

Talking about community

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Our talk begins...



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- Eira (2007) “Addressing the ground of language endangerment”

*“The urgency of **community** ownership in the process of reclamation is far more important than the need to ensure conformity with a linguists notions of analytical process and verification”*

(p. 82 emphasis added)

“Community” in Language Documentation

- Bell and Newby (1974) suggested:
“There has never been a theory of community, not even a satisfactory definition of what community is” (p. XLIII)
- They then posited:
“A community is a cohesive group to which people have a clear consciousness of who belongs ” (pp. 5).

Talk outline

- Community in the Tower of Babel
- Community in sociolinguistics
- Community in field linguistics
- Our fieldwork community experiences
- Developing ideas of community in language documentation
- Towards a broader understanding of community

Community in other fields

- Barnard & Spencer's (2002) Encyclopedia of social and cultural anthropology devotes nine pages to the discussion of community.
- Amit and Rapport (2002) & Curtis (2008) have reoriented anthropological considerations of community from focus on *place* to *sociality*.
- Warriner (2008) convened a AAAL panel on issues around education & community.

Community in linguistics

- **Discourse community:** *a grouping of people who share common language norms, characteristics, patterns, or practices (Bazerman and Prior 2005)*
- **Communities of practice:** *a group of people who share a craft and/or a profession (Lave & Wenger 1991), or mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 1988, Eckert 2000)*
- **Speech communities:** *a group of people who share a set of norms and expectations regarding the use of language (Yule 2006)*

Community is important in language documentation

At ICLDC2:

- 38/88 papers had “community” in the title
- 78/88 papers had “community” in the abstract

Field methods books:

Samarin (1967, p. 11), Abbi (2001, p. 2), Crowley (2007, p. 70), Chelliah and De Reusse (2010, p. 7)

Talk about the need to work with the community and how this relates to data collection processes

Field methods

Bowern (2008 pp. 7-8):

- Makes it clear that “community” is underspecified.
- No definitive answer as to what constitutes community engagement in fieldwork.
- Also problematises issue of community engagement, e.g. who to return materials to (2008 p. 194).

Field Methods

Holton (2009) enumerates the many levels that could be said to be community:

- regional language center
- group of speakers in the capital
- a particular village or villages
- engaged and interested speaker

Discrepancy between expectations of (i) the speakers
(ii) linguist and (iii) funding bodies/institutions

Our experiences

- The groups that we work with lack some of the hallmarks of “community” that some people expect in language documentation situations.
- This affects the way we do our work, and the way we talk about it.

Lamjung Yolmo and Khumbu Sherpa

- Central Bodic branch of Tibeto-Burman family.
- **Sherpa** (ISO 639-3: XSR) Spoken in Solu Khumbu (~80,000 ppl.)

Kelly fieldwork between 1998 and 1999

- **Yolmo** (ISO 639-3: SCP) Spoken mainly in Helambu area (~10,000 ppl.), small group in Lamjung (~700 ppl.)

Gawne fieldwork between 2009 and 2012
[population statistics from Lewis (2009)]







Lukla airfield's various uses...



Others' observations

Sherpa:

"The Sherpa family is not permanently embedded in a web of close kinfolk."

(Fürer-Haimendorf 1964, p. 39)

Others' observations

Sherpa:

"Without denying that there are structures of 'community' in Sherpa villages, in other words, the point is that such community must be achieved through *overcoming* the basic atomism and insularity of the component family units." (Ortner 1978, p. 41).

Others' observations

Yolmo:

“conflicting values of autonomy and interdependence.” (Desjarlais 1992a)

“A household... is a corporation unto itself.” (Desjarlais 1992b)

Implications for how we work

- Legitimacy can not be sought by approval of a single body or group.
- Projects to create language resources are often initiated by individuals, or the linguist.
- Gaining broad consensus on things like orthography simply requires talking to as many people as possible, rather than a single top-down body.

Implications for how we say we work

- The current focus on working with the community means that we still find ourselves participating in this discourse.
- Although there are no formal community organisations, there is still an assumption from ethics committees and funding bodies that this is the approval we will seek out.

Conclusion

- There are many different ways community exists in language groups.
- There are many different ways to work with these community groups.
- We need to start being more concrete about what community means in different contexts both for our work, and for the way we train younger field linguists.

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**What does community
mean in your work?**

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