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LANGUAGE SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

Edited with an Introduction by:
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Foreword by:
Professor Simon Ottenberg

During the 18th and 19th centuries and up to World War II, Linguistic studies in Africa were controlled by missionaries, colonial officers, explorers and persons generally untrained in language study. The emphasis was on the compiling of dictionaries and the translation into the vernacular of the bible and other religious materials. Little attention was paid to phonetic and phonemic clarity. Symbols were invented on the spot to represent what were sometimes considered strange African sounds. Moreover, the desire to trace historical roots led to arbitrary language classifications and the so-called 'Hamitic' movements in Africa.

Since the Second World War, however, the trend has somewhat changed, due to the emergence of professional linguists and the spread of interests to scholars world-wide, particularly to the United States and more recently Africa.

This book, a special issue of THE CONCH, approaches the question of language complexity in Africa from an original, inter- or multi-disciplinary and comparative perspective. Contributions range from mass media, ethnomusicology, sociology, sociolinguistics, anthropology, to literary criticism and transformational linguistics. While retaining each its own individuality, the six highly researched papers presented in this volume emphasise the unity within the diversity of African languages and language-related cognitive systems, and the knowledge of these as essential to a proper understanding of Africa.

This important thought-provoking book must commend itself to all who are genuinely interested not only in the language future of, but also the future of *Language* in, Africa south of the Sahara.

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