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Ju|'hoan and X'ao- 'aen documentation in Namibia: overcoming obstacles to community-based language documentation

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Megan Biesele, Lee Pratchett, & Taesun Moon

1. Introduction[1]

This paper describes the past, present, and future of a remotely-sited, community-based language documentation project near the border between Namibia and Botswana, where the Juǀ'hoan (ktz) and ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen (aue) languages are spoken. The paper presents an example of reignited linguistic pride within a community which speaks an indigenous language in danger of being supplanted by more dominant ones.

We review the various obstacles encountered and the ways in which the project managed to overcome them, paving the way for future new developments. Some of the issues and solutions are culture-specific, while others are widely applicable to similar projects. In Section 3 we outline some of the technical problems faced and solved in the course of the first decade of the Juǀ'hoan Transcription Group (JTG), while in Section 4 other project problems are discussed. These include practical ones such as limitations in the existing Namibian school system, as well as physical problems of the remote location, and social and political problems stemming largely from the attempt to foster a specialized project within a still fiercely egalitarian, recently hunter-gatherer society, which puts high priority on making community-wide consensual decisions. The future of the Juǀ'hoan Transcription Project will involve finding solutions to these problems as well as to extending documentation to ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, which is the topic of Section 5. There we

elaborate on how we can expect a number of new obstacles, and how the future documentation will benefit from the progress and experience gained from the Ju|’hoan project’s past.

2. The sociolinguistic contexts of Ju|’hoan and ǂX’ao-ǁ’aen

2.1 Ju|’hoan

Ju|’hoan is the first language of a group of former foragers of the Nyae Nyae region in north-east Namibia and adjacent north-west Botswana, but its future is threatened. Current estimates of speakers range downward from 33,600 (Lewis 2009) to 11,000 (Biesele & Hitchcock 2011: 5), but even this latter estimate may be high. At the project site, Tsumkwe (in Nyae Nyae, Namibia), which is home to some 2,000 Ju|’hoan San, Ju|’hoan is still learned at home and precariously holds national educational language status to Grade 4 via the Village Schools Project (VSP) begun by Biesele and Patrick Dickens in 1990. Ju|’hoan youth in other parts of Namibia are losing the language due to economic and political circumstances, and although it persists in religious healing, language attrition is clearly underway. In Botswana, with perhaps 5,000 speakers, Ju|’hoan is even less available to children because schooling is exclusively Setswana-medium and English-medium. Neighbouring languages and dialects include (Khoisan): !Xun, Hai‖om, Khoe, ǂX’ao-ǁ’aen, Naro (see Güldemann & Vossen 2000 for a general introduction to Khoisan linguistics) and (Bantu): Otjiherero, SeYei, SeKwanyama.

In contact situations Ju|’hoan speakers switch to Afrikaans, English, or Setswana. Nevertheless, the language has unparalleled ongoing potential for comprehensive documentation in Nyae Nyae, where the Ju|’hoan have avoided dispossession and fragmentation by creating an internationally recognized land conservancy. Ju|’hoan culture in Nyae Nyae is the most extensively studied, via long-term projects such as the Harvard Kalahari Research Project (HKRP), which includes Biesele. Additionally, Ju|’hoan, especially in Nyae Nyae as enabled by HKRP, VSP, and a new Namibian commitment to minority radio, is now experiencing community-based revitalisation. This project in digital documentation of Ju|’hoan language and culture is thus the culmination of 41 years of research, audio/video documentation, and language activism by anthropologist Biesele, her team of Ju|’hoan trainees, and linguistic consultants. It is based on community education in Ju|’hoan literacy, begun over 20 years ago by Biesele and the late linguist Patrick Dickens, who provided the orthography, dictionary, grammar (Dickens 1991, 1994, 2005), and curriculum materials for the Village Schools

Project and its development, the Ju|'hoan Transcription Group, both of which are in operation today.

2.2 ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen

ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen is spoken by about 2,000 San in the Omaheke province of Namibia and by 2,000 San in the Ghanzi district in neighbouring Botswana (Figure 1, see also Lewis 2009). ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen is a Naro exonym meaning 'northern people'. Community members generally define themselves as Ju|'hoansi or 'true people', although the situation is complex (see section 5.2). Linguists consider Ju a language-complex as there are no clear boundaries between the different dialects. The northernmost varieties are found in Angola. ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen is the southernmost variety, and thus its documentation is of utmost value to our knowledge of the Ju language-complex. The geographical position of ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, and the borders it shares with other neighbouring non-Ju San communities, lends itself to the study of broader Khoisan language typology. There are points of contact between ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen and both Taa and Khoe languages; thus, ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen may have very different loan patterns from other south-eastern Ju varieties like Ju|'hoan.

Figure 1: Distribution of ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen communities (Map by Simon Argus)

2.3 Socio-historical comparison

While the Ju|'hoan are said to be the most documented indigenous people in anthropology (Biesele & Hitchcock 2011: vii) and the Ju|'hoan grammar, dictionary, literacy primers and book of folklore are all accomplishments in which the Ju|'hoan people take great pride, for their ≠X'ao-ǁ'aen relatives some 200km south of Tsumkwe in Nyae Nyae it is quite a different story.

Under former South West Africa, the Ju|'hoan of Nyae Nyae were granted the right to live on a kind of native reserve, or 'homeland', called Bushmanland. Despite the fact that many of these San were also forced to vacate their *n!ore*[2] and that the new homelands were a far cry from the freedom and resources they had previously enjoyed, it was still a better fate than that which awaited the Ju|'hoan of the Omaheke. Forced to work on Afrikaner and Herero farms, many Omaheke Ju|'hoan communities were torn apart and became completely isolated. As whole families would often reside on a single farm, and as life on the farms often enforced strict labour regimes, groups found it more and more difficult to congregate and participate in traditional customs and rituals. Whilst in Nyae Nyae activists and academics strived to achieve a 'mixed economy' (Biesele & Hitchcock 2011), to which the JTG has significantly contributed, the Omaheke Ju|'hoan have been made entirely dependent on a local economy in which they play the role of the lowest underdog. Some language consultants are embarrassed to talk about their culture, and many are unable to give accounts of life around the camp fire or retell the stories their grandparents told as they will have been working on farms. Much of their traditional way of life has been drastically distorted in wars, corruption and by the people being uprooted from their *n!ore*.

3. The Project's Past: overcoming transcription problems through the use of ELAN

Ju|'hoan language documentation has grown from the grass-roots of the Nyae Nyae community. It arose from an intricate situation of community politics and development around the time of Namibian Independence (1990) that made very obvious an educational crisis among Ju|'hoan youth. Community leaders called on NGOs and donors, anthropologists and linguists in an effort to make sure young Ju|'hoan were not excluded from the educational processes that would be necessary for their future in independent Namibia.

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[2]　A powerful term for all Ju|'hoan which defines the land where they were born and over which they had long acted as stewards (Biesele & Hitchcock 2011: 55ff).

Their Village Schools Project (VSP) was a response to the crisis: it continues today to link the remote Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoan community to the national educational system in Namibia.

Linguists who paved the way towards the Village Schools Project included Ferdinand Weich, Ernst Westphal, Tony Traill, and Rainer Vossen. Patrick Dickens brought it into being. Linguists who have helped the Ju|'hoan Transcription Project (JTP) grow from the VSP include Amanda Miller, Wilfrid Haacke, Levi Namaseb, Tom Güldemann, Bonny Sands, Sheena Shah, Tony Woodbury, and Taesun Moon. The project has been careful to resist folklorisation and literate edits, hewing as closely as possible at all times to the actual utterances of the 40-year collection of recorded folklore, healing texts, oral history, songs, and dreams. It grew during the 1980s to include political meeting speeches and other documents of contemporary history, and now the JTG is the 'go-to' group for documenting political events in Nyae Nyae.

The transcription project started in 2002 with a donation of four laptops and hiring Catherine Collett as technical assistant to train native speakers of Ju|'hoan on-site in Tsumkwe, Namibia, in the basic computer skills necessary to transcribe and translate the extensive audio recordings collected between 1970 and 2002 by Biesele. For the first five years, the transcribers used Microsoft Word and a playback program called ExpressScribe to transcribe the recordings and provide line-by-line translations into English. Unfortunately, there were several problems with this set-up, whose frustrations provided the motivation to experiment with and transition to a different program. Word is of course a proprietary program not intended for transcription of the type we were wishing to carry out; Word files are also not preservable. ExpressScribe also had a few minor issues: it could only replay predefined lengths of time, such as the last 10 seconds, and it was often difficult to locate a previous utterance and play it back. Additionally the program made copies of the sound files into a temporary directory, and if a user failed to close a sound file after transcription, the copy remained in the temporary directory, eventually filling up the laptop's hard drive space (which was how the problem was discovered). Having to use and switch between two programs was also complicated and prone to error.

At the beginning of 2008 the transcribers switched to using ELAN[3], after less than two days of training. We found there were several benefits of using a dedicated transcribing tool:

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[3] See http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/, accessed 2012-11-02

ELAN forces greater fidelity to what is being said because of time alignment with the audio signal. When they were transcribing with Word the transcribers 'edited' the transcriptions to read more like written texts. Once a raw transcription was complete in Word and ExpressScribe, the transcribers would go over the transcription and translation – sometimes without listening to the audio – and edit the texts to 'correct' perceived grammatical mistakes, spoken infelicities, disruptions in narrative and other textual issues to create 'better' texts.

ELAN allows for multiple speakers in the transcriptions, each in a separate tier, enabling easy representation of utterance overlaps.

ELAN does not have elaborate font and paragraph settings. When using Word the transcribers always applied different font properties to titles, headers, transcriptions and translations, which consumed time and did not add to the quality of the transcriptions.

We also found that transcription speed greatly increased. Our fastest transcriber, for example, by 2009 could process a 10 minute sound file in two days or less, when the same sound file would have taken him about a week using Word. Ju|'hoan Folktales, the first book based on transcriptions made with ELAN, was published in June 2009 (Biesele et al. 2009), less than a year after use of ELAN began. The book is a collection of 14 folktales selected from among Biesele's recordings and transcribed over an intense, one-month session in the summer of 2008.

Nonetheless, in spite of these successes, some technological challenges remain, one having to do with ELAN and the other more general. The full mechanism required for ELAN is still complicated to some degree, such as defining tiers and dependencies, adding tiers, etc. These aspects of ELAN have proved far more difficult to teach than transcription. Nonetheless, occasions when customizing tiers is necessary are rare and do not pose a challenge to the maintainability of the project, even without the presence of an external supervisor. The more serious, perhaps crippling, problem is the difficulty of training the transcribers in file handling and file management. In spite of nearly seven years of computer training for some of the transcribers, files still get lost, are transcribed two or more times by different people, or are associated with incorrect sound files when there is no external supervisor to manage the files. This problem is not limited only to the less computer-literate transcribers. It is a problem that has been and still is observed for all the transcribers. The only solution for the moment is that the external supervisor manages all workflow processes apart from the transcription proper. In the future, we hope to be able to surmount this problem.

In 2011 we began using Dropbox,[4] a secure and reliable way to store and transfer files over an internet connection, so that documents and sound files can be exchanged between the United States, Germany and Namibia almost instantaneously.

Training native speakers of Ju|'hoan how to use the transcription software and operational details associated with digital transcription serve the long-term goal of preserving and disseminating this data. Database and dissemination activities form part of our ongoing plans to make the contents of the collection accessible and searchable on websites and online archives. The digitization of more than 1100 files of Ju|'hoan sound, transcriptions, and other linguistic materials was completed in 2010 by the Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Service of the University of Texas, enabling the deposit, in early 2011, of an extensive collection of materials with the Endangered Languages Archives (ELAR) at the School of Oriental and African Studies. In June 2012 this archive became accessible according to our specified access protocols, is detailed in a metadata spreadsheet and is able to be continuously updated. [5]

4. The Present: Problems addressed thus far with the Ju|'hoan Transcription Group

4.1 Practical

Perhaps the greatest practical problem facing this project over the years has been the technical one of transforming Biesele's diverse analogue collection of Ju|'hoan audio materials into usable digital form. In order to include Ju|'hoan people's expertise in their own language in the transcriptions and translations, the project had to face a problematic educational situation in both Botswana and Namibia. In both countries, access to schooling has been very minimal in the areas inhabited by the Ju|'hoan. In Namibia up to the time of Independence all schooling was Afrikaans-medium. In order to get started, the project had first to start an alternative school project, the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project (VSP), to teach Ju|'hoan students firstly how to read and write their own language, and then how to use that literate skill as a bridge to English. With the late linguist Patrick Dickens, Biesele and others started the

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4 http://www.dropbox.com.

5 See http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/juhuan-55892, accessed 2012-11-02

VSP in 1990, creating linguistic and curricular materials that later supported the creation of the Ju|'hoan Transcription Group (JTG). Most of the current JTG transcribers were originally pupils and teachers in the VSP, which is still ongoing today, having become part of the national educational system of Namibia.

Other practical problems were legion in this remote area of north-western Namibia. They ranged from the lack of basic civic infrastructure such as roads, public transport, clean water and sanitation, to challenges such as lack of housing, electricity, health services, and the extreme basic poverty of the population. Over the years the project moved from solar-powered laptops to generator power, but to do so it had to raise funds to build a free-standing structure associated with a small library in Tsumkwe, the administrative centre of Nyae Nyae. Finally being able to go indoors after many years of combating very high and very low temperatures, wind, blowing sand, gnawing rodents, and unpredictable battery life has greatly increased the efficiency of the project.

4.2 Social and political

The egalitarian ethos of the San people has provided both strengths and challenges to the transcription project, some of them completely unanticipated at its start. Although the work has benefited from the collaborative spirit of the transcribers, who discuss the work mutually and help each other at every opportunity, others in the Ju|'hoan community have sometimes been jealous that they have not had the employment opportunities enjoyed by the JTG members. A large part of the work of the project has been to make sure that the Ju|'hoan people's organization, now called the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, continues to feel a sense of community ownership and pride in the project. It has also been very important to extend training opportunities to younger Ju|'hoan. We are happy to report that the JTG members themselves came up with the idea for, and structure of, a youth training project. This project began in 2009 and continues today.

It has also been very important that the project use the consensual or group-decision-making processes common in the wider Ju|'hoan society. In general, Ju|'hoan people are greatly suspicious of anyone who tries to self-aggrandise or to stand out from others. Individual leadership is often trumped, for them, by more judicious 'leadership by committee' processes. At the same time, this egalitarian ethos has made it hard for individuals to take on specific roles and positions of authority over others, sometimes necessary in the life of such a project. All in all, however, the JTG has worked well together to solve these socio-political issues in the interest of cultural documentation, which is

becoming a more and more important focus for indigenous groups such as the San.

During the months of June to August 2010, a group of six transcribers working at the Norwegian-funded Captain Kxao Kxami Community Learning and Development Centre (CLDC) in Tsumkwe, Namibia, completed the transcription of seventy-eight audio files. These files included recordings of the Xamsa political meetings involving discussion of unlawful Herero settlement of the area, as well as several traditional healing narratives; they are being compiled for a new book intended for cultural preservation and language education. Fifty-one of these seventy-eight audio files were recordings of political meetings held in the Tsumkwe area between 26th June and 27th July 2010, and focused on the most recent illegal Herero invasion which began in the latter months of 2009. Over six hours of audio recordings were captured from these meetings and their translations are being used to assist the Ju|'hoan of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy in their legal battle with the Hereros and the Namibian government over land rights issues. Additionally, the summer of 2010 saw an increase in Ju|'hoan trainees who were willing to come in during the afternoons and study language skills and basic computing from the transcribers. Thirteen trainees ranging in age from late teens to men in their fifties came in to learn the basic components of both reading and writing in Ju|'hoan and the ELAN program which is used to transcribe their language.

5. The Future: Extending documentation to ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen

5.1 Overview of ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen

Most literature on south-eastern Ju varieties (Snyman 1975a, b; Köhler 1971) and the Ju|'hoan Dictionary (Dickens 1994) and Concise Grammar of Ju|'hoan (Dickens 2005) were compiled using the dialect in Tsumkwe (Nyae Nyae). Previous work on the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen variety is limited and offers two rather contradictory conclusions. Snyman (1975a, b) concluded that ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen is similar to Ju|'hoan of Tsumkwe, although his recordings may have included lexical data from Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoan. Following a later areal study, however, Snyman (1997) concluded that Ju|'hoan in Tsumkwe and ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen in Epukiro form two distinct dialect clusters, a view shared by many Khoisanists today. Other studies also point to greater divergence between the two lects: Bleek (1927, 1929) classified ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen separately, as did König & Heine (2008). Furthermore, Bleek (1927) noted that the relations between the two groups had 'always' been quite hostile, which contributed to the fact that,

according to her, 'there is a great difference in their speech. The two tribes cannot understand each other at all'. This view was further reinforced by Biesele's experience with the Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoan, who in the 1970s protested that they would dance with anyone except the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen. This hostility may have changed in intervening years, but the difference in lects may well persist, as Hasselbring notes:

> it took a few weeks to a few months before they [the Omaheke Ju|'hoan] could understand the language spoken there [in Nyae Nyae]. They said it was very different from their own language (2000: 78).

In most recent classifications, both Ju|'hoan and ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen (with the Dikundu variety) are part of the south-eastern branch of Ju, but in practically all recent publications researchers are forced to acknowledge that only scarce data exists for the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen lect.

Suzman (2000: 3) argues that the reason for the comparatively small amount of research undergone with the Omaheke San is perhaps because early ethnographers considered them 'less pure'. In recent times, the Omaheke San have attracted more attention from anthropologists and linguists. Suzman (2000) and Sylvain (1999, 2002, 2006) have documented the transition amongst the different Omaheke San groups as they struggle to come to terms with their new existence in a modern and independent Namibian society, particularly in Gobabis, the district capital, an Afrikaans-speaking and reputedly conservative town. The same kind of documentation from a (socio-) linguistic point of view, however, is completely lacking. As a result, not only has the academic community been missing out on unique developments in the culture of the Omaheke San, but the general pursuit of 'pure' San culture has incurred more tangible consequences for speakers of the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen variety. Subsequently, the gradual promotion of the Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoan has provoked language shift to such an extent that some consultants refuse to make recording sessions without having to hand a copy of the Nyae Nyae-based Ju|'hoan dictionary to which they can refer. Furthermore, the regional representative for the Omaheke San made it quite clear during an elicitation session that he believed the Omaheke Ju|'hoan should all speak like Nyae Nyae.

Despite the best intentions and a detailed plan of our goals, it is clear that the documentation of ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen presents many new challenges. Addressing some of these will draw upon the experience and foundations already firmly in place from the 'older sister' project in Nyae Nyae. Depending on the needs and desires of the community, and the possible convergence of the two lects

under investigation, the project has a timely opportunity to modify the Ju|'hoan dictionary, currently being re-edited, to include new lexical material reflecting a greater range of dialects and speakers. Furthermore, literacy primers which have been successful in Nyae Nyae can be adapted for the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen variety, and the expansion of community-based programs such as the Ju|'hoan Transcription Group can attempt to sustain the overall linguistic diversity of the south-eastern group of Ju dialects in eastern Namibia. However, there are also a number of issues which will have to be addressed. These include identifying the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen 'community', and two topics relevant to corpus structure: the role of elders and the documentation of traditional knowledge.

5.2 Identifying ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen speakers

No project is without unforeseeable problems. Nevertheless, we are able to foresee a certain number of inevitable issues, both in the context of our project and in documentation projects more generally. These issues include: dealing with communities that have been isolated and scattered across a wider area, difficulties identifying speakers of a certain language due to overlapping ethnonyms, conflicting endonyms and exonyms, and code switching.

The problem of identifying speakers of what is known as ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen is mainly due to the fact that many groups strongly self-identify as Ju|'hoan, and argue just as strongly that other groups do not have the right to such a title. Some groups, however, are quite aware of exonyms used to identify them, and some are aware of ethnic differences, even when language varieties are very similar. This raises an interesting point regarding how the San groups perceive their language and differences in local languages, and just how strongly the San identify with their language. This must be reflected as sensitively as possible in any attempt at dialect classification, as identity and language, at least the cases of the Ju|'hoan and the !Xoon (who speak a Taa language), are tightly interwoven with the notion of purity or being 'true'. Thus a possible result of this project could be that the language community decides it would rather not be defined as ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, as this is not how they self-identify. An ethnographically more sensitive nomenclature might also install a greater sense of pride in their language variety.

5.2.1 Where is the 'community'?

The term ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen has a variety of possible meanings. ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen is a Naro exonym meaning 'people of the north', and so in most areas the term refers to the people from north of the Omaheke, i.e. Nyae Nyae. For others, it

is a recent political label created when Traditional Authorities were introduced and a large area was divided up into Traditional Authorities with local chiefs. Some speakers do identify as ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, and distinguish themselves from the Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoan, while a minority reject both labels in favour of self-identifying as ǂ'am kxao 'people of the south'. In Blouberg (see Figure 1), a community that self-identifies as ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, a speaker described what he saw as tangible differences in the nature of the people from his area compared to Nyae Nyae, describing the latter as more aggressive. The same speaker identified a recording from over 300km away in Botswana as being the most typically ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen. This highlights a real challenge, both for the documentation and the installation of community-based documentation programs: where is the community? The experience and expertise of the JTG in Nyae Nyae would be most profitable to communities in Namibia, to save having to cross national borders. The orthography in use at Nyae Nyae, and accredited by the Namibian Ministry of Education, would also be readily accepted by communities in Namibia as a similar orthography is used for Nama-Damara, a Khoe-Kwadi language and local vernacular. Communities in Botswana, however, have greater contact with the Naro language, which is less prevalent in Namibia, and they have historical and traditional ties with Nyae Nyae. But the national border is a major hindrance and the orthography used in Nyae Nyae would be less readily adopted in Botswana, firstly by the government, but secondly by the speakers who are more familiar with the Naro orthography (Visser 2000) which uses Roman letters for click sounds: ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, for example, is written Tcg'aoX'ãe (Visser 2001: 35). In future our project should consider how we better integrate communities across the border.

5.2.2 Practicalities of identifying speakers

Given that the term ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen means 'people of the north' in Naro, undertaking fieldwork south of Nyae Nyae and asking 'are you ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen?' could only lead to confusion. Lacking the long-term relationships with communities that the project in Nyae Nyae thrives on, work on the ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen variety depends on building relationships with new communities in the Omaheke region. Our aim is to locate speakers who have lived in the region for several generations with as little connection to Nyae Nyae as possible. This is no easy task, but assistance with locating communities has come in many forms, primarily by word-of-mouth once in the field. Being able to clearly communicate the nature of the project is essential, so as not to make promises which later cannot be fulfilled if it becomes clear that work with a particular community is not possible. Albeit normally a fruitful first port-of-call, local San NGOs sometimes proved counterproductive as

corruption and poor rapport with communities had resulted in a bad reputation, which later became the reason one particular community initially refused to cooperate with the project. Local schools and development agencies can have a better idea of how different ethnic groups are spread across the region. The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA)[6] is a particularly good starting point for projects based in the region, since they are able to help with information such as which language groups live at which settlements, or whether or not a settlement has electricity. Similarly, other projects aimed at improving access to water and other kinds of local infrastructure may also be able to provide surveys and statistics of local populations.

Finding speakers who fit the profile of the project is not easy when one has little knowledge of the sound and structure of the language. Establishing which variety or dialect a person speaks is far more difficult. Relying on published dictionaries and grammars is useful, but as was frequently the case, a feature that appeared to be common to the Omaheke region was also described by the Ju|'hoan grammar or in the Ju|'hoan dictionary. Whilst previously the emphasis had been on the synchronic documentation of Ju|'hoan, working on ‡X'ao-‖'aen demands that we examine the development of the language-complex diachronically. It is unreasonable to believe that everyone living in Nyae Nyae originated from there, and indeed we know the Nyae Nyae community has long engaged in *hxaro* 'gift sharing' practices with communities hundreds of miles away in Botswana who are likely to be ‡X'ao-‖'aen speakers. The dictionary, for example, has multiple entries for 'younger sibling', probably reflecting the various lects of local speakers and the thoroughness of previous researchers. It remains, however, a synchronic snapshot of language use, and it is only slowly becoming apparent that some of the lexical entries for the Nyae Nyae-based dictionary are probably the result of migration in and out of Nyae Nyae and contact with other speech communities. Thus, having existing materials can be an advantage, but it can also be an obstacle when hypothesising about features that one hopes will provide a backbone for distinguishing lects, vital to the immediate future of the project. On a positive note, we should never underestimate the expertise of our language consultants as they are often sensitive to variation, however phrasing exactly what one is looking for is the test of a good field linguist.

Confusion about labels aside, most people say they speak Ju|'hoan and that there is no difference at all between the Nyae Nyae and Omaheke varieties.

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[6] www.wimsa.org.

For the Botswana Ju|'hoan the situation is slightly different in that all San, irrespective of the language they speak, are considered to be Ju|'hoan, and called ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen. Asking a speaker how they recognise if someone else is from their *n!ore* gives rise to rich and detailed responses: 'clicks sound shorter', 'they have their own word for "cup" whereas we borrow the word', 'we say gǂhoa and they say gǂhuin ('dog')'. This last comment is another example where both lexemes are found in the dictionary, even though speakers treat it as a shibboleth to distinguish between groups.

5.3 A balanced corpus and the role of elders

The documentation of ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen centres around building a representative corpus of primary data in order to gain an authentic picture of how the language is used today. This can only be achieved by balancing the corpus to reflect diverse communicative events from an equally diverse range of speakers. As researchers, we tend to privilege the language of a few elderly community members, but a corpus with an age bias will not provide a representative means of describing the language, nor will it offer an authentic view of language use today. In the case of ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen, this is a particularly salient issue. Interest in hunting and gathering traditions amongst younger generations has drastically declined; young Omaheke Ju|'hoan are often unable to talk fluently in their language about such topics. Most consider partaking in or even learning about such traditions to be trivial if not completely useless and seek to distance themselves from their ancestors' culture to better themselves in the public eye. In fact, this sentiment is not just restricted to younger generations, as even older generations deem ju ǂ'angsi 'old-time people' with 'old-time knowledge' to have no place in the world of jusa o ǁa'ike 'today's people'. For them, it embodies everything that has left them stigmatised within the larger society and is wholly redundant (Suzman 2000: 132).

Depending on the community, elders may either be outcasts or the cherished bearers of folklore and tradition. The difference in communicative registers between older and younger generations sometimes becomes clear during transcription. Some younger speakers were thrown off track when transcribing texts in which an elderly speaker had used a term belonging to an avoidance register which is employed during hunting to spare the hunter misfortune. Similarly, in a recording session in Botswana, after an elderly woman had finished narrating a tale her grandson proclaimed he had only understood approximately fifty percent of what his grandmother had said. Nǂaisa, the grandmother, is said to speak an old 'pure ǂX'ao-ǁ'aen' that no one speaks any more, and explained she saw no point in raising the matter as

the younger generations do not understand and the older generations had therefore ceased to use it. In other communities, even the oldest members have grown up working on farms and are not only more prone to code-switching but know very little about hunting and gathering. From a linguistic point of view, this is important as the speaker will know less of the taboo terms and avoidance register, which can be particularly relevant in terms of historical contact with other groups. Ultimately, our goal is to build a representative corpus of data, to provide a picture of variation in south-eastern Ju dialects. We will do this by travelling large distances in order gather texts from young and old, male and female, from multilingual speakers, and speakers who married in from different linguistic groups. Maintaining the variety of voices later in the project, however, may prove difficult and we may encounter new challenges. Good story tellers are not necessarily good at elicitation, and good consultants may not make the best transcribers. For example, we gave training in ELAN to a language consultant from Epako (a location outside of Gobabis where many San live), after which he went on to make basic transcriptions of texts taken from across the region. The newly-trained transcriber frequently 'mistranscribed' what the speaker had said in the narrative, replacing elements with forms that he preferred or deemed correct. As the focus of this phase of our project is on diversity in Ju dialects, it will be essential that we find means to ensure variation is properly documented, both by the researchers but also later by the Ju|'hoan Transcription Group and other community-based programs.
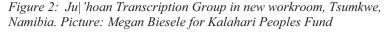
5.4 Documenting traditional knowledge

Attitudes towards hunting and gathering, and the knowledge that goes with it, vary from community to community, depending heavily on their location. In Epako the reduced knowledge residents have of hunter-gatherer traditions is instantly apparent. Many there have never hunted large game since it is now illegal and, due to the overpopulation of Epako, not a single root vegetable nor morama bean can be found for miles around the area. Speakers of all ages find it hard to name animals they have never seen, or to distinguish between plants and trees that no longer grow near where they live. Close proximity to other language communities, namely Afrikaans and Nama-Damara, means that practically all children growing up in Epako are trilingual, and marriage across ethnic groups is not uncommon. As Gobabis is the capital of the Omaheke district, many people migrate from afar to find jobs, including from Nyae Nyae. Thus, there are many speakers of the Nyae Nyae variety living in Epako. Living in a more urbanised environment brings with it urban facilities, including pre-schools (run in Nama-Damara or Afrikaans). Other more isolated communities, like Donkerbos-Sonneblom, or across the border at

Groot Laagte in Botswana, demonstrate a much more optimistic picture of the vitality of traditional cultural knowledge. In Groot Laagte, food gathering is still a whole family event, with some women spending many weeks gathering foodstuffs for their family and in order to sell in town.

6. Conclusion

Documentation projects, despite having the best intentions, often struggle with the problem of implementing community-based programs that offer perspectives and options for the community members. It is often not easy to give back to those who so generously provide us with our primary data, especially beyond the horizons of the project's timeframe. The future of our project is firmly anchored in what we believe to be a community-based bottom-up structure. Lessons learned from experiences in Nyae Nyae will provide a smoother transition of skills and resources needed to develop similar programs to benefit other communities. Among other things, it is hoped that some of the trained Ju|'hoan of Nyae Nyae will assist in orthography workshops and training in the use of ELAN. It is very likely that increased opportunities to meet at regional gatherings provided by NGOs such as WIMSA will help create the context for such formal gatherings. By 'formal', we refer to what the San see as the relatively self-promoting role of the 'teacher', something that was for a long time quite foreign to these egalitarian people. In the last few years, members of the JTG and their parent organization, the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, have visited other San groups in parts of both Botswana and South Africa. They are always met with great openness on the part of hosts, who are generally very enthusiastic to learn new skills in their own language. For this reason we remain very optimistic, particularly as it will also provide the JTG with second-to-none teacher-training experience. We hope this approach will help forge experienced and motivated local trainers at the core of multiple groups who can continue to pass on their skills when the researchers have left. The expansion of community-based programs such as the JTG is an attempt to sustain overall linguistic diversity and provide future prospects for language communities, for both of which the outlook is uncertain.

Figure 2: Ju|'hoan Transcription Group in new workroom, Tsumkwe, Namibia. Picture: Megan Biesele for Kalahari Peoples Fund

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