Participatory Documentation:
The Mayangna Linguists Team of Nicaragua.

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Participatory Action Research...

Community  Research
Linguistic Training

Participatory Action Research
What is it...
It implies the ACTIVE participation of the members of the community.
The members of the community are AGENTS in the process of discovery of knowledge (not 'informants', not 'object-of-study').

Why? What for?...
The (self) empowerment of the community of speakers.
A re-balancing of the power relationships.

Participatory Action Research: The Mayangna Linguists Team of Nicaragua.

community-based initiatives

collaborative teams

Mayangna community
URACCAN University
Linguistics Institute IPILC
Antolín, Dolores, Fendly, Gómez, Salomón
Benedicto, Viñas, Eggleston

External community
Purdue University
IELLab

... in a nutshell
1. Setting Up the Issue...

- Re-balance, re-distribution of Agentivity

  - Insider
  - Member of the language community & culture

  - Outsider
  - Member of dominant culture

  - Power of decision about
  - 'who', 'how', 'what', ...

- Flow of Knowledge

  - Language Community
  - Linguistic Research

  - Power of decision about
  - 'who', 'how', 'what', ...

- Step 1

  - Linguistic Training
  - Language Community
  - Linguistic Research

- Step 2
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Outline

1. Setting Up the Issue
2. The Basis: A 3-pillar Platform
3. Implementation
4. Consequences Beyond the ‘Field’
5. Conclusions

2. The Basis: A 3-pillar Platform

1. The Basic Principles
   1. Knowledge systems of equal value
   2. An egalitarian relationship
   3. Self-empowerment of the language community

2. The General Goals
   1. To create a local indigenous linguistics team
   2. To develop a Participatory dynamic
   3. To create materials relevant to the community

3. Implementation Mechanisms
   1. A joint decision-making process
   2. A continuous training program
   3. A self-evaluation mechanism

Outline

1. Setting Up the Issue
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3. Implementation

- The participants and the location
- The individual goals ...
  – The community’s
  – The research component
  – The training component
- ... and ‘how’ to integrate and articulate them
- Evaluating the implementation
3. Implementation...  
➢ The participants and the location

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3. Implementation...  
➢ The individual goals

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The participants and the location:
- Sumu
- Spanish
- Miskitu
- Kriol
- Rama
- Garifuna

The individual goals:
- Actions motivated by the cultural interests of the community:
  - Traditional folktales
  - Traditional songs
  - Oral history (leaders, past heroes, past community events, cultural celebrations and festivities)
  - Endogenous technology (construction of kuring, of utilitarian and artistic objects).
- Free spontaneous language data
- Training opportunities for community team
- Targetted spontaneous language data
- Interviews to women, elders, students...
3. Implementation...

➢ The individual goals ...

Community

Research

• Description of the language...
  ➢ Grammar...
  ➢ Dictionary...

• Explanatory analysis of structural properties...
  ➢ Modal constructions...
  ➢ Classifier Auxiliaries...

Linguistic Training

3. Implementation...

➢ Integrating all the components...

➢ Initial meeting
  ➢ Brainstorming
    ➢ decision making process
  ➢ Planning
  ➢ Evaluation

➢ Twice a year workshops ...
  ➢ short, intensive
  ➢ Evaluation
    ➢ With respect to initial goals
    ➢ More awareness, focus
  ➢ Planning
  ➢ Linguistic training sessions

➢ Intersession work periods
  ➢ Data collection
  ➢ Preliminary data processing
    ➢ Transcription, initial analysis, etc...

3. Implementation...

➢ Evaluating the approach...

Original Goal
→ Linguists ... members of the community
→ to rebalance power inequalities

➢ Yes! ...

➢ Different individual goals
  ➢ Shifting goals...
  ➢ Individuals vs community

➢ There is a team of indigenous linguists

➢ They are participating in key professional positions

➢ Increased presence of women

➢ BUT....

➢ Power and responsibility...

➢ is power rebalanced?

In progress...
  ➢ control of $$
  ➢ project writing
4. Consequences Beyond the ‘Field’... 

Some basic questions

- The source of the ‘knowledge’
  - Who ‘knows’
  - What constitutes ‘knowledge’
  - The (neo-)colonization of knowledge

- Whose priorities
  - Whose goals have ‘priority’
  - How ‘knowledge’ is ‘distributed’ or disseminated (publication venues, languages used, etc.)

- Ownership
  - Who ‘owns’ the language
  - Who ‘controls’ the language

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... their implications for Research in western-style institutions

- NSF: ‘Broader Impact’ section required
  Specific programs for EL, with NEH
- Canada’s Social Science and Humanities Research Council
  Strong requirements to work with First Nations languages
  Specific programs for FN languages
- LSA, Committee on Endangered Languages
  - K. Rice (editor of IJAL), position paper 2004 
    Ethical Issues in linguistic fieldwork: an overview
  - Ethical research -> Advocacy research -> Empowering research
4. Consequences Beyond the ‘Field’...

... and implications for Education in western-style institutions, e.g., in the classroom

- @ Linguistics: Field Methods Class
  - The role of the speaker
    - Undefined...
    - Lack of recognition for the contribution of the speaker
  - The rights of the speaker/community
    - What is it that is being said about my language
    - The right of ‘return’...to know the results of the research
  - The responsibility of the researcher towards the community

5. Conclusions

- A collaborative system that tries to...
  - Articulate the needs of everybody involved
  - Recognize the different ‘knowledges’ involved
  - Re-balance the power relations involved
- Emphasis on the process
- Work in progress... Some successes and ... More to do!

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