



National Planning for  
the Teaching of the  
Less Commonly  
Taught Languages

## **Priorities for U.S. Instruction in the African Languages: New Criteria and New Choices**

by David Wiley, Michigan State University

### **Special Paper Appendices (see below)**

- ◆ African Languages Available at the 11 University Title VI African National Resource and FLAS Centers 2001-04 and from the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), 2004
- ◆ Proposed New Prioritization of African Languages (2004)
- ◆ 92 Prominent African Languages or Language Families Ranked by Title VI National Resource Center Directors and Language Coordinators as Priorities for Instruction by U.S. Universities and Agencies, 2004 (Alphabetical Listing)

### **Introduction**

Faced with more than 750 languages in 54 African nations, the 11 Title VI African NRC and FLAS Centers have made available 54 of Africa's less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), including all 34 of the "high priority" languages of the continent (based on number of speakers, media, archives, medium of instruction, strategic importance). In 2001-02, approximately 1,500 students were enrolled in 24 of these languages at the 11 centers. 139 graduate students received FLAS Fellowships. The Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State, which serve the more narrow diplomatic and military language needs of government, have different functions and sets of priorities for choosing their course offerings; therefore, they offered only nine of these languages. Among the African languages, only Swahili, Yoruba, Wolof, Hausa, and Zulu are offered outside the Title VI NRCs. Most other African LCTL instruction occurs only in the NRC/FLAS universities.

African language instruction has grown slowly outside of these 11 NRC centers. In 2004, the CARLA LCTL database records 106 higher education institutions offering Kiswahili. Swahili is offered *annually* in 54 institutions, while others vary, offering the language on demand, in tutorials, through study abroad, in alternate years, not always at the same levels, and subject to student demand. 32 institutions report offering Yoruba, of which 17 offer annually. 16 offer Wolof, 9 annually; 16 Hausa, 8 annually; and 15 offer Zulu, 8 annually.

### **Revisiting language priorities of the African language and area studies community**

The African language and area studies community has had a history of active collaboration since 1972 when meetings began of the Association of African Studies Programs, the Title VI African directors and language coordinators, and later the African Language Teachers Association. From

those meetings came a series of agreements for collaboration in summer intensive language instruction, both in the U.S. and in Africa. The principle of those agreements was to share resources (e.g. summer FLAS fellowships), to use resources efficiently by not duplicating courses supported with FLAS fellowships, to plan collaboratively for all national and international offerings of languages, to apply conjointly through the AASP for the US/ED Group Projects Abroad intensive language offerings in Africa, and to circulate opportunity to lead national and international projects among qualified personnel in the different centers.

A key to that consensus was in developing agreements about the criteria to be used for selecting high priority African languages for instruction from among the 750-1,000 languages of the continent. This consensus was developed at meetings of directors and language coordinators in 1978-79 and is recorded in Wiley and Dwyer, 1980.

In these meetings of the 1970s, the conferees argued that prioritizing African languages is particularly important because unlike other world regions, most countries in Africa do not have one official indigenous language. In fact, “[t]he typical African pattern is one of numerous languages per nation, with no one language clearly dominant either in numbers of speakers or in the sociopolitical power of its speakers” (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:5). To accommodate this pattern, most African countries have retained the colonial language (i.e., French, English, or Portuguese) as the national language. However, because many African citizens were not trained in colonial languages, researchers need to learn local indigenous languages to speak with most African peoples (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:6). Because of the unique nature of the African language situation, conferees felt the need to find some way of prioritizing the 700-1000 different languages in Africa according to the need for instruction in the U.S.

To address the problem of African language instruction, in 1978 the conferees developed a set of criteria that ranks African languages into four groups. These four groups “suggest the relative significance of these languages in so far as language teaching and materials development are concerned” (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:6).

Because no one criterion can be used to prioritize languages, the conferees agreed upon three major criteria. (1) **The first criterion is the number of speakers.** This includes people who speak the language as their first language and as an additional language. (2) **The second criterion is the political, cultural, and social importance of the language.** This includes whether the language is the official language, if it extends across national boundaries, how widely it is used as a lingua franca, if it is used in educational systems, if it has a recognized oral or written literature, if it is used in mass media, and whether speakers or national agencies are promoting its use and literacy. (3) **The third criterion is the importance for U.S. national interests.** This includes concerns such as economic ties between the nation(s) where the language is spoken and the U.S., “political relations with the nation(s), strategic location of the nation(s) and/or language, and cultural and technological exchange programs” (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:7). While not always the case, typically most languages that rank high by the last two of the criteria also will have a large number of speakers. Similarly, languages with a large number of speakers with generally rank high on criteria 2 and 3 (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:7).

Wiley and Dwyer (1980) warn that “[w]hile all the criteria must be weighed against each other in establishing priorities, those in (the third criterion) are particularly subject to change for any given language because of shifting political and economic trends” (p. 7). Thus, as other LCTL scholars have noted (Bigelow and Legters 1964; Parker 1954), relying heavily on U.S. national interests as a criterion for prioritizing languages means that language needs will change frequently. Therefore, language institutes and centers should periodically review the languages they offer to see if they still are meeting the set criteria (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:7). Indeed, Africanist research scholars have changing emphases on countries as the safety and security changes in those nations besieged with civil conflict or deterioration of the economy and polity. For instance, enrollments in languages of South Africa have surged as that nation moved to majority rule, and U.S. enrollments in Amharic, Shona, and the three major Nigerian languages declined as Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria have been beset with economic, political, and security problems.

As Africanists discussed during the 1961 National Conference on the Teaching of African Languages and Area Studies, because there are so many African languages, it is best to group them (Welmers 1961). However, rather than grouping languages by region as Africanists did in 1961, the Africanists in the 1979 conference determined it was best to group the languages by whether or not the languages meet all or some of the criteria. Therefore, they developed four groups of languages as follows: (1) Group A consists of languages that meet criterion #1 and at least some of criteria #2 and #3; (2) Group B consists of the remaining languages that have more than one million speakers; (3) Group C includes languages with less than one million speakers but that scholars feel are of special local importance or key to primary research; and (4) Group 4 includes all the remaining languages. According to this grouping scheme, Africanists prioritized 23 languages in Group A, 30 languages in Group B, 29 in Group C, and the remainder in Group D (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:7-8). Now, the languages allocated to each category of priorities has changed based on the discussions among the Africanist directors and language teachers over the period 2002-04.

### **Revisiting and revising the priorities for instruction in African languages in 2003-04**

The Africanists of the Title VI community have agreed to use the occasion of the *e-LCTL Initiative* to revisit the consensus and collaboration that already has endured for 25 years. To arrive at a new consensus on collaboration among African programs and language specialists, on national criteria for selecting languages, and to apportion specific languages to the categories of priority, the *e-LCTL Initiative* has convened meetings of the African studies community, including representatives of the Title VI NRCs, the National African Language Resource Center, and African language program coordinators and faculty. The meetings 2002-04 occurred at:

- Meeting # 1 - Initial African languages meeting at *Distance Learning of the Less Commonly Taught Languages Conference*, February 1-3, 2002, Crystal City, Arlington, VA. At this meeting the 15 Africanists from Title VI NRCs and the National African LRC agreed to collaborate in planning (a) for reviewing criteria for priorities in the African languages, (b) to reconsider the extant priorities from 1980, and (c) to work together in planning for distance learning in the African languages.

- Meeting # 2 - 20 Africanist NRC and LRC directors and language coordinators met at the annual meeting of the *African Studies Association*, Washington, DC, December 5-8, 2002. At this meeting, those assembled reviewed the criteria and made suggestions of amendments of the specific language in the priority categories.
- Meeting #3 - More than 30 language teachers and coordinators, not only from Title VI centers, met in a plenary session of the *African Language Teachers Association* annual meeting at Indiana University, April 10-13, 2003, with Prof. David Dwyer from MSU leading the reconsideration of the extant criteria, the specific languages allocated to the various categories, as well as the history of collaboration in the African. A number of revisions were proposed and incorporated in the results reported in this paper.
- Meeting #4 - 35 representatives of African language and area studies programs across the U.S., including 10 of the 11 Title VI NRCs and the National African Language Resource Center, met at the annual meeting of the Association of African Studies Programs in Washington, D.C. on April 25, 2003. Review and revisions of the results to date were invited, a preliminary re-ranking of languages distributed, and an agreement reached to conclude the process at a joint meeting of the NRC and LRC directors and language coordinators at the forthcoming meeting of the African Studies Association in Boston, MA, October 30-November 2, 2003.
- The first version of this African synthesis paper was presented and comments solicited at the *National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages*, Los Angeles, Spring 2003
- A brief session of African Title VI National Resource Center (NRC) Directors were convened at the national Title VI Directors Meetings for further discussion in Washington, September, 2003.
- Directors and Language Teachers assembled briefly to discuss the project at the African Studies Association meeting, Boston, October 2003.
- Finally, the new data on the African language offerings by the NRCs was distributed at the Africa Session of the *e-LCTL Initiative Meeting*, Santa Fe, NM, February 19-21, 2004

### **The rationale for developing criteria for prioritizing African languages**

The following statement of a consensus has resulted from the eight meetings above.

**Purposes and uses of the criteria** - These criteria are developed in order to lay the groundwork for broader cooperation among the African language teaching community and to suggest:

- (1) the relative significance of these languages for learners foreign to Africa,
- (2) the priorities that should be given to the development of language teaching and materials,
- (3) what languages to offer in summer language programs in the U.S. and abroad, and
- (4) what languages should be given priority for developing distance learning materials and programs in order to extend access to the African languages.

**Qualifying our concern for criteria** - We all concur that every African language is important, and that special concern should be expressed for the potential loss forever of very small, minority languages. For linguists, all African languages are important. And for the indigenous speakers, their own language may be the most important of all. Furthermore, priority criteria and the resultant language classifications are not meant to marginalize any current language programs, courses, specializations, or research efforts.

For further history of prioritizing LCTLs in the Title VI centers and language community and the uses of priorities in planning for LCTLs, see “Collaborative Planning for Meeting National Needs in the Less Commonly Taught Languages: Defining Criteria for Priorities in the Languages of the World Regions,” (by D. Wiley, Revised September, 2003, [www.elctl.msu.edu](http://www.elctl.msu.edu)).

**Heritage Languages** - Teaching African language in the 1990s and beyond has been reshaped by the growing African heritage communities in the U.S., especially from Nigeria (circa 200,000+ in Houston alone and 50,000+ in Chicago), Ghana (9,000+ in northern New Jersey), Senegal (thousands clustered in suburbs of New York City), Ethiopia (60,000+ in greater Washington, DC and more in Atlanta and Los Angeles), Sudan, Somalia (40,000+ in Minneapolis/St. Paul and 20,000+ in Columbus), Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other countries. Because the first responsibility of the Title VI NRCs in U.S. universities is to provide access to African languages for research scholars and the full range of private and government users, the African language and area specialists meeting at the African Studies Association annual meeting in Washington, D.C. in December 2002, concluded that the heritage communities provide both tutors for languages and some new learners on our campuses. Their demand for learning their heritage language may provide additional enrollments for classes and, thereby, the decision on a campus to offer an African language; however, their demand is not a criterion for prioritizing which African languages should be offered in the broad national interest. Rather, priorities should be assigned to the languages not because of the presence of a large heritage community or a student demand but because of the inherent importance of the languages in the world region and the broad national interests of research scholars, students, teachers, linguists, businesses, NGOs, assistance projects, government, and the general public. Student and faculty demand for languages and available teachers always shapes universities’ decisions to offer (or not to offer) instruction and can be constructive in building capacity; however, the initial decisions should be based on the following criteria.

### **Criteria for Prioritizing African Language Offerings**

Because, we believe, no single criterion should be used alone to prioritize languages for serving the broad interests of scholars, students, the government, business, and other users, we propose the following major criteria for identifying the which languages should be emphasized for instruction in the U.S.

**(1) The first criterion: How many people speak the language?** This includes people who speak the language as their first language and as an additional language. In general, the languages with the larger number of speakers are also likely to be “national languages” or multinational.

**(2) Second: What is the national status of a language? Is the language a “national language” or multinational, i.e. the primary language or *lingua franca* for a nation or a region?** This includes whether the language is designated as the official language or, if not, whether it extends across national boundaries and is widely used as a trade language or broad multi-national *lingua franca*. (In some instances, languages are official national languages but are not widely taught, and their use may be declining, e.g. some of South Africa’s 11 “official national languages.”)

**(3) Third: What is the current usage of the language in each particular society? Is the language used widely in educational institutions, broadcast and/or print media, markets and neighborhoods, government agencies, and literatures of the peoples?**

**(4) Fourth: What is the importance of the language for scholars working in archives? Are large amounts of archival materials in that language important for various disciplines and other users?**

**(5) Fifth: How important is the language in politics, society, and culture of the country? Is the language important because of its usage or significance politically, culturally, and socially?** For example, although Amharic is a minority language of Ethiopia, its dominant usage for many years under Emperor Haile Selassie’s government and after his reign gives it importance beyond the number and proportion of its speakers.

**(6) Sixth: How important is the language for broad U.S. national interests? Is the language important for U.S. national interests such as for scholarly research and use by business, media, and government programs of economic assistance, security affairs, and foreign policy?** This includes concerns such as important economic ties between the nation(s) where the language is spoken and the U.S., “political relations with the nation(s), strategic location of the nation(s) and/or language, and cultural and technological exchange programs” (Wiley and Dwyer 1980:7). By definition, this criterion is the least stable and most subject to change as political and security circumstances are altered over time.

Clearly, the net priority accorded to individual languages shifts with the changing interests of scholars, government, and other users; therefore, priorities as shown below, need to be revisited at least once each five years and as pressing needs intervene.

This new consensus on criteria and on priority languages sets the stage for the next step: deciding how the U.S. African language community will ensure regular access to learning even the highest priority languages - in academic year classrooms on campus, summer intensive programs (both domestic and abroad), government language institutes, and via distance learning.

### **Denoting African Languages**

There is great difference of opinion about the names used to label African languages or language families. Sometimes the variations only reflect the different cultural histories of a language used in different countries, e.g. using Fula, Fulfulde, Peul, or Fulani for a single language family which spans a dozen countries in West Africa. Other times, differences reflect whether the

prefix is kept or discarded by different users and recorders, e.g. Kamba or kiKamba or Kikamba; Shona or chiShona; etc. Especially since the 1950s, however, some labels given to a language or language grouping sometimes have become a surrogate for ethnic contestation for power in the national or regional arena, such as “Bamileke” or “Grassfields languages” of Cameroon.

In the U.S., the languages offered by Title VI U.S. National Resource Centers are taught to support the research needs of graduate students and faculty as well as government and other users from the U.S. Aside from the specialized needs of linguists, the needs of these users are for the languages of African peoples - both in contemporary usage and in archival records. Because of the small market of student learners for any one of the 750 or more (some say 1,500) African languages, the student learner usually is taught one of several versions of a language group, even for the larger and more commonly taught languages such as Swahili and Arabic. For instance, distinct South African languages of Zulu and Xhosa, which had low demand during the apartheid era, were aggregated then as Zulu/Xhosa, but now are separated. Similarly, even though there are major differences between Malawian chiChewa and Zambian chiNyanja, they are similar linguistically and derive from the same root language; therefore, they are offered together in one class for students going to either country, usually utilizing the Peace Corps-produced learning tapes for Malawian chiChewa simply because those are the only available resources, even though a tutor may be a Zambian chiNyanja speaker.

On the ground in Africa, these languages have “histories,” processes of complex and continuing changes in meanings and definitions as well as in the labels that are assigned to them. Across the African languages, the refined differences of languages of smaller localities have been aggregated into larger scale units. This has been effected initially during the colonial period as choices were made about which language variant to use by the local colonial governments, militaries, and missionary organizations. After independence, choices are made by the schools in the educational systems, print and broadcast media, and even urban populations, where there are meldings, aggregations, new vocabularies, and choices made in common parlance or usage. The result is a selection from among the varieties of vocabularies, usages, and styles to *define* “a language” and to apply a label to it. Frequently, especially when classifying African languages from afar, this selection leads to similar languages being aggregated into a single language or language family. Thus, we have Fulfulde, Fula, Fulani, and Peul as labels for one prominent West African language and its variants. What is taught in the U.S. then is some melding of the specifications of the target reference grammar and the texts, influenced by the personal knowledge and histories of “native” language tutors or informants and the U.S. faculty instructors. Similarly, the NRCs aggregate Bambara, Mandingo, Mandikan, Maninka/Dyula, which may be tutored by a “native informant” who originated from any of those several language sub-families.

One particular language of current contestation is the Cameroonian “Bamileke,” a name of convenience used historically to indicate one of several sub-languages of circa one million speakers that now is being termed “Grassfields languages” or “Eastern Grassfields Bantu” or, sometimes, “Mbam-Nkam.” This category is comprised of at least 11 distinct but related languages with some mutual intelligibility, including Fe’fe’, Dschang (Yemba), Ghomala’, Kwa’, Medumba, Mengaka, Nda’nda’, Ngiemboon, Ngombale, Ngomba, and Ngwe. Today, each has 9,000 to 300,000+ speakers. Ghomala and Dschang (Yemba) are the most widely spoken,

especially in the linguistically powerful urban communities of Douala, Nkongsamba, and Yaounde. Some Cameroonians now argue that “Bamileke is not a language” in the contestation over linguistic and ethnic space in the national arena.

In the U.S., many students seeking a Cameroonian language for graduate research may have attended the junior-year abroad program of the School for International Training (SIT) which is based at the University of Dschang in the city of Dshcang, where Yemba is the principal local language. This locus then may influence the students’ choice of a particular variant of an African language in graduate study. (In fact, in the SIT Program at Dschang, the students are enrolled in intensive French and also take two weeks of oral Fulfulde.)

In utilizing the criteria proffered in this paper to select which African languages should be emphasized in U.S. African language programs, languages such as this Cameroonian cluster “rise” to inclusion only by aggregating the number of speakers to the more than one million total, which places the language in the second tier of priorities.

In the annual U.S. Summer Cooperative African Language Institute (SCALI), we similarly have denoted this language as “Bamileke,” even though in any particular summer, according to which tutor is hired and language texts selected, the emphasis may be on one of the other sub-languages. Clearly, U.S. teachers of African languages need to indicate the full breadth of their offerings, which in this case probably should be “Cameroonian Grassfields or Bamileke Languages,” but then indicate what is the sub-language of the tutor and the texts, tapes, and other instructional materials.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, the denotation of African languages will continue to evolve, and the naming of African languages or language-clusters offered in the U.S. will reflect those changes.

In the following pages, we provide the current consensus among the African language and area studies centers and communities of what languages are of higher priority for offering in the U.S. and what languages currently fit the criteria discussed above. It results in a larger first priority listing of 34 languages, 27 in the second priority category, and 31 in the third priority, totaling 92 of the 750-1,500 African languages. Over time, as there are changes in scholars’ access, research agendas and foci, and government interests, the list will change.

More important now, is for the African studies and language community to find the resources to expand these offerings beyond the circa 54 languages that were proffered by the Title VI NRC centers in 2001-04 and the approximately 25 languages that actually are taught in any given year. The broad national interest of scholars and higher education, commerce, government, and the public requires our moving to a deeper level of seriousness about African language instruction.

Revised July 3, 2004

**African Languages Available at the 11 University Title VI African National Resource and FLAS Centers 2001-04 and from the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), 2004<sup>1</sup>**

Key: ■ - language taught at NRCs in 2001-02	x - language available 2001-04
○ - language available on-demand at FSI	(+) - historical language
◇ - language available at DLI from private contractor	

<b>AFRICA</b>	<b>NRC</b>	<b>DLI</b>	<b>FSI</b>
Acholi / Luo	■		
Afrikaans	■	x	○
Akan / Twi	■		
Amharic	■	x	○
Ancient Egyptian (+)	■		
Arabic (Egyptian)	■		
Arabic (Modern Standard)	■	x	x
Arabic (Morrocan)	x		
Arabic (Sudanese)	x		
Bamana / Bambara	■		
Bemba	x		
Berber	x		
Caboverdiano	x		
Chewa	■		
Efutu	x		
Ewe	x		
Fula / Pulaar	■		
Hausa	■		
Igbo	x		
Kanuri	x		
Kikuyu	x		
Kimbundu	x		
Kpelle	x		
Krio	x		
Lamnso	x		
Legbo	■		
Lingala	■	x	
Luganda	x		
Lusaamia	x		

Maasai	x		
Malagasy	■		
Mandinka	x		
Mende	x		
Nupe	■		
Nzema	x		
Oku	x		
Oromo	■		
Oshiwambo / Ndonga	x		
Pidgin (W. Africa)	x		
Portuguese	■	x	x
Ruanda / Rwanda	x		
Sesotho	x		
Setswana	■		
Shona	■		
Somali	x	x	
Swahili	■	x	x
Swati	■		
Temne	x		
Tigrinya	x	◇	
Tonga	x		
Tsonga	x		
Wolof	■		
Xhosa	■		○
Yoruba	■		
Zarma	x		
Zulu	■		○
<b>Total Africa</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

**1. Notes on sources of data for this table:**

National Resource Centers data are derived from applications in November 2002 submitted to the NRC and FLAS programs of the U.S. Department of Education. x - "Languages available" are identified in the narrative of the proposals as those in which the center has the capacity to provide instruction. Ten of these were being offered in 2002-04 in addition to those taught in 2001-02.

Defense Language Institute (DLI) data about languages available are derived from the DLI website at <[www.dliflc.edu/Academics/schools/index.html](http://www.dliflc.edu/Academics/schools/index.html)>, last consulted on June 14, 2004, with additional information provided by Dr. Scott McGinnis, DLI - Washington, June 24, 2004.

Foreign Service Institute (at the US State Department's National Foreign Affairs Training Center) data on language offerings available are derived from the FSI pamphlet, "Language Training, School of Language Studies, NFATC, Foreign Service Institute, US Department of State" (distributed June 24, 2004) and from supplementary list provided by the FSI on June 25, 2004.

Note: 53 of the 54 languages that NRCs report as having available are used in contemporary societies, and only one (Ancient Egyptian) is a "historical language" relevant only to ancient texts. Historical languages are those that are ancient, extinct, or are used only for reading historical texts. Federal funds do not support instruction or fellowships for these historical languages. The principal source of this information is *Ethnologue* at <[www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)>.

¤ ¤ ¤ ¤ ¤

## **Proposed New Prioritization of African Languages (2004)**

### **Group A - Languages** (34 First Priority)

Acholi (Uganda)  
 Afrikaans (South Africa)  
 Akan/Twi (Ghana)  
 Amharic (Ethiopia)  
 Arabic (North Africa)  
 Bamana/Bambara/Mandingo/Mandikan/  
 Maninka/Dyula (West Africa)  
 Fulfulde/Pulaar/Fula/Peul (West Africa)  
 Hausa (Nigeria, Niger)  
 Igbo (Nigeria)  
 Kikuyu/Gikuyu (Kenya)  
 Kongo (Congo, Angola)  
 Kpelle (Liberia, Guinea)  
 Krio (Sierra Leone)  
 Lingala (Congo/Zaire)  
 Luganda (Uganda)  
 Malagasy (Madagascar)  
 Mende/Bandi/Loko (Sierra Leone)  
 Ndebele (Zimbabwe)  
 Nyanja/Chewa (Zambia, Malawi)  
 Oromo (Ethiopia)  
 Rwanda/Rundi (Rwanda)  
 Shona (Zimbabwe, Mozambique)  
 Somali (Somalia)  
 Sotho/Tswana/Ndebele (South Africa)  
 Swahili (East Africa)  
 Swati/SiSwati (Swaziland, South Africa)  
 Temne (Sierra Leone)  
 Tigrigna (Eritrea and Ethiopia)  
 Umbundu (Angola)  
 West African Pidgin English (Sierra  
 Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon, etc.)  
 Wolof (Senegal, Gambia)  
 Xhosa (South Africa)  
 Yoruba (Nigeria)  
 Zulu (South Africa)

### **Group B Languages** (27 Second Priority)

Anyi/Baule  
 Bemba (Zambia)  
 Berber (Tamazight/Tamacheq/Kabyllé)  
 Chokwe/Lunda  
 Efik/Ibibio  
 Ewe/Mina/Fon  
 Gbaya  
 Grassfields or Bamileke (Cameroon)  
 Kalenjin/Nandi/Kipsigis  
 Kamba/Kikamba  
 Kanuri  
 Kru/Bassa  
 Luba/Chiluba/Kituba  
 Luhya/Luyia  
 Luo/Acholi/Lango  
 Makua/Lomwe  
 Mbundu/Kimbundu  
 Mongo/Nkundo  
 More/Mossi  
 Nubian  
 Senufo  
 Songhai  
 Sukuma/Nyamwezi  
 Tiv  
 Tsonga (Shitsonga/Ronga or Shironga/Tswa or  
 Shitswa)  
 Yao/Makonde (Bulu)  
 Zande (Azande)

**Group C Languages** (31 Third Priority)

Ancient Egyptian  
Coptic  
Dinka/Agar/Bor/Padang  
Edo/Bini  
Fang  
Ga  
Gogo/Chigogo  
Gurage  
Hehe  
Idoma  
Igbira  
Ijo  
Khoi-Khoi/Khoi/San/Khoisan  
Lozi/siLozi  
Maasai  
Mauritian Creole  
Meru  
Nama/Damara  
Nuer  
Nupe  
Nyakusa  
Nyoro  
Pedi  
Sara Serere/Sine (Serer)  
Sidamo  
Soninke  
Suppire  
Susu  
Tumbuka/Chitumbuka  
Turkana/Teso  
Venda

**Group D Languages** (Fourth Priority)

All other African languages, totaling  
circa 700-1,000 languages.

**92 Prominent African Languages or Language Families**  
**Ranked by Title VI National Resource Center Directors and Language Coordinators as**  
**Priorities for Instruction by U.S. Universities and Agencies, 2004 (Alphabetical Listing)**  
 ~ a = highest priority, b = second priority, c = third priority ~

Acholi (Uganda, Sudan) - a  
 Afrikaans (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana) - a  
 Akan/Twi (Ghana) - a  
 Amharic (Ethiopia) - a  
 Ancient Egyptian (Egypt) - c  
 Anyi/Baule (Ivory Coast, Ghana) - b  
 Arabic (North Africa) - a  
 Bamana/Bambara (Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast)/Mandingo/Mandikan (Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau)/Maninka (Guinea, Sierra Leone)/Dyula (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali) - a  
 Bamileke (see Grassfields) (Cameroon) - b  
 Bemba (Zambia, DRC, Tanzania) - b  
 Berber (Tamazight (Morocco, Algeria)/Tamacheq (Mali, Burkina Faso)/Kabylle(Algeria)) – b  
 Chewa/Nyanja (Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia) - a  
 Chokwe/Lunda (DRC, Angola, Zambia) - b  
 Coptic (Egypt) - c  
 Dinka (Agar/Bor/Padang) (Sudan) - c  
 Edo (Bini) (Nigeria) - c  
 Efik/Ibibio (Nigeria) - b  
 Egyptian, Ancient (Egypt) - c  
 Ewe (Ghana)/Mina (Cameroon)/Fon (Benin, Togo) - b  
 Fang (Gabon, Cameroon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea) - c  
 Fulfulde/Fula/Fulani/Peul/Pulaar (West Africa) - a  
 Ga (Ghana, Togo) - c  
 Gbaya (Central Africa Republic, Cameroon) - b  
 Gogo (Chigogo) (Tanzania)- c  
 Grassfields (see Bamileke) (Cameroon) - b  
 Gurage (Ethiopia) - c  
 Hausa (Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Sudan, Togo) - a  
 Hehe (Tanzania) - c  
 Idoma (Nigeria) - c  
 Igbira (Nigeria) - c  
 Igbo (Nigeria) - a  
 Ijo (Nigeria) - c  
 Kalenjin/Nandi/Kipsigis (Kenya, Tanzania) - b  
 Kamba/Kikamba (Kenya) - b  
 Kanuri (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Sudan) - b  
 Khoi-Khoi/Khoi/San/Khoisan (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Angola) - c  
 Kikuyu (Kenya) - a  
 Kongo (DRC, Congo, Angola) - a  
 Kpelle (Liberia, Guinea) - a  
 Krio (Sierra Leone) - a  
 Kru/Bassa (Liberia, Ivory Coast) - b  
 Lingala (DRC, Congo) - a  
 Lozi (Silozi) (Zambia, Namibia) - c  
 Luba/Chiluba/Kituba (DRC Congo) - b  
 Luganda (Uganda, Tanzania) - a  
 Luhya/Luyia (Kenya, Uganda) - b

Luo/Acholi/Lango (Kenya, Tanzania) - b  
 Maasai (Kenya, Tanzania) - c  
 Makua/Lomwe (Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania) - b  
 Malagasy (Madagascar, Comoros Islands) - a  
 Mauritian Creole (Mauritius) - c  
 Mbundu/Kimbundu (Angola) - b  
 Mende/Bandi/Loko (Sierra Leone, Liberia) - a  
 Mende/Bandi/Loko - b  
 Meru (Kenya) - c  
 Mongo/Nkundo (DRC) - b  
 More/Mossi (Burkina Faso, Mali, Togo) - b  
 Nama (Damara) (Namibia, South Africa, Botswana) - c  
 Ndebele (Zimbabwe) - a  
 Nubian (Sudan) - b  
 Nuer (Sudan, Ethiopia) - c  
 Nupe (Nigeria) - c  
 Nyakusa (Tanzania, Malawi) - c  
 Nyanja/Chewa (Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique) - a  
 Nyoro (Uganda) - c  
 Oromo (Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia) - a  
 Pedi (South Africa) - c  
 Rwanda/Rundi (Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Tanzania, Uganda) - a  
 Sara (Central African Republic, Chad)/Serere/Sine (Serer) (Senegal, Guinea) - c  
 Senufo (Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Mali) - b  
 Shona (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia) - a  
 Sidamo (Ethiopia) - c  
 Somali (Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya) - a  
 Songhai (Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger, Nigeria) - b  
 Soninke (Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal) - c  
 Sotho/Tswana/Ndebele (South Africa) - a  
 Sukuma/Nyamwezi (Tanzania) - b  
 Suppire (Mali) - c  
 Susu (Guinea, Sierra Leone) - c  
 Swahili (East Africa) - a  
 Swati (Swaziland, South Africa, Mozambique) - a  
 Temne - a  
 Temne (Sierra Leone) - a  
 Tigrigna (Ethiopia, Eritrea) - a  
 Tiv (Nigeria, Cameroon) - b  
 Tsonga (Shitsonga/Ronga or Shironga/Tswa or Shitswa) (South Africa, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe) - b  
 Tumbuka (Chitumbuka) (Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania) - c  
 Turkana/Teso (Kenya, Uganda) - c  
 Umbundu (Angola) - a  
 Venda (South Africa, Zimbabwe) - c  
 West African Pidgin English (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria) - a  
 Wolof (Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali) - a  
 Xhosa (South Africa) - a  
 Yao/Makonde (Bulu) (Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique) - b  
 Yoruba (Nigeria, Benin) - a  
 Zande (Azande) (DRC, Central African Republic, Sudan) - b  
 Zulu (South Africa, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique) - a

## References

- Bigelow, Donald N. and Lyman H. Legters. 1964. "NDEA Language and Area Studies: A Report of the First 5 Years." *U.S. Department of Education, Bulletin* 41:1-131.
- Brecht, Richard D. and A. Ronald Walton. 1994. "National Strategic Planning in the Less Commonly Taught Languages." *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 532(March):190-212.
- CARLA - Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota. 2004. *Course Offerings for Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) Database*, <http://160.94.62.53/ctl/access.html>, Consulted July 2, 2004 by Prof. Deogratias Ngonyani, Michigan State University.
- Center for Applied Linguistics. 1975. *Material Development Needs in the Uncommonly Taught Languages: Priorities for the Seventies*, Arlington, Virginia: Center for Applied Linguistics
- Crump, Ted. 2001. *Translating and Interpreting in the Federal Government*. Alexandria, VA: American Translators Association
- Fife, Austin E. and Marion L. Nielsen. 1961. "Report of the Conference on Neglected Languages." in *Conference on Neglected Languages*. Washington, D.C.: Modern Language Association, reprinted in *Reports of Surveys and Studies in the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages*, New York: Modern Language Association, 1959-1961
- Gage, William. 1970. "Uncommonly Taught Languages." *ERIC Clearinghouse for Linguistics Bulletin* 17(September):1-18.
- Lambert, Richard D. 1973. *Language and Area Studies Review*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Political and Social Science, (esp. Chapter V, Language Instruction, pp. 149-202).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. "Problems and Processes in U.S. Foreign Language Planning." *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 532 (March):47-58.
- Moore, Sarah Jane. 1994. "Intervention Strategies in Foreign Language Planning." *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 532(March):74-87.
- Nordin, Glenn H., 2001. "Toward a National Language Strategy: A Proposal for the Interagency Federal Language Roundtable," Oct. 19, 2001, reported on the National Foreign Language Center website <[www.nflc.org/security/background.htm](http://www.nflc.org/security/background.htm)>, 4/29/2003 .
- Parker, William Riley. 1954. *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*. Washington, D.C.: Department of State.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1957. *The National Interest and Foreign Languages* (second ed). Washington, D.C.: Department of State.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1961. *The National Interest and Foreign Languages* (third ed). Washington, D.C.: Department of State.
- Simon, Paul. 2001. "Beef Up the Country's Foreign Language Skills," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2001, p. A23 (reported in [www.nflc.org/security/background.htm](http://www.nflc.org/security/background.htm), April 27, 2003).
- Twaddell, W. Freeman. 1959. *Survey of Language and Area Needs. and Facilities*, (Final Report submitted to U.S. Office of Education by the American Council of Learned Societies), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education

Welmers, William. E. 1961. "African Language Programs: Problems and Proposals." in *Report of the Conference on Neglected Languages*, edited by A. E. Fife and M. L. Nielsen. Washington, D.C.: Modern Language Association. (pp. 48-84)

Wiley, David and David Dwyer. 1980. *African Language Instruction in the United States: Directions and Priorities for the 1980s*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, The African Studies Center.

### Notes

David Wiley is a Professor of Sociology, Director of the African Studies Center, Lead Principal Investigator of the *e-LCTL Initiative* at Michigan State University. For more than a decade, he also has been co-chairperson of the *Council of National Resource Center (Title VI) Directors*.

Thanks to Professor David Dwyer at Michigan State University for organizing and chairing the reconsideration of priorities in the African languages at the 2003 annual meeting of the African Language Teachers Association.

Revised July 3, 2004