

J.P. Mohapeloa Critical Edition: Pronunciation Guide to the Sesotho Texts

This guide is not a definitive document but a ‘rough guide’ to a language that has tricky pronunciation issues and is known to few people outside southern Africa. Sesotho home-language speakers themselves do not always agree about spelling or pronunciation, and there are limitations when it comes to singing rather than speaking any language. Bearing this in mind, the following pronunciations of vowels, diphthongs, and consonants are offered in the spirit of helping choirs pronounce what they sing. Comments that help to improve this Guide are welcome via the Contact page on www.african-composers-edition.co.za, and corrections to it can easily be made online.

Sesotho vowel/consonant on the left, Sesotho examples in brackets, International Phonetic Alphabet symbol in the middle, English (or occasionally other language) equivalent sound or comment on the right.

a	(ba, ha, tsatsi)	=	a	as in French ‘ <u>lac</u> ’
aa	(lekaagang, thepaa)	=	a:	as in ‘ <u>last</u> ’ or ‘ <u>father</u> ’
ae	(hae, kae)	=	aɪ	as in ‘ <u>fight</u> ’ or ‘ <u>lie</u> down’
ai	(maila, tailoe)	=	eɪ	as in ‘ <u>play</u> ’ or ‘ <u>may</u> ’
ao	(ao, kaofela)	=	aʊ	as in ‘ <u>ah-oh</u> ’ (more separate than ‘au’)
au	(Taung, Mangaung)	=	aʊ	as in ‘ <u>now</u> ’ or ‘ <u>cow</u> ’
b	(ba, Basotho)	=	ɓ	as in ‘ <u>but</u> ’
b’e	(abbreviation)	=	ɓɛ	as in <u>b-é</u>
ch	(sechaba, chao)	=	tʃ	as in ‘ <u>chair</u> ’ or ‘ <u>church</u> ’
d	(Sesotho ‘l’ - see below)	=	d	as in ‘ <u>do</u> ’
e	(re, hole)	=	ɛ	as in ‘ <u>bed</u> ’ or ‘ <u>yet</u> ’
ea	(ea, moea)	=	ɶ	as in ‘ <u>ya</u> ’ (almost 2 sounds)
ee	(tjee, lefeela)	=	ɛə	as in ‘ <u>there</u> ’ or ‘ <u>where</u> ’
ei	(ei, seilatsatsi)	=	ɛɪ	as in ‘ <u>play</u> ’ (diphthong)
eo	(eo, eona)	=	ɛɒ	as in ‘ <u>Eyore</u> ’ (2 sounds)
eu	(qeu)	=	ɛu	as in ‘ <u>ne-oo</u> ’ (2 sounds)
f	(Afrika, kaofela)	=	f	as in ‘ <u>fool</u> ’ or ‘ <u>fetch</u> ’
g	(Gauteng, Mangaung)	=	ɣ	as in Dutch ‘ <u>gaan</u> ’
h	(ha, hare)	=	ɦ	as in ‘ <u>ham</u> ’ or ‘ <u>happy</u> ’
har’a	(‘har[e] a’ elided)	=	ɦa-ɹ-a	
hl	(hle, hlaha)	=	ɮ	as in Welsh ‘ <u>ll</u> ’
i	(liba, Morija)	=	ɪ	as in ‘ <u>city</u> ’
ie	(lie, tsietsi)	=	ɪɛ	as in ‘ <u>he ends</u> ’ (2 sounds)
ii	(pii, tiisa)	=	ɪɪ	as in ‘ <u>hit it</u> ’ (2 sounds)

iu	(liu, Bosiu)	=	iu:	as in 'p <u>hew</u> !' (diphthong)
j	(je, joale)	=	dʒ	as in 'j <u>oy</u> ' or 'j <u>ump</u> '
k	(kae, thaka)	=	k	almost a hard 'g'
kea_u		=	kjɛ-u	kya-oo (diphthong)
kh	(khomo, khotso)	=	ɣ	as in Dutch ' <u>g</u> aan' (soft)
l	(sala, joale, pelo)	=	l	as in ' <u>l</u> eft' (before a, e, or o)
l	(lifela, lumela)	=	d	as in ' <u>d</u> o' before i or u
ll	(lla, sello)	=	ɫ	as in ' <u>ill</u> -lit' (2 'l' sounds, not Welsh ll)
m	(Morena, Moshoeshoe)	=	ɱ	as in ' <u>em</u> pathy' (a separate sound)
mm	(mmè, hammoho)	=	ɱɱ	as in ' <u>l'm</u> maybe' (2 sounds)
'm	('mè, 'mutlanyana)	=	ɱɱ	abbreviation of 'mm' (2 sounds)
mmè		=	ɱɱɛ	as in ' <u>l'm</u> maybe' (2 sounds)
n	(nong, haneu)	=	ɳ	as in ' <u>n</u> oun' (a separate sound)
nc	=			prenasalised dental click
nch	=			prenasalised aspirated dental click
ng	(leng, mong, nong)	=	ŋ	as in ' <u>Ri</u> ngo' (2 sounds)
nk	(nka, nkutloe)	=	nk	as in ' <u>in</u> k' (2 sounds)
nn	(nna, senna)	=	NN	as in ' <u>in</u> no' (2 sounds)
nya	(nonyana, senyamafi)	=	ɲjɛ	as in ' <u>good on</u> ya'
o	(potla, koto)	=	ɒ	as in ' <u>not</u> ' or ' <u>pot</u> '
ō	(rōna, thōla)	=	ɔ:	as in ' <u>sore</u> '
oa	(oa, majoana)	=	ɒɑ	as in ' <u>lowa</u> ' (almost 2 sounds)
oe	(utloe, Moshoeshoe)	=	ɒɛ	as in ' <u>lowest</u> ' (2 sounds)
oeu	(Mosoeu)	=	ɒɛ-u	as in ' <u>So where to</u> ' (3 sounds)
oi	(tsoile, likhoiting)	=	ɔɪ	as in ' <u>coil</u> ' (diphthong)
oo	(koo, moo)	=	u:	as in ' <u>soon</u> '
ou	(tloukholo)	=	ɑʊ	as in ' <u>now</u> ' (diphthong)
p	(lipina, potla)	=	p	as in ' <u>papa</u> '
ph	(liphala, phera)	=	pʰ	as in ' <u>perhaps</u> ' (slightly aspirated)
q	(qe <u>u</u> , qojoa)	=		palatal tongue click
qh	(qho, qho <u>eng</u>)	=		aspirated palatal tongue click
r		=	r	as in ' <u>red</u> ' or ' <u>try</u> '
s	(se, thusa)	=	s	as in ' <u>see</u> '

sh	(shebile, lipshamathe)	=	ʃ	as in ' <u>sh</u> e'
s'o	('s[e] o' elided)	=	s-ɒ	almost as in ' <u>Seoul</u> ' (2 sounds)
t	(teng, litaba)	=		somewhere between 'd' and 't'
th	(theng, thula)	=	t ^h	as in ' <u>t</u> op' (slightly aspirated)
tj	(tjee, matjato)	=	tʃ	as in ' <u>ed</u> ge'
tš/ts	(tšohang, tšaba-tšaba)	=	tʃ	as in ' <u>it</u> s' (slightly aspirated 's')
u	(utloa, thula)	=	u	as in ' <u>g</u> ood'
ua	(ua, bua)	=	u:a	as in ' <u>two one</u> ' (2 sounds)
ue	(fue, uena)	=	u:ɛ	as in ' <u>w</u> et' (almost 2 sounds)
uo	(puo, lipuo)	=	u:ɒ	as in ' <u>too hot</u> ' (2 sounds)
uoa	(kuoane, shapuo)	=	u:wɒ	as in ' <u>do what</u> ?' (2 sounds)
v	(Davida)	=	v	as in ' <u>v</u> oice'
w	(wa)	=	ɒa	as in ' <u>lowa</u> ' (see 'oa' above)
x	(not found in these songs)			
y	(ya, moya)	=	ɟɛ	as in ' <u>y</u> a' (see 'ea' above)
z	(Eben-Ezer)	=	z	as in ' <u>z</u> oo'