

NICHOLAS THIEBERGER ed. 2012. *The Oxford handbook of linguistic fieldwork*. Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press. xiv + 545 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-957188-8. Price £100. Also available as e-Book and Paperback (£30).

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*The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork* (OHLF) was more than a decade in the making. It had its beginnings in a course taught by Nicholas Thieberger and Margaret Florey at the 2000 Australian Linguistic Institute in Melbourne. The final product is a collection of 21 chapters by 30 different authors representing, as well as various branches of linguistics, such diverse disciplines or topics as astronomy, botany, ethnography, gastronomy, geography, mathematics, musicology, toponymy, zoology, audiovisual technology, and copyright and legal concerns.

The question arises, why another book on linguistic fieldwork? After all, a dozen others have appeared over the past few decades.<sup>1</sup> Thieberger's answer to this question, in his Introduction, begins with the observation that over the last 15 years or so a new paradigm of research in field linguistics has developed, associated with the language documentation movement. The movement stems from a heightened awareness among linguists of (i) the speed at which many of the world's 'minor' languages are disappearing or losing ground to 'major' languages, and (ii) the interests that communities speaking languages in danger of disappearing have in maintaining or revitalizing their languages. The movement has been given a huge impetus by the establishment of several major international funding programs, such as DoBeS, ELDP, and DEL.

Influential papers by Nikolaus Himmelmann (1998, 2002, 2006) have served as the manifesto of the new paradigm. It is true, Himmelmann says, that linguistics has a long-established tradition of fieldwork-based descriptive research on languages of what we may call small, traditional societies. But he argues that language documentation should be regarded as a fairly independent field of enquiry from the descriptive paradigm that has long underpinned linguistic fieldwork. The two enterprises differ both in methods and in objectives. Descriptive linguists undertake fieldwork aiming to do in-depth analysis of a language. The collection of primary data is just a means to this end. Data collection focuses on eliciting utterances and native speakers' judgments on these (concerning sameness or difference, grammaticality, meaning, etc.), together with a sample of texts representative of the grammar. The ideal outcome, traditionally, is publication of a phonological analysis, a grammar, and a dictionary plus a body of texts, transcribed, with interlinear glosses and free translation.

The objective of language documentation projects, by contrast, is to record linguistic materials that will remain a resource for members of the language community well as for future generations of scholars. And it is not just language, in the descriptivist's sense—phonology, grammar, and lexicon—that is the target. The aim is also to record linguistic

<sup>1</sup>For a list, see Bowerman 2008:15. For an evaluation of several different fieldwork guides see Mosel's chapter in the book under review.

practices and communicative events that people regard as important parts of their cultural heritage, such as occur in various kinds of highly valued performances (oratory, song and dance, recitals of poetry or genealogies, story-telling, ritual formulae, and so on). In addition to audio recordings it is important to obtain visual records of such performances, because the linguistic text represents only one part of the speech activity. The materials gathered in the field should be systematically annotated and archived, to ensure that it will be accessible and useful to future generations, and not just to the fieldworker. Whereas in the descriptive paradigm primary data are appended to the analysis, in documentary work analysis is appended to the primary data.

More controversial is the issue of how detailed analysis needs to be to achieve documentary adequacy. Himmelmann acknowledges that ‘data’ is itself a problematic concept. Typically, what we count as data, such as transcriptions of texts in a phonemic (or other) orthography, is already the product of several layers of analysis. But he argues that while documentary projects call for an extensive and varied body of data to be collected and annotated, these need only low-level analysis. A working orthography needs to be established, and a grammar sketch and a small dictionary should accompany text materials—sufficient to gloss the texts. Compiling a fairly comprehensive reference grammar and dictionary entails years of work and is better postponed until after the basic documentary work is done.

Critics have pointed out the limitations of this strategy. Without pushing for detailed analysis you often don’t know what data are crucial to collect. A corpus of naturally occurring speech and text, no matter how large, will not be enough to allow the analyst to fully understand the phonology, obtain complete grammatical paradigms, resolve subtle questions of syntax and semantics, and obtain complete inventories and accurate definitions of words for particular semantic domains. The documentarians now acknowledge that elicited data are also needed.

This is the context in which *OHLF* makes its appearance. In recent years other books designed as manuals for documentary as well as descriptive fieldwork have appeared, such as Bovern (2008) and Gippert et al. (2006). The special virtue of *OHLF* is that it is thoroughly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. The chapters following the editor’s Introduction are grouped into four main sections: Part I: *Data collection and management* (4 chapters); Part II: *Recording and performance* (3 chapters); Part III: *Collaborating with other disciplines* (9 chapters); Part IV: *Collaborating with the community* (3 chapters).

Part I begins with a chapter by Anna and Andrew Margetts on practical issues with audio and video recording in a fieldwork setting. At 40 pages it is the longest chapter in the book. The authors point out the advantages of video recordings over audio-only as the basic recording method. To an old-fashioned linguist like me who is used to going to the field with a couple of cassette recorders, a camera and notebooks, their long list of ‘basic field equipment’ items (I counted 27) that the modern fieldworker should carry is both impressive and daunting, as is the range and detail of their knowledge of audio-visual recording technology and what can be done with it in fieldwork.

Training in linguistic field methods seldom tackles the difficulties of discovering the systematic semantic properties of words and constructions in the target language, as opposed to arriving at translation equivalents. The chapter in this book that is most thoroughly about semantic discovery procedures is Asifa Majid’s. She writes about experimental methods developed at MPI Nijmegen, in which non-linguistic stimuli are used to investigate semantic categories, such as color terms (where languages may vary in the role they assign to variables such as texture and succulence in basic color terms) and terms for cutting and breaking, and about how to interpret the results. She also considers some important meta-

theoretical issues, such as whether certain logical parameters are universal (such as hue and lightness in color terms). But it is disappointing that there is no chapter in the book that deals squarely with questions about how to define word meanings and the boundary (if any) between dictionary definitions and encyclopedic descriptions. However, several chapters in Part III treat particular semantic domains, e.g., Laurent Dousset's chapter on kinship systems, and assume a position on the dictionary vs. encyclopedia issue.

Ulrike Mosel writes about a domain where descriptive and documentary linguistics overlap—doing morphosyntactic research in the field. She critically reviews a number of published guides to fieldwork, noting their strengths and weaknesses. Mosel considers how to obtain a representative corpus, assesses the strengths and weaknesses of different guides to corpus gathering and points out that you need to know your typology before beginning fieldwork, otherwise you won't be able to ask informed questions.

Part I ends with a chapter by Nick Thieberger and Andrea Berez on data management. It is full of strictures and wise advice about all the things you should do to manage field notes and recordings, transcriptions and annotations and analyses, and about the importance of preparing materials properly for posterity and for community access. This is the chapter that made me feel most guilty, because it made me acutely aware of shortcomings in my own handling of field notes and tapes, especially with regard to archiving.

Part II, *Recording and performance*, begins with a chapter by Miriam Meyerhoff, Chie Adachi, Golnaz Nanbakhsh and Anna Strycharz on sociolinguistic fieldwork, especially investigating how language is used in social interaction, variation in a speech community, and speakers' attitudes to linguistic and social variables. Considerable attention is given to ways of mitigating the observer's paradox to ensure that one-on-one and group interviews yield natural, spontaneous speech.

Then comes a chapter by Mandana Seyfeddinipur on gesture and its functions and how to include such material in a language documentation corpus. She restricts discussion to one class of gestures, hand and arm movements, first examining the impressive variety of roles played by such gestural actions in communication and social interaction and then reviewing methodological issues in recording topics and genres likely to evoke different kinds of gesture. The gesture chapter made me think of another class of verbal signals that are largely overlooked in language descriptions, namely interjections that can't be adequately analyzed into segmental phonemes, and that are often combined with body language, e.g., the English interjections we might write, crudely, as *um* (hesitation filler), *mmm* (with nodding, flat intonation: I hear you, go on), *mmm* (high pitch, falling: really?, is that so?), *mm-mm* (with nodding: yummy, tastes good), *hm-hmm* (with nodding: agreement), *mm-mm* (with shake of the head: disagreement), *uh-oh* (here's trouble), *ugh* (with nose wrinkling: disgust), and *uhh* (with jerk of the head: exasperation) and the various clicks and inhaling and exhaling interjections, among many others.

Next is Linda Barwick's excellent chapter on how linguists in the field can and should investigate and record musical performance, such records generally being highly valued by the community and also forming a source of linguistic data, as well as being useful to musicologists at a later date.

Part III, *Collaborating with other disciplines*, contains nine chapters. If we include Barwick's chapter, which could well have been placed here, this part amounts to half the book. I'll come back to it shortly.

The three chapters in Part IV, *Collaborating with the community*, concern not data-gathering as such but important practical aspects of fieldwork and collaboration with the community. The first, by Keren Rice, is a thorough exploration of ethical issues. It is

followed by a long and rather daunting chapter by Paul Newman on copyright and other legal concerns (Newman is not only an eminent specialist in Hausa but also a professor of law) and, finally, a chapter on training students to face the realities of fieldwork, by Monica Macauley. This last is a very personal chapter, which recounts some of the misfortunes and traumas she suffered as a result of beginning fieldwork in rural Mexico without adequate training, and reflects on lessons to be learned from these.

Back to part III. This is a feel-good section for me as a lexicographer because its chapters, in different ways, all acknowledge that lexical domains are intimately bound up with wider systems of knowledge, beliefs, and practices that are central to a community's way of life and that to adequately investigate certain lexical and conceptual domains takes specialized expertise.

The first chapter, by Nick Evans, discusses the value of interdisciplinary teamwork in extending documentary coverage of languages. He observes that language is too big a thing for linguists to handle by themselves: “[t]he centrality of language to human life means we cannot document any language without understanding all the spheres of knowledge it is used to talk about” and this encompasses a vast range of domains. It stands to reason that investigators with expertise in botany, zoology, carpentry, fishing, horticulture, kinship systems, and other specialized lexical domains, will find out more about the lexicon for these domains than your average linguist. Evans' chapter comments on the pros and cons of several different strategies for interdisciplinary fieldwork: (a) the expedition strategy, where a team of scholars is present in the field for a long time, (b) the partner strategy, where a couple of scholars do different but complementary jobs, (c) the guest expert strategy, where a linguist brings in a range of specialists from other disciplines for short term investigations in the company of the linguist, (d) the long haul strategy where the leader of a project recruits students and other specialists for long-term collaboration, and in some cases, is able to recruit and train members of the target language community as primary researchers and authors. He goes on to delve into elusive and surprising parts of the verbal lexicon of Iwaidja, a language of Arnhem Land, in northern Australia. Verbs comprise an unusually high proportion (about 40 percent) of the total lexicon of Iwaidja, and Evans describes how interdisciplinary work helped to bring to light many highly specialized and unexpected verbs. He investigates possible explanations for the ‘verbiness’ of Iwaidja and for cross-linguistic variation in the way event descriptions are lexicalized.

Evans' chapter is followed by chapters on kinship and social organization by a social anthropologist, Laurent Dousset; on the language of food by a social anthropologist, Nancy Pollock; on botanical collecting by a plant taxonomist, Barry Conn; on ethnobiology by a botanist, Will McClatchy; on technology by a social anthropologist with a strong interest in material culture, Pierre Lemonnier; on ethnomathematics by a renaissance man, Marc Chemillier, with degrees in half a dozen disciplines; on ethnoastronomy by a cultural astronomer, Jarita Holbrook; on documenting terms for landscape by a very multidisciplinary group of authors, Andrew Turk, David Mark, Carolyn O'Meara and David Stead; and on toponymy (place names) by two linguists, David Nash and Jane Simpson. I will shirk the task of describing these chapters individually because of their highly technical nature. Most are crash courses in how to investigate a particular domain of cultural knowledge and language use, combining an introduction to the conceptual framework developed by specialists in that domain with lots of practical advice about how to gather data. Turk et al. make the point that for some domains, such as zoology, botany, color terms, and kinship terms, scientific taxonomies based on universal ‘etic’ properties of the phenomena provide a framework

against which indigenous taxonomies can be compared and described, whereas for other domains, such as landscape, such a framework is lacking or weakly developed.

Thieberger tells me that additional chapters were planned, e.g., on ethnozoology, on narratives and on language revitalization, but the authors didn't come through. Nevertheless the book covers a much wider range of fieldwork issues than any other manual I've seen. In fact, it is not just a book for linguists, it is a field guide for scholars of all sorts who do fieldwork that involves communities, especially traditional communities. It is not expected that an individual field linguist should try to gain competence in every domain that is described in this collection. Goodness knows, linguists doing documentation projects already have enough on their plates. But the message is that there is much to be gained by team projects, involving experts from a wide range of disciplines.

While we may agree that interdisciplinary teamwork is the best way to achieve rich documentation of the lexicon and speech genres of any language, this is easier said than done. Large scale interdisciplinary projects are hard to organize, take a long time, and are expensive. Typically, a training in linguistics does not focus on collaboration with specialists from other disciplines. Often it does not even include a training in dictionary-making. The major funding agencies for documentary work are biased toward funding relatively inexpensive short-term projects. This situation is likely to remain the norm.

I would like to end this review with some remarks about the role of dictionaries in language documentation. Himmelmann's manifesto did not advocate the compilation of full-fledged bilingual dictionaries as a priority in documentation projects. Yet of all the domains of language, it is lexicon that is of greatest interest to most speakers of endangered languages, because it is here that a vast amount of cultural knowledge is encoded.

Not long ago I came across a nice example of how an encyclopedic or ethnographic dictionary can serve as a data resource for future generations, centuries after it was compiled. Malcolm Mintz, an Austronesianist who specializes in Bikol, spoken in southern Luzon, a few years ago published a book about Bikol society around 1600 (Mintz 2011). His book contains chapters giving detailed accounts food and society, war and conflict, crime and punishment, religion, childhood and the family, and rice and agricultural and marketing practices. Where did he get his data? Largely from a remarkable dictionary, compiled around AD 1600 by the Franciscan padre, Marcos de Lisboa (de Lisboa 1754), who lived for ten years among the Bikol people.

We should not expect fieldworkers to produce good, ethnographically rich dictionaries in the course of a language documentation project of two or three years. But the fact is that dictionaries are highly valued by communities, and above all by those engaged in language maintenance and revitalization. This applies both to general dictionaries and to thematic dictionaries, which focus on particular domains or terminologies. Computer savvy linguists have in the last two decades made impressive advances in making online dictionaries more user-friendly.<sup>2</sup> Some print dictionaries of endangered and other 'minor' languages exhibit outstanding cultural coverage. But such works are usually the product of decades of research and represent a very small proportion of endangered languages. The challenge for the language documentation enterprise is how to achieve more of the same.

<sup>2</sup>A year or two ago I heard a talk on the future of dictionaries given by Sarah Ogilvie. One of her observations was that 20 years ago, field linguists' dictionaries were not essentially different in design from conventional, commercial dictionaries. The latter were printed works, consisting of texts and maybe some drawings. Today things are rather different. Field linguists have made major innovations in the form of dictionaries. It is not just that dictionaries are going electronic everywhere but that language documentation IT gurus have added whole new dimensions to electronic dictionaries, such as sound bites for headwords and example sentences and color photos and video clips of objects and activities.

One prerequisite is for departments of linguistics to give higher priority to training linguists in dictionary-making and in coordinating the kinds of interdisciplinary research needed to make ethnographically rich dictionaries.

The publication of *OHLF* is a timely and invaluable resource for this purpose and for instructing fieldworkers in many other facets of language documentation—data collection and management, recording performance, archiving, and interaction with the language community. The editor, especially, is to be congratulated for his vision in planning such an ambitious project and his hard work in turning the plan into a fine book.

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