

Nothing has been said in this article about the vowels (which present no problem) or the tone (which is not written in the orthography, although it is phonemically pertinent). Ideally the tone should be written, in common with all of the languages of the area, but it again does not carry a high functional load, at least for differences between words. Its functional load in relation to grammar may be much higher, but I did not have an opportunity to investigate that. In common with other languages of the area, the resistance to the introduction of writing tone would probably be very great and the attempt might be self-defeating. In the light of the fact that the tone is not written, and that therefore a certain amount of the meaning of the sentences is thereby lost, it makes it all the more imperative that the other changes in orthography be made.

Conclusion

Any change of the scope suggested in this article is a big undertaking for a mission program which has been publishing for years. It will inevitably cause inconvenience (more to the missionaries than to the Mupende) for some time to come. A change of this kind should be undertaken gradually, starting with the literacy programs in the schools and elsewhere, and extending to each new item that is published or reprinted. Each book or pamphlet as it is reprinted should be revised for spelling. This is something that can be very easily done by Africans, once they have learned the new system. Materials for first and second grades, however, should be completely revised immediately. New learners should not be subjected to the additional problem of having two spelling systems to study.

“Weeding” the Translation

In a translations report for Bambara, French West Africa, there is the following delightful paragraph:

One of the most frequent questions asked us about the translation work is, “Just where are you in the job?” The answer is always the same, “Everywhere and nowhere.” It isn’t like hoeing a row of corn, where you can say, “I have hoed this far; that which is behind me is finished.” Every time we come to a new weed in the row ahead, it reminds us that there was something back there a way that must have been a weed too. Sometimes it takes quite a bit of hunting to find it again.