

## Morphophonemic Reforms in Thuonjaj Orthography: An Excerpt from “Thuonjaj Cidmende” – A Rebuttal

Few days ago I had the good fortune of coming across a carefully crafted radical proposal for writing of the Dinka Language by a learned colleague named Aleu Majok and his team member Maawan Gordon Muortat and their associates Makuei Mabioor Deng and Santino Miabek Dau. Given the importance that the language holds in Culture and Human Progress, anything that may alter the course of the language needs to be taken seriously. It is within this context that I have chosen to engage the above mentioned gentlemen in a full rebuttal.

I will approach this from the point of view of my personal knowledge and encounter with the language. I will leave out researched work and available literature on Thuongjang to another day when time permits

I do not consider myself an expert in Thuongjang but I believe I have had enough interaction with written Thuongjang since childhood that my views may help in promoting Thuongjang – which I believe is the core desire of the proponents of *Thuongjang Cidmende*

I am also not a trained linguist so I will leave out a deeply technical approach until I have had the time to engage in academic work of this nature. For the purpose of this rebuttal, my English and Thuongjang language skills are sufficient to enable me understand the position of the proponents of Thuongjang Reforms

For the purpose of clarity, the proponent’s words are *italicized* and indented to the right by one tab while my counter arguments are in normal text

It is true that some reforms in written Thuongjang are long overdue. On that we agree but which reforms exactly? My understanding of your position paper is that you are in favor of totally discarding the existing Thuongjang Alphabets. If we take this as the premise, it would be unprecedented. Thuongjang as I know it is very rich and complex. If for instance we were to consider all the nuances, Thuongjang Alphabet would be very long and confusing. I suppose that was a consideration the pioneers of written Thuongjang might have made to come up with 27 letters of the Alphabet. The other six letters (Akeer yau) are variants. I have never fully considered them as part of the alphabet. But if you may, then we have 33 alphabets

From the Introductory paragraph on Page 2, the writer had this to say:

*Nevertheless, discussions and proposals for reforms have so far focused on mostly the vowel system (representation of tones and length, having had the breathiness aspect already settled by Dhuruai's umlauted vowels). The morphophonemic anomalies which form part of the reforms proposed in "Thuongjaj Cidmende", a radical proposal for a total revision and revamping of Thuongjaj orthography and grammar, have not been raised or addressed anywhere in the available literature on the language. This note, an excerpt from "Thuongjaj Cidmende", provides a brief explanation and illustration on only the morphophonemic reforms on [b, p], [d, t], [dh, th], [k, g], [u, w] and [i, y] as codas in lone morphemes (or single basic word unit) and for [u, w] and [i, y] as nuclei (or median letters in words).*

I do not believe serious morphophonemic anomalies exist that will warrant total revision and revamping of Thuongjaj grammar. For example what may be needed is proper understanding of the letters of the Thuongjaj Alphabet for which you have proposed the reforms such as [b, p], [d, t], [dh, th], [k, g], [u, w] and [i, y]. As it shall become clearer in the following paragraphs, I would like to bring to your attention that although softness of tone in the pronunciation of a particular Alphabet may make it sound like the other, for example, [b,p], the logic does break down in subsequent usage of the word especially in its grammatical application

### **Credibility of the Reforms**

*For the benefit of readers, I would like to, first and foremost, underline that I am not a linguist nor did I have a conventional training in this field to speak with authority on these proposed reforms. But usually linguists work with native speakers of a language in issues like these. Hence, as a passionate and analytical native speaker, I will attempt to illustrate the logic that necessitates these reforms which I believe are necessary to adopt if we are to retain the authenticity and ease the grammar of the language, Thuongjaj. Radical as they may be, I hope they will be understandable and sensible to other native speakers. [Aleu Majok, Page 2]*

I agree with you that credibility is as important as any reform desired. In this case, your credibility stems from the fact that you are a native speaker of the language for which these reforms are desired, and one that is very passionate about it for that matter. However, another minimum requirement here would be the written works in Thuongjaj. This is to say that the Reformer would be required to have a mastery of the language as to be able to write articles, books and/or express ideas exclusively in Thuongjaj without the aid of another language. If you write the language long enough, you will gain the leverage to reform it without the risk of future Linguistic Failure/Language Crash as your experience would have been maximal. In the absence of individual training in the Linguistics or the inability to write fluently in Thuongjaj,

one would still be able to engage in the Reforms as a purely academic matter if and when their subjects of study are those who have written extensively in Thuongjɔŋ and/or have proven understanding of the language in a peer reviewed system

I share in your passion to improve our language. As you present your logic for the reforms, I will put forward counter arguments on Thuongjɔŋ authenticity and grammar while working with you on areas for which we agree to reform

*Furthermore, the proposal on these reforms is a conclusion of observational and intuitive research work done with many Muonyjjeen/Jieen; those who are literate in other languages as well as Thuongjɔŋ and those who are completely illiterate (only monolingual in spoken Thuongjɔŋ). While the former group may sometimes have their pronunciations corrupted under the influence of second languages they are literate in, observations from the latter group remarkably manifest and support the validity of these reforms. It is therefore helpful to refer to this group where further investigations and substantiation are needed. [Aleu Majok, Page 2]*

This is true. The Dinka who are literate in other languages may not be a reliable research group as their pronunciations may be corrupted. However, the observatory research on the monolingual Thuongjɔŋ speakers may need further research because in most other languages, words may or may not be spelled as exactly as they sound. As we know it, this is too common in both English and French and that has not necessitated reforms. In Thuongjɔŋ, this is less common, in fact almost non-existent. But vowel breathiness is quite an issue that can cause spelling distress

*Another point to underscore is that, unlike dialect-specific spelling and other grammatical issues, these observations cut across all dialects and are in no way dialect constrained (at least as far as I have noted from my discussion with speakers of different dialects). [Aleu Majok, Page 4]*

You are right; there should be no dialect constraints in the writing of Thuongjɔŋ. Differences in dialect are minor issues which do not interfere with language structure. For example in American English, we have **organise** while the same word is spelled **organized** in British English. Likewise in Thuongjɔŋ, **kiir** (river) is acceptable in certain dialects while **ciir** (river) is acceptable to others. This is only a spelling difference which doesn't change word and sentence structure in any significant way

## Significance of the Reforms and the Position of the Linguists

*“Thuongjɔŋ Cidmende” is inspired by the need to write Thuongjɔŋ as much exact as the native speak it (what we speak is what we write and what is written is what is spoken). Doing this does not only achieve maximum word clarity possible but it also conserves the natural phonology and phonetics of the language. In part, there is an agreement on this among many linguists and writers who researched into Thuongjɔŋ.*

*Duerksen (1994) and Ladd (2012) summarise this into four principles.*

*Principle 1: “represent linguistic distinctions to the greatest extent possible”.*

*Principle 2: “don’t change more than necessary”.*

*Principle 3: “don’t use symbols that may cause technical problems”.*

*Principle 4: a unified orthography for all dialects*

*“Thuongjɔŋ Cidmende” is in accord with Principles 1 and 4, although in a different approach, but disregards the rest on the basis of significance of the reforms. The morphophonemic reforms herein illustrated and the concept of “The New Thuongjɔŋ Alphabet” which is based on the Nilerian script (also a new script invented for the purpose of correctly writing South Sudanese languages starting with Thuongjɔŋ) are directly and sharply contentious with Principles 2 and 3 respectively. Thus, the radical characterisation others have already made of these reforms. [Aleu Majok, Page 3]*

As you have mentioned, it is true that your proposal is so radical as to depart from Principle 2 and 3. You are exactly proposing to change more than is necessary which is very harmful for a language still under development. It also appears that in ambitiously wanting to write Thuongjɔŋ Cidmende, you will be tempted to use lots of symbols which will cause technical problems in violation of Principle 3

On Principle 1, Linguistic Distinction in Thuongjɔŋ has been represented by, for example, the inclusion of two extra letters of the alphabet “ɛ” and “ɔ”. These two letters are variants of the ‘e’ and “o” which are only distinctive to Thuongjɔŋ in sound and content

On Principle 4, we are totally in agreement that a unified orthography for all dialects be developed. This has been long overdue and it is time, we do it with the greatest urgency that it deserves. There is consensus among Thuongjɔŋ enthusiasts that Rek is somewhat a standard version of all the other dialects within Thuongjɔŋ. After wide ranging interactions with speakers of Padang Dialect, I also add that a future unified Thuongjɔŋ orthography will borrow heavily from Padang Dialect

On the proposal for the New Thuongjɔŋ Alphabet based on the Nilerian Script, rather than the Latin alphabet, I will reserve my comments until further research. I disagree with the premise that we need a new Alphabet for writing Thuongjɔŋ. If reasonable ground exists, which doesn’t exist at the moment, for a change in Thuongjɔŋ Alphabet then a discussion on whether to retain Latin or move to a new Nilerian Script will be reopened. For now, I maintain that Thuongjɔŋ can be improved but with the existing Latin alphabet in place

## **The situation and Manifestation**

***Situation 1:** Misplaced use of devoiced for voiced plosives when they function as codas in lone morphemes, bound morphemes or in compound words containing either lone/bound morphemes or both.*

***Situation 2:** Misplaced use of [u] for [w] and [i] for [y] when they function as medians in form of diphthongs words.*

*From the Muonyjang phonological point of view, there is no logic in the current spelling for the existence of the above situations in the Latin-based Thuongjaj orthography. Yet, phonemes or rather letters involved in Situation 1 play a crucial role in Thuongjaj grammar as will be shown shortly. Treating them as now done in the current spellings presents enormous morphological challenges in proper and common nouns, for example, Luεeth Majok Akuei (pronounced as Luenh Major Akuei) and amadic (from amat yic) respectively [Aleu Majok, Page 3]*

On the contrary, I find that the logic holds for the current spellings in Thuongjaj. As a matter of Spelling Rules in current Thuongjaj Orthography, words ending in “th” pronounced “tha” or an equivalent “s” sound in English do change their ending to “nh” in pronunciation only. Likewise words ending in “k” do change their endings to “ng” or “ŋ” in pronunciation but not written form: e.g. Luεeth Majok Akuei becomes Luenh e Major Akuei as you correctly put it. Your other example amat (meeting) and amatic or amat yic (in the meeting) is a different case all together. This falls under the rules of truncated compound words in Thuongjaj. Amatic is an appropriate truncated version of amat yic (amatyic would be wrong because Thuongjaj orthography DOES NOT allow a consonant after a consonant)

Let us apply your logic for a new Thuongjaj orthography to the above situation: Luεedh Major Akuei would still become Luenh Major Akuei as precisely as it is pronounced. And amad (meeting) would still become amadic or amad yic. Suffices to say, your proposed changes in spellings do not carry corresponding changes in Thuongjaj grammar

Let me provide a few more examples:

1. Thukul (school). The “th” in the beginning can be pronounced as a soft or hard “s” and would still be correct
2. Thon (bull). The “th” in the beginning is better pronounced as a hard “s”
3. Ajith (chicken), lueth (lie), cath (walk), etc. The “th” in the end carries a hard “s” sound. The hard “s” sound makes “th” sound like a “dh” but they are very distinctive
4. Dhuk/dhok (boy). This is a clear case for the use of “dh”. If you were to change “th” to “dh” in word endings, what does the letter “th” become?

***Situation 1: Misplaced use of devoiced for voiced plosives when they function as codas in lone morphemes, bound morphemes or in compound words containing either lone/bound morphemes or both.***

*This situation will be explained by looking at the devoiced-voiced plosive pair [devoiced, voiced] and the vowel-semivowel pair [vowel, semivowel]. That is, [p, b], [c, j], [t, d], [k, g], [th, dh], [i, y] and [u, w] respectively. The first letter from each of these pairs – [p, b], [c, j], [t, d], [k, g], [th, dh], [i, y] and [u, w] – is currently incorrectly written as a finale in lone words or compound words.*

*For example:*

*Lone words: tiop (pasted soil), loc (peg), dit (bird), tiok (mud), dhieth (birth), luoi (work) and baau (lake)*

*Compound words: rapdit (wild corn grass), apuocthiak (bride), miεtpuo“o“u (happiness),*

*muɔɔkmeth (babysitting), jiethpuoou (shock), baaicielic (courtyard), akeunhom (neighbourhood).*

*According to “Thuongjaj Cidmende”, these words, considering correction to Situation 1 only, should be spelt as:*

*Lone words: tiɔɔb, loj, did, tiog, dhiedh, luɔɔy and baaw*

*Compound words: rabdid, apɔɔjthyag, miɛdpuoow, muɔɔgmeth, jiɛdhpooow, baaycielij and akewnhom.[Aleu Majok, Page 3-4]*

Except for the [i,y] and [u, w] pair, the first letter from each of the other pairs is a strongly devoiced plosive for example the “p” in [p,b] is devoiced while “b” is voiced. Sometimes it may look like one should be substituted for the other but that is not the case. It boils down to how we pronounce the words as you have provided them in the above examples. As you have mentioned elsewhere in this document, we have these same problems in English and other languages. This is not enough ground for reforms

Let us pick the [t,d] pair and subject it to your new logic:

Tit (wait) becomes tid while tit yen/xen/an (wait for me) becomes tid yen/xen/an (wait for me). In pronunciation, tit yen/xen/an truncates to titɛɛn/titaan. If you truncate (and truncations are way too common in Thuongjaj) tid yen/xen/an to tidɛɛn/tidaan, that is a totally different word. This is to say that the voiced/devoiced vowel apparent confusion is a necessary nuance of the language itself

On [k,g] pair: Xok (cows). Xokiic (among the cows). Xogiic will have no meaning

### **Combined Corrections for Situation 1 and Situation 2**

*The above words, after a combined correction of both situations, can be correctly spelt as we speak them as follows: tyɔɔb, loj, did, tiog, dhyedh, lwɔɔy, baaw, rabdid, apɔɔjthyag, myɛdpwoow, mwɔɔgmedh, jyɛdhpwoow, baaycyelij*

*More examples of new spellings based on these reforms.*

*[p, b]: Warrab, Alyab, Matyɔɔb, alyaab, akob, arob, tab, lab, deb, rub, yieb, ajyeb, etc*

*[c, j]: Kwajjog, Cyej, Kyej, Akuj, cwej, wej, waj, moj, kɔɔj, kɔɔj, kɔɔj, dhij, pij, dɔɔj, laj, etc*

*[t, d]: Dud, Akod, gud, gaad, wid, bud, amad, pwood, dwod, adeed, kwɛɛd, awed, etc*

*[k, g]: Rumbeg, Dug, Gagrial, thɔɔg, dhɔɔg, dhag, wag, leg, tig, myog, yog, lug, etc*

*[th, dh]: thidh, widh, wadh, lwɛɛdh, apedh, nyidh, kwedh, weedh, podh, etc*

*[i, y]: Ayiɛɛy, Byɔɔr, Abyɛy, Pyɔɔk, kwyɛg, pyen, cyeen, byaar, yay, rwaay, cwaay, etc*

*[u, w] Twij, Makwey, Alew, Ayiy, kwaar, kwɔɔd, kwej, yweg, awoow, mɔɔw, paw, piw, etc [Aleu Majok, Page 4]*

These spellings are based on a new Thuongjaj Alphabet whose rules you have not defined for your readers. In the existing Thuongjaj Alphabet, a consonant cannot follow another consonant in a word for example in *tyɔɔb*, “t” and “y” are consonants, in *dhyedh*, “dh” and “y” are consonants, in *lwɔɔy*, “l” and “w” are consonants, in *apɔɔjthyag*, “j”, “th” and “y” are consonants (Three consonants consecutively is quite out of place). The rest follow the same

However, I will pick out a few more:

In *Warrab*, this is a compound word meaning war e rap (the pool of the dura or the pool where dura grows). In Thuongjang, when the last letter of the first word in a compound word is the same as the first letter of the last word in the compound word, you drop one of those letters. Therefore war rap becomes *Warap*. On the same note, *thok kuo/kua* (our goats) becomes *thokuo/thokua* (our goats)

Other compound words like Kuacjok can also be spelt Kuajok, omitting a “c” and both spellings are correct

*As can be seen, these spellings are obviously strange and may invoke a spontaneous resistance. But if we look carefully, we can realize the logic. For example, Twic is one of the only few old reformed spellings after changing over time from Tuic and now finally to Twij. It is therefore puzzling how the diphthong “ui” was only changed in Twic and the same was not applied in other situations now corrected. Another example is that of Aliab. Clearly, the same situation in Aliab and Twij is just as correct as in other words/names. Of all diphthongs, the only exceptional cases are “uɔ”, “uo”, “uɔ”, “uo” where substituting “w” for “u” does not give equal phones, for instance, in Kuɔl. However, the difference is allophonic just as in English /k/ phoneme in “key” and “cook”. So, it may appear to non-native speakers that these pairs are different when occurring as codas in words but if we examine the spoken sounds of the natives, it can be seen that these pairs exactly form or somewhat make up allophones of the voiced letter. The same thing occurs in Arabic and English where speakers of these languages cannot differentiate between [“b” & “p”] and [“k” & “kh”] respectively. But this case in Thuongjaj is unique in two ways; (1) the devoiced-voiced pair form distinct phonemes when occurring as onsets in words but not when codas and (2) while occurring as codas, the voiced letter predominates such as in dhiedh (birth) and tid (wait). In this case, thus, choosing to end words with voiced letters is more correct and preferable for grammatical reasons and morphological uniformity (simplicity of spellings). Hence, the need to eventually adopt these reforms. [Aleu Majok, Page 5]*

I would say that the resistance does not arise from the strangeness of the proposed spellings but rather from the fact that the logic does not hold for the most part. For example you have just made an erroneous assumption that the spelling “Twic” and “Aliab” are reformed and accepted over time. The same applies to the “Tonj”, “Abyei” spellings and a few others. They are spelt like that by English speakers. In Thuongjang, the correct spellings are “Tuic”, “Aliap” and “Abiei” respectively. For Tonj, I would spell it “Tony” but I know it might have been a corrupted version of a Thuongjang word. If I know the exact word that was originally misspelled, I would write it exactly as it were. These word spellings have not been accepted. We have not had a Language Congress to approve and reject certain spellings. We have also not had any Peer Reviewed Thuongjang Journals which could substitute for the absence of a language Congress.

Your proposal is not robust enough since you have based it mainly on the Spelling. The Spelling is a very small component of the language. If you choose to pursue these sorts of

reforms, a properly developed Alphabet is a prerequisite. This alphabet will then get subjected to rigorous Language labs for a long period of time. This process of course requires that one be well versed with infinite amounts of vocabulary in almost all the Thuongjang dialects, a fascinating Academic Work in my view

### **Significance of the proposed morphophonemic reforms**

*Until this far, a sense may have been made of these reforms or reservations may still persist on how logical and significant they are to adopt them. To shed more light, further elaboration and illustrations are made as follows.*

*I will begin this with a personal experience which triggered the wondering that eventually led to lending my efforts to seeking solutions to the spelling and pronunciation disparities as in Situations 1 and 2 and other phonemic challenges covered in “Thuongjaj Cidmende”. There is a misconception among many Thuongjaj speakers about knowledge of English alphabet relative to Thuongjaj. Many Jieeng, after learning English, think that they can spell Thuongjaj words. In fact even though one has learned the alphabets of the two languages, it is still not enough to spell Thuongjaj words correctly. One needs to exert a little more reading and writing efforts and when one does so with some keen attention, some anomalies will begin to surface. Here is my trigger; pronunciation of English “foot” and “food”. Without my realization, I used to pronounce both of them as “food”. In fact I pronounced everything that ends with ‘t’ such as ‘cat’, ‘rat’, etc as though they ended with ‘d’. This is not to mention non-Muonyjang phonemes such as /v/, /f/, /sh/, /z/, /s/ which give tremendous pronunciation challenges to the Nilotes (esp the Muonyjan, Naadh, Luo, Collo, etc). [Aleu Majok, Page 5]*

I totally agree. Just like some of us spend 16-20 years in English schools but still we may not even spell all English words correctly, it would be naïve for English-educated Thuongjang speakers to assume that they can be fluent in Thuongjang without practicing it. You are right that as one writes and practices Thuongjang for a long period of time, the subtleties and indeed some anomalies of the language become clearer. All Latin-based languages including English have these problems

### **Tracing and preserving potential historical and etymological relations between dialects/languages**

*In another remarkable show of evolution of dialects, Jangawil speakers (Malwal, Abiem, Kondeer, Bwancwai and Ajak) pronounce the same word as “dhied”. This is similar to the Njɔɔg pronunciation of “nom” rather than “nhom” as in most of the dialects. This shows that /d/ and /n/ may have evolved from /dh/ and /nh/ phonemes respectively with the passage of time or it may be the other way round. Since both “d” and “dh” are voiced plosives, it is impalpable to reckon that /d/ evolve from “th”, a devoiced plosive. This reveals to us very important historical and etymological information that will be useful in the studies of variations in dialects and their*

*possible origins. The same can be said of the relation between Thuongjaj and other languages of the Nilotic family. However, if we do not adopt morphophonemic reforms as explained above, then we are running a risk of losing this historical connection between dialects/languages as pronunciations will eventually shift with time in accordance to written form chosen. It is therefore vital that these reforms are adopted however strange they may look. [Aleu Majok, Page 6]*

As I shall talk about it shortly under Dialect Harmonization, this is a very important area that needs lots of work in written Thuongjaj. As people migrate outwards from each other, dialects and languages change as well due to distance and environmental interactions. If these dialects are not harmonized, they can possibly grow into distinct languages over a span of time. So regardless of Orthographic Reform, Dialect Harmonization is a necessity

### **Enhancing marking apophony in proper nouns and reducing variety of morphological forms of the same words**

*Where the plosive pairs function as codas in words or morphemes in compound words, it would be grammatically and practically convenient to decide that only the voiced plosives should be codas. With that decided it would be easier to develop means of marking plosive-nasal changes as a result of possessives, adjectives or numbers following proper nouns as in Majak Atem, ApugPadaj, GogMacaar, Majogdid and Makethacood respectively pronounced as Majang Atem, ApungPadaj, GogMacaar, Majogdid and Makenhacood. These changes in proper nouns are summarized in Table 2 below.*

Table 2: Markable

Case	Terminal Plosives	Alternate letters (Nasals)	Marks Used
1	<i>p,b</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mark 1</i>
2	<i>th,dh</i>	<i>Nh</i>	<i>Mark 2</i>
3	<i>c,j</i>	<i>Ny</i>	<i>Mark 3</i>
4	<i>k,g</i>	<i>Ng</i>	<i>Mark 4</i>
5	<i>t, d, w, y, γ</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mark 5</i>
6	<i>Terminal vowels</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mark 5</i>
7	<i>Internal vowels</i>	<i>One vowel omitted</i>	<i>Mark 6</i>
8	<i>Internal vowels</i>	<i>Two vowels omitted</i>	<i>Mark 7</i>

[Aleu Majok, Page 6 – 7]

I have finally come to the gist of your proposal; that it would be easier for marking plosive-nasal changes to show possessiveness with regards to proper nouns.

Nothing in the current setup prevents the nasal marks to be applied as is. It is not any easier to apply an apostrophe to a “g” to make it a “ŋ” in order to show possessiveness than it is to apply the same to a “k” for the same purpose. Let us test your logic using Majak Atem (Majarj Atem – meaning Majak of Atem or Majak born of Atem): If we choose to use a nasal

change marker, the apostrophe, then Majak' Atem (Majak of Atem) will be the same as Majag' Atem (Majag of Atem). That has not made our language any easier. The "g" and the "k" are all consonants in Thuongjaj and none would easily substitute the other. The notion that probably a "g" looks closer in appearance to an "ng" or "ŋ" is born out of your knowledge of other languages especially English

This is an area I agree with you on though: the premise that we need some plosive-nasal change markers in Thuongjaj. I would support some markers after thorough studies, like some that you have outlined above. However, overdoing it could also cause other unintended problems.

The other option that is widely in use is pronouncing those names as though there is possessiveness involved, for example Aleu Majok instead of Alen e Majok. All peoples other than the Muonyjaj/Jieng are currently using this system to refer to us and it works fine in my opinion.

To close this part, every language has its uniqueness which is teachable to any new learner of the same. Therefore the plosive-nasal changes are as unique to Thuongjaj and may be appreciated for whatever those changes are.

### **More Examples**

[b] → Xɔg ace la rabijj

→ Jon ace lam e wen cwed

[th] → Koor ace taj ne kwedhic

→ Manh a anyaar acii koor cam

[d] → Piw atɔw ne gudij

→ Kon a anyaar athieg aɸeɸ

[j] → Dhɔg ace rej taaw ne majij

→ Mony did akɔm ne way

[g] → Tig ahɛɛj maaw ne gorogij

→ Dhoŋ e Deŋ abioog ne thog

[y] → Kɔm ace loony ne cwaayijj

→ Yan e Kerismas aye looy akolnin 25 e Nyedh

[w] → Tɔŋ ace thɔɔr akewij

→ Arwɔn tog yen ace thow arwɔɔdhijj

[Aleu Majok, Page 8]

The above examples would correctly be read as follows:

### More Examples

[p] → ʎək ace la/lə rapiic

→ Joŋ ace lam e weŋ cuet

[th] → Koor ace tac/tɛc ne kueethic

→ Manh/mɛnh anyaar acii koor cam

[t] → Piu atɔu ne gutic

→ Kon anyaar athiek apɛi

[c] → Dhək ace rec taau ne macic

→ Mony dit akɔm ne waai

[k] → Tik aʎɛɛc maau ne gorokic

→ Dhoŋ e Deŋ abiook ne thok

[i] → Kɔm ace loony ne cuaaiyiic (**This is a very notable word combination**)

→ Yan (e) Athiɛɛi aye looi akolnin 25 e Nyedh

[u] → Tɔŋ ace thɔɔr akeuyic (other dialects have akeu nyin or akeu nhom)

→ Aruɔn tok yen ace thou aruɔɔthiic

## CONCLUSIONS

I have responded to the proposed radical shift in Thuongjang Alphabet and written form based on my personal knowledge of the language as I speak and write it. I have written Thuongjang literally my entire life.

I have made a case against the proposal for the most part but I have also indicated a willingness to work on some aspects together with the proponents of the Reforms. I am impressed by the creativity and the thought process into the proposal but I believe I have enough experience with both written and spoken Thuongjang to know that the Reforms are out of context in most of the content. Much of the content is on the spelling. The spelling can be changed only through the change of the Latin-based alphabet. With more research work to be carried out, if

the Nilerian Script (which I have not studied) becomes acceptable, then there will be room to discuss changes in spellings.

In summary, I believe that Reforms should focus on the following points:

### **I. The Dinka Language Development/Literacy**

There is a pretty good reason why we learn to speak first before we are able to write. Language development depends entirely on how widely it is spoken and written. In the recent past, the Government of South Sudan made a policy that all local Languages are national languages and that they can be taught in schools as mandatory courses up to Primary 4. I believe that is a great starting point for literacy in Thuongjaj. To encourage wide ranging literacy in the language, the following can be done:

- a. Developing Thuongjaj literacy materials like kids' books, themed cartoons, themed games
- b. Running Thuongjaj themed kids summer camps
- c. Thuongjaj essay competitions
- d. Magazines and Book Writing in Thuongjaj
- e. Thuongjaj Computer classes
- f. Creating incentives to encourage those who major in Languages and Linguistics to choose to specialize in Thuongjaj leading to the award of Bachelor, Masters and PhD degrees

### **II. Dialect Harmonization**

The Dinka have a variety of dialects, which sometimes can impede understanding amongst the various groupings for those who have not widely interacted within the different dialectal groupings. Dialect harmonization is therefore needed now not tomorrow.

There is a general consensus among the Jieng/Muongjaj that Rek dialect is somewhat an acceptable benchmark. It tends to have wide ranging vocabulary than all the others. I will also add that the Padaang dialect will contribute greatly in the process of dialect harmonization. Although the Bor dialect is rich and widely written; oftentimes it runs short of new vocabulary thereby borrowing heavily from other languages. This shortage of vocabulary is easily solved by the Rek and Padang dialects

Dialect harmonization will take three forms:

- a. Harmonizing words that are spelled differently owing to different pronunciations. A typical example is Marial/Mariar. I personally have written it as Marial for a long time but my dialect pronounces it as Mariar and I pronounce it as such till today
- b. Harmonizing totally different words that carry the same meaning. Some flexibility will be exercised here. Some dialects that lack certain words will be asked to

accept the words they don't have and to put them into daily usage through literacy programs. Different words across dialects that carry same meaning can be maintained until some eventually die out on their own

- c. Setting a benchmark for accepting new words into common usage. For example when later confronted with new situations through the use of technology, how do we give names to things that are new to Thuongjang. This situation is the same with all languages. An established benchmark, however, would help in resolving any later impasse

### **III. The Dinka Language and the Church: Connecting the dots**

Our Contemporary Civilization as the Dinka is based on the church. This started in December 1905 with the arrival of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to Malek, Bor. The Missionary, Archibald Shaw thought it wise to train a few select Dinka people in order to write Thuongjang. One of these few was Gordon Apeec Ayom, who with Shaw ended up translating the Bible to Thuongjang

However, mass Christianization did not reach the Dinka villages until 1984 – 1990. This mass conversion to Christianity is attributable to RTD Rev Nathaniel Garang Anyieth. The Church was and still is an interested party to the advancement of the Dinka Language so that they can spread the word of God in both spoken and written forms with ease. It therefore devised a short curriculum which comprised of the teaching of the Alphabet, Bunj Marial (Book of Marial) and then the Bible. Once you had reached the level of reading the Bible in Thuongjang, you were considered literate and therefore graduated. This Curriculum was also taught in IDP Camps across South Sudan and Sudan, and in the Refugee Camps where Dinka people could be found. Most Dinka people who currently speak and write Thuongjang fluently were and are in the church.

However, as is expected, this trajectory was not always smooth. A lot of our young people found themselves highly educated in English and/or other languages but lacking in their own Dinka language. Through this process of educational and personal enlightenment, they instinctively make a personal commitment to contribute to the Development of the Dinka Language. This group has better knowledge, training and armed with the right tools to advance the language. But they lack the Linguistic Training and Foundation.

The key is to merge these two groups for maximum language progress to happen. We as young people with the right tools for doing this job should seek linguistic guidance from the Church and especially from those literate in Dinka only (Those of us who are multilingual can sometimes make linguistic mistakes unknowingly even

though we are literate in Dinka). Suffices to say that the Church is a major stakeholder in any radical changes to written Thuongjaj

#### **IV. The Dinka Language and War Displacement**

All languages suffer through wars and displacement. Consequently, our language also suffered a great deal in the Displaced and Refugee camps, and further aggravated by resettlement programs around the world. In the process, we have and will continue to have people who either speak very little or completely do not speak Dinka at all. This is normal to all peoples of the world. These people however, if they can find the right tools for speaking and writing Dinka, they will make a personal effort to do so just like we have non-Dinka people who fluently speak and write our language. The onus is therefore on the Dinka Language technologists and enthusiasts to avail language literacy programs to this group. The dice is cast and the roles are clear cut. This is an open area of academic research for which one can be awarded a University Degree

#### **V. The Dinka Language and Technology**

Today, we stay on our computers and on the net for the most part of the day. It also makes sense that as we stay on the net, we must be talking but in which languages are we talking?

About eight years ago, I was asked by a random web developer to help him set up a web/internet domain in Thuongggjang. Things like, how does a date and clock/time appear in written Thuongjaj or especially in a Thuongjaj web domain? This determines whether or not you get some weird symbols/marks on your Thuongjaj. Things like punctuation marks ( , . ? etc) which appeared trivial to me but after I started working on them, I realized how difficult, but vital, that process was. In short, some things got me defeated and I have no recollection of how the whole ended

A year or two later, an Australian software writer named Andrew Cunningham approached Deng Atem Garang, Daniel Akec Thiong and myself to help develop a Dinka keyboard. And if I remember correctly, Muorwel Ater was consulted in the background. Much of our discussions were happening on Facebook in order to encourage public consumption of information. We all did our small parts and today we have our keyboard

On the same breath, a few years later, Daniel Akec Thiong developed an online Dulek Magazine purely in Thuongjaj. I personally contributed once or twice. If this would have continued, it would have been one great way to maintain an online Thuongjaj presence.

There is currently a website that goes by the name Pioocku Thuongjang: Let us learn Dinka which provides online resources on the Jieng/Muonyjang and their language. There are many other resources out there for which Thuongjang can be advanced technologically

Technology is a great way to advance Thuongjang and it would be a great service if our young people can pick up interest to write software and become web developers in Thuongjang. You can even make a living out of it

----- THE END -----

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