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RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNION GOVERNMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BANTU STUDIES
AND RESEARCH

A Practical Orthography
for Xhosa

1931

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A Practical Orthography for Xhosa

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNION GOVERNMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
RACE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The Central Orthography Committee, delegated by the Union Advisory Committee to deal with orthography, decided at its meeting held in Johannesburg, on the 16th of July, 1930, to make certain recommendations with regard to Xhosa, and these were subsequently approved by the Union Government Committee.

1. The most important changes on the existing orthography are as follows:—

(a) Aspiration, hitherto represented by a rough-breathing mark over the following vowel, is to be represented by *h*; e.g. *thetha* for *tétha*, *Xhosa* for *Xéosa*.

(b) The palatal voiceless fricative, now represented by *sh*, is to be represented by the I.P.A. symbol *ʃ*; e.g. *juʃa* for *shusha*; *umʃlatha* for *umsháthá*.

(c) Implosive *b*, now represented by the plain letter, will be represented by a new symbol, *ɓ*, and the plain *b* will represent the explosive *b*; e.g. *úɓúfáfa* for *ukubáfa* (to itch), and *ukúbáfa* for *ukubáfa* (to fly).

(d) *R*, which now represents both the voiceless velar fricative and the rolled *r* of English, will represent only the rolled *r*; and a new symbol, *ɣ*, will represent the unvoiced fricative, or the voiced, and *ɣɣ* the ejective varieties; e.g. *ukɣana* for *ukxana*, *igɣaya* for *irhaya*, and *ikɣole* for *irale*.

(e) The radical click sounds following a nasal will be represented by the click symbol preceded by *k*, instead of by the dotted symbol; e.g. *inkxani*, *inkqayi* (bald head), *inkxase* (sustenance) for *inǀani*, *inǀayi*, and *inǀase*.

(f) The aspiration of nasal clicks will be represented by *h* instead of the rough-breathing mark; e.g. *inxha*, *inǀhayi* (water pot), *inxhwa*, for *inǀh*, *inǀayi*, and *inǀhwa*.

(g) When it is necessary for clearness, long vowel sounds are to be shown by doubling the vowel; e.g. *maáa* (the horse), there (the horse) is: but *mae* (the horse), and *ite* (the horse).

3. The full scheme of sound representation in Xhosa will therefore be as follows:—

VOWELS

o	lala	lie down	o	olo	that (Cl. 5 sing.)
e	elo	that (Cl. 2 sing.)	e	ela	this (" ")
o	eli	this (" ")	u	ulu	completely
i	imi	standing			

PLAIN CONSONANTS

	Alveolar	Denti- labial	Alveolar	Pre- palatal	Velar	Glottal
<i>Explosive:</i>						
Radical	p		t		k	
Aspirated	ph		th		kh	
Voiced	b		d		g	
<i>Implosive</i>						
	ɓ					
<i>Nasal</i>						
	m		n	ny	ng	
<i>Fricative:</i>						
Radical		f	s	ʃ	ʈ	h
Voiced		v	z		ɖ	
<i>Roller</i>						
			r			
<i>Lateral:</i>						
Voiced			l			
Rad. Fric.			hl			
Voiced Fric.			dl			
<i>Affricate:</i>						
Radical				tʃ		
Aspirated				tʃh		
Ejective	mtʃ	ntʃ	ntʃ	ntʃ	kr	
Voiced	mv	nv		j nj		
<i>Lateral Affricate:</i>						
Ejective			ntl			
Voiced			ndl			
<i>Semi-Vowel</i>						
				y	w	

Examples

Explosives :

p	ipena	tall object
	impaku	mouse
t	teleta	talk like a child
	ituku	mole
k	kakade	of course
	talomo	a least
ph	phopha	escape
th	thetha	speak
kh	ikhaka	shield
b	baba	fly (verb)
	hamba	go
d	deda	give way
	inda	man
g	ugaga	dried hide
	aguye	it is he

Implosive :

ɛ	BoBo	itch
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Nasals :

na	memena	call out
n	nina	you (plur.)
ny	anyana	son
ng	ingwe	leopard

Fricatives :

f	ufefe	grass
s	kusasa	early morning
ʃ	ʃaʃa	hot
t	yasa	suspect
h	hamba	go
v	vila	open
z	zusa	get
ʒ	igʒaya	coarse sacking

Rolls :

r	serenji	orange (foreign)
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Laterals :

l	lala	lie down
hl	ihlahla	piece of brush
dl	dhla	play

Africates :

tʃ	tʃeqa	cut through
tʃh	tʃhona	sink, set
mf	imfo	swat cane
ntse	phantsi	down
j	ijaja	sour veld
ntʃ	intʃomanga	the west
ky	ikyele	sword
nz	amanzi	water
mv	imvu	sheep
nj	inja	dog

Lateral Africates :

ntʃ	intʃe	it is beautiful
ndʃ	indʃa	house

Semi Vowels :

y	yija	go!
w	uwewe	heap of stones

Notes

(i) Ejection will not be marked, nor will syllabic *m* be marked, as such.

(ii) Intervocalic *y* and *w* will be used, except where it can be shown that the sound is not present; e.g. *yija*, *lawula*, but *lala*, *lencʃi*.

(iii) The nasal velar coming before a velar explosive will be represented, as hitherto, by *n*, but before a vowel it will be represented by *ng*; e.g. *ingʻangʻnas*, *akangʻongʻasa*.

(iv) *h* will represent the disjunctive for the sounds hitherto represented by *nyʻ nywʻ* and *mʻ*; e.g. *inyhonyha*, *inywhela*, *imhaka*, for *inyonyá*, *inywéla*, *imhaka*.

CLICK CONSONANTS

	Dental.	Palato-alveolar.	Labial.
Radical	c	ç	x
Radical preceded by Nasal	ako	akç	akx
Aspirated	ch	çh	xh
Voiced	gc	gç	gx
Voiced preceded by Nasal	ngc	ngç	ngx
Nasal	nc	nç	nx
Nasal followed by voiced glottal fricative	neh	nçh	nwh

Examples

c	'oona	be clear
ç	uqaqaça	couch-grass
x	soxa	discus
akç	inkaxat	marksman
akç	inkaxayl	bald head
akx	inkaxax	carelessness
ch	ehana	hit the mark
çh	iqhala	proverb
xh	xhax	support
gc	gaxa	roast
gç	igçaxa	large knobbed stick
gx	gaxha	drive away
ngç	ingçamba	root
ngç	ingçambe	anger
ngx	ingçaxa	noise
nc	nxaxa	give up hope
nç	inxaxayl	fighting stick
nx	naxha	pot on, wear
nçh	inxha	grass
nçh	inxhaxyl	water-pot
nwh	inxhawa	bag

3. LENGTH

A vowel symbol is to be doubled to represent a long vowel sound, but this usage is to be limited to instances where confusion is likely

to arise; it is, however, to be consistently employed in all cases of the same word. Thus we shall write *inkosi*, chief, and *inkosi*, chiefs; *salu* (the *je*), and *ila* (the house), and *maale* (the *je*), there it (the horse) is; *umphanga*, steam, gas, and *umphanga*, lung; *khosa*, skin, and *akhosa*, stomach.

4. Stress

Is not to be marked in broad script.

5. TONE

For practical purposes only relative tone will be marked, and that only when it is necessary to avoid ambiguity. This is to be marked by a small vertical line on movable type, placed before the vowel, the line to stand above the upper line of the small letters for relatively high tone, and below the lower line of the small letters for relatively low tone. As the falling tone occurs with long vowels, the doubling of the vowel will sufficiently distinguish such cases; e.g. *likhang'a* (jumpkin), *likhang'a* (thigh), *likhang'a* (mountain veld); *ndithanda*'o (I have loved), *ndithanda* (and love, present subjunctive), *ndithanda* (love me); *uthanda* (thou lovest) and *uthanda* (he loves).

6. WORD CONSTRUCTION

The recommendations of the Xhosa Sub-Committee as passed by the Central Committee and the Union Government Advisory Committee, are as follows:—

While a word should not have more than one main stress, the lack of a main stress should not prevent the separation of elements, where etymology and facility of reading justify it.

- (i) Demonstratives should always be separated, thus: *esi sixeko*, *le nto*.
- (ii) *Kwa* also to be written separately, save when it is incorporated in a verbal form, thus: *kwa nana-Xhosa*, *ukwalingile*.
- (iii) *Nje* and *nga* (as great as) to be written separately, thus: *nje ngam*, *nga ngam*, *kanga ngokufa*, *egga agepanti*.
- (iv) *Ukanga* (verb) to be written separately, save where vowel fusion makes this impossible; thus: *ndinga ya*, (*ndinga singayanga*); but *ndingama*, *ndingakho* (I could build).
- (v) The auxiliary verbs *ba*, *ya*, *za* to be written separately, save where fusion of vowels makes this impossible, thus: *ndiya fama*, *ndiya safuna*, *ndiya kufuna*, *andiya kufuna*, *ndile ndifuna*, *ndoye ndifuna*, *ndiza kufuna*; but *efefuna*, *ndandifuna*.

(vi) Elided vowels: such expressions as *uak' effika, ufanan' ethetha*, etc., not to be written as one word, but as above with apostrophe, or else, in school books and literary work preferably, as *uak'e effika, ufanana ethetha*, etc.

(vii) The particles *na* and *ni* (interrogatives) and *ke* to be written separately; thus: *ke kakeka ke, uya hana na? uhi ni? uhi ni na zina?*

(viii) Proper nouns: (a) The article, the locative prefix and prepositions to be joined to proper nouns by a hyphen, thus: *a-Phatso, a-Gence, kwa-Koman*.

(b) The prefix *un-* in names of nationality and rivers to be treated as a prefix and to have no capital, thus: *un-Xhosa, akakho un-Xhosa, un-Ngegeja, em-Gwall*.

(ix) *Reduplicated stems*: The elements to be separated by a hyphen, thus: *akachala-chala, akacholwa-cholwa, inlale-ntlale*.

(x) The vocative particle to be joined to the noun without hyphen, thus: *ufaninani*.

7. CAPITALS AND CURSIVE FORMS OF SPECIAL SYMBOLS

The following are the forms proposed for impulsive *k*, the prepalatal fricative *j*, and the velar fricative *ɣ*.

Print:

Ḁ Ḃ
 Ḅ Ḇ
 Ḉ Ḱ

Cursive:

Ḁ Ḃ
 Ḅ Ḇ
 Ḉ Ḱ

8. GENERAL

From the examples given it will be seen that the new orthography, will often make the writing and printing of Xhosa words longer, and in some cases even clumsy, as compared with the present system. But the changes will have many advantages to outweigh any possible disadvantages:—

(i) *Discretes*, whose use is not understood, and is therefore neglected, by the great majority of Natives, and which, in an indifferently printed sheet, are trying to the eyesight, are abolished, except in one case, and that not a common one.

(ii) Greater consistency is attained.

(iii) Many ambiguities will be removed; e.g., *r* will represent only one sound, and the doubling of long vowels will distinguish at once words where length of vowel has semantic value. Reading is therefore made very much easier, especially for children and the imperfectly educated.

(iv) The writing of Xhosa and Zulu will now be practically identical for the same sounds, and both are brought into close approximation with the accepted orthography of most of the other Bantu languages, to the great advantage of the student of comparative philology, and of Natives who knew one Bantu language and desire to learn others.

W. G. BUSHN.

XHOSA SPECIMENS IN THE NEW ORTHOGRAPHY

(Psalm XVIII. 1-5)

1. Ndikuthanda ngemilini yam, Yehova, lemele lwam.
2. Yehova, agrandeza yam, mbazisele yam, misididi wam, Thixo wam, liwa lam, endzimela ngala, Ngweletjetje yam, laphando lesidiso lwam, agronde yam!
3. Ndinqaba u-Yehova angowokudanyiswa, Nditya sindiswa ezitjatheni zam.
4. Izintya sekufa zandijikela; Imilambo yethujijelo yandifandathekisa.
5. Izintya zolalafileyo zandibijela; Izintyelo sekufa zafetha kum.

(Job XII.)

1. Unokuyipala na inqwanya ngogwegwe? Uurjhanise elutyeni elwini lwayo!
3. Ingatayuzisa kanene na kwwe? Ithethe amawzi athambileyo kwwe!
6. Anga pwele ngayo na amakhubhaza aSambisayo? Ayade phakathi kwawoyweli.
10. Akukho sijaya sekuyixhokoxa; NguSani na ke engu zimisa phambi kwawo?

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