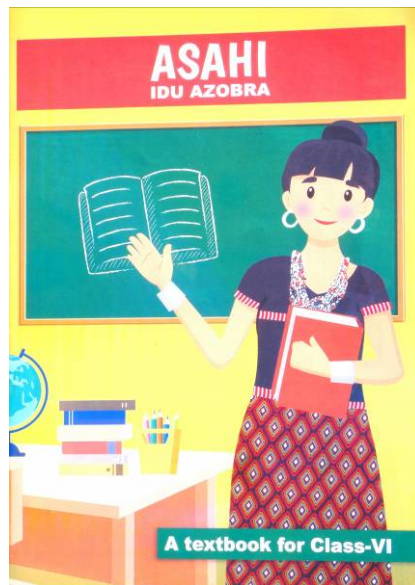


# Guide to Reading and Writing the Idu Language



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**SUMMARY**

This is a guide to reading and writing the Idu language of Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India

Keywords: Arunachal Pradesh; Idu

## 1. Introduction

The Idu language is spoken in the northeast of Arunachal Pradesh and in a few villages in Tibet, where their official name is Luoba. The Idu language was approved by the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh as a language of education in 2022, and development of textbooks and teaching in primary schools has begun. A preliminary textbook for Level 6 () has been published and more are under way. The orthography used in these books is based on the writing system developed in 2018, and published by the present author, Mite Lingi and Hindu Meme. This document is a guide to Reading and Writing the Idu language, based on the orthography, but also incorporating developing conventions, especially in the area of word division, which have evolved as more experience is gained in writing the language.

## 2. Background

There have been several previous attempts to write the Idu language, although none have been based on a description of the phonology that could in any way be described as credible (See Blench (2019 for a more detailed history). None have been adopted due to a lack of an accepted and practical writing system or orthography. It has been proposed to use Devanagiri script, although this is very poorly adapted to Idu, which has both tones and nasalised vowels. The ILDC has adopted the Roman Script for the Idu writing system, because the Idu language has both tones and nasalised vowels.

The first formal attempt to develop an orthography for Idu followed a visit by linguists from the CIIL (Central Institute of Indian Linguistics). It is not clear what analysis was undertaken but a trial primer was published (CIIL n.d.). A storybook including songs and narrative pieces on Idu life was published using these conventions but is now extremely rare (Figure 1).

Christianity among the Idu does not yet have a high profile, but missionaries from other regions of NE India would like to see a bible translation undertaken. Funded by Living Word, Shillong, the Baptist Church of Nagaland began a project to translate the New Testament around 2000. To develop an orthography for Idu, they employed a Mizo missionary with some knowledge of linguistics. No formal phonology was undertaken and the basis for the orthography is thus unclear. Figure 2 shows the title page of the Gospel of St. John, published in a trial edition in 2013. A curious addendum to these efforts at an orthography for religious purposes is Mega (n.d. but 2013). The cover is shown in Figure 3. This was apparently commissioned by the Bible Society of India although this is not evident from the book itself.

From 2015 onwards, the author together with the ILDC, began work on a more detailed phonology of Idu, with the aim of producing a practical orthography. The results are given in §3 below. The orthography, or ‘script’ in Indian terminology, was approved by the ILDC in 2018, and two documents, a *Reading and Writing Book*, and an alphabet chart, were published (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Simultaneously with these orthography publications, a dictionary and grammar of Idu are being prepared. Preliminary versions were printed in a few copies and presented at the 2017 Rē Festival. These have now been withdrawn as newer and more accurate versions are available. Progress has been made on an Android version of the dictionary, suitable for smartphones, which is projected for release in February 2023. Announcements can be found online of an Idu phone dictionary as far back as 2020, although this has nothing to do with the

Figure 1. Idu storybook

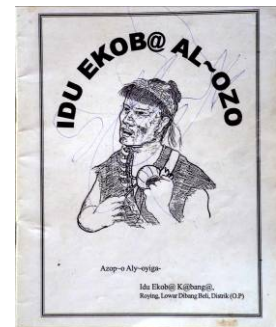


Figure 2. Gospel of St John in Idu (2013)

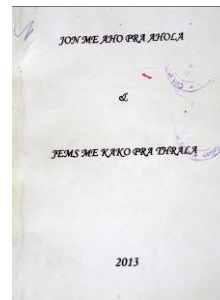


Figure 3. Bible Society reading book

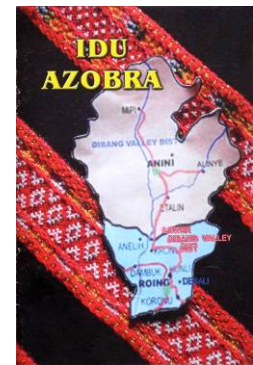
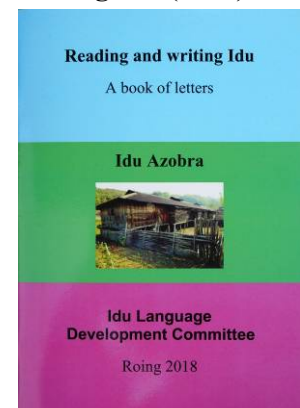


Figure 4. Reading and writing Idu (2018)



present enterprise<sup>1</sup>.

For Idu orthography to fully engage with modern communication, it will also need a writing system which can be easily used on social media and texting. Some conventions may have to be changed, but others simply need to be called easily from the keyboard. Work is under way to develop such a keyboard entry system.

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has now developed preliminary teaching materials based on these publications, the first of which is shown in the frontispiece of this document. Orthographies, however, represent work in progress, especially in the area of marking tone and rare phonemes, and this paper reflects recent decisions in this area.

Idu has two major dialects, Mithu and Midu, as well as variant lexicon spoken in the ‘Upper’ villages, notably the Anini area. The major difference is in the presence of absence of initial consonants. For example, a chicken is called *eto* in Midu and *meto* in Mithu. The dictionary records forms in both dialects, although Midu is generally preferred for standard texts. There is no significance in the phonology of two dialects, hence there are no differences in the representation in the script.

Idu has up to seven registers, that is parallel ways of speaking which diverge more or less from standard speech, and are used in particular sociolinguistic contexts. The most important of these are *igu* speech and the speech of hunters. In both of these, standard words and phrases are substituted for by other words, many of which are of unknown origin. Documentation of these registers is at a preliminary phase, so we cannot be sure there are no variations in phonology, but none so far have been detected. Provisionally, at least, these can be written with the same script conventions as standard Idu.

### 3. Phonology

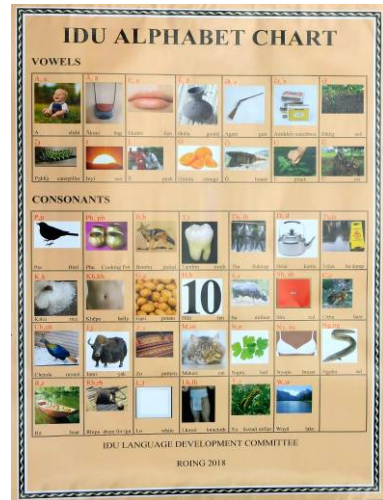
#### 3.1 Consonants

Table 1 shows the consonants of Idu with the most usual way of writing them.

**Table 1. Idu consonants**

IPA	as in	Gloss	Written	as in
p	pà	to cross	p	pa
p <sup>h</sup>	phāla	tea	ph	phala
b	bùni	yesterday	b	bunyi
t	tī	to cover	t	ti
t <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup> ū	bite	th	thu
d	dō	suck	d	do
k	kə	rice	k	kə
k <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> òndà	metal bell	kh	khonda
g	gè	to carry	g	gè
h	hā	eat	h	ha
s	sā	mithun	s	sa
ʃ	ʃrè	to dismantle	sh	shre
ʂ	ʂī	iron	s	si
tʃ	tʃī	to acquire	c	ci
tʃ <sup>h</sup>	tʃ <sup>h</sup> i	to walk	ch	chi
dʒ	dʒāmī	yak	j	jami
dz	ádzú	gorge	z	adzu

**Figure 5. Idu alphabet (2018)**



<sup>1</sup> Rather alarmingly, some of the present author’s material was used without permission

IPA	as in	Gloss	Written	as in
m	mà	black	m	ma
n	ná	pain	n	na
ɲ	ɲùtā	last room	ny	nyuta
ŋ	ŋá	I, me	ng	nga
r	ró	boat	r	ro
ɽ	ɽò	arrest	rh	rho
l	lò	white	l	lo
ɭ	ɭò	make hole	lh	lho
w	wā	cancer	w	wa
y	yū	beer	y	yu

Idu has a small subset of long or doubled consonants in initial and medial position. The only doubled initial consonant is /rr/, illustrated in the following contrast;

rrà	leave field fallow	rá	sharp
nnā	to dance	nā	to cook food other than grains
nnī	to push	ñjī	to chase

Doubled consonants in word-medial position are /mm/, /ll/ and /tt/. Examples;

èmmē	new moon	mē	to rear
állā	to lick	ālā	musk deer
áttī	to kick	ātī	village
īttū	to come up	itū	vagina

### Notes on Consonants

Most of the consonants are known to the Idu reader familiar with the English. But some special characters require mention as described below;

#### (i) Special ‘r’ or /ɽ/

The retroflex [ɽ] is extremely common and is widely familiar from other South Asian languages. In earlier attempts by IEK it was written as ‘wr’. The ILDC has adopted ‘rh’ to mark the special r. Examples are;

rhi	ɽí	boil esp. rice
rho	ɽò	arrest
rhū	ɽū	sound of dog

#### (ii) Special ‘l’ or /ɭ/

The retroflex [ɭ] is rare, but is still important. Earlier it was written as ‘ly’ in previous materials as in those developed by IEK. Here again ILDC decided to adopt ‘lh’ to mark the special l. Example;

lha	ɭà	wear loincloth
-----	----	----------------

#### (iii) /s/ and /sh/

/s/ and /ʃ/ (sh) are in free variation and are probably not to be considered distinct phonemes. Example; sa ~ sha (mithun), shu~ su (Red). But in words such as;

shré	to whistle
shrè	to copy, imitate
shrū	sour

the /ʃ/ is always sounded ‘sh’ so must be written.

**(iv) /j/ and /z/**

There is free variation of affricate [z] and the palatal affricate [dʒ] written ‘j’. Some speakers prefer [z] for particular words, so it may well be acceptable to write it as part of the alphabet, but it is unlikely to be a distinct phoneme. Example; *jami* (yak), *zu* (write). The ILDC recommends the general use of ‘j’.

**(iv) /c/ and /ch/**

The ILDC adopted ‘c’ as in *cita* (to cut) and ‘ch’ as in *chi* (to walk). Convention in India often uses ‘ch’ and ‘chh’, but this is to add extra letters for no reason and is influenced by English spelling (in words like ‘church’).

**(iv) /ts/**

Very often, /ts/ seems to be in free variation with /tʃ/ i.e. ‘c’ and so can be written that way. However, there are a few words where ‘ts’ seems to be always pronounced, such as;

tsàà	without any difficulty, at one go
tsí	to be rotten
tsílà	September
tsímbútú	gangrene
tsīyà	to be damp
tsō	light (as opposed to dark)

It should therefore be written as heard.

**(v) Nasal prefixes**

Idu has homorganic prenasalised consonants. Thus n- precedes dentals, ŋ- velars and m- bilabials. The ILDC recommend that these should be marked as sounded.

Examples;

njota	body
ŋgə	to saw
mbwēlō	transverse beam

The velar nasal /ŋ/ is written ‘ng’, so ‘saw’ will be nggə

Note that a nasal prefix often has the effect of making the stem vowel sound nasalised, but this may not be the case.

**(vi) Apostrophe mark (') for glottal stop/ʔ/;**

A slight glottalisation is heard when two vowels articulated separately are pronounced. Examples are;

àʔátò	à'átò	loom part
aʔota	a'ota	calf muscle

These are separate from long vowels and need to be marked in some way. The proposal is to use an apostrophe ('). Hence we can write a'ato and a'ota.

**(vi) Use of dash ‘-’ between two words with same vowel**

Example a-a means to give birth to a child.

**(vi) Consonant modification**

One of the more problematic issues in Idu phonology is the variation in palatalisation, labialisation and rhoticisation, i.e. with a ‘y’, ‘w’ or ‘r’ after a consonant. Many words seem to vary from one speaker to another and even within the speech of one individual. There is a definite tendency for younger speakers to drop these consonant modifications, for example, saying *nopu* instead of *nyopu* for ‘breast’ or saying *nani* instead of *nanyi* for ‘mother’. It is usual in writing systems to prefer the older, more conservative forms, so the ILDC has decided to keep the older forms, such as ‘nyopu’ and ‘nanyi’.

**(vii) interchange of ‘v’ and ‘l’:-**

There is dialect variation between ‘Upper’ and ‘Lower’ Idu, in regard to ‘y’ and ‘l’ and these two letters are interchanged. For example, *lo* which means ‘to buy’ in the Lower zone is pronounced *yo* in the Upper zone. The ILDC accepts that both forms may be written. Therefore ‘to buy’ can be written as ‘yo’ as well as ‘lo’.

**(viii) ‘ng [ŋ]’ and ‘ngg [ŋg]’:-**

Idu words distinguish between the velar nasal /ŋ/, written ‘ng’ and the velar nasal followed by ‘g’, i.e. ‘ngg’. These make important distinctions in meaning, for example;

àngā̄ taboo period; restricted period  
ānggó fish sp.

or;

ngà to not have; to be without  
nggà to spit out; to vomit out

Care must therefore be taken to distinguish these in writing Idu.

### 3.2 Vowels

#### 3.2.1 Overview

The underlying vowels of Idu are quite simple, but they are subject to many modifications, which make for a complex writing system. These modifications can be summarised as follows;

- a) Nasalisation. Idu nasalised all vowels, both long and short
- b) Length. Idu distinguishes long and short vowels.
- c) Retraction. Idu has retracted vowels, notably /ə/, but also the rare /o/ and /u/
- d) Breathiness. Idu has a single breathy vowel, /a̤/, which occurs in limited environments
- e) Tone. All Idu vowels bear a tone
- f) Dissimilar tone sequences. Idu allows sequences of identical vowels with different tones.

All of these must be carefully distinguished if Idu is to be written correctly.

Five of the Idu vowels correspond to English written vowels<sup>2</sup> but Idu has an additional vowel, schwa /ə/, shown in Table 2;

---

<sup>2</sup> Spoken English is usually considered to have eight vowels, hence the writing system is misleading

**Table 2. Idu cardinal vowels**

IPA	Example	Gloss	Written
a	ā	child	a
e	è	to do	e
i	ī	to live	i
o	ōō	to shoot	o
u	ū	to think	u
ə	kə	rice	ə

The schwa /ə/ is a central vowel such as you hear in English ‘bird’. Some common Idu words with schwa include;

to carry gə̃  
 rice kə̃  
 new mmə̃  
 flower pə̃

Some previous suggestions in Idu were @ and a^, neither of which are practical or useful. Any word with punctuation in the middle is likely to be read incorrectly. Also proposed was ‘eo’ which is found in Korean.

Writing a schwa/ə/ is difficult but ILDC has adopted it for following reasons:-

- The earlier use of ‘@’ as adopted by the IEK was not accepted by the community
- The ‘@’ stands for ‘at the rate’ and so it created more confusions.
- Writing other letters such as a^ and ‘eo’ created more difficulty and confusions.

### 3.2.2 Nasalised vowels

Nasalised vowels are those where the vowel itself has a pronounced nasal sound. This is heard in French, for example in words like *vin* /vā̃/ or *bon* /bō̃/. This type of articulation is very common in Idu. It should not be confused with the sounds /n/ or /ŋ/ at the end of a syllable. A previous solution that was tried in Idu was to write a tilde before the vowel which made the nasalised letters look like this ~a, ~e etc. This is both more difficult to type and looks poor on the page. The ILDC recommends the IPA superscript form i.e., writing a tilde (~) on top of the vowel to mark the nasal vowel. These are single characters in Unicode fonts and thus easy to type.

Idu has five nasal vowels, /ā̃/, /ē̃/, /ī̃/, /ō̃/ and /ū̃/. The central vowels and the modified vowels are not subject to nasalisation. Nasal vowels normally display length contrast, but no minimal pair has been found for ī̃ ~ ĩ. There is, however, a unique example of a sequence of non-nasalised and nasalised /i/, as in;

ī̃lī̃ third day of Rē̃

Nasalisation of the vowel preceding a homorganic nasal can occur word-medially, and it may be that nasalisation should be treated as phonetic in these case.

ā̃ndū̃[m]bā̃ dung beetle

The following show typical examples of nasalised vowels;

/ā̃/

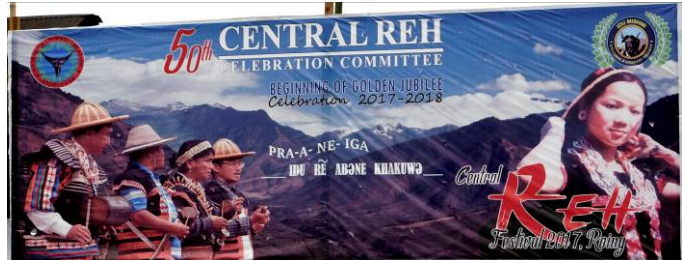
ā̃lō̃ to bring out s.t. hidden, reveal  
 cā̃ to fall on top of s.t.

/ẽ/

àlẽlò	length
àprẽmbó	tree sp.
àwẽ	bamboo basket for rice

**Important suggestion.** The Rẽ Festival is one of the most important cultural traditions of the Idu. However, it has typically been spelt ‘Reh’, although Idu does not have syllables with final ‘h’. This may have been an attempt to represent nasalisation, but it is misleading. It is hard to change established spelling, but ILDC proposes the festival is now spelt Ren or Rẽ. Figure 6 shows the poster for the Rẽ festival in 2017, where, somewhat confusingly, the name is spelt in two different ways.

Figure 6. Rẽ festival poster (2017)



/ã/

àkã	rat, big
-----	----------

/ã/

àprã	carpet
brãgá	to kill s.o. while dying

/ĩ/

There is a single example of a long, nasalised /ĩ/ in an ideophone;

sĩĩ	cool; chilly
-----	--------------

/õ/

ākhó	hand
āló	road, path, track
ànātró	herb sp.
cò	to punch

/ũ/

àkrũ	bamboo stemborer
ānjípũ	cucumber
āphũ	to observe taboo after a killing
cũ	to sprout (horn, branch from tree)

/ũũ/

ālõ ũũ	sandstone, easily broken
thrũũ	very sad; mournful

### 3.2.3 Long vowels

All vowels in Idu have a long/short contrast except /ə/, /ə̃/. Length contrasts for nasalised vowels are not easy to find and there is no examples for /ĩ/. Examples of contrast are very rare, given the overall size of the lexicon. It is very noticeable that many of the examples for length contrast in vowels are adjectives, adverbs or ideophones, which also have a feature of iconic lengthening for emphasis. This suggests that length contrast is a developing feature, not something which has been long embedded in the language. Nonetheless, it is sufficiently common as to be required in the orthography. The following tables show examples of contrast for the vowels;

a ~ aa

dā²	to borrow	dāā	safe distance
jā	to come down	jāā	reddish colour
kà	goitre	kàà	to cut out required shape
mrā	poison	mrāā	herb sp.
sà	net	sàà	slowly
wá	to scratch	wáá	sound of cock when you grab it

ã ~ ãã

pã	barren (animals)	pãã	sound produced by foot stamping
----	------------------	-----	---------------------------------

e ~ ee

cè	to cut	cèè	to tease
-te	verbal suffix denoting actions downwards	tēē	sound of twigs snapping

ẽ ~ ẽẽ

cẽ	to knit	cẽẽ	to tie
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i ~ ii

ìlì	soil	ìlìì	sting
mì	yellow	mìì	appearing uniform from a distance
pì	to bite (snake)	pìì	quiet

o ~ oo

mó	hunting technique for kites	móó	dazzled
tò	to pull	tòò	severely

õ ~ õõ

cò	to stamp s.t. on paper	còò	shortage
tõ	flour	tõõ	to break (rainfall)
brõbrõ	describes s.o. walking very actively	brõõ	to shoot up straight

u ~ uu

grū	to cry loudly	grùù	fees, payments
hū	to beat with stick	hūū	heavy, weighty
mù	to grow in a twisty way	mùù	to go out (fire, light)
phù	cooking pot	phùù	to puff air out of mouth
ɽù	to snatch	ɽūū	single strip of pork meat

ũ ~ ũũ

bũ	to emit smoke	bũũ	to be cloudy
cũ	to be immobile with sickness	cũũ	quite
hũ	liver	hũũ	ten
thrũ	to count	thrũũ	very sad

In addition to this, Idu also contrasts sequences of similar vowels articulated separately, which must be distinguished from long vowels. In this document they are treated as separate segments and a dot is placed between them. In some cases the tone is identical, but it can be dissimilar. Characteristic examples are;

ā.à	to give birth to child
ērā.ā	knife
è.ě	to go to the toilet (speaking to a baby)
ǰ.ǰsí	feeling tired, fragile
è.étà	dao handle
īsū.ū	Himalayan flameback
ìyū.ū	weakness due to excessive bleeding

It is proposed to write these with a dash – in orthographic practice.

### 3.2.4 Retracted vowels

Apart from nasalisation, Idu has two other types of vowel modification, retraction and creaky voice. Retracted vowels are articulated by pulling back the lower lip when pronouncing them. Technically, this is a vowel sound in which the body or root of the tongue is pulled backward and downward into the pharynx. Making the contrast between retracted and non-retracted vowels is essential in Idu, since retracted schwa /ə̠/ is relatively common and is in association with lip-rounding of the preceding consonant. Two other retracted consonants /ɔ̠/ and /u̠/ are extremely rare and occur primarily with ideophones or other expressives. Retraction in IPA is represented by an underline, and this has been adopted for the practical script. For some speakers, retracted /ə̠/ appears to be in free variation with a /we/ sequence. The following tables show examples of the retracted vowels;

/ə̠/ and /ɛ̠/;

khə̠	beeswax
ətākhrū	latrine
ēp̄ɛ̠	to eat something in particles
ḡɛ̠	to carry on the back
h̄ɛ̠	honey

Example of /ɔ̠/;

òr	sound of pig
----	--------------

Examples of /u/;

ūr to jack up (car etc.)  
ūrtè to pour

In the practical script it has been decided to write both /ə/ and /u/, but to ignore /o/, since it is so rare.

### 3.2.5 Creaky vowel /ɤ/

Creaky voice refers to a low, scratchy sound that occupies the vocal range below the common vocal register, most usually applied to vowels. Creaky vowels are common in mainland SE Asian languages but rare in India. Idu has a creaky vowel, /ɤ/ which occurs in a highly restricted context, before either /ɽ/ or /y/. Nonetheless, this is clearly contrastive, as shown in Table 3;

**Table 3. Evidence for phonemic status of Idu creaky vowels**

Idu	Gloss	Idu	Gloss
àyà	fan	āyā	white worm found in bamboo
āyā	daughter	āyá	fish sp.
àyē	to poison	àyè	to go round
āyē	to strip kernels from maize		
àrhē	to weed	àrhè	to measure
ārhē	to shuck a maize cob	ārhè	to aim (gun etc.)
māày	serow	māārdā	rust

Early versions of script suggestions proposed to ignore the creaky vowel, due to its rarity, but it is now considered that it should be retained.

## 3.3 Tones

### 3.3.1 Tonal system

Tone or pitch refers to the pitch at which a syllable is articulated. Most languages in the world are tonal, although major languages such as English and Hindi are not. Languages can have level tones which distinguish the number of pitches and contour tones. Idu has no contour tones on single vowels, somewhat surprisingly in the light of their importance in Tawrā and Kman. However, dissimilar tones on a sequence of two vowels can give this phonetic effect.

Idu has three level tones, marked as follows;

High- ´  
Mid -  
Low `

A macron (¯) over a vowel is thus mid-tone and not length. There are numerous minimal triplets on CV syllables, for example;

bá classifier for mithuns  
bā to go  
bà to whisper  
  
dá to feel  
dā to borrow  
dà to fix bamboo to a mat or a wall  
  
dé to ignore  
dē pure, clean

dè	to stand
hú	to dig with the hand vertically
hū	to beat with stick
hù	to put hand horizontally in a hole to search

Idu tones can be described as semi-mobile in context. There is no evidence for grammatical tone, and tones can be radically distorted in ritual formulae, sometimes to the point where speakers cannot unravel an utterance except where the originator of the formula already knows its meaning. Tones may also change in compounds, according to rules which are only poorly understood.

### 3.3.2 Should we write tone in the writing system?

Many Idu words are only distinguished by tone and if a reader cannot recognise the word quickly, reading will be confused and slow. Words which are written the same way without tones are called homographs. It is often possible by working through the sentence several times, or depending on context, to work out the meaning. However, this is not reading in the proper way. We need to be sure the reader can read effectively and quickly. However, marking tones can be an impediment as well, especially as Idu has many other diacritics on vowels. The solution, found in many tone languages worldwide, is minimal tone-marking, that is marking tones only where not marking them would lead to confusion. Consider the following set of words shown in Table 4;

**Table 4. Possible meanings of *adu* and proposed solution**

Idu	PoS	Orth	Gloss
ādū	v.	adu	to ask s.o.
ādū	n.	adu	ring or frame
àdū	v.	àdu	to give s.t. to a child to pacify it
àdū	n.	àdu	children on the maternal side of any generation
àdū	v.	àdu	to be fixed to a post (a banner or flag); to be tied to; to be pinned to
àdù	n.	àdù	eagle, generic

With no tone marking, all of these would be written ‘adu’, and it would be hard to work out the meaning of a written sentence quickly. The column marked ‘Orth’ would provide minimal tone-marking, enabling the reader to quickly work out which meaning was intended.

This is even more important with very short words, especially those consisting of a single vowel. Table 5 shows just some of the many meanings of ‘a’ with different tone heights. In this case it is proposed to write the high á and the low à with marks while leaving the mid-tone unmarked.

**Table 5. Possible meanings of *a* and proposed solution**

Idu	Orth	Gloss
á	á	at; in
ā	a	child; children; offspring; progeny
à	à	to give birth

Tone marking is not amenable to a unchanging rule; as knowledge of the language develops, so the conventions of marking tone may change.

## 4. Word division

### 4.1 Introduction

One of the most difficult aspects of developing a practical writing system is word division, when words should be split up when written together. Grammar is sometimes seen as the more difficult component of language description, and less useful than a dictionary. However, if we are to understand the logic of word division, then grammar is the basis for this. If the elements of a word are kept together in writing, the

outcome is often very long words, which are hard to read and process. The recommendation is generally in favour of splitting words unless there is a compelling argument for joining them. This section is again work in progress, finding rules to ensure we are dividing words in the most logical fashion and improving readability.

#### 4.2 Post verbal morphology

The most complex morphology in Idu is that of the verbs. Almost all other parts of speech have no morphology at all. Idu verbs are typically short, V or CV, but have numerous possible suffixed elements, both tense/aspect marking and more complex, the verbal extension system. The verb can also cross-reference the number of the subject pronoun. So –gá- may be inserted in the verbal complex to mark a third person plural subject. Similarly, *mí*, the negative marker, may be a distinct word, but can also be inserted in the verbal complex. Generally speaking, the verb and its suffixes must be written as a single word, even where long, because the suffixes have no independent meaning.

To illustrate this, take one of the longest extensions;

-hímìcīcī negative conative to do s.t. multiple times and not succeed

When attached to a CV verb, such as *dè*, ‘to stand’, this creates a long word;

*dè* to stand *dèhímìcīcī* to try to stand but fail

There is no way to break this word into meaningful independent units, so it must be written as it stands. An advantage of this type of word is that there is no possible ambiguity of meaning, so it can be written without tones.

Another type of post-verbal morphology changes verbs into nouns or gerunds. The suffix *-wēyā* following a verb creates a verbal noun (Table 6);

**Table 6. The nominaliser *-wēyā* in the Idu nouns**

Idu	Gloss	Idu	Gloss
<i>hā</i>	to eat	<i>hàwēyā</i>	edibles, victuals
<i>hī</i>	to have	<i>hìwēyā</i>	possessions
<i>lā</i>	to speak	<i>làwēyā</i>	things to be spoken
<i>tó</i>	to drink	<i>tōwēyā</i>	drinkables

In this case, the tone of the verb stem is lowered, showing the suffix is bound to it. Again it cannot be written separately.

#### 4.3 Sentence-final particles

One of the most difficult areas of word division is writing sentence-final particles, the short words at the end of sentences which identify it as a question, statement or other type of utterance. Consider the following;

- á marks polite imperative
- á question marker which complements WH- questions
- á at; in

Provisionally, the following solution has been adopted;

á This word is separated from the main sentence with a comma

*nyū āyā jí, á*  
you sit there, please

*āyāmā jījī pū, á*  
be seated there, OK?

á Marks questions

In Idu writing, this word is not written separately when it directly follows another question word, for example;

*hānòá?* Where?

However, in some cases it is split from the question word;

nyú hānò gè á  
you where go and come QM  
where have you been?

In this case, the reader will have to rely on the question mark to interpret the question marker.

á Locative suffix attached to nouns.

The proposal is to join the locative is joined to the noun with a full stop, for example;

*bōjārī.á*  
in the market

*ó.kò.á*  
at the house

These distinctions are only proposals at present. More experiment will be required to see whether they function effectively.

## 5. Punctuation

Punctuation marks are an important method of making written language easier to read. They have slowly invented and adopted over many years. The Romans, for example, did not use punctuation, but ran words together in a way that makes original texts hard to read. Modern English uses the following main punctuation marks (Table 7);

**Table 7. Punctuation marks**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Symbol</u>
Comma	,
Full stop	.
Semi-colon	;
Colon	:
Exclamation mark	!
Question mark	?
Hyphen/dash	-
Ellipsis	...

Most of these can be used for Idu in the same way as English. However, the grammar of Idu is very different from English and therefore, a mark such as a comma or semi-colon may not come in the same place. It is important to understand the syntax of the sentence before placing punctuation. The hyphen or dash has multiple uses in English, but it can be adapted in Idu writing to help break words which may otherwise be confused. The following sets out some examples of punctuation in Idu sentences;

### Comma

*ēnē kànyì, àndō ga jimi!*  
You two, don't fight!

### Full stop

*īnyí ó àndōnggō ilì a dega ji.*  
we keep pigs below our houses.

### Semi-colon and Colon

These are not normally used in Idu because of its sentence structure

### Exclamation mark

*ngá.gò e à dé mi mǎnā!*  
Don't irritate me!

### Question mark

*nyú āyā Rē má àdā dà.ā nà?*  
have you repaid the loan you took in his Rē?

### Hyphen/dash

There is as yet no standard use of the hyphen. However, it has been proposed to adapt it to resolve a common issue in writing, a sequence of two identical vowels which are to be pronounced separately, rather than as a long vowel. The example below shows how this would work.

*ā.à a-a to give birth to child*  
*è.étà e-eta dao handle*

### Ellipsis

Ellipsis in English writing shows something has been omitted. This can be for several reasons. For example the word is offensive and it preserves the reader's sensibilities. It can be an expression where other words are inserted between its two parts. For example;

*ā...ādū* 'to dandle'

When used in a sentence, this could be;

*ā pācā ādū mì*  
Don't dandle the child

where *pācā* is inserted between the two parts of the expression

Another use is to mark free repetition of an expressive word such as an ideophone. In this example, the speaker may freely repeat the word twice or several times;

*bàà...* sound of a tree or a person falling

## 6. Conclusion

This is a working document to establish the background to reading a writing Idu, as a support to the government programme of writing Idu in schools in Arunachal Pradesh. Some parts are regarded as settled, but other areas, particularly word division and punctuation are work in progress. It is hoped to issue further versions of this document as research into Idu continues.

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