Digital approaches to the historiography of missionary linguistics: Contextualizing French missionary analyses of African languages, c. 1850-1920

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Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:106767

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2016

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Overview and objectives

What is missionary linguistics and why does it matter?

Why go digital?

Technical infrastructure

- Applications: Ruby on Rails, JavaScript
- Languages: HTML, CSS, Markdown, XML (TEI)
- Theme: Helios HTML5
- Additional software: CartoDB

Research Questions

Q: What is involved in managing and managing a corpus of older linguistic texts?

Q: How do the object of study and the methodologies employed participate in a process of mutual shaping?

Q: What are the advantage/disadvantages of presenting older linguistic documents digitally?

Building a corpus: materials and methodology

- Delimitation of the corpus
- Assembling metadata
  - Bibliographic
  - Ethnolinguistic
- Conservation and digitization

Preliminary Findings

- Missionaries’ contributions to language study are of a deeply mixed and complex nature: At times, the texts reveal their authors’ deep appreciation for a language or speech community; at other times, they are miniature arenas of colonial and post-colonial processes of subordination exploitation, and (mis-)representation.
- Missionary dictionaries/grammars participate in a broader textual tradition, insofar as they reflect the rhetorical strategies attested in literary paratexts (Genette 1987).
- Digital corpora need to prioritize portability, compatibility, and longevity, over considerations like presentation and user-interaction (Bird & Simons 2003).
- Representations of data always encode a particular point-of-view.

Documenting indigenous languages

QUICK TIPS

- Using the placeholders provided below to add new elements to your poster: Drag a placeholder onto the poster area, size it, and click it to edit.
- Go to the VIEW menu and click on ZOOM to set your layout by going to VIEW and then SLIDE MASTER.
- If you are using an older version of PowerPoint some skills. Below is a list of additional software: CartoDB
- Database design and construction
- Recreation of text-internal hierarchies
- Text-encoding (TEI XML)

Acknowledgments

Project Team
Primary Investigator: Doyle Calhoun
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With support from
Carl Spina, Patrick Gonzales, Nina Bogdanovsky; Digital Library Programs, Burke Library; and Library Systems at Boston College; Ben Doyle and the staff at TAPAS/Northeastern University; Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett (University of Cambridge); Professors Joe Bray, Andrew Linn, Susan Fife-Schaw, Michael Pidd, and Richard Standen-Jones (University of Sheffield); Professors Toon van Hal and Pierre Swiggers (University of Leuven).