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I am &c

EDWARD B. STURGEON  
Missionary Bishop

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**BANTU ORTHOGRAPHY.**



## BANTU ORTHOGRAPHY.

My dear Friend,

I have had by your kindness the pleasure of reading a paper by the Bishop of Kaffraria on the Orthography of the Kafir language, which I should have liked, had he been in his usual health, to discuss with him, but now I can only briefly tell you in what points I do not feel that I can agree with what he says.

We are told that in *ndimtanda* the parts are as distinct as in the English *I love him*. Are they? It is a simple question of fact. The difference between formative syllables and words is a real one, and not a matter of taste or fancy. The distinction is this, that a word can stand alone, and has a meaning which it preserves throughout.

Now the Swahili for *I love him* is *nampenda* formed I suppose on the same lines with *ndimtanda*. In this word, *na - m - penda* are not distinct words, but only formative syllables. I

prove it thus. *Na* is a well known word, it is the conjunction *and*. Standing alone *na* can mean nothing but *and* or *with*, *m* is also capable of forming a word by itself, it means *ye are*, and it cannot mean anything else. Even the *na* is properly in two parts, *n-* the sign of the first person and *-a-* the sign of the indefinite present. Is not the *nga-* of the Zulu past made in the same manner? Again the word *penda* standing alone would be the second person singular of the Imperative, *love thou*.

The English words are really words, *I* means *I* everywhere and always, *love* means *love* and *him* means *him*, and their position has nothing to do with their meaning. It follows that in English we can put the stress of voice on whichever we please and make three or four different sentences— *I* love him, *I* love him, and *I* love him, each having its own meaning, I do not suppose you can do any thing like this with *ndimtanda*, certainly you cannot with *nampenda*, you would have to say *Mimi nampenda*, *Nampenda sana*, or *Nampenda yule*, in order to give the effect of the English. Still less could you say *m na penda*, him I love, or *penda na m*, love I him?

It is not enough to say that one might write *nga be ba bopa* unless one could go on to say that one might alter the order and keep the sense. If the position of the syllables is of the essence of their meaning and separately they mean nothing or something different, then one cannot be at liberty to write them apart.

There is no doubt that writing the formatives and root together does facilitate pronunciation, and that a lot of monosyllables is much more bewildering than a few long words, but still one ought to write the monosyllables, if they were really independent and the accent could be shifted about among them as niceties of meaning might require. It is not the pauses but the accents which are important in defining the words. But in Swahili, if you pronounced the formatives with equality of stress or with the stress upon any but the one proper syllable, you would be not merely wrong but wholly unintelligible, and so I fancy it would be in Kafir also. English people do not always and of necessity say *I-will-not bring-you-over*, they may part their words anywhere they please and say, *I will-not*, or *I will not*, or *I-will not*, a Kafir could not so divide his word.

but one must be very thoughtful indeed to be misled by it, when one knows how Latin and Greek and their modern representatives, and still more Arabic and Hebrew denote the persons, tenses, and the gender of the various parts of speech, and even of the subjects and objects of their verbs by formative letters and changes of vowels. The Semitic languages denote the gender of their subjects by a change in the verbal affixes, sometimes before, sometimes after the verbal root, and the gender of the object by an enclitic suffix. The Bantu languages in a similar manner denote the number and what answers to the gender of their subjects and objects by a corresponding change among their prefixes. Their prefixes do not thereby become words, any more than the formative particles of any other class of languages. It would be ridiculous enough to write *in tu wa tu for in tu na wutu*, but it is in principle the same as to write *a ni on a and wa ni on a for a ni on a and wa ni on a*. English usage has simply no analogy with it.

I am not at all satisfied that the particle ending in *a* which answers to the English *of* is not a separate word and ought not to be writ-

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There are of course in all languages cases of identical sounds arrived at by different derivations, and then the puzzle is not really greater in reading than in hearing. If there is any fear of confusion, the instances given show how to avoid it. *Ub'uya* is practically as distinct from *ubuya*, as *u b' u ya* is from *u bu ya*, and it is much less puzzling. Who could make anything of a page full of single and double letters like a t' e ti u b' u ya and so forth?

I conclude therefore that as the sounds must be grouped in one unchanging manner, it is best to group the signs for them into the words which they really and naturally form.

In *Umbuso wama Ngesi*, there seems to be a clear error in separating the *ama* from the *Ngesi*, just the same error that there is in separating *ndim* from *tanda*. It is absurd to say that you are to separate the syllables which determine the number of a verb and not to separate the syllables which determine the number of a noun. In English a verb is chiefly though not always, inflected by the use of separate words and a noun by formative letters, and if there were no other language in the world one might suppose this a natural distinction,

Ly do not mean *to*, and the *ku* which stands by itself means *is*.

I do not in the least see why the first letter of a proper name should not be written with a capital. The rule has been adopted in order to guide the reader as to what are proper names, and so save him from mistakes, or at least from the trouble of considering whether the word has a meaning or not. It is perfectly immaterial for this purpose whether the first letter is always the same. In a language which changes at the end, as the European languages do, the first letter remains the same. In languages in which the words change at the beginning, the first letters are not the same, and that is all. A capital letter in the middle of a word is simply a monstrosity, and like the use of hyphens, and italics, and queer fount letters, it is a pedantic sort of refinement which cannot coexist with the habitual and extensive use of a written language. It is extremely improbable that an average European would be able, or if able would take the trouble, to use them properly, while to a native they must be simply a matter of awe and obedience. To abandon all capitals is to go back to the

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confusion of an early manuscript.

I will say only one word about spelling. The sounds which need to be distinguished are those which cause a difference of meaning. The sound may not be always the same, but if it is similar and does not vary the meaning, the use of two or more signs is merely a fad. I suppose it is for this reason that we English who use our two *ths* in the same word have dropped the two signs we once had. It would be troublesome and useless to use different letters in writing *bath* and *baths*. I suppose that the real reason why *z* is dropping out of our alphabet is, that we say *house* and *houses*, after which it would be absurd to say that *s* and *z* are in English perfectly distinct letters.

I am afraid that there is a disposition to think of Mission spelling as people do of Mission converts. If these last are only as religious as the average Englishman, the Missionaries are reviled as having done nothing or less. So if their spelling is not up to a standard which no European language has attempted to reach, they are decried as unscientific. So it may be, but the use of printing and writing is to convey ideas quickly and correctly, and for this purpose

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ten separately. It depends upon the previous substantive as to both form and mark of number, and only coalesces with the following word, when that word begins with a vowel. In Swahili it never coalesces at all. In Nyanwezi every final vowel coalesces with a vowel following. As a rule in Nyanwezi no single initial vowel, which does not begin a sentence, is heard in purity and distinctness, but this is a rule of pronunciation and does not affect the division of words. Is the *-a* of *wa* in Kafir the only final *-a* which can coalesce in pronunciation with the *I* of *inkosi* so as to produce an *e* sound? If it is not, it is merely an instance of a rule of pronunciation and should be written *wa inkosi*. I am sorry not to know Kafir enough to have an opinion about the *s* in *wasemtata*. I was brought up to disbelieve the insertion of euphonic letters and to suppose that in such cases a letter properly belonging to the word had dropped off, except where necessity of euphony had prevented its being lost, as in the English *an eagle* contrasted with *a hawk*.

The natural rule as to writing such words as *nami* seems to me to be, that *na mi* shows that neither syllable has a distinct stress of

voice necessarily attached to it, whereas *nami* shows that the *na-* has the stress and that the *-mi* is to be always subordinated to it.

I do not think that any distinction can be kept between the Infinitive of a Verb regarded as a Substantive and the same word regarded as part of the Verb. It is in one sense always a Verb and in another always a Substantive. In very many instances it is impossible say which it is not. *Kupenda, loving*, looks like a Substantive but it can take an object like a Verb. *Kupenda kula, loving eating*, is merely a substantive denoting a kind of gluttony. *Kupenda fetha, loving money* is practically as much a substantive as *avarice* is, but it has a good deal of the verb about it still. It is extremely improbable that any native race would understand the need of making any difference in the spelling of what to them is certainly one word, and that a word beginning with *ku-* and requiring a similar beginning in all adjectives, pronouns and verbs which agree with it. *Kupendana kwao ku kuzuri*, is the Swahili for *their mutual affection is beautiful*. If you cut the *ku-* off from *-pendana* and say it means *to*, what are we to do with the *kw-* of *kwao* and the *ku-* of *kuzuri*, they certain-

one will be as scientific as one can, but one need not trouble oneself overmuch with the very difficult abstract question as to what are simple sounds, or feel it very wrong to write them by means of two letters. All systems in actual use do something of the kind, and they work very well. I protest against writing the *ch* in church *tsh*. I do not so pronounce it, nor does I think any Englishman, Germans do and we are apt to laugh at them for it. It is however not quite so absurd as to say that our *j* is properly represented by *dzh*. Is the Kafir *r* substantially the same as the Dutch *G*, and the Arabic *ghain*? I have been often told that it was, but now it is said to be the Arabic *kha*, which is generally written *kh*- and has no affinity whatever with *r*.

It would appear from Bishop Colenso's Zulu grammar that there are much more serious defects in the usual Kafir spelling than any yet noticed. He says that there are two sounds of *a* which denote different meanings as —

1. bala — count.

2. bala — write.

The difference described seems to resemble that in Swahili between

1. Kufa — to die.

2. Kufaa — to profit.

But in Swahili it is merely a case of double vowels, as is proved by the dialectic variation.

Kufala = kufaa.

However I find the difference between the two *balas* described quite differently a little further on, as *bala* count, and *bhala* write. All African languages have explosives, and the natural way of denoting them seems to be by an apostrophe, a mark which denotes the omission of something. In Swahili it is an *n* which has dropped out and left the explosive effect as its only representative. If *kona* means *it*, and *k'ona* means *there*, they certainly ought not to be written alike.

Again if *wátanda* means *thou lovedst*, and *watánda* means *he loved*, one or the other ought always to be written with an accent or mark of some kind.

Still more curious is the suggestion of a sort of tone.

beka — put down.

bèka — look.

Either this difference is a mere fancy, or it is a very important item in the discussion as to the orthography of Kafir words. We have

nothing of the kind in Swahili, nor, so far as I know, in any of the East Central languages. There are plenty of modes of denoting it, if it is there, any of which would be infinitely better than leaving it unmarked, but the possibility of the variety of sound arising from a doubled or an elided letter should be considered first.

I do not think that the division of syllables is very well laid down in any Kafir book that I have seen. Our rule is clear that all syllables must end in a vowel, but that *mu* and *ni* are often converted into 'm, and 'n, with the vowel sound transposed. So strong is this tendency that the name *Musa*, Moses, is very generally pronounced 'Msa. In Kafir books they seem to write *um* and *in*, I suppose because the vowel is pronounced more strongly, but can any other vowel stand before either n or m? If not, one need not write either of them.

In Swahili n must be a separate syllable before all consonants except d, g, j, y, and z. M must be a separate syllable before all consonants except b and w. Only therefore before these letters need we write an apostrophe. Apparently the Kafir rules are not so simple.

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