Life in Communities

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Class Outline

Day 1: Who are you?  Who is “The Community”?
Day 2: How do researchers build and maintain relationships?
Day 3: What are some models of engagement with communities and projects?
Day 4: What are some details you might not have thought of?
Day 1

Day 1

• Introduction
  – *This first class will introduce the trainers and our background working in and with communities.*
  – *We will explore questions researchers might ask about their own identities*
  – *We will explore questions researchers definitely should ask about identity (or identities) of the speech community*
Racquel Yamada

- Shaping Influences: native bilingual/bicultural; immigrant father; urban environment
- Flight attendant; language teacher
- Peace Corps/Suriname
- Kari’nja language project
- NILI
Spike Gildea

• Shaping influences: rural western Oregon
• Peace Corps/Nepal: Hindu (Nepali), Buddhist (Sherpa), animist (Sunwar)
• Venezuela: Panare, Yukpa
• Northern Brazil: Katxúyana, Apalaí, Akuriyó, Hixkaryana, Ikpéng, Tiriyó, Waiwai, Wayana
• Texas (6 years at Rice University)
• Guyana: Akawaio, Arekuna, Patamuna, Makushi, Kari’nja
Who are you?

• Your own history

• Your experience in “foreign” communities
Themes in exploring identity

• Language(s)
• Worldview & Authority
• Experience of (lack of) Resources
Identity: Language(s)

• Multilingualism
• Experience of speaking a low-prestige language
• Experience of being a non-native speaker
• Becoming a child again
Identity: Worldview & Authority

- Religious beliefs
- Education
- Technological expertise
- Knowledge of International history/current events
- “Everyone knows…”: Cultural expectations
- Flexibility
Identity: Resources

• First-world expectations about health, opportunity and “fairness”

• The researcher as “teacher/expert”
  – Trainer for language activities
  – Traditionally “in charge” of projects

• The researcher as “wealthy”
  – Employer/conduit for resources
  – Personally benefits from research
You don’t know what you don’t know

• You are an adult, fully competent in many domains of your own language, culture
• As a visitor to a new community, you may be:
  – Linguistically childlike
  – Culturally ignorant (potentially offensive)
  – Lacking important skills that everyone else takes for granted
  – Unaware of how much you are missing
Discussion

• What have you done in your life that might help to prepare you for the immersion experience?
• What do you know about yourself that makes you nervous about this experience?
• What makes you want to do this?
Who is “the community”?

- Labels for communities
- The experience of power
- Previous research experiences
- What does “the community” want?
- Who are the individuals researchers will interact with?
- Labels for individuals that work with researchers
Labels for communities

- The field (field work)
- The bush
- The jungle
- The interior
- The village
- The Res
- Home
The experience of power

• Being colonized
  – Political: Authority is with outsiders
  – Education: Outsiders’ knowledge is valuable
  – Religion: We have been so wrong…
  – Language: Diglossia
    • Politics and education: the “official” language
    • Commerce: local lingua franca
    • Home (& religion?): the ancestral language

• Living at the margins
Previous “research” experiences

- Explorers
- Missionaries
- Educators
- Anthropologists
- Linguists
- Documentary films
- *Ethno-* botany, pharmacology, ecology…
Who speaks for “the community”? 

- Political Powers
  - National and local governments
    - research visas
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs
    - permission to enter indigenous areas
  - Tribal council

- Religious authorities

- Powerful individuals

- There is rarely a single, unified voice…
Who are the individuals researchers will interact with?

- Political leaders
- Religious leaders
- Local schoolteachers
- “Stranger handlers”
- Storytellers
- “Natural Linguists”
- Experts in specific topics
Labels for individuals that work with researchers

- Subjects
- Informants
- Consultants
- Speakers
- Teachers
- Collaborators
- Friends
Discussion

• How will the community see you?
• How will you figure this out?