



Call for Papers Comparative Law and Language (CLL) Journal, University of Trento, Italy

Theme: Access to law in african languages: terminology and comparative perspectives

Edited by

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Background and rationale

African languages constitute central vectors in the development of the continent. In order to achieve this objective, it is imperative to make African languages genuine tools of knowledge, science, and education, and consequently of access to modernity (DIALLO/BEARTH, 2022; DJITE, 2011; DIKI-KIDIRI, 2008; etc.). From this perspective, DIKI-KIDIRI (ibid.) emphasizes that this ambitious objective can only be achieved “..... si les langues africaines en question sont convenablement outillées pour prendre en charge l’expression des réalités du monde moderne dans tous les domaines, en commençant par ceux qui ont un impact plus direct sur la vie des populations et des pays africains” (“... if the African languages concerned are adequately equipped to take charge of the expression of the realities of the modern world in all domains, beginning with those that have a more direct impact on the lives of populations and African states”) (M. DIKI-KIDIRI, 2008, p. 253). Stephen P. MOUZOU (2015, p. 446) and Maxime I. J. MANIFI ABOUH (2023) corroborate DIKI-KIDIRI’s (2008) position through their work in linguistics for development.

This position appears to have found resonance among specialists of African languages through the regular publication of research works in these languages. By way of example, Asseta DIALLO (2018) addresses the terminology of life and earth sciences in Fulfulde. In addition, the publication by Issiaka BAALO (2023) of a work introducing rhetoric in Bamanankan bears witness to this spirit of convergence toward the dissemination of research results exclusively in African languages.

Since the 2000s, academic activities aimed at equipping and instrumentalizing African languages have multiplied through the organization of national and international meetings on terminology. By way of illustration, mention may be made of the international conference held from 8 to 13 September 2024 at the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin) under the theme: “*Recherche-action en*

terminologie et alphabétisation pour la promotion du développement inclusif et durable en Afrique” (“*Action research in terminology and literacy for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable development in Africa*”). In the same vein, the Third High-Level International Scientific Conference was held from 28 to 31 July 2025 at Yambo Ouologuem University of Bamako (Mali) under the theme “*Vers plus d’aménagement de la terminologie dans les langues africaines*” (“*Towards greater development of terminology in African languages*”). Alongside these academic meetings, research on terminology, lexicography, lexicology, and literacy in African languages has experienced significant growth, as evidenced by recent publications of theses, books, and articles (I. BALLO, 2019; C. D. LIGAN, 2020; C. D. LIGAN et al., 2024; I. BALLO & P. A. ANDREDOU, 2021; A. TRAORE, 2023; F. BENGALY, 2024; etc.). These terminological studies in African languages cover several fields (human biology, computer science, sport, medicine, resilience, etc.). However, they do not sufficiently address research on the terminology of legal sciences in the languages concerned.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the field of legal terminology in African languages is not entirely unexplored. One may cite “*La traduction de la déclaration universelle des droits de l’Homme en sängö*” (“*The translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into Sängö*”) by Marcel DIKI-KIDIRI et al. (2008). The author highlights the methodology that led to the translation of the Declaration of Human Rights into the Sängö language, while emphasizing the crucial role of terminology in the conceptualization and naming of legal concepts in the target language.

Africa is a continent of immense cultural and linguistic diversity, with thousands of languages and legal systems coexisting. Historically, modern law was introduced and imposed in the wake of Western colonization. What remains striking, indeed intriguing, is that the legal system as imposed and practiced by postcolonial African states is expressed predominantly in languages inherited from colonization, notably French, English, or Portuguese. Consequently, customary legal systems and local languages are often marginalized. This results, de facto, in the exclusion from the legal system of its primary beneficiaries, namely the vast majority of African populations who do not have access to colonial languages. This situation creates a profound gap between legal texts and the lived reality of most African citizens, who have very limited access to law in their own languages (see TARR, 2022; TARR/SAMBOU, 2021). In this context, comparative law and comparison constitute central instruments for analyzing and understanding the dynamics between legal systems and languages, as well as their implications for access to justice and the valorization of local knowledge.

If one starts from the premise that “ignorance of the law is no excuse”, one is also entitled to ask how populations can comply with laws drafted in languages they do not understand. Before colonization, the vehicles of legal regulation were expressed in African languages, and law itself was articulated in



those same languages. Considered by UNESCO as one of the oldest declarations of Human Rights, the *Kurukanfuga* Charter of the Mali Empire of 1236 remains a living reference to the existence of models of legal regulation in precolonial African societies.

The transfer of complex legal concepts, often Western in origin, into African languages is not a simple linguistic operation. It raises fundamental questions concerning sovereignty, access to justice, and the valorization of local knowledge.

This call for papers aims to explore the theoretical and practical issues related to the creation, adoption, standardization, and dissemination of legal terminology in African languages. Discussion of the theme of this reference publication project is necessary, as it constitutes an essential dialogue for the development of a truly inclusive legal system adapted to African realities. It also aims to foster a reappropriation of legal concepts by speakers of African languages.

Comparative contributions will make it possible to better understand the dynamics between languages, terminology, and legal systems, thereby promoting more inclusive and contextualized practices.

Why submit a contribution?

This call offers an opportunity to participate in a critical and constructive reflection on the place of African languages within the legal framework. It is addressed to researchers, jurists, linguists, translators, and anyone engaged in the promotion and valorization of African languages and equitable access to justice.

By participating, you will contribute to:

- **Making law accessible** to a greater number of people in Africa.
- **Strengthening the cultural and legal identity** of African nations.
- **Enriching a field of research** that remains insufficiently explored.
- **Encouraging intergenerational and interdisciplinary dialogue** for sustainable legal development.

Thematic areas

Proposed contributions may fall within the following research areas:



- **Axis 1:** Challenges and issues in the translation of legal documents into African languages and intercultural and interlinguistic comparisons of legal translations
- **Axis 2:** Issues relating to the naming of legal concepts in African languages
- **Axis 3:** Comparative analyses (legal systems of countries and legal systems across different languages)
- **Axis 4:** Customary legal systems and endogenous terminology / comparisons between customary systems and modern law in different African countries
- **Axis 5:** Language policies and legal planning, taking into account comparisons of linguistic and terminological policies between states or regions

Scientific committee

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EDITORIAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The structure of the article must comply with the rules of scientific writing, depending on whether the article is a theoretical contribution or the result of field or documentary research.

- **For a theoretical and foundational article:**

Title, Author's First and Last Name, Institutional Affiliation, Email Address, Abstract in French, Keywords, Abstract, Keywords, Abstract in an African language, Keywords in an African language, Introduction (justification of the theme, research problem, hypotheses/scientific objectives, approach), Structured development, Conclusion, References. The article should not exceed 15 pages.

- **For an article based on field research:**

Title, Author's First and Last Name, Institutional Affiliation, Email Address, Abstract in French, Keywords, Abstract, Keywords, Abstract in an African language, Keywords in an African language, Introduction, Methodology, Results and Discussion, Conclusion, References.

Body of the article

The body of the article must comply with the editorial guidelines of the journal **CLL – Comparative Law and Language**, available at the following link:

<https://teseo.unitn.it/cll/index>

Submission procedures

Please also attach a short biographical note (approximately 120 words).

Submission deadline: 31 March 2026

Please submit your article to the following email address: editorial.clj.jus@unitn.it

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