African Voices is written primarily as an introductory text for African linguist-trainees, but contains material of value to anyone interested in the issues related to language use in Africa. The editors, a South African and a Kenyan respectively, have also co-authored several of the chapters. The authors of all twelve chapters are associated with African universities, and represent the countries of Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. It is from these contexts that the linguistic data and sociolinguistic examples are mainly drawn.

The editors write from a concern that, although language-based problems are a major issue in most African nations, attempts at solving these problems have historically been lacking in knowledgeable linguistic input. Their view is that the problems contributing to the inadequate development of Africa’s human resources are directly related to the use of a language unfamiliar to the majority of the population, usually an ex-colonial language, as the medium of education, of economic success, and of political participation. This book is written in hopes that it will play a part in training African linguists to help resolve the language-related problems in their own societies.

The basic premise of the editors is that while European languages are at this point an important and integral part of African society, “greater use of African languages will lead to the growth of more balanced citizens, both culturally and educationally.” They do not, however, attempt to answer all the questions they raise regarding the social, political, and educational implications of language policy and language use. The book makes clear that these are not easy problems to resolve and can only be addressed effectively in the context of a particular government and society. What this volume does accomplish is to bring these issues into focus and to give interested parties enough linguistic background to evaluate more intelligently the possible solutions.

In keeping with the format of an introductory textbook, each chapter begins with a list of “Expected outcomes” and throughout the book there are sections of questions, and occasionally
exercises, to encourage readers to interact with the concepts being presented and to challenge them to relate the material to their own experience.

The volume includes a chapter on each of the following topics: language-related problems in Africa, the languages of Africa, an overview of linguistics, languages in contact, languages in competition (including a discussion of the Suba language situation in Kenya), and basic introductions to phonetics, phonology, morphosyntax, lexical and semantic tools, and discourse. Without some input from an instructor, some of the material, especially parts of the phonetics and the discussion of the application of phrase structure grammar to African languages, might be difficult for the novice linguist to understand, but overall, the basics of linguistics are briefly but well presented.

Lest the readers forget that their introduction to linguistics is intended to be more than just a sterile academic exercise, the editors end the book with two more chapters dealing with language problems: one on the challenges of cross-cultural communication and another on language as it relates to education in Africa. Although they do not try to play down the difficulties African nations face in solving their language-related problems, the editors never waver in defending the cause of socio-cultural diversity and the valuable role of indigenous languages.