

3. The SO WHAT? Question

Describe in concrete terms, and across as many domains as you can, the contributions your dissertation research and publication will make.

3.0 Context for this question

The most difficult challenge I face in planning my dissertation is believing that it really will be relevant to the interests of other people besides myself. By this I mean that I cannot in good conscience invest the tremendous amount of time required to complete a dissertation – life is so short! – without believing that to a significant degree this effort will truly make an original contribution, beyond the set of benefits that I, as an individual, will accrue as a result of completing the dissertation for its own sake. Therefore, I have chosen to make this vexing issue an integral part of preparing for my dissertation research.

I hope that my dissertation – either the research process, the final written document, or both – will make a contribution in the following distinct but linked domains (numbered according to the sections below in which I will discuss them):

- 3.1. Employing, refining, and generating specific theories of the relationship between language and society
- 3.2. Employing, refining, and generating better research methods in linguistic anthropology
- 3.3. Employing, generating, and improving field techniques for linguistic anthropology, as well as sociocultural anthropology, linguistics, and perhaps even ethnomusicology
- 3.4. Adding to the body of scientific knowledge – to which other researchers across disciplines have access – on contemporary lowland Amazonian society and language, though the specific case of Nanti society and language
- 3.5. Providing some answers to the question of the social relevance and utility of scholarly activity to the various ‘laypersons’ who participate in that activity.
- 3.6. Putting together an interesting and accessible record of Nanti communicative phenomena for future use by Nantis themselves
- 3.7. Presenting my data, analyses, and conclusions in such a way as to make them useful to other researchers, especially linguists, ethnomusicologists, and language endangerment specialists.

3.1 *Employing, refining, and generating specific theories of the relationship between language and society*

As I discussed in my first exam question, my dissertation research project will explore *how* communicative activity and social organization are mutually-constituting, by examining in a systematic manner the ways that Nanti communicative practices, when examined in relation to each other, constitute a dynamic system. This project attempts to synthesize and build upon several research traditions that seek to understand how communicative practices and social organization are linked to one another.

I especially see my research being potentially of great interest to linguistic anthropologists and other researchers who take a discourse-centered approach to culture. While many researchers have done excellent work within this paradigm before me, I expect my research to be atypical in three ways. First, I intend to take the communicative system, or discursive ecology, as a primary level of analysis rather than as an *a priori* fact or an epiphenomenon. Second, I intend to focus my analysis on the phenomenon of INTERTEXTUALITY in everyday discourse. And third, I intend

to foreground the element of change within the system over time, by looking at instances of more and less MARKED discourse forms as ITERATIVE CONTEXTS for each other across time. While many studies look at everyday interactions, and others look at the social salience of discursive practices, and still others look at links between discrete instances of discourse across time, few studies closely examine the links between discrete instances of discourse over time as the site of continuity and change in social organization. I wish to push the limits of the notions of intertextuality and context from the familiar levels of text-to-text and text-to-context to the level of the points of contact between TEXTS and their contexts along the axis of time.

Similarly, I hope my research will be of interest to ethnographers of speaking who are interested in the demonstrable relationships between distinct WAYS OF SPEAKING. Again, while much excellent work has been done in this tradition, few researchers have directly addressed the SYSTEMATIC organization across discursive practices in a speech community. In many ethnographies of speaking, the only solid link between phenomena identified as distinct ways of speaking is that they are produced in the same speech community or by the same speakers; generally, JUXTAPOSITION alone carries the weight of INTERRELATION. Large-scale patterns of INTERTEXTUALITY and historical CONTINGENCY – to which speakers have access in their day-to-day communicative activities – have as yet received little attention. I hope my research will reflect the best insights of the ethnography of speaking tradition while drawing closer to its programmatic goal of demonstrating the “systematic coherence ... in the ways that speaking is organized” (Bauman & Sherzer 1989 [1974]: xi) and in empirically demonstrating *how* a speech community and its ‘speech economy’ (a la Hymes 1989 [1974]), reformulated as a DISCURSIVE ECOLOGY, manifest an “organization of diversity” (Hymes 1989 [1974]: 433).

On a more general level, the most frustrating aspect of being a student of anthropology – which is definitely mitigated by being a student of linguistic anthropology – is the lack of consistent SCIENTIFIC RIGOR in its methods. That is, anthropologists, by and large, feel no imperative to carefully define their terms, nor to use their terms consistently, nor to differentiate between specifically analytical terminology and mundane usages by non-specialists. Perhaps the most sympathetic characterization of this phenomenon is that many anthropologists are simply unaware of the radical HETEROGLOSSIA that inhabits our academic discourse. But regardless of whether anthropologists and other social scientists recognize it or not, our analytical language is constantly challenged by the shifting and fuzzy everyday uses of most of our key terms. As Jane Edwards astutely observes (writing specifically in reference to transcript design),

...readers necessarily bring with them strategies developed in the course of extensive experience with other types of written materials...strategies based on reading habits are not necessarily subject to conscious awareness and may be difficult to suspend when reading...even if it is desirable to do so. (Edwards & Lampert 1993: 6)

In my own writing, I refer to this as the ‘homonym problem,’ and it is not an easy problem to solve – neither as consumer nor as producer of academic discourse. Linguistic anthropologists, of all people, might be demonstrate more awareness of the heteroglossic possibilities of language, and therefore make their own definitions and usages explicit! One of the solutions to the homonym problem that I now take very seriously (thanks to some painful but instructive experiences with homonymy) is to carefully define any term whose heteroglossia I recognize as an impediment to understanding between my writing and its reader. This does not eliminate heteroglossia, but it can at least foreground the otherwise latent fact that multiple significations are possible. As I have worked through the concepts and issues that my dissertation research

addresses, I have been generating an extensive central glossary of terms, which accompanies these essays; it is my hope that this practice will be seen as a logical step in the development of scientifically rigorous social analysis. Many of the definitions in my glossary are ‘works in process’ that I will refine as my understanding increases, but I have come to find it nearly impossible to think about certain aspects of my research without referring back again and again to this (ever-expanding) set of core definitions.

In as much as anthropological research strives to be scientific – that is, SYSTEMATIC and PRINCIPLE-driven – it must be grounded in INTERSUBJECTIVELY valid empirical data and it must employ descriptive terms in a principle-driven and consistent manner. I have discovered that this is a statement far easier to make than to act on – and so I feel compelled to take the time and to make my most sincere effort to do my research as scientific research. I hope my glossary represents a significant step in this process. I also hope that it significantly aids my readers in understanding what I really mean – and don’t mean – when I present the analyses and conclusions that will form the core of my dissertation on Nanti discursive ecology. Otherwise, practically speaking, my dissertation may be more of a frustration than an aid to others who read it because they are interested in applying the results of my efforts to another related research question.

3.2 Employing, refining, and generating better research methods in linguistic anthropology

In a certain sense, my research project is a large-scale project with a small site, in as much as it demands a large body of data gathered over a long stretch of time and demands a high level of ‘insider’s knowledge’ into the verbal references and historical events that form links between discrete utterances. As such, my project demands an elaborate and detailed plan for gathering, organizing, and analyzing these data in order that they may answer the questions I pose (this plan is outlined in Question 2)

Because I am very concerned about the appropriateness and efficacy of my research methods, I plan to evaluate them and adjust them along the way during my fieldwork period (see my discussion of the grounded theory approach in section 2.4 of Question 2) as well as during the write-up of my dissertation. Indeed, an important section of my dissertation will be the explicit evaluation of not only the methods I used but their merits and demerits in light of the kinds and quality of data and analyses I am able to achieve. I would like the methodology section of my dissertation to be tangibly useful to others who are interested in doing similar research to mine or in answering similar questions. In my view, much of the (relatively scarce) literature on methods in anthropology that is currently available is insufficiently specific in terms of the actual steps, strategies, and reflexivity the researcher should to plan to take. Similarly, too often in published works, the author’s methods are essentially a side-bar to their results – which limits the ease with which someone else could successfully replicate those results in different places and times. I would like my dissertation project to make as transparent as possible the concrete steps I take, by which I reach the conclusions that I shall reach. In that way, the reader may evaluate and assess not only the validity of my conclusions, but also the validity of the ways in which I drew those conclusions.

3.3 Employing, generating, and improving field techniques

While the value of naturally-occurring discourse data in investigating questions of social organization is widely known among linguistic anthropologists, the specific techniques that are effective for gathering large bodies of data “in the wild” (a la Hutchins 1995: xiv) are relatively

underdeveloped – especially those designed to be minimally intrusive yet highly mobile, and to produce high quality data while using low profile equipment. Fortunately, key technological advances within the last decade – minidisc technology in particular – have given the field researcher entirely new kinds of freedom, especially in comparison with the kinds of (heavy, bulky, and fragile) state-of-the-art recording technology available just two or three decades ago. (Joel, I think of your Nagra and don't take my good fortune at all for granted!)

As I discussed in Question 2, over several years of recording Nanti feasting interactions, I have developed an excellent tool for collecting high quality discourse data, which I call the IRU, or Individual Recording Unit. Because I have been using and improving the IRU technique for several years, I fully expect it to be a reliable method for gathering naturally-occurring discourse data among Nanti interactants in the context of my dissertation research. More than that, however, I anticipate that after continuing to use and improve the technique during my dissertation research, I will be in a position to offer detailed instructions and recommendations to other field researchers for how to apply this technique to their own field situations.

Less fully developed and yet equally important are the techniques that I have discovered to be most effective for management, transcription, and analysis of multi-modal, naturally occurring discourse data. I hope that by carefully documenting and evaluating the procedures that I implement – and improve upon – in the course of my dissertation research, my field experiences will be of use to other students of discourse. If none others, I am thinking of the service my experiences might provide to my graduate student colleagues at UT, and to my other colleagues with whom I collaborate on other field projects in Peru. Too often, it seems, graduate students have to 'reinvent' the methodological wheel. To a certain degree, this is healthy, since it requires individual initiative and allows for new technologies to be incorporated into field research. But beyond that, I would like to see better resources and communication available to my peers *before* they put together their own methodological wheel.

Likewise, over the years I have developed a number of reliable yet relatively low cost technical solutions to problems that the field researcher working in difficult tropical rainforest conditions may encounter. While the number of researchers – in all disciplines – who work in this wonderful and challenging environment is woefully low, I hope that by systematizing and writing down my field techniques I might be able to share some of the knowledge I have gained through experience, and thereby help other researchers have fewer (sometimes heart-breaking) experiences with their own data-gathering field techniques.

3.4 *Adding to the body of scientific knowledge on contemporary lowland Amazonian society and language through the specific case of Nanti society and language*

By making my data and analyses available – not only in the form of my dissertation but also through other channels of distribution including journal articles, AILLA, conference talks and workshops, and reports and documents generated through Cabeceras Aid Project – I hope that my work will be of use to a variety of other individuals and entities, including:

- future Nantis, if and when they are interested
- anyone interested in indigenous verbal art – especially those who recognize it as a testament to the range of human expressive possibility
- anyone interested in knowing more about lowland Amazonian societies and languages
- researchers interested in areal, typological, and areal-typological patterns of discourse

- researchers interested in areal, typological, and areal-typological patterns of social organization
- researchers interested in patterns of human social organization more generally
- researchers interested in comparative work on human social organization
- researchers interested in comparative work on verbal art
- researchers interested in comparative work in other domains that my research addresses
- local policy makers and representatives of the Peruvian state, including the national education system, whose decisions can and will affect Nanti well-being in the long-term
- activists, humanitarians, and politicians interested in Nanti society – the more accurate the information that outside entities deploy, the less harm done, in most cases

The key to meeting all of the goals listed above, of course, is accessibility. Accessibility relies on two activities: *producing* print, digital, and interactional texts (the last of which I address in detail in the next section) and *disseminating* these texts through the physical world. While both of these activities are ‘part of the job’ of being an academic, they are at the same time not highly prioritized in terms of accessibility. To some degree, the production and dissemination of scholarship is important only in terms of the individual scholar’s career path. Therefore, I intend to engage in these activities from the perspective of ‘archive-building’ – that is, organization, storage, and dissemination of TEXTS for the sake of organization, storage, and dissemination, apart from any real or imagined use to which they will be put. If texts are made accessible, then other people can determine their own uses for them.

In academia, it seems many researchers feel a tension between making their work available and protecting their data from being ‘stolen’ or preventing their analyses from being ‘scooped’ by somebody else. Although I can imagine how frustrating such an experience would be, I also realize that there is far more work to be done on Nanti social and linguistic phenomena (and on social and linguistic phenomena in lowland Amazonia more generally) than I could possibly accomplish in several lifetimes, so I take the attitude that there’s more than enough data to go around. In the end, what really matters is the research, not who does it. So I firmly believe that making my data and analyses accessible to a wide community of scholars is my responsibility. A similar argument holds for making “my” data accessible to non-academics, especially if and when I am asked for it; it isn’t really “my” data to begin with, and I truly believe that wider knowledge about Nanti society, culture, and language on the whole will aid, not impede, their achievement of their own goals. This final comment leads very nicely into my next topic of discussion...

3.5 *Providing some answers to the question of the social relevance and utility of scholarly activity to the ‘laypersons’ who participate in that activity*

I see my answers to the question of the social relevance and utility of scholarly activity as clustering into two PRIMITIVE categories of activity: proactive dissemination of knowledge and information about Nanti society outside of Nanti society; and data-driven ADVOCACY that prioritizes the work of TRANSLATION between JUXTAPOSED, SOCIALLY₂-generated SYSTEMS of UNDERSTANDING and EVALUATION. The former set of activities means operationalizing the goal that I discussed in the previous section of making my data and analyses accessible in multiple domains. The latter, as stated, seems like a super-human task, but the global task is actually constituted by specific situated moments of interaction between me and other people. On the ground, this means investing real time in communicating with non-Nantis about *how* their

actions will affect Nantis; *why* they should choose to act in ways that will not bring harm to either Nanti individuals or society; and *why*, in terms of their own socially-generated worldview, they should choose to act in ways that support Nanti well-being and self-determination. (It also means communicating about these same issues with Nantis regarding non-Nantis). It means applying bits and pieces of my data and analyses to specific moments of situated cross-CULTURAL₂ interaction. It means choosing, again and again, to challenge prejudices wherever I encounter them and to seek out opportunities to root out and disarm such prejudices. Taking Peruvian national society on as a whole is a fool's errand. But actively engaging the real people who constitute it is not. With these broad categories of activity in mind, I will now discuss several aspects of my dissertation research that I consider to have direct applicability to my (past and) future advocacy activities.

As you already know, all of my research activities in the Nanti communities I visit are shaped and constrained by my understanding of Nantis' expressed interests and expectations of me as an ally and advocate. My own intellectual interest in Nanti *karintaa* performances, and the role these play both inside and outside of feasting in creating, maintaining, and altering relationships between Nantis, is grounded in the salience that *karintaa* performances have for Nantis themselves in creating, maintaining, and altering their relationships and their communities over time. Simply put, the observable consequences of *karintaa* interactions are manifold, both on the level of relations between individuals and on the level of supra-individual relations, such as between residence groups and between Nanti communities. If in fact, the relationship between communicative practices and social organization is as strong as I claim it is, then articulating the specifics of the relationships among Nanti ways of speaking will be directly relevant to a wide set of issues that impact Nanti lives on a daily basis, and may be directly useful to Nanti individuals in their specific decisions on how to conduct their social lives. To take a concrete example, many non-Nantis find Nanti feasting and chanting unsettling and threatening and some – including healthcare practitioners in the region – speak of it as an 'unhealthy' practice. It is my view that feasting and all that goes with it is very healthy, socially speaking, and I have on several occasions found myself in the position of having to articulate why Nanti feasting is a healthy practice that should *not* be discouraged by outsiders. I hope that the next time this happens I will be in a far better position to articulate this in a more persuasive and a more transparent way. In advocating for the well-being of a small indigenous community like Montetoni, I have encountered many profound prejudices. While I cannot remove these prejudices from Peruvian national society, I can confront them with non-threatening, reasonable, and interesting counter arguments. Ironically, feasting is clearly a potent locus for potential conflict between Nantis and non-Nantis, and I hope that my dissertation research will aid me, and Nanti individuals, in disarming some of this potential conflict. At the very least, the fact that Nanti feasting and verbal art is sufficiently important and interesting to warrant doctoral research has made a positive impact on the prejudices of Peruvians I have encountered. But when dealing with prejudiced individuals in structural positions of power relative to the Nanti communities, I need a robust argument in favor of Nanti feasting and other communicative practices. As I suggested above, I believe ignorance is more dangerous than knowledge.

Turning away from Peruvian society and back toward Nanti society, I believe that if I can come to an understanding of how Nantis use their communicative practices to continually meet most, if not all, of their social goals – both as individuals and as a collectivity – then I will be in a much better position than I am now to perform my role as ally and advocate. Many Nantis in Montetoni have made clear to me, both by word and by deed, their active commitment to

maintaining Montetoni as a cohesive and peaceful place to live together. And yet sometimes events take place – like a team of doctors arriving while a feast is in full swing, for example – that might have unexpected damaging consequences for their community's social health. But I strongly suspect that certain forms of communicative interaction are of crucial importance in either avoiding or alleviating the damages that such events can have, and I intend, in my doctoral research to articulate how and why that is the case.

At the present moment, in the overture to a new century and a new millennium, globalization is spreading with an ever-accelerating speed. As such, a small, relatively autonomous *healthy* society such as Nanti society becomes an ever-more scarce human phenomenon. If for no other reason, this characterization makes research on how Nanti society works of potentially great interest across many academic disciplines – including but not limited to sociologists, historians, and political scientists, as well as anthropologists; and across many non-academic domains, including, in the Nanti case: Peruvian policy makers, like the Ministries of Education and Health and their local outposts; international policy makers, like the WorldBank and the Interamerican Development Bank; international development interests, like the Camisea Gas Project Consortium; international nongovernmental organizations, like Oxfam and Conservation International; and smaller activist organizations, like Cabeceras Aid Project, AIDSEP (a Peruvian indigenous federation) and Shinai Serjali (a UK-based NGO working on land rights issues that directly affect the Camisea Nanti communities).

In very concrete terms, my research on Nanti society is, at the present moment, of great interest to many non-Nanti individuals, entities, and organizations, due to the happenstance that their territories overlap substantially with the lots that are being exploited for natural gas resources by an international consortium. Through no deed nor desire of their own, Nantis have been thrust into an international spotlight that is actually focused on the activities of this consortium. To make a long, unseemly story short, many people have vested interests in knowing how to “handle” the Nantis and many of those people have come to us (through Cabeceras Aid Project) for information. Regardless of my own stance toward the consortium and its parasites, I have been forced into a tiny but influential role as an advocate and spokesperson for and about Nanti interests. It is of utmost importance to me as a moral being that I perform this role as competently as I can. I believe that my research activities – partly, simply by being present in the villages for long stretches of time, and partly by being a competent anthropologist

Apart from the vested interests of all of these other entities, however, there is a more important motivation for focusing my research on how Nanti society works: up to the present moment, Nantis demonstrate a strong commitment to remaining a healthy small and relatively autonomous society. My experiences with several other small societies in Peruvian Amazonia have convinced me that most do *not* want to remain small and autonomous, but in fact opt for full frontal contact with national society. If human rights exist, then surely self-determination is one of them, and Nantis' determination to remain relatively autonomous requires a tremendous effort on all friendly sides to defend such a right. Though the ties between description of the features of *karintaa* poetry, analyses of discursive ecology, and global discourses of human rights to self-determination are few in number, I must therefore make these ties strong and secure ones.

3.6. *Putting together an interesting and accessible record of Nanti communicative phenomena for future use by Nantis themselves*

Because so many Nanti individuals have already expressed interest in listening to and viewing my recordings of their interactivities, I intend to make much of my collection of data available to them in the most accessible and usable forms that are (and become) available over the course of our relationship. At present, the technical obstacles are substantial, but this will change with time. Thinking about the long-term, I want the results of my research to be useful – educationally and politically – to Nanti individuals as they pilot their society into the future. Many of the practical details of implementing this goal are the same as those I discussed in section 3.4 on accessibility.

3.7 *Contributions to disciplines outside anthropology*

As we discussed at my prospectus defense, I do not *presume* that my dissertation is going to have a substantial impact in academic disciplines outside of linguistic anthropology – for that matter, I don't imagine it having more than a modest impact there. Perhaps this statement seems to undercut the point of this entire question, but I don't think it does: my basic stance is that I want my dissertation to *attempt* to be relevant, interesting, and useful in many domains; to offer data, analysis, and theory for the taking; and to address as many concerns as it can without losing cohesion. It is in this sense that I look to make a contribution in other fields – linguistics and ethnomusicology in particular.

3.7.1 *Formal Linguistics*

First, my dissertation research will generate a large body of recorded data in and on the Nanti language. This data will be very useful to me and to others for carrying out formal linguistic analysis on the language in the future (as I also discussed in section 3.x). At the same time, I will have collected this body of data from a wide range of settings and individuals (see question 2 on Method), so it will be very rich data in terms of revealing the relationship between aspects of formal structure and grammar, and patterns of use. Formal linguistics has given me a wealth of tools to use in my research on Nanti language use, from complex analytical frameworks such as phonology and morphosyntax, to underlying analytical principles that can be applied in new domains (see, for example, my discussion of contrastive features in section x of Question 1).

I hope that in return, I can offer to formal linguists some insights into the formal relationships between language use and context, as well as into the applicability of basic linguistic principles to novel domains of communicative activity. For example, how do speakers' uses of particular pronouns, types of verbs, and verbal suffixes vary systematically among different styles or genres of speech? How do the metrical constraints of *karintaa* composition interface with the metrics (and prosody) of everyday Nanti speech? How much change in the articulation of segments is still parsable to Nanti interactants?

3.7.2 *Ethnomusicology*

The discipline of ethnomusicology, like anthropology, faces the challenge of developing cross-culturally appropriate analytical tools and methods, particularly because many of the tools used in ethnomusicological scholarship were forged in the fires of another discipline, namely musicology, which has a very different set of assumptions about its object of study. Therefore, for example, ethnomusicologists confront the central issues of transcription (see section 2.9 in Question 2) just as anthropologists do: how can the tools and analytical concepts of transcription forged in one cultural and aesthetic context (that is, Western European musicology) be used successfully in vastly different cultural and aesthetic contexts? Or must entirely new techniques

and analytical concepts be developed in new research settings? How can the formal description of musical phenomena be wielded in understanding those phenomena as situated, creative, human behavior?

Because of the musical aspects of Nanti chanting and *karintaa* performances, I have gained much insight from scholarship in ethnomusicology concerning first, a variety of ways in which one can represent, in various media, formal features of humanly organized sound; and second, a variety of ways to represent and discuss the relationships between those formal features and patterning at other levels of organization. I hope that the work I do to describe, analyze, and represent the musical aspects of Nanti discourse will be useful be a useful resource for ethnomusicologists in carrying out their own data gathering, transcription, and analysis.

In a similar vein, I anticipate that many of the field techniques that I will use and improve in the course of my dissertation research could prove very useful to students of other musical traditions, as long as I make the effort to share the knowledge I gain in my field experiences across disciplinary boundaries (I refer back to my discussion in section 3.4 on accessibility).

3.8 *Endangered Language Documentation*

The issue of endangered language documentation resides at the intersection of several perspectives that I have discussed above. Many linguistic anthropologists, descriptive linguists, indigenous communities, and indigenous activists alike share strong a commitment to documenting endangered languages, even if their particular sets of motivations are not co-extensive. The perspective in common to all these groups is the inherent value of that which is linguistically unique to a particular indigenous group and the resultant drive to preserve or document that uniqueness in some way while it is still available. In the Nanti case, the specific motivations that I and Nanti individuals have for documenting Nanti language and communicative practices are still quite different, but we share an important goal: to assure that most Nantis continue to speak Nanti as their only or their first language, and to assure that their first written language will be Nanti, in spite of the pressures applied by outsiders that they speak and write Spanish and/or Matsigenka instead. Of course, should this goal of active monolingualism change for Nantis, it will necessarily change for me, out of my respect for Nanti self-determination. But for now, this is where the situation stands.

With about 500 speakers, Nanti is considered by many an endangered language, even though essentially all its speakers are monolingual in Nanti. There are, as yet, very few written materials in the Nanti language, and only a small amount of formal linguistic description has been done (almost all of it by me and Lev.) In as much as Nantis are, or will become, interested in gaining access to writing, there is a significant amount of work to be done in order to produce useful written materials in Nanti. I see all of the work involved in gathering data for my dissertation as potentially useful to future efforts to generate useful written and recorded materials in Nanti. One of the purposes of recording Nanti discourse data will always be to analyze it in relation to my research questions, but at the same time, another purpose will always be to build the collection of recorded resources Nantis will have for their own historical, educational, or political purposes in other contexts. As I have mentioned elsewhere, one of my long-term goals is to generate formal linguistic documentation of the Nanti language; gathering and analyzing data for my dissertation will directly support my eventual completion of that goal. I also anticipate that my experiences and accomplishments in the Nanti case will open up avenues and possibilities for similar documentation efforts on other endangered lowland Amazonian languages.

From my perspective, one of the gravest threats to the long-term survival of the Nanti language is, ironically, formal education, principally because there are no pedagogical materials in Nanti – although the assimilationist attitudes of most mestizos and acculturated indigenous people in the region, including the teachers, are a perhaps equally grave threat. Therefore, I see as important priority for my scholarly activities on the long-term the work of generating pedagogical materials – broadly construed to include materials ranging from classroom resources, like primers and grammars; to ‘primary source materials’ like TEXTS in Nanti; to ‘secondary source materials’ like WRITINGS₂ on Nanti history, culture, and society – a collection of materials that will be a resource for education both inside and outside Nanti communities. Until basic research and writing is generated, none of these resources will exist, and other inappropriate resources will be (and already have been) used to fill that gap.

3.9 *Concluding remarks on personal compromises*

I know – from reading anthropological scholarship, from anecdotal information among colleagues, and from my own prior field experiences – that the demands and expectations that the visitor or researcher may experience from villagers to participate in village life can be frustrating and even intrusive at times, especially when the purpose of one’s visit to the village may be to carry out complex research on a relatively tight time schedule.

However, I think it is of utmost importance that I respond appropriately to the demands and expectations placed on me by my Nanti hosts, even – and especially – when I don’t feel like it. The ways in which one can unintentionally offend, slight, or even alienate someone are countless, and one must proceed with extra caution when living in a matrix of social norms that are not one’s own. In my estimation, the best way to minimize giving others offense is to conduct one’s social life with great vigilance, learning to respond and interact in a locally appropriate way as soon as possible. Over the years, I have observed many outsiders visiting small indigenous villages, and it has often been painful to watch how either oblivious or disrespectful those outsiders have been in their conduct.

Among the expectations that I know Nantis will have of me during my field stay are the following: to attend to health matters when ever they arise in the village; to serve as an intermediary and translator when other outsiders visit; to participate in various social activities, including gardening trips, wild-gathering trips, and feasting; and above all, to behave like a ‘properly socialized human being,’ which means visiting and being visited by friends for long stretches of time every day. Behaving like a ‘properly socialized human being’ is actually very time consuming, and therefore at times greatly tests the patience of an outsider, but I deeply believe it is of utmost importance to do so, out of respect. From the point of view of a student of Nanti communicative behavior, it is precisely by participating in a variety of social events that I will gather a wide and rich body of data. The challenge is to learn to put one’s own personal needs for privacy or writing time on a Nanti schedule. This is one of my principal motivations in dedicating the better part of the next two years to my dissertation research: I want to allow time to do *well* both what matters to me as a researcher and what matters to Nantis that I do as a real ‘human being’ and ally.