

Lesson 1 Handout

Week 1: 5 September 2023

Basic Principles

- ㄣ READING DIRECTION: Manchu is read ‘top to bottom, left to right’, meaning that letters and words follow in a sequence of top to bottom, with lines processing left to right. This differs from the traditional way of writing Chinese ‘top to bottom, right to left’, where characters follow in a vertical sequence, but lines process from right to left. This difference in writing is used to advantage in bilingual texts: from an English reader’s perspective, a bilingual Manchu-Chinese book may have it’s ‘first half’ in Manchu and it’s ‘second half’ in Chinese, but in actuality the book has two beginnings — the Manchu begins from the leftmost page, and the Chinese begins from the rightmost page, both ending in the middle.
- ㄣ SPACING: Within a Manchu word, letters are strung together along a straight vertical axis, in a cursive script. Words are separated by spaces.
- ㄣ LETTER POSITIONING: Letters change form depending on their position in a word, with four possible positions: isolate (vowels only), and word initial, medial, and final. Some letters lack one or more forms because they are restricted to certain positions (in this handout, the letter *p* is word final, and thus lacks a final form).
- ㄣ LETTER VARIANTS: Some letters may also change form depending on the letters that surround them, or, more rarely, based on formalisms associated with distinguishing homophones (see later: genitive *i*, dotted final *n*).
- ㄣ PUNCTUATION: Punctuation in Manchu is poorly standardized, but there are two basic punctuation marks: ˘ , roughly equivalent to a comma, and ˙ , roughly equivalent to a period.
- ㄣ TYPEFACES AND HANDWRITING: There is a degree of variation between printed and handwritten styles, and within handwritten styles; I will include a variety of typefaces and writing styles in practice, but will generally use a printed style in examples and handouts.
- ㄣ TRANSLITERATION: There are multiple romanizations for Manchu, but we will generally use the Möllendorff system. Where relevant I will discuss different systems (for example, in reading transliterations, or in using software which requires a specific)

(Monophthong) Vowels

- ㄣ TRANSCRIPTIONS: Manchu has six vowels, *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *ū*. *ū* is often transcribed using the letter *v*, which otherwise does not appear in the Möllendorff transliteration system.

- ㄣ PRONUNCIATION: Below is a table with pronunciation guides for each of the vowels in their monophthong form (ie. when not surrounded by other vowels or semivowels *y* or *w*). We will talk more about how these are pronounced when in diphthongs in the future.

Letter	Möllendorff	Pronunciation Guide	
ᡤᡠ	<i>a</i>	[a] or [ɐ]	English <i>a</i> in father , Mandarin 阿
ᡤᡤᡠ	<i>e</i>	[ə] or [ɤ]	English <i>a</i> in comma , Mandarin 呃
ᡤᡠᡳ	<i>i</i>	[i]	English <i>ee</i> in flee , Mandarin 一
ᡤᡠᡳᡳ	<i>o</i>	[ɔ]	English <i>au</i> in caught , no Mandarin equivalent
ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ	<i>u</i>	[u]	English <i>oo</i> in goose , Mandarin 五
ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳᡳ	<i>ū</i>	[ʊ]	English <i>oo</i> in foot , the vowel in Mandarin 冬

- ᡤ VARIANTS: Below shows all of the variants we will see of vowels depending on their position. Notice that many variants of *e* and *u* appear to be copies of *a* and *o* respectively.

	Isolate	Initial	Medial	Final
<i>a</i> /a~ɐ/	ᡤᡠ	ᡤᡠ	ᡤᡠ	ᡤᡠ ᡤᡠ
<i>e</i> /ə~ɤ/	ᡤᡤᡠ	ᡤᡤᡠ	ᡤᡤᡠ ᡤᡤᡠ	ᡤᡤᡠ ᡤᡤᡠ
<i>i</i> /i/	ᡤᡠᡳ ᡤᡠᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳ ᡤᡠᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳ
<i>o</i> /ɔ/	ᡤᡠᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳ ᡤᡠᡳᡳ
<i>u</i> /u/	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ
<i>ū</i> /ʊ/	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳᡳ	ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳᡳ

- ᡤ RIGHT DOTS (*TONGKI*) ON VOWELS: Note that in many contexts, *a* and *e* only differ by the presence or absence of a dot (in Manchu: *tongki*). The same with *o* and *u*. Additionally, there appear to be some variants of *e* and *u* where there is no dot. We will see later how vowels are distinguished when the dot is not present.

No right dot	Right dot <i>tongki</i>
<i>a</i> ᡤᡠ	↔ <i>e</i> ᡤᡤᡠ
<i>o</i> ᡤᡠᡳᡳ	↔ <i>u</i> ᡤᡠᡳᡳᡳ

- ᡤ HANDWRITING: In handwritten Manchu, the final rightward stroke of a given word may be written without being preceded by an indentation to the left.

Typical final rightward stroke:

Handwritten final rightward stroke



Consonants *m*, *l*, *b*, *p*

- **PRONUNCIATION:** *m*, *l*, *b*, *p* are generally pronounced like they are written in English or Mandarin pinyin, with one major difference. The letter *l* has the sound of an American English *r* [ɹ] at the end of syllables (before a consonant or before the end of a word). See the ‘extras’ for a note about subtler pronunciation with Manchu consonants.

Letter	Möllendorff	Pronunciation Guide	
	<i>m</i>	[m]	Like in English or Pinyin
	<i>l</i>	[l] [ɹ]	Like in English or Pinyin before vowels American English <i>er</i> in letter, Mandarin 儿 elsewhere
	<i>b</i>	[b/p]	Like in English or Pinyin
	<i>p</i>	[p/pʰ]	Like in English or Pinyin

- **FORMS:** Below I show the forms of the consonants. The letter *p* is never found syllable finally, and so is never written word finally, hence no final form.

	Initial	Medial	Final
<i>m</i>			
<i>l</i>			
<i>b</i>			
<i>p</i>			—

The letters *m* and *l* combine as expected with following and preceding letters.





<i>ma</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mū</i>
<i>mama</i>	<i>meme</i>	<i>mimi</i>	<i>momo</i>	<i>mumu</i>	<i>mūmū</i>
<i>am</i>	<i>em</i>	<i>im</i>	<i>om</i>	<i>um</i>	<i>ūm</i>

Note that the final *o* and *u* in the monosyllabic word is different than the final *o* and *u* in the disyllabic word: in words which consist only of a single open syllable (vowel, or consonant vowel), the *o* and *u* do not have a ‘tail’ like they do at the end of multisyllable words.





The letters *b* and *p* affect following vowels in two ways:

(1) Effects of *b* and *p* on following vowels

- a. The loops of *o*, *u*, *ū* is incorporated into the letter like so:

<i>bo</i>	<i>bupu</i>	<i>būla</i>	<i>apū</i>
			

- b. Final *a* and *e* after *b* and *p* curves to the left, not the right:

<i>baba</i>	<i>bebe</i>	vs.	<i>mama</i>	<i>meme</i>
				

Practice

Please transcribe the following words into the Möllendorff romanization.



Practice writing the following words in Manchu script.

- (2)
- eme* 'mother'
 - ama* 'father'
 - pampu* 'a thick padded coat'
 - molo* 'maple'
 - balu* 'blind'
 - ume* 'do not'
 - pelembi* 'to cover the ceiling with a mat awning'
 - umpu* 'hawthorne'
 - limi* 'centimeter'
 - ula* 'river'

- k. *amala* ‘behind, after, later’
- l. *ele* ‘especially, still more’

Extras

ㄣ VOICING: A smaller difference in pronunciation concerns the voicing of stop consonants (*p*, *b*, *t*, *d*, *k*, *g*): the letters *p*, *t*, *k* are pronounced with aspiration [p^h, t^h, k^h/q^h] except intervocalically, where they are unaspirated [p, t, k/q]. The letters *b*, *d*, *g* are pronounced as voiceless unaspirated stops [p, t, k/q] except intervocalically or after nasals, where they are pronounced [b, d, g/G]. This difference in pronunciation is already a part of many English speakers’ phonology, and it incredibly subtle, so the distinction is not as important to highlight as the difference between syllable initial and syllable final *l*.