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LD&C possibilities for the next decade

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Editor of Language Documentation & Conservation

To mark the tenth year of *LD&C*, I asked Kenneth Rehg, the founding editor, to write about the journal's beginnings (see the accompanying article in this volume of *LD&C*). Here I outline highlights of the past ten years and set out possible directions the journal will be taking.

The past decade has seen great growth in the documentation of small languages and a corresponding increased attention to the urgency of recording as much as possible of the world's languages. Language maintenance efforts that use the outputs of language documentation are also increasing in number, with community-based language revitalization efforts occurring in all parts of the world.

LD&C has provided 340 free and high quality articles in the ten volumes published since it began in 2007, ensuring a broader audience than is possible with paid subscription journals. Our articles have had an amazing 630,447 downloads, with the most downloaded article having over 60,000 downloads.[1] We have taken advantage of online publishing to get articles out more quickly than traditional print journals can. This medium has also provided for both audio and video to be embedded in articles or made available to download. There is great potential for this intertwining of media and text to be increased in future.

The topics dealt with by our authors range from practical reflections on community-based language projects, to theoretical discussions around the nature of language documentation and conservation, to specific studies of aspects of an undescribed language, usually with media files provided. Some 40 technology reviews have covered the tools and methods typically used in fieldwork and analysis, including microphones, recorders, video cameras and software.

Themed sets of articles have included a focus on analyzing tone, a collection on Australian Aboriginal language centers, and language documentation in the Americas. We have also provided a venue for eleven Special Publications, often collections of papers but occasionally monographs, with another six currently in the queue. They are listed below and, while most titles are self-explanatory, the volume "Microphone in the mud" is a novel about fieldwork experiences in the Philippines which is also available as a print on demand book.[2]

*Thanks to Nikolaus Himmelmann, Lyle Campbell, Kenneth Rehg, and Toshihide Nakayama for comments on an earlier draft.

[1]See the latest statistics here: https://rebrand.ly/LDCstatistics

[2]https://www.amazon.com/Microphone-Mud-Laura-C-Robinson/dp/0985621133

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1. Documenting and revitalizing Austronesian languages
2. Fieldwork and linguistic analysis in indigenous languages of the Americas
3. Potentials of language documentation: Methods, analyses, and utilization
4. Electronic grammaticography
5. Melanesian languages on the edge of Asia: Challenges for the 21st century
6. Microphone in the mud
7. Language endangerment and preservation in South Asia
8. The art and practice of grammar writing
9. Language documentation and conservation in Europe
10. African language documentation: new data, methods and approaches
11. Mutsun-English English-Mutsun dictionary, mutsun-inkiS inkiS-mutsun riica pappel

The quality of submissions to *LD&C* has been very high, but as we become more widely known we have been attracting more submissions and necessarily cannot accept them all. In 2016 we rejected 14 proposed articles and published 18, with an additional four themed articles on archiving, two book reviews, one opinion piece, a technology review, and a "note from the field". Due to the quality of our articles, the standing of our Editorial Board, and the regular publication of our content, we are indexed by Scopus, ScienceOpen,[3] and are listed by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)[4] and by Sherpa Romeo,[5] all of which increase our reach and provide access to our content.

We have made a determined effort to include articles from outside of North America, Australia, and the UK, and we will continue that effort. We have 1,800 subscribers, and our Facebook page has 6,800 "likes".

What does the future hold for *LD&C*? There is clearly a great need for the kind of information we are publishing on topics related to documentation of languages, questionnaires and elicitation procedures, metadata entry and archiving, fieldwork methods and ethics, and the use of these materials in supporting revitalization or ongoing use of languages. We would like to increase the interdisciplinary content of articles, reflecting new methods in understanding the knowledge systems encapsulated in language. We also hope to increase the number of articles written by researchers from the Pacific, South America, Africa, and Asia.

Let us be realistic about how long it takes for the kinds of new methods discussed in *LD&C* to be adopted by a community of practice. While *LD&C* advocates for new and improved methods in documentation, the field is nevertheless lagging. The notion that better documentation methods will result in more robust linguistic analyses based in citable data has yet to be taken seriously by most field researchers. This can be seen in the amount of information held per language by archives in the Open Language Archives Community (OLAC).[6]

[3]https://rebrand.ly/ScienceOpenLDC
[4]https://rebrand.ly/doajLDC
[5]http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo
[6]This is summarised from the more detailed report that can be found here: http://www.paradisec.org.au/blog/2016/07/finding-what-is-not-there

Comparing that information with a list of all recent grammars of small languages, dating back fifty years (provided by Glottolog[7]) shows there are 1,708 grammars which have been produced since 1967, of which 1,253 are of languages that have fewer than 40 items in an OLAC archive. 300 of these languages have between 20 and 39 items in OLAC. 953 of these languages have between 1 and 19 items in OLAC, suggesting that for many languages, no records were archived by the researcher. If we consider the period since the development of theoretical work outlining the rationale for language documentation (post Himmelmann 1998) and including the major funding sources (DoBES[8] since 2000, ELDP[9] since 2002, NSF DEL[10] (ongoing)) and the appointment of academic posts specifically designated as being in the area of language documentation (notably at the University of Hawai'i), 683 grammars are listed as appearing since the beginning of 2000 in Glottolog. Of those languages, 292 have fewer than 10 items in an OLAC repository, 439 have 19 or fewer items in an OLAC repository, and 555 have 40 or fewer items in an OLAC repository. So, even in the era in which language documentation is gaining currency, there are still too few language recordings being archived. *LD&C* clearly has a continuing role to play in providing a venue for discussion of methods for incorporating better documentation into descriptive work, for reducing the effort required to produce well-described documentation, and for considering the impact of that work on future language maintenance projects.

We have always planned to include reviews of collections of primary language data as a way of recognizing the work that goes into making them (annotation, analysis, metadata creation and so on). We appointed a collections reviews editor and have published one collection overview, and we would like to see more submitted. We helped publicize the Boas prize,[11] promoted by ELDP and the Digital Endangered Languages and Musics Archives Network (DELAMAN). This prize recognizes collections built by early career researchers and results in a review of their collection being published in *LD&C*. We expect to see more linguistic analyses citing accessible primary sources, and have always encouraged the creation of citable data sources and supported efforts to provide primary data together with published work.

There is very little uptake of the potential that accessible archiving of primary data provides, both for academic research and for speech communities and the general public. We would like to encourage in-depth analyses (a phonology, a morphosyntactic analysis, not to mention a grammar) based on documentary materials collected by others. Note that this is standard practice when we are talking about printed legacy materials (Bibles, story books) from earlier centuries. No one has yet challenged published analyses on the basis of archived materials. There are a number of reasons for this, technology being among the more important, but working with archival materials is still cumbersome and fraught with technological failure. In supporting better interfaces to archival material and related issues, *LD&C* still has a lot to contribute.

[7] http://glottolog.org
[8] http://dobes.mpi.nl/dobesprogramme/
[9] http://www.eldp.net
[10] https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=12816
[11] http://www.delaman.org/delaman-franz-boas-award/

LD&C has also reported on the latest technological advancements in the field, with reviews of tools and discussions of methods for doing good documentation. The promise offered by automated speech recognition suggests that the currently time-intensive task of transcription may be greatly aided in the future by novel methods for building transcripts for many more hours of recordings than has previously been possible. The gaps in our current tools mean that many of us struggle with converting data from one format to another. There is a role for *LD&C* to air those problems and to try to encourage further work to improve in those areas.

It will become increasingly important to cite primary data in analyses and we are participating in efforts to develop citation standards in this area. To cite primary data, it must be in an archive. There are still too few language archives, so we want to help develop robust models of how to build new archives. Other transformational technologies will undoubtedly emerge in the near future and will be reported on through *LD&C*'s offerings.

As more and more language initiatives emerge, we support publication of work relating to language maintenance, conservation, and revitalization efforts. We particularly encourage submissions by community language activists. *LD&C* will continue to provide a venue for discussing best approaches to learning and promoting ancestral languages.

It is an exciting time and *LD&C* is contributing to the growing awareness of the need to support language activities. The journal helps to define language documentation and conservation as scholarly endeavors and to reflect the range of activity that is being undertaken to record and revitalize the world's small languages. As we move into our second decade I want to thank our founding Editor, Kenneth Rehg, for his vision for the journal and for setting its course, thank the Editorial Board for their guidance, and also thank our many reviewers who donate their time to support open access to high quality information. Finally, thanks to our readers for their continued interest which motivates our work.

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