



AFRICAN LANGUAGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Lugha

News from the Secretariat

A Message from the Executive Director

It is my honor once again to address the ALTA membership as the organization's Executive Director. My role is to make sure that the ALTA secretariat serves the organization well and, to that end, I want to take this opportunity to update everyone on our work in the past year.

After the 2007 ALTA Conference, the secretariat began a membership drive, which is still underway. For ALTA to be able to serve the community of African language teachers, it is important that instructors and others involved in the field renew their membership. Not only will this provide ALTA with much needed funds for new initiatives, but it will help us keep an up-to-date roster of language specialists. Such a roster would help us to connect those in need of language pedagogy services, such as teaching or testing, with the right people in the field. It would also help us direct new job announcements to the proper personnel.

As part of the membership drive, we have created a new category of members, known as institutional members. Institutions,

such as African Studies Centers, are encouraged to become members at this level so that their center can be provided with the latest ALTA journals, newsletters, and be kept abreast of current events in the language teaching community. To our delight, many institutions have joined already, but if an institution to which you belong is not currently an ALTA member, please encourage them to join.

Besides the membership drive, the projects that have consumed most of the secretariat's efforts in the last year have been the Standards and STAMP projects, as well as preparing for the 2008 conference. Held in conjunction with the annual conference of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), this promises to be a great event. We hope the focus on language pedagogy across linguistic groups will truly advance the ALTA mission. We will also be contacting presenters immediately for copies of the papers they present, in order to publish another high-quality issue of the Journal of ALTA. If you have research you would

like us to consider, please submit it to the secretariat.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to serve ALTA as Executive Director this year. The success of the organization this year has a great deal to do with the collaborative spirit of Executive Board. I would like to thank Alwiya S. Omar (Immediate Past President), Ousseina Alidou (President), Leonce Rushubirwa, (Vice President), Charles M. Bwenge (Treasurer), and Audrey Mbeje (Secretary) for their hard work and dedication. I also want to thank Openyu Majee, Matthew Brown, and Adedoyin Adenuga of the Secretariat for helping to implement new ALTA initiatives, to organize the conference, and for providing technological support.

In the next year, the ALTA Secretariat hopes to be involved in many more projects that will help professionalize our organization and our field. If you have any suggestions or concerns, they are always welcome at alta@mailplus.wisc.edu. I wish you all of the best in the coming year.

Antonia Folarin Schleicher
ayschlei@wisc.edu
Executive Director

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University of Wisconsin

A Message from Alwiya S. Omar *Immediate Past President*

I have just completed serving in the African Language Teachers' Association (ALTA) Executive board as Immediate Past President after serving as Vice president (2001 to 2004) and President (2004 to 2006). It has been a great pleasure for me to be involved in ALTA and in the field of African languages.



Alwiya Omar at the 2006 ALTA Conference

As ALTA member, I actively participate in the Kiswahili Group Project Abroad in Tanzania as reviewer of applications after having directed the Kiswahili GPA from 1999 to 2001 and co-directing it with Professor Lioba Moshi of the University of Georgia in summer 2003. I have also had the opportunity to organize two ALTA conferences - in 2000 at the University of Pennsylvania and in 2003 at Indiana University and

respectively co-editing and editing the volumes of JALTA linked to these conferences. I have participated in professional development such as attending workshops organized by the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC), ALTA, National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), and American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). As a result of attending an ACTFL workshop organized by

NALRC, I was able to pursue certification and I am now a certified ACTFL tester of Kiswahili. Through NALRC, several projects are under way: Professor Leonce Rushubirwa and I have co-authored the advanced Kiswahili text book which is now in NALRC press, and with Professor Charles Bwenge, we are in the process of developing computerized Kiswahili tests as part of Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) project.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all ALTA members for their active participation in the Association. I would specifically like to thank Professor Antonia Schleicher for volunteering her time serving as Executive Director of ALTA to

strengthen the Association and hence professionalizing further the field of African language teaching and learning. I am glad that there is a strong collaboration between ALTA and NALRC. I would also like to thank other members of ALTA Executive Committee: Professors Ousseina Alidou, Leonce Rushubirwa, Audrey Mbeje and Charles Bwenge. Many thanks go to Professor Akinloye Ojo, who is a past member of the ALTA board as General editor of JALTA.

I wish you all great success in the coming years. And even though I will no longer be part of the ALTA Executive board, I intend to remain actively involved in the field.

Alwiya S. Omar
aomar@indiana.edu
Immediate Past President

'With you in spirit' A letter from Vice President, Leonce Rushubirwa

Dear ALTA members,

It is with great pride and pleasure that I welcome you to our annual ALTA conference. For two years since you elected me as a Vice President, I have been an active ALTA board member serving from Canada. Frankly speaking, it has been a wonderful experience and I have enjoyed working with other members in making sure that ALTA is progressing.

I am convinced that although ALTA is

progressing our support is still needed to ensure that we are protecting this progress while strategizing ways to make it a more professional and service-based association for its members, students and other affiliated distinguished members. I therefore, would like to request you to consider becoming a volunteer and getting involved in our great association. Some of the ways you can enhance ALTA include:

- Promote ALTA to non-members who are eligible to become members
- Motivate our old members who haven't been seen for many years to re-join us to share their experience with our new members, especially those who are new in the field of teaching African languages in the US.
- Communicate to ALTA board members ideas or suggestions that you feel/believe could make ALTA stronger.
- Promote ALTA

- internationally, especially to those scholars who are interested to join us and are professionally involved in African languages/African studies.
- Participate in joint projects/research activities that are directed by members of ALTA individually or based in the educational institutions in which these members are working.
- Contribute scholarly papers or book chapters to our journals.
- Continue your involvement in

professional development initiatives to ensure that each of our members can compete professionally with others in the field of teaching foreign languages.

-Become visible and active during the whole year as we only meet once a year. You do not need to wait for our annual conference to provide your suggestion(s) to the leadership. ALTA is a combination of members and the leadership. Therefore, your participation is vital to the process in which all members have an equal opportunity to influence changes that will enhance and promote ALTA for the benefit of all.

I would also like to take this unusual step in

informing you about my circumstances since you elected me as a vice President. I know on my part it is not easy to raise these issues but I do so because of their importance. When you elected me in April 2006, I was teaching at the University of Kansas. In July the same year, I had to write a letter of resignation informing my department chair that I must resign from University of Kansas because of family and other personal reasons. My resignation was approved for August 18, 2006 and I returned to Canada. Last year, I could not attend the conference due to injuries I incurred in an automobile accident. Unfortunately, this year again I will not be able to join you because of my current employment responsibilities. However, I definitely plan to attend

next year's conference.

I would like you to know that although I am not attending the conference I am with you in spirit and I will be following up on your activities during the conference. I accept the position of President of ALTA and I will work very hard to act according to the ALTA constitution. Also, I am expecting that each of you will find a way to communicate with me any suggestions or concerns you may have. I can assure you that although as we stand united and sharing information, skills and expertise, we will meet our professional, career and scholarly needs because the future really is in our hands.

Long live ALTA!

Sincerely,
Leonce Rushubirwa, Ph.D.
Next President of ALTA

Movements at the Kamusi Project

A report from Martin Benjamin

Of many recent developments at the Kamusi Project, three are particularly relevant for ALTA members:

- 1) New site
- 2) New languages
- 3) New tools

1) New site:
kamusiproject.org.

After many years of incubation at the Yale Council on African Studies, the Kamusi Project has now become an independent entity under the auspices of the World Language Documentation Centre. All

site resources and memberships have been transferred to a new server at *kamusiproject.org*. Users can continue to search the dictionaries as before, and registered members can take advantage of the editorial tools as well as many new features.

2) New languages: PALDO

At an African Languages Dictionaries Workshop held at Yale in December 2006, the groundwork was laid for designing an interlinked, multilingual dictionary based on the Kamusi Project architecture. The resulting

proposal, the Pan African Living Dictionary Online (PALDO), has received an initial grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) that will fund (a) the computer programming necessary to move from a bilingual to a multilingual model, and (b) a 2500 term information technology (IT) lexicon in twelve major African languages.

PALDO will be expandable, with the flexibility to incorporate multiple languages.

Story continued on page 6.

Modified Oral Proficiency Interview (MOPI) workshop

Since assessment is an important aspect in language teaching and learning, African Language instructors at Indiana University attended a two day ACTFL MOPI workshop on January 17 and 18th, 2008 at Indiana University Bloomington.

The focus of the MOPI workshop was to train the instructors to conduct interviews of learners with proficiency levels from Novice to Intermediate High. The training was done in English but the participants intend to pursue certification in the languages that they teach, mainly Bamana, Akan, Zulu, and Kiswahili.

The workshop was conducted by Professor Karl Otto, Professor Emeritus from the University of Pennsylvania through the ACTFL Professional Development Department. A follow up to this workshop is another two day workshop focusing on Advanced to Superior proficiency levels.

Information on ACTFL workshops is available at <http://www.actfl.org>

'Since ALTA 2007' A Report from the NALRC

Since the last ALTA conference in Florida, the NALRC has been extremely busy publishing new materials for the teaching of African Languages. In the past year, textbooks for Intermediate and Advanced Swahili, Advanced Shona, Elementary Somali, and Elementary Kikongo have been published. A Wolof Dictionary also came out, which has opened up new avenues for the NALRC.

Currently, dictionary projects have been initiated for Shona, Swahili, and Yoruba. The NALRC plans to invigorate a new field of

research with this project, as qualified developers and interested parties come together to create pocket dictionaries for African languages. The NALRC hopes that students will find these materials extremely helpful and teachers will be able to help students employ these materials in the classroom and in real-world situations.

During the summer break, the NALRC convened a number of workshops and summer institutes for professional development in African language pedagogy. Please read more about these events elsewhere in LUGHA.

Also this summer, the NALRC hosted two training and orientations session for new Fulbright-Hays Foreign Language Teaching Assistants (FLTAs). The NALRC's work in the name of African languages has uncovered many of the issues faced by all less-commonly taught languages (LCTLs). The NALRC's devotion to LCTLs made it possible to present meaningful training sessions that excited all of the FLTAs, who represented many world language groups.

The NALRC also featured among hundreds of publishers at both the ASA and ACTFL conferences in

New York, NY and San Antonio, TX, respectively. At these conferences, the NALRC displayed all of the new textbooks and dictionaries that have been published in the last year. It is evident at these events that African languages are becoming increasingly visible and important to scholars and school administrators.

The NALRC wishes to show its appreciation to the ALTA board and members for their support in all these projects. As the field of African language pedagogy grows, the close partnership of ALTA and the NALRC will become increasingly important.

African Languages Standards and STAMP Workshop

In 2006, ALTA began the process of developing Standards for African languages. These Standards are based on the model developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which first published the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* in 1996. The ACTFL Standards are a collection of criteria that normalizes content across levels for the teaching of various languages. While the Standards do not dictate how a language should be taught, they identify the skills that students should have mastered after completing various levels of instruction. The goal of the Standards movement, and the kind of instruction that

it implies, is the production of students who are well versed in the "Five Cs;" Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities; with respect to the language of study.

No African languages are yet included in the published Standards document, but the work done in the ALTA-NALRC Standards Workshop, to develop documents for Swahili, Yoruba, and Zulu, will soon bear fruit. These documents have been written and revised and are in the process of official review for ACTFL publication. When complete, they will constitute a major leap forward for African language pedagogy.

In 2007, the project brought together instructors of Wolof, Akan-Twi, Hausa, and Afrikaans to begin developing Standards documents for their respective languages. Some of the participants brought drafts with them, which they immediately began reviewing and revising, while other participants began from scratch. Professors Antonia Schleicher and Alwiya Omar, former ALTA Presidents and key developers of the Yoruba and Swahili Standards, assisted participants with formulating and writing drafts. At the end of the week, the Wolof and Akan-Twi groups completed full drafts of the Standards for their languages.

On Wednesday, May 23, Sachiko Kamioka and Greg Hopper-Moore, from the Center for Applied Second Language Studies at the University of Oregon, joined the workshop to discuss another ACTFL initiative: Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP). The STAMP project seeks to develop computer-based assessments to evaluate student ability in a particular language, with regard to the guidelines established by the Standards for that language. For the African languages, tests are being developed for Yoruba and Swahili, which are the subject of a major session at this year's ALTA conference.

NALRC 2007 Summer Institute, May 29 – June 8, 2007

For the 8th year running, the NALRC hosted a Summer Institute in Madison, WI for professional development in the teaching of African languages. Through these annual institutes, the NALRC has equipped a total of 126 African language instructors in the latest communicatively-oriented approaches in teaching African languages.

New teachers such as university Teaching Assistants benefit from hands-on, research supported African language pedagogy. They also get a sense of the atmosphere of a new foreign language classroom while experienced teachers learn new strategies and techniques to apply to their classrooms. New instructors also benefit from the cultural knowledge that the American instructors bring to the Institute.

The 2007 Institute began on Tuesday, May 29, and ran until Friday, June 8. Twenty-four African language teachers converged at Madison from various locations such as Fisk University, Howard University, Indiana University, Lagos State Radio (Nigeria), and *Yoruba Wunmi* (UK). African languages represented at this year's institute were Kiswahili, Yoruba, Akan-Twi, ChiShona, Lango, Xhosa, Arabic, and Wolof.



Instructors for this year's institute were Steve Timm and Joe Nosek, UW-Madison teachers and practitioners of diverse pedagogical theories for the language classroom. During the first week of the institute, Mr. Timm taught and modeled best practices for instruction in speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Mr. Nosek led the second week, presenting a variety of strategies for realizing vocabulary retention and providing goal-based assessment.

On Thursday, June 7, a ceremony to present certificates to participants was held in Bascom Hall. Opening remarks were delivered by NALRC Director, Professor Antonia Schleicher and Professor Sandra Arfa, Director of the Program in English a Second Language at UW-Madison. Prof. Schleicher stressed the importance of skills gained from the Institute in equipping African language teachers in their classroom teaching. Participants, professors,

and invited guests were treated to an evening of blues harmonica music by the multi-talented Joe Nosek. Moses Mabayoje and his Yoruba ensemble chipped in with their Oriki Olodumare (praise poetry) and Joe Nosek partnered with and Steve Timm for their humorous "Performance and Speech Act" to conclude this section of the ceremony. Thereafter, Professor Tejumola Olaniyan of the Departments of English and African Languages and Literature gave a brief speech, noting the great work of the NALRC continues to do in training African language teachers before presenting certificates to participants. The closing remarks and Vote of Thanks were delivered by Aissatou Diop-Hashim, a French professor and aspiring Wolof instructor at Howard University.

After the awards were given out, everyone enjoyed dinner while African music throbbed in the background.

2007 NALRC Summer Institute Participants:

Seth A. Ofori (Akan-Twi)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Saddam Issa (Arabic)
Beloit College – WI

Reem M. Hilal (Arabic)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Mary Youssef (Arabic)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Said Hannouchi (Arabic)
University of Connecticut-Storrs

Sami Alkyam (Arabic)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Joseph Chikowero (ChiShona)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Ashford M. Njogu (Kiswahili)
University of Kansas-Kansas

David Wambua Kyeu (Kiswahili)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Florence Ebila (Lango)
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Elaine Mshomba (Kiswahili)
University of Pennsylvania, PA

Nasra Ahmed (Kiswahili)
Indiana University-Bloomington

Mohamed Yunus Rafiq (Kiswahili)
Indiana University-Bloomington

Zablon Mgonja (Kiswahili)
Fisk University-Nashville, TN

Beatrice Mkenda (Kiswahili)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Merchades M. Rutechura
(Kiswahili)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Francis Fanyana Lukhele (Xhosa)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Aderoju Adepoju (Yoruba)
Lagos State Radio Service,
Nigeria

Florence Olufolake Olamijulo
(Yoruba)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Adeyemisi A. Hastrup (Yoruba)
Yoruba Wunmi, UK

Titilayo Ayoola Shotonwa (Yoruba)
Lagos State Radio Service,
Nigeria

Olajumoke Mofolasayo (Yoruba)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Kamusi Project *continued*

The initial languages are being determined based on the specific terminology expertise available within the Pan African Localization network, due to IDRC's interest in promoting IT development in local languages. Over time, the project will build toward general dictionaries of many African languages, as well as terminology lexicons for a variety of domains. Language pairings that would otherwise not likely exist, such as Amharic-Zulu or Wolof-Malagasy, will be possible via a mechanism that bridges languages through a common index when bilingual expertise is not available. The goal is a resource to enhance communication among all regions of Africa.

Languages will be added to PALDO when partners are identified to undertake the work. ALTA members who are

interested in working on components for their languages of expertise are encouraged to contact *planning@kamusiproject.org*.

3) New tools: Grouping Tool and Verb Parser

Among the many new features the Kamusi Project has introduced recently, Swahili teachers will find the Grouping Tool and the Verb Parser to be especially useful. The Grouping Tool in particular is designed to address a major weakness in the way students use the Kamusi Project, and it especially needs the contributions of Swahili teachers in order to reach its full potential.

The Verb Parser is built directly into the Kamusi search engine. Users can enter any conjugated Swahili verb into the search box, and the parser will analyze the verb elements. A

student who searches for "nilipomwona" will learn not only the root verb, but also the subject, tense, and object markers. This tool speeds learning of how verbs work.

The Grouping Tool is a simple and intuitive mechanism to group and rank entries. Swahili teachers are familiar with receiving student essays with wildly inappropriate words gleaned from searches on the Kamusi Project. The problem is that, unless a headword has been put in some logical order by a human, the computer displays search results in simple alphabetical order. For example, Swahili has many words for various types of fish without known English names, all of which therefore fall under the English headword "fish"; without the grouping tool, all of those species that are higher in the alphabet than "s" would appear in search results before the general term

"samaki." The Grouping Tool makes it easy to arrange results by sense and importance, so that a participant can simply slide "samaki" up to the top, and cluster the remaining entries in a way that makes sense.

Swahili teachers can use the Grouping Tool to ensure that classroom vocabulary is correctly displayed on the Kamusi Project. The tool has an extremely simple design, fully explained and illustrated at kamusiproject.org/groupingtool. Once a word has been grouped, it is fixed for students everywhere, so the minute or two a teacher spends grouping an entry is a true public service. Since the Kamusi Project has over 70,000 entries, the alternative strategy of waiting around for somebody else to fix any given term is likely to result in continued frustration for teachers and students alike. With the help of ALTA members, we hope the problem of poorly arranged dictionary entries will soon be solved permanently.

Individual Announcements

Fallou Ngom

Fallou.Ngom@wwu.edu

I am on a Fulbright Lecturing/Research at the University Gaston Berger of Saint-Louis, Senegal for 10 months teaching linguistics courses and conducting research on Arabic and a'jami literatures of Senegambia. In Fall 2008, I will be moving to

Boston University as an Associate Professor of Anthropology and working in the African Language Program of the African Studies Center.

Katrina Thomson

kdthompson@humnet.uci.edu

At the March 2007 ALTA

conference, Katrina Daly Thompson took part in Antonia Schleicher's presentation on Standards, demonstrating use of Swahili standards in testing, as well as other conference presentations.

In June and July 2007, Thompson took 21 students to Tanzania where they studied Swahili at the Institute of Swahili and Foreign Languages in

Zanzibar and a course on popular cultures in Dar es Salaam. In August 2007, she spent two weeks at Chancellor College in Malawi, where she gave presentations on language issues in Zimbabwian and Tanzanian media. Thompson also supervised the African languages taught in UCLA's Language Intensives in LA program, which included Amharic, Swahili and Zulu.



ALTA Awards presented to Zoliswa Mali and the University of Florida African Studies Program at ALTA 2007

ALTA President
Ousseina Alidou and
Immediate Past
President Alwiya Omar,

presented the ALTA Emerging Scholar Award to Zoliswa Mali at the 2007 ALTA conference at the University of Florida, Gainesville. The 2007 award for Language Pedagogy Support went to the African Studies Program at the University of Florida for their efforts in supporting the teaching of African languages.

Individual Announcements *continued*

In July 2007, Thompson became Chair of UCLA's Interdepartmental Program in African Studies, which offers an undergraduate concentration and an MA.

The African Languages program at UCLA received an Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Languages (UISFL) grant from the Department of Education. During the 2007-09 grant period, the grant will allow UCLA to expand its African language offerings and develop a new major in African Languages and Cultures.

Jacques du Plessis
jacques@uwm.edu

Ever since I came to the US from Africa in 1984, I felt a need to promote awareness of Africa and its languages. I taught Afrikaans from 1985 through 2001 at BYU,

before accepting a post at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. I currently teach in the School of Information Studies, with a research focus on Information poverty, cultural interpretation of information, and the information campaign in the prevention of HIV. However, with a masters in Linguistics and a PhD in Instructional Technology, I have maintained my commitment to foreign language instruction.

In 2005 the website *www.afrikaans.us* presented the initial offering of an open course to the international community. The site grew to between five and six thousand visits per month.

In May 2007 I participated in the Standards/Curriculum Development and Evaluation Guidelines Workshop, and it

became clear that it would be a wonderful opportunity to expand this initiative to other African languages.

If you were to visit *www.afrikaans.us*, you will find that the site is designed to be a resource to beginner and intermediate learners. The site offers short flash movies to introduce vocabulary and explain grammar concepts, etc. Streaming audio and video is provided to help with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and culture. Yahoo Groups is used to offer a collaboration environment, with already more than 850 subscribed members.

The big picture will be to form a collaborative consortium among African languages. Initially the task would be to use the existing site to rapidly develop other languages. Then each language site will be customized. Finally, the

unique creativity developed with each site, will be shared with the other languages to exploit the benefits of open collaboration.

Once this final stage has been reached, each language website will be an invaluable resource to where ever the language is taught to provide a network for teachers and students.

If you are interested to find out more about this initiative, please contact Jacques du Plessis at *jacques@uwm.edu*. Hopefully we can meet each other this year at the ALTA conference in April 2008.

Kind regards,

Dr. Jacques du Plessis
School of Information Studies
Bolton 580, Univ of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
3210N Maryland Ave

Conference Announcement

**THE 1ST AFRICAN
LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURE
INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

**UNIVERSITY OF
BOTSWANA**

26 – 28 JUNE 2008

Prof H.M. Batibo & Dr R.
S. Dikole

Conference Theme:
Language, Literature and
Society

**The Keynote Speakers
will include:**

Professor Vic Web,
University of Pretoria,
South Africa

Professor Russell
Kaschula, Rhodes
University, South Africa

Registration:
Participants will be
required to pay a
registration fee of P150 or
US\$25. Students will pay
P50 or US\$10.

Accommodation:
This will range from
Campus hostels (around
P40 or \$8), Lodges
(around P120 or \$24) to
Hotels (around P300 or
\$60). Most of them are
close to the Conference
venue. Please indicate
early if you want us to
book campus hostel
accommodation for you.

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THE AFRICAN
LANGUAGE
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NEWSLETTER

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