

THE YEMBA LANGUAGE (CAMEROON): 90 YEARS OF TONE ORTHOGRAPHY

Kouesso Jean Romain (PhD)

Department of African Studies, Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences, University of
Dschang, Cameroon

ABSTRACT: *Yemba is one of the Cameroonian national languages that has been taught and written for 90 years. From a diachronic perspective, a lot of efforts have been made regarding the standardisation of this language, particularly the tone orthography. Despite achievements related to the awareness of the tonal phenomenon, the graphic representation of tones and the routes to handle the tone orthography, there remains a real challenge on the issue, namely designing efficient standard spelling norms. More so, important lessons can be drawn from the historical review of tone orthography in the Yemba language.*

KEYWORDS: Yemba, Orthography, Tone, Linguistic Research, Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Yemba is a Cameroonian language which in 1992 had about 300 000 native speakers principally in Menoua Division (West Region) and certain localities of Lebialem Division in the South West Region. The Yemba language belongs to the Niger-kordofanian phylum and springs from the subgroup of Central Bamileke languages of the East-Grassfield/Bantu branch/Bantoïd sub family/Congo-Benue family/Niger-Congo sub phylum (Dieu et Renaud 1983, Breton et Fohtung 1991, Kouesso 2009, Binam Bikoï 2012). Like so many languages in the world, Yemba is a tone language. In tone languages, words are made of three types of units, namely consonants, vowels and tones, each of which can serve to distinguish meanings of words or to indicate a grammatical function (Kutsch Lojenga 2014). As far as tone is concerned, it is the variation of musical pitch which accompanies the utterance of a syllable. Very often, tones are symbolised by distinctive signs marked on tone bearing units i.e vowels or consonants. In fact, let us consider the following illustrations drawn from the Yemba language:

- a. lètóŋ “nib”
- b. lètõŋ “read”
- c. lètòŋ “navel”

These words have the same consonants and vowels, placed in the same order. The vowel ə in the second syllable carries the high, mid and low tones in the three words respectively. So, the difference in meaning of these words is not accorded through consonants or vowels, but distinctively by tone variation, i.e high (´) in a., mid (˘) in b. and low (`) in c.

In spite of some 90 years of the history of writing Yemba (Momo 1997), the mastery of the orthography of tones in this language remains an unabated challenge. In the search of solutions for this challenge, it appears that, out of the purely linguistic and pedagogic tracks which are often exploited, we can also question the history and the practice of writing the language. Mainly endorsed through a diachronic perspective, the exercise is susceptible to radiate some

practical lessons. Our study is focused on five points: the context of study, some theoretical considerations, tone orthography models, convergent views and the lessons drawn.

Context of the study

Since several years, notably with the effective integration of national languages in primary schools, secondary schools and university programmes, the teaching of national languages has gained a certain gleam of vitality in Cameroon. In fact, according to Decree N° 08/023/MINESUP/DDES of 03 September 2008 creating the Department and the Laboratory of Cameroonian Languages and Cultures in the Higher Teacher Training College of the University of Yaoundé I, Cameroonian languages and cultures teachers are being trained. Thus, about 20 of them are yearly put at the disposition of the Ministry of Secondary Education since 2011. Furthermore, pedagogic activities linked to Cameroonian languages and cultures are officially going on in several colleges and high schools since the Service Note N°234/12/MINESEC/IGE/IP-LAL of 24 September 2012 authorising the teaching of these Cameroonian languages and cultures.

Despite many expectations, the introduction of Cameroonian languages and cultures in school programs gives room to a number of reflections on some practical issues among which includes the daily practice of writing the said languages. In this vein, the sporadic and incoherent orthographic principles usually found in languages, urge us to seek ways for designing long-lasting and coherent orthographic guides. In regulating the writing and reading in the graphemic, lexical, syntactic and text levels of the writing systems, these guides should fetch ideal solutions to everlasting and fundamental questions like the management of dialect variations, but also that of the mastery of tone orthography.

In the context of the formal teaching of national languages in general and the Yemba language in particular, emphasis should be laid on the appropriate linguistic competences of learners and teachers. It should equally be laid on the quality of books and other pedagogic writings. It is obvious that all these requirements of quality do not go along with the uncertainty of tone orthography.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For a better understanding of the problem of the tone orthography, some background literature on the issue is useful. We are principally interested to that of the mastery of tones and tonal graphic representation.

Orthography: Yesterday's Challenge, Today's challenge

The problem of the orthography of tones has always been the preoccupation of some linguists. According to Pike (1957: 37) cited by Voorhoeve (1964: 129) for example, all tones which change at the level of morphology and syntax must be represented graphically.

Tonemes substituted in morphology or syntax or sandhi should be written as pronounced. Failure to observe this principle obscures the functional system of the language, hinders the natives in learning to read, and imposes unnecessary burdens upon the foreign student.

Since then, a number of linguists tackled this question. It is the case of Voorhoeve (1964) and of Longacre (1964), who were respectively interested in tonal changes, and their representation in orthography.

In Cameroon and Africa in general, one of the major problems of which several languages are confronted with remains the representation of tones in orthography. Snider (2001: 326) states in these terms: "Tonal phenomena present some of the greatest challenges to good orthography design in Africa". Before him, Mfonyam (1996: 20) presented writers and teachers' difficulties as below:

One of the challenges that writers and teachers of African languages face today is to determine how best to represent tone in a written system. Furthermore, textbooks writers and teachers are confronted with the specific problem of knowing how best to teach tone to people who are learning to read and write tones in tonal languages.

The problem of tone orthography also appears as a preoccupation of either some "orthographists", writers, teachers and learners. How to graphically represent tones, in a way that they can be fluently taught, mastered and used?

Raising the question of teaching, mastery and fluent usage of tones in the Cameroonian context means that a definite response has been found to a primary question; that of their representation or not at the level of the orthography. According to Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1984: 17), the question to know if tones have to be represented in the writing of Cameroonian languages was resolved during the National meeting on the harmonisation of alphabets on 7th – 9th March 1979 in Yaounde.

In so far as African tone languages are concerned, the question is no longer whether tones should be marked but rather how they could be marked in the same way for as many languages as possible.

According to Bird (2001), tone marking in the writing of Cameroonian languages is justified only by the affirmation and the search of a Cameroonian or African identity, even if one advances a linguistic argument of the distinctive character of tones or of their importance in words and in the grammar. It is worth noting that no former experience was realised to show that tone marking favoured writing, reading and text comprehension. With tone marking, African languages in general and Cameroonian languages in particular had simply found the means to distinguish themselves from European languages from which their writing was just borrowed.

The decision of tone marking in orthography is not a common approach in all African countries. As revealed by Kashoki (1981) cited by Bird (1999a: 7-8), for example, it was held in Zambia that tones would not be graphically marked in orthography:

Tone, like vowel length, was accepted in all the seven languages as an important linguistic marker for signalling differences between two otherwise identical words. However, despite its functional importance, all the seven committees decided not to symbolize tone in the orthography. The basic argument advanced against its symbolization was that experience had shown that diacritics marks, where employed, generally hindered rather than facilitated fluent reading. It was

further argued that ordinarily, even without visual perception, tone would be adequately signalled by context.

The Cameroon situation together with that of Zambia are typical of what African languages face in general as far as the issue of tone orthography is concerned. But henceforth, looking at these contradictory situations, “orthographists” acknowledged that a good representation of tone in orthography should result from a deep research. Thus, the research on tones has helped to access important knowledge on how they function.

Tonal Graphic Symbols in African Languages

In Africa, two main models of tone symbolisation are distinguished: the representation by punctuation signs and the one by accents.

Representing tones by Punctuation Signs

The model of representing tones by punctuation signs framing words suits monosyllabic language systems. It also suits particularly complex languages and those languages in which certain distinctions of vocal marks already use the signs placed on the vowels (notably the central vowels). In Ivory Coast for example,

Les tons ponctuels sont marqués devant le mot et les tons modulés devant et après le mot (le début de la modulation indiqué devant et la fin de la modulation après) (Institut de Linguistique Appliquée 1979: 20).

[**Our translation:** Register tones are marked in front of words and complex tones in front and at the end (the beginning of a modulation is in front of words and the end comes after)]

The following examples drawn from the guéré language in Ivory Coast (Institut de Linguistique Appliquée 1979) illustrate the representation of tones by punctuation signs is the case in:

- a. "ndu « *planter* » (Very high tone)
- b. 'na « *drink* » (High tone)
- c. nε « *fire* » (Mid tone : not marked)
- d. "bhε- « *pepper* » (Falling very high-low tone)
- e. tɔ' « *wisdom* » (Rising mid-high tone).

Representing Tones by Accents

The use of accents to represent tones outfits languages where no other features are marked on segments. This is the case in Cameroonian languages. The examples below are extracts of Nguesso and *al.* (1987)

- a. ńló “*head*” (high-high tone): Ewondo
- b. síngi “*cat*” (high tone-low): Duala
- c. sēn “*friend*” (mid tone): Fe’éfe’é

d. bitámb “*shoes*” (low tone-high): Basaa.

Among the two ways of tone representation, the first is found to be the most widespread, as attested by Kutsch Lojenga (2014).

Independently from the way tones are to be represented, it is generally admitted that all the tones present in a language should not be marked in orthography. In recommending that only one tone be omitted in every language, Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1984) specify that the tone omitted should be the most frequent one. In this vein, when a language has four tonal levels, only three are represented; when it has three, two are represented, and when it has two, only one is represented.

According to Mfonyam (1989, 1990, 1996), the best orthography is that which enables the speakers to read and write their language well. To do so, any tone marking system must be systematic. “If it is decided that only grammatical tones should be marked, for example, then all grammatical tones should be marked consistently” Mfonyam (1990: 23). Mfonyam in effect distinguishes four options: the non-representation of tone (“no representation”), the representation of all surface tones (“full representation”), the minimal representation of tones (“minimal representation”) and optimal representation (“optimal representation”).

Kutsch Lojenga (1993: 17) remarks that the teaching of tone reading is much easier when tones are marked without discrimination: “The teaching of tone reading is easiest when tone is written everywhere in the language, rather than at certain places only to disambiguate lexical and grammatical ambiguity”.

Bird (199b) demonstrates that tone marking considerably reduces the speed of reading and writing, without yet resolving the ambiguity of words. He also reveals that the orthography of tone difficulties in Yemba are in majority due to the inadequacy between the orthographic system used and the proper tonal system of the language. Whereas the Yemba tonal system is a deep type (“deep tonal system”); i.e where musical pitch varies according to the context, its orthographic system is a surface one (“shallow tonal system”); i.e where tone is stable and realised as such, no matter the context.

Thus, we can notice that considerable progress has been made concerning characteristics of tones in African languages in general and in Cameroonian languages in particular. The main challenge today is the mastery of tone representation at the orthographic level, as to what specifically concerns the Yemba language.

Tone Orthography Models in Yemba

According to the deployed tonal system, the history of writing Yemba reveals four models of tone orthography. We will identify them by the Tone Orthography Generation 1 (TOG1), Tone Orthography Generation 2 (TOG2), Tone Orthography Generation 3 (TOG3) and Tone Orthography Generation 4 (TOG4).

TOG1

The TOG1 is the foundational model of tone orthography in Yemba. It was put in place by His Majesty Chief Djoumessi Mathias of Foreke-Dschang, the pioneer who designed the first yemba alphabet in 1928 (Momo 1990). The model was not described. In the *Syllabaire Bamiléké* (Bamileke Primary), Djoumessi (1958) does not talk about tones. We notice that he

uses diacritic marks ´, è, î and â for representing musical pitches high, low, high-low and how-high respectively on vowels. This is what appears in the extract below from (Djoumessi 1958: 26):

Afü' jüe takamelògò linee njëe, nzi á limü' athu ndogo
 ngyéla atswĥë püemenon ane tigu' chíi pop wee ane
 mbhü. M'ali'a, taka ga njëe ninon mmü'e athu, ndogo
 ngyéla áa pup : awéè ! awéè ! awéè ! A ngon ane emo'
 etsyü' ma gû jhüü ala' ndegli melhüe.

From this extract, we can note that TOG1 rests on marking of tones, i.e high tone, low tone, high-low and low-high, even if this marking is not systematic. In the word **ninon** "crowd" (third line of the extract) for example, vowels **i** and **o** are all low vowels. Thus, instead of the **ninon** orthography, one should have had **nìnòn**.

TOG2

This model appears in *Premier vocabulaire franco-bamiléké* (First French-Bamileke Vocabulary) of Momo Gregoire (1950). The author affirms :

Il y a trois tons : le ton bas (accent grave), le ton moyen (sans accent), et le ton haut (accent aigu) (Momo 1950:9).

[**Our translation:** There are three tones: the low tone (grave accent), the mid tone (without accent), and the high tone (acute accent)]

However, we realise that in his writing, tones are marked. It is the case in the extract below where we can find high and low tones, but also mid tone marked (Momo 1950:37).

A lige'è apà ngangë' wuo
 Ngüee me nfóogó ntsi mboon wuo.
 Nnu litsóogë mbònmbòn minfo wuo lē tòn,
 A gwhü à esi nchü sēt sēt, nkwhû.
 Púp efò lògò nkábá athú tipòn sēe a ambhi.
 Nin chēe anhumòn a swe'li athú hi,
 Nchē asēe tipòn, a swe'li àa athu hi;
 Nin mà'à tó ntsañantsaña a piop.
 (MOMO GREGUAR T. N.)

We can thus observe that in Momo (1950), explicitly appears a certain conscience of the existence of tones in Yemba, but also of the need for representing them in the orthography. Unfortunately, as with the case of the TOG1, the marking of these tones is not constant.

TOG3

The model TOG3 was developed by Tadadjeu and Tegomo-Nguetse in *lenāŋ* (1972). It strongly profits from the results of the analyses carried out on Yémba by the first author, particularly in the field of phonetics. Tadadjeu and Tegomo-Nguetse (1972), distinguish 5 fundamental tones in Yémba, namely:

- Three simple: high (ˊ), mid (ˉ) and low (ˋ) ;
- Two modulated: high-low tone (ˆ) and low-high tone (ˇ).

They indicate that in writing, the low tone will be omitted. Thus any vowel without a tone mark will be read with the low tonal level.

The extract hereafter TOG3 is illustrative of TOG3 (Tadadjeu and Tegomo-Nguetse 1972:44).

tepoŋ, e yá wóp mégo efartsem. Nafō ɛ ngwó ɔ̄ nka mégo. Á
 mboŋ nge mé túŋ esī nnék, ʒaɔ ntí mbap mét hú.
 Mbap kúna á sī ngwó mboŋ ta. Tá? nké ndzété nge mé lá
 yí te ɛ phíé mboŋmboŋ. Méla?mi mbap kúna zi e ká mbhíé e
 ɛ ngyá pue emɔ? ntí tepoŋ mía ʒō. Tá? wómɔ? mé kúé lēvem
 niŋ ; yí lé piŋ ntúŋ tae tá.

We can observe here that, the presence of the tone in the text is denser, compared to the texts of the TOG1 and TOG2. This density is due to the fact that tones are marked systematically on vowels, but also on some nasal consonants as it is the case with **n̄**- in **nnék** (second line). Such nasal consonants are called *syllabic nasals* because like vowels, they serve as syllable nucleus and thus, need to carry tones. Generally, they are found in prefix position. In the first two lines of the extract above, it is the case of **n-** (low tone) with the word **ngwó**, of **m-** (low tone) with **mboŋ**, of **n-** (low tone) with **ngɛ** and of **n̄-** (your top) with **nnék**.

TOG4

The TOG4 model is in force since the eighties. It is based on the marking of the high tone and

- A) Mvēŋ é sī éshhúé.
- B) Emō' epuo é sī ntōō m̄vēŋ.
- A) Awó á tsó' íchu ŋgyá á ?
- B) Tsoɔ ŋiŋ, yí mé ŋwēt mé tsó' ínēt.
- A) Ewɔ ŋkhā mé sáá ŋgwēŋ wuo ɔ ?
- B) ŋgán, yí mé ŋwēt mé saa.
- A) ŋgik ega á sī ŋgĩmté ínā'.
- B) Nna' á sī efū'ó.

the mid tone; the low tone not being marked. It is understood that the double vocalic principle prescribed in the General Alphabet of Cameroon Languages (Tadadjeu et al. 1979), the representation of the modulated tone becomes worthless. The dialogue extract of (Akenmo 2009:41) which follows illustrates the implementation of the TOG4.

In this extract, as in that which precedes, we can see a systematic marking of the high tone and low tone. It goes without saying that vowels and the syllabic nasals which do not carry a tone are read with the low level melody height.

From the different tone orthography models thus presented, the TOG4 is the one which has received great accreditations. It has gained grounds about thirty years and still profits from the results from linguistic studies carried out in Universities as well as in language institutions like the Summer Institute of Linguistics. TOG4 use is reflected in several works of which *Yémba*,

mpe tí ála'a zímpe (Handbook for reading and writing Yemba) (Harro et al. 1990), *Letóh nítí I* (Read and write) (Tadadjeu et al. 1992) *Petit dictionnaire yémba-français (Yemba-French dictionary)* (Bird and Tadadjeu 1997), *Menu Mán Plába* (mishaps of Mán Plába) (Kouesso 2000) *ηke mbōη ndém áne Yeéso Krísto pá' Lúkási a le tí épūp* (Gospel of Luc) (ABC 2000) and *Dialogue en yémba* (Dialogues in Yemba) (Akenmo 2009).

It is however advisable to announce the divergences that appear as the answers to the question of the reduction of the tone to be marked, or not to be marked, in order to guarantee fluency in reading (Bird 1999b). With Harro et al. (1990), Kouesso (2000) and Akenmo (2009) for example, we observe a tendency to mark all the high and mid tones. Bird and Tadadjeu (1997:7) introduced a certain number of restrictions and stipulated that:

Le ton de base des racines des mots lexicaux en dehors des verbes ne change [...] pas. En d'autres termes, les tons des mots indiqués dans le dictionnaire restent, autant que possible, inchangés dans les textes.

Les préfixes ne portent les marques de tons (haut et moyen) que si et seulement si ces derniers sont grammaticaux.

[**Our translation:** The basic tone of the roots of the lexical words apart from the verbs do not change. In other words, the tone of the words indicated in the dictionary remains, as much as possible, unchanged in the texts.

The prefixes carry the tone marks (high and mid) only if the latter are grammatical]

With these new provisions, Kouesso Jean Romain and Haynes Nancy worked out new principles for experimenting the Yemba orthography, contained in *Guide de l'orthographe des formes verbales en yémba* (Guide for the orthography of the verbal forms in Yemba (2015). A significant attention was granted to tone orthography. On the basis of these new orthographical principles, Gnintedem Jean Claude, in May 2016, proposed a rewriting of the text "Te zək anu te ndēkné mmók (1)" extracted from *Menu Mán Plaba* (Kouesso 2000:23-25). Hereafter we present the original and the reviewed versions, with main focus on tones. The tone to be rewritten (original version), just as their new forms are underlined and boldfaced.

Original version of the topic (Kouesso 2000:23-25)

TE ZƆK A NU TE NDĒKNĒ MMÓK (1)

Mé go ηgó á MƆ ηgōη éfēt ewōηkhū, tá', eyi lefet mó á mba Mán Plába a le tsīā. Lewō yi mé go nnáná á ngyā mó ηgap pyā lā, mé nan á mba Mán Plába ηgap taa ndeη ndeη. Dkō'ó acwet Ewōηzwí é kuo te ngyā á luo/loo, nnáná te njhū letéé mmók, nzōpƆ, mbimté, emō' é kuo esé'é/éséke mesoó póp, emō' é ti nnōηƆ nthúné mennet móp. Á ke ηgwó le akō lé, mé pfé āā etsō, nu āā melu', ηge "akō á akō". Njhū á piη ndá, o ó le zhé á léghu le mé ndá' alā' éfū'ē. Ewōηzwí é zé ηkó, mbaηa é kó, ewōηkhū é kó. Mba á mū'nē.

Mé á mba Mán Plába pá'ā, mé té nzétté ηge te membá' a á si ndōkƆ akō nzéké/mmíné epuo lé é, mé té ηkwāηté ηge te afuone á kūη ηkaη apé pé'e, á té á mba Mán Plába guo ke akō lé é. Nyη yīi a á le ntēté te', a gē shu', ηgwē á mén ntsaη ηkeηηe alā', eyi emō' á we á mén nzwiη atá mekaba; ηgwó á nyηη mbaηaá we á mén tepōη líta melu' alā'. Dgaη melu' alā' a wé púp, o zhé nge a ā lā' gé ékō' é, nūη melu' aleké mbōō mbótle lekua... Mō'ó Tela pó Tenyi é juo púp, ntōη á Mán Plába, nzétté á yí ηghū le, akūη mbhi athú ηkāp á mba yí keé lé. Á ge pó lué áne

akō lé; té pō á gē, te efhó pá'ngē eswhī **á** mba yí, pō **jū**ó ñgē mé éwú, ñdōkō mevēt pō melu' ñnúú ntshi, á piñe **mbúú** ñtōñ ñkāp té kwanṭe á lége, anu á gō lu ezó ñtó á ghū le akō lé. Ká'ā/ Ká' á pā'a, Mán Plába a á mba ñzéké alā' pá'ā, mbo a kūñ ñzá' akafē á ñkā' éswīñ te **a** pu mmī, ñtókṭé éfūúte meñkāp te efū ó oó, ñgē anu mó yī yí le te zhé ñgē yí gō ela' ñgwē mé pōñgō **a** yí. Mo'ó Tela pō Tenyi pwo **e ju**' té ndé á á mbū yí ñghū le: « O ñgō ñzókō **á** nu, o zhé ñgē nzém á piñ séñ o **ú** zók mmók ».

In this original version of the text, we have 592 tonal occurrences with 312 tones marked containing 241 high tones and 71 mid tones, and 280 tones unmarked i.e low tones.

In the following new version of the text written by Gnintedem Jean Claude, certain tones have been modified pursuing the new orthographic rules.

Text rewritten by Gnintedem (May 2016):

TE ZÓK Á NU TE NDĒKNE MMÓK (1)

Mé gō ñgō á Mú ñgōñ éfētē ewōñkhā, tá', eyi lefet mó á mba Mán Plába a le tsā. Lewō yū mé gō nnāñá á ñgyā mó ñgap pīā lā, mé nāñ á mba Mán Plába ñgap taa ndeñ ndeñ. Dkō'ó atswet, wōñzwí é kúú te ñgyā á lúú, ñnāñá te ñjhúé leteé mmók, ñzōpō, mbímtē, emō' é kúú esé'ē/éséke mesoó póp, emō' é ti nnōññá ñthúñē mennēt móp. Á ke ñgwó le akō lé, mé pfēt āā etsō, ñnú āā melu', ñgē “akō á akō”. Njhū á piñ ndá, o ó le zhé á leghū le, mé ndá' alā' éfū' ē. Wōñzwí é zé ñkó, mbaña é kó, ewōñkhā é kó. Mba á mū'ne.

Mé á mba Mán Plába pá'ā, mé té ñzétte ñgē, te membá' a á si ñdōkō akō ñzékē/ñmínē epuo lé é, mé té ñkwāñtē ñgē, te afuone á kūñ ñkañ apé pé'e, á té á mba Mán Plába gūō ke akō lé é. Dññ yī a á le ntētte te', **á** gē eshu'e, ñgwē á mén ntsañ ñkeññe alā', eyi emō' á we á mén nzwiñ atá mekaba; ñgwó á ñññ mbaña, á we á mén tepōñ líta melu' alā'. Dgañ melu' alā' a weē épúp, o zhé ñgē a **á** lā' gē ekó'e, éñú melu' aleké mboō mbótle lekua... Mo'ó Tela pō Tenyi é júo epúp, ñtōñ á Mán Plába, ñzétte á yí ñghū le, **a** kūñ mbhi athú ñkāp á mba yí keé lé. Á gē pō lúé áne akō lé; té pō á gē, te efhó pá' nge eswhī **a** á mba yí, pō **jū**ó ñgē mé éwú, ñdōkō mevēt pō melu' ñnúú ntshi, á piñe **mbúú** ñtōñ ñkāp té kwanṭe á lége, anu á gō **el**u ezó ñtó, á ghū le akō lé. Ká'ā/ Ká' á pā'a, Mán Plába a á mba ñzéké alā' pá'ā, mbo a kūñ ñzá' akafē á ñkā' éswīñ te **a** pu mmī, ñtókṭé éfūúte meñkāp, te efū ó oó, ñgē anu mó yī, yí le te zhé ñgē yí gō ela' ñgwīē, mé pōñgō **a** yí. Mo'ó Tela pō Tenyi pwo **e ju**' té ndé á mbū yí ñghū le: « O ñgō ñzókō **á** nu, o zhé ñgē nzém á piñ eséñ, o zók mmók ».

Tonal changes in the new version of the text are as in the table below where H = high tone, M = mid tone, B = low tone, Ø = no tone:

Table 1. Tonal Changes

| Tones | Total | Non modified | Modified | | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | | | Total | to H | to M | to B | to Ø |
| H | 241 | 218 | 23 | / | 1 | 22 | 1 |
| M | 71 | 56 | 15 | 4 | / | 9 | 2 |
| B | 280 | 245 | 35 | 27 | 2 | / | 6 |
| Total | 592 | 318 | 73 | 31 | 3 | 31 | 9 |

It is clear from the table that a total of 73 tones out of 592 tones of the original text have been modified, for 12, 33% of changes. 23 high tones out of the 241 (9, 54%), 15 mid tones out of

the 71 (21, 12%), and 35 low tones out of the 280 (12, 5%) undergone changes. Changes represented by Ø are cases where tones disappeared with the disappearance of tone bearing units during the whole process of rewriting the text.

The highest percentage of changes undergone by mid tones, i.e 21, 12%, as well as their lower representation in outcomes of changes, i.e 4, 10%), reflect the trend to mark lexical tones instead of modified tones. This trend is confirmed with massive transformation of either high tones or low tones (95, 65%), or low tones to high tones (77, 14%).

The two texts presented enable us to see the shape of a text written following the new orthographic principles. They also give way to interested persons to compare or to assess marking tone systems. The feedback of assessments may help in final decisions on tone orthography in Yémba.

As far as TOG4 is concerned, it appears that authors agree that only high and mid tones should be marked orthographically. Yet, it remains to clearly identify positions where some tones may not be marked to gain fluency in reading or in writing.

In the table below (11) are the four Yemba tone orthography models:

Table 2. Yemba Tone Orthography Models

| Constitutive elements | Tone orthography models | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--|
| | TOG1 | TOG2 | TOG3 | TOG4 |
| Tones | H (^ˆ) | H (^ˆ) | H (^ˆ) | H (^ˆ) |
| | M ([˘]) | M ([˘]) | M ([˘]) | M ([˘]) |
| | B ([˘]) | B ([˘]) | | |
| | HB (^ˆ) | | HB (^ˆ) | |
| | BH ([˘]) | | BH ([˘]) | |
| Main authors | Djoumessi Mathias | Momo Grégoire | Tadadjeu et Tegomo-Nguetse | - Haynes Nancy - Bird Steven - Kouesso Jean Romain |
| Reference periods | 1928 | 1950 | 1972 | Since 1983 |

We can see from the table that the writing of tones in Yemba is dynamic and gears towards the reduction of graphic marks. The movement is based on assets of research on tone languages in general, and on the Yemba language in particular. From the marking of 5 tone levels in 1928, we come out today with the marking of only 2, i.e the high and mid tones. But it should be stressed that not marking a tone does not imply the obliteration of the orthographic constraints. Indeed, the omission of a graphic symbol necessarily calls for the formulation of a specific rule of reading which indicates how to read where the omission took place. For instance, with the omission of the low tone graphic mark in Yemba, a rule indicated that when a vowel or syllabic nasal does not carry a tone, it is read with the low level melody (Tadadjeu and Tegomo-Nguetse 1972).

Orthography Convergences

At this stage of the evolution of the Yemba tone orthography, a number of achievements have been attained among actors of the development of the Yemba orthography. But before we look at these convergences, let us examine testimonies of two proven part-takers in writing and teaching the Yemba language. They are Tsomejio Albert Auguste and Haynes Nancy.

For Tsomejio Albert Auguste,

La plus grande difficulté de l'orthographe du yémba est l'éternel problème des tons : leur reconnaissance et leur marquage. C'est un véritable casse-tête chinois pour tout le monde : élèves, enseignants ou écrivains. Cette difficulté durera tant que la conscience du phénomène des tons restera de faible intensité. Il convient de réfléchir davantage sur des méthodes efficaces d'enseignement des tons. Mais quand on réglerait l'équation du marquage et la lecture des tons, l'orthographe du yémba deviendrait un jeu.

[**Our translation:** The greatest difficulty with the Yemba orthography is the undying problem of tones, mainly their recognition and their marking. It is a real challenge for everyone: pupils, teachers or writers. This difficulty will continue as much as the conscience of the phenomenon of the tone will remain of low intensity. It is advisable to think more on effective methods of teaching of the tone. But when the equation of marking and the reading of the tone will be regulated, the orthography of Yemba will become easier].

From its long experiment in the writing and the teaching of Yemba, Tsomejio identifies difficulties related to the mastery of tones as the most crucial problem of the Yemba orthography. He notices especially that the solution with this problem depends on the degree of awareness about the tonal phenomenon and also on the relevance of teaching methods.

Haynes Nancy says:

Pendant plusieurs années, nous avons fait face à une gamme de défis pour trouver une bonne orthographe efficace pour les tons en yémba. Une exigence pour la pédagogie serait qu'elle ne soit pas trop lourde à apprendre aux gens. Une exigence pour la pratique serait que ses détails ne soient pas superflus, et qu'ils amènent les gens à se décourager. Pendant ces années, nous avons profité des recherches des autres qui nous signalent combien sont utiles les principes tels que l'importance de l'image constante des mots, la redondance appropriée au contexte, et une orthographe optimale qui reflète la réalité psychologique des locuteurs. Il nous a fallu voir comment se rendre compte des perceptions des locuteurs, avec leur reconnaissance des formes lexicales, afin d'avoir une représentation lexicale.

En plus, il y a la question à propos du degré d'abstraction qui peut être supporté par la communauté. La réponse à cette question sera différente selon les attentes du locuteur et selon le niveau du lecteur (débutant ou expérimenté). Nous cherchons un degré moyen d'abstraction qui servira bien les deux pour une bonne lecture et une bonne compréhension de la langue.

[**Our translation:** For several years, we faced a range of challenges to find an adequate orthography for tones in Yemba. A requirement for pedagogy would be that it is not too difficult to teach to people. A requirement for the practice would be that its details are not superfluous, and that they lead people to be discouraged. During these years, we

benefitted from research of the others which tell us how useful are principles such as the importance of the constant image of the words, the redundancy appropriate to the context, and an optimal orthography which reflects the psychological reality of the speakers. We should have seen how to realize perceptions of the speakers with their pattern of lexical recognition, in order to have a lexical representation.

Moreover, there is the question concerning the degree of abstraction which can be supported by the community. The answer to this question will be different according to the speaker's expectation and the reader's level (novice or tested). We find an average degree of abstraction which will serve well both for a good reading and a good comprehension of the language].

In her 33 years' assessment of research on the Yemba orthography, the author mainly stresses on the fundamental requirements related to the development of an efficient orthography of tone. Its experiment indeed deserves to be capitalized.

The two testimonies from Tsomejio and Haynes mark out the field of convergences among actors of research and practice of the tone orthography in Yemba. We identified five convergences referring mostly to the awareness of tonal phenomenon, the representation of tones and routes to handle the tone issue.

Awareness of tonal phenomenon

Convergence 1: The tone orthography is a major challenge to raise in research of an efficient orthography of the Yemba language.

Representation of tones

Convergence 2: The tones are fundamental units of the Yemba language. Consequently, they must be represented in the orthography.

Convergence 3: Only the high tone and the mid tone are marked on tone bearer units, i.e vowels or syllabic nasals, as follow: ´ = high tone, ¯ = mid tone.

These first three convergences do not practically raise any antagonism and can be considered as points which achieve unanimity.

Convergence 4: The basic tonal forms of the words should be modified in writing only to mark a grammatical form or construction. In other words, phonetic changes of the tone are not written.

For this convergence 4, a significant difficulty remains to be resolved. How to exhaustively distinguish the tonal changes bound to grammar from purely phonetic ones?

Routes to handle tone orthography issue

Convergence 5: An efficient Yemba tone orthography must be grounded on three key routes; namely the scientific route, the teaching route and the documentation route.

- The scientific route: It rests on the crossing of several scientific approaches of which more insights are the linguistic, psycholinguistic and socio-linguistic approaches.

- The teaching route: It goes with the setting of relevant teaching methods, the training of writers and teachers, as well as the running of experimental classes and the follow-up and evaluations.

- The documentation route: It is of the production and the dissemination of reference teaching resources of orthography among which dictionaries, orthography and grammar books.

Lessons to be Drawn

The history of the tone orthography in Yemba gives way to three major lessons:

First lesson: With regard to advanced research and orthographical practices, it is necessary to thoroughly standardize tone orthography in Yemba by designing rules for writing and reading. These rules must be disseminated within the users by means of orthography and grammar books as well as training seminars of trainers. First of all, the responsibility falls on the academic and regulating authority of the language which is the Yémba Language Committee. The designed standards will certainly not be ideal, but they will have the merit to serve as a lawful framework for harmonising orthographic practices.

Second lesson: A study needs to be undertaken for highlighting the various tonal changes which are due to grammatical concords. Such changes will be automatically marked as such in the orthography. The study considered can be carried out at the university level, for example within the framework of Master's research. It can also be carried out within the nonacademic structures of research.

Third lesson: Besides the question of writing tones, pedagogic issues should also be a matter of concern. Indeed, the question of tone pedagogy is closely related to their orthography. As good tone orthography facilitates the teaching/training of tones, as relevant strategies and teaching methods constitute an asset to master tonal phenomenon. The connection of tone orthography and tone pedagogy necessarily calls for experimental studies from either academic or non-academic fields.

People and institutions involved in the development of Yemba and other similar languages should take advantage of these three lessons which directly fall on current requirements of the integration of the national languages in formal education in particular, and in written communication in general.

CONCLUSION

A diachronic approach of tone orthography in Yemba is of actual interest. It reveals that, without a thorough knowledge of tone, the pioneers of Yemba writing were already conscious of the need for representing tones in orthography. Due to deep linguistic research, considerable achievements have been recorded in this vein. Three tone orthography models have been revealed in Yemba, i.e TOG1, TOG2, TOG3 and TOG4. The latter model appears to be the one that really profited from assets of research in linguistics and teaching experiments. For the continuation of the search for ways and means leading to the establishment of a standard tone orthography in Yemba, it was significant not only to make a point of achievements but also to draw some useful lessons.

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