

Documentary Linguistics Workshop (DocLing) 2016: A Reflection

Yanti

Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia

The Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA) at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS), in collaboration with Endangered Language (EL) Training, conducted a Documentary Linguistics (DocLing) Workshop from 2008 through 2016. I had the opportunity to attend DocLing 2016, which was hosted at the institute from February 8 through 13, 2016. This paper shares my experience from DocLing 2016 and presents my reflection on the program.

Keywords: language documentation, collaboration, reflection, workshop

1. Introduction
2. Overview of DocLing 2016 workshop
3. Zooming in sessions in DocLing 2016
4. Personal reflection
5. Epilogue

1. Introduction

Language documentation is a subfield of linguistics which has grown very rapidly in this decade. Language documentation emerged as endangerment of the world's languages became a serious concern. In recent years, language documentation has become not only an interest of those who are concerned about language endangerment, but also of those who are working in all areas of linguistics. Linguists in general started to be aware that linguistic theories cannot be generalized based on a few well-known languages, such as English, German, French, etc. or on limited data based entirely on elicitation. Primary data collected through carefully planned and well-conducted documentation of various languages would also be useful to serve as the empirical foundation for the development of linguistic theories. For instance, this is the position taken by Himmelmann (2006: 1), who defines language documentation as “a field of linguistic inquiry and practice in its own right which is primarily concerned with the compilation and preservation of linguistic primary data and interfaces between primary

data and various of types of analyses based on these data.”

In 2013, a documentation workshop was hosted collaboratively by the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA) and Udayana University in Bali. I participated in the workshop to share with others the practical experience I had gotten from my own work in language documentation (Yanti 2010; Yanti, Tadmor, Cole and Hermon 2015). I came to realize that providing language documentation training to members of language communities was an effective way to empower them in documenting their own languages and to ensure the sustainability of the activity. Since then, I have been actively collaborating with the ILCAA group to give documentary workshops hosted in various places in Indonesia, such as Bali, Jambi, Samarinda, and Kupang (see Jukes, Shiohara and Yanti, this volume).

After lecturing in several workshops, I realized that what I shared in those events was mainly based on my field experience in language documentation, and I had never been to a structured and professionally organized language documentation workshop. Therefore, in one of my email exchanges with Asako Shiohara from ILCAA, I expressed my interest in participating in the documentary workshop that ILCAA was hosting in February 2016. Asako Shiohara then invited me to participate in the workshop.

This paper aims to share my experience during DocLing 2016 and to present my reflection on the program. Section 2 briefly presents an overview of DocLing 2016. Section 3 zooms in on the sessions in the workshop. Section 4 shares my personal reflection on the program and Section 5 is the epilogue of the paper.

2. Overview of DocLing 2016 workshop

DocLing 2016 was hosted on February 8–13, 2016 at ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. The workshop aimed “to provide methodological and technical training in various aspects of language documentation research, including audio and video recording, data analysis, metadata, data management, data mobilization, archiving and research ethics” (<http://lingdy.aacore.jp/en/activity/docling.html>).

As a series organized collaboratively by ILCAA and Endangered Languages (EL) Training group, DocLing 2016 presented four of the main speakers from EL Training: Peter K. Austin, David Nathan, Anthony Jukes, and Sonja Riesberg; as well as three ILCAA scholars who have ample experience in documenting minority languages: John Bowden, Toshihide Nakayama, and Hideo Sawada.

The program covered a wide range of topics which are essential for those who are interested in working on language documentation projects. These topics were presented in the forms of lectures, discussion forums, and group projects. The early sessions of the workshop mainly consisted of lectures, and covered topics like “an introduction to language documentation”, “methods, materials and genres”, “mobilization: audience research and design”, “ethics”, “data management and archiving”, “audio”, “software”,

as well as “still and moving images”. Discussion forums allowed the lecturers and participants to exchange their thoughts and experience about “roles, languages, and communities”, as well as “documentary theory and methods”. Some last sessions were devoted to group projects.

To provide the participants with a real sense of language documentation fieldwork, three of the participants whose native language was not known by the other participants were invited to serve as language consultants. The consultants speak different languages spoken in Indonesia. The first language consultant was Dominikus Tauk, whose native language is Helong, a language spoken in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. The second one was Hesti Widyawati Wieringa, who speaks Javanese, a language which is spoken by more than 80 million people (Simons and Fennig 2017). Finally, I was the third language consultant (Yanti, a native speaker of Jambi Malay spoken in Jambi City, Sumatra). Each of these speakers worked with several other participants in a group on projects based on the speakers’ respective languages.

3. Zooming in sessions in DocLing 2016

The six-day DocLing 2016 was a resource for those who were interested in documenting languages. The workshop presented both theoretical and practical aspects of language documentation, from planning to dissemination.

Some sessions were devoted to teaching the participants basic knowledge of language documentation. These sessions mainly consisted of lectures and covered topics such as what language documentation is, what it is concerned with, and why language documentation is important. In addition, topics like methods of collecting data, what materials to collect, what ethical issues one may encounter when doing language documentation, and what should be considered before starting a language documentation project were also discussed.

Some other sessions were designed to teach more practical and technical issues in language documentation, such as equipment for making audio and video recordings, how to make good recordings, software for data annotation, data management, and archiving. In addition to lecturing, the instructors showed the participants various types of equipment, such as audio and video recorders, microphones, tripods, etc. The use of software for data annotation and for making documentation products (e.g. dictionaries), however, was not practiced much unless the participants needed help for their group project.

Finally, some last sessions were allocated for group projects and involved participants’ concrete and active participation in conducting a so-called language documentation project. The participants were divided into three groups and each group worked with one language consultant.

In what follows, I will highlight the nature of the group project which the participants needed to work on. As the language consultant in a group working on Jambi Malay,

my native language, I worked with four other participants. They were Akiko Tokunaga, Linjing Li, Yuko Morokuma, and Norifumi Kurosima. Our group decided to make a video containing a story told in Jambi Malay, my first language. The video would have subtitles in three languages: Jambi Malay, English, and Japanese.

To work on the project, we could use any resources available at the ILCAA, including the audio recorder, microphone, and the well-equipped recording studio. The use of the studio was really a privilege for us. The lecturers were available to help if any group needed assistance or to discuss problems. Our group members worked together and applied what we learned from the workshop in conducting our project. What was coincidentally unique about our group was that each member seemed to have his/her own pre-assigned roles. I told the story in Jambi Malay, edited the audio recording using Audacity software, and provided the Jambi Malay and English texts for subtitles.¹ Norifumi Kurosima was responsible for recording me telling the story in the studio and translated the English text into Japanese. Yuko Morokuma is very talented in drawing, and, thus, she was the one who prepared the illustrations in the video using Firealpaca software.² Linjing Li was in charge of putting together and adjusting all the illustrations and the audio recording to produce the video, as well as taking pictures for documentation. Last but not least, Akiko Tokunaga inserted the subtitles in three languages on the video. She was also the one who uploaded the video to YouTube.³

It was not only our group which produced an outcome from the training. The group working with Dominikus Tauk, produced a website containing information about Helong.⁴ In addition, the group working with Hesti Widyawati Wieringa, made a power point presentation about *Bebek Ayu* (Lit. ‘pretty duck’).⁵ We were all very pleased with what we produced in such limited time.

4. Personal reflection

The DocLing 2016 workshop provided the participants with a plentitude of materials and information about language documentation. The workshop combined lectures, discussions, and group work, and these activities made the workshop interesting and lively. Although I had some prior experience in doing language documentation, I found that my experience as a participant and a language consultant at the same time was still invaluable.

My personal reflection on my participation in the workshop resulted in my reaching two main realizations. The first realization is about language documentation in general and the second one is about the documentary workshop, especially in the context of

¹ The Audacity software can be downloaded from <http://www.audacityteam.org>

² The Firealpaca software can be downloaded from <http://firealpaca.com/en>

³ Online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByOjvNI-LmY>, accessed on 2016-12-19.

⁴ Online at <http://www.el-training.org/outcomes/docling2016/helong/>, accessed on 2016-12-19.

⁵ Online at http://www.el-training.org/docs/docling2016/2016-02-13.dogling2016.Presentation%20Slides_Group.3.pdf, accessed on 2016-12-19.

Indonesia.

With respect to language documentation in general, I would like to make four main points.⁶

a. Planning is important

Planning is the earliest and crucial stage in language documentation. The planning stage in language documentation includes, among other things, setting the goals of the project, deciding on who will collaborate on the project, what funding resources and other resources are available, setting the time frame for the project, and deciding what kind of data are going to be collected, etc.

Before we decided to make a video as the goal of our project, we considered the resources and the time we had and what kind of project might seem useful and realistic to carry out. Then, we decided that we would make a video and started to discuss issues, such as what the contents of the video should be, who would be the target audience, how would the video be accessed by the audience later, what contributions each member of group could provide, the process that our group would go through in making the video, etc.

The planning we carried out was really important as it helped us focus on our goal and it served as guidance about what to do to reach the goal, and how to find a solution to any problems we might encounter. When we started to make the audio recording, for example, we were not sure which microphone to use and how far it should be located from the speaker. We tried two microphones and decided to use the stereo one. We also had to adjust the distance of the microphones several times until we got the best sound quality in the recording. We realized that we needed a good recording because we were making a video for the public.

b. Language community involvement

Speakers of a language know best about their language and people are always excited talking about their language because they own it. Including the active participation of members of a language community in a documentation project can be valuable for documenting the language itself. Native speakers of a language usually know of interesting materials to collect and can contribute in collecting data as well as transcribing the data.

In addition, inviting members of a language community to participate in a documentation project can also raise the awareness of the community about language endangerment. Dalby (2002) points out that “a language dies every two weeks.” Researchers are not in a position to force members of a language community to use and pass on their own language to the next generation.

⁶ These are not novel points with respect to language documentation. A number of publications about language documentation have pointed these out, for example, Himmelman, Gippert and Mosel 2006, Austin 2010.

Members of the community should decide what they think they should do with their language. If members of a language community are aware of how important their language is and are part of a documentation project, they are likely to be agents for protecting their language from endangerment.

c. Archiving

Archiving raw data and unpublished fieldwork notes has been a common practice for field linguists. In the Annual Business Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in 2010, members of LSA concluded the following resolution

“the Linguistic Society of America supports the recognition of these materials as scholarly contributions to be given weight in the awarding of advanced degrees and in decisions on hiring, tenure, and promotion of faculty. It supports the development of appropriate means of review of such works so that their functionality, import, and scope can be assessed relative to other language resources and to more traditional publications”⁷

By archiving recordings and texts, as permitted by the language community, a field researcher has shown respect to the language community, especially those who participate in the work. As pointed out by Dwyer (2006: 40), “...; disseminating or at least properly archiving collected data is far more respectful to a speaker community than piling it in the back of a closed.”

Archiving raw data and unpublished notes may also allow the materials to be further used by the future researchers as well as researchers from other fields of study.

d. Dissemination

The final stage in a language documentation project is dissemination. Disseminating the products of a documentation project is very important. Otherwise, the entire documentation project will not be useful. Products from language documentation can be in a form of dictionaries, grammar books, story books, videos, etc and they need to be published.

In the context of Indonesia, it is important that products from language documentation of the local languages, such as storybooks, picture dictionaries, videos and other potential materials for school local contents be made available to the members of the language community. The native speakers of these languages are excited when they find their language in such products. When I went back to the community with the storybook we published from

⁷ <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/resolution-recognizing-scholarly-merit-language-documentation>

documentation of Jambi Malay (Yanti, Tadmor, Cole and Hermon 2015), for example, I could see how excited and proud the people were when they saw their language appeared in print. We hope that this kind of efforts can help motivate the language community to maintain their language and pass their language to the next generation.

Regarding the documentary workshop, I suggest that workshops similar to DocLing be hosted in more places, especially in places where minority languages are spoken. Hosting documentary workshops in these places is a concrete effort to support the idea of involving the members of language community in documenting their own language and culture. Furthermore, collaborating with members of community can be beneficial to build language corpora for various types of research.

Learning from DocLing 2016, planning and holding future documentary workshops, especially in the context of Indonesia should pay attention to the following. First, a documentary workshop should allow enough time to deliver basic lectures about language documentation and how to do language documentation as well as to give the opportunity to the participants to familiarize themselves with various equipments needed in documenting languages (e.g. voice recorders, video recorders, and microphones), and to plan and work on a small project based on their native language. The experience to do a documentation project may inspire them to continue working on language documentation after the workshop. In previous documentation workshops hosted in Indonesia, we usually allocated two days and I think the workshops went well.⁸ Most of the participants claimed that the workshop was useful and inspiring.⁹ They also practiced recorded themselves/each other speaking or singing in their native languages and then transcribed part of the recordings. Nonetheless, they did not have a chance to design their own project and make a product which they could see and share at the end of the workshop. Therefore, adding two to three days to future workshops should be considered as it will give the participants the opportunity to plan and work on their own project during the workshop.

Second, documentary workshops hosted in different places should not be a hit-and-miss project. We hope that after the participants get some experience in doing a documentation project during the workshop, they will continue doing language documentation. Nevertheless, the participants may need help or guidance when they work on their projects. Therefore, it would be ideal if there is a follow-up program after the workshop. This follow-up program aims to ensure that the participants who decide to do language documentation could get supervision or guidance if they encounter problems in their projects, to nurture those who have passion in language documentation, as well as to seek the opportunity to collaborate with local communities

⁸ A half day seminar about language documentation for bigger audience usually preceded the actual documentation workshop.

⁹ Based on the answers provided by the participants on questionnaires we distributed at the end of the workshop we hosted in Kupang in 2016 as well as personal communication with some participants in previous workshops.

for future projects.

5. Epilogue

I benefited a lot from DocLing 2016. The experience during the workshop has enriched my knowledge and skills about language documentation. The knowledge and skills, together with the reflection points I made, will be useful for upcoming documentation projects and documentary training I will be involved with at my university in Jakarta or elsewhere.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Linguistic Dynamic Science Project researchers at Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), especially Asako Shiohara for inviting me to DocLing 2016. I would also like to thank Toshihide Nakayama and Anthony Jukes, the editors of the featured topic “DocLing” and Yasuhiro Yamakoshi, the editor of this volume, as well two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

References

- Austin, Peter K. 2010. “Current issues in language documentation”. In Peter K. Austin (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description* 7. London: SOAS. pp.12–33.
- Dalby, Andrew. 2002. *Language in Danger: How Language Loss Threatens Our Future*. London: The Penguin Press.
- Dwyer, Arienne M. 2006. “Ethics and practicalities of cooperative fieldwork and analysis”. In Himmelmann, Nikolaus P., Josh Gippert and Ulrike Mosel (eds.) *Essentials of language documentation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. pp.31–66.
- Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. 2006. “Language documentation: What is it and what is it good for?”. In Jost Gippert, Nikolaus P. Himmelmann and Ulrike Mosel (eds.) *Essentials of Language Documentation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. pp.1–30.
- Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. Jost Gippert and Ulrike Mosel. 2006. *Essentials of Language Documentation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Jukes, Anthony, Asako Shiohara and Yanti 2016. “Training for documenting minority languages in Indonesia and Malaysia”. *Asian and African Languages and Linguistics* 11. pp.45–55.
- Simons, Gary F. and Charles D. Fennig (eds.) 2017. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twentieth Edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. [Online at <http://www.ethnologue.com>, accessed on 2016-12-19.]
- Yanti. 2010. “A reference grammar of Jambi Malay”. Doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.
- Yanti, U. Tadmor, P. Cole and G. Hermon (eds.) 2015. *Critò Kitò: A collection of Jambi Stories in the Sabrang Dialect*. Jakarta: The Linguistic Society of Indonesia.