Linguistics 191A: DOCUMENTING LANGUAGES

HANDOUT #3a: THE YOBE LANGUAGES RESEARCH PROJECT
(main points of grant proposal for NSF Grant BCS-0553222, DEL)

“Each endangered language embodies unique local knowledge of the cultures and natural systems of the region in which it is spoken, [and] these languages are among the few sources of evidence for filling in the record of the human past.” (National Science Foundation (NSF), Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) program announcement, page 3)

History of the Yobe Languages Research Project

The grants

- “Bole language grammar, dictionary, and texts” (1999-2001, BCS-9905180): focus Bole language only; mainly support for Alhaji Maina Gimba to write his dissertation; one field trip in 2000

- “The Chadic languages of Yobe State, Nigeria” (2001-2004 with one-year no-cost extension, BCS-0111289): individual studies of five languages (Bade (two dialects), Bole, Karekare, Ngamo (two dialects), Ngizim); three field trips in 2002, 2003, 2004

- “Lexicon, linguistic structure, and verbal arts in Chadic languages of northeastern Nigeria (DBP, KAI, NBH)” (2006-2009 with one-year no-cost extension, BCS-0553222): continued studies of the original five languages plus one additional language (Bade (only Western dialect), Bole, Duwai, Karekare, Ngamo (focus on Gudi dialect), Ngizim); focus on areal features (lexical diffusion, shared idioms, shared proverbs, shared themes in songs, tales, aspects of culture such as marriage); two field trips in 2007 and 2009

Shared structure for the latter two grants

- **Lexicon** as a major component
- More attention to **morphology** and **phonology** than to syntax (in terms of direct elicitation)
- Information on larger structures ((phrasal and sentential syntax, discourse structure, etc.) based on…
  - Recording of **texts** (primarily tales, but some customs, such as marriage practices)
  - Recording of “**scenarios**” (narration of cartoons, dialogs based described situations, narration based on pictures or videos)
  - Written and recorded “**verbal arts**” (proverbs, superstitions, riddles, songs)
- **Educated native speakers** as the primary data collectors (as opposed to intensive Researcher-driven elicitation)
- Culmination of each field trip with **local publication** of one or more documents (dictionaries, collections of texts) in each language
- **Research Enhancement for Undergraduates (REU)** supplements for UCLA undergraduates
“Lexicon, Linguistic Structure, and Verbal Arts in Chadic Languages of Northeastern Nigeria (DBP, KAI, NBH)”

- Funded through the Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) program
- The languages are not “dying” and maybe are not even “endangered” in the near term; justified as a DEL project because it is an endangered language/culture area
- Some shared features, driving types of information to collect (turns out really to be two areas: the “Gashua” area and the “Potiskum” area)
  - Lexical diffusion (*gudugum*, large numbers of Kanuri loans)
  - Idioms and proverbs (*catch hand*)
  - Grammatical gender (feminine as the default)
  - Subordinate clause marking (clause final particles derived from nominal determiners)
  - In situ WH-Q and focus except for subjects, which are post-verbal
  - Folktale motifs (squirrel as the trickster)
  - Songs (innuendo in women’s songs)
- Methods of documenting
  - Filemaker database for lexicon (dictionaries produced as MS Word files)
  - Other Filemaker databases
    - Texts (line by line, with possibility of coding for structures)
    - Songs (not yet well-developed)
    - Idioms and expressions (hasn’t worked out as well as hoped)
    - Pictures
    - Kanuri loans
    - Comparative Chadic
  - Video: narratives, “scenarios”, phonology, morphology, songs
  - Audio: mainly collected by collaborators
  - Audio and video files edited, usually as QuickTime movies
  - Web sites: [http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/Yobe/](http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/Yobe/)
- “Work Plan” and “Broader Impacts”: these are sections required by NSF; the latter responds to a set of questions
  - “How well is discovery advanced while promoting teaching, training, learning?”
  - “[Does the project] broaden participation of underrepresented groups?”
  - “Will it enhance infrastructure of research and education?”
  - “Will it be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific understanding?”
  - “How does it benefit society?”
Linguistics 191A, Handout 3a

• Personnel
  - The Principal Investigator (PI)
  - Alhaji Maina Gimba (In-Country Director): impossible without him!
  - Nigerian project participants: teams of 2-4 educated native speakers for each of the six languages (at least some post-secondary education)
  - UCLA Research Assistant: 2010 Winter— theoretical implications of Bole “suffix doubling” and related issues

• Results from NSF-funded projects in the last five years (required for NSF proposal)

• Budget Justification (total project was $125,000; “indirect costs” 55%)
  - PI travel and per diem: air travel to Nigeria, housing, food, laundry, stuff for daily needs (batteries, bug spray, kerosene for lamps and fuel for generator, etc.)
  - In-Country Director
  - In-Country participants
  - UCLA Graduate Student Research Assistant (GSR)
  - Local travel
  - Equipment and supplies
    - Computing: laptops, software, storage disk, and printer
    - (Recording equipment for PI: I had my own camcorders (PAL and NTSC), audio-cassette recorder, and mini-disk recorder)
    - Local hardware: stabilizer, cassette recorders for Nigerian collaborators
  - Printing: local printing of documents
  - UPS mailing: dependable way to exchange documents between PI and In-Country Director
  - Miscellaneous supplies: stationery supplies, audio cassettes, batteries for participants recorders, furniture for work area, local photocopying, etc.

Not included in NSF budget: Gifts for everybody!