



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

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Pluridisciplinary Research on Language Contact in West Africa

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Report

Pluridisciplinary Research on Language Contact in West Africa

Organisers

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Themes and Objectives

In the highly complex multilingual region of West Africa, essentialist notions of language and identity can be questioned and common Western models of language death and multilingualism can be tested. In this respect the conference venue – Point Sud in Bamako, Mali – was ideally suited to bring together specialists on regional languages and cultures who work from different perspectives on understanding the complex ethno-linguistic aspects of this complex issue so as to put the individual elements in relation to one another.

Multilingualism is a two-sided phenomenon. It means, for one, the coexistence of two or more languages in the brain of a speaker and, secondly, the use of two or more languages in a whole society. Studies of individual multilingualism have shown that it is not simply that two separate languages are used in parallel by an individual, but that the speakers use their languages for different purposes and also have different degrees of proficiency and use. This also applies in analogy to multilingual societies in which a division of labour for the languages exists in terms of domains and contexts of use and where different roles, functions and prestige attributions are linked to the respective languages.

Most previous studies have focused on speaking situations in which one language is the official standard and others are accepted as unofficial (i.e. migrant languages). Complex situations such as those found in West Africa, where a former colonial language exists in contact with both traditional and standardised native languages and with numerous non-standard languages and dialects, have only recently been subject to scientific research. It must be conceded that the situation as it exists in West Africa is rather the rule than an exception; in many regions around the world, linguistic and social contexts are much more complex than existing language-contact models are able to represent.

A deeper understanding of the range and patterns of multilingualism, as they are found in West Africa appear highly relevant to the development of scientific research areas such as descriptive linguistics, contact linguistics, multilingualism studies and sociolinguistics in general. Advances in the knowledge are to be expected in areas and issues which revolve around linguistic identity, migration and urbanisation, oral history, ethnobiology and the preservation of traditional knowledge. Finally, areas such as education, child-rearing and development, which are also characterised by problems of multilingualism, are affected.

Against this background, it was the declared objective of the workshop to develop a scientific agenda for the emerging multidisciplinary field of integrative language documentation and also to establish a network of scholars who work on similar questions from different disciplinary perspectives. This was done with the explicit intent to include both indigenous scholars and those native to the region as well as internationally renowned academics.

The workshop programme included the presentation of papers as well as discussions in tutorials and work groups on different theoretical, methodological and practical approaches that appeared appropriate for the analysis of languages in conjunction with their contact situations, the resulting linguistic upheavals and social consequences for the respective speakers.

Methodology and Results

First it must be noted that the working atmosphere was very intense and fruitful. French dominated as working language with occasional digressions into English being translated into French by the organisers. The different presentation forms proved very helpful and conducive to wide-ranging discussions.

The papers of individual specialists, which were grouped into blocks of central themes, were followed by discussions on the presented issues. The second part of the day was spent in tutorials in which selected colleagues presented methodological approaches to the respective issues. Here, too, interesting discussions emerged, often with a pragmatic, research-relevant component. The late afternoons were reserved for group work. These randomly assembled working groups were intended to identify specific topics that might be interesting for an ESF research group application that could be developed in the course of the workshop. Methodological and theoretical aspects of the respective topics were also to be considered. This form of organisation proved extremely fruitful and constructive, as demonstrated in the number of proposals and the lively discussions.

The key issues that emerged and that the scholars in the newly established network will focus on in the West African context include:

1. Language and city
 - a. centre and periphery: the linguistic organisation of cities
 - b. linguistic relations in comparison: cities of the first, second and third order
 - c. linguistic correlates of migration and migration routes
 - d. relations between town and country and linguistic cross-influence
2. Dealing with multilingualism
 - a. language emergence
 - b. standardisation and stabilisation in the context of multilingualism
 - c. development of orthographies and conventions
 - d. integration of new media and technologies
 - e. multilingualism and education
3. Parameters and descriptive levels of multilingualism
 - a. concept, object and terminology development
 - b. comparisons of multilingual situations

Various methodological approaches were developed for the analysis of these key issues that in most cases tended to an ethnolinguistic, qualitative approach. New research methods using audio and visual material were encouraged and discussed, as was the sociological network approach.

Further aspects of the workshop's success include both the international scientific co-operation that was initiated with the workshop and the established relations on the north-south as well as on the south-south axis and that with the participation of representatives of UNESCO and ACALAN (Académie Africaine des Langues) connections with actors and decision-makers at the political level could be established. The participation of the African Union's ACALAN resulted in the establishment of a valuable contact for those members of the network working on the second key theme described above (in particular items c., d. and e.).

Sustainability of the Event

The organisers of the workshop will keep all participants informed of further developments, especially as concerns the establishment of an ESF research network. In the course of the conference the following African partners for this application could be won:

- ACALAN Bamako, Mali
- IFAN Dakar, Senegal
- ILAB Bamako, Mali
- Institut des Sciences des Sociétés CRNST Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- FLASH and ENSUP Bamako, Mali

In further discussions with representatives present from research institutions in Norway, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium, the basic structure of the application based on the key themes developed during the workshop could be established. The European partners have either developed research projects on these key themes or are in the process of developing them. They see great opportunities in the planned network of exchange along the described axes. The organisers of the workshop will complete the ESF application, co-ordinate it with the European and African partners and submit it this fall.

Participants

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| 1. Prof. André Batiana | Sociolinguistics, University of Ouagadougou |
| 2. Prof. Rose Marie Beck | Sociolinguistics, Goethe University Frankfurt |
| 3. Dr. Klaus Beyer | Linguistics, Humboldt University Berlin |
| 4. Dr. Sékou Bocoum | Sociolinguistics, ENSUP Bamako |
| 5. Prof. Amadou A. Cissé | Linguistics, University of Bamako |
| 6. Dr. Ibrahima A. Cissé | Linguistics, University of Stendhal & Leiden |
| 7. Prof. N'Do Cissé | Linguistics, University of Bamako |
| 8. Alexander Cobbinah M.A. | Linguistics, SOAS London |
| 9. Adama Coulibaly M.A. | Linguistics, University of Bamako |
| 10. Issa Coulibaly M.A. | Sociolinguistics, University of Bamako |
| 11. Dr. Abdourahmane Diallo | Linguistics, Goethe University Frankfurt |
| 12. Dr. Mohamed Diallo | Linguistics, University of Bamako |
| 13. Dr. Klaudia Dombrowsky-Hahn | Linguistics, University of Bayreuth |
| 14. Dr. Bréhima Doumbia | Sociolinguistics, University of Bamako |
| 15. Prof. Martine Dreyfus | Ethnology, University of Montpellier |
| 16. Issa Fofana M.A. | Geography, Point Sud Bamako |
| 17. Dr. Christine Glanz | Political Science, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning |
| 18. Prof. Cecile Canut Hobe | Sociolinguistics, University of Paris Descartes |
| 19. Dr. Kasper Juffermans | Discourse Analysis, University of Tilburg |
| 20. Prof. Caroline Juillard | Ethnology, Linguistics, University of Paris Descartes |
| 21. Dr. Gérard Kedrebeogo | Sociolinguistics, CNRST/INSS Ouagadougou |
| 22. Soumana Koné M.A. | Linguistics, University of Bamako |
| 23. Mahamadou Konta M.A. | Linguistics, Institut des Langues Abdoulaye Barry |
| 24. Dr. Kristin Lexander | Sociolinguistics, University of Oslo |
| 25. Prof. Fiona Mc Loughlin | Linguistics, University of Florida |
| 26. Dr. Friederike Lüpke | Linguistics, SOAS London |
| 27. Prof. Sozinho Matsinhe | Political Science, ACALAN |
| 28. Prof. Adjaratou Oumar Sall | Sociolinguistics, IFAN, University of Dakar |
| 29. Prof. Moustapha Sall | History, University Cheick Anta Diop de Dakar |
| 30. Prof. Henning Schreiber | Linguistics, University Hamburg |
| 31. Prof. Ingse Skattum | Sociolinguistics, University of Oslo |
| 32. Boureima Touré | Ethnology, Point Sud |
| 33. Saydul Wahab Touré M.A. | Linguistics, ENSUP Bamako |
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