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David D. Thomas
SIL-UND

Dottie Thomas
SIL-UND

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DAVE AND DOTTIE THOMAS'S METHOD FOR COLLECTING AND
ARRANGING THEIR LANGUAGE MATERIAL IN CHRAU

Equipment: spring-backed looseleaf binder, exercise books (with sturdy covers), pocket-sized notebooks, typewriter (preferably with some Vietnamese symbols on it). (Notebooks and exercise books available everywhere.)

Procedure for collecting language material:

Collecting procedure is to carry the little notebooks wherever we go and write down everything we hear, with an attempt at the meaning, and a note on date, speaker, and situation.

This information is then transferred neatly for permanent record into the larger exercise books (we have found the 100-page size most satisfactory). We each have our own little notebooks, but we pool our information into the exercise books. Our handwriting is quite different, so we don't need to say which one collected the material.

Systematic informant work is usually done right into the exercise books, as there is no fear of the books getting rough handling, the work is accurate and careful, and there is no pressure to write hastily and illegibly. In other words, the collecting is also fit to be the permanent record.

We don't strive for phonetic detail, as we know our ears are not tuned to the language. We feel we have done well if we can catch the general impression and the general meaning the first time around. Then as we go farther into the language and hear the same things repeated several times, gradually phonetic accuracy improves. And even in later work, phonemic distinctiveness rather than phonetic detail is the prime consideration, though phonetic description of the contrasts is needed.

Arranging the material:

Phonemic:

In one exercise book we set aside one page for every possibly suspect pair of sounds, vowels and consonants, and for possible unit vs. cluster questions. (We had only one page for length/shortness, but we wish we had had a page for it with each vowel, as it is already overflowing but we are still adding valuable information.) On these pages we list minimal pairs as we find them and check them or make statements of complementary distribution if that is found to be the case.

Syntactic and Lexical:

At the end of the first few days we went through our exercise book and picked out the words we had gotten so far, and organized them under what we guessed might be their syntactic classes. This we then typed up and put in our looseleaf folder.

(We type everything in order to have it neat and available, and in order to have carbon copies. We want carbon copies primarily as a safeguard against loss, fire, or destruction, sending it to Saigon for safekeeping.

Another value of carbons is to make the information available to others, so that the one at headquarters can easily be referred to by other SIL members or outsiders; also we have given a set of carbons to the University of Saigon, which helps relationships there and at the Department of Education. We will probably give a set of our current carbons to the Vietnamese missionary to the Chrau in Tuc Trung. We are currently making four copies of our typings (with carbons it is as easy to make half a dozen as it is to make one); the original we keep, the first carbon we send to Saigon, and the other two we keep here, building up sets for whatever purpose they may be wanted -- whether Saigon U., Grand Forks, missionaries, etc.)

After another week or so we added in the new words we had gotten since the first typing and alphabetized them with a rough guess at an alphabet (this within syntactic classes). We also made a list of what appeared to be the constructions (sentence or phrase) that had been used, with references to examples.

From here on out we added new words (and constructions) from the exercise book directly to the typed sheets daily (they were typed double-spaced to allow the addition of new words), and also adding new references (book and page) to words we already had. Then when a page would get full it would be retyped, making two, or sometimes even three, pages out of it, and the date of retyping would always be included at the top of the new pages (this to facilitate later reference). The old page would then be filed (not destroyed) marked with the date of retyping; this is a safeguard against error in retyping, so that in case of error or illegibility in retyping we can check back, as we have had to do quite a few times. This is the method we have followed and are still following.

The purpose of listing by classes at the beginning was so that we could find words we wanted with a minimum of searching. But as our listings grew, searching for meanings we wanted and knew we had become difficult. So we combined our major classes, and organized another section in our looseleaf notebook where we divided the words into major areas of meaning (emotions, tools, house, nature, colors, time, etc.) and typed these up, each classification on a separate page, double-spaced. This is our thesaurus. When a new word or phrase is of special interest and usability, or when we have extra time on our hands (a rare occurrence), we enter words into the thesaurus, but ordinarily we only enter them into the thesaurus when we retype a page of the dictionary, as that seems to be more efficient even though it means that there is a long gap between entering words in the dictionary and entering them in the thesaurus. As we retype thesaurus pages when they become full we are also refining, rearranging and resubdividing the words and categories.

We went for quite a long while with the major classes of words in the dictionary alphabetized together but the minor classes still listed individually. But we found that this created a lot of inefficiency and page-flipping, so we are now beginning to transfer the minor-class words into the main section of the dictionary. But in order to prevent the minor classes becoming lost in the dictionary, we have added a third section to the dictionary and thesaurus, a syntax section. In this section we list the membership of each of the minor classes, make a stab at defining the class, and

beside the word give references (if any) that fit the definition. Any morphemes that we think may belong in that class, whether proven or not, we list there, then as time goes by we refine the definition and the membership list. Every word in the dictionary henceforth must be labelled also as to its supposed syntactic class, and new words of minor classes that are entered in the dictionary are also entered at the same time in the syntax section.

I think that I would recommend that the syntax section be started at the same time as the thesaurus rather than waiting until things are as far along as we did. As soon as we get around to it we will make a stab also at defining the major classes, but we will not attempt to make a membership listing, but just let the dictionary carry that.

Useful phrases are entered directly into the thesaurus, as they would not show up in the dictionary.

This method we have followed provides a quick and sure method of amassing words, providing a starting point for phonemic analysis, as only the comparison of a large number of words can give a true picture of variation and contrast.

Typical dictionary entries are such as:

tadêêr	(to-)	'dê,dông'	'close, put on (opp.pux)'	V. 3.37; 4.12
takôom		(var. of <u>tatôom</u>	'to roof')	
ăng	(aang)	'duông nẻ'	'a crack'	N. 6.61,64
araq		'tĩnh-mạch'	'vein' (-PMP uRat)	N. 6.61
ayh		'cũng, chỉ'	'completely, alike; only, alone'	Ps., Pv., Fin. 3.35;5.2,6,47,49,60,63; 7.1,5,17,46

Col. 1 parentheses are alternate forms. Col. 3 opp. means opposite meaning; // means used consistently in parallel constructions with (Chrao likes to use doublets, as in the Psalms); N - noun, V - verb, A - adjective, Ps - pre-sentence, Pv - preverb, Fin - final particle. Any other interesting or useful information, such as loan sources, idiomatic usages, etc., can also be added in the 3rd column.

Typical syntax section entries are such as:

Presentence particles: Words which occur at the beginning of a sentence, i.e. before the subject spot.

arêêq	'now'
ayh	'only, completely' 5.79;7.5 (cf.Pv,Fin)
briq	'now, even, after that' 2.26;5.9,11 (but cf.5.12)

Typical thesaurus entries are such as:

Nature

trôx	'sky'	chhaar	'wind'
kô box	'sky'	luûp	'thunder'
prang	'sunny'	mii	'rain'
sup	'cloudy'	tuûm mii	'rain cloud'
sônhus-sônhom	'overcast'		

All major-class words must be entered in the thesaurus, but minor-class words do not have to be thesaurusized if it does not appear useful in individual cases.

There are two main advantages of this method over the 3 x 5 system of recording words. One is that a notebook is much more portable than a file and the other that words on a page are not as likely to get lost or jumbled up as individual slips are. Words are also easier to find when alphabetized on a page rather than on slips which have to be flipped. Quick, unconscious review of words is also possible when the eye runs down a page to find the place to add a new word. Retyping of crowded pages is somewhat time-consuming but is also good for review.

D. Thomas
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