

DEVELOPING A TIGRINYA LEARNING GRAMMAR

WILLIAM DYER

Currently, I am contributing to the development a learning grammar for the Tigrinya language. Tigrinya is a language of Ethiopia, also spoken in Eritrea and Israel. We are using the language documentation software SIL Fieldworks Explorer to record a lexicon, and texts from a Tigrinya speaker. Research topics that interest me are African linguistics, language documentation, language rights, and second language education.

Most of my current coursework in the linguistics program is preparation to document languages; especially those that are in danger of disappearing. A significant part of this preparation is learning how to make language documentation projects beneficial to the community of speakers, and not only the linguists who record language data. Collaboration with groups at the African Studies Association, such as the Education Session or Literature Session, will provide insight into what kinds of language materials have been beneficial to communities of speakers of other African languages. This kind of feedback is important in guiding future language documentation projects that will contribute to the community.

Contributions from linguists to a community of speakers might include any of the following: assisting with publication of education materials to teach the language to new generations, publishing written works to build up the legitimacy and perceived prestige of the language at hand, or building connections between the community and outside resources that can provide health services, educational services, or can address other needs the community might have. The advice and experience of other African Studies professionals will be critical information that could add to or modify this list, so that cooperation on language documentation projects meets the needs of African communities.



Other research interests of mine are West African Niger-Congo languages. I am currently receiving training in Wolof in a class at the Center for African Studies. Communicating in Wolof will allow me to work with a wide range of threatened or endangered language communities in

Senegambia. I hope to learn from experts in the field of African Studies to adapt and improve techniques from my field, and make cross-disciplinary connections.

William Dyer is a doctoral student in linguistics and a current FLAS fellow (Wolof).