

LETTERS AND THEIR SOUNDS

As Dakota is primarily an oral language, there is no standard alphabet, and various different orthographies have been used over the years. This book is written using the Standard Dakota Orthography because it is both phonemic and very similar to the Standard Lakota Orthography used in the New Lakota Dictionary and Lakota language textbooks (the only change is the removal of *l* and addition of *d*). The alphabet consists of the following 36 letters and combinations of letters:

a	aŋ	b	č	čh	č'	d	e	ǵ
h	ħ	ħ'	i	iŋ	k	kh	k'	m
n	o	p	ph	p'	s	s'	š	š'
t	th	t'	u	uŋ	w	y	z	ž

Each sound in the alphabet makes one and only one sound, the table below compares the sounds to those of English as much as possible. Additionally, the corresponding letter of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is given to help those familiar with this alphabet learn the pronunciation, and so that anyone who wants to hear the sound of the above Dakota letters may go to www.ipachart.com and click on the corresponding letter in the IPA.

SDO	IPA	PRONUNCIATION	DAKOTA EXAMPLE
a	a	like the a in <i>father</i>	até
aŋ	ã	like the o in <i>monkey</i>	aŋpétu
i	i	like the ea in <i>eat</i>	ité
iŋ	ĩ	like the i in <i>ink</i>	íŋyaŋ
u	u	like the oo in <i>boot</i>	úta
uŋ	ũ	like the oo in <i>loon</i>	úŋkhaŋ
e	e	like the e in <i>bed</i>	éthi
o	o	like the o in <i>torque</i>	oíyokphi
m	m	like the m in <i>mom</i>	mní
b	b	like the b in <i>boat</i>	bdé
p	p	like the p in <i>spin</i>	pápa
ph	p ^h	like the p in <i>pin</i>	pheží
p'	p'	no english equivalent	p'ó
n	n	like the n in <i>new</i>	napé
d	d	like the d in <i>dog</i>	dakhóta
t	t	like the t in <i>still</i>	tópa
th	t ^h	like the t in <i>too</i>	thípi
t'	t'	no english equivalent	t'é
g	g	like the g in <i>bog</i>	šúŋkag
k	k	like the k in <i>skill</i>	kimámna
kh	k ^h	like the k in <i>kill</i>	kháte
k'	k'	no english equivalent	k'á
č	tʃ	like the tʃ in <i>mischevious</i>	čónana
čh	tʃ ^h	like the ch in <i>kill</i>	čhápa
č'	tʃ'	no english equivalent	č'ó

SDO	IPA	PRONOUNCIATION	DAKOTA EXAMPLE
z	z	like the z in <i>zoo</i>	zuzéča
s	s	like the s in <i>see</i>	sí
s'	s'	no english equivalent	s'á
ž	ʒ	like the s in <i>pleasure</i>	žó
š	ʃ	like the sh in <i>shop</i>	šá
š'	ʃ'	no english equivalent	waš'áka
ǰ	ɣ	no english equivalent	ǰú
ħ	x	no english equivalent	ħé
ħ'	x'	no english equivalent	haħ'áŋna
w	w	like the w in <i>water</i>	wáta
y	y	like the y in <i>yes</i>	yé
h	h	like the h in <i>happy</i>	hoǰáŋ

Also, to help make this book easier to use for those accustomed to different writing systems, below is a table comparing many of the different orthographies that have been used for Dakota to this one

SDO	UMN	RI	B/D	TR.	SDO	UMN	RI	B/D	TR.
a	a	a	a	a	k'	k'	k'	k'	q
aŋ	aŋ	aŋ	ą	an	č	c	c	c	c
i	i	i	i	i	čh	ç	ç	c'	c
iŋ	iŋ	iŋ	j	in	č'	c'	c'	c'	c'
u	u	u	u	u	m	m	m	m	m
uŋ	uŋ	oŋ	ų	on	n	n	n	n	n
e	e	e	e	e	z	z	z	z	z
o	o	o	o	o	s	s	s	s	s

SDO	UMN	RI	B/D	TR.	SDO	UMN	RI	B/D	TR.
b	b	b	b	b	s'	s'	s'	s'	s'
p	p	p	p	p	ž	ž	ž	ž	j
ph	ḡ	ḡ	p'	p	š	š	š	š	s
d	d	d	d	d	ǰ	ǰ	ǰ	ǰ	g
t	t	t	t	t	ħ	ħ	ħ	ħ	r
th	ṭ	ṭ	t'	t	ħ'	ħ'	ħ'	ħ	r
t'	t'	t'	t'	t'	w	w	w	w	w
g	g	g	g	g	y	y	y	y	y
k	k	k	k	k	h	h	h	h	h
kh	ḵ	ḵ	k'	k					

In the above table, the column labeled sdo is the orthography used throughout this book. The label umn stands for the orthography designed at the University of Minnesota, ri for the orthography used by Riggs in his grammar and dictionary, b/d stands for the orthography used by Boas and Deloria in their grammar book from the 1930s, and tr. stands for the traditional orthography; which uses only characters appearing on a standard keyboard.

For the sake of second-language learning, the single most important issue when it comes to an orthography is being *phonetic*. A phonetic orthography assigns exactly one symbol to one sound, so that there is no ambiguity as to how to pronounce a word.

technically, this is
a *phonemic*
orthography

Compare this to the case of English, which is *extremely* non-phonemic, and causes headaches for foreign language learners and elementary students alike! The craziness that is English spelling is probably best summed up by the poem *Our Strange Lingo* by Lord Cromer:

*When the English tongue we speak.
 Why is break not rhymed with freak?
 Will you tell me why it's true
 We say sew but likewise few?
 And the maker of the verse,
 Cannot rhyme his horse with worse?
 Beard is not the same as heard
 Cord is different from word.
 Cow is cow but low is low
 Shoe is never rhymed with foe.
 Think of hose, dose, and lose*

*And think of goose and yet with choose
 Think of comb, tomb and bomb,
 Doll and roll or home and some.
 Since pay is rhymed with say
 Why not paid with said I pray?
 Think of blood, food and good.
 Mould is not pronounced like could.
 Wherefore done, but gone and lone
 Is there any reason known?
 To sum up all, it seems to me
 Sound and letters don't agree.*

Imagine how difficult it would be to learn to pronounce some of the words above from just how they are written. Things become much easier when we rewrite a portion of the above using a phonemic alphabet for English (based on the SDO), all of the pronunciations are made readily apparent:

*kord is difrent frum werd.
 kaw is kaw but low is low
 šu iz nevr raimd with fo.
 Think av hoz, doz, and luz*

While learning from books is surely not the best way to learn a language, making sure to use a phonetic spelling system consistently throughout helps overcome at least one of the disadvantages: once the alphabet has been learned there is no ambiguity on how to pronounce a word that has been written down, and one need not learn the spelling and pronunciation of words separately.

VOWELS

Dakota has eight vowel sounds in total, five plain vowels and three nasals (compare this to midwestern English, which has approximately 16 different vowel sounds).

ORAL	a	e	i	o	u
NASAL	aŋ		iŋ		uŋ

For the most part these vowels have close analogs in English, and only the nasal vowels need a little more attention. English has nasal vowels, but they only occur before nasal consonants (like *m*, *n* or *ng*); we find the nasal vowel *aŋ* in the word *haunt*, the vowel *iŋ* in the word *bean*, and a vowel much like *uŋ* in the word *loon*. Because in English we never say nasal vowels in isolation, it is hard at first to pronounce them without accidentally following them with an *n* or *m* sound (spelled in the Dakota alphabet, the above English words would be *háŋnt*, *bíŋn* and *lúŋn* respectively). To practice, say these words slowly and notice how your mouth is formed right before pronouncing the final consonants. Then try to say them again but without pronouncing the consonants at all.

What we call simple vowels are usually called *monophthongs* and complex vowels are *diphthongs*

While native English speakers do not have trouble producing the Dakota vowels themselves, it is oftentimes hard at first to pronounce them correctly in a word. This is because all of the Dakota vowels are simple vowels, whereas in English often times we have complex vowels composed of two vowels pronounced together in quick succession.

Probably the best way to notice this is to pronounce the letter *i* slowly for yourself; this is not a simple vowel as it seems to our English-trained ears, but a complex vowel made out of the vowel sound *a* followed by a short *y* sound. These kind of complex vowels do not occur in Dakota; but their prevalence in English makes it easy to accidentally use them.

A good example of where the temptation to do this is quite strong is the Dakota word *sí*, meaning foot. While it appears that this should be pronounced identically to the English word *see*, it is not. If you say *see* slowly, you'll notice that the English vowel there is actually a complex vowel that starts off as *i* but finishes with a *y* sound: were we to spell *see* with the Dakota orthography it would not be *sí*, but *síy*. So to pronounce the Dakota correctly the *y* sound must be dropped; which to English trained ears sounds a bit abrupt, almost like saying *see* and then immediately hesitating or being cut off. Likewise the vowel *u* in the Dakota word *sú*, meaning *seed* is not pronounced exactly like the English word *sue*, for this word also ends in a complex vowel that trails off into a *w* sound. In pronouncing Dakota words care must be taken not to let English's complex vowels sneak in!

There is one exception to this rule—Dakota has precisely one occurrence of a complex vowel—the vowels in *háu* are pronounced not as a sequence of two vowels but as a complex vowel that starts off sounding like *a* and ends in a *w* sound; much like the vowel in the English word *how*.

CONSONANTS

The consonants of the Dakota language can be roughly divided into two different families: the *long consonants* and the *short consonants*. You can tell the difference between a short and a long consonant when pronouncing them as a long consonant can be carried on indefinitely (think of the hissing sound you can make by pronouncing *ssssssssssss*) whereas a short consonant is pronounced in a quick burst (like *t* or *p*; trying to pronounce *#####* results in a staccato sounding *tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh*). Each of these two groups of consonants occur in families, and will be looked at separately.

these are usually called *stops* and *fricatives*

SHORT CONSONANTS

The short consonants in Dakota fall into a couple of families: voiced, soft, hard, click and nasal. They are as follows:

VOICED	SOFT	HARD	CLICK	NASAL
b	p	ph	p'	m
d	d	th	t'	n
g	k	kh	k'	
	č	čh	č'	

These are the *voiced*, *unaspirated*, *aspirated*, and *ejective* consonants respectively

The voiced consonants, *b,d,g* are pronounced exactly like their English counterparts. Both *b* and *d* commonly occur anywhere in a word, but *g* is only used in contractions – when a contraction results in a word ending with *k*, that *k* becomes a *g*; for example *šúnka kin* contracts to *šúnkag*. These consonants are called *voiced* because your vocal cords vibrate when pronouncing them; you can feel this if you put your hand on your throat while pronouncing *dakhóta* or *bosní*.

The soft consonants *p,t,k* are pronounced like the *p,t,k* in the English words *spill, still, skill*. Notice that these sounds are not the same as the *p,t,k* in the words *pill, till, kill*; to see the difference hold your hand in front of your mouth while pronouncing them and you'll notice that when pronouncing the second set of words there is a brief puff of air after the consonants, whereas in the first set there is not.

Pronouncing Dakota words which begin with the soft consonants is difficult at first; as English does not ever use soft consonants in that position, and even when done correctly brains raised on English tend to hear these sounds as sounding much closer to *b,d,g* than to *p,t,k*. Indeed, one way to practice pronouncing these consonants correctly is to whisper words containing *b,d,g*; when whispering voiced sounds become voiceless so the English word *bog*, when whispered, is pronounced with a soft *p* and *k*.

The final soft consonant, *č*, is pronounced kind of like the English *ch* sound, but is softer; it is like the *sch* in *mischievous* or the *j* in the made-up word *sjar* (which is meant to rhyme with *scar*).

The hard consonants are written using the two-letter combinations *ph*, *th*, *kh*, and *čh* to distinguish them from their soft counterparts. These are pronounced like the *p,t,k*, and *ch* in the English words *pot, tall, kid* and *chip* respectively. They have the accompanying puff of air that was mentioned previously, and are the most common short consonants occurring in English so are easy to pronounce correctly in Dakota words.

Unlike in English however, where if you accidentally used a hard *k* in the word *skill* it would sound weird but not change the meaning of the word, the contrast between hard and soft consonants is very important in Dakota. There are many pairs of words which differ only whether a particular consonant is hard or soft, for example:

kíza	khíza	uŋkípi	uŋkhípi
It squeaks.	He is fighting.	We arrived there.	We returned there.

A good analogy is the *r* and *l* sound in English. These sounds are very distinct to native speakers of English, and it would be very difficult to accidentally confuse the word *right* for *light*, or *clown* for *crown*. However, these pairs of words are very hard to distinguish for Koreans

learning English, as while Korean has both the *r* and *l* sound (represented by the letter ㄹ), they never occur in the same place in a word or are used to differentiate the meaning of two words, much like the hard and soft *t* for English speakers. Keeping in mind how different *r* and *l* sound to native speakers but not necessarily to second language learners helps in remembering how different *t* and *th* or *p* and *ph* are in Dakota.

The collection of click consonants in Dakota, *p' t' k'*, have no analogs in English—they are produced by simultaneously releasing a burst of air from your throat while pronouncing the consonant. One way to try and learn to approximate these sounds is by saying a word that ends in a consonant, followed by an interjection beginning with a vowel, like *oh!*. So, for example to get a feel for how to pronounce the sound *k'*, try saying the phrase *you're back, oh!* quickly and you'll hear that the *k* sound is followed by a short pause before the *o*. Shrinking this pause until it is almost simultaneous with the *k* produces an approximation sounding like *ba-k'o*. Some examples of Dakota words using these sounds are *p'ó*, *k'á*, *t'é* and *č'ó*.

The final collection of short consonants are the nasals, *m* and *n* (they are called *nasal consonants* because you say them with your mouth closed, the air all comes out your nose) and they are pronounced exactly as in English. A Dakota word using both of them is *mni*, which means water.

LONG CONSONANTS

The long consonants in Dakota fall into three families: voiced, plain and click. They are as follows

VOICED	PLAIN	CLICK
<i>z</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>s'</i>
<i>ž</i>	<i>š</i>	<i>š'</i>
<i>ǰ</i>	<i>ń</i>	<i>ń'</i>

The voiced consonant *z* is pronounced exactly as it is in English, and the consonant *ž* is pronounced like the *s* in the word *measure*. The consonant *ǰ* has no English equivalent, it is a 'guttural' sound which

sounds a bit like the French or German *r* sound. An example of a Dakota word in which this sound occurs is *aǰúyapi*, or bread.

The plain consonant *s* is pronounced as it is in English, and *š* is pronounced like the English letter combination *sh*, in words such as *šá*, which means *red*, or *šaké*, *claw*. The letter *ḥ* is the unvoiced version of *š*, it is also a raspy guttural sound kind of like the *ch* in the Scottish pronunciation of *loch*.

The click versions of these consonants again have no English analog, but are produced by saying the consonant and then inserting a quick pause; there isn't an explosive burst of air as with *p'*, *t'*, *c'* and *k'*, but instead in pronouncing *s'* it sounds more like you were about to start saying *see* and then just abruptly stopped after the *s*. To learn to say these sounds inside words instead of in isolation, we can approximate them using the same trick as for the short consonants— saying *gas*, *oh!* or *ash*, *oh!* quickly will give an approximation of the sounds *s'o* and *š'o*. The most difficult sound of the bunch is *h'*, which occurs in Dakota words such as *ha'ḥanna*.

The remaining sounds of Dakota, *w*, *y*, and *h* are pronounced exactly as their English counterparts, and provide no trouble for native English speakers.

OTHER FEATURES OF THE ALPHABET

One additional character is used in transcribing Dakota throughout this book is the small capital *A*. Many verbs and other parts of speech end in a vowel that alternates between being an *a* and *e* or *aŋ* and *e* depending on the usage of the word (this process is called *the a-e change*). For example the word for *to see* changes between ending in an *a* and an *e* as can be seen in the following two example sentences:

waŋdáka he	háu waŋbdáke
Did you see him?	Yes I saw him.

When such words are introduced but not used in a sentence, they will appear ending in a capital *A*, to denote the fact that they undergo this

change. So, for example the verb for to see will appear as *waryáka*. This use of the capital A is standard in the New Lakota Dictionary as well.

Another feature of Dakota which must be marked in any phonetic alphabet is stress. Where the stress falls in a word is very important in Dakota, as it is in English (to convince yourself of this, say the sentence *I am going to present you with a present*). Not only does pronouncing the stresses correctly give Dakota its characteristic sound, but it also changing the stress can often change the meaning of the word, as in the English example above. In writing, stress will be marked with an acute accent on the vowel in the stressed syllable; for example

máğa	mağá	wíyaka	wiyáka	zíča	zičá
garden	goose	feather	sand	turkey	squirrel

In most words there is only a single stressed syllable, however in some compound words there is a secondary stress, which is less pronounced than the main stress. This will be marked with a grave accent.

pté+oyáte	ptéoyàte	máza+ská	mázaskà
buffalo+nation	the buffalo species	metal+white	money

One final symbol which will appear in the writing of Dakota is the colon (:), which will be used for two different purposes. Sometimes in the process of creating words, the syllable breaks do not appear where you would expect them to, and to denote this a colon will be inserted to show the actual syllabification. One good example of this is the verb *sdodyá*, meaning *he knows it*. The conjugated form meaning *we know it* is *sdodúnyapi*, but this is in syllabified as *sdod-uŋ-ya-pi* and not *sdo-dun-ya-pi* as might be expected. To denote this fact, such cases will be written with an intervening colon, leaving us with the form *sdod:únyapi*. Some further examples are below.

khad:únye	škad:ómani	sdod:únyapi
You & I heated it up.	He went about playing.	We knew it.

As the normal way for syllables to end is in a vowel; the only time we will need to specially mark it is in the case where a syllable ends in a consonant. Thus, a colon will never appear following a vowel to denote a syllable break. We will instead use colons after vowels to denote the

fact that the vowel in question is a long vowel. Long vowels occur in Dakota when two of the same vowel appear next to each other and are contracted; instead of putting a glottal stop between them as would be expected, it is pronounced as a single vowel that is just twice as long. Some examples of this are below:

míihakab	čhaŋháŋpi	héehaŋ
mi:hakab	čháŋ:pi	hè:haŋ
behind me	sugar	when it was then

EXTRA SYMBOLS

Like in any language, quick, relaxed speech in Dakota occasionally uses different sounds than slower, more carefully pronounced speech. Consider in English the difference between the slow and fast pronunciations of "*Did you want to go to the store?*"

did yu want tu gow tu thuh stor?
dijuh wanuh goduh thuh stor?

Here we will look briefly at the Dakota analogs of these changes.

THE LETTER NG

While the nasal sound spelled *ng* in English does not usually occur in Dakota words, it appears as the contraction of *k* preceded by a nasal vowel in fast speech. For lack of a better symbol to denote this sound, it will just be spelled *ng* in Dakota as well (this does not interfere with anything in the alphabet, as the *n* sound is never followed by the *g* sound directly in Dakota).

šúŋka+manúŋ	íŋyaŋkA+khiyA
šúŋngmanúŋ	íŋyaŋng:khiye
He steals horses.	He made it run.

THE LETTERS Æ AND ɔ

Two other sounds that occur as contractions, but not in any other cases are the vowels æ, which is pronounced like the *a* in the English word *cat*, and the vowel ɔ, which is pronounced like the *o* in the English word *boar*. These particular symbols were chosen to represent these sounds simply as they are the standard symbols in the international phonetic alphabet.

Note however that this usage is not standard outside of this book (most of the time words are written in their careful, slow speech forms so no extra letters for vowels are needed), but for the sake of trying to record speech phonetically some extra symbols are needed here. Examples of this are below:

iyáye	mitháwa
iyæ	mithɔ
He departed from here.	It is mine.