

# Introduction: The pandemic ACAL

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ACAL 51–52 was not what we originally planned it to be. In fact, there was not supposed to be ACAL 51–52. The University of Florida was going to host ACAL 52 in 2021 after Rutgers hosted ACAL 51 in 2020. The last year we hosted ACAL at the University of Florida was in 2007. Therefore, when it was announced at ACAL 50 in Vancouver that we would be hosting it after Rutgers, we decided to make a big deal out of it and set to work for what we thought was going to be a memorable in-person conference. After all, there is no better place to be in the spring than Gainesville, Florida! Our main preoccupation at the outset was where to get funding to host the conference. We had lined up five places to go to for funding, two of which are our home departments. These are the Linguistics Department and the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. The other three are the Center for African Studies, the University of Florida International Center (UFIC) and the Office of Sponsored Research. Based on promises from the heads of the first three places and our belief that we could get some funds from the other two, we felt that our plans would run smoothly without a hitch. Alas, we planned without knowing that the worse pandemic of the century was just about to strike.

On March 20, 2020, shortly before ACAL 51 was due to start, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. All in-person events were canceled. Rutgers had already finalized preparations for an in-person conference by then and had incurred expenses that could not necessarily be recouped without the conference taking place. This included the acquisition of the conference tote bags below on which had a beautiful African-themed design with ACAL 51 written on them:

The Executive Committee proposed that we merge ACAL 51 with ACAL 52 and organize a joint conference. At the time, we thought that the pandemic would be





Figure 1: Conference tote bags for ACAL 51 at Rutgers

gone by the end of 2020, and we would be able to go back to holding in-person conferences. For that reason, in addition to accepting the papers that Rutgers had accepted for presentation at ACAL 51, we thought we could help them cut their losses by accepting the tote bags. One of the earliest discussions we had with the Rutgers team, therefore, was how much we were going to pay for the bags and how to we would add 52 to the writing on them.

We soon realized that even if the pandemic went away and we got the clearance to organize an in-person conference, travel restrictions at the time were going to prevent many people from traveling to Gainesville. This was particularly the case for our colleagues traveling from overseas. Nevertheless we wanted to have some people, however few, attend the conference in person, and, therefore, decided to plan for a hybrid conference. We had all become experts in Zoom discussions by then, and most of us had even participated in virtual conferences. The challenge with such a decision was determining how to budget for such a conference. Fortunately for us, the hotels were very flexible at the time, and gave us the most loosely binding contract. The size of the conference rooms were another problem. Since we could not tell how many people would show up, it was difficult to decide on which rooms to request for. The decision was taken out of our hands when the university declared that they were not yet open for in-person conferences. This was how come we became the first ACAL institution

to organize a virtual ACAL. Needless to say, this killed our plans to go in for the beautiful tote bags that Rutgers had acquired.

Once we decided on a fully virtual conference, the main question we had to deal with was how to manage the different time zones of the presenters. For the United States, the main time zones were the Eastern Time for Florida and the Pacific Time in California. For Europe, it was the Central European Time and British Time, and for Africa, we had the Greenwich Meridian Time for participants from West Africa, East African Time for participants from that East Africa, and South African Standard Time for our colleagues in South Africa. We also had a paper from Japan and, therefore, had to take Japan Standard Time into consideration. In the end, we decided to start the presentations at 10:00 am so as to ensure that our colleagues on the West Coast who were three hours behind the time in Florida would have time for coffee (it was 7:00 am). We were also compelled to end presentations at 4:15 for the sake of colleagues in East and South Africa and Europe. In addition to three plenary talks, 90 papers were presented that were spread over 23 panels. These range from phonetics and phonology of segments and suprasegments and various topics in syntax and semantics. There were a few papers in morphology, morphosyntax, sociolinguistics, typology and language documentation. Generally, considering that this was a first for us, the conference went much better than we had expected. One advantage of a virtual conference is that participants have to submit recordings of the papers beforehand so we know which presenters will be present. Only a couple of presenters were not able to show up after the presentation to answer questions due to technical constraints.

In the first of two papers on phonetics, Lindsay Hawtof, Fridah Gam and Kathryn Franich analyze the acoustic properties of implosives and voiced and voiceless stops in the Rìkpà?, a Bantu language spoken in the Center Region of Cameroon. In the second phonetic paper, Jae Weller, Matthew Faytak, Jeremy Steffman, Connor Mayer, G Teixeira and Rolain Tankou discuss the use of acoustic and ultrasound data to examine tongue position in vowels that follow stop consonants in Yemba, a Bamileke language of the larger Grassfields family spoken in the West Province of Cameroon. The third paper by Yaqian Huang straddles phonetics and phonology. In it, Huang uses elicited data with instrumental suffixation and valence-changing structures to undertake an acoustic analysis of the vowel system in Rere with the aim to capturing the phonetic characteristics of vowel quality in phonological distributions and phonetic processes. Rere belongs to the Heiban group of Kordofanian languages spoken in in the Nuba mountains of southern Sudan. There are four phonology papers. The first by Mary Paster and Jackson Kuzmik discusses vowel hiatus resolution (VHR) as well as present

a rule-based phonological analysis of the VHR) in Kikuyu, a Bantu language spoken in Kenya. In the second, Lee Bickmore provides an overview of the verbal tonology in Town Nyanga, a Bantu language spoken in Zambia, and contrasts it at various points with Chichewa. Kenneth S. Olsen then discusses the change of labial-velar plosives to labial consonants in Luto and its retention in Nduga, a dialect of Luto. Luto belongs to the Sara-Bongo-Bagirmi (SBB) sub-group of Central Sudanic, spoken in northern Central African Republic and southern Chad. The final phonology paper by Mike Cahill also explores the changes that labial velars undergo.

There are nine papers on syntax. The first paper by Liliane Hodieb provides a description and an analysis of the interaction between syntax and prosody in Wushi, a Ring Grassfields Bantu language spoken in Cameroon. Using Selkirk's Match theory, Hodieb discusses simple indicative sentences and modal constructions that express possibility in the language. The next paper by Katherine Russel proposes a unified account of grammatical tone and length in Gã. Makoto Furu-moto then follows with an examination of the contracted forms of the demonstrative in the Kimakunduch dialect of Swahili, and suggests that it is at an early stage of grammaticalizing into a pronominal suffix. In the next paper, Leora Bar-el and Malin Petzell discuss aspect in East Ruvu languages, a subset of the Great Ruvu languages of the Bantu family spoken in the Tanzania. Unlike other Bantu languages, the East Ruvu languages have a reduced set of temporal and aspectual morphemes. Bar-el and Petzell focus on the behavior of the morpheme *-ag-* which functions as the imperfective in Bantu languages. In the following paper, Ronald Schaefer and Francis Egbokare examine tense-related adverbs across a range of West African languages, and co-occurrence restrictions between various temporal adverbs and grammatical morphemes that express tense values in Emai, an Edoid language in south-central Nigeria. Next, Crisófia Langa da Câmara, Michael Diercks, Madelyn Colantes, Brendan Ly, Jackson Kuzmik and Hannah Lippard take an initial look at object marking and related properties of the postverbal domain in Cinyungwe, a Bantu language spoken in Mozambique. José Armando Fernández Guerrero then discusses three complementation strategies in Rere, a Kordofanian language spoken in the Nuba mountains in Southern Sudan. In the eighth syntax paper, Colin Davis examines limitations of extraposition using fieldwork data on relative-clause extraposition in Wolof, a language spoken in Senegal. The ninth and final paper by Aron Finholt and John Gluckman shows that the choice of *kwamba* and *kuwa* in Tanzanian Swahili is sensitive to factors like lexical class of the embedding predicate, person features of the main clause subject, and mood of the embedded clause which are known to cross-linguistically affect complementizer choice. The one sociolinguistic paper in the

volume by Bert van Pinxteren proposes 5 principles to consider in determining a limited number of languages that would be used in higher education. The final paper in the volume is a typology paper. In it, Mathew Harley discusses the findings of a survey of 247 vowel systems in Nigerian languages from 23 sub-families. He shows that they constitute 45 basic vowel inventories.