Fieldwork techniques and elicitation

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Sonja Riesberg

Universität zu Köln
„The aim of language documentation is to provide a comprehensive record of the practices characteristic of a given speech community. Linguistic practice and tradition are manifest in two ways:

1. the observable linguistic behaviour
2. the native speakers’ metalinguistic knowledge“
The ‘Observer’s Paradox’

Labov (1972:209)

‘the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation.’
Quality of Data

• *natural communicative events (CE)*, i.e. CE unaffected by any external interference → not amenable to LD
• *observed communicative events*, i.e. CE in which the external interference is limited to the fact that the ongoing event is being observed and/or recorded
• *staged communicative events*, i.e. CE which are enacted for the purpose of recording
• *elicitation*, i.e. a type of CE invented for conducting linguistic research and documentation
How to make “a comprehensive record”?

By making (video-/audio) recordings of different kinds of communicative events, for example:

– everyday conversations (e.g. while cooking in the kitchen)
– explanations (e.g. how to build a boat)
– (political) speeches
– prayers
– ritual speech (e.g. at a wedding or a funeral)
– story tales
– stories of (common) people’s lives
– (traditional) songs
– ...
How to make “a comprehensive record”?

But:

• different languages will have different communicative events
• you have to find out what kind of communicative events there are in the language you are working on

ambitious:
make different recordings of all different communicative events you find not only prayers or only informal conversation, but all you find in the speech community!
Recording explanatory texts

• people are often happy and willing to share their knowledge and present their skills
  – recipe/preparing food
  – building houses, boats, weapons ...
  – harvesting
  – crafting handicrafts
  – ...

Recording explanatory texts

Totoli – Abdullah explains how to make bricks

WN: *Doong mogutu sopa ana?*
What are you doing there?
*Kodoong mogutu apa?*
What do you want to do?

A: *Oh, kodoong pogutu lapis anu …*
Oh, I want to make a layer, em...
....
Recording explanatory texts

Yali – Yulius explains how to make Sago
Recording narratives

• ask people to tell a traditional folk story, myth of origin, fairy tales
  → often there is at least one “famous” story teller in the speech community

• ask people to tell the story of their life
  → some people have experienced interesting, funny, or dramatic things and are willing to share these experiences with you and other members of the speech community
Recording narratives
Yali – Wandikhe tells a story

K: *In. In nene.*
Tell (us). Tell (us), grandma

W: *Suit arire*
this story

W: *an ketia suit uruk lahi*
the story I am telling

W: *an hahon intore Fasig Aloma lema hag wilapag*
there was a woman like me who lived in Bukit Fasig

W: *weregmare ahun itno warapag*
her husband died
Recording narratives
Totoli – Nahre tells her life story

N: *iya, iya, i aku gane umur sumplai onom*
Well, well, I was only sixteen years old

*tahun pitu no pulu ai sabatu*
in the year seventy one

*taon nikabing lengan tau Mandaa*
that was the year when I was married to a native Mandar.
Recording songs

Hebon sings a Yali Suleng
Recording songs

Totoli Lelegesan
R: *Hallo*
L: *Hi, na wie geht‘s Dir?*  
   Hi, how are you?  
R: *Gut, und Dir?*  
   I’m fine and how about you?  
L: *Mir geht‘s auch gut.*  
   I am fine, too.  
R: *Hast Du eigentlich mal den Wetterbericht angeguckt? Am Wochenende...*  
   Have you seen the weather forecast? At the weekend  
L: *Ja, voll schönes Wetter.*  
   Yeah, really nice weather.  
R: *...25 Grad Sollen wir Grillen gehen? Hast Du Lust grillen zu gehen morgen?*  
   25 degree. Shall we have a barbecue? Do you want to have a barbecue tomorrow?  
L: *...*
Recording conversations

Totoli – conversation at the beach
Some tips and tricks

• Find somebody to help you
  – to explain why and what you want to record
  – to ask questions in order to keep the conversation going/to get more explicit information

• Try to make yourself “invisible”
  – if possible, put up your camera and leave the scene
  – don’t attract attention by standing behind and/or moving the camera around

• Try to record people in natural settings/situations
  – if possible, don’t arrange people for being recorded
How to make “a comprehensive record”? 

To get explicit grammatical information, under-recorded linguistic structures, and metalinguistic statements you might have use special strategies

→ ELICITATION/ USE OF STIMULI
Elicitation/Use of stimuli

linguistic stimuli
- translation
- judgment
- contextualizing
- questionnaire
- ...

non-linguistic stimuli
- video stimuli
- picture stimuli
- problem-solving tasks
- experiments
- ...

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# linguistic stimuli

## word lists

| 1. I          | 31. heavy   | 60. grass   |
| 2. you (singular) | 32. small   | 61. rope     |
| 3. he         | 33. short   | 62. skin     |
| 4. we         | 34. narrow  | 63. meat     |
| 5. you (plural)| 35. thin    | 64. blood    |
| 6. they       | 36. woman  | 65. bone     |
| 7. this       | 37. man (adult male) | 66. fat (n.) |
| 8. that       | 38. man (human being) | 67. egg |
| 9. here       | 39. child   | 68. horn     |
| 10. there     | 40. wife    | 69. tail     |
| 11. who       | 41. husband | 70. feather  |
| 12. what      | 42. mother  | 71. hair     |
| 13. where     | 43. father  | 72. head     |
| 14. when      | 44. animal  | 73. ear      |
| 15. how       | 45. fish    | 74. eye      |
| 16. not       | 46. bird    | 75. nose     |
| 17. all       | 47. dog     | 76. mouth    |
| 18. many      | 48. louse   | 77. tooth    |
| 19. some      | 49. snake   | 78. tongue   |
| 20. few       | 50. worm    | 79. fingernail |
| 21. other     | 51. tree    | 80. foot     |
| 22. one       | 52. forest  | 81. leg       |
| 23. two       | 53. stick   | 82. knee     |
| 24. three     | 54. fruit   | 83. hand     |
| 25. four      | 55. seed    | 84. wing     |
| 26. five      | 56. leaf    | 85. belly    |
| 27. big       | 57. root    | 86. guts     |
| 28. long      | 58. bark    | 87. neck     |
| 29. wide      | 59. flower  | 88. back     |
| 30. thick     |             | 89. breast   |
linguistic stimuli

questionnaires

• control structures (Polinsky 2006; Stiebels 2007)
• converses (Nedjalkov 1993)
• deixis and location (Engelenhoven 2000)
• figurative language (Gil/Shen)
• imparatives (Xrakovskij 2001)
• information structure (Skopeteas et al. 2006)
• language contact (Bowden 2000)
• motion events (Wälchli)
• oral tradition (Florey 2000)
• phonology (Everett)
• TAM (Dahl 1985)
• word order (Siewierska)
• ... (and many many more)
linguistic stimuli

questionnaires

0.2 Does the language have
a) prepositions
b) postpositions
c) both
d) neither

MAIN CLAUSE CONSTITUENTS

Word order in transitive clauses

1.1 Give an example of a transitive clause where: S is a definite human agent, O is a definite patient and the verb is a typical action verb such as hit or kill which would be used in answer to a question such as What happened? (If order in such cases is affected by the form of the verb, please postpone your comments to (1.12)).

1.2 Translate the example in bold assuming the specified context. Please provide all the possibilities.

   (A girl and a boy were quarrelling in the garden.)
   The girl hit the boy.

1.3 Translate the example in bold assuming the specified context. Please provide all the possibilities.

   (A girl and a boy were quarrelling in the garden.)
   The boy was hit by the girl.
linguistic stimuli

translation

a. *bale ia niseokanna*

   bale ia ni-seok-an=na
   house PRX RLS-seok-UV=3s.GEN

   ‘he entered the house’

b. ??? what is the respective non-realis form ???
linguistic stimuli
translation

b. ??? what is the respective non-realis form ???

NH: Rumah ini dia mau memasuki? Dia mau masuki?
He **wants** to enter the house?
S : *Bale ia kodoong seokina.*
NH: *Seokina!*
S : *Seokina.*
linguistic stimuli
judgments

SR : _Aku nikenti mangngana kolobii sasaakan._
A  : That’s the same as the preceding one, right?
WN: The first one was _I aku nikenti sasaakan mangngana kolobii._
A  : Yes!
WN: With _Aku nikenti mangngana kolobii sasaakan._
A  : That’s the same. You can say it like that.
WN: You can say it like that.
SR : Can you repeat it?
A  : How was that again?
WN: _Aku nikenti mangngana kolobii sasaakan._
A  : Yes. _Aku nikenti sasaakan mangngana kolobii._ Or: _Aku nikenti kolobii sasaakan mangngana._
WN: Or: _Aku nikenti mangngana kolobii sasaakan._
A  : Ah yes! _Aku nikenti mangngana sasaakan kolobii._ Like that, right?
WN: No! _Aku nikenti mangngana kolobii sasaakan._
A  : Oh yeah. That’s the same. _Aku nikenti mangngana sasaakan kolobii._
Some tips and tricks

• when eliciting, always let people repeat the forms/sentences you are giving
  – if a speaker accepts your forms/sentences but is not able to repeat them, they are probably wrong

• always record you elicitation sessions

• always check the same things with more than one speaker
M: \textit{sisia na tia ttoli}
they over there in Totoli
\textit{ladung ana}
(say) ‘ladung’ (for ‘to knock)
\textit{ana dello kita ingia, kami ingia kongkong}
but we here, we here (we say) ‘kongkong’
\textit{sia ladung}
they (say) ‘ladung’
Non-linguistic stimuli can be roughly divided into three types (San Roque et al. 2012):

i. encourage narrative production, through asking speakers to tell a depicted story

ii. require speaker to describe, categorize, and/or compare sets of non-linguistic stimuli

iii. elicit dialogic negotiation

→ many tasks combine more than one of these elements
The Frog Story (type i.)
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The Frog Story (type i.)
Body Colouring Task (type ii.)
Space Game (type ii. & iii.)
Space Game (type ii. & iii.)
Other widely used props

• Pear film (Chafe et al. 1980, 1994)
• Clips on event representation (Bohnemeyer et al. 1999)
• Family problem picture task (San Roque et al. 2012)
• MPI Nijmegen video clips: put-series, reciprocals
• QUIS-set from Uni Potsdam

→ and many more!

ALL AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET

see, for example, http://fieldmanuals.mpi.nl/
Quality of Data

linguistic self-awareness
investigators’ control

NATURAL COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

OBSERVED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

STAGED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS
- without props
- with props

ELICITATION
- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments
Recording explanatory texts
Totoli – Abdullah explains how to make bricks

WN: *Doong mogutu sopa ana?*
What are you doing there?

*Kodoong mogutu apa?*
What do you want to do?

A: *Oh, kodoong pogutu lapis anu ...*
Oh, I want to make a layer, em...

....
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A. explaining how to make bricks
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- without props
- with props

ELICITATION
- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments

W. telling a story
A. explaining how to make bricks
Recording conversations
Totoli – conversation at the beach
Quality of Data

linguistic self-awareness
investigators’ control

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NATURAL COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

OBSERVED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS
- conversation on the beach

STAGED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS
- without props
- with props

W. telling a story
A. explaining how to make bricks

ELICITATION
- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments
Recording songs
Totoli Lelegesan
Quality of Data

linguistic self-awareness
investigators’ control

NATURAL COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

- conversation on the beach

OBSERVED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

- W. telling a story

STAGED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

- without props
- with props

ELICITATION

- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments

Lelegesan
The Frog Story
Quality of Data

linguistic self-awareness
investigators’ control

NATURAL COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

OBSERVED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

STAGED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS
- without props
- with props

ELICITATION
- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments

conversation on the beach
W. telling a story
A. explaining how to make bricks
Frog Story
Body Colouring Task
Quality of Data


- linguistic self-awareness
- investigators’ control

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NATURAL COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

OBSERVED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

STAGED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

ELICITATION

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conversation on the beach

A. explaining how to make bricks

W. telling a story

- without props
- with props

Frog Story (Body colouring)

- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments
Space Game
Quality of Data

language self-awareness
investigators’ control

NATURAL COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

OBSERVED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

STAGED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS
- without props
- with props

ELICITATION
- contextualizing
- translation
- judgments

conversation on the beach

A. explaining how to make bricks
W. telling a story
Frog Story (Body colouring)
Space Game
Elicitation

**PRO**
- getting data you cannot find in your corpus so far
  - meta-linguistic statement, judgments, etc.
  - ungrammatical structures
- efficient for getting explicit grammatical information

**CONTRA**
- high degree of linguistic awareness/investigator’s control
- speakers might become bored/unconcentrated/confused easily
Use of non-linguistic stimuli

**PRO**
- help to get people talking
- can be fun
- provide data that is at the same time **natural** and parallel

**CONTRA**
- often culture specific
- sometimes very strange and difficult to use