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# Afrihili: an African Interlanguage

William S. Annis

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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 posteriori* 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 posteriori* IALs expand their linguistic base, and take vocabulary from languages outside of Europe, such as Lojban (1987) and Unish (1996).

Another *a posteriori* 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 ole 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<sup>2</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup>Constructed Slavic Languages, [http://steen.free.fr/interslavic/constructed\\_slavic\\_languages.html](http://steen.free.fr/interslavic/constructed_slavic_languages.html), retrieved March 9, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>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.<sup>3</sup>

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, **ye** 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 **òkan**, **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 of 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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<sup>3</sup>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<sup>4</sup>

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:*<sup>5</sup>

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 **owulaa** *madam*. A verb phrase nominalization pattern lengthens the vowel of the person prefix, **miye** *I am* and **miyye** *I who am*; **tatajo** *she will go* **taatajo** *she who will go*. Habitual tenses (“used to”) lengthen the vowel of the tense prefix, **miyɛdu** **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, **fue 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, **!Tena kenge zuri**. *How nice it would be!*

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<sup>4</sup>I am using the 1973 edition of *Ni Afrihili Oluga* for all the information in the following sections. The book was printed with movable type, and some letters are broken. The book was typeset by someone who didn’t know much if any Afrihili and some obvious spelling errors, such as **hji** for **nji** *sleep*, are fixed without comment.

<sup>5</sup>I did not notice any Afrihili words in *Ni Afrihili Oluga* using either **th** or **hw**.

## 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 yε 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 yε 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.**<sup>6</sup>  
 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**, **be away from** vs. **bɛn away from the**. The article can also contract with the *be at* sense of the copula **yɛ**, **lɛyɛn ishule**<sup>7</sup> *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*, **El-Afrihili** *Language of Africa*, **omu-afrika** *Citizen of Africa, African*, **li-afrika** *pertaining to Africa, African* (a regular adjective formation), **vol-afrihili** *el-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.	<b>mi-</b>	<b>mi</b>	<b>emi</b>	<b>m'</b>	<b>-mi-n</b>	Twi <i>mi</i>
2sg.	<b>wu-</b>	<b>wu</b>	<b>ewu</b>	<b>w'</b>	<b>-wu-n</b>	Twi <i>wu</i>
3sg. "he"	<b>lɛ-</b>	<b>lɛ</b>	<b>elɛ</b>	<b>l'</b>	<b>-lɛ-n</b>	
3sg. "she"	<b>ta-</b>	<b>ta</b>	<b>eta</b>	<b>t'</b>	<b>-ta-n</b>	Hausa <i>ta</i>
3sg. "it"	<b>yo-</b>	<b>yo</b>	<b>eyo</b>	<b>y'</b>	<b>-yo-n</b>	
1pl.	<b>nu-</b>	<b>nu</b>	<b>unu</b>	<b>n'</b>	<b>-nu-n</b>	Oromo? Wolof? <i>nu</i> .
2pl.	<b>ku-</b>	<b>ku</b>	<b>uku</b>	<b>k'</b>	<b>-ku-n</b>	Hausa <i>ku</i>
3pl.	<b>fu-</b>	<b>fu</b>	<b>ufu</b>	<b>f'</b>	<b>-fu-n</b>	

The subject prefix forms are used with verbs.<sup>8</sup> 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 Ghana, mibela...**  
 I kofe POS Ghana 1SG-wish  
*I, Kofi of Ghana, wish...*

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>It's **inshule** in the text, but elsewhere appears as just **ishule**.

<sup>8</sup>Sometimes they are seen written separately, before the verb.

And in **?Wena 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<sub>1</sub> is calling his<sub>1</sub> friend<sub>2</sub> and his<sub>1</sub> wife.*  
**M'imao rezi l'akuetu na ukai ulen.** *My brother<sub>1</sub> is calling his<sub>1</sub> friend<sub>2</sub> and his<sub>2</sub> wife.*

And a coreference system gets a single example,

**Abdulai lizi Ndiaye** *Abdulai<sub>1</sub> called Ndiaye<sub>2</sub>.*  
**el<sub>1</sub> lika le<sub>2</sub> kenode el<sub>1</sub> iwe** *He<sub>1</sub> told him<sub>2</sub> to bring him<sub>1</sub> a book.*

Attobrah says, “here ‘le’ is read backwards to be ‘el’.” 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,<sup>9</sup> **mimi** *I myself*, **tata** *she herself*. This can be used to emphasize possession, **l'iwe lele** *his own book*.

In addition to these basic pronouns which occur throughout the language, there are also inclusives **ne** *me and you* (dual) and **neu** *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, **ke 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,

**Kebidi amola kutede f'abini.**  
ke-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, **ke zuri alu** *it's a fine day*, **ke tutu** *it's cold*.

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<sup>9</sup>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 ye 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	<b>kowo</b> <i>each, each one, everyone</i>	<b>kawa</b> <i>somebody, someone, anybody, anyone</i>	<b>ki, ku</b> <i>this, that</i>	<b>nawa, nana</b> <i>not any, nobody, no one</i>
Person's	<b>kon</b> <i>everyone's</i>	<b>kan</b> <i>someone's</i>	<b>kin</b> <i>of that, of this</i>	<b>nan</b> <i>nobody's, no one's</i>
Thing	<b>kodo</b> <i>every</i> <b>koko</b> <i>everything</i>	<b>kada</b> <i>something, anything</i>	<b>ki, ku</b> <i>this, that</i>	<b>nada, nye</b> <i>nothing</i>
Time	<b>kopo</b> <i>always</i>	<b>kapa</b> <i>sometime</i>	<b>kipi</b> <i>at this moment</i>	<b>napa, neda</b> <i>never</i>
Place	<b>kofo</b> <i>everywhere</i>	<b>kafa</b> <i>somewhere, anywhere</i>	<b>kifi</b> <i>over there, by this way</i>	

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-*), **kofena lejo** *wherever he goes*, **kokawa bela** *anyone who wishes*.

The question and relative words all end in **-ena**, and use the second consonant of the correlatives as their initial consonant, **wena** *who*, **nenena** *whose*, **dena** *what*, **kena** *which, that*, **pena** *when*, **fena** *where*, **benena** *why*, **tena** *how*, and **senena** *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	<b>sifiri</b>	Hausa <i>sifiri</i> (< Ar. <i>ṣifr</i> )		6	<b>seta</b>	Hausa? <i>shidda</i>
1	<b>kana</b>	Yoruba <i>òkan, kan</i>		7	<b>fito</b>	Malagasy <i>fito</i>
2	<b>bari</b>	Swahili? <i>mbili</i> <sup>10</sup>		8	<b>nane</b>	Swahili <i>nane</i>
3	<b>sade</b>	Oromo? <i>sadii</i>		9	<b>tolu</b>	?
4	<b>hudu</b>	Hausa <i>hudu</i>		10	<b>du</b>	Twi <i>edú</i>
5	<b>diji</b>	Nubian <i>dij-</i>				

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 yε 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 **ε** gives ordinal adverbs, **kane** *firstly*, **sade** *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*, **to** *about*, **te** *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.*

<sup>10</sup>A number of related Bantu languages 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,

**Lε yε abu mu** *He is in a room.*

**Lε yεm 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 εn asiko** *She did it within time.*

**Talida yo ni asiko εn** *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 epenge nge-wa paasa, ni amalesi nge-sana-bwa.**

kama epenge 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 dena** *from what country are you?*

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

**Milibonako lε fo koni** *I have not seen him up till now.*

**Kε 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).*

**Nutagenda fo ton ishule** *We shall walk straight to the school.*

**Milo hapa fo ulu usaden** *I have been here for three days.*

**Fo miye omukama, kwayεko asela** *As long as I am king, there will be no thieves.*

**Fo mi...** *As far as I am concerned...*

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

**Ta lijo εn asiko apapan** *She went at a good time.*

**Ni ishule εn, nulibona ni omukazi** *At the school we saw the girl.*

**Mitada yo ulu usaden εn** *I will do it in four days.*

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

**εn mai iwe** *Each one has a book.*

**Nu εn mai iwe** *Each one of us has a book.*

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

## 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”	<b>miyε</b> <sup>11</sup>	<b>meyε</b>
“You (sg.) are”	<b>wuyε</b>	<b>woyε</b>
“He is”	<b>leyε</b>	<b>ɔyε</b>
“She is”	<b>tayε</b>	<b>ɔyε</b>
“It is”	<b>yoyε</b>	<b>eyε</b>
“We are”	<b>nuyε</b>	<b>yeyε</b>
“You (pl.) are”	<b>kuyε</b>	<b>moyε</b>
“They are”	<b>fuyε</b>	<b>wɔyε</b>
“They (inan.) are”	<b>fuyε</b>	<b>eyε</b>

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 lerejo**.

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,<sup>12</sup> though the tense and aspect semantics owe a lot to English.

Simple present	∅	
Present progressive	<b>re-</b>	Twi <i>re-</i>
Past progressive	<b>ri-</b>	
Future progressive	<b>ra-</b>	
Perfect continuous	<b>ro-</b>	
Past perf. continuous	<b>ru-</b>	
Future	<b>ta-</b>	Swahili <i>ta-</i>
Future perfect	<b>tɔ-</b>	
Past	<b>li-</b>	Swahili <i>li-</i>
Perfect	<b>lo-</b>	
Past Perfect	<b>lu-</b>	
Present Subjunctive	<b>ke-</b>	
Past Subjunctive	<b>ki-</b>	Swahili <i>ki-</i> “conditional”
Present Conditional	<b>nge-</b>	Swahili <i>nge-</i> “hypothetical”
Past Conditional	<b>ngi-</b>	

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

<sup>11</sup>In lesson three **yε** is defined as “is, is at.”

<sup>12</sup>Twi also has the template: subject prefix - TAM - verb stem.

**miyɛdu ɛtukana** *I am used to eating breakfast.* There is additionally a special past habitual prefix, **liə-**, **taliəduti 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 le iwe, miladu te le** *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 le** *I shall call him*, but:

**Mitazizi le.**  
mi-ta-zi-zi le  
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.

?**Lelojo** *Has he gone?*  
**Leyalojoko 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 ye 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, **lelowa laki sade ewe** *he has come in order to buy books*. It is used as the complement to constructions of aspect and mood, **milovə 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, lelisogo ni usuni.**

li-lomu ni abu ɛ-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 **lelojoja** he has not yet gone, or with **-ko bado**, as in **leyalojoko 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**, **lelijore** 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.**

ɛ-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**, **!soma<sup>k</sup> read!** For the negative, simply add the usual negation suffix **-ko**. Note that the plural marking comes after that, giving **!soma<sup>k</sup>o don't read!** and **!soma<sup>k</sup>ok 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, **?Wusosoli do you understand?**

Question words are *in situ*,

**?Ni imukazi rejo fena**  
 the girls PROG-go where  
*Where are the girls going?*

**?Wurebida wena**  
 wu-re-bida wena  
 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 letaladi mi ba, mitafe yo le to.**  
 kama le-ta-ladi mi ba, mi-ta-fe yo le 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 keko 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 ye hapa konje, ke 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, mingesani 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 le, mingijua le.**  
kama mi-ngi-bona le mi-ngi-jua le  
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.”

**?Dena wungesuma.**  
dena wu-nge-suma  
what 2SG-PRES.COND-like  
*What would you like?*

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

**Ni omuntu wena ngetaya mi, ye 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 lefua, kama leyi, 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 le iwe kesoma.**  
mi-li-fe le 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 lekejo** *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 **wena** *who*, **kɛna** *which*, etc., possibly a borrowing from English, **omola wena soma** *a child who reads*; **ki yɛ ol iwe kɛna milihitaɟi** *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,

**Lēliche se letawa**

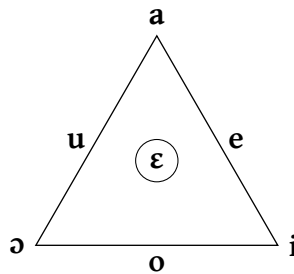
3SG-PST-say that 3SG-FUT-come

*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 principle 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 **ε** 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 **εmono** *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** > **memo** *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*, **fuaselō** *to deaden*, **fuasele** *deadly*, **efuaselō** *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 **dεmono** *disgraceful* from **εmono** *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 **dεmono** *disgraceful* giving **adεmono** *disgracefulness*, or prefix **ε-** and add the suffix **-kan-** using the echo vowel mentioned on p.4, **εdεmonokano** *disgracefulness*.

The diminutive is the suffix **-nd-** with the echo vowel, as in **urizindi** *stream* from **uru** *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*<sup>13</sup> 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 **-lo**, this time without an echo vowel, is the causative from both verbs and adjectives, **memolo** *electrify* from **memo** *electric*, **rolo** *fatten* from **ro** *fat*, **fuaselo** *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:”

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

<sup>13</sup>There is also **ishule** for *school*.

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 kena ni asiko lowa tɛ Afrika maide oluga olawusinun.**

nu-sadiki kena 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 ekana na eyiyai lerahanoholo.**

kupita kana oluga nu-ta-faulu ekana na eyiyai leraha-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 ledade oluga kari na nutumaini yongepokeabwa alu bi**

nu-re-kokari leda-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 ye leraha suade na ni ahadisini resene tu alu to alu.**

ni alsarufi ye leraha 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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