About the Digital Media Archive

Introduction

The DMA (Digital Media Archive) holds an extensive collection of printed and mechanically recorded materials in some 180 languages and dialects “from Abaza to Zulu”. Recording media range from Edison cylinders and needle-cut aluminum discs to motion-picture film and digital audio tape. Subject matter runs from psychological interviews to commercial language courses to field-recordings collected for linguistic analysis. One day the DMA hopes to put many of these materials on-line, but unresolved questions of copyright and limited resources militate against the realization of this objective anytime soon. (Issues regarding access to the archives are discussed at the end of this section.)

What is or is not included in the DMA collection reflects the pedagogical and scholarly interests of language instructors and linguistic researchers who have worked at the University of Chicago over the past eighty years. In terms of sheer number of titles the DMA's holdings of books, audio tapes and phonograph records in French and Spanish constitute the largest collections. Also extensive are the holdings in Arabic, Chinese, German, Japanese, Korean and Russian. Most of these items consist of language courses prepared at the University or purchased from commercial sources.

Meso-American Collection

The archives achieve their true distinction in the great number and variety of field recordings donated to the Labs over the past four decades. In particular, the DMA's collection of Meso-American materials stands out. From the 1930s, when the needle-cut aluminum disc represented the state of the art in audio recording, come hundreds of discs contributed in the main by the Manuel Andrade, a University of Chicago linguist. In his travels to Mexico and Guatemala he obtained recordings in the Aguacatec, Huastec, Kanjobal, Mam, Quech, Quiché, Totonac, Yucatec Maya and Zapotec languages. By the 1960s the recording art had advanced to the level of the portable reel-to-reel tape recorder. From this period emerges the extensive dialect survey of the Tzeltal and Tzotzil languages carried out by the late Norman A. McQuown (Departments of Linguistics and Anthropology) and his colleagues. Subsequently, graduate students working under the supervision of Prof. McQuown brought back recordings in Chol, Ixil, Nahuatl (“Aztec”), Pocomam and Tzotzil. Paul Friedrich (Professor Emeritus, Departments of Anthropology and Linguistics) has also given the LA some of his recordings in the Tarascan language.

Eric P. Hamp's Contributions

An especially prolific contributor to the archives has been Eric P. Hamp (Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, Departments of Linguistics, Slavic Languages and Literatures, Psychology (Cognition and Communication) and the Committee on the Ancient Mediterranean World). He has greatly enriched the collection with donations in some sixteen languages. As an Indo-Europeanist, Prof. Hamp has concentrated his scholarly research on various Albanian dialects as well as a number of Celtic languages - Breton, Welsh, Irish Gaelic and Scots Gaelic. But, in his travels around the world, he has also collected samples of widely divergent languages from Ainu and Lapp to Vlach and Lower Sorbian. In the academic year 1989-90, Prof. Hamp - on the verge of retirement - gave his last course on the reconstruction of Indo-European. Barbara Need, former Manager of the DMA, assisted Karen Landahl in recording each lecture on audiocassette. The resulting set of tapes, too, remains with the DMA for the use of future scholars.

Other Languages and Materials

Outside the Meso-American area other languages of the Americas are represented in the archive, sometimes by no more than a single audio-cassette or phonograph record. These include:

- Apache, Cayap, Cherokee, Comanche, Crow,
- Hidatsa, Inuit (Eskimo), Krenakore, Lakota (Sioux),
- Miwok, Mohawk, Navajo, Ojibway, Parintintin,
- Quechua, Quileute, Tingit, Tolowa, Winnebago, and Yurok

A strong emphasis on South Asian studies during the 1960s and '70s has also left a substantial mark in the archive. Course materials in South Asian languages were recorded in the DMA studio during those years, including Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Urdu. In addition, tapes and books from other universities have enriched the collection - in the languages of Telugu, Kannada, Nepali and Oriya. Finally, Norman H. Zide (Professor Emeritus, Departments of Linguistics, and South Asian Languages and Civilizations), has donated his personal collection of field recordings in the Munda languages of India such as Gutob.

Ethiopia and Sub-Saharan African also find representation in the archives. Holdings range from field recordings to courses prepared by the Foreign Service Institute in such languages as Amharic, Bolum, Chewa, Ewe, Fula, Gallia, Hausa, Kpelle, Kru, Masai, Mende, Swahili, Tigrinya and Zulu.

Languages, however, are not the only subjects found in the collection. In the 1960s, for example, Prof. McQuown explored the fields of kinesics (“body language”) and interview analysis, which are recalled in the form of filmed and tape-recorded interviews. Various scholarly conferences held around that time have also yielded recorded lectures on such topics as anthropology and syntax.

Access to the Archive

In principle, anyone associated with the University and possessing the proper identification has access to most of the materials stored in the archive. Except in those cases in which copyright permits the making of copies, all materials must be used on the premises of the DMA. Furthermore, access to the archive may also be restricted for the following reasons:

1. Before they can be used, certain materials (such as phonograph records) may have to be copied onto a more accessible (and less fragile) medium such as audio-cassettes - or digitized for on-line access. Limitations on staff time may delay such dubbing.
2. Other items (such as motion-picture films) may not be readily playable for lack of suitable equipment.
3. Some donors of archived materials may not permit use of their materials during their lifetime.