

## Àbèsàbèsì Orthography: A Proposal

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**Abstract:** This paper proposes orthography for Àbèsàbèsì a language known as Akpes in Literature with ethnographic identity *ibe*. Agoyi 2008 proposed the name Àbèsàbèsì formed from the root morpheme Àbèsì ‘we’ because it is the only identity accepted by all the nine communities that speak variant of the language. All speakers of the language are aware of the endangered status of the language hence the need to have a writing system that will be used in writing literature in the language for teaching and documenting the language. In line with Nigeria National Policy on Education 2004 section 4 subsection 19e states that the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be thought as a subject. To be able to implement this policy there is the need to propose orthography for the languages to assist speakers of minority languages who feel the need to save their languages from death. Since the speakers are familiar with the Yoruba orthography, this paper proposes graphemes that are close to the Yoruba graphemes. The orthography is based mostly on a co-language orthography principle. The proposed graphemes were tested with literate speakers of the language. In all 37 graphemes are proposed for the consonants, vowels and tone phonemes the various dialects attest.

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**Key Words:** Àbèsàbèsì multi-dialectal orthography, consonants, vowels, Nasalized vowels, tone, word.

### I. Introduction

Thames and Hudson (2007:8) say that...a person who can read and write has greater opportunities for fulfillment than one who is illiterate’. Orthography represents wisdom and thought. It puts agreements law, commandments etc on record. It facilitates the growth of a state and people. There is power in the coded word. ‘The commandment of a priest or king and his seal could go far beyond his sight and voice and could survive his death. The urgent for immortality has always been the first importance to writers’ writing can predict the future. Orthography serves the useful purpose of preserving the language. An endangered language that is reduced to writing for the few interested speakers helps in rekindling speakers’ interest in the language. A good orthography helps to preserve the proto- language.

We share Gary Simons (2011)’s view that ‘language variation limits communication’ He explains that dialectal variation may be so great as to prevent speakers of two dialects of the same language from understanding one another. To him many of the limits to communication can be overcome in written communication. A unified orthography encourages different pronunciations of the same word. Each reader assigns his own pronunciation to the written symbols. In proposing an orthography for Àbèsàbèsì, we take into cognizance Simons’ principles of Multidialectal orthography which is always designed to be used by many dialects.

Àbèsàbèsì ( known as Akpes in Literature and identified as *ibe* in Ethnography) is spoken in nine communities in Akoko division of Ondo State Nigeria. The communities are Ìyànì, Ìbaràmù, Gèdègédé, (these three communities are Ìluẹ̀nì) Àşè Ìkàrà̀mù (Èkiròmì), Àkùnnù, Ìlúđotun, (Akpes) Dája and Èş ùkù (Oş ùgù). In proposing Àbèsàbèsì orthography we will adopt the phonemic principle which states that graphemes should be assigned to all significant sounds. Speakers are already familiar with most of the grapheme proposed. Thus the Yoruba orthography as well as availability of graphemes on computer key board serves as a reference point in the choice.

### II. Àbèsàbèsì Phonemes

Àbèsàbèsì attests 22 consonant, seven oral vowels, five nasalized vowels and three level tones phonemes.

### III. Consonants

The 22 consonants phonemes Àbèsàbèsì attests are presented on a chart thus: Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labiodental	Glottal
Plosives	p b		t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasals			n		ɲ	ŋ		
Fricatives		m f	s	ʃ				h

Affricates				tʃ ɟʒ				
Roll				r				
Lateral				l				
Approximants						j	w	

The sounds should be written thus:

Table 1

Phonetic	Phonemic	Orthography
[b]	/b/	b
[bae] ‘come’ [badi] ‘beat’	/bae/ ‘come’ /badi/ ‘beat’	bae ‘come’ badi ‘beat’
[b <sup>w</sup> ]	/ b <sup>w</sup> /	bu
[ɛ b <sup>w</sup> i] ‘goat’	/ɛ b <sup>w</sup> i/ ‘goat’	ɛbui ‘goat’
[p]	/p/	p
[ipɔ̃mpɔ̃m] ‘thigh’	/ipɔ̃mpɔ̃m/ ‘thigh’	ipɔ̃mpɔ̃m ‘thigh’
[d]	/d/	d
[dò] ‘want’ [dàgi] ‘vomit’	/dò/ ‘want’ /dàgi/ ‘vomit’	dò ‘want’ dàgi ‘vomit’
[t]	[t]	t
[ta] ‘build’ [te] ‘exist’	[ta] ‘build’ [te] ‘exist’	ta ‘build’ te ‘exist’
[ɟʒ]	/ɟʒ/	j
[ɟʒòmi] ‘swear’ [ɟʒe] ‘eat’	/ɟʒòmi/ ‘swear’ /ɟʒe/ ‘eat’	jòmi ‘swear’ je ‘eat’
[k]	/k/	k
[ko] ‘sing’ [kàyì] ‘count’	/ko/ ‘sing’ /kàyì/ ‘count’	ko ‘sing’ kàyì ‘count’
[k <sup>w</sup> ]	/k <sup>w</sup> /	ku
[ik <sup>w</sup> i] ‘penknife’	/ik <sup>w</sup> i/ ‘penknife’	ikui ‘penknife’
[g]	/g/	g
[ga] ‘enough’ [gùmù] ‘to cover hole’	/ga/ ‘enough’ /gùmù/ ‘to cover hole’	ga ‘enough’ gùmù ‘to cover hole’
[kp]	/kp/	kp
[kpasi] ‘hear’ [kpani] ‘to deceive/trick’	/kpasi/ ‘hear’ /kpani/ ‘to deceive/trick’	k kpasi ‘hear’ kpani ‘to deceive/trick’
[gb]	[gb]	gb
[gbòmi] ‘to heat’ [gba] ‘give’	[gbòmi] ‘to heat’ [gba] ‘give’	gbòmi ‘to heat’ gba ‘give’
[f] [foi] to uproot’ [fù] ‘to cook’	[f] [foi] to uproot’ [fù] ‘to cook’	f foi to uproot’ fu ‘to cook’
[s] sà ‘know’ sagi ‘call’	/s/ /sà/ ‘know’ /sagi/ ‘call’	s sà ‘know’ sagi ‘call’
[ʃ]	/ʃ/	ʃ
[ʃo] ‘weep’ [ʃuù] ‘run’	/ʃo/ ‘weep’ /ʃuù/ ‘run’	ʃ o ‘weep’ ʃ uù ‘run’
[tʃ]	/tʃ/	tʃ
[tʃai] ‘small’ [tʃòò] ‘lead the way’	/tʃai/ ‘small’ /tʃòò/ ‘lead the way’	tʃ ai ‘small’ tʃòò ‘lead the way’ tʃ ɛỹrɛỹ na ‘mend me’
[tʃ <sup>w</sup> ]	/tʃ <sup>w</sup> /	tʃ u
[itʃ <sup>w</sup> i] ‘a type of beans cake’	/itʃ <sup>w</sup> i/ ‘a type of beans cake’	itʃ uì ‘a type of beans cake’
[h]	/h/	h
[hoi] ‘ripe’ [honò] ‘hard’	/hoi/ ‘ripe’ /honò/ ‘hard’	hoi ‘ripe’ honò ‘hard’
[h <sup>w</sup> ]	/h <sup>w</sup> /	hu
[ih <sup>w</sup> i] ‘urine’	/ih <sup>w</sup> i/ ‘urine’	ihui ‘urine’
[m]	/m/	m
[mi] ‘do’ [muà] ‘full’ [imi] ‘pregnancy’	/mi/ ‘do’ /muà/ ‘full’ /imi/ ‘pregnancy’	mi ‘do’ muà ‘full’ imi ‘pregnancy’
[n]	/n/	n
[nù] ‘go’ [nani] ‘wash (plates)’ [ono] ‘a type of seed’	/nù/ ‘go’ /nani/ ‘wash (plates)’ /ono/ ‘a type of seed’	nù ‘go’ nani ‘wash (plates)’ ono ‘a type of seed’
[ɲ]	/ɲ/	ny
[ɲ umì] ‘sweat’ [oɲ o] ‘wife’ [iɲ i] ‘water’	/ɲ umì/ ‘sweat’ /oɲ o/ ‘wife’ /iɲ i/ ‘water’	nyumì ‘sweat’ onyo ‘wife’ inyi ‘water’
[ŋ]	[ŋ]	ng
[íniŋi] ‘four’	/íniŋi/ ‘four’	íningi ‘four’

[y] [iyi] ‘day’ [yo] ‘dance’	[y] [iyi] ‘day’ [yo] ‘dance’	y iyi ‘day’ yo ‘dance’
[w] [wo] ‘resemble’ [wosi] ‘carry’	/w/ /wo/ ‘resemble’ /wosi/ ‘carry’	w wo ‘resemble’ wosi ‘carry’
[l] [lo] ‘weave’ [logi] ‘help’	/l/ /lo/ ‘weave’ /logi/ ‘help’	l lo ‘weave’ logi ‘help’
[r] [erikisi] ‘a type of ant’ [okpòro] ‘pilar’	/r/ /erikisi/ ‘a type of ant’ /okpòro/ ‘pilar’	r erikisi ‘a type of ant’ okpòro ‘pilar’

All the 22 consonants phonemes Àbèsàbèsì attests are represented. Since speakers are familiar with ‘ş’ used to represent ‘j’, I suggest ‘tş’ should represent ‘tj’.

The choice of ‘tş’ is based on the principle of familiarity. The intended user of the orthography are familiar with Yoruba orthography uses ‘ş’ to represent ‘j’ for the voiceless alveolar plosive quality is introduced grapheme to make it sound similar to the phonetic palato- alveolar fricative. The above suggestion is informed by the fact that it is easy for beginner class understand things that look alike. The teacher needs to guide the pupils to take note of the differences in ‘s’ ‘ş’ and ‘tş’ as graphemes. Furthermore, I propose the nasal quality in ‘ɲ’ and ‘ŋ’ should be represented by writing the grapheme for alveolar nasal ‘n’ to precede ‘y’ and ‘g’ respectively which results in the realization of ‘ny’ and ‘ng,’ the grapheme are in agreement with Schroeder 2010:7-8 suggestion for similar phonemes in Bantu Orthography. The above suggestions make the orthography as close as possible to the Yoruba Orthography which learners are already familiar. It also makes the orthography close to languages that attests similar graphemes as Suggested in Schroeder 2010.

### 3. Vowels

#### (i) Oral Vowels

Oral Vowels: Graphemes for the 7 Àbèsàbèsì oral vowels are shown on table 2 below.

<b>Front</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>Back</b>
<b>High</b>	i	u
<b>Mid High</b>	e	o
<b>Mid Low</b>	ɛ	ɔ
<b>Low</b>		a

The vowels should be represented as: Table 2

Phonetic Representation	Phonemic Representation	Orthographic Representation
[i] [imi] ‘pregnancy’ [iyi] ‘day’	/i/ /imi/ ‘pregnancy’ /iyi/ ‘day’	i imi ‘pregnancy’ iyi ‘day’
[e] [ehu] ‘rat’ [hu] ‘dry’	/e/ /ehu/ ‘rat’ /hu/ ‘dry’	e ehu ‘rat’ hu ‘dry’
[o] [oyo] dance (noun) [ko] ‘sing’	/o/ /oyo/ dance (noun) /ko/ ‘sing’	o oyo dance (noun) ko ‘sing’
[ɛ] semè ‘greet’ [ɛ] ‘it’	/ɛ/ /semè/ ‘greet’ /ɛ/ ‘it’	ɛ semè ‘greet’ é ‘it’
[a] [sà] ‘know’ [bà] ‘come’	/a/ /sà/ ‘know’ /bà/ ‘come’	a sà ‘know’ bà ‘come’
[ɔ] [ɔbɔ] ‘hand’ [lɔ] ‘throw’	/ɔ/ /ɔbɔ/ ‘hand’ /lɔ/ ‘throw’	ɔ ɔbɔ ‘hand’ lɔ ‘throw’
[u] [ku] ‘fall’ [hu] ‘die’	[u] [ku] ‘fall’ [hu] ‘die’	u ku ‘fall’ hu ‘die’

Literate speakers, young and old, are familiar with all the graphemes proposed on table 2 because of their exposure to Yoruba Literature. Therefore we do not envisage any problem in learning and teaching them.

#### (ii) Nasalized Vowels

The five nasalized vowels are:

ĩ	ũ
ẽ	õ
ã	

The vowels occur in words as represented on table 3 thus;

Table 3

Phonetic Representation	Phonemic Representation	Orthographic Representation
[ĩ] [eki] ‘one’ [it̩ĩ] ‘domestic animals’	/ĩ/ //eki/ ‘one’ /it̩ĩ/ ‘domestic animals’	in ekin ‘one’ ì t̩ ìn ‘domestic animals’
[ẽ] [edèn] ‘that’ [igbẽ] ‘when’	/ẽ/ èdèn ‘that’ /igbẽ/ ‘when’	en èdèn ‘that’ igbèn ‘when’
[ã] [hãsi] ‘peel (yam)’ [kpã] ‘deceive’	/ã/ /hãsi/ ‘peel (yam)’ /kpã/ ‘deceive’	an hansi ‘peel (yam)’ kpan ‘deceive’
[ḽ] [hḽ] ‘cultivate’ [hḽsi] ‘dry’	/ḽ/ [hḽ] ‘cultivate’ /hḽsi/ ‘dry’	on hḽn ‘cultivate’ hḽnsi ‘dry’
[ũ] [ɔũ] ‘hill’	/ũ/ /ɔũ/ ‘hill’	un oş un ‘hill’

All Àbèsàbèsì vowel phonemes are represented in table 3.

### Long Vowels

Àbèsàbèsì attests both long and short vowels. Graphemes are already proposed for the short vowels on tables 2 and 3. The long vowels will be represented by double grapheme for the shorter vowels that share similar phonetic features. Examples of such vowels are:

[i:]	/i/	ii	[uu]	/uu/	uu
[ee]	/ee/	ii	[oo]	/oo/	oo
ε ε	/ε ε /	εε	[ɔ ɔ ]	/ɔ ɔ /	oɔ
		[aa]	/aa/	aa	

The vowels can be found in lexical items like:

ikpe dùmẹ eỹ ‘guinea worm’  
ehii ‘word/matter’  
èhee ‘like this’  
èree ‘like that’  
ike de eỹgbẹ eỹ ‘lice’  
ínyáádo ‘a type of grass hopper’  
àjaà ‘pot’  
oỹo ‘you second person singular’  
ayoò ‘eye/face’  
ítiròò ‘eye lace’  
ş uù ‘run’

### 4. Tone

Tones are super-segmental phonemes that indicate the pitch of an utterance in a tonal language.

The three level tones Àbèsàbèsì attests should be represented thus:

Low Tone	[ ˩ ]	/ ˩ /	àkàdà ‘vagina’	èdèdè ‘penis’	òtulà ‘refuse dung’
High Tone	[ ˨˨ ]	/ ˨˨ /	‘aye’	omudẹ ‘mortal’	
Mid Tone	[ ˨ ]	/ ˨ /	not indicated	ebui ‘goat’	ebo ‘dog’
oyo ‘dance noun’			onyo ‘wife’		

### 5. Spelling of Words

Àbèsàbèsì: Words should be spelt as pronounced.

Each (meaningful unit) morpheme should be separated by word spacing. All the three significant tones should be appropriately reflected on the word. Examples are:

ajaà ‘pot’ àdàà ‘hoe’ atọ ‘land/ground’ adomi ‘moon’ igbadomi ‘sky’  
oni ‘person’ obọ ‘hand’ ş o ‘weep’ ş ongi ‘turn’ iş umi ‘head’ ş erè ‘roam about’  
etşi ‘market’ etşa ‘evil’ oşişegì ‘perforated pot/local sieve’ enami ‘meat’  
e namà ‘bird’ eỹgeỹ ‘door’ eỹteỹngi ‘fish’ eỹşeyşgi ‘suffering’  
ímonyì ‘melon’ omínyà ‘knife’ aş ongi mortal okureỹ ‘cane noun’ oỹjoỹjoỹ cake made from water  
yam’ oyeỹyeỹ ‘a type of beans’ òtílí ‘type of beans’  
èkpukpangi ‘a type of shrub’ ikpado ‘groundnut’ ikpári ‘children’ àkpàngì ‘chin’ ipoympoym laps  
omudẹ ‘pistol’

Idaja Ìgèdègédé Èkiròmì Aseṣ̄ Ìyànì Ìbaràmù Àkpes

The lexical items above are proposed taking into account the production of the lexis in isolation and in a string morphemic boundary of lexical items in a string will be indicated with word spacing.

For instance an individual from Èkiròmì going to Gègèdédé will say to the neighbour:

n á dasÌgèdègédé n á dasi Ìgèdègédé  
I ASP go Ìgèdègédé I am going to Ìgèdègédé

òhunẹ̀ òkùlebàgòrì ‘type of a tree’

tree pre-uproot-dog-bottom

‘obeshe’

‘òkùlebàgòrì’ is a word form from the combination of four morphemes:

ò- kulè- ebo- àgòrì

pre up-root dog -bottom

In the first example two morphemes are contracted in the speech of an Èkiròmì speaker. They are: *dasi* ‘go’ and Ìgèdègédé ‘name of a community of Àbèsàbèsì speakers’. Thus we propose the separation of each morpheme in structures that attest combination of more than one morpheme.

The universal punctuation principles that govern the use of question mark ?, comma , semi colon; colon : and compound words will be adopted as appropriate in the orthography.

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