

## **2. Notes on phonology and morphophonemics**

The phonology of Yabem is unusual among Oceanic Austronesian languages not only for the presence of tone, but also for an inventory of phonemes which seems quite large and complex in comparison with many other Oceanic Austronesian languages.

On a traditional analysis, the consonant phonemes of Yabem are:

Table 1. Consonants

	Labial	Labialised labial	Alveolar	Velar	Labialised velar	Glottal	
Stops	vl	<i>p</i>	<i>p<sup>w</sup></i>	<i>t</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>k<sup>w</sup></i>	ʔ
	vd	<i>b</i>	<i>b<sup>w</sup></i>	<i>d</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>g<sup>w</sup></i>	
Prenas. stops		<i>mb</i>	<i>mb<sup>w</sup></i>	<i><sup>n</sup>d</i>	<i><sup>ŋ</sup>g</i>	<i><sup>ŋ</sup>g<sup>w</sup></i>	
Fricatives			<i>s</i>				(h)
Prenas. fricatives			<i><sup>n</sup>s</i>				
Nasals		<i>m</i>	<i>m<sup>w</sup></i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ŋ</i>		
Laterals			<i>l</i>				
Semivowels		<i>w</i>	<i>y</i>				

The phoneme /h/ is shown in parentheses as it occurs only in loanwords from European languages.

Table 2. Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>i</i>		<i>u</i>
Mid	<i>e</i>		<i>o</i>
Mid-low	<i>ɛ</i>		<i>ɔ</i>
Low		<i>a</i>	

Phonetically, /e/, /ɛ/, /ɔ/ and /o/ are each somewhat higher than the phonetic use of these symbols normally indicates. As a result, the distinction between the front vowels /i/ and /e/ is quite difficult for a non-native listener to perceive. The corresponding distinction between the back vowels /o/ and /u/ is less problematic, because /u/ is somewhat centralised, and is phonetically somewhere between [u] and [ʊ].