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Review

Language Documentation: Practice and Values
Edited by Lenore Grenoble and N. Louanna Furbee
Amsterdam: John Benjamins 2010.
ISBN 978-90-272-1175-0.
xviii + 340 pages

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The volume under review is the result of ongoing discussions between leading researchers involved in language documentation and largely consists of contributions presented at a conference during the LSA Linguistics Institute at MIT/Harvard in 2005. Like many other volumes that result from conferences or workshops on a given research topic, this volume is a snap-shot of how the field of research was conceived at that time; i.e. questions that were the topic of discussion and in this case; problems facing language documenters and what amounts to a theory of language documentation. The volume has six sections (called parts): 1. Praxis and values, 2. Adequacy in documentation, 3. Documentation technology, 4. Models of successful collaborations, 5. Training and careers in field linguistics, and 6. Conclusion. The six sections are, in turn, divided into position papers and case studies, except for the first and last section, which only consist of position papers. The position papers set the stage for the more detail-oriented cases studies and ask questions that are relevant to specific aspects of language documentation, which needless to say, is treated as a bona fide field of research, emerging within linguistics.

The first section features position papers that cast a wide net in discussing issues of collaboration, ownership, ethics and shaping new research agendas that benefit and support the goals of language documentation. N. Louanna Furbee considers new formats for collaboration between academics and speech communities by drawing from her experiences with the OKMA (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib') in Guatemala where Maya-speaking linguists shape collaborations with heritage speakers that allow a measure of shared power and responsibility. Keren Rice outlines a Canadian context with the implementation of programs such as the CURA (Community-University Research Alliance) that focuses on forming alliances between community organizations and research institutions for the development and benefit of the communities. Projects approved by the CURA are expected to place emphasis on equal partnerships and feature education and training components. Martha J. Macri departs from a Californian context and discusses rights and ownership issues and the necessary identification of stake holders in documentation projects, but also what the goals are for collaboration in this context. It is clear from these papers and from other contributions in the volume that language documentation has a political dimension in the sense that it aims to break with existing research paradigms that put non-academic collaborators at a disadvantage, and aspires to build new formats for interaction that allow for a greater measure of equality between researcher and community member. I find it gratifying that the political aspect of language documentation plays an important role in the volume, not only from a human rights perspective, but from the point of view of data quality and the shaping of records to benefit annotation and analysis of the materials. A focus on the way data is collected, assembled, commented, formatted, analyzed and disseminated is key to the theoretical foundations of language documentation. Attention to the way data is gathered and recorded will have consequences for analyses made on that data. A native discourse accompanying language materials is e.g. important to identify the appropriate place of materials in a greater context, as

well as providing an enhanced meta-commentary, or "thick" metadata annotation that goes beyond the catalogue indexing of data entries ('thin metadata'; see Austin and Nathan 2004; Bergqvist 2007). Collaborative formats for interaction will affect research focus and produce new kinds of inquiries that a monological relation to data would fail to pick up on.

In section two, Anna Berge discusses the notion of adequacy in a documentation context. Her position paper is an exposé of the key components of language documentation with a gradual modification of the adequacy concept throughout the paper. Berge's discussion leads to the unavoidable conclusion that (adequate) language documentation must be reflective and flexible with regard to how adequacy is viewed in the context of a specific project. The ensuing case studies are heterogeneous and treat topics ranging from identifying genre-specific features of narratives (Vasquez Soto) to illustrating the need for a focus on conversation and interactive speech as suggested by the well-known limitations of many existing language descriptions (Buszard-Welcher), to a sketch of archival structures and tools that support annotation and formatting of documentation materials (Lust et al.).

The very notion of adequacy suggests a defining contrast to inadequacy and what is deemed "good enough" in a documentation context. Although I can understand the value of making such a contrast, I believe that the *practices* and *values* of language documentation are more useful concepts in shaping the discourse for language documentation as a discipline and in guiding any efforts at shaping a theory of language documentation. As any documenter of a language knows, one has to consciously choose a "research stance" that is reflected in the choice of methodology that will determine the quality and character of the documentation outcomes. A general change in attitude is required for the goals and aspirations of language documentation to be met, one that e.g. makes a transparent separation between the roles of data managers and data analysts and one that has a team based approach at center. The fact that the stated values and informed practices of language documentation have yet to become firmly grounded in some documentation projects does not make them inadequate. The way in which funding agencies, research institutions and individual researchers continue to develop formats for shaping documentation projects will not rest on either party's shoulders and with time, these will differentiate language documentation from language description in ways that presently may be unclear to parts of the linguistic community, although not to the contributors of the volume under review.

The third section, "Documentation technology" is an excellent contribution to the volume as a whole and features a position paper by Jeff Good that makes a convincing case for formulating the goals of a documentation project before choosing the technological tools needed to realize those goals. It discusses differences between the expectations of the linguist on what technology can and cannot do and the point of view of the technician who may be uninformed of the goals of a certain project and simply has to react to the requests of the linguist. Values, desiderata and recommendations are central notions in this discussion and Good identifies the gaps that exist between these notions and the practical solutions in terms of available and contextually useful technological resources. Case studies in this section treat the challenging issues of the longevity of documentation materials (Boynton et al.) and issues of dissemination and accessibility in the context of the PARADISEC archive and the LACITO/CNRS archiving project (Thieberger and Jacobson).

Section four is a return to issues of collaboration from section one. The first position paper by Donna B. Gerdts discusses the sometimes conflicting interests of linguists and community members and how these may result in a non-productive interaction that has frustration and reluctance as ingredients. She argues that a misunderstanding of what a linguist does and the linguists' inability to sometimes provide a community with what it

needs, are obstructions to a working collaboration that has both parties as decision-makers and stake-holders. The second position paper by Arienne M. Dwyer argues for the importance of flexibility, transparency and empowerment in forming research agendas and documentation activities. She illustrates this with three case studies from the US, (Kickapoo; Algonquian) Africa, (Ega; Niger-Congo) and Asia (Mangur; Mongolic and Wutun; Tibetan). Dwyer clearly states that 'activism' is implicit (or even explicit?) in research agendas that are shaped by formats for successful collaboration, in line with the inherent political aspect of the documentation agenda. The four case studies of section four stay in a American context with a paper on salvaging and making available the J.P. Harrington notes for the benefit of community members and academics alike (Macri); a report on a documentation project of Tojolobal that has emerged as an ancillary activity in efforts to promote the health of community members (Aguilar Mendez et al.); a case study on legacy documentation and how the cooperation between Tohono O'odham community members and academics makes existing materials more accessible to both communities (Fitzgerald); and, finally, a case study focused on a Hmong speaking community in Wisconsin that argues for the inclusion of pragmatics in language documentation and shows how the surrounding North-American socio-cultural context affects language change in Hmong as spoken in the US.

The position paper by Judith M. Maxwell in section five is a hands-on discussion of the practicalities of language documentation, i.e. training and preparation; what to do, where and why, what equipment to use and how to disseminate the results. The paper is a compact discussion of some key aspects of language documentation that draws on the author's own experiences and that of others. It is broader in scope and less theoretically oriented than some of the other contributions of the volume and will therefore be more accessible to the uninitiated. The case study is situated in the Hawai'ian context (Ajo et al.) and focuses on a student-run initiative to train native speakers in language documentation methodology, conceptually overlapping with the OKMA project in Guatemala (see Furbee, section 1) by making the speakers the primary stake holders in documenting their native language.

The concluding section consists of Leonore Grenoble's summary of the issues discussed throughout the volume in a "state of the field"-account that assesses accomplishments so far, and the way forward. Grenoble focuses the discussion on the role of technology, collaboration, and training in shaping meaningful practices and values that align with the ideal goals of documentation in the face of large-scale language endangerment. She paints a changing picture of documentation practices that is affected by e.g. advances in technology but also one that must respond to these from the point of view of goals and values in order not to let the available possibilities determine the course of action in a documentation context.

Language documentation: practice and values is a multi-layered effort that features the voices of documentation practitioners who are coming from different areas of the field (and the world) and who report on experiences from the perspective of detail and with a bird's eye view. It offers a top-down as well as a bottom-up view of the emerging discipline of language documentation and is a valuable snap-shot of language documentation at an early stage in its emergence as a discipline that is shaping linguistics by allowing theory-building to stem from data-treatment.

In the face of large-scale language endangerment, the practices and values of language documentation is the only (slim) hope for linguistics as a discipline to, at some point in the future, do away with "tentatively" in the analysis of language. Representative, discourse based corpora, rich in meta-commentary and annotation, formed in collaboration with the community of speakers and over an extended time period by more than one researcher, is the

ideal result of a language documentation effort. However, the key to the success of the discipline, as I see it, lies in letting a reflective and collaborative attitude shape research agendas in an ongoing evaluation of the goals of language documentation; i.e. what the best practice(s) is/are to achieve the aims of individual projects. *Language documentation: practice and values* is an important contribution in that spirit.

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