

The names you assign to your files can be used by the archive and, together with their address, will provide a persistent identifier, i.e. a name that will allow the file to be located now and into the future. Persistent identifiers may include a URL, but remember that websites alone cannot provide persistence of location unless they have adopted conventions like those offered by Digital Object Identifiers¹⁵ or Handles,¹⁶ which are both services that allow permanent names to be applied, via a redirection service, to impermanent addresses.

4.3.2 Handwritten fieldnotes and headnotes in digital language documentation

Since long before the age of digital language documentation, handwritten notes have been integral to linguistic fieldwork. Even in the current age of widespread awareness of the advantages of digital documentation, much day-to-day practice by field linguists is still based on analog procedures. Many linguists consider pen-on-paper to be the best method for preliminary elicitation and analysis; some field sites have no reliable power source, or perhaps using a computer in some locations would be obtrusive. Regardless of your reason for making handwritten notes, it is important to stay organized. You can use paper notebooks of whatever size you find convenient (or, in extreme need, scraps of paper that are conveniently to hand, or even, as in the case of one report, a coconut that was inscribed with a precious example: cf. Crowley 2007: 107). Whenever possible, use acid-free paper and pens with waterproof, archival-quality ink. Researchers working in damp, rainy, or flood-prone areas might try waterproof all-weather notebooks.

p. 105 In addition to being an obvious source of primary data, written fieldnotes also provide contextual information for recorded media, including the place, date, and participants, as well as any observations you want to note about the recorded performance itself. Much of the process of linguistic discovery is embedded in these ↵ notebooks in the form of ethnographic notes, thoughts, and early errors, and in fact the left-to-right, top-to-bottom format of western notebooks itself provides important temporal information about the fieldwork session.

Written notes are further supplemented by ‘headnotes’ (Ottenberg 1990: 144), which include the memories the researcher has that continue to enrich their analysis over time. Headnotes and written notes are, says Ottenberg, in constant dialog: ‘only after their author is dead do written notes become primary, for the headnotes are gone’ (p. 147). The ability to access the primary data in digital form facilitates this dialog, bringing new forms of interpretation to bear on the collection over time due to the ease of access provided by files in a digital format.

While the interpretive and creative application of the researcher's experience results in more than can be reduced to the data objects stored in an archive, without those objects the linguistic analysis lacks an authoritative base. Fieldnotes, like recordings, should be scanned as part of your regular backup routine and archived as images. You can also type up your written notes to make them electronically searchable, allowing you to reflect on what you have written, add to it, and formulate new questions.

4.3.3 Your metadata catalogue

Simply amassing a number of digital files will not give you access to the material in them, just as a bookshop with thousands of uncatalogued books does not make information easy to find. The metadata that you provided for items in your own collection as they were created can later be uploaded to an archive's catalogue. These metadata will also make it easier for you to work with your own collection in your continuing analysis of the language.