

Introduction: Documenting Variation in Endangered Languages

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The papers in this special publication are the result of presentations and follow-up dialogue on emergent and alternative methods to documenting variation in endangered, minority, or otherwise under-represented languages. Recent decades have seen a burgeoning interest in many aspects of language documentation and field linguistics (Chelliah & de Reuse 2010, Crowley & Thieberger 2007, Gippert et al 2006, Grenoble 2010, Newman & Ratliff 2001, Sakel & Everett 2012, Woodbury 2011).¹ There is also a great deal of material dealing with language variation in major languages (Bassiouny 2009, Eckert 2000, Eckert & Rickford 2001, Hinskens 2005, Labov 1972a, 1972b, 1994, 2001, 2006, 2012, Murray & Simon 2006, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2005).

In contrast, intersections of language variation in endangered and minority languages are still few in number. Yet examples of those few cases published on the intersection of language documentation and language variation reveal exciting potentials for linguistics as a discipline, challenging and supporting classical models, creating new models and predictions. For instance, Stanford's study of Sui (China) (2009) demonstrates that while socio-economic class in indigenous communities is un-illuminating, clan is a useful predictor of lexical variation. Likewise, phonological variation (Clarke 2009) may be more productively observed across different territorial groups in Innu (Canada), highlighting the role of "covert hierarchy" as a social factor. Other traditional variables like age and sex have also been re-considered, as in K'iche' (Guatemala, Romero 2009), where males are shown to avoid use of stigmatized phonological forms to a greater extent than females, in contrast to findings from American English (Labov 2001).

With these initial findings in mind, there is still great potential for further discoveries and discussion. From January 7-10 2016 at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in Washington, D.C., the Committee on Endangered Languages and their Preservation (CELP) held a symposium that included oral presentations that articulate general issues, specific examples and potential consequences of variationist methods applied in language documentation scenarios, followed by a panel discussion. The presentations were followed by poster presentations of case studies. All participants were invited to elaborate on the following questions:

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- What *additional* linguistic and social factors beyond those traditionally surveyed (e.g. gender, age, geographic location, socio-economic categorization) influence variation?
- Can variation be successfully documented in extremely endangered languages (i.e., is there a minimal population in which to observe or quantify variation)?
- How is variation studied in more or less fluent communities, and are less fluent speech communities a valid sample in comparison to that of a so-called ‘ancestral code’ (Woodbury 2011)?
- What is the role (if any) of a ‘standard’ or ‘prestige’ dialect in endangered or minority communities?
- How should the study of variation in heritage speech communities be carried out?
- What is the role of the *lingua-franca* or the dominant/majority languages in accounting for variation?
- What relationship is there between grammar-writing and analysis of variation?
- What methods and procedures are best suited to documenting variation in endangered, marginalized and under-documented communities?

This present collection includes seven contributions that grew out of this symposium and from subsequent conversations and interaction between the contributors and organizers. The first contribution in this publication, by Sali Tagliamonte, provides an account for integrating sociolinguistic methods used to investigate and document a variety of English dialects to endangered language documentation and field linguistics. Tagliamonte draws parallels between sociolinguistic fieldwork and the documentation of endangered languages by illustrating morpho-syntactic and discourse-pragmatic variation in Toronto English dialects and shows how dialect data can contribute to historical and comparative linguistics. The paper highlights the fact that as is common in endangered language documentation, sociolinguistic fieldwork equally makes an effort to provide a lasting record for the community and closely collaborates with community members. Moreover, Tagliamonte emphasizes the importance of collaboration across disciplines, as insights from sociolinguistic fieldwork can benefit researchers working on endangered language documentation.

Naomi Nagy examines variation from a generational perspective in heritage language speakers in indigenous and in diaspora communities. Her contribution describes aspects of the Heritage Language Variation and Change Project in Toronto, contrasting a “truly” endangered language (Faetar) to a less clearly endangered language (Heritage Italian). She compares Homeland and Heritage patterns, specifically, null subject patterns, to better understand the processes of language variation and change in lesser-studied varieties. The results of this comparison indicate that neither heritage language exhibits the simplification anticipated for small languages in contact with a majority language.

Katie Drager, Bethany Kaleialohapau‘ole Chun Comstock, and Hina Puamohala Kneubuhl turn to the growing Hawaiian speech community where phonetic variation is evident across fluent and semi-fluent speakers. They provide an analysis of phonetic variation in the word *kēia*, meaning ‘this’, examining the social, linguistic, and probabilistic factors that constrain the variation. Their methods include analysis of older recorded interviews with native-speakers. The observed variation has implications for linguists, particularly to models of speech production and planning, but also for Hawaiian revitalization efforts and the resources associated with those

efforts. With a better understanding of this variation in hand, the authors have created an educational website open to any interested user, that describes the factors and has audio exemplars.

Amalia Horan Skilton presents a case study on dialect contact in Máihiki (Tukanoan, Peru). She argues that the outcomes of dialect mixing in this speech community can be understood only through a fine-grained analysis centering the dialectal composition of the communities of practice to which speakers belonged in early life, with traditional categories used in most variationist analyses, such as age and gender, being less informative. Her study also reveals striking similarities with those described in classic variationist literature. Like urban English speakers, Máihiki speakers attach less indexical value to morphosyntactic than to phonological variation, they also engage in indexically motivated style-shifting.

John Mansfield and James Stanford examine three key methodological challenges that currently complicate variationist research in documentation, namely community engagement, variable identification, and innovative approaches to conducting sociolinguistic research in field settings that move beyond standard or traditional practices. They also present practical solutions to these challenges by drawing from insights and examples from their own prior research with Australian languages and indigenous languages of China. Ultimately, Mansfield and Stanford argue that indigenous languages are important for advancing sociolinguistic theory: beyond being a mere 'footnote', they are important as a 'focus' of further practical and analytical developments in this field and in the larger linguistics field as a whole.

Maya Ravindranath Abtahian and Conor Quinn zero in on the relationship between linguistic insecurity and language shift highlighting the importance of documenting variation in endangered languages and addressing the community's perception of variation. The authors discuss three types of linguistic insecurity, including a) insecurity of speakers who suffered punishment for speaking their language, b) insecurity of young speakers who may be less fluent than older speakers, and 3) insecurity of community members whose identity is questioned because they are non-speakers. They emphasize they need to include the documentation of dialectal variation and variation occurring within a community in order to validate these varieties and thus decrease linguistic insecurity.

Kristine Hildebrandt and Shunfu Hu consider "modified spatiality" as it aligns with speaker-reported attitudes and multilingual practices amidst recent and ongoing socio-economic and population changes in the Manang District of Nepal. Their study reveals that variation in self-reported attitudes and practices across these four languages can be explained as much with adjusted spatial factors (labeled 'social space') as with traditional social factors. These 'social spaces' include a modified version of Euclidean-type linear distance to account for temporal foot or motorbike travel distances between groups of communities; distance and access to a newly built motor road in the area; proximity to the District headquarters; and, a regionally popular social-psychological divide that groups District residents into "upper" vs. "lower" regions.

Based on the body of work presented in this special publication, many new or re-formulated research questions are able to be asked (and answered), and will provide fertile ground for further exploring and understanding variation in endangered languages or small language communities.

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