

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### 43<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN LINGUISTICS

The Annual Conference on African Linguistics for the year 2012 (ACAL 43) took place from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 2012 at Tulane University, New Orleans, U.S.A., under the theme **Linguistic Interfaces in African Languages**. Based on the theme, eight invited talks were delivered at plenary sessions by renowned African linguists and scholars of African linguistics, namely Professors Salikoko Mufwene, Oladele Awobuluyi, Laura Downing, Rose-Marie Dechaine, Juvenal Ndayiragije, Olasope Oyelaran & Oladiipo Ajiboye, Mark Dingemanse, Victoria Nyst, Larry Hyman and Douglas Pulleyblank. In general, the Conference was well attended with participants coming from all parts of the world. From universities in Ghana, four people attended the conference: Dr. Charles Oforu Marfo, from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ms. Regina Oforiwa Caesar from the University of Education, Winneba, Dr. George Akanlig-Pare from the University of Ghana, Legon, and Mrs. Millicent Quarcoo from Wisconsin University College, Accra. Other Ghanaians in universities abroad, namely Prof. James Essegbey, Dr. Seth Ofori, Ms. Joana Antwi-Danso and Ms. Charlotte Fofu Lomotey, also attended the Conference and presented papers.

The Conference started at 8:00am on Thursday, March 15, 2012, with registration of participants and an opening and welcome speech by the Head of the Linguistics Programme in the Department of Language and Anthropology, Tulane University, Prof. (Mrs.) Olanike Ola-Orie. In her speech, among other issues, Prof. Ola-Orie emphasized the need to subject the many languages in Africa to current theories and trends in linguistics and the need to relate studies in African languages to various scientific disciplines that seem to currently drive the world.

Actual presentation of the accepted papers started at 9:45am with three parallel sessions on the first day of the Conference. On this day, papers on the various aspects of languages and linguistics such as syntax, phonology, lexicography, morphology, acquisition, sociolinguistics and semantics, and their interfaces were presented. The second and the third days of the conference, March 16-17, 2012, were equally packed with presentations of papers on the same various aspects of languages and linguistics of Africa. At the end of presentations on the second day, there was a conference dinner and, at this dinner, socialization was at its best, with some music and dancing and presentation of gifts from the host university. Some members of the Ghanaian contingent, specifically Dr. G. Akanlig-Pare and Dr. Charles Marfo, joined a group on stage and performed real African drumming to the admiration of participants. The other Ghanaians sat not, but danced to the great beats.

The conference ended at 3:30 pm on the third day, March 17, 2012, after the papers that were scheduled for that day had been presented. At a business meeting

held before the closing day, it was agreed that the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of African Linguistics will be held at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., U.S.A.

As noted earlier, all the Ghanaians who participated in the conference presented papers. These papers were well received and this was evident from the great number of insightful questions and discerning suggestions made from the audience. On many of the several breaks, one person or more from the Ghanaian contingent was engaged in discussion by people from other nationalities on some aspects of the various papers on a Ghanaian language they had presented. Following some of these discussions collaborations for research were entered into. For instance, two linguists from Potsdam University in Germany, who work in Akan linguistics and are particularly interested in extra-sentential clauses in Akan, began collaboration with some of us. Also, having been informed of the existence of the Linguistics Association of Ghana (LAG) and its annual conference, one of them attended the most recent one, at the University of Education, Winneba, July 29 - August 1, 2012.

Charles Marfo

### **5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Gur Languages**

The 5<sup>th</sup> international conference on Gur languages was held in Bayreuth, Germany, from the 5<sup>th</sup> through the 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2012. Sessions were held at Iwalewa Haus, the Africa Center of the University of Bayreuth. Previous conferences were held at the University of Ouagadougou in 1997, National University of Benin in Cotonou in 1999, at the SIL headquarters in Kara, Togo (2001), and at the University of Bayreuth (2005). These meetings were sponsored under a project “Basic Research in the Gur Languages” conducted jointly by the Department of African Linguistics 1 at Bayreuth under Prof. Gudrun Miehe and the Department of African Linguistics at Humboldt University, Berlin led by Prof. Brigitte Reineke. The 2012 conference was not strictly part of that project, which has ended, but constituted a coda and wrapping up. The proceedings of the previous conferences have been published in a series of seven volumes entitled *Gur Papers / Cahiers Voltaïques*, appearing between 1996 and 2006. Several books on Gur languages have also been published by the project, through Rüdiger Köppe, Cologne. These publications have advanced our knowledge of the Gur languages and their circumstances very considerably.

The theme of the 2012 conference was **Gur internal and external relationships**. Accordingly, most papers dealt with various kinds of relations between Gur languages and other languages, especially their neighbours. Thus, for example, Klaus Beyer of Frankfurt University discussed “Contact between northern Gurunsi [in particular Pana] and Mande”, while Manfred von Roncador of Bayreuth discussed apparent convergences in the noun classes of the Gur languages Gurma and Moyobe, on the one hand, and the GTM (Kwa) languages Anii and Gidere on the other. Pierre Malgoubri of the University of Ouagadougou discussed the Grusi language Nuni and

its very divergent dialects, while Balaïbaou Kassin of the University of Kara talked on systems of nominal classification in eastern Grusi, ie. Kabiye, Tem, Lamba and Dilo. A total of fifteen papers were presented, by scholars from Germany (7), Ivory Coast (2), Burkina Faso (1), Togo (4), the Republic of Benin (1), and Ghana (1, namely M. E. Kropp Dakubu).

M. E. Kropp Dakubu

### **5<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Linguistics Association of Ghana**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Linguistics Association of Ghana was held at the University of Education, Winneba from July 30 through August 1, 2012. The theme for this year was **Communicating in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Role of Language and Literature**, and the Keynote speaker was Professor Domwini Dabire Kuupole, then Pro-Vice Chancellor of University of Cape Coast. The Welcome address was presented on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor of University of Education, Winneba by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (UEW), Professor E. N. Abakah, who coincidentally was the Chair of the Opening Ceremony.

Apart from the Keynote address, 50 presentations were made in seven parallel sessions. The presentations covered a wide range of issues of interest in language and literary studies. Some of the papers were on the areas of Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Discourse, Language and Literature, Socio-Pragmatics, Phonetics and Phonology, Pidgin and Language Evolution, Language Acquisition, Code-Switching, and Language Use. The sessions were all well attended and the papers and the discussions that followed them were intellectually stimulating.

At the General Meeting, which was held on the first day of the conference, it was agreed that the 2013 Workshop of the Association would be held at Central University College, Miotso on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2013, while next year's Annual Conference would take place from 29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013 at the University of Cape Coast. The General elections of the Association were also conducted during the General Meeting and the following officers were re-elected for another two-year term: Professor Nana Aba A. Amfo, University of Ghana, (President), Dr. Charles Marfo, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, (Vice President) Mr. Sefa Owusu UEW, Winneba (Secretary), Ms. Regina Caesar UEW, Winneba, (Treasurer) and Dr. Jemima Asabea Anderson University of Ghana, (Organising Secretary).

In all, the conference was attended by 91 participants from 6 countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands) across two continents making the conference a truly international one. Specifically, participants came from University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Education at Winneba, the University of Cape Coast, Central University College, Valley View University, Wisconsin University College, Christian Sciences University College, Kumasi Polytechnic, and Winneba Secondary

School. There were also participants from University of Lome, University of Lagos, Anambra State University and Obafemi Awololo University, Nigeria. We also had participants from Aston University (Birmingham, UK), Potsdam University (Germany) and University of Radboud (Netherlands).

On the afternoon of the second day, there was an excursion to the Kakum National Park, at Kakum near Cape Coast. The Conference Dinner, hosted by the Faculty of Languages Education of the University of Education in the evening of the first day, provided another avenue for socialization and networking.

Jemima Asabea Anderson

### **7<sup>TH</sup> WORLD CONGRESS OF AFRICAN LINGUISTICS (WOCAL7)**

The seventh World Congress of African Linguistics was held at the University of Buea, Cameroun, from the 20<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 2012. The theme of the Congress was **Language Description and Documentation for Development, Education and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Africa**. There were approximately 305 participants.

There were six Plenary Sessions, and five parallel sessions for days 1 and 2, increasing to six on day 3. Plenary talks were given by Jean Marie Hombert with Rebecca Grollemund, Beban Sammy Chumbow, Felix K. Ameka, H. Ekkehard Wolff, and Karsten Legère with Gratien Gualbert Atindogbé.

The program for the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of August included a workshop on African Sign Language, with presentations from or about Sign Language in eight African countries, including Ghana.

The conference concluded with a dinner and an excursion to the Limbe Botanical Garden and Wildlife Park the following day.

Cecilia Kotey

### **Towards Proto-Niger-Congo: Comparison and Reconstruction**

An international congress devoted to comparison of the major families classified by Greenberg as Niger-Congo and aimed at eventual reconstruction of Proto-Niger-Congo was held in Paris, France from the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2012. This congress was undoubtedly the first of its kind, and participants agreed that it was a very ambitious undertaking but well worth the effort. It was held under the auspices of *Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire* (LLACAN), which is one of the institutes of the French *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO), also located in Paris, and the Russian Academy of Sciences. All of the sessions were plenary, and

most of the presentations were papers invited from scholars active in the field. Participants presenting papers came from France (8), the USA (7), Russia (4), Nigeria (4), Germany (3), Canada (2) and one each from Ghana, Republic of Benin, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Kenya, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Ghana was eventually represented only by the present writer, although Prof. Abakah was expected. At the time of writing this report, the abstracts can be viewed along with other information on the Congress at the LLACAN web site:

<http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/fichiers/nigercongo/abstracts.html>.

Sessions were generally organized according to Greenbergian language families and sub-groups. The first session, following short welcoming addresses on behalf of INALCO, LLACAN and the Russian Academy of Sciences, was devoted to very general topics: 'S/TAM/P morphs in Niger-Congo languages' by Gregory Anderson of the U.S.A., 'Niger-Congo person markers' by Kirill Babaev of Russia, 'Lexicostatistics in Africa and its role in the reconstruction of proto-Niger-Congo' by George Starostin, also of Russia, and 'On the nature of final and initial vowels in Niger-Congo languages' by Irina Monich of the University of Connecticut, U.S.A. This was followed by sessions on Kwa (with presentations by M. E. Kropp Dakubu and S. Capo Chichi) and Ubangi. Sessions on the second day discussed Bantu and Bantoid, Jukunoid, and Adamawa. These sessions were all held at the Centre FIAP Jean Monnet, a student hostel with conference facilities where most of the participants also stayed. The third and fourth days' sessions were held at the INALCO Auditorium, and concentrated on Western Benue-Congo; Ijoid, Kru and Dogon; Gur and Senúfo; Atlantic; Mande and Kordofanian. All of this was concluded with a general discussion on problems and future work. A very nice dinner in a restaurant at the conclusion of the third day more than made up for the rather Spartan accommodation.

Not unexpectedly, much of the discussion was centered on whether some of the Niger-Congo families as defined by Greenberg are families at all. No firm conclusions were reached in most cases, but a great deal of material was presented for further study. Although some participants strongly advocated more and better lexicostatistics, most equally strongly advocated dedicated efforts to apply the comparative method with the aim of determining systematic phonological and morphological interrelationships, based on the large amounts of new and better data that have become available since Greenberg's time. It is expected that the Congress will result in at least one book, probably two, and that another congress will be held in 2014.

One cause of concern was the small number of linguists working in African comparative historical linguistics. The problem is particularly prominent on the African continent itself, where historical linguistics is rarely taught. The small proportion of participants from Africa is no doubt a reflection of this, especially since several of the participants from African countries are not actually native to the countries they arrived from. It is to be hoped that this situation will have begun to change by the time of the second congress.