Linguistic Fieldwork

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7 The role of text collection and elicitation in linguistic fieldwork

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I here advocate an approach to linguistic fieldwork in which text collection and elicitation are interwoven in a finely tuned, constantly modulated way. By text collection I am referring to the practice of compiling and analyzing naturally occurring speech and narratives in the language under study; by elicitation I mean either the use in language analysis of native-speaker intuitions or translations of decontextualized utterances from a contact language to the language being studied. Both practices are well motivated: text collections are reservoirs of cultural and linguistic information, and elicited forms provide crucial evidence necessary for the formulation of grammatical generalizations. In my own fieldwork experience with Meithei, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Northeast India in Manipur state, I have found that linguistic generalizations that result exclusively from elicitation tend to be unreliable. Likewise, language description based solely on textual data results in patchy and incomplete descriptions. I conclude that reliable and usable field data can only be collected when both text collection and elicitation are used.

1. Using text collection in conjunction with elicitation

My investigation of Meithei began, predictably, with the elicitation of wordlists and minimal pairs. I used such elicitation to build a rudimentary understanding of the phonology of Meithei. I then attempted the elicitation of paradigms of verb conjugations and noun declensions in order to discover the basic inflectional morphology. I studied case marking and word order through the elicitation of simple sentences with verbs that could be expected to require one, two, or three arguments.

At this stage I found it helpful to attempt a thumbnail grammatical sketch of the language. This helped me discover what information I needed to refine my analyses. I then collected some simple texts on which to test my hypotheses. I considered any piece of running speech or conversation a valid "text." Although I documented variables such as speaker age and

dialect, I did not limit myself to a particular demographic. Fortunately, as I was working on a language with almost two million speakers, I had no trouble finding willing participants. During a nine-month period, I collected thirty-five texts, including conversations, folktales, radio news broadcasts and plays. As far as content was concerned, the only restriction I placed on myself was to avoid potentially volatile topics such as local politics, drug trafficking in Manipur, or the policies of the Indian Central Government in Manipur.

I transcribed my first text, a folktale, with the help of a consultant. Since the text was on tape, it was fairly easy to play back the story, pause the tape at intervals determined by the consultant, ask the consultant to repeat the segment slowly, and transcribe the repeated portion phonetically. I was also lucky enough to be able to hire some linguistically sophisticated consultants, give them a tape recorder and have them transcribe the texts on their own in a practical phonemic alphabet. I then re-transcribed the texts and included phonetic details in the transcript. I had to check the content for accuracy because consultants sometimes "cleaned-up" texts by:

(a) removing scatological or sexual references, seemingly useless repetitions, and discourse markers or interjections because they seemed unsightly in written Meithei;
(b) replacing borrowed words, archaic words, or dialectal variants with indigenous, current, or prestigious variants, respectively; and
(c) rewriting or rearranging episodes in well-known narratives according to personal preference.

The next step was to get a free translation and a word-for-word translation of the text. Translation sessions from the language studied to the contact language, which was English, were invaluable. I learnt something new with almost every word my consultants helped me translate from the first texts I collected. In terms of phonology, I began the tough process of learning to differentiate tones, and I noted rules of assimilation and tested my hypotheses about phonemic distinctions. In terms of semantics and the lexicon, I learnt antonyms and synonyms of lexical items. These were rarely offered in list form; rather, they were presented in sentences which I dutifully recorded, along with all the pragmatic and cultural information my consultants offered me. My main consultant, Thounaojam Harimohon Singh, was particularly adept at providing Meithei paraphrases, explanations, or cultural notes to the text we were studying. This kind of opening up was encouraged by working on texts. Unlike the early elicitation sessions where my consultants fell in line with my agenda, during these translation sessions it was the consultant who was in control. All material incidental to the translation of the text was offered by him/her.

2.1 *Circumventing translation effects with data from texts*

Many of the seeming contradictions that came up during elicitation were straightened out by supplementary information from texts. First, I found the elicitation of paradigms for tense to be particularly useless since there is no one-to-one correspondence between form and function for the indication of tense and modality in Meithei. For example, the past tense can be indicated by the marker of mild assertion as in (1) or strong assertion as in (2).

(1) *laʔĭ*
lak-lə-ĭ
come-perfect-nonhypothetical
came

(2) *laʔe*
lak-lə-e
come-perfect-assertive
came

Either of these could show up in elicitation of the past tense. Additionally, consultants found it difficult to explain what the difference was between the examples when they occurred out of context. To determine the difference between (1) and (2), I found sentences with (1) in texts and asked consultants to oppose (2) in the same situation. From this I found that while (1) means 'came', (2) means 'certainly came'. Similarly, when consultants were unable to explain the meaning of the verbal suffix *-ləm*, except to say that it occurred in past tense verbs, I presented them with examples (3) and (4) and asked them to describe the situations in which they would be used. By using the scenarios provided in texts as a starting point, I was able to elicit the crucial information given in parentheses.

(3) *məhák* *čárəmkhre*
mə-hák *čá-ləm-khi-lə-e*
3rd psn-here eat-evidential-still-perfect-assertive
He (obviously) has eaten already.

(4) *məhák* *čákhre*
mə-hák *čá-khi-lə-e*
3rd psn-here eat-still-perfect-assertive
He (says he) has eaten already.

In this way, I was able to arrive at the hypothesis that *-ləm* was used with propositions that were based on inferential evidence. In order to check on my hypothesis, I then scanned other texts and repeated the process with other sentences and situations.

In order to vary activities during fieldwork sessions, I combined text-derived questions on unknown morphology, phonological processes, fast speech phenomena, and the refining of free translations with one or two of the following tasks:

(a) eliciting translations of English sentences to investigate specific topics such as the structure of questions, relative clauses, complements, adverbial clauses, or negation;
(b) transcribing/translating a new text;
(c) taping new texts with prompts such as pictures which my consultants would have to describe or comic strips from local magazines and newspapers that they would have to provide a script for (I found comic strips especially useful because the context was controlled enough that I could attempt translations on my own);
(d) recording conversations in Meithei on the days I had back-to-back meetings with native speakers (to ensure some amount of naturalness in the conversation, I usually left the room after I turned the tape recorder on); and
(e) asking consultants to fill in a verb morphology questionnaire that I devised by generating a list of all the possible suffix and prefix combinations in Meithei. I asked consultants to form sentences with verbs using these combinations.

2.1.1 Calques All of these activities were profitable. I soon learned, however, to be wary of data gained through (a) above. I noticed that the more complex my English sentences got, the more my consultants either provided calques, omitted categories, failed to provide non-prototypical constructions, or were influenced by the contact language. This tendency was especially pronounced when the translations required grammatical knowledge that my consultants did not possess. This is illustrated by (5). When I was investigating complementation, I first attempted eliciting subordinate clauses by asking for the translation of English sentences like 'Thoibi believes that Khamba is dead'. There were two deleterious effects to this method. First, in one of my early attempts to study this phenomenon, one consultant consistently translated the subordinator 'that' with the Meithei demonstrative pronoun 'that', which is actually never used as a subordinator. Second, notice also that my consultant did not provide me with an exact translation of the sentence I had requested.

(5) Calque with demonstrative pronoun *mədudə* 'that':
Thoybi *kháŋləmmĭ* *mədudə* *Khəmba* *hátkhre*
Thoybi knows that Khamba killed
Thoybi knows that someone killed Khəmba.

My consultant, though an educated woman, fluent in English and Meithei, had not been exposed to syntactic studies of Meithei which discuss

sentence structure in terms of main and subordinate clauses. Such studies simply did not exist at that time. Also, she had not taken a class in English grammar recently. Apparently, she could not see the structure of the sentences I gave her; rather, she saw only the surface string of words and so gave me a calque. Thus, it was imperative for me to supplement the translation of English sentences with the study of complementation in analyzed texts. There I discovered a rich system of subordination involving adverbials, nominalizations, and subordinators based on the quotative.

2.1.2 Categories missed in elicitation While it was possible to elicit prototypical constructions, it was much rarer for consultants to offer less common variants during translation work. For example, where elicitation uncovered one word-order possibility in sentences with subordinated clauses, several more were discovered through studying texts. Similarly, I discovered only two quotative complementizers through elicitation. By combing through texts of varied genres, however, I was able to find eleven others. Formed on the verb root *háy* 'say', each quotative occurs with unique nominalizing morphology: for example, *háyrágə* 'after that', where 'say' is suffixed by the adverbial participial *-lágə*, and *háybəgi* 'regarding that', where the root is suffixed by the nominalizer *-pə* and the genitive marker *-ki*. With elicitation it is common to miss a category or construction simply because the investigator is unaware of its existence.

An example of an easily missed category is evidentiality, perhaps because, to use Silverstein's terminology (1979: 234), it is a covert category, low on the "hierarchy of elicitability." Indeed, evidentiality is not discussed in many grammars of Meithei because these are based on either Sanskrit or Latin grammatical models (e.g., Pettigrew 1912, Shastri 1971, Grierson and Konow 1967), and such models rarely explicitly describe evidentiality as a category. Thus, descriptions of the category have not entered into Meithei textbooks, and the category is not high in the grammatical consciousness of either educated or uneducated speakers. However, evidentiality is robustly manifested in disparate formal systems in Meithei (Chelliah 1997: 295–312). It can be signaled through choice of complementizer as in (6), choice of nominalizer as in (7) and derivational verb morphology as in (8).

(6) Quotative complementizer *háybədu* is used with eyewitness accounts:
əhálduna yén huranbə háybədu úy
that old man chicken stealing that saw
I saw that stealing of the chicken by the old man.

(7) Nominalizer *-jat* 'kind of, sort of' signals indirect evidence:
məsi phúrəbəjatni
this is a type of having been beaten
It looks like it might have been beaten.

(8) Derivational suffix *-həw* 'start' signals an event witnessed at its beginning:
turen pahəwwí
river began to overflow
I saw the river overflowing.

Now, even though I had suspected that complementizers did code evidentiality, I was unable to elicit evidential values for them through translation. Questions like "How do you say, 'I saw/know/heard that he fell'?" resulted in calques with the verbs 'see', 'know', and 'hear' rather than through a change of the complementizer. Thus eliciting translations from English or Hindi was certainly an ineffective way to uncover the Meithei system of evidentials. What was effective was the elicitation of native-speaker reactions to paradigmatic substitutions of morphology that apparently had evidential value. The texts provided the context that made the exercise feasible. I discovered, for example, that the quotative complementizer *háybəsi*, which is composed of the verb 'say' followed by the nominalizer and the proximate determiner, is used for unsupported assertions, whereas *háybədu*, which is composed of the verb 'say' followed by the nominalizer and the distal determiner, indicates that there is eyewitness evidence for the subordinated complement.

Finally, clause chaining, which common in Tibeto-Burman languages (DeLancey 1989: 2), is hard to elicit, primarily because it is typical of narratives but not of everyday conversation. Additionally, consultants have a tendency to simplify during elicitation sessions to accommodate to the language fluency of the investigator, and to practical restrictions such as speed of transcription.

2.1.3 Influences of the metalanguage on translation For translation to be effective the consultant should be a fluent bilingual, that is, "reflective and creative . . . [and able to] transform the sentence according to the spirit of the [studied] language" (Bouquiaux and Thomas 1992: 41). However, whenever possible, fieldworkers select consultants that are authentic speakers of the language to be studied. I looked for consultants who were functionally bilingual but preferably were only marginally touched by the non-native culture and language. Thus, more often than not, my consultants did not have the knowledge of English necessary for effective translation of the nuances of English into Meithei.

Also, if the metalanguage variety used by the consultant is different from that used by the elicitor, problems can arise. Harold Schiffman (p.c.) comments on this point regarding his fieldwork on Tamil:

> Another problem with the whole business of elicitation of individual sentences/examples is that if it's done through English etc. you get two different varieties of English being used, e.g., American and Indian English, and the latter is often

not isomorphic with American/ British when it comes to things like aspect. I did my dissertation on Tamil aspect and couldn't even get proper examples of certain things because my English wasn't at all like the English of the people I was asking questions of; the only people who could really help me were American-trained linguists.

Since some of my consultants spoke a rather unstable Meithei-English interlanguage, I had to "translate" their translations into standard English. I soon learned to recheck my corrected translations with more fluent speakers of English, because there was no one-to-one equivalency between my consultants' idiolect of English and my own. This is illustrated in (9) where ME stands for Meithei English and SIE for Standard Indian English.

(9) ME What do you intend to do?
SIE: What are you going to do?
ME This is the last trip of rice.
SIE This is the last time the rice is going to come around.
ME ... be in good soil and have abundant resources.
SIE ... be in a place that will nurture one's research.
ME He is not being.
SIE He is dead.

Given the varying levels of proficiency with and cultural influences on different varieties of English, it is imperative to have reliable context in order to get equivalencies with Standard English.

2.2 *Circumventing the unreliability of grammaticality judgments with data from texts*

One of my methods of checking on language data was to take sentences from texts, create minimal pairs or sets by substituting words or morphemes, and then ask consultants what the sentence meant once the change had been carried out. Some investigators use a similar tactic where they create sentences out of whole cloth in the studied language and then query the consultant about the grammaticality of the sentences. Georgia Green states that this method is justified because

> once you go beyond the easy (The farmer killed the duckling) parts of a description, distinguishing among competing hypotheses just about necessarily involves you in getting judgments about unusual, often marginal sorts of sentences. It should not be surprising that people have difficulty judging these, and vary widely, and may be inconsistent. (cited in Li 1994)

In a review of the literature on using grammaticality judgments as linguistic evidence, Sorace (1996: 377–78) points out four main reasons for intra-speaker and inter-speaker inconsistencies, which can be summarized as follows:

(a) Parsing strategies: sentences which are grammatical but are tough to parse are often deemed ungrammatical even when they are not. For example, the following sentence seems ungrammatical, unless it is read with the appropriate intonation: "The horse raced past the barn fell."
(b) Context and mode of presentation: when consultants are faced with a sentence that is not clearly grammatical after a list of unequivocally grammatical sentences, they tend to label the fuzzy example ungrammatical.
(c) Pragmatic considerations: decontextualized sentences can be judged inconsistently depending on the context built for those sentences by the consultant.
(d) Linguistic training: linguists are more varied in their judgments than naïve speakers.

Additional observations about asking for introspective judgments are reported by Ross (1979: 136), who points out that speakers of a language typically share very clear intuitions about certain sentences, either accepting them without hesitation as grammatical – he calls these the "core" sentences – or rejecting them outright as ungrammatical – he calls these the "fringe" sentences. There is also the set of sentences about which speakers cannot unequivocally give a judgment on grammaticality or ungrammaticality – the sentences in the "bog." When native speakers are repeatedly questioned about these indeterminate sentences, they reach a point of "satiation" and become befuddled about their own intuitions. Summaries of further studies on judgment fatigue can be found in Luka (1995) and Hudson (1994). Additionally, Haj Ross (p.c.) has pointed out to me that there are constructions in English which sound fine initially, but on closer inspection defy interpretation. Consider, for example, "More smokers smoke more Camels than any other brand."

What do we learn about the language under consideration, or language in general, when judgments are variable and our theories are based on these judgments? It is true that theories of grammar are based on idiolectal performance data from which we try to extrapolate a description of competence (the *grammar*) (Shütze 1996). However, when performance is widely inconsistent, with crucial examples sometimes being partially or outright rejected and others partially or outright accepted, resultant theories cannot be reliable, because in these cases it is the fieldworker who decides which judgment is going to take precedence in his/her presentation of the data. As a result theoretical ends guide the description. Even if the sole aim of descriptive work is to establish an adequate theoretical explanation for a specific grammar which fits in with a universal grammatical model, letting "the grammar itself decide" (Chomsky 1957: 14) which sentences are

legitimately part of this language and which are not comes dangerously close to letting the linguist create structures that really are not part of the grammar or omit structures that really are. This is especially problematic for endangered languages, where much responsibility for documentation and language revitalization is put in the hands of the linguist.

Grammaticality judgments, then, are not the most reliable way of getting to grammatical competence. In fact, anyone who has done fieldwork has had sessions where a consultant has simply given up trying to be honest about grammaticality judgments. The more candid consultants might tell you to stop your method of elicitation, which is what happened to Jacques Guy:

> That was around 1970–71 when I was doing fieldwork in Espiritu Santo. . . . I was quizzing Hilaire Chalet, who despite his French-sounding name, was a full-blooded native of Malekula [Vanuatu, Melanesia], on these two native languages, when, suddenly, he said to me: "Listen, Jacques, I am going to tell you: you must not quiz me as you do because you confuse me. I no longer know. You must listen to what I say the first time. If you ask me again, I no longer know." (cited in Li 1994)

I had a similar experience trying to understand the interplay between semantic role and contrastive focus markers in Meithei. To understand this system of argument marking better, I made lists of simple sentences and a list of the suffixes that occurred on non-oblique arguments in paradigmatic opposition. I then generated a list of sentences with all possible combinations of argument-suffix combinations, as in (10–13) where *-nə* is the contrastive marker, *-pu* is the patient marker, and *pammí* means 'likes'. The question to my consultant was: "If (10) means 'Ram likes Sita', are (11–13) grammatical and what do they mean?"

(10) *ramnə sitapu pammí*

(11) *sitapu ramnə pammí*

(12) *ram sitapu pammí*

(13) *ramnə sita pammi*

My main consultant, a highly imaginative and patient worker, was thoroughly exasperated after no more than ten minutes of this exercise. For one thing, building context for some of the sentences was time consuming and, because of the mental gymnastics involved, exhausting. Also, sentences which sounded ungrammatical at first began to sound quite acceptable after a few minutes.

There are also problems on the phonological level with creating constructions for consultants to comment on. Minor but important modulations in vowel length, tone, stress, or intonation can cause grammatical utterances to sound ungrammatical. Indeed, ungrammaticality judgments may be based simply on mispronunciations by the fieldworker.

Finally, because consultants may be influenced by prescriptive knowledge about language rules (Birdsong 1989) and because consultants may not understand the terms "grammatical" and "ungrammatical" (Dixon 1992: 88), the fieldworker is forced into using misleading metalinguistic terms. For instance, the consultant may be asked if a sentence is "good" or if one "can say" a sentence. Not only may a sentence be judged bad because of the lack of context, it may also be judged bad for cultural reasons, such as tabooed communication between addressee and addresser. Most fieldworkers have encountered the consultant who will agree that one can say a sentence and then, at some later rechecking stage will add, "You might, as a language learner, say this sentence, but I never would."

The use of texts in guiding elicitation allows for the controlled use of native speaker intuitions. In my study of case marking and contrastive focus (Chelliah 1997: 93–129), I was able to effectively tackle questions about argument marking by sorting through texts and basing further elicitation on occurrences of argument marking in sentences in context. Thus consultant judgment fatigue was much less of a problem.

Another advantage of organizing elicitation sessions using texts as a starting point is that texts provided pragmatic context that my consultants and I could share. Some researchers claim that no sentence is truly "out of context" because, as Georgia Green puts it,

> [W]hen speakers "judge sentences" they are not judging abstractions on purely formal criteria; they are judging the reasonableness of someone uttering that sentence with some communicative intention. Even when speakers think they are making that judgment in a "normal," "neutral" or "null" context, they will differ on how they define that term. The rest of the time they will vary even more widely, because they will vary, as individuals, in how imaginative they are in constructing POSSIBLE context in which uttering that sentence might make sense [emphasis in original]. (cited in Li 1994)

However, one of the dangers of relying solely on context created at the moment of elicitation is that consultants may assume they share presuppositions and knowledge about the context with the investigator, and therefore, while providing accurate statements, will not supply information that to them seems obvious (Hopkins and Furbee 1991: 69). It may be deemed impolite or a waste of time to do so. In order to avoid such miscommunication, it would seem preferable for the consultant and investigator to be "on the same page" with regard to context. It makes sense to put the onus of context building, not on the speaker or the investigating linguist, who probably does not know enough about the culture to do so effectively, but on a narrative or other naturally-occurring discourse. An added bonus, of course, is that the type and number of responses that one gets will not be limited by differing degrees of imaginativeness on the part of the consultant.

2.3 *Circumventing consultant and fieldworker biases*

Many researchers feel that grammatical descriptions based on a single idiolect can result in a valid picture of the structure of a language. Theoretically, this may be an acceptable tenet, but in practice, restricting the consultant pool to a single speaker is fraught with danger. Individual consultants are often affected by the enthusiasm of the investigator when results apparently simplify linguistic analysis. Once the native speaker has "caught on" to the theoretical point the investigator wants to make, it is difficult to tease out dressage effects from accurate language data. Some fieldworkers believe in "training" a consultant not only to understand simple directions, methods of translation, and metalinguistic tools, but also in analysis and theoretical issues. Take, for example, this hypothetical address to a consultant: "I was wondering if you could move this noun out of this conjoined noun phrase because that would be really wild. You can't do that in most languages." Might not this method of questioning influence the consultant? If this type of elicitation and training must be carried out in order to further language analysis, then it is imperative, wherever possible, to widen the pool of speakers with whom formerly culled data can be rechecked for possible dressage effects.

If the language being studied has a grammatical tradition, this tradition may limit and guide the introspective statements of the consultant, thereby causing misrepresentation or omission of data. I have a striking example of this from my study of case and semantic role marking in Meithei. Most linguistically sophisticated speakers of Meithei are familiar with the analysis of Meithei case marking based on Sanskrit or Bengali grammatical models: subjects are marked with nominative case regardless of their semantic role in the sentence. In elicitation, educated speakers consistently provided sentences where subjects were marked. In texts, however, only subjects of causative verbs are consistently marked, whereas subjects of other verbs can occur with contrastive focus or other pragmatic marking. Now, it just so happens that the agentive marker which marks the subject of causative verbs, as illustrated in (14), is homophonous with the contrastive focus marker which can occur on any argument, as illustrated in (15).

(14)

məhákna	*əŋáŋbu*	*káphəllĭ*
mə-hák-nə	*əŋáŋ-pu*	*káp-hən-lə-ĭ*
third person-here-agentive	child-patient	cry-causative-perfect-nonhypothetical

He made the child cry.

(15)

əybunə	*Ramnə*	*nuŋširəbədi*	*phágədəwni*
əy-pu-nə	*Ram-nə*	*nuŋši-rəbədi*	*phá-gədəwni*
I-patient-contrastive	Ram-contrastive	love-if	good-would be

If Ram (not Chaoba) loved me (not Sita), it would be good.

It appears that speakers who had studied prescriptive grammar felt that "correct" Meithei sentences should have subjects that are case marked, and because the contrastive and agentive markers happen to be homonyms, they were able to implement this prescriptive rule. Speakers attributed the lack of marking on subjects in everyday conversation to the "carelessness" or "laziness" of speakers. I would never have discovered the fact that consistent subject marking was an artifact of prescriptive grammar had I not supplemented elicitation with the study of narratives and other naturally-occurring data.

The many Sanskrit-based grammars of Meithei which have encouraged the enforcement of this prescriptive rule are testaments to the fact that grammarians can also be influenced by personal theoretical and grammatical training. Similarly, we don't expect the fieldwork that leads to grammatical description to be theoretically uninformed, since one's theoretical training determines which aspects of language are to be studied and how the data should be presented. This is as it should be, since theoretical training provides necessary focus for language investigation. However, since there is circularity in linguistic inquiry – linguistic data forms the basis for linguistic theories and linguistic theories guide the gathering of linguistic data – fieldworkers should be constantly vigilant for theories that constrain or misshape their understanding of the data. To this end, the fieldworker should be familiar with more than one theory or grammatical tradition and develop an awareness of the limitations of each.

A consultant's knowledge of prescriptive rules can also influence the recording of phonological and phonetic data. Fast speech phenomena rarely show up in elicitation, not only because there is no running discourse which provides the environment for fast speech phenomena, but also because speakers carefully monitor pronunciation, often backing up and correcting themselves when such phenomena occur. Speakers sometimes dismiss forms produced in fast speech as "errors." For example, I was unable to get a translation for the form *háyšutətəw* in isolation; however, after getting my consultant to listen to the conversation it occurred in, I was told that it was a "mispronunciation" of *háyribə əsidə təw* 'do in the manner instructed'. A similar problem occurs with eliciting data for diglossic languages like Tamil. In these cases, consultants will tend to style shift from the colloquial to the formal pronunciation since the formal is perceived as being "correct" and the colloquial as "lazy" or "dialectal." The Observer's Paradox is certainly as relevant in descriptive fieldwork as it is in sociolinguistic fieldwork: a speaker's sensitivity to prescriptive rules can lead them to, as Sorace (1996: 379) puts it, "formulate adaptive rules that . . . modify their mentally represented grammars, often in order to avoid the production of stigmatized forms."

When one consultant provides the text, another helps with the transcription and translation, and yet another works with the investigator on additional questions raised through the text, the important step of rechecking material with more than one speaker can be accomplished. One could argue that rechecking with other speakers can also be done with elicited data. However, this raises a diplomatic problem in the interpersonal relationships between the fieldworker and consultants. If a high amount of respect is accorded the provider of the data to be checked, another consultant might be tempted to view mistakes as variation, or just forms that he or she is not familiar with. On the other hand, if the second consultant does not respect the original consultant, he or she may be overly critical of the data. These subjective influences are attenuated through work with texts, because then the second speaker is only being asked to offer an opinion about a sentence in context, and is not being put in the position of questioning the competency of either the original speaker or the elicitation process.

3. Conclusion

I have outlined above a practical method of interweaving text collection and analysis with elicitation. This method helps guard against the collection of aberrant data that can result from translation effects and the unreliability of grammaticality judgments. Grammatically obscure categories are less likely to be missed when text collection is an integral part of the investigation process. Finally, the use of textual data challenges both the consultant and the linguist to look beyond the prescriptive rules of the grammatical traditions and theoretical models that influence their respective understandings of language. Although text collection, transcription, and analysis are time-consuming and initially daunting tasks, the development of our theories would be well served with accurate language descriptions which, I believe, cannot be accomplished without text-based elicitation.

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