

Language Documentation and Description

ISSN 1740-6234

This article appears in: *Language Documentation and Description*, vol 4. Editor: Peter K. Austin

Editor's Preface and List of Contributors (LDD 4)

PETER K. AUSTIN

Cite this article: Peter K. Austin (2007). Editor's Preface and List of Contributors (LDD 4). In Peter K. Austin (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description*, vol 4. London: SOAS. pp. 5-11

Link to this article: <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/046>

This electronic version first published: July 2014



This article is published under a Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial). The licence permits users to use, reproduce, disseminate or display the article provided that the author is attributed as the original creator and that the reuse is restricted to non-commercial purposes i.e. research or educational use. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

EL Publishing

For more EL Publishing articles and services:

Website:	http://www.elpublishing.org
Terms of use:	http://www.elpublishing.org/terms
Submissions:	http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions

Editor's Preface

Peter K. Austin

The papers in this volume comprise two groups: some are the write-ups of talks given at workshops at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) while the others were presented at workshops or conferences elsewhere and have been revised by their authors for inclusion here. All the papers were anonymously refereed by colleagues at SOAS and other institutions; I am particularly grateful for assistance with refereeing from Leora Bar-el, Oliver Bond, Lise Dobrin, Anthony Jukes, and David Nathan. Rados Voica helped with sub-editing and checking references while Tom Castle did a masterful job with redesigning the format of *Language Documentation and Description*, layout and formatting, and looking after all aspects of printing and binding. The CD-ROM which accompanies this volume was developed and produced by David Nathan, Robert Munro, Candide Simard, and Zara Pybus; the cover design is by Tom Castle.

Papers in the first section deal with current issues in language documentation. Peter K. Austin and Lenore A. Grenoble's contribution discusses the defining properties of documentary linguistics and language documentation and their emergence as a new approach within linguistics that aims to produce rich corpora of language in use, particular for endangered languages. They highlight some issues of current concern in the field, including the definition of what it means to make a comprehensive record of a language, issues of determining the quality of a language documentation, the boundaries between documentation and description, and questions of interdisciplinarity and cross-discipline collaboration. Nick Thieberger and Simon Musgrave present a detailed discussion of how documentary linguistics raises new ethical challenges for researchers because language documentation has a greater impact in researched communities than traditional descriptive linguistic data collection practice. This is because of the potentially greater intrusiveness of researchers as they seek to capture a wider range of language use and the increasing use video recording to do so. In addition, because language documentation essentially includes an archiving component and access and use of the archived data is under the control of a third party, the deposit archive, there are ethical consideration introduced as a result. Thieberger and Musgrave present some sensible recommendations on how to approach these ethical issues in documentary research. The final paper in this section by Jeff Good introduces the concept of an 'ecology' of documentary and descriptive linguistic research, by which he means the set of individuals, resources, tools, and actions that are involved in creating, archiving, and using documentary and descriptive resources. Good wants to characterise the tools

and standards to be used for digital linguistic resources in order to help researchers avoid duplicating the work of others unnecessarily, and to ensure that linguistics does not accidentally focus on particularly salient domains (e.g. interlinear glossed text curation) at the expense of others (e.g. archiving) which he believes are equally important to the overall well-being of the ‘ecology’. He is also concerned to bring together a number of the concepts that he feels are crucial to understanding the state-of-the-art in digital linguistic resources and tools but which it is sometimes difficult to find detailed information about.

The second section of the volume includes papers which were presented at a one-day workshop held at SOAS on 11th February 2006 entitled “Meaning and translation in language documentation”. Also included is an important contribution by Nick Evans and Hans-Jürgen Sasse, an earlier version of which was pre-circulated as a discussion paper at the workshop. Evans and Sasse present a wide-ranging discussion of issues involved in coming to grips with semantics in language documentation, especially problems that arise with translation and interpretation of the documentary record. They argue that the search for meaning in language documentation is best seen as a never-ending combination of commentary of a hypertextual sort, which gradually leads to a fuller understanding of the recorded utterances. They locate their work in a tradition of scholarship that includes Talmudic commentary and poetic analysis. William Foley also explores the limits of translation arguing that the model of translation typically assumed by language documenters is not tenable. Traditionally, Foley argues, researchers studying under documented languages have relied on two heuristic principles to guide their work: effability (which assumes that meanings across language can be made to match), and a conduit metaphor (which presents language use as information transfer from speakers to hearers via containers of meaning). However, speakers’ and hearers’ theories of the world, embodied in their linguistic and cultural categories, are rather separate from and loosely connected to their sensible experience of the world. Since all understanding of that experience is represented in terms of conceptual and cultural schemes there is a necessary indeterminacy in knowledge which has important consequences for translating between languages. Using examples from Papua New Guinea and elsewhere, Foley argues that we need to be careful about assuming that Western academic approaches to meaning are applicable to all humans and to their languages in general.

Tony Woodbury’s paper deals with the life history of a Cup’ik narrative text he recorded in 1978 and worked on over the following 25 years. By presenting a particular case study in this way Woodbury demonstrates how understanding the meaning of a text emerges over time. He argues forcefully that a record of this process of emergence should be part of the documentary record left for future generations. He presents an approach to language

documentation that he calls ‘thick translation’ which incorporates and draws upon a range of data sources, including audio recordings of oral free translations, native speaker word and sentence translations, linguists’ parsing and glossing, more refined literary translations, poetic analyses of the original text, alternative renderings of a text, and discussions and exegeses of aspects of the text and its translation. All this should be included in the documentary record, Woodbury argues, in order to help users make sense of how and why particular decisions were made about translation of the recorded text. His study fleshes out the main points made by Evans and Sasse, namely that the search for meaning in language documentation relies on everything that the researcher can bring to the task.

David Bradley’s paper deals with problems of translation in elicitation and how the language used by the researcher to elicit vocabulary can skew an understanding of the semantic system of the language data being elicited. He presents material from a number of semantic domains and examples from research on languages of East and South-east Asia to illustrate this point. The following two papers move on to pragmatics. Lenore Grenoble discusses why it is important to document pragmatics and outlines some of the challenges pragmatics research presents when compiling a documentary corpus. Documenting spontaneous, contextualised language use requires extensive access to a community, and access to a wide variety of situations in which language is used, especially face-to-face encounters. Analysing pragmatics also demands a deep understanding of the language and the culture in which it is embedded, along with attention to factors such as eye gaze and gesture; this is both complex and time-consuming for researchers to come to grips with. Drawing upon her own work on Evenki, a Tungusic language, Grenoble examines how pragmatic and situational uses of language can be reconstructed from an existing language description; she does this not only in order to explore good practices in documenting pragmatics but also to look at the consequences of language shift on various pragmatic dimensions of an endangered language. Henrik Bergqvist’s paper further contributes to discussion of documenting pragmatics by showing how important is an understanding of the situational aspects of recorded interactions, especially speaker biographies and histories. Using data from his research on Lakandon Maya, Bergqvist demonstrates how understanding the reference of temporal words in on-going discourse in that language arises from considering the participants involved and the history of their prior interactions and experience. He argues that situational metadata thus plays an important role in understanding meaning in language documentation and should thus be meticulously recorded.

The final papers in this volume are write-ups of talks given at a one-day workshop held at SOAS on 3rd December 2005 on the topic of “Endangered languages and literacy”. The focus of Mary Raymond’s contribution is two

contrasting literacy projects in which she participated during her fieldwork in Papua New Guinea. Both projects involved pre-planning however she observed unpredicted outcomes of various sorts, often as a result of the resourcefulness of community members. She argues that it is important to balance planning and flexibility in approaching literacy work, and a willingness on the part of linguists to respond and adapt when unexpected opportunities arise. Yonas M. Asfaha, Jeanne Kurvers and Sjaak Kroon discuss the complex multilingual and multiscriptal situation in Eritrea and explore social use and acquisition of literacy in the various languages and scripts. Their study has important implications for language and literacy teaching in Eritrea, including impacts upon the development of literacy teaching curricula, materials, methodologies, evaluation procedures and tests. It could also contribute practically to the development and improvement of teacher training materials and programs, the improvement of adult and child literacy teaching, and to reading materials production. An empirically-based research programme along the lines they describe could have clear benefits for speakers of the many languages in Eritrea. Eva Csató and David Nathan conclude the volume with a description of the literacy situation for Karaim, an endangered Turkic language spoken in Lithuania, which has a multi-scriptal and multi-orthography history. They describe how this situation came about and how their own work on an interactive CD-ROM of Karaim materials and recently-developed language lessons has had to deal with computerisation of the various fonts and spelling systems. They argue for creating solid data encoding representations (like XML with specified character entities) from which multiple orthographies can be mapped in order to respond to the needs and desires of the various communities who have an interest in the language. Their work supports Raymond's appeal for flexibility in responding to the literacy needs of the people with whom linguists work.

This volume of *Language Documentation and Description* is accompanied by a CD-ROM entitled "The Disappearing Sounds of the World's Languages". The CD contains a recording of the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project Annual Public Lecture, given by the late Professor Peter Ladefoged at SOAS on 6th February 2004 along with

- a transcription of the lecture
- adaptations of the slides displayed in the lecture
- example sounds played during the lecture
- a table of contents
- an index
- extensive navigation controls

The CD runs under Macintosh OS X and Microsoft Windows. For Macintosh a recent Macintosh running version 10.1.5, 10.2.6 or later is required. For Windows a PC with at least Pentium 800MHz, 256 MB RAM, 800 x 600 monitor with 16 bit colour (thousands of colours), CD-ROM drive, sound card and speakers is required. The CD runs under most versions of Microsoft Windows. The program can be run directly from the CD-ROM. You can also install it on your computer simply by copying all the contents of the CD into a single folder on your computer's hard drive (which requires about 50MB disk space). No other installation is necessary. To start, double click the file 'Ladefoged' (or 'Ladefoged.exe'). To begin the lecture, press the "Start" button. To quit the lecture, press the "X" button.

As always, we welcome comments and feedback on the papers collected here, directed to the address in the inside front cover.

Bloomsbury, London

May 2007

List of Contributors

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Yonas M. Asfaha
 Babylon, Centre for the Studies of
 the Multicultural Society,
 Tilburg University,
 P.O.Box 90153, 5000LE
 Tilburg, The Netherlands.
 email: Y.M.Asfaha@uvt.nl</p> | <p>Eva A. Csato
 Department of Linguistics and
 Philology
 Box 635, Uppsala University
 Uppsala, SE-751 26,
 Sweden
 email: eva.csato-johanson@lingfil.uu.se</p> |
| <p>Peter K. Austin
 Department of Linguistics,
 SOAS
 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square
 London WC1H 0XG
 UK
 email: pa2@soas.ac.uk</p> | <p>William Foley
 Department of Linguistics
 University of Sydney
 Sydney
 NSW 2000
 Australia
 email: wilfoley@arts.usyd.edu.au</p> |
| <p>Henrik Bergqvist
 Department of Linguistics,
 SOAS
 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square
 London WC1H 0XG
 UK
 email: four.mount@swipnet.se</p> | <p>Jeff Good
 Linguistics Department
 University at Buffalo
 609 Baldy Hall
 Buffalo, NY 14260
 USA
 email: jcgood@buffalo.edu</p> |
| <p>David Bradley
 Department of Linguistics
 La Trobe University
 Bundoora
 Vic 3083
 Australia
 email: d.bradley@latrobe.edu.au</p> | <p>Lenore Grenoble
 Department of Russian
 Program in Linguistics and Cognitive
 Science
 6085 Reed Hall Dartmouth College
 Hanover, NH 03755 USA
 email: lenore.grenoble@dartmouth.edu</p> |

Sjaak Kroon
Babylon, Centre for the Studies of
the Multicultural Society,
Tilburg University,
P.O.Box 90153, 5000LE
Tilburg, The Netherlands.

Mary Raymond
Department of Linguistics, SOAS
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG
UK
email: 155623@soas.ac.uk

Jeanne Kurvers
Babylon, Centre for the Studies of
the Multicultural Society,
Tilburg University,
P.O.Box 90153, 5000LE
Tilburg, The Netherlands.

Hans-Jurgen Sasse
Department of Linguistics
Cologne University
Cologne
Germany
email: hj.sasse@uni-koeln.de

Simon Musgrave
Linguistics Program School of
Languages, Cultures and Linguistics
Monash University,
Vic 3800
Australia
simon.musgrave@arts.monash.edu.au

Nicholas Thieberger
Department of Linguistics and
Applied Linguistics
University of Melbourne
Parkville Vic 3010
Australia
email: thien@unimelb.edu.au

David Nathan
Endangered Languages Archive
Department of Linguistics, SOAS
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG
UK
email: djn@soas.ac.uk

Anthony C. Woodbury
Department of Linguistics
The University of Texas at Austin
1 University Station B5100
Austin, Texas 78712-0198
USA
email: acw@mail.utexas.edu