When Language Documentation becomes Language Archaeology: Methods for data retrieval in a highly moribund language

3L Summer School Lyon 2008
Cameroon

Adamawa

Kwanja-Land

Mbondjanga

The Kwanja Region

Yimbere (Sundani)

Nyamboya (Ndung)

Mbondjanga (Njanga)

Nigeria

Anglophone Provinces

Yaoundé
Difficulties in documenting a moribund language

1. Lost Data:
   - forgotten (speaker level) / lost (language level)

2. High Levels of Assimilation: (delimiting/defining the language)
   a) Speaker reliability (inconsistency, reliance on a limited pool of knowledge)
   b) Recognising language features from idiolectal features
   c) Sorting language features from other-language features
Encouraging Speaker Memory

- Regularity and Continuity (!)
- Photos / video footage
  - cultural events; from other villages
    - Domains
      - ’Natural collection’
      - Culturally-appropriate
- Group-work?

Relaxed environment
Texts: Searching for fossilised / unique forms

- All linguistic levels (text level-phonology)

NB. Codeswitching and Borrowings even in culturally important/salient texts
Delimiting and Defining the Language: Speaker Reliability

- Meticulous Recording of Data (!)
- Knowledge of peripheral speakers
- Different forms of triangulation
  - Lang comparison (see below)
  - Feedback
  - Matched guise (see below)

- Competence Tests
Delimiting and Defining the Language II:
Recognising language features from idiolectal features

- [ɕ] / [s]
  Sundani: [sùndù]
  Njanga: [ɕuŋdì] OR [sùndì]
Delimiting and Defining the Language II: Recognising language features from idiolectal features

- triangulation with other speakers,
- intra-speaker comparison when speaking another language,
- linguistic tendencies,
- likelihood/naturalness,
- behaviour of related lects,
Delimiting and Defining the Language: Sorting language features from other-language interference

- MATCHED-GUISE
  - Etic perspective
  - Knowledge of non-Njanga Kwanja

- LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS: Language Reconstruction and Discovering Borrowings
Productive Correspondences:

[i] (Sun) --> [i] (Nja): mandi/mandi; dʒebì/dʒèbì, nunì (bouchon), nɛmɛnɛ waˈ(flame)

Semi-productive

[u] (Sun) --> [i] (Nja): njumu/njimi, sundu/ɕindi, nduŋ/ndɪŋ

Other (possible*) correspondences:

[e] (Sun) --> [a] (Nja): seːŋge/saːŋga, -re/-ra particle, …
Thankyou

Laura Robson
lr81@kent.ac.uk