

Assessing Scholarship in Documentary Linguistics

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### Abstract

Documentary linguistics is new and distinctive enough that some linguists and other participants in academic reviews may be uncertain about how to assess its outputs. We recommend specific strategies for assessing documentary linguistic scholarship in academic review contexts, based on a brief description of the field for the benefit of colleagues in other areas.\*<sup>1</sup>

*Keywords:* Assessment, review, documentary linguistics, understudied languages

Documentary linguistics (Himmelmann 1998, Bird & Simons 2003, Woodbury 2003) creates records of understudied languages, especially endangered languages. This approach is new enough and its disciplinary norms and research outputs are distinctive enough within linguistics that colleagues sometimes find it challenging to assess work in this area. Even documentary linguists themselves, who may engage in work that does not match an archetype of academic research, may be unsure how best to present their own work in hiring and promotion cases. In the last decade, the Linguistic Society of America has adopted two resolutions relating to the significance of language documentation.<sup>2</sup> Here, expanding on these institutional statements, we recommend specific strategies for assessing scholarship in this area in academic review contexts.

Our backgrounds inform our approach. We write as non-Indigenous scholars who were trained in historical linguistics and syntax, and who teach in US universities. Our experiences related to documentation have centered on languages of California (Garrett) and the Caucasus (Harris), including documentary corpus building, descriptive and analytical work, lexicography and text editing, and contributions to language reclamation. Both of us have also had administrative experience in the LSA and have served in our respective universities as department chairs, who often play a key role in advocating for faculty in the academic review process.

This paper is not intended as a contribution to documentary linguistics per se, or the many contested questions or interesting research choices it faces; the paper is meant to help those who are involved in assessing scholarship in language documentation during the academic review process (see also Fitzgerald 2021:e3-e6). This does not mean that we intend to judge which kinds of scholarship products are good and which are not; we seek only to provide strategies for assessing any type of scholarship product. Language documentation itself is diverse and interdisciplinary: different researchers emphasize different facets of the enterprise, using tools from a range of other fields, including decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies. Its practitioners may be found in linguistics departments, departments of anthropology, languages and literatures, and Indigenous or Native studies, among others; in smaller and teaching-intensive universities, in liberal arts colleges, and in research universities. While these academic ecosystems vary, all involve some assessment of research. Scholars involved in language documentation may find themselves assembling dossiers and undergoing reviews in academic contexts where others are not actively involved in documentation. We hope that our

recommendations will prove useful for campus administrators, department chairs, and faculty colleagues, and that they may help researchers themselves make a good case for their work in academic contexts.

As background for our recommendations, we provide in §1 a basic definition and discussion of language documentation and its methods. In §2 and §3 we go on to discuss reasons this activity is important and describe its research outputs, so that those in other fields (within linguistics or in entirely different disciplines) can better understand the area. In §4 we present our specific recommendations.

**1. WHAT IS LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION?** Woodbury (2011:161) defines documentary linguistics as ‘the creation, annotation, preservation, and dissemination of transparent records of a language.’ As a set of distinctive research practices and disciplinary norms, language documentation began to crystallize in the 1990s. This was associated with three related impulses (Woodbury 2003): first, a growing realization that change was needed in response to what Krauss (1992) called a global ‘crisis’ of language endangerment; second, a desire to support language reclamation, revitalization, and sustainability (Fishman 1991, Hinton & Hale 2001); and third, a commitment to undo long-entrenched colonialist asymmetries whereby endangered, Indigenous, and other minoritized language communities are the OBJECTS of research rather than the AGENTS of linguistic action and investigation (Smith 1999, Leonard 2017, Gaby & Woods 2020).<sup>3</sup>

Since language documentation depends upon linguistic fieldwork, it may be helpful for us to describe some differences between documentary work and ‘traditional’ linguistic description and analysis, which may also depend upon fieldwork, bearing in mind that we refer to archetypes and that actual individual works cannot always be classified neatly. Traditional linguistic fieldwork is generally undertaken in the service of language description (yielding published grammars, dictionaries, etc.) and linguistic analysis (of matters of special research interest); for the purpose of assessment, its scholarly value can therefore be measured in the books and articles that result for scholarly and scientific audiences. Two examples of publications of this type are Meeussen’s (1959) grammar of Kirundi and Aissen’s (1997) analysis of obviation in Tzotzil and other languages. These are brilliant works that have had a major impact on linguistic thinking, and

remain important in the field. These two publications also have two features that we wish to highlight as typical for traditional fieldwork. First, as is appropriate in a descriptive grammar or an analytic study, in each work the examples adduced are those that are relevant for the questions at hand; a reader interested in different questions might or might not be able to find examples that would answer them. Second, in publications like these, it is not a disciplinary expectation that examples from authors' fieldwork have source citations; in these cases a reader who may be skeptical about an example cannot track down its source (in a published, recorded, or transcribed text, for example, or in field notes or recordings). One can write to an author who is still living, or start a fieldwork project if a language has users who want to be involved in that work, but these are not reliable general solutions. (We use the term 'user' to refer to any speaker, signer, knower, learner, or other user of a language.) Norms are different in some other areas. For example, in Indo-European linguistics, it is unusual to cite data from sources that cannot be checked, if necessary tracing data back to original manuscripts, inscriptions, etc.

With this in mind, language documentation can be distinguished in two basic ways from the kind of fieldwork-based linguistic research that was common in the mid-twentieth century.

First, language documentation makes available a key intermediate object between fieldwork and any resulting descriptive or analytic publications: the DOCUMENTARY CORPUS (Woodbury 2011). This is the set of materials — field notes, other written materials, and audio or video recordings — that were created during the work and might form the basis for any subsequent publications. Corpora may include conversation, narratives, oratory, poetry, songs, ethnobiological descriptions, child-directed speech or signing, and a variety of other genres, which may be documented on paper, in sound recordings, or as multimedia recordings. Such a corpus constitutes the 'primary data' for descriptive and analytic work (Himmelman 2012). It therefore has a role like that of the corpus of Early Cham inscriptions (Marrison 1975), the cuneiform corpus of Hittite (Laroche 1971, Laroche et al. 2020), or the CHILDES corpora of child language acquisition (<https://childes.talkbank.org/>). In earlier approaches to language description and analysis, while notes and recordings of the research exist(ed), they are not necessarily cited, accessible to other researchers, or even preserved. The creation of a documentary corpus that can be used by others is time-consuming work; in the context of academic personnel reviews, it is reasonable to compare what philologists working on literary texts might do in publishing the text

of a newly discovered manuscript of Chaucer or Sappho. And a sufficiently rich documentary corpus, unlike publications on specific topics (unlike grammars, even), facilitates open-ended inquiry into many matters that were not envisioned by those who originally assembled it.

A related point concerns what we call SOURCE TRANSPARENCY, that is, ‘provid[ing] access to the original data for independent analysis’ (Berez-Kroeker et al. 2018:4).<sup>4</sup> In the context of linguistic fieldwork, this means that the documentary corpus is in principle accessible and that publications based on it contain pointers or source references that will enable readers to find the original examples in the corpus and evaluate claims independently. For example, each Guébie sentence cited in Sande 2019 contains a source citation like ‘syl\_20131024’, referring to a field recording housed in an archived documentary corpus (Bodji & Sande 2013-2015, accessible online).<sup>5</sup> In many more traditional analytic works, source transparency is absent and a reader is not able to track down sources of data without communicating directly with an author. Without source transparency, errors of transcription, interpretation, and analysis (and even typographical errors) may be impossible to identify.

A second distinction is more challenging to describe precisely. The contours of most descriptive-analytic projects are determined by research goals formulated outside local language communities: to characterize aspectual semantics, for example, or the order of prefixes and suffixes, or a language’s tonal patterns, or more generally to prepare a typologically or theoretically oriented grammar. Such goals may or may not be of interest to local language communities. In contrast, documentary projects may be undertaken BY communities (perhaps including a linguist from the community, or assisted by a linguist from outside the community), or in collaboration WITH communities and based at least as much on their goals as an outside researcher’s. There are many different ways of doing documentary work, and many different kinds of products may be generated by this work. Indigenous linguists in particular play an increasing role in redefining research goals, and breaking down the dichotomy between academic and community interests.<sup>6</sup>

Local goals might not stem from linguistic theorizing or typologizing, or even grammatical description. These could include documenting the language of traditional ecological knowledge (Pérez Báez 2016, Si & Turpin 2017), travel narratives and wayfinding (Berez-Kroeker 2019), or discursive patterns used in crafts such as weaving (Wells 2019). Another way of putting this is

that while the main goals of traditional fieldwork are to document, describe, and analyze grammatical patterns and linguistic forms, in some language communities the main goals are to document language use in a range of contexts, even including bilingual or multilingual contexts — and, perhaps, to forestall or reverse language shift. A related point, emphasized for linguistic projects by Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) and Czaykowska-Higgins and colleagues (2018) and for academic assessment by Kovach (2019), is that community-based research is often grounded in complex cultural and social networks, can demand careful relationship building in the context of fraught colonial histories, and may in some cases primarily yield intangible outcomes.

This second distinction is broadly important in distinguishing language documentation from traditional description and analysis because the system within which academics work has evolved to facilitate and reward research with generalizable scientific goals, not necessarily community work that may have very different locally oriented goals. Language documentation pursues research goals defined by Indigenous and minoritized communities themselves (among other goals), and all facets of the research enterprise need to be taken into account together.

**2. WHY IS LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION IMPORTANT?** The world has seven or eight thousand languages. Linguists and others work with language communities to support their linguistic goals and to understand the variation found across languages. Most of these languages are used by small numbers of people with limited sociopolitical power; have not been documented thoroughly, described in detail, or analyzed with care; are not among the global languages most commonly studied as second languages; and are in serious danger of losing users as global languages exert their pressure world-wide. We would emphasize several specific points.

First, the properties of global and well-studied languages are not fully representative of human languages as a whole. These languages have global reach and are well-studied, not because they are in any sense superior as languages, but because of the accidents of history. Since one general goal of linguistics is to identify the full extent to which language can vary, it is important to take into account those that have few users and are under pressure from colonialism, globalization, and related forces. Syntactic ergativity, polysynthesis, switch reference, endoclysis, large gender systems, nasal vowel harmony, sonorant pre-stopping, and velaric airflow (click sounds) are among the many significant linguistic phenomena that would not be well documented or

understood without information from a diverse range of minority and endangered languages. Every inhabited continent is home to languages whose distinctive (sometimes possibly unique) properties have had major impacts on our understanding of human language. Only inclusion of a very wide variety of languages will inform us about the extent and limits of linguistic diversity and the capabilities of the human mind and creativity.

In addition, because language relationships provide important evidence for early human history, an understanding of the dynamics of human population dispersal over millennia requires information from all the languages belonging to a range of language families. Austronesian in the Pacific (Pawley & Green 1984, Pawley 1999, Gray et al. 2009) and Uto-Aztecan in Central and North America (Hill 2001, Hill 2011, Hill & Merrill 2017) are among many language families whose phylogenies have informed influential models of human population spread (e.g. Bellwood 2004) based crucially on the documentation of minoritized or endangered languages.

Studies in some subareas of language and cognition in recent decades have also crucially relied on information from lesser-known languages. Examples include the typology of color terms, kinship terms, numerosity, spatial cognition, and perception verbs (Kemp et al. 2018, San Roque et al. 2018). On the other hand, an overwhelmingly large portion of psycholinguistic studies of processing and production still depend on a single language selected from among a few languages of Europe, together with Chinese, Japanese, and Hebrew. Only recently have psycholinguists begun to realize that the processes of understanding and producing language are not all universal (Cutler 2009). While a little progress has been made in examining processing and production issues in a variety of languages of different types (for example, the articles collected in Harris et al. 2015), it is clear that such languages are key to addressing these questions.

Because languages have coevolved with the local cultural and natural world, the lexicon of every language encodes the knowledge its users have of cultural practices and conventions. It also encodes their knowledge of the natural world, including traditional knowledge of plants and their medicinal and nutritive properties, fauna, and environmental features. 'Indigenous peoples', according to the executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (Klaus Toepfer, in Duthie 2001), 'hold vital knowledge on the animals and plants with which they live. Enshrined in their cultures and customs are also secrets of how to manage habitats and the land

in environmentally friendly, sustainable ways.’ The president of the United Nations General Assembly has cited herbal medicine and ways of processing foods as traditional knowledge that benefits the world (Muhammed-Bande 2019), while biologists have argued that language loss is associated with the loss of medicinal knowledge (Cámara-Leret & Bascompte 2021). Other research has highlighted the importance of traditional ecological knowledge and its specific linguistic expressions in preserving detailed understanding of local ecosystems (e.g. Si 2016), making use of traditional food sources like kelp (Turner & Clifton 2006), and sustaining biodiversity and supporting conservation programs (e.g. Ramstad et al. 2007, Wilder 2016).

Every language is also a matrix for a society’s cultural expressions, including narrative, song, oratory, pedagogy, child-directed speech or signing, ceremony, talk about the natural world, conversation, and all the discursive practices distinctive to that society. As Nabeeta Erusaniah (Lulamogi) puts it, ‘when a wall of a hut collapses, the ceiling does not remain standing. What keeps the social practices and a ritual standing is the language. Kill the languages, and the shelter collapses too’ (Riehl 2019). Documentary linguistics helps to create a record of intrinsically significant verbal art and discursive and other sociocultural practices, supplementing local unrecorded knowledge and enriching world-wide understanding and appreciation of cultural and artistic diversity.<sup>7</sup>

A final point concerns the rights of Indigenous and minoritized people and the vitality of their communities. Traditional academic work relating to such populations is often conducted as research ON rather than WITH or BY them (Rice 2006, 2010, 2011), but language documentation is often collaborative (with language community members) or responsive (documenting what communities want documented). Such projects may build local capacity (training community members to do without outside researchers) and may help promote cultural and linguistic revalorization and the reassertion of local community rights. An example is the Ticha project (Broadwell et al. 2020). Centered on a digital corpus of Colonial Zapotec texts, this project is a collaboration between Zapotec community members and teachers (in Mexico and the US) and non-Indigenous linguists, historians, and digital humanities specialists. It includes documentation of present-day language use, training of community members in digital tools and philological methods, the creation of pedagogical materials in Zapotec communities, and community-based work to recover colonial-era vocabulary and understand its relations to present-day language

variation (García Guzmán 2020, Lopez 2020). More generally, because language rights are human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2010, Skutnabb-Kangas 2018), the language reclamation work emphasized by many documentary linguists can be understood as supporting human rights. For many who are involved in language documentation, what is most important is how it can benefit Indigenous and minoritized communities; for others, contributions to academic understandings of human language are crucial. It is essential that the assessment process respect both kinds of contribution.

**3. RESEARCH OUTPUTS IN LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION.** Language documentation may include a variety of activities. Over a period of years, for example, an outside researcher may first devote considerable time to working with community representatives or leaders (or a language program or cultural committee) to identify goals that interest the community. Researchers from within a community also negotiate research goals of interest. This could lead to a project in which (for example) the researcher works with younger community members to record elders talking about traditional occupations, including associated vocabulary and linguistic practices. A part of this work may include teaching skills or building infrastructure — for example, training youth in audio and video technology, linguistic transcription and annotation, and lexicography. Concrete outputs of such a project might include a series of subtitled videos, picture or story books for the community; booklets of specialized vocabulary; a corpus of recordings accessible through a linguistic archive; an article on ethnobiological terminology or a published analysis of a recorded text; and knowledge that can eventually inform a comprehensive dictionary and grammar.

Scholarship in this field thus has a broad range of outputs, including what might traditionally have been noted in the academic review process (if at all) under a ‘public service’ or ‘outreach’ rubric. It is important for those who assess such work to understand a key point:

The totality of a documentary linguist’s professional work may encompass significantly more than books with academic presses and articles in refereed journals, and that distributing that work among multiple categories of assessment may inaccurately present a coherent research whole as a collection of individual parts that are (as such) inevitably less compelling.

The following possible research outputs in documentary linguistics are ordered from least to

most familiar from a traditional academic perspective:

(1) **COMMUNITY-BASED DOCUMENTATION PROJECTS** are activities undertaken within a language community that record or otherwise document language use (and associated cultural practices) in contexts of local interest. Examples include the creation of video documentaries about artistic practices, the recording of traditional histories, cultural mapping projects, and many other kinds of work. **COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS RELATING TO REVITALIZATION** are activities undertaken within a language community that help promote language sustainability or reverse language shift. Examples include classroom-based language learning, training and supporting master-apprentice language teams, family-based language nests, local language pods, language camps, and many other kinds of work. Importantly, while it is possible to write an academic article **ABOUT** these projects (e.g. Czaykowska-Higgins et al. 2018, Florey 2018, Montoya et al. 2020) or to include their results in a documentary corpus, it is the community-based projects themselves that constitute the key work.

(2) **COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PUBLICATIONS** include pedagogically oriented grammars (see Lima 2020 for Kawaiwete), graded lesson books, picture books for language learning (e.g. Beier 2019 for Iquito), collaborative books documenting cultural and linguistic practices, and the like. Such publications are often locally or privately produced and used almost exclusively by the local language community.

(3) **ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS** (and the like) are critical outputs in many documentary linguistic research projects. Such a collection is far from a ‘data dump’ or a transfer of content from a researcher’s hard drive. Rather, it is a clearly described, rationally organized set of material created in a documentary project. For example, the ‘Materials of the Choguita Rarámuri Language Project’ (Chaparro Gardea et al. 2011-2018) includes sound recordings made between 2011 and 2018, organized into 77 digital file bundles, each of which may also contain ELAN annotation files, PDF copies of field notes, or related analytic materials. The recordings themselves include traditional elicitation work, fieldwork using experimental methods, and texts created by master speakers that range from personal, historical, and procedural narratives through conversations and interviews to prayers and oratory.

A documentary linguist who assembles an archival collection may also publish an overview of

the collection in a refereed journal. Such an overview contextualizes the work, describes the contents of the collection, explains its organization, and indicates its significance. It can also serve as an anchor in academic personnel cases and an indicator of the merit of the underlying work.<sup>8</sup>

(4) BROAD-BASED DOCUMENTARY PUBLICATIONS include dictionaries, texts, and text collections. In some cases these are primarily written for an academic audience (e.g. Kadagize and Kadagize's 1984 Batsbi (Tsova-Tush)-Georgian-Russian dictionary and Heath's 1980 volume of Nunggubuyu texts). Even so, relatively few high-profile academic publishers publish volumes of this kind; they often appear instead in regional or unrefereed series. In other cases, a language community is the primary audience for locally created publications (e.g. Kauhi's 1996 Hawaiian stories and Kakkaba's 2000 Bole stories). Volumes of this type are also sometimes oriented both to scholars and to language communities who may wish to use them for language teaching and other projects (e.g. Turpin & Ross's 2012 Kaytetye dictionary and Warner et al.'s 2016 Mutsun dictionary).

Some dictionaries and other documentary publications are available only online, like the Mawng Language Website or the Moro Story Corpus (Naser et al. n.d.); sometimes they are also integrated with texts and other materials as in the Miami-Illinois Digital Archive (Baldwin et al. 2016). Documentary linguists may also publish descriptions of these database and digital tools in (refereed) journals (e.g. Genee & Junker's 2018 overview of a Blackfoot resource). Such descriptions have the advantage of acting as anchors in academic personnel cases and as indicators of the merit of the underlying work. Software packages are analogous in other academic fields; for example, users of the statistics package R or the Bayesian phylogenetics package BEAST are encouraged to cite R Core Team 2013 or Suchard et al. 2018.

(5) GRAMMATICAL DESCRIPTION AND ANALYTIC STUDIES include full grammars (e.g. Newman's 2000 grammar of Hausa), descriptive studies of facets of a language's grammar, and analyses of linguistic questions of interest. Such publications usually pose no special assessment problem, because they are typically directed at academic audiences and can readily be published in conventional venues.

Of the research outputs in (1-5) above, only those in (5) are (almost always) subject to peer

review. The outputs in (4) may be, but, as noted, there are publication outlets for pedagogical volumes and even dictionaries that do not involve scholarly peer review. The outputs in (1-3) are almost never peer-reviewed in the usual sense. However, they are an essential part of the professional work of many documentary linguists, and in some cases the major part.

#### 4. SUGGESTIONS FOR ASSESSING THE RESEARCH OUTPUTS OF LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION.

Academic personnel decisions, including hiring, tenure, pay increases, and promotions, depend crucially on assessment metrics. In linguistics, assessment metrics may differ significantly across subfields; for example, citation metrics may be less valuable in descriptive linguistics than in areas such as psycholinguistics. Descriptive publications such as grammars, text editions, and dictionaries typically have a far longer scholarly life (as much as a century in many instances) than most analytic publications. Moreover, some critical impacts of language documentation lie outside the academy and are thus not reflected in academic citations. Such differences should be considered and explicitly noted as relevant.<sup>9</sup>

A further issue is that many American colleges and universities use metrics that distinguish excellence in research, service, and teaching. It may then be required to separate ‘research’ from ‘service’, so that each can be assessed according to institutional requirements, just as it is required to separate ‘scientific merit’ from ‘broader impact’ in grant proposals for some government agencies. If in fact the two activities are inextricably merged, this can be explained so that assessors can UNDERSTAND the ‘research’ (or ‘scientific merit’) and ‘service’ (or ‘broader impact’) aspects as a single whole, even while EVALUATING them separately. A faculty member being reviewed can then try to separate these two aspects — for example, labeling one activity as primarily research, but also involving service. At some universities, some documentary linguistic work might also count as CONTRIBUTIONS TO DIVERSITY or (for preparing pedagogical materials) TEACHING. The key point in such cases is to be clear that the work as a whole is coherent, even if bureaucratic requirements mandate reporting it under multiple headings.

For research outputs that are not peer-reviewed (categories 1-3 in section 3 above, and sometimes category 4), chairs, deans, and personnel committees may be uncertain how to make decisions. We suggest the following considerations and strategies.

Non-peer-reviewed dictionaries and text collections whose audience includes community

members (language activists, teachers, and learners) can be assessed by other documentary linguists or by language teachers from other communities. If such works have multiple goals, they should be judged accordingly. The goal of contributing to academic discourse ('research') can be assessed by asking what contributions the work makes to lexicography, lexical semantics, comparative linguistics, understandings of literary or narrative style, etc. Community-centered goals ('service') can be assessed by asking how effective the work will be in supporting language learning, disseminating cultural knowledge, contributing to the revalorization of a threatened language, etc.

An archival collection can be assessed by other documentary linguists given access to the collection's metadata, other descriptive material (such as a finding aid), and detailed contents. An associated article describing the collection, if one exists, is invaluable in this assessment. Evaluation criteria may include the breadth and diversity of the underlying documentary corpus (in linguistic phenomena, communicative genres, and participants), its potential utility both to future academic researchers and to the language community itself, the logic of its organization and the clarity of available descriptive material, and its accessibility and ease of use (Woodbury 2014).<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that excellence in creating archival collections is now recognized by awards such as the biennial DELAMAN Award (which 'recognizes and honours early-career documenters who have done outstanding documentary work in creating a rich multimedia documentary collection of a particular language that is endangered or no longer spoken') and the annual SSILA Archiving Award in Honor of Michael Krauss (which 'highlights the importance of creating long-term archival materials that are accessible to all communities concerned, including heritage and language communities as well as scholarly communities').<sup>11</sup> Both awards recognize excellence in both 'research' and 'service' components (including the significance of the collection for academic users, its accessibility and value for community users and language revitalization, and the quality of its own documentation and structure).

In some cases community collaborators could be invited to write letters of assessment either as documents in a dossier assembled by the documentary linguist or as confidential letters like those solicited in any tenure or promotion case. The collaboration is a mitigating factor in the second approach, just as any collaboration would be, but community members with whom a linguist is working are best positioned to describe their work and identify its impacts.

Some academic reviewers may be aware of (COMMUNITY-)ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP as a newer approach to scholarly activity that integrates what are traditionally distinguished as ‘research’ and ‘outreach’. A related approach is ACTION RESEARCH (Rowell et al. 2017). Some universities have offices that promote engaged scholarship, some academic fields have journals in this area, and assessment metrics are a topic of active discussion (Foster 2010, Changfoot et al. 2020).<sup>12</sup> Documentary linguistics is not usually framed as action research or engaged scholarship (and not all documentary linguists include outreach in their own professional portfolio), but the framing would be appropriate in many cases. In explaining the scholarly activity of some documentary linguists to campus-level assessors, it may be helpful for chairs to make this comparison explicitly. Alperin and colleagues (2019, 2020) point out that many institutions and disciplines confront the challenge of assessing non-traditional forms of scholarship, including community-facing work and the preparation of curated datasets; not all have yet developed metrics for doing so. One that has is the University of Victoria, whose useful guidelines emphasize the need to ensure inclusive peer review and to value local impacts and a ‘diversity of knowledge outputs’ in any academic assessment (Tremblay 2017).

Related to the challenge of assessing scholarship in documentary linguistics are a range of matters in linguistics and other fields. For example, the LSA has adopted a statement on ‘open scholarship’, which includes the creation of datasets and documentary corpora (Linguistic Society of America 2021). Other learned societies have made statements on evaluating digital scholarship; some may be relevant in specific cases.<sup>13</sup> We also recommend consulting the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), developed by a group of editors and publishers at the 2012 American Society for Cell Biology meeting (<https://sfdora.org/>). Although it focuses on the central place of research articles, DORA recognizes that ‘Outputs other than research articles will grow in importance in assessing research effectiveness in the future’.

**5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.** As background for our recommendations for evaluating work in the area of language documentation, we have provided general information about this approach to language. We began in §1 by defining language documentation and discussing it in contrast to an area that some may confuse with it, descriptive-analytic approaches. In order to help others understand language documentation, we described six reasons it is important: (1) it extends the information we have on languages of the world, (2) it provides evidence for an understanding of

human history, (3) it provides data for the study of cognition, (4) it provides a key to traditional knowledge of the environment, (5) it provides permanent supplementation for the traditional unwritten transmission of cultures, and (6) it can support the goals of local communities.

Because some research outputs in documentary linguistics differ from those in other areas, we discussed the research outputs in this area, including (1) community-based documentation projects, (2) community-oriented publications, (3) archival collections, (4) broad-based documentary publications, and (5) grammatical description and analysis. Though we recommend taking into account the full range of a documentary linguist's professional activity, including scholarship published in non-traditional venues and work that centers collaborative community projects, this does not mean any diminution of critical review in the assessment process. It simply means finding new ways to evaluate the quality of professional work.

For outputs that are not peer-reviewed, we suggest the following:

- Non-peer-reviewed publications can be assessed by other documentary linguists.
- An archival collection can be assessed by other documentary linguists given access to the collection's descriptive material and detailed contents.
- Community collaborators can be invited to write letters of assessment.

We recommend that all of this be evaluated with the understanding that in this approach to language research and service are inextricably bound together. Documentary linguists give generously of their time to the communities they serve, and we believe that they deserve a fair assessment of their work.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> See Linguistic Society of America 2011, 2018; the second of these was drafted by one of us, Harris.

<sup>3</sup> Recent assessments and reformulations of documentary linguistics include Austin 2016, McDonnell et al. 2018, Rehg & Campbell 2018, Seifart et al. 2018, Cruz Cruz 2020, and Fitzgerald 2021. Important antecedents of documentary linguistics as a distinct field include community-oriented language projects around the world beginning in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. the PALI Language Texts project of the Pacific and Asian Linguistics Institute at the University of Hawai'i). As emphasized by Epps et al. (2017), the modern language documentation project can even be seen as going back to the linguistic practice of Franz Boas and those of his circle.

<sup>4</sup> Berez-Kroeker et al. call this REPRODUCIBILITY, distinguishing it from REPLICABILITY, which for them refers to research 'that can be recreated elsewhere by other scientists, leading to new data' (p. 4). We will not use these terms here, or try to distinguish between them, because they are used differently by other researchers (e.g. Harris et al. 2006) and may (and, in our experience, do) lead to confusion. Our term SOURCE TRANSPARENCY is meant to evoke the terms OPEN-SOURCE and OPEN SCIENCE.

<sup>5</sup> Source transparency will remain an aspirational goal until it is more widely emphasized by journal editors and in linguistic pedagogy; few articles even in *Language* give precise source citations within a documentary corpus. A journal that does require source transparency in all submissions is *Language Documentation and Conservation*. On transparent citation practices see Andreassen et al. (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Note that not all work in the area of language documentation and reclamation concerns languages whose users choose the 'Indigenous' self-designation; the global landscape encompasses considerable ideological and positional diversity (see e.g. Clifford 2001, Lokyitsang 2017).

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<sup>7</sup> In principle this humanistic aspect of language documentation is not new — it goes back to Franz Boas and his students over a century ago (Epps et al. 2017) — but as implemented it is now broader than Boasian practice.

<sup>8</sup> Examples are Salfner 2015, Caballero 2017, Gawne 2018, Oez 2018, Franjeh 2019, Vaughan 2020, and Skilton 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Coauthorship brings up a further difference. Papers or books in documentary linguistics are sometimes coauthored by academic linguists and non-academic community members such as speaker/signer-collaborators. This practice respects the latter as the source of the knowledge being reported and the long, hard work that is often involved. Traditionally, speaker/signer-collaborators were almost never named as coauthors; it is important that the academic review process not disadvantage those linguists whose collaborators are named coauthors. Regardless of coauthorship, it is beneficial in promotion and tenure cases to explain the roles of all those who take part in the documentation process; for discussion see Bliss et al. 2020.

<sup>10</sup> See also Thieberger et al. 2016 on the assessment of ‘annotated corpora’, which are outputs derived from documentary corpora in the sense described above. We do not recommend assessing documentary corpora based on hits that count visits or downloads, since some major archives do not collect this information, hits do not necessarily reflect unique users, and in any case there are multiple reasons why it may take years for an archived documentary corpus to reach its full potential.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.delaman.org/delaman-award/> and <https://www.ssila.org/en/archiving-award>.

<sup>12</sup> Journals include *Collaborative Anthropologies* and *Public Philosophy Journal*; institutional centers include Brown University’s Swearer Center for Public Service (<https://www.brown.edu/swearer/about>) and UC Berkeley’s American Cultures Engaged Scholarship program (<https://americancultures.berkeley.edu/collaborate/american-cultures-engaged-scholarship>).

<sup>13</sup> Examples include the American Historical Association ‘Guidelines’ (2015) and the College Art Association ‘Guidelines’ (2016).