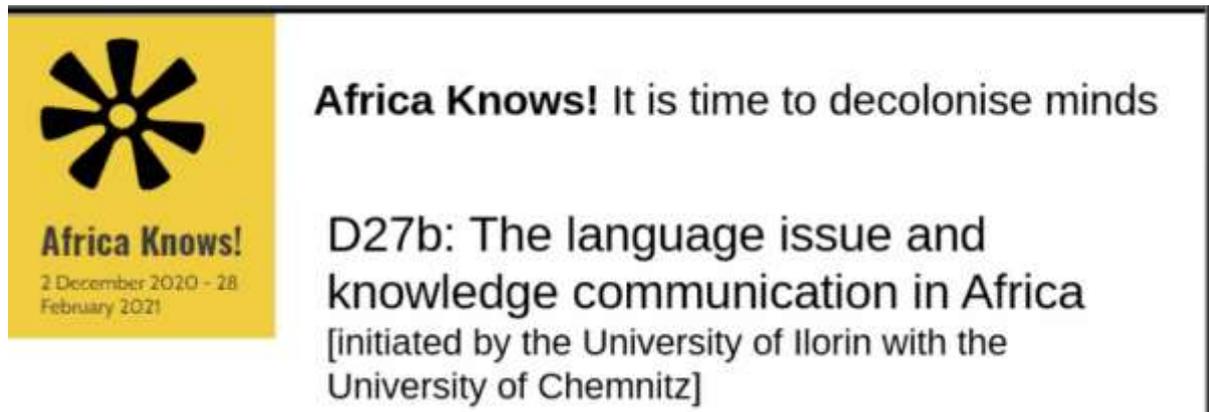


A Report on *The Language Issue and Knowledge Communication in Africa Panel* at the Africa Knows Conference, held on the 29th January, 2021



Conveners:

Marieke van Winden (Conference Organizer)
(African Studies Centre, Leiden University, Netherlands)

Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju
(University of Ilorin, Nigeria)

Josef Schmied
(Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany)

Bert van Pinxteren
(Leiden University, The Netherlands)

Rapporteur: Daniel Ajayi (Chemnitz University of Technology)

Summary of Panel: The panel probed into the age-long contestation that attends the roles and functions of languages in Africa, classified as both foreign and indigenous, in the production and reception of African indigenous knowledge. The papers presented at the panel asked key questions on the implications of the (non)-collaboration of these languages in promoting or obstructing indigenous knowledge in African institutions. Beyond this, participants at the panel engaged the impact of indigenous languages in the study of both African oral and written materials in African institutions.

All the papers were presented through PowerPoint and each presentation attracted robust discussions and comments that will continue to raise awareness especially among scholars of African Studies, on the need to re-position African indigenous knowledge production and reception through the indigenous languages.

Nigerian “duelling” languages and the backlash phenomenon: prognosis for the resurgence of indigenous languages

Presenter: Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (University of Ilorin, Nigeria)

Oloruntoba-Oju’s paper was not only a critique of the age-long domination enjoyed by English over other Nigerian indigenous languages but also an examination of how this domination is being recently impacted through the upsurge of positive attitudes among Nigerians towards the indigenous languages. Hence, in this paper, Oloruntoba-Oju engaged the ambivalent attitudes towards English alongside other Nigerian languages. One of the major contributions of Oloruntoba-Oju’s work is that the emerging backlash against the relevance and over-emphasized positive impact of English in Nigeria poses the possibility of bringing an end to linguistic imperialism in the country. The paper specifically submitted that the dueling or tango especially between English and Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria can help in the future restoration or resurgence of indigenous African languages.

Alter/natives and Im/perfect Futures: Education Sites and Communication for Transformative Democracy

Presenter: Muchativugwa Liberty Hove (North-West University, South-Africa)

In his presentation, Muchativugwa examined how the clamour for universal literacies in Africa is inhibited by the privilege given to the English language, private school education and the Internet. Muchativugwa argued that the quest for globalization is a cog in the wheel of progress of post-colonial African communities. As a product of the capitalist market economy, Muchativugwa submitted that globalization promotes colonial languages but hinders adequate utilization of African indigenous languages for knowledge creation and production.

Culture and Language – Empowering and Disempowering Ideas

Presenter: Bert van Pinxteren (Leiden University, Netherlands)

Van Pinxteren discussed, during his presentation, the colonial and indigenous ideas that both increase and inhibit African agency. He discussed these ideas in two related areas: culture and language. In the area of culture, Van Pinxteren argued how certain ideas about culture “work to obstruct a view of both the constants and the dynamics of African cultures and cultural identities”. To solve this problem, Van Pinxteren pushed for the emergence of new African cultural traditions and policies to stimulate such development. However, in the area of language, he proposed that all languages in Africa must not be treated as the same. He proposed

a framework of “discerned” and “designed” languages to advance policy. While the term “discerned” language was described as a linguistic concept, Van Pinxteren classified “designed” language as a sociological concept. He referred to a discerned language as the social and political act of pronouncing a dialect or speech register a language and a designed language as a language that is deliberately shaped and built as a standardized vehicle of education and literary expression.

Linguistic and Cultural Barriers to Learning and Development in Africa

Presenters: Emilie Sanon-Ouattara. (University Joseph KI ZERBO)

Sanon-Ouattara associated the problems of African countries especially in the area of education with the languages of instruction, which are usually European languages. In this paper, she advocated the need for a learning system that takes into account the cultural background including the language of learners. She established the reason for this learning, based on the undetachable inclusion of language in culture. Since a learning system that is dissociated from the cultural background of learners can only produce artificial leadership and superficial development, Sanon-Ouattara submitted that African countries should adopt a learning system that ascribes prominence to indigenous cultures and languages.

Mandarin in Lagos Schools: Emerging Online Perspectives

Presenter: Esther Senayon (Mountain Top University, Nigeria)

Using Netnography as research instrument, Senayon investigated people’s reactions to the introduction of Mandarin by the Lagos State government to Lagos State-owned secondary schools. In her paper, Senayon explored the reason for the introduction of such a language. According to her, the language was introduced to be of economic benefit to learners of the language. However, the language has failed to generate positive reactions and attitudes from many people who conclude that the introduction of Mandarin, a language with a starkly different orthography poses serious threats to indigenous languages in Lagos State.

The Amharic Language: History of Its Use in Ethiopia and Peculiarities of Ethiopia’s Language Policy

Presenter: Lida Zatolokina (Moscow State Institute of International Relations)

In her presentation, Zatolokina explored the history, functions and development of the Amharic language in relation to English and other indigenous languages in Ethiopia. Zatolokina started her presentation by discussing the multiethnic and multilingual situation in Ethiopia and

examining the present status of Amharic as the official language of government as stipulated in the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution. She equally pointed out the prominence given to Amharic through the single language policy of Emperor Menelik II, and how this has changed since the beginning of Derg's regime that also assigned complementary roles to English and languages of other ethnic groups. She explained how the change in the language policy over the last two decades has resulted in a linguistic phenomenon known as "guramayle", a coinage that signifies the mixture of English and Amharic in which less attention is given to the grammar of Amharic language. Zatolokina concluded that this linguistic phenomenon has a strong implication on the status and development of Amharic compared to English and other indigenous languages in Ethiopia.

Language and Educational Policies and the "Postcolonial" State in Africa

Presenter: Tesfaye Wolde-Medhin (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Wolde-Medhin was not able to present his paper but was present for the panel's discussions. In the paper submitted, he argued that institutional practices especially in the area of language and educational policies in most postcolonial states in Africa are products of European colonial domination. Wolde-Medhin highlighted the effects of this domination in the presentation. According to him, this situation has resulted in organizational disjuncture between the institutions and practices of state apparatuses and those of indigenous knowledge and sociocultural practices. Apart from this, it has also led to the instability and fragility of state power and further exposed it to internal contestations and corruptions. He observed that all these have strong negative implications on the development of indigenous sociocultural institutions and practices. Wolde-Medhin concluded his presentation by suggesting directions that support mutual interplay between homegrown and external sociocultural institutions and practices.

Leaving Behind the Mask: The Stylistics of Nigerian Sexual Diversity and Homophobic Discourse in the Digital Media

Presenter: Rasaq Ajadi (University of Ilorin, Nigeria)

In his presentation, Ajadi examined the role of the digital media in pushing the knowledge of homosexuality and other sexual orientations to the domain of global or public discourse in Nigeria. Ajadi particularly focused on how language is used in the discourse of sexual diversity and homophobic orientation. He identified linguistic negativity, agentivity, affectivity and silence as the major linguistic features in the discourse of homosexuality in Nigeria. Ajadi

concluded that homosexuality is not only objectified but represented as an alien practice in the Nigerian digital media.

Indigenizing Language for Universal Use in Nigeria

Presenter: Franca Attoh (University of Lagos, Nigeria)

Attoh in her presentation joined the lingering academic debate on the need for a national language in Nigeria. She advocated for a hybridized language that combines the features of the major indigenous languages for effective social relations, economic and political growth. The hybridization of these languages should lead to the configuration of a national language to be known as WAZOBIA, a fusion of three main languages, following earlier such suggestions in the literature. This language, according to Attoh, will not only help the conversational processes in different contexts in Nigeria but foster unity and socioeconomic health of the country.

“Blame Colonialism?” or “Blame the Government?” Identity Construction and Ideological Framing in Homosexuality Narratives on Nigerian Twitter

Presenters: Paul Onanuga (Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria) and Josef Schmied (Chemnitz University of Technology)

The presentation by Onanuga and Schmied examined the framing of the government-activists tango on homosexual practices and identities on social media in Nigeria. Through corpus-linguistic and critical analysis of homosexuality narratives on Nigerian Twitter, the paper revealed that “the government” and sometimes even “colonialism” are at the center of the blame-game from both anti-homosexuality and pro-homosexuality narratives on Twitter. While anti-homosexuality narratives charge the government to toughen the sanction on homosexuals, pro-homosexuality narratives criticize the government for failing to uphold the rights of queer groups. They concluded in the paper that the social media provide the platforms through which the propaganda or narratives on homosexual identities and ideologies are constructed.