

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

ACALAN

Communique on the planning workshop for the development of corpus in African languages: Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba.

The African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) held a planning workshop for corpus development in African languages: Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba on 11 and 12 April 2017 in Dakar, Republic of Senegal.



The objectives of this planning workshop were to:

- Identify modalities and set a timetable to build Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba corpora of at least 100 million words for each of the three language,
- Bring the language dimension into the discourse on every facet of life in Africa through the use of a larger platform like the Internet with a particular reference to Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba.
- Plan training programmes for linguists on the application of technology to building corpus for Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba; and
- Subsequently build terminologies, standardize and disseminate materials in African languages with special reference to Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba.

The President of the Assembly of Academicians of ACALAN, members of ACALAN's working structures, namely the Coordinators of the three Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions, the Head of the Culture Division of the Department of Social Affairs of the African Union Commission, Resource Persons, experts in the field of Human Language Technology, and staff of ACALAN were present. The Acting Director of the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa in Dakar attended the opening session.

The opening session began with a welcoming remarks from Dr. Lang Fafa Dampha, Ag. Executive Secretary of ACALAN. He thanked the participants for their willingness to participate in the workshop and their support. He also thanked the Government of Senegal, in particular, the Ministry of National Education through the Director of Literacy and National Languages, focal point of ACALAN in Senegal, Mrs. Ndéye Name DIOUF.

The Acting Director of the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa, in turn, thanked ACALAN for inviting UNESCO at this very important workshop. He presented UNESCO's activities in Africa, highlighting the importance of collaboration between ACALAN and UNESCO especially in the role of Information Communication Technology in language development.

Ms. Angela Martins, Head of the Culture Division of the Department of Social Affairs of the African Union Commission, on behalf of H.E. Amira El Fadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs, welcomed the delegates and congratulated ACALAN for organising such an important workshop. The workshop, She said, « goes in line with the African Union Agenda 2063 whose objective is to raise competitiveness, productivity and growth for « a prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.» She spoke about the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance that Senegal ratified in 2010. This Charter manifests the determination for the strengthening of solidarity and cultural unity. She also stressed the role of language in the perception of the world and its overall contribution to development. Emphasizing the main objectives of the workshop, which included planning for the development of corpus in African languages: Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba, she said that the Department of Social Affairs and her Division of Culture will continue to support ACALAN. She expressed the high hope that the workshop would contribute to ACALAN's efforts to develop African languages as a crucial factor of African integration and development in accordance with its statutes. She said that the planning workshop for the development of corpus in African languages: Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba shows ACALAN's dedication and the immense work that awaits it.

The President of the Assembly of Academicians of ACALAN, Prof. Beban Sammy Chumbow, in his turn, thanked the delegates and recalled the important role of Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions in ACALAN's statutes and development agenda since the creation of ACALAN by the African Union in 2006. He said realizing that African people are arbitrarily partitioned and divided by colonial boundaries, ACALAN's position is that vehicular cross border languages, whose domain of usage straddles several countries should be instrumentalized, developed and used as bridges of regional integration and co-operation across the present conflict generating borders of separation. He indicated that a good example of this possibility is Fulfulde, one of the vehicular cross-border languages of the present workshop which is spoken in a chain of 14 countries across the West African middle-belt, from Senegal through Nigeria to Cameroun and Sudan. We must therefore ensure the revalorization of our languages to use them to pass on knowledge and know-how in the effort to mobilize our people as agents of national development. In conclusion, he said having successfully produced harmonized orthographic and writing systems for the three languages, he counts on the commitment of the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions for the success of the development of a dynamic corpus by appropriation of the knowledge to be imparted and shared during the present workshop.

The Secretary General of the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Senegal, Mr. Ousmane Sow, representing the Minister of Education, congratulated and thanked ACALAN for the work it is doing to promote African languages. He then referred to a study by UNESCO conducted in 2010, which reveals that in Africa only 176 languages are used in education mainly in basic education. He ended his remarks by taking stock of what is being done with regard to the promotion of African languages and the upcoming projects.

During the ensuing sessions, the Emeritus President of the Assembly of Academicians and Chair of the session, Professor Ayo Bamgbose briefly outlined the objectives of the workshop and highlighted the main activities, including: Identifying modalities and establishing a calendar to create corpus in Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba. The Coordinator of the BAKITA-ACALAN Kiswahili Corpus project and the members of the three commissions in question then made presentations on the techniques of corpus development and the states of Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba in relation to corpus development. These were followed by extensive discussions, questions and answers as well as proposals at every stage and after every presentation.

Outcomes

At the end of the workshop the following agenda points were discussed *in extensio* followed by recommendations:

- Modalities to build corpora for Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba of at least 100 million words for each of the three languages are identified;
- A timetable for the corpus development in the three languages is set after project proposals by the three language commissions concerned.
- The language dimension brought into the discourse on all facets of life in Africa through the anticipated use of a larger platform like the internet with a particular reference to Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba.
- The terminologies for the standardization and dissemination of documents in African languages, in particular with regard to Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba are elaborated.
- The training of linguists on the application of technology to building corpus for Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba is planned and will be determined after the project proposals by the three commissions.

Recommendations :

1) On the computerization of developed terminology in general:

- i. Language is dynamic and belongs to the people. The use and recognition of new vocabulary as accepted and generally used by the people should be allowed;
- ii. ACALAN should collaborate with colleagues in the sciences field and with institutions such as CELHTO and CERDOTOLA, when developing the corpus ; because in developing the corpus as many oral services as possible should be included ;
- iii. The endogenous approach of sourcing for existing terminology from the indigenous knowledge repertoire of our communities should be used first before loan adaptation ;
- iv. Researchers should inform interviewees about their intention if possible before recording to avoid upsetting them and therefore hampering the process;

- v. Vehicular cross-border languages should be enriched by using the lesser-used languages and dialect of the same language in a region when the need arises;
- vi. There should be a systematic sharing of information across on the languages in the countries and this should be done through the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions and the focal points.

2) On the development of the Kiswahili corpus:

- i. BAKITA and ACALAN should create public awareness on the corpus and sensitize government leaders on the important role and need for the corpus ;
- ii. BAKITA – ACALAN should negotiate with owners of the Helsinki corpus to enable the Kiswahili Corpus project use the 14 million Kiswahili words already in existence in their corpus for the BATIKA-ACALAN Kiswahili corpus project to avoid reinventing the wheel ;
- iii. The target of 100 million words for Fulfulde, Yoruba and Wolof corpus project should be reconsidered by ACALAN to have a clear timeline and for more achievable targets with clear measurable goals and objectives and time lines for each objective;
- iv. The corpus should be exploitable for various purposes, such as a source for teaching.

3) On the development of the Wolof, Fulfulde and Yoruba corpus:

- i. African Languages should be empowered for instance by using them not only at the lower levels of education but in higher learning as well; learners at higher education should be encouraged to write summaries of their PhD work in their own languages; they could also be encouraged to write abstracts in African Languages ;
- ii. ACALAN should create synergies on the work Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions are doing to ensure harmonization of the writing systems (orthographies) as well consolidation and sharing of best practices in the development of African Languages;
- iii. The Fulfulde, Yoruba and Wolof Commissions should write project proposals for the development of corpus for their respective languages and submit to the ACALAN Secretariat for review.

4) Other recommendations:

- i. The Terms of Reference for functioning of Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions should be revisited and shared,
- ii. One script (Latin) which will be easier for the younger generations to learn should be used as much as possible;
- iii. Sensitization of national leaders is very important and should be used to achieve policy makers support for the corpus development project ;
- iv. In application of the recommendation made for the Kiswahili corpus in 2 (iii) above, all Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions should decide on achievable plans with measurable goals and objectives which should include timelines to serve as guide for the action plans/tasks in the coming years.

African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), Bamako - Mali, April 19, 2017