

Introduction to the Tai Le Script



This short introduction to the Tai Le script is intended for people with no prior experience but can be used by anyone looking for more information on this unique script. It is based on the current Unicode proposal to encode Tai Le and the successful implementation of the Tai Le script by XenoType Technologies on a Macintosh running OS X 10.2.x.

The main purpose of this document is to provide information for software developers in an effort to promote the support of Tai Le-enabled operating systems and support applications. We will not however delve into the specifics of programming support for Tai Le — the information herein should provide an adequate starting point regardless of the operating system or technology involved.

To this end, we will frequently diverge from traditional linguistic terminology in an effort to point out or emphasize certain features of this script. Linguists and purists will have to forgive us.

It should be emphasized that the underlying language represented by the Tai Le script uses no less than 3 different scripts, based in large part on geopolitical boundaries. The script under discussion is used predominantly in China. In Burma, Laos and Thailand other scripts are utilized but these are not covered by the current proposal.

Consonants

As currently proposed, the Tai Le script consists of 35 basic shapes, or nominal glyphs, which can be further divided into consonants, vowels and tone marks. The 19 base glyphs representing consonants are shown here:

ၵ ၶ ၷ ၸ ၹ ၺ ၻ ၼ ၽ
 ၾ ၿ ၻ ၼ ၽ ၾ ၿ ၻ ၼ ၽ

Vowels

Tai Le uses a total of 11 vowel marks as dependent vowel signs. When these vowels occur initially in a word or syllable, they occur with the vowel carrier ၵ. All of the dependent vowels are spacing glyphs that require no special treatment.

◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌ ◌◌

Tone Marks

Tone marks are an integral part of the Tai Le script — every word takes an inherent unwritten tone or one of 5 different visible tone marks. The current Unicode proposal specifically encodes the modern representation of these tones:

ᵿ ᵽ ᵿ ᵿ ᵿ

Since all of these modern tone marks are spacing glyphs, there are no special requirements to display them properly. They should always be input last in a syllable.

There is however another method for indicating these same tones that uses combining diacritics, all of which are already included in other areas of Unicode. There is a one-to-one correspondence between these marks and those above.

•• ˘ ˙ ˚ ˛

A thorough implementation of Tai Le support should include these additional tone marks and a way to display them — XenoType Technologies currently does this through the use of font features which are unfortunately unavailable in the application used to create this document. These marks are typically nonspacing but when they occur in conjunction with any of the vowel marks with ascenders, they becoming spacing marks that occur visually after the vowel.

Here’s a screen shot from another application that illustrates their use (both lines of text use the exact same Unicode data store):



