

**REFLECTIONS  
ON LANGUAGE  
DOCUMENTATION  
20 YEARS AFTER  
HIMMELMANN 1998**

edited by  
Bradley McDonnell  
Andrea L. Berez-Kroeker  
Gary Holton

Language Documentation & Conservation  
Special Publication **15**

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Published as a Special Publication of Language Documentation & Conservation

Language Documentation & Conservation  
Department of Linguistics  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
Moore Hall 569  
1890 East-West Road  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822  
USA

<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc>

University of Hawai'i Press  
2840 Kolowalu Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i  
96822-1888  
USA

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Cover design by Jack DeBartolo 3

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

ISBN: 978-0-9973295-3-7

<http://hdl.handle.net/10125/24800>

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Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 15  
*Reflections on Language Documentation 20 Years after Himmelmann 1998*  
ed. by Bradley McDonnell, Andrea L. Berez-Kroeker & Gary Holton, pp. 1–11  
<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/lhc/>  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10125/10125/24803>

## Introduction

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This chapter introduces the volume, *Reflections on Language Documentation 20 Years after Himmelmann 1998*, providing a short justification for the volume, summarizing each of the four major parts of the volume, and identifying major themes that emerge in the 31 chapters. It concludes by noting some of the volume’s limitations.

**1. Introduction**<sup>1</sup> Twenty years ago Himmelmann (1998) envisaged a radical (new?) approach to the science of language, recognizing a fundamental distinction between documentation and description and focusing on the collection of primary data which could be repurposed and serve as an enduring record of endangered languages. (For a concise overview of the development of language documentation over the past 20 years, see Austin 2016.) Of course Himmelmann was not the first to argue for an approach to linguistics grounded in data, especially the collection of text corpora. Some of the earliest field workers in the modern era—from Franz Boas to Edward Sapir to P.E. Goddard to Melville Jacobs—all saw the value of primary text collections and recordings (cf. Boas 1917). And the call to arms for renewed focus on endangered language documentation had been issued well before Himmelmann’s seminal paper was published (cf. Krauss 1992). However, by carefully articulating the distinction between documentation and description, Himmelmann (1998) clarified a truth that had been hidden within the everyday work of linguistics. It is a truth not far from the mind of every descriptive linguist, but one which had not often been discussed.

Most, if not all, linguistic field workers engage in both documentation and description, collecting and annotating primary recordings but then also analyzing those data to

<sup>1</sup>We would like to thank the contributors to this volume for their time and effort in not only writing thoughtful reflections, but also for their timely reviewing. We also thank Nikolaus Himmelmann for early conversations about the direction this publication should take. We also thank participants in the special session “20 Years of Language Documentation” at the 22nd Foundation for Endangered Languages Conference in Reykjavik for fruitful early feedback on the volume.

extract a description couched in meta-linguistic terms. Some authors have objected to Himmelmann (1998) precisely because these two activities—documentation and description—are often inseparable in practice. Yet, in our opinion, this objection misses the point. While the two activities may go hand in hand, the products suffer very different fates, with the former much more likely to have a lasting impact on the field. Woodbury (2011) defines documentary linguistics as “the creation, annotation, preservation and dissemination of transparent records of a language” (159). As anyone consulting a descriptive grammar written in an obscure syntactic framework can attest, linguistic description generally fails to meet the transparency requirement (cf. Gawne et al. 2017).

The recognition that documentation, not description, is more likely to have a lasting impact requires us to rethink the way we do linguistics. This does not mean that we need to stop doing description. It also does not give us license to ignore linguistic theory—in fact, quite the opposite. A renewed focus on primary data makes possible a data-driven science of linguistics in which theory is more robustly grounded in primary data, yielding reproducible results (cf. Berez-Kroeker et al. 2018). What this renewed focus does do is lead us to think more carefully about the collection of primary data as an end unto itself. This is the heart of the emerging field of documentary linguistics, as articulated by Himmelmann (1998). Now 20 years later we are able ask: how has this new field evolved?

In order to answer this question, we invited 38 experts from around the world to reflect on either particular issues within the realm of language documentation or particular regions where language documentation projects are being carried out. The issues addressed in this volume represent a broad and diverse set of topics from multiple perspectives and for multiple purposes that continue to be relevant to documentary linguists and language communities. Some topics have been hotly debated over the past two decades, while others have emerged more recently.

Thus, we asked each contributor to reflect on a particular issue in light of how the issue was originally raised and how it has developed in the field. While the original mandate was to reflect on the evolution of the field in the 20 years since Himmelmann (1998), many of the contributors have taken a longer view. In particular, many contributors speculate on what comes next, looking at the future of language documentation from a variety of perspectives. Hence, the 31 vignettes provide not only reflections on where we have been but also a glimpse of where the field might be headed. Based upon the subject matter, the chapters have been grouped into four parts:

**Part 1: Re-imagining documentary linguistics** These chapters re-imagine in some way how we conceive of documentary linguistics and how we carry out language documentations.

**Part 2: Key issues in language documentation** These chapters deal with key issues in language documentation that are already a part of the current discourse in the field, some of which have been discussed at length.

**Part 3: Beyond description: Creating and utilizing documentations** These chapters deal with the relationship between documentation and linguistic research and products thereof, such as dictionaries, grammatical descriptions, theoretical studies, and language corpora.

**Part 4: Views on language documentation from around the world** These chapters present a small sampling of language documentation (and linguistic fieldwork) in various regions around the world.

In the remainder of this introduction, we highlight some of the larger themes that have emerged in each of the four parts of the volume.

**2. Part I: Re-imagining documentary linguistics** The chapters in Part I take a broad view, envisioning a new future for documentary linguistics as a discipline. The authors of these chapters share the view that documentary linguistics should be imbued with a theoretical framework, not characterized as an atheoretical provider of data for linguistic analyses. To a large extent this view reflects a continuing maturing of the field. Documentary linguistics arose as a largely ad-hoc response to the endangered languages “crisis.” The race to catalog languages, develop recording and archiving standards, and implement funding schemes left little time to reflect on the scope of language documentation as a (sub)discipline of its own. Moving forward, Jeff Good (Chapter 2) suggests that we need to develop a documentary linguistics which is fully theorized and codified as a genuine subfield, taking care to consider aspects of languages which have often been omitted from the record. Good’s use of the label *documentary linguistics* as opposed to the generally synonymous term *language documentation* is deliberate, as the former suggests a genuine subfield of linguistics as opposed to an ancillary data-gathering activity.

Lacking a distinct theoretical framework, the field of language documentation has by default evolved with a focus on languages as the primary object of study. (Consider the huge effort still applied to the issue of distinguishing languages versus dialects.) This has happened in spite of Himmelmann’s stipulation that documentation should create a “record of the linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community” 1998: 166. A re-imagined, more fully theorized science of documentary linguistics could explore alternative approaches, for example by focusing on the linguistic behavior and knowledge of individuals rather than on particular speech events. Such an approach explicitly acknowledges the multilingual nature of speech communities which has been tacitly ignored by many documentation efforts

As several authors in Part I note, these new approaches to documentary linguistics have the potential to change the practice of linguistics more broadly. No where is this more apparent than in the discussion of Open Science and Reproducible Research. As Lauren Gawne and Andrea Berez-Kroeker (Chapter 3) note, the development of online digital archives has led to “a more open approach to data that would support research reproducibility” (p. 28). There is still much work to be done in order to fully realize the potential of open data in linguistics, but documentary linguistics is clearly leading the way toward creating a more data-driven science of linguistics, in which claims about language are grounded in data which can be accessed and assessed by other researchers. Looking ahead, Gawne & Berez-Kroeker call on linguists to value language documentation as fully as they have valued language description. Adopting and implementing professional standards such as the *Austin Principles of Data Citation in Linguistics* can help to move us in that direction.

Reflecting on the progress of documentary linguistics over the past twenty years, Nikolaus Himmelmann (Chapter 4) identifies a significant remaining challenge, which he labels the “transcription challenge.” This problem goes far beyond the practical issues of transcribing a large amount of collected data, i.e., the transcription bottleneck. Rather, the transcription challenge is about developing a “better understanding of the transcription process itself and its relevance for linguistic theory” (p. 35). Here Himmelmann echoes Good’s (Chapter 2) call for greater theorization of documentary linguistics. Transcription

is not a mechanical process but rather a creative act of “language making” which affects language ecology. Theorizing transcription requires an understanding of the cultural contexts of transcription, including speakers’ relationships to the normative aspects of writing (see also Dobrin & Sicoli, Chapter 5). Theorizing transcription also requires us to build language reclamation into the documentation cycle, as younger language transcribers may see themselves in the role of language learner through their work with older speakers (see also Leonard, Chapter 6). As Himmelmann concludes, “[i]t is only a minor exaggeration to say that language documentation is all about transcription” (p. 38, yet despite its important role in language documentation, transcription remains critically undertheorized and understudied. To the extent documentary linguistics has concerned itself with transcription, it has mostly focused on technical issues such as tools and standards. As Himmelmann reminds us, the conceptual separation of documentation and description provides an opportunity to focus on practices which have been overlooked or ignored in traditional descriptive linguistics. Given the key role of transcription in documentation, it clearly deserves a closer look.

Modern documentary linguistics was from the start envisioned as an interdisciplinary effort, yet as Lise Dobrin and Mark Sicoli (Chapter 5) point out, the anthropological perspective is often lacking. Even some of our most basic discourses about linguistic methodologies remain uninformed by community contexts. Who counts as a native speaker? How do speaker numbers get tabulated? Should language recordings be archived? None of these questions can be answered in the absolute but instead require an understanding of local cultural perspectives. For example, in situations of language shift, linguists may be tempted to define speakerhood in structural terms, whereas communities may place greater emphasis on command of cultural knowledge. Dobrin & Sicoli argue that—if local perspectives are taken into consideration—language documentation will be more successful to the extent that it recognizes the meanings that language has for local actors. Participant observation methodology provides a useful way to uncover these local meanings in language documentation work.

Although much of the rhetoric of documentary linguistics stresses the importance of community perspectives, the origins and practices of language documentation are often deeply rooted in colonial institutions which lie outside the control of local language communities. Intentionally or not, these power structures can sometimes work against Indigenous language communities. Wesley Leonard (Chapter 6) discusses some of the ways this occurs. Most notable is the false dichotomy between documentation and revitalization/reclamation—a distinction which is at best artificial and at worst detrimental to many language communities.

Leonard concludes his chapter by offering some potential “interventions” which can facilitate decolonial approaches to language documentation. Decolonial practices require rethinking the core values of linguistics in the academy, including such sacred cows as peer review. As Leonard notes, “[w]hen the language community is recognized as a core stakeholder, it follows that members of the language community will be among the reviewers of language documentation proposals and products” (p. 62). By recognizing speakers and speech communities as equal stakeholders in the documentation process—not as mere sources of data—we can not only counter the effects of colonialism but also improve the overall language documentation enterprise.

Mary Linn (Chapter 7) identifies an additional aspect of the effort to re-imagine documentary linguistics, namely, the need to engage with the wider public. As Linn argues, public awareness of the importance of language documentation is critical to

the success of documentation and conservation efforts and thus to the prevention of catastrophic language loss. Unfortunately, although endangered languages have featured prominently in the popular press over the past two decades, there is surprisingly little evidence of public support for language documentation and revitalization. Linn explores this topic via a qualitative review of public comments posted in response to articles about endangered languages published in major media outlets such as the BBC and the New York Times.

Language documentation obviously requires public support in the form of funding, be it directly through grants or indirectly through education. But public support is particularly critical to language conservation: if minority languages are to thrive, they will perforce do so alongside the majority languages which are currently threatening them. Engaging majority language communities in the appreciation of minority languages is thus critical to language survival. Unfortunately, changing public attitudes is notoriously difficult. Nevertheless, Linn sees one bright spot in the struggle to increase awareness and appreciation of endangered languages: namely, young people. She advocates for greater engagement with schools and teachers as a way to break down negative attitudes toward endangered languages. Her conclusion—“I have hope in change through youth” (p. 72)—signals an optimistic future for a re-imagined field of documentary linguistics.

**3. Part II: Key issues in language documentation** The chapters in Part II review some of the most important active discussions from the last two decades. Primary, perhaps, among these is the recognition of the need to “rehumanize” language documentation, to borrow a phrase from Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins (Chapter 11) and Dobrin & Berson (2011). That is, as a field we have done some serious reconsideration and reshaping of the archetype of the “lone wolf” linguist: models of fieldwork in which a single outsider enters a language community, gathers scientific data, and retreats back to the university are no longer acceptable. Instead, the goals of language documentation mandate us to include others. The inclusion of members of the language community in all aspects of the documentation project is a primary theme in chapters by I Wayan Arka (Chapter 13), Colleen Fitzgerald (Chapter 9), and Susan Penfield (Chapter 8). The training of language community members in documentary methods results in a continuous feedback loop between the activities of training, documentation, analysis and revitalization. The benefits of community training are apparent on all levels, from revitalization on a local scale to the recognition of language rights on a global scale (Arka, Chapter 13; Fitzgerald, Chapter 9).

The inclusion of experts from other disciplines in documentation projects has also become a priority in recent years. The value of interdisciplinary documentation should be apparent: including the documentation of music, ethnobiology, and ethnoastronomy, and other domains of knowledge in language projects makes the data richer and more valuable to more stakeholders. Nonetheless, challenges remain, because different disciplines have different goals as well as methods for reaching those goals. Penfield emphasizes that institutions such as universities and journals need to encourage more cross-disciplinary cooperation in order to facilitate the building of interdisciplinary documentation teams which can produce multifaceted data that will be of use to more groups of people.

Ethics has also been a prominent point of discussion over the last two decades (Czaykowska-Higgins, Chapter 11). Importantly, “language documentation is not historically, politically, socially or culturally neutral, and is not simply an intellectual

act (p. 113), and because the work often takes place in small communities that have experienced marginalization, we are obligated to develop ethical professional practices.

A final theme in Part II is the recognition of the role of the newly-elevated status of language documentation in expediting the development of ancillary initiatives to support the field. Most visible among these is the establishment of major funding initiatives specifically targeting documentation and revitalization activities worldwide, as Gary Holton and Mandana Seyfeddinipur (Chapter 10) discuss. These include larger funding regimes like the Endangered Language Documentation Programme (ELDP), the Documentation of Endangered Languages Program (DoBeS), and the U.S. National Science Foundation Documenting Endangered Languages (NSF-DEL) program. As Holton & Seyfeddinipur note, these funding schemes have dramatically improved the quality, scale, and pace of documentation projects around the world.

The development of technological support for language documentation is another area of rapid ancillary progress over the last two decades. Alexandre Arkhipov and Nick Thieberger (Chapter 14) discuss the urgent need to quickly develop software and workflows that adhere to standards for data longevity and interoperability, which has led to an ongoing discussion between linguists, developers, and language speakers/users. In recent years, ease of use has become an additional goal of tool development, which has led to increased participation by members of language communities in documentary data creation, and in the future crowd-sourcing technologies are likely to help ease the transcription bottleneck (Himmelmann, Chapter 4).

The increased awareness of language diversity brought about by language documentation has led to a renewal of efforts to standardize language and dialect names for better cross reference in databases and beyond. Sebastian Drude (Chapter 12) presents the histories of the Ethnologue, Glottolog, the ISO 639 standard, and atlases like the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. These histories are intertwined and have ramifications for how the general public reacts to declining linguistic diversity worldwide.

#### **4. Part III: Beyond description: Creating and using language documentations**

The chapters in Part III present several interrelated themes that center on moving the field forward. In some chapters, this means loosening the reigns of descriptive linguistic research agendas (Riesberg, Chapter 15; Schnell, Chapter 17; McDonnell, Chapter 19), and in others it concerns the broadening of our current understanding of how lexical knowledge is documented (Keren Rice, Chapter 18) and our current conceptions of documentary corpora (Sally Rice, Chapter 16). What ties these chapters together is that they primarily come from an academic perspective and are oriented to outsiders. (This does not mean that they do not recognize the central role of community members, the multipurpose nature of language documentations or the importance of language documentations for language reclamation: chapters by Sally Rice, Keren Rice, and Stefan Schnell all highlight these issues.)

Additionally, the chapters in Part III represent all three elements of the Boasian trilogy, and to different extents they draw attention to how (some part of) each element of the trilogy can be better conceptualized and/or utilized to accomplish desired outcomes in documentary linguistics (i.e., to create a multipurpose record of the practices of a speech community). Bradley McDonnell (Chapter 19), Sonja Riesberg (Chapter 15), and Stefan Schnell (Chapter 17) cover areas that are most likely to fall under the heading of “grammar” (though they also discuss connections between the ‘grammar’ and “texts”; see below), Keren Rice (Chapter 18) covers the “dictionary” through her discussion of

documenting the lexicon, and Sally Rice (Chapter 16) represents ‘texts’ with her discussion of documentary corpora. It is in these detailed treatments of the different components of the Boasian trilogy that we see new (or renewed) manifestations of the connections among each of the elements in contemporary contexts.

Sally Rice’s chapter on documentary corpora is the clearest example of this. She points out that while corpus building and annotation have been widely discussed in documentary linguistics, the characterizations of the applications of a documentary corpus in the language documentation literature—including to a certain extent Himmelmann (1998)—are vague and “replete with elusive and ultimately off-hand comments that do little to clarify exactly what a corpus is capable of” (p. 159). She quite convincingly argues that a fuller understanding of the potential uses of documentary corpora will better motivate the process of creating language documentations. She proposes that “[g]oing forward, we must stop regarding the corpus as a body of recordings, impeccably textualized and identified, and possibly left silent and still in an archive, but instead view it as an active and noisy collection of transcribed conversations teeming with insights about the language and its use that we can eavesdrop on again and again” (p. 161).

Keren Rice isn’t as emphatic in her critique of current practices in the field in her treatment of the lexicon. However, based on Himmelmann’s (1998) discussions of documenting a full array of communicative event types, she points out that while there will be lexical items that cross-cut different event types, there will be other lexical items that are much more likely to occur in one type of event. “Thus, in order to obtain a lexicon that is both broad and deep, a considerable corpus must be developed” (p. 184).

Sonja Riesberg (Chapter 15), Stefan Schnell (Chapter 17), and Bradley McDonnell (Chapter 19) each discuss how current linguistic research—whether that be descriptive grammars, theoretical studies of a single language, or cross-linguistic studies—interfaces with language documentations. How these two activities—documentation and description—interface has been an area of much debate since Himmelmann (1998). These authors, especially Riesberg, list several misconceptions surrounding Himmelmann (1998). McDonnell and Schnell’s chapters additionally provide practical examples of the relationship between linguistic research—including research goals, research questions, and linguistic analysis—on the one hand, and the documentation on which it are based on the other. For example, Schnell argues “it is overall more fruitful for innovative linguistic research to invest into the processing of haphazard language documentation data rather than attempting to collect precisely the kind of data demanded by specific analytical goals” (p. 173).

One final theme that arises repeatedly in this section is the importance of documenting naturally-occurring (connected) speech of different communicative event types. Sally Rice and Bradley McDonnell are most explicit in emphasizing the importance of everyday conversation; Stefan Schnell advocates for the multipurpose functions of documenting traditional narratives, and how such documentation can be (more) useful for linguistic research and (more) desirable for communities. Keren Rice, in her treatment of documenting lexical knowledge, even advocates for a documentary corpus of different communicative event types, as evidenced in her quotation above.

**5. Part IV: Fieldwork and language documentation around the world** Part IV begins with Claire Bowern’s reflection on linguistic fieldwork (Chapter 20). Her chapter does not summarize the other chapters in this part, nor does it purport to reflect on linguistic fieldwork across the entire world. Rather, from her perspective as one who

conducts linguistic fieldwork in Australia, she reflects on changes in fieldwork practices since Himmelmann (1998) by posing three questions: (i) Have field methods changed? (ii) Has the production of documentation changed? (iii) Has academia changed? She answers each question affirmatively, and in doing so she shows how linguistic fieldwork has progressed in several areas and still needs to develop in other ways. For example, there are more interdisciplinary projects, major increases in the amount of data collected, including conversational and natural data, a greater emphasis on archiving, and better recognition of the critical role of community linguists and language activists, but little has changed in terms of publications and more needs to be done to take advantage of digital media, such as linking media to text. In her conclusion, Bovern points out that while it's difficult to say how many of these changes can be directly attributed to Himmelmann (1998), this influential paper certainly came at the right time in history.

The remaining chapters in Part IV are diverse, both in terms of content and presentation. This reflects not only the different interests and perspectives of the authors, but also the diversity of contexts in which language documentation projects are situated. In many of these chapters, the calls for documentation projects (e.g., by Woodbury 2011, Austin 2014, 2016) to be tailored to their individual contexts are borne out. The most widely discussed issues that show this diversity include:

- (i) collaboration among communities, academic linguists, and other stakeholders, and more generally the role that academic linguists play in documentation projects in different regions, e.g., compare the discussions surrounding collaboration in Ghana (Ameka, Chapter 22), India (Chelliah, Chapter 24), Australia (Singer, Chapter 26), the Pacific (François, Chapter 27), the Chaco (Golluscio & Vidal, Chapter 29), and North America (Rosenblum & Berez-Kroeker, Chapter 32);
- (ii) the degree to which language revitalization/reclamation activities are intertwined with documentations, e.g., compare the differences found in India (Chelliah, Chapter 24), Australia (Singer, Chapter 26), the Pacific (François, Chapter 27), Southern Cone (Zúñiga & Malvestitti, Chapter 28), Mexico and Central America (Pérez Báez, Chapter 31), and North America (Rosenblum & Berez-Kroeker, Chapter 32);
- (iii) the differing needs for training and capacity building in the region, e.g., compare discussions of training needs in India (Chelliah, Chapter 24), eastern Indonesia (Sawaki & Arka, Chapter 25), Amazonia (Beier & Epps, Chapter 30), Mexico and Central America (Pérez Báez, Chapter 31), and North America (Chapter 32);
- (iv) the effects of governmental and other stakeholding institutions in the region and/or official policies on documenting and/or revitalizing Indigenous languages, e.g., compare eastern Indonesia (Sawaki & Arka, Chapter 25), Australia (Singer, Chapter 26), and the Chaco (Golluscio & Vidal, Chapter 29).

Many of these chapters present the history of language documentation and description—and to a lesser extent language reclamation/revitalization—in the region, cataloguing much of what has happened and is currently happening (see, for example, Güldeman (Chapter 21), Ameka (Chapter 22), François (Chapter 27), Zúñiga & Malvestitti (Chapter 28)). Some of these chapters make a particular point in presenting the history of language documentation in the region. Felix Ameka (Chapter 22), for example, presents the history of language documentation and language description in Ghana, making note

of *who* is doing the documentation and/or description. He shows that there has been a shift from outsiders conducting descriptive linguistic fieldwork to insiders and “insider-outsiders” (i.e., those who have knowledge of wider cultural practices and norms of the community, but who are not members of the speech community that is being documented) conducting documentary linguistic fieldwork.

There are also numerous connections between the major themes that surface in the chapters in Part IV and the chapters in earlier parts of the volume. For example, Christine Beier and Patience Epps (Chapter 30) highlight the need for increased training in ethnography as well as contextual training for academic linguists documenting languages in Amazonia, a point that Dobrin & Sicoli (Chapter 5) argue at length. Through their descriptions of individual documentation projects, Golluscio & Vidal (Chapter 29) show how funding initiatives—from DOBES, ELDP, Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL), and NSF-DEL—have had a major impact on language documentation efforts in the Chaco. At the same time, Sawaki & Arka (Chapter 25) highlight the fact that the vast majority of funded documentation projects in eastern Indonesia are conducted by foreigners, because Indonesian nationals typically do not have the training or capacity to be competitive for such international awards. Both points are discussed at some length by Holton & Seyfeddinipur (Chapter 10) as well.

Finally, some chapters in Part IV take a longer view of language description and language documentation in the region that they cover. For example, Zúñiga & Malvestitti (Chapter 28) discuss the earliest linguistic descriptions during Spanish colonial rule in some languages of the Southern Cone, and Ameka (Chapter 22) discusses early grammars in Ghana, tracing the origins of linguistic fieldwork back to the mid-19th century. Others trace the origins of modern, digital language documentation to activities that were being done prior to the publication of Himmelmann (1998). François (Chapter 27), for example, makes the point that the turn towards documentary linguistics was already taking place in the 1970s “when linguists understood that their role was to record languages in the way they were actually spoken,” which was evidenced by various collections, and in 1996 “Cnrs–LaCiTO created the first online audio archive in endangered languages, ... bringing together valuable fieldwork recordings with their text annotations” (p. 279) (see Jacobson et al. 2001). Circling back to Bowerman’s assessment of Himmelmann (1998), many of the chapters in Part IV show that while much has changed since the appearance of Himmelmann (1998), there was certainly a confluence of activities that led to the development of documentary linguistics as a field in its own right.

**6. Some limitations of the volume** In concluding this chapter, we ought to mention several limitations of this volume. First, we decided early on to focus on language documentation in this volume, and so there are no chapters dedicated to language reclamation/revitalization. We decided to limit the volume to in this way because we did not want give language reclamation short shrift, and we thought that the topic deserves an entire volume in its own right with editors with more expertise than we have in this area. Interested readers may wish to consult the recently-published *Handbook of Language Revitalization* (Hinton et al. 2018). Note, however, that many of the chapters do discuss issues of language reclamation/revitalization and how multipurpose language documentations relate to such issues. (See in particular Chapter 6 on (de)colonialism.) This to us represents an important trend in documentary linguistics where language reclamation is a driving force behind a language documentation.


Second, in Part IV, we compiled reflections from different regions around the world. One will quickly notice that there are very large gaps. This occurred for two reasons. The first is that we early on realized early on that the volume would become unwieldy if we attempted to provide a representative sample of the world's language. Instead, we aimed to get a diverse set of areas from as diverse a set of authors. The second is that we could not find an author to contribute or the author was not able to contribute a chapter in the end. Thus, our sample of different regions of the world is indeed small and has numerous gaps, but we do hope that these localized portraits of language documentation projects from around the world.

Finally, owing to space limitations we were only able to include vignettes from a small number of the many researchers engaged in documentary linguistics. This fact in itself is reflective of the growing success of the language documentation enterprise. Two decades ago the number of people engaged in documentary work was much smaller, and the views of the discipline—such as they were—could potentially be captured in a single volume. The sheer size of the field today makes this more challenging. Nevertheless, we feel that the views of the contributors to this volume are largely representative and widely shared across the field. No doubt there will be differences of opinion, especially regarding the key issues in language documentation and the future of documentary linguistics as a field. It is our hope that the reflections presented here will help to stimulate future discussion and debate as the discipline of documentary linguistics continues to mature.


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