

# The Olmec Language

by

Dr. Clyde Winters



The Olmec language is an agglutinative language. Words are formed in Olmec by the addition of suffixes to Olmec morphemes.

Due to homophony of Olmec monosyllabic signs the same sign and its word form can have multiple meanings. To understand Olmec writing you must use the acrophonic principle to interpret the Olmec logosyllabic signs.

The  
**Olmec Signs**  
 An ancient American Writing System



















	A	E	I	O	U	È
B						
D						
F						
H						
G						
L						
K						
M						
N						
P						

The  
**Olmec Signs**  
 An ancient American Writing System

**A E I O U È**






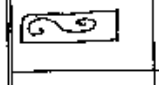


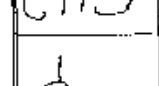
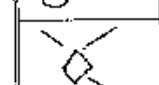
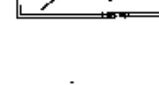
**S  
T  
Y**

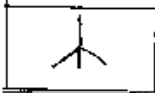
**/GB  
/GY  
KY**

					
				 E	
					
					
					
					
					



The  
**Olmec Signs**  
 An ancient American Writing System

Ngbe	
Nde	
Nde-Po	
Fa Po	
Yo Pol li	
Su Po	
Fa Kuku	
Po gbe	
Tu fa be	
ita	
Ngbe Po	

itu 

The unit of the Olmec logosyllabary is consonant ( C) and vowel (V) or CCV.

Each symbol can have multiple meanings.

The Olmec consonant system is as follows

p t k kp

b d g gb

f s h

w r y

m n ŋ

The Olmec consonants have the following pronunciation

B boy p pure

D dog r ran

Gy jump s saw

F full t tip

G gull ŋ sing

K canvas

L log

M man

N note

In Olmec nasal consonants occur in initial position before another consonant.

For example, n' is pronounced m before p and kb; n' is pronounced ŋ before k and g.

Pronouns

There are three pronouns in the Olmec inscriptions. They are :

n , l, me

l i , you, your



a , it, he; she

. In Olmec the pronoun is usually suffixed to the morpheme, but it can also occur in the initial position. For example,

a

a ku yu

literal translation (Lit.) it leading tomb

“ It is a leading tomb”.

A ku po bu-mbo gyu

Lit. He Govenor pure gigantic spirit of tranquility

“He is a Governor of gigantic purity the source of spiritual tranquility”.

A ku ni

Lit. He in possession principle of life

“He is in possession of the principle of life”.

A ku po

Lit. it stem pure

“It is a pure stem”.

A ta ni ngba i

Lit. it here soul home thou

“ It is here. (This) is the home of your soul”.

The most common pronoun in Olmec was the second person pronoun –i .

The pronoun *i*, means thine, thou, you and your. For example,

Sè            *i*

Lit. successful    thou

“Thou art successful”.

Po            *i*            to/tu

Lit. pure        your        King

“Your pure King”.

I            la                            gyo

Lit. thou    firmly situation    divinity

“Thou (art) firmly situated with the divinity”.

I            po

Lit. Thou    pure

I            gyo                            pa

Lit. thou    cult leader        admiration

“Thou (art) a cult leader of admiration”

There is only one example of the first person pronoun *n'*, in the Olmec inscriptions. This phrase is *nde po tu ta*, Lit. my union purity rule sacred. The translation is “My union (with) purity and sacred rule” or it could read “My union (with) purity (and) rule of the mystic order”.

## Nouns

There are three types of nouns in Olmec. These nouns represent inanimate and animate objects and qualities held to be superior traits for mankind.

### Inanimate Nouns



Bi, custom (habit), times of narration

Bolo, vestibule



Da prize



fa, container, place spot, proximity

fa, abundance, full, plenitude; love

fo, salutations

ga, hearth, home



gbe, cleansing, sanctified



gyo, amulet, talisman effective in providing one with virtue

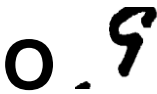


Ka, family maison, family house

kè, to study, learn, read



ki, order, commandment, law, envoy on a mission, raising star



Ta ki

“Sacred raising star”

kyu, tomb



la, good situation, apogee, foundation, gone to bed



la po tu

“The pure craftsman of the cult association”.



mè, understanding, judgment, comprehension; skill



(n)de, uncultivated land, uncultivated land near a river

nga, glow

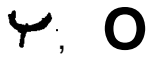
ngba, home



sa, air, heaven, end



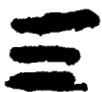
su, city, home, village, home, domicile, village



ta, habitation, place

ta ku

“(This) place (is) tops”.



to, place of rest



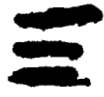
tu, refuge, abode



yo / yu , large hemisphere tomb



yu



to

ta

se

large hemisphere tomb place of rest here realize

“ Here to be realized the large hemisphere tomb as a place of rest”.

Animate nouns include the following terms.



Ba, powerful, spirit body

Bo, great, moral gradeur, to merit



Gyo-se, descendant of the divinity, son of god



Ku, head, Govenor



Kye, 'man'



La, craftsman, artisan



Sa, excellency, lord



Se gyo, supporter of the divinity



Tu / to, King, head of government, law

### Nouns of Quality

There are a number of Olmec nouns that describe a human quality or state of existence. These nouns include the following:



Bu , state of retreat



Fe, desire, wish



Fa, possession



Gina, "to be endowed with mysterious faculties"



Gyu, spiritual tranquility



Ngbe, white, favorable



ni, principal of life



po, purity, righteous



se, clever, victorious, power



ta, sacred object, mystic order, propriety



yo, vital spirit, image of the race

Below are a number of quality nouns used in Olmec sentences.

1. , fe po kye

“The pure wish for order”

## The Olmec Adjectives and Adverbs

There are a number of adjectives in the Olmec language. The most common Olmec adjectives include the following:



Ba, grand, great, strong, robust



Bo, to finish

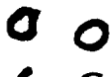


Bu, ample, big, large;

Bu-mbo, size, bulk, bigness, gigantic



Da, grand (used to describe dignitaries, and elites)



Pè, vast, huge, immense



Po, pure, purity



Su, vigorous



Ku, leading

In Olmec the adjective usually follows the noun or verb. Here we have **-ba**, which is joined to nouns to denote the idea of greatness, physical or moral, e.g., a kyè ba, “This man is great”. For example let’s look at the adjectives: bu, and pè:

1. Tyu a ki bu

Lit. Tomb his laws ample

Trans. “His tomb (is) ample Law”.

2. Tu pe I pè

Lit. “ King prodigious is superior”.

Trans. “The prodigious king is superior”.

In many cases the pronoun usually follows the adjective in Olmec sentences.

The most common pronoun in Olmec is **-a** , ‘he, she, it’. For example,



ba ku la

1. La ku ba

Lit. dormitory Governor large i

Trans. “The Governor’s large dormitory ”.



a ba ku la

La ku ba-a

Lit dormitory Governor large it

Trans. “The Governor’s dormitory (family burial site) it is large”.

In some cases the adjective is placed before the noun. This is especially true in relation to the adjective **pè** , ‘extensive, vast, and important’. For example,

1. Pè kyu

Lit. “Prodigious Tomb”.

2. Pè gyo a kye ba

Lit. important effective wonder making power he man/personage considerable

Trans. "He is indeed an important personage (with) considerable wonder making powers".

3. Pè gyo po ni

Lit. vast talisman pure soul

Trans. "A vast talisman is the pure soul"

4. Po ka I se

Lit. pure family mansion your realized

Trans. "Your pure family mansion is realized (here)".



## Adverbs

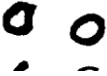
In Olmec there are five adverbs. Like the adjectives in Olmec the adverb can be placed either at the beginning of a sentence or after a noun or verb. For example,

**a**, 'indeed'

1. a l pè gyu

Lit. indeed thou assumed source of spiritual tranquility


Trans. "Thou indeed (have) assumed the (posture) (of a) source (of) spiritual tranquility".

The term  pè , 'indeed' is also an adverb. For example,

2. la pe ta pè

Lit. craftsman prodigious superior indeed



Trans. "The prodigious craftsman indeed, is superior".

In addition to  bè , representing the verb 'to be', it can also represent the adverb 'here' and 'very much'. For example,

3. Bè ni gyo

Lit. Here/ very much propriety talisman

Trans. "This talisman has very much propriety".

Olmec adverbs  **da** " now, at this moment" and  **bi** , " , present, moment, and coincidence' are frequently used . For example,

4. yu po gbe bi

Lit. big hemisphere tomb sanctified at present

Trans. "The big hemisphere tomb at this moment is sanctified".

5. da bu po I ki

Lit. at this moment in state of retreat purity thou an envoy on a mission

Trans. "At this moment (you are) in a state of retreat, thou purity (is like) an envoy on a mission (to spread good)".

6. ta la da bo

Lit. sacred object craftsman grand moral grandeur

Trans. "Sacred object (of) the grand Craftsman of moral grandeur".

Other Olmec adverbs include *li* 'indeed', ta 'here, and ku 'cleansing'. For example,

7. li gyo

Lit. "Indeed a specialist of the cult/religious order".

8. lit u

Lit. "Indeed, the Ruler".

9. ni lu nga ta

Lit. propriety much glow here

Trans. "Much propriety glows here".

10. po mi ta

Lit. pure imbibitions here

Trans. "Here are pure imbibitions".


11. su po ku i nu

Lit. offer libations pure cleansing thou habitation

Trans. "Offer pure cleansing libations in though habitation".

## Olmec Articles

The article 'the, this, etc.', are usually not written in the Olmec inscriptions. But

there are to frequently used articles in Olmec  i 'the, this', and



tu 'this'. These articles are usually suffixed to adjectives especially

po 'pure, purity'. For example,

1. gyo po

Lit. talisman effective in providing one with virtue pure

Trans. "pure talisman effective in providing one with virtue"

Gyo po-i

Lit. talisman effective in providing one with virtue pure this

Trans. "This pure talisman effective in providing one with virtue".

2. fa po tu

Lit. container pure Law

Trans. "Container of the pure Law"

I fa po tu

Lit. this container pure law

Trans. "This container (of) the pure Law".

## Olmec Sentence

The Olmec inscriptions provide us with several sentence patterns, depending on the type of inscriptions. The terseness of the Olmec inscriptions allowed considerable grammatical license in the inscriptions.

The favorite sentence pattern of a language includes a subject (S), verb (V) and object (O). The order of Olmec sentences vary, but the usual sentence pattern is SVO. For example,



ni      bè      ta

1. ta              bè              ni

Lit. habitation    very much    propriety

Trans. "This habitation has very much propriety".



su      ta      fa      tu

2. tu      fa                      ta                      su

Lit. abode possession partisan of the mystic order offer up libations

Trans. "This abode is in the possession of the partisan of the mystic order, (here) offer up libations".



3. su              i              su

Lit. domicile is honored as a libation

Trans. "This domicile is honored as a libation".

4. tu yu ta i ngbe

Lit. king tomb sacred object is unblemished

Trans. "The king's tomb is a sacre unblemished object".

5. ki ku lu

Lit. the order to touch from a distance hold it upright

Trans. "(He) touches from a distance the order (of the cult), to hold it upright".

There are also some VSO sentences in Olmec. The VSO sentences are usually short statements. For example,

1. tu gbe

Lit. cause to grow righteousness

2. da bo

Lit. arrange moral gradeur.

3. ta me

Lit. welcome understanding