

SADiLaR

South African Centre for Digital Language Resources

NEWSLETTER

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DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND OUR WORLD

“What does Digital Humanities (DH) mean to you? Which area(s) of the community could benefit from it? What about DH excites you and where do you see the future of DH in Africa and/or globally?” These questions were posed to SADiLaR employees. What follows is a summary of the answers they gave.

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When asked what DH entails for them, a commonality in SADiLaR employees’ answers was the collaborative aspect that DH has. It is a field in which an environment of reflectiveness about Humanities in general is possible and encouraged. Another general consensus was that the exploration of different topics is a significant part of how DH is viewed. One can say that there is really no limit to what can be done in DH; one seldom fails, and always learns. One particular response touched on DH serving a role in making research more accessible to a wider audience than before. The concepts of collaboration, reflectiveness and accessibility are extremely important, and it is encouraging that SADiLaR values these concepts in its approach to DH.

The next question pertained to the benefit of DH to communities. A common answer was that all areas of a community could benefit from DH. The possibilities for DH in the development of resources for and by marginalised communities cannot be overstated. One answer specified the benefits DH holds for students (from high school and

tertiary institutions) and libraries. DH promotes the preservation and digitisation of information, ultimately leading to the creation of resources that libraries and students can and will benefit from. This ties in with the earlier statement regarding making previously inaccessible research accessible to a wider audience.

The third question asked each employee what is inspiring or exciting about DH. The answers to this question were more individual, with some highlighting the time-saving aspect of using DH methods. Others mentioned its interdisciplinary nature and the freedom to experiment that comes with taking a DH approach. This question seems to have spoken to team members in different ways, since the answers ranged from the practical benefits to societal and personal benefits. The answers give insight into the ways in which DH is approached by different people, and it is indeed encouraging to see the diversity. One answer likened DH to a “big tent”, considering these interesting and interdependent answers.

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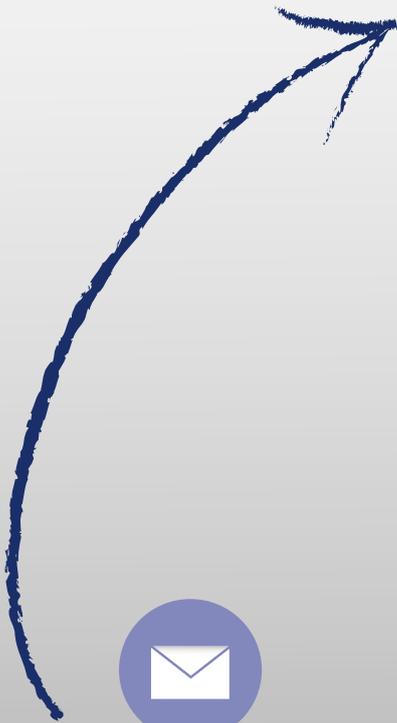


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If you would also like to answer these or other questions about DH, feel free to contact us.

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Finally, everyone was asked to look into the crystal ball and speculate on where they see their future in DH in Africa and globally. A common thread that ran through team members' answers, was growth. The responses included topics such as improving skills, specialising, exploring new possibilities and democratising the research space. There were also specific mentions of bringing Africa to the forefront of DH, instead of leaving Africa as an afterthought. It is a definite source

of inspiration to see the clear and ambitious plans of colleagues at SADiLaR regarding the future of DH. Certainly there is much food for thought here.

ESCALATOR PROGRAMME

ESCALATOR is a national programme that aims to grow an inclusive and active community of practice in Digital Humanities (DH) and Computational Social Sciences (CSS) in South Africa. Although the initiative is developed by the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR), it will provide an interdisciplinary information exchange platform where all stakeholders are welcome to contribute, participate and showcase their work.

The programme will be open to both newcomers and established researchers in the fields of DH and CSS. This initiative will provide opportunities to persons interested in these fields to gain knowledge, connect with local and international peers, and learn and share skills.

One of the major pillars of ESCALATOR is the Digital Champions Initiative, which will offer mentorship opportunities to

researchers and students interested in becoming digital research leaders in their communities. The initiative will expose those with limited experience in DH and CSS to contemporary research methods with the help of experts and peers. Interested candidates will be invited to submit small project proposals on which they will work under guidance from their mentor(s). During this time, they will learn digital and

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ESCALATOR
website



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computational skills related to their project and will also have an opportunity to grow their networks. The first intake of mentors and mentees for the Digital Champions Initiative will be towards the middle of 2021 with a second intake planned for 2022. The ESCALATOR programme intends to benefit undergraduate students, postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers, early career researchers, established researchers, lecturers, librarians, teaching and learning staff in public universities, research councils, and other research organisations in South Africa, specifically those in Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS). Various activities will also include people from non-HSS disciplines to encourage interdisciplinary skills transfer, conversations and collaborations.

When researchers are able to use technology, data, and research infrastructures, they can often answer questions in ways that were not ordinarily possible by using more traditional (manual) approaches or methodologies. It can also empower them to answer new types of questions that they were previously not able to address. ESCALATOR promises to have a positive impact on those who are involved and on the broader society. Researchers in HSS will be able to apply

appropriate digital and computational methods, use resources, data, and new and existing infrastructures such as those offered through SADiLaR to address South African societal needs. In time South African HSS researchers will be recognised as leaders in DH and CSS in Africa and globally.

To learn more about the programme, visit our website <https://escalator.sadilar.org>. Enquiries can be addressed to the programme manager at escalator@talarify.co.za or the SADiLaR project owner menno.vanzaanen@nwu.ac.za. We have also created a new Slack Workspace where South African researchers and students interested or involved in DH or CSS projects, training, resources and opportunities can meet with peers to share information, ask questions, and grow their network. Read more about this virtual workspace and how to join the DHCSSza Slack in our recent blog post - <https://escalator.sadilar.org/post/connect-with-the-community/>. Finally, the new Twitter handle [@DHSCCza](https://twitter.com/DHSCCza) (<https://twitter.com/DHSCCza>) is a place where we will share information about DH or CSS projects, events, resources and opportunities and retweet information from our community.



ESCALATOR

Towards an inclusive & active community of practice
in Digital Humanities & Computational Social Science

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CHILD LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT NODE

The Child Language Development Node is hosted by the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University on behalf of the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR).

The main function of the Child Language Development Node is to promote research on child language development in all South African languages and the digitisation of child language development data so that it is freely available on the SADiLaR platform for all scientists working on language, cognition, child development, language learning and language disorders.

The scientific and applied aims of the node are to advance knowledge about children's language development in African languages. Data on African languages can inform the development of valid diagnostic tools and interventions to promote language and cognitive development in South Africa's children in health and educational settings.

The Child Language Development Node has built up a network of scientists working on language development in different disciplines and departments at the following universities across South Africa: University of Cape Town, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences

University, University of KwaZulu-Natal, North-West University, University of the Free State, Sol Plaatje University and the University of Mpumalanga.

Our flagship project is an inter-university collaboration focusing on the development of Communicative Development Inventories (CDIs) for all South African languages. CDIs are parental reporting instruments that ask parents/caregivers to report on a child's use of gestures, words and sentences. They can measure language development from 8 to 30 months and are good overall indicators of communicative development. There are CDIs for over a hundred languages worldwide. These tools have been used to identify stages in language development and obtain norms for early language acquisition. These norms have formed the basis for developing linguistic and cognitive assessment and diagnostic tools in many countries. SADiLaR will be able to make available CDIs for all of South Africa's languages in the near future as well as normative data generated by means of these CDIs.

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The Language Development Node's digitisation of developmental data will have many applications. Scientists can use the data to develop new tools for assessment and intervention as well as linguistic, cultural and age-appropriate materials for different learning environments. The

digitisation of local linguistic and language socialisation data can inform the creation of African language-centred curricula for health and educational professionals to enhance their skills so that they are relevant to local needs.



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GLOBAL WORDNET CONFERENCE 2021

The eleventh Global Wordnet Conference (GWC) took place from 18 to 21 January 2021. It was the first time that the GWC was hosted in Africa and also the first time that it was held virtually. SADiLaR was the main sponsor of the event. Although it was an online event, the conference delivered 41 presentations including long and short papers as well as 11 posters. There were 216 registered delegates from six continents: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America.

The organising committee came from the University of South Africa (Sonja Bosch, Marissa Griesel, Lydia Mojapelo), SADiLaR (Juan Steyn, Liané van den Berg) and the University of Pretoria (Elsabé Taljard). This committee had to

deal with the challenging task of setting up a programme to accommodate all the presenters representing countries from Canada in the west to Japan in the east, taking their respective time zones into account.

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GWC proceedings



GWC videos



GWC poster presentations



Arabic Ontology



Prof. Mustafa Jarrar

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The conference kicked off with a welcome message from the Director of SADiLaR, Professor Langa Khumalo. Because the conference was held virtually, all of the presentations were pre-recorded by authors of papers and played on the Zoom platform. Presenters had to be present during their slot on the programme for a question and answer session after each paper. Although the virtual format meant less time to interact and network in person, the discussion of each presentation was as lively as ever. Participants enjoyed the range of topics, from discussion of newly established wordnets and resources for very specific use, such as the Taboo Wordnet, to more in-depth discussion around central issues such as updated standardised formats for wordnets. The conference drew not only presentations from established community members, but also attracted many new researchers who were interested in the topic but could not travel to the conference previously. These videos can be accessed via the GWC website:

<https://www.globalwordnet.co.za/programme/>

The poster presentations were also uploaded to the conference website and accompanied by a Google form for delegates to get in touch with the authors. Posters focused mainly on work in progress and showed a wide variety of wordnets and wordnet applications. The poster presentations can still be accessed at:

<https://www.globalwordnet.co.za/poster-presentation/>

Mustafa Jarrar, Professor of Artificial Intelligence from Birzeit University (Palestine), was the keynote speaker of the event. His very informative talk was based on linguistic ontologies and wordnets. Professor Jarrar spoke about the notion of linguistic ontology, which can play the role of being a wordnet and ontology at the same time. In his talk he touched on what can be learned from the ontology engineering literature to build wordnets with ontologically and formally cleaner content. The second part of the talk concerned the Arabic Ontology, which is an Arabic wordnet built with formal and ontological analysis in mind. The ontology is represented in a similar structure to wordnets, and is fully mapped to the Princeton Wordnet, the WikiData knowledge graph, and with many Arabic-multilingual lexicons. The ontology is being built at Birzeit University in Palestine, and it is available at: <https://ontology.birzeit.edu/concept/293198>

The organising committee learned a great deal from the process of delivering an online conference successfully and all challenges were overcome by new technologies. Professor Christiane Fellbaum, founding member of the Global Wordnet Association, remarked that it was a great success:

“I can honestly say that it was the best-run GWC we've had so far, despite the new format. There were no glitches, lively participation and everyone was happy, I think”.

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In future there might be scope for conferences to take place both virtually and face-to-face to accommodate more delegates, but also to hopefully see old friends and colleagues again in real life. We also look forward to the possibility of one day sharing our beautiful country with delegates of a future GWC in person.

Conference Chairs, also the Co-founders and Co-Presidents of the Global Wordnet Association:

Prof. Christiane Fellbaum,
Princeton University, USA, and
Prof. Piek Vossen, Vrije University
Amsterdam, The Netherlands



**Global
WordNet
Association**

TENTH WORLD CONGRESS OF AFRICAN LINGUISTICS (WOCAL 10)

Hosted by Leiden University
7-12 June 2021

History has it that there were two main stimuli which brought WOCAL into being, this according to Robert Herbert who is the co-president of the congress committee of the first WOCAL.

He describes the first stimulus as being the struggle for African independence and the second stimulus arriving in the early 1990s, when South Africa was

freed from the apartheid regime. By this time, South Africa was eager to be reintegrated into the global academic world after being isolated for decades.

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For the future of WOCAL it is of eminent importance to keep both aspects in mind, in order to keep the spirit of WOCAL as the only truly international and pan-theoretical Congress of African Linguistics with a strong emphasis on the participation of African scholars.

- Robert Herbert

WOCAL10 promises to be a fascinating and stimulating conference with insights and ideas from researchers all over the world. Some of us at SADiLaR are particularly looking forward to the conference because it is the only truly international and pan-theoretical conference in the field of African Linguistics, with a strong emphasis on the participation of African scholars.

There is also the Technologies for Enhanced Documentation of African Languages pre-workshop (TEDAL) to look forward to. The TEDAL pre-workshop will run a week before the WOCAL conference (31 May-4 June) hosted by:

- Professor Felix Ameka: Leiden University
- DR Sara Petrollino: Leiden University
- Dr Emmanuel NGUE UM: University of Yaounde
- Daan Van Esch: Google
- Mmasibidi Setaka: SADiLaR

During this workshop, Juan Steyn and Mmasibidi Setaka from SADiLaR will showcase the current research and tools developed at SADiLaR for South African languages. Topics such as

AI technologies, African languages and documentary linguist will be discussed during this workshop.

Finally, SADiLaR will also have a booth at the WOCAL conference on 9 June from 16:00- 18:00. Make sure to attend, show your support and enjoy three accepted papers by some of SADiLaR's members: Professor Langa Khumalo, Professor Tunde Ope-Davies, Rooweither Mabuya and Andiswa Bukula. Topics such as the following will be discussed, with time for some Q&A:

- Introducing SADiLaR
- Panel discussion: Why set up a research infrastructure for African languages?
- Technologies for enhanced documentation of African languages: new opportunities



**THIS IS ONE
CONFERENCE YOU
DO NOT WANT TO
MISS!**



Register for
WOCAL10

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