

The Founding of *Language Documentation & Conservation*

Kenneth L. Rehg

Founding Editor of Language Documentation & Conservation

1. Introduction¹ On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of *Language Documentation & Conservation* (*LD&C*), Nick Thieberger asked me to write a brief account of the founding of this journal. Before doing so, I should perhaps first note that *LD&C*, as well as the other activities carried out under the banner of language documentation and conservation at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), are a natural extension of the activities of its Department of Linguistics (see <http://ling.hawaii.edu>). Since its establishment in 1963, fieldwork and language support activities, especially for languages of Asia and the Pacific, have been a major focus of the department.

The impetus for the creation of *LD&C*, however, came first from UHM's National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC). That Center had been a major supporter of UHM's Language Documentation Training Center (<http://ling.hawaii.edu/ldtc>), an activity initiated by students in the linguistics department in 2004. The Director of the NFLRC, at that time Richard Schmidt, was impressed by what these students were doing and approached me in the fall of 2005 with the idea of starting a journal, akin to the journals that the Center was already sponsoring (see <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu>).

That conversation was carried on over a period of weeks and ultimately evolved into the idea of organizing a meeting, the purpose of which was to launch a major initiative in the areas of language documentation and conservation. The goal of this initiative was to advance language documentation and associated activities as a legitimate subfield within linguistics. Consequently, in imitation of the strategy employed by American linguists to establish their discipline as one distinct from anthropology, it was decided that the purpose of the meeting should be to lay the groundwork for a journal, an international conference, and a summer institute.²

With support from a number of centers on campus,³ this meeting was held at the East-West Center in Honolulu in April of 2006. It was attended by 28 linguists and academics with interests and experience in language documentation and conservation. The participants came from Japan's National Museum of Ethnology, the

¹I would like to thank Lyle Campbell, Kimi Miyagi, and Nick Thieberger for their comments on a preliminary draft of this paper. I, of course, accept responsibility for its shortcomings.

²In addition, a track in Language Documentation and Conservation was established within the graduate program in the Department of Linguistics at UHM.

³In addition to the NFLRC, this meeting was supported by funding from the UHM National Resource Center for East Asia, the UHM Center for Pacific Island Studies, and the UHM Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, the University of Melbourne, the University of Minnesota, the University of Oregon, and the University of Toronto.

One outcome of this meeting was a set of recommendations and plans that led to the launching of the first issue of *LD&C* in June of 2007. Another was the decision to inaugurate a biennial conference, now known as the International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation, which was first held in Honolulu in 2009 and has subsequently been held there every two years since. A third was a plan to conduct a biennial summer institute, spearheaded by Carol Genetti from the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB). Dr. Genetti had earlier proposed such an institute at a conference at Harvard University, held in association with the LSA Summer Institute at MIT in 2005. The outcome was the summer institute named InField, organized by Dr. Genetti and held in 2008 at UCSB. This institute was subsequently renamed CoLang and has been hosted by different institutions every two years since.

2. Choosing a name for the journal I have thus far been using the name *Language Documentation & Conservation* without further comment. However, both “language documentation” and “conservation”, as used here, require further explanation.

One view of language documentation, first advanced by Himmelmann, is that it “may be characterized as radically expanded text collection” (1998:2). In this view, documentation and description are distinctly different undertakings. In 2012, he provided a more nuanced definition of language documentation, motivated in part by his having noted that that some linguists assume it is “just concerned with (mindlessly) collecting heaps of data without any concern for analysis and structure” (2012:187). He further noted: “the fact that language documentation and language description can be separated fairly clearly on methodological and epistemological grounds does not mean that they can be separated in actual practice” (2012:188). At UHM, we believe both that they cannot be, and that they should not be. In defining language documentation, UHM’s Lyle Campbell (personal communication) expanded upon Woodbury’s definition of it as “the creation, annotation, preservation and dissemination of transparent records of a language” (2011:159) by adding “where that record is understood explicitly to include description and analysis of the language, including the production of a grammar and a dictionary.”⁴ Other fields of study can, of course, also contribute to the creation of such records, including sociolinguistics, language acquisition, linguistic anthropology, ethnobiology, etc. In training graduate students in language documentation at UHM, “our goal is to bring data, documentation, analysis, description, and theory together in one seamless whole” (Rehg 2007:18).

⁴The view of language documentation taken by linguists in Hawai‘i, and by many linguists elsewhere, is that it is fundamentally an extension of the Boasian tradition of documenting languages by means of texts, grammars, and dictionaries, but with corpora playing a more central role than they have in the past by serving as the sources of data for other documents.

The term “language conservation” also requires clarification. Conservation can be defined as: “a careful preservation and protection of something; *esp*: planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect.”⁵ Consequently, conservation, in the present context, is employed as an inclusive term that encompasses language revitalization, language maintenance, language resurrection, language perpetuation, language restoration, etc. All of these activities are undertaken in efforts to sustain – that is, to conserve – vulnerable and endangered languages. The use of the term conservation is also appropriate in that it links language support efforts to the broader undertakings of conservation in general. At the time of deciding upon the usage of the term conservation, I was influenced by the forward-thinking activities supported by *Terralingua* (<http://www.terralinguaubuntu.org>) under the rubric of biocultural studies, a field that is emerging as increasingly consequential for linguists.

3. The goals of the journal While thinking about the goals of *LD&C*, a primary concern was that of making it as widely accessible as possible. This meant that the journal had to be free. In many communities where vulnerable and endangered languages are spoken, any amount charged for a subscription is too much. The most economical way to distribute a free journal is, of course, via the internet. Consequently, it was decided that the journal should be online and open-access. An additional advantageous consequence of employing an electronic format is that it permits the inclusion of audio and video content, thus transcending the limitations of conventional paper journals.

A major concern arising from the decision to make *LD&C* an electronic journal, however, was whether it would be accepted by the academic community. In 2006, such journals were uncommon, and some potential contributors were concerned that it might be viewed as too unconventional and ephemeral. Consequently, the journal was designed, in part, to help alleviate such fears. It was decided that the journal would mimic hard copy journals and be produced in the form of annual volumes, with each page sequentially numbered. To further ensure that its content would appeal to a readership accustomed to print journals, all articles would be made available in the form of attractively designed PDF files. Following the practice of most academic journals, it was also decided that *LD&C* would employ a double-blind peer review process. Further, like hard copy journals, the journal would be published under the auspices of an academic press, in this case the University of Hawai‘i Press.⁶ Finally, to ensure long-term accessibility, the journal was to be archived in ScholarSpace, UHM’s open-access, digital institutional repository which provides statistics on numbers of downloads and the countries they originate from.⁷ All of these decisions were subsequently put into action in the production of *LD&C*.

⁵Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition, Springfield, MA, 1995.

⁶This arrangement was achieved with the assistance of Joel Bradshaw, who at that time served as the press’s Journal Manager.

⁷Persistent identifiers provided by ScholarSpace ensure the ongoing citability of each article, and RSS feeds populate our webpage and are also picked up by other indexing services.

It was also decided to focus the journal's content on topics that do not readily find a home in other journals. Consequently, the journal does not commonly publish descriptive papers, but, as noted on *LD&C*'s website, it publishes contributions on topics such as “the goals of language documentation, data management, fieldwork methods, ethical issues, orthography design, reference grammar design, lexicography, methods of assessing ethnolinguistic vitality, archiving matters, language planning, areal survey reports, short field reports on endangered or underdocumented languages, reports on language maintenance, preservation, and revitalization efforts, plus software, hardware, and book reviews.” Inspired by the practices of *Oceanic Linguistics*, a UHM sister publication, the journal also launched during its first year what has developed into a robust series of Special Publications. An advantage of online publishing is that special publications can add chapters after their initial publication, helping to avoid the delays experienced by print volumes waiting on one late paper.

4. Launching the journal I previously noted that *LD&C* is free – free to its audience, that is. The production of the journal does, of course, entail expenses in the form of office space, equipment, supplies, and staffing. In the initial years of the journal, UHM's National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) provided the office space, equipment, and supplies. The journal was staffed by volunteer faculty members as well as graduate students supported by graduate assistantships from NFLRC and Linguistics. The volunteer faculty from UHM were Albert Schütz (Copy Editor), Yuko Otsuka (Book Review Editor), and, from the University of Melbourne, Nick Thieberger (Technology Review Editor). At that time, I was also a faculty member at UHM and served as Editor. The graduate students who were selected to work with the journal were Akiemi Glenn (Managing Editor) and Jun Nomura (Web Production Editor).

The importance of the contributions made by the two graduate students who worked with the journal cannot be overstated. Ms. Glenn came to UHM to study linguistics after having been employed by Oxford University Press in New York City. She consequently brought a professional perspective to the structure of the journal and contributed to its format and procedures in innumerable ways. Mr. Nomura, also a linguistics student, came to UHM from Japan with considerable experience in programming and web design. He created the attractive website for the journal, which functioned remarkably well from the outset and was used by the journal until 2014.

The establishment of *LD&C* was further aided by a highly supportive Editorial Board, the charter members of which are listed at <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/1736>. All played a vital role in the creation of the journal, but the contributions of Paul Newman (Indiana University) merit special recognition. As the founding editor of the *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, he was fully cognizant of the challenges of launching a new journal and consequently was able to provide much meaningful support and guidance to *LD&C* until he retired from the board in 2012.

5. Conclusion And the rest is history. I continued to serve as Editor of the journal until 2011, when I passed the leadership role to Nick Thieberger. Under his direction, the journal has strengthened, is highly regarded, and has attracted contributions from outstanding scholars from the field of linguistics as well as related disciplines. Additional commentary on the more recent history of the journal is provided by Nick in the accompanying article.

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Kenneth L. Regh
rehg@hawaii.edu