

Reflecting and Shaping the Evolution of Documentary Linguistics: Nine Years of DocLing Workshops

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This paper discusses the evolution of the Documentary Linguistics Workshop (DocLing) organized by the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA) at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Held annually from 2008 to 2016, DocLing introduced nearly 200 students to the theory and methods of language documentation and made a unique contribution to the teaching of field linguistics in Japan, and to work on endangered and minority languages more generally. The changing nature of the workshops over time reflected changes in focus in the discourse surrounding language documentation.

Keywords: language documentation, training, ILCAA

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1. Origins of the workshop

The DocLing workshops arose from an initiative of Dr. Toshihide Nakayama at ILCAA who recognised that there were many young linguistics scholars in Japan who were undertaking ambitious and widely ranging fieldwork on endangered and minority languages, but who were receiving little or no formal training explicitly aimed at equipping them for modern fieldwork in documenting such languages (see Nakayama, this volume). This paper gives an overview of nine annual cohorts of these linguists and their projects, and the evolution of an innovative training curriculum and methods that were significantly shaped by the responses and unique needs of these researchers, at

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the same time as the field of language documentation itself was developing at its most rapid pace.

Dr. Nakayama initially called on the expertise of Professor Peter K. Austin and David Nathan, both alumni of ILCAA from the 1990s, but more importantly who were key trainers in the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (HRELP) at SOAS University of London. HRELP brought together a postgraduate academic program in Language Documentation and Description under the leadership of Peter Austin (ELAP), a digital language archive led by David Nathan (ELAR), and a granting program ELDP, together constituting the world's largest assemblage of activity and innovation on documenting endangered languages for the decade from 2003 onwards. At SOAS, Nathan and Austin realised that the potential of combining the intellectual foundations and teaching experience of the academic program, the technical and methodological strengths of the archive team, and the fostering of documenters through the granting program - all with significant international linkages and collaborations - would provide the ideal platform for training a "new breed" of language documenters. This also paralleled developments elsewhere such as the USA-based summer school InField which also had a significant focus on documenting endangered languages. Austin and Nathan, together with others in their teams and external guest experts, developed and ran the ELDP grantee training sessions in London from 2004 onwards, held once or twice a year for groups of 15–20, typically organised by the ELAR archive team under the auspices of ELDP.

This depth and breadth of experience seemed to meet the goals of Dr. Nakayama. While ILCAA has its main strength in field research across Asia, the SOAS team brought experience in teaching and training, as well as a certain international perspective (since it seems fair to say that some parts of Japanese academia are somewhat insular). And of course they also brought their already developed training curricula, materials, and methods. Additionally, both Austin and Nathan had some experience living in Japan and working in Japanese universities and with Japanese students.¹

2. The early workshops

The first DocLing workshop took place over 4 days from 14–17 February 2008. It largely followed the model of the HRELP workshops, with this simple program (see below), where Day 1 introduced notions of language documentation, a practice largely unknown in Japan at the time, Day 2 focused on audio and related techniques and

¹ Austin studied Japanese at the Australian National University in the 1970s. Later, Austin held a post of Visiting Foreign Professor at ILCAA in 1996–1997. Nathan also held a post of Visiting Foreign Professor at ILCAA in 1997–1998. Nathan subsequently was Foreign Professor at the University of Tsukuba from 2002–2004. Anthony Jukes who joined the team later also had some experience in Japan and had learned Japanese at the University of Melbourne.

technologies, Day 3 on data management and linguistic annotation and processing, while Day 4 covered a variety of associated topics that were treated, at the time, as less core to the values and methodologies of documentary linguistics.

Thursday 14	Friday 15	Saturday 16	Sunday 17
Visiting lecturers meet the students	Audio principles	Data management & formats	Grant writing OR Mobilisation
Defining documentation; the documentation process	Audio practical	Data practical; metadata	Ethics & IP
Corpus creation	Transcriber	Toolbox	Archiving
Form work-groups	Audio evaluation & discussion	Dictionaries (advanced Toolbox & Lexique Pro)	Wrap up

As the courses evolved, planning took into account the opportunities as well as the constraints of holding them at ILCAA in Tokyo. Through the lifespan of the courses, we enjoyed the very capable support from the LingDy office for the logistics of advertising for and screening candidates, organising travel and accommodation, arranging welcome and other social events, and booking rooms.

There was initially very little training equipment, which, we learned, was due to a quite different approach to equipping researchers for fieldwork in Japan vs that with which we were familiar with in the UK and elsewhere. While the typical UK-based postgraduate student would generally rely on their department or funding source to provide field equipment, we learned that equivalent Japanese students had to find their own means and equipment, and we heard more than once of students who had worked in fast food restaurants to save up to buy their own audio recorders, laptops and other field equipment. In turn, this meant that their equipment was not always optimally chosen, nor was training and support available for its use - a situation amplified by the generally individualistic and solitary research practices typical of Japanese academia. This meant that for the earlier workshops, we needed to transport rather large cases of training equipment from London, although by mid-way through the series, ILCAA had acquired their own excellent range of equipment. Thus, and still focusing on the audio component, while for students at our UK and European workshops, sessions on audio tended to set high challenges for participants in terms of understanding microphone attributes and psychoacoustics, those at DocLing seemed to offer many participants

starker revelations about the possibility of selecting different microphones.

On the other hand, the individualistic nature of Japanese scholarship meant that students tended to be more self-reliant than comparable UK students, and as a result it very quickly became routine that participants would turn up to the courses with their own fieldwork kit, even if with limited training in its use.

One of ILCAA's goals in establishing DocLing was to give Japanese participants the opportunity of exposure to international trends and practices, and in the second course, in 2009, this was expanded though establishing an open public lecture as a flagship part of the training event. In 2009, David Nathan gave the first such lecture, based on his team's work in London, *Archiving endangered language materials*.

The 9 year span of DocLing was a hefty portion of the timespan over which documentary linguistics itself developed, and the evolution of DocLing itself provided a microcosm of that development.

3. Social program

The DocLing workshops had a number of social aspects. Although they brought together mainly Japanese participants, these came from various universities across Japan, and, in addition, there was a regular sprinkling of participants from other countries such as China, Finland, France, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, Mongolia, Myanmar, Russia (including Republic of Buryatia and Tuvan Republic), Taiwan, USA, Ukraine, and Vietnam. The LingDy office typically organised welcoming events and a workshop-final party. The increasing emphasis on group work (see Section 5) encouraged participants to get to know each other, share experiences, meet and work outside the formal workshop hours, and to keep in contact afterwards. Some participants went on to enrol in courses at Peter and David's university, several undertook some kinds of ongoing collaboration, and many are still contacts via social media such as Facebook. However, the workshops' greatest social accomplishment is that they introduced two people (one as participant, another as group consultant/leader) who subsequently married and have had (so far) two children.

4. Staff

Staffing of the workshops grew steadily. Initially the workshops were taught exclusively by Peter Austin and David Nathan. They were capably supported by several ILCAA staff, including Hideo Sawada, Toshihide Nakayama, and the LingDy office headed by secretary Sachiko Yoshida. In 2010, Anthony Jukes, then at La Trobe University, joined the "permanent" team bringing his various skills including fieldwork methodology, linguistic software, media production and a variety of Indonesian contacts. Then in 2013, especially in the context of growing collaboration with Indonesian colleagues, Sonja Riesberg (Cologne University) joined the team and added

strong experience in remote fieldwork, community-oriented research, and linguistic analysis and corpus creation.

The ILCAA Japanese staff also gradually joined the teaching effort over the project lifetime, with Hideo Sawada adding sessions on the use of photography in language documentation, Toshihide Nakayama on documenting conversations and Honoré Watanabe on fieldwork techniques. Finally, the workshop also occasionally included some ‘guest’ presenters, including Nikolaus Himmelmann, John Bowden, Iku Nagasaki, and Anna Berge.

5. Group projects

The most unique aspects of the workshop series were the increasing emphasis on group work, the facilitation of that group work by language specialists, and the evolution of the group activities from year to year. The idea of using groups as a locus of learning is not, of course new, and was already a core part of the training practice at HRELP and elsewhere. However, it is not merely a stereotype that in Japanese academia, people typically tend to work and study in solitary ways. While it is beyond the scope of this article to speculate how such solitary ways fit with a Japanese ethnography, a majority of our participants consistently reported that they had never before engaged in group activities, despite many of them being postgraduate students and academic staff. Group work started tentatively in the first couple of years, more or less as an experiment. David in particular was a driver for this work, drawing on his experience a few years earlier as an English professor at Tsukuba University, and many techniques he learnt from a high-impact teacher of Mandarin Chinese, Dr. Meili Fang. Several of these techniques involved providing the right balance between motivation, instruction, and theatrics in order to catalyse participation against the background of Japanese reticence to hold forth “*deru kui wa utareru*”.

In earlier workshops, group activities were rather like university linguistics Field Methods sessions. Group activities were preceded by formal classroom sessions on language documentation methods and tools (recording and software). Then, groups of 3 to 5 participants were each assigned a speaker of a language unknown to the participants (in the earlier years, these were mostly Mongolian speakers who were students at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), and the groups attempted to “document” some feature(s) of their consultant’s language using the methods and tools they were exposed to in the more formal sessions.

Over the workshop series, we made several changes to this basic structure. Firstly, we made the group sessions more task- and outcome-based, so that the last afternoon was devoted to group presentations of their findings. We refined this to make the group activities more explicitly in the style of projects, so that groups were asked to prepare plans, negotiate roles, and present their plans to the class, thus providing a broader experience of working in teams. In fact, many of the participants reported in their

evaluations that this team-based work was not only their first experience of such activity but also the most stimulating, valuable and transforming aspect of the workshops (for examples of participant feedback, see the final section of this paper).

The next refinements, following trends in language documentation through the late 2000s, were to swing the major emphasis away from the more descriptive and formal linguistic side of documentation to more community-contextualised, humanistic and holistic approach to language documentation. We set this path through two mechanisms: firstly, by changing the roles and relationships with the groups' language consultants, and secondly by setting requirements on the group project goals. By 2012, the LingDy project was increasing its links with Indonesian linguists, and we were fortunate to have a cohort of four such linguists who could play the role of consultants to the groups. However, together with these linguists, we decided to adopt a kind of *realpolitik*, such that rather than "pretend" to be naive language consultants, these linguists would work with groups not only as language speakers but also as experts on their communities' language needs and contexts, and indeed as group *leaders* rather than servants of the groups. In addition, we prescribed that each group's project should include a community-oriented aspect, along a sociolinguistic, pedagogical, advocacy, or ethnolinguistic theme.

The teaching staff also provided assistance to the groups, as facilitators. In some cases, teachers were assigned to groups in order to provide particular skills to complement the groups' project goals. For example, those with an emphasis on video generally had access to Anthony Jukes who has experience with video; those who were developing websites had the assistance of David Nathan who is an experienced web developer.

Here is a description of the group work as presented to participants in the *DocLing Handbook 2016*:

Practical group projects are an important part of the workshop. They provide a way to embed practical, specific, advanced techniques in a practical, holistic activity. Course participants work together in their group, with a consultant and staff, to practise and to further develop the skills covered in the formal sessions. Project work focuses on exploring language documentation through:

- *roles and skills in group work*
- *planning in relation to documentation contexts and goals*
- *understanding workflow and documenting decisions*
- *collaboratively working towards concrete outcomes*

Each group will give a public presentation describing their methods and presenting their documentation outcomes.

Groups will consist of approx 4 participants. Each group will be allocated a language consultant, and a staff member. The consultant will assist and advise the groups on language and community aspects, and the staff member will act as a mentor and help with skills. Each group will work to a specific theme, such as documenting a linguistic genre or feature, designing pedagogical materials, planning a project grant application, writing a sociolinguistic description etc. On the final day of the workshop, each group gives a public presentation about their planning, activities, decisions, outcomes, problems, and potential future work.

The central role of group work can be seen in the program for DocLing 2016, which spanned 6 days (8–13 February). Group work related sessions fill 12 of the 24 session slots.

	10:00–11:20	11:40–13:00	14:00–15:20	15:40–17:00
Mon	Introduction to language documentation (PA)	Methods, materials & genres (SR, JB, TN)		Mobilisation: audience research & design (DN, AJ)
Tue	Ethics (PA)	Data management & archiving (lecture & practical) (DN)		Group projects startup: assign groups, themes, consultants, mentors
Wed	Audio (AJ, DN)	Software (PA)	Discussion forum - roles, languages & communities	Group work - plan & report
Thu	Still and moving image (HS, AJ) & discussion	Group clinic (topics as required)	Group work (facilitated)	
Fri	Discussion forum - documentation theory & methods	Group clinic (topics as required)	Group work (facilitated)	
Sat	Group work: finalise products and presentations		Group project presentations, Closing session	

As a result of this evolution, the workshops increasingly resulted in group projects completing resources that were of enduring and shareable value, and several of them were published on the web. Several examples can be seen at <http://www.el-training.org/outcomes/index.php#docling2015> and <http://www.el-training.org/outcomes/index.php#docling2016>.

A feature of the group work component was the afternoon of final presentations, held on the final afternoon of the workshop. The afternoon consisted of presentations from each group. Each group member was expected to contribute to the presentation, and the aims of the presentation were for the group to explain their plans, methods, difficulties faced, and to demonstrate the outcomes of their group sessions. More broadly, our motivations for requiring presentations were to (a) amplify the learning by sharing experiences and outcomes across all groups, (b) emphasise that language documentation and working with communities had broader practical applications and outcomes than narrow linguistic description and analysis, and (c) to round out the (for many) unique experience for Japanese scholars of working in collaboration and public speaking.

The presentation afternoons tended to take on a slightly festive atmosphere, fed by the adrenalin of working to a deadline and presenting in public and on occasion, to the culmination of groups' rather intense interactions over the week and impending departure, and some theatrics on the part of the teaching staff.

Another factor that made the workshops exciting was that, since the courses were rather autonomous, and not part of any accredited or mandated curriculum, we could experiment with content and activity structures. For example, in 2012, we ran an "experimental" group activity stream as a kind of distributed corpus preparation. Each group elicited and documented some language material, and in addition were tasked with negotiating and co-operating with other groups in order to understand the structural conventions and data management used by other groups so that they could interchange and combine the materials created by each individual group. Final presentations involved each group presenting the way that they had combined all the materials of the other groups with their own. The presentations were both impressive and diverse, with different but valid and creative approaches taken by each group.

The final DocLing saw a further development in the complementarity between the formal teaching sessions and the group work. In line with some trends in language documentation away from narrow emphasis on technical linguistic description and analysis, particularly a near-obsession with morphologically glossed written text, we decided to drop the formal sessions on some software tools (such as ELAN, Toolbox), and rather facilitate skills in these tools within the group work for those groups whose projects utilised them. In a small way, this change might be taken to represent the completion in a generational cycle of thinking about language documentation practice, evolving it from a bolting-on of some humanistic aspects (e.g. ethics, advocacy, pedagogy) to "classic" linguistic description and analysis, to a set of practices more

truly committed to responding to language endangerment.

6. Impacts and outcomes

Finally, after the conclusion of the workshop series, we are left to consider the impact and outcomes of the workshops. Perhaps the most revealing perspectives are those of the participants themselves, and we begin this section with selections from the feedback that we received from participants. The DocLing team emphasised continual improvement through seeking feedback from participants, both through discussion during the final wrap-up session, and follow-up surveys.²

Participants let us know about specific things they had valued learning, especially those which they had previously struggled with:

“I learned differences between language archiving and descriptive linguistics, whereas both of them compliment each other”

“I always have a problem with data management. Attending the lectures help me to solve my problem”

They frequently noted topics and concepts that were quite new to them. One frequently occurring feedback item was about the participants’ previous unfamiliarity with all aspects of audio recording and their surprise at how much they had gained from learning about it:

“Before attending the work shop I only focused on recording necessary materials since I recognized audio data as merely an option to carry out descriptive language; however, I learned that it is very important to focus on a good sound quality as well”

And other ‘discoveries’:

“It was new to know that there is no such thing like an “idealistic documentation””

“An idea about finding supporters after making the locals understand what the researcher does in the field was very new to me”

“Although I was not interested in creating materials for language education, I found out it was more exciting than I thought and I discovered I can create educational materials that can be used by others”

Some very useful feedback let us know how effective (or ineffective) our teaching was:

“I think the ethical issues are really difficult to deal with because we have to learn legal issues to clarify the problems. However I could enjoy learning this

² Note that we have lightly edited some of the feedback responses to improve readability.

topic because it was more like a quiz program. I think it is an interesting and probably the best way to learn each case. It was a lot of fun”

“I was glad to learn little about XML. The demonstration about making xml files on excel was very easy to understand”

The most enthusiastic comments were about group project work, in particular because it was often a novel or even first experience of collaboration for Japanese students and researchers:

“Group discussion was a good training for us because we could learn so many things from each other, which was a refreshing experience”

“It was a great experience to listen to the presentation of other groups in terms of being able to learn the way to approach each issue from different aspects”

“I thought it would be so fantastic if I could work with my teammates when I actually work on archiving everyday!”

“This was the best part. I had to come to terms with my weakness, realized how group projects are productive, stimulating and challenging. More could have been done but it’s not easy to be perfectly coordinated with people you just met a few days before. Overall, I learnt a lot from all the participants. This is a rewarding experience personally and professionally”

“The highlight of this workshop is the project work”

“It is the most enjoyable part of this workshop. We are very lucky to have great consultants, and also we are happy to be a team with other students”

And of course for some, group work presented new challenges:

“The difficulties in making communications internationally with people who do not have same mother tongue”

Some comments noted that previous suggestions for improvement that had been addressed:

“Since I participated in the previous DocLing 2011, I found the lecturers improved the direction of the project work. Last year the participants had to start from choosing topics and we had too many things to manage. However, this year the topic was already given and it was clear what to record, so we could concentrate on recording and data management”

Participants frequently expressed wishes for more hands-on time:

“Lectures were great but I would like to have a more time for practical sessions”

Some expressed deeper wisdoms and transformations:

“I knew that the technical methods of documentation are important so at first I

thought this workshop could be a good opportunity for me to learn how to record the language. However, it was a great discovery for me to know that it's much more important to understand what for we are recording the language"

"And the fact, or point of view, that language documentation and language description is not separate but connected was very interesting and enlightening for me. I think from my mind that it was very important step for me to have attended this seminar"

Very encouraging resolutions were made:

"In order to make a first step for managing data, I am going to organize my metadata"

Some feedback was disarmingly frank, perhaps illustrating differences between Japanese and western cultural and expected teaching styles:

"[following] my first experience of fieldwork, it was so instructive that I reflected my failures and learned important lessons. For example audio quality and detailed metadata are quite important. If I failed them, the irreplaceable materials would be lost. Especially when You Mr. Nathan told me face to face that the MP3 data I have was awfully bad and you looked a little angry about that recording, I felt my responsibility as a linguist by actual meaning. I will pay much more attention to record the sound materials with the best quality I can. I won't forget to write metadata"

Overall, feedback indicated a very high level of satisfaction with content, delivery and their learning, and especially appreciative of teacher input, possibly because that is a less frequent phenomenon in Japan:

"The advisers who had continuously supported our groupwork were great and kind. They are experts and continuously offered us the knowledge and skills to solve with the problems we faced. They helped us experiencing each activity regarding documentation and fieldwork. I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for their support"

Other measures of impact relate to the sheer reach of the workshops. Participants, although largely Japanese, also came from a range of other countries including Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Russia, Mongolia, Ukraine, Finland, France, Indonesia, Italy, Tuvan Republic, and the USA. And these participants were working on an even wider range of languages, including various Japanese dialects, Ainu, Ryukyuan, Uilta (Russia), Southern Min (China, Taiwan), Tibetan, Bende (Tanzania), Yakut (Russia), Mongolian, Korean, Persian, Basque (France), Kurdish, Turkmen, Coptic (Egypt), Swahili (Tanzania), Urdu (Pakistan), Dhivehi (Maldives), Roma (Czech), Breton (France) and several Indonesian languages.

The research and careers of many participants were aided by the workshops. For example, Robert Laub went on to complete his MA in Language Documentation and Description at SOAS University of London; Anna Bugaeva became a recipient of ELDP funding for documentation of Ainu language and collaborative project with the Endangered Languages Archive; and Michinori Shimoji went on to further document Ryukyuan languages. Those who participated as consultants also reported many positive outcomes, not just the chance to visit Tokyo (for some Indonesian visitors their first time to see snow) but also to learn more about their own languages, to learn the skills of language documentation, and to build links and friendships with the students and LingDy staff (see Yanti, this volume).

More broadly, the workshops cemented and initiated collaborations between ILCAA and other institutions, for example with SOAS University of London, and also with the University of Hong Kong, which has now seen a number of exchange events with the LingDy project. Many of the Indonesian consultants also played central roles in organizing the LingDy workshops across Indonesia which grew out of DocLing (see Jukes and Shiohara, this volume).

There are, of course, also some enduring teaching materials, most of which have been made public via the web. Several of these can be found at the following locations:

- <http://lingdy.aacore.jp/en/activity/docling.html>
- <http://www.el-training.org/courses/docling/2016/>
- <http://www.el-training.org/courses/docling/2015/>

And especially the participants' group work outcomes:

- <http://www.el-training.org/outcomes/index.php#docling2015>
- <http://www.el-training.org/outcomes/index.php#docling2016>

In the final years of the workshops, David and Anthony prepared handbooks for participants, elaborating on the program, content of sessions, links to further reading, and in particular with more detailed information about the group projects. These handbooks also help to leave a documented legacy of the workshops. But far more importantly, as a result of the DocLing workshops nearly 200 scholars have become wiser and better equipped for the important task of documenting endangered languages throughout the world.