

## **An Octosyllabic Kuria Praise Poem**

Leonard Chacha Mwita

### **Abstract**

This paper examines Kuria praise poetry from a prosodic point of view. It argues that though the poem is delivered at great speed, it follows well laid out rhythmic patterns. Further, it claims that the poem is fundamentally a syllabic verse, that is, a verse in which syllable count is the main organizational strategy. The main finding is that the poem under analysis is octosyllabic (i.e. has eight syllable lines). The study shows that phonology and prosody play a role in the production of eight syllable lines. Since poetry uses language as its building blocks, the study looks at some compulsory phonological rules of the Kuria language which apply to the poem. These are followed by the application of optional prosodic rules. The selective application of the prosodic rules creates a poetic system from ordinary language.

## 1.0 Introduction

Kuria is a language that is spoken in Kenya and Tanzania. It has about 500,000 speakers (Cammenga 2004). It has a rich culture of poetry, that is, praise poems, love poems, dirges etc. This paper focuses on praise poetry. Traditionally, the Kuria praise poem is delivered at great speed. This mode of delivery makes one wonder what kind of organization the poet uses in the poem.

In this paper I describe the rhythmic structure of a Kuria poem while being guided by the prosodic theory. I pursue the claim that the poem analyzed here is fundamentally a syllabic verse, that is, a verse which the meter measures the total number of syllables in a line.

Prosody refers to the analysis of the technical elements of poetry. The history of European verse has shown us three distinct systems of prosody (Bridges 1927): the quantitative system, the syllabic system, and the stress system. This paper employs the following principles of the syllabic verse:

- (a) There must be a certain number of syllables in a line of verse.
- (b) Any extra syllables must be accounted for by elision, deletion etc.
- (c) Any syllable may be long or short.

This paper is organized into five sections, as follows: First is an introduction, then a presentation of the data in section two. This is followed by the third section which discusses aspects of Kuria phonology that are relevant to the poem. The rules cited in this section are obligatory in the language. The fourth section looks at how the poem

is organized into lines. This section has optional rules. Finally, there are concluding remarks.

## 2.0 Data

Below is the poem that forms the basis of this analysis. It is written in Kuria orthography. The poem “as performed”, showing syllable divisions, can be seen in Appendix 2.

### A Kuria Praise Poem

1. Nigure nuni ogokeerya  
Hayo wansere kong'aina  
Keuni nendagokeeri  
Nenkanyora nkenyingeno
5. Abamura mbaane ba Mungo  
Abamura mbaane bairyoba  
Keuni ngokeererryande  
Uni ngacha gusumacha  
Nena abamura amaganda
10. Okoba hare nemeyeye  
Waito karibo Masaba  
Hare gegateye eganda  
Egende geraya Ntimaro  
Egende geraya Mogori
15. Tamanyambe obotereba  
Enchera ya kuya Ntimaro  
Gokerambo wabo Chacha  
Mwirot o bahiri Sererya  
Egesaku kebo Mogongo
20. Uni nkomokombokande  
Omontoto oyo nembane sana  
Tamanyambe gose kweri  
Gabaremere<sup>1</sup> Churyasi

- Churyasi Magige o Chacha
25. Uni ngokeererryande  
 Iriina ree hata Gisumo  
 Gisumo ke nyamanyoori  
 Nigo bogokya kinyoorya  
 Hano getanyoorri inkyo
30. Keranyoorya omogoroba  
 Omotema ere ba waito  
 Tamanyambe obotereba  
 Nakahikire kobaru  
 Nakarumere ndaikenda
35. Nena abamura amaganda  
 Tamanyambe gose kweri  
 Wandorra bayibirenge  
 Okoorre buya kongoorra  
 Keuni nendagotooni
40. Omogetang'osa nyatani  
 Waisa agetoorre enati  
 Ekanga gotara ronde  
 Nuni Tauti wa Chacha  
 Omonto ono atagukuura
45. Egesaku ke wabo Choni  
 Uni nigo nkobatebya  
 Egesaku kebo Mobenda  
 Otamobendere taya ogwe  
 Omonto wegesaku geito
50. Umugibinyoorya iching'omb  
 Egesaku kebo Gentaro  
 Waisa asingirwe na kenda  
 Owa ikumi numusubati  
 Uni ngokeererryande
55. Abamura mbaane ba Mungo  
 Kana keuni nembaane  
 Nkomokeeryande

- Mwiro wabakarang'ombe  
 Abakara ng'ombe ibiraryo  
 60. Abande baraarya amacharya  
 Tiga nekore marenge  
 Tasingisambe twigwe

### Translation

1. I have heard it is me you are greeting (praising)  
 So I have started to 'flatter'  
 I will also greet (praise) you  
 Even if it is at this time
5. My comrades of God  
 My comrades of the sun  
 I am also sending greetings.  
 Once I talked (gave praises)  
 With a handful of young men
10. In fact where I live  
 Our home is near Masaba  
 Where they made turns  
 Others going to Ntimaru  
 Others going to Migori
15. So know that with driving  
 The way to Ntimaru  
 At the emaciated one at Chacha's home  
 A person from the Sererya subclan  
 The family of Mogongo
20. I am remembering him  
 That person is a dear friend  
 Surely, do know that  
 Adversity has befallen Julius  
 Julius Magige son of Chacha
25. I am passing my greetings (praises)  
 His name even in Kisumu

- Kisumu where they get them  
 It gets them at dawn  
 If it does not get in the morning
30. It then gets in the evening  
 The player of that which is ours  
 Do know about driving  
 I used to reach where there were crowds  
 I used to bellow (praise) forcefully
35. With a handful of young men  
 Surely, do know that  
 The nasty one became feet (died)  
 You have done well to praise me  
 I will also praise you
40. One from the Getang'osa circumcision group  
 One who fixed a bolt  
 And it never moved  
 I am David son of Chacha  
 A person who does not cry
45. From the same family as John  
 This is what I am telling you  
 From the same family as Mobenda  
 If you do not like him go and 'fall'  
 A person from our family
50. One from the Gibinyoria circumcision group who  
 get cattle.  
 From the same family as Gentaro  
 A person who was partenered in dance with nine  
 The tenth one was a married woman  
 I am passing my greetings (praises)
55. My comrades of God  
 Even me he is my comrade  
 I am greeting (praising) him  
 A person of Abakarang'ombe subclan  
 Keepers of cattle in cowsheds

60. (While) others spread leather strips  
Let me be brief  
Shake so that we hear.

The data was collected in 1995 during a wedding ceremony. It consists of a praise poem with accompanying music from a fiddle and lyre. The praise poem lasts about two and a half minutes when played. The original recording was on audio cassette tape. This was digitized and a compact disc recording made at normal speed and at half speed. The half speed disc made it easier to get all the words and syllables of the poem while the normal speed disc was used to guard against any distortion that could arise from the former. It was therefore possible to listen to small chunks of the poem to determine how the syllables of the poem were arranged.

### **3.0 Kuria Phonology**

This section identifies consonants, vowels, and types of syllables found in the language. It also looks at the issue of vowel length. These factors are important in analyzing the internal structure of lines in poetry.

#### **3.1 Consonants**

The consonant segments of the Kuria sound system are set out in the table below. They are adapted from Cammenga (1994) with slight modifications.

**Table 1: Consonants**

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops: oral		/t/		/k/	
Stops: prenasalized	[mb]	[nt] [nd]		[ŋk] [ŋg]	
Affricates: oral			/tʃ/		
Affricates: prenasalized			[ntʃ]		
Fricatives: oral		/s/			
Fricatives: prenasalized	/β/	[ns]		/ɣ/	/h/
Nasals	/m/	/n/	/ɲ/	/ŋ/	
Trill		/r/			
Flap		/ɾ/			
Glides	[w]		[j]		

Among these consonant phonemes, [w] and [j] are positional variants of /u/ and /i/ respectively. The two sets of sounds are in complementary distribution; glides occurring before vowels and the high vowels occurring before consonants or at the end of words; for example:

- (1) /*(o)yokeeria/* → [*(o)ɣokéérjá*] ‘to greet’ (line 1)  
       /*okeeri/* → [*okeerí*] ‘(you) greet’  
       /*tuiyue/* → [*twííywe*] ‘we hear’ (line 22)  
       /*tuiyure/* → [*twííyüre*] ‘we have heard’

Also, the voiced stops [b], [d], and [g] only occur

as allophones of the voiced continuants /β/, /r/, and /ɣ/ respectively, when these are preceded by a nasal (Cammenga 1994). Thus, [b, d, g] and [β, r, ɣ] are in complementary distribution.

- (2) /Nβaanɛ/ → [mbaané] 'my comrade' (line 5, 6, 55)  
 /NraikeNra/ → [ndaikéénda]<sup>2</sup> 'I do forcefully' (line 34)  
 /ekaNɣa/ → [ekááŋga] 'it did not' (line 42)

The prenasalized stops included in Table 1 above are made up of a nasal-obstruent sequence. In this paper, it is assumed that such a sequence constitutes a single prenasalized consonant.

- (3) /kokeraNβo/ → [ɣo.ké.ráá.mbó] 'at the small dam' (line 17)  
 /NkokeereriaNre/ → [ŋgo.kéé.ré.rjáá.ndé] 'I am sending greetings' (line 7, 25, 54)  
 /eNtʃera/ → [ee.ntʃé.ra] 'way' (line 16)  
 /iNkio/ → [íi.ŋkjo] 'morning' (line 29)

### 3.2 Vowels and Diphthongs

There are fourteen vowels in Kuria with seven contrasting qualities occurring in long and short pairs.

**Table 2: Short Vowels**

	front unrounded	central	back rounded
high	i		u
mid	e		o
mid	ɛ		ɔ
low		a	

**Table 3: Long Vowels**

	front unrounded	central	back rounded
high	ii		uu
mid	ee		oo
mid	ɛɛ		ɔɔ
low		aa	

Diphthongs are rare in this language (Cammenga 1994). So far, only two diphthongs have been identified in the data. These are /ai/ and /ei/ as in these examples:

- (4) /ai/ [ndaíkéeénda] 'I do forcefully' (line 34)  
 /ei/ [yeíto] 'our' (line 49)

There is a possibility that /eu/ and /au/ could also be diphthongs but the fact that the performer puts the vowels in two separate syllables makes me not consider them as diphthongs. Examples from the poem with this type of vowel sequence are as follows.

- (5) [keuni] 'even me' (line 3, 7, 39, 56)  
 [taúti] 'David' (line 43)

### 3.3 Vowel Length

Long vowels can be either phonemic or derived.

#### 3.3.1 Phonemic Vowel Length

The phonemic status of vowel length is seen in the minimal pair below. I will mark tones throughout the paper as follows: unmarked (e.g. a) for low tone and acute accent (e.g. á) for high tone.

(6) [i - ki - βíra]	'the little finger'
[i - ki - βííra]	'a plastic container'
pp - cp - stem	

Vowels that are underlyingly long are limited to the penultimate position of the word. Long vowels in other positions can be shown to be derived.

### 3.3.2 Derived Vowel Length

Another way by which vowel length arises in Kuria is by compensatory lengthening. In such cases vowels are predictably long in the following two environments: (a) before prenasalized stops; (b) after glide formation has occurred.

#### 3.3.2.1 Vowel lengthening before prenasalized stops

In many Bantu languages, vowels are lengthened if they occur before prenasalized stops. Such lengthening is found in Kihehe (Odden & Odden 1999), Kikuria (Cammenga 1994), Luganda (Clements 1986), and Kinyarwanda (Kimenyi 1979) among other languages. This can be formulated as:

#### (7) Phonological Rule 1

$$V \rightarrow [+ \text{long}] / \_ \text{NC}$$

This is illustrated by examples from our data base shown in (8).

(8) Underlying	Surface	Gloss	
/neNkaɲora/	[nééŋkaɲóra]	'even if'	(line 4)
/ɲiNyeno/	[ɲiɲgéno]	'at this time'	(line 4)
/ekaNyá/	[ekááŋga]	'it did not'	(line 42)
/omoNto/	[moontó]	'person'	(line 44, 49)

### 3.3.2.2 Glide Formation

Kuria has many vowel sequences in underlying form but these are never realized on the surface except for /ai/ (Cammenga 1994) and /ei/. Most underlying vowel sequences are resolved by a process of glide formation. For example, the vowel /i/ changes to the glide /j/ if it is followed by another vowel but does not change if it is followed by a consonant.

Here are some cases where /i/ realized as /j/ in the data.

(10) <i>Underlying</i>	<i>Surface</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	
/okokeeria/	[oʝokéérjǎ]	'to greet'	(line 1)
/βirioβa/	[βirjóóβa]	'of the sun'	(line 6)
/sereria/	[sérérja]	'Sererya'	(line 18)
/kijnooria/	[kijnóórja]	'it gets'	(line 28)
/iNkiɔ/	[íinjkiɔ]	'morning'	(line 29)
/keranoria/	[keranóórja]	'it then gets'	(line 30)
/Nkoβateβia/	[ŋkoβáteβjǎ]	'I tell you'	(line 46)
/iβiraario/	[iβíraarjó]	'cowsheds'	(line 59)

Glide formation normally triggers compensatory lengthening of the following vowel. The first vowel in the sequence changes into a glide and the second vowel, which is underlyingly short, consequently lengthens. This is a common occurrence among Bantu languages with a vowel length contrast (Odden & Odden 1999).

In the examples that follow, the first vowel in the diphthong, /u/, also changes into a glide /w/ when it is followed by another vowel. The phonemes /w/ and /u/ share the features [+ high] and [+ round]. It is therefore easy for /u/ to change to the said glide.

There are examples in the data where the vowel /u/

changes to the glide /w/.

- (11) a. /asiNɣirue/ → /asiŋgirwe/ → 's/he was partenered  
with in a dance' (line 52)  
 b. /umuïro/ → /mwiro/ → [mwiŋro] 'person' (line 18, 58)  
 c. /tuiyue/ → /twiɣwe/ → [twiŋwe] 'we hear' (line 62)  
                   glide          compensatory  
                   formation  lengthening

From the examples given in (10) and (11), a glide formation rule can be given as follows:

(12) Phonological Rule 2: Glide Formation Rule

*A high vowel followed by another vowel is realized as a non-syllabic glide.*

$$\left[ \begin{array}{l} + \text{syllabic} \\ + \text{high} \end{array} \right] \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ 2 \end{array} \rightarrow \left[ \begin{array}{l} - \text{syllabic} \\ + \text{long} \end{array} \right] \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ 2 \end{array}$$

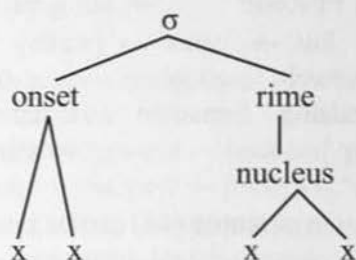
Though it has been stated above that glide formation is accompanied by compensatory lengthening, it is not always the case. There are two instances where lengthening does not take place after glide formation: (i) word finally, (ii) if the glide is followed by two other vowels. Below, we look at glide-vowel sequences in word-final position.

- (13) /okokeeria/ → /oɣokeeria/ → [oɣokeerja] (\*[oɣokeerjaa])  
                   voicing          glide          'to greet' (line 1)  
                   dissimilation  formation

There are also short vowels after a glide if the following segment is a vowel, for example:



(16)



This structure represents a syllable with a branching onset and a non-branching rime, where the rime dominates the nucleus which may branch. All the levels of the structure have potentially binary branching except the rime and terminal nodes.

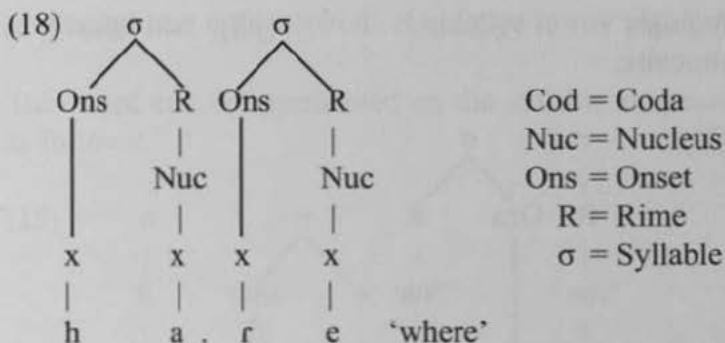
A look at the data shows that Kuria uses only open syllables; the syllable nucleus never combines with a consonant in coda position. The following are the types of syllables found in the Kuria language: V, CV, VV, CVV, and CCV. This means that the Kuria syllable takes the form  $C_0^2V_1^2$  where C denotes a consonant or glide.

The most common syllable in this language is the CV type. Examples of this type of syllable abound in the data.

The most common syllable in this language is the CV type. Examples of this type of syllable abound in the data.

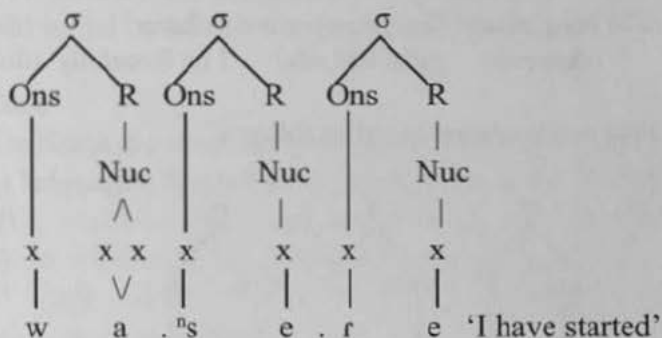
- |             |            |                |          |
|-------------|------------|----------------|----------|
| (17) nigure | [ni.ɣu.re] | 'I have heard' | (line 1) |
| hare        | [ha.re]    | 'where'        | (line 2) |

The word hare can be represented with its syllable structure as follows:



Syllables with a prenasalized consonant fall into the CV type. These are usually made up of a nasal-obstruent-vowel. Here are examples:

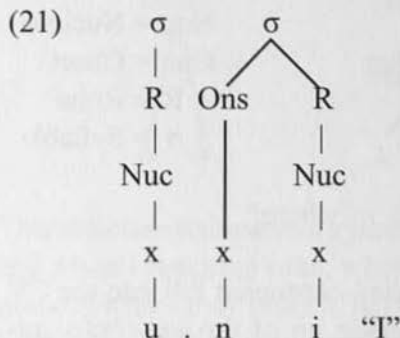
- (19) wansere [waa.nsé.ré] 'I have started' (line 2)  
Ntimaro [nti.má.ro] 'name of a place' (line 16)



Another syllable found in this language is the V-type. According to the data, the onsetless syllable is allowed mostly at the beginning of words. It is exemplified in (21):

- (20) uni [u.ní] 'I' (line 8, 20, 25, 46, 54)  
okoβa [o.ko.βá] 'In fact' (line 10)

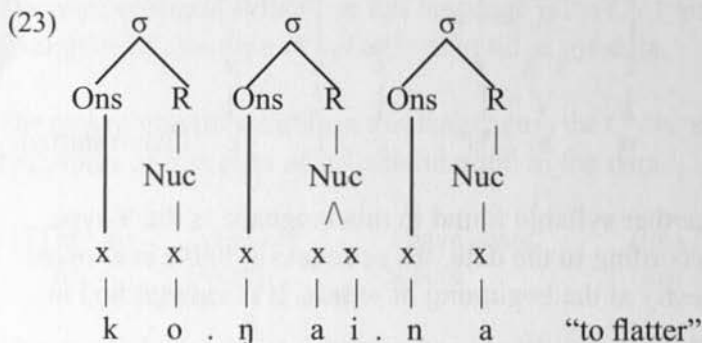
A single vowel syllable is shown with a non-branching structure.



The CVV syllable in Kuria is made up a consonant followed by a diphthong or long vowel. The following are examples:

- (22) kong'aina [ko.ŋaí.na] 'to flatter' (line 2)  
 ndaikenda [ndaí.kéé.nda] 'I do forcefully' (line 34)

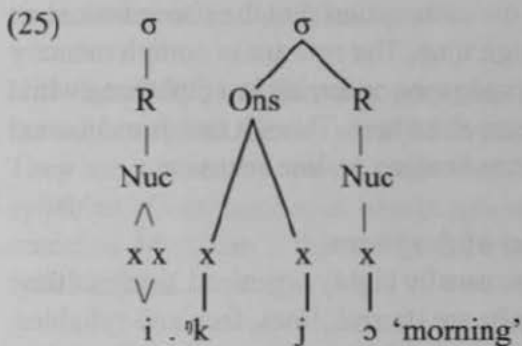
This can be represented as follows:



The other syllable type in Kuria is CCV. There is only one example of such a syllable in the data.

- (24)  $\text{inkio} \rightarrow [\text{ii.ŋkjɔ}]$  "morning" (line 29)

This word can be represented on the syllable structure as follows:



Example (24, 25) above also exemplifies the VV syllable type. This occurs as a result of the lengthening of a vowel in word initial position before a prenasalized stop.

### 3.5 Tone

Tone in Kuria is not lexically distinctive. Like most other Bantu languages, Kuria has two level tones: high (H) and low (L), which are assumed underlyingly (Cammenga 1994), to which may be added a rising tone (Whiteley 1955). Each vowel is marked with tone, either high or low as in these examples:

- (26) a. [tumá] 'sew'  
           [uyutúma] 'to sew'
- b. [torá] 'pierce earlobes'  
           [oyotóra] 'to pierce earlobes'

The rising tone has a sequence of LH within the same

syllable. This is one tone, with the two extreme ends marked to yield a rising contour. Here is an example:

(27) [okoŋainá] 'to flatter'

I proceed under the assumption that the rising tone is an allotone of the high tone. The two are in complementary distribution; the rising tone occurring in a diphthong while the high tone occurs elsewhere. Though tone is mentioned here it has no direct bearing on line scansion.

#### **4.0 Organization of the Poem**

Poetic rhythms are usually highly organized. Some of their organizational units are stanzas, lines, feet, and syllables. In this section I examine these units and show how they are used in organizing the poem.

#### **4.1 Lines in the Poem**

In this poem the poet chants the words of the poem in recitative fashion. This makes the poem distinctive in its prosody and marks it off from common speech. Singing and chanting seem to be the most natural ways of delivering metrical poetry in Kuria. The declamation is spontaneous and the poet improvises the words as he goes along. Moreover there is a fiddle and percussion player who is laying down the rhythm in 12/8 time by striking a note or short tune on the fiddle and pacing the poet with the rattles.

Careful attention to the declamation shows that the poet divides the poem into phrases or clauses which are delivered in one breath. This is done in what is felt to be equal intervals of time. It is this mode of delivery which justifies the division of the poem into lines.<sup>4</sup> The lines in

this poem form some kind of breath group with the last or eighth syllable performed on a low tone and leading to a pause at the end of each line. The generally low last syllable is an anticipation of the end of a unit of measure while the pauses at the end of each group of words act as an indicator of line division.

It is therefore clear that this poem has lines. Lines are the main organizational units of rhythm in this poem. They are formed by words, and words are made up of syllables. Computation of line-length is the first step in scansion. My claim is that this poem is made up of eight syllable lines.

A syllable count conducted in all the 62 lines yielded the following measures:

(28) Lines with 5 syllables	=	1
Lines with 7 syllables	=	4
Lines with 8 syllables	=	56
Lines with 9 syllables	=	1
		—
Total	=	62

This shows that majority of lines in the poem have eight syllables. The regularity or near regularity that we see in the poem suggests that this is a syllabic verse; it is measured according to the number of syllables per line

The claim that this poem is made up of eight syllable lines is not obvious. To show this, we need to know how to count syllables. For such regularity to occur in meter, some adjustments must be made. There are devices which have been used by poets consciously or unconsciously to

bring symmetry to poetic forms. These devices change the length of the lines in a number of ways without affecting their internal metrical structure. In this poem, phonological devices such as initial vowel elision, vowel deletion, and vowel degemination are employed to ensure numerical uniformity of the syllables in the lines and to maintain rhythm. These processes occur mostly due to the prosodic nature of the poem.

#### 4.1.1 Prosodic Rules

These are rules that apply on the regular phonological system of language modifying it for poetic use (Kiparsky 1977). They specify poetic language as a derivative of the system of ordinary language. The principal ways of modification are disregarding certain phonological rules and the addition of others. Prosodic rules are usually optional. Since prosodic rules have a form and content like that of ordinary phonological rules, I will state them in the format of ordinary phonological rules.

##### 4.1.1.1 Initial Vowel Elision

Elision is the adjustment of syllable count by omission. The elision encountered in this data affects mostly vowels and is known as Initial Vowel Elision. This is the elision of the preprefix in a noun. A noun in Kuria canonically consists of a pre-prefix or augment, class prefix, and a noun stem. The pre-prefix vowel is always a copy of the class prefix vowel  $/V_1 - CV_1/$ . Here is an example:

- (29) Noun Class 3: o            – mo            – te    “tree”  
                          pre-prefix    class prefix    noun stem

The Kuria noun classes showing pre-prefixes and class prefixes can be found in Appendix 1.

The pre-prefix is the initial vowel in nouns. Initial Vowel Deletion is represented by the following rule:

(30) Prosodic Rule 1

$V \rightarrow \emptyset / [S \text{ [NOUN]} \_ ]$

This rule deletes the initial vowel in nouns when they are in sentence initial position as the list in (31) shows:

- (31) /aβamura/ → [βamúra] 'youth, young men' (line 6, 55)  
 /eyeNre/ → [yéénde] 'others (cl 4)' (line 13, 14)  
 /aβaNre/ → [βáánde] 'others (cl 2)' (line 60)  
 /eyesaku/ → [yesáku] 'family' (line 19, 45, 47, 51)  
 /omoNto/ → [móóntó] 'person' (line 21, 44)  
 /iriina/ → [ríina] 'name' (line 26)  
 /omoyetanjsa/ → [moyétanjósa] 'one from Getang'osa  
 circumcision group' (line 40)  
 /umuyiβinoria/ → [muyiβinórja] 'one from Gibinyorya  
 circumcision group' (line 50)  
 /owaikumi/ → [waíkúmi] 'the tenth one' (line 53)  
 /aβakara/ → [βakará] 'name of clan' (line 59)  
 /umuiro/ → [mwííro] 'person' (line 18, 58)

I submit that the initial vowel elision is a prosodic rule. This is because in non-poetic speech the elision mentioned above will not occur.

Where a noun has a pre-prefix and a class prefix, the preprefix is easier to delete because words are still recognizable without it. Here is a line with 9 syllables if the Initial Vowel Deletion rule is not applied but 8 if it is applied.

- (32) [e - γε - sa - ku κε - βo mo - γo - ηgo] 9 syllables



When two vowels are in consecutive positions in different words, it can happen that it is the first vowel that is deleted. This is shown as:

- (35) Prosodic Rule 2  
 $V_1 \rightarrow \emptyset / \_ \# V_2$

This is poetic deletion; a device used by the poet to make the numerical intention clear. Here are some examples from the data. The vowel in bold in the underlying form is deleted in the surface form.

- | (36) <i>Underlying Form</i> | <i>Surface Form</i>  |
|-----------------------------|--|
|                             | <i>Gloss</i>   |
| a. /Nuni oyokeeria/         | → [nunóyókeerjá]   |
|                             | 'It is me you are greeting' (line 1)                               |
| b. /mayiye o tʃatʃa/        | → [mayíyotʃátʃá]   |
|                             | 'Magige son of Chacha' (line 24)                                   |
| c. /keranooria omoyoroβa/   | → [keránóórjómoyóróβa]   |
|                             | 'It gets them in the evening' (line 30)                            |
| d. /tamápaNβe oβotereβa/    | → [tamánámbóβotéréβa]  |
|                             | 'So know that with driving' (line 32)                              |
| e. /umuyibinoria itʃiŋɔmbɛ/ | → [muyíβínorjítʃiŋɔmbɛ]  |
|                             | 'One from Gibinyorya circumcision group who gets cattle' (line 50) |
| f. /ŋɔNβe iβirario/         | → [ŋɔmbíβírarjó]   |
|                             | 'cattle in cowsheds' (line 59)                                     |
| g. /omotema ere βa/         | → [omotéméréβá]  |
|                             | 'The player of that which is ours' (line 31)                       |

According to Casali (1997), elision of the first of two adjacent vowels ( $V_1$ ) is more common cross-linguistically, especially at the boundary between two lexical words. Two reasons can be advanced to explain why  $V_1$  elision happened in this data. First, the preservation of word initial

materials is related to the crucial function initial segments play in speech processing. A word can be recognized after the initial segments are processed. The second, and this is relevant for example (36b) only, has to do with functional reasons.  $V_2$  in example (36b) is made up of a one vowel functional word: *Magige o Chacha*. This word carries the information "son of". If it is deleted, all segmental features of that morpheme will be lost and it will not be possible to recover its contents (Schuh 1995; Casali 1997).

Also there are instances where it is the second vowel that is deleted. This is represented by the rule:

(37) Prosodic Rule 3

$$V2 \rightarrow \emptyset / V1 \# \_$$

This is poetic deletion; a device used by the poet to make the numerical intention clear. Here are some examples from the data. The vowel in bold in the underlying form is deleted in the surface form.

Here are examples:

(38) <i>Underlying Structure</i>	$\rightarrow$	<i>Surface Structure</i>
a. /Nβaane <b>a</b> βa/	$\rightarrow$	[mbaané βa] 'comrade of' (line 5)
b. /Nβaane <b>a</b> βa iriooβa/	$\rightarrow$	[mbaané βírjooβa] 'comrades of the sun' (line 6)
c. /tauti <b>o</b> wa tʃatʃa/	$\rightarrow$	[taúti wa tʃátʃá] 'David son of Chacha' (line 43)
d. /Nβaane <b>a</b> βa/	$\rightarrow$	[mbaané βá] 'comrades of' (line 55)
e. /Nkore <b>a</b> mareNye/	$\rightarrow$	[nékoré marééŋge] 'Let me be brief' (line 61)

In (38a-d), the context of the hiatus is made up of a lexical word followed by a function word. In these cases, there is more semantic content encoded in the lexical word and hence the non-elision of its segments. There are two lexical items in (38e). The second one has a preprefix but this is dropped in the surface form.

#### 4.1.1.3 Vowel Degemination

When there are two vowels of the same type in adjacent positions, one of them is deleted, but as in (40) below, it is not possible to tell which has been deleted. The term vowel degemination has been used to account for such a process (Hasegawa 1979, Nespor 1987). Vowel degemination is a rule that deletes one of two identical adjacent vowels across two phonological words. It can be written as:

#### (39) Prosodic Rule 4

V1# V1 → V1

Below are examples from our data.

(40) <i>Underlying Structure</i>	<i>Surface Structure</i>
	<i>Gloss</i>
a. /ɣɛɣateie eɣaŋra/	→ [ɣɛɣatɛjɛɣaanda] 'they made turns' (line 12)
b. /mwiɾo o βahiri/	→ [mwiɾo βahiri] 'a person of the subclan' (line 18)
c. /nena aβamura/	→ [nenaβamúra] 'with young men' (line 35)
d. /aβamura amayaŋra/	→ [βamúramayáándá] 'a handful of young men' (line 35)
e. /oaisa aɣetore/	→ [waísayétóórɛ] 'one who fixed/put it' (line 41)
f. /oaisa asiŋyirue/	→ [waísasiŋgírwe] 'a person who was partnered with in dance' (line 52)

- g. /βaraaria amatfaria/ → [βararjamátjárjá]  
 'they spread leather strips' (line 60)
- h. /omoNto oio/ → [moontójó]  
 'that person' (line 21)
- i. /omoNto ono/ → [moontónó]  
 'a person who' (line 44)

One example will suffice to show that the lines are irregular before deletion but regular (i.e. eight syllables) after deletion.

- (41) [ne - na a - βa - mu - ra a - ma - γa - nda] 10 syllables  
 [ne - na Ø - βa - mu - ra Ø - ma - γa - nda] 8 syllables  
 "With a handful of young men" (line 35)

#### 4.1.1.4 Prefix Allomorphy

This is a process by which the poet intentionally substitutes one grammatical variant with another one. Poetic grammar is superimposed on the grammar of the language. The process increases the number of syllables in a line. Only two cases are noted in the data.

- |      |                      |                     |           |
|------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| (42) | <i>Expected Form</i> | <i>Surface Form</i> |           |
|      |                      | <i>Gloss</i>        |           |
| a.   | [tiya ŋkore]         | [tiya nekore]       |           |
|      |                      | 'Let me do'         | (line 61) |
| b.   | [hare mmepeje]       | [hare nemepeje]     |           |
|      |                      | 'Where I live'      | (line 10) |

This is an example of formulaic patterns that performers employ in poetry. I submit that *nekore* and *nemepeje* are poetic lexicon since they are found in this form only in poetry. The phrase *tiya nekore mareŋge* is commonly used by Kuria poets to signal the end of the poem.



- /NkomokeerjaNre/ → [ɲkómokeerjáánde]  
 \*[nekomokerjaande]  
 'I am greeting him' (line 57)

This shows that this is not phonology. I propose that this is a lexical convention similar to the Kiparskian prosodic rules. Like other prosodic rules, the rule described above is optional. Below is the line in which substitution of allomorphs was used and another one which shows the line without application of the process.

- (46) [ti - ɣa ne - ko - rɛ ma - ɣɛɛ - ɲɔɛ] 8 syllables  
 [ti - ɣa Ø - ɲko - rɛ ma - ɣɛɛ - ɲɔɛ] 7 syllables  
 'Let me be brief' (line 61)

The next example happens to be the only line in the poem with nine syllables.

- (47) [o - ko - βa ha - re ne - me - ɲe - ɲe] 9 syllables  
 'In fact where I live' (line 10)

It is evident that the motivation of using allomorphy alternation in (48) is other than to bring the number of syllables in the line to eight. The poet is more concerned in this line with poetic formula (*nemeɲe*) than the number of syllables.

#### 4.1.1.5 Consonant Elision

Consonants can also be elided, so that syllables on either side are fused. This is shown by the optional rule below:

- (48) Prosodic Rule 5  
 C → Ø / V1 - V1

There is only one example of this type of process in the data. This is illustrated in (49).

- 49) [ee.ntfe.ra(j)a ku.ja nti.ma.ro]  
 'On the way to Ntimaro' (line 16)

In the line above, the glide *j* is elided thereby making the preceding syllable *-ra* to join the vowel left behind after the elision to form one syllable */raa/*. The result reduces the number of syllables in the line from nine to eight.

#### 4.1.1.6 Multiple Processes

In some lines, two or more prosodic rules apply. In the lines given below, initial vowel elision (IVE), vowel degemination (VD), vowel deletion (VD) and prefix allomorphy (PA) are used to bring them to eight syllables. Here are examples:

- (50) a. [a - βa - mu - ra mbaa - nε a - βa Muu - ŋgo]  
 10 syllables  
 [Ø - βa - mu - ra mbaa - nε Ø - βa Muu - ŋgo]  
 IVE VD 8 syllables  
 'My comrades of God' (line 5)
- b. [o - moo - nto o - jo ne - mbaa - nε saa - na]  
 10 syllables  
 [Ø - moo - nto Ø - jo ne - mbaa - nε saa - na]  
 IVE VG 8 syllables  
 'That person is a dear friend' (line 21)
- c. [o - ta - mo - βεε - nde - re ta - ja o - γwe]  
 10 syllables  
 [Ø - ta - mo - βεε - nde - re ta - ja Ø - γwe]  
 IVE VD 8 syllables  
 'If you do not like him, go and "fall"' (line 48)

- d. [ti - γa ηko - rε a - ma - rεε - ηγε] 8 syllables  
 [ti - γa ne - ko - rε Ø - ma - rεε - ηγε] 8 syllables  
                   PA                  VD  
 'Let me be brief' (line 61)

In example (50d) the application is stylistic because the line already had eight syllables but since the poet has to use the formulaic phrase *nekore mareenge* to signal the end of the poem; he substitutes {N-} with {ne-} but has to reduce the number of syllables by initial vowel elision.

Having determined the length of the normal line, I proceed to determine whether lines form stanzas in this poem.

#### 4.2 Stanza

The poet delivers the whole poem from beginning to end without any structural indications of where the stanzas start or end. In other poems like Swahili classical poetry, this could be indicated by the poet slowing down on the last line of the stanza, but this does not happen in this poem. Also, there are no rhyme schemes which act as a guide to the stanzas. These are indications that as a structural unit this poem does not have stanzas.

Semantic indicators like change of theme can also be used to divide the poem into stanzas. I looked at the poem using this criterion and there were no clear divisions which delineate stanzas. This confirms that there are no stanzas in the poem.

#### 6.0 Conclusion

This paper has looked at Kuria praise poetry from a prosodic point of view. It has established that despite the fact that the poet performs at high speed and produces the

words of the poem spontaneously, he does indeed employ specific rhythmic patterns. The study has found that fundamentally, the poem has eight syllable lines. Since most praise poems are recited in similar fashion, I take this to be the stereotype organization of the Kuria praise poem. It has also been shown that both phonology and prosody play a role in the production of the eight syllable lines. Compulsory phonological rules must apply before optional prosodic rules. The two however contribute in determining the length of the lines in poetry.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The translation of this line is problematic. It is not clear what 'gabaremere' means in this context. The translation is therefore an approximation of what I think it refers to.

<sup>2</sup> Compare:

/NraikeNra/ → [ndaikéénda] 'I do forcefully'

/oraikeNra/ → [oraikéénda] 'You do forcefully'

/araikeNra/ → [araikéénda] 'S/he does forcefully'

<sup>3</sup> PP = personal pronoun; Ass 'a' = Associative 'a'; PPRoot = personal pronoun root

<sup>4</sup> The line is an important unit in the construction of praise poems. Apart from being a grammatical and semantic unit, it is a rhythmic unit of utterance.

### A Glossary of Terms Used

*affricate* – is a consonant sound that begins with a complete obstruction of the breath stream and concludes with an incomplete closure and a sound of friction.

*allomorph* – a unit of meaning that can vary in sound, that is, phonologically without changing meaning.

*allophone* – is a phonetic variant of a phoneme in a particular

language.

*alveolar* – is a consonant that is produced with the tongue against the alveolar ridge.

*bilabial* – a consonant produced by both lips.

*diphthong* – a vowel combination involving a quick smooth movement from one vowel to another, but forming a single vowel sound.

*elision* – is the deletion or omission of one or more sounds (consonant, vowel, syllable) in a word or phrase.

*fricative* – is a consonant produced by forcing air through a narrow channel made by placing two articulators together.

*glide* – a sound that is halfway between a consonant and a vowel e.g. y or w.

*octosyllabic* – a poem having eight syllables in each line; also, a line of verse containing eight syllables.

*phoneme* – is the smallest contrastive unit in the sound system of a language.

*phonology* – is the study of how sounds are organized and used in natural languages.

*prenasalized consonant* – a sequence of a nasal plus plosive that form a single consonant e.g. the Swahili word *kamba* ‘rope’ has the phonemes *k/a/mb/a*. *mb* is a prenasalized consonant.

*trill* – a consonant sound produced by vibrations between the articulator and the place of articulation.

*velar* – a consonant produced with the back part of the tongue against the back part of the roof of the mouth (velum).

**References**

- Bickmore, Lee Stephen. 1989. *Kinyambo Prosody*. PhD Dissertation. UCLA.
- Biggs, Henry Parkman. 1996. *A Statistical Analysis of the Metrics of the Classical French Decasyllable and Classical Alexandrine*. PhD Dissertation. UCLA.
- Bridges, Robert. 1927. A Letter to a Musician on English Prosody. *Collected Essays* Vol. II. London. Oxford University Press.
- Burling, Robbins. 1966. The Metrics of Children's Verse : A Cross-Linguistic Study. *American Anthropologist* 68: 1418 – 1441.
- Cammenga, Jelle. 1994. *Kuria Phonology and Morphology*. PhD Dssertation. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- Casali, Roderic F. 1997. Vowel Elision in Hiatus Contexts: Which Vowel Goes? *Language* 73.2: 493 – 533.
- Chatman, Seymour. 1965. *A Theory of Meter*. London. Mouton & Co.
- Chen, M. 1979. Metrical Structure: Evidence from Chinese Poetry. *Linguistic Inquiry* 10: 371–420.
- Clements, G. N. 1986. Compensatory Lengthening and Consonant Gemination in Luganda. Leo

Wetzels & Engin Sezer, eds., *Studies in Compensatory Lengthening*, Foris, Dordrecht

- Clements, G. N. & John Goldsmith. 1994. Autosegmental Studies in Bantu Tone: Introduction. *Autosegmental Studies in Bantu Tone*. Dordrecht. Foris Publications.
- Clements, N. George & Samuel J. Keyser. 1983. *CV Phonology: A Generative Theory of the Syllable*. Cambridge. MIT Press.
- Cole, Thomas. 1972. Classical Greek and Latin. *Versification: Major Language Types*. New York. Modern Language Association.
- Halle, Morris & Samuel J. Keyser. 1966. Chaucer and the Study of Prosody. *College English* 28: 187-219.
- Hasegawa, Nobuko. 1979. Casual Speech vs Fast Speech. *CLS* 15: 126 - 137.
- Hayes, Bruce. 1988. Metrics and Phonological Theory. Newmeyer, Fredrick (ed). *Linguistics : The Cambridge Survey vol. II Linguistics Theory : Extensions and Implications*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Hayes, Bruce & Abigail Kaun. 1996. The role of phonological phrasing in sung and chanted verse. *The Linguistic Review* 13: 243-303.

- Hayes, Bruce & Margaret MacEachern. 1996. Are there lines in Folk Poetry? *UCLA Working Papers in Phonology* 1: 25-42.
- Hayes, Bruce & Margaret MacEachern. 1998. Quatrain form in English folk verse. *Language* 74.3: 473-507.
- Herbert, K. Robert. 1975. Reanalyzing Prenasalized Consonants. *Studies in African Linguistics* vol. 6, No 2. UCLA.
- Kimenyi, Alexandre. 1979. *Studies in Kinyarwanda and Bantu Phonology*. Carbondale. Linguistic Research.
- Kiparsky, Paul. 1968. Metrics and Morphophonemics in the *Kalavela*. C. Gribble (ed.) *Studies Presented to Professor Jakobson by his Students*. Cambridge. Slavica Publishers.
- Kiparsky, Paul. 1975. Stress, Syntax, and Meter. *Language* 51.3: 576 – 616.
- Kiparsky, Paul. 1977. The Rhythmic Structure of English Verse. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8.2: 189 – 247.
- Kiparsky, Paul & Gilbert Youmans. 1989. *Phonetics and Phonology: Rhythm and Meter* vol. 1. San Diego. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.
- Lieberman, Mark. 1975. *The Intonation System of English*. PhD Dissertation. MIT.

- Lord, Albert. 2000. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press.
- Malof, Joseph. 1970. *A Manual of English Meters*. Bloomington. Indiana University Press.
- Muniko, S. M., & Muita Magige, B. & Ruel, M. J. (eds). 1996. *Kuria-English Dictionary*. London. International African Institute.
- The New Testament in Igikuria (Endagano Ehea)*. 1996. Nairobi. The Bible Societies of Kenya and Tanzania.
- Nespor, Marina. 1987. Vowel Degemination and Fast Speech Rules. *Phonology Yearbook* 4: 61 – 85.
- Odden, David & Mary Odden. 1999. Kihehe Syllable Structure. van der Hulst, Harry & Nancy A. Ritter (eds). *The Syllable: Views and Facts*. Berlin. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Prince, Allan. 1989. Metrical Forms. In *Phonetics and Phonology: Rhythm and Meter* Vol. 1. San Diego. Academic Press. pp. 45 – 80.
- Schuh, Russell G. 1995. Aspects of Avatime Phonology. *Studies in African Linguistics* 24.1: 31 – 67.
- Shapiro, Karl & Robert Beum. 1965. *A Prosody Handbook*. New York. Harper & Row Publishers.

- von Staden, P. M. C. 1973. The Initial Vowel of the Noun in Zulu. *African Studies* 32.3: 163 – 181.
- Tarlinskaja, Marina. 1976. *English Verse: Theory and History*. The Hague. Mouton.
- Tarlinskaja, Marina. 1993. *Strict-Meter in English Poetry: Compared with Russian and German*. Alberta. University of Calgary Press.
- Whiteley, W. H. 1955. *The Structure of the Kuria Verbal and Its Position in the Sentence*. PhD Dissertation. University of London.
- Wimsatt, W. K. 1972. *Versification: Major Language Types*. New York. Modern Language Association.

## Appendix 1: Kuria Noun Classes

Class	Prefix (augmented)	Class prefix	Examples	Gloss
1	o-	-mo-	omoontó	'person'
2	a-	-βa-	aβaantó	'people'
3	o-	-mo-	omoté	'tree'
4	e-	-me-	emeté	'trees'
5	i-	-ri-	iriiyí	'egg'
6	a-	-ma-	amayí	'eggs'
7	e-	-ke-	eγeentó	'thing'
8	i-	-βi-	iβiintó	'things'
9	e-	∅	eβatá	'duck'
10	i-	-tʃi-	itʃiβatá	'ducks'
11	o-	-ro-	oroβáγɔ	'hedge'
12	a-	-ka-	aγatʃúβa	'small bottle'
14	o-	-βo-	oβokáánó	'sesame seed'
15	o-	-ko-	oγosóma	'to read'
16	a-	-ha-	Ahasé	'a place'
17	∅	ku-	γuusúkúuri	'in/at school'
18	∅	mu-	Moonsé	'inside'
19	i-	-hi-	ihiβéγɔ	'small seeds'
20	u-	-γu-	uγutʃúβa	'big bottle'

**Appendix 2: Performed Poem Showing Syllables and Tone (high tone in acute accent)**

Due to format restrictions, Appendix 2: Performed Poem Showing Syllables and Tone (high tone in acute accent) could not be printed. If you would like more information on Appendix 2: Performed Poem Showing Syllables and Tone (high tone in acute accent), please contact Leonard Chacha at [chacha@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:chacha@humnet.ucla.edu).