NITheCS Colloquium
Monday, 20 September 2021, 16h00
Prof Langa Khumalo | *SADiLaR*

"Locating SADiLaR as a strategic centre for developing computational resources for African languages in the Context of 4IR"

ABSTRACT

The South African Constitution (1996) recognises eleven official languages. These include English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, Setswana, Sesotho sa Leboa, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Siswati, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. The constitution articulates the imperative to develop all the official languages in order to achieve parity of esteem. However African languages are resource-scarce languages (Bosch et al. 2007; Pretorius & Bosch 2003; Keet & Khumalo 2014). This scarcity includes the paucity of exhaustive grammatical descriptions, the compilation of both large and specialized corpus resources, the development of machine-readable lexicons, and the development of human language technologies. In this presentation I want to introduce the centrality of the South African Centre for Digital Language Resource (SADiLaR) in addressing *in part* this paucity and providing an enabling function towards the intellectualization of African languages in the broad context of 4IR. SADiLaR is a research infrastructure (RI) funded by the Department of Science and Innovation, whose strategic function is to create, manage and distribute digital (and computational) resources as well as applicable software to all South Africa's official languages in order to stimulate and support research and development in the humanities and social sciences. SADiLaR is the first and currently the only hub of its sort in Africa. Its core mandate is thus to drive the Digitisation program (natural language processing), which involve the creation of relevant text, speech and multimodal resources for the research and development of SA's 11 official languages, and also a Digital Humanities (DH) programme that focuses on research capacity building. I will argue that the impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic on higher education in South Africa has inspired the academy to adopt new pedagogies in the teaching of African languages using digital humanities methodologies (*cf.* Khumalo 2020). I will finally demonstrate that SADiLaR's flagship programme called the Escalator Project (https://escalator.sadilar.org/), provides a vehicle through which to address the scarcity of computational resources for African languages thereby enhancing in a novel way the intellectualization of African languages.

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BIOGRAPHY

Professor Langa Khumalo is a Professor and Executive Director of the South African Center for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) at the North West University (NWU). SADiLaR is one of the 13 Research Infrastructures as established in the South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap (SARIR), that are funded by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). Professor Langa Khumalo is the former Director of Language Planning and Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Oslo (Norway), and an MPhil in Linguistics from Cambridge University (UK). He is the current Chair and Coordinator of the Africa Union (AU) IsiZulu Language Commission. He is an expert in Corpus Linguistics and Computational Solutions for the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), which is a Secretariat of the AU. He is the Chair of the Universities South Africa (USAf)'s Community of Practice for African Language Teaching and Learning (CoPAL). He is a member of the SARIR Planning & Management Forum. He is also a member of the Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure (CLARIN), which is a European Research Infrastructure for Languages Resources and Technology. He represents South Africa in the CLARIN National Consortium Forum (NCF). He is a Fellow of the Cambridge Commonwealth Society (FCCS), a former Language Champion in the Oxford Global Languages program (OGL) for Oxford University Press (UK), a member of the Scientific Board of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS, University of the Western Cape), and the current President of the African Association for Lexicography (Afrilex). He served as a member of the Language Policy Review Working Group appointed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which produced the current Language Policy Framework for Higher Education (*gazetted* in 2020). He is a member of the SADC Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Scientific Community of Practice. He is an award-winning author in Intelligent Text Processing and Computational Linguistics. He has been an invited speaker and keynote speaker at various local and international conferences and colloquia.

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