

PROFESSOR IDA WARD—AN APPRECIATION

PROFESSOR IDA C. WARD, until 1948 head of the African Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, was equally eminent as a teacher and researcher; she had lectured in many European universities and her distinguished gifts were known and appreciated in Europe and America. It is largely through her work and her personality that the African Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, has become a world-famous institution in the field of African linguistics. Her name will forever be connected with the study of African languages, and in particular of African tone languages. It was the function of tone in West African languages on which her work centred, and her achievements in this difficult and delicate field have initiated a new phase in our knowledge of African speech. Hers was the unfailing ear, the keen observation of sound-production and the art of reproducing foreign sounds and new sound-sequences, which make the true phonetician. What gave her work such fullness of life and actuality was its intimate linking with practical language study. It may be said that many of her important discoveries were the immediate outcome of her teaching. Teaching, practising, and researching were to her an indissoluble unit. 'The practical depends on the scientific, for one can never tell what practical problems—or solutions of problems—will be thrown up by meticulous scientific analysis', and 'on the other hand, the practical application of scientific research keeps the researcher within bounds, as it were, and will not allow him too far into the *realms of conjecture* and theorising'.¹ She was an ideal and enthusiastic teacher, never tiring, never losing patience. A group consisting of herself, an African assistant, and a small cluster of students was her ideal; here all were partners in the same aim, and all took an active part in the subject discussed.

Ida Ward had started her scientific career as a phonetician and a pupil of Professor Daniel Jones. From the beginning her attention was directed to questions relating to speech melody and similar problems: in 1926 she published, with L. E. Armstrong, a *Handbook of English Intonation* which has had a wide circulation in England and abroad.

In close collaboration with Daniel Jones she was soon drawn towards investigating African languages and their tone behaviour. In 1932 she became a lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies and in 1937 was appointed the Head of its African Department. Henceforward the School was the centre of her life and work and her special field was the languages of West Africa, in which intonation plays an essential part. The study of this phenomenon became, besides the general phonetic and grammatical structure of languages, her main task. It was to her advantage that at the School there were always Native assistants or students speaking various West African languages, who afforded ample opportunity for research. She paid several visits to West Africa to collect linguistic material, especially on the Efik, Ibo, Ibibio, and Yoruba languages, and also to advise the Governments of Nigeria and the Gold Coast on linguistic problems, in particular the possibility of finding a suitable written form for the Asante–Akan languages. She was planning a further visit in 1950.

¹ This quotation is from an article by Professor Ward in the *Zeitschrift für Phonetik und allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft* (1949, fasc. 1/2).

In Professor Ward's own definition 'tone languages are those in which the pitch of each syllable of a word or phrase is an essential part of that unit'. The significance of tones had until then been recognized solely or mainly in distinguishing otherwise identical words, little attention having been paid to the working of tone in phrases, where important changes in intonation may occur. Miss Ward has taught us that tone in single words is only a first step, and not even the most essential one, in the mastering of the problem, and that intonation also works in grammatical forms and syntactical structures; she has progressed to the tonal analysis of the whole language. To quote again her own words: 'It is obvious that an accurate tonal analysis is essential if we are to understand all the workings of a language . . . and judgements on the "richness" or "poorness" of expression of a language cannot be valid without a full tonal documentation.' In her book on Ibo¹ she gives a detailed description of what tonal analysis means, viz. '(a) to find out the inherent tone of every word of the vocabulary covered; (b) to classify into tonal classes nouns and verbs and to a lesser extent, adjectives; (c) to examine the "behaviour" of these tone classes: i.e. to find out if there are any changes and what those changes are; (d) to investigate the apparent purpose of the changes, or the conditions under which they take place; and (e) to set out the "tone patterns" requisite for all the main constructions of the language.' This new way of looking at tone languages is not easy to follow, but it is the only one which leads to satisfactory results, and it will have to be applied to all tone languages in Africa; Professor Ward was pursuing the study of tone, particularly as a possible basis of linguistic classification, up to the time of her death.

In 1930 Ida Ward joined the International African Institute; from this time onward she gave an increasing share of her time to its work, and contributed a number of articles to *Africa*.² She was soon elected a member of the Institute's Linguistic Group, which met frequently from 1931 onwards, and prepared a revised edition of the *Practical Orthography of African Languages* (Memorandum 1), which she supplemented in 1937 by a simplified version for the use of Africans. In 1936 she was appointed a representative of the School of Oriental and African Studies on the Governing Body of the Institute. In the following year she became a member of the newly constituted Linguistic Advisory Committee, which had frequent meetings until 1939, when, owing to the war, it ceased to function and was superseded by the Interim Language and Literature Committee, which under her Chairmanship directed the work of the Institute during the war until its reorganization in 1944. In that year the Linguistic Advisory Committee was constituted again, with Professor Ward as Chairman, to advise the Executive Council on all linguistic matters. It was

¹ *Introduction to the Ibo Language*, Cambridge, 1936; also, *The Phonetic and Tonal Structure of Efik*, Cambridge, 1933.

² 'The Arochuku Dialect of Ibo', R. F. G. Adams and Ida C. Ward, vol. ii, no. 1, 1929. 'Quelques observations sur la langue mandingue', Henri Labouret et Ida C. Ward, vol. vi, no. 1, 1933. 'A Linguistic Tour in Southern Nigeria', vol. viii, no. 1, 1935. 'A Note on the Abua Language', vol. viii, no. 3, 1935. 'How to learn an African Language', vol. x, no. 2, 1937. 'A Short Phonetic Study of Wolof

(Jolof)', vol. xii, no. 3, 1939. Together with the writer of these lines she published in 1933 the *Practical Phonetics for Students of African Languages*, in which her contribution was the lion's share (revised edition, 1948). In 1937 she published *Practical Suggestions for learning an African Language in the Field*, Memorandum xiv. She provided an introduction to Dr. Crosby's *Introduction to the study of Mende*, published by the Institute in 1944; her book on Yoruba was in the press at the time of her death.

charged with the organization of work on the Handbook of African Languages which the Institute is preparing with the aid of a Colonial Development and Welfare grant. Professor Ward continued as its Chairman until her death. In view of her manifold activities for the Institute, it was natural that, in 1947, she was elected a member of its Executive Council.

As this bare enumeration of facts shows, Professor Ward's work was equally significant on the practical and on the theoretical side. She has done much for the Institute, and through the Institute for the cultivation of African languages. She loved her work; it gave her a deep satisfaction and was the fulfilment of her life. With her masterly ability in the art of African linguistics she combined a productive mind: when she had seen a problem, she at once set to work at it and soon dealt with it in a literary form which was easily readable, unpretentious, and always reliable. Thoroughness of results and a simple way of presentation went hand in hand.

Professor Ward has had many friends, African and European. Those who have seen the beaming and expectant faces of Africans on entering her room for a discussion of their language, will not forget these meetings, nor will those who had the privilege of working with her and enjoying her friendship.

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