

Each of the characters represents one syllable, such as in the Japanese *kana* and the Bronze Age Greek Linear B writing systems. The first six characters represent isolated vowel syllables. Characters for combined consonant and vowel syllables then follow. It is recited from left to right, top to bottom.[3]

The charts below show the syllabary as arranged by Samuel Worcester along with his commonly used transliterations. He played a key role in the development of Cherokee printing from 1828 until his death in 1859.

Syllabary shown using an image

Sequoyah, inventor of the Cherokee syllabary

	a		e	i		o	u	v [ə̃]
Ꭰ	a		Ꭱ e	Ꭲ i		Ꭳ o	Ꭴ u	Ꭵ v
Ꭶ	ga	Ꭷ ka	Ꭸ ge	Ꭹ gi		Ꭺ go	Ꭻ gu	Ꭼ gv
Ꭽ	ha		Ꭾ he	Ꭿ hi		Ꮀ ho	Ꮁ hu	Ꮂ hv
Ꮃ	la		Ꮄ le	Ꮅ li		Ꮆ lo	Ꮇ lu	Ꮈ lv
Ꮉ	ma		Ꮊ me	Ꮋ mi		Ꮌ mo	Ꮍ mu	
Ꮎ	na	Ꮏ hna Ꮐ nah	Ꮑ ne	Ꮒ ni		Ꮓ no	Ꮔ nu	Ꮕ nv
Ꮖ	qua		Ꮗ que	Ꮘ qui		Ꮙ quo	Ꮚ quu	Ꮛ quv
Ꮝ	s Ꮜ sa		Ꮞ se	Ꮟ si		Ꮠ so	Ꮡ su	Ꮢ sv
Ꮣ	da Ꮤ ta		Ꮥ de Ꮦ te	Ꮧ di Ꮨ ti		Ꮩ do	Ꮪ du	Ꮫ dv
Ꮬ	dla Ꮭ tla		Ꮮ tle	Ꮯ tli		Ꮰ tlo	Ꮱ tlu	Ꮲ tlv
Ꮳ	tsa		Ꮴ tse	Ꮵ tsi		Ꮶ tso	Ꮷ tsu	Ꮸ tsv
Ꮹ	wa		Ꮺ we	Ꮻ wi		Ꮼ wo	Ꮽ wu	Ꮾ wv
Ꮿ	ya		Ᏸ ye	Ᏹ yi		Ᏺ yo	Ᏻ yu	Ᏼ yv

Notes:

1. In the chart, 'v' represents a nasal vowel, /ə̃/.

2. The character V *do* is shown upside-down in the chart, and in some fonts. It should be oriented in the same way as the Latin letter *V*.[4]

Syllabary shown using Unicode text

a			e	i		o	u	v
Ꭰ a			Ꭱ e	Ꭲ i		Ꭳ o	Ꭴ u	Ꭵ v
Ꭶ ga	Ꭷ ka		Ꭸ ge	Ꭹ gi		Ꭺ go	Ꭻ gu	Ꭼ gv
Ꭽ ha			Ꭾ he	Ꭿ hi		Ꮀ ho	Ꮁ hu	Ꮂ hv
Ꮃ la			Ꮄ le	Ꮅ li		Ꮆ lo	Ꮇ lu	Ꮈ lv
Ꮉ ma			Ꮊ me	Ꮋ mi		Ꮌ mo	Ꮍ mu	
Ꮎ na	Ꮏ hna	Ꮐ nah	Ꮑ ne	Ꮒ ni		Ꮓ no	Ꮔ nu	Ꮕ nv
Ꮖ qua			Ꮗ que	Ꮘ qui		Ꮙ quo	Ꮚ quu	Ꮛ quv
Ꮝ s	Ꮜ sa		Ꮞ se	Ꮟ si		Ꮠ so	Ꮡ su	Ꮢ sv
Ꮣ da	Ꮤ ta		Ꮥ de	Ꮦ te	Ꮧ di Ꮨ ti	Ꮩ do	Ꮪ du	Ꮫ dv
Ꮬ dla	Ꮭ tla		Ꮮ tle	Ꮯ tli		Ꮰ tlo	Ꮱ tlu	Ꮲ tlv
Ꮳ tsa			Ꮴ tse	Ꮵ tsi		Ꮶ tso	Ꮷ tsu	Ꮸ tsv
Ꮹ wa			Ꮺ we	Ꮻ wi		Ꮼ wo	Ꮽ wu	Ꮾ wv
Ꮿ ya			Ᏸ ye	Ᏹ yi		Ᏺ yo	Ᏻ yu	Ᏼ yv

Detailed considerations

The phonetic values of these characters do not relate to those represented by the letters of the Latin script. Some characters represent two distinct phonetic values (actually heard as different syllables), while others often represent different forms of the same syllable.[3] Not all phonemic distinctions of the spoken language are represented. For example, while /d/ + vowel syllables are mostly differentiated from /t/+vowel by use of different graphs, syllables beginning with /g/ are all conflated with those beginning with /k/. Also, long vowels are not ordinarily distinguished from short vowels, tones are not marked, and there is no regular rule for representing consonant clusters. However, in more recent technical literature, length of vowels can actually be indicated using a colon. Six distinctive vowel qualities are represented in the Cherokee syllabary based on where they are pronounced in the mouth, including the high vowels *i* and *u*, mid vowels *e, v*, and *o*, and low vowel *a*. The syllabary also does not distinguish among

syllables that end in vowels, *h,* or glottal stop. For example, the single symbol, Ᏸ, is used to represent *su* in *su:dali,* meaning *six* (ᏸᏞᎵ). This same symbol Ᏸ represents *suh* as in *suhdi,* meaning 'fishhook' (ᏸᎫ). Therefore, there is no differentiation among the symbols used for syllables ending in a single vowel versus that vowel plus "h." When consonants other than *s, h,* or glottal stop arise with other consonants in clusters, the appropriate consonant plus a "dummy vowel" is used. This dummy vowel is not pronounced and is either chosen arbitrarily or for etymological reasons (reflecting an underlying etymological vowel). For example, ᏧᎾᏍᏗ (tsu-na-s-di) represents the word *ju:nsdi,* meaning 'small.' *Ns* in this case is the consonant cluster that requires the following dummy vowel, *a. Ns* is written as ᎾᏍ /nas/. The vowel is included in the transliteration, but is not pronounced in the word (*ju:nsdi*). (The transliterated *ts* represents the affricate *j*).[5] As with some other writing systems (like Arabic), adult speakers can distinguish words by context.

Transliteration issues

Some Cherokee words pose a problem for transliteration software because they contain adjacent pairs of single letter symbols that (without special provisions) would be combined when doing the back conversion from Latin script to Cherokee. Here are a few examples:

- ᎢᏣᎵᏍᎠᏁᏗ = *itsalisanedi* = *i-tsa-li-s-a-ne-di*
- ᎤᎵᎩᏳᏣᏍᎠᏅᏁ = *uligiyusanvne* = *u-li-gi-yu-s-a-nv-ne*
- ᎤᏂᏰᏍᎢᏱ = *uniyesiyi* = *u-ni-ye-s-i-yi*
- ᎾᏍᎢᏯ = *nasiya* = *na-s-i-ya*

For these examples, the back conversion is likely to join *s-a* as *sa* or *s-i* as *si*.

Other Cherokee words contain character pairs that entail overlapping transliteration sequences. Examples:

- ᎦᎾ transliterates as *nahna,* yet so does ᎾᎿ. The former is *nah-na,* the latter is *na-hna.*

If the Latin script is parsed from left to right, longest match first, then without special provisions, the back conversion would be wrong for the latter. There are several similar examples involving these character combinations: *naha nahe nahi naho nahu nahv.*

A further problem encountered in transliterating Cherokee is that there are some pairs of different Cherokee words that transliterate to the same word in the Latin script. Here are some examples:

- ᎠᏍᎴᏃ and ᎠᏎᏃ both transliterate to *aseno*
- ᎨᏍᎥᎢ and ᎨᏅᎢ both transliterate to *gesvi*

Without special provision, a round trip conversion changes ᎠᏍᎴᏃ to ᎠᏎᏃ and changes ᎨᏍᎥᎢ to ᎨᏅᎢ. [6]

Character orders

1. The usual alphabetical order[7] for Cherokee runs across the rows of the syllabary chart from left-to-right, top-to-bottom: D (a), R (e),T (i), Ꮔ (o), OꞋ (u), i (v), Ꮝ (ga), ᴓ (ka), Ᏸ (ge), Ꮿ (gi), A (go), J (gu), E (gv), Ꮺ (ha), Ꮖ (he), Ꮂ (hi), Ᏺ (ho), Γ (hu), ᏼ (hv), W (la), ᏣꞋ (le), Ᏼ (li), Ꮹ (lo), M (lu), Ꮆ (lv), ᏸꞋ (ma), OᏥ (me), H (mi), Ꮹ (mo), Ꮗ (mu), Ꮎ (na), Ꮕ (hna), G (hah), Ꮑ (ne), Ꮒ (ni), Z (no), Ꮜ (nu), Oꞌ (nv), Ꮖ (qua), Ꮃ (que), Ꮗ (qui), ꝠꞋ (quo), Ꮥ (quu), Ꮕ (quv), Ꮂ (sa), Ꮿ (s), Ꮞ (se), Ᏸ (si), Ꮓ (so), ᏇꞋ (su), R (sv), Ꮣ (da), W (ta), Ꮝ (de), Ꮖ (te), Ꮥ (di), Ꮧ (ti), V (do), S, OꞋ (dv), Ꮞ (dla), Ꮏ (tla), L (tle), C (tli), Ꮗ (tlo), Ꮗ (tlu), P (tlv), G (tsa), Ꮩ (tse), Ᏹᴿ (tsi), K (tso), Ꮪ (tsu), Ꮳ (tsv), Ꮹ (wa), Ꮹ (we), Ꮻ (wi), Ꮼ (wo), Ꮽ (wu), Ꮾ (wv), Ꮿ (ya), ᵝ (ye), Ꮿ (yi), Ꮂ (yo), Ꮿ (yu), B (yv).

2. Cherokee has also been alphabetized based on the six columns of the syllabary chart from top-to-bottom, left-to-right: D (a), Ꮝ (ga), ᴓ (ka), Ꮺ (ha), W (la), ᏸꞋ (ma), Ꮎ (na), Ꮕ (hna), G (hah), Ꮖ (qua), Ꮿ (s), Ꮂ (sa), Ꮣ (da), W (ta), Ꮞ (dla), Ꮏ (tla), G (tsa), Ꮹ (wa), Ꮿ (ya), R (e), Ᏸ (ge), Ꮖ (he), ᏣꞋ (le), OᏥ (me), Ꮑ (ne), Ꮃ (que), Ꮞ (se), Ꮝ (de), Ꮖ (te), L (tle), Ꮩ (tse), Ꮹ (we), ᵝ (ye), T (i), Ꮿ (gi), Ꮂ (hi), Ᏼ (li), H (mi), Ꮒ (ni), Ꮗ (qui), Ᏸ (si), Ꮥ (di), Ꮧ (ti), C (tli), Ᏹᴿ (tsi), Ꮻ (wi), Ꮿ (yi), Ꮔ (o), A (go), Ᏺ (ho), Ꮹ (lo), Ꮹ (mo), Z (no), ꝠꞋ (quo), Ꮓ (so), V (do), Ꮗ (tlo), K (tso), Ꮼ (wo), Ꮂ (yo), OꞋ (u), J (gu), Γ (hu), M (lu), Ꮗ (mu), Ꮜ (nu), Ꮥ (quu), ᏇꞋ (su), S, Ꮗ (tlu), Ꮪ (tsu), Ꮽ (wu), Ꮿ (yu), i (v), E (gv), ᏼ (hv), Ꮆ (lv), Oꞌ (nv), Ꮕ (quv), R (sv), OꞋ (dv), P (tlv), Ꮳ (tsv), Ꮾ (wv), B (yv).

3. Sequoyah used a completely different alphabetical order: R (e), D (a), W (la), Ᏹᴿ (tsi), G (hah), Ꮽ (wu), Ꮹ (we), Ᏼ (li), Ꮑ (ne), Ꮹ (mo), Ꮿ (gi), Ꮿ (yi), Ᏸ (si), P (tlv), Ꮔ (o), M (lu), ᏣꞋ (le), Ꮺ (ha), Ꮼ (wo), Ꮗ (tlo), W (ta), B (yv), Ꮆ (lv), Ꮂ (hi), Ꮿ (s), Ꮂ (yo), Γ (hu), A (go), Ꮪ (tsu), Ꮗ (mu), Ꮞ (se), Ꮓ (so), C (tli), Ꮗ (qui), Ꮃ (que), Ꮂ (sa), Ꮖ (qua), Z (no), ᴓ (ka), Ꮳ (tsv), R (sv), Ꮒ (ni), Ꮝ (ga), V (do), Ᏸ (ge), Ꮣ (da), E (gv), Ꮻ (wi), T (i), OꞋ (u), ᵝ (ye), ᏼ (hv), OꞋ (dv), J (gu), K (tso), ꝠꞋ (quo), Ꮜ (nu), Ꮎ (na), Ꮹ (lo), Ꮿ (yu), Ꮩ (tse), Ꮥ (di), Ꮾ (wv), S, Ꮝ (de), G (tsa), i (v), Oꞌ (nv), Ꮖ (te), ᏸꞋ (ma), ᏇꞋ (su), Ꮗ (tlu), Ꮖ (he), Ᏺ (ho), H (mi), Ꮏ (tla), Ꮿ (ya), Ꮹ (wa), Ꮧ (ti), L (tle), Ꮕ (hna), Ꮥ (quu), Ꮞ (dla), OᏥ (me), Ꮕ (quv).

Numerals

Cherokee uses Arabic numerals (0-9). Sequoyah's numbering system [8] was never adopted.

Early history

Around 1809, impressed by the "talking leaves" of European written languages, Sequoyah began work to create a writing system for the Cherokee language. After attempting to create a character for each word, Sequoyah realized this would be too difficult and eventually created characters to represent syllables. Sequoyah took some ideas from his copy of the Bible, which he studied for characters to use in print, noticing the simplicity of the Roman letters and adopting them to make the writing of his syllabary easier. He could not actually read any of the letters in the book (as can be seen in certain characters in his syllabary, which look like Ws or 4s for example), so it is especially impressive that he came up with such a well-developed system. He worked on the syllabary for twelve years before completion, and dropped or modified most of the characters he originally created. The rapid dissemination of the syllabary is notable, and by 1824, most Cherokees could read and write in their newly developed orthography.[3]

Cherokee syllabary in use today, Tahlequah, Oklahoma

In 1828, the order of the symbols in a chart and the very shapes of the symbols were modified by Cherokee author and editor Elias Boudinot to adapt the syllabary to printing presses.[9] The 86th character was dropped entirely.[10] However, the new writing system was a key factor in enabling the Cherokee to maintain their social boundaries and ethnic identities. Since the year 1828, very few changes have been made to the syllabary.[3]

Later developments

The syllabary achieved almost instantaneous popularity, and was adopted by the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper, later *Cherokee Advocate*, in 1828, followed by the *Cherokee Messenger*, a bilingual paper printed in syllabary in Indian Territory in the mid-19th century.[11] It has been used since it was formed to write letters, keep diaries, and record medical formulas.[5] The syllabary is still used today to transcribe recipes, religious lore, folktales, etc. In the 1960s, the Cherokee Phoenix Press published literature in the Cherokee syllabary, including the *Cherokee Singing Book*.[12]

Sign in Cherokee, North Carolina

According to evidence as of 1980, the Cherokee language is still spoken both formally and informally by around 10,000 Western Cherokees. The language remains strong.[13] A Cherokee syllabary typewriter ball was developed in the 1980s. Computer fonts greatly expanded Cherokee writers' ability to publish in Cherokee.

An increasing corpus of children's literature is printed in Cherokee syllabary today to meet the needs of Cherokee students in the Cherokee language immersion schools in Oklahoma and North Carolina. In 2010, a Cherokee keyboard cover was developed by Roy Boney, Jr. and Joseph Erb, facilitating more rapid typing in Cherokee and now used by students in the Cherokee Nation Immersion School, where all coursework is written in syllabary.[9] The syllabary is finding increasingly diverse usage today, from books, newspapers, and websites to the street signs of Tahlequah, Oklahoma and Cherokee, North Carolina. In August 2010, the Oconaluftee Institute for Cultural Arts in Cherokee, North Carolina acquired a letterpress and had the Cherokee syllabary recast to begin printing one-of-a-kind fine art books and prints in syllabary.[14]

Possible influence on Liberian Vai syllabary

In recent years evidence has emerged suggesting that the Cherokee syllabary provided a model for the design of the Vai syllabary in Liberia, Africa. The Vai syllabary emerged about 1832/33. The link appears to have been Cherokee who emigrated to Liberia after the invention of the Cherokee syllabary (which in its early years spread rapidly among the Cherokee) but before the invention of the Vai syllabary. One such man, Cherokee Austin Curtis, married into a prominent Vai family and became an important Vai chief himself. It is perhaps not coincidence that the "inscription on a house" that drew the world's attention to the existence of the Vai script was in fact on the home of Curtis, a Cherokee.[15] There also appears to be a connection between an early form of written Bassa and the earlier Cherokee syllabary.

Classes

Cherokee languages classes typically begin with a transliteration of Cherokee into Roman letters, only later incorporating the syllabary. The Cherokee languages classes offered through Haskell Indian Nations University, Northeastern State University,[9] the University of Oklahoma, the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, Western Carolina University, and the elementary school immersion classes offered by the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Immersion School[16] all teach the syllabary. The Oconaluftee Institute for Cultural Arts incorporates the syllabary in the printmaking classes.[14]

Unicode

Cherokee was added to the Unicode Standard in September, 1999 with the release of version 3.0.

Block

The Unicode block for Cherokee is U+13A0 ... U+13FF:[17]

Cherokee[1] Unicode.org chart [2] (PDF)																
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A	B	C	D	E	F
U+13Ax	Ꭰ	Ꭱ	Ꭲ	Ꭳ	Ꭴ	Ꭵ	Ꭶ	Ꭷ	Ꭸ	Ꭹ	Ꭺ	Ꭻ	Ꭼ	Ꭽ	Ꭾ	Ꭿ
U+13Bx	Ꮀ	Ꮁ	Ꮂ	Ꮃ	Ꮄ	Ꮅ	Ꮆ	Ꮇ	Ꮈ	Ꮉ	Ꮊ	Ꮋ	Ꮌ	Ꮍ	Ꮎ	Ꮏ
U+13Cx	Ꮐ	Ꮑ	Ꮒ	Ꮓ	Ꮔ	Ꮕ	Ꮖ	Ꮗ	Ꮘ	Ꮙ	Ꮚ	Ꮛ	Ꮜ	Ꮝ	Ꮞ	Ꮟ
U+13Dx	Ꮠ	Ꮡ	Ꮢ	Ꮣ	Ꮤ	Ꮥ	Ꮦ	Ꮧ	Ꮨ	Ꮩ	Ꮪ	Ꮫ	Ꮬ	Ꮭ	Ꮮ	Ꮯ
U+13Ex	Ꮰ	Ꮱ	Ꮲ	Ꮳ	Ꮴ	Ꮵ	Ꮶ	Ꮷ	Ꮸ	Ꮹ	Ꮺ	Ꮻ	Ꮼ	Ꮽ	Ꮾ	Ꮿ
U+13Fx	Ᏸ	Ᏹ	Ᏺ	Ᏻ	B											
Notes																
1. As of Unicode version 6.1																

Fonts

A single Cherokee Unicode font is supplied with Mac OS X, version 10.3 (Panther) and later and Windows Vista. Cherokee is also supported by free fonts found at languagegeek.com and Touzet's atypical.net, and the shareware fonts Code2000 and Everson Mono.

- Languagegeek.com fonts [18]
- Everson Mono [19]
- atypical.net Cherokee font [20]
- Digohweli Cherokee font [21] – use this to display the new-form *do* (V-like).

References

[1] Sturtevant and Fogelson 337

[2] http://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U13A0.pdf

[3] Walker and Sarbaugh, 1993

[4] (http://www.languagegeek.com/font/fontdownload.html#Cherokee) implies that there was a difference between the old-form DO (Λ-like) and a new-form DO (V-like). The standard Digohweli font displays the new-form. Old Do Digohweli and Code2000 fonts both display the old-form.

[5] Scancarelli, 2005

[6] This has been confirmed using the online transliteration service.

[7] This is the same order as in the Unicode block.

[8] http://intertribal.net/NAT/Cherokee/WebPgCC1/Numerals.htm

[9] Staff. "Cherokee Nation creates syllabary keypad." (http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/living/87806252.html) *Indian Country Today*. 17 Mar 2010 (retrieved 23 Aug 2010)

[10] Kilpatrick and Kilpatick, 1968

[11] Sturtevant and Fogelson 362

[12] Sturtevant and Fogelson 750

[13] Foley, 1980

[14] "Letterpress arrives at OICA" (http://www.southwesterncc.edu/news/10-jul-sept/letterpress.htm) *Southwestern Community College* (retrieved 21 Nov 2010)

[15] Tuchscherer, 2002

[16] "Cherokee Language Revitalization Project." (http://www.wcu.edu/6314.asp) *Western Carolina University.* (retrieved 23 Aug 2010)

[17] The PDF version shows the new-form of the letter *do*.

[18] http://www.languagegeek.com/font/fontdownload.html

[19] http://www.evertype.com/emono/

[20] http://www.atypical.net/Cherokee.html

[21] http://www.cherokee.org/PressRoom/CherokeeFont/Default.aspx

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Further reading

- Cowen, Agnes. *Cherokee syllabary primer*. Park Hill, OK: Cross-Cultural Education Center, 1981. ASIN B00341DPR2.

External links

- Omniglot report on Cherokee (http://www.omniglot.com/writing/cherokee.htm)
- Cherokee – Sequoyah transliteration system (http://www.translitteration.com/transliteration/en/cherokee/sequoyah/) – online conversion tool

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