

Rethinking the documentation trilogy in endangered language research

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Descriptive Grammars & Typology
Helsinki, 27 May 2019

Overview

Grammars and language description

Documenting Manoki

Language documentation

Documentation of Manoki

End

The documentation trilogy

- ▶ A prototypical approach to language description involves linguistic research propped up by three legs
 - ▶ **Text collection:** (recording), transcription, annotation
 - ▶ **A dictionary**
 - ▶ **A grammar**
- ▶ Work on the two first elements has been expanding to include community-based approaches and involvement of the indigenous community
- ▶ This talk explores the question of how to open up the grammar writing aspect of language documentation to community-based research

Community-integrated workflow

- ▶ Pitch: old-school grammar writing in language documentation situations can be replaced with more intertextual, less linear materials
 - ▶ Which format is more adequate is up to the researchers and communities
- ▶ **Case study: documenting the language of the Manoki**

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What is “Manoki”?

- ▶ It is the autonym of an indigenous group in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil



- ▶ The first mention of the Manoki was as a group called Iranxe / Irantxe / Iranche in the 1910s, when Cândido Rondon's telegraph expedition encountered several indigenous groups in the Juruena valley



Brief chronology

- ▶ 1900: A Manoki village called Tapuru was attacked by rubber tapper Domingos Antonio Pinto and his men
 - ▶ There were at least 4 survivors, maybe more
 - ▶ As a consequence, there was some movement of groups and villages
- ▶ 1910s: The Manoki drifted closer to the telegraph stations and traded goods
- ▶ There were attacks between the Manoki and Tapayuna and Rikbaktsa groups in the area
- ▶ 1930s: The Manoki were approached by Jesuit and protestant missionaries

Brief chronology

- ▶ By 1953 all Manoki were living in a large Jesuit mission called Utiariti, with other indigenous groups
 - ▶ The Jesuits segregated parents and children, and punished the children when they spoke in their language
 - ▶ The various indians were encouraged to speak Portuguese, marry members of other groups, and seek work in the ranches or cities nearby
 - ▶ Occasions to speak in Manoki were reduced; the children grew up speaking in Portuguese; the rituals of the *neighbours* were forgotten







The Myky

- ▶ An isolated group in the area was contacted by Jesuit missionaries in 1971
- ▶ It was a group of 23 people, and they spoke the same language as the Manoki
 - ▶ They had fled the area in 1900 after the Tapuru attack
 - ▶ Diseases and attacks from other indigenous groups heavily reduced their population (a low of 9 individuals)
 - ▶ They call themselves Mÿky “people”
- ▶ Today the two groups live in their respective indigenous lands in western Mato Grosso



Terminology

For clarity, through this presentation I will use the following names with the following meanings:

- ▶ Mŷky - the name of the language
- ▶ Myky [miki] - the name of the 1973 group and their dialect
- ▶ Manoki - the name of the Iranxe group and their dialect

The indigenous lands

Município de Brasnorte, Mato Grosso



Manoki population and speakers

- ▶ 400-450 inhabitants in the Iranxe/Manoki indigenous land
- ▶ 8 villages
- ▶ Approximately 10 fluent speakers:
 - ▶ **Cravari:** Angélica, Luiz, Regina, Celso, Vito, Dolores († Inácio & Miguel)
 - ▶ **Recanto:** Alípio
 - ▶ **Asa Branca:** Manoel
 - ▶ **13 de Maio:** Dumitila
 - ▶ **Perdiz:** Francisco (?)
 - ▶ **(Paredão:** Alonso [does not talk])
 - ★ **Brasnorte:** Inocência
 - ★ **Parsi village:** Inácio's brother

The genealogy of Mÿky

- ▶ At first, *Iranche* was lumped together with Paresi as an Arawakan language by Cândido Rondon (1910):
“Para Rondon, os Irántxe são um grupo pareci, falando a língua paresi modificada, com as mesmas rêdes e casas.” (Pereira 1964)
- ▶ This was supported by Kalervo Oberg (1949), who met 5 Manoki in Utiariti and claimed they spoke an Arawakan language
- ▶ Pereira (1964) considered that they were *“um grupo isolado, como os Trumái, os Nambiquara, etc. A língua irántxe e a pareci não apresentam nenhum parentesco.”*
- ▶ Monserrat (2001, 2010) also considers it an isolate language
- ▶ I believe that there is something to be said about its genealogy



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Linguistics

- ▶ Linguists are interested in how human language works
 - ▶ How we communicate

(1) ✓ *The train arrived.*

- ▶ ... and how we don't

(2) ✗ *Train the arrived.*

Linguistics

- ▶ It is not very clear how all languages work
 - ▶ Inevitably, linguistics is biased towards big hegemonic Western languages
- ▶ The short answer is that we still don't know how similar and how different human languages can be (the extent of *language variation*)
- ▶ Unstudied languages are crucial for understanding the human faculty of language

Language endangerment

- ▶ Today, there are just under 7,000 different existing languages
 - ▶ By the end of the 21st century, as much as half of these languages will have fallen silent forever
- ▶ The library of languages is burning down at a historical rate
- ▶ The endangered languages that we do not document and study while we have the opportunity will vanish forever

Language endangerment

- ▶ Socio-economic pressures are behind most of language loss
- ▶ Once lost, a language is never coming back as it was
- ▶ The languages that will be lost are invaluable
 - ▶ To the human collectives that speak them
 - ▶ To understand our brains, our cultures, our history
- ▶ What can we do about this?
 - ★ Document and describe the hell out of endangered languages

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Goals of the documentation project

- ▶ The window of opportunity to document Manoki is narrow
 - ▶ It is already closed for certain types of research
- ▶ **What the community wants:**
 - ▶ To document the language and knowledge of the elders
 - ▶ To increase the knowledge among the younger population
- ▶ **What the linguist wants:**
 - ▶ To document the Manoki variety
 - ▶ To understand its grammar
 - ▶ To compile vocabulary

The tension

- ▶ In this case, the desired outcomes overlap a lot with the classic documentation trilogy
- ★ However, there is no time to do it all concurrently or consecutively

Mỹky tone

- ▶ Tone is attested in the language (Montserrat 2000, 2010)
”Often, the vowel in a long syllable also has a higher pitch (or, in contour, high/low), and similarly a stressed syllable has a vowel with a higher tone than in unstressed syllables. [...] High tone appears to contrast, and not only complement quantity.”
- ▶ The existing description is lacking in depth and detail, and a proper description is required
- ▶ We do not know if Mỹky and Manoki tone is identical or not
 - ▶ There are at least some phonological differences: /l/
 - ▶ /malula/ vs. /mawa/ “giant armadillo”

Mỹky tone

- ▶ Some minimal pairs:
 - /jamã/ L-L “small”
 - /jamã/ H-L “deer”
 - /jamã jamãsi/ L-L H-L-L “small deer”
 - /ajnã/ L-L “fire”
 - /ajnã/ H-L “evil spirit”
- ▶ Mỹky tone needs to be documented, described and analysed
- ▶ Mỹky is an isolate language, this is a genealogically unique instance of tone in an Amazonian language
- ★ The relevant data do not occur naturally in spontaneous speech

Speaker and addressee sex indexicality

- ▶ In both varieties of M̃ky, an inflectional morpheme on the verb complex indexes the sex of the interlocutors

(3) a. ♂→♂ or ♀→♀

Poku ko-pa-rã-meemĩ-∅.

bow scrape-REFL-M-3DU-SEX=

‘The two of them scraped a bow for themselves.’

b. ♂→♀ or ♀→♂

Poku ko-pa-rã-meemĩ-xã.

bow scrape-REFL-M-3DU-SEX≠

‘The two of them scraped a bow for themselves.’

The workflow

First stage:

1. Collection of recorded texts
 - ▶ Community workshops, training of younger Manoki
2. Description and analysis of parts of the grammar (e.g. tone, definiteness, sex indexicality)

Second stage:

1. Processing of texts (with Myky informants)
2. ELAN > FLEx > Corpus > Glossary workflow
3. Organizing the description and analysis in grammar form

Outcomes

- ▶ **What the community wants:**
 - ▶ To document the language and knowledge of the elders ✓
 - ▶ To increase the knowledge among the younger population (✓)
- ▶ **What the linguist wants:**
 - ▶ To document the Manoki variety ✓
 - ▶ To understand its grammar ✓
 - ▶ To compile vocabulary ✓

In this workflow, the actual grammar writing comes last

- ▶ Documentation urgency and community dynamics

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The end

Thank you