Evaluation of the Sumi language documentation project in Nagaland

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Acknowledgements

Sumi Cultural Association
Sumi Literature Board
Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research
Structure of talk

A. Project background
B. Project outcomes
C. Evaluation & Personal experiences
PROJECT BACKGROUND
NAGALAND
Window to Nagaland
NAGALAND

- Land area: 6,401 sq miles
- Hilly to mountainous
- Population: 1.98 million
- 16 main ‘scheduled’ tribes
- Languages mostly Tibeto-Burman
- English (official language)
- Nagamese (Assamese-based creole - unofficial lingua franca)
SUMI / SEMA

- 104,000 speakers based on 2001 census (Lewis 2009)

- Angami-Pochuri language (Burling 2003) (previously ‘Southern Naga’)

- spoken mainly in the Zunheboto district, but also in all neighbouring districts

- many new villages in Assam, east and northeast of Dimapur
PROJECT OVERVIEW & OUTCOMES
Project overview

“Documenting traditional agricultural songs and stories of the Sumi Nagas”

- funded from 2011-2012
- ELDP (Endangered Languages Documentation Project)
- Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research
Abokali Sumi, H.S. Rotokha, Amos Teo
Project overview

- Collection of:
  >16 hours of video & audio recordings
- photographs
- metadata spreadsheet

- Deposited with ELAR and Firebird
- visited **14 villages** across district
Documented activities

Agricultural activities:
- cutting down of the jungle
- preparing the ground
- sowing
- weeding
- harvest
- clearing of previous year’s fields
Documented activities

Other related activities:
- rice pounding
- rain invocation
- community fishing
- basketry and woodwork
- traditional sporting events
- war dances / celebratory dances
Interviews and stories

- explanation of agricultural cycle
- origin of songs
- themes of songs
- purpose(s) of activities
- traditional folktales related to songs
Archiving and Access

- In ELAR collection:
  
  139 video files  
  81 images  
  51 audio files  
  3 text files  
  29 ELAN files

>16 hours of video & audio recordings

- currently: full access to ELAR users
- still needs to be curated
Transcribed materials

- time-aligned transcriptions and translated in ELAN
- word documents
- audio annotations for some recordings (BOLD method) (Bird 2010)
Academic output (planned)

- contributing to PhD dissertation:
  - grammatical comparison

- working with Sumi students studying linguistics (Guwahati; Dimapur)
  - grammar of language
  - cultural dictionary
Documentary film

Yenguyelei Qha ‘The Silent Field’
produced by Mr Vito Sumi

Screened at Zunheboto Town Hall
Nov 11, 2012
Sumi Oral Traditions Documentation Project

FILM SCREENING

The Silent Field
(Tenguyelee Qha)

Shot over two years in villages across the District of Zunheboto, this film presents a selection of recorded material that covers over 25 groups performing different cultural activities associated with the traditional Sumi agricultural cycle. The film is part of a larger project aimed at documenting traditional rituals and songs that are no longer being transmitted to the next generation. Its title reflects the current anxiety associated with the loss of culture and identity among the Sumis.

A collaboration between both old and young, foreign and local, this project hopes to create awareness and interest in traditional Sumi rituals, and to help preserve the Sumi language and its various verbal art forms.

A discussion will follow the film screening.

Pic: Film screening
Literacy Development

- worked with Sütsah Academy and Northeast Literacy Network
- literacy workshop (October 2012)
- still mostly at advocacy stage
- curriculum design based on agricultural cycle?

Problematic to use – children not aware of this anymore
Problematic to use texts for young children’s books – too complex
EVALUATION AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES
Sumi Cultural Association

Benefits:
- driven by community desires
- able to mobilize large groups
- access to experts in various villages
Sumi Cultural Association

Shortcomings:
- focus on large scale performances
- a few members decide ‘what is important’
- unclear how to return output to rest of the community
Insider / Outsider perspectives

Abokali Sumi
- lived & studied overseas
- position as a woman in the culture
- expectations placed on her as a member of the community
- motivations questioned
Insider / Outsider perspectives

- ‘Insider’ positionality:
  benefits & complications

  e.g. Chavez (2008); De Andrade (2000) inter alia
Insider / Outsider perspective

Amos Teo
- outsider, but often mistaken for a local
- easy to blend in
- slightly different expectations than for other foreigners
IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE PATHS
Future work

- continue working with:
  Sumi Cultural Association
  local film maker Vito Sumi
  Northeast Literacy Network

- work with other Sumi speakers:
  other experts in local environment, plants, farming methods etc.
  PhD students of linguistics
References


Thank you all
Noshikimithi va na Mahalo!