Introduction and Acknowledgments

As part of the major initiative of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), Capetown, towards the harmonization and standardization of African languages across the continent, a workshop on standardization of orthographic/spelling conventions of cross-border languages of Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe took place at the African Languages Research Institute, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe between 23rd - 24th February, and between 29th - 30th June 2006. The two meetings were necessitated by the imposing need for all Shona language variants such as Barwe and Hwesa, which like Western Shona languages of Lilima and Nambya have experienced separate developments in the past. The label Shona is used in the sense that Clement Doke provided it in his report, "The Unification of the Shona Dialects". While Doke excludes the Western and Eastern Shona dialects from the Central Shona developments, this harmonization exercise extended it to include the Western and Eastern Shona language varieties.

The harmonization of the Shona Language varieties workshop was attended by linguists from Universities in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Botswana. At the end of the two-harmonization meetings, the participants came up with a single spelling system for all the Shona varieties found in these countries.

Shona variants, that is, those dialects that emerged from the historical evolution of the Proto-Shona, are Lilima and Nambya (Western Shona); Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore (Central Shona); Manyika, Ndau, Hwesa and Barwe (Eastern Shona). It remains to be seen whether in the future languages such as Venda can be considered for harmonization with Shona languages. Venda has very close lexical affinity with Shona. The two workshops also resolved that for the future common development of these languages, all new lexical acquisitions should be centrally cleared and harmonized by the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) that is currently undertaking major lexicography works. The participants also came up with sample texts using the new orthography. This, it is hoped, will facilitate the application of the spelling rules in all the Shona variants.

Fortunately for these languages, the harmonized Shona orthography does not present major divergences from the current practice. The morpho-syntactic rules of conjunctivity are similar. The alphabetic symbols are also fairly comparable. However, it will still be necessary for writers and governments to be made aware of the Shona harmonized orthography so that this development achieves the desired results. Workshops for teachers and writers should be conducted.