

Orthographic Processing and Phonological Awareness in Kalenjin

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Languages can have deep or shallow orthographies. Languages with shallow orthographies have a consistent consistent grapheme to phoneme correspondence. Such languages with shallow orthographies are associated with higher orthographic processing and higher phonological awareness. Orthographic processing is the ability to understand and recognize writing conventions as well as recognizing when words contain correct or incorrect spelling while phonological awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds or the spoken language. This study examines the use of Kalenjin orthography in reading. Kalenjin is the name given to a group of languages of the Southern Nilotic cluster and consists of Nandi, Kipsigis, Keiyo, Tugen, Marakwet, Sabaot, Pokot, Terik and Ogiek languages. These languages are closely related and are spoken in different areas in Kenya.

Due to the early advances in writing in Kiswahili, the first written Kalenjin languages i.e Nandi and Kipsigis employed the Kiswahili language script in its orthography. Kiswahili is a Bantu language with 5 vowels and 25 consonants. Kalenjin languages on the other hand have 13 consonants and a 10 vowels differentiated on the basis of +/- ATR. The use of the Kiswahili orthography system in the Kalenjin orthography does not take into consideration the differences in the ATR feature and tone and therefore seems to dampen the orthographic processing and phonological and phonemic awareness hence leading to poor reading skills of the language by some of the speakers of Tugen and Nandi languages. This is evidence by the preference of the use of Kiswahili and English Bibles instead of the Kalenjin Bible by most Tugen and Nandi speakers. Due to this some attempts been made to develop and use language specific Kalenjin orthography in writing some of the Kalenjin languages for instance Sabaot. These attempts have led to a change in the orthography of this language in issues pertaining to annotation of the tone system, the distinction of long and short vowels and the +ATR feature. This study attempts to find out the reading problems faced by Nandi and Tugen speakers in the use of the original Kalenjin orthography. It will also try to compare the original Kalenjin orthography and revamped Sabaot orthography with a view to finding out changes that have been made in original orthography. This will be done by focusing on the original Kalenjin Bible -Bukuit ne Tiliil by examining if there are any issues in the use of such orthography by Nandi and Tugen speakers. This will be done against the backdrop of the use of the revamped orthography from Sabaot with a view to finding out if the revamped orthography improves orthographic processing and phonological and phonemic awareness or not and improvements that may be made in the original Kalenjin orthography for Tugen and Nandi in order to improve literacy in the two languages.

This study aims to do this by first making a comparison of the similarities and differences in the two orthographies, undertaking a reading test for Nandi and Tugen speakers on selected verses and words from the Kalenjin Bible, a reconstruction of the verses and words for Tugen/Nandi orthography using the revamped orthography and an assessment of reading on the revamped Tugen/Nandi orthography. The participants will be tasked with reproducing the reading assignment in writing in order to find out their perception of how the Tugen and Nandi orthography ought to be with a view to making recommendations on how the Tugen and Nandi orthography should be rendered so as to improve the orthographic processing, phonological awareness and literacy in the languages.

References:

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