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Abbreviations and Symbols

ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
CONJ	conjunction
DEM	demonstrative
DEM ART	demonstrative article
DEM PRO	demonstrative pronoun
DIR	direction
EXCLAM	exclamatory word
FORM	formal address form
INDEF ART	indefinite article
INTER	interrogatory word
IVP	positional intransitive verb
IVS	simple intransitive verb
MANNER, DIR	manner or direction
N	noun

NUM	number
PART	particle (not translatable)
PER PRO	personal pronoun
PL	plural
PLU FAM	second person plural, familiar address form (<i>ix</i>)
PLU FORM	second person plural, formal address form (<i>alaq</i>)
PN	obligatorily possessed noun
POSS PRO	possessive pronoun
PREP	preposition
PRO	pronoun
REL PRO	relative pronoun
SING	singular
SING-FAM	second person singular, familiar address form (<i>at</i>)
SING-FORM	second person singular, formal address form (<i>laal</i>)
SPAN	Spanish loan word
TV	transitive verb
TVR	radical transitive verb
TVD	derived transitive verb

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LESSON

1

The K'ichee' Alphabet

The K'ichee' alphabet consists of the following sounds:

aa Closely resembles the *a* in "father."

aaj	reed	paar	skunk
chaaj	ash	laal	you (sing-form)

(See note 1.)

a A rapidly pronounced *a* resembling the *u* in "but."

aj	fresh ear of corn	ak'	chicken
kar	fish	jal	dried ears of corn

b' There are two forms of *b'*:

b'₁ FORMATION: This sound is formed by pulling air from the mouth back into the throat while pronouncing an English *b* and at the same time momentarily closing the throat before opening the lips to say the *b* sound.

OCCURRENCE: Before vowels.

b'e	road	ab'aj	rock
b'a	gopher	ub'een	tamale with beans inside

b'₂ FORMATION: Made by holding the breath while making a *p* sound and releasing the air in the mouth between the lips with a small puff of air or without releasing the air.

OCCURRENCE: Before consonants or at the end of an utterance.

jab'	rain	sib'	smoke
sub'	corn tamale	aab'	hammock

ch Like the *ch* in "church."

cho	lake	chiim	woven bag
wach	face, front	wo'ch	my house

ch' Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the *ch*, but now the throat is closed; only the air remaining in the mouth is used to produce this "glottalized" (produced with the throat closed) sound.

Hold your breath and practice making *ch'* and *ch'o*:

<i>ch'</i>	<i>ch'</i>	<i>ch'</i>	<i>ch'</i>	<i>ch'</i>	<i>ch'</i>	<i>ch'o</i>	<i>ch'o</i>	<i>ch'o</i>	<i>ch'o</i>	<i>ch'o</i>	<i>ch'o</i>
ch'o	mouse			puuch'	matter from eyes						
jach'	corn harvest			ch'iich'	any metallic object						

ee Pronounced like the *ai* in "bait."

cheech	for him	wee	mine (belonging to me)
eera	place where wheat is thrashed		

(See note 1.)

e A rapidly pronounced (short) *e* approximately like the *e* in "bet."

k'el	a small parrot	le	the (DEM ART)
------	----------------	----	---------------

ii Like the *ee* in "deed."

piim	thick	riib'	himself
siip	woodtick	wiij	my back

(See note 1.)

i A rapidly pronounced *i*.

sib'	smoke	in	I
------	-------	----	---

j Somewhat resembles the *h* sound in "hot" but pronounced deep in the throat with a scraping sound.

jat	go!	jooj	a black bird
ajijj	sugar cane	iij	measles

k Like the *c* in "cat."

ko	hard	keem	weaving
kuuk	squirrel	ki	maguey plant

(See note 2.)

k' Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the *k*, but now the throat is closed and only the air in the mouth is used to produce this glottalized" (produced with throat closed) sound.

Hold your breath and practice making *k'* and *k'a*:

<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'</i>	<i>k'a</i>	<i>k'a</i>	<i>k'a</i>	<i>k'a</i>	<i>k'a</i>	<i>k'a</i>
<i>k'a</i>	bitter			<i>k'ook'</i>	fragrant			<i>k'olok'ik</i>	spherical			<i>k'ab'ak'ik</i>	gaping (mouth)	
<i>k'i</i>	many													
<i>k'aak'</i>	new													

l There are two *l*'s:

l₁ FORMATION: Like an English *l* but with the tip of the tongue placed immediately behind the upper front teeth.

OCCURRENCE: Before vowels.

lo	perhaps	lawalo	seriously sick
Luu'	Peter (name)	lik'ilik	spread out

l₂ FORMATION: Formed with the tongue in the same position as it is for *l₁* but said without voicing (whispered); the air in the mouth is blown out over the top sides of the tongue while saying this sound.

OCCURRENCE: Before consonants or at the end of utterances.

aal	heavy	yaab'iil	sickness
jul	hole	te'l	torn

m Like the *m* in English.

am	spider	amoolo	fly
poom	copal	maam	grandfather

n Closely resembles the English *n*.

naan	ma'am	nuwaa	my tortilla
siin	bamboo	aninaq	quickly

oo Like the *o* in "phone."

ooj	avocado	pooy	scarecrow
lool	grasshopper	q'ooq'	type of squash

(See note 2.)

o A rapidly pronounced (short) *o*.

oj	we	kon	foolish
koj	lion	ch'ok	blackbird

p Like the *p* in “spot.”

poom	copal	puum	dove
poop	straw mat	peepe	butterfly, moth

(See note 2.)

p vs. b': It is often hard for a beginner in the language to distinguish between *p* and *b'*. The following contrasting words will help in hearing and pronouncing the difference:

sib'	smoke	b'o'j	clay cooking pot
siip	woodtick	po'j	a type of coastal tree
jab'	rain	kolob'	rope
poop	straw mat	ch'oop	pineapple

q A *k* sound produced deep in the throat. In order to produce this sound, it may help to place the tip of the tongue down near the root of the tongue and then, forcing the back of the tongue as deep as possible into the throat, pronounce a *k*.

aaq	pig	waaqib'	six
b'aaq	bone	b'aqiil	body

(See note 2.)

q' Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the *q*, but now the throat is closed and only the air remaining in the mouth is used to produce the “glottalized” (produced with the throat closed) sound. In Nahualá the mouth air is pulled back into the throat to produce this sound. In some dialects the mouth air is forced outward to produce the sound.

Hold your breath and practice making *q'* and *q'a*:

<i>q'</i>	<i>q'a</i>	<i>q'a</i>	<i>q'a</i>	<i>q'a</i>	<i>q'a</i>	<i>q'a</i>							
q'an	yellow	aq'ab'	night	q'ijj	day, sun	q'eq	black	waaq'	my tongue	q'aaq'	fire		

r There are two *r*'s:

r₁ FORMATION: Like the Spanish *flip r* (as in “pero”) or the *tt* in the English name “Betty.”

OCCURRENCE: Between two vowels.

toroom	open	eera	place for thrashing wheat
waraal	here	joron	cold

r₂ FORMATION: Like the Spanish trilled *r* (as in “perro”) but without voicing (whispered).

OCCURRENCE: Whenever the *r* is not found between two vowels.

rax	green	paar	skunk
ri'	that one	karna't	passion fruit

s Like the *s* in English.

t A *t* pronounced with the tip of the tongue directly behind the upper front teeth.

tap	crab	ataam	early
jat	go!	taat	sir

(See note 2.)

t' Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the *t*, but now the throat is closed and only the air remaining in the mouth is used to produce this “glottalized” (produced with the throat closed) sound.

Hold your breath and practice making *t'* and *t'a*:

<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>t'a</i>						
b'it'	a tearing sound			t'u'y	cooking pot									
t'oot'	snail			jat'iim	tied									

tz Like the *ts* in “sits.”

tzi	soaked kernels of corn (hominy)	tzatz	thick
tzaam	liquor	patzapik	shaggy

tz' Pronounced with the tongue in the same position as for the “tz,” but now the throat is closed and the air remaining in the mouth is used to produce this “glottalized” (produced with the throat closed) sound.

Hold your breath and practice making *tz'* and *tz'a*:

<i>tz'</i>	<i>tz'</i>	<i>tz'</i>	<i>tz'</i>	<i>tz'</i>	<i>tz'</i>	<i>tz'a</i>						
tz'i'	dog			suutz'	cloud							
atz'aam	salt			patz'an	dried plant stalk							

uu Like the *oo* of “boot.”

uul	landslide	puum	a kind of bird
suuq	scum	puuch'	matter from eyes

(See note 2)

u A rapidly pronounced (short) *u*.

us	gnat	jul	hole
sub'	corn tamale	k'uch	buzzard

w There are two *w*'s:

w₁ FORMATION: Like the *w* in English.

OCCURRENCE: Before vowels.

wa	tortilla	yawaab'	sick one
awaal	your child (woman)	oyowaal	anger

w₂ FORMATION: Somewhat like the *oof* in “aloof,” but the *f* is pronounced with the two lips rather than with the lower lip and upper front teeth.

OCCURRENCE: Before consonants or at the end of utterances.

teew	cold	ulew	land, earth
rajaaw	its owner	utiw	coyote

x Like the *sh* in “ship.”

xaan	adobe	aweex	corn planting
oxib'	three	xoot	earthen shingles or cooking plate

y There are two *y*'s:

y₁ FORMATION: Like the *y* in “yes.”

OCCURRENCE: Before vowels.

yaab'iil	sickness	iyoom	midwife
yaak	fox	saniyeb'	sand

y₂ FORMATION: Like the *ee* of “beet” immediately followed by the *h* of “hot,” but with the *h* pronounced directly behind the upper front teeth.

OCCURRENCE: Before consonants or at the end of utterances.

pooy	scarecrow	xu'y	stingy
t'o'y	woven cap	t'u'y	cooking pot

' Glottal stop, formed by quickly closing and opening the throat, as if saying the word “bottle” as *bo'l*. To pronounce “bottle” this way, first the *bo* of “bottle” is said, then the breath is held for a short moment before relaxing the throat muscles and saying the *l*: “bo” – hold breath – *l*.

b'aa'	well! oh!	tapa'l	a type of fruit
ja'	water	t'u'y	cooking pot
wachi'iil	my companion	kin'eeek*	I go
ub'e'eel	correctness	kix'eeek*	you go

* In this grammar glottal stops are almost never written before vowels, even though any word beginning with a vowel in K'ichee' is preceded by a glottal stop (e.g., 'ak' "chicken").

NOTES TO LESSON 1

- Final short vowels: Any short vowel that occurs at the end of an utterance is followed by a breathy *h* almost as if the vowel were said a second time in a whispered manner.

b'ah	gopher	choh	lake
b'eh	road	puupu	balloon
tzih	soaked kernels of corn		

- Aspiration: If the consonants *k*, *p*, *q*, and *t* occur before vowels, they are pronounced with a minimum of air escaping from the mouth (unaspirated), as in the *c* of "scare," the *p* of "spot," and the *t* of "stake."

kaa'	grinding stone	pooy	scarecrow
ko	hard	apanoq	over there
qeech	ours	tap	crab
aqan	foot	maataam	late

If the consonants *k*, *p*, *q*, and *t* occur before other consonants or at the end of an utterance, they are pronounced with a noticeable amount of air escaping from the mouth (aspirated), as in the *c* of "tic," the *p* of "up," and the *t* of "at."

pa'k	cracked hands	tap	crab
xok la'	that one entered	siip	woodtick
aaq	pig	at	you
uq	skirt	po't	woven blouse

OPTIONAL DRILLS

Listed below are some exercises to further the mastery of some of the more difficult sounds for those needing extra drill.

A. Regular vs. Short Vowels

aa, a

aaj	reed	chaaj	ash
aj	fresh corn	chaj	pine

b'aatz'	calendar day	k'aat	cargo net
b'atz'	thread	k'at	calendar day
aak'	type of grain	oq'aab'	an edible green
ak'	chicken	uq'ab'	his hand
kaawaaj	you want it	pataan	service
kawaaj	I want it	patan	head strap
ee, e			
eek'	bromeliad	cheech	for him
		k'el	a green parrot
ii, i			
siip	woodtick		
sib'	smoke		
oo, o			
ooj	avocado	poom	copal
oj	we	kon	stupid
q'inoom	rich	k'ook'	fragrant
q'inom	a type of fruit	ch'ok	blackbird
k'ooj	mask	q'oor	corn dough
koj	lion	q'or	lazy
uu, u			
uul	landslide	k'uul	blanket
us	gnat	jul	hole
suuq	scum	puuch'	matter from eyes
sub'	corn tamale	k'uch	buzzard

B. Distinguishing *k*, *k'*, *q*, and *q'* in Hearing and Speaking

kook	turtle	kuuk	squirrel
kook'	finely ground	kuuk'	with them
k'ook'	fragrant	quuk'	with us
q'ooq'	large squash	kuq	their skirts
q'aaq'	fire	quq	our skirts
qaaq'	our tongues	q'uuq'	quetzal bird
kaaq'	their tongues		
k'aaq'	new		
kaaq	their pig	kolik	to be defended, saved
qaaq	our pig	k'olik	to be put away
kaak'	their chicken	qolik	to be scraped, scratched
qaak'	our chicken	q'olik	to be picked (apples, coffee, etc.)
kaq	red	k'aq	flea

C. Glottal Stops

chee	for him	kuulik	he arrives
chee'	tree, wood	ku'lik	they arrive
ja	house	kab'alka'tik	he rolls over and over
ja'	water	kaab'alkatijj	you roll it over and over
tzi	soaked kernels of corn	ixoqii'b'	women
tz'i'	dog	i'xoqii'b'	women (third person plural)

STRESS RULES

In K'ichee' words are generally stressed on the last syllable (e.g., *tinamit* "town"; *kixqatzukuuj* "we look for you"). However, small particle-like words are generally not stressed unless they are the last word in an utterance (e.g., with the adverbial particle *na* "later": *kimb'ee na chwe'q*; utterance-final: *kimbee na*). If a word ends in a short vowel, then the stress is on the penultimate syllable of that word (e.g., *kojeewara jee la'* "We'll go sleep over there"; *chuwa ja* "in front of the house"). The stress rules for the language are more complex than what has just been stated, but since this is an introductory grammar, no more will be said about stress here.

USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

1. Xsaqirik.
Good morning. (greeting)
2. Xe q'ijj.
Good afternoon. (greeting)
3. Xok aq'ab'.
Good evening. (greeting)
4. La utz awach?*
- How are you?
5. Utz, malyoox. E k'u ri at?*
- Fine, thank you. And you?

* All expressions using second person singular or plural will here be found in the familiar *at* and *ix* forms. If these same expressions are to be said in the formal *laal* and *alaaq* forms, the appropriate changes must be made.