

**Tone Orthography
in Kako**
(Kako East)

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1. Introduction

The system that we are currently using for marking tone in Kako has been adopted after extensive literacy work had been carried out over a period of almost ten years. The system reflects practical considerations and is not primarily based on the analysis of the tonal system. Before we were able to decide on how much or how little marking we were going to suggest, we had to ask ourselves the following question concerning the Kako reader: Are we aiming at the weak or the fluent reader? We decided that we should be aiming at the intermediate reader who, according to our definition, describes the average Kako reader who is able to read up to three to four syllables at the same time.

Before adopting the present system, we used to write *all low tones* by marking the vowels concerned with a grave accent. We were so advised by Dr. Ursula Wiesemann after she had taken a brief look at the Kako tonal system. Thus, roughly 30% of all the vowels carried a grave accent. The tones of the unmarked vowels ranged between mid and super-high.

Example:

Njòkù	kwàŋma	kè	sòmà	ke	wete	fiḽò,	tiko	kòŋ	
elephant	left	go	hide	in	a	thicket	leave	back	
ne	ke	puyè.	È	kòḽò	wule	ngbàkè	nye:		
his	in	light	then	bat	came	surprise	him		
<<Ha,	tà	we	kò!	ɔ	tì	kase	nde,	mi	ta
ha	well	you	this one here	you	NEG	say	that	I	FUT
gòḽò	we	deŋgò!	ɔ	tì	sòma	ndi	muka,		
look for	you	in vain	you	NEG	hide	even	today		
è	mi	kwedya	ndi	we	muka!>>				
then	I	found	even	you	today				

The elephant left to hide in a thicket exposing his back. Then the bat arrived and took him by surprise saying: <<Ha, here you are, aren't you! Did you not tell me that I would be looking for you in vain? Did you not hide today, and isn't it today that I found you?>>

ones in order to mark them, seemed to be too difficult a task for the Kako reader.

Also, that the writing of all the low tones seemed to be unnecessary in the first place, became clear when we had several people take the following comparative test: Two texts were presented to several new readers: Text A which they first read was a known text from the reading and writing book which the students had been learning from. All the low tones were marked in text A. Text B was new to the readers and was unmarked for tone. The test showed that the majority of the readers, especially the weaker ones, did perform better on the unmarked text B.

As the literacy work was progressing and hundreds of people learned to read and write Kako, and this without us teaching them to read and write tone, we felt it was time to dismiss the first system of writing Kako low tone and start looking for a more workable system. Dr. Keith Snider has been instrumental in getting us on the right track.

The new system, we felt, would have to be user-friendly, that is, as simple as possible so that the student could learn it as easily as he would learn the vowels, consonants, word breaks and the like.

2. A user-friendly system for marking certain Kako words

Tone representation in Kako according to the new system is based on the principle "one form, one meaning". This applies only to the *marked* forms (words carrying one of the three accents used in representing tone in Kako). Accordingly, a constant word-image is maintained in which each word has a representation that is both unique and consistent. This is important for fluent reading.

Since Kako has only a very limited number of lexical minimal pairs that cannot easily be confused we decided not to mark lexical tone at all. Therefore, the only tones marked in Kako are grammatical.

As to writing grammatical tone, we felt that tone should be marked only in places where the average new reader had a problem reading the text correctly and fluently. The following example serves as a basis for explaining our point:

A	lepima	nde,	a	ti	bengwe	nye	na.
he	said	that	he	NEG	follow	him	NEG

As the Kako reader processing this sentence arrives at the negative marker *ti*, he has to make a decision as to what its meaning is in this place. Both the immediate and the wider context, which normally allow the reader to make such decisions, fail to do so in certain cases such as this one. In order to read this sentence correctly, the reader needs to know whether *ti* indicates past tense, future tense, aorist aspect or a prohibition. And he will only know if *ti* is marked accordingly, and if he has been taught so. The following examples demonstrate the potential for confusion:

- (1) Past negative: A tì **ɓɛŋgwe** nye na.
 he NEG-past follow him NEG
He didn't follow him.
- (2) Future negative: A tí **ɓɛŋgwe** nye na.
 he NEG-fut follow him NEG
He won't follow him.
- (3) Aorist negative: A ti **ɓéŋgwe** nye na.
 he NEG-aor follow him NEG
He does not follow him. (stating a principle)
- (4) Prohibitive: A tî **ɓɛŋgwe** nye na!
 he PROH follow him NEG
He must not follow him!

On the basis of these observations, we decided to mark tone only in cases such as the one described above where confusion with one or more other forms is likely. Thus, as far as the negative particle *tì* is concerned, we decided to mark three distinctive categories by diacritics whereas all other occurrences of *ti* in the language (here the aorist negative) are characterized by the absence of any special marking (zero marking).

As just mentioned and shown in the examples above, the marks used for indicating grammatical categories are *diacritics* that have traditionally been used for marking individual tones on individual syllables. For Kako we suggest a total of three distinctive diacritics plus zero marking:

<u>Accent</u>		<u>Examples</u>
grave accent	̀	kè (verb <i>go</i>)
acute accent	´	ɓéŋa (aorist aspect of <i>ɓɛŋɛ see</i>)
circumflex accent	ˆ	kêl (injunctive of <i>kɛlɔ do</i>)
zero marking	ti	(aorist negative/ narrative negative)

Rather than speaking of marking words for some distinct tone or tones, we propose to speak of marking words in terms of distinctive grammatical categories, a summary of which is shown in the table at the end. Thus, the acute accent of *ké* functions to distinguish the *subordinative marker* from the *locative marker* *kɛ* as well as from the verb *kè* meaning *go*. Although this acute accent has a morphological function rather than a tonal one, this morpheme is generally pronounced with a high tone. The same goes for *kè go* which is usually said with a low tone. However, these forms are taught with reference to *meaning* rather than to *pronunciation*. Our observation has been that it is easier to teach a meaning-based criteria than a pronunciation-based one.

Any diacritic mark in Kako is carried by the *first syllable* because this is the earliest possible place in any given word where the reader has to make a decision as to the meaning. No word carries more than one diacritic. For example:

Botu hene dyênangwe!
people all eat(INJ)
All people must eat!

Botu hene dyênangwe, né ɓo ɗoku.
people all eat(AOR) in order to they grow
All people eat in order to grow.

Teaching Kako tone orthography means teaching the correct way of writing a total of 12 distinctive grammatical categories (see Table 1 below) which results in 2% of all the vowels being marked in an average Kako text. How this is best done as far as pedagogical and methodical considerations are concerned, is still open for study. Generally speaking, we may say the following, using the aorist form **ɓéŋa** see as an example:

The aorist form of the verb **ɓeŋe** see is **ɓéŋa**. It will be taught that the whole graphic picture **ɓéŋa** made up of two vowels and two consonants as well as an acute accent on the first vowel represents the verbal form called *Aorist (AOR)*. This may best be taught in the context of a simple well known sentence from everyday life which will serve the student as a *key sentence* for further reference:

Ɔ ɓéŋa nan?
you see(AOR) how
How do you see it? or
What do you think about it?

More examples of this kind that are simple enough to remember by the learner would have to be added for the purpose of exercise:

A dyán dyen?
he arrive(AOR) when
When did he arrive?

A lépi ŋge?
he say(AOR) what
What did he say?

A sánangwe we?
he work(AOR) where
Where does he work?

From here the student goes on learning any other Aorist form by applying the principle of analogy.

The following table summarizes the 12 grammatical categories in Kako that are specially marked by diacritics.

TABLE 1 Specially marked grammatical categories in Kaka

FUNCTION	MAR-KING	EXAMPLE	PRONOUNCIATION
(1) Verb <i>go</i>	kè	A ke kè tɔ. he IPF go house <i>He is going home.</i>	[à ké kè tɔ]
(2) Pronoun <i>you-with</i>	wúne	Wúne ðo ta kè? you-with they FUT go <i>Will you go with them?</i>	[wúné ðó tá kè?]
(3) Aorist (AOR)	ɖ	A kél nge? he do(AOR) what <i>What does he do?</i>	[à kél ngè]
(4) Injunctive (INJ)	ɖ	A kél yo! he do(INJ) it <i>He must do it!</i>	[à kél yò]
(5) Past negative (NEG-past)	tì	A tì kè na. he NEG-past go NEG <i>He did not go.</i>	[à tì ké nā]
(6) Perfect negative (NEG-prf)	tì pa	A tì pa kè na. he NEG-prf PRF go NEG <i>He has not yet gone.</i>	[à tì pá kè nā.]
(7) Future negative (NEG-fut)	tí	A tí kè na. he NEG-fut go NEG <i>He will not go.</i>	[à tí kè nā]
(8) Prohibitive (PROH)	tí	A tí ken na! he PROH go NEG <i>He must not go!</i>	[à tí ken nā]
(9) Coord. conjunction (<i>and</i>)	, nè	A ðoma taðo, nè soso. he took goat and duck <i>He took the goat and the duck.</i>	[à ðómá táðò nè sósò]
(10) Subord. conjunction (purpose: <i>in order to</i>)	, né	Bo ðoma taðo, they took goat né ðo wo nys, in order to they kill her <i>They took the goat in order to kill her.</i>	[ðó ðómá táðò, né ðó wó nyè]
(11) Subordinative marker (SUB)	ké,	Yasi te yi mi lepe ké, ... thing the REL I sya SUB <i>What I am saying, ...</i>	[yási té yī mí lēpē ké,]
(12) Hypothetical marker (HYP)	má	A má ken tɔ, he HYP go house ma nye dya kamo. HYP he eat(PAS) couscous <i>If he had gone home, he would have eaten couscous.</i>	[à má kèn tɔ, mà nyé yá kámò]

3. Conclusion

In this paper a new system for marking tone in Kako has been presented. Whereas formerly texts had approximately 30% of the tones marked, now this has been reduced to 2%. Initial experience with the new system over the last year has been encouraging. However, the system still needs to be tested. For this purpose specific materials need to be developed. Work is underway on a manual presenting each case of special marking such as has been presented in Table 1 here above, including practice examples and test questions. In the first phase, the manual is meant to serve as a set of test materials which will be used both in our teacher training courses and literacy classes. After having served this purpose the manual will be revised and integrated into the existing reading and writing book (*Wùsè tól ne wùsè keti nùmbù kakò*). The Kako primers (*Baba bene botu be tɔ ne*) also need to be revised in view of the new marking system.

In closing, it is worth drawing the reader's attention to the *method* used in arriving at a new system. Rather than simply marking a subset of the phonemic tones, which is the standard practice in this country, a more practical approach was taken. Readers were presented with texts unmarked for tone and wherever they consistently encountered a problem in reading a certain word, the *function* of tone at that point was identified and a spelling change was introduced. A few well-placed diacritics enabled the necessary distinctions to be made, while avoiding the usual problems associated with the overmarking and undermarking of tone.

Batouri, May 1996