10. Multimedia Resources for Hunter-Gatherer Research

17273 - Meakambut ways of speaking: Documenting night-time conversations in a semi-nomadic hunter-and-gatherer society in Papua New Guinea

Presentation tpye: Oral presentation

Author(s): Hoenigman, Darja (The Australian National University, Australia/Australien)

The Meakambut are semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, numbering about 45, moving between rock shelters in their mountainous territory in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. Using observational film, and combining it with ethnographic and linguistic documentation, my research is focusing on a variety of their speech practices, in particular on night-time conversations.

In this talk, based on examples from the field, I will discuss some techniques of filming natural conversations in less than ideal conditions: at night, and in a highly humid tropical environment.

16169 - Multimedia resources for Australian traditional song

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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In Aboriginal Australia, sung performance traditions, often referred to as 'ceremonies', are intimately linked to the social order, history and religious practices of traditional life. It is of great concern to many Indigenous people that these songs are at risk of being forgotten, due to massive social changes and constant challenges to their role in modern society. In this paper we present some examples of the intimate relationship between ceremonies and traditional Aboriginal life and show how multimedia databases and publications of song recordings are currently being used by Indigenous people to assist in maintaining these traditions.

As a result of interdisciplinary work carried out between communities, linguists and musicologists to document songs, a growing body of such material is publicly available, either in discrete multimedia publications or in online databases. Examples by the authors include multiple CDs, ethnographic DVDs, books with embedded audio (sound printing), several song-focused archival collections (DoBES Iwaidja project song materials (Evans, Sasse, Barwick, et al); ELAR Western Arnhem Land Song Project (Barwick, Evans, Marett & Garde); and ELAR Arandic Song Project (Turpin)) as well as online resources including the Wadeye Song Database (Barwick, Blythe, Ford, Marett, Reid & Walsh 2009) (http://sydney.edu.au/wadeyesong) and the Wangga book project (Marett, Barwick & Ford 2013) (http://wangga.library.sydney.edu.au).

However, there are significant issues to overcome before the resources can be aggregated in searchable form. These include:

Extensive codeswitching, indeterminacy and use of esoteric language in song texts, meaning that standardized glossing and translation to aggregate different corpora is a significant, and so far almost impossible, challenge.

Heterogeneity: differences in research collaborators, available tools, and research questions at different times and places have contributed to heterogeneity within the collections. For example, non-verbal musical information such as melody, form and rhythm may be represented in different formats, either by more easily searchable alphanumeric annotation, sometimes using specialized music fonts, or in highly detailed 'etic' transcriptions using Western music notation, which although far more information-rich are typically not searchable (output as image files from proprietary music notation applications). Unifying the collections has been achieved to date by summarizing such information in standardized form; much more should be done.

Structural issues: song corpora typically consist of multiple tokens of minimally varying repetitions of set "pieces", so are much less internally varied than natural language corpora. While representativeness within a genre is addressed by including all known recordings (including from archival sources), some songs and genres may be much more frequently performed than the others, leading to questions of balance.

We are still working towards assessing and resolving such issues.

16162 - OCCAMS and Milingimbi Cultural Legacy

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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OCCAMS is web-based database tool that has been developed within the Centre for Digital Humanities Research at the Australian National University in Canberra. It was designed for the data management needs of interdisciplinary researchers integrating photographs, film and non-visual data. A variety of researchers including archaeologists, anthropologists, artists, biographers, historians and scientists were the intended users. The system was initially proposed to fulfil the needs of researchers working with cultural collections from Australian Aboriginal people involving large numbers of digital media files. As an original researcher in the project I would like to present how it has been used in a current Australian Research Linkage grant: The legacy of 50 years collecting at Milingimbi Mission. This is a joint project with Museum Victoria in Melbourne and Indigenous people from Milingimbi in Arnhem Land. OCCAMS is playing a key role in the various stages of the project: Collection of material, adding research information, consulting in the community and will in the last stages reporting. The major collections from Milingimbi are held not only in institutions in Australia, but are also in America, London, Switzerland and Paris. The system is flexible in being able to accommodate information from a variety of sources allowing for reading and writing metadata, batch uploading of files, controlled vocabularies and annotation of visual files. An important aspect of the system for working with sensitive and restricted data relating to Indigenous communities is the capability to control access.

16125 - Sharing knowledge and discovering resources: the Ju|'hoan archives at ELAR

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Globalisation is affecting ways of life all over the world. Many communities live in remote areas practicing traditional ways of life while at the same time other communities are in the process of moving away from their traditional practices whilst others are undergoing--and undertaking--profound lifestyle changes. The speed of change we are observing is dramatic and for many such communities no or only very little information is available. Over the past 15 years linguists have collected data sets on endangered languages worldwide. These data sets consist of audio-visual recordings, transcriptions and translations, and are rich in contextual information. These sets are stored and made accessible in digital archives around the world. However, these rich resources are often only known to and used by linguists.

The data sets entail rich information important to many other researchers and especially to anthropology. In this talk we will introduce a new data set on the Ju|'hoan San community in western Botswana, stored and made accessible by the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) housed at SOAS, University of London. The corpus is the result of a three-year language documentation project funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Program (ELDP). The rich linguistic and cultural material to emerge from this project represents a concise window in the long and dynamic history of these people. It provides an insight to the challenges of co-existing with the more dominant cultures and languages of their agro-pastoralist neighbours, in politically and socio-economically unfavourable conditions. The shift in language and culture is evident not only in the language change, but in the narratives, folklore, music, and daily activities like cooking. The corpus also reveals the resilience of the community and the struggle to maintain a linguistic and cultural identity, often resulting in a merge of traditions and values. The vitality of traditional folktales, the embrace of oral traditions from other cultures, and the creation of new stories with alternative themes and motives, is one way that the corpus tracks the forging of this identity. The data set is part of the much larger Ju|'hoan corpus at ELAR recorded by Megan Biesele since 1970, on which she reports in Session 14 of this same conference. We will point out what types of materials are available that are relevant for the broader study of hunter-gatherers.

The success of a corpus is judged by the ability to be multi-purposeful. The wealth of these corpora lies in the knowledge that was shared by language communities with linguists, but much of this cannot be fully appreciated or understood without an interdisciplinary approach. These rich resources create the link within and between disciplinary boundaries and unlock the potential collaboration and the exploitation of documentary collections that are now available on disappearing linguistic and cultural practices.