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Documenting Endangered Languages

Achievements and Perspectives

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This volume is dedicated to Ulrike Mosel,
in recognition of her contribution towards documenting
the world's endangered languages.

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Chapter 9
Retelling data: Working on transcription[*]

Dagmar Jung and Nikolaus P. Himmelmann

1. Introduction

Transcribing narrative and conversational speech is a core activity of all linguistic fieldwork, though one of the less attractive ones. Neither linguists nor speakers are generally very keen to spend long hours on this task. Nevertheless, it is without doubt one of the most important tasks to be carried out in the field requiring close cooperation between speaker(s) and researcher(s).

Given its significance, it is somewhat surprising how little attention this task receives in the literature. When transcription is mentioned, if at all, in field method books and articles, the focus is usually on phonetic aspects, i.e. questions relating to the proper representation of sounds and the distinction between broad and narrow transcription. Occasionally, there are a few additional notes on general procedure, as conveniently summarized in Chelliah and de Reuse (2011: 434–435). A notable exception here is Crowley (2007: 137–141) who discusses practicalities of transcribing a fairly large amount of narrative and conversational speech that go beyond the problems of basic procedure and properly capturing sound. Likewise, the current chapter is exclusively concerned with the conceptual and interpersonal issues arising when working on transcriptions of continuous text, for which usually some type of practical orthography (broad transcription) will be used.

We will not repeat Crowley's very useful observations and suggestions here. But we want to emphasize the point that text transcription has to be carried out in close cooperation with native speakers, and this usually means: in the field. It may be possible for a researcher to transcribe some parts of a text recording independently at a stage when one has achieved a certain mastery

of the language – enough, for example, to engage in simple conversational exchanges. However, it will almost never be possible to fully transcribe a recording, as there will always be sections where articulation is poor or very fast, major noise interferences occur, or new words or constructions are being used. Hence a serious attempt should be made to transcribe (and translate) as many recordings in the field as possible, unless it is also possible to work with native speakers at home.

Successful transcription thus essentially depends on a productive collaboration and interaction between researcher and native speaker. The productivity of this interaction may be hampered by a number of pitfalls which are the main concern of this chapter. In Section 2, we will first review some basic conceptual and practical issues which need to be carefully considered to ensure a productive transcription collaboration. Section 3 will then survey and systematize the different strategies native speakers may adopt when responding to the nontrivial challenges arising for them when engaging in transcription, focusing on aspects of (lack of) cooperation and typical changes applied to the recorded speech in the transfer to a written representation.

This chapter, thus, contributes to two interconnected topics in documentary linguistics. The first topic pertains to the idea that fieldwork should be conceived of as a cooperative learning enterprise between speaker(s) and researcher(s), as argued in detail by Mosel (2006). Here the important point is that researchers need to have a clear understanding of what kinds of demands they are putting on their collaborators and to see where the interests and goals of the two parties involved may diverge or even stand in opposition to each other. The second topic pertains to the idea that working on transcription may lead to the emergence of a new linguistic variety, as it involves the creation of a new written language. This is particularly true in those instances where recorded texts are carefully edited for publication in a local (e.g. educational) context, a process documented, perhaps for the first time, in a rigorous way in Mosel's work on Teop (cp. Mosel 2004, 2008). But it actually also occurs in similar, though less systematic ways in transcription, as we will document here.

Both topics, incidentally, provide further arguments for the proposal that the transcription process itself should be documented as fully as practically feasible. That is, ideally it should also be recorded, as was the standard practice within the Beaver Athapaskan language documentation project in Northern Alberta, Canada, from which all data in this chapter are drawn (Jung et al.

2004–present).[1] Without such a recording, the kinds of examples we discuss here would not be available.

2.   Basic conceptual and practical issues

To begin with, it will be useful to keep in mind that transcription is a metalinguistic activity generally not part of the speaker's and the linguist's normal linguistic repertoire. That is, there is no natural linguistic behavior involving an activity that can be said to be parallel to what is involved when transcribing recordings of continuous speech. Stenography, which has some semblances to transcription but differs considerably in purpose and focus, is a highly specialized activity as well, requiring a great deal of training and practice.

A more widespread and, in literate societies, more natural activity which may have some, but rather remote, semblances to transcription is note-taking in a meeting or a class, which may include the occasional literal transcription of a short segment of the contribution by a current speaker. But taking notes is primarily concerned with capturing the content of what is being said, not with providing a precise transcript of it. The 'natural' focus on content seen here also underlies a number of typical problems occurring in collaborative work on transcription, as is further discussed in Section 3.

The relative unnaturalness of transcription is due to two facts. First, it presupposes writing. Though literate practices are now widely found even in societies without a literary tradition, the very fact that writing is not a universal modality of linguistic communication (unlike speaking and signing) contributes to the special status of transcription. Second, and related to the first fact, transcription involves a transfer from one modality into another one. Such modality transfers are generally rare in linguistic behavior, the translation of spoken into signed language (or vice versa) probably being the only type of transfer occurring in nonliterate societies. Literate societies add reading aloud and dictation as widely used techniques in the acquisition of literacy.

As there are no natural models for transcription, it follows that transcription practices need to be established in accordance with the specific purposes a transcript is intended to serve. Or, to put this slightly differently, transcription is theory, as argued by Ochs (1979). In this classic paper, Ochs makes

a number of important observations. We repeat here only the most important and relevant one for our purposes: transcription always involves reduction and thus selection. It is practically impossible to represent a given speech event in its entirety in writing. This would have to include, for example, minute details of articulation, gestures, facial expression, etc. Apart from being unfeasible, any kind of transcription trying to capture as many features of the speech event as possible would actually defeat its purpose, as it would be very difficult to parse. That is, the goal of transcription is reduction, i.e. making those aspects of a complex speech event accessible that are of major relevance to the user of the transcript.

The transcripts typically produced in language documentation and description serve the purpose of making recordings of continuous speech accessible for further analysis, including, for example, morphosyntactic analysis. For this type of analysis, phonetic detail is usually not relevant, which is the reason why a broad transcription, using a practical orthography, is generally sufficient. What is relevant, however, is the segmentation of the continuous stream of speech into chunks of different sizes (words, intonation units). This segmentation has to make use of native speaker intuition (in particular with regard to the word level, see Peterson, this volume) and involves preliminary analytical hypotheses as to the relevant chunking units (see Himmelmann (2006) for further discussion of this rarely explicitly discussed aspect of transcription). This in turn means that transcripts have to be repeatedly revised in line with the better understanding of the relevant units obtained through ongoing analysis.

A further evident consequence of the fact that transcription is a theory-dependent project not part of anyone's basic linguistic repertoire is the fact that transcription has to be learned and practiced, both by the researcher and the native speakers collaborating in the task. As a rule, researchers should have transcribed a recording in their own language before setting out on the task of transcribing a recording in the field. Among other things, this will help them to have a clear understanding of the demands they are placing on the native speakers they engage for collaboration in this task. Additionally, it will help them comprehend the different kinds of reactions they will encounter when searching for transcription collaborators, to which we now turn.

As with almost all other activities involved in field-based language documentation and description (cf. Mosel 2006, Seifart, this volume), native speakers will differ quite significantly in their aptness for, and interest in, the

task of transcription. Given that it is an unnatural task, it should not come as a surprise that a very common, if not the most common, reaction is great reluctance to collaborate in this task, even from speakers who are happy to engage in other tasks such as providing example sentences for dictionary entries or grammaticality judgments, or compiling complex paradigms or taxonomies.

The reasons for such reluctance include: the unwillingness or inability to listen to chunks of the recording; declaring the recorded item impossible to understand; unwillingness or inability to repeat segments of the recording in such a way that they can be written down; lack of time. The reluctance to engage in transcription may also be based on an evaluation of the recorded discourse (or a part of it) in terms of correctness (not proper language), appropriateness (that is not how one can say this in these circumstances) or irrelevance (not worthy of being committed to writing). Such evaluations, in turn, are part of, or result from, the set of basic attitudes speakers have with regard to the variety being used and they display consciousness of linguistic norms, which appear to exist in all societies, even in ones without formally established standard varieties. The underlying system of attitudes is usually very difficult to untangle and, in the case of the Beaver data discussed in this chapter, we lack independent evidence for this system. We will therefore refrain from trying to link specific examples to basic attitudes, but for almost all examples in Section 3 it will be clear that some notion of perceived linguistic value is at play also in those instances where speakers engage in transcription but apply changes to the original record.

Finding good collaborators for transcription will thus often be quite challenging. However, it is usually not the case that in a given field situation there are very many options to choose from, and hence one has to find ways to make the best of the options available. Perhaps the most important qualification for becoming a collaborator in transcription – apart from being a reasonably fluent speaker of the language – is the willingness and ability to learn something new, i.e. to listen to small chunks of continuous speech and repeat them so that they can be written down (or, write them down oneself). Here transcription differs from many other activities required in language documentation and description where experience and a high level of linguistic skills and insight are essential. For transcription, it may often be useful to collaborate with younger speakers able and willing to learn the task, even if they no longer have a full command of the language. Difficult and unclear

segments must then be checked with more experienced speakers, who may lack the patience or interest to collaborate on this task for more extensive time periods.

It is not necessary, and in fact often not desirable, to work on transcription with the speaker who appears in the recording. While the speaker probably has a relatively clear idea of what she wanted to say, this does not mean that she is particularly good at listening to and restating precisely what was actually said. In fact, speakers involved in the recorded speech event are sometimes more likely to engage in the correcting and extension activities discussed in Section 3 than non-participating speakers. Furthermore, listening to one's own voice in a recording can be disturbing as it sounds quite different from what one hears when speaking and because one may feel embarrassed about dysfluencies, speech errors and other kinds of imperfections in one's own speech.

As transcription is not only an unnatural but also a very time consuming and tedious task which requires practice and dedication, it is the task that is perhaps most work-like of all the activities involved in field-based language documentation and description. It is thus also the task that is best approached in a work-like arrangement, characterized by regular working hours and a salary/remuneration in line with local practices, if such arrangements are at all possible in the community. Transcription is ideally done in an office-like setting, with adequate furniture and a low noise level, so that one can fully concentrate on the listening and interpretation task.

Work-like arrangements also provide for the option of independent transcription, i.e. a native speaker works by her/himself on the transcription of recordings. This, of course, presupposes that the speaker is able to handle the technical aspects of playback (ideally using a laptop, otherwise an audio player). It also involves some training and, crucially, regular supervision and checking. The latter are important for two reasons: first, independent transcribers, like researchers, may tend to develop 'bad habits' such as regularly misspelling a class of high frequency items, leaving out segments at times when they interrupt their work, etc. Regular checks may detect and arrest such developments early on. Second, and of equal, if not greater importance, independent transcribers need regular feedback and appreciation in order to keep up the motivation for good and productive work. If all these conditions are met, independent transcription, perhaps even involving two or three tran-

scribers, is probably the most efficient and productive method for tackling this task.

The widely practiced alternative to independent transcription is collaborative transcription, where researcher and speaker together transcribe a recording, preferably while both listening to it with a headset. The discussion in the following section is based on data generated in this way. The set-up generally involved a single native speaker and a single linguist. The native speakers were all elderly people as there are no younger speakers left, sometimes working on recordings of themselves, sometimes on recordings of other speakers. Transcription was not separated from translation, so that upon hearing a short segment played by the linguist, the native speaker would start with either explaining what was being said, or with a free translation, or with repeating the segment for the linguist to transcribe. All speakers involved are bilingual in English and Beaver and most of them also literate in English. Two speakers also have some familiarity with the orthography used for representing Beaver, hence being able to follow what the linguist was writing.

While this is just one type of set-up for transcription, many of the phenomena discussed below will also be found in transcriptions produced by independently working native speaker transcribers and also whenever native speakers are involved in editing precise transcripts for publications to be used in the community (cp. Mosel 2004, 2008).

3.   Retelling data: change and elaboration in transcription

As already mentioned in the previous section, in field-based language description the main goal of the linguistic researcher in the transcription process is typically to obtain a written version of what is being said in a recording which can then be used for further grammatical analysis. Given this goal, the focus is on precision: the transcript should contain all of, and only, the linguistic elements that have actually been uttered, including not only 'small words' of ambiguous function such as discourse particles which are easily overheard, but also linguistic manifestations of the production process such as false starts, markers of hesitation, etc. The latter often have little direct relevance for propositional content and grammatical structure, but ignoring them may lead to incorrect interpretations of content or structure (these may be edited out carefully later on as part of the overall analysis process). This

approach to transcription is very technical and its overall goal may not be easily understood by non-specialists.

Native speaker collaborators in the transcription process tend to have different goals and priorities which can generally be classified as attempting to improve the recording in a number of ways: to make the content clearer, to make it more appropriate for a general audience, to make it adhere to what they perceive as the proper norm or more authentic speech, and so on. Goals and priorities here depend in part on who is helping with the transcription: a transcriber who is also the recorded speaker may decide more freely on what should be edited in and out for semantic reasons or perceived mistakes in clause structure. He/she may also focus on rephrasing, expanding or repeating the text to guarantee its comprehension by the intended audience. A transcriber who is not among the speakers who appear in the recording may comment on specific lexical items and idiomatic expressions that should be changed.

In the following, examples from actual transcription sessions in a fieldwork setting illustrate these processes. They are organized into three major types: a) avoidance strategies where loose paraphrases and translations are provided instead of a precise rendering of the recording; b) editing-out strategies which lead to the removal of words and phrases; c) editing-in strategies changing elements appearing in the recording or adding completely new material. The latter two types belong more closely together in that they both relate primarily to linguistic form, while the first type is most closely related to the content being transmitted. Specific examples often involve a mixture of the three types, which cannot always be neatly separated.

3.1.   Paraphrasing: avoiding word-by-word renditions of recordings

There are basically two reasons for avoiding to repeat segments of a recording word-by-word during the transcription process (leaving aside boredom or impatience): either the desire to tell more, or the desire to tell less than what is actually in the recording.

From a native speaker's perspective, the important point in working on a recording is to understand what is being said, i.e. the core concern is with the message and not with its form, which often results in the desire to tell more

or to tell it differently.[2] This becomes especially relevant when the speaker in a recording works on the same recording together with a researcher from a different cultural background. In this case, the speaker may be perceptive of the researcher's need to obtain additional information in order to be able to fully understand the sense of what is being said. A typical example resulting from this state of affairs is the following: when played the segment given in (a) and asked to repeat it so that it may be written down by the researcher, the speaker volunteers the explanation given in (b). Upon the insistence of the researcher, the two words of (a) are dictated for transcription (and translated) but then immediately expanded again by a further elaboration of the story in (c):[3]

(1)   a.   *dáwǫ́t'yedye   aadi*
          what.kind.of.place 3.said
          'She said what kind of place.'

      b.   "(There's) willow in there, they make arrows with; but there's a snake in there, a big one, it will kill you."

      c.   "There's a creek in there, there's a saskatoon willow in there, but you got to fight the snake!"   (yaamaadzuyaaze_transcr001)

The main concern here is clearly that there (finally) is understanding on the part of the researcher. And while this may first be perceived by the latter as not being very helpful with regard to the primary goal of getting a useful (i.e. reasonably precise) transcription, it is evident that such information will later be of great value for interpreting the narrative. Depending on speakers and communities, work on a transcript may involve several retellings of the same narrative (in the contact language) which usually include important information for its interpretation. In some way then, the transcription setup should allow for making use of such elaborations.

The opposite motivation for avoiding the word-by-word repetition needed for precise transcription, i.e. the wish to transcribe less than what has been

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2.   As just mentioned and further illustrated in the following two subsections, form is of course also a major concern, in particular in those cases where the recorded form is judged to be inappropriate or incorrect. However, here the main concern is with cases of content-based avoidance.

3.   The practical orthography of Northern Alberta Beaver is used. Dentals are underlined (*s*, *z*), the acute accent marks high tone.

recorded, may be due to gender-specific speech, the avoidance of sexual explicitness, and other kinds of taboos, including respecting the linguistic "ownership" of certain topics by other persons. In a traditional story that was told by a male speaker about the wolf meeting his brother-in-law, the beaver, in the intense cold of winter, it is mentioned that the wolf's frozen testicles can be heard from far away. This situation is described with the use of an ideophone: *tł'aa tł'aa aadyi* 'clack clack it sounds'. The female transcriber rendered this by saying *ts'áa láádi* "something about 'a young beaver'", without mentioning the actual meaning.

Sometimes it is simply disbelief of the content of a recording which may lead to a refusal or avoidance of transcribing a segment. In still other cases, the speaker may in fact be unable to help as the segment in question may involve a different dialect or even another language. In the latter cases, the reluctance to help with transcription will usually be made explicit, often with an accompanying explanation. In some instances of taboo, however, it may not be obvious to the researcher that the native speaker is not willing or able to engage in precise transcription. The researcher may only find out later on, once he/she has a better understanding of the language and the general cultural context, that there is a discrepancy between the original wording and the material given in transcription (and translation). Rephrasings and other kinds of modification caused by observing taboos may be kept up rather convincingly and consistently for several units.

3.2. Editing-out

There are different types of elements that tend to be edited out (or 'overlooked') by native speakers in the transcription process regardless of the setup of the transcription process (independent or collaborative). Perhaps the most common type concerns hesitations or false starts, i.e. verbal elements that are not actually part of the linguistic construction, do not directly contribute to its meaning, and, most importantly perhaps in the current context, are generally absent in written formats other than transcripts. One very simple reason for leaving them out in dictation is, of course, the fact that hesitations and in particular false starts are difficult to reproduce. After some practice, the researcher her/himself will usually be able to identify such hesitations and false starts and can then add them to the transcription without having to bother the native speaker collaborator with this. However, some care has to

be taken in this regard as misinterpreted false starts may lead to a chain of errors, as illustrated with the following example.

(2)   a.   *ts'ídoaa* **ch'u**-... *ch'uunézis t'aaguyihtyį*
child.DIM **ch'u**-... wolf.hide inside.3PL.3O.put.ANIMO
'They put the baby into a wolfhide.'   (moose001:56)

In this example, the false start highlighted here was not initially identified by the transcribers and thus was not included in the first transcript. At the time when the transcript was being translated and the recording was listened to again for verification, the linguist insisted that there was a word missing in the translation (not having realized that it was a hesitation). Consequently, the following 'emendation' was carried out (which strictly speaking is a case of editing-in, but note that unlike the examples discussed in the following section, here the editing-in is triggered by the researcher):

    b.   *ts'ídoaa* **zǫ** *ch'uunézis t'aaguyihtyį*
child.DIM **only** wolf.hide inside.3PL.3O.put.ANIMO
'They put their **only** baby into a wolfhide'   (moose001transc003)

The particle *zǫ* 'only' was inserted, as it is phonetically close, syntactically well-formed (following an NP), semantically appropriate (the couple in the story had only one child) and functionally often occurs as a discourse particle. The fact that this segment does not actually involve this particle despite the fact that it would fit very well was caught only later, upon further checking of the transcript paying close attention to the sounds and overall features of articulation.

The second type of frequently omitted elements encompasses repetitions of words or phrases characteristic of emphatic oral speech, but which are deemed redundant or superfluous for the written version, a phenomenon that is also quite widespread and has occasionally been remarked upon by other authors (including Mosel 2008).

The third type concerns elements functioning as connectors or floor-keeping particles in discourse. In the second line of the following example, the initial *įh* was omitted in the first transcription:[4]

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4. In the remainder of this section, segments that have been left out by native speakers in the transcription process are put in parentheses (and in bold).

(3) *nį́itye, k'emoi hakui nį́itye,*
3.lived bush   cows 3.lived

'They used to live here, buffalo used to live here,

(įh...) wuts'ę̀   aléeske wúye,   łéés aghwįlé-'éh
(and...) from.here Eleske 3.is.called, dirt 3.made-because.of

then it is called Eleske (='on the dirt'), because they make the area dusty'.   (Eleske)

As indicated here, there is usually a pause following this frequent marker of hesitation. It is frequently not included in the string dictated for transcription and typically is not even commented on – that is, for the native speaker it is as if it is not really there. Similarly, the clause-final clitic *=ú* that generally marks combined clauses is very often ignored or not even noticed in transcription:

(4) *tsé'e wutsé madzéé' xáátsad(=ú),   datés'oé' nį́dyį́tǫ,*
dad very heart   3.falls.out(=**PRT**) 3.gun.POSS 3.took.ELOO
ts'ęhdzé' dyéeza
outside   3.went

'My dad became very mad, he took his gun, and went outside.'   (naabane003)

(5) *tłįįdyéedayi-'éh gǫǫ   łǫ́ǫ́dǫ́ dyídyeel(=ú)*
horse.team-with over.there all   1PL.go.PL(=**PRT**)

'We all go over there with horse teams.'   (bullrush_lake001)

This clause-final clitic can indicate a loose temporal embedding in the discourse and generally does not play a role in signifying a more specific interclausal construction.

Another class of words that are often edited out are evidentials that mark a narration as known to the speaker only via the word of others. Since there is no good translation for such particles, they are left out as 'not important'. In the case of Beaver, these words are also considered inappropriate for the written style, partly because the European language used as target language in the translation lacks the expressed category.

(6) *Yéhnuujéle   naawoghaneʔǫ laa (sǫ̂)   yéhjii.*
3SG-with.go.back 3PL-plan   FOC **(I.think)** 3SG.tell.3SG

'That woman was to return back with that guy, they had planned that, he was told.'   (Sweeney_Creek, Doig River Beaver)

Omissions may also pertain to parts of words, as in the following example:

(7) *hade tyéege ii   sadaa, uzéhtsǫ(-áa), madzagée   įhdadze*
just quiet DEM 3.sit   3.listen(-**DIM**) 3.ear.DIM.POSS both
náághada
3.move

'It just sat there quietly, listening a bit, its little ears were both moving.'   (day_ferry001)

This example involves the (crosslinguistically rather rare) instance of a diminutive element occurring on a verb. Here, it is not clear what exactly triggers the omission or oversight. As the other examples in this section illustrate, the most fundamental reason for editing out elements from transcription appears to be the assessment that they are irrelevant for the propositional content, as is most clearly the case for hesitations, false starts and – with some exceptions perhaps – repetitions. The difficulty of rendering the pragmatic or semantic nuances of particles and clitics in the contact language used for communicating with the researcher may also be relevant.

3.3. Changing and editing-in

Changing the wording, which often includes the insertion of further material, usually has the goal of achieving a clearer and more precise linguistic expression of the narrated event or situation. Typical examples include the use of overt nominals (in addition to pronominal markers on the verb) and additional indications of location, and the change of lexical stems (in Beaver frequently verb stems). Change of word order may also occur. Another type of modification pertains to the substitution of lexemes for stylistic or ideological reasons, a prime example being the replacement of English words with terms from the native language. The addition of a locational specification can be seen in the next two examples:[5]

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5. This section makes use of example pairs, where the first example provides the precise transcription while the second shows the modified version.

(8) a. *ashídle=yuu łenaxi-*
         y.brother=and 1PL.together
         'My younger brother and me (were tied) together.'

     b. *ashídle=yuu łehjíítł'ǫ   mak'edeisdii-k'e*
         y.brother=and 1PL.tied.together **saddle-on**
         'My younger brother and me were tied together **on a saddle**.'
                                                    (life_without)

In (8b) the location 'on a saddle' and a verb are added to the clause. Instead of the addition of whole phrases, postpositions may be changed to provide a more accurate depiction of the scene:

(9) a. **matyééle-moi** *įláádzis xįst'aas*
         3.sheet-at.edge gloves 1SG.cut.out
         'I cut out the gloves at the edge of her (bed) cover.'

     b. **matyééle-k'e** *įláádzis xįst'aas*
         3.sheet-on gloves 1SG.cut.out
         'I cut out the gloves on her (bed) cover.'   (first_gloves001)

Here, the second version is more appropriate in that it prepares the recipient better for the punch line of the episode in which the cover resulted in being accidentally cut up.

A further area for emendation pertains to fine semantic distinctions that may be conveyed with the help of grammatical markings. In Beaver, one important case here is the expression of distinctions in the number of participants through suppletive stems within the realm of motion verbs.

(10) a. *aláá nǫǫnaatł'is-de łííníí-n-í-**dyil***
          boat 3.crosses-LOC stop-PFV-1PL-**go.PL**

      b. *aláá nǫǫnaatł'is-de łííníí-n-í-**t'aats***
          boat 3.crosses-LOC stop-PFV-1PL-**go.DU**
          'We (pl/dl) stopped at the ferry.'   (day_ferry001)

In the recording, the plural motion stem is used, which, strictly speaking, is not correct, since only two people were in the car. Accordingly, the dual motion stem is edited in.

A similar example is seen below in (11) where again a plural stem is substituted for a dual stem. In addition, several other typical changes may be

seen in comparing the two versions. One consists of a change in agreement, from first plural subject to third plural subject marking:

(11) a. *hǫ́ty'e **laa** tsáá-**gha** k'éémoi-dze k'éé-ghí-**dish**-ełé*
          like.that **FOC** beaver-**for** bush-to   ASP-CNJ.1PL-**go.PL**-HAB
          'Like that, we used to hunt for beaver in the bush.'

      b. *hǫ́ty'e tsáá-**ka**   k'éémoi-dze k'éé-gha-**t'aash**-ełé*
          like.that beaver-**for** bush-to   ASP-CNJ.3PL-**go.DU**-HAB
          'Like that, they used to hunt for beaver in the bush.' (life_without)

Further changes include the editing out of the emphatic/focus marker *laa* following the first phrase, and the replacement of the purposive postposition *-gha* with *-ka*. Even though both are grammatical in this context, the latter appears in the common expression 'to go out in order to hunt an animal'.

Classificatory verbs are also a locus for semantic differentiation and specification. They are frequently replaced in transcription:

(12) a. *náádaagheilé'-éh k'éémoi-dze naxa-gha-dyeh-**tyé***
          wagon-with   bush-to   1PLO-3PL-ASP.V-**bring.ANIMO**
          'They brought us with the wagon to the bush.'

      b. *náádaagheilé'-éh k'éémoi-dze naxa-gha-da-**lé***
          wagon-with   bush-to   1PLO-3PL-ASP.V-**bring.PLO**
          'They brought us with the wagon to the bush.'   (life_without)

In this example, the speaker substituted the stem for animate objects, which refers implicitly to either a single or a dual object, with the stem for handling plural objects.

An even more elaborate case of semantic specification is seen in the following example. A very general verb found in the original recording (13a) is first replaced by a variant including a classificatory verb (13b) that pertains to stick-like objects (in this case the leg of a frog). The third variant in (13c) was suggested to be the one that best expresses the event depicted in the picture (from the Frog Story, Mayer 1994[1969]). The verb here specifically refers to the movement of legs:

(13) a. *tyehkazi tyéék'e łige mats'ané' **ǫ́ty'e***
          frog   in.water one 3.leg   **3.be**
          'The frog has one leg in the water.'

b. *tyehkazi tyéék'e   mats̱'ané' łige **sahtǫ***
   frog   in.water 3.leg   one **3.put.ELOO**

   'The frog has one leg in the water.'

c. *tyehkazi tyéék'e   **dyéh'ééts***
   frog   in.water **3.move.leg**

   'The frog moves a leg in the water.'   (frog_story001transc)

A different sort of editing is involved when phrases are replaced with phrases of an entirely different grammatical type. In the modified version, the situation is often described more explicitly than in the actual recording (note that in (14) the focus marker *laa* has again been omitted with the original overt subject noun in the modified version, so strictly speaking this is a case of replacement and omission):

(14) a. *méhẕi laa   łééyetł'ǫ*
         owl   FOC 3.tied.3.together

         'The owl tied them together.'

      b. *ı̱htyedi łééguyaghétł'ǫ*
         naked 3PL.tied.3.together

         'They tied them together naked.'   (buffaloman001)

Other possible kinds of changes include the paradigm of the verb (aspectual variation) or the choice of person markers. In example (15a), the speaker uses the areal pronominal marker *ghu-* as a possessive prefix to refer to the story in a general sense. The transcriber, who in this case is not identical to the speaker, chooses the third person marker *ma-* for this construction:

(15) a. *gaa **ghu-**lǫǫ*
         now **3ARE-**end

         'That's the end (of the story)!'

      b. *gaa **ma-**lǫǫ*
         now **3-**end

         'That's the end (of the story)!'   (ghutsahgeeze_woodpecker)

The transcription of the next example resulted in a change in word order within the first noun phrase: the modifier 'all' is shifted from its usual place following the noun to the front.[6]

(16) a. ***dane   łǫ́ǫ́dǫ́** ada'íídyii hesı̱   gutł'e ǫ́lı̱*
         people all   1PL.know must.be 3PL.passed.away

         'All the people we know, they are all gone.'

      b. ***łǫ́ǫ́dǫ́ dane**   ada'íídyii hesı̱   gaa matł'e ǫ́lı̱*
         all   people 1PL.know must.be now 3.passed.away

         'All the people we know, they are all gone now.' (St.Charles_001)

Possibly, word order here is influenced by interference from English. Recall in this regard that for all the Beaver data discussed in this chapter the work was set up in such a way that transcription was performed simultaneously with translation. That is, each unit was transcribed and translated before proceeding to the next unit, and there was no fixed order in between the two steps (the speaker would sometimes first volunteer a translation and then repeat the segment for transcription, or vice versa). In such a setup, interference from the target language is more likely than in a setup where all attention is concentrated on transcription. But, of course, there are many reasons why the latter procedure will often not be possible, besides the fact that it helps to have at least a rough idea of what one is transcribing.

Turning briefly now to the second major class of 'editing-in' modifications, code-switches or the use of non-aboriginal words often trigger significant modifications to the original recording.[7] Here is a simple example:

(17) a. ***marten** gulae, nóódyehk'azhi gulae*
         marten maybe fisher   maybe

      b. ***uust'yą́ą** gulae, nóódyehk'azhi gulae*
         marten maybe fisher   maybe

         'Maybe a marten, maybe a fisher.'   (day_ferry001)

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6. Other changes include the editing-in of the adverb *gaa* 'now' to emphasize the difference between the narrated past and the present situation, as well as a pronominal change (marked 3pl to general 3).

7. The tendency to replace English words or phrases in the annotation with Beaver terms is more pronounced in the Northern Alberta varieties.

It may also happen that longer segments in English are translated by the transcriber. Thus, for example, the clause *he hears something* was rendered as *wǫǫli díits'ak* in one transcription session.

More interestingly perhaps, the transcriber might speak a different variety of the language than the recorded speaker. This may result in changes in the transcript, both with regard to morphological form and in the naming of traditional characters:

(18)   a.   *gǫǫ*   *dyéézhe gaa éhdyi: aséi*   **dasbát-éh**
            over.there 3.went   now 3.said   grandfather   **1SG.hungry-with**

      nįka   *dyée-ya*
      2SG.for   ASP-**come.SG**

      'He went over there and said: grandfather, I came to you because I'm hungry!'

      b.   *gǫǫ*   *dyéézhe gaa éhdyi: aséi*   **Daskutł'e,** *nįka*
            over.there 3.went   now 3.said   grandfather   **Daskutł'e**   2SG.for

      dyée-zha
      ASP-**come.SG**

      'He went over there and said: grandfather Daskutł'e, I came for you.'   (aghat'usdane002)

In the recording the singular motion stem is *-ya*, while the transcriber repeats it as *-zha*. Both belong to the paradigm of the stem 'sg.moves', but they are used differently in various dialects of Beaver.[8] The second modification, the renaming of a character within a well-known traditional story, is explained by family tradition: "My grandfather told me about old man Daskutł'e." The original inflected verb form in (18a) that is not a personal name is thereby replaced by a personal name that seems to fit the particular story.

4.   Conclusion

Transcription of recorded data plays a central role in field-based language documentation and description. The final product, i.e. the transcript, forms the stepping stone for a variety of further activities, including not only grammatical analysis but also the preparation of educational materials or other written resources to support language maintenance or development efforts. But, as

argued here, the transcription process itself, while often tedious and disliked by all parties involved, provides valuable insights into the linguistic knowledge of speakers: insertion, omission, or change of items show the range of the linguistic repertoire and (un)acceptable variation and thus complement the evidence otherwise gathered in elicitation tasks. It may also provide important clues for our understanding of the creation of new linguistic varieties, as many of the phenomena reviewed here also occur when basic transcripts are edited for publication as written resources, resulting in the creation of a written language variety where none existed beforehand (cp. Mosel 2004, 2008).

From a scientific point of view, it is thus important to document, as much as practically feasible, the kinds of changes and elaborations discussed in the preceding section, i.e. to provide both as precise a transcript of the actual recording as possible as well as a record of the changes applied by native speakers in the transcription process and the motivations given for them (if any). The best way to do this is to record the transcription process as well, which, however, will often not be possible for various reasons.

There is, of course, a potential conflict here between scientific and community/speaker interests, which was already hinted at in the introduction to Section 3: What if a speaker or the community at large actually rejects (parts of) an utterance as incorrect or inappropriate, for whatever reason? Under such circumstances, which version should be made available to whom and in what form? There is no straightforward and easy answer to this question, as in all cases where conflicts arise about control and ownership in a documentation project, but layered access levels in a digital archive usually make it possible to accommodate the interests of all parties concerned.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person (usually indexing the subject argument if not otherwise specified)	FOC	focus
		HAB	habitual
		LOC	locative
ANIMO	animate object	O	object
ARE	areal	PFV	perfective
ASP	aspectual	PL	plural
CNJ	conjugation	PLO	plural objects
DEM	demonstrative	POSS	possessive
DIM	diminutive	PRT	particle

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8. Historically, a so-called voice marker has been absorbed into the *-zha* form.

DU	dual	SG	singular
ELoO	elongated object	V	valency

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Part III.
Documenting the lexicon