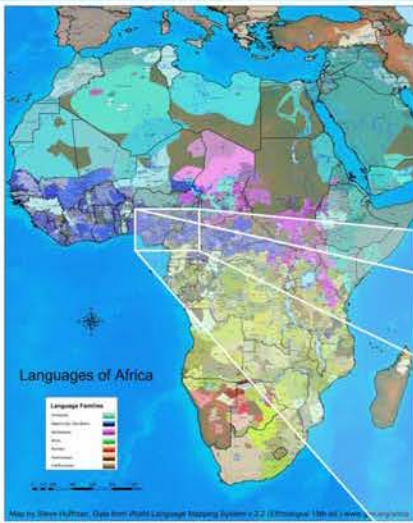


The Toronto Esan Grammar Project

Keren Rice, Nicholas Rolle, Annat Koren, & Ireh Iyioha

Department of Linguistics

University of Toronto



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 bh ch d e f f g gb gh h i j k kh kp l m mh 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
 - > Oguja 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