Introduction:
The Observer's Paradox states that the presence of the observer changes the condition of the observed.

“Skewing” is the resulting disconnect between the reality of the language and the results recorded by the language documentation project researcher.

Awareness is key for addressing this issue!

Four principles for avoiding skewing:

1. The researcher can adopt the attitude and role of a learner, rather than a “teacher” or a “scientist”.
   • The researcher can review the full bibliography available about the language, or if none, then about the language family.
   • The researcher can make contact with others who have observed the language and culture.
   • The researcher, in expressing willingness and ability to learn some of the language and culture, even a few simple greetings, opens the door to explanations and/or corrections from insiders (who might not otherwise feel that this person values what they have to share).

2. The researcher can try to organize the project including insider perspectives as much as possible, throughout the process.

3. The researcher can “over-document” the metadata to allow for unrecognized but culturally significant sociolinguistic distinctions – “pan the camera”, so to speak.

4. The researcher can leave complete results of the language documentation with the community, to promote feedback on errors and omissions as well as to promote the prestige of the language, if it is a deprecated language.

Resources for tips:

• Previous field manuals
• Recent field manuals
• Some language learning manuals
• See also the full text of my paper.

Paraphrase from Rubin and Thompson 1994 (p.117), a language learning manual: “[Documenting] a language is a complex undertaking, but if you know more about the process and about your own approach to the task, it can be a very rewarding, enriching, and enjoyable experience.”

This can be true both for the researcher and the language community involved.