

An Archivist's View of Metadocumentation

Lisa Conathan

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Yale University

Linguistic Society of America

Pittsburgh, January 9, 2011

No single answer to all metadata needs

- Archives use different standards.
- Archives implement the same standards differently.
- Archival standards change rapidly.

Archival metadata should be simple, reusable, and created for the long term (beyond the needs of current research projects).

Organize records hierarchically

1. Item: a notebook, an audio recording, a transcription
2. Groups or series of items: notebooks, audio recordings, transcriptions
3. Collection: Arapaho Documentation Project, 1980-1990
4. Personal archive/ Collection of personal papers: Arapaho Documentation Project, 1980-1990, Paiute Documentation Project, 1991-1995, Yurok Documentation Project, 1996-2010

Hierarchical organization reflects how you create and use your records; the details may differ for each project.

An example of hierarchical organization

Papers of the Yurok Documentation Project, 1980-1990

1. Administrative Records
 - 1.1. Grant application
 - 1.2. Project Description
 - 1.3. Curricula vitae
2. Fieldwork Records
 - 2.1. Audio recordings
 - 2.1.1 Audio tape 1980 May 2
 - 2.1.2 Audio tape 1980 May 3
 - 2.2 Field notebooks
 - 2.2.1 Notebook 1980 May
 - 2.2.2 Notebook 1980 June
3. Research Records
 - 3.1 Slip files
 - 3.2 Drafts of grammatical analysis

Minimal collection-level metadata

- Name of the primary collector or creator
- Identification of the provenance of the records
- Scope and duration of the project that produced the records
- Date range during which the records were created
- Names and ISO-639 codes of language(s) documented
- Description of the quantity, format(s) and media of the records
- Description of equipment used to create the records
- Abstract of the contents of the records and their importance
- Identification of any personally or culturally sensitive material

What to address in your description:

- What is the scope of the project?
- What is the goal of the project?
- Why is this particular data being recorded?
- How might the data be used/ how have you used it?
- Who played a role in recording and preparing the data?
- How does the documentation relate to the collector's career?
- How does the documentation relate to revitalization or other ongoing projects?
- How does the documentation relate to other documentation of the same language?

What is obvious to you is not necessarily so to others.

Minimal biographical information

- Full name and alternative names/nicknames, if relevant
- Date of birth (place of death)
- Place of birth, place of residence (place of death)
- Primary language(s)
- Secondary language(s)
- Role in creation of the collection
- Include curriculum vitae or short narrative biography

Biographical information is more useful for less-well-known people because the information is not readily available elsewhere.

Reasons to metadocument

- Help ensure that your data will not be discarded.
- Help ensure that your data will not be misrepresented.
- Help ensure that your data will be used.
- Document your career by saving evidence of your research goals or professional profile at different times.
- Document failed experiments as well as successes.
- Document the history of language documentation and of linguistics.

What to archive (in addition to linguistic data)

- Collection-level description
- Curriculum vitae
- Grant applications
- A short narrative biography
- A short narrative history of the documentation project
- Agreements with consultants
- Explanation of culturally sensitive or personally private material

Records such as these are necessary to write the history of your project, and fully contextualize data when it is used by other people in future research projects.

Collection-level metadata in archives

Karl Teeter Papers at Harvard

A. L. Kroeber Papers at Berkeley

Geographical metadata in the California Language Archive

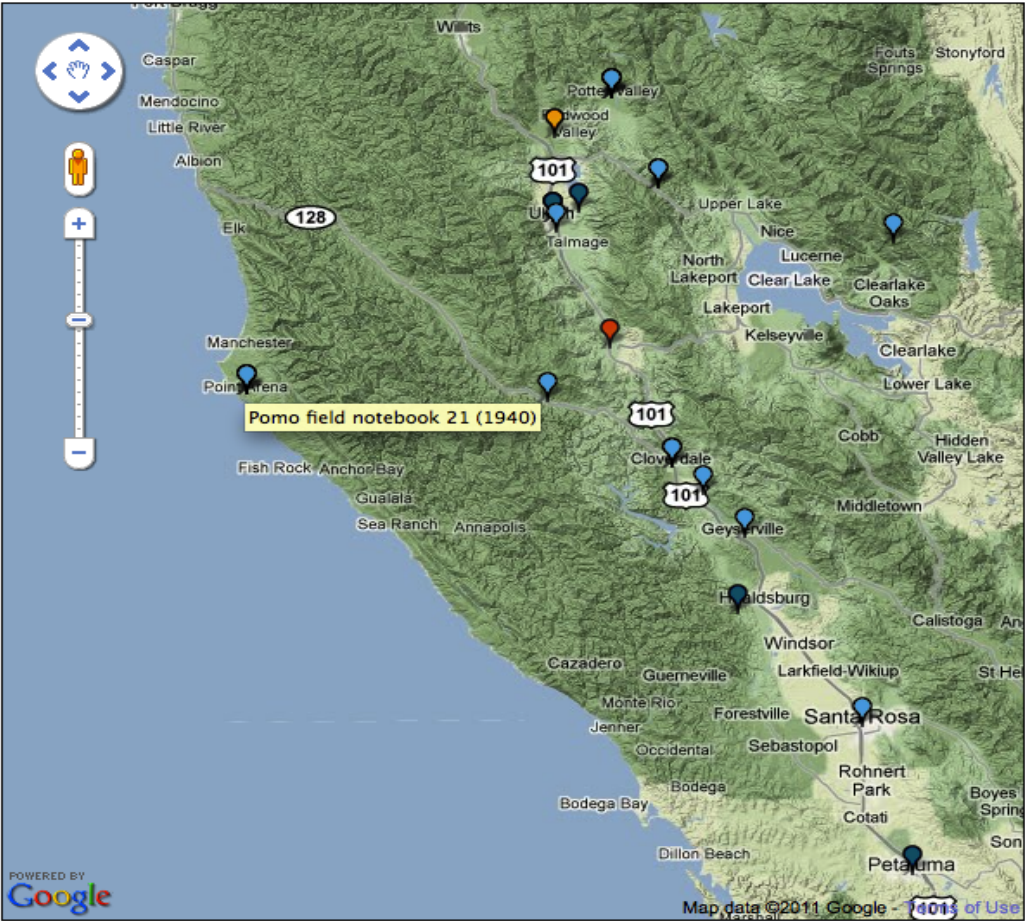
Geographical metadata in the CLA

CALIFORNIA LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

A catalog and online archive of the indigenous languages of California, western North America, and the Americas



HOME ADVANCED SEARCH EXPLORE COLLECTIONS ABOUT US HELP

Collections Languages





Map data ©2011 Google - 14013 of Use

Archival Documents and Manuscripts

-  Content Available Online
-  No Online Content

Audio Recordings

-  Content Available Online
-  No Online Content

Pomo field notebook 21 (1940)

Halpern.009.021 (1 notebook)
Language: Central Pomo
Contributors: Jenny Pike, Abraham M. Halpern, Steve Parrish

Archival descriptive standards

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Encoded Archival Description (finding aids)

Encoded Archival Context (links information from finding aids)

lisa.conathan@yale.edu