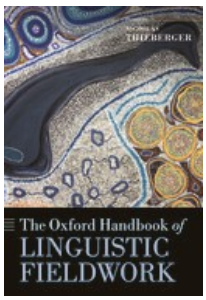

The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork

Nicholas Thieberger (ed.)

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CHAPTER

Introduction

Nicholas Thieberger

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Abstract

Linguists engaging in fieldwork have traditionally focused on a grammatical analysis of a language that may never before have been subjected to this kind of scrutiny. With increased awareness of the number of endangered languages, there has emerged a stronger emphasis on recording a range of material while in the field and also giving rise to language documentation as a distinct methodology within linguistics. This recognition of the loss of linguistic diversity has led to the support for the ongoing use of these languages including the production of records of as many different aspects of the language as possible. Linguists are in a position to record much more than narratives and example sentences. However, even they need guidance, once the topics of discussion go beyond everyday expertise. This book characterizes the new methods and tools associated with language documentation as forming a new paradigm of research. This paradigm focuses on collaboration with speakers and on the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge systems, of which language is one part. A further focus is laid on primary data as the warrant for analytical claims, and emphasizes replication of the analysis resulting in such claims. From this new paradigm, flows the need to create reusable primary data, and to provide for its accessibility and long-term cure.

Keywords: language documentation, replication, endangered language, grammatical analysis, linguistic diversity

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1.1 Why another handbook of fieldwork methods?

Linguists engaging in fieldwork have traditionally focused on a grammatical analysis of a language that may never before have been subjected to this kind of scrutiny. With increased awareness of the number of endangered languages (see Evans 2010, or Harrison 2010) has come a stronger emphasis on recording a range of material while in the field, also giving rise to language documentation as a distinct methodology within linguistics. This recognition of the loss of linguistic diversity has led to support for the ongoing use of these languages and the production of records of as many different aspects of the language as possible. At the same time the development of new technological approaches to language recording allows us to record more and to create richer textual annotations of recorded media than we could in the past. Linguists are in a position to record much more than narratives and example sentences, but need guidance once the topics of discussion go beyond everyday expertise.

We can characterize the new methods and tools associated with language documentation as forming a new paradigm of research. This paradigm focuses on collaboration with speakers and on the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge systems, of which language is one part. A further focus is on primary data as the warrant for analytical claims, and emphasizes replicability of the analysis resulting in such claims. From this new paradigm flows the need to create reusable primary data, and to provide for its accessibility and longterm curation.

p. 2 A linguist may be the only outsider to learn and prepare materials in a given language and culture, and so this handbook aims to increase the usefulness of those materials, both in their form and their content. The form of records can depend on the quality of recordings made in the field and this can vary considerably depending on the type of equipment used, the expertise of the user, and the environment in which the recordings are made. The ability to keep track of the various outputs of fieldwork (recordings, transcripts, fieldnotes, images, texts, analyses, dictionary and so on) requires planning and an explicit methodology. Advice on optimizing both the form and content of field material is provided in this volume.

Sanjek (1990) discusses the transformation of primary ethnographic data into ‘analysis’, a topic that has occupied many anthropologists but not so many linguists. Linguists typically operate in a framework that starts from a set of data and applies a method that originates most recently in the structuralism of Saussure and Sapir—described in a number of fieldguides and manuals (surveyed by Mosel in Chapter 3 of this volume). While this method begins with data collection, the data is soon relegated to what Marcus (2009: 22) calls a ‘present absence’—it is claimed as the basis for the conclusions provided in a grammatical description, but is not provided to allow verification of those claims. There has been an interpretive leap from linguistic fieldwork to analysis that has been described as using ‘inductive generalizations’ but which has not presented primary data together with the analysis, thus weakening the claims that can be made and not allowing reanalysis of the generalizations arrived at by the fieldworker. As advocated in various chapters in this collection, data can (and should) now be more central to linguistic analysis, and, if it is curated appropriately, can be reused in ways not originally planned for by the fieldworker, so that we can ‘anticipate a future need to know something that cannot be defined in the present’ (Strathern 2004: 7).

The focus on documenting endangered languages can be likened to salvage anthropology, which has been criticized as an attempt to capture some authentic version of a culture before it is ‘tainted’ by contact with other cultures. It is the case that the project of language documentation includes recording aspects of a range of human knowledge systems that exist without the influence of metropolitan languages, or perhaps in cases where such influence is not yet as complete as it is likely to be. The particularities of each language provide insights into the range of possible diversity of human expression, and it is often in the discourse of monolingual speakers of a generation before extensive shift to a metropolitan language that these particularities are still to be found. Lest this be construed as a defence of the appropriation of indigenous

knowledge (see §16.4 of Turk et al. in Chapter 16 of this volume) I should make clear that a major motivation for the methods promoted in this handbook is to create accessible records of a language which are typically the ones sought by speakers (and their descendants) when they become aware of the changes occurring in their language.

p. 3 Documentation is most urgent where the language may cease being spoken, but even in a large population of speakers a decline in the variety of speech genres or registers is a motivation for recording as broad a range of language performance as possible. We therefore need to record as diverse a range of people and as diverse a range of topics as we can. If we take the broader project of linguistic fieldwork to be a deeper understanding of human knowledge systems and societies, then it makes sense that we create material from our own research in forms that colleagues from other disciplines can use. As Evans (Chapter 8 below) puts it, 'undocumented languages contain too much information to be wasted on linguists alone'. This suggests that we need assistance with interdisciplinary topics not normally covered in linguistic field guides as they have been constructed up to now. A number of books provide advice on the kind of linguistic structures that can be expected based on typological surveys (e.g. Comrie and Smith 1977; Payne 1997; Shopen 2007). Most such guides offer sample wordlists and sentences for elicitation (e.g. Bouquiaux and Thomas 1976; 1992; Samarin 1967). Some go further and briefly discuss issues around preparation for fieldwork (e.g. Abbi 2001; Bowern 2008; Chelliah and de Reuse 2010; Crowley 2007; Vaux and Cooper 1999). Some are quite brief (e.g. Bartis 2002), some bound in a theory that makes them unusable (e.g. the tagmemics of Longacre 1964), and some are so detailed that it is difficult to find relevant information (e.g. Bouquiaux and Thomas 1976; 1992). Rather than producing yet another guide in the same tradition as those listed here, this handbook takes a different approach.

Linguistic fieldwork can result in more than just a description of the grammar of a language, it can also record cultural information that provides new insights into local knowledge systems. The problem for a linguist is that they cannot possibly be prepared for every topic that could arise in the course of fieldwork. As a result, either opportunities to explore such topics may be lost or the records produced may not be as useful to others as they could be. What would a musicologist like to see included in the recording of a performance? What would a botanist like to know about a plant's use and how it has been identified? Which constellation of stars is it that features in a particular traditional story? Of course, once we start down the road of trying to explain the world we could go in many directions. An early example (but by no means the earliest: see Urry 1972 for a summary of the literature) of just such a guide to anthropological issues—*Notes and Queries* (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 1951) (produced in six editions between 1839 and 1951)—ran through a vast list of topics under four broad headings (Physical Anthropology; Social Anthropology; Material Culture; Field Antiquities) that could be used by colonial officials to collect primary records. These prompts provided the basis for many of the records produced by early observers, most of whom who were untrained in ethnographic methods.

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1.2 The chapters in this handbook

The twenty chapters in this volume aim to support the creation of better records from fieldwork, both for linguistic research and for other purposes—especially for the use of speakers of the language being studied or their descendants with an interest in the range of topics described here, and for specialists in these areas. In general, chapters in this volume should be seen as a point of entry to the topic under discussion. Authors have often provided a guide to further reading that covers key relevant literature.

While collaborative fieldwork is desirable and productive (see Yamada 2007 and Evans, Chapter 8 below), it can also be logistically tricky to organize. In the absence of specialists, what can a lone researcher do when topics go beyond their expertise? It is clearly impossible in one book to cover all the information that a

fieldworker may encounter in their field location, even more so when our focus is not confined to a particular geographic or linguistic region.

This volume aims to be geographically inclusive, with contributors who work in the Americas (Berez, Chemillier, Macauley, Mark, O'Meara, Rice, Stea, Turk), Africa (Chemillier, Holbrook, Newman), Asia (Adachi, Nanbakhsh, Majid, McClatchey, Seyfeddinipur, Strycharz), Europe (Barwick), the Pacific (Conn, Evans, Lemonnier, Margetts and Margetts, Meyerhoff, Mosel, Pollock, Thieberger), and Australia (Barwick, Dousset, Evans, Mark, Nash, Simpson, Thieberger, Turk). For fieldwork guides specifically focused on particular geographic regions, see Abbi (2001) for India, Dai Qingxia, Luo Rendi, and Wang Feng (2009) and Heimer and Thøgersen (2006) for China, Steinhoff, Bestor, and Lyon-Bestor (2003) for Japan, Wurm (1967) and Sutton and Walsh (1979) for Australia.

1.2.1 Data collection and management

The first section of the volume deals with data collection and management. It is all too common for researchers to be sent into the field with no training at all in the use of equipment, with the result that their vital primary data is not as useful as it could have been. Central to the project of language documentation is the creation of records, and our reliance on fragile technologies to do this requires care and attention to detail. As a number of chapters (e.g. Chemillier, Majid, Meyerhoff et al., Seyfeddinipur) reiterate, a recording is often the only way of analysing an event that occurs too quickly for human observers to fully appreciate. It is highly desirable to record dynamic performances in order to study them, and to then ensure that these recordings provide the basis for claims made about the performances and the language. In Chapter 1, **Anna Margetts and Andrew Margetts** outline techniques and equipment for making the best quality recordings in
p. 5 the ↳ field and include a discussion of what characteristics to look for in your field kit (recorders, microphones and peripheral equipment), and what sort of power sources to consider when planning a fieldtrip.

Asifa Majid (Chapter 2) discusses experimental field elicitation techniques, how to design activities to encourage speakers to use particular conceptual categories and how to produce non-linguistic stimuli for elicitation as a means of exploring semantics. She describes how to administer various versions of the well-known Max Planck Institute materials, and how to interpret the results.

There have been a number of guides to linguistic fieldwork. **Ulrike Mosel** (Chapter 3) distils from a survey of this existing work the key points relevant to modern fieldwork and provides ‘a guide to the guides’, pointing out their pros and cons on a range of aspects of fieldwork methods, including various kinds of elicitation, text collection, and the development of a representative corpus. She emphasizes the need for linguists to know what is typologically expected for the target language and notes that non-linguistic researchers can still make an important contribution by making recordings with the help of speakers.

Nicholas Thieberger and Andrea L. Berez (Chapter 4) provide a guide to managing fieldwork data, from fieldnotes and recordings through transcription and annotation to analysis. They liken the creation of good fieldwork records to building a house with firm foundations, allowing subsequent extensions secure in the knowledge that the initial work can support them. Dealing with general principles as well as the specifics of data conversion, they discuss the underlying issues related to separating the form of data from its content, and the importance of preparing field material for posterity, both for our own reuse of it in our ongoing study of the language, and for the people we record.

1.2.2. Recording performance

The second group of papers focuses on performance of various kinds. **Miriam Meyerhoff, Chie Adachi, Golnaz Nanbakhsh and Anna Strycharz** (Chapter 5) present methods (including questionnaires, observation, and structured interviews) for determining variation within speech communities. Such variation may be based on characteristics like gender and power, and the authors explore ways in which field researchers may discover speakers' ideologies about and attitudes to language and society and how they use language for social and interpersonal purposes.

Mandana Seyfeddinipur (Chapter 6) guides us through the need to include gestures in our understanding of human communication, pointing out that there are no known societies in which gesture does not play a role. She provides an overview of the range of functions associated with gesture, the dimensions in which
p. 6 cultures differ in their gesture use, and describes ways in which gestures may give ↳ insights into cognitive diversity, as they have been shown to correlate with language-specific categories (like directional terms, or time references using gestures). From that theoretical base, the chapter describes how to include gestures in language documentation, with suggestions for both what to record and how to record it.

Fieldworkers are often in a position to observe musical performance and the types of questions they could ask and the ways in which they can record these are the topic of **Linda Barwick**'s Chapter 7. Recordings of songs are valued within the community and can be used to pass on traditions via new technologies. As pointed out also in Evans's chapter, new domains of vocabulary can emerge from the study of song texts as can insights into archaic forms of language preserved in song. Barwick also gives advice on technical and practical requirements for a good musical documentation and how these might differ from language documentation.

1.2.3 Collaborating with other disciplines

In the next section of the handbook, 'Collaborating with other disciplines', chapters deal with collaboration, that most desirable but elusive state of working with experts from other disciplinary backgrounds in order to benefit each other's research program and to enrich it with novel insights. An example of such relationships is discussed by **Nicholas Evans** (Chapter 8), working with anthropologists and musicologists to create richer records of Iwaidja that allow them all to explore details of cultural categorizations not previously apparent to any of them working individually. Such details include trirelational kinterms, distinctive verbs of wearing for different parts of the body, and previously unattested gender prefixes with lexicalized verbs. While this chapter points out the benefits of collaboration, the next chapters assume that the linguist is on their own in the field and so provide advice about ways in which a range of topics can be addressed by linguists.

Encountering systems of kinship and understanding their implications for everyday behaviour can take some time for the novice fieldworker, and **Laurent Dousset** (Chapter 9) provides a guide to notions of social organization and kinship and then to kinship terminologies. Forms of social organization based entirely or mainly in kinship have rules that prescribe who can marry whom, who can talk to whom, who is responsible for certain ceremonial duties, and for other more symbolic aspects of social reality. Understanding these rules will also facilitate one's own work by clarifying forms of one's own relationships that may not otherwise have been apparent.

In Chapter 10, **Nancy Pollock** outlines the anthropology of food, noting that various theoretical approaches have dealt with food in economic and nutritional terms in addition to a colonial notion of correct food
p. 7 consumption. She points to ↳ the need to observe who is collecting, hunting, and growing food as a means for understanding social organization. Food as an exchange also provides insights into relationships of

reciprocity. Research into what is considered good food, what is used for feast occasions, and methods of food production and processing can provide valuable texts on topics that are central to everyday life.

From kinship and an understanding of social relationships as exemplified in the use of food, we move on to two chapters dealing with the broader biological context, first **Barry Conn** (Chapter 11) describes methods for collecting plants, with suggestions for identifying or at least providing informed descriptions of plants. This chapter guides the uninitiated field worker in collecting plant specimens and points out the importance of doing so in order to verify the identification. Copious references are provided covering various plant types and many geographically specific resources. This chapter concludes with a very practical set of notes for the requirements of fieldwork including considering permits required, first aid, the use of GPS to locate specimens, and thinking carefully about your own ability to conduct what may be quite difficult hikes while seeking botanical information.

Focusing more closely on human uses of biological material, **Will McClatchey** (Chapter 12) makes a plea for the involvement of linguists in discovering how biological knowledge is acquired, learned, and controlled. What, if any, are the links between biological and linguistic diversity? How is new biological knowledge learned by migrants into new environments, and how long does it take? What are the systems for classifying plants and animals in the language, and how much are they culturally determined?

From the natural world and its cultural construction we move to an exploration of human artefacts. **Pierre Lemonnier** (Chapter 13) suggests linguists could record technical processes like making bread, weaving and so on and shows that objects and technical processes need to be understood in their cultural context. Similar to Pollock in Chapter 10, Lemonnier reminds us that culture underlies all technical processes, no matter how much they may appear to relate to the purely physical world. His case studies of the Baruya fence and Ankave drum illustrate wonderfully the cultural basis for these two otherwise apparently functional objects.

Understanding how quantification works in another culture can take some background knowledge of the range of possible counting and computational systems, including measurement of time, weight, and distance. **Marc Chemillier** (Chapter 14) describes methods for observing both quantification systems and more complex mathematical algorithms, such as sand drawings and divination games. This work emphasizes the value of experimental tests and observation, as asking speakers how they compute divination tables (illustrated in the chapter) gives a different result to observing their calculation of relationships in the table.

Still in a computational mode, the next chapter provides a crash course in cultural astronomy. **Jarita Holbrook** (Chapter 15) shows how to learn about celestial bodies before arriving in the field. She discusses how the stars and planets have been incorporated into cultural practices, including divination, calculation of seasons, and calendars, and into legends that help to explain their recurring patterns observed by most human societies.

From the cosmological we move to the terrestrial. In the first of two chapters related to indigenous views of geography, **Andrew Turk, David Mark, Carolyn O'Meara, and David Stea** (Chapter 16) describe methods for discovering how landscape is culturally conceptualized. The field of ethnophysiography explores a semantic domain that has not been central to linguistic explorations in the past (although the authors note that it did feature as a domain of study in Voegelin and Voegelin 1957) which asks how landscape is talked about, what features are considered to be distinct, and how they are related to each other.

Focusing on toponymy, **David Nash and Jane Simpson** (Chapter 17) provide examples of placenames and their possible role in analysing the semantic systems of the speech community. Their discussion covers denotation, sense, etymology, and etiology of placenames, as well as connotations, and morphological and grammatical properties. They point out there may be a number of sources for placenames which may, for

example, act as mnemonics for an event which is believed to have happened at the place, related to the exploits of ancestral beings.

1.2.4 Collaborating with the community

As the goals of documentation include recording more people in more domains than was previously the case, they also raise new possibilities for ethical concerns, such as consent among a broader group of people, longer fieldwork duration, archiving recorded material, and a greater role for speakers in collaboration and coauthoring of publications. It is common for linguistic field manuals to dive straight into elicitation and analysis, as if selecting and settling into the field location, the establishment of personal relationships, and concerns about ownership of material have already somehow been dealt with elsewhere. In Chapter 18, **Keren Rice** guides us through a range of ethical issues related to fieldwork, summarizing formal codes of ethics and pre-fieldwork institutional ethics approvals, noting that many such processes are intended for medical procedures rather than for cross-cultural humanities research. She provides useful advice on putting your own ethics procedures in place regardless of whether they are formally required or not. Such procedures include informing yourself as fully as possible about the language and about cultural values in your field location to avoid causing unintentional harm.

p. 9 Tied in to ethical fieldwork practices is the importance of understanding ownership of the material recorded and the need to obtain consent from speakers for whatever use you want to make of the resulting material. These topics are addressed in Chapter 19 by **Paul Newman**, dealing with copyright, moral rights, and intellectual property, and the added complication of the jurisdictions in which each of these may apply. Also important for the production of publicly funded research is the question of access to the outcomes; in addition to copyright, Newman touches on Creative Commons licences and Open Access models for provision of both primary material and published results of analysis.

In the last chapter, **Monica Macaulay** points out that the anthropological literature on fieldwork and its joys and disasters is vast, yet linguists have typically not been introspective about the nature of fieldwork and the difficulties of life in the field. Notable exceptions (some published since Macaulay's article appeared in 2004 are Kulick and Willson's (1995) collection on sexuality in the field, Crowley's (2007) personal account of fieldwork, Besnier's (2009) discussion of the politics of fieldwork, Bowern (2008) on ‘fieldwork and identity’, and Nagy's (2000) concern at the number of skills required by a fieldworker (theoretician, applied linguist, technical wizard, sociolinguist etc.).

Some subjects that had been planned for inclusion in the present collection had to be omitted for various reasons. These subjects included zoology, the analysis of narrative and folklore, and the collaborative development of materials for revitalization programs from the results of fieldwork. Further relevant topics have already been dealt with recently and did not need to be duplicated here, for example: Maddieson (2001) on field phonetics; Franchetto (2006) on ethnography; Schneider (2011) on second-language learning methods in the field; Kulick and Willson (1995) on sexuality in the field; and the collection of papers on various topics in Gippert, Himmelmann, and Mosel (2006).

The scope of topics addressed in this handbook is wide—it is hoped that each chapter will provide a starting point for exploration of its topic, giving many references to key literature in the area. The field of language documentation is drawing enthusiastic newcomers to linguistics, as well as attracting more established practitioners to engage with new methods. This handbook is offered as a guide to this emerging paradigm.

1.3 Acknowledgements

The idea for this volume started at the Australian Linguistic Institute in 2000, where I co-taught a course in
p. 10 language documentation with Margaret Florey. ↳ We discussed the theme of the linguist in the field as a 'one-person orchestra' who needs to collaborate with, or to have input from, specialists in other disciplines. Some time later, Oxford University Press invited a proposal for a volume on linguistic fieldwork and the present collection was begun. Thanks to the OUP team (John Davey, Julia Steer, Chloe Plummer, Jenny Lunsford and Karen Morgan) for their ever helpful advice. Thanks also to Charmaine Green (former president of the Aboriginal Languages Association) for permission to use her painting 'Land & Sky' as cover art.

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