1 Guiding principles to language documentation

1. **Accuracy**

   – You are creating a permanent record of your language and culture

   – Future language learners, community linguists, educators, researchers will be relying on your work

   – The more accurate you are the less time future language workers will spend correcting mistakes or clarifying data

2. **Detail**

   – As much information as *practically* possible – you can't do everything!

   – Best *possible* recordings (text, audio, video): you don't need to be a Hollywood director!

   – Attention to detail instills confidence in your work

3. **Consistency**

   – Once you have a system (transcription, recording, etc.) or way of doing things, be consistent in using it

   – Consistency = efficiency: if you have a consistent, organized system, it's much easier and quicker to find things

4. **Planning and goals**

   – Know your goals and take the time to plan how you'll reach them

   – Be realistic: it's better to have smaller, more manageable projects than grand, complicated ones – this maximizes the chances of success, which in turn gives you confidence for your next project!

2 Organizing your thoughts, ideas, and plans

1. **Questions to ask**

   – What kind of project am I undertaking?

   – What are the outcomes?

   – What are the steps I need to take to implement it?

   – How is the community involved?

   – Who is this for?

   – What kind of media? (i.e. text, audio, video, photo)

   – What is my skill/experience/preparation level?

   – Do I have or need permission/IRB and how will I obtain it?

   – Timeline, funding and budget?

   – Are there any ethical issues?

2. **Project design**

   – Pre and post session tasks: planning the location and setting where you will be doing your fieldwork, checking/analyzing your data after the session and planning for the next one based on this.

   – Making plans with language consultants (hours, frequency): planning how long your sessions will be (usually 2 hours max, plus breaks), making them feel as comfortable as possible.

   – Equipment: what kind of equipment do you have? What kind to you need in order to achieve your outcomes?

   – Archiving and sharing: where will your recordings and transcriptions be archived? Who will have access? Making plans to give your language consultants copies of your work together. What kind of media do they prefer?

   – Elicitation plan: What kind of language do you plan to elicit, and how can you best prepare in advance of your session? (See below)

   – Educational/community resources: coordinating your plans with language teachers, or thinking about how your language data can be used in an educational setting.

2. **Resources**

   – Hardware: transcription notebooks, computer, smartphone, personal recording device, microphones, cameras, USB drives, etc.

   – Software: digitization and editing software, linguistic and metalinguistic databases, etc.

   – Other tools: storyboards for elicitation, objects or photos etc. for eliciting the names of things

   – Money: to pay your language consultants and purchase your hardware and software

3 Types of language documentation

1. **Elicitation**

   a. Direct elicitation: *How do you say X?*

      * For objects and sentences that 'do not change'
      * Usually the easiest and quickest ways to get language data, and the best way to get familiar with a language
      * The beginnings of a dictionary

   b. Testing judgments: *Can I say Y (in this context)?*

      * Can be used if you already know about the language
      * Necessary for things that can't easily be translated or directly elicited: <u>*The*</u> *book is on the table* vs. <u>*A*</u> *book is on the table*

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2. **Observation**

    a. Prompting

        ∗ The "Show me" method

           – Ideal for documenting all of the steps in how things are made or done: *Can you show me how to make soup?*

           – Does not require alot of prep, but is alot of work in analyzing!

           – Storyboards: reduces the effect of English in an elicitation setting

        ∗ The "Tell me" method

           – Eliciting personal or traditional stories: *Can you tell me a story from your childhood?*

           – Also storyboards

           – Does not require alot of prep, but is alot of work in analyzing!

           – Take your linguist's hat off and be a listener!

    b. Passive observing

        ∗ Recording conversations

           – Supply a topic to two or more speakers and see what happens

           – Little prep needed: a great way to observe spontaneous, natural language use and different kinds of language you can't elicit

           – Possibly opportunities to interject with questions about the language

           – Actually challenging because you can end up with way more data than you can actually practically use

        ∗ "Fly on the wall"

           – Almost no prep needed: used to observe cultural practices where asking questions is maybe not possible or appropriate

           – Language art (i.e. song and poetry)

           – Take your linguist's hat off and be a listener!

4 Types of media

- With language elicitation and/or observation there are (at least) four kinds of media:

    1. Text: this is the bare minimum. Language documentation is about creating a linguistic record, which almost always means writing things down.

    2. Audio: Also the minimum. Language is sound!

    3. Video: think about why you want to record video: how does it contribute to what you are documenting?

    4. Photo: not an obvious choice, but given today's technology (i.e. everyone has a camera in their phone) it is a very easy way to add another dimension to the language record

    5. Other: botanical samples, art

5   Sharing and archiving

1. Community

   – How are they directly or indirectly supporting or guiding your work?
   – How will your work complement other efforts in the community (i.e. cultural, educational)
   – How will you present and/or share your work?
   – Are there any potentially sensitive issues?

2. Educational resources

   – Possibly part of the planning of your project: producing video clips to use in a classroom
   – A dictionary or grammar text that is accessible to language learners
   – Publications that can be used in a classroom
   – Considering what language teachers need

3. Archiving

   – What is the archival media?
   – Where is it being stored permanently and who has access to it?
   – Issues of duplicating and citing work

4. Accountability

   – Often, if you have a grant you must make arrangements for your notes and recordings to be archived or deposited with the organization that financially supports your work
   – Good record keeping
   – A successful project can lead to more money for future projects!