Training Linguistics Students for the Realities of Fieldwork

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Abstract. This article uses examples from the author's first fieldwork experience to illustrate the need for better training of graduate students in linguistics on the subject of fieldwork, especially in the personal and practical aspects. This very personal account also points out the need for the development of a better and more extensive literature on linguistic fieldwork, and makes suggestions about issues that should be covered in such a literature.

1. Introduction. The goal of this article is to make a very simple point: that we, as linguists, need to rethink our training of graduate students for fieldwork. While we generally do a very thorough job of teaching them how to elicit and analyze data, we often forget to tell them that there is a personal and practical side to fieldwork that can very well derail their research if they are not prepared for it.

A case in point is my first field trip to work with Mixtec speakers in Chalcatongo, a remote village in the mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico. The account I present here is quite personal, in order to provide the reader with an example of just how unprepared *this* student was for the practical and psychological aspects of being a fieldworker in another culture.

The anthropological and sociological literature on fieldwork is vast. Yet as a graduate student in theoretical linguistics, it never occurred to me that such a literature would exist, nor that such a thing would be useful to me. We might well ask why this literature on fieldwork has been so invisible to (at least some) field linguists. I think the answer lies in the history of our field. With the generative revolution we cast off the Structuralists, and with them, our ties to anthropology. For someone like me, raised in the generative tradition, those ties were simply a part of history. In the generative tradition, language, of course, is studied apart from culture and society. This is feasible for those whose data come from their own native-speaker intuitions, but it can lead to an odd schizophrenic existence for those who believe in the generative approach yet gather their data in the field.

On my first field trip, in my ignorance, I thought that since I was just studying language I had no need for any of that anthropological "stuff." I had no interest in Mixtec culture: I wanted to know about Mixtec morphology and syntax. But this attitude, I now realize, was the cause of many of my problems on that first trip.

In fact, I still think that I was right that I could do morphological analysis without knowing anything about Mixtec culture. But this is not the issue. The issue is that there I was, living among a group of people that I knew very little about. My awkwardness and confusion would have been greatly lessened if I had simply taken the time to learn more about them. At the same time, had I read up on what fieldwork is like for the fieldworker, I might not have felt so much like I was losing my mind while I was there, nor that I was a complete failure for not loving every second of it.

Now, obviously different fieldworkers have different backgrounds, different training, and different personalities. I am sure that many linguists have gone into the field for the first time with a solid knowledge of both the cultures they were visiting and what the fieldwork experience might be like. But plenty of stories indicate that others of us go into the field for the first time without such preparation.[1]

This article provides an example of how such ignorance can result in a miserable (even if productive) first field trip. It is designed to provide the reader with three things: a feel for the environment that I found myself in; a sense of the practical things I dealt with on my first field trip and my reactions to them; and, finally, some suggestions on how we can make the experience somewhat easier for others. To accomplish this, I include some artifacts from my trip, primarily excerpts from my field journal and quotes from the anthropological and (limited) linguistics literature illustrating the ordinary and almost predictable nature of my experiences and reactions.[2] These are indented, like the quotations immediately below.

> Fieldwork is a deeply emotional experience for those who undertake it. [Wengle 1988:xiv]

> *7/8/82: [First journal entry]*
> *WHAT AM I DOING HERE?*
> *Made it to Oaxaca. I'm sitting in a cafe drinking café con leche trying to calm down. I'm almost hysterical again. I feel so awful. I'm constantly on the verge of tears.*
> *Why am I here? I don't want to be here. I don't want to do this. It's 6 weeks staring me in the face. Will I feel like this for 6 weeks? I'll die. If I still feel like this in 2 weeks I guess I could go home. I don't know quite what it is that's so awful. I just want to be home. . . . Oh God. Six weeks. I can't do it.*
> *This is unreal. How did this happen? How did I let this happen?*

> Young women fieldworkers—and by young I mean women in their twenties—appear to have the most difficult time in the field. This is particularly so if they enter the field alone. [Wax 1979:518]

> The so-called "field manuals" that exist for the student are little more than vast recipe books, good on methodological concerns but nearly silent on matters of psychological adjustment. The student is also under tremendous pressure to justify his existence in the field—to the natives, to himself, and to the funding

> agencies and faculty judging his performance. His reputation and career are dependent, in some (probably large) measure, on his performance in the field. In all likelihood, the fieldworker is far less than fluent in the natives' language, and certainly he is ignorant about his place and behavioral responsibilities. [Wengle 1988:9]

2. "Monica, Hell." I should preface the description of my first field trip with two points. First, I was quite fluent in Spanish, which I used as a contact language with the Mixtec speakers in Chalcatongo (virtually all of whom are bilingual). Second, I had spent a great deal of time in South America (a year and a half in Chile, with travels throughout most of the continent), and had made numerous trips to Mexico and Guatemala. So, my problems were not due to any language barrier, nor to a general lack of knowledge about cultures south of the United States border. My ignorance was far more specific than that.

I had decided to go to Mexico to do fieldwork on the Otomanguean language Mixtec after working on it for about two years with a speaker in Berkeley, California. As my departure date got closer, I began to have a sense that events were sweeping me along towards a trip I had never really intended to go on. Although I had been the one who made the plans, suddenly I realized that what had sounded good in theory was terrifying in fact.

When the day came, I got on the plane, in hysterics. I made it to Mexico, and I made it to Oaxaca City. Eventually I found the buses I needed to get to Chalcatongo. Upon arrival, I found myself deposited on a dusty, deserted street. I had been told that there was a house that rented rooms, and I managed to find it. I was in luck—they actually had a room available. I got inside, closed the door and cried some more.

> *7/12 [in Tlaxiaco, on the way to Chalcatongo]: So I'm sitting here getting drunk. I'm on my second beer. This one is a warm Tres Xs. Mmm. I had to get drunk because I fell apart again tonight. I cried & cried.*
> *[A man had been harassing me the night before]: So I came home and became hysterical. I wanted someone real to talk to. Same old shit. When I'm like that I can't imagine making it through this. I really am thinking seriously about just going home early. Six weeks just seems insurmountable. I dunno, I just want to have the option. But it scares me to contemplate doing it—face-losing . . .*

> And he [the graduate student on the first day in the field] cannot leave, for his entire career, his prestige ranking within the discipline of anthropology, his professors' respect—and much else—depend on his maintaining a stiff upper lip, on organizing this chaos into a Ph.D. thesis. [Wengle 1988:3–4]

> *7/31: Eighteen more days—it's a lot. . . . When this nightmare is over it'll seem so petty. I'll think, heck, what's six weeks? No one will understand why I was so miserable, and I probably won't either. When I was talking to that Israeli woman in Oaxaca [who was traveling around the world for a year] about being alone I said something about how I didn't know how she could stand it—I was flipping out just from 6 weeks. She said "yeah,*

but you're probably more alone than I am." True, true. This is like the fucking isolation ward. . . .
Lost in space. I'll say.

8/7: I keep thinking how long each day is. Eleven [more] of 'em. When I get back will I even remember this feeling of wanting to push time along? Please, time, go by quickly. In the evenings I say to myself "only two hours till bedtime" because bedtime signifies another day over, signifies another morning to come, where I can cross another day off.
This really is like being in jail. Or in the isolation ward. Or on the moon.

I spent six weeks in Chalcatongo that first time, and quickly found two consultants. They were both knowledgeable, careful and caring, and I was very lucky to find them.

Nonetheless, my bouts of hysterical crying continued. There was no phone in the village, so I wrote incessantly—in my journal, and in my letters home. As my return address, I wrote "Monica, Hell." I lived for mail, which only rarely came, and read my few books over and over again. I know now that these are classic signs of culture shock—but at the time I just thought I was going crazy.

> Diaries and letters to and from the field are apt to be excellent sources in aiding the maintenance of one's sense of identity. One of the more important functions of diaries is to translate otherwise chaotic events into some order that makes sense to the individual in terms of his own lived past. [Wengle 1988:24]

Let me describe some of the things I was dealing with.

First, I had trouble finding food. Eventually I was able to establish a routine where I had a noon meal at a restaurant, and otherwise ate bananas and tomato sandwiches. But bananas, tomatoes, and bread were all things I could only buy twice a week, on the two market days. If I did not buy enough, and ran out of food, sometimes I could buy little packaged pastries at one of the stores, but that was about it. I lost a lot of weight.

7/17: Food is such a problem here. Yesterday I went to the one restaurant I know of and had: a small plate of greasy rice, tortillas (homemade wheat ones, not good at all), a main dish of—get this—breaded pork knuckle? They told me it was pata de puerco. Well, all it was was bone and gristle with breading over it, and red sauce of some questionable origin. Oh yeah and a tiny plate of beans. Not even black beans—pinto beans. Maybe today I'll get up my nerve and go see if that other place I spotted really is a restaurant. It's sort of hard to tell. No sign, nothing painted outside on the wall.

7/18: Today was mini-market day. On Sunday, there's a small market—about 1/2 the size of Thursday's. I bought bread and tomatoes and mangos and bananas. So I don't have to eat at the foul restaurants. Actually yesterday I did try the other restaurant and it was better. I just

had eggs and beans (black beans—yay!) and tortillas. That was a hell of a lot better than breaded pig's knuckles. I'm glad I had eggs—I don't think I'm getting any protein.

7/24: Today I had the first good food I've had [here]—at my eggs & beans restaurant. It was mole verde [green sauce]—with chicken, potatoes, and squash floating around in it. I asked if it was real hot, knowing full well it was a stupid question, & they said no, no. Of course I almost died it was so hot. But it was good.

Malnutrition . . . is produced by failure to consume adequate food. This can be related to the availability of food in the fieldwork environment, and also sometimes to the difficulty of transporting food supplies from outside sources to the research site. [Howell 1990:75]

[The other side of the coin is a fieldworker who gained thirty pounds.] In the face of extreme isolation from familiar social and intellectual sources of emotional satisfaction . . . an intensification of dependency needs was inevitable. Since it was essential that she not openly express her frustration and anger . . . , she attempted to relieve her insecurity by eating. [Wintrob 1969:66]

Second, it was the rainy season, and I was at an altitude of about nine thousand feet. It was extremely cold, and I was not prepared for it. I wore layers and layers of clothes, and froze when I had to wash something. We did have electricity in the house I lived in—most houses in the village had it. But, of course, there was no heat, and often when it rained, the lights would go out.

7/13: I'm sitting here with my down vest on over my thermal shirt, short-sleeve shirt and sweatshirt. It's fucking cold in this place.

7/18: Well, it's pouring and the lights are out and if I leave my door open for light the rain comes in. It's 5:45 so it's gonna be dark soon anyway. What, may I ask, am I going to do in the dark? I asked the señora if she had a candle but apparently she doesn't—she never came back. This is swell. It's thundering . . .

7/19: Well, the lights are flickering again and my tape deck is operating at varying speeds so I guess I just have to quit working for a while. I bought a bunch of candles today so when the lights go I'll be able to see. At least dimly.

8/4: I'm freezing. Today I washed my thermal shirt—I wear it 24 hours a day so it gets sorta filthy. I wear it every day and then to bed too. I sure shoulda brought more warm clothes.

I almost immediately became covered in little red bites from invisible insects. No bug spray or lotion helped, and this continued for the entire time I was there.

My room was also filled with flies. I got very good at killing them, and it became one of my favorite forms of entertainment. My record was forty-one in one evening.

7/15: I'm all covered in red bumps. They hardly itch at all. I wonder what it is. I guess I should spray my bed.

7/17: Now they itch. They keep me awake at night. I sprayed my bed. I cover myself in insect repellent twice a day, to no avail. Ugh.

7/23: My bites kept me up all night. I kept waking up scratching. And I woke up with a bunch of new ones. I even put [the] super-repellent on before I went to bed. I put it on again this morning. I don't know why, it doesn't seem to work. Nothing does . . .
26 more days . . .

8/3: I just killed 15 flies—there are easily twice as many again in my room. [Later]: And I have now killed 34 flies in my room. Lots left.

8/4: I woke up yesterday morning with a line of 12 bites going up from my knee. My legs, below the knee, are just completely polka-dotted. . . . But the big problem is sleeping. They keep me awake at night. And then I wake up scratching sometimes—ugh. It's so awful. They're mainly on my legs. I got three on my stomach, and a couple of weeks ago a bunch on one arm but other than that it's been the legs only. These fleas are leg-men. Assuming they're fleas. That's what everyone tells me. Invisible fleas, though.

I did manage to find consultants fairly easily, but they stood me up all the time.[3] Of course, the notion of scheduling appointments was not quite the same to the people I was dealing with as it was to me, with my Midwestern conceptions of what constitute promptness and politeness. If the consultant was not available, the day was shot for me—it was very hard to get people to agree to work without at least a day's notice.

7/19: I worked with C again this morning and have been working all day since on transcribing and also going through my data. I don't believe how much I work. I guess when there's nothing else to do. . . . If I ever want to write a dissertation, I know where to come.

7/23: Oh shit. C stood me up again. I haven't done any eliciting in days and I'm getting bored. Besides, I have so much planned that I want to do.

7/24: Now I've got a lot to write about. But no time, since I have my hot date at 2:00, and it's 1:45. . . . I was sitting here working (C stood me up again) and M came and knocked on the door and asked if I wanted to do some work. How wonderful. I was just feeling upset about not doing enough eliciting. So now I have tons of tape to go over . . . and of course I'm just writing in here.

> The fieldworker finds himself writing letters of a length and intensity of feeling that is not at all characteristic of him. Or the fieldworker finds that he is spending most of his time dictating into his tape recorder and typing it up in field notes. [Wintrob 1969:67]

Then there was my work itself: the more I worked on the language, the more incompetent I felt. I had terrible fears that I was putting myself through this torture for nothing—that there would be no results to show for it when I returned home.

> *7/17: God, I went a whole day without writing in here. Amazing. That's because I worked all day yesterday. I worked with C a couple of hours in the morning and then spent about six hours in the afternoon and evening working on the data. Jesus. I never work like this. It's a little frustrating. . . . I'm having trouble getting verb tenses and stuff out of him. He doesn't get the idea of paradigms at all. . . .*
> *I don't know what I'm doing. Face it.*
>
> *7/18: I also feel like I don't know what I'm doing, in terms of my work here. I feel so at sea. What am I investigating? How do I do it? I haven't the vaguest.*
>
> During the early period of fieldwork, anxiety that builds up tends to be free floating. It relates to environmental stresses, health concerns, and self-image, with fears of rejection by the community, feelings of inadequacy in collecting essential data, and fears of failure in completing the planned research. [Wintrob 1969:67]

One thing that I expected that I actually did *not* find was unwanted attention from men. I had been in enough big cities in Mexico to know what to expect along those lines, but it did not happen in Chalcatongo, at least not from the locals. They watched me, certainly, but it was more like being an animal in a zoo than a woman being ogled by men.

Unfortunately, there were a few men there from bigger cities, and they did give me some trouble. One in particular was a real problem. He would get drunk and pound on my door, and say strange things to me. At times I felt completely confined to my room—that it simply was not safe to go out. This was especially problematic, since, of course, the bathroom was across the courtyard.

> *7/31: God I hate this [place]. I went out to go to the bathroom & this guy who lives in one of the rooms here accosted me. He's drunk off his ass, mumbling, making gestures with his hands while looking at me meaningfully. I tried & tried to listen & understand—finally I started trying to leave. He kept saying no, no, mumble mumble. Finally I just told him I can't understand drunk men, and walked off. Came into my room & just pounded the walls. Now he's "singing." I hate drunks. . . . I can't stop crying. I hate this [place] and I want to go home. NOW. TODAY. Goddamn it. I was going to go out for a walk but now I feel like I'm a*

prisoner in this room. I guess I could go out & make a beeline for the front door—ignore him. Besides, I can't go out till I stop crying. . . . I hate this [place].

8/1: The drunk guy came and knocked on my door late last night. He kept mumbling "Préstame revista" [loan me a magazine]. I kept telling him I didn't have any revistas. Finally he said, then a book. I told him I only had books in English & he said to give him one of those. So I gave him "The Groves of Academe" by Mary McCarthy. I thought it was hilarious. So this morning he brought it back. . . . He was still drunk, said, "mumble mumble"—I'm sure telling me how much he enjoyed the book. He's been drunk all day today, too—singing obnoxiously, staggering around. UGH. He's been hanging out some with [the neighbor], who's probably drunk too, although luckily I haven't seen him up close enough to tell. They make me ill. It's not the fact of drunkenness—shit, I like to get smashed, myself, sometimes. It's just the way they get. The way the asshole has been drunk for 2 days now. . . . I hate 'em.

Most of the time, though, I was simply a curiosity. Occasionally there was ridicule that I was aware of, but usually they just stared at me. And they had good reason to stare! Take a look at figure 1.

Figure 1. A picture of a member of the community, me, and her sons.

Note the sheer difference in scale between the two adults in figure 1. Although it is really a very embarrassing picture, I include it to show how my mere physical presence affected how I must have been perceived. It was clear the whole time that I was there that I was regarded as an alien from outer space. I was an unmarried woman by herself, quite a bit taller than most people, with short hair, and wearing jeans.

> The fieldworker's marital status is of particular significance to anthropological informants, since most "primitive" cultures take kinship bonds as the fundamental source of social structure and social order. . . . But an unmarried, childless adult woman has no fully legitimate social place in most cultures. [Warren 1988:13]

A further idea of just how sore thumb-like I was can be seen in the following anecdote: shortly before I left the village someone asked me if I had ever noticed that children ran screaming from me when I walked down the street. Of course, I *had* noticed that. She told me that it was because the women had taken to telling their children to be good—or the *gringa* would take them.

I had become the bogeyman.

Although it is a funny story—and I tell it as a funny story—it also just sums up perfectly how alien I felt, and how alien they regarded me as being.

> *7/31: So I got on the bus to Chalcatongo & this time it left at 5:30 [a.m.]. These 2 obnoxious women got on a little after 5 & proceeded to make all sorts of noise—screaming & giggling in the front of the bus (they were friends of the drivers). Imagine my (unpleasant) surprise when the louder of the two started talking about me. The first clue was something about "la muchacha que parece a un muchacho" [the girl who looks like a guy]. I couldn't hear or understand all of what she said and I was really getting down on myself for being so paranoid, but then they went through this thing about "entró"—'she got on the bus', obviously. This was all in whispers, with glances to the back of the bus—it was too dark for her to see me. Then they got into this simply hilarious joke which consisted of Miss Obnoxious saying "Do you speak English" in a bad accent—they repeated that one about five times. That was when I knew for sure I wasn't being paranoid. Later, on the road, when it got light, they would every now & then whisper something & turn & look at me. . . . I fantasized all sorts of things to say to her but of course didn't say anything. She got off at Chalcatongo too—maybe I'll see her in town & can trip her or something.*

> *8/4: [M and I] were talking about the United States, and she said that she had heard—she didn't know if it was true—she couldn't believe it was (lots of hemming and hawing) but that she had heard that when Americans didn't want their children they killed them. I tried to set her straight.*

> [Fieldwork may or may not involve] catastrophic identity fragmentation. . . . a searing and traumatic attack against his or her sense of identity . . . [Wengle 1988:x]

3. How did this happen and what can we do about it? I have already suggested that at least part of the reason that I could go to the field so unprepared for what daily life would be like is that—at least for many of us—there is no place in our curriculum for training students in the practical aspects of doing fieldwork. Another factor plays a role, though, which is that the mystique of fieldwork remains very strong in our field.

A passage in the "Editor's Introduction" to *Emotions and Fieldwork* (Kleinman and Copp 1993) sums this up quite nicely:

> Fieldwork is supposed to be fun. . . . Anger, boredom, confusion, disgust, self-doubt, depression, lust, despair, frustration, and embarrassment are perhaps more than occasionally associated with fieldwork, but they are not often discussed—at least not in print—because such sentiments violate the pleasure principle so often associated with model practice. . . . This curious policing of socially correct feeling within the fieldwork community can lead to a rather bizarre slanting of research reports wherein the fieldworker is represented as wallowing in an almost unmitigated delight while engaged in the research process. This is quite possibly one reason why the actual experience of fieldwork can come as such a shock to the neophyte. [1993:vii]

Consider the explicit example of this in Samarin's book on linguistic fieldwork:

> Here and elsewhere in this volume I may give the impression that field work is more awesome than it really is. A field worker should take his work seriously, but he need not do it lugubriously, for an exciting and life-enriching experience awaits him. Field work is characterized in one word—at least for me; it is *fun*. [Samarin 1967:vii][4]

So, although until very recently linguists have rarely discussed their fieldwork experiences in print—we just write about our data—the "pleasure principle" message does get communicated. I do not know exactly where I learned it, but I *knew* that I was a failure because I hated my fieldwork so incredibly much.

> Berreman (1962) laments the dearth of information on "the practical problems" of carrying out fieldwork, such that "the person facing fieldwork for the first time . . . may suspect ethnographers of having established a conspiracy of silence on these matters. . . . As a result of the rules of the game which kept others from communicating their experience to him, he may feel that his own difficulties of morale and rapport . . . were unique and perhaps signs of weakness or incompetence. Consequently, these are concealed or minimized" (1962:4). [Wintrob 1969:64]

Now, I realize that for some people fieldwork really is unproblematic, not to mention fun. In fact, *I* actually enjoyed myself on two subsequent trips to Chalcatongo, in 1985 and 1992. This is not to say that there were no difficult moments, or that every minute was bliss. But on these trips I knew the territory, and, perhaps most importantly, I had company. I now understand that a great

deal of what I experienced on that first trip was simply due to being alone under a difficult set of circumstances.

In subsequent years I have done fieldwork with two North American tribes, the Karuk and the Menominee, and have had quite different experiences from that first trip to Chalcatongo. Although I always have (and probably always will have) some difficulty with the awkward social situation that fieldwork imposes, my abilities have steadily improved. I attribute this improvement both to age and to having learned (through bitter experience!) that indeed it *is* important to learn about a culture before one becomes involved with it, even if one really is only interested in how reduplication or plural marking works. I have focused on my negative experiences in this article, however, because we need to be reminded that they can happen, and that some students may not be naturals at this undertaking.

> Research courses and methodological texts only teach students how research ought to go, rather than how it does go in the real world. As social scientists, we have an obligation to share experiences with other researchers in order to develop our research skills and enterprise. [Easterday et al. 1977:346]

In anthropology and sociology, it has now become standard to talk about any and all aspects of the fieldwork experience. We need to start doing this in linguistics as well. Obviously there is no way to come up with an exhaustive list of prescriptions for successful fieldwork, since each situation is different—yet there is one very simple thing we can do to help our graduate students approach fieldwork more intelligently: we can describe for them a range of possibilities of what they might encounter.

> Fieldwork itself is unquestionably that aspect of qualitative inquiry in which one can assert the least control. One can be *prepared*, but that does not necessarily entail formal "training" of any kind. How one has learned to cope with all the other exigencies to be confronted in the course of everyday life surely has more predictive power for fieldwork success than how many courses one has taken, manuals one has read, or ethnographers one has known. [Wolcott 1995:146]

Some initial suggestions on things that we should address in training our students for linguistic fieldwork appear below.

Mechanics.

- Getting into the community: the necessity of a letter of introduction ("one of the cardinal rules of fieldwork procedure" [Henry 1969:36]).
- Finding someone to work with: I was told that finding consultants would not be a problem—that they would probably find me. This was in fact exactly what happened.
- Consultant compensation: is it necessary? If so, how much is required?

Going alone vs. going with company. This is something that can only be decided on an individual basis. A prospective fieldworker should think carefully about his or her own personality—his or her feelings about being alone, ability to deal with awkward social encounters, and so on—and make a decision based on that.

> While a few standardized formulas for the success of a fieldwork project exist (the do's and don'ts of fieldwork), in the final analysis, the skills and experience of each researcher in relation to the situation in which he undertakes to work seem to be the more crucial factors. The success of fieldwork is largely the result of the unique interaction between the personality of the fieldworker, the nature of the research problem, and the socio-cultural environment in which research is undertaken. [Henry 1969:46]

> I realized how much the process of field work would be enriched, and the psychological health of the field worker supported by the opportunity of working in the field with another person who was undergoing parallel experiences. I would recommend that field work by solitary investigators of either sex be discouraged whenever possible. [Golde 1970:78]

> To minimize the distress, we can recognize that mental stress can be very great in the field, and that we will vary as individuals and at different times in our lives in our ability to accept and cope with these stresses. We need to entertain the possibilities of our own limits in deciding what fieldwork we can and cannot do. There is an endless array of researchable problems, and no one has to go work on leech-infested jungle trails, on high altitude mountains, or in urban slums if that is beyond their own psychic capacity. "Know thyself," we are advised, and that seems to be particularly wise advice in the case of someone planning fieldwork. [Howell 1990:162]

Practical matters.

- Health and safety: Note that the issue of going into the field alone arises under this heading as well, and should be considered carefully.

> No matter how knowledgeable you are in theoretical linguistics, no matter how skilled you are in techniques of description and analysis, you're not going to achieve what you set out to do if you are sick or dead. [Newman 1992:3]

- Food: The anthropological literature on fieldwork tends to assume that food will be plentiful, and instead focuses on things like hiring someone to do shopping and food preparation. This was out of the question for me, since I had no access to cooking facilities, and was not in Chalcatongo long enough to make any such arrangements. The lack of cooking facilities also meant that I could only buy ready-to-eat foods, which severely limited the possibilities.

> Health in the field, as anywhere, depends in part on the diet available. Researchers typically have to balance their desire for a supply of fresh and attractive foods of the kinds they enjoy with their desire to avoid spending a large portion of their time cooking, shopping, or even growing food or hunting

> and gathering it. . . . We note that the single most frequently mentioned arrangement for food preparation is to hire a local cook and have that person do the cooking (and usually the shopping as well). [Howell 1990:57]

Gender and sex. Clearly a woman—especially a single woman—going into the field has to be prepared to face what the anthropological literature quaintly calls "hustling."

Emotional reactions and culture shock. Frank discussions of individual's experiences and a good reading list would be invaluable. Students should be familiar with the concept of culture shock and its many manifestations. I know now that things like uncontrollable crying and loss of self-confidence in one's work are commonplace. Although knowing such things intellectually may not provide complete protection from feeling them, it does usually help to know one is not alone in one's reactions.

> . . . one characteristic does seem to stand out in all the accounts of fieldwork that I am familiar with. I am referring to the associated problems of disorientation, worry, depression, fatigue, loneliness, stress, and the like. [Wengle 1988:xviii]

Prior visitors to the community. The fieldworker may find himself or herself judged on the basis of the behavior and attitudes of outsiders who visited the community at an earlier date. Such visitors might have been anthropologists, health care workers, government officials, etc., but in my particular case the issue arose with respect to missionaries. No matter what one's religious beliefs are, and no matter what one thinks about the goals and methods of missionary organizations, a nonmissionary fieldworker may have to deal with how missionaries are perceived in the community. I encountered attitudes ranging from mild suspicion to downright hostility based on the assumption that all linguists are missionaries. During a later field trip, my companion and I were even denied permission to work in a neighboring town because the authorities assumed (and could not be convinced otherwise) that we were missionaries. My point here is simply to emphasize that a beginning fieldworker should be forewarned about the potential problems that they might face due to the prior presence of missionaries, and should understand the religious politics of the place that they go to.

> *7/14: [A neighbor] told me one interesting thing—he knew some SIL linguists who were here. He didn't remember their names, unfortunately. He went on a long tirade about how [evil] they were. He said the people here already have their own religion and these people came in and "treated us like a lower form of life and tried to shove their religion down our throats." I explained that I knew about them and that I was not in any way connected with them. He seemed reassured and said he could tell I wasn't one of them. But that's the first I've heard of SIL. Some people have mentioned that there have been other gringos*

here, studying Mixtec, but they haven't said anything about them being missionaries.

As I said, this list is only a beginning, and is designed simply to get us thinking about publishing more specifically on linguistic fieldwork. Although the anthropological literature can be immensely helpful, there are significant differences in the ways that we approach the field. Among other things, linguists generally do not stay as long as anthropologists do, and many of us do not even try to integrate ourselves into the community in the same way that an anthropologist would. This, of course, means that our experiences will be very different. Until recently, however, there has been very little published on linguistic fieldwork (except for a few things like Dixon [1984] and Newman [1992]). This is now starting to change, with, for example, the publication of Vaux and Cooper (1999) and Newman and Ratliff (2001), but there is still surprisingly little.[5]

> For most young people a first field experience is an educational adventure, but it is usually difficult and it can be painful, discouraging, depressing and sometimes even agonizing. Some of these discomforts might be avoided if young fieldworkers and their research supervisors were made more aware of the fact that young persons in the field have certain inescapable disadvantages. There are some things that they simply cannot be expected to do. On the other hand, . . . young people have certain distinct advantages and they can do certain kinds of research which are out of bounds for older persons. [Wax 1979:517]

4. Conclusion. I have used my own first experience with fieldwork as an illustration of just how naïve a young linguist can be about all aspects of the fieldwork experience. Although embarrassing to admit to, the experiences that I had serve to highlight a gaping hole in the training that we give our students.

Usually the only discussion of such issues that a student gets is in a linguistics field methods course (if they take one). But even there, the personal and psychological aspects of fieldwork often get short shrift. I know that when I teach field methods, I am often overcome by the need for more time for elicitation. This can lead to a reduction of the time spent in the classroom without the consultant; time where the students and instructor get a chance to talk about the fieldwork experience, rather than perform it. We need to remind ourselves that learning through doing is not the only goal of a field methods course, and should be sure to reserve time to talk about the many personal, political, and practical issues that can arise. That is, instead of treating field methods simply as a class where students learn to apply their analytical skills to a real language, we should reconceive it as a class in which we also prepare students to go out into the "real" field to work, with all the complications that that can entail.

A second way to approach this is to develop a literature that specifically addresses the field experiences of linguists, especially issues like the ones I have mentioned here. It is only by developing a cumulative body of work on our widely

differing fieldwork experiences—and reactions to fieldwork—that we can adequately get across to novice linguistic fieldworkers some idea of what they are getting themselves into. The present article is my contribution to that nascent body of literature.

Notes

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1. Newman apparently shares my view of the training linguistics graduate students get (or do not get) before they go out into the field:

> . . . the position of [field methods] in the training of our graduate students is indeed marginal and is likely to remain so. This combined with the fact that publications by linguists on [field methods] have essentially ceased to appear and relevant books and articles by anthropologists and sociologists are generally ignored means that the number of new field workers will remain small and many scholars undertaking fieldwork for the first time will be untrained and unprepared. [1992:6]

2. The excerpts from my field journal are very personal and somewhat melodramatic (I was in my twenties, after all). They are not the kind of thing I would normally put in a article, yet I think they communicate what I went through in my first experience with fieldwork even better than my description.

3. Apparently being stood up is not uncommon. Henry (1969:43) describes the same problem with government officials in Trinidad, and Saberwal (1969:50–52) describes it in his work with the Embu of Kenya.

4. There is one note I am obliged to make here. While working on this article, I went back to the small number of works that were available on the subject of linguistic fieldwork in 1982. To my chagrin, I discovered that Samarin (1967) does have some warnings I wish I had paid attention to; for example:

> In his preoccupation with data . . . the linguist can very easily forget the human factors in his investigation of language. His collection and analysis of language phenomena are dependent on and in some way influenced by the people among whom he works and by his own personality and training. Without some understanding of himself, the language community, and the informant the linguistic investigator goes ill-prepared to the field. [Samarin 1967:7]

But aside from a short section addressing such issues, most of Samarin's work is dedicated to linguistic analysis.

5. I have recently heard of three in-progress field guides for linguists, so this situation may be changing shortly after publication of this article.

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