Linguistic Trash

Andrea Hollington; Nico Nassenstein; Anne Storch
University of Cologne; Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz; University of Cologne

1. Introduction: reflexivity and opacity

The ways in which linguists[1] have produced, and continue to produce, data on languages, as describers, documenters, rescuers and educationalists, not only reflect their established methodologies (based on elicitation, immersion fieldwork and language documentation) but also their shared ideologies pertaining to language. These ideologies determine and rationalize a particular perspective on language – as structure that can be delimited, recorded and described by linguists. They frame language as reproducible, controllable, and as an empirical fact that translates into metalinguistic discourse. Other forms of communicative practice are often not conceptualized as language, and consequently are not desired as parts of linguistic data: they are "noise," not meaningful speech (Deumert & Storch 2020). Language ideologies in linguistics are also of relevance for how the South, and regions across the globe that are marginalized, are conceptualized as data-mining sites, whereas theory is supposed to be produced in the North, or at globally renowned academic institutions in the metropolises, as an episteme that is detached from Indigenous language philosophies and local expert knowledges. Language – perhaps in particular in postcolonial contexts – therefore is seen not only as a structure that can be isolated from the noises surrounding it and presented as a discrete entity, but also as a system that can only be explained and made sense of by linguists as trained and authorized experts, and not with the help of Southern epistemologies and language ideologies shared by the so-called "speakers." The speakers' rationalizations of how structure and meaning emerge from speech is usually the focus of studies in other disciplines, such as folklore studies, folk linguistics, and anthropology.

The language ideologies that are part of Northern linguistics have emerged out of the discipline's complex history and are deeply rooted in its colonial basis. This has been critically discussed by numerous scholars, including Blommaert (1999), Mignolo (2000), Irvine (2001), Makoni & Pennycook (2005), Errington (2008), Bonfiglio (2010), Pennycook & Makoni (2020) among others, and continues to be part of reflexive and critical debates. Here, we do not intend to repeat the

arguments brought forth in previous work, but rather attempt a closer look at reflexivity in the South, by turning the gaze to the entanglements between Northern concepts of language and Southern ways of referring to them (Hoffmann 2020). We are interested in how "speakers" mimetically interpret, ironically refuse, and play with such concepts – depending on the context and goals of the conversation or performance.

Turning the gaze to the unpleasant and the incomprehensible in language aims at supposing coevalness, i.e. the fact of sharing the same timeframe, in the sense which Johannes Fabian (1983) assigned to it. It makes the holes in the system visible, the parts of language practice that we will not be able, and will not be permitted, to understand. The ideologies of the incomprehensible and untranslatable reflect complex entanglements of Self and Other, of the colonial and the colonized, of the Northern and the Southern, and so on. And while making meaning out of linguistic practice requires metalinguistic knowledge as a means of translation of a particular *text*, making sense of the incomprehensible requires the advocacy of *subjectivity*, of the irreproducible and the uncontrollable in language.

Methodologies of data production are crucial here: only by critically reflecting upon how we turn recordings and scrabbled notes into linguistic evidence can we look for the contradictions in linguistic academic practices, can we actually refer to the annihilation of the incomprehensible and subjective. Taking a look at our own recordings and transcriptions, we see a recurrent, rather obvious pattern: recordings are always, like imperfect photographs, touched up. The sounds made by roosters, children and rain are removed; stammering, mistakes and repetition are erased; and our own voices (talking to our smartphones, scolding our children ...) are taken out, too. This is not cleaning a recording to make it usable, but removing "the field," the sonic environment in which data production has taken place. The field is remade as a seemingly pure laboratory, and we attempt to make speech look like a reproducible event: creating the illusion that upon eliciting the same wordlist all over, the "informant" will always produce the same words, and more importantly, the same sounds. This seemingly allows us to justify our attempts to extract scientific 'truth' from an allegedly clean recording – a central criticism of the present paper.

Removing the noisy, unpredictable and trivial field creates space for an ideology of language as something that can be controlled by linguists, and that exists independently of its context and environment. There is no space for ironic comments by the "speakers" on the context of the "field" and the boredom of data mining, and no space for postcolonial critique on "the field," as a place that is other people's homes turned into a stage and laboratory. Subjectivity has no place in

such an ideological setting. It is not possible to describe a language (preferably an "unknown"/"remote"/"newly discovered" language) within the paradigms that we have been socialized with by carefully considering repetitions, mistakes, grunts, cries and silences as part of meaningful structure. Language (use) is irregular, noisy and disturbing, and so too are speakers' uttered doubts, or their wish to "undo" or "redo" a recording, as (unwanted) critical statements of self-reflexivity in the production of "linguistic data" (a concept whose understanding we intend to broaden here).

However, precisely these unwanted sounds and objections in our sonic archives can be seen as what makes language complete, as an interpersonal activity that has a real place in peoples' lives. But they are also, in many cases, auditory performances of language ideologies by the people who are heard in these recordings. These performances only reluctantly allow for intercultural translation, and tend to remain opaque. Seeing them as coeval ways of expressing knowledge about language and context might not make the ideological transactions that underlie performativity completely transparent. But it does shed a light on the reciprocal in the opaque, and on how Southern ("local") language ideologies, their noisy performance and unruliness also refer to the Northern (the other crack in the system) – to language removed from sound, smell, subjectivity and an entire life practice of actual people (Storch 2017, 2019). Noisy language theory points at the disturbance created by remaking language as a normative structure, and by turning its archived form into heritage, into something that can finally be owned, as world heritage or the legacy of a country, by other people.

Understanding noise here requires reflection on the meanings of order – in Michael Taussig's words a banal task: "But at the risk of enormous and enormously-forgotten banality, note there can be no south without a north" (1999: 80). The expressive performance of a person becoming an exhibit, and the speaker a specimen, is one of the concepts behind noise, which is also evident in music practices and reflects the agency of artists or singers in their lyrical performances and recordings. And then, there are ideas about hospitality, about inviting others inside one's personal soundscapes, and offer an opportunity to *still understand*, in spite of all the epistemic breaks that make language hard to grasp in its colonial settings.

2. Incorporeal signs

> Sounds, too, could be treated as found objects, raw materials and resources ...
>
> Rey Chow, *Not like a native speaker*

In the fulminant concluding chapter of her book on language and the postcolonial experience, Rey Chow (2014) offers reminiscences of her mother, a radio broadcaster, author and producer of numerous radio plays. By reflecting upon her mother's voice, the muteness of her personal experiences in her bequeathed manuscripts, and the sound nevertheless emerging from these texts and things, Chow makes some crucial observations about sonic objects:

> During a historical period when the innovations associated with musique concrète were gaining worldwide momentum, it became increasingly clear that sounds, like images, could be artificially produced, mixed, and assembled (in what became known as "aural montage"). [...] [E]ven as the telephone, the stairs, the doors, and the glasses and silverware stood authentically in the recording studio, they were not exactly props in the conventional sense [...] but rather objects with a mysterious, second-order existence. These objects were there for the sole purpose of mechanically fabricating a dramatic ambience that was, even as it came alive, purely imaginary. Like voices issuing forth from the bodies of the actors and actresses, the sounds produced with these objects were incorporeal signs, their reality being nothing less and nothing more than the auditory simulacra they evoked. (Chow 2014: 112 f.)

Mimicking the Other is not a simple practice such as imitation, for example. It is a practice that entails complex mediatization and reflexivity. And by treating sound as an object, as something that can be collected and utilized, this practice acquires a multilayeredness that speech otherwise does not have. Sounds (or noises) are not disturbances, of course, nor are they codes of their own, but aural accompaniments of speech, in the sense of theatrical scenery. And while speech is something "real" that comes right out of a person's mouth, mimetic sounds have an artificial quality. The objects that are mimicked and at the same time used as tools for making the mimicking sounds are not real objects, but imitations of them. Auditory simulacra, as Chow calls them, are evoked by precisely the objects and people that are at the same time created; and they are not made by real objects and people, but by their copies. They are incorporeal; they do not have any real existence.

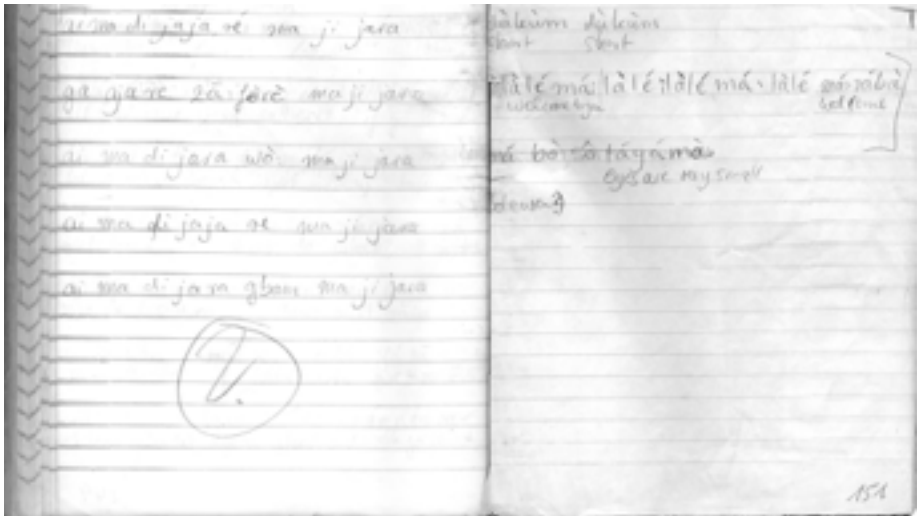
We consider this approach in Chow's book very liberating. First starting out with language as monolingual, ordered speech, we are finally invited to look at language as art, noise and copy. There is subjectivity in this language, authorship, and also community, in the sense of how voices and sounds are put together. Turning to

performances offered in storytelling settings, in another postcolonial context, it is all there: in the villages of Pindiga and Kashere in northeastern Nigeria, a group of elderly women told stories, sang songs, and so on. They all were members of a particular Jukun-speaking community and spoke a language referred to as Hone. This community was situated in a sociolinguistically complex area, where most people share equally complex linguistic repertoires. Unlike many other people in their villages, they spoke Hone a lot, a language which otherwise seemed to be marginalized.

The experience of marginalization rather frequently translated into regretful discourse about the younger generation's loss of the language. Many older people, however, continued to point out that Hone (and Jukun languages as a whole) had a sacred quality and was a powerful, agentive code that must not be shared needlessly with those who might use its power for harmful purposes.

Even though the storytelling was in Hone, it did not end there. It turned out that, after transcribing, there was a lot of what had made much sense in its aural form that would now, in its visual form, not provide any means for translation. The notebook either remained blank or was filled with brackets, question marks, and so on. Transcription and translation had always seemed to be unsatisfactory as a means of grasping speech and meaning, and here they ceased to be of any help – transcribed recordings void of meaning, and sounds for which there was no sign.

Figure 1: Transcription of the incomprehensible, with traces of data scrubbing



A solution would have been to throw this out of the corpus. All the women who participated in the storytelling event lived in matrimonial

homes that were different from those they grew up in. Following exogamous marriage practices, their families had married them off at a young age into other villages and often other sociolinguistic environments. It could be, the teacher Mohammad Hamma Dada said, that they had forgotten most of their former language, with the exception of these incomprehensible bits in their stories. He suggested it was Bolanci, but no Bolanci speaker could make sense of the sequences in question either.

Like other, clearly translatable parts of the texts, some of these sequences were performed as songs. This is a frequently employed stylistic element, but here it sounds a bit different: the voices mimic musical instruments, the *adhān* (i.e. mosque's call for prayer), the pattering of children's feet, and women's cries during a funeral. They seem to do the same as the sound designers at a broadcasting studio: they furnish a stage on which the actual play will be performed, in which the props are not tangible objects, but audible ones.

In the plays of Rey Chow's mother, the objects that were inserted as auditory simulacra were items that belonged to the environment the audiences experienced day by day, such as dishes in a kitchen, a door slamming, and so on. They belonged to the stories told in the plays as objects that made them more "authentic." But what kind of auditory simulacra are present in the stories presented by the elderly women in Kashere and Pindiga? What did they need to reconstruct, and what triggered the need for the insertion of these auditory simulacra into their stories? There are certainly several semiotic layers here. First of all, mimicked sounds make speech complete, and help to turn the gaze to the individual voice, to the talent of a specific storyteller, and to the rhetoric shared by a community.

But then, they also belong to language, as a form of other speech that constantly interferes with "normal, real" speech, like interfering waves on the radio. The auditory simulacra appear suddenly, in the midst of a story about a hyena and a goat, or about a mother and her child – in other words, in the midst of life, interrupting it. And these observations are crucial; the objectified sounds that are artfully placed in between "regular words" are used as mimetic interpretations of spirits, which are frequently encountered objects in the environment the storytellers live in. As wives who still remained "guests" to their husbands' families, and who were denied access to religious knowledge and decision-making institutions, they shared multiple experiences of otherness, strangeness and insecurity. At the same time, living in a household together with a group of co-wives also requires strategies of gaining superiority over others. The lack and creation of agency through spirit possession rituals and witchcraft discourse is therefore an important, although not explicit, motif in folktales. Here, objectified sounds that mimic spirits are used to turn experiences of

strangeness and agency into sonic scenery. The spirits themselves, however, are not there. Their representations remain incorporeal signs.

Considering the social situation of these women and their means of expressing themselves, it makes some sense to put the sections that, in isolation (as transcribed speech), are incomprehensible into the center and to frame them as language, as art, noise and copy. However, such a move might not translate into any emically informed metalinguistic discourse, but remains a gesture of acceptance that there are signs and meanings that are more important than the Northern "orderly speech," but that resist a full translation. As Diana Paton in her study on Obeah and spirituality in the Caribbean rightly observes, the language, practice and knowledge of marginalized and indigenous ways of seeking for agency and healing are represented as "a kind of insider knowledge." (2015: 299) All that is made visible and accessible to others is performances, plays and interpretations – simulacra of considerable auditory embodiment.

3. Sonic guerilla warfare

> Often they were unable to sleep or concentrate on their scientific work because of the noise; the din of quarrels and conversations kept them awake, but most of all they felt assaulted by the sound made by drums and other musical instruments.
> Johannes Fabian (2000: 15)

Spending time in Kisoro (southwest Uganda, Kisoro District) while documenting Rufumbira involved getting into contact with what local Bafumbira would describe as "the pygmies," more correctly referred to as the "Batwa people." When members of Bafumbira communities (Hutu as well as Tutsi) talked about the culture, language and daily life habits of their somewhat nomadic neighbors, "the pygmies," this was usually accompanied by making faces of disgust and antipathy, and the negative attitude was often underlined by referring to the apparent lack of hygiene in Batwa people's huts, through laughter, and especially by telling sexist jokes. Elderly Bafumbira men would often giggle and convulse when whispering that the best remedy against harrowing back pain would be sexual intercourse with a Mutwa woman. The Batwa people's fate therefore became tantamount to a label of deprived agency and rights, and rejected self-determination. Our encounters with the Batwa were limited to occasionally meeting intoxicated Batwa males in the dark nocturnal streets of Kisoro, often murmuring unintelligible words, yelling and emitting sounds of apparent anger and despair. Associations with "Rutwa," as other linguists, as well as local social workers, called the Batwa people's reportedly conserved heritage language, made it appear as an exoticized, presumably

endangered and marginalized language, before we even heard a single word of it. This was due to the social construction of ostracized "Batwa-ness" in Bafumbira society and thought, or, as Bahuchet (1993: 153) labels it, "*l'invention des Pygmées*" [the invention of pygmies].

The specific Northern linguistic label "Rutwa," *the* remnant language of the impoverished Batwa living on the outskirts of towns in southwestern Uganda (and parts of DR Congo, Rwanda, Burundi), had been adopted by social workers in Batwa projects, who would claim that "their Batwa" would still have proficiency in that mythical language (because the ascription of "originality" met a favorable response from the local NGOs when acquiring funding), despite the common view that "native" African peoples mostly adopted surrounding Bantu or Nilo-Saharan languages (see Vorbichler 1967, 1974; Bahuchet 2006, among others). The Batwa language has however mostly been treated as "distinctive," "original" and "endangered" (see the late Alexandre Kimenyi's website[2], and also the University of Delaware Research Magazine where it is referred to as "the native language of the Batwa people"[3]), in contrast with the claim of Batwa speakers themselves that they "mostly speak Rufumbira and Rukiga" (as recorded from interviews), and sometimes "a bit of Kiswahili" (as stated by one interlocutor in an interview).

Already Greek and Roman historians' and philosophers' accounts of pygmy peoples were characterized by mythic descriptions of Otherness in terms of bodily features, culture, and to some extent also when referring to their language. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the 9th century, summarizes Nonnosus' "History" in his "Bibliotheca or Myriobiblion" (Section 3, translated by Freese 1920: 20), and states that "[t]heir speech was human, but their language was unintelligible even to their neighbours," thus marking their linguistic behavior as non-standard, as exotic, and also as "meaningful noise." The approaches to "pygmy" communities as carried out by Northern researchers have often been dominated by presuppositions and rather clumsy generalizations and conceptual impositions. Sawada, who worked on spiritual concepts of Balese/Mbuti communities and encounters with "the dead," notes that the application of Western concepts to describe the supernatural world of the 'pygmies' usually creates "conceptual confusion as well as nominal confusion" and may "hinder researchers from understanding the Mbuti's own recognition of their supernatural world, since these terms bear implications from the European cultures." (1998: 86)

The Batwa are thus at first sight often victimized and less agentive participants in linguistic and anthropological discourse and research. The "originality" and "traditionality" of Batwa language patterns ("Rutwa") as Western labels of hegemonic knowledge and

documentation are commonly re-produced in the search for a "remnant Batwa language." This apparent "*oeuvre civilisatrice*" of "saving" Batwa people's language (see Figure 2) as a rewarding academic venture (the rescue of endangered languages as a good and profitable deed) often deprives Batwa speakers of agency and ownership. Linguistic research hereby focuses on the ascription of "purity" and "originality" to the Batwa community's linguistic deviations.

The recording sessions in the Batwa settlement outside of Kisoro, while mostly focusing on speakers' self-proclaimed multilingual language use, turned out to be an apparent "noisy chaos" (and led to a collection of what seemed to be mere "linguistic trash"). Internal as well as external disturbance reactions were obviously used by speakers as ideological strategies of 'obfuscation' of research results in the construction of "truth," "ownership" and "linguistic knowledge," and as a complex semiotic strategy to counter Northern ideology in the documentation of an "authentic language."

Figure 2: The Kellermann Foundation Newsletter 10/2011 on documenting "the original language"[4]


This July, Irene Vogel, professor of Linguistics and Cognitive Science at the University of Delaware, spent two weeks in Bwindi documenting Rutwa, the original language of the Batwa. She was assisted by undergraduate student Matt Herman and her daughter Rachel Abrams, a high school senior. Since the Batwa were forced out of their ancestral home in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in 1992, they have lost much of their heritage, including their language, as they have adopted the local language, Rukiga. There are only a few elders left with any recollection of the Rutwa language, so time is of the essence!

Irene, Matt, and Rachel, with the invaluable support and assistance of the Batwa Development Program (BDP) team, made phonetic

Flora teaching Irene pronunciation

transcriptions and audio and video recordings of interviews with seven elders living around Buhoma. They also hiked about 7 hours to the Batwa settlement at Nteko, where they found two more Rutwa-speaking elders. The elders provided the Rutwa names of many items, including foods, animals and plants they knew in the forest. Irene learned the amazing fact that Rutwa has about 5 different names for honey made from different insects. Irene and Rachel hope to return to Bwindi soon to make more inclusive recordings.

During the short recording sessions with two Batwa women, several children repeatedly cried, making the recorded stories unintelligible over longer stretches of speech. At the same time, a phone that was held near the microphone beeped several times when text messages came in. In addition, loud laughter by surrounding Batwa women was recorded while the two ladies were producing dialogues, telling stories,

and were being asked (by a Mufumbira assistant) to talk about "life in the forest," ancestry and preserved wisdom.

The chosen location for the recordings was a windy open space on a slope between the houses that local authorities had provided for the otherwise nomadic Batwa. This locality, potentially exposed to noise and disturbance, was the setting for the "sonic guerilla warfare" embodied by apparently passive, bored and miserable language assistants. While linguists aim to dominate the epistemic discourse and the decisions over what is and what is not "Rutwa," the community controls and determines the "field": a dusty open place where children cry, where "speakers" and researcher alike try to shield their eyes from the grains of sand and grey dust that enter everywhere; a space that is clearly owned by the "speakers," just like the language practices ('Rutwa') themselves. The accumulation of meaningful 'noise' ("sound, especially when it is loud, unpleasant or disturbing," Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2015) in the chosen setting displays a specific attitude toward the researcher, a critical anticipation of potential research results, and can be interpreted as guerilla warfare against hegemonic Northern principles of data collection. Just like in real guerilla warfare, the opponent (here the linguist from the Global North) is lured into the open field where he or she is prone to being criticized and deconstructed. The subversive strategy of noise as a production of chaos thus represents a strong critique. When we began to complain "that kid is … it will be very hard to listen to this because it's crying all the time!," the (non-Mutwa) assistant quickly told a Mutwa woman in Rufumbira *ngo umubwire acyecyeke biri gutuma Nico atumva!* [ŋ' umubgíɾ' aceceke βiɾí gutúma Nic' at^{h}ú:mva] "you may tell him/her to keep quiet, it causes Nico not to hear," whereafter she replied *ata namubwiye ngo amushaka shakire na utundi* [at^{h}a namubgije ŋ'amushá:ka shá:kiɾe n'utú:ndi] "I even already told her to go and look for something else (for the child to eat)." Instead of sending the crying children away, their cries and apparent noise filled the recording breaks with 'meaningful noise' (of "making someone not hear"); repeatedly a Mutwa woman referred to the obviously hungry child in her narrative and paused when the child began to cry again. The state of being miserable and incapable of feeding the community's children was subversively placed in a dominant part over and over again in the recording. "Noisiness" thus served as the conveyor for criticism of the system but also as a form of social critique.

Furthermore, the "Rutwa" recordings produced revealed a salient degree of translanguaging from the three Bantu languages Rufumbira, Rukiga and Kiswahili, often embedded in one sentence. When telling stories, Batwa women included lexical and grammatical elements from Rukiga and Kiswahili in their Rufumbira speech, or suddenly changed from Rufumbira to a Rukiga "matrix." Sometimes, one of the two

speakers would quickly add the equivalent lexeme in the other language respectively, which made it easier for us, while in most cases the apparent chaos demanded serious efforts when transcribing the data afterwards. Example (1) illustrates the use of all three languages in one sentence, with Kiswahili and Rukiga words in bold.

(1) *Nk' a-ga-kondo yacu nk' a - b á - t w a* ***yetu***

like AUG-NP12-tradition POSS1pl like AUG-NP2-Twa POSS1pl

nk' u - m u - g á n i . A - b a - á n a tw-a-b-ag-a

like AUG-NP3-story AUG-NP2-child SM1pl-PST-be-IPFV-FV

tw-ica-ye a-ba-kúru ***ba-ka-tu-gambir-a*** *ba-ti…*

SM1pl-sit-PFV AUGM-NP2-elder SM2-NARR-OM1pl-tell-FV SM2-QUOT

ba-ka-tu-bwir-a [ßakatubgíra] *ngo…*

SM2-NARR-OM1pl-tell-FV that

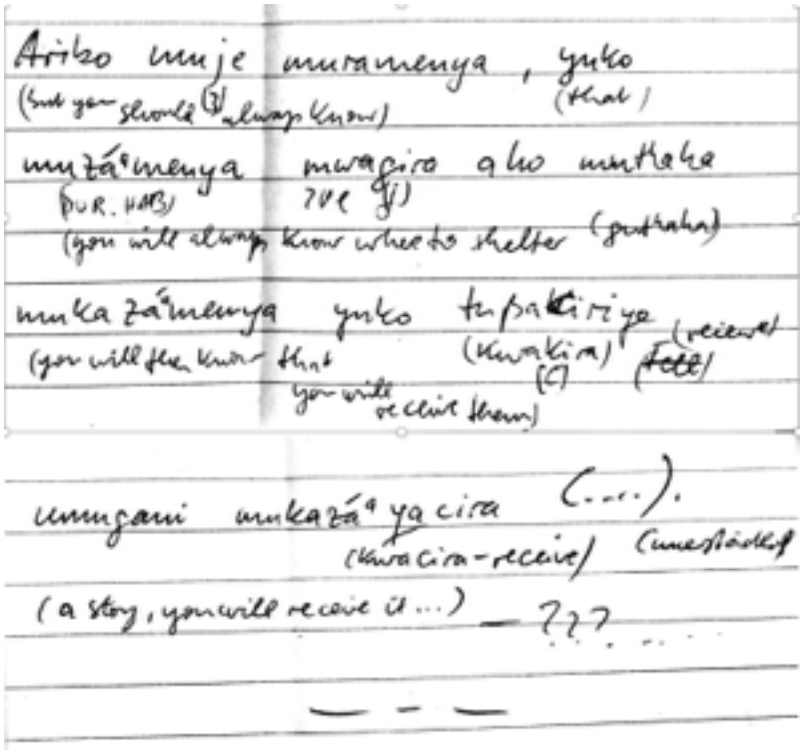
'As for our tradition, like our (>Kiswahili) Batwa, like a story. As children we were seated, the elders would tell us (>Rukiga) the following,… they would tell us that…'

This could be understood as a mimetic reaction of providing what the researchers ask for: a "distinct language" that is unique and kept alive, but that is, at the same time, full of exoticized sounds, entangled voices and subversive means of questioning the antiquated Northern label of "original heritage" in the Batwa language. These were represented by children's cries, the sounds of SMS and the lashing wind; or by what could according to Fabian be classified as *"*things, sounds and spectacles." (2000: 102) Moreover, using multiple languages as a deliberate strategy can increase the difficulty of deciphering "the requested" for the hearer/researcher, and thus the degree of "obfuscation."

Apart from "noise" and "translanguaging," fuzziness of expression also repeatedly occurred as a phenomenon when working with Batwa assistants in the field. The following example (Fig. 3) is from a fictional story that was told by a Mutwa woman in which suddenly, before officially finishing, the speaker's voice became soft

and turned into unintelligible murmuring, whereafter the recording session was ended. The murmuring sounds could not be deciphered, and in this and similar instances it seemed that speakers fulfilled the given task of *kugánira umugano* "to tell a story" but in an unintelligible manner, often realized by continuously turning (and facing) away from the microphone and researcher. The entire section of the story after having uttered *umugani mukazá yacira* "a/the story, you will receive it …" consisted of unintelligible and apparently insignificant mumbling, sent out as a clear message of agency to the recording linguist.

Figure 3: Unintelligibility and murmuring in the recordings



As a fourth deliberate strategy of "sonic guerilla warfare," thematic inaccuracies would repeatedly occur when recording "Rutwa" data. When asked to spontaneously tell a short story (if they were ready to come up with one), the speakers started but would then change the topic to a seemingly random incident in which a Mufumbira "Hutu" chased a Mutwa woman from his field, when she was looking for leftover crops that she could bring home to cook, after which she then slept without having eaten (see example 2). This seemingly random and confusing incident was embedded in the story as an ostensible marginal note, and narrated from the perspective of the woman in question, whereafter the actual story was continued.

(2) *n a h o na-ri n-giye [ŋjije] gu-céeβa, u-mu-hutu*

and.there SM1sg-COP:PST SM1sg-go.PFV INF-collect AUG-NP1-Hutu

a-n-yirukir-e=hó ngo n-ta=hó n-da-jy-a

SM1-OM1sg-chase-PFV=LOC so.that SM1sg-NEG=LOC SM1sg-PRG-go-FV

mu (i)-ntabire – none n-da-bu-rar-a. (…)

LOC AUG-NP9.field and.now SM1sg-PRG-OM14-spend.night-FV

'… and then when I went to look for food, a Hutu chased me away, so that I don't go to his ground/field – now I sleep hungry…'

By including social criticism of power hierarchies, misery and daily life reality (in contrast to the researchers' quest for fictional stories), the ulterior motives of recording predetermined linguistic "truth" as established in the Global North are questioned, and the requested "purity" (of clear data, straight storylines, compact narratives) is filled with "impurity" (relating to socio-economic realities, inaccuracies, losing the thread).

All in all, Batwa speakers reclaim agency by producing a "new language" Rutwa, which thwarts the researchers' intentions of documenting originality, mostly by exposing the recording situation to sources of noise, by translanguaging, as well as by being unclear and incomprehensible and by obviously becoming inaccurate. They therefore reclaim their agency and ownership in the production of language by providing a complex linguistic web of different languages, meaningful noise and circular narration chains, confronting biased Northern researchers with the critical and demanding task of "untangling the linguistic cable." The stories told thus changed from simple fictional narratives to lively testimonies of pain, misery and chaos but also of tricky agency and reflected shrewdness, as an expressive sonic guerilla warfare against the denial of linguistic coevalness and agency.

4. Sonic signatures and other noise in music

> The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would think of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning.
>
> Kamau Brathwaite (1984: 17)

Noise is a powerful concept when it comes to how we perceive others and how we want to be perceived. Connected to agency and power, the examples and cases discussed so far in this paper reflect the meaningfulness of noise in language and researching language. The way in which noise in linguistic practices is conceptualized as something undesirable and disturbing in language can also, and maybe even more explicitly, be observed in the perception of music practices. Conceptualizing music as noise was a common and recurrent theme in the reports and diaries of Western travelers and researchers in Africa in the 19th and early 20th century. Florian Carl (2004) analyzed the perception of African music in German-speaking Europe in that era and illustrates how African music practices were perceived as noise. In these processes of *Othering*, sounds and utterances that appeared unintelligible to Westerners were often subsumed under the label "noise."[5]

> Early in the morning, I was startled from sleep by earsplitting noise; fifty drummers serenaded the Damraki, and barely finished, they moved up to my door, starting the spectacle all over again. I quickly sent a few hundred shells out telling them to stop or to move on; but they only beat their drums more relentlessly and I was not spared from the noise being forced into my ears.[6] (Rohlfs 1984: 357, qtd Carl 2004: 27)

The discursive practices of knowledge production in these "encounters" which Carl analyzes can be regarded as the foundation of Northern epistemology and hegemonic knowledge with regard to the perception of non-Western music. They live on in current discourses. Other and countering knowledges from the Global South, which critique and challenge Western knowledge production, are often regarded as "local, traditional, alternative, or peripheral" (de Sousa Santos 2014: 200). However, if we want to overcome Western hegemonic knowledge production, we have to acknowledge other knowledges and work on strategies of what de Sousa Santos (2014) calls "intercultural translation."

Jamaican music, in particular reggae and dancehall, is very popular in the Western world and elsewhere. However, many of our approaches to and understandings of these music practices are (still)

influenced by Western hegemonic discourse (not only in academic works but also, and probably more so, in general discourses about Jamaican music). We have discussed how unintelligible utterances and 'noise' do not appear meaningful to us and are often cut out. This happens commonly when lyrics are transcribed. We have, as an example, looked at Etana's song *Free* and the way the lyrics are presented and transcribed on popular song text websites such as songlyrics.com and lyriczz.com. The following excerpt shows part of the lyrics of the song (the second verse) as presented on songlyrics.com.[7] While we have not changed any of the transcriptions, we have added, in bold, parts that Etana sings in the song which are not captured on the website. Here we refer to the studio version of the song; there is more variation and more 'noise' with regard to the lyrical performance when it comes to live concerts.

> Life is so sweet and I don't wanna die
> But this burden I bare could be hard sometimes
> Food scarce so me juggle everywhere
> Sometimes me make a move, me can't find no bus fare
> Go look for mama Jai, she says a na nottin' a da dare
> Pun da youth, dem face, I see the pain
> **ahahaha – ehey**
> **aha aha ahahaha**
> **ahahaha – ehey**

In Etana's soulful and unique singing style, ad-lib techniques like the ones transcribed in bold above play an important role and are characteristic of the singer's style. However, the omission of supposedly unimportant or non-meaningful parts of a singing performance is not only found in Etana's song. It is a widespread phenomenon, and transcriptions of lyrics which exclude "unintelligible" or "meaningless" parts can be found all across the Internet and in all music genres.[8] What we want to point out are the ideological understandings and perceptions of language in music, of what is considered part of it and what not, of what is considered meaningful and what not.

In Jamaican music, reggae and dancehall in particular, supposedly unintelligible and meaningless utterances and speech form an essential part of many songs and lyrical signs. Artists deliberately make various "noises" which are full of meaning within their respective context (e.g. as metaphorical or mock rendering of something referred to in the song, as a call and answer technique, and thus as mimetic othering). Carolyn Cooper writes:

> Decontextualised, the lyrics often become decidedly limp. To the uninitiated much of the 'noise' that emanates from the DJs[9] is absolutely unintelligible. The insistent sing-song of fixed rhythmic structures conspires to obscure meaning; individual words become submerged in a wash of sound. But if you permit your ears to become attuned to this border-line sound and allow for the free play of the intellect, then patterns

> of meaning cohere and a framework of analysis both socio-linguistic and literary may be constructed. (Cooper 1993: 136, footnote added after the page number)

In their songs, artists may laugh, grunt, cough or use other stylized noises. For example, such practices can be used to mark the identity of the respective artist, as a kind of individual "sonic signature." Certain artists have a specific sonic signal, sequence or "noise" which they use in all of their songs and which emblematically stands for them and their identity as an artist. Such practices yield a high recognition value, especially when the songs are played not only on the radio, where the artists' names may be mentioned, but also on mixtapes or in the dancehall where songs are mixed together and not played from start to finish. Fans and reggae listeners know the specific "sonic signature" of the artists and recognize them. Here it is very important that each artist finds a unique and authentic style in order to be different from the others (Irvine 2001).

Vybz Kartel ("di world boss"), one of the most renowned Jamaican dancehall artists of the last years, uses a kind of stylized mimicking cough which he drops in at certain spots in some of his songs, for instance in *Colouring Book*. As explained, it serves as a sonic signature and stylistic identity marker.

Similarly, Turbulence ("the future"), an artist who sings and deejays, uses a specific, and often shouted sound ("noise") as his signature in many of his songs and in live performances. This characteristic sound has become an emblem which marks his lyrical identity. Often the artist uses this sonic signature right at the beginning of his songs (for instance in his well-known song *Notorious*), but also at other spots in between. These are just two examples out of many, as the majority of Jamaican artists develop and use sonic signatures of different types. The variety of these practices testifies to the creativity of noise in the dancehall. Moreover, such practices are not only manifold, but they also have a long tradition and are rooted in Jamaican oral culture.

Sonic signatures and melodious noises are not new but were already being used by the early deejays in the first era of dancehall music in the 1980s. Admiral Bailey, a dancehall deejay of the first generation in the 1980s, was popularly known for his melodious "sonic noises" and unintelligible sing-songs in his music. In the songs *Old time something, Della move* and *Think me did done*, a range of unintelligible and seemingly meaningless words, phrases and sounds are creatively used by the artist and make up his unique singing style.

In fact, such practices and the various 'sonic signatures' of artists were so popular at that time, that the dancehall artist Papa San created a song about it. In the song *Style & Fashion*, which itself is made up of a "noisy" and "unintelligible" chorus (a chorus that indexes the

stylistic genre to which the sonic signatures belong), the artist discusses the practices and imitates the signatures of various popular artists. "Sonic signatures" cannot only be found in Jamaican music, but are also used around the world by reggae and dancehall artists who have adopted the practice. Moreover, there are various sonic noises, including a stylized cough similar to Vybz Kartel's above-mentioned example, mimicking, and ironic laughter, shouts of certain emblematic or stylistic expressions (such as "more fire"), among many others, which have been sampled and are popularly used by sound systems in the dancehall in their creative bricolage of assembling sounds, selecting tunes, mixing and playing music for an audience.

These examples illustrate the way in which "linguistic trash," "noise" and other sonic phenomena are meaningful in dancehall music, not on the level of denotative or literal meaning but rather on the level of connotation and figurative expression. "Sonic signatures" may be used as indexical signs by the artists, mapping their musical lyricism to their person and identity. But when they become popularly known and come to be perceived as the characteristic sonic identity marker of the artist, they also become icons. Emblematicity plays an important role here and turns the unintelligible into the outstanding. Moreover, these "noises" also reflect ideologies of aesthetics and serve poetic functions of language. Thus, these noisy practices are by no means "trash" in their own real sense and context, but are part of agentive and deliberate languaging in music.

5. Conclusions: ideology, language and agency

> Imperialism frames the indigenous experience.
>
> Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012: 1)

There is an interesting critique offered by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book on *Decolonizing Methodologies*: she argues that the Northern production of knowledge fragmentizes indigenous worlds, that through its disciplinary carve-up, a world gets divided and distributed to museums, art collections, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and so forth (2012: 29). Smith sees this division as an effect of a particular ideology, which frames knowledge as something that is constructed by experts whose true purpose is to gain control over their objects – bodies, masks, practices and words. This very radical critique translates into the observation that there is no form of *research* that might be able to produce insights into anything authentic, let alone indigenous. Research, a word that is problematic itself, she says, is

organized and practised according to the compartmentalized and culturally figured world of Northern academia. The language ideologies of the indigenous, therefore, are presented as mimetic interpretations of Northern ideology and practice, as a critique on the colonial experience, an expression of feelings of inequality. Language ideologies that are discursively negotiated in research settings are, in other words, bound to reflect these settings and their repercussions rather than anything else.

This observation has also been commented on, though in a less radical form, by Paul Kroskrity, who maintains that language ideologies are multiple, and always reflect the encounter between different people and the coexistence of different codes and ways of speaking. By maintaining a decidedly northern gaze on language, the multiplicity of ideas about what language might be does not feed very much into our descriptive and documentary work. And what we miss out, totally fail to grasp, from the perspective of the people who talked to us, is that there is a concept of language choice as agency, that there are ideologies about speech as doing which can be addressed beyond hegemonic discourses in academia and their predefined forms.

In its power to transform, noise as a concept is very similar to speech as magic, or "speaking as doing," as James Grehan (2004) puts it. Like the outrageous language in Grehan's study of Ottoman Damascus, the unintelligible, noise and murmuring have the power to "produce very real consequences" (Grehan 2004: 1008). The act of speaking here is more than communication, it is magic and tantamount to having effects – positive or negative – on bodies and minds. Noise here is not just disturbing sound, and it is not located outside the system, but is part of a conversation, has an addressee and triggers a reply: it is part of a performance, which, as Bauman & Briggs (1990) put it, invites an evaluation and reflection by an audience. Consequently, such ways of making sound are always also making meaning, as they trigger comments and link present to formerly experienced sounds.

Screaming, hissing, crying and coughing are therefore speech events that saliently make meaning; their categorization as "noise" in our examples, however, plainly reflects an imposition of epistemologically hegemonic language ideologies upon such meaning, in order to silence and marginalize the Other. In contrast, the sonic challenges in the various case studies eventually marginalize northern ideology, according to which the decoding and deciphering of such meaningful noise remains unachievable; common epistemes are thus temporarily silenced by "noisy ideologies." They are presented in current structural linguistic debates, e.g. on language documentation and its archives,[10] as disturbances and cracks in the system.

We end up with a problem of perspective and stance: do we look at another person's environment as "the field," a laboratory, or as a home? Can we make sense out of the observation that hegemonic language ideologies address sound phenomena that are beyond those domains that are typically and dominantly considered "language" (Bauman & Briggs 2003)? The sound theorist and philosopher Mladen Dolar argues that the difference between voice and noise is subtle and rests upon dynamic cultural conceptualizations of sonic events: "The dividing line between the two – voice and noise as well as nature and culture – is often elusive and uncertain. [...] (T)he voice can be produced by machines, so that there opens a zone of undecidability, of a between-the-two, an intermediacy, which [...] [is] one of the paramount features of the voice" (Dolar 2012: 539). This intermediacy and the powerful resistance it offers, it seems, has been reflected upon by those marginalized "speakers" more than by their "describers."

Notes

1. We are indebted to various colleagues and friends whose conversations and ideas have greatly contributed to this paper, especially Chris Bongartz and Angelika Mietzner. The journal editor and the anonymous reviewers are warmly thanked for their advice and helpful comments. Moreover, we are indebted to all generous interlocutors and friends, local linguists on-site at our research settings and research participants for sharing their knowledge with us and for their hospitality in southwestern Uganda, different regions of Nigeria and Jamaica. The data stem from our own linguistic fieldwork archives over a span of 15 years, which we critically evaluate in this text. Mary Chambers is warmly thanked for proofreading this contribution.

2. [http://www.kimenyi.com/The%20Batwa%20Languag1[1].pdf] (accessed 19 January 2017).

3. [https://www.udel.edu/researchmagazine/issue/vol3_no1_humanities/vogel.html] (accessed 14 May 2018)

4. [http://www.kellermannfoundation.org/KF_Newsletter/KF_Newsletter_10-11.pdf] (accessed 14 May 2018).

5. Interestingly, Carl discusses the sense of hearing with regard to the perception of music/noise and states that hearing is very difficult to control: *"Anders als der Gesichtssinn – dem nach Locke bekanntlich edelsten aller Sinne – macht der Gehörsinn ein Sich-Abwenden vom wahrgenommenen Phänomen kaum möglich. Vor etwas, das ich nicht sehen will, kann ich die Augen verschließen; vor etwas die Ohren zu verschließen, das ich nicht hören will, gelingt nur, wenn es einen gewissen Lautstärkegrad nicht überschreitet. Insofern ist der*

Gehörsinn, ganz ähnlich wie der Geruchsinn und im Gegensatz zum Gesichtssinn, zu einem eheblicheren Maße ein passiver und nur schwer zu kontrollierender." (Carl 2004: 24) [translation: "Unlike sight, according to Locke, the finest of all senses, the sense of hearing hardly allows oneself to turn away from the perceived phenomenon. I can avert my eyes from something I don't want to see, but to shut your ears from something I don't want to hear is only possible to a certain degree of volume. This means that the sense of hearing, like the sense of smell and unlike sight, is considerably more passive and harder to control."]

6. Original German text reads *"Frühmorgens weckte mich ein betäubender Lärm aus dem Schlaf; fünfzig Trommler brachten dem Damraki ein Ständchen, und kaum damit fertig, rückten sie vor meine Tür, den Spektakel von neuem beginnend. Rasch schickte ich ihnen einige hundert Muscheln heraus, mit dem Bedeuten, aufzuhören oder weiterzuziehen; allein sie schlugen nur umso unbarmherziger auf ihre Pauken los, und nichts von dem Ohrenzwang sollte mir erspart bleiben."*

7. See [http://www.songlyrics.com/etana/free-lyrics/#V10YSJBxVM3JgFDT.99], accessed 30 October 2018.

8. A similar point can be made with regard to other 'noisy practices' in singing, like stretching or cutting short syllables to meet aesthetic or rhythmic needs or simply as style.

9. It is important to note here that in the Jamaican Dancehall tradition, DJs (also spelled *deejay*) are not 'disc jockeys' but artists who 'toast,' 'deejay' or 'talk over' a *riddim* (in a style akin to rap). The term *deejay* contrasts with *singjay*, the latter referring to an artist whose style is classified as 'singing' rather than 'deejaying.' The DJ (in the disk jockey sense) who plays the music is called *selekta* ('selector') or *selektress* in Jamaican patwah.

10. For instance, in the form of a conference on "bad data" that took place in Amsterdam in 2016 (http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/baddata/), whereas the focus in some of these endeavors seemed to lie more on approaches on how to deal with minor qualitative or insufficient results (as "bad data") than on critical reflections of the Western researchers.

References

Bahuchet, Serge. "L'invention des Pygmées." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines,* vol. 33, no. 129, 1993, pp. 153–181.

Bahuchet, Serge."Languages of African Rainforest "Pygmy" Hunter-Gatherers: Language Shifts without Cultural Admixture." 2006, https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00548207/document. Accessed 25 September 2015.

Brathwaite, E. Kamau. *History of the Voice. The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. New Beacon Books, 1993.

Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology,* vol. 19, 1990, pp. 59-88.

—. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality.* Cambridge UP, 2003.

Blommaert, Jan. "The Debate is Open. Language, Power and Social Process." *Language Ideological Debates,* edited by Jan Blommaert, Mouton de Gruyter, 1999, pp. 1-38.

Bonfiglio, Thomas Paul. *Mother Tongues and Nations. The Invention of the Native Speaker*. Mouton De Gruyter, 2010.

Carl, Florian. *Was bedeutet uns Afrika? Zur Darstellung afrikanischer Musik im deutschsprachigen Diskurs des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*. LIT, 2004.

Chow, Rey. *Not Like a Native Speaker. On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience*. Columbia UP, 2014.

Cooper, Carolyn. *Noises in the Blood. Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*. Macmillan, 1993.

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide.* Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

Deumert, Ana, and Anne Storch. "Colonial Linguistics – Then and Now." *Colonial and Decolonial Linguistics*, edited by Ana Deumert, Anne Storch, and Nick Shepherd, Oxford UP, 2020, pp. 1-21.

Dolar, Mladen. "The Linguistics of Voice." *The Sound Studies Reader*, edited by Sterne, Jonathan, Routledge, 2012, pp. 539-554.

Errington, Joseph J. *Structure and Style in Javanese. A Semiotic View of Linguistic Etiquette.* U of Pennsylvania P, 1988.

Errington, Joseph J. *Linguistics in a Colonial World. A Story of Language, Meaning and Power.* Blackwell, 2008.

Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other*. Columbia UP, 1983.

—. *Out of Their Minds*. U of California P, 2000.

Freese, John Henry. *The Library of Photius, Volume I. Translations of Christian Literature* (Series I, Greek Texts). Macmillan, 1920.

Grehan, James. "The Mysterious Power of Words: Language, Law, and Culture in Ottoman Damascus." *Journal of Social History,* vol. 37, 2004, pp. 991-1015.

Hoffmann, Anette. *Kolonialgeschichte hören*. Mandelbaum, 2020.

Irvine, Judith. "Style as Distinctiveness: The Culture and Ideology of Linguistic Differentiation." *Stylistic Variation in Language*, edited by Penelopem Eckert and John Rickford, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 21-43.

Kroskrity, Paul V. "Language Ideologies." *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, Blackwell, 2007, pp. 496-517.

Makoni, Sinfree, and Alastair Pennycook. "Disinventing and (Re)constituting Languages." *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies,* vol. 2, no. 3, 2005, pp. 137-56.

Mignolo, Walter D. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton UP, 2000.

Paton, Diana. *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*. Cambridge UP, 2015.

Pennycook, Alastair, and Sinfree Makoni. *Innovations and Challenges in Applied Linguistics from the Global South*. Routledge, 2020.

Perley, Bernard C. "Zombie Linguistics: Experts, Endangered Languages, and the Curse of Undead Voices." *Anthropological Forum,* vol. 22, no. 2, 2012, pp. 133-149.

Rohlfs, Gerhard. *Quer durch Afrika: Die Erstdurchquerung der Sahara vom Mittelmeer zum Golf von Guinea, 1865-1867*. Thienemann, [1874/75]1984.

Sawada, Masato. “Encounters with the Dead among the Efe and the Balese in the Ituri Forest: Mores and Ethnic Identity Shown by the Dead.” *African Study Monographs,* vol. Supplement 25, 1998, pp. 85-104.

Storch, Anne. “At the Fringes of Language: on the Semiotics of Noise.” *The Sociolinguistics of Everyday Linguistic Creativity,* edited by Ana Deumert and Joan Swann, Special issue of *Language Sciences,* vol. 65, 2017, pp. 48-57.

—. “The Idea of a Yell. On Metapragmatic Discourse.” *Secrecy and Linguistic Creativity,* edited by Alexandra Aikhenvald, Andrea Hollington, Nico Nassenstein, and Anne Storch, Special issue of *International Journal of Language and Culture,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2019, pp. 10-28.

Sullivan, Shannon, and Nancy Tuana (eds.). *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance.* State U of New York P, 2007.

Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity. A Particular History of the Senses.* Routledge, 1993.

—. *Defacement*. Stanford UP, 1999.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Zed, 2012.

Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*. Continuum, 2010.

Vorbichler, Anton. “Die tonale Struktur der Verbalklassen in den Waldneger- und Pygmäensprachen des Ituri-Urwaldes, Ost-Kongo.“ *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft,* vol. 116, 1967, pp. 21-26.

—. “Das interdialektale Sprachverhalten zwischen sesshaften Balese-Hackbauern und nomadisierenden Wildbeutern. Analyse des Balese-Obi.” *Afrika und Übersee,* vol. 52, 1974, 144-145.

Electronic sources

Oxford Dictionaries. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/de/definition/learner/noise. Accessed 14 May 2015.

Kellermann Foundation. http://www.kellermannfoundation.org/KF_Newsletter/KF_Newsletter_10-11.pdf. Accessed 12 May 2015.

Alexandre Kimenyi's Website. "The Batwa Language: Studies in Cultural Survival, Language Preservation and Ethnic Identity." http://www.kimenyi.com/The%20Batwa%20Languag1[1].pdf. Accessed 13 January 2013.

University of Delaware Research. https://www.udel.edu/researchmagazine/issue/vol3_no1_humanities/vogel.html. Accessed 14 May 2014.

Music

Admiral Bailey "Della move", 1987, produced by King Jammy, Label: Live and Love

Admiral Bailey "Old time something"1987, produced by King Jammy, Label: King Jammy's

Admiral Bailey "Think me did done", 1987, produced by King Jammy, Label: King Jammy's

Etana "Free", 2011, produced by Kemar McGregor, Label: VP Records

Papa San "Style and Fashion", 1989, Label: Black Scorpio

Turbulence "Notorious", 2006, produced by Dan Kark, Label: VP Records

Vybz Kartel "Colouring book", produced by , Label: Tad's Records

Abbreviations

-	morpheme boundary
=	clitic boundary
AUG	augment
COP	copula
FV	final vowel
IPFV	imperfective
LOC	locative
NARR	narrative tense
NP	nominal prefix

OM	object marker
PFV	perfective
pl	plural
POSS	possessive
PRG	progressive aspect
PST	past tense
QUOT	quotative
sg	singular
SM	subject marker