

# Stable principles of linguistic fieldwork

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In this presentation, I would like to address the issue of linguistic fieldwork in Southeast Asia today and in the near future by raising the point that there are certain fundamental principles of fieldwork that should always apply, regardless of the state of technology, and regardless of the sociocultural, political, and economic situation. I will give two examples.

1. **Human relationships.** Success or failure in linguistic fieldwork depends on the quality of the human relationships that are established and maintained throughout the project and beyond. Most fieldwork entails making an imposition on members of the language community. From the first day, the fieldworker depends on the generosity, tolerance, and trust of the hosts. This must not only be reciprocated, but special attention must be given to the fact that the essential investment of fieldwork is in mutual and enduring interpersonal relationships with those who are helping you to collect and understand linguistic data.

2. **Research questions.** Field research is pointless unless your work is guided by explicit research questions. All fieldwork is selective, and so it is crucial to be able to say in advance why you plan to collect certain facts and not others, and what you plan to do with the data afterwards. Equally important, however, is to be flexible once you are in the field, and to be able to respond flexibly to opportunities and observations that you had not anticipated.

These two principles are examples of some important considerations for fieldwork that are entirely independent from the historical, technological, or political conditions; The main message of this presentation is that when focusing upon the changing techniques and conditions of fieldwork, it is essential not to overlook the basic principles.