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Consonants

Literate Hausa speakers use one of two writing systems. The "official" Hausa orthography uses the Roman alphabet augmented by the following special symbols:

B, Ɔ	"hooked b", representing an implosive "b"
D, ɗ	"hooked d", representing an implosive "d"
K, ƙ	"hooked k", representing an ejective "k"

In addition to the "hooked letters" and the apostrophe marking glottal stop, there are several other features of the Romanized orthography worthy of note:

C, c	always represents the sound spelled by English "ch" as in "child"
G, g	always represents a "hard g" as in English "gift"
J, j	always represents the sound spelled by English "j" in "jewel"
Sh, sh	always represents the sound spelled by English "sh" as in "sheep"
Ts, ts	represents an ejective "s" or "ts"

All commercially published books and nearly all Hausa language newspapers use the Romanized orthography including these symbols. Documents in Hausa have been printed in Romanized form since the late 19th century, but the current version was introduced for official use by the British colonial administration in the 1930's. A similar Roman orthography has been adopted for Hausa publications in Niger. The Nigerien version of the orthography has an additional special symbol (represented in the Nigerian orthography as 'y):

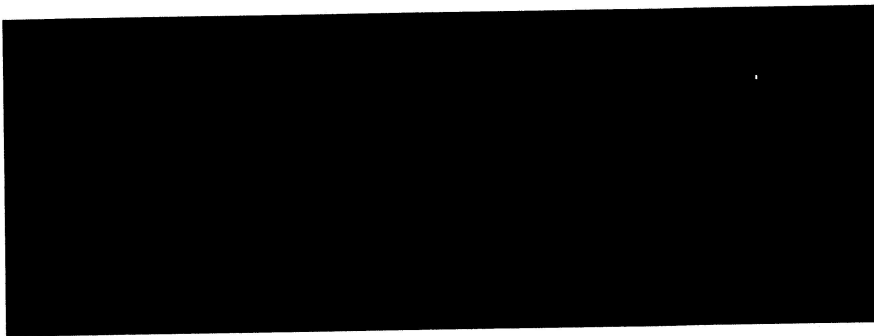
Y, y	"hooked y", representing palatalized glottal stop
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Writing Hausa using the Arabic alphabet: *ajami*



The other writing system in use by Hausa speakers is the Arabic alphabet. The Arabic alphabet, when used for writing Hausa, is referred to as *ajami*. Learned people have written Hausa in *ajami* since at least the early 19th century, when it was pressed into use primarily to write Islamic poetry in praise of Allah and the Prophet and to expound Islamic doctrine. *Ajami* continues to be used by many Hausas, especially in the composition of poetry, though there is at least one newspaper in Arabic orthography and a number of books have been published in Arabic orthography. Arabic orthography adapts quite well to Hausa. The two languages have exactly the same syllable inventory, viz. CV (consonant followed by a short vowel), CVV (consonant followed by a long vowel), and CVC (syllable closed by a single consonant). The sound systems of the two languages also overlap to a great degree, making it possible to use the Arabic orthography to represent Hausa with only a few minor adaptations.

There is no "standard" for writing Hausa in *ajami* and hence, there is variation in the way writers represent Hausa in this orthography. Following is a list of all the consonant sounds of Hausa in the standard Roman orthography (in Roman alphabetical order) together with their equivalents in a fairly commonly used variety of *ajami*. Examples of written Hausa below illustrate some of the variants:



Vowels, vowel length, and tone

Hausa has five vowel qualities, which the Romanized orthography represents by the normal five vowel symbols of the Roman alphabet. Hausa has distinctive **vowel length**, i.e. "long" vowels actually have longer duration in pronunciation than their "short" counterparts. Hausa is also a **tone language**, i.e. the relative pitch of the voice from syllable to syllable is distinctive.

The standard Roman orthography marks neither vowel length nor tone. To correctly read words in this orthography, one must therefore know whether a vowel is long or short and whether a syllable is pronounced on a relatively higher or lower pitch than contiguous syllables. Because vowel length and tone are crucial to the Hausa sound system, pedagogical works, reference works, and scientific works on Hausa usually mark tone and vowel length.

Marking vowel length: There are (at least) three methods for marking vowel length:

- macron over a vowel = long vowel, no mark = short vowel; this is the most common system in pedagogical works on Hausa--this is the system used on this web page where vowel length is marked
 dāgā 'battle' vs. **daga** 'from'
- doubled vowel = long vowel, single vowel = short vowel; most scientific linguistic works on Hausa uses this system
 daagaa 'battle' vs. **daga** 'from'
- no mark = long vowel, cedilla under vowel = short vowel; this marking system is used only in Newman and Newman, *Modern Hausa-English Dictionary*:

ɗaga 'battle' vs. **ɗaga** 'from'

Marking tone: There are (at least) three methods for marking tone:

- no mark = high tone, grave accent (`) = low tone, circumflex accent (^) = falling tone; most pedagogical and scientific works on Hausa use this system
fàzàntà (low-falling-high) 'filth'
- no mark = high tone, underline = low tone, small inverted "t" underneath = falling tone; this system is used only in R.C. Abraham's *Dictionary of the Hausa Language and Language of the Hausa People*:
fazantà (low-falling-high) 'filth'
- acute accent (´) = high tone, no mark = low tone; this system is used only by some German scholars:
fazántá (low-falling-high) 'filth'

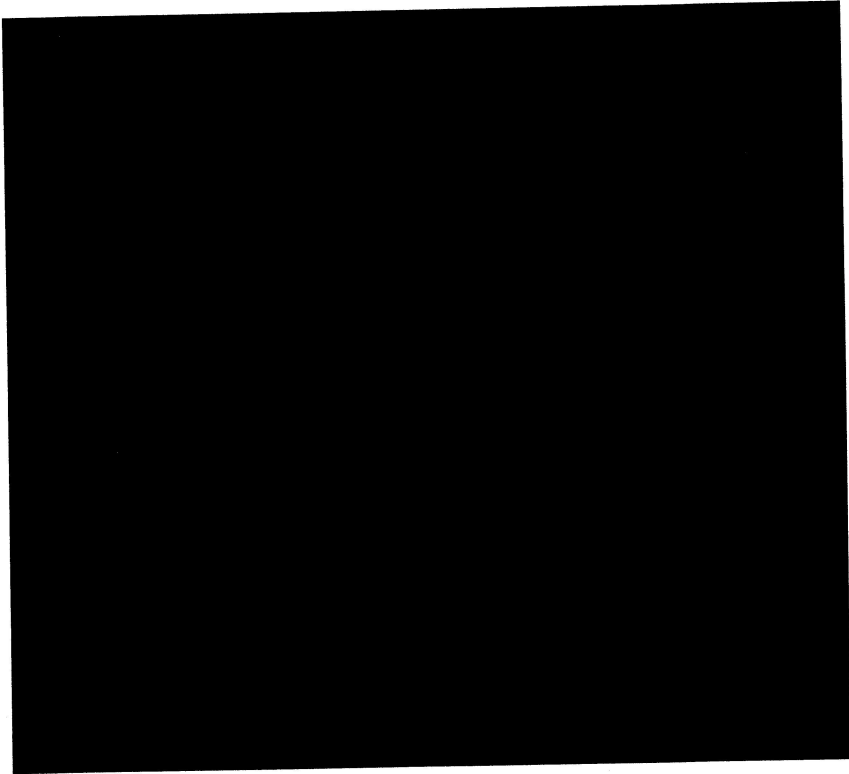
Vowels and vowel length in *ajami*: The Arabic writing system (*ajami*) has one advantage over the standard Roman orthography. Standard Arabic, like Hausa, distinguishes long and short vowels. Thus, when Hausa speakers write Hausa using *ajami*, they show vowel length as is normally done in Arabic, i.e. with the normal vowel points and *alif* showing long **a**, *waw* showing long **u**, and *ya* showing long **i**.

Arabic does not have the vowels **e** and **o**. When Hausa speakers write Hausa using *ajami*, they use the same symbols to write both **o** and **u** (both long and short). One must therefore know the words to know which vowel, **o** or **u**, is intended. *Ajami* does have a way to distinguish **e** from other vowels. A large point or dot under a consonant shows vocalization with a short **e**, and that dot, supplemented with a vertical stroke above the consonant shows vocalization with a long **e**. The following examples show all the vocalizations with the consonant **t**:

ت	تَا	تِ	تِي	تُ	تُو	تَ	تِ
ta	tā	tī	tī	tu	tū	te	tē
				or to	or tō		

No version of *ajami* marks tone.

The following table gives examples of several words as they would be written following the various writing conventions:

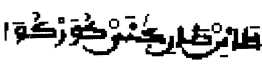


Some examples of Hausa writing in *ajami*

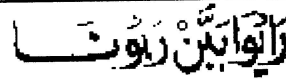
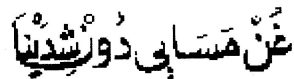

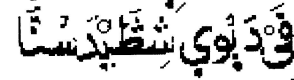
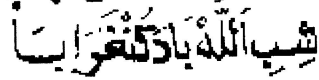
Below are examples of two styles of Hausa written in *ajami*, with a transcription in Romanized orthography. The transcriptions show vowel length with a macron over the vowel and low tone with a grave accent (`). In the standard writing system found in printed books, the diacritic marks over vowels would be absent.

Proverbs from Rattray, *Hausa Folk-Lore, Customs, Proverbs, etc.*, Volume 2, p. 272.

<p>1.</p>	<p>دَغْ كَوُكُوَا كُوَمَا كَدَابِي</p> <p>Dàgà kân faḳō kômā kân dàfē.</p> <p>Both the "hooked k" and the "plain k" are written with the Arabic symbol for "k". The "hooked b" is written with the Arabic symbol for "b".</p>	<p>'From hard ground, go to a pounded floor.'</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>إِيَاكَ كُرْجِي إِيَاكَ رُوْوَانَسَا</p> <p>Iyākā kurjī iyākā ruwansà.</p> <p>The "hooked k" in the second word is written with the Arabic symbol for "q" (the most common <i>ajami</i> rendering).</p>	<p>'The extent of a sore is the extent of its pus.'</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>إِدَان دَا كَامَاڤ نِيكََا، كُوَاڊُو يَا فِ كُوسَا دَا كَسَا</p> <p>Ìdān dà kāmāṣ nīkā, kwāḍō yā fi kusa dà kāsà.</p> <p>"Hooked k" and "plain k" are written with the symbol for "k"; "hooked d" and "plain d" are written with the symbol for "d".</p>	<p>'If it's (a case of doing something) like grinding, a toad is closer to the ground (hence closer to the work area)'</p>

4.	<p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p>Tsānin tsāni kē nan kuwaƙ kuwā.</p> <p>"Ts" is written with Arabic "emphatic t", more commonly used in <i>ajami</i> to write "hooked d". The "hooked k's" are written with the symbol for "k". The normal pronunciation of the word for 'friend' is <i>k'awa</i> (with <i>a</i> in the first syllable). One wonders if there could be an error in vocalization, transferred to the Roman transliteration.</p>	<p>'A ladder's ladder is what it is, a friend's friend.'</p>
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A verse from *Aljiyu Namangi, Imfiraji*, Part 3 (Verse 3). The style of writing in this example follows the conventions shown above in the table of Roman and *ajami* consonant symbols and the *ajami* vocalizations.

    	<p style="text-align: center;"> Rāyuwā bābban ràbō nā, Tārsāshin aiki na šāfnā, Shi bi Allāh bā dà kàngarā ba. </p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Gun masāfi don shi dainā, Fāi dà šōye shi tsai dà sunnā, Shi bi Allāh bā dà kàngarā ba. </p>
<p>Life is a great gift, All works of ruin,</p>	<p>For the wayward one so that he cease, Open and hidden, that he uphold right,</p>
<p>And that he follow Allah with no rebellious act.</p>	

Hausa is the only native language of Nigeria represented on Nigerian currency. Nigerian bank notes have their values written in Hausa, using *ajami*.

