

MIT Indigenous Language Initiative

Recent Endangered and Indigenous Language Projects

This overview contains brief sketches of some of the recent work that has been done by MIT-affiliated people on endangered or indigenous languages. The list is organized by language or project, since several of the people listed here have been involved in more than one project.

Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project

Jessie Little Doe (2000), Norvin Richards, Ken Hale

(with Benjamin Bruening, Connie Krause, Andrea Rackowski)

Location

Mashpee and Aquinnah (Martha's Vineyard), Massachusetts

Speakers

None initially, language unused since probably the 1800s

Overview of project

- Major goal: reclamation of the language for use by tribe
- Research and pedagogical materials development
- Teaching the language to members of the community

Community interest/involvement

Yes. The community has been involved in the project from the beginning.

The Community initiated the interest in reviving the language.

Continued enrollment by tribe members in classes.

Accomplishments

Master's Thesis (Jessie) -- *An Introduction to Wampanoag Grammar*.

Dictionary of Wampanoag (ongoing)

Classes for tribe members (intermediate and advanced immersion class) -- held on Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod

Ongoing status/progress/contact

Teaching is ongoing, Jessie still running project

Continuing to work on dictionary (Norvin continuing to contribute)

Lardil

Becki Norris, Norvin Richards (1997), Ken Hale

Location

Mornington Island, Australia

Speakers

- 5-6 fluent, youngest is 58
- Adult generation (~200) has passive grammatical knowledge and vocabulary use (especially kinship terms)
- Children don't speak it at all, but know some vocabulary

Overview of project

Dictionary project

- 1960s: Ken visited and started work on a dictionary.
- 1996: Norvin and Ken, with David Nash, Jane Simpson, Anna Ash (all of Australia) went to finish the dictionary Ken had begun in the 60s.
- 2002: Norvin and Becki went to work on a book of stories for use in language teaching, based on recordings of the stories that Ken made in the '60s
- Future: There is interest in teaching the language in the school. Connected to this, Norvin and Becki are beginning to look at creating teaching materials and perhaps compiling a textbook.

Community interest/involvement

- There is some interest in teaching Lardil in the local school, and there is a need for pedagogical materials to enable this.
- There was a Language Project Steering Committee on the island, but it is now defunct.

Accomplishments

Dictionary

Soon to come: book of stories

Ongoing progress/contact

- Becki and Norvin are this year looking into creating language teaching materials for use in teaching Lardil in the schools. They plan to return next summer with the materials and implement pilot use of them in the school.
- Norvin is also considering spending a longer period of time there in order to teach the language.

Other institutions involved/other funding/projects

Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is a government body that does work on native culture and language in Australia. They may be able to at least partly fund future research and language-teaching projects on Lardil (they already fund these sorts of projects for other aboriginal groups in Australia).

Also:

- Learner's Guide to Lardil -- brief sketch of textbook and companion tape -- put together by other researchers
- Cassy Nancarrow is presently on the island, compiling book of native songs, information about them, and companion dances.
- Another researcher is interested in the language project and has already worked on the Learner's Guide.

Jingulu

Rob Pensalfini (1997)

Location

Australia

Speakers

Around 12, youngest in late 50s

Overview of project

- Fieldwork in summers of 1995 and 1996 to create grammar (and MIT Ph.D. dissertation)
- Ongoing

Community interest/involvement

The community wanted to create a dictionary and was looking for a linguist to document the language, which is how they got connected with Rob

Accomplishments

- Dissertation: *Jingulu Grammar, Dictionary, and Texts*
- Two books
 - "A grammar of Jingulu" will be published by Pacific Linguistics later this year
 - Jingulu dictionary with illustrated stories should follow a year or two later
- several theoretical journal articles and book chapters.

Ongoing status/progress/contact

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“While working on Jingulu, I met two old men who were the last two speakers of Ngarnji (a related language). They have since died, but I am currently compiling what data is available (four or five linguists over the last hundred and fifty years have collected smatterings of Ngarnji) to write a sketch grammar of the language.”

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

- Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AITSIS)
- Small amounts of funding were also provided by the Katherine and Tennant Creek Aboriginal language centres (Australia),
- The Endangered Languages Fund (USA)
- MIT
- Recently (i.e. post-MIT) the University of Queensland (Australia) has provided some funding for the ongoing research.

Endangered Languages and Linguistic Diversity

Rob Pensalfini (1997), Jonathan Bobaljik (1995), Luciana Storto (1999)

An “investigation of language endangerment itself and the whys and wherefores of language maintenance” (Rob Pensalfini).

Rob Pensalfini, Jonathan Bobaljik, and Luciana Storto co-edited an MIT Working Papers in Linguistics volume on the topic, which arose from a series of weekly workshops which Jonathan and Rob organized one year at MIT.

“Here we not only heard from a variety of researchers regarding language maintenance projects around the world, but we investigated the more 'philosophical' questions of how and why a language becomes endangered, whether and why we should care, what if anything can/should be done about it, and so on.”

Maliseet-Passamaquoddy

Phil Le Sourd (1988)

(plesourd@indiana.edu)

From Phil LeSourd's website (<http://www.indiana.edu/~anthro/faculty/lesourd.html>):
“I received my first introduction to the Algonquian languages in a class on Mesquakie (Fox) that Ives Goddard taught at Harvard in the spring term of 1975. At the end of the semester, Karl V. Teeter, also at Harvard, offered me a chance to ride along with him to a

joint meeting of several Micmac, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy groups in Fredericton, New Brunswick, a conference that was being held to discuss writing systems for these languages to be used in several newly founded bilingual education programs. Somehow I wound up spending a day riding around Fredericton with a carload of Passamaquoddies from Maine, who had decided to speak no English that day. While I understood not a word that anyone was saying, I thought the language sounded like music. (I would later learn that Maliseet-Passamaquoddy is a pitch accent language: the "tunes" to which individual words are "sung" do indeed play a fundamental role in the language.) I was hooked.

Location

Indian Township, Maine

Overview of project

“In the summer of 1976, at Ken Hale’s urging, I took a job with the Wabnaki Bilingual Education Program at Indian Township, Maine, where I set about organizing a Passamaquoddy dictionary project and began trying to learn the language. The modest dictionary that grew out of my work over the next few years was published by the Micmac-Maliseet Institute in Fredericton in 1984. The results of my investigation of the phonological system of Passamaquoddy formed the basis for my dissertation, *Accent and Syllable Structure in Passamaquoddy*, which I completed in 1988.”

Accomplishments

Dictionary

Dissertation: *Accent and Syllable Structure in Passamaquoddy*

Ongoing Passamaquoddy project at University of Indiana

Passamaquoddy

Benjamin Bruening (2001)

Location

Indian Township, Maine

Speakers

Around 100

Overview of project

Benjamin Bruening spent much of his time working with speakers of Passamaquoddy, collecting data on the syntax of the language. These data form the basis of his Ph.D. dissertation, *Syntax at the Edge: Cross-Clausal Phenomena and the Syntax of Passamaquoddy*. In addition, he recorded numerous spoken texts (to be digitized and

analyzed at a later date), entered existing written texts into electronic form and analyzed them, and has begun work on a descriptive grammar of the language.

Bruening's dissertation research concentrated on four topics in the syntax of Passamaquoddy: Extraction phenomena, Wh-scope marking, The Inverse in Algonquian languages, and Raising to object (or "copying from complement").

Community interest/involvement

- There are some classes in the schools
- There is a dictionary project ongoing in New Brunswick,
- Part of the dictionary project includes sending younger speakers to visit older speakers and record conversations in Passamaquoddy. Partly the goal is to get new words, but recording and transcribing the texts will reveal a lot of interesting stuff too.
- The community has been working on publishing texts (mostly older stories) for a while.
- The Passamaquoddy consultants who participated in this study gained (limited) employment and the opportunity to preserve and study an integral part of their culture and self.

Accomplishments

- Ph.D. dissertation, *Syntax at the Edge: Cross-Clausal Phenomena and the Syntax of Passamaquoddy*.
- Bruening, Benjamin and Vivian Lin, 2001, "Discontinuous QPs and LF Interference Effects in Passamaquoddy," to appear in the Proceedings of the Workshop on the Semantics of Under-represented Languages of the Americas. Amherst, Mass.: GLSA.
- Bruening, Benjamin, 2001, "Constraints on Dependencies in Passamaquoddy," to appear in the Proceedings of the 32nd Algonquian Conference. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

Benjamin Bruening co-authored a paper with Vivian Lin (MIT), to appear in the Proceedings of the Workshop on the Semantics of Under-represented Languages of the Americas (held at UMass Amherst, March 2001). Eve Ng (University of Pittsburgh), also doing research on Passamaquoddy, shared data and other information. The Wabnaki Bilingual Education Program of the Passamaquoddy Tribe provided materials and workspace, as well as access to their electronic dictionary (a work in progress, funded by the NSF). Benjamin Bruening has also been in contact with Doug Whalen of the Endangered Language Fund and Haskins Laboratories concerning the creation of a web-based database of Algonquian audio and written data.

Ulwa

Tom Green (1999)

(with Ken Hale)

Location

Karawala, Nicaragua

Small village (~1000 pop.), last community of Ulwa people left

Speakers

About 400 still speak the language

Overview of project

The project began around 1988 between Ken Hale and a group of Ulwa speakers (1990 Tom Green took over most operations). Tom Green spent about 18 months total in Karawala over the next 5 years.

“The long-term goal of the project was to revive the Ulwa language among children and find a way to make it a sustainable part of their life and identity, but that has still never really gained enough popular momentum to succeed. Our short-term goals fared a little better: we made a pretty big dictionary (still unfinished but various versions have been distributed). We did a comprehensive sociolinguistic census of the community. We produced and published a few texts and some rudimentary scholastic materials (such as an illustrated children's dictionary). Ken and I wrote a few papers and gave a few talks on the language, and my thesis (1999) ended up being the closest thing there is to a descriptive grammar of the language.”

Community interest/involvement

“I worked almost exclusively with the six members of the Ulwa Language Committee in Karawala, although the whole community was enthusiastic (in spirit at least) about the project.”

Accomplishments

- Dictionary (ongoing, but versions have been distributed)
- Sociolinguistic census of community completed
- Tests and rudimentary scholastic materials (incl. illustrated children's dictionary)
- Dissertation: *A Lexicographic Study of Ulwa*.
- Various papers and talks

Ongoing status/progress/contact

“The project has been relatively inactive for several years now. The NSF money ran out in 1996, and my last trip down was a brief one in 2000. It looks like things may start to

heat up again soon, as some new grant money may be on the horizon. In the meantime, I work sporadically on processing the materials I already have; there is much in that remains undigested, unpublished, etc.”

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

- NSF grant for two years
- Sister institution in Nicaragua: CIDCA (Centro de Investigaciones y Documentacion de la Costa Atlantica). “They provided every kind of local support imaginable, which was crucial in a country like Nicaragua. Another student of Ken's, Danilo Salamanca (who's from Nicaragua), was the head of CIDCA for part of that time.”

Miskito

Danilo Salamanca (1988)

Location

Nicaragua

Speakers

“There were about 120,000 Miskito who lived in Honduras (25,000) and Nicaragua (95,000) according to estimations in the 80's-90's. They must be a little more now.”

Overview of project

“My involvement has been directed (to contribute) to create the conditions for the Miskito indigenous people to produce the materials they needed to develop the bilingual education programs that were started in the mid-eighties in Nicaragua and later in Honduras. The goal of those educational programs is to preserve the language and create a tradition of scholarship about it.

“In the short term that meant producing grammars and dictionaries that could be used as reference material to develop the curriculum (language textbooks at school, etc.) but also to enhance the prestige of the language in front of the rest of the population and the own indigenous people. In the long term, the goal is to contribute in different ways - an institution CIDCA (Center for the Investigation and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast) was created for with this purpose -- to create conditions such that the indigenous people would be able to conduct the research they consider necessary on their language (as well as in other fields).

“My study and work was/is carried out inside CIDCA and in cooperation with the Ministries of Education in both countries -- it contributed to the installation and development of the bilingual-education programs that exist, the creation and development of CIDCA of which I was director from 1990 to 19994 and through the work of this institution to the formulation of the Autonomy laws for the traditional Miskito territory

(now called “Region Autonoma del Atlantico Norte”) which now has its own government.”

Community interest/involvement

“During the 80’s the Miskito joined the American-backed rebel army in a war against the national (Sandinista) government of Nicaragua. They wanted independence or autonomy for the region where they live. The bilingual education program was one of the major cultural-rights claims. Both, bilingual education first, and political autonomy after, were granted by the (Sandinista) government of Nicaragua at the time. The constitution was changed and does still recognize those rights (although the Sandinistas lost power in 1990 and haven’t managed to win the elections since then). In Honduras there is a similar -- but more incipient -- bilingual educational program developed after a long political struggle by the different indigenous groups for their rights (including cultural ones).”

Accomplishments

“I have produced or contributed to produce -- in particular -- two grammars and two dictionaries of Miskito which have been used as reference material for the production of textbooks in school systems; among other things.”

Ongoing and Other involvement

“The nationally run bilingual educational programs are in place and generate different language projects. In Nicaragua there is a regional government in the area where the Miskito live and a University (URACCAN) run both partially by indigenous people and oriented towards their rights and needs -- Ken Hale used to teach linguistics there. The Centro de Investigacion y Documentacion de la Costa Atlantica (CIDCA) now part of the (Jesuit) Central American University (UCA) is run by indigenous people mostly and they carry some project related to the languages, including the publication of a scientific magazine Wani, which publishes occasionally papers in Miskito. Many other activities related to the languages are carried out by churches and other institutions.”

“First I worked for CIDCA from 1981 to 1994 which was originally an autonomous institution funded by the Nicaraguan government in part. We got many grants -- for our multi-disciplinary research (linguistics, biology, economics, history) -- the most important ones coming from SAREC, a national agency of the Swedish government to promote research in the third world countries (among other things) as a way to help development. Then -- after the Sandinistas lost power in 1990 -- CIDCA became part of the Jesuit university UCA. After I moved to France in 1995, I worked as a consultant, from 1996 to 2000 for the Ministry of Education in Honduras. From 1997 to 1999, I benefitted from a grant accorded to Ken Hale by the NSF and worked with him at MIT.”

Other Information

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“The Central American University -which contains CIDCA now -- has a web site where Wani (CIDCA’s periodical publication with information about their work and the situation with respect to indigenous people in Nicaragua) can be accessed: <http://www.uca.edu.ni/publicaciones>. In Honduras there is web site with information about the indigenous people : www.rds.org.hn/pueblos-indigenas.”

Mebengokre

Andres Salanova

Location

Brazil

Speakers

Between 4 and 5 thousand, in around 20 autonomous communities.

Overview of Project

“I have been working with Mebengokre on and off since 1996 as a linguistic researcher. Between 1997 and 1999 I served as a consultant to an educational project to train the Mebengokre teachers of four communities (other two were included later). This included two two-week sessions devoted to teaching essential linguistics to the teachers, and a four-month long stay in the field to carry out linguistic research that might be useful for the educational program.”

Community Interest/Involvement

“The only people ever truly involved with the education project was a segment of the (bilingual) young men. Interest in this group was variable.”

Accomplishments

“Out of my linguistic research has come a small dictionary of the Mebengokre language (with about 3000 entries), partly based on materials collected by previous researchers. Other linguistic materials produced about this language include my master's thesis and five published papers, as well as three unpublished texts with glosses. I also published, in collaboration with Maria Amelia Reis Silva, an article about the teacher training project and the role of linguistics in such settings.”

Ongoing

“The language is widely spoken, though young men are being sent to study in the surrounding cities at an increasingly earlier age (around 13 years of age currently). Some families live permanently or semi-permanently in the surrounding (Portuguese-speaking) towns, but their number is still small.”

Other Funding/Institutions

“I had, for a period of two years, a grant that covered fieldwork in connection with correcting the Mebengokre dictionary. Other trips to the field were funded by smaller grants, and on the two occasions that I traveled there in connection with the project to train Mebengokre teachers I was funded by the Brazilian Ministry of Education.”

Itelmen

Jonathan Bobaljik (1995), Susi Wurmbrand (1998)

Location

Village of Koyran in Russia, Kamchatka peninsula.

Speakers

At the time, there were about 100 speakers of Itelmen. There are now about 40-50.

Overview of project

In Jonathan’s fourth year at MIT (August 1993 - June 1994), he took a year off as a non-resident student and spent the year in the village of Kovran to work on Itelmen, doing anthropology and linguistic fieldwork with the Itelmen community (mainly basic description, but collecting material which would form the basis of later projects).

“My role in this project was as one of two research assistants for an Anthropology Professor from Columbia University (NY). I was invited and funded by him. Specifically, I was supposed to focus on linguistic documentation, and on issues such as trying to get involved in a language-revival program.”

Community interest/involvement

“The community was mostly welcoming, and very interested in principle. Most people were extremely supportive of us, and shared their resources far beyond what one could reasonably have asked of them. However, as a practical matter, even the generally interested young people and adults (other than the elderly) could not devote energy to language revival efforts as the economic situation was dire and securing basic necessities was very time-consuming.”

Accomplishments

- Contributions to Itelmen language teaching materials
- Grammatical sketch (in progress)
- Descriptive and theoretical articles on Itelmen

- Articles attempting to increase awareness of language endangerment, especially as seen as a political-economic issue rather than a linguistic one.
- The 1993-1994 "expedition" materials are slowly going up here:
<http://www.faculty.uaf.edu/ffdck/KEEE93-94.html>

Ongoing status/progress/contact

“Since the late 1980s, one Itelmen woman has been working on developing teaching materials for the primary schools in the few villages, and on training language teachers. She has produced some schoolbooks and a small dictionary. More recently, Itelmen classes intended primarily for adults have sprung up in the city where many Itelmen families have moved to escape the poor economic situation in the villages.”

“The number of speakers is dwindling steadily, though efforts at teaching at least a familiarity with bits of the language continue.”

Work is ongoing, both through direct contact, and continued research into the grammar of the language. Jonathan and Susi took another trip in 1996 and Jonathan has gone back a couple of other times. They also took a field trip in 2001.

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

“My 1993-1994 work was funded by the National Council for Soviet and East European Studies (US) in the form of a grant to Prof. David Koester, at Columbia University, the anthropologist I mentioned. Subsequently, I received grants on my own for follow-on projects and analysis.”

These included:

- W.F. Milton Fund (Harvard Med School), two trips in 1996
- some small grants at McGill in 1998, 2000
- FCAR New Researcher Grant (1999-2002)
- SSHRC Standard Research Grant (1999-2002, renewed 2002-2005)
- William Dawson Research Award (McGill) (2000-2005)
- FCAR and SSHRC both provided money for a field trip in 2001.

Karitiana

Luciana Storto (1999)

Location

Brazil

Speakers

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Overview of project

“I have started working with the Karitiana people in 1992, after visiting the village in 1991 and asking for their permission to study the language. They agreed but on one condition: that I helped their education project, reviewing their orthography, correcting the dictionary started by David Landin, an SIL missionary (the only person who studied the language before me), and giving them consultancies in all sorts of matters related to education and the language. I agreed to do that, and since then I have: (1) reviewed their orthography, proposing changes wished by the community, (2) started a literacy project (funded by the Norwegian Rainforest Foundation during 4 years) which was able to teach two thirds of the population above 10 years old to read and write in Karitiana; (3) started a dictionary (in English, Portuguese and Karitiana) which will contain all the lexical items in Landin's lexicon plus basic word lists from Swadesh, Brent Berlin's South American Indian Language Documentation Project, and others; (4) written some educational material to be used by the Karitiana in their incipient bilingual school (it includes some texts recorded with the elders). I have done that during my school vacations at Penn State (MA from 1992 to 1994) and MIT (1994 to February 1999).

Community interest/involvement

“The community is very young. They almost disappeared as a group in the 1950s (or 60s), when the two last villages fused into one as a survival strategy (there were mainly women in one and mainly men in the other). When I started working with the Karitiana they had only one white teacher at their school. Now all teachers are native speakers (there are 5 of them and other youngsters studying to be teachers). In the beginning of the education project (1993/1994) I didn't feel a lot of involvement from the community, probably because they were used to white people's promises which never got fulfilled. When they saw there were practical results from my work there, they became more involved in the project. In fact, the literacy project was only successful because of them. It worked like this: I taught about 20 youngsters (these were the only people interested in the beginning - everybody was invited and only 20 showed up) to use the orthography in night classes. Then I tested them, and everybody who got it 70% right was considered apt to teach others (we called them "teachers", and paid them US\$50 for having passed the exam). These teachers would teach as many students as they wanted in my absence, and when I came back in the following year I taught some more students and tested them plus the students of other "teachers" (they got paid US\$30 for each successful student). Everybody who passed the exam was able to teach, and in this way many people learned to read and write. We had to pay people for the time they took out of their daily activities to study. Otherwise it would not have worked, because the Karitiana are poor and don't always have enough to eat. As you see, if it weren't for the involvement of the community the project would not have happened because I was only able to stay in the village for a month each year, and this is not enough time to do the job. After 3 years of the program, I was very pleased, because I saw fathers studying with their children, old

illiterate women learning to read and write, and men studying with their wives. Some families bought blackboards and spent afternoons and evenings gathered to study the language. The village chief, who is a very hard to please fellow, not particularly my friend, called me in his house one day to thank me for the good work. When something like this happens you know you have made a difference.”

Accomplishments

- Dissertation 1999: *Aspects of a Karitiana Grammar*
- In the community:
 - “(1) reviewed their orthography, proposing changes wished by the community,
 - (2) started a literacy project (funded by the Norwegian Rainforest Foundation during 4 years) which was able to teach two thirds of the population above 10 years old to read and write in Karitiana;
 - (3) started a dictionary (in English, Portuguese and Karitiana) which will contain all the lexical items in Landin's lexicon plus basic word lists from Swadesh, Brent Berlin's South American Indian Language Documentation Project, and others;
 - (4) wrote some educational material to be used by the Karitiana in their incipient bilingual school (it includes some texts recorded with the elders).”
- “The Karitiana want me to continue working with them on projects such as the dictionary and grammar projects and to advise them in building the program of their bilingual school.”

Ongoing status/progress/contact

“Since I came back from the US I have written 6 proposals but was unable to get funding to do field work or to continue the education project; the proposals were considered good, but there was not enough funding for everybody in the foundations, so I couldn't get it (I had already received a lot of funding from them, so I guess the "message" was that I had to wait for a while). In 2001 I got some funding from foreign foundations and institutions to go back to the field, but I got pregnant and couldn't go to Amazonia (doctor's orders). The only field work I have done since 1999 was through bringing Karitiana informants to where I was living/working to participate in some research event (march 2000, for 10 days in a Conference in Petropolis, Rio; and january and february 2002 - about three weeks in Mato Grosso). The field work done on these out of the village locations enabled me to gather enough data to check the phonetic/phonological descriptions and analyses of the first two chapters in my dissertation (segmental phonology and pitch accent, respectively). With acoustic, articulatory and aerodynamic phonetic data in hand to support my analysis, I can now start writing a grammar of Karitiana. When I finish checking and completing the description of the morphology and syntax I will be able to finish the grammar, which will be published as a descriptive grammar to be used by the community in the village school. The dictionary will be an appendix to the grammar. I hope to continue studying the language during the rest of my academic life, and to try to find funding to initiate a long term project with the goal of producing a good dictionary

of Karitiana; the idea is to establish an office in Porto Velho (the closest city to the village) where some Karitiana would be able to work from time to time in this project, and keep in contact with me through e-mail). Such a project is interesting both theoretically and descriptively, because we can employ and train native linguists and get them to study some theory (argument structure). As native speakers get involved in doing linguistics, the contribution of the language to the study of universals gets more interesting because only they have linguistic intuitions and grammaticality judgments. A possible source of funding for such a project would be the Volkswagen Foundation. I have already applied for funding with them when I was in Museu Nacional in Rio. The idea was to initiate encyclopedic dictionaries in 10 languages studied at the Museu, but Volks accepted to fund the study of just one language. We chose Kuikuro, a Karib language which already had over 20 years of study by my good friend Bruna Franchetto. The project is very successful (it has funding approved for the next 4 years).”

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

“The Karitiana do not have any projects going on right now. I have no funding for them... and since I am busy trying to find a job myself, there is little I can do other than keep applying for funding.

“The field situation in Brazil is very complicated, because there are many indigenous institutions working on projects which do not give any results, and end up messing the result achieved by the projects which work. It's as if each NGO or governmental institution which gets close to a group wants to "own" them, and to poison them against other institutions. There is very little professionalism. What I try to do, and this I have learned with Denny Moore, in Museu Goeldi (in Belem, Para), is to work well and get things going with the community and stay out as much as possible from the white people's fights. This seems to work. The Karitiana have always supported me. In spite of my absence there since 1997, whenever I see my informants they tell me they have asked for me to be their teacher in the projects proposed by other foundations (but some other teacher was brought).

“The only projects in which they have participated lately are projects which intend to train teachers for the village schools or projects of degree equivalence (from fifth to eighth grade or high school).

“I got funding from CNPq and FINEP (brazilian governmental foundations) to do field work, from the NRF to do the education project, and from Wenner-Gren and Leiden University (Peter Muysken) to work on comparative Tupi phonology and syntax. All of these grants were part of larger projects from Museu Emilio Goeldi in Belem, state of Para.”

Warumungu

Jane Simpson (1983)

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Location

Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory of Australia

Speakers

The number of speakers has been declining rapidly; there are probably no more than 50 fluent speakers. Children and young adults use a creole with some Warumungu words.

Overview of project

“I have been working on and off for 20 years with Warumungu people, documenting the language, helping people set up a Language Centre, running short (1 week) vernacular literacy units for adults. I also worked with the school for one year helping with a programme for children in the school. Recently I have been helping with signage and documentation for a cultural interpretation centre.”

Community interest/involvement

“The community has a language centre run by Aboriginal people, whose job is to help maintain and document language and culture. Several adults have taken on the mission of trying to stabilise language loss, and some adults are attempting to revitalise their own language use. A number of people have done courses at CALL in linguistics and vernacular literacy.”

Ongoing status/progress/contact

“A team of which I am part has received funding to carry out research into early child language acquisition for Warumungu and several other Central Australian languages. At the same time I hope to investigate with Warumungu people the possibility of setting up language nests on the Maori model, as people see these as potentially a way of arresting language loss.”

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

“I received grants from the Australian Research Council, and from the University of Sydney for my research. For the Language Centre we received funding from the Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs (now called ATSIC). The courses were funded mostly through Batchelor College and SAL (now BIITE and CALL). I worked with staff from those institutions on running the courses.”

Kiowa

Daniel Harbour (2003)

Location

Oklahoma

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Speakers

Maybe 40 really fluent (age 75-95). The next generation speaks well, but not like the top generation.

Overview of project

Three general areas:

1. Theoretical linguistics -- exploring the grammar of Kiowa in search of evidence of Universal Grammar.
2. Collection of traditional stories and texts, for cultural / linguistic archives for Kiowa use; also, collection of idioms and sayings.
3. Preparation of teaching materials for younger Kiowas to reclaim the language. These are designed to be used by students in association with elders.

Community interest/involvement

“They are very interested in 2 and 3. Rather bemused by 1, though Vincent especially loves it when I confess to not being able to figure out what's going on; so, some have an understanding of the worth of the work and perceive the relationship between pure linguistic research (1) and the preparation of teaching materials (3).”

Accomplishments

- A few papers
- A dissertation forthcoming.
- A few texts and songs transcribed, but this will get going more next year, post-MIT.
- About 30 pages worth of lessons and exercises, introducing grammar and vocabulary systematically, but in a fashion that enables the student immediately to start saying things in Kiowa.

Ongoing status/progress/contact

“It's dying; people are frustrated at that and at not knowing what to do. There is a lot of positive feeling about my work, therefore.”

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

Ken Hale fund
MITWPL

“Together with Laurel Watkins (author: A grammar of Kiowa, 1984) and David Adger, I'm applying to the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme for funding for a 2-3 year project [concentrating on (2) with a bit of work on (1)].”

Previous projects

None. An earlier attempt died.

Taoih

Sonny Vu

Location

Vietnam (Central)

Speakers

26,000

Overview of project

“I was on a fellowship which sponsored some "field work training" which involved me going to Vietnam to identify a language to work on. I decided on Taoih which is a language spoken by a minority group living in a rural area in Central Vietnam near the Laos-Vietnam border. There are quite a few indigenous languages in Vietnam that would have been interesting, but Taoih was interesting in terms of its potential to have some very interesting data and the stage of its advancement towards language death (endangered because of number of speakers as well as general inaccessibility of speaker populations due to political forces). It's genetic classification is: Austroasiatic > Mon-Khmer > Katuic.”

“I was based in Hue (Central Vietnam) during this time - a period of three months - and was assisted by a local linguist, Thuan Tran, who was a teacher at Hue University.”

Community interest/involvement

“I actually could not get permission from the Vietnamese government to go to the community. I accessed speakers by going to a high school set aside by the Vietnamese government for ethnic minorities. The students were definitely very enthusiastic about the work.”

Accomplishments

- tapes of data on the language - wordlists, basic grammar, most of the phonetic stock - which have yet to be transcribed and written up into a paper.
- establishment of a relationship with the officials at the high school
- “There wasn't too much visibility of the project in Vietnam - this was somewhat intentional since I was working in a relatively sensitive area.”

Ongoing status/progress/contact

MITILI

“There are fewer and fewer native speakers - and the ones that do exist are getting more and more assimilated - especially in terms of their language. This is because the kids are being sent to Vietnamese schools like the one I was at. I have some evidence of the Vietnamization of their language(s). There are however a few monolingual native speakers of Taoih left - mainly elders in the villages. It's unclear to me (since I haven't had much contact with the elders) whether the younger generation is being encouraged to assimilate or not.”

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

“There were a number of language projects like mine going on in Northern Vietnam conducted by people at the National Institute of Linguistics. Central Vietnam is a bit more of a politically sensitive area so not very much work was done in that area.”

“I was supported by the International Pre-dissertation Fellowship Program by the (U.S.) Social Science Research Council. Apparently, I was the first linguist to have been involved in that program. I believe they would be willing to let other linguists participate as well, but the case would have to be made properly. Information is available on their website: <http://www.ssrc.org> If people are interested and would like to know more on how to properly orient their application for the program, I would be more than happy to help.”

Mohawk (and a few other things)

Mark Baker (1985)

Location

Quebec

Speakers

2000-4000

Overview of project

“I did some Iroquoian in my Ph.D. thesis, but it was all from secondary sources at the time. After I got my job at McGill and was near to the Mohawks I took that as my opportunity to see for myself if they really did incorporate all those nouns.

“I did have two experiences while at MIT that got me ready to do this kind of work. First of all, I worked with Josie Whiteeagle on Winnebago for one year as part of Ken Hale's lexicon project while he was away on sabbatical. I never published anything, but it was an important formative experience. Second, Ken Hale hired Sam Mchombo and assigned him to work with me on Chichewa, resulting in lots of the stuff published in

my thesis on that (nonendangered but "local") language. Without this experience I probably would not had the nerve to approach the Mohawks (or other groups since)."

With the Mohawks:

"I was trying to figure out everything about the morphosyntax that I could, and be a good citizen along the way. I offered people easy and semi-pleasant employment, and helped them in some teacher training courses, and in designing instruments to evaluate language use in the community and the effectiveness of their Mohawk teaching programs."

Community interest/involvement

"Only mildly interested. They liked to do things their own way (see below)."

Accomplishments

- Book "The Polysynthesis Parameter" (gave them copies)
- some related publications.

Ongoing status/progress/contact

hasn't been back in the last few years

Other institutions involved/other funding/concurrent projects

"I received money from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to do my work. I assume that their Education Centers and so on were funded fairly well by the Canadian government... but was not privy to any of the financial details."

Previous projects

"They had already written a grammar and some teaching materials, and had Mohawk immersion classes going. A lot had already been set up by Mariane Mithun and others before me. For the most part, they wanted to do it their own way and get the credit (and employment) that came with it. I was happy to let them, although was also happy to play a supporting role when asked. There were questions how effective their programs were, but I largely saw it as my job to mind my own business unless asked."