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Preserving the Archives of the Languages of the World

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In August 1986, the Archives of Traditional Music began a project to preserve and catalog the linguistic collections known as the Archives of the Languages of the World. These collections contain some twenty-three hundred reels of tape and three hundred discs representing nearly three hundred languages, about one hundred of which are Native American; the rest are from Africa, Australia, south and southeast Asia, and Europe.

The Archives of the Languages of the World was begun in 1954 by Drs. Charles (Carl) and Florence Voegelin. Carl Voegelin, who passed away in 1986, became the founding chair of the Indiana University Anthropology Department in 1946. A noted anthropological linguist with a particular concern for Native American languages, Voegelin also had a gift for weaving the interests of students and colleagues together in a variety of projects. The Archives of the Languages of the World (ALW) was such a project. Florence Voegelin served as its director.

The ALW was set up as an organized repository for the sound of language. As anyone with any experience transcribing knows, no written system can recover every detail of sound. The ideal preservation system includes well-documented recordings and transcriptions; recordings are difficult to work with unless there are transcriptions, and transcriptions can always be revised if the recordings are available. Scholars could use such a repository for the comparative study of a variety of languages, and a sound repository would be a particularly important resource when direct access to the language was inconvenient or impossible. Sadly, this had become more and more the case. The first half of the twentieth century had seen many Native American languages pass from use. Linguists had done a good deal of salvage work on these languages, but paper-and-ink descriptions are not the same as sound.

Voegelin and Voegelin originally intended the ALW to be a repository for languages without a written history. They proposed a systematic mode of collection. There would be a core corpus of collections specifically designed to illustrate the language's structure, and a secondary corpus showing the language in use in conversation, ritual, poetry, song, or any of the ways that a language can show the life of a culture. The core set of data would be elicited as vocabulary lists, as sentences to demonstrate rules of syntax, as grammatical paradigms to show, say, the various forms that verbs, nouns and pronouns might take, as minimum pairs—a pair of words differing by only one sound—that show how the sound system works. The secondary set of data might be obtained by having the informant recite texts, sing songs or tell stories. Or it might be recorded during an actual event, whether a formal ceremony or an informal conversation.

In addition to their linguistic and ethnographic content, the recordings represent voices from nearly forty years ago talking about who they are. Observations that must have seemed very mundane to the people making them . . . become rather exotic and sometimes very poignant for listeners now.

The bulk of the ALW's early collections were American Indian languages. Two in particular stand out because of the breadth of material covered: the Iroquois Dialect Distance Survey (1950) and the Penutian Vocabulary Survey (1953). Both of these were comparative studies. The Iroquois Dialect Distance Survey examined the mutual intelligibility of seven Iroquois languages. The Penutian survey compared vocabulary from twenty-two west coast American Indian languages to see how closely they were related.

In September and October 1950, Harold Hickerson and Glen Turner (then students of Voegelin's) drove from Brantford, Ontario (just west of Niagara Falls) over the border through western New York State, north through Syracuse up to the St. Lawrence River and back again to Brantford. They visited seven Iroquois Indian reservations and recorded samples of Seneca, Cherokee, Cayuga, Mohawk, Tuscarora, Oneida, and Onondaga.

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From the Director

Speech and Music

Both speech and music involve structures of time, tone, and timbre. Few of us pay much conscious attention to the different tones, timbres, tempos, and stretches of silence in speech—yet these are always present. All of us know how quickly we tire of a speaker who runs on in a regularly emphasized monotone. Tones not only vary from speaker to speaker, they vary from occasion to occasion (a private talk is performed quite differently from a sermon or political speech) and often also vary according to gender, age, and social status. Among the Suyá Indians of Mato Grosso, Brazil, with whom I have done research on this, old people speak using longer phrases, with more clearly articulated melodic contours, than younger people. When they sing individual songs they also sing that way: a married man's shout song is longer than a boy's shout song. The differences are systematic and meaningful to the members of the community, as are temporal, tonal "accents" in the United States.

In spite of their similarity, speech and music have often been treated as though they were completely distinct. Entire disciplines have developed, with their own professionals, journals, and bibliographic traditions, that ignore the similarity of the original aural material. Linguists have usually ignored the tonal and temporal features of speech; musicologists have not worked much on long stretches of oratory or developed transcription techniques that would be of assistance to linguists. Rather than treating the different genres of speech, song, and music separately, we would be better off if we considered them as interrelated systems of genres which employ phonetics, text, time, tone, and timbre in different but possibly systematic ways. This has been done in an interesting collection of articles, *Native South American Discourse* edited by Joel Sherzer and Greg Urban (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter). The audio cassette of recorded examples that accompanies the papers was prepared in the laboratories of the Archives of Traditional Music.

The Archives of Traditional Music endeavors to preserve original research materials. In our vaults we have the recordings of speech and song before they have been altered by the (shifting) canons of transcription and analysis. Our commitment to transcending narrow academic domains is exemplified by our assuming responsibility for the preservation and cataloguing of the tapes and documentation of the Archives of the Languages of the World (described in this issue), as well as by our policy of acquiring entire field collections, including both music and speech, rather than asking researchers to deposit only the music with us.

If future researchers are to put the time, melody, and timbre back into analyses of speech, they will have to resort to Archives such as this one, and they will need to attune their ears to aspects of (speech) communication that are all too frequently forgotten. If we can get researchers together to work on the music of speech and the language of music, we will perhaps do better justice to the poetry and music of song and speech around the world. When researchers are ready to try it, we will be ready for them.

The availability of the recordings in the Archives of the Languages of the World, now part of the Archives of Traditional Music, owes a great deal to funding provided by the National Endowment for Humanities and the National Science Foundation. But we are especially indebted to Dr. Bonnie Urciuoli, whose hard work and good humor have made this year memorable for all of us and will also have made the collections more accessible and usable than before. We wish her luck in her future endeavors, and thank her for her often heroic efforts on behalf of the collections.

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Photo by Alain Barker

Dr. Bonnie Urciuoli, principal investigator for the Archives of the Languages of the World grant.

They recorded conversations, myths, and personal stories, and provided interlinear translations. They then played samples of one language for speakers of another to find out how mutually intelligible the various Iroquois languages were. They recorded seventeen hours altogether. The results were published in the *International Journal of American Linguistics* in 1952. In addition to their linguistic and ethnographic content, the recordings represent voices from nearly forty years ago talking about who they are. Observations that must have seemed very mundane to the people making them—about work, about children's schooling, about daily life on a reservation—become rather exotic and sometimes very poignant for listeners now. It is particularly sad to hear people talk about how the languages they spoke as children faded from their lives.

Loss of language is also a recurrent theme in Morris Swadesh's Penutian Vocabulary Survey. In the summer of 1953, Swadesh and an assistant, Robert Melton, visited twenty sites in Washington, Oregon, and northern California, studying the languages which the linguist Edward Sapir had classified as the Penutian language phylum. This phylum contains languages highly diverse in form and widely distributed in space, from Tsimshian on the southern Alaskan border to Mayan in Central America. The fact that these languages are classified in a common phylum means that they would have come from a common ancestral language. Swadesh designed his survey to find data which would demonstrate that historical connection. Using a list of one thousand words and expressions, he surveyed twenty-two Penutian languages in twenty-four hours of recording (Nez Perce, Umatilla, Yakima, Warm Springs Sahaptin, Wishram and Wasco Chinook, Tsimshian, Santiam Kalapuya, Hanis and Milluk Coos, Siuslaw and Lower Umpquaw, Molale, Northern Wintu, Nomlaki, Patwin, Concow, Nisenan, Lake and Sierra Miwok, Klamath and Chukchansi). Three-quarters of these languages were spoken by fewer than one hundred people at the time of the survey: Nisenan, Wasco and Wishram were spoken by fewer than ten; Kalapuya by perhaps one or two. In the announcement at the beginning of the Siuslaw and Lower Umpquaw recording, the elicitor comments that all the remaining speakers of those languages are probably in that room. The informant for the Molale recording, Mr. Fred Yelkes, was the last speaker of that language; Molale is now extinct. Swadesh also recorded two Athabaskan languages, Coquille and Dootoodn, which are probably no longer spoken.

The ALW holdings grew steadily between 1955 and 1965. The Voegelins secured funding from the Ford Foundation to finance graduate assistantships and a summer field school for several years, and their students added their field collections to the ALW. For example,

between 1957-58, Kenneth Hale collected Jemez, Apache, Shoshone, Papago and Pima material in the southwest. Between 1958-1960, he worked in Australia, recording languages of the Cape York Peninsula, Arnhem Land, and the central and western desert. His field recordings and subsequent descriptions and analyses have documented many endangered languages. Like Swadesh's vocabulary survey, Hale's study provides a core linguistic corpus, a set of data elicited to illustrate the structure of a language. The Voegelins themselves recorded an extensive core corpus of Hidatsa (forty hours) and Shawnee (twenty-four hours). Much of the descriptive work done by the Voegelins and their students was incorporated into their *Classifications and Index of the World's Languages.*

Extensive preservation of a different sort was carried out by another Voegelin student, LaMont West. Although West published almost none of his data, he left a set of collections with considerable potential value for future investigators. In the autumn of 1956, West surveyed Plains Indian sign language speakers in Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, Alberta, Sasketchewan, and North and South Dakota. He filmed nine reels of sign speakers and recorded twenty hours of their translations of sign in their own languages and in English. The sign texts he recorded cover a range of subjects: autobiography, political commentary, myths, even conversation. As with the Iroquois material, many of these texts offer an interesting and often poignant view of these people's lives. Both the Hickerson/Turner and the West language collections are so thoroughly documented that it is possible to reconstruct their respective field trips in great detail. This sort of detailed documentation is immensely useful for anyone dealing with the contexts in which people speak, for so much of what people say must be understood in terms of who and where they are.

In 1961-62 and again in 1964-65, West made extensive recordings (fourteen and ninety hours, respectively) in Australia, mostly in Cape York, some in Arnhem Land. The recordings were accompanied by twenty-three reels of film of ceremonies, dance and ritual, and of Australian sign language. West's collections illustrate both language structure and use. Much of it is narration and commentary on local myths and customs. Some of it is translated; most is not. This obviously limits its accessibility. But recently, we made a demonstration recording of a short Yidiny (southeast Cape York) text for a linguistics student here. Using a Yidiny grammar, the student transcribed and translated half the text. Thus, the collections can be used even without transcriptions and translations.

A field collection of a very different kind is represented by Einar Haugen's recordings of Norwegian bilinguals in the midwest. Between 1935 and 1948, Haugen recorded about two hundred discs (fifty hours) of Norwegian Americans in southwestern Wisconsin and an adjacent strip of Minnesota. Haugen, an Iowa-born Norwegian-American (and so himself a 'native'), recorded an extensive corpus of reminiscences and anecdotes. This world, like that of so many people who came to the U.S. from an "old country", does not fall into neat cultural or linguistic compartments. As Haugen says in *The Norwegian Language in America:*

> [English] was learned . . . piecemeal but effectively, and as a vital part of the process of acculturation. It was learned together with new technical procedures, new social customs, new attitudes of approval and disapproval. . . . The immigrant was being initiated into one of the subtlest aspects of his environment, the invisible network of distinctions and congruences which the catagories of the new language imposed on his universe of experience. (Haugen 1969 [1953] 369-370).

Although the Norwegian language is hardly in immediate danger of extinction, the kind of bilingualism which Haugen documents often disappears in a few generations. Much of American sociological and cultural history is made of just such complex transitions. They cannot be duplicated once they are gone.

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The ALW's storage situation in the Anthropology Department became increasingly problematic over the years. As a result, Florence Voegelin, Martha Kendall, (who succeeded Florence Voegelin as ALW director) and Anthony Seeger, the ATM director, decided to move the ALW to the Archives of Traditional Music, where the collections could be stored in a climate-controlled environment and incorporated into the ATM's reference system. This was done in 1985. In 1986, with funding provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the Indiana University Office of Research and Graduate Development, I began to coordinate a twelve month preservation and cataloging project. I have been organizing and enhancing the documentation and cataloging all the collections on a database, using dBase 3+. Two ATM graduate assistants, Mary Dart and Alain Barker, have been making preservation copies of the field recordings. The collections will be catalogued on the OCLC, (Online Computer Library Center) database by the Archives of Traditional Music's librarian, Mary Russell.

About four hundred hours of preservation copies have been recorded, including collections of Salish, Arapaho, Blackfoot, Pawnee, Winnebago, Dakota, Mayan and Eskimo, as well as West's Plains sign language and Australian, Hale's Australian, the Voegelin's Shawnee and Hidatsa, Swadesh's Penutian, and Haugen's Norwegian collection. Thus, a good portion of the ALW's resources are now available for use by scholars, and indeed, requests for copies have already begun to arrive. The preservation recording of the field collections will continue. We are also having West's thirty-two reels of Plains Indian and Australian aboriginal film transferred to videotape so that they can be used in conjunction with the recordings.

The ALW collections contain about thirteen hundred hours of sound, most of it recorded twenty-five to thirty-five years ago on acetate-based tape. Since the stability of

this tape is unpredictable, we are doing as much preservation recording as possible with a goal of about eight hundred hours. Since that is about three-fifths of the total ALW material, we obviously have had to do a bit of picking and choosing. Our criteria have been: (1) were the recordings made in the field (between a third and one-half were done in the ALW offices in the Anthropology Department); (2) how unstable a situation do the recordings reflect; (3) what use is likely to be made of them, and by whom; (4) how intact and well documented are they (and is there a chance that further documentation will turn up someday.)

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For example, the Penutian Vocabulary Survey was one of the first collections recorded because it is intact, contains so much extinct or nearly extinct language material, is well documented, and likely to be used by linguists doing descriptive, comparative, and historical work. We have already made request copies of Penutian selections for two linguists. West's Plains Indian sign language collection was chosen next because the sign language may well be dying out. In addition, the collection is well documented and nearly intact, it is accompanied by a set of films, and its content would interest Native Americans as well as linguists and anthropologists. In fact, we have recently received inquiries about the collection from the Three Worlds Project near the Wind River Reservation in Riverton, Wyoming, a project concerned with Native American language preservation. Moreover, Brenda Farnell, an anthropology student at Indiana University, is currently doing fieldwork on Plains Indian sign language, covering some of the same territory that West surveyed. She has found sign language films in the National Anthropological Archives made twenty years before West's 1956 films with some of the same sign speakers. The NAA films, West's films and Ms. Farnell's own work will document a fifty-year range of sign language use.

Since the database makes it possible to select a range of information, and to design printouts in a variety of formats, it will be possible for users to request specialized information, organized in terms of culture groups, languages and language families, collectors, or geographic areas. This obviates the need to publish one catalog covering all the ALW collections; it also makes it easy to correct or update information when necessary. There are always collections for which documentation is less complete than one might wish (to say the least!). But as new information is found (sometimes in unexpected and fortuitous ways), it is helpful to have a cataloging system that can be updated continually. We will also compile one comprehensive volume, covering the complete set of ALW collections, from the database printouts. This will be kept in the ATM library as a reference catalog, and copies of it will be available to users upon request.

The ALW project has been an education for me as a linguist. Listening to field work as it happened provides the written and published linguistic analyses with new dimensions, and I have come to think about the history of American linguistics in quite a new light. Finally, while the project has been frustrating on occasion, it has always been fun.

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