From fieldnotes to grammar:
Artefactual ideologies and the textual production of languages in Africa

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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

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1 This essay is offered to Johannes Fabian in grateful acknowledgment of many years of inspiration and dialogue-from-a-distance. The basic ideas in this paper grew out of a series of long conversations on inductivism and artefactual ideologies of language between me and Michael Silverstein (University of Chicago) in the spring and fall of 2004, and Michael’s input has been invaluable. I consider the sections 3 and 4 of this paper a joint product, but assume full responsibility for all remaining shortcomings and lacunae. I am also grateful to Judy Irvine for directing my attention to a number of important sources, and to Joe Errington and Lukas Tsitsipis for useful comments and suggestions on the first draft of this paper. I presented it during the symposium Performing Anthropology, Amsterdam, 20 May 2005. Thanks are due to Johannes Fabian, Peter Pels, Mieke Bal, Bambi Schieffelin, Nicky Thomas and Birgit Meyer, who all made perceptive comments during the discussion there.
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 (1986) groundbreaking work 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 1983; cf. also Clifford & Marcus 1986) 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: we 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 we 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” (Fabian 1991 [1983]: 151; also Errington 2001). Irvine (2001a: 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”. (Irvine 2001a: 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”. (Koelle 1854: 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” (Irvine 2001a: 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” (Bauman & Briggs 2003: 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 (Land 1974; Bauman & Briggs 2003). 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 1974: 104,
on William Jones). 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.²

Philology does not ‘invent’ the notion of language-as-structure (Grammar I), but it innovates in its emphasis on the inductive study of Grammar I. Here is the basic principle of philology, developed in the late 18th and early 19th century by the likes of Jones and Schlegel: 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 (Irvine 2001a: 81-85; 2001b); 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

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² Judy Irvine, in correspondence about this text, provides the following caveat about work in this early period: “It’s perhaps interesting that Koelle’s compilation of Kanuri texts as prerequisite for grammatical analysis, à la the philological model, was apparently not the usual procedure at the time for scholars working on African languages (although in some cases it’s hard to tell, because they don’t all say much about how they worked). My impression is that most of them proceeded by a translation method, using a familiar text -- usually a Bible chapter or catechism, but perhaps sometimes something else -- and working with an informant to translate it into the unfamiliar language, figuring out grammatical forms along the way. It’s possible, too, that there were national differences among scholars’ procedures, with German-origin scholars like Koelle more likely to pursue a philological model.”
demonstrate its exotic depth, beauty and complexity.³ 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 relatere themselves” (Hollis 1905: 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.⁴ 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

³ This humanistic motive was also present in the tradition of Native American studies in the US. Bauman (2001) discusses the work of Schoolcraft, a contemporary of Grimm, Humboldt and Koelle.
⁴ These views are persistent; for a contemporary critique, see Silverstein (1998).
have been turned into grammatical convergences, and many anomalies have been
turned into relative conformity”. (Whitehead & Whitehead 1928: 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” (id.: vi), and
“the way to literary success has thus been opened to Kingwana” (id.: 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 Vallaey’s (1988: 201), a text
added after a grammar of the Logo language. The particular fragment is from a narrative
which Vallaey 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: Vallaey produces a so-called ‘literal’ translation, one
in which every Logo word is translinguistically 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 (ziit tourbillon!, zii anneau de cheville!), marked by
Vallaey as such with question marks.
Mbélé Bila drí mbazo bágárdrilé, drí nga, 
Vite Bila monta sur/une-vache, se leva, 
a'dô longô ngo: 
est en train de chanter/un-chant:

Tí mini birili! Tí mini kálâkî!
Vache, la tienne, tourbillon! Vache, la tienne, anneau de cheville! (?)

Tí mini birili! Tí mini kálâkî!
Vache, la tienne, tourbillon! Vache, la tienne, anneau de cheville! (?)

Ziiî birili! Ziiî kálâkî!
Ziiî tourbillon! Ziiî anneau de cheville! (?)

Ziiî birili! Ziiî kálâkî!
Ziiî tourbillon! Ziiî anneau de cheville! (?)

Drí nga, 
(Il) se leva,

Figure 1: Vallaëys (1988: 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 1939: 52-53) presents us with another 
widespread form of philological representation. The African text here is definitely 
remarkable. It is an edition of an 18th-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: Hichens (1939: 52-53)

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 (Bauman 2001: 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 Klingebenheim-von Tiling 1928: 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.

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-Inkishaft*, 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. Klingeheben 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" (id.: 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: Klingeheben 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, a very recent example that demonstrates the persistence of the philological tradition (from Sommer & Vossen 2000: 148-149). The text is remarkable here: it is a “traditional story” narrated by an old woman in Shiye, 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 Klingeheben’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: Sommer & Vossen (2000: 148-149)

All kinds of textual and notational operations are combined here. The Shiheyi 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').

Mà. rórá mû. g/êkwá. Àti á. kà. rórá mû. g/êkwá.
SCA3sg marry l. woman when SCi3sg CONC marry l. woman
'He married a woman. After having married that...

y. dô. kà. kà mû. dz. l. á kòkú mû. z. òkè.
1 DEM2 NAR INC OC3sg come out CAUS FV LOC17 3 yard POSS3sg.
'... woman he brought her (home) to his yard.'

Figure 5: two lines from Sommer & Vossen (2000: 149)
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 Shi ye yi 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 mü. g//ékwà.”
becomes

“SCa3sg. - marry 1 – woman”
and then

“He married a woman”

And rather than text as raw material (as in Klingonheben’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 2003). 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” (Goodwin 1994: 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 (1956) inductively on a philological corpus: “For the composition of this syntactic description, we used the following Lomongo literature” (De Rop 1956: vii, French original, italics added). This corpus of literature is – characteristically – authored by Belgian scholars: G. Hulstaert and E. Boelaert (both missionaries), 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 & 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 a Lianja Epic, which is by far the richest and most diverse source in our data set” (1956: viii). Of course, the reference here is to literate, philological representations of oral narrative: artefacts already tailored for linguistic analysis.5

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.

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5 De Rop himself published standard philological critical editions of the Lianja Epic (De Rop 1978).
b) Bij werkwoorden van wat en begeging draait de infinitief meestal het deel uit van de handeling, uitgesneden door het verwoorden. In verschillende dialecten heeft deze infinitief het prefix "va-".

De infinitief geeft aan dat de handeling wederzijds is gevolgd, dat het doel is bereikt; in tegenstelling met de subiectief, die het doel aanvaard moet aangeven. De infinitief is te lezen op het gevend. Er bestaan voortklinkende depen werkwoorden: va-<wet>, va-gaan, va-komen, va-komen, va-eten, va-staan, va-zitten, va-een, va-pen, va-gezien.

1. van (4, 3) Zij is een boer, gaan koken.
2. van (4, 3) Hij wil dat ik te midden komden.
3. van (4, 13, 2) Hij is een va-<wet> verkeerden.
4. van (4, 13, 2) Hij gaat de buurman koken.
5. van (4, 13, 2) Hij is een va-<wet> verkeerden.
6. van (4, 13, 1) Hij is een va-<wet> verkeerden.
7. van (4, 13, 2) Hij va-<wet> verkeerden.
8. van (4, 13, 2) Hij is een va-<wet> verkeerden.
9. van (4, 13, 2) Hij is een va-<wet> verkeerden.
10. van (4, 13, 2) Hij is een va-<wet> verkeerden.

Sommige va-<wet> verkeerden zijn ze kunstvol positie (N, 16, 17) Zij zijn zijn va-<wet> verkeerden.

Met enkele infinitie zijn er te verkeerden:

De infinitief kan in een lijndood een belanghebbend voorwerp bij zich hebben.

Avond datum begaf binnen kort kwiek. (N, 41, 13) Ik ben niet anders dan ik ben, anders dan ik ben, anders dan ik ben, anders dan ik ben.

En vervoegd werkwoord en infinitief kunnen ook een lijndood voorwerp bij zich hebben. De infinitief is dan niet completeren bij het werkwoord alleen, maar bij de groep werkwoord en lijndood voorwerp.

Ambachtswaar is dit in de talrijke (N, 13, 1) Hij heeft de persoon genomen om dat toe een afsluiting te gaan tekenen.

Figure 6: De Rop (1956: 39)
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 belaboured 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 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." (Bloomfield 1942: 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” (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". (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” (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 Grammar – 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” (3).

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6 This was a widespread opinion. Hulstaert, one of the Africanists to be discussed in the next section, echoed it in the early 1940s like this:

“The explanations of the blacks are a bit the same everywhere: everyone pulls in his own direction. None of them has a larger perception of these things. They couldn’t, of course: they don’t have the training for that”. (cited in Van de Velde 1999: 485; French original)
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 (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” (3-4). And this ‘fair knowledge’ can best be built with informants who are not “educated” or “cultured” (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”. (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.

* Compare again Hulstaert (1970: 3): “The biggest problem is with data written by informants. Such texts need to be checked afterwards with them and with other people” (French original).
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…”)$^8$ 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.” (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.$^9$ 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” (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:

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$^8$ Extensive fieldwork experience shines through in statements such as: “silently repeat the form to yourself, in a whisper or by movements of the vocal organs. It is better not to say it out loud, since one is certain to mispronounce, and this may disturb or disgust the informant” (10). How good for Western culture that Tarzan wasn’t trained by Bloomfield when he met Jane!

$^9$ Bloomfield mentions the existence of several phonetic writing systems, but he gives them only marginal attention: they are only useful when someone intends to publish his record (10).
“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”. (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 Klingengeheben (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 & 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” (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” (13, italics added).

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”. (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.” (13)

Figure 7: Benjamin Lee Whorf’s slip files on Hopi.

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” (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” (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”. (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” (Mead 1939). 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:

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10 ‘Speak like the native’ is a powerful trope in colonial linguistics, and scores of grammars and practical handbooks of African languages are subtitled with things like ‘Le Lingala - *tel qu’ils sort de la bouche des noirs*’.

11 She notes, for instance, that “[t]oday more than 25 field workers of both sexes, English and American, have done authentic field work using native tongues” (191-192). A year later, another leader of that generation of anthropologists, Robert H. Lowie (1940) reacted to Mead’s article, arguing that the use of native languages in
“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 (...)” (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”. (191)

Mead rather accurately typifies the philological tradition discussed above; but one cannot fail to spot the analogies with the reverse inductiveism 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 einführende methodology, and Mead provides a list and discussion of “types of study for which maximal use of the native language is essential” (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”. (195)

Ethnography was more widespread than suggested by Mead, and emphasizing that such ‘use’ came in different shades and degrees. Lowie also provides insightful though humbling autobiographic accounts of what it meant to ‘use’ a native language in the field.
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”. (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” (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”. (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”. (204)\textsuperscript{12}

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.

\textbf{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 \textit{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 \textit{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. Blommaert 2005: 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

\textsuperscript{12} Mead also mentions some important methodological flaws in linguistic fieldwork with informants (reminiscent of e.g. Briggs 1986) that are beyond the scope of this paper. Her article, to be sure, is worth reading.
**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 *kihnui* 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.

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

1. The accent on ‘kulúpango’ 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: ‘kumgongotea’ - *<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 Wahumi). 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.

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 – sharability
of insights from the field is already encoded in these notes). Looking more closely to 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 mayer
of interpretive conventions: abbreviations (‘V. Rel.’), lines indicating grammatical groups,
and symbols such as the ‘naught’. 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.
Figure 9: Secondary record.

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 Grammar 1 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. Silverstein 1977; Sherzer 1987; Hymes 1996)
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 (1970) *Esquisse du Parler des Nkengo*, Meeussen (1952) *Esquisse de la Langue Ombo*, Stappers (1971) *Esquisse de la Langue Lengola*, and Vansina (1959) *Esquisse de Grammaire Bushong*. All four *esquisse*es 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.\(^{13}\) These efforts yielded a treasure of published studies ranging from multivolume grammars and dictionaries, to articles and *esquisse*es. A quick glimpse at Van Bulck’s *Recherches Linguistiques au Congo Belge* (1948) – 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.

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.\(^{14}\) 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

\(^{13}\) These efforts were conceived pyramidalically, with descriptive studies feeding into large-scale comparative and classificatory studies such as the *Loenti* project (see Deoneux 1965). Prior to these comparative efforts, linguistic cartography was the major macro-level research target. Two authoritative language maps were published, one by Van Bulck (1948), another one by Hulstaert (1950), leading to ferocious discussions between both authors (see Van de Velde 1999). The *esquisse*es are still widely used in historical and comparative Bantu studies.

\(^{14}\) Until well into the 1970s, Belgian scientists were on the faculty of all major Congolese universities.
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 (1971), 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”. (Jacobs 1971: 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)”. (Stappers 1971: 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.

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15 These three genres characterize the oeuvre of many accomplished Africanists of the generation discussed here.
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 esquisse 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.

The basic structure is clearly reminiscent of Boas’ (1911) schematization of ‘the characteristics of language’ in the introduction to the Handbook of American Indian Languages. Boas’ scheme also moved from ‘phonetics’ to ‘grammatical categories’, and the
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ÉDITIONS J. HOUTEN & A. G. JOHNSON (Imprimé en Belgique).

Figure 10: Table of contents, Vansina (1959)
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 Ponthierville 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 minutiæ 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*.
PHONEMES

1. Les sons consonantiques simples sont au moins les suivants:

- i e a o u w
- m n p
- b l j
- f t s k

Il y a un système syllabique; dans les deux exemples suivants il y a le son bas: 
- l'entraîneur,.Images et flamme, d'ailleurs.
Le phonème g, quelquefois isolé à la position postvocalique (gg), se laisse former à moins sonore.
Sont rares ou douteux comme phonèmes indépendants les r, l, f, l, voir au vocabulaire les mots gens, pot,三种, une.
A côté de l, établi souvent suivant x ou par un moyen intermédiaire entre l et r.
Il y aurait cependant un phonème distinct, en 3, à un joueur par l'opposition (tarat, tire, tare, et tare, ouindre; ce dernier se retrouve identique en Brjag.

2. Les consonnes peuvent être précédées de nasal; alors que d, p, non.
- me m a (np)
- mb nd nj ng
- mp nt na ng

A l'initiale, mm- et nm- sont souvent réduite à m, m.

3. Les principales variations des phonèmes sont:
- d qui peut être: i) la réalisation d'une noce ou devant sonore; eg et ek seront dites eg et ek.
ii) la réalisation de ag devant noce soit ag, ag, ag; ag et eg suivent avec aj.
- d et ng suivent avec aj: ad, ad, ad, ad, aj, aj.
- d et ng suivent avec taj: la sonorisation des mots ban, foile, cecek, terre.
- y et w sont souvent la réalisation de p, i, é et y, u, o devant noce; il est à remarquer que y, distinct de j, peut être la première consonne d'un radical verbal, alors que w ne se trouve pas dans cette position (n. 60).

Figure 11: Mecussen (1952: 3)

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–IN VARIABLE. (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.

14. Le système des catégories de deux classes, exprimant normalement l'opposition de « singulier » à « pluriel », est en principe le suivant :

| 1, 2-6  | 1 a, 2-6 | buntu, bantu | personne(s) |
| 3, 4    | 3 m, 4 m | buju, biju   | racine(s)    |
| 5, 2-6  |        | lóbwe, babwe | pierre(s)    |
| 7, 8    | 07, 8   | ifaka, bìfaka| panier(s)    |
| 9, 10   |        | mpuki, mpuki| poir(s)      |
| 11, 13  | 11, 14  | lukùke, nkùke| porte(s)     |
| 19, 13  |        | jìlongò, tolìngò| hameçon(s)  |

En outre, il y a des corrélations de catégories, et des classes isolées.

Classes 1 et 2-6.

-ntu personne : buntu, bantu
-ŋenŋi étranger, visiteur, hôte : bøgenŋi, bøgenŋi
-ána enfant : bòna, bàna : aŋntu femme : wàjntu, bájntu
-áli épouse : wálì
t'Ómbò : boÒmbò, baÒmbò (un Songola de l'ouest).

Classes 1 a et 2-6 : 

Figure 12: Meeussen (1952: 9).

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, futurum, 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).
Les préfixes
\[ \text{nomination en le 1er lion;}
\text{nomination en le 2e lion, excepté aux classes 1, o et 17;}
\text{nomination en le 2e lion, excepté à la 1er et la 2me personne.}
\]
À la 2me et la 3me personne, il n'y a que des préfixes verbales; pour la 2me
on trouverait 16eme l'indication de base préfixe que celui de la colonne
précédente.

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) (1938) [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” (De Rop 1956: vii; De Rop later published his own Grammaire du Lomongo – Phonologie et Morphologie, De Rop 1958). 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 (1949), one of the many books of this 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 (1963) 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: The Ombo text in Meeussen (1952).

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 invariant 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.

*Tableau pour les classes ayant plus d’un préfixe d’accord.*

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a préfixe choisi pour le substantif  
b préfixe de l’adjectif  
c préfixe pronominal pour -mó (autre) et -moi (un)  
d préfixe pronominal pour le démonstratif rapproché  
e préfixe pronominal pour le démonstratif éloigné  
f préfixe pronominal pour le démonstratif anaphorique  
g préfixe pronominal pour le substitutif  
h préfixe pronominal pour le connectif et le possessif  
i préfixe verbal non suivi du formatif -a-  
j préfixe verbal suivi du formatif -a-  
k préfixe de l’infinitif objet  
l préfixe numéral

Figure 15: Stappers (1971: 270)

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 (e.g. Burssens & Van Bulck 1935; Burssens 1972). 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 is a register (Silverstein 2003), 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 Burek’s Recherches Linguistiques du Congo Belge (1948) 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 Burek lists sources which, often, should not be lent too much credibility as accounts of history and culture; to Van Burek, 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.16 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 Klinghenheben (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 (1986) 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—

16 Fabian’s (1984) Language on the Road of course demonstrated that such sources – e.g. early travelogues by European missionaries – could also be used for different, more interesting kinds of analysis.
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.

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17 This attitude has not vanished. It is not uncommon to read laudatory phrases like “Mr. Y has cracked the code of language B” in reviews of grammars of African languages. Usually, what is meant is that Mr. Y has provided a more rigorous (often: the first rigorous) grammatical description, and has been able to correct a few errors committed by predecessors.
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