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HARMONIZATION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES: STANDARDIZATION
OF ORTHOGRAPHY IN ZAMBIA

by

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This paper deals, within the general theme of harmonization of African languages, more specifically with orthographic reform in Zambia. Historically, orthographic reform in Zambia in its various forms (sporadic, haphazard, official, semi-official and non-official) may be said to date back as early as the close of the nineteenth century when Zambian languages were reduced to writing for the first time, principally by missionaries to whom the reading of the holy scriptures and ancillary literature constituted a central element in their evangelization and proselytization efforts. The present endeavour, however, is not concerned with reconstructing the history of orthographic reform movements in Zambia but with examining some of the issues and problems that have attended attempts aimed at standardizing the writing systems of Zambian languages, particularly those employed in the national education system. However interesting and illuminating in its own right, the actual history of orthographic reform is not attempted here for the simple reason that the focus is deliberately eclectically on problems and solutions rather than on events which may have promoted or hindered amelioration of the writing system(s) in practice at the time. Secondly, while it is certainly true that orthographic reform in Zambia has not been the exclusive attribute of one authority (in fact much of the effort has been instigated and sustained by various Christian denominations, individuals and/or private organizations), the significant breakthrough in orthographic reform that has been achieved since the attainment of independence in 1964 is to be attributed in the main to the efforts of the Ministry of Education.

Between 1970 and 1975 the Ministry of Education, partly in response to practical spelling problems (mainly inconsistencies) that had always conspired against the effective teaching of Zambian languages and partly owing to continual pressures from various sources, mounted a concerted and for the first time well-co-ordinated effort at national level aimed at bringing about a relatively rational and uniform manner of tackling the disparate systems of spelling that it saw being employed within the same language, particularly in literature prescribed officially for instruction in the national education system. The Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Zambia, (1) which commenced survey activities in February 1970, could be credited with providing further impetus to earlier efforts as well as with accelerating the momentum. Even though the Ministry had been aware for a long time of the special learning and teaching problems posed by disparate systems of spelling Zambian languages and had in fact taken certain remedial steps, (2) the Survey was able to use its vantage point and status as a semi-official pressure group to stress to the Ministry the importance of standardizing orthographies of Zambian languages at least for educational purposes.

These events and circumstances resulted, shortly after 1970, into the establishment by the Ministry of language committees (3) for each of the seven officially-approved Zambian languages. The committees' main responsibility was to propose for the Minister of Education's approval standardized rules of spelling. The intention was not to adopt an overall uniform system of spelling throughout the seven languages but rather to achieve a measure of standardization in each of the languages separately since it was believed that success was more likely to be ensured if uniformity of spelling was attempted in individual languages first.

This paper is concerned exclusively with the efforts and accomplishments of these committees and the languages with which they dealt, viz. Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga. It attempts to highlight in general and specific terms the problems experienced, the areas on which agreement has been reached and the ground that remains to be covered.

Since 1966, when English was prescribed as the sole medium of instruction in the entire Zambian education system, the seven Zambian languages have been taught only as subjects. In practice, however, they have often and widely been used as

the more effective means of instruction. All seven are taught and examined at primary school level, but only four, Bemba, Lozi, Nyanja and Tonga, are taught and examined at both junior secondary and senior secondary level. Lozi and Tonga were added to Bemba and Nyanja as examinable subjects at senior secondary level after 1974. In the University of Zambia a degree programme designed to enable students to major in Zambian (or African) languages was introduced during the 1976-1977 academic year. The programme includes the following courses: An introduction to Bantu languages, General linguistics, Intensive analysis of a Zambian language, African oral literature, Psycho- and Socio-linguistics, Analysis of texts in Zambian languages, Research and creative writing in Zambian languages, Research in Zambian language problems, and Teaching methods. Apart from giving to Zambian language teaching a much needed moral boost, these measures at university level underlined the importance of the availability of standardized systems of spelling of the languages to be studied.

General issues and problems

Before going on to discuss the more specific problems that arose out of the deliberations of the committees appointed by the Ministry of Education, it is considered useful and instructive to review some of the issues and problems that constituted major obstacles to meaningful reform before the appointment of the committees. One of these problems is general to all reform movements and has to do with force of habit or a general tendency to be deeply attached to the status quo and to be suspicious and distrustful of change. In spite of the fact that Zambian languages had been reduced to writing less than a century ago, those privileged to have received formal schooling and to have become literate in their own language came to identify the form of spelling in which they had learned to read and write as the only correct form of spelling, and were naturally averse to any subsequent moves to tamper with a form of writing to which they had become attached. This reflects a commonplace attitude on the part of literates wherever orthographic reform has been attempted to believe that the existing symbol is not merely a symbol and liable to be modified if necessary but the most fitting symbol. In other words, literate communities invariably become symbol worshippers, and to attack the symbols which they venerate usually with fanatical, religious fervour is tantamount to desecrating the very gods in whom so much implicit faith has come to be placed.

In Zambia this situation was exacerbated and complicated by a factor referred to here as "false equation". "False equation" involved equating written symbols to language itself, with the consequence that, in terms of orthographic reform, efforts aimed at improving the spelling in vogue tended to be interpreted as irresponsible or wicked machinations designed to destroy the language itself. Because those who were opposed to spelling reform failed to make the necessary distinction between written language (or the visual form) and spoken language (or the verbal form), it was generally extremely difficult for one to clarify the point that orthographic reform did not at all mean tampering with the actual structure of the language concerned. Protagonists of spelling reform were very often perceived by the antagonists as language "murderers". (4)

An additional problem related to what might be termed, for want of a better label, as the "identity" argument. This problem is best appreciated by pointing out that as the result of the special circumstances under which the diverse systems of spelling Zambian languages were evolved, the different missionary societies who first introduced them tended to adopt an orthography which reflected their own background, training or persuasion. Thus the Roman Catholic White Fathers, who worked mainly among the Bemba and related peoples in the Northern Province, introduced in the writing of Bemba an amalgam system of conjunctive and disjunctive spelling. The Protestant Paris Missionary Society in the Western

Province, on the other hand, bequeathed to Lozi a largely disjunctive system of spelling which has persisted up to now. In the Southern Province, because of their relatively more rigorous approach to the study of language, the Jesuits were the first to apply what would seem to be up-to-date linguistic findings in the writing of Tonga. One consequence of this rigour was that not only was written Tonga the most conjunctive of all the Zambian languages using a conjunctive form of spelling, but it was notable for its use of certain forms of symbolization (e.g. the "double" vowel to represent vowel length) at a time when these forms were unknown and therefore unappreciated by writers of the other languages. In due course, a particular style of spelling came to be associated with a particular language. For example, the "double" vowel came to be associated with Tonga. Precisely on account of the popular association of a type of spelling with a particular language, it was fairly common to find speakers of a language opposing spelling innovations in such terms as: "Why do you want to write our language like language so and so?". Such criticisms invariably implied that the suggested innovations were a step backward rather than a step forward.

In Zambia, within the constraints of limited formal educational opportunities, a considerable number of those who became literate initially in their mother tongue subsequently went on to become literate in English, an Indo-European language. In fact, as elsewhere in Africa where colonial conditions produced a social situation whereby functional literacy in effect meant permanent literacy in a European language, for most formally educated Zambians education for all practical purposes, as Ali Mazrui (1971: pp. 179-181) rightly remarks, came to be equated with ability to speak English. "Education in British colonies", he states, "was -- increasingly equated among simple folk with ability to speak English. There is no doubt that there was a strong connection between the prestige of the English language and the prestige of education at large". (p. 180)

This situation had immediate practical implications for orthographic reform. Owing to the nature of the education received during and even after colonial rule, an education very often with its basis and ethos in European ethnocentrism and the civilizing ethic, the longer an African learner stayed in school the better acquainted he became with the structure of a European language. Prolonged contact and familiarity with a European language, on the other hand, meant little more than a nodding acquaintance with his own language or African languages in general. The very concept stressing the importance of the use of the mother tongue but only in the primary stages of education, which since its introduction has been the cornerstone of formal education in much of Africa, is predicated on a subtle and carefully orchestrated philosophy of cultural and linguistic imperialism. It rests on a fundamental notion whose persuasive and compelling moral force consists in the assumed psychological, pedagogical and linguistic utility of the mother tongue but only as a stepping stone to the efficient and firmer grasp of European languages. The process is perceived as the least painless transition from African to European languages. As well as being culturally the least disruptive, it is seen as having the decided advantage of providing to the African child the best foundation for the subsequent competent manipulation of the given European language. As far as literacy is concerned, the upshot of all this is that permanent or functional literacy has meant in the majority of cases literacy in a European language. Concomitantly, any informed insights gained by the literate African concerning language structure have really been confined to the structures of European languages. Education in Africa is notable for its lack of commitment to African languages and for diverting a disproportionate percentage of the available resources to the acquisition of European languages.

In Zambia a direct consequence of this is that, when questions of reforming the existing orthography arose, the educated Zambian as would be expected immediately rushed to European languages for reference and guidance. For instance, in the

ensuing debate regarding whether or not the Bantu locative prefixes as manifested in Zambian languages should be spelt conjunctively with the noun to which they are closely structurally related, the educated Zambian, acting on his knowledge of English or some other European language, returned without hesitation a verdict of "separate!". For, in his view, these grammatical particles (or morphemes) were really prepositions and were equivalent to "on", "in" and "to" in English and should be so spelt. In matters of spelling in general, but particularly as regards word division, he much preferred to see that the spelling of Zambian languages conformed closely to the spelling conventions established for European languages. The argument, when put to him, that African languages possess a structure of their own and that this ought to be reflected in the orthography which is adopted usually merely served to raise his guard and to intensify his defence of the relevance of European spelling conventions.

As well as his predilection to fall back on his knowledge of European languages when discussing spelling reform, the educated Zambian tended to appropriate to himself on behalf of the silent illiterate population the role of spokesman. During a four-year experience (1967-1970) in the Department of Community Development as Chief Literacy Officer, I often came across claims by the literate sector of the population (including literacy officers) to the effect that the (illiterate) learners had rejected the orthography in use in the Zambia Adult Literacy Programme because of its departure in certain respects from established convention. Implicit in these claims was of course the assumption that the learners (still at that point unable to read or write, let alone grasp the finer points of orthographic conventions) had compared the new spelling adopted in the Programme with the traditional forms of spelling and had found it wanting. What had happened of course was that the literate Zambians (who were being required to adopt the new system of spelling and to teach it to aspiring literates) were themselves reacting, understandably, negatively to an unfamiliar convention. Because of their own discomfort with it, they projected, as seen from the claims, their own feelings as being shared also by those unable to read and write. This situation had the effect of adding to the difficulties of the reformers who now had the additional task of contending with rejectionist attitudes purporting to be those of the learners themselves. For the reformers could be criticized, as they often were, of going against the grain of the interests of the learners who, it was said, had decisively rejected the new-fangled conventions.

In summing up, it ought to be said that the points discussed above do not by any means represent the entire range of the issues involved. What has been stated merely serves as an illustration as well as to underline the social and other problems that had to be surmounted before the more technical questions could be tackled.

Common areas of agreement (5)

Although, as already stated, the seven committees set up to devise standardized spelling conventions for each of the seven Zambian languages officially approved for education did not set out originally to reach agreement across all the languages involved, the achievements of these committees are remarkable in the broad range of areas on which common ground was struck. Because of their significance and salience these are briefly discussed in this section.

(i) Short and long vowels

In the past of the seven languages only Tonga seemed to have observed in writing the distinction between short and long vowels with any degree of consistency. In the other six languages, vowel length was either not symbolized at all or if

it was it was done with a good deal of inconsistency. For example, while in Bemba the contrast between short and long vowels had been recognized almost right from the beginning, even those who were aware of this distinction did not apply it consistently in writing and how it was represented varied from one writer to another and from one publisher to the next. Nor was there general agreement as to what symbol(s) to use to represent the long vowel. In the majority of cases short and long vowels were both written in the same way, i.e., they were both written as a short vowel. In the earliest stages, notably in the White Fathers' publications, the circumflex (^) was inserted above the appropriate vowel to indicate length, e.g. ukufûta "to erase". Later on, the Northern Rhodesia (and after Independence, the Zambia) Publications Bureau adopted, but not in a consistent manner, the convention of doubling the vowel to represent length. More recently, the Zambia Bible Society has adopted yet a different convention, namely that of indicating length by a bar (-).

Partly in recognition of this wide variation in some languages of symbolizing the same thing by several different methods and partly because it was appreciated and a common consensus reached that the contrast between short and long vowels was an important differentiating linguistic marker in Zambian languages and ought to be represented in writing, six committees (viz. Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Nyanja and Tonga) arrived independently but coincidentally at a common solution of representing vowel length by doubling the vowel. On the other hand, the Luvale committee, after considerable discussion, came to the conclusion that the contrast found in the other six languages did not occur in Luvale. Luvale is therefore the only language among the seven in which vowel length will not be represented. In the languages where it was found to occur, it was resolved that vowel length would be reflected in writing in two instances: (1) where length functions to mark semantic differentiation between two words, and (2) where two vowels belonging to two different parts (i.e. morphemes) of the same word fuse or coalesce to result into a long vowel.

As a result of these measures, ten vowels (except in Luvale where vowel length does not apply) will now be reflected in the orthography, viz. five, short vowels i, e, a, o and u and their long counterparts ii, ee, aa, oo and uu.

Examples

(a) Vowel length in the stem of a word

	<u>Short</u>		<u>Long</u>	
Bemba	uku-shika	"to be deep"; "to sink"	uku-shiika	"to bury"
Kaonde	ku-teka	"to become damp"	ku-teeka	"to cook"
Lozi	mata	"run!"	maata	"strength"
Lunda	ku-toka	"to rot"	ku-tooka	"to be white"
Nyanja	bula	"kind of fruit"	buula	"groan with pain!"
Tonga	buka	"wake up!"	buuka	"ants"

(b) Vowel length as a result of fusion

Bemba	iciibi	from	ici- + -ibi	"door"
Kaonde	meenc	from	ma- + -ino	"teeth"

	<u>Short</u>			<u>Long</u>	
Lozi	saanda	from	sa- + -anda		"estate"
Lunda	maana	from	ma- + -ane		"wisdom"
Tonga	wakiibona	from	waka- + -i- + -bona		"he saw it"

(ii) Tone

Tone, like vowel length, was accepted in all the seven languages as an important linguistic marker for signalling differences in meaning between two otherwise identical words. However, despite its functional importance, all the seven committees decided not to symbolize tone in the orthography. The basic argument advanced against its symbolization was that experience had shown that diacritic marks, where employed, generally hindered rather than facilitated fluent reading. It was further argued that ordinarily, even without visual representation, tone would be adequately signalled by context.

(iii) Consonants

In all the seven languages a notable achievement of the committees' work was the break that was finally made from past practices which tended to treat Zambian languages as mere extensions of European languages. In the past, when presenting alphabets for each of the Zambian languages, it was usual to cast the presentation in such negative terms as "Language so and so lacks Q, X or H". Each of the committees considered its primary task as that of identifying the actual sounds (or phonemes) and the grammatical constructions characteristic of the language under consideration and then to devise appropriate means of representing them in writing. The result of this exercise were the alphabets (for vowels and consonants combined) which are summarized in Chart 1. (See next page.)

In specific detail, it should be noted that in those languages where the number of consonant sounds exceeded the letters available in the Roman (or English) alphabet, it was found necessary to devise more elaborate symbolization. Tonga is a good example. Notice, for example, that in this language two symbols b and bb have had to be introduced in order to reflect the phonemic distinction between a bilabial fricative and a bilabial stop. Similarly, hh has been added to the Tonga alphabet in order to reflect the contrast between the voiceless glottal fricative (h) and its voiced counterpart (hh). For the same reason, kk and cc have now been introduced for purposes of reflecting the contrast between the voiced velar fricative (k) and the voiceless velar stop (kk) and that between the voiceless palatal affricate (cc) and what can only be described here rather inaccurately as an indeterminate sound (c) between the voiceless and voiced palatal affricates cc and j.

In Luvale and Nyanja, two languages where aspiration was found to occur as a contrastive feature, a set of symbols (ph, kh and th) was duly added to set off aspirated from their non-aspirated contrasts (p, k and t). Note that in Nyanja a further distinction, not found in Luvale, is that between the aspirated voiceless palatal affricate (ch) and the voiceless unaspirated (c). In the languages where the use of c or ch is optional, this has to do with a general rule which reserves the use of c to common nouns, adjectives etc., and ch to proper nouns or place names.

In the three languages, Kaonde, Lunda and Luvale, where the voiced palatal fricative was found to occur, two (Kaonde and Lunda) chose to symbolize it by zh

Chart 1: Revised alphabets for the seven Zambian languages

	<u>Bemba</u>	<u>Kaonde</u>	<u>Lozi</u>	<u>Lunda</u>	<u>Luvale</u>	<u>Nyanja</u>	<u>Tonga</u>
	a(aa)	a(aa)	a(aa)	a(aa)	a	a(aa)	a(aa)
(fricative)	b	b	b	b	(v)	w̄	b
(stop)	-	-	-	-	-	b	bb
(affricate)	c(or ch)	ch	c(or ch)	ch	ch	c	cc(or c)
(aspirated)	-	-	-	-	-	ch	-
	d	d	d	d	d	d	d
	e(ee)	e(ee)	e(ee)	e(ee)	e	e(ee)	e(ee)
	f	f	f	f	f	f(or pf)	f
(voiced velar fricative)	-	-	-	-	-	-	k
	g	g	g	g	g	g	g
(voiceless)	-	h	h	h	h	h	h
(voiced)	-	-	-	-	-	-	hh
	i(ii)	i(ii)	i(ii)	i(ii)	i	i(ii)	i(ii)
(?)	-	-	-	-	-	-	c
	j	j	j	j	(n)j	j	j
(stop)	k	k	k	k	k	k	kk
(aspirated)	-	-	-	-	kh	kh	-
	l	l	l	l	l	l(or r)	l
	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
(velar)	ŋ	ñ	ñ	ñ	-	ng'	ŋ
	o(oo)	o(oo)	o(oo)	o(oo)	o	o(oo)	o(oo)
	p	p	p	p	p	p	p
(aspirated)	-	-	-	-	ph	ph	-
(alveolar)	s	ʃ	s	s	s	s(or ts)	s
(palatal)	sh	sh	sh	sh	sh	-	sh
	t	t	t	t	t	t	t
(aspirated)	-	-	-	-	th	th	-
	u(uu)	u(uu)	u(uu)	u(uu)	u	u(uu)	u(uu)
	-	v	-	v	v	v(or bv)	v
	w	w	w	w	w	w	w
	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
(alveolar)	-	z	z	z	z	z(or dz)	z
(palatal)	-	zh	-	zh	j	-	-

and one (Luvale) by j. In Luvale the situation is complicated by the fact that the same symbol is used to represent a different if related sound. As shown in the chart, j is also used for representing the voiced palatal affricate which, in this language, occurs only when preceded by an homorganic nasal, as in kunjuta "to cut with teeth".

In the six languages where it occurs, the velar nasal is symbolized in three different ways: as ŋ in three (Kaonde, Lozi and Lunda), as n in two (Bemba and Tonga) and as ng' in one (Nyanja). In Nyanja the voiceless alveolar fricative s, the voiceless labiodental fricative f and the voiced labiodental and alveolar fricatives y and z have alternative spellings, viz. ts, pf, bv and dz respectively. These alternative spellings are intended to reflect dialectal or even idiolectal pronunciations.

In none of the seven languages was an attempt made to achieve standardization in so far as dialectal variation was concerned. It was accepted as a general rule that it was undesirable at this stage to legislate against dialectal variation whether as regards pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary. Particularly in regard to grammar and vocabulary, it was considered practicable to leave writers to employ in writing their own dialect or a form of speech in keeping with the subject-matter of the style intended.

(iv) Word division

A further significant development arising from the recommendations of the committees was a general trend toward a more extensive conjunctive orthography than was the case previously even in languages, such as Lozi, in which traditionally conjunctive spelling had been stoutly resisted. While the measures taken in Lozi were notable by their lack of a radical departure from previous practices and were certainly modest when set against innovations in the other six languages, nevertheless important concessions toward a more conjunctive spelling system could be discerned. For example, the rule concerning locative prefixes now states that the locative prefixes kwa-, mwa- and fa- should be written disjunctively from common and proper nouns but joined to adverbs.

Among the six languages, Bemba, Kaonde, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga, tending toward conjunctive spelling, apart from minor variations, there was broad agreement on their treatment of such grammatical features as locative prefixes, the conjunctive morpheme meaning "and", "even" or "with", the copula ni- (or equivalent) meaning "it is" or "they are", the plural or respectful prefix ba-, a- or va-, the interrogative morpheme -nzi, -nshi, -nji etc., and the possessive morpheme(s) meaning "of". In all these instances a general rule applicable to all the six languages was formulated. It stipulates that these grammatical particles should in future be joined in writing to the (larger) grammatical elements (e.g. nouns) of which phonologically and grammatically they form an integral part. The significance of this rule is threefold. Firstly, it marked a break with an earlier disjunctive tradition. Secondly, introduced a measure of consistency in each of the six languages in their treatment of the morphemes enumerated above. Thirdly, a common pattern of dealing with these morphemes was made possible for the first time in all but one language, Lozi.

In the languages where there had previously been lack of agreement or a standardized convention, important though less significant developments included rules calling for the joining of the various negative prefixes to verb stems and nominal prefixes to noun stems. In Tonga, for example, one of the rules now states that "since ta- 'not' is a prefix and forms part of the verbal, it should be joined to the rest of the verbal". Similarly, in Lozi, it is recommended that "singular and plural prefixes mu-, ba-, si- etc., should be joined to noun stems to form common or proper nouns". In the latter language particularly there had been a tendency to write singular and plural prefixes separately - reflecting morphemic breaks - from the nouns with which they functioned as an integral part.

In general, the revised orthographies of the seven Zambian languages demonstrate a recognition that verbals (i.e. verb stems, their prefixes, infixes and suffixes) and nominals (i.e. noun stems and their prefixes) should be considered as constituting one word and should be spelt accordingly. As a result of this rule, the verb stem, the pronominal prefix, the tense sign, the object infix and the suffix will now be written as one word in all the seven languages.

As one dimension of word division, a common pattern of treating adverbs, interjections, exclamations and the like as separate words emerges as applicable to all the seven languages. Though the specific rules and the actual items with which they are concerned vary from one language to another, it is now established in all the seven languages that these parts of speech should be written as separate words.

Compounds, reduplications and ideophones are the other categories of word to which questions concerned with word division were directed by the seven committees. In the past practice as to how these special kinds of word were to be written varied not only from language to language but from writer to writer within the same language. It was therefore seen as extremely important to arrive, at least within the same language, at a common system of dealing with these items orthographically. There is some variation in the conventions adopted by the different languages, but in general terms all the languages show a preference for the hyphen in so far as reduplications are concerned and for writing compounds as one solid word, i.e. without a hyphen. For example, in Lunda reduplicated noun, verbal, adverbial and adjectival stems are to be hyphenated as well as compounds, whereas in Lozi only reduplicated stems are to be hyphenated while compounds are to be spelt as one word.

Among the seven languages only in Bemba is the ideophone recommended to be written in two different ways. In this language ideophones whose repetitions consist of only one syllable are supposed to be written as one word. Those however consisting of repetitions of two or more syllables are to be written as separate words. Thus fulululu, "a sound as that made by a bicycle when in full speed", and poocoo, "a sound as that of pouring water", are to be written as one word but nkanka nkanka nkanka, "the tick-tocking sound of a clock" or coco coco "the cheeping of chicks" is to be written as separate words. In the other six languages, on the other hand, a uniform rule will prevail, namely that of writing each of the repetitions regardless of the number of syllables involved as a separate word. It was argued and agreed in these languages that ideophones should not be regarded as reduplications but that each of the repetitions should be considered as a separate word.

Towards standardization across languages

In this section discussion will be concerned with those areas where it seems desirable to achieve a measure of standardization at a future date across languages. The point has been made that it was not the intention of the Ministry of Education when it set up the seven committees to devise a standardized orthography applicable to all the seven languages. But, as demonstrated, even working independently, the seven committees arrived at very similar results. As a result of constantly comparing notes, the committees came to appreciate that they were dealing with essentially the same linguistic phenomena and the same orthographic problems. Indeed, in the end comments were frequently made in the different committees in favour of an overall, uniform orthography for all the seven languages. It was said that, since in any case one of the aims of Zambian education was to teach Zambian languages to non-mother-tongue speakers, an overall, standardized orthography would greatly facilitate the transition many

children would have to make from one language to another. There was also the consideration of translating literature available in one Zambian language into another Zambian language. It was argued here that an orthography standardized so as to be applicable to all Zambian languages would be an asset to authors and translators.

The first area where standardization seems desirable is that concerning consonants. As provided for at the moment, there is considerable variation in the symbols assigned by the different languages to certain consonants. For example, the voiced bilabial fricative will, according to the proposed rules, be symbolized as b in five languages, as y in Luvale and as w (with or without a circumflex) in Nyanja. At the same time the voiced bilabial stop in the two languages, Nyanja and Tonga, where it occurs will be symbolized varyingly as b (in Nyanja) and as bb (in Tonga). If uniformity of spelling is to be attained throughout all the seven languages, it would seem desirable to reduce the several symbols presently proposed to only two, perhaps b as the symbol in all languages to represent the bilabial fricative and bb to represent the bilabial stop in Nyanja and Tonga.

Similar measures would have to be considered regarding the voiceless palatal affricate. According to the present rules, different languages will use different symbols for the same sound. Thus, for example, Bemba, Lozi and Nyanja will use the letter c to represent this sound (but note that Bemba and Lozi will also use ch but only in instances involving proper nouns or place names) while Kaonde, Lunda and Luvale will use ch instead. In Nyanja ch will be employed to stand for the aspirated voiceless palatal affricate, which in the language is in contrast with its non-aspirated opposite. To complicate matters further, in Tonga, because of a special need to differentiate in writing between the voiceless palatal affricate and its voiced counterpart on the one hand and what we have described as an intermediate sound between them on the other, the symbols cc, j and c to represent these three contrasts have been introduced. One possible solution here would be to use c consistently throughout all the languages for the voiceless, unaspirated sound, ch for the aspirated sound or in words involving proper nouns or place names, and j for the voiced sound. This solution means that Tonga would then have the problem of finding a suitable symbol for the indeterminate sound.

The next area for possible standardization is that regarding the velar nasal. At present this sound is symbolized in three different ways, n, ñ and ng', among the seven languages. It seems clearly possible here to reduce this variation to only one symbol, perhaps n since there is a general tendency to eschew diacritic marks in the writing systems of Zambian languages. Similarly, there appears to be no good reason why the voiced palatal fricative could not be represented by only one symbol, zh, in Kaonde, Lunda and Luvale, thereby eliminating the present practice of using j in Luvale.

Finally, a good candidate for general standardization would be word division. Though the seven committees made significant progress towards a uniform, more conjunctive convention of handling word division, several important areas which require uniform treatment across the seven languages remain. First of all, there is the problem of bringing Lozi in line with the other six languages. Then there is the general problem of inducing all the seven languages to agree to a mutually satisfactory system of dividing words in a uniform manner. Such a system would make it possible for the seven languages to approach the various prefixes (e.g. locative and respectful prefixes) and such features as compounds, reduplications and ideophones from the same point of view. In view of the encouraging degree of standardization already achieved, it seems reasonable to expect that the remaining ground would present fewer problems than was the case when the committees were confronted with largely unexplored territory.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Zambia was the last in a series of similar surveys carried out in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania from 1968 to 1970.
2. Before Independence in 1964 and for several years after that, the responsibility of standardizing the orthographies of Zambian languages fell to the Northern Rhodesia Publications Bureau (subsequently renamed the Zambia Publications Bureau), a semi-independent body within the Ministry of Education. After the establishment of the Zambia Adult Literacy Programme in 1965, an attempt was made by the Bureau in conjunction with the Literacy Programme to standardize the orthographies of the seven Zambian languages used in formal education and literacy education, but without much success. The Literacy Programme ended up using an orthography far in advance, in terms of innovations, of those used in formal education.
3. I was a member of all the seven committees in my capacity as linguist-consultant, with the role of supplying information on the structure of Zambian languages and their linguistic relationships.
4. For example, during one of the sessions of the Lozi Committee, an elderly gentleman rose in the middle of a heated exchange in a state of extreme agitation and exasperation and challenged all those who were for change to put a spear through his heart there and then. He was ready, he said, to sacrifice his life rather than suffer the sacredness of his language being tampered with.
5. The information utilized as well as the examples cited in this part of the paper are derived from the final recommendations of the seven committees. At the time of writing (December, 1977), the booklet into which they had been compiled by the Ministry of Education was in press at the National Educational Company of Zambia (NECZAM), the official publishers of educational material in Zambia. The copy available to me was in page-proof stage and did not have a title. I have assumed that it will be The Orthography of Zambian Languages and have cited it under this title in the references.

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