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Afrihili: an African Interlanguage

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El-Afrihili is an African language which has been created incorporating grammar and words from the languages of the African Continent. It also contains words from many other sources so Africanized that they do not appear foreign.

The idea to create this international language occurred to the author on 2nd January, 1967 at sea when he was traveling from British Dover to French Calais.

Ni Afrihili Oluga
K.A. Kumi Attobrah

Context and Reception

Starting in the 17th century some Europeans, on confronting the difficulties of international communication, begin to think about the design of created languages intended to ease communication across borders and also, in the case of scientific or philosophical discussion, to make that communication unambiguous. Some of these international auxiliary languages (IALs), such as Wilkins' *Real Character* (1668) or Delormel's *Langue universelle* (1795), followed a philosophical scheme, laying out the universe in words encoding taxonomies. For example, in Delormel's language words beginning with **a** have to do with grammar, giving **ava** *grammar,* **ave** *letter,* **alve** *vowel,* **adve** *consonant,* **alivau** *root,* **alidvau** *derived root,* **alizvau** *complex root,* etc.

Taking inspiration from lingua francas, *a postiori* IALs drew vocabulary from numerous languages and combined them with a radically regularized morphology and grammar. Schleyer's Volapük (1879) and Zamenhof's Esperanto (1887) are the most successful of these. For an example of the approach, Volapük, **no vilob eli buki, sod uni buki** *I don't want the book, but a book*, taking **no, vil-** and **buk-** from English, **el-** and **un-** from Romance. More recent *a postiori* IALs expand their linguistic base, and take vocabulary from languages outside of Europe, such as Lojban (1987) and Unish (1996).

Another *a postiori* approach is to focus on the languages of a particular family or area. Languages such as Volapük and Esperanto were effectively European zonal IALs due to the languages

they borrowed vocabulary from, but a deliberate approach can be found in the many Slavic zonal IALs, starting with Ruski Yezik (1661) and continuing to this day with projects such as Interslavic.[1]

Afrihili, created by Ghanaian civil engineer K.A. Kumi Attobrah in 1967, is an African zonal IAL, taking vocabulary from languages all over the African continent. Like some of the Slavic zonal IALs, which were part of or allied to a larger movement to unify the Slavic peoples, Afrihili allied itself with Pan-Africanism, a movement which seeks to unite Africans, including those of African descent worldwide, to improve the independent social, political and economic state of all Africans. Attobrah never uses the term "Pan-Africanism" itself, and defines fairly modest goals for Afrihili in the introduction to *Ni Afrihili Oluga,*

> El-Afrihili has been created with a view for it being adopted as the lingua franca of Africa. It would promote unity and understanding among the different peoples of the continent, reduce costs in printing due to translations and promote trade.

However, he also dedicated his book to four Pan-Africanist leaders, Marcus Garvey (1887–1940, Jamaican journalist and leader of several political organizations), Albert Luthuli (1898–1967, South African politician, once president of the African National Congress and first non-European to win the Nobel Peace Prize), Gamal Abdul Nasser (1918-1970, second president of Egypt), and Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972, first president and first prime minister of an independent Ghana, founding member of the Organization of African Unity).

The instructional text of *Ni Afrihili Oluga* also largely avoids direct reference to political or social ideas. Most of the example sentences and translations focus on day-to-day matters. From time to time, however, Pan-Africanist goals come through, as in the "Common Expressions" section of lesson three, "**?Wumai ɔle te afrini akanan** *Have you change for one afrini?* (Afrini is future currency for Continental Africa)."

The language was not met with universal approval by other Pan-Africanists. Charles Oladipo Akinde of the Grand African Movement for Common Action was scathing (Akinde, 1974, p. 41),

> On the other hand, some people are preaching a lingua franca in Africa. A few months ago it was reported that an African language was developed in a Ghana university[2] to be known as "Afrihili". This was to serve in West Africa as a unified language like Swahili in East Africa. But the program was an attempt to divert our attention from the most urgent problem of Africa today which is decolonisation.

And (Akinde, 1974, p. 18, revised introduction),

> Some confused minds often speak of a lingua franca (common language) for Africa. Some people even tried to construct another Esperanto for West Africa called "Afrihili". One cannot think of any greater intellectual madness than this proposition.

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[1] Constructed Slavic Languages, http://steen.free.fr/interslavic/constructed_slavic_languages.html, retrieved March 9, 2014.

[2] I have been unable to find anything to suggest Afrihili was the project of anyone but Attobrah working on his own.

Because the idea is incompatible with philology. If Africa must develop a language, it must come naturally with the continued free and equal integration among the African people. The interaction is today limited by the underdeveloped communication systems and the artificial barriers placed in the way of free interaction among our peoples by the system of bourgeois international relations inherited from colonialism; these barriers should be abolished!

According to a 1987 press release for 25th anniversary of the language (Africa Research Bulletin, p.8713), about a thousand people learned Afrihili to some unspecified degree, and "prizes were awarded to the best students in the new language in 1970, 1974, 1978 and 1982." The release further says that a copy of the grammar was to be presented to the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity on May 16, 1988 in Addis Ababa. This is the last published reference to Afrihili I could find, beyond publications listing its ISO 639-3 code.

Source Languages

In *Ni Afrihili Oluga,* Attobrah says that the language, "has been created incorporating grammar and words from the languages of the African continent," but gives no further information about how vocabulary was selected.[3]

The name of the language is "Afrihili," and as expected there is a good deal of Swahili vocabulary in the language, **sana** *very,* **zuri** *nice*, **kwa** *via,* **nyenyekevu** *humble,* **-soma** *read,* etc., as well as some verb morphology discussed below.

Twi, the most common language of Ghana, is also a source, **papa** *good,* **yɛ** *be (at),* **fa** *take*, **mi** *I*, **mu** *in*, the progressive marker **re-;** possibly **na** *and,* though the same word has the same meaning in Swahili.

Yoruba provides some vocabulary, **iwe** *book,* **owula** *lord* ("sir," in Afrihili), possibly **ɔ̀kan, kan** *one* (Afrihili **kana**) and **ko** *not,* though in Yoruba it's not a suffix, but comes before the verb.

Among other languages I was able to find represented are Hausa (**ta** *she,* **jibi** *food* for Afr. **ejibi**); Kikongo (**akuetu** *friend*); Jola-Fonyi (**emaano** *rice* for Afr. **emano**); isiZulu (**umuntu** *man* for Afr. **omutu**, **konje** *indeed*); Kinyarwanda (**inzira** *way*); Malagasy (**fito** *seven,* **lavitra** *far from*). Some member of the Nubian family also makes an appearance, in the number five (**diji**) and in the possessive suffix **-n.** I haven't been able to identify exactly *which* member of the family was Attobrah's source. The chance I have confused a source language with one if its close relatives is fairly high, especially with the Bantu languages.

English semantics presents itself strongly in certain areas I will note below, and there are a few places which I believe indicate familiarity with Esperanto.

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[3]Guosa, a recent pan-Nigerian IAL, is more systematic, and takes nouns for visible and concrete objects from Hausa, or other languages of northern Nigeria, and takes invisible and abstract things from Igbo, Yoruba or other languages of southern Nigeria. http://www.dawodu.net/guosa1.htm, retrieved March 15, 2014.

The Language[4]

Only a little space is devoted to the pronunciation of Afrihili, with the following equivalents given:

Vowel: (similar to pronunciation in local language script).

a — as in sat   i — as in sit
e — as in ape   o — as in old
ɛ — as in egg   u — as in hoot
ɔ — as in ought

Consonant:[5]

ch — as in chat   ny — as in cognac
sh — as in ship   th — as in there
kw — as in quack   bw — as in Bwana
ts — as in tsetsefly   hw — as in whistle

Though it is not discussed in the text, syllabic nasals are a regular part of the vocabulary, with such words as **nji** *sleep,* **ngo** *no,* **mbele** *in front,* etc.

Attention is never given to how exactly to pronounce it, but some vocabulary and several grammatical processes have vowels written double. For example, in the pair **owula** *sir* and **owu-laa** *madam.* A verb phrase nominalization pattern lengthens the vowel of the person prefix, **miyɛ** *I am* and **miiyɛ** *I who am;* **tatajo** *she will go* **taatajo** *she who will go.* Habitual tenses ("used to") lengthen the vowel of the tense prefix, **miyɛɛdu ɛtukana** *I am used to eating breakfast,* **mitaadu ɛtukana** *I will be used to eating breakfast.* Several of the languages Attobrah drew on have contrastive vowel length, which is likely how we are meant to interpret doubled vowels.

In the introduction Attobrah writes that, "Intonation or accent does not change the meaning of a word. The accent however is usually on the second syllable." It's not clear how this might interact with the long vowels.

The desire for strict regularity means there is little in the way of phonotactics, but in a few places euphony motivates some changes. The copula **yɛ** may reduce to just **ɛ** (sometimes written **'ɛ**) with the "it" subject prefix **yo-**, as in **sa yo bikama yo'ɛ papa** *buy it provided that it is good.* Other subjects occasionally have this reduction, too, **fuɛ tɛ wu** *they are for you.* The form **mile** *I know* may reduce to just **nle**.

Quite a few morphemes are attached to words using an "echo vowel." For example, the passive suffix is **-bw-**. A word cannot end in that, so the previous vowel is repeated after it, so that **sana** *see* + **-bw-** > **sanabwa** *be seen*, and **kabe** *advise* + **-bw-** > **kabebwe** *be advised.* The agent noun prefix, **-m-**, works similarly, except the vowel is repeated before the prefix, **-m-** + **okola** *work* > **omokola** *workman.*

The question and exclamation marks come at the beginning of the sentence, apparently with a period at the end, though that only shows up a few times, **!Tɛna kenge zuri.** *How nice it would be!*

The Noun and Adjective

All common nouns begin and end with a vowel. The plural is formed by replacing the initial vowel with the final vowel, as in **akalini** *pen* and **ikalini** *pens.* This appears to have been inspired by Yoruba, in which very many nouns start and end with vowels. While the initial vowel has no semantic content, nor does it mark class as it would in most Bantu languages, it is still used in a form of agreement reminiscent of Swahili and other Bantu languages. An attributive adjective follows its noun and has the initial vowel of the noun prefixed to it, and a **-n** suffixed. So, **sabo** is *new*, **akalini asabon** *a new pen,* **ikalini isabon** *new pens.*

The order of multiple adjectives is color, size, quality, number,

> **ni abanda ajan akeren azurin abarin**
> the cabins   red   small   nice   two
> *The two nice small red cabins.*

The comparative of adjectives is formed with the suffix **-noho** (Malagasy *noho* "than"). Sometimes this is written suffixed to the adjective, sometimes not. It can act as *-er than,* requiring no other marking on the comparand,

> **Ni evoka yɛ kono noho ni amago.**
> the pear   be mature COMP the mango
> *The pear is more matured than the mango.*

> **Mimai ewe   ebarin   noho wu.**
> mi-mai e-iwe e-bari-n   noho wu
> 1SG-have PL-book ATTR-two-ATTR COMP 2SG
> *I have two more books than you.*

Less than is marked with **nenoho**, which, with the "contrary meaning" prefix **ne-**, reminds one of Esperanto's **malpli** (**mal-** *"opposite"*, **pli** *more*).

Equality is marked with **da**, *as... as,*

> **Ki ature yɛ ja da ize.**
> this flower is   red as   blood
> *This flower is as red as blood.*

Quantifiers follow the noun, but do not take attribution marking, **du** *all*, **kasa,** *some,* **kila** *every,*

> **Mitafa   ewande kasa.**
> 1SG-FUT-take groundnuts some
> *I will take some groundnuts.*

The possessive, much like English *'s,* is the suffix **-n**, as in **ni oru** *the chief,* **ni orun ita** *the chief's house,* **ni urun ata** *the chiefs' houses,* and

ni omukaman okambon   adrashi azurin

ni omukama-n   o-kambo-n   adrashi   a-zuri-n
the king-POSS   ATTR-powerful-ATTR palace   ATTR-nice-ATTR

the powerful king's nice palace

Possession can also be indicated with the preposition **pe** *of,* which is also used in a partitive sense,

Fe mi ekeni pe tutu echi.[6]

give me glass   of   cold   water

Give me a glass of cold water.

    The definite article is **ni**. It is not used with people, countries, rivers, years, months, days, festivals, seasons nor the names of spirits or gods. It is frequently contracted with prepositions, **pe** *of* vs. **pen** *of the,* **bɛ** *away from* vs. **bɛn** *away from the.* The article can also contract with the *be at* sense of the copula **yɛ**, **lɛyɛn ishule**[7] *he is at the school,* but **lɛyɛ ni omuntu** *he is the man.*

    Proper nouns for countries and continents have prefixes for citizens, languages, etc., **A-frihili** *people of Africa,* **Ɛl-Afrihili** *Language of Africa,* **omu-afrika** *Citizen of Africa, African,* **li-afrika** *pertaining to Africa, African* (a regular adjective formation), **vol-afrihili** *ɛl-Afrihili-speaking* (**vova** *speak*).

The Pronoun

The personal pronoun seems to follow English in breaking down the third person into *he, she,* and *it* in the singular, with a single plural, *they.* The forms are,

	Subject	Object	Independent Subj.	Poss. I	Poss. II	
1sg.	**mi-**	**mi**	**emi**	**m'**	**-mi-n**	Twi *mi*
2sg.	**wu-**	**wu**	**ewu**	**w'**	**-wu-n**	Twi *wu*
3sg. "he"	**lɛ-**	**lɛ**	**elɛ**	**l'**	**-lɛ-n**	
3sg. "she"	**ta-**	**ta**	**eta**	**t'**	**-ta-n**	Hausa *ta*
3sg. "it"	**yo-**	**yo**	**eyo**	**y'**	**-yo-n**	
1pl.	**nu-**	**nu**	**unu**	**n'**	**-nu-n**	Oromo? Wolof? *nu.*
2pl.	**ku-**	**ku**	**uku**	**k'**	**-ku-n**	Hausa *ku*
3pl.	**fu-**	**fu**	**ufu**	**f'**	**-fu-n**	

The subject prefix forms are used with verbs.[8] The object forms are for direct and indirect objects, and after prepositions. The independent subject forms are used as the antecedent to appositive phrases and in single word answers,

Emi, Kofi pe Gana, mibela...

I   kofe   POS Ghana   1SG-wish

I, Kofi of Ghana, wish...

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    [6]From time to time one finds examples where adjective attribution follows the pattern of English, ADJ + N, without attributive marking, or N + ADJ, again without attributive marking. It's not clear if this is from a different stage of the language, or interference from English.

    [7]It's **inshule** in the text, but elsewhere appears as just **ishule**.

    [8]Sometimes they are seen written separately, before the verb.

And in **?Wɛna lida yo** *Who did it?* **Emi** *I (did).*

The first possessive is simply the object form with vowel elided, since all nouns begin with vowels,

> **Mibinda m'akalinki te**
> 1SG-write   my pencil   with
>
> *I write with my pencil.*

The second possessive is simply the object form taking the attributive marking of an adjective,

> **Etogo ewun.**
> etogo   e-wu-n
> house   ATTR-2SG-ATTR
>
> *your house*

For the first and second person, no guidance is given on when the first or second type of possessive is preferred, though the first is by far the most common in the book. For the third person, the different forms manage coreference, with the first possessive referring to the rightmost entity and the second possessive to the nearer,

> **M'imao rezi l'akuetu na l'ukai** *My brother$_1$ is calling his$_1$ friend$_2$ and his$_1$ wife.*
> **M'imao rezi l'akuetu na ukai ulɛn.** *My brother$_1$ is calling his$_1$ friend$_2$ and his$_2$ wife.*

And a coreference system gets a single example,

> **Abdulai lizi Ndiaye** *Abdulai$_1$ called Ndiaye$_2$.*
> **Ɛl$_1$ lika lɛ$_2$ kenode ɛl$_1$ iwe** *He$_1$ told him$_2$ to bring him$_1$ a book.*

Attobrah says, "here 'lɛ' is read backwards to be 'ɛl'." It's not clear how this would work with **ta** and **yo**, since neither ***at** nor ***oy** appear to be legal Afrihili words.

Finally, reduplicating the object form gives reflexives,[9] **mimi** *I myself,* **tata** *she herself.* This can be used to emphasize possession, **l'iwe lɛlɛ** *his own book.*

In addition to these basic pronouns which occur throughout the language, there are also inclusives **nɛ** *me and you* (dual) and **nɛu** *us and you* (plural). It's not clear how these work with the rest of the pronoun system.

There is also an "indefinite pronoun," **k-,** which takes tense marking, **kɛ mi** *it is I,* **ka mi** *it will be I,* **ki mi** *it was I,* **ko mi** *it has been I,* **ku mi** *it had been me.* These may be prefixed to some verb forms,

> **Kɛbidi   amola kutede f'abini.**
> kɛ-bidi   a-umola kute-de   f'abini
> 3INDEF-oblige PL-child obey-INF their parents
>
> *Children must obey their parents.*

The **k-** forms seem favored for describing the weather, **kɛ zuri alu** *it's a fine day,* **kɛ tutu** *it's cold.*

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[9]Given the existence of reflexive verb morphology of several sorts, this appears to be an intensive reflexive only.

Deixis and Adverbs

Afrihili has a two-way distinction in demonstratives, near **ki** *this* and far **ka** *there.* The plurals of these take **-nga**, giving **kinga** *these* and **kanga** *those.* There is also a "general" demonstrative pair **ku** *this* and **kunga** *that.* No rules are given about the precise distinction of the general demonstratives,

> **Ki omulenzi** *this boy (here)*
> **Ka omukama** *that chief (there)*
> **Ku yɛ ufre ubayan** *This is bad news*

If the demonstrative follows its noun, it takes the final syllable of the noun,

> **Omulenzi kinzi** *this boy (here)*
> **Omukama kama** *that king (there)*
> **Imukazi kangazi** *those girls (there)*

The basic question words and indefinites follow a schematic correlative pattern similar to Esperanto, though they are not laid out that way in the book,

	Each, every	Some, any	This, that	No
Person	**kowo**	**kawa**	**ki, ku**	**nawa, nana**
	each, each one, everyone	*somebody, someone, anybody, anyone*	*this, that*	*not any, nobody, no one*
Person's	**kon**	**kan**	**kin**	**nan**
	everyone's	*someone's*	*of that, of this*	*nobody's, no one's*
Thing	**kodo**	**kada**	**ki, ku**	**nada, nye**
	every	*something, anything*	*this, that*	*nothing*
	koko			
	everything			
Time	**kopo**	**kapa**	**kipi**	**napa, neda**
	always	*sometime*	*at this moment*	*never*
Place	**kofo**	**kafa**	**kifi**	
	everywhere	*somewhere, anywhere*	*over there, by this way*	

In addition to these core correlatives are several, some following the core pattern, some not, which occur for only one category: **nansha** *none,* **angi** *nil (noun),* **onye** *nothing,* **nata, neni** *by no means,* **nasa, ndo** *not at all,* **nda, nta, nehi** *no, not* (used in such phrases as "no water"), **nanjo bado** *not yet,* **kisi** *so much of, of such quantity,* **kibi** *for such reason,* and **kiti** *thus, in such manner.*

Prefixing **ko-** to the question words gives free choice indefinites (perhaps from Hausa *ko-*), **kofɛna lɛjo** *wherever he goes,* **kokawa bela** *anyone who wishes.*

The question and relative words all end in **-ɛna**, and use the second consonant of the correlatives as their initial consonant, **wɛna** *who,* **nɛna** *whose,* **dɛna** *what,* **kɛna** *which, that,* **pɛna** *when,* **fɛna** *where,* **bɛna** *why,* **tɛna** *how,* and **sɛna** *how much, how many.*

In addition to root adverbs, such as **sana** *very (much),* **ju** *too,* adverbs can be derived from adjectives either by lengthening the final vowel or with the suffix **-lo**, as in **wuvova harakaa ju** *you speak too quickly,* **jo nokilo** *come quickly.* The comparative **-noho** can also be adverbialized, **vova polinohoo** *speak more slowly.*

Numbers

The numbers give a good idea of Afrihili's range of source languages,

0	**sifiri**	Hausa *sifiri* (< Ar. *ṣifr*)			
1	**kana**	Yoruba *ǫ̀kan, kan*	6	**seta**	Hausa? *shidda*
2	**bari**	Swahili? *mbili*[10]	7	**fito**	Malagasy *fíto*
3	**sade**	Oromo? *sadii*	8	**nane**	Swahili *nane*
4	**hudu**	Hausa *hudu*	9	**tolu**	?
5	**diji**	Nubian *dij-*	10	**du**	Twi *edú*

Multiplication is indicated with the word **o**, **bari o sade** *two times three.* This is also used to build the larger place units, so that **duobari**, "ten times two" is 20, **duosade** is 30. Similarly for the **keme** 100 and **kalo** 1,000 and **mili** *million*, so that **kemeobari** is 200. Division is indicated with **si** *over,* and subtraction with **cha** *minus,* **hudu cha bari yɛ bari** *four minus two is two.*

Larger numbers are simply concatenated from their parts, **keme duobari kana** 121.

Simple unit fractions have two forms, either the prefix **ka-** ("one") or the suffix **-si**, so either **dijisi** or **kadiji** for *one fifth.* The first syllable of the numbers are used for the other divisions of a fraction, **badiji** *two fifths,* **sadiji** *three fifths,* etc.

The word **sau** before a number indicates times, **milibinda sau seta** *I wrote six times.*

Ordinal numbers take the suffix **-na**, **kanana** *first.* Changing the final vowel of a number to **ɛ** gives ordinal adverbs, **kanɛ** *firstly,* **sadɛ** *thirdly.*

Adpositions

Afrihili has a large collection of adpositions from various sources, **kwa** *via* (Swahili), **mu** *in* (Twi), **kusa** *near* (Hausa), **lavitra** *far from* (Malagasy). There is also a rather schematic set all starting with **t**, **te** *with,* **ta** *by,* **tu** *from,* **tɔ** *about,* **tɛ** *for, on behalf of,* **ti** *under.* These usually come before the noun phrase in *Ni Afrihili Oluga,* but there are still plenty of examples where they come after.

Mibinda m'akalinki te.
1SG-write 1SG-pencil with
I write with my pencil.

Milituhuwi mun adenle.
mi-li-tuhu-wi mu ni adenle
1SG-PST-lose-INCH in the street
I got lost in the street.

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[10]A number of related Bantu langauges have forms in *-bVrV-, -bVlV-*. I'm not able to determine which one Attobrah might have borrowed **bari** from.

Given this pair of examples in lesson five, it seems that the choice is up to the speaker,

> **Lɛ yɛ abu mu** *He is in a room.*
> **Lɛ yɛm abu** *He is in a room.*

The presence of the definite article sometimes seems to push the adposition to follow the noun phrase,

> **Talida yo ɛn asiko** *She did it within time.*
> **Talida yo ni asiko ɛn** *She did it within the time.*

As in English, the adpositions can be used adverbially, **wa hapa** *come here,* **wa mu** *come in,* **wa shi** *come down,*

Kama	epengi	ngewa	paasa,	ni	amalesi	ngesanabwa.
kama	epengi	nge-wa	paasa	ni	amalesi	nge-sana-bwa
if	sun	COND-come out		the millet		COND-save-PASS

If the sun would come out, the millet would be saved.

The preposition **tu** *from,* at least, can be used as a verb stem, **?wutu ofeka dɛna** *from what country are you?*

Two adpositions, **fo** and **ɛn**, came in for special elaboration. **Fo** means *up till, up until, up to, as far as, for the purpose of, direct,*

> **Milibonako lɛ fo koni** *I have not seen him up till now.*
> **Kɛ fo wu jode ita** *it is up to you to go home.*
> **Mitajo fo ni uzo** *I will go as far as the road.*
> **Mitawa fo bonade ni oru** *I came for the purpose of seeing the Chief.*
> **Jo fo (wu)** *Go straight ahead (of you).*
> **Nutagɛnda fo ton ishule** *We shall walk straight to the school.*
> **Milo hapa fo ulu usaden** *I have been here for three days.*
> **Fo miyɛ omukama, kwayɛko asela** *As long as I am king, there will be no thieves.*
> **Fo mi...** *As far as I am concerned...*

The adposition **ɛn** *in, at,* has a number of functions,

> **Ta lijo ɛn asiko apapan** *She went at a good time.*
> **Ni ishule ɛn, nulibona ni omukazi** *At the school we saw the girl.*
> **Mitada yo ulu usaden ɛn** *I will do it in four days.*

It can also quantify nouns, with meanings including *one among others,* as in **isili ɛn** *one of the soldiers.* It can mean *each one (of),*

> **Ɛn mai iwe** *Each one has a book.*
> **Nu ɛn mai iwe** *Each one of us has a book.*

Finally, it has the sense of *leading, at the head of,* in **lɛtawa umuntu udijin ɛn** *he will come at the head of five men.*

10

The Verb

Verb inflection takes its morphological inspiration primarily from Twi and Swahili. Here is the simple present tense of the copula in Afrihili and Twi,

	Afrihili	Twi
"I am"	**miyɛ**[11]	**meyɛ**
"You (sg.) are"	**wuyɛ**	**woyɛ**
"He is"	**lɛyɛ**	**ɔyɛ**
"She is"	**tayɛ**	**ɔyɛ**
"It is"	**yoyɛ**	**ɛyɛ**
"We are"	**nuyɛ**	**yɛyɛ**
"You (pl.) are"	**kuyɛ**	**moyɛ**
"They are"	**fuyɛ**	**wɔyɛ**
"They (inan.) are"	**fuyɛ**	**ɛyɛ**

No person prefix is used if the subject noun is given, so **mirejo** *I am going,* but **omulenzi rejo** *a boy is going* instead of ***omulenzi lɛrejo**.

Tense, aspect and mood (TAM) are marked on the verb with a prefix which comes immediately before the verb, **jo** *goes,* **rejo** *is going.* If there is person marking, it occurs in front of the TAM prefix, **mijo** *I go,* **mirejo** *I am going.* The TAM prefixes take a lot of inspiration from Swahili,[12] though the tense and aspect semantics owe a lot to English.

Simple present	Ø	
Present progressive	**re-**	Twi *re-*
Past progressive	**ri-**	
Future progressive	**ra-**	
Perfect continuous	**ro-**	
Past perf. continuous	**ru-**	
Future	**ta-**	Swahili *ta-*
Future perfect	**tɔ-**	
Past	**li-**	Swahili *li-*
Perfect	**lo-**	
Past Perfect	**lu-**	
Present Subjunctive	**ke-**	
Past Subjunctive	**ki-**	Swahili *ki-* "conditional"
Present Conditional	**nge-**	Swahili *nge-* "hypothetical"
Past Conditional	**ngi-**	

Habitual tenses are formed by lengthening the vowel of the TAM prefix, **miliidu ɛn zinga** *I was used to eating in the morning.* For the present habitual, the copula **yɛ** is used as the TAM marker,

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[11]In lesson three **yɛ** is defined as "is, is at."

[12]Twi also has the template: subject prefix - TAM - verb stem.

miyɛɛdu ɛtukana *I am used to eating breakfast.* There is additionally a special past habitual prefix, **liɔ-**, **taliɔduti mi ishule to** *she used to drag me to school.*

There is a past consecutive marker, **la-**, which acts much like Swahili **ka-**. Once an initial past tense **li-** is used, **la-** is used to mark sequencing, **milijo ita, milabona Issa, milafe lɛ iwe, miladu te lɛ** *I went home and saw Issa and gave him a book and ate with him.*

There are two immediate future forms. In the first, the first syllable is reduplicated. In the second, the verb stem takes the suffix **-di**. In both, the future tense prefix is also present, **mitazi lɛ** *I shall call him,* but:

> **Mitazizi   lɛ.**
> mi-ta-zi-zi   lɛ
> 1SG-FUT-RED-call 3SG.MASC
>
> *I shall call him (immediately).*

> **Mitazidi.**
> mi-ta-zi-di
> 1SG-FUT-call-IMMED.FUT
>
> *I shall call (immediately).*

However, an instance of the immediate future **-di** used without **ta-** is found in one example, **ade ngawadi** *it's going to rain.*

There is a type of frustrative TAM marker, **ya-**, used when "there is still hope of an event occurring." It is used in addition to the tense prefix.

> **?Lɛlojo** *Has he gone?*
> **Lɛyalojoko bado** *He has not gone yet* (but is still expected to).

The infinitive is marked by the suffix **-de**. It is used to nominalize phrases, **de rahisi yɛ papa** *to be simple is good* (just bare **de** is the infinitive of the copula). After verbs of coming and going it marks purpose,

> **Mitajo   ni ibise kolade.**
> mi-ta-jo   ni ibise kola-de
> 1SG-FUT-go the office work-INF
>
> *I will go to the office to work.*

It is used after **laki** *so that, in order that,* if there is no change in the subject, **lɛlowa laki sade ewe** *he has come in order to buy books.* It is used as the complement to constructions of aspect and mood, **milovɔ dude** *I have finished eating,*

> **Kɛfara   nu jode koni.**
> kɛ-fara   nu jo-de koni
> 3INDEF-be.good 1PL go-INF now
>
> *We had better go now.*

The infinitive is used to avoid repeating subject and TAM marking,

Ni imulenzi lisanako   nako   dude.
ni i-omulenzi li-sana-ko   na-ko   du-de
the PL-boy   PST-drink-NEG and-NEG eat-INF

The boys did not drink or eat.

Combined with the preposition **al**, the infinitive is used to attach attributive phrases of purpose to nouns, **etogo al njide** *a house to sleep in,* **ego al sade ukintu** *money to buy things with,* **abu al dude ejibi** *a room for eating food in.*

Verb forms without subject prefixes can be used as participles. For the simple present, **mɛ-** is prefixed.

Milikebe   wu riyanka   inka.
mi-li-kebe   wu ri-yanka   inka
1SG-PST-pass 2SG PST.PROG-slaughter cow

I passed by you (as you were) slaughtering a cow.

Lilomu ni abu, lɛlisogo   ni usuni.
li-lomu   ni abu lɛ-li-sogo   ni usuni
PST-enter the room 3SG-PST-close the door

Having entered the room, he shut the door.

Negation is marked with the verbal suffix **-ko**, which from time to time is found written a separate word,

Miligisoko   ki.
mi-li-giso-ko   ki
1SG-PST-order-NEG this

I did not order this.

"Not yet" is indicated with the suffix **-jo,** as in **lɛlojoja** *he has not yet gone,* or with **-ko bado**, as in **lɛyalojoko bado** *he has not yet come (but is still expected to).*

In addition to the basic TAM markers, there are aspectual suffixes. The continuative, "keep on" sense is marked with the suffix **-re**, **lɛlijore** *he kept on going.* The ventive is marked with the suffix **-si**, as in **du** *eat* and **dusi** *come to eat.* An inceptive, defined as "set oneself out to do or start an action," is marked with the prefix **b-** with an echo vowel, so **jo** *go* and **bojo** *leave, go away,* **nji** *sleep* and **binji** *go to sleep.*

When taking TAM marking, the copula, **yɛ**, is often dropped, leaving just person and TAM morphemes for the verb. When the infinitive is needed, **de** alone suffices,

Lɛlo   anche apapan.
lɛ-lo   anche   a-papa-n
3SG-PRF father   ATTR-good-ATTR

He has been a good father.

Existential expressions, "there is, there are," are formed with **kwa** followed by a TAM marker, **kwayɛ** *there is/are,* **kwalu** *there had been.* It takes the normal negative suffix, **kwayɛko** *there isn't,* but note **kwayɛ** **nehi indemo** **zare** *there is no football today.*

The bare verb stem acts as the singular imperative, **!soma** *read!* For the plural, add the suffix **-k**, from **ku**, **!somak** *read!.* For the negative, simply add the usual negation suffix **-ko**. Note that the plural marking comes after that, giving **!somako** *don't read!* and **!somakok** *don't (pl.) read.* First and third person imperatives are formed by replacing the normal person prefix vowel with **-e-** from **ke-**, **!nejo** *let's go!* and **!fesoma** *let them read!*

Questions

Simple polar questions are indicated by intonation, "by raising the voice on the last word to indicate a question form." Questions are written with the question mark before the clause, **?Wususoli** *do you understand?*

Question words are *in situ,*

?Ni imukazi rejo   fɛna
the girls   PROG-go where

Where are the girls going?

?Wurebida   wɛna
wu-re-bida   wɛna
2SG-PROG-look.for who

Whom are you looking for?

Complex Sentences

Afrihili has a range of conditional constructions. First, the real or general condition is introduced with **kama** *if* and the particle **ba** at the end of the clause. Future conditions have the future in both clauses,

Kama lɛtaladi   mi ba, mitafe   yo lɛ to.
kama   lɛ-ta-ladi   mi ba, mi-ta-fe   yo lɛ   to
if   3SG-FUT-ask 1SG BA 1SG-FUT-give it   3SG to

If he asks me, I will give it to him.

Ba is defined as marking the condition as "indefinite," but it is difficult to tell from the examples what exactly that means. For example,

Kama kɛko   bongo, sai   mikejo.
if   3INDEF-NEG so,   then.let 1SG-PRES.SBJV-go

If it isn't so, then let me go.

The condition may be emphasized with the conjunction **kamakeba** *if it be that,*

Kamakeba ni imulenzi yɛ hapa konje, kɛ kara.
if-it-be-that   the boys   be here   really,   it's ok

If it be that the boys are really here, it's o.k.

Present contrary-to-fact conditions use the TAM prefix **nge-**,

> **Kama mingemai**   **ego**   **ebakan,**   **mingesa**   **ni agakolago.**
> kama   mi-nge-mai   ego   e-baka-n   mi-nge-sa   ni   agakolago
> if   1SG-PRES.COND-have money ATTR-enough-ATTR 1SG-PRES.COND-buy the handkerchief
>
> *If I had enough money, I would buy the handkerchief.*

Past contrary-to-fact conditions use **ngi-**,

> **Kama mingibona**   **lɛ, mingijua**   **lɛ.**
> kama   mi-ngi-bona   lɛ   mi-ngi-jua   lɛ
> if   1SG-PAST.COND-see 3SG 1SG-PAST.COND-know 3SG
>
> *If I had seen him I would have known him.*

The **nge-**forms may also be used "with a sense of politeness or diffidence, in exclamations and in relative clauses."

> **?Dɛna wungesumɔ.**
> dɛna   wu-nge-sumɔ
> what   2SG-PRES.COND-like
>
> *What would you like?*

> **!Tɛna kenge**   **zuri.**
> how   3INDEF-PRES.COND nice
>
> *How nice it would be!*

> **Ni omuntu wɛna ngetaya**   **mi, yɛ hapa.**
> the man   who   PRES.COND-help me   is   here
>
> *The man who might help me is here.*

The conjunction **kama** may be repeated to give *whether... or...* clauses, which do not take **ba**,

> **Kama lɛfua, kama lɛyi,**   **yopasiwako**   **mi.**
> if   3SG-die if   3SG-live, 3SG-concern-NEG 1SG
>
> *Whether he dies or lives, it doesn't concern me.*

The subjunctive, **ke-** for present, **ki-** for past, has a range of uses. First, it marks wishes, **ejibi keberanuwi** *let the food get warm.* Except after verbs of motion, it marks intention,

> **Milife**   **lɛ iwe kesoma.**
> mi-li-fe   lɛ   iwe   ke-soma
> 1SG-PST-give 3SG book PRES.SBJV-read
>
> *I gave him a book to read.*

It is used after "words of compunction," such as **lazima** *necessary,* **shati** *of necessity,* as in **lazima lɛkejo** *he must go.* It is also used after verbs of forbidding, refusing and preventing. Such clauses take the negative,

M'apai   liki   mi kewako.
m'-apai   li-ki   mi   ke-wa-ko
1SG.POSS-father PST-refuse 1SG PRES.SBJV-go-NEG

My father refused to let me go.

Like the Swahili **ka-**tense, the subjunctive is used in sequencing commands,

Wa   kebona.
wa   ke-bona
Come PRES.SBJV-see

Come and see.

Afrihili has three distinct relativization strategies. First, it may use a question word, such as **wɛna** *who,* **kɛna** *which*, etc., possibly a borrowing from English, **omola wɛna soma** *a child who reads;* **ki yɛ ol iwe kɛna milihitaji** *this is the very book which I wanted.* Second, it may treat the verb stem as an adjective, from **ni omuntu kora** *the man works* to **ni omuntu okoran** *the man who works.* Finally, there is a relative word **a**, in **ni omuntu a wurebida ne** *here is the man you are looking for* (**ne** = "here is"), and:

Ni omola a   lisoma iwe
the child   REL PST-read book

The child who read a book

Ni iwe a   ni omola lisoma
the book REL the child   PST-read

The book which the child read

The relative word may also be used to attach attributive phrases, at least to nouns and adverbs of place,

Pale a   kwayɛ   otogo
there REL there-are houses

There where there are houses

Obeka a   peenani
place   REL above

A place on high

Obeka a   banda onse
place   REL without people

A place without people

Since the introduction to these examples specifically mentions places, this construction may not be freely usable with other sorts of nouns.

Related to the relatives is a focusing construction meaning "I who..., he who...," which seems to be patterned after Swahili. It is formed by lengthening the vowel of the person prefix, **lɛɛyɛ papa** *he who is good,* **nuuliko pale** *we who were not there.*

Indirect speech is introduced with **sɛ** (Twi), using absolute tense,

Lɛliche   sɛ lɛtawa
3SG-PST-say that 3SG-FUT-come

He said that he would come.

Word Building

As is usual in IALs, Afrihili has an extensive and regular system for generating new vocabulary from existing words. I will not catalog everything here, but will give a few examples which demonstrate how the system works in general, and include a few interesting derivational meanings.

An organizing princple of word derivation involving nouns is the "Hili Triangle,"
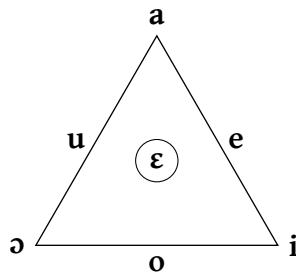
Several derivational rules involve finding the opposite vowel on the triangle. For example, the opposite vowel of **i** is **u**, and the opposite of **o** is **a**. The vowel **ɛ** doesn't take part in this particular process, but is used as a noun prefix in certain derivational patterns. It is also used as the noun prefix vowel whenever all the vowels of the stem are identical, so that, for example, **mono** *to disgrace* gives not ***amono** as would be expected, but **ɛmono** *disgrace.*

Converting a noun to a verb involves simply removing the vowel prefix, from **etogo** *house* to **togo** *to house.* To create an adjective from a noun, first remove the vowel prefix, then convert the final vowel to its Hili triangle opposite. For example, **umeme** *electricity* gives **-meme** > **memɔ** *electric.*

To create a noun from a verb, look at the final vowel and add its Hili triangle opposite to the front, as from **pinu** *determine* to **ipinu** *determination.*

An example elaboration, starting with **fua** *to die*: **ofua** *death,* **fuase** *be dead,* **fuaselɔ** *to deaden,* **fuasele** *deadly,* **efuaselɔ** *deadliness.*

Three additional adjective derivations simply involve adding a prefix to the noun, with no Hili triangle changes. **K-** creates adjectives meaning *without, -less,* as in **oro** *fat* creating **koro** *fatless.* Prefixing **l-** creates an adjective meaning *relating to, pertaining to, like,* **lora** *fatty.* The prefix **d-** means *with,* as in **dɛmono** *disgraceful* from **ɛmono** *disgrace.*

There are two ways to derive an abstract noun from an adjective. First, simply prefix the Hili triangle opposite to the stem, as in **dɛmono** *disgraceful* giving **adɛmono** *disgracefulness,* or prefix **ɛ-** and add the suffix **-kan-** using the echo vowel mentioned on p.4, **ɛdɛmonokano** *disgracefulness.*

The diminutive is the suffix **-nd-** with the echo vowel, as in **urizindi** *stream* from **uruzi** *river.* It appears to have an additional meaning, creating the name of a fruit from its tree, **enti** is *date*

tree and **entindi** is *date fruit.* It can also be used with verbs, **dundu** *eat little* from **du** *eat.* The augmentative is the suffix **-m-** with the echo vowel, **osikola** *school*[13] giving **osikolama** *university.*

Offspring or descendants are formed by the suffix **-v-** with the echo vowel, **omukamava** *prince* from **omukama** *king* and **akandovo** *chick* from **akando** *hen.*

As seen in the **fua** example above, the suffix **-lɔ**, this time without an echo vowel, is the causative from both verbs and adjectives, **memɔlɔ** *electrify* from **memɔ** *electric,* **rolɔ** *fatten* from **ro** *fat,* **fuaselɔ** *deaden* from **fuase** *be dead.*

To get a verb meaning "to pretend to do something," reduplicate the stem and add the suffix **-lu** as in **njinjilu** *to pretend to sleep* from **nji** *sleep.* Apart from the immediate future, the only other use of reduplication in Afrihili is with adjectives. Reduplicating them creates an attenuative, "somewhat, -ish," **roro** *fattish.*

There is a single infix, **-ma-**, inserted before the final syllable, to create nouns of occupation or profession, **isabamatu** *shoemaker* from **isabatu** *shoe,* **ukamamba** *banker* from **ukamba** *bank.*

To create a noun describing a person having the quality of an adjective, convert the final vowel to its Hili triangle opposite, prefix the Hili triangle opposite of that vowel, and then prefix **-m-** with the echo vowel. For example, **laju** *civil* gives **umulaji** *civilized person* and **makaho** *blind* gives **omomakaha** *blind man.*

Rather like Esperanto's *mal-* prefix, Afrihili has the prefix **ne-** to create words of "contrary meaning." It comes after the initial vowel when prefixed to a noun, **neyite** *descend* from **yite** *ascend,* **nekamili** *dirty* from **kamili** *clean,* and **enesendu** *disease* from **esendu** *health.*

Nouns can be joined into head-final compounds. To form them, remove the final vowel from both nouns, link the two, then put the final vowel of the first noun onto the second. For example, **aji** *class* and **abu** *room* produce **aj-** + **ab-** + **i**, giving **ajabi** *classroom.*

Example Texts

From the first lesson, "Greetings:"

Zuri zinga, owula	Good morning, sir
Zuri zinga, owulaa	Good morning, Madam
Zuri masa, owulaka	Good afternoon, young man
Zuri masa, intane	Good afternoon, elder
Zuri dani, owulakaa	Good evening, young lady
Zuri dani, intanee	Good evening, Lady
Zuri bali, imaboko	Good night, your Highness or your Worship
Zuri bali, etende	Good night, honourable Gentlemen
Zuri lu owulanda	Good day, Kid
Zuri lu aubuti	Good day, old man
Zuri mɔlɔ, ausi	Greetings, comrade
Shube	Thanks
ʔWuyi tɛna	How are you?
Miyi papa	I am fine (ie. I live good)

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[13]There is also **ishule** for *school.*

18

From the the first published Afrihili newsletter, **Ni Epengi** *The Sun,* 1971,

Ni Afrihili Ekati furahawise   kenode to ku ki ufrefi.
ni afrihili   ekati furaha-wi-se   keno-de to ku ki ufrefi
the Afrihili   center happy-INCH-STAT bring-INF to 2PL this newsletter

The Afrihili Centre is happy to bring to you this newsletter.

Nusadiki kɛna ni asiko lowa   tɛ Afrika maide oluga   olawusinun.
nu-sadiki kɛna ni asiko lo-wa   tɛ Afrika   mai-de oluga   o-lawusinu-n
1PL-believe that   the time   PERF-come for Africa   have-INF language ATTR-continental-ATTR

We believe that the time has come for Africa to have a continental language.

Kupita kana oluga   nutafaulu   ɛkana na ɛyiyai   lɛrahanoholo.
kupita   kana oluga   nu-ta-faulu   ɛkana   na ɛyiyai   lɛraha-noho-lo
through one   language 1PL-FUT-achieve unity   and understanding easy-COMP-ADV

Through one language we shall achieve unity and understanding more easily.

Nurekokari   lɛdade   oluga kari na nutumaini yongepokeabwa   alu bi
nu-re-kokari   lɛda-de   oluga   kari na nu-tumaini   yo-nge-pokea-bw-a   alu bi
1PL-PROG-attempt create-INF language such and 1PL-hope   3SG-PRES.COND-adopt-PASS day some

We are attempting to create such a language and hope it may be adopted in future

sukude da oluga   peduka tɛ ni awusinu aziman.
suku-de da oluga   peduka   tɛ ni awusinu a-zima-n
serve-INF as language ?   for the continent ATTR-whole-ATTR

to serve as a lingua franca for the whole continent.

Ni alsarufi yɛ lɛraha suade na ni ahadisini resene   tu   alu to alu.
ni alsarufi   yɛ lɛraha sua-de na ni ahadisini   re-sene   tu   alu to alu
the grammar is easy   lear-INF and the vocabulary PROG-increase from day to day

The grammar is easy to learn and the vocabulary is increasing from day to day.

!Afrika te.
Africa   with

Long live Africa!

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