

The Challenges of Language Documentation in the field of "Afrikanistik"

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Language documentation (LD), as a contemporary solution to language endangerment, is irreversibly caught in the 'claws' of new digital technologies meant to capture, store, annotate, and disseminate linguistic and cultural data. This significant advancement in the worldwide concern for language and culture preservation is, unfortunately, not yet appreciated as a valuable contribution towards the improvements of research conditions in most African countries. Indeed, while the scientists are wallowed in the sterile routine of language description to prove the efficiency of one theory over another, the government, the main fund provider, is busy dealing with daily problems of poverty alleviation and social crisis that force it to set its priority far away from matters relating to language extinction. The most recent global economic and social crisis, which is felt in the most drastic way in the underdeveloped countries, has not helped the situation. However, doing quality research on language related issues is central to the world's main development challenges, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), to which many African countries adhered.

Therefore, the ultimate question is: what could be the place of a discipline like LD in such a pessimistic scenery? How do we conciliate such divergent interests? As a multidisciplinary approach to language study, how can LD give an impulse to research in Africa? This presentation is an attempt to answer these questions and to show that LD can be an opportunity to improve on what we have been doing in the area of linguistic research. Applied Afrikanistik, as a prospective discipline, might become the platform where the divergent interests merge to produce more optimistic results towards the improvement of people's daily lives.