

Linguistics in plain language - A rationale

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It is becoming increasingly common for community participants in fieldwork to take the role of trainee linguist as much as consultant. Consequently, a relatively new role for trained linguists is to pass on to communities information and understanding about not only language but also linguistic analytical processes. While this is clearly beneficial for many purposes and reasons, it also presents new challenges in terms of finding ways to pass on these kinds of understandings both effectively and efficiently, while also maintaining productivity levels in the project at hand.

One way to facilitate this kind of knowledge sharing is to rethink the presentation of various types of linguistics texts, up to and including linguistic analyses. Examples of linguistics texts in plain language can readily be found in community grammars and teaching grammars, but the bulk of linguistics information remains largely inaccessible to community language workers. This is a problem for those wishing to do their own linguistics work, and also assists in maintaining community cautiousness about the role of linguists. At VACL, an emerging emphasis is the production of texts aimed at further demystifying linguistics concepts and processes, making terminology transparent, and improving the access of community members to information about their language which is readily available to linguists. We anticipate this leading to a stronger linguistics foundation for community co-workers, with a consequent gain for their assumption of greater proportions of the analysis work. It is also likely that an improved understanding of what linguists do will reap benefits for working relationships between linguists and communities.

This poster will present a range of possibilities for the presentation of linguistics texts, with the goal of stimulating discussion of the potential for this practice, possible counterarguments or difficulties involved, and further strategies for ease of inclusion of community consultants in various aspects of the work.