

Talks and cooperations with Zakari Tchagbale

Dafydd Gibbon, April 2015

In 1986, my first lecture and field linguistic visit to Abidjan, I met many young colleagues, now experienced professors, with whom I had long and fruitful discussions. These discussions continued during visits between Bielefeld and Abidjan. A discussion in 1986 which has had particularly long-term results was with my friend Zakari Tchagbale, who introduced me to many more subtleties of tonal variation in West African languages than I had been aware of previously. One of my most treasured possessions is the volume of his 'Exercices et corrigés', which he gave me during my first visit, and which has been a most valuable companion in my teaching and research for nearly 30 years. The most important part of this volume for me is the section on tone sequences in Tem, which formed the initial data for my computational model of downdrift in Niger-Congo languages. This model was first published in my 1987 contribution "Finite state processing of tone systems" at the 1987 conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics, citing Zakari's work. The contribution has become a standard reference in the study of the computational linguistics of tone languages, and has been frequently cited by other scholars. A second intellectual gift from my friend Zakari, which I appreciate equally, is our 'Facebook Fieldwork': I asked on Facebook a couple of years ago if he had recordings of the Tem data, and he said no. But two hours later I received an email with the recordings! I was and am very impressed. I was able to present the results of a speech synthesis experiment using these data during the Humboldt Colloquium in Abidjan in May 2014. Enfin, je te remercie très très cordialement, mon cher Zak, pour tes cadeaux scientifiques exceptionnels!