

Foreword

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The University of Georgia hosted the 39th Annual Conference of African Linguistics (ACAL) in Athens in April 2008. The papers selected to appear in this volume were first presented at the conference. This is the second time the conference was held at UGA. The first was held in 1990 and was organized with the support of the department of Anthropology by Professor Salikoko Mufwene, now at the University of Chicago and Professor Lioba Moshi who has been mainly responsible for the establishment and sustenance of a strong program in African languages and African Studies at the University of Georgia. The African language program that she launched in 1988 with one language, Swahili, has grown to currently include course offerings in Amharic, Manding and Yoruba. Classes in Zulu language and culture were also offered from 1998 until 2003. The African language program has continued to enjoy great support from the department of Comparative Literature and the African Studies Institute. The language and culture classes have contributed to the development of a Certificate program in African Studies; a Minor in African Studies; and a Minor in African Languages and Literatures at the University of Georgia.

The different certificate and minor programs have in return helped the University to retain its focus on the growth and continuance of the African language program. The work on language and society in various parts of Africa by the three African linguist faculty members in the African language program has also ensured the continued existence and growth of the African language program. It was therefore a needed boost and much pride for the University of Georgia to host the 39th ACAL. The excitement was palpable amongst interested faculty and the university administration. The response to the conference call was great and the conference featured about one hundred and forty participants who presented their current research work on African languages and linguistics. It was a remarkable opportunity for students in the African language program, the Linguistics Program and the various language related departments to interact with African linguists. One of the notable intentions of the African language program is to expose students at the University of Georgia to as many different African languages as possible. This intention informed the theme of the conference which was on the extent of linguistic research and the plight of languages on the African continent, specifically the endangered languages. The sixteen papers contained in this selected proceedings of the conference include descriptive and theoretical studies on diverse African languages and language groupings such as Shanjo, Few, Luganda, Shona, Sheng, Arabic, Yoruba, Òkò, Haya, Swahili, Yoruba, the Agaw branch of the Cushitic family and the Bantu language branch. These studies, in the areas of historical linguistics, morphology, syntax, phonology, phonetics, sociolinguistics and stylistics, provide an excellent sketch of the mode and spread of ongoing research in the field of African linguistics.

The Editors appreciate the work of all the reviewers of the submissions received particularly for their thorough and constructive comments and for their willingness to review additional versions of the papers. The conference featured three plenary sessions including lectures by Ronald P. Schaefer (Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville) who opened the conference and by Eyamba Bokamba (University of Illinois at Urbana and Champagne) who was featured during the conference banquet. The third plenary session was a round table panel discussion on documentation of African Language Grammars as part of the W.E.B Du Bois Series at Harvard University. The panel, proposed and chaired by John Mugane (Harvard University – working on Gikuyu) featured Masangu Matondo (University of Florida – working on Kisukuma) and Akinbiyi Akinlabi (Rutgers University – working on Yoruba).

In his paper *'Why do descriptive fieldwork? Dictionaries, Precedence Types and Verb Argument Order,'* Schaefer utilizes the results of dictionary fieldwork in Nigeria done on the Benue-Congo language, Emai to explore the potential for a principled constraint on verb argument alternation. Schaefer's opening paper is included in this proceeding. On its part, Bokamba's presentation, *'Linguistic Imperialism in Africa: the Role of Ukolonia and Critical Game Theory in explaining*

African Language Outcomes,’ focused on the need for a critical evaluation of the various sociolinguistic theories that have been proposed to account for the current neo-colonialist language policies on the African continent. He wondered about the appropriateness of these theories and the availability of evidence to support their postulations, if at all they are not based merely on assumptions. In the end, Bokamba proposes the ‘ukolonia’ theory as the best to account for the various exogenous and endogenous African language policies.

In the proposal for the panel on the documentation of African Language Grammars, it was contented that ‘descriptions of African language grammars have tended to be parochial of Indo-European language grammars inherited without much criticism from colonial times. Many grammars remain woefully essentializing of Africans, incomplete, and often shallow in the kinds of approaches they take about how language is organized and constituted.’ The plenary panel discussed amongst other things, two issues pertinent to the conference theme. First is the limited exemplification and explanation in many African language descriptions and second is how linguists’ narrow focus on boundaries of category types including their importance in established linguistic descriptions have not allowed for the appreciation of the beauty and richness of many African languages. Finally, using illustrations from the ongoing projects within the Du Bois Series in their respective languages, the panel outlined the processes of producing grammars for African languages that transcends boundaries and inhibitions of past grammars. Our sincere appreciation goes to all our plenary speakers, especially for their direct approach to addressing these specific challenges of language description and appropriateness of language theories in the field of linguistic research in Africa.

The conference would not have been successful without the support of many individuals, groups and academic units. Our colleague in the department of Comparative Literature and African Studies Institute, Karim Traore deserves a special mention for his support. We owe our gratitude to the administrators, staff and faculty in the Linguistics Program, the Comparative Literature department and the African Studies Institute for their support and participation. Faculty members such as Sandra Whitney, Keith Langston, Sarah Blackwell, Don McCreary, Shigeto Kawahara (now at Rutgers University), and Hyangsoon Yi deserve acknowledgment for the various roles they played during the conference. We are particularly grateful for the graduate students who took leadership roles in the conference planning including Laura Edmunds, Antje Ameyke, Betsy Barry, Rose Upor, Shih-Ju Young, Randall Beckloff, and Mwita Chacha. Special mention must certainly be made of Antje and Laura for their ‘yeomen’ efforts before and during the conference. We were additionally lucky to have the involvement of undergraduate students such as Diana Constantiniu, Kylie Pace, Jasmin Patel, Elizabeth Omaivboje and the members of the African Students Union (ASU). We must express our gratitude to Holly Blanchard and the staff of the Georgia Center for Continuing Education. Holly’s meticulous planning and remarkable attention to details was indispensable to the success of the conference. We are also grateful to the ACAL steering committee, including Lee Bickmore and Akinbiyi Akinlabi for their guidance, and former ACAL conveners Frank Arasanyin and Doris Payne for their contributions to the conference planning.

In addition to the efforts of these listed individuals and groups, the success of the conference was due to the financial support from the following: the President’s Venture Fund through the generous gifts of the University of Georgia Partners; Office of the Vice President for Instruction; Office of the Vice President for Research; Franklin College of Arts and Science; African Studies Institute; Department of Comparative Literature; Linguistics Program; Institute for African American Studies; Department of Romance Languages; UGA Graduate School; UGA Linguistics Club; UGA Bookstore; FTX Bookstore on Baxter Street; and Kelly’s Jamaican Restaurant. Finally, we owe our gratitude to all the conference participants for their contributions to the intellectual discourse during the conference and for the overall success of ACAL 39.

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