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By Shobhana L. Chelliah and Willem J. de Reuse
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There is no shortage of published handbooks in recent years spanning most topics and sub-fields of linguistics. From a linguistic field worker's perspective, however, a handbook on the subject of language description and field work is a welcome addition to the existing literature, which in comparison to other areas of linguistic research –and despite a recent surge in publications on the topic of language endangerment and language documentation– is relatively limited both in the number of publications and in scope.

The contents of the "Handbook of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork" (HDLF) span thirteen chapters: 1. Introduction; 2. Definition and goals of descriptive linguistic fieldwork; 3. The history of linguistic field work; 4. Choosing a language; 5. Field preparation: philological, practical and psychological; 6. Fieldwork ethics: the rights and responsibilities of the fieldworker; 7. Native speakers and fieldworkers; 8. Planning sessions, note taking, and data management; 9. Lexicography in fieldwork; 10. Phonetic and phonological fieldwork; 11. What to expect in morphosyntactic typology and terminology; 12. Grammar gathering techniques; 13. Semantics, pragmatics, and text collection, concluded by an index conflating language names, topics and persons.

Following the introduction, the authors define descriptive linguistic fieldwork and its goals in chapter 2. They make a conceptual distinction between language documentation/documentary linguistics (e.g. Austin 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008; Himmelmann 1998, 2006; inter alia) and descriptive linguistic fieldwork. The latter is defined as "the investigation of the structure of a language through the collection of primary language data gathered through interaction with native-speaking consultants." (p.7). Language documentation, as defined by documentary linguists, subsumes the definition of descriptive linguistic field work and aims at "a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community", a record including both "observable linguistic behaviour and the speaker's meta-linguistic knowledge" (Himmelmann 1998: 166). The "record" in this context is regarded as an annotated corpus resulting from language documentation activities. This corpus should be diverse; large; transparent; open to on-going work; opportunistically assembled; preservable; ethical; portable (Woodbury 2003:47).

Although the linguistic community has yet to reach a consensus on the details of the separation between language description and language documentation, the existing literature on the subject of language documentation provides reason enough for such a separation to be warranted. Indeed, most if not all relevant publications on fieldwork and related issues in the latter years have been in support of the fact that language documentation pays serious attention to a number of aspects of working with speakers to collect first-hand data that descriptive linguistics have failed to take into account,

historically. The differences between the two can be found on all levels of data treatment, i.e. in the way data is collected, annotated, formatted, and stored.

Though the authors maintain that HDLF is concerned with descriptive linguistic field work and not issues of language documentation, this position becomes questionable as the book progresses since many of the book's topics are ones that are exclusive to the discourse and theory of language documentation. Data and metadata annotation, archiving and the context of language endangerment are appropriately discussed but without clearly connecting the motifs behind their treatment, nor their place in the larger dichotomy between (traditional) language description and language documentation, as advocated by documentary linguists.

If, indeed, the authors' only concern is to discuss how a language can be described by working with speakers of that language in order to supply sufficient data to support the description, then e.g. metadata annotation would be irrelevant to the discussion since this is not really part of the descriptive process. Metadata becomes more relevant if archiving and issues of data transparency are at stake, which they are in language documentation but not in traditional language description. Given the topics discussed and commented on in HDLF, the reasons for their inclusion should, in my opinion, be more clearly stated to support the discussion of several topics in the first place.

Chapter 3 accounts for the history of linguistic field work, from the Spanish conquest of Latin and South America in the 16th Century, to key contemporary contributors, such as the late Ken Hale and identifiable movements that have shaped the disseminated results of linguistic field work over the past century.

Chapter 4 briefly discusses issues connected to choosing a language and a field site, dealing with the wants/wishes of a language community and considerations relevant to the linguist, as well as the necessary preparations he/she has to make in advance of committing to a working with a specific language community.

Chapter 5 stresses the need for preparation before going into the field. It provides advice on philological study and argues for the need to familiarize oneself with the local culture to avoid a situation where the linguist arrives ignorant of customs and practices that may well hinder early progress, or worse, make the entire enterprise impossible. The second half of the chapter provides practical advice on issues relating to grant applications, choice of equipment, checklists and travel documentation and how to prepare for an emergency. It also discusses local authority structures such as councils, community gate keepers, and other stake holders.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the ethics of working in the field. It makes reference, almost entirely, to recent publications resulting from the rise of language documentation as an emerging field of research, and appropriately treats access rights, data attribution, intellectual property rights and decent (common sense), personal behavior.

Chapter 7 details the different roles of collaborators and primary researchers in the field. It discusses terminology (e.g. what to call speakers in making reference to them as project participants) and what to look for in finding collaborators, how to keep track of their contributions in the resulting language materials, and related topics.

Chapter 8 discusses a number of concerns related to data management, e.g. how to plan a work session; data managing techniques such as note taking and metadata; data formatting; available software for working with data; data carriers; but also ethical conduct; common sense interaction between linguist and speaker, and archiving.

Chapter 9 is a compressed lesson in dictionary making. It contains advice on what choices to make in organizing lexical data and how to elicit it using different prompts and strategies. As all other chapters of the volume, it comes with a generous list of relevant references.

Chapter 10 focuses on the investigation of phonology and phonetics in the field. Apart from giving practical tips on how to make recordings that will serve this purpose and how to transcribe and analyze these recordings, the chapter also treats suprasegmental phenomena like stress, tone, intonation, and related prosodic features.

Chapter 11 is a survey of typological concepts and grammatical terminology for the field worker and comprises all of 77 pages including 14 pages of references. It is in essence a "crash course" in grammar writing, moving from parts of speech to language type, covert hierarchies such as inverse systems, inflectional categories and related concepts including semantic roles, definiteness, reference strategies, grammaticalization and functional theories of syntax. Subject by subject, the chapter is comparable to what a linguistics course covers over a full academic year.

Chapter 12 is almost comparable in scope to the preceding chapter and is devoted to techniques used in data collection, i.e. how to get what you need to describe the grammar of a language, also known as elicitation. To acquire elicitation skills means being typologically informed as well as knowing how a language works; it is the skill of being able to formulate "the next question" (Evans, p.c.) as well as keeping track of what one already has. The chapter discusses questionnaires and labels chapter sections dealing with specific elicitation techniques by difficulty-level (easy, medium difficulty, difficult).

Chapter 13 concludes the volume by briefly discussing some left-over topics from chapter 11 relating to semantics and pragmatics, such as deixis and presupposition. The focus of the chapter, however, lies on text collection: how to record texts; how to transcribe and translate texts; how to do text analysis, and why this is an important task in descriptive linguistic field work.

Despite its impressive scope and treatment of all topics related to descriptive linguistic field work and language documentation, HDLF is arguably not a handbook of descriptive linguistic field work compared to volumes in other familiar handbook series, such as Blackwell's and Oxford's "Handbooks in linguistics" or Cambridge's "Handbooks in Language and Linguistics", to name the most prestigious ones. These are published as part of a series dealing with subjects and fields of research in contemporary linguistics, but more so, they are all edited volumes that are, in some sense, state-of-the-art with respect to the field a specific handbook aims to cover. An edited volume is, following this, what one would expect from a recently published handbook in linguistics, regardless of subject matter and publisher.

The literal meaning of handbook, which appears to have been guiding the author's choice of title for the reviewed volume, denotes a book that should provide the reader with accessible instructions and references on a given topic; a pocket reference of sorts. This more narrow interpretation of "handbook" would thus deviate from the expectations stemming from the mentioned handbook publications in that the latter is something intermediate between a manual and a bibliography, and the former consists of articles dealing with the latest advances in a field by the researchers on the front line, as it were.

Apart from the unavoidable comparison to other handbooks in linguistics, how should HDLF be contextualized? This is not obvious given the partly diverging aims of the volume. One aspect is how HDLF relates to other manuals of linguistic fieldwork. Chapters 4 through 13 are partly or wholly devoted to practical aspects of fieldwork, sometimes stating the painstakingly obvious, but always keeping a systematic and clearly structured approach. Nothing is left without comment. This

quickly becomes an obvious weakness; if everything deserves a comment, then the treatment of many important topics becomes sketchy and sometimes oversimplified. The resulting impression is that the HDLF places all topics and concerns of linguistic field work on, more or less, the same level. This greatly reduces the possibility to navigate between aspects of working in the field and appears to suggest that all activities and theories connected to working with speakers to collect first-hand language data are of equal importance, which they are not. Some attitudes and choices will result in practices that subsume many less central concerns. Field work is a multi-dimensional enterprise that will be defined by the choices the fieldworker makes. HDLF does not communicate the plurality of layers that is the very nature of field work, which makes the contents of the volume come across as a never ending list of things to check before one can claim to have carried out successful fieldwork.

The value of HDLF is as a form of encyclopedia or, alternatively, as a commented bibliography on all matters relating to fieldwork. It is the result of years of assembling references and speaking to the world's leaders of the field and in this respect it complements work being published on issues relating to language documentation, as it includes comments on everything from ethical conduct, optimal recording techniques, appropriate formatting of language data, and archiving.

In this capacity, HDLF is an impressive piece of work. The level of detail and coverage is its strength; a close to complete survey and contemporary snap-shot of what descriptive linguistic field work and (in part) language documentation is about, at the beginning of the 21st century. Without stating it, the impact of language documentation and documentary linguistics on the way linguistic field work presently is defined, becomes clear from the topics that make up the core of the volume.

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