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Accessing the Greek Verbal System Through the Shona Verb: Toward a Bantu Approach to Biblical Languages

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Abstract

As with any other language, mastering biblical languages such as Greek remains a challenge in Africa. Meanwhile, many African languages hold keys to a better experience in teaching and learning biblical languages. Accordingly, this study proposes a Bantu-based approach to teaching and learning biblical Greek for effective delivery and better mastery. In this study, by means of comparative linguistics, the verbal system of Shona, one of the numerous Bantu languages spoken in Southern Africa, is used to demonstrate correspondences with the biblical Greek verbal system. Elements of special interest in the two languages' verbal systems relate to signification codes for *tense*, *voice*, *mode*, *person,* and *number*. The study is premised on the understanding that the verb is the heart of any language. The basic assumption of the study is that since both Shona and biblical Greek verbal systems are conjugated in comparable ways, something which English lacks, using Shona to teach or learn biblical Greek in the Zimbabwean context should be effective. The study proposes that this method be similarly tried with other Bantu languages and the other two biblical languages: Hebrew and Aramaic. In the end, there may be a need to produce biblical language grammar written with Bantu languages as their base, especially considering there is no substitute for learning in one's own language.

Keywords: Biblical Greek, λυω, Shona, conjugation, Bantu, verbal system, culture

Introduction

It is no secret that for many people preparing for pastoral ministry, learning biblical languages is something that is more endured than enjoyed. Some even go to the extent of quitting or changing their majors to avoid taking biblical languages such as Greek and Hebrew. According to Petronio M. Genebago, the experience of many seminarians in studying biblical languages is characterized by "grief," "frustration," and "agony."[1] Even forthose who successfully take the language courses, much of what they learn does not survive their first few years after college or seminary and is hardly ever used in the ministry. One of the challenges contributing to this situation could be that many students come to learn biblical languages through English grammar, which many are ill-informed about. So then, for many students, their first challenge is English, not Greek or Hebrew. Such is the case even in native English-speaking countries such as the USA. A realization of this fact has led to the production of resources meant to alleviate this challenge. Accordingly, English grammars for learners of Hebrew[2] and Greek[3] are on the market. Yet another approach seeks to

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1 Petronio M. Genebago, "'It's All Greek to Me,': Why Should I Study Biblical Languages?" *MinistryMagazine* (October, 2018), 16.

2 Long gives the observation that led to his book in these words, "after several years of teaching a variety of ancient Semitic languages, I recognize that most of my students have been learning two languages at the same time: the ancient language, of course, *and* the grammar and grammatical concepts of English, often forgotten." Gary A. Long, *Grammatical Concepts 101: For Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), xvii. Similarly, so for Miles V. Van Pelt, *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 11-12.

3 No one could have put this point across better than Lamerson. "In six years of teaching first-year Greek at the seminary level, it has become apparent to me that one of the greatest stumbling blocks to learningof foreign language, is the lack of familiarity with the grammar of one's mother tongue. It is, after all, difficult tunderstand how a Greek infinitive differs from an English infinitive, if you do not know what an infinitive is." Samuel Lamerson, *English Grammar to Ace New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). Page Number?

discuss both languages and their similarity to English.[4] Given such a situation in native English-speaking countries, one cannot help but ask: if goldrusts, what will poor iron do? The fact of the above-stated challenge could not be truer in Africa, where English is a foreign language to the vast majority of the continent's people.

Learning dead ancient languages (Biblical Hebrew and Greek) through the vehicle of a foreign language (English) could mean that many African students often face an insurmountable hurdle. But, at the same time, what if, in their own languages, African peoples could find linguistic elements that could make learning biblical Greek, for instance, a much more bearable experience? This study seeks to proffer just such a possibility. The Shona language, here representing the many Bantu languages, offers some compelling and irresistible possibilities with regard to the Greek verb in this regard.

Methodology

This study uses the descriptive and comparative linguistics approach. Although initially developed for the historical study of Indo-European languages, this method "has since established itself as a basis for the comparative study of other language families as well."[5] As commonly applied, this method seeks historical relations between languages within similar families such as Indo-European,[6]

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4 Peter James Silzer and Thomas John Finely, *How Biblical Languages Work: A Student's Guide toLearning Hebrew and Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004).

5 Gerrit J. Dimmendaal, *Historical Linguistics and the Comparative Study of African Languages* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 1.

6 Robert A. P. Beeks, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Revised and corrected by Michiel de Vaan (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011); Ekkarh König, *The Meaning of Focus Particles: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1991); Spike Gildea, ed. *Reconstructing Grammar: Comparative Linguistics and Grammaticalization*, Typological Studies in Language, Vol. 43 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000).

Semitic,[7] Asiatic,[8] or Bantu.[9] In this study, however, such is not the case,[9] considering Greek and Shona are from diverse language groups. One is from the Indo-European family, while the other is from the Afro-Asiatic family. Historical studies across these two families have been done in the past but with significant difficulties noted by Angel Sáenz-Badillos.[10] The study seeks not to suggest any kind of historical relationship but to explore ways by which elements of the Shona verbal system can be appropriated to access the Greek verbal system directly.

Essentially, there are four steps to this method: *Firstly*, identification of the two languages to the compared. *Secondly*, the determination of the base language, in this case, is Greek because that is one whose verbal system we seek to understand. *Thirdly*, description of constituent elements of both Greek and Shona verbs. *Fourthly*, comparative analysis of identified elements. In this way, "points of incidental parallelism are brought out, and potential incongruence identified."[11] The theoretical framework

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7 Louis H. Gray, *Introduction to Semitic Comparative Linguistics* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1934); Manwel Mifsud, *Loan Verbs in Maltese: A Descriptive and Comparative Study*, Studies in Semitic Languages and Lingustics, ed. J. H. Hospers and C. H. M. Versteegh (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). Although principally focused on the history of one Semitic language, Hebrew, the following two works achieve that through comparative consideration of other languages in that family group. Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Eduard Yechzekel Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983).

8 Ilia Peiros, *Comparative Linguistics in South East Asia*, Pacific Linguistics Series C-142, ed. StephenA. Wurm (Canberra, Australia: Pacific Linguistics, 1998).

9 Alice Werner, *Introductory Sketch of the Bantu Languages* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1991); Derek Nurse and Gérard Philippson, *The Bantu Languages*, Family Series, 4 (London: Routledge, 2003). The term 'Bantu' which means 'people' in a number of related African languages, is thought to have coined by Wilhelm Bleek. Raymond O. Silverstein, "A Note on the Term 'Bantu' as first used by W. H. I. Bleek,"*African Studies*, 27, no. 4 (1968):211-212.

10 Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, 27-28.

11 Mifsud, *Loan Verbs in Maltese,* 10-11.

underpinning this approach is the observation that "all students increase learning when new patterns are linked to what they already understand."[12]Accordingly, for effective learning to occur, new data (Greek) has to be able to dialogue with and make sense in the framework of already mastered old information (Shona). That is because "whenever individuals try to figure out what something means, they search for patterns that make sense to them."[13] If this fails, learning does not occur effectively, as has often been the case with biblical languages in the African context and others.[14] The general grammatical scaffolding on which the study is based is the building-block approach to NT Greek, pioneered by Richards.[15] The researcher is a native speaker of Shona. A few grammars have been produced on this language, almost exclusively by non-native speakers.[16]First, an illustration is given, followed by the basic verbal framework, tables, and discussions. Conclusions are subsequently drawn, along with appropriate recommendations at the end of the study.

Delimitation

The study is delimited to the verb system on the rationale that verbs offer access to the heart of any language since that is where all the action is. Underlining the importance of theverb, Robertson-Davis says, "Without a clear knowledge of the verb one cannot

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[12] Renate Nummela Cine, et al, *Brain/Mind Learning Principles in Action: Teach for the Developmentof Higher Order Thinking and Executive Function*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2016), 161.

[13] Ibid., 162.

[14] This is an inevitable result owing to the fact that "the brain is designed to perceive and generate patterns and resists having meaningless patterns imposed on it." Renate Nummela Cine, et al, *Brain/Mind Learning Principles in Action*, 161.

[15] W. Larry Richards, *Read Greek in 30 Days* [or less], rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: BreakthroughBooks, 2012).

[16] D. Dale, *Shona Mini Companion* (Repr, 1981; Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1999). Foreign Service Institute, *Shona: Basic Course*, Foreign Service Institute Basic Courses Series, ed. Lloyd B. Swift (Washington D. C.: Foreign Service institute, 1965).

interpret a Greek sentence. Exegesis is impossible and preaching is impoverished."[17] Greek has four modes (also called moods): *indicative*, *subjunctive*, *imperative,* and the *optative*.[18] This

study is limited to the indicative mode, considering that "the indicative is by far the most frequently used mood" in NT Greek.[19] Confining itself to introductory matters, the study doesnot seek to engage in matters relating to verbal aspect debates.[20]

To get started on the subject, our attention will briefly turn to Table 1 below. The table presents the three languages involved in this study: Greek, English, and Shona. Of special interest is how both Shona and English interface with the given Greek infinitives, as suggested by the provided translations.

Table 1: Translating Greek Infinitives

Greek & Shona		English
δυναμαι	λυθειν	*I am able to loose*
ndinogona	*kusunungura*	
δυναμαι	λυεσθαι	*I am able to loose (for) myself*
ndinogona	*kuzvisunungur(ir)a*	

In each of the two Greek infinitives in the table, there are two words: the main verb (δυναμαι) and the supportive verb/s (λυθειν/ λυεσθαι). An apparent similarity with Shona is that it translates the

[17] A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 10th ed.(New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1977), 284.

[18] Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New TestamentGreek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 41.

[19] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 447. Richards notes that there are 15, 000 indicative verbs in the NT and less than 2, 000 each for subjunctive and imperative modes. W. Larry Richards, *Read Greek in 30 Days* [or less], Rev ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Breakthrough Books, 2012), 48.

[20] For advanced learners, these issues are discussed in such works as Sten E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch, eds. *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016).

verbal phrases in 2 words each and in the exact same word order. On the other hand, however, for the same grammatical expressions, English translates the first in 5 words and the second in 7. This example suggests that Shona, just like Greek, is a more compact language than English. Therein lies the possibility that a native Shona speaker could probably learn the Greek verb better using their native language than they would through English or some other like French. The rest of this study is focused on probing what elements of the Greek verbal system could make the Shona verbal system a preferable way to access it, as compared to English, for native Shona speakers.

The first block in Richards' approach to the Greek verbal system is what he terms "the four basic verb forms,"[21] shown in red in the upper part of Table 2 below. The corresponding Shona verbal elements discussed are below.

Table 2: Four Basic Verb Forms

Secondary = All Past Tenses (+ ε augment) **IMPERFECT** Tense Endings				Primary = All non-past Tenses **PRESENT** Tense Endings	
Num.	**Per**	**Active Voice**	**Mid/Pass Voices**	**Active Voice**	**Mid/Pass Voices**
SG	1	-ον	-ομην	-ω	-ομαι
	2	-ες	-ου	-εις	-ῃ(σαι)
	3	-ε(ν)	-ετο	-ει	-εται
PL	1	-ομεν	-ομεθα	-ομεν	-ομεθα
	2	-ετε	-εσθε	-ετε	-εσθε
	3	-ον	-οντο	-ον	-ονται
SG	1	nda-i-	-(zvi)---(w)a	ndi-riku-	-(zvi)---(w)a
	2	wa-i-	-(zvi)---(w)a	u-riku-	-(zvi)---(w)a
	3	a-i-	-(zvi)---(w)a	a-riku-	-(zvi)---(w)a
PL	1	ta-i-	-(zvi)---(w)a	ti-riku-	-(zvi)---(w)a
	2	ma-i-	-(zvi)---(w)a	mu-riku-	-(zvi)---(w)a
	3	va-i-	-(zvi)---(w)a	va-riku-	-(zvi)---(w)a

Table 2 provides the backbone of the verbal systems in dialogue here. Greek personal endings occupy the upper two quadrants. Each of the personal endings shown conveys vital information about any given verb in the Greek indicative mode. This vital information

[21] Richards, *Read Greek*, 49-51

relates to *person* (singular or plural), *number* (1st, 2nd, or 3rd), and *voice* (active, middle or passive).

The upper left quadrant shows the verbal elements for the *imperfect* tense and all other secondary (past) tenses (esp. aorist). The upper right side shows the primary (present, futureand perfect) tense endings.

Correspondingly, the lower half of Table 2 shows the Shona indicative verbal elements, which serve exactly the same function as the Greek verbal endings above, albeit in a different way. Whereas Greek uses verbal endings to convey vital grammatical information, Shona achieves the same by means of prefixes, infixes, and suffixes that have a steady pattern, as shown in Table 2. These Shona verbal elements consist of subject pronouns (e.g., nda-; wa-; a), tense identifiers (-i-/-ri.), reflexive parts (-zvi-), and voice identifiers (-w-). Shona's ability, along with other Bantu languages, to fuse these elements with the verb root ensures the language(s) verbal system(s)' Greek-like density, as illustrated in Table 2 above.

While Table 2 has given the principal *indicative* verbal forms for Greek and Shona, Table 3 gives a paradigm that shows full verbal expressions built on the elements inTable 2. The convention used here is λυω, which is regularly used in Greek grammar for illustration purposes. Understanding its meaning as 'to loose,' the same verb, is used in Shona to illustrate the corresponding verbal inflections in that language.

Table 3: Basic Greek and Shona Verbs

Secondary = All Past Tenses(+ ε augment) **IMPERFECT** Tense Endings				Primary = All non-past Tenses **PRESENT** Tense Endings	
Num.	**Per.**	**Active Voice**	**Mid/Pass Voice**	**Active Voice Voices**	**Mid/Pass**
SG	1	ελυον	ελυομην	λυω	λυομαι
	2	ελυες	ελυου	λυεις	λυῃ(σαι)
	3	ελυε(ν)	ελυετο	λυει	λυεται
PL	1	ελυομεν	ελυομεθα	λυομεν	λυομεθα
	2	ελυετε	ελυεσθε	λυετε	λυεσθε
	3	ελυον	ελυοντο	λυον	λυονται
SG	1	ndaisunungura	ndai(zvi)sunungur(w)a	ndirikusunungura	ndiriku(zvi)sunungur(w)a
	2	waisungungura	wai(zvi)sunungur(w)a	arikusunungura	uriku(zvi)sunungur(w)a
	3	aisunungura	ai(zvi)sunungur(w)a	arikusunungura	ariku(zvi)sunungur(w)a
PL	1	taisunungura	tai(zvi)sunungur(w)a	tirikusunungura	tiriku(zvi)sungungur(w)a
	2	maisunungura	mai(zvi)sunungur(w)a	murikusunungura	muriku(zvi)sunungur(w)a
	3	vaisunungura	vai(zvi)sunungur(w)a	varikusunungura	variku(zvi)sunungur(w)a

Note: A guiding translation for Table 3 is ελυον (I was loosing); ελυομην (I was loosing myself/ I was being loosed); λυω (I loose); λυομαι (I am loosing myself/ I am being loosed). All the other verbs in this table carry the same meanings, reflecting inflections for number and person.

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Tense Identifiers

One of the key features of Richards' approach to the Greek verbal system is the use of tense identifiers. These make it possible to identify all the other tenses that are not covered in Table3. These outstanding tenses are *future*, *aorist,* and *perfect* and their voices. Tense identifiers are "one of the most important" elements given by Richards because by using them, "guesswork is eliminated when it comes to figuring out where a given form fits into a large number of verb and participle table."[22] Fortunately, even here, Shona has corresponding tense identifiers that fuse with the basic verb forms

22 Richards, *Read Greek*, 61.

given in Table 3 above. These, alongside their Greek counterparts, are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4:Tense Identifiers

Tense	Greek	Shona
Future (active and middle)	- σ	- cha
Future (passive)	- θησ	- cha---(w)a
Aorist (active and middle)	- σα	- ka---(zvi)---
Aorist (passive)	- θη	- ka---(w)a
Perfect (active)	- κα	- (none)
Perfect (middle/passive)	- (none)	- (zvi)---(w)a

As shown in Table 4, both Greek and Shona utilize specific tense identifiers. WhereasGreek future verbs are signaled by σ, all Shona future verbs, with no exception, will have the infix -cha- in them. At a glance, one will also immediately notice that all Shona passive verbs end in -*wa*. A notable difference between the two languages at this point is that whereas Greek can use a common form for either future active and middle voices (σ) or perfect middle/passive (none), Shona consistently has distinct forms (-zvi-) for middle and (-wa) for passive voices, as shown in the table. These tense identifiers can help a Shona speaker to immediatelyappreciate the Greek since their own language uses the same system. How these tense identifiers are applied to actual verbal constructions is shown in Table 5 below. Both Greek and Shona application conditions are shown.

Table 5: Tense Identifier Applications

Secondary = All Past Tenses (+ ε augment) With IMPERFECT Tense Endings		Primary = All Non-past Tenses With PRESENT Tense Endings	
Active Voice	**Middle/Passive Voices**	**Active Voice**	**Middle/Passive Voices**
Aorist active (AA): replace cv with: σα	Aorist middle (AM): replace cv with: σα	Future active (FA): insert σ before cv	Future middle (FM): insert σ before cv
Aor. Passive (AP): replace cv with: θη			Future passive (FP): insert θησ before cv
Perf. active (PA): replace cv with: κα			Perf. Middle/passive (PM/P): delete cv
(AA) insert -ka- between subject and verb root	(AM) Insert –kazvi- between subject and verb root	(FA) insert -cha- between subj. and verb root	(FM) insert –chazvi- between subj. and verb root
(AP) insert -ka- as above and -w- before final vowel (fv)			(FP) insert -cha- between subj. and verb root + -w- before fv
(PA) no tense identifier. Same for M/P voices			(PM/P) insert -(zvi)- between subj. and verb root + (w) before fv

As shown in Table 5 above, Greek tense identifiers either replace connecting vowels (CVs), which come between the verb root and the personal endings shown in Table 5 above, or they are simply placed before them.[23] Secondary tense identifiers, in the left quadrant of Table 5 replace the CVs, while the primary tense identifiers are placed before the CVs. One case is different: the perfect middle/passive, which has no tense identifier. Unlike all the others, it deletes the CV but does not replace it with any tense identifier since there is none for this tense form.

The Shona verbal system has no CVs to eliminate to accommodate tenseidentifiers. These are inserted between subject pronouns and the verb root. In cases where theverb is in the middle voice, the reflexive particle -zvi- comes immediately after the tense identifier, before the verb root. So, in the middle voice, both the tense identifier and the reflexive particle (-zvi-) are applied, as just described. The same applies, though with a slightvariation, to verbs in the passive voice. In this case, the tense identifier, as before, is inserted between the subject pronoun and the verb root. The

[23] Greek's use of the connecting vowels was simply meant to enhance pronunciation. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 128.

passive element of the voice, however, is signaled by a -w- that comes before the final vowel. This principle applies to all Shona verbs, considering that all words in this language end in a vowel. When both the Greek and Shona tense identifiers are applied, the full verb forms for both languages look as shown in Tables 6and 7 below, respectively.

Table 6: Greek Verbs with Tense Identifiers

Secondary = All Past Tenses (+ ε augment)			**Primary** = All Non-past Tenses	
Active Voice		**Middle/Passive Voices**	**Active Voice**	**Middle/Passive Voices**
Aorist active: repl. cv with: σα		Aorist middle: replace cv with: σα	Future active: place σ before cv	Future middle: place σ before cv
SG				
1	ἔλυσα	ἐλυσάμην	λύσω	λύσομαι
2	ἔλυσας	ἐλυσω	λύσεις	λύσῃ
3	ἔλυσα(ν)	ἐλυσατο	λύσει	λύσεται
PL				
1	ἔλυσαμεν	ἐλυσαμεθα	λύσομεν	λύσομεθα
2	ἔλυσατε	ἐλυσασθε	λύσετε	λύσεσθε
3	ἔλυσαν	ἐλυσαντο	λύσουσι(ν)	λύσονται
	Aor. Passive: repl. cv with: θη			Future pass. Place θησ before cv
SG				
1	ἐλυθην			λυθήσομαι
2	ἐλυθης			λυθήσῃ
3	ἐλυθη			λυθήσεται
PL				
1	ἐλυθημεν			λυθησομεθα
2	ἐλυθητε			λυθήσεσθε
3	ἐλυθησαν			λυθήσονται
	Perf. active repl. cv with κα			Perf. m/p remove cv
SG				
1	λέλυκα			λέλυ_μαι
2	λέλυκας			λέλυ_σαι
3	λέλυκε(ν)			λέλυ_ται
PL				
1	λέλυκαμεν			λέλυ_μεθα
2	λέλυκατε			λέλυ_σθε
3	λέλυκαν -ασι			λέλυ_νται

Note: A guiding translation for Table 6 is as follows: ἔλυσα (I loosed); ἐλυσάμην (I loosed myself); λύσω (I will loose), λύσομαι (I will loose myself/be loosed). All other verbs in this table are just inflections of the same verb. The same translation values given here apply to Table 7 below.

Table 6 above showcases Greek tense identifiers in actual verbs of different tenses, persons, numbers, and voices, as will be found in the NT. Again, Tables4 and 5 cover all verb tenses in NT Greek. The key to identifying these tenses is the verbal endings in Table 2 (imperfect and present). With regards to the rest of the tenses, however, as represented in Table 5 (aorist; future and perfect), tense identifiers are the key. When considered in conjunction with the verbal endings in Table 2, identification of Greek indicative verbs are assured. It was already demonstrated in Table 2 that in the indicativemode, the Shona verb mirrors the Greek one. This is also the case in the rest of the outstanding tenses, as shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Shona Verbs with Tense Identifiers

Secondary = All Past Tenses			**Primary** = All Non-Past Tenses	
Active Voice		**Middle/Passive Voices**	**Active Voice**	**Middle/Passive Voices**
(AA) insert -ka- between subject and verb root		(AM) -insert -kazvi- between subject and verb root	(FA) insert -cha- between subj. and verb root	(FM) insert -chazvi- between subj. and verb root
SG				
1	nda-ka-sunungura	nda-kazvisunungura	ndi-chasunungura	ndi-chazvisunungura
2	wa-ka-sunungura	wa-kazvisunungura	u-chasunungura	u-chazvisunungura
3	a-ka-sunungura	a-kazvisunungura	a-chasunungura	a-chazvisunungura
PL				
1	ta-ka-sunungura	ta-kazvisunungura	ti-chasunungura	ti-chazvisunungura
2	ma-ka-sunungura	ma-kazvisunungura	mu-chasunungura	mu-chazvisunungura
3	va-ka-sunungura	va-kazvisunungura	va-chasunungura	va-chazvisunungura
	(AP) insert -ka- as above and -w- before final vowel (fv)			(FP) insert -cha- between subj. and verb root + -w- before fv
SG				
1	nda-kasunungurwa			ndi-chasunungurwa
2	wa-kasunungurwa			u-chasunungurwa
3	a-kasunungurwa			a-chasunugurwa
PL				
1	ta-kasunungurwa			ti-chasunungurwa
2	ma-kasunungurwa			mu-chasunungurwa
3	va-kasunungurwa			va-chasunungurwa
	(PA) no tense identifier for this form.			(PM/P) insert -(*zvi*)- between subj. & verb root + (w) before fv
SG				
1	nda-sunungura			nda(*zvi*)sunungur(w)a
2	wa-sunungura			wa(*zvi*)sunungur(w)a
3	a-sunungura			a(*zvi*)sunungur(w)a
PL				
1	ta-sunungura			ta(*zvi*)sunungur(w)a
2	ma-sunungura			ma(*zvi)*sunungur(w)a
3	va-sunungura			va(*zvi*)sunungur(w)a

All that is represented in Table 8 above is what Shona verbs in different tenses look like. All tense identifiers are highlighted in red. All reflexive particles (-*zvi*-) are shown in dark blue and are in bold and italicized. Passive particles are bold and underlined in light blue (w). Two differences between the Greek verbal pattern and the Shona one have to be highlighted at this juncture. The *first* is a reiteration of what has already been stated. While Greek uses the same forms for middle and passive voices in certain instances, Shona, as shown in Table 8, has distinctly different forms for the 2 voices. This is especially important for the middle and passive voices of the perfect tense. As shown in the extreme lower right side of Table 8, when in middle voice, a perfect verb will have the reflexive particle (zvi). However, if the same verb is in the passive voice, the passive marker (-w-) will be used before the final vowel. These two markers are never used together. It can only be one or the other since, as already stated, Shona has distinct forms for each of the 2 voices.

The *second* difference to point out is that Shona does not have any tense identifiers for the *perfect* verbs. In this regard, it is both like and unlike Greek. It is like it to the extent that Greek does not have any tense identifier for the 2 voices of the perfect tense, the middle and the passive. At the same time, Shona is unlike Greek in that the latter language has a tense identifier for the *perfect*, active voice, whereas the former has none.

Conclusion

While appreciating that no two languages are identical, this study has analysed the parallels in the biblical Greek and Shona verbal systems using a comparative linguistics approach. The study was delimited to the indicative mode, exploring all its tenses. The findings of the study suggest that Shona is a highly viable option to teaching and learning the verbal system of biblical Greek. It has more in common with Greek than English, and it is usually used in Shona-speaking communities to teach Greek to people in pastoral training.

Based on the findings of this study, the use of Shona in accessing the Greek verb could significantly enhance the teaching and learning experiences of teachers and students, respectively. The principle involved is simple. Connect what learners need to know (Greek)to what they already know, as provided by culture (Shona). A much less effective way is tointroduce students to what they do not know (Greek) through the grammar of a foreign language they barely understand. With the approach proffered in this study, Greek and other biblical languages could be understood and used more effectively in teaching and preaching the Bible in many parts of Africa and beyond.

Recommendations

1. The study has limited itself to the indicative verbs; it is highly recommended thatthe other modes of the Greek verb system be similarly probed. These are the *subjunctive*, imperative, and optative modes. The infinitive may also be added.
2. This study focused on only one of the three biblical languages, Greek. It would behighly beneficial to explore the other two, Hebrew and Aramaic, in a similar manner.
3. Considering that Shona belongs to a larger family of languages, all together called Bantu, it is worthwhile exploring the possibilities that other languages in this family group also hold in relation to biblical languages.
4. Languages are just one of the numerous cultural elements that could bring Africacloser to the Bible and the Bible closer to Africa. The hermeneutically beneficial aspects of other Africa's cultural elements await exploration. The potential significance of this to Africa's experience of the Bible is great and worth every effort expended in that direction.