Collaboration or Participant Observation? Rethinking Models of 'Linguistic Social Work'

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Documentary linguists aspiring to conduct socially responsible research find themselves immersed in a literature on 'collaborative methods' that does not address some of the most pressing interpersonal challenges that fieldworkers experience in their community relationships. As recent controversies about the nature of collaboration indicate, collaborative models embed assumptions about reciprocity, negotiation, and the meaning and moral valence of categories like 'research,' 'language,' and 'documentation,' which do not translate equally well across all communities. There is thus a need for a method flexible enough to respond to the complexity and diversity of what goes on in particular cross-cultural researcher-community relationships. In this article, we encourage documentary linguists to consider the benefits of *participant observation*, a research method that is designed specifically to deal with the interpersonal nature of fieldwork in the human sciences. Because it ties knowledge production directly to the development of social relationships across difference, participant observation can help documentary linguists think fruitfully about the social approaches they take in their fieldwork, whether these ultimately come to involve formal collaboration or some other form of reciprocity.

1. Introduction[1] The current generation of documentary linguists has expressed a seemingly inexhaustible interest in discussing and promoting collaborative research,

taking the call for a more responsible linguistics to a level hardly imaginable twenty years ago. Florey (2008) describes this research climate as a "new linguistics," in which researchers engaged in the scientific study of language also address and even prioritize the interests of the communities they work with. But having reached a point where collaborative research is now regularly hailed as 'best practice' in linguistic fieldwork (e.g., Leonard & Haynes 2010, Mihas 2012; Penfield et al. 2008) and may even be a requirement for linguists seeking research licenses and grant funding, we believe it is time to take stock. Originally inspired by developments in critical soci-olinguistics (e.g., Cameron et al. 1992) and similar movements attempting to address power disparities in research (see e.g., Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Rice 2006, 2009, 2011; Schwartz & Lederman 2011), the documentary linguistics literature has converged on a common model of what collaboration entails. Going beyond the merely ethical methods of traditional 'linguist-focused' research (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009) that prioritizes the targeted pursuit of questions deriving from academic concerns, collaborative research as typically described has the following key components:[2]

- Linguists and community representatives work together as equal partners to design and establish project goals that will serve both academic and community needs.

- The products developed in the course of collaboration are accessible and useful for both community members and scholars.

- Community members gain new skills through linguistic training, so that the research process empowers them to carry out their own linguistic work without outsider involvement, rather than requiring them to depend on academic expertise and authority.

- Reciprocally, community members educate linguists about local expectations and norms, teaching them how to live and work in what is often, for the linguist, an unfamiliar physical and social environment.

A number of case studies have been offered in the literature to develop and illustrate this model, which foregrounds the interests of speakers and responds in part to calls coming from communities themselves (e.g., Ahlers 2009; Benedicto et al. 2007; Bowern & Warner 2015; Cruz & Woodbury 2014; Dicker et al. 2009; Dwyer 2010; Fitzgerald & Linn 2013; Florey 2008; Furbee & Stanley 2002; Garrett 2014; Leonard & Haynes 2010; Linn 2014; Mihas 2012; Miyashita & Chatsis 2013; Miyashita

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[2]There is considerable debate in the linguistics literature over the precise nature of "truly collaborative collaboration" (Leonard & Haynes 2010:273). The rise of collaboration in documentary linguistics is part of a larger cross-disciplinary movement that emphasizes equal partnership throughout the entire research process, from collaborative project design to co-authorship of resulting publications (Schwartz & Lederman 2011). But Bowern & Warner (2015:65) have recently proposed a definition that even considers an outside researcher involving community members in data collection, entry, and processing to be collaborative on the grounds that it gives community members "a stake in the research," "opportunities to shape the research program," and "insight into how research is conducted." It is not our goal here to take a position on what constitutes 'true' collaboration. Rather, we seek to show how participant observation can be useful to linguists regardless of the definition of collaboration they hold.

& Crow Shoe 2009; Penfield et al. 2008; Rehg 2007; Shneiderman 2010; Shulist 2013; Truong & Garcez 2012; Vallejos 2014; Warner et al. 2007; Watahomigie & Yamamoto 1992; Yamada 2007, 2011).

While most published discussions of collaboration offer positive narratives of success, examples of unsuccessful or otherwise unconventional collaborations are less often discussed. One exception comes from Sarah Shulist (2013), who discovered that her lack of prior familiarity with the urban setting in Brazil where she worked led her to have unrealistic expectations about her ability to conduct collaborative research on language revitalization there for her dissertation. Shulist's case also highlights the need for greater nuance in thinking about the temporal dimensions of collaboration, since the features outlined above would seem to imply relationships spanning years, decades, or even entire careers. Indeed, many researchers describe their long-term partnerships as evolving after working in a community for many years, rather than as something they set out to do or were required to do as a prerequisite to research.

Moreover, the collaborations described in case studies may not resonate with researchers who have had different experiences. This is a problem that we (and others; see Holton 2009; Shulist 2013) have encountered in reading about 'communities' that are assumed to be both unified and enthusiastic about language development. Saul Schwartz, for example, works in North America with a Chiwere (Siouan) documentation and revitalization project that is supported by some of those for whom Chiwere is a heritage language, but which is controversial among others as a result of language ideological differences, tribal politics, and individual and family affinities and animosities. And Lise Dobrin works with an Arapesh community in a cultural area of Papua New Guinea that has been characterized as 'importing' because of the high value people in this area place on the ability to appropriate objects and practices that have their origins elsewhere. In this cultural context, a movement to resist the shift to a non-local language would actually represent a profound move away from traditional values (Dobrin 2014; see Good 2012:44ff for a similar argument). For fieldworkers who find themselves aligned with only some factions of a broader community (e.g., Cruz & Woodbury 2014; Debenport 2010a; Kroskrity 2014), collaboration will involve linguists in social conflicts that mirror the troubling power dynamics that the approach is supposed to help mitigate. And for those who find themselves working within communities that are indifferent, ambivalent, or otherwise unprepared to take action with respect to their language (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998; Perley 2011), calls for collaboration do little to address how linguists might ethically engage in field research when their specifically language-related services are not in demand.

In other words, the articulation of any one set of common features as essential for doing ethical field research overlooks much of the complexity and diversity of what goes on in particular researcher-community relationships. This is a point of professional discomfort for some, who can feel imposed-upon or guilty when they find that designing their projects around the model being promulgated does not fit their situation or serve their goals (Crippen & Robinson 2013). In light of this discomfort, some authors have tried to acknowledge that "there are no single answers"

when it comes to ethical fieldwork because every research situation presents a unique set of personal, social, and cultural circumstances (Rice 2012:420; see also Bowern & Warner 2015; Czaykowska-Higgins 2009). Others have argued that ethical research is to some extent relative to the specific cultural contexts in which fieldwork takes place (Dobrin 2008, Holton 2009). Nevertheless, the discourse of collaboration in documentary linguistics has become increasingly standardized, presupposing rather than opening up the possibilities for how socially responsible research might be imagined and implemented.

The need for a broader perspective on ethical research is suggested by some of the questions that have been raised in the literature about what community collaboration should entail. At what point in a project should collaboration commence (Leonard & Haynes 2010)? Is it really suitable in all societies (Good 2012)? Is it necessary at all (Crippen & Robinson 2013)? These questions reflect linguists' varied experiences with the interpersonal dimensions of fieldwork, suggesting that the real challenge linguists face is something more complicated than deciding whether or not to collaborate; rather, it is discovering how to engage with speakers and communities in ways that resonate with their cultural values, even though these may be implicit or counterintuitive from the researcher's point of view. As we will argue, addressing this challenge requires us to recognize that the very notion of collaboration embeds within it certain culturally specific assumptions about reciprocity, negotiation, and the meaning and moral valence of categories like 'research,' 'language,' and 'documentation,' which may not translate equally well in all communities. To that extent, as we hope to show, linguists may find useful the anthropological method of *participant observation*, which is designed specifically to deal with the interpersonal nature of field research in the human sciences. Because it ties knowledge production directly to the development of social relationships across difference, participant observation can help documentary linguists think fruitfully about the social approaches they take in their fieldwork, whether these ultimately come to involve formal collaboration or some other form of reciprocity. We believe the notion of participant observation could be a constructive methodological resource for those who are committed to conducting their research in an ethical manner, but who conclude that the standard model of collaboration described above is not a realistic option for them. Formal collaboration need not be regarded as an end in itself; it is only one possibility for field linguists seeking to achieve positive social relations with community interlocutors.

2. Is data really the goal?   Although the literature on collaboration appears to be refining a methodological model for ethical research, we argue that this actually misconstrues what collaboration is. Collaboration is not a method of data collection on par with elicitation, the production of grammaticality judgments, or the experimental manipulation of variables. Instead, in emphasizing collaboration, linguistic fieldworkers seem to be striving for something more general: a way to integrate positive social relations into their research practices.

Linguists involved in collaborative research often struggle to describe and justify their community engagement to skeptical colleagues, who can be quick to dismiss

such activities as 'linguistic social work' as opposed to the real business of scientific research (Newman 1998:11, 2003:6). Graduate students are sometimes advised to postpone more involved forms of community engagement until after they get their degree or get tenure—even by professors who are in principle sympathetic to their aims—on the grounds that collaboration is likely to diminish their academic productivity (see Yamada 2007:258). Perhaps in response to such criticisms, a number of documentary linguists have presented collaboration as a research method that will lead to more or better scholarship, for example by ensuring the richness and hence multifunctionality of the documentary record, minimizing observer effects and interpretive bias, or transferring skills to speakers (Bowern & Warner 2015:76–77; Dwyer 2010; Furbee 2010; Vallejos 2014). We cannot help but observe, however, that these claimed advantages are all subsidiary to the discipline's main scientific goals. Indeed, what impresses us is how often linguists elect to take on collaborative projects *despite the fact* that these present serious challenges that are likely to interfere with, rather than advance, their primary scholarly agendas and careers.

As has often been noted, seriously engaging community interests can lead linguists into activities that exceed their expertise. These include pedagogical activities, like developing writing systems and classroom language lessons, and technological ones, like multimedia development and graphic design (see e.g., Gerdts 2010; Nathan 2004; Speas 2009). They can also lead to outputs that rank rather low on implicit scales of academic value. Here we may think first of dictionaries or text collections, which can be viewed (albeit wrongly) as atheoretical 'compilations,' but these are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the kinds of products communities may desire or need. Young Arapesh townpeople Dobrin works with in Papua New Guinea have asked her to help them develop an interactive kinship chart that they can consult in order to help them know how to appropriately address their elders. Jack Martin (personal communication) once noted to us that what a community he works with really needs is native-language coloring books—not the most compelling addition to a young scholar's tenure file! The Chiwere project Schwartz works with receives numerous requests to translate heritage language words and texts into English, or to calque contemporary English idioms and slogans into heritage language tokens for blogs, t-shirts, grant applications, and tribal programs. Although translation is a highly developed skill, it is a marginally theorized part of documentary practice (though see Evans & Sasse 2007; Foley 2007; Schultze-Berndt 2006; Woodbury 2007), and translation into a major lingua franca is antithetical in some ways to preserving the native language. Of course, from the community's perspective, the value system may be entirely reversed: being able to access a text in English may be more useful to community members than having it written in a heritage language they don't understand. But that is just the point: collaboration can require linguists to make some significant compromises from the perspective of their other professional commitments.[3]

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[3]Bowern & Warner (2015:70–73) maintain that documentary linguists do in fact possess expertise relevant to language revitalization, especially if the scope of revitalization is expanded from "kindergarten primers" to include immersion environments, teacher training, master-apprentice programs, and issues related to "ideological clarification." On some level, whether or not individual linguists possess expertise on these topics depends on their personal career trajectories; for some, helping to develop an immersion program

These compromises can even render invisible linguistic work that would otherwise be academically valued. Erin Debenport's (2010b, 2015) collaborative work on Tiwa, a Pueblo language in the US Southwest, provides a radical example. Due to local language ideologies that forbid the circulation of the language beyond the boundaries of the community, all of her linguistic work is kept strictly within the community and is publicly unavailable. While the community granted her permission to reveal examples of the language to her advisers when she defended her dissertation, these were not to circulate further; what she publishes are ethnographic accounts of the work's sociocultural dimensions. By asking academic communities to count as 'research' a variety of nontraditional outputs, collaborative research presents a challenge to traditional academic values (Schwartz & Lederman 2011:70–71). For example, Jack Martin (personal communication) worked for a number of years on a dictionary that was restricted to tribal members, reviewed only by them, and distributed only through their tribal museum. Because of its ambiguous status as a publication, it took many years before he felt comfortable listing it on his CV. As these scholars found, the time and effort invested in collaborative projects can be challenging to justify as legitimate labor to a wider disciplinary audience that prioritizes theoretical advances over descriptive work, much less community engagement.

To make matters worse, collaborative relationships are notoriously subject to the vicissitudes of community politics, making them unreliable reference points in building a career. As many linguists have found (e.g., Cruz & Woodbury 2014; Czaykowska-Higgins 2009:40, Rice 2006:137), factors like age, kinship, class, and religion can disaggregate communities into competing groups with potentially conflicting attitudes toward language preservation. Collaborative relationships are also dynamic: collaboration presupposes relationships with an extended duration, but over years and decades relationships can change as academics and community partners alike transition to new social positions. Sometimes these changes seem productive, breathing new life and value into old projects as communities take new interest in and ownership over their results and direction (Dobrin & Holton 2013). On the other hand, they can also make language researchers unwelcome in places where they have had congenial working relations for years.

One such example of souring community relationships is found in the work of Mark Awakuni-Swetland, who was adopted into an Omaha family in the 1970s. During the 1990s, he conducted research on Omaha language, history, and culture with the formal permission of the Omaha Tribal Council, and in 1999, he established an Omaha language program at the University of Nebraska with what seemed like overwhelming community support (Awakuni-Swetland 2003). But by 2010, the Omaha tribal government changed their relationship with Awakuni-Swetland. An officeholder on the tribal council accused him of misrepresenting himself as a tribal member, profiting from the language through teaching, grants, and textbooks, and circulating

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may take them even further beyond their comfort zone than coloring books. Whether or not linguists have relevant expertise, the question remains: is that expertise *professional*, in the sense of being recognized by colleagues as a valid and valuable form of disciplinary practice? The answer is currently *no* as Bowern & Warner (2015:73–76) concede: the fact remains that revitalization work must be accomplished "*on top of* the work that is likely to be acknowledged in hiring and tenure decisions" (Robinson & Crippen 2015:87).

the language online without full permission, claims which Awakuni-Swetland and his Omaha family denied. An investigation by the University of Nebraska's Chancellor's Office found the accusations to be without evidence (Perlman 2010). When he came up for tenure, some tribal members lobbied the University's Board of Regents to stop the process, and the tribe's cultural authority demanded damages from the university for institutional racism, commoditizing Omaha heritage without consultation, and theft of cultural and intellectual property. In a press release, they also called for Awakuni-Swetland to "cease and desist" from further work on the language and turn over all research and teaching materials to the Tribe (Abourezk 2010a,b; Omaha Tribal Historical Research Project, Inc. 2010). Debenport (2010a) describes a similar experience: after collaborating for six years with a Tiwa documentation and revitalization program, Debenport suddenly found herself unwelcome in the community when members of the tribal government who were opposed to Tiwa literacy decided to end the project and confiscated materials that she had helped them develop. Cases like these illustrate how community-internal social processes can have unpredictable results for collaborative researchers over the long term.

In light of these kinds of challenges, it seems reasonable to ask why many linguists feel such a strong impetus to collaborate. Our interpretation is that it reflects a growing awareness today that basic linguistic research is, to some degree, motivated by a desire to address the problematic social inequalities behind language shift. The current interest in collaboration cannot be understood without reference to the disciplinary movement to document endangered languages that began in the early 1990s. Responding to the worldwide shift from local to dominant languages, this movement called upon linguists to document, describe, and assist communities in revitalizing endangered languages before their loss makes studying them impossible (Hale et al. 1992). But although the documentation agenda may have gotten its original purchase in linguistics by pointing to language endangerment as a problem of diminishing data for the field, the process of conducting research on endangered languages has drawn linguists into relationships with people who are at various points along the road to language shift because they are experiencing the larger pressures that are well known to lead there: relative poverty, social marginalization, encompassment by dominant political structures, and misrecognition. Since the forces that drive language shift are fundamentally political, economic, and cultural, rather than linguistic, linguists who care about language vitality have begun involving themselves in activities that seek to address the root of the problem, even to the point of focusing their efforts on reducing socioeconomic inequalities or disparities in access to healthcare, rather than on linguistics (Henderson et al. 2014). Dwyer (2010:212) calls collaboration "implicitly activist," and we agree with this characterization. It responds to a question that fieldworkers have been asking themselves: Given that our research requires us to interact with speakers in this precarious situation, how can we do so in a way that does not objectify them and subordinate them in status, hence replicating in microcosm the marginalization that leads the languages we study to become endangered in the first place?

Or to put it somewhat differently, linguists are more aware than ever before that language documentation does indeed involve "linguistic social work." While this term was originally used by Paul Newman (1998, 2003) to question the disciplinary legitimacy of community engagement, we wish to claim for it a more neutral sense: that of establishing and maintaining positive, mutually beneficial social relationships with speakers and other community stakeholders. One way to understand the proliferation of literature on collaboration, with its descriptions of individual projects and celebration of their outcomes, is as a mechanism for translating field linguists' otherwise invisible social labor into something that can be comprehended by existing standards of disciplinary value (e.g., Bowern and Warner 2015:73–74). Developing a native-language coloring book might not be considered a legitimate professional accomplishment, but an article that describes the process of producing such a coloring book in a peer-reviewed academic journal is. From this perspective, the impulse to construe collaboration (along with participatory action research, community-based research, and similar approaches) as a 'method' that improves scientific outcomes makes sense, but perhaps also undermines many documentary linguists' long-term activist goals, since it presupposes and tacitly affirms the placement of documentary and descriptive work at the bottom of the disciplinary hierarchy, and social work nowhere at all. Until we recognize that the motive to collaborate emerges not just from scientific priorities but also from the "'human connection' piece of linguistic fieldwork that is so essential to successful working relationships and yet so rarely acknowledged publicly" (Yamada 2007:270; see also Bowern & Warner 2015:77–78), we will continue to struggle to provide an adequate accounting for the activities we are engaged in to our colleagues and even to ourselves. It seems that documentary and descriptive linguists are looking for a new way—and have a new willingness—to talk about the centrality of social relations in the professional work that they do.

3. Participant observation in linguistics and anthropology In the remainder of this paper, we would like to present the anthropological model of *participant observation* as another possible pathway to establishing positive social relations in particular situations, one that takes the classic questions of collaborative models like who controls the agenda or who benefits from the products to be potentially important, but only secondarily. Collaboration attempts to blur the troubling boundaries between "us" and "them" by empowering community members to themselves become researchers. But, as we observe above (and discuss further below), differences in power and culture between communities and academics cannot always be minimized in this way. Moreover, given that differences in culture and language are what motivate documentary research in the first place, the goal need not be to transcend those differences by achieving mutual agreement or reconciling academic and community values. Instead, we suggest, researchers can work to have positive social relations with community interlocutors *across difference* by trying, in so far as is possible, to understand what good relationships look like from their consultants' perspectives. By probing our experiences of coming to understand and empathize with people whose lives and goals are different from our own, we take the critical first step toward being able to engage

with them on *their* cultural terms. This is not something we are proposing researchers do instead of their linguistic research, but rather as an integral part of it.

It is important to distinguish anthropological from linguistic participant observation, since the two disciplines use the same term with rather different meanings and associations. In linguistics, participant observation is a marginal methodology that is rarely discussed in field methods texts. When it is, however, its primary advertised advantage is to mitigate the observer effects associated with structured elicitation, enabling fieldworkers to record more naturalistic data (Crowley 2007:144; Sakel & Everett 2012:136). In other words, it is meant to let linguists fade into the background while their strategically placed devices record what people would be saying if the fieldworker were not there. Thus, linguistic participant observation has been glossed as "overhearing" (Crowley 2007:142) or "eavesdropping" (Sakel & Everett 2012:136), and for some linguists has even raised concerns about the ethics of clandestine research (Wilson 2012). Not surprisingly, the concern to avoid observer interference also appears in the linguistic literature on collaboration. With regard to a project carried out by teams of native-speaker researchers, Dwyer describes the advantages of the research design as "effectively neutralizing the 'observer's paradox': researchers themselves were local, so their presence at events was minimally disruptive" (2010:204–205). Others have noted the advantages of similar arrangements (Vallejos 2014). Hand in hand with this is an emphasis on training for community members to empower them to do their own language work without having to rely on external support or expertise (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009:25 and many others). If an invisible linguist is good, an absent linguist is even better! So to summarize, participant observation as presented in linguistic field manuals is an activity along the lines of "the observation of participants (by a non-participating researcher)."

Anthropological participant observation is something very different. It involves researchers immersing themselves in native lifeways in order to gain experiential knowledge of what they are studying. Participant observation as practiced in anthropology is that discipline's most central and distinctive method for producing knowledge about social life. As a result of the historical divergence of American anthropology and linguistics in the twentieth century (Agha 2007; Duranti 2003, 2012; Stocking 1992), even anthropological linguists have not generally been exposed to important ideas about the reflexive nature and conduct of fieldwork that are now widely accepted in sociocultural and linguistic anthropology. Rather than considering interaction between fieldworkers and community members to be observer interference, a personal investment in social relationships in the community is taken to be essential for understanding the "native's point of view," the classic goal of sociocultural anthropological fieldwork since Malinowski (1922:25). One standard reference on anthropological methods describes it as "going out and staying out, learning a new language, […] and experiencing the lives of the people you are studying as much as you can. […] Participant observation involves immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly. When it's done right, participant observation turns fieldworkers into instruments of

data collection and data analysis" (Bernard 2006:344). In other words, *participant observation requires fieldworkers to embrace rather than try to mitigate their role as the personal vehicles of research*. Participant observers pay close attention not only to what community interlocutors tell them, but also to what they do not say or would find unsayable, in order to help make their very different 'common sense' explicit: just as speakers are rarely able to articulate the grammatical principles that they have internalized, "'tacit' aspects of culture largely remain outside our awareness or consciousness" but can be uncovered in the course of fieldwork (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:1–2). As this description intimates, while anthropologists participate in local community practices, that does not mean that they 'go native.' They continue to be anthropologists as they contemplate and record their experiences and observations in the field, and as they use their fieldnotes, memories, and embodied knowledge to write ethnographies for academic audiences when they return home.

Anthropological fieldworkers sometimes think of what they are doing as apprenticing themselves to native experts, or they liken themselves to students who take notes as they study under native teachers. This is something linguists can also relate to (see Hill 2006:119–124). Initially, researchers can feel like helpless children dependent on native parents for instruction and care. This is an experience that anthropological and linguistic fieldworkers share; for example, Stebbins (2012:300) assesses her ability to carry out everyday tasks during her linguistic fieldwork in Papua New Guinea as "infantile" and "on par with a local three-year-old"—something the present authors have felt as well. Participant observers put themselves in this kind of subordinate "one down" position (Agar 1996:119) as a way of learning how to participate properly in local social life, which they do as much by getting things wrong and being corrected as they do by getting them right. To the extent that many communities have formal or informal practices for socializing newcomers into the group and recognize a distinct transitional role, participant observers are often "legitimate peripheral participants" in whatever is going on—that is, both their participation and its amateur or unconventional qualities are anticipated, expected, or perhaps even required (Lave & Wenger 1991). Through this process of socialization, anthropologists do not become insiders, but they do not quite remain outsiders either. This contrasts with some linguistic models of collaboration, which tend to present 'outsider linguist' and 'community member insider' as if they were clear and static roles. Cruz & Woodbury (2014) illustrate what they call the "plasticity" of insider/outsider status in discussing their collaborative documentary work on Chatino languages in Mexico. When Cruz, a native speaker linguist, returned to do research in the village where she had grown up but not lived since she was a child, she realized she was not viewed categorically as an "insider" or an "outsider", but "found herself occupying a range of positions along a continuum" depending upon the situation (p. 284). This dynamic and context-dependent process of identification is a hallmark of the participant observer's position, whether he or she is native or not.

To a large degree, participant observers' roles in the community are not under their own control: they are placed in roles that make sense to their hosts. The implications of this for researchers' activities are significant because different expectations attach

to different social roles. Anthropological participant observers use their experience of others' reactions to their behavior to ask themselves questions like Stebbins does: "[W]hat does it mean to be a nice woman in Papua New Guinea?" (2012:314). Depending on local gender norms, the answer could be very different from what it means to be a 'good man.' Or, to take a classic anthropological example, a 'good father' (or son) can be very different from a 'good uncle' (or nephew) depending on whether the kinship system follows matrilineal or patrilineal descent (Radcliffe-Brown 1952). We may expect different interpretations to attach to 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in similar ways. Part of the challenge for participant observers is to figure out what roles (both elected and imposed) they are playing, and to see how it feels and how others react when they try to act accordingly. 'Acting accordingly' does not always mean doing what is expected. Fieldworkers can try to resist roles they are uncomfortable with by acting in a way that is incompatible with those roles. For example, Stebbins (2012:303) attempts to resist the role of *misis* 'white woman' in Papua New Guinea. (One of the most difficult experiences in fieldwork can be realizing that you are ascribed a role like 'wealthy foreigner' or 'colonizer' that is at variance with your self-image.) But before they can begin to manage the significance of their actions in relation to their hosts, participant observers must understand and internalize the local cultural categories and standards by which those actions are being interpreted. In other words, in order to know *what* to do, it is necessary for participant observers to understand *who* they are to their hosts.

So far, we have presented anthropological participant observation primarily as a mindset characterized by curiosity, empathy, and a certain degree of self-abnegation: it is not always easy, particularly for those who occupy social roles as teachers and experts in their own societies, to embrace the reversal of roles in the field that participant observation requires. Sympathetic readers may wonder how, in practical terms, linguists can operationalize participant observation as a method in their fieldwork—after all, don't anthropologists undergo years of specialized training to prepare them to be good participant observers? Perhaps surprisingly, this is not quite the case: the practicalities of participant observation, and the related question of whether the method can be taught to students prior to fieldwork itself, are controversial, with the historical lack of formal methods training in sociocultural anthropology (Mead 1959) contributing to a mystification of fieldwork as "the ethnographer's magic" (Malinowski 1922:6). For example, nothing could seem more basic to implementing participant observation than applying a writing instrument to the pages of a notebook, but there is no consensus among anthropologists even on something as fundamental as what fieldnotes are, how to write them, and whether they should be archived (Sanjek 1990). Linguists interested in reading more about participant observation could begin with Malinowski's (1922:1–25) famous programmatic statement or more recent references on anthropological methods (e.g., Bernard 2006; DeWalt & DeWalt 2011), but in a sense there is no need. What participant observation affirms above all is that the most relevant learning happens not in the classroom but 'out there' in the field through interactions with those who are hosting the research. Applying participant observation shifts the question from 'What do I think is appro-

priate?' or 'What does the literature on collaborative 'best practices' or my IRB say is ethical?' to 'What constitutes good relationships according to those I am interacting with in the field?'

We have written this article because we believe that incorporating participant observation into long-term linguistic fieldwork could enhance rather than disrupt established practices and values in language documentation. Note that for linguists to employ traditionally anthropological methods to calibrate their social relations in research does not necessarily imply that they will start including material on kinship terminologies and other stereotypically 'cultural' topics in their documentation as a way of making their results useful to anthropological audiences (see Franchetto 2006:186–188). Since field linguists are routinely engaged in social interactions with language communities, they are already in a position to systematically incorporate participant observation into their methodological repertoires. Of course, linguists are already engaging in a form of participant observation when they learn the language they are studying (or whatever language is in use in the community) and use it with the people around them (Chelliah & de Reuse 2011:430), or when they engage in the various activities that Guérin & Lacrampe (2010) gloss as "social integration." We do not see participant observation as something that would require extra training (though for students who plan on doing linguistic fieldwork, following an ethnographic methods course as a part of their education certainly could not hurt); nor need it replace a specifically structural-linguistic research agenda. Rather, we see it as providing a new, more adequate conceptual and methodological foundation for the investment linguists are already making in their fieldwork relationships.

4. Participant observation, collaboration, and social relations across cultural difference In recent years, a number of scholars have proposed that documentary linguists incorporate ethnographic methods in their fieldwork (Ahlers 2009; Childs et al. 2014; Dobrin 2008; Dobrin & Berson 2011; Harrison 2005; Hill 2006). Here, our emphasis has been on how the ethnographic method of participant observation can help documentary linguists establish positive social relationships with language communities. While not synonymous with 'collaboration' as linguists have tended to conceive of it, an inherently intersubjective method like participant observation can help facilitate collaboration. Note that we do not say 'subjective' method. In participant observation, the way one person's thoughts and actions come to bear upon another's is shaped in part by how the other person reacts to them. Virtually all of social life is intersubjective in this way. For purposes of this paper, we are being agnostic about whether language itself is similarly socially rooted. Linguistic anthropologists would argue that it is: Jane Hill (2006), for example, proposes intertwining documentary linguistics with an ethnography of language in order to capture the interplay between language structure, language use, and culture. "If we are to succeed in documentation," she writes, "we must incorporate a cultural and ethnographic understanding of language into the very foundations of our research" (p. 113). Similarly, Childs et al. (2014) propose the use of ethnographic methods not only as a way to help move the focus of documentation from ancestral codes to the social contexts

of language choice and use in multilingual communities; they also see it as a "prerequisite to culturally sensitive language planning and maintenance activities" (p. 171). But the intersubjective approach to field relationships we are advocating is also compatible with taking a formal approach to the analysis of whatever linguistic materials are collected.

For linguists who see no need for collaboration, it is perfectly possible to conduct field-based research without long-term engagement. Paying consultants or engaging in forms of reciprocity that do not center on language itself may still be highly meaningful and fulfilling for community interlocutors: language is not the only currency of positive reciprocity (Rice 2011). Some have suggested that language revitalization efforts have little need for linguists' professional expertise at all (Speas 2009). Even research that involves initiating contact, eliciting a word list, and then parting ways without expectations of future interaction may not seem negatively 'linguist-centered' from the perspective of a community whose interests lie elsewhere, and who feel they have been treated respectfully and fairly compensated for their effort and knowledge. While finding out what kinds of reciprocities are most culturally appropriate is something that usually takes time—often months, and very often years—even linguists who are unable to conduct long-term fieldwork can educate themselves about the societies they are planning to work in by reading ethnographic studies that have been written about them, noting especially those details that bear on exchange, interactional norms, knowledge transmission, and moral relations. Culture, like language, is always changing, and people may or may not live today in the same way that earlier ethnographies describe for their ancestors, but there are often continuities in practices and values that remain culturally significant and detectable over time, if in an altered form.

But for linguists who are committed to linguistic social work, we believe that participant observation offers a more productive path to meeting the challenge of determining what constitutes positive social relations than proposing directly to negotiate relative benefits, since these may not be the key issue at stake for their consultants. Indeed, one great advantage of participant observation is that it enables us to acknowledge that there are innumerable possibilities for constructing our research relations as partnerships in which community interests play a central—and centrally valued—role. After all, in studies based on fieldwork, the data is *always* to some extent collaboratively constructed through an interactional process in which all parties are moving things forward according to their own wishes and understandings while simultaneously responding in light of their interlocutors' moves.[4]

It should also be recognized that express negotiation, which is fundamental to the notion of formal collaboration, is itself a culturally specific style of interaction that

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[4]For example, when Dobrin mentioned to one of her Arapesh consultants that there were only a few minutes left on the tape they were using, he took the opportunity to record something of profound personal importance to him—a brief narrative performing the newly modern religious understanding he had achieved as a result of his contact with Dobrin and her husband. Even though Dobrin can be heard playing the role of linguist on the recording (and the recording now constitutes an instance of language documentation preserved in the Arapesh Grammar and Digital Language Archive), close analysis reveals that the speaker was also assimilating her interruptions and questions into the structure of his own speech (Dobrin 2012).

assumes that participants can and do say what they mean in an effort to clarify and reconcile differences. Yet not all people everywhere make the same connection Westerners do between overt speech and inner thoughts, intentions, and desires (see, e.g., Keane 2002, Weiner 1984) or use direct negotiation as a way to achieve consensus leading to concerted action (see, e.g., Brison 1992). We cannot assume that everyone will have the metalinguistic terms to objectify their ideas about language use, or that from the community's perspective the 'project' is the culturally appropriate unit of activity to focus on in discussions about such matters (Jensen 2012). As Edward Sapir (1927:121) long ago pointed out, the "deep-seated cultural patterns" that shape human behavior are "not so much capable of conscious description." For this reason, participant observation can help us expand the reach of our cross-cultural partnerships beyond what is expressly said and into the realm of what is felt.

Of course, we are not suggesting that fieldworkers disregard what their consultants say, but rather pointing out that when working across cultures, taking our interlocutors' discourse at face value out of respect for their autonomy makes it easy to misread the expressive, non-referential, and metalinguistic dimensions of their speech. Furthermore, not all cultural values are amenable to discursive representation since "tacit knowledge, the things we come to know without even knowing that we know them [...] is hard to put into words" (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:172). As a result, there are often significant disjunctures between discourse and practice in language revitalization, where what is said in one context may not seem consistent with what is then said, done, or felt at another time or place (Meek 2010). The dramatic cancellation of revitalization programs launched with initial enthusiasm, for example, is a persistent source of confusion and frustration for academic researchers and local language activists alike (Schwartz & Dobrin 2016). Her fieldwork on the Fort Apache reservation in Arizona led Nevins to write that language projects "were often received ambivalently and often became the target of controversy, despite the fact that nearly everyone voices concern about keeping Apache language going" (2013:14). This irony was not lost on tribal members, some of whom observed, after a promising project to develop online Apache language learning materials was shut down, "everyone says they want to save the language but when you try something, they don't want it" (2013:14). Similarly, Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) note with regard to Southeast Alaska that there is "a broad gap and disparity" between people's "verbally expressed goals on the one hand (generally advocating language and culture preservation) and unstated but deeply felt emotions and anxieties on the other (generally advocating or contributing to abandonment)" (p. 62). And as Leonard & Haynes (2010) write, "in some cultural contexts, particular issues may be important but not openly discussed, so 'listening' may also [have to] include actively observing what is not talked about, and developing culturally appropriate ways to address these issues" (p. 287).

During fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, for example, Dobrin noticed a discrepancy between villagers' elaborate talk supporting a vernacular language preschool in the community and the failure of parents to actually send their children to the preschool when it was open. With ethnographic understanding developed through her participation in many different aspects of village life, she came to appreciate that

the villagers valued the preschool not only because of its educational functions, but also because they hoped it would draw the attention of outsiders, who would then take an active role in supporting the project. Once it became clear that the school was to be funded and operated by the villagers alone, their interest in the project dissipated (Dobrin 2008).

During his fieldwork in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, Schwartz noticed that many pedagogical materials found ambivalent receptions among significant portions of the three federally-recognized tribes for whom Chiwere is a heritage language. Community members would explain why existing materials were inadequate for their purposes by saying, "Ioway and Otoe are different languages" or, "I can't read the spelling." The community linguists, language activists, and educators that Schwartz worked with attributed these views to ignorance and believed that they could be dispelled through education. They were frustrated by those who were slowing down the progress of language revitalization by "always wanting to do it their own way" and thus "constantly reinventing the wheel." Over time, Schwartz came to realize that claims that Ioway and Otoe (mutually intelligible Chiwere dialects) were different languages and that certain orthographies were unreadable were based not on ignorance but rather were polite ways of disaffiliating from others and the materials they produced, and reflected a general preference for indirect communication regarding sensitive interpersonal matters. Rather than seeing such factionalism as counterproductive, he came to appreciate that controversies about language revitalization reflected disagreement not about the value of language, but about the sources of legitimate authority (Schwartz 2015; see also Nevins 2013).

Finally, collaboration presupposes that all parties at least have compatible understandings of concepts like research, language, culture, and preservation, when in fact researchers and host communities can have radically different understandings of all of these (Dobrin & Berson 2011:196–199, Schwartz & Dobrin 2016). An impressive example of this is presented in Becquelin et al.'s (2008) description of the uneasy interface between their own documentary work and indigenous practices and discourses of 'language' and 'culture' among Trumai Indians in the Upper Xingu area of Brazil. In some ways, Trumai people strategically embrace the wider Brazilian society's "folklorized" view of native cultures as "collective patrimony" (2008:49), which would make the documentation of myths seem like a reasonable objective for a collaborative research project. But Trumai myth narratives embed their speakers' commentary on current events, and what the researchers found was that Trumai audiences listening to recorded myths would listen past their mythic content to interpret the clues they held about what was happening in the village at the time the recordings were made. The researchers eventually realized that "when listening to [myth] recordings, what [they and the Trumai were] listening to is not the same object" (2008:55). They also found that the collaboratively produced documentation was (from the researchers' perspective) often lost or destroyed, making them realize that distributing archival records for community curation simply "does not match the way the Trumai live their culture" (2008:56). Reflecting on their work in this community, Becquelin et al. (2008:53) had to wonder whether "fruitful collaboration between researchers

and the native community in the field of linguistic/cultural documentation is really possible."

While participant observation may sometimes lead a fieldworker to decide that formal collaboration could be productively implemented in a given research situation, it can also help us see how fieldwork that is not strictly collaborative can nonetheless involve positive social relationships, *even though the results may be counterintuitive from the researcher's own cultural perspective*. Nevins (2013) reaches such a conclusion after reflecting on a series of collaborative language maintenance projects she was involved in with the Fort Apache reservation community. Despite following what is "now best practice in language documentation and maintenance: collaborative projects that involve coordinating researcher and community goals, that accord expert status to indigenous vernacular authorities and that provide access to formal university training for local language advocates," she found that the work "still occasioned push-back and interception" (p. 224). In light of these experiences, Nevins proposes to readjust "the definition of research relationships" from a model based on "contract around common objectives" to one of "reciprocity between persons whose objectives are understood to be different, or equivocal" (p. 224–5). The alternative model of engagement across difference that she proposes grows out of her analysis of talk at an Apache Sunrise ceremony. There the leader "casts his act of speaking in terms analogous to the act of giving the prepared food" where "[a]longside gifts of food, gifts of words are offered in reciprocal exchanges between families who otherwise stand to one another as different, or other" (p. 225). Nevins asks, "Could language expert and community participation be modeled on [such distinctively Apache] reciprocal 'gifts of words,'" thereby setting "a new precedent for mutual recognition" (p. 225)? Reading back over Apache texts, both those she recorded and those recorded by a previous generation of researchers, she finds evidence that this is indeed the frame that documented speakers were attempting to use (p. 122–145). She therefore proposes to shift from a model of collaboration to a model of reciprocity as "a frame for recasting language research and language programs in more […] openended terms" (p. 226). While Nevins draws on a distinctively Apache conception of "gifts of words," reciprocity may also be a salient model for language research in other communities where instances of speaking can at times be understood as acts of exchange (e.g., Slotta 2012).

The disorienting incongruity between academic and local understandings illustrated by the Trumai and Apache cases just described is not an isolated phenomenon: for linguists and community members alike, fieldwork provides an opportunity to move diverse agendas forward across cultures, and in the process partial miscommunication and low-level conflict are probably not the exception but the norm. Our emphasis on the challenges to collaboration throughout this paper is an effort to acknowledge that cultural differences cannot always be overcome through direct negotiation. Making an effort to understand and respond to the culturally particular concerns of those with whom we work will not always make for an easy or efficient path to successful language revitalization or documentation, but it can expand the possibilities for both of these over time.

This is something we have experienced in our own research. Dobrin's participant observation in an Arapesh village in Papua New Guinea led her to conclude that because of the particular way in which good social relations are conceived of and lived by people in that community, the most helpful thing she could do to support the villagers' positive sense of self-worth—and hence their vernacular language in a situation of advanced language shift—was to intensify her engagement with the community in material exchange (Dobrin 2008). Although this conclusion originally sat uneasily with her own cultural assumption that empowerment would follow from autonomy and self-determination, she decided that for her to take the lead in language-related activities would not be received as a neo-colonial imposition but a welcome form of recognition, as indeed it has been. Schwartz, hoping to write an ethnography of language preservation for his dissertation, got involved in a community-based Chiwere documentation and revitalization project in which he helped his elderly community partner format dictionary entries, develop pedagogical materials, and support their family's language nest. While Schwartz appreciated the technical benefits of programs like ELAN and FLEx, his collaborator had been working on the dictionary in Microsoft Word before he met Schwartz, and he was sensitive to perceived interference in the project due to controversies surrounding language preservation in the community. When Schwartz brought up the possibility of using FLEx for the dictionary, his collaborator said that he had tried that program in the past but preferred the more intuitive interface of Word, which allowed him to work on his own and customize individual entries. As one of the last semi-speakers of his language, this sense of control over the project and the technology was exceedingly important to him. Through participant observation, Schwartz came to see how working together in the speaker's preferred medium was more respectful and empowering than trying to persuade him of the advantages of FLEx or transferring the materials to a program that he had already tried and rejected. Even though it meant violating linguistic best practices, Schwartz chose to adopt a 'one down' or learner's position, deferring above all to the relationship, rather than the data format.

In other words, doing what is necessary to support positive social relationships across cultural difference can lead to some awkward results: Is it interfering for an outside linguist to administer and prompt discussion on a social networking site for members of a New Guinea language community, as Dobrin now does? Isn't the longevity and portability of the Chiwere documentation threatened by Schwartz's decision to follow his community partner's software preferences? At some level the answer to both of these questions must be yes. But following our community interlocutors' leads even to counterintuitive ends can also provide new openings for engagement, language development, and research. Dobrin's positive connection with the village led her eventually to be welcomed by the substantial urban village diaspora, a community for whom (unlike the villagers) language loss is felt to be a serious problem undermining cultural continuity. She is now working with some of them to develop language revitalization resources focused on the kinship system and helping them to preserve prized items of cultural heritage (Dobrin & Holton 2013). She also worked with members of the diaspora community to bring a village elder to visit her

in the U.S. to serve as a native speaker consultant in a linguistic field methods course at her university. While he was there, he worked with texts that Dobrin had collected in the village, providing Tok Pisin translations that would make them accessible to his community. In Schwartz's case, one result of his positive relationship with his community partner was that he found himself taking on a more active role in managing interactions between the project, funding agencies, and tribal members over time. When his collaborator asked him to write a grant to fund a new corpus project to digitize, transcribe, and annotate legacy recordings, Schwartz arranged for part of the project budget to be used to hire a new student assistant whose responsibilities would include transferring data between Word and ELAN. Thus, unlike the dictionary, the corpus project is able to accommodate Schwartz's collaborator's preferences while also adhering to linguistic best practices. In both of these cases, a conscious investment in 'linguistic social work' contributed to the development of positive social relations from the perspective of our community interlocutors, and these in turn led to follow-on opportunities that could not have been foreseen, let alone negotiated, at the initiation of the research.

5. Conclusion   Discussions of collaboration in contemporary documentary linguistics have revolved around a very particular vision of what ethical research entails. In this paper, we have tried to open up the possibilities for field linguists who, for whatever reason, may not be in a position to collaborate on this model, but who are still concerned about their social responsibilities to their host communities and the individuals who become their consultants, teachers, friends, and even kin.

It is not only an awareness of power differences that serves as the impetus for linguists to engage in collaborative research. Experiences of traversing cultural differences can also spark a desire to establish mutually rewarding relationships with those whose languages and lifeways we are professionally dedicated to understanding, as these challenge our assumptions, enrich our knowledge, and transform us personally. But cultural difference is also where collaboration encounters its limits. The theme of 'collaborative methods' is so prominent in the current literature on the ethics of linguistic field research that it has come to seem synonymous with ethical research itself. But as we have tried to show, collaboration is not really a method, much less a generalizable model of ethical research. Whereas an ideal of collaborative 'best practices' promotes an established set of features for ethical research, the anthropological method of participant observation offers a means for discovering what constitutes positive relations according to members of a host community, and hence gives fieldworkers a way to determine what *practices* will actually serve *best* in a given research situation, whether this ultimately leads them to pursue formal collaboration, engage in personal forms of reciprocity, conclude that a shared understanding of research goals is not really achievable, or something else as yet unimaginable. By participating with intention in an irreducibly social process that does not presuppose or impose any one set of ideas about how good interactions will unfold, linguists can learn how to engage in those ways that are most meaningful to a community, in its own terms.

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