

MOGHAMO ORTHOGRAPHY GUIDE

by

NJECK Mathaus MBAH

The Moghamo Language Committee (MOLCOM)

P.O. Box 06

Batibo, Cameroon

2008

Abbreviations

COP	Copula
EX	Exclamation
F1	Future Certain Tense
F2	Future Uncertain Tense
HAB	Habitual Aspect
IMP	Imperative Mood
INF	Infinitive Prefix
INT	Interrogative
MOLCOM	Moghamo Language Committee
NEG	Negative Marker
NP	Noun Phrase
P1	Near Past Tense
P2	Far Past Tense
PERF	Perfect tense
PROG	Progressive Aspect
PRT	Present Tense
1s	First Person Singular
2s	Second Person Singular
3s	Third Person Singular
1p	First Person Plural
2p	Second Person Plural
3p	Third Person Plural

Table of Contents

ABBREVIATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. ALPHABET	1
2.1 CONSONANTS	1
2.1.1 Prenasalised Consonants	3
2.1.2 Palatalised Consonants	4
2.1.3 Labialised Consonants	4
2.1.4 Consonant Orthography Rules	5
2.2 VOWELS	5
2.2.1 Vowel Orthography Rules	6
3. TONE	7
3.1 LEXICAL TONE CONTRASTS IN THE ORTHOGRAPHY.....	7
3.2 GRAMMATICAL TONE IN THE ORTHOGRAPHY.....	9
4. WORD DIVISION	9
4.1 SUBJECT MARKER	9
4.2 NOUN PHRASE	9
4.2.1 Associative Noun Phrase	9
4.2.2 Reduplication	10
4.2.3 Compound Nouns	10
4.3 VERB PHRASE.....	10
4.3.1 Tense.....	11
4.3.2 Infinitive	11
4.3.3 Negation	12
5. EPENTHESES	12
6. ELISION	12
7. PUNCTUATION AND CAPITALISATION	13
7.1 FULL STOP.....	13
7.2 QUESTION MARK	14
7.3 EXCLAMATION MARK.....	14
7.4 COMMA.....	14
7.5 QUOTATION MARKS.....	14
7.6 CAPITALISATION.....	15
8. NEED FOR FURTHER TESTING OF THE ORTHOGRAPHY	15
REFERENCES	15

MOGHAMO ORTHOGRAPHY GUIDE

by Njeck Mathaus Mbah

1. Introduction

This paper proposes an orthography for Moghamo, a Grassfield Bantu language spoken by about 75,000 peoples in Batibo Subdivision, Momo Division of the Northwest province of Cameroon. SIL's Ethnologue classifies Moghamo alongside Meta as follows: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bentoid, Southern, Wide Grassfield, Narrow Grassfield, Momo (Grimes, 2000:45).

According to Dieu & Renaud (1983), Moghamo has four different speech forms (Batibo, Iyirikum, Bessi and Kugwe). ALCAM (the Atlas of central African languages) puts them in zone 8 under the number 866. This author agrees with Ndam (2001) that Ashɔŋ is one of the four speech forms of Moghamo (in addition to Batibo, Iyirikum and Kugwe): for Ndam, Bessi is the same as Batibo. This work is based on the Batibo speech form which is the reference dialect. Moghamo speakers are also found in some villages of Santa subdivision (i.e., Baforchu, Baba II, Ngyiembo and Mbe) and Banjah village, all in Mezam Division of the Northwest Province. Moghamo is closely related to Meta' spoken in the Mbengwi Central Subdivision of the Momo Divivision.

2. Alphabet

The Moghamo segmental alphabet is made up of nineteen consonants and seven vowels. They are represented below in upper and lower cases:

A a, B b, Ch ch, D d, E e, Ə ə, F f, G g, Gh gh, I i, J j, K k, M m, N n, ŋ ŋ, O o, ɔ ɔ, P p, R r, S s, T t, U u, W w, Y y, Z z, '.

2.1 Consonants

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

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/w/	[w] ⁴	W w	wàd <i>person</i>	iwe <i>wisdom</i>	—
	[ɥ] ⁴		wiri <i>beat (v)</i>	iwin <i>market</i>	—
/j/	[j]	Y y	yà'ə <i>come</i>	àyi <i>woman</i>	—

Notes:

- ¹ The consonant phone [r] occurs only stem-medially, while [d] occurs elsewhere.
- ² The glottal stop occurs only in syllable-final position or between vowels inside a root, and [k] elsewhere.
- ³ The consonant phones [ʒ] and [ʃ] are dialectal variants of [z] and [s] respectively.
- ⁴ The labial-palatal consonant phone [ɥ] occurs only before [i] while [w] occurs before any other vowel.

2.1.1 Prenasalised Consonants

One kind of consonant cluster found in Moghamo consists of clusters where the first consonant is a nasal consonant that is pronounced at the same place of articulation as the following consonant. Four different consonants comprising three voiced stops and one affricate may be preceded by such homorganic nasal consonants as in the following chart:

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/Nb/	[mb]	Mb mb	mbi' <i>kidney</i>	kɔmbi <i>scratch</i>	—
/Nd/	[nd]	Nd nd	ndɔŋ <i>flute</i>	sàndi <i>hatch</i>	—
/Ng/	[ŋg]	Ng ng	—	tangi <i>fix (v)</i>	—
/Ndʒ/	[ndʒ]	Nj nj	njo <i>debt</i>	—	—

2.1.2 Palatalised Consonants

Another kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is the palatal glide [j], which is always written as "y". Only three consonants may be followed by this glide, as in the following chart:

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial Position	Medial position	Final position
/kj/	[kj]	Ky ky	kyì <i>maize</i>	ikyed <i>arrow</i>	—
/gj/	[gj]	Gy gy	—	agyen <i>grass</i>	—
/fj/	[fj]	Fy fy	—	mafye <i>sweet potato</i>	—

2.1.3 Labialised Consonants

The last kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is the labiovelar glide [w], which is always written as "w". The following ten consonants may be followed by this glide, as in the following chart:

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/tw/	[tw]	Tw tw	twəŋi <i>string (v)</i>	nitwəŋ <i>twist</i>	—
/dw/	[dw]	Dw dw	—	ndwi <i>cloth</i>	—
/kw/	[kw]	Kw kw	kweg <i>grow</i>	tikwaŋ <i>millipede</i>	—
/gw/	[gw]	Gw gw	gwi <i>goat</i>	figwaŋ <i>salt</i>	—
/tʃw/	[tʃw]	Chw chw	chwi <i>show (v)</i>	nichwa' <i>chew</i>	—
/dʒw/	[dʒw]	Jw jw	—	ijwəg <i>nose</i>	—
/sw/	[sw] ~ [ʃw]	Sw sw	swe <i>fill</i>	àswètì <i>insult (n)</i>	—
/zw/	[zw] ~ [ʒw]	Zw zw	zwètì <i>rest (v)</i>	azweghì <i>breath</i>	—

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/nw/	[nw]	Nw nw	nwì <i>bitter</i>	tinwa <i>cheek</i>	—
/ɲw/	[ɲw]	ɲw ɲw	ɲwan <i>child</i>	fɲwàd <i>mosquito</i>	—

2.1.4 Consonant Orthography Rules

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

1. Never write a **v**, **x**, **h**, **l**, and **q** in the language.
2. The only consonants that can be word-final are **b**, **d**, **g**, **m**, **n**, **ɲ** and **'**.
5. If you hear a nasal consonant before "g", always write "n".

2.2 Vowels

The Moghamo language has seven oral vowel phonemes, presented with their allophones and proposed graphemes. The sounds are shown below as they occur in different positions of the word.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/i/	[i] ~ [i] ¹	I i	ito <i>intestines</i>	fiku'ù <i>bow</i>	isi <i>face</i>
/e/	[ɛ] ~ [e] ¹	E e	—	seg <i>groundnut</i>	àkwe <i>grasshopper</i>
/ə/	[ə]	Ə ə	—	jəg <i>sheep</i>	àkuɲə <i>pig</i>
/a/	[a]	A a	abo <i>hand</i>	ngam <i>language</i>	ghà <i>say</i>
/u/	[u]	U u	—	ifu' <i>medicine</i>	su <i>fish</i>
/o/	[o]	O o	—	to' <i>cup</i>	fiko <i>bucket</i>
/ɔ/	[ɔ]	Ɔ ɔ	—	àtɔɲ <i>bat</i>	nɔ'ɔ <i>law</i>

Note:

¹The vowels [i] and [ɛ] are dialectal variants of [i] and [e] respectively

Moghamo has a set of nasalized vowels contrasting with the oral vowels, and therefore they are phonemic also. The seven nasalized vowels are shown in the following chart.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/ĩ/	[ĩ] ~ [ĩ̃]	İ ĩ	—	zì' <i>gossip</i>	tì <i>push</i>
/ẽ/	[ẽ] ~ [ẽ̃]	Ẽ ẽ	—	—	awẹ <i>hail</i>
/ã/	[ã]	Ḑ ḑ	—	—	tḑ <i>ripe</i>
/ã̃/	[ã̃]	Ḃ ḃ	—	—	ighḂ <i>journey</i>
/õ/	[õ]	Ṑ ṑ	—	—	ghṑ <i>sick</i>
/õ̃/	[õ̃]	Ṓ ṓ	—	atḑgha <i>armpit</i>	inḑ <i>crowd</i>
/ũ/	[ũ]	Ṫ ṫ	—	—	inṫ <i>old age</i>

Note: When a word ends with a nasal in Moghamo, it is assumed that the preceding vowel gets its nasality from the final nasal and does not need a diacritic on the vowel, as for example, in **abin** *dance*, **iben** *farm* and **anəm** *blood*. More research on nasalized vowels in Moghamo is in progress.

2.2.1 Vowel Orthography Rules

Various rules regarding which vowels can occur in which positions are important to learn.

Here is a partial list of vowel orthography rules:

1. Never write "ĩ". If you hear "ĩ", write "i".
2. Never write "ẽ". If you hear "ẽ", write "e".

3. Tone

We have identified five surface tones in Moghamo: three level tones, High [á], Mid [ā] and Low [à]; and two contour tones, Rising [ǎ] and Falling [â]. It is not hard to find examples of tonal contrasts, such as in the minimal pairs that follow:

High v Low:

[gwí]	<i>bear</i>	[tʃé]	<i>light (v)</i>
[gwì]	<i>catch</i>	[tʃè]	<i>succeed</i>

Mid v Low:

[tʃǎm]	<i>sneeze</i>	[tɔ̄n]	<i>refuse</i>
[tʃà̄m]	<i>groan</i>	[tɔ̄n]	<i>roast</i>

High v Mid:

[ítʃí]	<i>rainy season</i>	[tóʹ]	<i>carry liquid</i>
[ítʃî]	<i>inlaw</i>	[tôʹ]	<i>cup</i>

Low v Falling:

[ínù]	<i>old age</i>	[íkì]	<i>one hundred</i>
[ínû]	<i>price</i>	[íkî]	<i>hunting net</i>

3.1 Lexical Tone Contrasts in the Orthography

It is undeniable that the 5 tones identified above are in contrast: we now need to tackle the question of how best to represent these in the orthography. SIL Cameroon is developing a system of producing practical, workable orthographies without necessarily indicating every possible tonal contrast. This is done by examining the *functional load* for tone. First of all, a complete list of tonal minimal pairs is produced: then the list is divided into separate groups depending on the particular contrast in question (e.g. High v Low, Rising v Mid etc. In effect, this results in an expanded version of the list given above in section 3). The fewer pairs there are in any particular group, the lower the functional load is for that particular contrast: in such a case, people are likely to have little or no trouble reading those words even if the contrast is not represented in the orthography.

In Moghamo, the results of this process were striking for a number of reasons:

- 1) no minimal pair was found in which the Rising tone was in contrast:
- 2) the Falling tone was only found to contrast in four pairs, all of them contrasts with Low tone:

- 3) only two minimal pairs were found in which High and Mid are in contrast:
- 4) there are several Mid v Low minimal pairs, and the greatest number of contrasts is found between High and Low.

The first observation indicates that a practical orthography does not need a specific mark for the Rising tones (i.e. the functional load for this contrast is zero). Clearly, the area where functional load is the greatest is between High and Low: this contrast will definitely have to be indicated, most likely with a GRAVE accent over the vowel in the syllable with Low tone.

However, given that there are so few contrasts between High and Mid, it may be possible not to mark this. An initial practical orthography can thus be proposed with only ONE tone mark, the grave accent for Low tone. Such an orthography leaves only two ambiguous pairs of words in our present data. It remains to be seen whether this ‘reduced’ tone system will prove adequate after testing. The following chart gives examples of words with each of the 5 tones:

Tone	Phonetic	Grapheme (Diacritic)	Examples	Frequency
High	[á]	a	bog <i>dog</i>	many nouns
Mid	[ā]	a	chəŋ <i>bottle</i>	some verbs and a few nouns
Low	[à]	à	kàn <i>nest</i>	many verb roots
Rising	[ǎ]	a	njo <i>debt</i>	a few nouns
Falling	[â]	a	nyam <i>meat</i>	rare

The two pairs of words that remain ambiguous because of tone are the following:

ichi [ítʃí] *rainy season* **nítəŋ** [nítóŋ] *to crow (like a rooster)*
ichi [ítʃì] *in-law* **nítəŋ** [nítōŋ] *to dig*

It is our belief that these two pairs of words will rarely be misunderstood in context, so we feel free to go ahead and test a writing system with this much ambiguity. Of course, as the number of words written in the language increases, other more difficult ambiguous pairs may come to our attention.

3.2 Grammatical Tone in the Orthography

Moghamo grammatical tone will be investigated at a later time. At this point we have not found any grammatical tone that requires additional diacritics in the orthography. Since this kind of discovery usually only happens as the new orthography is used for writing texts, we may add additional rules later.

4. Word Division

In Moghamo, we have chosen to adopt in large measure the orthographic conventions of the language of wider communication of the area, namely English. Our proposals also follow the guidelines of the General Alphabet of Cameroon languages (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo 1979).

4.1 Subject Marker

Subject markers in Moghamo are written as separate pronouns, as below.

Mərə	kòrò	ti	ighwen.	<i>He has returned from the market.</i>
3s	return		from market	
Mbɔ	kòrò	ti	ighwen.	<i>They have returned from the market.</i>
3p	return from	market		

4.2 Noun Phrase

The noun phrase may consist of a head noun followed by modifiers such as other nouns, adjectives and/or determiners

4.2.1 Associative Noun Phrase

Noun phrases are noun-noun (“associative” or “genitive”) constructions in which the first noun is “possessed” by the second noun. In Moghamo, there is no written associative morpheme (equivalent to “of” in English) between the possessor and the possessed. In Grassfields Bantu languages in general, the associative marker is often a floating tone (T) morpheme between the two words. These floating tone morphemes change the phonetic surface tone on the words according to the rules that every Moghamo speaker has in his head. We therefore choose to write neither the floating tone morphemes nor the phonetic surface tone, but to write the words with the same tone patterns they have in isolation.

Typical associative noun phrases are therefore written with basic word tone on each of the words, as follows.

àbàn ɲwàn

bag child

child's bag

ikam mbèb

fence vegetable

fence made of vegetable

4.2.2 Reduplication

Reduplication has a wide range of forms and functions in Moghamo. In the proposed orthography, reduplicated words are written as one word.

zàmbì *quickly* **zàmbìzambi** *very quickly*

dàrì *slow* **dàrìdari** *very slow*

ighu *bone* **ighughu** *bony*

ighwìd *fire* **ighwìdghwìd** *full of fire*

4.2.3 Compound Nouns

Compound nouns are also written in Moghamo as one word:

atog *head* **nəb** *house* **atoghənəb** *room*

ika *strong* **inu** *price* **ikanu** *expensive*

4.3 Verb Phrase

The imperative is taken as the citation form of the verb in Moghamo. Imperative verb forms do not have visible prefixes or suffixes. The verb root in Moghamo is usually monosyllabic, though sometimes it becomes disyllabic or even disyllabic because of the addition of some formerly productive Bantu extensions which have become lexicalised in present day Moghamo (either **ni**, **ri**, **bi**, **ti**, and **ki**, etc.). The result is that most disyllabic and trisyllabic verbs have these extensions as the second and third syllable respectively.

Examples:

Monosyllabic

si *put*
jæg *eat*

Disyllabic

bani *cross*
jwati *crunch*

Trisyllabic

nyo'ori *smell*

4.3.1 Tense

Moghamo distinguishes the following tenses which appear as Near Past, Far Past, Future Certain, and Future Uncertain when combined with Perfective Aspect. In the orthography, the tense markers are written separately. Note that the "Near Past" tense is really the Present Perfective construction, as shown below:

Near past (present perfective)	Àghò kè jæg 2s P1 eat	<i>You ate.</i> <i>(earlier today)</i>
Far past	Àghò ya jæg. 2s P2 eat	<i>You ate.</i> <i>(long time ago)</i>
Future (certain)	Àghò bìri jæg. 2s F1 eat	<i>You will eat.</i>
Present Progressive	Àghò we jèghə. 2s PROG eat	<i>You are eating.</i>
Present habitual	Àghò wèni jæg. 2s HAB eat	<i>You (usually) eat.</i>

4.3.2 Infinitive

The infinitival prefix in Moghamo is the prefix 'ni-' prefixed to the verb root. In the orthography, this form is written as a single word, as below.

nijæg *to eat*
INF-eat

nighə *to go*
INF-go

4.3.3 Negation

The negative word **chəyi**, is used to indicate negation. It usually comes at the beginning of the sentences, as in the examples below.

Chəyi wì ghò. *He did not go.*
NEG 3s go

Chəyi wì ya gho. *He is not going.*
NEG 2s PROG go

Chəyi wì bìri ghò. *He will not go.*
NEG 3s F1 go

5. Epentheses

In Moghamo, there are cases where underlying word final consonants (including some instances of final **b** may surface with a following epenthetic vowel (generally **ə**, the underlying coda, consonant is then presumably re-syllabified as an onset to the syllable containing the epenthetic vowel. The derived forms are written here rather than the underlying form. Examples

azərə məd	[ázəd məd]
	tree his
	<i>his tree</i>
atoghə məd	[átōg məd]
	head his
	<i>his head</i>
nəbè ŋwà'ànì	[nəb ŋwà'ànì]
	house book
	<i>school</i>

6. Elision

In the spoken language, when two vowels occur next to each other across word boundaries, the first vowel of the second word is elided, but the full lexical form is retained in the writing of the language.

ìṅə ikab [ìṅə káp]
 1s money
 my money

Word final /n/ (and less commonly /ŋ/ are sometimes elided in fast speech. However the full lexical form is retained in the orthography. When this happens, the preceding vowel is nasalised as seen in the following examples

aben məd [ábé mət]
 country his
 his country

The phoneme **b** is sometimes elided word finally, when followed by a word beginning with a consonant as in the following examples. However, the **b** is always written.

Mbɔb kə gwɛ. [mbɔ kə gwɛ]
 they P1 sleep
 They slept.

7. Punctuation and Capitalisation

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

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

7.1 Full Stop

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

Tèchòṅ ya ane’ ighwen.
 today COP day market
 Today is a market day.

7.2 Question Mark

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

Àghò kè son aghe ighwenè?

you P1 buy what market

What did you buy (earlier today) in the market?

7.3 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 as below:

Ndò!

go.IMP

Go!

Àghò ye'e aṅà!

you come here

You should come here! or Come here!

7.4 Comma

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

Mbah beri gwi titad, ìkub mḍ' tì ìkuṅə ikwè.

Mbah has goat three fowl one and pigs four

Mbah has three goats, a fowl and four pigs.

7.5 Quotation Marks

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

Mərə gha, “À kə jèghə aghə?”

3s say 2s PROG eat what

He said, “What are you eating?”

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

7.6 Capitalisation

Capital letters are used at the beginning of sentences, for proper nouns, and after a colon.
First word in a sentence:

Mbò biri ghò ighwen tèchòŋ.

3p F1 go market today

They will go to the market today.

Proper nouns:

Ìtòb tìkum ya Teboh, Ndam te Anim.

3p names be Teboh Ndam and Anim

Their names are Teboh, Ndam and Anim.

After a colon:

Anòghə mòg yà tesì': Mbə ya ghò.

thing one be true they PROG go

One thing is true: They are going.

8. Need for Further Testing of the Orthography

Any new orthography needs people to use it for some time before potential problems reveal themselves. At this stage, the authors acknowledge the able contributions of Mr Mbah Martin, Madam Gana and Mr Menget J T. It is our hope that this proposed orthography will be a significant first step in allowing the Moghamo people to start reading and writing the language.

References

- Anderson, Stephen C. 2001. "Phonological Characteristics of Eastern Grassfield Languages" in Ngessimo M. Mutaka and Sammy Bebam Chumbow (eds.). *Research Mate in African Linguistics: Focus on Cameroon*, 33-54. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Casali, Roderic. 1995. NCs in Moghamo: Prenasalized onsets or heterosyllabic clusters? SAL 24.
- Dieu, Michel and Patrick Renaud. (dir.) 1983. *Atlas Linguistique de l'Afrique Centrale: Situation Linguistique en Afrique Centrale, Inventaire Préliminaire. Le Cameroun*. Yaoundé, Délégation Générale à la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (DGRST), ACCT et CERDOTOLA.

- Grimes, Barbara F. (ed). 2000. *Ethnologue : Languages of the World*, 14th Edition. SIL International, Dallas, Texas.
- Ndam, Edith E. 2001. A dialectrometrical study of Moghamo. M. A Dissertation. University of Yaoundé.
- O'Neil, R. J. 1990. *A History of Moghamo 1865 to 1940: Authority and Change in Cameroon Grassfield Culture*. Ann Arbor: UMI.
- Spreda, Klaus. 1997. Field notes : studies towards the segmental portion of an alphabet proposal for Moghamo. Ms.
- Tadadjeu, Maurice and Etienne Sadembouo (eds.). 1979. *General Alphabet of Cameroon Languages*. PROPELCA 1. Yaoundé: University of Yaoundé 1.