

## **Elicitation techniques**

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Rosetta Stone

### **1. Morphological typology**

- a. Morphological typology affects the way you should elicit information
  - i. Isolating languages – you ask for the word for ‘chair’, and you’ll get *chair*
  - ii. Synthetic languages – you ask for the word for ‘chair, and you’ll get *bikáá’ dah asdáhí* ‘the thing for sitting up there on’
    1. Always follow up – ‘what does *bikáá’ dah asdáhí* mean?’ ‘what does *dah* mean?’
- b. Polysynthesis
  - i. Do not think of concepts as ‘words’
    1. Bad: “what’s the word for...?”
    2. Good: “how do you say...?”
  - ii. Offer examples in the language
    1. Does it make sense to say...?
    2. What about...? What does that mean? What’s the difference between this and that?
- c. Talk about what constitutes a ‘word’ in the language with your language expert

### **2. Do your research**

- a. Learn the pronunciation and use it
- b. Repeat words back to the informant, and let them correct you
- c. Keep your ego in check!
- d. A useful community role is that of a language learner

### **3. Informant Background**

- a. The first thing you should do when working with a new consultant is get an idea of their background
  - i. Gives you a chance to ask about their knowledge of the language, as well as their language attitudes
  - ii. Are you dealing with someone extremely conservative regarding language use?
  - iii. Breaks the ice – gets them talking about their personal life a bit more, and makes things more intimate; invites a more trusting atmosphere
- b. What was the linguistic situation like where they grew up? In their household? Who do they speak the language with, and when?
- c. Language ideologies
  - i. Prescriptivism
  - ii. Social connotations and roles

1. Cultural considerations – e.g. in some societies, men won't listen to the opinion of a woman

#### **4. Establish friendships**

- a. Watch for personal space
- b. Use food and drink!
- c. Try to relate
- d. Ask about religion, history, culture, local geography, local customs, etc.
- e. I start every session with a couple minutes of just shooting the breeze, finding out what's new in their life
  - i. Usually this leads to interesting cultural/ethnographic questions
- f. Elicit using culturally-relevant vocabulary whenever possible
  - i. Many informants will add little tidbits, sentences, or pieces of information as you go

#### **5. Literacy**

- a. Heath, Shirley Brice. What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School.
- b. How well do they read/write the language? This has a significant impact on how they see the language.
- c. Cultures have different uses for literacy that affect their language ideologies

#### **6. Culturally-specific methods of structuring an argument or discourse**

- a. In many cultures, to learn about the hole in the roof you ask about the weather
- b. Often explicit, detailed questions are exactly what you want to avoid
- c. Different ways of structuring propositions and discourses
  - i. Different cultural models
- d. Good approach: get them talking
  - i. Ask them to talk about it or describe it to you
- e. Bad approach: can we do this?
  - i. Can you say "Strong am I in the Force."?
  - ii. Answer: yes
- f. Grasp of English
  - i. Internationalize your English – don't use embedded structures, and avoid conditionals or garden path sentences

#### **7. Participant structures**

- a. Philips, Susan U. Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom.

#### **8. Conflict resolution**

- a. Your role in conflict should be as a facilitator
  - i. Encourage the language experts to interact
  - ii. Let them make the decision, rather than you

- b. Who are you accountable to? What are the long-term effects of your decisions on the linguistic success of the community?
- c. Inform and educate when needed, but give the language experts the tools to make the decisions themselves.
- d. *Getting to Yes* by Fisher & Ury

## 9. Checking your data

- a. ALWAYS DOUBLE CHECK YOUR ELICITED RESPONSE
  - i. Have them double check your notes, or read the sentence back to you
  - ii. "How's that sound?" – elicits an acceptability judgement
    - 1. Listen for hesitations
- b. Restrict the speaker's output as little as possible
  - i. This will lead to more natural language
  - ii. Always avoid leading questions
  - iii. "What are some other ways to say/talk about this?"
    - 1. Generates a lot of ideas
    - 2. Often gets you the data you're looking for immediately

## 10. Linguistics

- a. Languages tend to have linguistic terminology specifically for that language
  - i. Look these terms up whenever possible, and match them to broader linguistic definitions and typologies
- b. Avoid imposing (or letting your informant impose) linguistic terminology, even if they have a linguistic background
  - i. Let's face it – sometimes previous work on the language is just plain wrong
- c. Check your theories about the language with the speaker
  - i. Educate them a little about the linguistics behind it while you're at it
- d. Let the speaker know precisely what you're looking for
  - i. Sometimes they'll know exactly what you mean and start giving examples
  - ii. Most useful when you share a common terminology
- e. Beware of priming effects – don't continually present the speaker with the same types of sentences
- f. Teach the informant a little about linguistics
  - i. Try to get the informant to think twice before making linguistic generalizations; often they're too quick to generalize, overlooking certain exceptions or alternate uses of a structure/word.

## 11. Working with teachers

- a. Often language informants are former or current teachers or people who pass on education in the community
- b. Ask them "how do you typically teach this?"
  - i. Gets them explaining the language to you the way they explain it to their students

## **12. Mock conversation**

- a. Ask them to have a conversation with each other
- b. Then ask them to break it down for you
- c. You begin to learn important social features of communication, e.g. how to greet people, how to 'small talk', what types of questions are appropriate to ask, etc.