

Fieldwork and Field Methods in Linguistics

Paul Newman

Indiana University

[Note: This paper originally appeared in *California Linguistic Notes* 23(2): 1, 3-8 (1992), an informal newsletter, often containing brief scholarly articles, put out for many years at Cal State Fullerton by Alan S. Kaye (1944-2007). Since the paper was published in print form in an obscure newsletter, the opportunity for scholars nowadays to get hold of it is a hit or miss affair. By republishing it here, *LD&C* is finally making the paper openly and easily accessible. The article can be said to warrant republication for two main reasons.

First, although the paper dates from some seventeen years ago, it is frequently cited, and, in the opinion of many practicing fieldworkers, still makes valuable observations about field linguistics. Interestingly, a 2004 follow-up survey of university field methods courses came up with results that were essentially identical to those reported in the earlier study.

Second, the circumstances of the article's original publication have historical interest. When I had finished writing up the paper, I submitted it to a number of standard linguistics journals. The response in all cases was negative, the message being, "Thanks, but no thanks. This paper is about fieldwork: it is not about linguistics; i.e., it doesn't deal with theoretical issues nor does it contribute to general linguistic theory." I can't remember how it was that I showed the paper to Alan Kaye, the remarkable Arabist/Semiticist, whose name is known to many linguists by virtue of his voluminous and wide-ranging book notices in *Language*, but his immediate reaction was: "These important editors of important journals don't know what they're talking about. Your paper contains critical information and neglected observations, insights, and ideas that empirical linguists need to think about. You must get this paper published, and I would love to have it in *CLN*." As coincidence would have it, my paper came out the very same year that the groundbreaking paper on endangered languages by Ken Hale et al. appeared in *Language* (vol. 68: 1-42, 1992), a year that could be said to mark the rebirth of interest in linguistic fieldwork. Although I would love to claim credit for this renewed interest, it was obviously due to the *Language* paper and not my own, which most people hadn't, and still haven't, seen.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editors of *LD&C* for agreeing to republish this paper, and I dedicate its republication to the memory of Alan Kaye, my energetic colleague and good friend, who died of bone cancer two years ago at the young age of sixty-three.]

This note is in two parts. In Part I, I discuss issues relating to the human dimension of fieldwork in linguistics. In Part II, I describe the results of a small study on the status of graduate field methods courses in American linguistics departments.¹

¹ This work was supported by the Institute for the Study of Nigerian Languages and Cultures, Indiana University. Useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper were provided by Erhard Voeltz,

PART I: THE HUMAN FACTOR IN FIELDWORK

As is the case with most field methods courses, most writings on linguistic fieldwork—e.g., the classic, and still valuable, book by Samarin (1967) and the superb, but poorly known three volumes by Bouquiaux and Thomas (1973)—are concerned with technical aspects of data collection and analysis. With the exception of Dixon's (1984) personal account and the fine article by Craig (1979), the human dimensions of fieldwork that affect the researcher are seldom taken up as a point of discussion.

There have in fact been a number of books published recently about such personal issues in fieldwork. However, since they are addressed to anthropologists, these books are probably not known to most linguists.² As far as I am aware, none of them has been reviewed in a linguistics journal. And yet, the issues discussed are of critical importance to anyone doing fieldwork, whether the specific scientific problem being investigated concerns marriage customs, folk medicine, or grammatical structure. The purpose of this note is to alert linguists to matters that they should think seriously about before going into the field, and which should be included as part and parcel of any graduate field methods class. My aim here is neither to treat each topic in depth nor to provide a full review of the books that I want to bring to people's attention, but rather to awaken the interest of linguists in these matters. I should point out that although the orientation of the books mentioned is anthropological and thus the unspoken assumption is that the fieldwork is being done far away in some exotic place, most of the issues apply equally to linguistic fieldwork done in an urban ghetto at the foot of one's office building or in a nursing home where one's grandmother resides.³

1. HEALTH (Howell 1990). I suspect that most experienced fieldworkers minimize health hazards when talking to students or colleagues planning to go off into the field for the first time. West Africa, for example, is not the "white man's grave" that it was in the mid-nineteenth century. We all know numbers of researchers, Fulbright scholars, Peace Corps Volunteers, etc. who have spent time in Africa and who have come back alive to talk about it, all of which indicates that the health risks of going abroad clearly have been over exaggerated. Moreover, one of the purposes in talking with neophytes about to head off for the field is to reassure them about their forthcoming travels, not to alarm them. The result is

Anthony Woodbury, and members of my Kisi field methods class. I am grateful to Alan Kaye for suggesting that the *California Linguistic Notes* might be an appropriate outlet for this essay.

² An exception, perhaps, is Burling 1984, a work that is concerned with language, although with matters of language learning rather than linguistics per se. Although the book has some value, especially if the aim is to give someone a pep talk, it suffers from too casual an acceptance of the romantic "fiction" about anthropologists' acquisition and use of native languages in the field; it thus fails to address the real difficulties and problems in a sensible and practical way.

³ Some twenty years ago Burling (1970:681) wrote: "To an anthropologist, one of the unhappy results of the Chomskyan revolution in linguistics has been the widening gulf that has come to divide our two fields. . . ." Two decades later, the gulf is even wider, and, I would contend, it is linguistics that has primarily been the loser.

that most people go to the field inexcusably uninformed about local health conditions and remarkably unprepared to confront them. If they come back hale and hearty, it's due to good luck, not to foresight. Whereas the average person greatly overstates the dangers of going abroad, aided by the alarmist (?) TV coverage of the AIDS crisis in Africa and Southeast Asia, professional anthropologists and linguists have tended to understate the health risks.⁴ Nevertheless, as a perusal of Nancy Howell's book demonstrates, field work *is* hazardous. The problem is not so much the exotic diseases and the snakes and scorpions and lions that the layman associates with far off Asia, Africa and Latin America, but the shortage of doctors, hospitals, and medical supplies, which significantly magnify the potential seriousness of every ailment or injury that comes along. At the risk of frightening off potential fieldworkers, I would recommend that everyone going to the field for the first time (or anyone planning to return to the field, for that matter) should read Howell's remarkably comprehensive book from beginning to the end. Health in the field is not a luxury; it is an essential element to successful research. No matter how knowledgeable you are in theoretical linguistics, no matter how skilled you are in techniques of description and analysis, you're not going to achieve what you set out to do if you are sick or dead. Let me give a couple of examples, one major, one minor, where forethought and planning about health matters can be applied in a constructive way.

A major health hazard in the field that one needs to be aware of is car accidents. We of course have accidents here as well, but the rate in the third world is much much higher. There are lots of reasons for this, e.g. roads are poor and unlit, speed limits are non-existent or non-enforced, and equipment is inadequately maintained (especially, and most dangerously, tires); but the fact is that riding in a car is a risky proposition. A combination of dust and dusk and a gray Peugeot with bald tires speeding along at 70 mph without its lights on adds up to a disaster waiting to happen. (When one thinks of the extra dangers of two-wheel vehicles, those people who choose to ride motorcycles and motor scooters should have their heads examined!) Then, if one should be in an accident, the risk of serious injury is much greater than would be the case here. In the first place, cars tend not to have seat belts—if they come equipped with them, they are probably removed and used for other purposes—or, even if they have them no one uses them. Second, emergency services are less well developed. The closest hospital, which might be 100 miles away, is probably understaffed and undersupplied with blood and other essential medicines. So what can one do? In some sense, not much. The basic situation is as one finds it. But by being conscious of the problem and alert to the dangers, there are little things that one can do that can make a difference. For example, way back when I was in junior high school, we were given a little first-aid course where we were taught how to stop bleeding, handle shock, do CPR, etc. I promptly forgot what I learned and spent years in Nigeria travelling around without such knowledge and without carrying along a simple first-aid kit. That I was lucky and never needed it doesn't change the fact that I was stupid! Another unnecessary risk was failing to speak up when a chauffeur was speeding along faster than was prudent given the road conditions. Of course one doesn't like to be a back-seat driver, but, as with other issues relating

⁴ Anthropologists have been characterized as “supposedly educated people who don't believe in the germ theory of disease.”

to car safety, there are ways to handle a predicament if one has thought seriously about it in advance and is insistent about taking the necessary steps to protect oneself.

A second problem, of a much smaller but nonetheless important nature, concerns eye-glasses. For people who need them, broken or lost glasses represent more than a minor inconvenience. It's the difference between being able to work and not being able to work. So, take along an extra pair, a copy of your prescription, and perhaps the name and address of your optometrist back home in case you need to write for a replacement. This, of course, is very simple, but again it requires that you have thought about the matter in advance. It is such an elementary precaution that most people forget to mention it—including Nancy Howell—and thus most people end up going into the field not having done anything about it.

On the subject of taking things, it is amazing how many researchers go to far-off places without having packed necessary medications and such. I'm not talking about essential prescription drugs, which most people will attend to; but the lack of allergy remedies, sun-screen lotions, or birth control pills can create problems that could easily have been avoided.

2. CHILDREN (Cassell 1987). To judge from the silence in the accounts of their fieldwork experiences, you would think that all linguists are single people without dependents who are able to devote themselves from morning to night figuring out the intricacies of relative clauses or noun classifiers. The reality, of course, is otherwise. Like normal people, fieldworkers at some point in their lives have families and in many cases their spouses and children accompany them to the field. The children raise two problems. (At the risk of ignoring perhaps greater sources of grief and frustration, I'll let the spouses fend for themselves!) First there is the question of the children's burden from the point of view of time and attention. Normal child care is seldom a problem since in most parts of the third world domestic help is easily obtainable and affordable. (Nevertheless, as a then childless researcher, I was constantly amazed at the amount of time an anthropologist colleague of mine spent repairing children's toys that couldn't simply be tossed in the trash and replaced by an equivalent item at a local K-Mart.) However, if the children are not going to be attending a local school—which in many cases is not deemed feasible for linguistic or cultural or educational reasons—someone has to teach them at home. In the "traditional" family set-up, this would have been the "housewife" wife. Nowadays, the spouse of the field linguist is likely to have his or her own project or activity to carry out; or, as is increasingly common, the researcher is a single woman with children. People usually cope, but the problems are not nonexistent and *can* interfere with one's work schedule if left to chance.

A second, generally neglected, problem, which in some ways is more interesting, is the effect of the fieldwork situation on the children themselves. In the case studies included in Cassell, most of the anthropologists report that the overall experience for the children was positive. But that was with hindsight. As shown in the frank letters and diaries of some of the children themselves (see especially the chapter in Cassell by Scheper-Hughes), adjustment for children is not always easy and the experience of being in some exotic place is not immediately viewed as romantic or interesting. The age of the children seems to be a critical variable. Those 10 years of age or older might be thought of as those who would benefit most from a new and challenging experience; but they are also those who are least

thrilled about being yanked away from school (without their consent or vote!) and being separated from their friends and their familiar home situation. They are also the ones who one might admit really do lose something important by giving up a year of piano lessons or participation in the high school swimming team. The essays in Cassell are uneven, some more informative and more engrossing than others; but I suspect that anyone who has gone to the field with children will find at least one chapter that rings true. An interesting experiment would be to jot down one's favorite chapter before going to the field with children and then compare that to one's judgment after having returned.

3. GENDER AND SEX (Warren 1988). Depending upon where they go, women fieldworkers are likely to come up against more difficulties than their male counterparts.⁵ The general discrimination that women scientists face as a rule are likely to be intensified by cultural expectations about the appropriate behavior of women in male dominated societies. These expectations and concomitant suspicions, especially about the nature of unmarried, childless adult women, will be shared by local women as well as by men. On the whole, the "gender" problem seldom turns out to be insurmountable, primarily because professional women, through their past experiences, are possibly even more prepared than their male counterparts to confront what appear to be irrational obstacles. Still, there are practical and psychological difficulties to overcome and women linguists are well advised to read through a book such as Warren's and other works cited in her bibliography to increase their awareness of the special kinds of problems they can expect in the field and what they can do to prepare for them.⁶ You would think that women naturally would take practical gender issues into consideration in the choice of their field site—it is amazing how many don't.

Interestingly, while gender, i.e. the role of women professionals, is commonly discussed and written about, sex is not. Here there are myriads of problems which affect one's health, psychological well-being, and social/cultural adjustment in the field. They are problems of a private personal nature—many of which are no different whether one is in the States or abroad—but since their potential impact on the success or failure of a fieldwork project is far from negligible, it is irresponsible to take a head-in-the-sand attitude. Of the many kinds of difficult situations that one can face in the field, consider the following, which just come mind: (a) A married researcher goes to the field for a year without the spouse, who can't get away from his/her job. A year is a long time: what kind of sexual behavior is expected/agreed upon by the two parties and how will this, or some deviation from this, affect the marriage? (b) Although homosexuality is still far from accepted by mainstream America, this country has gone a long way (in some circles more than others)

⁵ The well-known book by Golde (1970) is now twenty years old. For a more recent collection of essays on gender and sex in the field, see Whitehead and Conway (1986).

⁶ As a minimum, women fieldworkers should leave their "liberation" back home and make sure that they dress in a conservative manner that could not be construed as sexually provocative by local standards. In general, and this applies equally to men as to women, awareness of and sensitivity to differences in cultural attitudes and social norms is an absolutely essential requirement for successful fieldwork.

in acknowledging differences in sexual preferences and orientations. What kinds of risks (personal, social, even criminal) is a homosexual subjecting himself to in choosing to work in a country where the matter is viewed with abhorrence? (c) A single woman who has grown up not thinking of herself as physically attractive as judged by normal American standards suddenly finds herself in a country where her light skin and physical attributes make her very desirable. How does she handle the sexual and emotional excitement of her new persona? (d) A shy, sexually inexperienced young man finds himself in a country where prostitution is totally open. What are the implications of this temptation in terms of his own moral/religious standards, the health risks, or his standing and reputation in the eyes of host country sponsors or counterparts?

As most people know all too well, one's judgment about sexual matters when presented with problems or opportunities of the moment is far from sage. There are no simple right or wrong answers—even what constitutes a significant question will vary from person to person—but individuals who go to the field without having considered sex-related matters at all do so at their own peril.

4. PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ETHICS (Cassell and Jacobs 1987). Ironically, in linguistics, a discipline in which the major intellectual figure has written extensively about the social and ethical responsibility of scientists (see Chomsky 1969, for example), the matter of professional ethics is almost never discussed.⁷ Unlike anthropologists, who seem to be obsessed with the matter, or at least concerned enough to devote space to it in their newsletter month after month, linguists rarely mention the matter or even acknowledge that it could be a problem.⁸ Leaving aside the general issues that are shared more or less by all scientists, more specifically by all social and behavioral scientists, I would contend that moral predicaments inevitably arise as soon as one is put in a field situation, whether the field is in the rain forest of Borneo or the streets of Brooklyn. Whatever linguistics might be when one is in the confines of one's office drawing syntactic trees or autosegmental diagrams, in the field it is still very much a behavioral science dealing with human subjects. Field linguists might think that they, unlike the anthropologists, are not investigating anything personal or confidential; but, as uninvited guests in someone else's society field linguists often have an impact on many people's lives of which they may be totally unaware. Unfortunately, the book by Cassell and Jacobs leaves much to be desired. In the first place, it is not geared specifically to fieldwork situations; and second, it doesn't clearly distinguish specifically ethical concerns from what I would call career management dilem-

⁷ Significantly, the LSA is not one of the many professional societies which help support the publication of the Professional Ethics Report, put out by the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

⁸ A particularly striking illustration of the difference between anthropology and linguistics as academic fields can be seen in their attitudes towards missionary groups, especially the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Whereas linguists generally regard members of SIL as valuable professional colleagues, many of whom (such as Kenneth Pike and Eugene Nida) have been prominent members of the LSA, anthropologists tend to view SIL members as anything from misguided amateurs to zealots guilty of cultural destruction and genocide (see Hvalkof and Aaby 1981).

mas, e.g. how should one (from a *practical* point of view) respond to an ethical breach on the part of a teacher or senior colleague or how does one wriggle out of an annoying request by a local government official. But for anyone who has not given much thought to issues of professional ethics, the book is an important first step. One needs an eye opener somewhere.

Take the following question, for example, which I've tried on a number of experienced fieldworkers who were caught off base by it. What is one's obligation to the permanent expatriates one meets in the field, whose brains one picks (and whose cold beer one drinks) apart from a thank you when one drives off? We all know a Willard or a Jean-Pierre or a Dr. Hastings, or a Miss Miller or a Father McLaughlin, most likely teachers in the local college or secondary school or long term missionaries, whom we're supposed to see when we go to Ouagadougou or Quito or Ifugao country. They know about the condition of the roads, who's who in the local government, and they are a mine of information on local history, language, and culture. So we impose upon them and don't think anything of it. Well-meaning researchers who would be horrified at the thought of exploiting one of their "consultants", (i.e. native speaker informants) or other individuals in the local community readily exploit these old expats without being in the least aware of it.

What is one's professional ethical responsibility regarding written materials one comes across in the field? My experience is that it is usually the last week of one's field period when a messenger comes by and drops off a manuscript dictionary or grammar or collection of texts for you to look at and leave behind to be picked up later. In some cases these papers, which are undergoing the fading of ink and the ravages of white ants, are of minor interest, but in others they are linguistically important descriptions of dying languages prepared by long-gone missionaries or local scribes. What do you do to preserve the uniquely valuable ones? Do you "borrow" these without permission, with the idea of returning them promptly—however that is defined—after you have made your way back to the States and arranged to get them photocopied, or do you allow them to go back to their rightful owner in the village where they will eventually disintegrate and be lost? To whom do you have an ethical obligation? To the world of scholarship, which has (or should have) a concern for "salvage linguistics", i.e. the preservation of information on dying languages; to the host country, which at some point, if not now, would want a record of its cultural and linguistic patrimony; or to the simple villager, who in good faith sent his notebook with the ribbon around it to this trustworthy white researcher who, for inexplicable reasons, had come this far distance to learn the local languages?

Dealing with officialdom inevitably brings up a host of practical and ethical problems, the most obvious being the bribe.⁹ In much of the world a "gift" to the appropriate official is the socially prescribed means for bringing a tape recorder through customs, getting a driver's license, or freeing up scarce housing. Apart from the fact that most of us don't know how to give a bribe—it's not something that is part of our professional training or experience—it presents us with an ethical dilemma. Should we take a culturally relative

⁹ People going into the field for the first time inevitably underestimate the amount of time it takes to get visas, host country institutional affiliation, research permits, and such. They also tend to underestimate the importance of getting these bureaucratic matters handled properly.

attitude in keeping with the old maxim “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” or should we adhere to absolute ethical principles that we believe in and handle the consequences as best as we can?

Moving closer to home, and thus affecting people who don’t think of themselves as field linguists, the ethical conflicts inherent in using one’s foreign graduate students as informants are legion. There are problems in disparity of summer salary, there are problems in determining authorship or co-authorship, and, most serious, there are problems having to do with student evaluation and grading. If the student has been a conscientious and insightful informant over a period of a year or two, don’t you have a moral obligation to give him or her a preference when it comes to assigning grades, awarding scholarships or travel grants, or allowing admittance to your PhD program? On the other hand, don’t you also have an ethical duty to your colleagues and the university to grade all students evenhandedly in an impartial and honest manner? I would guess that linguists who have not experienced professional difficulties of one sort or another with regard to their student informants have either been unusually lucky or, more likely, just plain oblivious to the ethical dilemmas surrounding them.

A major reason why ethical problems of fieldwork are not discussed more openly is that the cases we know most about are those that we’ve been involved in firsthand and which are thus an embarrassment to us. These are things we would prefer not to talk about. We would rather not discuss such matters with colleagues and we especially do not want to disclose them to students, even though students preparing for the field are the ones who could most benefit by hearing about them.

5. MONEY. The attitude of American field workers towards spending money is determined in great part by two factors. For many linguists, their first, and in many cases only, fieldwork project, is predissertation research. They thus go into the field straight from a four- or five-year stint living in the “culture of graduate student poverty” (CGSP). The essence of this culture is that one’s fellowship or teaching assistantship is barely enough to cover one’s expenses. There’s enough money to eat, especially if one buys bulk at the coop, and occasional trips are possible—there are always special airline deals that a clever friend knows about—but flush one is not.¹⁰ The idea that one has to be frugal and watch one’s money carefully follows the student into the field because the funds provided in the research grant tend to be meager. Then, there is the ideological objection to spending money generously when abroad because it is associated with the “ugly American” image. The result is that field linguists are often inexcusably and improperly tight. They fail to remunerate local people properly, especially musicians, story-tellers, and other performers, and their gifts to “friends” such as host country nationals who finished PhDs in the States some years earlier or to government or university officials who are relatives of foreign students at home, are totally inadequate. Moreover, they tend to sponge off resident expatriates, without giving it a second thought. The problem is that American researchers, including graduate students, not only are perceived of as being rich, but in fact *are* usually rich by

¹⁰ Even when graduate students are not really strapped for funds, they are conditioned to think that they are, or occasionally pretend that they are.

local standards. They must behave accordingly. This doesn't mean that the researcher has to flaunt his or her money — which we know *is* limited and barely enough to cover the needs of the field work period — it simply means that the researcher must escape from the CGSP mindset and behave in as generous a manner as possible consistent with professional norms and local expectations. The practical details will vary from place to place; what is required everywhere is a change in mental attitude.¹¹

PART II: FIELD METHODS COURSES

In the above, I have raised a number of human issues that are extremely important in preparing people for fieldwork. These are in addition to the technical questions of data elicitation and analysis that are normally covered in field methods (FM) courses. The question is, are these courses an integral part of our training of graduate students in linguistics these days? To provide an answer, I conducted an informal survey last year of all the major PhD-granting linguistics departments in the U.S. to get a rough picture of the status of field methods in linguistics as we begin the 1990s. A brief questionnaire was sent to the chairs of 44 departments chosen from the pages of the *LSA Directory of Programs in Linguistics in the United States and Canada* (1990). To encourage a high rate of response, the questionnaire was limited to half a dozen simple questions and was put on a self-addressed, stamped postcard; see figure 1. I was torn between asking all the things I wanted to know about, with the result that the questionnaire would be long and thus likely to be discarded or ignored, and limiting my inquiry to just a few questions with the aim of achieving a high response. Eventually, I opted for the latter. After a couple of months, a reminder containing a new postcard was sent to the non-respondents. In the end, 42 questionnaire cards were received, see table 1. The postcards contained a code so that I could know who had answered and who had not, but the responses were recorded anonymously. Here's a summary of the results.

(1) 34 departments offer FM courses in some manner or other; 8 departments do not offer it at all.

(2) Of the 8 which do not, 3 reported that they formerly offered such a course (5, 15, and 25 years ago). Only one reported that some other department (such as anthropology) has a linguistic FM course available to their students.

(3) FM is offered once a year (19); every other year (9), on an erratic basis (6).

(4) The length of the course is 1 academic year (9); 1 semester (19); 2 quarters; (4); 1 quarter (2)

(5) [i] The FM course is required for the MA (5); not required (35). [2 departments do not offer an MA.]

[ii] The FM course is required for the PhD (14); not required (28). The 14 "yes" departments include one where FM is only required for PhD students doing some specializations but not others.

¹¹ American graduate students need to be reminded time and time again that their host country contacts at the local university are probably professors with a PhD and thus should be given the respect and financial remuneration to which their position entitles them.

Questionnaire: Field Methods (FM) in Linguistics (< PN at IU)

Do you offer a field methods course? _____

If NO, (1) Did you formerly offer such a course? ____ About how many years ago? ____
 (2) Is there a linguistics FM course in anthropology or some other department that your students take? _____

If YES, (3) How often is the course offered? Once a year _____, every other year _____, erratic _____, other _____?

(4) How long is the course? Full year _____, 1 semester _____, 1 quarter _____, 2 quarters _____, summer session _____, other _____?

(5) Is it required? For MA students _____? For PhD students _____?

(6) Is FM treated as a central course taken by many students _____ or a peripheral elective taken by few students _____?

(7) Who usually teaches the course? An American Indianist _____, an Africanist _____, a theoretical/general linguist _____, a sociolinguist _____, other or varies from year to year _____?

FIGURE 1: The postcard questionnaire.

(6) Of the 20 departments where FM is offered but not required, only 2 report a high enrollment in the course, and in one of these the course is only offered erratically; 18 report that only a small number of students take the course. A few departments noted high undergraduate interest and enrollment in the FM course.

(7) Who usually teaches the course? An Africanist (5); an Americanist (11); a general/theoretical linguist (11); a sociolinguist (4); other or varies from year to year (16). The number exceeds the 34 departments offering FM since more than one option was often chosen, indicating for example that the Americanist and the general linguist alternated or that the Americanist was a general linguist or that the Africanist was a sociolinguist.

For those of us who believe that FM should be an essential part of graduate training in linguistics, what do these results tell us? That 34 out of 42 departments offer FM in one manner or another is possibly higher than many of us might have guessed. On the other hand, if one lumps the departments where FM is said to be offered on an erratic basis to the non-offering departments, one finds that in practical terms, a full 1/3 of the departments are not providing FM training to their students.¹² Not surprisingly, the length of the course is related to other indications of its importance or lack thereof in a department's program. The two departments where the course is only 1 quarter long report that it is an elective

¹² It is hard to imagine under what circumstances 1/3 of chemistry departments would fail to provide minimal lab training for their students.

taken by very few students. By contrast, the year-long courses are generally required as such—in some cases only one semester is required—or satisfy some broader departmental requirements. In only 1/3 of linguistics departments is FM required. Where FM is not required, students tend not to take it. Whether this reflects a bias in those departments for theoretical as opposed to descriptive linguistics or whether FM is just suffering the fate of most advanced elective courses I wasn't able to determine. The relatively high number of departments which identified the person most often responsible for teaching the course as an "Americanist" is in keeping with the long tradition of first-hand descriptive work in that specialization. In general, however, respondents went out of their way to avoid pigeonholing the FM teacher as belonging to some narrow category or other and indicated that the person teaching the course varied or that the one person was an X *and* a general linguist.

The manner of response to the questionnaire also conveyed information of attitudinal interest. First the extremely high response rate (42 out of 44) demonstrates an interest in the question. Then there were the annotations such as "No we don't, but I wish we did"; or "We plan to add FM to our curriculum some years down the road". Finally a number of people wrote letters in addition to returning the anonymous card, describing in detail the nature of their FM course or expressing concern about the current decline of FM in linguistics (as they perceived it) and offering their support for any project that might help turn the tide.

Brown	U. of Arizona	U. of Massachusetts
Cornell	U. of California (Berkeley)	U. of Michigan
CUNY	U. of California (San Diego)	U. of Minnesota
Harvard	U. of California (Santa Barbara)	U. of New Mexico
Indiana U.	U. of Chicago	U. of North Carolina
MIT	U. of Colorado	U. of Oregon
Michigan State U.	U. of Connecticut	U. of Pennsylvania
NYU	U. of Delaware	U. of Pittsburgh
Northwestern	U. of Florida	U. of Rochester
Ohio State U.	U. of Hawai'i	U. of South Carolina
Rice	U. of Illinois	U. of Southern California
Stanford	U. of Iowa	U. of Texas
SUNY (Buffalo)	U. of Kansas	U. of Washington
UCLA	U. of Maryland	U. of Wisconsin

TABLE 1: Universities responding to field methods questionnaire.

My own reading of the results is that the situation is perhaps not as bleak as many proponents of field linguistics have imagined, but that the position of FM in the training of our graduate students is indeed marginal and is likely to remain so. This combined with the fact that publications by linguists on FM have essentially ceased to appear and relevant books and articles by anthropologists and sociologists are generally ignored means that the number of new fieldworkers will remain small and many scholars undertaking fieldwork for the first time will be untrained and unprepared.

An important question that a number of people suggested that I address is why do I feel that field methods is of critical importance in the training of linguists? Specifically, why should FM be an integral part of a PhD program in the case of students who have theoretical interests and no intention of ever doing fieldwork?

The answer is two-fold. First, as case after case has shown, many linguists who start out as theoreticians later try their hand at descriptive work and could well benefit by having had a field methods course to think back on. The objective may not be description for description's sake—as if this truly characterized “descriptivists”—but the research that takes place is descriptive in nature and carried out with a native speaker informant. Sometimes the fieldwork is conducted at home in connection with an ongoing theoretical project. At other times it is done abroad as a by-product of travel opportunities that arise later on in one's career, e.g., Fulbright lectureships, invitations to international conferences and workshops, etc.

But even if the theoretician is never actually going to do informant work and thus doesn't need the skills and techniques taught in a field methods course, he or she needs fieldwork experience in order to have a proper appreciation for descriptive work. There is indeed a contradiction in the attitude of high-level theoreticians to descriptivists. On the one hand, theoreticians belittle descriptivists as linguistically second-class citizens, and fail to appreciate and respect the personal sacrifice and considerable intellectual effort that goes into primary data collection and analysis.¹³ On the other hand, they uncritically accept and use the descriptivists' basic data as if the transcription skills were flawless and thus everything of a factual nature in their articles, book, and theses were absolutely correct. Anyone who has struggled with a language with four tone levels or three degrees of length or a four-way phonation contrast (just to mention phonological complexities) knows that “mere observational adequacy” is hard to come by and that one has to approach each description with a certain degree of skepticism. Theoreticians who come up with sophisticated models and explanations naively depending on data from one description by one person of one language (about which they know nothing) do so at their own peril.

In conclusion, fieldwork is a complex business. It requires great skills of a technical, practical, and personal nature. And yet, most linguists are given inadequate field methods training as part of their graduate education, and their first trip to the field —their “internship” so to speak — often turns out to be their last. Fortunately, a certain number of capable linguists cannot resist the lure of the field and find first-hand descriptive work exciting and challenging. Thus, in spite of everything, the basic research on which linguistics as a discipline depends continues to be carried out; but, I would contend, on a perilous footing.

¹³ This attitude is an unfortunate, and, I am sure, unintended consequence of Chomsky's (1964) hierarchy of levels of adequacy in grammar, namely, from the bottom up, observational adequacy — “A grammar that aims for observational adequacy is concerned *merely* to give an account of the primary data” (p. 63, *italics mine*)—, descriptive adequacy, and explanatory adequacy.

REFERENCES

- BOUQUIAUX, LUC, and JACQUELINE M. C. THOMAS, eds. 1973. *Enquête et description des langues à tradition orale*. 3 vols. Paris: SELAF.
- BURLING, ROBBINS. 1970. Review of *Language and mind*, by Noam Chomsky. *American Anthropologist* 72: 681-82.
- BURLING, ROBBINS. 1984. *Learning a field language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- CASSELL, JOAN. 1987. *Children in the field: Anthropological experiences*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- CASSELL, JOAN, and SUE-ELLEN JACOBS. 1987. *Handbook on ethical issues in anthropology*. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association.
- CHOMSKY, NOAM. 1964. Current issues in linguistic theory. In Jerry A. Fodor and Jerrold J. Katz, eds., *The structure of language*, 50-118. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- CHOMSKY, NOAM. 1969. *American power and the new Mandarins*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- CRAIG, COLETTE G. 1979. Jacalteco: field work in Guatemala. In Timothy Shopen, ed., *Languages and their speakers*, 3-57. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop.
- DIXON, R. M. W. 1984. *Searching for aboriginal languages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- GOLDE, PEGGY. 1970 [1986]. *Women in the field: Anthropological experiences*. 2nd ed. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- HOWELL, NANCY. 1990. *Surviving fieldwork: A report of the Advisory Panel on Health and Safety in Fieldwork*, American Anthropological Association. Special Publication of the American Anthropological Association, no. 26. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association.
- HVALKOF, SØREN, and PETER AABY. 1981. *Is God an American? An anthropological perspective of the missionary work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics*. Copenhagen & London: Survival International.
- SAMARIN, WILLIAM J. 1967. *Field linguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- WARREN, CAROL A. B. 1988. *Gender issues in field research*. Qualitative Research Methods Series, no. 9., Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- WHITEHEAD, TONY L., and MARY E. CONWAY. 1986. *Self, sex, and gender in cross-cultural fieldwork*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.