Fieldwork basics[1]

Linguistic fieldwork is a form of science. We study a natural phenomenon (language) and develop a theory of its behavior. We may observe its behavior under more or less controlled contexts, develop hypotheses, and test these hypotheses by conducting experiments. At the same time, *language is the product of a speaker*.

(1) **Two principal components of skillful fieldwork:**

    a. <u>Manners:</u> Gathering data in a way that respects the speaker and keeps the speaker comfortable.

    b. <u>Methodology:</u> Gathering data in a way that yields information of maximal value to linguistic study.

Much of this module will be about learning what questions to ask, how to ask them, and how to understand the answers. In many cases, there is no single right way to ask a question. Throughout the semester, we'll learn from each other, see different styles, and see what works.

1 Manners

Fieldwork involves working with a speaker and therefore an important aspect of the work is to interact with them with respect and making them feel comfortable.

(2) **Respect:**

    a. Remember that the speaker is a human collaborator in this project whose time is valuable, and who has their own interests, skills, and stories.

    b. Avoid having extended discussions with team-mates in front of the speaker.

(3) **Friendliness:**

    a. Always do your best to be friendly and cheerful during meetings.

    b. Never get visibly upset or disappointed if the data is problematic.

    c. Don't be aggressive. Never challenge the data the speaker provides.

(4) **Appreciation:**

    a. Always be appreciative of the speakers contributions, even if:

        i. it's not directly related to what you wanted to talk about,

        ii. it contradicts other information or an analysis you have in mind

    b. Always thank the speaker for their time (even if they are also being monetarily compensated)

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[1]Much of this follows previous notes by Seth Cable and Jessica Coon.

(5) **Comfort:**

    a. Be careful not to overwork the speaker (also a methodology concern).

    b. Try to be aware of the attention level and interest of the speaker:

        i. Try switching topics and coming back later.

        ii. Ask the speaker if theyd like to take a break, grab some water, etc.

    c. Be sure to give the speaker time to think and respond, rather than moving quickly to the next question

2   Methodology

Data in linguistic fieldwork can be grouped roughly into two forms: naturally-produced speech/text and elicitation. Each have their advantages and disadvantages.

(6) **Naturally-produced speech and text:**

    a. <u>Advantages:</u> Gives us a picture of the language as it is actually used. We may find things we wouldn't have thought to ask for.

    b. <u>Disadvantages:</u> No negative data. We might not know exactly what we are seeing, because the context and meaning are not carefully controlled for.

(7) **Structured elicitation:**

    a. <u>Advantages:</u> We can get negative data and judgments.

    b. <u>Disadvantages:</u> We are limited by what we ask for.

In this module, we will conduct structured elicitation (7) as well as *task-based elicitation of naturalistic speech*. This allows for the elicitation of naturally-produced speech where we have some idea of what to expect, and we can also structure the task to target elicitation of particular types of expressions.

3   Assignment 1

The recording from the naturalistic task (the Frog Story) will be posted to IVLE in the Workbin. Transcribe the recording. Try to identify sentence breaks and identify which sentence goes with which part of the story. Submit on IVLE by class time next week.

Your transcription should be in IPA or at least a systematic romanization. Identifying the correct speech sounds and IPA will be difficult—don't worry too much about this right now. What is most important is that you are consistent in your choices.

4 Today's plan

4.1 Naturalistic task

We will look at (part of) a picture book and have Sandhya tell the story in Nepali.

4.2 Elicitation

1. Elicit Leipzig-Jakarta list of 100 basic words.
2. Elicit Ladefoged 1981 Nepali word list.

   The goal of these two word list elicitations is to develop a phonetic inventory for the language, especially relevant phonetic contrasts which will inform our transcriptions.
3. Elicit words and sentences relevant to the Frog Story.

   The goal of this section is to make it easier for us to understand and transcribe our naturalistic recording of the Frog Story, as well as begin the study of basic sentence patterns in Nepali.