

# Language and Identity Theories and experiences in lexicography and linguistic policies in a global world

Edited by  
Ilaria Micheli,  
Flavia Aiello,  
Maddalena Toscano,  
Amelia Pensabene

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ATrA 7

*Aree di transizione linguistiche e culturali in Africa*



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# Introduction

The spark that gave rise to the first reflections, which were then channelled into this volume, was lit on 7 November 2020, when the CPIA (Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti), the Provincial Centre for Adult Education of Avellino celebrated the closure of the DiM Project, an international project involving, in addition to Italy, also Greece, Scotland and the islands of Malta and Cyprus.

Carried out in the framework of the *Erasmus plus KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education programme*, the DiM (Dizionario Multilingue) had certainly represented a challenge for many actors at the same time, who, in the process of implementing the activities had found themselves having to come to terms with various problems relating to the complexity of the relationships between the linguistic code(s), the culture to which the migrants attending the classes belonged and, more generally, their identity and values, especially in the context of the global village.

In fact, it is well known that in the contemporary world diasporas play a major role in forcing human groups to face each other, people who only a few decades ago would never have had to meet, and it is equally well known that this encounter represents a delicate moment for the balance and the very maintenance of the social fabric where it takes place.



Special attention must therefore be paid to language, or languages, as the privileged instruments of the encounter, since there are aspects imbricated in inter-linguistic and inter-cultural dynamics that go beyond and accompany the mere grammatical dimension and are equally important in building solid bridges between native and non-native communities.

These aspects range from the habit of Western speakers to lead an almost monolingual life and their consequent difficulty in fully grasping what a language code represents for those who were born and live in a strongly multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural environment, to a whole series of other apparently trivial factors, but which, when considered in their natural habitat, that of lived life and not that of theoretical thinking, turn out to be so intertwined that they cannot be focused on or considered independently and autonomously.

Among these, there are certainly education, the prestige reserved to written languages as privileged instruments for “high” and institutional interactions, the deep feeling of homesickness for one’s mother tongue, often transmitted from one generation to the next only in oral form and spoken by minority groups that already in their homeland do not enjoy any consideration and that during migration end up being diluted and identified simplistically according to their geographical area of origin.

All this is accompanied by the fact that there are often few people in the country of arrival who show the slightest interest in learning more about the subject and its implications, even if only with a view to improving co-existence between citizens and encouraging mutual encounters, exchanges and the integral promotion of people in an environment that is at first sight unknown.

Unravelling these issues is no easy task and involves various scientific approaches, including at least the linguistic, cognitive, psycho-pedagogical, sociological and anthropological ones.

This book, far from offering answers, is intended as a contribution to the currently lively discussions on the theme of intercultural encounter and the teaching of L2 as a means of facilitating it.

The first to enthusiastically join the initiative were those colleagues who had participated as speakers in the closing day of the DiM project on 7 November 2020 and who, in most cases, had followed closely, as consultants and reviewers, the work of compiling and producing the multilingual and multimedia dictionary that can now be consulted free of charge online at [www.dimproject.net](http://www.dimproject.net).

They were then joined by other experts, who are also often personally involved in projects concerning diasporas, minority people and/or orally transmitted and endangered languages.

As the reader will see, the majority of the papers refers to Africa, since the concept note of the work developed from a brainstorming among africanist

friends, but we are sure that all the papers presented will be helpful to all those who are interested in the dynamics connecting language - identity - linguistic policies, above all in multilingual contexts all around the world.

Before starting our trip in the pages of the book, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all the contributors.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTENTS

This book is a collective work featuring three different types of contributions.

More theoretical chapters that introduce the reader to some thorny issues such as endangered languages, multilingualism and the eternal dichotomy between orality and writing - Legère on the UNESCO policies and the (ab) use of the (derogatory) term *indigenous* referring to minority languages and peoples; Sharma on Multilingualism in India; Micheli on the dynamics at play in the relations between oral and written languages in Sub-Saharan Africa and Tosco on the provocative issue of graphic systems for African national or minority languages that do not have a consolidated written tradition - alternate with more descriptive chapters focused on specific case studies - Rossi on the Farsi diaspora; Lusini on Tigrinya; Savà on two endangered languages of Southern Ethiopia (Ts'amakko and Ongota); Minerba on Wolof; Batic on the future of minority languages in Nigeria and Boldoni on the situation of local languages in Timor Leste -, all derived from fieldwork experiences.

Finally, in order to offer a glance at the present-day huge movements of people from Low and Middle Income Countries towards the western world, some applicative chapters relate more specifically to L2 teaching and learning, with a focus on inclusive projects for diasporas in Europe, and Italy in particular as the place of arrival of people coming from the Middle East, South East Asia and, mainly, Africa - the DiM project that inspired the whole volume (Mormone, Battista, Pensabene); the papers by Porcaro on the experience of Italian CPIAs; Aiello, Toscano and Tramutoli on the implementation of the UWAZO project, a tool designed to facilitate the learning of Swahili by Italian-speaking students and, last but not least Maffia on teaching techniques for courses aimed at non-literate adults.

The volume is thus organized into three distinct parts reflecting this kaleidoscopic amalgama:

**Part 1** contains all the papers related to the more general issues, i. e. multilingualism, minority languages and the dichotomy between orality and writing;

**Part 2** is a collection of all the papers focused on lexicography and L2 teaching;

**Part 3** gathers all case studies on different linguistic policies adopted (or that we hope can be adopted) in particularly complex multilingual contexts in order to allow the full and correct educational and personal development of speakers of languages not recognised as official and excluded from institutional communication.

As it is evident from the table of contents, most of the essays relate to African case studies, but the editor's wish is that they may also serve as a tool for reflection or as comparative material for other scholars working in similar contexts in other parts of the world.

## THE CONTRIBUTORS' PROFILES

The editors and the contributors to this volume are not all from the same background. Many of them are colleagues, lecturers and researchers from Italian and foreign universities, while others are school managers or teachers engaged in the front line of teaching L2 to adult students, often illiterate and sometimes struggling to navigate with ease in the educational system of the host country.

Below are their biographical profiles in alphabetical order according to their family name.

**Flavia Aiello** is Associate Professor at the University of Naples "L'Orientale"<sup>1</sup> (Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies), where she teaches Swahili Language and Literature at BA and MA level. She is the author of numerous publications on Swahili language and contemporary literature (both oral and written genres, including children's literature) and of translations of Swahili literary works. Between 2015 -2019 she participated in the e-learning project "Progetto formazione a distanza dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale" as responsible and coordinator for the realisation of resources and activities for Swahili language (with M. Toscano, R. Tramutoli and other collaborators), available on the UNIOR Moodle platform (<https://elearning.unior.it/>). She is presently developing, with M. Toscano and R. Tramutoli, a new Swahili-Italian online dictionary, which will be freely accessible from the UNIOR website.

**Gian Claudio Batic** is Senior Researcher in African languages and literatures at UNIOR. His research focuses on the description and documentation of Chadic languages. He has been visiting scholar at LLACAN-CNRS (Langage, langue et

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<sup>1</sup> From now on UNIOR.

cultures d’Afrique - Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique - Villejuif), J. W. Goethe University (Frankfurt am Main), and Bayero University, Kano. He is currently documenting Kushi, a minority language of northeast Nigeria.

**Maria Stella Battista** has been School Principal of the CPIA Avellino (Provincial Centre for Adult Education) since 2017, previously from 2015 she was school manager of CPIA Avellino-Benevento. She holds a degree in Geological Sciences from the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, awarded in 1989, and subsequently worked as a freelance geologist from 1990 to 2015. Alongside this, she taught mathematics, chemistry, physics and natural sciences in a number of secondary schools from 1996 to 2015. She has attended masters courses on the management function in schools and on the organisation and management of educational institutions in multicultural contexts.

**Carolina Boldoni** is a Postdoctoral Research Associate of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, in Lisbon (Portugal). Her research interests are intangible cultural heritage and the national formation of East Timor, where she conducted a 15-months fieldwork between 2017 and 2018. She is currently involved in the formation of a museum in the area of Trafaria, Lisbon, where she is conducting an ethnographic analysis regarding the tangible and intangible memories of the area.

**Karsten Legère** is Emeritus Professor of African languages, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. He studied African and General Linguistics (M. A. courses) at the Karl Marx University (of Leipzig, then German Democratic Republic) 1964-1968. The same year Sept. 1 he started his academic career as a Lecturer (focus on [Ki-] Swahili and Bantu languages), teaching in Leipzig 1968-1975, 1979-1983 (Senior Lecturer) and 1986-1994 (Associate Professor of Bantu languages), at the University of Dar es Salaam, Kiswahili Dept. 1975-1979 (as Lecturer) and 1983-1986 (Senior Lecturer), University of Namibia, Dept. of African Languages 1994-2000 (Professor), in Gothenburg 2001-Nov. 2010 (Professor, African Languages). After retirement, in Sweden Honorary/Visiting Professor at the University of Vienna until 2018. Academic degrees PhD. (1974), Dr sc. phil. (1982), Dr phil. habil (1991). He is honorary member of the Linguistic Association of SADC Universities (2001). His research interests include language policy and implementation, sociolinguistics, linguistic landscape, documentation of African languages, description of Kavango languages (Namibia), Tanzanian languages (Bantu, Cushitic, Southern Nilotic), orature and more.

**Gianfrancesco Lusini** (born 1962, PhD 1991), formerly Assistant (1995) and Associate Professor (2006), since 2019 is Professor for Gə‘əz and Amharic

languages and literatures at the Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo of UNIOR. He is the editor of the journal *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* and of the series *Studi Africanistici. Serie Etiopica*. “Alexander von Humboldt” Fellow in 2001-2002 (Hamburg University), and Visiting Professor at the Addis Ababa University (since 2014), he is the director of the “Centro di Studi sull’Africa”, and currently he leads the national research project CaNaMEI (Catalogo Nazionale dei manoscritti etiopici in Italia).

**Marta Maffia** is Junior Assistant Professor (RTD-A) at UNIOR, where she received her PhD in Linguistics in 2015. She has been an L2 Italian teacher in voluntary associations and in reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers. Her main current research interests encompass second language acquisition and second language teaching, particularly in the case of illiterate or low-literate learners; sociolinguistics of migration; prosodic aspects of emotional and pathological speech in L1 and L2.

**Ilaria Micheli** is Associate Professor in African linguistics at the University of Trieste. Her main interests encompass descriptive linguistics, endangered and orally transmitted languages of sub-Saharan Africa, applied ethnolinguistics and ethnomedicine for cooperation. Among her publications, worthy of attention are the books *Profilo Grammaticale e Vocabolario della Lingua Kulango (Côte d’Ivoire)* (Ed. Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale” - Dissertations vol. VI - 2007), *Figlio della Radice: Djedoua Yao Kouman - Guaritore e Cacciatore Kulango* (EUT - 2011 and 2017 in English) and *Grammatical Sketch and Short Vocabulary of the Ogiek Language of Mariashoni* (EUT - 2019).

**Emiliano Minerba** graduated at UNIOR. He is currently working at his PhD research, a comparative historical analysis of Swahili and Wolof metrical systems. Besides Swahili and Wolof prosodies and classical literatures, one of his other research interests is modern Swahili literature, particularly theatre.

**Angela Mormone** holds a degree in Business Economics from the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, and has enriched her CV with a master degree and advanced courses in the management of complex organisations. Currently working at the Direzione Generale dell’USR (Ufficio Scolastico Regionale) per la Campania (General Directorate of theUSR for Regione Campania), pursuant to Law 448/1998. Angela is the regional contact person for adult education, and is engaged in implementing practices to tackle educational poverty with particular reference to the inclusion of foreign school-children and those with socio-economic difficulties. She has participated in numerous round tables and steering committees at both regional and national level on issues relating to social hardship, unaccompanied foreign minors, adult education, system evaluation and guidance. She coordinates innova-

tion and educational research initiatives for USR Campania, paying particular attention to the implementation and application of project management techniques. She is a trainer and lecturer employed by universities as well as private institutions.

**Amelia (Lia) Pensabene** is a teacher at the CPIA Avellino where she teaches English at the prison school of the Casa Circondariale in Ariano Irpino and Italian L2 within asylum seekers' host structures. She has previously taught adults in the CTPs (Centri Territoriali Permanenti) both in a prison setting and in evening schools. Lia has a degree in Modern Languages and Literatures (Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, English) from the Istituto Universitario Orientale Napoli (IUO)<sup>2</sup> in Naples, with a thesis on Indian Linguistics. Lia spent several years in India, first in 1989 with a scholarship from the IUO, where she carried out research at the Delhi University and Banaras Hindu University Libraries and field research on the Bhojpuri language. She was subsequently awarded a three-year scholarship by the Indian Government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from 1990 to 1993 she was enrolled at the Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute Pune, where she carried out postgraduate research studies in sociolinguistics and lexicography. Her current interests are in language teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts. She was responsible for the design and overall coordination of the DiM Project and is currently the contact person for CPIA Avellino within the CRRSeS (Centro Regionale di Ricerca, Sperimentazione e Sviluppo sull'Istruzione degli Adulti) for Regione Campania.

**Emilio Porcaro**, head teacher of the CPIA in Bologna, has devoted the last twenty-five years to various spheres of work ranging from adult education and adult learning to issues relating to teaching Italian to foreigners, to focusing on competency evaluation and certification, and schooling in a prison setting. Since 2012, he has been president of RIDAP (Rete Italiana Educazione degli Adulti), the Italian adult education network. His published works include: *Il riconoscimento dei crediti per l'Istruzione degli Adulti. Metodi, procedure e strumenti* (with R. Sibilio e P. Buonanno, Loescher, Torino, 2020); *Il ruolo del Centro provinciale per l'istruzione degli adulti (CPIA) dentro e fuori dal carcere nella formazione scolastica degli adulti, in "Adultità fragili, fine pena e percorsi inclusivi. Teorie e pratiche di reinserimento sociale"* (edited by Luca Decembrotto), Franco Angeli, Milano, 2020; *Istruzione degli Adulti e religioni, in "Diritti Doveri Solidarietà" - Religioni per la cittadinanza*, Garante delle persone sottoposte a misure restrittive della libertà personale, Emilia Romagna, 2019; *Il ruolo dei CPIA nel processo di integrazione lin-*

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<sup>2</sup> IUO (Istituto Universitario Orientale) is the former name of the current UNIOR (Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale").

guistica dei migranti con un focus sui MSNA in *Sguardi Simmetrici*, Collana “I quaderni dell’Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per l’Emilia Romagna”, n. 41, February 2018, Tecnodid Editrice); *Minori stranieri non accompagnati* (in Atti del Convegno “Le attuali emergenze pedagogiche: i minori stranieri non accompagnati nelle scuole della Toscana”, Regione Toscana, 2015).

**Adriano V. Rossi** is Emeritus Professor of Iranian Philology and History of Ancient and Late-Ancient Iran at UNIOR. He studied languages, history and civilizations of the ancient and modern Near East at University of Sapienza (Rome), and directed for decades the Center for Asian Lexicography, (IsIAO - Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, now IsMEO - Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e L’Oriente). He was director of the Department of Asian Studies (1987-1988), Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (1990-1992), Pro-Rector (1987-1988) and Rector (1992-1998) at UNIOR. He is a member of scientific councils as well as numerous academies/societies, including Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and Balochi Academy, Quetta (Honorary). He represented Italy in the Asia-Europe Foundation (1997-2004); since 2016 he is president of IsMEO-The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, Rome.

**Graziano Savà**. Italian (Sicilian) linguist, Graziano Savà is specialised in the documentation and description of minority and endangered languages of Ethiopia. He is the author of the only grammar of the Cushitic endangered language Ts’amakko (Savà 2005) and has documented other little-known languages of Ethiopia such as Ongota, Bayso and Haro. He is also the author of studies concerning historical linguistics and code-switching. He is presently a Postdoctoral Fellow at UNIOR, Italy, carrying a research on the Nilo-Saharan language Nara (Eritrea).

**Suhnu Ram Sharma** had his MA and PhD in Linguistics from the university of Kurukshetra, (1970, 1975 respectively). Joined Anthropological Survey of India in 1974 as a Research Associate and worked on the tribal languages of Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman Islands, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. In 1980 Dr Sharma joined Deccan College, Post-graduate and Research Institute, Deemed to be university, Pune as Associate Professor and retired in 2006 as Professor of Tibeto-Burman Linguistics. He has published more than thirty research papers and three books on the description of tribal languages. He taught MA M. Phil courses in sociolinguistics, morphology, semantics and second language teaching methods. He guided 12 PhD students in different subjects related to language descriptions. Dr Sharma has been associated with the Himalayan Languages Project first at Leiden university, Netherlands and now in Bern, Switzerland. He attended several national and international conferences and seminars in

Europe, USA and China. Dr Sharma was a Gonda Fellow at IIAS (International Institute for Asian Studies) Leiden twice during 2005 and 2007 and Senior Fellow at the Himalayan Languages Project in 1997, 1995. Currently he is working towards the completion of Manchad Grammar.

**Maddalena Toscano** is a former researcher and teacher at UNIOR. She worked in the field of Bantu languages and literatures, mainly dealing with Swahili and Zulu languages, with special attention to applications of computational linguistics to digitalized text analysis. She wrote about Swahili lexicography and Zulu morphological structures. Results of her research activities were also included in her advanced course about the use of application of corpus linguistics in the teaching of Swahili language.

She had experiences in various Socrates projects. She coordinated the 'CAMEEL' (Computer Applications to Modern Extra European Languages) project, the results of which were included in the chapter 'European studies on computing for non-European languages' (<http://korpus.uib.no/hum-fak/AcoHum/book/NEL-chapter-final.html>) of the ACO-HUM (Advanced COmputing in HUmanities) publication. Among the results of these activities is UWAZO, a Swahili-Italian online dictionary, which is now being updated, thanks to the fundings from IsMEO and UNIOR. She was also the main coordinator of the Comenius project 'TIME for Teachers' (Tools in Multicultural Education), the final result of which is available in pdf format from the UNIOR Open Archives (<http://opar.unior.it/179>). She was the local coordinator of the 'EVLang' project (EVeils aux Langues), which aims at introducing a multicultural and multilingual awareness in the language teaching in primary school.

**Mauro Tosco** is Professor of African Linguistics at the University of Turin. His main area of research is the Horn of Africa, where he has been working on the analysis and description of Cushitic languages in an areal and typological perspective. Among his books: *A Grammatical Sketch of Dahalo, including texts and a glossary* (Hamburg, 1991), *Tunni: Grammar, Texts and Vocabulary of a Southern Somali Dialect* (Köln, 1997), *The Dhaasanac Language* (Köln, 2001); *A Grammar of Gawwada* and *A Gawwada Dictionary* (Köln, forthcoming).

A native speaker of Piedmontese, an endangered language of NW Italy, he works on the expansion and revitalization of minority languages, language policy and ideology.

Pidgins, creoles and language contact (*Pidgin and Creole Languages: A Basic Introduction*; München, 2001; with Alan S. Kaye) are his third main area of research.

**Rosanna Tramutoli** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at UNIOR. Her research focus is Bantu lexical analysis and a comparison of Swahili and Zulu body terminology. She holds a PhD in Swahili linguistics (2018) from UNIOR and



the University of Bayreuth. From 2013 to 2017 she was Swahili lecturer at the University of Bayreuth. Among her main research interests are cognitive linguistics, anthropological linguistics, semantic analysis, and lexicography. She has published contributions on international journals, such as *RAL (Research in African Literatures)*, *Kervan (International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies)*, *Africa* and *Swahili Forum*. She has recently published a monograph entitled *Encoding Emotions in Swahili. A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis with a Consideration of the Socio-cultural Context* (Köppe, 2020).

# Part 1

General issues:  
multilingualism, minority  
languages and the eternal  
dichotomy between  
orality and writing

# Linguistic identity in and out of Africa

KARSTEN LEGÈRE

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper discusses at least two approaches to determine linguistic identity. In so doing, particular attention is paid to the preparation and implementation of UNESCO's IYIL (International Year of Indigenous Languages) 2019 initiative. As known, given UNESCO's international prestige, institutions and speech communities felt stimulated by this IYIL2019 initiative. As a consequence, their focus was on dealing with those national languages of their countries which in a linguistic hierarchy are not in a top position (like e.g. English, French, Spanish and more), but are rated somehow less important by their speakers or officials. It turned out in the data analysis process for this paper that UNESCO's conceptualization deficits have hampered a productive grassroots response such as evidenced in Namibia. With regard to the development and dissemination of a unified identity concept world-wide a prominent African colleague points out that in Europe, North America, China, in many African countries south of the Equator, etc. own umbrella terms are well established. This implies that UNESCO's identity related activities have not so far much contributed to feasible changes.*

## KEYWORDS

*Identity; grass roots self-identification; top-down identification; African and Scandinavian examples; variety of results; terminological diversity versus UNESCO's global umbrella term.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION - SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND BASICS

On 22 November 2016 the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, Cultural) of the UN General Assembly proclaimed IYIL 2019. In this regard, the press release of 8 December 2016<sup>1</sup> announced that the resolution on the “Rights of indigenous peoples” stated the following: “The resolution stresses the urgent need to preserve, promote and revitalize endangered languages [...]”, inviting UNESCO to “serve as the lead agency for the Year”. [Emphasis added]

Shortly thereafter, the same text draws “[...] attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages at the national and international levels”. [Emphasis added]

The above extract shows a terminological contradiction in that endangered languages are equated with *indigenous languages* (henceforth IL) and vice versa. This cannot be explained as a simple oversight, because the UN/UNESCO/ILO, etc. approach to (non-) defining *indigenous peoples* includes also the language of each people. Thus, for assessing language endangerment there are criteria in UNESCO (2003) or *Ethnologue*. This discrepancy is glaring if, for example, one compares the glossonyms in the endangered languages collection at the Max Planck Institute of Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, The Netherlands,<sup>2</sup> or of the Endangered Languages Archive at the University of London, with the ethnonyms that are listed e.g. in the IWGIA Yearbook, by Wikipedia, etc.<sup>3</sup>

It is completely incomprehensible why for the terminological inconsistencies outlined above, in preparation of IYIL2019, UNESCO as a global player was not willing to get down to basics regarding the definition dilemma. Here the definition approach of the Council of Europe traced in the “European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” is an example that is worthy of being imitated:

*“Article 1 – Definitions,*

*For the purposes of this Charter: a) “regional or minority languages” means languages that are: i traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-liaison-office-in-new-york/about-this-office/single-view/news/united\\_nations\\_general\\_assembly\\_proclaims\\_2019\\_as\\_the\\_intern/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-liaison-office-in-new-york/about-this-office/single-view/news/united_nations_general_assembly_proclaims_2019_as_the_intern/); accessed 27 January 2019, recent search was unsuccessful, but available (accessed 21 August 2021) is another relevant link, i.e. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Seventeenth session, New York, 16–27 April 2018, Item 3 of the provisional agenda, Follow-up to the recommendations of the Permanent Forum, Action plan for organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages that is a useful overview of the IYIL 2019 focus and content. Link <https://undocs.org/E/C.19/2018/8>

<sup>2</sup> The results of the Documentation of Endangered Languages (DoBeS) initiative of the Volkswagen Foundation, the DoBeS Archive were accepted by UNESCO as “Memory of the World”.

<sup>3</sup> See The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), 2020. [https://iwgia.org/images/yearbook/2020/IWGIA\\_The\\_Indigenous\\_World\\_2020.pdf](https://iwgia.org/images/yearbook/2020/IWGIA_The_Indigenous_World_2020.pdf) as well as [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_indigenous\\_peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_indigenous_peoples) accessed 17 August 2021.

*who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population, ii different from the official language(s) of that State [...]"*<sup>4</sup>

As an alternative for the English description of 'indigenous' the Merriam-Webster dictionary may be helpful, as pointing out that this lexical item means either:

*1 a) produced, growing, living, or occurring natively or naturally in a particular region or environment, or*

*1 b) Indigenous or less commonly indigenou, of or relating to the earliest known inhabitants of a place and especially of a place that was colonized by a now-dominant group.*<sup>5</sup> [Emphasis added]

This Webster entry lists synonyms such as aboriginal, autochthonous, born, domestic, endemic, and native; antonyms are non-indigenous, non-native etc.

A check of UN/UNESCO websites to obtain an up-to-date list of ILs which are conforming to the UN/UNESCO conceptualization has been unsuccessful. There were info bites, such as the following data overview on the IYIL 2019 website:

#### *Indigenous Languages*

*At present, 96 per cent of the world's approximately 6,700 languages are spoken by only 3 per cent of the world's population. Although indigenous peoples make up less than 6% of the global population, they speak more than 4,000 of the world's languages.*

*Conservative estimates suggest that more than half of the world's languages will become extinct by 2100. Other calculations predict that up to 95 per cent of the world's languages may become extinct or seriously endangered by the end of this century. The majority of the languages that are under threat are indigenous languages. It is estimated that one indigenous language dies every two weeks.*<sup>6</sup>

Although having been responsible for the implementation of IYIL2019, UNESCO has been reluctant to submit a list of those ILs the endangerment of which is advanced.

As reported above, the groundwork for the IYIL2019 proclamation was done by Bolivia and Ecuador that also co-authored the associated text. The

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/0900001680695175> accessed 17 August 2021.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indigenous>, accessed 17 August 2021. An enquiry about "indigenous languages" is rejected as "The word you've entered isn't in the dictionary".

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/04/Indigenous-Languages.pdf>. [emphasis added]. This means that when annually 26 languages die until 2100, 80 years ahead approximately 2150 ILs (and not 4000) will be lost.

background against which these two countries propagated for a global initiative an umbrella term which is deeply rooted in their colonial past, as well as a critical review of terminological problems and inadequacies not only in the South American neighbourhood will be focused on in the following sections. In this respect, it should be borne in mind that the proclamation text offers various interpretations for its ambiguity and lack of adequate definition, as already pointed out above.

## 2. REGIONAL LINGUISTIC PROFILES IN THE LIGHT OF IYIL2019

### 2.1. BOLIVIA AND ECUADOR

Both countries support efforts to protect, empower and promote ILs back home and worldwide. However, in their constitutions, for example, the linguistic terminology involves catchphrases that have nothing to do with IL, because the term indigenous is only traced in the context of the word ‘people’, i.e. *pueblos indígena* ‘indigenous peoples’, which does not refer to any Bolivian or Ecuadorian language. This is illustrated below.

Quoted from Bolivia’s 2009 Constitution: “Son idiomas oficiales ... el castellano y todos los idiomas de las naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos ...” [emphasis added].

An exhaustive list of all languages other than Spanish follows. Here, *idiomas*, i.e. ‘languages’ applies to Spanish as well as to all other co-official languages.<sup>7</sup>

From Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution, Article 2: “... el castellano, el kichwa y el shuar son idiomas oficiales ... 1. Los demás idiomas ancestrales son de uso oficial para los pueblos indígenas ...”.

Notable is the catchphrase *idiomas ancestrales* (“ancestral languages”). Furthermore, Article 28 of Ecuador’s *Ley de Educación* (Education Law) speaks of “lenguas aborígenes” (“aboriginal languages”).

It is strange to observe above that, although both Bolivia and Ecuador have been IYIL 2019 protagonists, these countries use modified linguistic umbrella terms for the languages spoken by their populations back home. In view of this discrepancy, for comprehensive country profiles one has to consult *Ethnologue* (Simons & Fennig 2018). *Ethnologue* publishes statistical data on what it defines as IL (i.e. belonging to a specified country) vs. non-indigenous languages (Spanish plus immigrants’ languages). In addition, *Ethnologue*

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<sup>7</sup> A quotation from a Spanish digital dictionary - “We usually say *idioma* when we talk about languages (human tongue) while we use *lenguaje* as language like a programming “language” it would sound awkward to say *el lenguaje Inglés* instead of *el idioma Inglés*...”

(as a reliable reference source for determining the status of a language according to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale/EGIDS) lists 13 languages in Bolivia that are in trouble and 18 as dying, while eight are in trouble in Ecuador, and three are dying.

Further, it may be interesting to note here how, for example, Bolivian languages and peoples suffered from discrimination under Spanish colonial rule as well as under post-colonial governments after independence from Spain in 1820 (source: Leclerc 2020, Bolivia):

a) *Les langues indigènes furent interdites dans toutes les manifestations officielles de l'État espagnol, mais malgré tout les autochtones résistèrent à la tentative d'assimilation (castillanisation).*

b) *Quant aux populations autochtones, elles furent considérées comme «inférieures» et plus ou moins dépouillées de tous leurs droits civils, politiques, sociaux et linguistiques.*

Moving away from South America, the next region is sub-Saharan Africa with its strong focus on ethnic and linguistic self-identification<sup>8</sup> away from the colonial legacy.

## 2.2 SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

During a review of official language use in Africa the constitutions or other relevant official documents in 23 African countries mostly South of the Equator were reviewed. Below is a summary of the results.

As enshrined in the Constitutions of Benin, Cameroon, DRC, and Gabon among other African countries, all languages of African origin are identified as *national languages* since they belong to a defined nation-state. In the Congo Republic and in Mozambique, the terms *langues nationales véhiculaires* and *línguas veiculares* (in French and Portuguese respectively, the equivalent of *lingua francas*) are stipulated. More umbrella terms are published in Legère (2017), for an update see Legère (2021: 181-182).

Out of the 23 countries reviewed only Kenya and RSA use the term *indigenous* as follows:

In Kenya, referring to all languages other than the official ones (English and Swahili, the latter being also identified as Kenya's national language) the country's 2010 Constitution (Republic of Kenya 2010:14) states in its Article 7(3): "*The State shall (a) promote and protect the diversity of language of the peo-*

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<sup>8</sup> Remember the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - A/RES/61/295, p. 24, Art. 33; 2.: "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions." Source: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf) last accessed 21 August 2021

*ple of Kenya; and (b) promote the development and use of indigenous (i.e. Kenyan, K.L.) languages [...]*” [emphasis added].<sup>9</sup>

In the South African constitution (= Act 108 of 1996, Founding Provisions, Languages) the text reads as follows: “6. (1) *The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. (2) Recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people [...]*”

Here “indigenous” clearly means the official African languages of the RSA i.e., belonging to a particular place/country, as described in Webster 1) a).

Further, (5) (a) (ii) refers to South African heritage languages such as Khoi, Nama, and those of the San communities, which are **not** classified as ILs in the RSA constitution, although being related to Webster 1, b).<sup>10</sup>

In the 23 African countries studied, the language of the former foreign colonisers/administrators has everywhere been stipulated as the official language, even when it is co-official, i.e. sharing this status with another language, like e.g. Swahili in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda.

It is strange that in designing and organizing IYIL 2019, UNESCO was not prepared to study or to care about the official terminology that was coined by African governments or other official institutions<sup>11</sup> and the resulting linguistic implications at the national level.

Instead, IYIL protagonists made it easy for themselves by putting aside the principle of self-identification (see above), identifying all languages spoken by formerly colonially oppressed peoples worldwide with the umbrella term “indigenous languages”. This kind of strange conceptualization was the focal point that was discussed with senior colleagues and African language experts in 2019/20 against the African background.

The lack of a solid, globally acceptable UNESCO position on the implementation of IYIL 2019 became apparent at the annual meeting of the Namibian UNESCO Commission in Windhoek April 5, 2019 (not recorded by UNESCO Paris in its IYIL2019 event list). At this meeting, the Namibian organizers

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<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive overview that covers the constitutional dispensations in all African countries, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_linguistic\\_rights\\_in\\_African\\_constitutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_linguistic_rights_in_African_constitutions); accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Further, in Act No. 6 of 2019: Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Act, 2019, Chapter 1, page 8 see definitions of “indigenous community”, “indigenous cultural expression”. “indigenous knowledge” and “indigenous knowledge practitioner” Mind the terminological contradictions which are also evidenced in the SABC recording “Elevating indigenous languages remains a challenge” - <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3C9bYYzYdx8>. compared to [https://iwgia.org/images/yearbook/2020/IWGIA\\_The\\_Indigenous\\_World\\_2020.pdf](https://iwgia.org/images/yearbook/2020/IWGIA_The_Indigenous_World_2020.pdf) p. 161-PART 1 – Region and country reports – South Africa (web pages last accessed on 21 August 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Remember that earlier African governments rejected the term „indigenous peoples“ for its negative connotations in Africa, as it was used in derogatory ways during European colonialism (web sources Legère 2019 4).



came forward with their own interpretation of how to deal with this complex issue. In no way did languages of Namibia's First Peoples, such as those spoken by San communities, play a role. Instead, the invited speakers (divided into grassroots and academic) dealt with problems of African languages in Namibia in general (i.e. the Webster 1a interpretation) in terms of social prestige, language maintenance, promotion and development.

By the way, among the Namibian marginalised San, Ovaherero and Nama the latter speak Otjiherero. Thus, if these communities are identified as "indigenous peoples" by UNESCO and others, the language that Nama speak is not endangered.<sup>12</sup>

Next, what follows here are some observations regarding the position of the Sámi communities in Sweden and Norway.

### 2.3 SAMI - AN EUROPEAN MINORITY LANGUAGE GROUP (DIALECT CONTINUUM)

The Sami call themselves *Urfolk* (First People). Being *Urfolk*, the Sámi communities are frequently cited, when the current situation among and the future of First Peoples and minorities in Europe and the Arctic Region are dealt with.

In Norway the legal status of Sámi is defined in "The Sámi Act" (Act of 12 June 1987 No. 56) "§ 1-5. *Sami languages. Sami and Norwegian are languages of equal worth* (emphasis added). *They shall be accorded equal status pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 3*".<sup>13</sup>

During a visit to Karasjok (Norwegian Sámi administrative centre) and its Sámi Park some years ago i.e. the multitude of publications in the Sámi languages was noted with great attention and interest. By comparison, even prominent African languages do not come up by far with such a large number and wide range of publications as those of the Sámi. Another important achievement is the existence of the Sámi University of Applied Sciences (website <https://samas.no/en>) in Kautokeino in Norway which even offers language courses in various Sámi languages. The following Norwegian Sami languages are recognised by the EU authorities which at the right hand side of the table also determine the extent of this recognition.

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<sup>12</sup> Even in e.g. Cameroon First peoples have given up their heritage language in favour of that of their neighbours thus speaking a noun class language, the endangerment of which is not known.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-sami-act-/id449701/> further Chapter 3. The Sami language. § 3-1. Definitions. etc.; last accessed 21 August 2021.

Lule Sami	Part II (Article 7) and Part III (Articles 8-14)
North Sami	Part II (Article 7) and Part III (Articles 8-14)
South Sami	Part II (Article 7) and Part III (Articles 8-14)

article 7 - recognition and support, article 8 - education and 9 rights, media, etc.<sup>14</sup>  
As for the Sami languages in Sweden, a Swedish website<sup>15</sup> summarises that

*“In 2000, Sami was recognised as an official minority language<sup>16</sup> in Sweden, and the central government has since given the Sami Parliament greater influence and financial resources to preserve the Sami languages, which are rich in variation. Just imagine more than 300 different ways of saying snow – from powder to slush.”*

Another Sámi website states that *“Alla samiska språk är klassade som hotade språk [...]”*<sup>17</sup> in so doing accepting UNESCO’s endangered language version as portrayed in the *“Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of Disappearing”* (1996 > 2001, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition Mosley 2010). Further, the Sámi website records IYIL 2019 in Swedish as *urfolkssprakaret*.

Similar to Norway, Sámi studies and research are important and well established e.g. at the Umeå universitet, Várdduo - Centrum för samisk forskning.<sup>18</sup>

The list of Swedish Sami languages and their status as European minority languages is identical with the Norwegian list above.

As a matter of fact, the endangerment process among the Sámi languages is advanced. The estimate of Sámi numbers (i.e. 80.000 persons spread over 4 countries, 20,000 speakers of the most widespread North Sámi) worries the Sami communities.<sup>19</sup> What is highly interesting to note is the community commitment as reflected e. g. in the *Förslag till handlingsprogram för bevarande av de samiska språken*<sup>20</sup> which is a comprehensive action plan for language maintenance and empowerment. Its implementation is certainly not easy, in particular at the national level, where Swedish, Norwegian or Finnish

<sup>14</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/languages-covered-en-rev2804/16809e4301> which is a 10 page listing up all recognised minority languages updated on: 28 April 2020, entry Norway, pp. 2-3; accessed 17 august 2021.

<sup>15</sup> <https://sweden.se/society/sami-in-sweden/>.

<sup>16</sup> See also *Lag om nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk* (SFS 2009:724): *Samiska är ett officiellt minoritetsspråk i Sverige*. source: <http://www.notisum.se/rnp/sls/sfs/20090724.PDF>, further <https://www.sametinget.se/1079> - web pages last accessed 21 August 2021. Similarly, for Finland see *“Sámi Language Act”* (1086/2003) Link. Saamen kielilaki.PDF (finlex.fi).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.samer.se/2739>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.umu.se/vardduo-centrum-for-samisk-forskning>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>19</sup> <https://sweden.se/society/sami-in-sweden>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/151550>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

dominate as the national languages with the highest communicative prestige country-wide. It is evident that even if the minority languages are *de jure* equal to other national languages, the distribution and domains where the first-mentioned languages are used contribute to their privileged status. Outside the autonomous Sapmi area in the north of Scandinavia the use of the Saami language is rather restricted. Of course, people can speak Sámi in Helsinki, Oslo or Stockholm, but the number of those who understand this language there is small. The problems the Sámi communities are exposed to were well summarised and assessed in the context of IYIL2019 by Aili Keskitalo, Sametingspresident in Norway (see below), and Lars Miguel Utsi, Deputy Chairman of the Swedish Sametinget.

The Sámi language has been dealt with here quite extensively, because, from a global point of view the linguistic situation in Sápmi and the Sami endangerment process are very typical.

In this respect, judging from the Tanzanian experience,<sup>21</sup> special attention should be paid to the question - why should someone speak or preserve a language that is compared with other national languages for him/her less prominent in official, formal and even informal domains, as well as less widespread at the country level? As a consequence, the focus of any initiative should be to win the hearts of the young generation who should be prepared to take over the lead in language policy and implementation in due time. Obviously, neither the Sámi, First Peoples of both Americas and in other regions, nor ethnic communities and minorities such as in Africa, Australia or Asia are satisfied to see how their languages are getting lost, because they are no longer used.

At the end of IYIL 2019 the President of the Sami Parliament, Ms. Aili Keskitalo was contacted per email.<sup>22</sup> The message drew attention to the fact that IL is a stigma term in larger parts of Africa where it is associated with primitive, second-class or underdeveloped languages. Here is her response:

*From: Keskitalo, Aili <aili.keskitalo@samediggi.no >*

*Sent: Saturday, November 23, 2019 1:33:55 PM*

*To: Karsten Legère <karsten.legere@african.gu.se >*

*Re: IYIL 2019*

*"[...] Sami refer to ourselves as Indigenous,<sup>23</sup> and we do not consider this a derogatory term.<sup>24</sup> We are well aware of the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and have engaged substantially in the celebration [...]"*

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<sup>21</sup> In Tanzania and elsewhere the older generation esp. in rural areas is deeply concerned about this situation.

<sup>22</sup> She was a member of the IYIL2019 Organizing Committee.

<sup>23</sup> Who is non-indigenous in Scandinavia, according to the Sámi understanding?

<sup>24</sup> Which it is, even if this is not recognised by Sámi authorities, while people not only in Africa, but also elsewhere avoid it.

As a comment to this message - the question is why do the Sami call themselves *Urfolk*, but reject any self-identification which is similar to that in Canada and the USA as First People or First Nation? Instead, the Sami identify themselves with an English umbrella term that, as shown above in the example of Namibia, may be understood as negating the First People's concept.

As for Sámi and IYIL2019, mainly the Norwegian Sámi communities organised the Arctic Conference, where e.g. the following statement was made regarding priorities:

*“Our fundamental tenet is that the Norwegian and Sámi languages shall be considered to be of equal stature and value”.*<sup>25</sup> This calls for a robust language campaign throughout society, where all players can contribute to promoting the Sámi languages.<sup>26</sup>

This means, the Sámi authorities both in Norway and in Sweden keep the ball of language maintenance and promotion rolling. However, even the achievements so far are worth to be reported (maybe as a Sami language profile on the UNESCO website).

Identity problems have come up at the end of IYIL 2019, when UNESCO presented an overview of the events during this year 2019. This overview has been analysed with regard to linguistic umbrella terms which were traced in the events list. The results are summarised in the following section.

### 3. IDENTITY CONCEPTUALIZATION AND ITS TERMINOLOGY

The lexical items below are arranged according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary approach, as outlined in 1. above

a) \* national languages, *línguas nacionais*, *nationale Sprachen* (other than **the** national language, e.g. *Kiswahili*, *Kirundi* or *ikiNyarwanda*) belonging to a particular nation, \* minority language, *langue minoritaire*,<sup>27</sup> \* *lugha za jamii* in Tanzania, Kenya and more;

b) relating to the earliest known inhabitants and their language

\* ancestral languages;

\* heritage languages,<sup>28</sup> treasure language;

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<sup>25</sup> KL: Has this not been made clear in the Sami Act quoted above?

<sup>26</sup> <https://en.iyil2019.org/events/sami-language-conference-iyil2019-launching-in-arctic-region/>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. <https://en.iyil2019.org/events/langues-changements-et-adaptations-ethnographies-et-ecolinguistiques-des-communautes-cotieres-nord-europeennes-a-laune-du-xxieme-siecle/>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>28</sup> LINGUIST List: Vol-32-1080. Wed Mar 24 2021. ISSN: 1069 - 4875 announcing publications in Southern Unami which is “the heritage language of the Delaware Tribe of

- \* *urfolkssprak* in Scandinavia;
- \* languages of *Orang Asli* ‘First People’ in Malaysia;
- \* *lenguas originarias* (e.g. Mexico);<sup>29</sup>
- \* First Nations/First Peoples languages (USA, Canada),
- \* First languages (Australia);<sup>30</sup>
- \* *языки коренного первородного населения*, in Russia.

Suffice it to note here again that for UNESCO indigenous languages are also supposed to mean endangered languages, *langues en danger*, ~ languages in danger (of disappearing), since the whole IYIL2019 initiative has strongly argued for the maintenance, promotion and empowerment of small and not so small languages (like the Sami cluster)<sup>31</sup> that are in the process of being given up.

#### 4. IDENTITY FROM THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE - ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

The following are initially comments from a senior African colleague (a participant of the Regional Addis Ababa IYIL2019 conference organized by UNESCO end July 2019) who is concerned about UNESCO’s global imposition of a terminology that e.g. in Africa (but also elsewhere) is controversial and unpopular in particular in former Portuguese colonies:

a) Is the term “indigenous” pejorative? Yes, it certainly is, not only in terms of its origins but in its virtually exclusive use for non-European languages. Even in its practical application as proposed for the IYIL 2019, it is muddled up in its restriction to museum piece endangered languages to the exclusion of many languages which are in need of promotion and empowerment.

b) Can the term “indigenous” be redefined to make it less offensive? For example, can it be made to refer to autochthonous languages found in a given area? If this can be done, all languages including English, French and German will be called indigenous languages in countries where they are natively spoken. I doubt if those who have the messianic mission of rescuing dying languages will agree to relegate their languages to an inferior status.

c) Can the term “indigenous” be abolished? I doubt if this is possible. This is a term that has become part of the international discussion, especially in UNESCO circles.

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Indians (Bartlesville, Okla.) and the Delaware Nation of Western Oklahoma (Anadarko)” (emphasis KL).

<sup>29</sup> <https://en.iyil2019.org/events/exhibicion-y-venta-de-libros-relacionados-con-las-lenguas-originarias/>, last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>30</sup> The name of the First Languages Australia organization, see: <https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Dialects should be added as suggested already in the 2018 Yuelu Proclamation.

d) What can be done in the circumstances? Rejecting the use of “indigenous languages” in the sense of limiting its scope to just endangered languages. In the African context, the lesson to be drawn from this is that initiatives to adjust and reinterpret the term “indigenous” according to situation and reality may well be the way out.

This is a perfect summary that, together with the fundamental Robillard/Bahuchet (2012) discussion of the terminological escapades that the authors have traced among Central African forest dwellers should be highly relevant for UNESCO and other institutions which believe that there is no alternative to the global umbrella term “indigenous languages”.

Based mainly on the review of UNESCO documents and other sources that deemed to be important for the discussion of terminological issues related to IYIL 2019 and beyond the following is suggested here:

- It is time to stop the supremacist interference of organizations, institutions, NGO’s, ‘expats’ and persons from outside who feel being authorized to tell others - communities, ethnic groups, individuals - who they are.
- African States which have been studied in the context of identity matters should be encouraged to pursue their will and way of deciding by themselves what is appropriate (or not) in the process of linguistic self-identification.

It should be borne in mind that in view of the colonial past or racist connotations, quite recently terminological changes that are supportive to a constructive identity approach were made at the national/regional level as follows:

- E-word being replaced by “Inuit”;
- P-word in Central Africa being banned by officials;<sup>32</sup>
- partial self-identification as “First Peoples/Nations” instead of “Indian”;
- in Germany/Austria and Switzerland dropping words like *Mohr*, *Eingeborene* (already many years before *Eingeborensprachen*), but Duden and some media still maintain stigma terms like “indigene Sprachen” und “indigene Menschen/Indigene”<sup>33</sup> for denoting languages and peoples in Africa, Latin America, USA, Canada, Asia, Australia (on top of Aborigines).

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<sup>32</sup> Robillard&Bahuchet (2012).

<sup>33</sup> A typical example is the way how in German media D. Jur. Deb Haaland’s ethnic origin was described, such as *Indigene wird Minister*, ‘Indigenous becomes Minister’, also Wikipedia’s [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deb\\_Haaland\\_-\\_erste\\_indigene\\_US-Ministerin](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deb_Haaland_-_erste_indigene_US-Ministerin) ‘First indigenous Minister’, whereas the English Wikipedia version writes that the Secretary of the Interior is “[...] an enrolled member of the Laguna Pueblo [...]” <https://www.doi.gov/secretary-deb-haaland>: “[...] a member of the Pueblo of Laguna [...]” - links last accessed 21 August 2021.

The rejection of the stigma terms above is a solid argument against UNESCO's reluctance of dropping its favorite *indigenous languages*. Similarly, after World War 2 the French colonial stigma term *peuples indigènes, langues indigènes* was replaced by *peuples/langues autochthones*.<sup>34</sup> Also the N-word had been replaced a long time ago by *Afroamerican*.<sup>35</sup> Another terminological re-orientations happened in Mozambique, Angola, Cap Verde and Guinea Bissau, where the stigma term *línguas indígenas* was rejected being replaced with *línguas nacionais*. In addition, as earlier summarised - out of 23 African countries, only two have included the expression *indigenous languages* in official documents, all others have stipulated other umbrella terms.

Above the question was asked whether it is acceptable to call (the national languages) English, French, German (also Spanish, Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, etc.) *indigenous languages*, subsequently being answered - of course, not...

## 5. RÉSUMÉ AND OUTLOOK

This paper deals with issues related to linguistic identity. The starting point is the ambiguous use of the keyword *indigenous language* stimulated by UNESCO and its IYIL2019 profile. In this context, reference is made to two aspects, namely, on the one hand the self-identification by the language community on the grassroots level or likewise by qualified institutions on the national level. On the other hand, a linguistic identification is made from outside, the result of which is in contradiction to the national, regional or grassroots identification. Both cases produce a conflicting linguistic identity, since the second approach doesn't care for an identity which goes back to the linguistic self-identification process.

A number of examples from different countries (with a focus on South America, 23 African countries, Scandinavia) demonstrate how differently this global IYIL2019 initiative has been implemented in view of UNESCO's reluctance to define the exact profile of IYIL2019. Given UNESCO's international prestige, little opposition to the former authoritarian way, that has imposed a strange identity on a large group of languages worldwide, has been observed.

This is problematic, because UNESCO is now planning a Decade of Indigenous Languages, which, as a consequence, gives rise to a renewed divi-

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<sup>34</sup> See also Bouchareb, Rachid. 2006.

<sup>35</sup> But mind the use of its diminutive in the Philippines which is as pejorative as the N-word. BBC reports that the N-word has also been used by white actors in the Australian TV serie Neighbours, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-56652191>; last accessed 21 August 2021.

sion of the world into regions with languages the identity of which is on the one hand, determined from outside.

Accordingly, in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Australia/Oceania, as in the times of colonialism, there are indigenous languages. In contrast, Europe and North America are excluded from a global initiative to promote small languages and dialects, because there are hardly any languages whose speakers accept an identity imposed by UNESCO.



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# Multilingualism in India and the significance of multilingual dictionaries

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## ABSTRACT

*The Indian subcontinent has four major language families, e.g., Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic (Munda ) and Tibeto-Burman. These language families have co-existed together for many centuries and have resulted in widespread multilingualism. The multiplicity of languages does not impede communication as large populations habitually learn more than one language for daily communicative needs. With the increase in the movement of people in recent years for business, travel and educational needs, there is an urgent demand to teach and learn more languages. India, with more than 22 major official languages, requires the use of multilingual dictionaries. It will help in translation work that would be required at a large scale. With the help of modern technology it is now possible to make use of multilingual dictionaries for many purposes in daily life as we make use of the spoken knowledge of different languages in our daily life. The present paper will attempt to provide some facets of multilingualism in India and the need for multilingual dictionaries.*

## KEYWORDS

*Bilingualism/ multilingualism; Language/ dialect; communicative networks.*

The Indian sub-continent has been the home of diverse language families for many centuries. It may be due to the movement of different populations at different points of time over some millennia. Recently, based on some archaeological findings, it has been hypothesised that the diverse populations are indigenous to this sub-continent that may have thrived over many centuries one after the other. Therefore, India has four major families of languages e.g., Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic (Munda sub-family) and Tibeto-Burman. There are two minor language families e.g., Tai Khamti and the Andaman group of languages, like Great Andamanese, Jarwa, Onge and Sentinelese.

In addition to this diversity we have isolate languages like Nahali, (Central India) Burushaski (Hunza Valley, Pakistan) and Kusunda (Nepal) that belong to no other language families in the world. In order to account for this diversity we have to imagine that these distinct language groups must have been language families in their own right but were reduced to small isolates due to the dominant populations that thrived in Indian sub-continent. Otherwise it is difficult to imagine how these small populations belong to none of the families of languages that we know today in the world. Maybe their roots were here back in time and their populations decreased over a period of time for some reasons.

It has been well documented that the Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Austroasiatic (Munda sub-family) and Tibeto-Burman families of languages must have had sustained and long term contact that has resulted in what Emeneau, M.B. (1956) called 'India as a linguistic area', where some linguistic features spread cutting across the genetic boundaries of language families all over in different degrees. Needless to say that long term contact must have resulted in sustained and stable bilingualism leading to borrowing and the formation of linguistic area. Dravidian languages like Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil have a good number of Sanskrit borrowings. Even the existence of retroflex sounds in Indo-Aryan, Munda and some Tibeto-Burman languages is ascribed to Dravidian contact. The SOV word order, a pan Indian norm, must have resulted due to long term contact. This clearly shows that language families are not pigeon holes or islands but are deeply interconnected with widespread multilingualism for centuries. The linguistic communities in India habitually acquire and use languages other than their own for immediate oral communication. Multilingualism does not mean that people have good command over all the skills, like speaking, listening, reading and writing of more than two languages; but they have some competence to fulfil the communicative needs required. One native language may be used at home among the family members, the other dominant language may be used outside the home at work place and still another used at school as the medium of education. This is true of many small communities whose languages have no writing system developed so far. For example, a Byangsi speaker in

Uttarakhand is using his/her mother tongue at home and the dominant language Kumauni or Nepali just outside the home at market place, then Hindi and English at school as languages of education. Same is the case with many other tribal languages in North-East India and some parts of central India.

In modern times, the movement of populations has increased within India and abroad for education, work and business. This accounts for learning of other languages for daily use for different purposes, like education, business, entertainment and other electronic media like films and television, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and others. This means that the populations are interacting in different languages and need translation and the use of multilingual dictionaries for daily use.

The census of India has recorded a steady increase in bilinguals from 9.7 percent in 1961 to 24.79 percent in the 2001 census. (Bhattacharya S.S., 2018) Pandit, P.B. (1972) pointed out that in India bilingualism is a norm and monolingualism is an exception. This means that basically multilingualism is widespread and very much required for daily communicative needs of the Indian populations. Before I explain the bilingual situation in the Indian context it will be worthwhile to provide some ideal definitions of bilingualism. Here, the terms bilingualism and multilingualism are used interchangeably where they mean the use of more than one language in various social contexts. In some locations there may be two languages and in other places there may be three to four languages/dialects. The terms, languages and dialects are also not used in a well-defined way and are used interchangeably in the present paper.

Bloomfield (1933:56) defines bilingualism as “native-like control of two languages” —a very high goal indeed. For Haugen (1953:6) a bilingual produces “complete and meaningful utterances in other languages.” Weinreich (1953:1) considers bilingualism “the practice of alternately using two languages.”

There are many other definitions of bilingualism that have been provided by the scholars depending on the age of acquisition of second language (Butler, 2013), context of acquisition (Hoffmann, 1991), order and consequent acquisition (Hoffmann 1991), cognitive organisation (Hoffmann 1991), relative competence (Hamers & Blanc, 2000), functional ability (Butler, 2013), exogeneity (Hamers & Blanc, 2000), cultural identity (Hamers & Blanc, 2000) and social and cultural status of the languages (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). But for Indian contexts we need to redefine bilingualism.

First of all, in most social contexts, where oral communication takes place, more than one language may be used in particular situations like home, outside home, in the market place, in schools and colleges where the language and medium of education may be different. Therefore, the functional ability is much more important where the second or third language may be used in defined contexts. Moreover, the degree of bilingualism may differ from one

state to another. In a given situation one may use one language at home and the other in the market place just to buy goods and complete the transaction. S/he may not have full command of the second language with regard to skills like speaking, listening, reading and writing. So we can say that some minimal oral competence that is required in a given context of language use may be the ideal definition in Indian bilingualism rather than the definitions given above. Sure enough, some members of a community may have equal and effective command of two or more languages. So Indian bilingualism may be defined in one way or the other depending on the regions and social contexts. Some speakers may have equal and effective command over all the skills in more than one language whereas, in other cases they may master minimal functional abilities to carry out the communication in given social contexts. Oral communication networks are much more predominant in Indian bilingualism. For example, a native language like Byangsi (Uttarakhand) is used in most intimate and home domains, Nepali and Kumauni in outside home with friends and Hindi and English in school domains.

While looking at the global scene we find that many small languages are shifted in favour of dominant languages. But in the Indian sub-continent most languages are maintained even in the face of dominant languages. It is simply a matter of allocation of domains of language use for different purposes at different places without giving up one's language in the face of the other languages. Therefore, multilingualism helps maintaining languages over the generations. Moreover, for many small tribal populations the native language serves as a feature of their ethnic identity; therefore, they can't afford to give up their identity by adopting a different identity based on a different language. This is particularly true of Tibeto-Burman languages of North-East India like, Mizo, Ao, Thadou, Angami, Lota, Wanchoo, Nockte, Tangsa, Adi, Mishmi, Apatani, Tagin, Galo, Monpa, Manipuri, Bodo, Garo and many others. However, there are still some languages with less than ten thousand speakers with no writing system developed. These communities have shown a steady decrease in their number of speakers over the generations. But with modern technology the folk literature of these languages are being documented. In western Himalayas, where I have carried out extensive research on the Tibeto-Burman languages, I found a renewed interest among the people to write something in their languages. These languages are Byangsi, Rongpo, Manchad, (Patani) Kinnauri and a few others. After the spread of education they are becoming increasingly conscious of their languages.

Soon after the independence in 1947 India adopted a multilingual language policy by placing major languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Presently the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution recognises 22 major languages, e.g., Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit,

Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri to be used at State level for all purposes. In addition to these languages, Hindi and English are used for interstate and international official communications. Over the years more and more languages are being encouraged to be used in school education and other official use.

There are 121 languages spoken by more than ten thousand people in India according to the Census of India 2011, out of which 22 are Scheduled languages and 99 are placed under Non-Scheduled languages. However, the census of India further adds that there are 270 identifiable mother tongues. Many scholars wonder why illiteracy is not removed from India? This is due to the fact that large populations speak very different languages that are not the medium of education. Many languages don't even have writing systems. For example, a speaker of Manchad in Himachal Pradesh or an Ao Naga speaker in Nagaland has to face Hindi and/or English at school in order to be literate. These speakers also have to face a dominant language of the area as well. Therefore, there will be various levels of literacy depending on the language to be used in education. Hence, many tribal populations end up learning more than three to four languages simultaneously for their daily communicative needs. However, they may not be literate in any of the languages. Therefore, literacy is not a measure of bilingualism as such. But large populations are bilingual or trilingual for their communication needs. Literacy is defined as the knowledge of the written form of a given language which may not be the mother tongue of some tribal populations. But their communicative needs are met with the help of multilingualism.

In the linguistic history of India, Persian, Arabic and English were also added to the Indian communication network. That is the reason why all Indian languages borrowed extensively from these languages.

Today English is mostly used for higher education, science and technology and other international communication. The use of English has even increased since independence. It is assumed that an average educated Indian makes use of two or more languages in various walks of life. Mother tongue is used in the family and with friends, whereas the second language may be the medium of education; still the third language, like English, is added at school. In India when some populations move from one part of the country to another they learn the dominant language of the place even without formal learning. For example, Gujarati and Rajasthani shopkeepers settled in South India learn Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada or Telugu, whereas people from South living in North India learn Hindi. This apart in various state borders like Gujarat and Maharashtra, people command both Marathi and Gujarati; between Maharashtra and Karnataka, people learn both Marathi and Kannada side by side. The same type of bilingualism is found at all state boundaries that connect the populations with bilingual networks. This includes Hindi-Panjabi, Hindi-Marathi, Kannada-Tamil, Tamil-Malayalam,



Marathi-Telugu, Gujarati-Rajasthani, Assamese-Bangali, Bengali-Odia, Odia-Telugu and so on. The entire country is connected with bilingual networks of one type or the other.

Hindi is widely used in popular TV programs, films and other social media network communication and also functions as the medium of communication at informal level almost all over India.

The story of multilingualism becomes all the more interesting when we come to the tribal populations. They command three to four languages simultaneously.

For example Santhali-- a Munda language - at home; Bengali or Hindi, or Oriya outside home. At school, English and/or Hindi are added for education.

The same is true for many speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in North- East and North-West of India where native languages, plus regional languages, plus Hindi and/or English are further added to the discourse. One of the outstanding features of Indian multilingualism is the fact that, even if a person is somewhat deficient in speaking his/her second/third language(s), s/he is encouraged to speak it rather than discouraged. No one cares for the so-called standard prescribed or correct form of the language, as the immediate aim is to put one's idea across, that is, oral communication. The communicating oral skills in various domains of language use are considered more important, without caring for any standard or written mode of communication. That is why, many people don't feel the urgency to learn written form of some languages since the communication goes on for their daily needs. This kind of communication takes place in informal situations rather than formal occasions. It is a very interesting feature of Indian multilingualism that when there is an official directive to introduce some major language for official purpose, there is a resistance to learn/adopt that particular language, however, in given informal situations people learn and use the dominant language that one may confront. This means that the Indian people in general may resist learning a particular language if imposed, but would not mind learning a language that may be needed in certain domains of language use. It is a matter of freedom, choice and need that is more important. It is the linguistic diversity that holds rather than the uniformity of languages and culture.

With the increase in travel and business among the different states and populations, India needs more and more translations and formal learning and teaching of different languages. This means multilingual dictionaries will be very useful for a multilingual country like India, where more and more languages are being taught and learnt on a daily basis. It is important to note that most Indian populations don't give up their mother tongues in the face of dominant languages, as different languages are learnt and used in different domains of usage. That does not mean that small languages are not endangered as such. Some languages without any writing systems are likely to be lost over the generations and their use is highly restricted. Moreover, they are

moving from rural settings to urban settings where different languages are spoken and used for educational purposes.

Finally, with increasing social mobility, education and literacy in a multilingual country like India, more and more populations are moving from monolingual to multilingual communities. Therefore, the multilingual dictionaries will be required for multiple purposes, like translations, online learning and teaching languages and for other electronic media like blogs, twitter, facebook and WhatsApp usages. Over the years, more and more languages have been recognised and included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The number of languages that are being written and used on a daily basis are on the rise due to linguistic awareness. The increase in multilingualism is also helping to maintain endangered languages as educational resources are being upgraded and updated with the growing communicative needs of the people.

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# The natural supremacy of spoken language. Orality and writing in Africa

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## ABSTRACT

*This contribution aims to introduce the reader to the African socio-linguistic panorama and to the main issues bound to the often oversimplified dichotomy which sees, in abstract terms, verbal communication as opposed to written production. In the present article I will try to bring to light all different aspects which contribute to make the question a very complex and multilayered one, at least in Africa, above all because the vast majority of African languages to date do not even have a written form.*

*In such conditions, the issue is not whether, when or how, writing is used or allowed, but why the lack of adequate written varieties is so pervasive and whether and how things could be possibly changed for the better, in order to really value, protect and promote the use of minority and endangered African spoken languages.*

*In brief, I will discuss the following 5 points: 1) the number of living languages in the continent (and the difference between pluri- and multilingualism); 2) the presence of indigenous African scripts and imported alphabets from the 3rd millennium b.C. to present day; 3) the supremacy of orality over writing with specific references to traditional literature and artistic production; 4) the unfair distribution of literacy and formal education in the continent; 5) the importance of linguistic policies for the right to education and the protection of endangered minority languages and communities.*

## KEYWORDS

*African languages; Literacy; Writing systems; Endangered languages; Language policies.*

*“Asking a community to choose which of its languages should receive  
institutional support is like asking a mother to choose which of her children  
should be given new clothes”  
Jufferman & Abdelhay 2016.*

## INTRODUCTION

Far from being an exhaustive dissertation about the oral and written varieties of the more than 2000 different living African languages, which would, indeed, represent a too ambitious endeavor even for linguists much more capable than me, my simple goal in this paper is to outline at least the main features of communication and use of languages in the continent, as well as the characteristics of their appearance in verbal and/or written contexts, or the position reserved to minority, spoken languages in present day Sub-Saharan African school systems.

In the following paragraphs I will try my best to shed some light at least on five points which could help the reader to grasp the underlying complexity of the whole question of language *at large* in a continent which is everything but a monolith.

Thus, § 1 will be devoted to a brief commentary on the numbers registered for African languages and on the effective usability of data derived from a simple enumeration of languages and linguistic families in the continent.

§ 2 will offer a simple overview (with some personal reflections) on the dynamics underlying the development of scripts for local languages, considering that, far from being a continent without writing, Africa has been home of some of the most well known ancient scripts, which, in some cases (e.g. the Egyptian hieroglyph) date back even to the 3rd millennium b.C.<sup>1</sup>

In § 3 I will try to discuss what I mean when I speak of the supremacy of spoken over written language, making specific references to the African traditional oral literature(s) and artistic production(s).

§ 4 will be devoted to a brief discussion of the unfair distribution of literacy in the continent, while in § 5 I will focus on the importance of linguistic policies for the right to education and the protection of endangered minority languages and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph could be seen also as an introduction to the chapter by Mauro Tosco in this volume.

## 1. AFRICAN LANGUAGES: NOT A MERE QUESTION OF NUMBERS

Africa is home to 54 different countries, to hundreds of different cultures and to thousands of different indigenous languages. According to the most recent estimates of Ethnologue, in the world, around 7.000 languages are currently spoken, and Africa, together with South East Asia represents the region with the highest variety. The continent hosts, in fact, more than 2000 living languages. This means, in other words, that almost 1/3 of the world's languages are African.

The presence or absence of a writing system is not a *condicio sine qua non* for the identification of a variety as a language or a dialect, which is indeed a malicious belief we usually inherit from obsolete Western school memories. In order to be defined a language, a verbal variety must have a peculiar structure, with peculiar phonology, morphology, syntax as well as specific vocabulary and it must represent a *pivot* around which other slightly different but inter-comprehensible varieties (dialects) turn around.

Unfortunately, despite some noticeable exceptions (e.g. the Bantu family), we lack reliable data and complete descriptive materials on most African languages and their varieties<sup>2</sup>.

However, it can be accepted as a given that this is a feature that Africa shares with all those areas of the world which were subjected to colonialism (Latin America and South East Asia in the first place), or that have not been so much influenced by the Western education systems or by the true passion for description and scientific classification that the Darwinian experience boosted all around the world since the era of Enlightenment.

However, the complexity of the linguistic mosaic of the continent is not only due to the huge numbers of languages currently spoken. Understanding the numbers, in fact, does not simply mean to understand their geographic distribution, fancying that each language/community of speakers occupies a specific area, which is in itself monolingual, monocultural, and mono-ethnic. On the contrary, an attentive reading of these numbers tells us that the African reality is made, also and above all, of something much more complex, and that the cohabitation of multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic groups in the very same area, often creates highly variable socio-linguistic networks and dynamics that are very hardly perceivable by outsiders (see Batibo 2005, Lüpke 2010, Jufferman & Abdelhay 2016).

Researches on plurilingualism in themselves, referring only to the numerical dimension, can tell us much on the problems that African modern States should face, if and when they seriously intend to tackle the delicate issue of language policies, since, except for a very few cases in Mediterranean Africa or in the Horn (Somalia) where the number of languages spoken is

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<sup>2</sup> cf Micheli 2010.

very low, usually the density degree of linguistic diversity is uncomfortably high, above all in the equatorial sub-saharan regions, where in a country like Côte d'Ivoire, which has the same extension of Italy, more than 70 different languages belonging to 4 different families are spoken or, in a country like Nigeria, which is three times larger than Italy, there are more than 500 languages. However, numbers cannot tell us anything about how, when and by whom all these languages are really spoken.

Researches on multilingualism, on the contrary, being focused on the speakers' behaviour and attitudes rather than on numbers, tell us more about the status of the different languages that co-habit the same geographical area.

According to Batibo 2005, the more typical socio-linguistic model in the continent is represented by triglossia. An average African speaker has in fact in his/her linguistic toolbox at least three different languages, which are characterised by different statuses. The higher position is occupied by the official language of the country, generally the one inherited from the colonial period, which is used as a technical medium in official domains. The second position is generally reserved to the *lingua franca* of the macro area, typically an L2 for most of the speakers, who use it in their daily activities outside the family, at the market, when they travel to town or the like. The last position is represented by the local language, that is usually the speaker's mother tongue and is reserved to the domestic domain and to the verbal exchanges among close relatives or people living in the same village or in its neighborhoods in rural areas.

Many times, this basic triglossic model gets expanded with two or more other languages, due to different cultural traditions and marriage preferences. It is so for example in the Kulango sub-prefecture of Nassian in Côte d'Ivoire, where the Kulango (Gur) community represents a buffer group between the Akan (Kwa) speaking clans of the southern regions and the Lobi (Gur) located in the northerner areas. Kulango are traditionally open to intermarriages both with Akan and with Lobi groups and, therefore, a Kulango child can easily be exposed at the same time to his/her parents' language (Kulango), to his/her grandparents' one (possibly Lobi, Lorhon, Akan or even all of them), to Dyula (Mande), representing the *lingua franca* spoken at the market or in the shops and finally French (Romance) used in the school.

It should be self evident, but it is maybe important to underline, that in this case, the very same child is exposed not only to four (or five, or six) languages belonging to the same linguistic family, but even to four (or five, or six) languages belonging to different language families and/or linguistic phyla.

Two last points must be added (or anticipated) here in order to have a more complete idea of the whole picture:

- 1) of all the languages involved in the example just reported, the only one that is really used in daily written contexts is French. With the exception of Lohron, which has even not been fully described until now (at least as far as I know), the other four (Kulango, Lobi, Akan and Dyula) could actually be

written according to specific scripts based usually on the Latin alphabet with the addition of some diacritics and/or IPA symbols<sup>3</sup>, realised mainly by missionaries for their Bible translation, but certainly not universally known and, above all, very little, if ever, used for writing, being their usefulness limited just to the need of reading the Gospel or the Bible during the Mass or in other occasions reserved to the religious domain;

2) the very threat for true minority or endangered languages in Africa is not represented by ex-colonial languages, as it is often believed; rather their endangerment is much more due to other African languages enjoying a higher status, i.e. neighboring languages with a definitely higher number of speakers (in our example Kulango is suffocating Lorhon in the region due simply to their demographic majority) or the interethnic *lingua franca* (Dyula in our example), which allows its speakers to communicate with a larger network of people.

## 2. AFRICAN AUTOCHTHONOUS SCRIPTS

Despite the common view according to which Africa is a continent without writing, quite the opposite is true, since “The development of literacy in Africa seen as a whole certainly predates the histories of European colonialism and Islamic conquest” (Abdelhay; Asfaha & Juffermans 2014: 5).

One of the most ancient and prestigious scripts in the world, the Egyptian hieroglyph, was, indeed, born in Africa. The Nile valley, together with the Horn of Africa have been home to other very important ancient scripts, some of which are now extinct since long (e.g. Meroitic, Hieratic, Coptic, Old Nubian), while others still resist and continue to be used (e.g. Amharic, Ge’ez).

In addition to these more widely known written traditions, there are different other autochthonous scripts that were spontaneously developed by local communities in various parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, e.g. Nsibidi in southeastern Nigeria and Tifinagh in the Maghreb (now standardised in the Neo-Tifinagh form, which has recently become one of the three official scripts of Morocco, alongside with the Arabic and the Latin alphabets).

Of course, the local ancient scripts were reserved, known, used and passed down among specific groups of initiated peoples, mainly religious chiefs, without reaching and impacting on the lay population, but this is no wonder,

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<sup>3</sup> The case of Dyula offers indeed a nice example of a Mande language in which many *ajami* texts have been produced. We call *ajami* all those texts written with the Arabic alphabet but in local African languages. For writing Dyula, people could also use an autochthonous script, namely the N’ko alphabet, invented in 1949 by S. Kanté, which will be cited also in the next § and in Tosco’s chapter in this book.



since the same is true for the western writing tradition as well, which started to spread among the lower classes only when school attendance became compulsory.

Sometimes the invention of autochthonous scripts derived from the independent initiative of enlightened political chiefs, as it happened for example in Cameroon, where King Njoya himself, around 1885, created a special script for his language, Bamun, to be used in the court<sup>4</sup>.

Be it as it may, when the Arabic and Latin alphabets reached the continent and started to be used as mediums of “civilization”, first of all as a result of the Islamic and Christian missionary activities, or as a fruit of the commercial networks derived from the contacts with Arab merchants or the colonial administrations, they certainly “made an impact on Africa’s language and literary ecology” (Abdelhay, Asfaha & Juffermans 2014: 6).

In a way, indeed, these two imported, so powerful and flexible tools, worked as a time bomb for the creativity of many local leaders, who used them as a basis for the development of new peculiar scripts for writing down the local languages, mainly as an expression of cultural and ethnic identity.

As pointed out by Dalby (1967, 1968 and 1969) and Cooper (1991), dozens of scripts were created between the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries and they were usually (but not always) presented to the local population as a divine revelation accorded to religious leaders directly from God. Consequently, as it happens for the myriad of alternative religious movements which are born in the same way nowadays and which last until the charismatic leader is alive or in business, most of these scripts had a lifespan limited to that of their inventors and their public was limited only to a small group of proselytes.

Also in this case, however, some experiments had better outcomes with respect to others, and a couple of these scripts have survived till now, despite the fact that they remain limited to a small network of users. Two examples that owe being mentioned here are: 1) the Vai script of Liberia, “revealed” to Momulu Duwalu Bukele around 1830<sup>5</sup>, which is not an alphabet, but rather a syllabary; 2) the N’ko alphabet developed by the Guinean writer and educator Solomana Kanté in 1949 on the basis of the Arabic script and thought as a tool for writing down all the languages belonging to the Manding continuum of West-Africa<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The script seems to have ceased to be used a few years after Njoya’s death in 1931.

<sup>5</sup> On this see also Scribner & Cole 1981.

<sup>6</sup> On this see also Vydrin 2017 and Micheli 2021 (forthcoming).

### 3. THE NATURAL SUPREMACY OF SPOKEN LANGUAGES

That spoken language is a priority with respect to its written variety is for linguists an evidence that does not even need being commented.

However, for a larger public, it is probably worth underlining that this claim is easily ascertainable when considered under different perspectives: anthropological, ontogenetic and phylogenetic.

Anthropologically, it is evident that all languages are spoken, while not all of them are written. Indeed, only few hundreds of the 7000 languages spoken in the world at present, are written.

Ontogenetically, it is under everyone's eye that every human being learns first of all to speak and then, maybe, and only under certain specific conditions, he/she can also learn to write. Learning to speak is a natural process, which spontaneously starts in babies, even without specific training in this sense from their parents, through the imitating mechanism of lallation. Parents, on their part, can only help accelerating the process, if they constantly interact verbally with their children.

On the contrary, writing is a skill that can be acquired only much later and which needs already a quite complex ability on the part of the child in terms of movement coordination (learning to keep a pen in the right way in order to sketch small signs on a paper is already difficult). Thus, drastically simplifying, we can just say that learning to write is a cultural rather than a natural process and, therefore, it needs to be passed down to the younger generation by experts spending their time with this specific objective in their minds.

Phylogenetically, it is a fact that, in human history, spoken languages appeared ages before someone had the idea of writing them down. Between the moment in which *homo sapiens* evolved morphologically so to develop an articulatory apparatus suitable for the production of verbal sounds and the moment in which the first human community invented the first script, at least one million years had to pass.

Still today, the vast majority of human beings produce huge amounts of knowledge, literature, memories and cultural traditions even though they are not able to write.

Indeed, writing is not a *condicio sine qua non* culture grows and peoples have always developed and expressed themselves through poetry, theatre, music or storytelling even without writing anything down.

From this point of view, Africa is a continent extremely rich and the value of oral traditions is immense and is characterised by specific features. Every summary I could propose here would be too poor to be considered interesting, therefore, I simply refer the reader to Ruth Finnegan (2012, 2014, 2018) and the therein cited bibliography for an exhaustive description of the richest oral traditions of the continent.

#### 4. LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Another stereotype on Africa is that it is a continent with no education and with a very low literacy rate. Unfortunately, under this point of view, the stereotype is not that far from reality, since, despite the average literacy rate in sub-saharan African countries has risen very quickly in the last five years<sup>7</sup>, it still remains attested, in general terms, at 65% and there are still cases where illiteracy represents a tragic problem.

In Chad, for example, only 22% of the population can read and write.

The best rate is 96%, registered in the Seychelles, but as a matter of fact, sub-saharan countries show a literacy rate of more or less 50%.

In addition to this already dramatic figure, there are evident disparities in the real distribution of literacy and quality education among the population. Usually, in fact, the literacy rate of women is lower than that of men, and in rural areas there are still many communities where the indicator drastically decreases.

For example it is so even in a country like Ethiopia, where the national literacy rate is attested at 52% and where in the capital city, Addis Ababa, there are high quality universities: in the Hamar and Daasanach districts of South Omo Region, in fact, the literacy rate is as low as 1 and 2% respectively (see Micheli 2019).

I will come back on the issue of education in the next §, but let me just stress here that, at present, primary education, even where it is quite well widespread, is generally carried out in the official language of the country, i. e., with very few exceptions (e.g. Somalia as the best example), in the European language inherited from the colonial administration; a language which, despite its high presence in daily use in capital cities and the big towns, at least for what concern upper class people, is instead very poorly known and understood in rural areas as well as by lower class people in towns (see for example Micheli forthcoming about the usability of French in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso).

In addition to the low literacy rate, it is worth underlining that the access to libraries or the possibility to buy books is not at all obvious in many areas of the continent.

This fact tells us at least two things about African literature: 1) orality still represents the more widespread and most commonly used medium for literary production and expression, and 2) written literature, usually produced in the ex-colonial languages, is still reserved to a very small minority of the African population and African writers are well aware that their readers are mainly people living in other parts of the world, rather than in Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> World Bank data 2019 - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=ZG>

However, writing in a European language can be an asset for them, if we think that in this way African writers can at least make black voices and instances be heard in the global village.

## 5. LINGUISTIC POLICIES

As we have already seen in §1, Africa is a continent socio-linguistically characterised by multilingualism.

Everyone speaks usually at least three languages: his/her mother tongue, the regional dominant African language and the official language of the country.

The prestige and the contexts of use of these different languages reflect socio-economic features and relegate minority languages to the lowest status. Therefore, for the vast majority of these languages the risk of disappearing in the next few generations is not only very high, but also, unfortunately, quite probable.

Considering the possible evolution of the vitality of spoken languages all around the world, due not only to socio-economic reasons, but also to the effect of mass communication in social media and the like, Michael Krauss warned that “By the turn of the century only 600 languages will remain on the face of the earth, meaning that 90% of the world’s languages will have perished”<sup>8</sup>.

Of course, this phenomenon will have a much higher impact on the local living languages of sub-saharan Africa than the one it will have in the Western world.

In fact, in the Western world, almost all minority languages have nowadays at least been described and tools have been created for their preservation.

Already in 2001, according to the UNESCO *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, in Africa 97 languages were on the verge of dying. This means that already 20 years (or one generation) ago, one hundred African languages had only a few dozen speakers, all of whom in their old and very old age.

Today linguists usually consider a language as being severely endangered if it:

- has lesser than 5000 speakers;
- has no intergenerational transmission;
- has no social prestige;
- has mother tongue speakers who are bilingual in the regional dominant language and prefer to use the latter in their daily activities;
- does not respond in a creative way to new domains.

Looking at things under this light, it results self evident that the situation of African indigenous languages is dramatic and that the number of endangered

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Krauss in Batibo 2005:VII.

languages at present easily reaches and even probably surpasses four or five hundreds.

There is no way to discuss the issue at length here, but, as Batibo (2005: 114) puts it:

“Only if there is a strong political will associated with a chain of activities such as the sensitization of speakers, documentation of the minority languages, their introduction in school systems and promotion to wider public use will language revival succeed”.

Unfortunately until now, despite the true commitment of some enlightened rulers (as a single name I mention here Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the first and beloved President of Tanzania), linguistic policies in Sub-Saharan Africa result in many cases inefficient and in some cases even non-existent.

It is true that innovative programs, developed with the best intentions, have been proposed here and there and from time to time in different countries, aimed not only at providing primary school education to every child, but also to do so including local African languages in some experimental projects for primary schools (see for example Micheli 2021 - forthcoming - Sawadogo 2004 e Sanogo 2011 about Burkina Faso).

Unfortunately most of these experiments, which imply the use of local major languages alongside the official ones in different percentages during the different years of the first cycle of primary school, remained in most cases only on paper and were actually never realised or realised only in a very small number of schools with very few pupils involved.

It must be added that these kind of programmes, despite their positive intentions, are potentially dangerous for the ecology of local linguistic dynamics, because, if on the one hand it is already difficult to choose which of the many languages of the region shall actually be used in the schools (on this topic see for example Jufferman & Abdelhay 2016), on the other hand the use of a local language in the school is usually not perceived as an asset by the majority of parents, who rather prefer their children to start learning the official language in a “proper” way from the beginning, given that, in their view, only a proficient knowledge of the official language represents a real possibility for their children to get good jobs and reach better life conditions.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS (ADVOCATING FOR A BETTER APPRECIATION OF SPOKEN AND MINORITY LANGUAGES OF AFRICA)

With this short contribution, I hope to have reached the goal of outlining the 5 most important features characterising the extremely varied and highly complex linguistic panorama of the African continent.

I also hope to have been able to argue why neither an accurate enumeration of living, endangered or extinct languages, nor a detailed projection of that enumeration on topographical maps are appropriate ways for discussing all the delicate questions rotating around linguistic diversity, linguistic rights and linguistic agency of the different African peoples.

As reported in § 5, by the end of this century, our world will probably lose 90% of its languages and, of course, the first languages to disappear will be those languages whose prestige in terms of number of speakers and dignity of use in formal domains are low, i.e. the quasi totality of African languages.

In this perspective, only a huge effort in terms of seriously planned linguistic and educational policies adopted by States could help to partially hinder or (at least) relent the process.

Of course, we all know that Sub-Saharan low and middle income countries face a huge quantities of problems, ranging from health, economy, civil and political tensions, the effects of climate change as well as many others in addition, but I think that the question of good quality education and the protection of minority peoples and their languages should at least appear on their agenda as a true priority.

As a matter of fact, linguists, experts in cognitive studies as well as psychologists and educators all around the world underline since long now, that pupils learn more quickly and in a better way when they are taught in their mother tongue or in a language they truly manage.

In Africa, as we have seen in §§ 4 and 5, most primary education is taught in the country official language, which is usually the one inherited from the colonial administration and which is sometimes completely obscure to young children.

In addition to this, we have seen how, even when experimental programmes have been proposed, until now they have too often failed.

Therefore, much is still to be done (and must be done) to grant all pupils the right of learning at least during the first two years of primary school in a language they are really at ease with.

Moreover, it is important to consider new pedagogic strategies, more focused on the African rich tangible and intangible heritage, oral traditions, and artistic / literary production in order to trigger a more positive attitude of the youth towards their past and their cultural / ethnic identities.

Only reinforcing their education systems will African governments help their population to become more conscious of who they are and of the possibility they have, in order to be ready to compete and cooperate on an even footing at all levels with the outside world.

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# From IPA to wildcards: A critical look at some African Latin orthographies

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## ABSTRACT

*The article presents and discusses a few African Latin orthographies. The scope of the work is set out in section 1, while section 2 discusses a few orthographies featuring IPA symbols and diacritics. They were often the work of linguists and missionaries and were conceived for mother-tongue alphabetization and in order to translate and publish religious literature. They are scarcely useful in everyday casual writing, and especially so on a keyboard (where only a restricted set of symbols is to all practical purposes available). They are contrasted in section 3 with the use of digraphs and, most of all, with “wildcards:” symbols of the Latin, basic (unmodified) alphabet that are taken to use, often in an idiosyncratic manner, in order to represent phonemes that do not have a direct, built-in representation. The discussion is wrapped up in section 4, where the limits on the use of wildcards are evidenced and the practical limitations of many African orthographies reiterated.*

## KEYWORDS

*Orthographies; Latin script; IPA; diacritics; digraphs.*

## 1. A SHORT INTRODUCTION WITH MANY CAVEATS AND UNSOLICITED EXCUSES

Why are many African orthographies so bad? Is it because so many African languages are phonologically complex? Indeed, they are. But is this the only reason? And, for that matter, in what sense can we say that an orthography is “bad”?

This article will delve into an analysis along language-internal criteria, and the appropriateness of an orthography (which inversely correlates with deviation from a one-to-one correspondence between graphemes and phonemes; Sgall 1987) will not be called into question. Rather, attention will be focused on effectiveness (Cahill and Karan 2008; Cahill 2015). Granting that graphization has been, in Africa and elsewhere, a top-down process and that data on the approval of an orthography on the part of its real stakeholders – all of its potential users – are difficult to get, the analysis will concentrate on the internal characteristics of an orthography that are in all likelihood bound to facilitate or hamper its use.

Just as all languages are equal but some of them are more equal than others because they have been ausbauized (Tosco 2008) into written, official languages, also not all orthographies are equal: “big” languages may go along fine for centuries with awful, impractical and obsolete orthographies. Minority languages cannot: often their speakers are illiterate and must face the usual hurdles of acquiring literacy; in many cases reading and writing skills are offered to the minority language speakers in a locally or internationally big language. Both possibilities are widespread in Africa (and elsewhere). Or the minority language speakers already know the local majority language and its orthography and have thereby access to a sizable amount of material and information available in that language; the additional skills required in learning and using the minority language orthography are mostly justified in ideological and moral terms. Any material produced in the minority language will face very high hurdles in dissemination and will not be likely to be a winning competitor, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

In Africa and elsewhere many orthographies were designed by foreign linguists, policy makers or missionaries – often with some input from local language consultants – and basically with the aim of publishing in the local language. That the publication itself is a Holy Book or the word of the leading party and its sacred leaders does not change much: the speakers themselves will mostly be readers – i.e., passive users. A technically very accurate orthography will certainly be easy to learn.

Not the same can be said about actively using the orthography – i.e., as writers, and especially so when handwriting is replaced by the use of keyboards (of typewriters in the past and of computers or cellphones nowadays).

It is certainly true that most of these orthographies have never been tested in extensive, daily usage by speakers, but this use has probably never even been considered.

In short, one feels that not all the needs of the potential users were taken into consideration: the degree to which an orthography will be user-friendly will be much different if reading or writing are taken into consideration.

As the title implies, orthographies based upon the Latin alphabet only will be presented and critically discussed, and actually a tiny minority of them. Specifically, I will not be concerned with:

- the vigorous use of the Arabic alphabet, not only in the past but still today (for which Mumin and Versteegh 2014 is not only a must, but also a fascinating reading);
- the use and present spread of indigenous scripts (*in primis* the Ethiopic syllabary in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the recently revived Tifinagh Berber alphasyllabary);
- finally – and regrettably (and simply out of lack of competence and data) – the rise and to a certain extent spread of many “new” alphabets of Africa – such as the Vai syllabary, the N’Ko alphabet or the Mandombe script. A good overview is provided in Kootz and Pasch (2010).

## 2. THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF LINGUISTICS (AND LINGUISTS)

Both digraphs and IPA-based modifications of Latin letters are found in the orthography of Hausa (Chadic; ISO 639-3: hau<sup>1</sup>), probably the African language with the highest number of native speakers. Digraphs are < sh >, and < ts > for /ʃ/ and /tʃ/, respectively; IPA symbols are < ɓ >, < ɗ > for implosives and < ɓ̌ > for ejective /ǩ/. Ejectivization is instead not marked in the case of the affricate /tʃ/, while < ‘y > stands for a palatal glottal stop /ʔ<sup>j</sup>/. Under representation is found in the case of the same symbol < r > used for both an alveolar trill (the latter often expressed by < ʀ > in linguistic works, with plain < r > being reserved to retroflex flap /ɽ/) and most of all in the case of vowel length, which goes unmarked. As in many, maybe most African orthographies, tones are left unmarked.

Not surprisingly, leaving aside the still widespread use of Arabic-based *Ajami*, everyday Hausa written in *boko* (/bōkò/), i.e., the Latin alphabet, often disregards the “hooked” letters altogether and ‘one still encounters publications, including newspapers, where the plain letters are used’ (Jaggar 2001: 698): ‘the letters are printed without the hooks’ (Newman 2000: 726).

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<sup>1</sup> The ISO 639-3 code is provided for all and only African languages after their first mention in the text.

Nor are these problems limited to languages spoken in former British colonies: a cursory look at a few major languages of West Africa, suffices to show the extension of the IPA symbol < ŋ > for a velar nasal – e.g., in both Wolof (Atlantic; wol) and Bambara (Mande; bam). The latter adds to its inventory of graphemes marked by IPA symbols < ŋ > for the palatal nasal as well as < ε > and < ɔ > for the open-mid vowels; the same array of graphemes is also used in Dyula (Mande; dyu), a major lingua franca of West Africa (whose use and potentialities also as a written language are discussed in Micheli forthcoming).

Other languages face more and more difficult problems in their graphization.

In the case of many languages of South Sudan, troubles started at least in 1928, at the time of the Rejaf Language Conference (Tucker 1929), for which Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2016) provide a useful overview. Their attention mostly goes to the ideological aspects of the conference, and their stark critiques – framed in the new orthodoxy of postmodernism and postcolonial studies – focus on the “Orientalist” attitude of the participants (where “Orientalist” is of course an abusive term) and the alleged invention of discrete ethnic groups and languages with the aim of reinforcing and maintaining colonial power. Still, their analysis of Dietrich Westermann’s (1875-1956) orthographic proposals has some merit.

Following his long research in Sudan and West Africa and serving as director of the *International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* (later the *International African Institute*) from 1926 until 1939, Westermann proposed a *Practical Orthography of African Languages* (1928, 1930).<sup>2</sup> Proposed IPA symbols to be used in these “practical orthographies” include among others < ŋ >, < ʃ >, < ʒ >, < ʏ >. Further recommendations include the use of apostrophes for ejectives and/or implosives, of umlaut (diaeresis) for “central vowels.” Also, the notation of dental stops with the digraphs < dh >, < th > is recommended.

An early example of these orthographical choices is Heasty’s (1937) Shilluk dictionary, but the same solutions lie at the basis of the alphabets still used for many languages of South Sudan of different genetic affiliation and to some extent used in education (English only being the official language of independent South Sudan).

Among the main languages, Dinka and Nuer are cases in point: Dinka (din) and other West Nilotic languages have both modal and breathy vowels. Breathiness is marked in IPA by a subscript umlaut (diaeresis), as /a̱/, /e̱/, etc. The IPA notation is apparently the source of the Dinka superscript umlaut above the vowel, as in < ä̱ >, < ë̱ >, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Available online at <http://www.bisharat.net/Documents/poal30.htm> (last accessed June 2, 2021).

A a	Ä ä	B b	C c	D d	Dh dh	E e	Ë ë	É é	Ë ë	G g	Y y	I i	Ï ï	J j	K k	L l	M m
[a]	[ä]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[d̥]	[e]	[e̥]	[é]	[é̥]	[g]	[y]	[i]	[i̯]	[j]	[k]	[l]	[m]
N n	Nh nh	Ny ny	D̥ d̥	O o	Ö ö	Ɔ ɔ	Ǫ ɔ̥	P p	R r	T t	Th th	U u	W w	Y y			
[n]	[n̥]	[ɲ]	[d̥]	[o]	[ø]	[ɔ]	[ɔ̥]	[p]	[r]	[t]	[t̥]	[u]	[w]	[j]			

Figure 1. The Dinka alphabet (<http://www.languagesgulper.com/eng/Dinka.html>)

Although a few digraphs are used for consonants, no generalization of such a solution has been attempted. In stops, a breathy release is marked in IPA by a raised symbol for a voiced glottal fricative, as in /b<sup>h</sup>/: one could imagine a transcription \* < ah > for /ḁ/ (instead of < ä >), etc. As vowel length is not phonological, one could even use \* < aa >. This leaves the problem of vowel quality: seven vowel qualities are phonemic in Dinka, with open-mid /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ opposed to close-mid /e/ and /o/. Accents are often used in European languages to the effect of marking openness, but other solutions are conceivable, such as digraphs (\* < ae >?). The Dinka orthography simply keeps the IPA symbols, and not only sports < ε > and < ɔ >, but also breathy < ë > and < ǫ >.

Other IPA signs are found in the case of < ɣ >, < ɲ > and < ŋ >.

The Dinka orthography is interesting for the use of digraphs whose second element is consistently < h >: < dh >, < th > and < nh > for the dental counterparts /d̥/, /t̥/, /n̥/ to alveolars /d/, /t/, /n/.

At the same time, signs provided by the Latin alphabet and available in any standard keyboard but left unused in the Dinka orthography abound: < f >, < h >, < q >, < s >, < v >, < x >, and < z >. One can easily argue that at least < s > and < z > could be good solutions for the dental stops. As < ny > is used for the palatal nasal stop /ɲ/, the absence of the perhaps even more common digraph < ng > for the velar stop /ŋ/ is puzzling.

## 2. Bër ë dët

Ruëëth aabi yök any'iköl yic ë yän juëc yiic any'iköl yic.

### Añuĩ kek Awan

Wäthɛɛɛ yen aci Añuĩ lo tənë wën ë nyankënë cɔl  
Awan ku lëk yeen, “Manh ë nyankäi, awiëc ba p'ir y'in  
yaköl.”

Go Awan dhuök yeen, “Yenjö y'inër ye y'in p'ir y'en?  
Na wɛɛŋd'iit tɔ tɛën cä ke bi la dök y'iin, bi y'in ke  
p'ir!” Ku kat Awan bi wɛɛŋd'iit wën nyuäth la kuaath  
w'iir tiök yic bi wenj döt ebën. Ku le riŋ tənë nërë  
Añuĩ ku lëk yeen, “Yen kan yen miëthdu, y'in abi cuet  
yaköl tɛ c'it tɛ w'ic.”

Añuĩ aci puöu jal miët ku riŋ w'iir bi yök la cam.  
Na le yëët tiök yic, kɛ döt aya cëmën yök, go yic löny  
bi dhiau.

Go Awan lëk yeen, “Duk go dhiau kɛ wun yök kɛc  
gua bën. Na le yëët lä, ka aba kuany yic apath yenjö  
kënë diëc yäkke yiic.”

### Thiëc

1. Yenjö ci Awan nyuöth Añuĩ bi ya miëthde?
2. Ci Awan poth nërë thok kädë?

Figure 2. An excerpt from a page in Dinka (Caguor 2003: 4)<sup>3</sup>

The same system is basically followed for Nuer (West Nilotic; nus), with the umlaut being replaced for breathiness by underscore:

<sup>3</sup> This and all the following specimens of South Sudanese orthographies were obtained in Juba in 2013.

Man Dεεη κενε Nyaluaak cike wä ruup.  
 Mëë cike cop ruup, cuke wä göör ke tōōη.  
 Mëë görke, cu Man Dεεη nyääl nen rey  
 butbutä. Cε Nyaluaak cōl. Cεε wee, "Nen  
 nyääl εμο. Ε nyääl in la cam naath κενε lēey."  
 Cukε riη wic. Mëë cike cop thaar wec, cuke  
 gaac εlōη ke dual mi ci dual ke ke. /Ken nyääl  
 εμο bεn κōōrien. Cεε duōth guaathδε. Cu  
 Man Dεεη ciεη nōηikä ke tōōη kä cεε thaηη  
 tōōηni bany ruup. Nyaluaak cε dual εlōη a thile  
 tōōη ti cε nōōη dhōr man.  
 Mëë ci Man Dεεη cop ciεηδε, cεε lar Guan  
 Dεεη i "Cakō nyääl nen rey butbutä ruup."  
 Cu Guan Dεεη wee i "Ε jεn nyääl in la dεy  
 yōōk a cam εn wic εμε."  
 Cu Guan Dεεη ε wä gujil κενε Dak ke Man  
 Dεεη ke yōō ηäce guaathδε. /Ken κεν ε jek.  
 Cu Man Dεεη wee, "Cε jien. Ε jεn guaathδε,  
 εn butbut εμε."  
 Mëë cike bεn wic, cua ke thiec, i "Ci yen ε  
 jek?" Cuke wee /ken κεν ε jek.  
 Cu Man Bol wee, "Kä cε wä nikä, εn  
 nyääl?"  
 Cu Man Dεεη wee, "/Cä dee ηac εn guaath  
 ε cε wä thijn o."

Figure 3. An excerpt from a page in Nuer (Kuëne ke Thok Nath Bok ηuaan 1994: 65)

Breathiness is not phonological in Murle (Surmic; mur), and this entails the absence of umlaut and underscore; on the other hand, the same IPA signs seen above are again used for both vowels and consonants:

## ZOZOK CI ADUWONEK DEMEZOK

Omoloye ceen amotheth thur ki ram o 52 obek demazyak  
kɛɛɲ ci (sura) ririthɔn ci avi ŋina noko. Zɛɛ enek nɔɔɔ nɛ,  
"Anyak zɔɔz ci colai ŋina. Agayu inoko zɔɔz nico kawo kazi nɛ?  
" Kane Dokol." ŋina oovɔ zɔɔz ci ona kazi Dokol avi ŋina noko  
enek demazyak nɛ, kazi zɔɔz nico nɛ, "Dokol" jino bodo izi nɛ,  
kawo zɔɔz nico kazi nɛ? Azi demazyawa nɛ, kawo kazi nɛ,  
"Dokol" ŋɛɛɛn inoko ŋaathunonɔ ci ajowa zɔɔz ci kazi Dokol  
noko ŋaman ŋina? Azi demazyaihi oman nɛ, nɔɔn ce. Izi zin  
niina demezoithi nɛ, "Abona ɔɔɔth". Anyek zin ŋina demazyak  
wanɔ kathamanith kekebith golok ci zoozok niciko noko dook  
niigi doon kidicilim. Zɛɛ mazi icinu ijezith inoko niigi dook,  
Anyek zin nɔɔɔ dook kekebith moloye ci abɔɔɔ. Zɛɛ mazi  
odothith anyek kebedozek zoozok ci ɛɛl kaale ci aliyai ɛɛl  
gɔɔɔgi lootha noko kekebith niigi dook.

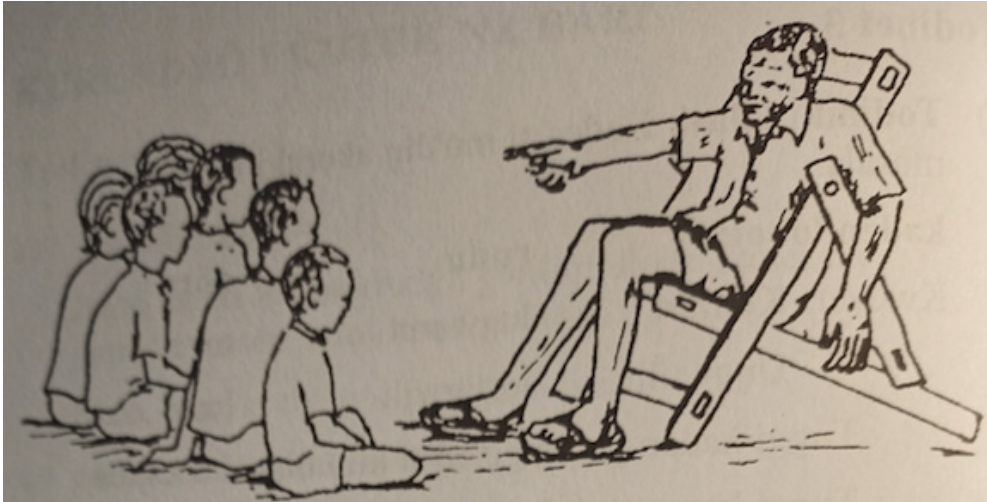
Figure 4. An excerpt from a page in Murle (Waragɛ O Miliny Murleye 2004: 54)

The use of diacritics and IPA signs is quite widespread, being found in many, if not most, orthographies of the area.

Another major language of South Sudan, Bari (East Nilotic; bfa and others), replaces most IPA signs used for Dinka and Nuer with diacritics, with the exception of < ŋ > for the velar nasal. The implosives are marked by a preceding apostrophe: < 'b >, < 'd >, < 'y >. Umlaut is preserved in the case of < ö > and a single digraph < ny > is found. No breathiness contrast operates in Bari.

In this regard, Owen's (1908) Bari grammar, with its abundance of umlauts, accented letters and digraphs (among which... < ng >) but no special symbol, was certainly better.





### **Ɔutu modon ko Ɔwajik kanyit buker.**

Ɔutu lele kata karen kanyit a Goke. Lepen lo gwe a modon parik. I diɲit nagon lepen dene adi nye gwe adara ko kulya ti togolon a luɲundye Ɔwajik kanyit liɲ kak. Kirut a lepen kulyani ko lepenat adi "Ɔwajik kwe! Ta lo meddya nan ɲilo, nan gwe a modon parik, riɲit nio kitayet gwe 'bayin, ko konyen kwe tine bulö meddya 'bura, swö kwe tine bulö yinga 'bura. Nan yöhö yinga kasu i kutusen ko ta molu wulundyö wulundyö kitajin nagon a nyo."

Kirut a kilo Ɔwajik kanyit poki i wu'yö na katajin kase gelen gelen. Togelen adi, nye yöhö kita. na katugwörönit lo toro'bo, tomurek adi nye yöhö kita na tumunit, tomusala adi nye yöhö kita na karyakanit lo kisuk ti ɲutu, a toiɲwan adi nye kita a kakurunita tobuker adi nye 'dekan kita na yuggu na kisuk.

I mukök nagon lepenat liɲ awu'yö kitajin kase, a monye lose kulyani ko lepenat adi, "Ana'but Ɔwajik kwe, nan aje yin kasu i kutusen. Ta lo meddi. Kogwon kulye kasu kilo

Figure 5. An excerpt from a page in Bari (Jujumbu Kendya ko Bari Buk Tomusala 1999: 52)

Mödö (or Jur; Bongo-Bagirmi; bex) is another language of South Sudan. The orthography used in Perrson and Perrson's (1991) dictionary and grammar resembles Bari in its use of < 'b > and < 'd >, to which < 'j > for a palatal implosive is added. Again, < η > marks a velar nasal and it further appears in the digraphs < ηg >, < ηb > and < ηm > for prenasalized phonemes.

Umlaut is used for < i̇ >, and < ė >, and a special sign for < ɔ̇ >.

The extensive use of IPA symbols seems restricted to languages of South Sudan for the historical reasons outlined earlier in this section; digraphs, accents and apostrophes are rather used elsewhere. The orthography proposed for Rendille (East Cushitic; rel) of Kenya makes wide use of digraphs but also of an apostrophe preceding the sign for the modal stop in < 'b > and < 'd > for the implosives, and also, strangely enough, in < 'h > for the pharyngeal /ħ/. An apostrophe following a digraph is used in < ng' > for the velar stop (following the orthography of Swahili). The other digraphs are < ch > for the modal affricate /tʃ/, < kh > for the velar fricative /χ/, and < ny > for the palatal nasal. Acute accents mark a high tone. This is all the more disconcerting since Rendille belongs with Somali to the same sub-subgroup of East Cushitic (according to current classifications, they make up, together with Boni, the eastern branch of Omo-Tana, itself a major branching of East Cushitic). As we shall see in more detail below, the orthography of Somali could have provided a solution for a few phonemes, such as < dh > instead of < 'd >. Although in Somali the corresponding phoneme is postalveolar (/d/) rather than implosive (/ɗ/), it could easily have been adopted and provide a model for \* < bh > instead of < 'b > for bilabial /b/. While the use of the same pattern for \* < hh > for the voiceless pharyngeal /ħ/ could have caused problems (in gemination), Somali offered an easy viable alternative in its use of < x >.

In Rendille, < x > is just one among a sizable number of unused signs of the Latin alphabet; the others are < c >, < p >, < q >, < w > and < z >.

## Alohi Chiirnaan

(The Rendille Alphabet)

Chi' Lagaabicho ( <i>Short</i> )	Chi' ladeeraacho ( <i>Long</i> )
A, a..... abár	Aa, aa .....abaár
B, b..... haabáb	bb .....`dábbal
Ch, ch..... siicha	cch .....ficcha
D, d..... disda	dd .....daddaáb
'D, 'd..... `dóo'd	'dd .....`dá'ddab
E, e..... ébel	Ee, ee.....eéra
F, f..... fálfí	ff .....áf far
G, g..... daaga	gg .....haggá
H, h..... á kaaha	hh .....á kaahha
'H, 'h..... á 'hiira	('hh .....á a'hhiira)
I, i..... íbir	Ii, ii.....í'íd
J, j..... Jíirá	jj .....jíijjo
K, k..... kákahe	kk .....díkkil
Kh, kh..... kháakhle	kkh .....íkkho
L, l..... léyley	ll .....lallaáb
M, m..... maalím	mm .....mammáh
N, n..... naánah	nn .....innó
Ng', ng'..... ng'óoj	—
Ny, ny..... nyarnyaár	nny .....nyannyaame
O, o..... órro	Oo, oo .....óor
R, r..... Rén'dille	rr .....araárri
S, s..... síbbis	ss .....sússukh
T, t..... tífto	tt .....hátto
U, u..... usú	Uu, uu.....úur
W, w..... Waákh	ww .....hawwées
Y, y..... yaáy	yy .....yéyyah

Figure 6. The Rendille alphabet (Wori Haaggane MARKO Khore 1993)

Very similar is the alphabet devised by the same missionary body for Dhaasanac (East Cushitic; dsh). Here again we find no IPA symbols and the implosives are represented with an apostrophe preceding the sign for the

voiced stop; as in Rendille, acute accents (in Dhaasanac, on both moras of a long vowel) mark a high tone.

At the same time the alphabet has quite a few peculiarities: the digraph < dh > marks a laminal voiced fricative /ð/, and does not take into account that an alternative pronunciation with its apical counterpart /z/ is well attested in all positions (Tosco 2001: 19).

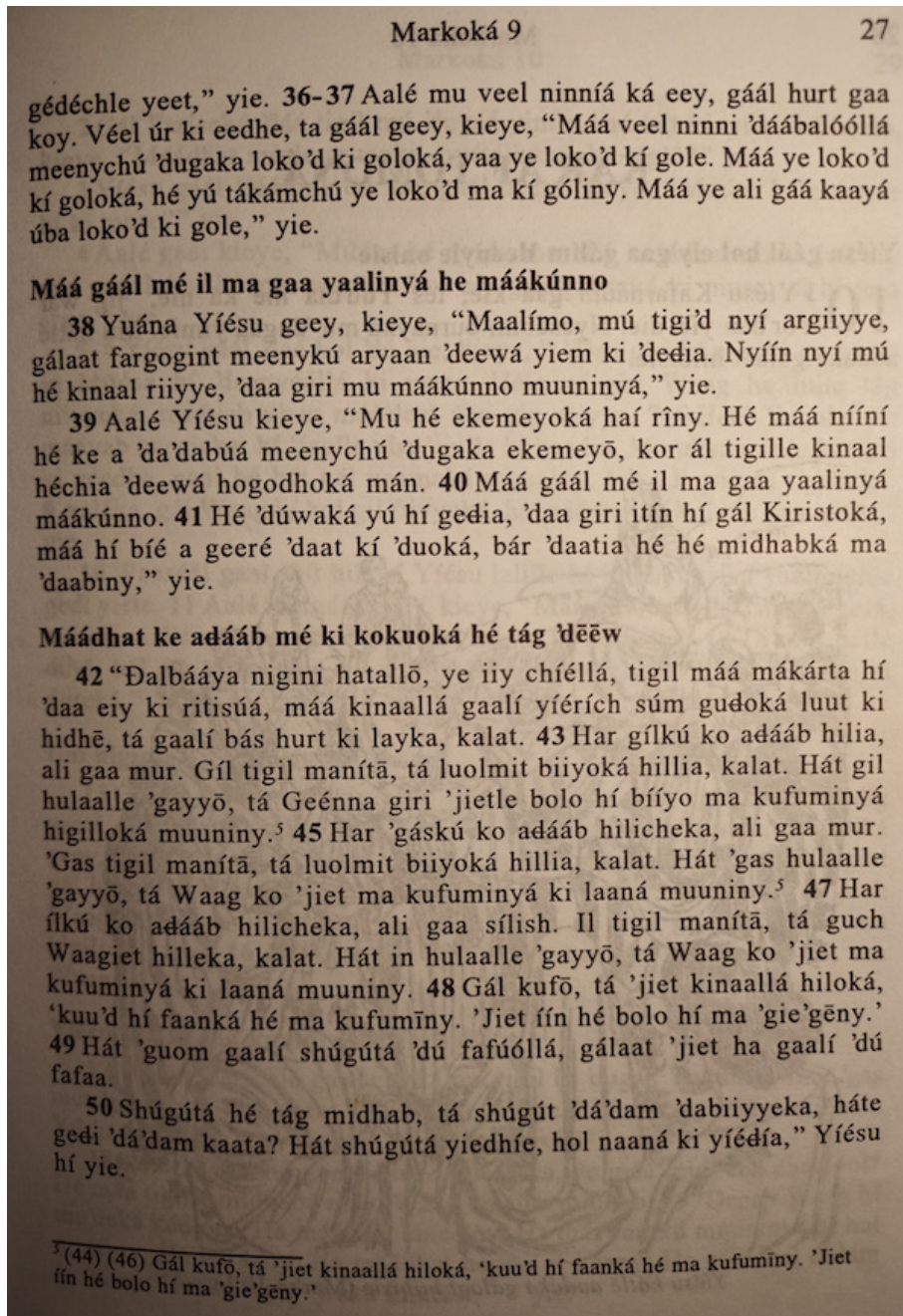


Figure 7. An excerpt from a page in Dhaasanac (War'gat Markoká 1997: 27)

Both diacritics and special symbols are found in the orthography of Gawwada (East Cushitic; gwd) proposed by the SIL International Literacy Department (with the additional complication that both the Latin alphabet and the Ethiopic syllabary are suggested). The apostrophe here follows the consonantal sign and marks an ejective (thus following the IPA conventions) in < c' >, < k' > and < t' >. IPA symbols are used for the pharyngeals: / ʕ / and / ħ /. Apart from < sh > and < ny >, the list comprises the use of < h > as second element for the implosives: < bh > and < dh >, but with no value in the case of < ch > for the affricate /tʃ/ (as in English) and of < qh > simply for /q/. The last two also imply that no “bare” < c > nor < q > are used, as well as no < z > nor < v >.

IKKITO POKO ሳALENA				ALE ALPHABET			
a  ለ	aa  ለ	b  ብ	ch  ሻ	c'  ሞ	d  ድ	e  ኪ	
arapko	aaxe	bahante	chepፍe	c'iwc'iwe	delle	telte	
ee  ለ	f  ፍ	g  ግ	h  ስ	u  ሀ	ፍ  ሻ	i  ኪ	
eero	fileye	gupo	harre	hisse	ፍardo	ilge	
ii  ስ	j  ድ	k  ኪ	h k'  ሻ	l  ለ	m  ሞ	n  ግ	
iibaare	mirja	kocho	k'alk'allo	leeፍo	maango	niiche	
ny  ሻ	o  ኪ	oo  ኪ	p  ጥ	qh  ሻ	r  ር	s  ስ	
nyannya	orpo	toomo	pasho	qhole	rigte	siito	
sh  ሻ	t  ጥ	t'  ጥ	u  ስ	uu  ስ	w  ወ	hx  ኪ	
shenge	tawo	t'ooqhanako	urrache	uuffe	waalo	hxaare	
	y  ድ	'  ኪ	bh  ኪ	dh  ስ	q  ኪ	z  ኪ	
	yiyako	lo'o	bhaqhasa	dhilanko	quladi	izah	

Trial alphabet chart produced by the participants of the language development workshop held in Arba Minch, 2012. Illustrations © 2001 SIL International Literacy Department

Figure 8. A proposed Gawwada alphabet (<https://www.alepeople.org/sites/www.alepeople.org/files/ALPHABET%20of%20%CA%95ALE.jpg>)

It is noteworthy that many of these orthographies, and in particular those of Kenya and Ethiopia, completely disregard the practical alphabets designed from the seventies for languages which are structurally and phonologically similar: just as no use of the solutions devised for Somali is made for the very similar Rendille, no attention is paid in the case of Dhaasanac to the contemporary Latin orthographies of Ethiopia (where a majority of the Dhaasanac live). It is to these innovative orthographies that we turn our attention in the next section.

### 3. EXAPTATION, OR: LEARNING TO USE WHAT YOU HAVE

#### 3.1. PLAYING WITH WILDCARDS

The Horn of Africa is home to at least two success stories among African Latin-based orthographies: two official or national languages in their respective countries and with many million speakers as well as potential users of written texts: these are Somali and Oromo (both East Cushitic; som, orm). Somali came first, with its orthography officialized in 1972.

The long, troubled history of the graphization of Somali and of the Somali language policy has been told many times and is the subject of whole monographs: Caney (1984) mainly deals with linguistic issues—history of the orthography and corpus planning; Labahn (1982) with the orthography as well as language policy in general. Laitin (1977, 1992 – the latter within the larger African context) explores the political side (although overtly biased in favor of state interventionism and nation building; for a critique cf. Tosco 2014). Short historical overviews are provided in Tosco (2010, 2015).

Predictably, Somali uses the digraphs < sh > for /ʃ/ and < kh > for /χ/, as well as < dh > for a postalveolar /dʒ/. Uvular /q/ is marked by < q > and vowel length by redoubling the sign for the vowel. Pitch is not marked (as well as vowel backing/advancement). Glottal stop is only marked when not in word-initial position by an apostrophe: < ' >.

The main problem was the absence of an established and practical way to mark the pharyngeals /ʕ/ and /ħ/.

The genial solution came with the use of unmodified Latin letters, namely < c > for voiced /ʕ/ and < x > for voiceless /ħ/ (< p >, < v >, and < z > remain unused).

Consciously or not, it was realised that any Latin alphabet is bound to have a few “wildcards”: symbols that simply come for free with the choice of using the Latin alphabet but have no clear phonemic value to start with, and are therefore available to get assigned, in principle, any value.

A few Latin letters are born as wildcards: e.g., < q > and < c > already in Latin marked allophones of /k/. In the conclusions we will argue that, nevertheless, < q > is worse than < c > as a wildcard. As for < x >, in Latin it was used since the beginning for the cluster /ks/ and has been put to many different uses in different orthographies around the world (its value as /ʃ/ in Maltese, Basque and many other languages is a major example).

Other letters become wildcards on a language-specific basis whenever a phoneme usually expressed by that letter does not exist. Of course, being language-specific, the value of a wildcard is also much “lighter” than the established value of another letter: it is therefore particularly prone to substitution.

When establishing an orthography for ‘Afar (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea; aar), the orthography of neighboring Somali was a possible choice. ‘Afar is spoken in Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, but in Djibouti only

competition with Somali and the ideological need to obfuscate similarities led instead to an orthography where the peculiar choices of Somali were shuffled: pharyngeals < c > and < x > of Somali became < q > and < c >, while the digraph < dh > for the postalveolar /dʒ/ (a rather obvious choice) became /x/. As ‘Afar (or, in the new orthography, Qafar) has no uvular stop, no new symbol for /q/ was needed. Remarkably, all the other signs of Somali were kept.

The “Djibouti” orthography is used in the ‘Afar regional state of Ethiopia alongside the Ethiopic syllabary.

In Eritrea, after independence (1991; *de jure* 1993), the languages of Eritrea have been provided with a unified, national Latin orthography from which they depart only for phonemes peculiar to single languages (Semitic languages Tigrinya, Tigre and, of course, Arabic are written, respectively, in the Ethiopic syllabary and in Arabic script). For the ‘Afar minority of Eritrea and the very similar Saho (East Cushitic; sssy) the Somali choices of the 1970’s have been implemented (plausibly in order to sever the links with the ‘Afar in other countries). In the end, three nation states have implemented two different orthographies for similar languages, with one and the same language (‘Afar becoming either Qafar in Djibouti or Cafar in Eritrea) having two different orthographies in different countries (three counting the Ethiopic syllabary).

phoneme	Somali		‘Afar (Djibouti)		‘Afar, Saho (Eritrea)		gloss of examples
ʕ	c	cad	q	qado	c	cado	“(to be) white)”
ħ	x	xaakin	c	caakim	x	xaakim	Somali “judge;” ‘Afar “governor;” Saho “doctor” (from Arabic ḥākim “ruler”)
dʒ	dh	dhal	x	xale	dh	dhale	“to give birth to”

Figure 9. Somali, ‘Afar and Saho: wildcards and political choices (adapted from Savà and Tosco 2008: 125)

The principle of using wildcards has been further implemented in Ethiopia in connection with the marking of ejectives in Oromo. A brilliant combination of the criteria of simplicity and frequency is used – supplemented in case by adherence to tradition. The overall picture is apparently puzzling but makes actually good sense:

modal		ejective	
IPA	orthography	IPA	orthography
/p/	< p >	/p'/	< ph >
/t/	< t >	/t'/	< x >
/k/	< k >	/k'/	< q >
/tʃ/	< ch >	/tʃ'/	< c >

Figure 10. Modal and ejectives in the Oromo orthography

For the rarely used (mostly in loans) bilabials, plain < p > stands for modal /p/ and the digraph < ph > for its ejective counterpart /p'/: an additional phonetic feature is paralleled by an additional graphic symbol. For the velars, < k > stands for the modal and < q > for the ejective (here following a long Orientalist and Ethiopianist tradition). Wildcards are instead used in alveolar stops and alveopalatal affricates. For the former, < t > stands for /t/ and < x > for ejective /t'/. For affricates, where < c > is a wildcard and the digraph < ch > a well-established solution for /tʃ/, frequency decides, and while < ch > is reserved to modal (and less common in Oromo) /tʃ/, simple < c > stands for its ejective counterpart /tʃ'/.

The web of motivations at play here is certainly complex; the present writer remembers that, when presented and discussed at the (first) International Symposium on Cushitic and Omotic Languages (Köln, 1986), “some modifications were recommended on the basis of phonetic consistency” (Heine 1988: 620). These recommendations – supported by most scholars (and a very young and naïve writer of these lines) – consisted basically in proposing the use of digraphs with < h > as second element for the ejectives.

Wisely, the Oromo did not pay attention to intellectuals and “experts” and stuck to their decisions. Since then, the Oromo solution has been highly influential in Ethiopia and has been followed in recent years by other Latin-based orthographies (cf. Savà and Tosco 2008). One could even say that the use of < x > for /t'/ has become a shibboleth of the new Ethiopian alphabets for a geographically and genetically diverse array of languages. While only Koorete (North Omotic; kqy) and Sidamo (East Cushitic; sid) are presented here, the examples could be multiplied.



## Erunxo 23

### Wora Go'unxe.



Goodiyaadani lam'i e gaditini anke wonta mixe mixhiya hangicha. Mosheni Naaqoni u sungicha. Wora go'unxe erusaxi uso erussechsha wolla zeersine u hangicha. Godiyaadey be gadita "woray abasuna go'e" hidi oyco. Moshey "woray bo'ose zawa, mooshshuna ira gooche, sahay wulqana shohutte ooxesekko e go'e!" hido. Naaqoy "woray keexuse bokkule, eexuse mixe, keemose maata, gatese dooshshe ingesukko e go'e" hido.

2. Bensy be pishsharo eruxi zawakko botti yoodo.

Goodiyaadey "Aadekko" hidi e itusso baane bidzi gadhesaxe u beedo. Sijaara ushichine e shife wora e dato. Ye wodey bono maaqicho gisha tamay izziyaw woraa ayto. Tamay wora miye aytine Goodiyaadani e gaditini wolla uydo. Ye ganda yecha geriti kessi tama bayssu. Goodiyaadani e gaditani ye geriti suuzzo. Ye woraa tama datta ade aytti tufe /higge/ zawa u anso.

Figure 11. An excerpt from a page in Koorete (Koorete Erunxi Pishsharo 1992: 58)

“Maammashsha afi’rinokki coyinna maxine worroonikki waasi mittoho” yinanni.

Wona qummi assinihu gede maammashshu gosà mitteyire lowore leellishanno. Lawishshu gede “a” nni-”g” geeshsha shiqinshiri sidaamu egeñnonso ‘Jajja roorsi’ran-no?, Cimeessa ayirrisanno?, Loosiraanchonso cee’maleessa baxanno?, halaale baxanno, Kaphphona?, wkl. Yinanni xa’mora dawaro ikkannore afi’rino. Hakkonni daafira maammashshu lowore afisiisa dandaanno.

Mittu affi wolu ledó afi’rino fiixooma leellishate maammashshu lowo kaa’lo ikkanno. Qoleno qaallate tíro maxaafa qixeessate hawama rakkino qaallanna insano assine tuqqinanni gari maammashshu aana leellanno. Hakkonnira maxaafa togooha anga afi’ra borrote loossa duuchchu danitera irkishsha ikkitanno.

Maammashshu kulamanno gara la’nanni woyite konni afii maammashsha calla ikkikinni qaalla duuchchate maammashshi roore yanna kaimu ikkito mitemite hasaanbannita ledó afi’riño. Mitemite honge hasaanbanni woyite kayinni, haransinenna kaima ikkire ka’a qolle agurre shiqinshanni. Konne xaphphi assini maammashsha kulinke mannino, kaima ikkire egeñne hee’renni haranse calla kulanna macciishinanni. Ikkona kayinni

### XIII

Figure 12. An excerpt from a page in Sidamo (Itiyophiyu... 1990: xiii)

When you accept the principle of wildcards, there is no need to stick to the Oromo solution: < x > again, but in this case for the voiced uvular fricative /χ/, has recently been proposed by SIL for Ts’amakko (East Cushitic, Ethiopia; tsb; closely related to Gawwada). Savà (this volume) has taken this proposal over in his proposed orthography of Ongota (unclassified, Ethiopia; bxe).

### 3.2. BREAKING AWAY FROM TRADITION

Other orthographic uses seem to point in the same direction: a progressive liberation from the bounds imposed by traditional (European) orthographic norms.

Digraphs are traditionally treated as combination of two letters and they are alphabetized under the first element only. Thus, *church* is listed in English dictionary after *campaign* but before *cut*, and the Somali-Italian dictionary (DSI 1985) follows this principle, with, e.g., *shabeel* ‘leopard’ after *saddex* ‘three’ but before *sug* ‘to wait.’

As the number of digraphs and wildcards as well as the use of a Latin orthography increase, the weight of tradition decreases. This is when a digraph becomes a “letter:” an autonomous, single grapheme. Already in the Somali-English dictionary (Zorc 1993) all words beginning with < dh >, < kh > and < sh > (the only digraphs of the Somali orthography) are listed separately, but still after their first element: < dh > after < d >, < kh > after < k >, and < sh > after < s >.

Moreover, in a first stage the first element only is doubled in gemination; in Somali, e.g., < ddh >, rather than < dhdh >, stands for /d̥d̥/, as in *gabaddha* ‘the girl’ (more commonly actually spelled *gabadha*). Once perceived as single letters, each of the elements of a digraph are instead doubled in gemination, yielding, e.g., Wolaytta *geeshsha* ‘clean, pure’.

The next step follows logically: if, e.g., < sh > is no longer < s > + < h > but a brand-new autonomous symbol, the order of digraphs in the alphabet can and must change. This is what happens in recent Ethiopian dictionaries of languages using the Latin orthography, with the digraphs increasingly found all together at the end of the list, as in the Wolaytta dictionary (Tophphiyaa 1991), with < ch >, < ph >, and < sh > following in this order after < z >, and in Oromo (Mekuria 1998) with < ch >, < dh >, < ny > and < sh > (no word begins with < ph >).

Still, in capitalization the first letter only is capitalized: tradition is adhered to when it implies a simpler solution.

Even a completely different tradition in listing letters may now be accommodated. The following Table is the alphabetical chart present in a Koorete primer. Following the pattern of the Ethiopic syllabary, vowels are listed as columns and consonants as rows, for a total in Koorete of ten vowels (five short and five long) and thirty consonants. Apart from this general graphical arrangement, the order of consonants is the traditional Western one (but the very last consonant is < th >). The digraphs are particularly abundant in Koorete: < ch >, < dh >, < jh >, < ny >, < ph >, < sh >, < xh >, < dz > and < th >. They are listed after (and under) their first element (< ch > after < c >, < dh > after < d >, and so on), rather than all together at the end.

The order of vowels, too, follows the traditional Western one, with each long vowel after its short counterpart.

5.4 diizo beyta tato.

	a	aa	e	ee	i	ii	o	oo	u	uu
b	ba	baa	be	bee	bi	bii	bo	boo	bu	buu
c	ca	caa	ce	cee	ci	cii	co	coo	cu	cuu
ch	cha	chaa	che	chee	chi	chii	cho	choo	chu	chuu
d	da	daa	de	dee	di	dii	do	doo	du	duu
dh	dha	dhaa	dhe	dhee	dhi	dhii	dho	dhoo	dhu	dhuu
f	fa	faa	fe	fee	fi	fii	fo	foo	fu	fuu
g	ga	gaa	ge	gee	gi	gii	go	goo	gu	guu
h	ha	haa	he	hee	hi	hii	ho	hoo	hu	huu
j	ja	jaa	je	jee	ji	jii	jo	joo	ju	juu
jh	jha	jhaa	jhe	jhee	jhi	jhii	jho	jhoo	jhu	jhuu
k	ka	kaa	ke	kee	ki	kii	ko	koo	ku	kuu
l	la	laa	le	lee	li	lii	lo	loo	lu	luu
m	ma	maa	me	mee	mi	mii	mo	moo	mu	muu
n	na	naa	ne	nee	ni	nii	no	noo	nu	nuu

ny	nya	nyaa	nye	nyee	nyi	nyii	nyo	nyoo	nyu	nyuu
p	pa	paa	pe	pee	pi	pii	po	poo	pu	puu
ph	pha	phaa	phe	ph ee	phi	phii	pho	phoo	phu	phuu
q	qa	qaa	qe	qee	qi	qii	qo	qoo	qu	quu
r	ra	raa	re	ree	ri	rii	ro	roo	ru	ruu
s	sa	saa	se	see	si	sii	so	soo	su	suu
sh	sha	shaa	she	shee	shi	shii	sho	shoo	shu	shuu
t	ta	taa	te	tee	ti	tii	to	too	tu	tuu
v	va	vaa	ve	vee	vi	vii	vo	voo	vu	vuu
w	wa	waa	we	wee	wi	wii	wo	woo	wu	wuu
x	xa	xaa	xe	xee	xi	xii	xo	xoo	xu	xuu
xh	xha	xhaa	xhe	xhee	xhi	xhii	xho	xhoo	xhu	xhuu
y	ya	yaa	ye	yee	yi	yii	yo	yoo	yu	yuu
z	za	zaa	ze	zee	zi	zii	zo	zoo	zu	zuu
dz	dza	dzaa	dze	dzee	dzi	dzii	dzo	dzoo	dzu	dzuu
th	tha	thaa	the	thee	thi	thii	tho	thoo	thu	thuu

Figure 13. A Koorete alphabetical chart (Koorete Bidzunxo Suma Erunxi Pishsharo 1990: 86-87)

### 3.3. WILDCARDS GALORE

But why to stop at “natural” wildcards? Any unused symbol may come to good use.

We go here beyond the notion that Latin symbols for consonant clusters (as in the case of < x >) or of original allophones (< c >) are “free:” any sign that happens to be useless in the language is up for grabbing and re-use.

Nara (Nilo-Saharan or isolate; nrb) of Eritrea offers maybe the most radical solution so far, and puts into relief as well a few problems.

Most solutions found in the Latin orthography of the languages of Eritrea are not peculiar at all, others partially are: e.g., a palatal nasal is < gn > in Saho, as in Italian, rather than < ny >. Again, shunning the Oromo (and therefore, in a way, the Ethiopian solution), an ejective /t'/ is not marked by < x > but by < th > in Bilin (Central Cushitic; byn) and Saho (East Cushitic; ssy), while < ch > marks an ejective palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ'/ – it was seen above that in Oromo it marks the modal. It was also seen above that Saho < c > marks the voiced pharyngeal /ʕ/ (*à la* Somali); a diacritic is therefore introduced for the modal affricate /tʃ'/: < č >.

The velar nasal is of course a problem for any Latin-based alphabet: its most common rendering is < ng >, but many other solutions have been or are in use, such as Swahili and Xhosa (both Bantu; swa and xho) < ng' >, < nh > in Galician (Western Romance) and Nawat (or Pipil; Aztecán), or simply < g >, as in Fijian (Austronesian).

Although absent in word-initial position the velar nasal is also phonemic in Piedmontese (Western Romance), where it is also probably more common than the alveolar nasal. The orthographic solution devised for Piedmontese is to use < n > where no ambiguity may arise and have a hyphen follow it in other cases (i.e., between vowels) yielding < n- >. This of course conflicts with hyphenation, but is consonant with the liberal use of hyphens in other points of the orthography (such as in order to separate clitics, following the French model).

Nara is most illuminating in its use of < v > for the velar nasal. Certainly, the presence of prenasalized voiced stops preempted the use of < ng > – as this digraph was chosen, quite correctly, to represent a prenasalized /<sup>h</sup>g/. Still, < v > is a brave choice, and to the best of my knowledge unique. In their proposed orthography for Ts'amakko of Ethiopia, SIL has used likewise < v >, but for a voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, and Savà (this volume) proposes to copy this in Ongota.

<i>b</i>	/b/	Voiced bilabial stop
<i>d</i>	/d/	Voiced alveolar stop
<i>t</i>	/t/	Voiceless alveolar stop
<i>g</i>	/g/	Voiced velar stop
<i>k</i>	/k/	Voiceless velar stop
<i>mb</i>	<sup>m</sup> b/	Prenasalised voiced bilabial stop
<i>nd</i>	<sup>n</sup> d/	Prenasalised voiced alveolar stop
<i>ng</i>	<sup>ŋ</sup> g/	Prenasalised voiced velar stop
<i>gw</i>	<sup>gʷ</sup> /	Labialised voiced velar stop
<i>kw</i>	<sup>kʷ</sup> /	Labialised voiceless velar stop
<i>ngw</i>	<sup>ŋ</sup> gʷ/	Prenasalised labialised voiced velar stop
<i>f</i>	/f/	Voiceless labiodental fricative
<i>s</i>	/s/	Voiceless alveolar fricative
<i>h</i>	/h/	Voiceless laryngeal fricative
<i>sh</i>	/ʃ/	Voiceless palatal fricative
<i>ch</i>	/tʃ/	Voiceless palatal affricate
<i>j</i>	/dʒ/	Voiced palatal affricate
<i>r</i>	/r/	Voiced alveolar trill
<i>l</i>	/l/	Voiced alveolar lateral
<i>w</i>	/w/	Voiced bilabial glide
<i>y</i>	/j/	Voiced palatal glide
<i>m</i>	/m/	Voiced bilabial nasal
<i>n</i>	/n/	Voiced alveolar nasal
<i>v</i>	/ŋ/	Voiced velar nasal

Table 1. List of Nara consonant phonemes

Figure 14. The consonant phonemes of Nara (Banti and Savà 2021: 240)

Furthermore: why to stop at letters? In Ethiopia, Wolaytta (North Omotic; wal) has introduced the digit < 7 > for the glottal stop, as in *lee7iyaa* ‘thin.’ It is most commonly found reduplicated, as in *ha77i* ‘now’.<sup>4</sup> As elsewhere, the phonological presence of a glottal stop is not marked in word-initial position.

This solution is not totally isolated, as it is also found in Squamish (Coast Salish) of British Columbia (whether it was consciously copied from Squamish is unknown to the present writer). It is still apparently isolated in Ethiopia, where the apostrophe < ’ > is preferred. The two solutions are shown here through the initial page of the *Book of Hosea* in Wolaytta (*Hosee7a*) and Oromo (*Hose’aa*).

<sup>4</sup> Examples are from the Wolaytta-Amharic dictionary (*Tophphiyaa...* 1991). The English translations are the most common meanings of the Amharic entries.

< 7 > is certainly more conspicuous – and therefore less likely to be forgotten in casual writing – than the apostrophe. It is obvious that language-internal considerations – such as frequency and relevance in morphological processes – will have to be taken into account in the selection.

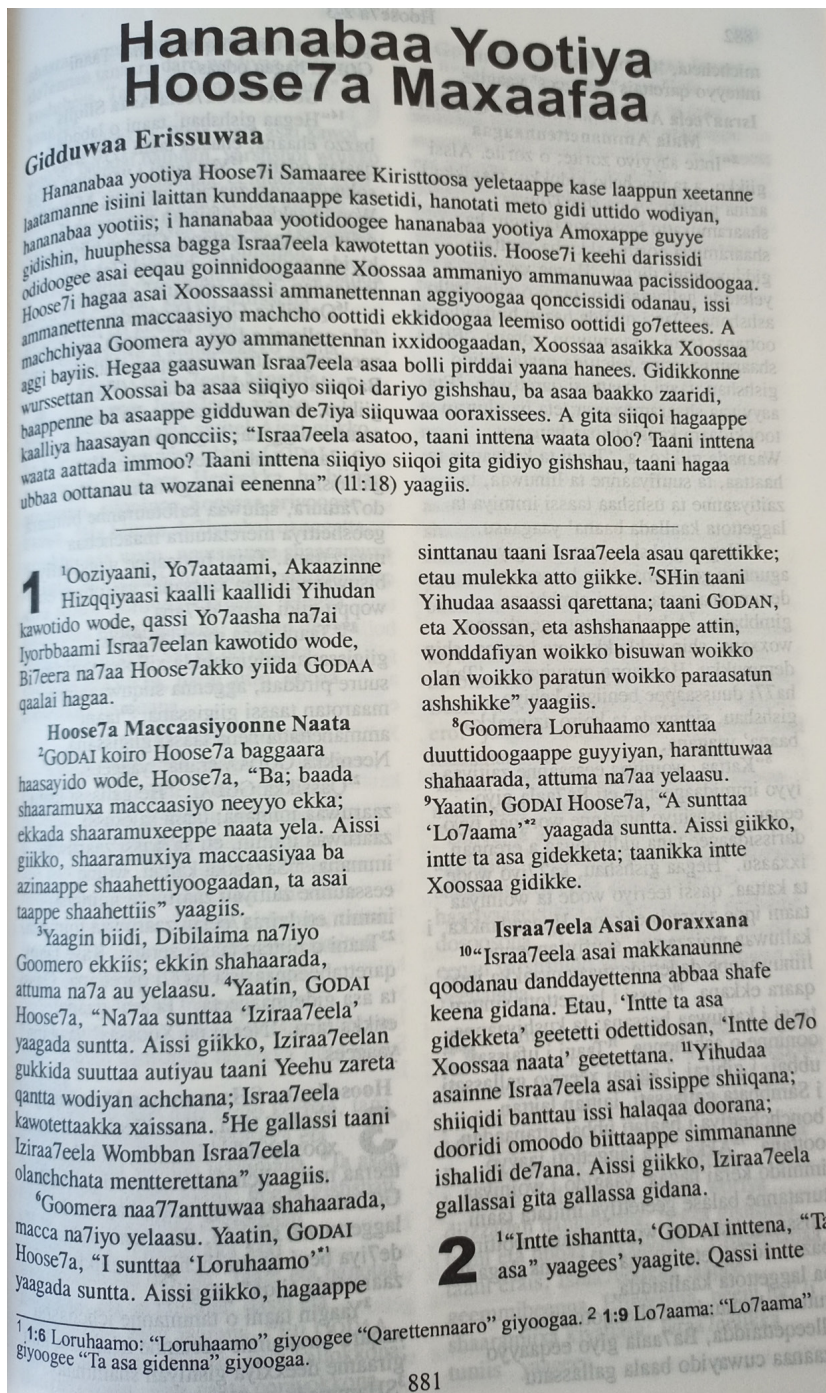


Figure 15. Hosea 1:10-11 in the Wolaytta Bible (Geeshsha Maxaafaa 1996: 881)

# Macaafa Hose'aa Raajichaa

## Ittiin Lixa

**1** <sup>1</sup> Kun dubbii Waaqayyoo isa bara Uziyaan, Yotaam, Ahaaz, Hisqiyaasis tarreetti biyya Yihudaa irratti mo'anii, Yerobi'aam ilmi Yeho'aash immoo biyya Israa'el irratti mo'etti, gara Hose'aa ilma Beriit dhufee dha\*.

\*<sup>1</sup> Isa 1:1; <sup>2</sup>Mot 14:23-29; <sup>3</sup>Amo 1:1

## Hose'aan Fuudhee Ijoollee Sadii Godhachuu Isaa

**2** Waaqayyo dura karaa Hose'aa yeroo dubbatetti, Hose'aadhaan, "Biy-yichi Waaqayyoon dhiisuu isaatiin ejja guddaa keessa lixeera; kanaaf dhaqi, dubartii ejjituu fuudhi, ijoollee ejjaas godhadhu!" jedhe\*.

\*<sup>2</sup> 2:4-10; <sup>3</sup>1; <sup>4</sup>11-19; <sup>5</sup>3-4; <sup>9</sup>1-2; <sup>11</sup>2; <sup>Er</sup> 2:20; <sup>Kes</sup> 23:18

**3** Kana irratti inni dhaqee Gomerin intala Diiblaayim fuudhe; isheen ulfoofttee ilma in deesseef. <sup>4</sup>Yommus Waaqayyo, "Yizre'el" jedhii moggaasi! Yeroo gabaabduu booddee sababii dhiiga Yizre'elitti dhangala'eef mana Yehuu nan adaba; mootummaan Israa'elis kanumaan akka raawwatu nan godha\*. <sup>5</sup>Gaafas ani dachaa Yizre'el keessatti humna warra Israa'el nan cabsa" jedheen.

\*<sup>4</sup> 2Mot 10:10-11

**6** Gomer ammas ulfoofttee, durba in deesse; Waaqayyo immoo Hose'aadhaan, "Ani si'achi mana Israa'eliif cubbuu isaanii isaaniif dhiisuuf matumaa oo'a hin argisiisu, kanaaf 'Lo-Ruhaamaa' jedhii maqaa moggaasi! [Hiikaan isaas 'Oo'a hin arganne' jechuu dha]\*. <sup>7</sup>Mana Yihudaatti garuu oo'a nan argisiisa, isaan nan oolchaa; iddaadhaan yookiis billaadhaan yookiis lolaan yookiis fardeenii fi abboota fardeenii utuu hin ta'in, ani Waaqayyo gooftaan isaanii harka kootiin isaan nan oolcha" jedhe\*.

\*<sup>6</sup> 2:3,25

\*<sup>7</sup> Mik 5:9; Zak 4:6; Isa 31:1-3; Far 20:7; 2Mot 19:32-37

**8** Gomer erga "Lo-Ruhaamaa" harma guuftee, ulfoofttee ilma in deesse. <sup>9</sup>Waaqayyo yommus Hose'aadhaan, "Lo-Amii" jedhii moggaasi, isinoo saba koo miti, anis Waaqayyo keessan

miti" jedhe. ["Lo-Amii" jechuun "Saba koo miti" jechuu dha\*].

\*<sup>9</sup> 2:25; Bau 3:14; Er 7:23

## Abdii Gara Fuula Duraa

**2** <sup>1</sup> Si'achi garuu lakkoobsi namoota hin safaramnee, isa hin lakkaa'annees in ta'a; qooda, "Isin saba koo miti" ittiin jedhame immoo, "Ijoollee Waaqayyo isa jiraataa" jedhamuuf jiru\*.

<sup>2</sup> Ijoolleen Yihudaa fi ijoolleen Israa'el tokkummaatti walitti in qabamu; walumattis nama isaan geggeessu tokko in kaafatu; guyyaan Yizre'el guddaa waan ta'uuf, isaanis biyyicha keessaa ol in dhufu\*.

<sup>3</sup> Egaa obboolota keessan, "Amii" obboleettota keessanis "Ruhaamaa" jedhaa waamaa! ["Amii" jechuun "Saba koo", "Ruhaamaa" jechuun "Oo'a argate" jechuu dha\*].

\*<sup>1</sup> Uma 22:17; Rom 9:29

\*<sup>2</sup> Er 3:18; Hos 1:4; 2:23-24

\*<sup>3</sup> 1:6,9

## Amanamuu Dhabuu Irraa Kan Ka'e Adabamuu

<sup>4</sup> Haadha keessan hadheessaa! Isheen haadha manaa koo ta'uu waan dhiifteef, anis abbaa manaa ishee ta'uu waanan dhiiseef, ishee hadheessaa! Isheen halalummaa fuula ishee irraa mul'atu, milikkita ejjummaas harma ishee gidduudhaa haa baafu\*!

<sup>5</sup> Yoo kun ta'uu dhaabaate garuu, wayyaa ishee irraa baasec akkuma gaafa dhalatteetti qullaa nan hambisa; ishees akka lafa onaa, akka lafa isa gogaa nan godha, dheebuudhaan akka isheen duutu nan godha\*.

Figure 16. Hosea 1 in the Oromo Bible (Macaafa Qulqulluu: 1118)



#### 4. A FEW CONCLUSIONS

By definition, to use a basic Latin keyboard only excludes graphic iconization (Sebba 2015), i.e., no “icon” similar to Danish < ø > or Spanish < ñ > may arise (although the use of < 7 > in Wolaytta could come very close to be an “icon”). What is possible instead is the idiosyncratic association of a grapheme to a phoneme, as repeatedly shown in this article, and with Somali < c > and Oromo < x > being maybe the most striking cases.

Second, the case of ‘Afar (Qafar) has shown that it is difficult to outsmart wildcards: in comparison to < c >, < q > is much less of a wildcard, and it has a strong association with a uvular stop or it simply marks a back allophone of /k/ (as it was in Latin and is still generally the case in modern European languages). < c >, on the contrary, can retain its Latin value as a velar stop (as in Romance languages with a non-front vowel following) and have different values with other vowels, or still be an alveolar affricate (as in Croatian, Slovenian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian...) or many other things. And it can of course become much else in digraphs or with diacritics. Neither a place nor a manner of articulation is strictly linked to it, synchronically.

The fact that no language, to the best of my knowledge, has followed ‘Afar in using < q > for a pharyngeal fricative or has given it yet another value than /q/ is certainly due to the imperfect ausbauization of ‘Afar: in Djibouti, French and Arabic are the only official languages, and both Somali and ‘Afar are conspicuous for their absence from the linguistic landscape. But I venture to say that there is something inherently awkward in making a wildcard out of a card that is not. In exaptation you turn into use what you have and is available; it is certainly more difficult (but not impossible) to change the use of a more or less functional tool.

Third, it is also apparent that wildcards are second bests. This strategy seems to be always secondary to the use of digraphs; e.g., /ʃ/ is always expressed by < sh > and an implosive /ɗ/ or postalveolar /ɗ/ is generally < dh >.

The use of digraphs is particularly shunned for vowels, except in the marking of length and notwithstanding the wide use of vocalic digraphs in many European writings.

Finally, maybe the most important – and saddest – conclusion is that many African orthographies were in a way born old: they are utterly incapable of being brought to use in the most modern technologies – pending financial investments (in developing, implementing and marketing keyboards) that the communities cannot sustain.

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<sup>1</sup> The publication year found in Ethiopian books is often in accordance with the local calendar (*Enkutataš*). It is followed here by the corresponding year in the Gregorian calendar.

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# Part 2

## Lexicography and Didactics of L2

# L'italiano come seconda lingua nei CPIA (Centri Provinciali per l'istruzione degli Adulti): Questioni e Prospettive

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## ABSTRACT

*In recent years, the adult education system has undergone a major reform that has led to the birth of the Centers for Adult Education (CPIA), autonomous educational institutions whose training offer is aimed at Italian and non-Italian adults and young adults. The present article aims to illustrate the role of CPIAs in the processes of linguistic and social inclusion and integration of foreigners. The issue requires particular attention as it poses continuous challenges, the most significant of which is the acquisition of a status of active citizenship by a large number of foreign citizens. Knowledge of the Italian language and culture, an essential tool for facilitating the integration process in the host community and participation in school courses for adults, also represents an indicator of the success of the migration process and the ability for immigrants to integrate professionally and socially in society.*

## KEYWORDS

*CPIA; adult education; lifelong learning; Italian as a second language.*

## QUESTIONI

Nell'ultimo quindicennio, l'intensificarsi dei flussi migratori internazionali ha determinato un significativo aumento della popolazione straniera in Italia le cui conseguenze hanno inciso profondamente sull'intero sistema dell'istruzione e della formazione dalla scuola dell'infanzia fino alla scuola degli adulti. Parimenti, le novellazioni normative in tema di immigrazione, come ad esempio l'introduzione del requisito della conoscenza della lingua italiana per ottenere i documenti di soggiorno nonché per aspirare alla cittadinanza, hanno avuto forti ricadute sul sistema scolastico rivolto alla popolazione adulta. Alla data del 1° gennaio 2019 la popolazione straniera residente in Italia risultava pari a 5.144.440 con un incremento di 140.000 unità rispetto al 2015 e un'incidenza dell'8,2% sulla popolazione residente, mentre alla stessa data il numero degli ingressi di cittadini non comunitari ammontava a 262.770 unità<sup>1</sup>. I paesi di provenienza risultano essere oltre 190, mentre i primi cinque paesi per numerosità sono la Romania, il Marocco, l'Albania, la Cina e l'Ucraina<sup>2</sup>.

I provvedimenti emanati in diverse occasioni dal Ministero dell'Istruzione (circolari, note, Linee guida) hanno avuto l'indubbio merito di sostenere le istituzioni scolastiche nelle scelte educative, didattiche e organizzative volte a garantire agli studenti dei paesi terzi il diritto all'istruzione e alla piena inclusione culturale e sociale<sup>3</sup>.

La prospettiva interculturale, entrata gradualmente nelle pratiche didattiche delle scuole di ogni ordine e grado a partire dai primi anni novanta del

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<sup>1</sup> Annuario statistico italiano 2019, Istat, pag. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Idos-UNAR, Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2015, Idos Roma, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Tra le circolari specifiche su questo tema ricordiamo: 1) la CM n. 24 del 1 marzo 2006 che trasmette le Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri: «la presenza di alunni stranieri è un dato strutturale e riguarda tutto il sistema scolastico. È necessario, dunque, individuare le migliori pratiche e disseminarle nel rispetto del Piano dell'offerta formativa e dell'autonomia scolastica, d'intesa con gli Enti locali e gli altri soggetti che sul territorio interagiscono per l'integrazione». Emerge un modello italiano di integrazione scolastica basato su quattro principi chiave: l'universalismo, la scuola comune, la centralità della persona in relazione con l'altro, l'interculturalità. 2) la CM n. 4233 del 19 febbraio 2014 con la quale vengono trasmesse le rivisitate Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri che affrontano secondo una prospettiva ancora più ampia e articolata la complessità del fenomeno degli studenti stranieri a scuola, fornendo indicazioni e strumenti di lavoro per individuare le modalità con le quali affrontare ciascuna situazione nella «consapevolezza che lo studente di origini straniere può costituire un'occasione per ripensare e rinnovare l'azione didattica a vantaggio di tutti, un'occasione di cambiamento per tutta la scuola».



secolo scorso<sup>4</sup>, è diventata in breve tempo il paradigma di riferimento nei processi di insegnamento e apprendimento, nella didattica, nei curricula, nelle relazioni intra ed extra scolastiche: «la via italiana all'intercultura unisce alla capacità di conoscere ed apprezzare le differenze la ricerca della coesione sociale, in una nuova visione di cittadinanza adatta al pluralismo attuale, in cui si dia particolare attenzione a costruire la convergenza verso valori comuni<sup>5</sup>».

Negli stessi anni altri due importanti e significativi provvedimenti aggiungono un ulteriore elemento di attenzione nei riguardi degli alunni e degli studenti giovani e adulti stranieri: la riforma, nel 2012, del sistema di Istruzione degli Adulti che ha portato alla nascita dei CPIA - Centri provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti e l'istituzione, nel 2016, della classe di concorso per insegnare italiano come seconda lingua A023 – lingua italiana per discenti di lingua straniera<sup>6</sup>.

Il 2012 è stato un anno significativo per *l'Adult education* in Italia. Due provvedimenti legislativi hanno contribuito al rinnovamento dell'intero sistema di *lifelong learning*: l'istituzione, grazie alla Legge 92/2012, del sistema nazionale dell'Apprendimento Permanente e la creazione dei Centri per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA). Questi ultimi hanno avuto, e tuttora continuano a svolgere, un ruolo centrale per quanto riguarda l'apprendimento della lingua italiana come L2<sup>7</sup>. Al momento in cui scriviamo oltre 250.000 utenti di cittadinanza non italiana (circa l'80% dell'utenza complessiva iscritta ai CPIA) frequentano i percorsi organizzati dai 130 CPIA attivi in Italia.

L'aspetto che maggiormente caratterizza l'impianto organizzativo e didattico del rinnovato sistema di Istruzione degli Adulti è il conferimento dell'autonomia scolastica: i CPIA costituiscono una istituzione scolastica autonoma, sono dotati di un proprio assetto organizzativo e didattico, sono articolati in reti di servizio e operano in stretta connessione con i soggetti pubblici e privati del territorio nel quale sono collocati. Ai CPIA si iscrivono gli adulti e

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<sup>4</sup> È con la CM 205 del 26 luglio 1990 che prende corpo il principio del coinvolgimento degli alunni italiani in un rapporto interattivo con gli alunni immigrati in funzione di un reciproco arricchimento.

<sup>5</sup> Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, *La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri*, Roma, 2007, pag. 9.

<sup>6</sup> La classe di concorso A23 è stata istituita con DPR n. 19 del 14 febbraio 2016 – Regolamento recante disposizioni per la razionalizzazione ed accorpamento delle classi di concorso a cattedre e a posti di insegnamento, a norma dell'articolo 64, comma 4, lettera a), del decreto-legge 25 giugno 2008, n. 112, convertito, con modificazioni, dalla legge 6 agosto 2008, n. 133 – pubblicato sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 43 del 22 febbraio 2016 – S. O. n. 5.

<sup>7</sup> I CPIA vengono istituiti con DPR 263 del 29 ottobre 2012 – Regolamento recante norme generali per la ridefinizione dell'assetto organizzativo didattico dei Centri d'istruzione per gli adulti, ivi compresi i corsi serali, a norma dell'articolo 64, comma 4, del decreto-legge 25 giugno 2008, n. 112, convertito, con modificazioni, dalla legge 6 agosto 2008, n. 133, pubblicato nella Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 47 del 25/02/2013.

i giovani adulti italiani e stranieri che abbiano compiuto il sedicesimo anno di età, che siano privi del titolo conclusivo del primo ciclo di istruzione o che non abbiano assolto all'obbligo di istruzione. In deroga al vincolo del sedicesimo anno si possono iscrivere ai percorsi di primo livello anche i Minori stranieri non accompagnati (MSNA) purché abbiano compiuto quindici anni.

La formulazione "italiano come seconda lingua" non compare mai nei dispositivi normativi di fonte legislativa. Gli ordinamenti dell'istruzione degli adulti utilizzano l'espressione percorsi di "Alfabetizzazione e Apprendimento della Lingua Italiana" (AALI) destinati agli adulti stranieri e finalizzati al conseguimento del titolo attestante il raggiungimento del livello A2 di conoscenza della lingua italiana del Quadro comune europeo di riferimento per le lingue elaborato dal Consiglio d'Europa. Le *Linee guida per il passaggio al nuovo ordinamento* del 2015 definiscono l'assetto didattico: i percorsi AALI sono articolati in due livelli A1 e A2; ciascun livello è finalizzato a sviluppare cinque ambiti di competenza: ascolto, lettura, interazione orale e scritta, produzione orale, produzione scritta<sup>8</sup>. L'intero percorso AALI ha una durata complessiva di 200 ore di cui 180 ore destinate alle attività didattiche e 20 ore destinate ad attività di accoglienza, orientamento e/o di messa a livello. I docenti impiegati per la realizzazione di tali percorsi sono maestri di scuola primaria posto comune e, in alcuni casi, docenti della classe di concorso A023. Tenuto conto che il livello A2 è indispensabile ai fini dell'assolvimento degli adempimenti previsti dalle novità in materia di immigrazione introdotte dalla Legge n. 94/2009, al fine di favorire quanto più possibile i processi di integrazione sociale ai percorsi di alfabetizzazione e di apprendimento della lingua italiana, possono iscriversi anche gli adulti con cittadinanza non italiana in età lavorativa in possesso di titoli di studio conseguiti nei Paesi di origine.

La tipica *classe* dei percorsi AALI, composta prevalentemente da migranti adulti, è plurilingue, multiculturale, eterogenea, intrisa di storie personali e problematiche spesso legate al processo migratorio. Soggetti diversi, ognuno con bisogni e attese differenti legati ora alla sopravvivenza, ora all'integrazione linguistica, al lavoro, alla regolarizzazione della propria posizione giuridica, all'età, al genere, alle condizioni di partenza, di scolarità e competenza alfabetica.

Un elemento che caratterizza gli apprendenti stranieri di immigrazione più recente è la loro diffusa disomogeneità quanto a livelli della scolarità esperita nei Paesi di origine. Soprattutto fra le donne immigrate per ricongiungimento familiare, fra i minori stranieri non accompagnati (MSNA) e i

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<sup>8</sup> Decreto Interministeriale MIUR – MEF del 12 marzo 2015 recante *Linee guida per il passaggio al nuovo ordinamento a sostegno dell'autonomia organizzativa e didattica dei Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti*, pubblicato in data 8 giugno 2015, sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale S.G. n. 130 - Suppl. Ord. n. 266.

richiedenti asilo si ritrovano situazioni di analfabetismo in lingua madre o di scarsa scolarizzazione. Ciò ha messo in evidenza la necessità di dedicare maggiore attenzione a queste nuove tipologie di bisogni linguistici. Nel 2018 il Consiglio d'Europa ha dato una prima risposta all'esigenza sempre crescente di insegnanti e formatori che si trovano spesso a dover insegnare a studenti scarsamente alfabetizzati o totalmente analfabeti mettendo a disposizione risorse per la creazione di strumenti e *framework* specifici. Nel nuovo Quadro comune europeo di riferimento, meglio noto come *Companion Volume*<sup>9</sup> sono stati inseriti dei descrittori per il livello precedente all'A1. Anche i quattro Enti certificatori attualmente attivi in Italia - Università per Stranieri di Siena, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, Società Dante Alighieri e Università Roma Tre - hanno elaborato un sillabo per il livello precedente all'A1 seguendo le indicazioni del QCER e del nuovo *Companion Volume*. *Il Sillabo per la progettazione di percorsi sperimentali di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana a livello Pre-A1*<sup>10</sup> raggruppa i migranti adulti analfabeti funzionali e/o a debole scolarità in quattro profili di alfabetizzazione<sup>11</sup>

Gruppo A. Migranti adulti che non hanno ricevuto una formazione adeguata nel loro Paese di origine, la cui lingua madre non è generalmente scritta o non è oggetto di insegnamento nel medesimo Paese. Alcuni individui di questo gruppo non hanno sviluppato l'idea di scrittura come sistema semiotico, portatrice di significato. Gli appartenenti a tale gruppo possono essere definiti pre alfabeti

Gruppo B. Migranti adulti che non hanno mai imparato a leggere e scrivere nella loro lingua madre. Nell'ambito di questo gruppo ulteriori distinzioni devono essere effettuate sulla base del sistema di scrittura della L1, nonché in relazione alla distanza tipologica tra la stessa e la L2. Gli appartenenti a tale gruppo possono essere definiti analfabeti.

Gruppo C. Migranti adulti che hanno ricevuto un'istruzione limitata nella loro lingua madre (in generale, meno di 5 anni). Gli appartenenti a tale gruppo possono essere definiti scarsamente scolarizzati o semialfabeti. Rientrano in tale gruppo coloro i quali non sono in grado di utilizzare la letto-scrittura nella maggior parte delle situazioni quotidiane, anche se riescono comunque a leggere o scrivere ad esempio parole isolate: ricordando la definizione dell'Unesco, sono considerati analfabeti. Vengono inclusi in tale gruppo anche i migranti adulti che hanno in parte perso le abilità di alfabetizzazione

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<sup>9</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Companion Volume with new descriptors*, Council of Europe, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> *Il Sillabo per la progettazione di percorsi sperimentali di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana a livello Pre-A1* è stato curato dagli Enti certificatori dell'italiano L2 con la collaborazione di Elisabetta Bonvino, Sara Di Simone, Francesca Giardini, Silvia Giugni, Giuliana Grego Bolli, Lucilla Lopriore, Eleonora Luzi, Paola Masillo, Costanza Menzinger, Sabrina Machetti, Anna Pompei e Lorenzo Rocca.

<sup>11</sup> Sillabo pre-A1, *cit.*, pagg. 5-6.

per mancanza di utilizzo della letto-scrittura, vivendo pertanto uno stato di analfabetismo di ritorno.

Gruppo D. Migranti adulti alfabetizzati: tale utenza differisce in maniera sostanziale dai tre precedenti profili in quanto con essa il percorso formativo può concentrarsi fin dall'inizio sull'apprendimento linguistico, comprendendo anche task di letto-scrittura ed individuando come obiettivi in uscita principalmente quelli stabiliti sulla base dei livelli del QCER.

Una tipologia di utenza numericamente importante nei CPIA è costituita dai richiedenti protezione internazionale, ospitati presso le strutture di accoglienza pubbliche e private sparse su tutto il territorio italiano, da nord a sud. Con riferimento agli studenti richiedenti protezione internazionale preme segnalare un fattore di criticità insito nella relazione CPIA/strutture di accoglienza e che si sostanzia in tre gradi differenti: a) è neutro laddove tale relazione rimane a un livello essenzialmente burocratico (ad es. limitata alla fase iniziale del procedimento di iscrizione); b) è ottimale laddove gli insegnanti e gli educatori delle strutture di accoglienza si pongono come figure ponte tra scuola ed extrascuola, tra CPIA e strutture di accoglienza, si manifesta un interesse reciproco rispetto ai processi educativi e di apprendimento, si definiscono momenti periodici di confronto reciproco durante l'anno scolastico; c) è pienamente efficace laddove vengono formalizzati accordi e protocolli che prevedono l'integrazione tra attività scolastiche ed extrascolastiche, la co-progettazione di percorsi individualizzati, la valorizzazione di risorse e attività complementari e di sostegno al processo formativo.

Per quanto riguarda gli strumenti di accompagnamento e di sostegno, i CPIA hanno prodotto e sviluppato numerosi strumenti e dispositivi funzionali alla didattica dell'italiano come seconda lingua nonché al miglioramento organizzativo. In ragione delle finalità possiamo definire la seguente macroclassificazione degli strumenti maggiormente utilizzati:

- a. strumenti amministrativi;
- b. strumenti per l'accoglienza;
- c. strumenti per il monitoraggio e per la valutazione.

Riportiamo nella tabella seguente, a titolo puramente esemplificativo, alcuni strumenti riconducibili alle categorie indicate:

Strumenti amministrativi	Domanda di iscrizione Informativa privacy
Strumenti per l'accoglienza	Protocollo di accoglienza Scheda di osservazione iniziale Traccia di intervista Test di ingresso di conoscenza della lingua italiana Fascicolo personale dello studente/Dossier Prove per valutare in ingresso il possesso di saperi e competenze nelle discipline non linguistiche Profilo dello studente Attestazione di riconoscimento dei crediti
Strumenti di monitoraggio e di valutazione	Patto Formativo Individuale/Piano Didattico Personalizzato Prove di verifica degli apprendimenti (iniziali, periodiche, finali) Schede di valutazione degli apprendimenti

## SCHEDA DI INFORMAZIONE INIZIALE

Si tratta di una scheda che viene redatta dai docenti preposti all'accoglienza nel periodo successivo all'iscrizione amministrativa. Contiene informazioni diverse a seconda che si tratti di minori o di adulti. Nel caso dei minori la scheda iniziale è generalmente articolata nelle seguenti aree: a) dati anagrafici, b) anamnesi familiare, c) rete sociale (parenti e conoscenti significativi), d) scolarità pregressa, e) conoscenze linguistiche (lingua madre, lingue straniere conosciute), f) valutazione delle competenze in ingresso (area linguistica, area logico-matematica, area artistico-espressiva), g) interventi personalizzati da proporre (mediazione linguistica, facilitazione linguistica, sostegno allo studio), h) profilo globale dello studente.

## TRACCIA DI INTERVISTA

Frequentemente, in fase di accoglienza, si utilizza una traccia-tipo di intervista allo scopo di ridurre la soggettività nella relazione docente-studente e fornire indicazioni precise per esplorare quelle aree necessarie a predisporre un piano di apprendimento personalizzato. Nel caso degli adulti l'intervista, condotta anche alla presenza di un mediatore linguistico, è tesa a identificare eventuali competenze acquisite in contesti di apprendimento informali, come ad esempio il lavoro, tali da poter essere riconosciute come credito.

## TEST DI INGRESSO DI CONOSCENZA DELLA LINGUA ITALIANA

Nei CPIA viene somministrato ai nuovi iscritti prima dell'avvio del percorso con l'intento di verificare il livello di conoscenza della lingua italiana posseduto e orientare lo studente al gruppo coerente con il livello posseduto.

## FASCICOLO/DOSSIER PERSONALE DELLO STUDENTE

È lo strumento che raccoglie in maniera strutturata quanto emerso durante la fase preliminare di accoglienza; documenta le evidenze identificate, contiene le prove somministrate per la valutazione delle competenze e costituisce la base per definire il successivo percorso personalizzato. Il fascicolo assolve anche la funzione di orientamento e riorientamento, di valorizzazione della storia personale, di documentazione del vissuto dello studente, nonché di supporto durante le fasi di transizione verso altri ordini di scuola, nel caso di prosecuzione degli studi.

## PATTO FORMATIVO INDIVIDUALE

Elaborato al termine della fase di accoglienza definisce il percorso di studio personalizzato, gli eventuali crediti riconosciuti, l'indicazione di eventuali percorsi integrativi e/o supplementari, le proposte per la facilitazione e la mediazione linguistica.

## PROSPETTIVE

Il CPIA rappresenta oggi l'istituzione scolastica pubblica alla quale gli stranieri adulti e giovani adulti possono rivolgersi per esigere il diritto, costituzionalmente garantito, di apprendere la lingua italiana, per conseguire un titolo di studio di primo o secondo livello nonché per acquisire le competenze di base necessarie per esercitare consapevolmente la cittadinanza e per un inserimento autonomo, responsabile e consapevole nella società. L'organizzazione dei percorsi sulla base dei risultati di apprendimento<sup>12</sup> declinati in termini di

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<sup>12</sup> In coerenza con la Raccomandazione del Consiglio e del Parlamento europeo sulla costituzione del Quadro europeo delle Qualifiche e dei Titoli per l'apprendimento permanente approvata il 23 aprile 2008 e analogamente agli altri percorsi scolastici previsti dagli ordinamenti, gli esiti dei percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana vengono descritti in termini di risultati di apprendimento. L'approccio

competenze, abilità e conoscenze favorisce negli apprendenti adulti la capacità di usare il sapere nella vita quotidiana ed è funzionale alle esigenze richieste dal contesto sociale e lavorativo. Il titolo conseguito ad esito dei percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana ha anche un valore aggiunto dal momento che ha validità legale per la richiesta dei documenti di soggiorno<sup>13</sup>. Nell'ambito degli accordi sottoscritti tra il Ministero dell'Interno e il Ministero dell'Istruzione al CPIA è stato attribuito il compito di predisporre, somministrare e valutare i test di conoscenza della lingua italiana di livello A2 e svolgere le sessioni di formazione civica previsti dall'accordo di integrazione<sup>14</sup>.

L'approccio interculturale costituisce il paradigma di riferimento della progettazione educativa, didattica e organizzativa nei CPIA. In una società in cui la presenza di migranti è sempre più presente ad ogni livello del tessuto sociale il CPIA ha adottato approcci didattici orientati alla comprensione delle diverse culture di appartenenza. Generalmente per stabilire una relazione positiva con un'altra persona e interagire con essa in maniera efficace ognuno di noi definisce le proprie strategie comunicative facendo ricorso a norme e valori che si porta dentro fin dalla nascita. Per stabilire altrettanto positi-

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basato sui risultati di apprendimento – di derivazione europea - sposta il focus dagli input dell'apprendimento (durata dei percorsi, discipline insegnate ecc.) agli output ovvero agli esiti formativi declinati in competenze, abilità e conoscenze. Per la descrizione dei risultati di apprendimento, le Linee guida assumono a riferimento il Common European Framework of Reference for Languages con riguardo ai livelli A1 e A2, è articolata in cinque ambiti (ascolto, lettura, interazione orale e scritta, produzione orale e produzione scritta) a loro volta declinati in termini di competenze, abilità e conoscenze.

<sup>13</sup> L'Italia si è uniformata alla linea europea riconoscendo la lingua come chiave di accesso al sistema: «il rilascio del permesso di soggiorno CE per soggiornanti di lungo periodo è subordinato al superamento, da parte del richiedente, di un test di conoscenza della lingua italiana» (l. 94/2009, art. 1, c.22, lett i).

<sup>14</sup> Il 10 marzo 2012 è entrato in vigore il *Regolamento concernente la disciplina dell'accordo di integrazione tra lo straniero e lo Stato*, emanato con D.P.R. 14 settembre 2011, n.179. Da tale data, gli stranieri di età superiore ai 16 anni che faranno ingresso nel territorio nazionale per la prima volta e richiedano un permesso di soggiorno di durata non inferiore ad un anno, dovranno sottoscrivere tale accordo presso le Prefetture o le Questure. Con la sua sottoscrizione invece lo straniero si impegna ad acquisire un livello adeguato di conoscenza della lingua italiana parlata (equivalente almeno al livello A2 di cui al quadro comune europeo di riferimento), una sufficiente conoscenza dei principi fondamentali della Costituzione della Repubblica, della cultura civica e della vita civile in Italia (con particolare riferimento ai settori della sanità, della scuola, dei servizi sociali, del lavoro e degli obblighi fiscali) e, laddove presenti, a garantire l'adempimento dell'obbligo di istruzione da parte dei figli minori. All'atto della sottoscrizione vengono attribuiti allo straniero 16 crediti che corrispondono al livello A1 di conoscenza della lingua italiana parlata ed a conoscenze di base di formazione civica e le informazioni sulla vita civile in Italia e, al fine di favorire questo percorso di formazione, allo straniero viene fornita la possibilità di frequentare, entro 90 giorni dalla data della sottoscrizione, un corso gratuito di formazione civica della durata complessiva di 10 ore presso i CPIA.

vamente una relazione non stereotipata con persone appartenenti a culture distanti dalla nostra dobbiamo consapevolmente compiere uno sforzo supplementare volto a ridurre quanto più possibile il filtro comunicativo creato dai valori e dalle norme della cultura di appartenenza. L'approccio interculturale alla comunicazione ci spinge, quindi, a riformulare le nostre consuete categorie culturali e di pensiero: concetti storicamente definiti come identità e senso di appartenenza vanno intesi in senso dinamico e fluido; l'interazione spesso conflittuale con l'altro dovrebbe diventare un'opportunità di arricchimento e di crescita personale e collettiva, una possibilità di confronto rispetto a valori, regole e comportamenti.

Nell'ambito delle azioni messe in campo per promuovere l'offerta formativa e per intercettare l'utenza, assumono un ruolo molto importante le relazioni extrascolastiche e le connessioni formali e informali con il territorio. A livello di microsistema il CPIA fa riferimento alla comunità straniera, ai CAS, allo SPRAR, ai luoghi di aggregazione sportiva, culturale e religiosa, ai luoghi di lavoro; a livello di mesosistema il CPIA fa riferimento alla rete dei servizi sociali, sanitari, ai centri per l'impiego e alle reti per l'apprendimento permanente. La prospettiva interculturale si arricchisce a ben vedere di significati molto più ampi e complessi in relazione alle numerose contaminazioni tra il CPIA e i diversi soggetti pubblici e privati operanti nei contesti sociali, economici e organizzativi del territorio di riferimento.

Il sistema dei CPIA appare quindi strategico per l'inclusione e la coesione sociale dei cittadini stranieri e dei migranti in quanto, grazie alla cura posta nelle pratiche didattiche di insegnamento dell'italiano come seconda lingua, favorisce l'acquisizione e lo sviluppo di strumenti culturali e cognitivi fondamentali per una piena integrazione nella comunità di accoglienza, per l'inserimento nel mercato del lavoro e per un esercizio libero e consapevole della democrazia. Occorre tuttavia intervenire a livello di macrosistema incoraggiando una radicale revisione e un potenziamento delle vigenti disposizioni normative in materia di istruzione degli adulti secondo una prospettiva onnicomprensiva di apprendimento permanente che tenga conto delle continue trasformazioni sociali, demografiche, culturali ed economiche del mondo globalizzato.



## REPERTORIO NORMATIVO

- Decreto Interministeriale del 12 marzo 2015 pubblicato in Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 130 del 6 giugno 2015 - Linee guida per il passaggio al nuovo ordinamento.
- DPR n. 286/1998 - Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero.
- DPR n. 394/1999 - Regolamento recante norme di attuazione del testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero, a norma dell'articolo 1, comma 6, del decreto legislativo 25 luglio 1998, n. 286.
- Legge n. 40 del 6 marzo 1998- Disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione degli stranieri.
- Legge n. 132 del 1 dicembre 2018 - Disposizioni urgenti in materia di protezione internazionale e immigrazione, sicurezza pubblica, nonché misure per la funzionalità del Ministero dell'interno e l'organizzazione e il funzionamento dell'Agenzia nazionale per l'amministrazione e la destinazione dei beni sequestrati e confiscati alla criminalità organizzata.
- MIUR, CM n. 301 del 8 settembre 1989 - Inserimento degli alunni stranieri nella scuola dell'obbligo: promozione e coordinamento delle iniziative per l'esercizio del diritto allo studio.
- MIUR, CM n. 205 del 26 luglio 1990 - La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale.
- MIUR, CM n. 73 del 2 marzo 1994 - Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola.
- MIUR, CM n.24 del 1 marzo 2006 - Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri.
- MIUR, CM n. 4233 del 19 febbraio 2014 - Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri.
- MIUR, prot. n. 3298 del 23 marzo 2016 - Linee guida per la progettazione dei Piani regionali per la formazione civico linguistica dei cittadini di Paesi terzi finanziati a valere sul FAMI - OS 2 - ON 2 - Azioni formative specifiche - percorsi sperimentali.

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# A bottom-up experience: The DiM project\*

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## ABSTRACT

*This contribution aims to outline the experience gained while working on the DiM project, the context within which it arose, its development as an Erasmus+ project and its resulting outcomes. The first part of this paper introduces the adult education system in Italy, which is considered a significant tool for the country to enhance its growth; it also explains the purpose of the Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIAs). The second part of the paper outlines the context in which the idea of the DiM Project took shape, having been designed from the outset as a teaching aid for students and teachers. The final section focuses on the development of the project from its inception, and highlights the work of the students who, thanks to their*

\* The authors discussed the content of this article in strict cooperation and agreement; however, for academic purposes, Angela Mormone is responsible for the section "Adult education: an opportunity for the country"; Maria Stella Battista for the section "The DiM Project in the context of CPIA Avellino"; Lia Pensabene for the sections "The idea of DiM", "First steps in the building of the DiM", "The DiM Project", "The key contribution of the experts" and "The results".

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*languages and with the assistance of teachers and experts, were the real key players in the creation of the multilingual dictionary.*

## KEYWORDS

*Adult education; DiM Project; CPIA Avellino; foreign students inclusion; L2 teaching.*

### 1. ADULT EDUCATION: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE COUNTRY

Over the last few years, lifelong learning, as an intentional individual process aimed at the acquisition of roles and skills involving a relatively stable change in the course of time, has become a key word in the welfare policies of the European Union. Among the many definitions of the term lifelong learning that have emerged over time, what makes the difference is certainly the principle of intentionality at the basis of which there is an individual who, proactively, seeks the training opportunities best suited to his/her goals and needs. On the basis of this assumption, it can be said that lifelong learning appeared as a structured concept in the second half of the 20th century, when UNESCO introduced it as a guiding principle for the renewal of education.

The need to talk about lifelong learning emerged primarily in the 1970s, in an international climate characterized by wars and poverty, when it became necessary to rethink a new educational paradigm. Later on, in the 1980s, the neo-liberal wave profoundly changed the context, and even the concept of lifelong learning shifted from a more humanistic vision to a prevalently economic one. Education was no longer understood as a tool to improve the conditions of society as a whole, but as a means to foster individual enterprise from a professional point of view. Moreover, since the 1990s there has been a new perspective on lifelong education in our country in the wake of the social inequalities created and in light of the challenges launched by the emergence of new technologies. The synthesis of this new paradigm is well framed in the working document of the European Commission, “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” dated 2000<sup>1</sup>, which underlines the interconnection between social and economic changes. Starting from this assumption, lifelong learning must promote collective development starting from the personal realisation of the individual.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Commissione delle Comunità Europee, *Memorandum sull'istruzione e la formazione permanente* Bruxelles, 30.10.2000 ([https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/dg\\_postsecondaria/memorandum.pdf](https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/dg_postsecondaria/memorandum.pdf)).

While we are strongly convinced of the intrinsic potential of the adult education sector in affirming the importance of lifelong learning as a driving force for personal and collective development, the adoption of suitable tools to promote such training has not taken place with the same speed and awareness. In recent years, the new adult education system has become an indispensable strategic infrastructure of our country's development policies, capable of responding to new training needs and anticipating and prefiguring the necessary innovations in the system. In fact, it represents a real driving force for the relaunch of learning for those who, for various reasons, have left the school system and thanks to bespoke courses devised for them, are afforded the possibility to make up for lost time, but above all have the opportunity to complete or enhance their skills.

Nevertheless, it must be said that the adult education system, although fully part of the Italian school system, still suffers from problems related to the real recognition of its identity. Starting from the principle that satisfied adults are and will be adequate citizens in society, we should note that having moved beyond a first historical phase in which it was limited to a single, albeit indispensable, compensatory function (i.e. primary literacy), adult education is now configured as a true 'existential regulator' and a tool for social inclusion. People placed in a position to exercise this right are able to guarantee full participation in social life as citizens. Talking about adult education today, therefore, means referring to the twofold instrumental and existential function it performs: the first aimed at compensating for training gaps or returning illiteracy; the second more linked to the cultural, ethical, value-based and self-fulfilling dimension of the individual's development process. In this sense, it is worth remembering that it is now recognised at an interdisciplinary level that fostering a culture of lifelong learning means promoting strategies of individual and collective empowerment, of intra- and intercultural mediation, of improvement of equal opportunities and even of promotion of well-being and democracy. In order for all this to become concrete in practice, it is first necessary to resolve the many problems/critical issues that, obviously, in Covid 19's time have become exceedingly complicated and thus have pushed for the need to renew motivation and relationships to be implemented in adults, whether they are students or not. Today, there are increasing numbers of young people with complicated paths behind them, who opt for the aforementioned evening courses. The typical student is in fact no longer just a worker who wants to resume his or her studies to improve future working opportunities, but a young man or woman who is unemployed or has never worked before and is trying to get back into the game (the so-called 'NEET'<sup>2</sup> group).

Yet data from around the world give us a scenario that is certainly not encouraging and which, among other things, sees the presence of 750 mil-

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<sup>2</sup> NEET is the acronym for "Not in Education, Employment, or Training".

lion illiterate adults. A picture that, in the specific case of the Italian situation, is even starker because of the persistence of strong inequalities between regions, due to the gap between Southern Italy and the national average<sup>3</sup>. A new glimmer of hope comes from the opportunity offered by Next Generation EU to create in Italy, finally, a truly structured system of lifelong learning in order to reach by 2025 the European objective of 50% of adults participating in training activities at least once a year.

It is in this scenario that the work of the Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIAs)<sup>4</sup> scattered across the country should be enhanced. If, on the one hand, the CPIA represents a clear institutional point of reference for the “reception, orientation and accompaniment aimed at the adult population with particular reference to disadvantaged groups” (Guidelines, 2015), on the other, this sector of our education system is called upon to implement the enhancement of the cultural and professional heritage of the person, starting from the reconstruction of his or her individual history, conveyed by the Individual Training Pact, stipulated by a Commission appointed by the CPIA itself, and certified by means of the Individual Booklet.

The CPIAs are organized as proper educational institutions and are autonomous; however, they have a rather complex internal structure. A territorial service network articulated in three levels, namely:

a) administrative unit: the CPIAs consists of a central office and delivery points (associated offices) of first level paths and literacy and Italian language learning;

b) didactic unit: CPIAs stipulate network agreements with educational institutions that provide second level courses for adults, also in order to connect first and second level courses;

c) training unit: in order to widen the training offer, the CPIAs stipulate network agreements with local authorities and both public and private organizations in order to integrate/enrich/favour the connection between different types of education and training courses.

The CPIAs also carry out research on adult education through the Regional Centre for Research, Experimentation and Development (CRRS&S). In the Guidelines of 2015<sup>5</sup>, in consideration of the curricula of the CPIAs, it is still stated that the training offer made by the CPIAs is aimed at obtaining the

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<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say that the proportion of graduates aged 30-34 is 21.6% in the South, compared to the national average of 26.9% (Source: OECD, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> In the 2014/2015 school year, the new Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) were established. The new centres carry out the functions previously carried out by the Permanent Territorial Centres (CTP) and by the schools hosting evening classes. (see <https://www.miur.gov.it/istruzione-per-gli-adulti-centri-provinciali-per-l-istruzione-degli-adulti>).

<sup>5</sup> DECREE 12 March 2015 - Guidelines for the transition to the new system to support the organisational and teaching autonomy of the Provincial Centres for Adult Education. (15A04226) (OJ General Series n.130 of 08-06-2015 - Ordinary Supplement n. 26).

certification attesting the level of education corresponding to that provided by the system in force at the end of elementary school; first and second cycle qualifications; the certification attesting to the acquisition of basic skills related to compulsory education; the qualification attesting to the achievement of a level of knowledge of the Italian language not lower than level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In this context, attention to policies for the inclusion of foreign students at the linguistic level is particularly important, considering that languages can be a source of discrimination and an obstacle to inclusion, but they can also be great resources and factors of resilience. The promotion of native languages and of the linguistic, human and cultural heritage that each immigrant brings with him/her cannot but be the point from which to start and on which to build new knowledge and new practices, linguistic but not only.

The result is the need to rethink education systems at all levels, with a special focus on the most vulnerable learners, who must be given specific instruction in order to guarantee social integration, even before educational/training integration. This is the direction in which the work of the eight CPIAs operating within Regione Campania is heading.

The educational and training dimensions that we find in this context are substantiated by competences: learning in prison, with migrants, at school, with adults, in the CPIAs, cannot but be dense with pathways that have “transversal and non transversal” competences as main axes to achieve adequate learning outcomes.

## 2. THE DiM PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF CPIA AVELLINO

On September 1, 2015 the Provincial Centre of Adult Education Avellino-Benevento came into being. It was to maintain this inter-provincial dimension until August 31, 2017 when two distinct entities, the CPIA Avellino and CPIA Benevento, were created. The centre included twenty-six service delivery points, of which six were prisons, with a student body made up primarily of foreigners mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern European countries with a level of education ranging from illiteracy to a university degree. Currently the CPIA Avellino consists of the central headquarters situated in the city of Avellino, three associated branches located in the province, four branches of prison schools located in four different prisons. All venues offer literacy courses for Italian adults as well as literacy and Italian language learning courses for adult foreigners aimed at obtaining the qualification attesting to the achievement of level A2 of knowledge of the Italian language of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages drawn up by the Council of Europe. Additional courses offered include first level courses leading to a lower secondary level qualification (equivalent to the Italian

terza media qualification); first level course - second educational period for the fulfilment of compulsory schooling comprising senior school years 1 and 2, for the fulfilment of compulsory schooling.

The DiM Project with its specific focus on learners' languages and cultures was born in this context. From the outset, it was clear that the interest shown in their own mother tongue made the students proud and happy, as they felt they were directly involved in the realisation of a project that concerned them closely. In addition, participation in the project yielded important results in the learning of Italian as a second language. There was also an impact on students not directly involved in the project, who enthusiastically took part in related workshop activities such as, for example, the production of drawings, and put forward suggestions that their own languages be included in the dictionary at a future stage.

## 2. 1 THE IDEA OF DiM

The idea of DiM arose within the CPIA Avellino in an Italian language course for foreigners (Italian L 2) during the 2016/2017 school year. The course was held at Poggio dei Signori, a facility located in Forino, which housed some sixty adult asylum seekers. The CPIA Avellino had signed a memorandum of understanding with this facility for the running of the Italian L2 course within it.

During the welcome and orientation phase which took place in the same structure, the class teacher conducted sociolinguistic interviews in the presence of the cultural mediator on duty at Poggio. The questions concerning the assessment of formal and informal competences, but also the understanding of the linguistic, cultural and experiential background, were asked by the teacher in Italian so that she could be aware of the level of L2 knowledge, and if necessary were translated into French or English. Often it was necessary, if not indispensable, to have an 'internal mediator' who was close to the language and/or ethnicity of the interviewee and could translate the answers into French, English or Italian.

The emerging class group, the vast majority of which came from sub-Saharan Africa, was composed of a group of French-speaking students from Mali, Togo, the Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Senegal; a group of English-speaking students mostly from Nigeria but also from Gambia, Ghana, Liberia and finally two students speaking only Arabic or its variants from Oman and Chad. Within the groups there were students who were not literate in their native language and had never attended school in their own country. Among them, three types of non-literate people could be distinguished: 1. those who spoke only their mother tongue and other local dialects and were unable to write in any language; 2. those who could speak but not write in the official



language (English or French) of their countries of origin; 3. those who had never attended any kind of school but spoke and wrote in French or English. Among those who had attended school, only a few had finished the course of study and obtained a diploma, all the others had attended school for a few years and only occasionally; yet another group, Muslim by faith, had only attended Koranic school and were not familiar with the Latin alphabet. A further group, from Nigeria, claimed to be able to read and write English, when in fact they were only able to hand copy flawlessly any text, despite being unable to read.

It was evident that the linguistic competence of all the students, including the non-literate ones, was remarkable since they spoke and understood at least three or four languages. Their ability to communicate within the various groups was surprising. There was something that I would call “linguistic solidarity” that allowed everyone to communicate with each other and with everyone else. This solidarity manifested itself very clearly within the same language group and was reinforced during classroom activities by reaching out to the other language groups, as in the case of the two Arabic-speaking students whom everyone tried to help even though they did not know Arabic. The idea of DiM was conceived in the multilingual and multicultural context of this classroom where a vast and varied world of different languages, sounds and cultures was enclosed within a few square metres. It was an opportunity to see the students from a different vantage point, as knowledge holders, giving voice to their identity through their native languages.

## 2. 2 FIRST STEPS IN THE BUILDING OF THE DiM

The idea behind the project was to take advantage of the linguistic skills of the students in the class to create a glossary of their languages, to be used as a teaching tool useful to both teachers and learners. The starting point for the experimental work was the lexical list A1 of the *Profilo della lingua italiana*<sup>6</sup> made up of about 500 headwords of level A1 of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

The lemmas were listed in alphabetical order on a sheet containing three columns: the first column contained the lemma in Italian; the second column

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<sup>6</sup> *Profilo della lingua italiana. Livelli di riferimento del QCER A1, A2, B1 e B2* is the result of the project entitled “Descrizioni dei livelli di riferimento per le lingue nazionali e regionali” (DLR), promoted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe in collaboration with the CVCL (Centre for Language Evaluation and Certification) of the University for Foreigners of Perugia and other international institutions (Cervantes Institute, University of Cambridge, Université Paris III - Sorbonne nouvelle, among others). (see: [https://www.hubscuola.it/profilo\\_lingua\\_italiana/origini.html](https://www.hubscuola.it/profilo_lingua_italiana/origini.html)).

contained the translation into English or French (for French or English speaking users); the third column was empty for the insertion of the translation into one's own language. The students were divided into groups speaking the same language.

From the teacher's observations it could be inferred that the task was carried out with a great deal of participation and interest, often outside class time, and was quite challenging. There were lengthy discussions about each term before finding the one that everyone thought best corresponded in translation from one language to another.

The writing phase was the most complicated and was entrusted by the group to the best student, usually to the pupil with the greatest number of years of schooling. The difficulty in transliterating the sounds of one's own language, mostly used orally, into a written form was evident. After the arduous phase of writing, the teacher recorded the lemmas with a mobile phone.

During the school year, the following languages were collected and recorded for A1 level: Kotokoli spoken in Togo; Bambara spoken in Senegal; Igbo, spoken in Nigeria. During the following school year (2017/2018), Twi language lemmas for A1 and A2 level were collected and recorded in another class consisting of 23 learners all from Ghana and belonging to the same ethnic group. Urdu language for A1 level was also collected with the help of a Pakistani student with a degree in foreign languages from Pakistan, attending a first period course (corresponding to the eighth grade).

### 3. THE DiM PROJECT

Already in its experimental phase, in the two years preceding the funding of the project by the European Community, the students involved had shown great interest and participation by working also after school hours. The project in its embryonic stage was presented at an interregional conference of CPIAs (Campania, Piemonte and Emilia Romagna) in December 2017. Colleagues appreciated the results of the project and suggested submitting an application for an Erasmus project so that it could be adopted as good working practice in teaching activities for the teaching of L2, and as a useful tool for the inclusion of foreign students.

A project application was submitted by CPIA Avellino as lead school for the Call 2018 within the framework of the Erasmus plus KA204 Projects - Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education for Good Practice and Social Inclusion, and was approved and funded by the European Community (Grant Agreement Number 2018-1-IT02-KA204-048332).

The project officially began on 15 October 2018 with the First International Meeting of all partners in Avellino to define the expected objectives, the languages to be included and the modalities of implementation. Seven European

partners participated in the realisation of the DiM Project: CPIA Avellino as Coordinator, CPIA Benevento, CPIA Ravenna, Active Citizens Partnership (Greece), 36.6 Competence Centre (Scotland), Future Focus Ltd (Malta), IMS (Cyprus). All the schools and institutions involved are active in the field of adult education for foreigners, and in particular in the teaching of L2. It should be emphasised at this point that the real protagonists of the project were the students of the various organisations and their native languages.

The choice of Bengali by the CPIA Avellino as a language to be included in the DiM was made following the monitoring that is carried out every year to gain a general overview of the students' catchment area. During the 2017/2018 school year, 1098 students were enrolled at the CPIA Avellino (91% of whom were foreigners, subdivided as follows: 69% from Africa, 16% from Asia and 15% from Eastern Europe. The Bengali language, or Bangla, spoken in Bangladesh but also in the Indian state of West Bengal, was one of the most widely spoken languages given the high percentage of enrolled students from Bangladesh, and was collected by the CPIA Avellino. The other student languages chosen were Bambara (spoken in Mali), collected by the CPIA Benevento; Wolof (spoken in Senegal) collected by the CPIA Ravenna; Fârsi (spoken in Iran), collected by the Greek partners; Russian (spoken in Russia), collected by the Cypriot partners; Tagalog (spoken in the Philippines), collected by the Maltese partners; Tigrinya (spoken in Eritrea), collected by the Scottish partners.

The CPIA Avellino coordinated the various phases and activities of the project by creating the format for the collection, and the database used to process the data for the construction of the online dictionary. It also designed the DiM project website. The linguistic data was acquired by each partner through laboratory activities in which the students translated the words of the lexical list A1 of the Profile of the Italian Language, first into English (vehicular language of the project) and then into their mother tongue. They subsequently recorded the audio of the translated word; transcribed the word onto an Excel file shared on Google drive; produced a drawing (these were created by students who lacked or possessed lower levels of literacy) and wrote a definition consulting one or more dictionaries. The students' work was supported by a teaching team, usually a teacher acting as a technician for the audio recordings and data entry into Google drive and the Language 2 teacher. For languages with an alphabet other than Latin, Google's input tools were installed as a Chrome extension in order to be able to write with characters not present on the keyboard.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dimproject.net/>

id_term	ve_lang	ve_lang_gr_ref	semantic_field	ben	grammar reference	audio_file_name	transliteration
1	at	(prep.)	Describing things	তে	পদাঙ্কীয় অব্যয়	ben_1_at.mp3	te
2	reside	(verb)	Home and building	বাস করা	ক্রিয়া পদ	ben_2_reside.mp3	bās karā
3	vinegar	(n. mass.)	Food and drink	সিঁকি	অগণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_3_vinegar.mp3	sirkā
4	water	(n. uncount.)	Food and drink/Natural world	পানি	অগণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_4_water.mp3	pāni
5	now	(adv.)	Time	এখন	ক্রিয়া বিশেষণ পদ	ben_5_now.mp3	ekhan
6	airplane	(n. count.)	Travel	বিমান	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_6_airplane.mp3	bimān
7	airport	(n. count.)	Travel	বিমানবন্দর	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_7_airport.mp3	bimānabandar
8	affection	(n. var.)	Relationship	মেহ	পরিবর্তনশীল বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_8_affection.mp3	sneha
9	agency	(n. count.)	Home and building	সংস্থা	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_9_agency.mp3	sangasthā
10	August	(n. var.)	Time	আগস্ট	পরিবর্তনশীল বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_10_august.mp3	āgast
11	help	(convention)	Communication	সাহায্য	নেতিবাচক	ben_11_help.mp3	sāhājy
12	tree	(n. count.)	Natural world	গাছ	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_12_tree.mp3	gāch
13	alphabet	(n. count.)	Communication	বর্ণমালা	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_13_alphabet.mp3	barṇamālā
14	tall	(adj.)	Describing things/People appearance	লম্বা	বিশেষণ পদ	ben_14_tall.mp3	lambā
15	love	(verb)	People personality/Relationship	ভালবাসা	ক্রিয়া পদ	ben_15_love.mp3	bhālabāsā
16	embassy	(n. count.)	Home and building	দূতবাস	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_16_embassy.mp3	dūtābās
17	friend	(n. count.){f}	Relationship	বান্ধবী	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ (স্ত্রী)	ben_17_friend.mp3	bandhabī
18	friend	(n. count.){m}	Relationship	বন্ধু	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ (পুরুষ)	ben_18_friend.mp3	bandhu
19	love	(n. uncount.)	Relationship	প্রেম	অগণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_19_love.mp3	prem
20	also	(adv.)	Communication	এছাড়াও	ক্রিয়া বিশেষণ পদ	ben_20_also.mp3	echārāo
21	go	(verb)	People actions/Travel	যাওয়া	ক্রিয়া পদ	ben_21_go.mp3	jāoyā
22	animal	(n. count.)	Animals	পশু	গণনীয় বিশেষ্য পদ	ben_22_animal.mp3	Pashu

Google sheet for Bengali language data collection

All the shared online work was evaluated by the CPIA Avellino team, who were responsible for checking the technical quality and constantly monitored all the data collected. Once the processing phase had been completed, data was uploaded onto the online DiM platform through the project website [www.dimproject.net](http://www.dimproject.net).



Bengali alphabet drawn by students

### 3. 1 THE KEY CONTRIBUTION OF THE EXPERTS

The project presented a number of challenges that had to be dealt with at different stages. From the outset, participating partners assumed that creating a dictionary would be a very simple task, the same assumption applying to the collection of linguistic data entrusted to them. Only during the implementation phase did they realise the difficulties and complexity of the project. The greatest problems were encountered both in the data acquisition phase and above all during the revision phase of the linguistic material at our disposal. It is widely believed, even among teachers, that whoever speaks a language must also know it. There was a lack of awareness among participants that speakers do not necessarily possess knowledge of their own language, just as, in many cases, they do not possess the metalinguistic ability to reflect on how their language works and how it is used. This led to several difficulties in the collection of language data as in the case of Tigrinya where the group of students was heterogeneous in terms of geographical origin (some from Eritrea and others from Ethiopia) and speaking very different and mutually unintelligible dialect varieties. In addition, the students were not very literate, having studied for only a few years in their country. For this reason, during the revision phase entrusted to the experts, the linguistic data of Tigrinya turned out to be mostly inaccurate (on the peculiarities of Tigrinya variants and their script, see Lusini in this volume).

Many difficulties were overcome thanks to the participation in the DiM Project of various experts, highly qualified people in the various languages, who generously gave their time and experience to advise, guide and review the work done by our students. Immediately after the approval of the DiM Project funding, the coordinator got in touch with Professor Adriano V. Rossi<sup>8</sup>, an expert in lexicography and Iranian languages, to request an opinion on the project and to seek advice on how to proceed with the design of the multilingual dictionary. Following an initial meeting with Professor A. Rossi, subsequent meetings were also attended by Professor Maddalena Toscano<sup>9</sup>, who has coordinated a number of European projects on multilingual education in multicultural contexts in the past, and Professor Flavia Aiello<sup>10</sup>. All of them found the project valuable and interesting and agreed

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<sup>8</sup> Professor Emeritus Adriano V. Rossi was full Professor of Iranian Linguistics and Iranian Philology at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. Since 2016 he is President of IsMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, Rome.

<sup>9</sup> Maddalena Toscano is a former researcher and teacher in Swahili language at UNIOR with experience as main coordinator in various SOCRATES Comenius projects (see for e.g.: T.I.M.E for Teachers <http://opar.unior.it/179/1/Intercultural.pdf>).

<sup>10</sup> Flavia Aiello is Associate Professor of Swahili Language and Literature at the University of Naples L’Orientale.

to collaborate to ensure its success, especially in the linguistic revision phase. Thanks to them, it was possible to get in touch with Professor Ilaria Micheli<sup>11</sup>, who revised the Bambara language resources and provided useful information on the linguistic structures of African languages. Professor Gianfrancesco Lusini<sup>12</sup>, was the consultant for Tigrinya; and Emiliano Minerba, a PhD student at the University L'Orientale in Naples, took care of the language revision for Wolof and all the problems related to data gathering for this language.

These academics, to quote Professor Lusini's words, decided to "take an active militancy" by going out into the field, working side by side with our native speakers and supporting the teachers with their specialist linguistic expertise. As mentioned earlier, the biggest problems for African languages were related to the prevalence of oral language and the lack of familiarity with written variants. This phenomenon occurs even among the most educated speakers, since the language of education often corresponds to the language of the former colonial administration.

### 3. 2 THE RESULTS

In its final format, the project consists of an online multilingual dictionary (<http://dictionary.dimproject.net/index.php>) called DiM, mounted on a digital platform and made freely available to all. The DiM currently contains eleven languages: Bambara; Bengali; Farsi; Russian; Tagalog; Tigrinya; Wolof; Italian; Greek; Maltese and English. A list of about five hundreds entries is available for each language. Each word is accompanied by audio; a schematic drawing made with vector graphics (for concrete names); a transliteration for words written in non-Latin scripts; a grammatical reference; the definition of the word (for highly coded languages with a great written literary tradition); a drawing made by the students for some languages (Bambara, Bengali and Wolof); language profiles containing the alphabet and descriptions of the main features of each language; semantic labels referred to words belonging to the same semantic field; examples of activities that can be carried out in L2 classes using words, audio, drawings or semantic lists.

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<sup>11</sup> Ilaria Micheli is Associate Professor of African Linguistics at the University of Trieste - Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting and Translation Studies (IUSLIT).

<sup>12</sup> Gianfrancesco Lusini is Full Professor for Ge'ez and Amharic languages and literatures at the Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo of the University of Naples "L'Orientale".

clothes

	Bambara	Bengali	Greek	English	Farsi	Italian	Maltese	Russian	Tagalog	Tigrinya	Wolof
	susseti	সোজা	κάλτσα	sock	جوارب	calza	kalzetta	носок	medyas	ካልሲ	kawas b-
	tirikò	জামা	πουκάμισο	shirt	پیراهن	camicia	qmis	рубашка	damit pang itaas	ካምቻ	simis b-
	kalisó	জামা	παλτό	coat	کت	cappotto	kowt	пальто	amerikana	ካቦት	west b-
	nènè	জ্যাকেট	σακάκι	jacket	ژاكت	giacca	gakketta	куртка	dyaket	ጃኪት	west b-
	jipu	ফুটি	φούστα	skirt	دامن	gonna	dublett	юбка	palda	ጎና	sipp b-
	dùlòkì dé	টি-শার্ট	μπλουζά	t-shirt	تي شيرت	maglietta	t-shirt	футболка	t-shirt	ጥልፆ	siletmaa b-
	dùlòkì	সোয়েটার	πουλóβερ	sweater	ژاكت	maglione	flokk	свитер	damit pang ginaw	ጎልፎ	mbubb b-
	nùneti	চশমা	γυαλιά	glasses	عینک	occhiali	nuccali	очки	salamin sa mata	ጠንጸር	lonet y-
	sànmìnelán	ছাতা	ομπρέλα	umbrella	چتر	ombrello	umbrella	зонг	payong	ጹላል	seelukaay b-
	kùlusi já	ট্রাউজার	παντελόνι	trousers	شلوار	pantalone	qalziet	брюки	pantalon	ስረ	tubay j-
	sàbara	জুতা	παπούτσι	shoe	كفش	scarpa	żarbun	туфля	sapatos	ጫጫ	dáll w-
	dùlòkì	পোশাক	φόρεμα	dress	لباس	vestito	libsa	платье	damit	ካዳን	yére b-
	borè	ফুল ব্যাগ	σακίδιο	backpack	كوله بيشى	zaino	barzakka	рюкзак	backpack	ጫሀደር	saaku b-

Semantic list of clothes

The user interface created for the DiM is very simple and is accessible from any device. Moreover, it is also designed to be used by people with a low literacy level and is suitable for embedding (the inclusion of the dictionary in any other website). Accessing the dictionaries is possible directly through the link: [dictionary.dimproject.net](http://dictionary.dimproject.net) (<http://dictionary.dimproject.net/>) and also through the website link: <http://www.dimproject.net/>. The DiM Project website chronicles the development of the project in its various stages and also contains articles related to the project written by participants or external persons. In addition, it contains the profiles of the countries involved in the project; a recording of the Multiplier Event (a one day webinar to showcase the project, with the participation of all partners, students, public figures and the academics who were instrumental to its success); and texts in Italian and English of the contributions of speakers who participated in the webinar.

CONCLUSIONS

The DiM does not claim to be a dictionary, but rather a multilingual glossary. Furthermore, it was not produced by expert lexicographers. The work produced in collaboration with the students was nonetheless a significant achievement for all those involved. The project offered a great opportunity for human and professional enrichment resulting from the exchange of experiences between the different partners, as well as between students and teachers from different countries, in order to gain a new awareness of the students' languages and cultures. It also provided the opportunity to reflect on the importance of languages as a vehicle of identity and culture; on being open to different cultures, languages and literatures and on other ways of receiving, teaching and learning with the belief that all languages are part of the common human heritage and are to be safeguarded and protected.

The DiM experience highlighted the importance of language and the need for language education in schools. Not all teachers who deal with language on a daily basis are aware of linguistic diversity and the importance of language knowledge in the learning process. The sociolinguistic interviews conducted with the students highlighted the strong emotional bond they have with their mother tongue. This powerful tie is encapsulated in the words of Rahman, a Bengali student at the CPIA Avellino and one of the protagonists of the work on Bengali. During the sociolinguistic interview, when asked if he was interested in participating in the DiM Project, he replied: “Sure, so finally I can do something for my language<sup>13</sup> too”. In fact, his commitment to the project has been truly incomparable, as he has devoted much of his free time in collecting data and writing definitions. Rahman concluded the interview with these words: “If I could express everything in my language, I would say it better and you would understand more”. This final statement captures well the meaning of the DiM Project.

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<sup>13</sup> The Bengali language movement arose as a political effort in East Pakistan, advocating the recognition of Bengali as one of the languages of Pakistan. The language issue played a very prominent part in the creation of Bangladesh.



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# Lexicography and language learning of Swahili L2 at UNIOR: the Swahili-Italian online dictionary project

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## ABSTRACT

*The present essay outlines the progress of a lexicography project, namely a Swahili-Italian online dictionary, which was developed at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” (henceforth UNIOR) and conceived as a useful digital tool for Italian L1 learners of Swahili in a context of renewal of the teaching/learning of Swahili at the UNIOR, encouraged by web-based distance tools and platforms.*

*As will be explained in detail, the software of the online lexical database, first developed in the period between 2003 and 2009, is in the process of being updated with some technical and lexicographical improvements, aiming for a resource that will be increasingly user-friendly to Swahili language students, and in general to Italian-speaking learners.*

\* The authors discussed the content of this article in strict cooperation and agreement. However, for academic purposes, Flavia Aiello is responsible for the sections “Introduction” and “Swahili L2, lexicography and web-based learning at Unior”; Maddalena Toscano for the sections “The online dictionary UWAZO” and “Swahili word structure and dictionary entry in UWAZO”; Rosanna Tramutoli for the sections “From UWAZO to KIU: software access and management tools” and “New learner-oriented features in the Swahili-Italian online dictionary KIU”.

## KEYWORDS

*Swahili L2 language learning; Swahili-Italian online dictionary; lexicography.*

## INTRODUCTION

This contribution aims to chart the developments of the Swahili-Italian online dictionary project at UNIOR, which was led by the three authors, and discusses some of the inherent challenges in Bantu languages/Swahili lexicography which targets foreign learners, along with the solutions recently adopted in the course of the dictionary updating.

The paper is organised in five sections, the first of which provides a background to the development of the dictionary's project by giving an overview of the teaching of Swahili language and literature at UNIOR. It also touches upon the related need for lexical resources for Italian speakers and the progressive use of distance learning and web-based didactic materials and activities by the teaching staff. The subsequent two parts are devoted to the origins of the project, namely the online lexical database UWAZO: the history of the project, its participants and the initial design of the database, which originates from lexicographical research applied to Swahili language and word structure. Owing to the old software being out-dated, UWAZO is currently in the course of being reprogrammed from an IT point of view by an IT specialist. This new phase has provided an opportunity to redesign some features of the dictionary, both in terms of software access and management tools, and of learner-oriented characteristics of the entries, as will be discussed in the last sections of this paper.

## SWAHILI L2, LEXICOGRAPHY AND WEB-BASED LEARNING AT UNIOR

The teaching of Swahili language and literature at UNIOR was established in 1969 by Elena Bertoncini Zúbková, an internationally renowned scholar of Swahili language and literature, whose educational activity was closely connected with research on the Swahili lexicon<sup>1</sup>, resulting in the production of lists of words and vocabularies<sup>2</sup>. These were (and still are) much needed tools for the Italian students of Swahili, given the ongoing rapid expansion of this

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Bertoncini Zúbková 1973.

<sup>2</sup> The work of Bertoncini Zúbková in this field remains largely unpublished. The only publication, out of print, is a small vocabulary published in 1977, *Vocabolario swahili-italiano e italiano-swahili* (1977).

Bantu language, called *Kiswahili* by its speakers, in Eastern and Central Africa. From the Indian Ocean coast and its neighbouring islands, where the Swahili people (*Waswahili*) live, the Swahili language has spread in the continent due to various historical factors, such as the caravan routes of the Arabo-Swahili merchants, the activity of missionaries, the language policies of colonial and postcolonial governments and the flows of migrants and refugees. It is currently used by approximately 99,000,000 people, mainly in Kenya, Tanzania and in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)<sup>3</sup>. It is also spoken in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and, to a lesser degree, in Somalia, the Comoro Islands, Mozambique, Malawi, Southern Sudan and Zambia<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence of the post-independence development of Swahili in a wide geo-cultural area and in multiple contexts of language use, especially in Tanzania, where it has become the dominant medium of communication in the public sector (basic education, administration, courts, national assembly, media etc.), the Swahili lexicon has been constantly growing, also due to a huge lexicographical initiative undertaken by experts from the National Swahili Council (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa, BAKITA) and the Institute of Swahili at the University of Dar es Salaam (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili<sup>5</sup>, TUKI)<sup>6</sup>. These latter institutions, besides producing general dictionaries, have been creating and disseminating terminologies for many domains of language use, such as law, science, and IT glossaries<sup>7</sup>.

Regarding bilingual lexicographical works aimed at Italian learners, apart from E. Bertoncini Zúbková's work which, as remarked above, remains substantially unpublished or out of print, three dictionaries have been published so far. These are Vittorio Merlo Pick's *Vocabolario kiswahili-italiano e italiano-kiswahili* (EMI, Turin 1961, re-edited in 1978, currently out of print), Maddalena Toscano's pocket-size *Dizionario swahili. Swahili-italiano, italiano-swahili* (Vallardi, Milano 2004) and Gianluigi Martini's *Dizionario swahili. Swahili-italiano, italiano-swahili* (Hoepli, Milano 2016). Furthermore, a terminological work has appeared, namely a Swahili-Italian linguistic glossary by Rosanna Tramutoli (*Kamusi ya isimu Kiswahili – Kiitaliano*, TUKI, Dar es Salaam 2018), published by the university press of the Institute of Swahili at the University of Dar es Salaam within

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.ethnologue.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Swahili has been declared national/official language in Kenya, Tanzania, DR Congo, Uganda, and more recently in Rwanda. As underlined by M. Mulokozi (2003), the Swahili language has also an international status, being amongst the official languages of the African Union since 2005. Furthermore, since 2019 Swahili is an official working language of the Southern Africa Development Community, an organisation composed of 16 states of Central, Eastern and Southern Africa.

<sup>5</sup> In 2009 the Institute was renamed TATAKI (*Taasisi ya Taaluma za Kiswahili – Institute of Swahili Studies*).

<sup>6</sup> See Sewangi 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See Aiello & Toscano 2017.

the sphere of a long standing cooperation agreement with UNIOR. All these useful works for Italian speakers, are however in print format, and partly only available at the library of UNIOR. Thus, in the early 2000s, the development of an online lexicographical resource for Italian learners was initiated by M. Toscano, as will be explained in detail in the next paragraph, in a context of renewal of the courses of Swahili at UNIOR, encouraged by Internet and digital technologies, which have revolutionised the teaching of foreign languages by introducing web-based distance tools and platforms.

Over the years, different digital materials and activities have been developed at UNIOR by the teachers of Swahili (E. Bertoncini Zúbková, M. Toscano, F. Aiello), in cooperation with mother-tongue collaborators, researchers and technicians<sup>8</sup>, to be used for “blended” or “hybrid” teaching/learning, i.e., to be combined with traditional face-to-face language courses<sup>9</sup>. These include a list of online resources for autonomous learning, available on the website of UNIOR’s Language Centre, CLAOR (Centro Linguistico di Ateneo Università L’Orientale)<sup>10</sup>, as well as e-learning modules which offer teaching materials and exercises integrating the contents of the Swahili language courses. The e-learning resources and activities are offered through the Moodle digital platform managed by CLAOR, and consist of two courses, one for beginners (“Swahili livello iniziale”) and one for intermediate-advanced level (“Swahili livello avanzato”)<sup>11</sup>, which can be accessed by registered students who are given the course login by the teacher. The basic-level Swahili e-learning course targets students, enrolled in BA or MA programs at UNIOR<sup>12</sup>, who are starting the study of one or two African/Oriental languages; the intermediate-advanced course is offered to 3<sup>rd</sup> year BA students and MA students (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> year). The learning objectives of the first course are to consolidate Swahili basic grammar knowledge and develop listening and comprehension skills. The intermediate-advanced course has been designed for students learning Swahili language

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<sup>8</sup> All the individual credits are available on the web pages quoted in footnote n. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Smyrnova-Trybulska, Eugenia. 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Swahili is the sub-Saharan language most widely taught at university level, inside and outside Africa, therefore a great deal of academic and non-academic teaching materials is available online, alongside Swahili-language media (information portals, musical videos, films etc.). The resources are classified in different sections, such as “integrated abilities”, “information portals”, “culture and society” etc., see <https://www.unior.it/ateneo/7644/1/swahili-sul-web.html>.

<sup>11</sup> See respectively <https://elearning.unior.it/course/view.php?id=84>; <https://elearning.unior.it/course/view.php?id=5>.

<sup>12</sup> Undergraduate degree courses: “Oriental and African Languages and Cultures”, “Political Science and International Relations”, “Comparative Languages and Cultures”; Master’s Degree Courses: “Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa”, “International Relations and Institutions of Asia and Africa”, “Comparative Literatures and Cultures”. See [https://www.unior.it/index2.php?content\\_id=17159&content\\_id\\_start=2&titolo=lauree-lauree-magistrali&parLingua=ITA](https://www.unior.it/index2.php?content_id=17159&content_id_start=2&titolo=lauree-lauree-magistrali&parLingua=ITA).

and literature, mostly to further develop the written comprehension of literary texts and the awareness of translation strategies. The switch to “blended” teaching/learning has been facilitated by the user-friendly features of Moodle, for which basic computer literacy is sufficient, and has involved the need to re-design course materials, as one simply cannot shift content from one medium to another, i.e. from textbook to digital, asynchronous technology<sup>13</sup>. Rather, it is important to acknowledge the characteristics and potentials of the new medium. Therefore, fair amount of new content has been introduced, based on audio/picture/video resources (such as vocabulary quizzes, cloze tests for listening comprehension etc.), which expose the students to “realia” and/or to language use in full contexts. Moreover, an advantage of Moodle-based activities is that they promote student-centred learning since the students can self-evaluate their achievements step by step.

Furthermore, from a partnership of UNIOR with Federica Web Learning, a platform created by the University of Naples Federico II to offer high-quality MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses), a MOOC for Swahili language and culture has been created by F. Aiello and published online in 2020, entitled “Karibuni! Introduzione alla lingua e cultura Swahili” (Welcome! An introduction to Swahili language and culture)<sup>14</sup>. The course is structured in 10 teaching units, containing slides (with text, pictures and links), short video-lessons and auto-evaluation quizzes meant both for students and a wider public.

Finally, a digital corpus of Swahili texts was collected by M. Toscano in collaboration with a number of students and researchers. It is a small (one million words) Swahili untagged raw corpus consisting close to fifty full texts, taken mainly from contemporary written literature, with the addition of some oral narratives and non-literary works (socio-political essays, handbooks about agriculture, media studies, information technology). It is available to researchers and MA students for their dissertation research on Swahili language, literature and linguistics.

AINI, a Swahili lemmatizer based on MSDOS<sup>15</sup>, was used for extracting lemma from the corpus.

The corpus was available online for a short while and was also searchable through the use of regex (regular expressions)<sup>16</sup> incorporated in Shika Neno<sup>17</sup>. For reasons of copyright restrictions only two lines of the retrieved contexts text were accessible to the user.

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<sup>13</sup> See Azaryad Shechter, Deborah 2015.

<sup>14</sup> See [https://www.federica.eu/mooc/c/karibuni\\_introduzione\\_alla\\_lingua\\_e\\_cultura\\_swahili](https://www.federica.eu/mooc/c/karibuni_introduzione_alla_lingua_e_cultura_swahili).

<sup>15</sup> By Professor T. Schadeberg and P. S. E. Elias, Leiden (no more available).

<sup>16</sup> For info on regular expressions see <https://www.sketchengine.eu/guide/regular-expressions/>.

<sup>17</sup> SHIKA NENO was a Linux environment, language dependent software for context retrieval. It allowed search for Swahili bases (by M. Sorrentino and M. Toscano, no more available).

The corpus is now only accessible offline. The digital corpus is used for searching examples and quotes to be included in the Swahili-Italian online dictionary.

The main tool used for information retrieval is CONCORDANCE<sup>18</sup>, a software for context retrieval which operates in a Windows environment. It is a language independent software which allows search for forms. CONCORDANCE also allows use of regular expressions and provides access to full text when the need for disambiguation occurs. It is for offline use only.

Here below are some screen shots from CONCORDANCE, the main software used by UWAZO operators to provide reliable examples of lemma usage.

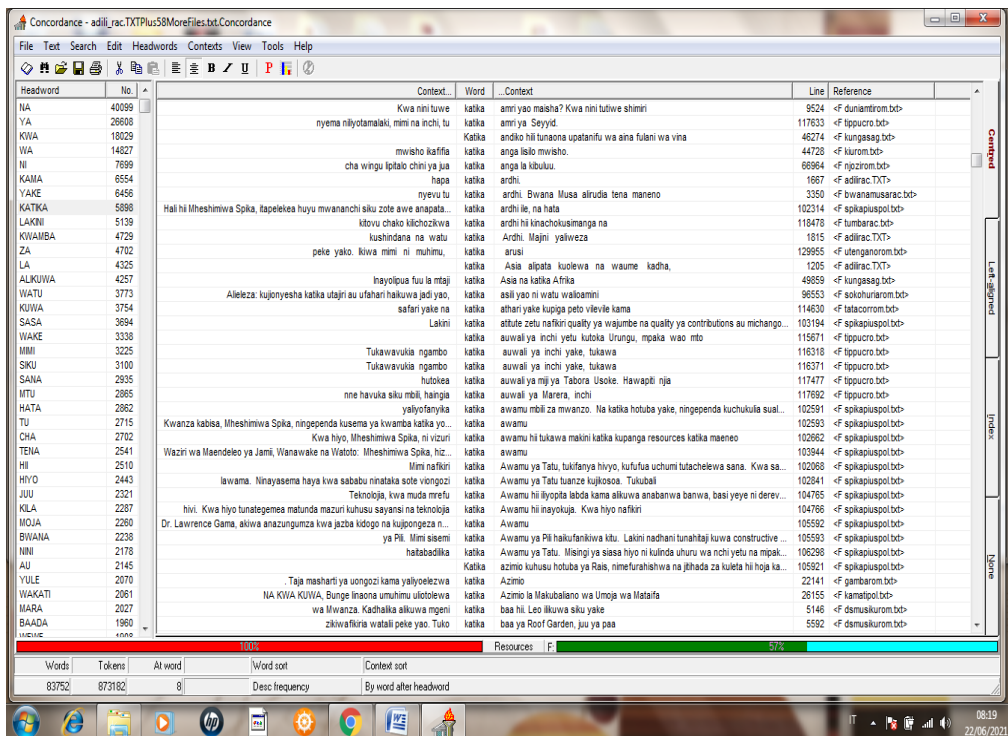


Figure 1. Concordance - Context sort of KATIKA, by word after headword

<sup>18</sup> Concordance: <http://www.rjcw.freemove.co.uk/>.

1 right	No.	2 right	No.	3 right	No.	4 right	No.
Hali	183	Ya	663	Ya	203	Na	194
Nchi	181	Wa	312	Na	175	Ya	143
Maisha	74	La	192	Wa	80	Wa	84
Nyumba	53	Hi	179	Kwa	70	Katika	53
Dunia	50	Na	164	Za	67	Kwa	50
Mji	50	Yake	161	La	55	Za	38
Sehemu	50	Cha	130	Ni	43	Ni	34
Hotuba	48	Za	106	Lakini	38	Yake	33
Bunge	47	Yetu	100	Katika	37	Watu	30
Kila	46	Hi	93	Chi	30	Kama	28
Mambo	46	Huu	79	Kama	25	La	26
Jami	45	Wake	73	Hi	24	Kila	20
Kipindi	45	Hiyo	66	Sasa	24	Kwamba	20
Ushari	45	Yao	60	Sana	23	Hata	16
Maka	44	Vya	41	Kwanza	19	Kuwa	16
Kiji	42	Zake	38	Watu	19	Hchi	15
Chumba	38	Haya	37	Maka	17	Cha	14
Shule	38	Hki	37	Kiwahili	16	Hi	14
Maeneo	37	Huo	36	Ambayo	15	Wake	14
Kundi	35	Moja	34	Ili	15	Ambayo	13
Safari	35	Ile	30	Kila	15	Ili	13
Mji	34	Kwa	29	Hanga	15	Maisha	12
Ulimwengu	34	Zote	29	Vya	15	Alikuwa	11

4 left	No.	3 left	No.	2 left	No.	1 left	No.
Na	180	Na	211	Na	213	Na	103
Ya	132	Ya	124	Ya	167	Sana	68
Wa	73	Wa	96	Wa	140	Kutoka	46
Kwa	59	Kwa	72	Kwa	70	Wake	46
Katika	53	Ni	45	Kama	59	Yake	41
Ni	52	Katika	37	Ni	43	Kwamba	40
Kama	30	Kwamba	37	Za	40	Alkuwa	39
La	27	Kama	33	Alkuwa	35	Kwa	38
Za	26	Yake	30	La	31	Mmoja	36
Kuwa	24	Alkuwa	23	Kuwa	30	Lakini	34
Kwamba	22	Sasa	21	Watu	29	Moja	34
Yake	20	La	20	Yake	28	Hasa	33
Sana	16	Za	20	Kwamba	26	Kumpia	33
Alkuwa	15	Kuwa	19	Sasa	23	Alina	30
Hi	15	Lakini	19	Mheshimwa	22	Hata	30
Au	14	Watu	19	Wote	22	Kazi	27

Figure 2. Concordance - Collocations of KATIKA

The screenshot shows the Concordance software interface. On the left, a list of words and their frequencies is displayed. The main window shows a concordance table with columns for 'Context', 'Word', 'Context', 'Line', and 'Reference'. A pop-up window titled 'View - FL\_\chiavetta\SWAHILI\Archivio\_testi\_swahili\CORPUS\adili\_rac.TXTPlus58MoreFiles.txt' is open, showing a full text snippet where the word 'katika' is highlighted. The text snippet includes a paragraph starting with 'Manayema. Alipoambiwa khabari ile Mirambo akamvita Sef: Waambie wale Waarabu, kesho waende zao, maana zimekuja khabari amri kadha wa kadha. Nami nasema khabari hizo uwongo. Zija-pokuba kweli, weve u katika amani, maana baba yako kana ndugu yangu. Lakini nataka, waondoke hawa Waarabu, waende zao, wasipate khabari wapagazi wao, watu wa Tabora, watatupa mizigo wakimbia. Itakuwa khasera kuu kwao. 14. Akaenda Sef bin Hamed akawaambia wale Waarabu na watu wangu: Kesho safari, mwende zenu. Nami nataka kirudi Tabora. Wakasfiriri wale Waarabu pamoja na watu wa Mirambo. Na siku ya pili akapewa Sef bin Hamed pembe tano kwa fraasila tisa wa robo akapewa na nguo, mdedule na bushhi na vitambi bura vinne. Akatoa na watu wake sita akampa Sef bin Hamed, Wenda nao hawa watu. Watatu awachukue Hamed bin Muhammed gwani, akamwambie Seyyid Barghash; Sasa baada ya kuja Hamed bin Muhammed sitaki tena vita naye. Hamed

Figure 3. Concordance - Access to full text, for needs of disambiguation



## THE ONLINE DICTIONARY UWAZO

UWAZO<sup>19</sup> is a Swahili-Italian online bilingual lexical database for Italian speakers. It contains about 5000 headwords selected from a Swahili frequency list<sup>20</sup> and from various other sources, including, in addition to the above quoted works of Merlo-Pick and Toscano, the lexicon used in the teaching materials of Swahili courses (by E. Bertoncini Zúbková) and some specific lexicons (e.g. immigration, body parts) resulting from various unpublished works.

Based on T.E.I. guidelines<sup>21</sup> and developed over a period of time between 2003 and 2009<sup>22</sup>, UWAZO came into being mainly thanks to IsIAO<sup>23</sup> funding and the collaboration of various experts<sup>24</sup>.

Alongside the T.E.I. guidelines, reference was made also to the guidelines contained in the materials of the lexicography and terminology courses<sup>25</sup>, acquired by the staff team (M. Toscano, F. Aiello, R. Tramutoli) through participation in specific training courses, as well as reference works for lexicog-

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<sup>19</sup> Originally available at the link [http://old.iuo.it/diprapa/swahili\\_leksikoloja/uwazo/default.asp](http://old.iuo.it/diprapa/swahili_leksikoloja/uwazo/default.asp), temporarily hosted at the link <http://www.siamoinsieme.org/mawazo/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Bertoncini Zúbková 1973.

<sup>21</sup> T.E.I. (Text Encoding Initiative): <http://www.tei-c.org/index.xml>.

<sup>22</sup> UWAZO was presented at the DWS 2004. Maddalena Toscano, Giuseppe Marzatico, Salvatore La Gala and Massimiliano Sorrentino: *Building a corpus based Kiswahili-Italian online lexical data base*, Third International Workshop on DICTIONARY WRITING SYSTEMS (DWS 2004), Brno, Czech Republic, 6-7 September 2004 (<https://nlp.fi.muni.cz/dws2004/pres/#17>).

<sup>23</sup> Funding came from the bilateral agreement IsIAO-UNIOR, 2002-2003 and from the bilateral agreement UNIOR-Univ. of Dar es Salaam, 2002-2005.

<sup>24</sup> M. Toscano for project planning, Swahili language consultancy from E. Bertoncini Zúbková and S. Sewangi (Univ. of Dar es Salaam). Inserting data by F. Aiello, M. Toscano, with occasional cooperation from C. Marzio and G. Aquaviva. As for the software, the first version was by Giuseppe Marzatico and Salvatore La Gala (MARS, Napoli). The second version, now in use, was built by Tommaso Borrelli and Luciano Piedimonte.

<sup>25</sup> June 1996. *Stage Inter-regional de formation à l'utilisation du logiciel MARIAMA*, a 10 days training course organized by the GDRE 1172 of CNRS, at the Centre de Formation de Luminy, Marseille, FR.

September 7-18 1998. *Intensive course on lexicography*, by AFRILEX-SALEX, Univ. of Pretoria, R.S.A.

August 5-8 1999. *16th Terminology Summer School, Module 1 – Terminology Teaching and Training*.

August 9-11 1999. *1st Terminology Summer Campus*, by TermNet and Infoterm, Univ. of Donau, Krems, AU.

July 16-20 2001. *Training workshop in lexicography and lexical computing*, by Information Technology Institute, University of Brighton and Lexicography Masterclass, Univ. of Brighton, (UK).

June 8-12 2015. *The 2015 Lexicom Workshop in Lexicography and Lexical Computing*, Masaryk University's Centre in Telč, Czech Republic.

raphy and publications on lexicographic standards. In the project phase other available DWSs were considered<sup>26</sup>.

UWAZO was specifically tailored for a list of needs which include flexibility in setting masks and labels, controlled on-line access, search facilities, output in .doc and .xml, and a user friendly and corpus based approach. Unlike a traditional printed dictionary, the online dictionary supports the transfer of knowledge from research to teaching/learning of Swahili (teaching module of computer applications to African languages), while also enhancing tools for distant learning and cooperation.

The UWAZO general framework is based on the aims and objectives of target users, and on language aspects which are relevant to the project. These elements were taken into account while defining the data base structure. Resources and tools available at the time were also considered.

UWAZO target users are Italian speakers/learners of Swahili, namely language students also majoring in (literature, political science, etc.) who are required to learn grammar (morphology and syntax) up to advanced level, to read and translate literature and political texts; to produce proper Swahili texts. Potential interested users are also non-language students (other individuals from NGOs, tourists, etc.) who need to know grammar at beginner/intermediate level.

UWAZO's basic aim is to support Italian mother tongue speakers in the autonomous learning of Swahili by providing detailed information on grammar/morphology and clues to syntactic structures. It also aims to provide updated lexical information, i.e., loanwords from English (e.g. *skrini* 'screen'); new meanings assigned to already existing words (e.g. *kibarua* 'temporary work') or neologisms (e.g. *simu ya mkononi*, 'mobile phone'; *tovuti* 'website'; *mtandao* 'internet').

All entries contain an indication of the grammatical category and at least one simple gloss. Most of the items are divided into sub-items and completed with examples of use. The inflected grammatical forms, in particular, contain various examples of use referring to the different meanings and functions. All examples were taken from the above-mentioned Swahili corpus.

Following T.E.I. guidelines for printed dictionaries which include free and structured entries, the UWAZO database structure is based on various groups which include a fixed list of elements with free position. Sub-class elements are also available. Main T.E.I. groups list used in UWAZO include: Gruppo grammaticale, Traduzione, Esempio, Etimologia, Confronta, DictScrap. Open lists of labels can also be created by the operator.

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<sup>26</sup> MARIAMA, by R. Nicolai, Univ. of Nice - (historical linguistics, restricted access) LinguaLinks; Shoe Box, by S.I.L. (field work, commercialised); DBT – LEXXIKO, by E. Picchi, ILC-CNR, Pisa (old version in MSDOS environment, new WINDOWS version not commercialised).

UWAZO management tools allow parallel login by various operators; it is possible to identify different log in identities but it has only two levels of management (control on giving new access only).

UWAZO does not allow off-line work (e.g. lexicographers working at home with their notebooks); it allows online work only. The corpus, presently available only offline, has to be made available to each operator.

Apart from the simple search for lemma, various advanced search options are available to the user: by PoS (part of speech), by type of word (form, morpheme, stem). It is also possible to search for words, Swahili and Italian, used in the examples, as shown in the following screen shots from UWAZO:

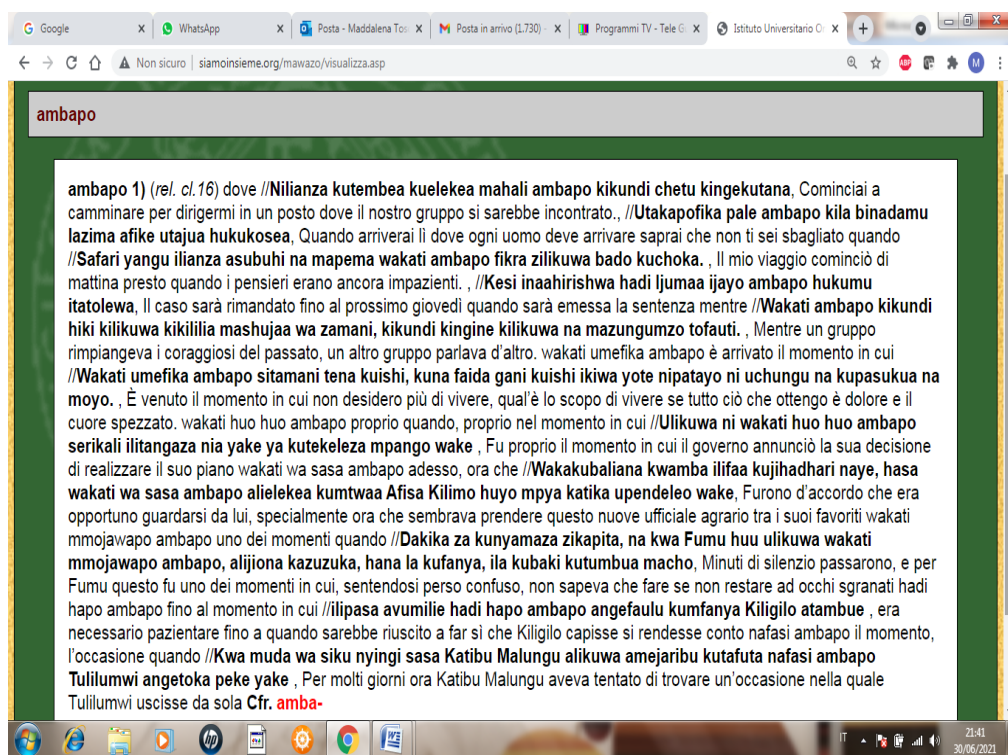


Figure 4. UWAZO - Basic search for lemma 'ambapo'

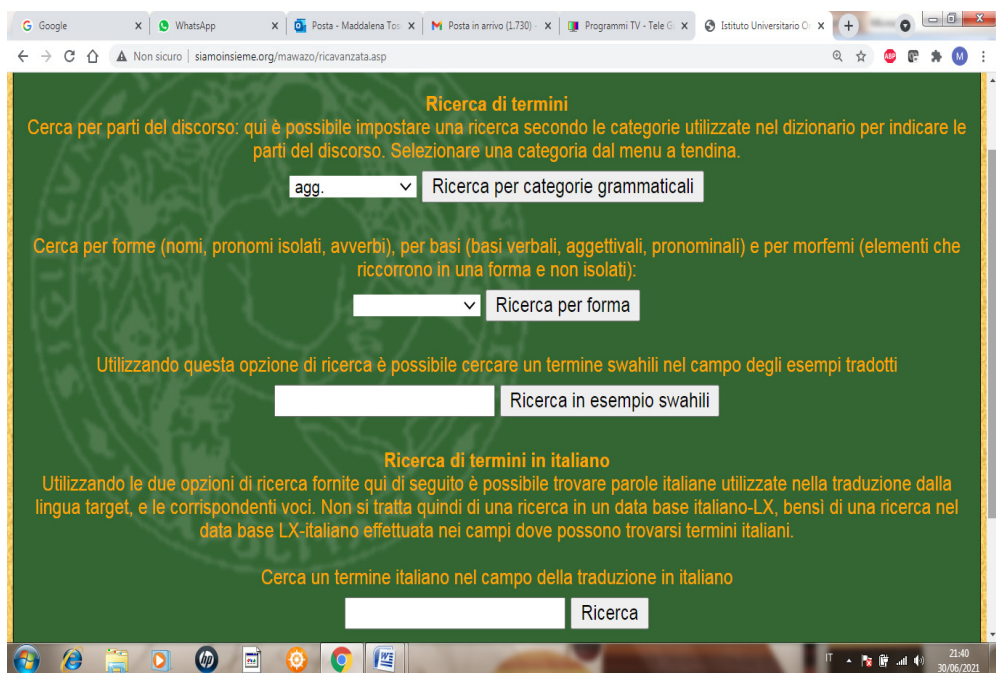


Figure 5. UWAZO - Advanced search options

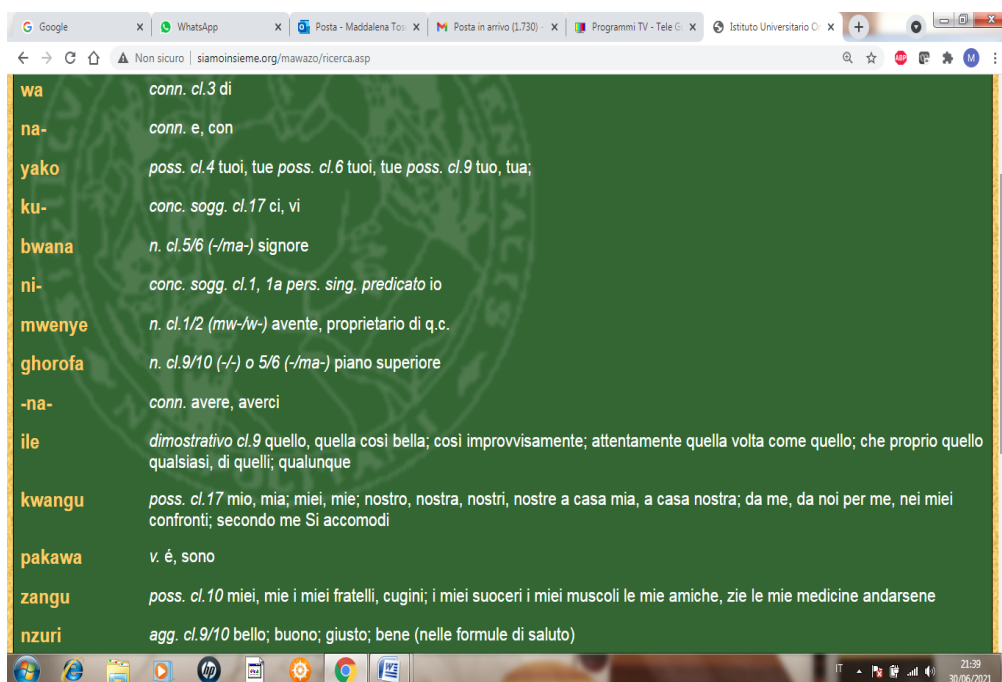


Figure 6. UWAZO - Search for 'nyumba' (casa) in Swahili examples. By clicking on each lemma shown in the list, the user will see different Swahili examples containing the word 'nyumba'

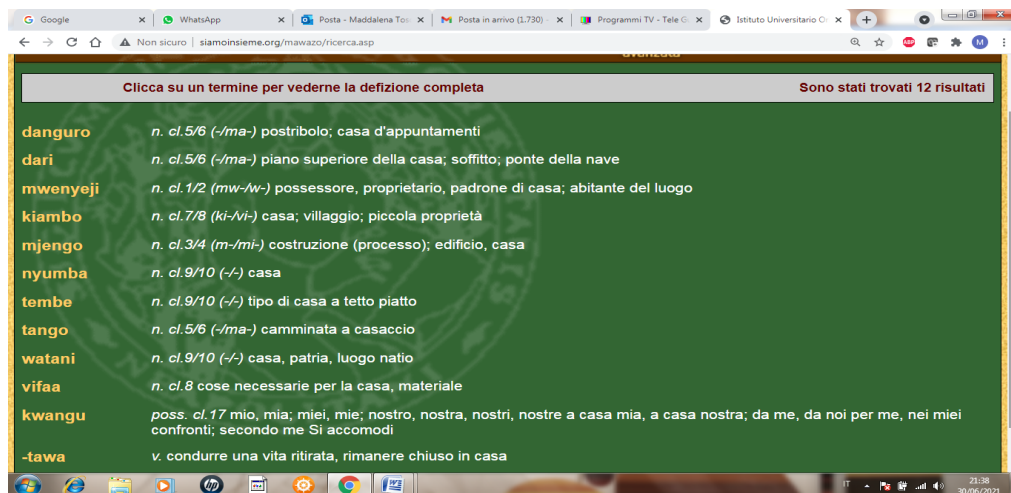


Figure 7. UWAZO - Search for word 'casa' in the Italian translation of examples in Swahili

## SWAHILI WORD STRUCTURE AND DICTIONARY ENTRIES IN UWAZO

Bantu languages are characterized by a complex system of noun classes, represented by noun prefixes. With the exception of classes 12 and 13 (which are no longer productive in the language), and class 11-14 which have merged into a single class, the Swahili noun class system includes 15 noun classes. Swahili words follow a main basic order: *Morpheme(s) + Stem*:

- nouns: class concord + noun stem (noun classes: cl. 1/2, 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, 9/10, 11-14/10; verbal nouns: class 15; locative classes: 16, 17, 18);
- adjectives: adjectival class concords (cl. 1...18) + adj. stem;
- pronominals: pronominal concords (cl. 1...18) + stem; stem + pr. conc. (1...18);
- verbs: subject class concords (cl. 1...18) + tense marker + (relative conc. cl.1...18) + (object concords cl. 1...18) + verbal stem + final vowels/extensions.

Swahili is an agglutinative language, which means that morphemes are juxtaposed to form words. Within the Swahili lexicographical tradition, the accepted lemmatization strategy is to list nouns in their full forms with class prefixes, whereas the prefixes of verbs, numerals, pronouns and inflected adjectives are ignored, and the stems alone are listed<sup>27</sup>. Thus, in standard printed dictionaries, we find the following types of Swahili entries:

<sup>27</sup> See Wójtowicz 2016: 410.

- nouns: singular form (e.g.: *moyo* ‘heart’ → *mioyo*; *moyoni*, *mioyoni*<sup>28</sup>);
- adjectives: stem (e.g.: *-baya* ‘bad’ → *mbaya*, *wabaya*, *mibaya*, *baya*, *ma-baya*, *kibaya*, *vibaya*, *kubaya*, *pabaya*);
- pronouns: stem (e.g.: *h-* ‘this’ → *huyu*, *hawa*, *huu*, *hii*, *hili*, *haya*, *hiki*, *hivi*, *hizi*, *huku*, *hapa*, *humu*; *huyo*, *hao*, etc.);
- verbs: stem (e.g.: *-soma* ‘to read’ → *-somea*, *-someka*, *-somesha*, *-somwa*, *-somana*, etc.);
- invariable forms (some prepositions, conjunctions, adverbial forms, etc.).

Considering that Swahili students are used to this lexicographical tradition, for the online Swahili-Italian dictionary we have decided to choose solutions adopted by almost all Swahili dictionaries in regard to the process of lemmatization. Consequently, we have listed only the stems alone for verbs, numerals, and inflected adjectives, ignoring subject concord and agreement prefixes.

On the other hand, in some other cases we have decided to reject traditional lexicographic solutions usually adopted in printed dictionaries, in response to beginner learners’ needs and we have listed closed sets of grammatical words, such as pronouns, in their full forms (with the stems also included as separate entries). We have also included all grammatical morphemes as separate entries, adding an explanation about their function.

Thus, the basic structure of an entry in the online Swahili-Italian dictionary includes the following elements:

- headword;
- variant/variants of the headword;
- poS (part of speech), that is, the grammatical category;
- noun class;
- translation (gloss and/or description);
- examples (quotations, collocations, idioms, proverbs, etc.);
- example translations;

Moreover, each entry is categorized according to the type:

- form (nouns or invariable entries);
- grammatical stem (verbs, pronouns, adjectives, variable entries in general);
- morpheme: e.g. noun prefixes, subject prefixes, object markers, derivational suffixes, etc.

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<sup>28</sup> *Moyo/mioyo* (cl. 3/4): ‘heart’; *moyoni*: ‘in the heart’; *-ni* is a locative suffix that expresses the locative relations indicated in Italian through prepositions, such as ‘in/at/from’ (Bertoncini Zúbková 2009: 7).

In considering the Swahili word structure, it is evident that, while working with a Bantu language, we have to address problems not experienced by lexicographers working with European languages. These problems are connected primarily to two issues: the form of headwords and the presentation of the numerous derivatives of a single root<sup>29</sup>. In the following sections, we will explore challenges and difficulties regarding the design of a new Swahili online dictionary as a learning/teaching language tool.

## FROM UWAZO TO KIU: SOFTWARE ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT TOOLS

The UWAZO software is presently being redesigned from an IT perspective owing to the old software now being obsolete. The upgrade is carried out by an IT specialist on the basis of the lexicographical indications provided by the three authors of this contribution. It includes some improvements aimed at the creation of a resource that will be increasingly useful to Swahili language students, and in general to Italian-speaking learners, as outlined in the next paragraph.

In the first phase of assembly of the new dictionary, the main effort was devoted to redesigning an updated version of the software, importing and editing previous data by tidying inconsistent entries, adding relevant missing information, and completing sets of grammar inflected forms. Closed sets belonging to semantic and grammatical categories, like days of the week, months and adjectives were verified, and additional vocabulary was also collected by students and researchers who worked on chosen sets they found useful in their studies, such as body parts or the Swahili COVID lexicon.

The new version of the dictionary, called KIU (Kiswahili-Italian-UNIOR), will be published online on an ad hoc page of the UNIOR website, and will be freely accessible to university students and the general public. The number of entries in the database (currently about 5,000) will also be increased.

The KIU dictionary, accessible by users from computers or smartphones, supports two different levels of access depending on the role: administrators, having the highest level of access to the database, can implement and edit data, and set up and manage the accounts of students and collaborators. Students and learners can have full access to database and software tools except for data publishing, which needs administrator approval.

UWAZO management tools also allowed parallel login by various operators, where it was possible to identify different login identities. However, unlike UWAZO, which only provided control on creating new login access, the

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<sup>29</sup> Wójtowicz 2016: 410.

updated software enables the administrator to control both access and data editing as well as publishing of all other operators.

Another implementation which characterizes the new software consists in the export/import of full or selected data to facilitate editing and updating by remote access.

Moreover, in addition to the Swahili-Italian dictionary, the new software was designed to be extended to other Bantu languages; in particular a Zulu-Italian lexical database (including a collection of body vocabulary and a small literary corpus) is being developed by R. Tramutoli.

## NEW LEARNER-ORIENTED FEATURES IN THE SWAHILI-ITALIAN ONLINE KIU DICTIONARY

New features for the entries have been introduced in the updated version of the Swahili-Italian online dictionary, in order to address specific Swahili L2 learner needs.

The new dictionary is going to be a learner's dictionary, that is, a bilingual dictionary with features that until recently have been primarily associated with monolingual learner's dictionaries: "extended grammatical information (meant to make the creation of real sentences easier, by providing hints for constructing the proper agreement patterns) and with visualisation of derivative forms that will provide extra lexical information and make navigation across the dictionary easier"<sup>30</sup>.

As regards to Swahili nouns, the entire plural form is entered immediately after the class prefixes and the searches can be carried out on headwords and plural forms of headwords; thus, if a user looks up for *maembe* 'mangos', he/she will be directed to the entry for *embe* 'mango'.

Differently from paper dictionaries and other online lexical databases, the online Swahili-Italian dictionary offers the possibility to search both for regular and irregular forms of the plurals, such as *jiko* (sg. cl. 5 'kitchen') - *meko* (= *ma* + *iko*; pl. cl. 6 'kitchens'); *jino* (sg. cl. 5 'tooth') - *meno* (= *ma* + *ino*, pl. cl. 6 'teeth'), where the noun class prefix of cl. 6 *ma-* coalesces with the vowel *-i* changing to *me-*. Indeed, students at a beginner level might not be familiar with similar plural forms of class 6 (e.g. *meko*, *meno*), which change consistently compared to the corresponding singular forms, following the Bantu rules of vowel coalescence. The possibility to search for full plurals is thus very convenient for learners at a beginner level who do not have sufficient knowledge of grammar to enable them to identify easily singular and

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<sup>30</sup> Bański & Wójtowicz 2008: 269-275. Bański & Wójtowicz 2012: 60-72.



plural forms which carry different noun prefixes and are hidden in the entries of the singular form<sup>31</sup>.

Another important issue with respect to macrostructure is related to the handling of derivation, which in Swahili, like in other Bantu languages, is very robust and typically creates dozens of complex lexemes from a single root, especially with regard to verbal roots<sup>32</sup>.

Verbs are described by the type of derivation and references to their base/root in the case of derivatives, or to derivatives in the case of roots. Through a mechanism of cross-entry references, derivatives are inserted as searchable sub-entries showing both sides of the derivational process (derivative → root/root → derivative)<sup>33</sup>. In standard paper dictionaries, only frequently used derivative verbs (e.g. *-pendeza* ‘be attractive’; *-endelea* ‘continue’) or those extended forms of the verb which have become lexicalized or fossilized, and which meaning is independent from the derivational process, (such as *-sima-ma* ‘stand’; *-kumbatia* ‘hug’; *-patikana* ‘be available’; *-wezekana* ‘be possible’) are usually searchable as separate entries and do not require learners to be aware of their morphological structure.

The Swahili dictionary for learners provides the possibility to look up all verbal derivative forms, i.e. all extended verbs, which have been listed as searchable sub-entries linked to the corresponding verbal bases. Thus, learners can either directly search for extended verb stems (e.g. *-fundishana* ‘teach each other’; *-jibizana* ‘answer each other’) even without being familiar with the derivational process. Alternatively, they can look for the basic form of the verb and consult the corresponding possible derivations. The extended mechanism of cross-entry references, which also characterizes other types of learner-oriented dictionaries designed for Bantu languages (see T-Lex; isiZulu.net)<sup>34</sup>, helps “to maintain a system whereby derivatives have the status of headwords, while simultaneously the derivational and semantic relationships between forms are preserved”<sup>35</sup>.

Swahili diminutive and augmentative forms are generally created by adding noun class prefixes of class 5/6 and 7/8 respectively to the nominal stem, for instance:

*mbuzi* cl. 3 (goat) → *kibuzi* cl. 7 (little goat) → *buzi* cl. 5 (big goat).

Thus, augmentatives and diminutives have also been entered as searchable derivatives forms linked with the corresponding nominal base, except for those forms which have acquired independent meaning in Swahili and thus

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<sup>31</sup> Kiango 2005: 264.

<sup>32</sup> Wójtowicz 2016: 410.

<sup>33</sup> Wójtowicz 2016: 411.

<sup>34</sup> TshwaneLex: <https://tshwanedje.com/dictionary/swahili/>; <https://isizulu.net/>.

<sup>35</sup> Wójtowicz 2016: 410.

constitute separate headwords (e.g. *m-ji* cl. 3 ‘town’ → *ki-jiji* cl. 7 ‘village’; → *ji-ji* cl. 5 ‘metropolis’)<sup>36</sup>.

Moreover, the updated Swahili-Italian dictionary (KIU) includes different entry variants (orthographic, dialectal/continental, allomorphs), searchable as cross-reference entries and visualized as part of the headword. Thus, entries are searchable not only in the plural form, but also according to the different orthographic and phonetic variants. For instance, both alternative forms *asante*, *ahsante* ‘thank you’, have been inserted in the entry.

Similarly, the search of noun class prefixes includes all allomorphs, that is the possible variants occurring in different phonological contexts, such as:

cl. 1 **m-**: *mw-* and *mu-* are two different variants which occur in different phonological contexts; *mw-* before vowels except before vowel “u”, where the prefix *mu-* does not undergo vowel assimilation -, e.g. *muungwana* ‘gentleman’)

cl. 2 **wa-**: *w-* before vowel (e.g. *mwalimu*, pl. *walimu* ‘teacher/s’);

cl. 3 **m-**: *mu-* and *mw-*; similar situation as class 1 prefix;

cl. 7 **ki-**: *ch-* before vowel;

cl. 8 **vi-**: *vy-* before vowel.

The Swahili noun class system is quite standardised and homogeneous; each noun class is represented by noun prefixes which mark all elements of a Swahili sentence and thus encodes the grammatical information necessary for the grammatical agreement. Nevertheless, in some cases, apart from noun class prefixes, other semantic and grammatical skills, which can hardly be included in the entry of standard dictionaries, are required in order to construct a correct Swahili sentence.

In order to enrich the learning tools and support beginner learners in the acquisition of Swahili grammatical knowledge, the design of the updated Swahili-Italian dictionary provides a tool for adding grammatical comments or usage notes where appropriate. This option allows us to enhance the quality of information contained in the entry with the aim of supporting the acquisition of grammar skills and expanding the learner’s vocabulary through the addition of:

- indications on the correct grammatical agreement for more complex cases: e.g. the agreement of animate nouns from non-human classes (e.g. *kijana* ‘young man’ cl. 7; *mama*, ‘mother’, cl. 9; *waziri* ‘minister’ cl. 5); possessive agreement with animate nouns in class 9/10 referring to close relationship (e.g. *bibi yangu* ‘my grandmother’: possessive agreement is in class. 9 and not in class 1 \**bibi wangu*), etc.;
- notes on the semantic features of a term in order to disambiguate meanings and facilitate the appropriate choice/use of a term in translations

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<sup>36</sup> Class 12, including the diminutives in *ka-*, has disappeared in standard Swahili and has been reintroduced by some Tanzanian authors from the hinterland under the influence of other Bantu languages; in a few cases, also the plural *tu-* of class 13 was imported.

and oral/written production<sup>37</sup>. For this purpose, semantic explanations can also be accompanied by a number of labels/tags indicating status (formal, informal, slang, derogative, euphemism, vulgar, colloquial etc.); register (literary, familiar, popular, etc.); semantic field (biology; zoology; military; music; legal; medicine; religion, etc.), frequency of use (common, rare); figurative or extended meaning.

Swahili learners will rely on phonological tools as well, such as audio recordings (and possibly the transcriptions) of difficult words to pronounce. Since Italian L1 Swahili learners do not usually face difficulties in Swahili pronunciation due to the high degree of similarity with the Italian phonological system, pronunciation has not been inserted by default for each entry; nevertheless, a few terms containing difficult sounds (not present in the Italian phonological system) are supported by audio recordings with pronunciation (e.g. words containing the sound *ng'*, such as *ng'ombe* or the sound *j*, such as *jambo*). This learner-oriented feature is also useful when adding hints for Swahili words with different accents and meaning, e.g. *barabàra* 'highway', *baràbara* 'perfectly'. Since in Swahili accent regularly falls on the penultimate syllable, the dictionary offers the possibility of inserting an audio support for those exceptional cases where an accent falling on the third last syllable of a word is distinctive in that it produces difference in meaning.

Furthermore, the dictionary provides another useful learner-oriented tool through a function which allows cultural terminology to be supported by images/pictures, together with a description/definition which substitutes the gloss/translation.

The possibility of adding images and descriptions to an entry is particularly helpful in order to clarify specific terms, which cannot be easily translated into Italian or for which the Italian gloss is not exhaustive enough to explain a cultural concept (e.g. *ugali*: "typical Swahili food similar to 'polenta'"; *kanga*<sup>38</sup>: "coloured women's textile"). This additional information is generally avoided in printed dictionaries and cannot be included due to printing size restrictions.

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<sup>37</sup> A cross-reference system is also exploited to link synonymous entries, such as *kinywa* - *mdomo* 'mouth'.

<sup>38</sup> "The kanga is a widely spread printed cloth, mainly used by women as a dress. The cloth measures ca. 110 cm in height and 150 in length. It is defined by a border (*pindo*), a central field (*mji*) and usually contains on the lower third a printed proverbial inscription (*jina*). We know that it was "invented" around the 1880s in Zanzibar and imported from Europe in this form, i.e. already imprinted with patterns and inscription. It played an important role in the emancipation of slaves and their integration into the Muslim Swahili community of the East African coast. [...] the kanga allows for the communication of the unspeakable, whereby the interactants cannot be held responsible for their interaction." Beck, 2001: 157, 166.

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# Unveiling oral and writing skills of low-literate learners of L2 Italian: from research to teaching practice

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## ABSTRACT

*This contribution is meant to give an insight into the topic of L2 acquisition and teaching in the case of low-literate adult learners. To the aim, two applied researches will be presented, both focusing on L2 Italian: one investigates the oral skills of Senegalese learners with different educational backgrounds in the country of origin; the other concerns the assessment of L2 writing skills in a multilingual group of refugees and asylum seekers. The results of both studies contribute to look at this peculiar target of learners from an unusual perspective, unveiling skills that can often be “invisible” to L2 literacy teachers.*

## KEYWORDS

*L2 Italian; low-literate learners; oral skills; writing skills; L2 teaching.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO most recent data (2017), worldwide there are still about 750 million people aged over 15 (women in 63% of cases) who didn't acquire reading and writing abilities in their first language or any additional language. Despite the great effort made by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics to obtain global data, the computation of this number is complicated by the absence of international standard tools to elicit data and to assess literacy levels and by the ambiguity of the definition of (il)literacy itself (Nitti, 2020)<sup>1</sup>.

The lowest adult literacy rates (below 50% of the population) are observed in several countries of Southern Asia (49%) and sub-Saharan Africa (27%): Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone etc. The highest rates (around 100%) are reported in the other regions of Asia, Europe and Northern America (UNESCO, 2017).

Data from the last census in Italy (Istat, 2020) confirm that illiterates represent 0.6% of the population (339.585 individuals), while 4% (about 2 million) is composed of literates without history of formal education and 16% (almost 9 million) is represented by people who only attended primary school. In order to obtain an overall picture of the illiteracy phenomenon in Italy, these data should be accompanied by those regarding non-native, migrant population, coming also from the most "illiterate countries", especially in recent years. Unfortunately, official data on levels of literacy, education and languages of migrants in Italy are still lacking (D'Agostino, 2017; Mocciaro, 2019) and some information can be only derived from reports of the SPRAR (System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees). In 2018, 12% of 41.113 guests of reception centres in Italy are described as illiterates, 63% as having a brief educational history (corresponding to Italian primary and lower secondary schools), while 19% attended high school (or equivalent) and only 6% university (Cittalia, Fondazione Anci, Ministero dell'Interno, 2019). In 2019, 15% of 21.108 migrants learning Italian language in the SPRAR centres were taking pre-literacy classes while 38.5% were attending a basic course (Cittalia, Fondazione Anci, Ministero dell'Interno, 2020).

Despite the presence of low-literate and illiterate learners is not a new phenomenon for teachers in L2 Italian classes (Minuz, 2005), it has gained importance with the recent migrations towards Italy and other European countries. People from rural areas of the world, often affected by violent con-

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<sup>1</sup> In this contribution the UNESCO definition of (functional) literacy will be adopted: «A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (or her) group and community and also for enabling him (or her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (or her) own and the community's development» (UNESCO, 2005, p. 22).

flicts, are entering societies in which every kind of communication is based on the written medium and they are therefore experiencing a semiotic shock (Adami, 2009). For those, learning to read and write in the second language is an arduous task but it's obviously essential to be able to interact with the literate community and to conduct an autonomous life.

Literacy acquisition and literacy teaching in a second language have recently become subjects of interest in the academic European context, as demonstrated by the introduction of the Pre-A1 Level descriptors in the *Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020), as well as in Italy (Borri et al., 2014)<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. ILLITERATE OR LOW-LITERATE ADULT LEARNERS OF A SECOND LANGUAGE

L2 literacy classes for adults are usually very heterogeneous in terms of learners' profiles, with a great amount of variables of different nature. Minuz (2005) and Borri et al. (2014) proposed the following distinction in:

- pre-literate: learners whose first language doesn't have a written codification or it is not used as language of education in their country of origin;
- illiterate: learners who didn't develop reading and writing skills in any language;
- low-literate (or semi-literate): learners who have a brief history of formal education (usually less than five years). They are technically able to read and write in at least one language but they can't use literacy skills in daily communicative situations (they are not functionally literate).

Other linguistic variables that must be taken into account in an educational context are the kind of writing system of the learners' mother tongue (Latin, non-Latin, alphabetic, logographic) and the typological distance between L1 and L2, which can both have an impact on the perception of familiarity with the new language and particularly with the new written code to be learned. As we will observe in the following paragraph, also the didactic approach to which learners have been exposed in the few years of schooling could give important information to L2 literacy teachers.

Moreover there could be a high variability also in terms of oral abilities already acquired in the second language (null, initial, basic or intermediate).

Finally, personal variables (such as age, motivation, presence of disabilities or experience of trauma) and contextual factors in the country of arrival

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<sup>2</sup> Previous researches mainly focused on L2 English and Dutch have been carried out especially by members of the international association LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) founded in 2005.



(nature and frequency of contacts with the L2, domains of use of the second language) can obviously influence the L2 acquisition process.

Pre-literate, illiterate and low-literate learners of a second language are usually described in literature as complex and difficult learners. Some of their features are:

- the slowness in the process of second language acquisition, with frequent failures in achieving high levels of L2 competence and obtaining official language certifications, so important for them in order to regularize their situation in the host country (Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009);
- the lack of metalinguistic skills both in L1 and L2 and the difficulty in focusing on linguistic forms instead of on their meanings (see, among the others, the studies on grammatical judgment by Van de Craats, Kurvers & Young-Scholten, 2006);
- the scarcity of abstraction ability, due to a concrete, pragmatic way of thinking, closely connected to objects and experiences that can be directly observed (on this topic, see the study on syllogism by Kurvers, 2002);
- the frequent lack of logical and numeracy skills;
- peculiar educational needs, also regarding the developing of motor and spatial orientation skills and, of course, of competencies related to formal classroom expectations and to studying techniques and learning strategies (Ardila, Roselli & Rosas, 1989; Minuz, 2005);
- an uncertain motivation to second language learning, both instrumental and integrative, that in some cases can be easily undermined by a sense of frustration and insecurity due to a previous unsuccessful history of formal education.

According to the European guidelines (Council of Europe, 2017) L2 teaching approach in the case of this specific target must necessarily be learner-centred<sup>3</sup>. Taking into account the characteristics and the communicative needs of learners, L2 literacy teachers must propose educational paths strongly linked to the concreteness of learners' lives outside the classroom context (Peyton, Moore, Young 2010; Brichese, 2018). Adults must be made aware of the objectives of the language acquisition process, in which learning to read and write in the L2 means also to develop linguistic autonomy, self-confidence and self-esteem. Valorising learners' past experiences and (also poor) linguistic abilities previously developed in formal or informal contexts of education and in any language become therefore necessary and essential.

In this respect, two studies conducted at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and focusing on L2 Italian low-literate learners will be presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent in-depth look at the topic of L2 Italian literacy teaching, see Caon & Brichese, 2019.

### 3. UNVEILING ORAL SKILLS: THE CASE OF SENEGALESE LEARNERS OF L2 ITALIAN

The first is a study conducted by Maffia & De Meo (2015) aiming at investigating the oral skills of low-literate Senegalese learners of L2 Italian.

Senegalese immigrants in Italy represent a small community: in 2020 they were 106.198 (2.1% of all foreign population – Istat, 2020), mostly resident in Northern regions of the country and represented by adult and not married men. Nevertheless, they have always been and still are a very visible minority group, especially for their common occupation as local street vendors and for their strong ability to create community based support structures and link with other ethnic groups (de Filippo, 2003).

Senegalese usually present a rich sociolinguistic repertoire, as it is often observed in people from countries with a history of colonization. In Senegal, French, in the two varieties of Standard and Non-standard, is the linguistic legacy of the colonial period, with the former usually associated with high education and prestige, the latter usually spoken in market places and other informal situations (Ngom, 1999). French is until today the official language of the country although it is spoken only by 10% of the population. The most widely spoken language is Wolof instead, which is the first of several national languages (Pulaar, Mandinka, Noon, Serer, Soninke, Arabic etc.). All these languages present a high vitality in oral communication but they have received a standardised Latin orthography only after the independence, in the early Seventies. Moreover, they are nowadays in the process to be introduced in the Senegalese education system, but exclusively in the first years of primary school (Universalia, 2019). As a consequence, in Senegal literacy skills are developed in a second language, French or Arabic, depending on the kind of school attended. While French schools propose a “European” didactic approach, that gives priority to the acquisition of literacy abilities and to the development of metalinguistic awareness, the educational approach adopted in Qur’anic schools (*daaras*) is mainly based on oral learning and memorization, that conversely gives priority to oral skills (speaking and listening), trained through the reciting of Qur’an (Gandolfi, 2003).

#### 3.1 PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

In order to evaluate if and how these different educational contexts in the country of origin could influence the acquisition of L2 Italian oral skills, 20 subjects were involved in the study: 10 learners who attended French school in Senegal and 10 learners who attended Qur’anic school (average of 7 years school attendance for all). They were all male, aged between 20 and 40, liv-

ing in Italy for a period ranging from 1 to 7 years and they all indicated Wolof as their mother tongue. At the moment of the research they were all attending L2 Italian classes offered by a voluntary association in Naples. Their literacy levels in French and Italian languages were assessed through standardised tests and resulted very poor. A test for Arabic was not administered because they all declared they were unable to read and write Arabic or to use it in real communicative situations.

An elicited imitation task was constructed and administered to all the participants: they were asked to listen once to 18 Italian utterances and to imitate them immediately after, as accurately as possible, regardless of the effective understanding of their meaning. The model utterances presented different degrees of complexity in terms of morpho-syntactic structures, length, lexical frequency and prosodic contours (assertion, questions and orders).

The entire corpus of imitations was object of two different kinds of analysis:

- an error analysis, conducted by a group of 10 experienced teachers of L2 Italian without any competence in phonetics, aimed at evaluating L2 utterances in terms of accuracy and kinds of errors;
- a spectroacoustic analysis, conducted by a phonetician through specific software, aimed at observing rhythmical and prosodic characteristics of Senegalese learners' imitations, in comparison to the utterances produced by the Italian models.

### 3.2 RESULTS

The results of the error analysis showed a higher level of accuracy in the imitations produced by French school learners, when compared to the Qur'anic school learners' productions. This difference in the performance of the two groups of subjects, somehow expected, was probably due to superior (even if very basic) analytic skills developed by learners in the context of French school education. Both in the case of simple and complex model utterances, French school learners were able to produce a higher number of complete and correct imitations, with lower percentages of errors, particularly in the case of segmental pronunciation and lexicon.

However, the spectroacoustic analysis revealed a "hidden" skill in the group of learners who attended in Senegal the Qur'anic school. Compared to the other learners, they were found to better imitate the intonational contour of simple and short model utterances, especially in the case of assertions and questions. Moreover, even when they were not able to correctly or entirely reproduce long and complex Italian utterances, they did not interrupt the imitations but instead they used a peculiar strategy in order to preserve the rhythmical structure of the original utterance: they correctly imitated the first

and the last syllables of the model utterances, while in the central portion they produced a meaningless sequence of hypo-articulated syllables, called “mumbling”, as in the two examples reported below (Maffia, Pettorino & De Meo, 2015).

Model utterance: *Fossi in te, non avrei la presunzione di essere impeccabile.*

Imitation (speaker 15): *Fossi in te xxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx cabile*

Model utterance: *Perché usi ancora il cucchiaino di plastica?*

Imitation (speaker 18): *Perché usare xxx di plastica?*

This study unveiled oral skills in a group of Senegalese learners of L2 Italian, specifically linked to the prosodic competence developed in the context of Qur’anic school education that can be normally “invisible” to teachers. A pilot study on L2 Italian teaching to this specific target of learners demonstrated that taking into account their peculiarities, grounding on them the entire educational path, can have a positive effect on language learning motivation and improve L2 literacy acquisition process (Maffia & De Meo, 2017).

#### 4. UNVEILING WRITING SKILLS: FUNCTIONAL ADEQUACY IN L2 ITALIAN TEXTS OF VULNERABLE LEARNERS

In this paragraph the results of another study focusing this time on the writing skills development of low-literate refugees and asylum seekers learners of L2 Italian are reported (De Meo, Maffia & Vitale, 2019). The low level of literacy in the first language and, often, a brief and uncertain history of formal education in the country of origin are only two of the several aspects that contribute to the definition of vulnerability of this group of L2 learners. Personal features such as experience of trauma, anxiety, depression, lack of concentration, fragility, perception of invisibility and isolation can characterize refugees and asylum seekers, and have, of course, a negative impact on the motivation to L2 learning (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; SPRAR 2010; Gordon 2011; Galos et al., 2017; Nitti, 2018).

The research originated from the observation of frequent failures in passing the written task of L2 Italian Certification Exams in classes for refugees and asylum seekers at the CLAOR, the Linguistic Centre of the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. The study had, therefore, a twofold objective: firstly it intended to monitor the development of writing skills in low-literate vulnerable learners of L2 Italian in the context of formal education; moreover and secondly it meant to test the effectiveness of different assessment methods of L2 Italian writing skills for this specific target.

## 4.1 THE CORPUS AND THE TWO SCALES

In order to reach these goals, 50 refugees and asylum seekers were involved in the research (only 5 women), coming from 16 different countries of Northern and sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia and with 20 different mother tongues (Arabic, Bambara, Bangla, Bissa, Mandinka, Urdu, Wolof, Yoruba etc.). A group of low-literate learners (0-8 years of schooling in the home country) was distinguished from a literate group (9-18 years), in order to understand if the variable level of literacy could have an impact on the development of writing skills and on the effectiveness of different assessment methods.

At the moment of the research, all the involved learners were hosted in an Extraordinary Reception Centre and in SPRAR centres in Naples and they were all attending L2 Italian basic classes. Their writing skills were monitored in a period of six months through the regular administration of written tasks. A corpus of 450 written productions, composed by narrations, descriptions and written interactions, was collected and all the texts were evaluated by experts using two different rating scales:

- a traditional scale, focused mainly on formal accuracy and in which the analytical criteria used in L2 Italian Certifications were considered and rated (language use, morpho-syntactic correctness, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation);
- a functional adequacy scale, assessing the ability of the writer to successfully transfer information and the socio-pragmatic appropriateness of his/her production. This scale is composed of four global dimensions - content, task requirements, comprehensibility, coherence and cohesion (Kuiken & Vedder, 2017; Vedder, 2016).

## 4.2 RESULTS

The first result of the study was a confirmation that writing skills development of low-literate refugees and asylum seekers learners of L2 Italian is a long and slow process. Nevertheless, a specific focus on L2 writing in the classroom context was found to be very helpful to improve quality and appropriateness of written productions in the second language.

Furthermore, through the application of the functional adequacy scale, higher and more stable scores were obtained, even at the very beginning of the observation and especially in the assessment of low-literates' productions and in the case of narrations and written interactions. While with the traditional scale the low scores given by raters in particular to the parameter of

morpho-syntactic correctness resulted in very negative evaluations, the functional adequacy scale appeared to be a reliable and efficient tool for valorising also poor writing skills, instead of underlying the limits of low-literates' productions.

Such results led to suppose that an assessment method focused on socio-pragmatic appropriateness of a written (but also oral) production, independently from the formal accuracy of grammatical structures, could be effectively used in classroom context but above all in L2 Italian Certification Exams for low-literate vulnerable learners, at least for A1 and A2 levels. This could avoid further educational failures that, in the case of this specific target, risk to have a disastrous effect on second language learning motivation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this contribution two different studies have been presented: the former focusing on the oral skills in the L2 Italian of Senegalese learners; the latter on the assessment method used to evaluate written texts produced by a heterogeneous group of refugees and asylum seekers attending Italian language classes offered by reception centres in Naples.

Despite being very different in terms of objectives, methodologies and linguistic materials analysed, the two studies have at least three aspects in common.

The first one regards the participants involved: adult low-literate learners of a second language, a target that has been neglected for a long time, drawing only recently the attention of academic community in Europe and also in Italy, due to the general growth of the migrant population and to the influx of refugees and asylum seekers also from countries with low literacy rates.

The second aspect is that both studies represent attempts to change perspective when describing low-literate learners' abilities: instead of pointing out to what they lack, these researches try to unveil and valorise what they can actually do with language, their "hidden" and maybe unexpected oral and writing skills.

Furthermore, what the two studies are also sharing is that they are deeply rooted in the L2 classroom experience and have important implications for teaching, constituting metaphorical bridges between the university and the different contexts in which L2 Italian courses are often provided, such as reception centres or voluntary associations.

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