

Moro Phonology

Elizabeth Guest 29/11/97

Missionary work started in the Moro group in 1936 and the Moro New Testament was published in the 1960's. They therefore have an established orthography. The original orthography had no capital letters, but when the New Testament was revised in 1993, capital letters were introduced. All the literature produced so far has been in the ləŋorəban dialect. Unfortunately, it seems that this dialect is mutually unintelligible from all the others (which do seem to be mutually intelligible). We will discuss some dialect differences at the end of this document.

Consonant Phones of Moro

p	ɖ	t	c	k
b	ɗ	d	ʃ	g
	f	s		
		ð		
m		n	ɲ	ŋ
		l		
		r	ɾ	
w			j	

Vowel Phones of Moro

i	u
e	ə
o	
a	

The Orthography

Here we give the orthographic equivalents of the phones, including words showing where these phones occur word initially, medially and finally. All words are in the ləŋorəban dialect. Note that in the orthography there are 7 vowel letters. All the vowels in the above chart are represented in the orthography, but there is also an extra symbol, 'ë', which corresponds to long or stressed 'ə'.

a	a	aicəba	food	aɖam	book	rama	locust
b	b	bwaiŋo	want	gabəla	want	elərəb	among
c	c	cəgwandwa	axe	ŋaica	mud		
d	d	dwidwi	small bird	nda	head		
ɖ	ɖ			nde	deers		
e	e	eta	lake	leŋa	egg	ome	fish
ee	ë	əpwa	fight with sticks	deuria	camel		
ə	ə	ərəda	meat	ŋəməna	kid		
f	f	fiɖu	find	ləfra	stick		
g	g	gü	field	igi	this		
i	i	iliɖu	buy/sell	iɖia	son	iɖi	this
ʃ	j	jaica	every day	rəjaico	pour water		
k	k	kuku	1 st born boy	rəkəɖu	tell	kədətak	pepper
l	l	lalo	float	ŋwala	grain	ŋwal	tear

m	m	maje	man	oman	tiger	am	crack in ground
n	n	nwano	look/see	ɲədənia	rabbit	loman	finger
ɲ	ɲ	ɲobar	bird	oɔɔña	hoe	ɲɔɔaiɲ	illness
ɲ	ɲ	ɲina	dog	ɲaɲala	lamb	eləɲ	king
o	o	opo	old woman	əober	eagle	laro	hen
p	p	pwaɔɔlwa	green leaves	bapa	father		
r	r	ropa	stars	əobarɪda	river/stream	lar	rope
ɾ	ɾ	ɾuma	sheep	eɾa	house		
s	s	so	eat	isia	fire		
t	t	twodo	stand	ɲətungu	owls		
t̥	t̥	t̥utu	4 th born boy	eɾa	lake		
u	u	ut̥ɔɔja	old man	dubwa	smoke	ɲulu	them
w	w	wara	tree	ɲawa	water		
j	y	yeɲor	elephants	weiya	waist		

Contrasts

I have asked the group for many contrasts, but I have not tried to be exhaustive. Instead I have concentrated on combinations that seem to be a problem between dialects.

b/p	abəlo	deny	apəlo	take them
f/b	fiɔ	find	biɔ	vomit
k/g	kero	bread	gero	harvest
d/t	ldu	frog	ltu	shelter
t/t̥	eta	rock	eɾa	lake
d/d̥	lwadia	tiredness	lwadia	cross
t/d̥	təro	prevent	əro	look after baby
t̥/d̥	miɔ	take and give to someone else	miɔ	have full udder or breast
nd/nd̥	ndəɲ	on hand	ndəɲ	firm
c/j	caca	girl's name	jaja	girl's name
m/n	mo	take	no	hear
ɲ/ɲ̥	ɲere	girls	ɲere	girl
ɾ/r̥	ɾo	be	ro	kick, to spear
r/l	raɔ	crawl	laɔ	cultivate
d/s	idia	son	isia	fire
o/u	tu	drink	to	lose
e/ə	erme	in the rib	rəme	rib
ə/ē	bəɔ	beat	bəɔ	miscarry
e/i	gede	it is green	gidi	will
e/a	plelo	above	plalo	under

Some contrasts between vowel and consonant lengths have been found, although long vowels and consonants are not generally written in the New Testament. In addition, a few tone contrasts have been noted. Where this is differentiated in the New Testament, it seems to be given by a double consonant, but it is generally ignored and the group sometimes find two words which they pronounce differently, but write in the same way. The group do not normally think about these things while writing, but these differences need to be looked into in more detail.

Examples:

vowel length:	iidi	in them	idi	this
consonant length:	waɔ	sew	wat̥to	set grass on fire

tone difference:

kápa light, transparent	kápa take	(both are kapa in the NT)
àpa father	apá bring	(apa and appa respectively in NT)
dēbia light	dēbía lion	
girəwàno discourage (pres)	girəwáno discourage (past)	

Dialect Differences

There are 7 dialects of Moro, spread over 6 clans. These are L^yain^yenia, Tobəɽelda, Uləba, Lənəbwa, Ndərria, Ləmwarəŋ, and Ləŋorəban. Ləmwarəŋ and Ləŋorəban are considered by the Moro to be one tribe (Wərria). The New Testament was translated into Ləŋorəban.

I have only started looking into the dialect differences. It seems that Ləŋorəban is not understood by speakers of any other dialect; and also that Ləŋorəban speakers do not understand any of the other dialects well. The main lexical differences between dialects are between labials (plosives in some dialects and fricatives in others), alveolar plosives (t and d) and between 'ɽ' and 't'.

In many words where Ləŋorəban speakers say 'b', other dialects say 'f', 'v', 'w', or 'u'. For example, 'vomit' in Ləŋorəban is 'biðu', but 'fiðu' or 'wiðu' in the other dialects. Note that 'fiðu' in Ləŋorəban means 'find'. Ləŋorəban has contrast between 'b' and 'f'. This contrast has not been checked for all dialects, but it does exist in Tobəɽelda:

gafəla he makes sure, goes away	gabəla he denies
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Moro speakers feel that this difference is important because 'b' is often inserted for present tense verbs.

Other differences are between 't' and 'd' and 'ɽ' and 't'. The 't'/'d' differences do not seem to cause many problems in understanding. The main difference cited is the word for 'cow': 'tia' in Ləŋorəban; 'dia' or 'di' in the other dialects.

Moro speakers find the 't' / 'ɽ' differences more problematic. Here in places where Ləŋorəban speakers say 'ɽ', the other dialects say 't'.

Examples:

L ^y ain ^y enia	Tobəɽelda	Uləba	Lənəbwa	Ləmwarəŋ	Ləŋorəban	English
itu	itu	itu	itu	itu	ɽtu	fall
lato	lato	lato	lato	lato	laɽo	fetch water
əti	əti	əti	əti	əti	əɽi	shield
tətəteto	tətəteto	tətəteto	tətəteto	tətəteto	ɽtətəteto	individually / ^{separately}
eɽata	atata	atata	atata	eɽata	aɽaɽa	roof of mouth

We do not know whether it is possible to predict the differences in the dialects, because we have not yet collected words which are the same in the different dialects.

Other differences concern meanings of words, and the use of different words for the same thing. We saw above that 'fiðu' means 'find' in Ləŋorəban, but vomit in some of the other dialects. Another example would be 'majen'. This means 'now' in Ləŋorəban, but 'a long time ago' in other dialects. Sometimes, words are simply different. For example the word for lillies in Ləŋorəban is not understood by Tobəɽelda speakers. The word for 'tomorrow' is 'eɽeɽe' in Ləŋorəban, but 'ulalditu' in Tobəɽelda.

We have not yet looked into grammatical differences, but Ezekiel (Tobəɽelda) says he does not understand the NT because he does not understand some of the functors, and many sentences do not make sense. As Mamut, a Ləŋorəban speaker, does not seem to have this problem, grammatical differences should be investigated.