Title: Afrihili: An African Interlanguage

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Afrihili: an African Interlanguage

William S. Annis

March 28, 2014

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

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

Ni Afrihili Oluga
K.A. Kumi Attobrah

Context and Reception

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

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

Another a postiori approach is to focus on the languages of a particular family or area. Languages such as Volapük and Esperanto were effectively European zonal IALs due to the languages
they borrowed vocabulary from, but a deliberate approach can be found in the many Slavic zonal IALs, starting with Ruski Yezik (1661) and continuing to this day with projects such as Interslavic.1

Afrihili, created by Ghanian civil engineer K.A. Kumi Attoobrah 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. Attoobrah 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 university2 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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2 I have been unable to find anything to suggest Afrihili was the project of anyone but Attoobrah 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 Oluja*, Attobrah says that the language, “has been created incorporating grammar and words from the languages of the African continent,” but gives no further information about how vocabulary was selected.³

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

Twi, the most common language of Ghana, is also a source, *papa* good, *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 *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, *latitra* far from). Some member of the Nubian family also makes an appearance, in the number five (*diji*) and in the possessive suffix -n. I haven’t been able to identify exactly which member of the family was Attobrah’s source. The chance I have confused a source language with one if its close relatives is fairly high, especially with the Bantu languages.

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

³Guosa, 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

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
- ε — as in egg  u — as in hoot
- o — as in ought

*Consonant:*^5^  
- ch — as in chat  ny — as in cognac
- sh — as in ship  th — as in there
- kw — as in quack  bw — as in Bwana
- ts — as in tsetsefly  hw — as in whistle

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

Attention is never given to how exactly to pronounce it, but some vocabulary and several grammatical processes have vowels written double. For example, in the pair *owula* sir and *owulaa* madam. A verb phrase nominalization pattern lengthens the vowel of the person prefix, *miye* I am and *miyi* I who am; *tatajo* she will go *taatajo* she who will go. Habitual tenses (“used to”) lengthen the vowel of the tense prefix, *miyeduu* etukana I am used to eating breakfast, *mitaado* etukana 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 *ye* may reduce to just *ε* (sometimes written ’e) with the “it” subject prefix *yo-*, as in *sa yo bikama yo’e* papa buy it provided that it is good. Other subjects occasionally have this reduction, too, *fue te 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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*4* 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.

*5* 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](image)

the cabins red small nice two

*The two nice small red cabins.*

The comparative of adjectives is formed with the suffix -naho (Malagasy *naho* “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 ye kono noho ni amago.](image)

the pear be mature COMP the mango

*The pear is more matured than the mango.*

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 ye ja da ize.](image)

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, kilo every,*

![mitafa ewande kasa.](image)

1SG-FUT-take groundnuts some

*I will take some groundnuts.*

The possessive, much like English ‘s, is the suffix -n, as in *ni oru the chief, ni orun ita the chief’s house, ni urun ata the chiefs’ houses,* and
ni omukaman okambon       adrashi azurin
ni omukama-n   o-kambo-n         adrashi   a-zuri-n
the king-POSS     ATTR-powerful-ATTR palace   ATTR-nice-ATTR

the powerful king’s nice palace

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

Fe mi ekeni pe tutu echi. ⁶
give me glass of cold water
Give me a glass of cold water.

The definite article is ni. It is not used with people, countries, rivers, years, months, days, festivals, seasons nor the names of spirits or gods. It is frequently contracted with prepositions, pe of vs. pen of the, be away from vs. ben away from the. The article can also contract with the be at sense of the copula ye, leyen ishule “ he is at the school, but leye ni omuntu he is the man.


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,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Independent Sub.</th>
<th>Poss. I</th>
<th>Poss. II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1sg.</td>
<td>mi-</td>
<td>mi</td>
<td>emi</td>
<td>m’</td>
<td>-mi-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2sg.</td>
<td>wu-</td>
<td>wu</td>
<td>ewu</td>
<td>w’</td>
<td>-wu-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3sg. “he”</td>
<td>le-</td>
<td>le</td>
<td>elc</td>
<td>l’</td>
<td>-le-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3sg. “she”</td>
<td>ta-</td>
<td>ta</td>
<td>eta</td>
<td>t’</td>
<td>-ta-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3sg. “it”</td>
<td>yo-</td>
<td>yo</td>
<td>eyo</td>
<td>y’</td>
<td>-yo-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pl.</td>
<td>nu-</td>
<td>nu</td>
<td>unu</td>
<td>n’</td>
<td>-nu-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2pl.</td>
<td>ku-</td>
<td>ku</td>
<td>uku</td>
<td>k’</td>
<td>-ku-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3pl.</td>
<td>fu-</td>
<td>fu</td>
<td>ufu</td>
<td>f’</td>
<td>-fu-n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Emi, Kofi pe Gana, mibela...
I kofe POS Ghana 1SG-wish
I, Kofi of Ghana, wish...

⁶From 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.

⁷It’s ishule in the text, but elsewhere appears as just ishule.

⁸Sometimes 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 brother₁ is calling his₁ friend₂ and his₁ wife.

**M’imao rezi l’akuetu na ukai uilen.** My brother₁ is calling his₁ friend₂ and his₂ wife.

And a coreference system gets a single example,

**Abdulai lizi Ndiaye** Abdulai₁ called Ndiaye₂.

**El₁ lika le₂ kenode el₁ iwe** He₁ told him₂ to bring him₁ 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,* 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, *kε 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,

**Kεbidi amolaikutede f’abini.**

*kε-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, *kε zuri alu it’s a fine day, kε tutu it’s cold.*

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*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,

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

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, nen 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, nena whose, dena what, kena which, that, pena when, fena where, bena why, tena how, and sena 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,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>sifiri</th>
<th>Hausa sifiri (= Ar. şifr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>kana</td>
<td>Yoruba ọkan, kan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>bari</td>
<td>Swahili? mbili(^\text{10})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>sade</td>
<td>Oromo? sadii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>hudu</td>
<td>Hausa hudu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>diji</td>
<td>Nubian dij-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>seta</td>
<td>Hausa? shidda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>fito</td>
<td>Malagasy fito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>nane</td>
<td>Swahili nane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>tolu</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>du</td>
<td>Twi edí</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 ye 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, badjisi two fifths, sadjisi 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 e gives ordinal adverbs, kana 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-1NCH in the street
I got lost in the street.

\(^{10}\)A number of related Bantu languages have forms in -b\(V\)\(r\)\(V\), -b\(V\)\(l\)\(V\). I’m not able to determine which one Attoobrah might have borrowed bari from.
Given this pair of examples in lesson five, it seems that the choice is up to the speaker,

Le ye abu mu He is in a room.  
Le yem 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 en asiko She did it within time.  
Talida yo ni asiko en She did it within the time.

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

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

The preposition tu from, at least, can be used as a verb stem, ?wutu ofeka denu from what country are you?  
Two adpositions, fo and en, came in for special elaboration. Fo means up till, up until, up to, as far as, for the purpose of, direct,

Milibonako le fo koni I have not seen him up till now.  
Ke 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, kwayeko asela As long as I am king, there will be no thieves.  
Fo mi... As far as I am concerned...

The adposition en in, at, has a number of functions,

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

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

En mai iwe Each one has a book.  
Nu en mai iwe Each one of us has a book.

Finally, it has the sense of leading, at the head of, in letawa umuntu udijin en 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,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afrihili</th>
<th>Twi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I am”</td>
<td>miye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You (sg.) are”</td>
<td>wuye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He is”</td>
<td>leye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She is”</td>
<td>taye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is”</td>
<td>yoye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We are”</td>
<td>nuye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You (pl.) are”</td>
<td>kuye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They are”</td>
<td>fuye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They (inan.) are”</td>
<td>fuye</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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, though the tense and aspect semantics owe a lot to English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple present</th>
<th>Ø</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present progressive</td>
<td>re- Twi re-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past progressive</td>
<td>ri-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future progressive</td>
<td>ra-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect continuous</td>
<td>ro-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past perf. continuous</td>
<td>ru-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>ta- Swahili ta-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future perfect</td>
<td>to-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>li- Swahili li-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>lo-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>lu-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Subjunctive</td>
<td>ke-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Subjunctive</td>
<td>ki- Swahili ki- “conditional”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Conditional</td>
<td>nge- Swahili nge- “hypothetical”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Conditional</td>
<td>ngi-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

---

11 In lesson three ye is defined as “is, is at.”
12 Twi also has the template: subject prefix - TAM - verb stem.
miyeedu etukana I am used to eating breakfast. There is additionally a special past habitual prefix, lio-, taliaduti 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, miladute 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.

?LeLeojo 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, milovo dude I have finished eating,

Kefara     nu jode koni.
ke-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 imunzi lisanako nako dude.
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, me- 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, lëlisogo ni usuni.**
li-lomu ni abu le-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-gis-o-ko ki
1SG-PST-order-NEG this

*I did not order this.*

“Not yet” is indicated with the suffix -jo, as in lëlojoja 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, lëlijore 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, ye, is often dropped, leaving just person and TAM morphemes for the verb. When the infinitive is needed, de alone suffices,

**Lëlo anche apapan.**
le-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, kwaye there is/are, kwalu there had been. It takes the normal negative suffix, kwayeko there isn’t, but note kwaye nehi indemo zare there is no football today.
The bare verb stem acts as the singular imperative, !soma read! For the plural, add the suffix -k, from ku, !somak read!. For the negative, simply add the usual negation suffix -ko. Note that the plural marking comes after that, giving !somako don’t read! and !somakok don’t (pl.) read. First and third person imperatives are formed by replacing the normal person prefix vowel with -e- from ke-, !nejo let’s go! and !fesoma let them read!

Questions

Simple polar questions are indicated by intonation, “by raising the voice on the last word to indicate a question form.” Questions are written with the question mark before the clause, ?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.
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 këko 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 hapo 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, mingesa ni agakolago.**

kama mi-ngemai ego e-baka-n mingesa 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 wungesumo.**

dena wu-ngesumo 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 lefu, 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, kena which, etc., possibly a borrowing from English, omola wena soma a child who reads; ki ye ol iwe kena milihitaji this is the very book which I wanted. Second, it may treat the verb stem as an adjective, from ni omuntu kora the man works to ni omuntu okoran the man who works. Finally, there is a relative word a, in ni omuntu a wurebida ne here is the man you are looking for (ne = “here is”), and:

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

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

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

Pale a kwaye 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, leeyɛ papa he who is good, nuuliko pale we who were not there.

Indirect speech is introduced with se (Twi), using absolute tense,
Leleche 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,”

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{a} \\
\text{u} \\
\text{e} \\
\text{o} \\
\text{i}
\end{array}
\]

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 \( e \) 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, \( \text{mono} \) to \( \text{disgrace} \) gives not \( *\text{amono} \) as would be expected, but \( \text{emono} \) disgrace.

Converting a noun to a verb involves simply removing the vowel prefix, from \( \text{etogo} \) house to \( \text{togo} \) 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, \( \text{umeme} \) electricity gives \( -\text{meme} > \text{memo} \) electric.

To create a noun from a verb, look at the final vowel and add its Hili triangle opposite to the front, as from \( \text{pinu} \) determine to \( \text{ipinu} \) determination.

An example elaboration, starting with \( \text{fua} \) to die: \( \text{ofua} \) death, \( \text{fuase} \) be dead, \( \text{fuaselə} \) to deaden, \( \text{fuasele} \) deadly, \( \text{efuaselə} \) deadliness.

Three additional adjective derivations simply involve adding a prefix to the noun, with no Hili triangle changes. \( \text{K-} \) creates adjectives meaning without, -less, as in \( \text{oro} \) fat creating \( \text{koro} \) fatless. Prefixing \( \text{l-} \) creates an adjective meaning relating to, pertaining to, like, \( \text{lora} \) fatty. The prefix \( \text{d-} \) means with, as in \( \text{demono} \) disgraceful from \( \text{emono} \) 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 \( \text{demono} \) disgraceful giving \( \text{ademono} \) disgracefulness, or prefix \( \text{ε-} \) and add the suffix \( -\text{kan-} \) using the echo vowel mentioned on p.4, \( \text{edemonokano} \) disgracefulness.

The diminutive is the suffix \( -\text{nd-} \) with the echo vowel, as in \( \text{urizindi} \) stream from \( \text{uruzi} \) river. It appears to have an additional meaning, creating the name of a fruit from its tree, \( \text{enti} \) 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 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, fuselo deaden from fuse be dead.

To get a verb meaning “to pretend to do something,” reduplicate the stem and add the suffix -lu as in njinjulu 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:”

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

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13 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 te Afrika maide oluga olawusinun.**  
nu-sadiki kena ni asiko lo-wa te 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 cyiyai lerahanoholo.**  
kupita kana oluga nu-ta-faulu ekana na cyiyai 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.*

**Nurekaokori 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 te ni awusinu aziman.**  
suku-de da oluga peduka te 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 ahdasini 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!*

**References**


