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Editorial

This volume brings together seven empirical studies that re-evaluate established linguistic theories, challenge long-standing typological classifications, and examine the political and cultural work of language in contemporary Nigeria. Spanning formal phonology, acoustic phonetics, formal semantics, syntax, critical stylistics, political discourse analysis, and sociolinguistic endangerment, these contributions showcase the methodological breadth and theoretical vitality of African linguistics. Together, the papers in the volume demonstrate that taking indigenous language structures and localized communicative practices seriously does more than fill regional gaps, it reshapes global linguistic frameworks.

The volume opens with two studies that challenge long-held assumptions regarding sound systems in Benue-Congo languages. In the first contribution on Bìròm vowel harmony, Nkechi Ukaegbu confronts the traditional typological classification that places Platoid languages within an *ATR-less zone* devoid of tongue root harmony. Drawing on acoustic measurements - specifically F1, F2, B1, and CPP - from 1,650 tokens elicited from ten native speakers, the study demonstrates that Bìròm operates a trace or incomplete Advanced Tongue Root (ATR) harmony system. Mid-height vowels interact such that [+ATR] and [-ATR] mid vowels do not co-occur within a root, with F1 and B1 serving as the primary acoustic correlates. By demonstrating that instrumental acoustic evidence can overturn broad areal generalizations, Ukaegbu recommends a revision of Bìròm orthography and calls for similar acoustic investigations across understudied Platoid languages. Moving to phonological processes in Yoruba, the second study re-examines the widely held view that Yoruba strictly disprefers hiatus and deploys elision, assimilation, or coalescence to preserve a CV syllable structure. Utilizing perceptual evidence alongside tonal and length diagnostics across native speaker data, Mayowa Oyinloye argues that Yoruba tolerates hiatus far more than it resolves it. When hiatus occurs, the language predominantly resorts to heterosyllabification rather than vowel elision or assimilation. The study repositions Yoruba within African language typology as a language that permits adjacent vowel sequences, demonstrating that phonetic arbitrariness - rather than a universal drive toward an unmarked CV structure - drives repair strategies when they do occur.

Shifting to the formal interface between structure and meaning, two subsequent articles apply rigorous analytical tools to West Benue-Congo languages. Addressing a persistent

gap in a domain previously dominated by syntactic accounts, the third paper by Olaide Akinwande investigates the semantics of content questions in Yoruba. Integrating Information Structure and Alternative Semantics, the study analyses in-situ content questions in spontaneous speech and demonstrates that they are not semantically identical to their ex-situ counterparts. Instead, in-situ content question operators carry three distinct pragmatic readings: clarity to resolve ambiguity, assurance to seek confirmation, and amazement or displeasure to express speaker stance. Furthermore, the paper refutes prior claims regarding verb/VP focus, showing that verb or VP focus systematically answers unrestricted content questions. The fourth paper by Usembo and Taiwo addresses syntactic and semantic variation by investigating why Edo possesses an unusually large inventory of thirty personal pronouns despite lacking morphological structural case. Combining naturalistic observations, key informant interviews, and media content analysis, the study reveals that structural case positions fail to explain pronominal selection. Instead, the authors argue that pronominal choice is dictated by thematic roles, proposing that the multiplicity of Edo personal pronouns stems from the grammaticalization of theta roles mediated through processes of permutation, adaptation, and cliticization.

Turning from internal grammar to language in use, two papers apply critical frameworks to persuasive discourse within contemporary Nigerian public life. The fifth article written by Bukunmi Adetunji extends Lesley Jeffries' Critical Stylistics framework to written religious-motivational discourse through an analysis of Pastor Sam Adeyemi's *Nigeria of My Dream*. Through qualitative analysis of strategic excerpts, the paper illustrates how noun choice, noun modification, and nominalization work alongside spatiotemporal framing to construct an ideology of national renewal. Noun choices establish key participants and cast the reader as an active agent; modifications project an envisioned future; and nominalization condenses processes while obscuring institutional agency. The study offers a replicable template for analyzing how religious leaders construct socio-political authority through print. Focusing on digital political rhetoric, Zubairu Malah in the sixth contribution investigates 200 campaign tweets from Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar during the 2019 Nigerian presidential election. Combining Classical Rhetoric, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Van Leeuwen's Legitimation framework, the study reveals contrasting communicative strategies: Buhari leveraged ethos to legitimize himself and his policies through authorization and rationalization, whereas Atiku deployed pathos to delegitimize the incumbent through moral evaluation. The findings highlight how

ethical authority and emotional manipulation function as complementary mechanisms in African digital political campaigns.

This volume concludes with a sociolinguistic study which assesses language endangerment in Uhàmì, a West Benue-Congo language spoken in Southwestern Nigeria. Analyzing direct elicitations of 101 basic Swadesh lexical items across 14 speakers in eight age demographics, Tolulope Adeniyi reveals a stark intergenerational gap with speakers aged 30 and below demonstrating severe vocabulary loss - scoring between 10% and 40% - while performance increased progressively among older cohorts, reaching 91% for ages 71 to 80. The study concludes that Uhàmì is undergoing rapid, non-neurological lexical attrition driven by a failure of intergenerational transmission, language contact, and shifting language attitudes.

Across their diverse empirical sites, the seven contributions in this volume converge on three core imperatives for contemporary linguistics. First, they underscore the necessity of empirical and instrumental rigour - whether through acoustic signal analysis in Praat, formal semantics, or corpus-based discourse frameworks - over unexamined typological assumptions. Second, they advance theoretical expansion, illustrating how African language data refines global models across phonology, syntax, and critical stylistics. Finally, they demonstrate a commitment to sociocultural and endangerment awareness, balancing formal structural analysis with critical reflections on how language mediates power, political legitimacy, and cultural survival. Readers are invited to engage with these rich insights, which collectively advance our understanding of African sound systems, structural mechanics, rhetorical power, and language vitality.

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