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MARIANNE MITHUN (Santa Barbara)

What is a language? Documentation for diverse and evolving audiences

Abstract

Earlier in the history of our discipline, it was sometimes assumed that the primary audience for linguistic documentation would be other linguists. Now, as more and more languages are endangered, documentation is becoming increasingly valued by the communities in which the languages are or were spoken. It can be useful for linguists and community members to consider together the kinds of documentation that will meet not only current needs but also those of future generations. Here we will focus on some ways in which evolving community concerns might affect documentation.

The primary goal of linguistic fieldwork seems straightforward enough: the documentation of language. The circumstances surrounding the work can vary in so many ways, however, that the actual endeavors can and should differ accordingly. Some issues to consider in undertaking fieldwork are just what it is we are trying to capture and for whom. Earlier in the history of our discipline, it was sometimes assumed that the primary audience for linguistic documentation would be other linguists. Now, as more and more languages are endangered, documentation is becoming increasingly valued by the communities in which the languages are or were spoken. It can be useful for linguists and community members to consider together the kinds of documentation that will meet not only current needs but also those of future generations. Here we will focus on some ways in which evolving community concerns might affect documentation.

Communities differ in many ways. The language under study may be the only one known in a monolingual community, or it may be one of two or more spoken by most community members. It may be used in a full range of contexts or only in some. It may be spoken by people of all ages, only by adults, or only by elders. It may have many speakers or just a few. Attitudes toward the language vary as well. In some communities, the traditional language is recognized as the heart of the culture, the codification of traditional knowledge and world view, the essential vehicle for the performance and transmission of a valued common heritage. Its use may color or even define the tenor of social interactions. It may serve as a powerful symbol of identity. In other communities, the traditional language is barely thought about at all, regarded simply as a utilitarian tool for conveying information. In some it is even viewed with contempt or shame, considered a sign of backwardness. Such differences affect the practical side of fieldwork in a number of ways, among them the roles of speakers and their communities in the process, and the material that is ultimately preserved in the record.

In communities where the traditional language is thriving in all generations, documentation may excite little interest: all speakers already know infinitely more than could ever be frozen in a grammar and dictionary, particularly those assembled by an outsider. Where the language is all but gone, community members may have moved on, showing little interest in older ways. There may in fact be little awareness of what a language is, of what it means to speak another language, beyond marking oneself as an outsider. More and more
communities, however, are realizing that the traditional language is under threat and are working to teach it to younger generations. Good linguistic documentation can be invaluable in such endeavors, in some ways that are immediately obvious to speakers and in other ways that speakers come to recognize only over time.

The variation across communities is matched by variation through time. Circumstances can change rapidly, particularly in the case of undocumented or underdocumented languages. It is natural and appropriate that our work be shaped at least in part by the goals and interests of those we interact with. Projects designed in the company of linguists can differ from those planned with community members, and differences within each group abound. Linguists working in different theoretical traditions will be attracted by different aspects of language, and communities in which the language plays different roles will have different priorities. But the potential audience for the work is not confined to those one sees on a regular basis at the time of documentation. In many cases what is recorded now will serve as a unique resource for a multitude of future audiences: not only linguists, but also language teachers, curriculum planners, descendants of speakers, and others.

The North American communities I have worked with vary in many of the ways mentioned above. In some, the language is still spoken skillfully by a relatively large number of young, active speakers. In others, it was spoken well by a few elders when we worked, but those elders are now gone. In one community, the last speaker died long before I arrived. The language had already been richly documented, but the field notes were largely inaccessible to descendants of the speakers because of their format. I have been fortunate to collaborate with some wonderful speakers, speakers who maintained exquisite command of their languages, with great stylistic virtuosity and rich vocabularies. Each has been an inspiration and a delight to spend time with, and each has been dedicated to producing a rich record of the language. But their areas of interest have been quite different. For many, the work has opened up exciting new ways of thinking. In the process of collaboration, they have become aware of the enormity of what they know and have developed an intense appreciation for something that was largely unconscious before. They share the passion of discovering patterns and systematicity, of uncovering the special logic of their language. Perhaps not so surprisingly, other speakers, in many cases the last good speakers of their languages, have had less interest in the nuts and bolts of grammar. They enjoyed watching my thrill at identifying a new morpheme or a new generalization, but more as friends who took pleasure in seeing others happy than as grammarians. Their families and neighbors were consistently hospitable to me, but because of their own graciousness and generosity rather than an interest in the language itself or the process of documentation. Even those whose heritage language is no longer spoken vary in their interests. Some are eager to learn every technical detail available on the language, while others are simply hoping to acquire some emblematic expressions.

Each of these situations has changed in the time since the community projects were first undertaken, and with these changes has come an evolution in the kind of documentation most valued by community members. In each of the communities there has been a substantial increase in the academic and technical sophistication of members and in the value they place on the records of the language that exist.

Much of the most active and dedicated work is being done by those mounting language programs to teach endangered languages to future generations. Linguists have, on occasion, remarked that they found participation in such projects a distraction from their work on language documentation. For me, probably because of the communities and individuals I have
been working with, nothing could be further from the truth. In the course of these projects I have learned much about the languages that I might never have had the opportunity to discover otherwise. Our work has focused primarily on training speakers as teachers and curriculum designers, working with them to establish practical orthographies and teaching materials, uncovering the special logic of their languages, and documenting the language as it is used by speakers in various settings from everyday conversation to formal oratory. The language programs have been instrumental in producing some of the best colleagues one could ever hope to have: excellent speakers, dedicated to preserving their languages, who are also linguists, acutely interested in the words of the language but also its history, and its special structures. Over the course of these programs, the linguistic sophistication of these speakers has grown substantially. The kinds of materials that were most useful to them at the outset were basic and clear, with emphases on the larger, more regular patterns. Now, many years later in some cases, these same speakers and their colleagues rejoice in discovering and explaining ever finer complexities of the language. As they prepare curriculum materials and plan coherent classes, they want resources they can turn to to explain not just basic grammatical principles, but also the special features of the language that distinguish it from the encroaching language. They are eager for explanations of the exceptions to patterns that seem to crop up every time they prepare a lesson. In the best of all possible worlds, good documentation would lay the foundation for materials that can meet the needs of such users at each stage of their work.

Some of my work has been with the last good speakers of traditional languages. After these elders passed away and the work was written up, I moved on to other projects. More recently, the children and grandchildren of those elders have reestablished contact, hungry for information about their heritage languages that are now barely spoken or not spoken at all. On their own, some have unearthed much of what I have written on the languages, often material that was originally aimed at a quite different audience. They have never complained, but if I had foreseen their interests and abilities, I might have been able to do some things differently.

Work with members of the group whose heritage language was gone before my arrival has also proven useful in raising issues about documentation for the future. The last speaker of that language died over twenty years before I first met with community members, but fortunately a voluminous record had been made over a half century by a skilled field worker. Most of this record remains in the form of unpublished field notes, generally unintelligible to non-specialists, but the notes are now available on microfilm. This material is becoming ever more highly valued by descendants, who are beginning to acquire the expertise necessary to access it. Many report that knowing about the language, even if they never become fluent speakers, has made a significant difference in their lives. Delving into the magnificent complexity and systemicity of the language of their ancestors has been something like taking a course in music appreciation, even if one never becomes a concert violinist.

Taken together, the experiences of these various communities show that documentation can be valued for quite different purposes at different points in time.

1. Celebrating identity

Heritage languages can function as important markers of identity, even when they are no longer spoken fluently or even at all. Descendants of speakers can take great pride in using phrases from the language in their daily lives. When communities begin to create language
lessons, the kinds of language that first come to mind are often everyday expressions. An early project aimed at teaching Central Pomo, a language of the Pomoan family indigenous to Northern California, included the phrases below.

(1) Central Pomo Title VII Project: Vicki Patterson and Frances Jack

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ta:sa mc'amam   | 'Set the table!'
| Waadum!         | 'Come!'         |
| Ma:á cʰúm!      | 'Eat!'          |

Sets of questions with choices of answers are appreciated, because learners can converse.

(2) Central Pomo Title VII Project: Vicki Patterson and Frances Jack

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Qašóy wa ma wá: 'wan? | 'Are you in good health?'
| 'é: Q'dí' e' a: | 'Yes, I'm good.' |
| Čʰów. Basêt' t'a: | 'No, I feel bad.' |
| Si'n in?        | 'Why?'         |
| Šná: 'tʰála     | 'I have a headache.' |
| 'tʰala          | 'I have a toothache.' |

Material of this type may not provide many surprises for linguists, apart from the exotic sounds, but it can become ever more meaningful to descendants of speakers as the language is threatened.

The Chumash language family is indigenous to the central coast of California, from around present San Luis Obispo south to Malibu, just north of Los Angeles. All six Chumash languages are now gone, but there is good documentation of many of them, particularly Barbařeno. John Pearody Harrington began work in 1913 with speaker Luisa Ignacio and several others, then continued with Mrs. Ignacio’s daughter Lucretia García during the 1920’s and 1930’s, and finally worked with Mrs. García’s daughter Mary Yee until his death in 1961. Mrs. Yee, who lived until 1965, was the last speaker of any Chumash language, but unlike many last speakers, she was highly skilled in the language, in part because she lived with other Barbařeno speakers throughout most of her life. The collaboration between these three generations of women and Harrington resulted in tens of thousands of manuscript pages of field notes. The work was carried out in an era before audio recording was easy, so it was nearly impossible to capture conversation. Constructing conversational routines like those in (2) was not a priority, and finding material that can be made into conversations in the field notes is a challenge. Barbařeno descendants are especially eager to create dialogue, however, and often come up with somewhat surprising inventions. How grateful they would be if Harrington and Mary Yee had spent a day assembling some everyday routines for them.

Expressions appropriate for several other domains of daily life have been appreciated in a number of communities. Descendants of speakers enjoy using traditional vocabulary in team sports, for example. Such language allows them to communicate strategy while puzzling their opponents, as well as to mark their identity and solidarity.

Other aspects of everyday life also offer opportunities for the use of the traditional language. One day, inspired by the dogs surrounding us during our work, Central Pomo speakers assembled a set of commands for use with pets. These have brought much amusement and satisfaction to younger generations, who can use them meaningfully on an everyday basis. (The dogs have had no trouble learning them either.)
Central Pomo canine commands: FRANCES JACK, FLORENCE PAOLI, speakers p.c.

**Qačem**
'Catch!'

**Bėda ʔch’am p̪hênčim**
'Wait right here!'

**Kb’ar ʔmi’ta-qacčim**
'Hop into the car!'

**Hál ʔam**
'Hop out!'

**Dá:wagám**
'Go outside!'

**Čáwyom**
'Come in!'

**Sílyom**
'Come here!'

**‘ch’am**
'Sit!'

**Mádi mti:čim**
'Lie down!'

**Pápíl čáwdim**
'Bring in the paper!'

In several communities where the traditional language is no longer spoken, descendants still want to give their children traditional names. Those engaged in documenting languages do not always think of recording lists of names, perhaps because names can be difficult to analyze and may not reflect synchronic grammatical patterns. When names are not part of the record, descendants sometimes try to create names from other vocabulary, often terms for animals or plants. Does it matter whether such names follow traditional patterns and practices?

After some time spent with speakers of Central Pomo, I realized that there were no greetings in my field notes, even though we had recorded numerous social encounters and conversations among a number of different sets of participants, and I had witnessed many more. I finally asked a group of speakers how they would greet each other. They looked puzzled. They responded that there are no words for ‘hello’ or ‘goodbye’ in the language, and indeed, I noticed that they did not use any such words when they arrived at gatherings or left. When I asked what they might say if they ran into someone they knew in town, they agreed on something to the effect of ‘Oh, you’re here’.

Central Pomo greeting: FRANCES JACK, FLORENCE PAOLI, SALOME ALCANTRA, speakers p.c.

**Bë:’ka**

**ma**

**mó:’wan.**

bë:’=’ka ma mó-’=’w-an

here=inferential 2sg crawl-around-imperfective

here apparently you are crawling around

'Oh, you’re here.'

When I would bring food or drink to the speakers, they usually responded with yahwi: which they agreed would be equivalent to ‘thank you’. The circumstances under which the phrase was used in earlier times do not appear to have been equivalent to modern California uses of ‘thank you’, however. Should traditional patterns of usage be preserved along with the words?

We might ask how far communities should seek to retain traditional patterns of expression for everyday situations. The basic commands in (1) like *Ma’à ʔch’am! ‘Eat!’ are straightforward enough (food eat!), and get the point across, but they do not necessarily represent the way speakers traditionally communicated. FRANCES JACK reported that speakers usually used the expression in (5) to invite someone to eat.
(5) Central Pomo invitation: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

fo: č'a:1 ma'á čb̪um kúč' na'ji.
fo: č'a:l ma'á čhu-m kúč' na'śi
1sg.pat with food eat.prf-imp little anyhow=but

'Come eat with me'

Recent conversations with descendants of speakers have made me realize that several kinds of language would be highly valued now that I had not anticipated when the elders were alive. One man leads a dance group that performs at intertribal powwows. He has told me that before other groups perform at these gatherings, their leaders usually deliver a welcoming speech in the traditional language of their community. He very much wanted a speech that would be appropriate for those occasions. During the nine years that I worked with elders from his community, recording long hours of narrative and conversation on a regular basis, the topic of powwows never came up. They were not part of the culture of those individuals at the time. But it is certainly easy to understand why such a speech would be important to him and his group now. On the basis of the material recorded from the elders, it was possible to assemble a speech that expressed what he wanted to convey, sometimes substituting words at crucial points, like 'grateful' for 'angry'. Several of the elders were so eloquent that they left an extensive record of fine rhetorical style. One aspect of this style is a kind of couplet structure, a sequence of two parallel lines, spoken with matching prosodic contours, which convey essentially the same meaning but differ in some structural or lexical way. They may show different word orders. One may be active and the other passive. One may contain a synonym of a word in the other. The couplet structure was used to highlight important points in all kinds of speech, both conversation and monologues. The speaker below was noting that the ranchers in the area would not allow Indian people to gather roots for basketmaking on their land. The first line is structurally passive; the second is active.

(6) Central Pomo couplet structure: Salome Alcantra, speaker p.c.

Ma: čb̪hé-m-a-w 'el dá: -č'-a-w čb̪ó-w
land dig-collag-pass-prf the want-rfl-impref-pl-pass-prf not-prf
land being dug by several the is wanted by several not

'Digging isn't wanted.'

Ma: čb̪hé-m-a-w 'el dá: -č'i-a-w čb̪ó-w
land dig-collag-pass-prf the want-rfl-impref-pl-prf not-prf
land being dug the several want not

'They don't want people digging.'

Fortunately, the man who asked for the powwow speech was raised around speakers as a child, so he has excellent pronunciation, though he does not consider himself a speaker. Because of his background and motivation, he was able to learn the speech and perform it beautifully.

Another need that I had not anticipated was funeral oratory. This same young man is now called upon to speak at funerals. On a number of occasions over the years, the elders who gathered to make a record of their language did discuss funerals, describing mortuaries, cemeteries, burial arrangements, and who attended various services. But of course no one ever spontaneously produced a funeral oration. I suspect these speakers may never have witnessed the traditional rites held before European customs took over.
The services they described were held in Spanish or English, even those that took place during their childhoods. It never occurred to me to ask them to record such speeches, and I think if it had, it would have seemed inappropriate to me to do so. But it would have made sense to discuss with these elders, at greater length, the kinds of things they would like to have in the record for future generations, including options of this type. Early in my work in another community with the head chief, an eloquent orator who did perform traditional speeches on ceremonial occasions, another chief passed away. The head chief was called upon to deliver the oration, which is elaborate. When he returned from the ceremony, I asked whether he would like to make a record of his speech. He agreed immediately, and we set to work. He distributed copies of the recording, along with a transcription and translation, to all of the sitting chiefs. He was one of the last chiefs to know the language well, but that speech was performed when he himself passed away, and it is still used to this day.

2. Discovering patterns

For most native speakers of unwritten languages, the intricate patterns of grammatical structure are all but invisible. Discovering the patterns can be empowering for speakers, learners, and descendants. Such knowledge is of course also indispensable for structuring coherent language courses, in which the language is presented in its own terms, according to its own logic, even if grammar itself is never taught explicitly.

It is also crucial if learners are to create language on their own. Sentence frames like those in (2) above (‘How do you feel?’ ‘My X hurts’) can provide the basis for new combinations as students learn words for body parts. Well constructed sets of expressions can provide a basis for the discovery of pervasive patterns like question formation, negation, and pronominal paradigms.

(7) Central Pomo patterns: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

| Central Pomo patterns: Frances Jack, speaker p.c. | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 'a: yéw | 'I stopped' | 'a: báčkaw | 'I planted (it)' |
| ma yéw | 'you stopped' | ma báčkaw | 'You planted' |
| mucl yéw | 'He/she stopped' | mucl báčkaw | 'He/she planted' |
| 'iwa ma yéw? | 'Did you stop?' | 'iwa ma báčkaw? | 'Did you plant it?' |
| 'iwa mucl yéw? | 'Did he or she stop?' | 'iwa mucl báčkaw? | 'Did he/she plant?' |

Descriptive grammars often show an economy of illustrative material: only one or two examples are provided of each pattern. Such terseness can be frustrating for those trying to devise language lessons and can lead to an unfortunate muddying of the record. It can be a challenge to assemble material that is not riddled with further complexities. The Central Pomo verbs ‘stop’ and ‘plant’ appear in (7) only with singular agents. If they are used with
plural agents, the pronouns change of course, but the verbs can change as well. A collective agency suffix -m(a)- may appear: *ya bâc³kamaw* ‘we planted (it)’ (literally ‘caused it to grow’). These verbs are perfective, ending in the perfective aspect suffix -w. The verb *tell*, however, given here only in command forms, is inherently imperfective and requires different aspectual suffixes. If learners attempt to create new forms on their own, there can be surprises.

Central Pomo contains a set of prefixes that can indicate the kind of motion involved in actions. The prefix *da-* , for example, indicates a kind of pushing motion, usually done with the palms.

(8) Central Pomo manner prefix *da-*: FRANCES JACK, speaker p.c.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{da-}yóːy & \quad \text{‘push things together’} \\
\text{da-}p'áːl & \quad \text{‘scrape up grains with the hand, as while making pinole’} \\
\text{da-t'ádaq'ac} & \quad \text{‘squash something with the palm of the hand, like a can’} \\
\text{da-náw} & \quad \text{‘cover up a hole with dirt’} \\
\text{da-}č'óːw & \quad \text{‘find something by digging, like basket roots’}
\end{align*}
\]

The last root č'óː:- above also appears in the verbs in (9).

(9) Central Pomo č'óː:-: FRANCES JACK, speaker p.c.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{h-}č'óːw & \quad \text{‘uncover something hidden under the ground by digging around’} \\
\text{ma-}č'óːw & \quad \text{‘uncover something by kicking the dirt away from it’} \\
\text{'-č'óːw} & \quad \text{‘find enough berries or walnuts by picking’} \\
\text{p'ha-}č'óːw & \quad \text{‘a stream of water reveals something you’ve been looking for’}
\end{align*}
\]

The manner prefixes serve to classify a large portion of Central Pomo action verbs according to the kind of motion involved, such as pushing *da-*, poking (h-), kicking (ma-), fine finger motion (-' -), by flowing (p'ha-), stepping, biting, sucking, encircling, suspending, swinging, falling, gambling, by internal force, mentally, and more. They are not generally used to form new words as speakers talk, however. Verbs like those in (8) and (9) are learned as whole words. Speakers have clear ideas of which combinations exist in the language, and detailed knowledge of with their special meanings and uses. This knowledge is reflected in the translations given by Mrs. Jack for the verbs above. The original rationale behind their creation can often be detected: the verb *da-náw* ‘cover up a hole with dirt’ is based on a root meaning ‘hide’. Their precise meanings are not necessarily predictable from their parts, however, nor is the existence of specific combinations. Mrs. Jack knew that the combinations *ča-č'óːw* (‘uncover by sitting?’) *p'-č'óːw* (‘uncover by encircling?’), and *p'ha-č'óːw* (‘uncover by seeing?’) did not exist. The need for such terms had never arisen, so they were never formed. Good documentation should provide a record of the words that exist, the words that have been created over generations for concepts considered name-worthly.

3. Appreciating what makes the language special

We expect to find certain kinds of general grammatical constructions in most languages, such as questions and negatives. Particularly meaningful for speakers and their descendants, however, can be differences: special vocabulary, special grammatical categories, special ways of packaging information through discourse, and special ways of talking to others.
3.1. Special vocabulary

For linguists, priority is often given to structure over substance, to grammar over lexicon. Yet one of the pleasures of delving into another language is discovering surprising vocabulary: alternative ways of segmenting experience into concepts. We know that domains of special interest in a culture are frequently reflected in an elaboration of vocabulary in that domain. Some elaboration can be related to the physical environment. Acorns were an important staple for the Central Pomo, who knew exactly where each kind of oak grew, how acorns from each tasted, how difficult each was to crack, how each should be prepared, and more. Their importance is, not surprisingly, reflected in the lexicon.

(10) Some Central Pomo ‘oak’ terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ts’apʰá</td>
<td>‘valley white oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mšiy</td>
<td>‘black oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šē’ám</td>
<td>‘interior live oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mē’ėš</td>
<td>‘(Coast) tan oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q’akʰúl</td>
<td>‘Oregon oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mē’ti</td>
<td>‘live oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’ē p’du</td>
<td>‘scrub oak’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myú</td>
<td>‘blue oak’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Central Pomo are renowned for their exquisite basketry. The language is rich in terms for different kinds of baskets and basketry materials.

(11) Some Central Pomo basket terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>štúː</td>
<td>‘root and willow coiled basket, also general cover term for baskets’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sāl</td>
<td>‘big, flat, coarsely-woven basket made of willow for leaching acorns, washing potatoes, fruit, or berries and carrying things’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p’cí</td>
<td>‘big basket, of willow, redbud roots, and white roots, finely woven, with alternating peeled and unpeeled roots producing a striped design, used as a burden basket for gathering wild seeds and tarweed and for storage’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p’qʰáľ</td>
<td>‘willow basket which comes to a point at the bottom and is worn on the back, sometimes carried with the aid of a tumpline, used for picking up kindling’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šaqʰán</td>
<td>‘flat, shallow, round willow work basket’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t’aːt ől</td>
<td>‘fanciest feather basket’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qʰačá</td>
<td>‘sharp-pointed conical basket with squared bottom, often used for boiling water or mush by throwing hot rocks into the liquid inside’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p’šé’o</td>
<td>‘“deer tooth” big, square basket of willow and redbud’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mcē</td>
<td>‘cone-shaped mortar basket with hole in the bottom, set on a rock and used for grinding acorns’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasú</td>
<td>‘flat basket of willow roots with designs, for gathering and roasting seeds, for blowing red chaff off of acorns, for dry-roasting wheat by shaking it with small pieces of charcoal to make yhúː (pinole)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dalá</td>
<td>‘large, flat winnowing basket’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>š’ēt’</td>
<td>‘big, thousand-stick basket, 2–3 feet across, woven around with roots, used for cooking acorn mush and storing food’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
háqow ‘fish trap baskets, made out of large, grey willow’
mat’ú ‘basket for collecting seeds that are then dumped into a p’čel.’
háy k’atól ‘long cradle basket, with sides that come up that curves under the baby’s bottom, made of dogwood sticks (háy ‘stick’) and a special kind of willow that looks something like poison oak’
q’alá šná ‘oval canoe basket of willow with black and white roots wrapped around it, white and black roots, perhaps redbud, typically used for sugar or small objects; it resembles a boat (šná) in shape’
ištú ‘fancy basket made with duck, robin, and red woodpecker feathers’

Some vocabulary can be collected quite efficiently by direct elicitation. The topic of oaks arose in the course of one discussion about ranchers prohibiting Indian people from entering their property to gather acorns in areas visited by their ancestors for generations. A number of different species were mentioned during the discussion, but I later asked the speaker about any other kinds of oaks she might know of, and she easily added more. This same speaker had a variety of baskets on display in her kitchen. She named each, then added terms for other kinds of baskets as she thought of them. The following day she added still more. Direct elicitation (‘What do you call this kind of basket?’ ‘What kinds of baskets are there?’; ‘How many body parts can you name?’, ‘Do you recognize the birds in these pictures?’) is of course most effective for nouns that designate concrete objects. These are also the kinds of words that usually appear first when speakers themselves plan language classes and produce wordlists. Much other vocabulary comes up only in spontaneous speech, often vocabulary that one would never think to elicit but that forms a substantial proportion of the language.

Sentences elicited by linguists to test specific syntactic issues are often quite heavy in nominals, particularly proper names. Such sentences can be surprisingly impoverished lexically. Some typical example sentences drawn from a textbook on syntax are below.

(12) Syntactic examples

\begin{itemize}
  \item John read the book.
  \item Mary gave John a book.
  \item John expects Mary to be angry at him/herself.
  \item John wondered for whom Susan bought which book.
  \item John regretted the fact that Mary was taller than she was.
\end{itemize}

Sentences cited from other languages in the same textbook show remarkably similar structures.

(13) Syntactic examples

(13a) French

\begin{itemize}
  \item Marie mange souvent du gâteau.
  \item ‘Marie often eats cake.’
\end{itemize}

(13b) Italian

Gianni presenterà Maria a Francesco.

‘Gianni will introduce Maria to Francesco.’

(13c) Finnish

Pekka naki ettu Matti katsoi itsäään.

‘Pekka saw that Matti watched himself.’
These examples were of course chosen to demonstrate specific points about syntactic structure. The use of names and simple nouns makes the structure easier for English readers to see. For those whose goal is language documentation for future generations of both linguists and communities, it is important to note that such material can be of limited value beyond the specific purposes for which it was intended. All too often, it limits the record not only of vocabulary, but also of larger patterns of expression. Most situations of language endangerment are the result of replacement by another language. Sentences like those above are often constructed by bilingual speakers (or, unfortunately by linguists who then ask for grammaticality judgments). In such situations, it is easy for bilinguals to tap into intuitions about the contact language, though the process may be unconscious, creating or sanctioning structures that they might never utter spontaneously in the target language.

3.2. Special grammar

We sometimes find sentences like those in (13) above forming the core of linguistic documentation and grammars. The elicitation of sentences translated from a contact language can facilitate direct comparison of languages, but we might ask whether they capture the essence of the target language. Spontaneous, unscripted speech, both monologue and conversation, can show distinctions and patterns that never appear in elicited translations, but that are nonetheless fundamental and pervasive.

The speaker cited below was describing the first time she met the future husband of her listener. She had gone into a store with her mother, and when they went to the cash register to pay, she noticed the man standing with her friend’s family.

(14) Salome Alcantra, speaker p.c.

Mèn 'iba
mèn 'i-ba
so be-as
’And then

du: counter yu hlág’
du: counter yu hla-q
other counter 1PL.AGENT multiple.go-level
we went to a different counter
mu:l mida mâyal č’a:l.
mu:l mida ma-ya-l č’a:l
that there 2-PL-PAT with
čató:’wanya
čató-’w-an=ya
one.stand-around-imprf=personal.experience
and he was standing there with you.’

Even in these three short lines, a number of grammatical differences can be seen between the Central Pomo and its English counterpart. One is the specification of number. Central Pomo verbs may or may not carry suffixes that distinguish number, but they often indicate number as an inherent part of their lexical meaning. The verb root hla- ‘go’ in the second line above denotes the motion of two or more persons together. An entirely different verb is used if one person goes alone. Similarly, the verb čató- ‘stand’ is used just for one person standing alone. A different verb is used for standing in a group. Standing alone and standing in a group are classified as two different situations.

Central Pomo speakers specify directions more systematically than speakers of many other languages. When the speaker cited above said that they went to the counter to pay, she included the suffix -q on the verb hla-q ‘multiple go’, specifying that the motion was horizontal or level. When she said the man was standing there, her verb contained the suffix -’w-‘around’; the man was not standing completely motionless, but his motion was not directed.

Central Pomo speakers typically pay more attention than English speakers to the source of their information. The last line above contains the evidential enclitic =ya, which has no counterpart in the English translation and generally does not appear when speakers translate English sentences into Central Pomo. It indicates that the speaker knows about the man standing at the counter from direct evidence: she witnessed it herself. The same speaker continued with the sentence in (15).

(15) Central Pomo: Salome Acantra, speaker p.c.
Men ʔ’a: mu:l,
so feel that
‘So then
ya qówhlĩba,
yə qow=hl-ka
1PL.AGENT out-multiple.go-and.same
we walked out and
m’enkay m’enkay
m-č=on kay m-č=e=kay
your-father=too your-mother=too
your father and your mother
mũ:mu máy řo:hlw’køe
mu:mu ya řo-=hl-w=’køe
3PL.AGENT cast-multiple.go-prf=to
were on their way over to Lake County
This sentence shows the same attention to number, direction, and evidence. For number, the speaker used the verb root for going in a group to describe her mother and herself coming out of the store, and to describe the listener's mother and father going to Lake County. It is interesting that the singular form of the verb 'sit (on the ground)' was used in the last line. When questioned, the speakers explained that it was used because the couple was in a wagon that was sitting outside the store. Other indications of number appear as well, though not necessarily where they might in an English translation. The verb ʂqʰá:m’kʰe ‘to pick (beans)’ contains the suffix -m which indicates collective agency, people working together. Still another indication of number appears in the last line. The verb ‘wait for’ is imperfective aspect. The imperfective aspect suffix has two forms, one for singulars and another for plurals.

Directions are fastidiously specified as well. We can see the proclitics qow ‘out’ on the verb qówhliw ‘walk out’ and só: ‘eastward’ on the verb só:hlíw used to describe going to Lake County, which was to the east.

We again see evidentials indicating the source and certainty of the information. The verb hlám’kama ‘they must have been going’ contains two. The clitic ='ka is the same inferential marker we saw earlier in ‘You’re here’, and the clitic =ma indicates lack of certainty. Together they indicate that the speaker could not know for certain that the parents were on their way to pick beans because she did not see them picking beans, but she surmised it. It is interesting that when the speakers later provided a translation of this material, they did not include the information conveyed by the evidentials. Evidentiality is also expressed by a particle that originated as a verb j’a ‘sense’ in the opening line of (15): Men j’a: mu:l ‘So I guess’.

Manner prefixes like those described earlier appear as well. The verb for picking beans, s-qʰá:m’kʰe, contains the prefix s-, which indicates that the picking is done with a downward pulling or dragging motion. The verb pʰdén’e’iw ‘wait’ begins with the prefix pʰ- ‘visually’.

Even in this short passage, we see syntactic structures that differ from their English counterparts. Conjoined noun phrases like m’e=kay m’b’e=kay ‘your father and mother’ are formed by following both conjuncts with the enclitic =kay ‘too’. Clauses are linked by suffixes and enclitics rather than conjunctions. The suffix -ba ‘and’ can be seen in the second line of (15): ya qówheli-ba ‘they walked out and ...’. The suffix -n ‘and’ can be seen in the fifth line bean s̥qʰá:m’kʰe ‘m’li hlám’kama, ‘they were going to pick beans and ...’. These markers do more than conjoin clauses. They distinguish realis sentences, those that represent facts known through the senses (past and present events), from irrealis sentences (commands, conditionals, futures), those that can only be imagined. The suffixes -ba and -n
are realis forms, because the speaker was describing an actual situation she had witnessed. The markers also make a second distinction. The suffixes are used to link what are portrayed as elements of a single, larger event or situation. Both -ba and -n are in this category. The enclitics are used to link what are portrayed as separate events or situations. The markers also make a third distinction. The suffix -n links simultaneous events, here the parents being about to go east while sitting waiting for their daughter. The suffix -ba links sequential events, the speaker and her mother walking out of the store and then spotting the waiting parents.

Brief though they are, these passages also contain markers that relate larger sections of discourse, like mé:n 'iba 'so then'. Such particles rarely appear in sentences elicited as translations of English models.

4. Conclusion

As we document languages, it is useful to consider what kinds of information will be valued not just by current colleagues, but also what will be sought by future audiences: linguists with a variety of interests, speakers, and their descendants. The needs and desires of all of these groups are varied and evolving. Particularly in the case of endangered languages, what is documented now will be utilized for purposes well beyond those we can imagine at the present time. Fortunately, modern technological developments allow us to record spontaneous, unscripted speech in real time, one kind of open-ended documentation that should provide answers to questions beyond those we have the imagination to ask.

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC</th>
<th>accusative</th>
<th>GEN</th>
<th>genitive</th>
<th>PL</th>
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<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>agency</td>
<td>IMP</td>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>question mark</td>
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<td>collective</td>
<td>IMPF</td>
<td>imperfective</td>
<td>PRF</td>
<td>perfective</td>
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<td>copula</td>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>RFL</td>
<td>reflexive</td>
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<td>PAT</td>
<td>patient</td>
<td>SG</td>
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<td>PASS</td>
<td>passive</td>
<td>TOP</td>
<td>topic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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