

Conference on Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory  
7-8 December 2007  
SOAS  
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## Abstract

### Language Documentation and Description among Refugee Populations

Forced migration of large numbers of people to urban centers such as Cairo has presented linguists with opportunities to document languages that have been, for a variety of reasons, previously difficult to access. However, working with refugee populations often poses a set of unique challenges. This talk will focus on the work of the Cairo Refugee Language Project (CRLP), a traditional and advocacy research umbrella at the American University in Cairo, in documenting two such languages: *Ghulfan* and *Amma*, both Nilo-Saharan languages of Sudan. In addition to documentation and analysis efforts, both projects also have community-based language maintenance components.

The discussion will highlight the challenges of carrying out language documentation work with refugee populations. Special interest will be paid to:

- techniques used to *identify and recruit refugee language consultants* and to *involve larger speech communities in the projects*,
- psychological and political issues, such as *need for special confidentiality considerations* and *how language documentation work might raise moral among refugees*,
- topics of linguistic importance, such as *authentication of languages, the effects of separation from home speech communities*, and *various issues involved in working with younger speakers*, and
- issues involving use of project data and outcomes for community benefit

Each of the above-mentioned topics will be discussed as they related to the *Ghulfan* and *Amma* documentation projects, with particular attention given to our strategies for meeting each of these challenges and the various successes and failures we have experienced in our efforts.

The discussion of working with younger speakers will also include questions of possible obsolescence effect found in our *Ghulfan* data, most notably a possible loss of mutual intelligibility with related dialects.

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