

PRONUNCIATION AND ORTHOGRAPHY

The Dagbani orthography employed in the text has been standardized to the system employed by the translators of the Assemblies of God New Testament Revision Committee. The Introduction provides a description and rationale for that decision.

The Dagbani orthography in the text employs five phonetic characters:

ɣ pronounced as a guttural “g,” a velar fricative like the ending sound of “Bach”

In words ending with -ɣu, such as “Ashayɣu” or “Bimbiɣu,” the stress is normally on the end of the word; for English-speakers not used to the guttural “g,” the sound resembles a final “l” as in “awl.”

ŋ, ɲ pronounced as “ng” in “tongue” or “singer” (NOT as in “finger”)

At the beginning of words and when followed by a vowel, the sound is closer to “nw”; for English-speakers, for example, an approximate pronunciation “ŋun’ da’ nyuli” would be “Nwun-da-nyuli.”

ʒ, ʒ pronounced as soft “zh” as in “measure” or as a French “j”

ɛ pronounced as “eh”, a short “e” as in “any”

ɔ pronounced as “o” in “ought”, a short “o”

Because the Dagbani language has been transliterated phonetically, readers unfamiliar with the pronunciation of African languages can follow several rules of thumb:

1. Pronounce all vowels and consonants. The general rule is that where possible, medial syllables end with the vowel sounds, as in French.

Thus “Dagbamba” is pronounced: “Da - gba - mba.”

2. Vowels:

“a” is short, as in “bar”

“e” is like a long “a”, as in “weigh”

“i” is like a long “e”, as in “bee”

“o” is long, as in “comb”

“u” is pronounced as in “boot”

The differences among Dagbani vowels, particularly shortened ones, are often difficult to distinguish in practice, and the ambiguities are often reflected in different orthographic sources.

3. Doubled vowels are pronounced the same as single vowels, but the sound is extended.

With specific reference to Dagbani orthography in the text:

1. Diagraphs like “gb,” “kp,” “ɲm,” “mp,” or “mb” are implosive.
2. In Dagbani, after “r” or “l,” a word is pronounced as if an elided short “i” precedes any succeeding consonant. Thus a word like “yelga” is pronounced with a slight roll on the “l,” almost as “yeliga.”

At the end of words, an apostrophe indicates an elided vowel. For example, “Sambani luɲa” becomes “Samban’ luɲa.”

With particular regard to the names of places, the text relies on the current Ghanaian spelling, although historical locations such as “Yɔɣu” are consistent with Dagbani. Of particular significance, “Dagbon” is spelled without phonetic characters; it should be pronounced “Dagbɔŋ.”

Dagbani place-names are often quite inconsistent with spellings on maps and other sources. Some current spellings suffer from anachronistic orthography, and other spellings are flawed simply because of misperceptions of place-names. The issues are compounded by the potential distortion of names and titles that incorporate place-names. It is the hope of the research team that in the future, the names of places will be adjusted to reflect Dagbani more accurately. For reference, *Index 1* gives both Dagbani and current spellings of places.