

AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Perhaps the basic function of the Languages Section of the Institute is, by its research, to help to provide the material urgently required for the preparation of teaching courses in Ghanaian languages, and accordingly its research has so far been devoted chiefly to the analysis of a number of the more important of these languages: Akan (Twi-Fante), Ewe, Dagbane, and Ga. It is proposed to describe different aspects of this work, as well as other research undertakings, in subsequent issues.

The analysis of several of the numerically less important of the languages spoken in Ghana is being carried out by the Summer Institute of Linguistics under a Co-operative Agreement with the Institute of African Studies. A report contributed by the Summer Institute follows.

LANGUAGE RESEARCH BY THE SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS

The Summer Institute of Linguistics is at present engaged in a study of some of the languages of Northern Ghana. This programme, begun in October, 1962, is being carried on in co-operation with the Institute of African Studies. It complements, in certain respects, the work of the members of the Institute's staff in the linguistic field (an account of which will be included in a subsequent issue of this Review). It aims to make an intensive study of some of the Northern languages, including a full analysis of their phonological and grammatical structure and a comprehensive collection of their vocabulary. In addition, comparative studies will be made, and it is hoped to collect a variety of textual material, including oral history, songs, and all types of folklore.

So far linguistic work has started in Kusal (October, 1962), Kasem (November, 1962), Basare (November, 1962), Kokomba (November, 1962), Vagala (December, 1962), Sisala (December, 1962), Bimoba (November, 1963), and Dagaare (November, 1963).

In each language-area a team of two members of the Institute is learning to speak the particular language as well as attempting an analysis of it. The teams are living in villages chosen for their suitability as representative of the language concerned and as having certain minimum necessities such as an all-

the-year-round water supply. Teams spend periods of from four to six months in their areas before coming south for a break of a few weeks and in order to buy supplies and work on their material.

During the early stages much time is given to learning analysis. In spite of this, however, a preliminary statement of the phonological analysis of some of the languages has been made, including Basare, Konkomba, Kusal, Sisala and Vegala. Very similar preliminary statements should soon be ready for Bimoba and Kasem.

The analysis of the phonological structure of these languages will provide the basis for the drawing up of an alphabet in each language. This is being done, keeping in mind the desirability of having the orthographies of all the vernacular languages in Ghana as uniform as possible. On April 11th, 1964, a one day Conference on orthographies was held at the Institute of African Studies. This was attended by about fifty people, all of whom are concerned with the orthographical problems of the vernacular languages of Ghana.

It has been possible to carry out a number of surveys, gathering linguistic material in several other languages, including Busa, Chakosi and Tampulma (Tamprusi). In these three languages a reasonable sample of material was obtained, and a brief phonological and grammatical sketch of the languages has been written. A number of texts has also been collected.

In addition to field work the Institute of Linguistics has arranged training courses in descriptive linguistics. These are introductory courses designed to give an understanding of the basic principles on which modern descriptive linguistics has developed. The first such course was run at the Institute of African Studies from March 12th to April 11th, 1963. A second course was conducted on the premises of the University of Nigeria at Enugu from December 16th, 1963, to January 17th, 1964. A total of just over fifty students attended these training courses. It is planned to have a similar training course each year.

For those who are already engaged in language work linguistic workshops have been run, the first from April 16th to April 26th, 1963, and the second from April 8th to April 24th, 1964. These workshops have provided an opportunity for those engaged in language analysis to discuss

their problems and to work on particular questions relating to the languages which they are studying, under supervision. Work has been attempted on about twenty languages at these workshops. Though the majority of these have been Ghanaian languages, there have also been participants from Upper Volta, Ivory Coast and Nigeria, working on languages spoken in those countries. Arrangements are being made for these workshops to be continued at regular intervals.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics plans to develop its work in such a way that similar field studies can be undertaken in other parts of West Africa. Already two field teams are at work in Eastern Nigeria, and it is hoped that four others will soon be located in four more Nigerian language-areas. Much linguistic research is needed throughout West Africa and the Institute looks forward to co-operating closely with other bodies interested in this field.

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