

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04113-4 – Language Endangerment
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Case Study

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Dobrin (2014) comes to the conclusion that collaboration is not always appropriate or even possible.

It is normal in linguistics and in anthropology that research by masters and doctoral students is done individually and over a relatively limited time, and the thesis is supposed to be entirely based on the student's own work. This enforces a lone ranger approach, at least initially. Team research may be very productive where possible, but much of the best work starts in lone ranger mode and some of it continues in this way. However, the lone ranger's data should not just be filtered through a Tonto, a single insider co-worker; nor should the lone ranger remain aloof from the community where collaboration is possible and realistic.

CASE STUDY: N|UU/N||NG BY MATTHIAS BRENZINGER, WORLD CONGRESS OF AFRICAN LINGUISTICS, AND SHEENA SHAH, SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

As of January 2018, the western N||ng variety, N|uu, is spoken by four elderly speakers: Hanna Koper, Griet Seekoei, Katrina Esau and Simon Sauls. This is one of the indigenous click languages of Southern Africa, which include click sounds like the English expression of disapproval sound 'tsk'. A few years ago, ||'Au, an eastern variety of this language, became extinct when Hannie Koerant and Fytjie Sanna Rooi passed away. The four remaining N|uu speakers are siblings and live in the outskirts of Upington, in the Northern Cape province of South Africa, but they are not in daily contact with each other, mainly because of restrictions in mobility due to old age and infrastructure. Thus, N|uu is no longer used on a regular basis. Afrikaans is the dominant language in this part of the country, and it is also the mother tongue of all members of the #Khomani community. Even though #Khomani is an exonym, the N||ng speakers and their relatives have accepted this name as their autonym. The last speakers of N||ng are exceptional resources in at least two respects: they still speak a language of outstanding importance and they are also witnesses of a widely neglected past, the genocide of hunter-gatherers in Southern Africa.

It is generally assumed that humans originate from Southern and East Africa. While more than 100 indigenous click languages might still have been spoken by hunter-gatherer communities in this part of the world a century ago, only about a dozen of them are still used as community languages today (Brenzinger, 2013, 2014). Together with click languages spoken by pastoralists who arrived in Southern Africa a

few thousand years ago, Nǁng was classified as a member of the ‘Khoisan’ language family. However, as more language data from these languages became accessible and with the progress made in improving the methods in historical linguistics, this language family proved not to exist (Güldemann & Vossen, 2000). Nevertheless, these genetically unrelated languages continue to be referred to as ‘Khoisan’, simply out of ‘convenience’. We use the term ‘indigenous click languages’ as these languages belong to different language families.

Linguists considered Nǁng to be extinct for several decades (Traill, 1999: 27). However, in the late 1990s, Nigel Crawhall met Elsie Vaalbooi, who turned out to be a fluent speaker of Nǁng. Via radio, Elsie asked other Nǁng speakers to make themselves known and some twenty elderly people from various parts of the Northern Cape province of South Africa revealed their competence in different varieties of this language (Chamberlin & Namaseb, 2001).

Ouma !Una was among these last speakers and was fluent in the Nǀuu variety. She vigorously stressed the importance of maintaining the Nǁng language and culture. Tweek Rivieren was her birthplace, which became a game reserve in the 1930s; all indigenous people, including !Una and her family, were subsequently forced out of their homes. Ouma !Una was instrumental in the #Khomani land claims, and, after a long struggle, the South African government compensated the members of the #Khomani community for the loss of their lands by granting them six farms in the heart of the Kalahari in 1999.

Their language, Nǀuu, with 114 phonemes, has one of the largest speech sound inventories in the world; forty-five click phonemes, thirty non-click consonants and thirty-nine vowels are represented in the Nǀuu orthography. The most striking phonetic feature of the language is the sets of bilabial clicks, also called ‘kiss clicks’, which only occur in two other languages.

By ignoring fundamental differences between hunter-gatherer communities in Southern Africa, all are commonly lumped together and referred to as ‘Bushmen’ or ‘San’. Even though they do not share racial, linguistic or cultural features, hunter-gatherers in Southern Africa seem to have one aspect in common, a past that led to their economic and cultural marginalization and the extermination of entire communities in genocides. Traill (1996) insists that assimilation of the hunter-gatherers into so-called coloured communities and not genocide was the major factor for the disappearance of these people and for the loss of their languages. At the same time, he states: ‘Whenever they found themselves in their homeland, intruders either killed them or treated them with utter contempt and, through a process of

“taming”, extinguished their ... identity’ (Traill, 1996: 183). Speakers of some languages shifted to south-eastern Bantu languages; in the Northern Cape, many of the former hunter-gatherers abandoned their languages in favour of Afrikaans. Traces of these languages can be found in Afrikaans varieties, such as the one spoken by the Karretjie Mense (‘donkey-cart people’) of the Upper Karoo who ‘perceive their spoken version of Afrikaans to be a Bushman language’ (Prins, 1999: 48). More recent studies reveal that genocide of hunter-gatherer communities wiped out entire communities in the second half of the nineteenth century. The extermination of hunter-gatherers was not only by Dutch-speaking pastoralists; there was heavy involvement of Baster, Griqua and Khoi groups in the destruction of hunter-gatherer bands.

The digital Bleek and Lloyd archive (<http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za>) constitutes a huge database for the !Xam language, consisting mainly of texts recorded by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd with !Xam prisoners in the 1870s. Few documents exist for most other related languages. Since the late 1990s, however, various linguists have recorded the N||ng language as remembered and spoken by the remaining speakers. Various language documentation projects have focused on specific aspects of N||ng, such as its sound system, selected morpho-syntactic structures and the lexicon, but also on discourse-based descriptions and analyses. There is a recent grammar of the Nuu language (Collins & Namaseb, 2011). Another important source with audio, video and text files is the Hugh Brody archive at the University of Cape Town.

Katrina Esau, also known as ‘Ouma Geelmeid’ and more recently as Queen Katrina, is the most active among the remaining Nuu speakers. For more than a decade, she and her granddaughter, Claudia du Plessis, taught Nuu as a team. In 2016, David van Wyk became involved in the teaching and, through his initiative, a Nuu language committee was established in December 2017. Katrina is non-literate and Claudia, David and another young woman, Mary-Ann Prins, are the only non-linguists who can actually read and write Nuu texts. Between thirty and forty children from the #Khomani community and the neighbourhood acquire Nuu phrases and songs in Nuu language classes, which take place three times a week for roughly two hours per day.

Since the beginning of 2012, we have supported community teaching efforts, working closely with community members in the establishment of a community orthography and the production of language teaching materials. In a community workshop in Upington on 24 March 2014, illustrated alphabet charts and other Nuu language posters with

translations in English, Afrikaans and #Khomani Nama were launched and are being used in the community teaching efforts (Shah & Brenzinger, 2017). In 2016, an illustrated trilingual (N|uu, Afrikaans, English) reader in the N|uu community orthography was handed over to the community. The contents and format of the reader are tailored towards N|uu teaching conducted by the community. The reader is based on words, phrases and sentences recorded in interviews, but also on natural conversations. The twelve sections of the book feature different semantic fields and include games, prayers and songs. N|uu–Afrikaans–English and Afrikaans–N|uu–English glossaries include the N|uu terms used by Katrina in her language classes (Shah & Brenzinger, 2016).

Not N|uu, but !Xam, which became extinct about 100 years ago, is the most visible related language in the country. On Freedom Day, 27 April 2000, the new coat of arms of post-apartheid South Africa was introduced with a written motto in this extinct language: *!ke e: !xarra ||ke*, with an official English translation ‘diverse people unite’. Very few people are able to read, let alone understand, this !Xam phrase, which features prominently on all South African currency.

On Freedom Day 2014, Katrina Esau received the Order of the Baobab in silver: ‘For her excellent contribution in the preservation of a language that is facing a threat of extinction. Her determination to make the project successful has inspired young generations to learn’ (www.thepresidency.gov.za). While this award is an important recognition of the N|uu language revitalization efforts of Katrina and the community, much more governmental support would be required in order to prevent N|uu from following the path of !Xam towards extinction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Your university ethics approval requires you to maintain the anonymity of your sources, but your consultants want to be identified as the experts who gave you their knowledge. What should you do?

Your initial topic does not work out; the field site is inaccessible or too dangerous, the community refuses to allow you to work there, the language turns out not to be spoken anymore or some other problem prevents you from continuing. What should you do, and whom should you tell before you do this?