

Cherrie, and Strangelove. Known as “the Paris of West Africa,” Lome, Togo, is known for its colorful fabrics and other textiles.

Senegalese and Congolese tailors are known for their designs, while the Wolof of Senegal are highly regarded for their elaborate braided hairstyles. Abidjan, Ivory Coast, has become an international source of beauty products for people of color. South Sudanese designers use the colors, patterns, and textures of their sophisticated fabrics, jewelry, and other fashions to tell the story of this new nation’s journey to independence. Kenyan designers are making an international name for themselves in fashion apparel, handbags, jewelry, scarves, and other accessories, such as iPad sleeves. Malawian designers are finding their niche in stylish, well-made, African-inspired goods created from locally sourced, recycled, environmentally sustainable, and organic materials.

*Doze Yolaine Butler and
Grace Wasike Namwamba*

See also African Aesthetic, The; African Hair Combs; African Influences on African American Art and Artists; Beauty as a Concept; *Gele* (Head Wrap); Hairstyles, Traditional African; Quilting and Textile Patterns

Further Readings

- Ajani, O. A. (2012). Aso Ebi: The dynamics of fashion and cultural commodification in Nigeria. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5(6), 108–118.
- Beck, R. M. (2000). Aesthetics of communication: Texts on textiles (leso) from the East African Coast (Swahili). *Research in African Literatures*, 32(4), 104–124.
- Donne, J. B. (1973). Bogolanfini: A mud-painted cloth from Mali. *Man: New Series*, 8(1), 104–107.
- Farber, L. (2010). Africanising hybridity? Toward an Afropolitan aesthetic in contemporary South African fashion design. *Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies*, 24(1), 128–167.
- Hackspiel, E. (2008). Modernity and tradition in a global world: Fashion in Africa. *African Arts*, 41(2), 90–91.
- Kaiser, S. B., & McCullough, S. R. (2010). Entangling the fashion subject through the African diaspora: From not to (k)not in fashion theory. *Fashion Theory*, 14(3), 361–386.
- Labelle, M. (2005). Beads of life: Eastern and southern African adornments. *African Arts*, 38(1), 12–35, 93.
- Loughran, K. (2003). Jewelry, fashion and identity: The Tuareg example. *African Arts*, 36(1), 52–65, 93.
- Rabine, L. W. (2002). *The global circulation of African fashion*. New York, NY: Berg.
- Rogerson, C. M. (2006). Developing the fashion industry in Africa: The case of Johannesburg. *Urban Forum*, 17(3), 215–240.
- Rovine, V. L. (2009). Colonialism’s clothing: Africa, France, and the deployment of fashion. *Design Issues*, 25(3), 44–61.
- Rovine, V. L. (2009). Viewing Africa through fashion. *Fashion Theory*, 13(2), 133–140.
- Seligman, T. K. (2006). Going global: Tuareg jewelry in the international marketplace. *African Arts*, 39(1), 48–63, 88.
- Toerien, E. S. (2003). Mud cloth from Mali: Its making and use. *Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences*, 31, 52–57.
- White, S., & White, G. (1998). *Stylin! African American expressive culture from its beginning to the zoot suit*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.

AFRICAN LANGUAGES, ACQUISITION OF

The acquisition of African languages may refer to past or contemporary learning of African languages either unconsciously through native speaker acquisition (L1) or with conscious intentionality as a second language (L2). The acquisition of African languages is relevant to African cultural heritage in North America by virtue of the fact that language is the primary vehicle by which culture is transmitted intergenerationally. Therefore, the acquisition of African languages serves as a powerful exemplar of African cultural continuity in the North American context. This entry discusses the acquisition of African languages from the past to more recent times to gain a broader understanding of the interrelated processes and manifestations of African cultural retention and continuity.

Historical Background: Connections Between African Language Retentions and African Language Acquisition

Acquisition of African languages in North America has both historical antecedents and contemporary manifestations. Works such as Lorenzo Dow Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* and Clarence Major's *Juba to Jive* are landmark works that document the retention of lexical items and idiomatic expressions from African languages on a regional basis and on a more widespread basis. While acquisition of African languages may be thought of as a contemporary phenomenon of conscious intentionality, the syntactic structures, idiomatic expressions, and the corpus of vocabulary that make up the lexicon of Ebonics itself are a testament to an older, preexisting thrust to acquire and reacquire linguistic connections to Africa by the broader Black population. Certainly, all Africans who were enslaved and brought to North America were not brought at the same time. As successive waves arrived, they brought with them retained linguistic knowledge in areas including, but not limited to, syntax, morphology, semantics, phonology, phonetics, pragmatics, and an overarching worldview that encapsulated all the aforementioned. For a congealed phenomenon as recognizably distinct as Ebonics to exist, it seems, therefore, that those who were already in North America may have acquired linguistic knowledge from more recent arrivals and, conversely, that new arrivals may have been influenced by the linguistic retentions of those who were already in North America. Such retentions and acquisitions may have been peculiar to the ethnolinguistic origins of individuals or groups encountered. Further, we have yet to discover the linguistic influence that those Africans who, according to some scholars, traveled to the Americas in pre-Columbian times may have had on place names, vocabulary, and other structures that have been retained to this day.

Past African Language Acquisition as an Influence on Modern-Day Retentions

Historic African patterns of language acquisition were transmitted across generations in the

American diaspora. Those patterns of speech and the retention of its syntax and some vocabulary are most evident in contemporary "Ebonics" or African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In AAVE, we find striking structural similarities, and therefore some linguistic and cultural continuities, between contemporary West African languages and the speech of African descendants in North America.

An example of retained syntax as a result of past acquisition may be found in the following structures:

Ebonics:

1. Where he at?

Where 3SG at

"Where is he?"

Yoruba:

2. Níbo l'ó wà?

Where FOC'3SG at

"Where is s/he?"

Akan:

3. Ehe(fa) na ɔwɔ?

Where FOC 3SG.at

"Where is s/he?"

Wolof:

4. Fan moo/Fu nekk?

Where 3SG at

"Where is s/he"

Interestingly, in the preceding examples, that which is grammatical in the African languages and Ebonics is generally regarded as ungrammatical in Standard English. Thus, rather than "bad English" what we are actually observing is good African-language syntax cross-linguistically. It is a testament to cultural continuity for such structures to persist in Ebonics since their acquisition over hundreds of years. These influences may also be found in resumptive-with constructions (*wit' yo stuck-up*

self), genitive marking (*Antwon house*), multiple negation (*ain't neva goin' nowhere*), consonant cluster reduction (*last las*), liquid deletion (*milk mik*), consonant replacement (*mouth mouf*), metathesis (*ask aks*), resumptive pronouns (*Latisha₁, she₁ don't know nothin'*), suck-teeth (and accompanying eye-rolling), and in speech events like "playing the dozens."

Further, these mutual influences in both directions between new arrivals and those born in North America have continued fluidly, with successive waves of continental Africans migrating to North America as well as via Black culture of North America exported through multimedia platforms such as movies, television, and the Internet.

Major Movements Toward African Language Acquisition in the Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries

While the link to Africa, linguistically and otherwise, may have been severely ruptured, it has never been severed. This may be seen most clearly in the movements of Africans in Nova Scotia who sided with the British during the American Revolution and who later went on to found Freetown, Sierra Leone, and in the lives and works of figures such as Marcus Garvey, Martin Delany, Chief Sam, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, and the African proponents of the American Colonization Society. In each case, these Africans made efforts to return to Africa and in some cases, actually did so more than once or permanently. While there is a dearth of documentation as to the degree to which Martin Delany and Henry McNeal Turner, for example, may have begun to learn African languages during their voyages to Africa, what we do know is that actual contact was made and communication was established.

In more recent times, in the 20th century, ideological offshoots of Marcus Garvey's UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) in their various manifestations bore fruit most substantively in the reclaiming of African culture by those who may be termed "cultural nationalists." With regard to acquisition of African languages, there

are several prominent examples of movements that are impetuses for diasporan Africans to reclaim African languages. Among such examples are Maulana Karenga's US Organization and its concomitant Kawaidea theory, based on Kiswahili; Oba Ofuntola Oseijeman Adedun Adefunmi's Oyotunji Village, based on Yoruba; and Nana Dinizulu's Bosum Dzemawodzi organization, based primarily on Akan and Guan. Also included in this list are Ra un Nefer Amen's Ausar Auset Society and Jacob Carruthers' Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, each of which is based on MDW NTR (hieroglyphics). While these examples are associated with prominent figureheads or proponents, they represent, more so, the major strands of interest for Africans of the diaspora in terms of African language acquisition. These are Kiswahili, Yoruba, and Akan. The first is associated more with what may be termed "cultural nationalism" and outward manifestations like the celebration of Kwanzaa, while the latter two are more associated with reclamation of African indigenous spirituality by those who have rejected Christianity, Islam, and/or other such Eurasian religions.

Motivating Factors for African Language Acquisition

Another major impetus for African language reclamation or acquisition may be found in the search for one's ancestry. Through DNA testing, archival research, divinations, roots readings, and other practices, many diaspora Africans have undertaken the immense task of tracing their ancestry to particular places of origin. While differences in methodology for attempting to uncover ancestry exist, once discovered or recovered, for some, learning the language of one's ancestral home is a major impetus to the acquisition of African languages.

For still others, family ties through marriage are a key factor in making the decision to acquire African languages. This marriage factor may happen either in the diaspora or on the continent among repatriates. Repatriation and travel to Africa, as in the past, continues to be a major motivating factor in the desire to acquire African languages.

African Language Teaching in Tertiary Institutions

In recent times, major universities throughout North America have broadened their course offerings to include a wide variety of African languages, including Kiswahili, isiZulu, Yoruba, Amharinya, isiXhosa, Akan (Twi), Wolof, Kikongo, Setswana, and more. A consortium of such schools offering African languages comes together, with Title VI funding, for the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute. Professional organizations such as the African Language Teachers Association (ALTA), National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCoLCTL), and the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) also exist to assist in the instruction of African languages.

African Language Acquisition in Independent Black Institutions

Apart from tertiary institutions, African language acquisition also takes place in various African-centered independent Black institutions, many of which are or have been institutional members of the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI). As many of these schools have their origin in the freedom schools and community control movements of the 1960s and 1970s, many have not only direct instruction of African languages, particularly Kiswahili, but also have African language vocabulary built into everyday activities and the names of various things and activities encountered in the school setting (*choo*—toilet, *chakula*—food, etc.). Such independent schools, and, more recently, charter schools, form another aspect of the acquisition of African languages in the North American context.

Ebonics as a Segue Into African Language Acquisition

Finally, although the status of Ebonics as an African language may be debatable, it has been argued by linguists such as Ernie Smith and Geneva Smitherman that Ebonics finds much of its vocabulary drawn from Standard English, while much of its

syntax is derived from African languages. It may be contentious to include the Ebonics debate and whether it should be taught in schools in our current discussion of African language acquisition in the North American context. However, because syntax is, without question, a crucial aspect of African language acquisition, it could be plausibly argued that the speaking of Ebonics is, in and of itself, a manifestation of African language acquisition (as L1 or L2) and that its successful acquisition may, indeed, assist in the learning and understanding of African languages.

The Future of African Language Acquisition in the North American Context

As the bridging of the digital divide continues to make the world progressively smaller, some organizations are using technology as a means of African language teaching. Among these organizations are Abibitumi Kasa, The Kamusi Project, Languages Africa, Learn Ga Now, and Xibaaryi. Some such efforts include online dictionaries, online classrooms, e-books, multimedia, lessons, videos, and more. As Africans in North America continue to be drawn to acquire African languages, these virtual and brick-and-mortar organizations are stepping up to meet their needs.

Recent African immigrants to North America, as well as a burgeoning repatriation movement found in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Tanzania, continue to make African language acquisition increasingly relevant. Indeed, the interest of Africans who have been in North America for hundreds of years to those who are second-generation North American-born Africans points to promising directions for African language acquisition even in the face of African governments whose policies toward African language proliferation tend to be underfunded and lacking in various ways, especially regarding policies that concern languages such as English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and neocolonial languages. It remains a distinct possibility that Africans in the North American context may provide motivation,

inspiration, and influence in the survival of African languages into the future.

Obadele Kambon

See also African Cultural Revivals; African Languages and American English; Africanisms in African Names in the United States; Africanisms in Contemporary English; Creoles as Pan-African Languages; Ebonics; Ebonics: The Retention of African Tongues; Pan-African Nationalism

Further Readings

- Bennett, J. (1908). Gullah: A Negro patois. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 7(4), 332–347.
- Cassidy, F. (1983). Sources of the African element in Gullah. In L. Carrington (Ed.), *Studies in Caribbean language* (pp. 75–81). Trinidad and Tobago: Society for Caribbean Linguistics.
- Crawford, C. (2001). *Ebonics and language education of African ancestry students*. Brooklyn, NY: Sankofa World.
- Duah, R. A., Ayiglo, A., & Blay, A. M. (2011). The dilemma of African-American English identity: A case of African language influence? In H. Lauer, N. A. A. Amfo, & J. A. Anderson (Eds.), *Identity meets nationality: Voices from the humanities* (pp. 111–134). Legon-Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Hancock, I. (1980). Gullah and Barbadian: Origins and relationships. *American Speech*, 55, 17–35.
- Kambon, O. (2014, March 7). *Africanisms in contemporary English* (Institute of African Studies Seminar). Available at <http://download.abibitumikasa.com/africanisms.pdf>
- Hancock, I. (1986). The domestic hypothesis, diffusion and componentiality: An account of Atlantic Anglophone Creole origins. In P. Muysken & N. Smith (Eds.), *Substrata versus universals in Creole genesis* (pp. 71–102). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Major, C. (1994). *Juba to jive: A dictionary of African-American slang*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Mufwene, S. (1985). The linguistic significance of African proper names in Gullah. *New West Indian Guide*, 59, 149–166.
- Smith, R. (1926). *Gullah*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Troike, R. C. (2003). The earliest Gullah/AAVE texts: A case of 19th-century mesolectal variation. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*, 18(2), 159–229.

Turner, L. D. (1949). *Africanisms in the Gullah dialect*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Websites

Kamusi: <http://Kamusi.org>
Learn Ga Now: <http://Learnganow.com>

AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

Borrowed words and elements from African languages are commonplace in American English used in the United States. Some sources date from the Atlantic slave trade, while others stem from multilingualism in Africa.

Commonplace African-Derived English Words

Banana, banjo, bogus, chimpanzee, cola, gumbo, mumbo jumbo, tote, yam—these are just a few commonplace African-derived English words. Enslaved children, women, and men first spoke them in the Americas. Today, their voices echo throughout the community of American English speakers. They came from Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, and The Gambia. They spoke Akan, Efik, Fula, Ga, Hausa, Ibibio, Igbo, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Mandingo, Mbundu, Swahili, Temna, Tshiluba, Twi, Wolof, and Yoruba. These languages span the continent from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and reflect the three largest language families of Africa—Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic, and Nilo-Saharan. Each language family is defined by having a common ancestor, yet these language families existed side by side, independent of geographic and ethnic concentrations. The story of African languages in American English, however, is more complex and subtle than these words alone may suggest.