

Thai

An Essential Grammar

Second Edition

David Smyth



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Thai

An Essential Grammar

2nd edition

This second edition of *Thai: An Essential Grammar* provides an up-to-date and concise reference guide to Thai grammar.

Using clear, jargon-free explanations, it sets out the complexities of Thai in short, readable sections and presents an accessible description of the language. Focus is kept on the real patterns of use today and grammar forms are demonstrated through a wide range of relevant examples. No prior knowledge is assumed on the part of the reader.

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- coverage of crucial topics, such as sentence particles, negation, questions and quantification
- examples given in both Thai script and romanised transliteration
- pronunciation section
- guidance on speech conventions and the Thai writing system
- glossary of grammatical terms
- two appendices covering romanisation systems and three key verbs
- bibliography

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David Smyth is Senior Lecturer in Thai at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

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Thai

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Preface

The aim of the first edition of this book was to provide a description of the main features of Thai grammar which would be accessible to the ordinary learner with little or no knowledge of linguistic terminology.

This second edition differs only slightly in content from the first edition. The major difference is cosmetic: examples are given in Thai script first, while the Mary Haas-based phonemic system of romanising Thai has been abandoned in favour of a less-technical system. In addition, some new examples have been included, some explanations simplified and some errors eliminated.

I am grateful to those people who have written messages of appreciation for the first edition and offered suggestions and advice on how it might be improved. I am indebted to Routledge's anonymous reviewers of the first edition for their valuable suggestions and encouraging comments. I am especially grateful to Sujinda Khantayalongkoch and Vantana Cornwell for sharing their insights on the language, often at great length, and for checking the Thai entries. Errors, omissions and other shortcomings that may remain are, however, entirely my own responsibility.

Introduction

Thai and its speakers

Thai (formerly called ‘Siamese’) is a member of the *Tai* family of languages, which are spoken by an estimated 70 million people dispersed over a wide area of Asia, from northern Vietnam to northern India. Thai, with over 50 million first-language speakers, is the most important language in the Tai family, which also includes Lao, Shan (spoken in northern Burma) and some 15 million speakers in south-western China. Despite common structural features, even closely-related Tai languages are often mutually unintelligible because of phonological and lexical differences. Tai speakers were once thought to have originated from China and migrated southwards, but today, the border area between northern Vietnam and China’s Guangxi province is regarded as a more likely origin. From the eighth century AD Tai speakers began to migrate westwards and south-westwards into what is present-day Thailand.

Thai is the national language of Thailand. Distinct regional dialects of Thai are spoken in the north, north-east and south of the country, but the language of the Central Region is regarded as the standard and is used both in schools and for official purposes throughout the country.

Thai is a tonal language, with the meaning of each syllable determined by the pitch at which it is pronounced. Standard Thai has five tones – mid, low, high, rising and falling. Thai has no noun or verb inflections: a noun has a single form, with no distinction between singular and plural, while past, present and future time can be conveyed by a single verb form. Like many other South-East Asian languages, Thai has a complex pronoun system, which reflects gender, age, social status, the formality of the situation and the degree of intimacy between speakers. Much of the

original Thai lexicon is monosyllabic; a high percentage of polysyllabic words are foreign borrowings, particularly from the classical Indian languages, Sanskrit and Pali.

Romanisation

There are many ways of romanising Thai but no universally recognised system. Academic linguists use one system, librarians another, the Royal Thai Institute yet another, while writers of textbooks, phrasebooks and dictionaries often adapt or devise their own personal systems. Thais can neither systematically write their language in the Western alphabet nor easily read Westerners' romanisations of Thai; the average Thai, when called upon to romanise Thai words, will almost certainly do so in a quite unsystematic way.

Some romanisation systems use special phonetic symbols to represent the sounds of Thai more precisely and accents to represent tones and vowel length, while other less-precise systems use a near equivalent in the author's own language – which may confuse learners who do not share the author's mother tongue or even just his regional dialect. The complexities and ambiguities of romanised Thai can be bypassed by learning to read the Thai script.

The romanisation system used in this book is similar to that used in *Complete Thai* (2010). The system appears in full in Appendix 1, alongside the Mary Haas/AUA type system favoured by academic linguists, and the Library of Congress system used by librarians.

Learning Thai

A number of readily available Thai courses can be used in conjunction with this grammar. *Complete Thai* (2010), for example, equips the learner with the necessary language to deal with a range of everyday situations, provides a structured introduction to the script and has accompanying CDs; the *Linguaphone Thai Course* (1984) and *Colloquial Thai* (2005) cover similar ground. The two-volume *Thai Language and Culture for Beginners* (2007) by Yuphaphann Hoonchamlong is an excellent and attractively produced course with accompanying DVDs.

Of earlier materials, *Spoken Thai* (1945–9) by Mary Haas, although dated in places, is an extremely solid work, which offers many valuable insights

into the language. *Foundations of Thai* (1968) by Edward Anthony et al., and *Thai Basic Course* (1970) by Warren G. Yates and Absorn Tryon likewise provide very thorough introductions to the language with comprehensive grammar notes. The *AUA Language Center Thai Course* (1967), prepared by J. Marvin Brown, was designed for classroom use with a native speaker, rather than self-tuition, but other works produced by AUA, including Brown's *AUA Language Center Thai Course: Reading and Writing* (1979), and Adrian Palmer's imaginative dialogue books, *Small Talk* (1974) and *Getting Help with your Thai* (1977) are well worth consulting. Reprints of *Fundamentals of the Thai Language* (1957) by Stuart Campbell and Chuan Shawewongse continue to appear periodically, and the book has long provided the Bangkok expatriate with a sound introduction to the language, despite its traditional grammar-translation approach.

For many years the only available grammar of Thai was *Thai Reference Grammar* (1964) by Richard Noss, which was based on his doctoral thesis. Although it is outstandingly comprehensive and insightful, it is addressed to those with a background in linguistics, and is at times bewildering or even intimidating for the average beginner. *Teaching Thai Grammar* (1992) by William Kuo does not go into anywhere near as much depth, but it serves as a very useful workbook for practising key structures, using Thai script. In addition to the first edition of this volume (2002), two other notable grammars have appeared in recent years: *Thai Reference Grammar: the structure of spoken Thai* (2001) by James Higbie and Snea Thinsan, which is aimed at the layman, and *A Reference Grammar of Thai* (2005) by Shoichi Iwasaki and Preeya Ingkaphirom, which is written with an audience of more advanced learners and linguists in mind.

Dictionaries

The last twenty years have seen the appearance of a number of excellent dictionaries reflecting up-to-date usage. These include Domnern and Sathienpong's *Thai-English Dictionary* (1994), Thianchai Iamwaramet's *A New Thai Dictionary with Bilingual Explanation* (1993) and Wong Watthanaphichet's *New Age Thai-English Dictionary* (2010), the latter providing a romanised pronunciation guide for each entry.

Of earlier dictionaries, *Thai-English Student's Dictionary* (1964) compiled by the American linguist, Mary Haas, remains a valuable tool for the learner. Each Thai script entry is followed by a phonemic transcription and English gloss. A particularly useful feature for the learner is that for

every noun the appropriate classifier is indicated; many of the entries also include well-chosen examples of everyday usage. George B. McFarland's *Thai-English Dictionary* (1944), although dated, also remains a valuable reference work for the more advanced student of Thai, for it contains many words of Sanskrit origin and extensive listings of flora and fauna not found in the Haas volume. Robertson's pocket-sized *Practical English-Thai Dictionary*, first published in 1969, is useful for the beginner, with Thai equivalents of about 2,500 common English words in both romanised transcription and Thai script.

Linguistic literature on Thai

There is a rich English-language literature on many aspects of Thai linguistics, most of which is catalogued in Franklin E. Huffman's *Bibliography and Index of Mainland Southeast Asian Languages and Linguistics* (1986). Much of this literature is in the form of unpublished doctoral theses written in American university linguistics departments during the 1970s and 1980s and therefore not readily available. A number of collections of essays produced to honour leading scholars of Thai, most notably William J. Gedney (1975), Fang-Kuei Li (1976) and Vichin Panupong (1997), include contributions which the serious learner can benefit from. Anthony Diller's essays on levels of language use (1985) and the role of Central Thai as a national language (1991) and William A. Smalley's *Linguistic Diversity and National Unity: Language Ecology in Thailand* (1994), a masterful study of the relationship between the national language, regional dialects and minority languages, are accessible to the layman and offer invaluable insights into the language and language situation in Thailand.

Pronunciation

Thai differs radically from English and other European languages in being a *tone language*. In tone languages the meaning of a syllable is determined by the pitch at which it is pronounced. The Thai sound system also includes a small number of consonant and vowel sounds which have no close equivalent in English. The lists of consonant and vowel sounds in this section include, where possible, a close equivalent sound in standard British English; speakers of American English need to be aware that the final ‘r’ in words like **jer** (‘to meet’) is not sounded. An example of each sound in a word is given for confirmation with a Thai native speaker. For a more technical description of the sounds of Thai, see Noss (1964) or Iwasaki and Preeya (2005).

I.1 Consonants

I.1.1 Initial consonants

The consonants **d**, **b**, **f**, **l**, **m**, **n**, **r**, **y**, **w**, **s**, **h** are similar to English; the following consonants, however, need further clarification:

g similar to *g* in *get* e.g. **gài** (ไก) ‘chicken’

k similar to *k* in *kick* e.g. **kài** (ไข่) ‘egg’

ng similar to *ng* in *singer* e.g. **ngahn** (งาน) ‘work’

j similar to *j* in *jar* e.g. **jahn** (จาน) ‘plate’

ch similar to *ch* in *chart* e.g. **chai**: (ชาย) ‘male’

dt similar to *t* in *stop* e.g. **dtahm** (ตาม) ‘to follow’

t similar to *t* in *too* e.g. **tai** (ไทย) ‘Thai’

bp similar to *p* in *spin* e.g. **bpai** (ไป) ‘to go’

p similar to *p* in *part* e.g. **pah-sǎh** (ภาษา) ‘language’

Many Thais find it difficult to produce an **r** at the beginning of a word or syllable and will substitute **l**. Thus **róo** ('to know') is often pronounced **lóo**, and **a-rai** ('what?') as **a-lai**.

1.1.2 Final consonants

A Thai syllable can end in two types of consonant sounds:

(a) **-p, -t, -k** sounds

These final consonants are *unreleased*. Technically, the airstream is closed to make the sound, but not re-opened, so that no air is released. Examples in English include the 'p' in the casual pronunciation of 'yep!' and the 't' in 'rat', when 'rat trap' is said quickly. Beginners sometimes find it difficult to hear the difference between words like **rúk** ('to love'), **rút** ('to bind') and **rúp** ('to receive'), while in attempting to reproduce these sounds, they may inadvertently 'release' the final consonant.

(b) **-m, -n, -ng** sounds

These sounds are familiar from English and present no problem.

1.1.3 Consonant clusters

The following consonant clusters (combinations of two or more consonant sounds) exist in Thai; they occur only at the beginning of a word.

gr- as in **grOOng** (กรุง) 'city'

gl- as in **glai** (ไกล) 'far'

gw- as in **gwâhng** (กว้าง) 'wide'

kr- as in **krai** (ใคร) 'who?'

kl- as in **klái:** (คล้าย) 'to resemble'

kw- as in **kwăh** (ขวา) 'right'

bpr- as in **bpra-dtoo** (ประตู) 'door'

bpl- as in **bplah** (ปลา) 'fish'

pr- as in **prá** (พระ) 'monk'

pl- as in **plâht** (พลาด) 'to miss, fail'

dtr- as in **dtrong** (ตรง) 'straight'

In everyday speech many Thais from Bangkok will omit the second consonant in a cluster:

bplah (ปลา) ‘fish’ becomes **bpah**

krai (ใคร) ‘who?’ becomes **kai**

bpra-dtoo (ประตู) ‘door’ becomes **bpa-dtoo**

A more radical transformation, associated with Bangkok working-class speech, is the change of initial **kw-** to **f-**:

kwǎh (ขวา) ‘right’ becomes **fǎh**

kwahm sòOk (ความสุข) ‘happiness’ becomes **fahm sòOk**

1.2 Vowels

The distinction between short and long vowels is important in Thai. Learners are likely to experience some difficulty at first in hearing and producing differences between the short and long vowel sounds **-ao/-ao:** and **-ai/-ai:**:

rao (เรา) ‘we’

rao: (ราว) ‘about’

kāo (เข้า) ‘to enter’

kāo: (ข้าว) ‘rice’

dtai (ใต้) ‘liver’

dtai: (ตาย) ‘to die’

sǎi (ใส) ‘clear’

sǎi: (สาย) ‘late morning’

When reading Thai script it is essential to be able to distinguish between long and short vowel symbols, as vowel length influences tone (see Chapter 2):

-u short vowel, similar to *u* in *run* e.g. **yung** (ยัง) ‘still’

-ah long vowel, similar to *a* in *father* e.g. **mah** (มา) ‘to come’

-e short vowel, similar to *e* in *let* e.g. **dèk** (เด็ก) ‘child’

-ay long vowel, similar to *ay* in *may* e.g. **tay** (เท) ‘to pour’

-er as a short vowel, similar to *er* in *number* e.g. **ngern** (เงิน) ‘money’;
as a long vowel, similar to *er* in *her* e.g. **jer** (เจอ) ‘to meet’

-air a short or long vowel, similar to *air* in *hair* e.g. (short vowel)

kǎirng (แข็ง) ‘hard’; (long vowel) **māir** (แม่) ‘mother’

-i similar to *i* in *bin* e.g. **bin** (บิน) ‘to fly’

-ee similar to *ee* in *fee* e.g. **mee** (มี) ‘to have’

-or a short or long vowel, similar to *or* in *corn* e.g. (short vowel)

dtôrng (ต้อง) ‘must’; (long vowel) **bòrk** (บอก) ‘to say’

- o similar to o in *Ron* e.g. **jon** (จน) 'poor'
- oh similar to o in *go* e.g. **dtoh** (โต) 'big'
- oo similar to oo in *book* e.g. **yÓOk** (ยุค) 'era'
- oo similar to oo in *coo* e.g. **róo** (รู้) 'to know'
- eu short vowel, with no equivalent in English, e.g. **nèung** (หนึ่ง) 'one'
- eu: long vowel, with no equivalent in English, e.g. **meu:** (มือ) 'hand'
- ee-a similar to ear in *hear* e.g. **sěe-a** (เสีย) 'to lose'
- oo-a similar to oer in *doer* e.g. **róo-a** (รั้ว) 'fence'
- eu-a long vowel with no equivalent in English, e.g. **bèu-a** (เบื่อ) 'bored'
- ee-o similar to io in *Rio* e.g. **dee-o** (เดี่ยว) 'single'
- oo-ay similar to oué in *roué* e.g. **roo-ay** (รวย) 'rich'
- eu-ay long vowel with no equivalent in English, e.g. **nèu-ay** (เหนื่อย) 'tired'
- oo-ee similar to ewy in *chewy* e.g. **koo-ee** (คุย) 'to chat'
- oy-ee long vowel with no equivalent in English, e.g. **doy-ee** (โดย) 'by'
- er-ee long vowel with no equivalent in English, e.g. **ner-ee** (เนย) 'butter'
- oy short or long vowel, similar to oy in *boy*, e.g. (short vowel) **bòy** (บ่อย) 'often'; (long vowel) **róy** (ร้อย) 'hundred'
- ai short vowel, similar to ai in *Thai* e.g. **tai** (ไทย) 'Thai'
- ai: long vowel, similar to ai in *Thai* e.g. **dtai:** (ตาย) 'dead'
- ew short vowel, similar to ew in *few* e.g. **hěw** (หิว) 'hungry'
- ay-o short or long vowel, similar to ayo in *Mayo* e.g. (short vowel) **ray-o** (เร็ว) 'fast'; (long vowel) **lay-o** (เลว) 'bad'
- air-o long or short vowel, with no equivalent in English, e.g. (short vowel) **tăir-o** (แถว) 'row, line'; (long vowel) **láir-o** (แล้ว) 'already'
- ao short vowel, similar to ao in *Lao* e.g. **rao** (เรา) 'we'
- ao: long vowel, similar to ao in *Lao* e.g. **rao:** (ราว) 'about'

1.3 Tones

Each syllable in Thai is pronounced with a specific tone. Standard Thai has five different tones, which are represented in the transcription system by an accent over the first vowel in the syllable. They are mid tone (no accent), high tone (´), low tone (˘), rising tone (ˆ) and falling tone (ˋ).

(a) Mid tone (*sěe-ung sǎh-mun*): normal voice pitch:

bpai (ไป) 'to go' **mah** (มา) 'to come' **pairng** (แพง) 'expensive'

(b) High tone (*sěe-ung dtree*): higher than normal voice pitch:

rót (รถ) 'car' **séu:** (ซื้อ) 'to buy' **lék** (เล็ก) 'small'

(c) Low tone (*sěe-ung àyk*): lower than normal voice pitch:

síp (สิบ) 'ten' **jähk** (จาก) 'from' **yài** (ใหญ่) 'big'

(d) Rising tone (*sěe-ung jùt-dta-wah*): starting from a lower than normal voice pitch with a distinctive rising contour:

kǒrng (ของ) 'of' **sǎo-ay** (สวย) 'pretty' **pǒrm** (ผอม) 'thin'

(e) Falling tone (*sěe-ung toh*): starting from a higher than normal voice pitch with a distinctive falling contour:

têe (ที่) 'at' **chôrp** (ชอบ) 'to like' **pôot** (พูด) 'to speak'

1.3.1 Tone change

There are a few common words which have a different tone in normal conversation to when pronounced slowly and deliberately in isolation. For example, *káo* (เขา) 'he, she, they', *chún* (ฉัน) 'I' and *mái?* (ไหม) (question particle) are all pronounced with a high tone in normal conversation but a rising tone when pronounced in isolation.

In one form of adjectival reduplication (see 6.4), the first element is pronounced with a high tone for the purpose of emphasis or intensification:

sǎo-ay	สวย	'beautiful'
sóo-ay sǎo-ay	สวยงาม	'so beautiful!'

In certain situations tones may also change; the unstressed first syllable in a two-syllable word is usually pronounced with a mid tone (see 1.4), while when two syllables with rising tones follow one another, the first is often pronounced as a high tone:

núng-sěu:	หนังสือ	'book'
sórng sǎhm kon	สองสามคน	'two or three people'

I.4 Stress

In words of two syllables, it is the second syllable (in italics) which is stressed. When the vowel in the first syllable is **-a**, it is normally reduced to a ‘neutral’ vowel (an ‘er’ sound like the ‘o’ in ‘tonight’) and in normal speech the tone is mid:

bpra-dtoo	ประตู	‘door’
sa-dòo-uk	สะดวก	‘convenient’

When the vowel **-ah** occurs in both the first and second syllable, it is commonly shortened in the first syllable:

ah-hähn or a-hähn	อาหาร	‘food’
pah-säh or pa-säh	ภาษา	‘language’

The writing system

Thai is written in a unique script. This has evolved from a script which originated in South India and was introduced into mainland South-East Asia during the fourth or fifth century AD. The neighbouring Lao and Cambodian scripts bear some close similarities to Thai. The first recorded example of Thai writing is widely believed to be a stone inscription found by the future King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851–68) at Sukhothai in 1833, and dated 1292 AD. In this inscription, the author, King Ramkhamhaeng, records that he actually devised the script. There has been lively debate in academic circles about the authenticity of the inscription, much of which can be found in Chamberlain (1991).

The Thai writing system is alphabetic. It is written across the page from left to right with no spaces between words; when spaces are used, they serve as punctuation markers, instead of commas or full stops. There is generally a close match between spelling and pronunciation. The following sections provide a broad outline of the key features of the Thai writing system; for practical, structured lessons in reading Thai, see Brown (1979) and Smyth (2010).

2.1 Consonants

The Thai alphabet is conventionally described as having 44 consonants, although two of these, **kǒr kòo-ut** and **kor kon**, fell out of use more than a century ago. The letters **réu** and **reu**, and **léu** and **leu** are not regarded as consonants, but follow the letters **ror reu-a** and **lor ling** respectively in dictionary arrangements.

Consonants are arranged according to the order of letters in the traditional Indian alphabet. All consonants are pronounced with an inherent **-or** vowel sound. Each consonant has a name, rather like ‘a-for-apple, b-for-bat’,

which children learn in school. For the foreign learner, knowing these names can be useful when asking how to spell a word, but it is not necessary for learning to read.

Many consonant symbols change their pronunciation at the end of a word. Because of the very limited number of final consonant sounds that exist in Thai (1.1.2), the *letters* representing initial **g, j, ch, d, dt, b, bp, s** and **f** sounds (as well as initial **k, p, t** sounds) are each channelled into one of just three possible final consonant *sounds* – **k, p, t** – when they occur at the end of a word. The following chart lists the consonants in dictionary order with their names and pronunciations, both as initial and as final consonants:

Name			Initial	Final
ก	gor gàì	(chicken)	g	k
ข	kǒr kài	(egg)	k	k
ค	kǒr kòo-ut	(bottle)	k	k
คว	kor kwai:	(buffalo)	k	k
คน	kor kon	(person)	k	k
ฆ	kor ra-kung	(bell)	k	k
ง	ngor ngoo	(snake)	ng	ng
จ	jor jahn	(plate)	j	t
ฉ	chǒr ching	(small cymbals)	ch	t
ช	chor cháhng	(elephant)	ch	t
ซ	sor sǒh	(chain)	s	t
ฌ	chor (ga)cher	(tree)	ch	t
ญ	yor yǐng	(girl)	y	n
ฎ	dor chá-dah	(theatrical crown)	d	t
ฏ	dtor bpa-dtùk	(goad)	dt	t
ฐ	tǒr tǎhn	(base)	t	t
ฑ	tor mon-toh	(Montho, wife of the god Indra)	t	t
ฒ	tor táo	(old man)	t	t
ณ	nor nayn	(novice)	n	n
ด	dor dèk	(child)	d	t

Name			Initial	Final
𑄎	đtor dtào	(turtle)	dt	t
𑄏	tör tÖng	(bag)	t	t
𑄐	tor ta-hăhn	(soldier)	t	t
𑄑	tor tong	(flag)	t	t
𑄒	nor nỏ	(mouse)	n	n
𑄓	bor bai mái:	(leaf)	b	p
𑄔	bpor bplah	(fish)	bp	p
𑄕	pör pêng	(bee)	p	p
𑄖	för făh	(lid)	f	p
𑄗	por pahn	(tray)	p	p
𑄘	for fun	(tooth)	f	p
𑄙	por sŭm-pao	(sailing ship)	p	p
𑄚	mor máh	(horse)	m	m
𑄛	yor yúk	(giant)	y	<i>depends on preceding vowel</i>
𑄜	ror reu-a	(boat)	r	n
𑄝	réu	–	réu/rí/rer	–
𑄞	reu:	–	reu:	–
𑄟	lor ling	(monkey)	l	n
𑄠	léu	–	léu	–
𑄡	leu:	–	leu:	–
𑄢	wor wăirn	(ring)	w	<i>depends on preceding vowel</i>
𑄣	sör săh-lah	(pavilion)	s	t
𑄤	sör reu-sěe	(ascetic)	s	t
𑄥	sör sěu-a	(tiger)	s	t
𑄦	hör hèep	(box)	h	–
𑄧	lor jOO-lah	(kite)	l	n
𑄨	or àhng	(bowl)	–	–
𑄩	hor nók hôok	(owl)	h	–

The chart below summarises the representation of final consonant sounds. Although there are theoretically 15 ways of writing a final -t sound, less than half of these are likely to be encountered in normal usage.

Final consonant sound	Thai consonant symbol
-p	บ ป พ ภ ฟ
-t	ด ต ถ ฏ จ ฉ ฐ ท ฑ ฑ ษ ศ ษ ส
-k	ก ข ก ฌ
-m	ม ๓
-n	น ณ ณ ฎ ฏ
-ng	ง

2.2 Consonants by class

Thai consonants are divided into three classes – *high*, *mid* and *low*. The class of the initial consonant is one factor in determining the tone of a word or syllable. In order to be able to read, the learner has to memorise the class of each consonant; the easiest way to do this is to memorise the shorter lists of mid-class and high-class consonants so that everything not on those lists can be assumed to be low-class.

Low class:	น	ม	ง	ร	ล	ย	ว		
	n	m	ng	r	l	y	w		
	ค	ช	ซ	ท	พ	ฟ			
	k	ch	s	t	p	f			
	ฌ	ฑ	ภ	ฎ	ณ				
	k	t	p	y	n				
	ฌ	ฑ	ฌ	ฬ	ฮ				
	ch	t	t	l	h				
Mid class:	ก	จ	ด	ต	บ	ป	อ	ฎ	ฏ
	g	j	d	dt	b	bp	zero	d	dt
High class:	ก	ฌ	ด	ฬ	ฝ	ศ ษ ส	ห	ฐ	
	k	ch	t	p	f	s	h	t	

2.3 Vowels

Vowel symbols can only be written in combination with a preceding consonant; they can appear after, before, above, or below a consonant, and even surrounding the consonant on three sides; in the following table, a dash is used to indicate the position of the consonant in relation to the vowel symbol. A few vowels change their form, depending on whether or not they are followed by a consonant. Thus, *l-ə* and *l̄-* represent the same -er sound; in a word like **ter** ('you', 'she') where no consonant sound follows -er, then the first form is used; but in **derm** ('to walk'), with a consonant following -er, the second form is used.

When a word begins with a vowel sound, the 'zero' or 'glottal' consonant symbol is used. (Note that the Thai letter representing 'zero' consonant and the -or vowel are identical.)

Vowel length is important in Thai because it plays a part in determining the tone of a syllable. Some long vowels use the symbols -*ǝ* and *ǝ̄* as vowel shorteners.

The following chart lists the vowel symbols in dictionary order, indicating whether the vowel is long or short:

- <i>ร</i>	-orn	long	พร	porn	(blessing)
- <i>รร</i>	-un	short	สรร	sŭn	(to choose)
- <i>รร-</i>	-um	short	กรรม	gum	(karma, fate)
- <i>ว-</i>	-oo-u-	long	ควน	dòo-un	(urgent)
- <i>อ</i>	-or	long	หมอ	mǝr	(doctor)
- <i>ะ</i>	-a	short	ค่ะ	kâ	(female polite particle)
- <i>ุ</i>	-u-	short	ตัด	dtùt	(to cut)
- <i>ว</i>	-oo-a	long	รั้ว	róo-a	(fence)
- <i>า</i>	-ah	long	มา	mah	(to come)
- <i>าย</i>	-ai:	long	ยาย	yai:	(grandmother)
- <i>าว</i>	-ao:	long	ลาว	lao:	(Lao/Laos)
- <i>า</i>	-um	short + m	จำ	jum	(to remember)

ิ	-i	short	กิน	gin	(to eat)
ึ	-ew	short + w	ผิว	pěw	(skin)
ี	-ee	long	ดี	dee	(good)
เ	-eu	short	หนึ่ง	nèung	(one)
เ	-eu:	long	ซื้อ	séu:	(to buy)
ุ	-OO	short	คุณ	kOOn	(you)
ู	-oo-ee	short + y	คุย	koo-ee	(to chat)
ู	-oo	long	ดู	doo	(to look at)
เ	-ay	long	เลข	lâyk	(number)
เ	-e	short	เป็น	bpen	(to be)
เ	-er-ee	long	เคย	ker-ee	(used to, ever)
เ	-er	long	เธอ	ter	(you, she)
เ	-er	short	เยอะ	yér	(a lot)
เ	-e	short	เตะ	dtè	(to kick)
เ	-ao	short	เรา	rao	(we)
เ	-o'	short	เกาะ	gò'	(island)
เ	-er	long	เดิน	dern	(to walk)
เ	-ee-a	long	เรียน	ree-un	(to study)
เ	-eu-a	long	เบื่อ	bèu-a	(to be bored)
เ	-air	long	แม่	mâir	(mother)
เ	-air	short	แข็ง	kăirng	(hard)
เ	-air	short	และ	lâir	(and)
เ	-oh	long	โลก	lôhk	(world)
เ	-o	short	โต๊ะ	dtó	(table)
เ	-ai	short	ใน	nai	(in)
เ	-ai	short	ไทย	Thai	(Thai)

2.4 Live syllables and dead syllables

Thai syllables are described in Thai as being either *live* or *dead*. A live syllable (**kum bpen**) ends with a long vowel, an **m**, **n**, **ng** sound, or the Thai letters -ย, -ง, -า, -เา, -ใ-, -ไ-; a dead syllable (**kum dtai:**) ends with either a short vowel, or a **p**, **t**, or **k** sound.

Live syllables: **mah** **doo** **bin** **rum** **yung** **ao** **kăi:**
 มา ดู บิน รำ ยั่ง เอา ขาย

Dead syllables: **dtó** **gà** **dòO** **rúp** **jòrt** **mâhk**
 โต๊ะ กะ ดู รับ จอด มาก

2.5 Tone rules

The tone of a syllable is determined by a combination of three different factors: (i) the type of syllable (live or dead), (ii) the class of the initial consonant (high, medium or low) and (iii) the length of the vowel (long or short).

2.5.1 Dead syllables

The following chart summarises tone rules for dead syllables with examples:

Initial consonant	Short vowel	Long vowel
Low class	HIGH TONE รัก rúk to love	FALLING TONE มาก mâhk much, very
Mid class	LOW TONE ติด dtit to stick	LOW TONE บาท bàht baht
High class	LOW TONE ขับ kùp to drive	LOW TONE สอบ sòrp to take an exam