

**PROPOSED
BUM ORTHOGRAPHY STATEMENT**

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Abbreviations used

IMP	Imperative
FUT	Future Tense
PST	Past Tense
NEG	Negative

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1 Introduction

This paper proposes an orthography for Bum, a Grassfield Bantu, Central Ring language spoken by about 15,000 to 20,000 people in the following villages: Fonfuka, Buabua, Konene, Kimbi, Saff, Sowe, Laa-Bum, Kimbi- River, Songka, Kichewi, Mulung, Kichaku, Balamua in Bum Subdivision, Boyo Division, North West Province, Republic of Cameroon. The sociolinguistic survey of Bum done by Melinda Lamberty (2001) shows that Bum is a homogeneous language without significant dialect differences.

Works already done on the Bum language include the sociolinguistic survey mentioned above. ALCAM 1983 also mentions a work done by D. Noumbi in 1981 entitled *Esquisse linguistique du Bum*, a Maitrise dissertation. However, this book has not been found¹ even at the University of Yaounde where the dissertation was defended.

2 Alphabet

The Bum segmental alphabet is made up of twenty-two (22) consonants and seven (7) vowels. They are represented below in upper and lower cases:

A a, B b, Ch ch, D d, E e, Ə ə, F f, G g, Gb gb, Gh gh, H h, I i, I i, J j, K k, Kp kp, L l, M m, N n, Ŋ ŋ, Ny ny, O o, P p, S s, Sh sh, T t, U u, W w, Y y.

2.1 Consonants

The consonant phonemes, their allophones and graphemes are presented in Table I below. We also show their use in various positions in the word.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/b/	[p] ¹	P p	—	chəphî <i>punishment</i>	—
	[b]	B b	bom <i>father</i>	hibòŋ <i>be pregnant</i>	—
/t/	[t]	T t	tofi <i>knowledge</i>	atù <i>head</i>	àlèt <i>bowl</i>
/d/	[d]	D d	dingà <i>okra</i>	hidìs <i>to speak</i>	—
/k/	[k]	K k	kûl <i>rope</i>	ikâk <i>face</i>	ngwûk <i>canoe</i>
/g/	[g]	G g	gùma <i>cemetery</i>	higùfnà <i>to argue</i>	—
/kp/	[kp]	Kp kp	kpenù <i>arm</i>	ìkpî <i>harvest</i>	—
/gb/	[gb]	Gb gb	gbî <i>movement</i>	higbò <i>lay eggs</i>	—

¹ It is therefore not certain that Noumbi's work really is on Bum from the North West Province.

/tʃ/	[tʃ]	Ch ch	chîn <i>now</i>	àchâm <i>frog</i>	—
/dʒ/	[dʒ]	J j	jìm <i>back</i>	ajì <i>wound, sore</i>	—
/f/	[f]	F f	fôlì <i>debt</i>	tofi <i>knowledge</i>	awòf <i>hook</i>
/s/	[s]	S s	sun <i>friend</i>	isê <i>eye</i>	mùs <i>cat</i>
/ʃ/	[ʃ]	Sh sh	shàktí <i>scatter!</i>	hishik <i>stir</i>	—
/h/	[h]	H h	hitâŋ <i>count</i>	iyahà <i>ringworm</i>	kwòh <i>satrap</i>
/y/	[y]	Gh gh	ghàn <i>you (plural)</i>	ighîn <i>breast</i>	—
/m/	[m]	M m	mòk <i>one</i>	ilemtì <i>nausea</i>	himòm <i>taste</i>
/n/	[n]	N n	nòm <i>mother</i>	nì <i>with</i>	ngàn <i>proverb</i>
/ɲ/	[ɲ] ²	Ny ny	nyàm <i>animal</i>	funyim <i>bird</i>	—
	[ŋ]	ŋ ŋ	—	fiŋtu <i>rubbish</i>	isôŋ <i>tooth</i>
/l/	[l]	L l	liŋi <i>curse</i>	hilim <i>bite</i>	kûl <i>rope</i>
/w/	[w]	W w	wùt <i>person</i>	iwôm <i>shoulder</i>	—
/j/	[j] ~ [ʒ] ³	Y y	yû <i>bee</i>	hiyìm <i>to dry</i>	—

Table I: Bum consonants

Notes:

¹ The [p] allophone of /b/ has no independent status as a phoneme. It is in complementary distribution with [b] : [p] occurring only syllable-final, [b] occurring in other environments. However, [p] is written as “p” in the orthography because of the extensive use of English as a second language.

² The phones [ɲ] and [ŋ] are in complementary distribution : [ŋ] occurring only syllable-final, [ɲ] occurring in other environments. However, both are written separately in the orthography because English also restricts [ŋ] to syllable-final position.

³ The phoneme /j/ has two allophones [j] and [ʒ] which are in free variation.

2.1.1 Prenasalized Consonants

One kind of consonant cluster found in Bum consists of clusters where the first consonant is a nasal consonant that is pronounced at the same place of articulation as the following consonant. All these homorganic nasal consonants are in fact syllabic and, as far as we have been able to find out, carry a low tone. The consonants which we have found that are preceded by such syllabic homorganic nasals are shown in the following chart (see also section 1.1.4):

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/Nb/	[ɱb]	Mb mb	mbàh <i>soup</i>	f̂ambu <i>bile</i>	—
/Nt/	[ɲt]	Nt nt	ntuku <i>night</i>	—	—
/Nd/	[ɲd]	Nd nd	ndâ <i>house</i>	hindòkò <i>sit</i>	—
/Nk/	[ɲk]	Nk nk	nkwu <i>orphan</i>	—	—
/Ng/	[ɲg]	Ng ng	ngaj <i>no</i>	isòngâ <i>squirrel</i>	—
/Ngb/	[ɲmgb]	Mgb mgb	—	himgbên <i>be sour</i>	—
/Ndʒ/	[ɲdʒ]	Nj nj	njàm <i>axe</i>	ìnjân <i>intestines</i>	—

2.1.2 Palatalized Consonants

Another kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is the palatal glide [j], which is always written in Bum as "y". We have only found five consonants so far which may be followed by this glide, as in the following chart:

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/tj/	[tj]	Ty ty	—	fùtyâ <i>ground</i>	—
/dj/	[dj]	Dy dy	dyâ <i>voice</i>	hidyàti <i>spread fire</i>	—
/tʃj/	[tʃj]	Chy chy	chyakù <i>mud</i>	hichyàti <i>pray</i>	—
/dʒj/	[dʒj]	Jy jy	—	ijyâk <i>madness</i>	—
/ʃj/	[ʃj]	Shy shy	shyə <i>thing</i>	hishyà <i>fetch</i>	—

2.1.3 Labialized Consonants

The last kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is [w], [ɥ] or [ɰ] which is always written in Bum as "w". This glide is conditioned by the following: [ɥ] only after labials; [ɰ] only after non-labials and before high front vowels; and [w] in all other environments. Despite only having about 1,100 words in our basic corpus, we have many examples of labialised consonants (and would likely have more if our corpus were larger). The kinds of labialised consonants that we have found so far are shown in the following chart:

Consonant Cluster	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/bw/	[bw]	Bw bw	bwû <i>goat</i>	—	—
	[bu]		bwəmi <i>hunt(n)</i>	hibwàt <i>scream</i>	—
/tw/	[tu]	Tw tw	—	fùtwì <i>hare</i>	—
/kw/	[kw]	Kw kw	kwùkà <i>deaf mute</i>	nkwòkâ <i>up</i>	—
/gw/	[gw]	Gw gw	gwî <i>partridge</i>	higwò <i>mill</i>	—
/fw/	[fu]	Fw fw	fweni <i>legs</i>	tùfwâ <i>bead</i>	—
/tʃw/	[tʃw]	Chw chw	chwò <i>go down!</i>	hichwòhî <i>take down</i>	—
	[tʃ]		chwèna <i>omen</i>	nchwì <i>daylight</i>	—
/dʒw/	[dʒw]	Jw jw	—	ijwò <i>mouth</i>	—
/ʃw/	[ʃw]	Shw shw	shwàkì <i>comb!</i>	hishwàkì <i>comb (v)</i>	—
/jw/	[jw] ~ [ʒw]	Yw yw	ywò <i>snake</i>	hiywòmî <i>sow, plant</i>	—
	[j]		—	hiywì <i>kill, murder</i>	—
/mw/	[mu]	Mw mw	mwàka <i>beehive</i>	—	—
/nw/	[nu]	Nw nw	—	fùnwi <i>knife</i>	—
/lw/	[lu]	Lw lw	—	ìlwî <i>knee</i>	—

2.1.4 Consonant Orthography Rules

Various rules regarding which consonants can occur in which positions or which can occur before and after other consonants are important to learn. Here is a partial list of consonant orthography rules:

1. Never write "ŋ" or "p" word-initially.
2. The only consonants that can be word-final are "t", "k", "f", "s", "h", "l", "m", "n", and "ŋ".
3. Never write a "zh". If you hear a "zh", write a "y".
4. If you hear a nasal consonant before "k" or "g", always write "n".
5. If you hear a nasal consonant before "kp" or "gb", always write "m".

2.2 Vowels

Bum has seven (7) vowel phonemes, presented with their graphemes in Table II below. The letters are shown as they occur in different positions of the word.

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
/i/	[i]	I I	ìfom <i>fat</i>	hikún <i>grunt</i>	hibìmî <i>admit to a wrong</i>
/ɛ/	[ɛ]	E e	—	hifèf <i>blow</i>	ìmê <i>vagina</i>
/i/	[i]	I i	—	ighîn <i>breast</i>	ùkî <i>bed</i>
/ə/	[ə]	Ə ə	—	fə̀n <i>chief</i>	aghə <i>what?</i>
/a/	[a]	A a	àkim <i>crab</i>	hiyàk <i>chew</i>	kwosà <i>slave</i>
/u/	[u]	U u	ùsum <i>pimple</i>	ùwûs <i>gun</i>	mfu <i>pus</i>
/ɔ/	[ɔ]	O o	—	itôŋ <i>navel</i>	àmò <i>only</i>

Table II : Bum vowels

3 Tone

We have identified [6] surface tones in Bum: 3 level tones, high [á], mid [ā] and low [à]; and 3 contour tones, low-high rising [ǎ], high-low falling [â], and high-mid falling [ã]. Of these six, however, only three are frequent and in contrast with each other: high, low and falling.

3.1 Lexical Contrasts Marked by Diacritics

Since we have only three basic tone contrasts, we propose a tone marking system that is the same as for the neighboring Kom language: low tones are marked by the grave accent, falling tones are marked by the circumflex accent; and high, mid and rising tones are left unmarked, as in the table below:

Tone	Phonetic	Grapheme (Diacritic)	Examples	Frequency
High	[á]	a	lìm <i>husband</i>	very many nouns and infinitive verbs
Mid	[ā]	a	fini <i>darkness</i>	rare
Low	[à]	à	filìm <i>onion</i>	many verbs and nouns
Rising	[ǎ]	a	liḡ <i>earwax</i>	rare in stem
Falling	[â]	â	ngwîk <i>seed</i>	many nouns, many verbs
High-mid falling	[ẫ]	â	kwô <i>forest</i>	only one word

Table III: Bum Lexical Tones

Our proposal is to write all Bum words as they occur in isolation (i.e. as they occur when pronounced by themselves or as they are most frequently pronounced in sentences), and it is these forms that will be written in the lexicon. Bum speakers should have no problem reading or pronouncing the actual phonetic tones in a sentence once they recognize the meanings of the individual words in that sentence.

One outstanding issue is the marking of tone on syllabic nasal prefixes. Since we have not yet found any high tones on these prefixes, we can say that the low tones on these nasals are predictable and do not need to be marked. If, in the future, further research turns up high tones as well as low tones on these nasal prefixes (this would not be surprising as one-third of vowel prefixes have high tones on them), then it will probably be necessary to mark the tones on nasal prefixes as well (i.e. adding a grave accent to only those nasal prefixes that have low tones on them). In the meantime, we will not make any marks above nasal prefixes.

As mentioned above, you can find minimal tone pairs only between high, low and falling tones in Bum. Below we have some of the minimal tone pairs that we have found so far :

- (1) **lìm** [lìm] *dry season* **ighin** [ìyín] *mosquito*
lìm [lím] *husband* **ighîn** [íyîn] *breast*
- (2) **hilìm** [hílìm] *smell, stink* **kìmà** [kímà] *armpit*
hilîm [hílîm] *wrap up* **kîma** [kímá] *cowry shell*

3.2 Grammatical Meanings Marked by Diacritics

No work has yet been done on the verb system so no proposal can be made yet for which grammatical markers need marking to avoid ambiguous sentences.

4 Word Division

Bum word division will hopefully be examined further at some later point in time. It will be especially important to develop appropriate criteria for distinguishing compound nouns from associative noun phrases.

In the meantime, we mention that all the normal Bum noun class prefixes will be written as part of the nouns, as shown below:

Class	Noun	Gloss
2	àgha	<i>words</i>
3	ùkpôk	<i>chair</i>
5	ìghâ	<i>wing</i>
6	àfûk	<i>farm</i>
6a	mkpôk	<i>chairs</i>
7	àbâ	<i>leopard</i>
8	ùbâ	<i>leopards</i>
9	bû	<i>dog</i>
10	bûsu	<i>dogs</i>
13	gbîtù	<i>movements</i>
19	sôf	<i>peg</i>
19a	mfûk	<i>farms</i>

5 Punctuation and Capitalisation

The punctuation marks and the rules that govern the Bum language are the same as those for English. The punctuation marks used for Bum are therefore as follows:

- 1) Full stop (.)
- 2) Question mark (?)
- 3) Exclamation mark (!)
- 4) Comma (,)
- 5) Colon (:)
- 6) Semicolon (;)
- 7) Quotation marks (“ ... ”) and (‘ ... ’)

5.1 Full Stop

The full stop (.) in Bum marks the end of a declarative sentence.

- (3) **Fangha wù yèn àfûk.**
Fangha he go farm
Fangha is going to the farm.

5.2 Question Mark

The question mark (?) marks the end of an interrogative sentence.

- (4) **Ngong nè yuna bwúsù sèk?**
Ngong FUT buy goats how-many?
How many goats will Ngong buy?

5.3 Exclamation Mark

The exclamation mark is written at the end of a command, or it is placed following exclamatory words or phrases. It functions to express interjections, surprises, excitement, and forceful comments as well as simple commands; as below.

- (5) **Yùfí!**
Listen-IMP
Listen!
- (6) **Tah kè yô biya ikwò!**
Tah NEG eat pear raw!
Tah should not eat raw pears!

5.4 Comma

Commas are used to separate clauses or parallel words within a clause, as below:

wa

- (7) **Ghèna yàmà wì, ghèna jyàlò.**
They sing NEG, they cry.
They are not singing, they are crying.
- (8) **Nàsàli kàta fùmùs, ngyêshù bà nì bwú.**
Nasali have cat, sheep two and goat.
Nasali has a cat, two sheep and a goat.

5.5 Quotation Marks

Quotation marks (“ ... ”) occur at the beginning and end of direct speech, as below:

- (9) **Njàng janà, “Lakì yulalò.”**
Njang said, village be-clean
Njang said, “The village is clean.”

Note: In English and Bum, other punctuation marks always precede quotation marks when they occur next to each other.

5.6 Capitalisation

Capital letters are used at the beginning of sentences, quotes, for proper nouns, and after a colon.

First word in a sentence:

- (10) **Ghaha na be yelò a Fundong.**
We all FUT go to Fundong.
We shall all go to Fundong.

Proper nouns:

- (11) **Ngong ti tonga Kwàngà, Ngwàtà, Chya, nì Kìmbì.**
Ngong PST call Kwanga, Ngwota, Chia, and Kimbie.
Ngong called Kwanga, Ngwata, Chia and Kimbie.

After a colon:

- (12) **Ghà ìmòk hamòk: Wù nje tèn à ndâ.**
One thing true: He is not inside house.
One thing is true: He is not in his room.

6 Need for further testing of the orthography

Any new orthography needs people to use it for a time before potential problems reveal themselves. It is our hope that this proposal will be a significant first step in allowing people to start reading and writing the Bum language.

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