

Friday 09:00-09:30

Workshop: Dialect Standardization: Approaches and Main Issues

Multidialectal Orthographies: an approach to systematically spelling differing dialects

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This presentation will review different approaches to spelling dialects and related languages. It advocates and illustrates an approach that is informed by both phonology and sociolinguistics.

A variety of approaches have been tried to spell languages that have significant dialect variation. These have been broadly classified into three categories. The “Unilectal” approach represents a single, standard dialect and all readers spell it the same way. Readers who are not familiar with the dialect must learn it. In some cases, this has required language learning to read what is said to be the students’ “own language”. The “Union” approach is the result of writing different language features according to different dialects, so that all dialects are included in some way. The results have been orthographic orphans, unclaimed by any of the dialects (Angogo 1982, Itebete 1974). The “Multidialectal” approach works to systematically write in a way that is psycholinguistically accessible to multiple dialects. At the same time, such an approach allows for including a wide variety of spoken forms when the communities feel a sociolinguistic unity.

The presentation advocates building on shared linguistic features in orthography development (Schroeder 2010), but opposes the approach of some to create unified orthographies that are so driven by sociolinguistic motivations that they ignore significant linguistic differences (Ningewance 1999), requiring readers to learn language rather than learn reading their own, e.g. the work of Prah (1998, 2002).

Examples will be drawn from a variety of languages, including the author’s field work in Ethiopia.

Bibliography:

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- Prah, Kwesi (ed.). 1998. *Between distinction and extinction: The harmonisation and standardisation of African languages*. Johannesburg: Witswaterstrand University Press.

- Prah, Kwesi Kwaa (ed.). 2002. *Writing African: The Harmonisation of Orthographic Conventions in African Languages*. CASAS book series no. 25. Cape Town: The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS).
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