BANTU SPEECH : A PHILOLOGICAL STUDY

THE law of compensation has been reserved for the last paper. A number of unfamiliar facts closely interrelated the one to the other have needed statement, so that it has been difficult to avoid discursiveness. Briefly, our argument has been that there are facts in Bantu having a very close analogy to the philological processes upon which Hebrew is built; moreover, there is a close relationship to many Sumerian forms, as well as to many Sumerian word roots. If this is mere guesswork, the law of compensation to which I alluded in the last paper, together with the consonant changes that result from it, will fail; if the law responds reasonably—as I have found so far in my studies—then it is worth while to continue the investigation further.

Now, as has already been stated, this law depends on the stability of vowel values; in order to pronounce the short vowel of the primitive, some change must be effected so that this short vowel may take the tone; and that change is best designated by the word "compensation."

One result, possibly the principal result, of this stability of the vowel is that great latitude is given to the interchange of consonants. Such interchange seems bewildering to the European; but it is controlled by two factors: first the basic change $m > g$, and, secondly, the changes shortly to be discussed, arising from palatalisation, labialisation, and nasalisation.

Finally, to correct these results, we have the known interchange of consonants in Hebrew, such as may be found admirably stated for our purpose in Davies' Hebrew Lexicon, based on Gesenius' larger work. Besides these instances of consonant change, many helpful notes will be found in the

Lexicon showing the phonetic relation of several Hebrew words to various members of the Aryan family. This is a digression, but necessitated as a defence of the writer's methods against those who hastily decry these articles as "unsound." In what immediately follows it is assumed that the reader will have constantly before his mind the Hebrew law of vowels;¹ for this vowel system gives a truer view of the Bantu vowel system than anything European.

Compensation.

There are two cases:—

(i) The short vowel remains, being supported by a second syllable: *e.g.*, G. *kōla*, do; *sīga*, sow.

By way of distinction this might be called syllabic compensation as opposed to true compensation, explained in (ii). Syllabic compensation has already been referred to, and will not be further commented on here except to note that it is clearly seen in Ganda, Nyoro, Kavirondo, and, as far as I understand, the respective writers, in Luba and Giriama (including presumably the Nyika and Digo dialects). Syllabic compensation has been virtually effaced from Swahili² and apparently from Karanga, by insistence upon a uniform accent on the penultimate syllable, irrespective of root origin; whilst it remains in a state of flux, partly recognised and partly effaced, so far as I can gather, in Nyanja and Zulu.

Rem.—That syllabic compensation was an original feature of Bantu I have very little doubt. Its loss is due most probably (with Swahili certainly) to outside influence. If it is also absent from Karanga, this fact, pointing as it does to some non-Bantu influence, would greatly strengthen the supposition that the peculiar "ch" sound in Karanga is of Semitic, possibly Phœnician, origin. I have already indicated the word "inkosi" as Semitic; and I am constantly impressed by the examples in Bryant's Zulu Dictionary (Zulu and Karanga roots point to a close interrelation of the two races at some previous date) of a strong undercurrent of nature-worship, not normal, so far as is yet known to Ganda or the surrounding countries. That is to say, the facts of nature, though, of course, just as fully known and acted upon,

¹ As given, for instance, in Gesenius' Grammar, p. 30-43 in the 1885 edition.

² Lingering traces in Swahili may be noticed in the slightly shortened vowels of words like *fanya*, do; *pata*, get.

are not woven into the conversational and metaphorical expressions of simple everyday thought and life as in Zulu. In short, there is a strong suggestion of anterior Baal worship in these Zulu phrases.

(ii) The more usual method, however, is to make the short vowel tone-long. There are various cases:—

a. A nasal is introduced; e.g., *genda*, go<√GEL.

b. Palatal "i" or labial "u" is introduced, thus giving a tone-long vowel, either

Without change of consonant; e.g., *lma*, cultivate;
luma, bite.

With change of consonant; e.g., G. *fumu*; Ny. *cumu*, a spear<√TUM, originally √LUM.

c. The short vowel is compensated exactly after the Hebrew model; viz.—

Short i to tone-long e; e.g., *leta*, bring.

Short ŭ to tone-long o; e.g., Sw. *cóma*, stab<√TUM.

d. Two (or more) of these processes may be combined in one word; e.g., *li-kongo*, a spear—√TUM with nasalisation to *tung* and short ŭ to tone-long o.

tenda, do—√KIL³ with nasalisation to *kind* and i to tone-long e.

That this palatal "i" and labial "u" correspond to the semi-vowel w and y goes without saying. In Hebrew, as in Arabic, long i and long u are regularly expressed by an addition to the root, viz., yod and waw respectively; similarly in Bantu the "i" or "u" compensation is an addition to the original root. Very possibly there is a tone-long "a" in Bantu, answering to tone-long a in Hebrew,⁴ and formed by the addition of an "a" sound. This might well be the case, for instance, in G. *kāba*, cry; *lāma*, give dyeing directions; *māla*, smear and others.

³ This is one of the few root forms in which specimens occur with each of the primary vowels a, i, and u. As KIL in above instance; also in Nj. *chita*; and as the origin of the causative ending, *isa* (for *kita*). As KUL in G *kola* and its allied forms. As KAL in such words as Sw. *fanya*, Ld. *sala*. This last is Sum. GAR, make, do.

⁴ Corresponding to ā in Arabic. Arabic always denotes the long ā by aliph; Hebrew very rarely does so, and the pronunciation of the vowel as tone-long "a" is traditional. On this analogy it is not surprising to find that in Bantu there is practically nothing to guide us as to the difference between essentially long a, tone-long a, and short a, except the living speech.

Rem. i.—Tone-long *i* and tone-long *e* often interchange: thus *ita* or *eta*, call; or Zu. *ema*, stand, *esa*, come; *ehla*, come down, answering respectively to G. *ima*; Ny. *isa*; Ny. *ika*.

Rem. ii.—These phenomena so overlap in one and the same language that there is no possibility of isolating them; and the only conclusion, therefore, is that they were well established before the different Bantu languages broke off from the parent stem. Thus, whilst G. *ita* (*wita*), call, is frequently *eta* (*weta*) in neighbouring dialects, it, nevertheless, does not pass into Zulu with tone-long *e* as the words just given, and many others, do, but retains its "*i*"—viz., *biza*, call. On the other hand, though Ganda uniformly prefers the "*i*," the reflexive pronoun in that language is tone-long "*e*" in place of the usual Bantu *zi* or *ji*.⁴

Palatalisation.

Certain changes occur in the consonants when they come before palatal "*i*." Thus arises either

1. Partial palatalisation, such as is found in all stages of development with *c* and *j*. Thus we have in the class prefix *ki*>*ci* (also *ki*>*shi*); or we may find as in Zulu *ti*>*ci*, e.g., *isitya* or *isitsha* (in the notation used for this paper *isica*), a dish. For instances of *j* see lower down.

2. Complete palatalisation; for instance in Ganda:—

lii>*li*>*zi*, e.g., *kola*, do; *omukosi*, a workman.

dii>*dí*>*zi*, e.g., *genda*, go; *genda bugenzi*, merely to go.

gii>*gí*>*zi*, e.g., *sigá*, sow; *omusizi*, a sower.

kii>*kí*>*si*, e.g., *wandika*, write; *omuwandisi*, a writer.

tii>*tí*>*si*, e.g., *kwata*, take hold; *kwata bukwasi*, just catch hold.

bii>*bí*>*bi*, e.g., *vuba*, catch fish; *omuvubi*, a fisherman.

píi>*pí*>*pi*, e.g., *lopa bulopi*, just to accuse.

mii>*mí*>*mi*, e.g., *soma*, read; *omusomi*, a reader.

nii>*ní*, e.g., *lwana*, fight; *abalwanyí*, warriors.

Rem. i.—The above changes are fairly representative of the whole Bantu field.

⁴ The base of the Reflexive form is *li i*; it remains *li* in Yao, but in other Bantu tongues usually palatalises to *si* or *ji*. The Sumerians pronounced the word for "self" as *ni i* (Langdon, p. 113). The obvious correspondence of Bantu *li i* to Sumerian *ni i* is the more remarkable when it is remembered that there is no such pronoun for "self" in Hebrew or Assyrian. Hebrew uses the noun "body" or "soul" in this sense. The particle *ni*, self, is, however, traceable as the prefix for the Niphal conjugation, which is "primarily reflexive of Qal."

Rem. ii.—These changes may sometimes be found with palatal "i" preceding the consonant; e.g., *eriso*, the eye <√IKO.

Rem. iii.—These changes often occur as permanent features, without any obvious relation to palatal "i"; e.g., s<k in *amaso*, eyes. The interchange l>z or k>s is very common; less so perhaps t>s or g>z.

The letter j deserves a special note to itself. Like c it is met in varying stages of development. Thus—

1. In Luba, li>ji uniformly. Whilst in Bantu generally l>j is not uncommon.⁶ In Ganda l>j is found in stem formation; e.g., *enyanja*, the sea<√YAL.

2. In Ganda there is a lisped "j" sound met with in two or three words and written "gy." Whenever an "n" prefix is added, this gy becomes p; e.g., *gya*, be burnt; *mpide*, I am burnt; whilst *gya*,⁷ new, makes *mpya*.

This change is traceable in *gya*, new, quite irrespective of the n prefix, throughout the Bantu area; e.g., Sw. *pya*, new = Zu. *tsha*, or *tya*. So far as I have gone at present, this change is confined to the words *gya*, be cooked; be on fire; be burnt: *gya*, new: and G. *mpya*, courts (sing, *olu-gya*).

Torrend long ago saw that Sw. *pika*, cook, might be an active form of the word *gya*, be cooked; and this is correct. For

a. *ika*, an unpalatalised form of the causative *isa*, is found in a causative sense in Nj. *imika*, set up; *kasika*, set down; and this is the ending of the word *pika*, cause to be cooked, from *gya*, be cooked.

b. The word *gya*, be cooked, occurs as Tonga *pya*, and Zu. *tsha*, *tya*; that is, with palatalised p in the one case and palatalised t in the other. There can therefore be no doubt that Sw. *pika* = Kv. *teka* = Zu. *peka*.

Rem.—"s" is characteristic of the causative in Bantu (*isa*); in Galla (*isu*); and in Syriac and Aramaic (sh of the Shaphel conjugation). Hebrew, on the other hand, has the unpalatalised "k" softened to "h" (Hiphil conjugation). In Sumerian *ka*, a variant form of *gar*, make, do, we may very possibly see the original of this causative idea—make to be, as still in modern French.

⁶ So, too, occasionally g>j, instead of g>z, according to usual rule for palatalisation.

⁷ Sum. *gi* or *ge*. Moreover Sum. *sil*, blaze, burn, answers in meaning to Bantu *gya*, with just the same change (bl) pi>gy.

In the use of the Zulu diminutive *yana* we find further instances of palatalisation; thus

pi>ty, e.g., (*kufupi*, near); *kufulyane*, near.

bi>ty, e.g., *intaba*, a mountain; *intatyana*, a hill.

mbi>nj, e.g., *intambo*, rope; *intanjana*, string.

mi>ny, e.g. *inkomo*, a cow; *inkonyana*, a calf.

Rem. i.—In the above ty is a palatalised c sound, written also tsh, or even sh (*kufushane*); in fact, pi>c (ty) in Zulu exactly answers to pi>(gy)j commented on in the preceding paragraphs. Fupi is an old form which has given way to the diminutive.

Rem. ii.—The first three instances are further confirmation of the change t>b (p), met with, for instance, in G. *tata*, *baba*, father; and G. prefix Bu as diminutive plural in place of Tu.

Rem. iii.—In Du. *bola*, do=G. *kola*, we find k>t>b, a slight extension of the preceding. Note, however, that k>b is equally a variation of the basic principle m (b)>g (k).

Emphatic 'j in Ganda usually answers to ij; e.g., G. 'ja, come; Ny. *ija*. But there are exceptions; for instance

In the word *ba'ja*, work with an axe=Ny. *baija*, the ij compensates an omitted nasal n; so that the true form of the word is *banga*. In Ganda *banga* has been restricted to the sense of making a crotch at the end of a post (*banga amanyo*) in building and the form *ba'ja* taken for the more general sense of working in wood.

From the first form of the root comes Sw. *upanga*, a sword; Ny. *mpango*, an axe; Du. *panja*, work in wood.

A similar compensation has already been noticed in the form *nyasa* for *nyanza*; and once *erinso* for *eriso*.

Other Changes.

Whilst such changes as k>s; l>z or j; t>k or c may be looked for as common, the other possible changes appear less frequently. A rare change is for the palatalised consonant to change from voiced to voiceless or *vice-versâ*; e.g., s>z or c>j. This happens, for example, in Zulu *biza*, call; for *bisa*, palatalised form of *bita*; or in Zulu *tsha*, *tya* (i.e., *ca*) instead of *gya* (i.e., *ja*) new.

For the general student of Bantu, the formation of the perfect as well as of the causative affords a remarkable

instance of palatalisation. Thus the normal perfect ending is "ire" and the causative ending "isa"; but the medial consonant is often omitted and the resulting form palatalised; e.g. :—

G. *luma*, bite; *lumye*, has bitten; i.e., *lumire* > *lumie* > *lumye*.

G. *genda*, go; *genze*, has gone; i.e., *gendire* > *gendie* > *genze*.

G. *kwata*, take hold; *kwasa*, cause to take hold; i.e., *kwatisa* > *kwatia* > *kwasa*.

This principle is of universal application; but unfortunately it is too involved for the beginner. Consequently all our elementary grammars have to go through a number of special cases, greatly obscuring the underlying principle that connects them all together.

Labialisation.

Labialisation cannot be so fully illustrated as the preceding. Doubtless the forms exist, but they do not form substantives or verbal adverbs which can be readily traced. Our principal source of information is the participle in "u." Unfortunately it is impossible to get a complete sequence from this form; and the gaps have to be filled up by analogy. The following examples are from Ganda :—

kû > fu, *golokoka*, be straight; *golokofu*, straight.

tû > fu, so analogy suggests.

pû, no instances; probably pû > fu.

lû { > lu, *wolu*, cold; *kalu*, dry; *yeru*, white.
> vu, *kakanyala*, be hard; *kakanyavu*, hard. [Only
with the ending *ala* (*wala*) become, be.]

ndû > mvu, *gonda*, be soft; *gomvu*, soft.

ngû > mvu, *yengera*, get ripe; *lyemvu*, a ripe banana;

bû > vu, *jenjeba*, be slack; *jenjebu*, slack.

Cf. *e'bavu*, a blister, with *bambala*, to blister.

mû > mu, *nyuma*, ketp in time, as drums; *kinyumu*, a drinking feast.

What has been said under palatalisation as to consonant change applies *caeteris paribus* here also. A tone-long vowel

is provided with or without consonant change, as *lúma*, bite; *fúmu*, spear; and the changes of consonant, especially t or k>f and b>v becomes a common feature, even apart from the presence of labial "u."

In addition, the following curious changes should be noticed:—

- (i) u>wi, e.g., Ny. *twika*, put on the head, as a load; Sw. *cukua*<√TUK, the head.

Rem. i.—*twika* becomes G. *ti'ka* with emphatic 'k, a curious change, not easy to explain.

Rem. ii.—G. *tuka*, arrive, reach a certain mark, passes as *fika* in many languages (Sw., Nj., Lb., Zu.), *fika* being for original *fwika*, with wi for u.

- (ii) u>we, with tone-long e, is only an extension of the preceding, i becoming tone-long e; e.g., *omutwe*, head √TU for √TUK; G. *fwē*, we<*tu*; G. *mwe*, you<*mu*. Cf. Lb. *dikonde*, a banana, also pronounced *dikwende*.

Rem.—The original of this change appears in the fact that Heb. *ain* sometimes corresponds to *gu* in Bantu, sometimes to *gi*; it can also be traced in one or two Bantu roots. Thus G. *gomba*=Sw. *ipa*, covet; √GUB (in Aryan KUP), covet; so, too, probably Ny. *iya*, take away, is from √GUL with l>t>y. This brings the word into line with Kr. *gusa*, take away; also Zu. *suka*, get away; Sw. *toka*, Kv. *tula*, *rula*<√TUL for √GUL, an allied form.

- (iii) u>wa; e.g., G. *twala*, take from one place to another, allied to G. *tola*, accept; Sw. *toa*, take away; Kg. *luaka* (*lwaka*)=G. *tuka*, arrive.

The word for "catch hold" is one of the most varied in Bantu. It has two roots; from the form KAP (allied to and possibly identical with Aryan KAP, hold) come Sw. *kamata*; Kv. *hamba*; Kr. *bata*; Zu. *bamba*; the last two showing the change k>t>b.

From KUP comes (u>wi) Nj. *gwila*; Nk. *gwira*; and so arises a form like Lolo *kita*, whence by palatalisation Sw. *shika*, catch hold. By the process u>wa, KUP yields (Ld., Kb., G.) *kwata*; Kk. *gwata*.

For the close relation of KAP to KUP, cf. the vulgar English "cop" for "catch."

Rem. i.—There are just a few cases like G. *kwāta* above where the tone vowel remains short, in spite of the labialisation. In this case

certainly the shortness arose from the necessity of uttering the word with the greatest possible despatch—Catch it!

Rem. ii.—G. *gwe*, thou, is a strengthened form of *we*, resulting from the subject pronoun *u* (o), thou, by change to *we* with tone-long *e*; *u* is from *ku*, thou, the object pronoun. From *we* arise the forms Ny. Kv. *iwe*, thou; Sw. *wewe*, though the original *ku*, thee, still remains as the object pronoun.

Nasalisation.

Nasalisation is a peculiar and characteristic feature, in that the nasal blends with its consonant after the manner of a glide. Its function is to compensate a short syllable, so making the vowel capable of taking the tone. This process was found to be very frequently in demand in Uganda, and to be so subtle as completely to puzzle the European.

The reading primer contained all the nasal syllables, *nda*, *nde*, *ndi*, etc.; *mba*, *mbe*, *mbi*, etc., but they never appealed to the pupil. The nasal might just as well never have been written; but directly the syllable was found in a word, the nasal went in, if it was wanted. So, too, in foreign words; the nasal *would* come in in the wrong place, as in *makansi*, scissors, already given.

A most interesting transliteration is Gúvamanti, government, showing reversion to a short vowel in the second syllable *va*, the main accent being thrown, according to rule, on the vowel before the nasalised syllable *nti*. The first syllable *gu* is also short, but not so short as the second syllable *va*.

In Arabic writing, as we have seen, the nasal is not marked; only the intelligence of the reader can supply it. For Semitic peoples reject this nasal glide. Thus, for instance, in Hebrew, the nasal *n* or *m* is generally found as a consonant with a short vowel, making a distinct syllable; and only occasionally as a consonant with *Sheva*, when it resembles sonant *n* or *m*.

One can see the influence of this at work in Swahili in the almost total omission of *n* in nouns of the *N* class; whilst with *k*, *p*, *t* a sort of explosive sound—called by some an aspirate—is given to these letters to denote its omission. In

Hebrew, as probably in all the Semitic languages, this omitted nasal is given by doubling the next consonant; *e.g.*, in the conjugation of a Pe-Nun verb such as *nagaš*, come near; impf. *yig-gaš* for *yin-gaš*.

Doubtless we all recall in our schooldays being taught to call double *g* in Greek *ng*; and Greek seems to come a little nearer to Bantu in the use of the nasal than other languages. So, too, when the Greek Jews transliterated Habakkuk, they made the double *b* of the original *hab-bak-kuk* into *mb*, so calling the prophet Ambakum. Conversely, when the Jews of that age required the Latin word *ambubaia* they made it into *ab-bub*. In all these cases there may be traced some slight recollection of the Bantu feature of nasal *n* glide to compensate a short vowel made tone-long.

More than this, the last traces of the radical change *m* > *g* in Bantu should be noted in the final *m* of Ambakum in place of *k*, the corresponding letter of the original Habakkuk. The change *g* > *b* is also noticeable at about this time; thus the Sidonian town of Gebal is called Biblos by the Greeks. Whilst in the Greek language itself we have *glepharon* = *blepharon*. In *k* > *m* and *g* > *b* we have the last traces of that fundamental change, peculiar to Bantu, though noticed also in Sumerian, *vis.*, *m* > *g*.

The interchange of the *n* and *m* is not much required in Bantu; but *m* is always written as the nasal glide before *p*, *b*, *f*, *v*. The change *m* > *ng* sometimes found in Bantu has some interesting associations. Thus the root ZIM found in the very prevalent Bantu word *mu-simu*, an evil spirit, is nothing but the root LIM appearing as LING in Sum. DINGIR, God, also found as DIMMER. Further, "ghost" in Sumerian is GIDIM or EDIMMU, the same root with *gi* or *e* added. This *gi* or *e* might very well correspond to the Bantu prefix *mu* in *mu-simu*, plur. *mi-simu*. Further, in the Bantu word *mulungu*, god, we see a cognate root LUNG for LIM. All these words for God and spirit are related to a root LIB or LIM, be dark, which appears in a number of Bantu words. No doubt to the same root belongs Sum. ZIB, darkness.

The changes which *n* exerts on the consonants are remark-

able; the following taken from Ganda are probably fairly representative of the whole group:

When *n* is followed by *l* (*r*) *nl* becomes *n* if the following syllable begin with *n* or *m*; *e.g.*, *enjala enuma* (*e n luma*), I am hungry. *nd* in all other cases; *e.g.*, *gyendi* (*gye n li*), I am here.

Rem. i.—*l*, *d*, *r* being cerebral are very closely alike; *d* as a separate consonant hardly exists, except as a variation of *l*.

Rem. ii.—Those Bantu languages which make *r* a distinct sound appear to have come under foreign influence, and not to be true normal specimens of Bantu. Nyoro and Kavirondo, for instance, which have the rolled *r* sound, are on the extreme edge of the Bantu field, and parts of those districts are in constant intercommunication with non-Bantu areas. Moreover, that strange type of language known as Madi, Logo, etc., with a distinctly Bantu foundation, though the superstructure is non-Bantu and probably negro, have that very peculiar combination *dr*, derived from a contraction of *liri*, or even *biri*. The word *ndri*, a goat, for instance, is *mbuli* (the pronunciation of *mbusi* on the borders of BuNyoro), blunted to *mbiri*, and finally sounded *ndri* for *mbri*.

Similarly, *mb* becomes *m* if the following syllable begin with *n* or *m*; *e.g.*, *mundu* (*m bundu* for *m bunduki*) a gun; but remains as *mb* in other cases; *e.g.*, *mbugo*, bark-cloths (sing. *lu bugo*, plur. *n bugo*).

When *n* is followed by *w*, *nw* becomes *mp*; *e.g.*, *mpulide* (*n wulide*), I have heard.

When *n* is followed by *y* or *i*, *ny* remains if the following syllable begin with *n* or *m*; *e.g.*, *nyongere*, am I to add more?; *nyimiride*, I am standing; *ny* becomes *nj* in all other cases; *e.g.*, *njagala* (*n yagala*), I want.

Finally, when *n* comes before an emphatic consonant, the consonant loses its emphasis and the prefixed *n* becomes *nzi*; *e.g.*, *bansibye* (*ba n 'bye*), they have stolen from me, *ente ensirugavu* (*en 'dugavu*), a black cow.

Rem. i.—Regarding *nzi* before emphatic consonant, note that the emphatic consonant first resolves into simple consonant preceded by *i*; and then *n* before *i* becomes, not *nj* as normally in G, but *nz* as in other Bantu examples.

Rem. ii.—Practically emphatic *n* or *m*, as root initials are all but non-existent in G. The one word 'ma, stint, grudge, makes *nyima*, I grudge, and so follows the usual rule of *n* followed by *i*.

Rem. iii.—In one or two cases we find that this *nzi* actually represents a form *nli*, with *l* normally palatalised to *z*. Thus *nsirugavu*,

black (cow), from 'dugavu, participle of 'dugala, be black. Now 'dug, the root of this word, is for irug, a re-duplication of LIG, making lilug for lilig. Hence 'dugavu is for lirugavu, a lost form whose only trace survives in the palatalisation l>z in the form nzirugavu.

In conclusion, then, nasalisation, palatalisation, and labialisation form the keystone of Bantu phonetic change; and they support what has been claimed in the previous papers. It now remains to collect further evidence; to agree upon a normal type of Bantu, and to carry the work forward without too much encumbrance of abnormal features. What has been written is, as was said at the beginning, an attempt to make a few notes on a subject of more than usual interest, rather than defer writing for a period of leisure that never came. Necessities of space have limited the discussion to a few of the more striking examples, so that the inferences drawn may often seem more arbitrary than they really are. It has seemed impossible to deal with the Bantu problem without taking a wider range of study than is usually accorded to it; and by so doing it is hoped to let in quite a flood of new light on the whole problem.

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