

How to Read and Write Bokobaru

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3. Convenience Each sound should be written in the simplest possible way, so that it won't be difficult to type and will be easy to read and write. The simplest way to write sounds is by using one of the letters of the Roman alphabet found on typewriters. This is done in Bokobaru 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. Boko, Bisā and Baatonu are all written in exactly the same way as Bokobaru.

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 Bokobaru as well.

2. Vowels

There are twelve Bokobaru vowels. Seven are oral and five are 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.

As there are only five vowels in the English alphabet, simple symbols cannot be found for all Bokobaru 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. Use the phonetic symbols (ɛ) and (ɔ).

eg. (tɔ) name (mɛ) body (fɛɛ) 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 computer fonts.

2. Use a dot under a vowel as in Yoruba.

eg. (tɔ̣) name (mɛ̣) body (fɛ̣ɛ̣) to rise

Nasalisation of the vowel and tone are very common in Bokobaru. 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. (ẹ̃), so we have chosen to use the phonetic symbols.

(o) sounds like (or) in the English word (sort)

(koo) chicken (do) one (poro) untie

(ɛ) sounds like (e) in the English word (pen)

(lɛ) mouth (sɛɛ) pick up (kɛ) do

(e) sounds like (i) in English word (pip)

(e) see, find (lemaa) umbrella (ble) goat

Pronunciation of nasal vowels

(ã) is (a) nasalised. It is not in English.

(kã) hair, feather (wã) hurry (sãã) be lost

(ẽ) is (ɛ) nasalised. It is not in English.

(sẽ) grass, bush (fẽ) squeeze (gẽ) enter

(õ) is (ɔ) nasalised. It is not in English.

(dõ) know (sõsõ) insult (gbõ) excreta

(ĩ) is (i) nasalised. It is not in English.

(zĩ) work (pãĩ) clever, wicked (vĩ) have

(ũ) is a (u) nasalised. It is not in English.

(gũma) bedbug (pũtã) explode

If a word ends in (ũ) it is pronounced as (m) or (ng).

(a zĩ ũ) it is difficult (gbakũ) baboon

(kũ) catch (gũ) clay

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 there.

(nao) wife (mè) body (né) child

(musu) above, up (mòde) but (maa) good

(ma sã néngo è) I saw a lamb

(mare ìsi vĕɛna gwe) an old man is sitting there

2. Question word sentences.

The last vowel of question word sentences lengthens, but not if it has low tone.

(dén à ūu) who is he?

(bɔrɛn à gàa buraa) when did he go to farm?

3. Verbs in Present and Durative tenses.

In Present and Durative tenses, the verb root is lengthened.

(èè yã oome) he is talking to me

(mée pɔ blee gĩa) I'm eating now

(wègɔ̃ bɔɛɛ gupingia wàgɔ̃ mɔɔ a kiia)

people came to him from everywhere

(èè kɛɛkɔ̃a) it is separating

Vowel clusters

Vowels may occur together in many combinations.

(fua) able

(sãɔ) better

(s) sounds like (s) or (c) in sauce, never like (s) in passion or nose. When (s) is followed by (i) or (e), the (s) may be pronounced as (sh), but it is always written (s).

(sɔɔro) five (nɔ̃sɛ) stomach (sã̃sã̃) be wrong
(sĩ) groundnut (kuseɛ) tortoise (Siigbea) Sirigberia

(r) only occurs in the middle of words, except in some borrowed names like Raseli and Rebeke. It is spoken faster than an English (r).

(maree) old man (bára) skin (oroo) pot

(y) sounds like (y) in English before oral vowels, but before nasal vowels it is pronounced (ñ) or (ny).

Note Do not write (yã) as (nyã).

(yá) sell (yi) tie (yó) melt
(yã) word (yĩ) nose (yõ) breast

(h) only exists in loanwords or sound words:

(wahaa) trouble (korohũhũ) large owl (ẽhẽ) aha
(hai) hey! (hayahaya) argument

Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe (') is used in the middle of words to show a break in sound (glottal stop). There is a tendency for it to drop out of Bokobaru words.

(dò'oroo) saucepot	(wé'i) tears
(ɔɔ'i) interest	(é'ε) break many
(yā'ori) speaker	(zàga'ĩa) storm
(gbɔ̀'ì) diarrhoea	(góro'ite) canoo

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. However there is a break in sound before these words in speech.

(ma oroo b̀ò) I made a pot	(à εγεε tò) he lied
(aɔ́ í mì) they drank	(à ɔ kèa) he touched it
(ma annabi è) I saw a prophet	(wa ú blè) we ate

Pronouns are the only words which begin with a vowel. Take note of the difference in pronunciation, there is no break of sound before a pronoun.

ma a e (maa 'e) I saw you
wá à dɔ́ (wáà dɔ́) we know him
eé n gba (eén gba) he will give it to you

Consonant clusters

There are not many groups of consonants, 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

(gyāa) sickness	(gwa) look at	(mlè) snake
(gyaanɔ) widow	(gwe) there	(pleple) select
(kyā) catarrh	(gwāavī) night	(plaa) two
(kyate) sandal	(kwā) crocodile	(blè) goat
(kyó) reading	(kwaa) grasshopper	(blá) beans
(swaa) river	(zwii) milk	(flā) whip
(swè) heart	(zwēsi) a fish	(vlā) tail

The nasal consonants (n) and (m) also form clusters within a word with other consonants. Before (m, b, p) the nasal consonant is written (m), otherwise it is written as (n).

(dāmboo) spider	(kámma bo) rest
(sāmpa) bamboo	(angota) bell
(wèndi) life	(anzure) inlaw
(wēnda) compassion)	(annabi) prophet

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

(Bokobarun ma ũ) I am Bokobaru

(Yurun ma ũro) I am not Yoruba

(à zĩ ũro) it is not difficult

(wá è gè ũ) we found it dead

Pronunciation of the syllabic nasal

Either within a word or alone, a syllabic nasal occurring before (m, b, p) is pronounced as an (m).

(n maree gàa ní bε) your elder went to their home

Before (f, g, gb, k, kp, v, w, y, ') it is pronounced as (ng).

(ma n yã mà) I heard you

Before (d, l, n, s, t, z) it is pronounced (n)

(n su gão) you returned with guinea fowl

Before the pronoun (à) it is pronounced (ny)

(Bokobarun à ũ) he is Bokobaru

(n à pó sè) you took his own

Before suffixed vowels it is pronounced as (ng) and written with a hyphen separating the syllabic nasal and the vowel.

(à mò kǔn durun-o) He brought sin.

(à à kpà Setãn-a) He gave him over to Satan.

Before another syllabic nasal it is pronounced as (nỹ)

(Bokobarun n ũ) you are Bokobaru

(ñ n pó sé) take your own

5. Tone

Lexical tone

There are three level tones: high, mid and low. Every syllable has a lexical tone, but it is not written on every occasion.

An acute accent (´) represents high tone.

A grave accent (`) represents low tone.

Mid tone is not shown.

There are many one syllable words in Bokobaru which are only distinguished by lexical tone. So tone is indicated to differentiate these words that would otherwise be written the same.

(gbà) door	(gba) give	(gbá) leg
(kà) arrow	(ká) crab	
(z`) slave	(z´) bee/honey	
(kpà) locustbean	(kpa) direction	(kpá) give
(gbà) platform	(gbá) leg	

On longer words low tone is written on the first syllable of all words that only have low tone, and high tone is written on the first syllable of all words that only have high tone.

(kpàsa) cow-farm	(kpása) axe
(gbàra) quiver	(gbára) wilderness
(kùu) horn	(kúu) eagle
(sòkoto) pants	(sósobi) compassion

Rule Low tone is written on top of the tilde, but not high.

(s`ã) wart	(zã) husband	(b`èè) bad
(sãa) sheep	(z`à) far	(b`èè) alive
(g`ũ) clay	(gb`aa) length	(z`õ) antelope
(gũ) obstinancy	(gb`aaa) power	(z`õ) lizard

Grammatical tone

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

Object and possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns

my	your	his/her	our	your	their
ma	n	à	wa	a	ń/aǔ

Direct Object pronouns

me	you	him/her	us	you	them
ma	n	à	wa	a	ń

Dative pronouns (to, on)

me	you	him/her	us	you	them
-ma	-mma	-a	-wa	-awa	-ńma

Benefactive pronouns (to, for)

me	you	him/her	us	you	them
-me	-nne	-ne	-we	-are	-ńne

Accompaniment pronouns (with)

me	you	him/her	us	you	them
-mao	-nyo	-o	-wao	-ao	-ńyo

Rule Indirect Object pronouns are joined to the preceding verb:

(ma yā onɛ) I spoke to him

(ma yā òare) I spoke to you (P)

Rule Always write tone on pronouns to differentiate them from each other. Compare:

(ma ń é) I saw them

(má òńne) I told them

(ma n e) I saw you (má ònne) I told you
 (má kpàmíma) I gave it to them (aǎ ní pǒ è) they found theirs
 (má kpàmíma) I gave it to you (aǎ n pǒ è) he found yours
 (à pǒme) it is his (a pǒme) it is yours (pl.)

Subject pronouns

There are 7 basic tenses in Bokobaru, each with its own set of subject pronouns. Write tones on these pronouns as shown:

Tense	I	you	he/she	we	you	they	one
Past	ma	n	à	wa	a	aǎ	wà
Past (no Obj)	má	ní	à	wá	á	aǎɔ	wà
Stative	má	ní	à	wá	á	aǎɔ	wà
Subjunctive	mà	n̄	à	wà	à	aǎ	wà
Future	mé	né	eé	wé	é	aǎé	weé
Present	mée	nee	èe	wée	ée	aǎe	wèe
Habitual	meè	neè	è	weè	eè	aǎè	wè

Rule All tones on Subject pronouns should be written

(má kuu) I am here (ní kūna) you're holding it
 (wá vī) we have it (á yemazi) you love me
 (wé onε) we will tell him (é onε) you will tell him
 (wée zīi kεε) we are working (ée zīi kεε) you are working
 (mà gáǒ) may I go? (wà gá) let's go
 (à zīi kε) work! (wè nɔ sé) one marries
 (wà zīi kè) one worked (è wēε mi) he drinks beer

When the object 'it' is not expressed, Past (no Object) pronouns are used instead of Past pronouns. Low tone on the verb shows that it is Past.

(ma yǎ è) (má è) I got it
 (wa pǒ blè) (wá blè) we ate it

Verb tone

The normal tone on the first syllable of verbs is high, mid or low, but in the Past tense the first syllable usually becomes low.

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

(à tá) depart!	(à tà) he departed
(à pìlā) get down!	(à pìlā) he got down
(n̄ káε) put them down	(n̄ kàε) you put them down
(kè ma pó blè) when I ate	(má tàta) I closed it
(Bíó zīi kè) Bio worked	(Bíó zīi kè) Bio worked

Note There are two exceptions to this rule.

1. In Past tense, if the verb follows an Object pronoun, the tone on the first syllable of the verb has the same tone as the object pronoun. Only verbs following the 'him/her' pronoun will have low tone.

(ma à è) I saw him	(à ma e) he saw me
(à n e) he saw you	(ma n̄ é) I saw them
(à wa e) he saw us	(ma a e) I saw you

2. In Past tense if the verb is Intransitive, meaning it does not take an Object, and follows (ma, n, wa, a), the first syllable of the verb will have the same mid tone as the subject pronoun.

<u>Intransitive</u>	<u>Transitive</u>
(ma bɔ) I went out	(má bɔ) I took it out
(n mɔ) you came	(n̄ mɔ) you swallowed it
(wa kã) we are satisfied	(wá kã) we tightened it
(a bɔε) you went out	(á bɔε) you poured it out

6. Compound words

Compound nouns

There are seven ways of making compound nouns.

1. A group of words including a verb and a pronoun:

(yenzi) love	(ísimma) sweat
(yādanne) teaching	(denlaa) superiority
(zangu) hate	(lédamma) counsel

2. Words consisting of a verb preceded and/or followed by a noun, especially when followed by (-gurɔɔ) time, (-kii) place and (-bɔ) instrument.

(zíkɛgurɔɔ) work time	(lákɛbɔ) pen
(ɔsikakii) wrestling place	(zùkūba) tether
(gɛkii) entrance	(gbɛdɛɛ) murder
(igurɔɔ) birthday	(gbɛkɛɛ) grace
(ésekɛgurɔɔ) sorghum harvest	

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

(téli) gun	(fɛɛdaa) sword
(gùpɛɛ) pillar	(kone) chicken
(górone) pestle	(mlɛdaa) python
(nɔpɔsɛɛ) mistress	(swabaa) riverbank
(bɛ'ɔɔ) tax	(òsiwɛɛ) dye-pit
(tévura) flame	(gɔgbɛ) man

Rule In compound nouns the first noun keeps its written tone.

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

(pleple) select	(sāsā) be lost
(paripari) many	(pāsipāsi) terrible

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

(zī) send	(zīna) sending	(zīri) messenger
(fāadi bo) talk	(fāadibona) talking	(fāadibori) talker
(zīi ke) work	(zīkena) working	(zīkeri) worker
(bú ba) farm	(búbana) farming	(búbari) farmer
(kǒ kakǒa) gather	(kǒkakǒana) gathering	

6. Nouns formed by adding the proprietor affix (-dee) to other words.

(yenzidee) loved one	(kekēdee) cyclist
(bēdee) house owner	(zùdee) cow owner
(búdee) farm owner	(ɔɔdee) rich man

7. A noun followed by an adjective is normally written as two words, but when the adjective follows a body part or (gu) place it is written as one word.

(mènnaa) good health	(pɔnnaa) joy
(mìnnaa) good luck	(mìzaa) bad luck
(swāgbāaa) stubbornness	(ɔkɔri) empty handed
(pɔfē) anger	(lébara) lip
(gbánenɔ) toes	(ɔzī) in hand
(létānga) chin	(mìkā) hair
(wéezē) intelligence	(lékpāsā) message
(gusiaa) darkness	(gupuraa) light
(guwāaa) heat	(gukea) somewhere

Compound verbs

A verb preceded by a noun is written as two words even though the equivalent English meaning is one word. The verb

is the part that changes tone in Past tense. The noun is the Object on which the tone stays the same.

(mé ii o) I will sleep

(ma la dà) I swore

(wée fãadi boo) we are chatting

(ma lù sè) I vowed

(Sabi ma náane kè) Sabi trusted me

Suffixes

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

(à kpà Bìoà) he gave it to Bio

(néε gaa buraó) are you going to farm?

(mé gáo) I will go with it

(à sãn) he forgot

(à kú kpén) it is in the room

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

(à de Bíola) he is better than Bio

(à yemazi) he loves me

(à ye ɔɔzi) he loves money

(à sãmagu) I forgot

(à ku kpén) it's in the room

Some suffixes beginning with a consonant are joined:

(gbě̀nɔ́ é gá buramε) people will go to the farm

(aãègɔ́ yãke maro) they never hear anything

7. Sample Text

Lakutu kína nɔkpare

Lakutu kína bé à kuu à nɔkpare vī. Nɔkpare pìn baade píngi yezi lakutu pì guu. Lakutu kína bídi kè gbě kè é nɔkpare pì kpáa. Ben kína pì e laasuu lee. Kè à laasuu lè à yáa, à be gāale f̃ lí gbèntē ze gwe, ben à bè gbě kè kà zù à f̃ lí pì pà ai à bò kpee kpa, adeen é nɔɔ kpáa. Ben baade píngi pɔɔ kè nna. Ben kína bè: Baade píngi gá be à soru ke. Azumazī uusie baade píngi mó.

Zī beea g̃ɔɔn Flēngo f̃e à gàa Gũma kiia à bè: Gũma, má yezi ñ ma faaba ke f̃ete. Má yezi ñ ɔsi ká ñ f̃ lí kè ze kí be gāale f̃me zia yānzi. Ben Gũma bè: Tó Luda wè, mé zī beee kenne kí. Ben Flēngo bè: Ma sáabu kè. Kè à pɔɔ kè nna, èe yáa dɔɔ.

Ben Gũma f̃e à nà f̃ lí pì f̃naa, èe f̃ɔ. Kè à f̃ à yáa, ben à gàa Flēngo kiia à bène: N zīi kè ní dāme, ma zīi pì kè má yáa. Ben Flēngo pɔɔ kè nna, èe ɔ wāa.

Kè Flēngo f̃e dɔ, à gàa Dāmboo kiia. Kè à kà, ben à bè: Dāmboo, ma mɔ ñ ma faaba keme. F̃ lí gbèntē bé à ze kína be gāale à wèe vī. Má yezi ñ wèe pì tatame. Ben Dāmboo bè: F̃ete yāme. Ñ gá ñ ṽe be.

Ben Dāmboo f̃e à gàa à f̃ lí pì wèe tàta. Kè à sù, à gàa Flēngo be à bè: Ma wèe pì tàta.

Kè azumazī kà, baade píngi soru kè, baade píngi a uta maaa dà. Lakutu kína bè: Baade píngi mó gupuraa kè. Ben nòbɔɔ

píngi mò. Flēngo bé à gǝ kpeε, èe mó idero. Kína bè Kíwesaane à oíne wà na kàzunaa. Ben Kíwesaa bè Gāsine à fεε à na kàzunaa. Gāsi kà zù à fǝ lí pà, à gí bɔ kpeεzi. Ben Kpera mò. À kà zù à fǝ lí pà, à gí bɔzi. Ben nòbɔɔ píngi zù, kà gí bɔ fǝ lí kpeεzi.

Flēngo bé à gǝ kpeε, èe mɔɔ, à sòkoto kǝn utao dà. Nòbɔɔ píngi bè: N kámma bo gǝɔ, né fǝro. Wá zù píngi, wée fǝro. N dǝ se kè wá gbāa denla. Flēngo mò à kùe à ì kpà kínaa. Ben wà bè: Flēngo, míbe n gǝ. N gbēɔ píngi kà zù kò. Ben Flēngo bè: Kǝn Luda gbāaaó mé nɔɔ pì sé. Ben kína bè: Yā kè maa. Flēngo gàa à kùe fǝ lí saε, èe wée kè Dāmboo tàtane gwaa, ben à kàle pèa à zù wée pì guu súusu. Ben kà pì gàa à bò fǝ lí kpeε. Ben baade píngi e yáa dɔɔ, baade píngi pɔɔ kè nna Flēngo. Ben kína bè wà nɔɔ kpá Flēngo.

Ben wí nòbɔɔ kù píngi, aǝ bàa lè wà tà sè guu zāazā. Ben Flēngo gǝ bεε saε a naɔ yānzì. Flēngo naɔ yānzìn à kú bεε saezi.