

Aspects of linguistic fieldwork in the German colonial era

Susanne Schuster
University of Bremen

When explorers, missionaries or government employees were sent to former German colonial territories at the turn of the 20th century, one of the main objectives was to record and describe local vernaculars. As many of these travellers had little or no knowledge about languages other than their own, there was an urgent need for instruction in linguistic fieldwork. This article focuses on this special type of colonial writing as these instructional texts are a very promising object for research for at least two reasons: first their guiding function enabled them to act as multipliers for the common knowledge on language studies. Investigating these manuals can therefore reveal how language ideologies conveyed by them have shaped linguistic documentation in the colonial context. This of course had a strong influence on any common thinking about these languages in the metropolis. Furthermore, when studied in chronological order, the manuals yield valuable insights into the development of fieldwork methodology.

1 Introduction

(Post)Colonial Language studies are gaining importance as a new research field within General Linguistics. Through the Creative Unit ‘Koloniallinguistik – Language in Colonial Contexts’, the University of Bremen joins in contributing to this development.¹ The aim of the joint research project is to gain a comprehensive view of language research as it was conducted during the German colonial era by compiling, re-editing and evaluating descriptive linguistic contributions (cf. Warnke 2009; Stolz, Vossmann & Dewein 2011; Dewein, Engelberg, Hackmack et al. 2012 for an extensive overview of the research objectives).

In clarifying our position – studying phenomena related to colonialism is by no means an academically camouflaged attempt at romanticizing or

¹ This study has been conducted within the scope of the Creative Unit ‘Koloniallinguistik – Language in Colonial Contexts’ at the University of Bremen funded by the Initiative for Excellence through the federal and state governments of Germany. For further information please consult our website: <http://www.culcc.uni-bremen.de/>.

defending colonialism; the adherents of the Creative Unit consider colonialism *de facto* a violation of human rights and a crime against humanity.²

Various studies have shown the substantial influence of the respective theoretical framework on language descriptions in colonial contexts (e.g. Stolz 2012; Hackmack 2012; Kutzner 2012). In this article I would like to focus on manuals for conducting linguistic fieldwork as another type of text worth studying in this context.

Knowledge of the vernaculars spoken in the colonial territories had always been considered a very important factor for religious, administrative and scientific purposes. It was indispensable for spreading the word of God, in strengthening colonial power in administrative work and for revealing the relations among the languages of the world. In order to facilitate access to unfamiliar languages encountered in the colonies, a need for the conception of a set of instructions arose.

These manuals differed widely over the course of time, in accordance with respective common knowledge on what language is and how it ought to be studied. Not only did this academic knowledge influence the manuals, but the real-world situation in the field as well. Many new problems emerged, which had to be dealt with. I would like to illustrate this interesting development by presenting and discussing three texts giving instruction on how to collect linguistic data while abroad. These documents, written shortly before and during the German colonial era from 1884 to 1918, when tied to their historiographical background, reveal their implicit ideologies.³ By investigating them in a chronological order, it becomes obvious how emerging challenges of one generation of linguists were met by an adjustment of methodology in the subsequent generation.

Many vocabularies, grammar sketches and text collections were written following the advice given in these and numerous comparable guides. The assumed knowledge concerning these languages, gained through the elicited data, played a crucial role in shaping common thinking about the native languages in the metropolis during the colonial era. Due to time and space limitations I will touch upon this issue of linguistic outcome with a preliminary chapter only.

In the same manner, the study as a whole is only meant to give a first glimpse at this interesting sphere of fieldwork manuals in colonial contexts; further corpus-based work is needed.

² This position was first explicitly pointed out by Prof. Dr. Thomas Stolz during his presentation at the Jacobs University in Bremen in March 2013.

³ For a detailed account on the historiography of linguistics, I refer to Arens (1969) and Koerner (1989).

I would like to conclude this introduction with one last remark on the format of the citations adopted for this paper: any source language citations will be given in translation in a footnote, unless they have been paraphrased within the text.

2 Three manuals on language recording and documentation

For the officers of Her Majesty's Navy in 1849, things were quite plain and well defined in terms of collecting languages. Great Britain of the Victorian age was a powerful and expanding nation with vessels in all the world's seas. It seemed therefore useful to provide its travellers and explorers with manuals that would enable even non-experts to collect interesting facts in a wide range of disciplines from all over the world. I would like to focus on one very important one here: *The Manual of Scientific Enquiry, prepared for the use of Her Majesty's Navy and adapted for Travellers in General*, edited by the famous astronomer Sir John Frederick William Herschel (1792–1871). It was first published in 1849 and provided the reader with helpful information on gathering data for exact sciences, such as astronomy or botany. Charles Darwin contributed an article on geology, just to mention one of the famous authors. In the manual's memorandum, the lords commissioners of the admiralty make the following comment:

Independently of matters of exact science, their Lordships would look, in many instances, for reports upon National Character and Customs, Religious Ceremonies, Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, Language, navigation,[...]: but for these only very general instructions can be given, though valuable Reports may be expected from men of observation and intelligence [...].⁴

These above mentioned instructions are for the most part given in the chapter 'Ethnology' by the early ethnologist James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848). After having elaborated on the proper procedure for collecting data on physical traits and social structures of indigenous communities, he gives the reader some useful instructions on how to obtain linguistic data. This last section of the chapter is entitled 'Language, poetry and literature'.

In 1875 the manual served explicitly as a model for a very similar German work: the *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen*⁵ edited by

⁴ Memorandum by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty prefixed to the first edition of the *Manual of Scientific Enquiry* 1849.

⁵ 'Manual for scientific observation while travelling'.

the German polar explorer and scientist Georg von Neumayer (1826–1909). In addition to chapters on natural sciences (geography, astronomy, etc.) there is a separate chapter on linguistics, written by the philosopher and linguist Heyman Steinthal (1823–1899). The *Anleitung* was published in numerous additional editions, and in 1906 after Steinthal's death it was the linguist Carl Meinhof who wrote the chapter at issue.

This gives us three manuals on how to elicit linguistic data within a period of 57 years. These documents can only serve as examples for a plurality of similar texts, but due to their interrelation with regards to their editorial history and their content, they are particularly suitable in illustrating this very important and directional period of linguistics.

Of course this short contrastive overview can by no means give a comprehensive account of the complete works of the authors and scientists Prichard, Steinthal and Meinhof.

3 James Cowles Prichard

3.1 ‘*Language, poetry, literature*’

According to the British doctor and polymath James Cowles Prichard, ethnology is one of the most interesting fields for an explorer to deal with. His article ‘Ethnology’ is one of 15 chapters found in the *Manual of Scientific Enquiry* and stands alongside contributions on subjects such as hydrography, geology and zoology. Prichard gives information on how to observe and record a magnitude of aspects of humanity in three sections: first the physical traits of a community should be recorded such as the colour of the skin, the physique and the hair structure. The second part deals with the cultural, social and economic characteristics of a community, such as trading, art and religion. In the final part, entitled ‘Language, Poetry, Literature’, Prichard begins as follows (Prichard 1849: 438):

As no other means have contributed so much to the increase of ethnology, and to the ascertaining of the connexions and relationship of different nations, as a comparison of languages, great care should be taken in every newly discovered country, and among tribes whose history is not perfectly known, to collect the most correct information as to the language of the people.

How is the traveller supposed to collect this most correct information? Over the course of two and a half pages, Prichard suggests a three-step plan: first and foremost access to all written texts of a community should be sought. If it so

happens that no written documents exist, oral texts should be recorded. This is step two. Step three would be followed should the community not even possess oral literature. The traveller shall ‘get some intelligent person to translate into the prevailing language some continuous composition’ (Prichard 1849: 438). First and foremost, the Lord’s Prayer is advocated. As the amount of words is deemed insufficient, chapters six and seven of the gospel of St. Luke should be translated additionally. These texts together will yield linguistic material which offers the beginnings of a corpus created from the translation of comparable texts. Prichard states in full self-confidence (Prichard 1849: 439): ‘A good translation of these two chapters will enable a person skilled in philology to furnish a tolerably complete analysis of almost any language.’

After having gained a reliable and comparable corpus following this strategy, the traveller is asked to collect a vocabulary of the respective language. Particular attention should be paid to the selection of the informants to distinguish the articulatory peculiarities of the distinctive phonological features of the language. The following semantic and grammatical fields should be considered (without differentiating formal and content elements): ‘numerals [...]’, ‘Words denoting family relations [...]’, ‘names of the different parts of the body [...]’ ‘names of animals, especially domestic animals’, ‘names of visible natural objects [...]’, ‘verbs expressive of universal bodily acts such as eat, drink, [...]’, ‘personal pronouns [...]’ and ‘prepositions’ (Prichard 1849: 439).

After this is done, the task is essentially completed. Looking for grammatical rules might be useful but is considered rather negligible, as they can easily be extracted from the collected text corpora. However, if the traveller wishes to analyse some grammatical features, then he should have a closer look at the so called auxiliary words (Prichard 1849: 440): ‘By auxiliary words are meant such words as have no proper meaning of their own, but tend to explain the relation of nouns and verbs.’ This definition obviously subsumes all kinds of function elements irrespective of their form: prepositions in English are termed ‘auxiliary words’ as well as (quasi) case marking affixes in Tartar, noun class prefixes in Bantu languages and incorporated affixes in polysynthetic American languages. The researcher is asked to pay special attention to the position of these grammatical elements in relation to the other elements in the sentence. Another issue worth noticing is the number of syllables and the way the language builds compound words.

As Prichard did not survive the publication of the manuscript, it is the manual’s editor Herschel who added an appendix to this chapter presenting a standardized transcription of foreign languages. He refers to the more detailed *Ethnical Alphabet* by Alexander John Ellis from 1848 (cf. Kemp 2001: 1575f.) which is, according to Herschel, doubtlessly of the utmost value but which has

the disadvantage that it cannot easily be transferred directly into print because of the many modified characters (Herschel 1849: 441). Herschel's alphabet on the other hand is much more concise: it consists only of Latin and Greek characters and letters in italics to transcribe 40 sounds, which occur in English, French, Italian and German.

Interestingly enough this appendix was omitted in the third edition of the manual in 1859 after it became clear that it had caused more confusion than transparency. Superintendent Robert Main writes in the preface of the third edition (Main 1859: vii):

Mr. Wright [reviewer of Prichard's text for the third edition, my insertion], says, "I should say this appendix would be quite as well omitted. There are very few persons who have a nice perception of the sounds of foreign languages, such as French and German, and the table is calculated to lead to much more confusion and misrepresentation on the part of those who use it, [...]."

3.2 *Historiographical background*⁶

Prichard's text mirrors illustratively the status quo of 19th century language study where language was regarded as a human feature comparable to physique or hair structure. In much the same way, languages were sought to be investigated like subjects of natural science. And like cutting people's hair or taking home their bones for further studies, language can be taken from the speaking individual as there was no association assumed between language, mind, culture or society.

Through the comparison of languages and the reconstruction of a proto-language together with the comparison of physical traits of human beings, an attempt was made to derive an answer to the most pressing question of 19th century science: the origin and evolution of mankind, a quest which is most prominently reflected in Charles Darwin's seminal 1871 work *The Descent of Man*.

This shared common concern entailed two implications for the study of language: The idea of language as an object of natural science led to the conclusion that, as any other natural object, language is exposed to decay. Its older stages are considered to represent a more unblemished state and therefore

⁶ I am using the term 'historiographical' according to Swiggers (2010:2): 'Linguistic historiography is the interdisciplinary study of the evolutionary course of linguistic knowledge [...]'.

the study of these ancient stages is more gainful than the preoccupation with contemporary states.⁷

The second consequence is of course that in order to reveal relationships and common ancestries the comparison of languages is much more promising than the study of individual languages. Encouraged by the results of Indo-Germanic language studies and the decoded similarities among some African languages, large-scale comparative studies were introduced such as Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle's *Polyglotta Africana* (1854) and Wilhelm Bleek's *Comparative grammar of South African Languages* (1862–1869) just to mention two of the most influential.

The study of languages is consequentially built upon the comparison of ancient texts and documents. The main task was to find matches in the linguistic material, particularly in the lexicon and in phonology. This was the method applied by Sir William Jones, Franz Bopp and Jacob Grimm, when studying the relations between Indo-Germanic languages. It therefore comes as no surprise that this methodology was likewise suggested for the study of unfamiliar languages. For this reason it was most important to have at one's disposal comparable texts. This is why Prichard and his contemporaries asked travellers to collect as many original texts as possible or, wherever this was not possible, to create a body of written texts with the translations of specified religious writings.

Provided with these samples and guided by the methodology of natural science – comparing and searching for similarities and differences – it seemed easy to reveal resemblances. Words form the basis of this comparison: similar sound sequences encode similar meaning. Comparison on the grammar level is mainly focused on word structure as well. A characteristic feature of a language family and therefore a parameter of language typology is for example the form and position of agglutinative functional elements, as Prichard had suggested, using the term 'auxiliary words'. This reflects contemporary language typology, as practiced for example by Friedrich von Schlegel (1808).

By joining disciplines such as ethnology, anthropology and comparative anatomy in the quest for origins, the 19th century study of language steps out of the realm of philosophical speculations and aims at adopting the methods of the modern and promising natural sciences. This adoption of methodology is unproblematic considering that languages are natural objects.

This close affiliation to neighbouring fields of research becomes obvious in the subsumption of the paragraph 'Language, Poetry, Literature' in the chapter on ethnology. The study of language in the field still has no common scientific background to rely on, no approved methodology to be learned and

⁷ Cf. e.g. Bopp (1833).

kept in mind: this is why no specialized training was required for carrying out linguistic fieldwork in 1849.

4 Heymann Steinthal

4.1 ‘Linguistik’

The *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen* edited by Georg Neumayer explicitly refers to Herschel’s manual as its model (Neumayer 1875: 5): ‘In dieser, wie in so mancher anderen Hinsicht war zwar ein Vorbild für unsere „Anleitung [...]“ in dem englischen „Manual of scientific enquiry“ vorhanden’.⁸ It pursues the same objective: to enable laymen to contribute to the advancement of science by collecting valuable data (Neumayer 1875: 5). Some modifications had been made in order to take into account the scientific situation in Germany. Some fields of research were omitted while others were added and yet others were re-arranged: linguistic fieldwork was no longer to be subsumed under ethnology but given a chapter of its own: ‘Linguistik’, written by Heymann Steinthal, influential linguist and pupil of Humboldt.

Spread over 19 pages, Steinthal elaborates on the art of observation and recording of linguistic data. In a short introduction the main objective is laid out (Steinthal 1875: 551):

[...] dass seine Aufgabe für die Reise nur ist: Material zu sammeln, dass später in Musse von ihm selbst oder von Anderen wissenschaftlich bearbeitet werden soll. Er hat Thatsachen zu beobachten und darzustellen.⁹

There is no need for specialized training in the forefront, a standard higher education was deemed sufficient, if the traveller follows Steinthal’s advice. All of this was organized in three parts, comparable to contemporary grammar books: phonetics, lexicon and grammar.

In the first part Steinthal gives the reader an introduction to phonetics, presenting various segmental and suprasegmental features such as the quality of vowels, the consonantal voicing, stress and intonation.

To train auditive perception, Steinthal strongly encourages the reader to learn the pronunciation of unfamiliar phonemes, this being the only way of learning how to distinguish them. Steinthal gives the reader examples for writing

⁸ “In this as in many other aspects, the ‘Manual of scientific enquiry’ served as a model for our *Anleitung*.”

⁹ “The only objective during his travels is: to collect material which will be scientifically studied later on, by himself or others. He is merely to observe and describe facts.”

European sounds and recommends for further instruction to consult Lepsius Standard Alphabet, 2nd ed. London and Berlin 1863.

The most extensive part of Steinthal's text (about eight pages) is dedicated to the recording of the lexicon. The reader should not be bothered with theoretical questions concerning the classification of the language during this task (Steinthal 1875: 556). He should choose not just one but several native speakers with bilingual abilities from whom to abstract differing individual peculiarities. If no such persons are available, an interpreter will suffice. First and foremost the traveller is intended to record indigenous continuous texts, whether tales, traditional stories, fables, or biographical texts. Steinthal seems to be aware of the effects of colonization on indigenous cultures as he emphasizes the importance of preserving this cultural heritage (Steinthal 1875: 557): "sie [die Erzählungen] zu erhalten, bleibt immer das Wichtigste."¹⁰

Steinthal, as a pupil of Humboldt, is convinced that language conditions people's ways of thinking and their perception of the external world and therefore regards language as the key to the human nature and the 'Volksgeist', the spirit of a people. It is therefore most important to encourage the informants to speak about all aspects of their cultural and social life to obtain insight into their conceptions and perceptions of the world. Translations of any religious texts are of course useless for this purpose (Steinthal 1875: 569): 'auf Übersetzungen aber etwa des Vater-unser oder eines Stückes der Evangelien oder einer europäischen Fabel lasse er [der Reisende] sich nicht ein'.¹¹

As this process of obtaining linguistic data renders itself undoubtedly very time consuming, Steinthal alternatively provides the reader with a list of approximately 1,000 words and phrases for which translations are to be elicited. Most of them (about 60%) are nouns referring to concrete objects (like animals, plants, body parts or types of dwellings), followed by verbs (about 30%) and adjectives (about 10%). Numerals, some adverbs and pronouns form only a smaller part of the list. Should this questionnaire still be too extensive, the explorer might fall back on a reduced version of this list (approx. 170 words and phrases), labelled with spaced lettering.

The last part of the manual regarding grammar is the shortest one. It deals predominantly with morphology, i.e. declination of nouns and adjectives, case, derivation as well as conjugation and verb aspects. The syntactical features of the language can be collected by recording simple subject-verb phrases in affirmative, negative or question form. More complex sentences can easily be created with the additional use of adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions.

¹⁰ "and to preserve them (the tales) remains the most important (part)."

¹¹ "The traveller should not revert to translations of the Lord's Prayer, parts of gospels or European fables."

Steinthal provides the reader with various sample sentences, which results in an impressive overview of possible German subordinate clauses.

There is some evidence that the basis for this compilation was a well-known German grammar book of the time: the *Theoretisch-praktische deutsche Grammatik* by Johann Christian Heyse. Steinthal was acquainted with Heyse, the latter's son Carl Wilhelm being Steinthal's teacher in 1848 (cf. Lazarus, Steinthal and Belke 1986: 396). Furthermore, the sample sentences and arrangement of topics are in parts identical to this grammar book.

Before concluding his instructions with the recommendation to record interjections and onomatopoeic expressions as well, Steinthal inserts a questionnaire by Charles Darwin. Darwin had designed and circulated a leaflet *Queries about expression* in 1867 to provide evidence of the universality of mimic expression. Included were questions such as 'Is the head nodded vertically in affirmation, and shaken laterally in negation?' and the answers of the explorers who came into contact with indigenous people formed the data basis for Darwin's 1872 work *The expression of the emotions in man and animals* (van Wyhe 2002).

4.2 *Historiographical background and changes in methodology*

Steinthal's concept of language presented in this manual is ambiguous: On the one hand, he has been strongly influenced by the naturalistic and materialistic view of some of his contemporaries, especially of August Schleicher (1821–1868) whose main work *Compendium der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen* is regarded as 'one of the most meritorious works in this field, by which the study of this branch of knowledge is extraordinarily facilitated and furthered' (Benfey 1869: 588; quoted in Jankowsky 2008: 1327). It describes the methodology of language science as mainly the same as that of the natural sciences (Schleicher 1866: 1): 'Die grammatik bildet eine teil der sprachwissenschaft oder glottik. Diese selbst ist ein teil der naturgeschichte des menschen. Ihre methode ist im wesentlichen die der naturwissenschaften überhaupt'.¹²

Steinthal was acquainted with this attitude (cf. Dittmar 2004: 698) and seems to share some aspects of it, as he uses botanical metaphors in referring to languages in some of his texts (e.g. Steinthal 1881: 82):

So gibt es im Menschen gewissermaßen einen Keim, der sich zu Sprache entfaltet [...], ist es die Aufgabe, die Zusammensetzung dieses Keimes darzulegen und die Bedingungen und Gesetze zu

¹² "Grammar forms part of linguistics or Glottik. This is itself part of the natural history of mankind. Its methods are essentially the same as the methods of the natural sciences."

erkennen, unter denen er aufgeht: wie ganz analog die Botanik diese Aufgabe für die Pflanzen [...] zu lösen hat.¹³

His instructions in the manual seem to reflect this presupposition in a subliminal way as well, since languages seem to be collectable in just the same way a botanist collects plants to take them home for further examination.

The concept of language as a distinct natural entity surfaces in another part of his manual: languages appear as separate entities with sharp boundaries and no intermediate forms, again just like plants (Steinthal 1875: 557):

Und dann beim Weiterreisen merke man darauf, wie sich die Redeweise ändert, wo sogar eine andere Sprache auftritt. Auch erkundige sich der Reisende, wie weit eine Sprache gesprochen wird.¹⁴

Still, Steinthal is convinced languages are substantially different from plants. He uses the botanical metaphors only as such – as for him language is an inseparable part of the human psyche, a psychological organ. In this regard he differs clearly from Schleicher. He argues against the application of purely scientific methods to languages: ‘Die Naturwissenschaft betrachtet die Gegenstände, insofern als sie bewusstlos sind; die Tatsachen des Bewusstseins bilden den Geist’¹⁵ (Steinthal 1881: 37), but language as an ‘Abbild des Bewusstseins’ [an image of the consciousness] (Dittmar 1997: 28) with no physical properties warrants observation from a different perspective, namely through the methods of psychology.

With Steinthal’s turn towards psychology, especially towards the *Völkerpsychologie* [social psychology] he also places distance between himself and classical philology, which is predominantly engaged in the study of ‘civilized’ languages. In contrast, he states that linguistics not only has to investigate the languages of so-called highly cultured people but: ‘[...] so leuchtet alsbald ein, dass die Sprachwissenschaft sogar alle Sprachen aller Völker der Erde umfassen muss’¹⁶ (Steinthal 1881: 38). This implies that

¹³ “There is as it were a seed inside the human being, which evolves into language [...]; it is the task to explain the composition of that seed and to discover the conditions and laws under which it sprouts: just like biology where the same is investigated of plants [...].”

¹⁴ “During continued travels, it is important to take note of how speaking changes, where the next language appears. The traveller should ask in what area a language is spoken.”

¹⁵ “The natural sciences consider objects as far as they are without consciousness; the facts of the consciousness form the spirit.”

¹⁶ “It quickly becomes clear, that linguistics must also comprise all the languages of all people in the world.”

linguists have to address explicitly the task of describing languages without a writing system.

With this concept of language in mind, it comes as no surprise, that language could no longer be considered written text, but an auditory object: ‘Zunächst ist die Sprache ein Objekt für das Ohr’ (Steinthal 1875: 552).

Obviously, Steinthal’s concept of language is at least twofold. So are the aims that the study of language, according to him, should pursue. In contrast to Prichard who was chiefly interested in traditional and written texts (step one of his instruction), Steinthal focuses on language as a manifestation of the human mind. Unlike in his other works which deal extensively with language classification (such as *Die Classification der Sprachen dargestellt als die Entwicklung der Sprachidee* from 1850), in this work he explicitly discourages the reader from engaging in this issue (Steinthal 1875: 556): ‘Der Reisende sei zunächst unbekümmert um jede theoretische Frage, wie: in welche Classe gehört eine Sprache, in die flectirende oder die agglutinirende?’¹⁷ Instead, the traveller is asked to record tales, fables and myths in present day speech as only these can give an insight into the human nature and the ‘Volksgeist’ of the people (Steinthal 1855: 390ff.):

Dieser Volksgeist thut sich kund zunächst in der Sprache, dann in Sitten und Gewohnheiten, Institutionen und Thaten, Ueberlieferungen und Gesängen: dies sind die Erzeugnisse des Volksgeistes.¹⁸

It is therefore most important to conserve the people’s cultural heritage.

But, in Steinthal’s view, language also gives us a clue of how people dissect their world into concepts; how thinking is structured according to language. This is why a record of the lexicon is another important goal of language studies. In keeping with Humboldtian tradition, primarily nouns, verbs and adjectives are the main elements needed to re-construct the world as a ‘possession of the mind’ (cf. Jungen and Lohnstein 2007: 22). Structural features are of but little significance in this regard. This corresponds to the number of nouns, verbs and adjectives in Steinthal’s questionnaire, which is of course also due to the fact that they are mainly denoting tangible objects, activities or properties and as such are much easier to elicit than functional elements.

¹⁷ “Initially, the traveller should not be concerned with any theoretical questions such as: what class does the language belong to: inflectional or agglutinative?”

¹⁸ “The *Volksgeist* manifests itself first in the language, then in conventions and customs, institutions and achievements, traditions and songs: these are the products of the *Volksgeist*.”

Regardless of these fundamental differences in the implicit aims of language studies found in Prichard's and Steinthal's contributions, one thing has remained unchanged: language is not studied for its own sake, but as a vehicle either to the early history of humanity or to its mind.

Shifting away from the study of ancient texts into the realm of spoken language is only one of several factors, which required a fundamental shift of the methodology in language studies. First of all, a reliable methodology for reducing sounds to writing was urgently sought after. This was especially true in the colonies where travellers, missionaries and government employees were confronted with an amazing diversity of vernaculars. And this task of transcription turned out to be more challenging and complex than expected: while in the appendix of Prichard's text Herschel mainly gives instructions on how to transliterate familiar European sounds accurately and consistently, Steinthal realizes that it is essential to know the nature and characteristics of sound production in order to recognize unfamiliar sounds and supra-segmental features in a reliable way. Steinthal himself had encountered the problem of inconsistent transcription in his work on Mande languages where he complains about the ambiguity of the transcription of the tone alteration in Vai in Frederick Edwyn Forbes's work (1851) (Steinthal 1867: 26):

Ein Blick auf das Vokabular von Forbes zeigt, dass die Sylben häufig bald mit h, bald mit r schließen, bald mit dem bloßen Vocal, und außerdem natürlich mit dem Nasal n. Leider erklärt sich Forbes nicht über die Bedeutung dieser End-Buchstaben h und r, [...]. Was soll also jedes r, h? [...] Sollte also nicht das h des Forbes, [...] den steigenden Ton, das r [...] den fallenden Ton und der bloße Vokal den gleichen Ton bezeichnen sollen? Die Entscheidung hierüber bleibt denen anheimgestellt, welche genauere Beobachtungen an Ort und Stelle machen können.¹⁹

However, accuracy in transcription is not only important for recording languages but also for delimitating one variety from another as the following example shows (Grube 1895: 83):

¹⁹ "A look into Forbes's vocabulary shows that syllables often end with h, sometimes with r, in other cases only with a vowel and of course with the nasal n. Unfortunately Forbes does not explain the meaning of these characters h and r [...]. What does every r and every h mean? Should not Forbes's h indicate the raising tone, the r the falling tone and the vowel the neutral tone? Decisions regarding this issue can only be made by those capable of precise observation in the field."

Hier wäre noch zu bemerken, dass die in Zöllers “Deutsch-Neuguinea und meine Ersteigung des Finisterre-Gebirges” S. 443ff. angeführten drei Kai-Dialekte [...] nicht existieren. Die kleinen Unterschiede jener drei Wortsammlungen, [...], beruhen lediglich auf verschiedenem Gehör verschiedener Sammler, zum Theil auch, wo die Worte ganz falsch, auf Missverständnisse beim Abfragen der Eingeborenen.²⁰

Comparability being a main factor sought by exact science in detecting similarities and differences, it became most important to create a standardized approach for obtaining comparable data. Prichard had built up such a database with the parallel corpus of religious texts, but now as language was no longer considered to manifest itself in letters but rather in sounds, these sounds had to be described in a uniform way. This is why Steinthal had his caveats about indigenous texts (Steinthal 1875: 556): ‘denn es bleibt fraglich, ob die einheimische Schrift überhaupt genau ist’.²¹ Lepsius’s Standard Alphabet was one of the most influential attempts towards archiving this goal of a standardized writing of unwritten languages.

Another factor of a change in methods is Steinthal’s close affinity to *Völkerpsychologie*, a newly developing branch of psychology, mostly associated with Wilhelm Wundt. It deals with the ‘meaningful influence of the individual’s “spiritual [geistig] environment” – his culture’ (Kim 2014). *Völkerpsychologie* ‘is the inquiry into “cultural products [Erzeugnisse]” of the “totality of spiritual life [geistiges Gesamtleben] in which certain psychological laws have embodied themselves”, specifically, language, art, myth, and customs’ (Kim 2014). This interest in ‘cultural products’ is the reason why records and preservation of traditional and original texts were of utmost importance to Steinthal.

In order to get an untainted view of people’s ways of thinking, it is indispensable to step out of the explorer’s own European worldview. This implies listening to the people rather than interviewing them (Steinthal 1875: 557): ‘Wenn man auch zunächst nicht anders kann, als dem Dolmetscher Wörter und Sätze abzufragen, so ist doch die wesentliche Aufgabe, die Sprache der

²⁰ “It should be pointed out here that the three Kai dialects which Zöller mentions in his *Deutsch-Neuguinea und meine Ersteigung des Finisterre-Gebirges* S. 443ff. do not exist. The minor differences between the three vocabularies are only caused by differing acoustic perception among the different field workers or partly, where the words are completely wrong, by misunderstandings during interrogation of the native people.”

²¹ “it remains doubtful, whether the writing system is accurate at all.”

Eingeborenen abzulauschen.’²² For the same reason it is important to refrain from giving concepts to translate (Steinthal 1875: 558): ‘Dabei hüte man sich, die Theile und besonders ihre Functionen selbst anzugeben; [...]. Als Hauptregel diene, dass man es so einrichte, dass der Eingeborene selbst uns das Wort und dessen Object oder Bedeutung gebe.’²³

Another important, and related, insight that Steinthal would formulate in the introduction of a later work (Steinthal 1881: 32), is not yet applied in 1875: The fact that not only lexical concepts, but grammatical categories as well, are language specific: Steinthal still adheres to the categories of traditional grammar writing (cf. Jungen and Lohnstein 2007: 18).

Despite the considerable change in the initial situation and the obvious increase in requirements, Steinthal has great confidence in the work of the travellers (Steinthal 1875: 551): ‘Der Reisende glaube nur nicht, dass er sich, ohne Sprachforscher zu sein, nicht um die Erforschung von Sprachen kümmern könne.’²⁴

Steinthal’s text reveals a clear emancipation away from the fields of ethnology and anthropology. In search of an appropriate scientific policy it still adopts techniques from natural sciences such as biology and evolutionary theory. This becomes evident in Steinthal’s emphasis on a uniform orthography. But as the subjects of investigation are perceived as essentially different in terms of ‘consciousness’, a call is made in favour of a methodological re-orientation – a task that will preoccupy language science in the following decades.

5 Carl Meinhof

5.1 ‘Linguistik’

In the first edition of the *Anleitung* (1875) we have just examined, the author Steinthal exudes great confidence in terms of the collection of linguistic data. In the second edition (1888) the tone has changed considerably (Steinthal 1888: xiii): ‘[dass sich] mit der Entwicklung naturwissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis auch die Anforderungen an den Reisenden beträchtlich gehoben haben’²⁵. Steinthal

²² “Initially, if no other way can be found outside of asking the interpreter words and sentences, the essential task is to record the language of the indigenous people by listening carefully.”

²³ “The traveller should be watchful not to give words for things and especially their functions [...] as a main rule he should let the indigenous person give the words along with their denotation and meaning.”

²⁴ “The explorer should not think that, without being a linguist, he would not be able to engage in the investigation of languages.”

²⁵ “parallel to the development of knowledge in natural science the demands set upon travellers have increased considerably.”

adds (ibid. xii): ‘[dass der Reisende] sich für seine Aufgabe gründlich vorzubereiten habe.’²⁶ In the third edition of the *Anleitung*, which we now look at more closely, these words of warning take on an even more urgent tone (Neumayer 1906: xi):

Ein Hinausschieben der Gewinnung solcher Information [i.e. die Literatur der Gegenstände der Forschung und des geographischen Gebietes, my insertion], in der Hoffnung, es nachträglich und im Verlauf der Forschungsreise nachholen zu können, ist nicht rätlich, und kann davor nicht ernstlich genug gewarnt werden. [...] Die Geschichte der Forschungsreisen bietet Beispiele genug, die den verhängnisvollen Irrtum, der in einem Verschieben des vorherigen Einsammelns gründlicher Informationen enthalten ist, erweisen.²⁷

The German linguist Carl Meinhof takes on the task of preparing the travellers for linguistic fieldwork in this third edition after Steinthal’s death in 1899. With 50 pages, his article in the *Anleitung* is much more extensive than those of both his predecessors.

In his introduction, Meinhof points out that the task of recording linguistic data cannot be taken seriously enough. Here, and again at the end of his text, he emphasizes the importance of good preparation. In opposition to Steinthal who had disapproved indigenous writing systems, Meinhof stresses their importance as they might open a door to the unfamiliar language. He also addresses dialects as an important part of language study.

His instructional text is no longer structured like a classical grammar book with chapters on phonology, morphology and on syntax, but takes a more practical approach: the first and most extensive part deals with an appropriate method for interviewing people (ca. 22 pages), followed by a second part regarding the art of listening, providing a detailed introduction into articulatory phonetics (approx. 13 pages). The last part deals with the correct way of transcribing the data (again approx. 13 pages).

The heading of the first part ‘richtig fragen’ [asking correctly] implies that there is a wrong way of questioning, if conducted without the required psychological sensitivity. In this section Meinhof addresses the potential pitfalls a researcher might come across when eliciting linguistic data. He displays a very

²⁶ “it is important for the traveller to thoroughly prepare himself for his duty.”

²⁷ “it is not advisable and it has to be explicitly warned against postponing the gathering of all relevant information available [i.e. the literature on the subjects of research and on the geographical area; my insertion], hoping that this can be done later on in the expedition. The history of expeditions is full of examples of the fatal consequences linked to this mistake of postponing the prior gathering of exhaustive information.”

paternalistic attitude towards the indigenous people, referring to them as anxious and ignorant as children. Similar to children they tax the traveller's patience when it comes to recording speech data: they tend to misunderstand questions, give inaccurate and wrong information, even on purpose, and their craving for admiration might distort the data.

Furthermore the traveller has to take into account his consultants' social status and pay attention to different registers (e.g. the language of women). He has to be aware that many things are organized completely differently from what he knows and expects: kinship might be structured in a dissimilar way, the ways of asking questions might be different, but also grammatical features such as the principles of showing syntactic congruence might be realized in an unfamiliar way. Nothing should be taken for granted.

After these introductory words of warning, Meinhof turns to the grammar, which chiefly includes morphology. Here he also adheres, as Steinthal did, to the traditional morphological classification and terminology of the parts of speech. The Latin based morphological distinction between inflectional and non-inflectional parts of speech is further retained.

Nouns and adjectives are treated in terms of the grammatical categories they display in Indo-European languages, i.e. gender, case and number. There is a suggestion of language contact phenomena when it comes to numerals, as they are very prone to lexical borrowing as a consequence of trading.

When eliciting verb morphology, the traveller should be aware of difficulties in obtaining all forms, as indigenous people are not familiar with the European conjugation scheme and might react confused (cf. p. 24 of this article). Meinhof addresses tempus, aspect, modality, subordinate clauses, participles, negation, passives and aspects of the verb. He warns against the attempted elicitation of the auxiliary verbs 'sein' and 'haben' (Meinhof 1906: 446): 'Beide "Hilfszeitwörter" sagen für sich selbst nichts aus und werden in sehr vielen Sprachen überhaupt nicht durch Verben ausgedrückt.'²⁸ After having mentioned the pronouns, he turns to the non-inflectional word classes such as adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, interjections and onomatopoeia.

After the amateur linguist has recorded the grammar of the respective language according to his instructions, Meinhof refers to Georg von der Gabelentz's 1892 *Handbuch zur Aufnahme fremder Sprachen* for hints on recording the vocabulary.²⁹ Two things should be kept in mind while doing this:

²⁸ "Both auxiliary verbs do not have a meaning of their own and in many languages they are not even expressed by verbs."

²⁹ *Manual for recording foreign languages* written by order of the Colonial Department of the German Foreign Office (Kolonialabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes); for a detailed study of this manual I refer to Kürschner (2009).

first, should the researcher ask for the words of what he thinks are everyday objects, he might receive a loanword as an answer, as these objects might have been newly introduced by missionaries or traders to the people. Secondly, Meinhof also mentions the particular obstacles that the traveller might encounter when attempting to record words from the field of religion or mythology. Indigenous peoples tend to reject cooperation in this matter. In contrast though, forms of address are usually unproblematic to obtain.

The next section ‘richtig hören’ [listening correctly] is dedicated to phonetics as the traveller will encounter many sounds he might have never heard before (Meinhof 1906: 462): ‘Es kommen in denselben [Wörtern] nämlich Laute und Lautverbindungen vor, die er noch nicht gehört hat, und die zu hören er erst noch lernen muss.’³⁰ It is of utmost importance to learn how to pronounce these sounds, this being the only way of exact distinction (ibid., 463): ‘Man hört nur das genau, was man selbst sprechen kann.’ Not only a fine tuned auditory sense is required to recognize the sounds but also visual and the tactile perception. Meinhof gives a detailed overview of the physiognomy of the vocal tract based on an anatomic sketch taken from Bremer’s *Deutsche Phonetik* (1893). He provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of the different types of sounds and each sound is described in terms of its articulatory place and manner, of the position of the tongue, of nasality, etc. Particular emphasis is placed on the so-called musical tone, as it plays, according to Meinhof, an important role in Chinese as well as in many African languages (ibid., 474): ‘Diese Tonunterschiede spielen im Chinesischen und vielen afrikanischen Sprachen eine große Rolle.’

After having accurately honed his auditory skills to recognize the unfamiliar sounds, the traveller is immediately confronted with the ever-present problem of transcribing his data. The use of self-constructed characters is problematic as the researcher will have difficulties in using them consistently and as they are usually not legible for other readers. If there is no other possibility the reader should turn to established European orthographies with an indication of his own provenience. But the best solution is still Lepsius’ Standard Alphabet (2nd edition 1863) to which Meinhof has added some modifications and adjustments.

Equipped with a consistent orthography such as the one described, the traveller might now proceed in collecting consecutive indigenous texts. Again he must be sure not to query too invasively, but rather to encourage people to talk of their own volition, because: (ibid.: 486): ‘Durch Fragen verschließt man

³⁰ “There are sounds and sound combinations occurring in the words that he has never heard before and which he first must learn to distinguish properly.”

den Leuten den Mund.’³¹ After stressing the importance of dialects for the study of languages, Meinhof again reminds the reader of the importance of a thorough preparation. Furthermore it is important to avoid analyzing and comparing the obtained data directly in the field but to wait until he has returned home where the necessary scientific references are available.

5.2 *Historiographical background and changes in methodology*

Meinhof links language much more to the human mind than his predecessors did. Whereas Prichard regarded language as a part of human beings, as valid as any other part, Steinthal has designated it as a psychological organ in the human mind. Both their guidelines seemed to imply that indigenous people were only waiting for the researchers to come and investigate them and their languages. Linguistics as Meinhof understands it, in contrast, dismisses the idea of language as an organ and considers it an expression of human life, which cannot be segregated from human beings. It cannot simply be taken from the natives, as Prichard and Steinthal had implicitly suggested, but the researcher should be prepared to encounter many obstacles and difficulties as he makes an unauthorized entry into foreign spheres of life.

As to the objectives of a preoccupation with language, Meinhof seems to pursue Steinthal’s tradition (Meinhof 1906: 438): ‘gewährt die Sprachkenntnis besonderes Interesse, weil sie dem Forscher ermöglicht, nicht nur die physische Beschaffenheit der Eingeborenen zu studieren, sondern auch einen Blick in ihre Geisteswelt zu tun’.³² But as the current methodology of natural science is not able to contribute anything substantial to this more metaphysical aim, this objective seems to recede into the background. Although Meinhof still recommends to collect original texts such as tales and songs, this is for another reason (ibid.: 487): ‘Aus diesem Material [die gesammelten Texte; my insertion] ist dann die Sammlung für Wörterbücher und Grammatik, die man bereits besitzt, zu ergänzen und zu berichtigen.’³³

Rather than trying to find out something about the spiritual life of people, Meinhof follows the thread of early comparativists such as Prichard. The main objective of language study is again the reconstruction of proto-languages, in his particular case: Proto-Bantu.³⁴ This is, as Prichard had already pointed out, a very promising approach, because (Meinhof 1907: 758): ‘Die Rekonstruktion

³¹ “Interrogation closes the people’s mouths.”

³² “the knowledge of the language is especially important as it allows the researcher not only to study the physical traits of indigenous people but also to get insight into their mentality.”

³³ “This material [the gathered texts; my insertion] is to be used to complete and correct any existing lexicon or grammar.”

³⁴ For a comprehensive overview of Meinhof’s work on African language see Pugach (2012).

ihrer [der schriftlosen Völker] Geschichte und damit eines wichtigen Teils der Geschichte der Menschheit ist entweder nur durch die Sprache oder nicht ohne die Sprache möglich.³⁵

Of course the practical use of language knowledge for the travellers should not be forgotten (Meinhof 1906: 438): ‘Abgesehen von dem praktischen Nutzen, den der Reisende ja selbst sofort genießt’.

The focus on spoken language, which we have already encountered in Steinthal’s text, has been further established in German language science at the turn of the century. The renunciation of the methods of historical–comparative philology is emphasized in the programmatic preface to *Morphological investigations in the sphere of the Indo-European languages* by Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann (Leipzig 1878: iii–xx, translation by Lehmann 1968: 202):

Therefore: only that comparative linguist who for once emerges from the hypotheses-beclouded atmosphere of the workshop in which the original Indo-European forms are forced, and steps into the clear air of tangible reality and of the present in order to get information about those things which grey theory can never reveal to him, [...] – only he can arrive at a correct idea of the way in which linguistic forms live and change [...].

The comparison of texts and letters has fallen into disuse; speech sounds were the only valid objects of investigation left for the so-called Neogrammarian linguists. Therefore a very sophisticated sound description and analysis becomes necessary. Linguistics is still in the early stages in terms of this task, as Meinhof seems to be painfully aware of the primitiveness of the methods, which can be nothing but provisional solutions. This urgent need for more refined measuring methods for thoroughly studying the nature of sounds is among others met with the foundation of the Phonetic Laboratory at the *Seminar für Kolonialsprachen* in 1910 in Hamburg and the launching of the *Internationales Zentralblatt für experimentelle Phonetik – Vox* in 1913.

However, working with speaking people instead of ancient texts requires more than accurate sound description; it entails a thorough study of the human psyche. Despite his intrusive paternalism, Meinhof tries to make clear the importance of stepping out of the traveller’s ways of social acting and thinking and to get an insight into the foreign ways of thinking and living.

³⁵ “The reconstruction of the history of oral cultures, which is the history of the main part of mankind, can only be done with language or not without language.”

Because of the structural differences among languages, which has become common knowledge by Meinhof's time, it is also important to abandon old thought patterns surrounding grammar (Meinhof 1907: 760): 'Die Beschäftigung mit primitiven Sprachen setzt also eine völlige Abstraktion von den geläufigen Sprachformen voraus'.³⁶ But this abstraction from familiar language structures is obviously difficult when it comes to explaining how to document unfamiliar structures: similar to Steinthal, Meinhof still assumes a kind of natural givenness of word classes and uses the classification and terminology found in German grammar books.

Confronted with these emerging challenges of accurate transcription, the required knowledge of the human psyche and the need to abstract from familiar language structures, it became obvious that this task of linguistic fieldwork could no longer be tackled by amateurs wandering through the field and ingenuously asking people about their vernaculars. In still doing so, they might run the risk of recording – unknowingly and unintentionally – distorted results (Meinhof 1907: 759): 'Ich habe bisher immer gefunden, dass dieselbe [scheinbare Gesetzlosigkeit] nur darin ihren Grund hatte, dass das Material entweder ungenügend aufgezeichnet war, oder dass man sich die Bearbeitung derselben zu leicht machte'.³⁷ This knowledge of the risks of insufficient preparedness led to a professionalization in the study of African languages, which is mainly associated with Carl Meinhof (Errington 2008: 87): 'Carl Meinhof, had developed this comparative enterprise into an independent academic field called *Afrikanistik*'.

The ongoing emancipation of linguistics also appears in the fact that Meinhof no longer uses any biological metaphors. Language study had found its own scientific methodology with the Neogrammarian's laws of regular sound change. With the possibility of empirical language documentation in the field, linguistics was no longer reliant upon speculations and hypotheses, but seemed to be enabled in making revisable predictions.

6 The outcome

The three manuals exemplify a multiplicity of similar texts which have aided many researchers, explorers, missionaries and others with the task of documenting disconcertingly unfamiliar languages.³⁸ We have seen how the

³⁶ "The preoccupation with primitive languages requires a total abstraction from common forms of speech."

³⁷ "I always found that assumed irregularities were only caused by inadequate recordings of the material or because of the fact that the task of documentation had been taken too lightly."

³⁸ Hildebrandt [1876] is only one of the authors who explicitly refer to Steinthal's instruction

implicit shared knowledge about language and its study significantly affected the form and content of the manuals. It is no surprise that these disparate manuals together with the special situation of language recording in a colonial context have decisively shaped the linguistic documentations produced and as a consequence the way in which these native languages were viewed in the metropolis.

I would like to exemplify this effect under only three aspects: intonation, the assumed lack of abstract nouns, and declension, keeping in mind that there are many more to be investigated.³⁹

Regarding intonation, a quotation of Franz Misteli (1841-1903), a Swiss linguist, will be very illustrative. Misteli re-edited Steinthal's *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues* in 1893 and added a chapter on Bantu languages. He identifies intonation as a distinctive feature of these languages (ibid.: 303; bold type added):

Merkwürdiger als die Laute ist die Intonation oder die Verwendung von Höhe und Tiefe der Stimme, um, wie im Chinesischen, Bedeutungen zu scheiden; sie scheint ein gemeinsames Merkmal der Bantusprachen, ist auch vielen nördlichen Negersprachen eigen [...], **obschon sie oft von Missionaren und Reisenden übersehen wurde.**⁴⁰

It becomes clear that this in fact was the case, as the following description of Vai, a northern Mande language, shows (Müller 1877: 144): '[...] d.h. ein und derselbe Lautcomplex kann unverändert in dem einen oder dem anderen Sinne gebraucht werden. So bedeutet Vei: *nyi* „Schönheit“ und „schön sein“, *di* „Fleiß“ und „fleißig sein“, [...]'.⁴¹ Misteli himself gives a possible reason for this disregard by trivializing the structural significance of intonation in African languages as opposed to the highly cultured Chinese (Misteli 1893: 304; bold type added):

Auch in die grammatischen Verhältnisse greift sie [die Intonation] nur selten ein und Fälle wie im Asante ónko "er soll gehen" und onkó

³⁹ I refer to Hackmack (2011 and forthcoming) for various other aspects.

⁴⁰ "Even more remarkable than the sounds is the intonation or the use of high and low pitch to express different meaning, similar to Chinese; this seems to be a common feature of Bantu languages, as well as of many northern Black African Languages [...], **although this is often overlooked by missionaries and travellers.**"

⁴¹ "This means that one and the same sound complex can be used unchanged for one sense or the other. Thus Vai *nyi* means 'beauty' and 'to be beautiful', *di* 'diligence' and 'to be diligent'."

"er geht nicht" sind sehr vereinzelt. **Die Darstellung des grammatischen Systems macht daher nicht unbedingt die Berücksichtigung der Töne notwendig**, derer eine vollständige oder eine praktische Grammatik natürlich nicht entbehren kann.⁴²

This non-observance of tonal distinction has remained, as a note in a modern Vai grammar shows. The author Welmers criticizes in his introductory words the work of one of his most famous predecessors August Klingenheben (1886–1967) on Vai (Welmers 1976: 1): ‘Klingenheben’s work is also far from adequate, and in some respects misleading. Although he discussed tone, for example, he failed to recognize lexical tone in verbs [...].’ It must be emphasized here that recognizing tone, especially in some African languages, is sometimes far from easy (Yip 2002: 133), but its oversight conceals an important structural attribute of the languages.

The second issue I would like to briefly touch upon is the putative lack of abstract nouns in some of the vernaculars. Meinhof states in his manual (1906: 448): ‘Häufig kehrt in den Aufzeichnungen der Reisenden die Behauptung wieder, die Sprache habe keine Abstrakta.’⁴³ This comes as no real surprise, as there are hardly any abstract nouns on the elicitation lists. The German missionary Sigismund W. Koelle gives the obvious reason (Koelle 1963: iv):

In the selection of the words which were to compose the Vocabulary I was guided by the desire to take those only which are most easily understood by the natives – names of visible objects at which I could point – avoiding all abstract words.

A very similar observation can be made in the case of an alleged lack of conjugation in native languages. Meinhof notes (1906: 448): ‘Eine andere Behauptung kehrt ebenfalls in den Aufzeichnungen von Reisenden häufig wieder, dass nämlich die betreffende Sprache weder Deklination noch Konjugation hätte.’⁴⁴ The reason for this assumption might be found in the way Steinthal, for example, advised verb morphology to be elicited (1875: 565): ‘Wenigstens ein Verbum muss vollständig durchconjugiert werden; besser aber

⁴² “Intonation only occasionally affects grammatical relations and cases as in Asante *ónko* ‘he shall go’ and *onkó* ‘he does not go’ are very rare. **It is therefore not absolutely necessary to include intonation in a description of the grammatical system**, although a comprehensive or a practical grammar cannot do without it.”

⁴³ “A frequent statement encountered in the descriptions is that the language bears no abstract nouns.”

⁴⁴ “Another common statement in the travellers’ notes is that neither declination nor conjugation are present in the language in question.”

ist es, die Conjugation vollständig an mehreren zu versuchen, etwa an *geben*, *reisen* und *liegen*.⁴⁵ Meinhof had realized that this method of recording morphological forms was inappropriate (Meinhof 1906: 452):

Bei dem Abfragen der einzelnen Personen halte man sich gewärtig, dass die Leute das uns zur andern Natur gewordene Schema „ich gebe, du gibst, er gibt“ usw. nicht kennen. Auf die Frage: „was heißt: ich gebe?“ wird man voraussichtlich befriedigende Antwort erhalten. Führt man aber fort zu fragen: „du gibst“, „er gibt“, so wird man den Gewährsmann leicht verwirren, weil er nicht weiß, von wem die Rede ist.⁴⁶

If the elicitation of verbal morphology had still been conducted as suggested by Steinthal it would not be a surprise that some languages would seem only to have a very limited set of verb forms.

These admittedly short examinations of a few examples of linguistic documentation were hopefully able to give an idea of how the implicit concepts of language, in addition to the situation in the colonial context, shaped the consequent linguistic outcome. We have seen how inadequate methodology leads to distorted conclusions and opinions which were likely to have strengthened the presumed inferiority of the described languages.⁴⁷

7 Summary and conclusion

This comparison has shown how the study of native languages has changed dramatically over the course of 57 years. We have seen how the historical and scientific ideologies shaped the way in which these languages were described. We could then discover how the exceptional circumstances of language documentation in a colonial context retroacted upon the methodology of language study.

⁴⁵ “At least one verb should be fully inflected, it is recommended though to have several verbs inflected such as *give*, *travel* and *lie*.”

⁴⁶ “When asking for the verbal conjugations it should be kept in mind that people do not know the paradigmatic scheme that has become a second nature to us. When asking: “how does one say *I give*?” a satisfying answer can be expected. But when continuing to ask for *you give*, *he gives* the informant will easily become confused, as he does not know who is being referred to.”

⁴⁷ Römer (1985) gives a detailed account of ideologically biased language studies in Germany whereas Kutzner (2012) describes the evaluative comparison of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ languages in the colonial context.

The preoccupation with this overwhelming diversity of unfamiliar cultures and vernaculars void of writing systems entailed two major intricacies, the problem of an accurate transcription being the first to be observed. For Prichard and his contemporaries transcribing spoken material expressed by the natives was not yet considered a big problem. Common knowledge of how to write familiar European sounds seemed to be sufficient. But things turned out to be much more complicated: Steinthal and Meinhof realized that this issue had to be faced with a more detailed and consistent phonetic description.

However, transcription was not the only challenge faced by researchers: Steinthal's assumptions concerning human beings and their language were a new turn in linguistics and he seemed to be quite unaware of the methodological consequences this entailed. He describes indigenous peoples as some form of repository in possession of language, happy to share it with the European researcher. But again things were much more intricate (Meinhof 1910: 3): 'Wir haben hier die zunächst sehr störende und ermüdende Aufgabe, dass wir die Sprachen zumeist erst aus dem Munde der Eingeborenen aufnehmen müssen'⁴⁸. He, in contrast to Steinthal, bears in mind that language cannot easily be taken from the native people, as it is inseparably intertwined within them as well as represents an essential part of the human psyche. Psychological and sociological aspects such as language attitude, language contact and change, context-sensitive language use etc. must be taken into account when it comes to language documentation.

Some examples have shown how the ideologically tinged language documentations resulted in outcomes that considerably shaped the common thinking about these languages.

Of course this investigation based on only a very limited selection of texts can merely give a preliminary inspiration into possible further research. The projects of the Creative Unit can make a decisive contribution to this aim by building up a comprehensive corpus of relevant texts.

8 References

- Arens, H. (1969). *Sprachwissenschaft: der Gang ihrer Entwicklung von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Freiburg: Alber.
- Bleek, W. (1862-1869). *Comparative grammar of South African Languages*. London: Trübner & Co.
- Bopp, F. (1833). *Vergleichende Grammatik des Sanskrit, Zend, Griechischen, Lateinischen, Litthauischen, Gothischen und Deutschen*.

⁴⁸ "We first have the very annoying and tiring task of recording the language from the mouth of the natives."

- Dewein, B.; Engelberg, S.; Hackmack, S.; Karg, W.; Kellermeier-Rehbein, B.; Mühlhäusler, P.; Schmidt-Brücken, D.; Schneemann, C.; Stolberg, D.; Stolz, T. & I. Warnke (2012). Forschungsgruppe Koloniallinguistik: Profil – Programmatik – Projekte. *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik* 40: 242–249.
- Dittmar, N. (1997). *Grundlagen der Soziolinguistik: ein Arbeitsbuch mit Aufgaben*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Dittmar, N. (2004). Forschungsgeschichte der Soziolinguistik (seit Verwendung dieses Ausdrucks). In: Ammon, U.; Dittmar, N.; Mattheier, K. J. & P. Trudgill (eds). *Sociolinguistics: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 698–720.
- Errington, J. (2008). *Linguistics in a colonial world: A story of language, meaning, and power*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Forbes, F. E. (1851). *Dahomey and the Dahomans; being the journal of two missions to the king of Dahomey, and residence at his capital, in the year 1849 and 1850*. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans.
- Grube, W. (1895). Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Kai-Dialekte. *Zeitschrift für afrikanische und orientalische Sprachen* 1: 83–94.
- Hackmack, S. (2011). *Gender in Swahili in selected colonial grammars*. Presentation held at the University of Bremen on the Linguistisches Kolloquium 2010/11. Available at: http://www.fb10.uni-bremen.de/sksv/dokumente/hackmack/Swahili_Gender.swf. (Consulted: 29.04.2014).
- Hackmack, S. (2012). Die Subjektprefixe des Swahili in kolonialzeitlichen Sprachbeschreibungen. In: Engelberg, Stefan and Stolberg, Doris (eds). *Sprachwissenschaft und kolonialzeitlicher Sprachkontakt*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Hackmack, S. (forthcoming). *Case in Selected Grammars of Swahili*.
- Herschel, J.F.W. (1849). Appendix to Prichard's 'Ethnology'. In: J.F.W. Herschel (ed). *A manual of scientific enquiry: prepared for the use of Her Majesty's Navy and adapted for travellers in general*. London: John Murray, 441–444.
- Heyse, J. C. (1838). *Theoretisch-praktische deutsche Grammatik*. 5th edition. Hannover: Hahn'sche Hofbuchhandlung.
- Hildebrandt, J. M. (1876). Fragmente der Johanna-Sprache. In: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 8: 89–96.
- Jankowsky, K. R. (2001). The crisis of historical-comparative linguistics in the 1860s. In: Auroux, S.; Burkhardt, A.; Ungeheuer, G.; et al. (eds). *History of the language sciences*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1326–1338.
- Jungen, O. & H. Lohnstein (2007). *Geschichte der Grammatiktheorie*. München: Fink.
- Kemp, J. A. (2001). The history and development of a universal phonetic alphabet in the 19th century: from the beginnings to the establishment of the IPA. In: Auroux, S.; Burkhardt, A.; Ungeheuer, G.; al. (eds). *History of the language sciences*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1572–1584.

- Kim, A.. 2006. Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/wilhelm-wundt/>> (Consulted: 16.04.2014)
- Koelle, S. W. (1963). *Polyglotta Africana*. Unchanged reprint of the 1854 edition, London: Church Missionary House, with a historical introduction by P.E.H. Hair. Graz: Akad. Druck- und Verl.-Anstalt.
- Koerner, K. (1989). Models in linguistic historiography. In: Koerner, K. (ed). *Practicing Linguistic Historiography: Selected essays*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 47–59.
- Kürschner, W. (2009). Georg von der Gabelentz' Manual for Recording Foreign Languages (1892) – Origins, Aims, Methods, Effects. In: *Current Issues in Unity and Diversity of Languages*. Collection of the Papers selected from CIL 18. <http://www.wilkuer.de/forschung/linguistikgeschichte/a_2009_-_gabelentz__manual_scan.pdf> (Consulted: April 2014)
- Kutzner, S. C. (2012). 'Zivilisierte' und 'unzivilisierte' Sprachen. Historische Sprachbewertung und das wirklich Fremde in Sprachen. In: Engelberg, & D. Stolberg (eds). *Sprachwissenschaft und kolonialzeitlicher Sprachkontakt*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 215–230.
- Lazarus, M.; Steinthal, H. & I. Belke (1986). *Moritz Lazarus und Heymann Steinthal: die Begründer der Völkerpsychologie in ihren Briefen*. Bd. II/2. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Lehmann, W. P. (1968). *A reader in nineteenth-century historical Indo-European linguistics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Main, R. (1859). Preface to the third edition. In: *A manual of scientific enquiry: prepared for the use of Her Majesty's Navy and adapted for travellers in general*. London: Murray, v–viii.
- Meinhof, C. (1906). Linguistik. In: von Neumayer, G. (ed). *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen. In Einzel-Abhandlungen. Band II*. 3rd rev. and enl. ed. Hannover: Jänecke, 438–488.
- Meinhof, C. (1907). Warum studiert man primitive Sprachen? *Anthropos* 2: 755–760.
- Meinhof, C. (1910). Das Studium der Kolonialsprachen. *Zeitschrift für Kolonialsprachen* 1: 1–4.
- Misteli, F. (1893). *Abriss der Sprachwissenschaft. 2. Teil: Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*. Neubearbeitung des Werkes von Prof. H. Steinthal (1861). Berlin: Dümmler.
- Müller, F. (1877). *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft. I. Band, II. Abt. Die Sprache der wollhaarigen Rassen*. Wien: Holder.
- Neumayer, G. (1875). Preface to the first edition. In: Neumayer, Georg (ed). *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse der kaiserlichen Marine*. Berlin: Oppenheim, 551–570.

- Neumayer, G. (1906). Preface to the third edition. In: Neumayer, Georg (ed). *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen. In Einzel-Abhandlungen. Band I.* 3rd rev. and enl. ed. Hannover: Jänecke, vii–xi.
- Pugach, S. (2012). *Africa in Translation: A history of colonial linguistics in Germany and beyond, 1814-1945.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Prichard, J. C. (1849). Ethnology. In: Herschel, J. F.W. (ed). *A manual of scientific enquiry: prepared for the use of Her Majesty's Navy and adapted for travellers in general.* London: Murray, 423–440.
- Römer, R. (1985). *Sprachwissenschaft und Rassenideologie in Deutschland.* München: Fink.
- Schlegel, F. von (1808). *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier: ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Alterthumskunde.* Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer.
- Schleicher, A. (1866). *Compendium der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen.* 2nd rev. ed. Weimar: Böhlau.
- Steinthal, H. (1855). *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie. Ihre Prinzipien und ihr Verhältnis zu einander.* Berlin: Dümmler.
- Steinthal, H. (1867). *Die Mande-Neger-Sprachen psychologisch und phonetisch betrachtet.* Berlin: Dümmler.
- Steinthal, H. (1875). Linguistik. In: Neumayer, G. (ed). *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse der kaiserlichen Marine.* Berlin: Oppenheim, 551–570.
- Steinthal, H. (1881). *Abriss der Sprachwissenschaft. Erster Teil: Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft.* 2nd rev. and enl. ed. Berlin: Dümmler.
- Steinthal, H. (1888). Linguistik. In: Neumayer, Georg (ed). *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse der kaiserlichen Marine.* 2nd rev. and enl. ed. Berlin: Oppenheim.
- Stolz, T.; Vossman, C. & B. Dewein (2011). Kolonialzeitliche Sprachforschung und das Forschungsprogramm Koloniallinguistik: eine kurze Einführung. In: Stolz, T.; Vossman, C. & B. Dewein (eds). *Kolonialzeitliche Sprachforschung. Die Beschreibung afrikanischer und ozeanischer Sprachen zur Zeit der deutschen Kolonialherrschaft.* Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 7–29.
- Stolz, Thomas (2012). Über die Wortmacherei, oder: die Verschiebung der Wortgrenzen in der kolonialzeitlichen Sprachforschung (am Beispiel des Chamorro). In: Engelberg, S. & D. Stolberg (eds). *Sprachwissenschaft und kolonialzeitlicher Sprachkontakt.* Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 17–47.
- Swiggers, P. (2010). History and historiography of linguistics: status, standards and standing. *Eutomia. Revista Online de Literatura e Linguística*, v. 3/2. Available at: <<http://www.revistaeutomia.com.br/eutomia-ano3-volume2-destaques.html>>. (Consulted: April 2014)
- van Wyhe, John. (2002). *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online* <<http://darwin-online.org.uk/>> (Consulted: 16.04.2014)

- Warnke, I. H. (2009). Deutsche Sprache und Kolonialismus. Umriss eines Forschungsfeldes.
In: I.H. Warnke (ed). *Deutsche Sprache und Kolonialismus. Aspekte der nationalen Kommunikation 1884–1919*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 3–62.
- Welmers, W. E. (1976). *A Grammar of Vai*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yip, M. (2002). *Tone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Susanne Schuster
University of Bremen
suschu@uni-bremen.de