Objective

To provide a tool that (1) familiarizes foreign language professionals with major African languages, language families, resources, and the dynamics of language on the African continent and (2) helps them identify particular languages.

Product

CASL’s African Language Identification & Familiarization Aid (ALIFA) is an online tool that includes a user-friendly, interactive map highlighting African language phonological features; a lexical comparison generator; and links to additional online language resources.

ALIFA is the result of exploratory research initiated at CASL and inspired by CASL’s Arabic Variant Identification Aid (AVIA). In contrast to AVIA, ALIFA adds a greater variety of resources to familiarize the user with the languages of Africa and focuses on phonological discriminators—that is, sounds that distinguish one language from another—for language identification. Phonological discriminators are distinguishable without prior knowledge of the grammar or vocabulary of specific languages.

ALIFA is accessible at www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~tpurvis/alifa/.

Relevance

ALIFA is useful for the following purposes:

- **Language identification**: Language analysts can be trained to recognize or hypothesize a particular language or language family based on the presence or absence of distinctive sounds in a speech sample.

- **Language familiarization**: That there are roughly 2,000 languages spoken on the African continent leaves the impression that linguistic research in this area is an overly daunting endeavor. ALIFA presents the African language situation in a more manageable perspective by highlighting major and critical languages and providing quick access to descriptive information and other resources relating to these languages.

- **Resource portal**: The ALIFA web-based tool can be adapted to provide links to a variety of linguistic resources such as summary descriptions of languages, electronically available and published resources, names of experts in particular language, and more.

For More Information

For more information about this project, contact us:

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