

A Script for the Galo Language



Contents:

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Presentation of Galo script and comparison with other scripts**
- 3. Basic sounds 1 - Vowels**
- 4. Basic sounds 2 - Consonants**
- 5. Tones**
- 6. Short and long sounds 1 - Consonants**
- 7. Short and long sounds 2 - Vowels**
- 8. Frequently asked questions**

1. Introduction

This is a brief introduction to the Galo Script. It is intended to be both **practical** and **accurate**: **practical** in the sense that it is useful, not too difficult to learn and understand, and not too difficult to use in handwriting, typewriters, computers and other writing media; **accurate** in the sense that it represents **all** the sounds of Galo correctly for the first time.

Please note that throughout this outline, we are representing Galo words using Lare pronunciation; however, the script is *not* designed for Lare *only*; it can be adapted to suit *any* Galo dialect, and most other Adi languages as well. For more discussion, please turn to section 8.

2. Comparison of Galo script with other scripts

Vowels

Galo	A	I	U	E	O	V	W
	a	i	u	e	o	v	w
Paadam	A	I	U	E	O	E	I
Devanagari	अ	इ	उ	ए	ओ	--	--
Phonetic	a	i	u	e	o	ə	ɨ

Consonants

Galo	K	G	Q	C	J	X	T	D	N	P	B	M	Y	R	L	S	H
	k	g	q	c	j	x	t	d	n	p	b	m	y	r	l	s	h
Paadam	K	G	NG	CH	J	NY	T	D	N	P	B	M	Y	R	L	S	H
Devanagari	क	ग	ङ	च	ज	ञ	त	द	न	प	ब	म	य	र	ल	स	ह
Phonetic	k	g	ŋ	tʃ	dʒ	ɲ	t	d	n	p	b	m	j	r	l	s/ʃ	h

Tones

Galo	˘
Paadam	--
Devanagari	--
Phonetic	˘

3. Basic Sounds 1 – Vowels

Galo	A	I	U	E	O	V	W
	a	i	u	e	o	v	w
Paadam	A	I	U	E	O	E	I
Devanagari	अ	इ	उ	ए	ओ	--	--
Phonetic	a	i	u	e	o	ə	ɪ

Examples:

A a

aci	‘elder brother’
akii	‘belly; guts’
aum	‘three’
aup	‘rib’

I i

ilo	‘bee’
iron	‘male boar’
iikuu	‘diced fermented bamboo’
iigam	‘molar tooth’

U u

uunam	‘to shine’
uugww	‘back (of the body)’
uduu	‘bamboo section’
uun	‘wound’

E e

ennam	‘to write’
eenam	‘to bind something’
eken	‘large, loose, tublike basket’
kodee	‘soil; earth; dirt’

O o

oo	‘vegetable’
ognam	‘to scrape’
odaa	‘prime rice beer’
omo	‘arrowhead’

V v

vgnam	‘to shake’
vkvr	‘fishing pole’
vbv	‘skirt’
vrvk	‘pig’

W w

ww	‘weed’
wwnam	‘to narrate’
wrww	‘ten’
whwk	‘cough’

4. Basic Sounds 2 – Consonants

Galo	K	G	Q	C	J	X	T	D	N	P	B	M	Y	R	L	S	H
	k	g	q	c	j	x	t	d	n	p	b	m	y	r	l	s	h
Paadam	K	G	NG	CH	J	NY	T	D	N	P	B	M	Y	R	L	S	H
Devanagari	क	ग	ङ	च	ज	ञ	त	द	न	प	ब	म	य	र	ल	स	ह
Phonetic	k	g	ŋ	tʃ	dʒ	ɲ	t	d	n	p	b	m	j	r	l	s/ç	h

Examples:

K k		G g		Q q	
kai	'big'	guluu	'fireplace border'	qo	'I'
kaanam	'to have'	gennam	'to lie down'	qoi	'fish'
kanv	'dark'	gognam	'to call'	qinnam	'to be ripe'
koohap	'fireplace tongs'	gwwtuu	'house pillar'	qillaa	'honey'
C c		J j		X x	
cumnam	'to weave'	jinam	'to give'	xidoo	'rain'
cvvdaa	'thumb finger'	jwwnam	'to be plump'	xamvv	'daughter-in-law'
cvrvv	'corner'	jarnam	'to fly'	xii	'person'
cwkc	'wall'	jabnam	'to talk'	xwjww	'old man'
T t		D d		N n	
taayap	'fan'	dumpaa	'pillow'	naanam	'to throw'
tain	'mushroom'	dumpoo	'head'	nappaa	'mouth'
tapum	'insect'	deerww	'plains area'	namv	'house'
twwpak	'drinking snack'	donam	'to eat'	nvtuu	'thread'
P p		B b		M m	
panam	'to chop'	banam	'to vomit'	minnam	'to blow'
porok	'chicken'	beedvv	'macaque'	munaa	'bag'
pwcww	'pot'	boho	'afraid'	moopin	'moopin festival'
pvmwr	'dust'	bvdaa	'road'	moi	'younger maternal aunt'
Y y		R r		L l	
yapuu	'white'	raapwr	'root'	lakcvv	'finger'
yvv	'who'	rumtum	'family'	lalwk	'shirt'
yvgoo	'circle'	roonam	'to scold'	luurap	'fence gate'
yaamee	'boy'	rwkv	'field'	loonii	'bone marrow'
S s		H h			
laksin	'fingernail'	hipv	'raft'		
hosi	'porcupine'	hottum	'bear'		
dvmsinam	'to beat oneself'	holuu	'fence'		
laksuk	'wash hands'	homen	'tiger'		

5. Tones

There are two types of word in Galo: **plain** and **tense**.

Plain words have a medium-high, level tone. They are not marked by any special symbol.

Tense words have a rising-falling tone.¹ They are marked by the symbol ` before the noticeable “high pitch point”. When we pronounce these words alone, the pitch is always falling; so, the tone mark is always at the beginning of the word.

Plain		Tense	
aci	‘elder brother’	`aci	‘pain’
xibo	‘guest’	`xibo	‘priest’
tabv	‘snake’	`tabv	‘sugar cane’
ai	‘tooth’	`ai	‘heavy’
au	‘fat/grease’	`au	‘spicy; chili taste’
agnam	‘to hook something’	`agnam	‘to scoop out liquid’
ajek	‘slice; piece’	`ajek	‘expert’
axi	‘elder sister’	`axi	‘two’
adwr	‘tired’	`adwr	‘out of shape’
anv	‘leaf’	`anv	‘mother’
apik	‘discharged soil’	`apik	‘bubble’
iinam	‘to extend a hand’	`iinam	‘to descend’
kuunam	‘to weigh something’	`kuunam	‘to be thin’
kennam	‘to flee’	`kennam	‘to turn a wheel’
komci	‘early morning’	`komci	‘grasshopper variety’
takv	‘squirrel’	`takv	‘body louse’

In context, the difference between plain and tense words is even more noticeable. Also, the position of the “high pitch point” in the word may shift. So, the tone mark will also shift to indicate its position. Compare the sound of:

Plain		Tense	
adwr kaaku	‘finally got tired’	a`dwr kaaku	‘finally became upright breadthwise’
komc vku	‘it’s become early morning’	`komc vku	‘in the end, it’s a grasshopper’
ajek ma	‘it’s not a slice’	a`jek ma	‘useless; amateurish’
adinv auv	‘the meat is fatty’	adinv `auv	‘the meat is spicy’

¹ Please note that this use of the term “tense” is not the same as “present tense” in grammar! It refers to the added **tension** in the vocal cords when producing these words.

6. Short and Long Sounds 1 – Consonants

In Galo, any **consonant** can be **short** or **long**.

Short consonants are written with a single symbol; for example, **t** as in **`hotam** ‘armor’.

Long consonants are written with two identical symbols; for example, **tt** as in **hottum** ‘bear’.

Examples:

	Short		Long
tabv	‘snake’	tabbv	‘it’s a snake’
akv	‘from there’	akkv	‘six’
`aco	‘breast’	`acco	‘quiet; slow’
aqo	‘different; strange’	aqqo	‘five’
namv	‘house’	`nammv	‘facial hair’
alo	‘salt’	`allo	‘tomorrow’

7. Short and Long Sounds 2 – Vowels

Like consonants, **vowels** can be **short** or **long**.

Short vowels are written with a single symbol; for example, **a** as in **anam** ‘to keep’.

Long vowels are written with two identical symbols; for example, **aa** as in **aanam** ‘to come; to enter’.

Examples:

	Short		Long
anam	‘to keep’	aanam	‘to come; to enter’
unam	‘to boil’	uunam	‘to shine’
wnam	‘to pound’	wwnam	‘to narrate’
onam	‘to pluck’	oonam	‘to raise; to tend’
`idum	‘wasp variety’	`iidum	‘go down purposefully’
`pwnam	‘to pour’	`pwwnam	‘to reach’
panam	‘to chop’	`paanam	‘to get’

A special problem: vowel length at the ends of words

It is also possible to have different vowel lengths at the **ends** of words. However, these differences are difficult to hear when a word is spoken out of context. Consider: **alo** ‘salt’ and **aloo** ‘bone’, or **tabv** ‘snake’ and **tabvv** ‘keep listening’. They don’t sound very different, right? But, if we hear them in context, the difference becomes clear: **alogo** ‘some salt’ and **aloogo** ‘a bone’, or **tabvgo** ‘a snake’ and **tabvvnam** ‘to keep listening’. Try pronouncing these words alone, and then with **-go** or **-nam** following:

	Short		Long
alo	‘salt’	aloo	‘bone’
tabv	‘snake’	tabvv	‘keep listening’
`aro	‘morning’	`aroo	‘completion of keeping’
`ako	‘old’	akoo	‘handle’
agv	‘top layer’	agvv	‘storage area’
`aco	‘breast’	`acoo	‘keep first’

Since words like **alo** ‘salt’ and **aloo** ‘bone’ consistently sound different when we use them in phrases and sentences, and also have different meanings, it will be necessary to spell them differently too – even though they may not sound very different when we pronounce them out of context. If we spell the words differently, children using a textbook or dictionary will be able to pronounce new or unfamiliar words correctly in sentences. If we don’t spell them differently, they won’t be able to learn the difference as easily.

8. Frequently-asked questions

Q: Why is it necessary to make a new Galo Script?

A: Every language needs a writing system which is both **accurate** and **practical**. So far, there is no writing system for the Galo language which succeeds on both of these points.

To be **accurate**, a script must represent *all* of the sounds which are used to make different meanings. Before now, no script has been developed for the Galo language which is accurate enough to represent Galo sounds correctly in every detail. For example, no existing script represents Galo *tones*, and many existing scripts do not represent the sounds *v* and *w*, as well as the difference between *long* and *short* sounds. The Galo Script described here represents all of these differences accurately.

To be **practical**, a script must not be too difficult to learn, or too difficult to use. Some scripts which have been proposed for Galo in the past have used unfamiliar symbols which are not generally found on typewriters, computers and mobile phones, and which are difficult for many people to write even using a pen and paper. However, this Galo Script uses only familiar symbols which are commonly found on most writing media, since this will make it easier for Galo people to begin using it immediately.

Q: Why is Galo Script based on English?

A: Actually, it is not based on English, since there is no “English” script. Galo Script is based on **Roman script**, which was the script used to write the **Latin** language of the Roman empire 2,000 years ago. Nowadays, the Latin language is not spoken anymore, and Roman script has become an **international script** which is not owned by any individual language or culture. Many widely-spoken languages have based their scripts on Roman script, including English, French, German, Spanish, Malaysian, Turkish, Swahili, and Vietnamese as well as **most tribal languages** of the world. Since Roman script is so commonly used and understood, it makes sense to develop a Galo script that is based on Roman script also. So – using Roman script is very **practical**. What we needed to do is modify and standardize it so that it can represent the Galo language **accurately**. Only after this is done can it truly be called a *Galo* Script.

Q: Why is Galo Script based on an existing script? Shouldn't we invent our own, unique script, which is completely different from any other script in the world?

A: There have already been some attempts to invent a completely new script to write Galo and other Tani languages. We think these scripts are very impressive, and we respect the ideas which led to their creation. However, we are concerned that using an invented script will not provide us with the results we hope for.

If we look at history, scripts have only been successfully invented perhaps three or four times in the history of the world, in China, Egypt, Babylon and the Mayan Empire. *Every other existing script has been adapted from one of these.* From Egyptian script, Semitic scripts were developed; from these Brahmic script was developed, and from there eventually Devanagari (Sanskrit) and then Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Telugu, Tamil,

Sinhalese, and every other major South Asian script. From Sinhalese developed Khmer (Cambodian), and from there Thai, Lao, and Burmese. From Chinese script came Japanese and Korean script, as well as early Vietnamese. The Roman script which we now use to write English, Spanish, Indonesian, Turkish, and so on, was *itself* derived from Greek and, before that, Egyptian script.

Why did so many people throughout history modify existing scripts instead of inventing new ones? Simply because: *scripts are very difficult for most people to learn*, and it is much easier to learn something which is based on something already familiar than to learn something which is completely new – no matter how perfect, unique or beautiful it may be.

Furthermore, there is an additional danger in creating invented scripts for languages spoken by relatively small populations. This is that it will be very difficult for most people to adapt them for use with computers and handheld devices such as mobile phones (in the case of mobile phones, it is and probably always will be impossible). This is a serious concern, because in the future almost all writing will take place on these media. We believe that it is too risky to create a writing system which cannot be widely used; rather, we should create a more **practical** writing system which people will be able to learn and use almost immediately.

Q: You call this a “Galo” script, but you’re only writing in Lare. How can non-Lare speakers accept this?

A: The examples in this booklet are written following the pronunciation of most Lare Galo speakers, because this is the variety of Lare that its writers know best. We are trying to be consistent in this booklet so that pronunciation of the examples can be clearly understood. This does *not* mean that we believe that Lare is “better” or “more correct” than other varieties of Galo, and this does *not* mean that Galo script is designed for Lare only. The goal here was to design a script which is useful to *all* Galo writers, and which can be adapted to suit any Galo dialect. For example, although Lare speakers will write **vrvk** ‘pig’, a Puugo speaker can use the same script to write **eek** or **eyek** ‘pig’ according to his or her pronunciation. Although Lare speakers will write **ui** ‘ghost’, a Tai speaker can use the same system to write **uyu** ‘ghost’ according to his or her pronunciation. This script gives us the possibility to write *all* varieties of Galo accurately.

Q: Can this script be used to write `Goqku Agom?

A: Yes. Since `Goqku Agom uses the same sounds as Spoken Galo, the script described here can write `Goqku Agom correctly.

Q: Why did you choose *q*, *x*, and *c* to write *ng*, *ny* and *ch*?

A: There are several reasons. One reason is that we are trying to follow a rule of **one symbol = one sound**. This makes the writing system more logical and consistent. For example, if we use the simple *n* to represent the sound *n* and simple *g* to represent the sound *g*, why is it that when we put them together they don’t make the sequence *n+g*, but instead make a completely different sound? Consider English: *finger* and *sing* – in the

first, we hear the sound *g* but in the second, we hear only *q*. English spelling has many inconsistencies and imperfections, and it isn't a good model for a Galo script.

Another reason is that languages like English which use combinations of letters to represent single sounds usually don't have **long** and **short** vowel and consonant contrasts like Galo does. For example, consider the words **uqqaa** 'baby', **axxi** 'little' and **peccaa** 'fool'. Using most existing scripts, we would have to write **ungngaa**, **anynyii** and **pechchaa**, which looks awkward to many people.

Finally, we are concerned about accuracy. Compare the words **ingeekee** 'please go ahead' and **ingin** 'vine tapioca'. The letters **ng** do not make the same sound each time. In the first case, we hear a sequence *n + g*, but in the second case, we hear a single sound *q*. Writing *ng* makes this difference unclear. But, if we write these words as **ingeeke** and **iqin**, the difference in the sounds is correct and clearly represented.

Q: Why did you choose *v* and *w* to write the sounds in **vbv 'skirt' and **wlww** 'stone'?**

A: As with *q*, *x* and *c*, we are trying to use symbols which are available in Roman script, but which would have no other use in Galo. Paadam script uses *e* and *i* to represent these sounds. This is not accurate enough, since it is impossible to represent the difference between **ai** 'tooth' and **aw** 'body', which are both written **ai** in Paadam – as well as hundreds of other words. Suppose your mother writes you a letter – in Paadam – saying “**ngok ai e acidu**.” What aches – her body or her teeth? There is no way to know. However, in our proposed script, she will write “**qok aw v`aciduu**”, and it is clear that her body is aching – not her teeth.

The sounds *v* and *w* are not found in English, Hindi, and most other Indo-European languages, and so they are not represented in most European and Indian scripts. But, they are found in many tribal languages of the Himalaya, and several of these languages are now using the symbols *v* and *w* to represent these sounds. For example, in Rawang, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Burma, the symbol *v* is used the same way as in Galo. And, many Nyishi now use *w* to write the same sound as in Galo **wlww**.

Q: You call Galo a “language”, but isn't it just a “dialect”?

A: This depends on definition. To most linguists and language experts in the world, the word “language” means anything that humans use to communicate, *usually by verbal speech*, but sometimes also by sign language or by writing. In this sense, *of course Galo is a “language”!* To deny it would be completely ridiculous. At the same time, not all Galo speakers speak in exactly the same way. They can understand one another very well, but there are some differences in pronunciation, word choice and style. In this way, we say that there are different “dialects” of the Galo “language”. So, for example, this booklet is written in the **Lare dialect** of the **Galo language**. This is what is meant by the word “dialect”: “**dialects**” are *different varieties of the same “language”*.”

So, according to linguists, **Galo is a language** in exactly the same way that English and Hindi are languages, and has an **equal status, value and importance**. The purpose of script development is not to *make* Galo a language. In fact, it is simply to help Galo people communicate using their language in more ways than is currently possible.

Q: Why is it necessary to develop the Galo language? In an age of globalization, shouldn't Galo people just learn Hindi or English and stop worrying about their native language?

A: We don't think so. First of all, it is wrong to suggest that it is necessary to make a choice between Galo or Hindi and English. Human beings are naturally able to learn more than one or two languages, and in areas of the world where many major languages are spoken in a small area, such as in Europe, in Nepal and in other parts of India, it is very common for people to speak, read and write five or six languages and sometimes more. So, there is **no need to choose between Galo or Hindi and English. With good education, we can have all three.**

But we also believe that there is something very unique and special about the Galo language, and we think it is very important to preserve it for as far into the future as possible. Definitely, the Galo language is the language of our parents and grandparents, and is an important part of the cultural identity of Galo people, so we should preserve it for this reason. But there is also something special and unique about the *language itself*, about its sounds and grammar, which make it distinctively different from Hindi or English, or any other language in the world.

Let's take a very simple example: the suffix *-`men*. In Galo, we can say *in`mendu*, which basically means the same as English 'going for a walk/stroll'. But how about *kaa`mendu*, *do`mendu*, *duu`mendu*, and so on? How can we translate these into English or Hindi? It's almost impossible. But in Galo, we can make *thousands* of words using this suffix *-`men*, and almost *none* of them exist in English and Hindi. Or think about *a*, *`bv* and *`tv*. In English, we simply say 'there'. But in Galo, we always give more information – is it on the same level? Above? Below? To the North? South? or East/West? Upriver? Downriver? or across the river? In this way, our grammar reflects the mountainous land that we come from. The land, the culture, and the language of the Galo people – they have evolved together over hundreds of years, and work *together* to make us who we are.

Finally, let us consider this: what happens if the child of an American doesn't speak English, but instead learns another language, like Spanish. Well, there are still at least 50 crores more English speakers left in the world, so this is not a great loss. But what happens if the child of a Galo doesn't speak Galo? How many times can this happen before the Galo language will stop existing in the world? If we don't teach our children, who will? If we don't speak our language, who will?

Q: What is the next step?

A: We believe that Galo has the potential to be used in almost any type of situation involving writing between Galo-speaking people, and that with a single, common script it should become possible to use Galo writing on a day-to-day basis. Once we have commonly adopted a single script, we can develop classroom textbooks, dictionaries, and grammars. Then, when children understand and can use Galo writing effectively, we can develop literature, poetry, songbooks, translations of books from other languages, foreign film subtitles, internet websites, and even road signs and public documents which will be commonly understood by all Galo speakers. It all begins now, when we all decide that we will write, together, in the same way.

9. Postscript

Tribal and minority languages all over the world are dying at an incredible rate. Some American tribal languages only have ten or fifteen good speakers left. What will happen when they die? The language will die with them, along with most of the knowledge and culture of a people who had existed in some form for hundreds or thousands of years. Languages like Hindi, English and Chinese are spreading across the globe, and speakers of languages like Galo will be under increasing pressure and find it more and more difficult to maintain links with their past. We cannot predict the future, and we cannot guarantee that Galo people of the future will choose to maintain their unique language and cultural identity. But we have to give them the chance. We *must* give them the chance! The heritage of the Galo people may go back a thousand years, and it is our duty to enable its survival for another thousand years or more.

Galo is *our language*. It *can* be preserved. It *must* be preserved. And it *will* be preserved...*if* we begin to work together *now*.

Galo Language Development Committee

© 2007 Galo Welfare Society Press (Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India).