# Reflections on a Community-based Approach to Writing Grammars of Endangered Languages

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Increasingly, there have been proposals for grammar writers to take the realities and needs of the community into account in order to produce grammars that can serve the interest of the native speakers (e.g. Kadanya 2006, Rehg 2014).  Obviously, a grammar of an endangered language should, among other things, lead to the maintenance and/or revitalization of the language. For revitalization initiatives to be considered successful, they should be sustainable (Fitzgerald 2018). However, grammars that are comprehensive and clear (Rice 2006, Noonan 2007, Payne 2014), yet focus on and meet the needs of the target community are still rare. This paper is a reflection, from a community linguist's perspective, on how a community-based grammar could be conceived and written in the African context. It is based on an exploration of existing grammars by native and non-native speakers, feedback from native speakers, and the opinions of some grammar writers. The paper points out some practical challenges involved, e.g., with data collection, actual use of the grammars, etc., and upholds the idea that a 'good' grammar that could also cater for the needs of native speakers should be based on sensitization, training and involvement of community members throughout the process.

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**Grammar writing and language contact**
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Language contact is as old as language itself. Every language has been and is in contact with other languages and traces of contacts can be found at many levels of grammar. Thus, on the one hand side when writing grammars even those linguists who are not particularly interested in language contact have to deal at list superficially with issues of language contact. On the other hand side, linguists interested in the study of language contact might decide to consult reference grammars in the hope of finding some information on contact phenomena because not every contact situation and every language family is covered by in-depth studies. Before being able to identify language contact phenomena one needs to know a good deal about the lexicon and grammars of the involved languages.

Language contact is not only of relevance for sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and historical linguistics, but also for typologists. There are no systematic comparative studies of how typologically, and diverse genetically languages 'react' to the impact of one and the same dominant majority language. In other words, it is not clear which role linguistic features such as structural similarity caused by genetic relationship and extra-linguistic features such sociolinguistic similarity caused by comparable contact situations play in determining the outcomes of language contact. This type and similar types of studies could be made possible if language contact would be treated more systematically in descriptive grammars (as discussed, e.g., by Mithun 2014, Aikhenvald 2015, Marten & Petzell 2016).

This talk deals with issues of language contact when writing a grammar. I will start from the trivial fact that most grammars of endangered languages or, more generally, minority languages, are not written by native speakers but by researchers who live and work in the speech community while using another language, the respective dominant, majority language, as a medium of communication. This practice has advantages and disadvantages. One recurrent problem for writers of grammars is the wish (of the writer or of the speech community or both) to describe the 'pure' language untouched by today's dominant language(s). In the main body of the talk, I will sketch how contact phenomena show up in different parts of the lexicon and the grammar. Loan words are the most visible result of language contact situations but some might be particularly difficult to detect because the donor language is closely related or the situation of language contact dates well back in time. In situations of intense language contact (level 3-4 on the scale by Thomason 2001: 70-71) also structural impact is to be expected and can occur at different levels of the grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax).

The talk will be based on my own experiences of writing grammars of Nakh-Dagestanian languages that are today spoken in a situation of asymmetrical language contact with Russian, but have been influenced by other languages before. I will also survey the treatment of language contact issues in reference grammars of languages spoken in other parts of the world, affected by majority languages other than Russian.

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**On writing grammars: Selected notes and observations**

In this talk I will survey some aspects concerning the history of grammar writing and then move on to discussing the parameters that grammars have, or should have. The parameters to be discussed include, among others, choice of object of description, choice of metalanguage, theory base, order of presentation, chronological frame, choice of terminology, and amount of extralinguistic information.

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**Fieldwork and Grammaticography in a Digital World**

Modern digital technologies provide new ways of doing fieldwork and producing grammatical descriptions. This covers a number of relevant aspects, from recording equipment, to software for text annotation and corpus creation, and even to archiving and database interfaces. However, using such technologies often requires skills that often go beyond typical linguistics course work, especially if these tools are to be used efficiently. In my talk, I will explore both the benefits and the drawbacks of relevant digital tools compared to traditional, analogue methods, specifically for smaller, underdescribed languages, and based partly on my own experiences working with Pite Saami.