

EDITORIAL NOTES

THE Editor has just returned from the Sudan, where he attended the Language Conference held at Rejaf, Mongalla Province, from April 9th to 14th, 1928, at the request of the Sudan Government, as expert adviser. Some of the more important points raised at the Conference are dealt with in these Notes, but readers desiring more information are referred to the full report of the Conference. Copies of the Report may be obtained from the offices of the Institute, price two shillings, postage extra.

The primary aim of the Conference was to create a sound basis for the education of the native population in the Southern Sudan. The conviction that elementary instruction at least should be given in the vernacular is now practically unanimous, and as the Sudan Government intends to build up a system of education throughout the whole of the Southern Soudan, it wisely began by surveying the linguistic situation in these vast and little known regions. Labour and disappointment can be saved if this preliminary work of ascertaining the important facts is done before beginning systematic education. Answers must be sought to the following questions: What languages are spoken in the territory and what are their affinities? Which of these dialects are to be used as standard languages in schools? How are they to be written? What type of text-book is desirable? What should their contents be? Who is to produce and publish them? How can provision be made for books through which Europeans may acquire a knowledge of the vernacular? These were in fact the main questions discussed at the Conference.

That the Conference can definitely be regarded as a success is largely due to the thorough preparation which had been made. As early as October, 1927, the Chairman of the Conference, Mr. J. G. Matthew, Secretary of the Sudan Government for Education and Health, sent to the persons or bodies concerned a detailed questionnaire on the problems to be considered. Replies were sent to Khartoum. Each delegate was sent a copy of these statements, so that before the Conference he was in a position to study the problems in the solution of which he was expected to take part. Moreover each member was well acquainted with conditions in his particular area, and most of those present had a good knowledge of the local vernacular. Many were also taking an active share in the study of languages and the production of literature. Thus a remarkable amount of general as well as linguistic and educational knowledge and experience was represented at the Conference.

In any African conference with similar aims successful results can only be hoped for if the preparations are made as carefully as was done in this case.

The Conference was attended by forty-two Government and Mission representatives. Most of them were from the Sudan, but there were also representatives from Uganda and the Belgian Congo.

The Conference did its work in plenary sessions and also in Committees dealing with particular languages and problems. Into these groups the members were divided for detailed work. General questions were discussed in the plenary sessions, to which reports of the discussions of the Committees of the previous day were submitted. The attention of the Committees was chiefly devoted to the orthography of particular languages, the combination of several dialects or languages into one literary language, the preparation of text-books and similar problems. The advantage of this procedure was that the experts who took part in the discussions of particular questions had time to study the problems fully and to arrive at agreement. Meetings in the early morning and late at night were devoted to discussing particular points relating to different languages.

From the purely linguistic aspect many parts of the Sudan are still *terra incognita*. This is shown by the fact that nothing but the names of certain languages are known. In fact it is possible that languages exist which have not yet been discovered. These languages, however, can only be those used in restricted areas; fairly accurate knowledge is now available in regard to the more important ones. A scientific classification is, however, not yet possible in every case, for even languages about which sufficient information is available appear to be of such an isolated type that they cannot so far be classified under a main group. For this reason it has been necessary to make the following provisional classification which is partly linguistic and partly only geographical. For all details reference should be made to the Report. The figures given are only approximate :

Group I (Nilotic)

1. Dinka. Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal Provinces. Spoken by 530,000.
2. Nuer. Upper Nile Province. Spoken by 430,000.
3. Shilluk and allied dialects or languages. Upper Nile, Bahr el Ghazal and Mongalla Provinces, Uganda, Kenya, Belgian Congo. Spoken by 1,231,000.
4. Burun. Upper Nile and Fung Provinces.

Group II (Nilotic)

5. Bari and allied dialects (Fajolu, Nyangbara, Kuku, Mandari, Kakwa). Mongalla Province and Belgian Congo. Spoken by 140,000.
6. Latuko, Lokoyo, Lafit, Dongotono. Spoken by 73,000.

Group III (Eastern Group)

7. Didinga and Longarim in Mongalla Province; Beir or Ajibba in Upper Nile Province. These are names of tribes which speak the same language.
8. Taposa in Mongalla Province.

Group IV (Madi, etc.)

9. Madi and allied dialects. In Mongalla Province: Madi, Moru-Miyu, Kaliko, Vukaya. In Uganda: Lugbara, Madi (Gulu) and Madi (Alivu). In Belgian Congo: Lugbara, Logo and Kaliko. Spoken by 370,000.

Group V (Zande)

In Mongalla and Bahr el Ghazal Provinces, in Belgian Congo and in French Equatorial Africa. Spoken by 740,000.

Group VI (Western Group)

This includes ten or perhaps more languages, most of them restricted in area. About their relationship, whether among themselves or with others, little or nothing is known.

The languages of Group I, viz., Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and probably also Burun, form a unit, in which Dinka and Nuer are most closely related. The single units of Group II are likewise closely interrelated, and Group II shows also distinct affinities with Group I. Groups I and II together form the Nilotic language group, which represents a well-defined type within East African languages. On the other hand Bari has evident affinities with Masai and has certain Hamitic features, of which there are also traces in Group I, especially in Dinka. The languages are notable for their rich plural formations, this being effected not only by affixes, but also by vowel change and by change of tone. Groups IV and V are of a different character; they resemble in many of their features the West African type, especially the Kwa group of Western Sudanic languages. Many of the word stems are monosyllabic, consisting of one consonant and one vowel, whereas in the Nilotic Group consonantal ending is the rule. Words are distinguished by tone, e.g. in Madi *ti* with a low tone means 'mouth', and with a high tone 'cow'. In the genitive case the possessor precedes the thing or person possessed. The sounds **gb** and **kp** are of frequent occurrence.

The Conference agreed that the following languages should be considered as 'Group Languages', i.e. languages which should be developed and in which text-books for use in the elementary vernacular schools of the Southern Sudan should be prepared as soon as possible: Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Bari, Latuko, and Zande. Madi is not included, as only a small proportion of the people live in the Sudan. It must, therefore, obtain its literature from elsewhere. The Acholi section of Shilluk, of which the main body is situated in Uganda, will continue to have its own literature, and the Acholi group in the Mongalla Province should obtain their books from the Acholi of Uganda, to whom they properly belong and whose literature is already used among the Loango.

The orthography recommended by the Institute was adopted, in the main, with certain adaptations to meet particular conditions prevailing in some

of the languages. It should, however, be realized by all those concerned that the establishment of a common orthography is only a first step. In theory there exists now a uniform system of script for all the languages in question. But the important point is the uniform application and use of this script by those writing books or other literature. Some of the languages cover large areas; they are spoken in separate districts and divided into a number of dialects. If in several of these, books are published independently by different agencies, such as missions, their orthography may and most probably will differ, and questions will arise as to how a certain word or a grammatical form is to be written. This is only natural in languages as yet insufficiently known and with grammatical formations which are by no means easy. These difficulties can be overcome only if within a short time text-books are published in each group language in an 'authorized' orthography and dialect. Whether this 'authorized' form is settled by an individual who is an expert in the respective language or by a small committee (the text-book committee) is a question of secondary importance. Close collaboration between the Education Department and educational authorities in the missions is necessary. Both should be represented on the text-book committee or committees for each group language. Text-books for use in schools should be approved by these committees, not only with regard to their content, but also their orthography.

In the discussion on text-books the importance of preparing grammars of the vernaculars written in the vernacular tongue for use in schools was emphasized. Another resolution says that 'it is a matter of first importance that books for the study of the important group languages should be available for missionaries and officials, and for this purpose the appointment of a specialist for a certain period is indicated'.

The Conference certainly did not solve all the linguistic and educational problems of the Southern Sudan, but it created a solid basis for future work; it gave to its members fresh impulse and a clear vision of the task that lies before them and it revealed a spirit of good will and a desire for co-operation.