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FRANK SEIDEL

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Documentary linguistics: A language philology of the 21st century

Frank Seidel

University of Florida

Abstract

This article argues that documentary linguistics' focus on 'direct representation of discourse' requires a broader conceptualization of the field that moves beyond purely linguistic concerns. This article recasts documentary linguistics as a philology, broadly understood as the inquiry into 'the multifaceted study of texts, languages, and the phenomenon of language itself' (Turner 2014: ix). The article explores three areas of connection between documentary linguistics and various philological endeavors, namely textual constitution through commentary as relevant to audio-visual language documents, immersive and aesthetic experience of language events performed in an archive, and memory production. The paper touches upon a conception of text which focuses on the interdependency with its commentary, it touches upon the aesthetic qualities of 'raw data', and it touches upon the archive as the repository of passive cultural memory. The reconceptualization of documentary linguistics described in this article opens documentary linguistics to non-core linguistic types of language documentation efforts and situates the documentary activities more broadly in the humanistic enterprise of communicating, discussing, studying, and understand human achievements of other times and places.

1. Introduction¹

In the past quarter century, documentary linguistics has emerged as a new branch or sub-field of linguistics, adding a new theoretical focus on data collection, processing, and preparation, aimed especially at recording and

¹ I would like to thank Misty Bravence, Julie Byrd, Ryan Duggins, and two anonymous reviewers, for their valuable comments on previous versions of this paper. Without their input the article would not have been possible in this form. Responsibility for the content, however, lies with me. I would also like to thank the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for funding two language documentation projects during which I was able to develop many of the ideas expressed here.

analyzing under-documented or unknown languages. This new sub-field developed partially in response to the realization that many languages spoken today will be extinct within the 21st century; documentary linguists² are working with a sense of urgency to create and preserve records of them. Advances in digital media production and processing further fueled this focal shift to linguistic data collection, by enabling easy creation and handling of sound and video recordings.³

From the outset, those interested in documentary linguistics recognized its interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary nature that interlocks insights and methods originating in different disciplines to record language knowledge and behavior. But despite the fact that the documentary linguistic annotation apparatus is a direct derivative of the apparatus in textual philology, the insights and achievements of philology (broadly understood) have rarely received more than cursory attention in discussions about documentary linguistics, nor have they impacted much on documentary linguistic practice.⁴ This is not to say that the intimate relationship of philology and documentary linguistics has remained completely unnoticed (cf. Evans & Sasse 2007, Himmelmann 2012, Woodbury 2011, 2014⁵). Woodbury (2011), in particular, takes a very inclusionary stance and identifies philological roots for documentary linguistics. Woodbury (2014) even goes so far as to conceptualize a language documentation⁶ as something akin to a publication, a book, that can be read, engaged with, and appreciated by a wide audience. This recent turn towards philology is part of a shift towards a broader understanding of documentary linguistics that originates in the realization that, as Conathan (2011:238) puts it, '[o]ver time, the importance of [documentation, FS] records may change and may be put to unanticipated

² As Woodbury (2014) points out, contributors to a language documentation need not be a single individual; I will use the singular throughout to represent the plurality of contributors, such as language documenter(s), archive curator(s) etc. Also language documenters need not be linguists, or from outside a community.

³ For general introductions see Austin (2010), Lehmann (2001), Himmelmann (1998, 2012), Gippert, Himmelmann & Mosel (2006), Woodbury (2003).

⁴ The linguistic motivation of many archive deposits (e.g. in ELAR, DOBES) is quite evident: most are created by linguists for linguists.

⁵ See also Garrett's (n.d.) conceptualization of the Yurok Language Project as Yurok linguistics and philology, or Stebbins & Hellywig (2010) on the Sm'algyax corpus, which flies under the flag of documentary linguistics, but is essentially philological.

⁶ I use the phrase 'a language documentation', with the indefinite article, to indicate the outcome of documentary linguistics as understood in Himmelmann (1998).

uses', by linguists as well as non-linguists (cf. Holton 2011). The question that arises then is: if language documentation is not (only) for linguists, in what framework should documentary linguists work? This paper aims to contribute to the delineation of such a framework.

I argue that documentary linguistics cannot be conceived separately from philology as a mere linguistic endeavor. In fact, the so-called Boasian trilogy of text collection, grammar, and dictionary, which is so often used as a conceptual basis for documentary linguistics, was not conceived as a linguistic but as an anthropological enterprise modeled on philology (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1999: 499). I will elaborate three areas of connection between documentary linguistics and different variants of philological enterprises to reframe and integrate documentary linguistics as a transdisciplinary⁷ (essentially) philological endeavor, not all of which is necessarily centered on topics important to linguistics. I also further delineate the functions and roles that a language documentation plays in the humanistic enterprise of communicating, discussing, studying, and understanding 'the things other humans have achieved and suffered and struggled for in other times and places'.⁸ As Woodbury (2003:47) phrases it: a language documentation 'should be useable by a philologist 500 years from now'.

This paper, which is essentially a critical analysis, begins with a brief preview of the arguments (Section 2), followed by an overview of the links between philology and documentary linguistics as discussed in previous publications (Section 3). Sections 4 to 6 deal with three areas of connection between philology and documentary linguistics: texts, aesthetics and representation, and cultural memory. The paper concludes with Section 7.

⁷ In the remainder of this paper the term 'interdisciplinary' is used for short term cross-disciplinary collaborations or the use of methods from another discipline to elucidate problems within a given academic discipline. The term 'transdisciplinary' is reserved for long lasting and integrated cross-disciplinary collaborations that target a reshuffled field which encompass several disciplines in continuous collaboration. For more on this see among others Ette (2004), Mittelstraß (2007), Möhlig, Seifert & Seidel (2010).

⁸ Richard Brodhead, President of Duke University on The Colbert Report (August 15, 2013, episode 9141, available at <http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/8ax5jq/richard-brodhead>, see: 1m58s).

2. Three areas of connection between documentary linguistics and various philological endeavors

The three philological facets⁹ discussed here do not stem from a clear-cut understanding of a discipline called ‘philology’, but rather originate in variants of humanistic inquiries into the ‘worlds that human beings have created for themselves and expressed in words’ which can be described as philological inasmuch as they deal with ‘the multifaceted study of texts, languages, and the phenomenon of language itself’ (Turner 2014: ix, 386).¹⁰ I believe that such a fuzzy, unitary, non-disciplinary (or transdisciplinary) viewpoint is warranted, considering Turner’s (2014) point of the artificiality of disciplinary boundaries in the humanities. Incidentally, Turner called this disciplinary distinctness a sham.¹¹ Such an inquiry is also warranted owing to the somewhat paradoxical picture that emerges where documentary linguistics is on the one hand described as interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary in nature (e.g. in Austin & Grenoble 2007, Himmelmann 2012), and on the other hand presented as a sub-field of linguistics (e.g. in Austin 2013, Himmelmann 2012, Woodbury 2003).

The practice of collecting, transcribing, annotating, and preparing audio-visual material of under-documented languages is not only a linguistic endeavor that produces discourse which can be used by philologists, but it is to a great extent textual philological activity in and of itself. Documentary linguistics stands here in direct connection to variants of philology that are on the one hand concerned with the constitution of texts, e.g. classical philology, and on the other hand with editorial work that is considered part of literary science, i.e., what is called in German *Editionsphilologie*. *Editionsphilologie* is more generally concerned with the creation of editions in conjunction with the study of the origin, dissemination, material conditions, and impact of any textual works deemed important enough (not just classical texts).

⁹ I will not go into philology as understood as studying the history of a language, nor in the narrow understanding of Blommaert (2008) who effectively equates language philology with producing the Boasian triad.

¹⁰ See Turner (2014) for a historic narrative that traces the origins of the fractured humanities in today’s academic world back to philological erudition that encompassed a vast set of topics and knowledge sets. Turner (2014:386) recognizes that the collective of disciplines called humanities are not just a ‘set of isolated disciplines’ but share an underlying unity of interest in the creations of humanity. It is here where the buzzwords of interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinarity – which have often been applied to documentary linguistics – anchor, as they delineate efforts to find correctives to the fractured landscape of knowledge-production in academia (cf. Mittelstraß 2007; Ette 2004:29ff).

¹¹ For a similar more differentiated view see Pollock (2009:946).

I will also argue that the shift to consider a language documentation as an ongoing publication (Woodbury 2014) and the increasing recognition of the importance of language documentations for non-linguists (cf. Holton 2011) contain an underlying, undiscussed aesthetic component. Not only should a language documentation enable reading,¹² but the separation of theory and the establishment of raw, low level, or so-called ‘atheoretical’¹³ data (Himmelmann 2012, Furbee 2010:7,8ff) opens the way for a philological, non-theoretical interaction.¹⁴ Language documents in a language archive can not only be read, but contemplated or ‘read slowly’, to take up a cornerstone of philology as the ‘art of reading slowly’. A defining and new element of documentary linguistic products is that they incorporate the ability to experience language in use through audio-visual documents. Scientific or research questions become secondary, in the sense that documentary linguistic outcomes do not require scientific or analytic training for interaction, in contrast to, for example, a grammatical description.

¹² I pick up Woodbury’s frame of regarding language documentation as a book. Reading a book and ‘reading’ a language documentation are, of course, not entirely the same. They do share, however, the fact that they are ‘non-theoretical’ forms of engagement. This form of engagement has been operationalized academically as ‘slow reading’ in philology and differs conceptually from a more superficial reading experience. Since language documents can also be watched and not only read I will adopt ‘contemplation’ as a general term for this type of interaction (more on this below; see also footnote 36).

¹³ I understand both Furbee’s (2010) use of the word ‘atheoretical’ and Himmelmann’s (2012) implicit theoretical flexibility to be confined to the linguistic discipline. This is similar to Haspelmath’s (2009) concept of a framework-free approach to linguistic study. Nevertheless, the term ‘atheoretical’ is often used in a more fundamental sense as either describing: (a) positivistic data gathering that is supposedly free of preconceived notions, or (b) a praxis-oriented appropriation of the world. The authors talking about linguistic data in connection with audio(-visual) recordings, language documentation, and documentary linguistics implicitly take starkly different soft-theoretical positions in this regard. To give a quick – and therefore, in its simplicity, utterly skewed – picture, Furbee (2010) and Haspelmath (2009) contrast with Himmelmann (2012) and Lehmann (2004), in that the former tend towards (b) while the latter (especially Himmelmann) towards (a). Furthermore, Lehmann (2004) and Tedlock (1983) oppose each other in regarding audio(-visual) recordings as representation and as performance respectively. Unfortunately, this is not the time and place to elaborate this important issue further, but a much more thorough discussion of the nature of (video) data in documentary linguistics at this level needs to be had if documentary linguistics wants to reach outside of the discipline of linguistics. I touch upon a few of the issues in Section 5: (a) realist vs. idealist approaches (the latter being extremely neglected as a target of documentary linguistics), and (b) understanding a language document as performance and not representation.

¹⁴ See Ziolkowski (1990:8f) for more on the oppositional pair of ‘philology’ and ‘theory’.

When looking at philology's newer achievements in the broad field of cultural studies, another connection of documentary linguistics to philology emerges. Assmann (2008) presents the concept of 'cultural memory' which is, in McGann's (2013, 2014) understanding, correlatable with philology as the 'fundamental science of human memory' (McGann 2013:345). Cultural memory represents 'a framework for the communication across the abyss of time' (Assmann 2008:97) that is filled out and kept alive by humans 'recalling, iterating, reading, commenting, criticizing, and discussing what was deposited in the remote or recent past' (Assmann 2008:97). In this way, meaning creation extends beyond the here and now, beyond one's lifetime into the past and the future. Considering this, it emerges that documentary linguistics is not merely preserving languages and communicative behavior through language samples or 'specimens', i.e. recorded discourse, but rather that it is also an act of communication through space and time that engages in and shapes cultural memory both on the local and the global level and across generations.

Thus, I hope to make the case that documentary linguistics should not be conceived of in terms of linguistics or as a sub-branch of linguistics, but rather as a philological endeavor that:

1. is characterized by a particular methodology and a set of practices (cf. Furbee 2010) that edit, present and comment on language documents as part of an intradisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary research endeavor;
2. produces a commented and interpreted outcome that **equally** targets further linguistic and non-linguistic study or interaction and enables an interaction based on 'slow reading';
3. enables the experience of language in use;
4. provides an inclusionary framework for treating and curating the emergence of grammars, dictionaries, and language documents, which results in a more holistic representation of language(s);¹⁵
5. generally operates in the realm of creating or preserving cultural memories.

¹⁵ I have to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this fact out to me.

3. Documentary linguistics and philology

Himmelmann (1998) pioneered the conception of documentary linguistics. In his seminal article he puts it in complementary opposition to descriptive linguistics: documentary linguistics deals with linguistic data collection, processing, and presentation while language description deals with linguistic analysis. Himmelmann's main achievement lies in establishing documentary linguistics as its own field of linguistic inquiry, with its own theories and methodologies, separate from descriptive linguistics. The aim of documentary linguistics is to provide a comprehensive ' (Himmelmann 1998:166) record of the linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community' (through multipurpose documentation. The outcome of documentary linguistics is a *language documentation*: the result of the activities of compiling, commenting on, and archiving language documents. In practice, these *language documents*¹⁶ consist of digital audio(-visual) recordings of language in use, as well as written manuscripts. Philology in its variant forms is connected to this endeavor more or less explicitly in a few publications.

3.1. Classical Philology and the hermeneutic-exegetic tradition as templates for developing methodologies in documentary linguistics

In two instances, philological-type text interaction is used to provide methodological insights for documentary linguistics. Evans & Sasse (2007) expose the problematic lack of attention given to the production of meaning inherent in documentary linguistics and suggest adapting the techniques of hermeneutic and exegetic traditions as a solution. The fundamentally philological activity of adding comment upon comment to central documents of secular or ecclesiastical traditions and the resultant web of multifaceted background information that is indispensable for documenting and creating meaning should, so Evans and Sasse hold, function as a blueprint for commentaries contained in documentary linguistic outcomes. The contribution of Evans and Sasse ends at presenting an overview of different varieties of these traditions and does not discuss concrete adaptations for documentary linguistics. It treats philological techniques, however, as integral to the field of documentary linguistics.

¹⁶ In the remainder of this paper I use the term 'language document' for both audio-visual recordings and textual manuscripts. This is not an attempt at a definition, it is merely a useful cover term to separate all the other language materials such as translations and transcriptions from what are considered the primary language documents in a language documentation.

In contrast, Himmelmann (2012) uses classical philology as a template to highlight the importance of a methodological space for documentary linguistics inside linguistics. In the same manner as philological criticism processes original manuscripts or inscriptions (raw data) into critical editions (primary data) on which further scientific inquiry is based, documentary linguistics processes audio(-visual) language recordings (raw data) to create transcriptions and translations with linguistic annotation (primary data), which are used for linguistic generalizations or to produce structural data (e.g. descriptive statements). Thus in Himmelmann's framework audio(-visual) language documents are treated as 'specimens of observable linguistic behavior', i.e. raw data, that are then transcribed, translated, annotated, and commented to become primary data. An audio(-visual) recording is considered to grant direct access to the original observable communicative event (Himmelmann 1998, 2006, 2008, 2012). Thus raw language data is conceived of as an atheoretical language sample; it simply exists similar to an inscription passed down through time, which is then adaptable to different theoretical frameworks (for a short critique of this view of data see fn. 13) (Furbee 2010, Lehmann 2004:207, Himmelmann 2012).

3.2 Philology as an end-user and a language documentation as a philological edition

Philology more often than not appears more as a secondary, ancillary discipline in many discussions about documentary linguistics (cf. among others Himmelmann 1998, 2006, 2008, and to a certain extent also Woodbury 2011, 2014). The contents of a language documentation are considered useful to a variety of disciplines outside of linguistics. Thus, even though Himmelmann characterizes documentary linguistics as 'radically extended *text* collection' [emphasis mine], philology is taken to be more of an end user, presumably as analyzer of the content of the collected and prepared language documents, rather than a fundamental part of the field itself. Woodbury differs from Himmelmann here in that he highlights the importance of philological commentary for a language documentation. He exemplifies this with work by Bergsland (1959) on Aleut, produced with philological commentary and narratives that work on the individual texts, and a framing narrative integrating and connecting the texts collected as a whole. Woodbury is, to my knowledge, the first to compare language documentary outcomes with something akin to a philological edition, which incidentally in the sub-discipline of *Editionsphilologie* is a fully recognized publication.

3.3. Discourse-centered approaches and the problem of representation in language documentation

In tracing the different roots of documentary linguistics Woodbury (2011) discusses a set of discourse-centered approaches that examine so-called surface phenomena of language, or performance. Hymes' (1985) communicative competence or Coseriu's (1988) '*Sprachkompetenz*' (language competence or competence of *parole*) come to mind as providing theoretical underpinnings for this type of approach to the study of language. Here the insights from a particular field of inquiry, which has come to be called *ethnopoetics*, are of particular importance to documentary linguistics. For one, proponents of ethnopoetics, including Hymes (1981, 1987), Sherzer (1990), and Tedlock (1983), among others, apply *poetics*, a concept from literary studies, to examine discourse. As a result discourse is treated as an artwork¹⁷ and questions about its constitution, other than grammatical rules and meaning creation, arise alongside questions of stylistics, aesthetics, and interpretation. Furthermore, researchers of ethnopoetics were interested in representation and translation of artful language,¹⁸ in bibliographical as well as performative form.¹⁹

4. Establishing texts through commentary

Before moving to the main part of this section starting in 4.2, it is necessary to provide some context and briefly discuss how the philological preparation of texts can be integrated into research endeavors in the humanities. Because of Himmelmann's use of classical philology as a methodological template (3.1), documentary linguists should not brush over the fact that this conservative variety of philology, which collects, organizes, emends, and preserves texts, has long been looked upon with distaste (cf. Pollock 2009:934). Considering this, I think it is useful for documentary linguists to take notice of the efforts to rehabilitate this type of philological scholarship by recognizing and discussing the variant textuality of manuscripts or texts in its social and material context instead of falling into the positivist trap of establishing an authoritative original version of a text (Cerquiglini 1989, Lockhart 2001, 2005, 2007, McGann 2013).

¹⁷ This poetic or literary assessment of discourse is not only a feature of ethnopoetics but other researchers, such as Bauman (1977), Friedrich (1979) and Labov (1972), advanced the insight that the dichotomy between ordinary language and poetic or literary language is, at the least, difficult to uphold.

¹⁸ I suspect that this phrase is somewhat pleonastic for many of these authors since all language use is constituted by more than just grammar and meaning.

¹⁹ Tedlock (1983:13) talks about performable translations.

4.1. Instrumentalizing textual philology for historical studies: an example

What Lockhart (2005, 2007) calls ‘New Philology’ is of particular interest here, because he instrumentalizes philology for the study of history by acquiring, editing, and chronologizing indigenously produced texts in Nahuatl. He recognizes the importance of incorporating the original texts into any type of analysis. Lockhardt (2007:2) writes:

I take it, for the record, that philology has to do with close, systematic work with written texts, leading in the first instance to editions, *but going on to many kinds of research in which the texts are kept in the forefront of the mind even in the final product of the research and not ultimately submerged as they are in much demography and economic history, and even in some narrative, institutional, and social history* (my italics).²⁰

Much of the activity of New Philology as described by Lockhart (2007:9f) also sounds familiar from a documentary linguistic perspective. The following excerpt is particularly telling:

Also nearly at the same time began the close analysis of the use and meaning of key indigenous terms, starting with the *altepetl*, the local indigenous state, and the terminology associated with the household, both sets very different from the approximately equivalent concepts in Europe.

The movement involved new translation techniques and results, partly arising from experience with a new broader corpus, partly from the revival and extension of Nahuatl grammar. Much of the grammatical work was separate, done by Nahuatl grammarians coming out of linguistics, language study, anthropology, but much has occurred among us as well [...]. Our translations have been less literal, with a fuller recognition of idioms. Translations in the style of Garibay or Anderson & Dibble might say, for example, ‘You are exhausted, fatigued’, which corresponds to the structure and literal sense of the original phrases; we say ‘Welcome’, because these words are always used when someone arrives and a welcome is called for, and also we finally found in a remote corner of the great *Vocabulario* of fray Alonso de Molina an entry that gives precisely that definition. And since we have learned more

²⁰ Note that this line of argumentation is very similar to concerns in documentary linguistics. However, the problem with linguistic (descriptive or formal) analysis is ‘erasure’ of data, to use Furbee’s (2010) characterization, and not submergence.

about Nahuatl syntax, above all about the meaning and use of particles, our translations are not chopped up into small unconnected phrases; instead we produce the at times very long sentences that capture the sustained nature of much Nahuatl rhetoric and add much to the sense.²¹

Thus, not only is philology recognized as the primary discipline that contributes to historical study, but linguistic analysis (through grammar and dictionary) is considered to be part of that philological endeavor. Textual collection and curation, grammatical and semantic analysis, and historical study are all combined into one research endeavor. In a way, the field of New Philology provides a template for what documentary linguistics can achieve when understood as a philology and not as a mere data producing linguistic sub-discipline.

4.2. Text in philology and documentary linguistics

In Himmelmann (2012) the classical philological enterprise is separated from documentary linguistics on the grounds that classical philology deals with historical, written language data and documentary linguistics is concerned with contemporary language data captured in audio-visual documents. This contrived dichotomy between the treatment of written documents belonging to the sphere of philology and the treatment of spoken language as the sphere of linguistics is somewhat surprising, albeit a recurring one (cf. for example, Lockhart's definition of philology given in 4.1). It is particularly surprising in ruminations on documentary linguistics because Woodbury's (2003) concept of discourse is based on Sherzer (1987:297) who subsumes all sorts of forms, 'large and small, written and oral, permanent and fleeting', under discourse.

But in addition to the untidy boundaries between written and oral language in terms of linguistic features and communicative strategies (cf. Tannen 1982), I argue in the following that audio-visual documents²² also share specific and essential characteristics with philological understandings of text. As Tedlock (1983:4) recognized, a recording on tape 'once made and removed to another time and place, has some of the properties of a written text'.

²¹ This excerpt first appeared in published print form in Spanish in Lockhart (2005:36f).

²² I will concentrate here on audio-visual documents and not delve into the role of bibliographical or digital written language documents in documentary linguistics. These documents are easily conceived of as written text and hence should be readily recognized as part of a philological endeavor.

4.2.1. Texts in the digital humanities: Texts, textual dynamicity, and their dependence on markup

The prototypical distinction between a bibliographical manuscript as text and a recorded language event as spoken discourse is even less clear when both can be integrated into the digital sphere. Speech, once it is recorded and digitized, loses some of its ephemeral characteristics. It becomes more easily accessible and it can, like a manuscript that is read again and again, be easily listened to again and again. More importantly though, the recording and further representations of it can now share the same digital space, similarly to the way a photographic copy of a bibliographical manuscript and its digital edition share the same space.

The notion that ‘all text is marked text’ muddles the boundaries between recordings of spoken discourse and digital representations of written texts even further. Buzzetti & McGann (2006) explore the preparation of texts for digital publication, whether the text is printed, scripted, or oral, and propose that adding markup to a digital edition of a text for scholarly use raises the question of how the markup can capture the volatility or dynamicity of a text, i.e. the variable, simultaneous, and overlapping structures contained in it, and becomes intertwined with the markup itself. A text (written or oral) will appear differently and can be used differently, depending on the markup it receives. Similarly, a recording of spoken language, transcribed and further annotated, ceases to be simple discourse and becomes interdependent with markup, similar to written texts (cf. 4.2.3 for more on this).

4.2.2. Constituting a text through commentary and text as retrieved communication

Such an interdependent conceptualization of text is not new to philology, whose conception of text has often differed from the linguistic conception of text (and from discourse when considered to be made up of several texts). For the text linguist Hartmann (1971), text is the natural, primary linguistic sign. Any spoken or written utterance is a text in that it has communicative functions. Text is the structural entity above the sentence, and sentences, words, morphemes etc. are abstracted concepts that make up a text.

In contrast, text in philology does not include all that is spoken or written. To understand this better we can look at the history of classical philology and the emergence of the concept of *textus* in medieval times, which is re-appropriated by Assman (2006:101ff):

Textus here stands in opposition to *commentarius*. *Textus* can be called a linguistic utterance to which one then relates in the form of a *commentaries*. *Commentarius*, conversely, is the form of

utterance that has a *textus* as its object. *Textus* and *commentarius* are correlative concepts. A linguistic utterance becomes a *textus* when it is the object of philological work: textual criticism, the production of a text, an edition, a commentary on a text. And, we may add, translation.²³

Thus in classical philology *textus* is not all that people utter, but *textus* captures those utterances that become the object of philological scholarship through editing, criticism, commenting, and translation. Only by adding a *commentarius* does a linguistic utterance become a *textus*. It is this understanding of text as *textus* that explains the self-commentaries of authors such as Dante (e.g. in *La Vita Nuova*) or Boccaccio (e.g. in *Teseida*). In providing commentary they turned their works into texts. Through the *commentarius* the philologist aims to bridge the difficulties of understanding owing to ‘intercultural otherness’ or the age of the text (Assmann 2006:101ff).

Combining elements of *textus* and the textlinguistical conceptions of texts, Ehlich (1984) highlights another aspect: text as ‘retrieved communication’ used in a distended communicative situation. Text production and text reception can be temporally and/or spatially separated and occur in two different perceptual spaces, one space for the Speaker and one for the Listener/Reader. This enables us to conceive of oral as well as written *texti* (Assmann 2006: 104).²⁴

²³ For more context I refer the reader to Kuchenbuch & Kleine (2006a) (in particular to the contributions by Kuchenbuch & Kleine (2006b) and Michael (2006)). The first work provides a historical overview of the various conceptions of text and *textus* and their passage through time, and the second delineates the mixture of oral commentary, textual memorization, and reading out loud of a text that formed the basis of pedagogy at the medieval university. This practice, in turn, laid the basis for the understanding of *textus* taken up by Assmann. Fundamental for the philological understanding of *textus*, i.e. the fact that only through observation/contemplation does speech become a text (Kuchenbuch & Kleine 2006b), is the theoretical work on hermeneutics by the philosopher and aesthetician Georg Friedrich Meier. He wrote: ‘Der Text (textus) ist die Rede, in so ferne sie, als der Gegenstand der Auslegung betrachtet wird’. [The text (textus) is speech, in as much as it is regarded as the object of interpretation, FS] (Meier 1757, 105:58). From the perspective of documentary linguistics it is interesting to note that Meier thought the written form inferior for interpretation, recognizing the importance of facial expressions, gesture, body position, etc. He thus came to the following conclusion: ‘Folglich ist die Auslegung eines Auslegers, der den Text liest, schwerer als desjenigen, der den Text hört ...’ [Therefore the act of interpretation by an interpreter who reads the text is more difficult compared to the interpreter who hears a text, FS.] (133:72f).

²⁴ See Assmann (2006) for a more exhaustive treatment of the relation of *textus* and Ehlich’s definition of text. It should be noted that for Ehlich additional formal criteria mark a ‘text’ as text. Rhymes and alliterations, for example, differentiate oral texts

4.2.3. Textual features and the volatility of language documents

When looking at these philologically-inspired concepts of texts, the similarities with an annotated language document are readily apparent. Viewing or listening to a recording does not happen in the same speech environment as the event. Rather, a recording behaves like a text in Ehlich's conception. Contemplating a recording in an archive is 'retrieved communication' and gives the recording textual features. Access is thus not immediate or direct but distended; the listener retrieves the communicative event from a recording in an archive/corpus, not from the original event.

Moreover, the transformational quality of a *commentarius* (commentary, annotation, translation etc.) sharpens our view of language documents. They cease to be viewable as raw data.²⁵ In fact, they become a *textus*, an item of philological scholarship. It follows then that language documents cannot be atheoretical and contextually isolated recordings of pristine, observable, and fixed discourse. Rather a non-annotated language document is minimally contextualized, non-prepared, for most 'readers' difficult to understand, and often cross-culturally 'retrieved communication' and lacks mediation. Just like in philology, only in its interdependent existence with annotation (and markup), translation, and commentary will it be possible to **form and see** one of many possible *texti* that lie within it. As Buzzetti & McGann (2006:71) write:

No text, no book, no social event is one thing. Each is many things, fashioned and refashioned repeatedly in repetitions that often occur (as it were) simultaneously. The works evolve and mutate in their use. And because all such uses are always invested in real circumstances, these multiplying forms are socially and physically coded in and by the works themselves. They bear the evidence of the meanings they have helped to make.

from other oral communication. However, Ehlich is a little inconsistent in his use of the word 'text' and his definitional differentiation of '*Sprechakt*' and text as 'retrieved communication' (cf. also Vater (1994) on this). Additionally, Assmann views oral texts as being retrieved from 'cultural memory' as if these texts (and not the stories) have an independent existence in cultural memory. The performative and creative aspect of a storyteller is downplayed here. For a more exhaustive overview over the complex and heterogeneous definitions of 'text' see Vater (1994).

²⁵ Note the difference between Lehmann's (2004) and Himmelmann's (2012) concepts of 'raw language data'. Lehmann recognizes the representational qualities of the audio-visual recordings as iconic representations of language events while Himmelmann understands these recordings as observed linguistic behavior.

To give the reader an idea of the nature of the principle behind this argument let us look at the two possible German renderings of *parlare italiano* ‘to speak Italian’.²⁶ This can either be rendered adverbially as in ‘*italienisch sprechen*’, carrying connotations of producing speech in Italian, or nominally as in ‘*Italienisch sprechen*’, with the connoted emphasis on knowing the language. In German, a translator necessarily makes a choice by either using capitalization or lower case and thus forms the perception of the original which licenses both interpretations.²⁷

Such a view of language documents draws our attention to the transcriptional, annotative, and commentative activities of documentary linguistics and their interpretational features. This is taken up in the next section.

4.2.4. Editing and commenting as an important interpretative activity in documentary linguistics

Providing transcription, annotation, commentary, and translation is not a clerical task, but is in itself interpretative. The preparation and commentary of one of many possible *texti* requires sophistication, scholarly awareness, and communicative as well as analytic sensibilities. Cerquiglini (1989) highlights the active role of biases that influence the creation of variance in text-to-text copying. Ochs (1979:44) reminds us that:

problems of selective observation are not eliminated with the use of recording equipment. They are simply delayed until the moment at which the researcher sits down to transcribe the material from the audio- or videotape.

Here the act of transcription manifests a particular view of the recorded document that is not solely licensed in and out of the text itself. And finally, Olson (1993:2) alerts us to the insight that it is ‘writing systems’ that:

provide the concepts and categories for thinking about the structure of speech rather than the reverse. Awareness of linguistic structure is a product of a writing system, not a precondition for its development.

²⁶ For a more thorough discussion of this principle I refer the reader to Buzzetti & McGann (n.d.) and McGann (2001). The example given here is inspired by Trabant (2009:16f).

²⁷ The search query ‘parlo italiano’ in www.linguee.de (German – Italian) produces textual examples of translations in German using either capitalization or lower case letters.

In other words when we write (or transcribe) we do not write down language according to underlying structures, but writing language is what enables us to ponder its underlying structures as mediated and formed by the particulars of each transcription.

4.3. Documentary linguistics is language documentary philology

By placing *commentarius* on equal and interdependent footing with the *textus* (i.e. transcribed and commented language document) the annotation and commentary (including non-linguistic commentary) are brought more into focus as a necessary part of an accessible language document. Woodbury (2014) realizes that

- (a) adding commentary and metadata to language documents and
- (b) the digital space in which they are presented

need to be more thoroughly deliberated and developed. I think he is right, but not because language documentations are also used by non-linguistic audiences, and not because language documenters think (or, owing to the necessities of the scholarly marketplace, need to think) of their archives as publications, but rather it is because what documentary linguists collect is not pristine raw data disconnected from the locus of interpretation. A language document is a pre-theoretical entity whose form is in part yet to be realized and can be given a particular form or several forms in different combinations of *textus* and *commentarius* (apparatus). Thus, I regard documentary linguistics not merely as a sophisticated and ethical way of collecting and processing language data; it is language documentary philology minus the exclusionary focus on the written. Having established this let us now look at documentary linguistics from a different philological facet, i.e. the non-theoretical scholarly ‘reading’ or contemplation of a language documentation.

5. Language representation and contemplation

5.1. Observation and representation in documentary linguistics

From a purely ‘scientific’ standpoint, an audio(-visual) language recording is an observation of linguistic behavior from which further observations can then be made. Himmelmann’s (2012:194) comment that ‘the important point for present purposes is that transcription aims to derive primary data (standardized symbolic representations) from raw data (observed linguistic behavior)’ makes sense if the recording itself is considered to be the observation. Without a doubt, a recording of a language event can also help

disambiguate certain aspects of language use, e.g., by showing an item to which a person points. And most importantly observations can trigger investigations that lead to new and interesting findings, as for example, in the studies of Levinson (1997) and Haviland (1993) on absolute directions in Guugu Yimidhirr. However, (direct) observation, here understood as a gathering of little factoids which have to be made sense of and whose appropriateness must be ascertained, is not necessarily the primary mode of interaction with a recording. In fact, I believe that observing the activities in a recording would be quite futile in many cases. Firstly, those who do not understand the recordings will most likely be unable to produce quality analysis, especially if the observations are dependent on understanding what is being communicated. Such users rely on the apparatus to make useful observations about the recording, and thus observe indirectly. Secondly, a discourse or a manuscript cannot be accessed through observation. In order to understand a manuscript or a discourse one has to read, listen, or watch it with the goal of discerning its meaning. This is an *interpretative* not an *observational* activity. Thirdly, observations about language elements that lead to creating a grammatical description are made, as Himmelmann (2012) describes, from primary data, not from observing the recording.

I postulate that creating²⁸ representations is the primary activity that a listener/viewer/reader of a language document is involved in. These representations can be of different types. They can be created to identify the meaning of a text in order to understand it (Huitfeld 2006:195), or to provide a graphic representation of spoken and gestural content (transcriptions), or to show the linguistic content of a text or discourse (e.g. morphological or syntactic tagging). Aside from creating representations of different types, several representations of the same type can also be created, e.g. two transcriptions. Himmelmann (2012:194) points this out in the following:

Segmentation and translation involve a certain amount of interpretation because neither is fully determined by the evidence available in the recording. As a consequence, two teams of researchers working on the same recording will not produce one hundred percent identical transcripts/translations (though, one would hope, that the two transcripts with translation would be reasonably similar and that the differences [for example, in representing clitic items] are irrelevant for many research purposes).

²⁸ I intentionally avoid the word 'deriving' here because it gives the action a teleological property that it does not possess.

Himmelmann makes an important point in highlighting the interpretative qualities of creating representations. But I do not share Himmelmann's optimism that differences in transcription and translation are irrelevant for many research purposes, be they linguistic or not. Transcribing a recording cannot be compared to typing the 'view source code' command in a web browser,²⁹ variegated by human inconsistency and the fact that all evidence for a transcription is not available. Rather, each representation equally shapes the recording and determines what the user can see and how they see it. The recording changes together with the transcription and these changes are not irrelevant. Similar to different representations of a manuscript the differences between transcriptions might be small, but they are highly relevant. An example for the relevance of the quality of the translation for understanding and further use has been illustrated above for Lockhart's *New Philology*. An example for the relevance of how transcriptions represent a recording for linguistic analysis can be found in Mettouchi (2013). She shows that the collation³⁰ of recordings and transcriptions in ELAN makes insights into linguistic features possible that would otherwise be very hard to come by.

5.2. The representation of language freed from 'terreur theorique'³¹

The fact that representation is a primary and non-trivial concern in documentary linguistics cannot be stressed enough. Not only is documentary linguistics concerned with representation of language documents, it underlyingly deals with representation of language in general. While documentary linguistics complements descriptive or formal linguistics by licensing primary data, it also challenges them as adequate representations of (a) language. By denying them adequate representational qualities, documentary linguistics takes a step towards an engagement that is akin to the non-theoretical philological approach. Let us look at this a little more closely.

²⁹ This imagery owes its origin to Johanna Drucker, as acknowledged in McGann (2001:143f).

³⁰ Collation in philology is the setting side-by-side of various representations of a text in order to, for example, track the development from the original manuscript to the published text.

³¹ Lyotard (1977) alerts us to the 'terreur theorique' that can impose itself on a reader, in the sense that a theory does not tolerate other theories besides itself and exerts a form of theoretical terrorism. A reader should be free of such confines. See also Compagnon (1998) on the theoretical fervor in the literary sciences in France during the 1960s and 1970s and its incapability or failing to displace 'common sense' ideas about the nature of literature within the wider 'reading' public.

5.2.1. Representing languages in documentary linguistics

Documentary linguists challenge the institutional dominance of higher level analysis as represented, for example, in the primacy of I-language vs. E-language (Chomsky 1986). They have sensibly argued that dealing with low-level or raw data needs to find equal theoretical attention, because a cavalier attitude towards this type of language data creates insufficient higher level analysis. In addition, they have also rightfully argued for scientific outlets for the preparation and dissemination of this type of data (Woodbury 2003:40, Himmelmann 2012, among others). However, I feel the most valuable contribution of documentary linguistic theorists is to reject the idea that lesser known and possibly endangered languages are, in the absence of enough time and personpower, most adequately documented by a set of grammatical rules (or additionally/supplementarily through a dictionary and some texts).³² This is significant because the idea that ‘direct representation of naturally occurring discourse is the primary project’ (Woodbury 2003:39) has far-reaching implications for conceptions of representability of language in general. Grammar, dictionary, etc. are subjugated and dependent on representations of language, and thus their limited language representational capabilities are highlighted, however much they help in understanding the structures behind those representations (cf. for example, Himmelmann 1998:162f and his critique of the concept of ‘describing a language’). The quest for representational language material is more virulent in situations where languages are under-documented, inaccessible, and representations cross cultural boundaries, but the implicit claim is general: an adequate and ‘theoretically open’ language representation is a necessary condition for any further inquiry. By making commented and viewable discourse representations available, documentary linguistics does not limit the interaction with a language: (a) to analytical scientific procedures, or (b) the perception of (a) language mediated by analytical products (e.g. a grammar). This is where documentary linguistics opens the study of (a) language up to an interpretative engagement.

³² For an overview of the different views on what constitutes the most important documentary element of the Boasian trilogy (grammar, text, and dictionary) see Chelliah & de Reuse (2011:15).

5.2.2. The aesthetic³³ qualities of raw data

It is notable that Woodbury's (2003) and Lehmann's (2004) appreciation of language data for its own sake contains an implicit aesthetic element. Woodbury (2003:40) writes:

I remember as a graduate student in the late 70s talking with graduate student colleagues from other departments about collecting natural speech data on tape pretty much for its own sake, just to have it as documentation, and being told I was being 'scientifically naïve', that there is no such thing as data independent of theory which uses data.

However, raw data is purported to exist, at first, outside any theoretical framework for which it is supposed to be utilized (Furbee 2010, Woodbury 2003, Himmelmann 1998).

If this is the case, then one could rightfully ask: if there is no theory that guides the perception of the document, what then is the purpose of recording raw data for its own sake? The basic answer that documentary linguists have provided, so far, is to paraphrase: like a manuscript that was preserved by chance and kept accessible for later generations (not for analysis under a specific theory but for its general interest and historical value) a language document should be recorded because of its potential to be analyzed at a later point in time.

I disagree. The importance of providing a 'record of a language event' is not centered around the potential for linguistic (re-)analysis, however important that is, but the fact that it brings the means along for watching and/or listening to language in use; it enables the archive visitor to relive and contemplate language as, like Krauss (1992) calls it, a human achievement.

³³ Aesthetics are not only important for the reception of a language documentation, on which I concentrate in this paper, but it is a ubiquitous feature throughout the whole documentation process. When I adjust the frame of an image (as I did nearly subconsciously during the filming of a Friday sermon in a mosque, for example) in order to include a whole clock and not cut it in half with the edge of the frame, then this is an action induced by aesthetic considerations. If the team working on *Baga Mandori* (bmd) continues to seek out one particular speaker because they enjoy his way of speaking Baga, then language aesthetic considerations influence documentary work during the production process. This underscores the claim that documentary linguists never just record mere data.

Just like a statue, a work of art in a museum, or a theatrical performance, it puts language in use on display.³⁴ If later analysis were the sole use then a radically extended transcription and translation that includes gesture etc. is a much more appropriate and necessary means of conservation to which a language document then adds validation and the possibility for correction but not much more. Thus, it is not primarily direct access to data that is provided, but a means to contemplate, to immerse oneself in a situation from which one is detached through time and/or space. Grammar, dictionary, and text collection do not allow this type of pretheoretic, aesthetic experience of language where the contemplator is at the same time an observer of language as well as a participant in the use of the language (e.g. they are listening to a discourse and trying to make sense of it), where they are simultaneously detached and drawn in. In this view, a language documentation ceases to be an observation deck and provides the means of reliving and immersing oneself into communicative events. This immersive quality of language documents has not gone completely unnoticed in theorizing documentary linguistics. It is the foundation behind Nathan's (2009) call for an epistemology of audio recording, but it should be realized that in principle an aesthetic, immersive experience of recorded language is available even without sophisticated manipulation of a recording, however desirable.

Through the focus on language documents, documentary linguistics indirectly exposes the conceptual distance between language and its representations. And by detaching language from analysis, documentary linguistics' raw data opens up to an aesthetic and/or contemplative reception. In fact, it is the language representational qualities of language documents and their transcriptions, and not their quality as being raw data that make it available for several different lines of scrutiny. Representation, as argued insightfully by Ankersmit (1988) is essentially agnostic to the epistemological qualities of the ideal or the real and can be adoptable and made use of in both worlds.

³⁴ Incidentally Woodbury (2014) uses a museum as model for the presentational possibilities of language documentation.

5.3. Contemplation³⁵ of language documents and language documentations

Contemplation enables meanings and uses to be extracted from a language document through a (recursive) dialogue into which the contemplator and the recording enter. The contemplation can be mediated by the form and content of the presentation in a language archive (including, but most importantly not limited to, grammar, dictionary, and *textus*). Interacting with a language document thus becomes similar to reading a book, to stay with Woodbury's (2014) metaphor, or looking at a painting. By opening up a language document to contemplation (or 'slow reading') it becomes clear that

³⁵ I do not wish to strictly define 'contemplation' here because I want to refrain from defining a particular form of interaction with a language document, but I would like to delineate the concepts I have in mind when using this word. The term is inspired by the 'non-theoretical' philological approach to 'reading' by a knowledgeable reader (cf. Ette 2004:165), but I want to extend it to also include a non-knowledgeable 'reader'. I consider contemplation to be something of the following equivalents given by The Oxford English Dictionary: 'the action of beholding, or looking at [or listening to, FS] with attention and thought' and 'the action of thinking about a thing continuously; attentive consideration'. It certainly also has elements of Kantian *Anschauung* although I do not wish to have it minimized to intuition. In using contemplation I am also thinking of certain aspects of 'contemplative immersion' popular during the late 19th century (Huysen 1975:91) (minus the essentialist ideas of art) and which has been methodically instrumentalized by the art and cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt (cf. Hinde (2000) on *Anschauung* in Burckhardt). Another aspect I include is Wittgenstein's *Anschauung* as 'a way of looking at' or 'a perspective on', which is instrumental in the process of reception of art. *Anschauung* here does not only recognize various elements (or 'aspects' as Wittgenstein calls them), as in the duck-rabbit-head, but also weighs them and thus determines what relations and interpretative horizons a work of art is introduced into. These judgments and the relational repercussions can then be promoted through argumentation (Lüthy 2012). In terms of a more 'scientific' type contemplation with a realist twist Ankersmit (1988) presents a fitting analogy in relation to the duck-rabbit-head: Historiography is like looking at the duck-rabbit-head and having to discern the heads without knowing what a duck and a rabbit is. In this context, I refrain from including religious experience or collected rational thought in my use of contemplation. Contemplation is useful because it does not define the theory, preconceptions, and/or biases that the audience necessarily brings along when beholding a language document. It leaves it open to the beholder what they want to bring along and what of the experience of beholding they judge to be important and pursue further, with all the biases that it entails. As an example of what I think is, at least, in part a contemplative (philological) narrative can be found in Jakobson (1968). His short treatise of 'Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry' is, while being decidedly structuralist, imbued with associations and comparisons outside of strictly linguistic interest, such as the parallelism of structure in art and poetry. In a certain way he presents us with his reading experience of works from the verbal arts enhanced by his vast knowledge, and viewed through the lens of the structural figures of congruent and incongruent parallelisms. He uses structure not as a means to itself, but to try and explain aesthetic experiences of language as it appears in poetry.

observation and analysis are by no means the only form of interaction with a language document or a language documentation. Even though grammar and dictionary are also there to help experience language and bridge language otherness, a language document enables language to come to or at the contemplator without being solely mediated by methods of systematic linguistic analysis and abstraction. Just as in the conception of early 19th century philology, the approach to language in documentary linguistics ceases to be merely scientific (i.e. analytic). Friedrich Schlegel (as cited by Bär 1999), writes about philology: ‘Mit dem Namen der Kritik wird die Sprachgelehrsamkeit bezeichnet, wenn man sie als Kunst betrachtet; Grammatik heisst der wissenschaftliche Teil der Philologie’ [With the term criticisms linguistic erudition is denoted, when understood as art, Grammar is the scientific part of philology, FS].

5.3.1. Contemplation and performance

The ability to relive or take part in a language event by watching a language document also highlights the performative aspects of the interaction.³⁶ A language document performs language for the contemplator, and through this performance the role of the apparatus beyond describing and explaining language structure is emphasized further. The apparatus is a decisive tool and determines:

- (a) the way language documents and their contents are integrated in the totality of the language documentation, and
- (b) the way they are received by an audience.

To use Bauman and Briggs’ (1990) terminology, the apparatus takes part in the ‘entextualization’ and ‘contextualization’ of the language documents. The apparatus, far from being a static entity set apart from a language document, takes an active part in the negotiation of meaning between archive user and archive. In this way, documentary linguistic practice does not only observe and enable observation of language in use but, by making language documents perform language in the environment of the language documentation, the distance between the reality of what (a) language is and its representations and reenactments is underscored further.

³⁶ Note that, in contrast to Lehmann (2004), the audio-visual document ceases to be representation and becomes performance.

5.3.2. Enabling aesthetic experiences in a language documentation

Theorizing aesthetic experiences of spoken language in the context of a language documentation is important for developing ideas about the phenomenon of language, a phenomenon which is larger than structure and sociolinguistics. Additionally, in order to convey ideas and experiences of what communication and language was like in certain regions beyond the examples in analytic, descriptive, formal, and sociolinguistic explanations, these ideas will also come from an aesthetic and experiential interaction with a language documentation; or as Ette (2004:165) formulates it: ‘eine durch Wissen potenzierte Erfahrung eines (wissenschaftlichen) Lesers’. One can rephrase this in the context of documentary linguistics as: an experience of language and discourse enhanced by the knowledge of a (scientific) participant.

5.4. A case in point

In the following, I provide an illustration for the relevance of what has been said above by looking at another but similar type of critique of the grammar (cum lexis and text) model as representing a language. In typical post-modern fashion – that is, based on the conviction that it is not only the object of study that needs explanation, but also the studies themselves with their results, emanating effects, and underlying biases that need to be reflected upon – Blommaert (2008) draws our attention to the reifying effects of European or Western style Africanist scholarship on the African ‘*Sprachlandshaft*’ (linguascape). The production of written grammars and dictionaries and, in fact, linguistically-inspired philological publications³⁷ (similar to, but not completely congruent with what Woodbury (2014) has in mind), have helped create African languages. These artefactual receptacles of language are thought of as sufficiently containing language. By virtue of being conceived as such, they have been used (separated and detached from the linguistic realities) as the object of further serious and regimented, i.e. professionalized, study. The grammars and dictionaries have been, as Blommaert calls it, the ‘birth certificates’ of languages. This critique contains important cautionary observations for documentary linguists such as highlighting the idea that preconceptions and biases towards languages as bounded, homogeneous, and stable entities, to use Blommaert and Rampton’s (2011) characterization, can

³⁷ Here in the narrow sense, and in many ways similar to actual documentary linguistic practice, as textually-based inductive analysis that leads to a language description.

form a language documentation prior to the fieldwork, as well as impact decisions during fieldwork when deciding what to record.³⁸

Apart from these direct repercussions for documentary linguistics, it is interesting to look at the framework that Blommaert and Rampton adopt, because this underscores the need for philologically-oriented documentary linguistics. Blommaert and Rampton operate with the recently developed concept of superdiversity³⁹ whose success lies, according to Vertovec (2014), in the fact that social scientists are trying to find terms for the ‘increasing and intensifying complexities in social dynamics and configurations at neighborhood, city, national and global levels’. As Beck (2011, cited after Vertovec 2014) says:

It is in this sense that over the last decades the cultural, social and political landscapes of diversity are changing radically, but we still use old maps to orientate ourselves. In other words, my main thesis is: ***we do not even have the language through which contemporary super-diversity in the world can be described, conceptualized, understood, explained and researched*** [italics in original, bold mine].

Blommaert & Rampton (2011:3) adopt this framework for trying to deal with the complex language situations found in ‘superdiverse’ settings:

If we are to grasp the insight into social transformation that communicative phenomena can offer us, it is essential to approach them with an adequate toolkit, recognizing that the traditional vocabulary of linguistic analysis is no longer sufficient.

³⁸ In this regard Himmelmann’s (1998) conception of documentary linguistics as recording language behavior seems a much better place to start from than Himmelmann’s (2006) definition of documentary linguistics as a record of a language. The former carries much less theoretical ballast regarding the concept of what language is and what its characteristics are. It is an unfortunate and cautionary tale that both documentary linguistic projects I have undertaken were conceived with a distinct language in mind: *Nalu* and *Baga Mandori*. This has influenced data collection to a great extent. During public speeches, for example, speakers shifted to *Nalu* because they were aware of the fact that I had come to record *Nalu* and not *Soso*, the local variety which would have been the most likely one to be used on those occasions. Self-editing prior to or during recording are, of course, traps in this sense that reify the picture the documenting team has of the linguistic behavior to be recorded.

³⁹ Superdiversity describes the multiplication and dynamic interaction of a set of cultural, social, legal, economic, and geographic variables that ‘affect where, how, and with whom people live’. For more on superdiversity see Vertovec (2014, 2007).

And this is where documentary linguistics understood philologically comes into play. If linguistic complexity of communication owing to the presence of a highly variable and polychrome repertoire of varieties and registers is the norm (as it is, for example, in many places of Africa) it should show up in the representation of language. This is where a philological approach that provides a performative and experiential platform for language gives this aspect of human language a chance for portrayal, even in the absence of words or perceptive capabilities for these phenomena.

The problem of linguistic superdiversity is not necessarily new⁴⁰ and researchers have struggled with this type of language situation for a long time. Some linguists working on non-European ‘*Sprachlandschaften*’ (linguascapes) have tried to come to terms with situations where multilingualism and multilayered repertoires seemed to undermine bounded concepts of language. Grace (1996:170) writes:

In short, there seems to be a complex pattern of communities within communities, with even the most narrowly defined ones having their own linguistic individuality.

This suggests that the familiar linguistic map – a map which depicts the region being mapped as divided up into linguistic domains, one for each language (that is, with the domain of the language being the area occupied by its community of speakers) – is misleading. At least it is misleading if it is taken to represent the *linguistically effective* communities of the region. [...] In fact, it has often been asserted that multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, is the normal human state. Thus, the linguistically-relevant community can no longer be thought of as corresponding to a specific single language, but rather to a *linguistic repertoire which may include resources from several languages*. [second set of italics mine]

⁴⁰ Blommaert & Rampton (2011) are of the opinion that this is a fairly new phenomenon brought about by globalization. While I think that globalization has most certainly intensified the phenomenon on a global scale, complex superdiverse societies are not a new phenomenon (cf. Fleisch’s comments on south-east Angola). I think what globalization rather has done is to confront ‘Westerners’ with this reality after a period of national consolidation.

Fleisch (2009:96-110) writes of the ‘*Sprachlandschaft*’ of what is much of Angola:

One of the main conclusions is that we have to assume a linguistic situation in SE [south east, FS] Angola that has continuously been recreating itself on the basis of preceding linguistic constellations that were similarly diverse, but in different ways than the actual situation. The most likely facts to be responsible for such a situation are low population density in a fairly large area, considerable small-scale movement of speakers, and thus frequently shifting earlier communicative networks. ... Rather one would assume a scenario with relatively small populations living and moving in a vast area with a low population density. These groups apparently did not show a significant hierarchy among themselves so that issues of prestige did not lead to unidirectionality in the transfer of linguistic material. For these reasons it has turned out to be impossible to create an unequivocal tree diagram.

Similarly, Seidel (2005:207) writes:

This paper develops hypotheses about historic and sociolinguistic interrelationships between different Bantu language varieties in the *Caprivi*, based on phonological and lexical proximities which are established through a statistical method called dialectometry ... Because the linguistic and ethnic situation in the *Caprivi* is highly heterogeneous, the statistical proximities between the language varieties are not converted into a classification of the language varieties. Instead the resulting historic and sociolinguistic implications will be put into relation with the differing claims about linguistic and ethnic affiliations in the *Caprivi*.

Most recently Lüpke & Storch (2014) have taken this issue up. They re-stress the view of ‘language as a socially embedded practice’ which is not neatly categorizable into different languages. Therefore, writing grammars of such categorized languages is a somewhat fictional endeavor. Lüpke & Storch, as far as I understand, argue for a shift away from looking at languages as always being categorizable as distinct entities coexisting side by side. They highlight the fact that languages can also exist in a situation better described as a ‘*Sprachlandschaft*’ (linguascape) characterized by a fluid tapestry of linguistic behavior using a multitude of non-clearly delimited modes and registers/varieties to communicate with each other.

Finding words for the description of these phenomena will not happen through observation (i.e. what these complexities are and how to describe them will not be directly observable in raw data). The incongruence of data

analysis clashing with more widespread concepts of language observed by the three studies excerpted above (cf. Grace 1996, Fleisch 2009, Seidel 2005) did not yield new terminology or a new paradigm, but rather remained principally on the boundaries of our current paradigms, either redefining a term or shifting the focus from one phenomenon to the other while pointing out the necessity for new research methods and definitions.

New descriptive and analytic tools and understandings will come about to a great extent by contemplation and trying to crystallize the relevant ‘aspects’ (to use Wittgenstein’s term) in language documents (and their apparatuses). Thus language documents need to be subjected to a non-theoretical type of scrutiny similar to the philological ‘art of reading slowly’ in order to work out new ‘aspects’ and to see where and how they ‘fit’ in the greater scheme of things, and thus give them terms and existence.

This is where a philological approach that enables contemplation, and operates mainly in shaping cultural memoirs (see below), has the advantage over, for example, a new ‘superdiverse’ approach to language description – with its own fields of ‘erasure’ and dark corners. It would also record and deem important those documents that do not show such high linguistically diverse complexity. It enables in its openness to reception and recording the possibility to transcend the problems of a national philology⁴¹ by (in the ideal case) enabling narratives, alternative narratives, and counter-narratives based on the same material.

To give an illustrative example: Bloemmaert & Rampton (2011) use a photographic copy of a note in Chinese that was written in two different scripts (simplified and traditional) in order to illustrate the problems and issues they are investigating in terms of ‘superdiversity’. Unfortunately, unless one is able to read Chinese one cannot see and appreciate the two varieties of scripts. Thus, in order to understand the meanings that Bloemmaert and Rampton extract from it, they need to provide commentary and narratively introduce the reader to the context of communication and the general cultural context. But most importantly, if any pictures of homogeneous notes that might have been taken are not archived, commented, and contextualized, the stories of these notes will be ‘forgotten’. Documentary linguistics helps solve this last problem and helps us to ‘remember’. This leads us to the last section of philology and the importance of ‘collective’ or ‘cultural memory’.

⁴¹ This is a long standing problematic issue in philology. For more on this see Pollock (2009) and references cited therein. See also Turner’s (2014) depiction of the misuse of philology, such as the anti-Semitic impetus of Johann David Michaelis.

6. 'Wirkungsraum' (domain of operation) of documentary linguistics

If documentary linguistics is not only extracted from descriptive linguistics, but further lifted into the sphere of a more general field of philology, what then is the role of this activity field? It cannot (solely) be the provision of data for linguistic description, language typology, formal theories of language, or studies under the interpretative horizon of superdiversity. The answer rests on language archives and associated domains of operation outside linguistics.

6.1. The importance of societal and cultural context

Listening to or watching a conversation with its interruptions, arrival of new participants, reactions to non-linguistic noise, etc. enable a viewer to perceive the immediate physical surroundings and activities of a communicative event. Apart from the direct contexts, there are cultural and societal contexts that are equally necessary for understanding language. The main vehicle for documentary linguists to bridge 'cultural otherness' is the commentary through which they shape the comprehension of the edited recordings. No grammatical description, be it ever so comprehensive, no language model, be it ever so predictive, no dictionary, be it ever so complete, no implicational scale, be it ever so insightful, will enable somebody to understand a communicative event. These might help decode a text or discourse, but they will not enable a person to understand communication. This point can be further highlighted through another variety of philology, the study of language and language learning. Here, Freadman (2014), from the perspective of a language educator, reminds us of Saussure (1916:13) who separates linguistics and philology, not on the basis of their subject matter, '*faits de langue*', but on their path of access to language and disciplinary goals:

Language is by no means the only object of philology, whose primary aim is to establish, interpret, and comment on texts; this first objective then leads to a second, the study of literary history and the history of mores, institutions, and so on; throughout this scope, it deploys its own critical method.⁴²

As Saussure depicts it, in philology the *faits de langue* are not understood solely from a linguistic perspective but also through the study of the culture and institutions associated with it. Freadman underscores the idea that the

⁴² Translation by Freadman (2014:375).

criticism of viewing language solely from a diachronic perspective has led to its exclusionary opposite: regarding language solely as a synchronic system to be extracted and described. This paradigm shift to linguistic synchronic structure has had problematic repercussions for language teaching. As language is taught from a synchronic perspective, both as a set of rules to be acquired and as present-day communicative competence, the approach effectively trains students to be understood, but not necessarily to understand. To a great extent, students of language fail to communicate effectively because they are missing a diachronic and cultural dimension of where speakers *are coming from*, what speakers share in their collective memory. It is here that documentary linguistics enters the realm of philology understood as cultural memory.

6.2. Canon and archive: language documentation as ‘cultural memory’

By collecting, discussing, preserving, and preparing language documents, documentary linguistics enables current and future generations, to recall, iterate, read, comment, criticize, and discuss ‘what was deposited in the remote or recent past’.⁴³ By preserving and making language documents accessible, documentary linguistics enables humans to ‘remember’. Documentary linguistics weaves under-documented or undocumented language behavior of marginal communities, networks, varieties, registers, etc. into the tapestry of our ‘memory’. Everything else that is not recorded or preserved will most likely be ‘forgotten’.

Inasmuch as language documentation participates in communication across time, it operates in a field of tension between *canon*, ‘the actively circulated memory that keeps the past present’ and *archive*, ‘the passively stored memory’ (Assman 2008:98). For Assmann, the canon comprises those texts, places, persons, artifacts, myths, etc. that are continuously re-enacted and re-appropriated within a society. These cultural artifacts are separated and selected through a process of canonization. The remaining artifacts of cultural expression, if not forgotten, are stored in passive memory: the archive is ‘the storehouse of cultural memory’. Assmann interweaves these two concepts tightly with two notions attributed to Burckhardt’s approach to studying

⁴³ Phrasing inspired by and taken from Assmann (2008).

cultural history: the traces and messages from the past.⁴⁴ Under ‘messages’ fall those items (artworks, etc. but also textual sources) of the past that are effectively staged with communicative intent to provide cultural or historical knowledge, such as to recount facts of what happened or what was. ‘Traces’, on the other hand, are the unintentional, indirect, unsystematic, eclectic pieces of information that can tell counter histories that differ from the official versions handed down through time via the powers in charge (McGann 2013, Assmann 2008). Thus, by representing language via language documents and not as a grammar or formal analysis etc., documentary linguistics preserves traces of language (and other aspects) inside its archival documents, which will allow different narratives to be weaved from it throughout its existence. On an analytic linguistic plane these narratives can solidify or counter the narratives of grammars or formal models through accountability (cf. Himmelmann 2012) and even develop new perspectives on these (cf. Mettouchi 2013). However, the language documents are not constrained to operate only on the analytic plane. Rather the documents:

- (a) contain traces that concern language in general and the linguistic varieties of a certain region, and
- (b) preserve cultural, historical, social, political traces in stories/narratives (language documents such as personal accounts, oral histories, descriptions, assessments, conversations, interviews on various topics, etc.)

These contents open the archive up to several different academic disciplines and beyond, and this is accomplished without the need to think of the preparation of data for a specific discipline, but by preserving language in an archive in which it can be contemplated.

Furthermore, as an agent in cultural memory production, documentary linguistics operates on the local level of the language users and the global level of a predominately academic and humanistic audience. This is important to recognize because the dominant modes of remembering are potentially different for these two contexts. Inasmuch as language archives are perceived

⁴⁴ For more on this and Burckhardt’s dilettantism see Burckhardt (1984). Burckhardt himself does not use the terminology adopted by Assmann, but elaborates on the value of a cultural historical approach (as opposed to a history of events) targeting what historical sources and artefacts signal unintentionally (traces) as opposed to what they report intentionally (messages).

as representing cultural activities and language behavior that is meaningful to the community at hand and made active use of in order to continue speaking a language (i.e. in language and cultural revitalization), they will be part of an active feat of remembering and some or all of the language documentation documents will be given ‘canonical’ status, i.e. they become artefacts that are ‘destined to be repeatedly re-read, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented’ (Assmann 2008:99). These messages from the past ensure a frame of cultural continuity in which they operate and provide meaning. On the global level (as well as the local level where the documentation is not canonized) the accumulation of language documents works mostly passively, the primary contexts for meaning creation are the archives themselves. In these ‘storehouses of cultural memory’ the language documents lie ‘de-contextualized’, to use Assmann’s words, from its original cultural frames, waiting to be introduced into new meaning frames by anybody who is interested in them.

7. Conclusion

Without losing sight of the centrality of descriptive concerns of documentary linguistics, I want to stress that the scope of documentary linguistics is larger than the narrow concerns of linguistics (particularly its descriptive and theoretical concerns). Unifying the three philological aspects (textual constitution through commentary, so-called contemplative reading, and memory production) I conclude that documentary linguists:

1. are involved in a scholarly activity that carefully edits, prepares, interprets, and comments on language documents presented across several media, and in various coding and narrative forms, in order to
2. engage with these language documents in analytical and/or contemplative fashion before the backdrop of a transdisciplinary attitude of understanding (a) language as a human achievement, (b) communicative practices, and (c) the human condition in general, and to eventually
3. take part in and shape cultural memory actively through heritage work, or passively through archiving.

By conceiving of documentary linguistics as a philology in this fashion, the field can retain its core linguistic preoccupations while opening up theoretically for a range of other non-core linguistic types of documentation efforts. These do not have to be done by linguists. These ‘guest editors’, as

Woodbury calls them,⁴⁵ can be, for example, anthropologists who collect interviews in regional languages and deposit their recordings and their transcriptions, or they could be community members who wish to make their stories available to a broader audience by having them recorded. Furthermore, the importance of unformed language documents in documentary linguistics (i.e. language documents without an apparatus of transcription and annotation) undercuts explanatory results (both universal and descriptive⁴⁶) by implicitly denying analytic linguistic science the ability to perceive language in an unmediated, immediate form. The mechanical view of language as being understood through neat-as-a-pin analysis is enhanced by a more poetic view that implicitly recognizes the distance between language and its representations and the conventions of their interpretations. Language is both separated from the presenter (i.e. the grammarian, formal modeler) and disconnected from its immediate ephemeral context, to be represented and performed in a language archive.

Like literature that deals with, for example, social or psychological issues in a way that is much closer to how humans experience these aspects in their daily lives, documentary linguistics presents us with language much closer to how we would experience it in daily life. Thus, through the introduction of aesthetic experiences channeled through immersion and performance, documentary linguistics provides an implicit counterpoint to the veracity effect of natural science-like systematic linguistic analysis that creates the false impression of authority by obedience to formalisms, which has in linguistic disciplinary practice come to be nearly synonymous with language and language study.⁴⁷

By conceiving of documentary linguistics as being engaged in remembering, equal importance is given to linguistic issues as well as more textually-centered contributions such as interviews, recordings by laypeople, chat/sms/text messages, notes, commentaries, narrative ethnographic films as commentary, etc. Memory covers both heritage work, where documentary linguistic outcomes can feed or develop into a cultural canon, as well as

⁴⁵ I would not call them ‘guests’ because they are equally involved in language documentation; it is just that their annotations are less linguistically oriented.

⁴⁶ See Dryer (2006) for the concept of descriptive explanation.

⁴⁷ As an exemplification of this attitude see Freidin’s (2009) response to Evans & Levinson’s (2009) proposal, which views language as a ‘bio-cultural hybrid’ shaped through cultural-historical factors and the general constraints of human cognition, and not by a domain-specific cognitive language faculty, and the underlying differences as to what counts as permissible evidence for claims about language.

preservation in archives, where it works as passive memory disconnecting, as Assmann (2008:99, 103) elaborates, the archive documents from the immediate contexts that determined their significance and storing them for reappropriation by an open community of archive users. A language documentation preserves languages for future generations in a way that they are able to also form non-theoretically mediated ideas on (a) language; to receive an impression of what (a) language was like (not only what its structure was).

While I recognize that there is a difference between presentational and preservational archiving formats (cf. Good 2011; Holton 2011), this dichotomy is not completely congruent with ‘active’ and ‘passive’ forms of remembering. Presentational products are not guaranteed to become part of a heritage, and merely preservational archives still present the language to users in certain ways, even when not a single thought has been given to its presentation format⁴⁸. Since engaging in passive memory is usually de-contextualized, the archive becomes the primary context for reception. By staying within the confines of the linguistic discipline (as currently delineated), documentary linguistics (or should we call it documentary philology?) has still not reached its full potential to achieve broader relevance and reach a bigger audience. Most important at the moment are questions of archive representation, as well as framing a conceptually open understanding of language. However, due to the fixation on observation and analysis, documentary linguists, unlike editorial philologists, artists, and writers, have not sufficiently tested or explored different ways of representation and presentation and how they affect reading, contemplation, and perception. Development of presentational forms of language documents has up to now been done primarily through the lens of making data accessible, comparable, and useable in digital formats (e.g. EMELD). Schwartz (2010:126) says:

Data depositories containing language documentation corpora are generally well structured, well maintained, and include large collections of many under-researched languages. However, they are not yet conceived of as resources that can be easily consulted on scientific or non-scientific questions pertaining to one of those languages.

⁴⁸ To give two brief examples for consideration: (a) xml encodes documents both in **human** and machine readable format, and (b) interlaced and progressive video presentation formats provide slightly different viewing experiences of fast motion; interlaced video appears a little blurrier (image softening). If thought about at all, the decision to shoot interlaced or progressive video is often guided by artistic considerations as well as the envisioned presentational output.

The above goal can only be achieved through collaboration between, among others, archivists, documentary linguists, and exponents of the digital humanities in order to develop representational language formats for mediated and non-mediated contemplation. This does not necessarily mean that the outcome has to become canonical and/or produce something polished through an editing process that erases heavily, such as the multimedia publications imagined in Csató & Nathan (2003), but rather it should force us to think of archives not as repositories for validating data of our descriptions and models, or for simply providing a record of linguistic behavior for communal linguistic analysis. Woodbury's (2014) paper is a start, but I believe the presentational possibilities of language documentation have to be explored in much more depth sooner rather than later. In order to do this, we have to leave the confines of linguistics with its analytic concerns, and accept and conceive of our language archives as veritable philological editions prepared for a broad audience, not just something produced in the framework of linguistics. Looked at this way, a language documentation already is a publication in its own right, but it is in dire need of forms that successfully engage a broad spectrum of archive audiences and that transcend the useful, but artificial dichotomy of preservation and presentation. In this way, documentary linguistics will not only profit from the philological endeavors of the 21st century, but can also feed back into them.

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