

Handbook of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork

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 Springer

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Chapter Synopsis of a Handbook of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 identifies the target audience for the Handbook. It reviews the current literature on fieldwork and closely related topics such as endangered language documentation. The authors report on how the Handbook is an original contribution to the field: it provides broad geographical coverage; a historical background of linguistic fieldwork; encyclopedic coverage of approaches and viewpoints on field sites, consultants, ethics, and methodology of data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes by laying out the organization of the book and provides a comprehensive reference list of other books on linguistic fieldwork.

Chapter 2: Definition and Goals of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork

Chapter 2 defines and discusses the primary, secondary, and ancillary goals of “descriptive linguistic fieldwork”. The chapter quotes from several publications on fieldwork to reveal the diversity in opinions on what constitutes fieldwork, field sites, and consultants. The chapter ends with a comprehensive reference list on the topic.

Chapter 3: The History of Linguistic Fieldwork

Chapter 3 provides an in depth account of the history of linguistic fieldwork. It tracks Christian missionary fieldwork from early colonial times to the current day mission of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators; the writings of “gentlemen scholars” from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries; commissioned word lists by wealthy or interested patrons; language descriptions

based on imprisoned, enslaved, or hospitalized peoples. The chapter also discusses fieldwork based on collaboration with native consultants and fieldwork contemporaneous with traditions less supportive of fieldwork. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of the Africanist fieldwork model and the current spate of fieldwork spurned by endangered language documentation and how these two influence our current understanding of what constitutes fieldwork. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4: Choosing a Language

Chapter 4 examines the factors which determine how a fieldworker selects a language to work on. Four main sources are identified and discussed: selection of the language is determined by an advisor or funding agency; the language community chooses the fieldworker; or the fieldworker selects the language. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 5: Field Preparation: Research, Psychological, and Practical

In Chapter 5, three avenues of preparation for fieldwork are considered. First, there is the specific research preparation for the language and culture to be studied, which should be carried out in addition to general typological study (see Chapter 11). Second, is the psychological preparation by which the fieldworker learns from previous experience what to expect from the field situation and considers how his or her individual personality will react to and will deal with the pressures of the field. Third, the chapter deals with the practical aspects that must be taken care of before a fieldworker sets off to the field, including seeking funding; making contacts with a community of speakers; and purchasing and learning to use the right equipment. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 6: Fieldwork Ethics: the Rights and Responsibilities of the Fieldworker

Chapter 6 is on the rights and responsibilities of the fieldworker to the host community, to the academic community, and to the self. Topics discussed include: the accurate and timely collection, description, and archiving of data; when called to do so by the community advocating for them and empowering and mobilizing them to be effective agents of language and cultural maintenance; exercising proper caution

and providing appropriate guidance for students sent to the field; appropriately attributing data sources and acknowledging/honoring data ownership and appropriate safeguards against disallowed access to data; being aware of the consequences of fieldwork, many of which are unintended; having control over personal behavior in the field and with consultants; seeking the appropriate permissions from local authorities be they from the fieldworker's home institution, funding agency, or central, local, tribal governments at the field site. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 7: Native Speakers and Field Workers

Chapter 7 deals with the selection of native speakers for a field project. Questions addressed include: how to begin looking for and hiring native speakers; establishing the role of speakers in the project depending on the speaker's individual characteristics (e.g. physical condition and age; gender; where they live; education and whether or not they are literate; personality traits; talent as a consultant; language proficiency; availability; and personal objectives in working on the field project); determining how many speakers to work with; exploring how good relations can be maintained with native speakers hired for the field project; and working with groups of speakers. In addition, the chapter looks at practical matters involved in dealing with consultants such as payment, gifts, and keeping track of native speakers through prompt cataloging of contacts. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 8: Planning Session, Note Taking, and Data Management

Chapter 8 is a practical guide to organizing field sessions. The chapter advocates finding a convenient time and space for each session; building a flexible plan with clear objectives and a list of planned activities or tasks; preparation before the field session of necessary equipment and other materials needed to meet the stated objectives; and the recording of session data for further analysis by appropriate note taking, recording, data organization, and archiving practices. Included are suggestions for the internal organization of the field session from the introductory warm-up phase to the close. Interviewing techniques are reviewed with discussion of: how speakers may interpret an interview question; how fieldworkers should evaluate and react to native speaker responses; and how a native speaker's interest can be maintained during a field session. The chapter reviews ways of taking notes during each session, keeping track of data collected during the session (audio and video files, field notes, printed materials); and the archiving of these data. Suggestions are

made about how fieldworkers can keep track of their finances. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 9: Lexicography in Fieldwork

Chapter 9 distills from a wide variety of sources advice for the fieldworker on collecting words which can be used for wordlists and lexica or dictionaries. This chapter provides a methodology on how to create a wordlist by using a wordlist elicitation schedule of common words as well as extended culturally-specific wordlists and/or eliciting words from picture prompts, derived from texts; and dialect surveys. Advice is provided for organization of elicitation schedules by lexical category and semantic field. The chapter provides advice on methods of data cataloging and database management, along with notes on speaker input in finalizing bilingual dictionaries. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 10: Phonetic and Phonological Fieldwork

Chapter 10 reviews the literature for advice on phonetic and phonological fieldwork. Topics covered include general preparation for such fieldwork such as learning how to transcribe and training the ear to perceive sounds not in the fieldworker's language. Guidance is also provided on how to organize word lists and short phrases for recording and; how to record such word lists for maximum success in phonetic and phonological analysis. It is also established that for this kind of fieldwork it is crucial to find the right kind and number of speakers to record, and to utilize native speaker input in determining sound distribution. We provide a detailed guide on how to elicit information on stress and tone. A comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 11: Morphosyntactic Typology and Terminology

Chapter 11 will assist the beginning fieldworker in isolating the morphosyntactic, morphological, and syntactic characteristics of the target language. It provides a handy reference on topics such as: formal marking systems (head vs dependent, inverse, switch reference); lexical and grammatical categories; terminological issues in morphology such as the definition of the word; mechanisms of clause combination and transformation; and major hierarchies and scales relevant to syntax. An important feature of this chapter is the must-read lists of references provided with each of the described constructions.

Chapter 12: Grammar Gathering Techniques

Chapter 12 reviews approaches that fieldworkers can take when trying to understand the morphology and syntax of a language. The chapter is introduced by a discussion on directionality in grammar collection and grammatical theories that might influence data collection. After reviewing current terminology and classification of grammar gathering tasks and methods, details of data gathering techniques for morphosyntax, morphology, and syntax are discussed. The authors provide a detailed review of elicitation schedules along with a typology of such schedules. Also discussed is analysis controlled elicitation, that is, elicitation that is not based on a schedule such as: target language interrogation; stimulus-driven; target language manipulation; target language translation; target language construction and introspective judgment; reverse translation; review; ancillary; covert; and meta-elicitation. Specific techniques discussed for eliciting morphological facts include paradigm elicitation; bound and free morpheme elicitation; stem and root elicitation; and elicitation of noun, adjective and verb morphology. For gathering data on syntax, a discussion of the use of introspective syntactic judgments in grammatical description is provided in addition to elicitation by schedule, analysis controlled elicitation, and reverse translation. Each method is ranked for difficulty in terms of how hard the tasks are for the speaker to understand and perform and how difficult it is for the fieldworker to execute and interpret the results. A comprehensive reference list, including many online resources, is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 13: Semantics, Pragmatics, and Text Collection

Chapter 13 reviews the place of semantics and pragmatics in descriptive linguistic fieldwork which are topics that are often given short shrift in field manuals. Included are a review of the basic definitions of word meaning (including synonymy, homophony, antonymy, and polysemy created through semantic change) sentence meaning; and pragmatics (including deixis, conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and conversational structure). Finally this chapter provides a detailed discussion of text collection including a review of what is said in the literature about the advantages of text collection; types of texts that can be collected and how and where texts can be collected and analyzed (specifically creating translation; transcription; word-for-word translation; constituent analysis and free translations). A comprehensive reference list, including many online resources, is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This book is a handbook, survey, and reference work for professional linguists and students of linguistics who intend to conduct descriptive linguistic fieldwork. Descriptive linguistic fieldwork (henceforth called linguistic fieldwork)¹ is the investigation of the structure of a language through the collection of primary language data gathered from interaction with native-speaking consultants.

As a handbook, it provides fieldworkers with detailed discussions of the theoretical, practical, and ethical issues involved in language selection, data collection, data management, interaction and work with consultants, and language analysis and description.

As a survey, the book covers past and present approaches and solutions to problems in the field, and the historical, political, and social variables associated with fieldwork in different areas of the world. The book also provides interested readers with access to topics through a detailed index and through comprehensive topical bibliographies at the end of each chapter.

In recent years there has been an increased interest in linguistic fieldwork. This is reflected in the publication, in just the last decade, of several book-length guides on the topic (Abbi 2001; Bowerman 2008; Crowley 2007; Vaux and Cooper 1998; Vaux et al. 2007) and two book-length essay collections (Aikhenvald 2007; Newman and Ratliff 2001). Three more recent book-length collections of essays should be mentioned here, even though they are not considered guides to fieldwork: Gippert et al. (2006) which is on language documentation; and Ameka et al. (2006), and Payne and Weber (2006/2007) which are on grammar writing. These three collections refer perceptively to aspects of linguistic fieldwork, and the essays in them are almost all written by accomplished fieldworkers.²

¹A detailed discussion of what is meant by descriptive linguistic field work as opposed to other sorts of linguistic fieldwork is provided in Chapter 2.

²For the sake of comprehensiveness, let us mention the three older book-length treatments of linguistic fieldwork: Samarin (1967), Bouquiaux and Thomas (1972), and Kibrik (1977). Samarin's *Field Linguistics* (1967) has served linguists well as a manual and is still a very comprehensive reference to the literature, but is now outdated in many technical, theoretical and sociolinguistic respects. Bouquiaux and Thomas's *Enquête et Description des langues à tradition orale* (1972) (and its more recent English translation Bouquiaux, Thomas, and Robert *Studying and Describing Unwritten Languages* (1992), include much helpful material such as sample questionnaires and a

Our contribution to this field is to provide a reference work that is broader in scope and coverage than existing volumes, from four points of view: geographical, historical, philosophical, and encyclopedic.

It is universally recognized that the experiences and the logistical, ethical, methodological, and analytical problems of descriptive fieldwork vary widely depending on the regions of the world where the fieldwork is conducted. This can be seen by comparing them: Abbi (2001) is geared to India, Bower (2008) describes the Australian situation, and Crowley (2007) the Vanuatu (Melanesia) and Australian situations.³ Vaux and Cooper (1998) does not cover geographical issues in any detail since it is a textbook designed for a 16-week semester field methods class with most of the examples taken from Armenian or Indian languages. Vaux et al. (2007), while not organized as a fieldwork class book, is an expansion of Vaux and Cooper (1998). *Linguistic Fieldwork*, edited by Newman and Ratliff (2001), and a special volume of *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* on fieldwork edited by Aikhenvald (2007) have wider geographical coverage. However, because of the format of these works – they are collections of essays by a variety of field linguists – the relevant information on a single issue, specific field techniques for example, are not referenced in one place.

In this book, we attempt to provide geographical coverage that is as broad as possible. We draw on our personal and professional experience in India, Belgium, the American Southwest and Plains, Alaska, and the Canadian North. Additionally, based on personal interviews, we report on the experiences of seasoned fieldworkers from every continent. Finally, we direct readers to the published literature in order to provide resources relevant to their particular fieldwork situation.

This book pays more attention than its predecessors to the historical background of fieldwork. There are three things that the history of fieldwork can teach the fieldworker. First, and most obviously, the fieldworker can learn to avoid the mistakes of the past, which are more numerous, diverse, and imaginative than we care to believe. Second, and particularly in the case of endangered language documentation, the fieldworker often has to carry out a philological study of older documentation or fieldworker notes, and it is impossible to do philological work without a study of the historical context. Third, the study of the history of fieldwork helps in understanding why consultants, in many areas of the world, have the perceptions of linguistic fieldworkers that they have. These perceptions are typically due to past treatment (benign or otherwise) by colonial administrators; missionaries; aid, social, or medical workers; anthropologists; or other linguists. The areas of the world where the modern fieldworker is the very first outsider “in the field” are becoming very rare.

lengthy bibliography, but are also outdated as to content. Additionally, both of these works, especially Bouquiaux and Thomas, are geographically oriented towards the study of African languages. Kibrik’s *The Methodology of Field Investigations in Linguistics* (1977) is outdated for the same reasons as Samarin, and is geographically oriented towards the languages of the former Soviet Union.

³ As mentioned in the previous footnote, earlier books on fieldwork were geared towards Africa or the former Soviet Union.

Linguistic fieldwork is usually seen as conducted while living in a community far from the fieldworker's own and interacting with a typically rural or village culture very different from the fieldworker's own. We have a slightly different view about who counts as a consultant, and about the typical setting of linguistic fieldwork. We propose that there is such a thing as linguistic fieldwork in one's own community, or even with one's own relatives. For example, these days, community-based language preservation efforts are often guided by members of the community. More often than not, these documenters are non-speakers or semi-speakers of their heritage languages, and therefore in effect have to conduct fieldwork within their own communities or with their own relatives. Between these extreme contexts are the cases of linguistic fieldwork in urban offices, inner city apartments, or in Native reservation offices and schools, and so on. In our view, fieldwork issues in these varied environments are incorrectly considered to be only slightly different from the typical fieldwork situation. Also, we feel that fieldwork in the urban environment is mistakenly considered far less interesting than fieldwork in the typical village or rural context. Such "unexotic" fieldwork situations are more commonly encountered than discussed in the literature and should be investigated further.

Finally, the need for an encyclopedic handbook becomes obvious when one considers the recent surge of interest in endangered language preservation and documentation, as well as its connections with the more established issues of language politics and policies. This surge of interest has highlighted the importance of documentary and descriptive fieldwork in endangered languages, and numerous articles and websites on such fieldwork are now available. In this book we compile references to and distill the information from recent books, articles, and websites discussing linguistic fieldwork.

One recent encyclopedic work that is somewhat comparable in scope to this handbook is Dixon's two volume *Basic Linguistic Theory* (2010a, b). This work also views descriptive fieldwork, descriptive methodologies and analysis, and typology as stages on a path towards the goal of accurate descriptive linguistics. While there is very much we agree with in this book (and we will point the reader to it often), we do not always agree with the concept of Basic Linguistic Theory as formulated by Dixon, which we will discuss in some detail in Chapters 11 and 12.

This volume also includes discussion of material that is often omitted, or is covered in less detail. For example, we provide a full treatment of the investigation of grammar beyond the sentence: too often discussion of discourse and conversational analysis is omitted in accounts of fieldwork; however, these are crucial loci of grammatical information that cannot be found in non-continuous speech. We also discuss the collection, representation, management, and methods of extracting grammatical information from such data. We discuss the relationship between questionnaire-based elicitation, text-based elicitation, and philology, and the need for combinations of these methods.

We cannot claim to have covered every idea, saying, or opinion regarding linguistic fieldwork, but we are confident that we have gathered representative ideas and opinions all in one place.

Furthermore, because of its encyclopedic nature, this book is not only useful as a researchers' guide to take to the field, but also as a reference tool for beginners as well as for professional linguists to consult before, after, and in between field trips.

Many linguistics and anthropology departments offer field methods classes and encourage students to conduct original fieldwork to supplement more theoretical studies. This book can be useful to such students. Field methods classes are typically organized according to the complexity of the language being investigated and the level of the students in the class, and they tend to follow a predictable schedule, e.g. 4 weeks on phonology and 2 on syntax, etc. This book could constitute the sole class reading for a field methods class, with the division of readings being left up to the discretion of the instructor.

The remainder of the book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 defines descriptive linguistic fieldwork and states its goals. Chapter 3 discusses the history of linguistic fieldwork, illustrating how a historical understanding of fieldworkers, consultants, and linguistic descriptions is a necessary complement to the philological aspects of fieldwork. Chapter 4 presents insights on how fieldworkers select a region or language to work on. Chapter 5 is more practical in nature, and provides recommendations on how to prepare for fieldwork and what to take to the field. Chapter 6 addresses ethical issues. Chapter 7 focuses on how to set up working relationships with language consultants, and on what to expect in the field in terms of the personal and professional implications of fieldwork. Chapter 8 breaks down the structure of a typical fieldwork session, discussing how best to begin, manage, and end a fieldwork session. Special attention is given to the ordering of elicitation tasks, and to consultants' reception, attention and understanding of those tasks. Chapter 9 outlines methods for word list collection and discusses the special case of fieldwork leading to the creation of dictionaries. Chapter 10 is a guide to doing phonetic fieldwork, with extensive sections on the study of tone, stress and intonation, as well as step-by-step methodology on phonemic analysis. Chapter 11 summarizes the major terms and typological structures that a fieldworker should know about before going to the field. It also reviews relevant semantic, pragmatic and discourse-related concepts. Chapter 11 should be used along with Chapter 12, which provides a detailed overview of methods of elicitation and data gathering techniques. Here we suggest adoption of a method which consistently resets tasks according to the complexity of reasoning required by the consultant and the growing knowledge of the language on the part of the fieldworker. Finally, Chapter 13 focuses on semantic and pragmatic fieldwork, and provides a methodology for using texts in linguistic analysis. This is followed by a subject, language, and author index.

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Chapter 2

Definition and Goals of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork

2.1 The Definition of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork

We define descriptive linguistic fieldwork as the investigation of the structure of a language through the collection of primary language data gathered through interaction with native-speaking consultants. Many other definitions emphasize the notion that the fieldworker must live like and with the native speakers of the language to be studied. For example, Everett (2001:168) defines linguistic fieldwork as:

...the activity of a researcher systematically analyzing parts of a language other than one's native language (usually one the researcher did not speak prior to beginning fieldwork) within a community of speakers of that language, prototypically in their native land, living out their existence in the milieu and mental currency of their native culture.

A similar emphasis is also in Foley's discussion (2002:131):

The ideal way to study the language of a traditional community is in situ, living with the village, learning as much of the social customs of the people as possible.

The same emphasis is present in Aikhenvald's (2007:5) definition as well:

Linguistic fieldwork ideally involves observing the language as it is used, becoming a member of the community, and often being adopted into the kinship system.

Aikhenvald (2007:5–6) goes somewhat further than Everett and Foley, in that she distinguishes between “immersion fieldwork”, which corresponds to her definition above, and “interview fieldwork”, where the relationship between fieldworker and speaker is superficial and perhaps shorter, in that it is limited to interactions during fieldwork sessions. We hold that the success of the fieldwork endeavor is not based on whether fieldwork is of the “immersion” or “interview” style, but on whether it is intelligently or poorly conducted. In most fieldwork there is an “immersion” dimension, as the fieldworker tries to immerse her/himself in the community, as well as an “interview” dimension, when the fieldworker sits down with a consultant and asks questions. To be sure, no fieldworker has ever conducted fieldwork without asking questions. Equally true is the fact that “interview fieldwork” can be done with disastrous results, but then again, the same thing can be said of “immersion fieldwork”, which can yield little analyzable data.

Everett, Foley and Aikhenvald are purists in this precise but romantic conception of fieldwork, much in the sense that the “participant observer” in the area of socio-cultural anthropology would consider himself or herself a purist in his/her field.

Other fieldworkers, such as Hyman (2001) and Samarin (1967:1–2), would consider the above definitions appropriate for prototypical fieldwork, but would agree that bringing the native speaker out of his/her milieu to another location, or working in an office is still considered fieldwork. While Crowley (2007:14–16) also holds that ideal fieldwork is in the community, he also accepts the possibility of fieldwork “at home”.

Concerning the issue of prototypical versus less-prototypical fieldwork, Table 2.1 from Hyman (2001:21) provides a useful overview:

The prototype and the least fieldwork-like types described in this chart are sometimes caricatured by terms such as “dirty feet” linguistics (Crowley 2007:11–13) and “armchair” linguistics, respectively (Aikhenvald 2007:4, Crowley 2007: 11–13).

In this book, fieldwork is conceived of as having a slightly wider scope than what Everett, Foley, Aikhenvald, Samarin, Crowley, and Hyman have in mind. We define fieldwork both in terms of what it is and what it is not.

Descriptive linguistic fieldwork is:

1. Data collection for the purpose of the documentation and description of a language
2. Data collection through interaction with speakers
3. Data collection in situations where speakers are expected to use the language naturally

Descriptive linguistic fieldwork is *not*:

1. Data collection only through introspection
2. Data collection only through examination of written documents or written corpora
3. Data collection only through controlled lab experiments

Table 2.1 Prototypical versus less prototypical fieldwork (Reproduced from Table 1.1 in Hyman 2001)

	Fieldwork prototype	Fieldwork countertype	Least fieldwork-like
Elicitee	Other	Self	Introspection
Elicitor/observer	Self	Other	Secondary data
Distance	Far	Near	One’s domicile
Setting	Small	Large	City, university
Duration	Long	Short	Brief stopover
Language	Exotic	Well-known	One’s own
Subject matter	A language in its natural/ cultural context	Language in general as a formal system	Abstract syntax
Data	Naturalistic	Controlled	Synthetic speech
Motivation	Languages-driven	Theory-driven	

We also argue that archiving, corpus-building and large lexicographic projects are not the concern of descriptive fieldwork. (See [Section 9.3](#) for further comments on lexicography and fieldwork.)

Introspection, i.e. in some sense using oneself as a native-speaking consultant (discussed at length in [Chapter 12](#)), is not considered fieldwork in any discussion. However, in linguistic descriptions resulting from fieldwork, insights from fieldwork and from introspection are not always distinguished. Many descriptions by native-speaking linguists have been written using both introspection and speaker interaction; this interaction includes fieldwork with one's relatives, and fieldwork with others within their own communities. Some grammars of unwritten Flemish dialects were written this way by scholars who considered themselves dialectologists first and foremost. They were native speakers of the dialects they described, but nevertheless were superb descriptivist fieldworkers. Examples are [Colinet \(1896\)](#) on the phonetics and morphology of the Aalst dialect, [Vanacker \(1948\)](#) on the syntax of the Aalst dialect, and [Pauwels \(1958\)](#) on the Aarschot dialect. These descriptions, although quite conservative in that they are pre-phonemic, are nevertheless quite accurate and detailed.

There has been some debate on whether description based solely on the introspection of a native speaker can be considered fieldwork. For some, introspection is regarded as not only an efficient, but also the most reliable method for accessing a language's structure (See [Chomsky 1957](#)). The goal of the Chomskyan program is to build a model of linguistic competence. Since the structure of a language is present in each individual speaker, investigation into the competency of one fluent speaker should be a valid way to uncover the structure of that language, and a speaker could thus uncover his or her competency through introspection. There are some well-known examples of how a native speaker's introspective comments have been used for language description: see, for example, [Sapir's \(1933\)](#) work on the psychological reality of the phoneme, where a native speaker was encouraged to think about the distribution of sounds in his own language. In this way, fieldworkers often ask the native speaker to be introspective. See also [Hale \(1972\)](#) who has argued for the role of native speaker introspection in fieldwork.

There even exists a tradition within dialectology implying that introspection by speakers of an exotic or unwritten language counts as fieldwork. An example of this view is [Basset \(1951\)](#), who carried out fieldwork with Berber varieties in North Africa, and relied to some extent on introspection by natives.

There are other interactions with native speakers that we consider to be fieldwork. Sociolinguistic and dialectological pursuits – if involving interviews with native speakers – are considered fieldwork, following [Lounsbury \(1953:413–414\)](#) and [Mosel \(2001\)](#), and pace [Munro \(2003:130–131\)](#). Philological work – if carried out in consultation with native speakers – is also considered fieldwork. Several excellent descriptions have been written which combine fieldwork with research on earlier written sources, i.e. philology and epigraphy, as shown in [Bower \(2008:4\)](#) and in [Section 5.2](#) in this book.

Finally, we agree with [Munro \(2003:130–131\)](#) that the controlled lab experiments used by psycholinguists and language acquisition researchers are not fieldwork, but

at the same time it needs to be acknowledged that controlled experimentation has a place, if a minor one, in fieldwork. Controlled experimentation has been particularly useful in phonetic fieldwork, as we will see in Chapter 10.

2.2 The Goals of Descriptive Linguistic Fieldwork

We consider that the goals of fieldwork depend on what sort of documents the fieldworker wants to produce. Not all fieldworkers state goals of fieldwork in terms of documents produced. For example, for Lounsbury (1953:414), fieldwork is a method “oriented toward a complete structural analysis of a language.” For Vaux and Cooper (1999:17) the goal of fieldwork is to “elicit the maximum possible amount of reliable data in the minimum amount of time”. Both goals are uniquely ambitious and uncomfortably vague. What indeed, is a “complete structural analysis?” What indeed, is the satisfactory “maximum amount of reliable data in the minimum amount of time”?

These are the sorts of questions we will attempt to answer in this book. In this chapter, we will also clarify what we mean by descriptive linguistic fieldwork. In the following sections we will distinguish three sorts of goals of linguistic fieldwork: primary goals (Section 2.2.1), secondary goals (Section 2.2.2), and ancillary goals (Section 2.2.3). The primary goals constitute what we will call descriptive linguistic fieldwork.

2.2.1 Primary Goals of Fieldwork

A European conception of descriptive linguistics distinguishes two methods of gathering data: (1) collecting a corpus of texts, which is part of what philologists traditionally do in their study of ancient written languages, and (2) interaction with a native speaker (Mosel 1987:10). Since for us fieldwork must involve interaction with a native speaker, only the second counts as real fieldwork.

In the American Boas–Sapir–Bloomfield tradition (Section 3.1), text collection and interaction with native speakers were not distinguished, since work was carried out on unwritten languages, and therefore all descriptive linguistics, including text gathering, originated in fieldwork, i.e. was based on interaction with native speakers. As a result, the European conception of descriptive linguistics as a cover term for two methods of data gathering can be discarded as too exclusive.

One can now distinguish (1) corpus collection of written documents, (2) corpus collection based on interaction with native speakers, (3) other activities based on interaction with native speakers. Activity (1) is part of the field of corpus linguistics, as well as of the field of philology. Activities (2) and (3) have given rise to the new field called “documentary linguistics”, which can briefly be defined as the collection or gathering of linguistic data through a variety of methods and techniques, with a

focus on reliability, representativity, and archivability. The field of “descriptive linguistics” is now conceived of as the analysis of language data gathered through activities (1) though (3). For some scholars, the goal of fieldwork should be documentation, whereas for other scholars the goal of fieldwork should not stop there, but should include descriptive linguistics as well. We will first discuss documentary linguistics as a goal, then descriptive linguistics as a goal, and then we will discuss the relationship between these two goals.

2.2.1.1 Documentary Linguistics

Documentation as a goal of fieldwork is, of course nothing new, since that was, after all, one of the goals of the Boas–Sapir–Bloomfield tradition (Woodbury 2003; Himmelmann 2006:14). At the time of this writing, documentary work is frequently being discussed because of the current attention to language endangerment issues (see Section 2.2.2.2).

Himmelmann (1998) is the foundational article arguing for a separation of documentary and descriptive fieldwork, within a broader field of descriptive linguistics (as originally defined in Section 2.2.1). We will argue in this chapter, and throughout this book, that a separation between documentary and descriptive fieldwork is not tenable, but first we will present in some detail the arguments for such a separation.

While Himmelmann (1998:163) recognizes that there is necessarily overlap in the area of the transcription of data in documentation and description, he argues that collection (i.e., documentary fieldwork) and analysis (i.e., descriptive fieldwork) are different activities in terms of result, procedure, and methodology. From a practical point of view, if collection and analysis are not distinguished, researchers will not pay sufficient attention to the activity of collecting. Secondly, when the documentary data are made available, they should be useful not only to people writing a descriptive grammar, but also to scholars in other disciplines such as anthropology, oral history, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. A grammatical description, on the other hand, is primarily useful only to grammarians and comparativists. Finally, description is different from documentation because there is no automatic procedure for deriving description from data, since depending on the underlying theoretical framework, different descriptions can and will result.

Lehmann (1999:1–2), holds a similar view of the distinction, and adds that since languages are dying faster than linguists can describe them, the only really urgent task is documentation. Lehmann distinguishes primary documentation, (i.e. a text corpus), from secondary documentation, (i.e. the description), and emphasizes that both must be accessible digitally. The documentation could be an “edited version of the field notes”, and more ambitiously, what he calls a “radically expanded text collection”, i.e. an annotated text collection, which should be a “record of the linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community” (Himmelmann 1998:165–166).