

Language and Identity
Theories and experiences
in lexicography
and linguistic policies
in a global world

Edited by
Ilaria Micheli,
Flavia Aiello,
Maddalena Toscano,
Amelia Pensabene

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ATrA 7

Aree di transizione linguistiche e culturali in Africa



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From IPA to wildcards: A critical look at some African Latin orthographies

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ABSTRACT

The article presents and discusses a few African Latin orthographies. The scope of the work is set out in section 1, while section 2 discusses a few orthographies featuring IPA symbols and diacritics. They were often the work of linguists and missionaries and were conceived for mother-tongue alphabetization and in order to translate and publish religious literature. They are scarcely useful in everyday casual writing, and especially so on a keyboard (where only a restricted set of symbols is to all practical purposes available). They are contrasted in section 3 with the use of digraphs and, most of all, with “wildcards:” symbols of the Latin, basic (unmodified) alphabet that are taken to use, often in an idiosyncratic manner, in order to represent phonemes that do not have a direct, built-in representation. The discussion is wrapped up in section 4, where the limits on the use of wildcards are evidenced and the practical limitations of many African orthographies reiterated.

KEYWORDS

Orthographies; Latin script; IPA; diacritics; digraphs.

1. A SHORT INTRODUCTION WITH MANY CAVEATS AND UNSOLICITED EXCUSES

Why are many African orthographies so bad? Is it because so many African languages are phonologically complex? Indeed, they are. But is this the only reason? And, for that matter, in what sense can we say that an orthography is “bad”?

This article will delve into an analysis along language-internal criteria, and the appropriateness of an orthography (which inversely correlates with deviation from a one-to-one correspondence between graphemes and phonemes; Sgall 1987) will not be called into question. Rather, attention will be focused on effectiveness (Cahill and Karan 2008; Cahill 2015). Granting that graphization has been, in Africa and elsewhere, a top-down process and that data on the approval of an orthography on the part of its real stakeholders – all of its potential users – are difficult to get, the analysis will concentrate on the internal characteristics of an orthography that are in all likelihood bound to facilitate or hamper its use.

Just as all languages are equal but some of them are more equal than others because they have been ausbauized (Tosco 2008) into written, official languages, also not all orthographies are equal: “big” languages may go along fine for centuries with awful, impractical and obsolete orthographies. Minority languages cannot: often their speakers are illiterate and must face the usual hurdles of acquiring literacy; in many cases reading and writing skills are offered to the minority language speakers in a locally or internationally big language. Both possibilities are widespread in Africa (and elsewhere). Or the minority language speakers already know the local majority language and its orthography and have thereby access to a sizable amount of material and information available in that language; the additional skills required in learning and using the minority language orthography are mostly justified in ideological and moral terms. Any material produced in the minority language will face very high hurdles in dissemination and will not be likely to be a winning competitor, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

In Africa and elsewhere many orthographies were designed by foreign linguists, policy makers or missionaries – often with some input from local language consultants – and basically with the aim of publishing in the local language. That the publication itself is a Holy Book or the word of the leading party and its sacred leaders does not change much: the speakers themselves will mostly be readers – i.e., passive users. A technically very accurate orthography will certainly be easy to learn.

Not the same can be said about actively using the orthography – i.e., as writers, and especially so when handwriting is replaced by the use of keyboards (of typewriters in the past and of computers or cellphones nowadays).

It is certainly true that most of these orthographies have never been tested in extensive, daily usage by speakers, but this use has probably never even been considered.

In short, one feels that not all the needs of the potential users were taken into consideration: the degree to which an orthography will be user-friendly will be much different if reading or writing are taken into consideration.

As the title implies, orthographies based upon the Latin alphabet only will be presented and critically discussed, and actually a tiny minority of them. Specifically, I will not be concerned with:

- the vigorous use of the Arabic alphabet, not only in the past but still today (for which Mumin and Versteegh 2014 is not only a must, but also a fascinating reading);
- the use and present spread of indigenous scripts (*in primis* the Ethiopic syllabary in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the recently revived Tifinagh Berber alphasyllabary);
- finally – and regretfully (and simply out of lack of competence and data) – the rise and to a certain extent spread of many “new” alphabets of Africa – such as the Vai syllabary, the N’Ko alphabet or the Mandombe script. A good overview is provided in Kootz and Pasch (2010).

2. THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF LINGUISTICS (AND LINGUISTS)

Both digraphs and IPA-based modifications of Latin letters are found in the orthography of Hausa (Chadic; ISO 639-3: hau¹), probably the African language with the highest number of native speakers. Digraphs are < sh >, and < ts > for /ʃ/ and /tʃ/, respectively; IPA symbols are < ɓ >, < ɗ > for implosives and < ɛ̃ > for ejective /k̟/. Ejectivization is instead not marked in the case of the affricate /tʃ/, while < ‘y > stands for a palatal glottal stop /ʔ/. Under representation is found in the case of the same symbol < r > used for both an alveolar trill (the latter often expressed by < ʀ > in linguistic works, with plain < r > being reserved to retroflex flap /ɽ/) and most of all in the case of vowel length, which goes unmarked. As in many, maybe most African orthographies, tones are left unmarked.

Not surprisingly, leaving aside the still widespread use of Arabic-based *Ajami*, everyday Hausa written in *boko* (/bōkò/), i.e., the Latin alphabet, often disregards the “hooked” letters altogether and ‘one still encounters publications, including newspapers, where the plain letters are used’ (Jaggar 2001: 698): ‘the letters are printed without the hooks’ (Newman 2000: 726).

¹ The ISO 639-3 code is provided for all and only African languages after their first mention in the text.

Nor are these problems limited to languages spoken in former British colonies: a cursory look at a few major languages of West Africa, suffices to show the extension of the IPA symbol < ŋ > for a velar nasal – e.g., in both Wolof (Atlantic; wol) and Bambara (Mande; bam). The latter adds to its inventory of graphemes marked by IPA symbols < ŋ > for the palatal nasal as well as < ε > and < ɔ > for the open-mid vowels; the same array of graphemes is also used in Dyula (Mande; dyu), a major lingua franca of West Africa (whose use and potentialities also as a written language are discussed in Micheli forthcoming).

Other languages face more and more difficult problems in their graphization.

In the case of many languages of South Sudan, troubles started at least in 1928, at the time of the Rejaf Language Conference (Tucker 1929), for which Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2016) provide a useful overview. Their attention mostly goes to the ideological aspects of the conference, and their stark critiques – framed in the new orthodoxy of postmodernism and postcolonial studies – focus on the “Orientalist” attitude of the participants (where “Orientalist” is of course an abusive term) and the alleged invention of discrete ethnic groups and languages with the aim of reinforcing and maintaining colonial power. Still, their analysis of Dietrich Westermann’s (1875-1956) orthographic proposals has some merit.

Following his long research in Sudan and West Africa and serving as director of the *International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* (later the *International African Institute*) from 1926 until 1939, Westermann proposed a *Practical Orthography of African Languages* (1928, 1930).² Proposed IPA symbols to be used in these “practical orthographies” include among others < ŋ >, < ʃ >, < ʒ >, < ʏ >. Further recommendations include the use of apostrophes for ejectives and/or implosives, of umlaut (diaeresis) for “central vowels.” Also, the notation of dental stops with the digraphs < dh >, < th > is recommended.

An early example of these orthographical choices is Heasty’s (1937) Shilluk dictionary, but the same solutions lie at the basis of the alphabets still used for many languages of South Sudan of different genetic affiliation and to some extent used in education (English only being the official language of independent South Sudan).

Among the main languages, Dinka and Nuer are cases in point: Dinka (din) and other West Nilotic languages have both modal and breathy vowels. Breathiness is marked in IPA by a subscript umlaut (diaeresis), as /a̱/, /e̱/, etc. The IPA notation is apparently the source of the Dinka superscript umlaut above the vowel, as in < ä̱ >, < ë̱ >, etc.

² Available online at <http://www.bisharat.net/Documents/poal30.htm> (last accessed June 2, 2021).

A a	Ä ä	B b	C c	D d	Dh dh	E e	È è	É é	Ë ë	G g	Y y	I i	Ï ï	J j	K k	L l	M m
[a]	[ä]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[d̥]	[e]	[ẽ]	[ē]	[e̝]	[g]	[y]	[i]	[ĩ]	[j]	[k]	[l]	[m]
N n	Nh nh	Ny ny	D̥ d̥	O o	Ö ö	Ɔ ɔ	Ǫ ɔ̃	P p	R r	T t	Th th	U u	W w	Y y			
[n]	[nh]	[ny]	[d̥]	[o]	[ö]	[ɔ]	[ɔ̃]	[p]	[r]	[t]	[t̥]	[u]	[w]	[j]			

Figure 1. The Dinka alphabet (<http://www.languagesgulper.com/eng/Dinka.html>)

Although a few digraphs are used for consonants, no generalization of such a solution has been attempted. In stops, a breathy release is marked in IPA by a raised symbol for a voiced glottal fricative, as in /b^h/: one could imagine a transcription * < ah > for /ḁ/ (instead of < ä >), etc. As vowel length is not phonological, one could even use * < aa >. This leaves the problem of vowel quality: seven vowel qualities are phonemic in Dinka, with open-mid /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ opposed to close-mid /e/ and /o/. Accents are often used in European languages to the effect of marking openness, but other solutions are conceivable, such as digraphs (* < ae >?). The Dinka orthography simply keeps the IPA symbols, and not only sports < ε > and < ɔ >, but also breathy < ë > and < ö >.

Other IPA signs are found in the case of < ɣ >, < ɲ > and < ŋ >.

The Dinka orthography is interesting for the use of digraphs whose second element is consistently < h >: < dh >, < th > and < nh > for the dental counterparts /d̥/, /t̥/, /n̥/ to alveolars /d/, /t/, /n/.

At the same time, signs provided by the Latin alphabet and available in any standard keyboard but left unused in the Dinka orthography abound: < f >, < h >, < q >, < s >, < v >, < x >, and < z >. One can easily argue that at least < s > and < z > could be good solutions for the dental stops. As < ny > is used for the palatal nasal stop /ɲ/, the absence of the perhaps even more common digraph < ng > for the velar stop /ŋ/ is puzzling.

2. Bër ë dët

Ruëëth aabi yök anyiköl yic ë yän juëc yiic anyiköl yic.

Añuï kek Awan

Wäthæεr yen aci Añuï lo tënë wën ë nyankënë cäl Awan ku lëk yeen, “Manh ë nyankäi, awiëc ba pïr yïn yaköl.”

Go Awan dhuök yeen, “Yeñö yinër ye yïn pïr yen? Na wεεñdïit tö tēën cä ke bi la dök yïin, bi yïn ke pïr!” Ku kat Awan bi wεεñdïit wën nyuäth la kuaath wïir tiök yic bi weñ döt ebën. Ku le riñ tënë nërë Añuï ku lëk yeen, “Yen kan yen miëthdu, yïn abi cuet yaköl tē cït tē wïc.”

Añuï aci puöu jal mist ku riñ wïir bi yök la cam. Na le yëët tiök yic, kë döt aya cëmën yök, go yic löny bi dhiau.

Go Awan lëk yeen, “Duk go dhiau kë wun yök këc gua bën. Na le yëët lä, ka aba kuany yic apath yeñö këne diëc yäkke yiic.”

Thiëc

1. Yeñö ci Awan nyuöth Añuï bi ya miëthde?
2. Ci Awan poth nërë thok këdë?

Figure 2. An excerpt from a page in Dinka (Caguor 2003: 4)³

The same system is basically followed for Nuer (West Nilotic; nus), with the umlaut being replaced for breathiness by underscore:

³ This and all the following specimens of South Sudanese orthographies were obtained in Juba in 2013.

Man Dεεη κενε Nyaluaak cike wä ruup.
Mëë cike cop ruup, cuke wä göör ke tɔɔŋ.
Mëë görke, cu Man Dεεη nyääl nen rey
butbutä. Cue Nyaluaak cɔl. Cue wee, "Nen
nyääl εmɔ. ε nyääl in la cam naath κενε leey."

Cukε riŋ wic. Mëë cike cop thaar wec, cuke
gaaç εlɔŋ ke dual mi ci dual ke ke. /Ken nyääl
εmɔ ben kɔɔriɛn. Cue duoθh gaaθhde. Cu
Man Dεεη cieŋ nɔŋikä ke tɔɔŋ kä cue thaŋŋ
tɔɔŋni banɣ ruup. Nyaluaak ce dual εlɔŋ a thile
tɔɔŋ ti ce nööŋ dhɔr man.

Mëë ci Man Dεεη cop cieŋde, cue lar Guan
Dεεη i "Cakɔ nyääl nen rey butbutä ruup."

Cu Guan Dεεη wee i "ε jɛn nyääl in la dεy
yɔɔk a cam εn wic εmε."

Cu Guan Dεεη ε wä guil κενε Dak ke Man
Dεεη ke yöö ηäce gaaθhde. /Ken κεν ε jek.
Cu Man Dεεη wee, "Cε jɛn. ε jɛn gaaθhde,
εn butbut εmε."

Mëë cike ben wic, cua ke thiec, i "Ci yen ε
jek?" Cukε wee /ken κεν ε jek.

Cu Man Bol wee, "Kä ce wä nikä, εn
nyääl?"

Cu Man Dεεη wee, "/Cä dee ηäç εn gaaθh
ε ce wä thɪn ɔ."

Figure 3. An excerpt from a page in Nuer (Kuëne ke Thok Nath Bok ŋuaan 1994: 65)

Breathiness is not phonological in Murle (Surmic; mur), and this entails the absence of umlaut and underscore; on the other hand, the same IPA signs seen above are again used for both vowels and consonants:

ZOZOK CI ADUWONEK DEMEZOK

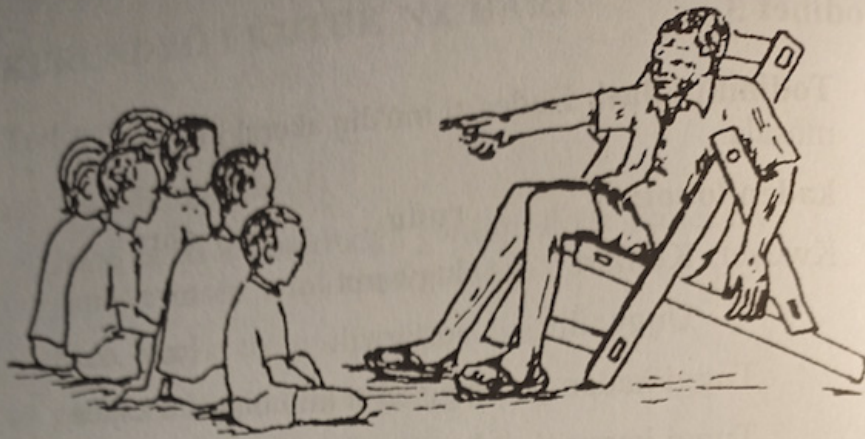
Omoloye ceen aməthəth thur ki ram o 52 obek deməzyak kəɛŋ ci (sura) ririthən ci avi ŋina noko. Zɛɛ enek nɔɔɔ nɛ, "Anyak zɔɔz ci colai ŋina. Agayu inoko zɔɔz nico kawo kazi nɛ? " Kanɛ Dokol." ŋina oovɔ zɔɔz ci ona kazi Dokol avi ŋina noko enek deməzyak nɛ, kazi zɔɔz nico nɛ, "Dokol" jɪnɔ bodo izi nɛ, kawo zɔɔz nico kazi nɛ? Azi deməzyawa nɛ, kawo kazi nɛ, "Dokol" ŋɛɛɛn inoko ŋaathunonɔ ci ajowa zɔɔz ci kazi Dokol noko ŋaman ŋina? Azi deməzyaithi oman nɛ, nɔɔn ce. Izi zin niina deməzoithi nɛ, "Abona ɔɔɔth". Anyek zin ŋina deməzyak wanɔi kathamanith kekebith golok ci zoozok niciko noko dook niigi doon kidicilim. Zɛɛ mazi icinu ijezith inoko niigi dook, Anyek zin nɔɔɔ dook kekebith moloye ci abɔbɔ. Zɛɛ mazi odothith anyek kebedozeke zoozok ci ɛɛl kaale ci aliyai ɛɛl ɔɔɔɔgi lootha noko kekebith niigi dook.

Figure 4. An excerpt from a page in Murle (Warage O Miliny Murleye 2004: 54)

The use of diacritics and IPA signs is quite widespread, being found in many, if not most, orthographies of the area.

Another major language of South Sudan, Bari (East Nilotic; bfa and others), replaces most IPA signs used for Dinka and Nuer with diacritics, with the exception of < ŋ > for the velar nasal. The implosives are marked by a preceding apostrophe: < 'b >, < 'd >, < 'y >. Umlaut is preserved in the case of < ö > and a single digraph < ny > is found. No breathiness contrast operates in Bari.

In this regard, Owen's (1908) Bari grammar, with its abundance of umlauts, accented letters and digraphs (among which... < ng >) but no special symbol, was certainly better.



Ŋutu modon̄ ko ŋwajik kanyit buker.

Ŋutu lele kata karen kanyit a Goke. Lepen̄ lo gwe a modon̄ parik. I diŋit nagon lepen̄ dene adi nye gwe adara ko kulya ti togolon a luŋundye ŋwajik kanyit liŋ kak. Kirut a lepen̄ kulyani ko lepen̄at adi "Ŋwajik kwe! Ta lo meddya nan ŋilo, nan gwe a modon̄ parik, riŋit nio kitayet gwe 'bayin, ko konyen kwe tine bulö meddya 'bura, swö kwe tine bulö yin̄ga 'bura. Nan yönö yin̄ga kasu i kutusen ko ta molu wulundyö wulundyö kitajin nagon a nyo."

Kirut a kilo ŋwajik kanyit poki i wu'yö na katajin kase geleŋ geleŋ. Togeleŋ adi, nye yönö kita. na katugwörönit lo toro'bo, tomurek adi nye yönö kita na tumunit, tomusala adi nye yönö kita na karyakanit lo kisuk ti ŋutu, a toiŋwan adi nye kita a kakurunita tobuker adi nye 'dekan kita na yuggu na kisuk.

I mukök nagon lepen̄at liŋ awu'yö kitajin kase, a monye lose kulyani ko lepen̄at adi, "Ana'but ŋwajik kwe, nan aje yin̄ kasu i kutusen. Ta lo meddi. Kogwon kulye kasu kilo

Figure 5. An excerpt from a page in Bari (Jujumbu Kendya ko Bari Buk Tomusala 1999: 52)

Mödö (or Jur; Bongo-Bagirmi; bex) is another language of South Sudan. The orthography used in Perrson and Perrson's (1991) dictionary and grammar resembles Bari in its use of < 'b > and < 'd >, to which < 'j > for a palatal implosive is added. Again, < η > marks a velar nasal and it further appears in the digraphs < ηg >, < ηb > and < ηm > for prenasalized phonemes.

Umlaut is used for < ï >, and < ë >, and a special sign for < ɔ >.

The extensive use of IPA symbols seems restricted to languages of South Sudan for the historical reasons outlined earlier in this section; digraphs, accents and apostrophes are rather used elsewhere. The orthography proposed for Rendille (East Cushitic; rel) of Kenya makes wide use of digraphs but also of an apostrophe preceding the sign for the modal stop in < 'b > and < 'd > for the implosives, and also, strangely enough, in < 'h > for the pharyngeal /ħ/. An apostrophe following a digraph is used in < ng' > for the velar stop (following the orthography of Swahili). The other digraphs are < ch > for the modal affricate /tʃ/, < kh > for the velar fricative /χ/, and < ny > for the palatal nasal. Acute accents mark a high tone. This is all the more disconcerting since Rendille belongs with Somali to the same sub-subgroup of East Cushitic (according to current classifications, they make up, together with Boni, the eastern branch of Omo-Tana, itself a major branching of East Cushitic). As we shall see in more detail below, the orthography of Somali could have provided a solution for a few phonemes, such as < dh > instead of < 'd >. Although in Somali the corresponding phoneme is postalveolar (/d/) rather than implosive (/d'), it could easily have been adopted and provide a model for * < bh > instead of < 'b > for bilabial /b/. While the use of the same pattern for * < hh > for the voiceless pharyngeal /ħ/ could have caused problems (in gemination), Somali offered an easy viable alternative in its use of < x >.

In Rendille, < x > is just one among a sizable number of unused signs of the Latin alphabet; the others are < c >, < p >, < q >, < w > and < z >.

Alohi Chiirnaan

(The Rendille Alphabet)

Chi' Lagaabicho (Short)	Chi' ladeeraacho (Long)
A, a..... abár	Aa, aaabaár
B, b..... haabáb	bb`dábbal
Ch, ch..... siicha	cchficcha
D, d..... disda	dddaddaáb
'D, 'd..... `dóo'd	'dd`dá'ddab
E, e..... ébel	Ee, ee..... eéra
F, f..... fálfí	ffáf far
G, g..... daaga	gghaggá
H, h..... á kaaha	hhá kaahha
'H, 'h..... á `hiira	('hhá a`hhiira)
I, i..... íbir	Ii, iiíid
J, j..... Jíirá	jjjíijjo
K, k..... kákáhe	kkdíkkil
Kh, kh kháakhle	kkhíkkho
L, l..... léyley	lllallaáb
M, m..... maalím	mmmammáh
N, n..... naánah	nninnó
Ng', ng' ng'óoj	—
Ny, ny..... nyarnyáar	nnynyannyaame
O, o..... órro	Oo, ooóor
R, r..... Rén'dille	rraraárri
S, s..... síbbis	sssússukh
T, t..... tífto	tthátto
U, u..... usú	Uu, uuúur
W, w..... Waákh	wwhawwées
Y, y..... yaáy	yyyéyyah

Figure 6. The Rendille alphabet (Wori Haaggane MARKO Khore 1993)

Very similar is the alphabet devised by the same missionary body for Dhaasanac (East Cushitic; dsh). Here again we find no IPA symbols and the implosives are represented with an apostrophe preceding the sign for the

voiced stop; as in Rendille, acute accents (in Dhaasanac, on both moras of a long vowel) mark a high tone.

At the same time the alphabet has quite a few peculiarities: the digraph < dh > marks a laminal voiced fricative /ð/, and does not take into account that an alternative pronunciation with its apical counterpart /z/ is well attested in all positions (Tosco 2001: 19).

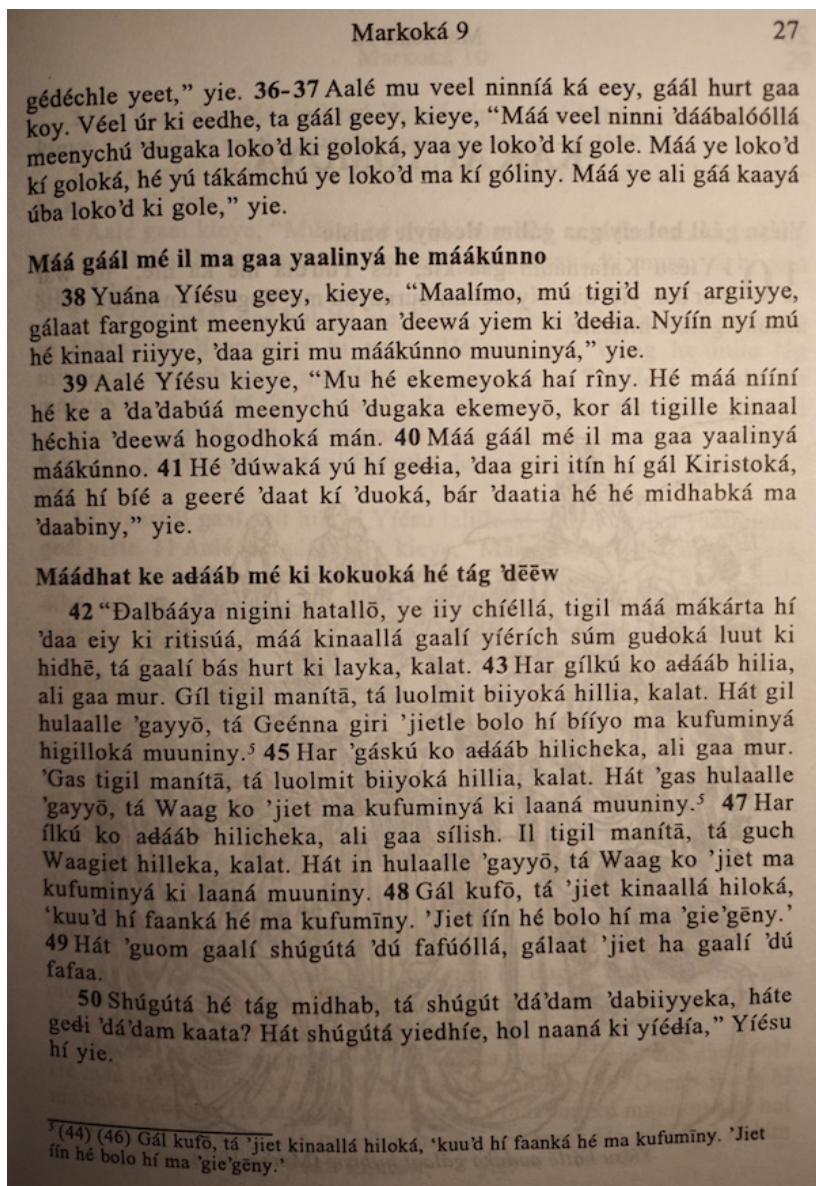


Figure 7. An excerpt from a page in Dhaasanac (War'gat Markoká 1997: 27)

Both diacritics and special symbols are found in the orthography of Gawwada (East Cushitic; gwd) proposed by the SIL International Literacy Department (with the additional complication that both the Latin alphabet and the Ethiopic syllabary are suggested). The apostrophe here follows the consonantal sign and marks an ejective (thus following the IPA conventions) in < c' >, < k' > and < t' >. IPA symbols are used for the pharyngeals: / ʕ / and / ħ /. Apart from < sh > and < ny >, the list comprises the use of < h > as second element for the implosives: < bh > and < dh >, but with no value in the case of < ch > for the affricate /tʃ/ (as in English) and of < qh > simply for /q/. The last two also imply that no “bare” < c > nor < q > are used, as well as no < z > nor < v >.









































IKKITO POKO ርALENA				ALE ALPHABET			
a ለ  arapko	aa ለ  aaxe	b ስ  bahante	ch ስ  chepʕe	c' ስ  c'iwc'iwe	d ስ  delle	e ስ  telte	
ee ስ  eero	f ስ  fileye	g ስ  gupo	h ስ  harre	h ስ  hisse	ፍ ስ  ፍardo	i ስ  ilge	
ii ስ  iibaare	j ስ  mirja	k ስ  kocho	k' ስ  k'alk'allo	l ስ  leeʕo	m ስ  maango	n ስ  niiche	
ny ስ  nyannya	o ስ  orpo	oo ስ  toomo	p ስ  pasho	qh ስ  qhole	r ስ  rigte	s ስ  siito	
sh ስ  shenge	t ስ  tawo	t' ስ  t'ooqhanako	u ስ  urrache	uu ስ  uuffe	w ስ  waalo	hx ስ  hxaare	
	y ስ  yiyako	lo'o ስ  lo'o	bh ስ  bhaqhasa	dh ስ  dhilanko	q ስ  quladi	z ስ 3 izah	

Figure 8. A proposed Gawwada alphabet (<https://www.alepeople.org/sites/www.alepeople.org/files/ALPHABET%20of%20CA%95ALE.jpg>)

It is noteworthy that many of these orthographies, and in particular those of Kenya and Ethiopia, completely disregard the practical alphabets designed from the seventies for languages which are structurally and phonologically similar: just as no use of the solutions devised for Somali is made for the very similar Rendille, no attention is paid in the case of Dhaasanac to the contemporary Latin orthographies of Ethiopia (where a majority of the Dhaasanac live).

It is to these innovative orthographies that we turn our attention in the next section.

3. EXAPTATION, OR: LEARNING TO USE WHAT YOU HAVE

3.1. PLAYING WITH WILDCARDS

The Horn of Africa is home to at least two success stories among African Latin-based orthographies: two official or national languages in their respective countries and with many million speakers as well as potential users of written texts: these are Somali and Oromo (both East Cushitic; som, orm). Somali came first, with its orthography officialized in 1972.

The long, troubled history of the graphization of Somali and of the Somali language policy has been told many times and is the subject of whole monographs: Caney (1984) mainly deals with linguistic issues—history of the orthography and corpus planning; Labahn (1982) with the orthography as well as language policy in general. Laitin (1977, 1992 – the latter within the larger African context) explores the political side (although overtly biased in favor of state interventionism and nation building; for a critique cf. Tosco 2014). Short historical overviews are provided in Tosco (2010, 2015).

Predictably, Somali uses the digraphs < sh > for /ʃ/ and < kh > for /χ/, as well as < dh > for a postalveolar /dʒ/. Uvular /q/ is marked by < q > and vowel length by redoubling the sign for the vowel. Pitch is not marked (as well as vowel backing/advancement). Glottal stop is only marked when not in word-initial position by an apostrophe: < ' >.

The main problem was the absence of an established and practical way to mark the pharyngeals /ʕ/ and /ħ/.

The genial solution came with the use of unmodified Latin letters, namely < c > for voiced /ʕ/ and < x > for voiceless /ħ/ (< p >, < v >, and < z > remain unused).

Consciously or not, it was realised that any Latin alphabet is bound to have a few “wildcards”: symbols that simply come for free with the choice of using the Latin alphabet but have no clear phonemic value to start with, and are therefore available to get assigned, in principle, any value.

A few Latin letters are born as wildcards: e.g., < q > and < c > already in Latin marked allophones of /k/. In the conclusions we will argue that, nevertheless, < q > is worse than < c > as a wildcard. As for < x >, in Latin it was used since the beginning for the cluster /ks/ and has been put to many different uses in different orthographies around the world (its value as /ʃ/ in Maltese, Basque and many other languages is a major example).

Other letters become wildcards on a language-specific basis whenever a phoneme usually expressed by that letter does not exist. Of course, being language-specific, the value of a wildcard is also much “lighter” than the established value of another letter: it is therefore particularly prone to substitution.

When establishing an orthography for ‘Afar (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea; aar), the orthography of neighboring Somali was a possible choice. ‘Afar is spoken in Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, but in Djibouti only

competition with Somali and the ideological need to obfuscate similarities led instead to an orthography where the peculiar choices of Somali were shuffled: pharyngeals < c > and < x > of Somali became < q > and < c >, while the digraph < dh > for the postalveolar /dʒ/ (a rather obvious choice) became /x/. As ‘Afar (or, in the new orthography, Qafar) has no uvular stop, no new symbol for /q/ was needed. Remarkably, all the other signs of Somali were kept.

The “Djibouti” orthography is used in the ‘Afar regional state of Ethiopia alongside the Ethiopian syllabary.

In Eritrea, after independence (1991; *de jure* 1993), the languages of Eritrea have been provided with a unified, national Latin orthography from which they depart only for phonemes peculiar to single languages (Semitic languages Tigrinya, Tigre and, of course, Arabic are written, respectively, in the Ethiopic syllabary and in Arabic script). For the ‘Afar minority of Eritrea and the very similar Saho (East Cushitic; sssy) the Somali choices of the 1970’s have been implemented (plausibly in order to sever the links with the ‘Afar in other countries). In the end, three nation states have implemented two different orthographies for similar languages, with one and the same language (‘Afar becoming either Qafar in Djibouti or Cafar in Eritrea) having two different orthographies in different countries (three counting the Ethiopic syllabary).

phoneme	Somali		‘Afar (Djibouti)		‘Afar, Saho (Eritrea)		gloss of examples
ʕ	c	cad	q	qado	c	cado	“(to be) white)”
ħ	x	xaakin	c	caakim	x	xaakim	Somali “judge;” ‘Afar “governor;” Saho “doctor” (from Arabic ḥākim “ruler”)
ɖ	dh	dhal	x	xale	dh	dhale	“to give birth to”

Figure 9. Somali, ‘Afar and Saho: wildcards and political choices (adapted from Savà and Tosco 2008: 125)

The principle of using wildcards has been further implemented in Ethiopia in connection with the marking of ejectives in Oromo. A brilliant combination of the criteria of simplicity and frequency is used – supplemented in case by adherence to tradition. The overall picture is apparently puzzling but makes actually good sense:

modal		ejective	
IPA	orthography	IPA	orthography
/p/	< p >	/p'/	< ph >
/t/	< t >	/t'/	< x >
/k/	< k >	/k'/	< q >
/tʃ/	< ch >	/tʃ'/	< c >

Figure 10. Modal and ejectives in the Oromo orthography

For the rarely used (mostly in loans) bilabials, plain < p > stands for modal /p/ and the digraph < ph > for its ejective counterpart /p'/: an additional phonetic feature is paralleled by an additional graphic symbol. For the velars, < k > stands for the modal and < q > for the ejective (here following a long Orientalist and Ethiopianist tradition). Wildcards are instead used in alveolar stops and alveopalatal affricates. For the former, < t > stands for /t/ and < x > for ejective /t'/. For affricates, where < c > is a wildcard and the digraph < ch > a well-established solution for /tʃ/, frequency decides, and while < ch > is reserved to modal (and less common in Oromo) /tʃ/, simple < c > stands for its ejective counterpart /tʃ'/.

The web of motivations at play here is certainly complex; the present writer remembers that, when presented and discussed at the (first) International Symposium on Cushitic and Omotic Languages (Köln, 1986), “some modifications were recommended on the basis of phonetic consistency” (Heine 1988: 620). These recommendations – supported by most scholars (and a very young and naïve writer of these lines) – consisted basically in proposing the use of digraphs with < h > as second element for the ejectives.

Wisely, the Oromo did not pay attention to intellectuals and “experts” and stuck to their decisions. Since then, the Oromo solution has been highly influential in Ethiopia and has been followed in recent years by other Latin-based orthographies (cf. Savà and Tosco 2008). One could even say that the use of < x > for /t'/ has become a shibboleth of the new Ethiopian alphabets for a geographically and genetically diverse array of languages. While only Koorete (North Omotic; kqy) and Sidamo (East Cushitic; sid) are presented here, the examples could be multiplied.

Erunxo 23

Wora Go'unxe.



Goodiyaadani lam'i e gaditini anke wonta mixe mixhiya hangicha. Mosheni Naaqoni u sungicha. Wora go'unxe erusaxi uso erussechosha wolla zeersine u hangicha. Godiyaadey be gadita "woray abasuna go'e" hidi oyco. Moshey "woray bo'ose zawa, mooshshuna ira gooche, sahay wulqana shohutte ooxesekko e go'e!" hido. Naaqoy "woray keexuse bokkule, eexuse mixe, keemose maata, gatese dooshshe ingesukko e go'e" hido.

2. Benay be pishsharo eruxi zawakko botti yoodo.

Goodiyaadey "Aadekko" hidi e itusso baane bidzi gadhesaxe u beedo. Sijaara ushichine e shife wora e dato. Ye wodey bono maaqicho gisha tamay izziyaw woraa ayto. Tamay wora miye aytine Goodiyaadani e gaditini wolla uydo. Ye ganda yecha geriti kessi tama bayssso. Goodiyaadani e gaditani ye geriti suuzzo. Ye woraa tama datta ade aytti tufe /higge/ zawa u anso.

Figure 11. An excerpt from a page in Koorete (Koorete Erunxi Pishsharo 1992: 58)

“Maammashsha afi’rinokki coyinna maxine worroonikki waasi mittoho” yinanni.

Wona qummi assinihu gede maammashshu gosa mitteyire lowore leellishanno. Lawishshu gede “a” nni-”g” geeshsha shiqinshiri sidaamu egennonso ‘Jajja roorsi’ran-no?, Cimeessa ayirrisanno?, Loosiraanchonso cee’maleessa baxanno?, halaale baxanno, Kaphphona?, wkl. Yinanni xa’ mora dawaro ikkannore afi’rino. Hakkonni daafira maammashshu lowore afisiisa dandaanno.

Mittu affi wolu ledο afi’rino fiixooma leellishate maammashshu lowo kaa’lo ikkanno. Qoleno qaallate tiro maxaafa qixeessate hawama rakkino qaallanna insano assine tuqqinanni gari maammashshu aana leellanno. Hakkonnira maxaafa togooha anga afi’ra borrote loossa duuchchu danitera irkishsha ikkitanno.

Maammashshu kulamanno gara la’nanni woyite konni afii maammashsha calla ikkikinni qaalla duuchchate maammashshi roore yanna kaimu ikkito mite-mite hasaanbannita ledο afi’riño. Mitemite hinge hasaanbanni woyite kayinni, haransinenna kaima ikkire ka’a qolle agurre shiqinshanni. Konne xaphphi assini maam-mashsha kulinke mannino, kaima ikkire egenne hee’renni haranse calla kulanna macciishinanni. Ikkona kayinni

XIII

Figure 12. An excerpt from a page in Sidamo (Itiyophiyu... 1990: xiii)

When you accept the principle of wildcards, there is no need to stick to the Oromo solution: < x > again, but in this case for the voiced uvular fricative /χ/, has recently been proposed by SIL for Ts’amakko (East Cushitic, Ethiopia; tsb; closely related to Gawwada). Savà (this volume) has taken this proposal over in his proposed orthography of Ongota (unclassified, Ethiopia; bxe).

3.2. BREAKING AWAY FROM TRADITION

Other orthographic uses seem to point in the same direction: a progressive liberation from the bounds imposed by traditional (European) orthographic norms.

Digraphs are traditionally treated as combination of two letters and they are alphabetized under the first element only. Thus, *church* is listed in English dictionary after *campaign* but before *cut*, and the Somali-Italian dictionary (DSI 1985) follows this principle, with, e.g., *shabeeel* ‘leopard’ after *saddex* ‘three’ but before *sug* ‘to wait.’

As the number of digraphs and wildcards as well as the use of a Latin orthography increase, the weight of tradition decreases. This is when a digraph becomes a “letter:” an autonomous, single grapheme. Already in the Somali-English dictionary (Zorc 1993) all words beginning with < dh >, < kh > and < sh > (the only digraphs of the Somali orthography) are listed separately, but still after their first element: < dh > after < d >, < kh > after < k >, and < sh > after < s >.

Moreover, in a first stage the first element only is doubled in gemination; in Somali, e.g., < ddh >, rather than < dhdh >, stands for /d̥d̥/, as in *gabaddha* ‘the girl’ (more commonly actually spelled *gabadha*). Once perceived as single letters, each of the elements of a digraph are instead doubled in gemination, yielding, e.g., Wolaytta *geeshsha* ‘clean, pure’.

The next step follows logically: if, e.g., < sh > is no longer < s > + < h > but a brand-new autonomous symbol, the order of digraphs in the alphabet can and must change. This is what happens in recent Ethiopian dictionaries of languages using the Latin orthography, with the digraphs increasingly found all together at the end of the list, as in the Wolaytta dictionary (Tophphiyaa 1991), with < ch >, < ph >, and < sh > following in this order after < z >, and in Oromo (Mekuria 1998) with < ch >, < dh >, < ny > and < sh > (no word begins with < ph >).

Still, in capitalization the first letter only is capitalized: tradition is adhered to when it implies a simpler solution.

Even a completely different tradition in listing letters may now be accommodated. The following Table is the alphabetical chart present in a Koorete primer. Following the pattern of the Ethiopic syllabary, vowels are listed as columns and consonants as rows, for a total in Koorete of ten vowels (five short and five long) and thirty consonants. Apart from this general graphical arrangement, the order of consonants is the traditional Western one (but the very last consonant is < th >). The digraphs are particularly abundant in Koorete: < ch >, < dh >, < jh >, < ny >, < ph >, < sh >, < xh >, < dz > and < th >. They are listed after (and under) their first element (< ch > after < c >, < dh > after < d >, and so on), rather than all together at the end.

The order of vowels, too, follows the traditional Western one, with each long vowel after its short counterpart.

5.4 diizo beyta tato.

	a	aa	e	ee	i	ii	o	oo	u	uu
b	ba	baa	be	bee	bi	bii	bo	boo	bu	buu
c	ca	caa	ce	cee	ci	cii	co	coo	cu	cuu
ch	cha	chaa	che	chee	chi	chii	cho	choo	chu	chuu
d	da	daa	de	dee	di	dii	do	doo	du	duu
dh	dha	dhaa	dhe	dhee	dhi	dhii	dho	dhoo	dhu	dhuu
f	fa	faa	fe	fee	fi	fii	fo	foo	fu	fuu
g	ga	gaa	ge	gee	gi	gii	go	goo	gu	guu
h	ha	haa	he	hee	hi	hii	ho	hoo	hu	huu
j	ja	jaa	je	jee	ji	jii	jo	joo	ju	juu
jh	jha	jhaa	jhe	jhee	jhi	jhii	jho	jhoo	jhu	jhuu
k	ka	kaa	ke	kee	ki	kii	ko	koo	ku	kuu
l	la	laa	le	lee	li	lii	lo	loo	lu	luu
m	ma	maa	me	mee	mi	mii	mo	moo	mu	muu
n	n	naa	ne	nee	ni	nii	no	noo	nu	nuu

ny	nya	nyaa	nye	nyee	nyi	nyii	nyo	nyoo	nyu	nyuu
p	pa	paa	pe	pee	pi	pii	po	poo	puu	puu
ph	pha	phaa	phe	phee	phi	phii	pho	phoo	phu	phuu
q	qa	qaa	qe	qee	qi	qii	qo	qoo	qu	quu
r	ra	raa	re	ree	ri	rii	ro	roo	ru	ruu
s	sa	saa	se	see	si	sii	so	soo	su	suu
sh	sha	shaa	she	shee	shi	shii	sho	shoo	shu	shuu
t	ta	taa	te	tee	ti	tii	to	too	tu	tuu
v	va	vaa	ve	vee	vi	vii	vo	voo	vu	vuu
w	wa	waa	we	wee	wi	wii	wo	woo	wu	wuu
x	xa	xaa	xe	xee	xi	xii	xo	xoo	xu	xuu
xh	xha	xhaa	xhe	xhee	xhi	xhii	xho	xhoo	xhu	xhuu
y	ya	yaa	ye	yee	yi	yii	yo	yoo	yu	yuu
z	za	zaa	ze	zee	zi	zii	zo	zoo	zu	zuu
dz	dza	dzaa	dze	dzee	dzi	dzii	dzo	dzoo	dzu	dzuu
th	tha	thaa	the	thee	thi	thii	tho	thoo	thu	thuu

Figure 13. A Koorete alphabetical chart (Koorete Bidzunxo Suma Erunxi Pishsharo 1990: 86-87)

3.3. WILDCARDS GALORE

But why to stop at “natural” wildcards? Any unused symbol may come to good use.

We go here beyond the notion that Latin symbols for consonant clusters (as in the case of < x >) or of original allophones (< c >) are “free:” any sign that happens to be useless in the language is up for grabbing and re-use.

Nara (Nilo-Saharan or isolate; nrb) of Eritrea offers maybe the most radical solution so far, and puts into relief as well a few problems.

Most solutions found in the Latin orthography of the languages of Eritrea are not peculiar at all, others partially are: e.g., a palatal nasal is < gn > in Saho, as in Italian, rather than < ny >. Again, shunning the Oromo (and therefore, in a way, the Ethiopian solution), an ejective /t'/ is not marked by < x > but by < th > in Bilin (Central Cushitic; byn) and Saho (East Cushitic; ssy), while < ch > marks an ejective palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ – it was seen above that in Oromo it marks the modal. It was also seen above that Saho < c > marks the voiced pharyngeal /ʕ/ (*à la* Somali); a diacritic is therefore introduced for the modal affricate /tʃ/: < č >.

The velar nasal is of course a problem for any Latin-based alphabet: its most common rendering is < ng >, but many other solutions have been or are in use, such as Swahili and Xhosa (both Bantu; swa and xho) < ng' >, < nh > in Galician (Western Romance) and Nawat (or Pipil; Aztec), or simply < g >, as in Fijian (Austronesian).

Although absent in word-initial position the velar nasal is also phonemic in Piedmontese (Western Romance), where it is also probably more common than the alveolar nasal. The orthographic solution devised for Piedmontese is to use < n > where no ambiguity may arise and have a hyphen follow it in other cases (i.e., between vowels) yielding < n- >. This of course conflicts with hyphenation, but is consonant with the liberal use of hyphens in other points of the orthography (such as in order to separate clitics, following the French model).

Nara is most illuminating in its use of < v > for the velar nasal. Certainly, the presence of prenasalized voiced stops preempted the use of < ng > – as this digraph was chosen, quite correctly, to represent a prenasalized /^hg/. Still, < v > is a brave choice, and to the best of my knowledge unique. In their proposed orthography for Ts'amakko of Ethiopia, SIL has used likewise < v >, but for a voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, and Savà (this volume) proposes to copy this in Ongota.

<i>b</i>	/b/	Voiced bilabial stop
<i>d</i>	/d/	Voiced alveolar stop
<i>t</i>	/t/	Voiceless alveolar stop
<i>g</i>	/g/	Voiced velar stop
<i>k</i>	/k/	Voiceless velar stop
<i>mb</i>	/ ^m b/	Prenasalised voiced bilabial stop
<i>nd</i>	/ ⁿ d/	Prenasalised voiced alveolar stop
<i>ng</i>	/ ⁿ g/	Prenasalised voiced velar stop
<i>gw</i>	/g ^w /	Labialised voiced velar stop
<i>kw</i>	/k ^w /	Labialised voiceless velar stop
<i>ngw</i>	/ ⁿ g ^w /	Prenasalised labialised voiced velar stop
<i>f</i>	/f/	Voiceless labiodental fricative
<i>s</i>	/s/	Voiceless alveolar fricative
<i>h</i>	/h/	Voiceless laryngeal fricative
<i>sh</i>	/ʃ/	Voiceless palatal fricative
<i>ch</i>	/tʃ/	Voiceless palatal affricate
<i>j</i>	/dʒ/	Voiced palatal affricate
<i>r</i>	/r/	Voiced alveolar trill
<i>l</i>	/l/	Voiced alveolar lateral
<i>w</i>	/w/	Voiced bilabial glide
<i>y</i>	/j/	Voiced palatal glide
<i>m</i>	/m/	Voiced bilabial nasal
<i>n</i>	/n/	Voiced alveolar nasal
<i>v</i>	/ŋ/	Voiced velar nasal

Table 1. List of Nara consonant phonemes

Figure 14. The consonant phonemes of Nara (Banti and Savà 2021: 240)

Furthermore: why to stop at letters? In Ethiopia, Wolaytta (North Omotiic; wal) has introduced the digit < 7 > for the glottal stop, as in *lee7iyaa* ‘thin.’ It is most commonly found reduplicated, as in *ha77i* ‘now’.⁴ As elsewhere, the phonological presence of a glottal stop is not marked in word-initial position.

This solution is not totally isolated, as it is also found in Squamish (Coast Salish) of British Columbia (whether it was consciously copied from Squamish is unknown to the present writer). It is still apparently isolated in Ethiopia, where the apostrophe < ’ > is preferred. The two solutions are shown here through the initial page of the *Book of Hosea* in Wolaytta (*Hosee7a*) and Oromo (*Hose’aa*).

⁴ Examples are from the Wolaytta-Amharic dictionary (*Tophphiya...* 1991). The English translations are the most common meanings of the Amharic entries.

< 7 > is certainly more conspicuous – and therefore less likely to be forgotten in casual writing – than the apostrophe. It is obvious that language-internal considerations – such as frequency and relevance in morphological processes – will have to be taken into account in the selection.

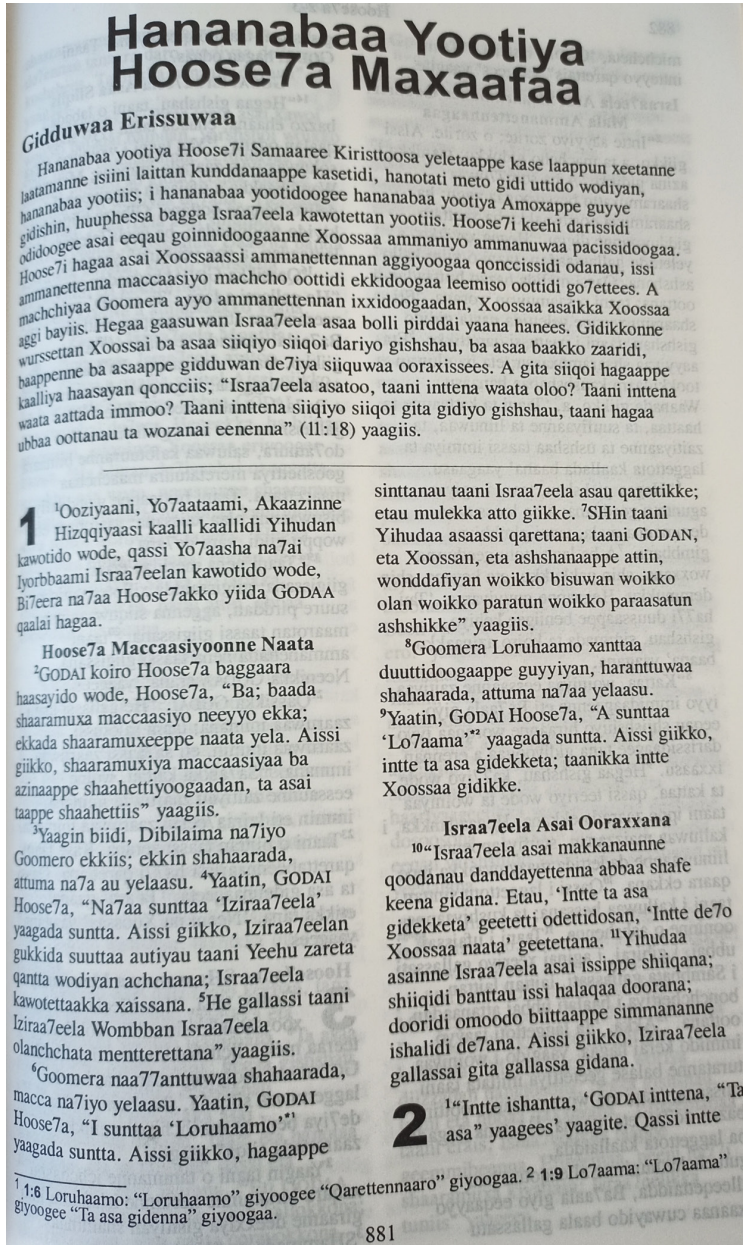


Figure 15. Hosea 1:10-11 in the Wolaytta Bible (Geeshsa Maxaafaa 1996: 881)

Macaafa Hose'aa Raajichaa

Ittiin Lixa

1 ¹ Kun dubbii Waaqayyoo isa bara Uziyaan, Yotaam, Ahaaz, Hisqiyaasis tarreetti biyya Yihudaa irratti mo'anii, Yerobi'aam ilmi Yeho'aash immoo biyya Israa'el irratti mo'etti, gara Hose'aa ilma Beriit dhufee dha*.
^{*1} Isa 1:1; ²Mot 14:23-29; ^{Amo} 1:1

Hose'aan Fuudhee Ijoollee Sadii Godhachuu Isaa

2 Waaqayyo dura karaa Hose'aa yeroo dubbatetti, Hose'aadhaan, "Biy-yichi Waaqayyoon dhiisuu isaatiin eja guddaa keessa lixcera; kanaaf dhaqi, dubartii ejjituu fuudhi, ijoollee ejaas godhadhu!" jedhe*.
^{*2} 2.4-10; 3:1; 4:11-19; 5:3-4; 9:1-2; 11:2; ^{Er} 2:20; ^{Kes} 23:18

3 Kana irratti inni dhaqee Gomerin intala Diiblaayim fuudhe; isheen ulfoofttee ilma in deesseef. **4** Yommus Waaqayyo, " 'Yizre'el' jedhii moggaasi! Yeroo gabaabduu booddee sababii dhiiga Yizre'elitti dhangala'eeff mana Yehuu nan adaba; mootummaan Israa'elis kanumaan akka raawwatu nan godha*." **5** Gaafas ani dachaa Yizre'el keessatti humna warra Israa'el nan cabsa" jedheen.
^{*4} 2Mot 10:10-11

6 Gomer ammas ulfoofttee, durba in deesse; Waaqayyo immoo Hose'aadhaan, "Ani si'achi mana Israa'eliif cubbuu isaaniif isaaniif dhiisuuf matumaa oo'a hin argisiisu, kanaaf 'Lo-Ruhaamaa' jedhii maqaa moggaasi! [Hiikaan isaas 'Oo'a hin arganne' jechuu dha]*." **7** Mana Yihudaatti garuu oo'a nan argisiisa, isaan nan oolchas; iddaadhaan yookiis billaadhaan yookiis lolaan yookiis fardeenii fi abboota fardeenii utuu hin ta'in, ani Waaqayyo gooftaan isaani harka kootiin isaan nan oolcha" jedhe*.

^{*6} 2:3,25

^{*7} Mik 5:9; Zak 4:6; Isa 31:1-3; Far 20:7; 2Mot 19:32-37

8 Gomer erga "Lo-Ruhaamaa" harma guuftee, ulfoofttee ilma in deesse. **9** Waaqayyo yommus Hose'aadhaan, " 'Lo-Amii' jedhii moggaasi, isinoo saba koo miti, anis Waaqayyo keessan

miti" jedhe. ["Lo-Amii" jechuun "Saba koo miti" jechuu dha*].
^{*9} 2:25; Bau 3:14; Er 7:23

Abdii Gara Fuula Duraa

2 ¹ Si'achi garuu lakkoobsi namoota Israa'el akka cirracha galaanaa isa hin safaramnee, isa hin lakkaa'amnees jedhame immoo, "Ijoollee Waaqayyo isa jiraataa" jedhamuuf jiru*.

² Ijoolleen Yihudaa fi ijoolleen Israa'el tokkummaatti walitti in qabamu; walumattis nama isaan geggeessu tokko in kaafatu; guyyaan Yizre'el guddaa waan ta'uuf, isaanis biyyicha keessaa ol in dhufu*.

³ Egaa obbooloota keessan, "Amii" obboleettota keessanis "Ruhaamaa" jedhaa waamaa! ["Amii" jechuun "Saba koo", "Ruhaamaa" jechuun "Oo'a argate" jechuu dha*].

^{*1} Uma 22:17; Rom 9:29

^{*2} Er 3:18; Hos 1:4; 2:23-24

^{*3} 1:6,9

Amanamuu Dhabuu Irraa Kan Ka'e Adabamuu

4 Haadha keessan hadheessaa! Isheen haadha manaa koo ta'uu waan dhiifteef, anis abbaa manaa ishee ta'uu waanan dhiiseef, ishee hadheessaa! Isheen halalummaa fuula ishee irraa mul'atu, milikkita ejjumaas harma ishee gidduudhaa haa baafu*!

5 Yoo kun ta'uu dhaabaate garuu, wayyaa ishee irraa baasee akkuma gaafa dhalatteetti qullaa nan hambisa; ishees akka lafa onaa, akka lafa isa gogaa nan godha, dheebuudhaan akka isheen duutu nan godha*.

Figure 16. Hosea 1 in the Oromo Bible (Macaafa Qulqulluu: 1118)

4. A FEW CONCLUSIONS

By definition, to use a basic Latin keyboard only excludes graphic iconization (Sebba 2015), i.e., no “icon” similar to Danish < ø > or Spanish < ñ > may arise (although the use of < 7 > in Wolaytta could come very close to be an “icon”). What is possible instead is the idiosyncratic association of a grapheme to a phoneme, as repeatedly shown in this article, and with Somali < c > and Oromo < x > being maybe the most striking cases.

Second, the case of ‘Afar (Qafar) has shown that it is difficult to outsmart wildcards: in comparison to < c >, < q > is much less of a wildcard, and it has a strong association with a uvular stop or it simply marks a back allophone of /k/ (as it was in Latin and is still generally the case in modern European languages). < c >, on the contrary, can retain its Latin value as a velar stop (as in Romance languages with a non-front vowel following) and have different values with other vowels, or still be an alveolar affricate (as in Croatian, Slovenian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian...) or many other things. And it can of course become much else in digraphs or with diacritics. Neither a place nor a manner of articulation is strictly linked to it, synchronically.

The fact that no language, to the best of my knowledge, has followed ‘Afar in using < q > for a pharyngeal fricative or has given it yet another value than /q/ is certainly due to the imperfect ausbauization of ‘Afar: in Djibouti, French and Arabic are the only official languages, and both Somali and ‘Afar are conspicuous for their absence from the linguistic landscape. But I venture to say that there is something inherently awkward in making a wildcard out of a card that is not. In exaptation you turn into use what you have and is available; it is certainly more difficult (but not impossible) to change the use of a more or less functional tool.

Third, it is also apparent that wildcards are second bests. This strategy seems to be always secondary to the use of digraphs; e.g., /ʃ/ is always expressed by < sh > and an implosive /ɗ/ or postalveolar /ɗʲ/ is generally < dh >.

The use of digraphs is particularly shunned for vowels, except in the marking of length and notwithstanding the wide use of vocalic digraphs in many European writings.

Finally, maybe the most important – and saddest – conclusion is that many African orthographies were in a way born old: they are utterly incapable of being brought to use in the most modern technologies – pending financial investments (in developing, implementing and marketing keyboards) that the communities cannot sustain.

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¹ The publication year found in Ethiopian books is often in accordance with the local calendar (*Enkutataš*). It is followed here by the corresponding year in the Gregorian calendar.

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