

Journal 1

I was a little unsure of what to write in here—since it's been referred to as a journal, I take that to mean it's not a place only for reading responses but also a place for reflection on the week's activities. I'll move forward with this assumption.

The most time this week was spent searching for and wrestling with software for linguistic fieldwork. Such software is not as robust and usable as we'd have hoped to find it. This is unfortunately another respect (in addition to what Bowerman addresses in her preamble) in which the field linguist is hard-pressed. Bowerman stresses that it behooves linguists not to be afraid of developing technical expertise. Obviously, that's not to say that field linguists who have resisted it are Luddites. It is a wise decision on the time- and resource-strapped field linguist's part not to invest heavily in learning something unless she's certain it will streamline her workflow. The software out there already is great, but there are advances in ease-of-use and feature-richness still to be made in fieldwork software. Fieldwork has not yet had its *InDesign*, the software suite almost every periodical publication uses these days to format its prints. Fieldwork has not yet had its *Photoshop*, an image manipulation program that even artists working in analog media like pencil-and-paper use heavily. There's every reason to think that a well-made software suite could help field linguists in their work.

Some have tried to address this need. For a time I fiddled with an web-based solution¹ that tried to fill this void that had the advantage of allowing community-wide collaboration, something that is only clunkily implemented in FLex. Its downsides were a poor user interface and buggy codebase. The maker has since halted most work on this project and moved on to another one which is more lightweight, but the exact same problems plague it.

Obviously, I must discuss SIL's FLex. It boasts a full-featured suite for assisting the field

¹ The "Online Linguistics Database", authored by Joel Dunham <http://www.jrwdunham.com/>. His current project is called LingSync, which is hosted here: <https://www.lingsync.org/>

linguist in producing a description of a language, offering many time-saving tools like automatic recognition of morphs and detailed searches. But FLex has its limitations. First, it is bound to the Windows operating system, leaving users of other popular operating systems like Apple's OS X and Linux out in the cold.² Further, it has a steep learning curve that assumes a degree of technical literacy or willingness to spend precious time on developing it. This is time, obviously, that is not spent on fieldwork. Finally, its source code is not released to the public, meaning that people cannot build off of it to suit their needs, nor can they know for sure that it will be accessible should SIL disappear.

I think the Google Drive-based solution will work fine for this course, as all we really need out of our collaboration software is the ability to share ensure consistency in our media, transliteration, and glosses. But the process of viewing all the other solutions made me realize that field linguists stand to gain much from a collaboration tool of the caliber of a Photoshop or an InDesign.

A note on the other readings. I'm in awe of the array of taboos and cultural practices that Mead and Schwimmer describe. Obviously Schwimmer and especially Mead have their problems, and we're assuming a guarded reading of their ethnographies. But trying to imagine the sort of events that led up to the sort of institutions described by them in Arapesh society boggles the mind. In other words, it's astounding how these individually seemingly meaningless cultural practices combine to the end that it's impossible to be a hermit in Arapesh culture.

2 There are workarounds whereby Mac and Linux users can use Windows-native applications, but these workarounds are unreliable and shoddy.