

Conference Reports

2011 was a very active year for linguistics in West Africa. We report below on some of the highlights. Our apologies if an event you know of is not represented.

The Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics

The annual Summer Conference of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics was held at the Wetlands Centre of the University of Ghana from the 2nd through the 6th of August, 2011. It was sponsored by New York University Accra, the University of Ghana, Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands), and the University of Giessen (Germany). It was the first conference of the Society to be held in Africa, and therefore was particularly significant because many creole languages are spoken by descendants of people exported from these shores, and African languages contributed very largely to their creation. There were more than 100 registered participants, from (at least) 18 countries.

The theme for the conference, very suitable under the circumstances, was “Traces of Contact”. Each of the four conference days began with a plenary talk, followed by papers given in three parallel sessions. The plenaries were delivered by Enoch Aboh (University of Amsterdam) on the topic ‘Creoles are not distinct languages!’, Felix Ameka (University of Leiden) on ‘Multilingualism, contact and convergence on the West African littoral: implications for trans-Atlantic *Sprachbund*’, M.E. Kropp Dakubu (University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies) with the title ‘The birth of languages in Ghana: contact the onlie begetter?’, and Francis Egbokhare (University of Ibadan) on ‘Second chance, sentiments and prejudice: engaging the challenges of Nigerian Pidgin development’. Kofi Baku (UG, History) gave an additional plenary at a reception at the New York University Accra campus, on ‘African agency, forts and castles and the African slave trade on the Gold Coast’. Session papers included theoretical and descriptive topics on contact and its effects among African languages in various parts of the continent; the nature of the effect of African languages on the creoles of the Caribbean; aspects of Nigerian and Cameroonian Pidgin English; topics concerning pidgin and creole languages spoken in such places as the Bahamas, Surinam, Papua New Guinea, Guam and Mauritius; Ghanaian Student Pidgin; the language of modern London youth; and many more. The conference was deemed a great success, and a credit to the organizers, both the executive of the Society and the local committee.

Linguistics Association of Ghana

The annual conference of the Linguistics Association of Ghana, its second since the Association was revived in 2010, was held from the 8th to the 10th of August, 2011 at the Conference Hall, Noda Hotel, Kumasi. The theme was “Languages in Context and Contact”, and the Keynote speaker was Professor Albert Owusu-Sarpong, former Head of the Department of Modern Languages, KNUST, and former Ghanaian Ambassador to France. He spoke on the theme “Diplomatic Language: Language Par Excellence in Context and Contact”. The Welcome address was given by the Vice-Chancellor of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Prof. Otoo Ellis.

In addition to the Keynote address, forty-seven presentations were made in ten working sessions, some of them held in parallel. Topics of papers were in the areas of pragmatics, semantics, phonology, syntax, morphology and various aspects of language contact including such phenomena as code-switching and other consequences of the contact of African languages with English and French. Another area of discussion was language in literary expression.

A total of sixty-one people registered. Participants from Ghana came from the Universities of Ghana, Education Winneba, Cape Coast, Methodist, KNUST, and Central University College, as well as the Institute of Professional Studies and the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation. There were also participants from five Nigerian universities: Ibadan, Catholic University, Jos, Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe; two universities in the Netherlands, Leiden and Amsterdam; and one from the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy.

The participants enjoyed excursions to Bonwire and to the KNUST campus. At the closing ceremony it was announced that the Association would hold a workshop on Utilizing ICT Resources in Academic Research on 13th January at the University of Ghana.

Working Group on Ghana-Togo-Mountain Languages

The working group on GTM languages held its fifth meeting at the Bishop Koning’s Guest House in Ho from the 8th through the 10th of August, 2011. The group was formed in 2006 in connection with the Southern Ghana-Togo-Mountains Groups project, led by Prof. Felix Ameka of Leiden University and funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. The working group (like the project as a whole)

further the academic study and development of about a dozen languages spoken by relatively small groups of people in Ghana and Togo. These languages were originally labeled *Togorestsprachen* (in German) by D. Westermann. The term was later translated as 'Togo Remnant Languages', on the assumption that they were spoken by remnants of refugees. In *The Languages of Ghana* (1989) the term 'Central Togo languages' was substituted, but at the 2006 meeting the working group adopted the term 'Ghana-Togo-Mountain languages'.

The group of about twenty people that met in 2011 included linguists, bible translators, and local advocates of the use of the languages for literacy and early education. Papers were presented on the following languages: Ikpana (Logba), Seleε (Santrokofi), Tutrugbu (Nyagbo), Siyase (Avatime), Tafi, Lelemi (Buem), Sekpele (Likpe), and Akebu. There were several more general papers, on cultural features, on the relationship of the GTM languages to Kwa, and on techniques and problems of dictionary creation. In addition three small Guang languages of south eastern Ghana were discussed, namely Nkonya and Gikyode, which have historically been in close contact with GTM languages, and Efutu. Some of the papers will be published, in various outlets. Others are part of ongoing research and PhD projects.

West African Languages Congress

Against considerable odds, the 27th Congress of the West African Linguistics Society was successfully held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from the 14th to the 20th of August 2011. The theme for the Congress was *Language Typology and Language documentation*. In his keynote address Prof. Ekkehard Wolff expressed criticisms of current trends in African linguistics and proposed important policy and planning guidelines. Other special invited guests were Prof. Florence Dolphyne, Prof. Norbert Nikiema, and Prof. Thomas Bearth.

Eighty active participants registered, from Ivory Coast, Germany, USA, Netherlands, Norway, Burkina, Togo, Senegal and many from Nigeria. Only one person from Ghana attended.

At the General Meeting it was agreed that 50th Jubilee Congress would be held in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 2013, and that the 2013 African Linguistics School would also be held in Ibadan. The French publisher l'Harmattan has agreed to publish the reviewed proceedings of the Congress, and more than thirty papers have been submitted.

Last but not least, the Ivorian Ministry of Higher Education and Research decorated the former and present presidents of the West African Linguistics Society

as well as a few members of the Counsel with the Order of the National Merit, for their achievements in the field of West African languages.

African Linguistics School

The second African Linguistics School was held from the 17th to the 30th of July, 2011, at the Centre Songhaï in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin. Like the first African Linguistics School held in Accra in 2009, it aimed at offering African students the possibility of becoming familiar with new advances in linguistic description and theory, and centered around the linguistic domains of Syntax, Phonology, Semantics, Languages in Contact, Field Methods, and Sign Language.

The organizers of the School were Enoch Aboh (University of Amsterdam), Akin Akinlabi (Rutgers), Chris Collins (NYU), and John Victor Singler (NYU). Certificates of completion were issued to 68 students from 13 countries, including 16 from Ghana.