

Poetic Rhythm in Kirundi

It is a cultural fact that all native speakers of Kirundi are familiar with, and adept at, clapping rhythmically to song and to chanted verse. This paper is a study of the way in which this rhythmic clapping is unambiguously assigned to text. We focus here on clapped rhythm, a kind of rhythm that is not overtly present in everyday speech, and we will refer to it as *poetic rhythm*. But it is a kind of rhythm that is easily accessible to native speakers of Kirundi, and it requires no explicit training to learn it; indeed, one of us (JN) is our primary informant on this material, and she is often as surprised at the patterns that emerge from our empirical studies as the other one of us (JG).

Kirundi is a mora-counting language, with an important vowel-length contrast between long and short vowels, a difference which is contrastive in most environments. Before nasal-consonant clusters, vowels are redundantly long (bimoraic). The specific rhythm that we focus on here is, at its lowest level, an alternating pattern of strong and weak positions for moras; since prosodic lines generally begin with a strong (i.e., clapped) position and end with a weak position, we conceive of this lowest pattern as a sequence of trochaic (strong-weak) feet, assigned to moras. The strong metrical position generally, but not always, falls on a short vowel or the first mora of a long vowel. See (1); see (x) for an example of a line where the line begins with a word (“Buruundi”) with a short vowel followed by a long vowel, and the first strong position is on the first mora of the second syllable.

But the rhythmic pattern that is really of interest is at the next level up of constituency: is a 3-beat pattern, where each beat corresponds to a trochaic (strong-weak) foot composed of two moras. In the western poetic tradition, a sequence of three feet is termed a *trimester*, and that is the term which we shall adopt. The longer 3-beat trimetric pattern is expressed with a clap on the first beat of foot 1 and foot 2, and no clap on foot 3. A simple example is given in (1), which also shows how we will notate the data. However, we do not follow the western tradition in assuming that the trimeter constitutes an entire line; quite to the contrary, it does not in Kirundi, and the lines we study here range from two trimeters to five trimeters in length.

(1)
example

The most striking aspect of the Kirundi trimeter pattern is the fact that the third beat is obligatorily *not clapped*.

Hora hora nkwiingiinge x x x x x
 Hora hora nkwiingiinge x mama a baana
 Bariingiingwa x x x x x x x

Hora nkwiime mukaaaso x x
 Hora nkwiime mukaaso mama x
 Mu(u)ka s'igikoooko x x x x x x x

Yookurami'amaazi x x
 Yookuramiz' amaazi mama x
 Inkaza x sozitaashe x x

Hora	hora	nkwiin	ii	Inge	
Hora	hora	nkwiin	gii	nge x	mama
(a)baa	na x	barii	ngii	I	ngwa x
Hora	nkwii	me mu	kaa	a so	x x
Hora	nkwii	me mu	kaa	so ma	ma x
Mu(u)	ka s'(i)	igi	koo	Oko	x x
Yoo	kura	m(i) a	maa	Azi	x x
Yoo	kura	miz(a)	maa	zi ma	ma x
Inka	za x	sozi	taa	Ashe	x x

↓ ↓ ∅ ↓↓ ∅
 Hora hora nkwiingiinge x x

↓ ↓ ∅ ↓ ↓ ∅
 Hora hora nkwiingiinge x mama

• • ∅ • • ∅ • • ∅
a baana x bariingwiingwa x x x x x x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Hora nkwiime mukaaaso x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Hora nkwiime mukaaso mama x

• • ∅ • • ∅ • • ∅
Mu(u)ka s'(i)igikoooko x x x x x x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Yookurami'amaazi x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Yookuramiz' amaazi mama x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Inkaza x sozitaashe x x

Second example

• • ∅ • • (∅)
Muramuubariz(a) icampoora

• • (∅) • •
Muramuubariz(a) icampoora

• • (∅) • •
Ndamuviire mu rugo rwiwe

Refrain:

• • • • (∅)
Hora maam(a) ihorere maama

• • • • (∅)
Horamaam(a) ihorere maama xx x x x x x x

3. Hymne national du Burundi

• • • • •
Buruundi Bwaacu, Buruundi buhiire,

• • ∅ • •
Shiing(a) icumu mu mashiinga,

• ∅ • • ∅ • • ∅
Gaba intaaha y'ubugabo ku bugiingo x x x.

• • ∅ •
Warapfunywe ntiwapfuye,

• ∅ • • ∅ • • ∅
Warahabishijwe ntiwahababuka x x x x x x

Comment: why the extra syllables?

• • ∅ • • ∅ • • ∅ • •
Uhágurukan(a) uhágurukan(a) uhágurukan(a) ubugab(o)

∅ • • ∅
uriikuuukira x x x .

• • • • ∅ • •
Komerwamashi n'amakungu Habwa impundu naabaw(e),

Comment: shortened in the song

Comment: shortened in the song

∅ • • ∅ • • ∅ • •
Isamirane mu mashiing(a) isamirane mu mashiinga

Comment: 3 moras in the foot?

Comment: 3 moras in the foot?

Comment: 3 moras in the foot?

Comment: 3 moras in the foot

• • • • ∅ • •
Buruundi bwaacu x rari ry'abasookuru,

Comment: shortened in the song

∅ 1 2 ∅
Ramutsw(a) intahe n'ibihugu,

Comment: 3 mora foot?

Comment: should be long, shortened in the song

1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅
Ufatanij(e) ishaka n'ubuhizi x x;

Comment: extra uncounted syllable

1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅
Vuz[a] impu[u]ndu wi[i]ga[a]nzu[u]y[e] uwakuga[a]nz[a]

1 2 ∅
uwakugaanza.

1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅ 1
Buruundi x bwaacu x nkoramutima x kuri tweese x

2 ∅ 1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅
Tugutuuy[e] amaboko x umutima n'ubuzima,

1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅ 1
Imaana yakuduha[a]y[e] ikudutuungire

Comment: maybe shortened? not sure

1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅ 1 2
Horan[a] ubumwe n'abagabo n'iiiteekaane x

Comment: Lengthened by the song

∅ 1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅ 1 2 ∅
Saangwa n'urweeze x sa[a]ngwa n'amahoro meeza x x x.

• • ∅ • •
Giraso x x na nyo goseenge

• • ∅ • • ∅
Barakubona x bagataamba x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Gir(a) imigoongo yoose x x x (syncopation!)

• • ∅ • • ∅
Nzoogushiira naande? x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Na nyoko na x x nyogoseenge x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Baakubona x bagataamba x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Taamban(a) inkoongooro x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Yuuzuy(e) amaata meenshi x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Kamirwa na so mugeenzi x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Se(e)wuwuundi(i) aratiinda x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Haabwa niyákiire x x x

• • ∅ • • ∅
Ihahaaye ibiboondo x x x .

A different syncopated pattern:

(/) / / /
(x) [1 x 2 x 3 x]