

DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS I
prof. Nicole Nau, UAM winter 2016/2017



First lecture
10 October 2016

TOPICS OF THE DAY

- ❖ Who I am (and who are you?)
- ❖ What is Documentary linguistics?
- ❖ Language documentation: what, why, who
- ❖ What will we learn this semester?
- ❖ Bonus track [there was no time for it, but you may do it at home!]

ABOUT ME

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MA program **Empirical Linguistics and Language Documentation (ELLDo)**: <http://elldo.amu.edu.pl>

Educational platform **Languages in Danger**:
<http://languagesindanger.eu/>


Database **Poland's Linguistic Heritage**:
<http://inne-jezyki.amu.edu.pl/Frontend/>

DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS

- ❖ a new field of linguistics (since the 1990s)
- ❖ concerned with **language documentation** (sometimes synonym)
- ❖ interdisciplinary

Documentary linguistics is related to:

- concern about language endangerment
- corpus linguistics
- speech technology
- ethnography
- ...



«Documentary linguistics takes up a vision of the integration of the study of language structure, language use, and the culture of languages.» (Hill 2006)

«Documentary Linguistics [..] is concerned with the making and keeping of **records** of the world's **languages** and their **patterns of use**.»
(Woodbury 2003)

QUESTION

What records are there of the English language?

Imagine nobody speaks English anymore. What could someone learn about English from the existing records?

How is the situation for the other ~ 7000 languages of the world?

LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

«Language documentation is concerned with the methods, tools, and theoretical underpinnings for compiling a **representative** and **lasting multipurpose** record of a natural language or one of its variants.»

(Himmelman 2006)

«Language documentation acquires language data from **many contexts** in the best, most **transferable**, and most **durable** formats.» (Furbee 2010)

«language documentation is the **creation, annotation, preservation** and **dissemination** of transparent records of a language» (Woodbury 2011)

THEORY AND PRACTICE

«without theoretical grounding language documentation is in the danger of producing “data graveyards”, i.e. large heaps of data with little or no use to anyone» (Himmelman 2006)

«evidence from archival deposits shows that video tends to be poorly used by documentary linguists, with video recordings being made without reference to hypotheses, goals, or methodology, simply because the technology is available, portable and relatively inexpensive.» (Austin 2014)

«PREHISTORY» (LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION BEFORE DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS)

16th – 18th/19th century, for example

- ❖ European travelers and scholars collect the Lord's Prayer in various languages
- ❖ Spanish missionaries in Latin America write grammars and dictionaries of indigenous languages
- ❖ German and Russian scholars describe languages of Russia / Siberia

Why?

LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION IN THE LATER 19TH AND THE 20TH CENTURY

A remarkable scholar and person:

Franz Boas (1858-1942)

education in physics and geography

pioneer of modern anthropology

founded a standard for documenting languages: text collection + dictionary + grammar

? why is this (not) enough ?



CURRENT IDEAS ABOUT LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

«a language documentation should strive to include as many and as varied records as practically feasible [...] Ideally, then, a language documentation would cover all registers and varieties» (Himmelman 2006)

«our field of enquiring is limited by our understanding: who would have imagined the importance of documenting mundane conversational speech a century ago?» (Berge 2010)

QUESTIONS

If your language were endangered, what would YOU want to document for the future?

Given the limits of time, money, and persons: what should be documented first?

COURSE PROGRAM

Language documentation: principles, general questions (October, lecture 1-3)

Data acquisition: fieldwork, recording, elicitation techniques ...; basic data management (November, lecture 4-7)

Transcription and annotation (December, lecture 8-10)

What else can you do with your data? (January, lecture 11-12)

Presentation of your projects (23.01.2017)

Summary (30.01.2017)

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Find the homepage of this class at the site elldo.amu.edu.pl

Section Bibliography

Section Tasks & Text => password: DocuLing

contains homework!!!

For course credits: three **assessment tasks**, due:

- 07.11. on language documentation
- 12.12. on data acquisition (recording with metadata)
- 23.01. on annotation +...

BONUS TRACK

Watch the trailer of the film «The linguists» and discuss what could it be that

(a) someone (e.g. prof. Nau) likes about it

(b) someone (e.g. prof. Nau) doesn't like about it

Can you relate your discussion to what was said in this lecture?

find the trailer here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HInOD7VrCdY>