

Title: “Doing this kind of linguistics you do feel like you’re making a difference in the world”: Postgraduate linguistics students learning in the field.

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Abstract

Despite the stated importance of fieldwork within the discipline of Linguistics, and the existence of several texts about fieldwork (Thieberger, 2012; Bowren, 2008; Newman & Ratliff, 2001), there is very little literature concerning the experience of fieldwork from tertiary students’ perspectives (see Macaulay, 2012). In this article, the work of four New Zealand postgraduate linguistics students working with fourteen Vanuatu teachers to translate reading materials written in Bislama¹ into seven vernacular languages is documented. Findings indicate that students were motivated to be involved in the fieldwork by a range of factors including travel, altruism, and commitment to the communities and their languages; they drew on and, in some cases, clarified many concepts from their undergraduate studies; and that the fieldwork experiences both allowed them to gain confidence in their linguistic skills and influenced their future studies in linguistics.

¹ Bislama is the English-based Creole which is the National language of Vanuatu.

Introduction

Linguistics, or the scientific study of language, is one of a range subjects offered in most New Zealand tertiary institutions which is not taught at secondary schools and as such it would be fair to say it often struggles to attract students. Those students who do discover the subject are often students of foreign languages and anthropology. Linguistics encompasses a broad range of sub disciplines including the study of sound and sound patterns known as phonetics and phonology, the study of word structure and formation known as morphology, the study of sentence and phrasal patterns known as syntax, the study of interaction known as discourse analysis and Conversation Analysis, the study of meaning known as semantics, the interaction between psychological factors and language known as psycholinguistics and the study of the interaction between language and social factors known as sociolinguistics (see for example, Fromkin et al., 2015).

Given the pervasive influence of language across all disciplines and professions, students of linguistics find that their studies in these areas give them valuable insights in the range of fields in which they eventually find employment (Janet Holmes, personal communication); however, one very specific field in which linguistic analysis skills has particular relevance is in the documentation and analysis of threatened or endangered languages (Bowren, 2008; Crowley, 2007; Newman, 2009; Thieberger, 2012). It is a well-known and oft-quoted fact that the number of languages in the world is steadily decreasing. Distinguishing dialects and languages is a complex process, but some statistics indicate that there are currently 7,099 languages used in the world (Ethnologue Languages of the World, 2017) with approximately a third of these being endangered, that is having fewer than 1,000 speakers. Thus, the need to both document languages which are threatened, but more importantly to use linguistic skills to support the revitalization of such threatened languages is a highly relevant use of linguistic skills. Indeed Newman (2009) suggests that going into the field to collect data is “the basic research upon which linguistics as a discipline depends” (p. 124).

A survey of 42 PhD granting linguistics departments in North America indicated that 38 departments offered courses in field methods, usually on an annual basis (Newman, 2009). Newman implies quite a divide between those linguists who collect data (who he calls descriptivists) and those linguists who theorise from such data (theoreticians), suggesting that that it is very important that all linguists have some background in field linguistics so that they are aware of the complexity of such work both in terms of interpersonal relationships and personal sacrifice. He recommends that those going into the field should consider matters

relating to their health, the place of their children in a fieldwork situation, varying norms around gender-appropriate behaviour and sex, the place of money, and several areas relating to professional ethics. He suggests that, unlike the related field of anthropology, this last area (ethics) is one which has been neglected with regard to linguistics. He explains the importance of ethics in this way: "...as uninvited guests in someone else's society, field linguists often have an impact on many people's lives of which they may be totally unaware" (p. 118). He then proceeds to deal with many aspects of ethics relating to picking the brains of local permanent expats, dealing with officialdom, and working with graduate students, but does not mention any matters relating to ethical behaviour relating to the communities whose languages are being documented.

Crowley (2007) devotes a whole book to the practice of field linguistics, also distinguishing between Newman's Descriptivists and Theoreticians using the perhaps more evocative phrases 'Dirty Feet Linguists' and 'Armchair Linguists'. In addition to exploring ethical issues of informed consent and withdrawal for language informants, he explores ethical issues relating to communities whose languages are being studied, explaining that in some situations, researchers have been excluded from communities because of the perception that they take, but give nothing in return. Crowley (2007) suggests "We researchers should therefore consider ourselves obligated to provide something for the community in which we have done our work. What we provide for the community by way of feedback should be something that will be valued by members of the community, as well as being of some kind of practical benefit to people in the community" (p. 34). He proposes, for example, that providing reading materials to support vernacular literacy would be a very worthwhile return.

Collins (2011) also discusses approaches to linguistic fieldwork, explaining his commitment to fieldworkers learning some local language, and to using an ethnographic approach to their data collection. In addition, he underlines the importance of considering what is taken and what is left behind when considering the ethics of linguistic fieldwork. As well as ensuring that locals are happy for their language to be written down, that they know when they are being recorded, how their recording will be used, and how they can withdraw their participation if they so decide, Collins is also very clear that part of being an ethical field linguist is contributing to the community from which a linguist is taking data. He describes initiatives he has participated in such as creating community libraries and rubbish collection: "When we participate in community life, people rarely feel that they are getting ripped off. By giving as well as receiving, we participate to some degree in the daily give and take of local life" (p. 212).

Yet, despite the stated importance (even centrality) of fieldwork within the discipline of linguistics, and the existence of several texts about issues relating to the practice of fieldwork, there is very little literature concerning the experience of fieldwork from students' perspectives. One exception is a chapter by Macaulay (2012) who reflects on her own first experience of fieldwork with Mixtec speakers in Chalcatonga, Mexico, revealing the many challenges she faced and her unpreparedness outside of her linguistic analysis skills. She calls for "a more extensive literature on linguistic fieldwork" (p. 457) to be used in preparing graduate students more effectively for fieldwork experiences. Such student perspectives provide valuable information to include in guides to fieldwork, and may also inform classroom preparation for students preparing to be in the field.

In this article, the work of four New Zealand postgraduate linguistics students working with fourteen Vanuatu teachers to translate reading materials written in Bislama² into seven vernacular languages is documented. This translation work is seen as a specific kind of fieldwork because in the process of translating the readers, data in each of the seven vernacular languages was also collected, with approval from the speakers involved. While this is not a traditional nor comprehensive method of collecting language data, it nevertheless does provide data which can later be analysed and added to corpora linked to these languages. Semi-structured interviews with the four students and their lecturer are analysed in terms of what they learned from this fieldwork and how it relates to their university studies. The broader question of the place of practical work in university studies is considered.

Context

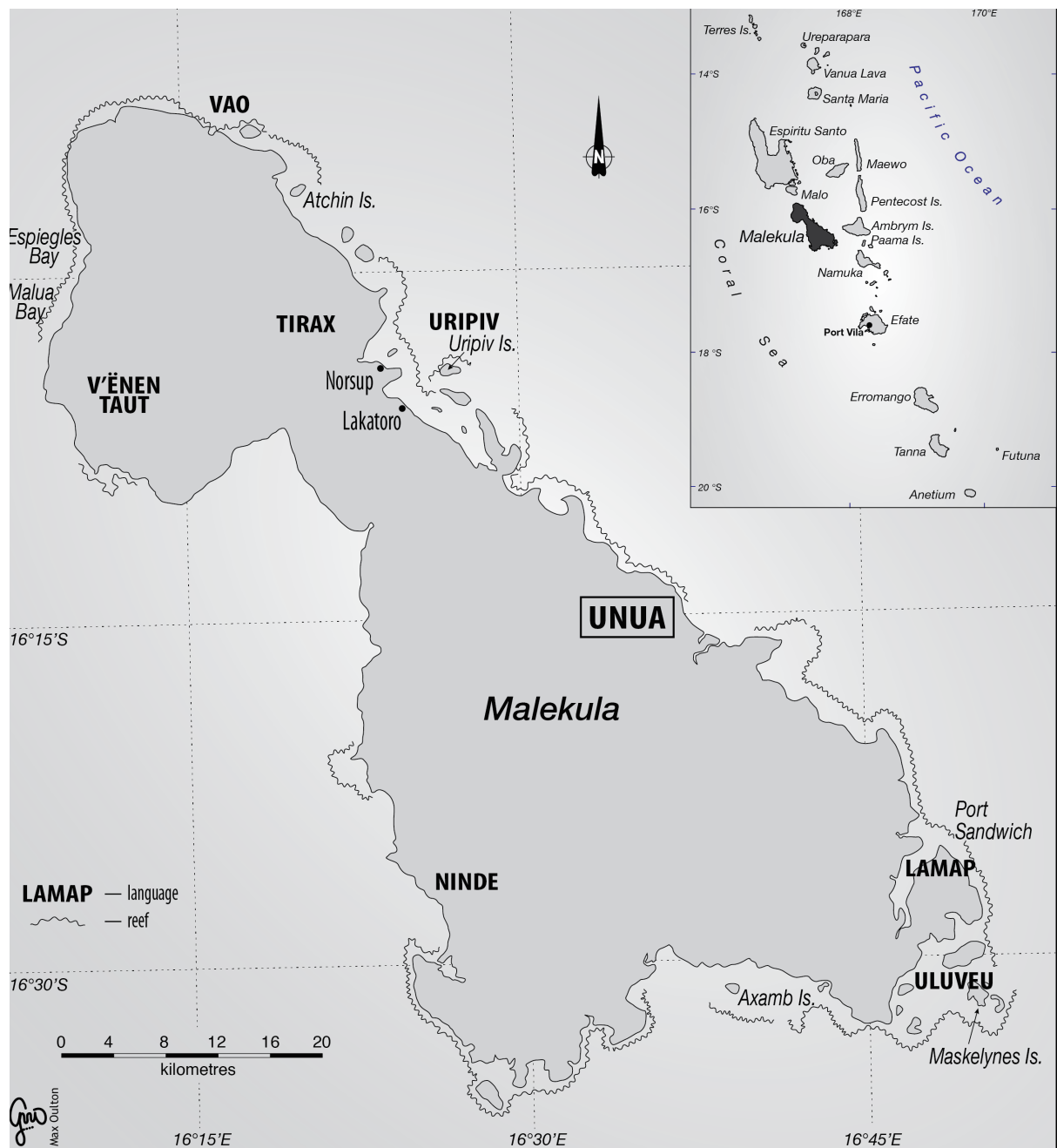
Vanuatu is renowned for its linguistic diversity. Estimates vary, but it is suggested (Crowley, 2007) that there are at least 100 languages spoken by the approximately 200,000 people of this Melanesian archipelago formerly known as the New Hebrides. In 2012, a National Language Policy was endorsed in Vanuatu, accommodating the vernacular languages of Vanuatu within the formal education system for the first time in the nation's history (Ministry of Education 2012). To enact the new National Language Policy, the Ministry of Education developed a plan to create vernacular resources for around half of Vanuatu's 100+ languages. To support this process, linguists were approached, including the lecturer who organized the work being conducted in the field. Julie has been working with communities in Malekula, Vanuatu for the last 14 years. In 2015, she facilitated the first

² Bislama is the English-based Creole which is the National language of Vanuatu.

regional workshop on Malekula Island to translate Year 1 reading materials into seven local languages with the author assisting, and in 2016 a second workshop was conducted to translate Year 2 and 3 reading materials.

The setting for this work was in a Ministry of Education Building in Norsup on the island of Malekula in the Malampa Province of Vanuatu. Malampa is an administrative region including the islands of Malekula, Ambrym and Paama. Malekula is the second largest island in Vanuatu, and is known as the most linguistically diverse of all the islands, with more than 30 distinct languages (Lynch & Crowley 2001). In November 2015 and 2016, a group of four postgraduate linguistics students and two university lecturers arrived to work with fourteen teachers from around Malekula. Their main focus was to support local teachers to translate the Year 1 (in 2015) and Year 2 and 3 (in 2016) reading materials produced by the Ministry of Education in English into seven local languages (see Figure 1 for map): Lamap (spoken in southeast Malekula), Mae (spoken in east Malekula), Maskelynes (spoken on small islands south of Malekula), Ninde (spoken in the southwest of Malekula), Tirax (spoken in north central Malekula); Uripiv (spoken on the northeast coast of Malekula) and V'ënen Taut (spoken in northwest Malekula).

Figure 1. Malekula Island showing locations of languages included in Ministry of Education vernacular education project.



Method

Using an interpretive paradigm (Cohen, Morrison & Manion, 2007), data for this research was collected via two semi-structured interviews with each participant, one just before the second workshop, and the second within a month after the second workshop. After ethical approval was received, interviews were conducted with questions focusing on the connections between the students' undergraduate studies and their fieldwork, their motivation for taking part in the workshops, the challenges faced during the workshops, and what they learned during the workshops (see questions in appendix). These interviews ranged in length from 13:43 to 41:30 minutes and were recorded using QuickTime Player. Recordings were transcribed and sent to the participants for checking prior to analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) once transcripts were approved.

Student participants

The student participants included four students (two men and two women- see Table 1), and one university lecturer (female) who led the work. The students ranged in age from 22 to 53, and were at various stages of postgraduate studies. Taylor (23) had completed his Bachelor of Arts, Laura (22) had just completed her Honours degree in linguistics, Rob (27 years) had completed his Bachelor of Arts (major linguistics) and Master of Arts (linguistics) and is currently completing his PhD working with two Malekula languages, and Cat (53) had completed her Bachelor of Arts (linguistics) and is currently working with one of the Malekula languages in her Master of Arts. The university lecturer (Julie) has been teaching linguistics at university for 17 years, and, as reported above, has been working with languages on Malekula for the last 14 years.

Pseudonym	gender	Age	Undergraduate subjects	Languages Spoken	Vanuatu languages	Completed qualifications
Cat	F	53	Anthropology Archaeology Spanish French Linguistics	English German French Spanish Bislama Swiss - German	Lamap	Bachelor of Arts Postgraduate Diploma in Linguistics

Laura	F	22	French Linguistics	English French	Uripiv	Bachelor of Arts Bachelor of Arts with Honours
Rob	M	27	Linguistics Anthropology French	English French Bislama Spanish	Tirax and Venentaut	Bachelor of Arts Master of Arts
Taylor	M	23	Linguistics Spanish Anthropology	English NZ Māori Cook Island Māori Spanish German	Uluveu	Bachelor of Arts

Table 1: Student participant data

Findings

Analysis of the data from the ten interviews conducted (two each for the four students and two for the lecturer) revealed several key themes in relation to the value of the fieldwork for postgraduate linguistics students: (1) students drew on many concepts from their undergraduate linguistics studies in their workshop participation; (2) students only fully understood some key linguistic concepts they had covered in their undergraduate degree by being involved in the fieldwork; (3) students were motivated by many factors including desire to travel, to explore ethics, and also altruistic motivation with regard to giving back to communities from whom they collect linguistic data and contributing to supporting endangered languages; (4) students gained confidence in themselves as linguists by participating in fieldwork; and (5) participation in fieldwork seems to have a direct influence on choice of topics and participation in continuing linguistic study.

Examples of each of the themes will now be presented with interview excerpts and examples from the four student and one teacher participants.

1. Students drew on linguistic and nonlinguistic undergraduate work

The range of undergraduate work that participants reported making links to during their fieldwork included phonetics, morphology, syntax, sociolinguistics and anthropological

linguistics. They also drew on several non-linguistic skills and concepts from their undergraduate degrees including anthropological ideas about the relationship between language and culture, and translation theory covered in some French studies courses. In her first interview, Cat explained in some detail that she perceived links to phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and sociolinguistics in her work with two teachers translating readers from Bislama to Lamap, a language spoken in South East Malekula. She also observed links between the fieldwork and her undergraduate French and anthropology studies which gave her pause to reflect on the ethics of influencing another culture, in particular in relation to the linguistic work done by missionaries.

I really wanted to see in general if it is a good thing to interfere with other cultures and how far to interfere, and how far to take control or not to take control. I really wanted to test that because I always want to make a difference in the world. I never knew what it was and I have had lots of contact in the past with missionaries and I always struggle with that concept (religious). So, I'm not saying it's all negative, what they're [the missionaries] doing at all. I can see lots of positive things happening and we are actually kind of building on a lot of what they have worked on before us but the whole concept of how far do you go? How ethical is it? How do people actually feel about you coming in and doing something? That was the big motivator for me to find out where I stand with that view of the world. [Interview 1]

In her second interview her focus was more on consistency in the developing orthography, and her new understanding of standardisation, particularly in relation to the teaching of reading and writing:

Well the main reason of course is if we want to teach others to use the language in a written form it's helpful if you have a standardised form to simply avoid any errors and misunderstandings especially the syntax involved and so there are grammatical structures that are attached to verbs which needs to be consistent otherwise the meaning can change radically. ... So, I guess for educational purposes really, it needs to be standardised. [interview 2]

Laura had studied French and linguistics in her undergraduate degree, and could also see links between her linguistics work with respect to phonetics, morphology and syntax, and to the translation theory she had covered in French classes.

In addition to linguistics, Rob had also studied French, Spanish and Anthropology in his undergraduate degree, and noted several links to his study in these areas with his work in the field in Malekula. There were links to translation theory (covered in French), and to the strong links between language and culture discussed in anthropology. In his first interview, Rob noted links to phonology from his linguistics studies, and in his second interview he noted links to morphology and syntax also. Taylor was also very aware of links to phonology in the first time he worked in Malekula on the translation project. His comments indicate the detailed and fine listening skills needed when trying to link a written symbol to an acoustic sound:

So we heavily relied on the IPA chart, the International Phonetic Alphabet, and just tried to find the right symbol to write the word. You know it was really hard with the subtle difference between a /b/ and /p/ ... And so those little tricky things you ought to listen out for. [Interview 1]

He was also aware of morphological and sociolinguistic issues. For example, there was a question over whether a definite article was a prefix to word, or a separate word, and there were differences in the suffixes used by male and female speakers which the teachers needed to take into account when they were translating the readers from Bislama. During the second workshop he noticed both phonology and morphology at play, and while he didn't use the word 'standardisation' he did describe issues relating to standardising the written form, particularly in relation to written word boundaries.

But, for example, like a person marker on a verb, they decided to attach the prefix which is the person marker to the verb. But throughout the workshop this year it was a little messy because half of the words have the prefix together with the verb and on some occasions they write it separately. So I kept asking, just to be sure how he wanted to have it written. They admitted that they wanted them together in some of the words, [and sometimes] he wrote them separate. One of the words he actually dissected into just ...sounds and I asked why. It was a long word and I asked why and he said that for better pronunciation but normally he wants to write it together. [Interview 2]

The lecturer, Julie, described the extraordinary intensity of listening to unfamiliar languages all day, and working with the required speed and accuracy given there would not

be many opportunities for correction later. She indicated that this work drew on the students' knowledge of phonology, morphology and anthropological linguistics, where for example, kinship terms may have more salience.

Almost all of the language communities encountered issues when they were working their way through their translations because we are working from Bislama into indigenous language. The prompt in Bislama was not specific enough for the requirements of their language so there'll be place where a story would have a narrator and you had to know the gender of the narrator to select their appropriate kinship term. For example, if you're a girl talking about an uncle you'd use different kinship term than if you are a boy talking about an uncle. And also the relationship with the uncle was maternal or a paternal uncle. It is significant in all of the languages....and sometimes the pictures didn't give the details that they needed.

[Interview 1]

Responses from all five participants indicated that the fieldwork done in Vanuatu linked strongly to the undergraduate work of the students across many aspects of linguistics and other language-related study they had completed.

2. Understanding key linguistics concepts for the first time

This theme presented itself as part of the previous theme where students were making connections with their previous studies, but its unique nature was evident when Julie explained that while these particular students were very strong linguistics students who were multilingual, it seemed that many concepts she covered in the classroom were not fully understood until the work in the field was completed:

They all speak more than one language so they are all multilingual, or at least bilingual, most of them are multilingual. They have really strong analytical skills and yet there's still things that will take them by surprise, they have to go oh that's right, that's, that's something that I need to remember. [Interview 1]

One example she gave related to word classes (i.e., whether words are classed as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc.) and the real difficulty in accepting that often in Oceanic languages what might be an adjective in English is a verb.

Accepting that what's an adjective in English is a verb and this is something which I have taught with all of my classes with reference to Oceanic language data and still each time students encounter an adjective being a verb they are taken by surprise. So I don't know at what point they just go oh, okay they are verbs. But it seems that at the level these guys were at with their language analysis, things like that are still surprising and that's probably from being into locked to very strong dominance in English. I think it's hard to escape that. [Interview 1]

3. Students were motivated by many factors

Laura was motivated for her initial trip to Vanuatu largely by the opportunity to travel to this part of the world, but also by the opportunity to experience linguistics in action outside of the classroom, and to be part of work which supports endangered languages. Like the other students her second visit was linked to the relationships she had made with the teachers she worked with, but also to being part of action which saves languages:

I just like meeting the people while this time definitely developing proper friendships there so I definitely want to go again. ...It's nice to know even though it's not going to be immediate change, ten years or so down the line children are going to be learning in their first languages on Malekula because of the work that I did. I'm going to be smiling because of this. I will be able to tell my grandkids like oh I helped these people to save their language and I helped their children to learn their own language like you can. It's amazing. [Interview 2]

In both interviews when asked about his motivation to do the work in Malekula, Rob talked about the need to give something back to the communities from whom he had collected data for his Masters and PhD studies. In his second interview, he elaborated on this:

It's part of the whole thing of working with people, that your work somehow could be a kind of benefit to them. Because our work takes so long ... it sometimes feels like the people who are working aren't receiving as much benefit as they should. Particularly because without the people who talk to me and work with me, I can't do my work, so I am kind of deeply aware of this kind of feeling of like I think I said in the first interview [being] kind of like a language thief. In particular, in the context of a postcolonial country you feel like a colonist again. [Interview 2]

Rob felt extrinsic factors played no part in his wanting to do this work; he simply enjoyed it, but he did note that having it on his CV probably helped him to get funding for his PhD. He also talked about the enjoyment of using his linguistics for a practical purpose, rather than simply for academic purposes.

Taylor's motivation to go the first time in 2015 related to his love of travel, and the support and encouragement provided by his lecturer. The second time was motivated by the knowledge of how much he had enjoyed the first time, and also a commitment to the teachers and the languages he had worked with:

I feel like I'm actually helping first of all the people, secondly helping to keep the language alive. You know like every year you hear so many languages becoming extinct and I know that's quite disheartening. And just to know that I've some way in some shape and form I've helped keep a single language float, for me it just quite important... When you lose your language, you lose culture. You lose kind of who you are. I was brought up with a number of languages and I would quite be disappointed if I got to go through the half way of my life and I found that I couldn't speak ... my father's language, quite disappointed. [Interview 2]

Julie's motivation for the huge logistical task of taking four students to a remote location mainly stemmed from her own experience of not having these opportunities as a young linguist, and when she finally did have these experiences, realising how valuable they were. There was also the practical fact that the task of translating readers for Years 1-13 in seven different languages was more than she could achieve on her own. She could see the synergy in matching student and community needs. After the second workshop she said,

And in the future, this is a first step, a pathway to becoming field linguist. So, if you start the process and you're contributing and you are developing a relationship with a linguist individually in service to the community you are working with that, they [the students] see the focus is to produce products of value to community and the secondary outcome of doing it is data, that we get access to this amazing pool of data. It's not enough to do a PhD thesis but it's enough to do a Master's thesis. You know there's grammatical content in there if it's done carefully. The quality is good enough to make good observation about language. [Interview 2]

Thus the participants' motivation for taking part in the fieldwork ranged from desire to travel and see a new place, to a deep desire to contribute towards maintaining threatened languages and giving back to communities whose languages give so much to the field of linguistics. Certainly, it seemed that relationships with the Malekula language communities played an increased role in student motivation for subsequent work. The satisfaction of matching two needs to provide a mutually beneficial experience for the students and the language communities was a strong motivator for the lecturer.

4. Students gained confidence in their skills and identity as linguists

Unlike many professions which students study towards at universities (such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, and psychologists), the profession of being a linguist is not familiar to the broader community. Additionally there are no practical requirements built into a linguistics degree, so it was perhaps not surprising that students and lecturer reported gaining confidence in their work as a linguist as part of the outcome of the fieldwork experiences. Cat described being put in a situation which meant she had to gain confidence in her skills as a linguist:

...you become part of something right outside yourself, which you just cannot have in a classroom because it is interaction and the contact with people and being confronted with problems in the field demands some kind of response. You can't walk away and you need to deal with it, and there is a lot of frustration, a lot of doubt and mostly, really for me was the feeling of inferiority, not knowing, and feeling not skilful enough [Interview 1]

Like Cat, one of the challenges to participating in the first workshop for Laura related to belief in herself having skills that would be useful:

The biggest challenge was me because I'd just completed my undergraduate degree and I was going over there in the role sort of, not teacher, but they [the Malekula teachers] were looking to me for guidance and it was me who was trying to muddle my way through. [I had to] step up, step up to the plate and just believe in myself because I could actually help and what I did say was worthwhile so I think that was the biggest challenge. I feel like I now know a lot more and I'm more confident in my linguistic skills. [Interview 1]

During Rob's two interviews it was clear that he was grappling with the role of a modern linguist who unlike linguists in the 19th and 20th centuries (Crowley, 2007) does not tell speakers of a language how to write their language, but who collaborates and listens to the speakers, leaving final decisions with them:

I noticed in the first few days of the workshop I was really struggling not to take control of ... particularly Big Nambas because ...as I have said I'm familiar with that language...not to take control of it and ... what they were doing which is not why we were there. The idea is to support them....and pass the control over to the people I'm working with. [Interview 1]

Taylor also reflected on the approach to linguistic fieldwork described by Rob in which the linguist collaborates with the language speakers, but ultimately it is the speakers themselves who make decisions on how their language will be written:

One thing that I do remember is with the Maskelynes language, they have a W at the end of some words which I feel it does not need to be there but they are in their comfort zone of writing it there and without it, it looks a little bit strange [to them]. [Interview 2]

The interview data clearly indicates the importance of the fieldwork experience in developing the confidence and identity of the four postgraduate linguistics students.

5. Experience of fieldwork influenced future studies

The experience of fieldwork in Malekula impacted future plans of all of the participants. Cat's work in the field in Malekula for the first workshop influenced her confidence to continue her studies with a postgraduate diploma in linguistics and then working as a Summer Scholar with some of the data gathered in the summer following her return. Since her second trip she has begun a Masters degree in linguistics creating a grammar sketch of Lamap. She said that her fieldwork added a whole dimension to her work with the Lamap data.

After her first trip Laura completed an honours degree in linguistics, and several of her research assignment during this year related to her work on languages in Vanuatu. After her second trip she was moving into the workforce, in a job not specifically linked to

linguistics; however, she had hopes of doing a PhD in the future. She also expressed a desire to continue using her linguistic skills no matter what job she was in:

It would be nice to be able to just keep coming back and to use my linguistic skills. You don't just do this for fun. You do it because it becomes a passion... Julie did [say] this would be a good PhD. If I go to study in the future it will probably be based on the languages in Malekula because I know about them. As Julie said I've got networks there now so it makes future research easier. I love the place. [Interview 2]

In both interviews for this study Rob saw a clear link between the work he completed in Malekula, and his continued study in the field of linguistics:

I'm actually working with two of the languages I was working with last year [in the workshops]. So, I'm working on Big Nambas which I worked on for my Masters degree and my new current project also involves the Tirax language and also another language ... which is spoken in Tautu but was originally spoken in another area with the other two languages. And so, yes, it's quite good because it means that I'm working closely with supporting the development of literacy materials for languages which I'm currently involved in with research. So it feels like it's less of a one-way passage of knowledge expertise. [Interview 1]

Taylor was clear that his work in the field has definitely influenced his desire to work as a translator or a field worker in the future.

As well as seeing the students really starting to fully understand many linguistic concepts, after the first workshop, all four students continued to be involved in linguistics at Honours, postgraduate diploma and PhD level, and after the second workshop two of the four were directly involved in further linguistics study at Masters and PhD level. In both cases Julie sees that their work in the field had a direct and positive influence on the students' work. The remaining two are both future prospective thesis students, their enthusiasm directly influenced by their work in Vanuatu. When asked to sum up the power of the field experience for the postgraduate linguistics students, she said,

I feel like what they are learning was the social responsibility along with the academic and the potential for academics to create social change and empowerment

and social transformation. And that it is a responsibility and an enormous pleasure to be doing it. It's really hard work for this particular group, but it's like the funnest thing you can possibly do. [Interview 2]

These themes will now be discussed.

Discussion

Drawing on undergraduate concepts and understanding key linguistic concepts (1 and 2)

It is quite clear that the students were aware that their work in the field, translating reading materials from Bislama into seven different vernacular languages linked strongly to their undergraduate linguistic study in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, sociolinguistics and anthropology. They gave detailed and specific examples of each of these areas in relation to their translation work. Their lecturer, Julie, indicated that although these were very strong students who had done very well at undergraduate level, it was not until she saw them grappling with data in the field that they appeared to truly understand some linguistic concepts previously covered theoretically in her lectures. This difference between theoretical and practical knowledge does not appear to have been considered specifically in relation to linguistics education in the literature; however, it is covered with regard to teacher education practicums. Barnes and Magorinsky (2016), for example, interviewed 19 pre-service teachers in three North America teacher education degree programmes about the contribution to their learning to be a teacher from both their theoretical learning (or coursework) and their practicum experiences (or field experiences as the authors call it). Their findings indicate the importance of the practicum experiences in fully understanding the ideas presented via coursework concerning the work of a teacher.

Referring back to the distinction between the 'Dirty Feet Linguist' and the 'Armchair Linguist' discussed by Crowley (2007) and Newman (2009), and the suggestion that fieldwork is an essential component of a linguists training, it would appear that the reported experiences of the four postgraduate linguistics students in the present study support this idea. Until these students actually had to decide if morphemes were to be joined in one word, or kept separate; until they had to decide if a word was acting as an adjective or a verb; until they had to accept the inconsistencies of a newly created orthography, these students did not fully appreciate the messiness of concepts they had previously learned about as neatly defined theoretical concepts in the classroom. There is a sense in which a linguist who does not experience fieldwork is like a teacher who does not visit the classroom.

Motivation and giving back (3)

The motivation for the students to take part in the fieldwork experience in Vanuatu was diverse, but followed similar trends to existing literature concerning the motivation for teachers to take part in work with teachers in a developing country. Daly and Sharma (2017) examined the motivation of 8 New Zealand teachers who travelled to Northern India to work with untrained teachers. Their findings indicated that the New Zealand teachers were motivated by a desire to travel and also to use their skills in a meaningful way. The linguistics students in the present study had similar motivations concerning travel and wanting to use their skills in a meaningful way, in this case to support endangered languages. And for all of the linguistics students, like the teachers in the Daly and Sharma (2017) study, the return trip to participate in the second workshop was also motivated by the relationships established in the first workshop experience. There were also strong ethical commitments stated about being a linguist who does not just take the data and give nothing in return. As suggested in the work of Crowley (2007) and Collins (2011), these students were committed to giving back to the communities with whom they were working. Unlike many fieldwork situations which are set up primarily to collect data, this context was set up with the express purpose of creating literacy resources to support the revitalization of several endangered vernacular languages. Data collected was a secondary and incidental outcome rather than the primary purpose of the fieldwork. Indeed Julie, the lecturer, indicated she believed that the fieldwork set up in this way could provide an effective pathway for emerging linguists to both collect data and establish authentic relationships with language communities for their future career as a linguist.

Influence on confidence as a linguist and continuing linguistic study (4 and 5)

Lastly, it is evident that the experience of fieldwork for the four postgraduate students in the present study had a direct influence both on their actual and their intended future contribution to the field of linguistics. All of the students' study in the year following their first fieldwork experience was directly influenced by their translation work alongside the Malekula teachers. And after the second workshop, two of the four were still doing postgraduate work in the field, with the other two expressing an intention to work in this area in the future. It could be argued that the students in the very act of committing to the work in Malekula for two years running had self-selected as future linguistics researchers. We do not have any way of knowing what the students may have done if they had not had this experience. It is nonetheless helpful to have some evidence that taking linguistics students on such fieldwork can have a long-term influence on their future work, and at the very least does

not put them off future studies in this area. Three of the four student participants discussed their fears of not knowing whether they could actually do the work required of them as linguists supporting the Malekula teachers before the first workshop. This fear was not evident at all in the interview conducted after the second workshop. Thus, the workshops also served to support the students' developing confidence in and perhaps identity as a linguist. It is quite likely, although not proven within the confines of the present study, that these two areas are related. When a student gains confidence in their linguistic skills in fieldwork, this may make it more likely that they will continue with graduate research.

Conclusion

This small qualitative study of four postgraduate linguistics students given the chance to participate in two pieces of fieldwork related to the translation of literacy materials into seven Malekula vernacular languages has provided an insight into student motivation and experience not previously documented in the discipline of Linguistics. The findings indicate that when a fieldwork experience for students is arranged around the provision of a useful language resource for a vernacular community it may have very positive long-term effects on their understanding of key linguistic concepts, their confidence and their long-term commitment to further research work in the field. It also shows us that as well as being motivated by a desire to travel, students have altruistic motivations for contributing to such work which relates to their desire to support endangered languages thus contributing to preserving global linguistic diversity. While none of these findings may be unexpected, this study provides some documentation and discussion of these issues in relation to the teaching of linguistics in tertiary education which may be built upon in the future. It is clear that offering a chance for linguistics students to practice their theoretical knowledge in a real-world fieldwork context when constructed around a project designed to support endangered vernacular languages can have many benefits for both the vernacular communities and the postgraduate students involved.

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Appendix: Semistructured Interview Questions

Interview 1

1. Please tell me about your work in Malekula in 2015
 - What did it involve?
 - What aspects of your linguistics studies did it link to?
 - What key concepts from your linguistics studies did you make links to as you worked? (prompts: minimal pairs, tense/aspect, ergativity, politeness theory)
 - Have key concepts from any of your other papers at university been relevant to this work? If so, in what way?]
 - Did you learn anything during your work at Malekula which you think could not be learned in any other way? If so, what?
2. Can you tell me about what motivated you to go?
 - What were the challenges?
 - What were the push factors?
3. Since you came back, have you continued your studies in linguistics?
 - What are you studying?
 - Has it been influenced at all by your work at Malekula?

Interview 2 (after work in Malekula 2016)

1. Please describe your work in Malekula in 2016.
 - How was it similar/different from your work in 2015?
 - What aspects of your linguistics studies did it link to?
 - What key concepts from your linguistics studies did you make links to as you worked? (prompts: minimal pairs, tense/aspect, ergativity, politeness theory)
 - Have key concepts from any of your other papers at university been relevant to this work? If so, in what way?]
 - Did you learn anything during your work at Malekula which you think could not be learned in any other way? If so, what?
2. Can you tell me about what motivated you to go a second time?
 - What were the challenges this time?
 - What were the push factors this time?
3. Will you be continuing your studies in linguistics in 2018?

- What will you be studying?
- Might your choices be influenced at all by your work at Malekula?