Project Summary: Natügu [ntu] Dictionary & Legacy Texts

Overview, Objectives and Methods

Three intersecting factors make the next two years strategic for the Natügu Dictionary and Legacy Texts project. Locally, a Natügu [ntu] dictionary has been requested and community members are eager to collaborate with the researcher. Nationally, the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education will complete vernacular education pilot projects in two languages by late 2015, and products from this fellowship could position Natügu to be one of the next languages selected for government-funded vernacular education. Internationally, the Natügu project participates in The Reefs-Santa Cruz Lexicons Project, a collaboration between the applicant and researchers in the remaining three Reefs-Santa Cruz (RSC) languages.

Project production goals are: (1) to produce a Natügu dictionary with an English finder list, for two audiences using two orthographies and different media: books and digital versions for the language community and a digital version for linguists; (2) to annotate legacy texts: an 80-page handwritten autobiography with an oral reading on video, plus 15 hours of digitized legacy cassette recordings. The PI’s home archive, the SIL language and culture archives, will host the corpus.

The methodologies employed are: (1) two- to three-week Rapid Word Collection workshop to collect words by semantic domain; (2) use the lexical database software Fieldworks Language Explorer, commonly known as FLEx for processing of lexemes collected; (3) use SayMore software for data management of digital audio and video files; (4) incorporate Basic Oral Language Documentation (BOLD) protocols for oral recordings, and (5) use ELAN for time-alignment of audio, video and written transcription on a video segment. The work has three phases: (1) a two-month pre-field phase to prepare the lexical database in FLEx and to interlinearize the autobiography; (2) a four-month fieldwork phase for semantic domain elicitations, AV recording of the autobiography, and oral processing of the texts; and (3) a six-month post-field phase to refine dictionary entries, generate dictionaries, format books, and archive the full corpus.

Intellectual Merit

The dictionary and legacy texts of this project, along with the grammar and texts of an earlier DEL Fellowship will comprise the primary searchable documentation of Natügu. The language’s vitality depends on children learning it as their first language, and that is strengthened by being a written language. However, few actually read or write Natügu fluently and not all parents are transmitting Natügu to their children. The dictionary and related materials will contribute to language maintenance.

The RSC Lexicons Project is a collaboration with Drs. Åshild Næss and Anders Vaa, who work on Äiwoo [nfl], and Engdewu [ngr], respectively, and with Valentina Alfarano, who will do fieldwork on Nalögo [nlz]. We intend to a) analyze morphological and semantic principles of complex verb stem formation in RSC; b) establish principles for making headword and related decisions; c) establish how these principles conform to general theories of lexical semantics and compositionality; and d) develop a lexical database of Reefs-Santa Cruz languages which will form the basis for a historical-comparative analysis aimed at reconstructing its proto languages. Establishing the relationship of ProtoRSC to ProtoOceanic and its modern languages can help resolve questions about the origins of the RSC languages and the migratory scenario from which they arose, which have been debated for over 100 years. The collaboration strengthens the outcomes of this project and increases its long term scientific impacts.

Broader Impacts

The PI lived on Santa Cruz Island nearly 20 years. Her dictionary work will engage Natügu men and women from four age varieties, including 10-15 former co-workers from the Natügu Language Project and others in their networks. The dictionary has been requested by the community, and the autobiography will serve as a cultural history and advanced reader, with the oral texts informing it and vice versa. The use of the dictionary, autobiography, and texts in the schools will contribute to language maintenance. It is hoped that speakers of Engdewu and Nalögo can be trained in Rapid Word Collection along with Natügu speakers, creating language vitality momentum for all three Santa Cruz languages at once.

Impacts in the US relate to the PI’s teaching, where the proposed work would increase her classroom effectiveness in the language documentation course she teaches, and inform best practices in language and culture documentation. Internationally, the PI will collaborate with three colleagues on The RSC Lexicons Project, and will serve on Alfarano’s dissertation committee.