

**Project Title:** Composing relationships: extemporaneous Nanti karintaa poetry in Peruvian Amazonia

**Summarize your research question or research objective (in no more than one sentence):**

Informed by the discourse-centered approach to culture (Urban 1991, Sherzer 1987), I will describe and analyze contemporary extemporaneous Nanti karintaa performances as a distinct Nanti ‘way of speaking’ within the context of coexisting social and discursive practices.

**Question 1. Describe your research question or research objective. That is, what will the focus of your investigation be? (One page maximum)**

My dissertation research on Nanti karintaa performances emerges from my ongoing linguistic anthropological research in the Nanti communities of Montetoni and Marankehari on the Camisea River in southeastern Peru. Karintaa is extemporaneous chanted poetry presently performed by Nantis exclusively within the context of group chanting during community feasting. I will describe and analyze the linguistic, sociocultural, and spatio-temporal features that distinguish karintaa from other forms of Nanti communicative behavior. Based on this analysis, I will offer a preliminary theory of the relationships between karintaa and other speaking practices that constitute a local dynamic communicative system, or discursive ecology (Beier 2001). This project is part of my longer-term work to document the range of contemporary Nanti communicative practices, including formal linguistic description of their as-yet minimally documented language (Beier & Michael 2001).

Weekly feasts are presently the locus of village-wide sociability within the two recently-formed Nanti communities of Montetoni and Marankehari. Large multi-family settlements such as these are an unprecedented social configuration for these Nantis and feasting is one of the most significant social innovations to emerge in these new settlements. Outside of feasting, Nantis typically have few interactions with individuals who are not members of their own residence groups; feasting both reinforces and generates sociability and solidarity across residence groups (Beier 2001). While doing research on Nanti feasting, I observed that many forms of action and interaction that transpire within the context of feasting may be entirely restricted to that context – and moreover, that forms of communicative behavior that are highly marked in non-feast contexts become unmarked forms during feasting. Within the set of social transformations that take place during feasting, karintaa manifests a radical transformation of interpersonal verbal behavior in which chanters explicitly express evaluative stances that are not heard in daily spoken discourse. These radical transformations of interactional behavior have profound implications for theories of Nanti social organization. In particular, I hypothesize that karintaa provides a highly-constrained, socially-acceptable medium for expressing emotion and giving voice to interpersonal and intergroup tensions that in other contexts are dispreferred because they would have unwanted divisive or conflictual effects.

Nanti feasting in its present form first emerged in 1996, four years after the founding of Montetoni. Two activities define Nanti feasting: sharing and consuming oburoxi, a fermented drink made from yuca mash; and intensive group chanting that usually continues for 18 to 24 hours. Concurrent with sharing and drinking oburoxi, feasters form groups, clasp hands, and move about the open areas of the village while chanting. Nanti chanting brings together two genres of verbal expression: simultaneous, asynchronous performance by all group members of short formulas from a large but relatively fixed repertoire; and intercalated extemporaneous karintaa poetry performed by individuals who compose these lines within a set constraints set by the formula. Sequences of karintaa are often performed interactively such that two or several chanters dialogue through their karintaa compositions.

Nanti karintaa is simultaneously highly creative and rigidly structured. The sound contours of karintaa are determined by the matrix chant formula but their referential content may be entirely original. By first discovering and describing the formal features of karintaa, I will investigate how Nantis co-construct this discursive space, or ‘key this frame’ (Goffman 19xx), in practice. In evaluating the referential content of karintaa, I will closely examine the ways in which chanters frame their own experiences in their karintaa compositions and examine the ways in which chanters articulate responses to the framings of others, thereby investigating the dialogical nature of karintaa. Karintaa often involves light-hearted teasing and innuendo-laden banter, but may also express reactions, evaluations, and emotions that are highly disfavored in spoken discourse. In general, Nantis strongly dislike aggressive speech and actions and carefully avoid interpersonal conflict (Beier and Michael 1998). Commentary on people’s actions and words is almost entirely reportative, rarely evaluative, and never speculative (Michael 2001). While karintaa compositions typically do not violate these basic discursive constraints, controversial topics and strong personal emotions are often articulated. Most often, these karintaa

compositions introduce a discursive space in which potential interpersonal conflict is introduced and resolved through subsequent verbal interaction.

By examining the trajectories of karintaa utterances through space and time, I hope to gain insight into how discourse both reflects and creates dynamic relationships among Nanti individuals.

**Question 2. How does your research question relate to the work of other anthropologists? What will your research add to this work? (One page maximum)**

My research on karintaa chanting is informed by a discourse-centered approach to culture, which proposes “that culture is localized in concrete, publicly accessible signs, the most important of which are actually occurring instances of discourse” (Urban 1991: 1) and which “takes [discourse] to be the richest point of intersection among language, culture, social, and individual expression” (Sherzer and Woodbury 1987: vii). In this view, “culture is an emergent, dialogic process, historically transmitted but continuously produced and revised through dialogues among its members” (Farnell and Graham 1998: 412). Actual instances of discourse such as karintaa are seen to be not only representative of but *constitutive of* the social and cultural life of the community in which they occur. This approach has the tremendous strength of looking at discourse rather than through discourse in seeking to understand specific social and cultural configurations. My research on Nanti karintaa provides data to test the theory that discourse constitutes culture and society by documenting the trajectories and entailments of specific utterances through time and space.

Taking culture to be ‘the locally-salient set of emergent behaviors and evaluations’; society to be ‘the set of lived relationships between individuals and groups of individuals’; and language to be ‘the form of social action that embodies culture and society’, I will examine specific karintaa utterances as discrete social actions that both reflect and shape Nanti culture and society. By examining these utterances within their cultural, social and spatio-temporal contexts, I hope to understand if and how these utterances alter their contexts of origin, and further, I hope to describe how

Ground-breaking work in the ethnography of speaking and ethnography of communication traditions (Bauman & Sherzer 1974, Hymes 1972, Keating 2001, Sherzer 1983, Sherzer 1990) informs my analysis of karintaa as a uniquely Nanti ‘way of speaking’ while theories of performance (Bauman 1977), framing (Bateson 2000 [1972], Goffman 1974, Goffman 1981), context (Duranti & Goodwin 1992, Urban and Silverstein 19xx), poetics (Hymes 1981, Jakobson 1960, Jakobson 1981, Sherzer & Woodbury 1987) and semiotics (Silverstein 1976, Turino 1999, Urban 1982, Urban 1991) shape and enrich my analysis of karintaa as highly contextualized and historically situated verbal art co-created by performer and audience together. My conceptualization of a dynamic system of mutually-informing and complementary communicative practices as a Nanti discursive ecology lies at convergence of these interlinked theoretical traditions (Beier 2001).

In applying the discourse-centered model to Nanti culture, I integrate theories of the inherent dialogicality of language (Bakhtin 1981, Voloshinov 1973) and dialectical models of human society (Gourlay 1978, Gramsci et al 1971, Williams 1977) to understand large-scale cultural phenomena. At the same time, my analysis of specific instances of contextualized karintaa performance are informed by theories of practice, agency, and individuality (Bourdieu 1977, Bourdieu & Thompson 1991, Duranti 1997, Duranti & Goodwin 1992). In examining contemporary relationships among Nanti individuals and residence groups within the context of their recently-formed villages, I have proposed that composing and performing karintaa provides a unique opportunity for Nantis to integrate novel experiences into their existing patterns of social understanding (Beier 2001). In my dissertation research I will draw on this set of theoretic traditions to refine my tentative analyses of the relationship between karintaa as localizable moments of individual creative expression and the dynamic, dialogic sociocultural and spatiotemporal matrix in which these moments are embedded.

Amazonia is both among the most linguistically- and culturally-diverse areas of the world and among the least understood. The relative dearth of thorough documentation of indigenous Amazonian discourse forms (Beier et al 2002), together with the grave threats to linguistic and cultural diversity (Grenoble & Whaley 1998, Woodbury 1993) recently accelerated by globalization, inspire me to contribute a thorough and contextualized study of Nanti karintaa performances to the body of literature on Amazonian discourse. My attention to both the areal and typological features of Nanti chanting and its exceptions to areal-typological patterns is informed by key works on lowland Amazonian verbal art and poetics (Basso 1985, Basso 1987, Basso 1990, Basso 1995, Graham 1995, Michael 2001, Sammons & Sherzer 2000,

Seeger 1987, Sherzer 1974, Sherzer 1983, Sherzer 1990, Sherzer & Urban 1986, Urban 1982, Urban 1991).

An overarching motivation for my research on Nanti karintaa is to document this unique form of human expression for the benefit of future scholars as well as future Nantis. Valid anthropological and linguistic theories will account for the vast diversity of what humans actually do – but to do so, data on human cultural and linguistic diversity must be available to test and refine theories. I will document, as thoroughly as I can in the course of my lifetime, what it is that Nantis do – and why, and how – to make a meaningful contribution to the store of knowledge that we have about our complex and diverse species.

**Question 3. What evidence will you need to collect to answer your research question? How will you go about collecting this evidence? (One page maximum)**

My objectives are to thoroughly describe contemporary Nanti karintaa performances; to confirm my assertion that karintaa is a distinct Nanti 'way of speaking' within the context of coexisting social and discursive practices; and to generate a preliminary theory of the relationships between karintaa and non-karintaa 'ways of speaking', which together constitute a local discursive ecology. To meet these ends, I will record, transcribe, and analyze naturally-occurring karintaa performances and naturally-occurring non-karintaa discourse data. I will focus on daily conversational discourse, but I will also attend to other marked Nanti 'ways of speaking' including leader-talk, scolding-talk, and spoken banter during feasting.

In analyzing data from karintaa performances, I will describe the salient linguistic, poetic, musical, and semantic features that define karintaa, striving for both an etic and an emic perspective. I will analyze non-karintaa discourse data for contrasts, correspondences, and correlations between various other forms of Nanti verbal expression and karintaa. If indeed karintaa is a distinct Nanti 'way of speaking', I will find aspects of content and form that are in complementary distribution between the two sets of data. Further, if indeed Nanti 'ways of speaking' together constitute a discursive ecology, I will find patterned correlations between specific ways of speaking, specific social contexts, and specific forms of social action. Ideally, these correlations will also provide insight into Nanti conceptions of agency, individuality, and sociability.

My two primary data sets will be extemporaneous karintaa performances recorded during feasting in Montetoni and Marankehari and interactional data among Nantis and between myself and Nantis recorded outside of karintaa performances. These new data will expand the corpus of karintaa and interactional data that I have gathered since 1997 and which forms the basis for the hypotheses and tentative analyses that motivate this project.

I will gather karintaa data using the recording methodology that I have developed over the years during which I have been participating in and documenting Nanti feasting. Feast participants, including myself at times, are fitted with a small waistpack containing a Sony minidisc recorder. A stereo lavalier microphone is clipped to the feaster's clothing. This method's key advantages are these: first, the recorder goes wherever the feaster goes, and records whatever the feaster says, chants, and hears; second, the equipment is visible so everyone knows at a glance that they are being recorded; and third, the microphone mounted on the feaster selects his or her voice and the voices of those in the immediate vicinity out of the tumultuous sound of many people chanting simultaneously, thus providing clear recordings of monophonic and polyphonic karintaa.

I will gather non-karintaa discourse data using this same waistpack technique, but more often I will wear the waistpack. In addition, I will use minidisc recorders and stationary microphones to record interactions that take place in my hut or in others' huts. I will supplement my audio data with video recordings in order to document the visual, spatial, and gestural aspects of Nanti communication.

While in the field, I will back up all my data on CDs; selectively transcribe salient segments; and review these segments with Nanti consultants for the purposes of translation and contextualization. These consultation sessions themselves will be recorded and reviewed with consultants to maximize multi-leveled intersubjective understanding of the original material (Bernard 2002, Graham 1995, Ochs 1979).

I will describe at least the following aspects of the general form of karintaa poetry: phonological and syntactic features; tonic and rhythmic structure; prosodic features; repetition and parallelism; and semantico-referential features. In examining the improvisational aspects of individual karintaa performances, I will configure these features as a constraint system from which improvisations emerge.

In analyzing the semantico-referential content of my data, I will track chains of interactions, including karintaa, through which the actions and words of others are presented and represented. I will identify correlations between events and interactions, and the ways these are presented and represented verbally in individual karintaa. Upon identifying highly salient events in the community, I will especially focus on interpersonal or intergroup conflicts when they emerge and identify if and how these conflicts are addressed, resolved, or exacerbated in karintaa. Conversing regularly with Nanti participants and

observers about these chains of interactions as they are unfolding is a crucial strategy in documenting the various perspectives and interpretations involved in these events.

**Question 4. Describe your training and preparedness for this research (examples: language competence, technical skills, previous research, and any other relevant experience). Describe any work you have already done on this project, and/or how it relates to your prior research. (One page maximum)**

I have been working on health, land rights, and language rights issues with the Camisea Nanti communities since 1995 and my dissertation research project has emerged from this long-term relationship. It is my commitment to these communities that drives me to complete a doctorate in linguistic anthropology; I believe I can most effectively collaborate with these communities in achieving their self-determined goals as a well-trained research scholar in anthropology and linguistics.

In effect, all Nantis are presently monolingual in Nanti. While a few young Nanti men can communicate in Matsigenka, no Nanti speaks Spanish or English. Through daily living among Nantis together with linguistic analysis of the Nanti language, I have become a highly competent speaker of Nanti, I can chant competently in Nanti, and I am developing my skills in performing extemporaneous karintaa. My linguistic work has given me extensive experience in transcribing the Nanti language.

The field research I conducted for my master's thesis provides crucial context for my dissertation project. My thesis describes and analyzes Nanti feasting practices; which are the social matrix in which chanting and karintaa are performed. In addition to informing my theoretic approach to the social and linguistic aspects of feasting, chanting, and karintaa performance, through my previous research on feasting I have developed and refined research methods and technical strategies appropriate to gathering karintaa data, as I described in Q3.

Because I have a long-term relationship with the Nantis of Montetoni and Marankehari, I already have a substantial knowledge of highly salient events in recent Nanti history. This knowledge, partially documented in the data I have gathered since 1997, provides a valuable longitudinal perspective to my study. In addition, I will use my data sets from Montetoni and Marankehari comparatively to assure that I am not making spurious correlations between feasting, chanting, karintaa, and their impacts on interpersonal and intra-village social relations.

Because I have been fascinated by the phenomenon of karintaa since I first witnessed Nantis performing it in 1997, I have evaluated my training in graduate school partly from the perspective of its relevance to understanding karintaa. My training in formal linguistics has shed light on the affordances and constraints that the structure of the Nanti language itself brings to bear on karintaa. My training in linguistic anthropological theory and methods has shown me how language, and verbal art in particular, can embody more abstract social and ideological phenomena. And my training in social theory has given me intellectual tools to use in understanding the larger-scale phenomena that articulate with discrete speech events and particular interactional configurations captured in my data.

From a broader perspective, my dissertation research is supported by the network of affiliations and collaborative relationships that I have developed over the years that I have been working with indigenous groups in Peruvian Amazonia. I have developed professional relationships with a number of Peruvian scholars, including Dr. Gustavo Solis (Solis 2000) at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima and Sr. Gabel Sotil (Morey & Sotil 2000, Sotil 1997, Sotil 2001) at the Universidad Nacional de la Amazonia Peruana. I plan to formalize my affiliations with these institutions during my next visit to Peru in May 2003. I highly value the opportunities I have already had to collaborate with Peruvian researchers and scholars, indigenous groups and federations, and representatives of both the public and non-profit sectors in Peru, as well as international organizations concerned with indigenous issues. I see my dissertation research as inseparable from my more general goal to contribute useful and accurate data to contemporary political and philosophical discourses that involve indigenous people. I look forward to continuing to share ideas, research results, and published materials with them.



**Question 5. Given that the Wenner-Gren Foundation's goal is to further basic research in anthropology, what contribution will your project make to meeting this goal? (One-half page maximum)**

My research project contributes to the goal of furthering basic research in anthropology on several levels. First, **I am seeking and amassing data from contemporary Nanti society that speaks to enduring anthropological issues**, including theories of the relationships between discourse in society and culture; theories of human agency and intentionality; and theories of the interface between individual thought and social action. In particular, data from the Camisea Nanti communities offers healthy challenges to theories largely based on "western" philosophies and ideologies. Nantis now living on the Camisea River first established long-term relationships with non-Nantis in the late 1980s; as a result, many aspects of contemporary Nanti society and daily life are still uniquely Nanti. The data I gather in my work with these two Nanti communities is an extremely rich nexus for comparison and refinement in elaborating generalizable theories of human social and linguistic behavior.

Second, **I intend to have a long and productive career doing anthropological research in Amazonia**. I have already been conducting field research within the context of my relationship with the Camisea Nanti communities over the last seven years, and I intend to continue my anthropological investigations far into the future. My overarching intellectual and ethical commitment as a scholar is to use my training to document cultural and linguistic phenomena in indigenous Amazonian communities that provides these communities with high-quality documentary resources that support their self-determined interests. Wenner-Gren's support of my dissertation research project will advance my development as a highly competent and knowledgeable linguistic anthropologist whose primary commitment is to practice ethically-driven scholarship of the highest theoretic merit.

Third, **I am committed to collaborating with and mentoring other young anthropologists, so that our discipline will have a host of bright and innovative practitioners for decades to come**. I have already been centrally involved in establishing three other field research projects in Peru by young anthropologists who contacted me as a result of my work with Cabeceras Aid Project, and similar opportunities continue to arise. My commitment to research includes a commitment to inspire others to conduct original and valuable anthropological research.

In summary, I believe that I am exceptionally well-prepared to make a unique and valuable contribution to the field of anthropology in the course of my career, and I am confident that Wenner-Gren's investment in my dissertation research will indeed greatly benefit our discipline.

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