Proceedings of the
EACL 2009 Workshop on
Language Technologies for
African Languages

AfLaT 2009

31 March 2009
Megaron Athens International Conference Centre
Athens, Greece
Preface

In multilingual situations, language technologies are crucial for providing access to information and opportunities for economic development. With somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 different languages, Africa is a multilingual continent *par excellence* and presents acute challenges for those seeking to promote and use African languages in the areas of business development, education, research, and relief aid.

In recent times a number of researchers and institutions, both from Africa and elsewhere, have come forward to share the common goal of developing capabilities in language technologies for the African languages. The goal of the workshop, then, is to provide a forum to meet and share the latest developments in this field. It also seeks to attract linguists who specialize in African languages and would like to leverage the tools and approaches of computational linguistics, as well as computational linguists who are interested in learning about the particular linguistic challenges posed by the African languages.

The workshop consists of an invited talk on African language families and their structural properties by Prof. Sonja Bosch (UNISA, South Africa), followed by refereed research papers in computational linguistics. The call for papers specified that the focus would be on the less-commonly studied and lesser-resourced languages, such as those of sub-Saharan Africa. These could include languages from all four families: Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan and Afro-Asiatic, with the exception of Arabic (which is covered by the ‘Computational Approaches to Semitic Languages’ workshop). Variants of European languages such as African French, African English or Afrikaans were also excluded from the call. The call was well answered, with 24 proposals being submitted. Following a rigorous review process, nine were withheld as full papers, and a further seven as poster presentations. These proceedings contain the double-blind, peer reviewed texts of the contributions that were withheld.

We would like to thank the US Army RDECOM International Technology Center - Atlantic for generously sponsoring this workshop.

We wish you a very enjoyable time at AfLaT 2009!

— The Organizers.
AfLaT 2009 Organizers

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Invited Speaker:

Sonja Bosch, Department of African Languages, University of South Africa (South Africa)
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Conference Program

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

09:00–10:30 Invited Talk: "African Language Families and their Structural Properties" by Sonja Bosch

10:30–11:00 Coffee Break

Session 1: Corpora (11:00–12:30)

11:00–11:30 Collecting and Evaluating Speech Recognition Corpora for Nine Southern Bantu Languages
Jaco Badenhorst, Charl Van Heerden, Marelie Davel and Etienne Barnard

11:30–12:00 The SAWA Corpus: A Parallel Corpus English - Swahili
Guy De Pauw, Peter Waiganjo Wagacha and Gilles-Maurice de Schryver

12:00–12:30 Information Structure in African Languages: Corpora and Tools
Christian Chiarcos, Ines Fiedler, Mira Grubic, Andreas Haida, Katharina Hartmann, Julia Ritz, Anne Schwarz, Amir Zeldes and Malte Zimmermann

12:30–14:00 Lunch Break

Session 2: Morphology, Speech and Part-of-Speech Tagging (14:00–16:00)

14:00–14:30 A Computational Approach to Yorùbá Morphology
Raphael Finkel and Odetunji Ajadi Odejobi

14:30–15:00 Using Technology Transfer to Advance Automatic Lemmatisation for Setswana
Hendrik Johannes Groenewald

15:00–15:30 Part-of-Speech Tagging of Northern Sotho: Disambiguating Polysemous Function Words
Gertrud Faaß, Ulrich Heid, Elsabé Taljard and Danie Prinsloo

15:30–16:00 Development of an Amharic Text-to-Speech System Using Cepstral Method
Tadesse Anberbir and Tomio Takara

16:00–16:30 Coffee Break
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Session 3: General Papers and Discussion (16:30–18:00)

16:30–17:00  Building Capacities in Human Language Technology for African Languages
Tunde Adegbola

17:00–17:30  Initial Fieldwork for LWAZI: A Telephone-Based Spoken Dialog System for Rural South Africa
Tebogo Gumede and Madelaine Plauché

17:30–18:00  Discussion

Poster Session (During Coffee and Lunch Breaks)

Setswana Tokenisation and Computational Verb Morphology: Facing the Challenge of a Disjunctive Orthography
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