

SHERIFF ISSAKA

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EDUCATION

University of California, Los Angeles

PhD, Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence - Natural Language Processing

May 2029

University of Wisconsin - Madison

B.S., Computer Science || Cert., African Studies

May 2022

RESEARCH INTEREST

My research lies at the intersection of advancing AI capabilities and developing innovative approaches for resource-constrained settings. I am particularly focused on developing multilingual large language models that can perform effectively in low-data and limited-infrastructure environments. This work complements my interest in enhancing models' common-sense reasoning abilities for reliable misinformation detection. Drawing inspiration from personal experiences and a drive for impact, I also explore topics across bioinformatics, optimization, architecture, interpretability, efficiency, deployment, and policy in AI systems.

SKILL SUMMARY

Research: Pytorch, HuggingFace, Sklearn, TensorFlow, NLTK, Statsmodels, Docker, MLflow, Dask

Tools: Python, Java, C, R, Stata, JavaScript, TypeScript, ReactJS, React Native, AWS, GCP, Azure

Languages: English, Twi, Hausa, Kusasi, Busanga, French (basic), Arabic (basic)

SELECT MEDIA AND AWARDS

1. [UNESCO Global Coalition for Linguistic Diversity Founding Member](#) June 2025
2. UCLA Computer Science PhD Fellowship September 2024
3. [UCLA Graduate Dean's Scholar Award](#) September 2024
4. [How can we improve collective intelligence in a multilingual context?](#) Translated May 2023
5. [Towards Africa-Centered AI](#). UW-Madison International Division May 2022
6. [UW-Madison exhibit blends art with science](#). The Cap Times February 2022
7. [Fueling Discovery Special Section](#). Wisconsin State Journal October 2021
8. [Faces of Data Science](#). Data Science Institute September 2021
9. [Wisconsin Science and Computing Emerging Research Stars](#) January 2021
10. [African Studies Program's Racial Justice Award](#) January 2021
11. [King Morgridge Scholar](#) September 2018

LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

- Collaborating with [Common Crawl](#) to fix the internet's language bias in African languages
- Working with [MLCommons](#) to create and host large open datasets, supporting global AI growth
- Actively mentoring 3 undergraduate students from marginalized communities in AI research

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Researcher

[Misinformation, AI, and Responsible Society Lab](#) || Advisor: [Saadia Gabriel](#) Sep 2024 - Present

- Leading research initiatives investigating the robustness, fairness, and scalability of large language models
- Developing novel approaches to enhance model performance in multilingual and low-resource settings
- Designing evaluation frameworks to assess model reliability in misinformation detection tasks

Lead AI Researcher

[African Languages Lab](#) May 2020 - Present

- Pioneering AI/NLP research initiatives for African languages, encompassing architectural design, large-scale data collection, and deployment of innovative NLP solutions
- Leading a diverse team of 13 researchers, engineers, and linguists, establishing efficient workflows, and fostering cross-functional research collaboration

Data Scientist

[Zafar & ICU Data Science Labs](#) || Advisors: [Nabeel Zafar](#) & [Anoop Mayampurath](#) Feb 2023 - Sep 2024

- Led computational research in clinical informatics, developing ML models for early detection of pancreatic cancer and pediatric clinical deterioration prediction
- Implemented novel NLP techniques to extract and analyze millions of unstructured clinical notes, advancing high-throughput phenotyping methodologies
- Built AI algorithms for automated risk stratification, significantly improving patient outcome predictions

Machine Learning Researcher

[Dairy Brain](#) || Advisor: [Michael Ferris](#) Sep 2020 - Feb 2023

- Implemented classification and regression models to predict feed efficiency in cows, leveraging over 50 parameters and 10,000 genetic and observed data points to improve the baseline model by over 30%
- Employed core ML principles such as cross-validation, cost-complexity pruning, dimensionality reduction, MLP, regularization, optimization, and distributed cloud computing

SELECT PUBLICATIONS

1. **The African Languages Lab: A Global Low-Resource Language Initiative Collaborative Approach to Advancing NLP for Underrepresented African Languages.** Sherif Issaka, Yinka Ajibola, Evans Kofi Agyei, Faith Nchifor, ..., Saadia Gabriel. Preprint, August 2025
2. **AI Debate Aids Assessment of Controversial Claims.** Salman Rahman, Sherif Issaka, ..., Shi Feng, Nanyun Peng, Yejin Choi, Julian Michael, Liwei Jiang, Saadia Gabriel. [Preprint](#), June 2025
3. **Machine Learning to Predict Early Death Despite Pancreaticoduodenectomy.** Kaleem S Ahmed, Clayton T Marcinak, Sherif M Issaka, ..., Syed Nabeel Zafar. [Journal of Surgical Research](#), May 2025
4. **X-teaming: Multi-turn jailbreaks and defenses with adaptive multi-agents.** Salman Rahman, Liwei Jiang, James Shiffer, Genglin Liu, Sherif Issaka, ..., Saadia Gabriel. [COLM](#), April 2025
5. **Machine Learning-Driven Modeling to Predict Postdischarge Venous Thromboembolism After Pancreatectomy for Pancreas Cancer.** Kaleem S Ahmed, Sherif M Issaka, ..., Anoop Mayampurath, Matthew M Churpek, Jomol Mathew, Syed Nabeel Zafar. [Annals of Surgical Oncology](#), February 2025
6. **The Ghanaian NLP Landscape: A First Look.** Sherif Issaka, ..., Xuefeng Du. [Preprint](#), May 2024