

Field-Methods

Source: Bower (2008) and Abbi (2001)

- What does fieldwork involve and what do we do in field-methods with regard to the training that is imparted to the students in linguistics?
- What is the relationship between the data that we collect and the theory that shapes our research and guides our data collection, and the speakers of the languages we are working with?
- What are the techniques that we introduce for the collection of data of a language in a particular way?
- How do we go from the 'raw' data to a research paper?
- And what are the rights and responsibilities of the linguist and the consultant in the whole process?

- These questions form the core of what fieldwork entails and should be the focus of any training in field-methods.
- Although data elicitation strategies and data processing methods are the focus of a field methods' class, in the field, there are many more worries that are needed to be handled than just data collection.
- And it is often said and laughed by hardcore field-linguists that *linguistics* is the least of the fieldworker's worries.
- Therefore, we need to talk about lots of issues and sharpen our linguistic tools to help us to equip in doing the work.
- These may constitute real work in the field.

There seems to be a paradigm shift in the very out-look and approach of the 'field-work/methods' in recent past.

It is almost a departure from the good old traditional way of doing the field-work, where the 'core' work in the field would involve elicitation and working out the features of the language under study at any cost.

The underlining for the above phrase is both in positive as well as in negative sense.

The positive aspects would highlight the amount of work that have been done, and the negative aspect is that the researchers than the researched ones have always been benefitted by the work.

Therefore, there is a need to balance the two up, so that at least some benefits must be given to the natives as well.

So, what the procedures of 'balancing the two up'?

Well, at least some importance must be given to 'archiving the data for future use', 'linguistics as the metadata, and 'inclusion of ethics of field-work'.

The last point hints at the provision of some payment to the natives in the field while engaging them for the work.

This is the least help that one can do to the natives, and the academic institutions must be forced to understand the point that we can not be guests in the field and be fed the data without the least help from our side.

I have been individually fighting for this provision in our budget.

However, the University authorities have mostly turned down the request on the ground of some lame-excuse.

This is really sad and we must do something for this.

Ethical practice is just as much a part of fieldwork as finding out about the language.

And organizing the data is just as much a part of fieldwork as analyzing it and writing up the results.

We do not have the luxury of working in a discipline with limitless funding, and students do not acquire extensive ethical training.

It is impossible to do well in one area without taking care of the others. We cannot afford to think of these topics as non-core.

Therefore, I would divide my teaching-part in the field-methods class in two sections.

The first section will introduce the necessary steps, sharpening the tools and preparing ourselves to be able to do the work in the field.

Part-I : preparing ourselves linguistically

Pencil and paper

Computer knowledge

Recording equipment

Transcription

A. Broad b. Narrow

Data template

Organizing the data

Before the class

After the class

Meta-data

Discovery procedures for phoneme inventory

Handling phonology of unknown language

Word-lists

Elicitation

Elicitation of small sentences
Basic or day to day useful sentences
Handling morphology of unknown language
Decide a topic for Micro study of the language
Choosing a consultant
Linguist-consultant interactions
Working with semi-speakers
Staying / Living in the field
Coming back from the field
Working in a group to eliminate any unsolved problem
Working together for cross-verification
Working together for uniformity in the elicitation
Making it possible to collate and compile a grammar
Giving back the grammar to the natives
Contribute in the development of the knowledge in that language

Part-II: Managing the ethical issues in field-work:

Ethical Field Research

Preliminaries

Ethics of recording

Ethics and archiving

Acknowledging speakers

Permissions

Other ethical issues in research

Payment as the token money for the hours s/he gives

Minority areas and endangered languages

Further reading for the individual topics

Appendix A: Metadata Sheets

*Appendix B: Suggested Fieldwork Program
for an Un-described Language*

Appendix C: A Basic Phonetics/Phonology Checklist

Appendix D: A Basic Morphology/Syntax Checklist

Appendix E: Sample: Consent Form

Appendix F: Equipment Checklist

Appendix G: Basic Wordlist