

A Transformation in African Language Teaching in the United States: The Emergence of a Field Superstructure

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1. Introduction

1.1. Preliminary remarks

The teaching and learning of African languages at the United States (U.S.) comprehensive research institutions that began with the enactment of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 and functioned with little inter-institutional coordination for decades has undergone a definite transformation since 1999: The emergence of the field of African languages. This change results from the collaborative efforts deployed and wisdom shared by many scholars, particularly Africanist linguists. These scholars' insights and efforts in this transformation have been externalized and practiced through organizations that they have created. Field-internally, they include the Annual Conference on African Linguistics (ACAL) that was launched in 1970 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; the African Language Teachers Association (ALTA) established officially at an ACAL meeting at the University of Georgia, Athens, in 1988; and the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) created in 1999 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Externally but within the general field of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs), the field of African languages has benefited immensely from its interaction with other LCTLs under the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), of which ALTA was a co-founding member, that was officially established at the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the Johns Hopkins University' School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C. in 1990 (Bokamba 2002).

1.2. Objectives

The objectives of this paper are two-fold: First, to review the emergence of the field of African languages in the U.S. during the last ten years in light of the roles played by ACAL, ALTA, NALRC, and NCOLCTL in nurturing the study of African languages. In the review section we will attempt to document three inter-related developments: (1) the transformation of else while Africanist linguists to language pedagogists; (2) the exploitation of the synergies between ALTA and its sister organizations in matters related to language programming; and (3) the pivotal role played by NALRC in the professionalization of the field of African languages, including the publication of well-designed pedagogical materials. In addition we will examine and ascertain the field's future potentials, focusing on how the roles of the affiliated organizations referenced above could be exploited to re-invigorate it to meet both the language learning and linguist research needs of the twenty first century.

2. Review

2.1. Historical precedents

The study of African languages did not start in a class room but in the field as early as the 15th Century with missionaries who were curious about the languages of the communities they were interested in converting to Christianity. Their work begun with the writing of dictionaries and simple

grammars that inspired linguists like Wilhelm H. I. Bleek who published two volumes of *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages* (1862/69) after his pioneering work on Bantu linguistics, including the naming of this language family; James Frederick Schön who published *Grammar of the Hausa Language* (1862), followed by *Dictionary of the Hausa Language*, with Appendices of Hausa Literature (1876); Carl Meinhof (1899) who published on the phonology of Bantu languages and influenced subsequent research on African linguistics during his time; Johann Ludwig Krapf (1850) who published the first grammar of Kiswahili; Diedrich Westermann (1911) who conducted research in West Africa and published the *Languages of the Sudan*; Alice Werner who published *The Language Families of Africa* (1915) and popularized the study of African languages at the University of London's school of Oriental and African Studies; Doke (1927) who published *Textbook of Zulu Grammar* and devoted much of his research on the South African languages; E.O. Ashton (1943) who published the most influential grammar Kiswahili; and A. E. Meeussen (1959) who, among other works, published *Essai de Grammaire Rundi* and devoted much of career writing such grammars on several other central bantu languages; Guthrie who is known mainly for his classification (1948) and detailed two volumes of comparative study (1967) of Bantu languages, but also published the first English *Lingala Grammar and Dictionary* (1935), to name only a few.

2.2. Evolution of PAL in U.S.

Needless to say, Programs in African Languages (PAL) in the United States were formally established in the late 1950s as an integral and crucial component of the National Defense Act (NDEA) of 1958 that created African and other Area Studies Centers (Dougherty 1993, Ruther 1994, Swenson 1999). The programs were mostly nested in linguistics and African literature departments that have been, over the years, relatively successful in nurturing the teaching of African languages largely by Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) under the supervision of linguist or a literature specialist, because of the role of African languages in linguistic and literary research. As such, PALs did not exhibit a sense of field, the different programs and their supervisors were loosely connected to each others nationally only as "African language coordinators" congregating at the annual ASA meetings initially until the establishment of ACAL by 1972 as an annual event after which an embryonic sense of a community, but not a field, emerged as they begun to share challenges and discuss possible solutions. The challenges included the training of TAs, availability of good teaching materials, and standardization of specific language curricula nationally to facilitate summer programs, including GPA.

With regard to non-linguists who have served as language coordinators, it is interesting to note that many African literary critics have linguistic training that may have enhanced their interest in language research. The exposure to language study that African linguistics and literature scholars have received has contributed to the quality of African languages pedagogists whom we have today. Such scholars have trained in both formal and functional linguistics, giving them the advantages of understanding the structure of their target languages and using this knowledge to enhance their effectiveness in language instruction. Thus, those linguists that engage in linguistic theory as well as language pedagogy bring to the language classroom the best of both worlds. They understand how to manipulate the linguistic structures to benefit an adult learner of a new language which often times is a daunting task for non-linguist or language pedagogists.

It is also important to point out here that the strong relationship between the teaching of African languages to linguistics or literature has contributed to the credibility and survival of many African languages on college campuses. In addition to teaching general linguists or literature, many of the African or Africanist scholars have for decades assumed leadership roles in their home departments for the teaching of African languages. They also function either as language coordinators, advisors, or advocates at their institutions. These roles are critical and have, for many years, served as the driving force that has fostered strong language and African area studies programs on college campuses (Lambert 1973, 1984, Thompson 1980, Clements 1989).

At the general linguistic field level, African languages were instrumental in interrogating linguistic theories that had for a long time relied only on Indo-European languages. New data from African languages forced linguists to abandon analyses that do not do justice to African languages and to devise explanations that make particular sense to specific language or a group of languages. Moshi

(1998, 2000) challenged theories that did not consider the possibility of multiple object marking in African languages such as Kichaga and the idea that all locative nouns should be considered *chômeurs*. ACAL provided the forum where scholars could individually and collectively challenge such assumptions that were then often taken as universal. Thus, the study of languages provided ample data, the cultural and social environments through which such data could be interpreted. ACAL's success in transforming the linguistics academy would not have been possible without relying on the available resources provided through the teaching of African languages. For over a decade, ACAL has inspired scholars to explore little known African languages that are critical in linguistic research. Such languages provide comparative data that offer new information that enhances scholars' knowledge of the more commonly taught African languages (viz., Arabic, Kiswahili, Yoruba, Wolof, IsiZulu) that have been institutionalized in the U.S, Europe, and to some extent Asia. It was the extended pool of data from African languages in the 1980s and 1990s that created unprecedented interest and opportunities in African language research which in turn increased the demand among graduate students for the study of African languages (Clements 1989, Bokamba 2002). The demand propelled an increase in the number of African languages taught at research institutions. Much of the responsibility for developing the field of African languages and their teaching at many of the U.S. colleges and universities lie in the hands of scholars who are members of ACAL and or ALTA.

3. Synergies Between LCTL-based organizations

What emerges from the overview above is the conjugation of synergies between a few key organizations in the U.S. that have been involved in the study and research on African and non-African LCTLs. The manner and contexts in which they collaborated is both interesting and informative, and thus merits some discussion here.

3.1. The relationship between ALTA and ACAL

The emergence of the African ALTA in 1987, officially in 1988, was a consequence of ACAL's success in mobilizing scholars with a keen interest in both language teaching and linguistic research. ALTA's main mission is to develop the field of African languages to meet global challenges. Bokamba (2002) attributes the emergence of ALTA to the marginalization of African language teaching and learning at the national level (under ACAL) which forced Africanist linguists interested in language teaching and learning to organize and facilitate the creation of a forum where pedagogists and linguists could discuss ways to sustain the teaching and learning of African languages in the U.S. The force behind ALTA was, and still is, the many active African language teachers and experts, many of them being African students or scholars that were recruited for different institutions. This group had an unmatched interest in and a desire to promote the teaching and learning of African languages.

From its inception, ALTA used different venues to organize its annual meetings, the most popular being the ACAL meeting, and secondarily the African Studies Annual meeting (ASA) due to its strong affiliation with Title VI or National Resource Centers (NRCs) that are required to include language study in their major funded activities. Title VI Centers fund a variety of language activities as well as language teaching positions on their college and university campuses. The early members of ALTA were originally from NRCs. In the later 80s and early 90s, ALTA members used the ACAL to convene language coordinators' meetings, as an opportunity to discuss matters related to summer language teaching and other responsibilities mandated by NRCs at their respective campuses. They also used the venue to discuss national responsibilities that included the organization of intensive summer language programs abroad. These study abroad programs, popularly known as Group Projects Abroad (GPA), were and continue to be funded by the US Department of Education for three or four years at a time; and have focused mainly on Hausa, Kiswahili, Yoruba, and IsiZulu. Initially, the program targeted graduate students and supported them for six to eight weeks of intensive language in Africa. The majority of these students were students of linguistics, history, and political science. The requirements were that upon completion of their Masters or PhDs, these graduates would engage in higher education or service in government agencies. In addition to the intensive summer program, In 1993 ALTA, with the support of the Association of African Studies Programs (AASP), launched a national intensive summer language in the U.S, popularly known as SCALI (Summer Cooperative African Languages

Institute). This program is also a mandate from the US Department of Education to NRCs, a necessary condition for the funding they receive that have shown evidence of a strong support for languages. Based on the ideas of cost-effectiveness in African language instruction and economy of scale, SCALI provided learning opportunities to students at any level of an African language study.

In the 90s, ALTA members were active participants at the ACAL conference as linguists focusing on linguistic research. At that time, ACAL did not concern itself with language pedagogy but focused exclusively on linguistic theories through the exploitation of data from African languages, especially those that had already been institutionalized. And were readily available without necessitating field travel to Africa. Needless to say, ALTA members exploited this dual role to attract the attention of the theoreticians to acknowledge the relationship between linguistic theories and language teaching and learning.

The ALTA membership's growth in ACAL was a direct result of the strong relationship between ALTA and ACAL. Linguists who were also interested in language teaching and learning found ALTA to be a good avenue through which they could explore language pedagogy. Non-linguists found ALTA to be a forum through which they could benefit from linguists' insights on language study. Non-title VI institutions produced the majority of the ALTA membership considering the small pool of funded NRCs within AASP nationwide. ALTA's second and fourth presidents came from non-Title VI institutions (University of Georgia at Athens and Delaware State University respectively). From 1992 ALTA made a concerted effort to recruit scholars from traditional black colleges in addition to small colleges that had a strong track record of teaching African languages, but had limited representation in academia. Many of these schools had an African language requirement for either their minor or majors in Black Studies. For a while the languages of choice were Swahili, Hausa, and Yoruba. Many of these schools also had among their faculty the 1960 pioneers of Black Studies and African languages initiative in the U.S.

3.2. The Relations between ALTA and NCOLCTL

ALTA's success in field development was also enhanced by its early relationship with NCOLCTL in which the first founding Vice President was a key member of ALTA and ACAL and in which a few other Africanist linguists/pedagogists subsequently played key roles as officers. As indicated above, NCOLCTL was officially established at NFLC in 1990, but its activities began in January 1987 at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Washington D.C. with a nationwide consultative meeting on the revision of the Title VI legislation, Higher Education Act of 1986, in which representatives from different LCTL fields were invited (Bokamba 2002). NFLC was a product of the President's Commission on Foreign languages and International Studies, with a principal objective to improve foreign language capacity in the United States.

The National Foreign Languages Council organized conferences between 1987 and 1990 on the need for the US to be ready to engage the world. This allowed NFLC to influence the various foreign language fields including African languages. Richard D. Lambert's leadership at NFLC provided strategic guidance and material support. The leadership promoted dialogue among scholars from different fields that eventually formed NCOLCTLs in 1990. The expected outcome was that the different groups would find collective solutions to common problems and would develop a coherent group of scholars with one voice advocating for foreign languages (Brecht and Walton 1994, Bokamba 2002). NCOLCTL used these goals to mobilize practitioners/ linguists from different language fields.

The role of linguists in the various meetings held by NCOLCTL was critical, especially that of the Africanist linguists. Their participation was seen by NCOLCTL as an added advantage that would raise its visibility. In the final analysis, it was the African languages membership that shaped the direction of these conferences, the agendas that directly affected the language fields, and what eventually emerged as the federation of language associations under the NCOLCTL umbrella. The first Vice President and second President of the Association was Professor Eyamba Bokamba from ALTA. He was among the founding members who made it possible for the NCOLCTL to secure its first major grant from the Ford Foundation in 1990. This grant was instrumental in NCOLCTL's early accomplishments and assortment of agendas intended to strengthen the different NCOLCTL associations and the fields they represented. A subsequent grant in 1992 allowed the NCOLCTL

membership to focus on language learning frameworks intended to enhance the teaching and learning of foreign languages by creating life-long learners (Bokamba 2002).

ALTA was one of the earliest associations to embrace NCOLCTL and to designate tasks and activities intended to further NCOLCTL's endeavors. ALTA's enthusiasm and development under this umbrella were instrumental in shaping the direction of NCOLCTL as a new vehicle for global language and cultural understanding. ALTA was also the first association to initiate discussions on the language learning framework through organized conferences and workshops for its members. Its leadership and representation on the NCOLCTL Board was a major advantage because it was able to work on two different fronts simultaneously: the ALTA membership agenda and its interest in the activities of NCOLCTL. The team style representation of ALTA on the NCOLCTLs Board enhanced its membership's understanding to appreciate the issues that ALTA had to address within the language framework concept, with special attention to the African languages' field specific perspectives. Consequently ALTA's field initiatives were used by NCOLCTL as guidelines to a generic development model from which other associations could draw examples.

ALTA benefited most in material development, best practices, national visibility (Bokamba 2002), the development of a pool of professional language teachers trained during the summer sessions at NALRC (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and with its financial support, and an attempt to change the culture of transient instructor pools at college campuses. As a national tool and through its forums, NCOLCTL was instrumental in empowering many individuals teaching African languages at the different institutions where they seemed powerless to initiate changes at the institutional level.

The period between 1992 and 2009, has been most revealing in major institutions of higher learning. Not only have African languages been elevated but also many linguists/pedagogists have been absorbed in the main stream of academia by appointment as Lecturers and Assistant Professors. There are several scholars who hold tenured or tenure track positions at these institutions with major responsibilities in African language pedagogy. In fact institutions that did not have USDE funded Title VI Centers have done better in this respect. These are historic and much-awaited developments in the field of African languages teaching and learning. More needs to be done to strengthen this achievements, a point I will return to in the recommendation section of this paper.

ALTA's new found role in NCOLCTL and its national visibility enhanced its mission that had been shelved since its inception in 1988. NCOLCTL enabled ALTA to work together rather than in isolation at their various institutions. Projects for NCOLCTL that were funded by the Ford Foundation found examples for other language associations from ALTA through the well thought out selection of projects that had respectable outcomes. NCOLCTL used the success shown by ALTA to convince the FORD Foundation that their money was going to good cause and results produced were beneficial and met the Foundation's expectations. ALTA's success can be explained by its strong leadership at that time (1991-97) ¹as well as its members' willingness to transform the field of African languages.

NCOLCTL exploited ALTA's energy, more in the early first ten years of its inception (1992-2002) than in the last seven (2003-2009). In the early years NCOLCTL found it easy to work with ALTA because it was well organized and it was an emerging field that had been largely ignored by academia. ALTA's enthusiasm served NCOLCTL very well, especially in raising its visibility during the formative years particularly in placing its concern about the plight of LCTLs. However, this relationship was not without anxiety on the part of ALTA which was cognizant of the fact that there are less commonly taught languages and there are lesser commonly taught languages. 99% of the African languages fall in the category of the 'lesser' commonly taught languages. Currently, only Arabic, Swahili, and Yoruba could be considered in the company of less commonly taught languages like Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Hebrew, and the Turkic languages. As stated earlier, ALTA's visibility in NCOLCTL was enhanced by a strong representation at the NCOLCTL leadership board. This is evidenced in the role played by Dr. Antonia Fòlárín-Schleicher, who not only rose to become NCOLCTL's second Africanist president, after Dr. Bokamba, but also initiated the move of the association's headquarters to the University of Wisconsin where it has thrived financially and membership wise. Further, she established NALRC (National African Language Resource Center - NLRC), a Title VI center, that has successfully galvanized the field of African languages in different

¹ These include: Eyamba Bokamba, (University of Illinois), David Dwyer (Michigan state University), John Hutchinson (Boston University), Lioba Moshi (University of Georgia), Antonia F. Schleicher (University of Wisconsin), and John I. Mtembezi (Delaware State University).

ways, including: Publication of a well-conceived language textbooks series that is informed by current SLA theories; publication of student reference grammars on selected languages; annual sponsorship of different professional development institutes in African language teaching and learning; evaluation of programs in African languages; publication of artistically and well informed colorful brochures on numerous African languages, and convening of the ALTA annual meeting, etc. NALRC has become a role model for other NLRCs in the nation. More recently, another former ALTA president, Dr. Alwiya Omar has been elected the Association's Vice-President and will become its president based on NCOLCTL's bylaws.

The funding opportunities from NCOLCTL and the strong leadership that ALTA developed in the 90s allowed ALTA in the last ten years to become a mainstream language association. This was done through mobilization and careful planning of activities. The objective was to strengthen the field and to make the association sustainable. One of the most effective strategies was the creation of language specific task forces to allow individual languages or groups thereof to organize. The other was the establishment of an ALTA annual international conference in 1997.

ALTA developed language task forces based on the language specific interests of its membership. These task forces were charged with the responsibility of recruiting new members to ensure that each specific language or group of languages represented the interests of the field. It was at this time also that ALTA achieved an increase in its membership and program strength through workshops on materials development, teaching methodologies, mentoring, and outreach to K-12 and community organizations.

Establishing the taskforces allowed ALTA to envision better the structure and scope of field. The leadership quickly realized that only two languages, namely Swahili and Yoruba, had a reasonable number of participants to make a group each. The other languages were organized into collaborative groups composed of language clusters. Such clusters included the Southern African languages (Lingala, IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Sesotho) and the West African languages (Bamana, Hausa, Wolof). Other smaller languages, Chichewa, and Kikongo-Kituba formed an interest group. It was clear from these groupings that the field had serious inequalities based on how widespread African languages were institutionalized. Compared to the 1980s, it was clear that while there were more institutions teaching African languages, the number of languages with sustainable institutional support had declined substantially due to budgetary constraints and low enrollments. While some non-Title VI funded institutions discontinued the offering of their African languages due to lack of institutional funding and or permanent staffing, some Title VI funded institutions did not guarantee continuation if the external funding was not available. The funding and subsequent growth or decline in demand for these languages seem to follow changes in world politics including the end of the cold war and apartheid and the emergence of new realities in the world such as terrorism and global economies. For example, the South African languages: IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Sesotho that had emerged as a group in the 80s lost ground after the political transformational changes that took place in South Africa in the mid 90s. To some extent there has been a drop in the number of graduate students from South Africa seeking educational opportunities in the U.S., making it very hard for institutions wishing to teach any of these languages to find instructors. Many of the students and professionals who came to the U.S. in the 80s and 90s for linguistics, education and other language related degrees have returned to South Africa to take positions in their respective disciplines or in the government, and prospective students are either receiving their education in South Africa or prefer other Commonwealth countries such as Canada, Australia, or the United Kingdom.

The war on terrorism has increased the demand for Arabic at many institutions of higher education nationwide. However, because Arabic has its own association (American Association of Teachers of Arabic - AATA) and its own annual linguistics conference, ALTA has never been able to court successfully its members to the family of African languages. This is in spite of the fact that two-thirds of the speakers of Arabic worldwide live in Africa. Even though AATA is the primary organization for teachers of Arabic, individual teachers do take membership in ALTA for professional reasons other than as being representatives of an African language taught in the United States.

The establishment of the task forces also helped ALTA to contain any under currents that could potentially weaken the association due to the field inequities. The fact that there was a group in which each member could be a part allowed ALTA's field development agendas to be carried out effectively through the various taskforces. Each taskforce designed their own priorities depending on their field development stages, either at the elementary or advanced levels. For example, because Kiswahili had

advanced greatly on teaching materials, it had the advantage of focusing on professionalizing the field and further diversifying the teaching materials. The other languages focused on different strategies for mobilizing interest in the teaching and learning of their languages, and in the production and distribution of teaching materials.

Within a year of operation the task forces created unprecedented enthusiasm in the field. Scholars and language pedagogists started communicating with each other, discussing best practices in teaching and learning. The latter resulted in a newsletter “Teaching ideas and resources for African languages” compiled and published by Indiana University under the editorship of Dr. Robert Botne, one of our finest linguists and pedagogist. The newsletter offered the field an opportunity to share classroom experiences. Other field achievements included the production of teaching and learning manuals such as *Mwalimu wa Kiswahili* “The Swahili Teacher”, compiled by the Swahili taskforce and which is still in production and distribution by NALRC (I will return to the discussion of this Center shortly).

3.3. Emergence of ALTA’s annual international conference

To sustain the task forces, the leadership organized group meetings at different conferences, workshops, and meetings of mutual interests. The most effective venue was ALTA’s annual international conference. This conference was a consequence of a weakening in the relationship between ALTA and ACAL. ALTA’s loyalties to ACAL were very strong between 1991 to 1995. The relationship was built on mutual understanding considering that each had a high percentage of members who were both linguists and pedagogists. ALTA’s membership included individuals who were only pedagogists, while specializing in an academic discipline other than linguistics (many came from language education, instructional technology, and second language acquisition disciplines). The breakaway weakened both associations because a certain percentage of the members could attend only one of the conferences hosted by either ACAL or ALTA. For ALTA, the convening of its own conference was a demonstration of field maturity and a clear understanding of what members needed for professional development that they could not obtain under ACAL which focuses primarily on theoretical and descriptive linguistics. Because institutions had begun to appreciate the role of a linguist pedagogist in African languages, ALTA seized the opportunity to change the negative perceptions of academic scholarship in African language research and pedagogy. The ALTA conference attracted scholars worldwide and the quality of the presentations demonstrated that the establishment of an annual publication for its conference proceedings (JALTA) was warranted.

Another development akin to ALTA’s endeavors in field development, particularly the annual conference, was the benefit of a new breed of language teachers and coordinators who were at the time of its inception graduate students in different institutions. These individuals are now either in a tenured/tenure track positions or hold instructor positions in major colleges and universities in the U.S. Some have ventured out to Europe and Asia where the teaching of African languages shows great promise.

3.4. NALRC’s role in the professionalization of the field

ALTA’s and NCOLCTL’s successes and the viability of their activities, particularly the conferences and workshops, inspired the foundation of the first National African Languages Resource Center (NALRC) in 1999 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The Center was established by the efforts of ALTA’s third president, Dr. Antonia Fòlárín-Schleicher, who secured a US Department of Education Title VI grant to facilitate the promotion of African language teaching and learning in the US through the sponsorship of various key projects and programs (Schleicher 2000) from her home institution. She also applied for and received a grant from NSEP (National Security Education Program) to produce a series of textbooks on African languages. The creation of NALRC with Title VI and the NSEP funding enabled it to draw on the available expertise in the then strongly emerging ALTA’s membership to commission and coordinate, initially, textbooks in several targeted African languages that included Kiswahili, Egyptian Arabic, Lingala, IsiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana, and Amharic. With careful planning and advice from a National Advisory Board consisting of senior ALTA scholars, NALRC produced these textbooks under the same communicative language teaching approach used in Dr. Folarin-Schleicher’s own textbook, *Jé K’á So Yorùbá* (Yale University Press 1993), and dubbed

the publications “Let’s Speak [an] African Language Series”. That served as an initial venture for the Center and an incentive for the production of other publications that have included additional textbooks for second and third year in selected languages, and student reference grammars in some of the same languages. To date NALRIC has published close to 30 grammar books and textbooks that are available to the field of African languages teachers and researchers. NALRC also embarked on other materials that targeted teaching and learning such as flash cards that were made available to the field without charge. These publications under the leadership of Dr. Folarin Schleicher have answered what used to be one of ALTA’s most vexing questions: The availability of good textbooks that are informed, like in commonly taught languages, by current second language acquisition theories.

NALRIC has also been extremely successful in its ambitious professionalization of the field agenda that include: language program coordination; materials development and dissemination; and professional development for African educators. It has an elaborate website that displays valuable information for African languages teachers and learners, including an Africa language map that shows the countries, languages, and historical background. Although the map is not yet comprehensive, it is a valuable resource. The books already published in the different series include: (1) thirteen books on Kiswahili, Egyptian Arabic, Lingala, Sesotho, Isizulu, Twi, Kikongo, Somali, Shona, and Wolof in the Let’s Speak Series; (2) two books one on Kiswahili and another on Shona in the Let’s Read Series; and one book on Kiswahili in the Let’s Communicate Series. There are also Seven learner reference grammars for Kiswahili, Shona, Twi, Amharic, IsiZulu, Bamanakan, and Pulaar; one bilingual dictionary for Wolof; and vocabulary flash cards for Kikongo, Zulu, Bamanakan, Pulaar, Kiswahili, Wolof, Yorùbá, Luyia, Amharic, Twi, Tigrinya, Chichewa, and Lingala. There are also twenty seven beautifully designed and highly informative language brochures that describe and advertise the languages to the field, and role-play cards that are generic in nature but very useful in traditional classroom settings. The Center has also embarked on the production of instructional technology materials. The first productions were CDs and accompanying textbooks for Yorùbá, Amharic and Egyptian-Arabic. The Center has been very successful in mobilizing and assisting ALTA members in compiling these materials while it makes the publication process possible.

In addition, NALRC has conducted summer workshops for teachers and language coordinators where the participants explore the best teaching and learning practices; the development of common metrics for the teaching of African languages; and the preparation of research-based pedagogical materials. The annual summer teachers and language administrator’s workshops, including a more recent teacher development program, namely, "STARTALK", has proved very valuable to the field by allowing scholars to exchange ideas on best practices and to work on collaborative projects that have produced valuable publications for the field. It has also assumed the responsibility of housing ALTA’s administrative offices, including the organization of its annual conference.

By taking charge of the conference, NALRC has provided ALTA with the stability it needs by guaranteeing a venue each year, a daunting task in the past when the conference was shuttled from one college or university to another without any assurance that the host institution would subsidize the conference adequately and offer other logistical support for it, including the publication of the proceedings. As a funded Center whose major objectives are to promote and support the development of the teaching of African languages in the U.S., NALRC is the best equipped organization to support such an annual conference.

4. The Emergence of a Field and Superstructure

From the preceding discussion it should be evident that was once in the 1970s and early 1980s a loose and potentially emerging field of African languages in name only through the convening of Title VI language coordinators, began to take a definite shape as a nascent and potential promising field after the official establishment of ALTA in 1988 as a result of the NFLC-convened meeting on HEA 1986 at SAIS. The active participation of key ALTA members in the development and expansion of NCOLCTL from the late 1980s through the late 1990s offered ALTA and the field of African languages incredible opportunities to be inspired by the NCOLCTL leadership to create what has become today one of the most successful association of this federation. With the founding of NALRC in 1999, the leadership and vision provided by Dr. Fólárín-Schleicher and her National Advisory Board in developing an ambitious agenda that exploits fully the expertise in the African languages

field, and in headquartering and managing the ALTA secretariat, we have experienced a true transformation of the field. We have moved from an inept and loosely connected organization to a field with a superstructure. This transformation, according to Bokamba and Mchombo's recent evaluation report of NALRC (July 2009: (1) has been largely possible because of NALRC for a number reasons; (1) that the Center[NALRC] has played a catalytic role in the development and professionalization of the field of African Languages Teaching and Learning; (2) that it has become the proverbial backbone of this field; (3) that as a result of achievements (1) and (2), it has been called upon to extend its expertise to other LCTLs through NCOLCTL and the U.S. State Department's IIE program; (4) that its overall performance in terms of productivity and utilization of the LCTL field's experts, especially Africanists, is superb and unmatched by its LRC counterparts; and (5) that all the above achievements are undoubtedly attributable to the vision and leadership provided by the Center's Director, Professor Antonia Fòlárín-Schleicher. What follows implicitly from conclusions (1) and (2) is that without NALRC, the field of African languages in the U.S. would not have attained its current robust standing among the LCTL fields, and the various PALs at Title VI institutions and elsewhere would not have improved their curricula so as to become competitive with other LCTLs as they have in the past nine years.

We could not agree more with these conclusions and there are numerous examples to substantiate them as discussed above. NALRC had a major influence on the field by inspiring innovative projects involving with the development of teaching materials. The production of the Yoruba CD and accompanying textbook served as an example to Kiswahili and IsiZulu. Both language fields have (independently of NALRC) produced textbooks and electronic materials that are in wide circulation, both nationally and internationally. With support from the US Department of Education and the University of Georgia, the Kiswahili program developed a series of video materials with accompanying textbooks that were later converted to DVDs and CDs for ease of access by clients, and more recently on-line instructional medium for non-traditional students. The University of Georgia Kiswahili Distance Learning Program attracts students from all over the nation and abroad. The interest shown for Kiswahili indicates that there is a high demand for African languages outside of the traditional institutions. This is an issue NALRC, ACAL, and ALTA need to discuss to explore ways in which this new medium could be exploited. Many of the students that are using this medium are graduates at institutions where Kiswahili is not taught and they need the language to prepare for field research in Kenya or Tanzania and/or to work with development or homeland security agencies.

5. Recommendations

In order to ascertain the field's future potentials, we need to direct our attention to the critical roles of ALTA and its affiliated organizations referenced above, namely ACAL, NCOLCTL, and NALRC. Each has untapped exploits that could invigorate further the field of African languages to meet both the language learning and linguist research needs of the twenty first century. Two possible ways to pursue this action are, first, for established and recently appointed Africanist scholars to network and seek external grants from the public and private sectors to at least sustain the existing PALs; and second, for such scholars to use such external funding to leverage institution-internal support for these languages in the face of the current budgetary difficulties. To achieve both of these objectives will require unrelenting effort, but it can be done in the interest of foreign languages and cultures capacity building for the U.S. that initially motivated the establishment of Title VI centers.

To conclude, the twenty first Century has brought new challenges that require the same amount of rigor in the way nations have to be prepared for such challenges. Major challenges are in global terrorism and security, health, the economy, the environment, and the growing population all of which require a high level of global understanding. The view that the United States cannot afford to study LCTLs because they facilitate global economic competitiveness while strengthening cultural understanding nationally (Simon 1980, Garcia and Othergmy 1984) is still true today as it was in the early years when it was stated.

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