Worrying about ethics and wondering about “informed consent”: Fieldwork from an Americanist perspective

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1. Introduction

This paper is meant as a contribution to the ongoing discussions of the ethics component of documentary work on endangered languages today. Such discussions have become pressing in the context of a changing world characterized by on the one hand, an increased ethnic consciousness and the politicization of indigenous languages, and on the other, an increased sense of responsibility on the part of linguistic professionals working with communities of endangered languages. At this point, the issues of technological developments for that documentation are finding their way into meetings and conferences, with some discussion of the ethical and legal aspects linked to those technologies, such as issues of intellectual property and “access” for the materials produced and to be archived. But the fact is that much remains to be done to identify all the ethical issues involved, from the beginning to the end of such field projects and in terms of all the actors concerned, and then to articulate them, in a realistic and concrete manner, for academics and funding agencies not familiar with the nature of fieldwork in general, or with this kind of fieldwork in particular.

The task of how to tackle a discussion of the ethical issues as they present themselves today can feel admittedly not only challenging, but rather daunting in its complexity, and certainly somewhat overwhelming to talk and write about. This is particularly true for the majority of us field linguists who have been trained and have acquired experience in describing the grammatical structure of such endangered and under-described languages (which by the way, is already a dauntingly complex and sometimes overwhelming challenge in themselves!), but have not been particularly prepared by our profession to handle and articulate to ourselves or the outside world the ethical issues embedded in the socio-political dimensions of our field projects. Meanwhile, those ethical concerns are becoming omnipresent in the enterprise of fieldwork, and have become one of the major concerns of the new sources of funding for documentation projects.
2.2 Massive loss of Native American people and languages

The story of Native American people is a story of massive loss of peoples and languages. The term "massive loss" has been applied to the loss of Native American people and languages in various ways. While the term "massive loss" has been applied to the loss of Native American people and languages in various ways, there is a clear distinction between the two concepts. The term "massive loss" refers to the loss of a significant portion of a population, while the term "massive loss of languages" refers to the loss of a significant portion of a language.

The loss of Native American people and languages is a complex issue that cannot be easily summarized. It is important to recognize the diversity of the Native American communities and the languages they spoke. The loss of languages is a particular concern because languages are not just tools for communication; they are also repositories of culture, history, and identity. The loss of languages can lead to the loss of cultural knowledge and the erosion of cultural identity.

The massive loss of Native American languages has been documented by a number of researchers. The most well-known study is the work of E. E. S. Heidrick, who compiled a list of the languages spoken by Native American peoples in the United States and Canada in the late 19th century. He identified 230 languages spoken by the Native American peoples in the United States and Canada, but only 60 of these languages were still spoken by the end of the 20th century.

The loss of languages is a result of a number of factors, including colonization, forced assimilation, and the loss of cultural knowledge. The loss of languages has had a profound impact on the Native American communities, and it is important to acknowledge the contributions of these communities to American society.

2.3 Endangered languages

The term "endangered languages" refers to languages that are in danger of extinction. These languages are often spoken by small, isolated communities and are at risk due to a variety of factors, including the loss of cultural knowledge, the loss of speakers, and the dominance of dominant languages.

The loss of languages is a concern for many linguistic and cultural communities. It is important to recognize the importance of preserving languages and the knowledge that they contain. The loss of languages can also have a significant impact on the cultural and social diversity of societies.

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2.3. Language loss in America as loss of genetic diversity

The sense of massive loss can also be considered from the angle of the loss of genetic linguistic diversity, which inherently also means loss of typological diversity. A linguistic argument for the urgency of describing and documenting the Amerindian languages has therefore been the impact of this double loss (genetic and typological) for the studies of language origin and evolution, migration and population patterns, and cognitive diversity of the human capacity for language. In this perspective of diversity, the most telling figures become, then, not those of the absolute number of languages, but rather those of the number of language families, and language stocks (families of families). And as shown in Table 1, the most striking figures for the entire world are in North and South America, when compared with figures of Europe, South and East Asia, Africa, and Australia:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Stocks</th>
<th>avg. no. of lgs/stock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and S.E. Asia</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>99.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meso America</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Global distribution of languages and stocks (figures from Nettle and Romaine 2000: 37)

The striking figures of North America correspond to the extraordinary linguistic variety of the languages along the Pacific Coast and those of South America to the wealth of languages of the Amazon region detailed in Queixa-Los and Renault-Lescure (2000). The high figure of stocks and families in the Amazon region actually comes from a long list of isolates: in Bolivia, for instance, 19 of the 34 identified languages of the Amazonian region are isolates; while the rest of the languages belong to five different families.

Taking into account these figures of number of stocks of America in general and South America in particular helps place this continent in perspective alongside the rest of the world, in particular if one compares these figures to those of Asia and Africa, where the situation seems reversed, with a very high number of languages but a relatively low number of stocks.

2.4. The implications of language death by language shift in America

Essential to the understanding of the sense of doom and urgency felt by Americanists, in the face of the figures mentioned above, is that it is a situation of the confrontation of single indigenous minority languages, many times genetic isolates in fact for South America, with one dominant and all-powerful colonial language (be it English, French, Spanish, Portuguese or even Dutch). In such a context, language shift means giving up "the" indigenous language in favor of the colonial language. It means indeed moving away from an indigenous monolingualism, and moving through an imbalanced bilingualism with a not fully mastered dominant language of a very different linguistic structure and conveying a very foreign colonial culture, to arrive at a monolingualism in the colonial language but without full mastery of that colonial language. The experience of many Americanist fieldworkers has been to witness the consequences of such a widespread phenomenon of quickly accelerating language shift, in which people are lured away from their language and culture with promises of an integration that in fact never materializes, creating masses of doubly marginalized populations, never really integrated, yet also having lost their language and culture and the identity and dignity that went with them.

Two remarks will be added about this phenomenon of language shift in the American context. First, that in earlier times in the USA (Canada and Australia), such shift has been traumatically induced by public policies specifically meant to eradicate the languages. This was done, for instance, through kidnapping children against their parents' will, then keeping them in boarding schools with the expressed goal of making the children lose their language. The memory of such treatments still lingers on in native communities. Second, language shift is happening even with the largest indigenous languages of America, those that could seem still vital because of their (relatively) large number of speakers, but which are actually in danger of tipping over into widespread language shift. In this case, language shift is worrisome because it would seem to point to the possibility of a very generalized loss of the native languages of America in a foreseeable future, through an insidious but nevertheless very real process of shift. Such is the case of Kechua, the largest Native American language in the Andean region of South America, spoken today by 8 to 12 million speakers, and also for Navajo, the largest language in the USA, with over 120,000 speakers, but under pressure in spite of its bilingual education programs.
2.5. Ethnic consciousness and politicization

Various dynamics that played themselves out on the American continent contributed to raising consciousness about the centrality of language to ethnic identity, and to politicizing the issue of ethnic languages. They consisted of successive initiatives of Whites during the last decades that more or less openly threatened the survival of indigenous languages and against which indigenous communities organized themselves. In the eighties in the USA it was the threat to the Native languages of the English Only movement that led to the organization of Native communities to press for what became the Native American Languages Act of 1990. This bill “guarantees the right of Native Americans to use and support their languages, and hails the indigenous languages as a unique part of American heritage that the government has the duty to assist native communities in preserving” (Hinton 2004: 20). For Latin America, the turning point was around 1992, and the official celebrations of the supposed “discovery” of America sponsored by Spain and Latin American governments. At that time, the mobilization of the Native populations protesting this celebration and affirming their identity as well as their linguistic and cultural rights reached all of America. In the following years, one after the other, most countries of Latin America recognized their multiethnic and multilingual nature, and modified their Constitution to that effect.

The politicization of Native American languages and the mobilization of many indigenous communities was matched by that of linguists working with such communities on native languages. Linguists became advocates for the Native American Languages Act in the USA, and supported the indigenous movement surrounding the 500th anniversary of the supposed “discovery of America”. Craig (1992a) retraces some of the dynamics of this movement that swept through the American continent and changed forever the relation of most academic linguists to the indigenous communities. The rhetoric about “endangered languages” in America was, for instance, first developed by Americanist linguists at the annual LSA meetings of December 1991, with a special panel on the subject of endangered languages, that led at the same meetings to the creation of the LSA Committee on Endangered Languages, and the Declaration of the LSA on behalf of endangered languages. The papers from the panel were published in the following issue of Language (Hale et al. 1992). At about the same time, linguists from all over the world had been working to raise the issue with the UNESCO, and the 1992 XVth International Congress of Linguists in Quebec sponsored a panel on endangered languages.

The point to be made is that the mobilization and politicization of a great number of academic Americanists echoed that of the indigenous communities with whom they were working. This sensitization took various forms, from participating in language institutes for speakers or community members, to developing new forms of negotiated fieldwork, to raising the issue of language endangerment in academia and beyond, to lobbying for legislation to protect those languages. All of this occurred while continuously working on describing some of these endangered languages.

2.6. Similarities with Australia

All that has been said above about language loss, the sense of urgency, the politicization of languages, and the involvement of field linguists applies equally to Australia. On that continent, one finds the same decimation of population and loss of languages with shift of unique ethnic language to local English, official policies of language extermination by mistreatment of the population including sequestering of children into boarding schools, and a growing commitment by field linguists to acknowledge the concerns and needs of the Aboriginal populations. As in a number of Latin American countries, Australian fieldworkers (linguists and anthropologists) are being asked to help delimit traditional territory, which is frequently based on traditional narratives and dreams that are often part of the language material collected. They are also being asked to work with the communities on their bilingual education programs.

In fact, the mobilization of Australian linguists occurred somewhat before that of the Americanists, and their radicalization is even more marked. Australian linguists are often considered pioneers in the way they developed codes of ethics together with the Aboriginal people; as a professional group of field linguists they can even be considered as more sophisticated in their reasoning and consideration of the ethical issues raised by working on endangered languages, as will be mentioned later.

2.7. Contrast with South Asia

The various factors of the situation of Native American languages considered above in this first section, from the massive loss of people and languages, to generic linguistic diversity, the direct impact of massive language shift on indigenous language loss, to the politicization of indigenous languages were assembled in order to account for why such a mobilization concerning endan-
gered languages came from Americanist linguists. Such an exercise in outlining the specificities of the American continent was actually prompted by the occasional denigrating or simply puzzled remarks from field linguists of other regions of the world confronted with the attitude of many Americanist linguists on the issue of endangered languages and with their relations to communities of speakers. The clear stance of advocacy of the Americanists that is sometimes taken to be excessive or academically inappropriate when seen from other parts of the world was also said here to be largely shared by Australianist colleagues for similar reasons, with different but parallel sociopolitical developments. In contrast, specific factors of other regions of the world could be put forward in order to explain how the issue of language endangerment may have been perceived there with less intensity, and viewed with less or different concerns by linguists who are specialists of those regions. In the case of South Asia, which is of interest here (and to some extent in the case of Africa, too) the politicization of languages and the ethnoconsciousness of the phenomenon of language endangerment would seem to be less intense because of the following factors, among others:

(a) an active and multilayered multilingualism, in multicultural societies where language loss is less visible and tangible to the extent that it occurs in the midst of the maintenance of some other configuration of multilingualism,

(b) a different colonial history that has meant lower numbers of languages lost, and less active policies to eradicate the languages,

(c) larger numbers of languages, but in dialect chains of genetically related languages, with a common under-identification of “mother tongues” of less than 10,000 speakers,

(d) an identification of language more in terms of their role as expression of social identities than for their strictly linguistic differences

(e) less politicization of language issues per se, on a background of more developed politicization of religious issues and affiliation to a region, religion being stronger than language issues as a basis for identity

(f) language shift normally to other indigenous languages rather than to former colonial languages.

These factors and the fact that very little attention has been paid to lesser-known languages in South Asia has had the effect that discussions on issues of fieldwork and ethics of fieldwork have been lacking so far in the discussions of the linguistic situation of that region of the world. One of the aims of this paper is therefore to present a framework under which these crucial questions could be discussed in a South Asian perspective.

3. On ethics

Ethics of fieldwork is at once an old and a relatively new subject. Today, in the context of new documentation projects of endangered languages, the issues to be included in a “code of (good/ethical) conduct” seem to have diversified and multiplied. They need to include issues linked to the use of new technologies, as well as a reconsideration of traditional data elicitation methods for linguistic analysis, and, crucially, need to take into account the complexities of the sociopolitical context of endangered languages.

3.1. Concerning methodological, technological and ethical issues

Ethical issues are embedded in a host of other “local” issues, such as methodological and technological ones, and permeate the whole enterprise of fieldwork, from its conception to its finalization, and involve more of the totality of its aspects than any easily sensed or accepted. They are embedded in complex chains of issues, ranging from what kind of linguistics for which kind of work; to what kind of field methods to use to collect data, for what purpose, with what kind of speakers; to what technologies should be used to capture the data, analyze it, store it, archive it, etc., and then disseminate it, and to whom. Some are old questions, concerning the relation to the speakers and to the communities, which are always raised about fieldwork (see Craig 1992a, 1992b, 1993a; Grinevald 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, in press), but others are newer ones introduced or highlighted by new technologies and the archiving on the net with the potential of the latter for unlimited access, including such issues as intellectual property, the right to privacy, and the right of access.

In order to tackle the somewhat diffuse and overwhelming issue of “ethics”, linguists can start by learning from the code of ethics of close professional fields, such as anthropology, sociology or psychology, for instance, disciplines which have a stronger tradition than the discipline of linguistics has had of attending to the ethical aspect of their work, including fieldwork. Among linguists, however, one must take note of the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, to be considered here later. There are in fact multiple ways of constraining the ethical issues one is faced with while doing fieldwork, as will be quickly sketched out below.
choice of information retrieval engines and the use of models and algorithms to improve the search functionality. The issue of relevance and the use of feedback mechanisms is also important in improving the performance of search engines. The importance of this issue is highlighted in the context of improving the quality of search results.

A key issue in the field of information retrieval is the use of feedback mechanisms. The use of feedback mechanisms is important in improving the quality of search results. The feedback mechanisms can be used to refine the search results based on user feedback. This can improve the relevance of the search results and improve the user experience.

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Producing materials of use to the community, writing for the community. This point deals with the so-called "applied linguistics" aspect of the work more and more demanded by communities and raises the issues, on one hand, of the manpower to do the work where and when there is often nobody else but the academic linguist to do it, and, on the other hand, the lack of academic recognition for this type of work.

Following up, staying in touch, keeping the field open for future researchers. The important idea is that such projects develop over years, decades even, with multiple field stays, and that they must be seen as evolving processes.

This listing was just meant to give an idea of the variety of issues that involve the concept of ethics. In many ways it could be updated today as the discussion has progressed, but essentially touches on most of the unavoidable themes. What is important here is the concept that the period(s) of fieldwork proper are sandwiched between two phases of academic residence, the "before" of preparation and planning from a distance, and the "after" of returning to and reintegrating the academic environment. Implicit in this repeated back and forth movement between the field and academia is the fact that fieldworkers generally feel the pressures of often conflicting demands, those from the field and those from academia, two types of worlds that know little of each other.22

3.3. Another way of looking at ethics: Multiple allegiances

Another way to go about capturing the set of ethical questions to keep in mind when doing fieldwork on endangered languages is to approach them through the prism of the multiple allegiances that link the fieldworker to different entities and agents. This appears to be the approach of foundations such as the Volkswagen-DOBES and the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Documentation Program based at SOAS in London, as pointed out in Austin (2003).

The overall picture of the network of responsibilities to different entities is sketched out on the DOBES web site. It offers a First World and TOP-DOWN view of the relations involved and the constraints and commitments that fieldworkers sign on to, with respect to their different partners: funding agents, technical archiving agents, academic agents. Funding agents have explicit requirements of outputs delivered in a timely fashion without risk of legal pursuit, archiving agents have specific technical requirements of data processing, and, while not appearing clearly in DOBES MPI schema, although a reality of the life of academic fieldworkers, the academic requirements of scientific quality of the output and of demands for certain types of production if one is to secure or pursue an academic career must also be taken into consideration.

The agents identified in the DOBES schema on the front page of its Code of Conduct include:

1. The funding agency (such as the Volkswagenstiftung in Germany, the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Programs in England, the National Science Foundation in the United States)
2. The host academic institution for the project and the fieldworker
3. The archivers of the materials of the project (such as DOBES at the MPI Nijmegen, HRELAP in London as SOAS, and the Archives of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), at the University of Texas at Austin)
4. The national and regional institutions of the country of fieldwork, including the indigenous organizations
5. The local community organization
6. The individual linguistic consultants
7. The users of the documentation

It is probably an understatement to say that the different agents involved create a maze of commitments of often conflicting nature, and that one of the major challenges of fieldwork is to juggle all these constraints, requirements, and commitments. What would also need to come forward is a stronger voicing on the part of experienced fieldworkers about the nature of the work of description and documentation of an endangered language and the kind of relations that field linguists establish with the speaker communities and individual consultants. Newman and Ratliff (2001) is a good place to begin to read about such relations on the part of some of the best-known field linguists from around the world.

3.4. A focused look at the relation of a linguistic fieldworker to a linguistic community: The Australian model

What follows is extracted from the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. It replicates the "Principles of Ethical Research" spelled out (2002: 5-11) and is organized around issues that to a certain extent arise at the different phases of the time-line presented earlier, of before, during and after the actual fieldwork, but emphasizes the continuous process of
3.3 Conclusion on ethics of human rights research

The development work with indigenous populations (see Chapter 3.2) is aimed at promoting human rights and improving the lives of indigenous peoples. The framework for human rights and indigenous peoples in this research is based on the understanding that human rights are universal and apply to all individuals, including indigenous peoples.

4.1 A review of case studies

The ethical considerations in this research were guided by the principles of respect, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. The research aimed to be respectful of the cultures and traditions of the communities involved, while also ensuring the well-being of the individuals and communities. The research was conducted in consultation with the communities and with their consent.

5.1 Data collection and analysis

The data collection methods included interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding the data and identifying patterns and themes. The findings were presented in a structured format, including tables and figures.

6.1 Discussion and implications

The findings of this research have significant implications for the development work with indigenous populations. They highlight the importance of respecting the cultural and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and ensuring that their rights are protected. The research also underscores the need for collaborative partnerships between researchers and communities.

7.1 Recommendation for future research

Further research is needed to explore the implications of this research for the development work with indigenous populations. It is recommended that researchers collaborate with communities to ensure that their perspectives and viewpoints are included in the research design and implementation.
Identify community, regional or other indigenous umbrella organizations
- Communicate with relevant individuals and organizations by appropriate means. Face-to-face meetings are always desirable. The budgetary and funding implications of such visits should be considered.
- From the outset, objectives should be clear, while maintaining flexibility and a willingness to modify your goals and ways of working.

To follow such recommendations is no doubt much to ask of linguists fresh out of graduate linguistics courses who want to embark on such projects. They require getting to know the community well enough to judge who the "relevant" interlocutors are, as well as the "appropriate" means of communication, and a positive attitude towards collaborative research that always means a slower and more complex process, while academia and finance institutions are looking for demonstrated and marketable results and products. The concerns could alternatively be labelled as:

- Consent about what and for what
  The concerns range from permission to be in that particular place, to collect data, under what circumstances, and then to treat the data later on, and to make it public through standard publication or virtual internet distribution. They remind us of consent forms for experimental sciences, and property rights issues.

- Consent from whom
  Clearly one must deal with a variety of constituencies from whom to get consent. There are individuals identified as leaders or representatives and collectivities organized in identifiable institutions or not; and there are speakers who provide the data and community members who may or may not be speakers of the language being documented but who consider themselves as much the owners of the language as the speakers themselves.

- Getting consent when
  The foundations demand consent prior to actual fieldwork, as part of grant applications, but consent is a matter of process, of negotiations, of re-evaluation and updating. The initial consent is already the result of some interaction and fieldwork, and usually covers the process of planning. But as the project takes place and develops, it is likely that dynamics also develop that require periodic reviews and re-assessments.

- Consent obtained how and in what form
  One needs to consider the validity of a written document, a source of some reassurance for the funding agencies operating in a legalistic First World, but a written document that is actually a foreign object in the oral tradition language communities that are specifically the target of those projects. The lack of literacy tradition means that the written medium is not easily mastered by members of the endangered language communities, who are usually, precisely, the most marginalized sectors of the society. And beyond the actual act of writing and signing, one needs to rethink the significance of a written document across cultures. Recent consideration of this cross-cultural challenge has led to the possibility of non-written forms of consent, such as video recordings of the discussions and agreements reached between the principals concerned.

One should not expect that there will ever be a set guideline to informed consent. This is because fieldwork projects are not laboratory experiments. They are always embedded in specific socio-political circumstances that vary at infinitum, in the context of which informed consent is a question of establishing a working relationship cross-culturally and then maintaining it throughout the project. It is one of the most challenging aspects of all the multiple responsibilities that fall on the fieldworkers, who are academics usually raised and trained far away from the realities of the field and little prepared in the fields of sociology, political science, or anthropology, where such issues are addressed more regularly.

4.1.2. A story of letters of consent

What follows is a case study in the complexity of the concept, and in the practical issue of getting a letter of consent for a grant application that illustrates, among other things, the evolution in field approaches and financial institutional demands over a 20 year span. It offers the perspective on the subject of a long time fieldworker as committed from the start to the concept of collaborative research and informed consent as she feels now puzzled and challenged by the realities of their implementation.

The story is that of the Rama Language Project (RLP) of Nicaragua, a project of description, revitalization, and documentation of a very endangered language, the ethnic language of the smallest and most marginalized ethnic group within the country. It contrasts the conditions of the first phase of the project (1985–93) to those of its present second phase (2004–6) and its evolution in the need to obtain letters of consent from community and institutions. It focuses in particular on the process of obtaining successive letters of consent from the community for two successive applications to the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Program, in order to give a sense of all
4.2.1. The political context of a two-track project

The political project was one of the linguistic projects of "linguists" for Nicaragua, and was cast from its point of origin into the political context of revolution in Sandinista government. The project was conceived in the discussions among the Sandinista Government and the Caribbean Coast (now known as the autonomous region of Rama). The project was presented to the Sandinista Autonomy, financed in 1987, and was granted linguistic rights to all the ethnic groups of the region.

The project was a response to demands from the Rama community, expressed through representatives of the ethnic language, to revitalise their own language, Rama. In this case, the outside interest of political discourse of multi-ethnicity and the demand for the regional form of the language in the political discourse of multi-ethnicity and the demand for the regional form of the Rama language led the community to demand the revitalisation of their own language, Rama. The task given to the Rama, as the language they had all abandoned, was to revitalise the language. The task was to respond to the demands of the community, which was the point of departure for the linguistic project. The task was to revitalise the community's language, Rama, in order to respond to the demands of the community, which was the point of departure for the linguistic project.
Miss Nora Rigby clearly stated her decision to continue, to fulfill her vision of seeing her language written down and documented so it would not disappear forever. Craig (1992b) and Grinevald and Kaufmann (2003) were written as a homage to the power of that woman rescuer of her language.

4.2.3. Thinking through the notion of “consent” in this context.

This first phase of the Rama project, requested by the community, evolved therefore in the midst of major difficulties and multiple allegiances to be managed. One was working in a revolutionary time with its demands (and exhilaration); in the midst of a raging (anti-Sandinista) “Contra war” translating into common war time constraints. The other was handling the new divisions in the Rama community due to wartime, creating yet another layer over the already profound division of the community between islanders – non speakers and mainland – speakers. And finally, on top of everything, came the devastating hurricane Joan that destroyed 80% of Bluefields and left the island of Rama Cay momentarily under water, meaning among other things the loss of all the materials of the project.

In this context, the issue of consent mostly took the shape of getting a permit to enter the zone of sometimes active military conflict, of associating with a new regional research institute (Center for Research and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast known as CIDCA), and of seeing how to respond to community demands as transmitted by Sandinistas authorities. As far the issue of consent from the main speaker, Miss Nora, an old illiterate woman, it was simply affirmed in the grant application. It was clear from very early on in the project that the situation was one of mutual benefit between the main linguist and the main linguistic consultant for the language, with very evenly balanced demands for services. The linguist wanted time and attention for linguistic description, and the speaker the same for support in her initiatives on the island for some Rama language revitalization, culminating in her teaching Rama to Kindergarten children daily for almost ten years.

This first phase of the RLP was certainly a learning experience and good training ground for reflections on projects of description and documentation of endangered languages. The challenges included the balancing act of doing straightforward linguistics, with few speakers including one fluent but semi-speaker as it were, in the midst of a war, and of balancing the demands of a community ambivalent about where the language was coming back from, with those of the main speaker and leader of the project who had her own agenda. It included the added layer of challenge from the Sandinistas asking how the Rama language was going to be revived and refusing to engage in a discussion of whether it was at all possible to revive it. Back in academia, the pressures came from financing foundations, including the negative evaluation for the renewal of the project, two years into it, by theoretical linguists that deemed the work produced (a census of the last speakers, a collection of texts transcribed, glossed and analyzed, an initial dictionary and an initial grammar sketch), as amounting to not having involved any “linguistics” yet, i.e., “theoretical” linguistics.

4.3. RLP phase 2: HRLP Dictionary and archiving project 2004–6

As it were, the first phase of the project ended up with a draft of an extensive grammar of the language available to interested linguists in pdf format (but yet to be reviewed, completed, and published); data for a dictionary that was almost entirely entered into an early version of a new and promising software for dictionary making, 4th Dimension, and a collection of texts in the IT format, the ancestor of the now very widely used Shoebox program and its successor, Toolbox. And then the life of the two main linguists of the project, the present author and main assistant Bonny Tibbits, took several turns and major changes so that the project material ended up boxed and left to sit for ten years. This is another reality of many such projects, boxes of data in linguists’ offices or garages that did not materialize into final publications, for any number of reasons, from a sense of perfectionism or of overwhelming responsibility of being so few and isolated, working on such an impressive quantity of new data, with the feeling that the analysis will improve with time and additional data. There is the guilt, there is the sense of unfinished business, there is dealing with pressures of life that do not leave time or energy to even think about it.

But fieldwork projects of this sort are life-long adventures. Dictionaries are often stories of decades of the life of a linguist, and circumstances can change. In the case of the RLP, two different changes of circumstances made the reactivation of the project possible. One was new impetus from the community asking for more attention to the Rama language, and the other new developments in linguistics about documenting and archiving endangered languages, with an opportunity to obtain financial support to complete the project.

4.3.1. The set-up of this second phase

The second phase of involvement of the linguist with the Rama Language Project came again from a request from the community, and brought out the need for a letter of consent to be included in a grant application.
The production of new products, or the creation of new industries, requires a deep understanding of the market and the potential for success. The development of new products often involves significant financial investment, and the success of these efforts depends on a clear understanding of the market and the potential for success. The development of new products often involves significant financial investment, and the success of these efforts depends on a clear understanding of the market and the potential for success.
Those were Ramas that had been in contact with the outside world and had been receiving training in western-style leadership in recent years. They were the ones to handle the official discourse on the need to save the Rama language for ethnic identity purposes. In an interesting way, no Rama speakers were present at the meeting that took place on university grounds.

The letter reads as follows (reproduced as is):

Blaefields 15 of November 002
Collet Craig
Rama documentation project

To the community of Rama Cay is an opportunity to look back to our history where the language is in extinction. We then the leaders of the community of Rama Cay are willing to support the project; because it is part of our identity, as an indigenous group. The teacher the leaders the student will surely participate and support this project and make it bright in our community. The access of the young people in participating in training will have to do with the development of our community. So then once more we omit our self to willingly work, participate and help in the project.

So then to end we only want to tell yo we hope that this will be a reality.

[signed by seven people: the president for the council, the secretary, two teachers, the pastor, and two community leaders.]

4.3.4. Project rejection and reapplication: A second letter of consent

Things became more complicated when in fact the project was turned down in its initial form. The linguist was advised to reapply, but to concentrate on the production of the dictionary without including the training component for the community. Although a second proposal was accepted on principle, the foundation then requested further drastic cuts in the budget, to a final amount of a quarter of the original one, through elimination of most of the field components and interaction with the community. And it requested in addition a new letter of consent from the community dated from that year.

It is difficult to describe the kind of frustration this request for a second letter of consent created for the linguist. How to tell the community that the project had been turned down, that only a part of it had finally been granted, with no component of community work or fieldwork, but that another letter of consent from them was needed? And how to negotiate this from a distance and in a short time frame? In the end a short form letter was prepared by the linguist that reproduced some of the basic language of the original letter produced by the Ramas themselves. It read as follows:

We the leaders of the Rama community know and understand about the Rama Dictionary Project presented to you by Colette Grinevald (we know her as Miss Colette). We consider that it is a project of great importance to the Rama community and we willingly support it. We believe it will help us in our efforts to save the Rama language and culture which is part of our ethnic identity. We hope that with your help this project can become a reality.

Through the miracle of email and the good will of local contacts that went to the island of Rama Cay to obtain signatures, ten Ramas signed this letter, not all the same ones of the first letter. There was this time a combination of teachers, official representatives, and community members. The signatures included this time some Rama speakers from the mainland community, as well as others unknown to the linguist. This letter of consent was filed away and satisfied the needs of the foundation, and support was granted for a dictionary production and archiving project. But it certainly raised a number of issues for the linguist about the process of requesting and producing letters of consent, and the significance of this written document at both ends.

4.4. Musings on obtaining letters of consent

This story was told in order to illustrate the kind of possibly extremely complex and difficult situations field linguists can find themselves in, caught between the demands, the needs, and the world views of the linguistic communities and those of the financing institutions. It was meant to give some concrete example of the kind of stressful field situations academics are little prepared to face. In this case, witnessing the extremely demanding and elaborate process of the production of the first letter of consent allowed the linguist to reflect on how much we first world academics demand of indigenous communities to conform to our needs for written documents and for representativeness. And considering the hopes raised earlier about involvement of the community through some training, the process of requesting a second letter for a project that did not officially include any community involvement and basically financed the production of a linguistic dictionary and the setting up of a web-based archive on French and US university sites produced both anger and anguish in the linguist. Without putting in question the necessity of including getting “informed consent” in the list of ethical issues to be handled in doing such kind of fieldwork, this experience certainly brought to the fore for the linguist the questions of consent from whom, consent to do what, consent obtained through what process, consent in what form, and ultimately consent for whom.
Foundation launched a special funding program in 2003 for the documentation of endangered languages (DEL).

12. With linguists from the UNESCO efforts and from the LSA winter panel, see Uhlenbeck (1992) and later Grenoble and White (1998) for the earlier assessments of the situation of endangered languages by linguists.


15. My personal experience, for instance, is to have, on several occasions and as I perceived it, somewhat condescendingly, been treated as a "bleeding heart" or "social worker" Americanist, and so, notably, by fellow Africanists. See also, for instance, Ladeofoged's criticism of the LSA panel and the publication of its proceedings (Ladeofoged 1992, an Africanist in fact), and another kind of response (Dorian 1993).

16. Thanks to Anju Saxena for a discussion of this list of differences and the information that SIL was actually kicked out of India, in contrast with its own omnipresence, until recently, in most Latin American countries.

17. Based at the time on various documents from different disciplines, such as the American Anthropological Association (Handbook on Ethical Issues in Anthropology [1987], and Principles of Professional Responsibilities [1990]), the American Sociological Association (Revised ASA Code of Ethics [1980], and the American Psychological Association (Ethical Principles of Psycholinguistics [1990]).

18. Different fieldwork frameworks are discussed in Cameron et al. (1992) and presented in Craig (1993), Grinevald (1998, 2003). The simplest model, when there is little ethnic consciousness and no politicization of the language, is that of work on the language, with the linguist entering the community and finding a speaker or speakers with whom to work and largely ignoring the community, except to live in it, but without developing work relations with the community. This was the so-called "ethical" framework, typical of much fieldwork until the latter part of the twentieth century (such as many PhD dissertation work by graduate students in the seventies, as Craig 1977). The most complex model, with multiplication of responsibilities and allegiances, and increased likelihood of need for negotiation and handling of conflict of interests, is a model said to be WITH speakers, at best BY speakers, and is the standard framework today wherever the ethnic groups and the languages are politicized. It is certainly the dominant model for fieldwork in Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru today, for instance. The most advanced model, BY the speakers, is best represented by the Guatemalan model, in particular the trained native Mayan linguists of OKMA, submitting their own documentation projects to the foundations today. (See England 1992 and Grenoble 2002 about the state of affairs in Guatemala today.)

19. The ghosts of Project Camelot and the Vietnam era, and the issue of the Peace Corps infiltration in certain countries marked the period that saw the developments of these codes of conduct. The concern remains today, such as during the Sandinista times when doing fieldwork in the Contra War area, or in most border areas of the Amazonian region for instance.

20. An updated version of this list would actually situate this issue of return of materials and preparation of materials appropriate for community use toward the end of the DURING in the field phase, with as much community involvement as possible and evidence of the work done being left in the field in the first place. This is the case even if little evidence of the work is still available on the next visit.

21. An issue raised for instance by native Mayan linguists in the late 1980s, who objected (with good reasons in the opinion of the present author) to the indeed extremely high frequency of the transitive verbs "to kill" and "to hit" in the grammatical examples of the multiple PhD theses of North American academics being produced at that time.

22. Grinevald (2000) was an attempt at articulating the kinds of pressures felt by fieldworkers upon return from the field, and the nature of the academic dynamics which are unavoidable if one is to stay in academia. Gerds (1998) already mentioned, is a well articulated presentation of what communities want linguists.

23. Financial support was again provided later by the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Paul Chapin, then director of the linguistics program of the National Science Foundation, is to be commended for considering applications for fieldwork in Nicaragua at the time the United States government was orchestrating the demise of the Sandinista government and financing the Contra War.

24. This in the context of seemingly no recognition of the source of those speeches now completely appropriated by the community, nor any concrete evidence left on the island of any of the multiple series of publications and materials produced. This is the common and very humbling experience of the systematic disappearance of all materials produced for over a decade, disappearance observed regularly at each new field trip and dealt with for the years of the project by constant reprinting and redistribution of materials. First World linguists need to learn to deal with the non-naturality of oral tradition cultures, meaning no familiarity with written materials, as well as the weather conditions of tropical humidity that easily destroys anything one might want to keep. Maybe even more disturbing is the realization of the total absence of consultation of the materials still kept in the library of the research institute CIDCA by any of the URACCAN students and faculty (non-Rama) directly or remotely involved with research projects with the Rama on Rama Cay.

25. Such a "dry camel" would be an alternative to the practically obsolete Panama Canal, and would function as a railroad line cutting across southern Nicaragua to transport containers from big tankers between two deep sea ports, the one on the Caribbean coast being built near and on Rama settlements.

26. This is the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Documentation Project, one of three major sources of funding for documentation of endangered languages today, the other being the Volkswagen DOBES program and the NSF/NEH Smithsonian Documentation of Endangered Languages program (DEL).
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A Visual Guide to the American Landscape

By: Andrew R. Gearhart

Introduction

The American landscape is a diverse and complex system of natural and human-made elements. This guide aims to provide an overview of the major components of the American landscape, including its physical features, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural aspects. It is designed to help readers gain a deeper understanding of the rich biodiversity and ecological processes that shape the American landscape.

Chapter 1: Physical Features

- Topography
- Climate
- Vegetation
- Water Bodies

Chapter 2: Ecosystems

- Terrestrial Ecosystems
- Aquatic Ecosystems
- Coastal Ecosystems

Chapter 3: Human Impact

- Settlement Patterns
- Agriculture
- Urbanization
- Conservation Efforts

Conclusion

The American landscape is a vital resource that sustains countless species and provides numerous benefits to humans. By understanding the various components and the interactions between them, we can better appreciate the complexity of the American landscape and work towards its preservation.

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