

Obituaries for Prof. Pius N. Tamanji

July 23, 1965- November 30, 2014

Prepared by Philip Mutaka and largely inspired by Prof. Tamanji's own notes

#### General presentation of Pius Tamanji

Pius N. Tamanji, who was recently promoted Professor of linguistics one year ago, had been an active staff member, as Professor, at the Department of African Languages and Linguistics, University of Yaounde 1. Tamanji was born on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1965 in Bafut, Bezam Division, North-West region. He studied for a BA in English in the University of Yaounde and a Maitrise and Doctorat de 3e Cycle in the Department of African Languages and Linguistics, University of Yaounde 1. He defended his Doctorat de 3eme Cycle thesis in 1991, and was recruited the same year as assistant lecturer to teach generative syntax in the same department. Five years later, he travelled to the USA, under a William Fulbright Junior Staff Development programme. He completed his PhD programme in the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in August 1999. He returned to Cameroon the same year and resumed his duties as assistant lecturer in the Department of African Languages and Linguistics. In 2003, he travelled to Germany under the Alexander von Humboldt Research fellowship. He spent 14 months in the University of Cologne and returned to Yaounde in March 2005. The same year, he was promoted to the grade of Associate professor. He also taught courses in the University of Buea and in the University of Dschang. In 2008, he travelled again to Germany, this time in the University of Hamburg where he began negotiations for cooperation between Yaounde and Hamburg. A memorandum of understanding was later signed between the two universities. He returned to the University of Hamburg again in 2010, this time, as a DAAD visiting professor. He taught Articulatory phonetics, Syntax of African Languages, Field Methods, and Linguistic Diversity in Africa. I read from his notes that, as he was applying for a promotion to the rank of Professor, he had supervised 92 and examined 106 maitrise theses, supervised 36 and examined DEA and MA dissertations, supervised 3 and examined 10 PhD dissertations. This means he has supervised more than these works.

#### Support to University and National Development

Tamanji has contributed immensely to the introduction of online education in the University of Yaounde 1. Under the auspices of the Humboldt Alumni Association, he received training for 5 years on online education. He eventually emerged as one of the trainers in the team. He currently has two courses online (elearning. Uninet.cm; one of which is complete and has been tried with MA students. He has also received training in the International Labour Office in Italy on quality assurance in online education. Up till his passing away, he was serving as consultant and international evaluator for the OpenECBCheck Community ([www.ecb-checkcorg](http://www.ecb-checkcorg)). Open ECBCheck, based in Germany, is a low-cost based peer review group in online education consisting of several UN organizations and universities. Tamanji recently encouraged one of his students to do a PhD in online education (rather than in linguistics). With this student and the Humboldt Alumni Association Cameroon, funding was obtained for the student – Meguieng Sidze Sandrine- to do a PhD in the United Nations University in Bonn, Germany. Tamanji has also created a course which focuses on training students to be self-reliant through the creation of jobs and businesses from daily community challenges. This course has been tried with selected MA students in the Department of African Languages and Linguistics. Tamanji was also operating a private educational institution for primary and secondary education in Yaounde. The Primary School (Eden Education Foundation, Nkolbisson) is currently in its 11<sup>th</sup> year of existence. The secondary school which features the Lower sixth form at moment is in its seventh year of existence. Tamanji was also serving as linguistic consultant for the Bafut Language Committee and as scientific coordinator in charge of the development of languages of the North West region. In this role, he assisted in the creation of language committees and in the development of local languages for literacy purposes.

#### Contribution to Research

Tamanji has five books and more than 30 articles published in recognized journals to his credit. These publications result from research which he has carried out on the languages of the Grassfields region of Cameroon. He has researched extensively on Bafut, his mother tongue. He has created a research group in his department and named it after the famous Grassfields Bantu Working Group. This group is responsible for describing the grammars of Grassfields Bantu languages. The first major publication resulting from the research of this group is *Aspects of Reduplication in Languages of Cameroon and Senegal* (edited by Tamanji and Mba). Tamanji recently submitted a major research application to the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Programme. As he obtained funding for this project, he was currently working with colleagues from the Anthropology and Biochemistry departments of the University of Yaounde 1 to study the language and practice of traditional medicine in the Grasslands Region of Cameroon. More specifically, the investigators for this project, The Language and Practice of Ethno-medicine in the Grasslands Region of Cameroon (LAPEM) (two linguists, one biochemist and one anthropologist) will be

- a) collecting audio and video data on verbal art performances (including recitations and incantations) used during the preparation and administration of traditional medicine in the target communities,
- b) collecting audio and video data on the local names and medicinal properties (as known to the local population) of these plants,
- c) collecting samples from plants commonly used in the ethno-medical industry and undertaking a scientific (laboratory) study of the medicinal properties of these plants. The laboratory study involves extracting the active ingredients of each sample and screening each sample for its phytochemical properties.

Tamanji played a key role (Vice president of organizing committee) in the organization of the BS Chumbow International Symposium which held in the University of Yaounde 1 in April 2010. This symposium brought together over 300 delegates from Britain, USA, Nigeria, Mali, Sweden, and Cameroon. The Proceedings of the symposium are currently being processed for publication. Recently in 2012, Tamanji organized the World Congress of African Linguistics in the University of Buea from 17-24 August. This was described as the most heavily attended WOCAL congress on the African continent. The congress brought together over 400 delegates from 28 countries in the world. The papers presented at this congress are currently being revised for submission for publication.

#### Supporting the growth of Junior colleagues

Apart from supervising the research of PhD students, Tamanji has played a major role in assisting junior colleagues to get promoted within the university system. In 2008, he rallied a large number of colleagues and together they prepared papers and submitted to the organizers of the World Congress of African Linguistics which held in Cologne, Germany. In the end, 9 colleagues (5 from the University of Buea and 4 from the University of Yaounde 1) were selected and sponsored to attend the congress. Six papers presented by these colleagues at the congress have since been published. Earlier on, he had put together the Grassfields Bantu Working Group for the purpose of researching in the Grassfields Bantu languages. Thirteen members of the group published papers in the book *Aspects of Reduplication in Languages of Cameroon and China*. The members are currently doing research on the evolution of grammatical items in the Grassfields Bantu languages. Tamanji also sensitized junior colleagues to present papers at the BS Chumbow International Symposium. Eighteen junior scholars in his department presented papers and thirteen have revised their papers and submitted for publication. Thirty-six of his colleagues (including especially PhD students) attended and presented papers at the WOCAL congress which he organized in the University of Buea in August 2012. He has also co-opted junior colleagues to join him in the supervision of MA and PhD dissertations and in writing linguistics course books for the students in his department. The first course book done with Dr. Tabe Florence (*Groundwork in Generative Syntax*) already exists in manuscript form as a trial version. The second book, (*Introduction to Linguistics*) involving a PhD student (Moguo Francine) and two colleagues (Dr. Tabe Florence and Dr. Ndamsah Gratiana) is currently being prepared. He has co-authored and published two journal articles with Dr. Ndamsah Gratiana (Constituent Structure of the Associative Construction in Grassfields Bantu”), and “ Issues in Reduplication in Limbum”).

#### Final note from the JWAL assistant editor

As the current JWAL assistant editor, I wish to add that, when Keir Hansford, the JWAL editor, expressed the wish to retire and that he needed to train someone to be doing his job of editing, I proposed him Pius Tamanji who gladly accepted as I knew that he had done some editing at his home university of Massachusetts at Amherst when he was a student. Keir Hansford has consistently praised him and even recommended him to the WALS authorities who are the legal owners of the Journal as one of the best candidates to replace him as the new JWAL Editor. His passing away is thus felt as a great loss. This is also an opportunity for me to convey the condolences wishes from Prof. Firmin Ahoua and Prof. Constantine Yuka (respectively President and Executive Secretary of the West African Language Society) to his family on behalf of the West African Language community.

Pius Tamanji leaves his wife with four children and his dear mother who was already living with him after his father passed away about a year ago. May God bless them in this time of grief and we all pray that the Lord God reserve a special place for you in his paradise. Many people will mourn you indeed because you were so kind and so helpful to so many people. May your soul rest in peace, for eternity, and make sure you continue to inspire positively, those you have left behind. Pius Ngwa Tamanji.