



SOUTH EAST AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES FORUM (SEALLF) 2021 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE – CALL FOR PAPERS

“AFRICAN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES & GLOBAL MODERNITIES”

The 11th annual meeting of the South East African Languages and Literatures Forum (SEALLF) will be organized virtually by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). The SEALLF meeting is held by scholars whose work focuses on the study of African languages and literatures, African language pedagogy, linguistics, African language policy, and African/Black cultural studies.

In this conference, we invite papers and panels that reflect on the critical role of African languages as vehicles of modernity and modernization, but also African languages as produced by cultural conjunctures resulting from Africa’s entanglement in global capitalist dynamics. By foregrounding the notion of ‘global modernities,’ we seek to further decenter the idea of one unilineal modernity and, instead, to favor a conversation around multiple trajectories of modernity, specifically those taking root in the languages and cultures of Africa. Thirty-five years ago, Ngugi wa Thiong’o wrote, “Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture.” While African languages embody and convey African cultures, we also find it worthwhile to probe into an obvious reciprocity, which is how social and cultural circumstances also determine forms and styles of African speech, vocabulary, and tongues. In fact, COVID-19 has occasioned conjunctural genres of local ‘awareness music’ in African tongues, just as African health specialists and religious leaders in Senegal and Kenya, for instance, have found themselves negotiating a new lexis to talk about the pandemic.

Furthermore, we hope to expand on the postcolonial scholarship on language that upholds the practice of indigenous language writing as a modern medium for preserving indigenous African languages and for disseminating African culture and humanism. While we believe that this decolonial perspective on the language-culture nexus predicates on a valid conception of modern African language writing as an instrument of emancipation and self-affirmation, we hope to explore similarly important roles that non-written mediums – such as performance, film, visual art, and internet-based technology – have played in the survival and expansion of African languages as well as the popularization of African epistemologies.

Obviously, African languages carry the imprint of Africa’s encounters with Europe but also the Arab-Muslim world; encounters that have not only yielded fascinating forms of African literacy and literature, but which also prompt us to constantly revisit our definitions of what an ‘African language’ is. These queries, among others, hint to the important processes of language driven cultural modernization effected through various modes of Africanization and globalization in art, literature, and performance. Today, while the machinery of Western languages still prevails in several domains in Africa, indigenous African languages have remained central in the production of cultural modernity both at the national and transnational levels. We hope to explore such resilience in African languages by considering how they mediate in the localization of the global and in the globalization of the local. More concretely, we seek to examine how global African modernities, in their respective genealogies, are iterated in literature, art, popular music, media, internet technology, and other mediums in which language remains central. We hope to do so while considering how Africanist pedagogies and methods ought to seriously account for the epistemological connection between language and African subject matter. We would like, therefore, to explore how African languages, as modern carriers

of culture, convey complex messages of modernity whose expressive styles, content, and contours defy the Weberian tradition as much as they challenge any essentialist attempt to frame the cultural scopes of African languages and literatures.

By engaging with African literature in its diversity, performance, and artistic practices in this conference, we hope to examine the role and place of African languages in the production and negotiation of modernity. We welcome theoretical and/or practical approaches to the critical role of African languages as carriers of modernity in the continent and beyond. We invite papers and panels addressing any related questions, including the following:

1. The role of African languages in African cultural modernization
2. Language in African literature and performance
3. African languages and the internationalization of US universities and colleges
4. African language teaching and institutional collaboration between African and US institutions
5. Challenges of African language teaching in US universities and colleges
6. Promoting African languages in K-12 US schools in the southeastern region of the US
7. Relationship of indigenous African languages and foreign languages
8. Language in African arts and media
9. Language and regional/continental interconnectedness in Africa
10. African languages in STEM education and research in the US and in Africa
11. Reinforcing sustainable relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Community Colleges (CC) by encouraging teaching and research in African languages, cultures, and literatures
12. What lessons has COVID-19 taught us about remote African language instruction?
13. COVID-19 and African language teaching pedagogy

Deadline for conference paper/panel submissions: May 21, 2021

Please send proposals of 250 words to: SEALLF@unc.edu

Proposals should include presenter's full name, institution, contact email, paper topic and abstract. If submitting a panel proposal, please have the panel chair submit all the individual paper proposals in one email to the organizing committee. If you had previously submitted for the 2020 in-person meeting – cancelled due to the COVID-19 – please resubmit to confirm your participation in the 2021 virtual conference.

