

BAMUKUMBIT (MANKONG) ORTHOGRAPHY GUIDE

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**This article concerns the Bamukumbit (Mankong) language, spoken in
Ngoketunja Division, in the North West Region of Cameroon.
ISO 639-3 language code: bqt**

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Abbreviations

(n)	noun
1s	1 st person singular
DL	dual
EX	Exclusive
EXT	verbal extension
F	Future tense
HAB	Habitual aspect
IMP	Imperfective aspect
INC	Inclusive
IND	indefinite personal pronoun
INF	Infinitive marker
NEG	Negative marker
P1	Today past tense
P2	Yesterday past tense
PL	plural
PROG	Progressive aspect
REL	Relative pronoun
SG	singular
SS	Same subject marker

1. Introduction

This revised paper documents the current orthography used for the 2013 publication of the Bamukumbit transition primer (Mankong Language Committee, 2013). The current orthography is based on Simpson's orthography, originally proposed in 2006, but with significant revisions made where current practice differs from her original proposal.¹

In section 3, rules are proposed for representing lexical tone. The transition primer does not follow these rules, but instead leaves tone unrepresented. Nonetheless, this section is maintained in this paper, with the intention that after further tonal analysis is done, these rules will be modified and implemented. In this revised paper, tone is marked with diacritics only in the sections that discuss tone. Elsewhere, tone is left unmarked, reflecting current practice.

Bamukumbit [ISO 639-3 bqt] is a Grassfields Bantu language. The *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al. 2013) reports the following classification of the language:

Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Ngemba.

The Bamukumbit people live primarily in Bamukumbit village, Balikumbat Subdivision, Ngo-Ketunjia Division, North West Region, Republic of Cameroon, where there are approximately 12,000 speakers of the language (Lewis et al. 2013).

Linguistic studies that have been carried out in the Bamukumbit language include a language survey (Seguin, 1994); a phonological sketch (Simpson, 2006) which was the basis for the first edition of this orthography guide; a study of the noun classes (DeVisser, 2006), a collection of narrative texts (DeVisser, 2008); a study of the noun phrase (DeVisser, 2011); and a study of tone in nouns (DeVisser, 2013).

Studies of other Grassfield Bantu languages were also helpful in the preparation of the first edition of this orthography guide (Alomofor 2005, Achotia 2005, Njeck 2003, Njeck 2005).

¹ Section 1 has been updated to include new information. In Section 2 (Alphabet), the letters **h** and **y** have been added to the alphabet, and an explanation of the cedilla has been added. In Section 3 (Tone), the first paragraph has been added. Sections 5.1 (Elision of *i*) and 5.2 (Elision of *a* From *wa*) are completely new material. In Section 6.2 (Question Mark), the material on yes/no questions is new. Sections 4.1.1 (Subject Pronouns), 4.1.2 (Other Pronouns) and 6.4 (Comma) have been changed completely from the original orthography guide. Sections 2.1.4 (Consonant Orthography Rules), 2.2.3 (Vowel Sequences), 2.2.4 (Vowel Orthography Rules) and 4.4 (Reduplication) have been modified from the original to a lesser extent. Throughout this whole revised orthography guide, examples have been adjusted or even replaced with more appropriate examples, to reflect the changes that have been made to the spelling rules.

2. Alphabet

The Bamukumbit segmental alphabet is made up of eighteen consonants and ten vowels. They are represented below in upper and lower cases:

A a, B b, Ch ch, D d, E e, Ɛ ɛ, Ɔ ɔ, F f, G g, H h, I i, ɪ i, J j, K k, L l, M m, N n, ŋ ŋ, O o, ɔ ɔ, Ø ø, R r, Sh sh, T t, U u, W w, Y y, ’.

The diacritic (,) (a cedilla) is also used in the orthography, to indicate nasalised vowels as discussed in section 2.2.2.

Throughout this orthography guide, diacritics are also used to indicate tone, but only in sections where tone is being discussed. In practice, tone is not being marked orthographically. Further research is necessary before a tone orthography can be proposed that will adequately serve both readers and writers.

2.1 Consonants

The consonant phonemes, their allophones and graphemes are presented in Table 1 below. Each grapheme is shown in its various positions in the word.

Table 1 Consonant Graphemes

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final Position
/b/	[b]	B b	bir <i>lice</i>	abe’ <i>load, burden</i>	—
	[p̚] ²		—	—	bab <i>kite</i>
/t/	[t]	T t	tɔ <i>basket</i>	ato <i>head</i>	—
	[tʰ] ³		ti’ <i>advise</i>	toti <i>up</i>	—
	[t̚] ~ [ɟ] ⁴	R r	—	—	nibor <i>sky</i>
/k/	[k]	K k	kɔ <i>bed</i>	akɔ’ <i>chair</i>	—
	[ʔ] ⁵	’	—	—	kwa’ <i>very, truly</i>
/f/	[f]	F f	for <i>mouse, rat</i>	afo <i>leaf</i>	—
/ʃ/	[ʃ] ~ [s] ⁶	Sh sh	shɔ <i>friend</i>	ashɔr <i>hoe</i>	—
/tʃ/	[tʃ]	Ch ch	chi’ <i>only</i>	acha’ <i>mud</i>	—

² Word-finally the phoneme /b/ is realised as [p̚].

³ The phoneme /t/ is aspirated before the high non-back vowels, [i] and [ɪ].

⁴ Word-finally, the phoneme /t/ is realised [t̚]~[ɟ].

⁵ Word-finally the phoneme /k/ is realised as [ʔ].

⁶ Some speakers pronounce [s] before front vowels and before [a].

/ɣ/	[ɣ]	G g	gi <i>go!</i>	agə <i>mortar</i>	—
	[g] ⁷		ŋgo' <i>year</i>	aŋgə <i>thief</i>	—
/h/	[h]	H h ⁸	Haŋibwa <i>(woman's name)</i>	—	—
/m/	[m]	M m	maa <i>child</i>	ama' <i>gift, dash</i>	kam <i>crab</i>
/n/	[n]	N n	nwa <i>snake</i>	anɛ <i>field</i>	nən <i>body</i>
/ŋ/	[ŋ]	Ŋ ŋ	ŋɔ <i>man</i>	aŋɛ <i>spy</i>	—
/l/	[l]	L l	li' <i>shadow</i>	alu' <i>waist</i>	—
	l~ɾ ⁹	L l	—	alɔ'li <i>curse (n)</i>	—
	[d] ¹⁰	D d	ndə <i>house</i>	andɪndɪm <i>bat</i>	—
/w/	[w]	W w	we <i>laugh!</i>	nɪwu <i>funeral, death</i>	—
	[g ^w] ¹¹	Gw gw	—	ŋgwaa <i>salt</i>	—
/j/	[j] ~ [ʒ] ¹²	Y y ¹³	yɔ <i>tomorrow</i>	ayo' <i>yam</i>	—
	[dʒ]	J j	—	njim <i>backwards, behind</i>	

2.1.1 Prenasalised Consonants

Prenasalisation is one of three types of consonant clusters found in Bamukumbit. This is where a nasal consonant is pronounced at the same place of articulation as the following consonant (homorganic nasal), as in Table 2 below:

⁷ When the consonant phoneme /ɣ/ is preceded by a nasal consonant, it undergoes hardening and is realised as [ŋg].

⁸ In September 2007, during the alphabet book workshop, the Bamukumbit participants decided that it was necessary to add the letter **h** to the alphabet, because there are many Bamukumbit names beginning with this sound. The sound /h/ seems to be contrastive only in names, exclamations, and borrowed words. In such cases, it is found only word-initially or word-medially. Word-finally, the sound [h] may be added optionally to certain words that otherwise end in a vowel. In such cases, the letter **h** is not written.

⁹ Where the phoneme /l/ occurs in a non stem-initial position, it is in free variation with [ɾ].

¹⁰ When the consonant phoneme /l/ is preceded by a nasal consonant, it undergoes hardening and is realised as [nd].

¹¹ When the consonant phoneme /w/ is preceded by a nasal consonant, it undergoes hardening and is realised as [ŋg^w].

¹² When the consonant phoneme /j/ is preceded by a nasal consonant, it undergoes hardening and is realised as [ndʒ].

¹³ In September 2007, during the alphabet book workshop, the Bamukumbit participants decided that it was necessary to add the letter **y** to the alphabet.

Table 2 Writing Prenasalised Consonants¹⁴

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial Position	Medial Position
/mb/	[mb]	Mb mb	mbi <i>mosquito</i>	ambəm <i>whitewash</i>
/nt/	[nt]	Nt nt	nte <i>colour</i>	anta <i>elephant's tusk</i>
/ŋk/	[ŋk]	ŋ k ŋk	ŋka' <i>barren woman</i>	aŋka <i>monkey</i>
/nl/	[nd]	Nd nd	ndo <i>cup</i>	andindim <i>bat</i>
/ŋɣ/	[ŋg]	ŋ g ŋg	ŋgam <i>prophecy</i>	aŋgo' <i>turraco</i>
/ntʃ/	[ntʃ]	Nch nch	nchi <i>bottle</i>	kunchamni <i>toad</i>
/nj/	[ndʒ]	Nj nj	nja' <i>chest</i>	—
/ŋw/	[ŋg ^w]	ŋ gw ŋgw	ŋgwar <i>mother-in-law (of a woman)</i>	—

2.1.2 Labialised Consonants

Consonants can also be labialised. That is, they can be followed by the labiovelar glide [w], which is written with the letter **w**, as seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Writing Labialised Consonants

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position
/b ^w /	[b ^w]	Bw bw	—	abwa <i>hand</i>
/t ^w /	[t ^w]	Tw tw	twi <i>crush!</i>	ntwir <i>hip</i>
/k ^w /	[k ^w]	Kw kw	kwi <i>bone</i>	mikwa'li <i>gravel</i>
/f ^w /	[f ^w]	Fw fw	fwantɔ <i>refuse!</i>	—
/tʃ ^w /	[tʃ ^w]	Chw chw	chwe' <i>dip!</i>	nchwa <i>war</i>
/ʃ ^w /	[ʃ ^w]	Shw shw	shwakur <i>trousers</i>	—
/m ^w /	[m ^w]	Mw mw	mwa <i>mother</i>	—
/n ^w /	[n ^w]	Nw nw	nwa <i>snake</i>	minwi <i>knife</i>
/ŋ ^w /	[ŋ ^w]	ŋw ŋw	ŋwi li' <i>eyelash</i>	miŋwi <i>hair</i>

¹⁴ There is no column for “final position” in Table 2 or Table 3 because consonant clusters cannot occur word-finally.

/l ^w /	[l ^w]	Lw lw	lwi' <i>heat (it)!</i>	milwi <i>nose</i>
	[nd ^w]	Ndw ndw	ndwa <i>time</i>	—
/j ^w /	[j ^w]	Yw yw	ywe'li <i>wait!</i>	—

2.1.3 Consonant Orthography Rules

Various rules on which consonants can occur in which positions or which can occur before or after other consonants are important to learn. Here is a partial list of consonant orthography rules:

- 1) The letter **l** only occurs morpheme-initially. Elsewhere, write the letter **r**.
- 2) The letter **t** only occurs morpheme-initially. Elsewhere, write the letter **r**.
- 3) If you hear a nasal consonant before **g** or **k**, always write **ŋ**.
- 4) Never write the letter ' at the start of a word.
- 5) Always write **n** before **d**. (In other words, **d** can only occur after an **n**. If there is no **n**, write **l**.)
- 6) Always write **n** before a **j**. (In other words, **j** can only occur after an **n**. Elsewhere, write **y**.)

2.2 Vowels

The Bamukumbit language has ten vowel phonemes. The sounds are shown below in Table 4, as they occur in different positions of the word.

Table 4 Vowel Graphemes

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/a/	[a]	Aa	abe' <i>load, burden</i>	chi' <i>only</i>	maa <i>child</i>
/e/	[e]	Ee	—	fer <i>meat</i>	mingwe <i>woman</i>
/ɛ/	[ɛ]	Ɛɛ	—	nde' <i>necklace</i>	abe <i>bag</i>
/ə/	[ə]	Əə	—	kəb <i>pig fence</i>	ndə <i>house</i>
/i/	[i]	I i	—	li' <i>eye</i>	ŋgi <i>voice</i>
/i/	[i]	fi	ifa'li <i>I have erred.</i>	alim <i>tongue</i>	mbi <i>rain</i>
/o/	[o]	Oo	o <i>you</i>	nicho <i>camp (n)</i>	mbo <i>poor person</i>
/ɔ/	[ɔ]	Ɔɔ	—	nibɔ' <i>pumpkin</i>	ŋɔ <i>person</i>
/ə/	[ə]	Øø	—	mbø' <i>shoulder</i>	nindø <i>bamboo</i>
/u/	[u]	Uu	—	shu <i>fish</i>	afur <i>feather</i>

2.2.1 Vowel Length

Bamukumbit has both short and long vowels, though long are less common. In the orthography, long vowels will be marked as a sequence of two vowels (**ii**, **ee**, etc.). Some length minimal pairs are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Writing Short and Long Vowels

Short Vowel		Long Vowel	
ŋgwa	<i>raffia bush</i>	ŋgwaa	<i>salt</i>
michi	<i>blood</i>	michii	<i>urine</i>
mbi	<i>world, outside</i>	mbii	<i>grub</i>

2.2.2 Nasalised Vowels

Nasalised vowels are common in Bamukumbit. Six of the ten vowel phonemes can be nasalised. In the Bamukumbit orthography, nasalised vowels will be written with a cedilla (,) under the vowel as shown in Table 6 below. In case of a long nasalised vowel, or a sequence of two different vowels, both nasalised, the cedilla should be written under the first vowel only.

Table 6 Writing Nasalised Vowels

Phoneme	Grapheme	Word Initial	Word Medial	Word Final
/ĩ/	ĩ	—	fĩmita <i>trader</i>	abi <i>dance (n)</i>
/ẽ/	ẽ	—	—	abẽ <i>visit</i>
/ã/	ã	—	ŋgafo <i>medicine man</i>	sha <i>nest</i>
/õ/	õ	—	—	fõ <i>fon, king</i>
/ũ/	ũ	—	—	ŋku <i>mountain</i>
/ǎ/	ǎ	—	mbǎfu <i>cowrie shell</i>	atǎ <i>iron</i>

2.2.3 Vowel Sequences

There are two types of vowel sequences (two vowels occurring next to each other) in Bamukumbit. The first is where the vowel [u] is followed by the vowel [a]. In isolation, there are some words that are pronounced [ua], and some that are pronounced [wa], in similar phonological environments. Some examples are shown in Table 7 below, written according to their pronunciation in isolation.

Table 7 Words With [ua] And [wa]

[ua]	[wa]
------	------

ashua	<i>tooth</i>	shwa	<i>hang! put hat on head!</i>
kua'	<i>make fire!</i>	kwa'	<i>clear (land, farm)!</i>
nikua	<i>spear</i>	nikwa	<i>four</i>

This would seem to indicate that there is contrast between [ua] and [wa]. However, for any given word that has a sound [ua] or [wa], the pronunciation can change between [ua] and [wa] when the word is pronounced in various environments. Thus, a single spelling, **wa**, is used for both [ua] and [wa], as shown in Table 8 below:¹⁵

Table 8 Writing Words with [ua] and [wa]

[ua]		[wa]	
ashwa	<i>tooth</i>	shwa	<i>hang! put hat on head!</i>
kwa'	<i>make fire!</i>	kwa'	<i>clear with machete!</i>
nikwa	<i>spear</i>	nikwa	<i>four (4)</i>

The second type of vowel sequence is where the vowel [i] occurs immediately before the vowel [ɛ]. Some example words are listed below in Example 1.

Example 1

achie	<i>tail</i>
ashie	<i>star</i>
bie	<i>avocado, pear</i>
kie	<i>fry</i>
kie	<i>bowl</i>
mishie	<i>broom</i>
ɲwieni	<i>earthworm</i>
shie	<i>to dry (in the sun), to smoke</i>
ntɪŋkie	<i>adult, older person</i>

2.2.4 Vowel Orthography Rules

Various rules on where vowels can occur are important to learn. Below are some of the important orthography rules concerning vowels:

- 1) Never write ə in a prefix or suffix. Even if you hear the sound /ə/ in a prefix or suffix, write **i**.
- 2) The letter ø only occurs before a glottal stop or in an open syllable. Never write ø in a syllable that ends with **b**, **r**, **m** or **n**.

¹⁵ The original orthography guide, written by Hazel Simpson, proposed two different spellings, **ua** and **wa**, based on the isolation pronunciation of any given word. In practice, however, it has proved difficult to implement two different spellings, with speakers unable to settle on a single spelling for each particular word having these sounds. In 2011, during a Creative Writing Workshop, several Mankong speakers who were reading and writing the language regularly at that time agreed to use only 'wa' for all words that contain the sounds [ua] or [wa]. This has been easier to implement, and the current Bible translators and literacy teachers continue to follow this practice.

3. Tone

This section on tone orthography was not followed in the transition primer (Mankong Language Committee, 2013). Nonetheless, the section is maintained here so that it remains documented for the near future when we hope to begin representing tone in the orthography.

Five surface tones have been identified in Bamukumbit. There are three phonetic level tones: high [á], mid [ā], and low [à]; in addition to these, there are three contour tones low falling [à̃], high falling [â] and rising [ǎ].

3.1 Lexical Tone Contrasts

At this point in time, the data collected shows numerous minimal pairs between high and low tones, high falling and low falling, and high falling and rising, but no minimal pairs have yet been found between low and low falling. In addition, mid-tone only occurs in complex words or in phrases, due to underlying tonal processes. As a result of these findings, it may be helpful in the future to keep low and low falling unmarked, while high and mid are marked with the same diacritic (á). The remaining contour tones could be marked as follows: high falling (â) and rising (ǎ). Table 9 below summarises this information.

Table 9 Tone Marks

Toneme	Allotone	Tone Mark	Examples	
/á/	[́]	´	tɔ́ <i>basket</i>	ntóó <i>breeze</i>
/ā/	[̄]	˘	nífɔ̄ <i>eight</i>	bitáali <i>three</i>
/à/	[̀]	unmarked	asha' <i>gizzard</i>	Nígɔ̃ <i>Bambalang</i>
/à̃/	[̂]	unmarked	ŋki <i>water</i>	faa <i>wooden nail</i>
/â/	[̂]	ˆ	shî <i>face</i>	atô <i>head</i>
/ǎ/	[̃]	unmarked	fɔ' <i>foam</i>	—

Tonal minimal pairs are relatively easy to find. A few of these are listed in Table 10 below, showing minimal pairs for the common contrasts.

Table 10 Tonal Minimal Pairs

L and H	fum	<i>peel, shell (noun)</i>	fúm	<i>mould (noun)</i>
	fu'	<i>ash</i>	fú'	<i>fellow wife</i>
	kam	<i>Juju dance</i>	kám	<i>crab</i>
L and HL	mba	<i>enemy</i>	mbâ	<i>quiver, sheath</i>
	mbə	<i>side</i>	mbê	<i>money</i>
	nan	<i>stretch marks</i>	nân	<i>buffalo</i>
HL and H	ntô	<i>place name</i>	ntó	<i>breeze</i>
	mbî	<i>outside</i>	mbí	<i>mosquito</i>
	mîtâ	<i>trap</i>	mîtá	<i>market</i>

As with other recent orthography proposals in Cameroon, it is proposed that all Bamukumbit words are written as they occur in isolation (i.e. as they occur when pronounced individually). This would also be the form recommended for use in a lexicon/dictionary.

Regarding verbs, it is proposed that they are marked for high tone leaving low tone unmarked. As with nouns, these tones may undergo changes when occurring in context (becoming rising or falling), however, the crucial contrast is between the high and low tone which are always present, whether level or contour.

There are syntactic tones in Bamukumbit when a word occurs in context. However, Bamukumbit speakers should not have undue difficulty reading or pronouncing the words in context, once they recognise the meanings of the individual words that make up the sentence.

3.2 Grammatical Meanings Marked by Diacritics

Grammatical tone has not been studied in detail during this analysis. It is an area which will have to be considered during any future revisions of the orthography.

4. Word Division

This section gives guidelines for word division in various contexts.

4.1 Pronouns

4.1.1 Subject Pronouns

First person singular (1s) subject pronouns (N- and **i**-, both underlyingly L-toned) and same subject (SS) pronouns (N- and **i**-, both underlyingly H-toned), are written as prefixes on the word that immediately follows (verb root, tense marker, aspect marker or negative particle).¹⁶ This is shown in Example 2 to Example 5 below.

Example 2 Verbs With 1s Subject Pronouns In The Form Of The Prefix N-

Nna' **ŋki**, o nwa? *Should I give you water to drink?*
1s.give water you drink

Mbi' **ŋgi** a miṭa shə. *I went to the market today.*
1s.P1 go to market today

Nde **njɔ** miwur bebɛɛ. *I usually buy red oil.*
1s.HAB buy oil red.red

ŋka **bi'** **ŋgi** a miṭa. *I didn't go to the market.*
1s.NEG P1 go to market

Example 3 Verbs With 1s Subject Pronoun In The Form Of The Prefix i-

ifi **awə** **ŋgiɛ**... *I tell you that ...*
1s.tell you.PL that

Example 4 Verbs With Same Subject Pronouns In The Form Of The Prefix N-

Bi **ni** nchwa i mme'ni i.
they.IND P2 whip him SS.allow him
They whipped him and released him.

Ncho **nchu** **ŋgiɛ** ... *And [they] were saying that ...*
SS.PROG say that

Bwa **ni** **ŋkɔ** she nise o, **ŋka** **nji** aku i.
they P2 enter inside tomb the SS.NEG see corpse his
They went into the tomb but [they] did not see his body.

Example 5 Verbs With Same Subject Pronouns, With The Prefix i-

Andwa **bwa** **ni** ndwani **ŋgi**, ishati **ŋɔ** ala'tɔ chə.
time they P2 come-out go SS.meet person country other
As they went out, they met a man from another country.

¹⁶ For both 1s and SS pronouns, when the verb root begins with **f** or **sh**, the prefix may be pronounced with a nasal consonant, with the vowel [i], or with no segment at all, depending on the phonological context and on the speaker. Orthographically, we write **i**. When the verb root begins with a nasal consonant, an extra nasal consonant is written to indicate first person or same subject.

All other subject pronouns are written separately from the verb, as in Example 6 below.

Example 6 Subject Pronouns Written as Separate Words

O **cho** **ŋgi** **a** **mita?** *Are you going to the market?*
 you.SG PROG go.IMP to market

A **ni** **fi** **a** **mi.** *He told me.*
 he P2 tell OBJ me

Bi' **cho** **nee** **ako'.** *We are cooking achu.*
 we.EX PROG cook.IMP achu

Bo'o **ko'.** *You and I should go up.*
 we.DL climb

Bi'ni **gi.** *Let's (all) go!*
 we.INC go

Bə **ki** **kəm** **a** **mutu.** *You (plural) should not touch the vehicle.*
 you.PL NEG touch OBJ vehicle

Bwa **ka** **cho** **sha.** *They are not at home.*
 they NEG be compound

4.1.2 Other pronouns

All other pronouns should be written as separate words, as in Example 7 and Example 8 below.

Example 7 Direct Object Pronouns

Kwer **i!** *Help him!*
 help him

ŋga **ŋkwer** **o.** *I will help you.*
 I.F help you

O **ga** **ŋkwer** **a** **mi?** *Will you help me?*
 you.SG F help ? me

Example 8 Possessive Pronouns

nibi **mi** *my cola nut*
cola nut my

nibi **o** *your cola nut*
cola nut your.SG

nibi **I** *this cola nut*
cola nut his

nibi **yi'** *our cola nut.*
cola nut our (excl.)

4.2 Verbs

4.2.1 Infinitive

Where the infinitive form of the verb is used, the affixes **mi-** and **-ni** will be written as part of the verb, as in Example 9 below.

Example 9

ŋji **migabni.** *I know how to share.*
I.know INF.share.INF

Miyɔbni **abɨ** **anu** **shi'ni.** *Singing is a good thing.*
INF.sing.INF music thing good

4.3 Compound Words

Where two words occur together (noun + noun, noun + adjective, verb + noun) and have a meaning that is distinct from the sum of the two words, they should be written as one word, as in Example 10 below.

Example 10

mɔɸfu *cowrie shells* (Lit: money white)
achabala' *language, country talk* (Lit: talk of village)
njində *successor, chop chair* (Lit: eater of house)

Adjectives should be written separately from the noun (unless it gives a distinct meaning as in the compound words above), as in Example 11 below.

Example 11

mimbo **shishi** *black dog*
dog black

takɔ' **mimbo** *big dog*
big dog

niki	lani	<i>clean pot</i>
pot	clean	

4.4 Reduplication

Where a word is reduplicated, the two iterations should be written together as one word, as in Example 12 below.

Example 12

ገጋ	shishi	<i>black man</i>
man	black.black	

ndwi	fufu	<i>white dress</i>
dress	white.white	

A	ጠጠጠጠ.	<i>He is lying down.</i>
he	lie.lie.EXT	

5. Elision

Where vowel elision occurs, it is proposed that the constant word shape is given priority and that the word is written as it would be in isolation. This is being proposed after consultation with some native speakers who believe that once the individual word is recognised, correct pronunciation will not be hindered.

5.1 Elision of the Vowel *i*

The most common case of elision is the elision of the vowel [i] from the end of certain words.¹⁷ Example 13 gives a partial list of these words.

Example 13

bi	(class 2 relative pronoun)
gi	(class 1 relative pronoun)
gi	(class 3 relative pronoun)
ki	<i>not, without</i> (negative marker)
-li	(verb suffix, also found in some nouns)
mi	(class 6 relative pronoun)
mi	<i>if</i>
ni	<i>with</i>
ti	<i>until</i>
yi	(class 5, 7, 10 relative pronoun)
yi	(class 9 relative pronoun)

When these words are followed by a word that starts with a consonant, the letter *i* is clearly pronounced. However, when they are followed by a word that begins with a vowel (usually *a*, *i* or *o*), the vowel *i* is not pronounced. Nonetheless, it is still written, in order to maintain a constant spelling for each word. The pairs of sentences in Example 14 to Example 18 show this. In the second example of each pair, the vowel *i* is underlined where it is not pronounced.

Example 14

Tɛ mi lɛ fa' afa' ni ŋkwabaa.
father my HAB work work with cutlass
My father usually works with a cutlass.

Mwa mi lɛ fa' afa' ni ashɔr.
mother my HAB work work with hoe
My mother usually works with a hoe.

¹⁷ This elision normally does not occur when the vowel [i] is part of a verb root. For example, in the following sentence, there is no elision of [i] from the verb **gi go**: **A gi a mita.** *He has gone to the market.* However, elision of the [i] is optional when the verb **bi be** is followed by a vowel. For example, the sentence **A bi akə?** *What is it?* is pronounced in two ways: [à bí àkə] ~ [à bá àkə]. It is written one way (**A bi akə?**), regardless of pronunciation.

Example 15

Mi bwa kwa, bwa ni nji yɔ.
if they like they come eat thing
If they want, they can come and eat.

Mi o kwa, o ni nji yɔ.
if you like you come eat thing
If you want, you can come and eat.

Example 16

Nche'li ŋkɔ ŋgwa na. *I thank everyone.*
I.thank all people all

Nche'li i. *I thank him.*
I.thank him

Example 17

Ywe'li ti ndwa go ko'.
wait until time the correct
Wait until the time is correct.

Sho' mikɔ mwa ti a la.
wash rice that until it clean
Wash that rice until it is clean.

Example 18

Yi i lɛ yi ŋkɔ ŋɔ na.
sense his pass the-one all person all
He is wiser than everyone.

Yi a minubango' yi a lwanɪ ambwɔ bishɔ mi.
This it folkstories which it come-out from friends my
These are folk stories that have come from my friends.

5.2 Elision of *a* From *wa*

Another common case of elision happens when a noun that ends in **wa** is followed by a noun modifier that begins with the vowel **o** or **i**. In such cases, the pronunciation of **wa** is changed to [u]. (It is as if the **a** in **wa** becomes silent, and the **w** changes to **u**.)

Example 19 and Example 20 below show this change in pronunciation. Nonetheless, spelling of these words remains the same.

Example 19

mwa mi		<i>my mother</i>
mwa o	(pronounced mu o)	<i>your mother</i>
mwa i	(pronounced mu i)	<i>his mother</i>

Example 20

abwa mi

abwa o (pronounced abu o)

abwa i (pronounced abu i)

my hand (arm)

your hand (arm)

his hand (arm)

6. Punctuation and Capitalisation

The punctuation marks suggested for use in Bamukumbit are similar to those used in English. The following punctuation marks are suggested:

Full stop (.)
Question mark (?)
Exclamation mark (!)
Comma (,)
Colon (:)
Semicolon (;)
Quotation marks (“ ... ”) and (‘ ... ’)

Each of these are discussed, in turn, below.

6.1 Full Stop

The full stop (.) in Bamukumbit marks the end of a declarative sentence. This is illustrated in Example 21 below.

Example 21

Ncho ngii a mita. *I am going to the market.*
I.PROG go to market

Ma ni njii i yɔ. *I saw him yesterday.*
I P2 see him yesterday

A yi miŋwa’nji. *He knows how to write.*
he know INF.write.INF

6.2 Question Mark

The question mark (?) marks the end of an interrogative sentence, as in Example 22 below.

Example 22

O gi fə? *Where are you going?*
you go where

A lɛ kə? *What is happening?*
it pass what

O fo’ bɔ biŋkə? *How many children do you have?*
you have children how.many

With yes/no questions, the vowel *i* is usually pronounced at the end of the question, with a high tone, to indicate a question. When the last word in the question ends in a vowel, the vowel may be lengthened instead. Or if the last word ends in a glottal stop, an echo vowel may be added. However, we do not write these extra vowels on the last word, since this pronunciation difference is not at all related to the

particular word, but is a syntactic feature. Thus, the question mark is particularly important for yes/no questions, to help the reader understand what is being read, and pronounce it with the correct tone, since there is no other orthographic device to indicate the change in meaning and pronunciation. Example 23 below gives some examples.

Example 23

O gi a Man? *Are you going to Bamali?*
 you go to Bamali

Bi' fu'li bikafa bi'? *Should we draw our swords?*
 we.EX remove swords our

6.3 Exclamation Mark

The exclamation mark is written at the end of a command, or it is placed following exclamatory words or phrases. It functions to express interjections, surprises, excitement and forceful comments as well as simple commands. Some examples are given below in Example 24.

Example 24

Gi! *Go!*
Me'ni mi! *Leave me alone!*
Lwa fo! *Get away from there!*

6.4 Comma

Commas are used for indicating a pause in speech, but shorter than the pause indicated by a full stop. This usually occurs between clauses that are related to each other within a sentence. For example, a comma can be used to separate an independent clause from the main clause the follows it. This is an especially important use of the comma, since there is no other signal, orthographically, to indicate that the first clause is dependent. Compare the two sentences in Example 25 below:

Example 25

A gi a ngu njii a ɲɔ chə.
 he go to farm see OBJ person certain
He went and saw a certain man. OR He went to see a certain man.

A gi a ngu, njii a ɲɔ chə.
 he go to farm see OBJ person certain
When he went to the farm, he saw a certain man.

Although the sequence of words in these sentences is identical, there is a difference in sentence structure, and in pronunciation and meaning. The first sentence, in Bamukumbit, has only one clause. Although there are two verbs, they are linked in a serial verb construction. In the second sentence, on the other hand, there are two clauses, a dependent clause followed by a main clause. In pronunciation, the end of

the dependent clause is marked by rising intonation followed by a brief pause. Orthographically, it is essential to use a comma to signal this change in both pronunciation and meaning.

6.5 Quotation Marks

Quotation marks (“...”) occur at the beginning and end of direct speech. This is illustrated in Example 26 below.

Example 26

A chu ŋgie, “Na’ ma nibi!”
he say that give me cola nut
He said, “Give me cola nuts!”

A chu, “Bi’ni gi!”
he say we.INC go
He said, “Let’s go!”

Note: As in English, other punctuation marks always precede closing quotation marks when they occur next to each other in Bamukumbit.

6.6 Capitalisation

Capital letters are used at the beginning of sentences and for proper nouns. Some examples are given in Example 27 below.

Example 27

Bwa ga ŋgi a miṭa shə.
they F go to market today
They will go to the market today.

Ma ni nte Mange bwa Aki.
I P2 call Mange and Aku
I called Mange and Aku.

7. Need for Further Testing of the Orthography

This proposal seeks to outline an alphabet and writing rules for the Mankong language. The orthography of any language should be effective in conveying the language and be easy for native speakers to learn to read and write. This can only be evaluated once native speakers of the language are taught to use the new orthography. Thus, it is hoped that the future Bamukumbit Language Committee will take an active role in evaluating and revising this proposal as and when they deem it to be necessary. The proposal presented here should provide a good foundation for any future revision.

One area which should be researched further would be the tone of the language, particularly, grammatical tone and how it should be marked and how tone should be marked on parts of speech other than nouns and verbs.

It is hoped that the draft orthography presented here will provide the impetus for a programme which will see Bamukumbit speakers learning to read and write in their mother tongue.

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