

# WOCAL11 – CIPL Conference Report

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## ***Conference Overview***

The 11th World Congress of African Linguistics (WOCAL 11), was held at the University of Nairobi, Kenya between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2024. WOCAL is an international and pan-theoretical conference of African linguistics with a strong participation of African Scholars. WOCAL11 was organized by the international steering committee, led by the President Felix Ameka from the Leiden University.

The conference included plenary talks and presentations covering a wide range of research areas within the field of African linguistics, such as morphosyntax, phonology, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, sign language, language endangerment, and discourse analysis. More than 230 researchers from all around the world attended the conference in person, with many more people attending and presenting online. Presenters were given 20 min for their presentations plus 10 minutes for questions.

## ***My contribution to the conference***

At WOCAL11, I co-presented together with my supervisor on the OriKunda research project, prof. Rozenn Guérois, LLACAN (CNRS). The OriKunda project deals with the origins and present-day status of Chikunda language spoken in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Chikunda is a previously undocumented language, claimed by historians to be a mixture of different Bantu languages. With our presentation 'Classifying Chikunda: A comparison of the noun class systems of the Zambezi Valley Bantu languages', we presented newly collect linguistic data on Chikunda. Our paper sought to provide a first comparative analysis of the noun class system of Chikunda and some of the other languages of the Zambezi Valley, such as Nyungwe, Sena, Chewa/Nyanja, Shona, and Yao.

WOCAL11 was the perfect venue to present this type of research for several reasons which became very noticeable during the Q/A session. Several of the scholars in the audience are conducting research on Bantu languages from the area and were able to provide us with valuable comments. The descriptive part of our paper, especially on noun class pairings, was appreciated by audience members who will be able to adopt our analytical framework in their own research. The comparative nature of our paper shed new light on possible areal features and contact zones around Lake Nyasa and the Zambezi Valley. Furthermore, the fact that the conference was attended by researchers working on language families from across the African continent, proved to be vital for the larger discussion of 'mixed languages' and people movements in highly multilingual areas. The lack of clear synchronic evidence of language intermixture in the Chikunda noun class system triggered discussions regarding the notion of 'mixed languages' in Africa. Our presentation showed that, based on its nominal system, the supposed 'mixed language' of Chikunda cannot be meaningfully distinguished from any other language subjected to contact from surrounding languages in the type of highly multilingual settings that characterizes many parts of Africa.

### ***Personal experience of the conference***

I am very pleased with the outcome of WOCAL 11. First, there was the valuable feedback and discussions received in relation to our own presentation. Secondly, I was able to attend numerous interesting presentations, including plenary talks and workshops that were highly relevant for my own research. Thirdly, it proved to be a great opportunity to meet and network with researchers. All of the above proved to be very inspiring for the fieldwork I conducted following the conference. Participation in WOCAL 11 will ultimately, undoubtedly, improve the quality of my research.