

Guide to the Healy Lake Writing System

by Gary Holton

The transcriptions of Healy Lake words used in this book make use of the symbols in the standard English alphabet plus a few special characters. The two most significant special characters are the “barred-l” (*l̄*) and the “nasal hook” (*•*). There are also several “accent” marks which are used to mark tone on vowels (*á, â, a=*).

Sounds which are written and pronounced as in English

Consonant	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
ch	chox	big	choke
t	tuu	water	too
s	saa	sun	son
h	he[n	creek	hen
m	menh	lake	men
n	nah&o;g	outside	now
sh	sheen	summer	she
th	thiit	embers	thin
y	yaadiimeey	northern lights	yell
k	ko;n&	fire	cool
l	laale[el	butterfly	look
j	jeyh	mittens	jay
w	wudzih	caribou	woo

Some symbols represent sounds which occur in English but are not found at the beginning of a word. In Tanacross these sounds can occur at the beginning of a word.

Consonant	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
ts	tsa;&	beaver	cats
dz	dzeen	day	adze
dl	dleg	squirrel	padlock
nd	ndiig	creek	bandage

Sounds which occur in English but are spelled differently in Healy Lake

Consonant	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
dh	nadh&aay	liver	this

Sounds which do not occur in English

Consonant	Example	Meaning
ʔ	ʔii	dog
tl̥	tle • e •	friend
tth̥	tthee	rock
ddh̥	ddhel	mountain
x	xos	thorns
gh	ghah	for
nh	menh	lake
yh	aayh	snowshoe

One very noticeable set of sounds which do not occur in English are the glottalized consonants. These sounds are a feature of all Athabascan languages (and many other Native American languages). When the apostrophe follows certain consonants, it indicates a glottalization, a “catch-in-the-breath” sound formed by using the closed vocal chords to compress the air in the vocal tract. Glottalized sounds are sometimes found at the end of English words (for example, some speakers’ pronunciations of “back”).

Consonant	Example	Meaning
tl̥ʔ	tl̥ʔii	rope
tth̥ʔ	tth̥ʔex	sinew
t̥ʔ	t̥ʔaath	cottonwood
k̥ʔ	k̥ʔa;ʔ	gun
ts̥ʔ	ts̥ʔeyh	canoe
ch̥ʔ	ch̥ʔox	quills

The apostrophe and the hyphen

The apostrophe (&) has a special meaning in the Tanacross alphabet. By itself it indicates a glottal stop, the sound which occurs in the middle of the English exclamation *uh-oh*. Sometimes it is necessary to indicate that a glottal stop is not part of the previous letter. In this case, a hyphen (-) is used to separate the previous letter and the glottal stop. An example is nek-&eh ‘I see’. It would be wrong to write this as nek&eh because this word does not contain a glottalized-k (k&).

The underscore

The underscore (_) is used in combination with certain letters and letter combinations to indicate that a sound begins voiceless and becomes voiced as it is pronounced. Thus, the sound sh sounds very much like *shy* and the sound s sounds very much like *sz*.

Consonant	Example	Meaning
h_	wuh_ig&	his dog
s_	wus_e;eg&	his saliva
t_h_	t_h_e;t	liver
s_h_	s h %oi	in
x_	xdelx_os	they are playing

Vowels

Healy Lake has five vowel symbols: *i*, *e*, *a*, *o*, *u*. All but *o* can occur either long or short. The long vowels are written double. The exact pronunciation of long versus short vowels may vary depending on context.

Vowel	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
ii	Äii	dog	me
i	s%ont&eh	it is	in
ee	&e;eÄ	trap	mane
e	se;n&	star	men
aa	tsaath	roots	on
a	k&a;&	gun	pot
o	ko;n&	fire	cone
uu	tl&uuÄ	rope	tooth
u	Tthiitu;&	Tanana River	two

Nasalization

Vowels may be nasalized, that is, pronounced with air coming out through the nose as well as the mouth. This is indicated with the nasal hook.

Vowel	Example	Meaning
i •	k&i • i •	birch
e •	ge • yh	dry
a •	ch&et&a • =a • &	leaves
u •	gu • u •	worm

Tone

Vowels may also be marked for tone

Tone	Vowel	Example	Meaning
low tone	e	nen	you
high tone	e;	ne;n&	land
falling tone	e[je[g	berries
rising tone	e=	ts&e=d&	blanket

Consonant Chart

		labial	dental	alveolar	lateral	palatal-alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal
Stops/ Affricates	unaspirated	b	ddh	d	dl	dz	j	g	&
	aspirated		tth	t	tl	ts	ch	k	
	glottalized		tth &	t&	tl&	ts&	ch&	k&	
Fricatives	voiced		dh		l	z		gh	
	semi-voiced		th		l̂	ŝ	sh	x̂	
	voiceless		th		l̂	ŝ	sh	x̂	h
Nasals	voiced	m		n					
	voiceless stopped	mb		nh nd					
Approx	voiced	w					y		
	voiceless						yh		