

Some people were surprised that my time in Japan would be spent researching African languages. But there is a very active community of linguists working on African languages at universities and research institutes across Japan.

With the support of my JSPS Post-doctoral Fellowship, I was lucky enough to become part of this vibrant community for three months towards the end of 2017. I was based at the Graduate School of Language and Culture at Osaka University, under the guidance of Professor Nobuko Yoneda.

Professor Yoneda and I had met on several occasions at conferences in Europe, as well as in Tanzania. She has spent a research stay at SOAS, University of London, where I was also previously based. This was a fantastic opportunity for me to gain insights from her extensive experience and knowledge of the Bantu languages, as well as to work with the wider Japanese research community.

The Bantu language family is one of the largest in Africa, comprising of some 600 languages spoken across Central, East and Southern Africa. The Bantu languages exhibit a number of broad similarities as well as a high degree of small-scale variation – making them an ideal lens through which to examine processes of language change and language contact.

The aim of the project, which was supported by the JSPS fellowship, was to look at one aspect of this variation – complex constructions – and to establish a small, but detailed, examination of a set of features in this domain, with a focus on a set of Bantu languages spoken in Tanzania. This research took place against the backdrop of on-going collaboration between colleagues based in Europe, East Africa and Japan on a project examining morphosyntactic micro-variation in the Bantu language family.

The project has already resulted in a joint publication between myself and Professor Yoneda. We intend to continue our research, and have plans to present at upcoming conferences

I was impressed by the research environment I was exposed to whilst in Japan. I also received a very warm welcome from both students and staff alike. And even had the chance to see some of the Osaka University undergraduate students perform their own translation of the Lion King in Swahili!

Three months went by far too quickly, but I certainly hope this will not be my last trip to Japan!

