

Recorded Sound Preservation Study

[1] How are archives, libraries and university libraries tracking what they have in their collections? If they don't know what they have, what systems or models would they use to compile this information and what sort of support would they see as necessary to accomplish it?

The University of Chicago Language Archives is currently using FileMaker Pro databases to track our collection of recorded sound and supporting textual documentation. We are currently using two main databases--one title-based, one item-based--with no relation defined between them. Our ultimate goal is to have a single database that contains both sets of information, one that can be exported following the OLAC conventions for access on the web. Despite our best efforts, not everything in the Archive currently is in one or the other database, but we are working item by item and title by title to bring them current. We are assigning a bar code to every item in the collection in anticipation of moving the archive during construction this spring.

We have worked with a museum that has good-sized collection of recorded audio which is stored under very poor conditions. They do not know what they have and they do not have the playback equipment to identify unlabeled recordings. They need to hire staff to organize the material, research the items that are labeled (there are many commercial recordings); we would do the work to identify what is not labeled. I do know that they have cracked and broken records, so equipment to play those back (and to clean them would be needed). Grants to the museum and the Archive, and gifts to the museum to pay for staffing, equipment, and better storage would be the best support we could receive.

[2] In the absence of resources to process or preserve sound recordings, are institutions withholding information about what they have?

The University of Chicago Language Archives has had a print copy of its catalog available in the University Library for a number of years, and our web site (undergoing revisions) has long listed the pedagogical items we sell. As noted above, we are working toward putting our catalog on line--and any patron who walks in our front doors can look at the hard copy. If people ask for a specific item, we will try to make a copy (this used to be an analog copy, but now we do digital ones), as long as the project is small (or the patron can pay). We do not withhold information about our collection, but it is not currently widely available. We do get phone calls (oh, I'm interested in language X, do you have any?) and I help as best I can, but copyright often does not permit us to distribute material.

[3] There's relative consensus on the percentage of motion pictures that have been lost, for whatever reason, and knowledge about specific losses. Can anyone provide to the board anecdotal, but verifiable, evidence or accounts of specific sound recordings of socio-cultural value that are already lost?

The closest I can come are some field recordings done by Eric Hamp in Italy (he was collecting data from speakers of Albanian). As we were working to capture these, my tech found some where the oxide was flaking from the backing! I don't remember if these were originals or back-up copies, but fortunately we still had a copy of the tape, so the material was not lost. On the other hand, had these been the only copies, we could not have recovered the audio. We also have recordings which we are

capturing now, whose capture quality might have been better a few years ago. These are field recordings of Mesoamerican languages.

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