



Universiteit Leiden

## Talen en culturen van Afrika

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#### **Report on the International Conference on Endangered Ethiopian/African Languages**

27-30 April 2005, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The conference was held at the beautiful Main Campus of Addis Ababa University, in the Cultural Centre Building. It was attended by scholars from Africa (Kenia and Tanzania), America, Europe (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) and Japan. With the active participation of many staff members of SIL Ethiopia Office and students of the Department of Addis Ababa University, the conference was a major occasion that brought large number of Africans and Africanists together.

Two keynote speeches (by Professor Peter Ladefoged and Professor Gerrit Dimmendaal) and thirty three papers were presented. The topics included, among others, reports on the morphology and syntax of several minority languages, perception of language endangerment (papers by Kartsen Legère, Klaus Wedekind), sociolinguistic issues (by Alemayehu Gurm, Linda Jordan, Itsushi Kawase, Elisabeth Lanza and Hirut Woldemariam, Mesfin Messele, Yvonne Treis, Endeshaw Woldemariam, Aklilu Yilma), language revitalization efforts (presented by Kembo Sure), theoretical issues on language loss (the papers by Mathias Brenzinger, Zelealem Leyew and Graziano Sava and Mauro Tosco), language documentation and training of linguists (papers by Felix Ameka, Gerrit Dimmendaal and Thilo Scahdeberg), technical/methodological issues on various aspects of documentation: sound recording (by Peter Ladefoged), literacy (by Aija Katriina Ahlberg) and orthography (by Josephat Rugemalira).

Unique to this conference was the two hours round table discussion session in the morning of 29 April 2005. The discussion involved academics and eight invited guests representing speech communities from different regions of Ethiopia. Among these were policy makers and minority-language use activists. The discussion was meant to find out what/how native speakers expect linguists to contribute in the maintenance and development of minority languages. This initiative was highly appreciated both by the community representatives and by linguists. During the closing session on 30 April, however, some scholars remarked that the discussion with community representatives would have more impact if the latter had more time/chance to voice their concerns.

With many quality papers, good discussion and relaxed atmosphere, the conference was an academic and social success, not to forget the relaxing extra events: poetry reading in Konso/Amharic (by Ato Kora Gara, one of the two representatives from Konso), an excursion to Sup'p'a, the closing reception at the well-situated Semen Hotel (with coffee ceremony and traditional music).

After the conference, some participants, staff and students of the Department of Linguists of AAU attended series of lectures and most-wanted training on instrumental phonology which were given by Professor Peter Ladefoged and Dr. Klaus Wedekind. These two scholars stayed on after the conference for this purpose. They deserve special thanks.

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