

Setting up a linguistic fieldwork project

What is fieldwork?

- Hyman (2001): “a state of mind” -> prototype

	FIELDWORK PROTOTYPE	FIELDWORK COUNTERTYPE	LEAST FIELD-WORK- LIKE
ELICITEE	Other	Self	Introspection
ELICITOR/OBSERVER	Self	Other	Secondary data
DISTANCE	Far	Near	One's domicile
SETTING	Small	Large	City, university
DURATION	Long	Short	Brief stopover
LANGUAGE	Exotic	Well-known	One's own
SUBJECT MATTER	Languages as used in their natural/cultural context	Language in general as a formal system	Abstract syntax
DATA	Naturalistic	Controlled	Synthetic speech
MOTIVATION	Languages-driven	Theory-driven	Mathematical linguistics

Why do fieldwork?

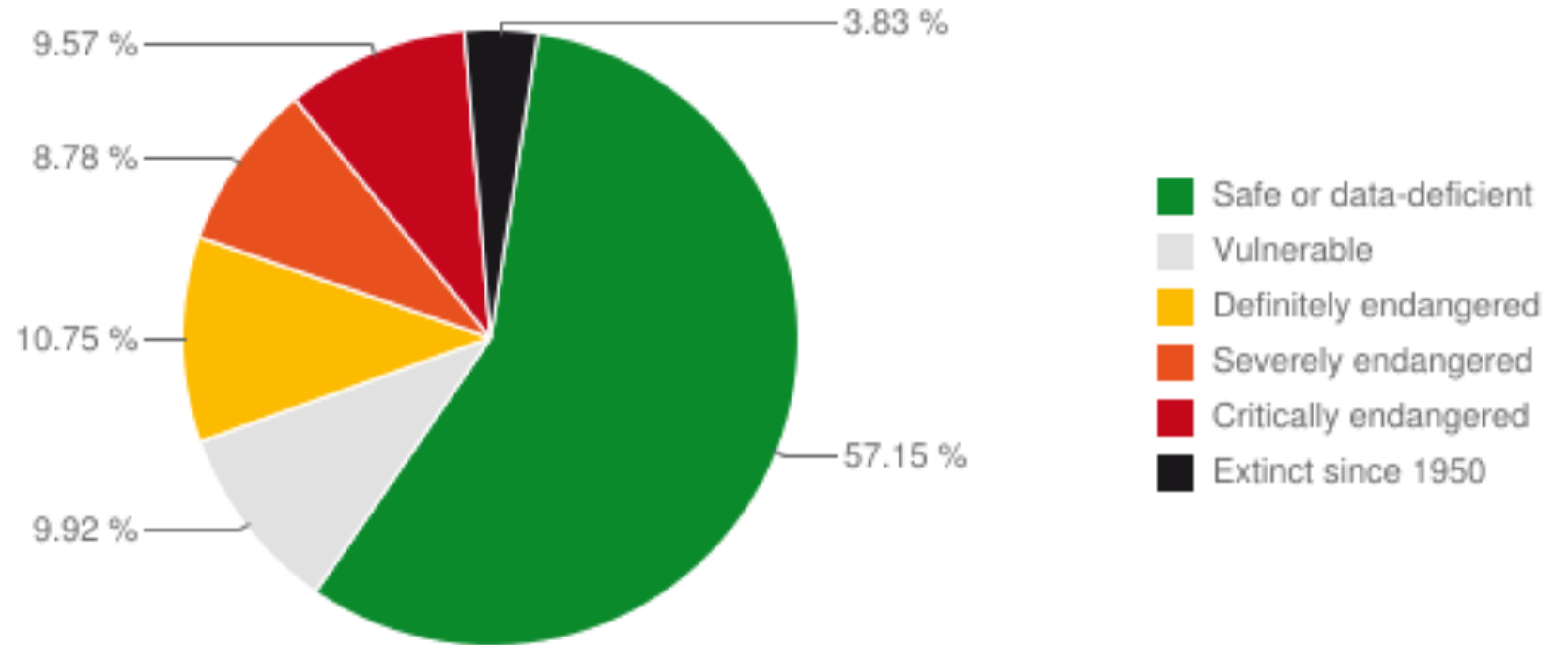
- Language endangerment
- Underdocumentation
- Linguistic theory

EGIDS (Ethnologue)

Table 1 . Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale

Level	Label	Description
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of a nation.
3	Wider Communication	The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.
4	Educational	The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.
5	Developing	The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
6a	Vigorous	The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.
6b	Threatened	The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.

UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger



So what?

- Language endangerment occurs often in situations of inequality
- Language is part of, and a carrier of, local cultures, so preserving/activating a language can keep cultural traditions alive
- As linguists we want to study as many languages as possible (for reconstruction, UG, etc.)

So what does fieldwork have to do with it?

- Documentation can help renew the interest and motivation of native speakers
- Description provides a basis for language materials
- Materials can help revitalise a language
- Documentation provides access to the language data even if the language does eventually die.

Under- documentation

- Basically, a word list or a 100-page reference grammar are not enough to answer more complicated and detailed linguistic questions
- So we need to get out there and gather more data!

Linguistic theory

- Description and theory depend on each other
 - There is no such thing as a theory neutral description!
 - Any analysis of a language involves abstraction from the data, and the way in which we abstract is conditioned by our theoretical assumptions.
- Theory informs description: it forces one to make explicit hypotheses and therefore arrive at new questions
- Data inform theory: if the hypothesis is proven false by the data, or if data on a new phenomenon appear, the theory needs to be adjusted

So how do we do it?

- We need someone who speaks the language (as a native speaker with active command of the language)
 - And then what?
 - Elicited vs. semi-spontaneous vs. spontaneous data
 - Recorded and transcribed(More on this on Friday!)

- We need a research question and project!

8 steps to an effective linguistic research project

1. Choose a (broad) topic
2. Brainstorm (alone or with others). It is important at this stage to just generate ideas, even bad ones. Just jot them down – selecting will come later.
 1. Why is this interesting?
 2. Which different questions can we ask?
 3. Ask 'what if...' questions regarding your topic
 4. Try to think from different angles
3. Check what the current thinking is about this topic, and what has already been done
4. Select and formulate one specific research question (and thereby also limit your research area and objectives in a realistic way!)
5. Formulate subquestions whose answers are needed to answer the overall research question
6. Determine which data are needed to deduce an answer to the subquestions (if this is unrealistic, return to 4 and 5)
7. Match an appropriate methodology (longer stretch of speech, specific recordings, judgements)
8. Make a plan for when to do what, taking into account that speakers are human beings 😊

Learning from experience

Take 5 minutes to reflect on previous projects
(in study or personal life):

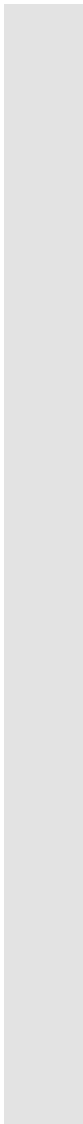
- What worked well?
- What are your personal potential pitfalls?
- What do you want to improve?

Example research questions

- Tone in Chitonga
- Description of lexical tone in Chitonga
- Description of lexical tone in the Chitonga noun phrase:
the influence of modifiers

Get started!

- Tell your neighbour your topic of interest, as broadly or as narrowly as you are currently thinking about it
- Determine which step in the process you are at, or which is most useful for you at this moment (we will have further time to set up your precise project in the rest of this week)
- Put in some time and effort at that step, and perhaps the next



	Elicited	Semi-spontaneous	Spontaneous
Method	Translation or judgement	Response to a stimulus	No stimulus
Good for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative data • Competence • Specific forms or meanings • Testing grammaticality hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneous speech in specific areas • Performance • Connected intonation • Interspeaker comparison • Finding what you don't expect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Actual use • Cultural knowledge • Discourse particles • Connected intonation • Finding what you don't expect
Downsides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be unnatural • Risk of calqueing • (Un)Acceptability can be due to different factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of negative evidence • Difficult to get specific forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of negative evidence • Difficult to search • Difficult to get specific forms
Needed	Prepared questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate stimuli for your research question • A recorder 	A recorder

Elicitation pitfalls

- Speaker may accept a sentence because
 - they're being polite
 - they do not care or are tired
 - you're a foreigner
 - they misinterpreted the question/stimulus
 - it's a good sentence!
- Speaker may reject a sentence because
 - they're making life difficult for you
 - they do not care or are tired
 - this is not the prescribed/taught form
 - there is a mistake in a part of the sentence you weren't after
 - the wrong context is imagined
 - the sentence has a semantic or cultural implausibility
 - it's an ungrammatical or infelicitous sentence!

Working with an informant

- They are a collaborator on the project.
- They are your teacher. They have the language intuitions you're after, so assume that they are right.
- Be respectful, polite, and patient.
- Show interest and be appreciative, even when things are not moving in the direction you had in mind. You might find something even more interesting!
- Be mindful of their state (bored, tired, ...) and the tasks you ask them to do.
- Manage your own reactions to their responses to not put them off or bias them.
- By participating in this class, you agree to treat the obtained data with care!

Ethics

- Agree beforehand with the community and speakers who owns the data – sign a consent form
- Agree with the speaker whether and how much to pay. This depends partly on your budget, but mostly on the local culture. (for the LIME, this has been organized)