

TOWARDS A PHONOLOGY OF NGWE

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Ngwe (ŋwé) is a language spoken in the Western and Eastern Cameroons. My informants come from the Western Cameroons group, which numbers approximately 20,000 speakers and is situated in and around Fontem. Fontem is to be found marked on the Ordnance Survey map, five miles from the border between Western and Eastern Cameroons, at latitude 5° 50' N. The tribe which speaks Ngwe is known as the Bangwa, and the area they occupy is about 600 sq. mls. around Fontem, where the paramount chief, the Fon of Fontem, lives. My main informant has been Mr. Bernard Foretia, whose family is closely related to that of the paramount chief. I have also had the help on occasions of a second informant, Mr. Ashu (a Bayange name).

This article provides a phonetic account of the sounds so far analysed, followed by a grouping of the consonantal items according to a tentative phonology and, finally, an illustrative word-list, selected from the data collected.

Below is a table of the total consonantal and vocalic occurrences so far noted in the material:

CONSONANTS	labio-						labio-			
	bilabial	dental	alveolar		palatal		velar		velar	glottal
plosive	p	b		t	d	c	j	k	g	ʔ
fricative		β	f	v	s	z			ɣ	ɣβ
affricate	pɸ				ts	dz	tʃ	dʒ	kx	ʔh
roll		ʋ				r				
lateral						l				
nasal		m		ŋ		ɲ			ŋ	ŋm
semi-vowel		w								

VOWELS	i	y			u	u
		e	ø	ə		o
		ɛ	œ		ɤ	ɔ
		æ		a		

ts represents an affricated voiceless alveolar plosive in medial positions, but in word-final position the affrication may be replaced by strong post-aspiration.

d, l and r are interchangeable, unless immediately following a nasal when only d can appear; and immediately following an alveolar plosive when only r can occur.

ʔh represents a glottal stop with strong fricative release.

ʋ and kx have only been observed in a few instances and will need further investigation.

ɣ represents a high front vowel with lip-rounding.

ɤ represents a low back vowel with lips close together.

u represents a high back vowel with spread lips.

The following vowels may occur long, but at the present stage I am treating them as disyllabic because of tonal factors: ii, ee, ɛɛ, aa, ɔɔ, ɣɣ, əə.

