Sociolinguistics in Africa
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Societal (or: institutional) multilingualism provides the background to communication patterns in Africa, oral and written (note also "polygraphism"). Individual multilingualism is the most frequently used strategy to overcome language barriers. Institutional multilingualism ranges from formal national language policies to informal bi- or trilingual communication habits in educational, legislative, executive, juridical, religious and other cultural institutions as much as in less formal settings such as market places, the work place, and in-group encounters. Such communication patterns as can be associated with individuals, social groups and/or institutions undergo change in time under the impact of varied political, economic and cultural factors on language use. Since patterns can also be imposed on members of society (i.e., by legislation regarding education and certain socio-cultural activities and with regard to professional qualifications) such politics of language has immediate effects on the social mobility of individuals, the establishment of democracy, and civil society. Since language legislation and language use symbolize and manifest power relationships within society, language policies and politics empower or disempower languages, irrespective of their degree of standardization and sociolinguistic status. In Africa, the power struggle of languages tends to affect not only the "polyglossic" relationship between exogenous and endogenous languages, but also between "big" vs. "small" indigenous languages; it also triggers the coming into existence new urban vernaculars which dynamically spread across society (and into the diaspora) from their roots in the jargon of urban juvenile delinquents.