

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 “Bimbiɛɣu,” 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”

General guidelines:

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

1. Syllables and stress:

Pronounce all vowels and consonants evenly. 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.

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

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

3. Consonants:

With regard to doubled consonants in the text:

Diagrams like “gb,” “kp,” “ŋm,” “mp,” or “mb” are implosive.

In Dagbani, some other doubled consonants are pronounced as if an elided (epenthetic) neutral vowel is inserted between the first consonant and any succeeding consonant. For example, frequently after “r,” “l,” “b,” “y,” the epenthetic vowel precedes any succeeding consonant. Thus the consonant cluster is pronounced with a slight medial roll, as in “athlete” or “jewelry.” In spoken Dagbani, a word like “Garba” is pronounced with a slight roll on the “r,” almost as “Garaba”; “yelga,” is pronounced with a slight roll on the “l,” almost as “yeliga,” Other examples are words like “kurli,” “sabli,” “kpalgu,” or “dɔyri.”

Some orthographic systems, as noted above, insert an epenthetic “i,” although in such representations the “i” is short and is not emphasized in pronunciation.

4. Place-names:

With particular regard to the names of places, Dagbani place-names are often inconsistent with spellings on maps and other sources using the English alphabet, spellings which themselves vary based on interpretations of Dagbani pronunciation. The text generally relies on the current Ghanaian spelling, although historical locations such as “Yɔɣu” and “Yiwɔɣu” are consistent with Dagbani.

Of particular significance, “Dagbon” is spelled without phonetic characters; it should be pronounced “Dagbɔŋ.”

5. Compound words and names:

Other compromises for English readers involve some compound words. Although signifiers like “kpɛma” (“the elder”) should be attached to a name (as in “bakpɛma” for “senior father”), to avoid confusion we have divided several chiefs’ and elders’ names into two words. Thus “Naa Mahamankpɛma” is represented as “Naa Mahaman Kpɛma”; “Naa Mahamambila” is represented as “Naa Mahamam Bila”; “Subekpɛma” is represented as “Subee Kpɛma”; and so on. More frequently, the compounded form is maintained. Examples are “Nanton-Naa Alaasambila” and “Naa Zombila” and “Naa Abilabila.” Similar to the treatment of place names, and to avoid confusion, we have also occasionally used differing but conventional spellings for what are basically the same names.

Also for clarity are the distinctions among the three uses of Naa Abilaaɪ, who are also distinguished as Naa Abilaaɪ (Naybieɣu), Naa Abudu (Sanmar’ Gɔŋ), and Naa Abilabila.

6. Plurals and other conventions:

Plural conventions are followed in most Dagbani words and expressions; however, we have made some compromises for English readers with regard to English plural forms for several frequently used words, for example: “tindanas” instead of “tindaannima” or “tindamba”; “guŋgɔŋs” instead of “guŋgɔŋa.”

In other cases, we have substituted widely-used West African forms such as “maalam” and “maalams” for the Dagbani “afa” and “afannima.”