# VENDA AS A BRIDGE LANGUAGE

by

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by

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SOVENGA

## SUMMARY.

The Language we today call Venda seems to have evolved from Swahili, Tshiluba, Luganda, Shona, Chichewa and Shambala.

Venda forms a bridge between languages of Central and North-east Africa and languages of Southern Africa. Its vowel system is similar to that of Swahili, Luganda, Chichewa and Shona.

The consonantal system of Venda is more or less similar to those found in Luganda, Shona, Swahili and Kikuyu, except for the aspirated forms which do not occur in some languages, and the voiced forms which do not occur in others. This makes Venda a bridge between languages which are predominantly voiced and those which are predominantly voiceless.

The morphology of the words of many of the languages in Central and East Africa can be interpreted from Venda morphemes.

The verbs and derived verb stems can be explained from Venda forms.

The syntax of Venda makes it possible for one to construct sentences in the other languages with a fair measure of correctness.

Since the morphemes and tonemes of Venda allow adjustments we may conclude that Venda sounds, tonemic aspects, and syntactical aspects form the basis of learning any of the forementioned languages in Africa. The Venda language forms a functional bridge between languages North of the Limpopo river and languages South of the Limpopo river.

A good working knowledge of Venda will serve as a key to unlock the treasure in many a language in Africa.

## OPSOMMING

Die taal wat ons vandag Venda noem, het skynbaar ontwikkel van Swahili, Tshiluba, Luganda, Shona, Chichewa en Shambala.

Venda vorm 'n brug tussen die tale van Sentraal- en Noord-Oos-Afrika, en die tale van Suider-Afrika. Sy klinker-sisteem is soos dié van Swahili, Luganda, Chichewa en Shona. Sy konsonantsisteem kom min of meer ooreen met die wat ons in Luganda, Shona, Swahili en Kikuyu vind, behalwe vir die geaspireerde vorms wat in sommige van die tale nie voorkom nie, en die stemhebbende vorms, wat weer in ander nie voorkom nie. Dit maak dat Venda 'n brug is tussen tale wat hoofsaaklik stemhebbend is en dié wat hoofsaaklik stemloos is.

Die morfologie van die woorde van die tale van Sentraal- en Oos-Afrika kan vanuit Venda-morfeme geïnterpreteer word. Hul werkwoorde en afgeleide werkwoorde kan vanuit die Venda-vorms verduidelik word.

Die sintaksis van Venda maak dit moontlik om met 'n redelike mate van korrektheid sinne in die ander tale te konstrueer.

Daar die morfeme en toneme van die Vendataal aanpassings toelaat, kan ons aflei dat die klanke, tonemiese en sintaktiese eienskappe van Venda 'n basis vorm vir die aanleer van enige van die bogenoemde Afrika-tale. Die Vendataal skep 'n funksionele brug tussen die tale noord van die Limpoporivier en dié suid daarvan.

'n Goeie kennis van Venda dien as 'n sleutel om die skatte van menige Afrikataal te ontsluit.

## Venda as a Bridge Language

Mr. Vice-chancellor, members of the Council, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

I wish you to accompany me along the road which Venda has taken on its way down South. It will form our bridge across the rivers of language boundaries.

Historically the Venda language was evolved from languages of Central, North, West and North-East Africa. It is a language which is unique in itself and which has developed from Swahili and other languages of East Africa.

Venda has traces of central west-Africa languages such as Tshiluba of Zaire. It also has traces of the Chichewa of Malawi.

The Venda language, being a mirror of the physical beings who use it in their communication from day to day, has survived many attacks by other languages around its borders. In its survival it has also acquired some aspects which belong to its attackers.

The Venda as a bridge language may be discussed under the following headings:-

(a) Phonetics and phonology
(b) Morphology
(c) Syntax.

(a) **Phonetics and phonology.**

In order to illustrate that Venda is a bridge language let us look into the phonetics and phonology of the languages occurring widely on the eastern side of the African continent:

### (i) Vowels

All the vowels are voiced speech sounds in the following languages:-

| VENDA | LUGANDA[1] | SHONA[2] | SWAHILI[3] | KIKUYU[4] | N.SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | a | a | a | a | a |
| ∈ | ∈ | ∈ | ∈ | ∈ | ∈ |
| i | i | i | i | e | e |
| ⌣ | ⌣ | ⌣ | ⌣ | ⌣ | ⌣ |
| u | u | u | u | u | u |
|  |  |  |  | i | i |
|  |  |  |  | u | u |

(1) Ashton E.O.:  et al : **A Luganda Grammar**, p.3.
(2) Fortune G. :  Grammar of **Shona**, p.3.
(3) Ashton E.O.:  Swahili **Grammar**, p.3.
(4) Armstrong L.E.:  The Phonetic and Tonal Structure of **Kikuyu**, p.5.

From the above table it is evident that Venda, Luganda, Swahili and Shona have a basic five-vowel system while Kikuyu and N. Sotho have a seven-vowel system. Venda and the other languages compensate for the extra close vowels by means of raising the close vowels in relevant environments.

### (ii) Consonants

| VENDA | LUGANDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | KIKUYU | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| p | p | p | p | | p |
| ph | ph | ph | –(ph) | | ph |
| b | b | b | b | b | – |
| w | w | w | w | w | w |
| m | m | m | m | m | m |
| t′ | t′ | t′ | t′ | t′ | t′ |
| th | th(tt) | th | – | –(th) | th |
| d | d(dd) | d | d | d | – |
| s | – | s | s | – | s |
| z | – | z | z | – | – |
| f | f(ff) | f | f | f | f |
| v | v(vv) | v | v | – | – |
| t̂′ | – | – | t(th) | – | t′ |
| t̂h | – | – | th(dh) | – | th |
| d̂ | – | – | d(dh) | – | d |
| n | n | n | n | n | n |
| r | r | r | r | r | r |
| l | l | | l | l | l |
| l̩ | l | l | l | l | – |
| k′ | k′ | k′ | k′ | k′ | k′ |

| VENDA | LUGANDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | KIKUYU | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kh | kh(kk) | kh | kh | –(kh) | kh |
| g | g(gg) | g | g | g | – |
| h | – | h | h | h | h |
| fh φ | – | – | – | – | –(fh) φ |
| β | β | β | – | – | β |
| mb | – | mb | mb | mb | – |
| nz | – | nz | nz | – | – |
| mv | – | mv | mv | – | – |

| VENDA | LUGANDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | KIKUYU | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| y | y | y | y | y | y |
| tʃh | – | tʃh | tʃh | – | tʃh |
| dy | – | dy | – | – | – |

From the above table it is evident that Venda uses ejected, aspirated and voiced forms of some consonants while the language next to it in this phenomenon is Luganda. Venda uses ejected and aspirated forms and thus it agrees with N. Sotho. Therefore Venda forms a bridge between Northern Sotho and Luganda. Venda also uses voiceless and voiced speech sounds thereby forming a bridge between Shona and Swahili.

Venda seems to have more consonants than the above mentioned northern languages and also more than Northern Sotho. Where Venda has voiceless ejected, voiceless aspirated, and voiced speech sounds it shares these characteristics with Zulu in the extreme South.

A person who has learnt to articulate Venda speech sounds should be in a position to articulate the speech sounds of the languages mentioned above with ease.

Venda has voiced nasal compounds as well as voiceless nasal compounds e.g. **mb** and **mp.** This makes it possible for one to be carried across to Shona for the North and to Northern Sotho for the South.

### (iii) phonological processes

| Process: | VENDA | LUGANDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | KIKUYU | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assimilation: | mmama nkanda | mpeta mbala | gere wangu | lete pikeni | | mmuši nkgata |
| Nasalization: | mbebo pfulo | – | mbereko pfungwa | | | pelego phulo |
| Velarization: | leṅwa | – | remwa | – | | lengwa |
| Palatalization: | ṱanganya | – | shaganya | – | | hlakanya |
| Elision: | mpato mpunga | – | mpunga veni | ko(ku-o) | | mphago mollo |
| Coalescence: | – | – | weni wedu | wevi | | meno lapeng |

The phonological processes occurring in Venda seem to indicate that these processes are a phenomenon of the languages of the South

and not of North and Central Africa. Both Swahili and Luganda exhibit very few of these processes found in Venda. Venda serves to take the northern languages acroos to the southern languages although it is also possible for Venda to take one to West Africa as it has many words in common with Tshiluba, a language of Zaire.

### (b) Morphology.

The morphemes found in Venda also help one to cross over to the other languages:

#### (i) Nouns

The Venda noun consists of the prefix and the stem or a suffix:

mu-prefix — thu stem > muthu (person). We find the same order of the morphemes in the following languages:

VENDA : mu- -thu > muthu (person)
SHONA : mu- -nhu > munhu (person)
N. SOTHO : mo- -tho > motho (person)
ZULU : umu- ntu > umuntu (person)
SWAHILI : m- -tu > mtu (person)

The plural of the above nouns assume the following forms:

VENDA : vha- -thu > vhathu (persons)
SHONA : va- nhu > vanhu (persons)
N. SOTHO : ba- -tho > batho (persons)
ZULU : aba- ntu > abantu (persons)
SWAHILI : wa- -tu > watu (persons).

The other noun classes behave similarly:

| | VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | N.SOTHO | ZULU |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | muthu | munhu | mtu | motho | umuntu |
| 2. | vhathu | vanhu | watu | batho | abantu |
| 3. | muri | muti | mti | more | umuthi |
| 4. | miri | miti | miti | mere | imithi |
| 5. | lito | ziso | jicho | ihlo | — |
| 6. | mato | meso | macho | mahlo | mehlo |
| 7. | tshithu | chinhu | kutu | selo | isintu |
| 8. | zwithu | zvinhu | vitu | dilo | izintu |
| 9. | ṅombe | ngombe | njia | ngope | ṇombe |
| 10. | dziṅombe | dzinombe | njia | dingope | iziṇombe |
| 11. | luthu | runhu | ulimi | — | uluthi, ulimi |
| 12. | — | tunhu | — | — | — |
| 13. | kana | kana, kabudzi | — | — | — |
| 14. | vhuthu | hunhu | — | botho | ubuntu |
| 15. | u ita | kuita | kucheza | go dira | ukuenza |
| 16. | fhasi | pasi | — | fase | phanzi |
| 17. | kule | kure | — | kgołe | kude |
| 18. | murahu | mumunda | — | morago | emva |
| 19. | — | svinhu | — | — | — |
| 20. | kuthu | — | — | — | — |
| 21. | ḓithu | zvinhu | — | lelo | — |

From the above examples it is evident that Venda has a monosyllabic prefix while Zulu has a disyllabic prefix. The other languages share the monosyllabic characteristics of Venda, including Swahili. Venda can also cross over to Tsonga e.g. maḓi (water) > mati (water) ṅwana > 'nwana (child)

#### (ii) Pronouns : Absolute

The absolute pronoun consists of the prefixal element and the stem:

| | VENDA | SHONA(1) | SWAHILI | N. SOTHO | ZULU |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | e-ne | i-ye | ye-ye | ye-na | ye-na |
| 2. | vho-ne | i-vo | wa-o | bo-na | ɓo-na |
| 3. | wo-ne | i-wo | ha-wo | wo-na | wo-na |
| 4. | yo-ne | i-yo | ha-yo | yo-na | yo-na |
| 5. | ḽo-ne | i-ro | ha-lo | lo-na | lo-na |
| 6. | o-ne | i-wo | ha-o | o-na | o-na |
| 7. | tsho-ne | i-cho | ha-cho | so-na | so-na |
| 8. | zwo-ne | i zvo | ha-vyo | tšo-na | zo-na |
| 9. | yo-ne | i-yo | ha-yo | yo-na | yo-na |
| 10. | dzo-ne | i-dzo | ha-zo | tšo-na | zo-na |
| 11. | lwo-ne | i-rwo | — | — | lwo-na |
| 12. | — | i-two | — | — | — |
| 13. | ko-ne | i-ko | — | — | — |
| 14. | ho-ne | i-hwo | — | go-na | kho-na |
| 15. | ho-ne | i-ko | ha-ko | go-na | kho-na |
| 16. | ho-ne | i-po | ha-po | go-na | kho-na |
| 17. | ho-ne | i-ko | na-ko | go-na | kho-na |
| 18. | ho-ne | i-mo | na-mo | go-na | kho-na |
| 19. | — | i-svo | — | — | — |
| 20. | kwo-ne | — | — | — | — |
| 21. | ḽo-ne | i-ro | — | lo-na | — |

(1) Fortune G. : **Grammar of Shona**, p. 133

From the above pronouns we can deduce that all the absolute pronouns in these languages are disyllabic. The N. Sotho and Zulu pronouns assume the same form while Venda and Shona seem to reverse the order of the elements. The Venda prefixal elements appear as suffix elements in Shona while in Shona the prefixal element is i- for all the pronouns.

In Shona the prefixal element does not follow the class of the noun while in Venda it does. It seems that Venda inherited the suffix element as its prefix element in the formation of the pronoun but took the suffix element of the pronoun from Northern Sotho and Zulu. Venda lies between the two languages. The Northern Sotho and Zulu ye- seems to come from Swahili e.g. **yena** $<$ **yeye.** The **ene** of Venda may have come from the Swahili **yeye** $>$ **ene.**

**The demonstrative pronoun consists of the vowel of the prefix plus the stem:**

| Class | VENDA | | | SHONA[1]) | | | SWAHILI[2]) | | | N. SOTHO | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 1. | uyu, | uyo, | ula | uyu, | uyo, | uye | huyu, | huyo, | yale | yo, | yoo, | yola |
| 2. | svha, | avho, | vhala | ava, | avo, | vavo | hawa, | hawo, | wale | ba, | bao, | bale |
| 3. | uyu, | uyo, | ula | uyu, | uyo, | uye | huu, | huo, | ule | wo, | woo, | wola |
| 4. | iyi, | iyo, | ila | iyi, | iyo, | iye | hii, | hiya | ile | ye, | yeo, | yeła |
| 5. | ili, | ilo, | lila | iri, | iro, | iroro | yai, | hili | lile | le, | lela | |
| 6. | aya, | ayo, | ała | aya, | ayo, | ayayo | maya, | hayo | yale | a, | ao, | ale |
| 7. | itshi, | itsho, | tshiła | ichi, | icho, | ichecho | hiki, | hicho | kile | se, | seo, | sela |
| 8. | izwi, | izwo, | zwila | izvi, | izvo, | zvezvezvo | hivi | hivyo | vile | tše, | tšeo, | tšela |

The demonstrative pronoun consists of the vowel of the prefix plus the stem:

The above demonstrative pronouns relate the distance from the speaker. The first position indicates "here" the second "there" the third "thereyond". These forms may be emphasised or repeated in other languages in order to show the preciseness of e.g. onohoyo (that very one) in Venda while in Shona the farthest distance is indicated by reduplicating the demonstrative e.g. **ichechecho, iroro, ivavo** (that very one, those very ones) etc. It appears that Shona an Swahili use tone to indicate the farthest position.

(1)　Marconess F. **A Grammar of Karanga**, p. 101
(2)　Ashton E.O. **Swahili Grammar**, p. 58

8

## (iv)　Adjective

The adjectival stem is governed by the pronominal concords of the noun it qualifies. The following are the adjectival stems:

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI[1]) | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|
| —hulu (big) | —kuru | —kabwa | —golo |
| —tuku (small) | —duku | —dogo | —nnyane |
| —lapfu (long) | —refu | —refu | —telele |
| —pfufhi (short) | —pfupi | —fupi | —khutswe |
| —swa (new) | --swa | —pya | —swa |
| —swu (black) | —tema | weusi | —so |
| —tshena (white) | —chena | —eupe | —sweu |
| —raru (three) | —tatu | —tatu | —raro |
| —tanu (five) | —shanu | —tano | —hlano |
| —vhili (two) | —viri | —mbili, sili | —bedi |
| —vhifha (bad) | —ipa | —baya | —bifa |
| —nona (fat) | —nona | —nono, nene | —nona |
| —tswuku (red) | —shava | —ekundu | —hubedu |

The adjectival stems of the above languages are more or less the same and in other cases too one can deduce the sound shift from one language to the other. For instance Venda **pfufhi** derived from Shona **pfupi,** p $>$ fh in Venda; **lapfu** from **refu, raru** from **tatu, p$>$ fh, r$<$ t, f $>$ pf.**

Venda has common forms with Shona and Swahili and also common forms with Northern Sotho, therefore acting as a bridge between North and South.

Sometimes Venda uses both forms of the adjective for different meanings. For instance **tswuku** and **ngunduu. Ngunduu** is derived from Swahili **ekundu** and in Venda it means 'most red' or 'red as blood', while **tswuku** is used for ordinary red colour.

### (v)　Possessive.

The possessive in Venda shares many features in common with other languages. It consists of the possessive concord and the possessive stem:

(1)　Ashton E.O.　:　**Swahili Grammar**, p. 46.

9

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| wanga (mine) | wangu | wangu | wa-ka |
| wau (yours) | waku | wako | wa-go |
| wawe (his) | wake | wake | wa gagwe |
| waṋu (yours) | wenyu | wenu | wešo |
| wavho (theirs) | wavo | wao | wabo |

The possessive is almost the same in form and in meaning. For instance: Venda **wanga** Shona **wangu** Swahili **wangu** and N. Sotho **wa-ka.** The Venda and Northern Sotho are the same except for the nasal compound which becomes **k** in N. Sotho (ng > k). The same thing takes place in wau > wago for Venda and N. Sotho (u > o).

The Shona and Swahili forms are the same e.g. wake > wake and wenyu > wenu where coalescence has taken place in both languages. In wavho > wavo > wao > wabo all the languages are the same except Swahili where some form of elision seems to have taken place to make **wao.**

### (vi)  The Quantitative pronoun

The quantitative consists of the prefixal element plus the stem or suffix: -othe  -ose  -ote  -ohle:

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| tshoṱhe | chose | chote | sohle |

Here the quantitative appears to be the same for all these languages. The fifference is only in the speech sounds which appear to form a sound shift;

Swahili:  chote
Shona:  chose
Venda:  tshoṱhe
N. Sotho:  sohle i.e. Swahili Venda Shona N. Sotho: t > ṱh > s > hl.

### THE VERB

The verb in these languages is normally disyllabic becoming polysyllabic when suffixes are added to the basic verb stem. There are very few monosyllabic verb stems which I consider to be linking elements between the Bantu languages and languages of West Africa or the Sudanic languages. Many of the verb stems are identical in form and in meaning:

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| –bika | –bika | –bika | –phega/apea  (cook) |
| –imba | –imba | –imba | —  (sing) |
| –vhumba | –vumba | –umba | –bopa (mould) |
| –swika | –svika | –fika | –fihla (arrive) |
| –lela | –rera | –lea | –lela (bring up for) |
| –lala | –rara | –lala | –lala (sleep) |
| –linda | –rinda | –linda | –leta (to keep watch over) |
| –vhona | –vona | –ona | –bona (see) |
| –lima | –rima | –lima | –lema (plough) |
| –sema | –sema | –sema | –sema (to scold, be watchful) |
| –ponda | –ponda | –ponda | –pota (to plunder) |
| –tanga | –tanga | –tanga | —  (to encircle or begin) |
| –onda | –onda | –onda | –ota (to be lean) |
| –tema | –tema | –tema | –rema (to cut) |
| –tenda | –tenda | –tenda | (–theta) (to thank) |
| –penga | –penga | –penga | (–pheka) (to be mad) |
| –famba | –famba | –famba | —  (shoulder, walk) |
| –ruma | –tuma | –tuma | –roma (send) |
| –ambuwa | –amuka | –amka | –apoga (cross, wake, clear up) |
| –anea | –aneka | –anea | –anega (spread, dry up) |
| –tshimbila | –chimbidzika | –kimbia | –sepela (walk) |
| –bva | –bva | –bva | –tswa (get out, come out) |
| –dzima | –dzima | –zima | tima (extinguish) |

The verbs are all very similar in these languages. For instance the basic verb stem for 'to hoe' or 'plough' is -**lima** in Venda, -**rima** in Shona, -**lima** in Swahili, -**lema** in Northern Sotho; the same can be said of -**onda** (to be lean) in Venda, -**onda** in Shona, -**onda** in Swahili, and -**onda** in Northern Sotho. The same holds good for -**ruma tuma roma** respectively.

The Venda verb -**tenda** is identical with the Shona and Swahili verbs in form and meaning. In -**tshimbila** (Venda) the Shona form means 'to run' but the other languages all have the basic meaning.

### Derived verb stems

The basic verb stems can extend or change their basic meaning by adding suffixes to their final root:

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| –limela | –rimera | –fungia | –lemela |

**-ea (potential)**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| –limea | –rimeka | –fungika | –lemega |

**-iwa, -wa (passive)**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| –nwa | –nwa | –nywa | –nwa |
| –liwa | –dyiwa | –liwa/pewa | –lewa |

**-ana (reciprocal)**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| –fungana | –fungana | –fungana | –ratana |

The general principles underlying the verbal suffixes in these languages as far as function is concerned is the same. The sufixes bring about a shitf of meaning in all the above languages. For instance "be eaten" is -liwa > -dyiwa > -liwa > -lewa in all the languages with the same shift of meaning. In -limela > -rimera > -fungia > lemela all these forms mean 'to do for some one' or 'on behalf of some one' or 'in the direction of someone'.

Venda is closer in some respects to Shona and at the same time it is closer to N. Sotho in others. It also shares the same verbs and forms of verbs with Swahili. Venda as a result of this sharing of verb forms stands in between Shona-Swahili and Norther Sotho and other languages in the South. It is clear that many languages meet in Venda, as we have seen in the speech sounds above. Venda therefore serves as a bridge language which communicates either North or South.

### The Copulative

The copulative is a construction in which formatives and other words constitute sentences which do not use any of the forementioned verb stems:

**VENDA**

NDI MUTHU (it is a person)
ndi vhathu (they are persons)
Hamisi ndi mulapfu

**SHONA**

ndi munhu
ndi vanhu
Hamisi ndi murefu

**SWAHILI**

ndi/ni mtu
ni watu
Hamisi ni ɣefu

**N. SOTHO**

ke motho
ke batho
Hamisi ke yo metelele

The ni/ndi copulative concord or copulative subject is used in Swahili in the copulative construction. The **ndi** is used in Venda while **ke** is used in Northern Sotho. These are forms of the positive while for the negative we have the following:-

**VENDA** : Ali a si mulapfu (ali is not tall)
**SHONA** : Ali asimurefu
**SWAHILI** : Ali simrefu
**N. SOTHO** : Ali gase yo motelele

The negative is formed by using -a si-, -si-, -ga se- formatives in the above languages.

The compulative construction can use pronouns, adjectives, adverbs etc. in all the forementioned languages. There is a close relationship between the **ni** in Swahili and the **ndi** in Venda. The **ni** form is also found in Venda when using concords as copulative formatives e.g. **ni vhathu** (you are people)

### ADVERBS

The adverbs in Venda, Shona, Swahili and N. Sotho modify the verb in respect of time, place and manner. Adverbs are words which are derived from other parts of speech as well as independent word. The following will isslustrate the forementioned languages:-

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|-------|-------|---------|----------------|
| Zwino (now) | zvino | sasa | bjale |
| namusi, naasi (today) | Nasi, namusi | leo | naasi, lehono |
| kale (long ago) | kare | kale, napo | kgale |
| masiari (day time) | masikati | mchana | mosegare |
| vhusiku (night) | husiku | usiku | bošego |
| ngafhi (where) | kupi | wapi | kae |
| phanda (front) | mberi | mbele | pele |
| kule (far) | kure | kule | kgole |
| lini (when) | rini | lini | leng |
| matshelo (tomorrow) | mangwana | kesho | go sa sa |

It is interesting to observe that the adverb 'today' **naasi > nasi > leo > naasi** is the same for all the languages except Swahili. Swahili has **sasa** for 'now' while N. Sotho has **go sa sa** for 'tomorrow'. Shona and Venda have **zvino/zwino** for 'now'. All the languages use the noun vhusiku > husiku > usiku bošego as an adverb. Venda and Swahili use the locative suffix -ni which is also present in N. Sotho. N. Sotho has locative **lapeng.** Shona does not use the locative suffix but locative prefixes, e.g. **pamusha** (at the court yard) **pamusoro** (on the head).

### IDEOPHONE

The ideophones in these languages use the same ideophone which is more or less the same in form and in meaning:

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|
| bu (falling) | bu | pu, tifu | pu/po |
| ṅai (shine) | nai | —kufa fofofo* | ngai |
| waa (fall) | waa | mwa | waa |
| dugi (spark) | — | tiki, teke | tuki |
| pilivhili (red) | piriviri | —kunuka fee* | hwebii |
| tshabwa (of water) | — | chubwi | — |

The ideophones in Venda are nearly similar with those found in Shona e.g. pilivhili > piriviri (for red). Sometimes it approaches those of Swahili e.g. **bu > pu     tshabwa > chubwi     dugi    tiki    kwatsha < kacha** in which the two languages are getting closer to each other. Even in the case of ideophones Venda can enable us to move across to Swahili with ease.

## CONJUNCTIONS

The conjunctions link up sentences in more or less the same manner in these languages:-

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | NORTHERN SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|
| fhedzi (but) | asi | ile, lakini | fela |
| uri (so that) | kuti | — | gore |
| bva (since) | bva | bali/bva | go tswa |
| na (and) | na | na | na |
| zwino (and then) | zvino | — | bjale |

Venda and Shona are closer in their conjuctions. For instance they both use the adverb **zwino/zvino** and also **bva** (since) as conjunctions. All the languages in the above table use the conjunction **na** but all differ in the conjunction fhedzi > asi > lakini > fela. Venda, Shona and N. Sotho use the same form of the conjunction to introduce the subjunctive clause, viz.: **uri > kuti > gore.** Therefore Venda forms the bridge between Shona and N. Sotho while on the other hand is closer to Swahili.

## SYNTAX

The languages exhibit the sentence structures shich appear closer on morphological and syntactical bases:

**VENDA:** Lufhanga lwo xela (the knife is lost)
**SHONA:** Bang rarashika
**SWAHILI:** Kisu kimepotea
**N.SOTHO:** Thipa e lahlegile

14

Applying re-write rules[1]) on the above sentences we have the following:

### VENDA
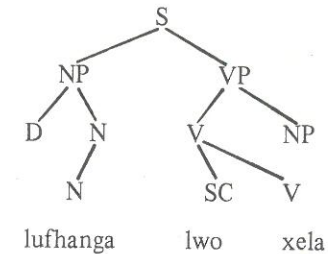


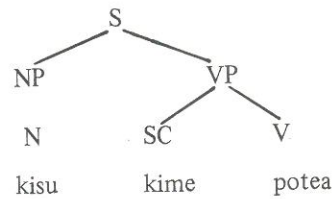NP = Lufhanga
VP = lwo xela
SC = lwo
V = xela

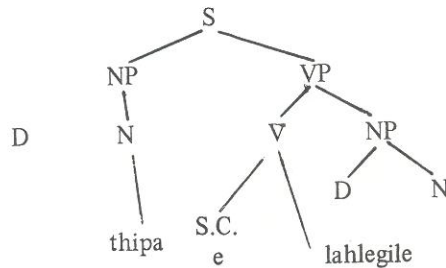### SHONA
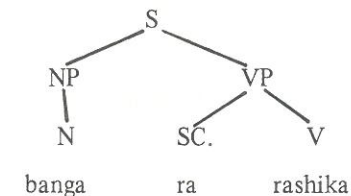


NP = banga
VP = rarashika
SC = ra—
V = rashika

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(1)    Adopted from Chomsky N. : Aspects of the Theory of Syntax
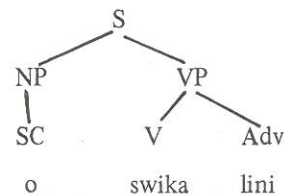
15

## SWAHILI



```
            S
          /   \
        NP     VP
         |    /  \
         N   SC   V
        kisu kime potea
```

NP  = kisu
VP  = kimepotea
SC  = kime
V   = potea

## NORTHERN SOTHO



```
              S
           /     \
         NP       VP
        / |      /  \
       D  N     V    NP
          |          / \
        thipa       D   N
         S.C.           lahlegile
          e
```

When the interrogative sentence is involved we have the following:

## VENDA



```
          S
        /   \
      NP     VP
       |    /  \
      SC   V    Adv
       o  swika lini
```

## SHONA



```
            S
          /   \
        NP     VP
         |    /  \
        Sc   V    Adv
        wa  svika rini  :  **wasvika rini**
```

## NORTHERN SOTHO



```
            S
          /   \
        NP     VP
         |    /  \
        SC   V    Adv
         o fihlile leng  :  **o fihlile leng/neng**
```
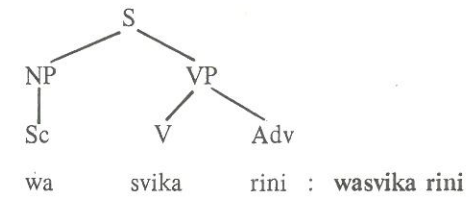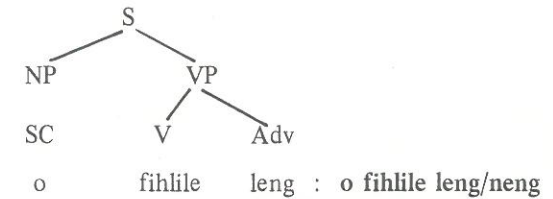
The above simple sentences illustrate the phrase structure of the languages we are dealing with. It is also evident that the sentences may be expanded to complex sentences and even to compound sentences without altering the phrase structure of the languages under discussion.

Venda will serve as key language to unlock the doors of these languages. It will help a person from either North or South to cross over easily to the sentence structure of any of the forementioned languages.

When the sentence has a noun which is qualified by an adjective we have the following:

## VENDA



```
                S
             /     \
           NP       VP
          / \      /  \
         D   N    V    NP
         |   |         / \
         N  Adj. V    D   N
            SC V      N  Adj.
```

— munna  muhulu  o  la  —  khuhu  khulu
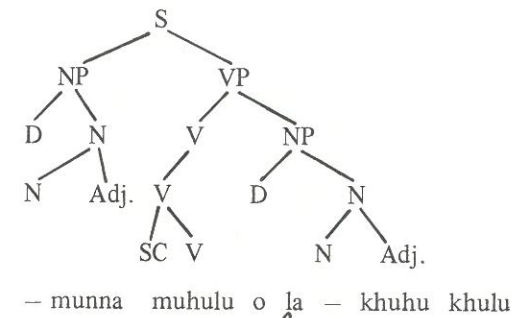
Here the adjectives follow the nouns they qualify immediately and nothing intervenes between them and the adjective.

**SHONA:** Murume **mukuru** onodya sadza. (the big man eats porridge)



murume   mukuru   uno   dya   sadza
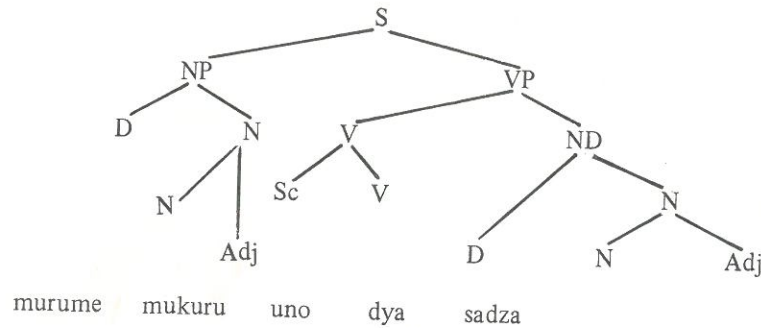
## SEMANTICS

Semantically Venda shares many features in common with Shona, Swahili and Northern Sotho as far as vocabulary and word forms are concerned.

The form of the word determines the meaning of the word but the latter is also influenced by the context. The meaning of a word or phrase is very important as far as language as a medium of communication is concerned. The order of the morphemes too has to do with the meaning of a word. Let us look at few examples from the languages we have been dealing with previously in order to see the relationship between meaning and form:

(i) **Nouns**

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | N. SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|
| Muthu (person) | munhu | mtu | motho |
| vhathu (persons) | vanhu | watu | batho |
| mwana/nwana (child) | mwana | mwana | ngwana |
| ṅwaha (year) | mwaka | miaka | ngwaga |
| muvhili (body) | miri | mwili | mmele |
| ṅwedzi (moon) | mwedzi | mwezi | ngwedi |
| mpunga (rice/weed) | mpunga | mpunga | mphoka* |
| tshithu (thing) | chinhu | kitu | selo |
| ngoma (drum) | ngoma | ngoma | koma + |
| mbeu (seed) | mbeu | mbegu | peu |
| nyimbo (songs) | nyimbo | nyimbo | — |
| ndimi (tongues) | ndimi | ndimi | timi |
| mbudzi (goat) | mbudzi | mbuzi | pudi |
| mmbwa (dog) | ibga | mbwa | mpya |

18

The form is slightly affected by the order of the morphemes of each language but when sound shift is taken into consideration it is evident that the sounds are diachronically the same.

(ii) **Verbs**

| VENDA | SHONA | SWAHILI | N. SOTHO |
|---|---|---|---|
| —imba (sing) | —imba | —imba | — |
| —vhumba (mould) | —vumba | —umba | —bopa |
| —ambuwa (cross) | —amuka | —amka | —apoga + |
| —swika (arrive) | —svika | —fika | —fihla |
| —lala (sleep) | —rara | —lala | —lala |
| —fha (give) | —pa | —pa | —fa + |
| —fa (die) | —fa | —fa | —hwa + |
| —onda (get lean) | —onda | —onda | —ota |
| —tenda (thank) | —tenda | —tenda | - theta* |
| —ruma (send) | —tuma | —tuma | —roma |
| —amba (talk) | —amba + | —ambia (tell) | —apa |
| —anea (to dry up) | —aneka | —anea | —anega |
| —adzima (borrow) | — | —azima | —adima |
| —dzima (extinguish) | —dzima | —zima | —tima |

Deducing from the above words it is clear that the basic meanings of the words have been retained in these languages although in certain words the area of meaning has shifted a little, for instance **ambuwa** in Venda means 'to cross a river' while in Shona **Amuka** means 'to get up from a state' or 'from sleep to a state of consciousness.' In Swahili it means almost the same as it does in Shona and yet in N. Sotho it means 'to clear up', especially of the clouds.

**Ngoma** in Venda means the drum, the initiation school, the fontanelle of the small child. In Northern Sotho it has the first two meanings but not the third, while in Shona and Swahili it has retained the basic meaning i.e. drum.

In the idiomatic expressions of many languages some words shift their primary meaning, for instance:

VENDA    :   u ḽa kholomo     (to win a beast, or worth a cow)
             u ḽa hatsi   (to be suffering, to be poor)
             u ḽa tshelede    (to spend money recklessly)
N.SOTHO  :   go ja kgomo  (worth a beast)
             go ja bjang  (to have nothing, to be poor, to suffer)
             go ja tshelete  ( squander money)

In addition to the above characteristics, meaning may also be dependent on the tonemes of the languages concerned.  For instance in

\*     The No. Sotho  k < ng (sound shift) g < k.
         f < p (sound shift)
         hw < f (sound shift)

\+     It is not found in this language but derived by analogy from other languages.

19

VENDA          : Vhà àmbà mùthù  (They mean a person or it refers to a person) LL
                 Vhà ámbá múthú (do they mean a person? ) HH[1])
                 mùthù (a person)  LL
                 múthú  (a person and not an animal)  HH
                 ndi thángá (they are roofs)  HH
                 ndi thàngà (they are reeds)  LL

NORTHERN
SOTHO          : Ke bóná pélà (I see the rockrabbit)  HL[2])
                 Ke bóná pèlà (I see a xylophone)  LL
                 Kè mòthò (I am a person)  LL
                 Ke móthó (is it a person? )  HH

## CONCLUSION

From our travels with a Venda drum from the borders of Ethiopia through Kenya, Tanzania, Rhodesia into the Transvaal we find that the Venda language shares many things in common with languages spoken in those countries.

From Maroteng in the heart of Lebowa to Gaborone through to Tshinshasa and finally to Kampala the Venda language can form the basis of one's knowledge of the languages spoken in these areas.

With the Venda language's system a person can learn some of the languages in the area without much difficulty.

Since the morphemes and the tonemes of Venda allow adjustments we may conclude that:

1)    Venda sounds, tonemic aspects and syntactical features may form the basis of learning any of the forementioned languages.

2)    The Venda language can be used as a bridge to cross rivers and pools of languages in this area.

3)    Venda is the key to the study of the Northern Languages:

(i)    muthu > munhu > moto > muntu > mtu > motho (person)
       (Venda > Shona >Lingala > Tshiluba >Swahili > Northern Sotho)

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1. **Mathivha M.E.R., The Toneme Patterns of the Venda Noun**

2. **Endemann T.H.M., A Grammar of Northern Sotho, Part I**

20

(ii)    ndala > zhala > nzala > tlala  (hunger)
        (Venda > Shona > Tshiluba > Northern Sotho)

(iii)   mvula > mvura > mvula > pula  (rain)
        (Venda > Shona > Tshiluba > Northern Sotho)

(iv)    tshanda > tshianza > seatla (hand)
        (Venda > Tshiluba > Northern Sotho)

(v)     ive > ibge > dibwe > lebje > ribwe (stone)
        (Venda > Shona > Tshiluba > Northern Sotho > **Tsonga**)

(vi)    mulimi > murimi > mudimi > molemi > murhimi (plougher)
        (Venda > Shona > Tshiluba > Northern Sotho > **Tsonga**)

(vii)   u fha > kupa > kupa > kupa > go fa (to give)
        (Venda > Shona > Swahili > Tshiluba > N. Sotho)

4)    The Venda language can form a good link of the various languages of the Bantu Language family.

**The Acceptance of the Chair of Venda.**

Ri ofha vhoinwi midabe,
Vha wela miedzi na milambo,
Vhatanzwa matombo a kuna,
Ṅwali a vha khoda nga lulimi luswa – **Luvenda.**

Kha vha daho neledzi vha do dzi wana ngalwo,
Lwone lu do vha tanganya ña vha muya u si na nama,
Vhaendeulu vhatei vha Venda

Venda shango la tsiku huvhili,
Hune mivhula-vhusiku ya tatisana na mielela,
Mielela ya levhela mitongola,
Mitongola ya tokonya makole,
Makole a rothisa mitodzi,
Mitodzi ya vha milambo na tsinga dza Venda.

21

Vha a li funanaa shango ḽa Ṅwali we denga,
Fhuluḽêdzani vhafumakaḓzi vha Venḓa,
Pembelani vhahali vha Venḓa,
Mukaṋo wa laṋu no ṋewa.

With the above words Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to accept the chair of VENDA LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE in the University of the North and to help it in the present development as a vehicle of Venda culture and philosopy.

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