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Multilingualism and Change on the Kinyarwanda Sound System post-1994

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Multilingualism and Change on the Kinyarwanda Sound System post-1994

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Research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics

Supervisor: Ms. Arista Da SILVA

Johannesburg, October 2006

Declaration

I, Hilaire HABYARIMANA, declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. I am submitting it for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted at any other University for a degree, or any form of examination.

Signed……..
On the 20th day of October 2006.

Dedication

To my wife Christine,

For your love and patience during my absence

To Patrick, Larissa and Melissa,

For your future motivation to science

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people for their assistance in this research project.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor Ms Arista Da Silva for her invaluable insights into this research.

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I wish to extend my thanks to the government of Rwanda for having funded my training and this research. Without their help this work would not have been possible.

My special appreciation goes to my family, colleagues at the National University of Rwanda, classmates and friends at Wits, for all their moral support and encouragement which enabled me to enjoy and complete this work.

To all of you who, directly or indirectly contributed to this work, I say ‘thank you!’
Hilaire HABYARIMANA

Abstract

The present study on 'Multilingualism and change on the Kinyarwanda sound system post-1994' focuses on sociolinguistic approaches oriented to the effects of language contact to Kinyarwanda sound change. Many studies on various multilingual societies have been conducted, and most of them have focused on multilingualism and language policy, education and social integration in different multilingual societies. In particular, most studies conducted on the new linguistic configuration of Rwanda have focused on language attitudes in a multilingual context, but none of them has tackled the issue of multilingualism and sound change as a result of language contact. The main hypothesis expounded in this research is that Kinyarwanda sound variants that can be heard from current speech arise owing to Kinyarwanda speakers' language background.

In the light of the literature review on multilingualism and sound change, an extensive analysis of the most prominent linguistic variables of sound variation in Kinyarwanda was done, and its evaluation shows that there have been shifts in the sound system of Kinyarwanda post-1994. It has been shown that some sounds were modified or shifted to other sounds which exist in neighbouring languages because of contact. In addition to that, it has been argued that this sound variation has been possible mainly because Kinyarwanda came into contact with other languages which have different sound systems. It is hoped that this research will add a new dimension to studies of multilingualism within Bantu languages and will contribute to yielding a solution to the Rwandan language problem because of suggestions related to how the Kinyarwanda sound system can be standardized.

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