

An aerial photograph of a wide, winding river in a vast, flat landscape. The river is light brown and meanders through a dark, textured terrain. The sky is a pale, hazy yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall scene is serene and expansive.

# **Language documentation: Perspectives from Amazonia**

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**COLING Dec 13 2019**

# Language documentation

- “Documentary linguistics [is] conceived of as a fairly independent field of linguistic inquiry and practice that is no longer linked exclusively to the descriptive framework.” (Himmelman 1998: 161)
- “There is a dialectical relationship between corpus and apparatus – the corpus informs the analytic apparatus; but analysis – including everything you bring to the table when doing grammatical and lexical elicitation – in turn also informs the corpus.” (Woodbury 2003)

# Language documentation: Advances in the field

- Emphasis on strong community collaborations
- Multimedia documentation, prioritization of video
- Ethnographic grounding and interdisciplinary approaches
- Emphasis on natural discourse; attention to conversation, multilingual language use, etc.
- Open-access archiving

(e.g. EMELD 2005, Czaykowska-Higgins 2009, Grenoble & Furbee 2010, Seyfeddinipur et al. 2019)

# Variation among communities and regions

- Community infrastructure and organization
- Divergence/convergence in value systems and priorities among community members, researchers, and other actors (Dobrin 2008)
- Interest in and/or commitment to maintenance/revitalization initiatives
- Degrees of formal education, literacy, and/or computer literacy within the community
- Accessibility of a contact language between researchers and community members
- Access to basic amenities – electricity, internet, health care, etc.

# Language documentation is *not* a one-size-fits-all endeavor

Fundamental need for **participant observation** in documentation:

“Because it ties knowledge production directly to the development of social relationships across difference, participant observation can help documentary linguists think fruitfully about the social approaches they take in their fieldwork, whether these ultimately come to involve formal collaboration or some other form of reciprocity.” (Dobrin & Schwartz 2016)



# Language documentation in Amazonia

Particular challenges,  
particular opportunities

“The particular features of the Amazonian milieu exhort of us not only a deep awareness of the social and cultural contexts that are home to the language(s), but also a methodological approach that invests in achieving some communicative competence, makes time for participant-observation within the community, and makes a commitment to ethnography as part of the documentation process.” (Beier & Epps 2018:323)







Naduhup peoples of the  
Rio Negro region:  
Hup, Yuhup, Dâw, Nadëb





# Fieldwork: getting there...





# Living there...





# Participant observation





# Language documentation



## ꠘꠢꠇꠢꠂ ꠘꠢꠂ

1	Hhóh baib' tēh-in piŋg	1
2	Baib' b'óyn'an káikp piŋg	3
3	Dóh-ly ayúp-lyan un'up piŋg	6
4	Baib' d'ó' k'etép piŋg	10
5	Saná pó baib'	14
6	Mih táh nih pēj wodép piŋg	16
7	Baib'an yo'móy yókép piŋg	25
8	Hūgnih bahadp piŋg	29
9	Sohó ya'áman káwág wóitp piŋg	32
10	Baib' yán piŋg	36
11	Mihóy wád nih piŋg	38
12	Táhan ayup-ly yo'móy yókép piŋg	47
13	Wí' K'ég Tēh tēh-inan tóhóp piŋg	51
14	Hūp-ly Dóh-lyan wád dnap piŋg	57
15	Ya'ám piŋg	60



## Dicionário

Em andamento

Dâw – Português – Inglês





# Documenting Hup incantations



Epps & Ramos 2018  
Epps & Ramos fthcmg  
Ramos 2018



Photo: Danilo P. Ramos

Coca circle, Tat Dëh community



# Path-traveling incantation

(fragment; Ponciano Salustiano, 2011)



Yí no yó', yúwàn yí no yó' b'ay, nì ib' b'è'ét ãh hitã' yet ham d'áháb'ay, fĩhĩy n'àn.	Having said thus, having said that part, I lay down my fish-fence (pari) of life to surround the snakes.
Nì ib' b'è'ét hídàn hitã' yó', wèd, hídan, ãh wèd nó'ayáh.	Having surrounded them with my fish-fence of life, food, I offer food to them (the snakes).
Pũ'ũk, tàk pũ'ũk b'ò', pãhãy tàk pũ'ũk b'ò', mòt tàk pũ'ũk b'ò'.	(I offer them) coca, the gourd of latex-coca, the gourd of sorva (Couma guianensis) latex-coca, the gourd of rubber-tree (Hevea sp.) latex-coca.
Yúuwút yúp fĩhĩy n'àn, nìd'áh b'áw n'an, b'áwàn, yày mòyan ùy ãhàn, dèh hətàn, sá' mòyan ùy ãhàn, tòd mòyan ùy ãhàn, hm, mòyan ùy ãhàn, dèh hətàn ãh nóop b'ay.	With this, to these biting snakes, to the common lanceheads (Bothrops atrox), to the common lancehead, to him of the small root-clump house, to the water lancehead (Bothrops sp.), to him of the aerial root-clump house, to him of the hollow tree house, to him of the house, to the water lancehead, I speak (to them).

# Manioc-bread incantation



(fragment; for parents of newborn; Ponciano Salustiano, 2011)

*Yít nọ yö', ayup tehe pät b'ok, yęc pät b'ok,  
moytud pät b'ok, tug pät b'ok, sïb pät b'ok,  
dëh-sïb pät b'ok...*

*Hũ n'an, wayrö' n'an hũ' yí'iy.*

*Yęc n'an, moytud n'an, sïb n'an,  
yí' d'äh nïh hïdïh nág s'ïd yö' pïd, tïh nem  
d'äh nïh hey'-b'ah, hïd ta' yí' pïdï b'ay.  
Hĩ' ap hũ d'äh nï ten, wayrö' hũ d'äh, sïb  
d'äh*

*Yít nọ yö' mah, yup tuy hũ n'an b'ay.*

*K'aj n'an, met n'an, yí' d'ahan, nág s'ïd pïd,  
hïd hey'-b'ah, hïd nem, hïdan ta' d'äh hi yí'  
pïdïh. Noyha'.*

*Yít nọ yö' b'ay [pöhöy hũ n'an] hũ n'an nọ yö',  
Tu hũ n'an, tōhöt (?) n'an hĩ' ap ïn wəd këy  
n'ïh n'an.*

*Hũyāw n'an, moḥoy n'an, bïg n'an, tãh n'an  
yí' d'äh nïh, hïdïh hup sët heh hïd ta' yí'ïh.  
Hïd yam piha hïd ta' yí'ïh.*

*Noyha'.*

Having said that, I list the anteater hair vessel, guan feather vessel, night curassow feather vessel, guariba monkey hair vessel, curassow feather vessel, brown-rumped-curassow feather vessel...

*(I list) all the flying animals (birds).*

The jacundás, the night curassows, the curassows, having washed their oil,

I then surround the scissors of their lice.

*(I list) all the flying animals (birds), the curassows.*

*Having said that, (I list) the (animals that eat) the ucuúba fruit.*

The green acouchis, the agoutis, all those, I wash their oil, their scissors, their lice, I surround and send these down, I say.

*Having said that, having spoken about all the animals that dwell in the trees, (I go on to) the ground animals, the collared peccaries, all those that we eat.*

The pacas, the deer, the anteaters, the tapirs; those ones', I surround their hup-sët disease material.

I surround their piha song. I say.

# Incantation for removing magical spines

(fragment; Ponciano Salustiano, 2011)



*Dèh hiyö'öy, m'às töhö mòyan uy ìhan, weg  
yòh mòyan uy ìh nìh, hòp hup ãy nìh,  
tình dèh yǎh b'ah dèw, wah nǎw b'ah.*

*Yúp ãh bab' ni dö'öp, hòp ków, hòp ków tég  
b'ah, pu ág tég b'ah, bíy' tég b'ah, dèh  
hiyö' ni n'ìh, bíy'.*

*Dèh pòh ùt tég b'ah, ãh do' nenep, ãh do'  
neneh, tē!*

*Hǎ'ap dèh, dèh mi hiyö', ãh do' nenep, tē!  
dèh k'et yòh ham k'èt yǐ'ìh.*

*Yúwan b'iyǐ' do' yö', tìh wǐ' d'ö' nìh ten, nusö',  
s'ùg sǒ' ãh sopop b'ay.*

*S'ùg sǒ', sèhék, s'ùg húp ìh, sèhék hup ìh  
nìh, tình d'apbuy yup tìh bí' nìp, sèhék  
b'ah tìh bí' nìp, wahnáw b'ah, dèh sisíw,  
sisíw dó b'ah, sǐp sásáw, tìh bí' nìp.*

*Those of the lower part of the river, (the fish-master)  
of the white mud house, (fish-master) of the sand  
house, the fish-woman's, her water-vacu splinter  
burl, her water-abiu splinter.*

*These I list together, fish pimenta, fish pimenta  
tree splinter, genipapo tree splinter, pupunha  
(type) splinter, those of the lower river, pupunha.  
The deh-poh-spine tree splinter, I list those (to come  
out), list those out, until!*

*All those from the lower river, I list them out, until!  
I get to the headwaters.*

*Having listed all this, if it doesn't listen (i.e. the  
illness continues), I go up into the forest.*

*The forest lord of the paricá, the paricá-lord's, the  
weapon he made (i.e. the patauá spine), the sadap  
splinter he made, the abiu splinter, the water-  
brazil-wood splinter, the red brazil-wood, he  
made (all trees with very hard wood)....*



# Path-Traveling incantation: Textual structure

Section	Movement	Entities elaborated	
Opening			
A	Movement 1: Laying down the mussurana snake canoe	Types of canoes/trees they are made from	A. Introduction
B	Movement 2: Engaging and subduing the venomous snakes	Common lanceheads, water lancehead, water-duck lancehead, bushmaster	
	Movement 3: Engaging and subduing the stinging insects and other malignant creatures	Black bees, wasps, worm lizards	B. Subduing malignant entities
	Movement 4: Engaging and subduing the tree-people	Those of the major non-riverine ecotomes: caatinga, forest, swamp, hill	
	Movement 5: Engaging and subduing the dance-staffs	Those of the tree-people, the shadow/spirit-people	
	C	Movement 6: Engaging and embodying the tobacco-caterpillars	Tobacco-caterpillars, also marbled swamp eels, lizards, sparrows, seed-finches
Movement 7: Engaging and embodying the marbled swamp eels		Marbled swamp eels' bodies, cigars, weapons	
Movement 8: Engaging and embodying the squirrels and ocelots		Grey squirrel, red squirrel, ocelot, stump jaguar	
D	Movement 9: Shaman hides himself within the passionflower		D. Conclusion
Closing			

# Parallelism

(1)

<i>hup-</i>	<i>hùt</i>	= <i>tëg</i>	<i>-ni-</i>	<i>yë-</i>	<i>k'ët-ëý,</i>	‘Possessing a cigar, (I) enter and stand,
RFLX	tobacco	=CL:stick	VRB	enter	stand-DYNM	
<i>hup-</i>	<i>käd</i>		<i>-ni-</i>	<i>yë-</i>	<i>pem-yí'-íh</i>	possessing a stool, (I) enter and sit...’
RFLX	stool		VRB	enter	sit-TEL-DECL	(lines 138-139)

(2)

		<i>pũ'ũk,</i>		‘(I offer them) coca,
		coca		
	<i>[tək</i>	<i>pũ'ũk]</i>	<i>b'ò',</i>	the gourd of latex-coca,
	latex	coca	gourd	
	<i>[[pãhãy</i>	<i>tək]</i>	<i>pũ'ũk]</i>	<i>b'ò',</i>
	sorva	latex	coca	gourd
	<i>[[mòt</i>	<i>tək]</i>	<i>pũ'ũk]</i>	<i>b'ò'</i>
	hevea	latex	coca	gourd
				the gourd of rubber-tree ( <i>Hevea sp.</i> ) latex-coca.’
				(lines 22-25)

# Complex verbal constructions

3) *hid-nìh mòi sò' píd yãhã'-yë-k'ët-yí'-íy*

3PL-POSS house LOC DIST cast.down-enter-stand-TEL-DYN M

'(I) **cast down (their staffs, to cause the beings) to enter and stand** inside their house.'

4) *Ów-meh-d'äh nìh, hid-nìh sáp-át, hup-sap-ni-yö'*

lizard-DIM -PL POSS 3PL-POSS body-OBL RFLX-body-VBLZ-SEQ

The small lizards', with their bodies, **having embodied myself (in them)**...



# Strategic use of evidentials and markers of speaker authority

5) *hib'áh-těh=ǎy=d'äh*      *sop-k'ět-áy-ě'-ní-p*      *mòy*      *k'öd-öt,*  
origin-offspring=FEM =PL      ascend-stand-VEN-PERF-ASSM-DEP house      inside-OBL

*húp*      *mòy*      *k'öd*      *ni-sop-k'ět-áy-yöö',*  
person      house      inside      be-ascend-stand-VEN-SEQ

*k'ět-hup-käd-ni-sop-k'ět-áy-yöö',*      *píd ãh d'öb-yí'-bî-h,*      *nóha'.*  
stand-RFLX-pass-be-ascend-stand-VEN-SEQ      again 1SG descend-TEL-HAB-DECL      I.say

'...inside the house where the ancestral women **apparently** went up to stand, (the child's spirit) goes up to stand inside the house, (I) cause (it) to be transformed and come up from the river to stand, then I go down to the river again, **I say.**'



# Metaphorical associations

Shaman's engagement with entities is based on principle that their worlds are metaphorically parallel to that of humans – similar enough that humans can interact, but disjunct such that the interaction is powerful and/or dangerous (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998).

## Path-Traveling Incantation:

- Movement 1: shaman encloses the length of the path within a canoe that is simultaneously a mussurana snake (*Clelia rustica*)
- Movement 3: bees' sting is their ayahuasca
- Movement 7: shaman embodies the marbled swamp eels (*Synbranchus marmoratus*)



Mussurana snake



Tobacco caterpillar



Bushmaster



Marbled swamp eel



Amazonian red squirrel



Wasp



Ocelot



Passionflower

# Incantation as shamanic action and encyclopedic ontology

Lays out intricate taxonomic relationships among flora, fauna, spirits, and other entities; details their properties, locations, and associations within an ecological and cosmological matrix.

In verbally artistic discourse “the potentials and resources provided by grammar, as well as cultural meanings and symbols, are exploited to the fullest and the essence of language-culture relationship becomes salient.” (Sherzer 1987: 296)



# Conclusions

Work with Hup incantations highlights some of the particular challenges and opportunities of documentation in the Amazonian context:

- Deep ethnographic engagement
- Long-term collaborative work that attends to particular community priorities, including particular perspectives on maintenance/revitalization
- Need for extensive monolingual fieldwork and deep understanding of the grammar

Language documentation calls for flexibility, creativity, and open-mindedness...

There is no single recipe.





Thank you!