Harmonizing THE Orthography of Gĩkũyũ and Kĩkamba
Kioko, Angelina Nduku; Njoroge, Martin C.; Kuria, Peter Mburu

URI: http://erepo.usiu.ac.ke/11732/981
Date: 2014

Abstract:
The term orthography is derived from the Greek word 'orthos' which means 'correct', and 'graphein', which stands for 'to write' (Sampson, 1985). The orthography of a language describes or defines the set of symbols (graphemes and diacritics) used to represent the phonemic inventory of that language in the writing and the rules on how to write these symbols. According to Massamba (1986), a language takes a limited number of sounds from the central pool of speech sounds to form its phonetic inventory. In this chapter, orthography is used to refer to the system of symbols used in the writing system of Gĩkũyũ and Kĩkamba. There are three types of orthographies (Read, 1983: 143-152).

The first is the 'phonemic orthography'. In a 'phonemic' orthography there is a one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and graphemes. This type of orthography has a dedicated sequence of symbols or symbols for each phoneme. Examples of languages that have phonemic orthographies are Korean and Kiswahili. The second type is the 'morpho-phonemic orthography' which considers both the phonemic features and the underlying structure of words. In this case, words may be written in the same way despite differences in pronunciation. For example, the pronunciation of the plural marker in English {s} is conditioned by the phonetic environment in which it occurs, yet it is written with the same grapheme <s>. The plural forms 'cats' and 'dogs' are pronounced as [kæts] and [dɒɡz] respectively although the two final sounds are written.

This item appears in the following Collection(s)
- Publications and Case Studies [66]

All these spelling changes weakened the phonetic character of Old English orthography. They gave rise to fluctuations in the graphic presentation of sounds and words. In Old English, the sound [e:] was represented only by the letter ē. In Middle English, the sound [e:] could be represented by e, ee, ei, ie. In Old English, the word fisc had only one spelling. Since we use the Gĩkũyũ orthography throughout this sketch grammar, Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the orthographic representations of each of the above segments.

Figure 3: Gĩkũyũ consonant orthography. stop nasal tap fricative affricate approximant. Although Gĩkũyũ orthography treats ũ in V1 position as w, our analysis of diphthongs includes no glides, instead using vowel-vowel sequences. One reason for this is that orthographic w and ũ have the same pronunciation in this position (unless before o, in which case w equates with u). In addition, no other consonant clusters exist in Gĩkũyũ, and a VV analysis is consistent with this.