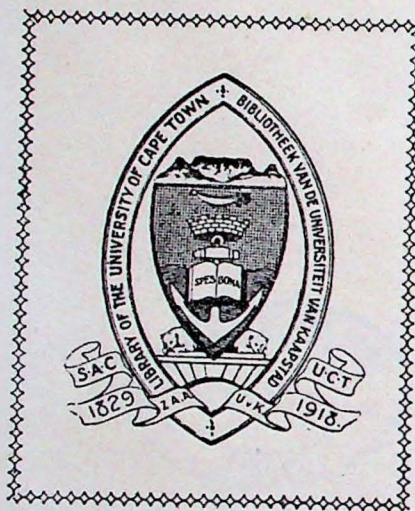


SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR AN
IMPROVED KAFIR ORTHOGRAPHY

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African Studies Seminar.

Mapley *Thesaurus*
Orthography

SOME SUGGESTIONS

FOR AN

Improved Kafir Orthography,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP OF ST. JOHN'S,

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THE existing translations of the Bible into Kafir are admitted by most missionaries to be unsatisfactory; and a very general desire exists to improve them, and to bring them up to our present state of knowledge. On all hands it is agreed that APPEYARD'S Translation requires revision; and many missionaries are very far from satisfied with the New Translation, and are unable to regard it as having supplied a revision which meets the requirements of the case. Every one knows our indebtedness to Mr. APPEYARD, and would treat his translation with all respect; but there are none who would not thankfully hail—Mr. APPEYARD himself would, if still living—a new translation which should represent more exactly and idiomatically the original Scriptures in the native language.

The object and labour of us all, therefore, should be, without bitterness or obstinacy or prejudice, to do our best to produce a good translation; we should avail ourselves of the labours of the past whenever we can, but at the same time—acknowledging our allegiance to truth and right only, and not to the mere authority of names—we should be bound in no way to accept and continue the use of either what is old and first, because it is old, or what is new and last because it is new.

The object of the translator should be to represent as faithfully and accurately as possible the meaning of the original. A good translation cannot be verbal. Languages consist of words, and arrangements of words into sentences, or idioms; and to ensure a good and faithful translation, a knowledge of the latter is as important as a knowledge of the former. Every translation to be good must be *idiomatic*. To secure an idiomatic translation, the translator must think the meaning of what he is translating in the language into which he is translating.

In all languages there are various styles—the colloquial and the formal: the language of every day life, about common things,—more or less careless, inexact, and vulgar; and the language of narrative and of oratory,—more correct, exalted, and impassioned. The formal and more proper styles are those we should use in translating the Bible and Prayer-book.

All questions relating to words, their exact meaning and application, all arrangements of them into sentences, all idiomatic

peculiarities, should be referred to competent natives, and be left to their decision; care being taken that they have first comprehended the meaning of the words they are required to put into their own language. No translator of the Bible or Prayer-book should proceed with the work without having a reliable native by his side.

But at the present time, when the question of translation and revision is occupying so much of the thought of missionaries and native converts, it may be wise to consider another question also, and inquire whether, whilst attempting to improve the translations, we may not adopt a better mode of spelling and writing the language. It is my judgment that it is highly important that we should not perpetuate the anomalous alphabet and mode of writing which have come down to us from the early missionaries.

The natives of South Africa had not sufficient intelligence to form an alphabet for themselves. Their language, though extremely remarkable for its grammatical structure, had not been reduced to writing; and consequently, whilst the authority of the natives as to words and idioms should be paramount, they are not competent to give any assistance in reducing their language to writing, except so far as teaching us the sounds which the characters are required to represent.

When the early missionaries set themselves the task of supplying the want of a written language, they had to determine whether they should employ a new set of signs, or some of the alphabets already in use. In considering the sounds met with in Kafir, they did not find them of so intractable a character but that, with few exceptions, the Roman Alphabet might be employed to express them. Indeed there was no other alphabet, to which a similar objection might not be made as to the Roman,—the impossibility of exactly expressing some of the sounds by means of the letters employed. Mr. MELVILLE BELL had not then invented his alphabet,—the only physiological and strictly philosophical one ever invented,—and even had it then existed, there would have been the same difficulties in adopting it as exist now, and they are probably for the present quite insurmountable.

But in choosing the Roman characters, it was wisely determined to make considerable

alterations and modifications in the use of them, so as to adopt a phonetic orthography.

There are, however, certain sounds in the Kafir language, so different from those of any European language, that it was necessary to have new characters to represent them. But the missionaries, instead of inventing new signs, did what appeared to them equivalent—they employed some of the Roman Letters which the phonetic system of writing rendered unnecessary, to represent sounds entirely different from those for which they are used in European Languages. In this I think they erred.

Another still more serious error was the system of running a large number of small words into one long word, without any reason that I have been able to detect, and with no other result than that of rendering the study of the language more difficult, and throwing needless obstruction in the way of reading and spelling.

With the view of making the present agitation regarding translations as widely productive as possible, I have determined to propose a few alterations in the alphabet, and to recommend a different mode of writing.

The vowel sounds in Kafir are very full and uniform. They are represented by the letters a, e, i, o, u; and are thus pronounced:—

A as *a* in father
E as *a* in mate
I as *ee* in feet
O as *o* in hope
U as *oo* in moon

There is a shortened sound of *a* and *o* final, which the organs of speech so naturally adopt, that it is not necessary to employ any diacritic sign to mark the difference.

U has also in some few words (Zulu) a sound very similar to the French *u*, but the examples are so few, that it is not worth while to mark them.

There are two other sounds,—one resembling *i* in *right*; for this sound *ai* or *aji* is used, which the natives often pronounce as a dissyllable; the other resembling *ou* in *our*, for which *au* or *aan*, as *Kaala* or *Kaaula*, is used.

It is not proposed to make any change in the vowel system already adopted.

Most of the *consonants* may be retained with the powers they respectively have in English. And it would be convenient and

greatly facilitate learning to read if all were named on one principle, viz., *bi, di, fi, gi, &c.*, the *i* being pronounced like *ee* in *feet*.

It is necessary to remark on those only which are limited or modified in their application.

g is always hard, like *g* in *get*. For the soft sound of *g*, *j* is used.

r. This letter, under the mistaken supposition that the *r* sound does not exist in Kafir, has been unfortunately employed for the guttural aspirate (*ch* German). It has been also used to represent its true sound in words which are taken over from other languages; but more frequently, in condescension to the native difficulty in pronouncing the *r*, it has been converted into *l*. Lately, several suggestions, arising from the objection naturally felt to the continued use of the *r* for the guttural, have been made. The Rev. L. GROUT and Dr. BLEEK recommended the Greek *Chi*. But the introduction of a Greek letter into the midst of Roman characters disfigures the type. In modern Kxosa books, *r*, when used for the guttural, has a diacritic mark placed over it, *r̄*. But if, as is admitted, an alteration be required, would it not be better at once to adopt some character free from objection?

The objections to *r̄*, whether with or without a diacritic mark, are these:—

1. The true *r* sound is met with in Zulu and Kxosa in certain onomatopoeic words, as *ukuti ru, to whir*, the *r* being pronounced in the strongest Scottish mode; and *ukuti dri, to whir*.

2. It occurs in Suto, where it largely takes the place of the *l* in Zulu; and also in other of the alliterative languages of Africa.

3. It is required in proper names taken over from other languages.

4. It is undesirable, as a question of education, to conclude that the native cannot pronounce the *r̄*. He can be taught to pronounce it in a few lessons.

The *r* therefore is retained with its usual power.

The *s* is used invariably for the hissing sound, as in *sister*.

There are three letters, *c, q, and x* not required in the phonetic mode of writing Kafir.

The soft sound of *c* is represented by *s*; its hard sound by *k*.

Qu is represented by *kw*.

And if the sound of *x*, as in *except*, occur in Kafir, it might be represented by *ks*.

Thus we have three letters *c*, *q*, and *x* not required in the Kafir alphabet; and there are several sounds which require either new letters or new combinations to represent them. They are:—

1. Three forms of the aspirated *l*.
2. Two guttural aspirates.
3. Three clicks.
4. Two nasalized sounds.
5. Several sounds which, although for the most part spelt by the Roman letters, have not been spelt uniformly, and which it will be worth while to specify.

1. THE ASPIRATED *l*. That a considerable difficulty exists in forming a determinate notion of the sounds arising from aspirating the *l*, is clear from the various ways in which it has been proposed to represent them; thus, besides *hl*, we have *kl*, *ll*, *shl*, *thl*. I should say the only one that is approximately correct, and that in some words only, is the last. In these sounds we must be careful not to be led away by local, personal, or tribal utterances, which, it appears to me, must have been the case hitherto. The best way of escaping such tendencies, and arriving at the correct pronunciation or orthography, will be to endeavour to ascertain the position of the organs of speech whilst uttering sounds.

The aspirated *l* sound has been compared with the Welsh *ll*. I have requested many Welsh people to pronounce this sound with the vowel *a* for instance. They have, I think I may say invariably, uttered *thla*, which represents only one form of the combination in Kafir,—*hl*, *thl*, and *dhl*.

To pronounce *hl* with the vowel *a* for instance, without the introduction of any *t* or *d* sound,—place the tongue on a level and in contact with the upper teeth, with the tip a little separated from the tips of the front teeth, breathe through the space thus formed, and whilst breathing say *la*; the result is the sound required; that is we have a combination of what we may call the dental fricative or aspirate with the liquid *l*. It is quite intelligible that, from personal or local peculiarities, the frication may be more or less pronounced, being sometimes so rough as to resemble the sound it is attempted to represent by *kl* or *ll*. The same differences are observed in pronouncing the guttural fricative, as in the name

Usakhili (Kreli) which is sometimes pronounced like the German *ch*,—or like *kh* *U-sa-khi-li*, or as if the syllables were thus divided, *U-sak-hi-li*. So with this *hl* sound,—as in *inhlizigo*,—the frication is so great with some men as to almost resemble a click. This is occasioned by the contact of the tip of the tongue with the upper teeth whilst uttering the sound, giving rise to an explosive sound in connection with *l*, instead of a simple breathing.

In the same way *thl* may be pronounced viz. by saying *la* in combination with *th* as heard in *thigh* or *breath*. But my opinion is that this sound and that of *hl* are interchangeable, and are used indifferently by different persons, or by the same person at different times.

Dhl may be pronounced in the same way, viz., by saying *la* in combination with *dh* as heard in *thy* and *breathe*.

It does not appear at all necessary to introduce new signs for the aspirated *l* sounds.

THE GUTTURAL ASPIRATES are two in number, the soft guttural and the rough guttural. The first is the German *ch*, or the Scotch *ch* in *loch*. For this I have hitherto used *hh*, as the simple *h* and this guttural are interchangeable; and this guttural aspirate may be regarded as only a more pronounced form of *h*, that is, the result of a greater frication. In this I followed precedent. But as the custom, of marking the aspirated consonants by a Greek aspirate over the following vowel, has become common in Kafir books, I consider it would be better to employ the *h*, with the addition of the aspirate before it, as *h'*.

For the second guttural aspirate, (of the character of which as an aspirate I have no doubt, though some have regarded it as a click) for which Mr. GROUT recommends the Greek *chi* with a dash, as he recommends *chi* for the former guttural,—I have used *hh* italicised in Roman print, and in Roman type in Italian print. As this variation of type is ugly, I would recommend that we use the *h* with the Greek aspirate after it as *h'*.

We should thus have the aspirates *h*, *h'*, *h^e*, which would be a simple and efficient mode of representing the sounds, and would scarcely have the appearance of introducing new signs.

3. THE CLICKS. As the letters *c*, *q*, and *x* were not required for the phonetic spelling of Kafir, they have been employed to repre-

sonant the clicks. There is the greatest possible objection to this. For these letters are required to represent very different sounds in languages which the natives are learning; and the use of them (for although apparently not generally noticed, *e*, *g*, and *x* are really only an inconvenient kind of diacritic mark) is inconsistent, and obscures the real character of the click sounds and prevents a ready comprehension of their meaning.

The clicks are not consonantal sounds by themselves, but are sounds united to and modifying certain consonants. In Kafir the consonants thus modified are *g*, *k*, and *n*. There are three click-sounds,—the dental, palatal, and lateral,—and the three consonants are severally modified by these three click-sounds in three ways.

i. The dental click is similar to the sound we make when vexed, and is formed by placing the tip of the tongue to the tip of the front teeth, and withdrawing it with a suction. This produces a simple click sound and it will be found quite impossible to combine this simple click-sound with a vowel so as to form a syllable without the aid of some consonant.

ii. The palatal click is formed by placing the tongue against the roof of the mouth, so that the tip shall be against the roots of the upper fore teeth, and withdrawing the tongue with a strong suction.

iii. The lateral click is formed by placing the tongue somewhat loosely into the roof of the mouth, and withdrawing one side of it from the double teeth with suction. It is similar to a click made to urge on a horse. There appear to be two modifications of this sound,—which may be merely personal or tribal, but which are quite distinct,—caused by withdrawing the side of the tongue in front from the bicuspids, or behind from the molars.

As with the dental, so with the palatal and lateral clicks, it is quite impossible to combine them with vowels without the aid of some consonant.

Dr. BLEEK and the Rev. L. GROUT have proposed that we should use the signs recommended by Lepsius. The signs are \vee for the dental; \wedge for the palatal; and ∇ for the lateral click.

The introduction of new signs as letters to an alphabet already in use, is always difficult, and when avoidable is objectionable; and it may well be demanded of those who suggest them that the new signs shall

be distinct in print and easily adaptable to writing. The signs suggested by Lepsius are lacking in both these characteristics. I am therefore decidedly of the judgment that they should not be adopted.

I have at various times discussed the subject with other missionaries. All agreed in the importance of having new signs for the clicks, and most of them that the sign should be in the form of a diacritic over *g*, *k*, and *n* respectively. After much consideration, I conclude to propose the following:—

For the dental click $\overset{\circ}{g}$ $\overset{\circ}{k}$ $\overset{\circ}{n}$
 For the palatal click $\overset{\vee}{g}$ $\overset{\vee}{k}$ $\overset{\vee}{n}$
 For the lateral click $\overset{\nabla}{g}$ $\overset{\nabla}{k}$ $\overset{\nabla}{n}$

4. TWO NASALIZED SOUNDS. The first is the nasalized *g*. As in *nga*. The *n* is here used to denote nasalization, and I would not suggest any change.

There is another nasalized sound, not occurring, so far as I know, in Zulu, and only occasionally met with in Kxosa. It is common in Swahili, and in the language of tribes on the Shire. Bishop Steere used for this sound *ng'*. His remarks,—

"*Ng'* is a peculiar African sound, much resembling the *ng*, which occurs at the end of many English words. If we could divide *longing* thus *lo-ng'ng*, without at all altering the pronunciation, it would come very near the African sound, which is never final because all Swahili syllables must end with a vowel. Some prefer to write this sound *gn*, as it resembles the sound given by Germans and others to those letters when they occur as initial letters in Greek. This sound must be distinguished from the common sound *ng*, in which the *g* distinctly passes on to the following vowel as in the English word *engage*; in *ng'* both sounds are heard, but neither passes on to the vowel."

I would remark that in the Kafir languages the *ong* represents a nasalized *g*, whilst the sound in question appears to be a nasalized *n*. Some natives pronounce it with a slight aspirate. I should recommend *n'*. I have met with it in the following words:—

Inankazi, a harlot. Ni! well!

Uku nonzela, to make faces.

5. SOME OTHER SOUNDS. It is not necessary to allude to many of these combinations, for a little attention will enable the reader to recognize the pronunciation from the letters employed.

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ju. I do not know any sound in English resembling this, but its pronunciation is distinctly indicated by these letters; as *isijwili*, a lamentation.

ny, like the *ni* in *onion* or *companion*; as *inyaniso*, the truth.

tsh, like *ch* in *church*; as *uku tsho*, to say so.

ty, a sound quite distinct from the last, and not to be confounded with it; as, *uku ty*, to eat.

There are many other combinations which would be better illustrated in a 'First Reading Book' than explained in the Alphabet.

PART II.—KAFIR ORTHOGRAPHY.

TWO modes of writing South African Languages have been adopted: one, in which a number of small words is run together to form one long word, as *andisafanelekile*, "I am no longer worthy"; the other, in which the several words are separated from each other by spaces, as in English.

As regards the former, I am quite unable to see anything to recommend it, or to conceive the reason why it has been adopted. It needlessly adds to the difficulty of learning to read and to spell, and greatly obscures the structure of the language.

Let us take a few examples.

The natives say for "I love him," *Ndi m tanda*, "I him love," where every word is as distinct in Kafir as in English. How obscure does "*Novchim*" look in English! No less does *Ndimtanda* in Kafir.

Why should we write *ngabebabopa*, "they ought to bind them," and not *nga be ba bopa*? Why should we run the Kafir words together, when we write the English words apart? How strange it would appear and how difficult it would be to understand the English if written thus, *Theyoughttobindthem*.

A person understanding the language gets over the obscurity by the context, and even he has a difficulty in determining whether he is to understand *ubuya*, as *u b' u ya* "you were going," or as *u buya*, "you are coming back." So in the following sentence, *Nembala ateli gula gula ukungena*, "So then he hastens inside," he may see at once that *тели* is not the negative form of *tela* "speak;" but it requires a ready knowledge of the language to separate a sentence so written into its elementary words, and catch at once the meaning of *a t' e ti in ateli*.

I presume that this mode of writing several words together is adopted, because in listening to a native speaking it sounds as though the words were pronounced together, and possibly from some idea that the pronouns *subjective* and *objective* are verbal inflections, and as such are really a part of the verb. But the pronouns are as distinct from the verb as they are in English, and have a function quite distinct from verbal inflection. As regards several small words, in conversation and reading, being pronounced together as one word, it will be observed (when the supposition is not attributable to the inaptitude of foreign ears) that the same thing occurs in every language. For example in the sentence above, "They ought to bind them" sounds as much like one word in English as *Nga be ba bopa* does in Kafir.

Let us take a sentence from the *Cape Folk-Lore Journal* at random:

Andiyi kuniweza kukuba benindicumcumza.

"I will not bring you over, because you crushed me," or word for word, "Not I go to bring you over, it to be (being a fact) were you me crushing." Let us write the English words together, and see what an odd effect is produced. I will not bringyouover, because youcrushedme.

Do we not utter the sentence very much as though it consisted of but four distinct words? If we watch our own reading or talking, we shall find that every paragraph consists of sentences and subsidiary sentences; in the subsidiary sentences the several words are pronounced rapidly, so as apparently to coalesce into one word; each subsidiary sentence is separated from the other by a slight pause. As in the above sentence, I will not /

bringyouover /, because / youcrushedme.

I have selected an example from the *Folk-lore Journal* because I have observed that a new system of division is being adopted in several Kafir publications, which appears to show that working linguists are dissatisfied with the present mode of writing the language, and are trying to grope their way to something more satisfactory. Thus, in the sentence just quoted, the pronunciation has not determined the division of the words; for there is no perceptible pause after *yi*, but the subsidiary sentence "I will not bring you over" would sound like one long word, *Andiyikuniweza*. But here *andiyi* is regarded as one word, that is, as the negative form of *uku ya* "to go." And doubtless this domination of a grammatical principle over the mere sound of utterance is an advance in the right direction.

Let us take another example from the *Isigidimi*:

Umbuso wama Ngesi.

Here *wama* is written apart from *Ngesi* which is dignified by a capital letter. Now *wama* should not be separated from *Ngesi*; it is the initial change by which *Ngesi*, "an Englishman," becomes *Amangesi*, "Englishmen." The *wa* is the possessive particle, which coalesces with the initial *a* of *Amangesi*, making it a plural possessive case. Clearly such a division of the word is improper. Thus we have the strange anomaly of a word being divided into syllables, whilst distinct words are blended into one long word.

In the following line we have *kusempatweni*.

Here *ku* and *se* are united, whilst *se* which belongs to *mpatweni* is separated from it. If pronunciation is to govern our mode of writing, it should be *kusempatweni*; if grammar and orthography, *ku sempatweni*. For the *m* in *impato*, does not belong to the root *pato*, but to the prefix *im*, and it is not to be pronounced with *p*, but with *i*, the proper division of the syllables being *im-pato* not *i-mpato*. *Empatweni* is the locative case, the initial *s* is simply euphonic to prevent the *ku* and *e* from being slurred.

Whilst speaking of the division of syllables I would point out a similar mistake in the "Kxosa Psalter." In the first two verses we meet with two instances;

ngo-ntliziyo for ngen-tliziyo
ngo-mbulelo for ngom-bulelo.

n and *m* belong to the prefix, and not to

the root, and should be pronounced and written accordingly.

If we turn to older Kxosa publications, we shall find that recent writers are departing in several particulars from the former mode of writing, without being apparently guided by any fixed rules. I have quoted the above examples merely for the purpose of showing that a new mode of writing the language is being adopted. But the new system is not an improvement on the old; for whilst the old mode of running words together is in most cases retained, in others it is arbitrarily set aside; whilst in some instances we find the division carried so far as to separate definite words into syllables.

I see no probability of missionaries coming to an agreement or of escaping from an arbitrary system which must lead to sundry anomalies, except by agreeing to write each word as a distinct word.

I need not say much on this method of writing words apart, because it is in itself so self-evident. But there are still some difficulties which require a few remarks.

When a sentence or several words have become petrified into a word, although its etymology may be still clear, I should write it as one word, as *ngani?* not *nga ni?* "Why?" *kangaka*, not *ka ngaka*, "so much." Prepositions with the cases they govern may be written together, as *kuye* not *ku ye*; *nami* not *na mi*; and such words as *bakowetu*.

Again, I would not separate the possessive particle from the noun. In most instances they are necessarily blended, as *umntwana weinkosi* (*wa-inkosi*). I would also write *umntwana kagangelizwe*, that is, I would regard *kagangelizwe* as the possessive of *Ugangelizwe*. I would also write *umntu waseMantata*, and *umntu wakwazulu*, not *wa s'Emantata* or *wa kwa Zulu*; regarding them as possessive cases, and examples of the mode in which the possessive of persons and places is formed.

Another, perhaps arbitrary, but still convenient mode of writing is to write *uku* "to" by itself when the verb is used as a verb, as *uku tanda* "to love;" *ndi yafutanda*, "I am going to love;" but when the verb is used as a noun to write it as one word as *ukulanda* "love;" *ukulanda kweke kukulu* "his love is great."

There is a difficulty also as regards capital letters, and we find consequently in printed books some ugly anomalies: such as a capital in the middle of a word, and para-

graphs beginning with a small letter or two capitals. This has apparently arisen from not considering that the prefix is an essential part of a noun, and so giving the nominal root an undue prominence; and partly, from our being unaccustomed to those *initial* changes upon which grammatical inflection in the Kafir languages so much depends. We thus almost lose the identity of a word by its having an altered beginning, and try to fix it by a capital in an unusual place; as *Inkosi*, *Enkosini*, and so it is usual to write *e-Nkosini* or *en-Kosini*; and in the vocative case *nKosi*. It appears to have been overlooked that *Enkosini*, is quite as distinct and complete a word as *Inkosi*, and if it requires to be dignified by a capital, the capital should take its place as the head-letter. To use capital letters to distinguish roots is a novelty in writing. When a capital is placed at the beginning of a root as *nKosi*, "Lord" or "Chief," *Kosi* which thus bears the mark of eminence has no personal meaning, indeed no meaning whatever, and thus a mark of eminence is thrown away on a meaningless combination of letters, which can only assume a living sense by having combined

with it the requisite prefix. Doubtless both roots and prefixes had originally determinate meanings well understood; but these meanings are no longer known, and the prefix forms an essential part of a word, and is necessary to specialize the root meaning, whatever it might originally be, thus:—

root	<i>ntu</i>	
	<i>un-ntu</i>	a man
	<i>ubu-ntu</i>	man-hood.
	<i>isi-ntu</i>	man-kind.

It would save us from many difficulties, if we could concur in giving up capitals altogether, or in using them solely for the purpose of marking paragraphs, or the commencement of a new clause after a full stop; and proper names in the nominative case. As the feeling is strong in favour of marking the Divine Names by a capital, and it is desirable so to mark them, I would recommend that they be always written in small capitals thus:—*UTIKXO*, *ETIKXWINI*; *INKOSI*, *ENKOSINI*, &c., thus getting over the difficulty of the change of the initial by inflection; but if this is not adopted, the capital should always be the head-letter, whatever that letter be.



Z JUNE 1942

