ULWA (SOUTHERN SUMU): THE BEGINNINGS OF A LANGUAGE RESEARCH PROJECT

Ken Hale

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

0. Introduction.

The story which will be told in this chapter, unlike others in this book, is not the story of a mature and fully established language project. Rather, it is a report on the very beginnings of a program of research on an indigenous language of the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast. It is a before-and-after study, so to speak, reporting on the events preceding the researcher's first field-trip and contact with members of the language community, the research done on the trip itself, and the outcome in relation to future stages of the project. The language involved—called Ulwa, or more loosely Sumu— is the southern variety of the Sumu group. The northern variety, now called Mayangna, is documented in Norwood (1997). It is to this latter variety that the term Sumu was generally applied until recently.

Ulwa is spoken primarily by inhabitants of Karawala, a town of 935, near the mouth of the Rio Grande, the large waterway which separates the Northern and Southern Autonomous Atlantic Regions. Some 30 residents of the nearby town of Kara also speak Ulwa. At Karawala itself, Ulwas speakers number 351, according to a recent survey, but most young members of the Ulwa community itself no longer use Ulwa, Miskitu being the primary language of the town (for details, see Green and Hale, to appear). Though the exact number of speakers is not known, it is clear that Ulwa is a distinct minority within the overall Sumu population of approximately 8,000, just as Sumu itself is a minority in relation to the much larger, 70,000-strong and linguistically dominant, Miskitu population of the Atlantic Coast.

1. The origins of the Ulwa language project.

The scientific investigation of a given language cannot be understood in isolation. Of course, this follows by definition, since it is carried out within the context of a science of linguistics, and since, furthermore, as a scientific undertaking, it is responsible to the larger human community which its results could affect. This truth has special significance in contemporary Nicaragua, where current lingustic research began, in a real sense, a consequence of important historical and socio-political developments within a country which was working to build a successful revolution for all its people. Linguistic research on the Atlantic Coast must be understood, above all, within the context

of the Autonomy Project, an important part of which is the formal recognition, safeguarding, and strengthening of the intellectual wealth of the peoples of the region. A central means for the expression of this wealth, of course, is language, and the Autonomy Project has formally recognized this both by forming and supporting linguistic research projects and by bringing the products of linguistic research to bear in education, through bilingual/bicultural education programs and through the publication of materials in the indigenous languages.

The origins of the Ulwa language project lie fundamentally in the Autonomy Project. The research was not initiated in the first instance by the investigator, as is more typically the case in field research. It was, in fact, commissioned by members of the Ulwa community, partly in response to the success of the Rama Language project and partly because of a very real fear that the status of Ulwa people as a minority, in relation both to the other Sumu communities and to the Miskitu, would result in the degradation and eventual loss of their own recognizably distinct linguistic tradition. Addressing this sort of concern on the part of Antantic Coast communities is one of the most important functions of the Autonomy Project.

In the summer of 1987, a representative of the Ulwa community requested of the Regional Committee of the FSLN, in Bluefields, that research be begun on the Ulwa language. Colette Craig of the Rama Language Project was asked to undertake this work. Because of her responsibility to the Rama study, however, she would have to postpone working on Ulwa, and she suggested that I undertake to do at least the initial phase of field work. This would mean that the Ulwa project might possibly start as soon as January of 1988, when I planned to be in Bluefields teaching in a bilingual education workshop with teachers from the Rio Grande area.

Through Craig, I was given a letter from Carlos Castro of the Regional Committee inviting me to consider initiating an Ulwa language project. I accepted the invitation eagerly and began to write a research proposal to be sent to CIDCA, who would be my institutional sponsor in Nicaragua, and to the Regional Committee. The proposal was for an initial phase only, to consist of two brief trips, designed to accomplish three modest ends: (1) to obtain enough basic data to prepare brief but informative introductions to the vocabulary and grammar of Ulwa; (2) to determine, on the basis of these materials, the principal differences between Ulwa and Northern Sumu; and (3) to get an initial idea of the manner in which an Ulwa language project, in the true sense, could develop — i.e., grow into an autonomous language project whose character and direction are in the hands of the community.

In October of 1987, I was able to discuss my proposal in detail with Charlie Hale, an anthropologist who works in the Rio Grande region and who is well known to the people of Karawala. In December, he presented aspects of the proposal to the community and, together, they formulated a plan of action

according to which an Ulwa speaker, chosen by the community, would meet me in Bluefields on January 9, 1988, at the conclusion of the bilingual education workshop. This person would work with me in the CIDCA offices there for a week, accompany me on a brief trip to Karawala, and return with me for a final week of work in Bluefields.

The community elected Abanel Lacayo Blanco, a man of 53, to work with me on Ulwa. This plan had an extremely beneficial effect on the research. While it meant that I would not be free to choose my own linguistic consultant, it greatly stream-lined the process of getting started on the language. And it is not very likely that I could have chosen a consultant more perfectly equipped to work at the speed required by the brief period of two and a half weeks remaining before I would have to return to my university. Lacayo speaks excellent Miskitu, as well as Ulwa, and he also commands English, Spanish, and the Twahka variant of Northern Sumu. The entire range of his linguistic abilities proved useful in my research. Moreover, he took the task of documenting Ulwa very seriously.

Accordingly, fieldwork on Ulwa was initiated in January, 1988, in accordance with the schedule just described. Aspects of the linguistic research itself will be discussed in the sections to follow. But before proceeding, I will mention the short trip to Karawala which occurred midway in the research period.

The Karawala visit represented the first step in the important process of creating an awareness on the part of the Ulwa speakers of the town that work on their language is under way, as they had requested, that a member of their community, chosen by them, is directly involved in the research, and, most important, that the character of the project is something they will have a say in. Arrangements for travel to Karawala—by panga, or outboard launch —were made by the Regional Committee, taking advantage of a trip planned by Tomas Kelly, the FSLN representative responsible for the Rio Grande region. Colette Craig, whose work in the Rama language project inspired the original Ulwa request, was also able to take part in the trip. This was fortunate, not only because of the valuable advice and help she gave, but also because of the fact that this association with the Rama language program enhanced the credibility of the embrionic Ulwa project. Furthermore, the trip enabled Craig to be introduced to the Ulwa community in anticipation of her own eventual research on the language, tentatively projected to focus on the speech of the Ulwa people at Kara, recent refugees from the west, whose history has involved Spanish, not Miskitu, as the primary language of external contact.

Our stay in Karawala was brief, only a day and a half. The purpose of the visit, to give the people of Karawala information about the language project, was accomplished in part by talking to individuals and small groups, and in part by means of a brief presentation at town meeting. Lacayo took it upon himself to

escort us around the town, to orient us spatially within it and to introduce us to people he felt we should meet. We made an effort to meet individuals who we had been told might be expected to take a special interest in the project and, eventually, form a committee to oversee its work.

At the town meeting, a number of concrete materials were shown to illustrate the kinds of materials that would be developed in the Ulwa project. These included several pages of an unfinished brochure on the Ulwa alphabet and the elementary dictionaries of Miskitu and Rama published under the auspices of CIDCA. The alphabet brochure was presented as a project which might be completed in the Karawala school, on the model of current work in the Rama program. The dictionaries exemplified a more long-term project which would require the involvement of Ulwa speakers for a number of years. As an initial step in this project, I proposed to prepare, as quickly as possible, a preliminary vocabulary of Ulwa on the basis of the material obtained in January. This would be set out in a format approximating that of a full-fledged dictionary of the language and would therefore serve as an example of the work that would have to be done to produce such a document. I would bring this preliminary vocabulary back to Karawala in March, during a break in my teaching schedule. At that time I would meet with Lacayo and other interested people to discuss how to proceed in the business of correcting and augmenting the preliminary vocabulary, with a view to producing an Ulwa dictionary. The proposed March visit to Karawala, the fate of which will be described briefly at the conclusion of this chapter, was to be the second of the two field trips projected in my original proposal to the Regional Committee and to CIDCA.

Due perhaps to nervousness, I erred in my presentation to the Karawala town meeting by failing to emphasize the importance of forming a group of knowledgeable Ulwa speakers to serve as consultants and overseers to the project. Such a group would be crucial in making this effort a true community project and, therefore, a meaningful part of the Autonomy process. It was not enough that it had been commissioned by the community. Speakers of Ulwa must also be directly involved in the research, in the practical application of its results, and in decisions concerning its conduct. I attempted to correct this error by letter, by talking to individuals, and by introducing Lacayo to dictionary-making activities in which he could involve others. I also planned to make this the first priority in my proposed March trip to Karawala, bearing in mind, of course, that realization of the ideal situation here faces certain practical problems, the most urgent of which is that of financial support for individual Ulwa speakers who become involved in linguistic research which might remove them from their regular sources of income.

Following the town meeting, we left Karawala and returned to Bluefields, where a final week of research on Ulwa was undertaken. I will turn now to a consideration of aspects of the research which are more directly connected to the language itself, beginning with its position in relation to its linguistic sister,

Mayangna (Northern Sumu), and the implications that has for linguistic research on Ulwa itself.

2. Ulwa as a Sumu language, implications for research.

Ulwa belongs to the Sumu subfamily of Misumalpan, a small language family whose name was constructed from syllables contained in the names of the languages which are believed to belong to the group—these are Miskitu and Sumu, of eastern Nicaragua and Honduras, and (the now extinct) Matagalpa-Cacaopera, of western Nicaragua and El Salvador. Misumalpan, in turn, is believed to be related to Chibchan, the family to which Rama belongs.

The Sumu subfamily consists of two closely related languages, Ulwa (or Southern Sumu) and Mayangna, a dialect complex including principally Twahka and Panamahka in Nicaragua. Panamahka speakers far outnumber Twahka speakers. There is a sister dialect of Mayangna, called Tawahka, in Honduras. The precise nature of the relationship between Ulwa and Mayangna is not known, in part because of the fact that Ulwa is not extensively documented. One of the purposes of my research on the language is to arrive at a better understanding of the relationships within the Sumu group and, ultimately, of the relationships between Sumu and Miskitu, within Misumalpan, and between Misumalpan and its putative Chibchan relatives. For present purposes, I will limit my remarks to the issue of the relationship between Ulwa and its Northern Sumu sister, Mayangna.

The literature on Mayangna includes both a grammar (Norwood, 1997) and two dictionaries (von Houwald, 1980; McLean, 1995). In addition, there is an active bilingual education program serving the Mayangna community, and a substantial body of written literature exists in that language. By contrast, when I began to plan for my field work on Ulwa, the material I had at my disposal was limited to the vocabularies and grammatical notes published in the 1920's by Lehmann (1920) and Conzemius (1927). These materials are excellent, in fact, but they simply whetted the appitite for more details about Ulwa, leaving many questions concerning Sumu relationships in sharper focus, perhaps, but still unanswered.

Within the Ulwa language project, the concern with such comparative issues was motivated by several considerations, historical, scientific, and educational. And each of these concerns relates, in one way or another, to the fact that the project was responsible to the speakers of Ulwa and, therefore, to their aspirations in the context of important developments under way in present-day Nicaragua. So some care was taken in the preparatory and initial stages of the investigation to place Ulwa within the Sumu group, partly because of the fact that this issue was seen as important in determining the character of the research project.

One question was whether Ulwa "deserved" a full study. Or was it so close to Mayangna as to warrant nothing more than, say, a listing of its lexical and grammatical divergences from the latter? As a linguist, my attitude is that every language deserves a full study, resources permitting. And, as I have argued above, the fact that a particular language is closely related to another one simply enhances scientific interest in it. Moreover, in the Ulwa case, the community of speakers wanted the language to be studied. Other things being equal, considerations such as these justify a research project. However, linguistic research which seeks to be responsible to the people whose language is the object of investigation must take seriously certain practical questions. In this instance, two practical considerations emerged as important in planning the Ulwa study, (1) the desire on the part of people on the Atlantic Coast, and elsewhere in Nicaragua, to document the cultural history of the region, and (2) the very real need to know the position of Ulwa in relation to Mayangna in order to plan for the integration of Ulwa into the educational programs of the Ulwa community. These considerations placed the comparative Sumu question high on the list of priorities for research and, consequently, had an influence on the manner in which the initial field work was planned and carried out. But, of course, in order to address the comparative issue properly, research on all aspects of Ulwa grammar and lexicon had to be undertaken. In this section, I will discuss aspects of the actual research and the planning for it.

3. Field work on Ulwa.******

3.1. Planning and methodology for research on Ulwa.

My attitude to the notion "linguistic field methods," or the notion "what one should do in linguistic field research," is this: "Do whatever you need to do in order to learn the language." That is to say, take the position that you are there to learn the language, and do whatever you have to in order to achieve that end—assuming, of course, that your purpose is to document the grammar and lexicon (as opposed, say, to a project whose purpose is ethnolinguistic or sociolinguistic in nature, in which case documentation of the grammar will be presupposed). On the one hand—whether this is a real purpose in the research, or merely a convenient fiction—the methodological strategy of setting oneself the goal of learning the language has the effect, assuming it is applied successfully, of virtually guaranteeing adequate coverage. And, on the other hand, the strategy automatically adapts to virtually all conceivable situations—ranging from one extreme, the situation in which the language under investigation has never been recorded at all before, to the opposite extreme, in which the language (English, say) has been the object of linguistic research for centuries, has a vast literature, etc., and in which the purpose is to investigate a particular, as yet only partially understood, grammatical subsystem (e.g., the grammar of transitive/intransitive verb pairs, such as that seen in I broke the pot vs. the pot broke, a topic which happens to have universal significance, with relevance to Sumu and Miskitu grammar as well).

Let us assume that we are going to accept as valid the strategy just mentioned. This will determine, to a large extent, the planning one does in preparing oneself, linguistically, for the actual field work. Thus, in principle, one has the choice of either utilizing or ignoring previous work done on the language. Assuming the work is good, our strategy decides the issue, since it demands that we make whatever use of the existing literature we can in order get into the language, to learn it. In my case, I had available to me the works of Lehmann (1920) and Conzemius (1929), consisting of comparative vocabularies, with grammatical notes, in Sumu and Miskitu. I also had the CIDCA grammar of Miskitu, the dictionary of Miskitu by Heath and Marx (1961), and some knowledge of Miskitu through study and through work in bilingual education workshops on the Atlantic Coast. This access to Miskitu was important to me in my work on Ulwa. Moreover, I was able to use what I knew of Miskitu to assess the general quality of the work of Lehmann and Conzemius and, thereby, to determine whether their materials on Ulwa and the Mayangna varieties could be relied on. My conclusion, on the basis of their control of Miskitu data, was that their work was of excellent quality (though not totally devoid of mistakes, of course; no work of this sort can be expected to be perfect). I can also say, with my first contact with Ulwa speakers now behind me, that my admiration for these early investigators continues undiminished.

At a later point in my research, though not soon enough to help in the planning stage, I had available to me a pre-publication draft of the excellent new grammar of Mayangna by Norwood (1997). I was able to use this work during my last week in the field in checking to see if certain elements which Norwood had documented for Mayangna also existed in Ulwa. Following the field trip, I was able to obtain a copy of the Mayangna dictionary by von Houwald (1980). While these two recent works will be of great value in planning future research on Ulwa, the works which played the greatest role in planning for the initial phase were those of Lehmann and Conzemius. They permitted me to gain a basic understanding of Sumu verbal and nominal morphology, to begin acquiring a basic vocabulary of Ulwa, and to form an initial conception of internal relationships within the Sumu subfamily, as well as relationships between Sumu and other Misumalpan languages.

Lehmann's work includes a list of twelve hundred concepts, identified by a German, a Spanish, or an English gloss, and rendered, where possible, into Miskitu, Mayangna, and Ulwa. Although the Ulwa column is sparse in some lexical categories, particularly verbs, it is uselful; and the work as a whole proved to be extraordinarily useful to me in planning for my first sessions with an Ulwa speaker. In particular, the word lists enabled me to prepare, quickly and efficiently, a protocol for use in eliciting material for an elementary vocabulary of Ulwa—this was to be the first concrete product of the research project. In fact, the principal research guide, which I assembled for myself was a copy of Lehmann's comparative vocabularies arranged in a bound folder in such a way that each

page of the list had opposite it a blank page on which I could write Ulwa forms. As a part of my advance preparation, I placed a check mark beside each concept that I wanted to elicit in my first "pass" in acquiring an Ulwa vocabulary. Since Lehmann had done the very difficult work of assembling a list of concepts appropriate to Central America, I was spared an enormous amount of labor in the preparatory stage. And the initial work of Conzemius on documenting the nominal and verbal morphology of the Misumalpan languages was also instrumental in getting me to a position—in advance of my first trip—at which I could easily understand "what was happening" in the very first sentences I elicited for Ulwa. It would have been a serious mistake not to utilize the early work of these excellent scholars—the speed with which actual field work on Ulwa was able to procede owes much to their contributions to the linguistics of the Atlantic Coast. I should point out here that there is always a tendancy to distrust the work of early scholars, since one does not have a basis, really, on which to judge their work fully. This tendancy to distrust is encouraged, in part, I imagine, by disconcerting fluctuations and inconsistencies in orthography—often overly detailed phonetically and, consequently, highly variable from one point to the next. Only with hindsight, subsequent to actual contact with speakers of the language, can the full value of such early work be appreciated. While this scepticism and doubt is, in a manner of speaking, an injustice to the early scholars, it is healthy and absolutely necessary in the context of field research on a little documented language. No matter how good one feels about the abilities of earlier researchers, the material must be checked again and again. In the case of Ulwa, every item had to be rechecked, not only for accuracy in the transcription of consonants and vowels, including an initially difficult-to-hear length contrast in the latter, but also for certain basic morphological properties—the formation of the construct state (for nouns), and the formation of the "theme", or base for inflection (for verbs)—not to mention all that must be determined eventually concerning the relationships between lexical items and the syntactic structures in which they appear in well-formed sentences. These latter bits of information, with rare and idiosyncratic exceptions, were completely absent from the early vocabularies, of course.

Whether or not one has access to earlier scholarship on the language one studies, I consider it absolutely essential to have a "script," or "protocol" when one goes to a working session with a speaker of the language. It is not necessary, always, to <u>follow</u> the script, but it is a necessary item, if only to fall back on when, as often happens, ones head simply ceases to work, particularly in the investigation of difficult syntactic problems. In the beginning stages of field work it is especially important to have a script, because—assuming you have the <u>right</u> script—this is the best way to get into the language quickly without, at the same time, having to use your mind to make plans on the spot. Do the planning ahead of time; in the eliciting sessions themselves, to the extent it is possible, concentrate just on the forms of the language. Don't mix jobs, in the initial phase, at least—it is too exhausting. Of course, as always, this methodology carries a risk with it, namely, the risk of rigidity. Always be willing to abandon the

prepared script at any time in order to follow an interesting lead—this does not violate the principle of minimizing exhaustion; in fact, it helps to relieve it. This mixture of procedures leads to chaotic looking field notes—ones you will probably be ashamed to show to your colleagues—but, in the end, the work will be better and richer. A cardinal rule, in this regard, is the following. If your language consultant, or informant, volunteers something not in the planned script, write it down immediately, and follow it up if something comes to mind in relation to it. If you can't see the relevance, never mind; write it down anyway. Its importance will become clear eventually—in fact, your best clues about the language will probably come from such notes.

Returning to the Ulwa project now, although there existed material on the language, material which could be trusted to some extent, that material would have to be checked and rechecked. This I knew, because I knew certain facts about the Misumalpan languages which told me in advance that certain forms would have to be collected for each lexical item in order, properly, to document it. Since my purpose in the initial phase was to prepare an elementary vocabulary, containing entries approximating those of a complete and adequate dictionary, I resolved to document adequately each lexical item I obtained, in relation to its phonology, its morphology, and its syntactic properties. Despite the leg up that the earlier work on the language had given me, this meant that, for the field context itself, it made sense to operate as if Ulwa were completely unknown to linguistic science and to proceed as if I were documenting it for the first time—a fiction, to be sure, but one which seemed to me to be methodologically sound in this instance.

In starting work on Ulwa, I decided to follow the procedure I have used elsewhere—North America, Mexico, Australia—in working on a "new" language. The first session, for example, would involve eliciting basic vocabulary—I usually start with body part terms—with a view, at this early point, of getting used to the sound of the language and to developing a way of writing it. And I would proceed in this manner through the basic vocabulary (of some 500 items) I had originally isolated from Lehmann's list until I reached a point when I felt enough at ease with the Ulwa sound system to begin getting the vocabulary items in sentences, rather than in isolation. This would be an important juncture in the research, since the study of the grammar could begin at that point, and the morphological and syntactic properties of each lexical item could be obtained, in conformity with my principal goal in this phase of field work. Moreover, certain lexical categories, verbs in particular, can be elicited efficiently only in sentences.

In all essential respects, my actual study of Ulwa proceeded in the manner just described—elicitation of lexical items, with gradually increased collection of sentence material in the course of a slow but steady progress through the basic vocabulary, punctuated by many side trips into areas of grammar which opened up as more and more sentences were obtained.

In working on a new language, it is often wise to refrain from obtaining sentences, or other long stretches of speech, until the sound system of the language is mastered to some extent. It is good, therefore, to start by eliciting nouns, which can be obtained in isolation. It is important, when sentences are obtained, to have phonological control over the material contained in them. The point at which it makes sense to begin eliciting sentences is actually quite early, but it differs from language to language. Ulwa has a sound system which is exceedingly forthcoming in this regard and, while details of the system (e.g., aspects of vowel length, sonorant devoicing, and the accent system) will probably take a considerable amount of time to understand fully, it is possible to feel quite comfortable writing Ulwa words almost immediately. In fact, after just a couple of words, it seemed rather pointless in this instance to refrain further from getting lexical items in sentential contexts.

In part, Ulwa is easy to write down because it has a straightforward three-vowel system (/a, i, u/). The vowels are pronounced in a manner which approximates that of the cardinal positions associated with these three vowel symbols—close to, but slightly more lax than, the Spanish values associated with them. The only difficulty in hearing the Ulwa vowels is length—each vowel has a short and a long counterpart (the latter indicated by a circumflex diacritic, following the established, but seldom actally observed, Miskitu orthographic practice), giving a total of six vowel phonemes in the language. The length feature accounts for the existence in Ulwa of such minimal pairs as <u>bas</u> 'hair' beside <u>bâs</u> 'three'. The vowel of the second of these has roughly twice the duration of that of the first.

The syllable structure of Ulwa also contributes to the ease with which the language can be written. Each syllable begins with at most one consonant (except for some borrowings from English and Miskitu, which begin with two), the nucleus of each syllable is always a vowel, and a given syllable may be closed with at most one consonant. Diphthongs include four short and four long /ai, au, ui, iu; âi, âu, ûi, îu/.

Finally, the consonant inventory of Ulwa represents, for the most part, a highly "unmarked" type, consisting of a series of three unaspirated stops /p, t, k/, two voiced stops /b, d/, the fricative /s/, the glides (or semivowels) /w, y/, and the laryngeal fricative /h/. A mildly complex feature of the Ulwa consonant system is found in the inventory of sonorants. The nasals, (flap) rhotics, and laterals occur in pairs of voiced and voiceless, the latter written with an [h] following the appropriate alphabetic symbol. Like their voiceless stop counterparts, the nasals are in three positions of articulation, bilabial, apico-alveolar, and dorso-velar: /m, mh; n, nh; ng, ngh/. The flaps and laterals are all apico-alveolar: /r, rh; l, lh/.

10

The symbols just introduced comprize the "alphabet" with which I wrote Ulwa when I gathered data on it and when I wrote up my results. It is identical to the alphabet which has been in use for Miskitu for many years; and the same has also been adopted for Northern Sumu. The fact that it is perfectly adequate for Ulwa and the fact that it is already in use in other Misumalpan languages make the choice of this alphabet extremely convenient, though the choice cannot be considered final until it is approved by members of the Ulwa community.

In the following sections, I will discuss briefly how the procedures alluded to above were actually implemented, and I will discuss some of the data which were obtained, both in relation to method and in relation to their relevance to linguistic issues.

3.2. The language of elicitation.

Prior to meeting Abanel Lacayo, with whom I was to work on Ulwa, I had met several members of the Ulwa community of Karawala in the context of the Miskitu bilingual education workshop in Bluefields. From these people, I had formed a good picture of the general linguistic situation at Karawala, and I had determined that I would have a choice of three languages to use in eliciting Ulwa—Spanish, English, and Miskitu. I decided to use Miskitu, the language best known to Karawala rersidents and the one which would enable me to obtain Ulwa data with the greatest speed. I would, of course, have recourse to English or Spanish where necessary. Although there were drawbacks associated with the choice of Miskitu, I reasoned that, since I would be returning to work on Ulwa again, the biases introduced in the data through the use of Miskitu would eventually be recognized and avoided when more "monolingual" eliciting procedures could be employed.

The danger involved in using Miskitu is one familiar to me from other areas of multilingualism—parts of contemporary Aboriginal Australia, for example. It is often the case that the grammars of languages under such conditions of intensive contact have "converged", becoming typologically similar, if not virtually identical. As a result, it is very possible for a speaker to "imitate" exactly the structure of a second language when translating it. The methodological problem which this circumstance creates is that of being uncertain, occasionally, whether or not a form one obtains in elicitation truely represents the structure of the language being studied. So for example, when I ask for the Ulwa corresponding to the Miskitu sentence below, is the response in some sense "true" Ulwa? Or is it merely an Ulwa "copy" of the Miskitu?

Miskitu:
Yang sula kum kaik-ri plap-an.
(I deer one see-NFOBV1 run-PAST3)
'I saw a deer and it ran away.'

11

Ulwa:
Yang sana as tal-ing îr-ida.
(I   deer one see-OBV1 run-PAST3)
'I saw a deer and it ran away.'

These sentences correspond exactly, morpheme for morpheme, with one very slight exception. In Miskitu, the obviative ending on the first verb (`see') reflects a tense distinction which is neutralized in Ulwa. In both languages, this ending represents the category "first person obviative" (glossed OBV1 above)—i.e., the subject of the verb in the initial clause is first person, and the reference of the subject changes in the second clause (from `I' to `deer'). This switch in subject reference is know as subject obviation (glossed OBV), or switch reference. In Miskitu, in addition to these categories, the tense distinction future/nonfuture is marked—the marking is nonfuture (glossed NF) in the sentence cited above. In Ulwa, the tense categories are neutralized completely in the obviative endings. Thus, total imitation is impossible, for morphological reasons. But the syntactic correspondence is perfect.

It is reasonable to be suspicious of such a close match between the stimulus and the response. In this case, we happen to know that the surviving Misumalpan languages share, as an integral part of their grammars, the system of "verb sequencing" which is exemplified by this Miskitu-Ulwa comparison. Thus, we can be sure, in this instance, that the Ulwa is as natural as the Miskitu.

The situation is different, however, in the case of certain other constructions. I cannot be sure, for example, that I have a proper understanding of the Ulwa relative clause. Compare the following Miskitu and Ulwa forms:

Miskitu:
[Yang sula kaik-ri] ba   plap-an.
(I   deer see-PAST1 the run-PAST3)
'The deer I saw ran away.'

Ulwa:
[Yang sana tal-ikda] ya   îr-ida.
(I   deer see-PAST1 the run-PAST3)
'The deer I saw ran away.'

Here again, the two languages share an identical structure, the so-called "internally headed" relative clause, known to be a favored type in Miskitu. The dependent clause (bracketted above) is simply nominalized, by means of the immediately following definite article (ba in Miskitu), and the semantic "head" of the relative clause (sula `deer', in the Miskitu version) simply appears in its logical position within the dependent clause—i.e., object position; preceding the verb, as expected in this verb-final language. Thus, in this type of relative construction, the semantic head does not appear external to the dependent

12

clause, as it does in the English translation, for example. The Ulwa version corresponds precisely to the Miskitu. In the short time available to me, I was not able to determine whether this is in fact the favored form for the relative clause in Ulwa. And I have reason to be cautious in this instance, since it is known that it is the <u>externally</u> headed relative clause which is favored in Northern Sumu (cf. Norwood, 1997)—though even there, as a translation of the Miskitu, the internally headed form was readily given by a speaker of Twahka:

<u>Twahka:</u>
[Yang sana   tal-na-yang] kidi   k-îra-na.
(I   deer   see-PAST-1   the   3-run-PAST)
'The deer I saw ran away.'

It is clear from this example that it would be a mistake to rely exclusively on Miskitu in eliciting Ulwa. But this is not the plan in any event. The use of a separate language of elicitation is solely an expedient in the initial phase, during which an elementary understanding of the structure of the language is being acquired. As soon as possible, monolingual methods must be employed in obtaining Ulwa data, methods which do not rely on a language other than Ulwa itself. The data collected monolingually can be used to "correct for" any Miskitu influences in the data of the initial phase. The harm associated with the use of Miskitu in the first phase is minimal, in my judgment. And, in fact, the two bodies of data—that elicited through Miskitu and that elicited monolingually—will consitute a source of information on an important aspect of the Ulwa linguistic situation, namely, the extent to which Ulwa imitates Miskitu in the course of translation. A potential hazard will become a virtue.

Interestingly, while Ulwa morphosyntactic structures are close and often identical to their Miskitu counterparts, and no conscious attempt is made to keep the two languages distinct in this regard, there is a conscious effort on the part of Ulwa speakers to avoid using lexical items which are identical to Miskitu ones. This was especially true in the context of eliciting sessions, where, it was perceived, only "pure" Ulwa should be given. There is a perception among Sumu people generally that Miskitu occupies a position of greater power in relation to Sumu. And this is an objective fact, in actuality. And the Sumu people perceive further that the purity and continued existence of their languages are threatened by the sociopolitically more powerful Miskitu language. A concern for purity in Ulwa usage is therefore understandable, and it proved to be a factor which had to be dealt with in the context of field research on Ulwa.

Although this is not universal among Ulwa speakers, there is a feeling among some that any Ulwa word which is identical to its Miskitu counterpart is a borrowing and, given the perceived language status asymmetry in the community, it is generally felt that the borrowing must be from Miskitu into Ulwa. Such speakers attempt, where possible, to avoid giving words of this sort in eliciting sessions, though they use them freely in conversation. Such words are

13

avoided even where it can be shown that the borrowing was in the other direction, i.e., in cases where the word in question is in fact "pure Ulwa", to the extent that this notion makes sense.

In the first days of work on Ulwa, the avoidance practice described above extended even to the first person pronoun, which has the from yang in both Miskitu and Sumu. This was somewhat problematic, since there is no convenient replacement for it. In many cases, one can take advantage of the fact that Ulwa is a so called "pro-drop" language—i.e., one can omit the subject of a sentence, because the inflection on the verb is rich enough to permit identification of the person and number categories of that argument. Thus, one can omit the first person pronoun in (a) below, giving (b):

> (a) Yang sana as tal-ikda.
> (I   deer one see-PAST1)
> 'I saw a deer.'

> (b) Sana as tal-ikda.
> (deer one see-PAST1)
> 'I saw a deer.'

This is one way to avoid using the pronoun yang, but it is not really practical or realistic, since, in normal Ulwa speech, the pronoun is frequently kept. Another avoidance technique that was tried was that of using the expression muihki (kat) `my (very) person/body' in place of the pronoun. But since this is grammatically a third person form, its use as a first person pronoun, which would otherwise require first person agreement (on the verb, for example), created uncertainty in forming phrases and sentences requiring such agreement.

Having noticed that yang appeared often and without hesitation in Ulwa conversations which I overheard, I suggested that it was not necessary to avoid using that pronoun in our eliciting sessions. I pointed out that yang is more thoroughly integrated into the grammar of Ulwa than its Miskitu look-alike is into the grammar of that language. In Ulwa, the independent pronoun is cognate with elements appearing in the system of verbal inflections—these cognate elements are, specifically, the first person object prefix yâ-, and the first person subject suffixes -yang, -ng. In Miskitu, no obvious relationship exists between the independent pronoun yang and the verbal inflections. Thus, if borrowing is involved at all, it is as likely as not that it was in the opposite direction, from Sumu into Miskitu—as in the case of the adjectives in -ni mentioned earlier. Be this as it may, the avoidance of yang was discontinued after the first week of work and, in general, considerations of linguistic purity ceased to play a significant role in the research, except that I was requested to place a mark beside each Ulwa item that was identical to the Miskitu, so that it could be checked later with older speakers.

14

3.3. Some notes on Ulwa: data from the first page.

If there is any mystery associated with field work, it is quickly dispelled by a glance at some actual field notes. By way of introducing some of the Ulwa data obtained on my first trip, I will reproduce here the material appearing on very first page of my field notes. My field notes are always chaotic, since I dash from topic to topic, and I regularly abandon my own rules of conduct. This is not true of all linguists, I hasten to say. Many linguists have beautifully organized and easily legible notes. So the notes the reader is about to see are those of a linguist who works in the "messy" tradition. They will require some comment.

First Page of Field Notes, January, 1988

1.   tuki, tu:ki da-láka (twisi latwan), muihki tuki da-lá:pai.
          man tú:ma dala:pai pi. (man twisam latwan ki?)
          alas tu:ka itukwana. (witin twisa tara)
2.   tinipas; muihki tikipas, man támapas,
          alas takapas.
3.   kungkimap/k; muihki kungkimap/k   k?
          kungmamap/k, alas kungkamap/k.
4.   ánà:ni; muihki ana:ki (?);
          mán anà:ma, álas anà:ka.
7.   nangkitak (kaikma), nangmatak, nangkatak,
          mining nangnitak, manna balna nangmanatak,
          mining balna nangnitak.
10.   makdaka (nakra), mikdiki (naikra), mamàkdaka,   I needs
          alas makdaka, minìkdinika (wan nakra).   I work
15.   tapa (kiama), muihki kat tapà:ki (kiaima), man tapama,
          alas tapà:ka, tapa:ni.

---

sana as talikda	I manna balna palka sana taldamna pi?
(sula kum kaikri)	I (man nani pali sula kaikram ki?)
sana taldam pi?	I alas balna sana taldidi (sic!).
(sula kum kaikram ki?)	I (witin nani swalya ba kaikan)
alas sana talda.	I yakau tala sana:kaya.
(witin sula kum kaikan)	I (bukra kaiks swalya ba)
mining balna sana as talwida.	I
(yawan sula kum kaikan)	I
(also yang nani, no dist?)	I

The numbers (1-4, 7, 10, 15) correspond to the numbering in Lehmann's list. Forms given in parenthesis are the Miskitu used in eliciting or, occasionally, the Miskitu given by Lacayo to translate an Ulwa form volunteered by him. My commentary will take each item on the page in turn.

The first item, glossed in German as <u>Zunge</u> 'tongue', appears in Lehmann's list as '<u>tuisa</u>' or <u>twisa</u> (with a macron and an accent on the [i]) for Miskitu and <u>tu-ke</u> (with an accent and a macron on the [u]) for Ulwa. I used the Miskitu form <u>twisi</u> 'my tongue' to elicit an Ulwa form, getting '<u>tuki</u>', which I first wrote with a short [u], then with a long vowel (notated by means of a colon at this stage, [u:]). I immediately broke my own rule and obtained a sentence, which I was not really prepared to handle. I asked for the Ulwa equivalent of <u>twisi latwan (sa)</u> 'my tongue is sore', and I got a form which I wrote as <u>tu:ki da-láka</u>. I would now write this as <u>tûki dalâka</u>. For the same meaning, I also got <u>muihki tuki da-lá:pai</u>, which I would now write <u>muihki tûki dalâpai</u>.[1] Note that <u>muihki</u>, rather than the more usual <u>yang</u>, was given as the first person pronoun here. I now know that <u>dalâka</u> is a noun or an adjective, meaning 'pain' or 'painful', and that dalâpai is the third person present form of the verb <u>dalânaka</u> 'to hurt, ache'. At the time, I knew none of this, of course, and was not really prepared to write the words down. I was perplexed by the accentuation of the forms, and thought that the first syllable must be some sort of partially detatched proclitic, since it did not bear the main stress (hence the hyphenation). For some reason—Miskitu influence, undoubtedly—I expected all words to bear initial stress. I later determined that, in Ulwa, the second syllable is stressed if it is heavy (i.e., is closed or has a long vowel) and the first is light. The other sentences were elicited to obtain the second and third person possessive forms: <u>man tu:ma dala:pai pi</u> 'does your tongue hurt?'; <u>alas tu:ka itukwana</u> 'his/her tongue is big'. These would be written the same now, but with the circumflex notation for vowel length, in place of the colon. In addition to filling out the singular possessive paradigm, I learned that polar (or "yes-no") questions are formed by means of the particle <u>pi</u> (later corrected to <u>pih</u>) placed at the end of the sentence.

In eliciting the second item, glossed <u>Mund</u> 'mouth' in Lehman, I followed the common Miskitu practice of using the first person inclusive <u>wan bîla</u> 'our (incl) mouth' as a citation form. This yielded something I was not then expecting, namely the form <u>tinipas</u>. I knew that this involved an infix, but I was not expecting <u>-ni-</u>, which I assumed was exclusively a Mayangna element. I had not yet figured out that Mayangna third person regularly corresponds to Ulwa first inclusive.

The first and second items illustrate nicely the general characteristic of Misumalpan nominal possessive paradigms that the affixes marking person of possessor are sometimes suffixed to the noun, sometimes infixed to it:

<u>tû</u> 'tongue'   <u>tapas</u> 'mouth'

---

[1]These revisions in the transcription reflect some gradual progress in hearing stress and length in Ulwa. The analysis which finally emerged, however, well into the 90s, would be better reflected by omitting the length diacritic on <u>dalâpai</u>, <u>dalâka</u>, and <u>dalânaka</u>. The vowel in question is stressed, according to an exceptionless rule of Ulwa—unknown to me in 1988—and stressed open syllables are regulary lengthened.

1	tû-ki	ti-ki-pas
2	tû-ma	ta-ma-pas
3	tû-ka	ta-ka-pas

The third item on Lehmann's list, glossed <u>Lippe</u> 'lip', is remarkable only because I had difficulty initially hearing the position of articulation of final stop consonants, which are "unrealeased" and, therefore, do not present to the listener the tell-tale burst so useful for identification. At first I heard the final stop of this form, which I know in fact to be <u>kungmak</u>, as a bilabial, hence the fluctuating notation <u>p/k</u>.

The fourth item, glossed <u>Zahn</u> 'tooth', gave me my first inkling of how the stress system worked. My notes here are confusing, but I was beginning to see that the second syllable, where strong, receives stress. Lehmann's seventh item, glossed <u>Nase</u> 'nose', is straightforward, but it exemplifies for the first time (in my notes, at least) that the plural suffix <u>-na</u>, which appears on the first and second person pronouns (as in <u>yang-na</u> 'we (exclusive)' and <u>man-na</u> 'you (plural)'), also appears on the corresponding possessive, as in <u>nang-ma-na-tak</u> 'your nose' (you plural), beside <u>nang-ma-tak</u> 'your nose' (you singular).

The item numbered 10 in Lehmann's list, <u>Auge</u> 'eye', is accompanied by the notation "needs work". I did not understand what was going on in this form. For one thing, the first and third person forms are represented only by the expected vowel harmony, it would seem—the actual person markers are not separately discernable. Moreover, there is an apparent repetition of the infix <u>-ni-</u> in the first inclusive form. These features, I was not yet prepared to understand. On the other hand, this item helped to confirm the account of Ulwa stress which began to develop. The second person form, and the first inclusive form as well, showed stress on the second syllable, as expected. Lehmann's item 15, <u>Ohr</u> 'ear', shows the same stress pattern, but it illustrates a problem of hearing which continues to be a real one for me—that of hearing a final long vowel. My transcriptions of words like <u>tapâ</u> 'ear', when these are unaccompanied by suffixes, fluctuate in regard to the length of the final vowel. The final syllable in such cases is also the second syllable, and it should therefore receive the main stress, making its length easy to hear. But this does not appear to be the case, to my hearing, at least.[2] I continue to have difficulty with this. I also failed to record length on the second vowel of <u>tapâma</u> 'your ear', though I did record that vowel as bearing stress (as expected of a long vowel in that position). The use of a grave accent (`) in marking some main stresses reflects my perception, at the time, that

---

[2]To this day, I hear alternation in these CVCV forms. Where the final vowel is stresses, in conformity with the general rule, that vowel is lengthened, as expected. Where the initial syllable is stressed, its vowel is not especially long.

the pitch on the associated vowel was level, or even somewhat depressed—rather than raised, as might be expected of a stressed vowel.

My notes were taken on a blank page facing the page from Lehmann's work which I was using to help cue my eliciting. I made use of only seven items from the first page of Lehmann's list, so the facing page on which I was working had some space left over. I decided that, whenever this happened, I would fill it up with other Ulwa material, material that would get me further into the grammar and make me more able to elicit, with understanding, longer stretches of Ulwa speech. The material appearing at the bottom of the first page, below the line, represents this sort of "page filler". In this instance, various past-tense forms of the Ulwa verb talnaka 'to see' are obtained in response to Miskitu sentences involving the corresponding verb (kaikaia) in that language. The sentences depict verious events of seeing a deer: sana as talikda 'I saw a deer'; sana taldam pi(h)? 'did you see the/a deer?'; alas sana talda 'he/she saw the/a deer'; mining balna sana as talwida 'we (plural incl) saw a deer; manna balna palka sana taldamna pi(h)? 'did you (plural) really see a deer?'; alas balna sana taldida 'they saw the deer'; yakau tala sanaka ya 'see that deer (yonder)!'. From this a partial past tense paradigm of the verb talnaka is obtained:

	singular		plural
1	talikda	excl:	-------
		incl:	talwida
2	taldam		taldamna
3	talda		taldida

The missing form (talikdana) was obtained at a later time. In the original notes, the third person plural form was recorded incorrectly as *taldidi, and a question was raised concerning the first person inclusive. Specifically, the issue was whether there was in fact a distinction in Ulwa between inclusive and exclusive first person. In addition to the past tense forms, the singular imperative was also obtained (the plural was obtained later). The sentence containing the imperative also illustrates other points of Ulwa grammar, e.g., the fact that a noun must appear in the construct state following a demonstrative determiner, and the noun may itself be followed by a definite article. The sequence sana:kaya in the above transcription corresponds to what I would now write as sanaka ya 'the deer', consisting of the construct state of the noun sana 'deer' and the definite article ya. Interestingly, in the notes, this noun phrase is extraposed to the right of the verb, leaving the demonstrative stranded in the original pre-verbal position appropriate to the object. I can be certain that this sentence, and its Miskitu equivalent, were volunteered, since I myself would not have had enough confidence to elicit the sentence using the marked (extraposed) order in Miskitu bukra kaik-s swalya ba (yonder see-IMP deer:CONSTR the). This is an example, therefore, of the sort of side benefit one gets by writing down everything one's consultant offers. The interest of this example consists, in part,

in the fact that it shows that the construct state induced by a preceding demonstrative remains on the noun when it is extraposed. A small detail, perhaps, but one I would not have thought to look for at the time—the information came "for free".

With hindsight, I can see that this page contains a lot of information which I could not possible have appreciated when the data were collected. This is the typical condition, for me at least. I must let the material rest for a time, move on to other items in my prepared elicitation plan. I return to the beginning, to correct and fill in gaps, only after gaining some experience with the language. Each field worker has an personal style, I imagine. And, in my case, I find it exhausting to try to fill in gaps, to complete paradigms, and the like, when I first encounter them. I get impatient and irritable when I try to do it. Thus, for example, I did not, on the first day, press for the inclusive-exclusive distinction, which did not come out as straightforwardly as I had expected it would. In the interests of forward motion and of concession to my own style of work, I momentarily postponed eliciting this sector of the verbal paradigm. But in this particular case, even after a wait, little headway was made. The inclusive-exclusive distinction exists in Miskitu and in Myangna, and it was recorded for Ulwa by Conzemius. It turns out, however, that the situation in this regard is not altogether clear in contemporary Ulwa. The expected forms exist, but their use has changed somewhat, it seems. In any event, time constraints simply did not permit me to get to the bottom of the matter. The picture I have now is that yangna (balna), the historic first exclusive, remains in that use, while mining, the historic inclusive, is now used for both inclusive and exclusive. Future work will tell whether this is correct.

In general, the field work proceeded in this manner until, at a point in the final week, I began to introduce a "monolingual" technique, in parallel with continuing elicitation in the pattern exemplified above. The new routine was introduced with a view to devising a program of research which Lacayo could carry on after I left the field. In the following paragraphs, I will reproduce and comment on a later section of my notes, one which represents this second technique.

3.4. More notes on Ulwa: an Ulwa dictionary project.

In conformity with my assumptions concerning the relationship between the Ulwa language project and the community of Ulwa speakers, in particular, that the project was the property of that community, I hoped to make it possible for work on the language to continue during my absence. Accordingly, Lacayo and I developed a project which he could carry on in Karawala, one which would furnish data for the study of Ulwa grammar and, at the same time, supply material for entries in an eventual dictionary of Ulwa.

The project made use of the <u>Diccionario Elementar del Miskitu</u> recently published by CIDCA. This served as the "script" for the project. The project itself was to proceed as follows: the Ulwa equivalent of each entry in the Miskitu dictionary was to be determined and exemplified by means of an Ulwa sentence, hopefully one which would reveal as much as possible about its meaning and its grammatical properties. This is a method which I often use to obtain sentences in a manner which reduces to a minimum any possible contamination from a language other than the one being studied. To this extent, it is a "monolingual" method; the illustrative sentences are volunteered and, therefore, are independent of any language of elicitation.

The following items are the first entries obtained as this dictionary project was being discussed and developed by Lacayo and myself. The entries are reproduced as they were first written down, except that an English translation has been added in brackets, following the parenthetic Miskitu. The entries appear in the alphabetic order determined by the Miskitu, as in the CIDCA dictionary.

<u>Some Ulwa Dictionary Entries (notes pp. 119-120)</u>

Dî auhka (ail) [oil]
> Dî auhka karak yâmanh kisnaka. (Ail wal plas kiskaia.)
> [Oil is for frying bananas.]

Mahka (ailal) [much, many]
> Kasnaka dîka mahka lauka. (Piaia dûkia ailal bâra sa.)
> [There is much food.]

Pâpangh (aisa) [father]
> Yang papanghki kau dalâka talyang. (Yang papiki ra
> latwan kaikisna.) [I love my father.]

Yulnaka (aisaia) [to speak, say]
> Mâmahki kau yul as yultuting. (Mamiki ra sturi kum
> aisaisna.) [I'm going to say a word to my mother.]

Sapitka (albanghkia) [abyss]
> Sûlu as sapitka kau wauhdi âwi yawada. (Yul kum
> albanghkia ra kauhwi dimi wan.)
> [A dog fell into the abyss.]}

In these entries, the Ulwa sentences represent data of a primary character, essentially uninfluenced by any other language—each is simply invented, to illustrate a lexical item, and is not given as a translation. By contrast, the Miskitu sentences are given as translations of the Ulwa, and if any linguistic mimicry is involved here, it is the Miskitu which imitates the Ulwa. And, in fact, in the

second entry, the Miskitu imitates the Ulwa expression for 'food'—i.e., kasnaka dîka 'thing to eat'—using the literal translation piaia dûkia instead of the more common Miskitu word plun 'food'.

Data obtained in this way are somewhat less tractable than are data obtained by translation, and there is a certain amount of chance involved in relation to coverage. Structures which exist in the language may, by chance, never show up in material of this sort, no matter how extensive. However, the data are more trustworthy. And the coverage problem just mentioned is balanced by the fact that structures often emerge which one could never obtain through elicitation, since one can never know a priori what structures a new language will have—thus, the coverage problem itself demands use of methods which enable a speaker to use his or her linguistic knowledge freely, without undue influence from a distinct language of elicitation. The sensable thing to do, therefore, is to use all techniques which succeed in obtaining data, making allowances, of course, for the risks involved in each.

In these five entries, a number of features of Ulwa grammar are illustrated. The first entry, for example, illustrates the use of an infinitival as the main predicate in a clause. I must confess at this point, however, that I do not fully understand what is happening in this sentence. My English translation does not properly reflect the Ulwa (or the Miskitu) which, more literally, would be something like To fry bananas with oil. It is not clear what the subject of the infinitive should be taken to be. Further work is required here, needless to say.

In the third entry, the idiomatic expression dalâka talnaka 'to love' (lit. 'to see pain') appears. This is identical to the Miskitu expression latwan kaikaia, which I had known beforehand, and if I had used the Miskitu to elicit the Ulwa, I would have wondered about the authenticity of the latter. Since the Ulwa was primary here, however, it seems to me reasonable to accept the Ulwa and Miskitu expressions as a genuine calque—i.e., an idiomatic expression shared by the two languages.

The fourth entry illustrates an Ulwa "cognate object" construction. The verb yulnaka 'to speak, say' appears there in the expression yul yulnaka 'to say a word', or more literally 'to speak speech'. The noun yul 'speech, word, language' functions as the direct object, and the argument corresponding to the individual to whom the speech is addressed is marked for case by means of the postposition kau, which has both accusative and dative case functions.

The final entry here illustrates the so-called "serial verb construction", an important feature of Misumalpan grammar generally (Norwood, 1997, for examples in Mayangna). The final three words in the Ulwa sentence (and its Miskitu translation) is a series of verbs expression the idea 'fall into'. The first verb, in the proximate participial form wauhdi, expresses the principal action, that of falling (cf., wauhdanaka 'to fall'); the second, also in the proximate

21

participial form <u>âwi</u>, from the verb <u>âwanaka</u> 'to enter', expresses the notion of movement into an area (the abyss, in this case); and the final verb, in the fully inflected past tense form <u>yawada</u> `went', expresses the direction of the action, as is often required in Ulwa sentences depicting motion—in this instance, we have direction "away from speaker's point of reference" (expressed by <u>yawanaka</u> 'to go'), as opposed to direction "toward speaker's point of reference" (normally expressed by <u>wânaka</u> 'to come').

Volunteered sentences obtained in the course of dictionary work of this sort are a rich source of grammatical information. To be sure, longer texts—traditional stories, oral ethnographic essays, conversations, autobiographies, etc.—are also extremely valuable and must be obtained. However, I find the volunteered sentences of the dictionary to be especially valuable. They are, in effect, texts themselves, albeit short ones, and they are much more manageable than long texts. For the initial phases of language work, they have the advantage that they can be transcribed easily. Each sentence, or textlet, by virtue of its brevity, presents a minimum of "new" problems or mysteries, permitting the linguist to arrive quickly at some understanding of what is going on.

This lexicon-based strategy was to play a role in the next phase of the Ulwa project. The plan was that Lacayo would, as his time permitted, continue to work on the dictionary in the manner illustrated above until mid-March, when I hoped to return. I arranged with CIDCA to continue paying a salary to Lacayo during my absence, in order to compensate him for the time spent on the project. In addition, I left with him a set of 3/5 cards on which to make entries, a box of ball-point pens, a cassette tape recorder, batteries, and tape. Although he did not feel comfortable doing so, Lacayo could write Ulwa forms, using the Miskitu orthography. The tape recorder would make the work proceed more quickly and more enjoyably—it could all be done orally. Moreover, it would ensure that the Ulwa length distinctions would be recorded—these are normally ignored in Miskitu writing practice. But since I could not be sure how long the tape recorder would keep working, I made sure Lacayo had materials to write with—these would not otherwise be available in Karawala, and the opportunity to repare a broken recorder would be nil anywhere on the Atlantic Coast.

I have not heretofore mentioned the use of tape recorders. Normally, I tape everything I obtain. But since this trip was short, and I needed to work quickly, I recorded very little. I wanted to make sure that I had a reasonably good written record of everything, partly because I was never fully confident of the recording equipment I had with me or in my ability to hear everything accurately on the recording. I felt that if I recorded, I would have to write as well—almost doubling the demands on the little time I had. Accordingly, I decided to minimize recording. Although I feel that I had no real choice in the matter, I would not consider this to be the right decision under more relaxed conditions. Rather, I would advise taping everything, if at all possible.

This concludes the remarks I wish to make concerning the actual collection of Ulwa data during the January trip to Bluefields and Karawala. I will turn now to some concluding remarks, following a brief description of my unsuccessful attempt to return to Karawala in March.

4. Epilogue.

After returning to my university at the beginning of February, I began to do the work required to produce the preliminary Ulwa vocabulary which I had promised to bring back to Karawala in March. I got help of David Nash, a colleague of mine in the Warlpiri Dictionary Project of the Center for Cognitive Science, MIT, and we put together a small book of some 500 Ulwa entries, with glossing in Spanish, Miskitu, and English. To the extent possible, each entry was made as complete as possible. Not all entries were successful, by any means, but in the best ones, the necessary grammatical and semantic information was included, and at least one informative example sentence was given, with Spanish translation. An introduction on the writing system was included, together with sample nominal and verbal paradigms and a short comparative vocabulary of Ulwa and Northern Sumu. The book was to serve both to provide an example of what printed dictionary entry would look like and to provide a base upon which to build, by correcting and expanding the many deficient entries, and by integrating into it the work being done by Lacayo. In addition to the pocket-sized book, a larger, double-spaced, large format, version of the vocabulary was made for the purpose of incorporating corrections and additions.

My plan was to go to Karawala with copies of the vocabulary and, together with Lacayo, discuss with interested Ulwa speakers the possibility of continued documentation of the language, preferably to be carried out largely by members of the community. However, due in part to a delay brought about by Reagan's introduction of troops into Honduras, the time available for the March trip was compressed to less than two weeks. It is not wise to attempt to get from Massachusetts to Karawala, and back, in a period so short as that. As it turned out, I got within 50 kilometers of Karawala when the outboard motor of the panga which was transporting me failed definitively. It had taken me a week and a half to get that far, and it was clear that, with Easter week beginning, it was not going to be possible for me to resume my journey.

I got close, but not close enough. Setbacks of this sort are common in field work. My experience in this instance was a picknick compared to some I have heard about. Moreover, the trip was not a complete failure. I met lot of fine Nicaraguans I had not known before, and it was even possible to recheck and extend some of my Ulwa data, with Karawala people in Bluefields and with fellow passengers on the ill-fated panga. I also heard, by rumor, that Lacayo was involving others in his work on Ulwa. This was superb news, and while I longed to get to Karawala and to talk to him, it is possible that my failure to manage it

was a good thing, better in the long run for the development of an autonomous community-based Ulwa language project.

I had prepared a sort of "language kit" for Lacayo and others at Karawala—a small suitcase containing copies of the Ulwa vocabulary, a copy of the Heath and Marx Miskitu dictionary, a copy of Lehmann's comparative list, a copy of von Houwald's dictionary of Mayangna, a new tape recorder, with batteries and tape, many pens, markers, pads of paper, and a variety of other items that would be useful in carrying out the work of documenting Ulwa. In addition, Basilio—a member of the Rama Language Project—prepared for me a set of pages for an Ulwa alphabet book, to be illustrated by Karawala school children; this was also included. Since I was not able to reach Karawala myself, I left this kit (together with instructions for its use) at CIDCA in Bluefields, to be delivered when possible.

I have taken some time here to discuss my failed attempt to return to Karawala because I believe that the best sort of conclusion I can write to this chapter is one which is forthright about the realities of field work in an isolated area. Contretemps of the type described above often decide people against the whole business of field work. But it must be remembered that having an unsuccessful trip on one particular occasion says nothing at all about what will happen the next time. Moreover, no such trip is a complete failure; the trick is to turn each trip into some sort of success. And the most important thing to remember is that this type of field work is a long-term affair; it proceed in small steps over many years. Efficiency, in the usual modern-day sense of the term, is not the point. What matters is eventual success, and that will be measured by the extent to which work on the language is integrated in a meaningful way into the life of the community of people who speak it.[3]

References

[3]This represents the story up to March 1988. I made a trip in July of that year, with the intention of going to Karawala, but , due to a back injury, I was only able to work in Managua and Bluefields, with Lacayo as before. When I was next able to return to Karawala, in January, 1989, a six member Ulwa Language Committee had been formed, composed of three elders and three school teachers. This team, called Ulwah Yulka Tunak Muihka Balna (UYUTMUBAL) and Comité del Idioma Ulwa (CODIUL), had by then prepared enough entries to produce a second edition of the vocabulary. This was also printed up as a book and distributed, together with a number of childrens' books written down by the Language Committee. The Comittee also built a house in which to work and to house visiting linguists. A graduate student from MIT worked with the team for two years, with funding from the National Science Foundation (Grant Number SBR-9308115). A third version of the vocabulary, now worthy of the name "dictionary," should appear soon—a provisional version of it is on the web (http://web.mit.edu/ling-phil/lex/misumalpan/ulwa/www/ulwa.html). The Ulwa Language Committee is concerned presently with the question of teaching the language in the school. Like most other language projects on the Atlantic Coast, the Ulwa project must contend with extraordinary economic difficulties. In all honesty, it must be said that its fate is uncertain.

Conzemius, Edward. 1929. Notes on the Miskito and Sumu languages of Eastern Nicaragua and Honduras. International Journal of American Linguistics 5:57-115.

Green, Thomas, and Ken Hale. To appear. Ulwa, the Language of Karawala, Eastern Nicaragua: Its Position and Prospects in Modern Nicaragua. International Journal of the Sociology of Language 132:185-201.

von Houwald, Götz. Diccionario Español-Sumu Sumu-Español. Managua: Ministerio de Educación.

Lehmann, Walter. 1920. Zentral-Amerika, Teil I, Die Sprachen Zentral-Amerikas in ihren Beziehungen zueinander so wie zu Sud-Amerika un Mexiko. Two Volumes. Verlag Dietrich Reimer: Berlin.

McLean Cornelio, Melba. 1996. Diccionario Panamahka. Managua: CIDCA

Norwood, Susan. 1997. Gramática de la Lengua Sumu. Managua: CIDCA.