

Alago phonology

Reading and Writing Alago Language: a Guide. Alago Language Development Committee, 2008

Ayewa, A A (2010) *Ethno-linguistic Diversity in Nigeria and the Study of Alago Language*. Onaivi: Keffi, Nigeria

Guide (2008)

Vowels. Page 4 states that there are “nine” vowels, but only seven are given: <a, e, i, o, u, ɛ, ɔ>. (<x> symbols indicate orthography; /x/ phonology; [x] phonetics.)

i	u
e	o
ɛ	ɔ
a	

Page 4 also states that only one single instance of a nasalized vowel in the language: *hin* (“me”, 1st person pronoun) had been so far discovered; presumably [ɪ̃]. (“More may be found in the course of further study.”)

Consonants. Page 7 states there are 24 consonants: <b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, z, sh, ny, ng, ngm, kp, gb>. (<u> is given erroneously as a consonant on p 11.)

The following instances of palatalization are given: <py, by, my, ry, ky, gy>.

The following instances of labialization are given: <pw, bw, mw, fw, kw, gw, ngw >.

The following instances of clusters with [l] are given: <gbl, bl, kpl, pl, kl, kwl, ml>.

The following instances of syllabic nasals are given: <mb, mp, nyy, ngg, nngw, nny, nngm, ngb, nt, nd, nf, nk, nsh>.

Tones. Page 23 states that there are 4 tones: high, marked as <´>; mid, not marked; low, marked as <`>; “falling tone”, but this not illustrated and not marked in any way. The three tones are contrasted as in this example:

<ìzɛ´> “beer”
<ìzɛ> “fat”
<ìzɛ̀> “tears”

No explanation is given for the apostrophe that occurs in the stories of p 35-37. If this indicated the omission of a word-final vowel before a word-initial vowel following, then some explanation ought to appear somewhere. It might even be better if a word space appeared immediately after the apostrophe, so that the reader could identify the word following more easily.

Ayewa (2010) provides the phonetic basis of the above orthography in Chapters 6 and 7. The vowels are presented in a vowel chart as above. /u/ does not appear in word-initial position, but does occur medially and finally; all six other vowels appear in all positions.

The consonants are displayed in the following chart in the conventional way.

(Orthographical equivalents)

p	b		t	d		k	g	kp	gb	
		f	v	s	z	ʃ				<sh>
						dʒ				<j>
	m			n		ɲ	ŋ	ŋm		<ny> <ng> <ngm>
				l						
				r						
						j		w		<y>

Ayewa also gives /kw/ and /gw/ on his chart, but since the Guide gives five other combinations with /w/, it seems unnecessary to single out the velar pair. The /h/ that appears with /ŋ/ in the velar column is, apparently, a printer's error. It should also be noted that "plosives" in the chart on p 59 are then called "stops" on p 60; they should be consistently labelled either one way or the other. The velar nasal on p 60 should be /ŋ/ on two occasions in the list. The voiceless "post-alveolar" fricative on p 61 should be /ʃ/ in the list. The one affricate /dʒ/ probably has an identical point of articulation as the /ʃ/; both can be labelled as either "post-alveolar" or "palato-alveolar". It would be better to identify /r/, not as an approximant, but as either a flap/tap or a roll/trill, according to the actual manner of articulation; the English /r/ ([ɹ]) is a central approximant because there is no friction with it, but this may not be the case with the Alago /r/ (voiced alveolar trill?). /l/ is often labelled a lateral approximant, or simply "lateral". The approximants /y, w/ are true semivowels; /w/ is usually labelled as "labial-velar" to indicate double articulation, rather than "labio-dental" which suggests a single point of articulation, like "labio-dental".

Consonants do not occur word-finally, but they all seem to occur both initially and medially. In the list on p 62, should "tired" be /ŋw/ etc? 'take' be /ŋ/ without <h>? and "shake" be /dʒ/? Ayewa points out with reason why names should not be spelt with a final consonant.

Syllable structure. This section needs revising, in the light of the material provided in the Guide about consonant combinations.

Palatalization occurs as follows:

py by ky gy kp gb
my ry

Labialization as follows:

(Orthographical equivalents)

pw bw kw gw
fw
mw ŋw <ngw>

This is why it seems strange that only /kw/ and /gw/ should be included on the consonant chart; what about all the others? Better to have none of them in the chart.

Clusters with /l/ as follows:

pl bl kl kpl gbl
ml

/kwl/ is also given; I wonder whether this should be rather /klw/.

But if there are clusters with /l/, then CV cannot be the only syllable structure; there must also be CCV. And if CCV is allowed, then it might also be that the palatalized and labialized consonants could also be considered as clusters. And what about /klw/ (or /kwl/)?

The Guide also makes reference to syllabic nasals, as above; therefore, an additional syllable structure to recognize is N. One question arises: do syllabic nasals carry tone? The examples given on p 69 do not have tone marks; can we be sure that these nasals are long and prominent enough to be syllabic, rather than be "pre-nasalization"?

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