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Supplementary Paper

A NOTE ON AFRICAN LANGUAGE BIBLIOGRAPHY

by

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There would appear to be three major needs in this field:

- (i) a standard system for the cataloguing of material on/in African languages, with an established methodology for their sub-classification;
- (ii) a standard list of bibliographical reference-names to cover all African languages and ethnic groups;
- (iii) a co-ordinated system for the listing of African vernacular publications.

(i) Linguists are still far from agreed on the 'genetic' classification of African languages, and this remains an unsuitable frame of reference for their bibliographical sub-classification. It would be more useful if African languages could be grouped into several major bibliographical sections on pragmatic grounds: these could be 'genetic' where large groupings have been established beyond dispute, e.g. 'Bantu', but would otherwise be regional, e.g. 'West African'. The arrangement of all languages within each section would be strictly alphabetical.

(ii) A standard romanized form needs to be established as the bibliographical 'reference-name' for each African language (and ethnic group), avoiding the use of phonetic characters and diacritics: each such reference-name would need to be unique with regular distinctions made between African languages or ethnic groups with similar or identical names (i.e. by orthographic variation, or by the use of postscript numerals or compound names). Bibliographical reference-names would be based on the nomenclature most commonly used in previous literature and would not necessarily represent indigenous forms. (The latter could be recorded in a separate, more complex catalogue of African linguistic and ethnic names, designed for linguistic rather than bibliographical purposes.)

(iii) The efficient cataloguing of vernacular publications, many of them ephemeral, can only take place in Africa. The major languages require separate bibliographies, which should be prepared and maintained by a relevant institution in each language-area. The multitude of less important languages should be dealt with on a national or regional basis. Regional centres would avoid a proliferation of bibliographies among the smaller countries, and would help to ensure uniformity and continuity.