A History of African Linguistics

Bringing together a team of leading scholars, this volume provides the first global history of African linguistics as an autonomous academic discipline, covering Africa, America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. Defining African linguistics and identifying important forerunners, the volume describes its emergence from a ‘colonial science’ at the turn of the twentieth century in Europe, where it was first established mainly in academic institutions of former colonial powers. Its riddance from the ‘colonial project’ is traced, following its ‘decolonization’ and subsequent spread from imperialist Europe across all inhabited continents, with particular reference to its academic establishment in the various regions of Africa. Providing inside views of African linguistic research and its ramifications over time, active researchers in its various sub-fields present highly informative accounts of current and past research priorities and achievements. The 26 authors are themselves representatives of the various regions of both the world and Africa, in which African linguistics has become entrenched in academic institutions.

A History of African Linguistics

Edited by

H. Ekkehard Wolff
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Preface

African linguistics, as we accept it today as being a separate and autonomous field of academic research and teaching, had its origins in colonial Europe and was without parallels in other parts of the world. It partly pre-dated but mainly accompanied the imperialist regime of European colonial expansion and Christian mission in Africa, boosted by the notorious ‘Scramble for Africa’ that preceded and followed the Berlin Congo Conference of 1884/1885. Obviously, early African linguistics used to serve the colonial project by taking care of its linguistic dimension, in the beginning fostering but later and currently challenging the hegemonic dominance of the ‘North’ over the Global South. Thereby, it continues to weigh in on postcolonial national language policies and planning in Africa until this day.

Hence, African linguistics has come of age and has rid itself almost completely of the missionary and colonial paradigm. Today, it prides itself on its global academic representation as an autonomous academic discipline, as witnessed by the World Congress of African Linguistics, which has met triennially since 1994. Based on the early and ground-breaking work of its precursors, professional African linguistics arose during the peak period of European colonialism in Africa. It eventually also established itself outside the former European colonial powers, namely in Eastern and Northern Europe. Another boost followed decolonization and African independence after 1960. Since then, African linguistics has found an academic home not only across Africa, but also in the Americas and eventually in parts of Asia and Australia.

Increasingly in recent years, if for a long time rather hesitantly, members of the scientific community of African linguistics have begun to turn their attention to their own academic history, not least with a view to challenging the prevailing ‘Northern’ by a complementary, if not alternative, ‘Southern’ perspective. The fact that African linguistics is not everywhere established as a separate academic discipline apart and distinct from ‘general linguistics’, on the one hand, and ‘African studies’, on the other, has tended to slow down the emergence of critical concern with not only its academic but also its ideological history. Further, with only few exceptions, there is little information available that would be reliable, comprehensive, and easily accessible on where, when,
Preface

by whom, and how African linguistics emerged and became entrenched in institutional structures of academia in the various parts of the world, including Africa herself. In its early days at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly in Europe, it remained in the shadow and under the influence of already established disciplines such as Egyptology and Semitic philology. For reasons of the geographic proximity of its object of study to languages and cultures in the Near and Middle East, it was administratively located near, or as part of, ‘Oriental studies’. Later, by the middle of the twentieth century and in the wake of African independence from European colonialism, it had to set itself apart from the intrusive and much more general African studies that had some of its roots in black studies and the modern human rights movement, mainly in the USA. In this volume, the authors trace the motivations for the establishment and subsequent growth of African linguistics, often beginning with simply providing language instruction for practical needs, if not for nostalgic purposes (as in the case of early black studies). Today, this academic field is pursued in autonomous and titular university departments of ‘African languages’ or ‘African linguistics’ in some parts of the world, or as an integral part of more encompassing institutions such as ‘general linguistics’, ‘African and Asian studies’, ‘foreign studies’, and ‘world cultures’ in others.

For this volume, and for the first time in history, 26 experts from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe have come together to tell the story of African linguistics, namely how it emerged as an academic field more or less of its own accord in their various world regions. They tell the story from within, being actively involved themselves as researchers in various sub-fields of African linguistics in different places. They are not looking at matters from a distance as historians or archivists.

As a rule and characteristically for Africa as a whole, research on African languages began and was stimulated by impetus from outside Africa, often tainted by a Christian mission and colonial agenda. This linked African linguistics ‘in the field’ intimately to research activities that were conducted simultaneously outside Africa. The current volume takes a focused view on matters. Rather than sketching out research history according to language groupings or individual languages in particular regions of Africa, for which a growing literature is already available, it focuses on research activities from the perspective of the origin of researchers and institutions. The structure of the book, therefore, reflects different world regions as much as sub-regions of Africa, where African linguistics emerged under quite different conditions, involving both African and non-African individuals and institutions.

The absence of previous worldwide surveys, the selective availability of digitalized historical documents available via the Internet, and presuming that relevant sources still remain undiscovered and hidden in archives that
are difficult, if not impossible, to access from where today’s researchers live and work, mean that gaps in knowledge and information persist. This must be accepted for the time being. The editor and the contributors share the hope that this volume may stimulate local in-depth research into the history of the study of African languages and linguistics in the various parts of the world. This should then subsequently allow for a broader and critical review of African linguistics, which would link up with current general debates on colonial and postcolonial continuities and their impact on knowledge production in and about Africa. Against this backdrop of persisting lacunae, the present book pilots a broad approach to the complex history of African linguistics in a global perspective. It does so by providing expert ‘inside’ views on the academic history of African linguistics within and outside Africa, which may serve as a first fact-finding and fact-describing vade mecum to the global history of African linguistics since its inception as a ‘colonial science’ in imperialist Europe more than 130 years ago.

This volume accompanies The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics (Wolff 2019), for which a survey of the regional histories of African linguistics was considered an essential topic. The restricted space available in the Handbook allowed only for abridged summarising treatments. This companion volume, therefore, provides the necessary space needed for a more detailed treatment including extensive bibliographical references. It is compiled by the same editor in cooperation with mainly the same authors, who contributed historical accounts of different length and detail to both volumes.
Abbreviations and Acronyms

AATA American Association of Teachers of Arabic
AAU Addis Ababa University
ACAL Annual Conference of African Linguistics
ACALAN Association of Contemporary African Linguistics
African Academy of Languages
ADEA Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ACALAN Association Internationale de Dialectologie Arabe
AJL Australian Journal of Linguistics
AL Africana Linguistica
ALS African Linguistics School
Australian Linguistic Society
African Academy of Languages
Arabic Linguistic Society
ALSEC Africano Linguistica
Afar Language Studies and Enrichment Center
AUPEC Alfabeto Unificado para a Escrita do Cabo-Verdiano
ALUSTP Alfabeto Unificado para a Escrita das Línguas Nativas de S. Tomé e Príncipe
ARAL Australian Review of Applied Linguistics
ARAS Australasian Review of African Studies
a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne
(AGSHC, Cologne)
ASAFAS Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies
ATR advanced tongue root
AAVE African American Vernacular English
BA baccalaureus artium, bachelor of arts
BakfraLe Colloquium on Berber Languages
BAKITA National Swahili Council
BFSU Beijing Foreign Studies University
BICCL Biennial Colloquium on the Chadic Languages
BIGSAS Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies
BLR Bantu Lexical Reconstruction
### Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BRICS</td>
<td>Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa</td>
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<td>CALL</td>
<td>Colloquium on African Languages and Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>CERD</td>
<td>Centre d’Études et de Recherches de Djibouti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFS</td>
<td>Côte française des Somalis</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIBIO/InBIO</td>
<td>Research Centre in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLARIN</td>
<td>European Research Infrastructure for Language Resources and Technology</td>
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<td>CLO</td>
<td>Cahiers de Littérature Orale</td>
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<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNRS</td>
<td>Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODESRIA</td>
<td>Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPLP</td>
<td>Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (Community of Portuguese Language Countries)</td>
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<td>CRI</td>
<td>China Radio International</td>
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<td>CRLD</td>
<td>Centre for Research on Linguistic Diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRUD</td>
<td>Centre de Recherches de l’Université de Djibouti</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSIR</td>
<td>Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>CVCP</td>
<td>Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>DaF</td>
<td>Deutsch als Fremdsprache (German as a Foreign Language)</td>
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<td>DEL</td>
<td>Documenting Endangered Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>DELL</td>
<td>Department of Ethiopian Languages and Literature</td>
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<td>DLING</td>
<td>Department of Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMG</td>
<td>Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoBeS</td>
<td>Dokumentation Bedrohter Sprachen</td>
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<td>DOBES</td>
<td>Documentation of Endangered Languages Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.C.</td>
<td>Ethiopian Calendar</td>
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<td>EHESS</td>
<td>École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELDF</td>
<td>Endangered Languages Documentation Fund</td>
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<td>ELDP</td>
<td>Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Documentation Program</td>
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<td>ELRC</td>
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<td>ENLOV</td>
<td>École Nationale de Langues Orientales Vivantes</td>
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<td>EPHE</td>
<td>École Pratique des Hautes Études</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>EST</td>
<td>extended standard theory</td>
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<td>FLAS</td>
<td>Foreign Language and Area Studies</td>
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<td>FOCAC</td>
<td>Forum on China–Africa Cooperation</td>
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</table>
Abbreviations and Acronyms

LBT Lutheran Bible Translators
LCRC Language and Culture Research Centre
LLACAN Langage, Langues et Cultures d’Afrique
LoT Languages of Tanzania Project
LREC Language Resources and Evaluation
MaLEX Malawi Lexicon Project
MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoI medium of instruction
MPhil magister philosophiae, master of philosophy
NACALCO National Cameroonian Languages Committee
NC Niger-Congo
NECAAS Network of European Centers of Asian and African Studies
NELIMO Núcleo de Estudos de Línguas Moçambicanas (Institute for the Study of Mozambican Languages)
NEPAD New Partnership for Africa’s Development
NGO nongovernmental organization
NINLAN National Institute for Nigerian Languages
NISA Nilo-Saharan - Linguistic Analyses and Documentation
NISALICO Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Conference
NRF National Research Foundation
NSF National Science Foundation
NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology
NUC National Universities Commission
NUFU Nasjonalt Utvalg for Utviklingsrelatert Forskning og Utdanning (National Committee for Development-Related Research and Education)
OPSL Occasional Papers in the Study of Sudanese Languages
ORSTOM Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d’Outre-Mer
PALOP Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (Officially Portuguese-Speaking African Countries)
PANMAPAL Pan-African Master’s and PhD Programme in African Languages and Applied Linguistics
PhD philosophiae doctor
RCLT Research Centre for Linguistic Typology
REST revised extended standard theory
RIÉ Recueil des inscriptions de l’Éthiopie (Bernand et al. 1991)
RMA Language Resource Management Agency
RMCA Royal Museum for Central Africa (Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale)
RTP-Afrika Rede de Televisão Portuguesa
RUD Revue Universitaire de Djibouti
RUEPUS Research Unit for Experimental Phonology of the University of Stellenbosch
## Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<td>South African Journal of African Languages</td>
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<td>SAL</td>
<td>Studies in African Linguistics</td>
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<td>SELAF</td>
<td>Société d’Études Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<td>SIL</td>
<td>Summer Institute of Linguistics</td>
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<td>Seoul National University</td>
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<td>SOAS</td>
<td>School of Oriental and African Studies</td>
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<td>SSHRC</td>
<td>Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council</td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>standard theory</td>
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<td>SUNY</td>
<td>State University of New York</td>
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<td>SUSO</td>
<td>Uniﬁed Orthography of a Uniﬁed Language called Shona</td>
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<td>SyWAL</td>
<td>Symposium on West African Languages</td>
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<td>TAM</td>
<td>tense, aspect, and mood</td>
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<td>TFAI</td>
<td>Territoire Français des Afars et des Issas</td>
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<td>TGG</td>
<td>transformational-generative grammar</td>
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<td>TUFU</td>
<td>Tokyo University of Foreign Studies</td>
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<td>Translators without Borders</td>
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<td>UD</td>
<td>University of Djibouti</td>
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<td>UDC</td>
<td>Union pour le Développement Culturel</td>
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<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>USC</td>
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<td>VAD</td>
<td>Vereinigung der Afrikawissenschaften in Deutschand</td>
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<td>WALS/SLAO</td>
<td>West African Linguistic Society/Société Linguistique de l’Afrique Occidentale</td>
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<td>World Congress of African Linguistics</td>
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