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It is with great pleasure that I write this report as I reflect on the great opportunity accorded to me by the organisers of AILA Solidarity Awards, the sponsors, and the anonymous reviewer(s) that recommended my abstract for the prestigious Multilingual Matters award.

First, I wish to thank Multilingual Matters for extending a helping hand to needy scholars, AILA Solidarity Committee for ably guiding us through the process with succinct and clear communication from the beginning to the end of the event.

There is no doubt in my mind that without the award, I would not have attended the 18<sup>th</sup> AILA Congress in Rio. To put the matter in perspective, one has to understand the isolation that most of us, scholars from underfunded universities, suffer from lack of interaction at the international level and the resultant ‘stunting’ in understanding the emerging epistemological and innovative ideas.

The award enabled me to attend my second AILA Congress since 2002, interact with top scholars and engage in quality diverse and thought-provoking topics in applied linguistics beyond language teaching and materials development. The congress widened my scope into current and emerging issues affecting society and theoretical scholarship responses and practices in health communication, social justice, queerness in society, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, multilingualism and decolonisation, language and politics, language and identity issues, etc. I attended all the plenary sessions and thoroughly enjoyed the illuminating presentations and feel scholarly rejuvenated. The north-south dialogue and reaction by the symposium on *‘Multilingual frontiers, an emerging politics of Southern linguistics’* to me was the epitome of a welcome paradigm shift of a healthy North-South dialogue.

The 18<sup>th</sup> AILA Congress was a great and comprehensive academic event with diverse but very interesting paper presentations. The plenaries which set the academic tone for the Congress, provided new cutting edge perspectives and dimensions in applied linguistics as did the individual papers and symposiums that I attended. The papers were both broad and deep enabling me to reflect on a number of issues in applied linguistics. The congress has deepened and broadened my understanding of the new knowledge frontiers and pushed my research boundaries in the areas of sociolinguistics and language planning anew. The core areas of research in multilingualism and the new theories that embody perspectives from various top scholars in the area was both illuminating and challenging to be shared with my research colleagues in my university and country. There are new theoretical perspectives and research areas that I can engage in and also interest both my undergraduate and postgraduate students. Attending these papers enthused me and provided new areas to be navigated, resulting in a number of topics for further research in my area. As a result of attending this Congress, I have interested a colleague and we have jointly submitted an abstract in discourse analysis to an international linguistics congress taking place next year.

Furthermore, attending the Congress has given me a new platform to network with other scholars in applied linguistics. As a practitioner and researcher, instead of working in isolation, I look forward to cementing these collaborative networks to build new knowledge and provide a Malawian perspective. My paper presentation on '*A complex web of decisions: Family language choices in multilingual Malawi*' under the symposium **The complexities of family language policy across multilingual settings** was well received. I was pleased with the debate and questions that ensued after the presentation which showed that it stimulated a lot of debate on the issues and I have managed to link with other scholars in Sweden, New Zealand and Mozambique to work together in this research area.

Further lessons were learnt on the smooth conference organisation. I wish to congratulate the organising committee for a well planned and executed conference. I attended sessions relevant to my field of sociolinguistics and language planning but also expanded my horizon into other interesting areas of scholarship such as financial communication and conversation analysis.

Once again, thank you AILA and Multilingual Matters for this great perception on the need for solidarity awards, the initiative and generosity in extending a helping hand to scholars lacking resources but have the ability to deliver. Let us continue to stand in solidarity as we build bridges between the various categories of scholars.

Edrinnie Kayambazinthu