The Toronto Esan Grammar Project
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Background on Esan
- 300,000~500,000 Speakers
- South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria
- Edo State
- Little formal documentation
- 25~40 dialects
- English: official language of education

Linguistic Facts
- SVO language
- [Edoid, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo]
- <a b b h ch de e f g h i j k kl m mb n o p r s t u v w y z>
- Analytic language, head-initial properties
- Little morphology
- No case marking, little agreement, no inflection

Grammar Project
Our Beginnings:
- Senior field methods class
- Language has no formal descriptive grammar
  - Ogua Dialect
- Comprehensive overview of published language grammars and sketches for reference and guidance

Writing a Grammar:
- Elicitation sessions with consultants abroad within the GTA
- Drafting table of contents and dividing up of sections
- Inter-group dissemination of data, ideas, and analyses

The Product:
- Reference for all interested parties
  - Esan people and teachers
  - Academics and linguists
  - Students of the language

Challenges
Removed from natural speech community:
- Little access to previous material, knowledge of ground level language situation & environment
- Limited dialogue between this project and Esan community

Group collaboration:
- Descriptive challenges from multiple analyses
- Compilation and standardization of a large amount of data
- Confirmation of data difficult due to dialect differences

Successful Strategies
Simulation of natural Esan speech community:
- Elicitation of formal and informal speech, stories, songs, sayings, idioms
- Organization of all data currently obtained (including speaker’s level of confidence)
- Contacts with Esan community facilitating sending of Esan texts and dictionaries
- Local community arose in absence of one in Nigeria

Group collaboration:
- Individual contributions & group coherence:
  - Formatting conventions, language database, thorough investigation of each linguistic topic, and use of program LaTeX for compilation

Outside of the Classroom
- The theoretical in practice:
  - Enormous need for Language Documentation
    - Language/Dialect shift, lack of documentation across the globe
    - Taking a small but crucial step in worldwide goal of language preservation/conservation/revitalization
  - Have sought to use the accumulation of linguistic knowledge and skills we have acquired
  - Aim towards a singular and attainable goal

Future Plans
- Second draft of grammar reviewed, edited, and rewritten
- Sending representatives to Nigeria to (i) Conduct fieldwork with consultants; (ii) Form academic partnerships with local Universities; (iii) Involve Esan community in the project
- Product of publishable quality ready in 2010

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