

2 Phonology

The orthography employed here is adapted as much as possible and feasible to that used in primary schools of Abim District. Differences concern most of all the following: First, we consistently mark distinctions in the tongue root position of vowels (see section 2.2) and in tone (2.3). Second, we also mark the distinction between dental and alveolar plosives, writing the former {th} and {dh} and the latter {t} and {d}, respectively. And finally, we also distinguish between the velar nasal [ŋ] and the prenasalized velar stop [ŋg], which are both written {ng} in the Labwor orthography. The following examples illustrate these differences:

<i>Typical phonetic value</i>	<i>Present orthography</i>	<i>Labwor orthography</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
[^h à'fɪn]	àhín	atin	'child'
[d ^h 'àŋ]	dhìàŋ	dyaŋ	'cow'
[kòŋð]	kòŋð	kongo	'beer'

For another difference (*tw* vs. *ty*) see section 2.2.

The voiced stops *b*, *dh*, *d*, and *g* are devoiced at the end of words and are usually unreleased, hence they are in this position indistinguishable from corresponding voiceless stops, e.g.,

léb thùr [lép tù:r] 'Labwor language'

cf. léb-á 'my language, tongue'.

In contrast, voiceless stops are voiced in certain voiced environments. For example, *t* and *th* are replaced by *d* and *dh* [ð], respectively, before the nasal *n*, e.g.,

ðt nà kwâr > ðd nà kwâr 'a red house'.

2.1 Consonants

The consonant system distinguishes five places of articulation, and there are three parallel series of voiceless stops, voiced stops, and nasals, in addition to two liquids and two glides:

p	th	t	c	k
b	dh	d	j	g
m		n	ny [ɲ]	ŋ
		r		
		l		
w			y	

Notes on pronunciation

th is typically a voiceless stop [t̪], frequently pronounced [tʰ], e.g.,

thámó [t̪ámó] or [tʰámó] 'think'

The symbols {c} and {j} stand for pre-palatal affricates, [tʃʷ] and [dʒʷ], respectively, and hence could as well be placed in a separate category of affricates.

k is pronounced by some speakers, though not by others, as a post-velar plosive or affricate in intervocalic position where both vowels are low or back:

dhákó [dʰákó] or [dʰákʷó] 'woman'.

b is mostly a plain bilabial stop, but some informants use consistently an implosive stop [ɓ] instead. Occasionally, *b* is fricativized between vowels, e.g., *ókòbò* [ʰókòβò] 'she says'.

d The default pronunciation is that of an alveolar stop. However, it tends to be realized as a retroflex stop, occasionally also as an implosive stop.

dh is a voiced stop [d̪] but tends to be realized as a dental affricate or fricative:

dhìàŋ [d̪ìàŋ] or [d̪ʰìàŋ] or [d̪ʰìàŋ] 'cow'.

Intervocally however it is invariably pronounced as a dental fricative:

mòdhò [ˈmòðò] 'drink water'

r is a single tap word-internally. Word-initially it tends to be aspirated [ʰr], while word-finally it is only weakly pronounced, sometimes approaching zero.

Nasal compounds, consisting of a nasal consonant and a plosive, do exist but are rare, e.g.,

kàmpálà 'Kampala'

éntò 'but'

Since they do not belong to the recurrent sound units of the language we have not listed them in the table of consonants.

In Acholi, Lango, and some other Southern Lwoo languages there is a combination of a plosive plus a semivowel, e.g. [tw], [ty]. In Labwor we did not hear a semivowel in most cases but rather a short vowel, usually though not always having the same tone as the following vowel. Accordingly, we render the combination as consisting of a plosive and a vowel, e.g.,

Labwor		Lango (Noonan 1992)	Meaning
kùò	[kù'ò]	kwò	'theft'
lièc	[li'èc]	lyèc	'elephant'
àríò	[ʰàr'íò]	àryô	'two'

But we also found cases of consistent combinations of plosives plus semivowels in some lexemes, e.g., *kwènè* 'where?' (cf. Lango *kwènè*).

Geminated consonants do occur but are rare (but see Storch 2004 for alternative observations).

2.2 Vowels

There are two sets of vowels which we assume to be distinguished on the basis of the relative position of the tongue root. The following sets are pronounced, respectively, with an advanced tongue root position ([+ATR]) and a retracted tongue root position ([-ATR]):

([+ATR])			([-ATR])		
i		u	ɪ		ʊ
	e	o		ɛ	ɔ
	a			a	

The low vowel *a* however is not part of this distinction but rather is the same in both sets. Nevertheless, one of our five main informants occasionally made a distinction, pronouncing [ə] in words where in the related Lango or Acholi languages there would be a low [+ATR] vowel, as in (1). But if asked to repeat the relevant word, he would produce a [-ATR] vowel, that is, he would no longer distinguish two low vowels and would say (2) instead of (1).

- (1) tùàk kéd- à!
 (2) tùàk kéd- à!
 speak with- 1.SG.POSS
 'Talk to me!'

Word-initial vowels are mostly introduced by slight voiced aspiration (e.g., á [ʰɔ́t] 'house'), and in emphatic pronunciation, they tend to be preceded by a full voiced aspirate ([hɔ́t]). Less commonly, there may be a glottal stop instead ([ʔɔ́t]). None of these, however, has a distinctive value, hence they are ignored in the present orthography, where we write {ɔ́t}.

Back vowels are nasalized by some speakers preceding *m* in word-final position:

áru écièmú. [ʰá:ruétʃièmú] 'Let us eat!'
 IMP 1.PL.eat.AP.SUBJ

When two vowels meet at a word boundary, the second one tends to be deleted:

gín ó'tíê kà òwóló or gín ó'tíê k-òwóló
 3.PL 3.PROG 3.cough

'They are coughing.'

In frequently used collocations, especially involving the demonstrative *ni* and the possessive enclitic *na*, the nasal is dropped in favor of compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel:

óð nì	or	ó:d-ì	'this path'
yáth nì	or	yá:dh-ì	'this tree'
yáth nón	or	yá:dh-ó	'that tree (near you)'

But like in other Southern Lwoo languages (Heusing 2004: 32ff.), vowel length does not appear to be distinctive, even if there are a number environments that trigger vowel lengthening, paradigm examples being preceding the liquid *r*, cf. (1), when the vowel has a contour tone (falling or rising), as in (2), and in open root syllables of monosyllabic lexemes (3). Vowel lengthening appears to be restricted to root morphemes.

- | | | | |
|-----|------|---------|-------------|
| (1) | kwàr | [kwà:r] | 'it is red' |
| (2) | wǎl | [wǎ:l] | 'cough!' |
| (3) | mǎ | [mǎ:] | 'give!' |

Cf. also:

à-nén	vs.	à-nê:n-í
1.SG.see.AC		1.SG-see.IMV-2.SG.O
'I am seen'		'I see you'

Vowel harmony

Cross-height vowel harmony, based on the distinction [+ATR] vs. [-ATR], is important especially in the verbal word. It is operative on the one hand in the root vowel of the verb, which determines the ATR feature of certain suffixes, such as the aspectual suffix *-ɔ*, e.g.,

kwàl-ò	'steal'
lwòk-ò	'wash'
mòdh-ò	'drink (water)'
tèd-ò	'cook'

On the other hand it is also operative with certain dominant [+ATR] suffixes, such as the second person singular object and possessive suffix *-i* or the imperative plural suffix *-u*, which turn [-ATR] stem vowels into [+ATR] vowels:

kèd-á	'with me'
kèd-í	'with you'
kèd-é	'with him, her'

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Imperative plural</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
kùr	kùr-ú	'wait'
kwàlò	kwàl-ù	'steal (tr.)'
lìò	lìl-ú	'smoothen'
ɲwècò	ɲwèc-ú	'run'

wóló wòl-ú 'cough'

While dominant suffixes have as a rule a [+ATR] feature, there appears to be at least one dominant [-ATR] vowel suffix, namely the reflexive (“middle”) verbal suffix *-èrê* (see 5.3.3), which changes a preceding [+ATR] stem vowel into a [-ATR] vowel:

én óṅèò. 'He has known it.'
 3.SG 3.know.PFV

òṅè- rê. 'It is known.'
 3.know.PFV- REFL

There are, however, a number of additional factors interfering with vowel harmony which require further studies.

2.3 Tones

The following tonological units are distinguished:

High á

Low à

Falling â

Rising ǎ

A tonal analysis could not be carried out within the short period of field research that we were able to conduct. Most of the tone rules described by Noonan (1993) for Lango and Heusing (2004) also apply to Labwor. The following are a few elementary rules that are relevant for a better understanding of the data presented below.

(a) A low tone between two high tones is raised to high:

án à- nén. > án á- nén.

1.SG 1.SG- see.AC

'I am seen, am visible.'

(b) In a series of more than two high tones, the third undergoes downstepping, that is, is lowered (marked by a superscript exclamation mark), e.g.,

dhákó ná > dhákó [!]ná 'my wife'

én bá ηé- á. > én bá [!]ηé- á.

3.SG NEG know-1.SG

'She doesn't know me.'

3 The clause

Since copular verbs may but need not be used in many contexts (see 4.1), an utterance may consist simply of a noun phrase, which in the following example is a personal pronoun:

én. 'It is him.'

3.SG

The basic, and also the predominant order of clausal arguments is

subject – verb – object – adjunct,

where adjuncts (or peripheral participants) are prepositional phrases.

Examples

dhòk mǎrǒ cǎmò lùm.
 cattle like.IMV eat.INF grass
 'Cows like to eat grass.'

kúr ígǒ dhòk kɪ lúth!
 NEG.IMP 2.hit.SUBJ cattle PREP stick
 'Don't beat the cows with a stick!'

Core participants are not marked for case, the only means of distinguishing the transitive subject (A) from the object (O) is via word order. This, however, applies to nouns only; personal pronouns, which also have full participant status, do distinguish subject from object forms (see 5.3.1).

In intransitive sentences, the situation is somewhat different. The subject frequently precedes the verb (1), but equally often does it follow the verb (2).

(1) gín óbìnò k- àríò- àríò.
 3.PLS 3.come.PFV ka- two- two
or

(2) òbínó gíní k- àríò- àríò.
 3.come.PFV 3.PLS ka- two- two
 'They came two by two.'

This applies not only to main clauses but also to subordinate clauses:

èthínò ñéó ní gín túò.
 children know.IMV COMPL 3.PLS be.sick.IMV
or

èthínò ñéó ní túò gíní.
 children know.IMV COMPL be.sick.IMV 3.PLS

'The children know that they (not they themselves) are sick.'

The only core participant that is obligatorily present in declarative main clauses is the subject, even if it may be marked only by means of verbal inflections. When transitive verbs are involved, objects are implied without being formally expressed. Thus, a minimal transitive clause takes a form as in (1), even if it is always possible to add subject and object noun phrases, as in (2).

(1) àné̀nò. 'I see it.'

1.SG.see.IMV

(2) án àné̀nò à̀thím à̀cìèl. 'I see one child.'

1.SG 1.SG.see.IMV child one

In ditransitive constructions, the prevalent order is subject – verb – recipient (R) – theme (T), but the order of R and T is frequently reversed, irrespective of whether heavier (i.e. morphologically more complex) or lighter constituents are concerned:

òkélò ònyù̀thò nì món búké.
Okelo 3.show.PFV PREP women books

or

òkélò ònyù̀thò búké nì món.
Okelo 3.show.PFV books PREP women
'Okelo showed the women the books.'

én ó̀wílò n- á̀thím bó̀ŋ ná níèn.
3.SG 3.buy.PFV PREP- child clothes REL be.new

or

én ó̀wílò bó̀ŋ ná níèn n- á̀thim.

3.SG 3.buy.PFV clothes REL be.new PREP- child
 'He bought the child new clothes.'

A highly topical theme (T) can be frontshifted, i.e. placed at the beginning of the clause, cf. (1), while this is not normally possible with a recipient (R) (2). Note that R is almost invariably a prepositional phrase.

(1) búké òkélò ònyùthò nì món.
 books Okelo 3.show.PFV PREP women
 'The books, Okelo showed them to the women.'

bój ná nién èwílò n- áthín.
 clothes REL be.new 3.buy.PFV PREP- child
 'He bought the child new clothes.'

(2) *nì món (*n-) òkélò ònyùthò búké.
 PREP women REL Okelo 3.show.PFV books

There are three prepositions that may be used to present recipients (R) in ditransitive constructions (see 6.1): *nì* (*n-* before vowels), which is used for recipients proper, *né*, which is primarily a benefactive preposition, and *bóth*, which is most of all a directional preposition:

én ókèlò n- á'thín pì.
 3.SG 3.bring.PFV PREP- child water
 'He brought the child water.'

én ókèlò `mé á'thín pì.
 3.SG 3.bring.PFV PREP child water
 'He brought the child water.' or 'He brought water for the child.'

òkélò òtùàkò gĩ- nón bóth dhàkò m̀erè.
 Okelo 3.speak.PFV thing- HEA PREP woman 3.SG.POSS
 'Okelo spoke about that to his wife.'

The verb *m̀iyò* 'give', however, presents the recipient without a preposition:

ìmíyò ẁnú gí p̂.
 2.give.IMV 2.PLS 3.PLO water
 'You give them water.'

Peripheral participants are introduced by means of a rich set of prepositions, for which see section 6.1.

4 The verb phrase

The verb phrase has the following basic structure:

negation - auxiliary - verb - object

Examples

món ònyò cùò bà mító màdhò gíní thábá.
 women or men NEG want.IMV drink 3.PLS tobacco
 'Neither women nor men want to smoke.'

4.1 Verbs

Verbs are inflected for a variety of grammatical functions, in particular for person, number, aspect (4.3.1), modality (4.3, 4.5), and valency (4.2). Labwor is an inherently aspectual language, and in accordance with their aspectual behavior, verbs can be divided into the five lexical classes to be discussed below. These classes are defined in terms of the aspectual event schema that they represent, where event schemas are described in terms of the following three phrases: an initial boundary or change of state (CS₁), a state or situation (S), and a final boundary or change of state (CS₂).