

ENGWO ORTHOGRAPHY GUIDE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Explanation of some terms	2
2. Alphabet	4
2.1 Consonants	4
2.1.1 Syllabic Prenasalised Consonants	6
2.1.2 Consonants plus “y”	7
2.1.3 Consonants plus “w”	8
2.1.4 Consonants plus “l”	10
2.1.5 Consonant Clusters	11
2.1.6 Consonant Orthography Rules	12
2.2 Vowels	13
2.2.1 Echo Vowel Rule.....	13
2.2.2 Long Vowels.....	13
2.2.3 Nasalised Vowels	14
2.2.4 Vowel Orthography Rules.....	15
3. Tones	15
3.1 Lexical Contrasts Marked by Diacritics	15
3.1.1 Lexical Tones on Long Vowels	16
3.2 Grammatical Meanings Marked by Diacritics	16
4. Word Division and Vowel Elision	16
5. Punctuation and Capitalisation	19
5.1 Full Stop	19
5.2 Question Mark	19
5.3 Exclamation Mark	20
5.4 Comma	20
5.5 Quotation Marks	20
5.6 Capitalisation	20
6. Further Testing of the Orthography	21
7. References	22

NOTE: To fully understand everything in this document, section 1.1 which gives an **explanation of terms** will be very helpful to the reader, especially the non-linguist. While you read through the document, if you cannot understand the meanings of certain words, come back to section 1.1 and look up the words and learn their meanings. The words are described there in alphabetical order.

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1. Introduction

This paper proposes an orthography for Engwo, spoken in Njikwa Subdivision, Momo Division, North West Region of Cameroon. Engwo is classified by ALCAM under “Ngwɔ” code [861] as follows: Niger-Kordofan, Niger-Congo, Bénoué-Congo, Bantoïde, Bantou, Grassfields, Momo, with the following listed as dialects: Konda, Basa (Bassa), Ikweri (Ekperi), Banya, Bako and Okorobi (Dieu and Renaud 1983: 352). This Orthography Guide and all other documents written on the language are based on data collected from the reference dialect only: [ALCAM]: Ngwɔ. The Ngwo people call their language “Engwo” but the name of the village is Ngwo. The name Ngwaw is used to refer to the clan which goes beyond linguistic boundaries and involves all the villages of Njikwa Sub Division including Oshie (ngishe). The other names -NGUNI, MINGUHNI, NGUNU and ENGWINI mean the same thing written by the colonial masters as a result of communication barriers or mispronunciation in their attempts to spell the name of the village. Some neighbouring villages still use these names to refer to Ngwo.

The Ethnologue (Gordon 2005:70) lists Ngwo (Ngwaw) [ngn] with the following linguistic classification: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Wide-Grassfields, Narrow-Grassfields, Momo. Ethnologue estimates 50,547 speakers (2000 WCD) and includes the following as dialects: NGWO (NGUNI, NGWAW, MINGUHNI, NGUNU), KONDA (Eza), BASA (BASSA), IKWERI (EKPERI), BANYA, BAKO, OKOROBI. A Rapid Appraisal Survey of Ngwo by Elizabeth Brye (1999:15) proposes BAKWA, EKWEBO and AMASI as some of the dialects. Additional Engwo speakers are scattered all over the world. Speakers of Engwo and related dialects all trace their origins to the Widikum (Tadkon) ethnic group of Batibu towards Mamfe.

Neighbouring languages include Meta’, Mundum, Ngie, Ngishe, Manta, Ihatum, Batomo, Menka, Atong, Caka and Beba (see Rapid Appraisal by Elizabeth Brye 1999:10).

The same Rapid Appraisal Survey reports that in November 1989, another team conducted a linguistic and sociolinguistic survey in Momo Division and collected preliminary data for Meta’ [ALCAM 864], Moghamo [866], Ngie [863], Ngishe [Oshie 862] and Ngwɔ [861]. The two major linguistic studies of Engwo known to us are on phonology: A Simple Contrastive Analysis of the Phonemes of English and Engwo by D.T. Atogho and The Phonology of Ngwo by Eyovi Njwe.

To begin literacy work on the language, the following documents have so far been produced by Julius A. EYOH:

- 1) Ntsò Ìwè'rè Engwo: An introduction to the Engwo alphabet (2004): a 48 page A5 document describing the Engwo alphabet.
- 2) Zì'ró Gèrè Ìwè'rè Engwo: A Transition Manual (2006). A5 size, 76 pages.
- 3) A a, B b, Ch ch Engwo (2005): An 80-page A5 document written in the form of a primer for child and adult literacy.
- 4) Sound Track in Engwo: A book on the names and sound of the letters of the Engwo alphabet. Also showing how the different tones are marked on long and short vowels. A5 size, 18 pages.
- 5) Practice Sentences in Engwo (2005): A4 size, 6 pages.
- 6) Bàbá Àfîn manì bwó ànòm bóbóbó fyee (2004): An A5 story book (Big book).
- 7) A translation of “The Lord’s Prayer and The Apostles’ Creed” (2004).
- 8) A translation of Chapter One of the Gospel of John (2007).
- 9) The Engwo Alphabet Chart (2004).
- 10) Adopted Alphabet of the Ngwo Language (2007): A5 size, 64 pages: A report on the decisions taken by the Ngwo community concerning their alphabet and their intentions to develop their language and culture. Edited by Julius A. EYOH.

1.1 Explanation of some terms

Allophone – Two different sounds that represent the same phoneme (see “phoneme” on next page). They may occur in different word positions. For instance, if **p** does not come at the end of words but **b** does, and if **b** does not come at the beginning of words but **p** does, then **p** and **b** are allophones of the same phoneme.

Alphabet – A collection of all the letters that are used in writing of language.

Capitalisation – The use of capital letters. It talks about when and where to use a capital letter.

Consonant clusters – Two or more consonants next to each other in one word, e.g. *Ngwê God*, *m̀pwò cow*, *ekwá skin*, *éblâ shoes*, etc.

Diacritics – This refers to the way tones are marked on vowels (´ ` ˘ ˘ ^) so as to distinguish the specific meanings of words. For instance, *atán chair*, but *àtàn grasshopper*. The only difference between the two words is the tones shown by the diacritics.

Final position – At the end of (a word). For instance the letter **n** is in the final position of the word *atán chair*.

Frequency – How often a sound or letter may be used in a language. Some letters are more frequently used in a language than others.

Grapheme – Symbol used as a letter of the alphabet. For instance, the Engwo alphabet has 36 graphemes (or letters). Grapheme is a technical term for a letter of the alphabet. **A a** is a grapheme.

Initial position – At the beginning (of a word). For instance, the letter **p** is in the initial position of the word **páná** *tear it*.

Labialised – A consonant that is followed by a **w** as in the word **abwó** *hand*.

Consonant plus l cluster – A consonant cluster that ends with the letter **l** as in the word **éblá** *shoes*.

Long vowels – Vowels that are pronounced in words by “dragging out” (prolonging) them. Such a vowel is doubled as in the words **shúu** *fish*, **kóo** *cover it*, **tée** *show it*.

Medial position – In the middle (of a word). For instance the letter **p** is in the medial position of the word **m̄pwò** *cow*.

Nasal – Sound or letter pronounced with air passing through the nose e. g. **m, n, ŋ, ny**.

Orthography rules – Rules that must be respected in order to correctly read or write a language.

Palatalised - A consonant that is followed by the letter **y** and a vowel as in the words **abyé** *wound*, **ékye** *medicine*, **àngyóró** *abundance*, **fyee** *two*, **mbyèè** *us*.

Phoneme – A sound that plays a role in bringing about a change in the meanings of words. For instance, in the words **ató** *head* and **ató** *branches*, **o** and **ɔ** are contrasting phonemes. In the words **abán** *breasts* and **atán** *chair*, **b** and **t** are separate phonemes because a change from one of them to the other brings about a change in the meaning of the word.

Prenasalised – A consonant that is immediately preceded by a nasal consonant, for instance, the word **m̄pwò** *cow* is a prenasalised word because the consonant letter **p** is immediately preceded by the nasal **m**.

Tones – The different distinctive pitches used in pronouncing the syllables of words. They are indicated by “signs” (diacritics). For instance the word for **atán** *chair* begins with a mid tone which is not marked with a diacritic in Engwo and ends with a high tone which is marked with the diacritic (´). Also, the word for **àtàn** *grasshopper* is pronounced with two low tones which are marked with the diacritic (`). The difference between these two words is clear, thanks to the tones which are marked by diacritics.

2. Alphabet

The Engwo segmental alphabet is made up of 29 consonants and 7 vowels. They are represented below in upper and lower cases:

A a, B b, Ch ch, D d, Dz dz, E e, E e, F f, G g, Gb gb, Gh gh, H h, ' ', I i, J j, K k, Kp kp, L l, M m, N n, Ij ij, Ny ny, O o, O o, P p, R r, S s, Sh sh, T t, Ts ts, U u, V v, W w, Y y, Z z, Zh zh.

2.1 Consonants

The Engwo consonant phonemes, their allophones and graphemes are presented in the table below. We also show their use in various positions in the words.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/p/	[p]	P p	páná <i>tear it</i>	ìnpwò <i>cow</i>	—
/b/	[b]	B b	bó <i>dog</i>	éblâ <i>shoes</i>	ándwòb <i>beans</i>
/t/	[t]	T t	túró <i>fall</i>	àtě <i>father</i>	—
/d/	[d]	D d	dú <i>harvest</i>	edó' <i>love</i>	ngúd <i>oil</i>
/k/	[k]	K k	kô <i>gong</i>	ékò <i>pot</i>	—
/g/	[g]	G g	ga <i>talk</i>	agú <i>hills</i>	—
/kp/	[kp]	Kp kp	kpééré <i>cough</i>	ekpê <i>canoe</i>	—
/gb/	[gb]	Gb gb	gbe <i>cut</i>	íngbáa <i>salt</i>	—
/ts/	[ts]	Ts ts	tsó' <i>laugh</i>	etsó' <i>laughter</i>	—
	[tʃ]*	Ch ch	chwâ <i>ground</i>	echú <i>red fly</i>	—
/dz/	[dz]	Dz dz	dzèré <i>forget</i>	edzô <i>fireplace</i>	—
	[dʒ]*	J j	ji' <i>porcupine</i>	eju <i>shame</i>	—
/f/	[f]	F f	fó <i>pass</i>	efééré <i>argument</i>	—
/v/	[v]	V v	vánà <i>vine</i>	—	—

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/s/	[s]	S s	sàrà <i>fibres</i>	esóm <i>farm</i>	—
	[ʃ]*	Sh sh	shúu <i>fish</i>	eshúnú <i>congregation</i>	—
/z/	[z]	Z z	ze <i>vomit</i>	èzo <i>devil</i>	—
	[ʒ]*	Zh zh	zhírí <i>add</i>	ezhú <i>nose</i>	—
/w/	[w]	W w	wùú <i>uproot</i>	ewá <i>firewood</i>	—
/j/	[j]	Y y	—	ayé <i>woman</i>	—
/ɣ/	[ɣ]	Gh gh	ghóóró <i>rinse it</i>	eghó <i>respect</i>	—
/h/	[h]	H h*	hló <i>cut it</i>	ahlá <i>hoe</i>	—
	[ʔ]	’ ’ **	—	ékó’ró <i>sugarcanes</i>	ekó’ <i>sugarcane</i>
/l/	[l]	L l	lě <i>do (have it)</i>	álo <i>foot (leg)</i>	—
	[r]	R r	—	azóró <i>tree</i>	—
/m/	[m]	M m	mè’è <i>swallow it</i>	mòmó <i>touch it</i>	móm <i>wine</i>
/n/	[n]	N n	nú <i>take it</i>	ànà <i>cocoyam</i>	abán <i>breasts</i>
/ɲ/	[ɲ]	Ny ny	nyém <i>meat</i>	Anyó <i>maggot</i>	—
/ŋ/	[ŋ]	Ŋ ŋ	ŋà’rá <i>tickle</i>	elóŋó <i>trousers</i>	̀ndzàŋ <i>poverty</i>
/w/	[w]	W w	wùú <i>uproot</i>	ewá <i>firewood</i>	—
/j/	[j]	Y y	—	ayé <i>woman</i>	—

*The phoneme /l/ occurs root initially whereas the allophone [r] occurs root medially.

*Except for exclamations, the letter /h/ must be followed by /l/ in all Engwo words.

*The allophones [tʃ, dʒ, ʃ, ʒ] are only followed by either a high vowel [i, u] or a glide [y, w] whereas their corresponding phonemes are never followed by a high vowel or a glide. The allophones are nevertheless represented with different

graphemes as adopted by the local community to aid transition to English literacy. So the vowels that follow **ch**, **j**, **sh**, and **zh** are always the high vowels **i** and **u** or the semi-vowels **y** and **w**.

**The glottal stop [ʔ] is an allophone of the glottal fricative [h] because it occurs only at syllable final position where [h] does not occur.

2.1.1 Syllabic Prenasalised Consonants

One kind of consonant cluster found in Engwo consists of clusters where the first consonant is a nasal consonant that is pronounced at the same place of articulation as the following consonant. Quite a good number of consonants may be preceded by such a homorganic nasal consonant. So far, apart from very few words like **ndó** *house* and **Ngwê** *God* which are not syllabic, most of the prenasalised consonants in Engwo are syllabic at word-initial position. This means that a tone is marked on the nasal consonant except for the mid tone. The tone on the nasal syllable is not predictable and so has to be marked. The mid tone is not marked. The consonants which are followed by a homorganic nasal consonant (symbolised by N) are given in the following chart.

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final Position
/Np/	[mp]	Mp mp	̀mpẁ <i>cow</i>	́ampwa' <i>bush baby</i>	—
/Nb/	[mb]	Mb mb	̀mb̀b <i>huckleberry</i>	̀amb̀ <i>weevil</i>	—
/Nt/	[nt]	Nt nt	̀nt̀' <i>palace</i>	́ántá <i>seed</i>	—
/Nd/	[nd]	Nd nd	ndím <i>water</i>	́ánd́ _́ ́ _́ <i>long throat (greed)</i>	—
/Nk/	[ŋk]	Nk nk	̀nk̀m <i>barren woman</i>	̀ánḱ <i>elephant</i>	—
/Ng/	[ŋg]	Ng ng	̀ngo' <i>suffering</i>	̀ángára' <i>cricket</i>	—
/Nkp/	[ŋkp]	Nkp nkp	̀nkpem <i>calabash for palm oil</i>	́ánkpa <i>occultic society</i>	—
/Ngb/	[ŋgb]	Ngb ngb	̀ngb̀èrè <i>match</i>	—	—
/Nts/	[nts]	Nts nts	̀nts̀ <i>poison</i>	̀antsákè' <i>caterpillar (a type)</i>	—

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final Position
	[ntʃ]	Nch nch	̀nch̀u <i>wickedness</i>	̀anchyê <i>vegetable (sp)</i>	—
/Ndz/	[ndz]	Ndz ndz	̀ndz̀an <i>poverty</i>	̀andzá <i>mine</i>	—
	[ndʒ]	Nj nj	̀nj̀i <i>road</i>	ewérénjĩ <i>laziness</i>	—
/Nf/	[mf]	Mf mf	̀mf̀ò <i>chief / fon</i>	̀amf̀òr̀òbid <i>dung beetle</i>	—

2.1.2 Consonants plus “y”

Another kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is the palatal glide [j], which in Engwo is always written as *y*. Below are those consonants that may be followed by this glide:

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/pj/	[pj]	Py py	pyèdè <i>pour out</i> <i>liquid</i>	èpyê <i>pear</i>	—
/bj/	[bj]	By by	byé <i>build</i>	ebyé <i>cutlass</i>	—
/tj/	[tj]	Ty ty	tyě <i>tether</i>	etyé <i>stone</i>	—
/dj/	[dj]	Dy dy	dyě <i>be first</i>	—	—
/kj/	[kj]	Ky ky	kyée <i>abandon</i>	ékye <i>medicine</i>	—
/tsj/	[tʃj]	Chy chy	chyé <i>catch in mid</i> <i>air</i>	áchyè <i>unproductive</i> <i>plant</i>	—
/dzj/	[dʒj]	Jy jy	jyê <i>net</i>	—	—
/fj/	[fj]	Fy fy	—	efyé <i>hind leg</i>	—
/vj/	[vj]	Vy vy	—	Vìvyân <i>somebody's</i> <i>name</i>	—
/sj/	[ʃj]	Shy shy	—	ashyê <i>toothbrush</i>	—

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/zj/	[zhj]	zhy zhy	—	azhyé <i>local drier</i> <i>tray</i>	—
/mj/	[mj]	My my	mye <i>get finished</i>	—	—
Palatalised consonants can be prenasalised as the following examples indicate.					
/Npj/	[mpy]	Mpy mpy	—	ámpyè' <i>somebody's</i> <i>nickname</i>	—
/Nbj/	[mby]	Mby mby	̀mbyee <i>tapper's knife</i>	ámbyé <i>madness</i>	—
/Ntj/	[ntj]	Nty nty	ntyee <i>prolong</i>	ántyee <i>unforgiving</i> <i>habit</i>	—
/Ndj/	[ndj]	Ndy ndy	ndyee <i>(to) us</i>	—	—
/Nkj/	[ɲkj]	Nky nky	̀nkyè <i>week</i>	—	—
/Ngj/	[ɲgj]	Ngj ngj	̀ngye <i>wind pipe</i>	—	—
/Ntsj/	[ntʃj]	Nchy nchy	̀nchyê <i>yours (plural)</i>	ànchyê <i>vegetable (a</i> <i>type)</i>	—
/Ndzj/	[ndʒj]	Njy njy	njyee <i>ours</i>	—	—
/Nfj/	[mfj]	Mfy mfy	̀mfyê <i>yours</i>	—	—

The letter **y** in palatalised words as seen in the table above does not bear a tone. Hence, do not put a diacritic on the **y**, instead put the diacritic on the vowel that comes immediately after the **y** in palatalised words.

2.1.3 Consonants plus “w”

Another kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is the labiovelar glide [w], which in Engwo is always written as **w**. Quite a few consonants may also be followed by this glide, some of which are prenasalised. See the following chart:

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/pw/	[pw]	Pw pw	pẁ̀ń <i>select</i>	—	—
/bw/	[bw]	Bw bw	bwé <i>pick them</i>	ébwé <i>tadpoles</i>	—
/tw/	[tw]	Tw tw	twà'a <i>push</i>	etwá' <i>Irish potato</i>	—
/dw/	[dw]	Dw dw	—	adwó <i>throat</i>	—
/kw/	[kw]	Kw kw	kwá'a <i>ascend</i>	ekwá' <i>ladder</i>	—
/gw/	[gw]	Gw gw	gwè <i>hate</i>	égwá <i>plantain</i>	—
/tsw/	[tʃw]	Chw chw	chwâ <i>soil</i>	—	—
/dzw/	[dʒw]	Jw jw	jwé <i>snake</i>	éjwá <i>plum</i>	—
/fw/	[fw]	Fw fw	fwè'è <i>work (v)</i>	àfwè' <i>work</i>	—
/sw/	[ʃw]	Shw shw	shwééré <i>fill it</i>	ashwê <i>grub (edible larva)</i>	—
/zw/	[ʒw]	Zhw zhw	zhwèéré <i>breathe</i>	azhwééré <i>spirit</i>	—
/mw/	[mw]	Mw mw	—	Émwà' <i>a village in Menka</i>	—
/ɲw/	[ɲw]	ɲw ɲw	ɲwó <i>child</i>	àɲwâ <i>cat</i>	—

Labialised consonants can be prenasalised as the following examples indicate.

/Npw/	[mpw]	Mpw mpw	̀̀mpwè'è <i>corner</i>	ámpwá' <i>bush baby</i>	—
/Nbw/	[mbw]	Mbw mbw	̀̀mbwèré <i>sleep</i>	̀̀mbwarambwad <i>blessing</i>	—
/Ntw/	[ntw]	Ntw ntw	̀̀ntwà' <i>pillar</i>	—	—
/Ndw/	[ndw]	Ndw ndw	̀̀ndwá <i>horn</i>	àndwá <i>worm</i>	—
/Nkw/	[ɲkw]	Nkw nkɲ	̀̀nkɲám <i>ram</i>	—	—
/Ngw/	[ɲgw]	Ngw ngw	̀̀ngwám <i>leather drum</i>	ángwà' <i>young colocasia cocoyam</i>	—

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/Nfw/	[ɲfw]	Mfw mfw	ɲfwe <i>missed plight</i>	—	—
/Ntsw/	[ntʃw]	Nchw nchw	ɲchwe <i>sun</i>	àchwɔnchwò <i>good one</i>	—
/Ndzw/	[ndʒw]	Njw njw	ɲjwè <i>debt</i>	énjwé' òkù <i>corn silk</i>	—

2.1.4 Consonants plus “l”

Besides the other consonant clusters, the Ngwo language has another kind of cluster that consists of a consonant plus l. This is when the lateral consonant [l] comes after a different consonant in a word. Some of these consonant plus l clusters may be prenasalised, as in the table below:-

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/pl/	[pl]	Pl pl	pládá <i>sew roughly</i>	aplákwa' <i>bird (a type)</i>	—
/bl/	[bl]	Bl bl	blìdi <i>mix it</i>	éblá <i>shoes</i>	—
/kl/	[kl]	Kl kl	kládá <i>begin</i>	èklò <i>fright</i>	—
/gl/	[gl]	Gl gl	gli <i>go out</i>	agló <i>sickly condition</i>	—
/fl/	[fl]	Fl fl	fli <i>drive away</i>	èflaa <i>bird (a type)</i>	—
/hl/	[hl]	Hl hl	hlìdĩ <i>tighten</i>	ahlá <i>hoe</i>	—
/ɲl/	[ɲl]	ɲl ɲl	ɲlímí <i>be sweating</i>	ɲlímí <i>sweat</i>	—
/ml/	[ml]	Ml ml	mlá <i>don't respond</i>	emlá <i>heftiness</i>	—
These consonant plus l clusters can be prenasalised as the following examples indicate.					
/Npl/	[mpl]	Mpl mpl	mplí <i>bird (a type)</i>	—	—
/Nbl/	[mbl]	Mbl mbl	mblí' <i>cliff</i>	àmblà <i>seed</i>	—

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/Nkl/	[ŋkl]	Nkl nkl	̀̀nklì <i>night</i>	—	—
/Ngl/	[ŋgl]	Ngl ngl	̀̀nglò <i>sheep</i>	̀̀ànglò <i>boundary</i>	—
/Nfl/	[mfl]	Mfl mfl	̀̀mflanà <i>cocoyam</i> <i>leaf</i>	—	—

2.1.5 Consonant Clusters

Below are all the consonants and all the consonant clusters found so far in Engwo.

Consonants	N-	-w	N-w	-y	N-y	-l	N-l
P p	mp	pw	mpw	py	mpy	pl	mpl
B b	mb	bw	mbw	by	mby	bl	mb
T t	nt	tw	ntw	ty	nty		
D d	nd	dw	ndw	dy	ndy		
K k	nk	kw	nkw	ky	nky	kl	nkl
G g	ng	gw	ngw		ngy	gl	ngl
Kp kp	nkp						
Gb gb	ngb						
’ ’							
Ts ts	nts						
Dz dz	ndz						
Ch ch	nch	chw	nchw	chy	nchy		
J j	nj	jw	njw	jy	njy		
F f	mf	fw	mfw	fy	mfy	fl	mfl
V v				vy			
S s							
Z z							
Sh sh		shw		shy			
Zh zh		zhw		zhy			
W w							
Y y							
Gh gh							
H h						hl	
L l							
R r							
M m		mw		my		ml	

Consonants	N-	-w	N-w	-y	N-y	-l	N-l
N n							
ŋ ɲ		ɲw				ɲl	
Ny ny							

2.1.6 Consonant Orthography Rules

There are some consonant orthography rules worth noting in the writing of Engwo:

- The only consonants that can come at the end of a word in Engwo are **b, d, ', m, n, ɲ**. Hence
- Never write **t** at the end of a word, write **d**.
- Never write **p** at the end of a word, write **b**.
- Never write **c** alone, always write **ch**.
- When **w** and **l** are preceded by a nasal, always write **ɲw** and **ɲl** respectively.
- When **g** and **k** are preceded by a nasal, always write **ng** and **nk** respectively.
- Never write **s** before **u, w, i** or **y**, always write **sh**.
- Never write **z** before **u, w, i** or **y**, always write **zh**.
- Never write another nasal in front of **f, b** or **p**, always write **m**.
- Never write another nasal in front of **t, d, ch** or **j**, always write **n**.

NB: The Ngwo language has about 8 noun classes so we should always remember this rule: In most of the words, if a singular noun begins with **e**, its plural will begin with **a**. For instance **égwɔ́ plantain** but **ágwɔ́ plantains**. If a singular noun begins with **a**, then its plural will begin with **e**. For instance **ànà cocoyam** but **ènà cocoyams**. If the plural of a word is derived by adding **r** and the preceding vowel to the end of the word, then there is the high probability that the word should begin with a consonant or a syllabic nasal and not with a vowel. Hence, do not write [èmpwò] for [cow], write **mpwò** so that the plural will be **mpwòrò**.

2.2 Vowels

Engwo has 7 vowel phonemes, presented with their graphemes in the table below. The sounds are shown as they occur in different positions of the word.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final Position
/a/	[a]	A a	álo <i>foot</i>	atán <i>chair</i>	éta <i>moon</i>
/e/	[e]	E e	eló <i>line</i>	èkèrè <i>up</i>	ebyé <i>cutlass</i>
/ɛ/	[ɛ]	Ɛ ɛ	—	èkèrè <i>pepper</i>	ánkééré <i>dizziness</i>
/i/	[i]	I i	—	ebírí <i>war</i>	akírí <i>umbrella</i>
/o/	[o]	O o	—	edó’o <i>love</i>	ató <i>head</i>
/ɔ/	[ɔ]	Ɔ ɔ	—	ànkón <i>date palm</i>	ató <i>branches</i>
/u/	[u]	U u	—	ékùrú <i>tiger</i>	ewù <i>market</i>

2.2.1 Echo Vowel Rule

There is a post glottal stop echo vowel in Engwo. This means that after the glottal stop [’], the preceding vowel is always or often sounded again (echoed).

Native speakers are free to either write the echo vowel in some words or not to write it depending on how the individual pronounces the word. This is free variation. It does not cause any confusion, though the echo vowel tends to be very strongly pronounced in most words especially verbs. For instance, the following words can be written with or without the echo vowel:

bundle = ebó’ or ebó’o

ladder = ekwá’ or ekwá’a

love = edó’ or edó’o

bend it = bú’ or bú’u

climb = kwá’ or kwá’a.

The echo vowel rule applies to all the vowels in the language.

2.2.2 Long Vowels

All the seven vowel phonemes in Engwo can be lengthened to give new meanings to words. Below are all the seven long vowel counterparts of the seven short

vowels with their graphemes and with example of words in the various positions in which they occur.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final Position
/a:/	[a:]	AA aa	—	káará <i>chase</i>	saa <i>leave it</i>
/e:/	[e:]	EE ee	—	kpééré <i>cough</i>	tée <i>show</i>
/ɛ:/	[ɛ:]	ƐƐ ɛɛ	—	fééré <i>argue</i>	zɛɛ <i>loosen it</i>
/i:/	[i:]	II ii	—	bíírí <i>ask</i>	bíi <i>beg</i>
/o:/	[o:]	OO oo	—	kóoró <i>cover it</i>	goo <i>pull (drag it)</i>
/ɔ:/	[ɔ:]	ƆƆ ɔɔ	—	tóóró <i>compensate</i>	fóɔ <i>pass</i>
/u:/	[u:]	UU uu	—	shúurú <i>fishes</i>	shúu <i>fish</i>

NB : No long vowel can appear word initially. Long vowels are possible only as first root vowel.

2.2.3 Nasalised Vowels

In Engwo, some vowels are pronounced with air passing through the nose, making a difference with other vowels that do not have this. Nasalised vowels bring about a change in the meaning of words. A nasalised vowel in Engwo is written with a cedilla (¸) under the vowel. In the pair of words below, one of the words has a nasalised vowel and the other does not, and this signals the difference in meaning between the pair.

ewú *death*

kùurù *select*

ewú *market*

kùurù *weep (plural)*

Other examples include

fɔ̀ *pass*

shìi *press and rub*

éwê *gossiping*

2.2.4 Vowel harmony

Apart from affixes that might always have a different vowel, typical basic roots in Engwo words have same vowel harmony. This means that a disyllabic root in Engwo for instance will always have the same vowel repeated in both syllables. This is the case with all multi-syllabic basic roots in the language. Only root initial vowels may be long. See examples below:

káará	<i>chase</i>	ńchírí	<i>sand</i>
páná	<i>tear</i>	atótó	<i>tip</i>
akédéshi	<i>looking glass</i>	ekóbó	<i>change</i>
ekédéshi	<i>looking glasses</i>	ekóbó	<i>spoon</i>
ńgéré	<i>cheeks</i>	azóró	<i>tree</i>
ánkééré	<i>dizziness</i>	ekúmú	<i>name</i>
ebírí	<i>war</i>	gúurú	<i>bend</i>

2.2.5 Vowel Orthography Rules

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

- Never write two different vowels next to each other, else the first vowel which is **i** will change to **y** or the **u** will change to **w**. Hence
- Never write **i** before another vowel, except another **i**, write **y** e.g. **ebyé** *cutlass*.
- Never write **u** before another vowel, except another **u**, write **w** e.g. **ebwó** *hands*.
- When a vowel is long, you double it as in **awúu** *bone*, **shúu** *fish*, **kóo** *cover it*, **saa** *leave it*, **díi** *dirty it*, **fjɔ** *pass*, **fééré** *argue*, etc.
- Only **a** and **e** can appear word initially, except in exclamations or in borrowed words.

3. Tones

We have identified five surface tones in Engwo: three level tones: high [á], mid [ā] and low [à]; and two contour tones, rising [ǎ] and falling [â]. It is common to find contour tones in Engwo like high-mid [a] or low-high-mid [a]. The mid part of the tone which often comes last is an interrogative marker which does not need to be indicated in the orthography since we use the question mark.

3.1 Lexical Contrasts Marked by Diacritics

As of this point in time, we have discovered several minimal tone pairs for words that contrast high tone, low tone, mid tone, rising tone and falling tone with each other. Though we may not have as many words with contour tones as there are with level tones, the point is that all five tones are attested in the language. Hence we propose an orthography in which three tones: high, low, falling will be marked by diacritics in the language except for the most recurrent tone: the mid tone, which remains unmarked and the rising tone which does not contrast with the mid though less recurrent. It is common orthography practice to indicate non-contrastive or less contrastive tones or one of the well-attested contrastive tones by specifically omitting to mark a diacritic over the vowel. See the chart below:

3.1.1 Lexical Tones on Short Vowels

Tone	Phonetic	Grapheme (Diacritic)	Examples	Frequency
High	[á]	á	etán <i>chairs</i>	very many nouns, few verbs.
Mid	[ā]	a	etan <i>on the bed</i>	many nouns and verbs
Low	[à]	à	ètàn <i>grasshoppers</i>	many nouns and verbs
Rising	[ǎ]	a	ga <i>say/talk</i>	mostly in imperative verbs
High-falling	[â]	â	tân <i>five</i>	some nouns and verbs

3.1.2 Lexical Tones on Long Vowels

With long vowels in Engwo, the high tone or low tone is marked on the first of the two vowels. If it is a falling tone, the first vowel carries a high tone and the second vowel carries a low tone. This should have been the case also with the rising tone but we do not indicate a diacritic mark for the rising tone. This means that long vowels will always have but level tones. The long vowel that has to bear a mid tone is left completely empty as with the rising tone as you can see in the table below:

Tone	Phonetic	Grapheme (Diacritic)	Examples	Frequency
High	[á:]	áa	étáa <i>heart</i>	many nouns and verbs
Mid	[ā:]	aa	naa <i>place</i>	many verbs, few nouns
Low	[à:]	àa	kàa <i>cancel</i>	some nouns and verbs
Rising	[ǎ:]	aa	zεε <i>loosen it</i>	many verbs, some nouns
High-falling	[â:]	ââ	abéè <i>side</i>	many verbs, few nouns

Our proposal is to write all Engwo words as they occur in isolation (i.e. as they occur when pronounced by themselves), and it is these forms that will be written in the lexicon. Engwo speakers should have no problem reading or pronouncing the actual phonetic tones in a sentence once they recognise the meanings of the individual words in that sentence.

It is fairly easy to find Engwo words where the only difference between them is tone. For example, note the minimal tone pairs below illustrating the five different tones. NB: the mid tone is not marked:

ńtsá [ńtsá] <i>broom</i>	enó [ēnó] <i>soldier ant</i>
ńtsà [ńtsà] <i>plantation</i>	ènò [ènò] <i>bamboo</i>
atán [ātán] <i>chair</i>	ébwó [ébwó] <i>finger</i>
àtàn [àtàn] <i>grasshopper</i>	èbwò [èbwò] <i>whitlow</i>
ewú [ēwú] <i>death</i>	ánam [ánām] <i>farmland</i>
éwu [éwū] <i>fire</i>	anâm [ānām] <i>lamp</i>
ànà [ànà] <i>cocoyam</i>	gô [gô] <i>mahogany tree</i>
ànâ [ànâ] <i>ant</i>	go [gǒ] <i>fall</i>
kɔ [kǒ] <i>block it</i>	ebúm [ēbúm] <i>fear</i>
kô [kô] <i>gong</i>	ebûm [ēbûm] <i>belly</i>

Though it is very uncommon to find tone contrast in words with long vowels in Engwo, we can nevertheless cite a few cases:

kée [ké:] <i>cashew nut</i>
kεε [kě:] <i>filter (v)</i>
fée [fé:] <i>defy</i>
fεε [fě:] <i>detach (banana) from cluster</i>
kúurú [kú:rú] <i>heap up</i>
kùuru [kù:rū] <i>select</i>

As can be seen above, for both long and short vowels, all the tones: high, low, mid, rising and falling have a contrastive value though we mostly have near minimal pairs. There are ambiguous words that are not differentiated by tones. It is our feeling that these homonyms can be marked with the same diacritics and that they will be disambiguated by how they are used in context. Some of the tonally identical and orthographically ambiguous word pairs that we have found are shown below:

etâm [ētâm] *type of tree*
etâm [ētâm] *walking sticks*

túurú [tú:rú] *lock with key*
túurú [tú:rú] *make it fall*

etán [ētán] *chairs*
etán [ētán] *bed*

ηwó [ηwó] *drink*
ηwó [ηwó] *child*

ngwòm [ngwòm] *leather drum*
ngwòm [ngwòm] *mortar*

ekó' [ēkó'] *sugarcane*
ekó' [ēkó'] *Indian bamboo*

ndi [ndĩ] *clothe*
ndi [ndĩ] *type of tree*

éta [étā] *moon*
éta [étā] *month*

3.2 Grammatical Meanings Marked by Diacritics

We should note that tones are very important in Engwo not only because they can bring about a change in the meanings of words but also because they mark different tenses. For instance:

Hortative: **Mmè ngwó andzá a ndó.** *I should go to the house*

Progressive: **Mmè ngóò andzá a ndó.** *I am going to the house*

Past3: **Mmè à zé'.** *I came (very far past)*

Past1: **Mmè á ze'.** *I came (recent past)*

Note that the absence of a tone in a word may indicate the presence of a preposition. Examples:

ewú *market* **ewu** *in the market*

ató *head* **ato** *on the head*

abwó *hand* **abwo** *in the hand*

4. Word Division and Vowel Elision

We need to bear in mind that when we write sentences in Engwo, each word is written separately depending on its grammatical category and the meaning it conveys. It is evident that there are post-lexical rules in the language which need to be explained, like vowel elision. A word may be pronounced somewhat differently in normal speech than in isolation: it is quite common for some sounds especially vowels to be dropped (elision). However, each word should ideally retain its full form in all contexts in order to facilitate recognition except where vowel elision can be done and there is no confusion. Same as syllabic nasals, all noun prefixes are part of the nouns and never separated. For instance

aká *dish*, **eká** *dishes*

Note that though we use “w” and “y” for labialisation and palatalisation respectively, we still have situations where two different vowels will occur next to each other in words. Such situations occur at boundaries between morphemes or in compound words. This therefore means that whenever we have two different vowels occurring next to each other, the first of the vowels can be any of the vowels in the language since all vowels can occur at word final position and the second and last of the vowels should always be either “a” or “e”. The reason being that “a” and “e” are the only vowels that occur at the beginning of any Engwo word as prefixes. So they will always mark the beginning of the next morpheme in a word or the beginning of the next word in a compound word. But when “e” has to occur in such a position, it gets deleted. Also, when “a” has to occur next to another “a” in this case not intended to be a long vowel, the second “a” gets deleted (Note that long vowels are found only in root words and never as affixes). Whenever two different vowels come next to each other as such, only the first bears the level tone or the contour tone is split onto both vowels. See examples of words with two different vowels occurring next to each other:

bwòáti	<i>orphans</i>
ḡwóàyè	<i>girl</i>
ḡwóàṅṁ	<i>boy</i>
endóoróaghṁ	<i>hypocrisy</i>

If the first vowel is either “u” or “i,” then the two morphemes that make up the compound word should be separated with a hyphen as in these examples:

àku-ato	<i>stubborn person</i>
àti-àṅṁ	<i>blacksmith</i>

On a general note, we can say that based on how native speakers pronounce a word, two different vowels can be tolerated next to each other in Engwo compound words and for borrowed words, this can only be done provided the first of the two vowels is neither “i” nor “u”.

Remember we said above that when “e” has to occur second to another vowel in such a situation, it gets deleted and when “a” has to occur next to another “a” in this case not intended to be a long vowel, the second “a” gets deleted. See examples:

ṁbwò + égwṁ = ṁbwògwṁ	<i>core of a plantain stem</i>
ṁflă + àṅṁ = ṁflăṅṁ	<i>cocoyam leaf</i>
abú + égwṁ = abúgwṁ	<i>midrib of plantain leaf</i>

The deletion of the vowel from the word **na** *it is* and the use of the apostrophe in its place is a possibility when the following word begins with a vowel because the vowel is not often pronounced. It is good to always fit the vowel. See the examples below:

Not	but	for
N' engɔ	Na engɔ	<i>It is him/her.</i>
N' éngɛ	Na éngɛ	<i>It is so.</i>
N' abwó	Na abwó	<i>It is the hand.</i>
akyé n' akyé	akyé nì akyé	<i>generation to generation</i>
Mmè wa ndè' m' ebi Èyɔɔ.	Mmè wa ndè' ma ebi Èyɔɔ.	<i>I will give but to John.</i>

5. Punctuation and Capitalisation

The punctuation marks and the rules that govern the Engwo language are the same as those for English. The punctuation marks used for Engwo are therefore as follows:

- 1) Full stop (.)
- 2) Question mark (?)
- 3) Exclamation mark (!)
- 4) Comma (,)
- 5) Colon (:)
- 6) Semicolon (;)
- 7) Quotation marks (“ ... ”) and (‘ ... ’)

5.1 Full Stop

The full stop (.) in Engwo marks the end of a declarative sentence.

- (a) **Eyó ngɔ̀̀ a ndó ñwè'rè.**
 Eyoh go to house book
Eyoh is going to school.
- (b) **Akú a ngɔ̀̀ ewu.**
 Aku he go market
Aku went to the market.

5.2 Question Mark

The question mark (?) marks the end of an interrogative sentence.

- (a) **Àpà a shi nde?**
 Apa he has eat
Has Apa eaten?
- (b) **Ekúmú ngwê na awɛ?**
 name your is who
What is your name?

5.3 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 commands as well as simple commands; as below.

- (a) **Ngòò!**
go.IMP
Go!

- (b) **È kabó gàmà!**
she much talk
She talks a lot!

5.4 Comma

Commas are used to separate clauses or parallel words within a clause, as below:

- (a) **Eyó kema ñwó bó, na ghô tètè.**
Eyoh is.not child not is man mature
Eyoh is not a child, he is a mature man.

- (b) **Áwòrò wu le èkwà'rá téd, búrí fyee, àñwá manì bóró kwè a ndó mó.**
Awuro be has fowls three goats two a cat and dogs four in house his
Awuro has three fowls, four goats, a cat and four dogs in his house.

5.5 Quotation Marks

Quotation marks (“...””) occur at the beginning and end of direct speech, as below:

- (a) **Ablí ngò kúù gà kpe, “A ku eni ye nò?”**
mother her weep say that she die why
Her mother cried and said “why did she die?”

- (b) **A gà kpe, “Ngwò ngòò awé?”**
she said that you go where
She said, “Where are you going?”

Note: In English and Engwo, other punctuation marks always precede quotation marks when they occur next to each other.

5.6 Capitalisation

Capital letters are used at the beginning of sentences, for proper nouns, and after a colon.

First word in a sentence:

(a) **Ángɔ shi ngɔɔ ekwà.**
they have go farm
They have gone to the farm.

(b) **Ángɔ ba ngɔɔ ewu ànchwɔ.**
they are go market today
They will go to the market today.

Proper nouns:

(a) **Ànká a ngɔɔ ewu manì `Awúm, Ása, Égho nì Échyè.**
Anka he go market with Awum Asa Egho and Échiè
Anka went to the market with Awum, Asa, Egho and Echie.

After a colon:

(a) **À tyê ebwá ñwa': Engɔ ni tsè' a ndó bó.**
it is only thing one she not be in the house not
One thing is true: She is not in the house.

6. Further Testing of the Orthography

Any new orthography needs people to use it for a time before potential problems reveal themselves. It is our hope that this proposal will be a significant first step in allowing people to start reading and writing the language.

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