

Collaboration: A Reply to Bown & Warner's Reply

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Although we disagree strongly with a number of Bown and Warner's (hereafter B&W) characterizations of our own paper (hereafter C&R2013), we do agree with most of their assertions, and we welcome this contribution to our discipline. We intentionally gave our original paper a provocative title and wrote in a provocative manner in order to get the discipline's attention. With the publication of B&W, we are hopeful that we succeeded in that goal. We are not against collaboration, we simply believe it needs to be considered in a more critical light. Although B&W do not say so explicitly, we think we are in agreement that all of the scenarios they have outlined in their § 2 are ones in which the linguist is behaving ethically. That is the essential point we are attempting to make in C&R2013—that there are situations where a non-collaborative approach may be appropriate and ethical.

We applaud B&W's greatly expanded definition of collaboration: "if an outside researcher involves community members in collecting language data, entering language data into databases, or other 'data processing' tasks, this is also a type of collaborative research" (p. 65). We do not believe collaboration was previously understood in this way, and C&R2013 was written with a much narrower interpretation of the word *collaboration*. We agree wholeheartedly with B&W that "Much of the previous literature about collaborative linguistics is rather vague about what collaboration can entail" (p. 65) and we hope that we can move forward as a discipline in being more explicit about what we mean when discussing *collaboration*.¹

B&W's discussion of the history of linguistic fieldwork lies at the heart of the apparently disparate viewpoints of C&R2013 and B&W. Much of the literature on collaboration that we referenced in C&R2013 is in direct response to a history of linguistic fieldwork that disregarded community goals, often blatantly. For those linguists who began conducting fieldwork several decades ago, the literature on collaboration is clearly a response to an ethos of linguist-centered fieldwork that ignored community goals. On the other hand, there are now many linguists who have only begun their careers and are, therefore, reading this collaboration literature without any active models of the old kind of linguist-centered fieldwork. To those younger linguists, the collaboration literature seems to be calling for community-directed research at the expense of linguist-directed research, as opposed to the more balanced approach advocated by B&W and Leonard & Haynes (2010), *inter alia*. It is telling that 41% of documentary linguists responding to a survey about fieldwork agreed

¹We are, however, puzzled by B&W's strong rejection of our claim that "[...] the primary goal of documentary linguistics is the documentation of particular human languages in a principled scientific manner" (C&R2013: 124). We had not thought this to be a controversial characterization of documentary linguistics, but we see that this is a topic in need of further discussion and would open up the question to readers of this journal.

with the statement “Documentary linguists must compromise scholarly goals to meet the community’s needs” (Robinson & McDonnell, forthcoming). This finding suggests that the newer reading of the literature on collaboration as calling for community-directed research is more pervasive than B&W suggest.

B&W’s discussion of training for language revitalization hits the nail on the head. They say, “A linguist who has not received good training in language revitalization may begin work with a general idea that the field of linguistics now advocates ‘giving back to the community.’ This linguist may know only a few of the least effective ways to do that” (p. 71). B&W go on to advocate more training in language revitalization, and we echo that exhortation, though we are perhaps more pessimistic than B&W on this point. Even graduate programs that focus on language documentation often lack specific training on language revitalization, and B&W’s suggestion that students read up on language revitalization techniques in preparation for fieldwork is well-intentioned, but perhaps a bit naïve. In our experience, graduate students have so much assigned reading from coursework and background reading for a dissertation proposal that little else gets read before heading to the field. (However, to our graduate student readers, we say, go out and read about language revitalization now!).

We wholeheartedly agree with B&W’s suggestion that it is “important for the field of linguistics at this stage to work toward changing how language revitalization work and collaboration with a community to determine language goals are evaluated in hiring and tenure decisions,” (p. 74) but we are dismayed at the models advocated in § 5.3 of their paper. Models 1 and 3, the models that apply to outsider linguists working in academia, both suggest that the linguist do the revitalization work *on top of* the work that is likely to be acknowledged in hiring and tenure decisions. While model 1 does allow that the underlying documentary corpus serves both purposes and that there is some overlap, this model is still advocating a significant amount of work on top of the work that will advance one’s career. Model 3 is even more daunting, asking the linguist to do the language revitalization work on top of totally separate traditional linguistic work. This volunteer work may be important and may be a way of acknowledging the community’s contribution to the non-volunteer work, but absent from B&W’s discussion of these models is any mention of work/life balance.²

Finally, B&W claim:

We do not know of anyone telling graduate students that work with endangered language communities is always easy or successful, or even implying this. Instead, various sources argue for the need to teach younger linguists about the difficulties of fieldwork. (p. 78)

Here B&W make a jump from discussing *collaboration* to discussing *fieldwork*. Indeed, fieldwork training does usually include discussion of the difficulties of *fieldwork*, but it does not always include discussion of the difficulties of *collaboration*, nor are those discussions pervasive in the literature, especially since the recent literature tends to focus on successful collaborations. We argue that young linguists are prepared for the difficulties of *fieldwork* but are often surprised by the difficulties of *collaboration*, as evidenced in Guérin & Lacrampe (2010). B&W go on to say:

We cannot imagine how a linguistics graduate student could get as far as making their first trip to work in an endangered language community without real-

²We acknowledge that work/life balance isn’t something everyone has the privilege to worry about, but we would nevertheless encourage the discipline to place value on the families of linguists.

izing that linguists collaborating with communities often encounter conflicts.
(p. 78)

Yet young linguists we talk to are telling us just how surprising it has been for them that collaboration was not easier. That is, they are prepared for malaria and lack of electricity but frequently entirely unprepared for interpersonal conflict. That is why we decided to write C&R2013.

REFERENCES

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