Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com

Beyond time, place, comparability, and searchability: Transdisciplinary apparatus in documentary linguistics

Preliminaries:

- Results of documentary linguistic (henceforth DL) endeavors are **explicitly** open to and targeted towards a general audience and across disciplines.
- I view usability of a language archive by "philologists 500 years from now" (Woodbury 2003) to be a very important aspect guiding what I do.
- DL's preservational character is more important for me than validation of current theories.
    - o DL is not an objective, documentary activity that freezes moments in time, but an activity that results (through an archive) in an inter- and intracultural "communicative act" across time and/or space (cf. Assmann 2009, Payne 2005.).
    - o An archive is a meaning generating entity (not an observation deck for language and language behavior).
    - o Note that apart from the preservational dimension the underlying focus on linguistic diversity carries different historic dimensions as well. Diversity is a product of history, universality is idealiter not a product of history. A language archive is a historic entity (continually changing), a grammatical analysis is in its basic conception a finished product.
- I view DL is as an act of cultural memory creation, less as creating a record of "X.
- I view the main achievement of DL as providing language representation(s) that enable an experiential engagement with language documents (audio-visual recordings)
- I consider "language" to be a cultural formation that cannot be condensed to a grammatical representation, a formal model, discourse, or analyzed in a sociolinguistic paradigm. [Consider in this light the metaphors: Language(s) are different ways to make the world appear ("shine a light on the world"), to discover the world. Trabant 2003:324]
- I view DL as transdisciplinarily oriented around a central field: "language".
    - o Note here the unity of linguistics and philology (as a text oriented study of a languages literature) as can be found with Humboldt (Trabant 2003:267) or also in the (Coseriu 1988) and his concept of "Sprachkompetenz" as a competence of producing speech (texts).

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

Question:

What would I, as a person interacting with collected documents form the past like to know about these documents in order to discern the multiple layers of meaning that I expect to exist therein?

Partial answer: I would like to know about the protagonists present in the language documents and the agency that underlies their action in those documents.

Meta-Documentation

The importance of providing context has been stressed several times (e.g. Ashmore 2008, Nathan 2010)

> Meta-Documentation of the project (Austin 2013): Providing more context than OLAC or EMELD require. While not in principle limited to this, he deals more with an overall documentary bracket of a language archive: e.g. with the transposition of the theoretical and methodological section of a monograph to the practice of language documentation.

> "Secret histories" (Gnerre 2008) as applied to the language documents themselves (not only the data generation and analysis). Gnerre argues for a more specific contextualization of certain elements in a language documentation. He focuses on language data.

> Participatory Language Documentation (e.g. Linn 2014). Introduce community and speaker contextualization.

> Woodbury's (2011, 2014) framing narrative in a Language Documentation/Archive. A language archive framed as a museum exhibition or a book.

DL is not just a documentary activity, but also a story telling activity.

> Importance of the origin (how they came about) of the language documents.

> Reflexivity as part of the documentation (the stories told involve us as well).

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

Protagonists:

Data on speakers was collected based on language contact questionnaire from Bouquiaux (1976).

> Speakers lived in a highly heterogeneous linguistic environment and master a multilingual repertoire.

> But the basic feeling was it is good to have detailed background data on speakers.

> It quickly became apparent the I was not only interested in linguistically relevant information, such as "what was the first language learned", but the principally closed questionnaires often drifted into more open interviews (unfortunately badly recorded), which centered around my attempts to understand where people are coming from and trying to get to know the person that I am interacting with.

> This has led to a redesign of the information gathered into a database with several more categories.

> I regret not having gone into recording life histories. These would be great additions to all documents where protagonists appear and could be consumed or read alongside them in inter-textual fashion.

Agency:

The speakers, recorders, interviewers, and interviewees do not simply fill out documentary linguistic roles (Austin 2013), but they follow their own agendas, which have direct influence on the content and situation of the recordings. In the following a few examples:

- Acted as agents of personal or community interests
    - Bitonko, March 1, 2014: three_stones (00:46:58:12)
    - The presence of a sub-district chef during an oral history recording was assessed to have been motivated by making sure the speakers would not compromise the political aspirations of the sub-district chef to separate from the main district and create a separate district. This was provided as a reason for the relatively uninformative performance of the main authority (in the assessment of the consultants conducting this session) and in my view also the reason for the developing frustration in the two consultants during the session [This information was volunteered to me when discussion (debriefing) the session afterwards.]

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

- Actively acted in a recording situation that involves a camera
    o Kaback, April 4, 2012: mkissata
    o The women of the myaando secret society where very much aware of us and the camera, interacted with it and us, and guided our filming activities (for an ethnographic documentary of a death ritual) according to their wishes.

- Act in situations (also owing to camera) that are in some ways marked as special to the speakers
    o Katourfoura, April 2, 2011: conversation_002v (00:00:00:19)
    o The district chef gives a pep talk to the soccer team from Katourfoura that participates in a island wide soccer tournament. The team had an important game the next day. It was assessed that the district chef and some other speakers only came, because they knew I was going to film the event. I had gone around the day before asking permission to do so from several key persons involved with the traingin fo the team. [Caveat, in discussing this I might have lead the consultants when discussing this].

    o Dobali, February 2014, soccer_narrative_001 (IMG_0963)
    Some recording set ups are often unfamiliar for the consultants and assistants and how to behave in them. I provide guidelines. (Note: I do not consider a static camera that captures as much context as possible the ideal set-up for every linguistic event (see below public_speech_001v).)

    o Bele-Bele, February 25, 2014: narrative_coup_001_003 (IMG_0963)
    o I had been contacted by the former district chef who wanted to tell me his history as a district chef and the events that led to his ouster (which I think he still has not really put behind himself). After he had finished his account people from the audience behind the static camera started a discussion and asking him further questions. I tried to channel the questions so that they would be audible on the camera. The son of the main speaker was still not happy. He wanted to have several points clarified (for the camera and the recording, he knew about those events and wanted his father to include them in his narrative). So we had him conduct his own interview with.

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com

This and the presence of the district chef in the recording of three_stones shows that the camera can be recognized as the memory tool with official character that it is. And that speakers and a community can instrumentalize this medium according to their wishes. (Note that Ramón Sarro (2008) describes the inhabintants of the northern Guinea coast as "masters of the stereotypes they want to project").

- take the goals of the recorders (research conductors, team members, etc.) into account
  - Katchembe, March 1, 2012, public_speech_001v (excerpt: 00:04:51:03-00:05:20:04)
  - This session was an hour long. Most of the speeches were in Soso. This interaction of a translated comment (from Soso – Nalu) during a fidão was done to the benefit of my presence. The participants knew I was there for Nalu and had adjusted so that I would go home with something to show for. [Later assessment by consultants, who felt that the interchange would not have been necessary]. This is not to say that the practice is unnatural to them, just that my presence influenced the way this public speech went.

Integration of agency into archives

Language documents and contextual narratives are connected. The integration of their inter-textuality is not only comparability as a digital service feature, but an editorial decision:

- Integrate the comments or texts into ELAN as a collated "notes" tier (to create a semi-coherent) "reading" experience, or I can integrate them incoherently as separate texts that need to be read side by side.
- This can be extended to meta-documentary methodological comments for, e.g dictionary entries. I can give a general account of the methods used or integrate information on the provenance of each entry and the particularities of the collecting situation. [This is probably a vigorous over-extension of the practice of meta-documentation, but not completely without its merits.]

Language documents can be collected with contextualization of other documents in mind.

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honululu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

The things you cannot see: Cultural contextual information.

Cultural contextual information is geared towards explaining "the foreign" to a future archive user. It is part of understanding a culture and what is going on, and it is by default part of understanding where people are coming from in a communicative situation.

- o Kaback, April 4, 2012: mkissata
- o The bérimé or mrim are guardian spirits that play an important role in the secret societies, who manage the relationships and interaction between the bérimé and the Nalu. The concept is much more complex than a simple translation as "ancestor spirit" or "guardian spirt " would convey. But understanding what an mirm is is crucial to understanding the mkissata ritual that we filmed. The dancers are the carriers of the bérimé and one dancer in particular bears the mrim of the deceased. We conducted an ethnographic interview with a consultant who had the authority and knowledge to speak with us and knew what information he could divest and what would be considered secret knowledge. (Note that this whole complex of secret societies and "guardian spirits" is an aspect of Nalu culture that has been under immense pressure ever since the 1950ies and is expected to disappear with the death of the last initiates).

Documentary Linguistic practices can be adopted as a research method and the communal exploration of aspects of history and culture can lead to a series of recordings exploring a certain topic in different genres and settings.

- o These recordings can be aimed at providing further understanding for the researcher and team and thus help in presenting the foreign in the words of community members, but guided by questions and explorative guides developed by the research team. This does not (and should not) have to be limited to eliciting commentary.
- o Assessments and debriefings after recording sessions can help understand what was going on during a recording session, realizing further questions to explore, as well as ordering, connecting, and integrating documents in an archive.

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com

Outlook

Agency of the protagonists and language documenters are not the only important contextual information, but they are central.

- It is central because I consider language a cultural formation (includes among other things ways of thinking, communication, discourse ethical underpinnings. etc.). I do not consider language to be the different ways of realizing an underlying language capacity. It is as a cultural formation that it can be considered an achievement and a language archive should enable a comprehension why it is so. [e.g. as a culturally aware visitor I will, on top of reading about the history and the landmark sights to see, I will also consult a language documentation – not to get communicative pointers – but to look for the landmark sounds (texts, language documents) to hear and the landmark thought patterns to think (in Mahuatl or Mexican Spanish etc.) (Trabant 2008].Understanding where the speakers in the language documents are coming from is a first step towards understanding the language(s) they speak as an achievement. This can only be achieved transdisciplinarily with a broad (Humboldtian) understanding of language and language studies. [e.g. "How do inhabitants of the northern Guinea coast master the linguistic obfuscation necessary to project the stereotypes they want to project?" This is related to discourse ethical underpinnings (cf. Grice 1975)) and other aspects of a language that are not only preoccupied with structural, discourse, and sociolinguistic analytic questions.]
I think we should enable and value non-analytic (poetic?) experiences with a language and in this way further explore why an individual language should be considered a human achievement beyond its conceptualization as a structural organism/system.
- Life stories
- Debriefing and assessments should be systematized or done habitually as a way to gather contextual data that relates to agency when engaged in creating a "language documentation"

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

Comments and commentaries should not be limited only to general documents framing a set of sessions, but should be considered an integral part of an archive that is guided by editorial procedures and decisions.

- o Comments and commentaries can be gathered along lines of exploration determined by the team and the researchers before the backdrop of a "communicative act" across time and space in an effort to understand and present "the foreign".
  - ▪ Note that this includes and necessitates grammatical and structural linguistic information.

Language archives are also non-trivial editorial works and should thus be recognized as their own editions (i.e. publications)

The language documentary practice itself can be a methodology to gain further cultural understanding.

References

Ashmore, Louise. 2008.The role of digital video in language documentation. In: P. K. Austin (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description* 5. London: SOAS:77-102.

Assmann, Aleida. 2008. Canon and Archive. In: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.) in collaboration with Sara B. Young, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Grutyer:97-107.

Bouquiaux, Lux and Jaqueline Thomas (eds). 1976[2]. *Enquête et description des langues à tradition orale, Vols. I,II, & III.* Paris: Société des Études Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France.

Coseriu, Eugenio. 1988. Sprachkompetenz. Grundzüge einer Theorie des Sprechens. Tübigen: Francke.

Gnerre, Maurizio. 2008.Linguist's multi-layered data and the linguistic community's polyphony. In: P. K. Austin (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description* 5. London: SOAS:29-59.

Grice, H. Paul. 1975. Logic and Conversation. In: Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgane (eds), *Syntax and Semantics*. Vol 3: *Speech Acts.* New York/San Francisco/London. Academic Press:41-58.

Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. 1998. Documentary and descriptive linguistics. *Linguistics* 36.1:161-195.

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

Linn, Mary S. 2014. Living archives: A community based language archive model. In David Nathan & Peter K. Austin (eds) *Language Documentation and Description,* vol 12: Special Issue on Language Documentation and Archiving. London: SOAS. pp. 53-67

Nathan, David 2010b. Archives and language documentation: From disk space to MySpace. In P. K. Austin (ed.) *Language documentation and description. London: SOAS,* vol. VII pp. 172–208.

Noonan, Michael. 2005. Grammar writing for a grammar-reading audience. *Studies in Language* 30,2:351-365.

De Saussure, Ferdinand 1916/1995. Cours de linguistique générale. (Charles Bally, Anton Séchehaye, and Albert Reidlinger (eds.), critical edition with comments by Tullio de Mauro). Payot et Rivages.

Sarró, Ramon. 2008. *The Politics of Religious Change on the Upper Guinea Coast: Iconoclasm Done and Undone*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Trabant, Jürgen. 2008. Was ist Sprache? München: Beck.

Trabant, Jürgen. 2003. *Mithridates im Paradies*. München: Beck.

Woodbury, Anthony C. 2003. Defining Documentary Linguistics. In: P. K. Austin (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description* 1:35-51.

Woodbury, Anthony C. 2011. Language documentation. In Peter K. Austin and Julia Sallabank (eds.) *The Cambridge handbook of endangered languages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:159–86.

Woodbury, Anthony C. 2014. Archives and audiences: Toward making endangered language documentations people can read, use, understand, and admire. In David Nathan and Peter K. Austin (eds), Language Documentation and Description 12 (Special Issue on Language Documentation and Archiving). London: SOAS:19-36.

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

General map of research area

[Research area is encircled]

Frank Seidel
University of Florida
fseidel@ufl.edu, frank.zidle@gmail.com
ICLDC 4, Honolulu, February 26 – March 1, 2015

Close up map of research area

[Orange circle indicates area where Baga Mandori is spoken.]

[The thick red line delimits the area where Nalu is spoken.]