Language documentation training as an underpinning of grammar writing

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Many descriptive grammars are written by language documentarians or linguistic fieldworkers with strong ties to the discipline of language documentation. This is especially true for grammars of endangered languages. Improving access to training in modern methods and tools for data collection and management is therefore a key underpinning to improving the quality and multi-purpose utility of grammars. Grammar writing is a significant undertaking requiring a massive time commitment. Improved skills in the use of data management workflows and tools for organizing data and analyses can help grammar writers work more systematically and efficiently. Training in these areas is sometimes offered as a part of linguistic field methods courses, but the methods and tools taught vary wildly. Tools like ELAN for time-aligned annotation or FLEx for interlinear glossing and methodologies like the use of video or Basic Oral Language Documentation may be omitted. Furthermore, only very few would-be grammar writers are students in programs that offer such courses. The integration of documentary methods and tools is indispensable to produce consistent, reproducible data that can easily be searched and organized to write grammars that stand the test of time.

In this talk, we introduce the new collection of free, multilingual, online learning resources created by our team to address the urgent need for accessible language documentation training globally. While these resources were created with language documentation training needs in mind, many of the modules cover areas of particular interest to grammar writers, including data management, ELAN, and Fieldworks Language Explorer (FLEx) for glossing and lexicon creation. The resources are offered in multiple formats so learners can choose among short video tutorials, detailed PDF guides with screenshots, or ultra-brief checklist style guides. Where relevant, we provide sample files, templates and other auxiliary resources so learners can follow along with the training materials even if they do not yet have their own fieldwork data to work with. Each set of materials is designed so that it could be included in a field methods curriculum as a stand-alone module, used as the basis of a summer-school style workshop training, or used as a resource for independent learning. To further expand the accessibility and reach of the materials, we have produced translations of the core guides into French and Spanish. With these materials, we intend to promote an empirically and scientifically sound approach to grammar writing.