



Applied Linguistics and Literacy
in Africa and the Diaspora

An AILA Research Network
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Editor's Comment

Dear ReN Africa Members,

Once again, I welcome you to our April issue of the ReN Africa Newsletter. In this issue, you will find news about upcoming conferences especially in Africa, but also interesting and informative reports from various conferences held in the past six months.

Our pedagogical practice is so much better when it is informed by findings from the field. Are you grappling with how to teach reading in the myriad of African languages? Read about the different views of some experts during the BAAL SiG LiA workshop and from the papers presented on language policy and practice in education during the BAAL conference.

In the last issue, we mentioned about a new initiative by the South African Institute for Distance Education. The African Storybook Project has made great strides since then, and you will learn more about the progress so far, including opportunities it offers for research.

Lastly, you will find book reviews and publications. We always want to learn about what research you are engaged in. Make ReN Africa Newsletter your platform for disseminating your research.

I would like to thank all those who have read the ReN Africa Newsletter and given us their feedback. It helps us to remain relevant to our community of practice in AILA. Enjoy.

With best regards,

Yours,



Juliet Tembe,
Editor





Upcoming Conferences and Events

Conference: Reading Methodologies in African Languages, Johannesburg, 24–27 June

The annual conference *Reading Methodologies in African Languages* is hosted by Linguistics society of SA (LSSA), Southern African Applied Linguistics Association (SAALA), and Southern African Association of Language Teachers (SAALT). This year the conference is to be held at Wits University in Johannesburg from 24 to 27 June 2014. If anyone wishes to present a paper that fits the theme of our strand then they need to say so on their submission. The email address for the conference is: Conference2014.linguistics@wits.ac.za

Dates: 24–27 June 2014

Venue: Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa

Language in Africa SIG Annual Meeting: 'Ideology and language choices: African perspectives', London, 3 May



The Language in Africa SIG of BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) is holding its Annual Meeting on Saturday, 3 May, 2014, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Dr. Tope Omoniyi, Professor of Sociolinguistics, University of Roehampton will be leading presentations with 'The English-Plus Project and Effective Public Healthcare in Sub-Saharan Africa'. His interests and publications cover a wide area: these include language policy and planning, the impact of social change on language identity, and multilingualism and education. There will be eight further presentations on language issues in countries across the continent from the Gambia to Malawi.

Poster presentations are still welcome for display throughout the day – these can be sent in by email by those unable to attend in person to Dr. Ross Graham: bsx288@coventry.ac.uk. The attendance fee is £20 for BAAL members, £30 for non-members, and £10 for students. We particularly welcome attendance by postgraduate students. Registration forms are available from the LIASIG website: liasig.wordpress.com. Enquiries to csmcglynn@btinternet.com

Conference: “*Language: Synergies and intersections*”, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa: 24 - 27 June

The Language in Africa SIG of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) is forming a Thematic Panel on reading in Sub-Saharan Africa. There will be at least 4 papers, led by Leila Schroeder of SIL who published “Teaching and Assessing Independent Reading Skills in Multilingual African Countries: Not as Simple as ABC” in *Language Issues in Comparative Education* last year. It concerns appropriate methodologies in African social and linguistic contexts. This panel is a continuation of the Language in Africa SIG seminar *Reading in African Languages: Developing literacies and reading methodologies* held with the University of KwaZulu-Natal at SOAS, University of London, on the 17, Jan. 2014. That seminar raised a great deal of



interest in issues in reading in Sub-Saharan Africa (report in this Newsletter).
www.wits.ac.za/conferences/language

Announcements

Cambridge-Africa Alborada Research Fund

Cambridge-Africa Alborada Research Fund supports researchers from the University of Cambridge and sub-Saharan African institutions, across all disciplines, to initiate and/or strengthen research collaborations by providing funding for research costs. The deadline for applying is May 2, 2014. [More information.](#)

SIL International's Language and Culture Archive

Is there a dictionary for the Guerguiko language of Chad? Have any literacy materials been published in the Makaa language of Cameroon? You can now search SIL International's Language and Culture Archive online at www.sil.org/resources/archives. The Archive lists over 30,000 works collected, compiled, or created by SIL, its strategic partners, or members of ethnolinguistic minority communities. The works describe, document, and/or communicate in the languages and cultures SIL serves worldwide and can be searched by domains, countries, subjects and languages. One quarter of the works listed are also available to download.

ZAPP – Southern African Poetry Project

I'd like to inform the REN Africa Research Network of the launch of ZAPP - the Southern African Poetry Project, a collaboration between the Universities of the Witwatersrand, SA and Cambridge, UK. Its aim is to promote the study, enjoyment and writing of Southern African poetry in education through workshops, events, materials and conferences. It will run for a period of three years and will hopefully make an impact. See the ZAPP [Facebook page](#) and [website](#), or contact Professor [Denise Newfield](#).



Job opportunities

STIR Education Uganda Partnerships Manager

The ideal candidate will have at least 4 years' experience (with at least 2 years in grassroots education), a good knowledge of the East African education context, clear leadership skills, good 'start-up' experience and a strong commitment to working in partnership. [More information.](#)



STIR Education Programme Manager

The Uganda Programme Manager will have excellent skills in partnership/ relationship management; be a very positive and solution focused person; be extremely organised. The ideal candidate will have at least 3 years' experience (with at least 2 years in grassroots education), a good knowledge of the East African context, clear leadership skills and good 'start-up' experience. [More information.](#)

Call for journal articles

Special issue of the *Journal of Communication and Language Arts* on Reading, Literacy and the Burden of Underdevelopment in Africa

The call states, "We seek research-oriented studies which may include but are not limited to reading engagement, motivation, comprehension of digital and print-based texts, content area reading, digital literacies, 21st century literacy competences, language and literacy education, broad discussions of issues relating to literacy education and policy proposals for improving reading and language education." The deadline for submissions is 16 May 2014.

In the field

The African Storybook Project Research Network

The African Storybook Project Research Network (ASReN) is a network of researchers, students, and others who are interested in research on the [African Storybook Project](#) (ASP) (see previous newsletter) and related areas. The purpose of ASReN is to bring scholars (virtually) together and to serve as a platform for discussions, sharing of ideas and news, and possibly also collaborations. [The website](#) is still under construction, but is expected to launch in May 2014. The advisory board consists of Bonny Norton (chair), George Openjuru, Mastin Prinsloo, Suzanne Romaine, and Ephraim Mhlanga. See the video: [The African Storybook Project: Questions for Research](#). For more information or to join the network, please contact the webmaster, Espen Stranger-Johannessen (espensj@gmail.com).

Reports from conferences and other events

BAAL Conference 2013: 'Opening New Lines of Communication in Applied Linguistics' Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, September 5-7, 2013

Report of Language in Africa SIG track papers and meeting

The four papers presented various aspects of language policy and practice in education in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda.





Baleeta and Islei reported their interim findings on the teaching of literacy in Primary 1 in Ugandan government schools. Literacy skills are not improving as was hoped when a new Thematic Curriculum for Primary 1- 3, to be taught through local languages, was introduced in 2007. Their project is based in a particular District of Uganda, involving the local university, the Primary Teachers' College, especially Tutors responsible for in-service support, District and Municipality inspectors and seven well-regarded schools. The aim is to produce a 'refresher course' for in-service teachers in early literacy. They highlighted that they have found a problem that is more fundamental than methods and materials: the curriculum hardly provides any syllabus content or guidance for teaching literacy through a Bantu language. They noted that this must be due to the gradual loss of knowledge of teaching in 'the vernacular' since Independence; English has almost completely permeated the Ugandan education system. However, through their ethnographic and collaborative approach the researchers have found strong local interest and underlying expertise in literacy in the local language. Teachers respond very positively to reviving their knowledge of the traditional syllabic method, known as 'Alifu'. However, the researchers cautioned that this method is restricted, especially in developing sound awareness and reading stories from early on. They are exploring how to develop the method within the 2007 Thematic Curriculum with the seven teachers in their classrooms.

Baleeta and Islei are grateful to BAAL for supporting their project through the Linguistic Activities Fund 2013-14, and enabling Margaret Baleeta to present at the conference through the Chris Brumfit Scholarship.

Ansre reported on her survey of the implementation of the Ghana language policy in education in Primary One classrooms. This research is preliminary to her PhD proposal. Ghana has a particularly complex history of language in education policy, and is still finding it difficult to address the multilingual and linguistic complexity of lower primary classrooms. Currently the government has chosen 11 Ghanaian languages that can be used as medium of instruction from Kindergarten 1 – Primary class 3. Like most Sub-Saharan African countries, Ghana is highly multilingual, and there is wide variation in the number of speakers of a single language, and great diversity of languages spoken within the urban centres. This frequently makes the selection of the language to be used in a primary school a very sensitive issue. Ansre sampled monolingual, bilingual and multilingual schools in the Ga district and Volta Region. She found that not only are weak teacher training and lack of resources a widespread problem, the actual choice of language creates particular difficulties in particular schools: for example, the teacher may not be fluent in the language, or there may be a high proportion of pupils with a different mother tongue from the language of the school. Ansre concluded that the challenges of providing education through Ghanaian languages needs to be addressed through context sensitive materials and methods, not a 'one size fits all' approach.

These first two papers highlighted the problems in pedagogy that can result from lack of research into language and literacy acquisition in African languages, and lack of research into sociolinguistic contexts. The next paper by Anku was more closely aligned with the theme of the conference – new lines of communication.

Anku focussed on the influence of social media on student writing, with the particular emphasis that in countries like Ghana where English is the most powerful official language of the country, but has to be learned by the majority through school education (ESL), the effect of social media on students' writing is particularly significant. Parents, media and policy makers in Ghana



are concerned that students' performance in English is deteriorating country-wide. Anku collected data from three sites commonly used in Ghana - Facebook, Twitter and Whatsup – to establish the frequency of non-standard usages in grammar, lexis, orthography and punctuation. She complemented this with questionnaires and interviews, and matched the results with the types and frequency of language errors in students' essays and exercises. She found several correspondences, especially in the use of abbreviations and punctuation. Anku suggested that more work on pronunciation will help students with spelling.

The presentation raised very interesting questions, for example: why should this be perceived as more of a problem in Ghana than in the UK? Is the emphasis on accuracy an example of language insecurity, sometimes expressed through negative attitudes to the development of new varieties of English, even as used by the educated? Or is the spread of inaccuracies a justified fear? In a sociolinguistic (ESL) context where there is less everyday use of standard English for learners to hear and read, are young people less aware of the difference between standard and non-standard forms? But peer group non-standard usages and lack of reading are not confined to Africa ...

Wildsmith-Cromarty's presentation on the potential role for Kiswahili in South Africa gave us the opportunity to view language policy in education from a different perspective. In post-apartheid SA there are now 11 official languages. Is there more political will towards developing the use of African languages than in other Sub-Saharan countries? One difference seems to be the focus on using them in Higher Education: in 2014 the University of KwaZulu-Natal is becoming officially bilingual in isiZulu and English. Yet in South Africa there also seem to be similar problems to other African countries due to parents' perception of English as the means to upward mobility, and the complexity of using African languages when the pupils in a school may well not speak the same home language (see Ansre's paper). Wildsmith-Cromarty has begun to explore the possibility of introducing Kiswahili as a way out of the dilemmas – noting that not only is it an official Language of Wider Communication in East Africa, but that social attitudes in SA may be favourable as it was used as a language of 'the struggle' among ANC cadres training in East Africa at the time. The focus in SA at present is on developing and promoting the African languages, and the role of English is being questioned. Kiswahili may at least be perceived as *African*. Using questionnaires and interviews, Wildsmith-Cromarty investigated attitudes and identity issues amongst a sample of university students, and those in the informal sector. She found that 89% considered Kiswahili favourably in a range of domains, mainly for travel and tourism, followed by trade, education and culture. This research shows a way into local investigations into cultural values that are affecting language policies and practices.

Report on the BAAL SiG LiA Workshop: Reading Methodologies in African Languages, SOAS, University of London, January 17, 2014

The seminar was held from 13h00 – 18h00 at SOAS and was hosted by Lutz Marten. It had been organized by the following BAAL members: Caroline McGlynn, Lutz Marten, Ross Graham and Rosemary Wildsmith-Cromarty, who also led the seminar. There were 30 participants and 7 presenters.



The opening address, *Reading in African Languages: Research and Practice* by Rosemary Wildsmith-Cromarty set the tone for the afternoon by providing an overview of the current debates in the field. She distinguished between two major areas of focus in Reading and Literacy research: reading as an individual, psycholinguistic and cognitive process with emphasis on the structure of language and the mechanics of reading on one hand, and reading as a social, often collective experience with literacy being emphasised as social practice/s. The overview then covered the implications for reading pedagogy based on the different perspectives, and research initiatives in South Africa addressing these areas. The appropriateness of current methodologies in use in African classrooms was questioned. This led to the key question to be addressed by the seminar: if the reading process is different for learners reading in an African language which is structurally different from many European languages, including English, how should instructional techniques be adapted to cater for this? Could the solution lie in a mixed-methods approach, which would then have serious implications for teacher training in Africa?

The rest of the seminar was arranged thematically with the first theme focusing on reading processes, and the second on successful pedagogic interventions. With reference to the first theme, Elizabeth Pretorius (*The use of eye tracking technology to study reading development in African languages*) and Sandra Land (*Zulu orthography and reading*) presented their research on the application of eye-tracking technology to reading processes in the African languages. Their position is that given the agglutinative, transparent orthography of most languages within the proto-Bantu group, we cannot assume that processes and norms for reading will be the same as those for other languages, especially English. A further distinction was made between Bantu languages with a conjunctive orthography and those with a disjunctive orthography. Pretorius presented her research on reading development at the Foundation Phase in Zulu, Northern Sotho and English, whilst Land focused on the reading behaviour of competent adult speakers of Zulu. Both researchers explored the possible effects of orthographic features and differences on reading processes.

The second theme contained presentations by Andrea Kiso on a teacher training project in Malawi (*Focusing on language structure: a literacy project in Malawi*), Anne Smyth on a bilingual reading project in Swaziland (*Asifundzeni: An intervention aimed at developing bilingual reading skills*), Jo Westbrook (*Towards a balanced approach to early reading in sub-Saharan Africa: phonics vs whole language continues*) on the challenges of appropriate teacher training for African languages, and Francoise Ugochukwu (*Functional Igbo (Nigeria) – the potential advantages of learning in dialect*) on learning in one of the dialects of the Igbo language through the 'Functional Igbo' method. Smyth's paper argued that children learn inappropriate ways of reading (i.e. decoding of phonemes and words as opposed to the construction of meaning) if their first experience of reading is in a 'foreign' language, i.e. English. She introduced a reading intervention, *Asifundzeni*, which worked with illustrated 'Big Books' in both languages as a way of focusing on meaning. The findings from her research show that regular exposure to books and reading the same text twice facilitate comprehension. Ugochukwu, in a similar vein, presented an intervention for learning Igbo consisting of a partly bilingual manual and DVD for primary school teachers, pupils and their families. The aim is to revive Igbo in a diasporic context by providing material in the home dialect in order to contribute to the language-of- instruction debate in Nigeria.



Both Kiso and Westbrook focused on the importance of appropriate teacher training for African educational contexts. Kiso's intervention focused on the language structure of Chichewa and the phonological and grammatical units in the pupil's indigenous mother tongues that may differ from those of Chichewa and therefore could create difficulties for teaching children to read Chichewa, the dominant language of instruction. A handbook has been developed for teacher training as a result of this project. Westbrook, on the other hand, problematized the emphasis on phonics teaching by donors and national assessments of early reading, stressing that the teaching of phonics requires adequate resources, teachers specialised in reading processes and a systematic approach. Without these in place, phonics teaching leads to rote learning and memorization rather than on deriving meaning from text. Westbrook thus argues for a more balanced approach as both phonics and word level work are appropriate for languages with transparent orthographies. This, she argues, prepares the way for the reading and comprehension of continuous text.

The ensuing discussions after each presentation yielded the following main points for reflection going forward:

1. Reading methodologies for the African languages need to consist of a balanced approach, taking into account the structure of the language and its orthography
2. Phonics instruction requires specific training and teaching skills otherwise it will relapse into a mechanical linking of sounds and rote learning
3. Teachers need to be trained for teaching meaning so that reading with comprehension is encouraged. Reading of continuous text facilitates this process
4. It is important to teach reading in the first language before teaching it in a second, especially in contexts where an ex-colonial language is the dominant medium of instruction as this facilitates comprehension
5. More appropriate materials are needed for teaching early reading skills. These should be designed for specific local contexts with the participation of teachers
6. Task-focused reading assessments may be better predictors of reading rate and reading proficiency especially for adults
7. Reading development and proficiency depends on regular exposure, abundant reading materials and practice
8. Bilingual approaches to reading where an ex-colonial language is the medium of instruction facilitate the construction of meaning and therefore are better predictors of eventual proficiency.



Publications

Archer, A. and Newfield. D. (eds.) (2014). *Multimodal approaches to research and pedagogy: Recognition, resources and access.* New York and Abingdon, Routledge.

The book takes a social justice approach to literacy, representation and communication, has an explanatory introductory chapter, and contains a collection of case studies from South Africa, focusing on multimodality in education.

Ekanjume-Ilongo, B. (2013). *Phonology made easy for novices.* Lambert Academic Publishers.

The book is intended for use by students who are studying Linguistics for the first time and are being introduced to Phonology as novices. From the author's experience as a Phonetics and Phonology teacher, such students find it difficult to adjust with the new symbols and terminology they are meeting for the first time. The book therefore tries to make students who are interested in language to understand the importance of knowing phonology, and introduces the main units and concepts of the discipline. Since the book is mainly intended as an introduction to phonology for beginners, it goes straight into the fundamental component of phonology – which is the phoneme – and gives the students many exercises that will enable them to put into practice what they have learned theoretically.

An additional element about the book is that the author has preferred to emphasize on segmental phonology, syllables, and a brief mention of tone, stress and intonation, in order to give the students a firm and thorough background of phonology that will prepare them for a more advanced phonological study. With this comprehensive foundation students will be able to deal with more abstract topics later with a better knowledge of what is expected of them. The book contains many exercises adapted from various sources like Laurel J. Brinton and Donna M. Brinto, Dillard (1972), Smitherman (1977), Mehmet Yavas (2011) to equip the students with enough practical work and thus make them familiar with the different phonological concepts.

About the author: Dr Beatrice EKANJUME ILONGO is a holder of PhD in Linguistics from the University of Yaoundé 1- Cameroon. She has been teaching a broad range of Linguistics courses in the university for the past 13 years (Cameroon, Burundi and Lesotho). She is presently a Senior Lecturer and Head of English Department at the National University of Lesotho. Her major research interests are in Phonetics/Phonology, Morphology, African Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics and other related disciplines. She has several publications in these areas in accredited refereed journals.

Kalel, T. M. (2014). *Essai de grammaire kanyok -L32- Phonologie, Morphologie, Syntaxe (Essay of kanyok grammar -L32- Phonology, Morphology, Syntax).* Editions René Descartes, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Kinshasa/ René Descartes Editions, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, University of Kinshasa.

This book is a synchronic description of this language belonging to the luba zone of Guthrie, description derived according to functional method of Luc Bouquiaux. Phonology presents tones,



phonemes, vocalic length, syllabic structure, combinations and frequency of sounds. Morphology presents the description of morphophonemes, and morphotonemes with rules of representation. It gives an outline of grammatical categories from minimal utterance, derivation's and composition's mechanisms, syntagmatic structures, conjugation paradigm. Syntax presents grammatical categories which can function as subject, predicate and complement. It presents also primary relations, allowed combinations and incompatibilities. Syntax also analyses the sentence according to it is simple, complex, marginal, marked or non-marked. Marked sentence has mechanisms as emphasis, interrogation, exclamation, injunction, passivation, negation and modalisation. Complex sentence examines four relations: juxtaposition, coordination, subordination and relativisation.

About the author: Timothée MUKASH KALEL is Professor of Congolese languages, African linguistics, morphology and syntax of bantu languages and contrastive analysis French-Bantu languages. My thesis at University of Sorbonne in 1982 described phonology, morphology and syntagmatic of Kanyok language.

Book review

Mumin, M. & Versteegh, K. (eds.) (2014). *The Arabic script in Africa: studies in the use of a writing system* (Studies in Semitic languages and linguistics, 71). Leiden: Brill. Hardback, 400 pages, 2 colour maps, 134 € / 174\$. ISBN13: 9789004256798. E-ISBN: 9789004256804.

Reviewed by David Roberts. For the complete review with references, please see Written Language and Literacy, 17:2 (2014). Reproduced with permission.

This book explores how Arabic script has been used to write African languages other than Arabic, a written representation commonly known as Ajami. These tend to be diverse and idiosyncratic, exhibiting a high degree of variation between languages, writers (Luffin, 313) and manuscripts (Bondarev, 113).

The extensive list of references to Arabic script usage in Africa (Mumin, 63-76) attests to a growing interest in this subject, but this is apparently the first time that an entire edited collection has been devoted to it. Most of the contributions are based on papers presented at TASIA 1 (*The Arabic Script in Africa – Diffusion, Usage, Diversity and Dynamics of a Writing System*) a workshop that took place on 6 - 7th April 2010 at the University of Cologne, Germany.

Although the use of Ajami is well documented in Hausa, Swahili and Fulfulde, it is usually thought of as being quite a rare and isolated phenomenon. Mumin puts paid to this myth, listing – and illustrating with a colour map (45) – no less than 80 attested languages and a further 15 cases that need further verification. And tantalisingly, contributors repeatedly express their confidence that many more sources are waiting to be discovered (Mumin, 49; Bondarev, 109; Humery, 193; Vydrin, 209).

After a general introduction (Mumin & Versteegh, 1-22), there are two overviews, covering Arabic script and its spread to non-African languages (Daniels, 25-39), and Arabic script in Africa (Mumin, 41-76). From then on the book is structured geographically, with North, West,



East and South Africa treated in turn. Overall, the geographical spread is impressive, and not limited to the African continent: there is also evidence from Brazil and the Caribbean (Dobronravin, 159-172).

Since Ajami spread with the influence of Islam, most sources are religious texts. But there is an array of other genres too: texts about Islamic jurisprudence, education and language, marginal notes in medical and astrological treatises, personal correspondence, chronicles, hunter incantations, travel diaries, an attestation of divorce, an election pamphlet, homework, Bible translations, currency inscriptions, newspapers, genealogies, poetry, songs, nursery rhymes, amulets, treaties, contracts, bills, internet forums and text messages.

With a diversity of sources comes a diversity of field conditions and methods. While Breedveld is poring over faded privately owned manuscripts speckled with dirt and kept in a leather bag to protect them from harmattan dust and mildew (148), Souag is investigating the Facebook pages of a confident, connected middle class who spend their leisure time in urban cybercafés (94-103). While Humery is deftly conducting semi-structured interviews with somewhat reluctant clerics in the mosques and Qur'ānic schools of Senegal (176), Dumestre, concerned that his presence as an outsider may be counter-productive, is sending a friend who is a Muslim cleric to a far-flung town in Mali to personally hand-copy manuscripts that by now are fully a century old (and that are published here for the first time, 231-244).

The book is not devoid of human interest. In the north of Nigeria, a female writer, prolific in several literary genres, promotes women's literacy two centuries before the coining of the word feminism (Breedvelde, 146). Further south, the Qur'ān is translated into Yoruba by a Christian missionary, refreshingly broadminded but apparently unaware that a translation by a non-Muslim outsider stands little chance of ever being accepted by the local population (Warren-Rothlin, 266). In a Brazilian plantation, an African slave killed in an uprising is found with a small book of prayers left dangling around his neck (Dobronravin, 166). In Cape Town, a Swedish beer brewer and philanthropist publishes a trilingual election pamphlet to canvas for votes among the influential "upper non-white class" of traders and craftsmen in the Cape Muslim community (Versteegh, 315-380).

Idiosyncratic transcription and transliteration conventions can make comparison of linguistic data between publications onerous. And Ajami, with its complex mixture of linguistic, orthographic, calligraphic and exegetical variation, not to mention spelling mistakes and degraded texts, presents particularly formidable challenges. The editors have opted for a mixed system of graphemic transliteration that is innovative, whilst honouring the Arabist literature (Mumin & Versteegh, 5-6). The introduction untangles these complexities with great clarity, and the ensuing chapters apply the transcription and transliteration conventions in a thoroughly systematic way, with a fine attention to detail, accuracy and readability. The book is packed with the minutiae of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, exploring the relationships between writing, speech and meaning in Ajami, local Arabic and standard Arabic.

Any writing system that is invented for one language undergoes changes when it is borrowed to represent another, to take into account the linguistic structure of that language. In Africa this may include phenomena such as seven- and nine-vowel systems, vowel length, diphthongs, syllabic nasals, palatal affricates, retroflex and labio-velar stops, palatalisation, labialisation, nasalisation and tone. Interestingly, additional letter shapes are rarely added to the



basic inventory (Daniels, 30; Bondarev, 138). Instead, there is a strong preference for amplifying the basic stock by the addition of diacritics (Souag 99; Breedveld, 145).

Researchers in several domains will find this collection a useful addition to their libraries. It invites grammatologists to look beyond the usual pre-occupation with Roman script, and takes Semiticists to the peripheries of their linguistic family. Comparatists interested in proto-forms will find inspiration in Bondarev's reconstruction of Old Kanembu (138), while those involved in developing practical orthographies for previously unwritten languages will gravitate towards Warren-Rothlin's contribution (261-289). Several of the articles adopt an ethnographic approach which will appeal to anthropologists, and the social context that forms the backdrop to all the contributions will speak to sociolinguists and historians.

Tell us about your research!

Send us a short profile (one paragraph) of the research you are undertaking on language or literacy education in Africa by August 31, 2014, for inclusion in our next issue.