A Multipurpose Record:
Traditional Botanical Knowledge in Language Documentation

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Background

• Botany for Linguists project
  – treatment of plant terms and names in language documentation

• Personal experience
  – linguistics MA
  – museum studies
  – ethnobotany
  – Kaipuleohone digital archive
Botany for Linguists

• Lexicon survey
  – survey of 6 recent lexicons – Pacific area
  – gaps in inclusion and definition of plants

• Interviews
  – challenges associated with botanical information
  – suggestions for improvement

• Suggestions
  – outside resources
  – elicitation, definition, presentation
Botany for Linguists

• Importance?
  – why is it important for linguists to accurately portray botanical knowledge/information?
  – examples?

• Expanding idea of audience

• Kove (PNG)

• Pohnpei (Micronesia)
Expanding Audience - Linguistics

• Documentation for linguists, now also for communities (Mithun 2007)
• Expanding audience of documentary work
  – increased sensitivity
  – technology
  – voice of community
  – raw data (Himmelmann 2008)
• Emerging sense of responsibility
Expanding Audience – Museums/Archives

• Relevance – language data generally destined for digital archive or repository
• Growing awareness in museums and archives of multiple audiences
• Outreach to traditionally overlooked communities
• (Excellence and Equity report, Museums and Communities stuff)
Multipurpose Record

• Intersection of the linguistics side and the archive side of language documentation
• Opportunity to contribute data to an interdisciplinary undertaking
Kove

- Language shift to Tok Pisin/English
- Complex vocabulary describing/categorizing natural world
  - *avei, varei, movue, venamu, romuromu* "tree"
  - *avei* "tree"
Pohnpei

- Linguists contribute to ethnobotanical work (standardize spelling)
- Result is more accurate data
  - useful to wider audience (linguists, Pohnpeians)
  - more accessible
Conclusions

• Expanding audiences – multiple reasons
• More public "project of knowledge"
• Respect for consultants, culture, language
• Opportunity rather than obligation?
• Place in training/education?
• How to increase accessibility of data?
References


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