AILA Africa ReN Newsletter

Editor's Comment

Dear ReN Africa Members,

Welcome to the 9th Volume, 1st Issue of the 2015 newsletter of the Research Network on Applied Linguistics and Literacy in Africa and the Diaspora. This issue brings you news of upcoming events, notable of which is the bi-annual Language & Development conference to be held in New Delhi, India, this coming November. The African Storybook Project has made remarkable progress in its one year, with 348 unique stories on the website, over 1000 translations, and 42 African languages. Read about how it is forging partnerships in the promotion of early grade literacy in African languages. Barbara and Agatha give us insight into early grade reading assessment appropriate for cross-language comparison. Finally, we share the changes in the language policy in Tanzania.

With best regards,

Yours,

Juliet Tembe,
Editor

Upcoming Conferences and Events

11th International Language and Development Conference 18-20 November 2015, New Delhi, India

In 2015 the theme of the Language and Development Conference is **Multilingualism and Development**. The conference aims to explore current understanding of a range of issues (see below), with evidence from a broad range of countries, in order to inform future research and practice on global, national and local levels. The conference will present an opportunity to examine the extent to which developments in research, policy, and practice in the linguistically super-diverse cities of developed countries have relevance for highly diverse multilingual contexts in Asia, Africa and Latin America. More information. The sub-themes of the conference are:
1. Multilingualism and the metropolis
2. Language, technology and multi-literacies
3. Multilingualism, marginalisation and empowerment

Closing date for submission of proposals: Friday 26 June 2015
Notifications of acceptance: Friday 10 July 2015
Speaker participation confirmation: Friday 14 August 2015

International conference Globalising Sociolinguistics, Leiden, Netherlands, June 2015

A combined European, American and British dominance is known to exist in sociolinguistic theory-making. This results in difficulties in using several dominant sociolinguistic models outside their 'western' geographical domain. Most researchers working outside this domain are keenly aware of this, and hence objections to this dominance are regularly raised. This conference addresses mismatches between mainstream sociolinguistic models and non-Anglo-Western sociolinguistic settings. Papers are invited on sociolinguistic issues, from various areas in the world, which challenge or expand mainstream theories. Both theoretical and empirical contributions are welcome. More information.

Confirmed plenary speakers:
- Florian Coulmas, Director of the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo. Associate Editor of the International Journal of the Sociology of Language; Author of Sociolinguistics.
- Maarten Mous, Professor of African Linguistics and Head of the Department of African Languages and Cultures, Leiden University. His research interests include Language & Identity and Cushitic and Bantu languages.
- Daming Xu, Professor of Chinese Linguistics at the University of Macau; Co-editor of Industrialization and the Re-structuring of Speech Communities in China and Europe.
- Reem Bassiouney, Associate Professor of Linguistics at the American University of Cairo; Author of "Functions of Code-Switching in Egypt" (2006) and "Arabic Sociolinguistics".

Dates: 18–20 June 2015
Venue: Leiden University, Netherlands

Publications

Barbara Elaine Graham and Agatha J. van Ginkel (2014). Assessing early grade reading: The value and limits of 'words per minute'. *Language, Culture and Curriculum 27*(3).

This paper explores the extent to which 'words per minute' (WPM) benchmarks, based mainly on research with native English speakers, are appropriate for cross-language comparisons. A quantitative study of early grade reading in two European (English and Dutch) and two African languages (Sabaot and Pokomo) analysed WPM and comprehension scores of over 300 children in three countries. Results indicate that similar comprehension scores were associated with diverse WPM rates. This suggests that WPM is not a reliable comparative measure of reading development since linguistic and orthographic features can differ considerably and are likely to influence the reading acquisition process. We argue that a good understanding of the languages of literacy (L1 and/or other) and their effects on reading acquisition are essential to the quest for quality education. Read article here.

In the field

The African Storybook Project is partnering with Aga Khan Foundation

The African Storybook Project (ASP) has been providing African children's stories through their online platform since early 2013. Since then the project has expanded to offer stories in about 45 African languages (and counting), and building partnerships across the continent. ASP is now collaborating with the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in West Nile, Uganda. The AKF's Strengthening Education Systems in East Africa (SESEA) is a five-year project that aims to sustainably improve learning outcomes, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy, for pre-primary and primary students in selected districts in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. They implement the Reading to Learn program in 150 schools, which involves teacher training, provision of relevant local language material, community support and training of school management committees. The program equips teachers to teach reading, but key also is the provision of supplementary readers for the libraries and schools. These need to be in the local languages, not only in English. However, there were no supplementary readers for their schools and libraries in the local languages of Lugbarati, Kakwa and Aringati. ASP offered 50 openly-licensed stories in Lugbarati and English from which ten titles could be selected and translated into the other two languages, uploaded on the ASP website and then published. The Ministry of Education and Sports approved seven of the titles, and together AKF and ASP worked on the suggested improvements before re-publishing.

In the news

Tanzania dumps English as its official language in schools, opts for Kiswahili (Quartz)

Tanzania is set to become the first sub-Saharan African country to use an African language as the medium of instruction throughout the schooling years. As part of far-reaching plans to reform education, President Jakaya Kikwete's administration announced last week that, going forward, education in Tanzania will have Kiswahili as the sole language of instruction. Full story.