

Fieldwork: Expectation of and from Researcher

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This paper addresses issues of linguistic research on endangered languages including ethics and conflicts between researchers and speakers of the targeted languages. In particular, the transition of a researcher is described by comparing my fieldwork experiences on languages in vigorous use and languages in danger of disappearing. I discuss how my views toward research have transformed from researcher-driven to community-driven, and how the role of researchers has grown from primary research conductors focusing on their research questions to research collaborators of the communities accommodating the needs of the communities. Some conflicts between researchers and language speakers in the community are illustrated by trying to tell both sides of the story, and the importance of appreciating language speakers' history and background is especially stressed to understand those conflicts and to prepare fieldwork on endangered languages. The difficulty in balancing between professional and personal involvement in the research is also considered.

The main activities in linguistic fieldwork are the collection and analysis of language data obtained directly from its speaker(s). As shown in Samarin (1967), this does not necessarily mean that the data collection has to be done in the "field" such as in the speaker's community. Sakel and Everett's (2012) definition of fieldwork intends to cover those different types of fieldwork:

Fieldwork describes the activity of a researcher systematically analysing parts of a language, usually other than one's native language and usually within a community of speakers of that language. (p. 5)

Thus, it is considered as fieldwork even when you work with a native speaker of your targeted language in your office far away from the speaker's community.

There are many books and articles written on and about Field Method (Duranti, 1997; Newman & Ratliff, 2001; Sakel & Everett, 2012); however, they deal with methodologies for the most part, for example, selecting/asking questions, managing/organizing data, and building hypotheses. In addition to these methods, which are fundamental knowledge and skills in order to conduct fieldwork, ethical concerns became a big part of fieldwork in the late 1990's and a number of studies address this issue (Crowley & Thieberger, 2007; Dwyer, 2006; Rice, 2006). This is also the same period of time when the descriptive linguistic fieldwork attracted more interest since the necessity of language documentation of endangered languages began to be emphasized (Hale, 1992a, 1992b; Krauss, 1992). It is crucial that the theory of linguistic research model has actively developed from researcher-centered to community-centered (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Leonard & Haynes, 2009;

Stoecker, 2003; Strand, 2000) as more researchers work in undescribed or underdescribed language communities, most of whose languages are facing disappearance in near future. When working on such languages, the goal of linguistic fieldwork becomes more than the collection of first-hand language data to be analyzed, which researchers expect from the language speakers they work with. Instead, researchers are expected to contribute to the communities through activities such as creating language documentation and teaching materials.

In my past linguistic career as a student and as a researcher, I had opportunities to conduct/participate in fieldwork on four different languages: Bontok, Palauan, Halkomelem, and Lillooet. The first two are Austronesian languages, and the others are Salish languages. By sharing the views of linguistic fieldwork from my experiences, it is my hope that this paper will benefit not only linguistic students but also students in the humanities and social sciences such as anthropology and sociology, who intend to go out to live, observe, and work with people from different cultures and do fieldwork.

By sharing my fieldwork experiences and comparing them, I would like to show the different views that speakers hold toward their languages. There are noticeable differences between languages speakers with a stable use of their language and ones under threat of losing their language. In particular, I will explain the views of minority language speakers by introducing a brief history of their language endangerment. Based on their views, discussed are some of the difficulties I encountered while working on minority languages in British Columbia,¹ and I will describe the reasons² why people in those communities hold a rather negative perception toward linguistic research. Finally, I will propose that it is necessary to adapt a type of research model called “community-based research” as research is no longer about what researchers expect from the community. In those communities, it has become more about what communities expect from researchers.

Fieldwork Experiences

My fieldwork experiences are in two types of the communities; one is where all the community members speak their language in everyday life, and the other is where a very limited number of old speakers are left with few occasions to speak their language. People in the former type of communities speak Bontok and Palauan, and the latter Halkomelem and Lillooet.

Austronesian Languages

Bontok and Palauan both belong to the Austronesian language family spoken in a wide range from Easter Island to Madagascar, throughout Southeast Asian and Pacific islands. Bontok is a Philippine language, spoken in Mountain Province, which is in the northern part of the Philippines. Palauan is a Micronesian language, an official language of the Republic of Palau.

¹ A lot of these issues are probably shared views among researchers working in Canada as well as in the United States.

² The reasons discussed in this paper are based on my experiences, and any misinterpretations or misrepresentations are on my own.

Bontok³ (the Philippines). It was my first experience in the field, and I was still an MA student at that time in 1997. The primary researcher was a professor at the University of Hawai'i, who had written a Bontok-English dictionary (Reid, 1976). For me, there was more to learn from how he conducted his research in the field than in assisting him. It would not have been possible to go to such a remote place for the first time and stay over a month and a half if I had not been with someone who was familiar with the place and knew people over there.

The objective of the fieldwork then was to update/add vocabulary for the revision of his dictionary. Although there were several Bontok speakers that he mainly worked with in the village in Guina-ang, it was our routine that we walked around the village with a pencil and a notebook and talked to people whenever we saw an opportunity. People there were mostly monolingual speakers of the Bontok language except some young people who went to colleges and worked outside of Bontoc, who spoke some English as well as some Ilokano. Given his history with the people there and his fluency in the Bontok language, this style of fieldwork was possible. An important lesson to be learned there was that waiting is a part of fieldwork. There were some "unproductive" days when we did not talk to anyone in the village or did not gain any data. When you are in the field depending on other people, things often do not go well as you expect. You always have to have flexibility and patience in the field.

Palauan. The research was conducted in Koror, the capital of the Republic of Palau⁴ at that time, for a couple of weeks in 1998. Palau had gone through over a century of colonial period under four different countries: Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Until Palau became an independent nation in 1994, it was under the administration of the United States for about 50 years.⁵ Accordingly, the people there were bilinguals of English and Palauan back then,⁶ keeping a fluency of the Palauan language in every generation.

Prior to this trip, I contacted the Ministry of Education in Palau, and they kindly arranged for me to work with a language consultant.⁷ He spent a few hours a day answering my questions to elicit a certain type of syntactic construction in Palauan, and also offered guided tours to the places such as museums and libraries.

A Palauan couple, whose daughter was a student at the University of Hawai'i, kindly provided accommodation for me. It turned out that the wife was one of the people who were sent to the University of Hawai'i to attend a program on English-Palauan bilingual education. Even though Palauan was far from the threat of becoming a declining language, she shared her concerns with me that Palauan would become endangered as a result of the English-Palauan bilingual education system. She felt that there were fewer and fewer households that used Palauan as a primary language.

During my stay in Palau, People were friendly and welcoming wherever I went, and not one person questioned the purpose of my stay. It was not because they had no idea about who I was. In fact, according to my Palauan consultant, it was obvious to the local people that I was an anthropology researcher of some kind. Another thing is that being Japanese turned

³ It is spelled as Bontoc as well. See Reid (1999) and Ethnologue (Lewis, Gary & Fennig, 2015) for more details. The place we went is called Guina-ang, which is roughly a two-day trip, taking several hours on a bus each day, away from Manila.

⁴ It is also referred to as Belau.

⁵ See Britain & Matsumoto (2015) for more references.

⁶ There were still a lot of old people who spoke Japanese.

⁷ The term "consultant" is discussed in *Salish Languages*.

out to be in my favor to carry out research in Palau. In spite of the fact that Palau went under Japanese administration for over 30 years until the end of WWII, I saw very little hostility in Palauan people toward Japanese people. A lot of old people spoke very good Japanese, and they were happy to see me and to talk to me in Japanese in the market and at church on Sundays. Afterward, a Japanese researcher I met there told me that it was not always the case in other Micronesian islands. She found it too hard to conduct her research in some Micronesian islands because some people were so hostile to Japanese people. You may not have a choice of where to go depending on your research subject; however, selecting where to carry out research is an important factor of your study.

Overview. The two Austronesian languages I worked on are not endangered languages by any means.⁸ People in Guina-ang, the Philippines, were more than willing to talk to us, invited us to their houses to offer drinks, and did not mind our taking notes or taking photos. The Palauan consultant was also devoted to spending time with me, even though we did not set any formal work arrangement. He knew I was a linguistic student, but it did not come up in our conversation that what I was studying by eliciting those sentences from him, or that what I was going to do with the data.

In both cases, especially in Guina-ang, thanks to the professor I went with, it was not my serious concern about having to build a good rapport with the targeted language speakers, since they had, in a way, accepted me to carry on research from the moment I arrived there. Moreover, as far as I am aware of, there was no issue on how to manage or interpret the data as personal information. It is my assumption that they did not think they were giving away anything they would have been able to take issue with later, or that they did not imagine that we, linguists, would use the data for their disadvantage.

It is probably the case in many places in the world that people do not mind teaching their language to people from outside of their community, especially if you are from outside of their country, when their language status is stable. However, it is another story when working on endangered languages.

Salish Languages

Before explaining my fieldwork on two Salish languages, it is useful to give ideas about the term “First Nations,” how to address the targeted language speakers, and what makes languages “endangered.”

The term “First Nations” is used only in Canada and not in the United States, which excludes Inuit and Métis, who are, altogether with the First Nations, referred to as “Aboriginal” or “Indigenous” people. Some people say the use of “Natives” or “Indians” is politically incorrect, and it is true that those terms sound offensive to some Aboriginal people. Although people I know call themselves “Indians,” I would not use the term unless they know me well enough to understand that I mean no disrespect.

A targeted language speaker a linguist works with used to be referred to an “informant” or “consultant.” I used to use the term “consultant” without being aware of any negative connotations (Crowley & Thieberger, 2007, p. 86). Some researchers use the term “co-researcher” and work together as co-authors. Others use “research co-investigators” or “partners” (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009, p. 41). I regard the elders I work with as language teachers.

⁸ The language status of Central Bontok spoken in Guina-ang is 5 (developing) in Ethnologue (Lewis, Gary & Fennig, 2015).

There are 23 languages in Salish currently or historically spoken in British Columbia, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Oregon. At least five languages are no longer spoken, and the remaining languages are all endangered, having a small number of fluent speakers shown in Czaykowska-Higgins & Kinkade (1998, pp. 64-67), which is mostly in grandparent generation or older, having disruption of intergenerational transmission (Lewis, Gary & Fennig, 2015), and/or having limited domains and functions of language use (Brenzinger et al., 2003).

Both Halkomelem and Lillooet belong to the Salish language family, and they are endangered languages spoken in British Columbia, having only two to three percent of fluent speakers left in the communities where I visit. Most of those fluent speakers are over 65 years old.

Halkomelem (Duncan, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada). Since starting a graduate program in 1998, I have been working with an elder⁹ who is a fluent speaker of Halkomelem.¹⁰ Until then, a notion of research ethics was not familiar to me. The research has been conducted by a professor¹¹ as the primary researcher of the projects, and the ethical approval and consent forms were taken care of by her. She has set up a place where the elder can work in the best possible environment near the reserve where the elder resides. This working arrangement worked well probably because it is the middle ground between being in an office and being in the field. Not only had we been productive, but also we had some opportunities to see the locations that appeared in her stories and to be invited to traditional ceremonies in the community.

The elder is a linguist herself, having been trained to write and read the language at the University of Victoria, as well as, but not limited to, a language teacher and a public speaker of the community. She was also a co-instructor in a Field Method course I taught at the University of Victoria, and is currently an instructor of language immersion courses, which are offered in the Duncan area through a university in Burnaby. The coordinator of the courses is the professor mentioned earlier, and they have been actively working on language education, which the community desires.

Beside a tremendous knowledge of the language and culture, I learned an important social convention when working with the elder, that is, to give her some space to think, and not to rush her. Even though she is fluent in both English and Halkomelem, the work is still intense and exhausting for her. It is hard to wait patiently especially when there are a great deal of questions to ask; however, it is considered to be impolite to ask more questions or even to speak while she is still thinking of the previous question. I also found that it is a part of First Nations' culture, in general, to wait for people until they are ready.

Lillooet (Mount Currie, British Columbia, Canada). I went to Mount Currie for the first time in 2007 as a family friend,¹² and have been visiting there every summer and sometimes in winter as well ever since. At that time, I already obtained my Ph.D. degree, and especially since coming back to Japan to work in non-linguistic departments, the pressure to publish

⁹ I use the term 'elders' here with a respect for their language fluency, their knowledge about the culture, and their wisdom that comes with the age.

¹⁰ The island dialect is called Hul'q'umi'num'. There are two other dialects: upriver dialect (Həŋqəmihəm) and downriver dialect (Halq'eméylem).

¹¹ The professor I mention here was my supervisor in the program, and my research would not have involved fieldwork without her good relations with the community.

¹² A colleague of mine at the University of Victoria was related to the family.

linguistic papers has been lifted to a certain degree. Thus, the motivation of going back to Mount Currie was not merely to carry out linguistic research. It is true that it was presented to me as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience life on a reserve, which is a significant part of research for a fieldworker like myself. However, the motivation has become more and more personal over the years.

In addition to some linguistic research, living in the community gave me some valuable opportunities to learn about salmon fishing and berry picking, which are their traditional culture and still play a part of their everyday lives. Furthermore, I was privileged to have a chance to visit their band school where they offer a language immersion program for children from five to eight years old. My friends also invited me to sit in some First Nations Study classes offered by a university in North Vancouver through their local learning centre.

The language spoken there is called Lillooet¹³ in English. Their language has been studied intensively by a linguist, and he produced a grammar book and a dictionary as well (Van Eijk, 1987, 1997). Whenever the community is in need of language or educational materials, he would be the one whom they contact and who produces what they need. When a community, especially a small community in the Northwest of America, has someone who has already established a rapport to work on their language, they tend to be reluctant to work with other linguists, if not to reject other researchers completely. If I had been just an unacquainted linguist wanting to observe those classes, they would not have felt comfortable having me around at school or in their community at all.

When you go to places for the first time, people may welcome you and offer cooperation for your research. However, they really welcome you when you return there. I believe it is the case everywhere, yet it might take a little more time to get settled in the First Nations communities. If you try to carry out research as you would do in other communities where “safe” (not endangered) languages are spoken, and conduct researcher-centered fieldwork, you are more likely not to be welcomed there. It is necessary to understand the history of how their languages became endangered in order to work on First Nations languages on or off reserve.

Brief History of Language Loss and Decline in British Columbia

Generally, First Nations have rather a negative and critical idea about academic research. That makes it harder to carry out fieldwork, especially when they are sad and angry about their language status. Those mixed feelings are not always understood by researchers at first. It is helpful to know where their unfavorable position toward research comes from when working in the community.

A number of historical factors played roles to cause language endangerment, and, most of all, two of those factors severely impacted on the language decline in British Columbia as well as on the Northwest Coast of America. One is the decline of Aboriginal population, and the other is the education policy by the government.

Smallpox

With the arrival of the Europeans, various infectious diseases landed northwest coast of America. The greatest mortality was caused by smallpox, which appeared as a series of

¹³ They prefer the name Ucwalmicwts, spelled in their orthography and translated as an “Indian language,” to St’át’imcets that is also used in other Lillooet speaking areas.

epidemic waves. One-third of the Aboriginal population was lost during 1836–1838, and more than 60% vanished in the north coast epidemic area during 1862-1863 (Suttles & Sturtevant, 1990, pp. 141-144). Some people told me that some of those epidemics were caused on purpose, which seems to be a common notion in the community:

There have been claims that Whites sometimes deliberately caused smallpox epidemics among Native Americans by giving them blankets infected with small pox; some of these claims are certainly fabricated, but at least one genuine incident does appear to have been planned and perhaps implemented. (Thomason, 2015, p. 20)

Indian Residential School

When working and spending time with elders, it is inevitable to hear sad and horrifying stories about Residential Schools. The Indian Residential School system started with the amendment to the Indian Act in the late 19th century,¹⁴ and it is characterized as “aggressive assimilation” (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005, p. 43; Thomason, 2015, p. 20) of Aboriginal people to the New World. Patrick (2007) states the following:

The brutality of the residential school system has been a particular target of legal action, not only because this system required children to be separated from their families, and permitted them to be subjected to physical and psychological abuse, including punishment for speaking Aboriginal languages, (p. 41)

This particular policy under the Canadian colonialism not only interrupted the transmission of the culture of the Aboriginal people, but also caused great destruction of their being. A healing process has just begun for some people, while others are still stuck in the darkness. When it comes to the issue of language, mixed feelings of people and the reality cross many ways over the language revitalization, whose accomplishment cannot be soon enough for them. However, language research still has a negative connotation even though it is intended to contribute to the language revitalization in the future. In the next section discussed are primary difficulties in carrying out research and their reasons of why people in the communities view the research unfavorably.

Difficulties in Working with Endangered Languages

It is Aboriginal people’s mutual view that their language endangerment is a result of colonization; that is, the Canadian government tried to take away their languages. If the death of Aboriginal people under the colonization process is characterized as genocide, the government’s attempt to suppress the Aboriginal language and culture is a cultural genocide (Coast, 2013). Some people who went to Residential Schools were too traumatized to speak their languages, and others stopped speaking their languages to their children because they did not want their children to suffer as they did. It still seems to be the case for some that the

¹⁴ The Residential School system lasted over a century until 1996 when the last school closed (Health Canada, n.d.). A formal apology was made in June 2008 by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Canadian Government and all Canadians (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2015).

word “white people” in their language carries a negative connotation that comes from the history in which the Canadian government and Residential Schools caused their agony and distress.

In addition to the history of prohibiting the Aboriginal language, due to misunderstandings (and disregarding) of the protocol between Aboriginal communities and some researchers and mistreatments of their language by some researchers in the past, Aboriginal people are very protective of intellectual property. Their intellectual property extends to numerous forms:

Storage and preservation of [Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge] differs between communities and may exist in various forms including, but not limited to: stories, language, songs, symbols, proverbs, practices, ceremonies, folklore, art, paintings, drawings, laws, customs, rituals, inventions, understandings, medicines, technologies, expressions, or identities. (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.)

Some communities have a language committee, whose members are usually fluent speakers of the language. For example, in Tsilhqot’in:

The Tsilhqot’in Language Committee was formed in 2010, consisting of Tsilhqot’in Language experts who are fluent and literate in Tsilhqot’in. The ... purpose is to work on language projects and initiatives that revitalize and preserve Tsilhqot’in language and culture. (Tsilhqot’in National Government, n.d.)

In Mount Currie, the Lil’wat Nation has a language committee called Language of Authority. A letter must be submitted to Language of Authority to obtain approval prior to carrying out a language project in the community, stating who you are, the nature of your project, what you intend to do for your project, and, more importantly, how the project benefits the community. It is also specified in the letter that the materials resulted in the project such as written products and audio/video recordings will belong to the community and to the people who participated in the project.

To make language research more difficult for researchers, there is a huge gap between what linguists do and what Aboriginal people expect.¹⁵ Some language conferences and workshops are open for Aboriginal language speakers, teachers, and linguists. For many speakers, their languages are sacred and very distinctive (Ignace, 1998, p. 24). For instance, some speakers got so upset and offended to see how linguists analyzed their language at a workshop I attended. At another conference, a speaker characterized her language as a story. Salish languages are polysynthetic with many layers of morphemes, and linguists analyze and try to identify the function of each morpheme. To her, those layers show her images in her mind and tell her a story, which could not be generalized and explained by lifeless linguistic terms.

Similarly, the needs of language speakers and linguists do not always match. Linguists, including students and those in academic positions, are under constant pressure to publish and present academic papers. Those academic papers are written in a way only linguists can figure out what those papers are about. On the other hand, some language speakers feel disappointed

¹⁵ See Gerdtz (1998) for more details.

to see their language in incomprehensible papers when they could have done something more fruitful with their language than answering linguists' questions for those papers, which appeared to be unpractical and useless for their community. Many communities are in need of educational materials that are user friendly, and they are short on resources in many ways.

Lastly, funding and political situations in the community can make matters complicated. Language revitalization is not possible without either a language policy or sufficient funding as Grenoble and Whaley (2006) state that "we cannot overemphasize that any policy, the long term, is only as good as its enforcement, an adequate level of funding for it, and the administrative commitment it receives" (p. 28). It sometimes happens that the funding granted to the community for language projects is used for different purposes due to an urgent nature of other projects or a change in its political structure. Nonetheless, Aboriginal communities are short of funding and they feel that the government neglects their language rights:

The resources committed to Aboriginal language programs are far fewer than what is committed to French in areas where French speakers are in the minority. For example, the federal government provides support to the small minority of francophones in Nunavut in the amount of approximately \$4,000 per individual annually. In contrast funding to support Inuit-language initiatives is estimated at \$44 per Inuk per year. (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 203)

I have seen a conference presenter from an Aboriginal community express her frustration of insufficient funding from the government, who was verbally aggressive toward linguists who were recipients of academic research funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).¹⁶ As a researcher who has worked with the First Nations for a long time, her frustration was completely understandable though the accusation was wrongly directed.

These difficulties are well-recognized when working on endangered languages in British Columbia, and are probably shared views of the researchers and people in the Aboriginal communities in North America. While the researcher-centered model works well in "safe" language-speaking research, it faces a limitation in endangered language research.

Expectations from Researchers

The main stream of research models until around 1990's was a researcher-centered model, which is still actively conducted all over the world. However, this model does not reflect the needs of communities. The trend of research models has been shifting from researcher-centered to community-based research which "involves collaboration between trained researchers and community members in the design and implementation of research projects aimed at meeting community-identified needs" (Strand, 2000, p. 85). More and more communities take initiatives on language projects and education, and many communities

¹⁶ SSHRC is the federal funding agency for research and training in the discipline on postsecondary level. It used to offer funding for CURA (Community-University Research Alliances) projects, which benefitted a number of language projects collaborated between researchers and communities. Unfortunately, it is no longer available today.

mark successful achievements nowadays, which are shared in conferences and workshops.¹⁷ Researchers of endangered languages are expected to become supporters to revive those languages.

If you are only interested in academic research, you might find it difficult to work in the communities. Aboriginal rights, land claims, and environmental issues are as important as preserving their languages. When you are put on the spot discussing those issues, it would be a professional thing to do to stand as an observer, but it will be harder and harder to do so as you keep going back to the community and form a relationship with the people. At least what you can do is to understand where they come from and what they are going through. Though it is emotionally difficult from time to time, you have to remember you are privileged to see them all. You are a witness, and everything is a part of fieldwork.

Having seen these issues and difficulties in working on endangered languages in British Columbia, why would one want to pursue it? I am definitely not the only linguist who studies them while being aware of all those issues. Other researchers would give a number of reasons such as passion for research, fascination with the culture, and commitment to saving languages. From my perspective, what matters most is people. Without people, you do not have research, culture, or motivation to save a language. They are not your research objects. They are your teachers, co-researchers, partners, and your friends. I always have a fun and exciting time with them although I do not mention it much in this paper. My view of fieldwork has changed over the years in my career, and so has my view of the world. It is my hope that this paper inspires young scholars to go out in the world and contribute to other people in the societies.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the elders I work with for their kindness, patience, sense of humor, and friendship. My great appreciation also goes to the members of the First Nations community, who accepted me and became good friends. I would not have been able to do fieldwork that is a sequence of wonder and joy without the help and guidance of the professors I worked with. I owe them a great deal of gratitude and respect. Last but not least, I would like to show my appreciation to the people I met in Guina-ang and Palau. They have opened up my perspectives of the world, and they will always have a special place in my mind even if I will not have a chance to go back there in this lifetime.

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