

Comparing methods of collecting proverbs: Learning to value working *with* a community

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Abstract: This paper describes and compares eight different methods of collecting large numbers of proverbs, providing a rubric for comparing the methods. The value of collecting proverbs *with* a community rather than *from* a community is stressed, highlighting the importance of community involvement and empowerment by including the community in the research. Involving the community in the collecting project is held to be ethically desirable, but the comparison of different methods shows that the methods that foster more community involvement can produce better collections of proverbs.

1. Introduction to collecting proverbs

This paper is written for people who want to collect proverbs, a follow-up to my earlier work on collecting proverbs (Unseth 2007, 2008). Here I describe and compare other methods of collecting proverbs. In that earlier work, I developed a method for collecting many proverbs in a short time, but that approach was focused on the scholar doing the eliciting. It paid no attention to the language community where the proverbs were spoken, a major fault I address here.

I believe the previous article can be very helpful for those gathering proverbs by eliciting them in interviews. It has been used successfully, e.g. in Ethiopia (Mesfin Wodajo 2012:21). I will not repeat the material of my previous work here, but will assume that those who read this (especially those who will collect proverbs by elicitation) will read my earlier work, also.

Since my earlier work, as the result of input from others, I have come to see the importance of collecting proverbs *with* a community, rather than merely collecting proverbs *from* a community. My approach is summed up in the phrase “Prioritize people and process over product.” That is, the researcher should not focus on merely gathering proverb data to produce a book, a *product*. Instead, the researcher should put a high priority on helping the *people* of a community value their own proverbs and involving the community members in the *process* of collecting proverbs. The final result is not merely a collection of proverbs, but a community that appreciates their proverbs in new ways, a community that now possesses a written collection of their proverbs, a community where different generations have worked together on discussing and gathering proverbs, and possibly a community with some people trained in new skills.

1.1 Key terms related to collecting proverbs

A few key terms must be introduced before I proceed.

The first term may seem to obvious, “proverb”. To begin collecting proverbs, a scholar must find the best local way to speak of “proverbs”. Some languages have a specific word for proverbs, others use a more generic label that may include idioms, riddles, euphemisms, or stories. Some languages have narrower definitions, dividing sayings into smaller categories based on their own criteria. (This exploration of the emic view of proverbs and related speech genres can be valuable in itself.) When there is not a narrow, specific label for “proverb”, then the use of examples will help clarify what kinds of language forms are desired. However, collectors should not spend much time rejecting forms that are not (in their minds) canonical

proverbs. It is generally wiser to adopt the policy “if in doubt, collect” (Bryant 1945:21) and sort the collected sayings later.

This article uses the phrase “language community” to refer to a group of people who share a common language and identity. It is possible for people to feel that they are part of more than one language community. The factors that affect which language community people identify with may also include such factors as religion, location, genetic descent, customs & traditions, caste, etc. For purposes of this article, the concept “language community” assumes that the people share a common language, even if other additional factors are also locally relevant in identifying language community membership.

The phrase “community involvement” means the community being actively involved in the collecting of the proverbs. High community involvement is more than simply telling proverbs to a microphone. High community involvement includes such activities as community members deciding what methods to use in collecting proverbs, many members of the community contributing proverbs to the collection, community members encouraging other community members to contribute proverbs, different generations of the community being involved (though maybe in different activities), community members sifting the collected proverbs to decide which ones should be included, etc.

This article uses the phrase “proverb project” in a broad, general way. For purposes of this paper, the number of people involved is not limited. A lone individual person who wants to study proverbs from a language community could be a “proverb project”. A large team of people working together to collect proverbs from a language community could be a “proverb project”. A “proverb project” may be one or a few people simply collecting proverbs because they enjoy it, or a project might be a formally organized group with leadership structure and a budget. Many proverb projects are individual university students working on course projects, dissertations, or theses. Most proverb projects will use more than one method to collect proverbs. A proverb project may simply hope to collect a few dozen proverbs in a language community, or it may hope to gather thousands of proverbs.

Among proverb scholars, there is a useful term that refers to the set of proverbs that adults in the language community will know. The term is “paremiological minimum”. “Paremiological” refers to the study of proverbs, “minimum” refers to the smallest number. The paremiological minimum is not the total number of proverbs in a community, but the small set of proverbs that are widely known across the community by most adults. When studying proverbs, some people want to collect every possible proverb, even if they are obscure and not known by most people. Other proverb collectors want to collect proverbs in a way that allows them to measure the paremiological minimum, the proverbs known across the community. As we compare different methods of collecting proverbs, some methods are more useful in helping to decide which proverbs are in the paremiological minimum, and other methods are not.

2. Different methods of collecting proverbs

There are a variety of ways to collect proverbs. The following categories of collecting proverbs represent seven different ways to collect proverbs. Each method is labeled in relation to the researcher. Note that most proverb collectors use more than one method, even if they concentrate on one method as their main one.

Yankah noted, “Doubtless... proverbs recorded in actual life situations, with the full complement of social, situational, and discourse contexts would be the ideal data” (Yankah

1989:172). But collecting such data is very time consuming. Also, though simple lists of proverbs are not “the ideal data”, proverbs scholars of all sorts have found them very useful for all kinds of study.

2.1 Researcher as rememberer

This method requires that the researcher is an adult who is full member of the language community, not just a speaker of the language. If a researcher is a college student, there are two likely problems. First, they are not old enough to have learned a large percentage of the community’s proverbs (Luomala 1971). Secondly, they have probably spent too much time outside of the traditional community to have learned enough traditional proverbs.

A researcher using this method will not be able to simply recall and write a large number of proverbs at one sitting. As time goes by, different events and different conversations will remind the researcher of more proverbs.

A few researchers who know a large number of proverbs have been able to remember large numbers of proverbs (Mahgoub 1968:5, Schneider-Blum 2009:vi) but even these researchers benefitted from additional methods.

Researchers working to remember proverbs can benefit from using the sorts of techniques I described for using when the researcher is elicitor (Unseth 2007, 2008). The difference in using the techniques is that the researcher, instead of asking others, will ask themselves the questions, such as “What proverbs are there that mention snakes?”

2.2 Researcher as bookworm

There have been many proverbs collected by researchers pouring through books (and now the Web). One of the best known examples of such proverb research in the library is Erasmus (c. 1466-1536), who compiled a large collection of Latin proverbs from many sources, published as *Adagia chiliades*.¹ In their guide to field work, Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater specifically suggest that for gathering proverbs, researchers visit the library, “a treasury” (2002: 312). One of the modern English proverb collections, B. J. Whiting’s *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings*, published in 1989, “was based on notes Whiting took as he detected proverbs in the course of his... reading” (Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro 2012: ix). Today, such research can also be done by studying proverbs via the Web, such as was done as one research technique in compiling *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* by Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro (2012: x,xi). This kind of literature-based proverb collection can be applied to a wide variety of languages. For example, in writing an analysis of Nepali proverbs Valerie Inchley compiled proverbs from 36 published Nepali sources (2010:3).

Sadly, sometimes proverb collections have been prepared and published, but they are no longer available to the public in shops, but only in specialized libraries or on obscure websites. For example, in a book about western Pakistan published in 1876, Thorburn included over 400 Pashto proverbs. The book is no longer available for purchase, but it has been scanned and posted on the Web. For studying Pashto proverbs, this collection of proverbs can be useful, especially for comparing older proverbs with today’s proverbs. Some proverbs are exactly the same, some old ones are forgotten, and some old ones are updated. For example, 140 years ago

¹Erasmus’ work was more than merely lists of proverbs (it also contained comments on many of them), but it is cited here as the best-known early example of a proverb collection.

Thorburn recorded a proverb “Of the broken bow two persons are in fear” (1876:408). However, in today’s more technological military world, in Afghanistan there is an updated proverb, “An unloaded gun makes two people afraid” (Yun and Pashai Language Committee 2010: 241). In this case, comparing a proverb from an old source and from a current collection is enlightening.

Patrick Bennett described his frustration when he was trying to study proverbs from languages of Zambia, but he could find only one book of local proverbs for sale in Zambia (1997: 244). Several proverb collections had been published in small quantities in the past but were no longer available to buy. Also, one large collection of proverbs had been transcribed only in a master’s thesis from a previous decade done at a foreign university, so it had never been accessible to the people of the language community.

Colleges and universities near a language community may have collections of proverbs produced by scholars (local or international), as research projects or as theses and dissertations. Previously published collections and academic products are sometimes available in specialized libraries and archives, such as at seminaries, national library facilities, mission offices, NGO’s, embassies, Ministry of Culture libraries, or in the collections of local scholars. If the proverb researchers have access to these resources, seeking such proverb collections in libraries or the Web is sometimes very useful. For example, the 1982 thesis on Zambian proverbs that Bennett and his students could not access is now freely available on the Web (URL http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1885&context=open_access_etds).

Zellem (2014), on the other hand, purposefully paid little attention to the existing Pashto proverb collections by Thorburn (1876), Enevoldsen (1967), Benawa (1979), and (Tair & Edwards 2006), emphasizing the contribution of the living Pashto language community (more on this in 2.7). Even if he had wanted to consult all of these published, the collections by Enevoldsen (1967), Benawa (1979) are no longer for available for sale.

2.3 Researcher as elicitor

My earlier descriptions of techniques for eliciting proverbs was envisioned for situations where a researcher was collecting proverbs, working from the researcher’s viewpoint and priorities, and largely for the researcher’s benefit (Unseth 2007, 2008). I explained there in detail how to help community members remember and recite large numbers of proverbs in a fairly short time. The advantage of this method is that it produces a relatively large collection of proverbs quickly. However, the involvement of the community is largely limited to a very small group serving as sources of information. There may be collection of proverbs published from such a collection project, but the community will have been only minimally involved in the process and is likely to feel less ownership of the collection.

Asogwa pioneered using some of these methods I described when he was collecting proverbs among his own Igbo community. He reported that he was “able to collect up to two hundred proverbs from a single person in one sitting. We have also been able to collect up to one thousand in several sittings from one person” (2002:49). This proverb collection was done by a researcher who is a member of the language community which is better than the work being done by an outsider, but the work was done from the viewpoint of researcher as elicitor involving only a few members of the Igbo community.

2.4 Researcher as alert conversationalist

Those who have stressed the importance of collecting proverbs as used in actual contexts value the transcription of a proverb when it has been used in a natural setting. “Doubtless... proverbs recorded in actual life situations, with the full complement of social, situational, and discourse contexts would be the ideal data” (Yankah 1989:172).

The value of this method is obvious, but so is the large amount of time needed, especially in relation to the small amount of data collected by this method. Collecting proverbs as an alert conversationalist requires a high degree of skill in the language, so it cannot be employed by most outsiders who are involved in a short term research project.

Elías Domínguez Barajas, a member of the Spanish-speaking community whose proverbs he was researching, used this method in his own family context, involving only a few members of the language community. Though he was able to transcribe some very rich contexts of proverb use, his published collection contains only 14 proverbs that he witnessed, and three of those occur in a single conversation. By collecting proverbs in his own social circle, he complained that he was “missing out on joys of uncritical participation. Several times I found myself thinking that I need to jot down the circumstances surrounding a proverb as soon as it is uttered, and analyzing the situation, instead of enjoying the moment” and sometimes found himself “feeling genuinely resentful” that he had to be an alert researcher observing and listening to the situation (2010:5).

2.5 Researcher as transcriber/witness

Two recent innovative studies by Ethiopian researchers have demonstrated ways to collect significant numbers of proverbs in natural contexts.

Among the Guji Oromo of Ethiopia, Tadesse Jaleta Jirata (himself a Guji), collected proverbs by transcribing them in contexts where he knew to expect large numbers of proverbs (2009). Being a community insider, he found a way to gather a large number of proverbs in their natural contexts at two kinds of traditional meetings that are natural contexts for frequent proverb use. He recorded speeches and deliberations at two kinds of meetings: *Ebbisa* and *Gumi Ganda*. He describes *Ebbisa*, led by the *Qallu*, a traditional leader, as an occasion for “traditional blessings, prayers, enumeration of cultural values and ways of life” (Tadesse Jaleta Jirata 2009:9). The *Gumi Ganda* meetings deal with conflict resolution, mediation, and local problems. Both types of meetings are rooted in tradition and work to reinforce traditions, so it is not surprising that both involve the use of many traditional proverbs. From his notes at a series of these meetings, he collected about 250 proverbs in their spoken contexts. After the meetings he interviewed elders to discuss the proverbs he had collected, and these discussions generated another 60 proverbs, for a total of 310. Collecting so many proverbs in context by transcribing them at proverb-rich events is a noteworthy accomplishment both for his own research, but also as an example of methodology which proverb researchers and folklorists can learn from and adapt elsewhere.

Following on Tadesse Jaleta Jirata’s example, another Ethiopian scholar, Mesfin Wodajo and his team of Kafa researchers² went to events “where people come together for social and

²Because Mesfin Wodajo sent out trained friends to witness and transcribe proverbs in context, his methodology included some aspects of researcher as both transcriber/witness and also as dispatcher. Researchers almost always use at least two methods.

cultural occasion such as coffee ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, public discussions and during resolving conflicts (traditional court)” (2012:40). He, too, was able to gather large numbers of proverbs in contexts. For example, he described an event where a father used a proverb counsel his son against arguing with a powerful rich man (2012:56).

2.6 Researcher as dispatcher

In this mode of proverb collection, the researcher does not have to be a member of a local speech community. Instead, the researcher dispatches members of the speech community to collect proverbs.

This technique was used on a small scale by Teferi Kassa, asking Ethiopian school students to collect proverbs from their families (p.c.).

A large scale proverb project using this method (Bryant 1945, Kimmerle 1947) was the 40 year project of the American Dialect Society that resulted in *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder, Kingsbury, Harder 1992). They dispatched researchers (often from colleges) to elicit proverb from people in different regions.

A more structured proverb project that dispatched people to collect proverbs was led by Ryszard Pachocinski who was a lecturer and researcher at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. He had his students collect and document proverbs from their home language communities in Nigeria. First, he had each of them write down 20 proverbs that they knew. For each proverb they were to write:

1. “A transcription of the proverb in an indigenous language,
2. Word-for-word-under-word translation into English,
3. Translation into literary English,
4. Description how the proverb functions in the society.” (Pachocinski 1996:vii)

Also, each proverb entry was marked to indicate its language, the person who transcribed it, etc.

This step is similar to researcher as elicitor, as Pachocinski asked each of the students to write proverbs down. It was vital practice for them to write down not only the vernacular proverb, but to also write down two translations (one literal and one grammatical English), and also the function of each proverb.

After this practice, when students returned to their home areas, he assigned them to collect more “proverbs from the elders of their respective peoples and to interview the elders on the role of proverbs in traditional life”. As a result of these efforts, he collected about 3,000 proverbs from 64 different ethnolinguistic communities (Pachocinski 1996:viii).

This method of proverb collection provided the opportunity for many members of the languages community to be involved. The university students were involved as local collectors, but the best results were obtained when they sparked discussions of the community’s proverbs and values. In this way, these discussion-starter students could serve as small-scale catalysts, not merely collectors.

On a smaller scale, one male proverb collector working in India hired women to collect proverbs where he, as a male, could not go. He reported, “The best collections of proverbs are among the women, who interlard their discourses plentifully with them, I paid women to collect them in the *zenanas*. I got a plentiful and rich crop” (Long 1875:347).

The idea of researcher as dispatcher was also used for gathering riddles (like proverbs, a small genre of folklore), by a team of Estonian scholars. They organized a national campaign for children in schools to collect riddles, which brought in thousands of new riddles for their files (Krikmann and Sarv 1996: 125).

2.7 Researcher as inviter

Researchers wanting to elicit proverbs from many people in the community can invite everyone to submit proverbs to designated people or addresses. Part of the American Dialect Society's multi-decade project included this type of proverb collection (as well as the above-mentioned dispatching of collectors). Researchers working with the project spoke at a wide variety of meetings, telling people about the project and asking for people to submit proverbs they knew (Bryant 1945, Kimmerle 1947). A researcher can also do this in less face-to-face ways, such as inviting people via news papers, posters, radio, television, the Web, etc. to submit proverbs.

With this method, the community contributes proverbs to the researcher(s), but there is little contact between them. Also, there is little interaction about these proverbs between members of the community.

2.8 Researcher as catalyst

The idea of researcher as catalyst, and even “instigator” (in the best sense of the word), is an innovation in proverb scholarship. In this method, not only does the community submit proverbs, but community members discuss the proverbs among themselves. Or stated in another way, they submit the proverbs to each other.

This researcher as catalyst method has much in common with a group of approaches bearing such names as “engaged scholarship”, “empowering research”, “action research”, or “participatory action research”. I will not try to differentiate all of these, but they have in common that they promote research *with* and *for* a community, not research that benefits only the researcher. This type of proverb research together can be much richer than simply giving the community copies of the collection of proverbs that have been submitted.

The researcher as catalyst method is, to borrow the words of one book, “research on, for and with...”

- (i) Persons are not objects and should not be treated as objects...
- (ii) Subjects have their own agendas and research should try to address them...
- (iii) If knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing.” (Cameron et al 1992: 22-24)³

A first approximation to this approach, though not so strongly articulated as a research philosophy, has been pioneered by Edward Zellem as a new approach to collecting proverbs in a way involves the language community with both the researcher and with each other via the Web.⁴ After publishing a book of 151 Dari proverbs collected by a variety of traditional

³I have borrowed some important ideas, values, and phrases from these authors, but my motivation is more from the Golden Rule than a highly constructed theory of power/knowledge.

⁴This Web-based approach may seem like an example of “virtual fieldwork” (Cooley, Meizel, Syed 2009), but it is important to realize that the Pashto language community was interacting virtually with each other as well as the

methods, he had returned to the USA from Afghanistan. Members of the Pashto language community pressed him to publish a book of Afghan Pashto proverbs, also, but he did not speak Pashto. In order to collect proverbs from the Pashto community, he made a virtue out of necessity: “I developed a 21st century solution to the two barriers of language and geography. The answer I found was *crowdsourcing for content* using social media, the World Wide Web, and mobile phones” (2014:v).

He describes his techniques in his book:

“I created a *mataluna* [proverbs] collection page called “The Pashto Proverb Project” on my website and began to crowdsource. Friends and fans of Afghan Proverbs across the globe started spreading the word online, and soon many fresh, popular, and meaningful contributions of Pashto Proverbs started flowing in. They came from native Pashto speakers in Afghanistan, Pakistan and over a dozen other nations.

Soon I had far more *mataluna* than the 151⁵ that I needed. Some were in several different Pashto dialects, and I wanted to ensure that all of them were understood and commonly used in today’s Afghanistan. So I began operationally testing the crowdsourced *mataluna* with daily tweets, using the Twitter handle @afghansayings and the hashtag #AfghanProverbs. The number of followers on Twitter grew fast, and they were not shy about commenting on and retweeting my Pashto Proverbs tweets. I was able to assess quickly from the number of retweets, favorites, and comments if a particular *matal* was popular and correctly translated [into English].

I also needed an expert editor to verify my collection. I found one in the brilliant Hares Ahmadzai, a native speaker of Afghan Pashto and fluent in several other languages. Mr. Ahmadzai generously volunteered his services to the project. Soon we had selected and validated 151 of the best crowdsourced Afghan Pashto Proverbs.” (2014:vi,vii)

Because the collecting of proverbs was in the hands of the Pashto speaking community, they were energized into talking to each other about their own traditional proverbs, tweeting and retweeting. The community became involved in the collection and circulation of their own proverbs. This also raised the value of traditional proverbs in the eyes of many in the community. It also began discussions of some positive traditional values among a younger generation of Afghan Pashto speakers, young people who have never known their country at peace.

By gathering proverbs in this way, Zellem the researcher who did not speak Pashto, involved many in the Pashto-speaking community who contributed hundreds of proverbs. The community’s involvement became much more than merely contributing proverbs towards a book. Rather, they contributed their remembered proverbs, opinions about the correct form of some proverbs, and their ideas about the meaning and application of these proverbs. This process

catalyst researcher. That is, this was not merely a researcher observing people virtually, but it was a community interacting virtually within itself and deliberately telling the researcher what data to collect.

⁵Due to outside factors, before Zellem’s Pashto proverb project was begun, it was required that the book would contain exactly 151 proverbs, regardless of how many proverbs were gathered.

continued even after the book was published, the community still carrying on discussions among themselves about proverbs as they submit more.

Proverbs collected in this way give the researcher who wants to analyze them an extra gift. Some proverbs were submitted by many different people, other proverbs were only submitted by only one. This allowed Zellem to see which were the most common Pashto proverbs, allowing him to estimate the paremiological minimum, but that was not the reason for him doing crowdsourcing. “If that helped add to the academic body of knowledge on the Afghan paremiological minimum, so much the better” (2014:v). Proverbs collected by some other methods are less likely to reveal the paremiological minimum (though the researcher as dispatcher is more likely to come close to the paremiological minimum than the researcher as elicitor).

The American Dialect Society project in the middle of the 20th century had some limited similarities. They gave public presentations on proverbs and printed preliminary collections of the proverbs gathered in some states and circulated these. But the communication was one-way, one-time, as people submitted their proverbs to the researchers, and there was no structure for members of the community to communicate with each other about the proverbs.

3. Integrating my earlier methodology with the seven

In my earlier article, I explained how to collect a large number of proverbs from an individual or a small group in a limited amount of time (Unseth 2007, 2008). Though this present work focuses on the involvement of the community, my earlier ideas can be profitably applied to four of the seven methods described here.

If researchers who members of the language community work more or less alone, simply trying to remember as many proverbs as possible, researchers can apply the ideas from the earlier article to themselves. For example, they can try to remember proverbs about donkeys, then proverbs about midwives, then proverbs about forgiveness, and so on. The techniques described in the earlier article can be used as easily by the researcher alone as on a group of community members.

If the researcher is working as an elicitor, then the techniques from the earlier article are explicitly planned and described for this situation.

If the researchers are working as a dispatcher, the ideas described in the article can be applied at a slower pace. Instead of simply asking people for proverbs, they could stimulate their memory by asking for proverbs about various topics or with certain key words. For example, if the researcher is sending out students, on their first time out, the dispatched collectors could ask for proverbs about various animals, such as dogs, chickens, mice, snakes, cattle, bats, etc. The next time out, they could ask for proverbs about various human roles, such as mother, butcher, fool, blacksmith, etc. The next time out, they could ask for proverbs about laziness, cooperation, family loyalty, generosity, etc.

If the researcher is working as an inviter, my earlier ideas can be adapted for use with a large audience. If the invitation is done only once, my earlier ideas can only be used in a limited way. If there can be multiple opportunities to invite the community to submit proverbs, such as via a weekly column in a newspaper, then each invitation can suggest a specific topic, such as proverbs about animals, then the next could be proverbs about human roles, etc.

If the researcher is working as a catalyst, my earlier ideas can be used in similar ways to what was just described for dispatched collectors. In electronic messages (whether by Twitter,

Facebook, or on a website for collecting local proverbs), the researcher can ask the types of questions just mentioned for collecting by being a dispatcher.

4. Proverb collection methods: highlighting community involvement

Previous work on collecting proverbs has generally focused either on collecting a large corpus of proverbs or collecting proverbs in their contexts of use. This presentation focuses on a totally different factor: it highlights the involvement of the community in collecting proverbs (and benefits to the community by their involvement). This community involvement includes not merely direct involvement in collecting the proverbs, but also the community's increased appreciation of their own proverbs and an appropriate attitude of ownership of the final product (ownership in the best and fullest sense, not merely copyright quibbles).

As a cautionary note, Dobrin (2008) has shown that at least in a Melanesian context, for community involvement to be successful, an outside researcher must also be seen as contributing materially to the community, becoming a part of the community's pattern of reciprocal relationships. Though few reading this will work in Melanesia, the point is that researchers may not be able to remain external and unattached from the community. Collecting proverbs *with* a community will likely carry some expectation or obligation towards the community. For example, giving printed copies of a proverb collection to key people and institutions within the community would seem a likely way to repay a community, but also a way to help them continue the process of discussing their proverbs.

In this emphasis on community involvement, I have summed up my guiding principle as "Prioritize people and process over product." That is, I believe that we as researchers must put a higher value on benefitting the language community, not simply on publishing a collection of proverbs or writing an academic article. This benefit to the community can include a greater involvement by community members in the collection of their proverbs, but the greater benefit to the community can come when they themselves learn to value their own proverbs and the positive values they teach. This can be especially effective if the process leads to the younger generation discussing proverbs with their elders, and possibly these younger people then take the lead in submitting the collected proverbs to a central collector. This was done, for example, among the Pashto community, where Zelleman organized an effort to collect proverbs via Twitter and a website (2014): the younger generation submitted the proverbs they learned from their elders. In this way, different generations contributed their strengths for the benefit of the broader community. The production of a published collection of proverbs — the *product* — was not the only goal. The *people* of different generations in the community pondering and discussing their proverbs together is also a valuable *process*.

Of course, outside researchers and community members may have different goals related to collecting proverbs, but there will be much common ground. For example, members of a smaller language community which is surrounded by a larger language community, and feeling pressure to be absorbed into the larger community, may focus on wanting to collect proverbs to assert their language's independence and beauty, while an outside scholar may be more interested in collecting their proverbs to analyze a specific topic, such as proverbs about family relationships and obligations. But even with different priorities, researchers and language communities can still work together.

Some language communities already have substantial proverb collections published. That does not mean that this article is irrelevant to their situation; having a published collection of

proverbs does not automatically prevent a team from gathering more. For example, there is a published collection of over 1,300 Pashto proverbs available for purchase on the Web (Tair and Edwards 1982, revised 2006), plus older collections by Benawa (1979), Enevoldsen (1967), and (Thorburn: 1876). But most in the Pashto community were not aware of any of these books. Edward Zellem launched a proverb collection effort via the Web and generated interest and enthusiastic participation among many in the Pashto community, and then he published the results in 2014 (Zellem 2014). He had received the necessary number of Pashto proverbs in the first few months of collecting and could have published the book then. Instead, he prolonged the process for several months to sustain the interaction within the community. Even after the book had been published, more proverbs have been submitted as he and members of the Pashto community have continued interacting about proverbs on Twitter. The *product* has been produced, but the *process* continues. This shows a successful application of my maxim “Prioritize people and process over product” – the process of community involvement was important for Zellem, not merely producing the book of Pashto proverbs. Zellem could have compiled the proverbs available from the previously published books and produced a fine *product*, but this would have prevented the community from benefitting from the *process*.

Researchers must always work ethically and legally with the language community on such points as informed consent, future access to the collection, copyright, distribution rights, permissions, crediting local contributors — often working at a higher ethical level than the minimum legal requirements (Jackson 1987:259ff). But the approach promoted here is to work with the community at even deeper levels.

I have classified proverb collection methods under eight labels, though the categories are not entirely separate. Also, most proverb collectors have used multiple methods. These eight methods are presented in somewhat caricatured fashion, but this serves the goal of highlighting the differences between the general approaches.

In the list below, each of the methods has an increasingly higher amount of community involvement than the one above it.

1. Researcher as remember
2. Researcher as bookworm
3. Researcher as elicitor
4. Researcher as alert conversationalist
5. Researcher as transcriber/witness
6. Researcher as dispatcher
7. Researcher as inviter
8. Researcher as catalyst

To help readers visualize this in a different way, these methods are displayed on a continuum of community involvement in Figure 1:



Figure 1: Continuum of community involvement

Clearly, multiple methods can be combined in a single collection effort. For example, a scholar may start by remembering proverbs (Rememberer), then glean proverbs from books (Bookworm), then use these proverbs to spark discussions with knowledgeable members of the community (Elicitor). Almost all existing collections have been collected by researchers using multiple methods to varying extents.

These methods differ in more than merely the degree of community involvement. For example, the collection method will also affect the size of the proverb collection, e.g. if the scholar collects proverbs only as an alert conversationalist, the collection will be small. Also, the collection method chosen will greatly affect how much the collection reflects the paremiological minimum, the researcher as elicitor is less likely to help identify the paremiological minimum, but the last three methods are much more likely to do this.

This discussion of methods for collecting proverbs is not meant to mathematically or rigidly identify the most appropriate method for collecting proverbs in any specific proverb project. Each proverb project will have to select the most appropriate method(s) for collecting proverbs in their specific circumstances. They will have to consider such factors as time available for proverb collection, budget available for proverb project, accessibility of the language community (physical access and electronic media access), the goals of the proverb collection (quantity or paremiological minimum), etc. But no matter the method chosen, community involvement should also be considered, then maximizing community involvement in whatever method is chosen.

Note that the method used by a researcher does not guarantee an attitude. For example, it is possible for a researcher functioning as elicitor (as described in my previous work) to find ways to involve a broad part of the community in discussing proverbs. In contrast, simply organizing a Twitter-based proverb collection project does not ensure that the researcher will conscientiously work with the language community to involve and empower them.

5. What do we do with the results of collecting?

No matter how proverbs are gathered, whether by a solitary bookworm researcher, or by a broad community-driven effort, or by a combination of all the methods, the collection can be used for a variety of analysis and application.

The collection of proverbs, probably a selected portion rather than every single item that was submitted, can subsequently be edited for distribution. This is certainly one area where significant involvement from the community is required. An expert (or small team of them) is needed to edit the collected proverbs for such things as spelling, choosing the form(s) of the proverb to be included in the collection (from among alternative forms submitted), deciding if proverbs are not appropriate to be included in a public collection, etc.

Whatever the distribution channel, the community that was involved in the proverb distribution should have convenient access to the collection.

The distribution of a proverb collection may be in print, online, in audio form, or a combination. This could be in a variety of ways, such as presenting bound copies given to schools, graphics files that can be read on cell phones, installments being printed in a local newspaper or magazine, websites, etc. When doing proverb research, especially when involving the community in the research, researchers have an obligation to share the data appropriately to those involved (Sommer 2009).

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