THE TIV LANGUAGE ORTHOGRAPHY AND PHONOLOGY

SEMINAR

**The Tiv Language Alphabet**

The Tiv language had not developed its alphabet before the influence of the Dutch, Finnish, Portuguese missionaries, slave trade and later western (European) colonisation. Since both the French, British and Portuguese language(s) use the Latin script, the Tiv language adopted the Latin Script letters which suit its spoken language. Just like most African languages, it is a tonal language, characterized by the use of many diacritic marks. The consonants are not aspirated.

The Tiv alphabet has 25 letters (unlike the English which has 26) thus:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O Ô P R S T U V W Y Z

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The Tiv language does not have the English Q and X. Rather the digraph **kw** and **ky** are used as in kwen (gong) and kyav (loads)

**Tiv Vowels**

The Tiv language has six vowel letters of which have both short and long variants: **a, e, i, o, ô, u** (for the short sounds). And **aa, ee, ii, oo, ôô, uu** (for the long sounds). Stress and intonation are important aspects of the Tiv language phonology.

There are 18 vowel sounds in Tiv altogether: / ɑ/ [a], /a:/ [aa], /æ/ [ã], /æ:/ [ãã], /e/ [e], /e:/ [ee], /ɛ/ [ẽ], /ɛ:/ [ẽẽ], /ɪ/ [i], /i:/ [ii], /o/ [o], /o:/ [oo], /œ/ [o] [nyoho], /œ:/ [o:] [nyoon, foon, doon, doonoo]\*, /ɔ/ [ô], /ɔ:/ [ôô], /u/ [u], /u:/ [uu]..

NB. Using double vowel sounds instead of single vowel sounds and vice versa can alter meaning in the Tiv language. As in ma (drink) and maa (build) va (come) and vaa (cry, bond) etc.

While gazetting the English writing system the Europeans had a big challenge in such scenarios painted above since the long vowel sounds in English are marked by the ‘:’ as opposed to doubling vowel sounds in the Tiv language. For instance words like Gbooko (a town) were written Gboko, Tarka for Tarkaa, wang (clearly) for waang, nagh (sacrifice) for naagh etc

The Tiv Consonants

The Tiv language has 19 consonant letters. Its consonants occur either as individual sounds or digraphs, trigraphs or Tesseragraphs:

Consonant sounds are basically: /b/, /c/, /d/, /f/, /g/, /h/, /j/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /t/, /v/, /w/, /y/, /z/.

Digraphs: /tw/ twer, /ty/ tyo, /ng/, /mb/, /sh/ etc.

The European may see /mb/ as two different sounds, but it is not so in the Tiv language.

Trigraphs: /mby/ mbyor, /ndy/ etc

Tessegraphs: /ngby/ etc.

Mention must be made that these tessegraphs are very few in the Tiv language.