Participatory orthography development in Abawiri

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Outline

• Traditional perspectives on orthography development
• Participatory Methods
• Abawiri: a case study
• Evaluation and prospects
Traditional perspectives on orthography development

- Focus on phonological contrasts (e.g. Dawson 1989)
- Emphasis on ease of reading and writing (e.g. Smalley 1959)
- A growing awareness of social factors (Cahill & Karan 2008; Clifton 2016; papers in Cahill & Rice 2014)

***But orthographies remain a linguist-centered enterprise*** (Seifart 2006)
Issues with traditional approaches

- Acceptability (Clifton 2016)
- Ownership (Dobrin 2008 and many others)
An alternative: Participatory Methods

• Emerged in the field of community development (Kumar 2002; Kaner 2007)

• Both an **ideological framework**

  “A participatory approach values community knowledge and local expertise. It invites outsiders to do things *with* rather than *for* community members. It recognizes that if community members are not involved in decision making they will often reject what outsiders do for them by not using innovations.” (Sue Hasselbring)

• and a **set of “tools”**
  - Gauging interest in language development (Kluge & Choi 2016)
  - Strategic planning (Hanawalt et al 2016)
  - Variation, multilingualism, language attitudes (Truong & Garcez 2012, Ryn Gonzales’s talk yesterday)
  - Literacy (Varghese 2013)
  - Phonological and grammatical analysis (Kutsch Lojenga 1996)
  - Orthography development (Kutsch Lojenga 1996; Easton 2003)
Participatory orthography development

**Foundational ideas:**

- Speakers know things
  - The language
  - The social system
  - Other writing systems
- Their knowledge is valuable
  - Collective intuitions as a starting point
  - Representative group of community members
Participatory orthography development: 2 implementations

- Participatory research in linguistics (Kutsch Lojenga 1996)
  - Writing words by semantic domain
  - Sorting words by relevant segments and tones
  - Discussing problem areas

- Alphabet Design Workshops (Easton 2003; Easton & Wroge 2012)
  - Writing stories, marking trouble spots
  - Group reading, marking trouble spots
  - Discussing problem areas
  - Repeats iteratively
Abawiri: a case study
Background on the language

Abawiri (also known as Foau)
- Part of the Lakes Plain family
- Speaker population = 400 and growing
- Isolated
- (Lack of) multilingualism
- Positive attitudes and recent surge of interest in language development
- Strong motivation for local ownership of development work
Workshop format

Step 1: Discuss what makes a good writing system
Step 2: Write words for each consonant and vowel
Step 3: Write words by semantic domain
Step 4: Write procedures
Step 5: Assemble a grapheme chart
Step 6: Write stories
Step 1: Discuss what makes a good writing system

- Brief introduction of letter ↔ sound correspondence
- In other contexts, longer participatory discussions would be required
Step 2: Write words for each consonant and vowel

- 6 groups of 4-5 people
- Each group designated a ‘scribe’
- All groups wrote a target word for each sound
- Groups’ work compared
[dúkè] ‘bird’
Target segment: /d/

[f̥wòu] ‘bee’
Target segment: /f̥w/

[yrà] ‘fruit’
Target segment: /y/
### Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>Vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t^w$</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b^w$</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>$\varepsilon$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$d^w$</td>
<td>$\theta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$d_3$</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$d_3^w$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$g^w$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$f^w$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$s^w$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Options for labialized consonants

- Cw (e.g. <dworu>, <fwou>)
- Cu (e.g. <duoru>, <fuou>)
- Cwu (e.g. <duworu>, <fuwou>)

Options for high front vowels

/authorize/:
- yu (e.g. <yura>, <yudabi>)
- uyu (e.g. <uyura>, <uyudabi>)
- yun (e.g. <yunra, <yundabi>))
- u (e.g. <ura>, <udabi>)

/i/:
- yi (e.g. <tryi>)
- i (e.g. <tri>)
Options for labialized consonants

- **Cw** (e.g. <dworu>, <fwou>)
- **Cu** (e.g. <duoru>, <fuou>)
- **Cwu** (e.g. <duworu>, <fuwou>)

Options for high front vowels

\(/\text{y}/\)

- **yu** (e.g. <yura>, <yudabi>)
- **uyu** (e.g. <uyura>, <uyudabi>)
- **yun** (e.g. <yunra>, <yundabi>)
- **u** (e.g. <ura>, <udabi>)

\(/\text{i}/\)

- **yi** (e.g. <tryi>)
- **i** (e.g. <tri>)
Step 3: Write words by semantic domain
Types of sago

Building materials

Household appliances
Step 3: Write words by semantic domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic Domain</th>
<th>Number of words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of sago</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of bananas</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other edible plants</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of trees</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials for house construction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household supplies</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4: Write procedures
Gardening
Building a canoe
Hunting pigs

Buat Pe'ahu
BuSA RO
WO RO
WEI TROI RO
Ei KYO WOJIO TROI RO
U WORYU GRE TOIRO
EiKRE KRI JO RO
GRWI RO
DA SA RO
OR A BRI YO RO
DA SA RO
Ei KYO RO
Ei GYUE SA RO
DE SI KARO.

SOXYDAC
Soyiriedi dibije'iro,
Kongwe twere sama
Are biaro, di e snira.
Soyida bore.
Kare twira bore, karejina
Bo, die sofwo'iro bore,
Two. an biama acara.
Aunirare bhavi'iro
Bwari'bo, tre'aporo.
Tre'apyru ro, sinnyu
Barim.
Tari bore, yirama.
Yirirari ari'iro
Ouka.
Ou'woro bo, twiro tru
Bweira.
Kerohu bo, yai kri'iro

Bwoiru ro bayi'iro.
Di'ukari'iro
Ro dyu'iro.
Step 5: Assemble a grapheme chart
Step 6: Write stories
When Dyiabi almost drowned

Killing a snake

The widow of Nain

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When Dyiabi almost drowned

Killing a snake

The widow of Nain
Evaluation and prospects

• Outcomes
  – Tapped into and strengthened local ownership
  – Community made all decisions
  – Linguistically sound
  – Positive initial experiences in reading and writing

• Follow-up
  – Necessarily just the first step in an ongoing and iterative process (Karan 2006)
  – Revisiting issues already covered
  – Discuss and practice conventions for word breaks, punctuation, tone
  – Increasingly meaningful/useful reading and writing tasks
Evaluation and prospects

• Issues
  – Not all stakeholders present
  – Constant pressure for linguist to take over
  – Long time gap between first and subsequent workshops
  – No sustainable structure (yet) for ongoing development
Thank you

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References (1)


References (2)


