

INTRODUCTION

SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION

1. The Acholi (Acoli) alphabet, according to the Standard Orthography now in use, is :

a b bw c d e g i j k l m n ny ŋ o p pw r t u w y

That is, there are 5 vowels, 16 consonants (including the compounds bw pw ny) and two semi-vowels, w and y.

Vowels

2. Each vowel letter has two pronunciation values, 'close' and 'open' (in the case of a, 'normal' and 'centralized'), so that the reader must be careful to choose the right pronunciation in order to be understood. Thus :

koyo	pronounced with	'close o'	(phon. koyo)	means the cold
	"	"	'open o'	(phon. kɔyo) " to separate
keto	"	"	'close e'	(phon. keto) " to put
	"	"	'open e'	(phon. kɛto) " to scatter
culo	"	"	'close u'	(phon. culo) " to dilute
	"	"	'open u'	(phon. cɔlo) " to pay
gin	"	"	'close i'	(phon. gin) " thing
	"	"	'open i'	(phon. gɪn) " they
akan	"	"	'normal a'	(phon. akan) " let me keep
	"	"	'centralized a'	(phon. akän) means safe keeping (1)

Naturally it would be much simpler if each sound were represented by a different sign in the orthography, but that would involve complications. So, in order in some way to overcome this pronunciation difficulty, without at the same time departing from the accepted Standard Orthography, it has been decided to distinguish the 'open' vowels and the 'centralized a' by varying the type in this Grammar. (In normal readers etc. no such typographical distinction is made). Thus :

'close' vowels.	'open' vowels.
koyo (the cold)	koyo (to separate)
keto (to put)	keto (to scatter)
culo (to dilute)	culo (to pay)
gin (thing)	gin (they)
'normal a'	'centralized a'
akan (let me keep)	akan (safe keeping)

The values of these special vowels are represented by Muratori (English-Bari-Lotuxo-Acoli Vocabulary) and Crazzolaro (A Study of the Acooli Language) as follows :

Present work	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>u</i>
Muratori	<i>ä</i>	<i>ε</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>ɔ</i>	<i>Ū</i>
Crazzolaro	<i>ä</i>	<i>ε</i>	<i>ī,ē</i>	<i>ɔ</i>	<i>ö</i>

Vowel length

3. There are a certain number of words, mostly monosyllabic, which end in a long or stressed vowel, which is here written double. In the Standard Orthography doubling is recommended in only a selected list of nouns viz.

aluu (vapour)	moo (oil)
coo (porcupine)	odii (form of beer)
coo (guinea worm)	pii (water)
daa (my grandmother)	raa (hippo)
doo (weed)	taa (tobacco)
guu (ironstone)	too (fox)
koo (bamboo)	wee (content of stomach)
lee (animal)	woo (noise)
maa (my mother)	yaa (shea butternut)

In the present work, however, final long vowels, where they occur, are consistently doubled for the sake of accuracy. (1) e.g.

daa (to quarrel)	aa (to come)	akakaa (maliciously)
too (dead, to die)	oo (to arrive)	atataa (at random)
coo (to awake)	oo (to get spilt)	oyoo (mouse)

Diphthongs

4. All diphthongs in Acholi begin with the semi-vowel *w* or *y*: (2) the following vowel may be 'close or 'open,' short or long.

'close'	'open'
lwenyo (to fight)	gweno (hen)
twiyo (to bring forth)	kwiko (to become thin)
gwok (dog)	kwoyo (to sew)
myero (to be suitable)	myelo (to dance)

'normal a'	'centralized a'
cwari (bug)	cwari (your husband)
dyanj (cow)	dyanji (cows)

With long vowel :

kwoo (theft, to steal)	kwoo (life, to live)
dwee (moon)	dwee (gravy)

Sound change in vowels and diphthongs

5. 'Open' stem-vowels are rendered 'close,' and 'a' is 'centralized' under the following conditions :

(a) When the second person suffix *-i* pl. *-wu* is added to the stem of a noun or a verb.

- (b) When the plural suffix *-i* is added to the stem of a noun.
- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| (a) | kom (chair) | but | kommi (your chair) |
| | amito (I like) | : | amiti (I like you sg.) |
| | aculo (I pay) | : | aculwu (I pay you pl.) |
| | akayo (I reap) | : | kayu (Reap ! pl.) |
| (b) | gwen (hen) | : | gweni (hens) |
| | jago (sub chief) | : | jagi (sub chiefs) |

Consonants

6. **bw** and **pw** are preferred in the Standard Orthography to Crazzolara's **bv** and **pf**, though the latter sounds are often heard.

c is always pronounced like the 'ch' in 'charity.'

j is always pronounced like the 'j' in 'gem.'

ny is pronounced as in the Italian word 'signore' or the French word 'monseigneur.'

ŋ is pronounced like the 'ng' as in 'singer' (never as in 'finger'; ng, when it occurs, is pronounced as in 'vanguard' e.g. **pyengi**, their hides).

k is often softened between two vowels almost to 'h,' but it never written so.

t is often softened between two vowels almost to 'r,' but is never written so. (Crazzolara's letter *f* for this softened sound is unnecessary).

Double consonants

7. Double consonants occur before certain suffixes.

(a) '*non-intimate*' genitive :

pyenne (his hide for sitting on)

batta (my leg of meat)

cf. **pyene** (its hide)

bada (my arm)

(b) *Certain demonstratives.*

ot-ti (this house)

pyen-no (that hide)

cf. **ot** (house)

pyen (hide)

(c) *Indirect object suffixes.*

ocwalla cente (he sent me money)

cf. **ocwala** (he sent me)

(d) *Reflexive suffix.*

anenne (I see myself)

cf. **anene** (I see him).

ACCENT

(8) For the accent of the words the following notes may help.

(9) (a) in words composed of a *v-c-v* the accent is on the last vowel, which is long.

E.g. **abaa** (father), **obwoo** (net), **oboo** (lungs) etc. . . .

The verbs make an exception. E.g. **uru** (to wonder), **ono** (to cough), **umu** (to cover), etc. . . .

- (10) (b) in words with a *c-v-c* the stress is on the only vowel they have. E.g. **bol** (handle), **ret** (wound), **tic** (work), **cam** (food), etc. . . .
- (11) (c) in words with a *v-c-v-c* the accent is on the last vowel. E.g., **olik** (bat), **obwol** (muchroom), **olam** (fig tree), **ogwal** (frog), etc. . . .
- (12) (d) in words with a *c-v-c-v* the accent is on the stem-vowel. E.g., **geno** (to hope), **balo** (to spoil), **jago** (sub-chief), **banya** (debt), **cuyu** (to pierce with red-hot iron), **jubl** (buffalo), **keda** (gall bladder), etc. . . .
- (13) (e) in words with a *v-c-v-c-v* the accent is on the central vowel. E.g., **oboro** (shell), **aboro** (eight), **okado** (bee-eater), **otigu** (kind of vegetables), **adita** (little basket), **akuri** (dove), **adola** (ulcer on leg), etc. . . .
- (14) The position of the accent remains the same even when the word is suffixed, or prefixed as in the case of verbs.

E.g. **boyo**, cloth
banya, debt
konyo, to help

boyona, my cloth
banyawu, your debt
akonyo, I help
akonyowu, I help you,
 etc. . . .

- (15) The glottal stop is worthy of mention. It is a plosive made by closing and then releasing the vocal cords.

It occurs clearly when a verb beginning with a vowel is prefixed with the verbal prefixes of the conjugation.

E.g., **a'aa**, I am coming
gi'onyo pii, they poured the water
wa'oo, we arrived
i'om kweri, fetch the hoe,
 etc. . . .

TONE

- (16) Acholi is a tonal language and some words may be distinguished by tone alone.

E.g. **bèl** with low tone means wrinkled
bél with high tone means corn
kàl with low tone means place enclosed by a palisade
kal with high tone means millet

Tone is not indicated in the Standard Orthography, nor in the present work except in verb conjugation. (1)