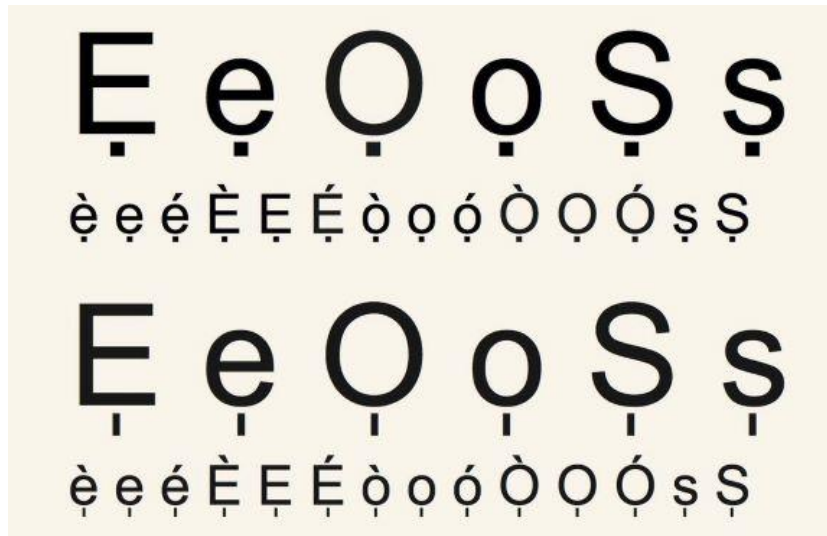


## How Should We Write Yorùbá?

A Two-session [Online Symposium](#) on Yorùbá Orthography in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



*Wednesday 2 and Thursday 3 September 2020*

*15.00–17.00 West African/UK time*

*Hosted by the British Library*

*In partnership with Africa Writes and the Lagos Studies Association*

### **Description**

Writing with diacritics (accents and special characters) is essential in the Yorùbá language of Nigeria and Benin. Diacritics indicate the tone of vowel sounds, and thus the meaning of individual words. But this has put Yorùbá, and other African languages, at a specific disadvantage online and with computer technology because of the general unavailability of tools, the irregular use of diacritics by other Nigerian writers in English, and the different attitudes among readers and writers of Yorùbá about when and whether to use the marks in general.

The Yorùbá writing system has undergone a lot of changes since Bishop Àjàyí Crowther first used it to compile *A Vocabulary of Yorùbá* (1843), particularly through the orthographical conferences of 1967 and 1983 headed by Ayò Bamgbóṣé, and today’s use in literature and colloquial communication. Even the internet has added new ways of circumventing the old orthography with words like “oshey” or “wayray” or “jor” showing up to replace “o ṣé” (thank you), “wèrè” (a mad person) and “jòṣò” (please) online.

These changes have sometimes brought a lot of headaches to users who are never sure what the standard is in each prevailing milieu. This online symposium seeks to answer some of the questions posed by this reality, and pose new questions of its own.

What is happening to Yorùbá standard writing in academic work written in English and published in Western journals? What about books published in two languages (or even just in Yorùbá), or words from Yorùbá used in Nigerian literature published in English? Have we jettisoned the diacritics totally? If not, under what circumstances will they need to be used? Are the rules clear? What are the rules concerning the tone-marking of names of famous Nigerians who typically don't use it? People like Wole/Wọlé Soyinka/Şóyínká or Tẹ́jú/Teju Cole? What do we expect of foreign publishers who encounter our names/words? What do we expect of ourselves and Nigerian publishers? And what challenges are there in technology to proper writing of Yorùbá today on the computer and the internet?

This two-day online symposium (in English) will address these questions, through conversations with writers, academics, editors, experts and people who interact with the language in various fields. There will be two sessions of two hours each, featuring presentations and ample time for discussion.

The audience will include those who read and write in Yorùbá or any tone language, people who read Nigerian literature, people who interact with academic work from Africa or languages with tonal diacritics, people interested in writing systems and literature from non-English-speaking environments, and people generally interested in language and linguistics.

We hope that the symposium will be the beginning of a wider and deeper conversation on Yorùbá orthography in the digital age.

### **Book now**

#### **Programme and participants:**

- **Session 1: Yorùbá: From Mission Field to Web Page**
  - Wednesday 2 September, 15.00-17.00 West African/UK time
- **Session 2: Using Yorùbá Today: Literature, Leisure and the Academy**
  - Thursday 3 September, 15.00-17.00 West African/UK time

#### ***Convenor:***

**Kólá Túbòsún**, *Nigerian linguist, creative writer and currently a Chevening British Library Fellow working in the Asian and African Collections*

#### ***Confirmed speakers:***

**Professor Adélékè Adéèkọ**, *Humanities Distinguished Professor at Ohio State University*

**Dr Túndé Adegbolá**, *Human Language Technologist, and Executive Director, African Languages Technology Initiative*

**Mosúnmólá Adéqjọ**, *doctoral student and Writing Instructor at the University of Florida*

**Àrẹmú Adéqlá**, *the Yorùbá scrabble inventor*

**Professor Karin Barber (CBE)**, *cultural anthropologist and academic, currently at London School of Economics*

**Dr Carli Coetzee**, *editor of the Journal of African Cultural Studies and Research Associate, African Studies Centre, University of Oxford*

**Kólá Túbòsún**, *Nigerian linguist, creative writer and currently a Chevening British Library Fellow working in the Asian and African Collections*

**Mqlará Wood**, *Writer, cultural activist and critic*

**Host:**

**Dr Marion Wallace**, *Lead Curator, Africa, at the British Library*

**Booking essential via**

**<https://www.bl.uk/events/How%20Should%20We%20Write%20Yoruba>**

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