

Report on JSPS Research Experience

Project Title: An initial description of Isanzu: a Bantu language of the Tanzanian Rift Valley Area

Institute: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Department: Institute of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa

Host: Dr. Daisuke SHINAGAWA

In 2018, of the thirteen languages of the Tanzanian Rift Valley Area, Isanzu was the least understood. Using Isanzu data collected in 2017-2018, the project described the Isanzu language for the first time, providing information on its place within the Bantu language family, and within the Tanzanian Rift Valley Area.

During my time in Japan, many people reacted to my project with surprise: a recent graduate of a UK university, studying an African language in Japan? My response was always the same: Japan is a world-leading nation in a wide range of fields and disciplines, and the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) is an ideal place to undertake the detailed description of a hitherto undocumented language. Under the direction of my supervisor, Daisuke Shinagawa, I received expert support in understanding and analysing Bantu languages - a language family with which I had only limited experience. In addition to Dr. Shinagawa, I was also surrounded by a community of Africanists and descriptive linguists, and the opportunities to learn from them, in both formal and informal contexts, was significant. As a result, I ended my time in Japan with a much greater understanding of Bantu languages than previously: an essential skill as I continue to develop my expertise in the languages of the Tanzanian Rift Valley.

For researchers who are new to Japan, I feel like the most important aspect is the relationships you build: my colleagues at TUFS ensured that I could work effectively, and provided all sorts of new ideas and suggestions as I progressed in my research. It's also the best way to experience Japanese culture!