



Call for papers

1st International Colloquium of the Observatory of African Plurilingualism (OPA)

Dschang (Cameroon). December 13-15, 2023

Reflecting on practices, learning, teaching of African languages and cultures in light of the labour market *Contributions to sustainable socio-economic development*

The year 2021 saw the creation of the **Observatory of African Plurilingualism (OPA)** at the initiative of the Assane Seck University of Ziguinchor in Senegal. The OPA is an international scientific association whose objective is to contribute to the introduction of African languages into the education systems of French-speaking African countries. As early as 1953, in the *Report of Experts on the Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*¹, the UNESCO, while underlining the difficulties inherent in the introduction of these languages as languages of schooling, insisted much less on the purely linguistic or didactic obstacles of such an undertaking than on the social and political obstacles. Because they want to reaffirm this position, the OPA's members adopt an epistemological posture whose originality lies in the intimate articulation of these different orders of facts. Among other things, the link between language practices and economics have been the subject of some number of reference works (Bourdieu, 1977; Grin, 2011 and 2017). The first OPA conference is thus an opportunity to revisit the complex processes related to the design and implementation of public policies that are based on and *truly* support plurilingualism and African languages. It is, therefore, at least to some degree, in line with a resolutely prospective dynamic.

The issue of plurilingualism in Africa, but also in areas that were once considered monolingual, has been brought to the fore by factors such as the reconfiguration of global geopolitical balances, the increase in migratory movements, and the rise of information and communication technologies. For decades, a multitude of research studies (Bearth & Fan, 2002; Tourneux, 2008; Ouane & Glanz, 2010; Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014; Leconte, 2014; Auzanneau et al., 2016; Metangmo-Tatou 2019) as well as major international organizations (World Bank, CONFEMEN, UNESCO, etc.) have rendered the strictly technocratic vision of economic aggregates obsolete by unequivocally asserting the importance of valuing human capital in the process of sustainable development. They have emphasized not only the cognitive but also the educational and therefore economic gain of introducing most spoken languages alongside the official European languages for a fairer and more efficient schooling. However, the relevance of the arguments put forward did not instantly overcome the old predilection for monolingual educational models. The centralising language policies of a systemic Jacobinism have really taken their toll on the ways in which language repertoires are managed and on the collective imaginaries as obstacles to sustainable development.

Although we observe with Daouaga (2018) that the cause of biplurilingual education is now being heard at the institutional level for certain levels of education (basic and secondary education), it is being done so with very diverse fortunes since today, on the African continent, only one in five children is schooled in a language with which he or she is familiar (UNESCO, ADEA, African Union, 2022). Furthermore, diversified training programmes adapted to

¹ According to the terminology in use at the time.

multilingual contexts and built on existing linguistic and communicative skills are lagging behind (Oueba and Glanz, 2010). Such programmes would create valuable employment niches (SDG 8)². It must be acknowledged that biplurilingual education is *ushering* in a new era, but it must be recognized, however, that its justification still has difficulty in taking deep roots in the societies concerned and, a fortiori, in public policies. This is all the more true as the linguistic skills that may be capitalized on rarely provide any *economic and/or socially recognized added value* in a profession's scope or in the development of a career. The correlation between plurilingualism and socio-economic reality is not immediately obvious, and studies in this field in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa are still too scarce. It is that link between economic and social matters on one hand and language management on the other hand that constitutes the core concerns of what is now referred to as linguistics of/for development (Métangmo-Tatou, 2003; Métangmo-Tatou, 2019; Agresti, 2021; Zouogbo (ed.), 2022).

The persistence of a diglossic ideology in sub-Saharan Africa can also be explained, in many contexts, by the application of a major reform of educational systems without prior information nor an awareness-raising phase for the target group (Tabi Manga, 2000). This is why we consider that work on representations is necessary to truly anchor the parameter of inclusiveness in psychosocial habits, not only for school education (Prax-Dubois, 2020) but also in the field of vocational training (Tourneux and Métangmo-Tatou, 2010; Amédégnato, 2014; Métangmo-Tatou, 2019). The first OPA colloquium should play a groundbreaking role in this direction.

The aim of this colloquium is to broaden the scope of reflection and intervention beyond the school sphere by considering public policies and practices in the fields of integration, employment, and vocational training (Ans et al., 1992; Chaudenson & Slodzian, 1994; Georgescu & Stabback, 2008; Dhorsan & Moreno Chachuaio, 2008; Silué, 2018; Leconte & Troncy, 2021). The aim is to document the relationship – possibly two-way – with African languages. This problematic is bound to raise one common objection used to disqualify the use of African languages: their presumed inability to carry the full range of specialized discourses and to express scientific and technical *realia*. In this respect, research based on a terminological approach appears to be essential and truly decisive (Diki-Kidiri, 2008; Frath and Sow, 2022; Mouzou, 2022) in a context where vocational training systems remain largely monolingual. Communicators, interpreters, health workers, teachers, to name just a few, receive training that prepares them to interact exclusively with French-speaking audiences, which often implies, in an allophone context, cobbling together solutions – not always for the better. Yet, most of these professionals have, *a priori*, an endogenous linguistic and cultural capital which, if duly reinforced and supervised, would enable them to enhance their professional practice. The entire social body could then benefit from bi-competent profiles, ideally trained in an intercultural perspective.

The fact is that the solely synchronic – because profane – vision that we have of the languages we are in contact with does not always allow us to perceive that these same languages only became truly functional thanks to social dynamics and different types of development and planning actions (Tatou, 2021; Leconte, 2021). It is especially true for those languages that are today privileged vectors of specialised content (French, English, etc.). While corpus planning, status planning and acquisition planning appear to be essential activities for promoting the use of African languages and cultures in education, vocational training, and work, they are deeply linked to the central problem of the OPA working group that initiated this colloquium, the WG on 'Linguistic Policies and Imaginaries'. This problematic is built around the urgency of nurturing positive language attitudes among African languages speakers, given the causal relationship between dysphoric representations and the difficulty of setting up efficient and sustainable language policies.

In this perspective, OPA members are committed to contributing to the design, implementation, and evaluation of biplurilingual public policies. More specifically, through this conference, the OPA is engaging in a reflection on the functional uses and representations of African languages in relation to the issues of education, vocational training, employability, and entrepreneurship, which are crucial issues in the current economic situation.

This colloquium proposes 4 thematic axis:

Axis 1: Epistemology of language sciences

Historicity of linguistic theories and epistemological conceptions. Foundations and issues of linguistics for development. Applied linguistics theory. Language policy and planning theory. Cross-cultural comparison. Pluridisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Research methodology. Citizen involvement and researcher's responsibility. Open science. Link between research and society.

² It is worth noting that "470 million jobs per year will be needed worldwide for new entrants to the labour market between 2016 and 2030". <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/fr/economic-growth/>

Axis 2: Public language policy and planning

State of the art of public language policies and practices in the relevant fields (education, vocational training, labour market). Language legislation and guidelines. Policies to promote African languages and plurilingualism. Linguistic imaginaries. People's acceptance and resistance. Translation practices and policies. Social responsibility of States, universities, training centres, and companies.

Axis 3: Vocational training, labour market and African languages

Mapping of African languages practice-related professions and training. African languages, artificial intelligence, and digital professions. Employability and African language proficiency. Language practices at work. Language (in)security. Contextualising job offers, professional skills, training systems in various fields (administration, health, culture, justice, agriculture, trade, media, education, environment, etc.).

Axis 4: Language training engineering in various professional fields

African languages training-needs analysis. Language skills framework. Functional literacy skills in relation to the labour market. Language training engineering and course design. Language training practices. Vocational African language learning and teaching (didactics of languages for specific purposes). Pedagogical materials and resources. Language Engineering and monolingual/plurilingual terminological adjustments/creations (physical or digital).

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Submission types

Submissions may be based on fundamental, basic or applied research, practical cases and feedback. All proposals can be taken on, insofar as the communication or workshop project addresses the key challenges laid out by the WG 'Language policies and imaginaries' and is able to shed light on the African situations in the fields concerned or to support the dynamics.

The organisers will accept three submission types:

- **Individual presentation:** 30 min (20 min presentation + 10 min questions)
- **Roundtable:** 90 min (discussion on a specific topic amongst 3-5 speakers and with the audience)
- **Collaborative workshop:** 120 min (workshop can be thematical (Cf. axis) or with methodological aim (research methodology)
Collaborative workshops aim to propose to participants a concrete experience (i.e. drawing a methodological guide or a plurilingual technical handbook, developing or revising a vocational training program, designing a pedagogical project, contextualising official language policy, etc.). A first feedback will be provided during the colloquium and may be extended afterwards.

Languages of the colloquium: French and English.

Submission process

Proposals can be individual or collective, submitted by researchers, doctoral students, post-doctoral students but also association members, practitioners, professionals involved in the theme of the conference, and institutional actors in language policies.

Multidisciplinary proposals or proposals involving both researchers and practitioners, institutions and/or civil society are mostly welcomed.

Proposals must be submitted no later than May 15, 2023 (midnight, your local time):

-> **by email** : send it simultaneously to the following 3 addresses: opafricain@gmail.com ; metangmo.tatou@gmail.com ; ndieme.sow@univ-zig.sn

-> **or by dropping your proposal and details on our website:** <https://colloque-opa-2023.sciencesconf.org>

Each submission will include a PDF file (sent by email or uploaded online) with:

- the name of the speaker(s) and, if applicable, the scientific or professional affiliation
- an email address
- a mini biography of the speaker(s) (150 words max)
- the type of submission (individual presentation, roundtable, collaborative workshop)
- the thematic axis (1, 2, 3, 4) or specific topic
- a title
- 5 keywords
- A summary of the proposal (300-500 words) explicitly stating the issue at stake, the problematic, the theoretical framework, the methodology, the main results, and the elements for discussion.
 - For proposals involving institutional actors, professionals, civil society, the organisers will pay specific attention to the issue at stake in the proposal, its scope and objectives, the questions raised to bring some elements to discussion with the audience.
 - For collaborative workshops: in addition to the above-mentioned requirements, the organisers expect the speaker(s) to precise the target audience, to explain how the workshop will proceed (including the feedback process) as well as the post-colloquium perspectives.
- a bibliography with a maximum of 5 references

The OPA Colloquium review process is double-blind, i.e. the names of the authors, reviewers, and affiliations are not revealed to each other. All submissions are peer reviewed by the conference scientific committee.

Timeline

- **5 April 2023: call for papers online and submissions open**
- **15 May 2023 (midnight, your local time): deadline for all submissions - papers, roundtables, and collaborative workshops**
- **17 July 2023: notification emails sent out**
- **02 October 2023: registration opens**
- **04 December 2023: registration closes**
- **13-14-15 December 2023: 1st OPA Colloquium**

Following the colloquium, a selection of articles will be published by the *Presses de l'Observatoire du plurilinguisme africain* (POPA). At this stage, trilingual abstracts in French – African language – English will be required.

Practical information

- Location: University of Dschang, Cameroon
- Registration to the colloquium is compulsory for all speakers as well as for any person wishing to attend the latter. Registration includes access to the colloquium, coffee breaks and lunches. It does not include accommodation. Additional fees may be required for optional activities (dinner, visits...).
- Registration fees:
 - Academics non-members of the OPA, administrative or technical management staff and assimilated: 50.000 FCFA (75 euros)
 - Academics members of the OPA: 35.000 FCFA (55 euros)
 - Students, doctoral students, post-doctoral students: 25.000 FCFA (40 euros)
 - Other professionals and members of associations: 35.000 FCFA (55 euros)

For any questions, please write to us: colloqueOPA2023@gmail.com

You will find all useful information our website: <https://colloque-opa-2023.sciencesconf.org>

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