

**The Role of Lexical Elicitation in Language Documentation**  
**(with a focus on ꞤHoan)**

Direct lexical elicitation has its limitations, but it also has an important role in language documentation. In our experience, lexical elicitation with speakers of Khoisan languages who have little or no formal schooling presents challenges not anticipated in most surveys of linguistic field techniques. In this paper, we discuss the methods by which we elicited vocabulary in ꞤHoan, a Khoisan language related to the Ju (!Xun and Ju|'hoansi) languages. This includes the preparation of wordlists of targeted lexical areas, based on a database of comparative Khoisan lexical items arranged by semantic field, and African language wordlists (designed largely with Niger-Congo languages in mind), e.g. Snider & Roberts (2006), Bouquiaux & Thomas (1992). By eliciting and translating lexical items in semantic groupings (which provide a semantic context), one can compare and contrast items which may have similar or identical meanings, reducing the number of mistranslations. We will discuss our use of props, field guides and play-acting in lexical elicitation. We will also discuss the benefits and drawbacks of monolingual elicitation, a technique we used to elicit ꞤHoan bird terms and plant terms.

Bouquiaux, Luc & Jacqueline M. C. Thomas. (1992). *Studying and Describing Unwritten Languages*. (Translated by James Roberts). Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Snider, Keith & James Roberts. (2006). *SIL Comparative African Wordlist (SILCAWL)*. SIL Electronic Working Papers 2006-005. Available online at: [www.sil.org/silewp/2006/silewp2006-005.pdf](http://www.sil.org/silewp/2006/silewp2006-005.pdf)