



**The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork**

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CHAPTER

## 14 Fieldwork in Ethnomathematics

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the subject of fieldwork research addressing mathematical concepts developed in elaborated traditional knowledge. Its goal is to give advice to fieldworkers from this particular point of view, and to draw their attention to methodological issues with respect to the completeness of data collection during fieldwork and the veracity of the interpretations and analyses subsequent researchers are able to undertake without visiting the field. The same holds for more recent books on a similar subject. One must distinguish a mathematical concept and its application. From an ethnomathematical point of view it is useful to make a few observations on the best way to record annotated new media while visiting the field, whether video or computer experiment, in order to make possible afterwards the exploration of their mathematical content. The study devoted to the question of completeness of data collection during fieldwork, a crucial point in ethnomathematics for checking the consistency of mathematical knowledge embedded in the data. The study tackles the question of vernacular lexicons used for numbers and measurement, and it will be seen that it only partly meet the general goals of an ethnomathematical approach. Furthermore, the article discusses the use of measurement terms. Finally, it addresses the question of mathematical operations on approximate quantities carried out in a society where there are no number words above five.

**Keywords:** [ethnomathematics](#), [mathematical content](#), [data collection](#), [vernacular lexicons](#), [ethnomathematical approach](#)

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