

**Труды Института
востоковедения РАН**

Труды Института востоковедения РАН

Серийное издание ISSN 2587-9502

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Выпуск 29

РОССИЙСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК
ИНСТИТУТ ВОСТОКОВЕДЕНИЯ РАН

Ответственный редактор выпуска
А. И. Коган

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С. А. Бурлак, И. Б. Иткин

Труды

Института востоковедения РАН

Утверждено к печати Редакционно-издательским советом
Института востоковедения РАН

Выпуск 29

Труды Института востоковедения РАН. Вып. 29: Проблемы обшей и востоковедной лингвистики. Язык меняющийся: семантические и грамматические изменения в языках Азии и Африки / отв. ред. выпуска А. И. Коган; ред.-сост. А. С. Панина. – М.: ИВ РАН, 2020. – 303 с.

**ПРОБЛЕМЫ ОБЩЕЙ
И ВОСТОКОВЕДНОЙ
ЛИНГВИСТИКИ**

Papers of the Institute of Oriental Studies of RAS. Issue 29. Studies in General and Oriental Linguistics. Languages and Change / Ed. by A. Kogan. – Moscow: IOS RAS, 2020. – 303 p.

Язык меняющийся:

**семантические и грамматические
изменения**

В языках Азии и Африки

ISSN 2587-9502

DOI: 10.31696/2587-9502-2020-29

Выпуск основан на материалах конференции «Востоковедные чтения 2020. Язык меняющийся: семантические и грамматические изменения в языках Азии и Африки» (Институт востоковедения РАН, 21-22.10.2020) и охватывает широкий круг тем, включая языковые контакты, заимствования, инновации в фонетике и морфологии, эволюцию синтаксических конструкций и лексических значений.

The volume is based on the proceedings of the conference on the languages of Asia and Africa held at the Institute of Oriental Studies on 21-22.10.2020. It covers a broad range of topics such as language contact and lexical borrowings, semantic shifts, innovations in syntax, morphology and grammar in various languages of Asia and Africa.

Москва
2020

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Sound Variation /f/≠/ff/ in Kuria Varieties Rinchari and Simbiti

1. Introduction

The Kuria (also spelt 'Kurya') language is one of the North-East Bantu languages spoken by Kuria people who live in North-West Tanzania and South-West Kenya. According to *Ethnologue*, the number of L1 speakers is 690 000. In his updated Guthrie list, Maho labels Kuria language with the code JE43, thus shifting it from the Guthrie E zone to the new J zone and does not indicate any dialects for it. However, he indicates four closely related languages, namely Simbiti (JE431), Hacha (JE432), Surwa (JE433), and Sweta (JE434). Chacha argues that Simbiti and Rinchari constitute dialects of Kuria [Chacha 2014, p. 15]. For the sake of our study and based on the linguistic proximity among these languages as well as the shared sociocultural identity of their speakers, we consider them as a continuum of Kuria varieties. Figure 1 provides an overview of the location of Kuria varieties within Tanzania. The two neighbouring varieties – Simbiti and Rinchari – will be hence the core of our interest because they exhibit a remarkable sound variation.

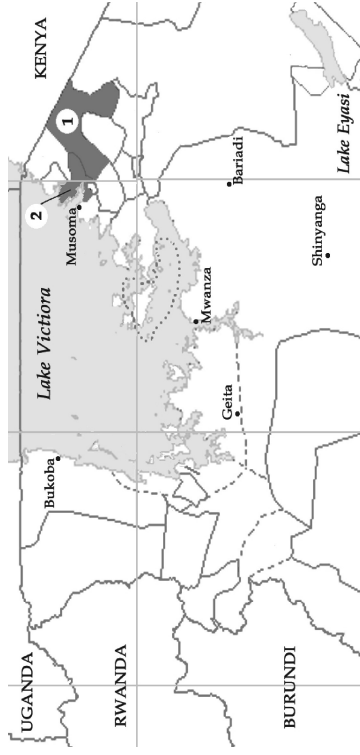


Figure 1: Location of Kuria varieties in Tanzania
No. 1 – Kuria, No. 2 – Simbiti (Ethnologue.com)

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Simbiti and Rinchari are spoken in Rorya and Tarime districts of Mara region and are mutually intelligible since their difference from each other is minimal. The most significant distinction in phonetics is the contrastive use of palatal affricate /f/ by Rinchari speakers and alveo-palatal sibilant /ff/ by Simbiti speakers in the same phonological contexts. In other words, the varieties share a stock of lexical items differing from each other by /f/ ≠ /ff/ variation (accompanied sometimes by other minor differences). These lexical items are shown in Table 1.

No	Rinchari	Simbiti	Part of speech	Gloss
1	amanche	amanshe	noun	water
2	chimande	shemande	noun	groundnuts
3	chinguru	shinguru	noun	power
4	chinhukya	shinhukya	noun	hair
5	chinyenyi	shinyenyi	noun	vegetable
6	chora	shora	verb	collect
7	enyacha	enyasha	noun	lake
8	ghecha	ghesha	verb	cut
9	ghethocho	kethosho	noun	hare
10	haghacha	haghasha	verb	build
11	honchora	honshora	verb	exchange
12	ichahe	ishahe	noun	tea
13	icharu	isharu	adverb	much
14	icho	isho	adverb	yesterday
15	incho	insho	verb	come
16	kogocha	ghosha	verb	pound
17	machomu	mashomu	adverb	fine
18	mchere	moshere	noun	rice
19	mosacha	mushasha	noun	man
20	sumacha	shumasha	verb	speak

Table 1: Common lexical items of Rinchari and Simbiti
with /f/≠/ff/ variation

The data presented in Table 1 were collected from three sources:

- 1) word list of 300 items in Swahili that was used for translational elicitation;
- 2) short text in Swahili that was translated into Rinchari and Simbiti by native speakers;
- 3) interviews conducted with native speakers of Rinchari and Simbiti aiming to clarify the meaning of the obtained lexical items.

The interviews made it clear that Rinchari speakers use sound /f/ successively and never use sound /f/, while Simbiti speakers demonstrate the opposite tendency.

This fact determines the research question: what is the nature and cause of the /f/→/f/ variation in Rinchari and Simbiti? We suggest two possible explanations that shed light on its nature and cause: articulatory drift and sound change.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework includes two different approaches to explaining sound change – articulatory drift and historical sound change. While articulatory drift is a more hypothetical approach and cannot be proved directly, historical sound change can be traced through the comparative method. The comparative method implies an analysis of cognates and / or proto-forms (if they are available) to shed light on the processes of language change in time. Yohana [2009, pp. 150-157] and Paul [1886/1970] in Kataoka [2011, pp. 14-15] provide theory and evidence of articulatory drift. The study of historical sound change is based on [Meussen 1967], [Nurse/Philippson 2003], [Bostoen 2009], [Dimmendaal 2011], [Mwita 2012], [Bostoen/Bastin 2016].

3.1. Articulatory drift

Articulatory drift is a concept based on the physiological and cognitive aspects of language acquisition, which points out the learning mechanisms as the driving forces for sound change. Paul assumes that the cause of sound change is the articulatory representation in one's memory which keeps on changing by favouring the current sensation over earlier ones [Kataoka 2011, pp. 14-15]. If for some reason a new articulation is introduced and favoured, the drift starts. The drift occurs with certain directionality rather than randomly because certain sound sequences are easier to articulate than the others. For example, the Italian word *otto* 'eight' is easier to pronounce than its Latin ancestor *oceto*. The introduction of a new sound may be triggered by repetitive mispronunciation or language contact.

Sound borrowings through language contact are well attested in African languages. In Southern Chasu dialects, sounds /s/ and /z/ shift to /θ/ and /ð/ respectively in informal speech as the result of language contact with Nguno language [Yohana 2009, pp. 150-157]. Simbiti is the only Kuria variety that demonstrates the /f/ sound in its consonant inventory. So we can assume that /f/ sound was introduced to Simbiti by one of the neighbouring languages: Luo, Kabwa, Swahili, or Jita, and Simbiti speakers opted for the ease of articulation of the affricate /f/ reducing it to only one component /f/. Once simplified pronunciation arose, it kept on being repeated and spread across

the Simbiti community. It is quite possible that the new sound /f/ was favoured due to psychological and cognitive reasons. As the auditory representation is based on the sound inventory of the speakers which comprises all that they have been exposed to, we may assume that the new generation grew in the use of /f/ sound in the whole Simbiti community. After having been transmitted from one generation to another, /f/ sound has become one of the identity markers for Simbiti speakers.

This explanation is rather sophisticated as we cannot attest it synchronically with current data, unlike [Yohana 2009], because the assumed process had been completed far in the past. That is why we develop another explanation based on the evidence of the historical development of Bantu languages.

3.2. Historical sound change in Bantu languages

Historical sound change is reconstructed for many Bantu languages through the application of the comparative method. The comparative method implies the analysis of similar lexical items in related modern languages with the aim of reconstruction of the proto-language. Several Proto-Bantu language systems have been proposed since the late 19th century. In our study, we use the reconstruction proposed by Nurse and Philippson [2003, p. 146]:

Consonants:	p	t	c	k
	b	l/d	y/j	g
	m	n	ny	
	mp	nt	nc	nk
	mb	nd	nj	ng
Vowels	i	e	a	o
Tones:	High	Low		u

Figure 2: Proto-Bantu sound system

The Proto-Bantu sound system experienced many changes across living Bantu languages, although some languages retain many elements of the initial system. The main phonological processes observed across Bantu languages are:

- 1) vowel harmony;
- 2) vowel gliding;
- 3) vowel deletion (with compensatory lengthening);
- 4) fricativisation *c > s, *j > z;
- 5) spirantisation after high close vowels *i and *o;
- 6) Dahl's law;
- 7) lenition (consonant weakening);
- 8) (de)voicing of consonants.

4. Results

Sound change analysis implies diachronic rather than synchronic approach to language variation. Hence, we treat the sound variation shown in Table 1 as the evidence of divergence in the consonant system of Kuria during its historical development. To trace this development, we should come back to the common stage of Kuria varieties, that is Proto-Bantu (as to the best of our knowledge there is no separate reconstruction of Proto-Kuria) and try to identify which sounds gave rise to the sounds /ʃ/ and /j/ in modern Simbiti and Rinchari. To do so we expand Table 1 with Proto-Bantu roots retrieved from the online database *Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3*.

No	Rinchari	Simbiti	Proto-Bantu	Zones	Gloss
1	amanche	amanshe	*jiji 'river; waterhole' / *jinji 'water'	CDEFG HJKLM RS/F GK MNS	water
2	chimande	shemande	*jido *groundnut'	J	groundnuts
3	chinguru	shinguru	*dibù 'strong, hard, difficult'	J	power
4	chinthukya	shinthukya	*cingà 'string; hair (on body)' / *cenjĩ 'hair tuft on tail'	ABCFG HKLSR/ J	hair
5	chinyenyi	shinyenyi	?	?	vegetable
6	chora	shora	*còd 'pay tax' / *choose'	C, J / C F J M	collect
7	enyacha	enyasha	*jànjà 'lake'		lake
8	ghecha	ghesha	*kánt 'cut'	E, G	cut
9	ghethocho	kethosho	?	?	hare
10	haghacha	haghasha	*bák 'build'	AEGNS	build
11	honchora	honshora	*còd 'pay tax' / *choose'	C, J / C F J M	exchange
12	ichahe	ishahe	?	?	tea
13	icharu	isharu	?	?	much
14	icho	Isho	*jó 'yesterday'	D F J M N P	yesterday
15	incho	Insho	*jij / *jinj 'come'	ABCEF GHJKL MNP RS / KLM P	come
16	kogocha	Ghosha	*pond 'pound, stamp, beat; forge'	E G J L M N P S	pound

17	machomu	mashomu	*jiám 'be beautiful, be good'	G K L M	fine
18	mchere	Moshere	?	?	rice
19	mosacha	Mushasha	*cáijà 'old man; man'	J	man
20	sumacha	Shumasha	*jamb 'speak; answer'	B C E H	speak

Table 2: Common lexical items of Rinchari and Simbiti with /j/-ʃ/ variation and their Proto-Bantu roots

The Proto-Bantu forms were chosen with regard to sound similarity between them and their modern cognates in Simbiti and Rinchari based on assumed reflexes and their spread through the E, J and the neighbouring zones. Forms given after slash (/) are supportive although located not in the E or J zones. Question mark (?) stands for the absence of the appropriate form.

4.1. Fricativisation *c > j

Table 2 suggests that both /ʃ/ and /j/ sounds originate from two Proto-Bantu sounds, namely *c and *j. Many Bantu languages realise *c and *j as /s/ and /z/ respectively and this process is often called fricativisation. However, the sound change *c > j is attested for two languages, Shanjo and Fwe, spoken in Zambia (K-zone) in [Boeston 2009]. The author assumes that "The regular <...> reflex of *c is /s/, but this could well be the outcome of the process *c > j > s, whose first step is attested in Shanjo and Fwe" [Boeston 2009, p. 125]. So Simbiti demonstrates the first step of *c > s fricativisation, and its /ʃ/ phoneme should be considered as retention rather than innovation. We can assume that *j > z fricativisation happened according to this model as *j > z > s, but /z/ underwent devoicing and merged with /ʃ/, because there is no evidence of voiced sibilants in modern-day Simbiti and Rinchari.

4.2. Post-nasal Affrication

The process that might have happened next or at the same time with fricativisation is affrication of /ʃ/ before nasal consonants. Nurse and Philippson indicate the post-nasal affrication for Kongo H10, Yaka H31 and Venda S21, giving examples from Kongo H10 [Nurse/Philippson 2003, p. 51]:

- ku-N=ɸfi-a → kú-m=ɸfi-a 'to lead me'
 - ku-N=sib-a → kú-n=tsib-a 'to curse me'
- Similarly /ʃ/ could have given rise to the affricate /ʃ/ after a nasal, and we can see it in our data¹:

¹ sb – Simbiti; reh – Rinchari.

- *rch.* amanche ‘water’ > *sb.* amanshe ‘water’ > *jinji ‘water’;
- *rch.* incho ‘come’ > *sb.* insho ‘come’ > *jinj ‘come’;
- *rch.* honchora ‘exchange’ > *sb.* honshora ‘exchange’ > *còd ‘pay tax; choose’.

The proto-forms *jinji and *jinj possessed nasals before the consonants which triggered affrication in Rinchari but did not influence Simbiti as it seems to be immune to innovations after *c > j fricativisation.

4.3. Spirantisation

Affrication could also have been triggered by *r*-spirantisation. The nature of *r*-Spirantisation consists of the influence that the high close aspirated **r* vowel, found in prefixes, causative extensions and agentive suffix, exerted on preceding consonants. Nurse and Philippson give a summary of these changes as follows [Nurse/Philippson 2003, p. 53]:

(a)	*pi	> pʰi	> pfʃ	> fi	> fi
	*bi	> bʰi	> bvi	> vi	> vi
(b)			> psj	> (tsj)	> sj
			> bzj	> (dzj)	> zj
(c)	*ti	> tʰi	> tsj	> sj	> sj
	*dʃi	> dʰi	> dzj	> zj	> zj
(d)	*ci	> cʰi	> dzj	> sj	> sj
	*ji	> jʰi	> dzj	> zj	> zj
	*ki	> kʰi	> ksʃ	> (tsj)	> sj
	*gi	> gʰi	> gzj	> (dzj)	> zj

Figure 3: Bantu spirantisation

Figure 3 shows that *C^H is modified to a fricative or an affricate but it lacks the description of sound shift for /ʃ/. In our view, it could have resulted in /ʃ/. We can prove it with our data:

- *rch.* chimande < *sb.* shemande ‘groundnuts’;
- *rch.* chinguru < *sb.* shinguru ‘power’;
- *rch.* chinthukya < *sb.* shinthukya ‘hair’;
- *rch.* chimyenyi < *sb.* shinyenyi ‘vegetable’.

These nouns exhibit the shift of the prefix *ki to shi and not to the regular si, because Simbiti stopped the fricativisation process halfway confining itself with /ʃ/ instead of regular /s/. The language system could not substitute *ki with si because it was lacking /s/ at that time.

Another process triggered by high aspirated **r* is causative derivation with the suffix **r* that can lead to the emergence of /ʃ/ as shown by Nurse and Philippson for Bemba M42 [Nurse/Philippson 2003, p. 54]:

- -fiit- ‘be dark’ → fiis-s ‘darken’ [fiis-a].

- -cind- ‘dance’ → cins-i ‘make danc’ [cins-a].
- -lij- ‘cry’ → lis-s ‘make cry’ [lis-a].

The authors note that Bemba M42 shifts every lingual consonant to /s/ before the causative suffix **r* and palatizes to /ʃ/. We can assume that similar process took place on the earlier stage of development in Kuria when lingual consonants were changed to /ʃ/ because of the absence of /s/, and the subsequent palatalisation gave rise to /ʃ/ forms in Rinchari, but did not affect Simbiti because of its conservative nature. We prove this assumption with the verbs ending in cha/sha found in our data:

- *rch.* ghecha < *sb.* ghesha ‘cut’;
- *rch.* haghacha < *sb.* haghasha ‘build’;
- *rch.* koghocha < *sb.* ghosha ‘pound, stamp, beat; forge’;
- *rch.* sumacha < *sb.* shumasha ‘speak; answer’.

It should be noted that semantics of these verbs allows them to take causative extensions, and the presence of /ʃ/ or /ʃ/ in the final position cannot be attributed to their proto-forms (*kánt, *bák, *pònd, *jamb).

4.4. Sibilant Harmony

In contrast to *sumacha* ‘speak’, the word *shumasha* ‘speak’ seems to have undergone the process of sibilant harmony “which disallows or limits the co-occurrence of alveolar and alveo-palatal sibilants <...> In Rwanda D161 and Rundi DJ62, /s/ becomes alveo-palatal across a vowel, when the following consonant becomes (alveo-)palatal as the result of y-initial suffix, e.g. soonz- ‘be hungry’ vs. a-ra=shoonje- ‘he was hungry’ (<soonz-ye)” [Nurse, Philippson 2003, p. 57]. The sibilant harmony can be attested in Simbiti with the words *shumasha* ‘speak; answer’ and *mushasha* ‘man’. It does not occur in Rinchari where the corresponding words have /s/ instead of the first /ʃ/: *sumacha* ‘speak’ and *musacha* ‘man’.

4.5 Fricativisation *c > f > s

The words *sumacha* ‘speak; answer’ and *musacha* ‘man’ provide evidence of the presence of sound /s/ in Rinchari in those positions where it was allowed to develop from *c and *j: *rch.* *musacha* < *cájà ‘old man; man’, *sumacha* < *jamb ‘speak; answer’. In other words, due to the lack of sibilant harmony in Rinchari, the process *c > f > s was completed in positions that were not affected by any other phonetic processes involving /ʃ/. Moreover, the sound /s/ is also present in Simbiti. Here are some of the numerous examples:

- risaka ‘bushland’ < *cáká ‘thicket; bush-country’ (E F G H J L M N);
- sarya ‘destroy’ < *céfni ‘destroy; pull down’ (J K);
- magheso ‘harvest’ < *kéc ‘cut; harvest’ (E F J H L N R S).

These examples show that in Simbiti and Rinchari fricativisation *c / *j > s was completed in those positions that were not blocked by other processes that retained the first stage fricative /ʃ/ and turned it into /tʃ/ in what later became Simbiti: post-nasal affrication, spirantisation in prefixes and causative extensions, and sibilant harmony.

5. Conclusion

In the previous sections we tried to address the problem of /ʃ/ ÷ /tʃ/ sound variation in Simbiti and Rinchari varieties of the Kuria language based on the 20 lexical duplets exhibiting this variation.

The more plausible explanation of this phenomena is that on the earlier stage of its development the Kuria language underwent incomplete fricativisation *c / *j > j. The /ʃ/ sound was fossilized in what later became Simbiti and gave rise to /tʃ/ sound in what nowadays is Rinchari variety. Fossilisation and affrication are triggered by the same phonological processes: post-nasal affrication and spirantisation in prefixes and causative extensions, while sibilant harmony serves only for fossilisation. In segments that were free of the mentioned processes, full fricativisation took place. That is why now both Simbiti and Rinchari exhibit the sound /s/.

This framework helped us to explain the shape of the following lexical items listed in Table 2: 1, 11, 15 – post-nasal affrication; 2-5 – spirantisation and affrication in the prefix; 8, 10, 16, 20 – spirantisation and palatalisation in causative extension; 19-20 – sibilant harmony. However, there are some lexical items for which we have not found a reliable explanation. We can assume that the items 13, 14 may be influenced by the initial i, items 9, 14, 17 may be influenced by the following o, items 12, 18 are obviously borrowed words and were assimilated by Rinchari and Simbiti according to their phonological rules (Rinchari substituted /tʃ/ with the closest sound /ʃ/), items 6, 7, 19 show strong ties with their proto-forms, but the nature of /ʃ/ ÷ /tʃ/ correspondence is not clear. These question require further research and discussion.

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