Luke Gessler
March 30, 2015
ANTH 5401

Journal 6

I spoke with a few other students in 5401 and decided to use this journal more for broad reflections on the experience in the course than for details of Arapesh's grammar.

Online archive. Speaking with other students about the online archive, we all agreed it was an excellent resource to have. I used it often to cross-validate my own transcriptions if I had reason to doubt it, and when I missed class it was invaluable. Having the archive around added much value to the course.

However, there were ways in which it could have been made more useful. A few common problems: (1) there was much variance in transcription style across contributors, resulting in difficulty in e.g. finding all instances of a word *napwe*, as it could have been transcribed as *nap^{w}e, napwɛ*, etc; (2) there was similar variance in glosses, e.g. varyingly "sit" and "stay" for forms of -*pwe*; (3) differing standards on how to segment and enter utterances: sometimes forms were entered whole, e.g. *douk ei yapwe əgɨndək* 'I stay/sit here today', and other times they were segmented word-by-word.

Obviously I don't have solutions for all these problems myself, but there are a few ideas I have. Professionals in the field of programming have found it useful for readability of programs to institute *code reviews*. This is exactly analogous to peer review of journal articles, except now with snippets of computer programs instead of academic journal articles. Why not also apply this process here? The class would at the beginning decide upon a standard of transcription, glossing, and segmentation. Then the week's uploaders would put their forms onto the database tentatively. The reviewers would look at these forms and either vet them or suggest changes. This would do much to address the stifling variance we see in the database.

One class, one field linguist. A loose goal at the beginning of the course, as I recall it, was to appoint one student each class as the principal investigator who would perhaps not ask all the

questions, but definitely lead the elicitation in only a few directions at most. At the beginning this was more or less adhered to, but before long classes came to be less structured, with each student in the class being free to interject with her own questions.

There are merits to this way we ended up doing things. It's good that if each student had burning questions she needed answered from last week's notes she could use class time to investigate that. And it's probable that much of the time other students in the class had been asking similar questions to themselves, so it was still a productive way to structure our inquiry.

Nevertheless, it seems to me there is more merit to the "one class, one field linguist" approach. When every student in the class was allowed to explore her own line of inquiry in a single session, I often found myself disoriented. Much of the time it felt as if there was too little data gathered for a single thread to have been resolved beyond reasonable doubt, and furthermore it required a bit of mental gymnastics to stay abreast of all the disparate threads being pursued in sequence by everyone. One outcome of this is that I felt discouraged from asking my own questions in class, as I did not feel I would have sufficient opportunity to fully probe whatever it was I wanted to investigate—be it deictic pronouns, verbal conjugation paradigms, feasibility of "decomposition" of serial verb constructions, etc. To be certain, for many classes we did plan out in advance which topics we'd address, like verbs of motion or pronouns, but even these can be explored in many different ways, and it seems desirable to have only a single person at a time exploring them in a thorough way.