resource management (eg, Gelles 2000; Guillet 1992; Trawick 2002; Zimmerer 2000) and not on the specific values and needs of Totora’s residents, which was particularly problematic in a region without prior history of multi-community or intra-community irrigation management. Research in this region revealed a very different type of community organization that emphasized the nuclear family and promoted wage-labor activities in addition to and sometimes over communally organized agricultural work (Furman 2008).

The consultants organized workshops, work-parties, hands-on instruction and experimental agricultural plots to elicit the adoption of new farming techniques and, more importantly, to foster a sense of community, trust and cooperation among dispersed members. Though members were interested in the idea of forming a cooperative, once it got past the planning stages these activities were met with low levels of participation. Lahuachama members generally found the added responsibilities to be time consuming, meaningless, and at the expense of other, more lucrative economic obligations (eg, Mitchell 1993).

After four years working with the members of Lahuachama, the consulting teams were only partially successful in their goals. Members were distributing water with limited conflict and, in the field of agricultural development, the consultants had reached a handful of members who showed interest and had enough capital to invest in new crop varieties, growing techniques and irrigation technologies. The cooperative, however, failed to take hold. Its success relied too much on a uniform economic goal and the members developing inter-familial trust.

This case study reveals a problem of some participatory development programs. Though they aim to address local concerns, they still transform issues that are political, economic and social into technical issues (Li 2007), and continue to prescribe standardized programs valued only by external agencies (Ferguson 1994). The members of Lahuachama fought for irrigation water, but to assume that in sharing this resource they would readily change established economic activities or excuse years of inter-familial competition was not just idealistic but the direct result of the “business” of development (Furman 2008). Water and workshops alone cannot create community; the desire to form economic and social partnerships must be locally felt and valued.

Carrie A Furman conducted research in Totora, Bolivia and earned her PhD in cultural anthropology from UC Riverside in 2008. She is presently a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Georgia for the Southeast Climate Consortium and a visiting scholar at Georgia State University.

Local market where families in the region sell their crops.

For more photos from Carrie A Furman, go to www.flickr.com/photos/anthropologynews.

Preserving and Revitalizing Endangered Languages

An Interview with The Linguists

Dinah Winnick
Anthropology News

Gregory DS Anderson and K David Harrison have received broad recognition for documenting, preserving and helping to revitalize endangered languages through the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, where they serve as director and director of research, respectively. Their work is chronicled in the documentary film The Linguists, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008, appeared on PBS, and has been screened across the US (http://thelinguists.com). Since the film’s debut, they have worked with National Geographic on the Enduring Voices Project (www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices).

Harrison and Anderson have effectively served as advocates in their field, making the issue of language endangerment more visible in the media through the New York Times, Washington Post, LA Times, Wired, Scientific American, Christian Science Monitor, MSNBC, NPR, BBC, the Colbert Report and more. Anderson focuses on historical linguistics, descriptive grammar, morphology and verb typology. Harrison focuses on phonology, morphology and how languages shape the structure of human knowledge, and is an associate professor at Swarhmore College. Responses below are from both authors, unless otherwise indicated.

AN: What was your role in developing The Linguists?

Greg Anderson and David Harrison: We largely directed location and language selections, which were mainly our research areas, but we had no role in planning the US segment (Chemehuevi language). We also had no role in determining the film’s narrative structure and very minimal control over what footage was selected. However, we did successfully request the inclusion of one important scene, where Vasya Gabov (a last speaker of Chulym) explains how he invented a writing system for his language.

AN: The film emphasizes the situated nature of your work as field linguists. Do you feel that it conveyed an accurate sense of your work practices, environments and relationships?

GA/DH: The film portrayed a selection of practices, but only touched the surface. None of the “boring” prep work, which lasts for months or years, was captured naturally, as it does not catch or hold an audience’s attention. A major gap in the film that one might point out is thus how we negotiated access to communities or languages, which of course requires significant investment in the cultivation of personal and professional contacts with local academic and activist networks, but seems like magic in the film. However, many of the relationships shown in the film have matured considerably over time, so it is difficult to be overly critical of what was captured, as the footage represents just single moments in long-term relationships.

AN: How have different audiences responded to The Linguists?

GA/DH: Outside of academic circles, the film has been nearly universally applauded. Especially gratifying for us has been the positive reaction of majority Native American audiences at Sundance, in Santa Fe, and in Oklahoma. We agreed to help make the film to increase public awareness about the global language extinction crisis. We also hoped that it would help spark interest in young people who might pursue linguistic training and contribute to this work in the future. The film

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has been an unqualified success in achieving these goals. Some professional academicians have critiqued it from various perspectives, such as arguing that the film's content or narrative reproduce discourses of colonialism, underemphasize theoretical linguistic investigation, or give field linguistics an overly adventurous spin.

**Chulym-speaker Nina Tarloganova and David Harrison in a still shot from The Linguists, Photo courtesy Ironbound Films, Inc**

**AN: You have said that you don't like using the word “discovery” in talking about linguistic encounters. How do you deal with mainstream media’s tendency to sensationalize your work?**

**GA/DH: The mainstream media will spin any topic the way they feel has maximum impact for their for-profit business model and that is simply the reality one must accept. When given the opportunity (such as in public or professional appearances), we try to clarify the issues and give a more nuanced perspective rather than popular media will allow. Although many people seem to recognize media spin for what it is—an attempt to attract readers and audiences—what has been surprising is how some otherwise rational, even skeptical, scholars seem to swallow things as presented in mainstream media associated with The Linguists and our language hotspots model—which has similarly raised a bit of brouhaha in the blogosphere—without questioning the information source. We expected a more measured approach from some colleagues who have instead drawn wild inferences from mainstream coverage of our work and responded negatively on blogs, rather than seeking more information and less hyperbolic interpretation.**

**AN: Greg, at a National Geographic forum you commented that phonetic symbols can seem intimidating and exclusionary. How do you maintain a positive balance between creating accessible, engaging work for public audiences and strong scholarship for the scientific community?**

**GA: It is indeed difficult to negotiate one’s way through these disparate worlds that are at times at odds, but it was partly to serve this dual purpose that Living Tongues was created in the first place. In practice, catering to these different audiences is similar to teaching both a 101-level course on linguistics and an advanced seminar on complex predicates. One must simply know one’s audience and tailor one’s presentation of concepts or information in a way suited to the audience’s background and expectations. In discussing a single story, for example, a language revitalization case may be mainly interested in how it is pronounced and what it means, but linguist colleagues might require extensive commentary on the phonological, morphological and syntactic structure of the words and sentences. Sure, this means doing things twice in a sense, but with the needs and expectations of two very different end-users in mind.**

**AN: You’ve said that “languages become invisible before they become extinct.” What factors contribute to language invisibility, and how do you manage these challenges to accessing a language in a new field site?**

**GA/DH: Many different factors contribute to the invisibilization of minority speech communities. It could have to do with conscious decisions by the community to remain out of sight or under the radar, but frequently there is an external social factor, such as local dominance issues or government policy. For example, China’s policy of recognizing only 55 official minorities dictates that many minority groups will include more than one language group. Identities, of course, can be submerged to avoid discrimination on a local level, but it has been our experience that local knowledge is often far more precise about language variability than official records might suggest, even if couched within prescriptive or cultural norms that are at odds with a strictly linguistic interpretation of the situation. So while groups may be nationally or globally invisible they are often not so on a local level. Tapping into local academic and social networks is really the only way that trust can be gained and access to communities granted. Making an effort to learn about a minority people and to speak their language goes a long way toward building bridges for mutual respect and cooperation, and these efforts are often warmly received.**

**AN: How do you manage intellectual property rights (IPR) for the languages, knowledge and stories you document, as well as the audio and audiovisual recordings you make?**

**GA/DH: In our non-profit, the Living Tongues Institute, we are clear in assigning IPR or ownership to the speakers for their stories and other collected material. All linguists can really lay claim to accurately is the analysis they do, and in our own work we acknowledge the source of every form ever cited, tagged for speaker, to keep as accurate data as possible on demographic, sociolinguistic and individual variation. Individual communities have different ideas about how their materials should be made available and we honor this, both in terms of limiting public access where needed and developing products that accommodate the needs of speech communities, such as a talking dictionary for the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, which is open only to enrolled tribal members.**

**AN: Are there particular resources or initiatives that you recommend our readers access to learn more and to get involved in work with endangered languages?**

**GA/DH: The majority of the work in the domain of endangered languages is being done outside of academia at the grassroots level all around the world. The Enduring Voices project has begun to collect links to these efforts and will ultimately serve as a clearinghouse or information portal for revitalization movements. Living Tongues Institute works together with a range of communities, but none of this work is possible without public support through donations and grants. Living Tongues is a 501(c)(3) non-profit; all donations are tax-deductible and the Institute spends its funds to produce usable end-products for speech communities, such as recordings, dictionaries and readers.**

*For information on the Living Tongues Institute, contact K David Harrison at dharris2@swarthmore.edu or Gregory DS Anderson at livingtongues@gmail.com.*

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**Gregory Anderson and Sora-speaker Oranchu Gomongo in a still shot from The Linguists, Photo courtesy Ironbound Films, Inc**