

‘You couldn’t make it up’:

The phonology of Hyam

**[DRAFT CIRCULATED FOR COMMENT -NOT FOR CITATION WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE
AUTHORS**

Roger Blench
Mallam Dendo
8, Guest Road
Cambridge CB1 2AL
United Kingdom
Voice/ Fax. 0044-(0)1223-560687
Mobile worldwide (00-44)-(0)7967-696804
E-mail R.Blench@odi.org.uk
<http://www.rogerblench.info/RBOP.htm>

This printout: January 2, 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION1
2. LOCATION, HISTORY AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION.....1
 2.1 Nomenclature1
 2.2 Location and settlements.....1
 2.3 Language status.....1
 2.4 The Hyam group1
3. PHONOLOGY2
 3.1 Vowels2
 3.2 Consonants5
 3.3 Tones10
REFERENCES.....10

TABLES

Table 1. Principal sources of data for lexical comparison Error! Bookmark not defined.

1. Introduction

This is a preliminary phonology of the Hyam language as spoken in Nok and nearby villages in Central Nigeria. The Hyam languages are often known in earlier literature as ‘Jaba’ ‘Jaba’ although this is a cover term for a group of rather disparate languages distinguished more by their cultural than linguistic unity. Existing literature is confined to Gerhardt (1988, 1992) and Jockers (1992). The first of these deals with the morphology of Hyam of Kwoi, the second with some old sources for ‘Jaba’. None are very detailed or are based on extensive lexical data.

In the light of a growing enthusiasm of the Hyam community for literacy materials and a practical orthography with a long-term view to Bible translation, it seemed worthwhile to undertake a more comprehensive phonology of Hyam. The orthography committee selected Hyam of Nok as the most widely understood lect of Hyam and it is this which is described in this paper¹.

The present document should be seen as *a preliminary draft only*. Hyam has an elaborate and complex phonology which is far from fully understood, both at the phonetic level and in terms of tone. The large number of consonants and the rarity of some of them means that there may well be more to elicit. This document is also *not* a suggestion for a practical orthography; this will come when the phonology is more fully documented.

2. Location, history and sociolinguistic situation

2.1 Nomenclature

Hyam of Nok is often called Jaban Ketare.

2.2 Location and settlements

2.3 Language status

2.4 The Hyam group

The present published classification (Crozier & Blench 1992) lists these groups as follows;

Cori
Hyam cluster (incl. Kwyeny, Yaate, Sait, Dzar, Hyam of Nok)
Shamang
Zhire

It now seems likely that the Hyam cluster consists of only the following;

Hyam of Nok Sait Dzar

¹ The initial impetus for this paper was an ICAL Workshop held in Jos in May 1999, where Veronica Gambo worked with other linguists to prepare an initial phoneme chart. The data was subsequently retranscribed and expanded in working sessions in Jos in November 1999, with other speakers, including xx. The authors would like to thank all those who have participated, either as informants or with suggestions for analyses.

3. Phonology

The phonology of Hyam is extremely rich in consonants and also has a complex tonal system. Everything below should therefore be regarded as tentative.

3.1 Vowels

Hyam probably has seven phonemic vowels;

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Close-Mid	e	ə	o
Open-Mid	ɛ		
Open		a	

This uneven system is somewhat unusual.

Examples of contrastive vowels;

u	~	o	
kup	bone	kop	ten
dzùŋ	fly	dzoŋ	mosquito
cu	soul	co⁺	sore

i	~	e	
nit	set trap	net	person
cim	plait	cem	small hoe

ɛ	~	a	
ʃɛk	rabbit	ʃak	to cook
shywɛk	food at a bereavement	shywak	spoon

ɛ	~	e	
ʃɛk	rabbit	ʃek	forest
shywɛk	food at a bereavement	shywek	cobra

a	~	ə	
ʒa	his mother	ʒə	is a mother
khaa	tail	khə	to take
gya	things	gyə	something

ə	~	o	
gyə	something	go	listen
kə	and	ko	whether
cə	how many?	co⁺	sore

e	~	ə	
ke	father	kə	charcoal ? error
teŋ	mash ?	təŋ	stick for staking beans

a	~	o	
bap	stick	bop	gun
yap	to hunt	yop	lice
káp	river	kop	ten

Hyam probably has three phonemic lengthened vowels;

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i:		u:
			o:
Open		a:	

Examples of contrast:

	Hyam	Gloss	Hyam	Gloss
a	fa	up	fáá	broom
	tat	throw	taat	three
	kan	rainbow	kaan	to select first
i	ʒi	wife	ʒii	blood
	xi	head	xî	saliva
	ɲí	mouth	ɲii	you pl. ? error?
o	khwom⁺	horn	khwoòm	spring
u	ʃû	face	ʃuu	charcoal
	kup	bone	kuup	short
	kù	masquerade	kuu	chest

Hyam appears to have no phonemic nasalised vowels, although nasalisation is sometimes heard on words beginning with /h/. Thus:

[hãã] ‘bamboo’ /haa/

This is almost certainly due to rightwards movement of final nasal consonants. The other environment in which nasalisation occurs phonetically is where a final nasal consonant occurs after a diphthong. Thus:

CVVN → CṼṼ

Examples:

Woman clan leader	kwaiŋ⁺	→	kwāi⁺
Twisting and turning restlessly in bed	wyeinwyéin	→	wyēīwyēí
Announce	ǵoiŋ	→	ǵōí
Scratch	kwoiŋ	→	kwōí

Diphthongs

Hyam has a limited number of diphthongs, shown in Table 1;

Table 1. Hyam diphthongs

	Hyam	Gloss
au	yaù	bell
	saù	crocodile
	màu	measure length
	tau	shoe
ai	kaikái	separately
	kwaiŋ⁺	old woman leader
	naik	to stop (s.)
əu	dəu	cockroach
oi	kwoiŋ	to scratch
	yoiŋ	pain
	ǵoiŋ	to announce

Examples demonstrating contrast:

a	~	ai	
nak	ring	naik	to stop (s.)
nyak	cow	nyaik	to stop (pl.)

a	~	au	
saa	tears	sau	to be quick
hwa	to drink	hwau	to be fast

Woman clan leader **kwāi⁺** to scratch **kwōí**

3.2 Consonants

Hyam consonants without prosodies are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b	θ	t d		c j	k g	kp gb	ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ	n		ɲ	ŋ		
Trill			r					
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ		x ɣ	ʃw	h
Affricates			ts dz					
? Retroflex?						ʎ ɠ		
Approximant					y		w	
Lateral Approximant			l		ɭ			

ʔ is perhaps a labiodentalised velar, thus possibly /gv/

ɱ dental n contrasting with alveolar

/p/ and /b/ are only contrastive in initial and medial position. /r/ and /l/ are in free variation in initial position.

Thus:

[ri] ~ [li]	look
[ribi]~[libi]	ground
[rik]~[lik]	rope

[θ] and [ð] are allophones with [θ] occurring word-finally and [ð] word-medially.

Long consonants occur as a result of morphophonological processes. For example:

/mm/

mmuk testes

/yy/

yyap search (pl.)

Examples of contrast

kp	~	gb	
kpak	rock	gbak	ram
kpam	fence	gbam	tree sp.
kpye	to refuse	gbye	bushrat

k	~	g	
káp	river	gàp	to share
kóm	corpse	góm	song
kák	hawk	gak	to dilute

t	~	d	
tat	to throw	dat	gourd cultivar
tuk	to put	duk	to rub
tar	food-gourd	dar	?

k	~	kp	
kop	ten	kpop	chief
kak	hawk	kpak	rock
kan	rainbow	kpan	spear

b	~	gb	
baŋ	breast	gbaŋ	to lock
bap	to stick to	gbap	to put together
ba	to come	gbam	tree sp.
m			

k	~	kh	
ki	tree	khi	head
kak	hawk	khak	to borrow

t	~	c	
tu	to take	cu	soul
taŋ	staking stick	caŋ	antelope

d	~	n	
dak	leg	nàk	ring
di	will	ni	to see

n	~	ɲ	
nám	body	nyam	meat
naŋ	four	nyaŋ	scorpion
nan	who	nyan	root

Hyam palatalised consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	b ^y		t ^y d ^y		k ^y g ^y	kp ^y gb ^y	
Nasal	m ^y						
Trill			r ^y				
Fricative		f ^y	s ^y		x ^y ɣ ^y		h ^y
Affricates			dz ^y				
Approximant				y ^y			

k	~	ky	
kaŋ	stick	kyaŋ	farm
ku	to start	kyum	thorn
m			
ka	to hold	kyam	cheeks
m	tight		
g	~	gy	
gaŋ	to unlock	gyaŋ	to open
gam	to level	gyam	'confusionist'
gom	song	gyom	songs
gy	~	gw	
gyam	animal sp.	gwam	glutton
gyap	shared	gwap	medicine
gyam	confusion	gwaŋ	many, big
ky	~	kw	
kyák	winnower	kwák	grinding-stone
	r		
kyon	shaved	kwon	knife
kyaŋ	farm	kwaŋ	many, big
ky	~	gy	
kyam	teaching	gyam	confusion
kyaŋ	farm	gyaŋ	to open
kyom	work	gyom	songs
t	~	ty	
tàm	cheek	tyam	cheeks
tom	to send	tyom	messages
tuk	day	tyuk	days

ty ~ tw
tya semi-liquid **twa** to say

ty ~ dy
tyam cheeks **dyak** legs
tyem to spread **dyem** to bend

d ~ dy
dak leg **dyak** legs
den door **dyen** sluggish

dy ~ dw
dyari to pull **dwari** to welcome

b ~ by
bat to touch **byat** mat
bes hot temper **byes** headboard to carry firewood

f ~ fy
fat baboon **fyat** to kill
fap quiver **fyap** thief

m ~ my
mam to mould **myam** to imitate
men dew **myen** wise

s ~ sy
sap poison **syap** theft

h ~ hy
has resemblance **hyas** buffalo
hat to break **hyat** to sweep

py ~ kp
pyo seed **kpo** to fall, kind of food

Hyam labialised consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	b ^w		t ^w d ^w		c ^w j ^w	k ^w g ^w
Nasal	m ^w					
Trill			r ^w			
Fricative		f ^w	s ^w	ʒ ^w		x ^w
Affricates			z ^w dz ^w			

The following contrastive sets are available to demonstrate the phonemic status of the labialised consonants;

k	~	kw	
kak	hawk	kwak	grindstone
kap	river	kwap	to borrow
kom	corpse	kwom	to weed

g	~	gw	
gak	to dilute	gwak	to grind
gap	to share	gwap	medicine
gaŋ	to unlock	gwaŋ	big

gw	~	gb	
gwak	to grind	gbak	ram
gwap	medicine	gbap	to put together

kw	~	gw	
kwap	to borrow	gwap	medicine
kwak	grindstone	gwak	flour
kwom	to weed	gwom	glutton

kw	~	kp	
kwak	grindstone	kpak	rock
kwon	knife	kpon	riverbank

tw	~	dw	
twa	said	dwa	bush
twáŋ	to filter	dwáŋ	fish sp.

d	~	dw	
da	mother	dwa	bush

z	~	zw	
zut	mist	zwut	to cover
sw	~	s	
swom	judge	som	source
sur	to fold	swur	making soup
sw	~	zw	
swat	dance	zwat	reserve
sw	~	sy	
swat	dance	syat	full
swap	?	syap	steal
m	~	mw	
mok	testis	mwak	to measure

Hyam prenasalised consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Alve-	olar	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar
Plosive	ⁿ b	ⁿ t	ⁿ d(y)	ⁿ c	ⁿ j	ⁿ g
Nasal	^m m					ⁿ kp

It may well be that not all consonants with prosodies have been correctly identified yet.

3.3 Tones

Hyam has three level tones and rising and falling tones. Some of the glide tones arise from long vowels and diphthongs, but others seem to occur on single vowels. No minimal triplet has yet been discovered but some nouns seem to bear all three tones.

References

- Abraham, R.C. 1962. *Dictionary of the Hausa language*. London: University of London Press.
 Bendor-Samuel, J. ed. 1989. *The Niger-Congo languages*. Lanham: University Press of America.
 Castelnau, F. de 1851. *Renseignements sur l'Afrique centrale et sur une nation d'hommes à queue qui s'y trouverait*. Paris: xx.
 Crozier, D. and Blench, R.M. 1992. *Index of Nigerian Languages (edition 2)*. SIL, Dallas.

- De Wolf, P. 1971. *The noun class system of Proto-Benue-Congo*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Gerhardt, L. 1983a. *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Sprachen des Nigerianischen Plateaus*. Glückstadt: Verlag J.J. Augustin.
- Gerhardt, Ludwig 1983b. Lexical interferences in the Chadic/Benue-Congo Border-Area. In Wolff, E. & Meyer-Bahlburg, H. (eds.) *Studies in Chadic and Afroasiatic Linguistics*. 301-310. Hamburg: Helmut Buske.
- Gerhardt, Ludwig 1988. Bemerkungen zur morphologie des Kwoi. In *Afrikanische Arbeitspapiere, Sondernummer 1988*. ed. W. Mohlig. 53-65.
- Gerhardt, Ludwig 1992. Zwei alte Quellen zum Hyam (Plateau, Nordnigeria) näher betrachtet. In: *Komparativ Afrikanistik etc.*, 138-150.
- Guthrie, M. 1967-73. *Comparative Bantu*. 4 vols. Gregg International Publishers.
- Hansford, K. Bendor-Samuel, J. & Stanford, R. 1976. *An Index of Nigerian Languages*. Ghana: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Jockers, Heinz 1982. *Untersuchungen zum Kwoi-Dialekt des Hyam/Jaba*. M.A. Afrikanischen Sprachen, Universität Hamburg.
- Koelle, S.W. 1854. *Polyglotta Africana*. London: Church Missionary Society.
- Mukarovsky, H. 1976-1977. *A study of Western Nigritic*. 2 vols. Wien: Institut für Ägyptologie und Afrikanistik, Universität Wien.
- Newman, R.M. 1997. *An English-Hausa dictionary*. Lagos: Longman.
- Shimizu, K. 1975. A lexicostatistical study of Plateau languages and Jukun. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 17:413-418.
- Shimizu, Kiyoshi. 1980. *Comparative Jukunoid*. (3 vols) (Veröffentlichungen der Institut für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie der Universität Wien: Afro-Pub.
- Temple, Olive 1922. *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*. Argus Printing and Publishing Co. Capetown.
- Westermann, D. 1927. *Die Westlichen Sudansprachen und ihre Beziehungen zum Bantu*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Williamson, K., and K. Shimizu. 1968. *Benue-Congo comparative wordlist, Vol. 1*. Ibadan: West African Linguistic Society.
- Williamson, Kay 1971. The Benue-Congo languages & Ijo. In *Current trends in Linguistics 7* (ed.) T. Sebeok 245-306. The Hague: Mouton.
- Williamson, Kay 1973. *Benue-Congo comparative wordlist: Vol.2*. Ibadan: West African Linguistic Society.