Who is the audience?
Documenting Minahasan languages for the diaspora and beyond

Anthony Jukes
CRLD, La Trobe University
Documenting intangible things

- Language
- Processes
- Techniques
- Activities

- How do we document them? And how do we present the documentation to others?
- A case study: Minahasan regional cuisine
Sulawesi

- Slightly smaller than Great Britain
- Population c. 16 m
- 114 languages (Ethnologue)
- Population concentrated in north and (esp.) south peninsulas
- Economy – cocoa and coffee (south), cloves and coconuts (north)
Particular issues in Minahasa

• The languages are all under pressure from Manado Malay and Indonesian
• The last domain of use tends to be in the farms, gardens, forests — but the speakers are becoming too elderly for agricultural work and can’t be recorded in situ
• Meanwhile, traditional agricultural practices are changing through modernisation
• There are many things to document!
• Many Minahasans live in diaspora (Japan, Netherlands, US, Australia, HK)
Toratán project

- ELDP funded postdoctoral project.
- Two years (12 months in the field)
- Over 70 hours of video and 20 hours of audio recorded.
- 15 speakers, from 45-78 yrs of age
- approximately 30 hrs of video + audio from 67 separate sessions selected for archiving at Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR)
- About 80% transcribed and translated into Manado Malay and English using ELAN
- A smaller amount further analysed and interlinearised with Toolbox
Documentation of Ratahan

Language: Ratahan [th]
Depositor: Anthony Jukes
Location: Indonesia

Summary of deposit
This deposit consists of audio and video recordings of speakers of Toratàn (Ratahan), spoken in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, resulting from fieldwork conducted between June 2005 and September 2007.

Group represented
Toratàn

Language information
Toratàn, Bentenan

Deposit contents
The deposit comprises over 120 audio and video files, as well as transcriptions of many of the recordings in the form of ELAN files.

Genres include personal history, elicitation, folk tales, and free conversation.

Other information
Toratàn (Ratahan), an isolated member of the Sangiric family, is spoken fluently by only a few hundred people, all of advanced age. The language is giving way to Manado Malay and the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. A nearby dialect, Bentenan, may have already disappeared. Eight speakers of the Wio and Wongkai dialects were recorded for the deposit.
Archived collections: who is the audience?

• A lot of material is being produced – but who’s going to watch it?
• The endangered language archives do a vital job – but they are not (yet) generally accessible to various potential audiences
• A lot of the material produced is simply not interesting
Video in language documentation

• Many (most?) people are using video these days
• There are very good reasons to do so
• But are we doing our best?
• Two main types:
  – sit and talk
  – point and show
Sit and talk

Here are Willem, Anes, and Bert

And here they are 63 minutes later
Point and show

• Pan around! Look at everything! This is great! Problem is – it looks terrible
Should LDC video be watchable?

• Sure, why not? Or at least some of it should be. Great cameras are available these days — if we know how to use them.
• Many language documenters have been given significant amounts of funding (public or private).
• They are working with people who are often custodians of unique linguistic and cultural knowledge.
• They have both the opportunity and the responsibility to record this in ways that are both comprehensive and accessible.
• ‘Linguists may learn from ethnocinematographic contributions... that there is also an aesthetic aspect to the video documentation of communicative behavior’ (Dimmendaal 2010:155)
A palm sugar video was created during the ELDP project on Toratán (2005-7).

The narration is by Bert Hosang – it was transcribed and translated into English and Indonesian.

The post-narration model worked well for several reasons, eg.

- The elderly speakers can’t climb up trees
- The guy climbing the tree isn’t in the best position to provide a live explanation of what he’s doing — and would be difficult to record
‘Languages of Minahasa’ project

• A 4-year ARC-funded project aiming to comprehensively document and describe Minahasan languages of North Sulawesi, focusing on Tonsea, Tombulu, and Tondano

• One of the aims is to examine the extent of grammatical variation among these languages

• So I need a way of collecting data which can be compared across these languages

• And I want to make things that are accessible to the communities, and the diaspora
Narrated videos

• Videos of local cultural/economic activities can serve as culture documentation as well as linguistic stimulus
• Narrations can be collected from multiple speakers, in multiple languages
• They can potentially be interesting to watch — and narration in local languages with subtitles in wider-used language means they can appeal both to communities and casual viewers (language by stealth!)
• To be interesting they should be well-filmed – there is an aesthetic component
• Editing is important – find the balance between brevity and completeness
Minahasan cuisine

• Everyone loves food
• Minahasans have an attachment to their cuisine, and their (notorious) use of the ‘festive meats’
• A particular focus of nostalgia in diaspora communities
• A two year discussion on Facebook about how best to cook things in bamboo – most participants are outside Minahasa
Cooking videos

• Cooking videos have been made for a variety of local recipes, e.g. water (sago grubs), kangkung (water spinach), kolombi (pond snails), ricarodo (eggplant stew), tinoransak (spicy pork)

• These have been used to elicit narrations from 5 people in the 3 languages studied (Tombulu, Tondano, Tonsea)

• All the narrations get used as ‘data’ – but the best ones are used to showcase the language and put online. Using ELAN they are transcribed and translated and these annotations are used as subtitles.
How to deliver videos?

• VCDs/DVDs
  – This used to be the only practical way — but increasingly people are post-physical media

• Online options are better but as yet there is no ideal solution
  – In theory HTML 5 will allow selection from multiple audio tracks – but as yet the language archives can’t do this (to my knowledge), nor do they yet deliver subtitles unproblematically
Here and now solutions

• Vimeo
  – good quality
  – small but active user community
  – no support for subtitles or alternate audio

• You Tube
  – good support for subtitles
  – none for alternate audio
  – large user community (yay), including the very dregs of humanity (boo)
Water (sago grubs)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVy2QsFqdYI
Paniki

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mITluBEHpTg

Warning: somewhat gruesome in parts
Reactions

• Producing them
  – It is quite easy to collect narrations — people are familiar with the processes and environments shown, and enjoy explaining them

• Watching them
  – *Water* (sago grubs): 5,149 views on YouTube — the most watched Tombulu broadcast in history! (The Tondano version with 561)
  – They are linked and discussed in Facebook groups
There are still difficulties

• UR DOIN IT RONG
  – narrators are hyper-critical about the activities –
    they could do it better!

• Some people are never going to become
  voice-over professionals

• Some manage to thwart my attempts to
  record their narrations
Thank you!