

RELAZIONI

Language Documentation Workshop at UCSB (InField) – June 2008

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The University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) hosted the first InField – *Institute on Field Linguistics and Language Documentation* – with Carol Genetti as the Director. You can find more in-depth information at their website www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/faculty/infield which lists all the workshops and some of their resource materials. The workshop itself went for ten days (June 23-July 3, 2008) and then was followed by a four-week (July 7–August 1, 2008) field training session (working with local language speakers) similar to a field methods course where the participants were able to apply the skills learned in the workshop.

Personally, this was one of the most enjoyable workshops that I've attended recently – not only because of the excellent location right on the beach but also the very good

logistical organization by the Linguistic Department at UCSB. I appreciated the format of the conference – there were plenary sessions on general topics of interest to everyone, then plenary sessions on “best practices” (case studies) in language documentation, and then parallel sessions consisting of smaller groups to learn specific skills. The skills courses emphasis was on “hands-on” learning – i.e., how to make videos, how to use video editing software, how to make good audio recordings, learning how to use audio editing software, etc. Three workshop tracks were offered – 1) for language activists, 2) for students who were then taking the Field Training, and 3) linguists.

I found the ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) class (<http://www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan/>) particularly helpful in learning how to link transcriptions to audio and video media. This software comes free from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, Netherlands. It is an annotation tool that allows you to create, edit, visualize and search annotations for video and audio data. Initially it has been used quite a bit for sign language, but now is seeing more use with language data. It is similar to Toolbox in alignment of various layers (tiers) of data transcription and analysis, but adds the ability to view/ listen to the accompanying video and audio files. There are several nice features of using ELAN – 1) it creates an archival XML document linking your annotations (text) to the timeline of the media, 2) it is flexible enough to be used when you have a recording of either one speaker or multiple speakers (or multiple languages) all in one conversation video/ audio file, and 3) it allows import/ export to a range of other popular linguistic software and formats (such as Transcriber, Toolbox, CHILDES, etc).

Another fun aspect of this InField was that only about half of the 200+ participants were linguists. The other main group consisted of actual language speakers from minority/ endangered groups – what were called “language activists”. These people were not necessarily trained linguists, but they were passionate about maintaining, revitalizing, and promoting their heritage languages. This added quite a bit of personal enthusiasm to all the material that we were learning as the professional linguists intermingled with the people who were directly impacted by language documentation. Each day after lunch, a plenary session was devoted to one of these language groups presenting their “Model of Language Documentation and Revitalization”. Thus we were able to hear from 10 different people groups – such as the Maori in New Zealand, Hawaiian, Manx in the UK, and various native American groups in Canada and the US.

The next InField is planned for 2010 at the University of Hawaii (Kenneth Rehg – organizer) and then possibly the University of Oregon will be the host in 2012. Next year 12-14 March 2009, there will be a language documentation conference (<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ICLDC09/>) in Hawaii. This is billed as the *1st International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation* (ICLDC) and held at the Hawaii Imin International Conference Center, on the east side of the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa campus.