

Putting practice into words: Fieldwork methodology in grammatical descriptions

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Introduction

In science, claims must be *falsifiable*, *verifiable*, and *reproducible*

Linguistic science values reproducibility too

Today we will look at the state of reproducibility and methodology in language documentation research

Reproducibility in Documentation

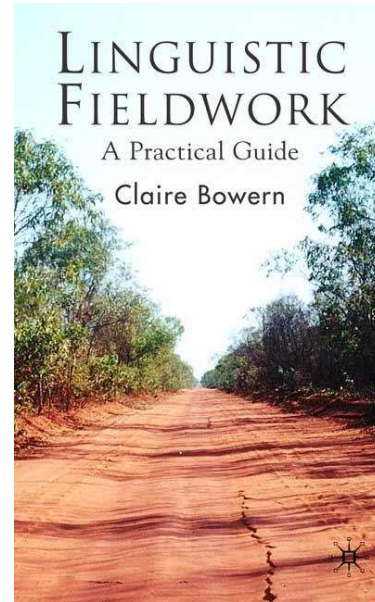
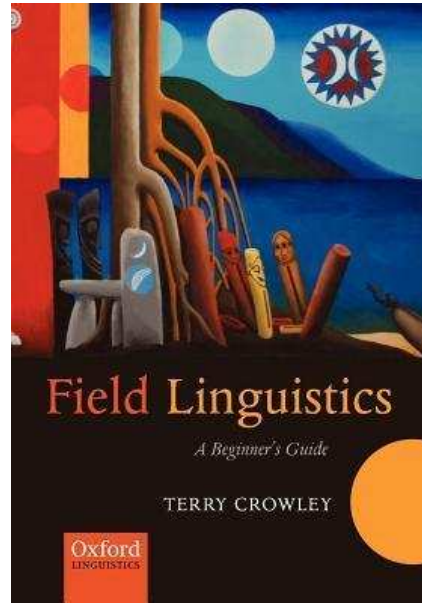
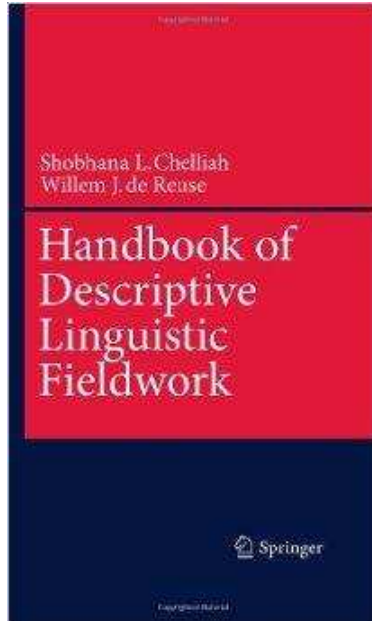
Language Documentation can make claims reproducible:

“[Language] documentation [...] will ensure that the collection and presentation of primary data receive the theoretical and practical attention they deserve.” (Himmelmann 1998:164)

“[...] it is our professional responsibility to provide the data on which our claims are based [...] It enhances the scientific basis of the linguists’ work.” (Theiberger 2009: 365-6)

“Establishing open archives for primary data is in the interest of making analyses accountable.” (Himmelmann 2006:6)

We have good models for fieldwork



Gippert, Himmelmann & Mosel (2006), Crowley (2007), Bowers (2008), Chelliah & de Reuse (2011), Thieberger (2012), Nakayama & Rice (2014), LD&C, LD&D and many more.

On valuing reproducibility

Despite this, most descriptive publications make reproducibility difficult

Boasian history (cf. Woodbury 2011):

- Raw textual data separate module from the descriptive grammar that generalizes over it
- No tradition of linking generalizing claims to data
- Old habits are hard to break!

Putting practice into words

What methodological features do linguists report on in their writing?

How do researchers link their writing back to the underlying data?

Data Sample

50 Published Grammars

50 PhD Dissertations

also 200+ journal articles (not discussed today)

All published/awarded 2003-2012

Grammars: A variety of publishers, institutions, languages

Articles: 9 Journals, range of areal and theoretical focii

Data Coding

1. Presence of methodology:

1.1 Books

Presence of explicit methodology rated on 1-5 scale (1= negligible, 5=comprehensive)

1.2 Articles

Presence of explicit methodology counted as yes/no

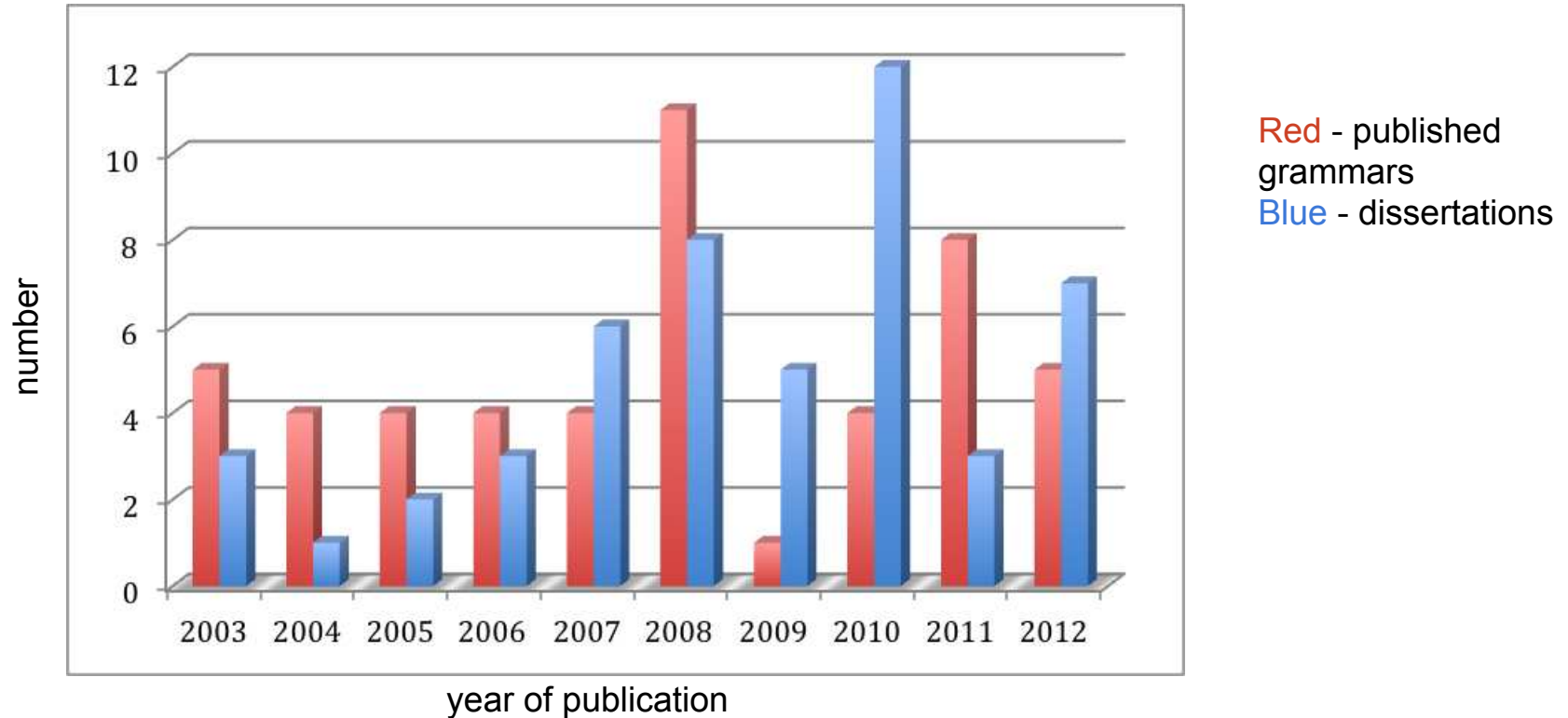
2. Tracked mention of:

- participants
- data collection equipment
- data analysis tools/software
- time in field
- genres collected
- archiving process

3. Data citation:

Rated on 1-5 scale (1=None, 5=Fully resolvable to underlying data) and conventions noted

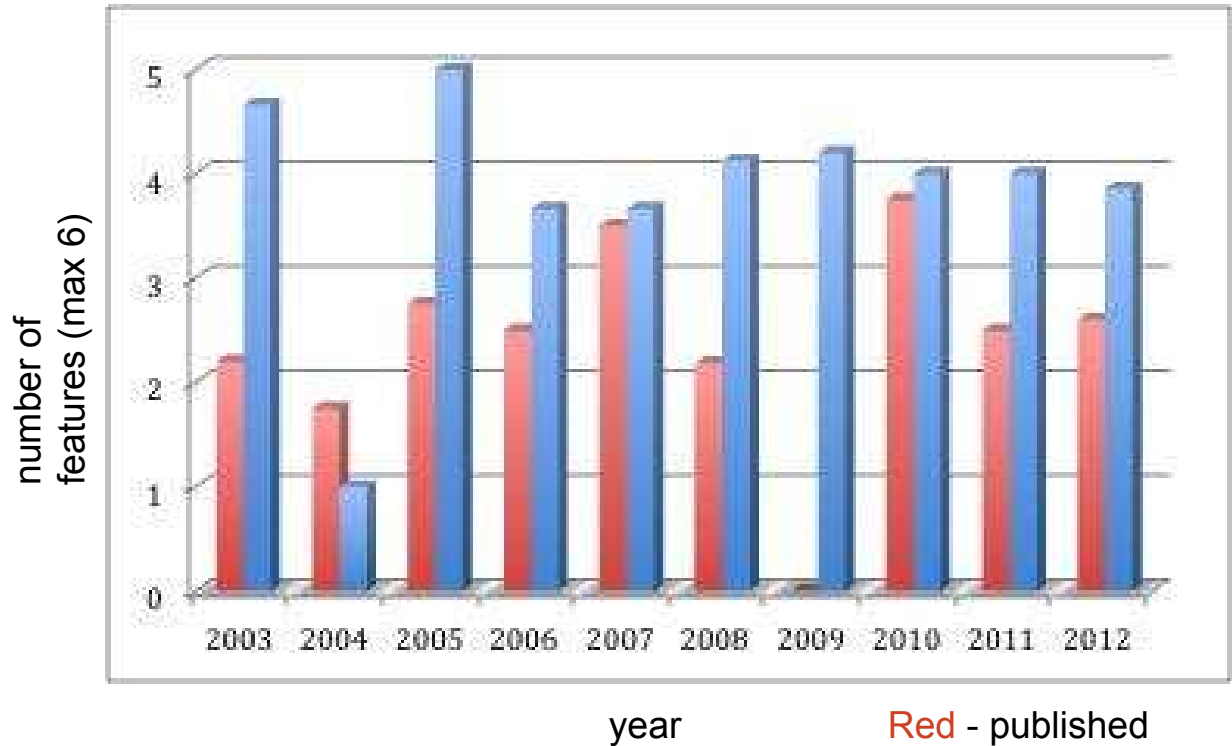
Data distribution



Methodology comprehensiveness

PhDs contain more of the categories that make a good methodology

Independent t-test
 $t(98)=3.65, p=.0001$



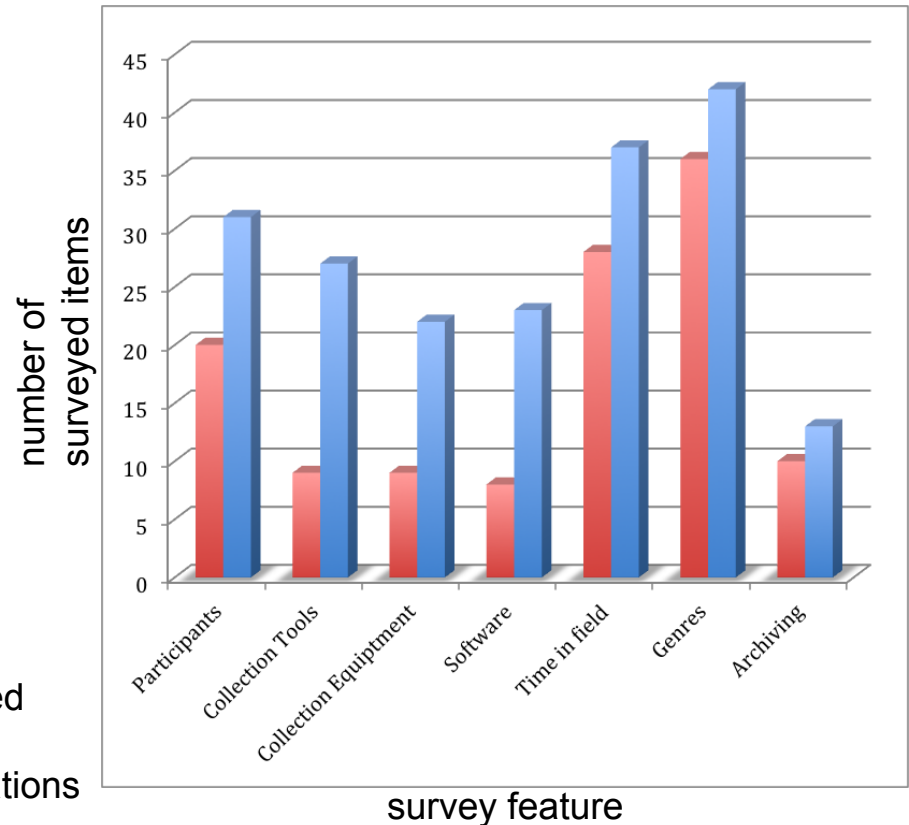
Red - published grammars
Blue - dissertations ¹⁰

Methodological features discussed

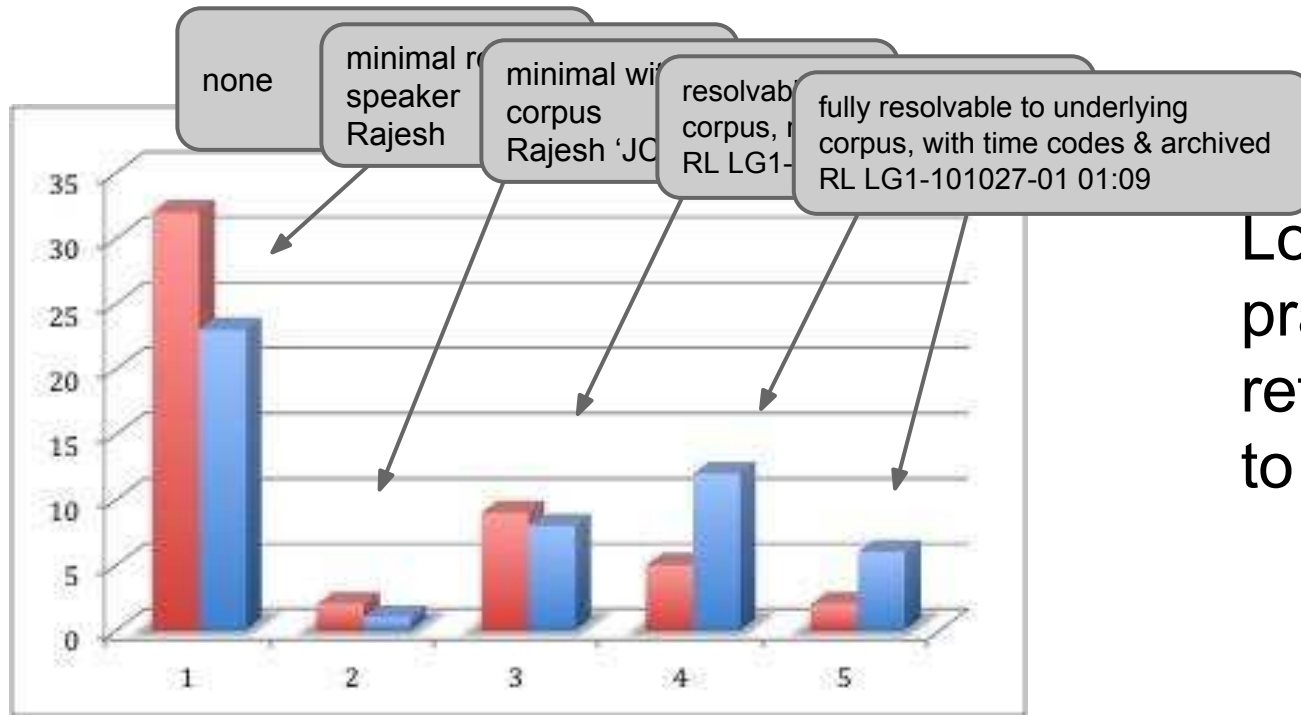
Some features more common than others

PhDs generally outperforming published grammars

Red - published grammars
Blue - dissertations



Example referencing



Low rates of good practice in referencing back to original data

Red - published grammars

number of publications

Blue - dissertations

Still many improvement to make

A minimally good descriptive grammar should report on:

- participants
- data collection equipment
- data analysis tools/software
- time in field
- genres collected
- archiving process

And

It should link description to underlying data

e.g. Ring (2015: 424)

(1065) *tæ pan map utæ u hadem*

tæ **pan** **map** u=tæ u=hadem
NVIS ask mercy M=NVIS M=Hadem

‘then the Hadem (Daloi) asked forgiveness’ [PP05KO_049]

Encouraging good practice

We can also encourage good practice by others as well

Encouraging students

We can introduce students to good practice (cf. Pawley 2014)

At University of Hawaii major change to PhD Handbook of Requirements (since Fall 2013):

- Students whose theses are based on fieldwork are required to properly archive their data
- Archiving plans part of the Dissertation Proposal. Only accepted DELAMAN archives may be used.
- Students required to submit proof of deposit to the committee before the dissertation can be approved.
- Descriptive theses must cite resolvable resources.

Encouraging colleagues

Peer review process provides one opportunity to encourage colleagues to give more information about their research

Informal gatherings like Linguistics in the Pub provide spaces for talking about documentaiton methods outside of ICLDC (www.rnld.org/LIP)

Conclusion: Put your good practice into words

Clear and transparent methodologies and examples linked to underlying data help make language documentation more reliable and replicable.

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Thank you.

These slides can be viewed at [**bit.ly/GoodMethods**](https://bit.ly/GoodMethods)

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Thanks to The University of Melbourne library staff