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Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space

Call for contributions to a collective publication

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In February 2014, the Lexicology, Terminology and Translation (LTT) network held a conference in Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, on “Describing linguistic and cultural heritage at the service of multilingualism in sub-Saharan Africa”. Following the event, and with the support of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, LTT organised a seminar devoted to creating academic programmes for French-speaking translators and interpreters working with African languages, with the aim of developing professional prospects for students in language and literature.

Similar programmes already exist in Northern African countries. In 2009, the UN Office at Nairobi launched the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation (PAMCIT), bringing together six universities: the University of Nairobi in Kenya (CTI), the University of Legon in Ghana, the University of Buea in Cameroon (ASTI), the University of Maputo in Mozambique, the Gaston Berger University in Saint-Louis, Senegal, and the Cairo University in Egypt. Other post-graduate programmes are being created, the most recent example being in Rwanda where, with support from LTT and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, a Master’s programme in Translation and Interpreting was launched in 2016. Other established schools are also trying to pick up momentum in this area, sometimes with support from international organisations.

Major international organisations active in Africa offer translation and interpretation services (such as the United Nations Office at Nairobi, or the African Union in Addis Ababa). However, looking beyond the traditional model where interpretation and translation are exclusive to international relations and colonial languages, there is a need to invest in translation and interpretation studies for public service, in the languages spoken by local communities. Certain African countries are aware of the challenges of linguistic diversity, and of communication issues stemming from the use of former colonial languages; as a result, these countries allow the use of local languages in their democratic assemblies, sometimes even offering simultaneous interpretation services (e.g. in the parliaments of South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, an Senegal, as well as in the Pan-African Parliament).

The challenge for African countries today is to train reliable linguistic intermediaries, while for many NGOs, local or international experts and journalists in the field the problem is that they have to communicate with local communities without always realising the extent of the linguistic difficulties involved. There is increasing talk of “community-based interpretation”, which can be of interest to hospitals, municipalities, courts, social services, cooperatives, refugee camps, etc. The creation of an international justice system has also dramatically highlighted the question of interpretation in courts as well as that of major communication issues between European languages and the languages spoken by witnesses, victims, and defendants (e.g. Kinyarwanda in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Krio in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, or Sango in the International Criminal Court).

Despite a number of surveys, reports and experiments, the topic of school curricula still seems to be a crucial one on a continent with great linguistic diversity. In the background remains the inevitable question of curricula based more on the multilingual potential inherent to African countries: could using both African and European languages — through a well thought-out approach (ELAN-Africa project, CLIL) — help overcome some barriers to development? For the professional practice of translation and interpretation, this involves a number of challenges: acquiring modern equipment, creating writing systems for certain languages, and producing lexical resources adapted to each community's specific situation. Local language resources will also be developed, by translating major works of a universal nature in the areas of science, literature and philosophy, among others, as well as by promoting the publication of works written in African languages. The compilation of large corpora (aligned and in digital form), such as dictionaries, could also be a great step forward in achieving these goals. All this can only be considered seriously if research and experiments that have been already carried out over many years, and that deserve recognition, are taken into account.

The LTT network is calling for contributions to a collective publication whose chapters will address all these topics. Contributions should relate to, project feedback, challenge descriptions, methodological reflections, overviews, etc. Submissions should be sent before July 1, 2017, to contact@reseau-ltt.net, and follow the editorial guidelines. They may be written in any of the African Union's official languages, and should be no longer than 40,000 characters (excluding spaces, but including the bibliography and appendices).

The publication project is headed by experts supported by an *ad hoc* scientific committee, most of whose members are from LTT member laboratories and whose composition may be extended depending on linguistic needs. During the scientific review, each contribution will be anonymised and reviewed by two committee members, at least one of whom will be from Africa. If the reviewers disagree on a given article, it may be given to a third reviewer. In order to be published, contributions must take into account all comments made by the reviewers.

Timetable:

- April 1, 2017: publication of the call for contributions
- July 1, 2017: submission deadline
- November 1, 2017: feedback from the scientific committee
- January 1, 2018: submission of the final versions
- April 1, 2018: publication

Scientific Committee

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Xavier Blanco Escoda (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

Mame Thierno Cisse (Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar)

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