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19.5.3

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The PhD dissertation has a special status, which doctoral student researchers should be aware of and think about. Most American universities require that dissertations be submitted to University Microfilms International (UMI), now part of a large information company called ProQuest, which handles public sale and distribution of theses. UMI does not, however, require assignment of copyright, which remains with the author. Thus if the author wants to make his work freely accessible to anyone and everyone, he can upload the dissertation on a personal or departmental website. Moreover, many universities around the world now have open-access digital repositories which will house PDF versions of their students' PhD dissertations and make them discoverable, and this is often a sensible way to make this information available. Alternatively, if the author is willing to pay a small fee, UMI offers an open access option that allows interested readers to get hold of the dissertation for free through UMI itself. Another possibility, if the author would like to make the thesis available in the host country, but not necessarily to everyone without restriction throughout the world, would be to make copies of the dissertation to send back on computer disk, with the idea that some enterprising person in the field site country could print out copies on demand.

Finally, given the traditional idea that a dissertation is supposed to be an academic product that contributes to human knowledge, and not a student's personal property, one could argue that all dissertations should be in the public domain. That is, when it comes to dissertations, there should be a policy not only of open access but also open use. Since it is the student and not UMI/ProQuest who owns the copyright, there is nothing stopping a new PhD copyright holder from dedicating the copyright on the thesis to the public. There could be a brief delay, of let's say seven years, during which time only the student would have the opportunity to exploit the material in the thesis in whole or in part, but thereafter, the work would enter the public domain and be available for anyone to enjoy and benefit from. That is, using the oft-cited words of US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, the thesis would then be 'as free as the air to common use' (*International* 1918: 250).

19.6 Conclusion

Linguistic fieldworkers are not trained to know copyright law any more than copyright lawyers are trained to do phonetic transcription or carry out sophisticated morphophonemic analysis. Nevertheless, copyright and other intellectual property matters do impinge on the ability of linguists to carry out their research fully and to meet professional and ethical obligations, and thus some degree of familiarity with the principles of copyright is essential. Providing that basic exposure to copyright principles and practice has been the goal of this chapter. No field linguist can be expected to understand or solve every intellectual property difficulty that might come along, but the hope is that this overview will alert linguistic fieldworkers to the nature of copyright so that they can anticipate problems, make necessary preparations, and have a good idea as to when they need to seek legal help.