Seeking new paradigms for collaboration: Results from a study of field linguists

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Overview

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Motivation
Motivation

• Collaboration is becoming the ideal in language documentation

• Field linguists are expected to collaborate with members of the community whose languages they document

• The ideal model is one which empowers the community (Cameron et al. 1992)
Issues

• Cultural expectations about collaboration are highly variable (see Dobrin 2008, Holton 2009)

• Collaborative projects are less likely to be the kind that are rewarded in academia

• Dissertations cannot be co-authored

• Outsiders new to a community are not aware of local politics
Issues

• Writings on collaborative fieldwork come mostly from Australia & the Americas (e.g., Czaykowska-Higgins 2009, Grinevald 2003, Rice 2006, 2010)

• Australia and North America:
  • First world
  • Educated
  • Often easier to identify community leaders
  • Languages are very highly endangered
  • History of colonial suppression of languages
Survey Background
Survey Background

- Over 200 field linguists completed the survey
- December 2012
- advertised on LinguistList, Facebook, email, and other linguistics listservs
- conducted online with surveymonkey
This survey is intended to help uncover the factors that lead to successful collaboration between documentary linguists and community members whose languages they document. Endangered language communities vary considerably in their demographics, and collaboration may be more feasible in some communities than others.

*2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- PhD
- Masters degree
- Graduated from college
- Some college
- Graduated from high school
- Graduated high school
- Did not graduate from high school

*3. Are you currently employed in higher education, or enrolled at an institution of higher education?

- I work in higher education
- I am a student in higher education
- I do not currently work or study in higher education
- Other (please specify)

*4. In what country do you primarily reside/have employment?

- [Select a country]

*5. Have you ever conducted linguistic fieldwork, documented a lesser-studied language, or done language work in an endangered language community?

- yes
- no

*6. Did you work directly with speakers of the language or members of the heritage community who lived in this community?

- yes
- no
Survey Background

- Work in higher education: 54%
- Student in higher education: 26%
- Other: 20%
Survey Background

- PhD: 62%
- Masters degree: 29%
- College graduate: 9%
Survey Background

In what country do you primarily reside/have employment?

- United States: 40%
- Australia: 12%
- Canada: 9%
- United Kingdom: 5%
- Other: 34%
Survey Background

residence region

North America: 49%
Europe: 22%
Oceania: 17%
Asia: 7%
South/Central America: 2%
Africa: 3%
Survey Background

Fieldwork region

- North America: 20%
- South/Central America: 16%
- Oceania: 27%
- Africa: 12%
- Europe: 9%
- Asia: 16%
Survey Background

How did you initially become involved with this language?

- community member: 3%
- chose without knowing anyone: 31%
- speakers contacted someone else: 18%
- field methods: 4%
- spoken nearby: 11%
- speakers contacted directly: 5%
- other: 28%
Survey Background

Vitality of language

- Threatened: 44%
- Endangered: 26%
- Very endangered: 13%
- Vital: 10%
- Other: 4%
- Dormant: 3%
Survey Background

most typical education level in community

- no school: 0%
- some primary: 5%
- primary: 10%
- some middle: 15%
- middle: 20%
- some HS: 25%
- HS: 30%
- some college: 25%
- college: 15%
- some middle: 10%
- primary: 5%
- some primary: 0%
Survey Results
Attitudes about collaboration

Do you agree with the following statement? Documentary linguists must engage in collaborative work with the communities whose languages they document.
Attitudes about collaboration

Do you agree with the following statement? Documentary linguists must compromise scholarly goals to meet the community’s needs.
Types of collaboration

- changed a plan of research to meet the needs or wishes of community members: 54%
- participated in language revitalization or language maintenance efforts: 51%
- trained a community member in another way: 51%
- worked on a language project that was outside your area of expertise: 41%
- collaborated with community members on a project that was not language-related: 33%
- trained a community member to use linguistic software: 29%
- conducted an orthography workshop: 29%
Types of collaboration

- Conducted research initiated by community member: 22%
- Conducted research initiated by a community leader: 21%
- Trained a local teacher to teach the language: 19%
- Taught the language to language learners: 18%
- Co-authored a paper with a community member: 17%
- Helped a community member obtain a degree in linguistics: 8%
Amount of collaboration

Median = 3

% of Respondents

Number of types of collaboration
Collaboration is more likely when:
Collaboration is more likely when:

Language is spoken in the USA, Canada, or Australia
Collaboration is more likely when:
Language is spoken in the USA, Canada, or Australia

![Box plot showing number of types of collaboration between Rest of the world and US, CA & Aus]
Collaboration is more likely when:

- **Speakers are educated?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Average Number of Types of Collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some primary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
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<td>some middle</td>
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<tr>
<td>some college</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*most typical education level for community members*

*NOT SIGNIFICANT*
Collaboration is more likely when:

Language research was initiated by speakers

Average number of types of collaboration

- Speakers contacted directly: 9
- Speakers contacted someone else: 5
- Community member chose without knowing anyone: 4
- Field methods: 3
- Spoken nearby: 2
- Other: 2
Collaboration is more likely when:

Language research was initiated by speakers
Collaboration is more likely when:

Language is dormant

**p < .001**

Number of types of collaboration

- dormant
- very endangered
- endangered
- threatened
- vital
- other
Collaboration is more likely when:

Fieldworker has worked on a language for many years
Collaboration is more likely when:

Researcher has worked on a language for many years
Collaboration may be more likely when:
Collaboration may be more likely when:

Language is spoken in a first world country
Collaboration may be more likely when:

Language is spoken in a first world country

![Box plot showing number of types of collaboration for 1st world and other categories. The p-value is p < .001.](image)
Collaboration may be more likely when:

Language community has clear leaders

$p < .01$
Collaboration is less likely when:
Collaboration is less likely when:
researcher is a student

Number of types of collaboration

work in higher ed  student

p < .001
Collaboration is less likely when: researcher resides in Asia (inc. Middle East)
Collaboration is less likely when:
researcher resides in Asia (inc. Middle East)

China (1)
India (4)
Jordan (1)
Nepal (1)
Singapore (1)
South Korea (2)
Taiwan (4)
Thailand (2)
UAE (1)

$p < .001$
Discussion
Survey respondents believe that they must collaborate, but not that they must compromise scholarly goals.

Fieldworkers are engaged in more research for than research with.

Students are less likely to be involved in collaborative work.

Discussion
Discussion

• Fieldwork involves more collaboration if the community initiates the relationship
• Collaborative research is dependent on the culture of both the speakers and of the researcher
• Collaborative research is more common the longer the researcher has spent in the field
Acknowledgements

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References


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