

Centering Indigenous Methodologies in Linguistic Fieldwork: Creating the Naso Cultural Encyclopedia

Miriam Aguilar (Naso; Universidad de Panamá)

and

Natalia Bermúdez (University of Chicago)



In the Naso territory settled by Panama, there exists an abundance of knowledge and information that Nasos protect from outside individuals and organizations who exploit them for personal interests. There has been collaboration with linguists from different places like United States, Europe, and other countries who have helped create Naso alphabets and pedagogical materials like a Bible, grammar, and short stories. The field of language documentation emphasizes collaborative research methods that balance linguistic projects with supplemental goals such as pedagogical materials. These field models center academic goals and the Indigenous goals are secondary.

However, Nasos' disapproval of these projects is due to non-Nasos leading these projects who don't know the language or culture, which renders those materials illegitimate. In response to this, a group of Naso university students got together to lead a project with the support of Naso elders in order to document our language and culture ourselves, through the *Naso Cultural Encyclopedia*, with the financial support of an Endangered Languages Documentation Program grant (2015-2018) and technical support of the linguist Natalia Bermúdez. We argue that linguists should use this method in field research, and that goals of linguists such as gathering data for analysis can be met while centering Indigenous goals. We propose a model of linguistic fieldwork called *Native–Authored Research* where the primary goal is decided, led, and produced by Indigenous people, and the linguist's role is to provide ancillary training in linguistics and technology, as well as securing ample financial support through grants. We show how linguistic research can come out from these projects, such as Aguilar's B.A. thesis and Bermúdez's Ph.D. dissertation.