Field Techniques applied in the collection of language data

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Our Mission

- To document Indian languages, standard and marginalized
- To acknowledge and record languages used for inter-ethnic communication [multilinguality]
- To write grammars and grammatical sketches
- To prepare dictionaries (conventional and digitized)
- To write sociolinguistic grammars/sketches
- To prepare digitized audio-visual samples of each language under investigation

Various Methods

- Observation Method.
- Interview Method
- Sending Questionnaire Method.
- Documentary Source Method
- Videoing of unstructured events
- Audio recording of unstructured events
- Combinations of observation, interview and questionnaire.

Interrogation Techniques

- Improper interviews, whether in the methodology or in the content, lead to communicative blunders. Avoid them. Kinship terms.

- Translation Method [use of questionnaire]

- Pictorial Representation [Word List + dictionary]

- Substitution Interrogation [grammar testing]

- Getting narration [grammar, lexicon, archive forms, narrative strategies, discourse patterns]

Interviewing Structured and Unstructured Interviews

In *unstructured* interviews the interviewer asks open-ended questions and allows interviewees to respond at their own pace in their own words.

In *structured* interviews, the interviewer asks all informants the same questions, in the same sequence, and under the same set of conditions.

Early stages of research deal with unstructured interviews while the later stages of research are more structured

Structured interviews

- **Preparation of the Questionnaire**
  - Goals should be clear
  - Each questionnaire should be numbered
  - Language of the Questionnaire will depend upon:
- The linguistic composition of the speech community
- The language of the investigator
- The nature of the inquiry
- Length of the questionnaire [depends on the topic of investigation]

Structured Surveys

a) **What is involved**?: interviews by linguists; records answers to predetermined/ standardized questions.

b) **Advantages**:

- Same desired information is obtained from all

respondents==> statistical analysis

- Most effective for specific type of data

- Information not contaminated by others' opinions

- Verifiable: across speakers, across time period

- Most useful in testing linguistic theory

- Ideal for sociolinguistic work

In-depth Interviews

- In- depth and open-ended individual interviews offer the researcher a vital flexibility and allows for the identification of issues and questions not yet in the information bank developed by the research. The formulation of new questions and routes of inquiry is an important strength of qualitative research.

- The researcher's skills, attitudes, and experiences are key to engaging hard-to-reach individuals to participate in research studies particularly in in-depth interviews.

Interviewing Informants [10 commandments]

- First approach the head of the household

- Always begin by describing your aims and objectives to the informant.

- Start with direct questions regarding the background of the informants.

- One must follow all the etiquette that the social norm of the community dictates.

- Do not criticize, oppose or contradict the informant while interviewing, even if you totally disagree with her/his views.

- Try to complete all your interviews before sundown in village settings and before 9 p.m. in city settings.

- No interview should last for more than two hours per informant per day.

- Try to avoid public places such as kiosks, tea stalls, hotels, pubs, school-grounds etc

- One must record the interview provided the informant does not object to it.

- You should make a note of all possible features (linguistic and non-linguistic) which come to your notice and which might be useful in writing the report later. My Bird book was the result of this practice.

Features of a good informant/contact person

• A willing one

• Possesses good knowledge of the target language

• Possesses good knowledge of the contact language

• Possesses good translation talent

• Possesses good pronunciation

• Possesses patience

• Possesses honesty and pride towards his/her MT

• Possesses experience with talking to foreigners [not   essential]

• Linguistically not sophisticated

• Possesses associative mobility of thoughts

Additional note:

- *The **name** of the investigator, **place** of the interview and the **date/time** of filling out the questionnaire should be recorded at all costs.*

- *Information on recording machine should be meticulously noted down.*

- *Metadata*

Information Regarding the Informant

- The best course is to ask 1-4 initially and wait for the rest.
- Name of the informant:
- Primary language spoken at home (mother-tongue):
- Other languages spoken at home:
- Languages known to you: Read--------, Write--------, Understand----
- Age :
- Gender:
- Education:
- Medium of instruction at the primary level
- Profession, if any
- How long have you stayed in this place?
- Why and when did you migrate to this place? (if migration is involved).
- The **name** of the investigator, **place** of the interview and the **date/time** of filling out the questionnaire should be recorded at all costs.

Interviewing is an art: guidelines

•interview in everyday, familiar settings, take cues from context
•look for specific examples & artifacts
•do not pre-suppose answer/s
•be open-ended - avoid yes/no questions
•be flexible to adapt line of questioning
•establish and maintain good rapport with the members
•casual conversation is not bad
•believe that respondent is an expert in her field
•do not interrupt unnecessarily
•plan questions that allow paraphrasal quality – ask the same question in different ways
•Always keep your recording device on

Challenges for the Qualitative Interviewer

❖ What are some of the major challenges that an interviewer/researcher must address or overcome in order to conduct a successful qualitative interview? (i.e., What makes qualitative interviewing difficult?)

❖ Establishing Rapport

❖ Gaining confidence in yourself

❖ Instilling comfort

❖ Building trust

❖Defining norms of conduct and conversation,

❖ Negotiating power

❖ Creating an appropriate climate for exchange

❖ Asking the right questions and knowing when to probe for details

❖ Being an attentive and adaptive listener

❖ Being aware of potential reaction from the community

Ethics and Linguists

Areas of responsibility for linguists:

➢ Consider your subject with TLC

➢ Do not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of

the   subject

➢ The local community practices and beliefs

should be respected

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➢ The governmental help and information should be sought as and when required.

➢ The Linguist's responsibilities to the community of Linguists should be kept in mind.

➢ Do not accept gift or anything from the consultant

➢ Give back to the society in return of the data in various forms: script, dictionary, grammar, encyclopedia, word lists, CD

- The researcher's skills, attitudes, and experiences are key to engaging hard-to-reach individuals to participate in research studies particularly in in-depth interviews.

- Participate in the daily-life of the community.

- Try to immerse in the life-pattern of the community keeping simultaneously distancing yourself to have an objective view of the language and its users.

How to transcribe and record?

- Sound recording and transcription should be simultaneous
- Analysis and transcription goes hand in hand
- Interlinear translation has to be as fine as possible
- Remarks are not to be considered trivial
- Recording Source of the data is very significant

Interlinear gloss and translation of a sentence

698   GA   atʰire ca:y kʰudi ŋolobom

MB   a-tʰire   ca:y -kʰudi   ŋolo-b-om

Gl   CL1-child what-for   cry-FA-NPST

Egl   Why is the child crying?

Hindi बच्चा क्यों रो रहा है?

Src   Nao Jr./ 06.12.05/ MD.1 Gr.14 T.1 CIILQ4/ Narayan A-4

Rem Interrogative

GA = Great Andamanese; MB = Morphemic Break; Gl = Gloss; EGl = English Gloss; Src = Source; Rem = Remarks

Field notes1

- Field notes should be written as soon as possible after leaving the field site, immediately if possible.

- We are all very likely to forget important details unless we write them down very quickly.

- Since this may be very time-consuming, students should assign special time slot to do so, but as close to the real interview as possible.

- Initial analysis should be done before going for the next interview next time.

Field Notes 2

a list of points that should be included in all field notes:

- Date, time, and place of observation

- Specific facts, numbers, details of what happens at the site

- Sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, tastes

- Personal responses to the fact of recording fieldnotes

- Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and insider language

- Questions about people or behaviors at the site for future investigation

- Page numbers to help keep observations in order

The Meta data

The non print version gives additional information as each entry is marked for its source as well as for the name of the investigator, the date it was collected, the location of the recordings on a particular Mini Disk, track and group number specified, as well as the page number of the notebook it was written on by the investigator.

Metadata

Make table or use excel sheet to record:

- Biographical information (log)
- Content of the interaction (descriptive)
- Personal impressions (diary)
- First interpretations (analytic notes)
- Dates of recording
- Names of the investigator
- Location and Time of elicitation
- Details of recording, MD, track, video details, page number etc.

Variation

 "Researchers have to try to find out whether variation in speech between informants they consult are the result of elicitation techniques or whether they truly reflect linguistically interesting variables in the data"

Additional Data-Gathering
Techniques
- Census taking
- Mapping
- Document analysis
- Collecting genealogies
- Photography
- Inventory of resources
- Study of material remains

A Manual of Linguistic Field Work and Structures of Indian Languages

Anvita Abbi

Recommended readings

•Abbi, Anvita *A manual of Linguistics Fieldwork and Structures of Indian languages*

•Introduction and Chapter 1 from: *Linguistic Fieldwork* edited by Newman and Ratliff, CUP, Cambridge, 2000.

•*Projects in Linguistics, A Practical Guide to Researching Language*, Wray et Alia, Arnold, London, 1998.