

# KINYARWANDA LESSONS

by

**Betty Ellen Cox and Faustin Gukuba**

**with extensions by Matthias Brack (2016)**



**Betty Ellen Cox** (1918-2012)

In Burundi: 1944 - 1980

In Rwanda: 1980 - 1986

Original page 6 of Cox' Lessons:

- 6 -

## LESSON 2

Ni and SiVocabulary

|                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| umwana (pl. abana) - child     | afite - he (she) has        |
| umwami (abami) - king, Lord    | bafite - they have          |
| umwigisha (abigisha) - teacher | cyane (adverb) - much, very |
| umwigishwa (abigishwa) - pupil | murakoze - thank you        |

4. Vowel change. Though we observed that the singular prefix of Class 1 is umu-, we will find some words in which it seems to be umw-, as in the nouns given above. This is due to the fact that u before another vowel becomes w. This rule applies not only in this instance, but wherever u precedes another vowel, for the language does not tolerate two vowels coming together. Thus: umu-ana becomes umwana. This lengthens the vowel which begins the stem: umwigisha, abigisha.

Also, a before another vowel drops out, thus the plural of these nouns: aba-ana becomes abana; aba-igisha becomes abigisha. (Later you will learn an exception to this rule about a.)

5. Use of ni and si. Ni means "is" or "are", "he (she) is", "they are" (third person singular and plural in present time), and does not change its form regardless of the subject. Its negative is si, meaning "is not", "are not", "he (she) is not", "they are not". (These words may not be used in a dependent clause or when followed by a word of place.) Ni and si may also be used with "it" for the subject. e.g. Ni umwami - it is the king. Umwana ni umukobwa - the child is a girl. Umugabo si umwigisha - the man is not a teacher. Umwigisha ni Andereya - the teacher is Andrew.

Exception: If the subject of "is" or "are" is a place, as well as the word following, the words ni and si may be used even though followed by a word of place. e.g. Kirambo ni kure - Kirambo is far away.

Note: Since in Kinyarwanda two vowels may not come together (in speaking), and most words end in vowels, and start with vowels, the last vowel of a word is dropped (elided) when the next word begins with a vowel.

e.g. (one says) umwana n'umukobwa - the child is a girl (though one does not write the apostrophe); umugor' arahinga - the woman is hoeing (but one writes: umugore arahinga).

Exercises:

I. Without reference to the vocabularies, give the plural of the following words and their meanings:

- |            |            |              |               |
|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. umwana  | 3. umwami  | 5. umuhungu  | 7. umukobwa   |
| 2. umugabo | 4. umugore | 6. umwigisha | 8. umwigishwa |

II. Translate into Kinyarwanda:

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. The teacher has a wife.           | 9. Teachers work hard (much).  |
| 2. The children are going.           | 10. The women have children.   |
| 3. The man is a teacher.             | 11. The pupil is a girl.       |
| 4. The boys are working hard (much). | 12. The girl is not a teacher. |
| 5. The pupils have a teacher.        | 13. Men have wives.            |
| 6. A woman is hoeing.                | 14. Pupils hoe.                |
| 7. The child is not a boy.           | 15. The teacher is a man.      |
| 8. The man has a son.                |                                |

\* \* \* \* \*

## Table of Contents (pp)

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Introduction  | (v-xii) |
| Lesson A: Categories of the Universe and Nominal Classes (M.B.)           | (a-h)   |
| Lesson B: Concepts of Time and Verb Conjugation (M.B.)                    | (i-p)   |
| Lesson C: Special Vocabularies (q-z)                                      |         |
| Lesson 1: Class 1 -umu -aba   | (1)     |
| Lesson 2: Ni and Si   | (1)     |
| Lesson 3: Possessive Adjective  | (2)     |
| Lesson 4: Class 2 umu- imi-   | (4)     |
| Lesson 5: Mu and Ku   | (5)     |
| Lesson 6: Possessive Particle   | (6)     |
| Lesson 7: Class 3 in- in-   | (7)     |
| Lesson 8: Adjectives  | (8)     |
| Lesson 9: Adjectives (cont.)  | (9)     |
| Lesson 10: Review   | (10)    |
| Lesson 11: Class 3 (cont.)  | (11)    |
| Lesson 12: Verb -rî   | (12)    |
| Lesson 13: Class 4 iki- ibi-  | (13)    |
| Lesson 14: Class 4 (continued)  | (14)    |
| Lesson 15: Special Uses of Class 4  | (14)    |
| Lesson 16: -ra Present Tense: The Actual Present                          | (15)    |
| Lesson 17: Negative of the -ra Present                                    | (17)    |
| Lesson 18: Class 5 i- ama-  | (18)    |
| Lesson 19: Class 5 (cont.)  | (20)    |
| Lesson 20: Review   | (21)    |
| Lesson 21: Verb -fite   | (23)    |
| Lesson 22: Infinitive and Imperative                                      | (24)    |
| Lesson 23: Class 6 uru- in-   | (25)    |
| Lesson 24: Class 6 (cont.)  | (26)    |
| Lesson 25: Prefixless Present Tense: The Habitual Present                 | (27)    |
| Lesson 26: Class 7 aka- utu-  | (28)    |
| Lesson 27: Class 8 ubu- ama-  | (29)    |
| Lesson 28: Class 8 (cont.)  | (30)    |
| Lesson 29: Future Tenses  | (31)    |
| Lesson 30: Review   | (32)    |
| Lesson 31: Negative of Future Tense                                       | (33)    |
| Lesson 32: Class 9 uku- ama-  | (34)    |
| Lesson 33: Class 10 aha-  | (35)    |
| Lesson 34: Chart of the Classes   | (36)    |
| Lesson 35: Vowel-stem Verbs   | (37)    |
| Lesson 36: (Negative) Far Future and Negative Present of Vowel-stem Verbs | (38)    |
| Lesson 37: Cardinal Numbers 1-10  | (39)    |
| Lesson 38: Higher Numbers   | (40)    |
| Lesson 39: -ngâahê? How many?   | (42)    |
| Lesson 40: Review   | (44)    |
| Lesson 41: -êese, -ôose - all, every                                      | (45)    |
| Lesson 42: "To wash"  | (46)    |
| Lesson 43: -ndî - other   | (47)    |
| Lesson 44: Some Verbs   | (48)    |
| Lesson 45: Verb -zi - to know   | (49)    |
| Lesson 46: Adjective Chart  | (49)    |

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Lesson 47: Word Order   | (51)  |
| Lesson 48: Personal Pronouns                                  | (52)  |
| Lesson 49: Review   | (53)  |
| Lesson 50: Reading Lesson                                     | (54)  |
| Lesson 51: Ordinary Past Tense: Perfect Past                  | (55)  |
| Lesson 52: Rules for Past Endings                             | (56)  |
| Lesson 53: Past Verb Endings                                  | (57)  |
| Lesson 54: Ordinary Past (continued)                          | (59)  |
| Lesson 55: Negative of Ordinary Past                          | (59)  |
| Lesson 56: Past of -rî; -ga tense                             | (60)  |
| Lesson 57: Object Pronouns                                    | (61)  |
| Lesson 58: Object Pronouns (continued)                        | (62)  |
| Lesson 59: Object Pronouns with Vowel-stem Verbs              | (63)  |
| Lesson 60: Review   | (64)  |
| Lesson 61: Ordinal Numerals, -ôombî                           | (65)  |
| Lesson 62: Months, Days of Week, Telling Time                 | (66)  |
| Lesson 63: Some Household Items                               | (68)  |
| Lesson 64: Stative Voice                                      | (69)  |
| Lesson 65: -o with the Infinitive                             | (70)  |
| Lesson 66: Imperative with the Subjunctive                    | (71)  |
| Lesson 67: Subjunctive  | (72)  |
| Lesson 68: How to Say "Stop" and "Wait"                       | (73)  |
| Lesson 69: Possessive Particle with 'a' changed to 'ô'        | (74)  |
| Lesson 70: Review   | (76)  |
| Lesson 71: Far Past Tense                                     | (77)  |
| Lesson 72: Negative of Far Past                               | (78)  |
| Lesson 73: Father and Mother                                  | (79)  |
| Lesson 74: Brother and Sister                                 | (80)  |
| Lesson 75: Immediate Past                                     | (81)  |
| Lesson 76: Possessive Adjectives                              | (82)  |
| Lesson 77: Possessive Adjectives (continued)                  | (84)  |
| Lesson 78: Causative Verbs                                    | (85)  |
| Lesson 79: Causatives (continued)                             | (86)  |
| Lesson 80: Review   | (87)  |
| Lesson 81: Objects with Causatives                            | (89)  |
| Lesson 82: Coverbs -tyâ, -tyô                                 | (90)  |
| Lesson 83: Passive Verbs                                      | (91)  |
| Lesson 84: Past of Passives                                   | (92)  |
| Lesson 85: Passives of Monosyllabic Verbs                     | (93)  |
| Lesson 86: Demonstrative Adjectives                           | (94)  |
| Lesson 87: Demonstratives (continued)                         | (95)  |
| Lesson 88: Demonstratives (continued)                         | (96)  |
| Lesson 89: Not Yet Tense -râa                                 | (97)  |
| Lesson 90: Review   | (98)  |
| Lesson 91: Dependent Clauses                                  | (99)  |
| Lesson 92: Dependent Not-Yet Tense                            | (101) |
| Lesson 93: Demonstrative Pronouns -kwîiriye, -riinda, -goomba | (102) |
| Lesson 94: Relative Clauses                                   | (103) |
| Lesson 95: Relative Clauses with no Noun Antecedent           | (104) |
| Lesson 96: Pronoun Ndê?                                       | (105) |
| Lesson 97: Adjective -hê?                                     | (106) |
| Lesson 98: Prepositional Form of Verb                         | (107) |

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Lesson 99: Uses of Prepositional Form          | (108) |
| Lesson 100: Review                             | (110) |
| Lesson 101: Reading Lesson                     | (111) |
| Lesson 102: Miscellaneous Words                | (112) |
| Lesson 103: Reflexive Verbs                    | (113) |
| Lesson 104: Uses of Ntaa                       | (114) |
| Lesson 105: Further Notes on Ntaa              | (115) |
| Lesson 106: Reciprocal Form of Verb            | (116) |
| Lesson 107: Associative Verbs                  | (117) |
| Lesson 108: Coverb -tê?, Comparisons           | (119) |
| Lesson 109: How to Say "Why?"                  | (121) |
| Lesson 110: Review                             | (122) |
| Lesson 111: How to Say "Some", The Conditional | (123) |
| Lesson 112: Adjectives Expressed by Verbs      | (125) |
| Lesson 113: Reduplicated Verbs                 | (126) |
| Lesson 114: Quotations, Direct and Indirect    | (127) |
| Lesson 115: Prepositional Suffixes             | (128) |
| Lesson 116: Kî and Uumukî                      | (130) |
| Lesson 117: The ka- Tense                      | (131) |
| Lesson 118: Some Adverbs; The -racyâa- Tense   | (132) |
| Lesson 119: More Adverbs                       | (133) |
| Lesson 120: Miscellaneous Expressions          | (135) |
| Lesson 121: More Miscellaneous Expressions     | (137) |
| Lesson 122: More on Verbs, Summary of Tenses   | (139) |
| Lesson 123: The Narrative Tenses               | (141) |
| Lesson 124: Narrative Continued                | (142) |
| Lesson 125: Review                             | (144) |

## Introduction

Kinyarwanda is a rich language with many words having similar meaning, yet fine shades of thought. Two words may be translated by the same English words and yet they may not be used interchangeably. So strive to ferret out the exact meaning of words. Also, remember that each Kinyarwanda word does not have an exact English equivalent, and likewise, do not expect to find a Kinyarwanda equivalent for each English word. Listen carefully even when you do not understand. Learn your pronunciation **from an African, not a European**. From the beginning, spend time daily with an African, reading or trying simple conversation, with him (her) correcting you. Kinyarwanda is a tonal language, which means that variations of pitch of voice, as well as length of syllables, will completely change the meaning.

These lessons have been prepared in view of a person's spending a day on each lesson. Some lessons may require more than a day's study. The lessons are only a guide to study. You will learn many words that are not included here.

## Pronunciation

(with additions by M.B., taken from Kimenyi, 1979)

### A. The vowels:

**a** is broad as ‘a’ in ‘far’  
**e** is almost like ‘ay’ in ‘hay’  
**i** is almost like ‘ee’ in ‘bee’  
**o** is almost like ‘o’ in ‘obey’  
**u** is like ‘oo’ in ‘food’

### B. The consonants:

**d, f, g, h, k, m, n, p, s, t, v, w** are pronounced practically the same as in English.

**b** has a very soft, ‘voiced’ sound with the lips barely touching, unless it is preceded by **m** in which case it is quite hard. It does not have the rather explosive quality that it has in English.

**c** always has the sound of ‘**ch**’ as in ‘**church**’.

**g** and **k** in front of **e** and **i** are softened (and slightly aspirated): ‘**gjay**’, ‘**gjee**’ and ‘**kjay**’, ‘**kjee**’.

**j** has a very soft sound, like ‘j’ in the French ‘**jour**’.

**l** is used mainly in foreign words and names. (In older books, **li** is used for **ri**.) But the sound is the same as for **r** (see below); some Rwandans don’t hear the difference between ‘**black**’ and ‘**Brack**’.

**p** is not a genuine Kinyarwanda letter and occurs mostly in loan words, e.g. ‘urupapuro’ - paper.

**q** does not exist in Kinyarwanda.

**r** has a short trill sound, as if you tried to say **d, l**, and **r** at the same time. The tongue should just beat **one single time** against the roof of the mouth – not like in the rolled ‘r’ used e.g. in Italian!

**x** does not exist in Kinyarwanda.

**y** as in ‘you’. (In combination with other consonants, see below). It is never a vowel like **y** in ‘baby’ or ‘by’!

**z** as in ‘zone’.

### C. Consonant clusters:

In Kinyarwanda there exist not only many pairs of consonants, but also clusters of more than two consonants. They produce sounds that don’t occur in European languages and are difficult for us to learn.

**bw** is pronounced ‘**bg**’ (and even written **bg** in some older books). Be careful not to put a vowel sound between these two letters.

**cw** is pronounced like ‘**chkw**’.

**cy** is pronounced like ‘**chy**’.

**dw** is pronounced like ‘**dgw**’.

**dy** like ‘**dgy**’ (see **jy** below).

**jw** is pronounced like ‘**zgw**’.

vowel+**jy** is pronounced like ‘vowel+**djy**’ with ‘j’ like in the French ‘**jour**’): ‘**kujya**’ → ‘**kudjya**’

**kwo** and **kwu** are old-fashioned and, according to the new orthographic law of 2014, to be replaced by ‘**ko**’ and ‘**ku**’. (In most cases, this has been indicated in the Cox Lessons.)

**mp** is pronounced (and in older literature also written) as ‘**mh**’.

**mw**+a is often pronounced like ‘**mng**’+a with ‘ng’ like in ‘**English**’: ‘**Mngaaramutse!**’

**my** acquires a soft ‘n’ in the middle: ‘**mny**’, which is hardly heard.

**myw**+a becomes something like ‘**mngnw**’+a, where the ‘ng’ is like in ‘**English**’.

**njw** is pronounced as ‘**nzgw**’.

**njy**+vowel is pronounced as ‘**ny**+vowel’, the ‘j’ is hardly heard.

**nk** is pronounced as ‘**ngh**’ with a very soft **g** between **n** and **h**.

**nn** When this occurs in a past stem it is pronounced rather as if there were a slight **j** after the **n**’s.

It has been described as **ning** (as in **sing**). This should be practiced many times with an African.

**nshyi** is pronounced as ‘**njhi**’ with a very short and soft **j**.

**nywa** is pronounced as ‘**nwa**’; the ‘y’ is not heard.

**nywu** is pronounced as ‘**ngwu**’ with the ‘ng’ is like in ‘**English**’; the ‘y’ is not heard.

**nt** is pronounced with a clear **h** at the end and a very soft **d** in between: ‘**ndh**’.

**pw** is pronounced as ‘**pk**’ and **py** as ‘**pk**y’.

**rw** is pronounced with a soft **g** between the **r** and **w**: ‘**rgw**’. The ‘r’ is hardly heard at the beginning of a word (e.g. in ‘**Rwanda**’); after vowels it is heard as described above.

**ry** also has a slight **g** sound between the **r** and **y**, but not very strong: ‘**rgy**’.

**shw** is pronounced as ‘**shkw**’.

**sw**, **sy**: there is a slight **g** or **k** sound between the letters: ‘**sgw**, **sky**’.

**tw**, **ty** are pronounced as ‘**tkw**, **tky**’ (where the ‘k’ is rather soft).

**zw** as in ‘**zgw**’.

#### D. Rules for consonant changes:

- 1) ‘**n**’ before the **labials** ‘**b, m, f, v, p**’ becomes a ‘**m**’: in-bwa → imbwa, in-puunzi → impuunzi.
- 2) ‘**nh**’ becomes ‘**mp**’ (pronounced as ‘**mh**’!): in-haamba → impaamba (plural: amahaamba).
- 3) ‘**n**’ before ‘**r**’ becomes ‘**nd**’: n-ra-vûg-a → ndavuga, in-ririmbo → indirimbo.
- 4) ‘**n**’ before ‘**n**’ or ‘**m**’ drops out: in-mâana → Imâana.
- 5) ‘**n**’ before a **vowel stem** becomes ‘**nz**’: in-ara → inzara.

#### E. Dahl’s law:

This is also called “Change-down rule” in Cox’ Lessons (see Par. 21). It states the following rule: Before a syllable beginning with one of the following consonants:

**c, f, h, k, p, s, t**

the letter ‘**k**’ in the prefixes (-)ka-, (-)ki-, (-)ko-, (-)ku-, and -raka- becomes a ‘**g**’, so that these prefixes become (-)ga-, (-)gi-, (-)go-, (-)gu-, and -raga-. Similarly, the letter ‘**t**’ becomes a ‘**d**’, so that (-)tu and -ta- become (-)du and -da-. Also, ‘**t**’ at the end of some roots (e.g. ‘-rit-’, ‘-fût-’) becomes ‘**d**’.

Examples: iki-tabo → igitabo, aka-tuûza → agatuûza, ku-kôr-a → gukôra, tu-têek-a → dutêeka, a-tu-ha → aduha, tu-ki-som-a → tugisoma, ku-rit-uk-a → kuriduka, aka-kîza → agakîza, ku-sât-uk-a → gusâduka, ku-rit-uk-a → kuriduka, a-raka-pfâ → aragapfa, ku-tâ → gutâ, nyoko-kurû → nyogokûru, n-ka-kin-a → ngakina, ku-fût-ik-a → gufudika.  
(See page ix below for the phonetic spelling of the vowels.)

**Note:** Dahl’s law does **not** apply

- 1) to ‘**nta-**’, ‘**ntu-**’, etc. (remember that these are pronounced ‘**nha-**’, ‘**nhu-**’, etc.!),
- 2) before a **long vowel**.

Examples: nti-u-kôra → ntuukorâ, uku-he → ukuûhe, iki-he → ikiîhe.

## F. Rules for vowel changes:

There are lots of vowel changes in various situations. We just mention a few important ones; others will be met later in the Cox lessons.

- 1) In the beginning of a word, 'a+v' where 'v=a,e,o' becomes 'y': a-eeg → yeeg, a-ar → yar.
- 2) 'a-i' → 'ee' and 'a-u' → 'oo': ku-bâ-ir-a → kubêera, ku-tâ-ur-a → gutôora, etc.
- 3) 'i' and 'e' before a vowel 'v' become 'y': i-a → ya, etc.
- 4) 'u' and 'o' before a vowel 'v' become 'w': gu-kô-a → gukwâ, ku-gu-a → kugwa, etc.

## Some Useful Expressions [(m) is for plural (or polite) forms; A: gives answers] (see page ix below for the phonetic spelling of the vowels)

(m)uri aaho? - good morning! (general greeting; to someone you see rarely or for the first time)

[pronounced: '(m)uraho'] A: (m)uri aaho naâ(m)we? - good morning! and yourself?

ni aamahôro? - how are you (lit.: 'is there peace, calm?') A: ni aamahôro! - I'm fine!

(m)waaramutsehô? - good morning! (to someone you see nearly every day; used until about 11h)

[lit.: 'have you spent the night (well)?']

A: (m)waaramutse (...-hô naâmwe)? - good morning! (and yourself?) Or simply: yeegôo - yes.

(m)waarâaye? - good morning! [used very early in the morning; lit.: 'have you spent the night (well)?']

(m)wiiriwehô? - hello! [used after about 11h; lit.: 'have you spent the day (well)?']

A: (m)wiiriwe, (m)wiiriwehô naâmwe? - hello! and yourself?

amakurû (ikî)? - how are you? (lit.: 'what's the news?')

A: (ni) meezâ! - fine! [lit.: good (news)!] and you may add: Yeegôo!

(m)urabehô! - good-bye! (when you don't expect to see him/her soon again; lit.: 'stay alive!')

A: (m)urabehô naâ(m)we

(m)uriirirwehô - good afternoon (when you expect to see him/her again the same day)

A: (m)uriirirwe [...-hô naâ(m)we] - good afternoon [for you, too]

(m)ura(ra)mukehô - good evening (night) (after about 16h, meant until next day) A: ... naâ(m)we.

Yeezû akuzwê! - Jesus be praised! (Christian greeting) A: itêekâ (ryôose)! - for ever!

God protect you! - Imâana ikuriindê!

God bless you! - Imâana iguhê umugisha! [lit.: God may give you (his) blessing]

amashyô! - (have) herds of cows! (old aristocratic greeting) A: amashyoongorê! - herds of females!

ndashaaka kwîga ikinyarwaanda - I want to learn Kinyarwanda

ntaa kibâzo! - no problem, don't mention it!

urugeendo rwiizâ! - have a good journey!

yee, yeego - yes

(m)urakôze (cyaane)! - thank you (very much)!

(m)urashaaka ikî? - what do you want?

(m)uruturuka hê? - where do you come from?

(m)uragana hê? - where are you going?

ongerâ! - do it (or say it) again!

b'uretse! - wait (stop)!

(m)urakôra ikî? - what are you doing?

fâsha! - help (me)!

igitabo kiri hê? Where is the book?

subiramô! - repeat, say it again!

uti ikî? - what are you saying?

urassetsa; ceceka! - you are joking; be silent!

tega amatwî - listen

nsomera aya magaambo - read these words for me

ndashoonje pe! - I'm very hungry!

akiira! - please(, take it)! (when you offer sth.)

sigara amahôro! - remain in peace!

oya - no

ndagushiimye! - thank you!

iki nî iikî (iki n'îiki)? - what is this?

(m)urajya hê? - where are you going?

komeza! - continue (keep on)!

rekerahô! - stop (that's enough)!

gerageza! - try!

sinûumva - I don't understand (hear)

ngwiinô (vubâ)! - come here (quickly)!

urwaarê ubukîra! - good recovery!

nsubiyemô - I repeat

siimbyûumva - I don't understand this

urûumviise? - have you understood?

tega urushyî - give me your hand

ndagerageza - I'm trying

ndashaaka umûnyu - I want (some) salt



## Extensions by Matthias Brack (2016)

The Cox Lessons have been corrected for obvious misprints and occasionally brought up to date. They were extended by three introductory lessons A - C, by further vocabular examples, and by the phonetic spelling of the vowels. The sources are the following:

- (1) **Eugène Shimamungu:** „*Le Kinyarwanda. Initiation à une langue bantu*”  
(L’Harmattan, Paris, 1998).

Shimamungu is teaching in France and has worked at the Académie Française. His book is very concentrated and assumes the grammar to be known.

- (2) **Karel Dekempe:** „*Kinyarwanda - Wort für Wort*”  
(Kauderwelsch Bd. 130, 2. Aufl., Bielefeld, 2010).

- (3) **C. M. Overdulve and Irénée Jacob:** „*Initiation au Kinyarwanda*”  
(L’Harmattan, Paris, 2000).

This is the French equivalent to the Cox Lessons, but more advanced and using the explicit phonetic spelling of the vowels adapted here. I. Jacob wrote a „*Dictionnaire Ruandais-Français*” (3 vols., Kigali, 1983-85) which, however, is out of print.

- (4) The **On-line Kinyarwanda Dictionary** at <<http://kinyarwanda.net/>>. Here many words can be heard, spoken by native Rwandans, by clicking on an ‘audio’ sign.

- (5) **Alexandre Kimenyi:** - „*Studies in Kinyarwanda and Bantu phonology*”  
(1948-2010) (Linguistic Research Inc., Canada, 1979)  
- „*A Relational Grammar of Kinyarwanda*”  
(University of California Press, London UK, 1978)  
- „*A tonal Grammar of Kinyarwanda*”  
(Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston N.Y. USA, 2002)

Kimenyi, who taught at the University of California at Sacramento, was perhaps the most outstanding Rwandan linguist (besides being a poet), specialized in particular also in phonology. His books are very detailed in explaining the linguistics and phonetics of Kinyarwanda, especially for the rich variations occurring in verb forms.

From the books (1), (3) and (5), two basic introductory **Lessons: A. Nominal classes** and **B. Time and Verb conjugation** were extracted, and **Lesson C** contains special thematic vocabularies (collected from all sources). They appear after this Introduction with page numbers a,b,c, ..., while the original Cox Lessons are page numbered 1,2,3 ....

### Phonetic spelling of vowels:

Since Kinyarwanda is a **tonal** language, one has to differentiate both the **lengths** and the **intonation** (low or high) of the vowels. The above sources have been consulted for the short and long, low and high **vowel tones**. We denote them explicitly in Lessons A and B, and have introduced them into the Cox Lessons in all Vocabularies and in some of the grammatical parts. Like in (3) and (4), we write:

|            |  |                                  |
|------------|--|----------------------------------|
| a,e,i,o,u  | for <b>short low-tone</b> vowels:                                    | umugabo - man; inzu - house      |
| â,ê,î,ô,û  | for <b>short high-tone</b> vowels:                                   | isokô - market; sô - your father |
| êe,âa,etc. | for <b>long downgoing</b> vowels:<br>(tone starts high and ends low) | isôoko - source; umwâana - child |

|            |  |  |
|------------|--|--|
| iî,oô,etc. | for <b>long upgoing</b> vowels:<br>(tone starts low and ends high)     | umuhiîgi - hunter; umukoôbwa - girl                            |
| uu,aa,etc. | for <b>long low-tone</b> vowels:<br>(tone stays low)                   | umuuntu - human; daatâ - my father                             |
| ââ,etc.    | for <b>long high-tone</b> vowels:<br>(tone stays high - is very rare!) | (umugabo) utââje -<br>(the man) who has not come (far perfect) |

The pair of words 'isokô', 'isôoko' could not be distinguished without this explicit spelling. According to the present law (see note below), this linguistic writing is not to be used in usual books, journals etc. Other such word pairs are (see also the Vocabularies below):

|  |  |
|--|--|
| igikara - black colour (noun)              | igikâra - charcoal                         |
| ikibwa - mean little insect                | ikibwâ - little dog                        |
| urutoki - finger                           | urutooki - banana plantation               |
| guhuma - to be blind                       | guhuuma - to howl (esp. by hyenas)         |
| gusega - to climb a tree                   | guseega - to beg                           |
| gusiba - to erase, delete                  | gusiiba - to be absent, omit               |
| iteke - Taro (a root vegetable)            | itêekê! - you may prepare the food!        |
| kuvura - to coagulate                      | kuvuura - to cure, nurse                   |
| bakora - they work                         | bakorâ - (3pp) who work/(that) they work   |
| bâkora - while they work                   | baakorâ - (3pp) who would work             |
| baakora - they would work (with compl.)    | baakôra - they would work (end of phrase)  |
| bâakora - while they would work (+ compl.) | bâakôra - while they would work (e.o.phr.) |

It should be noted, however, that this phonetic spelling does not reflect all the details of the spoken Kinyarwanda. As underlined by both Shimamungu and Kimenyi, high tones are always anticipated in the syllables occurring before them, but this is not reflected in the standard phonetic spelling. **Stress** (or accent) often coincides with high tones, but not necessarily; there don't seem to exist any fixed rules for where to put stress. It is more the alternation of low and high tones that produces the melody of the spoken language (see Kimenyi, 2002), like in French, and differently from e.g. German where each word carries a stress on a well-defined syllable. (Germans and Danes often confuse high final tones in French with stress – which leads to their characteristic accents!)

Furthermore, **high tones** may **move** from the original (lexical) syllable towards **left** (i.e. to one or more syllables before), depending on grammatical circumstances. This is so, in particular, in **verb** forms where the tone can also depend on the presence of a following **complement** (object or adverb). Many tenses can only be differentiated by the lengths of vowels and the locations of high tones (see the 8 versions of 'bakora' above!). The situation is so complex and the number of tenses and aspects – some of which we don't even know in European languages – is so rich that they cannot all be described in these Lessons. (Dekempe did not even attempt to do so.) For those who want to learn all of this, we recommend in particular the text book (3).

**Note:** A new law for the orthography of Kinyarwanda has been issued in 2014. (For the full text, see the internet site <[http://www.editions-sources-du-nil.fr/Photoshop/ImyandikireyikinyarwandaOfficial\\_Gazette\\_no\\_41\\_bis\\_of\\_13.10.2014.pdf](http://www.editions-sources-du-nil.fr/Photoshop/ImyandikireyikinyarwandaOfficial_Gazette_no_41_bis_of_13.10.2014.pdf)>.) It is aimed at simplifying some of the phonetic intricacies of the earlier standard writing. Since the simplifications often hide the etymological origins of the words, they are disputed by some linguists. The new law is not reflected in the Cox Lessons, except for the change of 'kwu' and 'kwo' to 'ku' and 'ko', and the phonetic spelling of vowels as given above.

## Some notes about Kinyarwanda and Rwanda

**Kinyarwanda** is a **Bantu** language (Bantu: from 'abaantu' = 'people'). It is the national language of **Rwanda**. In the German colonial time, the latin script was introduced for its writing. It has two sister dialects: Kirundi and Giha. **Kirundi** is the national language of **Burundi**, and **Giha** (Kiha) is spoken by the **Baha** ('Ha people') in the north-western parts of **Tanzania** (east of Lake Tanganyika and south-east of Rwanda and Burundi). Kirundi, Giha, and Kinyarwanda are, linguistically speaking, dialects of the same language in the sense that all their speakers understand each other completely. Together, they represent the second largest cluster within the Bantu language group, today spoken by more than 22 million people in Rwanda, Burundi, eastern Tanzania, southern Uganda, and eastern Congo (DRC). The largest Bantu language is **Kiswahili**, spoken by more than 80 million people along the east of Central and South Africa. (It is the mother tongue of the **Baswahili** ('Swahili people') living along the eastern coast of Africa, all the way from southern Somalia down to northern Mozambique. It has developed as the most common commercial and administrative language of that region. It has Arab roots - 'sawahil' in Arab means 'coasts' or 'borders' - and is written both with Arab and Latin scripts. (It is the official administrative language of Tanzania where, in fact, more than 120 languages are spoken.)

It is rather unique for Africa that in one country (namely Rwanda), nearly 100% of the population speak the same language (Kinyarwanda). Educated people in Rwanda also speak French, English, or Swahili, which are all declared as official languages and taught in schools (although French is being abandoned by the younger generations).

Kinyarwanda has one *ethnic* dialect: **Gitwâ** (or Igitwâ, spoken by the ethnic group of the Twa, see below), which has not been studied linguistically so far. In Rwanda there exist also two distinct *regional* dialects: **Igikîga** in the mountainous north-west ('umukîga' = 'mountain inhabitant'), **Ciciga** around the border to Uganda, and **Ikinyanguga** ('language of the inhabitants of Induga') in the south-western region originally called Induga. These dialects have, in turn, several subdialects. The main differences between the dialects, including Kirundi and Giha, concern phonology, pronunciation, and sentence structure - besides variations in their vocabularies.

In their own language, the Rwandans are called **Banyarwaanda** (lit.: 'inhabitants of Rwanda'); the singular is **Munyarwaanda**. If one wants to stress that one is speaking of a female Rwandan, one says **Munyarwaandakazi** ('-kazi' = ending for 'female'). The name **Rwaanda** contains the root '-aand' of the verb 'kw-aand-a' - 'to expand, spread' and means something like 'the expanding region'.

Rwanda has three **ethnic groups**: 1. The **Batwâ** ('Twa', presently less than 1%), related to **pygmies**, are hunting tribes and specialized in making pottery. They were the original inhabitants of all of Central Africa (according to archeological evidence since earlier than 1000 B.C.). They were later marginalized by the invading Bantu-speaking people, lost their original languages and adapted to the Bantu languages; in Rwanda they speak the Kinyarwanda dialect Gitwâ mentioned above. 2. The **Batuutsi** ('Tutsi', today about 9%; until 1962 up to 17%) were originally mostly herders, bringing their typical long-horned cattle ('ibigarama' = 'Tutsi cows') into the region; there exist contradicting theories about where they came from. 3. The **Bahutû** ('Hutu', today about 90%) were originally agricultural farmers. Historians quarrel about the precise times at which the Bantu-speaking Hutus and Tutsis migrated into the region; both arrived after the Twas, the Tutsis presumably after the Hutus. The three ethnic groups were intermixed by marriage and differences between Hutus and Tutsis can often not be recognized.

## History and Myths of Rwanda

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Rwanda and Burundi consisted of kingdoms with elaborate institutionalized property arrangements that guaranteed a social and political equilibrium. A **Mwaâmi** (king = 'umwaâmi', pl. 'abaâmi') was the head of the state; he could be elected from different ethnic groups. In the German colonial time (1884-1916), Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania formed the **German East African Protectorate**. In the Belgian colonial time (1916-1962), **Ruanda-Urundi** and the **Belgian Congo** constituted the **Belgian Colony of Central Africa**. Both Germans and Belgians systematically favored Tutsis, giving them better education and administrative positions. They used a system of indirect rule through the Mwami who had to subdue to their administration. They believed in a myth about a feud between two 'tribes' of which the (smarter) Tutsis dominated the (inferior) Hutus - a myth to which the Christian churches adhered. The missionaries helped the poor Hutus; the churches collaborated with the colonial powers in using the Tutsi elite for their purposes. Burundi had a long dynasty of **Ganwa** kings who were not Tutsis but either Hutus or Bahas; but in adjusting the (complicated) reality to their preferred myth, the Belgians simply declared these Burundi kings to have been Tutsis. They also artificially increased the ethnic division by declaring all owners of more than a certain number of cows as Tutsis and all the poorer ones as Hutus.

In 1943, Mwami **Mutara III Rudahigwa** is baptized in the Catholic Church, assuming the Christian name Charles. He contributes actively to the conversion of Rwandans to Christianity; in 1946 he dedicates Rwanda 'to Christ the King'. In the 1950s he increases the number of Hutus in the administration and abolishes the feudal system of 'ubuhâke' that exploited the Hutus; he also starts demanding independence from Belgium. He dies unexpectedly in 1959 before the country achieves independence in 1962.

Hutus rule the country after its independence in 1962 and expel Tutsis from most of the important positions. Systematic killings of Tutsis begin and cause thousands to flee to the neighboring countries. In 1973, the Hutu defense minister **Juvénal Habyarimana** takes power in a military coup and is declared President. In 1990, a civil war starts, in which **Paul Kagame** leads the 'Rwandan Patriotic Front' (RPF) (formed by Tutsi refugees and supported by the Ugandan army) against the Hutu-controlled Rwandan Government Forces (RGF) (supported by French troupes). Habyarimana's death in a plane crash on April 6, 1994 (whose perpetrators have not been exposed yet) launches a genocide during which at least 800'000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus are massacred, some also in churches. After the end of the civil war in July 1994, the first democratically elected President of Rwanda is a Hutu, **Pasteur Bizimungu** (1994-2000). Since 2000 the President is Paul Kagame. All Prime Ministers of Rwanda since 1960 have been Hutus.

A heart-breaking account of the genocide is contained in the book "*Shake Hands with the Devil*" (Arrow Books, London, 2004) by **Roméo Dallaire**. He is the Canadian Lt. General who led the UNAMIR forces that the United Nations sent to Rwanda in 1993, in order to help implementing the so-called 'Arusha Peace Agreement' (1993) with the aim to establish a new democratic government including all parties. He was bound to fail, due to the reluctance of the leading powers (USA, Great Britain, France, and Russia) to send support - in spite of his strong warnings against an upcoming genocide.

There exists a vast literature about the Rwandan genocide, including interpretations that attribute causes and responsibility of the massacres to the Tutsis and the RPF, and books that claim the (unaccounted) killings of up to 500 thousand Hutus during the civil war. In the aftermaths of the Rwandan genocide since 1994, several million people (including Hutus and Tutsis) have died in the Great-Lakes Region of Africa, mainly in refugee camps, due to famine, epidemics, and the still ongoing civil war in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, ex-Zaire).

## Semantic Neutralization

An interesting phenomenon of the Rwandan language is what Kimenyi (2002) terms **semantic neutralization**. It means that semantically different -- and often even contradictory -- things or properties are named (and even conceived) by the same word. We just give a few examples below, occurring in different circumstances.

### a) Time:

ejô = yesterday, *or*: tomorrow  
vubâ = soon, *or*: recently

keêra = long ago, *or*: in the far future  
-îira (adj.) = late, *or*: early

### b) Space:

-reere (adj.) = long, *or*: tall, *or*: deep

-guſi (adj.) = short, *or*: low, *or*: shallow

### c) Properties of humans or situations:

igikoôbwa = attractive, *or*: ugly girl  
ishyano = extraordinary beauty, *or*: tragedy  
bibî = (e.g. to love) much, *but*: -bî = bad

igigorê = attractive, *or*: ugly woman

### d) Verbs:

kuyugiira = to blare, shout (through megaphone); *or*: to whisper (into ear)  
kuyogooza = to devastate, *or*: to cultivate a large field quickly  
kuva = to begin (start) to (+verb), *or*: to stop to (+verb)  
kuva ejô = since yesterday, *or*: starting (from) tomorrow