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Reflections on linguistic analysis in documentary linguistics

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This article reflects on the role of analysis in language documentation since Himmelmann (1998). It presents some of the criticism that Himmelmann's notion of analysis faced and how he responded (Himmelmann 2012). However, analysis in this context rarely refers to analysis alone, but the term includes the larger research goals and research questions. This study, then, situates the research goals, research questions and analyses that I have employed in my research on Besemah on a cline from *facilitative* to *restrictive* in terms of the diversity and spontaneity of the (archival) record that is produced, building upon Himmelmann's (2012) conceptual basis for distinguishing documentation and description. It does so through two case studies in Besemah, one with a highly facilitative research goal, question, and analysis and another with a highly restrictive research goal, question, and analysis.

1. Introduction[1] The role of analysis in language documentation—or the perceived lack thereof—has been one of the most contentious issues in language documentation since Himmelmann (1998). This is largely a reaction to Himmelmann's sharp distinction between language documentation and language description as two separate fields of inquiry. In my reflection, I very briefly review some of the criticism that Himmelmann's original proposal faced (e.g., Rhodes et al. 2006, Evans 2008) and how he has responded

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(Himmelmann 2012). Through discussion of linguistic analysis in these papers, it has become clear that this term represents more than analysis itself but is almost always tied to larger research goals and research questions as well as issues of data collection (i.e., how documentary linguists decide on the data to be gathered and go about gathering them and—often based upon the analysis—go about annotating them). Based on these discussions, I show from my research on Besemah (iso 693-3: pse), a Malayic language of southwest Sumatra, that the types of analyses that I chose to utilize as well as their associated research goals and questions had a significant effect on the documentation of Besemah. More specifically, I illustrate how the analyses that I chose to employ, based on different research goals and questions, had consequences for (i) the types of (raw) data that were archived, and (ii) the extent to which these data were annotated in the process of analyzing them.

Building upon Himmelmann's (2012) conceptual basis for distinguishing documentation and description, I situate the research goals, research questions and analyses that I have employed in my research on Besemah on a cline from *facilitative* to *restrictive* in terms of the diversity and spontaneity of the (archival) record that is produced.[2] Maximally facilitative research goals, research questions and analyses allow for the types of data collection and annotation that result in a documentation that is spontaneous (i.e., not constrained by a researcher's task), diverse (i.e., encompassing many different types of speech events), and richly annotated (i.e., with information on all types of linguistic and non-linguistic factors). The documentation is enriched on various levels based primarily upon the analytical path one chooses to follow, but it does not put many constraints on the data that are collected. Maximally restrictive research goals, research questions and analyses allow for the creation of a dataset that is controlled in such a way as to avoid confounding variables and allow for a more straightforward analysis that better answers specific research questions that need such control. Facilitative research goals, research questions and analyses arguably have less researcher bias in data collection, and the resulting documentation may prove to be more useful to a wider range of audiences in the long term. It allows for a documentation that has the best chance to answer questions that we have not yet thought to pose. Restrictive research goals, research questions and analyses, on the other hand, purposely bias the data collection, and the resulting archival record are less likely to create a dataset that will be widely utilized in the long-term or used to answer questions that have not yet been asked.

From this perspective, it seems to me that descriptive linguistics tends to set research goals, pose research questions and draw on analyses that would be located somewhere in the middle of this cline, and researchers now and in the future may benefit from incorporating different types of research goals, research questions and analyses that fall on the extreme ends of this cline (i.e., those that are more facilitative and to a lesser extent those that are more restrictive). That is, it is my impression that descriptive linguistics ask research questions and employ analyses that draw heavily on semi-spontaneous collections of staged narratives (i.e., narratives told for the purpose of documentation) and artificial tasks (e.g., Pear Story (Chafe 1987), Frog Story (Berman 1994) or SCOPIC (Barth & Evans 2017)) on the one hand, and targeted elicitations based upon manipulated or invented examples for the purpose of filling in a paradigm or obtaining grammaticality judgments on the other hand. Often facilitative research questions and analyses that

[2]Spontaneity here is similar to what Himmelmann (2012) refers to as "direct input from native speaker", which is divided into two groups: "data based on observable linguistic behavior" and "data based on metalinguistic skills" (199).

result in the collection and annotation of everyday conversations are often marginal if represented at all in a documentation. Presumably, this is because interactional data is much more difficult to process and analyze. Likewise, carefully controlled experiments that test well-defined hypotheses, which fall on the restrictive end of the cline, are also quite uncommon due to a number of factors related to training and the practicalities associated with running such experiments.

The next section outlines controversies surrounding analysis since Himmelmann (1998), and then section 3 presents two examples from my research on Besemah, one facilititive, which involves the annotation of conversational data, and one restrictive, which involves an experiment on word stress that collected a controlled dataset.

2. Controversies over analysis Himmelmann's (1998) proposal to create a sharp distinction between documentation and description—while it was met with much enthusiasm (see Austin 2016)—faced both skepticism and criticism (Evans 2008, Rhodes et al. 2006, Chelliah & de Reuse 2011, Woodbury 2011), and much of this criticism addressed issues surrounding the role of analysis in language documentation. For example, Rhodes et al. (2006), in an unpublished report to the Linguistics Society of America's Committee on Endangered Languages and their Preservation (CELP), responded to Himmelmann's distinction between language documentation and language description by emphasizing the importance of a systematic analysis of a language. They contend that there is an important *accounting function* of analysis, which holds the view that the systematic analysis that one does during the production of descriptive materials (e.g., a reference grammar) is essential for the documentary linguist to know what has been documented and what still needs to be done. Their view is summarized by the following quotation:

> Himmelmann (1998) has argued persuasively that documentation is distinct from what he calls description, i.e., linguistic analysis. We think this is seriously mistaken. In order to know how far along one has come in documenting a language one must be able to measure how far there is to go. A crucial part of that measurement is found in the accounting function of analysis. How do we know when we've gotten all the phonology? When we've done the phonological analysis, and our non-directed elicitation isn't producing any new phonology. How do we know when we've gotten all the morphology? When we've done the morphological analysis, and our non-directed elicitation isn't producing anything [sic] new forms, and — crucially in inflected languages — when we elicited all the implicit inflected forms that haven't happened to come up in non-directly [sic] elicitation. (3)

Evan's (2008) review of Gippert et al. (2006)—but in reference to Himmelmann (2006) more specifically—follows up on the point made by Rhodes et al., where he notes various examples for which carefully controlled elicitation was needed to understand key concepts about the phonology and the grammar of various languages. He also points out the importance of the thorough analyses that result from a reference grammar where he criticizes Himmelmann's approach to language description: "To see this as mere formulation and organization is to grossly underestimate the nature of the analytic challenge" (348). Both Evans (2008) and Rhodes et al. (2006) maintain the position that the systematic analysis that is found in language description is not ancillary to language documentation, but is a crucial element of it.

In addition to these explicit criticisms of Himmelmann's conception of language documentation, there is a general misunderstanding that language documentation concerns the amassing of data without any analysis or that language documentation even opposes analysis in some way (Himmelmann 2012: 1). However, analysis has always been a part of Himmelmann's conception of language documentation. For example, Himmelmann (1998) proposes that there be a mutual dependency between analytical frameworks (e.g., sociolinguistic and anthropological approaches to language, phonetics, corpus linguistics, etc.) and the documentation, wherein the process of collection and presentation of a language documentation is significantly influenced by the analytical framework. On a more practical level, Himmelmann (1998) addresses the need for analysis in the transcription, translation, and commentary in the documentation of speech events, which allows the documentation to be accessible to a wide range of audiences. Therefore, the crux of the debate over analysis is not whether documentary linguists should incorporate analysis in their documentations but to what extent can documentary linguistics separate out the activities associated with language documentation from the systematic analysis of particular phenomena found in descriptive linguistics (see also Chelliah & de Reuse 2011).

In a follow up to Himmelmann (1998, 2006), Himmelmann (2012) addresses these issues more explicitly and from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In theory, he proposes a model that distinguishes data types based on input from native speakers: data based on observable linguistic behavior (e.g., recording of a conversation) and data based on metalinguistic skills (e.g., elicitation). These data types intersect with three stages of data processing: (i) processing raw data (e.g., recording audio/video recording), (ii) processing primary data (e.g., transcription and translation of recording), and (iii) developing structural data (e.g., descriptive generalizations, interlinear glosses). For Himmelmann this model helps in the delineation of activities concerned with documentation and those concerned with description, which is summarized in the following quotation:

> Documentary linguistics … is primarily concerned with raw and primary data and their interrelationships, including issues such as the best ways for capturing and archiving raw data, transcription, native speaker translation, etc. Descriptive linguistics … deals with primary and structural data and their interrelationships … Primary data … thus have a dual role, functioning as a kind of hinge between raw and structural data. They are the result of preparing raw data for further analysis (documentation), and they serve as input for analytical generalizations (description) (2012: 199).

In practice, however, Himmelmann (2012) recognizes that documentary linguists are not necessarily going to create neat distinctions between these types of activities. Thus, he provides a pragmatic resolution: "Do what is pragmatically feasible in terms of the wishes and needs of the speech community and in terms of your own specific skills, needs, and interests" (201). This resolution provides a lot of freedom for the linguist to document what they are best trained to do and satisfies the needs and desires of the community. It also fits into a larger shift in language documentation to individualized approaches that are tailored to the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are occur (Austin 2016). This resolution, while providing the documentary linguist more freedom in terms of their choice of research goals, research questions and analyses to be employed, raises important issues regarding the resulting documentation and its usefulness, especially in its ability to be useful to different users in the long-term and answer questions that no one has thought to pose. *How useful is the documentation for a broad audience? How useful will it be in the long-term? How likely can it be used to answer other yet to be posed questions or be used for other purposes?*

These questions harken back to the original reason that Himmelmann (1998) proposed to separate documentation from description: data collections and their annotations tended to be limited to serve descriptive goals and lacked long-term usefulness to a broad audience. In my own research, I have found that beyond Himmelmann's pragmatic resolution, it is also important to reflect on how given research goals, research questions and/or analyses *facilitate* a documentation that is long-lasting and potentially useful to a wide range of audiences or *restricts* the dataset that is intended to answer only current research questions.

3. Different approaches This section briefly reflects on the effects of adopting research goals, research questions, and analyses that fall on either end of the facilitative-restrictive cline. I demonstrate this with two very different studies that I employed in my research on Besemah. The first study is highly facilitative and concerns voice selection in everyday conversation in Besemah. This study shows that while the research question is focused, (i) my larger research goal to understand structures that arise in the course of everyday conversations allowed me to collect data that is broadly useful for various purposes, and (ii) the research question required intimate knowledge of social, cultural, and interactional contexts of the everyday conversations in the corpus, which ulitimately resulted in rich annotation of these speech events.

The second study is highly restrictive and concerns the status of word-level stress in Besemah. It shows how the data collection is restricted because it is directly tied to both the research question and subsequent analysis that crucially requires control of confounding variables. It is important to note that while I think both highly facilitative and highly restrictive research goals and analyses are important to answer different research questions, they are not equally important for language documentations. Highly facilitative research goals, research questions, and analyses are much more important for a language documentation, and highly restrictive research goals, research questions, and analyses may serve an important supportive role for a language documentation. The importance of this supportive role is difficult to predict in the long term as we cannot know what questions will be important for future users of the documentation, but as we will see they are clearly important to answer current questions.

3.1 Highly facilitative analysis While the inclusion of conversation in language documentations have been generally advocated for (Himmelmann 2004, Sugita 2011, Childs et al. 2014, Austin 2016), there has been little emphasis on how best to collect or analyze conversation in a language documentation context (McDonnell forthcoming). Field linguists have long recognized the difficulty of working with conversational data as narrative data is much easier to collect, analyze, and exemplify in writing.

However, everyday conversation is ubiquitous, and its documentation is vital (Levinson 2006, Childs et al. 2014). It is both useful for broad audiences and in the long-term has potential to answer questions that we have not yet thought to pose. Thus, research goals that seek to answer particular research questions about everyday conversation are highly facilitative because data collection is typically not tied to any particular research question and the documentation is not constrained by it.

The study presented in this section is a case in point. The conversations were collected before I posed any particular research question. Equally important is the fact that the analysis of everyday conversation, which this study required, allowed for the creation of rich annotations at many different levels, including (i) extensive glossing and additional semantic and morphosyntactic annotations and (ii) annotations of sociocultural knowledge and interactional practices. See McDonnell (forthcoming) for further description of these types of annotation, especially those in (ii) above.

Voice selection study My study of the *symmetrical voice* system (i.e., a voice system with two or more transitive voices, neither of which is derived from the other) in Besemah (McDonnell 2016) exemplifies the these points concerning facilitative research goals, research questions, and analysis well. In this study, I was interested in answering a straightforward research question: *At any given point in a conversation, what led to the use of one voice over the other?* In Besemah, this was particularly interesting because each of the two voices (i.e., the agentive voice and the patientive voice) were quite common in conversation; agentive voice occurred approximately 60% and patientive voice approximately 40% of the time. I chose to answer this question using methodologies from Usage-based linguistics (Bybee & Beckner 2009), Interactional Linguistics (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen 2001) and quantitative corpus linguistics (Gries 2017).

In order to answer this research question, I drew on a handful of recordings of everyday conversations that I had collected earlier, based upon my larger research goals to understand structures that arise in the course of everyday conversations. These recordings had been transcribed, translated into Indonesian and English and received some glossing. Once I had a clear research question in mind, I cleaned up the transcription, translations, and glosses and finished glossing the remainder of the recordings. Most importantly, with the help of several Besemah language consultants, I provided commentary about the larger context in which the symmetrical voice alternations occurred as well as the semantic and syntactic information about predicates and their arguments. These annotations were included in a notes tier in ELAN. This documentation was, in turn, further coded for quantitative analysis, including several morphosyntactic properties (e.g., transitivity, presence of causative/applicative suffix, person-number of arguments) and discourse properties (e.g., information status, specificity of arguments, topic continuity) based upon the detailed documentation (i.e., transcriptions, translations, glosses, and commentaries). For a detailed discussion of this process see McDonnell (2016: 201-226).

While it is unclear how useful the detailed coding would be to a broader audience, the annotation created during fieldwork is widely accessible and broadly useful. Besides transcriptions, translations, and glosses, it provides commentary on the grammar of the language, but more importantly it provides commentary that contains important cultural information, broader social context, and information about speakers and referents. For example, understanding the information status of referents, whether or not they occurred in a symmetrical voice construction, was critical to my study. However, Besemah speakers rarely refer to someone by name once that person has children, instead they commonly refer to them using *bapang* 'father' or *endung* 'mother' and the name of their child (e.g., *endung Refki* 'Refki's mother') or using a kinship term *mamang* 'uncle' or *bibik* 'auntie' and their eldest child's name (e.g., *bibik Refki* literally means 'Refki's auntie' or 'auntie Refki' but is commonly used to refer to 'Refki's mother').[3] This use

[3]This phenomenon is known as *teknonomy* in Anthropology.

of the kinship term and eldest child's name created much ambiguity for someone who does not have intimate knowledge of the people discussed in the recordings and the sociocultural contexts in which these reference terms are used. In many cases, the same individual was referenced in many different ways, using different kinship terms. Thus, in annotating these conversations, I consistently asked Besemah language consultants about such referents, and included information on who the speaker was making reference to and why the speaker used the particular kinship term they did. This information, which is part of a larger category of annotation that Schultze-Berndt (2006) refers to as contextual commentary, helps future users of this documentation interpret the conversation.

The analysis of symmetrical voice then facilitated a rich documentation not just of symmetrical voice or even Besemah grammar but of various aspects of everyday conversations in Besemah. It led to me to ask questions about the conversations themselves that I would have likely not asked otherwise, and it forced me to understand the conversational contexts much more deeply. Most importantly, the annotation that my analysis produced has the best chance to be useful for the long-term to answer questions that have not been posed because they serve an accessibility function that helps future users of the documentation to understand it.

3.2 Highly restrictive analysis While some have advocated that elicitation take on a more experimental approach (e.g., what (Yu 2014) refers to as "an experimental state of mind"), most current elicitation practices in descriptive linguistics differ from experiments in the follow ways:

1. Stimuli and design are set for all participants in experiments but elicitation tasks are often adaptive, where linguists react to the responses of the language consultant;
2. Experiments set out to test specific hypotheses while elicitation often involves a process of honing different hypotheses until there is something testable;
3. Experiments typically involve statistical analysis and elicitation rarely if ever does.[4]

Thus, experiments represent more restrictive research goals, research questions, and analyses because the data collection is constrained by the analysis and experimental design, which requires control; data are collected with specific research questions and necessary controls in mind. The study I present in this section on Besemah word stress exemplifies these restrictive research goals, research questions, and analyses well. It demonstrates how experimentation is necessary to address questions that cannot be answered by elicitation alone but critically rely on control and a subsequent statistical analysis. It also demonstrates that the dataset that results from such a study is restricted in terms of its limited usefulness beyond the present study.

Word stress study Recent studies have shown that the analysis of word-level stress is not at all straightforward (Gordon 2014), and in the description of many languages word-level stress and phrase-level prominence appears to have been conflated. That is, language descriptions appear to commonly describe word-level stress based upon words

[4]In some cases, the distinction between elicitation and experimentation is less clear. For example, the frog story was originally collected in a controlled way and with a particular hypothesis in mind (Berman 1994). Nowadays, it is my impression that the frog story is collected as a way to elicit a story with relative ease. The point here is that there are distinctions between prototypical elicitation and experimentation.

uttered in isolation, which means that the word in and of itself is a complete utterance. Thus, word- and utterance-level prominences are conflated, which make it impossible to tell whether the prominence is attributed to the word, the utterance, or a combination of the two. Recent studies have shown this to be particularly prevalent in the languages of Indonesia (van Zanten & van Heuven 1998, 2004, van Zanten & Goedemans 2007, van Heuven et al. 2008, Maskikit-Essed & Gussenhoven 2016).

To answer this question for Besemah, I designed an experiment that carefully controlled for various word- and utterance-level factors and subsequently conducted a quantitative analysis of the acoustic properties of these words. Details of the experiment and analysis are described in McDonnell & Turnbull (2018). The basic idea is that if I control for word- and utterance-level factors, then I can attribute a result (e.g., differences in pitch, intensity, spectral balance, etc.) to either prominence in the word or the utterance. The types of control imposed on the recordings for word-level factors include (i) matched vowels within the words (e.g., /pipis/ 'pulverize', /tatap/ 'touch') to control for intrinsic acoustic properties of vowels (i.e., low vowels have intrinsically higher intensity) and (ii) balance in the weight of syllables within the word (e.g., words with two light syllables or two heavy syllables, a light followed by a heavy syllable or a heavy followed by a light syllable) to control for the possibly of stress being attracted to heavy syllables. Utterance-level controls include (i) varying the position of the target word within the utterance (e.g., the word appears in a phrase medial position or a phrase final position) in order to understand any interactions with utterance-final pitch excursions (i.e., boundary tones) and (ii) varying the information status of the target word (e.g., whether the word is 'in-focus' or 'out-of-focus').

What is important to note here is that the archived dataset that results from this highly restrictive analysis provides crucial evidence for word-level stress. Such an analysis would not be possible if it were based upon elicitation under a descriptive framework. The analysis is, however, only as good as the design in which it was collected and the dataset underlying the analysis is unlikely to be re-purposed in any significant way. They would likely only be useful for the purposes of reanalysis (e.g., based on new acoustic measurements or a new quantitative analysis).

4. Conclusion In this reflection, I have shown how the different research goals, research questions, and analyses affected the archival record of Besemah. I show that these can be highly facilitative, which allow for rich documentation both in terms of the raw data that is collected and the annotation created, or highly restrictive, which allows us to answer specific (hypotheses testing) questions that cannot be answer through elicitation. From this reflection, I hope to encourage researchers interested in language documentation to consider their research goals, research questions and analyses in terms of the resulting archival record of the language, even to the point that researchers could take a more radical approach and alter the research goals they set, the questions they pose, and the types of analyses they employ to ensure a rich archival record of the language.

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