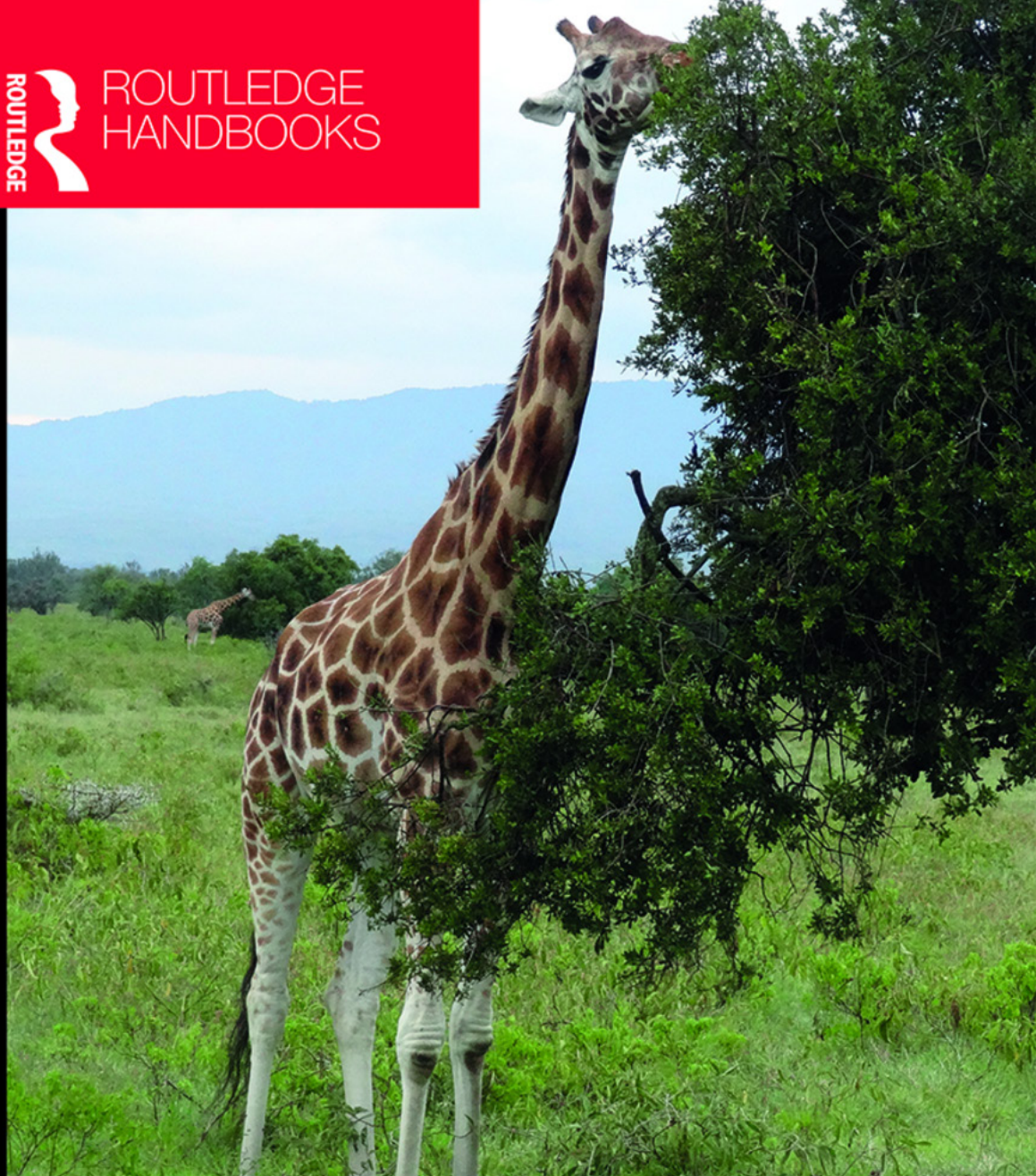




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**Adams Bodo** is Professor of African Studies (African Languages and Literatures) at the University of Vienna. He specializes in formal theoretical linguistics, cross-cultural communication, digital humanities (languages and literatures in new media), Computer-Mediated Communication for Linguistics and Literacy: Technology and Natural Language Education, and international studies involving Africa and Asia.

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# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF AFRICAN LINGUISTICS

*Edited by Augustine Agwuele and Adams Bodomu*

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# DEDICATION

This *Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics* is dedicated to Ayo Bamgbose. With over five decades of exemplary scholarship on African languages, the indefatigable professor remains very active in the field and exceptionally passionate about research into African languages.

Additionally, the *Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics* is specially dedicated to the following African scholars for their exemplary scholarship on African languages: Professors Florence Dolphyne, Salikoko Mufwene, Sam Mchombo, and Bokamba Eyamba. These renowned scholars have championed the course of linguistics on the continent, and they have been exemplary in their commitment to research, teaching and mentoring generations of student-scholars.

The field of African linguistics would not have been in existence without the selfless efforts of many researchers, fieldworkers, informants, and diverse scholars and students of African languages. To these innumerable important personalities we also dedicate this Handbook.



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# CONTENTS

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Notes on contributors</i>  | <i>x</i>    |
| <i>Foreword</i>   | <i>xiv</i>  |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>   | <i>xvii</i> |
| <br>  |             |
| Introduction: African linguistics   | 1           |
| <i>Augustine Agwuele and Adams Bodomo</i>   |             |
| <br>  |             |
| <b>PART I</b>   |             |
| <b>History, method, and typology</b>  | <b>13</b>   |
| <br>  |             |
| 1 A short history of African language studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on German contributions | 15          |
| <i>Sara Pugach</i>  |             |
| 2 Historical linguistics in an African context: a brief state of the art  | 33          |
| <i>Gerrit J. Dimmendaal</i>   |             |
| 3 Linguistic research in the African field  | 55          |
| <i>Bruce Connell</i>  |             |
| 4 Tone and tonology in African languages  | 72          |
| <i>Constance Kutsch Lojenga</i>   |             |
| 5 A system-based typology of MOOD in Niger-Congo languages  | 93          |
| <i>Isaac N. Mwinlaaru, Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, and Ernest S. Akerejola</i>  |             |

|                                   |  |            |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------|
| <b>PART II</b>                    |  |            |
| <b>Sound and syllable system</b>  |  | <b>119</b> |
| 6                                 | Coarticulation: segmental and suprasegmental interactions in Yoruba<br><i>Augustine Agwuele</i>                | 121        |
| 7                                 | Labial-velars of Africa: phonetics, phonology, and<br>historical development<br><i>Michael Cahill</i>          | 150        |
| 8                                 | Syllable structure and vowel/zero alternations in Moroccan<br>Arabic and Berber<br><i>Mohamed Lahrouchi</i>    | 168        |
| 9                                 | Vowel harmony (beyond ATR) and its impact on<br>morphological parsing<br><i>John Rennison</i>                  | 181        |
| <b>PART III</b>                   |  |            |
| <b>Phrase and sentence system</b> |  | <b>205</b> |
| 10                                | West African serial verb constructions: the case of Akan and Ga<br><i>Dorothee Beermann and Lars Hellan</i>    | 207        |
| 11                                | Logophoricity, long distance reflexives, and the Yoruba anaphor <i>Òun</i><br><i>Nike Lawal</i>                | 222        |
| 12                                | The encoding of information structure in African languages<br><i>Nana Aba Appiah Amfo</i>                      | 243        |
| 13                                | Bantu applicatives and Chimiini instrumentals<br><i>Brent Henderson</i>  | 262        |
| 14                                | The form and function of Dagbani demonstratives<br><i>Samuel Alhassan Issah</i>                                | 281        |
| 15                                | Experiencer predications in Chadic: a study of the<br>semantics-syntax interface<br><i>Zygmunt Frajzyngier</i> | 297        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>PART IV</b>   |            |
| <b>Language and society: theory and practice</b>   | <b>323</b> |
| 16 Translation theory and practice past and present: applying the Target Audience Criterion to some West African languages<br><i>Keir Hansford</i> | 325        |
| 17 The representation of African languages and cultures on social media: a case of Ewe in Ghana<br><i>Elvis Yevudey</i>                            | 343        |
| 18 Sustainable language technology for African languages<br><i>Arvi Hurskainen</i>   | 359        |
| 19 Language planning for sustainable development: problems and prospects in Ghana<br><i>Paul Agbedor</i>   | 376        |
| <b>PART V</b>  |            |
| <b>Creative expressions and cultural life</b>  | <b>389</b> |
| 20 The language of youth in Africa: A sociocultural linguistic analysis<br><i>Heather Brookes and Roland Kouassi</i>                               | 391        |
| 21 African youth languages: the past, present and future attention<br><i>Sandra Nekesa Barasa</i>  | 409        |
| 22 Gestures and gesturing on the African continent<br><i>Heather Brookes</i>   | 427        |
| 23 Tense and time-depth in the Mabia languages of West Africa: testing the philosophy of linguistic relativity<br><i>Adams Bodomo</i>              | 438        |
| <i>Index</i>   | 450        |

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# FOREWORD

When I was invited to write a foreword to this book, I insisted on seeing the content of the chapters of the book rather than basing my observations on just the table of contents and the abstracts. In the event, I was able to read all the chapters on Facebook with the exception of one dealing with communication in Ewe, a small group language in Ghana. Considering the assumption in some circles that many African languages are endangered and destined for extinction, it is interesting to see how a non-major language is holding its own on the social media. My conclusion on reading this book is that the editors have done African linguistics a good turn by bringing together a compilation of scholarly chapters on a wide range of topics in the field.

Several years ago, in reviewing the state of African linguistics in West Africa, I had cause to observe as follows: “The nature of language studies is such that linguists have become specialists in a narrow area of study. You hardly meet a linguist, but rather a phonetician, a phonologist, a semanticist, a lexicologist, etc.” Ayo Bamgbose (2000/2001) “New Directions in West African Language Studies” *The Journal of West African Languages* XXVIII:1, 115. Not that there is anything wrong with specialization, but the effect it has had is that many African linguists don’t know or may not even understand what other specialists in their fields are doing. In bringing out *The Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics*, the editors of the volume have provided inspiration for us to revisit topics we might have encountered in the distant past and to learn some new things about the research our colleagues are engaged in.

The topics covered in this book are comprehensive, balanced and representative of the different areas in African linguistics. Beginning with the history of African linguistic research by German scholars and an informative review and update of comparative historical studies of African languages, the book traverses a wide range of topics including prerequisites and strategies for data gathering in fieldwork in language in general and in tone in particular, physiological and instrumental investigation and description of coarticulated phonetic segments, alternating vowel and null in syllable structure, vowel harmony, topics in syntax including MOOD systems, serial verbal constructions, local and long distance anaphors, information structure, applicatives, demonstratives, and experiencer coding and predication. Language in society is represented by language planning, particularly in education, types of translation, as

well as statistically as opposed to rule-based approach in machine translation. To round off the rich collection, concluding chapters in the book explore the phenomenon of urban male codes, which are said to be developing into a marker of identity, a review of the literature on gestures and gesturing in African languages, and a resurrection and application of the Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic relativity to a group of languages spoken in Ghana. I used the term “resurrection” in relation to the concluding chapter intentionally for I erroneously thought it was going to be a rehabilitation of a dead concept, but my fears were dispelled by the argumentation and the conclusion that found the hypothesis untenable.

Either by accident or design, at least ten of the chapters in the book are paired in the presentation of the same or a similar topic. While Chapter 1 gives a history of African linguistic research from the perspective of the contribution by German philologists and linguists, Chapter 2 makes a historical survey of African language classification leading to an update of recent developments. Chapter 3 shows the need for a language survey preparatory to fieldwork and then gives detailed guidelines on the phonetic study of languages in fieldwork, while Chapter 4 focuses on how to record and analyze tones. Chapter 6 provides an extensive instrumental investigation of the way phonetic segments interact during articulation while Chapter 7 maintains the conventional use of the term “coarticulation” to cover labial-velars, the interaction between whose segments is then analyzed articulatorily as well as instrumentally. Both Chapters 16 and 18 handle translation from two different perspectives, the former in the conventional approach of types of translations and challenges of translation, particularly with data from Bible translation, the latter with the advantages of rule-based over statistically based approaches to machine translation with convincing illustrations. Chapters 20 and 21 are both a survey of urban male codes based mainly on the same codes and equally with little or no illustration. In spite of the inevitable overlap in the coverage of each pair, putting them side by side is still worthwhile for we are enabled to see two sides of the same coin, since each chapter in the pair complements the other.

The contributions by most of the authors are well-researched, informative and authoritative. This is not surprising since the authors are writing on the languages they know and have been working on, in some cases for decades. It is also good to note that most of the chapters are well illustrated with language data from one or more languages. Such illustration helps the reader to form an opinion about the validity of the arguments being put forward and its probable cross-linguistic application. In fact, the analysis of data goes beyond accounting for what is presented but often leads to the theoretical implications of the conclusions. Talking of theory, the contributors come from different theoretical backgrounds and it is a credit to the editors that they have been able to accommodate these differences.

A look at the list of contributors shows that some of them are veterans in African linguistic research, while some are younger scholars. In fact, one of the contributors is a graduate student working on his PhD dissertation. Also, while many of the scholars are non-African linguists working on African languages either in Africa or in the Diaspora, a good proportion of the authors of the chapters in this volume are either established or budding African scholars in the field of African linguistics. I cannot help but reflect on a comment made by the author of Chapter 1 of this book. She draws attention to the way many early German researchers failed to give credit to the contribution to their work by African assistants, either by not acknowledging them by name or derogatively consigning them to the nondescript category of mere informants. It is a measure of the great strides that we have made in linguistics that African scholars of African linguistics are now given deserved recognition.

*Foreword*

As I said in the opening paragraphs of this foreword, we have a lot to gain by reading *The Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics*. Personally, I have been refreshed by updates on topics that I was familiar with and learnt new things about others. I recommend it to all linguists, particularly those in the field of African linguistics.

Ayo Bamgbose  
May, 2017

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A work of this kind is only possible due to an intensive and extensive cooperation and participation of several collaborators. The first Editor and initiator of this Handbook, Augustine Agwuele, attracted diverse collaborators and provided the editorial, intellectual, and coordinative oversights that brought this Handbook to fruition. The second Editor of the Handbook, Adams Bodomo, an experienced editor of Africanist journals and book series, contributed experienced reviewers from his vast network to ensure high quality reviews.

Profound acknowledgement goes to the contributors to the Handbook for their dedication and hard work in meeting the deadlines and going through several revisions. Some of them were not deterred by personal and familial challenges.

Each chapter in the Handbook benefitted greatly from the insightful reviews and invaluable comments of several anonymous reviewers. Thank you all for your support and your strong commitments to the intellectual process.

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# INTRODUCTION

## African linguistics

*Augustine Agwuele and Adams Bodomu*

Presented in this introduction is a very brief overview of some landmarks in the development of the study of languages in Africa. Specifically highlighted are some of the approaches to documenting and classifying the different languages, some basic research themes featured in the theoretical explication of the languages with aspects of their practical implementations, as well as the dynamism involved in the use of language as a socio-cultural capital. These themes circumscribe the scope of the Handbook.

### **Study of African languages**

The different languages and their speakers on the African continent have for centuries attracted attention from different quarters; ranging from compendium compilers, to Arab scholars, economic prospectors, missionaries, colonialists, and contemporary professional linguists. The diverse engagements with African languages showcase different ideologies influencing the works produced by the different observers including their scope and foci. As will be shown in this introduction, the initial impetus in the study of African languages owes largely to the European<sup>1</sup> contemporary theorization in linguistics that, however, has profited significantly from African scholarship on African languages.

The late 18th-century and early 19th-century Europe witnessed a wave of ideology interlinking the development of language and thought. The growth of the study of individual languages became a part of growing nationalism experienced in Europe during this time.<sup>2</sup> Within this milieu, Williams Jones emerged to propose, in 1786, a connection between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin unleashing the now popular comparative approach synonymous with historical linguistics.<sup>3</sup> Armed with this approach, many European scholars went about collecting lexical items to determine not only the relationship between languages but the connection between peoples following August Schleicher's 1853 (Stammbaum) stem tree theory, through which related languages can be grouped together and traced to their ancestral origin. Both the European ideology and methodology eventually carried to Africa and led to the initial wave of classification of the peoples and their languages, albeit within a schema that not only othered the people but devalued them, their culture, history, and achievements.

Whereas this early practice was conducted with minimal or no fieldwork, the emergence of the so-called salvage anthropology of around the late 1800s and early 1900s, which emphasized

a focus on form and structure based on the view that linguistics provides a tool for the analysis of culture, ushered in fieldworks and language documentation. This was the era of colonial linguistics, a part of a larger colonial project, which, according to Sara Pugach (Chapter 1), naturalized differences, privileged European knowledge and unraveled and remade precolonial African social and ethnic formations (Errington 2001), privileged some, and relegated others. Many African scholars have rightfully been critical of some of the works of this era and the ideologies that propelled them.

Following, and in reaction to, the ethnographic approach, was theoretical linguistics that studies each language on its own merit. The goal of this approach is to understand language as a phenomenon, a system, and as a means of introspecting into the mind. This era, largely championed by the Generative Grammarians, motivated linguists to work on their own languages, adopting methodologies modelled after the hard sciences. This era of 'introspective' linguistics created a dichotomy between performance and competence. To this distinction linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists reacted by focusing on the performative aspect of language, underlining the communicative function of language and its function as an instrument of socialization through which individuals become full-fledged functioning members of their speech community. The chapters in this Handbook encompass studies on both competence (theoretical) and performance (socio-cultural) linguistics themes.

Since the 1970s, due to a confluence of shifts in paradigms and interests in social institutions, the study of language not only included a focus on marginal and disparaged speech forms such as pidgins and creoles, but also involved such topics as language evolution (Mufwene 2001, 2011) and acquisition (Mufwene 2010), the use of language in context, the place of language in social dynamics such as gender, identity, inter-group relations, and language as a social force.

The concerted efforts of the various extant linguists as well as the cumulative work of the different historical players ultimately yielded the currently accepted understandings about the linguistic situation in the continent. For instance, there are 2,144 living languages in the continent, with a total number of 887,310,542 speakers.<sup>4</sup> This is 13.4 percent of the world's 7,099 languages. These languages are classified into four linguistic phyla with several families. The phyla include the Niger-Congo phylum that stretches from the Gambia, through central Africa to South Africa. It has about 1,400 languages and around 200 million speakers. The Afro-Asiatic phylum, with 241 languages and 230 million speakers, covers the whole of North Africa including some languages in the Middle East. The third phylum, Nilo-Saharan, as the name suggests, covers the Saharan deserts. It is encased between the Afro-Asiatic phylum in the north and Niger-Congo in the south. It has 150 languages and about 12 million speakers. The fourth phylum is the Khoisan. This is the smallest member of the group with about 30 languages and 120,000 speakers.

Across these various epochs and disciplines the themes of old are still present, but they are no longer under some of the derogatory assumptions that preceded the 1960s. Sara Pugach's exploration of the Germans' contribution to the study of African languages in Chapter 1 provides a glimpse of the zeitgeist of colonial linguistics. Thus, in classifying African languages, for example, the current goal is no longer to devalue their speakers. Different from the missionary linguists for whom literacy and study of languages were essential for proselytization, documentation of languages is now carried out in recognition of language as a cultural good, and with the consciousness that the interrupted transmission of an integrated lexical and grammatical heritage spells the direct end of some cultural traditions, and the unraveling, restructuring, and reevaluation of others (Woodbury 1993). The consciousness of the place of language in cultural transmission, maintenance, and expression entrenches language documentation and



Figure 0.1 Map of African languages

Note: Used with permission of the author, Jost Gippert. Available online at: <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/karten/afri/afrikaf.jpg>, (last accessed, May 16, 2017).

revitalization as a sub-discipline of linguistics, giving its practitioners on the continent the urgency that it rightfully deserves among scholars of African languages.

Our knowledge of the different languages in Africa has been expanding very rapidly, more so since the 1960s, when many African states began to gain political independence and had to make decisions on the adoption of a national language. At the time of independence, the reigning view was that African languages were poorly studied and the few that were described owed largely to the accounts of travelers, missionaries, agents of the colonialists and some sponsored western scholars. Since then, however, the study of African languages has effectively stopped being the sole prerogative of westerners. Many highly qualified and motivated Africans drawing from their academic trainings, native intuitions, and cultural heritages began to describe, explicate, and illuminate different aspects of their languages. Notable among these are Ayo Bamgbose, Florence Dolphyne, Salikoko Mufwene, Sam Mchombo, and Bokamba Eyamba whose notable works began to appear in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Younger scholars of African origin, some of whom are featured in this Handbook, have continued the tradition of excellence started by the first post-independence African scholars. Technological

advances and innovations in different fields aid in furthering the scientific investigations of African languages. Increasing ease in traveling and better modes of transportation allow access to remote areas, making it possible for an increasing number of previously undocumented linguistic groups to be reached and studied.

### **Some issues in the study of African languages**

In 2009 there were 6,909 known languages in the world. Out of these, 2,100 were in Africa (Lewis 2009). In 2017, 7,099 languages are recorded worldwide (Simons and Fennig 2017). Of these, 2,144 languages are in Africa. Just within a space of eight years, there is recorded an increase in the total number of languages existing in the world and in Africa. On a country level, 527 languages are listed for Nigeria in 2017. Seven of the attested languages are known to be extinct. Comparatively, there are now 520 living languages relative to the 521 listed for the country in 2009. An existing language could become moribund and eventually die out of use. Previously undocumented languages could be discovered as in the case of Nigeria. The dynamism involved in the life of languages makes the quest to find, study, and describe them an ongoing concern of the linguistic community. No meaningful progress can be achieved in these efforts without a careful understanding of the historical dimensions to the earlier approaches and an appropriate grounding in contemporary scientific procedures inimical to making sense of the diverse issues that impinge on proper documentation of previously unstudied languages and yielding data for their theoretical analyses. Parts I, II, and III of this Handbook pertain to language documentation and theoretical descriptive analyses.

The activities of earlier European linguists and operatives across the continent were significant in their own right, although largely imbued with serious social, cultural and political flaws, the consequences of which are still being borne by Africa today. Some of the methodologies that they employed still remain useful to scholars working in the field today. Dimmendaal, in Chapter 2, instructively surveys the different methodologies that were employed to arrive at the classification of African language. They ranged from the large-scale word list comparisons approach of Wilhelm Koelle, to NeighborNet and rhizotic network currently in use, among others. By exploring the various practical approaches, the chapter presents us with an overview of the current language families of Africa, dialectical variations and language continuum, the dynamics involved in contact situations, the spread of language, that is, movement of people, and the connection of speech with groups' social identity.

While Dimmendaal's chapter explores the historical approaches employed in earlier description and classification of African languages, Bruce Connell in Chapter 3 presents modern and contemporary fieldwork tools invaluable to the scientific documentation and description of unstudied or understudied languages of Africa. The approaches highlighted are largely informed by recent developments in the field of documentary linguistics and a concern for language endangerment. He underlines, for instance, the sociolinguistics approach, which explores the knowledge and use of language. Different from the abstract formal approach of theoretical linguistics, the sociolinguistics approach allows for information on how the possible various groups that comprise a community may be obtained, and it provides insights that may allow subsequent aspects of the fieldwork to be better conducted. Information concerning language innovation and change, and language shift, can also be gleaned; this is of obvious importance when doing fieldwork on a threatened language. More generally, survey results can also be of use to local language committees, government, and non-government agencies, to inform language-planning policies and education policy. Additionally presented are a host of practical instruments of fieldwork; these range from community profile questionnaires, household,

individual, and administrative survey, to self-reporting. Some of these instruments are used in studying, for instance, language use in the market place. He also describes and discusses the utility of phonetics, especially acoustic studies, for fieldwork with pertinent exemplifications from seminal applications of the same in presenting the structure of a language.

An important phenomenon in African languages is tone. The lexical manipulative of pitch contrastively employed by many languages in the continent, coupled with the dynamic changes that tones undergo in running speech, informed the formulation of the non-linear approach to phonology as contained in Autosegmental Theory (Goldsmith 1976). Recognizing the significant place of tone in African languages, Constance Lojenga, in Chapter 4, focused her discussion solely on grassroots fieldwork on tone and tonology, thereby giving prominence to this important but much neglected theme in the field. Tone may not be easily perceptible to those scholars whose first language lacks them, and for those that use languages where variation in pitch is lexical, making sense of the attested variations across languages may be inundating. Thus, there is the need for proper training to assure successful fieldwork and proper analyses. According to Lojenga, the training should include information about tone languages in general, typology of tone, and instructions on the methodology for doing fieldwork on tone. Fieldworkers are to be thoroughly equipped to develop skills in listening, hearing, and reproducing tones, in addition to being skilled in transcribing different tones. The provided theoretical discussion and practical guidelines of Chapters 4 and 5 continue the historical development of the study of African languages, showing contemporary scientific approaches as well as marking a change in the motivation and assumptions of fieldwork.

Language is one of the biological endowments of humanity. Linguistics, the scientific study of language, subsumes a wide range of subject matter purposefully deployed to explicate its universal properties and particular features as manifested in specific speech communities. Linguistics therefore includes not only the actual documentation, description and classification of existing languages, as shown in Part I, it also involves the quest to understand language as a phenomenon. Essentially, the goal of theoretical linguistics is to illuminate the language faculty (Chomsky 2000). Some of the issues involved in the theoretical explications of knowledge of language are often abstract in nature, since these issues target internalized rules common to speakers of a particular language. The explication of the internalized rules possessed by members of a language community include describing the rules and principles observed by speakers and hearers, as well as the form and structure of this common knowledge, that is the grammar of language. While it is stereotypically popular to look to African languages for 'exotic' linguistic features, such as tone, clicks, doubly articulated consonants or the famous Bantu noun (see Hombert and Hyman 1999), which are not peculiar to Africa, the ten chapters of Parts II and III of the Handbook elucidate the theory of grammar in general. They present some fundamental topics germane to exploring language as a system and that illustrate aspects of the thematic approaches relevant to understanding the workings of this system. Chapter 6 explores coarticulation, one of the oldest research inquiries in phonetics, pertaining to how hearers recover individual phonemes from speech sounds that are overlapped and fused in utterance. Thus, Agwuele studied the interaction of tone with the segments that bear it in Yoruba in order to understand if tone exerts influence on the segments, as observed when segments are perturbed by suprasegmental factors such as stress. Ultimately the study confirmed the tone vocalic feature in Yoruba. Another pervasive phonetic feature of the largest linguistics family in Africa is the presence of doubly articulated consonants. Labio-velar sounds are examined in Chapter 7 by Michael Cahil. The study of the structure of sounds, that is the patterns or distributions of the sounds of a language and how the different sounds interact, i.e., phonology, is the main focus of Chapters 8 and 9. Both further exemplify linguistic pursuits in the endeavor

to uncover the knowledge of language possessed by its speakers, in this case, syllable structure vowel alteration, and vowel harmony. Going beyond the sound system to the level of phrase and sentence, Part III presents six chapters that provide additional data that show significant facts about human language. The themes explored include West African serial verbs, anaphors and Binding Theory, the encoding of information structure, applicatives, demonstratives, and experiencer predications. These topics present novel data that further showcase scientific approaches in the exploration of the language faculty, and, more significantly, they underscore the importance of African languages in theorizing about language.

Parts II and III exemplify some of the basic research on languages of Africa that generate knowledge about the phenomenon of language, and, quite importantly, they provide vital information necessary to address practical issues concerning the life of the people as contained in Parts IV and V. The fundamental issues involved, as carefully explored in both Parts, include that of representation of speech, thoughts and ideas; basic linguistic works thus feed into a whole lot of social and cultural matters including the use and representation of African languages in the social media. In a sense, the different themes of the 8 chapters that make up Parts IV and V rekindle the thoughts of the famous African writer wa Thiong'o, when he wrote; "This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle of any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1981). Language planning and language policy are two of the most important areas that have profited from continuous language documentation and basic research as these implicate nation building, economic, and educational development of independent African states, each of which is multilingual as well as ethnically and religiously diverse. The significance of language in the construction of a nation and in unifying people was a motivation for German involvement in language documentation in Africa, as shown by Sara Pugach in Chapter 1. In their efforts to seek 'national unity' in diversity, most independent African states adopted an exoglossic policy following independence. By maintaining and using the language of the ex-colonizer for official government business, education, and media, indigenous languages are not only suppressed and under-developed, but a large proportion of the people who do not speak these foreign tongues are effectively excluded from participating in the life of the state. Literacy in one's own language is not promoted, being related to mainly aural/oral language, most indigenous languages are not written so, therefore, they are undervalued. Above all, the people are denied their rights "to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures".<sup>5</sup> Aside from this, several of the conflicts in the continent are ethnolinguistically centered. Thus, given the importance of language in forging unity and in resolving inter-ethnolinguistic conflicts, the various African states take seriously the issue of language planning and policy, relying on the works of linguists to make language policies and plan languages. Some of these linguists are Bamgbose (1999/2008; 2000), Koffi (2012) and Kamwangamalu (2016), among many others.

Whereas the poor state of research into African languages by the time of independence has often been seen as one of the reasons for maintaining the language of the ex-colonizer, the many linguistically informed positions of many African scholars on multilingualism and cultural pluralism not only nullify this old position, they also provide scientific basis for the value of all languages, not only as cultural heritage but also as cultural capital, thereby aiding the government of each country to come up with solutions that fit their specific situation. For instance, Ethiopia's official language is Amharic, South Africa operates 11 official languages, Tanzania recognizes Kiswahili, an indigenous lingua franca, as the official language, and Nigeria recognizes the three majority languages in the country (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) along with English as the official languages. Essentially, scholars, concerned with education,

urge instruction in the mother tongue, presuming there to be an influence of the first language in perception and cognitive development. The scholarship in language documentation and education underscore the invaluableness of own language for educational and cognitive purposes, as well as how language implicates such socio-cultural factors as gender, individual and group identity, media and youth expressions. Focusing on the State of Ghana, Paul Agbedor, in Chapter 19, provides a good discussion of the problems and prospects of language planning for development. While he narrowly focuses on Ghana, some of the problems he noted are not confined to this country. With respect to Ghana, Bodomo (1996) proposed a trilingual model of education that he argues would ensure that Ghanaian/African children have a basic grounding in their mother tongues or first languages before learning to read and write in major African and world languages.

Beside the issues of national language and education, some contemporary scholars are exploring African languages for technological and forensic purposes, some others seek to apply linguistic knowledge to making possible machine reading for the blind. Regardless of the ends of these diverse linguistic works, gains are not possible without a careful understanding of the pertinent theoretical and conceptual issues such as are addressed by basic research studies in phonetics, phonology, syntax, and pragmatics. The diversity of approaches serves to make explicit the inter-relatedness of the sub-disciplinary perspectives in the scientific study of language, as well as the vast range of scholarship and literature of each sub-discipline. These differing and cohesive perspectives are also invaluable in showing the multiplex nature of language in relation to culture, society, and indeed civilization.

As a species-specific affair, language is a communal property, and an expressive socio-cultural product. It is a complex repository of knowledge, ideas, history, emotions, cultures and social dynamics of a people. It provides orientation to communal values; it indexes certain ethos, and, through its power to encode, it is the primary means of socializing a child into the society, and of transfer of cultural heritage inter-generationally. Thus, complementing theoretical linguists' quests to uncover the knowledge that speakers and hearers have of their language are efforts to empirically understand how users employ this knowledge across diverse communicative situations. Part V of the Handbook explores the verbal and non-verbal locutionary function of some African languages. This 'real world' (Sapir [1949] 1985: 162) orientation of the four chapters in this section underscores the fact that individuals and groups adjust to reality linguistically. The use of language is a local affair, it is specific to culture and responsive to social dynamics. Brookes and Kouassi (Chapter 20) and Barasa (Chapter 21) give comprehensive accounts of 'Youth language', a linguistic variety that, according to Brookes and Kouassi, emanated in urban centers, mainly among male groups on the periphery of society. These linguistic forms include Tsotsitaal spoken in South Africa, Sheng in Kenya, Nouchi in the Ivory Coast, and Indoubil in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both chapters explore their origin, spread, structure, use, and future prospects. More pertinently, these 'spontaneous performative practices', which emerged as a social marker of identity and of social marginalization, have assumed mainstream economic and political significance analogous to the form of urban dressing explored for Sophiatown (i.e., Tsotsil, whose notoriety centered on internecine fights for street-corner dominance) by Sharp (2015).

Study of languages is not limited to the aural or spoken version as 65–70 percent of all communication is presumed to be non-verbal. Along with the documentation, description and theorization of African languages, there is a growing interest in the study of the non-verbal communicative strategies employed across the continent. For instance, Orié's (2009) description of Yoruba hand gesture, Brookes' (2001, 2004) repertoire of South African gestures, and Agwuele's (2014) documentation of Yoruba head and face gestures. These works focus not

on sign language, but on quotable gestures (Kendon 1992). Heather Brookes in Chapter 22 provides an insightful panoramic overview of the study of non-verbal communicative gestures across the continent. This impressive work, which covers the typology of gesture, its theoretical underpinning with respect to the relationship between the nature of gestures and gestural behaviors, and the communicative ecology shaped by social and material environments among others, show the growing importance of documenting the various ways in which African people also ‘speak without words’.

One of the persistent questions in language studies is the possible influence of language on its speakers.

Everything humans perceive, think, value and feel are learned through their participation in a socio-cultural system, mediated by language. Language provides the mental categories through which experiences are categorized. Because different categories and conceptual schemes are found in different languages, it is presumed that speakers will be channeled to pay differential attention to aspects of the world that hold greater significance for them.

*Agwuele 2016: 5*

The last chapter in the Handbook by Adams Bodomo addresses this primary question of linguistic philosophy. It is an inquiry into linguistic relativity using data from Dagaare and Dagbane, two Mabia languages of northern Ghana and adjoining areas of West Africa. The chapter uses the metrical tense structure of these languages to question the validity of the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The main claim of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is that the language we speak determines, or at least influences, the way we view the world around us. The stronger version claims a determining relationship while the weaker version only claims that the relationship is one of influence and is not deterministic. Bodomo’s study supports only a weak version of linguistic relativity, showing instead that, independent of the language they speak, all humans are capable of going through the same thought processes. Language does not determine or structure the logical thought process. What the structure of language does is to influence the way we express thought and not determine the way we reason about reality.

### **Why a handbook of African linguistics?**

Already noted are the long and enduring interests in the different African languages and their speakers. Also noted is the uninterrupted growth in studying African languages. Keeping pace with this growth on the continent are the various outlets for the dissemination of the findings from these studies. There are different regional (e.g., West African Linguistic Association) and international (e.g., African Language Association) scholarly bodies and academic associations; local, national and international journals covering linguistics and sub-fields of linguistics; as well as the formation of different departments dedicated to the study of languages in a growing number of universities being created across the continent. Aside from these, there have been several landmark works. For instance, in 1995, Akinbiyi Akinlabi edited a very informative book entitled *Theoretical Approaches to African Linguistics*. This work, produced in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the annual conference on African linguistics, contains 24 chapters covering syntax, phonology, and language acquisition and sociolinguistics. Heine and Nurse (2000) edited the anthology on *African Languages: An Introduction* which contains 12 chapters. The book covered four language phyla in Africa, it includes chapters on phonology, morphology, syntax and typology, and there is a section on comparative linguistics, on the

history of African languages, and on sociolinguistics. This vast work is the closest thing to a Handbook. Perhaps as an addendum to it, Heine and Nurse in 2008 edited another book titled: *A Linguistic Geography of Africa*. It is a data-driven collection of essays that raised pertinent questions concerning the field of linguistics on the continent. Other works on African linguistics include *Studies in African Linguistic Typology* (Voeltz 2000). This collection of essays is aimed at providing a broad perspective of African linguistic typology, it has 21 chapters, each of which tried to produce data from a linguistic group on the continent. There is also *African Voices: An Introduction to the Languages and Linguistics of Africa* edited by Webb and Kembo-Sure in 2000. With contributions from scholars who are in African universities, the goals of this anthology were to introduce students to theoretical linguistics and to introduce language and linguistics in Africa. Finally, John Mugane edited in 2003 another anthology with the title: *Linguistic Typology and Representation of African Languages*. It comprised of 25 chapters selected from papers presented at the 33rd Annual Conference on African Linguistics. The three main sections, aside from the plenary papers, include chapters on phonetics, phonology and morphology, syntax and semantics, historical linguistics, and language and society. All the aforementioned works reveal the importance of language documentation, classification, and explication in Africa. They uncover data and observations that allow for conjectures on the origin of language; the relationship between languages and language change. Further, these works provide insights to how the different people employ languages in their everyday life as well as how language influences their institutions.

Despite all these, there is not in existence a single Handbook on African languages. This is a glaring gap yearning to be filled, especially given the enormous work on the different languages in the continent and the vibrancy that the field has experienced over the past 50 years. This present Handbook is an initial step towards filling this gap. The Handbook subsumes aspects of issues pertaining to language documentation and description, theoretical explications of the phenomenon of language, linguistic praxis, and socio-cultural dimensions. Notably missing in this first instalment of the Handbook are themes related to language origin, creoles, writing systems, forensics and computation. Subsequent editions will cover these and other issues.

African languages and the cultures associated with them require an interdisciplinary enterprise (Bodomo 2017). As such, there must be a serious agenda to describe, document and preserve them, not just for their own sakes, but for their important role in interdisciplinary scientific research. So, while the study of Africa (including its languages, literatures, histories, and societies) is important in itself (indeed, no university can claim to be a global university without a well-supported African studies program), the role of Africa in linguistics for any scholarly endeavors, especially in the humanities, remains invaluable. We therefore need resources such as this Handbook to provide reliable reference sources. It is hoped that this *Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics* will play such a role.

### Why African linguistics?

The choice of the adjectivizing term, African, in the *Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics* is not to feed the evanescent othering of the continent and its people. There is no doubt of the reality of the burden of othering for Africans along the three dimensions eloquently described and elegantly demonstrated by Spivak in 1985. Be it in producing and reproducing Africa as the subordinate, or creating and making it the pathological, deviant and inferior, and seeing it as bereft of knowledge, science, creativity and advancement, this multidimensional process of othering is often reinforced and neophytes are socialized into it through a repetitive re-enactment of a single stereotype.

Rather than feed this insatiable appetite for infantilizing the continent, the adjective is mainly a geographical delimitation of the focus of the data being explicated, it is not to other, exoticize, or mark the linguists or the linguistic work on the continent. Linguistic scholarship on the continent is, in some cases, at the forefront of knowledge production in enriching the data that informs theories concerning language origin and diversification. This Handbook informs, educates, elucidates, and contributes new information to the field of linguistics in general, it does so decidedly in showcasing works that are based on data from languages in the continent. Rather than being subjected, and intensifying the line between us and them, the works on the languages of the continent become the objects of discourse, showing their invaluable in linguistic theory and practice. The scholars, Africans and non-Africans alike, are not objects in colonial interpellations; they are active agents purposefully exploring different significant linguistic issues of universal import using diverse data from different language families in the continent.

### Notes

- 1 For an overview of the history of European scholarship on the documentation and classification of African languages, see, for example, Agwuele, A. (2008); Nurse, D. (1997).
- 2 J.G. Herder in 1772 asserted that a nation cannot exist without its language, that is the language of its fathers. He considered language to be the collective treasure of a nation (see Herder, Johann Gottfried (1772) *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache: welche den von der Königl. Academie der Wissenschaften für das Jahr 1770 gesetzten Preiserhalten hat*. Berlin: Voss). For W. von Humboldt, language is the spirit of the nation, it is the mental exhalation of a nationally individual life (Humboldt, *On Language, On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, edited by Michael Losonsky. CUP 1999).
- 3 For thorough treatment of the practice of comparative linguistics in Africa with diachronic analyses, see Dimmendaal, G.J. (2011).
- 4 Simons, G.F. and C.D. Fennig (eds) (2017). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Twentieth Edn. Dallas, TX: SIL International, online version: [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com).
- 5 E/CN. 4/sub. 2/1993/29. Part iii, Article 14 of the UN Sub-commission on Human Rights Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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## PART I

# History, method, and typology



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# 1

## A SHORT HISTORY OF AFRICAN LANGUAGE STUDIES IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON GERMAN CONTRIBUTIONS<sup>1</sup>

*Sara Pugach*

### **Introduction: missionaries and the written word**

This chapter provides a brief, non-exhaustive overview of the history of African language studies from the early nineteenth century. It will then narrow to focus on how scholars, particularly those from Germany, transformed the field from a humanistic pursuit to a discipline steeped in natural scientific methodologies. The transformation, which occurred around the turn of the twentieth century, shifted the discipline away from its roots in text-based, philological study, and towards an emphasis on the body's physical production and articulation of sound. I will examine this change using the example of the Phonetics Laboratory that officials at the Hamburg Colonial Institute established in 1910 at the request of Carl Meinhof, then Europe's foremost specialist in African languages. It was at the laboratory that Africans became Meinhof's main subjects. Meinhof and his colleagues, including phonetician Giulio Panconcelli-Calzia, examined Africans using mechanical equipment designed to capture sound. The experiments that were conducted were never benign; instead they were expressions of colonial power, as the experiments were used to "prove" the primitivity of African languages in comparison with those belonging to Indo-European and other language families. Further, the African participants were subordinated to scientific research led by Europeans, and had little input into the tests performed on them.

African/colonial linguistics were, moreover, generally part of the larger colonial project that naturalized difference while concealing the weakness of the power structures that undergirded European rule. At mission stations in Africa, where western African language studies were born, and in European universities, where the discipline was institutionalized, it was shaped by and embedded in a colonial matrix that privileged European knowledge and unraveled and remade precolonial African social and ethnic formations (Errington, 2001). Both the textual work of determining where linguistic territories started and ended, and the physical analysis of

languages considered “primitive,” fed into the wider objective of categorizing and controlling African peoples. As the late Patrick Harries pointed out, most African ethnic categories did not exist before the late nineteenth century, when missionaries researched and standardized their languages (Harries, 1988). Metropolitan sites of African language study continued this work by favoring certain languages over others, as well as by relegating them to the status of *Kolonialsprachen* (colonial or “primitive” languages), a category that implied they were underdeveloped in comparison with the mature European and Asian *Kultursprachen* (“civilized” languages).

This did not mean that European research on African languages remained static over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the shift from a textual focus to a physical one, along with the emergence of a classificatory system that grouped African languages in terms of their supposed linguistic “maturity” and the growing influence of scientific racism as the nineteenth century wore on ensured that the discipline altered considerably through time (Irvine, 1993). Nevertheless, linguistics remained critical for colonization throughout, as it always helped determine the boundaries of African ethnic categories and reinforced hierarchies of difference.

Let us begin by looking concretely at how and why a field of African linguistics emerged in the west. European explorers, colonial officials, missionaries, and other visitors to Africa were the first westerners to take an interest in the continent’s languages. The Portuguese, who interacted with and eventually colonized western and central African kingdoms such as Kongo and Angola, began to compile lists of words in various African languages in the early sixteenth century. Missionaries – in this case, Capuchins – were both learning the Kongo language and translating religious texts into it by the seventeenth century, primarily because they were frustrated with their inability to communicate without the aid of interpreters (Thornton, 2017). Around the same time, there was at least one “armchair” scholar, Hiob Ludolf, working on the extinct Ethiopian language of Ge’ez from his base in Germany; although not a missionary, his research was heavily influenced by his links to the Jesuits (Miehe, 1996; Uhlig, 1986). From this early period, Africans were also involved in linguistic research; the Capuchins in Kongo relied on the assistance of a Kongolese priest named Manuel Roboredo (Thornton, 2017), while Ludolf collaborated with Ethiopian priest Äbba Gorgoryos (Uhlig, 1986). Europeans could not conduct African language research without Africans, but nonetheless usually relegated them to ancillary roles, ensuring that Africans were not considered the primary authors of the Bible translations, grammars, and dictionaries that were produced (Pugach, 2007).

While the beginnings of African language studies do stretch back to the sixteenth century, it was in the nineteenth century that African language research really began to blossom. The amateur discipline was initiated largely, though not wholly, by German Protestant missionaries.<sup>2</sup> These missionaries first worked for British missionary societies, including the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Non-Comformist London Missionary Society (LMS). The CMS, in particular, became home to many Germans. William Wilberforce and other leading abolitionists had founded the CMS in 1799 (Hole, 1896). Its first station was in Sierra Leone, the British colony that had been designed as a haven for freed slaves. When the CMS was originally unable to find English missionaries for the enterprise, its leaders quickly drew on their continental contacts to recruit German-speaking, Lutheran pastors from Prussia and Württemberg, most of whom had trained in Berlin (Hole, 1896). Karl Friedrich Steinkopff, a one-time secretary of the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* (German Christianity Society) and pastor at St Mary’s German Lutheran Church in London, was crucial in this regard (Kirchberger, 2007). This early cross-national collaboration was not without controversy; denominational disputes, such as whether the Lutherans would have to submit to the authority of an Anglican Bishop, troubled English and German alike (Kirchberger, 2007).

Nonetheless, since the Germans did not have the funds to go to Africa without British support, and the English did not have the personnel, an alliance was formed (Walls, 2001).

G.R. Nyländer, who had been educated in Berlin and arrived in Sierra Leone to work for the CMS in 1806, was the first German missionary to publish on an African language. This was the 1814 *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bullom Language* (Anderson, 1999; Walker, 1847; Nyländer, 1814). In Sierra Leone Nyländer was soon followed by others, including C.F.C. Wenzel and J.S. Klein (Hair, 2014), who wrote on Susu, C.F. Schlenker, who worked on Temne (Schlenker, 1864), and S.W. Koelle, who compiled the *Polyglotta Africana*, an early classification of West African languages (Hair, 1967; Koelle, 1854), in addition to more specific work on Vai (Koelle, 1854). Other CMS missionaries from German-speaking Europe entered the service on different mission fields, such as J.L. Krapf in Ethiopia and Kenya (Pirouet, 1999), and J.F. Schön in Nigeria (Cust, 2002). Eventually, more Britons joined the CMS and German-speaking societies founded their own fields. The Berlin Missionary Society (BMS) established stations in East and South Africa (Wangemann, 1872), the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS) settled in Namibia (Menzel, 1978), and the North German Missionary Society (NMS) moved into Togo (Schubert, 2003). German-speaking missionaries slowly began to shift from writing their dictionaries and grammars of African languages in English to composing them in German.

Why, though, were the bulk of the earliest missionary linguists German? And why did they take such a keen interest in the study of African languages? These are important questions, since missionary work set the tone for the future development of the African linguistics discipline. Practically, the missionaries hoped to dispense with interpreters and communicate directly with potential converts. Yet, on another level, the need for linguistic knowledge acquired more urgency. Nineteenth-century German missionaries were under the influence of a strong Pietist tradition. They believed that true conversion to Christianity could only be attained when the Christian message touched a person's heart in his or her native language. Following such late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German Pietists as Philipp Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke, these missionaries emphasized inner spirituality over strict church doctrine, a hallmark of German Pietism (Wallmann, 1995). Since the achievement of inner spirituality involved native language communication, transcribing unwritten languages became important, as did the production of dictionaries, grammars, Bibles, and other religious texts.

Theological issues initially sparked the missionary enthusiasm for language. Yet debates about national identity inside Germany – and the role of language in its construction – also contributed to the disproportionate involvement of German missionaries in African language research. There is an extensive literature on the significance of nationalism to the nineteenth-century German preoccupation with language study, which scholars such as George Mosse, Leon Poliakov, Suzanne Marchand, Douglas McGetchin, Tuska Benes, and George Williamson have all shown in different ways (Mosse, 1964; Poliakov, 1996; Marchand, 1996; McGetchin, 2009; Benes, 2008; Williamson, 2004). Germany was not politically unified until 1871, but had a strong contingent agitating for unification much earlier, indeed from the Congress of Vienna and the reconstruction of a Europe ravaged by Napoleon in 1815. For scholars such as J.G. Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Jakob Grimm, language thus provided a common identity and awareness of nationhood well before a concrete German state actually existed (Köpke, 2009; Langham Brown, 1967; Roberts, 2010).

The argument further runs that German interest in linguistics is related to the early nineteenth-century Romanticism that connected a *Volk*, or people, both to the soil on which it lived as well as to the tongue that it spoke (Mosse, 1964; Poliakov, 1996). According to intellectuals such as Herder, language thus represented the spirit, or soul, of a nation (Herder, 1997; Benes, 2003).

Grimm's fascination with not only German itself, but also German literature – including the famous fairy tales – also demonstrates how a scholar came to associate culture with language, and to see the two as inseparable and intertwined (Grimm et al., 1812). This made sense, since again, before 1871, German identity had more of a linguistic than a political fixity.<sup>3</sup>

Missionaries and university philologists shared some common concerns about language. For example, both were inheritors of the seventeenth-century Pietist tradition that stressed a strong personal bond with Christ. Even so, before the late nineteenth century, the missionaries were largely uninterested in nationalism or German unification. Isolated from Germany, they identified mainly with other European Protestants. They considered themselves part of an international Christian community, not a national German one. Still, the CMS missionaries were educated in a milieu where texts by scholars such as Herder, Humboldt and Grimm were influential, and many had studied in German universities where their ideas were prominent. Some missionaries were also celebrated in the wider academic community, with the linguistic achievements of missionaries such as Krapf, Koelle, and Schön all fêted throughout Europe. Krapf received a PhD from the University of Tübingen in 1844 for his work on Ethiopian languages (Griegenow-Mewis, 1996), while his colleagues Koelle and Schön were both awarded the prestigious Volney Prize for comparative philology, as was Basel missionary J.G. Christaller for his work on Ghanaian languages (Leopold, 1999).

The transcription, creation and critique of texts in African languages was central to the work of these nineteenth-century missionaries. Their Pietist background encouraged this focus on text, especially when it was biblical. The biblical translations that German Pietists produced also led to a profoundly new way of envisioning the Bible itself, as Jonathan Sheehan has suggested (Sheehan, 2005). Pietists saw the Bible as a text for general consumption, and not the personal provenance of the learned elite. Consequently, the Bible was the crux around which Pietist life turned for all believers, regardless of social or class status, and certainly regardless of race. To missionaries raised in a Pietist framework, it was thus important that Africans be able to read biblical passages in their own languages, and in so doing make the texts their own.

Even though German missionary linguists did not think of themselves in nationalist terms, their work still contributed to the process of European colonization, in this case expressly British colonization. The CMS missionaries Krapf and Schön made their allegiance to Great Britain plain in their writings. Adrian Hastings has pointed out that Krapf proposed in 1841 that British political authority be established in Ethiopia to help secure the country for Christ, very specifically tying the success of Christianity to that of British colonialism (Hastings, 1996). Then, in an 1862 Hausa grammar, Schön went a step further. In the preface he quoted English abolitionist T.F. Buxton's assertion that "from the slave trade itself, a nation has been reclaimed, and now enjoys, in comparison with Africa, a blaze of light, liberty, religion, and happiness. That nation is Great Britain" (Schön, 1862, p. xiv). Their linguistic work was thus clearly carried out in the service of both British colonization and international Christianization, which were tightly entwined and reinforced the same European power structure (Pugach, 2012).

While German missionaries may have initiated nineteenth-century African language studies, many non-German Europeans also pursued and became distinguished for their linguistic research. As Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová has shown, the French Catholic White Fathers were extremely invested in learning and transcribing various African languages, to the extent that they were not allowed to speak any but the languages in which they preached after being in the field for a certain period (Pawliková-Vilhanová, 2007). Krapf was one of the founders of Swahili studies (Griegenow-Mewis, 1996; Pirouet, 1999), but the British Edward Steere, who missionized in East Africa from the 1860s and ultimately became Bishop of Central Africa, was also a pioneer in the discipline (Frankl, 1999), as were the French priest Charles Sacleux

(Ricard, 2007), and the British CMS Deacon William Edward Taylor (Frankl, 1999). A good discussion of the work of Protestant Swiss missionaries in South Africa in detail was made by Harries (1988). What all of these missionaries, and others, had in common was a commitment to colonization and Christianization, both of which contributed to the upending and reshaping of precolonial African societies. As per the Comaroffs (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991), missionary linguistic interventions codified, ossified, and classified African languages, as well as the people who spoke them.

Colonial administrators worked as African linguists alongside missionaries. They also worked to reorganize African society to suit colonial needs – for instance, to bring Africans into a cash economy and reorient labor practices to benefit the mother country – and used language as a tool to do so. In the British context, some of the most well-known linguist-administrators were H.H. Johnston (Oliver, 1957), and Robert Needham Cust, the latter of whom was also an Anglican missionary (Cust, 2002). French administrators were involved in linguistic research as well, pursuing linguistic and anthropological research in tandem, as did most of those who conducted linguistic studies (Ginio, 2002).<sup>4</sup> In addition, from 1902 an entire series of books in Germany – the *Archiv für das Studium deutscher Kolonialsprachen* (Archive for the Study of German Colonial Languages) – were primarily composed by German colonial officials doubling as linguists (Pugach, 2012).

One of the other most pivotal figures in the development of African linguistics was Wilhelm Bleek, a German who was not a missionary but a scholar and librarian. Bleek was among the first to write a dissertation on African languages, and is renowned for having coined the term “Bantu” to describe the vast language family that dominates much of the African continent (Spohr, 1965).<sup>5</sup> His background in biblical criticism and theology was similar to that of his missionary colleagues, and he came of age intellectually in the same academic orbit (Bank, 2006). Bleek ultimately emigrated to South Africa, became librarian to Cape Colony Governor Sir George Grey, and continued his linguistic studies by meeting with and assessing the languages of local African populations, chief among them “Bushmen” (Bank, 2006).

Bleek’s work with Africans again drives home the point that although Europeans considered themselves the primary “authors” of African language grammars, dictionaries, and Bibles, it is more apt to say that the texts were *co-authored* by Africans, since they supplied most of the raw data in their role as informants. Indeed, many scholars have addressed the significance of African participation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic and linguistic research (Schumaker, 2001; Lawrance et al., 2006). This included many Africans who grew up on mission stations, became missionaries themselves, and conducted linguistic research. Akan minister C.C. Reindorf worked with Basel missionary Christaller on studies of Ghanaian languages (Bearth, 2000), and the celebrated West African Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was a linguist as well (Hair, 1969). He and CMS missionary Schön recorded the languages they encountered while on a trip to the lower Niger. Crowther became the chief Yoruba specialist of the age, translating the Bible and other religious texts into Yoruba (Hair, 1987). He was indeed the first person to publish anything in Igbo (van den Berselaar, 1997).

Relationships between African and European missionary linguists were fraught with issues of power imbalance and white domination. Reindorf, for instance, ultimately had to yield to Christaller when they disagreed over issues related to their research (Bearth, 2000). The subject of power – and agency – in the study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African languages is extremely significant. Europeans could not conduct their linguistic research without Africans, but the names of many African researchers were never written down, and have been lost. Missionaries would often credit their African informants with having done more

for their translations and vocabulary compilations than they had themselves (Pugach, 2012). Nonetheless, records on most of these Africans's lives are scarce, leading to an erasure of their presence at the site of linguistic production.

### **German colonialism, nationalism, and inherent racism**

From the first publication of an African language grammar – Nyländer's 1814 work on Bullom – through the middle of the nineteenth century, the German missionaries at the forefront of African linguistics defined their identities through religion, not nationality. Above all else they were Christians. Later in the nineteenth century that changed. After German unification in 1871, missionaries were progressively swept up in the nationalist fervor that had gripped the country, especially as Germany began to compete with other European powers for African colonies (Stoecker, 1986).<sup>6</sup> While the Protestant missionary establishment in Germany was generally conflicted about whether to remain true to their ecumenical commitments or support German colonial ambitions, the most prominent missionary linguists were active proponents of German imperialism (Pugach, 2012). They followed the dictums of Rhenish missionary inspector Friedrich Fabri, who was never personally a missionary in Africa, but nevertheless became Otto von Bismarck's main adviser on colonial policy. Fabri was an avid colonialist who was convinced that Germany's success was dependent on its ability to participate in the colonial scramble (Fabri, 1884).

The main missionary behind this transformation, however, was Carl Büttner.<sup>7</sup> Büttner is central both to the history of African linguistics *and* to the history of German colonialism. Büttner was a member of the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS), and went to South West Africa – what is now Namibia – in 1872. He remained there through 1880, both proselytizing to the local population and conducting research on local languages such as Herero. Büttner was originally in favor of the British expanding their dominion in the Cape Colony into South West Africa, thereby effectively placing the region under British imperial control. The British, however, were uninterested in annexing the territory, and Büttner ultimately concluded that Germany would be a better master.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, after he had been back in Germany for five years, Büttner returned once again to South West Africa, this time as an agent of the German imperial government. Büttner became one of the main participants in the negotiations that led to South West Africa officially becoming a German colony. His linguistic knowledge helped as he was able to negotiate treaties on Germany's behalf in South West African languages. Upon his final return to Germany in 1886, Büttner took on the role of Mission Society Inspector for the newly founded *Deutsche-Ostafrikanischer Missionsgesellschaft* (German-East African Missionary Society), a society that was expressly imperialist in nature (Menzel, 1978).

Büttner's enthusiasm for German colonization influenced his linguistic scholarship. Originally he wrote his work on Herero and other South West African languages in English. He later condemned himself and others for this. He argued that Germans had always been the most active Africanist scholars, and had diminished themselves by submitting to British domination through their use of English. This opinion that German linguists had been "slaves to a British master," carried over into what became the work of the rest of his life, a teaching position at the newly founded *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen* (Department of Oriental Languages). The *Seminar* had been opened at the *Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität* (Friedrich-Wilhelms University) in Berlin for the express purpose of training Germans preparing for colonial careers in the languages they would need at their postings (Menzel, 1978).

At the outset, African languages were a minor consideration at the *Seminar*. Much more weight was given to Middle Eastern and East Asian languages, where it was assumed the

bulk of the students would go. It did not take long, however, for African languages such as Swahili and Hausa to grow in popularity. As Germany's involvement in its colonies of German East Africa, German South West Africa, Togo, and Cameroon grew, so did the need for students who could communicate in their languages. These students were primarily civil servants (Pugach, 2012). Missionaries were no longer the primary audience for African languages studies and training. Accordingly, the Pietist goals of transforming a people by transforming their language diminished in importance, and an emphasis on practical speaking skills emerged.

At the same time, missionaries – or those with strong ties to the Protestant missionary community – remained crucial to the discipline as it underwent institutionalization. During his tenure at the *Seminar*, Büttner began to work with and mentor a pastor named Carl Meinhof, who would go on to become one of the most significant figures in early twentieth-century African linguistics. Meinhof, who was born in Pomerania in 1857, became interested in African languages during the 1880s. This was when a young Cameroonian, Njo Dibone (Dibone and Meinhof, 1889), lived with Meinhof briefly in order to study German. While Meinhof taught Dibone German, Dibone taught Meinhof his language, Duala. Already involved with Protestant missionary causes, Meinhof's encounter with Dibone radically altered his career path. Meinhof continued to research and write about African languages through the turn of the century, at first focusing largely on the Bantu group, to which Duala was classified. In 1899 he published the *Grundriss einer Lautlehre der Bantusprachen* (An Outline of Bantu Phonology) (Meinhof, 1899), which rocketed him to the apex of African linguistics. Ultimately, in 1903, Meinhof left his small country parsonage for Berlin and a position teaching Swahili and other Bantu languages at the *Seminar* (Pugach, 2012).

The growth of scientific racism, with an intensification of the belief that racial difference could be objectively measured by assessing physical criteria such as skull shape or skin shade, also had an increasing impact as the nineteenth century wore on, and certainly influenced linguists like Büttner and Meinhof. Linguistic phenomena were increasingly correlated with racial characteristics. For example, the languages of taller, lighter-skinned Africans were commonly classified as “Hamitic”, whereas those of shorter, darker-skinned individuals were usually typed as “Nigritic” or “Sudanic.” Anthropologists and linguists argued that the Hamites, a group that had migrated to Africa from Europe or the Middle East in the distant past, had conquered and suppressed Africa's original, “Nigritic” inhabitants. Once the Hamites had settled in Africa, they began to intermingle with the vanquished natives and lost many of their “superior” racial traits. Still, Meinhof – who published his *Die Sprachen der Hamiten* (Hamitic Languages) in 1912 (Meinhof, 1912), and had become the top scholar of Hamitic languages, as well as Bantu ones – maintained that the superior Hamitic languages, remarkable for inflection and the use of grammatical gender, were largely impervious to change. Therefore, even if a Hamitic group had blended in with its non-Hamitic neighbors, linguists would know from its language that the people in question were Hamitic (Meinhof, 1912).

When Meinhof published *Die Sprachen der Hamiten*, he was the acknowledged leader in the emergent field of *Afrikanistik* – African language studies. The only person who came close to matching him was former North German missionary Diedrich Westermann, the leading expert on non-Bantu West African languages and peoples at the beginning of the twentieth century (Stoecker, 2008). In 1912 Westermann took over from Meinhof at the *Seminar*, and Meinhof left for Hamburg's newly founded Kolonialinstitut. Meinhof left the *Seminar* because its leadership refused to grant him funding for a *Zeitschrift* and, more importantly, for a phonetics laboratory (Pugach, 2012).

The laboratory, as stated at the beginning of the chapter, was central to the development of African studies as the discipline was further institutionalized and moved increasingly away from the original missionary interest in language as a tool for religious conversion. At the laboratory, African language study was an “objective” science, with specific values to measure and quantifiable data to produce. Linguistic researchers continued to develop pedagogical techniques to expedite language learning. However, whether the linguists were missionaries or not, they were now equally preoccupied with uncovering structural patterns that European and African languages shared, with the hope that so doing would provide clues about not only the origins of specific African language groups, but German origins as well (Pugach, 2012).

While Meinhof and his colleagues searched for origins, the laboratory he had established also made it clear that African languages were fundamentally different from European ones. Indeed, Meinhof’s insistence that the laboratory was crucial to African linguistics was rooted in the belief that African languages were exceptionally appropriate subjects for phonetic inquiry. The *Kultursprachen* – including most European and Asian languages – had lengthy written traditions that philologists had already examined, in some cases exhaustively. By contrast, because many African languages lacked written texts, they had hardly been touched by western scholars (Meinhof, 1910a). Further, African languages could not be illuminated using the literary techniques applied elsewhere. Instead, they required the careful phonetic analysis of “living speech” and the presence of either native speakers or well-made recordings of their voices.

While practical considerations were of principal importance to the Seminar and its Africa-bound students, Meinhof and his peers believed that their institution also had scientific obligations. Chief among these was, again, the responsibility to research the linguistic, and thus the cultural, religious, and biological origins of humanity, as well as of discrete racial groups. In this regard, Meinhof contended that *Kultursprachen* had usually altered so much since they were first uttered that it was impossible for science to recapture their original forms. Combined with the fact that ancient texts were composed in literary language and did not reflect the way people had really spoken, Meinhof felt that their value to the study of origins was limited. At the same time, he held that many African languages had remained practically untouched by history. Some of these groups, Meinhof maintained, lived in remote areas and had not come into contact with other people before Europeans arrived (Meinhof, 1936). Their languages had been preserved almost as if they were fossils, offering linguists a unique opportunity to explore the earliest structures of speech. With the sophisticated auditory, medical and transcriptive technologies available in the early twentieth century, those structures could be analyzed precisely, but only in a laboratory using newly developed methodologies to collect phonetic data.

The laboratory was originally founded principally for the study of African languages. Not long after it opened, though, Meinhof was besieged with requests to use the laboratory from professors in other departments, as well as the public. The laboratory was fast becoming recognized as a space to investigate all manner of languages and linguistic abnormalities (Pugach, 2012). Those who were interested in deaf-mute communications, stuttering, and deformities or injuries to speech organs all looked to the laboratory to conduct their research. In short order the laboratory turned into a locus for the construction of both the abnormal and the normal, defining what was “typical” for speech and what was not. Meinhof had begun with the assumption that European languages represented the pinnacle of linguistic sophistication, and that African languages were their stunted, underdeveloped cousins.

As the laboratory evolved, Africans continued to be the subjects of phonetic experiments, but were joined by others. For example, in 1913, linguists examined 400 “normal and deaf-mute children” with “anthropometric devices” such as the spirometer, which measured the volume of air coming in and out of the lungs (Panconcelli-Calzia and Körner, 1994). This meant that in the laboratory, African languages were ultimately located on an axis between primitivity and maturation, but also on a continuum between regular and aberrant. European languages were models of refinement, and the laboratory served as a chamber for exploring deviation within and outside them.

After Germany lost its colonies in World War I, the laboratory – which was founded in a specifically colonial context to advance the goal of imperial expansion – continued to branch out, increasingly moving away from its original purpose. Phoneticians studied veterans who had injured vocal organs (Göpfert, 1920), as well as twins and triplets. Panconcelli-Calzia brought three-year-old triplets Ursula, Erika, and Herma into the laboratory in 1935 to determine whether the register that they spoke in and the gestures they made while so doing were identical, thereby advancing the “science” of racial hygiene. He pointed to three “areas” of racial hygiene or genetic research, the “racial-biological, family-biological, and twin-biological,” and held that phonetics was particularly suited to support the third. It was important to conduct experiments with children such as Ursula, Erika, and Herma at a young age because environmental factors had not yet altered their voices. Panconcelli-Calzia contended that research on the triplets and other *Mehrlinge* (multiples) would make a significant contribution to curing genetic diseases by unraveling the nature of biological inheritance (Schilling, 1950). What he did not mention, but which was surely the case, was that the laboratory also enhanced the wider Nazi project of classifying racial traits by adding phonological categories to the existing catalogue of racial characteristics.

That biological characteristics and the racial differences that could be attributed to them would become so relevant by the 1930s would not have been immediately apparent when the laboratory opened in 1910. While the laboratory defined the normal and abnormal, it was also envisioned as a site for the *effacement* of physical features and the abstraction of sound. Meinhof scoffed at anthropologists who claimed that African and European vocal organs were dissimilarly formed, and that this made them unable to pronounce certain sounds (Meinhof, 1910a; Müller, 1879, 1884). Biologically, the lips, larynx, and pharynx were constructed in the same way, and neither Africans nor Europeans had superior articulatory equipment. When Meinhof, Panconcelli-Calzia, and other Europeans working at the laboratory made phonographic recordings of Africans speaking, they often played them back later for purposes of assessment. The African bodies themselves disappeared, replaced by detached voices whose racial origins and identities remained obscure.

The turn to allegedly “objective” reality was part of the larger intent to model African linguistics after the physical sciences and to reject the humanistic philological traditions that applied to *Kultursprachen*. This entailed “reading” African languages in terms of physical, rather than cultural, texts. Indeed, while other fora, such as the various ethnological and geographical journals devoted to the study of the colonies, presented and interpreted the religious and social content of African oral history and folklore, articles that appeared in the laboratory’s publication *Vox* emphasized topics such as sound shifts in African languages and the laws that governed them (Meinhof, 1918). Curiously then, although research coming out of the laboratory highlighted aspects of African languages that were foreign to Europeans, it also attempted to collapse difference and boil language down to a basic, unmarked series of combinations of consonants and vowels.

## Pedagogy and research at Carl Meinhof's Phonetics Laboratory

This strange amalgam of emphasis on both difference and its dissolution, definitions of the abnormal and their negation, is what makes the history of Hamburg's Phonetics Laboratory so intriguing for the story of African linguistics. Psychological and physical characteristics all came under the laboratory's purview. During its first years the Phonetics Laboratory was part of Meinhof's *Seminar für Kolonialsprachen*. All research and teaching done in the laboratory was thus closely connected to the goals of instruction, and students who took classes in an African language often had to report for practical exercises at the laboratory. One of the most significant features in both classroom and laboratory was the division of workload between Germans and Africans. The Germans were the lecturers who "translated" African grammar and vocabulary into terms students could understand. The Africans' main job was to demonstrate correct pronunciation and elocution. Meinhof believed that their roles could not be reversed. He found it unlikely that even the best European instructor would be able to mimic "exotic" African sounds on a consistent basis. A European could not teach his or her students how to speak an African language correctly on a mechanical level. For that reason, while Europeans were used as test subjects for experiments on African languages when native speakers were not available, the distinct preference was always for Africans. The Africans at the laboratory shared some similarities with the informants who had worked with missionaries and administrators in the field, but this comparison can go only so far. In the field, Africans explained the particulars of their languages to the Europeans. In the laboratory, Africans did not comment on the grammatical or morphological characteristics of the languages, merely speaking words from them so that they could be repeated back (Pugach, 2012).

At the same time, Meinhof also believed that Africans could not teach Europeans grammar in terms that the latter could comprehend. As he explained in 1910,

The native . . . is doubtless master of his material in the fullest sense, but he does not understand the European line of thought as it appears in the brain of the pupil. He is thus totally unable to supply the connecting links between European and non-European ideas . . . He who has ever interested himself in non-European languages knows . . . how great the gap is between these and our own. The discrepancy is based not only on the vocabulary or in a few deviations in the method of expression, but is founded on complete differentiation in the whole construction of the language, or in other words on quite another method of thought. What is plain to the one is unintelligible to the other, and what appears difficult to one is natural to the other. So, in African dialects, it is quite frequently the case that what the European calls the front, the African calls the back.

*Meinhof, 1910b, p. 263*

According to Meinhof, thought itself was determined by grammatical structure. Therefore, Europeans and Africans, who spoke languages belonging to different families with what he considered different levels of sophistication, would not be able to describe their languages to each other.

Africans and Europeans also served different functions in the laboratory, even if the line between them was not always clear-cut. Students were encouraged not only to listen to Africans and repeat what they heard them say, but also to observe them with their eyes. Depending on how close they were to the African "test subject," this would allow them to see the exact place

where articulation occurred and how speech organs moved. In order for students to be properly trained in the laboratory, African languages had to be absorbed visually before attempting to understand them aurally. Meinhof said that:

first, the learner must be shown how he personally makes sounds. He is impelled to touch his own lips, to look in the mirror. Words are pronounced for him and he is required not to listen with his ear, but to observe the movement of the lips with his eyes. If he has understood how known sounds are produced, he can then be shown the way that unknown ones are, until he sees the difference. Then he must try to mimic these, and when he finally can do so, he can also learn to hear.

*Meinhof, 1910a*

When British clergyman W.H.T. Gairdner visited the department in March 1912, he referred to the African teaching assistants at the laboratory as “living phonographs.” He said that they stood “on the (European’s) side” to be “cranked up” whenever there was need of demonstration (Gairdner, 1912). But he was only half right. For Meinhof, Panconcelli-Calzia, and other Europeans in the laboratory the African assistants were obviously much more than phonographs. They were literally “texts” to be “read” by students and studied by scholars.

This method of learning had roots in the training of *Taubstumme* (deaf-mutes), who would later become among the most important experimental subjects at the laboratory. Those who were deaf and mute could not learn to speak by listening to and repeating what they heard. They had to rely on visual cues, and in so doing demonstrated that language could be learned visually as well as aurally. Only when students were able to “think themselves into the position of a deaf-mute,” would they become cognizant of the importance of phonetics to the study of African languages (Meinhof, 1910a). By extrapolating from the study of the “abnormal,” students would arrive at an understanding of why they had to observe the way sounds were formed before personally repeating them.

In contrast to those who were deaf and mute, however, African difference had little to do with *physical* abnormality. Meinhof disparaged German scholars and missionary officials who maintained that “in spite of anatomy . . . the gums of the English are differently built,” when they could not learn to speak English with the proper accent, and he felt likewise with respect to Africans and their languages (Meinhof, 1910a, p. 151). To Meinhof, African difference rested rather in psychology and culture. The missionary G.L. Cleve had made Meinhof aware of the ways in which custom could precipitate sound shift by demonstrating how sounds in some Bantu languages were transformed by the ritualistic wearing of lip pegs (*pelele* or *ndonya*) and mutilation of teeth:

With these mutilated organs, a person can, naturally, not articulate all sounds as he can with healthy ones. As a result of the mutilation, a type of articulation thus becomes general. Even after the custom has disappeared, the articulation remains. This theory can also apply to specific cases. So, for example, Yao women wear a big piece of wood in their upper lips. They can’t speak the letter f, and because the children learn to speak from the women, the f has disappeared from the language.

*Cleve, 1903, pp. 681–701*

Meinhof’s mentor Wilhelm Wundt, whose works on *Völkerpsychologie* had a marked influence on the linguist, had claimed that in the transition from countryside to city, sound shifts of a kind that Meinhof had noted for Swahili often began to occur:

Wundt has made us aware of a process that is surely worth notice, namely that in the city, with increased contact, people speak more and more quickly than they do in the country with little contact . . . Naturally, in quick speech sounds will be more fleetingly pronounced and then disappear entirely. Thus, for example in Swahili, which as a coastal and trading language is spoken very quickly, the l after the stressed syllable has as a rule dropped away. Likewise the u after an m has mostly vanished, because both sounds, as lip sounds (bilabials) are very similar. People no longer say múti for tree, but rather m'ti, similar to how we still write “lesen” but actually say “lesn.”

*Meinhof, 1910a, pp. 59–60*

Language change was thus related to cultural and psychological phenomena, and students came to the laboratory not only to learn languages, but also to understand the African “mind.”

Yet neither Wundt nor Cleve’s theories sufficed to explain all sound shifts as historical or psychological phenomena. This was why the physical procedures conducted at the laboratory assumed such a central function. Although African pronunciation was still related to African psychology, the body, not the mind, was the object of investigation. Meinhof was convinced that the empirical observation of living beings would allow him the opportunity to train Germany’s colonizers in proper pronunciation and, additionally, to uncover new sound laws. His approach and that of his students rendered Africans as objects who could be analyzed by a “professional.” This kind of approach is similar to what Mary Louise Pratt has described in terms of travel writing, where Africans almost disappeared into the landscapes surrounding them, leaving only vestigial traces or “scratches” to indicate their existence (Pratt, 1992). The adopted approach or gaze to Africa in this case was, however, not located in the colonies, but rather in a laboratory environment in Germany, which was familiar to German teachers and students.

Meinhof indeed believed that it was only in the controlled setting of the laboratory that hypotheses could be tested and linguistic laws established. Knowledge of sounds and sound shifts had been significant to the categorization of African languages since the middle of the nineteenth century. The CMS missionary Koelle had prepared his *Polyglotta Africana* in 1854 with hopes of transcribing 200 or so African languages and comparing sounds across them (Koelle, 1854), and in 1863 the German Egyptologist and philologist Richard Lepsius had created a standard script for representing all the languages of the world, which also emphasized the importance of sound (Lepsius, 1863; Meinhof, 1913). Yet nineteenth-century linguists were, “dependent on simple observation, without experiments,” which made their findings imprecise (Meinhof, 1913). However, thanks to experimental phonetics, a science that emerged in the late nineteenth century and was crucial in the laboratory, linguists had the opportunity to conduct research with more sophisticated methods.

Panconcelli-Calzia defined experimental phonetics as the practice of “determining, dissecting, classifying, and researching the conditions of change in phonetic processes occurring in the present, independent of geographical location.” This experimentation was, “the intentional, arbitrary creation of a phenomenon under any simplification or change of factors.” Untrained observers would “wait patiently” for the appearance of such phenomena, but the experimental phonetician would take the matter into his own hands, using either organic or mechanical methods to produce the desired effects in his subjects (Panconcelli-Calzia, 1921, pp. 11–18).

“Organic” methods were conducted simply, using hearing, sight, or touch. Researchers would watch the faces and mouths of their test subjects to see what sorts of movements they made when certain sounds were produced, or place their hands on the subjects’ heads, noses, chests, or larynxes to see how they vibrated during speech. Mechanical or “non-organic” methods included the use of various kinds of machinery. Some of these were designed to “fix”

the movement of speech pictorially, in graphs, and others produced more transitory results. This machinery supplemented the five senses and helped determine how language functioned. X-rays “supported the eye” by displaying “the movements of the diaphragm, if only momentarily and, alas, through the shadow of the liver” (Panconcelli-Calzia, 1921, p. 22). X-rays could further show movement of the larynx, as could a laryngoscope, a tool for peering down the throat. Neither of these, however, produced fixed images that could be analyzed after the fact. Therefore, they were further augmented by machines that captured the rise and fall of sound graphically, as exhibited by airflow. The most important of these was the kymograph, a motorized, rotating drum upon which a stylus charted sound vibrations in sinusoidal curves as the test subject spoke into a tube. Sarah Barrows, an American who visited the Phonetics Laboratory around 1914, enthused that the kymograph represented what was “really a new and indirect way of writing, in which instead of words being transcribed by the hand in the conventional spelling, they are recorded by the instrument as they are formed by the organs of speech” (Barrows, 1913–1914, pp. 66–67). These experiments had to be conducted with living beings. Panconcelli-Calzia disparaged nineteenth-century efforts to study phonetic processes with dead material. The experiments also had to be “harmless.” Any invasive procedures, such as tracheotomy, were not acceptable (Panconcelli-Calzia, 1921).

Since colonialism required further investigation of African languages, Meinhof considered Africans indispensable to experimental phonetics and the results coming from his laboratory. Barrows even referred to the African subjects as the laboratory’s *Experimentierkaninchen* – its guinea pigs – evoking a particularly chilling image (Barrows, 1913–1914). Africans were seen as useful for the sounds they made, and the items that decorated Meinhof’s *Seminar für Kolonialsprachen* at the Colonial Institute constantly recalled the importance of physicality to its purpose. In 1912 the Seminar held an exhibition in which the “tools” of African studies were displayed. The exhibit emphasized the importance of bodies, as opposed to texts, for African linguistics. Shown were “anatomical preparations, models of speech organs, x-ray pictures and plaques.”<sup>9</sup> Everywhere the significance of biology and anatomy predominated, reminding visitors that African linguistics and phonetics were physical sciences.

None of this is to suggest that the Africans who worked in Meinhof’s laboratory were quiescent, or that they had no role in determining how language was taught and investigated. As I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere, they were key to the success of Meinhof and his colleagues (Pugach, 2007, 2012). In addition to their participation in phonetic experiments, the Africans in Hamburg taught a variety of languages, including Swahili, Hausa, Duala, and Ewe (Pugach, 2012). They had greater control over the dissemination of knowledge in the classroom than in the laboratory. Africans continued to take the lead in linguistic research, conducting it in tandem with Meinhof and his colleagues to produce volumes such as a publication of Ewondo texts (Heepe, 1919). The ostensible author of the book was Meinhof’s colleague and fellow Africanist linguist Martin Heepe, but the several Ewondo native speakers with whom he worked – including the chief Karl Atangana – were co-authors, even if they were not listed as such, since they supplied all of the texts in the book (Heepe, 1919).

One of the problems with Meinhof’s laboratory practice, however, remained its demotion of Africans in terms of their role as linguists. Where they had once discussed their languages, the vocabulary and grammar, with their German colleagues, they now stood silent if they were not being called on to demonstrate sounds. While there is no record of how the Africans felt about being test subjects, we can speculate that they probably did not like having their throats and mouths touched by German students in the service of experimental phonetics. As *Afrikanistik* shifted from a humanistic discipline to a natural science, Africans had increasingly less input on the study of their own languages.

## Conclusion

Hamburg's Phonetics Laboratory made the physical process of language production central to the study of African languages. Meinhof and his colleagues believed that African languages were primitive, and that their primitivity made them ideal for phonetic research. They were deemed similar to the languages that Europeans and others had probably spoken in prehistory (Meinhof, 1936), and to research them was to discover how the earliest speech must have sounded.

The laboratory was also what I call a "hypermetropolitan space," ideal for examining the colonial other and identifying his or her "traits." Students were offered the chance to observe Africans in a controlled environment that would allow their languages to be dissected better than they could be in the colonies. This was a far cry from the research conducted in the nineteenth century, which was largely undertaken in Africa itself, and which included close collaboration between missionaries and Africans to transcribe, translate, and transliterate languages that were, in many cases, being reduced to writing for the first time. With the emergence of experimental phonetics and advanced technology, it became easier to extract linguistic and phonetic information. Languages could be recorded by phonograph in the laboratory and then played back repeatedly until a student was able to mimic the sounds it produced.

The enterprise of research into African languages began in the context of missionization and colonization. Early scholars, many of whom were missionaries, focused on language because they were interested in biblical translation and exegesis, cultural knowledge, and practical communication. They were philologists, whose work was under the influence of scholars such as Herder and Humboldt. Meinhof and Panconcelli-Calzia shifted the terms of the debate when they founded the Phonetics Laboratory. Africanists were now physical scientists, seeking answers to how vocal organs made the sounds that they did. This transition from humanistic to biological pursuit was not a complete one. The interest in biblical translation into newly encountered African languages did not end, and neither did the transcription of folktales and other oral texts. But effort was increasingly funneled into examining African languages from a physical perspective, one that excised them from their cultural context and excluded Africans from collaboration with Europeans.

## Notes

- 1 Some of this chapter is adapted from my book, Sara Pugach, *Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814–1945* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012).
- 2 J.S. Vater, who published the first known description of Shilluk, is an example of an early nineteenth-century German scholar who was not a missionary. See J.C. Adelung and J.S. Vater, *Mithridates oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde; Mit dem Vater Unser als Sprachprobe in beynahe fünfhundert Sprachen und Mundarten* (Berlin: Voss, 1812), and Oswin Köhler, "The Early Study of the Nilotic Languages of the Sudan, 1812–1900 – I", *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. 51 (1970): 85–94.
- 3 Ironically, this seems to have been the case despite the profusion of German dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible.
- 4 Indeed, Carl Meinhof once even called linguistics and anthropology "auxiliaries" to each other, as evidence collected in one would also benefit research in the other. See Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 97.
- 5 The category "Bantu" has of course since been subsumed into the much larger Niger-Congo group. Bernd Heine, Derek Nurse et al., *African Languages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chapter 2.

- 6 Germany first became a colonial power in the 1880s; indeed, it was German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who hosted the infamous Berlin Conference that divided up Africa amongst the European powers in 1884–5.
- 7 Section on Büttner adapted from Sara Pugach, “Lost in Translation: Carl Büttner’s Contribution to the Development of African Language Studies in Germany,” in *The Politics of Language Study*, ed. David Hoyt and Karen Oslund (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 151–184.
- 8 With the exception of the deep water port at Walvis Bay, which they did incorporate into the Cape Colony. See Lynn Berat, *Walvis Bay: Decolonization and International Law* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1990).
- 9 “Ausstellung des Seminars für Kolonialsprachen,” *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung, Organ der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*, Nr. 25, Berlin, 22/6/12, 29. Jg. 1912.

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