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The Language Documentation and Conservation Initiative at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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Since its inception in 1963, the Department of Linguistics at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) has had a special focus on Austronesian and Asian languages. It has supported and encouraged fieldwork on these languages, and it has played a major role in the development of vernacular language education programs in Micronesia and elsewhere. In 2003, the department renewed and intensified its commitment to such work through what I shall refer to in this paper as the *Language Documentation and Conservation Initiative* (LDCI). The LDCI has three major objectives. The first is to provide high-quality training to graduate students who wish to undertake the essential task of documenting the many underdocumented and endangered languages of Asia and the Pacific. The second is to promote collaborative research efforts among linguists, native speakers of endangered and underdocumented languages, and other interested parties. The third is to facilitate the free and open exchange of ideas among all those working in this field. In this paper, I discuss each of these three objectives and the activities being conducted at UHM in support of them.

1. INTRODUCTION.[1] It is likely that linguists of the future will remember this century as a time when a major extinction event took place, as an era when thousands of languages were abandoned by their speakers in favor of languages of wider communication. What is considerably less certain, however, is how linguists of the future will remember *us*. Will we be admired for having conscientiously responded to this crisis, or will we be ridiculed for having thoughtlessly ignored our evident duty?[2]

Obviously, there is no way we can know the answer to this question. The future is unknowable and incalculable, but this does not mean that we cannot play a role in shaping it. As Alan Kay has asserted: “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”[3] While there is admittedly a considerable amount of Western, liberal hubris implicit in this statement, it requires no unusual prescience to know that what we must do now is take action. We need to document as many endangered languages as possible, and we need to train young linguists to carry out this work.

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[1] I wish to thank Peter Austin, Lisa Ebeling, Paul Newman, Laura Robinson, Tsz-him Tsui, Albert J. Schütz, the audience of the International Conference on Austronesian Endangered Language Documentation, and two anonymous referees for their useful comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also indebted to Joel Bradshaw, with whom I have had numerous interesting conversations about fieldwork. I accept full responsibility for the shortcomings of this work.

[2] Michael Krauss (1992:8) noted: “If we do not act, we should be cursed by future generations for Neronically fiddling while Rome burned.”

[3] See http://www.smalltalk.org/alankay.html.

It is this latter task—the training of young linguists—that I wish to consider in this paper. Clearly, we need to train a cadre of young scholars who will conduct high-quality fieldwork in the hope that their efforts will help ameliorate the massive loss of accumulated wisdom and the catastrophic loss of information that will result if we fail to respond to this impending crisis. First, though, we must ask ourselves, how do we train them, and what do we train them to do?

This paper provides some provisional answers that we have arrived at within the Department of Linguistics at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM)—a department that has had a long-standing interest in Austronesian languages.[4] Because the efforts I describe in this paper were developed within this specific context, they may be of limited applicability to linguists working elsewhere. I should also emphasize that our efforts are undergoing periodic revision, and, we hope, improvement, so this paper should be read as a report on a program under construction.

2. LEVELS OF ADEQUACY. If our ultimate goal is to prepare young linguists to do fieldwork, the first question we must consider is, what kind of fieldwork? What type of fieldwork will be adequate for documenting an endangered language, or any language for that matter? I would suggest that it might be useful to conceptualize this issue in terms of three approaches to fieldwork, which I will characterize as (1) artifactual fieldwork, (2) traditional fieldwork, and (3) documentary fieldwork.[5]

By "artifactual fieldwork", I mean fieldwork that is done for special purposes.[6] It characteristically entails gathering data centered on one or more specific features of one or more languages. Fieldwork of this type is typically undertaken by comparativists, typologists, or formalists in search of information relevant to the development of a particular theoretical claim. The data, or artifacts, they gather are extracted from their natural context and are assigned significance only insofar as they are useful for the purposes of external comparison.

I use the label "traditional fieldwork" to characterize fieldwork that has as its goal the description of a specific language. The defining characteristic of fieldwork of this type is that it is generalization- rather than data-oriented. Thus, the grammars that result from such fieldwork typically include minimal amounts of data, usually just enough to illustrate a grammatical claim. While the products of such fieldwork may also include dictionaries and a limited number of texts, audio and video recordings and data bases are not usually made part of the public record.

Much of the linguistic fieldwork that has been carried out up to now can be characterized as being one of these first two types. The claims about a language that result from such work are essentially (and, until recently, necessarily) of the "take-my-word-for-it" type; they cannot be verified empirically, except through additional fieldwork. However, an increase

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[4] The URL for the UHM Department of Linguistics is http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/.

[5] The term 'fieldwork' means different things to different people. I consider here just those types of fieldwork that focus in part or in whole on obtaining information about adult grammars of one or more languages.

[6] The term "artifactual fieldwork" comes from Joel Bradshaw.

in concerns about language endangerment, coupled with new technology, has given rise to a third approach to fieldwork—documentary fieldwork.

"Documentary fieldwork" is far more ambitious and inclusive than either artifactual or traditional fieldwork. Nikolaus Himmelmann (2006:1) notes that "… a language documentation is a lasting, multipurpose record of a language." The goal of documentary fieldwork, then, is to contribute to the creation of such a record. Ideally, its outcome is a body of materials that meets the needs of both the speech and the scientific communities. To paraphrase Rhodes et al. (n.d.), it involves the development of high-quality grammatical materials and an extensive lexicon based on a full range of textual genres and registers, as well as audio and video recordings, all of which are fully annotated, of archival quality, and publicly accessible.

In reality, fieldwork is likely to combine some aspects of all of these approaches and will rarely or never achieve the high standards set for documentary fieldwork. The goals one sets for fieldwork are dependent upon many factors, including the vitality of the language, the number of people participating, the skills of the fieldworker(s), the amount of available funding, and the time available to spend in the field. It is not my intent to denigrate fieldwork of any kind. Even if we know that our efforts will fall short of the ambitious agenda of documentary fieldwork, that should not inhibit us. Indeed, it is essential that we train young fieldworkers to be pragmatic, to set realistic goals, and to assign priorities. Every piece of information that we collect is potentially useful in ways that we may not be able to envision. All fieldwork that is well-done makes a contribution.

Ideally, however, our target should be documentary fieldwork. But how do we prepare young linguists to conduct such work? At UHM, our response is an endeavor that I will call the *Language Documentation and Conservation Initiative*. I will discuss this initiative in terms of (a) academic training, (b) collaborative research, and (c) open communication.

3. ACADEMIC TRAINING. In response to the need for linguists capable of conducting high-quality documentary fieldwork, UHM has established a graduate program in "language documentation and conservation" (LDC), one of the first of its kind in the United States.[7] Since its inception in 1963, this department has had a special focus on Pacific and Asian languages. It has supported and encouraged fieldwork in this region, and it has played a major role in the development of vernacular language education programs in Micronesia and elsewhere. The LDCI thus represents a renewed and intensified commitment to such work.

Our ideas about what we should be doing if our current focus is on endangered and/or underdocumented languages are still fluid, but it seems clear that linguists going into the field need training in at least five general areas. They need a solid foundation in (1) linguistic theory, (2) fieldwork methods and technology, (3) methods of language conservation, (4) area studies, and (5) what I will call, for lack of a better label, field skills, a category that includes knowledge of ethics, health, hygiene, and other capabilities that contribute to a fieldworker's well-being. Our program is not equally prepared to provide formal training in all five of these areas—probably no program is—but at present our program is designed

[7] The URL for the LDC program is http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/graduate/degreesandrequirements.html.

as follows.

3.1 COURSE STRUCTURE. Our department offers a large number of graduate level courses in linguistics. The following chart thus lists just those that provide training in one or more of the five areas listed above. The check mark(s) listed after each course designate the *primary* goal(s) of the course.[8]

TABLE 1: Courses for language documentation and conservation students.

Course Number	Course Title	(1) Theory	(2) Fieldwork	(3) Conservation	(4) Areal	(5) Field Skills
410	Phonetics	•				
420	Morphology	•				
421	Phonology	•				
422	Grammar	•				
640G	Methods of Language Documentation		•	•		•
750G	Language Planning			•		
630	Field Methods		•			•
611	Acoustic Phonetics	•	•			
631	Language Data Processing		•			
640G	Polynesian Language Family				•	
640G	Language Contact	•				
640G	Anthropological Linguistics	•	•			
640S	Sociolinguistics	•	•			
645	Comparative Method	•				
661	Proto-Austronesian				•	
750F	Phonetic Fieldwork on Endangered Languages		•			
750G	Lexicography		•			
770	Areal Linguistics				•	

The first six courses listed above are required of all students in the LDC MA track. The seventh course, field methods or its equivalent, is required of all PhD students. The remaining courses are electives; MA students in the LDC track must take at least three of these. Note that the content of the 770 seminar in Areal Linguistics varies from semester

[8] Several courses are labeled 640G. This is a generic course number for 'topics in linguistics.'

to semester. Recent offerings have included courses on the Austronesian and Austroasiatic language families, as well as on the languages of Southeast Asia, the Pacific, the Central Pacific, Micronesia, and Borneo. Capable students who complete the MA program are encouraged to apply to the PhD program. At this level, the course requirements are flexible; hence, no special track is necessary.

Many of the courses listed in Table 1 are likely to be offered in any modern department of linguistics. What distinguishes the UHM program from many others are courses like *Methods of Language Documentation* (which provides an introduction to language documentation and conservation), *Language Planning* (not commonly offered in American universities), *Language Data Processing* (with a focus on corpus linguistics), *Phonetic Fieldwork on Endangered Languages* (of transparent importance) and *Lexicography* (which, so far as I am aware, is not regularly offered in any linguistics department in the United States). Linguistic theory also plays a central role in the UHM program, for reasons discussed next.

3.2 THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC THEORY. It is an unfortunate fact that during the past four to five decades a schism has developed between linguists who are primarily theory-oriented and those who place a high value on fieldwork. This situation is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in our own field of Austronesian linguistics, where we now have two competing conferences, both of which originated in the United States—the ICAL (International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics) series, which are broad in scope and attract many fieldworkers, and the AFLA (Austronesian Formal Linguistics Association) series, which focus on the contributions that Austronesian languages might make to linguistic theory.[9] While there are, of course, some linguists who attend both conferences, the question remains, why does this schism exist? An answer to this question is well beyond the scope of this paper, but one observation about fieldwork is worth noting.

In many departments of linguistics, perhaps especially in the United States, fieldwork and fieldworkers have unfortunately, but unquestionably, been marginalized. In 2004, Paul Newman surveyed 45 American universities offering a PhD in linguistics and found that, while 80% offered a course in field methods, only 38% required it of PhD students and only 42% offered the course every year.[10] These statistics were virtually unchanged from a similar survey he had carried out in 1992. The unfortunate fact is, in many American universities fieldwork is not encouraged, and, if it *is* undertaken, it is often for the purpose of gathering limited data germane to a specific theory; it is what I have called artifactual fieldwork.

Clearly, this situation is deplorable, but there is no reason why it need continue. In fact, there is at present an increasing concern for healing this breach and for strengthening the empirical foundation of our discipline, triggered largely by concerns about language endangerment and loss. The 2007 winter meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, for example, included a symposium on "Endangered Languages and Linguistic Theory",

[9] There are, of course, other regularly scheduled conferences that focus on Austronesian languages, including the Austronesian Languages and Linguistics (ALL) series, and the Conference on Oceanic Languages (COOL) series.

[10] See Newman 2005.

as well as an address by Mark Liberman on "The Future of Linguistics,"[11] in which he suggested new directions for our discipline, including a focus on language description and documentation.

At UHM, our goal is bring data, documentation, analysis, description, and theory together in one seamless whole. We do not diminish the importance of any of these elements. We believe such an approach to be good science; the creation of a useful record of a language necessarily entails a considerable amount of analysis[12], and linguistic analysis requires linguistic theory. In our case, however, providing students with a solid grounding in linguistic theory is also a necessity. As Peter Austin (2003:10) has observed: "it is important that we think about how language documenters can advance their careers, or at least not set them back."[13] We work within an American academic setting, and if our intent is to produce students who are employable—and that should be a primary concern of every department—it is essential that our graduates be able to communicate in the language of mainstream American linguistics.[14]

Linguistic theory is thus an essential component of our program, but we attempt to ensure that our students are not theory-bound. We encourage exposure to competing theories, and we try to ensure that our students understand that there are more wonders among the languages of this planet than are dreamed of in the halls of academia. In fact, it is not uncommon, I suspect, for fieldworkers to experience what I call theory-lag. That is, they not infrequently observe phenomena for which no current theory has any satisfying explanation.[15] In this respect, it is good fieldwork that can put one on the cutting edge of linguistic theory.

At UHM, we fully recognize that the theories, and for that matter the technology we work with, are ephemeral, but they cannot for that reason be ignored. As Thorstein Veblen (2004:197) has astutely observed: "Invention is the mother of necessity."[16]

4 COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH. The field of language documentation is evolving into a borderless discipline. It is therefore essential that linguists forge alliances with all those who have a stake in the documentation and conservation of linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity. The question is, how do we involve others in this essential work?

Clearly, the people who have most at stake in the documentation and maintenance

[11] The slide show for this talk can be found at http://ldc.upenn.edu/myl/LSATalk.pdf.

[12] For example, a linguist cannot competently transcribe and annotate a text unless s/he knows a considerable amount about the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language.

[13] At a recent conference, I was told by a faculty member from an American university that she would strongly discourage young linguists from getting involved in language documentation until they had tenure. Clearly, until we can fully professionalize our work, we must find ways to overcome such concerns.

[14] It is also important that linguists, both students and professionals, be able to recognize data of theoretical/ typological interest when they encounter it.

[15] For examples, see Blevins 2007.

[16] The full quote from Veblen is: "And here and now, as always and everywhere, invention is the mother of necessity".

of threatened languages are the people who speak them. Part of the training of young linguists, then, ought to include experience doing collaborative research with speakers of such languages. At UHM, the key effort in this regard has been the *Language Documentation Training Center*, described next.

4.1 LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION TRAINING CENTER. The *Language Documentation Training Center* (LDTC)[17] was initiated by Meylysa Tseng, a linguistics graduate student at UHM. In 2003, Ms. Tseng set out to organize a community service project. Given the linguistics department's long-standing interest in documenting languages, and given the rich cultural and linguistic diversity present on the campus, she decided upon an activity that would bring together graduate students in linguistics and speakers of minority and underdocumented languages. The result was the project now known as the LDTC.

The mission of the LDTC, as described by the students who run it, is to equip native speakers with rudimentary skills in documentation, to offer them a public outlet for information about their languages, to support them in their language analysis and documentation efforts, and to inspire them to become language advocates in their own communities.

To accomplish these goals, international students partner with graduate students in linguistics in a one-semester training program that consists of eight two-hour workshops conducted on Saturday mornings.[18] These workshops, led by volunteer graduate students, familiarize the participants with endangered language issues and provide training in basic documentation skills, including digital recording, lexicography, and translation. The final product at the end of the semester is a webpage that includes basic information about the student's language. At present, these webpages are structured to include (1) biographical information about the student and basic information about the language (where it is spoken, number of speakers, etc.), (2) rudimentary information about the sound system, (3) a rendition of the Bird Story[19] in the target language, with morpheme-by-morpheme glosses, a free translation, and a sound file, (4) brief comments on the morphology and syntax of the language, (5) a two-hundred-word Swadesh list, including sound files for at least 25 of the items, plus (6) information on the orthography.[20] To date, the project has produced 44 webpages. Because the project is open to all students, some of the pages are devoted to relatively well documented languages that are not endangered, such as Javanese, but the LDTC site nevertheless includes a remarkable range of languages, including some for which there is little or no other documentation, thus highlighting the rich linguistic environment in which our students work.

It is difficult to overstate the impact that the LDTC has had on our department. It has provided a laboratory for our documentation students, it has resulted in a stirring sense of camaraderie among its participants, and it has been well-received, both on the campus and

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[17] The URL for the LDTC is http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/~uhdoc/index.html.

[18] The partners in the LDTC often work together outside of workshop hours as well. Participants are encouraged to return in following semesters to delve into their languages more deeply.

[19] Based on a wordless picture book. See the LDTC site for details.

[20] See, for example, the website for Manadonese at http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/~uhdoc/manadonese/.

in the community. It is a project with goals that others can understand, perhaps especially in Hawai'i, where the indigenous language is highly endangered. The LDTC has also been given a substantial amount of publicity in newsletters, newspapers, and on the radio. In 2005, the center received the national "NAFSA-TOEFL-ETA Partnership in Excellence Award" for its innovative methods of involving international students in on-campus activities. In that same year, it also won first place in the UH College of Business "Business Plan Competition" in the non-profit "social" category, reflecting the students' goal of making the project self-supporting. More recently, in Fall 2006, the LDTC won first place in the UH Sustainability Awards in the category of "cultural conservation."[21]

The activities of the LDTC have also led to a number of important spin-offs. For example, several of our current students have been working with a community of Tokelauans who live on O'ahu. They are assisting in the development of a Tokelauan learner's dictionary for elementary school students, as well as a corpus of written and spoken Tokelauan. Two of our faculty members have also assisted the Tokelauans in designing and administering a questionnaire to learn more about the use of Tokelauan in the local community. Most recently, the LDTC has been invited to work with speakers of minority languages at one of the largest high schools in Honolulu. This activity will open up new opportunities for the center and allow our graduate students to become more directly involved with the community.

The accomplishments of the LDTC have also served as a catalyst for involving other departments and organizations on the campus in the important work of language documentation and conservation. In 2006, for example, four federally funded centers on our campus—the National Foreign Language Resource Center, the National Resource Center for East Asia, the Center for Pacific Island Studies, and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies—wrote proposals for renewed funding. All of these centers requested and received funds to support the UHM language documentation and conservation initiative. The LDTC, then, has been a very successful program with far-reaching consequences. Where feasible, I would urge other linguistics departments to consider establishing a comparable student-directed center. The payoffs can be substantial.

4.2 FUTURE COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES. At present, UHM is planning three additional activities that focus primarily on collaborative research and learning. These are (1) a conference, (2) a summer institute, and (3) the creation of an alliance of people concerned with issues of language and cultural sustainability.

In 2009, UHM will host a conference on language documentation and conservation. While we have not yet decided upon a theme for this conference, collaborative research is likely to be a major focus. The loss of a language affects not only its speakers and linguists, but anthropologists, archeologists, ethnobotanists, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, historians, ichthyologists, ornithologists and many others as well. Linguists have assumed the burden of documenting endangered languages, but it is essential that we involve others whose lives and careers are affected by the current world-wide convergence of language and culture.

In 2010, UHM will host a summer institute designed to bring together language ac-

[21] See http://sustainable-uh.hawaii.edu/index.php?section=2&island=2.

tivists, graduate students in linguistics, professional linguists, and others with interests in language documentation and/or conservation. The planning for this institute is still in the preliminary stages, but it is likely that it will provide instruction in field methods and related topics, including orthography development, dictionary and reference grammar design, and audio and video recording techniques. It will additionally include training in language maintenance and revitalization work, including the development of literacy materials and the utilization of current technologies to gather, process, disseminate, and archive linguistic information. This institute will be the second in what we hope will become a series of such institutes, to be held every two years. The first such institute, named InField (Institute on Field Linguistics and Language Documentation), will be held in 2008 at the University of California in Santa Barbara.[22] Present plans call for the University of Oregon to host the institute in 2012.

In conjunction with the conference and summer institute, faculty and students at UHM are also exploring how they might create a local alliance of people interested in the work of language documentation and conservation. The current climate for such an effort on the Mānoa campus is excellent. For example, the university has established an "Office of Sustainability," which posts as its theme "A sustainable university, reflecting traditional island values."[23] In the first UHM Sustainability competition, 29 projects were submitted from across the campus, representing a wide variety of interests and disciplines. As previously noted, the student-directed LDTC project won one of the eight awards.

Clearly, there is much to be gained by cooperating with others. We view such efforts as essential to our program, in large part as a consequence of what we perceive as our need to overcome problems of insularity—the insularity of our location, of our discipline, and of academia in general. We believe that these efforts will not only enhance the stature of our program, but of our discipline as well. In this respect, the language documentation and conservation initiative at UHM is establishing a new agenda in which our students are urged to become involved with others in shaping our local, regional, and global future. If we are going to attempt to meet the challenge of documenting and sustaining hundreds, or even thousands, of languages over the course of this century, then such collaborative efforts are essential. Time is short, and linguists cannot do it all.

5. OPEN COMMUNICATION. Paul Newman (2007:28) has noted that an alternative reading for the acronym LD&C (Language Documentation and Conservation) might be Language Documentation and Communication, a reminder to us all that disseminating the results of our research is as essential as the research itself. All too often, the insights we glean and the information we gather remain buried in our offices.[24] Thus, two of the goals of the language documentation and conservation initiative at UHM are (1) to provide a publishing outlet for field linguists, and (2) to establish an archive where linguistic data and documents can be safely stored and, consistent with the wishes of the speech community, made available to others.

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[22] See http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/faculty/infield/

[23] See http://sustainable-uh.hawaii.edu/index.php?section=1

[24] I do not exclude myself from this accusation.

5.1 THE LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION AND CONSERVATION JOURNAL. Not publishing the results of one's fieldwork is a serious problem. However, publishing our work in exorbitantly priced books and journals seems to me a scant improvement upon having not published them at all.

While there are many publishing outlets for research that is theory-oriented, or even descriptive-oriented, until now there has been no journal devoted to the wide range of interests of field linguists. UHM is attempting to fill this need by launching *Language Documentation and Conservation (LD&C)*, a new, fully-refereed, open-access journal that is sponsored by the National Foreign Language Resource Center and published exclusively in electronic form by the University of Hawai'i Press.[25]

The homepage for this journal notes that: "*LD&C* publishes papers on all topics related to language documentation and conservation, including, but not limited to, the goals of language documentation, data management, fieldwork methods, ethical issues, orthography design, reference grammar design, lexicography, methods of assessing ethnolinguistic vitality, archiving matters, language planning, areal survey reports, short field reports on endangered or underdocumented languages, reports on language maintenance, preservation, and revitalization efforts, plus software, hardware, and book reviews."

LD&C is designed to ensure that it is available to the widest audience possible. Therefore, the journal is free and open to all, without the need to subscribe. The choice of an electronic format for this journal allows it to include audio and video content, links to other sites, and, because its content is available in HTML, as well as PDF, it is also accessible to the handicapped.

5.2 FUTURE ACTIVITIES. If the products of our documentation efforts are not properly archived and made accessible to others, now and in the future, our efforts will have been for naught. Consequently, it is our intention to establish a language archive center at UHM, to be directed by Nicholas Thieberger, who will be joining our faculty in January of 2008.

We also wish to explore ways in which we can improve upon the design of the products we create and store. That is, while we are very much concerned with the processes of language documentation, we also intend to pay increasing attention to what we produce.

If our work is to be of use to others, it is also essential that we give thought to how we might create linguistic products that are low-cost or free, accessible and comprehensible to the widest possible audience, sensitive to the needs of the speakers of the target languages, and of maximal value in the future. Speakers of threatened languages commonly want linguists to assist them in developing basic literacy tools—orthographies, dictionaries, reference grammars, and reading materials. But what form should these products take? What constitutes an optimal orthography, and, given the rapid changes taking place in the media, what form will dictionaries, grammars, and reading materials take in the future? These are important concerns that will require additional consideration from those of us interested in assisting minority language communities.

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[25] The URL for this journal is http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/. The inaugural issue appeared in June, 2007.

6. CONCLUSION. Let me end this paper on a personal note. As a result of our endeavors in the areas of language documentation and conservation, our department has been obligated to come to terms with what I see as three common shortcomings of linguistics programs in the United States. These are (1) the failure to train young linguists, perhaps most especially international students, to gather original data, (2) the failure to involve others in our research efforts, and (3) the failure to consider how we might make at least some of our research findings useful and accessible to a broad audience.

The greatest benefit of the language documentation and conservation initiative to our department, however, has been its effectiveness as a recruiting tool. It has attracted excellent students who are active, engaged, enthusiastic, and committed to what they are doing. In many respects, they remind me of the young people I worked with in the Peace Corps in the 1960s. These students desire to live purposefully, and they are unafraid to accept challenges. They have revitalized our department.

A second benefit to our department has been the recognition we have received for our efforts, not so much from those within our discipline, but from those outside it. Our activities in the community, as well as the many students we have sent into the field, have helped to create an image of a department that is doing important and consequential work, and that is playing a meaningful role in society.

Finally, we work with the hope that we are heeding Jonas Salk's admonition—that we try to learn to be good ancestors. Some linguists have downplayed the significance of language loss, arguing that because languages change, new languages will evolve. But this strikes me as specious reasoning. Speaking of the loss of biological diversity, E. O. Wilson (2006:84) has observed that, after a mass extinction of species: "The original level of biodiversity is not likely to be regained in any period of time that has any meaning for the human mind." If we lose more than half of the world's languages this century, how long will it take to regain the current level of linguistic diversity? 10,000 years? 50,000 years? Ever? Wilson (2006:55) also teaches us that, "If a miracle is a phenomenon we cannot understand, then all species are something of a miracle". And so, too, are all languages.

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