

BOOK REVIEW

Ericka A. Albaugh and Kathryn M. de Luna, editors. *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 426 pp. List of Contributors. Index. \$99.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780190657543.

Tracing Language Movement in Africa, edited by Ericka Albaugh and Kathryn de Luna, presents an interdisciplinary perspective on language movement and change. Each chapter in this book discusses an aspect of language change in Africa and the African Diaspora based on various academic disciplines, including anthropology, literature, political science, linguistics, and historical linguistics. The editors identify four major themes found in the eighteen chapters: collection and significance of data; connection of language to people, as opposed to geography; recognition of the constant movement and change associated with languages; and how language represents authority, status, and responsibility. Each of the chapters attempts to reimagine African linguistic landscapes based on the disciplinary and regional interests of the authors.

After the introduction, the remaining chapters are organized into four parts. The first section presents the classification of languages and how various branches of academia gather and use linguistic data. The second chapter, written by linguist Derek Nurse, begins with a historical look at the study of language. Yet the real significance of the chapter lies in how well Nurse explains the use of the historical linguistic method to recapture historical data. He offers step-by-step explanations of how the vocabulary of present languages can be used to reconstruct words and concepts from the past. The rest of the chapters in Part One examine such topics as how to classify languages, archeology and language, and a brief discussion of the Afrobarometer network, which collected linguistic surveys from thirty-six African countries over a sixteen-year period.

Part Two looks at the transformations of languages, either through consolidation or expansion. In Chapter Six, for example, author Mohan Ennui uses sociolinguistic and anthropological linguistics to study language contact and conflict in North Africa. An interesting contradiction found in this chapter is that the author labels Berber or Amazigh as an Afro-Asiatic language but fails to also identify Arabic as belonging to the same language

family. In an edited volume of research on African languages, the African origins of Arabic should have at least been noted. The next chapter, written by Fallou Ngomon about Ajami literacies, is an important contribution to the understanding of the synchronic relationships between Islam and various African communities. However, this chapter privileges West African Ajami and ignores the many Somali, Swahili, and other historical texts from East Africa also written in Arabic script.

Chapter Eight chronicles the standardization of African languages, which was initiated by the colonialists and the missionaries and completed using European-based orthographies. Chapter Nine examines how war and social upheavals spread language, not always to the detriment of the survivors. Chapter Ten studies the role of *lingua francas* and shows that studying the multi-linguistic nature of postcolonial Africa is more meaningful than just researching the individual languages.

Part Three concentrates on tracking the invention, borrowing, and transformation of individual words over time. Chapter Eleven by Kathryn de Luna presents actual language evidence, demonstrating how words can contribute to understanding social history over the *longue durée* in Central Africa. She examines roots such as **kwàshi*, meaning in-laws or cross-cousins, and what this root can tell historians about kinship relations and their transformations over time. While this is an innovative article, de Luna assumes, with no linguistic evidence furnished, that these Bantu-speaking people were not originally matrilineal and innovated matriliney a thousand years ago in the Batoka Plateau. This is a subject hotly debated by linguist historians, and she probably should have at least acknowledged that.

In Chapter Twelve, David M. Gordon centers the linguistic term used to describe small groupings of loanwords in a language, or *Wanderwörter*. Kiswahili and Portuguese are the two loanword languages studied within south central Africa; they are used to examine trade routes, directions of cultural and political contact, and new ways of conceptualizing strangers vs. insiders. Chapter Thirteen examines African Urban Youth Language (AUYL). As post-independent Africa becomes more urbanized, there have been several linguistic transformations, but this chapter focuses on multilingual youth who create new “languages” in an effort to incorporate their urban neighbors into a common form of communication. In this chapter, Philip Rudd shows the reconstruction or resocialization through language of young people born and raised in Africa’s urban communities. Chapter Fourteen discusses language changes resulting from recent military engagements involving the three border countries of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the transformations of languages, both consciously and unconsciously, in areas of conflict or post-conflict.

Part Four looks at language remnants in the African Diaspora. Chapter Fifteen by Maureen Warner-Lewis presents many of the known linguistic remains among the peoples of African descent in the Americas. This chapter offers several examples, and it is an excellent read for any class on the African Diaspora and language. Chapter Sixteen is also rich with

examples of not just words, but also oral traditions and metaphors found in Bantu-speaking African communities as well as among descendants of African slaves living in the Americas. This chapter by Robert Slenes is especially compelling because it moves beyond strictly word evidence and into the realm of retained ideas.

Chapter Seventeen looks at beliefs found among Caribbean French-African Creoles which reflect the African heritage of their ancestors. The author, Hanétha Vété-Congolo, reminds us that silence or the non-use of African languages was required of Africans by the slavers. The French-African Creole may speak a language with a great deal of French, but “[t]he complex transformation of Africans did not preclude the fact that they invested their new language with deep and significant African values.”

Chapter Eighteen is the conclusion to this edited volume; it raises interesting questions about language transitions, assimilation to monolingualism, the loss of original languages (such as that of the Batwa [pygmy]), as well as cultural tolerance, a mainstay of precolonial Africa. This is an impressive collection of diverse but also interconnected research on language, language movements, and what it all means in the context of modern Africa and African history.

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