

The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics

This book presents an in-depth and comprehensive state-of-the-art account of the study of 'African languages' and 'language in Africa' since its beginnings as a 'colonial science' at the turn of the 20th century in Europe. Compiled by 55 internationally renowned scholars, this groundbreaking account looks at past and current research on 'African languages' and 'language in Africa' under the impact of paradigmatic changes from 'colonial' to 'postcolonial' perspectives. It addresses current trends in the study of the role and functions of language, African and other, in pre- and postcolonial African societies. Highlighting the central role that the 'language factor' plays in postcolonial transformation processes of sociocultural modernization and economic development, it also addresses more recent, particularly urban, patterns of communication and outlines applied dimensions of digitalization and human language technology.

H. EKKEHARD WOLFF is Professor and Chair (emeritus) of African Linguistics at Leipzig University. He publishes widely on descriptive, typological, comparative, and applied linguistics and sociolinguistics of African languages, and on oral literatures. He has published over 25 books including *Sprachkunst der Lamang* (1980), *Referenzgrammatik des Hausa* (1993), *The Lamang Language and Dictionary* (2 vols., 2015), *Language and Development in Africa: Perceptions, Ideologies and Challenges* (2016), *Multilingual Education for Africa: Concepts and Practices* (2016), *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication: A South African Perspective* (2017), and *A History of African Linguistics* (to appear 2019).

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Edited by
H. Ekkehard Wolff

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Contributors

Dorothy Agyepong Doctoral student, Linguistics Section, School of African and Gender Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Colleen Ahland SIL International, Dallas, TX, USA; Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, California State University, Long Beach, Long Beach, CA, USA

Akinbiyi Akinlabi Professor, Department of Linguistics, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

Nicholas Baier Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Linguistics, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

David Barasa Postdoctoral Researcher, Linguistics Section, School of African and Gender Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Sonja Bosch Professor, Department of African Languages, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

G. Tucker Childs Professor and Chair, Department of Applied Linguistics, Portland State University, Portland, OR, USA

Emily Clem Doctoral student, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

Bruce Connell Associate Professor, Linguistics and Language Studies Program, Glendon College, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

Ana Deumert Professor, Linguistics Section, School of African and Gender Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Sigurd D'hondt Associate Professor, Research Collegium for Language in Changing Society (RECLAS), Department of Language and Communication

Studies & Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä,
 Finland

Gerrit J. Dimmendaal Professor, Institut für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie,
 Universität zu Köln, Cologne, Germany

Abderrahman El Aissati Assistant Professor, Department of Culture
 Studies, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

Yamina El Kirat El Allame Professor and Vice-Dean for Research and
 Cooperation, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V
 University, Rabat, Morocco

Anne-Maria Fehn Researcher, Department of Linguistic and Cultural
 Evolution, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Jena,
 Germany; Institut für Afrikanistik, Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe Universität,
 Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Human Evolutionary Genetics Group, CIBIO/
 InBIO: Research Center in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources, Vairão, Portugal

John Hajek Professor of Italian Studies and Director of the Research
 Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-cultural Communication (RUMACCC),
 School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Melbourne,
 Australia

Bernd Heine Professor and Chair (emeritus), Institut für Afrikanistik und
 Ägyptologie, Universität zu Köln, Cologne, Germany

Kathleen Heugh Professor, Research Centre for Languages and Cultures,
 School of Communication, International Studies and Languages, University
 of South Australia, Magill, Australia

Andrea Hollington Researcher, Global South Studies Center, Universität
 zu Köln, Cologne, Germany

Arvi Hurskainen Professor (emeritus), Institute of World Cultures,
 Faculty of Humanities, Helsinki University, Helsinki, Finland

Larry M. Hyman Professor of Linguistics, Department of Linguistics,
 University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

Angelika Jakobi Senior Researcher (retired), Institut für Afrikanistik und
 Ägyptologie, Universität zu Köln, Cologne, Germany

Peter S. E. Jenks Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics, University
 of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

Shigeki Kaji Professor, Department of Sociology, Kyoto Sangyo University;
 Kyoto University (emeritus), Kyoto, Japan

Russell H. Kaschula Professor and NRF Research Chair for Intellectual
 alisation of African Languages, Multilingualism and Education, African

Languages Studies Section, School of Languages and Literatures, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

Roland Kießling Professor, Afrikanistik, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

Inge Kosch Professor, Department of African Languages, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Constance Kutsch Lojenga Associate Professor (retired), Linguistics Centre, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands; Senior Linguistics Consultant, SIL International

Florian Lionnet Assistant Professor, Program in Linguistics, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA

Friederike Lüpke Professor of Language Documentation and Description, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, SOAS, University of London, London, UK

Amani Lusekelo Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages and Literature, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Alamin Mazrui Professor, African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

John Merrill PhD, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

Rajend Mesthrie Professor and NRF Research Chair in Migration, Language and Social Change, Linguistics Section, School of African and Gender Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Ronny Meyer Maître de conférences (Amharique), Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), and Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique (LLACAN), Paris, France; formerly Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Alice Mitchell Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

Philip Nguessimo Mathe Mutaka Professor of Linguistics, University of Yaoundé I, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Hiroshi Nakagawa Professor, School of Language and Culture Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan

Nico Nassenstein Assistant Professor, Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, Germany

H. Steve Ndinga-Koumba-Binza Lecturer, Department of Language Education, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, Cape Town, South Africa

Ayu'nwi N. Neba Head of Division Teaching and Teaching Staff,
 Department of Linguistics, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon

Dion Nkomo Associate Professor of African Languages Studies, African
 Languages Studies Section, School of Languages and Literatures, Rhodes
 University, Grahamstown, South Africa

Ivan Panović Assistant Professor, Linguistics and Multilingual Studies,
 School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Nina Pawlak Professor, Department of African Languages and Cultures,
 University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

Margarida Petter Professor, Department of Linguistics, Universidade de
 São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

Nicholas Rolle Postdoctoral Fellow, Program in Linguistics, Princeton
 University, Princeton, NJ

Justus C. Roux Professor (emeritus), Extraordinary Professor, Department
 of Afrikaans and Dutch, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Hannah Sande Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Georgetown
 University, Washington, DC, USA

Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle Directrice de Recherche (emerita), Lan-
 gage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique (LLACAN), CNRS, INALCO, Université
 Sorbonne Paris Cité, Villejuif, Paris, France

Wolbert G. C. Smidt Director of 'Ethiomap', Forschungszentrum Gotha,
 Universität Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany; PhD advisor and teacher in the PhD
 programme 'History and Cultural Studies', Mekelle University, Mekelle,
 Ethiopia

Sun Xiaomeng Professor, School of Asian and African Studies, Beijing
 Foreign Studies University, Beijing, P. R. China

Alena Witzlack-Makarevich Assistant Professor, Linguistics Department,
 The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

H. Ekkehard Wolff Professor and Chair (emeritus) of African Linguistics,
 Institut für Afrikastudien, Universität Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany

Yang Chul-Joon Humanites Korea (HK) Research Professor, Institute of
 African Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin, South
 Korea

Alexander Zheltov Professor and Chair/Head of the Department,
 Department of African Studies/Department of African Ethnography, St.
 Petersburg State University/Museum of Ethnography and Anthropology,
 St. Petersburg, Russia

Preface

African linguistics has come of age as a separate academic discipline that, about 130 years after its inception in predominantly German-speaking academia, and 25 years after establishing the international conference series of the World Congress of African Linguistics, had not yet seen the publication of a comprehensive and solitary ‘handbook’ of its own. Therefore, in October 2015, Helen Barton of Cambridge University Press approached the editor with the proposal to design and compile such a volume for their prestigious Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics series. Beginning in November 2015, the editor finally assembled 55 experts who represent a remarkable mix of generations, professional experiences, genders, current affiliations, and origins. The task was to sketch out the history, the state of the art, and promising perspectives of African linguistics in the early 21st century and to reflect on past and current research priorities and recent changes of paradigm. The authors completed their chapter manuscripts between November 2016 and November 2017.

The African linguistics community had long deplored the scarcity of foundational literature for their field. With only few exceptions, representatives of the first and second generations of Africanists between 1885 and 1970 did not record their thoughts on the theoretical or methodological, not to speak of political and ideological, foundations of their concerns with languages in Africa, apart from individual cases subscribing to national colonial projects. There were hardly any publications before the 1980s, which would describe in greater detail the emergence of African linguistics as an autonomous academic discipline, or outline its specific research methodology and priorities. A notable exception is volume 7 of *Current Trends in Linguistics (Linguistics in Sub-Saharan Africa)* of 1971. *The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics* fills a gap and adds – with a rather wide focus – to the dynamically growing literature on African languages and on language issues in Africa, which, however, tend to have rather narrowly focused perspectives.

Researchers working in the field increasingly realized that the peoples speaking African languages in situ remain in dire need of academic guidance, which would give science-based input to postcolonial linguistic, educational, and sociocultural planning. As editor, I wanted to ensure that a ‘handbook’ of African linguistics worth its title not only broadly covered descriptive, typological, and historical-comparative issues of individual languages or groups of languages but also reflected the manifold ramifications of language into matters of cultural, social, political, and economic life in Africa and followed these ramifications across the divides of generations and genders, rural and urban communities, educated ‘elites’ and under-educated ‘masses’, and reflected the differences between indigenous African and other languages. Such a broad approach not only reflects my own background in German-speaking *Afrikanistik*, but also mirrors the transdisciplinary programme of the World Congress of African Linguistics (WOCAL) since it was first convened in 1994. The structure of the present handbook does exactly this.

The handbook includes abridged regional histories of African linguistics, depicting its emergence towards the end of the 19th century as a ‘colonial science’ in Europe and following its global spread in the 20th and 21st centuries. In order to provide a fuller picture, it is accompanied by *A History of African Linguistics*, written by the same authors and published by Cambridge University Press, which contains more detailed and more fully referenced historical accounts.

The editor expresses his gratitude to Cambridge University Press, in particular to Helen Barton and all members of the team. We had just finalized production of my book *Language and Development in Africa: Perceptions, Ideologies and Challenges* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) when Helen approached me with the idea of compiling *The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics*. She accepted my proposal to have a sister volume, *A History of African Linguistics*, published in a parallel manner, in order not to overload the handbook with important hitherto unavailable information on the various regional histories of African linguistics, as was admonished by one anonymous reviewer of the original proposal with good reason. I am grateful for her confidence in me to shoulder the double project, and for the continuous and efficient support from her and by her team.

I am deeply grateful to all contributors for their professional and focused cooperation, and their concern about observing necessary deadlines. Most authors and co-authors delivered within a time span of twelve to less than eighteen months from the time they accepted the invitation, some continuously improving their chapters in professional dialogue with the editor and colleagues, occasionally comparing notes with authors of other chapters in the project. I was happy to see that many authors followed the editor’s advice to team up with co-authors in order to secure a both topically and geographically wide representation. In fact, geographic author representation ranges from Canada and Finland in the North to Australia, Brazil, and South Africa in the South, from the West Coast of

the United States, via several European countries and Israel, to Russia, China, South Korea, and Japan in the East. It also involves good representation of the African sub-regions: from Rabat, Morocco, in North Africa, via Addis Ababa and Mekelle, Ethiopia, in North-Eastern Africa, Buea and Yaoundé, Cameroon, in West and Central Africa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in East Africa, to Pretoria, Grahamstown, and Cape Town in South Africa. Fortunately, there were only very few withdrawals by prospective contributors, for suddenly emerging unfavourable personal circumstances; none of these withdrawals was critical because other excellent authors took over on rather short notice, yet delaying the completion of the whole book manuscript for several months. However, we lost two originally planned chapters, one on language policies and planning and one on the early history of standardization and literacy development of African languages; both issues are dealt with in other chapters, even though not with the originally planned depth and detail.

Finally, I am very grateful to both Helsingin Yliopisto (in particular the Department of World Cultures) in Helsinki, Finland, and to Rhodes University (in particular the Faculty of Humanities and the School of Languages and Literatures) in Grahamstown, South Africa, which each hosted me for periods of five to six months during preparation stages of this handbook. My Visiting Professorship in Helsinki (2016–2017) was co-sponsored by the DAAD Johann Gottfried Herder Program, and my stay in Grahamstown (2017–2018) was made possible by Rhodes University under a Hugh Le May Fellowship with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. All this support is gratefully acknowledged. Back at Rhodes, after an earlier six-month research visit in 2014–2015 under the DAAD Johann Gottfried Herder Program, I enjoyed the privilege of a congenial and stimulating academic environment, sharing with my local colleagues a focus on and passion for the intellectualization and re-empowerment of African languages.

General Introduction

The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics presents retrospective as well as prospective views on the scientific study of African languages on the one hand, and of language in Africa on the other. These are two fundamentally different but related perspectives, which both lie at the core of African linguistics as an autonomous academic discipline. A team of 55 expert authors stemming from or working in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe came together in order to compile the present volume. Primary focus is on the more than 2,000 African languages, which together amount to almost one-third of all living languages on our planet. This focus covers various perspectives on how these languages can be analysed and described, grouped and classified, and on how they have influenced each other in geographical neighbourhood over time through language contact/multilingualism – all this on the basis of established and theory-guided scientific methods and procedures. Additionally, the book also looks at other languages, namely those that were brought to Africa, as much as at language varieties that emerged within Africa, in historical times. Further, this handbook deals with aspects of language use in various cultures and societies in Africa. It addresses issues of language ideologies and attitudes, and describes how these weigh in on views of language(s) in Africa among professionals and in a wider public, both within and outside of Africa.

This handbook updates its outstanding predecessor *Linguistics in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Vol. 7 of *Current Trends in Linguistics*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok) of 1971, and complements pre-existing introductory volumes to the study of African languages and linguistics, like, for instance, Pierre Alexandre, *Langues et langage en Afrique noire* (1967; translation: *An Introduction to Languages and Language in Africa*, 1972); Edgar A. Gregersen, *Language in Africa: An Introductory Survey* (1977); Bernd Heine, Thilo C. Schadeberg, and Ekkehard Wolff, *Die Sprachen Afrikas* (1981); Jean Perrot, Gabriel Manessy, and Albert Valdman, *Les langues dans le monde ancien et moderne* (2 vols., 1981);

Bernd Heine and Derek Nurse, *African Languages: An Introduction* (2000; translation: *Les langues africaines*, 2004); Ngessimo M. Mutaka and Pius Ngwa Tamanji, *An Introduction to African Linguistics* (2000); and G. Tucker Childs, *An Introduction to African Languages* (2003). As the present handbook neared completion, two other ambitious publications appeared in print: *The Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics* (2018, edited by Augustine Agwuele and Adams Bodomo), and *The Languages and Linguistics of Africa* (2018, edited by Tom Güldemann).

Evolution has made Africa the cradle of humanity and the home of human language. Here it evolved and diversified, and from here it spread across all inhabited continents. This alone makes African linguistics a field of prime relevance in the overall study of the history of humankind. Furthermore, and since times immemorial, Africa has been and is a hub of multilingualism, which has increasingly complex ramifications into practically all aspects of social, cultural, political, and economic life. Current research into aspects of (applied) African (socio)linguistics, therefore, opens new and in-depth perspectives on the nature of multilingualism in general as much as on its variant manifestations in territorial, sociocultural, individual, and institutional perspectives. These are likely to challenge the prevailing ‘Northern’ and Eurocentric ideological bias in public as much as in academic discourse on Africa and, more generally, on the Global South.

In this handbook, expert authors treat African linguistics as being much more than just a geographically focused sub-field of modern linguistics. No doubt, African linguistics owes much of its theoretical and methodological foundations to developments in general and theoretical linguistics. Vice versa, however, it increasingly contributes challenging insights from the analysis of African language data to the testing and refinement of theoretical assumptions and methodological tools in general linguistics. More than that, African linguistics represents a unique field of studies that rests on, but also overcomes the limitations of, narrow and so-called hard-core linguistic approaches, with a wide interface to neighbouring social and cultural sciences.

On the one hand, African linguistics honours traditional approaches to language in terms of ideology-laden theoretical constructs like, for instance, ‘heritage language’, ‘mother tongue’ / ‘home language’, and ‘(ex-)colonial language’. Consequently, African linguistics works with two complementary approaches to the central object of study. Providing genuinely new empirical data, it delivers – at times monolectal – grammars for hitherto under- or totally undescribed languages, based on a thorough analysis of utterances from individual members of a speaker community. It also deals with both abstract and highly standardized reference systems, like in the case of established African ‘standard languages’. More recently, it explores dynamically changing actual language use in communities of practice, and does so under currently fashionable terms like ‘(trans-)

linguaging’ and linguistic ‘superdiversity’, thereby calling into question our received notions about ‘named languages’ and ‘multilingualism’.

On the other hand, African linguistics allows for various trans- and interdisciplinary perspectives, viewing languages as being essentially embedded in the cultures and societies of African peoples, with which they continuously entertain dynamic interaction. Since the times of the teaching and writing of one of its German founding fathers Diedrich Westermann (1875–1956), African linguistics (in German: *Afrikanistik*) entertains very close if not essential links with social and cultural anthropology (in German: *Völkerkunde*) and (oral) history, in addition to phonetics and both general descriptive and comparative linguistics. With this in mind some like to refer to Westermann’s legacy as having established some kind of ‘comprehensive African linguistics’ (in German: *Gesamtafrikanistik*) that reaches far beyond the scope of hard-core linguistics research on African languages.

Third, and in terms of applied science, African linguistics links *languages as resources* to the aspirations of their speakers in their quest to master their daily routines and to meet the social, cultural, political, and economic challenges of sustainable, including mental, decolonization and of what is sweepingly called ‘development’.

African linguistics, thereby and apart from individual language structures and genealogical classification into language families and branches, addresses the lingering effects of colonialism in terms of continued linguistic and cultural imperialism and the onslaught of globalization. These have a strong impact on language choice and language use by individuals and sociocultural groups of practice in Africa, shaking the foundations of so-called traditional cultures and societies, which entail constant adaptations of both patterns of language use and properties of the languages themselves. The present handbook reflects this broad approach to African linguistics, which may appear innovative to some readers but is quite familiar to others, depending on the reader’s academic socialization.

Obviously, no handbook can ever be complete with regard to coverage of all potentially interesting and relevant subject matters, the present one being no exception. Readers and reviewers are encouraged to identify gaps and shortcomings and do their best to compile complementary publications in order to create a fuller picture. The contributors and the editor of *The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics*, however, take pride in having cleared the ground and laid foundations, so to speak, for other expert authors to build and expand on the description of African linguistics worldwide.

In Part I, the handbook provides abridged surveys of where, since when, and how African linguistics became entrenched in academia on this planet, from the precolonial to the current postcolonial era. The historical overview includes not only the countries of the former Western European colonial powers, where African linguistics originally emerged as a ‘colonial

science' but also their neighbours in Eastern, Central, and Northern Europe, in addition to destiny countries of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas, the former African colonies and current independent states themselves, and, of more recent vintage, places in Asia and Australia.

Part II constitutes the main body of the present handbook. It addresses the core issues of African linguistics, namely the descriptive analysis, comparison, history, and classification of African languages. Reflecting established mainstream lines of research, the handbook offers approaches to African languages within the framework of their partly proven and partly still hypothetical or contested genetic classification, that is, as members of language phyla and families based on the still valuable yet critically reviewed referential classification by Joseph H. Greenberg in his seminal work *The Languages of Africa* (1963). However, in their presentations, the authors share an innovative triple perspective on (a) cross-linguistic language typology and (b) the impact of language contact in terms of areal linguistic approaches, yet (c) not neglecting unilineal language history as reconstructed by classic comparative methods.

Part III enlarges the scope of the present handbook to encompass bird's-eye views on the overall linguistic situation in Africa, reflections on language ideologies and attitudes, and discussions of patterns of language use and the interdependencies of languages with ever-changing surrounding cultures, social norms, and practices in Africa. This includes a focus on the more recent and dynamically increasing impact of urbanization, digitalization, and mobile communication.

Part IV, rather selectively, addresses applied perspectives that link African linguistics to issues of societal transformation, cultural modernization, and economic development, through focusing on languages and multilingualism as resources for overcoming mass poverty, academic underperformance, and technological marginalization. Crucially, this involves language-in-education matters, language intellectualization and re-empowerment, and reaping benefits from human language technology.

Like presumably most if not all contributors to this volume and many more Africanist colleagues across the planet, the editor believes in a comprehensive approach to status, acquisition, corpus, and opportunity planning for languages in Africa. He believes in providing science-based assistance for designing and implementing mother-tongue-based multilingual language policies for education across the continent, which would serve the ultimate benefit of the peoples who speak African languages as first or second languages in their homes and workplaces. Unfortunately and to this day, African and non-African intellectuals outside professional linguistic circles, including the political elites, tend to neither listen to nor understand what we Africanists are trying to tell them. We do so in countless academic publications, via formal recommendations from within learned societies, and by resolutions emanating from high-class professional meetings, some of us willing to embrace language activism and

risking degradation from the ranks of ‘pure’ academia. But clearly, for the sustainable empowerment of Africa’s ‘human resources’ to become able to take into their own hands postcolonial social transformation, cultural modernization, and economic development, only adequate education will do the job. ‘Adequate education’ obviously involves effective multilingual communication competencies in both endoglossic and exoglossic languages, because only this will enable African learners to compete successfully – both locally among each other, but also globally with members of their age cohort across the planet. Only mother-tongue-based multilingual quality education will overcome individual limitations of the ‘linguistic jail’ (Ouane 2003) of the mother tongue and of sociocultural ‘underdevelopment’, and will finally turn Africa into a knowledge-producing continent on equal scale with other continents, rather than remaining only knowledge-consuming at the mercy of the ‘North’. The African as much as the global arena is characterized by almost ubiquitous multilingualism in the higher domains of 21st-century verbal communication and knowledge production. Africans from all walks of life must be enabled to not only survive in the prevailing postcolonial and largely underperforming educational systems, but come out on top of qualitatively optimized systems, and thus attain equal opportunities with age-mates in other parts of the world. Targeting this far-reaching goal and supporting the linguistic dimension of endeavours along the way lie at the heart of matters that this handbook is about, apart from introducing and describing African linguistics as a thriving academic discipline across the globe.

The Editor

Abbreviations and Acronyms

The abbreviations listed below are used across chapters in upper- or lower-case, often in small CAPITALS. Occasionally, the same abbreviation or symbol refers to different categories, or the same categories are represented by different abbreviations or symbols, in different chapters. The abbreviations and symbols are those originally used by the authors of the individual chapters.

. I	set I person markers (A and S) in Gwama
. II	set II person markers (O and S) in Gwama
↓H	downstepped high tone
*L	floating low tone
∅	zero marked (unmarked)
#	boundary
1, 2, 3; 1/2/3	first, second, third person
1/2/3/4/5	agreement class in East and West !Xoon, Tsumkwe Jul'hoan
A	agent argument of transitive clause
A	aorist
AA	Afroasiatic
ABS	absolutive
ACALAN	African Academy of Languages
ACC	accusative
AD	preverbal particle <i>ad</i> 'non-realized' (Berber)
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ADJ	adjective; adjective-deriving formative
AFF	affirmative
AFLaT	African Language Technology
ALT-i	African Language Technology Initiative
ALUPEC	Alfabeto Unificado para a Escrita do Cabo-Verdiano
ALUSTP	Alfabeto Unificado para a Escrita das Línguas Nativas de S. Tomé e Príncipe
ANN	status annexus

ANTICAUS	anticausative
APPL	applicative
ASAFAS	Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies
ASC, ASSOC	associative (marker)
ASP	aspect
ASR	automatic speech recognition
AST	African Speech Technology
ATR	advanced tongue root
ATTR	attributor
AUX	auxiliary
BA	baccalaureus artium, bachelor of arts
BAKITA	National Swahili Council
BEN	benefactive
BFSU	Beijing Foreign Studies University
BLARK	Basic Language Resource Kit
BLR	Bantu Lexical Reconstructions
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
C	consonant
C, CG	common gender
CALL	Colloquium on African Languages and Linguistics
CAR	Central African Republic
CAUS	causative
CC	geminate consonant
CF	clause focus
CF, CFG	centrifugal
CIBIO/InBIO	Research Centre in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CL1	class 1 gender
CL2	class 2 gender
CLARIN	European Research Infrastructure for Language Resources and Technology
<i>CLO</i>	<i>Cahiers de Littérature Orale</i>
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
CNST	construct state
CNT	continuous
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
COLL	collective
COM	comitative
COMP	complementizer
COP	copula
CPL	completive (aspect)
CPT	centripetal
CRLD	Centre for Research on Linguistic Diversity