

DOCUMENTATION AND DESCRIPTION OF ANIMERE

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A major part of my research is on language documentation and description, and I recently began working on *Animere*, a critically endangered Ghana Togo Mountain (GTM) language. GTM languages are located in the hills of the Ghana-Togo border, hence the GTM label. Animere is the most endangered of the GTM languages with less than 30 speakers all of whom are over 50 years old (I have just been informed that the oldest speaker of the language has died). It is also no longer being transmitted to children. All Animere speakers also speak *Adele*, another GTM language, and *Akan*, the regional dominant language. In addition, many speak several other languages in the region. In 2013, one of our graduate students, Bryan Gelles, got an Endangered Languages Documentation Program (ELDP) grant and spent a semester collecting stories in Kacheibe, the village where the language is spoken. Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit Bryan to work on a detailed transcription and analysis of the stories. In the summer of 2017 Fiona McLaughlin and I got a National Science Foundation grant to organize a summer school at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), Ghana, for graduate students and junior faculty in West Africa and the United States. The school was organized in collaboration with Felix Ameka at Leiden University and Samuel Atintono at UEW. Because of its endangered status, trainees at the summer school worked with 4 native speakers of Animere, whom we brought to Winneba, to document different aspects of the language. The duration of the program was rather limited (i.e. two weeks) and, therefore, trainees focused on collecting lexical items, mostly relating to body part and health-related vocabulary.

Just before the start of the summer school, I took 4 undergraduate students to Nkwanta to work with two of the speakers and a language consultant. This trip was funded by the Center for African Studies'

Research Tutorial Award (RTA) and was aimed at giving the students firsthand experience in documenting an endangered language. We worked with the speakers and language consultant to transcribe some of the stories that Bryan had collected four years prior. The students undertook a preliminary analysis of the sound system and set up a rudimentary orthography system which they used in the transcription of the stories. This was so that they could prepare a reader for the community using the stories. They also created an Animere-English lexical database. Based on the foregoing work, we have deposited the following materials at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS): 29 bundles that reflect the way of life in Animere. Each bundle contains either a video of the stories recorded by Bryan or an elicitation video involving the students who traveled with me to Nkwanta. The original storytelling includes mixed

generations of Animere speakers who sit together and tell different folk stories and fables relating to their cultural identity. The stories include cultural explanations, personal accounts of life as a *Benimber* (i.e. Animere people), historical interactions, 'legends' told at gatherings, as well as songs and dance.

I am currently working with an undergraduate student to undertake a grammatical analysis of the stories. The first topic we pursue is the serial verb construction (SVC). This is a construction in which two or more verbs occur in a clause without overt coordination. Different languages have different restriction on the SVC. We will investigate constraints on the SVCs in the Animere stories. The results will be presented at the 50th Annual Conference of African Linguistics, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

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