

Discovery workshops in grammar. How communities benefit from typological research.

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This paper is a progress report on the "Discovery" approach to teaching linguistics near to the speakers. While the original concept was developed for Bantu, it was recently applied to languages belonging to Nilo-Saharan and Afro-asiatic language families. A workshop was held in Ethiopia, bringing together speakers from Berta, Gumuz (Nilosaharan), Shinasha and Northern Mao (Omotic). Based on Heine's (1981) model of 8 basic language types, the existing series of lessons was modified so that differences in structure would reflect in the topics and examples. Other than in well-established courses, no exercises were available, so we had to provide ad-hoc examples. The results of the two weeks were: Four drafts of grammar sketches in under researched languages, systematic training of primary teachers in basic grammar knowledge of their own mother tongue, increased language awareness. These contribute to the establishment of an initial bilingualism model as proposed by Lopes (1997). The Discovery course also resulted in several unexpected linguistic findings, for example the realization that co-verbs are not omnipresent in Ethiopian languages.

The synthesis of teaching at grass-roots level and harvesting from universal-typological perspectives results in a series of insights which help understand the variety and underlying similarities of local languages and empowers linguistic communities to develop their own languages.