

Zimmerman, Klaus and Birte Kellemeier-Rehbein (eds.) *Colonialism and missionary Linguistics* (Colonial and Postcolonial Linguistics 5) Berlin/

München/Boston: Mouton de Gruyter, 2015. Pp. x + 266.

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This book is the fifth in the De Gruyter series Colonial and Postcolonial Linguistics.

Along with a second volume focusing on the linguistic aspects of translation, this is the outcome of the Seventh Conference on Missionary Linguistics held at the University of Bremen in 2012. The focus of the book is the relationship between missionaries, missionary linguistics and the colonial administration, set against the wider context of the colonial era. The rationale for the collection is to engage and further the dialogue on the ways in which colonial endeavors impacted on descriptive linguistic work carried out by missionaries at the time. The volume is wide-ranging, with chapters contributing insights relating to language policy, transcription practices, lexicography and the role of language in forging ethnic identity. It provides a valuable contribution to discussion surrounding this period of history and its impact on linguistic knowledge today.

However, the volume varies substantially in terms of quality, content and writing style and may have benefitted from greater editorial involvement.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section comprises a single chapter, 'From missionary linguistics to colonial linguistics', by Tomas Stolz and Ingo Warnke. This chapter is dedicated to the distinct – albeit interconnected – natures of missionary and colonial linguistics. Missionary linguistics is defined as the study of the linguistic work of missionaries. In contrast, colonial linguistics refers to all linguistic

studies carried out under the conditions of colonialism. Whilst missionary linguistics is seen as essentially monodisciplinary, colonial linguistics is seen as multidisciplinary, exploring the connections between language and colonialism from a wider perspective. This chapter draws on the work Zimmerman (2004), one of the editors of the volume, in detailing the way in which these endeavors differ in terms of scope and practice. It is ultimately a description of the ‘state of play’ of the two disciplines, and provides an appropriate opening chapter for the volume, setting the context for the remainder of the book.

The second part of the book addresses missionary and colonial linguistics in the context of Africa. ‘Missionary descriptions in a colonial context’, by Clara Mortamet and Céline Amourette, provides a compelling discussion of four Swahili grammars written by French missionaries between 1885 and 1944. The grammars were compiled primarily with the goal of teaching Swahili to Europeans. They range from the more classical and prescriptive in nature (Delaunay’s 1885 *Grammaire Kiswahili*) to the more practical handbook-like description (Brutel’s 1913 *Vocabulaire français-Kiswahili et Kiswahili-français precede d’une grammaire élémentaire*). Van den Eynde’s 1904 grammar (*Grammaire Swahili suivie d’un vocabulaire*) is described as the most ‘colonial’ (46) both in its ideology and goal, providing advice on controlling local populations rather than on the transmission of religious ideologies or education. Finally, Sacleaux’s 1909 *Grammar des dialectes Swahilis* is described as the most ‘modern and exhaustive’ (41), reflecting the author’s knowledge of the trends in European linguistics, despite it not being the most modern in terms of chronology.

The notion of grammatical case is employed by Susanne Hackmack in ‘Case in selected grammars of Swahili’, as a means for discussing the impact of changing

perceptions on linguistic enquiry and linguistic description. The chapter also examines Swahili grammars, focusing on six published between 1891 and 1904. These were authored by three trained linguists who were not affiliated to Christian missions, and by three protestant theologians who were missionaries based in Africa. In present-day work, Swahili (and Bantu languages more broadly) is not considered to have overt grammatical case. However, the grammars sampled in the chapter all make widespread reference to grammatical case, employing the terms ‘nominative’, ‘genitive’ and ‘accusative’ throughout. In this way, the chapter addresses the ways in which prevailing attitudes and conventions at a given time can shape the output of linguistic enquiry – a feature that is as much a challenge for present-day linguistics as it was in the colonial era.

In ‘The first missionary linguistics in Fernando Po’, by Susana Castilla-Rodríguez, the work of the early missionaries in Equatorial Guinea is discussed. She claims that, in addition to descriptive linguistic work, the missionaries created ethnographic documents that influenced the cultural view of the colonisers about the natives. Spanish missionaries were sent to Equatorial Guinea as part of the Spanish government’s goal of making natives Spanish subjects (83). The chapter discusses the central role that literacy played in this goal, with the translation of religious texts intrinsically intertwined with the missionary endeavour of converting the local population to Catholicism. The chapter also touches on the different approaches taken by different denominations. Both Baptist and Catholic missionaries used people from local communities as interpreters. However, whilst Baptist interpreters were seen as highly educated and fluent in the local languages, the Catholic priests tended to see it as their responsibility to ‘educate’ the interpreters (92). The chapter concludes by noting

that the missionary strategies employed in Equatorial Guinea, in contrast to other colonies, did not see local languages as jeopardising the Hispanisation project, but rather as an integral means of bringing ‘Spanish missionaries closer and facilitating the immersion of natives into the colonial source language’ (97).

Both ‘Imagined communities, invented tribe?’, by Martina Anissa Strommer, and ‘Pre-colonial language policy of the Rhenish Mission Society’, by Stefan Castelli, both deal with what may be considered the more stereotypical conception of missionary linguistic work. The former examines the role played in the early codifications of language in drawing ethnic boundaries. The establishment of ethnic identity is presented as deliberate tactic that was part of the system of dominance imposed by colonial rule and British imperialism in its quest to divide and rule. However, since it was often unclear on which criteria group membership should be defined, the first task was to create the ethnic identities upon which the divisions would be dependent. In the case of Namibia, Strommer argues, this began, not with the arrival of German colonisers but with the advent of the first permanent European missions in the country. The chapter provides a detailed account of a small group of Rhenish missionaries operating in Namibia between 1842 and 1861. In addition to writing the first primers on the language and coining new lexical items, one of the missionaries, Johannes Rath, was interested in documenting local folklore and beliefs. The author claims that his record of traditional stories contributed to the perception of the Herero as a homogenous, independent community, where previously this had not been the case.

Castelli also discusses present-day Namibia, but in this case focuses on the language policy of the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS). From the outset, the administration placed great emphasis on the linguistic competence of its missionaries.

Alongside encouraging them to learn English in order to be able to keep contact with Europeans in South Africa (132), and Dutch since ‘almost all tribes are familiar with it’ (133), the newly-shipped missionaries were implored to learn the native languages ‘as intensively and as quickly as possible’ (133). Language was considered central to the official RMS language policy of trying to ‘mentally colonise’ the indigenous population. The chapter provides detailed insights into the lives of individual missionaries in South-West Africa, with a focus on the period between 1829 when the first emissaries were sent to the region and the founding of the fourth RMS mission in Rehoboth in 1884. The discussion includes personal accounts of struggles learning the local languages and finding appropriate terms for concepts used in evangelisation and wider communication, representing a recurring theme throughout the book.

‘Reducing languages to writing’, by Cécile Van den Avenne, examines the practice of transcription and the choices adopted by French missionaries in writing Bamanan (also known as Bambara) in the late 19th and early 20th century. The study examines a number of ‘handbooks’ written by missionaries and the military with the view of making the language accessible to explorers, military and traders, as well as the wider public (172). In contrast to other colonial territories in Africa, where a local language may have been used by the colonial power as a lingua franca, Van den Avenne asserts that French colonial policy did not grant any status to African languages. The importance given to the use – and associated description – of African languages therefore declined as the colonial administration became further established. Despite this, a number of French-Bamanan handbooks were written in the 1910s and 1920s. The chapter focuses on the task of ‘reducing’ Bamaman to writing and the three schools of thought that were adopted in the development of an orthography for the language: one

heavily influenced by the author's knowledge of Arabic, one using the Latin alphabet with a strict phonographic principle of one sound-one letter, and the third drawing more heavily on the conventions of written French. The chapter presents the first inclusion from Francophone Africa and constitutes a welcome new perspective on the impact of different approaches and colonial contexts.

The third section of the book is dedicated to the discussion of the shape of colonial and missionary linguistics in the context of the Americas. 'Transculturation, assimilation, and appropriation in the missionary representation of Nahuatl', by Catherine Fountain, explores the relationship between missionary linguists in Mexico and the indigenous languages they described. The focus is on the perceptions of the Nahuatl language in the eyes of the missionary grammarians. Nahuatl was promoted as the *lingua general* or 'common language' amongst the indigenous population in 1578. The chapter proposes that, contrary to popular belief, the grammarians were favourable towards Nahuatl and in some instances viewed it as an equal to Spanish or Latin, the most highly regarded language in Europe at the time. Missionary descriptions refer to the language as 'no less orderly or delicate than any other' (182) and note its 'elegant adverbs' (ibid.). However, the chapter also suggests that the study of a language – in establishing its norms – can change the way in which a language is taught, as well as a speaker's perception of the language. The chapter makes some important points about linguistic and cultural exchange not being unidirectional in nature, introducing a welcome level of nuance into an all-too-often simplistic narrative leading to polarised debate.

'Connections between the scientific discourse and the frontier missions in the surroundings of the Viceroyalty of New Granada', by Micaela Carrera de la Red and

Francisco José Zamora Salamanca, looks at the connection between the scientific discourse and the frontier missions in New Granada (present-day Colombia). It examines not only the acts of grammar writing and linguistic description, but also the ‘botanical expeditions’ that took place across South America in the last few decades of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. These expeditions resulted in numerous European ‘discoveries’ in terms of mineral, botanical and agricultural knowledge, and the associated need for new linguistic terminology to refer to these items. The chapter distinguishes two types of loanword from the Amerindian languages present in Spanish: loanwords from the early days of colonisation and the European conquest, and on the other hand, loanwords that result from these frontier missionaries and explorers. Examples include names of trees and fruit, such as *aguacate* ‘avocado’ which comes from the Nahuatl, and *cherimoya* which comes from the Guatemalan language Quiché (216). They note that the study could be extended to the whole of Spanish America and indeed it may provide an illuminating way of further exploring the linguistic outcome of the meeting of the ‘two worlds’ in the colonial context.

‘Examples of transcultural processes in two colonial linguistic documents on Jebero (Peru)’ concludes the volume. This chapter, by Astrid Alexander-Bakkerus, focuses on the Jebero language of northern Peru as it was spoken in the 18th century. Manuscripts documenting the language were written by Jesuit missionary Samuel Fritz in order for his fellow missionaries to be able to learn the language. One of the manuscripts contains a bilingual doctrine in Quechua and Spanish, whilst the other is in Jebero and Quechua, reflecting the widespread use of Quechua in the area. A grammar of Jebero was also written. The vocabularies are heavily imbued with colonial and missionary terminology – ‘give alms’, ‘confess’ and ‘have a good conscience’ (238) are

all present. Latin and other European languages are taken as the reference point. Ultimately the chapter describes the ‘paternal’ attitude of the grammarian towards the languages he is describing, including the suggestion that the speakers may pronounce their own language badly (243). However, as is seen in previous chapters, cultural transmission does not only occur in one direction, and the search for ways in which to describe certain phenomena and processes in the language under description also resulted in a broadening of the describer’s world view.

As noted in the book, Errington (2008) describes the work of missionary linguistics as ‘the largest body of linguistic work on a global scale’ (158). As such, *Colonialism and missionary Linguistics* constitutes an important addition to the field of colonial and missionary linguistics, and to the discipline of linguistics more broadly. Its contribution to present-day linguistics lies in a number of inter-connected themes that appear throughout the volume: the way in which research and descriptive work are modeled by the theories that are dominant at the time, the potential for exchange – both linguistic and cultural – to go in both (or more) directions, and the danger of a single narrative. However, the origins of the volume in a conference are apparent in the presumably coincidental selection of chapters, and the editorial input appears to be limited. Whilst the breadth of the coverage provided by the contributions is illuminating, the overall impression is less that of a coherent volume and more that of a collection of individual chapters. There are, for example, no cross-references to other chapters within the volume, which is regrettable given that connections between the discussions, as well as the conclusions drawn, could naturally be brought out. Similarly, no substantive introduction or conclusion are provided, contributing further to the

feeling that an opportunity has been missed to draw parallels across both time and geography as the otherwise insightful snapshots provided by the volume detail.

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