

The symbols and sounds of the Ahmao script

This key to the Ahmao (Pollard) script has been set out using non-technical terms, in order that the reader, unfamiliar with the International Phonetic Script may be able to use the Glossary. The student seeking a detailed appraisal of the script, together with an account of its development and an analysis of the tonal system of the language is referred to "A Myth Become Reality. History and Development of the Miao Written Language." Volume 1, by Joakim Enwall. Published by the Institute of Oriental Languages, Stockholm University.

The Miao language is monosyllabic, each syllable being made up of an initial and a final. In the script the initials are written with large symbols and the finals with small symbols. The final may be written in any one of four positions relative to the initial, thus,

Y€ Y• Y, Yf

and this position gives an indication of the tone in which the word is to be pronounced.

Tones

The seven tones as defined by Wang Ming-ji have the following values

1 is 45 2 is 55 3 is 53 4 is 33 5 is 13 6 is 11 7 is 21

The tones are indicated on a five level scale, with 5 as the highest, and 1 as the lowest level. Thus 55, 44 and 22 are all even tones at the high, medium and low levels respectively, while 24 begins low and rises, while 53 begins high and falls etc.

The seven tones are spread over the four positions of the Ahmao script as follows,

Position 1 (Y€)	Position 2 (Y•)	Position 3 (Y,)	Position 4 (Yf)
Tone 1	Tones 2, 3, and 4	Tone 5	Tone 6 and 7

The eight tone markers in the Pinyin when applied to Ahmao have the following tone values.

Pinyin	d	b	t	x	k	s	l	f
Ahmao tone	45, 55	55, 54	33	24	11	21	11	21

Initials

Miao	Sound	Pinyin
P	b as in <u>bat</u>	b
P'	p as in <u>pen</u>	p
T	d as in <u>do</u>	d
T'	t as in <u>ten</u>	t
X	dz as in <u>suds</u>	z
X'	ts as in <u>lets</u>	c
E	j as in <u>jug</u>	zh or j
E'	ch as in <u>chum</u>	ch or q
D	d(r) This sound does not occur in English. It is the letter "d" pronounced with the tip of the tongue curled toward the roof of the mouth giving the "d" a faint "r" quality	dr
D'	t(r) As above but with the letter "t"	tr
K	g as in <u>go</u>	g
K'	k as in <u>kill</u>	k
A	gl as in <u>glass</u>	dl
A'	cl as in <u>class</u>	tl
W	Guttural g. This sound does not occur in English. It is similar to the letter "g" but pronounced at the back of the throat.	gh
W'	Guttural k. As the foregoing but with the letter "k"	kh
M	m as in <u>me</u>	m
'M	This sound does not occur in English. It is an "m", preceded by a short exhalation of breath through the nose	hm
C	n as in <u>night</u>	n
'C	This sound does not occur in English. It is an "n", with nasal breathing as explained above	hn
G	ng as in <u>sing</u>	ngg
'G	This sound does not occur in English. It is an "ng", with a nasal breathing as explained above	hngg
L	l as in <u>life</u>	l
F	This sound does not occur in English. It is the Welsh "ll"	hl
Y	This symbol has no pronunciation. It is used as a measure with words which are purely vowel sounds, i.e. finals only, so that their tonal positions can be properly shown	Not used in Pinyin
H	h as in <u>high</u>	h
V	v as in <u>view</u>	v

Miao	Sound	Pinyin
B	f as in <u>fun</u>	f
Z	z as in <u>zoo</u>	r
S	s as in <u>sun</u>	s
Q	y as in <u>you</u> .	y
	j as in the French word for "I" je	y
	Some words are always pronounced one way, some always the other, but there are many where there is some ambivalence between the two	
J	sh as in <u>show</u>	sh or x
	This sound does not occur in English. The voiced vowel that follows it is pronounced at the very back of the throat but there is no glottal stop.	hx
'	This sound does not occur in English. It is pronounced as the foregoing but is accompanied by the expelling of breath. It is akin to the "ch" in Scottish pronunciation of "loch"	hx
U	This symbol is occasionally used in Chinese loan words for the sound "w" as in " <u>w</u> ang"	w

Note. The first sixteen of the initials, P to W', may all be preceded by the letter C, e.g. CP, CP', CT, CT' etc. [In Pinyin written nb, np, nd, nt etc.] In all but two cases the pronunciation of these compound initials is exactly as would be expected, e.g. CT is "nd" as in land, CX' is "nts" as in ants. The exceptions are CP and CP' which are pronounced "mb" as in timber, and "mp" as in temper respectively.

In the case of the initials E, E', CE, CE' and J, the normal equivalents in Pinyin are zh, c, nzh, nc, and sh. However, when the final that follows is ž or any diphthong beginning with ž including the diphthong š, the Pinyin equivalents become j, q, nj, nq, and x, respectively.

Finals

Miao	Sound	Pinyin
ÿ	ee as in <u>see</u>	i
	i as in <u>it</u>	i
f	a as in <u>father</u>	a
.	ou as in <u>ought</u>	o
ï	oo as in <u>too</u>	u
ß	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "u" of " <u>une</u> " in French, and is formed by pronouncing "ee" with the lips pursed	yu
ó	e as in <u>the</u>	e
×	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "e" of "the" but pronounced with the teeth together and the tip of the tongue close behind the teeth	w
—	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "e" of "the" but pronounced through the nose, similar to the "un" in " <u>unction</u> "	ang
ã	This sound does not occur in English. It is similar to the "ir" in " <u>shirt</u> ", or the "ur" in " <u>church</u> " but with the "r" pronounced very lightly	i
ë	This sound does not occur in English. It is pronounced in the same way as the foregoing but with the lips pursed	yu
Ǝ	ye as in <u>yet</u>	ie
§	ea as in <u>beatitude</u>	ia
«	yo as in <u>York</u>	io
ã	ew as in <u>hew</u>	iu
Û	ieu as in <u>dieu</u> in French	ie
"	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "e" as in " <u>the</u> " followed by the "u" of the French word " <u>une</u> ". It is the sound "ow" in " <u>cow</u> " as it is pronounced in the Devonshire dialect	eu
<	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "ee" of " <u>see</u> " followed by the "¨" sound described above	ieu
Ç	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "ee" of " <u>see</u> " followed by the "×" sound described above	iw
‡	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "ee" of " <u>see</u> " followed by the "—" sound described above	iang
¿	ay as in <u>say</u>	ai

Miao	Sound	Pinyin
»	ie as in <u>die</u>	ai
-	ee as in <u>see</u> , followed by ie as in <u>die</u>	iai
•	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "o" as in " <u>hot</u> " followed by "oo" as in " <u>too</u> "	ao
3	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "ee" of " <u>see</u> " followed by "•" as described above	iao
>	This sound does not occur in English. It is the "u" of " <u>une</u> " in French followed by the "e" as in " <u>let</u> ". N.B. many speakers do not distinguish between this sound and "Ē "	ie
Ç	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound "un" as in <u>shun</u>	en
ë	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound "a" as in " <u>father</u> " followed by "ng" as in " <u>hang</u> ".	ang
ï	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound "ing" as in " <u>ling</u> "	ing
Ó	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound "ou" as in " <u>ought</u> " followed by "ng" as in " <u>hang</u> "	ong
÷	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound "way" as in " <u>away</u> ".	ui
û	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound “wa” as in “ <u>wag</u> ”	ua
—	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound “wa” as in “ <u>water</u> ”	uo
•	This symbol is used in Chinese loan words for the sound “wi” as in “ <u>wine</u> ”	uai