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Maud Devos (RMCA Tervuren)

How to unlock Meeussen's (meta-)linguistic heritage at the RMCA

A. E. Meeussen (1912–1978) was a Belgian pioneer linguist in the field of Bantu languages. During his career at the Royal Museum for Central-Africa (1950–1977) he pushed the field forward on descriptive, comparative-historical and theoretical levels. He left behind an important (meta-)linguistic heritage both in published (for which see Coupez 1980 and https://scholar.google.be/citations?user=q4fG_b0AAAAJ&hl=en) and unpublished form. The RMCA is starting to make efforts to unlock his unpublished legacy which, at present, sits uncatalogued on the shelves of the museum's linguistic department. The Meeussen „archives“ entail both 1) „empirical“ linguistic data including audio recordings from fieldwork sessions in Burundi and the Maniema region of the DRC in the 1950s, notebooks, drafts of papers and card boxes with catalogued grammatical and lexicographic data, and 2) meta-linguistic data consisting of an estimated 12 meters of archival units involving administration documents, acquisition records and especially correspondence with missionary, linguistic and speaker communities.

In line with Austin (2013) the Meeussen „archives“ aim to preserve not only the research outcomes but also as much as possible of the research context which inevitably shaped them. In an era in which linguists are more and more aware of the colonial origins of their discipline and the ongoing legacy of colonialism in contemporary linguistics (see e.g., Gilmour 2006, Errington 2008, Zimmermann & Kellermeier 2015, Hollington & Storch 2016, Deumert & Mabandla Nkulukelo 2018, Agyekum 2018, Deumert & Storch, forthcoming a, Deumert & Storch, forthcoming b) a linguistic archive covering a period before and after independence needs a contextual layer. Research on the (meta-)linguistic data before and after independence will help to identify continuities (coloniality) and changes in the way linguistic research was carried out.

The presentation will identify some changes and continuities related to the linguistic research carried out at the RMCA before and after independence. It also aims to incite some discussion around the following archival issues:

- 1) What should a (historical) linguistic archive preserve? Are all (meta-)linguistic data in need of preservation and how do we decide? And is the same inevitably true for contemporary linguistic archives?
- 2) Online publication versus copyright and privacy issues: the possibilities and impossibilities of the online publication of linguistic and meta-linguistic materials. Who are the actors and how can they be involved?
- 3) How can we build a maximally participatory archive? Who are the potential archive users and who do we want them to be?

Maud Devos obtained a PhD with a dissertation entitled *A Grammar of Makwe* (Leiden University, 2004). She currently is a researcher at the Royal Museum for Central Africa and a guest lecturer at Ghent University where she teaches Kiswahili. Her research interests lie primarily in the description, typology, morphosyntax and comparison of Bantu languages. She has carried out fieldwork on three north-Mozambican Bantu languages: Makwe (PhD), Shangaji and Mwani whose histories are intertwined with the history of Kiswahili along the east-African coast. She is a co-editor of *Africana Linguistica* and *Swahili Forum*.

Institutskolloquium Sommersemester 2021 (Leitung: Nico Nassenstein)

Wann? Dienstag, 6. Juli 2021, 18:00–19:15 Uhr

Wo? Konferenzschaltung via Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4362747051?pwd=ZW85YmFKUjQ1aHZFeFIWVjF0bVdnZz09>

Weitere Informationen: www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de