

<b>TGZ</b>	<b>Sŋŋ</b>
I-yu-no	du-le-nv, /
ijuhno	tulehnã
ijuhno	tu:le:hnã
ain	he.arose

<b>ŋ</b>	<b>ŋŋ</b>	<b>ŋŋ</b>
tsi-li, /	U-dv-ne	u-ne-tsv.
li	utãhne	unetsã
si:hi	u:tã:hne	u:hne:tsã
g.to.return	he.said.it	when.he.spoke

paid for our sins],  
he paid it all for us.

he arose,  
"a second time," he said when he spoke.'

—From Worcester and Boudinot n.d.: 57.

### Bibliography

Fredrick Kilpatrick. 1963. "Inconsistencies in Cherokee spelling." In *Language and Culture: Proceedings of the 1962 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Linguistic Society*, ed. Viola E. Garfield, pp. 60–63. Seattle: University of Washington.

*Cherokee-English Dictionary*, ed. William Pulte. Tablequah: Cherokee Nation.

*The Civilization of the American Indian* 16). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

"Cherokee Orthographies." In *The Linguistics of Literacy*, ed. Norman D. Lima, and Michael Noonan (Typological Studies in Language 16). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

"American Writing Systems." In *Language in the U.S.A.*, ed. Charles Brice Heath, pp. 145–74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barbaugh. 1993. "The Early History of the Cherokee Syllabary." *Ethnohistory* 40.1: 1–20.

[Charles Boudinot.] n.d. *Cherokee Hymn Book*. Philadelphia: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

## Scripts of West Africa

JOHN VICTOR SINGLER

Surveys of indigenous writing systems among the Niger-Congo languages of West Africa have identified as many as sixteen scripts. The best known of these, the Vai system, was invented in the 1830s, with the others all created in the twentieth century. The principal scholarly work on writing systems in the region is that of Dalby 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970. The recency of several of the systems described by Dalby indicates that the creation of writing systems is a continuing occurrence in modern West Africa.

Dalby divides the systems geographically: Liberia–Sierra Leone (Vai, Kpelle, Mende, Loma, Bassa, Gola); Cameroun–Nigeria (Bamum, Bagam, Ibibio-Efik, Yoruba); Guinea–Senegal–Mali (Manding [Mandekan], Wolof, two Fula); and Côte d'Ivoire (Bete, Guro). Of the fifteen systems for which information was available to Dalby, eight were alphabets, and seven syllabaries. Three of the alphabets and one of the syllabaries were written from right to left, while the remainder were all written from left to right. The two with the largest current use and the greatest body of written literature are Vai and N'ko, the Manding alphabet, and they are described here.

### The N'ko alphabet






According to Dalby (1969: 162), the N'ko alphabet for Mandekan was created by Soulemayne Kante in Kankan, Guinea, in the years following World War II. Mandekan (what Dalby calls Manding) encompasses Bambara, Maninka, Mandinka, Dyula, Malinke, Kuranko, Mandingo, and various other dialects spoken widely across the West African Sahel and the regions south of the Sahel. N'ko (literally 'I say' in all the dialects) reads from right to left. There are eighteen consonants and seven vowels. A diacritic placed below a vowel indicates nasalization, and diacritics placed above a vowel or syllabic nasal signals length, tone, and "differences of tonal behaviour resulting from different grammatical contexts" (Dalby 1969: 165). This last, according to Dalby, primarily points to the difference in Mandekan tone patterning between nouns and verbs.

### Vai script

The Vai script was developed in approximately 1833 by Momolu Duwalu Bukele, who told the German linguist S. K. Koelle that the inspiration for the Vai script had

come to him in a dream (Dalby 1967). Bukele and five friends then devised the characters for the script. Evidently Bukele was aware of the existence of the Arabic and Roman writing systems, and possibly Cherokee as well (Dalby 1968, Holsoe 1971). The script was standardized in 1899 and again in 1962, this last at a conference at the University of Liberia. The conference is said to have been dominated by Western-trained Vai scholars rather than by the people who actually use the script on a daily basis (and who are not literate in English). The script's primary use is for correspondence and record-keeping. Since knowledge of the script is acquired informally rather than formally, there has been no mechanism for the imposition of the standardized version. Items are occasionally published that use the script—e.g. a 1989 translation of the Gospel of Mark in Vai with the Roman alphabet on the left and the script on the right—but the basis for the enduring popularity of Vai has been its personal uses rather than more public ones.

### Orthographic principles

The Vai writing system is a left-to-right system. While it has always been described as syllable-based, the basic unit of the system is more accurately the mora. The weight of the syllable determines the number of characters that will be used to represent it. The only closed syllables are those ending with a velar nasal. If a syllable ends with a velar nasal consonant, the nasal is written with a separate character , e.g.  *ke-ni* [kɛŋ] 'house'. The velar nasal can itself be syllabic, e.g.  [ŋ] 'first person singular'. (The velar nasal is subject to assimilation processes and is not always pronounced as a velar; but however it is pronounced, it is always written as .) Apart from these cases involving a nasal consonant, every syllable ends with a vowel. When an open syllable contains only a short vowel, the syllable is written with a single character, e.g.  *ji* 'water'. When it contains a long vowel or a diphthong, it is written with two characters.

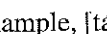

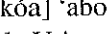




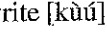









There is variation as to the spelling of syllables containing a long vowel or a diphthong. For example, [táá] 'go' is ordinarily written  *ta-a* and not  *ta-a*. Similarly, [lákóá] 'about' is most often written  *la-ko-wa*. Apart from loanwords, the only Vai words which begin with a vowel are pronouns, interjections, and conjunctions. Of these, only the pronouns are truly common in speech or writing, and they begin with either *i* or *a*: [í] 'you (singular)', [à] 'he, she', and [ànú] 'they'. The character for *a* is . Ordinarily it is reserved for those instances when it starts a word; when it occurs as the second half of a long vowel or diphthong,  *ha* or  *wa* is used instead. By contrast,  *i* appears both word-initially and otherwise. In the script chart devised at the 1962 conference, a distinction is made between the characters for *wV* syllables and for *V* syllables. However, except for *wa* versus *a*, this is largely an artificial distinction and is not strictly observed. Thus, while it is certainly possible to write [kùú] 'compound, home' as  *ku-u*, instead it is usually written  *ku-wu*.

TABLE 54.1:

Translit. <sup>a</sup>	V
p	[p]
b	[b]
ɸ	[ɸ]
mɸ	[mɸ]
kp	[kp]
mgb	[mgb]
gb	[gb]
f	[f]
v	[v]
t	[t]
d	[d]
l	[l]
ɖ	[ɖ]
nd	[nd]
s	[s]
z	[z]
c	[c]
j	[j]
nj	[nj]
y	[j]
k	[k]
ng	[ŋg]
g	[g]
h	[h]
w	[w]
	—
lv	[l̥]
m	[m]
n	[n]
ny	[n̥]
ñ	[ɲ]

a. The transl.





A series of phonetic changes in progress in Vai is affecting the fit of the written language to the spoken language. In the case of [ŋ] between like vowels, the consonant is disappearing, while the surrounding vowels are becoming nasalized, e.g. /kaŋa/ 'box', now ordinarily pronounced [kãã]. Even though in most cases this change is largely complete, the affected words continue to be written as if the nasal consonant were still present, e.g.   *ka-nia* 'box'. A less advanced but far more pervasive change is the variable deletion of [l], both word-medially and as the first segment of grammatical elements such as postpositions. (The greater importance of the change involving [l] is a consequence of the segment's widespread presence word-internally in Vai.) In writing, the use of characters containing [l] is more conservative and arguably more formal than the use of [l]-less ones. There is also geographic variation in this, reflecting the degree of completion of the phonetic change in different areas. Thus /káló/ 'moon', most often pronounced [káo], is spelled both   *ka-lo* and   *ka-wo* (and also   *ka-o*).

The discussion thus far has implied that vowel length is always indicated; but in fact it is sometimes omitted, particularly in grammatical elements. This omission includes instances where the long vowel has been created by the disappearance of [l]. This can be seen, for example, in the sample of Vai script below; the assignment of phonological length there follows Welmers 1976.

Vai has lexical tone, with two level tones and two contours (transcribed ˊ high, ˋ low, ˎ falling, ˏ rising). The writing system does not indicate tone. However, as Welmers notes, "Pairs or larger groups of stems that differ from each other only in tone are not particularly common, especially within a single grammatical category" (1976: 31).

As suggested above, Vai has a strict (C)V(N) syllable pattern. The final nasal is expressed by a separate character, and vowel length also involves distinct characters. Because of the restriction of possible syllable shape and the conventions regarding the final nasal and vowel length, the number of possible "syllables" to be represented by the Vai script is comparatively small, slightly more than 200.

There is no division between words. Many writers signal the end of a sentence by writing  *hé*. Script users familiar with other writing systems, i.e. Roman or Arabic, tend to replace  with \*. As noted by Scribner and Cole (1981: 142–50), the lack of division between words makes reading the script difficult. Vai literates report that the script is easier to write than to read. Still, various script conventions and distributional patterns among Vai's consonants make the task less arduous than it might be otherwise (Singler 1983: 897).

### The characters

The table of characters given in TABLE 54.1 emerged from the 1962 conference at the University of Liberia. Most literates find the need for only forty to sixty characters. In many ways, the participants at the 1962 conference "filled in the blanks," creating symbols where none had existed before. Thus the conference largely intro-



