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Editor's Preface and List of Contributors (LDD 7)

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Editor's Preface

Peter K. Austin

The papers in this volume of *Language Documentation and Description* are, with two exceptions, written up versions of lectures given at the 3L Summer School held at SOAS from 23rd June to 3rd July 2009. The exceptions are a chapter on audio in language documentation by David Nathan that is a revised version of a journal article, and my chapter on applying for a language documentation research grant that grew out of a handout developed for a tutorial session at the 3L Summer School. The chapters have suggestions for further reading and discussion exercises, and thus the volume could serve as an introductory textbook to some of the major topics within language documentation.

Before discussing the contents of the volume, an explanation of how it was put together is in order. One of the 3L Summer School participants, Yukari Nagayama from Hokkaido in Japan, recorded all the plenary lectures (apart from the first) as mp3 files on her Edirol recorder and then passed a copy of the digital recordings to me (the recordings and copying were done with the permission of the lecturers). SOAS PhD student Louise Ashmore and MA graduate Jennifer Marshall transcribed the recordings and inserted into the transcribed files at the appropriate points materials from the lecture Powerpoint slides and class handouts. The resulting files were revised and rewritten by the lecturers as chapters for this volume, and then passed to me for editing and to Jennifer for checking the bibliographies. I also asked David Nathan to revise his paper on audio epistemology (published in 2009 in the *Journal of the International Association of Sound Archives*) for inclusion as a chapter here since it contains much material that is relevant to language documentation (and in fact includes discussion of the 'advanced audio' practical session that David and Tom Castle ran at the 3L Summer School). Finally, I expanded my handout on applying for a research grant into a full chapter. The final layout and typesetting was done by Tom Castle in his usual efficient and effective manner. As a result of this process we have been able to 'fast track' publication of the 3L course material. I am really grateful to all those involved in making this happen so quickly and so well.

The first chapter is my overview of language documentation theory and practice, highlighting its major features and how it differs from language description. I also raise some issues which I see as somewhat problematic and unresolved within language documentation, highlighting them for further research and discussion. These issues include measures of quality of

documentation outcomes, interdisciplinarity, meta-documentation, and sustainability. As a developing field, we should expect there to be topics for argument and debate among practitioners and I hope that my remarks spark such debate.

The second chapter, also by me, deals with issues related to communities and ethics in language documentation. These are both ‘hot topics’ since our field was established in the late 1990’s with explicit concern for the rights and needs of stakeholders in the language documentation process, particularly language speakers and communities. The chapter presents an overview of major issues in ethics, intellectual property rights, and moral rights, and is intended as an introduction for linguists not usually exposed to these issues in their training. Suggestions for further reading and some exercises are included.

Friederike Lüpke’s chapter on research methods in language documentation is a lightly revised version of her contribution entitled ‘Data collection methods for field-based language documentation’ that was published in *Language Documentation and Description* Volume 6. She examines how the new concern for data and its representation that has arisen with documentary linguistics over the past ten years has an impact on the nature of the corpus documenters collect and the research methods available to be used for each type of material to be included. Her discussion is richly illustrated and covers the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, including elicitation, participant observation and stimulus-based experimentation, arguing for a more reflexive concern for research methods and consideration of how different methods can be employed to complement each other. Her chapter is an important contribution to the ongoing development of good practices in language documentation and should be essential reading for those new to the field.

The next chapter by Adam Schembri introduces the new area of documentary sign linguistics (indeed, Adam suggests that the term was first used at the 3L Summer School) which is concerned with the documentation of sign languages, both those used by ‘macro-communities’ such as British Sign Language or American Sign Language, and those used by ‘micro-communities’ such as Nicaraguan Sign Language or Kata Kolok sign language from Bali. After dispelling some myths about sign languages and presenting a typology of them, Adam moves on to cover the major features of documentary sign linguistics and how and why it has developed now. He argues that software tools such as ELAN now provide a means for sign language researchers to transcribe and share data in ways that could never be managed in the past. Rising concerns for language diversity and

endangerment have also played a role in seeing this field emerge now, as has attention to the rights and needs of signers, both Deaf and hearing. The sad history of discrimination against signers (which continues in some countries and communities) mirrors that of many minority language speakers. Adam's chapter then discusses in some detail the project he is leading to develop a corpus of British Sign Language with a focus on regional and social variation. He covers particular issues related to the Observer's Paradox, first spelled out by the sociolinguist William Labov. The paradox states that the most vernacular unmonitored language use occurs when people are not being observed, yet the only way we can collect this data is by observing language use. For sign languages special issues arise due to the fact that research participants are self-selecting and a specific subset of the community of users, along with the fact that the need to video record interactions means that the recording context has to be highly controlled and 'unnatural'. The researchers' wish to make data openly available also raises numerous ethical problems because of the shared knowledge of the Deaf community and the impossibility to anonymise participants. Adam's chapter contains many illustrations and screen shots, and guidance for further reading. Hopefully it will spur more linguists to pay attention to sign languages, especially endangered micro-community sign languages which they may come across in their spoken language fieldwork and which are frequently completely undocumented.

Julia Sallabank's chapter deals with issues in language documentation and language policy. She argues that 'language policy is any decision that is made about language ... conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit'. Language policy may be formulated at any level, from family to state (to international agreements between states), and may involve overt or covert actions that affect languages and their uses. She covers top-down and bottom-up policy development, and discusses why policy is relevant to language documenters and describers. Any research work involves political choices (which language to work on, which consultants to interview, what outcomes to produce, whether to get involved in language revitalisation etc.) and hence, explicitly or implicitly, decisions about language. Decisions not to do certain things are as much policy decisions as explicit choices to engage in activities, including advising stakeholders on language issues. Julia discusses frameworks for language policy and planning covering theoretical and implementational concepts, including corpus, status, acquisition and prestige planning. She also deals with language and human rights and development, and issues of gender and language policy. She argues that researchers working on documenting endangered languages need to be familiar with the concepts and literature on language policy because: 'we are likely to be in touch with people who care about their language. We may have more effect on language policy at grass-

roots level because that is the level that we are working at. As we have external contacts and knowledge of other contexts, we can form a bridge between communities ... We may be called on to advise on language policy, or to mediate between local groups and government authorities.' Knowing about policy concepts and practices can help documenters be better prepared for the language decisions they will inevitably be called upon to make.

David Nathan's contribution deals with archiving, which has been seen from the outset as a fundamental part of language documentation. He covers a range of topics in digital language archiving, including archive models (like the traditional Open Archive Information Systems model), and the goals and types of language archives. The bulk of his chapter is an account of the principles and practices adopted by the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at SOAS, including workflows, feedback mechanisms, data quality and formats, deposit file organisation, metadata, and how the deposit process works; all of this is supported with copious examples and explanations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of recent developments at ELAR where a Web 2.0 social-networking approach is being developed to archive deposit and access and use management, turning the archive from a repository into a communication channel between those who create language documentation and those who wish to use it.

The interactions between language documentation and description and linguistic theory are the topic of Peter Sells' chapter. He argues that the fields should be intimately connected for three reasons. Firstly, grammatical description presupposes some theory, whether it is explicit or implicit (and hence informal). Secondly, he suggests (along with theoreticians such as Noam Chomsky) that linguistic theory must be informed by more and better data and description. Finally, linguistic theory can be useful both in the field, to help uncover linguistic phenomena, and 'at home' in order to be able to present interesting, relevant or unusual materials and analyses to fellow linguists.

Oliver Bond's chapter deals with interactions between language documentation and language typology, arguing that the two fields have much to contribute to one another. He introduces the typological method, and then exemplifies it with data on relativisation patterns cross-linguistically, including looking at areal patterns and distributions on a world map. He further explores the cross-linguistic hierarchy of accessibility to relativisation, showing how such a hierarchy can only be derived by inter-language comparison. He then moves on to argue that typology and documentation have many interests in common and can support each other: typologists rely on good quality documentation and description, and their work generates data

sets, questionnaires and stimulus kits that can serve the needs of documenters in terms of providing ideas about what is possible or likely in languages and tools for these ideas to be tested. Typologists have also promulgated standards in glossing that can assist documenters with making the metadata they create more comparable and accessible. Even so, Bond argues, documenters need to pay careful attention to fine-grained description of terms and concepts used for labelling and analysis in their own work in line with the view, recently adopted by many typologists, that linguistic categories are language-specific and not universal. He illustrates this with material from Jaminjung word classes and his own fieldwork on Eleme verb paradigms.

David Nathan's second chapter focuses on sound and unsound practices in audio recording within language documentation. He argues that linguists have not developed a clear epistemology for audio within their research and have tended to treat recording as the creation of evidence rather than as documentation of performance. He argues that there is an ethical dimension that demands the best possible recording quality, paying close attention to equipment choice, training and the context and environment within which the performance occurs. Also important, and something which has been emphasised in training courses at SOAS, is listening, understanding psycho-acoustics and paying attention to the sound stage, managing the context in order to maximise signal to noise ratios and capture as much spatial information as possible. He concludes the chapter by presenting a set of criteria that can be used for evaluating recordings within language documentation, emphasising the idea that audio recordings should be made in order to be experienced by human listeners and should convey what a human listener would experience at a particular location during the performance of a particular linguistic event, including information about spatial locations.

The final chapter is my discussion of applying for a language documentation research grant. It covers issues such as how to find a grant, what the application process involves, and how to formulate a good application. The importance of clarity, persuasiveness, cohesion and coherence, credibility, and relevance in preparing the application is emphasised, along with the need to pay close attention to detail. Formulation of a detailed budget is also covered, including the various categories of expenses normally able to be included. The likely outcomes of the application process, both success and failure, are also briefly discussed. The chapter concludes by noting that the key ingredients of a successful grant application are timing, careful preparation, background research, hard work, and attention to detail, especially making sure that the project goals, methods and budget

mesh well with the priorities of the research funder with whom the application is lodged.

I am grateful to all the authors for their contributions, and the expeditious manner in which they prepared their chapters for this volume. Comments and feedback on several of the chapters were provided by Lise Dobrin, Lenore Grenoble, Susan Penfield, and Tony Woodbury. Design, formatting, layout and printing was managed wonderfully by Tom Castle, who also designed the cover.

As usual, readers are encouraged to send comments and feedback on the chapters presented here, directed to the address on the inside front cover.

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