

7/14: [A neighbour] told me one interesting thing—he knew some SIL linguists who were here. He didn't remember their names, unfortunately. He went on a long tirade about how [evil] they were. He said the people here already have their own religion and these people came in and 'treated us like a lower form of life and tried to shove their religion down our throats.' I explained that I knew about them and that I was not in any way connected with them. He seemed reassured and said he could tell I wasn't one of them. But that's the first I've heard of SIL. Some people have mentioned that there have been other gringos here, studying Mixtec, but they haven't said anything about them being missionaries.

As I said, this list is only a beginning, and is designed simply to get us thinking about publishing more specifically on linguistic fieldwork. Although the anthropological literature can be immensely helpful, there are significant differences in the ways that we approach the field. Among other things, linguists generally do not stay as long as anthropologists do, and many of us do not even try to integrate ourselves into the community in the same way that an anthropologist would. This of course means that our experiences will be very different. Until recently, however, there has been very little published on linguistic fieldwork (except for a few things like Dixon's 1984 book and Newman's 1992 article). This is now starting to change, with, for example, the publication of Vaux and Cooper (1999) and Newman and Ratliff (2001), but there is still surprisingly little.⁶

For most young people a first field experience is an educational adventure, but it is usually difficult and it can be painful, discouraging, depressing and sometimes even agonizing. Some of these discomforts might be avoided if young fieldworkers and their research supervisors were made more aware of the fact that young persons in the field have certain inescapable disadvantages. There are some things that they simply cannot be expected to do. On the other hand, ... young people have certain distinct advantages and they can do certain kinds of research which are out of bounds for older persons. (Wax 1979: 517)

20.4 Conclusion

I have used my own first experience with fieldwork as an illustration of just how naïve a young linguist can be about all aspects of the fieldwork experience. Although embarrassing to admit to, the experiences that I had serve to highlight a gaping hole in the training that we give our students.

Usually the only discussion of such issues that a student gets is in a linguistics field methods course (if they take one). But even there, the personal and psychological aspects of fieldwork often get short shrift. I know that when I teach field methods, I am often overcome by the need for more time for elicitation. This can lead to a shrinking of the time spent in the classroom *without* the consultant; time where the students and instructor get a chance to talk about the fieldwork experience, rather than perform it. We need to remind ourselves that learning through doing is not the only goal of a field methods course, and should be sure to reserve time to talk about the many personal, political, and practical issues that can arise. That is, instead of treating field methods simply as a class where students learn to apply their analytical skills to a real language, we should reconceive it as a class in which we also prepare students to go out into the 'real' field to work, with all the complications that that can entail.

A second way to approach this is to develop a literature which specifically addresses the field experiences of linguists, especially issues like the ones I have mentioned here. It is only by developing a cumulative body of