Role and ethics of researchers and method of documentation

Tasaku TSUNODA
Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo
tsunoda@tooyoo.L.u-tokyo.ac.jp

1 Introductory notes
The present paper is based on and incorporates Tsunoda (1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, forthcoming). What is stated below is what I consider to be the ideal research and researcher in language endangerment situation. This paper by no means claims that I have practiced every ideal stated below.

2 Aim of documentation
What is the aim of documentation of endangered languages? No doubt different researchers have different aims, such as:

(a) to satisfy their academic curiosity;
(b) to enhance their academic success;
(c) to secure research data for themselves and/or other researchers;
(d) to document endangered languages as a cultural heritage of the mankind, for the benefit of the mankind, and;
(e) to document a given endangered language as a cultural heritage of the community, for the benefit of the community — so that the research result can be used, for instance, for language maintenance or language revival.

It seems that traditionally researchers have mainly been concerned with (a), (b) and perhaps (c) as well, and that they have largely neglected (d) and (e). Recently, however, a growing number of researchers are arguing for the importance of (d) and (e). Furthermore, in Australia, the communities are beginning to control the research conducted there, and to place importance on (e), and they have begun to criticize and even reject those researchers who do not respect (e). See also Hudson and McConvell (1984:76-86). Similar situations are reported by Grinevald (1998) regarding South American languages, by Okuda (1998) regarding the Ainu language of Japan, and by Yamamoto (1998) on North American languages.

3 Role of researchers
The most URGENT tasks of researchers (here, I mean linguists) are no doubt the
following two:

(a) to document endangered languages (Krauss 1992:8, Lehmann n.d., 1996), and;
(b) to return the result of the research to the communities.

4 Method of documentation
4.1 A holistic approach rather than a narrow approach

In view of the aims (c) to (e) — though not (a) or (b) — listed in Section 1, it is important to document an endangered language (or an endangered dialect) in such as way that 'an interested person will be able to know what the once-existent language or the dialect was like' (Tamura 2000b; translation by me). This in turn makes it vital to take a holistic approach. By a holistic approach I mean documentation of a language as a whole, including its socio-cultural background. That is, the researcher needs to examine the language's phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse, lexicon (including personal names and place names), semantics, sociolinguistics, dialectology, historical linguistics, and so on. In addition, the researcher needs to look at the kinship system, mythology, folklore, naming, songs, dances, social history, and so on.

It is relevant to note that a few groups of Aborigines of North Queensland, Australia are planning to revive their languages, including the culture, and they stated to me that they want songs and dances, among other things. This underlines the importance of documenting a given language's socio-cultural background.

That is, as Marianne Mithun (cited by Yamamoto 1998:226) says, 'Fieldworkers cannot be afford to be narrow'. The importance of a holistic approach is also central in the documentation program proposed by Himmelmann (n.d., 1998), that by Lehmann (n.d., 1996), and that by Moore (n.d.).

Dixon's (1972) study of the Dyingbal language of Queensland, Australia is a fine example of a holistic approach; its looks at just about every aspect listed above of the language — except that he published a book on songs separately (Dixon and Koch 1996).

Unfortunately, however, still now it is not uncommon to come across a researcher who focuses on just one aspect of the language, e.g. phonology only, syntax only, or vocabulary only. Such a narrow approach may be useful for the purpose of enhancing the researcher's academic success, but it is not advisable in documentation of endangered languages. It will not be very useful to an interested person who wants to know what a given language (or dialect) was like.
4.2 What to publish: 'grammar, texts and vocabulary', and audio- and video-data

Traditionally, it has been considered important to publish a set of a grammar, texts and a vocabulary of a given language. Heath's (1980, 1982, 1984) work of Nunggubuyu of Northern Territory, Australia is a fine example; he published a grammar of 664 pages, texts of 556 pages, and a dictionary of 399 pages.

In addition, it is important to publish sound recording and also video-recording of texts, conversations, gestures (including sign language), songs, dances, and so on. These publications should include information on the various aspects of the language and its culture mentioned in 4.1.

Recently, with the development of IT, multi-media publications of linguistic data have appeared and are now beginning to flourish. For example, see David Nathan's website (http://www.dnathan.com/v1/byLang.htm) on multi-media resources on Australian Aboriginal languages.

People of the communities are beginning to shown interest in multi-media resources and to recognize value in them for language maintenance, language revival, and so on.

4.3 Raw data and result of analysis

It has been customary to publish the result of analysis, e.g. grammars, dictionaries, papers, and so on. However, Tamura (1996, 2000b, among others) argues for the importance of publishing the data itself. A similar view is expressed by Himmelmann (n.d., 1998). Publication of raw data is important for a number of reasons. Thus, (i) technical papers are generally unintelligible to the people of the community. (ii) A given piece of analysis represents only a fraction of the language and does not provide a picture of the entire language (or dialect). (iii) The analysis may well contain errors on the side of the researcher.

5 Research for the communities and the general public

[1] Returning the research to the communities

It is important to return the result of the research to the community. In Japan, those researchers who work on the Ainu language have set a truly fine example; see Okuda (1998) and Tamura (1996, 2000a, 2000b), among others. See Hudson and McConvell (1984:76-86) and Hinton (1994:249-54) for Kimberley, Australia and for California, USA, respectively.

There are a number of ways to return the result of the research to the community. (a) To send (copies of) field tapes, field notes, vocabulary cards, etc. to relevant or-
ganizations or institutions. In my case, I lodge such materials with Kimberley Language Resource Centre (an Aboriginal organization in Halls Creek, Western Australia) and to Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.

(b) To assist with (i) teaching of the language concerned, (ii) preparation of teaching materials and other language materials, (iii) publication of language materials, (iv) broadcasting radio (and TV?) programs in the language, and (v) dissemination of information on the language and culture, and so on.

(c) To give lectures to non-indigenous people of the community to inform them of the local language and culture.

There may be other ways to return the result of the research to the community. The important thing is NOT to become ‘an academic thief’. In order to achieve the goal, it is vitally important:

(d) to write the research result in the language that the community people can understand. (Thus, it would be pointless if I used Japanese to write up my data on Australian Aboriginal languages.)

Needless to say, these activities will be indispensable for language maintenance or even language revival.

[2] Information to the general public

Thus far, I have talked about benefits to the communities where the research is conducted. In addition, it is important to inform the general public of the language endangerment situation and the value of linguistic heritage. This can be done by means of symposia, public lectures, newspaper articles, books, and so on. One of the efforts towards this goal by means of the internet is ‘Welcome to the Linguistic Olympics !’, at the following website:

http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~tpayne/lingolym/index.htm

6 Ethical codes

In order to avoid ‘exploitation by academic thieves’, it is important to establish ethical codes for researchers. In Japan, those researchers who work on the Ainu language have been seriously concerned with ethical issues; see again Okuda (1998) and Tamura (1996, 2000a, 2000b). However, on the whole Australia seems far more advanced in this respect than countries such as Japan, and I shall just a few examples from Australia.

(a) The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies has strict guidelines for research ethics. See ‘Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indige-
nous Studies’ at http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/news.htm. They concern (i) approval of the community, (ii) privacy of the individuals, (iii) benefits for the community, (iv) intellectual property rights, (v) method of publication, and so on. Similar guidelines are included in grant application forms. See ‘2000 Research Grant Application information’ at the same website. No applicant will be awarded a grant unless he/she satisfies these ethics requirements.

(b) Northern Territory University — and no doubt other universities as well — has a committee for research ethics, and I believe that a researcher — whether a faculty member or a student — needs to have his/her proposal approved by the committee before commencing fieldwork.

(c) The Australian Linguistic Society has a committee for research ethics.

(d) Before a researcher publishes the result of his/her fieldwork, he/she needs to have approval from the relevant language centre or Aboriginal council. If the work contains information or photos of, for example, secret ceremonies, then its publication will be likely to be withheld.


References
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