



INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM
AT THE WALTER BENJAMIN KOLLEG
UNIVERSITY OF BERN

THURSDAY, 11 OF MAY 2017

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UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

**Language and language use
in Africa: issues in research
and everyday situations**

11th of May 2017

UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, Bern

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth, University of Zurich

Prof. Dr. Anne-Claude Berthoud, University of Lausanne

Dr. Martin Benjamin, EPFL Lausanne

Interdisciplinary Symposium at the Walter Benjamin Kolleg University of Bern

Language and language use in Africa: issues in research and everyday situations

Organization

Walter Benjamin Kolleg (WBK), Phil-Fakultät, University of Bern
Swiss Society for African Studies (SSAS)

Convenor

Djouroukoro Diallo (MA), PhD researcher, Walter Benjamin Kolleg, University of Bern
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Keynote speakers

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Anne-Claude Berthoud, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Dr. Martin Benjamin, Ecole polytechnique fédéral Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland

University of Bern

May 11, 2017

Time: 08:30 am to 06:00 pm

Venue: University of Bern, UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, Room A 301

Program

Thursday, May 11, 2017

08:30 – 09:00 *Registration / Coffee*

09:00 – 09:10 *Welcome*
Djouroukoro Diallo (MA)

09:10 – 09:55 *Opening Lecture*
Keynote speaker: Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth
Local language hermeneutics. What difference for science in Africa?

09:55 – 10:10 *Discussion*

10:10 – 10:55
Keynote speaker: Prof. Dr. Anne-Claude Berthoud
Les enjeux du multilinguisme pour une communication équitable et un développement durable

10:55 – 11:10 *Discussion*

11:10 – 11:40 *Coffee break*

11:45 – 13:00 *Panel*
Local languages and sustainable development: what challenges for science?

13:00 – 14:00 *Lunch*

14:00 – 14 :45

Keynote speaker: Dr. Martin Benjamin

The Policy and Practice of African Languages in an Era of Globalizing Technology

14:45 – 15 :00 *Discussion*

15:00 – 15 :30

Dr. Mohomodou Houssouba

Developing online resources for African languages

15:30 – 15:45 Coffee break

15:45 – 16:15

Dr. Ayé Clarisse Hager-M'Boua

A Bilingual Education within the Ivorian Education System

16:15 – 16:40

Dr. Carmen Delgado

Interpreter training in the Kenyan language scape

16:40 – 17:10

Natalie Tarr (MA)

Interpreting the Administration: Burkina Faso's Courts in Translation

17:30 – 18:00 *Plenary discussion and End of the Symposium*

Abstracts

Keynote speaker

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth, University of Zurich

Short biography

Thomas BEARTH (1937), Prof. em. Dept. of Comparative Linguistics, Univ. of Zurich. African Language Consultancy, Bodenackerstr. 3, CH-8957 Spreitenbach. E-mail: thomas.bearth@flashcable.ch.

PhD in General Linguistics from the University of Geneva (1971, Henri Frei). Linguistic research and applications in the fields of language development in West Africa.

Habilitation 1988. Professor of General and African Linguistics at the University of Zürich (Switzerland).

Research interests: Tone and intonation, syntax, discourse pragmatics, interfaces between grammar and discourse, and language and socio-economic development. E-learning in African languages (Mande, Akan, Bantu).

Books: L'Énoncé toura (1971); Temps et aspects dans le discours toura (1986). Communicative sustainability (with R.M. Beck, R. Döbel, 2014, CD, 2017).

Awards: Commandeur de l'Ordre du mérite national de Côte d'Ivoire (2007) ; 5e Prix CSRS – LODH for research partnership (2009, CSRS), and Honorary award for transdisciplinary research (2010, Swiss td-net).

Presentation title

Local language hermeneutics. What difference for science and development in Africa?

Abstract

The Swiss government's release summarizing the results of the Research Fair of November 2016, organized by the *Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries* (kfpe) and the *Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation* (SDC), mentions in an open list « new technologies, water, food, language and urbanisation » as factors coming into play in the implementation of the SDG constituting the Agenda 2030 adopted by the *UN General Assembly* in September 2015. The fact sheet presented at the Fair on the theme « Language Equity – a Key to Sustainable Development » claimed for language (i.e. any locally relevant language) a tie-breaking role vis-à-vis the classic trefoil of sustainabilities (ecological, economic, social), as an indispensable resource for negotiating a balance between multiple and often competing goals and subgoals.

Calls for connecting language diversity and extension work are recurrent in various contexts and from various quarters, not only linguists (see e.g. the ERC mandated *Digital World Forum*, 2009). Contradictory theorization, epitomized in Easterly & Levin (1997) contra Harare (1997) for which the Millennium Goals would have provided a testing ground, was not followed up by scientists, producing a stalemate perpetuating the negative effects of a syndrome of global change (Bearth 2013), mitigated by organizations such as OIF (successor of AIF, one of the signatories of Harare 1997). This backlog of undone homework constitutes a compelling reason for interdisciplinary research not to miss the current opportunity, to set an agenda which will address relevant questions in a way meaningful to actors at all levels, to which this Symposium will hopefully contribute.

The Agenda 2030, while silent on issues of language, provides a framework favorable for revisiting issues of inclusion and equity of access to resources, which in turn depend partially on recognition of linguistic diversity and asymmetries of ranking, size, vitality, etc. Language (i) as a resource in its own right (the right to use one's language, coded in some constitutions but underexploited, e.g. South Africa), and (ii) as a « metaresource » for development (resource for ensuring equal conditions of access to knowledge, medical basics and other vital resources) is to claim its rightful place, on the assumption that Goal 17 should be taken in the sense of a « contrat social » to be negotiated with all potential stakeholders – with matching burden and benefit.

A few issues have shaped my thinking as a linguist trying to be relevant for those not primarily interested in language and linguistics but sharing a concern for equity, and sustainability:

Communicative dependency, a condition still prevailing in rural Africa, calls for strategies not already comprised in general poverty reduction programs, notably upgrading language diversity and recognizing it as a factor for which development planners are to be held accountable.

Communicative sustainability, its positive counterpart, takes things beyond the level of participation- Aiming at a shift of the source of knowledge to communities, and by empowerment for extending one's sphere of action beyond it, two case studies show that, other things being equal, the principle of diminishing return related to size of community and number of speakers is falsified if global issues such as biodiversity or sensitization to major health hazards are taken into account.

Investment into language diversity, given the means available to do it with modest cost, is a unique chance for more and less remote societies to participate in global knowledge society in the roles of beneficiaries but also of contributors. Missing it today means perpetuating inequalities and reaping loss for all in the future.

My presentation will shed further light on these issues, using evidence from case studies illustrating language as the solution to problems (partially) imputable to language. It is gratefully acknowledged that this would not be possible without local language as main resource and, as part of *Local language hermeneutics* (LLH), the LMR – locally mediated research (Beck 2011, Adesola 2014).

Keynote speaker

Prof. Dr. Anne-Claude Berthoud, University of Lausanne

Short biography

Anne-Claude Berthoud est linguiste, professeure honoraire de l'Université de Lausanne. Elle est actuellement responsable du groupe de travail "Langues et science" du Conseil Européen pour les Langues. Ses travaux se situent à l'interface de la linguistique de l'énonciation, de l'interaction et de l'acquisition. Ils portent aujourd'hui principalement sur l'interaction plurilingue et la construction des connaissances. Dans cette optique, elle a coordonné le projet DYLAN (Language Dynamics and Management of Diversity), entre 2006 et 2011, dont les résultats sont publiés dans l'ouvrage « Exploring the Dynamics of Multilingualism » (John Benjamins, 2013, avec F. Grin et G. Lüdi).

Presentation title

Les enjeux du multilinguisme pour une communication équitable et un développement durable

Abstract

La prise en compte de la diversité des langues et des modes de communication conduit en quelque sorte à inscrire les objets de connaissance dans un « développement durable », en y apportant une nouvelle forme de qualité. Saisir les « points de butée », les zones de conflits, les nœuds de résistance, dans l'idée que c'est lorsque les mots deviennent opaques qu'on est amené à les interroger, à en saisir les décalages interlinguistiques, les zones d'intraduisibilité ou d'incompatibilité. Ainsi, par exemple, assurer les normes de sécurité dans plusieurs langues peut s'avérer un gage de qualité de ces normes, une façon de combattre le risque de superficialité et de simplicité attaché à l'usage d'une langue unique et de briser ainsi le mythe de sa transparence.

Saisir des modes de faire communicatifs et argumentatifs spécifiques, attachés à diverses cultures linguistiques et montrer comment ces différentes ressources sont exploitées par les interlocuteurs dans la résolution de problèmes ou la prise de décisions peut contribuer aux critères de qualité et de durabilité d'un projet scientifique, durabilité qui s'inscrit ainsi dans la complexité et dans le long terme, et par conséquent dans l'abandon des solutions toutes faites.

Dans ce sens, les enjeux du multilinguisme pour le développement durable se définiront tout à la fois en termes conceptuels et en termes stratégiques.

Keynote speaker

Dr. Martin Benjamin, Ecole polytechnique fédéral Lausanne (EPFL)

Short biography

Martin Benjamin leads the Kamusi Project, an international effort to map human linguistic knowledge and make it available for social and technological development, and has recently joined EPFL as a Senior Scientist. An American from a small town in Vermont, he trained at Columbia and Yale as an anthropologist, examining issues related to poverty, health, environment, and gender in rural Africa.

He began studying Swahili in preparation for his field research in Tanzania. Lacking a good dictionary, he set out to create one in 1994 by initiating a collaborative project on the then-nascent Internet. That project became one of the most widely used computer resources for African languages, leading Benjamin to focus his full attention on multilingual lexicography and computational linguistics.

He has lived in Lausanne for family reasons since 2007, working on a variety of activities related to African ICTs, from moderating the localization of Microsoft Windows and Office in Swahili to developing ICT terminology for a dozen languages and managing the creation of computer locales for nearly 100. During that time, he has used the initial online Swahili experience to re-engineer the dictionary from the ground up, building a data model that will make possible language tools and scholarship at a much finer level of detail than previously considered realistic. Kamusi is now an independent Swiss-based NGO through which Benjamin directs language development activities that are expanding throughout and beyond Africa.

In September 2013, to pursue the informatics potentials of massive multilingual data, including structuring data for highly accurate translation systems and the development of self-regulating crowdsourcing for reliable data collection, Benjamin joined the Distributed Information Systems Laboratory in EPFL's School of Computer and Communications Sciences.

Presentation title

The Policy and Practice of African Languages in an Era of Globalizing Technology

Abstract

Are the billion people who speak Africa's 2000 languages doomed to linguistic exclusion from contemporary global advances in knowledge and technology? Or will they lead the way in growing a communication system that bridges languages worldwide? These questions are both practical and philosophical. From a practical perspective, linguistic data has not yet been collected to a degree that can integrate African languages in current technologies. Collecting codified linguistic knowledge is more a question of will than technology, however. Kamusi has developed a core infrastructure for language data that has the flexibility to treat Africa's linguistic complexity, such as tones, noun classes and agglutination, regional variations, or intricate alphabets. To bring languages to digital life, though,

require more than a robust platform - it demands the political belief that the effort is not only possible, but worth the time and money. Many nations have made high-minded pronouncements in support of their indigenous languages, but little action has ensued on the technological front. Inaction springs from many sources: a belief by some that local languages are a constraint to progress, a view of technology as an impenetrable foreign language preserve, efforts in some countries to promote one or a few national languages in preference to many smaller ones, an insistence on elite languages beyond early primary school, and of course the allocation of funds when limited budgets must confront looming issues such as health, food security, and environmental preservation. In principle, linguistic data and tools can be produced for many African languages that would place their speakers at the forefront of emerging technologies. The question at hand is whether linguistic equity as a social objective can be achieved in practice, given the low priority mother tongues have in much of Africa's ideological terrain.

Speaker

Dr. Mohomodou Houssouba, Centre for African Studies, University of Basel

Presentation title

Developing online resources for African languages

Abstract

In his 2007 essay, *Securing a Place for a Language in the Cyberspace*, Marcel Kidi-Dikiri draw a roadmap for individuals or groups involved in developing IT resources and digital content for any less-resourced language. Though African languages fall largely into this category, there are still remarkable demographic and socioeconomic disparities to be reckoned with. In some cases, the effort involves documenting an endangered language on the verge of extinction. In other situations, there are major vehicular languages lacking the most basic tools to figure in the global digital landscape. To remedy such shortcomings, the author points out two complementary processes: the translation of software interfaces and the production of digital content in local languages. Then years later, have this call had any echo in Africa?

It is worth examining the impact of the dynamic ignited across the continent, particularly with the launch of the Pan African Localization project (PANL1ON, 2004-2007) and the African Network for Localization (ANLoc, 2006-2013). This movement led to the mobilization of volunteers to translate open-source software into African languages. It would have its most productive period between 2009 and 2012. But even beyond this period, the initial impulsion continues to sustain many projects, with teams sufficiently resilient to pursue their goals in software translation as well as content production.

In this regard, the collective publication, *Toward a Multilingual Cyberspace* (2012) gives a broad view of the turning point and recasts the strategic challenges of digital inclusion from the perspectives of different actors from the south, namely

ANLoc and Maaya – World Network for Linguistic Diversity. Kidi-Dikiri's two contributions to the volume address the practical issue of mother-tongue education and the ethical imperative of a global vision in favor of inclusive digital policies and technical solutions to ensure multilingualism in the cyberspace. In the African context, there is a strong need for public leadership to ensure the continuity in community efforts as well as the equitable production and sharing of resources in and for different languages.

Four volunteer projects and public initiatives will be showcased to illustrate the complex dynamics underway across Africa, highlighting the successes and setbacks experienced over the last decade. The critical assessment of the situation seeks to go beyond the fascination for IT tools to focus on the urgent need to question the terms of Africa's participation in digital humanities.

Speaker

Dr. Clarisse Ayé M'Boua, Researcher & Consultant TRECC (Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities), Côte d'Ivoire / Switzerland

Presentation title

A Bilingual Education within the Ivorian Education System Abstract

Abstract

Does the PEI (Programme d'École Intégrée) schools' way of teaching has some advantages (better phonological awareness, better performance in vocabulary, in reading (in French), in oral text comprehension) than the EPP (Ecole Primaire Publique) schools' way of teaching? Do the students of the PEI schools know better the sounds (graphemes-sounds correspondence) of the languages (both French and local language) than those of the EPP schools? Do the students of the PEI schools have a vocabulary richer than those of the EPP schools? Do the students of the PEI schools have a better performance in reading (in French) and in oral text comprehension (both in French and in local language) than those of the EPP school?

Our interdisciplinary research entitled: "PEI schools vs EPP schools in Côte d'Ivoire" will show the importance of using local languages (the Ivorian languages: Abidji, Attié, etc.) during the first 3 years of the formal education for the first literacy instructions (e.g.: reading and writing).

Our research will contribute to a better understanding of using local language (lingua franca) for a good and efficient development of the students' literacy skills in a multilingual context and will provide a scientific evidence-based framework to implement a bilingual education within the Ivorian Education System. In this respect, students in public primary schools in Côte d'Ivoire, mainly those in villages, will have the adequate linguistics and cognitive abilities for literacy development improving therefore their school outcomes, and then the academic ones.

Speaker

Carmen Delgado Luchner, PhD, Global Studies Institute, University of Geneva

Presentation title**Interpreter training in the Kenyan languagescape****Abstract**

The research project presented here is based on an ethnographic case study of the first conference interpreter training programme in Kenya, which was put in place at the University of Nairobi in 2010. The course was implemented through a North-South partnership project involving the United Nations, the European Commission, and the University of Geneva among other stakeholders. This presentation will shed light on the challenges students, trainers and managers of the project experienced during its pilot phase and relate these to the wider socio-linguistic reality of Kenya.

Conference interpreter training is based on the assumption that students have a perfect command of at least one of their languages, the “mother tongue” or “A language” and only a passive, yet complete, understanding of their other working languages. This assumption does not fully reflect the dynamic realities of individual multilingualism and formal and informal language acquisition. Furthermore, in a society like Kenya, where the language of the home, the language of day-to-day communication and the language of the education system are different, this assumption might have to be questioned in order to provide training that is best adapted to students’ language profiles and the requirements of users on the local interpreting market. An additional particularity of the Kenyan case, as compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, is that Swahili is used throughout the country as a vehicular language. It therefore constitutes an alternative to English, in particular in urban centres. This has a direct impact on the interpreting market, in particular as far as the need for English/Swahili interpreters is concerned.

Based on these different considerations I will suggest potential avenues for a better contextualisation of interpreter training in Kenya and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Speaker

Natalie Tarr (MA), Center for African Studies, University of Basel

Presentation title

The interpreter as *dalamina*? Translating the court and interpreting French justice

Abstract

In many African societies the head of state, the king only spoke through his translator, never addressing the population directly. French colonial administrators, the majority of whom could not speak African languages, were dependent on interpreters. In the courtroom in Burkina Faso today, judges may only use the official language French. Interpreters have thus always been a part of communication in Africa – as *dalamina*, as colonial clerks, and as public servants working for the court today.

In Burkina Faso, the criminal courts hire (untrained) people to interpret between the French-speaking court and the African-languages speaking defendants, witnesses, and public. But the (court) interpreter's role has never been as ill defined as it is today. During colonial times, African interpreters were specifically trained for their job as intermediaries. Many enjoyed immense prestige among the local population and they were always indispensable to the French colonial officials. But in spite of their being indispensable, interpreters were often treated with disdain by the colons (Mopoho 2001). This top-down talk can be seen as typical for a highly hierarchized organization or society. The French justice system in use in Burkina Faso is managed in a strictly hierarchical way (Ginio 2006). Burkinabe social structure as well functions and is organized hierarchically, but not along the same lines as French jurisdiction. In the courtroom in Burkina Faso, these two hierarchical systems come into contact. The translational work of both the court and the interpreter – how the French justice system gets translated into daily Burkinabe reality – are at the center of my investigations.

Invitation to the panel discussion

Deutsch

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren

In Zusammenarbeit mit der *Schweizer Gesellschaft für Afrikastudien (SGAS)* organisiert das *Walter Benjamin Kolleg* am 11. Mai 2017 eine interdisziplinäre Tagung zum Thema: **“Language and language use in Africa: issues in research and everyday situations”**.

Die Tagung bringt die Sprache in der Mehrzahl zur Sprache: Mehrsprachigkeit im afrikanischen im Vergleich zum europäischen Kontext, insbesondere unterschiedliche Aspekte der gelebten und praktizierten Mehrsprachigkeit, dies unter den Gesichtspunkten der Partizipation und der nachhaltigen Entwicklung sowie der Sprachenpolitik in Afrika im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung.

Als Folgeveranstaltung des an der Research Fair „Pathways to transformation“ (kfpe/DEZA) vom 9.-11. November 2016 vorgestellten Moduls „Language, equity and sustainable development“ verfolgt die Tagung das Ziel einer interdisziplinären Ausweitung und Einbindung der erwähnten Thematik. Im Blickfeld sind Problemerkennung, Problemlösung und praxisorientierte Forschung zur Mehrsprachigkeit im sozialen Umfeld von Anwendungsbereichen wie Bildung, Landwirtschaft, Rechtsprechung, Medizin, Business usw., sowie Strategien zum Ausgleich des sprachbedingten Gefälles bei der Aneignung komplexen Wissens und der Partizipation. Auch innovative theoretische und partnerschaftliche Ansätze wie kommunikative Nachhaltigkeit oder „Locally Mediated Research“ stehen zur Diskussion.

Um eine offene Diskussion über ein breites Spektrum an aktuellen Fragestellungen und ihren Implikationen für die Entwicklungspraxis und deren theoretischen Voraussetzungen zu ermöglichen, lädt das Organisationsteam alle Tagungsteilnehmer zu einer Paneldiskussion ein. Das Panel findet unter dem Thema: „Lokale Sprachen und nachhaltige Entwicklung: welche Herausforderungen für die Forschung?“ im Anschluss an die einführenden Referate von Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth (Universität Zürich) und Prof. Dr. Anne-Claude Berthoud (Université de Lausanne, Conseil Européen des Langues) statt. Es soll den Austausch zwischen Forscherinnen und Forschern, Akteurinnen und Akteuren aller mit afrikanischer Mehrsprachigkeit befassten Disziplinen fördern und nicht zuletzt dazu dienen, weiterführende Fragestellungen, akute Problemfelder sowie Lösungsansätze anzusprechen.

Themenvorschläge sind willkommen. Benutzen Sie die dazu vorgesehene Rubrik auf dem Anmeldeformular der Tagung (bis 30. April 2017).

Freundliche Grüsse,
Djouroukoro Diallo

Français

Mesdames, Messieurs,

En collaboration avec la *Société suisse des études africaines* (SSEA), le *Walter Benjamin Kolleg* organisera le 11 mai 2017, un colloque interdisciplinaire sur le thème : **“Language and language use in Africa : issues in research and everyday situations.”**

Ce colloque propose de discuter les questions de multilinguisme dans un contexte africain. Les différentes présentations porteront sur divers aspects liés au multilinguisme en Afrique tels l'éducation, l'agriculture, la justice, le développement durable tout comme la thématique des politiques de langues en Afrique dans l'ère de la numérisation. En outre, le colloque fait suite au stand „Language, equity and sustainable development“ exhibé lors de la foire scientifique organisée du 9 au 11 novembre 2016 par la *Commission pour le partenariat scientifique avec les pays en Développement* (KFPE) et la *Direction du développement et de la coopération* (DDC).

L'intérêt suscité par le stand et les présentations a motivé les organisateurs du Colloque du 11 mai 2017 sur le Multilinguisme en Afrique d'envisager un panel sous le thème : « Langues locales et développement durable : quels défis à relever pour les objectifs de l'agenda 2030 ? ». Le panel, ouvert à tous, aura lieu à la suite des interventions d'ouverture du Colloque, et s'inscrit aussi dans une double perspective d'expériences dans la recherche aussi bien que sur le terrain. Les propositions de thèmes sont bienvenues. Elles doivent nous parvenir jusqu'au 30 avril dans la rubrique du formulaire d'inscription prévue à cet effet.

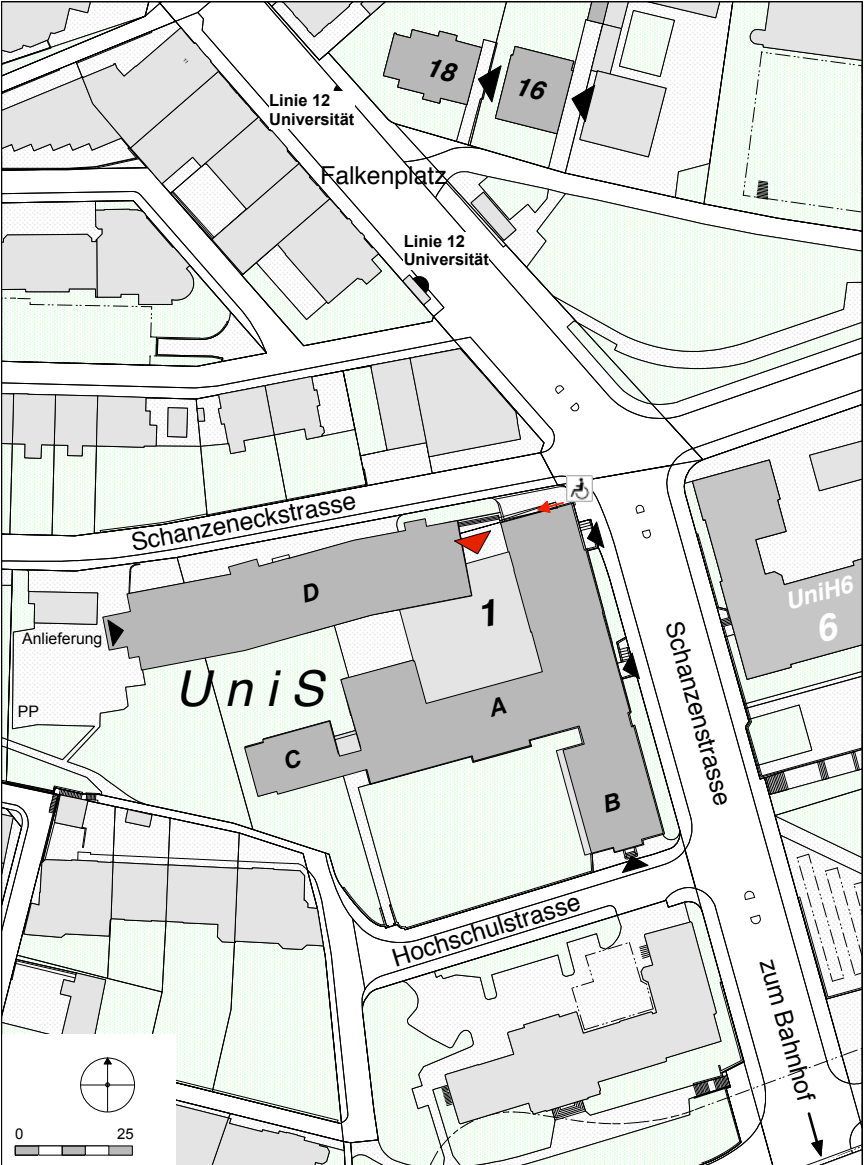
Meilleures salutations,
Djouroukoro Diallo

Location: how to join the symposium?



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Schanzeneckstrasse 1, Situation





**Language and language use
in Africa: issues in research
and everyday situations**

11th of May 2017

UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, Bern

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth, University of Zurich

Prof. Dr. Anne-Claude Berthoud, University of Lausanne

Dr. Martin Benjamin, EPFL Lausanne