

Roberts, David (2015): Laying a foundation for tone orthography research and decision-making: the Kabiye homograph corpus. *Scripta* 7. 151–189.

Abstract: The standard orthography of Kabiye (Togo) does not mark tone. In such a context, how can a researcher adequately assess the degree of ambiguity in the written language and make a valid contribution to the debate about how tone might be incorporated in the second generation of language development? This article approaches that question, not from the perspective of phonological analysis which has tended to dominate the literature, but from the point of view of the linguistics of writing. Applying Catach's (1984) model of lexical ambiguity to Kabiye, it advocates the development of a homograph corpus in which words, roots and affixes are included or excluded on the basis of semantic, morphological and dialectal criteria. A homographic prefix with pronominal, negative and immediative interpretations illustrates how the homograph corpus is then applied to a frequency and distribution analysis of ambiguity in natural written contexts, and an analysis of oral reading errors in the classroom. A dictation task reveals that participants who were taught a segmental modification of the negative prefix write with greater accuracy than participants who were taught to add tone diacritics.

Keywords: homography, written ambiguity, tone orthography, African languages.