

Naturalistic elicitation tasks

1 Introduction

Traditionally, methodology for the study of an understudied language has come in two forms:

1. elicitation (more next week)
2. building a corpus of naturally-occurring narratives and texts to analyze

Recall from week 1: What are their advantages and disadvantages? In addition:

(1) **Some disadvantages of paradigmatic elicitation from Louie (2015):**

- a. Paradigmatic elicitation can be boring.
- b. Setting up hypothetical situations can be mentally taxing, and it is easy to keep thinking about a previous situation.
- c. With minimally-contrasting examples, the consultant could start to theorize and come up with their own heuristic for answering your questions.

The choice of methodology also informs/depends on the aspect of language under study. Some phenomena are best studied using (or absolutely require) naturalistic, long-form data: for example, tense/aspect, pro-drop, ellipsis, topicalization, discourse particles, etc.

But the traditional elicitation/corpus divide is a false choice. These methods are on a spectrum. In this class we'll conduct *task-based elicitation of naturalistic speech* as well as traditional structured elicitation.

(2) **Goals of task-based naturalistic elicitation:**

- a. Keeping elicitation engaging and maybe even fun.
- b. Eliciting the target expressions or constructions you're interested in.
- c. Making the naturalistic speech recorded relatively predictable. For this, it is very important to control the setup and give clear instructions.

2 Examples

(3) **Storytelling:**

- a. The consultant could be asked to narrate an established story. Useful materials:
 - <http://totemfieldstoryboards.org/> (the "animal party" was from there) Burton and Matthewson (2015) (on IVLE) discuss their use.
 - Katie Sardinha's <http://story-builder.ca>
- b. Alternatively, the consultant could speak as a particular character.

- c. Best if the story has a traditional narrative arc: begin by introducing characters, follows a logical sequence of events, and leads to a conclusion. Burton and Matthewson (2015) recommends plot twists; Louie (2015) recommends humor.
- (4) **Describing:**
- a. The consultant could be asked to describe what is happening in pictures/storyboards or a video.
 - b. Example of carefully controlled pictures: Ben Bruening's scope fieldwork materials <http://udel.edu/~bruening/scopeproject/scopeproject.html>
 - c. Compared to telling a story, there may be more variation in what gets described. This may later make your task of identifying what was said more difficult.
- (5) **Playing a game:**
- a. Many games involve "partial information" — one player has some information that the other is seeking.
 - b. Could also get statements of desire, commands, ...
 - c. Can work well with multiple consultants, but then you are less in control of what will be said.
 - d. Some games could be played alone or with a non-speaking player.
 - e. Alternatively, you (the linguist) could be a speaking player, either in English or using basic expressions in the target language. This could be interesting and appropriate for some games, but it does result in a less natural situation.

Session planning begins in the same way as in last week's general discussion: identifying themes, brainstorming hypotheses and questions, then thinking of individual test cases that will help you address these questions. Then, *design the task to try to elicit such test cases*:

- if setting up a story or describing a scene, design the narrative so that the desired structure comes as a natural consequence in the story.
- if playing a game, the game could be rigged so that certain events occur.

3 Afterwards

After your naturalistic elicitation, you will submit a transcript. Try to split the speech up into sentences and align them with what you think their English translations might be. Three-line glosses are not necessary. An example (though short) is in last week's folder online, for the "animal party."

One goal of task-based naturalistic elicitation is to get a good balance of text that you understand and new constructions/phenomena that we haven't seen. For example, from last week's "animal party":

(6) **Some (many) words we don't understand:**

- a. lokherkhe-le sodhyo, khane kura aru kos-le lehayo.
squirrel-CASE asked, food ??? ??? who-CASE brought
'The squirrel asked who brought the food.'
- b. lokherkhe-le **feri** sodhyo, piune kura haru kol-le lehayo.
squirrel-CASE ??? asked, drink ??? ??? who-CASE brought
'The squirrel ??? asked who brought the drinks.'

What is *feri*? Could it be something like 'then,' 'also,' 'again'...? This is something we weren't looking for, which apparently was licensed by the preceding context (the squirrel asking a question before), and we now could look into systematically.

Because the speech is more fluent and natural, we also observe some phonological variation:

(7) **Some phonological variation:**

- a. [bohonyo] vs [bonyo] 'answered/replied' (bohonyo.mp3 on IVLE)
- b. [kos-le] vs [kol-le] 'who-CASE' (kosle.mp3 on IVLE)

You can also work with the consultant to further study the recording, by playing the audio back to the consultant sentence-by-sentence and translating the sentences or asking about particular phrases.

References

- Bochnak, M. Ryan, and Lisa Matthewson, ed. 2015. *Methodologies in semantic fieldwork*. Oxford University Press.
- Burton, Strang, and Lisa Matthewson. 2015. Targeted construction storyboards in semantic fieldwork. In Bochnak and Matthewson (2015), 135–156.
- Louie, Meagan. 2015. The problem with no-nonsense elicitation plans (for semantic fieldwork). In Bochnak and Matthewson (2015), 47–71.