# The Contribution of C.M. Doke to Written Shona

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In discussing the contribution made by Clement Doke to the development of Shona in its written mode, it will be useful to commence with a look at his work and experience in African linguistics before 1929, when he accepted the invitation to advise the government of Southern Rhodesia on the formation of a common written medium for the Shona dialects.[1] Doke was then thirty-six years old. Seven years of his early manhood, from 1914 to 1921, had been devoted to missionary work among the Lamba people of north-western Rhodesia (now Zambia). His work was initially that of a schoolmaster but, as his grasp of the language grew, it developed more and more in the direction of Bible translation for which his superiors recognised he had a distinct flair.[2] He spent 1919 in Johannesburg on furlough as an M.A. student at an extension of the Transvaal University College. His thesis, *The Grammar of the Lamba Language,* was the result of his field experience and bore the marks of the philology available to him in his early undergraduate work in modern and classical languages.

Doke's experience so far, the prolonged and intimate exposure to the Lamba language and oral literature, and the more academic translation and descriptive work, made him both suitable for, and receptive to, an opening which occurred in 1921, after his return to Johannesburg from the mission field. The remarkable and brilliant Jan Hofmeyr, about to become the first principal of the new University of the Witwatersrand, was just then planning to provide for the introduction of Bantu Studies into the curriculum. He was aware of Doke's linguistic work in Bantu languages through his connection with Transvaal University College in

Johannesburg and through his common membership, with Doke, of the Baptist Church. As a result, he encouraged Doke to fit himself for appointment as a lecturer in the subject by means of a session, 1921-22, at the University of London. This suggestion was taken up by the new recruit and carried out entirely at his own expense. At London he was registered at three of the University's Schools, evidence of the broad conception he had of his subject, which was also that of his future Principal. The first was the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), where he was a student of Alice Werner and read for the School's Diploma in Comparative Bantu. The second was University College where he worked under Daniel Jones in order to acquire proficiency and a certificate in phonetics. The third was the London School of Economics where he was a student of C.G. Seligman. The choice of a major language for his dissertation at SOAS was decided, not by Doke's own current interests and former experience acquired in south-central Africa, but by Werner's ability to examine him. She had some knowledge of Zulu, acquired by working with Harriet Colenso, and, furthermore, there was a suitable Zulu-speaking informant available in the person of the Reverend John Dube who was in London at the time. Hence, though Doke had come with original material in Lamba and Luba, keen to exploit and develop his research into these languages, the choice was Zulu, and the topic 'A Dissertation on the Phonetics of the Zulu Language'. Duly qualified by his work in London, Doke returned to South Africa in August 1922. He was appointed Senior Lecturer in Bantu Philology as from the beginning of 1923 and proceeded to offer courses in Zulu, Phonetics and Ethnology.

Doke had only acquired competence in Zulu as a result of his work in London. The difference between the phonology of Zulu and that of Lamba, with which he was more familiar, had struck him forcibly, and encouraged, I believe, a penchant for phonetics as an approach to linguistic description and as a research field. Once appointed, he expanded his SOAS dissertation into a doctoral thesis, published as a special number of *Bantu Studies* in 1926 under the title *The Phonetics of the Zulu Language*. The problems raised by the analysis and description of the clicks in Zulu led him to investigate these types of sound in what he sensed had been their source, namely the Bushman languages of South West Africa, as they were then known. So in 1925, just two years after his appointment, and with his thesis completed, he undertook a research trip by oxwagon from Grootfontein, one of the termini of the railway from Swakopmund. His course lay along the Omuramba



Wamatako, a river or river course tributary to the Kunene. It involved a trek of some three hundred miles but he was successful in being able to meet both Berg Dama and Bush people. From among the latter he induced one of the men to stay with him for some time as an informant. The results of his work were published in December of the same year as 'An Outline of the Phonetics of the Language of the Qhung Bushmen of the North-West Kalahari' in *Bantu Studies*. He confessed that the Bushmen fascinated him more than any other African group, though the Lamba remained his own people, especially dear to him until the end of his life. The publication of his *Lamba Folk-Lore* witnessed to his wide and deep interest in the cultural life of these people (Doke 1927a).

The publication, also in 1927, of the *Text Book of Zulu Grammar* again emphasised the phonetician in Doke. For the underlying grammatical scheme, according to which the language was described and analysed, rested frankly on the incidence of a single phonological feature defined by Doke as stress, but later identified by Cole as length. As a result of observing how native speakers employed the criterion of penultimate 'stress' in slow speech, Doke claimed to have found the basic 'parts of speech' which reflected the structural categories peculiar to Bantu syntax. His approach may be neatly summarised by quoting four sentences from a pamphlet which he was to write in 1929 in defence of his proposals for conjunctive writing in Shona:

1. There in an inherent word-division in all Bantu speech.
2. Stress is the word builder in Bantu. In each word or wordgroup in Bantu there is one, and only one, main stress.
3. Each complete word *will be taken* [author's emphasis] to constitute some 'part of speech' according to the work which it does in the sentence.
4. Then these fundamental parts of speech ... may be further subdivided according to the form in which they appear.

In view of the foregoing I think it is true to say that Doke's interests during his early academic years, prior to the Shona enterprise, lay chiefly in the field of phonetic research. Possibly this was because he considered that the objective approach to the analysis and description of Bantu languages according to their own intrinsic categories and structure, on which he laid much importance, should rest on a rigorously scientific foundation. Within the whole field of philology, it was phonetics alone which could claim to supply this. Be this as it may, a further indication of

Doke's preoccupation with phonetics during the two years before the Shona assignment can be seen in the publication of three papers on Central African phonetics (Doke 1927c, 1928, 1929). In the latter study on Bemba, he collaborated with the Reverend B.H. Barnes, C.R., who was to be the moving spirit in the small language committee with which Doke was to work during the Shona enterprise.

This enterprise, namely Doke's research into the relationships between the Shona dialects and his proposals for a single writing system to serve those who spoke them, was led up to and rendered possible by two developments during 1928.[3] These developments had been gradually forming over a number of years but were only articulated then. The first was the acceptance by the government of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) of its responsibilities towards African education through the creation of a Department of Native Development (DND) which was to work in co-operation with the missionary societies who had hitherto been the pioneers in this task. The language question had presented itself since it was accepted that the medium of instruction was to be the pupils' own mother tongue in the early years of schooling. Hence it was clearly necessary to supply suitable textbooks in the languages concerned. It was the following sentence in the speech of the Colonial Secretary, outlining the government's intention, which convinced the missionary societies and, in particular, their organ, the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference (SRMC), that action on the question of a common literary language, so long desired but so long delayed, must be taken. Unanimity on this issue was the second of the developments to which reference has been made above. The decisive sentence ran,

> Without such textbooks no great advance can be made in Native Education, and I am hopeful that, *with Government assistance,* the missionary bodies of Southern Rhodesia will put their heads together to get a common language suitable to the needs of the different Mashona tribes so that larger and less expensive editions of higher class textbooks can be printed' [author's emphasis] (SRMC 1928, Item 23, p. 12).

Mrs C.S. Louw of the Dutch Reformed Mission at Morgenster, whose speech to the 1928 SRMC carried this information, added that the government had decided to give liberal grants in aid of the printing costs of editions of not less than five thousand copies of school textbooks in



the vernacular under certain conditions. One of these conditions was that there were to be only two versions recognised, one for Matabeleland and one for Mashonaland, and that the languages used were to be those decided upon by the SRMC.

The credit for the new direction must go to the Colonial Secretary of the time, Mr Leggatt. He not only brought about a new attitude towards African development in the Legislative Assembly, but also, by his practical good sense and promise of financial help in the production of books, secured a measure of agreement among concerned missionaries never witnessed before. The choice of the common written language was left to the SRMC whose members duly put their heads together the day after hearing of the government's proposals. Their response, still influenced by partisan feeling, as well as by uncertainty as to how to meet the condition of a single written language, was finally worded thus:

> This Conference finds itself unable to decide at present between the alternative of standardising two dialects for Mashonaland, viz. Chizezuru and Chikaranga, or of standardising a unified language built on all four existing dialects. We therefore prefer to reserve our opinion until expert advice has been obtained. We would respectfully request the Government to approach the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures with a view to obtaining a suitable expert to investigate and advise upon the matter. (SRMC 1928)

This, the result of lengthy discussion, was the substantive motion of the Conference and was carried unanimously. Thereupon the Director of the DND appointed a committee of missionaries he considered knowledgeable and representative of the three main areas concerned to collaborate with the expert to be chosen. They were the Reverend B.H. Barnes, C.R., Chairman, who was to speak in particular for the two eastern groups of dialects, loosely termed Manyika and Ndau, Mrs C.S. Louw of Morgenster for the south-eastern dialects grouped as Karanga, and the Reverend A. Burbridge, S.J. for the central dialects grouped as Zezuru. Doke was the International Institute's nominee and, when he was apprised of this and of the scope of the work of the committee with which he was to work, immediately sent Barnes a preliminary questionnaire. The answers to this would suggest useful lines of enquiry. The most useful contribution of the committee consisted of the compiling of comparative vocabularies which 'made abundantly clear

the great extent of agreement as to vocabulary among the Shona dialects' (Doke 1931:9). In an interim report to the Director of Native Development on the progress of their preparatory work, the Chairman, somewhat prematurely perhaps, prescribed proposals which would guide Doke's research:

1. That under Dr Doke's expert guidance we definitely set about unifying the orthography.
2. That for the present we advise the Government to give what aid they may deem necessary to Chizezuru and Karanga publications in the agreed common orthography.
3. That a final solution be sought, not in the selection of any one or two dialects, but by taking steps to secure the mingling of all the dialects on equal terms, thus leaving ultimate unification to the natural selection of the people using the dialects. (Interim Report of Language Committee, 3-4. Burbridge Papers, No. 1)

The comparative vocabularies had by this time, late in 1928, 'suggested very forcibly that the 'languages', even as represented in the different locally produced vocabularies, were not four different languages at all, but really only dialects of one language. A great deal of the apparent unlikeness clearly followed from the curiously diverse ways of representing some of the sounds' (Interim Report, 3). Instead of this curious diversity, a single orthography would reveal the underlying unity. Such was clearly the expectation of the committee, or at least of its chairman. But could a single orthography meet the requirements of all the dialects in regard to their written representation? One of the questions in Doke's preliminary questionnaire was, 'Wherein do the dialects differ in phonetics?' (Doke 1931:7,9). To this the Committee could provide no complete answer and, as Doke wrote later in his *Report,* this question formed the centre of his year's work and, one may add, the area of his greatest interest.

Another and more basic question to which no certain answer could be given was 'How many allied 'Mashonaland' dialects are there?' Doke eventually claimed to have discovered the existence of at least fifty-one sub-dialects. From these he selected thirty-seven for purposes of comparison by means of lists of words written in International Phonetic Alphabetic script. These he grouped into six dialect groups or clusters, the familiar four (Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Ndau) to which he added



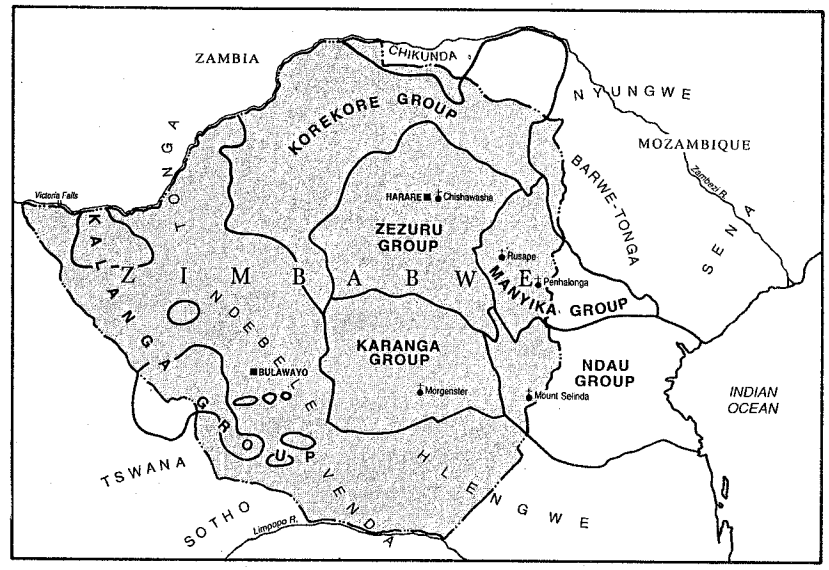


*Figure 1. Shona language groups in Zimbabwe and mission stations mentioned in the text. (Source: Doke 1931).*

Korekore to cover the northern dialects, and Kalanga, those of the south-west and west. His identification of subdialects or local varieties was fairly objective as he was aided, not only by his own instrumental research, but also by the existence of local names reflecting the sense and experience of the people speaking these languages and who could distinguish their own speech from other neighbouring forms. In his grouping of the sub-dialects into clusters, however, Doke seems to have accepted without question the classification current in the SRMC. He speaks of the 'four known main dialects' of Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika and Ndau, groupings which have been found to be linguistically highly imprecise and approximate (Doke 1931:7).[4]

In his preliminary report to his Director, Barnes mentioned the committee's intention to consult the Reverend Francisque Marconnès of Chishawasha on 'these language questions on which he has spent so many years of careful and devoted work'. He also mentioned, in his capacity of representing Ndau as well as Manyika, the consultation he had held with the missionaries of the American Board who, working in the fringe dialects of Ndau, desired to be included in any scheme of unification. At this meeting suggestions as to new symbols were put

forward by Dr W.L. Thompson, an old campaigner in the cause of a unified and unambiguous orthography for Shona (Interim Report, p. 5). Marconnès and Thompson represented two extremes between which the committee and Doke himself were to move. Marconnès saw no need for any symbols other than those of the 'old alphabet so that the ordinary student would not be frightened nor the mechanical equipment of the small printer and ordinary typist overtaxed' (Marconnès 1931:1).[5] Thompson had been for many years, in fact since 1909 when the question of a uniform system of spelling Shona had first surfaced, a strong advocate of the IPA for all the languages of Southern Africa. 'New sounds should have new characters' and, if the IPA symbols were not available, one should not hesitate to turn to other distinctive means such as the use of numerals to represent them. Thus he advocated the use of the numerals <6, 8, 2, 9> for the sounds to be represented in Doke's unified orthography as <ʂ, ʐ, tʂ, dʐ> (Thompson 1927:67).[6]

Other views were being canvassed by C.S. Louw, the 'Karanga member' of the committee, and she contributed to its files suggestions for a practical orthography from authorities who included Professors D. Westermann, C. Meinhof and D. Jones. Thus the committee was faced with a range of divergent views and aware of a number of possibilities. Barnes stated, 'The only point on which the committee was certainly of one mind in the difficult question of orthography is in desiring to do away with diacritics and to make the necessary changes as few and simple as possible' (Interim Report, p. 5). The use of diacritics had been a feature of the publications of the mission presses of Mount Selinda (for Ndau), Morgenster (for Karanga) and Chishawasha (for Zezuru). For example, the sounds for which Thompson had proposed the use of numerals had been spelt <s̲, z̲, ts̲, dz̲> in Louw (1905).

As a result of his research into the dialects of Shona, and their relationship to one another, Doke was confident enough to be able to make a number of recommendations which, if followed, would lead to the creation of 'one unified literary language' (Doke 1931:77, Recommendation 2). This present account is concerned mainly with Recommendations 6 and 7 which define the form of the proposed orthography (Doke 1931:82-99). Recommendation 6 called for the use of the conjunctive method of word division. The case for it had already been separately and fully argued in the pamphlet previously mentioned and followed the same lines as Doke had applied in his *Textbook of Zulu Grammar*. There were few objections to this Recommendation in subsequent discussions. Recommendation 7 called for the adoption of



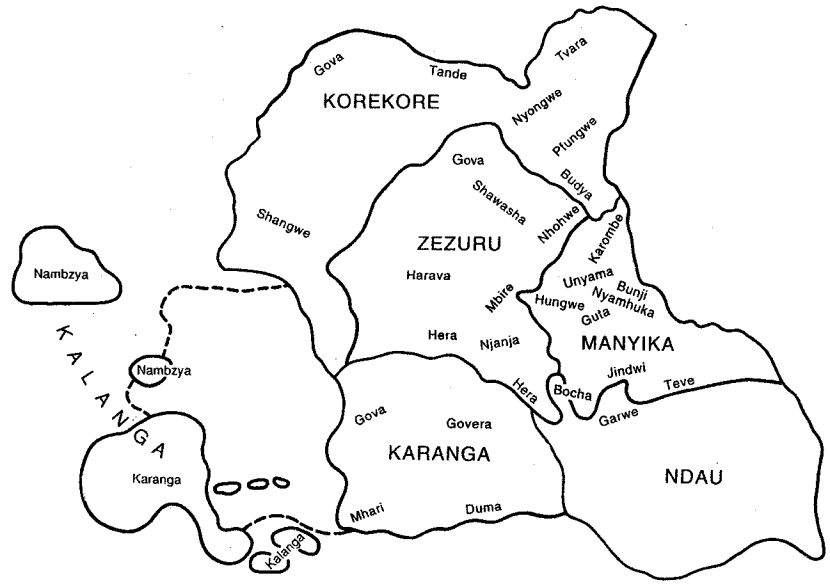


*Figure 2. Shona language groups and representative subdialects. (Source: Doke 1931).*

the Africa Alphabet of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IAI) as presented in its first Memorandum entitled *Practical Orthography of African Languages*. In it, the IAI recommended that African languages should be written on a Romanic basis but added that 'special consonant letters' should be used to supplement the ordinary Roman letters (IAI 1927:3-4). The Memorandum obviously implied that African phonologies should have orthographies tailored to suit their needs and which represented them at first hand. But the reason given for special symbols was the practical one that diacritics, which necessarily come into play to adapt Roman letters to African values, are unsatisfactory on pedagogical, psychological and typographical grounds (IAI 1927:5).

I turn now to a short account of the orthography which Doke recommended. The brackets <and> are used to indicate the letters and letter combinations which were eventually prescribed as the 'new orthography'. Shona phonology could be provided for only partially by the Africa Alphabet. Doke seems to have drawn on the IPA for his symbolisation of the voiced implosives, bilabial <ɓ> and alveolar <ɗ>,

and for that of the labialised alveolar fricatives, voiceless <ʂ> and breathy voiced <ʐ>, though, in IPA, these latter stand for retroflex fricatives, not labialised ones. The remainder of the special symbols which he recommended for the unified orthography, namely <ʋ, ʃ, ʒ, ŋ>, are to be found in the Institute's table of symbols.

With the addition of these eight special symbols, the alphabet of single letters recommended for unified Shona comprised the following, amounting to 32:

<a b ɓ c d ɗ e f g h i j k m n ŋ o p r s ʂ ʃ t u v ʋ w x y z ʐ ʒ>

In addition, it was necessary to list all the digraphs and trigraphs for the compound consonantal onsets that could occur, and which were symbolised by combinations of single letters such as the affricates <pf, bv, ts, dz> sanctioned by the Africa Alphabet. In keeping with these, Doke recommended <tʂ, dʐ> for the alveolar labialised affricates. For the prepalatal affricates [tʃ, dʒ] he recommended the single letters <c, j>, and <ny> for [ɲ] as suggested by the IAI. In all, 45 digraphs and trigraphs were recommended to provide for all the compound consonantal onsets. They are as follow:

- the affricates <pf, ts, bv, dz, tʂ, dʐ>
- the nasal-oral combinations <mb, nd, ŋg, nj, mv, nz, nʐ>
- the voiceless aspirated stops <ph, th, kh> found in Ndau and Manyika
- the breathy voiced nasals <mh, nh>
- the numerous dialectal diaphones by which the consonants in the verb radicals meaning 'fear', 'eat' and 'relieve the bowels' are symbolised, namely <ty, dy, nny>
- the lengthened <nn> which occurs in the single adjectival stem *-nna* 'four' but only in Karanga and Kalanga
- the combinations of single and compound consonants followed by [w], <px, bg, mŋ, mbg, mx, tw, dw, nw, kw, gw, ŋgw> etc.

These consonant+*w* combinations are very numerous, and Doke was inconsistent in the symbolisation he advocated which was partly phonetic and partly phonemic. It was semi-phonetic in the case of combinations of bilabials with /w/, and phonemic in the case of all others. The IAI's Memorandum, under the heading of 'General Principles', stresses the importance of the recognition of phonemes in establishing an orthography (IAI 1927:9-10). It is strange that Doke makes no mention or explicit use of this important principle in his recommendations, in particular in his treatment of the consonant+*w*



combinations which call for such an application. He seems to have been led to follow his phonetic bent by his fascination with what he misleadingly called 'velarisation' (Doke 1931:53-57).[7] The term is a misnomer because the combinations of consonants + *w* in their several dialectal varieties are not velarised in the sense that they involve a change from non-velar to velar. What happens is that /w/, already velar, is realised in such combinations as a remarkable series of velar allophones (stops, fricatives, approximants), depending on dialect and phonetic environment. Instead of recognising the phonemic unity underlying all the different realisations of /w/ in these combinations, Doke chose to give special prominence to those occurring after bilabials, hence <px, bg, mŋ, mbg> for /pw, bw, mw, mbw/. But he symbolised them as <w> in all other contexts, for example, <tw, sw, kw, gw> etc.[8]

In the combinations which appear to have resulted from the influence of the palatal approximant /y/, namely <ty, dy, nny>, Doke's choice of symbols followed, perhaps unconsciously, phonemic principles, and they have consequently endured through all the changes in orthography which have followed, and in spite of representing the greatest range of dialectal diaphones (Doke 1931:87). Evidently Doke was too much of a pragmatic phonetician to accept the theory of the phoneme though he applied the test of minimal pairs, normally used to discover the existence of distinct phonemes, to justify the use of distinct letters. For example, <ɓ> is distinguished from <b>, <p> from <ph>, and high, mid and low tones from one another by comparing minimal pairs (Doke 1931:45, 67, 74).

Doke completed his work well within the year 1929, but before the final version was prepared the Director of the DND, Heli Jowitt, wished to secure the imprimatur of the IAI. In a letter to its Secretary General, Major Hans Vischer, he asked for its decision to be cabled. He wrote, 'The reason underlying the above suggestion is the urgency of a decision in view of the fact that Dr. Doke's final report will not be submitted to Government and will not go to press until we hear from you.' Other reasons Jowitt had for requesting a prompt reply were that the printing of his own annual report would otherwise be delayed and controlling regulations relative to the subsidising of vernacular publications needed to be drafted.[9] In the event, as Doke mentioned in his introductory remarks to the *Report,* his recommendations regarding the alphabet and the orthography received the endorsement of the IAI (Doke 1931:2). They were not presented to the Legislative Assembly, however, at least in printed form, until 1931. Prior to this formal step it was necessary to put the proposals to the body which had requested them, namely the

SRMC. This Jowitt did in 1930 by circulating to members of the Conference Doke's eleven recommendations with the proposed alphabet which had been printed in the DND *Annual Report* of the previous year. Discussion on the orthography was preceded by a stout defence by Jowitt of the use of African languages as against the use of English in schools. At that time less than two per cent of pupils were in standards above Standard 2, and ninety per cent were in infant classes. 'It was obvious that the vernacular must remain. It was definitely rich enough to be attractive as a literature, and educationally it was inevitable.'[10]

On the orthography the Conference expressed gratitude and appreciation to Doke, to the Language Committee, to the Colonial Secretary and the Director of the DND for their work, understanding and financial assistance. But it was less than enthusiastic about the Recommendations as they stood. The most influential members, John White of Epworth and A.A. Louw, Jr. of Morgenster, were for a gradual transition from the 'old regime' of separate orthographies to the new with its fearsome battery of unfamiliar letters, 'a veritable Chinese puzzle'. They were in favour of only a modified conjunctive method and a reduction in the number of new symbols (SRMC Minutes 1930).

Obviously, a good deal of persuasion and explanation was going to be necessary to induce users of the old systems to accept and apply the new in the different fields where it was now required. These would be mainly school textbooks, but there were also the questions of missionary and religious literature, government language examinations and the preparation of a new dictionary which Barnes saw as the most important aid towards unification. 'Unify the orthography and pool the vocabularies' was his slogan. In an article contributed to the *Native Affairs Department Annual* (NADA), Barnes (1934) traced the immediate steps taken to implement the change. At the 1930 meeting of the Advisory Board for Native Development, John White had sought to temper the new developments to the existing educational and missionary situation. Declaring that there was a good deal of misunderstanding in regard to the Shona language, he urged that effective steps should be taken, in the form of an enlarged committee, 'to assist as far as possible, the communities represented in writing and using the language'. So government was requested, at a suitable period after the receipt and circulation of Doke's *Report*, to convene a language committee. This committee was to consist of Doke himself, the three members who had earlier worked with him, two members of the Native Affairs



Department, two members of the NDD, and two from the SRMC chosen by its Executive Committee. Their task was to advise government concerning the early adoption *or modification* of Doke's recommendations regarding the Shona language (author's emphasis).[11] This request, worded by Jowitt as Director of the DND, left the question open as a gesture of the doubters anxious to keep the discussion practical and close to the ground. However, when this enlarged committee met in the following year, it approved Doke's recommendations *in toto* save that <sh> and <zh> were substituted for <ʃ> and <ʒ>, this being the only modification that Doke was prepared to accept (Barnes 1934:32).[12] So the new recommendations were submitted to government and accepted as the official orthography on 3 September 1931. Subsequent revisions of the Doke alphabet in 1955 and 1967 were to make great use of suitable digraphs formed by combinations of roman letters to symbolise single phonemes instead of the special symbols. Their use has proved a viable and effective alternative to the use of single letters, either 'phonetic' or marked by diacritics. This device was not considered by the enlarged committee, however, save in the cases of <ny> (in the original Doke alphabet) and the substituted <sh> and <zh>. To do so would be contrary to the principle of 'one sound, one symbol', and its corollary, 'one symbol, one sound'.

As regards the situation in 1934, the date of Barnes's 'Progress' article, the writer considered that things were going reasonably well. True there was as yet no one in Mashonaland who thought of himself as a member of a 'Shona' people, or as speaking a language called 'Shona'. Individual clans and their dialects had their own names but, with the introduction of a common single system for writing them all, recognition of their relationship, already seminally present, would grow, and a single literary form would develop. The aim of the committee had been to remove the obstacles to this natural development. As Barnes put it, anxious to stress the value and promise latent in Doke's work, 'I suppose that few, if any, of the Bantu languages have had the advantage of such close and careful expert study at such an early stage' (Barnes 1934:35).

Among the steps taken to implement the new system had been the provision of readers in the new orthography from three mission presses now equipped with the new founts. Another was the provision of courses for teachers in training. Barnes himself had published his *Vocabulary of the Dialects of Mashonaland in the New Orthography* in 1932, and a Shona grammar was with the publishers. This was *A Shona Grammar, Zezuru Dialect* by the Reverend J. O'Neil, S.J. with notes on Karanga

and Manyika by the Reverend A.A. Louw, Jr. and the Reverend B.H. Barnes, C.R.

Progress in the use of the new orthography could be reasonably assured in institutions either controlled or aided by the DND. Its adoption in other spheres, such as the sister, but by no means sisterly, Department of Native Affairs, the post office, the police and the press was, to say the least, in doubt. As regards the NAD, Barnes hinted delicately that particularly its younger members should show some gratitude to their government for providing such help towards the adequate mastery of Shona which their work, lying among the Native people, seemed to demand. 'I should not dare to suggest to the older officials that they must learn the new tricks and perform them themselves. But I do suggest that they need not be afraid to encourage the younger men who are coming on to study the sounds of the native speech and to endeavour, both in speaking and in writing, to reproduce them as accurately as can be done' (Barnes 1934:35). An indication of the extent to which the NAD considered it necessary to conform in regard to written Shona can be gathered from an inspection of the papers of the annual Civil Service Native Language Examinations. Appointments and promotion within the NAD depended on passing this examination. The papers from 1912-1922, in which the language is called Chiswina, and from 1924-1934 in which the term is Chishona, are all set in the varying idiosyncratic and approximate spellings in use by Native Commissioners and their clerks. They are not exemplary either in matters of grammar.[13]

The attitude of the NAD was well expressed in a letter of 22 January 1935 from the Minister for Native Affairs, Dr Godfrey Huggins, in reply to one from Father Barnes urging adoption by the NAD of the new orthography. Huggins was to become Prime Minister later in the same year. He replied that there was no question of introducing the new orthography into the Department. 'The very numerous young officials in that Department have passed their Native Language Examination already, and they have far too much to do to expect them to pass another one ... After I took office about fifteen months ago, the first missionary who came to see me was violently opposed to the new orthography, and asked me what I was going to do about it. I told him I knew nothing about it, and from the number of people I have discussed the matter with since, I should say that about 50 per cent are in favour and 50 per cent are against it. Meanwhile it is the official language of the Native Development Department and will continue to be so.'[14]



Another obvious area in which the adoption of the new orthography was desirable was the press catering for the African reading public. Its attitude at this time is recalled in an editorial of the *Bantu Mirror* of 22 February 1944, contemplating the start of a paper in Salisbury. 'The question of orthography is almost certain to be raised by some who think that the New Orthography should be adopted. It will therefore be wise to recall the discussions which led to the decision that, whatever others might do, the Native Newspapers would stick to the characters or symbols found in the English alphabet.'

The division of opinion to which Huggins referred caused the country to have two Shona orthographies, side by side, from 1931 to 1955. The opposition to, and criticism of, Doke's proposals, politely voiced in the SRMC and discreetly reported in its Minutes, was much more outspoken outside. 'There are few subjects on which mere opinions can differ so fundamentally as on the correct representation of the sounds we think we hear,' wrote Barnes (1934:32). He could have added that a threat to the way we spell our language rouses feelings such as few other issues provoke. For an example of the criticism voiced, and the feelings expressed, we have a pamphlet published about this time by the missionary, A.S. Cripps, well-known for his devotion to the Shona people. It is entitled, somewhat tendentiously, *Language-Making in Mashonaland*. Cripps had taken up the challenge posed by the new orthography following on the death of John White. The pamphlet is dedicated to the memory of 'John White of Mashonaland' and the author, conscious of his mission, quotes the following words from *The Pilgrim's Progress:* 'My Sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my Pilgrimage.' The views expressed by the contributors, 'Four Europeans and Four Africans', give a fair sample of the feelings of many about the change. H.M.G. Jackson, Sometime Chief Native Commissioner of Southern Rhodesia, contributed the Preface. He applauded the aim of Doke's work but deplored the means, namely 'the use of exotic symbols' which 'impose the strain of mastering dual systems upon people who are unable to bear it' (Cripps n.d.:vi).

Similarly, Canon Edgar Lloyd of Rusape voiced the more sensible objections arising out of 'the invention of new symbols to express certain peculiar sounds in the language'. It was 'both quite unnecessary and also a gratuitous looking for trouble ... Surely an agreed combination of the letters of the present civilised alphabet could have been devised, and would have been found more generally acceptable, as an agreed convention. This would have allowed much good work done by the

committee to commend itself, and would have withstood the test applied by general readers who are, after all, the main people to be considered' (Cripps n.d.:21).

Another criticism voiced in the pamphlet concerned the lack of any African representative on the Language Committee responsible for launching the new orthography. At the 1932 SRMC, the Reverend M.J. Rusike, a prominent member of the Methodist Church, had put forward a motion in favour of such representation, but it was withdrawn in favour of the following: 'That the Director of Native Development be requested to ensure adequate consultation with Native assistants in the functioning of the Language Committee' (SRMC Minutes, 1932). In Barnes's view, 'the Native population of the next generation or two' were to be the court of final appeal who would, after due trial, pass the verdict on the orthographic reform (1934:35).

John White's last contribution was a letter, printed in Cripps's pamphlet, pleading for a continued supply of the old literature for those who had become used to it and would know no other. Dated 22 March 1933, it was a reasonable appeal on behalf of the people for whom he had done so much in an apostolate lasting nearly forty years. 'Let there be no attempt to coerce the people in this way to adopt the new regime. Time must decide the issue between the two schools' (Cripps n.d.:v).

For the rest, much heat and little light were engendered by the implication that a White Man's Native Language was being foisted on the unfortunate people of Mashonaland who were now being robbed of this last remaining vestige of their culture. 'Are our Tribes to be dispossessed of their own Speech as well as of their own Land?', cried Cripps. And M.J. Rusike asserted, using one of the orthographies being replaced, namely that used in John White's translation of the New Testament, published as early as 1907, *'Barungu bari kuita rurimi rutswa rwa bano timanikidza kuti titaure'* (The Europeans are making up a new language which they will force us to speak) (Cripps n.d.:5, 16).

As the thirties wore on and gave way to the forties, the supporters of the new orthography and their influence gradually faded from the scene. By 1938 both Barnes and C.S. Louw had died. Their places on the DND's Language Committee were taken by the Reverend Morely Wright (for Manyika) and the Reverend Harald von Sicard (for Karanga). Jowitt was succeeded by J. Farquhar in the new capacity of Director of Native Education. Farquhar was against the use of African languages as subjects or as media of instruction above the very earliest classes. He wrote that English should be the language of education.



Unified Shona was a creation from above and from without. It was the work of phoneticians eager to apply the rules of the IPA, not the result of an indigenous development. There was a strong desire to reintroduce the roman alphabet to simplify printing, reading and writing (Farquhar 1946:13).

In the same year, a former colleague of Father Barnes, the Reverend Father Baker, C.R., moved in the SRMC that a return be made to the recognised twenty-six symbols of the Roman alphabet and that the system of conjunctive writing should be modified. The Department of Native Education was asked to ignore for the future Recommendations 6 and 7 of the Doke *Report*, and to instruct the official Language Committee accordingly. No vote was taken on this motion but, after strong views had been expressed on both sides, the whole question was referred to a committee to be appointed by the executive with the further recommendation that Africans be included as members (SRMC Minutes, 1946). Increasingly the Conference was being won over to this view, though a last attempt in a contrary direction was made in 1950 by the SRMC to maintain the Doke orthography in education and to persuade government and the press to adopt it too, 'one common orthography being a fundamental prerequisite for the growth and development of Shona as a literary language'. An argument put forward at this Conference which strongly influenced the passing of the resolution was the fact that the complete Shona Bible, printed in the New Orthography, had just come out. In the main it was the work of the Reverend A.A. Louw, Jr. and it was an outstanding literary achievement (SRMC Minutes, 1950). Moreover, its printing and publication had cost Morgenster a good deal of money.

The replies from African Newspapers Ltd and the Secretary for Native Affairs were reported to the 1952 Conference and proved uncooperative. The latter wrote, 'I have to advise that, while sympathising with the position in which the Missions find themselves with regard to the publication of material in the new orthography, there appears to be little support for the project outside educational circles. Many issues are involved and it is proposed to reinstate the Language Committee or an Advisory Literature Committee in order that future policy may have the careful attention it obviously deserves' (SRMC Minutes, 1952).

Meanwhile, with literacy becoming more and more widespread, and dependence upon written Shona ever greater in the conduct of everyday life, the existence of two official, and several unofficial, forms of writing the language was becoming more and more anomalous and embarassing.

In December 1953 the NAD took the initiative and appointed an Interim Literature Committee to tackle the problem. Its membership was impressive: it was chaired by the Chief Native Commissioner, and had as prominent members the Chief Information Officer and the Publications Officer of the NAD's Information Services Branch. Also included were the Director and two Inspectors of the NED, and representatives from the African press and the SRMC. This committee decided to test public opinion on the issue before it, and the Information Services Branch, in consultation with the Director of the NED, were requested to conduct the enquiry. Two questionnaires were sent out, Questionnaire A for general distribution and Questionnaire B for the printing and publishing trade. Essentially, opinion was desired on two points:

- Should there be a single standard orthography for the Shona dialects?
- If so, should it be the 1931 orthography, or a modified form of this containing just one or two special symbols considered necessary, or, finally, one using only the letters of the English alphabet?

The persons and bodies addressed were asked to give reasons for their choices as otherwise they would not be taken into account.

The memorandum accompanying the questionnaires ably described the confused and frustrating situation that had called for the enquiry. Among its more telling points were the following:

> It would appear that the need to use six phonetic symbols has hitherto hindered the universal adoption of the 'New Orthography'. Conservatism, the need to equip presses and typewriters specially, the desire for economy and the lurking suspicion that it is possible to produce a practical Shona alphabet using only the letters of the English alphabet, have all played their part in producing the present somewhat absurd 'multiple Shona orthography' situation.
>
> All Shona readers read the vernacular newspapers without apparent difficulty. The majority of Shona-speaking Africans are required, in practice, to be able to read Shona in at least two systems of spelling, one imposed for school use and the other provided by the African press. The situation is definitely not conducive to the production of a strong, well-based Shona literature with a wide circulation. The Government has therefore decided to institute an enquiry into the matter of Shona orthography in the hope that one Shona orthography may be adopted by all. (Interim Literature Committee of the NAD: Questionnaire on Shona Orthography, 29 Dec. 1953)



The enquiry, calling as it did for both opinions and reasons motivating them, was a brilliantly executed exercise, completed in just four months. It yielded a most interesting picture of an orthography and its writers and readers in transition. The documents covering the operation should be part of the library of any sociolinguist today. The provisional conclusions on the evidence provided by the two questionnaires was fairly summarised by the Publications Officer, D.P. Abraham, in the following two paragraphs:

> The 'New Orthography' is in many respects more scientific in form than other systems of spelling Chishona used hitherto, but a majority of European and African opinion, individual and institutional, appears to favour the use of a Roman alphabet Shona orthography on the grounds of simplicity and economy. The economic standpoint, that to produce literature as cheap as possible for Africans it is necessary to adhere to the Roman alphabet for Chishona, is supported by the Government and African newspaper presses, and by most of the notable publishing houses who submitted replies, as well as by three major mission presses.
>
> The position is arrived at, therefore, that it becomes necessary to resolve a situation that for many years has proved a linguistic and educational embarrassment to the Mashona, and has hindered the plentiful production of books on all subjects to meet their requirements. The weight of opinion favours abandonment of the 'New Orthography'. If this course is taken, it will be necessary to formulate a single standard orthography using only the letters of the Roman alphabet, to be adopted as the officially recognised Shona orthography. (Report on a Preliminary Enquiry into Shona Orthography, 1 May 1954).

The results of the enquiry showed that 65 per cent of the replies to Questionnaire A, and 77 per cent of those to Questionnaire B, were in favour of a roman alphabet Shona orthography. Professor Doke provided the only vote for the New Orthography from the several academic interests canvassed.

The results of the enquiry provided the agenda for the third meeting of

the Interim Literature Committee, held on 19 May 1954. Its first resolution, proposed and seconded by two of the SRMC representatives, the Reverend S.K. Jackson and the Reverend Father Bradshaw, C.R., was carried by six votes to two. It recommended that a standard Roman alphabet orthography be accepted for Chishona for all official purposes. The two dissenting votes were those of the NED inspectors who stressed the difficulties that would arise in abolishing a system used for over twenty years in the schools.

This done, consideration was given to the means whereby this recommendation could be put into effect. It was then decided to request government to 'appoint a committee to devise a method of writing the sounds of the Shona dialects with the letters of the Roman alphabet, with due regard to the system at present in use in the schools, and bearing in mind the problems of word-division and the need for urgency'. As regards the membership of the proposed committee, it was decided that it should be small, be informed in regard to linguistics and the Shona dialects, and be able to command the confidence of the interests concerned. Its representations should also be open to review before final acceptance. Two other issues were ventilated and are interesting in view of later developments. The first raised the possibility that the proposed committee might form the foundation of a permanent Shona Language Committee, competent to deal with the problems of the developing written language. The second alluded to the need for a publication fund to promote the writing and publication of literature in Shona (Interim Literature Committee, Minutes of the Third Meeting, 19 May 1954).

The initiative of the NAD had been encouraged, and even anticipated, by the views and work of influential members of the SRMC. Members active in the cause of the growth of Shona literature, such as the Reverend A.A. Louw, Jr. and the Reverend S.K. Jackson, were investigating ways in which a more practical orthography might be devised. Academic opinion from authorities in the field of African language study, such as G.P. Lestrade of the University of Cape Town, A.N. Tucker of the School of Oriental and African Studies, and N.J. van Warmelo of the NAD (South Africa), was sought. C.M. Doke was again approached for his opinion by the chairman of the Shona Orthography Committee of the DRC, the Reverend C.J.J. Brand, as early as 1950. He replied: 'I am not prepared to give way to any change in the conjunctive writing. In regard to special symbols I feel it might be possible to substitute *sf* for ʂ, and *zv* for ʐ ... The other symbols for the bilabial fricatives and velar nasal, as well as the use of *c* , (not *ch),* are



essential to the orthographic settlement.'[15]

Thus digraphs for single phonemes, spurious constructs hateful to the phonetician, were gradually being accepted as substitutes for the ideally unambiguous creations of the IPA. <sh> and <zh> had been allowed in the New Orthography instead of /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ in 1931, and Marconnés's long-standing suggestion of <sv> and <zv> for /ʂ/ and /ʐ/ was being increasingly favoured. The need to replace <ʂ> and <ʐ> in particular evoked some strange suggestions. A.N. Tucker proposed <fs> and <vz> on philological grounds suggested by Ur-Bantu sound shifts. His colleague, Hazel Carter, suggested the use of cedillas with <s> and <z> to stand for labialisation.[16] A.A. Louw, Jr. would reluctantly accept <sw> and <zw> 'in spite of the fact that this would be another inconsistency which would bring us into difficulties with velarization combinations which we have accepted'[17] In 1950 S.K. Jackson had put forward the capital letter <C> to stand for /ʐ/, and <ç> for /ʂ/.[18] In the same year, the present writer, upon being approached by Jackson for his opinion on the matter, advocated the use of <sv> and <zv>, the convention being that the use of *v*, common to both digraphs, would indicate the common phenomenon of labialisation. I added, 'May I also express the hope that *all* the special symbols will be scrapped, thus giving Shona some hope of surviving as a written language. As I see it, to leave even one special symbol in the orthography is to cut down the output of the press by about 50 per cent.'[19]

On the implications for the text of the Shona Bible, Jackson had this to say, 'We all feel deeply the presence of the Shona Bible in Southern Rhodesia. It was an important factor in the resolution by the SRMC [in 1950] to adhere to the 'New Orthography'. If, however, the production of literature for a people is hampered by an unrealistic orthography, it is not fair to point to the Bible as a reason why the unfavourable conditions should remain for ever. There is no doubt in my mind that very soon the Bible in Shona should be revised ... When the Bible is to be revised, there is no reason why the orthography cannot be changed as well' (S.K. Jackson, Memorandum).

A.A. Louw, Jr., the translator of the Bible, also wrote about this time, 'In spite of the fact that I have written the whole Bible in the new orthography, I am by no means wedded to it, and would welcome a simplification.' As a member of the official 1931 committee which had approved the New Orthography he had in fact pleaded for a simpler orthography 'but did not succeed in convincing my fellow members on the committee, especially Dr Doke'.[20]

At this time Doke was in the process of withdrawing from academic life and was no longer disposed to contribute any further. He was, however, urgently called upon to do so by the Reverend Harald von Sicard, a member of the SRMC who had been appointed to represent Karanga on the dormant official Shona Language Committee after the death of C.S. Louw in 1938. He wrote, 'Do you know that the Rev. Jackson of Morgenster is attacking our Shona orthography? No doubt, Government would back him. I never expected the objections to come from there. In a memorandum he says he does not know of any other Bantu language with six new symbols. Do you? Personally I think his suggestion is based on purely local Rhodesian considerations without viewing the question from a wider African angle. I would greatly appreciate it if you could assist me in fighting his "new" orthography.'[21] Von Sicard was greatly interested in Shona oral literature and traditional history. He had used the 1931 orthography extensively in rendering Shona texts, as in his large collection of Shona folktales, and was understandably disturbed.

Doke passed the matter to the present writer to deal with in a moving letter which expressed a degree of trust greatly appreciated. He wrote, 'My present state of health is not conducive to enter a controversy of this type, and as I am in the midst of packing and the worries of removal on retiring, I feel that you, who have made a special study of Shona, would be the right man to deal with the present situation.'[22]

'The present situation' was being very ably dealt with by the Publications Officer of the Information Services Branch. The committee recommended by the Interim Literature Committee had been approved by government as the Shona Orthography Committee and it met on 4 July 1954. The chairman it selected was the Reverend S.K. Jackson, and its convenor and secretary was D.P. Abraham, the Publications Officer. There was a representative from the NED, two prominent Africans, Adv. H. W. Chitepo and M.M. Hove, Federal M.P. and former editor of *The Bantu Mirror*, and two linguists, the Reverend Michael Hannan, S.J., examiner in Shona for the Cambridge Examination Certificate, and the present writer.

The minutes of the four-day meeting, which were compiled by D.P. Abraham, are an impressive testimony to the range and thoroughness of the work done. It contained in particular an exhaustive list of the phonemes, allophones and diaphones of Shona, exemplified and described with a refinement of detail never attempted before or since, which Abraham had prepared in advance. However, the orthography



devised by the committee, known subsequently as the 1955 Spelling, failed to preserve the distinctions which Doke had recognised and, indeed, discovered. In particular, the symbols <b> and <d> were to stand for both the voiced implosive and the breathy voiced explosive stops [ɓ, b] and [ɗ, d]. The letter <v> was to stand for both the voiced labiodental/bilabial approximant and the breathy voiced fricative [ʋ, v]. Finally, the digraph <ng> was to stand for both the velar nasal and its combination with the voiced velar stop [ŋ, ŋg]. Some of the committee urged that the phonemic character of the spelling could be preserved by a judicious use of <h> in digraphs such as <bh, dh, vh> which would contrast with <b, d, v>, but this was rejected, in particular by the African members. Their reasons were that the orthography was being designed primarily for Shona speakers and readers who would know from the contexts in which the ambiguous letters would occur what values to give them. They also thought that what they considered the excessive use of <h> would make the written language look 'funny'.[23] The committee then compiled *A Guide to Standard Shona Spelling* (Shona Language Committee 1955) which was published the following year, after its recommendations had been approved.

In the event, however, most of what Doke had contributed to Shona was carried over into the 1955 spelling. Almost all of his recommendations regarding word-division were retained, the only departure being a decision to separate forms based on the very common verb equivalent /-NA/ 'be with; have' into two words. For example, *ndiné nzára* 'I have hunger, am hungry'. This practice parallels forms based on the similarly defective verb radical /-RI/ 'be'. For example, *ndirí múnhu* 'I am a person'. The change to the Roman alphabet was soon shown to be beneficial in the rapid appearance of publications of all kinds and the growth of an authentic written literature, in continuity with its oral roots, but profiting also from the influence of the literary genres of English. In this the Publications Bureau which Doke had called for was chiefly instrumental. The word division which he had prescribed was one in which the supple and subtle syntax of Shona could appear and be easily appreciated. Most of all, Doke's timely, informed and energetic work saved Shona from the divisive fragmentation which still afflicts the orthographies of the Nguni, Sotho and Tsonga dialects. He laid the foundation for the emergence of a single Shona-literate community with a common literature, even now 'an asset to the literatures of the world'.

## *NOTES*

1. The details of Doke's missionary stint and his early academic career which are mentioned here were related by him to the writer during a visit to Kwesu, Doke's home in Alice, in 1963.
2. See the paper by Fivaz in this volume.
3. In describing the stages and significant moments in the evolution of the Shona orthography, the following sources have been drawn upon: (i) Reports of the proceedings of the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference, (ii) Papers relevant to the orthography question filed by the Reverend A. Burbridge, S.J. in his capacity as the representative of the Zezuru dialects on the Department of Native Development's Language Committee, 1929 and following years, (iii) Doke's *Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects*, presented to the [Southern Rhodesian] Legislative Assembly, 1931 [S.R. 25-1931], (iv) Minutes of the Interim Literature Committee, the Orthography Committee, and the Shona Language Committee, all of the Native Affairs Department, Southern Rhodesia, (v) Letters and memoranda sent to the writer in connection with his work on the Committees mentioned under (iv) above.
4. In particular, the clusters identified as Manyika and Ndau included linguistically very diverse dialects. Thus the dialects of the eastern highlands need to be distinguished as forming a separate group for which the name of 'Nyanga' is suggested. Further, some unpublished work in 1980 presented to the writer by R. Chiadzwa, a Garwe speaker, revealed another group drawn from both Doke's Ndau and Manyika clusters. It comprises Garwe, Jindwi and Bocha. Also on the dialects of Doke's Ndau cluster, Mkanganwi (1972) has queried the basis for classifying Coastal Ndau or 'Shanga' with the 'peak' Ndau of Chimanimani.

   The uncritical recognition of the 'four known main dialects' has led in time to this classification being transferred into fields other than linguistics, such as ethnology, history, sociology and even politics, to imply the existence of definite social groups so named. Doke himself asserted that he was not concerned with ethnic affinities. See Doke (1931:28); and Chimhundu (1992).
5. In Doke's Foreward to this work, published as a Special Number of *Bantu Studies* (Supplement 5) because of the invaluable material it contained, he recalled numerous conversations with Father Marconnès on the principles of Bantu word-division which, however, failed to bring them into agreement. Doke considered Marconnès not strong on the side of analytical and descriptive phonetics (Marconnès 1931:ix-x).
6. Thompson and a Ndau-speaking friend, Simbine Nkomo, had collaborated as informants with Professor Daniel Jones in the preparation of a pamphlet *The Pronunciation and Orthography of the Chindau Language* published by the University of London Press in 1911.
7. 'One of the main features of the Shona dialects is the occurrence of velarization due to the action of the semivowel w' (Doke 1931:53). One reason for Doke's giving this feature the emphasis and the misleading interpretation he did may have been a perception of an analogy between Shona and Nguni in this respect. In Nguni, bilabials occurring before w become palatals in morphophonemic changes. For example, *-boph-* + *-w-* → *-botshw-* 'be tied'. In Shona, however, the changes are phonetic: they do not affect the "bilabial consonants but only the following *w*, e.g. *-rap* + *-w-* → *-rap* χ- 'be healed'.
8. Apart from coming across the treatment of the phoneme in the IAI's Memorandum, Doke must surely have encountered the concept when he was a student of Daniel Jones who was using it in his teaching as early as 1915 (see Jones 1967, Appendix 1).
9. Letter of 4 October 1929. Burbridge Papers, No. 2.
10. SRMC Minutes, 1930, Appendix XI. Department of Native Development, Southern Rhodesia. 'Dr. Doke's Recommendations for Language Unification, 1930.' Burbridge Papers, No. 3.
11. Advisory Board for Native Development, Minutes of 1930 Meeting. Burbridge Papers No. 4.
12. This modification, however, was not incorporated in Doke's *Report* which was presented the same year.
13. The practice of the NAD did not change in this respect even after the Roman alphabetic replacement. In a memo presented to the Shona Language Committee in 1961, the Chairman commented, 'Not only has the new official orthography not been introduced into the language examinations sponsored by the Department of Native Affairs, but candidates for this examination are actually penalised if they have studied the new official orthography in preparation for the examination.'
14. Letter in the archives of St Augustine's, Penhalonga, and made available to me by courtesy of the Reverend Father Maurice Bradshaw, C.R.

15. Letter from C.M. Doke quoted in a circular addressed by the Reverend C.J.J. Brand to the DRC Shona Orthography Committee, 29 March 1950.
16. Memorandum sent to G. Fortune on 4 Feb. 1954.
17. Letter to G. Fortune of 18 Dec. 1953.
18. In C.J.J. Brand's Circular of 29 March 1950.
19. S. K. Jackson, Memorandum on Shona Orthography, 23 Sept. 1953.
20. Letter to G. Fortune, 18 Dec. 1953.
21. Letter to C.M. Doke, Nov. 1953.
22. Letter to G. Fortune, 4 Nov. 1953.
23. NAD Shona Orthography Committee, Minutes of the First Meeting, 14-17 July 1954. The need for the distinctions was felt thereafter, however, and, in a further revision in 1967, the digraphs <bh, dh, vh> and <n'> (for [ŋ]) were accepted into the system of Standard Shona which is still in use at the present time.

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# C.M. Doke's Contribution to Shona Linguistic Studies

## Dialects, Phonetics and Grammar

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Doke contributed to Shona in more ways than one. Not only did he play a major role in its linguistic studies but also in its development as a literary language. This paper will be concerned with the former aspect only — with his contribution to Shona studies. His contribution to Shona as a literary language is the subject of another paper in this volume.

The main study of Shona by Doke is his scientific investigation into the dialects of Mashonaland (Doke 1931a). Although he did not write a grammar of Shona *per se*, he nevertheless contributed in this sphere in an indirect way through the influence that his grammatical model had on the linguists who subsequently wrote grammar books of Shona. Doke's work marked a milestone in Shona studies. In saying this one is not disparaging the work that was carried out by grammarians who came before him or who were his contemporaries, most of whom had little, if any, formal training in linguistics. They contributed in their own way mostly by collecting useful data and making some worthwhile observations. Some publications in this regard which preceded Doke's work include: *An Outline of a Grammar of the Mashona Language* by Hartmann (1893), *A Hand-book of Chikaranga* by Springer (1905), *A Manual of the Chikaranga Language* by Louw (1915), while those of his contemporaries include: *A Grammar of Central Karanga* by Marconnès (1931) and *A Shona Grammar: Zezuru Dialect* by O'Neil (1935). Nearly all of them were missionaries to whom the conduct of linguistic investigation was a secondary task, if not a mere hobby. Each one of

them was usually confined to one dialect area or another because of his missionary work. Some of the work, however, was purported to cover the entire Shona group although in actual fact it did not. None the less, none of them carried out work in the phonetics of Shona which could serve as a basis of this study.

## *PHONETICS, PHONOLOGY AND DIALECTS*

Doke's work, *A Comparative Study in Shona Phonetics* (1931b), was truly monumental. Surprising as it may sound, this work was a by-product of a task which he had been invited to perform by the then government of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), namely to advise it on a common orthography for the dialects of Mashonaland. His report on that task forms part of the subject matter of another paper in this volume as already mentioned. In his work Doke made a comparative analysis of the main dialects spoken in Mashonaland. His study gave greater weight to phonetics and phonological processes which occurred in these dialects than to morphological and syntactic aspects.

Through his study Doke was able to show not only the geographical distribution and extent of each of the main dialects of Shona, but also the language situation in and around Southern Rhodesia. This was probably the first time that both linguists and non-linguists as well as administrators had a good picture of the language situation in the country. His statistical tables, which were liberally provided in his Report (1931a), showed that the dialects of Mashonaland formed the largest language group with 799 619 speakers out of a total population of 1 024 479 — 78 per cent. The Ndebele speakers, who numbered 132 610 or 12,9 per cent of the population (Doke 1931a:26), were the second largest group. On the periphery of his map are such languages as Chikunda in the north-east of the country, Barwe-Tonga in the east, Hlengwe (Shangaan) and Venda in the south, and Tonga in the west of the country in the Zambezi valley. Most of these languages were, and still are, minority languages whose main bodies are to be found in the neighbouring countries.

According to Doke's survey the main dialects of Mashonaland which he identified were Korekore, Zezuru, Manyika, Karanga, Ndau and Kalanga (see map on p. 111). Briefly, the Korekore are found in the northern districts stretching in a horse-shoe pattern from around Gokwe through Urungwe, Guruve (then Sipolilo) to Mount Darwin and the



Mozambican border. The Manyika are in the eastern districts, from Nyanga in the north through Mutare to Marange and Mutambara in the south. The Ndau occupy the south-eastern part of the country, with the Karanga in the vast territory of Masvingo Province, and the Zezuru in the central districts in a radius approximately a hundred and ten kilometres around Harare. These dialect groups are still occupying more or less the same areas which they occupied at the turn of this century. However, owing to a variety of factors, —urbanisation, education, for example — these dialects either have already been or are in the process of being weakened to a greater or lesser extent. In terms of the distribution of the Shona dialects in particular, and the language situation generally in Zimbabwe today, Doke's work and the accompanying map remain the key points of reference. In other words, in terms of geographical distribution no work on the scale of Doke's effort has been carried out since the publication of his Report (1931a) and his book (1931b).

In his study of the dialects of Mashonaland Doke soon discovered that they shared a great deal in common from the viewpoint of their phonology, vocabulary, morphology and syntax. The salient features by which these dialects were found to be bound together into one language included:

(a) an underlying unity of vocabulary;
(b) a sharing of particular phonetic features, such as a five-vowel system, employment of implosives (though not in western Kalanga) and 'whistling fricatives';
(c) a sharing of particular grammatical features, such as monosyllabic noun prefixes, a significant super-addition of prefixes to nouns, a uniform tense system, decimal numeration, vocalisation of initial consonants of stems in class 5 nouns, and locative formation (Doke 1931b:7).

Doke concentrated on phonetics and collected a wealth of vocabulary items. On the basis of their vocabulary and phonetic differences he was able to identify six main Shona dialects (the ones which were mentioned above). He was also quick to realise that there existed buffer dialects between some of these major dialects, for example, Hungwe which shares the characteristics of both Zezuru and Manyika, Buja which lies between Manyika and Korekore, and Garwe between Manyika and Ndau. Furthermore, in each dialect Doke recognised sub-dialects which differed among themselves to a greater or lesser extent.

*A Comparative Study in Shona Phonetics* demonstrated that Doke was endowed with a rare natural ability to study human sounds. His observation of the data with which he worked and his recording, analysis and description of them were on the whole quite accurate. Of course, we may argue or differ with the nature of his scientific method. Nevertheless, when we consider the instruments which Doke used then, that he was not a speaker of Shona, and that he conducted his investigation into Shona in a space of only one year — 1929 —we cannot but help conclude that he performed a sterling job. In this work Doke provided, within the confines of his model, a phonetic description of each of the dialects as well as the processes of what he called velarisation, nasalisation, vowel coalescence and elision.

In his treatment of the consonants, Doke grouped them into plain consonants and velarised consonants. Plain consonants are those 'composed of one phone element or a homorganic combination of elements' (p.34), while velarised consonants are those which are 'non-homorganic combinations which are due to the action of /w/' (p.34). With regard to plain consonants, he was able to distinguish in Shona between:

(a) the explosive stops [b̪ , d̪ ] and the implosive stops [ɓ , ɗ ];
(b) the alveolar fricatives [s, z] and what he called the alveolar-labialised fricatives, also sometimes referred to as the 'whistling' fricatives [s̪ , z̪ ];
(c) the denti-labial fricative [v̪] and the bilabial fricative [β] (for which he incorrectly used the symbol [ʋ];
(d) the alveolar nasal [n] and the velar nasal [ŋ]; and
(e) the voiced nasals [m, n] and the breathy-voiced nasals [m̤, n̤].

He also identified laterals in those dialects in which they occurred and his transcription of them is commendable. Mention of the sounds in (a) to (e) above is pertinent because those who ventured into Shona studies before Doke tended either to confuse them or to distort them completely. With regard to the articulatory and auditory description of the other individual as well as compound consonants and vowels, it is unnecessary to repeat what Doke said. It is worth noting, however, that in his description some special sounds were accompanied by kymographs, palatograms and/or diagrams which illustrated places of articulation, and sometimes also by photographs of the subjects showing positions of the lips during the articulation of a given sound, for example, [s] and [s̪] (Doke 1931b: 294).



Velarisation, which is said to be due to the influence of the velar semi-vowel /w/, is claimed by Doke to be one of the main features of the Shona dialects and a peculiarity of this cluster of Bantu languages, though not entirely restricted to it alone. Concerning velarisation Doke says:

> Velarisation is brought about by an abnormal raising of the back of the tongue towards the soft palate (velum), instead of the usual slight raising effected in pronouncing the velar semi-vowel, *w*. This abnormal raising may take the place of the semi-vowel, or in certain cases precede the semi-vowel (p.109).

Examples of velarisation are:

| *Words* | *Zezuru* | *Karanga* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| pwere | [pkere] | [pxere] | (children) |
| mabwe | [mabge] | [mabɣe] | (stones) |
| kuswera | [kuskwera] | [kusxwera] | (spend the day) |

This interpretation of the so-called /w/ clusters was adopted by Fortune in both his *An Analytical Grammar of Shona* (1955) and in the earlier, though not in the latest, edition of *Shona Grammatical Constructions*, Volume 1 (1985). However, Pongweni (1989) claims that Doke's interpretation of the influence of /w/ is not plausible, and, considering the definitions of the *phoneme* and the *allophone*, I tend to agree with him. Doke's interpretation makes allophones of sounds which elsewhere in the language are contrastive, for example, in [pkere] above, [k] is said to be an allophone of /w/, which it is not. In the following minimal pairs, /k/ and /w/ clearly show contrast:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| /-kora/ (intoxicate) | vs | /-wora/ (decompose) |
| /-kara/ (be gluttonous) | vs | /-wara/ (spread out) |

For a more comprehensive treatment of the argument against Doke's interpretation of velarisation see Pongweni (1989:28-31).

A second respect in which one takes issue with Doke concerns his interpretation of the voiced bilabial and alveolar stops. He says '... the common *b* and *d* sounds, when not associated with a homorganic nasal, are implosive. In the homorganic compounds *mb* and *nd* the second element is always explosive ... in the affricates *bv* and *dz* the explosive is

also found' (p. 49). Doke seems to imply in this case that the voiced implosive *ɓ* and the breathy-voiced explosive *b̤* are allophones of one phoneme, so are *ɗ* and *d̤*. But elsewhere the members of these pairs of sounds show contrast which confirms their phoneme status, for example,

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *ɓara* (a bullet) | vs | *b̤ara* (a wheelbarrow) |
| *ɗora* (an edible caterpillar) | vs | *d̤ora* (a dollar) |

Doke speaks of *h* being 'preceded by nasals' in *mh* and *nh* (p.93), as in: *mɦuka* (animal) (cl. 9/10) and *nɦunzi* (flies) (cl. 9/10). These so-called sequences are but single sounds which are accompanied by breathy voice, the one being bilabial *m̤* and the other alveolar *n̤* (see Pongweni 1989:31).

The shortcomings outlined above and others in Doke's work are a consequence of the way he conceived of his approach to the study of the sound system of a language. Reviewing Doke's *Southern Bantu Languages*, Gleason (1956:569) criticised Doke's pattern, mentioning, among other things, 'its weak development of phonemics'. Pongweni, also pointing out some shortcomings in Doke's *A Comparative Study in Shona Phonetics*, says that they stem from 'his failure to back up largely accurate observations with an explicitly articulated phoneme theory ...', and he goes on further to say, 'Doke should have found or devised some categories capable of bringing home some order to his otherwise tantalising multiplicity' (1989:31). The question which arises from these criticisms and which remains unanswered is whether or not Doke was aware of the phoneme theory at the time that he wrote these works, for nowhere in them does he seem to have mentioned it.

With regard to tone in Shona, Doke revealed one of his greatest weaknesses. He seems, firstly, to have been unable to distinguish between the significant levels of tone, and, secondly, to tone-mark his Shona examples in a correct and meaningful way. According to him, Shona operated on a three-level tone system. None of the linguists who came after him subscribed to his system. They all identify only two levels of tone: a relative high tone and a relative low tone, and this is the system that is widely accepted in Shona studies today.

In the same work Doke discusses stress and length. Regarding stress he says, 'Stress exists in Shona, as in all other Bantu languages ... In Bantu, stress is the word builder. The stressed syllable gathers around itself the unstressed syllables and unites them into a word' (Doke 1931b:205). As is now known, Doke mistook stress for penultimate length.



## *GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE*

Doke's direct contribution to Shona grammatical studies is found in Recommendation 4 in his Report which has already been referred to. The recommendation reads, 'That a unified grammar be standardized on the basis of Karanga and Zezuru.' The justification of this recommendation rested on the fact that the total population of the speakers of these two dialects was more than half the total number of Shona speakers in the country at that time. He gave the noun class system as an example of the treatment of an aspect of grammar. He proposed that the noun classes be treated in the unified language using the singular-plural linkage system:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Class I | mu- | ʋa- |
| Ia | --- | ʋa- |
| II | mu- | mi- |
| III | ci- | ʐi- |
| IV | i- | dzi- |
| V | ri- | ma- |
| VI | ka- | tu- (Northern) |
| | ʂi- | u- (Southern) |
| VII | ru- | dzi-, ma- |
| VIII | u-, ʋu-, hu- | |
| IX | ku- (Locative and Infinitive) | |
| X | mu- (Locative) | |
| XI | pa- (Locative) | |

(Note that the orthography used here is the one he recommended in his Report.)

The structure of the other categories and aspects of Shona grammar are dealt with by way of comparison only in *The Southern Bantu Languages*. Doke recommended that the noun prefix forms in those dialects which deviated from the list above, Korekore and Karombe, for example, should be ignored in the unified grammar. Indeed, this was followed and is the practice in standard Shona today.

As has already been said elsewhere above, Doke did not write a grammar of Shona as such. However, the influence of his grammatical scheme is evident in Shona studies between 1931 and about 1970. In order to facilitate the arguments which will be presented, an outline of Doke's scheme is given overleaf:

| | |
|---|---|
| I.Substantive: | (a) Noun (divided into classes) |
| | (b) Pronoun |
| | i. Absolute |
| | ii. Demonstrative |
| | iii. Quantitative |
| | iv. Qualificative |
| | v. Relative |
| II.Qualificative: | (a) Adjective |
| | (b) Relative |
| | (c) Enumerative |
| | (d) Possessive |
| III.Predicative: | (a) Verb |
| | (b) Copulative |
| IV.Descriptive: | (a) Adverb |
| | (b) Ideophone |
| V.Conjunctive | |
| VI.Interjective | |

This scheme was adopted by G. Fortune in his *An Analytical Grammar of Shona* (1955) which became the main reference Shona grammar book for the next fifteen years or so.

Unlike his work on phonetics and phonology, Doke was credited by Gleason in the review mentioned above for departing from the tradition of European grammar and for setting up syntactic categories which were more appropriate for the description of Bantu languages. To show that the model had some merit, a number of grammar books were written using it for various Bantu languages in Southern Africa — Swazi, Zulu, Shona and Tswana, for example.

As we know, Doke's approach was first to identify the *word* in the language he was investigating. He did this by a phonetic criterion. This was his famous penultimate stress, but which Cole is said to have pointed out was more correctly termed penultimate length. Most words in Bantu languages seem to have this penultimate length. Having defined his units or words, he set them out into different categories or parts of speech, each according to its syntactic function. In this way he established his six main parts of speech: the substantive, the qualificative, the predicative, the descriptive, the conjunctive and the interjective.

The main criticism of the *An Analytical Grammar of Shona*, and by implication that of Doke, is that its categories are based on words.



Syntactic relationships for Doke appeared to be the relationships between words which he had isolated and identified. This did not allow for an adequate treatment of the interdependence of units below the words, for example, affixes as in *chingwa chichena*, and much more serious, of units greater than words, for example, phrases and clauses. Although he recognised the existence of phrases and clauses within the structure of sentences, he did not clearly show their syntactic relationships — how they meshed in with one another in sentences. The value of his scheme seems to lie more in its morphology than its syntax. In short, Doke's grammatical model did not make much headway in syntax beyond Southern Africa for at least two reasons: (a) his failure to realise that morphemes rather than words are the building blocks of a language in its grammatical aspect, and (b) that sentences are not just linear arrangements of words; they are to be understood in depth also.

## *SUMMARY*

Doke's work is criticised for occasionally lacking, among other things, principled and rigorous phonological and grammatical theories. Nevertheless, certain things stand clearly to his credit: firstly, his ability to observe, record, analyse and describe fairly accurately the data with which he worked; and, secondly, his boldness in breaking away from the grip of European grammatical tradition and devising a model suitable to some extent at that time for Bantu languages.

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# Some Thoughts on Future Language Policy for South Africa

## With reference to the Language Plan of Action for Africa

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The choice of topic for this contribution to the Doke Centenary volume has been accompanied by nagging doubts. No sooner had I decided to share my ideas on a possible language policy for South Africa in light of the OAU's Language Plan of Action for Africa (1986) than I had second thoughts about it: would my seemingly presumptuous choice of topic be understood as interference in the internal affairs of another country?

In the context of the Doke Centenary, however, I am emboldened to offer my few thoughts to my South African colleagues for a reason similar to that I had expressed to my Namibian colleagues in 1990:

> What is absolutely clear to me is that only Namibians can shape their own destiny. We as outsiders can only be a helpful nuisance. As friends from outside all we can do is to create disquiet in the minds of the Namibian people by drawing their attention to pending or unfinished business and thereby creating an atmosphere of challenge. (Kashoki 1992a:45-46)

Precisely the same sentiments dictate the attitude I have adopted in shaping the present contribution. But there is perhaps a far weightier reason for my decision to discuss the challenges that the OAU's Language Plan of Action for Africa poses, or at least suggests, to the

people of South Africa. My resolve derives from the significance and relevance of Clement Martyn Doke as both pioneer and bridge builder in the scientific study of language and the practical promotion of African languages in this part of the world.

In the first regard, Doke, as a towering figure, can best be described not only as a pace-setter but even more as a founding father of Bantu linguistics. Indeed, as Wilkes (1978:96) noted, 'From 1927 until the fifties, Bantu linguistics in South Africa remained firmly in the model of what is generally referred to as the Dokean approach.' This in itself eloquently attests to the stature and influence of a single individual who brought so much to bear on the direction, character, and texture of the linguistic studies and literary works in African languages that up to this day continue to have an inspiring effect on those of us who are concerned with the promotion of language study in Africa. In this vein, if Doke could write of others and give them a place in history as 'Bantu language pioneers of the nineteenth century' (Doke 1959), he too, in equal measure, deserves a similar accolade as a Bantu language pioneer of the twentieth century. Doke was an intrepid explorer in a field which, at the time he lived, was only in the most speculative and rudimentary stage. There can be no doubt that this part of the world, and students of Bantu languages in particular, are in Doke's debt.

Doke as a pioneering luminary in Bantu linguistics has considerable relevance to what is to be stated subsequently. To a great extent his contribution to our knowledge of African languages spoken within the borders of Zambia and South Africa is of enduring relevance to the present pursuit of deepening our understanding of African languages.

Doke also played a prominent role as a bridge builder among African countries. His interest in language came out of his early experiences as a missionary in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). Doke's seven-year sojourn in Lambaland enabled him to complete his master's dissertation, which appeared in 1922 as *The Grammar of the Lamba Language*. From this initial work, Doke soon turned his attention to the languages of South Africa, beginning with Zulu. Doke's role as a central figure in the unification of the Shona dialects (Doke 1931) and his research into Shona phonetics extended the links he built to include three countries: Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Besides being a language pioneer and a bridge builder, Doke should be remembered and acknowledged as a practical man. He did not confine himself merely to matters of linguistic theory and description. He was concerned as well with putting dictionaries and manuals in the hands of



students of Bantu languages, specialists and non-specialists alike. Thus, in Zambia we see, apart from numerous religious pamphlets, the appearance of *Lamba Folk-Lore* (1927) and *English-Lamba Vocabulary* (1933; 1963) and *Graded Lamba Grammar and Exercises* (1963). In Zimbabwe, Doke's concern with the practical promotion of African languages yielded, as we have noted, his *Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects* (1931). In South Africa, Doke's works at the practical level range from the monumental *Zulu-English Dictionary* (1953) to suggestions for a programme of linguistic research in Bantu and other native languages of South Africa as well as numerous Zulu and Ndebele readers.

Here we gain an illustrative glimpse of a committed scholar driven by the desire to bring to practical fruition his love for, and expert knowledge of, the African languages with which he was privileged to work. It is upon this legacy that I now wish to build as I turn to the implications for South Africa of the OAU's Language Plan of Action for Africa.

## *A NOTE ON SOME LANGUAGE POLICY ANTECEDENTS*

Before going on to discuss specifically the major implications of the OAU's Language Plan for South Africa, it might first be useful to cast our eyes back and touch briefly on some language policy antecedents that appear to have lingering relevance apropos of language policy formulations in Africa. It is well known and widely acknowledged that language policy before the early 1960s when most former British colonies in Africa attained political independence was strikingly tilted in favour of African languages, especially in the domain of formal education. The retreat from language policies that clearly favoured the use of one or several selected African languages as media of instruction and/or as subjects in the national education system was sounded in 1961 by a Commonwealth Conference at Makerere University, Uganda (Commonwealth Conference 1961). In a significant departure from previous policy stands regarding the role of African languages in the formal educational process, the new stance held that wherever English functioned as a second language, particularly where it served as a medium of instruction in the higher grades, schoolchildren should be exposed to it as early as possible upon entering school, preferably as a medium of learning right from the start. The immediate consequence of this was the adoption of policies in such countries as Kenya and Zambia that now

made English the dominant medium of instruction during the entire span of a child's education in the formal national education system. In Zambia, this is still the position today.

In sharp contrast, before the Commonwealth Conference in 1961, the notion that the mother tongue was the most appropriate medium of instruction generally held sway. As evidence of this, consider the British Government's 'Education Policy in British Tropical Africa' (Great Britain 1925), wherein the principle was established that indigenous languages (or *vernaculars*, as they were commonly known) should be accorded primary importance in the educational policy of colonial territories. This policy was given greater explicit force following the publication of 'The place of the vernacular in Native Education' in 1927 (UNESCO 1953). It is as a result of this policy that as early as 1927 educational policy in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) allowed for the use of four indigenous languages, namely Bemba, Lozi, Nyanja and Tonga, as both media of instruction and as school subjects in the educational system. It is largely the same policy that accounts for the use of Tswana, Northern and Southern Sotho, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu in South Africa's educational system. There can hardly be any doubt, moreover, that it was the favourable attitudes prevalent at the time towards African languages which in large measure influenced Clement Doke and others to take scholarly and practical interest in them.

Indeed, it is pertinent to remember that *Education in Africa*, being a study of East, Central and Southern Africa published in 1925 by the (Second) African Education Commission stated unequivocally, *inter alia*, that 'all peoples have an inherent right to their own language. It is the means of expression of their personality and no greater injustice can be committed against a people than to deprive them of their own language.' Of particular relevance to the South African situation and, of course, the present discussion, the report added that 'in the past, practically all controlling nations forced their language on native peoples and discourages the use of their native tongue. Fortunately at the present time the only powers that still maintain this attitude in their possessions are the French and the Portuguese. Whatever their motives the policy is unwise and unjust.'

Towards the end of the 1920s, a new ally espousing the virtues of African languages and cultures arrived on the scene in the corporate person of the International African Institute (originally known as the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures). The 1930 meeting of the Executive Committee in Rome resulted in the issue of the



oft-quoted statement regarding the place of African languages in education, the main elements of which are cited below:

- 'It is a universally acknowledged principle in modern education that a child should receive instruction both in and through his mother tongue and this privilege should not be withheld from the African Child.'
- 'The child should learn to love and respect the mental heritage of his own people, and the natural and the necessary expression of this heritage is the language.'
- 'We are of the opinion that no education which leads to the alienation of the child from his ancestral environment can be right, nor can it achieve the most important aim of education, which consists in developing the powers and character of the pupil.'
- 'Neglect of the local language involves the danger of crippling and destroying the pupil's productive powers by forcing him to express himself in a language foreign both to himself and to the genius of his race.'
- Consequently, 'As a general rule, therefore, during the first three years of school education instruction should be carried on exclusively in an African language.'
- As a safeguard, 'We recognize that it is undoubtedly necessary for the progress of Africa that many Africans should acquire a thorough knowledge of a European language in order to obtain free access to the sources of western life and thought, but these will be better understood and more appreciated by the student if he has first learned to think in his own language and to understand his own civilization.'

Following close on the heels of this statement by the International African Institute was the philosophical position assumed by UNESCO (1953), which was given concrete expression in the well-known report *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*. Paralleling the sentiments of the International African Institute, UNESCO held the view that on educational, cultural and psychological grounds, education is best and more efficaciously imparted by means of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

The antecedents sketched here, together with the foundation laid by Doke, provide an immediate and relevant bridge to the OAU Language Plan of Action for Africa. It is therefore appropriate to examine the provisions of this plan and some possible implications for language policy in a new, democratic South Africa.

## *THE OAU 'LANGUAGE PLAN OF ACTION FOR AFRICA'*

### *Implications*

At the present time South Africa is poised on the threshold of a break from its apartheid past, and a new democratic era. This period calls for a great deal of conscious self-examination and planning for the future. It is a period that will severely test the ability of South Africa to shape its destiny in the best manner possible and to the greatest advantage of all its citizens. In this process of planning for the future – a very delicate and intricate task of shaping the national destiny – South Africans will inevitably have to come to grips with the inescapable necessity of formulating an appropriate and comprehensive language policy that will truly reflect the aspirations and political, cultural, social and economic needs of its people. It is in this regard that the 'Language Plan of Action for Africa' may be of some relevance by pointing to some critical considerations that ought to inform the formulation of an appropriate comprehensive language policy.

The full text of the Language Plan of Action for Africa is contained in the Appendix. The following discussion outlines some of the major provisions of the plan, with particular attention to the development of future language policy for South Africa.

As adopted by Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa in July 1986 as henceforth the official position of the OAU, the most immediate and relevant provisions of the Language Plan of Action for Africa are as follows:

- First, that a major primary objective is 'to encourage each and every member state to have a clearly defined language policy'.
- Second, that steps should be taken to ensure that 'all languages within the boundaries of member states are recognised and accepted as a source of mutual enrichment'.
- Third, that appropriate measures should be taken 'to liberate the African peoples from undue reliance on the utilisation of non-indigenous languages as the dominant, official languages of the state in favour of the gradual take over of appropriate and carefully selected indigenous African languages in this domain'.
- Fourth, that member states have the duty of fostering and promoting 'national, regional and continental linguistic unity in Africa in the context of the multilingualism prevailing in most African countries'.



Quite clearly, these provisions of The Language Plan of Action for Africa have definite implications for South Africa. As outlined above, one of the major objectives of the plan is for every African country to embark upon the formulation of a comprehensive language policy appropriate to its circumstances. It stresses the importance of political will as the primary ingredient in utilising language factor in a meaningful way in the process of national development. My position in Namibia in 1990 was the following:

> If Namibia does not embark upon an integrated language policy at the dawn of its political independence, it will have made a false start. The time to put the Namibian house in order as far as language is concerned is at the beginning and not when independence has been consolidated. At that time, deep-seated attitudes will have set in and become entrenched and it will then be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change them. (Kashoki 1992a:43)

The United Nations Institute for Namibia's (UNIN) publication *Toward a Language Policy for Namibia* reinforces this view when it points out that:

> Experiences of other African countries have shown that where English has been the vehicle for communicating the affairs of government, law, education and politics, the development of African languages has all too often been retarded if not overlooked altogether. This seems to be largely due to the lack of an integrated language policy at the beginning which can lead to indigenous peoples developing attitudes of indifference to their own language. (UNIN 1981:54)

For South Africa, the time to seize and exercise the required political will cannot be more opportune than now, while the country is preoccupied with shaping the national destiny and practically the entire population is galvanised towards a single national purpose. Subsequently, it is most likely that the government's attention will be drawn in many different directions as a result of a diversity of pressing national issues coupled with the emergence of detractors and critics, a condition which will tend to distract the government from pursuing delicate issues such as those pertaining to language policy in a determined manner.

It is said that humanity never learns from the precedents of history.

None the less, it is to be hoped that South Africa will prove an exception to this generalisation. In this connection it may be said that Namibia, by all appearances, missed a golden opportunity to learn from historical antecedents by directing its planning not at the evolution of a truly comprehensive language policy but somewhat narrowly at ensuring that Afrikaans, perceived at the time as an instrument of oppression, was supplanted as an official language by English, a non-indigenous language associated with democratic attributes and global communication.

A third dimension, the provision calling upon each African country to have in place a clearly defined language policy, touches on a broader issue than just the language or languages that ought to be in use in the national education system. It relates to the broader question of what ought to constitute the functional languages in the formal affairs of the state, in what domains, to what degree and to what end. Indeed, as stated explicitly in (d) of the Plan under 'Aims, Objectives and Principles', African countries are expected 'to ensure that African languages, by appropriate legal provision and practical promotion, assume their rightful role as the means of official communication in the public affairs of each Member State in replacement of European languages which have hitherto played this role'. The reference to *practical promotion* is an invitation to African countries to go beyond mere sweet-sounding resolutions and various political platitudes to something more concrete: the translation of pious, if well meaning, political posturings into meaningful programmes of sustained action.

While on the matter of legal provision, a crucial point is how this is to be accomplished, the question being whether it is to be by constitutional arrangements or merely by juridical provisions outside the framework of the national constitution. Those countries which regard language as a fundamental human right, for example, China, India and, more recently, Namibia, elect to ensure that the question of language is provided for in the heart of their constitutions. This is yet another aspect concerning language policy that South Africa will have to consider as it plans for its long-term future.

The practical issue which poses the greatest problem in multilingual countries is the question of selection of one or several languages out of multiplicity of others to serve the formal functions of the state. The Language Plan of Action for Africa urges that all languages within the boundaries of Member States be recognised and accepted as a source of mutual enrichment. This laudable suggestion, however, only begs the vexing question of which languages are to be selected and legislated as



the official languages of the state – and which ones are to be denied this status.

This, of course, brings multilingualism, both societal and individual, into the equation. How is the widespread phenomenon of multilingualism in both these senses best to be exploited to the advantage of citizens of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual nation-states, as a rich national resource and as a positive force, as well as a fact of life than cannot be ignored?

This further raises the politico-philosophical question which is best stated in this way: what kind of citizen is to be regarded as an ideal citizen from a sociolinguistic perspective? The view which is increasingly common is that in multilingual countries, in order to match policy with sociolinguistic reality, the multilingual rather than the monolingual individual ought to be regarded as the ideal citizen of linguistically complex modern nation-states. Or, as Bamgbose (1991) has aptly put it, 'In the African situation, a person who speaks several languages is to be regarded as a better integrated citizen than one who is proficient in one language, even if that language happens to be the country's official language.' In other words, 'it is the adaptable, flexible, or versatile multilingual capable of exploiting to his best advantage the multilingualistic codes at his disposal, and not the inflexible monolingual, that we posit as the future citizen of multilingual Zambia' (Kashoki 1977).

This view clearly suggests that in multilingual countries, notwithstanding questions of cost and the highly sensitive nature of the issue of selection, it is highly desirable that multilingualism ought to be the cornerstone of language policy. It follows from the recognition that if multilingualism as a sociolinguistic phenomenon is a normal, natural feature of the majority of countries in the world, then it deserves to be reflected appropriately in national language policies. Stated negatively, the new orientation thus calls on governments in multilingual countries to reverse the earlier preoccupation with monolingual language policies in favour of those more in accord with actual sociolinguistic phenomena. Here Brann provides a timely caution when he observes, 'In Africa generally, and in West Africa in particular, the unilinguistic model is not appropriate and would lead both to conflict as well as to cultural impoverishment' (Brann 1990:123).

A multilingual language policy in another sense touches upon the democratic principle of effective participation of citizens in national affairs. Undoubtedly, where multilingualism is consciously built into the

country's language policy as the dominant principle, it has the likely consequences of broadening opportunities for more citizens to participate in national affairs. It has, in other words, democratising consequences.

Recognising that even a multilingual policy in a complex multilingual nation-state cannot accommodate all the languages within national boundaries without exception, the practical question arises as to the role of non-official languages, following the principle that all languages within national boundaries are to be recognised and accepted as a source of mutual enrichment. Where democratic structures revolve primarily around community-based organisations and hence community-centred decision-making processes, non-official languages may achieve easy accommodation. However, where social and political structures are highly centralised, such accommodation may not be easy to achieve. The central issue, therefore, of the place of communities in a democratic South Africa and in the decision-making process with respect to language policy formulation and implementation, as with other spheres of national life, will have to be faced. What is not at issue is that quite clearly some matters pertaining to language maintenance or language utilisation will have to be left to the communities themselves as their direct responsibility while the state concentrates on the use of others for official purposes.

The points just discussed lead to the call by the Language Plan of Action for Africa upon African countries 'to liberate the African peoples from undue reliance on the utilisation of non-indigenous languages as the dominant official languages of the state in favour of the gradual take-over of appropriate and carefully selected indigenous African languages in this domain'. Here it will suffice to address only two cognate issues.

The first, as a point of clarification, is that the suggested gradual shift from non-indigenous to indigenous languages as official languages is not in any way intended to negate the complementary, useful role that non-indigenous languages have played in the past, are playing now, and will undoubtedly continue to play well into the distant future in Africa's affairs. Both in recognition of today's reality of the ever growing interdependence of our world and the need to equip citizens of African countries with the communicative competence necessary to make them citizens of the world, it is imperative that as many languages as possible spoken in the world, particularly those of wider communication and of science and technology, are within reach of a wide spectrum of African citizens. After all, the Language Plan of Action for Africa desires that, within Africa itself, deliberate steps should be taken 'to foster and promote regional and continental linguistic unity in Africa in the context



of the multilingualism prevailing in most African countries'. The extension of this proposition to the rest of the world is both logical and inevitable, for the phenomenon of multilingualism is not confined to Africa alone; it is a dominant feature of the majority of countries in the world. The challenge to South Africa, however, is the quite intricate matter of the policy that has to be decided upon as to which and how many African and non-African languages are to be taught in the education system within the limits of government resources.

The second point worth making here relates to the argument, so often made by those who question the suitability of African languages in their present state as viable instruments of modern government, whether it is at all realistic to expect African languages to eventually become functional languages of the state. The case of Afrikaans in the context of South Africa is both instructive and illustrative in this regard. As Combrink reminds us,

> A century ago, in August 1875, in Paarl, a small town near Cape Town, the founding meeting of a language society took place behind drawn curtains in a private house. The main aim of this rebel society, called the Fellowship of True Afrikaaners, was to create an awareness amongst the speakers of Afrikaans that Afrikaans, not Dutch or English, was their mother tongue and ought to be their written language. The vigour and enthusiasm of this Fellowship kindled a flame and nurtured it for many years. Fifty years later, 1925, Afrikaans was legally recognised as one of the two official languages of the then Union of South Africa, the other one being English. (Combrink 1978:69)

Combrink further states that, whereas initially 'Afrikaans had an embryonic literature (mainly poetry), very few textbooks, no Bible, a puerile technical terminology and no standing in the world of commerce and industry' (1978:69), within a relatively short period of fifty years the situation had changed drastically:

> Today Afrikaans is the mother tongue of more than 4,000,000 speakers, and is the second language of an equal number of people. It is the medium in thousands of primary and secondary schools. Afrikaans is now fully fledged as a language of religion, education, economics and science. More than two hundred

> technical dictionaries have appeared in it — most of them English-Afrikaans, Afrikaans-English — and thousands of scientific textbooks, even encyclopedias and learned journals. (Combrink 1978:69)

Afrikaans is also a medium of instruction at several South African universities; according to Combrink (1978:69), 'of the sixteen South African universities eight are English medium, five Afrikaans medium and three dual medium'.

This single example implicitly provides several relevant lessons. Perhaps the most salient is the recognition that from small insignificant beginnings great things are possible; that is, any language, however impoverished originally, can rise to the occasion as an official language, adequate in every way for the functions of a modern state. Secondly, political will is a necessary ingredient in the transformation of a language from a state of inadequacy to a state of adequacy as an official language.

However, for African languages to achieve any measure of functional utility as official languages, the initial mobilisation of the necessary political will alone is not sufficient. Unfailing commitment and sustained practical support (financial and otherwise) are necessary to ensure the modernisation of the language(s) in question to a reasonable or acceptable degree of viability.

In more distant times, the story of *The Triumph of the English Language* (Jones 1953) provides further testimony to what is needed in order for what was originally essentially a rustic tongue, unsuited to the demands and exigencies of complex forms of statecraft, to become a functional medium of government business in a modern state. As with Afrikaans in the nineteenth century, English from modest, lowly beginnings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is today not only the pre-eminent language of international communication but is additionally, and even more importantly, the premier language of science and technology.

More recently in this century and on a considerably more modest scale, Kiswahili in Tanzania presents us with yet another apt lesson. Following a political decision taken shortly after the attainment of political independence designating it as a national and official language, practical measures within the limited resources of Tanzania were taken in a deliberate attempt to render Kiswahili suitable for use as a functional language of government business. The result is that today, apart from its use as a medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools,



Kiswahili is also the predominant language of government business generally (cf. Abdulaziz 1980). Kiswahili is used in the national parliament, widely employed in the Civil Service, taught at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, where a Department of Kiswahili has been established, and it occupies a healthy place in the mass media, both print and electronic. As in the case of Afrikaans, specialised, technical dictionaries of Kiswahili are increasingly available.

Kiswahili as an example has special significance: not only does it demonstrate that any human language is amenable to modernisation but, even more to the point, it pointedly undermines the widely held notion that African languages by some conspiracy of nature are innately incapable and unsuitable for modernisation, particularly in the scientific and technological fields.

This paper has sought to achieve two primary ends. The first has been to renew Clement Martyn Doke's deserved place in the history of Bantu linguistics and to celebrate his legacy to the ongoing programmes involving the conscious promotion of African languages in a practical manner. The second aim has been to provide a thumbnail sketch of the principal features of the OAU's Language Plan of Action for Africa and its implications and challenges for language planners, and thereby to stimulate those whose task it is to shape the linguistic destiny of South Africa.

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# Language Plan of Action for Africa

## Organization of African Unity

Secretariat
P.O. Box 3243
Addis Ababa

Council of Ministers
Forty-Fourth Ordinary Session
21 – 25 July 1986 Original:
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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English

*PREAMBLE*

We, Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity meeting in our 22nd Ordinary Session, in Addis Ababa, from 28 to 30 July 1986

GUIDED

By the Organization of African Unity Charter,
By the Pan-African Cultural Manifesto of Algiers (1969),
By the Inter-Governmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa organized by UNESCO in Accra 1975 in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity,
By the Cultural Charter for Africa, with Special reference to Part I Article 1 (a) and (b), Article 2 (a), Part III Article 6 1(a), 2(b) and Part V Articles 17-19,
By the OAU Lagos Plan of Action (1980) for the Economic Development of Africa,
By the Final Report (27th April, 1982) of UNESCO's Meeting of Experts

on the 'Definition of a Strategy for Promotion of African Languages':

CONVINCED

That language is at the heart of a people's culture and further convinced that, in accordance with the provisions of the Cultural Charter for Africa, the cultural advancement of the African peoples and the acceleration of their economic and social development will not be possible without harnessing in a practical manner indigenous African languages in that advancement and development;

CONVINCED

That, as in other spheres of national life, Africa needs to assert her independence and identity in the field of language;

AWARE

That, up to the present, the majority of Member States have not taken the necessary practical steps to accord their indigenous languages their rightful official role as provided for by the Cultural Charter for Africa, the Lagos Plan of Action and other related resolutions of the Organization of African Unity;

RECOGNIZING

That each sovereign state has the right to devise a language policy that reflects the agricultural and socio-economic realities of its country which is consonant or in close harmony with the needs and aspirations of its people;

CONVINCED

That the adoption and practical promotion of African languages as the official languages of the state are certain to have great advantages over the use of non-indigenous languages in democratizing the process of formal education and involvement of the African populations in the political, cultural and economic affairs of their country;

AWARE

That illiteracy is an obstacle to the economic, cultural and social development of African countries and that mass literacy campaigns cannot succeed without the use of indigenous African languages;



AWARE

That, in recognition of the ever-growing interdependence and interaction at all levels of human endeavor and brotherhood of man, communication with the outside world beyond the boundaries of the African continent is inevitable and ought to be provided for or reflected in the language policies to be devised and implemented by each sovereign state;

CONVINCED

That the promotion of African languages, especially those which transcend national frontiers, is a vital factor in the cause of African Unity;

RECOGNIZING

That, within Africa itself, the existence side by side in almost all African countries of several languages is a major fact of life and the knowledge that, because of this, multilingualism (i.e. the mastery and use of several languages by individuals for purposes of daily communication) is an equally dominant social feature of life in these countries, should induce Member States to make the promotion of multilingualism in their countries a prime consideration in the evolution of an appropriate language policy;

AGREE

To adopt the Language Plan of Action for Africa as set out below:

## *PART I*

## *AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES*

The aims and objective of this Plan of Action are as follows:

(a) To encourage each and every Member State to have a clearly defined language policy;
(b) To ensure that all languages within the boundaries of Member States are recognized and accepted as a source of mutual enrichment;
(c) To liberate the African peoples from undue reliance on the utilisation of non-indigenous languages as the dominant, official languages of the state in favour of the gradual take-over of appropriate and carefully selected indigenous African languages in this domain;

(d) To ensure that African languages, by appropriate legal provision and practical promotion, assume their rightful role as the means of official communication in the public affairs of each Member State in replacement of European languages which have hitherto played this role;

(e) To encourage the increased use of African languages as vehicles of instruction at all educational levels;

(f) To ensure that all the sectors of the political and socio-economic system of each Member State are mobilized in such a manner that they play their due part in ensuring that the African languages(s) prescribed as official language(s) assume their intended role in the shortest time possible;

(g) To foster and promote national, regional and continental linguistic unity in Africa in the context of the multilingualism prevailing in most African countries;

## *PART II*
## *PRIORITIES*

(a) *Policy formulation*
Whether at the national, regional or continental levels, the selection and prescription without undue delay of certain viable national, regional or continental indigenous African languages as the official languages to be used for the formal official functions of the State, regional grouping or the OAU.

(b) *Implementation and Promotion*
The subsequent implementation of the language policy adopted and the incorporation of the official African languages in the political, educational, social, cultural and economic lives of the people.

(c) *Modernization*
The modernization as necessary and by any means required of the indigenous African languages selected and prescribed as official languages.

(d) *Mobilization of Resources*
The mobilization of financial, human and other resources and all relevant public and private institutions in the practical promotion of the chosen official languages.



## *PART III*
## *PROGRAMME OF ACTION (METHODS AND MEANS)*

In order to fulfil the objectives set out in Part I, the African States solemnly subscribe to the following programme of action:

(a) At continental level and as a concrete expression and demonstration of the OAU's seriousness of purpose, the adoption without undue delay by the Organization of African Unity and the regional associations, Organizations or institutions affiliated to it of viable indigenous African languages as working languages;

(b) To encourage regional associations, organizations or institutions already accorded or those applying for observer status to the OAU to adopt indigenous African languages as their working languages;

(c) At regional level, the adoption by regional groupings of viable, regional indigenous African languages as official or working languages;

(d) At national level, the imperative need for each OAU Member State to consider it necessary and primary that it formulates with the minimum of delay a language policy that places an indigenous African language or languages spoken and in active use by its peoples at the centre of its socio-economic development;

(e) In order to fulfil the objective in (d), the need by each Member State to establish a national language council, where none exists, or to strengthen it, where one already exists, as a national sounding board for the formulation of an appropriate national language policy;

(f) The absolute necessity that each Member State, as a matter of supreme practical importance, follows up the formulation of an appropriate national language policy with an adequate and sustained allocation of the necessary financial and material resources to ensure that the language or languages prescribed as official language(s) achieve(s) a level of modernization that meets the needs of administering a modern state;

(g) In recognition of the negative estimation in which indigenous African languages are generally held in Africa by the general public, the necessity for each Member State, as part of its national programme of promoting those African languages duly prescribed as official languages, to mount a sustained campaign of educating or re-educating the national population about the inherent or potential

practical utility of African languages to counter the present widespread negative attitudes in Africa towards these languages;

(h) In recognition that the formal national education system plays a key role in the practical use of any language, the need for each Member State to ensure that all the sectors (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary) of the national education system are pressed as appropriate in the service of the practical promotion of the indigenous language(s) selected and prescribed as (an) official language(s);

(i) Aware that African universities, research institutes and other institutions concerned with the study and promotion of African languages have a unique role to play in strengthening the role these languages play in the daily lives of the African peoples, the need to these institutions to strike a proper balance in future between the scientific study of the African languages and their actual use and practical promotion;

(j) In connection with (i) above, the need for each Member State to render its national universities and other research and related institutions a primary instrument for the practical promotion of African languages as regards such critical promotional activities as the compilation of technical and general dictionaries, the writing of textbooks on useful subjects, the training of teachers of language, translators, interpreters, broadcasters and journalists, the production of useful books and other types of literature relevant to the lives of the contemporary African and the up-dating of vocabulary in African languages;

(k) In recognition of the fact that to impart formal or other types of knowledge the vehicle of instruction or communication should be a language familiar to the learner, the absolute necessity that each Member State should, as an essential part of its educational policy, prescribe as media or vehicles of instruction those indigenous African languages that best and most effectively facilitate the learning process;

(l) In recognition of the singularly strategic role widespread literacy among the national population plays in the socio-economic development of a country, and recognizing further that literacy in languages familiar to the national population are employed, the advisability of using indigenous African languages as media of instruction in national literacy campaigns mounted by Member States.