AWING ORTHOGRAPHY GUIDE

by

ALOMOFOR Christian

and

Stephen C. ANDERSON

December 2005 revision
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Associative Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>Complementizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPH</td>
<td>Emphasis Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAB</td>
<td>Habitual Aspect Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMP</td>
<td>Imperative Mood Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>Negative Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>Past Tense Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl.</td>
<td>Plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROG</td>
<td>Progressive Aspect Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg.</td>
<td>Singular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2s          | Second person singular pronoun |
3s          | Third person singular pronoun |
3p          | Third person plural pronoun |

Ñ-          | High tone homorganic nasal prefix (the nasal consonant is always pronounced at the same place in the mouth as the following consonant) |
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................. ................................................................. 1

2. ALPHABET .................................................................................. ........................................................................ 1
   
   2.1 Consonants ............................................................................. ....................................................................... 1
      2.1.1 Prenasalized Consonants .......................................................................... ................................................... 3
      2.1.2 Palatalized Consonants .................................................................................. ................................................... 3
      2.1.3 Labialized Consonants .................................................................................. ................................................... 4
      2.1.4 Consonant Orthography Rules ........................................................................ 5

   2.2 Vowels ..................................................................................... ....................................................................... 5
      2.2.1 Vowel Length .................................................................................. ................................................... 6
      2.2.2 Vowel Diphthongs .................................................................................. ................................................... 6
      2.2.3 Prefix vowels .................................................................................. ................................................... 6
      2.2.4 Vowel Orthography Rules ........................................................................ 7

3. TONE ......................................................................................... ........................................................................ 7
   
   3.1 Lexical Tone Contrasts Marked by Diacritics ................................................................. ............................................ 7
      3.1.1 Tone Marking for Short Vowels ........................................................................ 7
      3.1.2 Tone Marking for Long Vowels and Diphthongs .................................................. ........................................... 8

   3.2 Grammatical Meanings Marked by Diacritics ........................................................................ 9

4. WORD DIVISION................................................................................................................................. 9

5. ELISION ...................................................................................... ....................................................................... 10

6. PUNCTUATION AND CAPITALISATION .................................................................................. 11
   
   6.1 Full Stop .................................................................................. ................................................... 11
   6.2 Question Mark .................................................................................. ................................................... 11
   6.3 Exclamation Mark .................................................................................. ................................................... 11
   6.4 Comma ....................................................................................... ................................................... 11
   6.5 Quotation Marks .................................................................................. ................................................... 12
   6.6 Capitalisation .................................................................................. ................................................... 12

7. NEED FOR FURTHER TESTING OF THE ORTHOGRAPHY .................................................. 12

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................................ 13
AWING ORTHOGRAPHY GUIDE
by Alomafor CHRISTIAN and Stephen C. ANDERSON

1. Introduction
This paper\(^*\) proposes an orthography for Awing, a Grassfields Bantu language spoken by about 19,000 people in the Mezam division, North West Province, Republic of Cameroon. According to the Ethnologue (Grimes, 2000:29), Awing is a Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Ngemba language, related to Baminkumbit. As far as the authors know, the only previous research done on this language was on phonology (Azieshi, 1994).

2. Alphabet
The Awing segmental alphabet is made up of 22 consonants and 9 vowels. They are represented below in upper and lower cases:

A a, B b, Ch ch, D d, E e, E e, ؕ e, F f, G g, Gh gh, I i, I i, J j, K k, ’ ’, L l, Mm, N n, Ny ny, Й й, O o, 惊奇 c, P p, S s, Sh sh, T t, Ts ts, U u, W w, Y y, Z z

2.1 Consonants

The consonant phonemes, their allophones and graphemes are presented the table below. We also show their use in various positions in the word. All Awing words end with a vowel so word-final consonants do not exist (except the word for "only" shown below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/t/</td>
<td>[t]</td>
<td>T t</td>
<td>тăма choke (v)</td>
<td>нăтă intestine</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[tʰ](^1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/k/</td>
<td>[k]</td>
<td>K k</td>
<td>қăтă stumble</td>
<td>лăмкă smell (v)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ʔ](^2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/b/</td>
<td>[b]</td>
<td>B b</td>
<td></td>
<td>лăбтă plan (v)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[p](^3)</td>
<td>P p</td>
<td>пîмă believe</td>
<td>апĕĕлă mad person</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/</td>
<td>[d]</td>
<td>D d</td>
<td></td>
<td>сĕннă turn round</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[l](^4)</td>
<td>L l</td>
<td>лĕднă sweat (v)</td>
<td>алăсăма tongue</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[l] - [r](^4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/g/</td>
<td>[g]</td>
<td>G g</td>
<td></td>
<td>фăгă blow (v)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\) This paper was originally published in May 2005 with the help of Akem Shedmankah Helen and Kendall Isaac in addition to the present authors. The paper was then revised by the present authors with helpful feedback from the Fon of Awing, Prof. Paul Mbangwana, Dr. Samuel Atechi, Polote Gideon, and Mbatu Alex.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ɡ/</td>
<td>[ɡ]²</td>
<td>Gh gh</td>
<td>ghaŋa</td>
<td>naghó</td>
<td>grinding stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ts/</td>
<td>[ts]</td>
<td>Ts ts</td>
<td>tsó’ə</td>
<td>atsáŋa</td>
<td>punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/tʃ/</td>
<td>[tʃ]</td>
<td>Ch ch</td>
<td>cha’tó</td>
<td>achiə</td>
<td><em>blood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɹ/</td>
<td>[ɹ]</td>
<td>F f</td>
<td>fełə</td>
<td>afůə</td>
<td>leaf, medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/</td>
<td>[s]</td>
<td>S s</td>
<td>sednə</td>
<td>nəse</td>
<td><em>grave</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʃ/</td>
<td>[ʃ]</td>
<td>Sh sh</td>
<td>shía</td>
<td>øshűə</td>
<td><em>fish</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/</td>
<td>[z]</td>
<td>Z z</td>
<td>zó’ə</td>
<td>azagó</td>
<td><em>odour</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[dz]⁶</td>
<td>Dz dz</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>ndzó</td>
<td><em>beans</em></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʒ/</td>
<td>[ʒ]</td>
<td>J j</td>
<td>jágo</td>
<td>ajúma</td>
<td><em>thing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[dʒ]⁶</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>njwĩŋə</td>
<td><em>whistle (n)</em></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/m/</td>
<td>[m]</td>
<td>M m</td>
<td>miša</td>
<td>lúma</td>
<td><em>bite (v)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/</td>
<td>[n]</td>
<td>N n</td>
<td>nō</td>
<td>lednə</td>
<td><em>sweat (v)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ŋ/</td>
<td>[ŋ]</td>
<td>Ny ny</td>
<td>nyagló</td>
<td>anyeŋə</td>
<td><em>claw (n)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ŋ/</td>
<td>[ŋ]</td>
<td>Ng ng</td>
<td>ngá’o</td>
<td>ghaŋə</td>
<td><em>chest</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/w/</td>
<td>[w]</td>
<td>W w</td>
<td>wáakó</td>
<td>nwůuə</td>
<td><em>death</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ʡ]⁷</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>akwáala</td>
<td><em>support (n)</em></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/j/</td>
<td>[j]</td>
<td>Y y</td>
<td>yika</td>
<td>ayáŋa</td>
<td><em>wisdom</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
2. The consonant [k] occurs root-initial, while the phone [ɔ] occurs in other positions (it only occurs final in one exceptional word in the language, the word for "only" shown in the chart).
3. The consonant phone [p] occurs stem-initial while the alternate consonant phone [b] occurs in other positions.
4. The consonant phone [l] varies freely with [r] between vowels inside a root, while the alternate consonant phone [d] occurs after a nasal consonant.
5. Contrary to most Grassfields Bantu languages, Awing does have contrast between [ɡ] and [ɣ] between vowels, though this contrast is neutralized in other environments (like other Grassfields Bantu languages, Awing has only [ɣ] word-initial and only [ɡ] after nasal consonants).
6. Consonant phones [dz,dʒ] occur only after nasal consonants while alternate consonant phones [z,ʒ] occur in other positions. While the authors suggested writing the predictable [dz] with just "z", the Awing Language Committee insisted on writing this allophone with "dz".
2.1.1 

**Prenasalized Consonants**

One kind of consonant cluster found in Awing consists of clusters where the first consonant is a syllabic nasal consonant that is pronounced at the same place of articulation as the following consonant. This consonant is written ‘m’ before ‘b’ and ‘n’ elsewhere. Quite a few consonants may be preceded by such homorganic syllabic nasal consonants (symbolized as \(\tilde{\eta}\)), as in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonant Cluster</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}b/</td>
<td>[mb]</td>
<td>Mb mb</td>
<td>mbe’tə</td>
<td>ambeenə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}t/</td>
<td>[nt]</td>
<td>Nt nt</td>
<td>ntəmə</td>
<td>nanteemə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ntʰ]</td>
<td></td>
<td>ntúmkə</td>
<td>mantid</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}d/</td>
<td>[nd]</td>
<td>Nd nd</td>
<td>ndę</td>
<td>mandę</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}ts/</td>
<td>[nts]</td>
<td>Nts nts</td>
<td>ntsoolə</td>
<td>mantsoolə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}ʃ/</td>
<td>[ntʃ]</td>
<td>Nch nch</td>
<td>nchi’</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}z/</td>
<td>[ndz]</td>
<td>Ndz ndz</td>
<td>ndzö</td>
<td>mandzö</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}ʒ/</td>
<td>[ndʒ]</td>
<td>Nj nj</td>
<td>njii’</td>
<td>nanjwinnə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}k/</td>
<td>[ŋk]</td>
<td>Nk nk</td>
<td>nkadtə</td>
<td>ankoonə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}g/</td>
<td>[ŋg]</td>
<td>Ng ng</td>
<td>ngə’ə</td>
<td>nangoomə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}m/</td>
<td>[mm]</td>
<td>Mm mm</td>
<td>mmə</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}n/</td>
<td>[nn]</td>
<td>Nn nn</td>
<td>nnämə</td>
<td>ghánnə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}ŋ/</td>
<td>[ŋŋ]</td>
<td>Nny nny</td>
<td>ŋŋŋi’</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/(\tilde{\eta}ŋ/</td>
<td>[ŋŋ]</td>
<td>Ngu nŋu</td>
<td>ŋŋŋi’</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Awing as "y". Only a few consonants have been found so far followed by this glide, as in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/tʃ/</td>
<td>[tʃ]</td>
<td>Ty ty</td>
<td>tyá’ə</td>
<td>tyáaə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kj/</td>
<td>[kj]</td>
<td>Ky ky</td>
<td>kyagə</td>
<td>akyámə</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2.1.3 Labialized Consonants

The last kind of consonant cluster is where the second consonant is the labiovelar glide [w] or its labio-palatal glide allophone [j] (before all non-back vowels), both of which are always written in Awing as "w". Quite a few consonants may be followed by these labialized glides, as in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonant Cluster</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/tw/</td>
<td>[ʨ]</td>
<td>Tw tw</td>
<td>twáŋa</td>
<td>mɔtwév</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bury</td>
<td>saliva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kw/</td>
<td>[kɕ]</td>
<td>Kw kw</td>
<td>kvaŋa</td>
<td>akwe</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cough (v)</td>
<td>response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/bw/</td>
<td>[pɕ]</td>
<td>Pw pw</td>
<td>pwóŋa</td>
<td>mɔpwóndnàa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dip (v)</td>
<td>(be) kind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/dw/</td>
<td>[ʥ]</td>
<td>Dw dw</td>
<td></td>
<td>ndwigta</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>end (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/gw/</td>
<td>[gɕ]</td>
<td>Gw, gw</td>
<td></td>
<td>ngwáŋa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/fw/</td>
<td>[fɕ]</td>
<td>Fw fw</td>
<td>fwaŋa</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>chisel (n)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/jw/</td>
<td>[ʡ]</td>
<td>Shw shw</td>
<td>swaŋa</td>
<td>ashwáŋa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>razor</td>
<td>swelling (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɔw/</td>
<td>[ʣʡ]</td>
<td>Jw jw</td>
<td>jwiŋa</td>
<td>ajwíŋa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>breathe</td>
<td>window</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/tʃw/</td>
<td>[ʧʡ]</td>
<td>Chw chw</td>
<td>chwigá</td>
<td>nachwéŋa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>spy (v)</td>
<td>hearth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/nw/</td>
<td>[nʡ]</td>
<td>Nw nw</td>
<td>nwaŋa</td>
<td>manwaŋa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>disappear</td>
<td>bone marrow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ŋw/</td>
<td>[ŋʡ]</td>
<td>Ňw, Ňw</td>
<td>ŋwáglo</td>
<td>manwaŋa</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bell</td>
<td>(be) clean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/lw/</td>
<td>[lʡ]</td>
<td>Lw lw</td>
<td>lwéŋkà</td>
<td>nàlwelà</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fill (v)</td>
<td>bump (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.4 Consonant Orthography Rules

Various rules on 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 an "r". If you hear an "r", write an "l".
2. Never write "tt" or "d" at the beginning of a word.
3. Never write "b" at the beginning of a word, write either "p" or "mb" instead.
4. Never write a "p" after an "m", write a "b" instead.
5. Never write a consonant as the last letter of a word.
6. If you hear a nasal consonant before "b", write "m"; if you hear a nasal consonant before any other consonant, always write "n".
7. Always write "gh" and never "g" by itself at the beginning of words.
8. Always write "ng" and never "ngh" when a "g" sound is preceded by a nasal consonant.

2.2 Vowels

The Awing language has 9 vowel phonemes, presented with their allophones and proposed graphemes in Table II below. The sounds are shown as they occur in different positions of the word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i/</td>
<td>[i]</td>
<td>ɪːi</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>légɔ</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/iː/</td>
<td>[i]</td>
<td>ɪːi</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>kɪːˈɔ</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u/</td>
<td>[u]</td>
<td>ʊːu</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>lúmɑ</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>ɛːɛ</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>neˈɔˈ</td>
<td>nəse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
<td>ɔːɔ</td>
<td>əʃuːa</td>
<td>nape</td>
<td>ghɑːɡə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>[ɔ]</td>
<td>ɔːɔ</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʊ/</td>
<td>[ʊ]</td>
<td>ʊːʊ</td>
<td>tsóˈɔˈ</td>
<td>natɔˈ</td>
<td>intestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɛ/</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>ɛːɛ</td>
<td>pɛnɑˈ</td>
<td>fɛˈ</td>
<td>give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ə/</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
<td>ɔːɔ</td>
<td>nɔŋə</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>aːa</td>
<td>apɔˈ</td>
<td>náŋə</td>
<td>ɲwaˈá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hand (n)</td>
<td>look for</td>
<td>shine (v)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.1 Vowel Length

Awing has both short and long vowels\(^1\), the long ones written as a sequence of two vowels. Several long vowels are used quite extensively: \(/æː/, /oː/, /ɛː/, /əː/, /aː/\). Examples of these vowels and their contrasting short vowels are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Short Vowel</th>
<th>Long Vowel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ṅẹpέẹnọ</td>
<td>crown of head</td>
<td>ṅẹẹ</td>
<td>ẹẹẹẹẹ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṇdzẹmọ</td>
<td>dream (n)</td>
<td>ṇẹẹ</td>
<td>ẹẹẹẹẹ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alelo</td>
<td>bridge</td>
<td>ẹẹẹ</td>
<td>ẹẹẹẹẹ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Long [iːː, ɨːː, uːː, oːː] do not occur, though sometimes short vowels with high tone seem a bit longer.

2.2.2 Vowel Diphthongs

Of all the possible combinations of adjacent vowels, only three vowel sequences are possible in Awing, as shown in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/iə/</td>
<td>[iə]</td>
<td>ɬə iə</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>atia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/iə/</td>
<td>[iə]</td>
<td>ɬə iə</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>əkiə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/uə/</td>
<td>[uə]</td>
<td>Uə uə</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>puŋə</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These diphthongs vary in their frequency. Both of the sequences [iə] and [uə] are common and do not contrast with palatalisation and labialisation before [ə]. Thus it would be possible to consider these two sequences as allophones of [yə] and [wə] and write them “yə” and “wə”\(^2\), but we consider them to be diphthongs as they sound as long as two separate syllables. The remaining diphthong [iə] is quite rare; the only example we have to date is the one given in the chart above.

2.2.3 Prefix vowels

As in other Grassfields Bantu languages, Awing has neutralization of vowel contrast in prefixes, specifically between the vowels ’e’ and ’ə’. Though Awing speakers have free variation between [e] and [ə] word-initially, the more frequent ’ə’ will always be written in this position, as in the examples below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Final position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/e/ ~ /ə/</td>
<td>[e] ~ [ə]</td>
<td>ə ə</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^1\) Long vowels only occur as the first vowel in noun and verb stems.

\(^2\) The initial sounds are longer than other glides, but they could be phonetically lengthened due to the weak nature of the following [ə].
2.2.4 Vowel Orthography Rules

Various rules on which vowels can occur in which positions are important to learn. Here is a partial list of vowel orthography rules:

1. Never write "ya" right after a consonant. If you hear "ya", write "ia".
2. Never write "wa" right after a consonant. If you hear "wa", write "ua".
3. Never write "e" at the beginning of a word, always write "o" instead.

3. Tone

3.1 Lexical Tone Contrasts Marked by Diacritics

Awing has three pitch levels (high, mid and low) and a variety of pitch glides between various levels.

3.1.1 Tone Marking for Short Vowels

Awing has a lot of minimal tone contrast between high and low and between mid and low, but none between high and mid tones. The main reason for this is that most non-low tones following a low tone are mid and not high. Though there are occasional mid tones that do not follow a low tone, we have not found any minimal tone pairs in which these particular mid tones contrast with a high tone. The result of this finding is that we have decided to write both high and mid tones with the same diacritic á (actually describing this diacritic to Awing speakers as a "non-low tone" mark). As in most tone languages where tone needs to be marked, we choose one tone to be marked by the absence of a diacritic on the vowel in question. In the case of Awing, we have chosen not to write any diacritic on syllables with low tone. We have decided to use the symbols â and á for any falling and rising tone glides respectively, though these symbols are relatively infrequent in Awing. The tone marking system we propose is therefore illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Phonetic (IPA)</th>
<th>Grapheme (Diacritic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>[á]</td>
<td>á</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>[ã]</td>
<td>ã</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>[à]</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising</td>
<td>[â]</td>
<td>á</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>[å]</td>
<td>â</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to marking tones on vowels, tone is also marked in Awing on syllabic nasal prefixes. Since all such prefix tones are low for nouns, beginning nasals in Awing nouns do not have any diacritic marked on them. Syllabic nasal prefixes on verbs, however, are always high and therefore always marked. We show some examples below of such nasal prefixes on various nouns and verbs:

- mbéena [mbéenã]  | nail  | mbéená  | hate
- mbeŋá  [mbeŋá]  | cockroach  | mbéŋá  | missing
- ndooná  [ńdoonã]  | misfortune  | ńdónó  | beg
- ngooná  [ńgoonã]  | patient  | ńgooná  | sick
As with many recent orthographies in Cameroon, our proposal is to write tone on all main Awing words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) as these words are pronounced in isolation (i.e. as they occur when pronounced by themselves), and it is these forms that will be written in the lexicon. Various grammatical words however (pronouns, tenses, aspects, negatives, conjunctions, prepositions and associative/genitive markers, complementizers, etc.) will be written without any tone marks as they never contrast with other words within sentences. When reading, Awing speakers should have no problem pronouncing the actual phonetic pitch of entire sentences once they recognize the meanings of the individual words that make up those sentences.

It is fairly easy to find Awing words where the only difference between them is tone. For example, note the minimal tone pairs (or triplets) below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awing</th>
<th>Tonal Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kóŋó</td>
<td>[kóŋó]</td>
<td>ditch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kóŋə</td>
<td>[kóŋə]</td>
<td>flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koŋə</td>
<td>[kóŋə]</td>
<td>owl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koŋó</td>
<td>[kóŋó]</td>
<td>yell at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>akooló</td>
<td>[àkò:rə]</td>
<td>latrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>akoolə</td>
<td>[àkò:rə]</td>
<td>leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alamó</td>
<td>[àləmə]</td>
<td>pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alámə</td>
<td>[àləmə]</td>
<td>cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yə</td>
<td>[jə]</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yíə</td>
<td>[jíə]</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 Tone Marking for Long Vowels and Diphthongs

As we have seen in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, the Awing language has long vowels and vowel diphthongs. In the case of long vowels and diphthongs, it is very important to decide upon a system for writing the tone on these kinds of vowels. In Awing, we have decided to write all the tones found on any long vowel or diphthong on the first vowel of the vowel pair. Therefore, there will never be any tone marked on the second vowel when two vowels are adjacent within a word. We believe that this kind of system ends up with fewer diacritics on vowels and hopefully therefore a higher level of acceptability by the Awing community.

Below are a few examples of tone marks on long vowels and diphthongs in Awing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awing</th>
<th>Tonal Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>akooló</td>
<td>[àkò:bə]</td>
<td>forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alámə</td>
<td>[àlə:mə]</td>
<td>tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aghåå</td>
<td>[àyå]</td>
<td>season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nóolə</td>
<td>[nò:rə]</td>
<td>snake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Grammatical Meanings Marked by Diacritics

Many Grassfields Bantu languages need one or two additional diacritics for specific grammatical meanings because these meanings are signaled only by changes in pitch. While it appears that Awing does not have such a need for marking the hortative mood (like various related languages), it does appear to mark habitual aspect by changing the pitch of various words in a sentence. We believe that this kind of situation is best handled by using a special diacritic to signal "habitual aspect" directly. We feel the best diacritic for this purpose is the diuresis (two dots over the vowel) á. Our rule is that this diuresis diacritic should be placed on the first vowel preceding the verb in a sentence.

As an example of this marker, please note the following sentences where the consonants, vowels and word-level tone diacritics would not be enough to indicate the difference in meaning intended, therefore the diuresis is added in the habitual aspect sentence:

A kə ghənə məteenə.  [à kə yɛnɔ mɔtɛnɔ]  
3p PAST go market  
He went to the market.

A kə ghənə məteenə, a pen ŋkéénə.  [à kə yɛnɔ mɔtɛnɔ, ã pɛn ŋkéɛnɔ]  
3s PAST.HAB go market, 3s now tired  
He used to go to the market, but now he’s too tired.

4. Word Division

Awing 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 Bantu noun class prefixes will be written as part of the nouns, as for the classes shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>mǎ</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>pəmǎ</td>
<td>mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>əkwunó</td>
<td>bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>əkəŋə</td>
<td>pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>əkəŋə</td>
<td>pots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>alá'ə</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>alá'ə</td>
<td>villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ndəə</td>
<td>hammer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Word Forms: Long and Short

One of the complications of words in Awing is that most words have long and short forms and you can not predict the actual long form from the short form or vice versa. This means that at least two forms (actually four if you count the plural form for nouns and the prenasalized form for verbs) need to be written for each word in any lexicon or dictionary of Awing.
In Awing nouns, both the singular and plural forms will have short and long variants, as we show in the examples below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sg. Long</th>
<th>Sg. Short</th>
<th>Pl. Long</th>
<th>Pl. Short</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apeemá</td>
<td>apa</td>
<td>apeemá</td>
<td>apa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apéená</td>
<td>apá</td>
<td>apéená</td>
<td>apá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkæŋá</td>
<td>nkæŋá</td>
<td>mænkæŋá</td>
<td>mænkæŋá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkæŋá</td>
<td>nkæŋá</td>
<td>mænkæŋá</td>
<td>mænkæŋá</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"bag"  
"flour"  
"steep place"  
"traditional peace plant"

Each Awing verb root also has four forms: short and long forms for verbs with a high tone nasal prefix /Ñ-/ (except for verbs with either /ð/ or /s/, which never show the nasal prefix) as well as for parallel forms without that prefix, as in the examples below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>/Ñ-/ + Long</th>
<th>/Ñ-/ + Short</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tæmá</td>
<td>ti</td>
<td>ñtæmá</td>
<td>ñti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tænó</td>
<td>ti</td>
<td>ñtænó</td>
<td>ñti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fíñø</td>
<td>fíñø</td>
<td>fíñø</td>
<td>fíñø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fíñó</td>
<td>fi</td>
<td>fíñó</td>
<td>fi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"stand"  
"be mature"  
"resemble each other"  
"sell"

Important Note: For nouns, the lexical tone of the root is the one found on the long forms; for verbs, the lexical tone of the root is the one found on the long form without the nasal prefix /Ñ-. It is these tones that should be written all the time on the same root, even if the tones change slightly in certain grammatical constructions.

6. Elision

In Awing associative constructions, word-final /ο/ is often deleted in regular speech. In the orthography, this ο is always written, as in our examples below:

Lě nəpɔh.   [lě nəpɔʔð]
this pumpkin
This is a pumpkin.

Lě nəpɔh nə kɑnáŋ.   [lě nəpɔʔ nə kɑnáŋ]
this pumpkin AM chameleon
This is a “chameleon pumpkin” (type of melon).

In addition, when a word ending with a vowel is followed by a word starting with a vowel, the second vowel is always deleted in normal speech. In the orthography however, both vowels are always written, as below:

natóʔ nə atð   [nətóʔ nə tíʔ]
potato AM tree
climbing potatoes (type of potato)
7. Punctuation and Capitalisation

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

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

7.1 Full Stop

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

Móonə a to noŋno a akwunə.
baby 3s PROG lie on bed
The baby is lying on the bed.

7.2 Question Mark

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

A ghelə la ake?
3s do COMP what?
What is he doing?

7.3 Exclamation Mark

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

Lə!
leave.IMP
Get out!

Kə pinkə sóŋə!
NEG again say.IMP
Don’t mention it again!

7.4 Comma

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

Po ma ngyiə la afə, po ghenə la nkñə.
3p NEG come to here, 3p go to stream
They are not coming here, they are going to the stream.
7.5 Quotation Marks
Quotation marks (" … ") occur at the beginning and end of direct speech, as below:

Máma a tô mbítə ngə, “Ghə ghenə lə əfə?"  
grandmother 3s PROG ask COMP, 2s go to where  
*Mama (grandmother) is asking, “Where are you going?”*

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

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

First word in a sentence:

Po zì nóolə.  
3p see snake  
*They have seen a snake.*

Proper nouns:

Mbá’chi, Apenə nə Mbyáb tə nkə’ə atiə.  
Mbachiə Apənə and Mbyaaɓə PROG climb tree  
*Mbachiə, Apənə and Mbyaaɓə are climbing a tree.*

After a colon:

Lô anuə: Tâta akə ndé chîə pó.  
be thing: Tata (grandfather) NEG house in NEG  
*It is true: Tata (grandfather) is not in the house.*

8. Need for further testing of the orthography

Any new orthography needs people to use it for a time before potential problems reveal themselves. This orthography has already been in use for one year now and has benefitted from a good amount of constructive criticism.
References


van den Berg, Bianca. 2004. A phonological sketch of Awing. (manuscript)