The landscape of Kinyarwanda dialects, with a special emphasis on Kirera

by

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Kirera (*ikiréera*)

is a dialect of Kinyarwanda, spoken in **Uburera** in the North of Rwanda

in the regions of Musanze, Burera and Gakenke

(former Communes of Kinigi, Kigombe, Gahunga, Cyabingo, Gatonde and Ndusu)

(The two first authors – D.S. and M.M. – of this paper are native Kirera speakers)



In the paper, we give a long list of many dialectal regions

Differences between Standard Kinyarwanda (SK) and Kirera (K):

SK:	**K:**
- uses **palatalized** consonants:	- uses **unpalatalized** consonants:
shy, jy, cy	***sh, j, c***
- sounds softer, more diffuse	- sounds harder, clearer
- spoken faster	- spoken more slowly
	- frequent appearance of ***‚g‘*** or ***‚ga-‘***

Examples for SK: ***shy*** → K: ***sh***

- *i**shy**ano*	→	*i**sh**ano* = “danger / mishap”
- *ibi**shy**imbo*	→	*ibi**sh**imbo* = “beans”
- *umu**sh**yo*	→	*umu**sh**o* = “knife”

Examples for SK: ***jy*** → K: ***j***

- *n**jy**ewe* → *n**j**ewe* = "I" *(emphasized)*
- *bi**jy**ane mu nzu* → *bi**j**ane mu nzu* = "take them into the house"
- *umu**jy**anama wan**jy**e* → *umu**j**anama wan**j**e* = "our adviser"
- *umu**jy**o**jy**o ni isuka n**shy**a**shy**a* → *umu**j**o**j**o ni isuka n**sh**a**sh**a*
  = "*umujojo* is a new hoe"

Examples for SK: ***cy*** → K: ***c***

- *i**cy**aha* → *i**c**aha* = "error / offense"
- *i**cy**ambarwa* → *i**c**ambarwa* = "clothing"
- *shyira i**cy**o **cy**uma mu **cy**umba* → *shira i**c**o **c**uma mu **c**umba*
  = "put that knife into the room!"

Appearance of the consonant ‘*g*’

- ‘***g***’ in front of the possessive prefix *w-*:

umurima wanjye → umurima ***g****wanje* = “ my field”

- ‚***g***‘ in front of a demonstrative pronoun:

jya gucyura ariya matungo → ja gucura ***g****ariya matungo*

= “Bring those domestic animals home!”

- ‚***g***‘ replacing ‚***y***‘:

amashyiga ***y****o gutekaho → amashiga* ***g****o gutekaho*

= “(three) stones to cook upon”

*a****y****a mafaranga u****y****ampere Majyambere → a****g****a mafaranga u****g****ampere Majambere*

= “give Majambere this money from me”

Use of the suffix *-ga* for the habitual present:

Remember that in SK, ***-ga*** is used for **habitual** actions only in **past tenses**:

nasomaga = "I used to read / I was reading"
bubakaga = "they used to build / they were building" (a house)

In Kirera, ***-ga*** is frequently used for the **habitual present tense**:

*turya**ga** sa sita*	= "we normally eat at noon"
*aratека**ga***	= "she is cooking"
*abana batinya**ga** ishamba*	= "children are afraid of the forest"
*arasetsa**ga** = akunda**ga** gusetsa*	= "he likes joking."
*iwacu turahinga**ga***	= "our usual occupation is farming"
*Papa aracuruza**ga***	= "my dad is a trader"
*ibishimbo byumye bitinda**ga** gusha*	= "dried beans take longer to be cooked"
*buri gitondo tuja**ga** mu kiriziya*	= "every morning we go to church"

Use of explicit relative pronouns:

In SK, **relative clauses** are always formed using the **relative mood** of the verb (with a **postradical high tone**).

In contrast, Kirera can make use of **explicit relative pronouns**:

SK: *igitabo usom**á*** → K: *igitabo **có** usomaga* = "the book which you are reading"
SK: *ibitabo nasomy**é*** → K: *ibitabo **byó** nasomye* = "the books that I have read"

Use of different words:

K uses ***kugamba*** [*kugaamba*] for '**to speak**' instead of *kuvuga* in SK
baragambaga = "they are talking", *ugambaga iki?* = "what do you say?"

K uses ***indiga*** [*indiga*] for '**knife**' instead of *umushyo* in SK
indiga ni umusho = "*indiga* is a knife"

K uses ***ishoka*** [*ishóoká*] for '**axe**' instead of ***intorezo*** [*intóorezo*] in SK

K wishes ***ugereyo*** *amahoro!* for "**have a** safe **journey**!" versus ***usohore*** *amahoro* in SK

The **first part of our paper** (written by Father Dukuzumuremyi) gives an account of the role that Kinyarwanda dialects play in Rwandan society and culture.
It discusses the problem that school children, who grow up in families speaking particular dialects, often have difficulties learning Kinyarwanda and even understanding their teaching in Kinyarwanda.

A child said: *"When I started schooling, Kinyarwanda was difficult for me. When we were asked to write 'k', it was difficult for us to do it."*

Another said: *"To know the consonant 'b' is difficult."*

But also Kinyarwanda teachers can have problems when they don't know the local dialects the children speak at home.

One teacher said: *"It requires self-sacrifice to find out how to help a child by using teaching aids. I use drawings I brought from home. You show it to the child, you describe it in English, translate it into Kinyarwanda, and then into the language the child used most often at home (e.g. Mashi)."*

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION!