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SHORT GUIDE TO THE RECORDING OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES

THE following list of words and sentences is intended as a first guide towards the systematic recording of African languages. The number of African languages and dialects about which little or nothing is known is great, and it is desirable that such languages should be recorded before they die out or degenerate. In many parts of Africa the chief language or dialect of a district has been used in literature and has been well studied, while on others little work has been done and there is no published material available. Records of these lesser known languages as well as of dialects of languages already known would afford valuable help towards comparative study, and any one who contributes to the collection of reliable data will render a service to linguistic science in addition to furnishing material for the practical study of a particular language.

This list accurately filled in will be of considerable value. If opportunities occur for making a more extensive record, the *Questionnaire Linguistique* issued by the Institut d'Ethnologie de l'Université de Paris and republished under the auspices of the Comité International Permanent de Linguistes (J. Schrijnen, St. Anna Straat, Nijmegen, Holland) should be consulted. *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (5th edition), published by the Royal Anthropological Institute (52 Upper Bedford Place, London, W.C. 1), also contains sections on methods of collecting vocabularies and on phonetics.

ALPHABET RECOMMENDED

Consonants.

b, d, f, h, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, v, w, z should be used in their English values; **ph, th, kh** are aspirated **k, t, p**; **ʈ** and **ɖ** are retroflex **t, d** (the tongue-tip is placed somewhat farther back than in the formation of ordinary **t** or **d**).

g has its hard value, as in *get, go*.

r stands for the rolled lingual (tongue-tip) *r*.

x is used to represent the Scotch sound of *ch* in *loch* (the German *ach*-sound).

y has its consonantal value as in *you, yet*.

ty, dy, ny, ly, sy, zy represent palatal *t, d, n, l, s, z* (ty almost as *t* in *tune*, ny as in *cañon*), ly as *ll* in *Sevilla*.

kp, gb represent the labio-velar consonants of many Sudanic languages.

ŋ is used for the velar *n*, i.e. for the sound of *ng* in English *sing*, German *singen*.

f for bilabial *f*.

v for bilabial *v*.

ʃ for the English sound of *sh*, French *ch*, German *sch*.

ʒ for the English sound of *s* in *pleasure*, French *j*.

ɣ for the voiced velar fricative sound (in German *Lage* the *g* is mostly pronounced *ɣ*)

ts as German *z*, almost like *ts* in English *hats*.

dz the corresponding voiced sound.

tʃ or c as English *ch* in *church*.

dʒ or j for the sound of English *j*.

p', t', k', etc., are consonants with a glottal stop. A glottal stop between two vowels is likewise to be expressed by an apostrophe: a'a.

'b, 'd, 'g are implosive *b, d, g*.

Dental consonants. In languages where dental *t* and *d* are to be distinguished from (generally used) alveolar *t, d*, the former may be written **th, dh**. This is, however, only possible in languages which do not contain aspirated *t*.

Vowels.

The vowels **a, e, i, o, u** have the so-called 'Italian' values.

ɛ is an open *e*, almost like *e* in *bet*, or in German *Bett*, French *è*.

ə is an open *o*, like *o* in *hot*, or in German *voll*, French *col*.

ə is a central vowel, like the first vowel in *about*, or the *e* in German *bitte*.

Diphthongs should be represented by two letters: **ai, ei, ei, au, əu**, etc.

Nasalized vowels are to be marked by the sign ~ ã, etc.

It is recommended that long or doubled sounds, consonants as well as vowels, be represented by doubling the letter: **fa** short *a*, **faa** long *a*, **sig** short *g*, **sigga** long *g*.

Tone.

In most African languages, tone is an essential element in phonology. In many cases the distinction of two tones, low level and high level, may be sufficient for the present purpose. The low level tone may be marked by a grave accent, à, etc., the high level by an acute accent, á, etc. Where more tones are distinguished, the middle tone may be marked á, the rising ǎ, and the falling â.

If sounds other than those mentioned above are found in a language, they should be observed, imitated, and described as exactly as possible; this should also be done in cases where a sound resembles a sound in a given European language, but is not really the same. As a general rule it may be said that a sound can be correctly described only by a person who is able to pronounce it correctly.

For further information on orthography the reader is referred to *A Practical Orthography of African Languages*, revised edition, price 1s. (published by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures), London, 1930: and Ida C. Ward and D. Westermann, *Practical Phonetics for Students of African Languages*, London, 1933.

Certain difficulties may arise in obtaining these linguistic records. When isolated nouns are asked for, the reply may be a sentence, or may contain an attribute: thus instead of 'nose', the reply may be 'my nose' or 'it is my nose'. The personal pronouns are difficult to discover or are apt to be confused by the informant, particularly those of the 1st and 2nd persons. Mistakes of this type and other similar ones will be discovered as the work progresses and may then easily be corrected. The speaker should be asked to give information on his mother tongue only.

*Name of language**Dialect**Where spoken**Name of people or tribe*

head

eye

ear

nose

mouth

cheek

forehead

tooth

tongue

lip

hair of head

hair of body

neck

breast (woman's)

heart

lungs

liver

belly

my arm is long

my tooth aches (me)

I

bowels

back

arm, upper

arm, lower

shoulder

elbow

hand

right hand

left hand

finger

finger-nail

leg

knee

foot

bone

blood

skin

he broke his leg

his hair is white

my hair is black

blood is red

bone is hard

he opened (his) mouth

2

man (person)

husband

man (not woman)

wife

child

brother

boy

sister

girl

chief

slave

potter

friend

fisherman

stranger

hunter

doctor

warrior

smith

all people

father

white man

mother

we go home

we go to the chief's house

the woman bore a child

a stranger came

strangers came

why do people shout?

they are afraid

he is a white man

earth

sky

sun

moon

star

day

night

morning

evening

to-day

yesterday

to-morrow

The sun is rising

the sun is setting

it is hot to-day

it is cold

the sun is shining

the moon is shining

wind

thunder

lightning

fire

water

rain

fog

hill

road

town

market

farm

the wind is blowing

it rained yesterday

it thundered

lightning killed a man

the fire burns

the water is cold

the water is hot

the people cut a road

the people hoe a farm

give me water to drink

give me food to eat

my mother went to the market

plenty of animals are in the bush

my mother was ill

she is well now

my father is in the town

my father is on the farm

one

two

three

four

five

4

six

seven

eight

nine

ten

RECORDING OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES

10

eleven
 twelve
 thirteen
 fourteen
 fifteen
 sixteen
 seventeen
 eighteen
 nineteen
 twenty
 twenty-one
 twenty-two

thirty
 forty
 fifty
 sixty
 seventy
 eighty
 ninety
 hundred
 two hundred
 five hundred
 thousand

5

salt
 stone
 iron
 gold
 coal
 sand
 mud
 dust
 charcoal

soap
 hat
 shoe
 cloth
 loin-cloth
 trousers
 spear
 bow
 arrow

club	mill-stone
gun	calabash
powder	knife
war	bush-knife
needle	spoon
beads	hoe
comb	axe
rope	hammer (of smith)
broom	anvil
bracelet	canoe
mat	mortar
basket	pestle
drum	stool
pot	book
dish	

put salt in the food

the salt is finished

buy some salt

iron is hard

iron is hot

this iron is not hot

coal is black

we bought medicine

I bought one cow

my brother bought two cows

the chief has a big house

the chief has four houses

we saw five men

my house is big

your house is not big

people go to war

they fired guns

they threw spears

6

cow

bull

male calf

female calf

male goat

female goat

horn

male sheep

female sheep

hair of sheep (wool)

fowl

cock

hen

egg

egg-shell

chicken

pig

horse

dog

male dog

female dog

bird

bill (of bird)

feather

guinea-fowl	hare
vulture	chameleon
hawk	lizard
eagle	mantis
crow	spider
hornbill	locust
weaver-bird	butterfly
elephant	fly
ivory	flea
buffalo	louse
male buffalo	tick
female buffalo	snake
hyena	scorpion
antelope (various kinds)	frog
baboon	mouse
chimpanzee	rat
leopard	tortoise
lion	porcupine
ostrich	bee
crocodile	honey
hippo	meat (animal)
fish	wild animals
squirrel	domestic animals

the dog barked

a dog bit me

the cow ran away

the hen cackles

the hen lays eggs

the cock crows

they killed one monkey

they killed monkeys

elephants came into our farm

they destroyed our farm

we shot one elephant

birds are in a tree

chicken eat corn

a snake bit my mother

my mother cried

my brother's goat died

children eat honey

honey is sweet

the hunter killed a leopard

he gave the chief a skin of a leopard

the chief thanked him

a hunter brought me meat

I bought meat

is he big?

no, he is small,

but he is strong

7

tree

medicine

leaf

branch of tree

root of tree

bark of tree

shadow of tree

shadow of man

grass

reed

bush

forest

firewood

guinea-corn

maize

ground-nut

oil

bean

rice

yam

cassava

cucumber

onion

banana

ocro

oil palm

palm fruit

palm kernel

palm branch

palm oil

fan palm

raffia palm

baobab

cotton

cotton-tree

soup

tobacco

tobacco-pipe

the tree is high
the leaf is green
the maize is ripe
women bring firewood
we sell ground-nut
this is my rice
it is not yours
this is my mother's cassava
this is the white man's cotton
your (sing.) farm is big
my farm is small
his cotton is bad
the people come
they bring their loads
they are tired
I saw you all
your (pl.) clothes were wet
your feet were dirty
the boys go
they carry their hoes
give me a big banana
this banana is not big
that one is big
give me that one

8

I saw a red bird

I saw many red birds

he has a small house

I saw you (sing.)

the chief saw me,

and he called me

I saw him

we saw a sheep and a goat

whom did you see?

we saw you (pl.) on the road

we called the people

we called them

our father saw us,

and he called us

you are many

they are not many

we killed one fowl

we killed fowls

I called the women

the stranger bought cows

9

the chief's house is bigger than my
house (big pass my house)

he has more money than I have

they hoe the farm for the chief

he worked for me

he beat him with a stick

he cut the tree with an axe

they built the house of mud

we carried the maize in baskets

he carried the box to the white man

he brought me the cassava

the woman is in the house

the children are behind the house

a bird is on top of the house

he made a fire under the pot

he stood beside me

I sat down under the tree

you stood in front of the tree

they talk palaver

a big palaver has come

a man has been killed

two goats have been stolen

IO

I go

I go away

he came

he came from the town

we run

I sit down

I rise

I fall down

we breathe

I cough

I spit

I sneeze

I snore

I laugh

I weep

I beg you

I sleep

I dream

I wake up

he was ill

he died

I talk

I hear

I see him

he likes me

we eat banana

we drink water

the woman cooks meat

she grinds corn

she pounds cassava

she sweeps the yard

she fetches water

he fell down

he broke a stick

the smith makes hoes

my father makes baskets

what are you doing ?

he remained here

people dance

they do not dance to-day

he gave me a little money

II

I am coming

we are coming

people are coming

the children are playing

the men are building a house

he is crossing the river

he will come to-morrow

the women will plant maize to-morrow

my brother came yesterday

the boys went to school yesterday

we worked yesterday

I am going to eat food

we are going to sleep

the women are going to wash clothes

they are going to hunt

he (usually) goes to town

we (usually) work on the farm

did he come?

no, he did not come

he says he will not go

the boys are not sleeping

I am not going to call him

if you do not go,

I shall not go

who ate the banana?

I did not eat the banana

go!¹

come!

call the man!

do not go!

do not be afraid!

run!

call him!

help me!

do not come!

do not tell him!

I 2

name

what is your name (how do they call you? or, your name is who?)

my name is Kofi

where is your father?

I want to see him

what did he say?

he said he was coming

tell him to come

who has come?

I do not know

nobody has come

whom do you want?

¹ The imperatives should be given both in the singular and plural.

what do you want?

I want money

how many boys have come?

two only have come

they are too lazy

whose house is this?

it is my grandfather's house

to whom did you give the money?

why did he not come?

my house is here, come in!

his house is there

do you agree?

I agree

I cannot agree

it is finished

I 3

tree cutting is men's work

food cooking is women's work

coming home is pleasant

going is hard, coming is pleasant

tree-cutter

house-builder

potter

traveller

load carrying

tree-cutters

house-builders

travellers

potters

load carrier

I4

he is glad

he is sorry

he is angry

why is he angry?

ask him!

he will not tell me

we are satisfied

he gave me nothing

he is stingy

I trust in you

you are right

I am wrong

I think it is all right

I hope he will come

he did it for me

thank you!

I5

younger brother

elder brother

father's elder brother

father's younger brother

„ elder sister

„ younger sister

mother's brother

„ younger sister

„ elder sister

grandfather (father's father)

„ (mother's father)

grandmother (father's mother)

„ (mother's mother)

husband's brother

„ sister

wife's brother

„ sister