Pius Hasha
It is in more than one respect a pity that Professor Malcolm Guthrie died so soon after the publication of his magnum opus because that untimely demise deprived the connoisseurs of the battle royal which would surely have taken place between the London master and his scholarly opponents, especially the American linguists. *Comparative Bantu* certainly is a most remarkable piece of work—be it only as a tour de force of the printer’s art—and also certainly not an easy one to read. Is it as revolutionary as it purported to be, vis-à-vis, that is, the classical or Meinhofian school of Bantu linguistics? Both Meinhof and Guthrie had the same final aim, namely the reconstruction of the prehistorical ancestor to all modern Bantu languages, yet with different methods. The latter put more stress on synchronical comparisons, his ‘Common Bantu’ being, rather than a reconstruction of the ancestor language, like the former’s UrBantu, a symbolical representation of contemporary related forms (‘shapes’ in his own personal terminology), and it is only after elaborating a catalogue of comparative series of which this ‘Common Bantu’ consists that he attempted the actual reconstruction of Bantu prehistory. According to this reconstruction—which met with the strongest criticism of both the German/South African and the American schools—Proto-Bantu developed, in the lacustrine area, from a Pre-Bantu originally spoken somewhere near Lake Chad, and further on divided into two dialects which account for the differences obtaining nowadays between Eastern and Western languages. This, of course, runs contrary to the more generally accepted opinion that Proto-Bantu was a West African language which probably developed on what is now the Plateau area of Nigeria and, so to speak, flew down southwards at a fairly recent date to cover up the present field of Bantu expansion (see, for instance, G. P. Murdock’s *Africa*, New York, 1959).

It is, indeed, difficult to take a definite stand on Guthrie’s prehistorical hypothesis. While his argument concerning the high proportion of common roots in the central area seems to give it some weight, it fails to be fully convincing when one tries to explain the resemblance between Bantu and many of the class-languages of West Africa, including some which are found at a considerable distance from both the present ‘Bantu line’ and the hypothetical Pre-Bantu focus. Also Guthrie’s hypothesis postulates migratory movements which check only sketchily with most of the available anthropological and archaeological data. On the other hand both his symbolization of ‘Common Bantu’ and his classification of contemporary languages do seem sounder and more useful than those

of Meinhof’s followers. It must be stressed that his methods were painstakingly strict and severe—he would not, for instance, put on the same ‘Comparative Series’ (C.S.) items with close and analogous, but not identical, meanings, or with close but non-recurrent sound patterns. Finally, even those Bantu scholars who disagree with his historical reconstruction, do generally accept his ‘pragmatic’ classification and use his ‘Common Bantu’ catalogue.

May one then speak of a Guthrian school of Bantu, or even African linguistics? While most of the members of his former department at the School of Oriental and African Studies are only too apt at emulating his rather painful intellectual tic of using a rather obscure and idiosyncratic terminology, chiefly made up of mysterious initials, it seems that his actual influence is perceptible only among some of the younger British-trained linguists and possibly among some late-comers to the field of linguistics. In fact Malcolm Guthrie was no general linguist. He does not seem to have taken much interest in the modern theories of language, including those developed in his own country (e.g. Halliday’s scales and categories). This attitude, of course, can be presented as a sane reaction against the temptation (too seldom resisted by some American scholars) to theorize about hardly explored ‘exotic’ languages. Still it certainly has been a limiting factor to Guthrie’s influence. Put in another way it means that while there is doubtlessly a London school of African linguistics, this school is characterized more by its working methods than by any common theoretical approach.

The same, in truth, seems to hold good in the French situation. In the last ten years or so France has taken considerable steps to make good for her former lack of interest in African languages. Professor Pierre Alexandre, the man in charge of the main collection of African linguistics published in Paris, is, indeed, an SOAS alumnus and Guthrie’s pupil. Nevertheless, and in spite of what is stated on the flyleaves of all volumes in the collection, one can still doubt that there is such a thing as a Parisian, or even a French school in that field. Professor Alexandre himself, in the first volume of the collection, describes, aptly enough, his own methods as ‘a cocktail of Guthrie and Martinet’ (incidentally he is probably the only author in the field able to write an amusing book on such a desicated topic as the A.74 verbal system), but this definition does not extend to the other books in his collection, which lacks markedly in homogeneity, both in the subject matters (there are dictionaries and literary texts as well as grammars and descriptions) and in the underlying theoretical methods and assumptions. This is not to detract from the general quality of the published studies, which are on the whole at a very high level. As mentioned above, for instance, while Professor Alexandre’s description of Bulu bears a strong Guthrian imprint—it often reads as a translation from SOAS English—I. Dugast’s Grammaire du tunen is very much in the Meinhovian tradition, while F. Lumwamu starts a trend of his own in his highly formalized Essai de morphosyntaxe systématique des parlers kongo where there is some evidence of an American influence (e.g. in the use of graphs and matrices). The same runs true for the published texts: Dr A. I. Sow’s Chroniques.

et récits du Foûta-Djalon (Fulani) are of historical and literary, rather than purely linguistic, interest. Similarly, M. S. Eno Belinga's Découverte des chantefables du Cameroun belongs to the fields of folklore and musicology rather than to linguistics. On the other hand C. Pairault's *Documents du parler d'Iro* and J. Thomas' *Contes, proverbes... ngbaka-na’bo* are primarily linguistic documents. The latter deserves special mention as an astonishing monument of African scholarship, which bears comparison with the great 19th century German editions of the classics. J. Thomas has set up a model—one which will be difficult to follow both because of the amount of time and work involved and of the price of the book.

This is perhaps the main fault of the collection, that its volumes are in most cases so highly priced as to put them out of the reach of most individuals, even in the so-called developed countries. This is especially serious in the case of the dictionaries. As a native-born Bantu-speaker, this reviewer does not feel competent to deal with G. Calame-Grivaile's Dogon dictionary, except by mentioning that it looks like a good source of ethnological data (see esp. the drawings and photographs, all too rare in other works of this type). As for I. Dugast's Tûnen and P. Helmlinger's Duala, they manage somehow to be quite outdated in their presentation (the entries are arranged according to the alphabetical order of prefixes!), while at the same time providing us with a wealth of precisely recorded, previously unavailable facts. Tûnen, a borderline language according to Guthrie, is quite a-typical and divergent from the rules and traits one expects to find in Bantu. Duala is much more 'classical', and far better known (it was first described over 100 years ago), but the best available dictionary was fifty years old and in German: the new one is three times bigger, gives the tones, and has a wealth of examples (especially proverbs), which, despite the outmodedness of its presentation, puts it on a par with the great Bantu lexicographic works. All three dictionaries, by the way, have a reverse (French-African) index, a device which should be made compulsory. Considering their price, and the fact mentioned above that the editor is British-trained and reputedly favours English-French bilingualism in Africa, they should have been provided as well with an English index for the benefit of those African scholars who have little or no French, and who share in the general belief that, due to the francophonie policy, there is no such thing as a French school of African linguistics.

*Post-Scriptum.* Sans vouloir contester dans leur ensemble les observations de P. Hasha, je crois devoir signaler qu'à mon avis, c'est plutôt dans les publications de la SÉLAF qu'on verra se manifester les méthodes et les tendances qui permettent de parler d'une « école de Paris » en matière de linguistique africaine. L'influence de Guthrie — médiatisée notamment par celle de A. Meeussen, probablement le meilleur bantuiste actuel — n'y est pas totalement absente, mais reste moins importante que celles de A. Martinet et A. Haudricourt. C'est sans doute à ce dernier qu'il faut attribuer la pratique — à notre avis très saine — de ne pas séparer langue et culture : les études parues concernent aussi bien la linguistique « pure » (phonologie, morphosyntaxe, etc.) que l'ethno- et la sociolinguistique et la littérature orale. Sur le plan méthodologique, on signalera tout spécialement les deux numéros spéciaux : *Enquête et description des langues à tradition orale* (1971) et *Les langues sans tradition écrite : méthode d'enquête et de description* (colloque CNRS de Nice, 1971, sous presse). — P. A.

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