

REVIEWS

***A history of African linguistics*, ed. by H. Ekkehard Wolff.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019, 351 pp.
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The editor of the book, Prof. H. Ekkehard Wolff, is a renowned German scholar specializing in African studies. During his decades-long academic career in this field, he focused in particular on Afro-Asiatic linguistics. Wolff has envisaged *A history...* as an accompaniment to *The Cambridge handbook of African linguistics* (Wolff 2019). The two volumes were published almost simultaneously. Academics from all continents, actively working on African languages data, were invited to contribute to *A history...* 7 out of total 26 authors are from Africa (affiliated to the African universities). Among them there are researchers whose works are recognized outside the narrow circle of specialist in African languages. This highlights the significance of African linguistics within the general linguistic studies.

A historical reflection gives a man an impulse to revise his achievements and point out things that should be improved by next generations. Most certainly, this idea applies to all sorts of scientific activity which ought to be summarized once in a while as it gives an opportunity “to look back” in order to see a discipline’s state of the art as a whole: its achievements and gaps¹. In order to secure an accumulative forward-moving continuity of any scientific discipline, self-reflection is needed. This is done in the first place by means of a critical study of its history. *A history of African linguistics* edited by H. Ekkehard Wolff is the first ever (!) monograph devoted entirely to the history of African linguistics in global perspective². It is a detailed and elaborated report on its development from the

¹ See section 1.2 “Learning from History” from p. 3 onwards in *A history...*

² Recently, some valuable monumental monographs on African linguistics have been published. However, they neglect the history of the discipline (Güldemann 2018, Vossen & Dimmendaal 2020) or provide but a very short one with the focus on contributions from Germany (Agwuele & Bodomo 2018).

very beginnings up to the present day that provides “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” (“Preface”, p. xvii). The book demonstrates that initially European-established African linguistics has now relocated to a large extent to African academic centres, where it became the foundation of national philologies. Yet, European universities are still leading in long-term research and good quality publishing.

The message of the book can be encapsulated in the statement that the history of African studies is related to the history of the world, as it reflects mutual cultural and political influences, among various African and non-African peoples. The European colonialism gave impetus to the development of language-oriented Africanistics. Despite this atrocious inborn stigma, the new discipline developed scientific standards and quickly became established in the countries that did not have colonial traditions, such as those located in Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe. With some delay, the same processes took place in the African states. African linguistics in all these countries developed according to their own conditions. *A history...* does not value the achievements and allocates relatively the same amount of space to various regions of the world. However, as a result, the transparency of these regional descriptions is different (e.g. almost the same amount of pages is dedicated to Eastern Europe as a whole, where the tradition of Africanistics is relatively long, and to Canada, where the discipline is young, and limited to the individual contributors). The editor tried to keep *A history...* balanced in terms of the number of pages devoted to history of the studies in particular sub-regions, with Africa covering well deserved 131 pages, Europe 51, other parts of the world 45.

A history of African linguistics comprises 12 chapters. Their shortened versions, as the editor indicated in Preface (p. xvii), were included also in the aforementioned work (Wolff 2019) in order to depict briefly the history of the discipline at the margin of the main topic. There, full descriptions could not be included mainly due to the huge amount of space occupied by the extensive references lists. This constraint, though, does not hold for the current publication whose bibliographic entries cover 80 out of total 351 pages. Such stock of data is of great use for the researchers.

The structure of the book reflects the geographical and chronological distribution of the institutions and scholars dealing with “African linguistics”, i.e. a scien-

tific research field covering such domains as “African languages”, “language in Africa” and “the applied dimension of linguistics in Africa” (p. 1). Thus, each chapter covers roughly three periods that can be labelled as “pre-scientific”, “colonial and postcolonial”, and “contemporary times”. Going back to the geographical division that organizes the structure of the book: first three chapters cover Europe, from the Western colonial countries to countries with lesser ties to Africa located in Central and Eastern Europe and in Scandinavia. Next seven chapters deal with Africa starting from Arab countries in the north, and down south, distinguishing such sub-regions as Eastern, North-Eastern, and Southern Africa. Additionally, in regard to some sub-regions a criterion of official language was established. Therefore, separate chapters deal with African linguistics in francophone West and Central African countries, anglophone in West Africa, as well as luso- and hispanophone states. One chapter covers Americas. The book closes with the story of African linguistics in Asia and Australia.

In this review, I would like to comment on history of African linguistics in Poland which is discussed in Chapter 3 “African linguistics in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Nordic countries” by a linguist and Hausaist Nina Pawlak from the University of Warsaw. This part of the book focuses on the regional ties in the development of African linguistics in selected countries formerly belonging to what was known as the “Eastern Block”. First of all, it is important to acknowledge that due to the geo-political issues the East European countries, such as Poland, drew inspiration both from the West and the East (Russia). It led to the development of new perspectives which combined these two “schools”. The discipline of African linguistics in Poland is not very impressive in terms of institutions. It developed (and still develops) to a large extent thanks to individual contributors. Hence, firstly, not enough information was provided concerning the pioneer of African linguistics in Poland, professor Roman Stopa (1895-1995) from Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He was a scholar renowned worldwide, thus by virtue of this fact he also deserves special attention. Let me take the liberty to add here a few words on his account. Stopa devoted his life to the study of African languages but also to musicology. He authored about 100 works mainly on Khoisan languages and cultures (whereas only two are cited, including one on Swahili). In the beginning of his career in the 1930s he published in Polish and German, later also in English. He studied in Hamburg, Paris, London, and conducted a field research in South-Western Africa. His travels gave him opportunity to meet in person and keep in contact with some of the greatest experts in African languages and linguistics of that time (including Meinhof, Westermann, Moillet, Cohen, Bleek, Bargery), as well as anthropology (Malinowski), all of

whom appreciated his work. This secured his position in the Western academic circles as an expert on “click languages”. During his long carrier (he was publishing until the 1990s) he focused on tracing the cradle of human language for which, he believed, the Khoisan languages are the key source data. Controversial are some of his ideas that linked the Khoisan languages to other languages and language families, including the Indo-European. These theses were fairly criticized (Raa 1973, Tucker 1973). Evidently, Stopa was a supporter of the hypothesis of monogenesis of the language, nowadays predominantly rejected. Nevertheless, it does not diminish the scientific value of Stopa’s works, especially in the field of phonetics. Most of them are today completely forgotten. Despite this, Roman Stopa is the only example of the Polish contribution to African linguistics development in its early stage and thus deserves to be remembered and honoured. Unfortunately, his research on the “click languages” has no continuators in Poland but is reportedly appreciated abroad, particularly in Germany, where many of the studies on Khoisan are published (Kłosowicz 2017, Kowal 1992). Secondly, the description lacks any references to Stanisław Piłaszewicz’s numerous works on Hausa language and literature. Until recently, he was a leading Polish Hausaist and Africanist based in Warsaw, now retired. Moreover, the chapter does not mention a crucial role of Eugeniusz Rzewuski in establishing a department devoted to studies on local languages in Mozambique, yet we can find this information elsewhere in the book (p. 193). Thirdly, I think it is worth to at least mention the name of Izabela Will from the University of Warsaw. Her works on Hausa cross the boundaries of linguistics and focus, i.a. on the relationship between speech and gestures (i.a. Will 2009), as well as speech and culture (Will 2017). The aforementioned information could not be included in the chapter due to limited space dedicated in *A history...* to the Polish contribution. The editor’s decision to combine the history of African linguistics in Russia, Czechia, Hungary, and Poland in one multi-thread story is understandable albeit not fair in respect to Poland. Whereas the Russian achievements undoubtedly surpass those of other countries described in this section, Poland deserves to be placed in the middle of the achievements ranking, overwhelmingly surpassing the rest both institutionally and in terms of quantity of research. It seems that the necessity of reducing the content to the “crucial information” did not allow to include some of the significant contributions (i.a. Nina Pawlak’s papers on various aspects of Hausa), whereas in respect to other regions (e.g. the Nordic countries, Canada) even the minor ones were mentioned. Hence there is a relatively small number of references to the works of the Polish scholars, compared to what is provided in other chapters (cf. excessive lists of works in Chapters 4 and 9).

In regard to Ethiopian studies in my *alma mater*, Chapter 5, p. 90 states that “regular Geez courses” were available in Warsaw in the period of 1952-1968 thanks to the work of Stefan Strelcyn. It needs to be noted that tradition of Geez studies has never died out completely. In the 1970s a student of Strelcyn, Aleksander Ferenc, joined the university staff³. Recently, the tradition has been re-established by Marcin Krawczuk who thought Geez introductory course dedicated to students of Amharic but available also to other students in the academic years 2014/15 and 2019/20. There is a will to offer this course on regular basis in addition to Krawczuk’s research on Geez literature (see e.g. Krawczuk 2014, 2019).

Generally speaking, I regard all chapters of *A history...* to be well written and highly informative. My attention was grabbed by Chapter 10, which contains a particularly interesting analysis of (under)development of African linguistics against the historical background of luzo- and hispanophonic countries in Africa, illustrated with a few “quick facts” about each of them.

A history... attracts the reader with its beautiful baobab forest cover picture, so different from the monotonic one-colour covers of most of the linguistic publications we have seen so far. The book has four separate indexes: index of African languages, countries, keywords index, and name index. This makes it a useful source for any preliminary query. Most importantly, the text of the whole publication is nicely formatted using easy to read fonts and minimal number of footnotes that do not distract while reading. Yet some minor typographic errors were spotted, e.g. a reversed apostrophe ‘ instead of ’ (p. 123), missing dot at the end of the sentence (p. 134, p. 241 paragraph 2), unnecessary space (p. 140 first paragraph, p. 151 second, p. 180 first, p. 188 acknowledgement, 194 first, p. 244 fifth, p. 247 first), missing “of” in the phrase “University Zanzibar” (p. 140), “African” instead of “Africa” (p. 148, f.n. 4), a whole fragment without spaces starting: “NancyC...” on page 152, unnecessary bracket in “1843)” (p. 157), missing coma between the words “Chaga-Rombo” and “Amharic” (p. 234). Moreover, on p. 172 instead of “*bookoo*”, I recommend scientific notation of this Hausa word as “*bōkō*”. In turn, on p. 134 it is advised to use the term “Muslims” in place of “Moslems” as this term is “formerly common but now old-fashioned, increasingly rare, and sometimes offensive variant of ‘Muslim’” (Merriam-Webster). It is not clear what the author meant, stating on p. 242 that “Noordin Shariffa Begam [...]”

³ Information on Ethiopian studies in Poland can be found at: <http://www.afrykanistyka.uw.edu.pl/pliki/files/Ethiopian%20studies%20in%20Poland.pdf> [17.06.2020].

compared Chinese tones with Kiswahili tones [...]”⁴, taking into account that Swahili is a major non-tonal language of the world. (However, the majority of linguists agree that Swahili was a tonal language at earlier stages of its development). A few misspelled names of languages have been spotted, e.g. Tigré instead of Tigre (p. 96), KiBajuni should be Kibajuni⁵ (or Bajuni), and Chi-Mwiini should be Chimwiini (or simple Mwiini⁶) (p. 107), Hadzabe should be simply Hadza⁷ (p. 133), Wollaitta is a non-standard spelling of Wolayta (or Wolaytta) (p. 237 and in the index), Berbers should be Berber (p. 241), on p. 205 Kambaata is spelled wrongly as Kambataa, and Basketo as Baskeet (also in the index). In regard to Sidamo it is recommended to unify the spelling: on p. 66 we see Sidaamu, whereas on p. 237 – Sidaama. Another issue is lack of diacritics in the notation of certain Polish names, such as Orlowska instead of Orłowska (p. 99 and in the index), Stanislaw should be Stanisław (p. 100, in the references and in the index), Bogumil – Bogumił (p. 107 and in the references) or misspelling, e.g. Lipski appears twice incorrectly as Lispski on p. 231.

It is rather unlikely that *A history of African linguistics* will find its way to a random reader. The publication is addressed to a narrow circle of specialists and provides a fine self-reflection in African linguistics on the level of a discipline. A unique character of *A history...* is the reason why the publication deserves the highest recommendations to all Africanists and linguists. It is a first ever publication covering all known history of African linguistics on all continents written by the contributors working and living in their respective countries and/or in their countries of professional interest. What is more, the book includes 80 pages of references covering the works on African linguistics. It is an enormous stock of useful data for scholars of related disciplines. This, as well as the fact that studying history of African linguistics can help to find ways to improve the language planning as a part of sustainable development planning in Africa and elsewhere (p. 19), slightly extends the scope of its potential readers.

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⁴ In fact Noordin Shariffa Begam in his MA thesis titled *Comparative study of Chinese and Swahili dialect speech* „analyzes the differences and similarities between the Chinese and Swahili phonetic system” (online: <https://www.dissertationtopic.net/doc/1871550> [18.06.2020]).

⁵ By the analogy to the spelling of *Kiswahili* and other names of Bantu languages in which the editor decided not to use capital letters or a hyphen to mark the morphological structure of the word.

⁶ As a rule, the names of Bantu languages in the book are given without prefix class morpheme, e.g. Swahili rather than Kiswahili.

⁷ In Hadza language the term *Hadzabe* is an ethnonym, while the native name of the language is *Hadzane* 'of Hadza'.

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