

Scripts for Munda Languages

NORMAN ZIDE

Sorang Sompeng

We know less about Sorang Sompeng than about the other two scripts; the one history and description of this script is found in a short paper by Khageshwar Mahapatra

TABLE 56.1: *The Characters of Sorang Sampeng with Transliterations*

୩	୧	୨	୩	୪	୫	s	t	b	c	d	g
୬	୭	୮	୯	୧୦	୧୧	m	n̄	l	n	v	p
୧୨	୧୩	୧୪	୧୫	୧୬	୧୭	y	r	h	k	j	ñ
୧୮	୧୯	୨୦	୨୧	୨୨	୨୩	a	e	i	u	o	ε

(1978–79). Sora has been written in a Roman-based script originated by Baptist missionaries, and also in Telugu and Oriya characters. Mahapatra describes controversy between the promoters of Oriya and those of Telugu for the predominant influence on the Sora people living between the Oriya- and Telugu-speaking populations in what later became the Orissa–Andhra border area. Some “self-conscious tribal leaders,” Mahapatra writes, “instead of choosing a side to merge themselves, endeavoured to maintain their identity by inventing a new script for themselves.” Malia Gomango, an influential leader of the non-Christian Sora, led the movement for a separate script, and “inspired his son-in-law, Mangei Gomango,” to devise a proper script for Sora. Mangei, “an educated person ... conversant in Oriya, Telugu and English,” retreated to the hills, where on June 18, 1936, he received in a vision the 24 letters of Sorang Sompeng. He founded a religious order dedicated to Akshara Brahma. The script was widely taught, though it is unclear to what extent it is used; all the publications listed by Mahapatra are by Mangei, though the press has also issued many ephemera.

The 24 characters are arranged in a four-row by six-column diagram, with the six vowels in the bottom row. (The shwa vowel is “inherent” in the letter.) The letters get their names from 24 gods in the Sora pantheon, e.g. *s* for Sundañ, *t* for Tənod; no rationale is apparent for the ordering. The names of the consonant characters are derived by adding *a*’ to the consonant sound, i.e. *sa*’, *ta*’, etc. Mahapatra suggests that the general shapes of the characters owe something to English cursive letter shapes; perhaps the loops and curlicues were influenced by the Telugu script.

Divine providence does not guarantee a script linguistic efficiency. Mangei’s script does not represent the phonemes of Sora (TABLE 56.2) as well as it might in an efficient writing system. But it should be noted that we don’t know as much about the

TABLE 56.2: *Sora Phonemes*

p	t	c	k	ʔ	i	i	u
b	d	j	g		e	ə	o
m	n	ɲ	ŋ		ε	a	ɔ
	r	ɽ	l	w			

script as we need to, so we may be missing morphophonemic and, perhaps, dialectological information built into Mangei's writing system. Sorang Sompeng uses the *h* symbol for the glottal stop [ʔ] (there is no aspiration in Sora outside loanwords), but seems not to write glottal stop in some of the instances where it does occur. The retroflex [ɻ] is written *rd*. Mahapatra claims that there is no use for *c* and *v* in Sora. The letter *i* is used for [i] and [i̥], and *o* for [o] and [ɔ]. Consonant clusters are written not with conjunct characters (as in the Indic scripts), but by simply juxtaposing consonant letters, so the reader must recognize the presence or absence of [ə] in any particular instance. There is no *halanta*-like "killer" diacritic.

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