

# The History and Development of Zulu as a literary Medium

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the developmental history of Zulu as literary medium, starting from the time missionaries first reduced it to writing approximately 150 years ago up to 1993 when its current orthography was finalised. An orthography specifies a number of things about the writing of a language, notably how the speech sounds should be written and where the boundaries of words occur. In this article the focus primarily falls on the developmental history of the alphabetic system of Zulu. Contributions made by different language pioneers to the orthographic development of Zulu are highlighted. So too are the changes that from time to time were made to its alphabet. Only limited attention is given to word division in Zulu, not because it is regarded as a minor orthographic matter, but because it was a far less controversial issue among the scholars who were involved in the orthographic development of this language than what it later became in academic circles. Ever since Doke's theory on word identification in the African languages was accepted as an orthographic principle in Zulu, a certain uniformity in the writing of Zulu words was achieved so that when the orthography of this language first became standardized in 1934 (and in its subsequent revisions), the orthographic committees concerned found it necessary to regulate the writing of only a small number of words in this language – something which is borne out by the relatively small number of word division rules Zulu has. In conclusion a number of problems that writers have with some of the capitalisation rules in Zulu are pointed out.

## 1. Historical background

Of the different indigenous languages spoken in South Africa Zulu was one of the first ones that were put to writing. Although it became a written medium more than 150 years ago and today is one of the major languages of communication in this country its history as a written language has never been properly documented. The result is that students of Zulu normally have very little knowledge if any, regarding this important aspect of the Zulu language. It is to address this apparent shortcoming in the teaching of Zulu that prompted this investigation.

Before the advent of Western civilization in South Africa, the indigenous people of this country did not read or write but relied instead on their rich oral tradition. This was the situation until the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Christian missionaries from Europe and America came to South Africa with the purpose of bringing the gospel to the native people of this country. These missionaries, however, soon discovered that their work comprised much more than preaching Christianity and spreading the gospel. One of the first major challenges they had to face was, of

course, to acquire and record the languages spoken by the people whom they came to minister the gospel to. They subsequently also had to reduce these languages to writing as without a writing system it obviously would not have been possible for them to teach their converts how to read and write nor to translate and print scriptural texts, and eventually the whole Bible, in the languages of these people. Since no group in those days other than the missionaries undertook to educate the African people, acceptance of Christianity remained the only means of access to literacy, which at the time became exclusive to Christian converts and their families. This marked the beginning of an era that would see African language studies in this country remaining nearly exclusively in the hands of missionaries for many years to come.

## 2. The putting to writing of Zulu

Zulu was the third African language in South Africa after Xhosa and Tswana, to be put to writing. Its writing history dates back to 1848 when what is assumed to be the first piece of written Zulu appeared in print. The credit for this achievement goes to a certain **Newton Adams** of the American Board Mission who was responsible for the translation of a number of extracts from the book of *Genesis* published under the title: *Extracts from Genesis*. The well-known missionary station *Adams Mission* near Amanzimtoti owns its name to this missionary. One year later, in 1849, J.C. Bryant, also of the American Board, produced what was probably the first ever grammatical account of the Zulu language (albeit a very concise one) when he published his ideas upon the Zulu language in a thirteen-paged article in the *Journal of the Oriental Society* entitled: *The Zulu Language*. After this contribution by Bryant, Zulu gradually developed into one of the most important literary mediums in Southern Africa.

Other missionaries who made significant contributions to the development of Zulu as a literary medium include:

**Hans P.S. Schreuder**, to whom the credit goes for being the author of what was probably the first grammar (written in Norwegian) of the Zulu language.

**J.W. Colenso**, a highly regarded missionary and language pioneer whose acclaimed Zulu grammar entitled: *First Steps in Zulu: Being an Elementary Grammar of the Zulu Language* was published in 1855 and subsequently reprinted several times. The town of Colenso in KwaZulu-Natal is named after him.

**Jacob Ludwig Döhne**, who has the distinction of producing the first scientific dictionary published on a South African Bantu language entitled: *Zulu-Kafir Dictionary, etymologically explained with copious illustrations and examples* which was published in 1857.

**A.T. Bryant**, who in 1905 published his extremely useful *Zulu-English Dictionary* in which he included proposals for a new Zulu orthography that was for the first time based on phonetic principles.

## 3. The development of the alphabetic system of Zulu.

An orthography specifies a number of things about the writing of a language, notably how the speech sounds of a language should be written and secondly, what the recognized words in the language are, i.e. where the boundaries of words occur, so that autonomous words be written separately from one another. At this point it is perhaps important to note that during the earliest years in the writing history of Zulu, and in particular during the second half of the 19th century,

attention was focussed more on improvements in the orthographic representations of the Zulu sound system, i.e. the Zulu alphabet, than on anything else in its writing system. In the discussion that follows we will focus on the historical development of the alphabetic system of Zulu first and then briefly comment on the problem of word division in this language.

### 3.1 The Zulu alphabet during its earliest years

As was noted earlier, Zulu, like most of the other African languages spoken in this country, was first put to writing by missionaries whose initial task it was to develop an alphabet for the languages of the people they brought the gospel to. However, they soon discovered that knowledge of the sound system of their mother tongue or of that of the classical languages, was not enough to enable them to devise orthographies for the African languages because of the many sounds in these languages they were unacquainted with. They consequently had to create a way of capturing these new sound structures into written form. This was not an easy task but their efforts were none the less laudable, particularly as far as Zulu is concerned, because the basic sound system they had developed for this language has over the years never been drastically changed. Take for instance the click sounds. They were depicted by **x**, **c** and **q** respectively, as, in fact, they still are today. (The reason(s) why these specific letters of the Roman alphabet were chosen to represent the click sounds is not known. It is possible, however, that they were the only letters left in the alphabet to represent the click sounds after all the others had been used to depict the rest of the sounds in the Zulu sound system.) This does not mean that there are no significant differences between how the Zulu speech sounds were written then and how they are written today. The following are some of the most conspicuous imperfections in the earliest orthographic representations of the Zulu sound system as it was used in among others Colenso's *First Steps in Zulu* (1855) and in Roberts' *An English-Zulu Dictionary* (1880).

- (a) The failure to indicate *aspiration* in aspirated plosive and click sounds even though aspiration in these sounds is clearly audible. This means that words and stems with aspirated sounds such as *-thanda*, *ikhanda*, *ekhaya*, *-phuma*, *-chitha*, *qhwa* and *isiXhosa*, were respectively written as *-tanda*, *ikanda*, *ekaya*, *-puma*, *-cita*, *qwa* and *isiXosa*.
- (b) No orthographic distinction was made between the three  $b^s$  found in Zulu, i.e. an implosive **b** [b], a voiced explosive **b** [b] that occurs in the nasal compound *mb* and its devoiced explosive counterpart **bh** [b]. All three these  $b^s$  were erroneously written with the same symbol, i.e. **b**, as for instance in: *-beka* (cf. *-beka*) *put*, *-beka* (cf. *-bheka*) *look at* and *imbuzi* *goat*.
- (c) Two juxtaposed vowels without a glottal stop between them were written without a semi-vowel between them. Consider in this regard the following examples where no glottal stop occurs between the juxtaposed vowels *ai*, *au* and *ao* respectively: *ugwai* (cf. *ugwayi*) *tobacco*, *aukho* (cf. *awukho*) *it's not here*, *usaoti* (cf. *usawoti*) *salt*, *imbaimbai* (cf. *imbayimbayi*) *canon*.
- (d) The lateral-alveolar fricative *dl* [f] was written as **dhl**, e.g.: *amandhla* *strength* (cf. *amandla*), *ibandlha* *assembly* (cf. *ibandla*).
- (e) The voiced glottal fricative *hh* [h] was written with a single **h**, e.g. *ihashi* *horse*, (cf. *ihhashi*), *iholo* *hall* (cf. *ihholo*).
- (f) The prepalatal fricative *sh* [ʃ] was either written as **sh**, **tsh**, **ch** or **ty**, as for instance in: *ishumi*, *itshumi* or *ichumi* *ten* (cf. *ishumi*), *-shaya*, *-tshaya*, *-tyaya* or *-chaya* *strike* (cf. *-shaya*), *-shisa*, *-tshisa* or *-tyisa* *burn* (cf. *-shisa*).

- (g) All instances of compulsory vowel elision were indicated by means of an apostrophe, e.g.: lab'abantu (< laba abantu) *these people*, s'omile (< si-omile) *we are thirsty*, b'alile (< ba-alile) *they refused*. The copulative prefixes when preceding pronouns were inexplicably also written with an apostrophe despite the fact that vowel deletion does not occur here, e.g.: y'imi (cf. yimi) *it is I*, ng'uwe (cf. nguwe) *it is you*, y'ibo (cf. yibo) *it is them*.

Matters were further complicated by the fact that most missionary societies that operated among the Zulus in Natal in those early days, such as the American Board Mission, Church of England Mission, Norwegian Mission and Berlin Missionary Society, each had their own set of orthographic rules. For instance, in his *Grammatik for Zulusproget* (1850) Bishop Hans Schreuder of the Norwegian Mission used a number of special symbols for the present **j**, **hl**, **dl**, **sh**, **tsh**, **ts**, etc., employing modified Roman letters, with diacritics superimposed. He also used three very unfamiliar characters to represent the click sounds. Furthermore, he confused, at times, **sh** and **tsh**, and sometimes missed the initial nasal in the compound **ng-** (as was often done by contemporary authors such as for instance the Rev. J. Bennie of the Glasgow Missionary Society who did so in Xhosa. (Pinnock, 1994: 74). Colenso, however, never committed this deficiency in his writings.

As a result of a lack of agreement between the various missionary societies concerning the acceptance of a uniform orthography for Zulu, the American Mission Board decided to set up a Committee on Uniform Orthography and invited Lewis Grout (after whom the town Groutville in KwaZulu Natal was named) to analyse the Zulu speech sounds and to make suggestions as to how their representations in writing can be improved. In a paper delivered in 1852 before the *American Oriental Society* Grout proposed new signs to take the place of **hl** and **dl**. He also proposed modified symbols for **j**, **tsh**, **r** and **kl**, as well as well as modifications of the basic **c**, **q** and **x** by diacritic marks for the voiced and nasal clicks. In addition he recommended 'that every fundamental sound in a language should have its own appropriate representative'. (Doke, Cole, 1984: 42). Grout actually deduced no less than 91 such 'fundamental sounds' in Zulu, many of which he indicated by means of special orthographic symbols.

The perceived revolutionary nature of Grout's proposals unfortunately led to disagreement with his colleagues and eventually to the rejection of his thesis. Despite its rejection, Grout's thesis must nevertheless be regarded as the first serious effort to standardize the Zulu orthography. In future there would be further attempts to standardize and upgrade the writing system of this language. In fact, various orthography settlements would from time to time be reached as far as Zulu was concerned. The first such attempt came in 1905 when A.T. Bryant made certain proposals regarding the standardization of the Zulu orthography.

### **A.T. Bryant's proposals for an improved Zulu orthography**

Of the different language pioneers who contributed to the development of the Zulu orthography A.T. Bryant was among the first to use phonetic means in an attempt to rectify the many inconsistencies and imperfections that marked the orthography of this language at that time. (As was noted above, just about every missionary society had its own set of orthographic rules.) In 1905 A.T. Bryant wrote in his acclaimed Zulu Dictionary:

*One of the most conspicuous defects hitherto, in regard to the Zulu language, has been the very imperfect system of writing it; and one of the most conspicuous features of this Dictionary is an attempt to remove that defect by supplying a new and original method of orthography based on phonetic principles.*

And further:

*I have believed that the only reasonable course, acceptable to any thinking people whose duty it may become to reduce a barbarous tongue for the first time to writing, is to pen the sounds as exactly as possible as they come from the speakers' mouth. Heretofore this has not been done -coba,-cobha and -chobha; -potoza and -photoza each having its own meaning and different pronunciation, have all, in their respective groups, been written in the same way, without any distinguishing mark. There were at least nine different sounds, commonly occurring in Zulu speech, left entirely unprovided for in the old system of writing followed by Bishop Colenso. (Bryant: op. cit.: 1905: 9\*)*

It is on account of his phonetic approach that Bryant (op. cit.: 12) proposed that all the aspirated sounds in Zulu, notably the plosives and click sounds, be written with an *h*, i.e. as *ph*, *th*, *kh*, *ch*, *xh* and *qh* so as to distinguish them from their non-aspirated counterparts, i.e. the ejective plosives *k*, *t* and *p* and the radical clicks *c*, *x* and *q*. This was a definite orthographic improvement as aspiration is a clearly audible phonetic feature of many sounds in Zulu and is often the only phonetic difference between words and stems in this language. Compare the following examples in this regard:

|       |                      |   |         |                        |
|-------|----------------------|---|---------|------------------------|
| -paka | <i>park</i> (as car) | : | -phaka  | <i>serve</i> (as food) |
| -xoxa | <i>converse</i>      | : | -xhoxha | <i>prod</i>            |
| -kala | <i>weigh</i>         | : | -khala  | <i>cry</i> .           |

Bryant (op. cit.: 15) furthermore claimed that what hitherto was written as a single **b** was in fact three different b-sounds, viz. an aspirated **b** [b̥] as in -beka *put*, -bona *see*, a slightly aspirated **b** (that occurs as part of the nasal compound mb) and a strongly aspirated **b** that occurs outside of nasal compounds. He consequently proposed that the latter two b's be distinguished from the first one by writing them with the symbol **bh** which meant that the compound **mb** was to be written as **mbh** as for instance in imbhobo (cf. imbobo) *hole*, imbhuzi (cf. imbuzi) *goat*, -bambha (cf. -bamba) *catch* and -lambha (cf. -lamba) *become hungry*.

Bryant differed from Colenso in that his phonetic approach necessitated that a glide be inserted between juxtaposed vowels with no glottal stop between them. Thus he wrote ugwayi *tobacco*, usawoti *salt*, awukho *it is not here*, etc. whereas Colenso wrote them as ugwai, usaoti, aukho, etc.

Bryant's phonetic approach was no doubt also the reason why he favoured the doubling of vowels in certain instances in Zulu. He maintained that each of the primary vowels in Zulu has a variant form that is pronounced with greater length than its other variant forms (including the variant that occurs in the penultimate syllable). (See for instance Bryant (op. cit.: 1).) These so-called long vowels are only found in a limited number of words in Zulu. To distinguish them from their shorter counterparts he proposed that they be written in doubled form, as for instance in the following examples: -pheepha (cf. -phepha) *be safe*, isihiiya (cf. isihiya) *pumpkin-mash*, ihaashi (cf. ihashi) *horse* and -nquuma (cf. -nquma) *cut off*.

Bryant furthermore rejected the different letters used by writers for the prepalatal fricative [ʃ] (see examples given earlier) by proposing that this sound be constantly written as **sh**, as for instance in -shaya *hit* and ishumi *ten*.

Bryant's proposals (Bryant: op. cit.: 90\*) also included a rule concerning the use of the hyphen whereby enclitics '... (that) perform the service of *adverbial suffixes* and retain their own essential meaning', were to be written with a hyphen. In terms of this rule the interrogatives -ni? *what?* and -phi? *where?* as well as the enclitic -ke *then* were to be hyphenated, as for example in: -phuza-ni *drink what?*, una-ni? *what is the matter?* si-phi *isitsha? where is the vessel?*, gijima-ke *run then*.

Several of Bryant's orthographic proposals would eventually be included in what was probably the first *officially* recognized Zulu orthography that came into effect in 1934. (Doke, 1954: 91)

### 3.2 The 1934 Zulu orthography: The first officially recognized Zulu orthography

A great orthographic upheaval occurred in Africa in the 1930s as a result of the work of the *International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* founded in London in 1926 by D Westermann and his colleagues. A new and consistent African orthography was proposed and this sparked off a quest for language standardization throughout the continent. This 'wind of change' also reached this country and in 1928 led to the setting up by the Union government of the so-called *Union Government Advisory Committee on Bantu Studies and Research* (later reconstituted as the *Inter-University Committee for African Studies* (Doke, op. cit.: 91)). In the same year the Advisory Committee appointed the so-called *Central Orthography Committee* to take charge of the question of reforms in the various orthographies. The *Central Orthography Committee* in turn appointed a sub-committee for each of the four main African language groups in the country, i.e. for the Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga languages respectively.

In November 1929 the Central Orthography Committee met in Johannesburg under the chairmanship of Prof. C.M. Doke to consider the work done by the various sub-committees. Following their recommendations certain changes to the orthographies of the languages concerned were approved by the Advisory Committee. The orthographic system of some languages such as Xhosa and Northern Sotho for instance, was quite harshly affected by these recommended changes. Zulu on the other hand, needed to implement only a relatively small number of changes as far as the representation of its sound system was concerned. In some instances these orthographic changes were the same as those proposed by Bryant (1905) (see 3.1 above) while in other instances they were different. Theunissen (1943) reported the following recommendations concerning the orthographic representation of the Zulu sound system that were approved by the Advisory Committee in 1929 and which came into effect in 1934 as part of what was presumably the first officially recognized Zulu orthography.

- (a) The implosive *b* [ɓ] was to be written as **ɓ** and its explosive counterpart as **b**. (Bryant (1905: 12) suggested that they be written as *b* and *bh* respectively.) Compare for instance the following examples written according to the requirements of the 1934 orthography:

|                            |   |                          |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| -ɓala <i>count</i>         | : | -bala <i>write</i>       |
| -ɓeka <i>place</i>         | : | -beka <i>look at</i>     |
| -ɓuka <i>watch/look at</i> | : | -buka <i>book a seat</i> |

- (b) No doubling of vowels was permitted. This meant that Bryant's so-called long vowels that he indicated by means of a double vowel, were to be written with a single vowel. Words and stems with long vowels such as -ceeba *be rich*, -pheepha *avoid injury* and ihaashi *horse*, had in terms of this ruling to be written as -ceba, -phepha and ihashi respectively. The only doubling of an alphabetical symbol that was permitted was in the case of the voiced glottal fricative *hh* and the nasal **m** of the abbreviated noun prefix of classes 1 and 3 when this prefix occurs before stems beginning with the nasal *m*, as for instance in: **ummeli** *lawyer* and **ummbila** *maize*.
- (c) The *b* in the nasal compound *mb* which Bryant wrote as *mbh* was to be written without an *h*, as for instance in: *imbiza* (and not *imbhiza*) *pot*, *imbuzi* (and not *imbhuzi*) *goat*, -hamba (and not -hambha) *walk/go*.

- (d) An orthographic distinction was made between the voiced glottal fricative h [ɦ] and its unvoiced counterpart h [h]. (Bryant wrote both as h). The former was to be written with a double hh and the latter with a single one, as illustrated in the following examples:

|         |       |          |         |
|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| ihhashi | horse | -hamba   | walk/go |
| ihhala  | rake  | ihostela | hostel. |

- (e) The letter **dl** replaced the letter **dhl**, as in *ukudla food*, and *indlu house*.
- (f) Aspiration was to be orthographically indicated by means of the letter *h*. This meant that all aspirated sounds in Zulu were in future to be written with the letter *h*. Whereas in the past, words and stems such as *umuti tree*, *isikati time*, *-puma go out*, *-ti say*, *-cita spill*, were written without an *h*, they would now be written with one, i.e. as *umuthi*, *isikhathi*, *-phuma*, *-thi* and *-chitha*.
- (g) The enclitics *nje* and *bo* were to be hyphenated, as for instance in: *isilwane-nje it is just an animal* and *thula-bo! shut up!*
- (h) The symbol *kl* was used to represent the lateral affricate and replaced the symbol *x* (sometimes *hx*) that authors such as Roberts (1880) used to represent this sound, e.g. *-kleza* (cf. *-xeza milk into mouth*, *uklebe* (cf. *uxebe hawk*).

The 1934 orthography also included rules pertaining to the use of capital letters in the writing of Zulu. This was the first time that the issue of capitalisation in Zulu was formally addressed. Two letters were selected for capitalisation purposes, the first letter of the word and the first letter of the stem. Basically only two capitalisation rules were given, viz. capitalisation of proper names (the first letter of the stem) and capitalisation of words when they are the first word in a sentence or when they form part of the title of a book or an essay, in which case the first letter of the word would be a capital letter.

The approval of the orthographies of the various indigenous languages by the *Inter-University Committee for African Studies* marked an important point in the orthographic history of these languages as it meant that their respective orthographies had for the first time attained official recognition and furthermore that their future development as official languages was ensured. The languages whose orthographies were officially recognized at that time were Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Sesotho and Pedi. (The other two Nguni languages, i.e. Swati and Ndebele, were not yet reduced to writing and were consequently regarded as dialects of Zulu (Msimang, 1994: 194).

### 3.3 The 1950 revision of the Zulu orthography

In 1950 the Zulu orthography apparently underwent a further revision. (Doke, 1954: 16, footnote). The amendments (if any) that were approved are, however, not known as no record of this revised orthography could be traced. It is also uncertain whether there was any connection between this 1950 revision of the Zulu orthography and the so-called Somerset House conference on orthographic reforms held a few years earlier.

### 3.4 Bantu Education

During the 1940's through to the 1950's serious efforts were made by certain prominent African language scholars such as Professors Doke (for Nguni) and Lestrade (for Sotho) to unite the orthographies of those Nguni and Sotho languages that had written forms. The intention was to

standardize the orthographies of the various languages belonging to each of these two language groups so as to make it easier for the speakers of the languages in each group to read one another's literature. These efforts culminated in the epoch making Somerset House Conference in 1947 where a combined Sotho committee was appointed to cater for the three Sotho languages, i.e. Northern Sotho, Tswana and South Sotho respectively, as well as a combined Zulu/Xhosa committee to cater for these two languages. (Swati and Ndebele were excluded as they were not yet written languages at that time). Although the joint Zulu/Xhosa committee successfully eliminated several unnecessary orthographic differences between these two languages they unfortunately did not succeed in achieving their ultimate goal, i.e. the unification of the orthographies of these languages. The main reason for this was the drastic change the African language scenario in this country underwent during the mid 1950's which eventually led to the demise of both the Nguni and Sotho language committees. In 1954 the Central Government decided to transfer all educational matters concerning the various official Black (Bantu) languages of South Africa from the Provincial Governments to what was then known as the Department of Native Affairs where these matters were placed under the control of a specially created sub-department called Bantu Education. (The latter would in 1958 become an independent government department known as the Department of Bantu Education.) In the same year that the Department of Native Affairs took control of the African languages, the joint Zulu/Xhosa language committee was dissolved and a new language committee for each of these two languages appointed, i.e. one for Zulu and one for Xhosa. Three other language committees were also appointed, namely one for Sotho, one for Venda and one for Tsonga. In addition to the various language committees the Department decided on the recommendation of its Bantu Education Section to appoint a so-called Bantu Language Board that was to be the highest authority in the country concerning all orthographic matters regarding the African languages. In the early 1970's the different language committees were upgraded to language boards and placed under the jurisdiction of the Departments of Education of the various homelands and independent states.

At the beginning the various language committees had a twofold task: They had to develop and revise (if necessary) the spelling rules for each of the languages they represented and secondly, to create and develop terminology in these languages that was primarily needed for school use. The Department undertook to publish from time to time updated versions of the work done by these committees (later language boards). The first publication of this kind for Zulu appeared in 1957. Apart from a terminology list it also contained a revised version of the Zulu orthography.

### 3.5 The 1957 revision of the Zulu orthography

The 1957 revised version of the Zulu orthography, a product of the work done by the joint Zulu/Xhosa language committee (referred to earlier), contained several changes to the existing orthography and was published by the Department of Native Affairs (Bantu Education Section) under the title: *Terminology and Spelling No. 1*. (A much more detailed account of the 1957 revision appeared in *Terminology and Spelling No 2* that was published in 1962.) The following orthographic rules pertaining to the representation of the Zulu sound system were approved in 1957 by the said Bantu Language Board:

- (a) The implosive  $\text{ɓ}$  gave place to  $\text{b}$ , e.g.: *ubaba* (previously *uɓaɓa*) *father*, *umbuzo* (previously *umbuzo*) *question*.
- (b) The explosive (devoiced)  $\text{b}$  [ $\text{b}$ ] gave place to  $\text{bh}$ , e.g.: *-bhema* (previously *-bema*) *smoke*, *umbhali* (previously *umbali*) *writer*.



The above two rules implied that the contrasting pair *b* : *b* which occurs in many older Zulu literary works including Zulu dictionaries, was replaced by the opposition *b* : *bh* which currently applies, as for instance in: *-bala* [bala] *count* and *-bhala* [bala] *write*.

- (c) The voiced bilabial explosive occurring (only) in combination with the bilabial nasal *m* was to be written as *b*, e.g., *-hamba go, travel, imbongi bard*.

This rule was necessary because no orthographic distinction was made between the bilabial implosive *b* [ɓ] and the voiced bilabial explosive *b* [b].

- (d) The voiced *hh* [ɦ] gave place to *h* which meant that the distinction *h* : *hh* no longer applied in written Zulu, as for instance in: *ihashi* [iɦaɦi] *horse* and *hamba* [hamba] *go/travel*.

The rationale behind this decision is not very clear, especially as the opposition *hh* : *h* is phonemic in Zulu, i.e. the substitution of the one sound for the other in words that have otherwise the same phonological form, causes a change in meaning, as for instance in: *ihholo hall* : *iholo wages*. It is possible, however, that the committee's decision not to make this orthographic distinction was influenced by the fact that the instances where the opposition *hh*:*h* is phonemic in Zulu are far less than the instances where it is non-phonemic. Consider for instance the following examples in this regard: *umhhume* : *umhume cave*, *-hhalala* : *-halala applaud*, *-hhehha* : *-heha entice*. In many of the older publications in Zulu a single *h* is used to represent both the voiced glottal fricative [ɦ] and its voiceless counterpart [h].

- (e) The doubling of vowels was reintroduced albeit as an optional rule. It applied to one instance only, i.e. when the *-z-* in the prefix of class 10 nouns is omitted, e.g.: *iinkomo* (cf. *izinkomo*) *beasts* and *iindawo* (cf. *izindawo*) *places*. (The 1934 version explicitly forbade the doubling of the vowels in the prefix of class 10 nouns.) Although the doubling of vowels was allowed in this instance the rule nevertheless made it clear that the full form is preferable.
- (f) For the first time a rule dealing with optional (vowel) elision was included. Optional vowel elision which often occurs in Zulu in poetry and dialogue, was to be indicated by an apostrophe, as for example in: *Ngob' isab' izul' ukuduma* *Because it was afraid of the thundery weather*.
- (g) The hyphenation of the enclitic *bo* and *nje* that was part of the 1934 orthography, was cancelled. (Only the enclitic *-ke* had to be hyphenated, e.g.: *Gijima-ke. Run then*.)
- (h) An extra rule was added to the capitalization rules.

Whereas the 1934 orthographic rules only allowed for the first letter of the word and the first letter of the stem to be capitalized it was now permissible to also capitalize the first letter after the initial vowel of the noun prefix, as for instance in: *uMnumzana Mr.*, *aMakhosi Kings* (Bible book) and *iSiqephu Section*. The reason why the committee found it necessary to include this rule is not very clear as the existing two capitalization rules (referred to in 3.2. above) seem to have provided for all instances of capitalization. It is possible, however, that uncertainty among writers about the form of the stem of certain words as in the case of nouns such as *uMenzi Creator*, *uNkulunkulu God*, *uMboniseni* (personal name) and *uSihlalo Chairman* may have influenced the committee to include such a rule.

Whereas the 1934 orthography referred to only three instances of capitalization (see 3.2. above) several new categories of words that need to be capitalized were now added. Under the rule that capitalizes the first letter of the stem were added: (a) nouns denoting nationalities, e.g.: *iXhosa*

a *Xhosa speaker*, amaNgisi *Englishmen*, (b) nouns denoting languages, e.g. isiZulu *the Zulu language* and (c) place names, e.g. eThekwini *Durban*, kwaNongoma *Nongoma*. (Note that the locative prefix *kwa-* was not supposed to be capitalized.). The (new) rule that capitalizes the first letter after the initial vowel of the prefix included such categories as: (a) the names of the Deity, e.g. uNkulunkulu *God*, uMoya oyiNgcwele *Holy Spirit*, (b) days of the week, e.g. uMsombuluko, *Monday*, uLwesibili *Tuesday* and (c) any other common nouns (not listed above) that require a capital letter.

### 3.6 Orthographical reforms after 1957

After the 1957 revision, the orthographic system of Zulu underwent three more revisions, one in 1962 (*Terminology and Spelling No. 2*), one in 1972 (*Terminology and Spelling No 3*) and the final one in 1993 (*Terminology and Orthography No. 4*). Of these, the two last mentioned revisions were done under the auspices of the Zulu Language Board. Only a few minor changes regarding the representation of the sound system resulted from these revisions. They are the following:

- (a) The doubling of vowels was disallowed (1962).
- (b) A semi-vowel had to be inserted between vowels appearing in juxtaposition without a glottal stop between them, e.g.: uyinki *ink* and uwoyela *oil* (1972). (In many of the older Zulu publications examples of words with such juxtaposed vowels are found, e.g. waengangitshelanga (cf. wayengangitshelanga) *he had not told me* and inkosi yayiqeda (cf. yayiqeda) *the chief had just arrived*.)
- (c) The double hh representing the voiced glottal fricative [h] that was discarded in the 1957 revision, was reintroduced in the 1993 revision.

In the 1972 and 1993 revisions the capitalization rules were further upgraded. Apart from certain changes to the existing rules on capitalization several more instances of capitalization that were not provided for in the 1957 and 1962 revisions, were included. Among the new additions that were approved in the 1972 revision were the capitalization of (a) the qualificatives of capitalized nouns (first letter of the word), e.g. uLwandle **O**lubomvu *Red Sea*, (b) months of the year (first letter of the stem), e.g. uMasingana *January*, (c) names of books of the Bible (first letter of the stem), e.g. isAmbulo *Revelation* (d) the title of persons (first letter after the initial vowel), e.g. uMfundisi Dube *Reverent Dube* and finally, (e) the official names of schools, post offices, etc. (first letter of the word), e.g. Umlazi Post Office. (The 1993 revision requires that the second letter of such official words must also be a capital letter, i.e. U**M**lazi Post Office, ON**D**ini High School, etc.) In 1993 a further category was added under the rule 'the first letter after the initial vowel', namely the capitalization of names of organizations, historical events, etc., e.g. iNhlangoano YeZizwe *United Nations* and iMfuduko Enkulu *The Great Trek*

Two important changes concerning capitalization were made in the 1993 revision. The first one concerned the capitalization of the names of the books of the Bible which was changed from the first letter of the stem (according to the 1972 revision) to the first letter following the initial vowel. This entailed a change in the spelling of several books of the Bible, as for instance the books Kings and Proverbs that were hitherto written as amaKhosi and iZaga respectively but will now have to be written as aMakhosi and izAga. The second change concerned the writing of qualificatives and was requested by the Bible Society. This change affected the writing of qualificatives of the names of the Deity only. In future the first letter of the stem of these words will be a capital and no longer the first letter of the word, as or instance in: uMoya oCwebile *Holy Spirit*.

Finally, an editorial change was also made in that the capitalization of place names became a separate category. Place names no longer formed part of geographical names, it became a category on its own.

#### 4. Word division

In the preceding paragraphs the historical development of the Zulu alphabet was highlighted. In conclusion a few words also need to be said about word division as this forms an integral part of the orthographic system of Zulu and, in fact, of the orthographic systems of all the other official African languages spoken in this country.

The problem of word division in the African languages dates back to the time these languages were first put to writing and missionaries discovered that what are words in their own languages are not necessarily words in the African languages and *vice versa*. Their problem was further complicated by the fact that at that stage there was no formal mechanism or linguistic principle that they could rely on in order to identify the words in these languages. The result of this was that over a long period of time writers of these languages decided, almost at will, what to write as words and what to write as part of words.

A few examples of how Zulu was written by some of these authors, such as J.C. Bryant (1848), H.P.S. Schreuder (1850) and F. Suter (1907), will suffice to illustrate this point:

Most of the prefixal morphemes of the verb were written disjunctively, i.e. as separate words, as for instance in: a ngi m bonanga (not I him saw) *I did not see him* (cf. angimbonanga). (See also Schreuder (1850) for an extreme example in this regard.)

The possessive concord, the conjunctive formative *na* and the demonstrative pronouns were all written disjunctively, as for instance in: inkomo ka baba *father's beast*, lo muthi *this tree* and wena na mi *you and me*.

Through the influence of authors and linguists such as A.T. Bryant but especially C.M. Doke, a certain uniformity in the writing of Zulu was achieved so that when the orthography of this language first became standardized in 1934 (and in its subsequent revisions) Zulu orthographers found it necessary to regulate the writing of only a small number of words in this language. Of these the writing of the demonstrative pronoun undoubtedly received the most attention, with its writing being revised in all 5 issues of the Zulu spelling rules that were published since 1934. First disjunctively (1934), then either disjunctively or conjunctively (1957/1962), then conjunctively again (1972) and finally disjunctively (1993).

Some of the other word division rules that may be mentioned together with the date of their first implementation (given in brackets) concern the writing of:

- (a) The auxiliaries *-be* and *-se* which must be written disjunctively when they appear with a concord but conjunctively without a concord (1957), as in: ngabe ngimfunu *I was looking for him*, but besilambile *we were hungry*.
- (b) The inflected absolute and possessive pronouns both of which must be written disjunctively when they appear before quantitative pronouns (1993), as in the following examples: ngazo zombili *with both (hands)* and wabo bonke *of all of them (the people)*.
- (c) The copulative verb with the stem *-ba* which is written disjunctively in all instances (1993). For example: waba ngumfundisi *he became a preacher*.

Although the current word division rules in Zulu are nearly entirely based on Doke's (1939) definition of the word in the African languages, it does not mean that all forms that are regarded

and written as words in this language can also scientifically be proven as words. Van Wyk (1958) has convincingly shown that Doke's theory of the word in the African languages is scientifically untenable and that many of the forms that he identified as (single) words in Zulu can, in fact, be proven to consist of two or more words. By making use of certain linguistic tests, van Wyk proved scientifically that forms such as the associative formative *na-*, the instrumental formative *nga-*, the copulative prefixes *ng(u)-* and *y(i)-* and the possessive concords are, in fact, independent words in Zulu and not, as Doke maintains, parts of words.

Although van Wyk's approach to word division was indisputably superior to that of Doke, it never really gained acceptance in orthographic circles in the Nguni languages, mainly because of the fundamental orthographic changes in the writing system of these languages it required. It therefore came as no surprise that Zulu, with its long literary tradition, preferred not to implement van Wyk's recommendations in its orthographic system. This, of course, means that there is a discrepancy between what constitutes a word scientifically and what are orthographically regarded as words in Zulu. This is, however, not an abnormal situation. Elsewhere (Wilkes, 1985: 153) I have shown that linguistic reasons cannot always be of decisive importance in orthographic matters and that it is often necessary for practical considerations to take precedence over scientific motivations.

### Concluding remarks

The Zulu writing system has a long tradition and has over the years proved to be one with few anomalies and inconsistencies. This is borne out by the fact that its orthographic rules are relatively few in number and by and large also easy to grasp. However, despite the user-friendliness of its writing system it nevertheless has a number of orthographic rules that many writers feel uncomfortable with. This pertains especially to some of its capitalization rules. Because of insufficient space a detailed discussion of this problem is not possible here. The following two examples will therefore suffice to illustrate this point.

A capitalization rule that may be singled out in this regard is the one that requires that the first letter of the qualificative of a capitalized noun must be a capital letter. When the first formative of such a qualificative is a possessive concord, as often happens, then it means that the possessive concord must be written with a capital letter, something many writers of Zulu find unacceptable. Consider the following examples in this regard:

iNtaba YaMajuba *Mountain of Doves*  
uMbuso WamaRomani *Empire of the Romans/Roman Empire*  
aManxiwa AseZimbawe *Zimbabwe Ruins*

What complicates this matter even further is the fact that the possessive concord in these qualificatives is not written in a consistent way in the latest Zulu spelling rules (*Terminology and Orthography No. 4*). In some words this concord is written with a capital letter, as for instance in the examples given above, while in others it is written with a small letter, as for instance in uNqongqoshe weMfundo *Minister of Education*. (*Terminology and Orthography*, op.cit.: 99), uMthandazo weNkosi *Lord's Prayer* (op.cit.: 91).

The same capitalization rule has a further shortcoming in that it does not provide for the capitalization of the letter *z* that forms part of the qualificative of many capitalized nouns, especially those referring to government departments, e.g. uMnyango WeZemali *Department of Finance*, uMnyango WeZempilo *Department of Health*. (The letter *z* forms part of the relative

(possessive) concord of class10 eza- and refers here to the class 10 noun *izindaba affairs*. The name uMnyango WeZemali therefore literary means *Department of Financial Affairs*.)

Finally, many writers of Zulu fail to appreciate why nouns are not all capitalized in the same way. Why in the case of some nouns, such as those denoting the names of organizations, books of the Bible or geographical names, the first letter after their initial vowel is capitalized while in the case of other nouns, such as those denoting nationalities and languages, the first letter of the stem is capitalized? There seems to be no clear morphological or semantic reason that justifies this difference in capitalization. Perhaps the whole issue of capitalization in Zulu should be considered afresh when the time comes for the next revision of its orthography.

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