SEMIVOWELS IN THE COYONO ALPHABET

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INTRODUCTION

Cuyono speakers attempting to write their own language experienced greatest difficulty knowing when to write w and y. This study is a presentation of the whole Cuyono orthography, with special attention to the semivowel problem. Both phonemic analysis and implications for spelling are discussed.

It is intended that this study will be helpful in standardizing the spelling of materials published in Cuyono. Since the orthography is based on a phonemic analysis, it is expected that Cuyono literature written according to the conventions presented here will be read easier than material in which other alphabets are used. In order that this orthography might receive the widest possible use, the advice of school officials and educated Cuyono speakers has been sought at each stage of the analysis and the orthography of Filipino has been followed wherever possible.

There are four vowels and 16 consonants in Cuyono. Sections 1, 2, 3, and 5 consider matters of native Cuyono words and assimilated loan words which are not proper nouns; section 4 deals with special rules for proper nouns and assimilated loan words.

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SYLLABLES

It is necessary to know the structure of Cuyono syllables before the writing of [i] and [o] is considered. Whether i or o (vowels) or y or w (consonants) are written is a matter of interpretation analysis, based on the distribution of the sounds in syllables. i and o occur in syllable nucleus position (i.e., vowel position), while y and w occur in syllable margin position (i.e., consonant position). Thus, [ta.oan] to write is written tawan, but [bo.i.en] to keep alive is written boien because the two have different syllable structure, even if both have a sequence of three vowels. In the discussion which follows, C represents margin (or consonant) positions in a syllable and V represents nucleus (or vowel) position in a syllable.

1.1. Phonemic conclusions.—There are four different syllable types of Cuyono: CVC, CV, VC, and V. Conclusions concerning the shape of these syllables are based on perceived syllable waves which are manifested by sequences of nonsuspect phonemes. Suspect sequences (i.e., those which contain [i], [o], [y], or [w] or clusters of identical vocoids) are then interpreted on the basis of the nonsuspect sequences. Examples of both types are given under each syllable type.


1.1.2. CV.—This syllable type has two different pronunciations, depending upon the vowel which manifests the V position of the syllable and upon the characteristics of the following syllable. The two pronunciations are: (1) when the vowel is


Syllable division is marked throughout by a period on the line (.) to indicate syllable pronunciation. We do not propose this for the practical orthography, however.

Italics indicate the part of the data which illustrates the text.
a short offglide from the consonant and (2) when the vowel is given normal length.

(1) Short pronunciation is given when V is manifested by i or o before vowel initial syllables in which the vowel is different from V: si.ak ‘to chop firewood’, di.an ‘there’, bo.i ‘live’, to.ad ‘upside down’, sin.si.li.o ‘money change’, so.il.do ‘salary’, no.i.bi ‘nine’, ko.ar.ta ‘money’. The i and o of the italicized syllables are offglides of the C, rather than being given full length. Thus, two syllables are actually perceived as one syllable, as far as speed of pronunciation is concerned; but on the basis of nonsuspect patterns we interpret them as two syllables.

(2) Normal length pronunciation is given (a) when V is manifested by a or e (e.g., da.e.g ‘to defeat’, ba.el ‘large’, te.me.an ‘to dip’, ma.is ‘coru’, ta.o ‘person’, ba.ba.i ‘woman’, ta.na ‘he, she’, ta.tay ‘father’, te.yeb ‘whirl’, be.el ‘take’, ma.al ‘dear’) and (b) when V is manifested by i or o before consonant initial syllables (e.g., ba.kay ‘white (animal)’, pi.lay ‘tired’), before vowel initial syllables in which the vowel is the same as V (e.g., si.it ‘thorn’, to.od ‘knee’), and word final (e.g., si.gi ‘OK’, do.to ‘there’). Here we have interpreted long vowels (clusters of identical vowels) as two syllables on the basis of nonsuspect patterns.

1.13. VC.—This syllable type occurs word initial, after vowel final syllables, and before consonant initial syllables: ka.en ‘to eat’, la.od ‘deep sea’, ba.it ‘take from stove’, be.el ‘take’, is.da ‘fish’, it.log ‘egg’, te.me.an ‘to dip’, so.il.do ‘salary’.

1.14. V.—This syllable type occurs word initial and after vowel final syllables: a.nay ‘termite’, t.kaw ‘you’, o.say ‘comb’, o.ot ‘head of grain’, a.og ‘kind of poison’, e.yey ‘to stay in water up to neck’, di.a ‘this’.

On the basis of these syllable types, we can interpret longer sequences of phonemes as sequences of syllables that have already been posited, even though we do not find these syllables occurring in sequence manifested by nonsuspect phonemes. That is, we do not find CV.VVC sequence of nonsuspect phonemes (e.g., *le.a.en) to use in interpreting bo.i.en ‘to keep alive’. By analogy to shorter sequences, however, we interpret the syllables as marked.

1.2. Implications for orthography.—Some observations concerning spelling with i/y and o/w can now be made.
(1) \(y\) and \(w\) are used only in consonant positions, either initial or final in a syllable: waw 'thirst', saw saw 'dip into', bay bay 'shore', bay lo 'exchange', ba lay 'house', aw to 'car', ta wan 'to give', ko yab 'scatter'.

(2) \([i]\) and \([o]\) are written as vowels \(i\) and \(o\) when they occur before another vowel as an offglide from a consonant: si ak 'to chop firewood', bo i 'live', so il do 'salary', ko ar ta 'money', ing ko in tro 'encounter'.

Since Cuyono has vowel clusters within a word, the insertion of \(y\) and \(w\) following \(i\) and \(o\) offglide is not required. This is different from the practice in Filipino, e.g., Cuyono ni og and Pilipino ni yog 'coconut'.

\(y\) has not been observed as the second member of a consonant cluster in a word. When a consonant with an \([i]\) offglide occurs in the middle of a word and following a vowel, the consonant and \([i]\) always manifest a CV syllable type, i.e., the syllable break never comes between the two. poli st a not * poli ya st 'police', na si on not * nas yon 'nation', sin si li o not * sin sil yo 'money change', la ni ag not * lan yag 'shining', ma si aw not * mas yaw 'faded'.

When a consonant with an \([o]\) offglide occurs in the middle of a word and following a vowel, the syllable break may be either between the consonant and the \([o]\) (e.g., ban wa not * ba no a, ka w a ng not * ka no ang, da r wa not * da ro a 'two') or before the consonant (e.g., i la a not * il wa 'poison him', bo ro a ten not * bor wa ten, so so a yen not * sos wa yen). The choice is made on the basis of perceived syllable break.

(3) Morpheme and syllable boundaries do not necessarily coincide. Therefore, the spelling of some roots will change when they are suffixed, because of a change in syllable makeup, e.g., tao plus -an is ta wan 'to give' but bo i plus -en is bo i en 'to keep alive'.

VOWELS

The four vowels in Cuyono are: \(a\), \(e\), \(i\), and \(o\).

2.1. Phonemic conclusions.—\(i\) is a front vowel: ki l id 'side', ti leb 'to cup a basket down on an animal to catch it', ma is 'corn', da i 'forehead', li it 'a type of wild vine', bit bit 'to carry by handle', bi bi 'lips trembling ready to cry'.

\(e\) is a high-to-mid central vowel: se led 'inside', te lek 'touch', be ken 'no', la em 'think', de et 'touching', den 'already', ket ket 'stained and more stained'.

\(a\) is a front vowel: ba wa ng 'to punch', ba noi 'butterfly', ba noi 'butterflies'.

\(o\) is a back vowel: bo noi 'iron', bo asi 'beef', bo w a ng 'to hit'.
devVries and Roe: Cuyono Alphabet

\[a\] is a low central vowel: dan 'that', kad.kad 'to pull out from container', bal.bal 'punish', sang.sang 'to put into mouth'.

\[o\] is a back vowel: bol.bol 'body hair', song.song 'contrary', kot.kot 'dig', bot.bot 'small mouse', bo.bo 'to pour'.

2.2. Implications for orthography.—(1) \[e\] does not represent a front vowel, as in Pilipino and Spanish, but rather a sound not found in either Pilipino or Spanish, produced farther back in the mouth than \[e\] in those languages. For the use of \[e\] to represent a front vowel, see 4.21.

(2) There is only one front vowel in Cuyono, \[i\], unlike Pilipino and Spanish which have two, \[i\] and \[e\].

(3) There is only one back vowel in Cuyono, \[o\], unlike Pilipino and Spanish which have two, \[u\] and \[o\].

Those with a background in Pilipino and Spanish will have to take special care not to follow Pilipino and Spanish when spelling Cuyono words which are cognate with Pilipino or borrowed from Spanish or Pilipino, e.g., pa.ri.ho 'same', dis.po.is 'then', bo.sis 'voice', kin.si 'fifteen', ta.nem 'plant', pi.ro 'however', mag.ri.si.bi 'to receive', ka.to.rog 'sleep', ti.nin.ti 'lieutenant', do.ko.min.to 'document', mim.bro 'member', kom.pani.ro, ko.-rin.ti 'current', is.pi.rin.si.a 'inspiration', pa.rin.ti 'parents', ko.bir.tos, ko.bir.ta, a.bir.to, sin.to, 'one hundred'.

CONSONANTS

The 16 consonants in Cuyono are: \[b, k, d, g, h, l, m, n, ng, p, r, s, t, w, y\], and (') (glottal stop).

3.1. Phonemic conclusions.—\[p, t, k\], and (') are voiceless stops, at bilabial, dental, velar, and glottal points of articulation respectively; \[b, d, and g\] are voiced stops at bilabial, dental, and velar points of articulation.

The nasal consonants are \[m, n, and ng\], with bilabial, dental, and velar points of articulation. There are two fricatives: \[s\], a voiceless alveolar sibilant, and \[h\], a voiceless glottal fricative. \[l\] is an alveolar lateral and \[r\] an alveolar flap. \[w\] and \[y\] are semivowels (having the phonetic quality of vowels, but functioning in consonant position—cf. (1) of 1.2).

3.2. Implications for orthography.—The writing of \[w\] and \[y\] has already been treated in section 1. \[d, l, m, n, p, r, and t\] do not present any special problems. The remaining consonants we consider in three sections.

3.21. Replacement of Spanish spelling.—Each phoneme of Cuyono is written the same way in every occurrence. The
spelling of words is according to their pronunciation by Cuyono
speakers, not according to the manner of spelling in the lan-
guage of origin. Consequently, qu (before e and i) and c (else-
where) are both written as k, since they both represent the
same phoneme—voiceless velar stop: i.kaw ‘you (sg.)’ not
*icao, a.keng ‘my’ not *aqueng. Similarly, g is written for
every occurrence of the voiced velar stop. gu is not used be-
fore e and i: di.gi ‘here’ not *digue.

b replaces v in Spanish loan words: bo.sis ‘voice’ not *voces.
s replaces the c spelling for the voiceless alveolar sibilant
in words such as mag.ri.si.bi ‘to receive’ (not *magrecibe)
and bo.sis ‘voice’ (not *voces).
h replaces j in words like pa.ri.ho ‘same’ (not *parejo) and
is inserted in words like ang.hil ‘angel’ (not *angel).

3.22. Velar nasal.—ng is the only digraph symbol in Cuyono.
It represent the velar nasal.

3.23. Glottal stop.—The symbol for glottal stop is a single
quote (‘). It is written, however, only word medial, as in
ta’leb ‘cover’, be’na ‘stutter’, na.ga.’e.et ‘getting tighter’,
pa.’e.e.ni ‘to say “yes” to’.

Any utterance initial glottal stop is a noncontrastive feature
of vowel onset. It drops utterance medial except when it
occurs in roots beginning with double-e. Note that in
na.e.e.la.man there is no medial glottal stop, since the root is
e.lam ‘to know’.

Likewise, utterance final glottal stop drops when it occurs
utterance medial. By not writing it when it occurs final in
an utterance, the contrast between the presence and absence
of glottal stop in that position is disregarded. There are,
however, relatively few words that end in a vowel in utterance
final position and only a few minimal contrasts have been
found: /ba.i/? ‘great-grandmother’ and /ba.i/ ‘leave it alone’,
/ar.a ta.na i.lo.a?/ ‘he did not go out’ and /i.lo.a/ ‘poison him’,
/ar.a ta.na i.ka.sa.la?/ ‘he did not sin’ and /a.ra ta.na
i.ka.sa.la/ ‘he did not get married’.

Some of the words that end in a vowel when utterance final
are: a.na ‘his, her’, ta.na ‘he, she’, ka ‘you’, si.gi ‘OK’, mga
‘plural’, nga (ligature), sa (case-marking particle), si (case-
marking particle); the temporal particles da, ra, and pa; dia
‘this’, da.ya ‘that’, do.to ‘there’, di.gi ‘here’, si.e.ti ‘seven’,
no.i.bi ‘nine’.

mga is the spelling convention for what is phonemically /manga/.
The correct use of /y and o/w will help to indicate when the glottal stop does occur: /pi.na.o/?/ pinao 'fireplace' and /pi.naw/ pinaw 'distance', /ba.ba.i/?/ babai 'woman' and /bay.bay/ baybay 'shore'.

LOAN WORDS

There are three areas in which the conclusions stated in the previous sections are modified by unassimilated loan words and by proper nouns.

4.1. Proper nouns.—The names of persons and places which are commonly used in Pilipino are spelled as they are in Pilipino: Felix, Marquez, David, Pedro, Zacarias, Gabriel, Nazaret, Galilea, Juan, Bautista, Jesus.

4.2. Unassimilated loan words.—There is one phoneme and one syllable type which occur only in unassimilated loan words.

4.21. Pilipino e.—The words for 'seven' and 'ten' retain the Pilipino pronunciation for the second vowel, i.e., [si.e.ti] and [di.es]. Since e is used to represent the high-to-mid central vowel in Cuyono, there is potential difficulty in its use again to represent [e]. Nevertheless, we have chosen to use e, since there are a number of proper nouns that also use this symbol to indicate the [e] sound, e.g., Jerusalem, Jesus, Puerto Princesa. Only a few Cuyono speakers use the [si.i.ti] pronunciation for 'seven'. Other possible solutions might have been to spell 'seven' as syi.ti or si.yi.ti, but even these produce conventions which do not otherwise occur. Following are other words which follow the same spelling pattern as sieti: bi.e.nes, si.er.to, im.pi.er.no 'hell', kon.si.er.to, Di.si.em.bri 'December', Bi.er.nis 'Friday', ki.ni.en.tos 'five hundred', si.en.sia.

Thus, [e] sound which is retained in some loan words is spelled with e. Many loan words, however, have not retained this pronunciation and they are written as pronounced (cf. last paragraph of 2.2).

4.22. CCV syllable pattern.—Loan words such as tra.ba.ho 'work' and ma.is.tro 'teacher' manifest a CCV syllable type which is not found in native Cuyono words (cf. 1.1).

OTHER SPELLING CONSIDERATIONS

5.1. Word and root boundaries.—Space is written only at word boundaries. Special attention is drawn to three areas of possible difficulty.
5.11. Affixes.—No space is written between a stem and the affixes which occur with it: ma.tin.lo ‘beautiful’, mag.ta.mi.aw ‘to invite a second time’, ing.sa.sa.gi.ap ‘is searched for’, e.e.men ‘soak it’. The two should not be separated since the affix and stem are pronounced together and since the affixes cannot usually be said without a stem. Pronouns, on the other hand, are written as separate words because many of them may be said alone, because they occur in more than one position in relation to other words, and because they often have their own stress.

5.12. Reduplicated roots.—When a root of more than one syllable is reduplicated, a hyphen is written to separate the two occurrences of the root, e.g., ka.go.rang-go.ra.ngan. ‘ancestors’, ad.law-ad.law ‘daily’.

5.13. ta kaw ‘I-you’.—The sequence of morphemes which means ‘I-you’ is written as two separate words, i.e., ta kaw. This practice is analogous to ‘I-they’ which is written ko san da. Thus, ‘I will give you some’ is written ta.ta.wan ta kaw.

When ta occurs without kaw, it means ‘first person plural’, e.g., kan.ta.en ta ‘let’s sing it’ and a.mos ta ren ‘let’s go’.

5.2 Sight word.—The ligature y is pronounced/i ?/. We have retained y as the spelling since it is a word which occurs frequently and since it is unusual in that the glottal stop is not dropped word final utterance medial. y ligature is often contracted, only the glottal stop remaining. In such cases a single quote is appended to the word preceding the contraction to indicate retention of the glottal stop: sa da.lan’ ang ka.o.sa.-yan is a contraction of sa da.lan y ang ka.o.sa.yan ‘in the path of peace’, pa.ri.ho’ ang a.ran is a contraction of pa.ri.ho y ang a.ran ‘the same as his name’, and sa a.li.ma’ a.teng nga ka.a.way is a contraction of sa a.li.ma y a.teng nga ka.a.way ‘in the hands of our enemies’.

5.3. Shortened long vowels.—Long vowels (which are written as a sequence of two identical vowels) are longer when they are stressed than when they are not. Speed style also affects long vowels. For these reasons, the shortened form ma.a- of the prefix ma.ga- ‘future actor focus’ is shortened to ma-, e.g., ma.ga.ba.lik or ma.a.ba.lik or ma.ba.lik ‘will return’. We have chosen to write either maga- or ma-, depending upon speed style. The reason for not writing maa- is that it can seldom be distinguished from ma-, since the prefix most often occurs without primary stress.