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## **Editors' Introduction and List of Contributors (LDD 11)**

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# Introduction

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## 1. Overview

This volume of *Language Documentation and Description* contains six papers and is divided into two sections: one section includes papers on applied language documentation that arose from a workshop held at SOAS in 2011, and the second contains papers on South East Asian languages prepared specifically for this volume.

Section 2 of this introduction considers a number of general issues pertaining to applied language documentation in sub-Saharan Africa, while section 3 discusses all six papers in the volume in turn.

## 2. Applied Language documentation in Sub-Saharan Africa

### 2.1 Background

The last twenty years have seen a dramatic worldwide increase in funding for linguistic fieldwork. This has largely been motivated by a concern to document the world's endangered languages, but it has also been accompanied by the emergence of a new subdiscipline of Linguistics called 'language documentation; or 'documentary linguistics' (see Himmelmann 1998, Woodbury 2011 for programmatic statements, and Austin 2012 for an annotated bibliography). Language documentation is characterised by Woodbury (2011: 159) as 'the creation, annotation, preservation, and dissemination of transparent records of a language'. The first four papers in this volume are concerned with the last of these components, namely dissemination, and more particularly the dissemination of language documentation outcomes in local contexts in Africa. These papers are based on presentations originally given by the authors at a *Workshop on Applied Language Documentation in sub-Saharan Africa* held on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at

the SOAS and funded by the British Academy.<sup>1</sup> The workshop was attended by approximately fifty researchers and linguistics students.

In recent years a considerable number of grants have funded work on the documentation of African languages<sup>2</sup>, including research by African scholars based in Africa. Much of this research has concentrated on the collection of primary documentary materials (lexicons, text collections) of spoken and signed languages, with the goal of archiving the data for posterity. Less attention has been paid to issues of language support and revitalisation, or what we are calling ‘applied language documentation’, that is, language documentation research intended to have a direct and tangible application within the communities where the languages are spoken (see also Section 2.2 below).

Research on applied language documentation has so far been heavily skewed towards the (post-colonial) linguistic situations found in Australia and the Americas, and it is far from clear that the kinds of activities that have been practised in these former settlement colonies can straightforwardly be transferred into the African arena. The main purpose of this introduction is to consider a number of issues relevant for applied language documentation in Africa. We do not mean to be prescriptive, since Africa (or even just that part of the continent south of the Sahara) is by no means a single homogeneous entity. Rather it seemed more appropriate to identify a number of issues which individual language documenters might consider before embarking on their own projects. We should also point out that the issues discussed here are likely to be more relevant for smaller documentation projects with limited current funding and uncertain future funding, rather than large or well-established long-term enterprises.

The rest of this ‘thematic’ part of the introduction is structured as follows: section 2.2 addresses the question of whether linguists have a responsibility to

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to the British Academy (<http://www.britac.ac.uk>) for financial support that enabled overseas speakers to be invited to the workshop. Support also came from the Endangered Languages Academic Programme at SOAS. The workshop was organised by Oliver Bond, Phil Jaggard, and Stuart McGill. We should point out that by “applied language documentation” we really mean *language documentation applied* – in other words we are concerned not so much with developing theories and models of an Applied Language Documentation sub-discipline (cf. Applied Linguistics), but rather with identifying principles, practices, and practical advice based on experiences in real world applications, as presented in the papers and discussed at the workshop.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.hrelp.org/grants/projects> and search for Africa.

get involved in applied language documentation, particularly PhD students. Section 2.3 is concerned with communities, while section 2.4 discusses three further practical issues: the use of multimedia, knowledge transfer, and the possibility of non-linguistic assistance. Finally, section 2.5 presents a distillation of the discussion in the form of a series of questions addressed to the documenter.

## 2.2 Documentation and its application

An interesting aspect of the definition by Woodbury quoted above is the inclusion of the word *dissemination*, which does not really square with the usual meaning of the term *documentation*. Nevertheless the sub-discipline of documentary linguistics which has developed over the last two decades has consistently emphasised the role that speech communities have to play, both as participants in the documentation process and as users of the documentary corpus. For methodological reasons Himmelmann (1998) advocates the involvement of native speakers in shaping the documentary corpus, and in Gippert et al.'s (2006) influential handbook of language documentation many chapters assume that documentary corpora will be of some practical use to the speech community. For example, Nathan (2006: 363) explicitly assumes 'that you hope that some of your fieldwork will one day be applied to the maintenance, strengthening, or revitalization of the visited community's language'. With respect to orthography development, Seifart (2006: 275) writes that '[m]uch of the success of a language documentation depends on casting these records in an orthography that appeals to the speech community' and

if it is accepted that the documentation has to be accessible to the speech community, the development and implementation of a practical orthography in the speech community is an absolutely necessary task in an early phase of a documentation project. (Seifart 2006: 275).

Himmelmann's introduction to the book spells out the general philosophy followed by the authors:

it is an integral part of the documentation framework elaborated in this book that it considers it an *essential* [emphasis added] task of language documentation projects to support language maintenance efforts wherever such support is needed and welcomed by the community being documented. More specifically, the

documentation should contain primary data which can be used in the creation of linguistic resources to support language maintenance, and the documentation team should dedicate part of its resources to ‘mobilizing’ the data compiled in the project for maintenance purposes. (Himmelmann 2006: 17).

Similar sentiments are expressed by Austin (2010) and are also written into the funding guidelines of major granting bodies. ELDP’s ‘Small Grants Information Pack’<sup>3</sup> states that projects should result in documentation materials that are ‘accessible to and usable by members of the language community’ (p4). The ‘Information for applicants’<sup>4</sup> provided by the DoBeS project of the Volkswagen Foundation contains a similar statement (p3):

the documentation project should be used to transfer basic linguistic knowledge to the speech communities themselves and help them to develop schooling material etc. In any case, the community should get copies of the documentation on CD ROM or a print out on paper (e.g. all written material such as transcriptions, translations, drawings, photographs etc.).

This emphasis is not always apparent in the work of researchers doing fieldwork on African languages. For example, the Africanist Newman (1998) argues against academic linguists becoming professionally involved in revitalisation activities (see below), and Ladefoged’s (1992) sceptical reply to Hale et al.’s (1992) seminal article on endangered languages is particularly well-known in the language documentation community. Other researchers have suggested that in the case of particularly endangered languages in Africa, linguists should concentrate on ‘pure’ documentation. Thus, Dimmendaal (2004: 84) writes concerning as yet undocumented endangered languages in Africa:

Revitalisation, in my view, should not be given high priority. When individuals decide to give up their mother tongue, they usually have good reasons for doing so.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.hrelp.org/grants/apply/sg2011/sg\\_ipack\\_2011\\_OL.pdf](http://www.hrelp.org/grants/apply/sg2011/sg_ipack_2011_OL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/fileadmin/downloads/merkblaetter/MB\\_67\\_e.pdf](http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/fileadmin/downloads/merkblaetter/MB_67_e.pdf)

Similarly Blench (2007: 153) recommends that the limited resources available for language maintenance should be reserved for more vital languages, commenting that:

Almost by definition it is hardly worthwhile to spend limited resources on languages whose speakers seem to be deserting them.

In defence of revitalisation efforts it can be argued that intergenerational transmission is not the only worthwhile outcome of language revitalisation (e.g. Dorian 1987; Austin & Sallabank 2013 on the importance of the concomitant revitalisation of *people*), and the regret of future generations when it is too late (highlighted in Dorian's 1993 well-known response to Ladefoged 1992) can be found in Africa as well as Scotland (see McGill & Blench, this volume, for an example). For documenters working with endangered languages in Africa the views held by the members of the community they work with should be an important consideration, even if there is little or no hope for restoration of intergenerational transmission.<sup>5</sup>

As noted above, there is a general consensus in the documentary linguistics literature that dissemination and other kinds of application are a necessary component of doing language documentation. A number of people at the workshop argued against this idea (see also Crippen & Robinson 2011). One way of approaching this issue is as follows: as researchers our ethical responsibility to our universities and funders is to carry out and publish disinterested research of the highest quality without being drawn into the time-consuming application of this research. We have no responsibilities to the communities we are working with beyond following a general ethical code of conduct in our individual contracts with our research subjects (for example

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<sup>5</sup> It should also be pointed out that opportunities for funding are not the same for a language known to be vital as for an endangered one, since funding bodies like ELDP and the DEL initiative of the National Science Foundation naturally tend to prioritise endangered languages. Thus medium-sized languages (e.g., with numbers of speakers in the tens of thousands) can fall between two stools, particularly in Africa where there is much less national money available for documentation compared to places such as the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia. The problem is exacerbated in the sub-Saharan African context since many medium-sized or even large languages may be in great need of documentation, especially in regions as linguistically diverse as Nigeria and Cameroon. See Good (this volume) for an extreme example of linguistic diversity, and McGill & Blench (this volume) for an example of extreme paucity of documentation – such as the Tsuvadi language spoken by 200,000 Nigerians, for which there are no published articles or data.

ensuring that informed consent applies, that they are appropriately recompensed and that data is used ethically). As mentioned above, this view has been well articulated by Newman (1998).

Unsurprisingly Newman's position has been contested (e.g. Walsh 2005, 2010), and many documenters see the local application of their research as a necessary (or at least justifiable) part of their job, regardless of the possible negative impact on their research productivity or career prospects. There are a variety of factors contributing to the obligation to 'give back' felt by many linguists (see Truong & Garcez 2012, Stebbins 2012). One of the strongest of these is the desire to address past wrongs (or looked at more negatively, 'displaced guilt'). Thieberger's (1990) paper on Australian Aboriginal languages identifies morality or social justice as the most compelling motivation for language support and revitalisation, and indeed this argument may be stronger with respect to Australia and other settlement colonies than Africa. Indigenous communities have (in general) become a lot more dysfunctional in the former, and even where there is inter-ethnic conflict in Africa, the consequent social disruption may be less easy to directly link to either colonialism or language loss. An interesting feature of the discussion at the workshop was that the moral argument generally carried most weight for those working with Khoisan peoples (such as the Jul'hoan and ǀX'ao-ǁ'aeen discussed in Biesele et al., this volume), who have suffered in a similar way to Australian Aborigines.

There is also undoubtedly a personal factor involved when it comes to outside linguists' various motivations for getting involved in language maintenance and other applications of our work, and in this respect Africa is also distinct from Australia and North America. Endangered languages in Africa are, in general, losing ground to other indigenous languages rather than to European languages (see also, e.g., Mufwene 2002), and Western researchers may feel less directly implicated in language endangerment. Nevertheless the role of colonialism in African language endangerment should not be neglected. In north-central Nigeria, for example, the present dominance of Hausa over the smaller Middle Belt languages is due as much to decisions made by British colonisers in the early twentieth century as it is to the *jihad* of the nineteenth.

The concept of ‘reciprocity’ is sometimes evoked in academic codes of ethics. For example the Canadian Tri-Council ethics statement<sup>6</sup> highlights the importance of reciprocity (‘the obligation to give something back in return for gifts received’). Himmelmann (2008: 340-343) argues that linguists’ views on the appropriate scope of reciprocity depends on their conception of their subject matter: those who see language as primarily the description of an abstract lexico-grammatical code to be extracted from subjects will think in terms of a contract with (and obligations to) the individuals involved. Conversely, others who view language as consisting of the speech practices of a community documented through participant observation will think of a contract with (and obligations to) the community as a whole. A single researcher may of course focus on both ‘linguistic documentation’ and ‘language documentation’ at different times, and the nature of the particular research project is one further factor relevant to issues of application.

Some attendees at the SOAS workshop advocated that as linguists our primary concern should be to follow the Hippocratic injunction ‘above all, do no harm’ – in other words documenters have a responsibility *not* to engage in applied work unless they can be confident that no harm will result. This echoed one the main principles of Good’s paper (see Section 3 below) and puts the onus on language documenters to carry out a detailed ethnographic study in order to understand what the unexpected effects of their attempts to help might be. This is ideally required anyway as part of the task of deciding what text types the corpus should consist of (Seifart 2008), yet in reality many documenters lack any significant training in anthropology and ethnographic methods. Does this then disqualify them altogether from any significant applications of their documentary work? Two things can be said in mitigation. First, as has already been discussed above, the linguistic ecology of African language situations can vary enormously, with the Lower Fungom area described by Good a particularly complex example. Secondly, the damage that can be wrought by small-scale, short-term projects is limited by their nature. Rather than the introduction of literacy or recorded music to a culture previously unexposed to such things, documentation projects are more likely to be concerned with more mundane activities such as assisting local efforts to increase the vernacular share of existing domains of language use.

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<sup>6</sup> In particular Chapter 9 on research involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. See <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>.

Finally, linguists should be aware that it is not possible to avoid influencing the speech community altogether. Language documentation projects, which usually involve researchers spending long periods of time on the field, are always going to have some sort of effect. Dorian (1993: 576) argues that ‘one’s fieldwork...inevitably has political overtones’, and that even ‘pure’ as opposed to ‘applied’ language documentation is ‘inevitably a political act’ (Dorian 1993: 575).

### 2.2.1 The role of students

One of the most controversial subjects of discussion at the SOAS workshop was the role of students, in particular PhD students, in applied language documentation. It was argued that students should be ‘protected’ from feelings of obligation about getting involved in applied language documentation, for reasons related to the one given in Newman’s (1998) paper mentioned above – it will distract them from the focus of their PhD research, which may make them less employable in the future with a consequent adverse effect on the discipline as a whole.

It is possible, of course, that students may not want to be protected, even if they understand the possible implications for their career prospects. Postgraduate students in the Endangered Languages Academic Programme at SOAS become interested in language documentation not primarily through linguistics, but because of a concern for the application of language documentation, most particularly language support and revitalisation. This is perhaps unsurprising if one considers the programme’s own marketing material:<sup>7</sup>

*Fieldwork skills will enable students to take a role in documenting and assisting threatened languages around the world. For those concerned about assisting endangered language communities around the world, the pathway in Language Support and Revitalisation provides the necessary awareness of linguistics, language ecology and language planning and policy making [emphasis added].*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hrelp.org/courses/ma/>

Students attending the SOAS workshop who had either been attracted in this way to the discipline of linguistics, or who had considered the question addressed in the previous subsection and concluded that they do want to apply their documentary work for the good of a particular community, were understandably concerned that without any project-specific application, such things as the collection and archiving of text corpora alone are unlikely to bring any tangible local benefits. In most places in sub-Saharan Africa it does not matter how advanced our archival techniques are – if the vast majority of community members have no prospect of access to computers then they will have no access to language archives at all, unlike (for example) most indigenous communities in Australia and North America.<sup>8</sup>

The notion of ‘deferred payback’ was discussed at the workshop as a means of alleviating such concerns. The idea is that students devote their doctorate to their PhD topic and collection of the documentary corpus, and defer any application of this material until they become a paid academic. The thinking behind this is that students do not (or perhaps *should* not) have enough time to devote to effective applications of language documentation. The advantages of this approach are clear, but there are also arguments against it. The most obvious is that by no means all PhD students will secure suitable post-doctoral fellowships, and even fewer will achieve a tenured position. Thus the prospects for such payback are slim, and in most cases it would be dishonest for the student to allow the community to think otherwise. It is also highly debatable whether lecturers or professors are in any better position than students. Teaching and other professional responsibilities (not to mention more settled family lives) usually leaves very little time for overseas fieldwork. This is even more of an issue for projects based in Africa, since for a variety of reasons they tend to be much more dependent on outside linguists than projects in other parts of the world.

### 2.3 Communities

In the previous section we used the term ‘community’ freely without any qualification.<sup>9</sup> And indeed language documenters generally have some kind of idea about who ‘their’ community is. For example, a linguist might reasonably say ‘I work with the X people in central Nigeria’. However unless the

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<sup>8</sup> Although see the discussion on smart phones and feature phones below.

<sup>9</sup> But see Austin and Sallabank (2013) for discussion of some of the complexities surrounding this term

endangered language community really is very small, no-one can work to the same degree with all members of a speech community, so what the linguist really means is that he or she works with some subset of speakers of language X.

In the context of sub-Saharan Africa this subset will usually be largely composed of men, regardless of the gender of the researcher. There are a number of reasons for this. Partly it is because men are generally more highly-educated (in the Western sense) and better able to communicate with the researcher through a European language or a *lingua franca* such as Hausa or Swahili. In addition, due to exogamous marriage practices there are also sound methodological reasons for beginning one's fieldwork with male language consultants – in any given village the women will usually show much greater linguistic diversity than the men. While this is of interest sociolinguistically, particularly with respect to the study of language endangerment, at the beginning of one's research it is best to concentrate on the speech of one or two speakers of the same lect, in order to establish the basics of a single coherent phonological and grammatical system.

Dobrin (2008) argues that linguistic fieldworkers have a responsibility of fostering long-term personal relationships in order to empower communities. However the people to whom we feel most indebted (and who may themselves feel they have the greatest claim on our assistance) in an African context will often be among the more powerful within the minority language community. What they see as beneficial applications of language documentation may well differ from the opinions of the outside researcher, or the less privileged within the community itself. In general language support and revitalisation activities may meet with favour from only a subset of the speech community – indeed the speech community may even be divided as to whether it wants the documentary project to go ahead at all. Language documenters should recognise this, and for any given application of their work they should be clear about which subsection of the community it is intended to reach.

It was stressed at the workshop that it is an essentialist simplification to model the world as a collection of discrete speech communities each defined by their adherence to a single heritage language. This simplification may be more or less helpful depending on the complexity of the sociolinguistic setting of the documentation project, and it will be correspondingly more or less straightforward to decide on exactly who it is appropriate to support in terms of applied language documentation. For Cicipu, for example, (and other Kainji languages – McGill & Blench, this volume) language loss almost always goes hand in hand with 'becoming Hausa' and shifting ethnic as well as linguistic affiliation. Town-dwellers who have changed their ethnic

identification in this way no longer speak Cicipu and self-identify as Hausa, even though it is widely-known that they are ‘really’ Cicipu by birth. At first glance one might assume that it would be relatively straightforward to identify one’s ‘target community’ for applied language documentation as (a subset of) those who identify themselves as Acipu. After all, those who no longer wish to be associated with the Cicipu language are unlikely to respond positively to any language-based support activities. Nevertheless, such people are also important ‘stakeholders’ of the documentary enterprise – for what they stand to lose just as much as what they might gain from the project.

Other situations are much more complex. Good (this volume) stresses the dynamicity of the sociolinguistic situation in the Lower Fungom region of the Cameroonian Grassfields, an area of extraordinary linguistic diversity.<sup>10</sup> The linguistic situation there seems to be in a state of flux, with various languages ebbing and flowing over the last few hundred years along with their associated polities. In other research Di Carlo & Good (2012) have stressed that it is the dynamicity of this language ecology that linguists should be trying to preserve, rather than the current ‘snapshot’ of languages. This extreme diversity has implications for applied language documentation in Lower Fungom – why should one particular linguistic group be singled out for assistance?

Finally, Good also raises the important point that outside linguists, particularly those working in Africa as opposed to North America or Australia, benefit from several distinct communities, all of which are likely to be under-resourced and any of which it is reasonable to try to assist. Consideration of this issue may free up the documenter to use his or her knowledge and skills where they can be of most use.

## 2.4 Practicalities

In this section we discuss three practical issues relevant for language documentation: the use of multimedia, knowledge transfer, and the possibility of non-linguistic aid.

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<sup>10</sup> In another talk at the workshop (not included in this volume), Friederike Lüpke and Alex Cobbinah also stressed the fluidity of individuals’ ethnic identity in the Bañounk communities of Senegal.

### 2.4.1 Multimedia applications

The standard techniques of applied language documentation found in textbooks such as Gippert et al. (2006) (including orthography development, the production of dictionaries and vernacular literacy materials, and multimedia applications) have largely been formulated by linguists working outside of Africa. Good (this volume) stresses that it is by no means obvious that these techniques can straightforwardly be transferred to the sub-Saharan environment. This is particularly true in the case of the production of literacy materials such as folktale collections, perennial favourites of grant funding applications. Considering the overall effort expended, vernacular literacy programmes in sub-Saharan Africa have been spectacularly unsuccessful (see Fasold 1997 for case studies and discussion of relevant issues). Lüpke (2011) argues that part of the reason for this is that there may be no ‘ecological niche’ for literacy in the vernacular as opposed to regional, national, or foreign languages. While linguists working with minority languages are aware that there is strong evidence in favour of mother tongue education, this is likely to be irrelevant for the kind of language development that might be carried out by a single researcher within the confines of a typical documentation project. A more important point with respect to small-scale applications of language documentation is that the existence of a dictionary and other vernacular books such as folktale collections serve to bring prestige to the speech community, irrespective of whether the materials themselves ever see much use.<sup>11</sup> Fieldworkers planning to devote time and energy to vernacular literature should be realistic and consider whether an intangible increase in the community’s prestige is a sufficient return – the likelihood is high that the majority of the materials produced will remain if not unsold, then at least unread.

Lack of enthusiasm for vernacular literacy in much of sub-Saharan Africa should not be assumed to stem from a corresponding lack of desire for language development/support and maintenance (see McGill & Blench, this volume, for an example from Nigeria). Different media may prove better catalysts for increased vernacular language use; in particular, mobile

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<sup>11</sup> Good (this volume) offers a counter-argument in the form of the following provocative (and perhaps tongue-in-cheek) statement concerning the usefulness or otherwise of dictionaries when it comes to affirming a community’s identity:

we have found no reason to believe that a dictionary would be somehow more affirming [of a community’s identity] in the Lower Fungom context than, say, giving consultants framed certificates in recognition of their efforts, which could be done at much lower cost.

technologies are advancing extremely fast in Africa and arguably offer much more promise than books for developing semi-sustainable applications of language documentation, particularly in the timescale available to the typical documenter.

To give an example of the pace of technological change – on Stuart McGill’s first field trip to the Cicipu language area in Nigeria in 2007 the nearest mobile phone reception was two hours’ motorbike ride away. Not a single person in his host village owned a phone. By 2012, however, the mobile phone had (in the younger generation) replaced the tape recorder as the main means of playing music, and Cicipu songs recorded by native speaker documenters are being exchanged using Bluetooth onto 2GB SD memory cards bought in the local market less than three miles away. Bluetooth (which is available even on cheap handsets) is particularly useful in remoter areas, since the technology operates without the need for a mobile phone connection, and there is no direct cost to the user. Together with the availability of inexpensive audio recorders (e.g. the Zoom series) which record directly onto SD cards and can convert WAV to MP3 without a computer, these recent developments in technology vastly increase the possibilities for small-scale dissemination of documentary corpora with only marginal dependence on outside linguists.

It is also becoming clear that for many Africans the mobile phone is going to become their main source of Internet consumption rather than desktop or laptop computers. Linguists and archivists who are planning to make material available to local communities online should design websites and applications (or ‘apps’) primarily for feature phones and smartphones, and only secondarily for desktops/laptops (see also Birch 2012, McElvenny & Wilson 2009).

Language documenters wishing to disseminate their corpora should be grateful for the spread of mobile phones for other reasons; it is much quicker and cheaper to transfer video and audio onto mobile phones than it is to typeset and publish printed material. The implications of texting are important too, since texting may provide the requisite ‘niche’ for vernacular literacy. Orthography developers should take this into account, and consider what characters are available on local mobile phones (this varies widely depending on the country).

#### **2.4.2 Knowledge-transfer**

All of the papers in Part 1 of this volume touch on knowledge-transfer in one way or another. If, as is usually the case in African contexts, the documenter

is both a foreigner and a non-native speaker, then he or she will clearly learn a great deal from the communities involved. Researchers may want to consider how they can reciprocate, so that their collaborators benefit not just materially, or through corporate benefits such as cultural affirmation or language maintenance, but also by personally acquiring new knowledge and skills. If these are in the area of applied language documentation then so much the better, since this will increase the likelihood that the corpus can continue to be applied (and even enhanced) in the absence of the outside researcher. Examples include techniques of audio and video recording, transcription/spelling in the vernacular, and the user of computer software such as ELAN,<sup>12</sup> Transcriber,<sup>13</sup> and the dictionary program WeSay.<sup>14</sup> The projects discussed in the papers by Thomas, Biesele et al., and McGill & Blench all involved extensive collaboration with native speakers who had not previously used computers.

Ironically, programs that are easier (“less challenging”) to use such as WeSay might result in less relevant knowledge-transfer in the long run. For example the Cicipu documentation team (see McGill & Blench, this vol) learnt about menu-driven applications, file management, file backup, and Windows keyboards for different languages through using Microsoft Word and Transcriber rather than WeSay; the latter program takes care of all of these issues for the user.

### 2.4.3 Non-linguistic assistance

The term ‘documentation’ is ambiguous in meaning between the product (the corpus) and the documentary process. Applied language documentation is normally associated with the former since as linguists we can see how we might try to use the material to offer ‘linguistic’ help. However the process of language documentation in sub-Saharan Africa usually involves the extended presence of an outside researcher in the field, and the community’s relationship with this outsider will often open up access to quite different contacts and possible sources of funding for *non-linguistic* help. As Good points out in his paper, there seems to be a default expectation that collaboration between linguists and communities should be linguistic in kind.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://trans.sourceforge.net/en/presentation.php>

<sup>14</sup> <http://wesay.palaso.org/>

Indeed funding bodies may reject applications for assisting the community in areas that are not, however tenuously, linked to linguistics. This is particularly frustrating in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, where it is often inappropriate to pay a decent wage by Western standards, and community members may in fact prefer to enter into reciprocal relationships with the researcher, cemented with long-term undischarged obligations (see Dobrin 2008 for discussion in the Melanesian context).

Examples given by Good include help with the construction of a health centre, roads and bridges, and providing assistance to a national archive of historical documents. A more modest example might be to collaborate with a village in the installation of a borehole. If funding is rejected, foreign researchers should not rule out the possibility of contributing personally where possible. Outside linguists almost always live in comparative luxury and it is disingenuous not to admit that we benefit financially from our fieldwork through the publications we produce and the career advancement that results.

## 2.5 Summary

Here we present a number of general questions relevant to applied language documentation in sub-Saharan Africa, distilled from the previous discussion. This is not intended as a typology or to be prescriptive: these questions are simply offered as a summary of the issues discussed at the SOAS workshop and in the papers presented here, as well as potentially an analytical aid to researchers.

- What kind of research are you doing? Is it primarily ‘linguistic documentation’ or is it ‘language documentation’? The answer will affect the scope of reciprocity required.
- Which community(ies) have you benefited from in your own research? Which are you best able to help effectively?
- To what extent are people’s ethnic identities fluid? How complex is the language ecology and the local linguistic politics? Do you understand enough to be confident your interventions will do no harm?
- To what extent has the community been disenfranchised by more dominant groups? Could applied language documentation activities in the face of opposition make things even worse for the community?
- Is there a niche for the kind of applications you are planning? This is particularly relevant for attempts to encourage local literacy.

- To what extent are computers available? Would mobile phones be a better avenue for dissemination?
- Do you have a reasonable expectation of having a long-term association with the community? If so would you consider the idea of ‘deferred payback’? What would be the impact of doing so?
- What is the overlap between the knowledge and skills that your collaborators want to acquire (and that you can enable them to do so), and the knowledge and skills that will be useful for present and future documentation? Consider choosing your documentation technologies with skills transfer in mind.
- Is non-linguistic help appropriate? Do you have contacts that could assist the community in ways you cannot? Would you consider setting aside money for this in your funding applications? Can you help personally?

### **3. The papers**

Part 1 begins with Jeff Good’s paper which offers an analysis of ‘community collaboration’ based on his experience documenting the Lower Fungom languages of northwest Cameroon. The literature on how language documentation can be used in the revitalisation of languages often assumes research contexts typical of Western countries such as the United States and Australia rather than sub-Saharan Africa. Starting from the assumptions that the goals of community collaboration in applied language documentation are revitalisation and building a local capacity for documentation, and more generally that such collaboration in itself is worthwhile, Good introduces and illustrates three principles for collaboration in an African context. Firstly, outside linguists benefit from several distinct communities, all of which are likely to be under-resourced and all of which it is reasonable to try to assist in some way. Examples include the speech community whose language is being documented and the academic community in the host country, as well as existing projects focused on other nearby languages. Not all of these communities are able to benefit to the same degree from the rather specialised help that the linguist can bring, and perhaps paradoxically it may not be the actual endangered languages speech community that is the most appropriate one to concentrate one’s efforts on, even where the goal is revitalisation of that community’s language. Secondly, Good stresses the importance of taking the time to understand the language’s ‘social significance’. As Di Carlo & Good (2012) have discussed elsewhere, the extreme linguistic diversity currently found in the Lower Fungom area is likely to be a (relatively) recent socio-political response, and ‘maintenance’ efforts by ethnographically-

uninformed linguists have the potential to do more harm than good. Thirdly, support to the various communities should not be limited to the merely linguistic. The paper ends by outlining general principles for language documentation which are applicable to those working outside Africa.

The paper by Michael Thomas also focuses on community collaboration, based on his experiences working on the Sakun (Biu-Mandara, Chadic) documentation project based at the UNESCO Sukur World Heritage Site in Adamawa state, northeast Nigeria. Significant effort was devoted to knowledge transfer in the domain of computers, despite the fact that the project was carried out as just one part of a PhD programme, and even though the Sakun documenters were starting from scratch in this respect (this theme recurs in the papers by Biesele et al. and by McGill & Blench). Thomas identifies a number of ways in which the documentation enables his collaborators' goal of language development, including the choice of corpus and the design of the orthography.

Megan Biesele, Lee Pratchett, and Taesun Moon review the experiences over the last ten years of the Jul'hoan Transcription Group in Namibia, a community-based project who have been transcribing digitised recordings of their native language Jul'hoan (Khoisan) since 2002. Of particular interest is their positive experience in training novice computers to use the annotation software program ELAN, which is often thought of as being relatively complex to use (e.g., Berez 2007). Other linguists have reported similar successes with the program (Thomas this volume, Bob Williams p.c. on the Uncunwee (Ghulfan) Documentation Project). The latter part of the paper examines the prospects for a new project on the nearby related language #X'ao-l'aen, spoken on the border of Namibia and Botswana. The authors discuss the difficulties that identifying 'community' members pose for a fledgling project, and the potential contribution of elders and their traditional knowledge. They conclude that the community-based 'bottom-up' structure of the Jul'hoan Transcription Group will be an important factor in the documentation of the linguistic practices of other groups such as the #X'ao-l'aen, regardless of the continued presence of outside researchers. This can be seen in the light of Good's discussion of different communities – with the documentation of #X'ao-l'aen benefitting from earlier investment in Jul'hoan.

The contribution by Stuart McGill and Roger Blench is concerned with Kainji, a severely under-documented subgroup of Benue-Congo spoken in northern Nigeria and consisting of approximately sixty languages. After summarising the state-of-the-art in Kainji documentation, they go on to relate how, despite the current religiously-motivated violence in Nigeria, Muslims can be found collaborating with Christians on Kainji language projects. This

is the case even to the extent that it brings them into conflict with Muslims from the dominant ethnic group, Hausa. The authors argue that this is in part due to an ideological divide, although not the usual Muslim/Christian opposition. Instead, due to past persecution and present domination by the Hausa, speakers of Kainji languages, at least in part, define their identity in opposition to the Hausa, regardless of religion. The prospects for language support and revitalisation enterprises are therefore high, although in inverse proportion to the interest of academics in engaging in such activities in Nigeria. The article ends with some practical recommendations for language projects with similar sociolinguistic settings, stressing the importance of even a limited amount of knowledge transfer.

Part 2 contains two papers dealing with languages of South East Asia. Geoffrey Benjamin's paper is a state of the art overview of research on Aslian languages spoken in Malaysia and Thailand, a sub-group of the Mon-Khmer language family that is little known outside a relatively small group of specialists. Benjamin's panoramic contribution draws on his more than 50 years of research and fieldwork and covers the history of research on Aslian, language classification, an overview of the structure and use of the languages, and some notes on anthropological issues connecting Aslian peoples with their Mon-Khmer relatives. Peter Austin's paper is a preliminary description of the expression of tense-aspect-mood in Sasak, spoken on Lombok island in eastern Indonesia, showing that the language has no tense category and expresses aspect and mood via auxiliary particles that function like independent word-level clitics. He also outlines the functional equivalent of evidentials, namely two types of constructions involving verbs and nouns that express locutionary and perceptual-cognitive-sensory semantics. The paper is illustrated with copious examples from a range of Sasak regional varieties with many examples drawn from Austin's extensive documentary corpus of Sasak.

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Dunn, Michael, Niclas Burenhult, Nicole Kruspe, Neele Becker & Sylvia Tufvesson. 2011. Aslian linguistic prehistory: A case study in computational phylogenetics. *Diachronica* 28, 291-323.

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