When talking about knowledge in language, the examples given usually refer to categorizations attested in the lexicon or the grammar of a language. Studies describe the categorization of plant and animal names or they describe grammatical devices like evidential. However, the documentation of knowledge often includes further areas like practical skills or information and ideas of people, for example about the history of a group, cosmology and religion, ethnomusicology, medicine and the like.

“Language encodes the range of human experience and knowledge; its disappearance entails the loss of the skills, information, beliefs, and ideas of a people. Often this involves specific knowledge about plants and their medicinal uses. It also includes historical knowledge; preliterate societies record their histories in their oral traditions, including stories, legends, and songs which tell the history of their people, settlements, battles, and so on. Language is more than a repository for religious and spiritual beliefs; in many societies the language itself is sacred and cannot be separated from religious beliefs and practices.” (Grenoble 2006: 140)

Thus, knowledge has to be understood as a wide field. Since projects are usually restricted in time and funding, it might be necessary to restrict the goals of the research. This might, however, leave out important aspects and present a one-sided picture of a given community or one that is biased by outsiders’ ideas. Therefore, a pilot study is needed, which is based mainly on observation to create a reasonable research program for the time given which takes into consideration the aspects relevant to a given speech community.

There is a difference between the knowledge of individuals and the knowledge of a speech community as such. Knowledge is not absolute, but rather something that is construed and negotiated within a society. The definition of knowledge, i.e. what is understood as knowledge, is different in every group. Moreover, communities often have specific ideas about the expertise and knowledge of certain individuals and who is considered the best consultant for the given task to be documented. In many cases, communities consider elderly people, and especially men, as the appropriate consultants to give information. This might conflict with the interests of the researcher to document knowledge with people from different sociolinguistic backgrounds and expertise to get a variety of data. Thus, the local understanding of knowledge as well as the understanding of expertise and knowledge of individuals has to be taken into consideration and documented. Moreover, the process of negotiation of expertise before a recording is made should be documented as well.