



The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork

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CHAPTER

8 Anything Can Happen: The Verb Lexicon and Interdisciplinary Fieldwork

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Abstract

The centrality of language in human life means we cannot document any language without understanding all the spheres of knowledge it is used to talk about. Equally, undocumented languages contain too much information to be wasted on linguists alone. As the medium through which the whole fabric of traditional knowledge about everything in the world is transmitted, the importance of these languages stretches out in the direction of many fields of enquiry, from ethnoecology to comparative jurisprudence to deep history to the study of musical and verbal art. Linguists, then, have a responsibility not just to their own field but to all areas of scholarship concerned with the almost infinite varieties of human creativity, and we abrogate this responsibility if we do not seek to follow our documentation of the languages we study down all these lanes and by ways of orally transmitted lore. One of the appeals of fieldwork is that we get the opportunity to develop interests in many new subjects, from botany through ethnography to thatch-making. But few linguists reach the point where we are able to really penetrate to the heart of all these fields, and in practice the best way to extend our documentary coverage is through some form of interdisciplinary fieldwork. The advantages of interdisciplinary fieldwork are most obvious in the way it can extend the detailed lexicon of targeted areas — botanical terms with the botanist, rock types with the geologist, terms for spear or personal adornment types with the material culture specialist, and so forth.

Keywords: [ethnoecology](#), [ethnography](#), [thatch-making](#), [orally transmitted lore](#), [musical art](#), [verbal art](#), [verb lexicon](#), [interdisciplinary fieldwork](#)

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8.1 Introduction¹