

Applied Linguistics

Post Office Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751

503-725-4088 tel
503-725-4139 fax
email@pdx.edu

9 January 2008

To whom it may concern

Guillaume Segerer has asked me to write him a letter in support of his application for a research position (CR1), and I do so with great pleasure. Guillaume and I have been correspondents for many years and colleagues since 1998 when I sought (and obtained) affiliation with the LLACAN research group. I have followed his work closely in that we share an interest in the Atlantic languages and in that Guillaume has shown great creativity and application in his comparative work. Not only has he conducted an intensive investigation into a language in the field, he is also current with the latest computational methods for analyzing large quantities of language data. It is a rare combination of talent and experience, one which augurs well for the success of the research program he proposes.

I was happy to read in his “Projet de recherche” that Guillaume plans on returning to the field (Feb 2008) in order to renew the close relationship he has with languages in situ, evidenced so dramatically in his work on Bijogo. I reviewed (quite favorably) his 2002 description, a monumental work that has understandably aroused great scholarly interest, and several important spin-offs (conference presentations, articles, etc.). The field of African linguistics, and especially those of us studying the Atlantic Group of Niger-Congo, have benefitted greatly from this description and have forced many of us to reconsider the classification of these languages.

Guillaume’s experience with African language, however, is not limited to languages of the Atlantic Group, nor to the more traditional methods of comparative work. He has studied (and published on) African languages beyond the Atlantic Group and has already made important contributions to language typology. His organization of a colloquium at the recent (2007) ALT conference in Paris demonstrates how meaningful his involvement is in that area. Moreover, as illustrated by his work with Konstantin Pozdniakov, he is willing to explore new, especially computationally based, approaches to the comparison of languages. With his background and design skills, Guillaume will contribute significantly to the field in both the methodology and theory of historical and comparative linguistics.

Another important feature of Guillaume’s scholarship is his ability to work with others. This can be seen in his ability to speak the three major languages of research (on African languages), French, English, and German, but also in his many joint publications. With the large amounts of data that are needed for analysis in new, computationally based approaches, such cooperative work is required. As something of an aside, I should note that I am very happy

that he has organized the Kisi data that I have collected and will do the same with the Mani data I will soon send him and the Kimi (Krim) and Bom data I am presently collecting. Guillaume is an engaging and forthright individual, a wonderful colleague who both listens attentively and contributes meaningfully to public discussions.

Unfortunately I am unable to comment with any expertise on the more technical side of his qualifications (programming, etc.) except to say that his linguistically informed work in this area is very welcome! His involvement with the design and creation of various databases has contributed to the modernization of the field, and will no doubt continue to revise our thinking as he pursues his research goals.

In sum, Guillaume's past achievements and projected goals combine to constitute a coherent and well-conceived research agenda. He has a strong record of publication in the major areas of his research program. It is amazing to me that he has accomplished so much without a full-time research position. Guillaume's excellent work has gone unrewarded for too long. I strongly urge you to offer him a research position so that he may continue his high-quality and innovative investigations.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed)

G. Tucker Childs
Professor
childst@pdx.edu
(503) 725-4099