WOCAL-7 Sociolinguistics Workshop
Working Group 3:

Which factors inform the "market value" of an indigenous African language in a "polyglossic" multilingual environment?

Chairs: Pius Tamanji & H. Ekkehard Wolff

Anna Belew: anna@linguistlist.org
Ayu'nwi Neba Fusi: anfusi@yahoo.com
Cecilia Kotey: ckotey@yahoo.com
Ekkehard Wolff: ekkehard.wolff@gmx.de; wolff@uni-leipzig.de
Joseph Baya: bayajoseph@yahoo.fr
Mba Gabriel: mbagaby2002@yahoo.fr
Pius Tamanji: tamanjip@ahoo.fr
Seunghun Lee: seunghunlee@ccsu.edu

cc: Jeff Good & Tucker Childs

Pre-Working Group Information from the Chairs

Organisational issues:
We are grateful to *Anna Belew* (Eastern Michigan University) who will be our working group's "scribe", i.e. she will be the one to take notes and assist in the presentation of the workings group's input for the plenaries.

Mba Gabriel will thankfully step in as deputy for the co-chairperson Pius Tamanji and assist in the coordination of the working group whenever Pius will have to be off in order to attend to his multiple tasks as the Chief Organiser of WOCAL-7.

Aims and structure of the Workshop & Working Group sessions:
As we all have been informed, the Workshop itself will involve a mix of plenary sessions and working group sessions. The general idea is that the plenaries will be fed by the input from the discussions and results from the working groups, so that everyone will become aware of the dealings of the whole Workshop.

Our main concern at the Workshop is, once again: How can we optimise **sociolinguistic language DOCUMENTATION** in African multilingual contexts, based in our own experience and expertise in the field as much as on innovative ideas towards achieving the main goal, ideally involving cooperative research between junior and senior as well as African and "Western"

researchers. This means that we are collectively working on a **research agenda** devising future activities in sociolinguistic language documentation. In other words, we are more interested in **open questions** (what we don't know yet) than in **ready answers** (what we already know).

The coherence of the whole Workshop will, therefore, be guaranteed by a set of common issues to be discussed with priority in **all the working groups** which we should all keep in mind when collecting points and issues for our group's presentations in the plenaries. Some of these questions are the following (Jeff Good & Tucker Childs):

1. *In what ways do African sociolinguistic contexts appear to be different from Western contexts?*
2. *What kinds of products (e.g., recordings, videos, transcriptions) are required to document the important features of African languages relevant to the group's topic? What kind of metadata needs to be collected?*
3. *How would one go about structuring a field research project to gather the necessary kinds of documentation related to the group's topic? What special challenges are there as set against more usual kinds of fieldwork?*
4. *What special ethical considerations are there in working with communities to gather data relevant to the topic?*
5. *What kinds of training opportunities are needed for researchers to successfully undertake documentation on your working group's topic?*
6. *How can a more sociolinguistically-informed approach to language documentation result in the creation of more effective community language resources?*

Our working group sessions, therefore, will contain the following components:

- An initializing presentation by one of the Chairs (H. Ekkehard Wolff) on some major sociolinguistic issues related to the working group topic (cf. below).
- Stimulus reports, at least one (possibly more), by all participants from their personal experience and their professional expertise which should have a bearing on the topic.
- Focussed discussions of individual presentations.
- General discussions on how the presentations relate to the overall questions and issues addressed by the Workshop as a whole (and which would feed into the plenary reports of our working group).
- Prepare, and continuously add to, a list of suggestions and recommendations by the group for consideration in the final plenary.

Clarification the topic:
The overall topic of the group is, in more familiar terms, **language choice**, and **motivations for language choice**, in African **multilingual contexts**. Language choice, however, is usually not one between several languages which would be on an equal footing; as a rule there is a "**value & prestige hierarchy**" at work in which some languages a conceived of as being

higher up on a scale and others lower, that some languages are more useful or important than others (depending on whichever purpose – how are these purposes perceived and linked with language), or the like. Basically, therefore, we are dealing with **language attitudes**: how are languages seen and valued (by their own speakers, by speakers of other languages in the same context, by administrations and governments, etc.). Such **value & prestige hierarchies** have long been referred to in the literature as **diglossia**, particularly when referring to "high" versus "low" varieties of the same language (such as, very conspicuously, in the case of Arabic). In the African context we are dealing with high degrees of multilingualism, and therefore such hierarchy applies to the value relationship between different languages (not just varieties of one language) – therefore, the term **polyglossia** has been suggested to describe such sociolinguistic situations. The most common situation in Africa is one in which an ex-colonial language of European provenance is valued as highly prestigious and finds itself on the top of such hierarchy, while local languages, in particular when spoken only by rather small "minorities" (what exactly is a "minority" language in the African context? A question of attitudes?), tend to be seen at the lowest end of the **polyglossia scale** of prestige and "usefulness", with "majority" languages, "national" languages, and widely spread *linguae francae* usually somewhere in between. This situation, under the perspective of languages' "usefulness" for speakers in multilingual contexts, can also be referred to as describing the **market value** of languages: How likely is it for non-speakers of a language to "invest" time and effort into acquiring another language (as "second language" or "foreign language" – a valuable distinction in African contexts!), or even for speakers of one language itself when "language maintenance" is on the agenda in cases of ongoing language endangerment. But: No language is "born" as a prestigious official or national language, or a *lingua franca* (this, however, to the exception of pidgins and creoles), it is "made" such by speakers' choice when many non-speakers invest into acquiring and using it. So: When and why do they make which choices in terms of language acquisition and use? Also, the position of languages on **polyglossia scales** tends to change over time under the impact of *local, regional, national, global* **historical, sociocultural and economic changes and developments**, i.e. languages "rise and fall" from non-prestigious, if not stigmatised, local "vernaculars" to highly prestigious languages of power and knowledge (to even be considered "classical" languages) – good examples are provided by Latin and English (or French, or German) in Europe, and Afrikaans in South Africa, for instance, but also Arabic (like spoken Arabic varieties in Africa and "classical" Arabic).

Our central concern in the group could be questions like the following:

- *How do speakers perceive languages to have a certain position on a polyglossia scale?*
- *How do languages get higher up on the scale, and what makes languages drop on the scale (is it numbers of speakers, origin, standardisation~ literacy/postliteracy, linguistic behaviour of the elites in power, i.e. 'elite closure', etc.)?*
- *How can we elicit, analyse and describe attitudinal changes among speakers and non-speakers of a particular language which directly affect its "market value"?*

- *How do we identify and document situations which potentially lead to "stable" versus "instable" bi-(tri, quadri-, etc.) lingualism?*
- *Which tools, techniques, ethical considerations, etc. need to be particularly looked at if we want to achieve a better understanding of people's choices?*
- *What can or must speakers do to keep their language from dropping on the scale (with the ultimate prospect of language death when it becomes of "no value" for the next generation of speakers)?*
- *How can we use a better understanding of the issues involved in order to assist speech communities in their attempts to "maintain" and "empower" their own languages (beyond technical "standardisation"), i.e. by pushing it up on the polyglossia scale?*
- *Where do "tandem solutions" come in as optimal approaches, i.e. teaming up of local (possibly junior) counterparts with more senior counterparts from outside the local speech community – what can these do what others can't? How could and should local (junior) counterparts be trained, if needed? Where and how do knowledgeable people (wise men and women) from local communities come in? Which roles must African universities (Depts of linguistics/African languages) play in this and other regards?*
- *Any other pertinent questions.*

Expected contributions by participants:
First of all, we all want to share insights and knowledge based on our experience and expertise in fields which relate to the working groups overall topic and goals. The contribution of each participant could or should be the following:

1. Come, if you wish, with a short statement introducing your own research, or summary of your research interests, (and note that this is not meant to be a formal research presentation!);
2. Come definitely with statements (again: no full formal presentations!) of
   a. your personal experiences (e.g. as member of a speech community in a multilingual society, as field researcher, as language activist/member of NGO, etc.)
   b. your professional expertise (as researcher, administrator, etc.)
   c. your own ideas on interesting and new approaches, including possibly novel research tools, to the topic.

Pre-Working Group Questions?
Please, address them to the two Chairs simultaneously:

Ekkehard Wolff: ekkehard.wolff@gmx.de
Pius Tamanji: tamanjip@ahoo.fr