The roles of native speakers in linguistic fieldwork

“consultant”
“speaker”
“teacher”
“interlocutor”
“source”
“subject”
“assistant”
“informant”
“informant” [added by RGS]

Learning to speak the language

- a difference between anthropologists and linguists
- [Issues of practicality and talents of the researcher.]

Flexibility and open-mindedness in fieldwork

- Go with a plan (a “protocol”)
- BUT Go with the flow [RGS]

Personal/psychological aspects of fieldwork

page 8: A long list of negatives that get in the way of the “fun”!

Ethical concerns

pages 9-10: A comprehensive list of ethical questions.

Questions and challenges

- Models for field work logistics: (a) a visit of limited duration; (b) long term (up to life-long) commitment; (c) survey field work, i.e. no commitment at all to a particular language or community
- Whither technology?
- What models of field work are used in/by different countries or different traditions?
LARRY HYMAN, “FIELDWORK AS A STATE OF MIND” (pp. 15-33)

“The true fieldworker is a languages-driven person who may devote his or her activities to any number of goals: linguistic theory, description of languages, comparison of languages, reconstruction of languages, development of language materials for the community, etc.” (pp. 21-22)

1. What is fieldwork?

- Data must be acquired (a) directly (b) from other speakers
  - Library research, getting data from others’ recordings, etc. is not field work
  - Introspection is not field work
- Going to the field: to be “field work”, there has to be some combination of…
  - Distance: eliciting data in a university class does not seem to qualify [Hyman seems to contradict himself in the next paragraph where he calls working on an “exotic” language in a field methods class as fieldwork]
  - Exoticism: work on a standard language like [general American] English or [standard Parisian] French does not seem to qualify
  - Duration: opportunistically collecting a small amount of targeted data in a short time seems insufficient [I disagree with Hyman here]

The higher the “value” on any of these scales, the more “canonical” the idea of fieldwork.

- Methodology
  - Elicitation: researcher plays an active role in generating data
  - Observation: “better fits the prototype of fieldwork” (p. 18) [Is this true?—RGS]
- Subject matter

  “…most of the issues on which even field linguists conduct their research are not ethnographic in nature. Consequently, there are few cases where a linguist will go to the field out of a ‘logical’ necessity. Instead, the motivation will be a practical one: to find speakers of languages that are not available close to home.” (p. 19)

  [I find this to be a narrow view of what one might want to learn about a language. It seems to me that working with speakers outside the “field” is more opportunistics (a speaker of an interesting language happened to be available) than a reasoned decision on what one might like to learn about a language.—RGS]

- Goals
  - Descriptive, Historical, Theoretical
    - Let the data drive the work \[\text{“Butterfly collectors”}\]  \(\leftarrow\)  attitudes \(\rightarrow\)  Let theoretical issues drive the work \[“Armchair/Ivory tower snobs”\]
Table 1.1 (p. 21) The features of prototypical linguistic fieldwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fieldwork prototype</th>
<th>Fieldwork countertype</th>
<th>Least fieldwork-like</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elicitee</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Introspection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elicitor/observer</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Secondary data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Far</td>
<td>One’s domicile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>City, university</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Brief stopover</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Exotic</td>
<td>Well-known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject matter</td>
<td>A language in its natu-</td>
<td>Language in general</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ral/cultural context</td>
<td>as a formal system</td>
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<td>Abstract syntax</td>
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<td>Data</td>
<td>Naturalistic</td>
<td>Controlled</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Languages-driven</td>
<td>Theory-driven</td>
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2. Fieldwork as a state of mind

[selected remarks—this section details the path that one fieldworker’s research followed]

- [let the language guide the fieldwork] “…languages have a ‘story’ to tell: it is our job to find these stories and figure them out” (p. 22)
- [the value of comparing languages] “If at any time there is a lull in your work, or you can’t seem to find what the interesting issues are, get the next dialect, then the next, then the next, etc. In this way the languages (dialects) themselves will tell you what’s interesting.” (p. 26)
- [what is “interesting” in language data?] “It is as if [(some) theoreticians] cannot appreciated the ‘puzzle’ [of language analysis] without translating the discussion into formal theoretical terms. If these data do not obviously bear on some aspect of theory, why are they interesting? I don’t think that this state of mind is compatible with that of the fieldworker.” (p. 29) [my underline—RGS]

[Some other features of fieldwork as a state of mind from the Conclusion]

- “…love of discovery, of going out into the unknown in search of uniqueness.” (p 29)
- “…dedication to the ‘whole language’. … As a fieldworker, one’s objective is to study whatever is out there.” (p. 30)
- “Part of the pleasure of fieldwork lies in the daily challenges: the tougher the challenge, the greater the personal and intellectual rewards.” (p. 31)
SOME OF RGS’S FIELD WORK EXPERIENCES

Focused field work projects

Resident in the place

- Agadez 1965-1967: Work on Tamazhaq
- Potiskum 1968-1970: Research on Ngizim syntax
- Gashua 1973-1975: Research on Bade, Duwai, Manga

Going to the place for more than a couple of days but less than a year

- Miya 1982-1982: Research on Miya
- Accra, Amedzofe 1994: Work on Avatime

Opportunistic field work

Extended time working on a language because speakers were available

- Kano 1974: Work on Tamazhaq
- Zaria 1982-1983: Work on Bole

Short duration visits of two days or less (down to two hours!)

- Cameroon 1982: Work on Gidar, Podoko, Zime, Lele
- Bauchi 1982: Two hours’ work on Zaar (Sayanci)
- Bauchi State 1983: Work on Bele, Kirfi, Galambu, Gera, Geruma
- Damaturu 2007: Work on Maka

In a classroom or university office

- UCLA 1969: Student in a Thai field methods class
- UCLA 1972-1973: Instructor in a Pulaar field methods class
- UCLA 2004-2010: Work on Korean pitch accent