

How to Read and Write Boko

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1. Introduction

The way of writing a language has to be based on sound principles. It should be accurate, consistent, convenient, standard and acceptable. Let us look at these principles in relation to how we write Boko before we go into details.

1. Accurate. The writing system must agree with the sound system of the language being written. All sounds which make a difference to the meaning of words in a language by being interchanged should be written differently. For example the words

'de' who 'de' kill

are pronounced differently and therefore must be written differently or else there will be confusion and ambiguity for the reader of the language.

Minor differences in pronunciation which do not affect the meaning of words should not be written differently. Speakers may not be aware of such small differences and know automatically that they do not change the meaning of words. For example, the word (kě) 'to tear' can be pronounced in two slightly different ways as (kě) or (kyě), but this does not change the meaning of the word and therefore should not be reflected in how we write it.

2. Consistent The same sound should always be written the same way. The English language often breaks this principle. For example the sound (f) is written as: fresh, telephone, off, rough. The Boko language however, follows this principle, as the same sound is always written the same way.

3. Convenience Each sound should be written in the simplest possible way, so that it won't be difficult to type and will also be easy to read and write. The simplest possible way to write sounds is by using one of the letters of the Roman alphabet found on typewriters. This is done in Boko for 5 of the 7 oral vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and for all but two of the consonants, (gb) and (kp) which are written with two characters.

4. Standardization The way of writing a particular sound should be the same from one language to another. Thus the sound (gb) is written the same way in Yoruba and a host of other languages. This makes it easy for Nigerians to pronounce the names of fellow Nigerians and their places of origin correctly, even when they do not know the language where those names originate.

This cannot always be done. In Hausa there is no (gb), (kp), (ɛ), (ɔ) or nasal vowels, so Hausa does not have symbols for these. In Yoruba there is no (p), but they use the (p) symbol for the (kp) sound. Bariba, Bokobaru and Bisā are all written in exactly the same way as Boko.

5. Acceptability A good orthography should be familiar and acceptable to the speakers of the language for whom it is intended. It is important to pay attention to people's feelings about the spelling of their language. It is also necessary for speakers who have such feelings to be open-minded and to examine the proposed orthography on its merits. This orthography has been used acceptably by the Boko in Benin Republic for many years and should prove to be an efficient way of writing Boko in Nigeria as well.

2. Vowels

There are 12 Boko vowels, 7 oral and 5 nasal:

i	e	ɛ	a	ɔ	o	u
ĩ		ẽ	ã	õ		ũ

Rule Nasalisation of a vowel is shown by a tilde (~) written over the vowel.

There are only five vowels in the English alphabet, so simple symbols cannot be found there for all Boko vowels. We have to look elsewhere for the two remaining oral vowels and also for a system of marking nasal vowels. The alternatives are:

1. To use the phonetic symbols (ɛ) and (ɔ)

eg. (tɔ) name (ɛsɛ) medicine (fɛlɛ) rise

This is done for many African languages and is accurate and consistent, but as the letters (ɛ) and (ɔ) are not found on standard typewriters, it is not convenient. However these special letters are not difficult to write and can be added to typewriters and are even more easily added to a computer font.

2. To use a dot under another vowel as is done in Yoruba.

eg. (tɔ̣) name (ɛ̣sɛ̣) medicine (fɛ̣lɛ̣) rise

Nasalisation of the vowel and tone are very common in Boko. These both have to be shown by modifying the vowel as will be shown below. To add a third modification would be overloading the vowel, ex. (ɛ̣̃) so we have chosen to use the phonetic symbols.

Five of the Boko vowels can be nasalized and these nasal vowels have to be differentiated from the oral vowels. This is done in some languages by using a tilde (~) or by adding (n) after a vowel, as in Yoruba.

i	ε	a	ɔ	u
ĩ	ẽ	ã	ɔ̃	ũ
in	en	an	ɔn	un

The last line is not possible in Boko because of the common occurrence of the syllabic nasal which is also represented by (n). It would be an overloading of one symbol to use it for three different sounds.(ie. as a nasal vowel, a nasal consonant and syllabic nasal.)

In terms of accuracy, the following way of writing the 12 Boko vowels is fully adequate.

oral	i	e	ε	a	ɔ	o	u
nasal	ĩ		ẽ	ã	ɔ̃		ũ

Pronunciation of oral vowels

(a) has the same sound as (a) in English word (pan).

(ba) rope (pa) fill (kpa) give

(i) has the same sound as (ee) in English word (peep)

(si) accept (pipi) wash (gbi) basket

(u) has the same sound as (ou) in English word (group)

(su) return (pu) whiten (ku) be there

(ɔ) has the same sound as (o) in English word (sock)

(bɔ) go out (kpɔ) fish (lɔɔ) well

- (o) has the same sound as (or) in English word (sort)
 (ko) chicken (do) one (polo) untie
- (ɛ) has the same sound as (e) in English word (pen)
 (lɛ) mouth (sɛlɛ) pick up (kɛ) do
- (e) has the same sound as (i) in English word (pip)
 (e) see, find (ble) goat (gese) short

Pronunciation of nasal vowels

- (ā) is (a) nasalised. It is not in English.
 (kā) hair, feather (wā) hurry (sāsā) get lost
- (ē) is (ɛ) nasalised. It is not in English.
 (sē) grass, bush (fē) squeeze (gē) enter
- (ō) is (ɔ) nasalised. It is not in English.
 (dō) know (sōsō) insult (gbō) excreta
- (ī) is (i) nasalised. It is not in English.
 (zī) work (pāsī) clever, wicked (vī) have
- (ū) is (u) nasalised. It is not in English.
 (gūgūna) island (pūna) explode (būu) secret

Note If a word ends in (ū) it is pronounced as (m).

- (kū) catch (gbaū) baboon (būu) undressed

Rule As there is no contrast between nasal and non-nasal vowels that follow directly after the consonants (m) and (n), the tilde (̃) is not written.

- (nɔ) wife (mɛ) body (nɛ) child
 (musu) above, up (limaū) priest (maa) good

Note The vowels (e) et (o) are never nasalised and the consonant (l) is never followed by a nasal vowel unless it is part of a consonant cluster (bl, pl, vl, fl, ml)

(sole) fight	(bee) this	(koo) roll up
(lé) mouth	(mlē) snake	(flā) whip

Long vowels

All the vowels can be lengthened.

Rule All the vowels can be lengthened and are written as two vowels and in some cases three.

(bēē) alive	(dii) owner, boss	(tēē) quietly
(guu) in	(gbēē) belly	(gbāā) long
(aā) three	(siī) four	(luutē) dust
(oo) pot	(ɔkɔ) claw	(tēē) reddish

In the following words the vowel is longer still and is written as three vowels:

(gɔɔɔ) cola nut	(saaa) offering	(kaaa) foot itch
(bēēē) worth	(baaa) blessing	(yaaa) nonsense
(naaa) put together	(kāaa) gather up	(fāaa) scatter

Vowel Clusters

Vowels may occur together in any combination.

Rule Where nasal vowels follow each other, the tilde is written only on the first vowel.

(gbāā) power	(būu) naked	(tēā) red
(gbāē) shake	(ɔ̄oi) earthworm	(sīāna) truth

This is also true when you add a suffix:

(sē, sēu) grass, in grass	(pā, pāē) useless, its useless
(bā, bāɔ) bird, birds	(wē, wēa) open, open

Rule When a nasal vowel follows an oral vowel, the tilde is written on the nasal vowel:

(aã) three	(siĩ) four
(kpaaĩ) level	(kpaaũ) meet

Pronunciation of vowel clusters

There are many vowel clusters in Boko due to the fact that medial consonants have dropped out. This may cause spelling problems. When these words are compared with the equivalent words in Bisā or Bokobaru the true spelling can be found.

(yāe) something = (yāke) in Bisā/Bokobaru

In a group of vowels, when the vowels (i, e, o, u) follow (ɛ, a, ɔ), they tend to change the quality of the latter. Before (i) and (e) the pronunciation of (a) approaches that of (ɛ), (ɛ) approaches (e) and (ɔ) approaches (o).

(mae) father	(yāi) reason	(pɔe) something
(gbēe) someone	(mɔe) rice	(Bāi) 4th son
(ae) profit	(kpāi) thief	(pai) full
(vāi) bad	(kāi) close	(sai) without

Before (u) and (o) the pronunciation of (a) approaches (ɔ) and the pronunciation of (ɔ) approaches (o).

(i tao) he didn't depart	(sɔu) preparation	
(í kau) pour water in	(dāuna) young brother	
(má gɛ lɔo) I won't go again	(mɔo) axe	
(a ku ma ɔu) it is in my hand	(kpɛu) in room	
(gbaũ) baboon	(leu) rain	(mao) mango
(au) blood	(teu) in fire	(nao) count
(gbau) under	(weu) in eye	(lao) lessen
(bau) ever	(leu) rain	(bao) news

3. Consonants

There are the 19 Boko consonants:

b	d	f	g	gb	h	k	kp	l	m
n	p	s	t	v	w	y	z	'	

Note (c, j, q, r, x) do not exist in Boko. (b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, t, v, w, z) have the same sound as in English.

(búsu) raw	(bua) farm	(baa) even
(dada) learn	(dii) mirror	(dēε) struggle
(fɔ̃) be able	(fεε) rise	(flā) whip
(ki) chief	(kolo) throat	(kε) do
(la) leaf	(lεε) fall	(luutē) dust
(mɔ) metal	(zɔ) slave	(maa) good
(nε) child	(nini) cool	(sānu) together
(pa) handle	(pε) mat	(pua) white
(ta) depart	(toena) hunter	(ta) depart
(vu) wake	(vī) milk	(vlā) tail
(wa) bone	(wε) eye	(wisi) salt
(zu) cow)	(zɔ) slave	(zī) work

(gb) and (kp) are not found in English, but are common in African languages.

(kpε) house	(kpɔ) fish	(kpoo) mustard
(kpakpa) quickly	(gba) leg	(gbāsī) dirt
(gbε) stone	(gbɔ̃) excreta	(gbāgbā) heal

(g) sounds like the (g) in girl but never like the (g) in large.

(ga) die	(εgε) a lie	(gisi) hip
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(s) sounds like both the (s) and the (c) in sauce, but not like the (s) in nose or the í in can. Before the vowel (i), the (s) is often pronounced as (sh) but not before other vowels.

(soolo) six	(nɔsɛ) stomach	(sāsā) get lost
(sī) groundnut	(si) receive	(sisi) call

(y) sounds like the (y) in English before oral vowels, but before nasal vowels it is pronounced (ñ) or (ny). Do not write (yā) as (nyā).

(yia) sell	(yā) word, matter	(ye) tie
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When a plosive consonant is followed by a nasal vowel, the consonant is post-nasalised, that is, there is an extra nasal sound between the consonant and the vowel. This is not written.

(dā) wait	(tē) taboo	(bā) bird
(kpāi) thief	(gbē) person	(pā) useless

(h) only exists in loanwords or sound words:

(wahala) trouble	(koohūhūna) owl
(ēhē) aha	(hai) hey!
(hayahaya) argument	(Nuhu) Noah

Apostrophe

The apostrophe (') represents the glottal stop, a Boko consonant. It does not have a sound, but causes a break in the sound.

(do'oo) saucepot	(wɛ'i) tears	(gbɛ'a) cassava
(gbɔ'i) diarrhoea	(ɔ'i) interest	(a'a) ah!
(ɛ'ɛ) break up	(zaa'ina) donkey	(zaa'iana) storm
(go'ilena) boat	(busu'ūfāa) sand	(le'i) spit

Rule The apostrophe (') is only used in the middle of a word to show a break in sound (glottal stop).

There are many words which begin with a glottal stop, but it is never written in this position, so these words appear to begin with a vowel. This is an inconsistency, but it saves the introduction of a new character, as (') may look strange at the beginning of a word.

(á) yam (oo) pot (εεε) lie (í) water
 (ɔ) hand (ɔεεε) banana (e) see (ú) food

In fact it is only the pronouns which begin with a vowel. Take note of the difference in pronunciation, there is no break of sound before a pronoun.

ma á è (ma-á-è) I received a yam
 ma á e (maá-é) I saw you

Consonant clusters

There are not many groups of consonants in Boko, but words with the following combinations exist and some of the words are very common.

gy	ky			
gw	kw	sw	zw	
ml	bl	pl	fl	vl

(gyā) sickness	(gwa) look at	(pla) two
(gyaa) widow	(gwea) condition	(plε) chose
(kyā) cobra	(kwi) ten	(blε) food
(kyale) sandal	(kwā) crocodile	(blaa) beans
(kyo) reading	(kwa) grasshopper	(bla) forty
(swa) river	(zwāa) cloth	(flā) whip
(swε) whistle	(mlē) snake	(vlā) tail

4. Syllabic nasal

The syllabic nasal is written as an (n) like the consonant (n), but it always has a tone, and can occur alone or as part of a word.

(ń, n, ñ) you(sg.)	(má ye ñ gé) I want you to go
(n) your	(má gé n bɛ) I'll go to your home
(ń) them, theirs	(ma ń é) I saw them
(n) Object marker	(ma pɔn we) it is mine

There are 7 words which begin with a syllabic nasal:

(nlɛ) you (Pres)	
(nnɔ) with you (sg.)	(ńnnɔ) with them
(ńyɔ̄) you (Future)	(ńyɔ̄) you (Subjunctive)
(nò) whether	(no) it is not

It occurs at the end of a word in the pronoun (an) them, and also when nouns which end in (na) lose the final (a).

Note It is written as (m) before (b, p)

(gēna) - (gēm bɔlɛ) trip	(ĩana) - (ĩam pa) air
(kɔ̄m pa) find	(soompa) hoe handle
(Sɔ̄mbaa) Sokonbara	(Kā̄nkpe) a village

It occurs in the middle of a compound word.

(yenzi) love	(sɔ̄kēngu) shock
(gbeaampua) leopard	(foonde) ashmatic
(ēmbasu) porcupine	(duunkena) sinner
(dendae) half-sister	(bantoe) wild cat
(ampiɔ) them	(kpanziɛ) refuge

Note When a word ends in (ū), it may sound like a syllabic nasal or an (m), but it should not be written as such.

(kū) catch	<u>Compare:</u>	(i kūo) he didn't catch it
(geseū) too short		(a geseūo) it is not too short
(fēneū) too small		(a fēneūo) it is not too small

The little word (ū) which means 'as' or 'equivalent to' should not be confused with a syllabic nasal.

(Boon ma ū) I am Boko
 (a zī ū) it is difficult
 (Yuun ma ūo) I am not Yoruba
 (wá è gè ū) we found it dead

Pronunciation of the syllabic nasal

Whether occurring alone or in a word, if it is before (m, b, p) it is pronounced as an (m)

(n mae gè ní bε) your father went to their home

If before (f, g, gb, k, kp, v, w, y, ') it is pronounced like the (ng) in sing.

(ma n yā mà) I heard you

If before (d, l, n, s, t, z) it is pronounced as (n)

(n su ò gεo) you must not return

If before (a) it is pronounced as (ñ) or (ny)

(Boon aà ū) he is Boko (n aà pɔ sè) you took his own

If before another syllabic nasal it is pronounced as (nỹ)

(ma ge n n dao) I went with your mother

(Boon n ū) you are Boko

(n̄ n pɔ sε) take your own

5. Tone

Lexical tone

There are four lexical tones in Boko, high, mid, semilow and low. Every syllable has a lexical tone, but it is only written in Boko when necessary to avoid ambiguity.

An acute accent is used to show high tone (´)

A grave accent is used to show low tone (`)

Mid tone is not shown.

Semilow becomes low when qualified, and can only then be written with a low tone.

Problem The word for dog has a mid tone (gbē). The word for person has a high tone, but this is never written on top of a tilde, so dog and person are written the same. It is hoped that the context will show clearly whether it is dog or person.

There are many one syllable words in Boko and some are only distinguished by tone. So tone is often indicated to distinguish these words that would otherwise be written the same.

(gbá) leg

(gba) stool

Some one syllable nouns have semilow tone which is not written. They only have low tone when they are followed by another noun or adjective.

(gba) stool

(gbà εna) low stool

Similarly high tone one syllable nouns can have the high tone written when they occur alone, but if they are followed by a noun or adjective with mid or low tone then the high tone becomes mid and should not be written.

(pó) thing

(pɔ maa) good thing

Note the following:

(ka, ká) arrow, crab	(bèè, bēè) bad, alive
(sa, sá) big, bow	(tɔ, tó) vengance, name
(wisi, wísi) salt, flour ball	(zǎ, zā) far, husband
(zε, zé) heap, road	(zɔ, zó) slave, bee/honey
(bùà, bua) cotton, farm	(dii, díi) master, mirror
(kaa, kàa) fence, cake	(kuu, kúu) horn, eagle
(laai, láai) attention, curse	(màa, maa) thus, good
(sìa, sia) twin, black	(taae, táae) fault, fertiliser
(lε, lé) thorn/song, mouth	(bàa, baa) concern, skin
(gbàa, gbāa) length, power	(wà, wá) let us, bone
(ì, í) pronoun, water	(à, á) he (past, yam
(wì, wí) broke, shame	(gbaa, gbāa) calabash, desert
(kòɔ, kɔɔ, kóɔ) insect, morning, intermediary	

Grammatical tone

Tone in Boko may be lexical as above or grammatical. Grammatical tone occurs on pronouns and verbs.

Object and Possessive pronouns

Kind of pronoun	Singular			Plural		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
Possessive	ma	n	aà/a	wá	á	ń/an
Direct Object	ma	n	aà/a	wá	á	ń
Dative	-ma	-ma	-wà	-wá	-wá	-má
Benefactive	-mèè	-nè	-è	-wèè	-é	-né

Rule Indirect Object pronouns (Dative and Benefactive) are joined to the preceding verb:

(ma yā òè) I spoke to him

(ma yā òé) I spoke to you (Pl.)

Rule Always write high tone on plural forms of Possessive and Object pronouns.

(ma á yā ònḗ) I told them about you

(ma ní pṓ kpámá) I gave them theirs

Rule When a third person singular Object or Possessive pronoun relates to the Subject of the same sentence, it loses its low tone.

	Object/Possessive	Dative	Benefactive
Normal	aà	wà	è
Same as Subject	a	wa	e

Different to subject

Biṓ aà yā dṓ

Biṓ mè wá aà e

Biṓ mè mà oè

Biṓ mè mà kpawà

Same as subject

Biṓ a yā dṓ

Biṓ mè wá a e

Biṓ mè mà oè

Biṓ mè mà kpawa

Inamimate (it)

Biṓ a yā dṓ

Subject pronouns

There are 8 basic tenses in Boko, each with its own set of subject pronouns. Tones are always written on these pronouns:

Tense	I	you(sg.)	he	we	you(pl.)	they	one
Future	má	nyṓ	a	wá	á	aa	wa
Stative	má	ń	a	wá	á	aa	wa
Past	ma	n	à/a	wa	a	aa	wà
Subjunctive	mà	ṅ	aà	wà	à	aa	wà
Present	mále	ńle	àle	wále	ále	aale	wàle
Habitual	mi	ni	ì	wi	i	aai	wì
Past Neg.	mi	ni	i	wi	i	aai	wi
Consecutive	mí	ní	i	wí	í	aai	wi

Rule High tone is written on first and second person Future and Consecutive pronouns as shown above.

(má oè) I will tell him	(mí oè) then I will tell him
(ńyṣ gē) you will go	(ní oè) then you will tell him
(wá ta) we will depart	(wí oè) then we will tell him
(á kǎ) you'll be satisfied	(í oè) then you will tell him

Rule Write low tone on all Proposal pronouns except they, and on third person Past, Present and Habitual pronouns, except they.

(oè àà gḗ) tell him to go	(wì yā o) one talks
(à yā ò) he spoke	(mà géó) will I go?
(àlè yā o) he is talking	(wà gḗ) let's go
(ì yā o) he talks	(à zī kē) work!
(má ye ñ gḗ) I want you to go	
(wàlè zī kē) one is working	
(wà zī kè) one has worked	

Note When the object is not expressed, the tone on the Past tense pronouns is raised as for Future, but low tone on verb shows that it is Past.

(ma yā è)	(má è) I got it
(à yā è)	(a è) he got it
(wa pṣ blè)	(wá blè) I ate it
(n yā kè)	(ń kè) you did it
(a í mì)	(á mì) you drank it

Verb tone

Verbs have one, two or three syllables. The normal tone on the first syllable of verbs is high, mid or low, but in the Past tense the first syllable becomes low:

Rule Write low tone on the first syllable of verbs in the Past.

(ké ma pó blè) when I ate (má tà) I closed it

(Bìo zī kè) Bio worked

Note There are four exceptions to this rule.

1. There are six irregular verbs which do not normally take Past tense. They are:

(dǔ) know	(vī) have	(te...zi) follow
(ye...zi) want	(ku) be there	(de) be

These verbs usually take Stative tense pronouns for Present or Past tense meaning:

(má aà dǔ) I know him	(má téaazi) I follow him
(má á vī) I have yams	(má yeaazi) I love him
(má kú la) I am here	(má de màa) I am like that

2. In Past tense, if the verb follows a Direct Object pronoun, the tone on the first syllable of the verb has the same tone as the Object pronoun.

(ma aà è) I saw him	(à ma e) he saw me
(à n e) he saw you(sg.)	(ma ní é) I saw them
(à wá é) he saw us	(ma á é) I saw you(pl.)

3. In Past tense, if the verb is Intransitive (no Object) and follows a first or second person subject pronoun, the first syllable of the verb will have the same tone as the subject pronoun and so low tone is not written.

<u>Intransitive</u>	<u>Transitive</u>
(ma bǔ) I went out	(má bǔ) I took it out
(wa kā) we are satisfied	(wá kā) we tightened it
(a bǔle) you went out	(á bǔle) you poured it out

4. If the verb follows a Direct Object which ends in a syllabic nasal, the first syllable of the verb will have the same tone as the syllabic nasal and so low tone is not written.

(ma aà sãn kɛ) I slapped him (à gɛ̃n bɔ̃lɛ) he tripped
(à gbɛ gbeem pa) he rolled stone (à ñam pa) he rested

Note Verbs which normally have a low tone on the first syllable also take low tone on the second syllable in Past tense. It is still written on the first syllable in Past tense as with the other verbs.

(a pila) he will go down (à pìla) he went down
(a pila) he unloaded it

6. Compound words

Compound nouns

There are seven ways of forming Compound Nouns.

Rule In compound nouns the first noun maintains its tone.

1. Nouns formed by a group of words including a verb and a pronoun:

(yenzi) love	(ísima) sweat
(zãngu) hate	(lédama) counsel
(denla) superiority	(yãdane) teaching

Note These words do not always form a noun.

(à le dàamá) he counselled them
(à yã dàné) he taught them
(má yeñzi) I love them
(a deñla) he is better than them

2. Nouns formed by a verb preceded and/or followed by a noun, especially when followed by (gɔɔ) time, (kīi) place and (bɔ) instrument.

(leusisikpɛ) mosque	(lákɛbɔ) pen
(dɛɛkakīi) wrestling place	(zukūba) tether
(gɛkīi) entrance	(gbɛdɛ) murder
(dɔgɛgaa) ladder	(gbɛkɛ) grace
(ɛsekɛgɔɔ) guinea-corn harvest season	

3. Words composed of two nouns of which the first qualifies the second rather than owning it.

(wékā) eyelash	(téli) gun	(fɛnda) sword
(wɛ'ūa) tax	(ɔmi) thumb	(kosa) cock
(mɛbaa) skin	(lé'i) saliva	(mìkā) hair
(mòsɔ) bicycle	(wé'i) tears	(vīnisi) butter
(gugbāntoo) north	(lézī) in mouth	(ɔzī) in hand
(pɔfɛ) anger	(gbázī) near leg	(lébaa) lip

4. All reduplicated words, whether nouns, verbs, adverbs or numbers are written as one word.

(bebe) roam	(susu) straight	(dodo) one by one
(dasidasi) many	(pāsipāsi) dangerous	(sāsā) be lost

5. Participles and actor nouns are formed by adding (-a) and (-na) to a simple or compound verb.

(bebe) roam	(bebea) roaming	(bebena) roamer
(faai bo) talk	(faaiboa) talking	(faaibona) talker
(zī ke) work	(zīkea) working	(zīkena) worker
(bú ba) farm	(búbaa) farming	(búbana) farmer

6. Other compound nouns are formed by adding (-na) or (-de) to other words or morphemes.

(yenzide) loved one	(ḡnɔna) wise person
(zḡɔde) large one	(kífēnena) hare
(ɔde) rich man	(gopana) staff
(zude) cow owner	(bana) antelope

7. A noun followed by an adjective is normally written as two words. There are two exceptions - when the adjective follows a body part or (gu) place.

(pɔna) joy	(gupua) light
(ɔgii) empty handed	(gupii) everywhere
(wézē) intelligence	(gusia) darkness
(swāgbāa) stubbornness	(guwāa) heat

Compound verbs

A verb preceded by an object is written as two words even though the equivalent English meaning is one word. Note that the verb is the part that changes its tone in Past tense, while the tone on the Object always stays the same.

(má i o) I will sleep	(wále fāai bo) we are talking
(Bio tɔɔna ò) Bio coughed	(Sabi ma sua bà) Sabi saved me

Suffixes

Rule Suffixes which begin with a vowel are always joined to the preceding word.

- (má gé swai) I will go to the river
- (ńle gé buaó) are you going to the farm?
- (mále gé buaó) I am not going to the farm
- (mále gé buaḡ) I am going to the farm
- (dé mé lé gé buai) who is going to the farm?
- (láḡ bee gwa) look at this book

(mále gé buaoo) I am going to farm OK?
 (má géò) I will go with it
 (Sabi mò kooa) Sabi came this morning
 (wi yãe maoo) we didn't hear anything
 (gbẽo ku dasi) many people are there
 (gé o gbẽoŋe) go and tell people

Rule Six short postpositions, (-la/-a) over, (-zi/-i) near, (-gu/-u) in, (-wa) at/on, (-e) to/for and (-le) in, are always joined to the preceding word:

(a de Biola) he's better than Bio (a dea) its better
 (a yemazi) he loves me (a ye ũai) he loves money
 (à sãmagu) I forgot (a ku kpéu) it's in the room
 (a kpàwà) he gave it to him (fo kpámá) greet them
 (má òè) I told him (má òné) I told them
 (néo dàwále) children met us

7. Sample text

Wẽle kía wẽdia

Wẽle kía mé kú a wẽdia ví. Wẽdia pi ɔ gbẽo píi yei wẽle pi guu. Wẽle kía bíli kè gbẽ pó a wẽdia pi kpawà. Ǿ kía pi lé laasoo ke. Ké à laasoo kè a yãa, aà be gãae ɔ li zɔo ze we, ɔ à mè: Gbẽ pó ka zù, à fɔ lí pi pà e à bò kpe, ade mé no pi ví. Ǿ gbẽ píi pɔ kè na. Ǿ kía mè: Gbẽ píi gé be aà sou ke. Ǿsãadazí oosi gbẽ píi mó.

Zí bee zí gɔo ɔ Kífẽnena fẽle à gè Gbã kii à mè: Gbã, má ye ñ ma faaba ke yoo. Má ye ñ dẽe ka ñ fɔ lí pó ze kibe gãae fõmee zia yã. Ǿ Gbã mè: Tó Lua wèi, má zí bee kene Kí. Ǿ Kífẽnena mè: Ma n sáabu kè. Ké aà pɔ kè na, ale yáa lo.

Ō Gbã fêle, à nà f̃ lí pi f̃awa, ale f̃. Ké a f̃ a yãa, ɔ à gè Kífēnena k̃i a òè: N zī pó n̄ dāmee, ma zī pi yãa. Ō Kífēnena pɔ kè na, ale ɔ wã.

Ké Kífēnena fêle lo, à gè Dãnsa k̃i. Ké à kà, ɔ à mè: Dãnsa, ma mo n̄ ma faaba kee. F̃ li z̃o mé ze kíabe gãae, a e ví. Má ye n̄ e pi tatamee. Ō Dãnsa mè: Yã yoonae. Gé z̃le be. Ō Dãnsa fêle à gè f̃ lí pi e tãta. Ké à sù, à gè Kífēnena be à mè: Ma e pi tãta.

Ké ãsãada mò, gbē píi sou kè, gbē píi a ula maa dà. Wêle kía mè: Gbē píi mó gupua guu la. Ō nòbɔ píi mò. Kífēnena mé g̃ k̃é, i mo yãao. Kía mè Kiwesae aà oné wà na kazuawa. Ō Kiwesa mè Banae aà fele na kazuawa. Bana ka zù, à f̃ lí pà, à g̃i b̃oi k̃e. Ō Se mò zu. Se ka zù, à f̃ lí pà, à g̃i b̃oi. Ō nòbɔ píi zù, ka g̃i b̃oi f̃ lí k̃e.

Kífēnena mé g̃ k̃é zã, ale mó, à sòolo n̄ ulao dà. Nòbɔ píi mè: Kãma bo g̃o, n̄ỹ f̃o. Wá zù píi, wi f̃o. N̄ d̃ sãasã wá gbãa denla. Kífēnena mò à kùle, à f̃o k̃pà kíawa. Ō wà mè: Kífēnena, n̄ mé n̄ g̃. N gbēo píi aa ka zù kò. Ō Kífēnena mè: N̄ Lua gbãao má no pi sé. Ō kía mè: À kè maa. Kífēnena gè kùle f̃ lí sae, ale e pó Dãnsa tãtae gwa, ɔ à kàle pèwà, a zù e pi guu súsu. Ō ka pi gè b̃o f̃ lí k̃e. Ō gbē píi lé yãa lo, gbē píi pɔ kè na Kífēnawawa. Ō kía mè wà no k̃pá Kífēnawawa. Ō nòbɔ píi wí n̄ k̃u, aa bàa lè aa tà s̃easao guu zãzã. Ō Kífēnena g̃ be sae a na yãi. Kífēnena na yãi a kui be sae.