

Lesson 1

Pronunciation & Transliteration

Pronunciation

Láadan was constructed to be simple to pronounce. This description is tailored for speakers of English because the material is written in English; but the sound system has been designed to present as few difficulties as possible, no matter what the native language of the learner.

Vowels:

- a as in “calm”
- e as in “bell”
- i as in “bit”
- o as in “home”
- u as in “soon”

When a Láadan vowel is written with an accent mark above it, it is a vowel with high tone. English doesn't have any tones, but that will be no problem for you, since you can express it as heavy stress. Think of the way that you distinguish the noun “convert” from the verb “convert” by stressing one of the two syllables. If you pronounce a high-toned Láadan vowel as you would pronounce a strongly-stressed English syllable, you will achieve the same effect as high tone. Because Láadan does not use English stress, this will not be a source of confusion.

Consonants:

- b, d, sh, m, n, l, r, w, y, h—as in English
- th as in “think”
- zh as in “pleasure”
- lh see below

There is one more consonant in Láadan: it is “lh” and it has no English equivalent. If you put the tip of your tongue firmly against the roof of your mouth at the point where it begins to arch upward, draw the corners of your lips back as you would for an exaggerated smile, and try to say English “sh,” the result should be an adequate “lh.” It is a sound with a hissing quality, and is not especially pleasant to hear. In Láadan it occurs only in words that are themselves references to something unpleasant, and can be added to words to give them a negative meaning. This is patterned after a similar feature of Navajo, and is something so very handy that I have always wished it existed in English.

Transliteration

“Transliteration” is the term that refers to “translating” the sounds (not the meanings—nor the letters) of one language into another. Láadan has a rather limited (from an English standpoint) set of sounds into which to transliterate foreign words. Couple this with Láadan's requirement that vowel-sounds and consonant-sounds occur in strict alternation, and many, if not most, foreign words are likely to come out sounding very different from their originals.

We could start with some names. In English, names have no inherent meanings (or the meanings English names used to have are no longer considered relevant), so they present an excellent opportunity to practice transliteration.

One further point. The Láadan sounds “h,” “r,” “w,” and “y” are not permitted at the end of a word.

English-Láadan Sound Correspondences

What follows below is a rough chart of Láadan sounds to substitute for English sounds. There will be some variation due to English consonant-clusters, vowel-clusters and other non-Láadan-compatible formations. “Ø” means that it might be possible to simply omit that sound for transliteration purposes.

a (pat) a, e	e (pet) e	i (machine) i	q h, sh, Ø	w (want) w
a (cake) e	e (meet) i	j zh	r r	x (axe) sh
a (father) a	e (hey) e	k h, sh, Ø	s (Sam) sh	y (you) y
b b	f h, sh	l l	s (daisy) zh	y (cygnet) i
c (certain) sh	g (get) d, b, h, zh, Ø	m m	sh sh	y (type) a
c (cat) h, sh, Ø	g (George) zh	n n	t th	y (marry) i
ch (chat) sh	g (beige) zh	ng n	u (uh) a	z (zoo) zh
ch (machine) sh	h (hot) h	o (pot) a, o	u (cue) yu, u	z (azure) zh
ch (charisma) h, sh, Ø	i (bit) i	o (boat) o	u (soon) u	
d d	i (bite) a	p b	v (very) b, w	

Examples

Anna

The consonant-vowel alternation is already present, and none of the sounds is far from one found in Láadan. We should raise the tone of the first syllable to simulate the English stress pattern.

Ána

Anthony

The consonant cluster “nth” does present a bit of a problem: do we interpose a vowel between the “n” and the “th,” or do we “lose” one or the other? Láadan doesn’t have a “shwa” vowel (the one between the “th” and the “n”); we’ll substitute an “e” in that place.

Anetheni, Aneni, Átheni*

Bethany

This is very direct. An accent on the first syllable will simulate the stress pattern of English.

Bétheni

Carol

Remember, we’re after the sound, not the spelling.

Hérel

Elizabeth

This one is easy!

Elízhabeth

Marcia, Marsha

We have a couple of options here. We could insert a vowel to separate the “r” from the “sh” or we could drop one of them.

Máresha, Másha*

Margaret

The “rgr” consonant cluster in the prevalent American English pronunciation of this name presents real difficulty. The fact that it involves the very problematic “g” further complicates matters.

Máhareth, Mázhareth*

Mary

“**Mary**” transliterates very easily. The consonant-vowel alternation is already present, and the sounds are easily substituted.

Méri

Matthew

This one is pretty straightforward.

Máthu

Michael

This name is a little more troublesome than some of the others. It has that “**long-i**” sound followed immediately by a “**k**” sound.

Máyeshel, Máyeheh, Máhel, Máshel, Máyel*

Steven

We have a problem. No “**s**,” no “**t**,” the “**st**” consonant cluster; no “**v**,” no “shwa.” So do we begin with “**sh-**” or “**th-**” or “**sheth-**”? And, for the “**v**” should we use “**b**” or “**w**”? A few possibilities:

Shethíben, Shíwen, Thíben*

Suzette

How could we omit the founding mother of Láadan?

Shuzhéth

Teresa

Another easy, one-for-one transliteration.

Therísha

William

Fairly straightforward; the only real difficulty is the “**l**” followed immediately by a “**y**.” We’ll use the “**e**” in place of the shwa in the second syllable.

Wílem

Below are a couple of place-names.

Arkansas

Suzette Haden Elgin’s home state. She has provided two variations of transliterations for this word. The first is a more “formal” transliteration; the second was originally coined as a “pet-name” but has been gaining currency as the “official” version.

Arahanesha, Aranesha*

California

This author’s home state. No “**k**,” no “**f**,” the “**rny**” consonant cluster. Both the “**k**” and the “**f**” could be transliterated using “**h**” or “**sh**,” but it would be nice to use different sounds to reflect the differences in the original sounds. How about:

Halishóni

Several of the names above have more than one form. All are valid, formally, but some are more euphonious than others—and some are more typically “Láadan” than their fellows. These are marked with asterisks (*) and will appear in the lessons to follow.

Exercise

Consider your own name or names and those of your friends and family members. How would they transliterate? How do the transliterations sound?