

Lao

ພາສາລາວ

Spoken in: Laos, and Northeastern Thailand (Isia)

Official language of: Laos

Lao is the official language of Laos; it is a tonal language of the Tai family. Lao is a concise language; Prefixes and combinations of basic words are used to make more complex meanings. The sentence structure is also quite simple and "grammar" refers mostly to word order.

The Lao writing system evolved from Sanskrit, the alphabet has been reformed several times over the past 50 years. The number of consonant letters was reduced so that words can be read phonetically.

The Lao script today consists of 30 consonants (20 sounds) and 28 vowels and diphthong possibilities. Written Lao proceeds from left to right, though vowel signs may be written before, above, below, around or after the consonant, depending on the sign.

Currently SSWAHS Health Care Interpreter Service employs 1 FTE Laotian interpreter and 5 sessional interpreters.

Lao alphabet

Consonants

Consonants are divided into three classes which help to determine the tone of a syllable (indicated by the numbers below). The sounds represented by some consonants change when they are used at the end of a syllable. The consonants can all be used at the beginning of a syllable but only some can be used at the end of a syllable.

ກ	ຂ	ຄ	ງ	ຈ	ຜ	ຊ	ຢ	ດ	ຕ	ຄູ	ທ	ນ	ປ
ໄກ່	ໄຂ່	ຄວາຍ	ງົວ	ຈອກ	ສົ້ອ	ຊ້າງ	ຊຸງ	ເດັກ	ຕາ	ຄູ່ງ	ທຸງ	ນົກ	ເປັ
k/k	kh/k	kh/k	ng/ng	c/t	s/t(s)	s/t	tʃ/y	d/t	t/t	th/t	th/t	n/n	b/p
[k]	[k]	[k]	[ŋ]	[tʃ]	[s]	[s]	[tʃ]	[d]	[t]	[t]	[t]	[n]	[b]
1	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	3	3	1
ປ	ຜ	ຝ	ບ	ພ	ມ	ຢ	ຣ	ລ	ວ	ຫ	ອ	ຮ	
ປາ	ຜົງ	ຝົນ	ບຸ	ໄພ່	ມ້າ	ຢາ	ຮ່າ	ລົງ	ວີ	ຫ້າວ	ອີ	ຮ້ອນ	
p/p	ph/p	f	ph/p	f/p(f)	m/m	y	l/n	l/n	v(w)/w	h	'	h/n	
[p]	[p]	[p]	[f]	[f]	[m]	[j]	[l]	[l]	[w]	[h]		[h]	
1	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	1	3	
ຫງ	ຫຍ	ຫນ	ຫມ	ຫຼ, ຫລ	ຫວ								
ng	tʃ	n	m	l	w								

The consonants in the final row are compounds and conjuncts used as alternatives to the basic consonants.

Vowel diacritics (with k)

ກະ	ກິ	ກຸ	ກູ	ກາ	ກີ	ກູ	ກູ	ເກະ	ເກະ
ka	ki	ku	ku'	ka:	ki:	ku:	ku:'	ke	kae
[ka]	[ki]	[ku]	[ku]	[ka:]	[ki:]	[ku:]	[ku:]	[ke]	[kae]
ໄກະ	ເກ	ເກ	ໄກ	ເກະ	ເກີ	ເກັວ	ເກຍ	ກົວ	ເກັວ
ko	ke:	kae:	ko:	ko'	koe	kia	kia	kua	koe:y
[ko]	[ke:]	[kæ]	[ko:]	[kɔ]	[kɛ]	[kia]	[kia]	[kua]	[kɛ:y]
ເກຍ	ກໍ	ເກີ	ເກືອ	ເກົາ	ໄກ	ໄກ	ກົວ	ກໍ	
koe:y	ko':	koe:	ku'a	kaw	kay	kay	kam	k	
[kɛ:y]	[kɔ:]	[kɛ:]	[kuə]	[kaw]	[kaj]	[kaj]	[kam]	[k]	