

ORTHOGRAPHICAL ISSUES IN ALOR LANGUAGES

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1 Introductions

- Who is doing what, where in Alor? Each person to give brief overview of their activities, goals and plans
 - Frantisek Kratochvil, Pak John Haan, Ibu June Jacob, Pak Neil, other SIL people, other interested parties present (Pak Dan, Pak Amos, Pak Marlon, Florens Titing)
- What we are doing.
 - Marian
 - Overview of AAPP project
 - Work on Teiwa
 - Work on Bahasa Alor
 - Louise
 - Survey outcomes
 - Work on Klou
 - ELDP, archival of data and production of VCDs, possible production of story books

1 Why Develop Orthographies?

- Who will be using the orthographies – either reading or writing in a local language?
- *The community:*
 - formal contexts: literacy primers for school, the bible
 - Is there any possibility of local language materials being used in primary schools, e.g. in teaching reading and writing to kelas 1 students?
 - Is there any possibility of having students in primary and/or secondary schools write letters/texts/traditional stories/jokes in their mother tongue as part of their linguistic/cultural education?
 - informal contexts: letter-writing, list-writing, etc.
 - Does the community have a tradition of informal literacy? If not there is the moral/ethical question of whether and why one should be introduced, with outsiders consciously ‘changing’ a part of their culture.
- *Academics* – linguists, us
- *A general audience*
- *A combination of the above*

1.1 Local Communities

- Do they have an existing, widely accepted orthography?
 - If so, should we adopt their orthography or try to change it and why?
 - If not, what is the need to create one?
- The orthography must be widely accepted.
 - The development of an orthography needs community input
 - If the community is going to use the orthography they need to feel ownership of it.

- The orthography needs to be practical, and account for local community needs.
- The orthography needs the support of influential people in the community (eg. clan leaders, religious leaders, village head)

1.2 Academics

Ideally, an orthography should be produced that is appropriate for local communities, the academic community as well as a more general audience. However, there may be choices made by local communities in how to represent their languages orthographically that will be inappropriate or insufficient for academic writing. In such cases we may use a slightly different orthography to that used by the community.

For example, if a community decides to underdifferentiate between two phonemes, for academic writing we may choose to differentiate them.

2 Orthographic Symbols

2.1 General Rules for Choice of Symbol

- There needs to be phonemic/morphophonemic reasoning for each orthographical choice.
- An orthography designed for the speech community does not necessarily need to show all phonemic differences.
 - Eg. Indonesian underdifferentiates between [↔] and [E], representing both with <e>; and between [ʔ] and [k], representing both with <k>.
 - If an item has a low functional load underdifferentiation is unlikely to cause problems, if it has a high functional load then it should probably be specified.
- The orthographies should aim to have one symbol for one sound.
 - for readability, and reproduction

- Do not use more writing symbols than strictly necessary; i.e. “underdifferentiation” is preferred over “overdifferentiation”.
- The orthographies should avoid diacritics or non-letter symbols
 - for ease of reproduction (writing, typing, printing)
 - for ease of reading and wider acceptance by native speakers
- Orthographies should reserve complicated symbols and representations for the most marked item, and/or the least frequent item in a pair/set.
- Should spelling be phonemic or morphemic? Where should the boundary be drawn?
 - The English plural has three phonological realisations [s] as in [kats]; [z] as in [dogz]; and [↔z] as in [hæʊz↔z], but only one orthographical realisation: <s> - *cats*, *dogs* and *houses*.
 - In contrast, the Indonesian *meN-* prefix is differentiated for all of its phonological realisations: *melayani*, *membaca*, *menulis*, *menyeberang*, *menghormati*.

2.2 Phonemic Segments in Alor Languages

- Where sounds correspond to those in Malay/Indonesian, except for cases of underdifferentiation (eg. glottal stops, schwas), the Malay/Indonesian should be used, because this is what literate Alorese are used to, and the conventions are mainly phonemic.
 - /p/ = <p>; /b/ = ; /t/ = <t>; /d/ = <d>; /k/ = <k>; /g/ = <g>
 - /m/ = <m>; /n/ = <n>; /ɲ/ = <ny> /N/ = <ng>
 - /c/ = <c>; /tʃ/ = <j>
 - /l/ = <l>; /r/ = <r>
 - /s/ = <s>; /h/ = <h>
 - /w/ = <w>; /j/ = <y>

- Schwas
 - If schwas are phonemic, do they need to be represented?
 - Ideally yes, to avoid ambiguity
 - What is the functional load of the schwa? How frequently is it used? Where is it found within words? If it is phonemic, but very infrequent with a low functional load, it may not be necessary to distinguish it orthographically.
 - E.g. in Indonesian orthography, schwa is not distinguished: lemah vs. lelang, helai vs. heran. In many cases schwa is a predictable (unstressed) allophone of /e/ in Indonesian; the cases where it contrasts phonemically with /e/ can be learned
 - If schwas are purely phonetic, do they need to be written at all?
 - Eg. in Klon, schwas are inserted between consonant clusters automatically: do not *need* to be written
 - From a linguistic viewpoint, “underdifferentiation” is the best choice in such cases: do not use more symbols than strictly necessary. Alternatively, one could use a symbol that is in use for something else (for example, *e* may be used to mark both /e/ as well as schwa). The advantage is that the vowels that native speakers feel “are there”, are also present in writing.
 - The most marked sound should be given the more complicated representation (e.g. have a diacritic or be represented by two vowels)
 - Possible ways of representing the contrast between schwa and /e/:
 - schwa = <e>, /e/ = <é>
 - schwa = <eu> or <ei>, /e/ = <e>
- Long vowels

- “Avoid diacritics or non-letter symbols”, i.e. “letters are better than diacritics”: represent long vowels as double vowels. For example, /a/ = <a>, /a:/ = <aa>.
- If vowel length is not always contrastive in all its occurrences, does it need to be written?
 - E.g. the language has a few minimal pairs with short-long vowel contrast: e.g. *naabi* vs. *nabi*, *piina* vs. *pina*, but in general, vowels are not clearly marked for length. That is, there is no pair *baani* vs. **bani*, and /bani/ may be pronounced as [bani] or [ba:ni], without a distinction in meaning.
 - In such cases, the functional load of the contrast should be considered: which sound is least marked, and used more frequently: the long or the short vowel? This is the one that should be written.
 - In addition, if it also used frequently, the more marked sound could be written with the more marked symbols. Note that “underdifferentiation over overdifferentiation” applies in case it is used infrequently.
- Vowel sequences
 - Spelling of glides in different syllable positions (Eg. Klon ‘canoe’: <ey> or <ei>?)
 - Indonesian spelling conventions: glide precedes vowel, but vowel follows vowel:
 - glide-V: *yang* (*iang), *yuli* (*iuli), *ya* (*ia), *wau* (*uau)
 - V-V: *tai* (*tay), *doi/dui* (*doy/duy), *bau* (*baw)
 - V-glide-V: *mengoyak* (*mengoiak), *layang* (*laiang)
 - How are vowel sequences treated across morpheme boundaries?
- Glottal stops
 - Considerations for the choice of symbol:
 - Avoid diacritics or non-letter symbols

- Are there other phonemes in the back part of the vocal tract? How are they to be represented orthographically?
- The functional load of the glottal stop – how frequently it is used, where it is found within words
- Do people’s names or place names or significant cultural items begin with a glottal stop?
- Choice of symbol:
 - If the glottal stop is phonemic and has a high functional load, it must be represented. But only in the positions where it is phonemic! For example, it may be that it is phonemic word-medially, or at the end of the word, but not at the beginning of words. Only write its phonemic use.
 - Use a letter symbol than a non-letter symbol; e.g. <q> rather than <’>
- Uvular phonemes
 - Following ‘letters are better than non-letters’ and ‘one sound, one symbol’ it is easiest to use unused symbols such as <q>, and then resort to a non-letter <’> for the glottal stop. For fricatives, use <x>. If this is unacceptable to communities a combination of symbols may be appropriate, like <kh>, <qh>, following Indonesian conventions.
- Geminates
- Phonemic Stress
 - If phonemic stress is found in any of the languages of Alor then it should be marked in minimally those cases where it could cause ambiguity.

3 Words

3.1 General Rules for Writing Words

- Clitics, pronominal affixes, short pronouns, particles, adpositions
 - Should they be written 1. as a part of their host base, 2. with a hyphen to the host base, or 3. as separate ‘words’?
 - General rule 1: Follow function/meaning rather than actual phonological realisation.
 - General rule 2: Be consistent. If native speakers insist that an item is written as a separate word in some contexts, then it should be consistently written as a separate words in the other contexts as well.
- Reductions
 - Should we write the reduced form, the full form, or both?
 - Ideally, write the full form to reduce ambiguity. Be consistent.
 - Fossilised forms, reduced forms that are idiomatic and those appearing in quotations should be written as such; the full form is written elsewhere.
 - The communities feelings on this matter should be taken into consideration: not all reductions are alike; some reductions are felt as alternative forms for the full form (*cannot* > *can't*), while other reduced forms may be considered nonsense words if people see the reduced form in writing.

3.2 Morphemes in Alor Languages

- Morphological items that should perhaps be standardised across the Alor languages are:
 - inalienable/alienable possessive pronominal affixes
 - subject/object pronominal affixes
 - Tense, Aspect, Mood particles/affixes
 - Derivational affixes

- Partial and full reduplication
- Morpheme attachment
 - If two items occur in adjacent position and no items can ever intervene, then they should be written as a single word (eg. object pronouns)
 - If two items can be broken up by another constituent or word, then they should be written as separate items (eg. subject pronouns)
- Reductions
 - Ideally, write the full form to reduce ambiguity. Be consistent.
 - Fossilised forms, reduced forms that are idiomatic and those appearing in quotations should be written as such; the full form is written elsewhere.
- The communities feelings on this matter should be taken into consideration: not all reductions are alike; some reductions are felt as alternative forms for the full form (*cannot* > *can't*), while other reduced forms may be considered nonsense words if people see the reduced form in writing.
- Reduplications
 - Following Indonesian orthography, both partial and full reduplications to be separated by hyphens.

4 Summary

Standard 'guidelines' can be, and should be, established, to have some conformity in the way that the languages of Alor are written. If a set of standards is established they should not be followed blindly, but rather be adapted to the needs of each language and language community. That is, each symbol and writing convention for each language should be assessed based on the overall (phonemic and grammatical) structure of the language in question and community wishes.

As a general rule when speakers are inconsistent in the way that they present something orthographically the linguist can make the final decision. However, if speakers have consistent, strong feelings about the way that something should be represented, and there

are no good linguistic reasons why it should not be done that way, then their preference should be followed.

5 References

Gudschinsky, Sarah C., 1973. *A Manual of Literacy for Preliterate Peoples*, SIL: Ukarumpa, PNG.

Matthews, Delle and Jean Dawson, 1988. *Technical Studies Handbook: Orthography*, Revision 1, SIL, Indonesia Branch, unpublished.