

**SENGA HANDBOOK. A SHORT
INTRODUCTION TO THE SENGA
DIALECT AS SPOKEN ON THE
LOWER LUANGWA, NORTH-
EASTERN RHODESIA**

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Senga Handbook. A Short Introduction to the Senga Dialect as Spoken on the Lower Luangwa,
North-Eastern Rhodesia by A. C. Madan

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TO

THE SENGA DIALECT

AS SPOKEN ON THE LOWER LUANGWA

NORTH-EASTERN RHODESIA:

BY

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PREFACE

FEW persons are likely at present to begin the study of Senga without previous knowledge of some other dialect of Bantu. It may therefore be enough to say that Senga exhibits all the general features of other Bantu dialects, and no attempt is made here to enlarge upon such. Nor can completeness be claimed for any part of this short Introduction even as to what is peculiarly Senga. All that is aimed at is a brief outline, accurate as far as it goes, of Senga Grammar and Vocabulary, in the hope that it will at least be sufficient as a starting-point for further study, and require supplementing rather than correcting hereafter.

Reclus, 6-12-46 H. 24

By Senga is here meant the particular selection of Bantu forms and words used by the Senga people in British territory on the Lower Luangwa. A large section of the tribe is in Portuguese territory southward to the Zambezi, and there are Sengas settled in the north of the Luangwa valley, as well as among the Angoni eastward. How far they use the Senga represented in this book, the compiler does not at present know. Hitherto Senga appears to have been entirely unwritten, and it is not even mentioned by Torrend (*Comparative Grammar of South African Bantu*) or by Last (*Polyglotta Africana Orientalis*). A short Vocabulary of Northern Senga by Sir H. H. Johnston agrees closely with the present one. The Sengas are a weak tribe (though they may number some 50,000 altogether) raided hitherto by stronger neighbours, Wemba, Angoni, and Portuguese, without enterprise or important arts, and their dialect does not appear likely to spread or even to hold its own as a separate one against the unifying tendencies already at

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work in North-Eastern Rhodesia. It has points of clear resemblance to other dialects between the Luangwa and Lake Nyasa, as well as to Swahili and others more distant, but it also has its own features of interest and perhaps some real peculiarities, as may be gathered from the following pages.

Their contents were compiled mainly from the evidence of an intelligent young Senga, who has travelled but little, and does not know familiarly any dialect but that of his home on the Luangwa. The fact increased the value of his evidence as well as the difficulty of obtaining it. The result is at least a specimen of what is actually spoken as Senga, and one which has borne such verification and farther inquiry as the circumstances allowed. In describing it, a knowledge of the meaning of grammatical terms and distinctions common to most grammars is throughout assumed.

The Senga call themselves Ansenga, their country as a whole Unsenga, and their language Chinsenga.

A. C. MADAN.

FORT JAMESON,
March 8, 1905.

The separate lists of Nouns, Verbs, &c., will supply in some degree the place of a Senga-English supplement to the English-Senga Vocabulary at the end.

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CHAPTER I

SENGA AS WRITTEN

IT appears that the sounds used in the Senga dialect are capable of being sufficiently represented in writing by the use of the English alphabet according to the system adopted by Bishop Steere for Swahili, and by many others.

As applied to Senga the system is briefly this:—

1. Vowels, as in Italian, i.e. *a, e, i, o, u*, are used as follows:—

<i>a</i>	for the sound of <i>ar</i> in <i>farther</i> .
<i>e</i>	” <i>a</i> in <i>fate</i> ,
<i>i</i>	” <i>ee</i> in <i>feet</i> .
<i>o</i>	” <i>or</i> in <i>sort</i> .
<i>u</i>	” <i>oo</i> in <i>root</i> .

In unaccented syllables each vowel may have a lighter sound. When vowels occur together, each is pronounced separately.

2. Consonants, as in English, except that

c is only used in the combination *ch*, for the sound of *ch* in *chin*.

g is only used for the sound of *g* in *go*, never as *j*.

s is only used as in *so*, never for *x*.

y is used only as a consonant or semi-vowel, not a distinct vowel as in *any*.

The only points to be noticed in Senga pronunciation are:—

(i) a peculiar modified nasal sound, common in one form or another to many Bantu dialects, here represented by *ng'*, and resembling the first *ng* in *singing*,—the *ng* sound not passing on to the vowel following, though forming one syllable with it.

(ii) a preference in prefixes and formative syllables generally for a modified sibilant sound, resembling the sound of *s* in *pleasure* and *vision*, and here represented by *sh* or *shy*.