

## Alexander-von-Humboldt Linguistic Marathon, May 15-25, 2023

Guest scholars from Cameroon and Nigeria and PhD students discussed their work on Empirical English Studies in four countries at six universities



*Picture 1 Daniel Nkemleke presenting at the symposium in Klagenfurt*

### **An appraisal by Daniel Nkemleke (Georg Forster Research Fellow from Cameroon)**

Our Alexander-von-Humboldt “Linguistic Marathon” aimed at sharing on-going research of Humboldt Alumni/scholars, DAAD and other PhD students based at TU Chemnitz with peers of six universities in three European countries: Brno in the Czech Republic; Klagenfurt in Austria; Padua, Venice, Ferrara, and Modena in Italy. Symposia on the topic “Empirical English Studies: Discourse-, Corpus-, Psycho- & Computer-Linguistic Approaches” were organized at each university. In Slovenia, we did not visit a university, we just went through some high passes so that we literally stood in the snow - and sent unforgettable pictures to our families in Africa. At each other stop, the presentations we made received valuable and useful feedback for academic improvement or further research. On the last day of our “Linguistic Marathon”, our Chemnitz-in-group reviewed the whole experience and noted with satisfaction the benefits of academic interaction across institutions. Partners on the ground at the six universities visited had done the mobilising job, so that for each seminar, there were students and staff contributing to the discussions. This was a key factor in the success of the marathon.

For me as a Humboldt Alumnus with previous experience in academic networking and collaboration with Germany since 2006, this was indeed an innovative project idea by Emeritus Prof. Dr Josef Schmied, who has mentored so many of us from Africa (PhD, DAAD, AvH). Our group of seven learned a lot about the different university traditions, students’ research orientations, as well as staff perspectives. One of our PhD students working on “Mental health discourse” in Nigeria met an Italian student, who reported on a similar project in the Emilia. In Klagenfurt and Ferrara, I had the opportunity to explore possible areas of academic co-operation with our University in Cameroon, where we stand in need of interdisciplinary perspectives in our research in the humanities. In Brno, I was able to renew contacts with academics whom I had met in 2007 during a Chemnitz-Brno research seminar. Although I have collaborated with them during subsequent return visits to Chemnitz, to have visited Masaryk University of Brno 16 years after first contacts was yet another milestone in my interaction with European academics. The Italian experience was unique, not only because of the spectacular view we had of Venice with its canals and imposing architecture; but we discussed with Digital Humanities students in what way their university was different from the other three universities in the country we visited, Padua, Ferrara and Modena. These cities and their old universities, too, are famous in many ways. For example, the unique uniform coloured buildings in the city centre of Modena thrilled me.

Food, culture, and landscape ranked high in my appreciation of this marathon. For this, Italy stood out clearly! Diverse, good, and different (from Africa, and even Germany that I know) as food was; it is the “Caffè” culture that amazed me. They have coffee in all places, served in smaller “tazzine” for the most part; although one

could also order a bigger cup. For the six eventful days that we spent in Italy, I saw no tea served to people in the eating and drinking places—a big contrast with Germany. Hotel breakfast in Italy is small compared to other countries like the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany, and the options on the table are limited. Coming from Africa, I saw a different way of life in almost every corner of Italian streets, the local markets, shops etc. Cities are dense and this makes nightlife buoyant and attractive. The underground lighting system that illuminates the moats surrounding the huge fortified buildings in the centre of Ferrara left an imprint on me. Our able host, Prof. Schmied, explained the history behind these high-rise buildings, the cathedrals and other places. His expertise of the history of European culture and the places we visited, was most instructive for me, broadening my understanding of the world, and of the value of an intercultural perspective.

I cannot emphasize enough the value of academic cooperation; for it is in this kind of interaction that we evaluate ourselves and our contribution to knowledge in our disciplines. What I take home from here is this outreaching perspective to academic research. My university department will certainly be reaching out to partners that we interacted with at these European universities, whereby student and staff exchange projects will be the focus.

This linguistic marathon was not only very rich in academic content, as we discussed some new project ideas and made new contacts. We also noticed that in Padua students had erected tents to protest against the exorbitant rents for accommodation, as they cannot find affordable places to sleep in their university city. This was just one experience in which my knowledge of the European ways of life has significantly been enhanced. I am very thankful to Prof. Schmied for this initiative, and for his input throughout the seminars and presentations. Last but not the least, I wish to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for generously supporting this marathon.



Picture 2 Daniel Nkemele and Ibukun Filani after the symposium in Brno





Picture 3 After the symposium in Klagenfurt (Daniel Ajayi, Sven Albrecht, Ibukun Filani, Marina Ivanova, Josef Schmied, Daniel Nkemeleke)



Picture 4 After the symposium in Padova: Sara Gesuato, Sven Albrecht, Ibukun Filani, Marina Ivanova, Daniel Ajayi, Daniel Nkemeleke, Josef Schmied