Digital approaches to the historiography of missionary linguistics: Contextualizing French missionary analyses of African languages, c. 1850-1920

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Digital approaches to the historiography of missionary linguistics

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Overview and objectives

What is missionary linguistics and why does it matter?

Why *go digital*?

Source Texts

Research Questions

Q: What is involved in managing and managing a corpus of older linguistic texts?

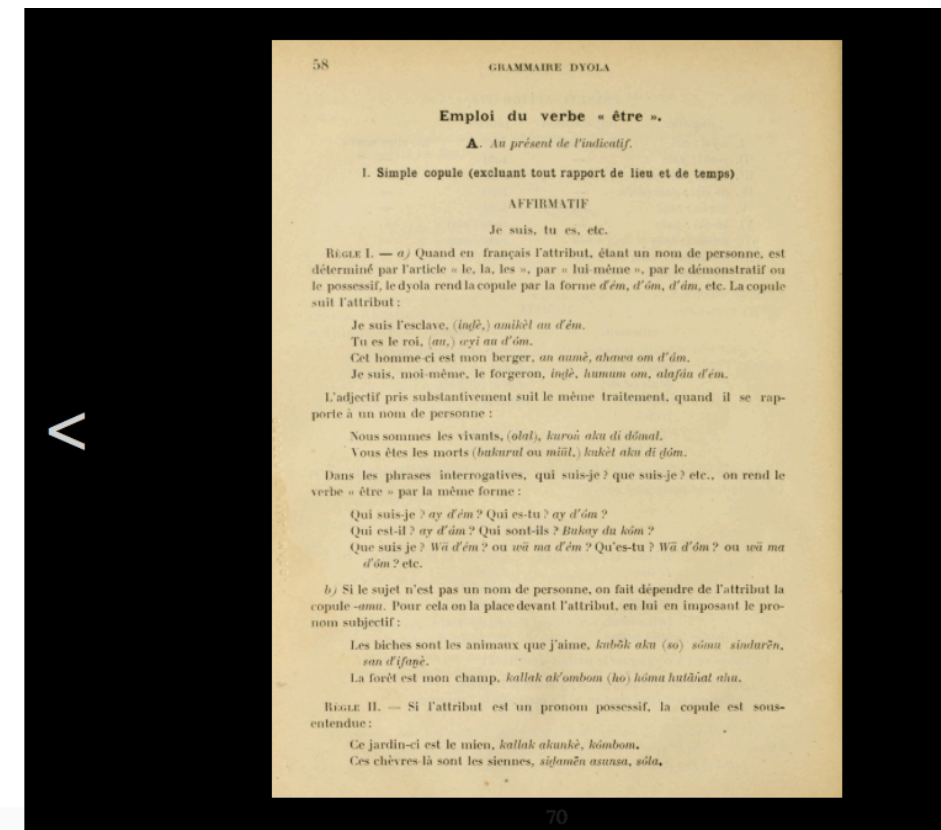Q: How do the object of study and the methodologies employed participate in a process of mutual shaping?

Q: What are the advantage/ disadvantages of presenting older linguistic documents digitally?
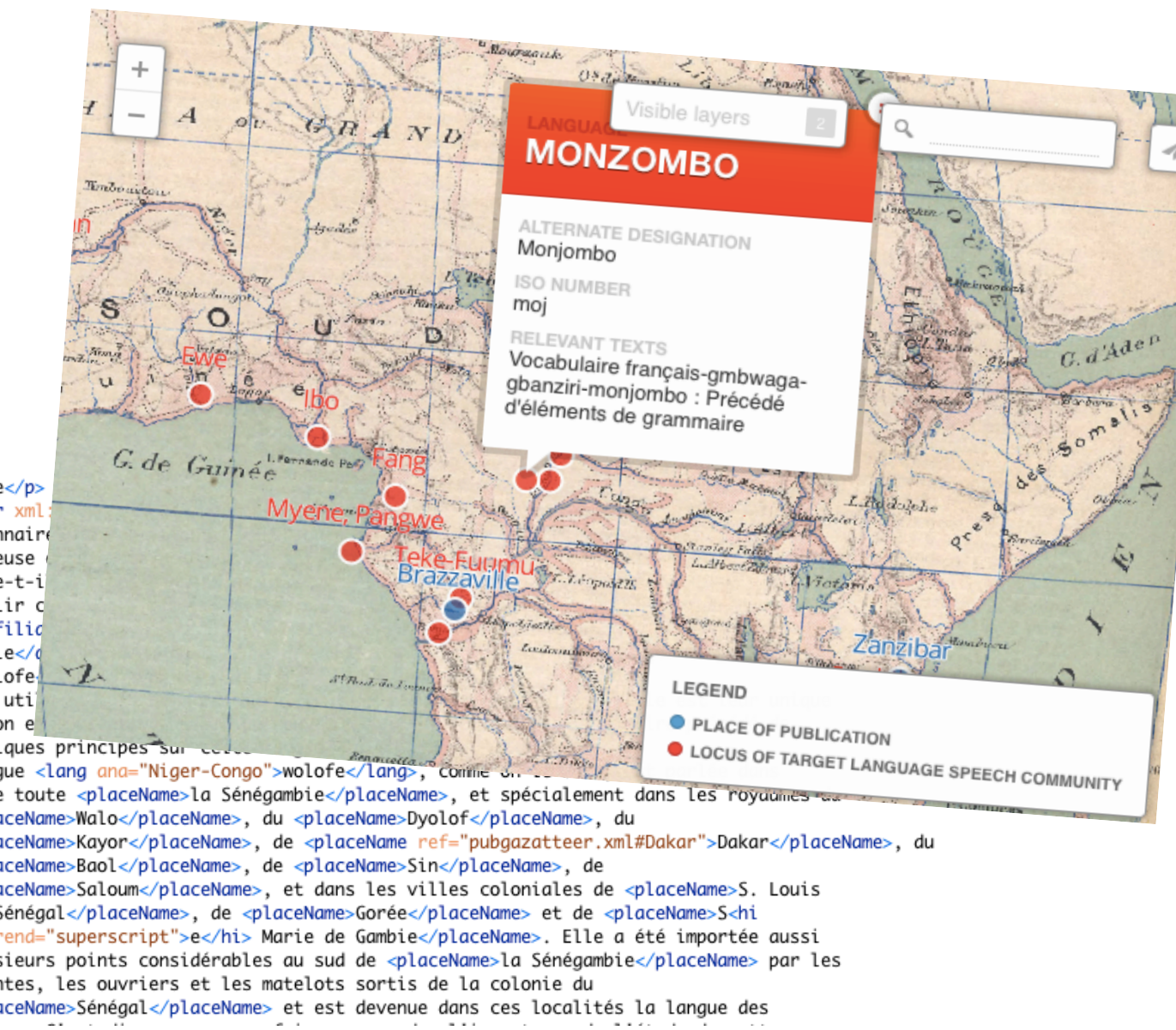
Building a corpus: *materials and methodology*

- Delimitation of the corpus
- Assembling *metadata*
  - ✓ Bibliographic
  - ✓ Ethnolinguistic
- Conservation and digitization

- Database design and construction
  Technical infrastructure
- Recreation of text-internal hierarchies
- Text-encoding (*TEI XML*)

- Corpus visualization
- Presentation, publicity & outreach

Language, mission, and Africa

Contextualizing French missionary linguistic analyses of African languages, c. 1850–1920

Introduction

Corpus

Technical infrastructure

- *Applications*: Ruby on Rails, JavaScript
- *Languages*: HTML, CSS, Markdown, XML (TEI)
- *Theme*: Helios HTML5up
- *Additional software*: CartoDB
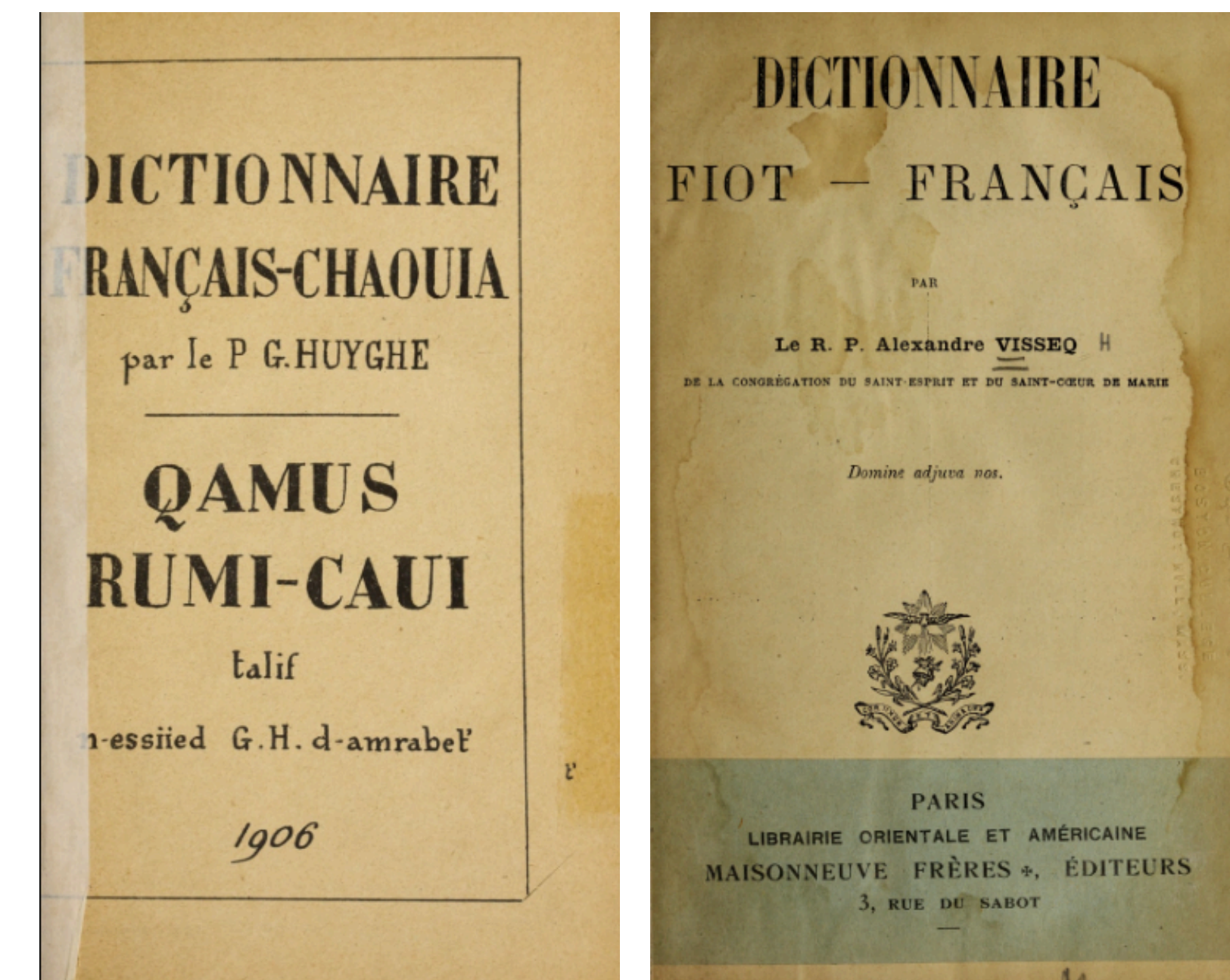
Documenting indigenous languages

Preliminary Findings

- Missionaries' contributions to language study are of a deeply **mixed** and **complex** nature:

  At times, the texts reveal their authors' deep appreciation for a language or speech community; at other times, they are miniature arenas of colonial and post-colonial processes of subordination exploitation, and (mis-)representation.

- Missionary dictionaries/grammars participate in a broader textual tradition, insofar as they inflect the rhetorical strategies attested in literary *paratexts* (Genette 1987).

- Digital corpora need to prioritize *portability, compatibility,* and *longevity*, over considerations like presentation and user-interaction (Bird & Simons 2003).

- Representations of data always encode a particular *point-of-view*: