

INTRODUCTION

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This collection is intended to provide an overview of studies, methods and databases at the interface between linguistics and oral history research, and with a particular focus on minority languages and contact varieties. The inspiration for this interdisciplinary project originated in the workshop *Oral History Meets Linguistics* which was arranged by Bernd Kortmann, Stefan Pfänder and Katja Roller and took place in December 2015 at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS). At the workshop, a number of questions were addressed, including:

- What can linguistic approaches to oral history data look like?
- What challenges and opportunities do such archived data present for linguistics research?
- In which way can historians profit from close collaboration with linguists?
- Are there archived oral history materials currently unknown to linguists that could be useful for future research? Or, concomitantly, what about linguistic data that could be useful to oral historians?

A number of linguists, historians and anthropologists participated in the workshop, and benefited from the lively discussions and interdisciplinary exchange of ideas, resources and know-how.

In this, one thing became quite clear: linguists and historians stand to profit in multiple ways from close collaboration. However, no significant discourse between linguistics and oral history studies has really come to life in the literature. This collection attempts to close this gap by providing contributions from linguists concerning various target languages, as well as from historians and anthropologists, and in doing so, presenting a multifaceted interdisciplinary examination of approaches to orally remembered historical events.

In the first chapter, *Documenting Oral Histories in the Russian Far East*, Erich Kasten discusses text corpora for multiple aims and uses with examples of Itelmen, Koryak and Even texts that have been recorded by him and his team since the mid-1990s in Kamchatka. The focus is on a quest for new ways to transmit endangered languages and traditional knowledge to younger generations. The use of electronic media and archives on the internet facilitates open access and sustainability of the data. In addition to that, conventional print media and DVDs still serve, for the time being, important functions, especially in more remote places. In this, younger community members are encouraged to practice endangered vernacular and cultural knowledge

in recorded life histories in order to allow these to survive. Through such hybrid publication strategies, the language data can simultaneously be made available for different uses, such as the preservation of linguistic diversity within the community and for scientific research and comparative analyses by linguists, historians and cultural and social anthropologists.

The following chapter by Michael Rießler and Joshua Wilbur on *Documenting Endangered Oral Histories of the Arctic: A Proposed Symbiosis for Documentary Linguistics and Oral History Research, Illustrated by Saami and Komi Examples* argues that documentary linguistics can provide valuable resources for social science research, particularly for studies in anthropology and oral history. In this, the authors focus on an approach to collecting linguistic data on endangered languages using digital technologies that can make this useful data available outside of linguistics. With their thorough annotations and “thick” metadata the recordings from various Saami and Komi groups can be easily used not only for linguistic, but even for comparative historical research. This discussion can even be seen as a set of best-practice guidelines for digital archiving and publication of such data. Examples of oral histories in linguistic data are provided showing how similar political socioeconomic transitions which these specific communities went through over the past decades are documented. They conclude that both linguistics and oral history stand to benefit significantly from cooperative research.

Igor Krupnik’s and Lyudmila S. Bogoslovskaya’s chapter *Our Ice, Snow and Winds* shifts the focus to the Russian “Sea Ice Knowledge and Use” (SIKU) project. SIKU was the first scientific program in the Arctic that systematically collected indigenous nomenclatures for ice, snow, and weather phenomena in local languages and dialects. This documentation contains elders’ and hunters’ narratives on the use of sea ice, safety in ice hunting and traveling, and practices of ice- and weather forecasting. Similar to the approach in Kasten’s chapter, this addresses the practical aim of ensuring continued use of traditional knowledge under pressing problems such as the current challenges of climate change. While the bilingual lexicon (dictionary) of local ice terms illustrated in this chapter did not have a place in indigenous culture, it appeals to today’s hunters, elders, youth, teachers, ice scholars, linguists, and heritage specialists. This work relates directly to the recent book by Alexandra Lavrillier und Semen Gabyshev “An Arctic Indigenous Knowledge System of Landscape, Climate, and Human Interactions”, published in 2017 by the Kulturstiftung Sibirien, that discusses Evenki reindeer herders’ and hunters’ knowledge on the basis of their own vernacular.

Ophira Gamliel’s case study on *Fading Memories and Linguistic Fossils in Jewish Malayalam* relates to preceding chapters as it underpins the urgency to record endangered language data before it potentially falls into oblivion within in the near future. Similar to Kasten’s chapter, Gamliel shows through personal accounts how her awareness of this important issue increased and how she eventually became fully involved in this project. By relying on concrete linguistic findings, the paper chal-

lenges accepted and, arguably, biased notions regarding the oral history of Kerala Jews as reconstructed in foreign languages (Portuguese, English and Hebrew) from the late 17th century to the present. The chapter argues that the linguistic description of a castolect on the verge of extinction is crucial to the study of the sociocultural history of minority communities.

In her chapter on *Uncovering Indigenous Englishes through Oral Storytelling* with the example of the Witsuwit'en people from north central British Columbia, Sonya Kinsey clearly shows how a community tries to cope with the dramatic loss of their particular vernacular. Although language revitalization efforts are underway, they have not shown the expected results so far. During her fieldwork, Kinsey noticed that a break in dialectal language transmission often coincided with a break in cultural transmission—as is also demonstrated in Kasten's, as well as Krupnik and Bogoslovskaya's chapters. She emphasizes how traditional storytelling practices are at the heart of many indigenous communities, and are important modes of transmitting history and culture from one generation to the next.

This finding relates to the following chapter of this volume: Michael Dürr discusses the *Structural Study of Myth in the Light of Oral History and Linguistics* using the example of “La Geste d'Asdiwal” by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Referring to an iconic text collected in the heydays of early linguistic data collection on indigenous languages at the beginning of the 20th century, Dürr directs our attention to a closer linguistic analysis of the original text, an analysis that obviously has been neglected so far. He questions that characteristics or traits were selected as relevant for previous analyses which were based on Franz Boas' English translation. In contrast, these previous analyses are compared here with the information structure of the original Sm'alg̃yax text. Furthermore, through in-depth text analysis, the author reveals some implications in particular genres of stories, such as *adawx*, and discusses how the use of Sm'alg̃yax directional particles can lead to the core of structuralism.

Katja Roller's chapter on *Memories from Wales and their Implications for Corpus Linguistic (and Historical) Research* outlines how oral history interviews from Wales can be used for corpus linguistic analyses of Welsh English grammar. The study presented explores how consciously people from Wales and from London perceive different grammatical features of Welsh English (determined through questionnaires) and whether the features perceived more consciously are more frequent in spoken Welsh English. A positive correlation between the features' conscious perception and their usage frequency in Welsh English could be found, providing evidence for usage-based theories of language.

Apart from these linguistic implications, Roller argues that analyses of constructions such as the non-standard habitual progressive can also yield fruitful insights for oral historians, for example, in that they illustrate daily practices and routines at different times in (remembered) history. Roller also observes that in oral history collections speakers from a specific region do not necessarily speak the local dialect,

which can complicate the situation for the researcher. Kasten noticed the same in his material, when, after enforced relocations in later Soviet times, local groups “took their particular dialects with them” to new environments where the same language was spoken differently by others. Therefore, for precise language documentation, it is important to document the individual background of each speaker in the meta-data, including information on e.g. where the speaker’s family is from or may have migrated from in the past.

Annette Gerstenberg combines sources from linguistics and oral history research for the analysis in her chapter *A Difficult Term in Context: The Case of French STO*. The author makes use of two databases compiled in the 2000s with elderly French speakers: the linguistic corpus *LangAge* and the oral history collection *Zwangsarbeit / Forced Labor 1939–1945*. Based on these sources and data from newspaper archives she explores how the historical term *STO* (*Service du Travail Obligatoire*) is used and what meaning can be attributed to it in different contexts. Among other things, the author finds that *STO* referring to “a person doing Forced Labor” (as opposed to the common meaning “the institution of Forced Labor”) is mainly used by speakers with first-hand experience of working in *STO*. This suggests that specific shades of meaning of the term *STO* are constructed based on individual personal experiences.

In the concluding chapter on an *Interactional Understanding of Oral History Interviews*, Cord Pagenstecher and Stefan Pfänder bring together oral history, conversation analysis and interactional linguistics. This chapter studies dialog patterns in video-taped testimonies of Holocaust survivors. The biographical interviews are understood as the results of a recorded interaction: the narration and its layers of meaning are co-constructed in a working alliance between interviewer and narrator, with both participants using specific verbal and non-verbal resources. By analyzing examples of repetitions and of re-tellings within testimonies, the authors explore the potential of interdisciplinary cooperation between historians and linguists in understanding the dialogical character of oral history interviews.

The detailed analysis of linguistic and contextual implications of certain interview situations given in this last chapter relates to the broader issue of appropriate recording techniques that has been discussed thoroughly in some of the earlier chapters. Kinsey noticed that storytelling provides opportunities to record longer, uninterrupted samples of speech. Such stories are also more likely to contain authentic local constructions, providing a more comfortable natural type of response from indigenous speakers, as opposed to the standard question/answer format of many linguistic interviews. Kasten emphasizes how certain recording techniques can bias the outcome of documented oral histories, especially if they are geared towards aesthetic or commercial uses, in contrast to scientific and community needs that are clearly prioritized in the endeavors of the authors of this volume. However, as the discussion by Rießler and Wilbur has shown, even film projects can produce valuable data for such purposes, depending on the experience and interest in a reliable and trusting cooper-

ative relationship between the producer, the community and anthropologists. This is not always a given, as stressed by Anna Gossman-Stammler during her presentation at the Franco German Seminar “Gateway to the Arctic” at the Alfred Wegener Institute in Potsdam in November 2016. She had had similar rather negative experiences with a BBC film crew in Yakutia, as addressed in Kasten’s chapter. However, there are other more promising examples such as those demonstrated in the films by Christian Vagt and Stephan Dudeck, and by Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio, which were shown and discussed at the Berlinale film festival in 2017. These films often contain full soundtracks in the given Nenets languages and express indigenous views more clearly.

Rießler and Wilbur indicate that language documentation projects often include legacy data, and thus cover a greater time-span, which then allows for diachronic comparisons. The advantage of incorporating earlier text recordings for current analyses and—after modernizing their orthography—for community use is addressed in Kasten’s chapter with regard to the Kamchadal texts, recorded by Jochelson about 100 years ago. Around the same time, Henry Tate provided the “Story of Asdiwal” to Boas’s text collections of the First Nations of the Canadian Pacific Northwest that is discussed by Dürr. These forms of re-use direct our attention to the particular value of legacy data for revisited oral history and linguistic analysis with more advanced technical and methodological means, as well as for the repatriation of cultural knowledge in order to sustain endangered languages and cultural memories of the given people. It should also make us optimistic with regard to the future use of current data collections.

Finally, as Roller points out, a combination of linguistic and oral history approaches can give the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place in developing a richer understanding of the past, and in keeping it alive. This aspect has been the main concern in many contributions of this volume and may serve as common ground for further discussions on oral history and linguistics in the future.