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REVIEW

Le swahili de Lubumbashi. Grammaire, textes, lexique [The Swahili from Lubumbashi. Grammar, texts, lexicon]. Aurélia Ferrari, Marcel Kalunga, and Georges Mulumbwa. 2014. Paris: Editions Karthala, 226 pp., ISBN 978-2-8111-1130-4.

Swahili is one of the four national languages of the Democratic Republic of Congo, together with Ciluba, Kikongo and Lingala, spoken by many millions mainly located in the eastern provinces. This interesting volume, appeared amongst the recent contributions to the Karthala series "Dictionnaires et Langues" (Dictionaries and Languages) directed by Henri Tourneux, is devoted to a specific variety of Congolese Swahili, i.e. the Swahili of Lubumbashi[1], an originally vehicular and hexogen language which, as a result of the colonial language policy (Fabian 1986), has increasingly been spoken among urban residents, principally, but not exclusively, in oral communication and performance[2], thus entering an ongoing process of vernacularisation and becoming the first language for a part of the population of the Katangese region. The work is a result of the collaboration between Aurélia Ferrari, specialist in emerging African language varieties, presently lecturer at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and two scholars from the DRC, experts in Swahili and Bantu languages, namely Marcel Kalunga, professor at the Universities of Lubumbashi and Kalemie, and Georges Mulumbwa, senior assistant in linguistics at the University of Lubumbashi.

The book consists of three parts, the first of which is entitled "Linguistic and sociolinguistic description", and includes two chapters. The initial chapter, "Linguistic and sociolinguistic description of the Swahili of Lubumbashi", focuses on the language level (phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary) and is based on an oral corpus, composed of a theatrical performance (*Saler ya mwisho* [the last salary] by the troupe Vicanos) and a large number of stories and spontaneous conversations recorded in various places and from people of different ages, genders and socio-cultural backgrounds in Lubumbashi. The authors of this study, for the purpose of language description, have proposed a standardised method of transcription on

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[1] This variety has formerly often been labeled as Swahili de Elisabethville, Copperbelt Swahili, Shaba Swahili, and Katanga Swahili.

[2] The use of a "proto-Swahili" of Lubumbashi is attested, for instance, in some newspapers edited in colonial days (though often influenced by the standard Swahili which was taught by missionaries at school) and also in private writing, such as diaries and letters. A rich digital archive of oral and written texts in Congolese/Lubumbashi Swahili, called *Archives of Popular Swahili*, has been made available within the site *Language and Popular Culture in Africa*, a web-based project set up by Johannes Fabian and Vincent de Rooij of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam (see http://www.lpca.socsci.uva.nl/index.html, last visited on 19/11/15).

examining the spontaneous noting down of people, which can be highly differentiated. It must be noted, in fact, that the Swahili of Lubumbashi has no normalised orthography yet, given the fact that it is prevalently oral - in that area the languages of education and formal writing are French and, to a much lesser degree, an "ameliorated" Swahili close to its standardised East-African form, called *kiswahili bora*, the best/excellent Swahili. In some instances the authors, following the resolutions taken during a meeting of DRC linguists at the University of Lubumbashi with the aim of standardising the orthography of Congolese languages, have made proposals which diverge from the standard transcription of Swahili in East Africa, for example the phoneme [tʃ] is transcribed as "c" instead of "ch" (*cupa* and not *chupa* for "bottle").

Another interesting point arising from this work is that, despite its relative flexibility, the Swahili of Lubumbashi presents a fairly stable and complex physiognomy, e.g. with regard to the nominal classification or to the verbal forms. The noun morphology of Lubumbashi Swahili, as presented by the authors, discloses a system more articulated than standard Swahili, with class 11 (prefix *lu-*) separated from class 14 (prefix *bu-*) and the presence of the diminutive class 12/13 (prefixes *ka-* and *tu-*), like in numerous bantu languages. The verb morphology reveals salient differences in remoteness from standard Swahili, additional TAM (tense, aspect and mood) markers (e.g. the habitual present *-aka*), and deviations in the use of the copula (instead of *ni* one finds the verbal conjugation of the form *-ko*, used also, in combination with another conjugated verb, to express the progressive present).

This remark contradicts the idea of a "simple" idiom, unworthy of scientific and public interest, a still widely diffused heritage of the colonial and postcolonial language policies, as it emerges from the reading of the second chapter, "The Swahili of Lubumbashi from 1880 until these days", a historical excursus where, after a review of the major studies on this language variety by linguists and anthropologists (a. o. E. Polomé, J. Fabian, W. Schicho, M. Takizala, A. M. Kapanga), from the origins until contemporary times, the sociolinguistic developments of the Swahili of Lubumbashi are depicted and located within the context of the post-independence language policies which have taken place in Zaire/RDC. In the last section of this chapter, in particular, the authors have described the recent developments of the language situation in education (where the national languages are very marginal in comparison to the official language, French), in politics, justice, administration (where the local vehicular languages are used next to French, Lingala in the army, and English is newly gaining symbolic prestige – it now appears for instance on the banknotes, together with French and Swahili) and finally in the media (where the press is nowadays almost completely Francophone and the national television transmits only announcements and a few shows in the vehicular languages; vice versa 60% of radio programs in Congo are diffused in the national languages). Very interestingly, the authors have remarked that in Lubumbashi the local radio and TV stations broadcast cultural programs principally in the

local variety of Swahili, and in two cases (*Nyota*, *Djua*) even the news are read in Swahili of Lubumbashi, in stark contrast to other parts of DRC (such as in the Kivu and Maniema provinces, etc.) where the media, particularly the radio programs, are dominated by *kiswahili bora*. This latter choice, however, is sometimes criticised or derided by the people – as it emerged by collecting commentaries in the Internet and social networks – because the Swahili of Lubumbashi, commonly referred to in French as *swahili facile* (easy, simple Swahili), is still often self-perceived by the speaking community as a language medium inadequate for formal communication, although it is highly practiced and appreciated in oral narration, songs and performances of popular theatre - an urban genre which started in colonial days and has further developed in post-independence Lubumbashi, thanks to the creativity of various groups and actors, like the renowned Mufwankolo.

The Swahili of Lubumbashi, in sum, has become an important marker of the identity of the Lubumbashi population, and a fundamental medium of the local culture and verbal creativity. To get a sense of this, the second part of the book presents three texts composed in Swahili as it is spoken in Lubumbashi. The texts were collected on the field, transcribed and translated into French by the authors. These are an anecdote, "*Barafiki ba də*" (two friends), a tale told by Sando Marteau called "*Muji wa tata*" (the village of our father) and, again, a song by Sando Marteau entitled "*Kwetu ni kwetu!*" (Our homeland is our homeland!). The third and last part, followed by the bibliography, is a Swahili of Lubumbashi – French lexicon (53 pp.), a very useful instrument, especially for Francophone scholars, students and even general audience interested in this variety of Swahili.

To conclude, this book is a recommended reading on account of the quality of the linguistic descriptive analysis, which is accompanied by a well drawn overview of the sociolinguistic expansion of the Swahili of Lubumbashi and of the main available secondary literature, and enriched by the transcribed oral texts and the lexicon. The work testifies the commitment on the part of the authors to the growth of this area of research within the Swahili studies and will presumably inspire further initiatives.

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