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### From fieldnotes to grammar

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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 84

### **From fieldnotes to grammar Artefactual ideologies of language and the micro-methodology of linguistics**

by

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# **From fieldnotes to grammar**

**Artefactual ideologies of language and the micro-methodology of linguistics**

**Jan Blommaert**

## **Preface: what linguists have made of it**

Most standard textbooks and historical accounts state that linguistics as a modern science started with the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* in 1916. In this posthumous compilation of course notes, Saussure outlined a new and fully scientific discipline, the object of which would be *langue*: the stable and structural patterns of language, patterns and structure that appear to be common to and to underlie the vast diversity of actual utterances people make. This new object, Saussure argued, could be systematically studied *in its own right*, as an object that offered exclusive access to linguists and would not have to be shared by other scholars of language – philologists, historical linguists, early anthropologists. Saussure's intervention created linguistics as an autonomous science; but this science had been defined by just a fraction of what could be studied as 'language'. Reviewing this momentous move, Asif Agha comments:

“The project is, first of all, *extractionist*: It pulls out from the totality of *langage* a fraction called *langue*, singling it out for exclusive attention. The extraction of the object of linguistics is achieved by a metonymic reduction: a part replaces a whole. Second, it is *restrictivist* in a specific sense: it reflexively equates the boundaries of a discipline with the study of the object extracted. A Saussurean linguistics is expressly not the study of language. It is the study of *langue*. (...) And, third, it is *exclusionist* in a correspondingly *langue*-dependent sense: all those whose interests lie beyond the study of *langue*, or language structure, are excluded from the happy few upon whom the honorific title of “linguist” may be conferred.” (Agha 2007: 222)

Thus, Saussure's definition of *langue* as the exclusive object of the (equally exclusive) science of linguistics did more than what it claimed: it not only created a new science, but also delineated a community of subscribing practitioners as well as a set of boundaries between such practitioners and practitioners of competing or overlapping approaches to language:

“A *langue*-centric constitution of an object sphere (and its associated episteme) now articulates the epistemic (social) project of a discipline by restricting tightly the sphere of epistemic concerns that count as “doing linguistics”, and hence delimits for its practitioners, within the larger sphere of their concerns with language, *the activities they*

*do as linguists.*” (Agha 2007: ibid)

Saussure’s views became paradigmatic and his particular, restrictive delineation of linguistics quickly became, by the metonymic move described by Agha, a synonym for ‘the study of language’. Such was at least the opinion of Leonard Bloomfield, to whom we owe several things: the canonization of this Saussurean object as the only object that would allow linguistics to be fully scientific, and the definitive separation of this fully scientific (and increasingly systematic) linguistics from the more general and (to use a contemporary vocabulary) interdisciplinary projects in which the study of language featured prominently. For Bloomfield and his followers, linguistics should study the immutable, perduring and ‘deep’ patterns, the contextually and historically insensitive generative aspects of language. This view, later powerfully perfected by Noam Chomsky, would become hegemonic. Students all over the world who had an interest in ‘language’ would from now on have to study linguistics – the science of *langue*. And being a linguist from now on became a synonym for being ‘a specialist of language’ (not of *langue*).

Competing approaches continued to exist, however. Dialectology, philology and anthropology did not die because of the rise to power of modern linguistics. Especially in anthropology, there is an unbroken line running from Boas and Sapir (contemporaries of Saussure), via Hymes, Gumperz and Labov (contemporaries of Chomsky), to scholars such as Silverstein, Agha, Briggs and Bauman (my own contemporaries). In this tradition, language was seen as a *cultural* object, that is: an object of doubtful autonomy, demanding examination in relation to other patterns of human conduct and social organization (Silverstein 2004). The Chomskyan revolution in the 1960s and 1970s went hand in hand with the emergence of a range of new adjacent disciplines focused on language: sociolinguistics, pragmatics, ethnomethodology to name just a few. The hegemonic effect of linguistics was clear though, and it was articulated in perpetual territorial conflicts over what was linguistics and what was not – see the famous battles between hardcore Generative Grammarians and Generative Semanticists (Huck & Goldsmith 1995). It also forced scholars of language in the adjacent disciplines to adopt more rigorous and disciplined (‘linguistic’) techniques into their work – saying something scientific about language meant that it had to at least *look* like linguistic analysis.

Modern linguistics was decidedly modernist. Its focus on deep and invariable structures underlying the multitude of diverse actual instances of language, and its insistence on rigorous categorization and classification of linguistic features became elements of a model and

blueprint for classical structuralism, and thus a brilliant and respectable example of the dominant *épistème* of its era. Lévi-Strauss was generous in his admiration for the virtuoso structuralism of modern phonology and syntax; Marc Bloch admonished young historians to pay close attention to the methodology of linguistics, to which he attributed extraordinary analytical powers because of its clarity and rigor. It may sound quite unbelievable now, but for a while linguists were actually very prestigious scholars. Linguists appeared to be able, better than most others, to create order out of chaos: the infinite variability of actual language use could be reduced to a limited set of principles and rules, from which, in turn, every possible actual language form could be derived. In many ways, modern linguistics was the pinnacle of scientific modernism. It had isolated its own autonomous object, thus securing its sovereignty as a science, and it had developed a methodical pattern oriented towards an orderly organization of each and every relevant linguistic form in relation to each other.

An earlier modern concept of language thus acquired its modernist scientific shape. There was indeed such an older modern concept, as Bauman & Briggs (2003) demonstrate. For Bauman & Briggs, the point of departure is the work of Bacon and Locke, in which language was wrested from society and became the purified isolated, autonomous object of rationality-in-Modernity, opposed to ‘hybrids’ – mixtures of language-and-society – spoken by the non-elite. Locke added to this a view of governmentality: “linguistic surveillance becomes a key dimension of [his] pedagogical program” (Bauman & Briggs 2003: 43), and “[t]ying purification to governmentality rendered language a perfect vehicle for constructing and naturalizing social inequality” (Id: 59). This language ideology and the concept it produced would be the ‘language’ of Modernity. It was complemented by the works of several others, in which the rational and autonomous view of language was both contrasted with and used to define Modernity’s Others: the people of the past, the country folk, people who live in oral cultures and perform ‘tradition’. Such views of linguistic Othering were developed by antiquarians such as Aubrey, Bourne and Brand, whose work tied common people firmly to the past by locating them in a (hybrid) linguistic space of (oral) folklore and tradition. Philologists such as Blackwell, Wood and Lowth introduced relativism by seeing ‘premodern’ language as indicative of epochal change. So both contemporary Others and historical Others could be opposed to Modern, rational man. Blair’s Ossian added a political and universalist-developmental dimension to this set of ideas, thus showing the path to Herder who defines poetic (hybrid) form as the essence of National culture. In what at first glance looks as a role-reversal, Herder defined poetry (i.e. folklore and tradition) as the ‘purest’ and most ‘natural’ expression of the spirit of a *Volk*. But we get a clearer image of the relationship

between rationality and folklore in the work of the Brothers Grimm, where the rational, autonomous (Lockean) language ideology was used to identify, locate and appraise folklore. This more or less finished complex of ideologies was continued, elaborated and extended in the work of, among others, Franz Boas, and is thus enshrined in the emergence of American anthropology as well as in the emergence of modern Saussurean linguistics. Modern linguistics presented a fully developed and sophisticated frame for describing and analyzing this concept, adding linguistic-scientific *modernism* to the ‘language’ of Modernity.

This modern language was a particular object, as we have seen. It excluded most of what makes language interesting and relevant, reducing it to denotational functions, structural ‘purity’ and transparency, strongly oriented towards a ‘standard’ spoken and written norm, and characteristic (even defining) of a community – a ‘people’, a ‘culture’, a ‘nation’ (Silverstein 1979, 1996, 1998, 2000). It is this skeleton ‘language’ that became a powerful practical and ideological ingredient of the emergence and development of the modern nation-state. It is also this ‘language’ that dominates contemporary language teaching, language testing and language regulation in contemporary identity politics (Blommaert 1999).

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The historical sketch just given is necessary because of several reasons (and naturally Foucault’s oeuvre is inspirational here). First, historicizing epistemologies and methodologies is a prerequisite for critique. If we wish to improve particular kinds of analysis, it is essential that we remember where the tools for such an analysis come from, in what kind of *épistème* they are grounded, and what kind of historical ideological load they carry. Science is one particular form of intertextuality, and whenever we engage in scientific work, we insert ourselves in a discursive history in which terms and concepts have acquired a particular load. This load – the implicit view of reality inscribed in terms and patterns of argumentation – is an essential element of the kind of reflexivity that is required in every scientific project, and scholars perpetually need to balance the technical usefulness of particular terms against the particular historical load they carry. This is why Makoni & Pennycook (2007) proposed to disinvent (and, in effect, reject) the very notion of ‘language’ in the field of language studies: the modernist concept of ‘language’ was fundamentally discredited because of the excluding and stratifying effects it entailed, as described by Bauman & Briggs. These effects had been particularly acute in the context of colonialism, where the languages of the colonial Other were invented or constructed, ordered, ranked, and appropriated as part of the colonial project

(see e.g. Fabian 1986). For Makoni & Pennycook, the term ‘language’ as used by colonial linguists was one instrument in imperialism’s toolbox, and thus risked to obscure postcolonial linguistic realities as well as prejudice postcolonial sociolinguistic emancipatory processes.

Second, if we see linguistics as a historically situated ideological complex, we can empirically engage with actual linguistic-scientific practices as technologies of ‘veridiction’, in Foucault’s terms (e.g. Foucault 2005). The practices of linguists are regimented, disciplined practices that, together, produce a ‘discourse’ or ‘regime of truth’ on language(s). The practices of linguists are, thus, *productive* practices, practices that *create* a particular reality of ‘language’ – in general as well as in particular, they also create realities of *languages*. Linguistics as a discipline can thus be seen as a complex of technologies of veridiction, with internal as well as external directions. Internal: the actual practices of linguists produce and reproduce the discipline itself, by producing and reproducing the generically regimented discourses on its object ‘language’. Thus, internally a concern for ‘quality’ can be articulated, and ‘progress’ in linguistics can be defined and described as more refined and sophisticated practices that still operate within the boundaries of the discipline (hence the frequent controversies over what belongs to linguistics and what doesn’t). Externally: the practices establish linguistics as a discipline in relation to other bodies of knowledge, shaping the ‘authority’ of the discipline in the field of ‘language’. Genres – organized complexes of forms attached to conventional projections of recognizable meaning – become key objects in such an analysis, because it is by means of the production and reproduction of genres that the technology of veridiction develops.

Third, as a further precision of the above, we can now inspect microscopic disciplinary practices as *inscribed* by and into the history of the regime of truth. ‘Inscribed’ keeps the double meaning here that Foucault attributed to the French verb *inscrire*: practices are themselves ‘marked’ and ‘ordered’ (epigraphically, so to speak) by the long histories in which they are embedded; they are in the same move also ‘registered’ into those histories, they have been made members of the larger set of practices that historically constitute the regime of truth. We can now engage with the micro- or infra-methodology of linguistics as *emblematic* of the larger regime of truth. Historization, thus, opens up a field of empirical inquiry, it invites a kind of historical ethnography of scientific practices as a complement of the more broadly sketched sociology of science as practiced, e.g. by Bruno Latour (e.g. Latour & Woolgar 1979; for ethnographic explorations see e.g. Goodwin 1994; Blommaert 2004). This empirical dimension – attending to the actual organization of micro-practices – is largely lacking in most earlier treatments of science as a complex of historically situated,



ideologically loaded professional practices; in our own field, neither Bauman & Briggs (2003) nor Makoni & Pennycook (2007) engage with such levels of detail. The empirical inspection I suggest here is a necessary complement to such broader attempts at historicizing and situating the study of language, for it allows us to see the *totality* of the historical ideological complex, from the slow and longitudinal development of the *épistème* all the way to the everyday professional routines that are the bread and butter of linguistics as a profession.

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At this point, I can introduce the present study. Its point of departure is of course autobiographic: as someone trained in African linguistics, I was for many years confronted with a particular kind of linguistics – Bloomfieldian in ambition and colonial in historical location and pedigree. The body of work that I had to consider a key part of my professional training, and which as a professor of African Linguistics I was expected to pass on to future generations, bore the problematic features that later prompted Makoni & Pennycook's radical rejection. I had, consequently, been involved in some 'revisionist' research, critically examining the ideological and methodological foundations of early and classical Africanist work (leading, ultimately, to a different approach articulated in Blommaert 2008a).

This autobiographical concern acquired depth and direction in 2003, when I spent the winter in Chicago as a visiting professor and a close colleague of Michael Silverstein. It is in a series of long discussions in 2003 and 2004 with Silverstein that this study emerged as a concrete project, part of a larger (but as yet unfinished) joint historical and ideological study of modern linguistics in which we focus on textual practices – the infra-methodology of linguistics, mentioned earlier – as a way into and as an empirical argument for the larger epistemic and ideological movements. A degree of dissatisfaction with the lack of detail in Bauman & Briggs (2003) – a text that was available at the time – spurred us on to look into actual textual practices that define 'modernist' linguistics.

More specifically, we saw how, empirically, a lot of what modernism is about in the field of language hinges on the notion of 'standard', and that 'standard' itself had a real shape, so to speak: 'standard' is always about the actual shape of language – spoken or written – and always starts from a particular shape – the canonical handbook, grammar, dictionary. Thus we started from the following assumption: the creation of standards for 'unwritten' languages proceeded through an orientation to literacy, the creation of a written, artefactualized image of the language, and the linguistic description itself was one of the artefacts thus produced. This

linguistic description moved through several stages, clearly visible in so-called ‘field linguistics, from the dialogical records of initial contact (fieldnotes) to the monological genre-realization of ‘a grammar’. At all levels, we should see inscriptions of the ideological frames in which the object language was captured, and the sequential ordering of textual practices would gradually construct *a* language. This language would be an ‘artefactualized’ object, something that had turned the whole of language into a small, pocket-size artefact, and the grammatical texts were themselves crucial artefacts in the process.

The material I had gathered for this study was voluminous, and I decided to focus on one particular sub-genre, the so-called ‘*esquisse grammaticale*’, ‘grammatical sketch’, a ‘miniature’ grammar of a language typically produced on less known African languages and thus a typical product of the field linguistics I intended to trace. Grammatical sketches, as we shall see, imposed high demands of scholarship and professional skill on the linguists who practiced them. They represent ‘pure’ linguistics in the field: scholars would always be specialized in some language or set of languages, and grammatical sketches were side-products, descriptions of languages in which the linguists were not specialized, but of which they could nevertheless produce a clean-and-quick, context-less grammatical description. The grammatical sketch, thus, is the purest possible genre of representing artefactualized language, a language entirely lifted out of the social, cultural and political contexts in which it occurred.

A first version of the study was published in an open access publication (Blommaert 2006); a considerably shortened version was later published in a special issue of *Language & Communication* (Blommaert 2008b). I also lectured on this topic on at least four occasions: at a symposium in honor of Johannes Fabian, in Amsterdam, May 2005; at an interdepartmental seminar in Chicago, January 2006; a departmental seminar at the Institute of Education, January 2007; and at the Finnish Linguistics Conference in Jyväskylä in May 2009. It is clear that the topic stuck with me, and that I forced myself to refine the analysis and take its insights into a variety of related fields. The publication of Makoni & Pennycook (2007) underscored in my view the relevance of the project. So when Gilles-Maurice de Schryver asked me whether I had any significant writing projects that could find their way to his publishing house, I was happy enough to submit the unabridged (and never published) version of the study that had kept me restless and engaged for the best of the first decade of this century.

I still consider this an unfinished product, and in the Postscript to this study I will outline some directions in which I would like to take this research. There is an urgent need for

studies that engage with the actual research and textual practices we perform, because these practices are at the core of what we understand by ‘training’ and ‘study’. We transmit them every day to our students, whenever we tell them to perform a particular operation in *this particular way*. Our historical and ideological quality control – our duty to ‘unthink’ our science, in Wallerstein’s (2000) terms – compels us to be critical and reflexive about such practices, and our capacity to understand human culture through language is dependent on such perpetual quality control. There is of course no neutral science, and the one we practice is as much a historical accident as, let us say, Freudian psychology or contemporary opinion survey research. Awareness of this simple given is the key to a perpetual interrogation of the quality and relevance of what we do, and we cannot escape questions of quality and relevance. The fact that such questions usually involve ethical and political issues as well is unpleasant to some, but again inescapable. Dell Hymes wrote several times that one of the big problems with language was what linguists had made of it (e.g. Hymes 1996); it is because of this particular linguistic frame – the Saussure-Bloomfield-Chomsky frame – that language in real life is often an incomprehensible, frustrating and oppressive thing, something that incapacitates people rather than to empower them. This problem, I would say, is something that linguists ought to address. And when they do that, they cannot avoid looking sharply at what they themselves made of it.

## From fieldnotes to grammar:

### Artefactual ideologies and the textual production of languages in Africa

#### 1. Introduction

Language often comes to us in a material shape: the shape of messages, texts, inscriptions, visualizations of meaning assuming a particular codified form. Commonsense, as well as a series of more sophisticated linguistic ideologies, some of which will be discussed below, teach us that there is a ‘natural’ mode of occurrence of language, and that this ‘natural’ mode is an *oral* mode. Language, from that viewpoint, is necessarily immaterial in essence, and material modes of occurrence of language are suggested to be derived, secondary modes of occurrence. Language is what people *speak*, and whenever we wish to inquire about the linguistic competence of an individual (or whenever people inquire about our competence) the question will be ‘what language do you speak?’

This is unproblematic, were it not for the fact that a very significant part of the phenomenology of language is material and visual – written or otherwise graphically represented. Thus, when the answer to the usual question is ‘I speak Dutch’, the assumption is that the person not only *speaks* Dutch, but is in control of all the codes and norms contained in Dutch, including orthographic codes and norms: whenever we say ‘I *speak* language X’, we in fact say ‘I *speak and write* language X’. Speaking and writing (or visualization) form a bundle of features in commonsense views of language, and asymmetrical competence (competence, e.g. in speaking, not in writing) is perceived to be a problematic, incomplete form of competence. Moreover, language very often occurs *as* material representation: as a text, a book, a dictionary, a website. The way in which language is organized in material representations is often the key to ‘becoming’ a language; prior to the materialization of language in coded texts, linguistic resources are rarely granted the status of ‘language’.

Fabian’s groundbreaking work [18] taught us that material representations of language (in his case, a wide variety of grammars and practical textbooks on Swahili in the Belgian Congo) can be read as documents bespeaking the particular social and political relations under which communication in/through/on that language proceeded. He demonstrated how material products of a particular kind of folk and specialized linguistics could be read

*ideologically* as a politics of knowledge, part and parcel of the colonial enterprise. Colonial linguists, the best of whom were trained in the Boasian-Malinowskian tradition of field ethnography, not only *collected* a ‘corpus inscriptorum’, they also *produced* one in their notes, correspondence, and published works. A critical and reflexive ethnography (again pioneered in part by Fabian [16]; cf. also [9]) has in the meantime hammered this insight home. In this essay, we use this insight as our take-off point and intend to delve a bit deeper, looking at specific types of linguistic artefacts on Africa and at specific practices of constructing such artefacts.

## 2. The problem

The problem we want to address in this paper can be formulated in its most general sense as that of the relation between literacy practices and the emergence of ‘grammar’, where grammar is seen both as a particular ideological construct of language-as-structure and a material representation of language. ‘Grammar’, therefore, will be used here both in its abstract sense (*the* grammar of English – henceforth Grammar1) and its concrete material sense (*a* grammar of English – henceforth Grammar2), and an important part of the argument will be that both senses are connected: an abstract idea of grammar sustains, but is also produced by, particular generically regimented literacy practices that generate material grammars.

Put in a different frame: I will try to demonstrate that grammar is an ordered complex of language ideologies and generically regimented practices that shape and concretize the ideologies. The pivot of this register is the language-ideological assumption that an infinite number of dynamic, contextualized, socioculturally embedded and variable acts of language can be ‘reduced’ – by means of specific, genred literacy practices – to a small set of rules and formulas, from which, in turn, an infinite number of dynamic, contextualized, socioculturally embedded and variable acts of language can be deduced. This I call an artefactual ideology of language. The reduction is comprehensive: the finite set of rules and formulas is supposed to account for *all* the acts of language, and can in effect be seen as *a replica of ‘the’ language*: a textual artefact that creates a closed, singular and pure ‘language’, a genred, *textual locus of creation* for languages with names, speakers, areas of distribution and relationships with other (similarly conceived) languages. This, as we know, is the very idea of ‘grammar’, and it underlies both the idea of ‘structural description’ and that of generativism.

Fabian has shown how colonial linguistics “began with descriptive appropriation of African languages” and “soon turned to projects of prescriptive imposition of standards of correctness” [19: 151] (also [15]). Irvine [28: 63] notes how twentieth-century linguistics expressed its quest for the status as a science in particular discursive styles, notably “affect-free expository prose, in standardized varieties, referring to a world external to the communicative act itself” and goes on to examine this in the domain of the early descriptions of African languages. Like Fabian, she observes that

“the connection of linguistic analysis with the establishment of standards, and with intellectual and moral improvement, was widespread, as was the image of wild chaos that many scholars thought must necessarily characterize languages lacking an indigenous written literature”. [28: 67]

Here, we have a theme that will be central to most of our argument: the creation of standards for ‘unwritten’ languages (i.e. the connection between description and prescription) proceeded through an orientation to literacy, the creation of a written, artefactualized image of the language, and the linguistic description itself was one of the artefacts thus produced.

In developing this argument, we will try to sketch a *procedure* which operates in macro-time and in micro-time; it characterizes the development of modern field linguistics in the twentieth century as well as the practical activities of field linguists. It is in many ways the becoming of a Foucaultian *pouvoir-savoir*, also in the sense that there is no clear chronological-causal sequence to this development other than a broad historical sweep in which different kinds of activities co-existed and only gradually became rearranged into a new form of knowledge construction. The procedure gradually became a *canon*, a normative, authoritative complex of practices resulting in generically recognizable texts. The full story is obviously beyond the scope of this paper; we shall concentrate on the skeleton structure of this procedure, starting from the philological tradition, then moving on to Bloomfield’s proposals for practical field linguistics, and then turning towards a particular textual genre: the *esquisse grammaticale*, the grammatical sketch.

### **3. The philological tradition**

The Rev. S.W. Koelle, one of the pioneers of African language studies, describes part of his research procedure in the preface to his *Grammar of the Bornu or Kanuri Language*:

“As there was no native literature, considerable time was required merely to bring some satisfactory portion of the language before my view. (...) The basis of this Kanuri grammar is a manuscript literature of about 800 quarto pages, which were dictated to me by my interpreter”. [32: i, ix]

The “considerable time” mentioned by Koelle was spent on the creation of an *ersatz* native literature, which could then be used as the ‘corpus’ for the construction of a grammar. Preference was given to “genres (...) which, though oral, might be considered analogous to a body of literature such as a European language might offer” [28: 68]: folk-literary genres such as epics, fables, and so forth, ‘stories’ that could be produced as monological, unidirectional and generically ‘special’ discourse. This corpus emerged out of an ethnographic encounter in which a particular speech act was performed: *dictation*, a ‘special’ type of speech that nicely corresponds to the monological and unidirectional stories that needed to be dictated. We will come back to this below.

To be sure, Koelle (a contemporary of von Humboldt and the Grimm Brothers) did not invent anything. His preference for particular, special speech genres was a preference for what Herder and Grimm called *Naturpoesie*, a textual (oral) tradition that incorporates and articulates the spirit of a particular people, therefore offering “privileged scientific objects, providing more transparent windows on linguistic patterns at the same time that they were (...) textual forms that embodied the nation” [2: 205]. The African oral equivalents of European written literature, thus, offered a degree of ‘purity’ that was needed to detect the ‘true’ language. This ‘true’ language was (paradoxically, at first sight) a language devoid of social, cultural and historical influences, a concept which in European thought develops over the span of two centuries, from Bacon, to Locke, Condillac and Port-Royal to Boas and Saussure [2; 33]. But importantly, this true language can only be detected *inductively*, from consideration of factual occurrences of (‘pure’, ‘true’) language – from “evidence offered by the language as spoken or as known from texts and inscriptions, not derived from speculative reconstructions” (Land commenting on William Jones [33: 104]). And linguistic – *structural* – analysis of languages, such as in historical-comparative linguistics and typology, must be based on a rigorous examination of such ‘real’ corpora of texts.

Philology does not ‘invent’ the notion of language-as-structure (Grammar1), but it innovates in its emphasis on the *inductive study of Grammar1*. Here is the basic principle of philology, developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the likes of Jones and Schlegel

and carried over through generations of scholarship until now: language is primarily a complex of forms from which meanings are generated, and such forms can be established inductively from a scrutiny of real forms of occurrence of texts. This philology, as we know, became one of the most important tools for establishing ‘national’ and ‘racial’ (cultural) differences, and in an era of imperialism it therefore became one of the major tools for the construction of a *savoir* about the colonized peoples. Early Africanist scholars such as Wilhelm Bleek (a student of Jakob Grimm’s), consequently, set standards for later work by publishing both ‘folklore’ (i.e. texts in African languages) and descriptive and comparative linguistic studies [28: 81-85; 29]; similar standards, of course, became the hallmark of the Boasian tradition in the US.

### ***3.1. Philology and quality***

Important here is the connection between a corpus of ‘literature’ and the idea of linguistic purity and standardization on the one hand, and of cultural sophistication on the other hand. The term ‘literature’ suggests sophistication and beauty, as well as (in the Herderian-Grimmian tradition) cultural authenticity and therefore a place in grand classifications of peoples in ‘mankind’. Consequently, the existence of a literature suggests a particular ‘quality’ of culture and, by implication, a degree of ‘quality’ of the language. A lot of the recording of folklore, consequently, was conducted with a humanistic motive: to document and preserve an ‘authentic’ culture (bound to disappear as such due to colonization) and to demonstrate its exotic depth, beauty and complexity. Consider the following statement from the preface of A.C. Hollis’ *The Masai*:

“My endeavour in writing this book has been to place on record some of the thoughts and ideas of the Masai people, before their extinction or their admixture with Bantu elements and contact with civilisation renders this an impossibility. The stories, the proverbs, the riddles, the songs, and the account of the customs and beliefs of this interesting people are all given in the words of the relaters themselves” [22: iv]

The authentic culture of the Masai needed to be preserved, for “[i]t has often been proved in other parts of the globe that the native, on the advent of the white man, alters his habits or ceases to exist” (id.: v). And in order to preserve what there is to be preserved, a clear, pure, structured and transparent language needs to be reconstructed: the language that articulates the authenticity, uniqueness and sophistication of the culture, and the language that (in terms



of Grimm's laws and their application by people such as Bleek, Meinhof and Johnston) enables the study of genetic affiliation and historical reconstruction.

Great care was given to purity and transparency. Since language-culture relationships were singular and linear, and given the assumption of authenticity, 'mixed' or 'confused' languages were evidence of 'acculturation' (or "admixture", in Hollis' terms) and needed to be removed. John and L.F. Whitehead, missionaries with a distinguished career as descriptive linguists, described their work as follows in the preface to their *Manuel de Kingwana*:

“[The authors] proposed to discover the agreements and the disagreements of the parent Swahili and its daughter Kingwana, and to harmonise all that they found agreeable to the known Bantu laws of speech, transforming the disagreeable foreign elements into the indicated agreeable forms, eradicating the DOUBLE and TRIPLE ENTENTES in many Swahili words or phrases, and so making Kingwana a worthy medium for all forms of instruction and translation. They believe that the way to literary success has thus been opened to Kingwana (...) Many grammatical divergences have been turned into grammatical convergences, and many anomalies have been turned into relative conformity”. [49: iii-iv, emphasis in original]

The result of these interventions – the prescriptive bias in colonial linguistics as noted by Fabian and Irvine – was an *improved* language, one that restored the cultural uniqueness of Kingwana and so preserved the authentic culture, but simultaneously also prepared its speakers for the “admixture” that would result from the “contact with civilisation” (as Hollis would say). The Kingwana meticulously constructed by the Whiteheads would offer its speakers a number of new possibilities: “translating, both prose and poetry, scientific definition and mathematical precision, clear thinking and its true expression” [49: vi], and “the way to literary success has thus been opened to Kingwana” [49: iii]. We see how the Whiteheads here actually suggest that their 'improved' Kingwana will acquire or enable more *functions*. The range of action of the language, so to speak, will be extended by their efforts of purifying and structuring.

The construction of a written literature and that of an 'improved', pure, transparent, understandable and multifunctional language thus went hand in hand. Generically and in terms of the particular textual artefacts, this assumed particular presentational shapes in which literature and grammar co-occur graphically. We will discuss four such particular shapes.

### 3.2. Genres of textual artefactualization

1. *Pidginized target language*. Figure 1 shows a fragment of Vallaëys [44: 201], a text added after a grammar of the Logo language. The particular fragment is from a narrative which Vallaëys classified under '*Histoires*', 'stories'. The text is suggested to be traditional and remarkable as a genre of Logo folklore, and this fragment contains a 'song': a repetitive, refrain-like formula. Respect for the source text shines through in the way in which the target language – French – is being used here: Vallaëys produces a so-called 'literal' translation, one in which every Logo word is translanguistically replicated in a French word or phrase. The effect is a pidginized form of French, with peculiar syntax (*Vache, la tienne, tourbillon!*, or the shift from *passé simple* in *se leva* towards durative present in *est en train de chanter*) and lexis that makes little sense in French (*ziïï tourbillon!*, *ziïï anneau de cheville!*), marked by Vallaëys as such with question marks.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1: Vallaëys' Logo text, fragment of p.201

Clearly, making sense of the text *as text* in French is not central here; French genred textuality is sacrificed in favour of Logo genred textuality, and the mediating link between the source text and the target text is grammar. Logo grammar 'saturates' the target text to such a degree that the target text becomes distorted. The 'literal' translations thus composed are one very widespread genre of philological textual artefactualization, and it offers us a singular, problematic object: the source text, seen as something that cannot be adequately converted into 'natural' target language. This genre of philological representation marks the source text as exotic, impenetrable, obscure *unless one masters the grammar*. It is an emblematic replication of text.

2) *Equivalent literariness*. Figure 2, from Hichens [21: 52-53], presents us with another widespread form of philological representation. The African text here is definitely remarkable. It is an edition of *Al-Inkishafi*, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century poem in Swahili, originally *written* in Arabic script. This type of representation aims at representing the literary, poetic qualities

of the text. The Swahili text is not presented as prose but as poetry, not in sentences but in lines and (numbered) verses. The translation in turn uses English conventions for poetic style (“cluster’d”, “e’er”, “’tis” etc.) as well as line and verse organization. At the same time, we see phonetic, grammatical and etymological footnotes. Thus, the text initiates different forms of linguistic analysis and represents what is known linguistically. But we also see, in the translation, long cultural, historical and intertextual explanations, not so much oriented towards an accurate linguistic understanding of the text than at a *cultural* understanding.

FIGURE 2 HERE

Figure 2: Pages 52-53 of Hichens’s *Al-Inkishafi*

Unlike most other scholars of African languages, Hichens confronts a written literary tradition – this is ‘real’ literature, and it apparently requires conversion in equivalent literary-traditional stylistic formats. The linguistic interventions thus made in the translation are telling. Hichens is not satisfied with the ‘literal’ translation of Figure 1, he produces a ‘literary’ translation, that is, a translation that converts Swahili poetic conventions into the equivalent conventions in English. His translation, consequently, contains the sort of “refining work” that Bauman detected in Schoolcraft’s editions of Native American texts: a series of textual and linguistic interventions that create ‘literariness’ in English [1: 52]. This can be done because of the use of the philological apparatus: the footnotes. ‘Literal’ translations, etymologies, peculiarities, in short everything that explains the distance between a literal translation and a literary one is footnoted. The textual artefact is a triad: the ‘original’ text, the linguistic and cultural footnotes (i.e. analytic text providing ‘literal’ translations) and an equivalent literary text in English.

3) *Text as raw material*. Figure 3, from Klinghenben-von Tiling [31: 8-9], presents a Galla text in a notational system that contains specific symbols (about which we will say more below), with the German translation in the facing column.

FIGURE 3 HERE

Figure 3: Pages 8-9 of Klingenheben-Von Tiling's Galla text

Like in the previous example, the Galla text contains footnotes, with linguistic commentary. Both texts are graphically presented as *prose*, i.e. in the form of sentences with conventional punctuation and equal in length. And ellipsis in the Galla text is marked by bracketed additions in the German translation, displaying an awareness of the need to produce a translation as (linguistically) close to the Galla text as possible, as well as an awareness of conventions of textual completeness and referential adequacy in German.

In contrast to the *Al-Inkishafi*, the texts here are unremarkable and address things like the sale of horses, travels and so on, as well as a series of greeting formulae; furthermore, they were not collected during fieldwork. Klingenheben mentions that: "In the summer semester of 1922, two natives were put at my disposal for a course on Galla, and the texts to follow were written down from dictation by them" [31: 1, German original]; the notes she further adds all relate to dialect differences between both speakers. Probably, these texts came into existence because of a felt need for a 'corpus' on Galla, and the main purpose of the texts would be linguistic (and comparative) analysis.

The grammatical and lexical footnotes initiate such analyses: Klingenheben refers to published sources on Galla; she identifies borrowings and etymologies; observes remarkable stylistic, phonological and tonological features; explains particular inflected forms in relation to the root; and she mentions different phonetic or morphological realizations of words by her informants. The corpus is shot through by multiple procedures: grammatical-structural, dialectological, phonetic, comparative, lexical-etymological, comparative aspects are all footnoted. Thus, we see here how the text *prompts* a wide variety of linguistic analyses; it is the raw material for in-depth linguistic analysis and simultaneously represents the upper limit of linguistic knowledge at the time of production. The function of these analyses is denotational equivalence: the grammatical and lexical notes motivate and support a 'precise', 'accurate' translation.

The presentation of the Galla texts is another way of representing text: as a prose corpus, with an accurate translation and with explanatory (linguistic, lexical) footnotes. Such texts are then philologically converted into comprehensive linguistic analyses, in which the principle is that everything that is in the text also needs to be explained in the grammar and

contained in the dictionary. The textual artefact here is a dual object: we have the ‘original’ text, and we have an accurate, ‘literal’ translation-with-footnotes which is an instrument and product of linguistic analysis.

4) *Text as grammar*. A fourth way of presenting texts is Figure 4, from Sommer and Vossen, a very recent example that demonstrates the persistence of the philological tradition [41: 148-149]. The text is remarkable here: it is a “traditional story” narrated by an old woman in Shiyeyi, a language with hardly any native speakers left. Sommer and Vossen present a dense and layered but singular textual artefact here: text-as-grammar. There is no trace anymore of the literariness which we saw in Hichens’ text, and the duality which we saw in Klingenheben’s example has here been collapsed into one conventional text-artefact of philology: the text with interlinear glosses and translation presented, as it were, as one bar in a score (Figure 5).

FIGURE 4 HERE

Figure 4: pages 148-149 of Sommer and Vossen

All kinds of textual and notational operations are combined here. The Shiyeyi text is written in an orthography which includes tonal and click symbols; the interlinear glosses contain conventional abbreviations for particular linguistic features (‘CAUS’: causative; ‘POSS’: possessive), and stylistically unadapted denotational equivalents of verbs and nouns (e.g. ‘marry’, ‘come out’).

FIGURE 5 HERE

Figure 5: detail of Sommer and Vossen

The translation, finally, converts the coded interlinear information into propositionally, grammatically and stylistically adequate sentences in English. Thus: three different kinds of notation and three different but related forms of textuality combine into one format of textual

representation, in which the Shiyeyi text is first converted into an ‘unreadable’, but linguistically informed notation system, which in a next move motivates and supports a ‘literal’ and linguistically accurate English version. Thus,

“*Mà. rorà mù. g//ékwà.*”

becomes

“SCa3sg. - marry 1 – woman”

and then

“He married a woman”

And rather than text as raw material (as in Klingenheben’s example), we have text-as-analyzed, text as grammatical composition, and grammar as the *explanans* of text.

### **3.3. *The Vedic ideal***

There is nothing that *in se* necessitates the particular formats of representation given above. Text can be represented in many formats, and there is no reason why the philological text-artefacts would be intrinsically superior to, for instance, a phonetic transcript or an ethnopoetic transcript (a point made with some insistence by Hymes [27]). We are seeing here conventions for representing text in relation to its structure and its meaning in another language, conventions which Charles Goodwin would qualify as ‘professional vision’: “[d]iscursive practices (...) used by members of a profession to shape events in the domains subject to their professional scrutiny” [20: 606]. The professional vision is that of philology: a discipline in which text, linguistic analysis and translation synergize in remarkable (and variable, as we saw) ways. The synergy responds to what we could call the Vedic ideal: a mode of work, epitomized in the monumental studies on Vedic texts, in which every single ingredient of the texts (words, sounds, grammatical structures) can also be found in the grammar and the dictionary of Sanskrit. Students of African languages have very often been inspired by this Vedic ideal: the ideal of a closed, finite corpus of texts that is sensed to completely contain ‘the language’, and which could therefore be used for each and every grammatical and lexical study. Thus, the philological corpus involves an *orientation to a*

*closed body of text*, suggested to instantiate *every relevant form of occurrence of language-as-structure*.

To give just one example: the Belgian missionary linguist Albert De Rop based his Lomongo syntax [10] inductively on a philological corpus: “For the composition of this syntactic description, we used the following Lomongo *literature*” [10: vii, French original, italics added]. This corpus of literature is – characteristically – authored by Belgian scholars: G. Hulstaert and E. Boelaert (both fellow missionaries of De Rop’s congregation), and De Rop himself. The sources are:

- three volumes of sacred history (Hulstaert)
- the acts of the apostles (Hulstaert)
- two volumes of ogre stories (Boelaert)
- one version the Lianja-epic (Boelaert)
- a locally published journal called Lokole lokiso (edited by Hulstaert)
- another version of the Lianja-epic (Boelaert)
- Mongo proverbs (Hulstaert)
- Juridicial stories (Hulstaert and De Rop)
- Tortoise stories (Boelaert)
- De Rop’s own MA dissertation on ‘spoken verbal art of the Nkundo’
- The gospel of St John (Hulstaert)

The sources in this closed and finite corpus are coded with a symbol (M, N, Li...), and the examples given in the syntax refer to source, page, and paragraph (see Figure 6).

In line with the preference for ‘special’ genres noted earlier, De Rop adds: “Most of the quotes are taken from the *Nsong’â Lianja Epic*, which is by far the richest and most diverse source in our data set” [10: viii]. Of course, the reference here is to literate, philological representations of oral narrative: artefacts already tailored for linguistic analysis.

We will come back to the philological tradition further on. But before that, we need to delve somewhat deeper into the specific practices of text reproduction. In our discussion of such philological text-artefacts, we have already hinted at issues of notation and dictation. To this we now turn.

FIGURE 6 HERE

Figure 6: de Rop's philological practices.

#### **4. Dictation, notation and writing**

The construction of the corpus – the closed body of text that instantiates every form of occurrence of language-as-structure – involves an artefactualization of language: an image of language as a textual artefact of restricted size, that can be belabored in a variety of ways and from a variety of perspectives, that can be 'put to work', can be (materially) carried around and stored, used and re-used. Artefactual ideologies of language enable the mutual convertibility of Grammar1 into Grammar2, and this conversion from one into the other proceeds by means of technical-linguistic (genred) discursive practices: dictation and notation.

In its simplest schematic form, the problem here is this: linguists need to get involved in real-time interaction with 'informants' in order to collect the texts that form the corpus – fieldwork. The material thus collected is, of course, dynamic, contextualized speech performed in particular genres, styles and linguistic varieties and seriously dependent on the particular mode of production and the conditions under which the interaction proceeds. When this dynamic, contextualized event is over, the material thus collected becomes static, a-contextual 'evidence' not for dynamic and contextualized modes of occurrence of language (the *pragmatics* of language) but for Grammar1 of the language: a generative, deductive structure that enables the infinite production of dynamic and contextualized speech. The issue to be examined here is the way in which a particular pragmatics dominating the fieldwork encounter contributes towards this conversion from dynamic into static, discourse into language, speech into Grammar1, or, from another angle, from an anthropological perspective on language into a linguistic perspective.



We will examine in some detail the viewpoints of two historical authorities: Leonard Bloomfield and Margaret Mead. Both, of course, had a considerable influence on developments in linguistics and anthropology respectively.

#### ***4.1. Bloomfield's reverse inductivism***

In 1942, Leonard Bloomfield contributed his bit to the US war economy. The increased need for learning foreign languages required a practical, yet scientifically sound method, and Bloomfield's 16-page *Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Languages* [4] provided a canonical blueprint for such a method.

Bloomfield starts by emphasizing one of the basic credos of American linguistics in the Boas-Sapir tradition:

“The student of an entirely new language will have to throw off all his prepossessions about language and start with a clean slate (...) It will be an unreasonable procedure and a source of endless difficulty and delay if we start (...) from the English state of affairs and try to adapt our practice and our description of the foreign language to the arrangements which we happen to have in English.” [4: 1]

Thus, there is no language-related *a priori* in the study of foreign languages; the point of departure for studying an entirely new language is *language-less*. Thus one needs to “try to formulate *without setting limits upon the English wording*, such definitions as seem to cover the cases and to make clear the distinctions of the foreign language” [4: 2, emphasis added; compare with Figure 1 above]. The language spoken by the foreigner dominates the procedure; the linguist's English needs to be adapted to it.

This point, however, is slightly complicated when Bloomfield discusses one of the main instruments for learning the language: the informant.

“The informant is not a teacher and must not be treated as such. (...) He cannot make correct theoretical statements about his language; any attempts he may make in this direction will turn out to be a sheer waste of time”. [4: 2]

Thus, the foreigner's language may be the stable object and the linguist's English needs to be something more flexible, but that does not mean that the foreigner's speech can be trusted as a metalanguage: “speakers cannot describe the structure of their language” [4: 3]. The metalanguage needs to be a third object, one that describes *structure*; and the “trained

linguist” is in control of that. This metalanguage – structural knowledge or Grammar1 – is language-less, it does not correspond to any kind of competence-*in-language*: “There is no connection between this knowledge and the practical command of the language” [4: 3].

Bloomfield has separated two kinds of language at this point: one, a dynamic ‘practical’ object; the other a language-less metalanguage. The first is to be produced by the informant; the second by the linguist. Literacy enters the picture when Bloomfield cautions against informants who are literate: such an informant “is likely to discourse about the system of writing and to furnish us with obsolete literary forms” of the *thou hast* or *he goeth* kind [4: 3]. The writing system of the foreign language is not a target for *practical* study, and “if one needs to acquire the conventional system of writing and the literary forms of the language, this should be postponed until one has a fair speaking knowledge” [4: 3-4]. And this ‘fair knowledge’ can best be built with informants who are not “educated” or “cultured” [4: 4]. Bloomfield advocates strict ‘naturalness’ in the choice of informants.

Not only has the foreigner’s language been disqualified as a metalanguage; the foreigner’s literacy has been disqualified as a target of study as well. Recall that English too was rejected as a metalinguistic point of reference; when it comes to literacy, however, English comes in again. Bloomfield now proposes his famed fieldwork procedure; it is a sequence of particular speech genres and literacy practices:

“Make the informant say things to you in the foreign language. (...) never stop trying to imitate the foreign pronunciation.

Write down everything the informant says: make him repeat it until you have made the best written record that you can make. Read your written notes out loud over and over again (...)

Make fair copies, put words on slips, keep comparing forms that resemble each other; with as little reference as possible to English, try to determine the use and meaning of the foreign phrases, words, and components of words”. [4: 5]

The informant speaks, the linguist writes; the informant repeats, the linguist corrects his notes; the linguist reads aloud his notes; the linguist starts producing secondary notes: copies and slips; the linguist starts analyzing these notes. Observe how in this passage, the term *form* appears as a word for particular modes of occurrence of language. The informant does not

produce ‘forms’, he produces ‘things’, ‘words’ and ‘phrases’; *forms’ start occurring in, and emerging from, the linguist’s record.*

Summarizing, we see that informants are required to produce ‘natural’ oral speech. The linguist then embarks on literacy practices that convert this speech into ‘forms’, and such forms need to be *practiced* by the linguist (“read your notes out loud over and over again...”) and this with two aims: *learning* the language (practically) and *understanding* it (structurally). The practice advocated by Bloomfield is *learning to speak from structure*, to speak ‘correctly’, to process and produce a language which is *altered* by its conversion into literate, structured ‘forms’.

Consequently, learning the language (or “*mastering*” it, as Bloomfield calls it) proceeds on the basis of orientations towards a written artefact: the record. And this record is a careful and disciplined written replica of the spoken ‘natural’ language of the informant. English literacy is a basic tool, but (like ‘English’ in general) it needs to be adapted with considerable flexibility:

“Of course, as far as possible, one will assign familiar letters of the English alphabet to the foreign sounds. (...) in sum, *any letter can be used for any sound, if only you make a clear definition and stick to it.* (...) It is self-evident that one must work out a system of writing which will show all the relevant distinctions of the language.” [4: 9, emphasis in original]

The writing system one utilizes, in other words, is an adapted, stretched form of English literacy, tailored in such a way that it accurately represents every important formal distinction in the language. Such accuracy is attained by the sequence of speaking and writing which we saw above: the linguist needs to go over his record time and again, and “[a]s soon as one recognizes an essential distinction, one must get the informant to repeat the earlier material, so that one can take a new and correct record of it” [4: 9]. And in doing so, “the important thing is speed of writing”.

Speed of writing – speed of talking: dictation and notation come into play. We saw above that Bloomfield emphasized the importance of having a non-literate informant in order to get ‘natural’ data. He continues:

“The less we slow up the informant, the more naturally he speaks. Therefore use the letters of the English alphabet and where you have to supplement them try to devise characters that you can write quickly”. [4: 10]

We will come back to the issue of dictation in a moment. At this point, we see how the construction of a text-artefact – the ‘record’ – proceeds through rigorously disciplined speech and writing practices, in which the ‘naturalness’ of the foreign language dominates English, which is required to be adapted to the foreign language. The target is *structural accuracy in the primary record*: it needs to be revisited over and over again, but only when important structural distinctions appear that hadn’t been noted initially. The record is thus not a ‘recording’, it does not result in a replica of the ‘natural’, situated, contextualized and variable speech event but in a *structural* replica, a replica in which language is already to some degree decoded as *form*. This can be done by means of a writing system which is based on English (i.e. on *orthography*), but which has been detached from its orthographic norms and now serves, not as an instrument for *writing*, but as an instrument of *notation*. So, while we saw that Bloomfield advocated a ‘language-less’ metalanguage (the linguist shouldn’t be oriented too strongly towards English), we see that he advocates an ‘orthography-less’ notation system here. Real, natural language (English as well as the foreign language) does (or can)not produce structure. Notation systems, consequently, are not necessarily meant for *reading*; they are meant for analyzing language. The complex notation system devised by Klingenheben (Figure 3), for instance, is not readable unless one has been introduced to the analytic strategies of representing ‘foreign’ texts; the same of course applies to Sommer and Vossen (Figures 4, 5).

The primary record, as we saw, must be revisited over and over again until it is fully accurate. It then leads to secondary records, and “[t]he most important of the secondary notations is the card index” [4: 13]. Whereas we could say that the primary record is the textual format for ‘language’, the card index is the textual format for *form*: “[o]ne copies every *form* on a slip, with its meaning, and files these alphabetically” [4: 13, italics added].

FIGURE 7 HERE

Figure 7: Benjamin lee Whorf’s files for the Hopi dictionary.

Here is one of the canonical professional textual tools of modern linguistics: the slip file (see Figure 7 for an example). And here is the birth of Grammar1-in-Grammar2:

“By comparing and rearranging these slips in every possible way (...) one not only gets great help towards memorizing the forms, but also one discovers the similarities between forms”. [4: 13]

Observe that the discovery of such grammatical features, for Bloomfield, still goes hand in hand with practical learning – the idea of learning from structure:

“The discovery of these structural features, such as words or components of words, always affords interest and even excitement and this, of course, helps one to retain the forms (...) In time we shall thus accumulate lists of words, stems, roots, affixes, and what not, and begin to set up a grammar which tells us how these are combined into longer forms.” [4: 13]

Note also how in this stage, a new lexicon is used to describe the language materials collected by the linguist: “words, stems, roots, affixes, and what not”. Language has now been completely converted into structure (‘form’) and by organizing a dialectics of speech and literacy practices – the creation of Grammar2 through the record and the card files – we see the genesis of Grammar1.

Bloomfield’s procedure is directed towards structure, and in contrast to the philologists before him, he does not start from texts but from isolated “things”, “everything the informant says”. Texts in the philological sense can be recorded as soon as one has acquired “vocabulary and some readiness in writing” (both of which, as we have seen, are products of Grammar2 and orient to Grammar1). Then, one “can ask the informant to dictate connected texts” [4: 13]. Recall Bloomfield’s remark on the speed of writing above: Bloomfield assumes that ‘natural speech’ is fast and that the writing system, accordingly, must be so adapted as to maximize speed of notation. However, when discussing the *dictated* texts, we are facing a different speech act. Consider this remark:

“Informants differ greatly in their ability at dictation. Some cannot overcome the strange situation of dictating. Others can dictate only at a speed which makes recording [i.e. notation - JB] impossible”. [4: 14]

Dictation is a “strange” (‘unnatural’) speech act, a thing to be learned, and whereas speed of delivery was quite crucial in the first stages of research as it guaranteed ‘naturalness’, dictation appears to proceed differently, slower, and under particular circumstances that are not identical to the ones that characterized the earlier phases. Dictation, clearly, involves a selection of informants. And while we have seen that in the earlier phases of research the linguist needed to adapt his speed and method of notation to the oral speech of the informant, the relationship is the other way round here: dictation is a speech act tailored to the needs and requirements of careful notation.

All in all, Bloomfield does not dwell long on the issue of texts. Collecting texts is an (apparently quite specialized) *result* of acquired competence in the language, and such competence is a competence in language-as-structure. Consequently, Bloomfield concludes,

“The result of careful, persistent and speedy work is the ability to converse in the language. As a by-product, if one has the necessary knack or training, one may produce a set of texts, a grammar, and a dictionary of the language. Even if one does not get this by-product, one’s use of the language should embody all the things that would be explicitly stated in these books. In sum, these things amount to a reproduction of the way the native speaks”. [4: 16]

We can now summarize Bloomfield’s conception: the ‘native’ produces an infinity of ‘natural’ utterances; they should be reduced to structure (forms) by means of a complex procedure of textualization; when such structure has been acquired, one has learned *and* understood the language, and one will ‘speak like the native’. The linguist first works *inductively*, by making his record of “everything the informant says”. This, then, leads to structure (Grammar1), and from structure, one can *deduce* the totality of real, contextualized, dynamic language events – reverse inductivism. And Grammar1 can be obtained by a fieldwork method that revolves around the construction of Grammar2: a collection of text-artefacts in which the foreign ‘language’ is converted into ‘form’; in which ‘English’ is approximated and stretched as an explanans (even pidginized, remember Vallaey’s example in Figure 1), and in which writing is converted into notation.

#### **4.2. Mead’s cultural language**

In roughly the same period as Bloomfield’s *Outline Guide*, Margaret Mead wrote an apology for using “native languages as fieldwork tools” [35]. Mead reflects on “the last fifteen years”,

during which more and more anthropologists had begun to use ‘native languages’ in studying other cultures. Like Bloomfield’s paper, Mead’s can to some extent be read as a summary of views current in the era of Boas and Sapir. Yet, Mead represents a radically different viewpoint than Bloomfield’s, representing another aspect of the Boas-Sapir legacy: the *cultural* treatment of language, a view of language as something in which one can invest culturally, not only linguistically.

In contrast to Bloomfield, Mead puts far less weight on literacy (fieldwork) practices in acquiring the foreign language. The language, to her, is primarily a culturally organized oral instrument of communication, and ‘understanding’ it requires *cultural* understanding, not only *linguistic* understanding. In other words, Mead would be highly critical of Bloomfield’s claim that decoding the language as structure would immediately enable the linguist to “speak like the native”, and she would argue that quite a bit more is required.

Mead begins by noting that, until recently, the use of native languages as fieldwork tools was controversial; the influence of Boas and Malinowski gradually made the practice more acceptable, though the tone of her paper suggests that in 1939 it was still not an element of the anthropologist’s standard toolkit. The main reason for this situation was the difference in general focus of anthropology then and now:

“The emphasis which had been laid upon the collection of accurate verbatim texts put a premium on linguistic accuracy and work at a table with one efficient interpreter. English-speaking interpreters were available (...)” [35: 190]

Thus:

“Given the type of problem being studied and the type of broken cultures within which they were being studied, there was no reason fifteen years ago why an ethnologist should have made any attempt to learn to use a native language. He merely learned to record it, learned enough technical terms to direct the course of his inquiries, and analyzed the form of the language or the literary form of songs and myths from his collection of texts”. [35: 191]

Mead rather accurately typifies the philological tradition discussed above; but one cannot fail to spot the analogies with the reverse inductivism advocated by Bloomfield either. The shift towards the use of native languages in the field, Mead argues, was a result of a shift in central problem: the relationship between the individual and religious structures, belief systems,

culture and personality and so forth. Such topics call for a more *empathetic* methodology, and Mead provides a list and discussion of “types of study for which maximal use of the native language is essential” [35: 194-195]. Among these, she mentions:

“The native language as something that is used as well as collected is necessary also in linguistic researches in which the linguist wishes to go beyond the formal analysis of language, and to study the correspondence between linguistic symbolisms and other forms of symbolism in the culture, the cultural background of idiom, the way in which the language is learned, the variations in the use of language by different personalities, the degree and type of verbalization which accompanies overt activities, the relationship between the language and the thought habits of those who speak it”. [35: 195]

Compared to Bloomfield’s viewpoints, Mead’s program is slightly more ambitious. The *result* of Bloomfield’s procedure – “a reproduction of the way the native speaks” – is here the *instrument* (one could even say the *condition*) for studying the things that, in Bloomfield’s view, could all be deduced from Grammar1: the dynamic, cultured aspects of language as something non-autonomous, embedded in systems and practices that can be called culture. Furthermore, Mead separates “formal analysis of language” from a wider and more varied research program that needs to be engaged with *separately*, i.e. that cannot be simply generated from formal analysis. Significantly, such a research program requires *speaking skills*, and such skills

“must under the present conditions be acquired by the investigator on his own initiative. The traditional method of teaching students linguistics in America is aimed towards giving them maximum skill in accurate phonetic recording and in linguistic analysis, with an assumption that the task of analysis is to achieve a final understanding of the form of the language from a mass of phonetically accurate and absolutely unintelligible material, plus a literal translation furnished by an interpreter. The student is taught an enormous respect for native categories and made to feel that to impose any of our categories upon the native language is to violate it”. [35: 201]

And she caustically adds: “the laborious collection of a large number of texts in the field, and careful translation of the texts, does not teach the field worker to *use* the language” [35: 201, italics in original]. Again it is hard to miss the critique of a program such as Bloomfield’s here:



“Vocabularies must be built up, not merely on language slips as they come up in texts, but systematically, and oriented towards *use*. Such an approach is so directly in contravention of the implications of much linguistic training in America, that it seems worthwhile mentioning it. It would quite obviously take months, and perhaps years, to learn to use a native language if one relied upon a repertoire gained from translating texts”. [35: 202]

And:

“Understanding the language so that the results of that understanding become usable data, involves a great deal more than linguistic virtuosity, and may be achieved with a lower degree of linguistic virtuosity than the professional linguist dealing with written records of narrative texts would believe possible”. [35: 204]

Thus, here is a problem both for philology and for the Bloomfieldian approach towards field linguistics: according to Mead, they both appear incapable of *deductively* generating the dynamic and situated forms of language that Mead sees as the cultural aspects of linguistic systems (or one could say: the sociolinguistic systems or the pragmatics of language). Mead, like Malinowski before her, is silent when it comes to pointing out how the ‘native language’ should actually be learned; but she is clear about how it should *not* be learned when it is supposed to retain some of its contextual, cultural and social situatedness (and hence, anthropological-epistemic value). She is critical of formats that distort the natural, situated, culturally meaningful use of language: dictation, notation, the creation of a record, the careful analysis of slips, in short, the complex of analytic discursive and literacy practices that Bloomfield had advocated as the most reliable road to the heart of language. According to Mead, this completely misses the point.

### ***4.3. Notation and dictation as textual practices***

Let us now see how all of this converts into minutiae of literacy practices. The point is: apart from the macro-methodology described by Bloomfield (and criticized by Mead), there is a micro-methodology of notation and dictation, in which the conversions of language into form, talking into dictation and writing into notation occur *on the spot*, in the actual situated practices of fieldwork interaction. In other words, Grammar1 starts emerging as soon as a fieldwork event of elicitation starts and particular literacy practices begin to give shape to Grammar2. The conversion is *in* the acts of fieldwork communication.

In order to illustrate this, I will turn to some samples of my own fieldnotes, taken during fieldwork in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1996. Here is the setting [cf. 3: 405ff]. In the mid-1990s, I started to note the emergence of a Hip-Hop scene among youngsters in Dar es Salaam. I soon found myself in the company of young people willing to initiate me into their ways of life. It started with a girl telling me that her brother now spoke *viswahili*, i.e. the plural of ‘Kiswahili’ – multiple Swahilis at the same time. The boy was called and he produced some phrases to me in the presence of his father, who disapprovingly said that ‘this was not Swahili’ and told me that the boy *anaongeza chumvi* – ‘added salt’, exaggerated, went too far. Rules had been broken. The girl and her brother brought me in contact with a group of approximately 14 young people, all living in the neighbourhood and all between 14 and 20 years old. The group consisted of six male core members and a second circle of boys and girls. In terms of ethnic background as well as social class, the group was highly heterogeneous: some of the members were poorly paid waiters or messengers, one worked as an aide to a shoe repairman, while some others were children of middle-class families and had access to prestige goods (clothes, shoes, music cassettes) and cars. Yet, the group qualified itself as *Wahuni*: ‘gangsters’, crooks (a Swahili equivalent of the ‘Gangsta’ of US Hip-Hop). The group of *Wahuni* spoke ‘*Kihuni*’, the language of the bandits (the *viswahili* earlier mentioned to me). I started recording conversations with the group, and invariably, such conversations took the shape of unilateral displays of *kihuni* in the form of single words or phrases. The group, unsurprisingly, was deeply committed to the creation and maintenance of an ‘antilanguage’ shared by the whole of the Dar es Salaam *Wahuni* scene. It consisted of baffling instances of linguistic mixing, borrowing and relexification in Swahili, English and other languages, and sound play. Apart from ‘plenary’ recordings, I also sat down with members of the group, who spontaneously started dictating individual words and phrases to me. Figure 8 is a copy of a page from my notes.

The micro-methodology mentioned above becomes apparent from a whole cluster of graphic features of the page. First, I distinguish between ‘new’ words (i.e. terms dictated to me by the *Wahuni* as belonging to their ‘language’) and ‘old’ words, words I already knew. The ‘new’ words are noted in capitals, the ‘old’ ones – used for glossing – in lower case. I consistently use this throughout the dictation event, it is the basic structuring tool in my notes, separating the main categories of knowledge here. But there is more.

## FIGURE 8 HERE

Figure 8: fieldnotes, *Kihuni* dictation

In several places in my notes, we can see how specific deviations of ‘standard’ writing practice occur:

1. the accent on ‘kulùpango’ marks a deviation from the normative prosodic contour of Swahili terms (where the stress is on the penultimate syllable);
2. the notation ‘kumgongotea’ is twice corrected: ‘kumgkong’otea’ - <g> is replaced by <k>, and the quotation mark after the <ng> is added to signal that the <ng> here is not the ‘ng’ of ‘anger’ but of ‘ring’.
3. the accolade connecting ‘mung’anda’ and ‘kulupango’ marks denotational equivalence within the same register: both are ‘new’ (written in capitals) and near-synonyms.
4. The same goes for ‘GOZIGOZI = ZIBILIDUDA’; here, both terms are noted in capitals – both are ‘new’ and belong to the register dictated to me; but ‘zibiliduda’ is a term I already knew from a previous dictation session. It is still a ‘new’ term, but can be used as gloss because it is known.
5. Finally, consider the form ‘(ni)TAIBUKA’ with a reference to (‘KUIBUKA’). Here, a new inflected verb form is noted and immediately interpreted in light of Swahili verbal morphology. The subject prefix ‘ni’ is bracketed, and the root ‘IBUK’ is underlined so as to distinguish between the productive root and the contingent inflectional morphemes. The inflected verb, furthermore, is immediately connected to the ‘dictionary’ form KUIBUKA (infinitive).

What we are facing here is the ‘stretching’ of an ortho-graphic norm (as advocated by Bloomfield). I manipulate the conventions of standard Swahili writing so as to provide an *accurate* record, in which ‘new’ and ‘old’ words have been separated, and in which all kinds of linguistic, phonetic, syntactic and orthographic relations between the ‘new’ lexicon and other bodies of specialized knowledge are inscribed. These inscriptions are routinized: they draw on habituated distinctions in writing, recognizable signs that can be *added* to ‘ordinary’

writing in such a way as to project or add a *linguistic-interpretive frame* onto the dictated lexicon.

The conventions thus deployed are not conventions of writing, but conventions of notation. They involve a transformation of the textual material from spoken utterance to written form (Grammar1), and from a situated communicative event to a detachable, decontextualizable ‘record’, for primary use among specialists (not among the *Wahuni*). The notation conventions organize a disjuncture between speaker and linguist; they create a closed, hermetic, linguistic object: Grammar1 through Grammar2. The notation conventions drag the textual material out of the field and into the lab.

This shift becomes even more clearly visible as soon as we turn towards the secondary record – the elaboration of primary records in the solitude of evenings in the field. Figure 9 is another page from my notebook.

FIGURE 9 HERE

Figure 9: fieldnotes, the secondary record

Here, there is no trace anymore of the informant: these notes are directed towards a totally different audience of specialists. (Observe that my own note taking prepares them for that audience: I make notes in English rather than in my native language Dutch – the potential sharing of insights from the field is already encoded in these notes). Looking more closely at the page, we see that the ‘texts’ gathered during dictation, interviewing or recording sessions are now disassembled and become single, decontextualized ‘examples’ in a conventional linguistic-analytic form of prose. And they are now accompanied by an explicit textual layer of interpretive conventions: abbreviations (‘V. Rel.’), lines indicating grammatical groups, and symbols such as the ‘Ø’. The ‘field’ has disappeared here, and this mode of textualization has reordered the participation framework, the function, and the control over text gathered in the field. My voice now completely dominates, and it organizes Grammar1 in Grammar2.

In essence, we see precisely the same movement here as in the philological formats of text-representation. Text *immediately*, in presenting it, becomes *form*, a kind of form that requires technical, professional conventions of notation in order to be ‘understood’ well.

Perhaps ‘writing’ can be sloppy, but notation can’t, because it is in the practice of notation that the linguist emerges as the dominant interpreter of meaning and function.

#### ***4.4. Alternatives***

The digression on Bloomfield and Mead was necessary in order to establish an important point. Disciplines in science have a tendency to assume that there is no alternative to the way of studying phenomena than that contained in their methods and theories. Surely in the context of African linguistics (and as we shall see in the next section), the philological tradition and that of reverse inductivism were often seen as the only valid ways of ‘learning’ the languages, or if not of learning, of offering the languages for inspection in a format that allows particular epistemic practices. Languages, so it was understood, could *only* be conceived in this way, could *only* be studied in this way, and could *only* be presented in this textual format.

The construction of this format, as we have seen, involved complex processes of textualization revolving around dictation and notation – two modified, abnormal(ized) genres of language representation that (in Bloomfield’s opinion) belonged to the professional vision of the trained linguist, but that could also be shared by whoever intended to learn a foreign language practically but correctly (i.e. based on Grammar1 rather than on pragmatics). Dictation and notation allow for a profound recasting of ‘language’, from speech into form, thereby reorganizing the function and the potential audiences of texts. And by means of these textualization processes, an artefactual reproduction of language was generated: a concise, transparent representation of language-as-structure. In Foucault’s terms, this artefactualization of language constituted a ‘discourse of truth’: a valuable, authoritative discourse pattern sensed to produce superior (correct, accurate) knowledge of language.

We now know that there were alternatives. The particular view propagated by Bloomfield was a contested view, and if we take Mead’s critique as a case in point, there surely were different, authoritative views on the ‘best’ study of foreign languages. Artefactual, structural views of language were *specific* technical ideologies of language and according to Mead and many others [see e.g. 26; 37; 38] much of language was missed by taking the road of philology or (Bloomfieldian) linguistics.

## 5. The *esquisse grammaticale*: an artefactual genre

We now turn to one particular genre in the description of African languages: the *esquisse grammaticale*, the grammatical sketch. We shall restrict ourselves to work done on languages in the former Belgian Congo, and we will examine four examples produced by prominent Belgian Bantuists: Hulstaert, *Esquisse du Parler des Nkengo* [25]; Meeussen, *Esquisse de la Langue Ombo* [36]; Stappers, *Esquisse de la Langue Lengola* [42]; and Vansina, *Esquisse de Grammaire Bushong* [48]. All four *esquisses* are written in French; the translations of fragments given below are our own. For reasons of parsimony, we will refer to authors' names whenever the four specific texts are discussed.

### 5.1. *Professionalization and fieldwork*

The *esquisse grammaticale* is a 'mature', highly professionalized, technical genre of language description. It was not (directly) meant for practical language learning but fitted into the large-scale Belgian academic efforts of the 1950s to comprehensively 'describe' and classify the languages of the Congo. These efforts yielded a treasure of published studies ranging from multivolume grammars and dictionaries, to articles and *esquisses*. A quick glimpse at Van Bulck's *Recherches Linguistiques au Congo Belge* [45] – a work of colossal encyclopaedic scholarship – shows that until the 1940s, the term 'esquisse' was hardly ever used by scholars to signal a particular genre of grammatical description. Studies were labelled *Grundrisse* or *Grundzüge*, *notes de grammaire*, *outline grammar*, *essai de grammaire*, *elements de grammaire*, or simply *grammaire* or *la langue X*. Most often, they offered grammar, vocabulary and texts. The *esquisse* thus appears to come into being as part of the gradual (post-WWII) professionalization of Belgian African linguistics. Practitioners had undoubtedly been influenced by the stock-in-trade of professionalized linguistics: grammatical sketches in the fashion of Boas' *Handbook of American Indian Languages* [5], of varying length and degree of detail, and seen as the 'best' modus for describing languages threatened with extinction [see 43].

Linguistic studies in this new era of professional scholarship were usually based on fieldwork, an endeavour for which colonial and early postcolonial circumstances offered excellent conditions. And such fieldwork was done in the fashion of Boas and Bloomfield; it aimed at 'inventory' descriptions of language-as-structure, and it should ideally result in the classic generic triad of published results: a Grammar, a Dictionary, and a collection of Texts.

It varied from extensive and detailed fieldwork over an extended period of time, involving audio-recording and other forms of collaborative work, to brief one-on-one elicitation sessions with an informant, mainly working from a questionnaire. Two examples illustrate the extremes of the fieldwork continuum. The first example is from Jacobs [30], the author of a multivolume grammar of Tetela and of shorter *esquisses*:

“The material used for this grammar was collected during fieldwork between early 1953 and 1960. (...) The research on Tetela proceeded on the basis of meticulous transcriptions of audio recordings. The texts thus obtained provide a reliable image of the living spoken language. Ordinary stories were best suited for recording; for apart from the narrative mode, they make abundant use of dialogue, exclamation and question. (...) Audio recordings have the advantage that they can be listened to over and over again. Without this method, it would have been impossible for us to solve the various difficulties that emerged during research, to wit: the difference between o and u; the transcription of semivowels; vowel and consonant length; vowel assimilation and vowel elision; the tones of long consonants; the progressive tone effect; the tonal flow in verbs and other word types. Transcriptions of audio recordings are true documents of living spoken language and they form a reliable basis for further indispensable research by elicitation”. [30: 2, Dutch original]

The second example is from Stappers’ *Esquisse*:

“Our informant, Ali Gabriel, born in 1944 in Ponthierville, was a student (...) at the University of Kinshasa (1968-1969) (...) The linguistic corpus on which this sketch is based was obtained by direct elicitation during fifty hours of interviewing, spread over seven months (November 1968-May 1969)”. [42: 257, French original]

Note that both authors claim to have worked on a corpus of narrated texts (Jacobs) or other linguistic specimens (Stappers); we are, of course, reminded here of the procedures discussed in the previous sections.

The *esquisse* was conceived as a ‘minimal’ Grammar2: a skeleton-structural description of a language, and usually of a language of which there was no authoritative published record yet. It was, for all practical purposes, a genre of salvage linguistics. Performing it was technically demanding and publishing it (if done well) was welcomed as a genuine contribution to knowledge of the Congolese languages. It was usually short.

Hulstaert's sketch is 71 pages long; Meeussen's counts 44 pages; Stappers' is 50 pages long; and Vansina's 109 pages; it could therefore be published as a stand-alone booklet (Hulstaert, Meeussen and Vansina) or as an article (Stappers).

## ***5.2. The canonical structure***

The *esquisses* all share a canonical structure, which can be schematized as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Phonology
3. Morphology
  - nominal forms
  - pronominal forms
  - verbal forms
  - invariable forms
4. (Syntax)
5. (Wordlists)
6. Texts

The sequence of sections is fixed for as far as 'introduction', 'phonology' and 'morphology' go; the sequence of the remaining sections can vary. Figure 10, Vansina's table of contents, shows the full range of sections.

FIGURE 10 HERE

Figure 10: Vansina's table of contents

The basic structure is clearly reminiscent of Boas' schematization of 'the characteristics of language' in the introduction to the *Handbook of American Indian Languages* [5]. Boas' scheme also moved from 'phonetics' to 'grammatical categories', and the latter category



consisted of nominal, pronominal and verbal categories. Let us now take a closer look at the different parts of the structure.

1. **Introduction.** The introduction is as a rule very brief. The authors situate the language geographically (Stappers: 257: “the Lengola language (...) is spoken in the Republic of Zaire in the Ponhierville area”), ethnically (Vansina: 5: “The Bushong are the central tribe in the cluster called Bakuba”), in relation to other dialects or varieties (Hulstaert: 1: “The linguistic notes used in this sketch are from the Bongila, the Nonga and the Poku. These groups differ little if anything among themselves”) and/or within existing classifications of Bantu languages (Stappers: 257: “The Lengola language, given the code D12 in the classification of the Bantu languages by M. Guthrie...”). The authors also mention, in the briefest possible terms, the origin of the work (Meeussen: 1: “The present attempt at description is based on notes taken at Kailo between 8 and 27 June 1951, a period during which I also took down some Binja”), and all of them mention the names, place of residence and ethnic affiliation of informants (see the fragment from Stappers given earlier). Some authors provide remarks on the notation system used in the *esquisse* (Meeussen: 1: “The transcription used here is the ‘Africa’ alphabet (...); from the IPA alphabet I borrowed the symbol...”). Finally, authors also mention the (few) existing works on the language.

The introduction does not inform us on the theoretical framework, nor on the minutiae of the methodology used by the authors. Together with the overall conciseness of the introductions, this suggests the existence of a lot of common ground among a particular community of scholars. There must have been at least an implicit consensus about the usefulness and adequacy of the particular generic structure of the *esquisse*. The fact that this structure also remained intact over a relatively long time-span, from the 1950s to the 1970s in our four examples, and that it survived the onslaught of the Chomskyan emphasis on a massively theorized linguistics in the 1960s, also strengthens this impression.

2. **Phonology.** The chapter on phonology is usually brief, and simply presents the different sounds of the language in a standard organizational frame and lay-out, including the sequential organization of vowels analogous to the vowel quadrilateral and of consonants according to articulation place. Figure 11 shows the first page of the chapter in Meeussen’s *esquisse*.

FIGURE 11 HERE

Figure 11: Meeussen's phonology

From such a sound inventory, authors then move on to combinations of sounds: vowel harmony, contraction, the structure of the syllable, and tonology. The chapter on phonology also establishes the writing conventions for the language. From now on, the language will be written by means of the symbols used for describing its sounds.

3. **Morphology.** The morphology chapter dominates the *esquisse*. It corresponds roughly to Boas' survey of 'grammatical categories'. With the exception of Stappers, the authors all follow the sequence: nominal-pronominal-verbal-invariable. (Stappers inserts a chapter on 'morphophonology' and then treats nominal forms alongside verbs under 'inflection'). *Nominal* forms are treated within the framework of Bantu nominal categories marked by class prefixes. Thus, very much like in the case of the sounds, we get a schematic overview of classes using the standard numbers of Bantu noun classification, and a few prefixes + roots as examples. Figure 12 illustrates this.

FIGURE 12 HERE

Figure 12: Meeussen's noun classes

*Pronominal* forms include the personal pronouns, connectives, possessives, demonstratives, interrogatives, numerals. All four *esquisses* treat these categories, and they all use roughly this sequence of categories in their discussion. *Verbal* forms are organized in terms of inflectional categories that encompass tense, aspect, modality: 'infinitive', 'constatative', 'present', 'perfect', 'future', 'continuatives', 'subjunctives', and so on. Again we see how the authors first provide a formulaic rule followed by examples. *Invariable* forms – ideophones and particles – are usually listed with only the slightest attempt at categorization.

All in all, the treatment of morphology is strongly oriented towards generative morphosyntactic formulae, in which different possible combinations between affixes and

roots are schematically presented. In Vansina and Meeussen, the whole of the ‘system’ is summarized in a number of tables (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13 HERE

Figure 13: Meeussen’s system tables

4. **Syntax.** Vansina is the only author who has a separate chapter on syntax. His chapter contains three sections: the word groups (nominal, pronominal, verbal and invariable), the proposition (a combination of such groups), and finally the sentence (composed of different propositions). From small to big: syntax is here understood as ‘word order’, the gradual extendibility of linguistic structures as soon as words are being formed, until the point where a sentence has been formed. The different permutations of the slip files printed on paper, one could say.

‘Syntax’ thus understood was a notoriously obscure and ‘difficult’ area of African linguistics. De Rop’s *Lomongo Syntax*, mentioned earlier, explicitly aimed at complementing Hulstaert’s *Praktische grammatica van het Lonkundo (Lomongo)* [23] [practical grammar of Lonkundo (Lomongo)], of which De Rop writes that it had covered sounds, tones and morphology, but “a systematically composed syntax of Lomongo did not yet exist” [10: vii] (De Rop later published his own *Grammaire du Lomongo – Phonologie et Morphologie*, [11]). The great Hulstaert himself never really produced a fully-fledged study of the syntax of Lomongo, having devoted sixty-plus years to phonological, morphological, lexicographic and dialectological studies and on the collection and edition of Lomongo texts. The marginal status of syntax as a topic of inquiry is also attested by the meagre attention given to it in *Manuel de Linguistique Bantoue* [46], one of the many books of that other workhorse of Belgian African linguistics, Gaston Van Bulck. In the chapter on the structure of Bantu languages, Van Bulck’s treatment of phonetics covers ten pages (63-73); that of morphology fifteen pages (73-88) and syntax one and a half utterly uninformative pages (88-89). De Rop’s very concise *Introduction à la Linguistique Bantoue Congolaise* [12] likewise devotes about 20 pages to phonology, 30 pages to morphology, and 6 pages to syntax. The study of Bantu languages, obviously, was primarily a matter of sounds and morphemes, their distribution and combinability – Bloomfield, Hockett and Harris are not far away.

5. **Wordlists.** Meeussen, Stappers and Vansina all provide an alphabetically organized vocabulary of different length, but in each case oriented towards ‘basic terminology’: terminology that could be used for historical and comparative analysis. Hulstaert provides a brief note on lexical differences between Nkengo and Lonkundo, of which he had separately produced a long lexicographical study.

6. **Texts.** In all four examples, the authors close their study with ‘texts’ with a ‘literary’ French translation on the facing page or column (Figure 14). The texts are usually ‘folkloric’, mostly animal fables. The most generous is Hulstaert, who provides no less than nine texts. Vansina gives two texts and Stappers one. Meeussen provides one animal fable as well as a translation of ‘*phrases du questionnaire de M. Guthrie*’ – a list of elicitation expressions developed by Malcolm Guthrie and designed to provide information for linguistic analysis.

FIGURE 14 HERE

Figure 14: Meeussen’s Ombo text

### **5.3. Discussion**

The *esquisse* is obviously a specific, codified textual and epistemic genre: *a pocket-size, uniform description of everything a linguist needed to know about the language*. As mentioned earlier, the *esquisse* is a mature and professionalized genre, instrumental in providing linguistic-descriptive material for large-scale comparative analyses of African languages. There is, consequently, a wealth of implicit agreement on what kinds of things were required for that purpose: the canonical structure of the *esquisse* is a blueprint of such a genred and regimented collection of linguistic knowledge. What was needed, we now can see, was rigorously analyzed sound inventories, surveys of morphemes and their combinations, a basic vocabulary that could be compared with that of other languages, and a sample of folkloric (i.e. ‘authentic’, ‘natural’) texts-with-translation, which offered a glimpse of how the grammar and vocabulary were brought into action in stories.

If we now compare this to the philological tradition discussed earlier, we see that the texts-and-translations here *follow* grammar; the phonetic, morphological and lexicographic notes ultimately lead to a text, which is not there for analysis because it is the result of

analysis. The dynamic, cultural aspects of language are a precipitate of structure, of grammar – an echo of Bloomfield’s reverse inductivism and a suggestion that dynamic and variable texts emerge from static and invariable grammar, not the other way around. Still, we see traces of the philological tradition in the use of texts as part of linguistic description, as well as in the emphasis on ‘original’ texts. With the exception of Meeussen’s translations of Guthrie’s elicitation phrases (which, *en passant*, offers us a glimpse of Meeussen’s fieldwork practice) all the authors offer ‘cultural’ texts, *not produced by themselves* but suggested to be the people’s texts. This is philology: the linguist not only contributes to the study of linguistic structure, but also, and simultaneously, to the study of literature, and text and grammar are two sides of one coin.

But more than anything else, we are facing a *professional* written code here: a literacy complex nested in a small community of users. All the authors use technical notation systems (the Africa Alphabet, the IPA...) and similar structuring devices such as the numbered categorization of noun classes in Bantu languages, the vowel quadrilateral for organizing the vowel inventory of the language, the use of linguistic-technical abbreviations (aff = ‘affirmative’, etc.), references to Guthrie’s Bantu classification index and so forth.

FIGURE 15 HERE

Figure 15: Stappers’ system tables

Thus, with an eye on Figure 15, it is clear that the *esquisses* are not meant to be ‘read’ but to be ‘examined’, because they are not ‘written’ in a usable orthography but ‘noted’ by means of a technical, hermetic notation system, the uniformity of which was the object of a considerable amount of professional reflection in its own right [7; 8]. It is equally clear that they are not intended for a wide audience but for a restricted group of ‘experts’ who can comprehend the implicitness of the technicality of the genre.

This implicit complex of genre features operates like a *register* [40], as a literate discursive system that produces semiotically an object – language-as-structure – and the subjects involved in the construction of this object – Africanist linguists. And this register provides *stability*: its function as a normative discursive system produces maximally

communicable text-artefacts within the community of scholars interested in communicating in this fashion. And interestingly, the stability of the genre rests upon the capacity to ‘shrink’ language to a concise artefactual set of schemes, formulae and tables. The less ‘text’ in the grammar, the better the grammar is *qua* grammar – a good Grammar2 presents Grammar1 in its skeleton form. This miniature replica of language was not an autonomous genre, as we have seen. It was part of a larger repertoire of genres, and its main function was not to provide a practical language teaching or learning tool, but to be used as a building block in larger scientific edifices: classification, historical and comparative research, linguistic cartography.

## 6. Conclusion: The birth certificate of language

Let us recall that many of the *esquisses* came into being because the languages they addressed had not (yet) been appropriately described. Thus, languages were literally born in the textual procedure here described: a procedure which rested on an assumption of language-as-structure and as replicable in artefactualized textual objects: the concise but accurate description. Van Bulck’s *Recherches Linguistiques du Congo Belge* [45] again provides us with clear illustrations of this. The whole book is organized around written sources, ‘records’ in the Bloomfieldian sense, composed by European or other non-African scholars, missionaries, travellers and explorers, and languages are listed (i.e. they are suggested to *exist*), and afterwards plotted on the linguistic map of the Congo, when at least a suspicion of their existence can be culled from the existing sources.

This existence of language was a matter of their existence as *researchable structure* in a written record. A ‘language’ or ‘dialect’ is acknowledged as such when there are lexical or grammatical (morphological) records that allow comparison with other languages. And this, as we have seen, was a matter of textual procedure, the artefactualization of language into textual items that could be seen as stable, rigorous, and illustrative of the ‘essence’ of the language. There was considerable respect for such textual items. Van Bulck lists sources which, often, should not be lent too much credibility as accounts of history and culture; to Van Bulck, however, the few bits of language contained in such sources were invaluable, for they were very often the only existing written, textual artefacts for languages nowhere else documented. Thus, salvage linguistics in Africa, like elsewhere, assumed the shape of attention and appreciation for whatever was or could be made textually existent. The bits of Galla mundane storytelling collected by Klinghenben (Figure 3) were published in one of the most prestigious journals of its time (edited by Carl Meinhof) and were probably also

perceived as an important contribution to knowledge of that part of Africa. And the practical handbooks, *phrases usuelles* and other (hardly reliable) linguistic curiosa discussed by Fabian [18] found their way to the shelves of a good number of academic libraries and thence into comparative linguistic studies. For better or for worse, here was textual language stuff – always useful in the hands of those who could convert it into respectable linguistic knowledge (rather than practice, of course).

The more professionalized this occupation became, the more importance was given to uniform, structured, codified textualization. The *esquisses* in that sense provide us with a glimpse of professional ideologies of textuality, in which rigor in generic form indexes epistemic validity, and in which the ‘reduction’ of the wild variation in language usage to a handful of pages on language structure suggested to be the engine behind this variation was seen as a mark of great scholarship. The indexicalities of epistemic validity and scholarship are anchored in textual formats, in *ways of writing language*, codified and deviant from ‘ordinary’ writing of language. And given the so-called ‘unwritten’ status of most African languages, the particular professional, codified writing of linguists was often the first (and often the *only*) writing of the language at all – a ‘described’ language often entailed a *scribed* language.

The point is: languages came into being because, as Bloomfield declared, not every act of writing would do; they came on record, one could say, because of the particular textual-generic requirements that were imposed on ‘the record’, and they came on record *in terms of* these generic requirements. The record therefore included certain things at the same time as it obscured other things; it made certain things visible while it made other things invisible; it demarcated a particular – pocket-size – collection of phenomena as being ‘language’. Writing was already tailored towards Grammar1, it needed to be a writing that made structure visible in written normative, structuring code: Grammar2. The official birthplace of a good number of African languages is this nexus of Grammar1 and Grammar2. And their birth certificate is a technical textual artefact such as the *esquisse*.

## Postscript: the end of synchrony

The languages created by means of the textual practices discussed in this little study were created *sub specie aeternitatis*, created forever. Once ‘documented’ by means of textual artefacts such as the *esquisse grammaticale*, languages truly existed and would forever exist. Prior to such interventions, their sheer existence was in doubt and terms such as ‘*dialect*’, ‘*parler*’, ‘*jargon*’ or ‘*sabir*’ were used to describe them (for a discussion see Blommaert 1999: 101-110; also Fabian 1984). It is as soon as a language can be described as ‘language’ without the article, as fixed generative structure and *system*, that the language is given an eternal life. This, I would say, is the way in which the structuralist synchrony – the timeless nature of ‘fundamental’ and ‘deep’ social and cultural structures – percolates into and is carried forward by actual professional textual practices. A particular way of writing things down, using a strict genre template and requiring the display of ‘method’, creates the timeless reality it took as its object, because these practices are entirely saturated by the ideological assumptions that organize them. As soon as scientific inquiry hits the systemic core of a social or cultural phenomenon, time stops and the phenomenon can be extracted and lifted to a sphere of eternal pure existence.

A lot here depends on how ‘system’ is understood. We have inherited from structuralism a view of a system as being a stable and static form of order, impermeable to outside pressure. A system is necessarily timeless and context-less – it is the deeper level that generates the ‘real’ phenomena operating in a concrete context, the ‘software’, so to speak, that allows an almost infinite number of applications. Systems, or ‘structures’, consequently display an uneasy relationship to history: the structuralist ‘synchrony’ was necessarily ‘achronic’ because it did not claim to have any empirical existence. After all, an *empirical* Saussurean-Bloomfieldian-Chomskyan ‘synchrony’ in linguistics, for example, would come down to “the recording of all the words spoken at the same time by thousands of speaking subjects” – an enterprise which Greimas, for instance, qualifies as “rather pointless” (1990: 95), and which from a structuralist viewpoint would also not be worth one’s while. ‘System’, however, can also be imagined as a *historical* given, as something that brings historical coherence (and hence, understandability) to isolated facts by means of patterns – cultural patterns such as e.g. ‘classicism’, historical ones such as e.g. ‘absolutism’, economic ones such as e.g. ‘capitalism’ and so on. Foucault’s work addressed and decoded such systems – regimes of power/knowledge – and much of Bourdieu’s work can be read as an analysis of the class system in France. Such patterns define systems; they are systemic, but they are not



abstract. They have a real ('synchronic') existence in a plethora of individually insignificant but observable material features, and such features make sense when they are seen in their totality. Historicizing the notion of 'system', consequently is an exercise that has an effect both on our descriptive accuracy – every 'synchronic' description of a 'system' will necessarily be a historical snapshot – and on our explanatory adequacy – what we know of language makes 'achronic' and immutable interpretations of a linguistic system an entirely unrealistic thing. If we wish to make sense about language, we must keep it real.

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There are good reasons why we must keep it real. The main reason is that the task of description (a good old structuralist assignment) is still there, and this task becomes increasingly complex due to the fast changes in the sociolinguistic world. Globalization processes result in forms of sociolinguistic diversity for which we now need to use the term 'superdiversity' (Vertovec 2007). I must at this point summarize an argument that I developed at length elsewhere (Blommaert 2010; Blommaert & Rampton 2011). Superdiversity forces us to consider forms of 'multilingual' language 'mixing' as default elements of communication, both in spoken and written forms; the stability enshrined in the traditional concept of 'language' is not there in the actual occurrence of language in human communication. Consequence, the focus of our attention should shift from 'language' as traditionally understood to *repertoires*, the actual complexes of communicative resources gathered by individuals and deployed in communication (cf Blommaert & Backus 2011). Such resources are manifold, and comprise specific 'bits' of language: genres, styles, registers, accents, normative patterns of deployment, metapragmatic (ideological) understanding of the rules and effects of their deployment. And the repertoires in which they are combined are highly dynamic indexical-biographical complexes, in which whatever someone 'has' in the way of 'language' always reflects a particular stage in one's life, a particular social, cultural and political position in relation to various normative complexes in a 'polycentric' social environment that counts numerous actual arenas for social conduct. Conduct in such social arenas demands the deployment of specific resources, which leads to specific 'identities' in such arenas. And the competence one needs to be perceived by others as a normal member of such-and-such a group involves, crucially, the capacity to shift from one arena to another, from one 'identity' into another, from one set of enregistered resources into another. Communicative competence nowadays is best defined as the competence to shift and move,

the capacity, in other words, to be a *mobile* social subject. And such mobility is greatly dependent on the capacity to absorb new forms into the dynamic system that we call repertoire, to make such forms fit into existing normative patterns or to create new normative patterns by means of them – a process called enregisterment:

“To be sure, the manifold of registers of which any ‘language’ is composed is in constant flux, but it is the enregisterment of any emergent linguistic form that constitutes the effective historical ‘force’ of change (...)” (Silverstein 2008: 13; see also Agha 2007)

We see, thus, how the system itself now consists of and is animated by the capacity to change; changeability is itself the engine of ‘language’, the force that keeps language alive. Needless to say, such ‘languages’ are never twice the same, and we are very poorly served by defining such languages in terms of stable and static ‘deep’ structures that ‘underlie’ the bewildering variability and changeability we observe, and in so doing also present these dynamics of variation and change as ‘superficial’. The engine of the *linguistic* system, we can now see, is its dynamic and mobility-oriented *sociolinguistic* organization. Change and mobility are the essential systemic features of language.

This insight is becoming increasingly recognized. In the Preface, I already mentioned the work of Makoni & Pennycook (2007) who ‘disinvent’ the notion of language in light of its historical and ideological load and the oppressive categorizing effects it had as a consequence of that. Similar interventions emerge from descriptive work, where scholars bump into the clumsiness of an established vocabulary organized around (closed and bounded) languages and multilingualism (understood as plural monolingualism). To give one example: Jens-Normann Jörgensen, in correspondence with me (10 November 2010), suggests we surrender the use of ‘language’ whenever we speak of ‘language learning’, because ‘language’ is a conventional (i.e. ideological) projection of belonging, a conventional categorization procedure, that groups particular (conventionalized) complexes of forms and establishes them as ‘belonging to X’. Thus in actual fact,

“we do not learn languages. We learn features. Learning features involves being made aware of what ‘language’ they are constructed as ‘belonging’ to. Since I have had classes for a couple of years in my teenage that wore the label ‘German’, I know that ‘the word *Durchschnittsgeschwindigkeit* is a word from the German language’. I also

know that letting the word *durch* follow by a form with an ending which we mark as ‘accusative’ is ‘a rule of the German language’ (...). I have somehow learned and stored a number of features about which I have learnt that they ‘are part of the German language’.” (see also Jörgensen et al 2011)

Doing away with ‘language’, for Jörgensen, would enable us to explain the incredible flexibility with which we appear to absorb new features and deploy them together with others, regardless of whether they ‘belong’ to a particular ‘linguistic system of Language X’ or not. In other words, removing ‘language’ from our vocabulary would liberate us from seeing innovations in resources for communication primarily in terms of ‘languages’, and would enable us to see them in a fully pragmatic way as social and cultural instruments to be deployed whenever the occasion arises and circumstances demand it.

Jörgensen is not alone in this terminological exercise, and we have seen, over the past number of years, people suggesting neologisms such as ‘linguaging’, ‘translinguaging’, ‘polylingualism’, ‘metrolingualism’ and so on (e.g. Creese & Blackledge 2010, Otsuji & Pennycook 2010; for a survey see Juffermans 2010 and Blommaert & Rampton 2011), each time in an attempt to be as precise and specific as possible in their descriptive account of observable human communication. In each case, the people who coined the terms felt that the established vocabulary prejudiced an accurate account in which flexibility, dynamism, change, negotiability – in short, *instability* – were central and fundamental (i.e. *not* superficial) features. Such work helps us to see that languages, in real life, always appear with an accent, in a genre, a style, a register, always connected to effects we can describe as voice, and always within a broad context of sociolinguistically stratified economies of signs and meanings. Real languages are always ‘non-standard’.

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If we accept that the linguistic system is in effect and in its empirical shape a dynamic sociolinguistic system geared towards change and mobility, and that, consequently, systemic statements about language ought to express this dynamics, we have effectively rejected a paradigm – the paradigm that generated modern (and modernist) linguistics. I sketched this paradigm in the Preface to this book, and the study itself illustrated how this paradigm saturated the infra-methodology of linguistics, guiding the actual genred textual practices of linguists and so constructing a particular ‘language’. We have observed textual practices that

produced the ‘synchronic’ (or better, ‘achronic’) linguistic fact. We are now at a point where we can see that our critique leads us to a paradigmatic decision: the end of synchrony as a target and a platform for the study of language.

Rejecting one paradigm does not mean that the next one, or an adequate alternative one, is readily available. Rejecting the synchronic paradigm brings us into open, unknown territory and this can be both Eldorado or Death Valley – depending on how we chart our itinerary. We have seen above that a growing number of scholars struggle with the descriptive vocabulary we employ. This struggle points to the fact that the exercise is demanding and difficult, and that we do have quite a distance to cover before we find ourselves in the comfort zone of a new and fully developed alternative paradigm. The major lines are clear, and can be easily summarized in a set of propositions: (a) instead of language, we address actually occurring communicative resources; (b) organized in repertoires, seen as indexical biographies that are flexible, open-ended, dynamic; (c) and oriented towards change and mobility across a variety of social arenas; (d) in which processes of enregisterment are the key to understanding the dynamics of the system. There are also major precursors and significant bodies of work to help us on our way. But none of that removes the basic challenge: to get from critique – a well founded critique that offered us excellent reasons to reject an older paradigm – to reconstruction, to a new science of language which, in all likelihood, will no longer bear that name.

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