Methodology and best practices for community engagement and reciprocity of research – KBA report

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Overview

• Here I overview the main contributions of the KBA subprojects to the relevant communities

  – I refrain from suggesting ”best practices”

    • We all have a lot to learn
    • Each IP contributed to the community according to constraints of time and resources

      – For some components, direct return of results to the community was not obvious

        » IP5, comparative kinship, and the genetics component of IP4

  – I remark that there are difficulties in determining communities, and making sense of what ”they” may want

    • Especially in some cases of extreme endangerment

      – E.g. in the case of !Ora (Korana), there is one good speaker (aged 100), and a couple of elderly semi-speakers scattered in a larger area (with no contact between them), many of them (functional) non-literates.
      – There is no coherent !Ora ethnic group as such, people of !Ora descent live mainly in Tswana or Southern Sotho communities. Historically many !Ora merged with Coloured and Xhosa groups, too.
      – There is a group of activists that have recently had some land given back to them by the government in the Free State; this group (or in any case its leaders) tend to be politicised.
• The main domains in which the KBA subprojects returned results of research to the relevant communities were:

  – Orthography design and literacy
  – Products
  – Linguistic training

• The actual contributions were decided in consultation with community members, and community councils
Orthography design and literacy

• A number of communities requested development and testing of orthographies for the languages, and training in their use

– Aside from this, where this was not a relevant concern, a related contribution concerned spelling of toponyms:

• IP2 advised a !Ora leader and member of South African Geographical naming committee on the spelling of a !Ora name (on sign posts, maps etc.). In the name in question, authorities had taken a Xhosa click symbol (<x>) (for what is actually a different click in !Ora (/!/). Most people in the area being Afrikaans or Southern Sotho speaking, that wrong symbol was pronounced not as a click but a velar fricative.

– This was a felt need by that leader, who does not speak or remember the language, though his grandfather was one of the main !Ora informants of Meinhof in the 1920s
• IP1, IP3, IP4, and the AP were involved in orthography design

  – IP4 was involved in developing a practical orthography for ŽHoan

  • Little scope for testing since except for one person all consultants are illiterate

    – And their main consultants are three women in their 60s and a man in his 40s

  – The AP was involved in revising the G|ui and G|aana orthography so as to better work with Unicode fonts
– IP3, the Taa project

• Prior to the start of the KBA projects – within the DOBES projects on Taa – two orthography workshops were run with Taa speakers from Namibia in the training centre of the Omaheke San Trust (a local NGO) at Gobabis, in October-November 2006 and February-April 2008

• During these workshops, six to ten speakers were trained to write Taa according to our proposed practical orthography, which was discussed and significantly modified through feedback of the speakers

• Four speakers trained in the orthography continued until 2012 to transcribe recordings, and thereby to practice the orthography as a preparation for an envisaged training as teaching assistants following the intended language recognition in Namibia
• IP1 developed and tested an orthography for Shua in 6 workshops in 2011 and 4 in 2012, all held in Nata Primary School

– See http://www.hum.au.dk/ling/research/Shua/Orthography.htm for details
– c.14 people on the writing committee, and an attendance at the workshops of 4-15 people
– The workshops conducted by McGregor and Kure
– Workshops presented information on writing and orthography design, and recommendations made in workshop 6, 2011
– Workshops in 2012 followed up with further training and practice in use of the orthography
Recommendations for writing Shua

Background

Six writing workshops were held in the Nata Primary School from May through to July 2011, and attended by a committee of Shua speakers (see list of participants at end). The purpose of the workshops was to make an informed set of proposals for the letters to be used in writing Shua. The workshops discussed the sounds of Shua, and some of the main ways of representing these sounds in writing. This took 5 of the 6 workshops. In the final workshop decisions were made as to a trial system of spelling.

Main considerations taken into account in making the decisions were:

1. The same sound should always be written in the same way.
2. Different sounds should always be written differently.
3. As far as possible, use the letters used in English and/or Setswana to represent the same sounds in Shua.

Important qualifications

The committee’s proposals are understood to be tentative, and are suggestions that need to be tested out over time. The committee realises that there is no perfect way of writing any language, and it is a matter of choosing which look like the best options, trying them out, and modifying them if and where necessary. Compromises have to be made, and were made by members of the committee.

The reasons for the committee’s decisions are not indicated specifically here, for reasons of space.

The spellings of illustrative words given in this document reflect our best guess; there may well be errors, especially in the representation of tones.

The letters proposed for writing Shua

Vowels

Ordinary vowels (short): i (phi), k (khi), e (ke), o (ko), a (ka), a (ka), u (kuu), e (ke), o (ko).

Long vowels: i (phi), k (khi), e (ke), o (ko), a (ka), a (ka), u (kuu), e (ke), o (ko).

Nasal vowels: i (phi), k (khi), e (ke), o (ko), a (ka), a (ka), u (kuu), e (ke), o (ko).

Consonants

p (phi), b (be), mh (dhi), t (phi), d (be), nd (dhi), th (thau), t (phi), d (be).

Respiratory sounds: 

h (khhu), ma (mother), m (mouth), mh (dhi), th (thau), t (phi), d (be).

Tones

High tone: i (phi), k (khi), e (ke), o (ko).

Low tone: i (phi), k (khi), e (ke), o (ko).

Important words:

1. (phi) “puff adder”, kh (khwe “person”), k (k’gera “boy”), q (qhu), m (ma “head”), n (en “short”), ny (nyu “wind”), ng (ngona “three”), mb (mat “egg”), nd (njar “wombat”), nyd (nyiru “black”), ng (ngwame “wombat”)

f (mainly in borrowed words; possibly in a few Shua words; e.g. one pronunciation of ‘t’ in “tulip” (tulip) — also pronounced with an initial k, e.g. “k’r’” mother), dh (dho “rock monitor”), x (kha “cold”)

v (only in borrowed words), z (zela “cloth”), h (hata “four”)

Low tone: i (phi), k (khi), e (ke), o (ko).

Notes on long vowels: they are to be indicated separately on both the vowel and the colon. For example, e is indicates a long e sound with tone falling from high to low throughout it.

Shua Writing Committee

Orefele Aloso, Octave Andries, Tiny Bophie, Kagiensu Dilo, Mogolo Bevan Gabantshenske, Molatedi Gabantshenske, Kedzume Galebusitu, Selebcane James, Gakenkutwe Power Leakwa, Obusutwe Mphalala, Eider Masako, Lensego Odmuro, Keyakologete Reggie, Megan Seokese, Reggie, David Robson, Pono Zuka, Tshohelelo Zuka

Teachers in the workshops

Blesswell Kure & Bill McGregor
Some workings in the Shua orthography, from the 2012 workshops
Products

- Three main types of product have been developed or are being developed for communities
  - Documentations of the languages
    - Online documentations are to be produced by each IP, accessible to relevant communities – and others, given community agreement
    - None of these are ready as yet
  - Texts, including primers
  - Encyclopedias and dictionaries
• IP4 prepared a booklet of a children's story, containing English and ǂHoan versions.
  
  – This is thought to be something of use for the kids, who learn English in school
  – Although none will be able to read the ǂHoan text, it seems that people are proud of their language (i.e. ǂHoan) when they see that it can be written

• AP has a research field site at New Xade, Ganzi District, Botswana, where there is a small community library
  
  – AP contributed some of publications including a concise booklet *Encyclopedia of |Gui and ||Gana Culture and Society*, which contains many |Gui and ||Gana terms relevant to each entry, transcribed in a phonemic orthography proposed by our team

  • It is planned to make a fauna and flora word list, which will be contributed as illustration of the revised orthography to the community library when ready
• In workshops in 2006 and 2008 the raw version of a Taa primer was developed
• In a fieldtrip to Namibia in September 2011, IP3 tested and corrected this primer was again went through according to the latest version of the orthography, and added more texts

  - The West !Xoon version of the primer is currently edited and expected to be finished in 2012
  - This will serve also as a model for versions in East Taa dialects, which will be developed in an orthography workshop in Kang (Botswana) planned for March 2013 including speakers from all Taa settlements in Botswana

    » This workshop was planned for March and then September 2012, but was postponed due to practical constraints

• IP3 is in contact with two missionaries at Ukwi, who would like to participate in literary activities and who might promote them in their locality
• IP1 plans to produce a dictionary of c. 1000 lexemes in this orthography

• Will consist of Shua headwords, Setswana and English translations, and illustrative sentences

• So far we have gotten only a part way there – each word is being tested in the workshops, and an agreement reached as to spelling

  – The dictionary is envisaged as a community project with community input at each level, including the spellings of words

  » It is felt this is the best way to teach the orthography to literate speakers and part speakers

• Funding will be sought for further literacy workshops in 2013 which will target the completion of this dictionary
Linguistic training

• IP1 provided linguistic training to Blesswell Kure, a native speaker of Shua

  – In the field and at Aarhus University (10 months 2010-2011)
  – Kure has a BA (Hons) in linguistics, and the training was specific to Shua

• Including in transcription of words and texts
• Issues in orthography design
• Recording techniques
• Fieldwork methodology
• Dictionary design and preparation

• Kure served as research assistant in the field for IP1, IP4, and IP5

  – Furthering his competence in fieldwork methodology
Other forms of involvement

• Previously IP3 participants supported the Namibian Taa community to apply for the official recognition of the Taa language, by organising a meeting with Laurentius Davids (National Institute for Educational Development, NIED), on November, 12th, 2006, and another meeting with Maria Namupala at WIMSA (Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa) in Windhoek on April, 8th, 2009.

• The contact to WIMSA has been maintained during the KBA project. Active support is envisaged for the future process of language recognition, which depends on the final version of the primer. IP3 has exchanged data and academic literature with WIMSA.

• To contribute to the promotion of general awareness of endangered languages, IP3 participated in the newly created website http://www.endangeredlanguages.com, editing and sharing material from our Taa recordings in Namibia (2011/2012). IP3 also responded to a request by ‘!Khwa ttu: San Spirit Discovered’ (www.khwattu.org, a San Cultural and Educational Centre aiming at tourists to South Africa but also providing training to San in literacy, entrepreneurship, tourism, health issues, community development, craft production/marketing and gender awareness, in the Western Cape, South Africa) and shared our Taa recordings for an exhibition of San stories and survival (2011).