

Bangime semivowel *ɥ*: an audio tour

Bangime has an unusual glide (semivowel) *ɥ*. This is the IPA symbol for a high front rounded semivowel, similar to that in French words like *huit* [ɥit]. It does not occur in Dogon, Songhay, or (to our knowledge) in Mande languages of the zone. However, it does occur in the neighboring cliffs dialect of Bozo-Jenaama as spoken in Kargué and Namagué villages.

The known Bangime words that include this semivowel are listed below. There are several nouns (1), a few verbs (2), but no adjectives, numerals, affixes, or grammatical particles. Transcriptions are for prepausal (e.g. isolation) pronunciations, manifested in this sample in the form of prepausal tone-dropping on the final syllable of underlying M-toned /C̄VC̄/ (1a,c,d,o-q,s; 2a,i,j). Tones are irrelevant to the articulation of *ɥ* and can be disregarded here.

(1) Nouns

initial (including *Cɥ* clusters), n=7

- a. *sɥī* 'grain-based meal' (could also be analysed as /sɥij̄i/)
- b. *ɥij̄è* 'moon'
- c. *ɥij̄è* (1 of 2) 'water'
- d. *ɥij̄è* (2 of 2) 'day-night transition' in *ɥij̄è [Ø k̄wⁿɔ̄]* 'night fell'
- e. *ɥèbè* in: *ɥèbè [Ø k̄wⁿɔ̄]* 'it was just before nightfall'
- f. *ɥèèrì* 'drinking glass' (< French *verre*)
- g. *ɥàà* 'price'
- h. *ɥòwⁿ* 'rain (n)'
(rounding of *ɥ* is clearest in definite *ā ɥòwⁿ* 'the rain')

intervocalic, n=11 (or 10, excluding 'shell; tree bark')

- i. *ɕúɥé* 'earth, country, mud'
- j. *ɕùɥè* (1) 'dream (n)'
- k. *ɕùɥè* (2) 'nére tree (*Parkia*)'
- l. *súɥé* 'breast'

- m. *sùɥè* ‘chicken’
- n. *tùɥè* ‘ashes’
- o. *kūɥè* (1) ‘calabash’
- p. *kūɥè* (2) ‘shell; tree bark’
- q. *nūɥè* ‘balsam-spurge shrub (*Euphorbia*)’
- r. *ɲúɥⁿéè* ‘song’
- s. *sūɥì* ‘stuttering (n)’

(2) Verbs (shown in 3Sg perfective form with *kóó ɲ*).

initial, n=3 (or 1, excluding ‘buy’ and ‘(rain) fall’)

- a. *kóó [ɲ ɥìjè]* ‘he/she ascended’
- b. *kóó [ɲ ɥàà-rà]* ‘he/she bought’, cf. noun ‘price’ (1g)
- c. *kóó [ɲ ɥṵm-bḍ]* ‘it rained’, cf. noun ‘rain’ (1h)
(rounding of *ɥ* is clearest in perfective-2 *ɥḍ-wⁿ* ‘it rained’)

intervocalic, n=6 (5 excluding ‘sing’)

- d. *kóó [ɲ gùɥèrè]* ‘he/she wove (rope)’
- e. *kóó [ɲ ɲùɥèntà]* ‘he/she went in and came out the other end’
- f. *kóó [ɲ ɲùɥⁿè-rè]* ‘he/she sang’, cf. noun ‘song’ (1r)
- g. *kóó [ɲ tùɥè-rè]* (1) ‘he/she carried on head’
- h. *kóó [ɲ tùɥè-rè]* (2) ‘he/she transplanted, grafted’
- i. *[à ɥḍwⁿ] kóó [ɲ ɥṵm-bḍ]* ‘it rained, the rain fell’, cf. noun ‘rain’ (1h)
- j. *kóó [ɲ sūɥè]* ‘he/she descended’

(2d) and (2e) have also been heard with *j* instead of *ɥ*, the distinction being phonetically subtle. In the case of ‘(rain) fall’ (2c), the rounding of *ɥ* has been heard most clearly in perfective-2 *ɥḍ-wⁿ*, as opposed to perfective-1 *kóó [ɲ ɥṵm-bḍ]*, where the flanking

rounded vowels mask the rounding of *ɥ*. This verb also has inflected forms beginning #ɥu, including imperfective *ɥù-wⁿɔ̄*. This transcription is “correct” as underlying form, but it is heard as [jùwⁿɔ̄].

The breakdown by position (initial versus intervocalic) and by quality of adjacent vowels, combining nouns and verbs (including verbs with variable *ɥ ~ j*), is in Table 1 below. Pairs involving phonologically related nouns and verbs (‘rain’ and ‘rain fall’, ‘buy’ and ‘price’) are counted as singletons. ‘Calabash’ and ‘shell; tree bark’ may be the same lexical item and are counted here as a singleton. However, homonyms (‘carry on head’ and ‘transplant, graft’, ‘water’ and ‘day/night transition’, and ‘dream’ and ‘nééré tree (*Parkia*)’) are counted as distinct items. Nasalized *ɥⁿ* in ‘sing’/‘song’ is not distinguished in the numbers from *ɥ*.

Table 1

initial	8	# <u>i</u> (or #C <u>i</u>)	5
		# <u>e</u>	1
		# <u>ɛ</u>	1
		# <u>a</u>	1
intervocalic	15	#Cu <u>e</u>	13
		#Cu <u>e</u>	1
		#Cu <u>i</u>	1

The opposition *i* versus *u* is effectively neutralized after initial *ɥ* and before intervocalic *ɥ*. There are no cases of initial #ɥu... (other than underlying forms of ‘rain fall’ where *ɥ* is realized as *j*), and no cases of intervocalic #Ciɥ... However, in *sūɥi* (1h) the word-final *i* is clearly unrounded.

In initial position, there is a preference for a following *i* (5/7) or less often another other front vowel (2/7). The exceptions are a pair of examples each with *a* and *ɔ*, but each pair consists of a verb and a cognate noun (‘rain’ and ‘rain fall’, ‘price’ and ‘buy’), so each pair reduces to a single root. *ɥɔ̄wⁿ* ‘rain’ can sound like [jɔ̄wⁿ] with unrounded semivowel *j* in isolation, but in the definite form the rounding in *ɥ* is audible (and the lip-rounding visible) after the low vowel of definite proclitic *ā*.

(3) *ā ɥɔ̄wⁿ* ‘the rain’



In the relatively numerous #ɥi... examples, the rounding extends phonetically in part to the *i*, so *ɥijè* ‘moon’ is heard as something close to [ɥjè]. The phonetics, and the analysis, are complicated by that fact that all of the initial #ɥi... examples are either followed by unrounded palatal semivowel *j* or else (in ‘grain-based meal’) have long *ii* which (in Bangime) is not distinguishable from underlying /iji/.

The intervocalic examples all involve preceding *u* and following *ε*, less often another front vowel *i* or *e*. The preceding *u* has a fronted articulation, e.g. *súuḗ* is approximately [sýuḗ]. One could therefore consider the possibility of reanalysing the “u” as /i/ before intervocalic *ɥ*.

The stems in (4) show that *w* and *j* can also occur in #Cu_ε, and that initial #wi and #ju contrast with #ɥi.

- (4)
- a. *ɲùwè* ‘fat (n)’
 - b. *ɲújé* ‘wife’
 - c. *wààɖíbí* ‘obligation’
 - d. *kóó [ɲ wìndè]* ‘he/she wrote’
 - e. *kóó ɲ jūm-bà* ‘he/she danced’

When initial *ɥ* is followed by a nonhigh vowel (*ɥe*, *ɥε*, and especially *ɥa*, *ɥɔ*), *ɥ* can be heard with a labialized release, as in (1g-h) above. That is, the lip rounding extends beyond the retraction of the palatal approximation of the blade of the tongue. A low-level phonetic transcription [j^w] or [ɥ^w] roughly captures this.