

Writing systems in local Coast Salish languages

Writing systems

Many Coast Salish languages have more than one writing system, so things can get a bit confusing when you are trying to read and write them.

SENĆOŦEN has a single, standard orthography. It was created in 1978 by W̱SÁNEĆ elder Dave Elliott Sr. and adopted by the W̱SÁNEĆ School Board in 1984 (<http://wsanecschoolboard.ca/about-the-school/history-of-the-sencoten-language>).

Hul'q'umi'num' also has one main writing system that most current language resources use. You may come across variations of this system though. I have included in parentheses other letters that are sometimes used for some of the sounds.

The Ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) language group has recently adopted a new writing system, called the Ləkʷəŋiʔnəŋ Phonetic Alphabet. This is the one that is used in the charts below. You will likely still come across other ways of writing the language though, so might have to take some educated guesses at what sounds the letters correspond to ☺

Language Resources

Hul'q'umi'num'

- Hul'q'umi'num': Ta'ulthun sqwal "learn the sounds" pages: <http://sqwal.hwulmuhwqun.ca/learn/learning-the-sounds/>
- First Voices Hul'q'umi'num' alphabet page (Quw'utsun): <https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/sections/Data/Coast%20Salish/Halkomelem/HUL'Q'U MI'NUM'/learn/alphabet>
- Introduction to Hul'q'umi'num' (lessons + vocabulary): <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/hulq/>
- Hul'q'umi'num' stories: <http://sxwiem.hwulmuhwqun.ca/>
- English - Hul'q'umi'num' dictionary: <http://www.sfu.ca/~gerdts/papers/HulquminumWords.pdf>
- SD79 Hul'q'umi'num' resources: <http://abed.sd79.bc.ca/hulqumimum-resourses/>

SENĆOŦEN:

- First Voices SENĆOŦEN alphabet page: <https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/sections/Data/THE%20SEN%C4%86O%C5%A6EN%20LANGUAGE/SEN%C4%86O%C5%A6EN/SEN%C4%86O%C5%A6EN/learn/alphabet>
- Timothy Montler's (2018) SENĆOŦEN Dictionary (introduction to sounds) – *not available online*
- Timothy Montler's Classified Word list (basis of 2018 Dictionary): <https://itservices.cas.unt.edu/~montler/saanich/wordlist/>
- Timothy Montler's Grammar: <http://www.montler.net/saanich/Outline/>

Ləkʷəŋən:

- <https://www.songheesnation.ca/community/l-k-ng-n-language-reawaken>
- Tess Nolan's MA thesis: <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/8062>

Vowels

Hul'q'umi'num'	SENĆOŦEN	Ləkʷəŋən	Description
a and aa	A	a	similar to English <i>bat</i> or <i>father</i>
--	O	--	similar to English <i>bought</i>
e and ee	Á	e	similar to English <i>bet</i> or <i>bait</i>
u	E	ə	varies; often similar to English <i>but</i>
i and ii	I	i	similar to English <i>bit</i> or <i>beet</i>
ou and oo	U	u	similar to English <i>boot</i>
ey	Ā	ey	similar to English <i>bait</i>
ay/uy	Í	ay/əy	similar to English <i>bite</i>

Familiar consonants

Hul'q'umi'num'	SENĆOŦEN	Ləkʷəŋən	Description
p	P	p	Similar to English <i>pat</i>
t	T	t	Similar to English <i>tick</i>
k	C	k	Similar to English <i>cat</i>
th	ᚦ	(θ)*	Similar to English <i>thing</i>
s	S	s	Similar to English <i>sing</i>
ts (c)	--	--	Similar to English <i>betsy</i> – note: in Hul'q'umi'num', this counts as a single sound, and it can occur anywhere in the word
sh	Ś	š	Similar to English <i>shell</i>
ch	Ć	č	Similar to English <i>chair</i>
h	H	h	Similar to English <i>hat</i>
l	L	l	Similar to English <i>leaf</i>
y	Y	y	Similar to English <i>yacht</i>
w	W	w	Similar to English <i>wait</i>
m	M	m	Similar to English <i>meet</i>
n	N	n	Similar to English <i>nest</i>
--	Ŧ	ŋ (ng)	Similar to English <i>sing</i> – note: in English this sound only occurs at the ends syllables and words; in Coast Salish languages it can occur anywhere
'	,	ʔ	This is called a glottal stop; it is similar to the catch in the throat in the middle of English <i>uh-oh</i>

* According to linguistic description, Ləkʷəŋən does not have the sounds θ, tθ, and t^h. This is unlike SENĆOŦEN but like Klallam (on the Olympic Peninsula in the US). Sometimes we do see them written though, so they are included here.

Unfamiliar “plain” consonants: front of the mouth sounds

Hul’q’umi’num’	SENĆOŦEN	Lək’wəŋən	Description
lh	ł	ł	Similar in tongue position to English <i>l</i> , if you whisper the word <i>please</i> , with air whistling out the sides of the tongue
tth	--	(tθ)	Similar to English <i>t+th</i>

Unfamiliar “plain” consonants: back of the mouth sounds

Hul’q’umi’num’	SENĆOŦEN	Lək’wəŋən	Description
kw	ƶ	k ^w	Similar to English <i>queen</i>
q	Ʒ	q	Similar to English <i>k</i> but further back in the mouth. Try saying <i>k</i> while pressing your tongue down with a pencil
qw	Ʒ	q ^w	Just like <i>q</i> but with rounded lips; similar to <i>kw</i> but further back
hw (xw)	Ʊ	x ^w	Pronounced in the same part of the mouth (velar) as <i>kw</i> , but the tongue body doesn’t quite touch the hard palate, creating a breathy, whistling sound
x (ǰ)	X	x	Raspy sound pronounced at the back of the mouth, at the same place as <i>q</i> . Think of trying to get a small crumb out of the back of your mouth
xw (ǰw)	X	x ^w	Just like <i>x</i> but with rounded lips.

Unfamiliar “ejective” consonants

Hul’q’umi’num’	SENĆOŦEN	Lək’wəŋən	Description
p’	B	p̣	<i>Ejectives consonants all sounds that involves a complete stop in airflow. They are pronounced like the plain consonants (e.g. p’ is like p), but with a tightening of the throat (‘glottal stop’) at the same time. The result is a small pop when the airflow is released.</i>
t’	D	ṭ	
kw’	Q	ḳ ^w	
q’	K	q̣	
qw’	Ʒ	q̣ ^w	
tth’	ƶ	(ṭθ)	
ts’	--	č̣	
tl’	Ʊ	ł̣	
ch’	J	č̣	

Unfamiliar “glottalized” consonants

Hul’q’umi’num’	SENĆOŦEN	Lək’wəŋən	Description
l’ or ’l	L, or ,L	ḷ or ?l or lʔ	<i>Glottalized consonants are all sonorous sounds. The glottalized consonants are pronounced like the plain ones (e.g. l’ is like l), but with a tightening of the throat at the same time. Sometimes this tightening creates a complete stop in airflow; other times it just creates a bit of creakiness in the sound.</i>
y’ or ’y	Y, or ,Y	ỵ or ?y or yʔ	
w’ or ’w	W, or ,W	ẉ or ?w or wʔ	
m’ or ’m	M, or ,M	ṃ or ?m or mʔ	
n’ or ’m	N, or ,N	ṇ or ?n or nʔ	
--	Ń, or ,Ń	ŋ̣ or ?ŋ or ŋʔ	