

## Writing in Indigenous African Scripts: from *Satzschrift* to Alphabet

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New inventions of writing within indigenous societies constitute an interesting phenomenon. In most cases new scripts can be classified as “individual writing systems” rarely expanding beyond a closed circle of friends and relatives. However, even such scripts can show non-standard approaches to the way the language is reduced to writing, as the one-to-one mapping with an existing official orthography is practically never observed. An overview of scripts used in the Sub-Saharan Africa is planned. This region is known for numerous attempts to introduce new orthographies in modern times, starting from the Vai script which originated in the 1820s (Dalby 1967). All the script types are attested here, from the so called sentence (phrase) writing or *Satzschrift* (Meinhof 1911) to alphabets. Majority of scripts are syllabaries, which can be in particular explained by phonotactics of the respective languages.

Numerous graphical systems can be classified as sentence writing, where a symbol corresponds to some proverb, statement, or even a short story. Such (in fact, proto-writings) include *Adinkra*, *Nsibidi*, *Nlo* (Ewe proverbs), *Sona*, etc. (cf. Kubik 1986, Tuchscherer 2007). Often, they are linked to some secret societies and the meaning of signs is not fully known by non-initiates.

Indigenous naming of scripts either reflects some standard recitation order (cf. Arabic أبجد, Ge'ez አቡጊዳ, Greek αλφάβητο, English *ABC*, Polish *abecadło*, Ukrainian *абетка*, etc.) or a special name is given based on various considerations. Examples of the first group include: *A-ja-ma-na* for the Vai syllabary, *Ki-ka-ku-i* for the Mende syllabary, *Ma-sa-ba* for the Bambara syllabary (Galtier 1987), *A-ka-u-ku* for the Bamum script. Reference to the inventor can be used to name the script (e. g., Somali alphabets *Cismaaniya* or *Osmanya* and *Kaddariya*, the *Mwangwego* script from Malawi, etc., cf. Rovenchak & Glavy 2011). Descriptive names are shown by the following examples. The Bassa alphabet invented in the 1920s by Dr Tomas Flo Lewis is called *Vah* (𐑉𐑋), which means in vernacular, according to script literates, ‘to throw a sign’. *Nko* (𐑏𐑍), meaning ‘I say’ in the Manding languages) is the name of the script invented in 1949 by Sòlomána Kánte (Dalby 1969). This is the most successful attempt to introduce a new orthography. Assane Faye named his Wolof script *Garay* (𞤄𞤂𞤊𞤆) after the mountain under which the idea of invention came to him during the announcement of Senegal's independence. *Mandombe* (𞞐𞞑𞞒𞞓𞞔), an abugida created by David Wabeladio Payi in 1978 and used within the Kimbanguist Church, is translated from Kikongo as ‘for the Black people’ (Rovenchak & Glavy 2011).

In modern African indigenous scripts, virtually no special attention is paid to any special notation of proper names. Only a handful of them is different in this respect. A name determinative, the reminiscence of the ideographic stage of script's rapid evolution, is attested in the Bamum script: a sign called *ndzəmli* is used before personal names (Schmitt 1963). Most probably, it was also borrowed by the neighboring Bagam script.

Most of the discussed scripts are unicameral. In fact, this follows an overall statistics in the world as only some alphabetic scripts (Greek, Roman, Cyrillic, Armenian) utilize two cases. However, even in bicameral scripts not always the case is used to distinguish proper names. For instance, in the Wolof *Garay* script, initial letters in sentences are supplied by a decorative arc, but proper names remain rendered in lowercase. Interesting example is Oberi Okaiɛ, a script used within a semi-Christian church for an invented language. This writing system seems to be significantly influenced by the English orthography. Not only capital letters are used in Oberi Okaiɛ, but also an ideograph ATU to represent ‘I’ has a two-fold meaning: denoting some significant people, males, etc. when in uppercase and all other instances when in lowercase (Hau 1961). Yet another rare example of a bicameral script is the Beria (Zaghawa) alphabet also known as the ‘camel alphabet’.

Several other issues of the functioning of modern indigenous African scripts are also planned for discussion, with special attention given to the writing systems being least analyzed in the literature.

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