

DOCUMENTATION OF LUSSESE:

LANGUAGE AND PERCEPTION IN THE LIGHT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PARAMETERS.

In my presentation I would firstly like to present the project of the Institute for African Studies in Cologne led by Prof. Anne Storch: the primary scope of our project is collecting data on Lussese, an almost extinct variety of Luganda spoken on the Ssesse islands in Lake Victoria. Based on this we strive after a comparative study considering the expressions of perception in general, with special focus on perception verbs following the hypothesis that linguistic expression of senses, feelings and thoughts is determined by cultural experience rather than by universal principles.

Considering the little that is known about the history of the Ssesse Islands we look back at a long history of often forced migration. In the beginning of the 20th century all the Bassese had to leave the islands because of a pandemic of Tsetse flies. They were forced to settle the coasts around Lake Victoria and when coming back around 1915 they found other people in their settlements, also partly forced to migration mostly from northern and western Uganda. For economical and social reasons, the Bassese didn't want the new generation to learn a variety of language that would be a barrier for the children's further development: the *lingua franca* on the islands was and still is Luganda. On the other hand Lussese is the language of the local religion. The word *Bassese* is used commonly not referring to the human inhabitants of the islands, but to the spirits. Lussese is not just metaphorically a spiritual language, but in the sense that spirits communicate with the people in Lussese. Although there is some previous work done on variation of color terminology and the linguistic expression of taboos and social hierarchies expressed in Luganda, the study of Lussese sheds new light on the interference between cultural experience and practices, religious beliefs and language in a little researched area. Documenting Lussese we have to consider the influence of the history of language contact on the one hand, and the religious status of Lussese on the other hand. Analyzing the linguistic expressions of perception is not possible without understanding the cosmology and the religious and moral categories that arise out of it.

Further I will present the methods applied and the data collected during my fieldwork in 2009 and 2010. I will argue that the theoretical and methodological developments in the fields of perception and its linguistic expression will contribute not only in understanding language in and through the cultural and social context of speakers: to include endangered languages in the field of language and perception means an attempt to interact with the speakers. I will try to show that interaction between researcher and informant implies looking for alternatives to the monologues of elicitation and breaking the illusion of the researcher in the lonely and power-full role of the objective observer. Interaction presumes a dialectical setting and the consciousness that only together with the informants and by considering the own perception as a consequential interference in our fieldwork, we can lay down the often quite Eurocentric eyeglasses of linguistic theories and try to capture some of the sense of the informant's language, some of the experience and reality expressed before they get lost forever.

Scientific fields:

Language Documentation; Semantics; Linguistic Anthropology; Spiritual Speech register; Bantu-Studies, Luganda -Studies