

# Introduction

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Overview of ACAL*

The 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on African Linguistics (ACAL), held from April 9-11, 2009 under the theme of “African Languages and Linguistics Today”, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, represents the culmination of a steady evolution of the field of African linguistics in the United States. The conference was initially conceived by Braj B. Kachru in 1970, then Head of the Department of Linguistics, as a one-time strategy to place the University of Illinois’ programs in African languages and linguistics on the map as a potential center for African linguistics. He enlisted two of his then newly appointed Africanist colleagues, Chin W. Kim (general phonetician/phonologist with an interest in Kiswahili) and Herbert Stahlke (Yoruba phonologist), who reportedly agreed with some hesitation to organize and convene the conference on April 24-25, 1970.

The conference achieved a great success with regard to the participation of distinguished and emerging Africanist scholars whose research covered topics of great theoretical interest at the time. This led to the decision to convene the conference on a rotational basis at several Research I universities with established or emerging African studies centers (e.g., Indiana University, Michigan State University, University of California at Los Angeles, Stanford University, Ohio State University, Yale University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison). By the time the conference returned to its birthplace, the University of Illinois, on April 5-7, 1979 to mark its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it had not only grown in scope and theoretical sophistication, but it had also become one of the most prestigious international conferences in the field. It was then officially made an annual conference and named the Annual Conference on African Linguistics (ACAL). Since then, the University of Illinois has hosted ACAL every ten years (viz., 1989, 1999, and 2009), for a total of five times.

ACAL has experienced a number of remarkable developments in addition to its stability and increasing attendance. These include its establishment as the leading international conference on African linguistics in North America; the presentation of papers that are informed by and often interrogate various Western languages-based theories; the exponential increase in the participation of younger scholars who are native or near-native speakers of African languages; and the birth of two other international conferences on African languages and linguistics: the *World Congress on African Linguistics* (WOCAL), that is held around the world biannually; and the *Annual Conference of the African Language Teachers Association* (ALTA) that is held yearly, mainly at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, U.S.A.

### 1.2. *Organization of the proceedings and paper summaries*

The studies contained in these proceedings represent in part these developments, the maturity of the field with regard to theoretical knowledge and diversity thereof, and the field’s expanding territorial scope. Over 100 papers were presented at ACAL 40, and we would have liked to include at least one-third of them after the rigorous vetting to which many of the submitted papers were subjected, but this was not feasible for a number of factors associated with edited work, especially conference proceedings. The papers published here fall into six sub-fields of linguistics: Language Acquisition, Morphology, Phonetics, Phonology, Sociolinguistics, and Syntax. For presentational purposes we have organized the papers into five parts: Part I, Invited presentations; Part II, Language

Acquisition; Part III, Morphology and Syntax; Part IV, Phonetics and Phonology; and Part V, Sociolinguistics. Under each group the papers are arranged in alphabetical order according to the authors' names, rather than thematically since this was not an option.

In Part I the mixed topic plenary session papers address different issues that have field-wide impacts: Bamgbose's critical review of African language policies and the necessity of empowering the disenfranchised African languages; Henderson's review of the impact of African languages on general syntactic theories; and Moshi's chronicling of the evolution of the field of African languages teaching and learning.

Bamgbose's paper, given as a campus-wide keynote address in conjunction with the 40<sup>th</sup> ACAL, offers the reader is, on the one hand, an in-depth critique of African language policy formulation and practices after almost 60 years of political independence; and on the other hand, a well-documented and poignant analysis of the extent to which African politicians have continued to squander one of the best sets of basic tools of development at all levels of personal and national development. What he succeeds in demonstrating is that African languages, especially the major and trans-border ones, merit empowerment through their elevation as national and official languages in public domains. He maintains, as do other sociolinguists in this volume (e.g., Bokamba and Frydman), that there are no convincing arguments for language policies and practices that exclude the languages spoken by over 80% of the target populations.

Henderson's plenary session paper examines research on the syntax of African languages, with a focus on Bantu languages, since 1990. He discusses the impacts this work has had on syntactic theory in general. In this pursuit, Henderson observes that there has been an "exponential increase in syntax researchers who are interested in African languages" as reflected in the multiplicity of topics studied, as well as conferences and workshops devoted exclusively to African languages. He points out that while some of this work may have been peripheral to core syntactic theory because the phenomena studied are specific to African languages, there are two major areas in which these languages, particularly Bantu, have had considerable impact in interrogating and influencing the direction of core syntactic theory. These are the study of grammatical relations and morphosyntax, and grammatical agreement. He devotes much of the paper to documenting this research and the extent to which it has played a fundamental role in shifting aspects of the core syntactic paradigm.

Coming thematically between these two papers is Moshi's plenary presentation on the evolution of the field of African languages teaching and learning in the United States and its transformation to a superstructure since the late 1980s. In this chronicling, Moshi shows that the emergence of this field, as initially documented in Bokamba (2002), and its subsequent expansion into a superstructure consisting of a mixture of strong and emerging language-specific subfields (e.g., Kiswahili, Yoruba, West African, and Southern African languages) is due not only to the leadership provided by selected Africanist scholars, but also in a fundamental fashion to the synergies that they facilitated between ALTA (African Language Teachers' Association) and three other professional organizations: ACAL, NCOLCTL (National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages) and NALRC (National African Language Resource Center). In this post-9/11 era with its considerable financial difficulties that negatively affect African language programs across the U.S., she appeals to Africanist scholars to double their efforts in advocating for the retention and viability of these programs.

Thomas' contribution in Part II, Language Acquisition, presents a detailed experimental study of the acquisition of relative clauses in Kiswahili by a group of American students who are studying the language at Michigan State University as a foreign or so-called second language. This unique and novel study on an African language, to our knowledge, shows the interface of Syntax and Language Acquisition. After reviewing the three different relativization structures found in Kiswahili, Thomas argues, contra the established research findings in SLA regarding the easiness of learning complex sentence structures based on the distance in the placement of key elements, that the participants in her experiment found the occurrence of tense on the verb in a relative clause to be an "indispensable" feature in distinguishing between the three relativization strategies, and in learning them.

The papers in Part III, Morphology and Syntax, address several issues in these areas with data from two different language families: Semitic and Bantu. Ayalew, in his morphosyntactic study on Amharic, examines the relationship between two Causative deriving affixes {a-} and {as-}, and unifies the causative morpheme by suggesting an underlying passive base for {as-} and associating the {s-} of

{as-} to the passive/reflexive affix {t-}. Diercks' paper examines the syntax of the Lubukusu (a Bantu language of Kenya) Locative Clitic, and determines that "the locative clitic is an agreement morpheme that may only occur when agreeing with a locative phrase that has a thematic relationship with the predicate". This finding leads him to offer a proposal that accounts for the occurrence of this element. In contrast to this single feature-based study, Duarte, in his paper on Changana (a Bantu language of Mozambique), deals with a series of phenomena that interact in the formation of relative clauses in this language: Tense, agreement patterns, definiteness and Wh-questions. He arrives at essentially three findings: (1) subject inversion occurs in impersonal and cleft constructions and that the definiteness feature is a condition for definite and specific D/NPs to undergo movement to topic positions; (2) Changana's Wh-questions are characterizable as in-situ as in most other Bantu languages; and (3) relative clauses exhibit the occurrence of inversion and resumptive pronouns found in many other Bantu languages.

The four contributions in Part IV, Phonetics and Phonology, provide insights garnered from both instrumental techniques (Manyah, Midtlyng, Shosted) and the modeling of constraints on phonology (Sibanda). The three phonetics studies broaden our understanding by focusing on the unique phonological inventories of African languages, including nasal vowels in Twi (Manyah), whistled fricatives in Changana (Shosted), and velaric ingresses (clicks) in Zulu (Midtlyng). Sibanda approaches the persistent debate over the synchronic/diachronic nature of underlying representations with novel data from Nguni. These contributions highlight the need for continued efforts to document and describe the sounds and sound systems of African languages and to incorporate these data in relevant theoretical models.

Finally, the Sociolinguistics papers in Part V deal with a variety of issues, including mainly language policy formulations and practices (Bokamba, Michieka and Frydman), language attitudes (Chakrani and Muaka), and language variation and convergence (Kanana). In explaining the neo-colonial mentality among African states that have retained the colonial language policies, Bokamba criticizes Myers-Scotton's (1993) "Elite Closure Theory" and Laitin's (1992) "Strategic Game Theory" for their weaknesses in explaining these policies on the grounds that the two theories lack empirical support, and cannot be generalized to the situation in Africa. He proposes his own theory, "Ukolonia", that he claims to be empirically grounded, to account for the pervasiveness of neo-colonial language policies and practices in the continent. Michieka's paper interrogates the Kenyan language policy and practice in English that privileges it over the national (Kiswahili) and regional languages by exposing the myth of English as a second language (ESL). She argues, on the basis of data from rural Kisii-speaking communities, that English is instead a foreign language (EFL) in Kenya and should be treated as such. Similarly, Frydman's study of Namibian language policy of "English-Only" in a stable multilingual and highly illiterate society is viewed as ideologically rather than language-ecologically informed. As such, Frydman argues, it is counterproductive to the country's educational development goals, among others, and requires a reformulation that will take account of the indigenous languages.

Chakrani's and Muaka's papers draw on their dissertation fieldwork, respectively in Morocco and Kenya, to probe the attitudes that inform African language policies and practices. Chakrani interrogates "the current theoretical understanding, whereby local languages, Standard Arabic (SA) and Moroccan Arabic (MA), are presented as iconic of local identity and synonymous to cultural authenticity" in contrast to French, "the ex-colonial code, [that] is [seen as] imbued with status-bearing traits and aspect[s] of modernity." He argues that the so-called ideology of modernity is hegemonic, and facilitates the exclusive projection of French as its vehicle to eventually encroach in domains previously reserved to the local languages. Similarly, Muaka's study that focuses on "language perceptions and identities" among mainly youths in Kenya where English is perceived as the prestige language and vital asset for upward mobility, while Kiswahili (the national and co-official language) and local languages are not so indexed. Muaka found that this perception, considered to be static by previous studies, is inaccurate in that Kenyan youths' "language identities are continually constructed to reflect the contestation that exists between local and dominant ideologies". Departing from this language policies/attitudes orientation, Kanana's paper examines the morpho-phonological similarities and differences between Imenti and Chuka (a dialect cluster of an unspecified Bantu language of Kenya), and finds that the inventories of the two dialects show areas of divergence and convergence.

### *1.3. Concluding remarks*

We hope that this collection of papers demonstrates not only the vibrancy of African linguistics in most of the major subfields of linguistics after 40 years of research, but that they will also contribute significantly to future research in African linguistics in particular, and non-African linguistics in general. The collection also shows continuing gaps in areas such as language acquisition, for which we have only one contribution, semantics, and pragmatics for which there are no contributions in these proceedings. As we assess the success of the field through the prism of ACAL, these gaps suggest that efforts must be made to train and mentor future scholars in these areas in order to increase their numbers and visibility.

# Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: African Languages and Linguistics Today

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Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2011

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Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics:  
African Languages and Linguistics Today

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This paper can be cited as:

Bokamba, Eyamba G., Ryan K. Shosted, and Bezza Tesfaw Ayalew. 2011. Introduction. In *Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Eyamba G. Bokamba et al., v-viii. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com), document #2560.