

Role of an Archive

Peter Wittenburg, Peter Austin, Helen Dry

This is just a list of topics that are relevant in our eyes for discussing the role and task of language archives. It is intended as a kind of common reference for the speakers of the special session about language archives. We have clustered the questions loosely into groups, but these groupings are not meant to impose an order of discussion or restrict the presenters in any way. Speakers should feel free to select discussion points from any group and/or to mention other relevant issues.

1. The Role of an Archive

- a. What are the key tasks of an archive?
- b. Who are the people involved (consultants, researchers, archivist, users¹, funds, ...) and how should their roles be delimited?
- c. Who should be the archivist? Is the best archivist a linguist, a computer scientist, a different species, ...?
- d. Is providing online availability of information important and/or necessary?
- e. Is convenient presentation² a task of the archivist? Or of the user? If the user, what should the archive do to facilitate this?
- f. Is uniformity required and if yes at what level?
- g. How much does the Web change the rules of the game³?

2. Accessibility

- a. Is it acceptable to require a certain access tool or does the archivist have to be neutral?
- b. What level of access should be given to the resources and the information about the resources (metadata)?
- c. Can we make a difference between media resources and textual data types in terms of their open accessibility?
- d. Does media (audio and video) in archives have to be digital?

3. Availability:

- a. Given that providing long-term availability is a task, how to achieve it?
- b. How many generations can we reasonably expect to make use of these archives?
- c. What kinds of guarantees can we give today wrt long-term availability?
- d. What are the implications of technological developments for the possibility to giving long-term guarantees in the future?

4. Technical Concerns

- a. Which data types⁴ have to be supported and how?

¹ Which groups of users are addressed (linguists, ethnologists, teachers, journalists, the public, ...)

² With convenient presentation an elaborated special purpose selection of the material is meant such as a nicely designed web-site with much commentary or a special CDROM

³ There is increasingly much data at different places about the same topic. For example: Linguists may visit a community to record the language. But TV teams make recordings about more sensational aspects of the culture where that language is spoken. Do we have to combine these different sorts of information?

- b. Is the archive managing static data or is the data dynamic? If dynamic, how to deal with this over longer periods of time?
 - c. Does an archive need to rely on standards? If so, do we have the right standards and how long will they hold?
 - d. Do we need interoperability between archives and if yes on which level?
 - e. How can we achieve interoperability?
 - f. What to do with strange formats? Do we have to bring them to a “standard format” or do we leave them as they are?
- 5. Legal and Ethical issues**
- a. Are we faced with legal and ethic problems and if yes how seriously do archivists have to take them?
 - b. Can we protect the material against mis-usage? Can we afford the costs?
 - c. Is an archive obliged to take everything offered (if it is in the thematic scope) or can it refuse to take material? In the latter case, for what reasons?

⁴ Data Types stands for the variety of documents which can occur in language documentation and research such as annotated recordings, wordlists, dictionaries, grammar descriptions, field notes, ethnographic descriptions, music notes, series of photos, etc