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JOYCE I. WANGIA

## **MORPHOPHONOLOGICAL ISSUES IN TRANSLATION: The Lulogooli Bible**

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### **Introduction**

Translation is commonly defined as the transfer of meaning from one language to another. From this simple definition, we could pick out some key terms: *transfer*, *meaning*, *language*. Meaning is expressed through language and the translator is the “word processor.” As such, the translator could be described as the mechanical or the technical agent in the process. If the translator is equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge, s/he is likely to come up with a superior product. Lexical knowledge alone is not sufficient. Like the wiring of the most sophisticated machine, the complexities of language involve intricate details which become very significant during translation. This article examines some of these details that are connected to *phonology*, the sound level of language, and *morphology*, the level which describes the word shape in a language. The article is based on my doctoral research (Wangia, 2003), in which I looked at aspects of mistranslation in the 1952 Lulogooli Bible.

### **Background**

Lulogooli is a Bantu language, a sub-group of the Luyia cluster of languages of Western Kenya. Luyia is an umbrella term for some seventeen language groups of Western Kenya with varying degrees of mutual intelligibility. The earliest efforts to introduce some form of literacy in Lulogooli can be attributed to Quaker

missionaries (Kanyoro, 1983; Mojola, 1995). The first reader in Lulogooli was published in 1907 by CMS Press in Kampala. This was a primer that consisted of a few pages of syllables, a selection of the most common words in the language, and short biographical Bible stories. This led to the publication of a few other educational booklets. In 1908 Emory Rees started the translation of the Gospel of Mark (Mojola, 1995). The complete Bible was published in 1952 and it has remained one of the major written works in Lulogooli. Having to learn a language, develop a writing system, and translate the Bible, the missionaries did a commendable job. However, the non-native speaker factor, coupled with lack of a writing system basis, must have largely contributed to the inevitable flaws in the translation. In this article we look at some of the linguistic problems in the text and how these can apply to translation in general.

### Phonological issues

Phonology defines and describes the sound system of a language and how various sound patterns are represented in writing. This section will deal mainly with prosodic features that are deemed to affect the writing system and hence, translation. These include graphemes, tone, tense realization, intonation, and vowel lengthening.

#### Graphemes

Graphemes are correspondences of phoneme realization in writing, i.e., spelling or orthography. Thus, graphemes are essentially letters of the alphabet, and a phoneme may be represented by one or more letters. Although the basic Lulogooli word pattern is CVCV, there are various phonological processes of labialization, palatalization, and affricate combinations that do not have consistent spelling. These are constantly a source of confusion and/or difficulty in reading and writing. Inconsistencies in the orthographic representation of sounds pose a problem in the Lulogooli Bible. In the case of vowels, for example, there is no way of distinguishing between long and short vowels from the spelling of words; or rather, vowel lengthening—which is a significant feature in distinguishing the meanings of words—is not marked. For instance, *mavere* “millet” vs. *maveere* “milk” are distinct articulations whose distinction can be represented in the orthography by doubling the vowel as in the case of the second word. This distinction is not made in the Lulogooli Bible. In most cases, a single vowel is used where there is need for a lengthened (double) vowel. We shall discuss this issue in detail later. There are also orthographical problems as far as some consonant representations are concerned. The first four examples below illustrate some of these orthographical problems.

1. There are a number of cases where a sound is arbitrarily represented by two orthographical symbols. In other words, it is not predictable when to use which variation. One such case is the phoneme / *b* /, a voiced bilabial fricative which is sometimes represented in the orthography as ‘b’ (voiced) and other times as ‘v’ (voiceless). The examples below picked randomly from chapter one of Matthew attest to this.

	‘v’		‘b’
<i>yivulwa</i>	“was born”	<i>buyanzi</i>	“love”
<i>vayuda</i>	“Jews”	<i>Bayuda</i>	“Jews”
<i>vanene</i>	“the great”	<i>hoholola</i>	“untie”
<i>vandu</i>	“people”	<i>bukumi</i>	“glory”

It is interesting to note that the same sound in the same word is represented differently in the same chapter as in the case of *vayuda* (Matt 1.1) and *bayuda* (Matt 1.2).

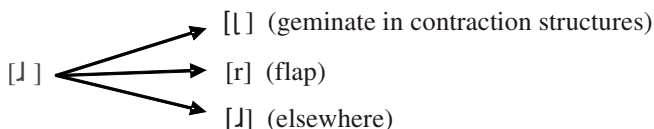
In Lulogooli, /b/ and / / are distinct phonemes. The former, a stop, puts Lulogooli at variance with most Luyia languages, which have only the bilabial fricative / / and use the stop only when preceded by a bilabial nasal /m/. Kanyoro (1983) explains that the Anglicans, the Catholics, and the Church of God (missionary institutions) represented / / with the orthographic symbol ‘b’ mainly because the dialects they worked with do not have voiced stops. However, she fails to point out that the missionaries who worked with Lulogooli did not make a clear distinction between / / and /b/, either.

The following minimal pairs clearly show the distinction between the bilabial stop [b] and the fricative [ ], hence proving the presence of both phonemes in the language.

	/b/		/ /
<i>baasa</i>	“iron”	<i>yaasa</i>	“hide”
<i>bang</i>	“arrange”	<i>yanga</i>	“how many”
<i>buura</i>	“dye”	<i>yuura</i>	“reveal”
<i>kuba</i>	“beat”	<i>kuya</i>	“to be”
<i>vibaga</i>	“cats”	<i>viyaga</i>	“three”

Furthermore, Lulogooli, unlike most other Luyia languages, employs the other voiced stops, i.e., /d/ and /g/. Using the same letter—‘v’ and ‘b’—to arbitrarily represent two different phonemes—/ / and /b/—in the orthography creates confusion.

2. The other set of confusing phonemes are the approximants [l] and [r]. These are also employed haphazardly in the orthography, i.e., it is not clear when ‘l’ is used and when ‘r’ is used. Sometimes one is used in a word in one place, and the other is used in the same word in another place. What we do have in Lulogooli is the alveolar approximant phoneme [ɹ] (IPA in Malmkjaer, 1991), which is sometimes realized as [l] geminate, e.g., *zizagilla* “continue,” (Ladefoged, 1975:223), and oftentimes as [r] flap, e.g., *roa* “see.” We can therefore state as a rule the use of this phoneme:



3. A similar example is the sound /z/, which is indiscriminately written at times as 'dz' and at other times as 'ts' in the orthography. There is need to synchronize this discrepancy. The notation 'ts' is a common feature of the other Luyia dialects, which tend to devoice all the stops. It would appear, then, that Lulogooli, which employs voiced stops, should stick to 'dz' and not try to match the other Luyia marker 'ts.' However, the letter 'z' would be a better option. It represents the same sound used in Swahili, which is standardized and which Lulogooli readers are familiar with.
4. There are other grapheme representations of labialized consonant sounds that do not naturally represent the articulations in the language. These are consonant clusters like 'gy,' 'ky,' 'vy,' and 'ly,' which are used to represent the sounds [dʒ], [kʲ], [vʲ], and [lʲ] respectively. As noted above, since Kiswahili orthography is already standardized and many of the Lulogooli readers are familiar with it, it is easier for the readers to approximate its system than to deviate from it; hence, these spellings could be adapted as 'j,' 'ch,' 'vi,' and 'li' respectively.

### Tone

Tone languages remain a major challenge to the writing system. Consequently, translators working in such languages need to be consciously aware of this and seek for effective ways of handling the language. Lulogooli, like most Bantu languages, is a tone language. Unfortunately, like most Bantu languages, tone is not marked in the orthography in spite of its significance in distinguishing meaning (Kioko, 1994, 2002). There are pairs of words in the language that are similar in consonant and vowel composition but that differ only in tone. It is difficult to relate the spoken language to the written language when tone is not marked.

Tone makes meaning distinction in Lulogooli as the following contrasting examples show.

5. <i>malá</i>	"finish"	<i>malà</i>	"intestines"
<i>matú</i>	"leaves"	<i>matù</i>	"ears"
<i>vohá</i>	"tie"	<i>vohà</i>	"ferment"
<i>komerá</i>	"grow fat"	<i>komerà</i>	"to germinate"
<i>liginá</i>	"stone"	<i>liginà</i>	"act of blaming"
<i>yitá</i>	"pour"	<i>yità</i>	"kill"
<i>yavá</i>	"these ones"	<i>yavà</i>	"dig"
<i>kalá</i>	"that small thing"	<i>kalà</i>	"cut"

In these examples only the high and low tone are marked, but more levels are present.

### Tone, intonation, and vowel lengthening

In Lulogooli, tone is intertwined with intonation and vowel lengthening to perform various grammatical functions. In addition to meaning distinction, tone coupled with intonation and vowel length marks various aspects of tense and interrogative. The following example shows different tenses marked from the same form of word.

6. yèyà “sweep”  
 yéyà “is sweeping”  
 yéyá “swept”

The same form can be used to ask a question:

yéyáà? “is s/he sweeping?”

Notice, however, that in the interrogative, the final vowel is lengthened in addition to the tonal change. This is articulated with a double rising and a falling tone.

### Vowel length/quality

Lulogooli has pairs of words whose meanings are distinguished on the basis of vowel length. All the phonological characteristics of members of these pairs are the same except a vowel that is *short* in one word is represented as *long* in the other. Thus, vowel length in Lulogooli is phonemic. When this distinction is not made in writing, reading becomes strenuous. Examples of these are:

- |                  |           |                |                 |
|------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|
| 7. <i>mavere</i> | “millet”  | <i>maveere</i> | “milk”          |
| <i>inda</i>      | “louse”   | <i>índaa</i>   | “stomach”       |
| <i>tùma</i>      | “send”    | <i>tuuma</i>   | “jump”          |
| <i>kula</i>      | “on that” | <i>kuula</i>   | “extract tooth” |
| <i>tula</i>      | “go”      | <i>tuula</i>   | “off load”      |

The fact that tone is not marked in the Lulogooli Bible could be one of the reasons why reading the Bible is difficult for most people. It can be observed, for example, in church gatherings during a reading-aloud session that even competent readers stumble over words/phrases and have to keep going over them. This certainly demands more processing effort from a reader who, in the process of reading, has to keep figuring out what the correct tonal variation for certain words in a text is. Two Bible examples below illustrate this.

### 8. Romans 1.26-27

*va leka butumiki bwomwima bwavakali ni vaduka kuli miliru mu likayirwa lyavo avene . . . .*

they abandoned the normal role of women and burned like fire in their desire for each other.

The underlined expression, *vaduka* “they burnt,” has a high tone on the final syllable, i.e., *vaduká*. However, the same form but with a low tone on the final syllable, *vadukà*, means “they arrived.” A reader has to read it through the context, i.e., *vaduka kuli muliru* “they burnt like fire” to know that it is the former which is correct. If s/he had started off by reading with the sense “they arrived,” s/he will be forced to re-read again with the correct tone. In the next example, we see that vowel quality determines different tenses.

### 9. Acts 6.1-2

*Mu madiku yaga lwa vegidzi vadasika, Ayayuda va vola Lugreki . . . .*

in the days when the disciples multiplied, the Jews who spoke Greek . . . .

In this text, reference is made to “Greek-speaking Jews.” This is expressed in Lulogooli as *Avayuda va vola Lugreki*, which means “the Jews spoke Greek.” In other words, the simple past tense *vavola* “spoke” is used instead of the simple

present, *vavolaa* “who speak.” The latter correctly describes a condition or states the fact that these were Greek-speaking Jews. Normally, tense is marked on the verb in Lulogooli; and more often than not, the different tenses are realized by the differences in the tone or stress applied during the articulation of the same verb. In the above example, the vowel at the end is lengthened to show a present tense. A contrast of this, for example, would be to lengthen the vowel on the middle syllable, i.e., *vavoola*, which changes it to the present continuous tense, “are speaking.”

### Tense

Kanyoro (1983:105) describes Luyia (hence Lulogooli) tense as being distributed into the past in three degrees and into the future in four degrees as shown below:

FP — IP — NP — PRES — NF — IF — FF — RF

**The present tense** (PRES) refers to ongoing action, whether immediate or habitual. Example, *ayinzila* “he is working” or “he works.” The other specifications above are interpreted as:

#### The past tense

- (i) NP — near past, which incorporates action which has occurred within the past few hours, e.g., *ndakulia* “I ate.”
- (ii) IP — intermediate past, which can extend over a period of a few weeks, e.g., *ndaliyi* “I ate recently.”
- (iii) FP — far past, which refers to a period beyond the immediate past, e.g., *ndaalia* “I ate a long time ago.”

#### The future tense

The varying degrees of the future tense can be exemplified as follows:

- (iv) NF — near future: *ndalia* “I am going to eat.”
- (v) IF — immediate future: *nandie* “I will eat soon.”
- (vi) FF — far future: *ndakalie* “I will eat sometime.”
- (vii) RF — remote future: *ndilia* “I will eat whenever.”

From these examples, we see that different tenses are marked by very slight modifications on the verb forms. This calls for carefulness in writing. The two examples below show violation of *tense* in the translation.

### 10. Matthew 4.4

*Navutswa ya tivula na a vola gang'odeywi*

but he answered and said it has been written.

English translations, e.g., RSV and GNT, use a form of perfection, “it is written” as in the original Greek. According to the Lulogooli tense specifications above, the form used in this text is the IP (immediate past), which gives a different connotation from the original. The appropriate form should actually be the FP (far past), i.e., *gang'odwa* “it is written.”

The next example, from Acts 2.47, describes acts that occur simultaneously, namely, that “the Lord was adding to the number of disciples as the people were

getting saved.” The two acts of “saving” and “adding” are simultaneous but the Lulogooli translation implies the two acts were in succession.

### 11. Acts 2.47

*Kandi Mwami ya va dasira madiku na madiku a va li ni va honnywa*

and the Lord added them days upon days those who had been saved.

The tense in *a va li ni va honnywa* “those who had been saved” implies that the people had been saved earlier. A correct rendering is, *a va honnywanga* “who were being saved.”

Tone and vowel quality (which is a form of stress) are significant in Lulogooli and, if not marked, could contribute to misinterpretation of meaning in a translation. They are an integral part of the phonology of the language. Their appropriate use in a written text would play a significant role in aiding the reader to attain the intended interpretation at minimum processing cost (Gutt, 1992).

### Morphological issues

Morphology is defined as the study of words and their structure (Bauer, 1983). It explains the rules which account for the changes in the shapes of words and the various word formation processes. These rules vary from language to language. For instance, one way in which English accounts for plurals is by the addition of the morpheme ‘s’ to a root, e.g., boy + s = boys. Lulogooli, on the other hand, accounts for most plurals by changing the nominal prefix, for example, *mu + yayi* “boy” vs. *va + yayi* “boys.” In this case, ‘mu’ marks the singular morpheme while ‘va’ marks the plural. It should be noted, however, that these morphemes represent other meanings. For example, *mu + moni* = “in face”; *va + vo* = “theirs.” In these examples, ‘mu’ marks preposition and ‘va’ possession. These nominal class prefixes (morphemes) are significant in that they are responsible for agreement in sentence structure. What are some key areas?

### Roots and affixes

A root is the base form of a word. Three categories of word can be distinguished: (1) **lexeme**: the abstract vocabulary item that normally would appear in a dictionary representing core meaning like “boy,” “see,” “tall”; (2) **word-form**: the different realizations of the core words or lexemes, e.g., boy/boys, see/saw/seen, tall/ taller/tallest; and (3) **grammatical word**: the word in this case is associated with certain morphosyntactic properties, e.g., noun, adjective, verb, tense, gender, number, etc.

These divisions can be easily and neatly applied to English, which clearly separates roots (free morphemes) from affixes (bound morphemes) with a few exceptions. However, unlike English, Lulogooli does not always divide words into free and bound morphemes. Lulogooli joins several morphemes together into one word-form. A prominent flaw in the Lulogooli Bible is the attempt to isolate Lulogooli morphemes according to English word structure. The result is an unnatural language structure. Lulogooli, as an agglutinating language, attaches affixes to roots so that there are several morphemes in a word. For example, the word form *siyaloleka* is in effect a sentence which can be translated in English as “She/he was not seen.” This word (sentence) has several morphemes which can be isolated as follows:

*Si* - *ya* - *lol* - *ek* - *a*

Negator - Pronoun - See - Stative - Final vowel  
(past)

Sometimes these morphemes are not easily describable as they may not even be isolable, especially in the case where tone is involved. Nevertheless, what we observe from this is that both the affixes and roots are bound morphemes and thus cannot be separated from each other. Knowledge of agglutinating affixes comes naturally to native speakers and is automatic in speech. In the written form, however, a conscious effort has to be made to determine boundaries. This feature can be illustrated by a phrase in Matt 1.21:

**12.** *na I've u la mu gulika lyeta lilye Yesu . . .*

and you will call his name Jesus . . .

This phrase has nine divisions when it should have just five as, *naïve ulamugulika lyeta lilye Yesu*. Unnatural divisions affect the flow of a text.

### Nominal prefixes

The initial vowel is the most salient feature of Lulogooli nominal prefixes. The behavior of the prefix vowel with regard to the status of the root noun is one aspect whose understanding helps in determining the nature of affixation. A common noun in Lulogooli consists of a root, a prefix, and a pre-prefix. These prefixes mark number as exemplified below.

#### (a) Singular

<b>13. Pre-prefix</b>	<b>Prefix</b>	<b>Root</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
<i>u</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>ndu</i>	“person”
<i>e</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>kombe</i>	“cup”
<i>u</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>kana</i>	“girl”
<i>i</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>nyonyi</i>	“bird”
<i>u</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>vaso</i>	“line”

#### (b) Plural

<b>Pre-prefix</b>	<b>Prefix</b>	<b>Root</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
<i>a</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>ndu</i>	“people”
<i>i</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>kombe</i>	“cups”
<i>a</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>kana</i>	“girls”
<i>a</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>nyonyi</i>	“birds”
<i>i</i>	<i>zi</i>	<i>mbaso</i>	“lines”

The singular noun pre-prefix vowel is sometimes optional (especially in writing). However, with nouns whose prefix is a consonant only, the pre-prefix vowel is obligatory. For example:

<b>14.</b> <i>engoko</i>	-	<i>e+n+koko</i>	“chicken”
<i>inguvu</i>	-	<i>i+n+kuvu</i>	“dress”
<i>imbwa</i>	-	<i>i+m+vwa</i>	“dog”
<i>inda</i>	-	<i>i+n+ta</i>	“stomach”

In the pluralization of these nouns, the prefix duplicates the pre-prefix vowel, thus making it optional. Their plurals become:



- |         |                |   |                   |
|---------|----------------|---|-------------------|
| 15. (i) | <i>zingoko</i> | - | <i>i+zi+ngoko</i> |
| (i)     | <i>zinguvu</i> | - | <i>i+zi+nguvu</i> |
| (i)     | <i>zimbwa</i>  | - | <i>i+zi+mbwa</i>  |
| (i)     | <i>zinda</i>   | - | <i>i+zi+nda</i>   |

In addition to nominal prefixes, particles with prepositional meaning can attach to the Lulogooli common nouns.

### Preposition particles prefixed on nouns

Common prepositions in Lulogooli are *na* “with,” *ya* “of,” *ku* “on,” and *mu* “in.” These can be exemplified as below:

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 16. <i>akina</i> . . . <i>namazi/nimburi</i>   | “s/he is playing with water/goat” |
| <i>inyumba</i> . . . <i>yilinyonyi/yengoko</i> | “house of bird/chicken”           |
| <i>vika</i> . . . <i>komesa/kukidari</i>       | “put on table/bed”                |
| <i>yingila</i> . . . <i>munyumba/mwilina</i>   | “enter in house/hole”             |

The vowel of the preposition coalesces with the vowel of the noun since the preposition is prefixed to the noun as shown in these examples. The vowel particle changes depending on the class prefix of the following nouns. For example, the vowel of the particle *na* “with” could change in the following ways:

- |                      |   |                |                |
|----------------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| 17. <i>na+engoko</i> | = | <i>nengoko</i> | “with chicken” |
| <i>na+avandu</i>     | = | <i>navandu</i> | “with people”  |
| <i>na+umwana</i>     | = | <i>numwana</i> | “with child”   |

The surface affixes are *ne*, *na*, *nu*; and all of them are related to the underlying *na*. It undergoes these changes due to morphophonological processes in the language. The Lulogooli Bible text tends to use the underlying form in an attempt to separate the morphemes. This renders the reading unnatural, hence, difficult.

### Proper nouns

Proper nouns do not take prefixes. As such, they normally would stand independently in a construction, that is, they do not have affixes bound to them. In the examples above, the common nouns carry prefixes. However, as shown in the example below, proper nouns do not have vowel prefixes as in *(e)ngoko* “chicken” or *(e)kekombe* “cup” above. Hence, in the following example:

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 18. <i>inguvu ya Musa</i> | “cloth of Musa” versus, |
| <i>zinguvu zia Musa</i>   | “clothes of Musa”       |

*inguvu* “cloth” is pluralized with the prefixation of the morpheme *zi* while *ya Musa* “of Musa” remain as free particles. The *ya* “of” particle is independent of the noun *Musa* which is a proper noun and does not have a prefix vowel like, *\*(e)Musa*. If this were the case, we would expect it to take the ‘y’ consonant prefix, i.e., *\*yeMusa*. Thus, proper nouns like *Musa*, *Nairobi*, and so on can be said to be free morphemes.

### Conjunctions and nouns

Conjunctions similarly stand as free morphemes in relation to nouns. The most common conjunctions are *na* “and,” *kandi* “and/again,” and *navuzwa* “but.” Thus, we can, for example, contrast:

19. *kuhing'ana navandu* "to argue with people" versus,  
*Nyasaye na vandu* "God and people"  
 or  
*uvukumi nu vwami* versus, *kuhing'ana nuvwami*  
 "power and glory" "to argue with ruling power"

### Verbal affixes

Most verbal affixes appear in the suffix position as verbal extensions. These usually indicate either passivization, applicative, manner of action or aspect. For example: *deka* "cook," *dekela* "cook for," *dekiza* "cause to cook," *dekeka* "been cooked." Most verbal extensions do not cause problems as far as word division is concerned. The notable problem is with verbal prefixes.

### Verbal prefixes

Verbal prefixes appear fragmentally in the Lulogooli Bible. They are of two types, pronoun prefix and infinitive marker. Examples of pronoun prefixes:

20. *yadeka* "she+cooked," *asomaa* "she+is reading," *uzie* "you+go."

These are often separated in the Lulogooli Bible, i.e., *u zie*, *ya deka*, *a soma*, and so on, which is unnatural. Examples of infinitive marker prefixes are: *ku -lia* "to+eat," *ku -seka* "to laugh," *ku- lola* "to see." Again, these should not be separated.

### The interrogative

The interrogative marker appears next to the noun. Examples are:

21. *mwana wavwaha ula?* "whose child is that?"  
*muwayi ki wakwiva?* "which boy stole?"

The items *wavwaha* and *ki* mark the interrogative in these examples.

In interrogatives with pronoun subject as head, the interrogative marker occurs after the verb marker, e.g., *uziza hai?* "where are you going?"; *avola ndi?* "what is she saying?" The items *u* "you" and *a* "s/he" are pronoun prefixes affixed to the verbs *ziza* "going," and *vola* "say," respectively. In the Lulogooli Bible, such prefixes are separated from the roots such as, *u ziza*, *a vola*, contrary to the morphological pattern of the language.

### Agreement

Lulogooli, like other Bantu languages, falls into a nominal system of paired classes. This is a grammatical system whereby affixes indicate the singularity or plurality of a noun. This is the system that governs or maintains subject/verb agreement in sentence structure. The class to which the head noun belongs must be reflected throughout the entire sentence. In other words, the prefixes used on the numerals, adjectives, and verbs related to the head noun will reflect the concord system of that noun. For example, *mundu* "person" belongs to class 1. Its plural, *vandu*, belongs to class 2. Thus, the first pair of nominal class 1/2 is described as the *mu/va* class. The following pair of sentences illustrates the agreement in class 1/2:

22. (i) (u)mundu (u)mulahi yakuleta      “a good person has brought help”  
           (o)vokonyi  
       (ii) (a)yandu (a)valahi yakuleta      “good people have brought help”  
           (o)vokonyi

The underlined prefixes show how agreement is maintained in each sentence for class 1/2 respectively. Bantu scholars tend to generally agree that the noun class prefixes exhibit predictable semantic reference (Kanyoro 1983). Class 1/2 (*mu/va*), for example, is generalized to have human reference; and class 7/8 (*ki/vi*) is the “thing” class which includes utensils, instruments, and some body parts.

Bantu languages thus require that noun modifiers and verbs carry pronominal prefixes which match the noun class of the noun in question. The verb *gota* “get lost,” for example, will carry different prefixes in agreement with various nouns:

23. *vandu vagoti*                      “people are lost”  
       *kana kagoti*                      “little child is lost”  
       *kekombe kegoti*                “cup is lost”  
       *luvusi logoti*                    “thread is lost”  
       *zimhuri zigoti*                “goats are lost,” etc.

In writing, the agreement pattern helps the reader to identify the noun referred back to in cases where there is more than one reference in the structure. There are several cases in the Lulogooli Bible where the agreement structure is violated and this creates ambiguities and comprehension problems. A pronominal prefix acts as a marker indicating what class the noun belongs to. In sentence construction, the noun by its prefix dominates the other words in the sentence such that they are brought into concordial relationship with the noun by means of affixes or concords. Thus the verbs, adjectives, and determiners related to a particular noun will be marked to agree in class with the noun. The final two examples show how agreement is violated in the text.

## 24. Genesis 6.5-6

*Kandi Yahova ya lola ubudamano bwa avandu bwa li bunene ku lilova  
 kandi lisaavira lyosi na tsinganagani tsyomwoyo gwavo . . .*

and Jehovah saw that the people's evil was great on the earth and all their determination and thoughts of their heart . . .

There is a problem of agreement in the phrase, *tsinganagani tsyomwoyo gwavo*. The literal backtranslation is “the thoughts of their heart.” *Tsinganagani* “thoughts” has a plural prefix *tsi* which automatically leads us to expect plural markers in the rest of the phrase. The next word *tsyomwoyo* “of heart” does maintain a plural prefix *tsy* but immediately violates the rule by marking *mwoyo* “heart” as singular. Agreement works back and forth affecting every item in the clause as explained above. The first two prefixes in the phrase *tsi* and *tsy* mark plural. The violation of the agreement rule is actually realized when we consider the last two words in the phrase, that is, *mwoyo gwavo* “their heart,” which makes it appear as though these people shared one heart. The problem, therefore, is on the word *mwoyo* “heart,” which needs to be changed to *mioyo* “hearts,” and *gwavo* “sing,” which also needs to be changed to *jiavo* “plural” to agree with the plural *mioyo*.

Nida and Taber (1969:114) in a similar example note that in some languages the problems of plural and singular become especially acute in a phrase such as “the two shall be one,” for if the language requires plural concord on predicate attributives, such as “one,” a literal rendering of this biblical phrase may be meaningless, even as it is in so many Bantu languages, for “one” cannot occur with a plural prefix. Accordingly, one must often transform this expression into “the two shall be just like one.” The Lulogooli translation tried to get around this particular example by translating it as *vombi valagwa inyama indala* “both will become one muscle” and tried to maintain agreement in *inyama* “muscle” *indala* “one.”

The second example with an agreement problem is:

## 25. Romans 8.15-16

*Kigira simwa vugula roho gwobutugwa gu duke kandi mu butii, navutswa mwa vugula . . .*

because you did not take the spirit of slavery so it gets fearful but you took . . .

In the phrase *gu duke* “it gets,” *gu* “it” marks *roho* “spirit” as the referent because it agrees with the prefix *gw* in *roho gwobutugwa* “spirit of slavery.” However, this is clearly not the meaning of the text as it is not the spirit that is becoming fearful but the people. Compare, e.g., RSV, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.” The correct prefix should therefore agree with the people pronoun, i.e., *mw* in *simwa* “you did not” and not the spirit pronoun, *gu*, i.e., *gu duke* “it gets.” The correct form, therefore, is the prefix *mu* “you,” hence *mu duke* “you get,” which makes it clear that it is the people being referred to as becoming fearful. As it is, the Lulogooli text is ambiguous. It leaves the reader wondering whether it is the spirit that is fearful or the people.

## Conclusion

This article aimed at highlighting some of the intricate linguistic issues that contribute to accuracy in written language and consequently in translation. In concluding, I wish to draw attention to the concept of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986; Gutt, 1991, 1992, 2000), which particularly helps explain the relationship between writing and interpretation of meaning. This theory suggests that the process of communication succeeds because of the principle of relevance. Sperber and Wilson (1986:48) define relevance in terms of the following conditions:

1. An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.
2. An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small.

Thus relevance is dependent on the interplay of two factors: contextual effects and processing effort. Context is understood as “the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986:15). According to Gutt (1992:1), unnaturalness in translation arises from inconsistencies with the principle of relevance, e.g., choice of a wrong or unusual word. Relevance is gained by communicative clues which Hatim (2001:102) describes as “features built into the text for the purpose of guiding the audience to the intended

interpretation.” These are, for example, phonological, onomatopoeic, figurative expressions, and so on. In this article, we postulate that application of accurate phonological and morphological patterns of a language contributes to the creation of relevant contextual clues and, hence, to successful translation.

A major challenge for tone languages is how to mark tone. For tonal markings to be functionally effective, they have to be simple and systematic enough for both the basic reader and the expert to follow. Bible translators are pace setters in language literacy, particularly in African languages. The orthography used should reflect the natural structure of the language.

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