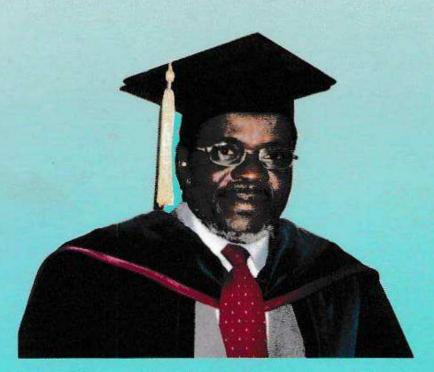
HUMANISM, GLOBALIZATION And THE RELEVANCE OF PHILOSOPHY

A festschrift in honour

of



Professor Udo Akpan Etuk

Edited By: Uduma O. Uduma Francis Etim

C Uduma Oji Uduma & Francis Etim

First Published, 2016

ISBN:978-0010109-9

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Published by: Inbonet Resources 58 Grace Bill Road, Eket Akwa Ibom State (08023561019)

Cover Design: Comm-watch Productions (63 Nwaniba Road, Uyo, AKS)

Printed by COMM-Watch Productions 63 Nwaniba Rd, Uyo

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DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS AND NIGERIAN LANGUAGES: A CHALLENGE TO THE NEW HUMANITIES

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Introduction

The whole world spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary....They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them in the fire Come ... let us build for ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching heaven. Let us make a name for ourselves, so that we do not get scattered all over the world' (Genesis 11:1-8).

Language is very important to man and to God who created man. Scripture says according the passage above, that the whole world spoke one language in the beginning, until man misbehaved. Man wanted to make a name for himself by building a tower to avoid being scattered. The question one may ask is: 'what is the connection between language and bricks?' God knows best, and the descendants of Noah saw the power in language. So, they decided to build for themselves both a city and a tower. But unfortunately, due to their impudence, God decided to confuse them through mutual unintelligibility.

Lead paper presented at the 11th Meeting of the Association of Nigerian Languages Teachers (ANLAT), 6-9, December, 2005 at the University of Calabar. I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the 11th Annual Conference of the Association of Nigerian Language Teachers (ANLAT). I will also like to thank the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN). Aba for giving me an opportunity to present some parts of this talk at its Lecture Series in October, 2005.

He scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the tower of Babel. The message here is clear, that is, language is a strong and important force that should be handled with care and it should be properly harnessed and developed.

Every language has the right to be accounted for in any community, and a right to exist, whether it forms a 'majority' or a 'minority' language. Language is an extremely important aspect of a community. It is an important index of identity. It is used for all communicative functions that a community requires, and it serves as a repository of a people's culture, history and exploits. In fact it is language that differentiates the homo sapiens from other animals. It is so important to man that every community and every government should address linguistic issues with the same vigour that infrastructures are developed.

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With this background to the topic at hand, we will like to begin with an exposition of the key terms in the paper, namely, Documentary Linguistics, Nigerian languages and the New Humanities.

The paper is discussed in 7 sections. We present some background here, followed by sections 1 through 3, in which we explore the key terms in the paper, after which we present a plan for the documentation of Nigerian languages, with some illustrations in section 6 tion 5 discusses the main challenges we face in dealing

with Nigerian languages, and sections 6 and 7 present several strategies for coping with the problems and making the Nigerian languages relevant to Nigerians.

1. Documentary Linguistics

Documentary Linguistics is based on American Anthropological concerns about the disappearance of Amerindian languages. Boas (60) captures the picture very succinctly when he says that: "...much information can be gained by listening to conversations of natives and by taking part in their daily life, which, to the observer who has no command of the language, will remain entirely inaccessible". As a theoretical basis therefore, Documentary Linguistics draws from the Anthropological Ethnography of Speaking after Boas (1911), which was developed by Gumperz and Hymes (1964), and streamlined by Urban (1991).

Documentary Linguistics conforms to the times in terms of practice, tools and products. It is actually a response to the growing crises of language endangerment, and it deals with the record and representation of natural discourse. Since discourse is primary in Documentary Linguistics, then both description and analysis are secondary-products of the record of natural discourse which form the documentary corpus. Descriptive and explanatory materials like grammars, dictionaries, etc. annotate the documentary corpus. Documentary Linguistics curates texts, such that they can be both accessed and shared electronically using very special tools. It encourages researchers to collect and record a wide range of linguistic phenomena in genuine communicative situations, and it uses high quality sound and video recording to make sure that the results are the best possible record of the language.

The tradition for the new discipline is being set, and its specifications for analysis and what can be considered as best Linguistic practices are currently being worked out in the areas of data annotation and markup, electronic and card catalogue for linguistic data in digital archives, general ontologies, and what

should constitute the best practices for language documentation. The curation of linguistic data is also being explored. Being a new area, the modalities and detailed specifications for its concepts need to be worked out. Much of that is going on now.

There are many language documentation projects all over the world and some of them are currently working on different aspects of formalizing Documentary Linguistics. For instance, the E-MELD has had about four workshops on different aspects, the latest being in July, 2005, which critiqued the General Ontology for Linguistic Description, with the theme, 'Linguistic Ontologies and Data Categories for Language Resources'.

Language documentation is done in connection with digital archiving. Emphasis is placed on how natural discourse data can be represented, transcribed, preserved, disseminated and made accessible worldwide. And such access is only possible in the space of flows. The focus at this stage therefore, is setting the right traditions for its formalism in the areas of data annotation and markup, as well as electronic and card cataloguing for linguistic data, especially multi-media data in digital archives.

2. Methodology

Since a language documentation project aims to collect and create data in different media covering use of language in different social and cultural contexts, its priorities are to:

- create a range of high quality materials to support description;
 - enable the recovery of knowledge of the language even if all other resources are lost;
 - 3. generate resources in support of language research.

Language Documentation projects create materials in the following media, each of which has both strengths and weaknesses

 Video has immediate and rich authenticity. It is multidimensional in content and it can be produced by the community without the assistance of the researcher. On the other hand, it is more difficult to process and store, and it needs a lot of annotation which is time consuming and difficult to preserve. 2. Audio contains less information, but it is simple. Audio files are easier to work with and there are several software for editing and presenting sound.

Text this is the traditional way. It is compact, stable and 3. easy to store, access, index and revise. But when it is used to document language, it requires a lot of analyses and abstraction which can sometimes lose information that

were in the original event.

Meta data this is data about data. It is structured 4. information describing characters of events, recordings and other data files. It is in form of text, but it is an independent media. Its collection is dependent on the type of materials described e.g. Catalogue (speakers, collectors, time, place of recording, etc.), description (content, relationship to other resources, etc), technical (performance and preservation information), administrative (responsibilities, access statements, etc)

Basically, the methods, terminology and media all aim at making knowledge about a language accessible to a wide range of audience academics, community members, learners, teachers, etc.

Given the nature of this new enterprise, special tools are needed. Of course, the basic fieldwork materials are still useful, like writing materials, recording (audio/video) equipment, etc, but in addition to this, computational resources are needed for creating, describing, analyzing, viewing, querying or generally using electronic language data. Tools of application programmes, components, fonts, style sheets, converter programmes, etc. are therefore very important.

1.2 Key Players in Language Documentation
Several groups of people are involved in language documentation. What principles should govern each group in terms of behaviour? Right now, it appears as though researchers are operating independently and there are no professional requirements. But different bodies are preparing some guidelines. For instance, the Australian Linguistic Society, The American Anthropological Association, The Electronic Metastructure for

Endangered Language Documentation (E-MELD), etc. are addressing different aspects of documentation. Even African Languages Technology Initiative (ALT-I) is working out something for African languages. Such guidelines are necessary, especially with the advent of global publication of the World Wide Web. All that is being done covers the different key players in language documentation like the funding agencies, the archivers, the researchers made up of Field Linguists, Anthropologists, IT Specialists, etc, the speaker communities, the users of the languages and the general public.

The study, documentation and teaching of Nigerian languages should contribute to this formalism, and it is believed that what is being done in the University of Uyo, is a step towards that

direction.

1.3 Some Language Documentation Projects

A lot of work is being done on different aspects of language documentation. Most of the projects are in Europe and America. Some of these include among others: Electronic Metastructure for Endangered Language Documentation (E-MELD), Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (HRELP), Summer Institute of Nigeria (SIL), Open Language Archives Community (OLAC), African Languages Technology Initiatives (ALT-I), West African Languages Archives (WALA), etc. The ALT-I is based in Ibadan. This is important to us. You may visit its website for more information. The West African Language Archive (WALA) is also close. This is one of the archives housing West African data. Currently, the WALA which is a result of a cooperation between the Universities of Bielefeld, Cocody and Uyo, has multi-media data on Ega, Iko and Ibibio. Data on more languages are needed.

Some of these projects include:

* E-MELD (http://emeld.org/)

GOLD

* SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC BEST PRACTICES IN DIGITAL LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION (http://emeld.org/school/

* QUERY ROOMS

THE LINGUIST LIST

- Hosted by SOAS, *HRELP (http://hrelp.org/) London
- * SIL (http://www.sil.org/)
- * OLAC (http://www.language-archives.org/)
- * ALT-I (http://www.alt-i.org/projects.htm/)
 * WALA (http:coral.lili.uni-bielefeld.de/LangDoc/EGA/)

The Linguistic Situation In Nigeria 2.

Let us now look at the linguistic situation in Nigeria. It is rather complicated. Within a hierarchy of a geopolitical structure and ethnic groupings, there are over 500 languages and dialects. There is an official dichotomy between major languages (i.e. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and the minor languages (i.e. all others). The three major languages have some kind of a 'national' status, and they enjoy a lot more government patronage from both the Federal and State governments where they are spoken. Perhaps due to this, awareness has been created in communities where these languages are spoken and the communities are more involved in their development. On the other hand, the minor languages are at different levels of gross underdevelopment. The huge number may not be the only problem responsible for this lack of attention or interest. It may be more a problem of lack of advocacy and inadequate knowledge of the importance of the language of a people to both its speakers and humanity.

Nigerian Languages 2.1

The Ethnologue, one of the current references for Nigerian languages in fact records 515 languages for Nigeria. Out of these languages, 505 are still living indigenous languages, 8 are extinct while 2 are second languages (Grimes 2000:166). Although Ethnologue's sub-divisions do not exactly fit the current Nigerian geopolitical partitioning, they provide a fair linguistic guide, and we adopt it here for some illustration.

These languages are spoken by about 373 ethnic groups (Otite 2000:14-20). Geopolitically, Nigeria is divided into manageable compartments: six geopolitical zones (South South, South East, South West, North East, North Central and North West, and these are further subdivided into 36 States plus a Federal Capital Territory, and these are also further subdivided into 774 Local Government Areas. The linguistic situation, given this complex geopolitical background is simply chaotic.

We illustrate this level of chaos with South Eastern Nigeria, which is one of the most linguistically fragmented areas of Nigeria. Grimes (2000) records about 121 languages. From the index, she has

327 - 448.

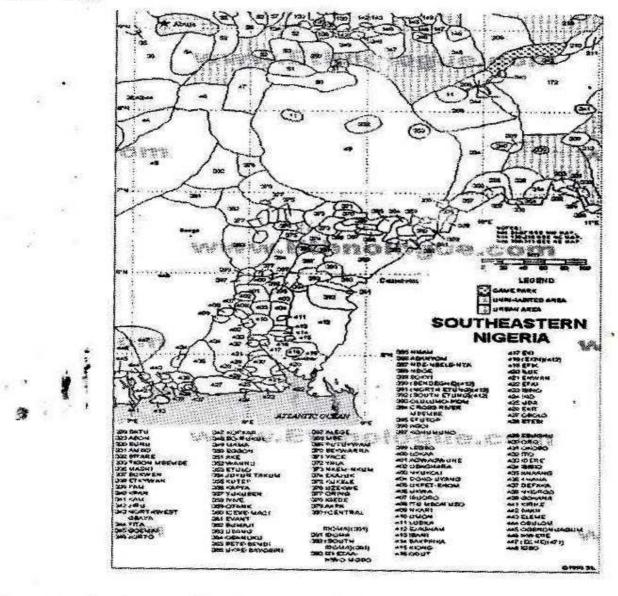
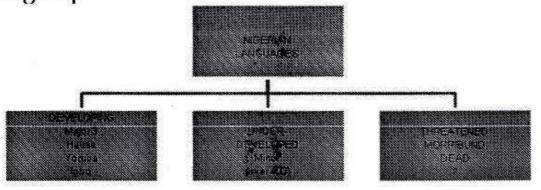


Illustration for the South eastern Nigeria (Grimes 2000)

2.3 The Status of Nigerian Languages

On the basis of the dichotomy mentioned earlier, Nigerian languages can be classified into three groups: developing languages made up of the major three languages, underdeveloped languages made up of about 500 minor languages at different stages of underdevelopment, and a small number that is highly endangered made up of moribund and dead languages. Grimes (2000) records eight in this last group.



The status of Nigerian languages

3. The Humanities

3.1 Humanism

Let us now explore the third key term in our paper, the 'New Humanities'. The word 'new' implies that there is an 'old' version. It is derived from 'Humanism', and we look at Humanism from a philosophical perspective. This is a movement that attempted to restore the universality of human values during the Classical, Scholasticism of the middle ages. Key proponents of Humanism' include: Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Sigmund Freud, etc. Humanism tried to revive the languages, philosophy and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome. It provided a way of looking at the world through the eyes of humans, their nature and their place in the universe. Of course, there were several versions both religious and non religious. It taught that every person has both dignity and worth and should therefore command the respect of every other person. But unfortunately, in an attempt to restore man's dignity, it replaced the position of God with man and encouraged man to be the measure of all things. This created a problem.

3.2 The New Humanism

In order to remedy this problem, the New Humanism according to Udo Etuk (1999) developed to put back God in the correct place. The New Humanism appreciates simple values and agrees that although man is the highest of all God's creatures, He (God) designed everything else for man's benefit. Therefore, since the environment is God's gift to man, man should treat it with respect. Man can use science and technology to develop, explore and improve the environment. He can even exploit it, but he suffers for it, and problems arise when he exploits it. Currently, we can see a heightened interest in man's problems, some of these are linguistic, social, ethical, political, economic, etc. and they sometimes involve investigations from related disciplines.

3.3 The Humanities

Along these lines, the Humanities have been used to cover studies that emphasize the cultural aspects of man's civilization. It is indeed derived from *Humanism*. In the light of our discussion on the New Humanism therefore, it follows that we are dealing here with a new approach to these studies which assume the supremacy of God as creator of the universe; and man's respect for God's creation, even with the use of science and technology to explore, develop and improve the environment. A major transmitter of culture is language. The intangible aspect of our culture can only be transmitted through language. Therefore, language occupies an important place in man's dealings with the environment; Science and Technology should be used to explore, develop, store and preserve it.

Linguistics, the science of language has, like other humanistic disciplines, strived in recent times to use science and technology in its quest for language Universals, as well as Rara and Rarissima. Documentary Linguistics has tried to develop a methodology and indeed it is setting a tradition that can accommodate several languages at a time, with a focus on the endangered languages, such that all languages can be attended to. Endangered ones are revived and live ones are developed. This important aspect of man's culture deserves a lot of attention within the Humanities. Every discipline

uses language.

4. Plan for Documenting Nigerian Languages

The complicated linguistic situation in Nigeria should not be used as a continued excuse for not developing Nigerian languages. We do agree that all the languages cannot be attended to at the same time. What we need is a well thought out and worked out plan for documenting them. All agencies must be involved. Professional groups like Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN), Association of Nigerian Languages Teachers (ANLAT), National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Departments of Linguistics, the Government, etc. should all collaborate in this.

A possible plan for documenting Nigerian languages could involve a tripartite effort involving the government, the speakers and the specialists. But first, a proper language policy, which should be pluralistic in nature to cover every language, perhaps in stages. Then, such a policy can be implemented using the three-tier government structure, and the six geopolitical structures already put in place. Each L.G.A. should have an L.G.A. language to be chosen at that level, preferably the language spoken in the L.G.A. headquarters. The L.G.A, which is the level of the grassroots, should play as active a role as the State and Federal levels in the development and choice of an L.G.A. language. Each Local Government Area should have a language committee to look at language matters. Such a committee should be made up of members of the L.G.A. who may not be linguists. Linguistic specialists can be invited to provide the technical know-how, especially with regard to the corpus planning. Each State should have a state language, preferably the language spoken in the State capital. There should be a State Language Committee to address linguistic issues. This way, several languages can be addressed at the same time. This proposal does not affect the major languages. Those are already developing.

4.1 Documenting Nigerian Languages for Development and Archiving

In the light of these, what should we be doing with regard to

language documentation in Nigeria? The area to cover is both vast and fruitful. We need to harness all our resources so that we can document Nigerian languages both for development and archiving.

The vibrant living and developing languages should be documented for development. Such development should aim at different things including producing databases to be converted to dictionaries, grammars, orthographies, etc. This should also aid the communities that speak these languages in the preservation of the languages in developing teaching materials, in planning (both corpus and status) and revival of some languages that may be heading to a moribund stage.

Several benefits accrue to us for the development of Nigerian languages. These include: linguistic analyses, database of primary language data to support this, orthographies, dictionaries, text

collections, journal articles, primers, literary works, etc.

For those languages that are threatened, they should be documented with the sole aim of archiving. There should be a plan for regular conversion of data into an active format using XML files, or even tab-delimited text, etc.

Several benefits also accrue to us for the archiving of Nigerian languages. Primarily, we will have huge databases of transcribed and annotated language data, searchable corpora that can be accessed and shared worldwide in the space of flows. These data can be in multi-media forms, metadata, talking picture dictionaries, audio CDs, web pages, search engines, etc.

Let us illustrate briefly with two documentary situations from the Cross River State of Nigeria. Kiong is a moribund Upper Cross language spoken by the Akpab Okoyong people of Akpabuyo in Cross River State. The language is known by just about 20 people. The people do not speak it anymore, as Efik is spoken in the area as a first language. The language has no record or description, and there has been no work done on it whatsoever. A documentation of this language should be urgent, drastic and comprehensive. Discourse on every aspect of the language should be recorded immediately before these 20 people die, and such data converted to archiving format urgently. And then the description and analyses of different

aspects of the language can follow. The language needs to be revital sed and writing and reading materials produced so that it can be taught to the people who should be sensitized to show enough interest to learn it. In other words, it can be taught as a second language first, and then with time and more advocacy, it will be learned enough to resume its first language status in the homes of the Akpab Okoyong people.

On the other hand, Leggbó, another Upper Cross language spoken by the Aggbó people of Abi and Yakurr of Cross River State is a vibrant language still spoken by about 60,000 people. It also needs a record, (both audio and video) of discourse of various aspects of endeavour. This then can be developed into orthographies and other writing materials, descriptions, grammar, lexicons, dictionaries, story books, primers, etc.

5. The Challenges

We are faced with huge challenges in the documentation of Nigerian languages. Language documentation is an expensive venture, and we lack funding for such projects. Besides inadequate funding, we have inadequate facilities. This challenge is linked up with the first. Equipment for documentation are expensive. Very basic equipment like cameras (video and audio), computers (laptops, desktops) etc. are expensive. Even when some of these tools are available, many linguists in Nigeria and teachers do not show enough interest in them, and ignorance of the use of the facilities is another challenge. Our public utilities are not very steady. Power supply is epileptic. Due perhaps to inadequate manpower, we have excess teaching workload as teachers, which leaves very little time for research. Documenting Nigerian languages given the number of languages in Nigeria is a real challenge to the Humanities.

6. The Role of Some Bodies in Providing Coping Strategies

6.1 Ninlan

Although we are faced with several challenges, there are some coping strategies to help us document our languages. We have

Broken down these strategies for ease of handling into roles that the different key players in language documentation can play in Nigeria, beginning with NINLAN. We think that NINLAN should play more of a supervisory role for the different departments of Linguistics and Nigerian languages, as well as form a link with the government on issues pertaining to Nigerian languages. Specifically, NINLAN should:

 Create forums for education on current trends and work out best practices for Nigerian language documentation

2. Run workshops to demonstrate new technologies

 Set up working groups to develop different areas of Nigerian Linguistics

 Coordinate the activities of the departments of Linguistics in Nigeria

Advise government on language issues

Streamline the tools for language description and documentation

7. Harmonize the orthography for Nigerian languages

8. Supervise language description and documentation projects

 Contribute to the current theorization of Documentary Linguistics worldwide

 Provide a website that can host documentation efforts of Nigerian Linguistics

11. Provide facilities for a search engine for Nigerian languages

 Collaborate with LAN and other professional bodies to develop modalities that can be considered best practices for Nigerian Linguistics

For instance, NINLAN can organize workshops on different areas of linguistics and connect both the experts in those areas and those in the field and teachers. It is at such forums that both the experts, fieldworkers and teachers can form working groups to look at the different areas in Nigerian Linguistics, and then draw up what can be considered as best practices for the discipline.

6.2 The Departments of Linguistics

The Departments of Linguistics should try to meet the training

needs, and research so that they can contribute to the current theorization of new areas. They should specifically address the training needs of the students. In addition to the traditional linguistic programs, the curricula should be revised to embrace new areas like:

- Language documentation
- 2. IT and linguistic globalization
- Use of video
- 4. Archiving practices
- Writing metadata, etc.

The Departments should encourage a team-oriented interdisciplinary approach to research involving field linguists, other disciplines, speaker communities, and IT specialists.

6.3 Professional Associations

Professional associations, related to the Humanities should provide a platform of interaction for the different agencies involved in documenting these languages through conferences and workshops. These associations have annual conferences. They should be planned strategies, reviews, workshops, updates to empower and encourage field workers and teachers of Nigerian languages. They should also provide a platform for reporting on researches and fieldwork, and each Association can set up a working group at conferences. The groups can report on work in progress at the next meeting.

6.4 The Government

The government should fund research, provide scholarships for training manpower, promote, and help to enlighten the public on language issues and its policies on it. The legislature should legislate on language matters, and the government should supervise language documentation projects through NINLAN.

The three tiers of government should be involved in different aspects of language documentation, and this is one of the aspects that NINLAN should coordinate.

6.5 Individuals, NGOs and Cooperate Bodies

Some individuals, NGOs and cooperate bodies have the wherewith-all to assist in language documentation. They can specifically support areas such as: funding research on languages and their documentation, developing tools, (both hardware and software), increasing advocacy, etc.

An important area which we need to address is the use of NGOs for both advocacy and funding. There are numerous NGOs with a focus on politics, economy, social welfare, etc. There is none yet on language. It will help if we as linguists, either in groups or individually, form NGOs that can focus on language issues in the area of research, funding and advocacy.

6.6 The Media and the Arts

We need support from the media for publicity and advocacy through articles, commentaries, documentaries, etc. The media can help bridge the gap between public awareness and intellectual opinion in 'Linguistic Ecology' (Crystal 2003:24).

Another untapped area that we can explore is the theatre. We need support from the arts for awareness through entertainment with language themes. This can be done through fiction, drama, music, exhibitions, etc.

6.7 The Speakers

We need the support of the speakers in the areas of funding, manpower and advocacy. Some members of the communities may be wealthy enough to provide some funds. Manpower for training can be drawn from the community, as the wealthy ones can be encouraged to give some kind of scholarship to those who may be interested and intelligent, but cannot afford to pay school fees. The communities can also help in the promotion of the language.

7. Making Nigerian Languages Relevant to the Society
Every Nigerian language is spoken in an area, but every Nigerian
language is not relevant to every Nigerian. The languages that

appear to have a regional spread should be empowered and encouraged to be used in the media, in government, education, etc. The languages that appear to be State languages should be used at the state level in the same way, and the languages that appear to be

L.G.A languages should be empowered and be so used.

Nigerian languages have to be made relevant to Nigerians. It is the need to use them at different forums that will motivate and attract both funding to language projects and interest in their fate. We believe that if some of the Nigerian languages are used for legislative business (even once in a week as is done in Ogun State House of Assembly every Wednesday with Yoruba), then their inadequacy to cope in terms of terminology will make the law makers look for the linguists to elaborate their codes further. We believe that with conviction to use the language properly those who have the where-with-all to sponsor such a project will willingly do so.

Advocacy will help us in this area very much, and we should explore it. It is important that the languages be made relevant in the different communities where they are spoken. It makes practical

sense.

Documenting Nigerian languages is a challenge we can handle if we put some things in place. Working on the languages can help us develop tools in line with modern technology and globalization. We need to start from somewhere. We need to first draw up a proper plan for the documentation of these languages. While a new area of Linguistics is evolving in the area of Language Documentation, we need to contribute to that development, especially as we have the data resources from which we can tap. We need to join in the formalization of the subject. Nigerian languages have very special features and apart from developing them for posterity, they can contribute to linguistic theories. But if we are not working on them, then, we will not have much to offer. And while the specifications are being worked out, many interesting areas of Nigerian languages will be left out of the ontologies that are being fine-tuned now if we do not take part in what is going on globally.

In July, 2005, I attended one of the several workshops testing out some of these specifications, the E-MELD Workshop series on Digital Language Documentation at Harvard, in Cambridge. We had four groups 1. Native American, 2. Sino-Tibethan, 3. Australian and 4. Austronesian, Caucasian, Turkic and Mongolic. There was no

working group on African languages due to almost zero representation at the conference. After the details are worked out there may be interesting and important features that could be left out of the formalism which the General Ontologies for Language Documentation (GOLD) is drawing. For instance, in the area of property terms, there was nothing on 'ideophones', and when I brought that up, we had problems getting references from the internet to support it as we did for other features that were not African specific.

We should begin to document Nigerian languages in the light of these new developments in the field, both for development and archiving. That way, we will be contributing to humanity and the development of a linguistic formalism for modern language documentation. That way, we will be facing head on some of the challenges that Nigerian languages pose for the New Humanities.

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