

## A SEMANTIC DIVERSITY OF SOME SHI VERBS: AN OBSTACLE TO PEOPLE LEARNING MASHI AS THEIR SECOND LANGUAGE

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**ABSTRACT:** The natives of Bushi speak Mashi, a language that brings about confusion to its learners since a single verb may bear more than one meaning. By dint of noticing that this is an obstacle to the mastery of the language in question, we have tried to explain and bring more light to the matter. To do so, we have collected some Shi verbs, namely the ones we thought were useful for the fulfillment of the present work. It was realized that people who learn Mashi as their second language ignore that the latter is a tone language.

This is mostly manifested in Shi verbs. Besides, we have noticed that a learner of Mashi needs to pay much attention to vocalic length, and also the context or circumstances in which any single Shi utterance is provided.

**KEYWORDS:** Semantic, diversity, obstacle, tone, Mashi.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

There are numerous reasons which motivated us to deal with the topic under discussion. Firstly, we have found that not all people of Shi origin speak Mashi properly. Secondly, many Shi people assume that Mashi is too easy that it cannot bear any subject of study. Thirdly, those who learn Mashi as their second language seem to be un- aware of the fact that tones, the circumstances in which a word is uttered and its social contexts are of paramount necessity.

Each human being has got a language he speaks and that he may claim to know or speak well. Yet, he ignores that he may be speaking the language in question superfluously. In fact, as far as Mashi is concerned, some issues need to be revealed through the pre- sent paper since they impact on people's learning.

What can people learning Mashi as their second language do to understand what a Shi utterance actually means? What are the main elements that the learners of Mashi can take into consideration so as to acquire it satisfactorily?

In trying to deal with "***A semantic diversity of some Shi verbs: An obstacle to People learning Mashi as their second language,***" we have based the work on the following hypotheses:

- Tones and vocalic length that prevail in Shi verbs are influential to grasp the meaning.
- Contexts and circumstances impact a lot on the understanding of a Shi utterance.

To collect the data of this work, we have used interview and documentation. First, concerning interview, we consulted some Bashi who know more about Shi language, and ask them to provide Shi verbs so as to check the latter 's semantic diversity. The check on these verbs aimed at finding out what the semantic diversity in question originated from. In this paper, each Shi verb to be dealt with is copied down, and then translated into English. Second, we read some books related to our topic, especially the ones we thought were useful for the fulfillment of this work.

The present study enables people to discover the reasons why the semantic diversity of some Shi verbs is said to be an obstacle to Shi learners. Thanks to this study most people notice that Mashi is never spoken or learnt in a careless or untidy way. The study that we deal with at present helps as well people bear in mind what is needed to understand Shi language, that is, suprasegmental, the social context in which a verb is used, and the circumstances in which an utterance is provided.

We should be expressing ourselves vaguely if we decided to deal with every Shi word or verb. So, we have managed to be more precise and concise by dealing only with Shi verbs. Besides, it has been quite impossible to study whatever bears obstacles to any learner. However, we found it better to be stuck only to some issues originating obstacles to those who learn Mashi as their second language.

Our objective in this research is to:

- Reveal the predominance of tones and vocalic length in Shi verbs together with their consequences.
- Prove that the contexts and the circumstances in which the verbs are used are tremendous facts for understanding Shi utterances.

We came up against some problems in our research among which the data that were sometimes conditioned by the payment. Also, it was not easy to find documents written in Mashi for the present topic. Yet, most of our informants who were gentle and kindly provided us with useful data through which we accomplished this paper.

The present work is subdivided into three sections. The first section consists of the introduction. The second section deals with the analysis of Shi verbs with regard to tones, vocalic length, contexts and circumstances. The third section concerns the conclusion.

## **2 SHI VERBS ANALYSIS AND ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS**

To analyze Shi verbs, we found it better to be translating them into English. All of them are always uttered by the natives of Mashi, the latter being the language of the Bashi. The Bashi are people living in Shi tribe which is located in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo, precisely in South-Kivu, in both territories named Walungu and Ka- bare.

Since Mashi is a tone language, it is worth defining “tone”. This is “the pitch of the voice of someone when he is speaking.” Tone language in its turn is “ a language in which the way a sound goes up or down affects the meaning of the words.”

Here below, are some Shi verbs to deal with:

- “kúdumba” and “kudumba”
- “**kúdumba**” means to go here and there looking for Shi traditional beer called “kasigisi” while “**kudumba**” is to be keen on committing adultery.

There is a prosodic feature on the first syllable in “**kúdumba**” (to go here and there looking for Shi traditional beer ....) but it is on the second syllable in “ **kudumba**” (to mean, to be keen on committing adultery). It is realized from this that the difference between the two verbs originates from where the tones are sensible, that is, on the first and the second syllables of the respective verbs (i.e **kúdumba** and **kudumba**). This is a huge obstacle to people who learn Mashi as their second language because that will bring about confusion in their understanding.

From this, it is easy to notice a semantic diversity. It is then worth defining “**diversity**” as the quality of having variety and including a wide range of different people or things.

- “kúbùla”, “(ku)kùbùla” and “(ku)kùbuula”

The three verbs differ from one another because of their tones which are not produced equally. The first verb “**kúbùla**” has a tone on the first syllable and another on the second one. One will notice that when these two tones are produced this way, the verb in question means “to miss”. It is worth mentioning that though “**kúbùla**” means “*to miss*”, the context in which it may be used is also of paramount necessity. For example, the following two sentences differ according to the context in which the verb is uttered.

If the verb is used in a context of sexual intercourse it means something else. In a sentence: “**kúbùla** *obuhya olusiku wagi shiragwa*”; normally, in a literally translation, this sentence means “*to miss the marriage the day you have got married*”. Yet, taking into account the context the verb is used, the latter no longer displays a literal meaning but literary instead. Thus, it means “*to fail to ejaculate during your first sexual intercourse with your bride*”. But when you say for instance: “**kúbùla omushangi**”, the phrase simply means “*to miss clothing*”.

The second verb “**kukùbùla**” has no variety as far as the voice level is concerned when we refer to the second and the third syllables. This fact plays an important role to distinguish this verb from the others. While “**kukùbùla**” means “*to hit strongly*” “**kúbùla**” and “ **kukùbuula**” mean respectively “*to miss*” and “*to give somebody one’s old wearing, letting him own it*”.

- “kúrhùma” and “kùrhùma”

The first verb means “to send somebody somewhere” whereas the second means “to cause something happen”. As it can be easily seen, the two verbs differ from one another because of their tones which differ as well. However, to understand what each of the two verbs implies, one has to refer to the context in which it is uttered. Unlike a learner of Mashi, when somebody says, “Ná kúrhùma érwishi (i. e I will send you to the river), a skilful speaker of Mashi will grasp the direct meaning undoubtedly. As for the learner, the latter will lose time to check which of the tones of the two verbs has been used so as to react to the speaker.

- “Kukòla” and “kúkòla “

“kukòla” means “to repeat again and again what somebody has uttered in order to shame or mock him” whereas “kúkòla” simply means “to work”. Then, one can realize that there is no relationship between the first verb and the second one as far as their meanings are concerned. This is due to the absence of a prosodic element on the first syllable of the first verb and its presence on the first syllable of the second one. This fact bears an obstacle to somebody learning Mashi as his or her second language since they are unable to discover what the difference originates from.

- “kúfuka”, “kùfuka” and “kufuuka”

These three verbs are dissimilar as far as their meanings are concerned. That is, the first means “to wrap things while they are being cooked or just before they are being put into a pan for being cooked”. The second means “to fight with somebody, hitting one another while both of you are lying on the ground”. Finally, the last (“kufuuka”) means “to resuscitate”. This verb is characterized by a vocalic length which is located on the second syllable. However, the difference existing between all of the three verbs (“kúfuka”, “kùfuka” and “kufuuka”) originates respectively from the pitch in the first two ones and the vocalic length (“uu”) located in the third.

- “kúlongola” and “kulòngoola”

“kúlongola” means “to head a queue during a walk” and “kulòngoola” means “to go on disputing with someone permanently”. We can realize that the tones and the vocalic length intervene in the differentiation of the two verbs. That is, the opposite tones on both of the two verbs and the vocalic length (“oo”) on the third syllable of “kulòngoo- la” have a huge impact on the meanings. From this, a learner of Mashi encounters a blockage as far as the comprehension of the present verbs is concerned.

- “kúhinga”, “kúhinga” and “kuhinga”

One should pay much attention to the first two verbs because both their spelling and tones which are the same do not impact on the meaning. It is the context that impacts on the meaning instead. In other words, the meanings are displayed through the contexts in which they may be produced. In fact, the first “kúhinga” means “to cultivate” (see soil) while the second “kúhinga” means “to have sex with somebody’s wife when she is pregnant and then make her terribly sick as a consequence”.

For example, when someone says, e.g 1. “kúhinga nája buno”(i.e I go to cultivate now). In this case, the listener should know what to refer to in order to make himself sure that the speaker is really talking about cultivating the soil; for instance, to check whether he behaves like somebody who goes to the field (to check the tool such as hoe, machete, spade,....). In short, the listener (or learner) must recognize the context in which the speaker has provided the verb or even the whole utterance.

e.g 2.” Ka kúhinga wáhinzire oyo múkazi ?”( i.e Have you had sex with that woman when she was pregnant ?). Once this verb is used transitively with “woman” as object, the learner might keep in mind that the verb in question does not mean “to cultivate” any more.

In addition, the third verb (kuhinga) differs from the first two ones because of the opposite tone that it bears on the second syllable. This verb means “to change some- thing for something else”. For example, in a sentence, “kuhinga engale oku ishwa”(i.e to change a car for a plot of land)

- “**kútumula**” and “**kutùmuula**”

Both of the tones and the vocalic length play an important role in the two verbs as far as their meanings are concerned. The first verb carrying a tone on the first syllable means “*to be accused of doing something*” whereas the second having a tone on the second syllable and a vocalic length (“**uu**”) on the third syllable means “*to renew a field*”. In other words, the vocalic length in the verb “**kutùmuula**” influences more the distinction between the present two verbs.

- « **kukula** », « **kúkula** » and « **kukuula** »

These three verbs are different in meaning though each of them has three syllables.

Also, unlike the first and the third verbs, the second verb has a prosodic element on the first syllable. However, “**kukula**” means “*to use magic power to attract a wrongdoer who had fled or hidden*” ; “**kúkula**” means “*to grow up*” and “**kukuula**” means “*to uproot*”. Then, to differentiate these three verbs remains an obstacle to somebody learning Mashi as his second language.

- “**kútùnda**” and “**kutunda**”

“**kútùnda**” means “*to stir milk that is kept in a calabash so as to start serving it*” whereas “**kutunda**” means “*to push*”.

While the first verb has got two opposite tones respectively on the first and the second syllables, the second verb has not any prosodic element. If we can happen to say that these two verbs differ in meaning, it is because of these two distinctive features, namely the presence of the tones in one verb (**kútùnda**) and their absence in the other (**kutunda**). This is what often complicates a learner of Shi language.

- « **kúshiga** », « **kùshiga** » and « **kushiiga** »

These three verbs do not mean the same thing since “**kúshiga**” means “*to plead for and benefit from a temporary settlement from someone*”; “**kùshiga**” means “*to bet*” and “**kushiiga**” is “*to rub oil over one’s or someone else’s skin*”. It is worth telling that a learner of Mashi will not know how to distinguish the three verbs. However, he needs to be aware of the context or possibly the circumstances in which each of them is used; otherwise he will simply be confusing them, especially, if he does not take into account the vocalic length (“**ii**”) existing on the second syllable of “**kushiiga**”.

- “**kúyaaka**” and “**kuyaaka**”

“**kúyaaka**” means “*to flee*” whereas “**kuyaaka**” means “*to light*”. All of the two verbs are concerned with vocalic length (“**aa**”) that is on the second syllable though they are different in meaning. The difference in meaning is due to the tone which is located on the first syllable of “**kúyaaka**”. So, “*to flee*” is different from “*to light*”.

- “**kugaanyá**” and “**kúganya**”

The two verbs do not have the same meaning. “**kugaanyá**” means “*to despise*” while “**kúganya**” means “*to dry up stagnant liquid*”. Each of the present verbs is composed by three syllables. In addition to this, the verbs in question have tones. As for the first verb, the tone is noticed on the last syllable whereas it is on the first syllable in the second one.

We must also emphasize that the vocalic length (“**aa**”) we find in “**kugaanya**” does not appear by chance. This is the complement to the dissimilarity of the two verbs as far as their meanings are concerned apart from the prosodic elements.

- “**kúloba**”, “**kúloba**” and “**kuloba**”

These are three verbs that differ in meaning. It is easy to find that the first verb and the second one are similar in spelling.

The first verb means “*to fish*”, the second one means “*to gossip*” whereas the third (**kuloba**) whose prosodic feature is absent means “*to get wet*”. However, to remedy all probable confusion which bears obstacles on the side of the learner, some features need to be known by the learner in question, namely the context or circumstances in which the verbs are used, and also the way the speaker produces his utterances ( i.e whether the speaker was careful about the presence or the absence of tones). Then the listener should be careful when the speaker says, for example:

**e.g 1. Kúloba** omú nnyanja (i.e **to fish** in the lake)

**e.g2. Kúloba** ómulungu wawe (i.e **to gossip** about your neighbor)

**e.g3. kuloba** kwarhumire ágúla ígoti (i.e **to get wet** has caused him to buy a raincoat)

• “**kúlasha**” and “**kúlasha**”

Unlike people who speak Mashi as their mother tongue, those who learn it as their second language will think that the present verbs share the meaning. Yet, the two verbs are quite different in meaning though they share the tones. The first verb means “ *to shoot* ” ( i.e namely with an arm ) and the second one means “ to lose ( i.e see death ) a husband after you have lost some others “ ( i.e more than one husband ) “. However, what is more required to understand these verbs is to know the context or circumstances in which they are used.

For example, a speaker can say:

**e.g 1. Okúlasha** en’ nsiimba kurhàba kúlembu ( i.e **to shoot** an animal is not easy ).

**e.g 2. Okúlasha** buba buhanya oku mukazi (i.e **to lose husbands** is a doom for a woman).

It is worth telling that none of these two verbs can be used in place of the other in terms of context. In other words, each of these verbs has its own context or circumstances through which it can be used properly.

Besides, the following verbs in a chart have the same features as “ **kúlasha**” and “ **kúlasha**”.

That is, they differ in meaning but share the tones and the spelling.

<p>. <b>Kúhusha</b> –to miss what you have aimed at</p> <p>. <b>Kuhya</b> –being burnt</p> <p>. <b>Kutwa</b> - to cut</p> <p>. <b>Kugula</b> – to buy</p> <p>. <b>Kúbùnga</b>-to move away (to go on living in a new area, probably because of having been ill-treated in your former dwelling place.)</p> <p>. <b>Kúrhanga</b>- to be the first to start doing something.</p> <p>. <b>kulunga</b> - to season the food</p> <p>.<b>kulibirha</b> – to run</p> <p>.<b>kulumwa</b>- to be bitten</p> <p>.<b>kúluma</b> –to bite</p> <p>.<b>kulema</b> –to create</p> <p>.<b>kúziga</b> –to be sexually excited</p> <p>.<b>kulwazá</b>- to nurse a sick person.</p>	<p>.<b>Kúhusha</b> –to commit adultery</p> <p>.<b>kuhya</b> – being guilty</p> <p>.<b>Kutwa</b> -to grow up(see someone who was not expected to because of great economic hardship or heavy sickness)</p> <p>.<b>kugula</b>-to provide the dowry or marriage portion</p> <p>.<b>Kúbùnga</b>- to plait something</p> <p>.<b>kúrhanga</b>-to block somebody or something to go on moving forward.</p> <p>.<b>kulunga</b> –to have one’s fracture healed.</p> <p>. <b>kulibirha</b>-to have a diarrhea.</p> <p>. <b>kulumwa</b> –to have a diarrhea</p> <p>. <b>Kúluma</b> –to hurt</p> <p>. <b>kulema</b> – to plea for something again and again.</p> <p>.<b>kúziga</b> - to be greedy</p> <p>.<b>kulwazá</b>-to make somebody sick.</p>	<p>.<b>kuhya</b> –being ripe(especially, fruit)</p>
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As we said before, each of the verbs above has its correspondent though different in meaning.

However, to notice it, one should be reading from the left to the right with regard to the first column towards the last one.

### 2.1 IMPACT OF TONES AND VOCALIC LENGTH ON SHI VERBS

From the present point, it is necessary to tackle the verbs of some prosodic elements together with those of vocalic length.

In fact, a “vocalic length” is defined as the amount of time that a syllable bearing a doubled similar vowel lasts.

- **“kúyaaga” and “kùyaaga”**

Once we check the two verbs, we find that they have two opposite tones on the first syllables.

Even though all of them have the second syllable that is “yaa”, we notice that their meanings remain dissimilar. That is, “kúyaaga” means “to lose a case after trial or dispute” whereas “kùyaa-ga” is “to scratch” (to rub your skin with your nails, especially because it itches). This characteristic always brings about obstacles to the learner’s understanding of Shi verbs. In the same way, the opposite prosodic features on the first syllables of both verbs also impact on the meanings of the present verbs. In other words, the meanings of these two verbs are affected by the tone and the vocalic length. Because of this, the learner might be prudent to grasp the context and the circumstances in which the verbs are produced.

- **“kùleemba”, “kùleemba” and “kúleemba”**

The first verb means “to be physically weaker”, the second means “to be gentle, especially in terms of behavior” while the third means “to pretend to give something you own to somebody when he has already held out his hands expecting to receive it”. As we have mentioned it previously, learners need to be careful so as to know how to differentiate Shi verbs. For example, a learner of Mashi will only take into account the vocalic length (“ee”) that the verbs in question share. That is, he will not pay attention to the prosodic elements that they all carry on their first syllables. Besides, an unskilled learner will not care about the first and the second verbs while these need to be contextualized for better understanding since they all have the same spelling. When somebody says, for instance:

e.g 1. “kùleemba nk’ówanywir’óbúfúmu” (i.e **to be weaker** like somebody who has taken drug)

e.g 2. “kùleemba emalanga g’omukulu wawe w’omukolo” ( i.e **to be gentle** before your boss)

e.g3. “kúleemba na mulembága ci ntakamuh’ákantu” (i.e **I only pretended to give him** but I can’t give him anything)

Thus, a learner of Mashi is disposed to confusion because he is not informed that to understand such verbs mostly depends on the understanding of the context and the circumstances in which the verbs in question are produced.

- **“kúsheenda” and “kúsheenda”**

As we have just said it, the difference between the two verbs is mostly due to the context or the circumstances. This is to say that the prosodic elements together with the vocalic length that we find in the present verbs impact indirectly on their meanings. That is, if we remove those elements and the vocalic length, these verbs will become meaningless. Then, once those complications are encountered by the learner, they bring about innumerable obstacles to his understanding.

It is once again necessary to remind that the following chart is to be read carefully from the left to the right with regard to the verbs which match in terms of vocalic length.

2.2 CHART OF VERBS OF VOCALIC LENGTH WITH DISSIMILAR MEANINGS

.kurhuula-to lift down a luggage that had been carried or lifted up	.kurhuula-to provide the offerings	.kurhuula-to be humble	.kurhuula-to bring a huge part of meat(always a cow's leg) to someone as a recognition to a cow he had given you formerly)
.kurhoola-to pick up	.kurhoola-to marry (as far as the man is concerned)	.kurhoola-to take something which is being given to you	
.kufuula-to rot	.kufuula-to resuscitate	.kufuula-to repair(a tool,radio...)	
.kuseeza-to tie something strongly	.kuseeza-not to leave	.kuseeza-to bargain for the bride price	
.kupeepa-to finish completely	.kupeepa-to select (especially true minerals from wrong ones)		
.kuyiigula-to open	.kuyiigula-to visit the newly-weds with drink and food, one or two days after the marriage ( always done by the family of the bride)		
.kurheera-to lay eggs	.kurheera-to lose	Kurheera -to attack somebody surprisingly	
.kuhuuna-to ask someone for something	.kuhuuna-to pray to go God		

3 CONCLUSION

This paper was fully about *“A Semantic Diversity of Some Shi verbs: An obstacle to People Learning Mashi as their Second Language”*. In dealing with the present topic, we have provided an important sample of Shi verbs in order to find out how a semantic diversity of Shi verbs is an obstacle to people who learn Mashi as their second language. At first, it has been noticed that each of the verbs in question are composed of four syllables or less once they are infinitives. This is to mean that we did not deal with verbal extensions. Then, we found that Shi verbs often bore suprasegmental features, namely, tones. The same verbs mostly included vocalic length. It has been realized during the analysis that Mashi is really a tonal language. That is, the way a sound goes up or down affects the meaning of Shi verbs. This is what we showed in the work through the verbs that we tried to detail. We have provided the verbs with equal tones and same spelling but different in meaning; the verbs with opposite tones and dissimilar meanings; the verbs with no prosodic element and same in spelling, but different in meaning. After we have pointed out all of these elements above, we have realized that the latter constitute obstacles to people who learn Mashi as their second language. First, they are unable to discover where tones vary in a verb. Second, they are incapable to know where vocalic length prevails in a verb. Third, they always fail to match the meaning of Shi verbs with the contexts or the circumstances in which the verbs in question are used.

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