

AFRICAN ACADEMY OF LANGUAGES –ACALAN-

Regional Conference on the topic: “NATIONAL POLICIES: THE ROLE OF CROSS-BORDER LANGUAGES AND THE PLACE OF LESSER USED LANGUAGES IN ... AFRICA”.

BAMAKO (MALI) – International Centre of Conference – 16-18 MAI 2006

FINAL REPORT

1. The Regional Conference on “**NATIONAL POLICIES: THE ROLE OF CROSS-BORDER LANGUAGES AND THE PLACE OF LESSER USED LANGUAGES IN WEST AFRICA**” was held in Bamako from the 16th to the 18th of May 2006 in the International Centre of Conference. Organized by the African Academy of Languages, in partnership with UNESCO and the Malian Government, and with the support of the Intergovernmental Organisation of the French Speaking World (OIF) and Swiss Co-operation, this Conference was assigned the following objectives:
 - **to analyze the situation of the use of national languages in all domains of life;**
 - **to develop arguments for :**
 - a) promoting national, regional and continental integration;
 - b) developing and promoting linguistic research and production programs;
 - c) promoting cultural and linguistic diversity as a factor of national, regional and continental integration;
 - **to invite decision makers to :**
 - a) share experiences of introducing national languages in educational systems with a view of harmonizing them;
 - b) identify, support and coordinate language promotion networks;
 - **to contribute to set up working structures for ACALAN.**

2. Delegates from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo attended this Conference as well as two observers from South Africa. In addition, there were representatives from some partners Organizations of the African Academy of Languages: UNESCO, (the UNESCO Regional Office in Dakar-BREDA, the UNESCO cluster and national office in Bamako, the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg-IUE), the Intergovernmental Organisation of the French Speaking World (OIF), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the West African Economic Community and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and ROCARE. The following special guests also attended the sessions of the Conference: Pr. Ayo Bangbose (Nigeria), Pr. Arame Fal (Senegal) Pr. Hassana Alidou (Etats-Unis), Pr. Fary Silate Ka (Senegal), Pr. Marcel Diki Kidiri (France), Pr. Norbert Nikiéma (Burkina Faso), Dr Mathieu R. Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso), Pr. Kalilou Tera (Côte d’Ivoire), P. Kouadio N’Guessan Jérémie (Côte d’Ivoire), Dr. Angelina Netshieni (South Africa), Pr. Ingse Skattum (Northway), M. Augustin Gatera (Rwanda).

3. The official opening ceremony, chaired by the Malian Minister of culture in the presence of his counterpart of “**African Integration and Malians abroad**”, registered several speeches among which those of the representatives of the UNESCO Director General, of OIF, of Swiss Co-operation and of the President of the African Academy of the languages - ACALAN- who, in his speech warmly thanked all the participants and more particularly UNESCO, OIF and Swiss Co-operation for their financial support in the realization of the Academy’s major projects.
4. After observing a minute’s silence for the famous linguists who passed away, the following Presidium was installed for the Conference:

President: Mr. Adama Samassékou, President of the African Academy of the Languages.

Vice-president: Pr. Ayo Bamgbose from Nigeria.

Rapporteur General: Dr. Hamidou Seydou Hanafiou from Niger.

Assistant rapporteur: Burama Jammeh from the Gambia.

5. The keynote speech was delivered by Professor Ayo Bamgbose, Emeritus Professor, from the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), who broadly described (1) the language situation in West Africa and (2) the important activities so far implemented, with a view to their preservation and use particularly in the educational systems. Stressing on the successes and failures recorded here and there, he placed all these activities in the context of Africa’s Renaissance.
6. Following this keynote speech, the draft agenda proposed by the African Academy of Languages was adopted. Presenting the Conference’s background note, Professor Amadou Touré, the Executive Secretary of the Conference, provided the participants with some precisions on the objectives, the schedule and the expected outcomes of this meeting organized by the African Academy of Languages in collaboration with its partners. The following sub-themes were retained:
 - Cross-border languages and lesser used languages: presentation of each country’s situation in order to typologize the situations in West Africa;
 - Cross-border languages’ corpus planning : Results and Prospects;
 - Language, factor of integration;
 - Strategies for the creation of language commissions.
7. The first sub-theme, “Cross-border languages and lesser used languages”: was thoroughly examined in a plenary session facilitated by Professor Olabiyi YAI and reported by Professors Fary Silate KA from Senegal and Alex Dzameshie from Ghana.

Professor YAI recalled first the conclusions and recommendations of the Bamako (Mali) 1979 Conference on the use of African languages. This meeting permitted to have an initial non exhaustive identification of regional inter-communicational languages in West Africa with the view to an endogenous development. At that time, the list of the proposed languages was as follows:

- **Fulfulde:** Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Sudan, Chad and Mauritania.
- **Hausa:** Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Cameroon and Ghana.
- **Kanuri:** Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

- **Manding**: Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso.

Professor YAI also reminded the participants the minimal definition of regional inter-communicational languages, adopted during the Bamako meeting, namely: the fact that it is spoken at least in two African States.

In addition to the need of standardization of the concepts, the question which is still raised is, according to him, how to evaluate what has been done in terms of identifying and promoting cross-border languages. More specifically, it is a must to wonder about the progress recorded as regard the effective use of languages in the strategic fields of teaching, press and new technologies of communication. In conclusion, Professor YAI wished that the Conference contribute to:

- define the minimal missions of the State in the promotional activities of national languages in general and cross-border languages in particular.
 - assign ACALAN realistic and achievable tasks and in the same vein to redefine the role of UNESCO and other partners in order to be able do more and better.
 - find out the ways and means to fund the planned activities which will make it possible to achieve the objectives set together.
8. After this introduction, Doctor Hassana Alidou presented the outcomes of the analysis of the general questionnaire that had been sent to the States by the African Academy of Languages. The following observations and conclusions were noted:
- national languages are used in the most diverse domains. They are the privileged means of communication, both in daily life and in socio-economic exchanges.
 - in several countries, they are used as languages of adults' literacy.
 - national languages are not used in any country as a generalized and exclusive medium in formal basic education; however a certain number of countries have experimented or are experimenting the promotion of bilingualism in school, one of the elements of which is an African national language (Mali, Burkina Faso, etc).
 - on the other hand, other countries which made a good start, are regressing today.
 - There is still much to be done in all the socio-economic domains and particularly in the perspective of a sustainable development.
 - However, in most of the countries as well as within the AU's organs and bodies, there is today a real political will to promote national languages in general and the languages of regional integration in particular. The question will be how to change this will into a concrete reality.
9. During the general debate following this presentation, some useful clarifications and contributions were provided, which permitted to conclude on the need to seek rapidly the best ways of accelerating the process of promotion and integration of national languages in all the domains of life.
10. Doctor Hassana Alidou's presentation was followed by those on the language situations by the delegates of the countries represented.
11. The following observations were made from the Analysis of these presentations:

- some languages, with their statutes and their functions (cross-border, vehicular, lesser used, etc) were clearly identified according to the countries: each country enumerated and located the languages it shares with its neighbours. Some delegations have carefully put forward some statistical data.
- broadly speaking, none of the countries has sufficiently reliable, or even recent statistical data. Some countries have given statistics sometimes going back to the 1960's (1963 for Nigeria) or 20 years old (25 years old for Guinea Bissau). This implies today the urgency to carry out reliable sociolinguistic investigations in order to control better the data. In addition, various institutions and many organizations having in charge the promotion of languages in the countries, were identified per country.
- it is the same for the domains of languages use.
- it must be noted however that language policies are not always clearly defined. They are even some time non-existent (Guinea Bissau, Togo, etc). However, some countries worked out and presented clear policies on the basis of normative and legislative texts: Constitutions, blueprint laws, decrees, etc (cf Niger, Senegal, Mali, etc);
- however, there are some countries where the national languages are not still subject to legal texts officially defining their orthography (case of the Ivory Coast, although the languages are written there, and books published);
- in the education sector, in all the countries, national languages are more used in adults' literacy and/or in daily communication or in media or in artistic expressions than in formal basic education;
- some countries need support from other countries to work on the languages they are sharing (proposal of Guinea Bissau).

12. At the end of the discussions which followed these presentations, the following conclusions have been made:

- it seems useful to carry out an in-depth survey on the statutes and the function of the languages in each country and in particular those of cross-border languages: Senegal has started such a work and developed a certain number of methodological tools. According to Mr Augustin Gatera, a special guest from Rwanda, who has a long experience in the field in UNESCO, informed that his country has also a survey questionnaire. These countries are ready to make available these tools for the others.
- Indeed, the progress is slow, but it's real. The recent decisions taken by the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union's meeting in Khartoum in January 2006, which declared the African Academy of Languages as a specialized Institution of the African Union, go in line with the awareness of the highest political authorities on the place that should be granted to African languages. These decisions constitute a powerful support for the development of the continent.

13. The discussions on the sub-theme related to the "instrumentalisation of the vehicular cross-border languages: Results and perspectives" took place in a working group under

the supervision of the facilitator Dr Hassana Alidou. Mr Guédiouma Traoré from Mali and Kedrebeogo Gerard from Burkina Faso were the rapporteurs of this group.

In the session, Dr Alidou presented the results of the examination of the specific questionnaires on the languages instrumentalisation addressed to the States. It appears from her analysis of the few answers obtained, that if the instrumentalisation of African national languages is progressing in some countries, it is really regressing in others. Three categories of country were identified:

- a) the countries which have, for several years, considered African national languages as media for literacy and schooling and are at the stage of generalization.
- b) the countries which are still using these languages within an experimental context.
- c) the countries which have given up any policy of these languages use in the formal education system.

However, in the strategic domain of communication, it can be noticed that public and private media have been increasingly returning to national languages in all countries concerned. It is the same in the domain of reading books publishing, and didactic materials in national languages particularly in the countries which introduced these languages into teaching. Timid efforts are also made in the use of new information and communication technologies.

14. The sub-theme entitled “Languages, factors of integration” constituted the focal point of sessions of another working group supervised by Professor Arame Fal from Senegal, with Burama Jammeh from The Gambia and Kalilou Téra from Ivory Coast as rapporteurs. In introducing the session, Prof. Fal specified the objectives and made a certain number of observations namely:

- What are the languages of integration in West Africa and how to identify them?
- What is the current level of research et how to capitalize the gains in order to support the concrete actions on the ground such as for example those experimented in primary education in Niger or those in adults’ literacy celebrated each year for more than thirty years in our countries.
- How to really benefit from the numerous experiments conducted in isolation?
- Many African countries have real or potential capacities to which are added those from some institutions as the African Union and the African Academy of the Languages and those from civil society organizations. Concerned by the question of languages, all these structures must be put at contribution for their development.
- The administrative context as needs have changed in most of the countries. An example: the bank forms need to be translated into the language of the majority of their customers.
- The press, in particular radio stations, use increasingly national languages everyday in their programs for a more effective communication.

- The promotion and the use of the African languages have become a collective responsibility.

On the basis of this analysis, the working group made a series of suggestions aiming at:

- giving priority to the African languages of integration in the process of selection and treatment.
- working out at the national level linguistic policies closely linked to regional and sub regional policies.
- considering, in addition to foreign languages, the possibility of using local languages as official languages particularly at the level of the Parliaments, justice and other sectors of development.
- demanding from specialists to take the responsibility of informing decision makers on what is really possible as far as languages are concerned.
- investigating the activities undertaken elsewhere such as in Finland and Switzerland.
- doing in such a way that the choice of the languages of integration is made on the basis of objective criteria so that to treat all the languages equally;
- starting the development of dictionaries of the various languages.

For the identification of the languages of integration, the working group proposed the following criteria:

- cross-border features;
- internal and external vehicularity;
- the extent to which it is used.

Integration can be considered in a triple context:

- local (or national);
- sub regional;
- regional.

To illustrate this point, the languages of integration of Senegal, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau (Wolof, Manding, Fulfulde, Jola and Hausa), were mentioned as examples.

The working group, moreover, suggested the need of using some languages of integration by the sub regional and regional Organizations like the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) for Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Guinea Conakry, Liptako Gourma for Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, the Organization for the Development of the Gambia River (OMVG) for Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone. The choice of these languages would be of course left to the politicians who would seek the opinion of the experts.

15. The third day of the conference was partly devoted to the identification of the strategies of establishing the language commissions of the African Academy of Languages

(ACALAN). This plenary session was moderated by Mr Adama Samassékou, President of the African Academy of Languages.

In his introduction, before recalling the sub-theme of this plenary meeting, Mr. Samassékou associated the participants in homage to Mr. Seydou Thiero, passed away in May 17, 2006.

Then, the President of the African Academy of Languages proposed an examination of the articles 22, 23, 24 and 25 of the Statutes of the African Academy of Languages. Chapter III entitled *Working Structures* indicates that the working structures of the African Academy of Languages are:

- the national languages Structures;
- the commissions for vehicular cross-border languages.

The President of the African Academy of Languages has also recalled that one of the goals assigned to the Academy is counselling the States; the goal of the creation of the institution being to valorise African languages with the view to reinforcing the development and the integration of the continent.

According to these articles, the African Academy of the Languages can set up any other structure necessary for its functioning.

Each Member State of the African Union determines the composition and the functions of the national languages structures.

For each vehicular cross-border language, the African Academy of the Languages has the authority to establish a Commission.

The Language Commissions constitute the working bodies of the Board of the Academy and of the Assembly;

The selection criteria of and the number of the members in each Commission are determined by the Rules of procedure.

Each Language Commission appoints a Coordinator in the beginning of its first session.

The Coordinator coordinates the activities of the Commission and centralizes the results of work then sends them to the Secretary General of the ACALAN in preparation of the sessions of the Assembly.

The President of the African Academy of Languages has also pointed out that one of the main missions of the Academy is to advise the States; the creation of the institution aiming at supporting the integration of the continent.

The discussions which followed permitted to share on the denomination of language commissions. Must they be called 'Academies' or has another name like 'Institute' to be found?. From the various interventions, it has been noted that:

- The important part of the work is done at national level.

- All the cross-border languages will not be taken into account. Then objective criteria must be determined.
- Those who really know about the situation of cross-border languages must objectively speak about it.
- The national Academies of languages (if this is the selected denomination) will neither replace the Universities nor some Institutions which already exist in some countries.
- It is necessary to integrate the vision of the African Academy of Languages into the national concerns while safeguarding the States' prerogatives.
- The language commissions must offer the possibility of consultation on vehicular cross-border languages. It seems essential to decide on the first commissions to set up and to plan their taking charge of either by the African Academy of Languages or the States.
- The management of the language commissions must be coherent considering the diversity of the current situations.
- To mitigate the risk of bureaucracy, physical meetings must be reduced to the strict minimum.
- The establishment of the national structures must be carried out before the end of year 2006.
- In order to legitimate the language commissions, a meeting at regional level of the Ministers in charge of language issues is proposed.

16. At the end of the sessions, the Conference adopted the following recommendations:

TO THE STATES:

- The implementation by the OAU, the African Union, UNESCO, OIF and ADEA of all the decisions taken for the promotion of African languages.
- The beginning of the codification of all the languages at the national level (tasks of the national structures in charge of the promotion of national languages).
- The involvement of the private sector in the development and the use of languages for the integration.
- The establishment of a close collaboration between countries for human resources as well as for cross-border languages development.
- The encouragement for a synergy of experiments and expertises between the countries in the fields of linguistic research and of African languages promotion.
- The use of cross-border languages as a means of achieving the objectives of Education For All - to reduce illiteracy.
- The development and implementation of language policies and programs at national and regional levels.
- The use of African languages as a medium for teaching at least for all the primary education curricula and their introduction in examinations.

- Pre and in-service teacher training at all the levels of education.
- The creation of African languages departments in the universities and the introduction of African language teaching as living and foreign languages.
- The use of African languages in the field of New Communication and Information Technologies (NTIC).
- The localization of free or not software in national languages.
- The organization of the edition in African languages by co-edition and multilingual edition of translated works.
- The edition of monolingual dictionaries, children' and adults' reading books, descriptive grammars and teaching grammars.
- in reference to article 23 of the Statutes of the African Academy of Languages, the creation and/or the reinforcement of national structures (Where they do not exist) responsible for the promotion and the development of national/African languages before the end of 2006.
- The organization of a meeting, at the level of the West African Region, of Ministers in charge of language issues to lay down an act of launching Cross-Border Language Commissions (CBLC).
- In the inception and implementation of languages programs, the involvement in each country of all other Ministries in charge of language issues by the Ministry in charge of ACALAN.

TO THE AFRICAN ACADEMY OF LANGUAGES:

The conference recommends:

- To take advantage of the expertise and experience of the special guests to the Conference in order to establish the cross-border language commissions in West African zone in the course of year 2006, declared by the African union Commission Year of the African Languages (YOAL). To this effect all the special guests are invited to make to ACALAN propositions related to the following points:
 - a) the first cross-border languages to consider in the creation of the language Commissions, according to the following none exhaustive criteria:
 - the number of speakers of the cross-border languages;
 - the number of countries concerned with each of those shared cross-border languages;
 - the dynamics of each of the cross-border languages.
 - b) a chronogram of the establishment of the Commissions, as all of them cannot be installed in the first year.
- to set up a structure of documentary research which will provide:
 - the names of all the languages and related statistics;
 - a database of all the orthographies of the languages;
 - a compilation of the technical terms to be translated into all the cross-border languages;
 - a collection of the legal texts concerning the languages;

- The whole available on an ACALAN website.

- to support the development of vocabularies (terminologies) on life and life competencies; e.g. sewing, carpentry, etc.
- to have all the experiments on languages evaluated in order to capitalize the results obtained.
- to take initiatives for the harmonization and the standardization of the orthographies of national languages in use at sub-regional level for education, communication, trade, health and agriculture.
- to support the national and regional projects of lexicons and dictionaries development on the terminologies of cross-border languages.
- to take initiatives for the translation of sub-regional instruments into cross-border languages (e.g. the African Charter of the Human Rights and the Peoples, treaties of UEMOA, CEDEAO, OMVS, OMVG and Liptako Gourma) and to do so, to request the support of regional and sub-regional Organizations of integration in West Africa.
- to set up, in co-operation with the States and specialized international organizations, a network of scientists and linguists to develop/translate scientific terminologies in cross-border languages.
- to promote and to use cross-border languages in workshops, conferences and regional and sub-regional seminars.
- to set up a mechanism of funds collection and mobilization for the sustainability of its activities.

TO UNESCO:

The conference recommends:

- sharing experiments and results of research on African national languages.
- supporting the establishment and the reinforcement of structures/organizations of national languages promotion in all the sub-regional countries.
- capacities building as regards the revalorization and preservation of national languages.
- supporting sensitizing programs on the importance and the use of African National Languages as instruments of development and integration at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

TO OIF (French International Organization):

The Conference recommends:

- the continuation of its support to African languages computerization.
- the reinforcement of its support to the promotion of the African languages in the domain of new communication and information technologies.
- its support to the African Academy of Languages for the creation of the Pan African Center of Interpretation and Translation in Bamako.

TO SWISS COOPERATION:

The Conference recommends:

- the continuation of its support to the promotion of African languages.
- the continuation of its support to ACALAN in the elaboration of African Linguistic Atlas.

TO UEMOA, CEDEAO, ADEA, BAD AND BOAD:

The Conference recommends:

- to join their efforts with the African Academy of Languages for a synergy of action.

TO ALL THE GOVERNMENT AND NON GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS:

The Conference recommends:

- to continue their support to the African Academy of Languages.
- to make available for the African Academy of Languages, all texts published on African languages.

Bamako, the 18th of May 2006

The Conference

**Regional Conference « National Policies: The Role of Cross-border Languages and the Place of Lesser Used Languages in West Africa » (ACALAN)
Bamako (Mali) - 16 /18 May 2006 - International Centre of Conference**

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