Introduction to

Linguistic Field Methods

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Authors' Preface

The present volume addresses the need for an up-to-date and accessible introduction to the elicitation of linguistic data from native speaker informants. The material, following an introductory chapter surveying the general enterprise of field research, is organized into eight major areas of current linguistic interest: Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Sociolinguistics and Dialectology, Historical Linguistics, and Lexicography. The chapters are designed to be covered at a rate of one per week, based on a sixteen-week semester. Each chapter presents basic structures to be elicited, and provides cautionary tales drawn from the experiences of seasoned field workers who have attempted to elicit these structures. These, in turn, are followed by suggested readings and illustrative exercises for each chapter. Emphasis is placed not on developing a theory of field work, nor on learning linguistic theory, but rather on providing enlightening suggestions and entertaining anecdotes designed to guide students down their own personal paths to linguistic discovery.

Though we are theoretical linguists ourselves, this is not a book of linguistic theory; we believe that the fundamentals of linguistic theory are best covered in the introductory phonetics and phonology, syntax, morphology, and general courses offered by most linguistics departments. This book is designed to be accessible to those who have no background in linguistics, and may not even be interested in pursuing a degree in linguistics. Those who *are* interested in pursuing further linguistic study should consider this book as the jumping-off point for theoretical study of each topic. For example, we consider stress systems in chapter 8, but we do not look at the theories that have been developed by phonologists such as Morris Halle and Bruce Hayes to account for the behavior of stress systems. We focus on how to collect the relevant data successfully; the question of why the data look the way they do is amply treated in textbooks on phonological theory, such as Kenstowicz 1994. We have tried to lead the interested beginning reader to these sources in our Suggested Readings at the end of each chapter.

Though the pace of the text is designed for an undergraduate-level introductory Field Methods course, and requires no prior knowledge of linguistics, more advanced students and scholars may find many portions of the book useful as well. We have made a conscious effort to present the material in a conversational manner devoid of unnecessary technical terms and rhetorical devices; we hope that this departure from the norms of academic writing style will not prove excessively jarring to our readers.

Chapters 4, 9-13, and 16 were contributed by Cooper; the remaining chapters were written by Vaux. At some points, particularly when relating personal anecdotes, it has been necessary to refer to the author involved as "I". In all such cases the narrator in question can be inferred from the chapter breakdown just provided.

We are indebted to the following colleagues for their contribution of anecdotes and comments on earlier drafts of this book: Makiko Asano, Ernest and Terri Barreto, Andrew Carnie, Dan Everett, Amanda Fortini, Ken Hale, Morris Halle, Kevin Herwig, Sabbir Kolya, Christina Maranci, Lynn Nichols, James Russell, Seth Sanders, Engin Sezer, Michele Sigler, Höskuldur Thráinsson, Cassia van der Hoof Holstein, Calvert Watkins, and Lindsay Whaley.

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Cambridge, MA
October 1998

1 Introduction

The field of linguistics currently finds itself in a curious state. On one hand, most cutting-edge research in the field for the past forty years has been based on the Chomskyan premise that the primary focus of linguistic inquiry should be on the grammatical competence of the individual, regardless of the particular language (s)he speaks. This has engendered a great deal of insularity in the linguistic community, as theoretical linguists have increasingly concentrated on their own language (normally English), and quite often only their own idiolect. This approach is of course justified in many respects, for no two individual grammars are the same, and conflation by the linguist of multiple grammars can lead to all sorts of confusion and error. Furthermore, there is—contrary to popular belief—more than enough material of linguistic interest in a single individual's grammar to keep a linguist busy for an entire career.

However, linguistics is simultaneously moving in the opposite direction as well. The same research program which validates devoting one's whole professional life to elucidating the grammar of a single individual also mandates (by virtue of its belief in Universal Grammar, an innate linguistic endowment common to all humans) investigation into the full range of linguistic possibilities allowed by natural languages. It is therefore in the interest of theoretical linguists to have at their disposal descriptions and analyses of the widest possible variety of languages. At the same time, there is an ever-increasing need to document and analyze the rapidly decreasing pool of human languages. Fortunately, in spite of the current dominance of theoretical linguistics in the United States and Europe, there are still many professional and aspiring field linguists who are committed to carrying out the work that remains to be done.

The state of the field, then, is that we have widespread interest in both theoretical linguistics and empirical linguistics. Unfortunately, the intersection of the set of theoretical linguists, who wish to elucidate the structure of human Language as a whole, and the set of field linguists, who wish to study new and exotic languages, is relatively small. Theoretical linguists often condemn field work as a misguided use of time better spent on reflection on and analysis of a constrained corpus of data, whereas field linguists generally find theoretical linguistics to be excessively narrow in scope, and would prefer to be out in the field collecting new data. How do we strike a compromise between these disparate ways of looking at language?

This textbook is an attempt to mediate between these two linguistic camps: we endeavor to make it possible for theoretical linguists to conduct research in the field, and for field linguists to organize their efforts in a theoretically enlightened manner. We also hope to encourage field work on the vast variety of languages that remain entirely or partially unstudied, and to imbue this work with a modicum of theoretical sophistication. This last point is very important for, as Morris Halle often points out, data on their own are meaningless; it is the theoretical framework which dictates what facts are interesting and what facts are not. The theory, moreover, tells us what questions to ask; without a well-articulated linguistic theory, the field worker (like most pre-nineteenth century scholars) is limited to disconnected anecdotal observations. We therefore ground our selection of topics and questions to be presented in this book in the general framework of modern (generative) linguistic theory. However, we are careful not to overemphasize here the machinery of generative linguistics, as it would be distracting to students at the level for which this textbook is designed.

We have also attempted to address the lack of a comprehensive textbook that presents the rudiments of field methodology in all of the major areas of linguistic inquiry. Though a number of books and articles dealing with various aspects of field work already exist (see for example Payne 1951, Longacre 1964, Samarin 1967, Brewster 1982, and other sources provided in the References), each is fairly limited in scope, and most are now outdated in terms of the theoretical machinery they employ or assume. Consequently, we cover not only the core disciplines of Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax, but also Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, and so on.

1. Why Do Fieldwork?
The skeptic may ask why one should do field work at all, given that

- there are no professorships of field methods, nor of most of the languages of the world,
- life in the field is often fraught with personal, political, intellectual, and intestinal difficulties,
- it is (normally) easier to deal with oneself in familiar surroundings than it is to devote the time and energy necessary to go into the field, locate informants, befriend them, learn their language, and so on,
- most of the languages on which field work is or needs to be conducted will in all likelihood soon be dead (cf. Hale et al. 1992).

There are in fact many counters to this daunting list of objections. Taking the last objection first, the fact that a language is endangered makes it no less interesting linguistically. In fact, there is a certain fascination in working with a language that may be dead in fifty or a hundred years—how many of us would give everything we have to hear a living speaker of Hittite, Egyptian, Prussian, or any of thousands of other extinct languages? Furthermore, with many endangered languages the field worker can actually play a role in saving the language, by developing a writing system, fostering speakers' interest in passing on the language to their children, and so on. I have found my own work on developing a writing system and the beginnings of a literary tradition for the Homshetsik of northeastern Turkey to be much more rewarding on a personal level than any of my work in theoretical linguistics.

Field work can also bring a great deal of personal enrichment associated with visiting exotic locations and meeting new and unusual people. Documenting an unstudied language also instills the satisfaction of creating something new, and adding knowledge to the world. Ideally one's field work will also benefit the linguistic community being studied, by demonstrating to speakers that their language is of interest to outsiders. Sometimes it is even possible to validate the speakers' language by creating literature, or by training native speakers as linguists so that they can conduct further research on their own. These points may not seem important to Western readers, who speak languages that are officially recognized in their countries, are taught in schools, and have millions of speakers. However, many minority languages are not even acknowledged to exist in the countries where they are spoken, much less taught in schools or allowed in publications. For example, the Homshetsik mentioned earlier are not recognized by the Turkish government, though their population numbers in the hundreds of thousands and they form the majority of the population in northeastern Turkey. Their language, Homshetsma, is not allowed to be taught in the local schools, nor to be spoken in public areas. For the many ethnic minorities like the Homshetsik located throughout the world, the attention of a non-native linguist can therefore be laden with significance that Americans might not appreciate at first.

There are also a number of reasons for theoretical linguists to carry out field work. Field work is obviously required for syntacticians and phoneticians who are not working on

their native language, since grammaticality judgements and phonetic data cannot be culled at will from published materials. Field work also provides the linguist with access to a broader range of data than can be culled from published sources, and these data are generally more reliable than what one finds in many publications dealing with theoretical linguistics, where the data cited are often taken from secondary sources. Modern linguistics also dictates that it is important to collect what *can't* be said as well as what *can* be said, and published sources such as dictionaries and grammars generally state only the preferred way of pronouncing a given item or saying a given phrase. For example, grammars of English might well state that sentences like "who do you think that John saw?" are possible, but few of these would mention that "who do you think John saw?" is also possible, and even fewer (or perhaps none) would include the fact that the seemingly similar sentence "who do you think that saw John?" is *not* possible. Along similar lines, theoretical linguists often need to know not only what can and can't be said, but also nuances of acceptability and optionality that are never mentioned in traditional grammars and dictionaries. Dictionaries of English, for example, invariably fail to mention that both [hit^h] and [$hi\ʔt^\top$] are acceptable pronunciations of "heat", and that in American speech the latter is preferable, whereas the former sounds somewhat awkward and affected, though it is more common on television programs. Linguists who need access to this sort of detailed information must perforce garner it from field research.

Finally, field work instills an appreciation of the complexity of language which linguists can easily miss if they work only on their native languages. The most convincing demonstration of this comes when novices are asked to transcribe a simple utterance in a language with which they are not familiar, and invariably find it impossible to identify even the most "basic" linguistic elements, such as word boundaries and phonemes.

2. Selecting an Informant
So far we have seen that there are many reasons for learning field methods and conducting research in the field. The next challenge is to track down and begin working with one or more speakers of the language you have chosen to work on. This is not as easy as it might appear at first, unless of course you are taking a Field Methods course, in which case the teacher will normally have selected an informant (or "linguistic consultant", as some prefer[1]) in advance.

When selecting an informant, there are many factors to be taken into consideration. We will begin with suggestions that apply to individuals searching for a native speaker, and then conclude with some tips for selecting informants for Field Methods courses.

2.1. Selection for an Individual Linguist
Field work can be extremely rewarding if one selects the right informant(s), and equally painful if one selects the wrong informant. However, there are certain steps one can take to reduce the risk of picking unwisely.

First of all, it is generally a good idea to select an informant who is of the same gender as the field worker. Of course, in a society where more than two gender types are recognized, this maxim should be adjusted accordingly; the basic point here is that field workers should avoid selecting informants who might become sexually interested in them (see section 3.2.1 for discussion of what can be done when this happens). Relationships of this type inevitably disrupt the working relationship between field worker and informant, and often lead to personal trauma as well. A further advantage of selecting an informant of the same sex is that

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[1] We generally use the term "informant" to refer to the native speakers with whom we carry out field work, but many people find this term to smack of espionage and skullduggery, and prefer to use more neutral terms such as "linguistic consultant" or even "raconteur".

he or she will be more likely to feel comfortable interacting with the field worker, particularly when discussing potentially touchy issues such as terms for body parts, incontinence, and so on.

One should naturally try to find a fluent native speaker of the language being studied. However, this is not always possible. The Algonquian language Miami, for example, has no native speakers left; one can now only work with elders who remember isolated words and may be able to understand passages of older texts. At least in this situation, though, it is possible to distinguish easily between what is Miami and what is English. Other cases can be much more complicated. For example, most of the nonstandard dialects of Armenian are only spoken by individuals who also speak standard Armenian, and freely mix the two. In cases like this, where the dialects, registers, or languages spoken by the informant are very similar, it can be extremely difficult to be sure which category a given form belongs to, and the informant generally does not indicate which is which. When working on the Armenian dialect spoken in the Iranian city of Isfahan, I once came upon a dialectal form that was glossed in Armenian as *ʃikʰ*. Not knowing this word offhand, I checked through all of the biggest and best Armenian dictionaries, without any success. After many hours of torment, I realized that the author was not providing an obscure Armenian lexical item, but rather was invoking the French word *chic*!

For these reasons, it is generally better to pick an informant who is monolingual. However, this option can also present complications. The most obvious difficulty is that monolingual informants are much harder for the field worker to communicate with, unless he or she happens to speak that language as well. Monolingual informants are also less likely to be familiar with the notion of grammatical categories, variability in the semantic fields covered by different lexical items, and so on, since they have not had to confront the differences between their own and another language.

There is no general rule for determining the age of the optimal informant, because all ages have advantages and disadvantages in a given situation. As a general rule, younger informants are more likely to defer to the field worker (though extremely young informants are of course prone to having short attention spans and can become uppity); they are also more likely to be willing to provide saucy vocabulary, less likely to be sensitive to touchy social and political issues, and may be quicker to grasp the subtleties of the linguistic enterprise, which can be useful if one is interested in training native speaker linguists. Older informants may be preferable for researchers interested in archaisms in language, folklore, and so on.

As for the number of informants that the field worker should strive to obtain, the answer is again unclear. Some linguists prefer to have only one informant, and some prefer to have many; there are advantages to each scheme. If one works with a lone informant, one obtains relatively consistent data, whereas when working with two or more informants, differences in idiolect, dialect, and so on inevitably appear. For generative linguists interested in studying the linguistic competence of a single individual, working with two or more informants is in many ways counterproductive. Finally, with only one informant it is easier to establish a working relationship, simpler and faster to obtain the information one wants, easier to arrange meetings, and cheaper (assuming one pays the informants).

Conversely, by working with many informants one obtains a better overall picture of the language (though many generative linguists would claim that languages do not exist— only individual grammars...). Interaction with multiple informants takes some of the social and mental pressure off of each individual in the group (though a certain type of social skill is required on the part of the field worker in order to mediate among the members of a large group). When multiple informants are present simultaneously, it becomes possible to record natural conversations. Technically this is possible with single informants as well, but most

individuals find it difficult and strange to conduct a conversation with themselves! Multiple informants can also exercise quality control on each other, and trigger each other's memories of elusive forms and constructions. In one Homshetsi couple I work with, the wife comes up with forms her husband can't remember or corrects the forms he does produce, even though in general he is much more familiar with the language than she is (both are bilingual in Turkish, which she speaks almost exclusively). One final advantage of consulting multiple speakers of a given language is that some of them may not possess the linguistic feature in which the field worker is interested. Once, after reading a grammar of a dialect of Armenian which the author claimed to have 44 vowels, I made a concerted effort to find speakers who could produce these vowels. Each speaker of the dialect that I met, however, turned out to speak a subdialect with significantly fewer vowels; it took several years and numerous informants to find a single person who spoke the relevant subdialect (it later turned out that the president of Armenia speaks the same subdialect, but it has been somewhat difficult to arrange a meeting with him).

It is also important to consider the amount of schooling that the potential informant has had. Informants with a great deal of education can be useful in the sense that they may have a better idea of why it is important to carry out field research. Individuals with less exposure to academia, conversely, sometimes find intellectual enterprises such as linguistic field work to be self-indulgent, obscure, pointless, and devoid of "product" (words drawn from the mouth of my grandfather upon hearing that I was becoming a linguist).

However, I have found that schooling is normally counterproductive when dealing with informants. Schools generally teach students a broad range of fallacies about language in general and their language in particular, such as the idea that certain literary forms that no one actually says in real speech are "correct", and the forms that people actually use are "wrong". This sort of misinformation can have a significant effect on people's linguistic performance, particularly in situations where they feel their linguistic competence is being tested, such as a data gathering session with a linguist. I have often found it very difficult to elicit certain forms (that I knew existed) from my informants, because they insisted that certain other forms were "correct", though they never actually used them in spontaneous discourse.

Another product of education that can be problematic in informants is knowledge of orthography. Surprisingly often, as we will see in more detail in chapters 2 and 7, speakers try to alter their pronunciation to match what they know to be the spelling of a given word, particularly in careful speech registers. Even when they do not alter their pronunciation, informants are generally reluctant to acknowledge that their pronunciation differs from the sequence of letters in the official orthography. Consequently, it is generally preferable (at least for phoneticians, phonologists, and morphologists) to pick informants who have not learned to spell or who speak a language that has no writing system.

One final tip about selecting an informant: some informants are better than others. Informants, after all, are not just grammars; they are regular people with likes and dislikes, quirks, and eccentricities (though probably not as many as the average linguist). Consequently, they are unlikely to be content sitting in a room churning out mundane vocabulary items and what to them are obvious grammaticality judgements. It is important, therefore, to select an informant who is patient, friendly, and likely to be interested in or at least tolerant of linguistics. Whether or not the informant is interested in linguistics is partly in the hands of the field worker, of course; it is his or her responsibility to make the data gathering sessions interesting to the native speaker. But more on this subject later.

2.2. Selection for a Class

The factors to be considered when selecting an informant for a class are by and large the same as those discussed above. However, some of the caveats we issued in the previous section are less important in a classroom situation, since the individual student is more sheltered from the informant on a personal level. By the same token, though, field work in a classroom situation is generally less rewarding, because one has less time to develop a relationship with the informant and one must subordinate one's own lines of research to the interests of the class as a whole.

When selecting an informant for a Field Methods class, we recommend finding a speaker of a language that has not been studied and/or is endangered. Such a language is more likely to engage the interest of the class, and will also make it possible for the teacher and students to make novel contributions to the field by compiling the data collected in class. The drawback of picking an unstudied language is that it will raise the hackles of the large number of students who demand that background reading materials be made available for the course. A typical example of this problem arose recently when I taught a Field Methods course on a completely unstudied language spoken in Azerbaijan. One of the students insisted at the end of the course that he could have done a much better job on his final project if I had provided reading materials for him to study. This of course misses the point that conducting field work is not like writing a research paper; one wants to discover new facts and generalizations, not reanalyze old ones. Unfortunately, students with this particular philosophy often appear in Field Methods classes, so the teacher should consider selecting a language on which a modicum of literature has been written.

The teacher furthermore can choose between what I call *Blind* and *Easy* field work. Blind field work involves working with an informant who does not share a common language with any member of the class; Easy field work involves the less challenging task of dealing with an informant who understands a language spoken by the members of the class. While Blind field work is certainly more intellectually challenging, and presents a whole range of hurdles that do not arise in Easy field work, I do not recommend it for an introductory-level Field Methods course. For this reason, we do not cover the techniques peculiar to Blind field work in this textbook.

Finally, when preparing a Field Methods class, the teacher should try to find a language that is exotic (at least to the students), but not *too* exotic. The first time I taught a Field Methods course, I exuberantly brought in a speaker of Abkhaz, a Caucasian language known for its wild inventory of 60 consonants and 2 vowels, expecting the students to share my excitement with this new linguistic challenge. The good news was that they shared my excitement, but the bad news was that they were completely unable to distinguish most of the phonemes reliably, even by the end of the semester. The lesson to garner from this is that it is probably better to choose a language that has no more than a few sounds that will be unfamiliar to beginners. Conversely, if one selects a language with no unusual sounds, the students in the course who are of a phonetic or phonological bent may become alienated. Try, then, to pick a language with a goodly sprinkling of unusual features in each linguistic domain—phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and so on.

3. Working with an Informant

Once the field worker selects an informant, a whole new set of conditions must be satisfied if the two are to interact pleasantly and efficiently. Some of these conditions involve personal interactions, and some are purely linguistic; we consider each in turn.

3.1. Interacting with the Informant on a Personal Level

The main guidelines for getting along well with an informant are fairly simple:

- Become friends.
- Watch out for personal space!
- Don't underestimate the importance of food and drink.

We'll return to these points in more detail in the discussion that follows.

First, though, we would like to discuss some more delicate matters. It is very important to be sensitive to issues of ethnicity when working with informants. Members of majority cultures often do not realize, for example, that ethnic and linguistic identity can be a source of embarrassment or even danger for many minority groups. This can have a range of psychological effects even when members of these groups have relocated to a country where they are not persecuted. When individuals have grown up in a society where they are ridiculed, beaten, or jailed merely for belonging to a certain group or speaking a certain language, they can become extremely sensitive to even the mention of their ethnic or linguistic identity.

I once came upon a checkout worker in a computer store who was clearly from Africa. Being interested to find out what language(s) she spoke, I asked her what her native language was. "French," she replied. Since her accent indicated that French was not actually her native language, I asked what other languages she spoke. "None". At this point the interview was in danger of ending, so I tried another tack, asking where she was from. "Ivory Coast". Since no further information was forthcoming, I fell back on one of the most important lessons of field work, namely that sometimes one can only get the right information by asking the right question. "Do you speak Bambara?" I asked, guessing one of the larger languages of the area. "Yes! How did you know??" she replied, suddenly becoming interested.

Several lessons can be drawn from this story. It is risky to press individuals too closely about their language and ethnicity, unless one knows the right questions to ask and how to ask them. This should only be done when one is sure that it will not make the informant feel uncomfortable or annoyed. Furthermore, as we shall see in more detail later, one cannot always take what the informant says at face value.

On another occasion, I ran into a worker at a convenience store who appeared to be from Ethiopia. Having recently taught a Field Methods course on Tigrinya, a Semitic language of Ethiopia, I decided to ask him what language he spoke. He indicated that he spoke Amharic, the official language of the country. Knowing from experience that ethnic identity in Ethiopia is a highly charged political issue, and that many Ethiopians therefore say that they are Amharic when they actually belong to a minority tribe, I tried to think of a way to ascertain his true identity in an inoffensive way. In the end, I decided to try out some Amharic phrases I knew on him. This had the desired effect, as he became very friendly, gratified that someone was interested in his country, and subsequently revealed that he actually was a native speaker of the Cushitic language Oromo.

A similar situation arose with a friend of mine from the Homshetsi community mentioned earlier. This particular man identified himself upon moving from his village to Istanbul as either Turkish or Laz, another ethnic minority of northeastern Turkey. By doing so he avoided being identified as a member of the Homshetsik, who are related to the Armenians, one of the primary enemies of the Turks. I found that on the first few occasions that I met with him, my friend became very sensitive when the colleague I was working with at the time mentioned parallels between his language and Armenian, and when he pointed out how the Homshetsik were related to the Armenians. Ironically, my Homshetsi friend (who

owns a rug store) later developed a working relationship with a repeat customer who identified himself as Jewish, and refused to pay by check or credit card, insisting instead on paying in cash (thereby not having to reveal his name). This man then entered the store one day when I was having a session with my friend and his wife, and I immediately recognized him as a member of the local Armenian community! It turned out that he had tried to hide his Armenian identity from my Homshetsi friend because he had heard him speaking Turkish with his wife, and therefore assumed that he was Turkish and would not want to deal with an Armenian.

The field worker should also be aware of cultural differences, especially those involving issues such as gender, politeness, and personal space. The latter issue is one that few people are aware of, yet causes more problems than almost anything else. As any visitor to a Mediterranean or Middle Eastern country can tell you, not all cultures have the same standards of personal space. Americans, for example, need to maintain a certain distance (at least two feet) between themselves and their interlocutors; any distance smaller than this can create surprising amounts of discomfort and emotional trauma. An Italian male, on the other hand, typically prefers a much smaller personal space, and is more likely to make direct physical contact than an American is. All too many times I have seen this sort of discrepancy in standards of personal space and physical contact lead to major problems, normally involving American field workers coming to believe that their informants are sexually harassing them. Since accusations of sexual harassment are very serious in many countries, field workers should be extremely careful to avoid confusing disparity in standards of personal space with sexual harassment. My informants from Turkey and Armenia frequently grab my arm or leg, hug me, and do various other things which in their own countries are indications of friendship, but in countries like the United States would be construed by women as sexual harassment.

Some colleagues have expressed to me the opinion that informants from other countries should be required to conform to the social mores of the country in which they are living at the time, and should be punished if they do not. Though I certainly agree that this is the safest course for visitors to take when visiting or moving to a foreign land, I feel that the situation is slightly different with field workers. When one decides to conduct field research, one commits to interacting with informants on their own terms. Field work is not about forcing informants to conform to our standards; it is about learning what one can about their language and culture. Field workers therefore should be prepared to deal with a wide variety of potentially disquieting social and cultural discoveries, even if they are only trying to collect syntactic data.

One can make it easier to appreciate differences of this type by trying to develop an appreciation of the informant's culture. Field workers can in fact kill two birds with one stone by asking informants about their religion, history, local geography, personal and place names, local customs, and so on. In doing so, you not only learn about the informants' culture, but also demonstrate to them that you are interested in them as more than objects of linguistic curiosity. This is very important in developing a friendship with the informant, which is one of the cornerstones of successful field work.

Perhaps the most important element in befriending an informant, though, is food and drink. Food and drink provide the fastest way to a person's heart, and failing to take advantage of this fact can make one's road long and hard. Many times while in Armenia I wished for an iron stomach as I was plied with vodka, köfte loaf, and boiled lamb chunks, and had to say no. As a teetotaller and a vegetarian, I am all too aware that consumption of meat and alcohol constitutes a central bond between guest and host in most countries of the world. Declining to partake in these communal feasts can drive a hefty wedge between the field worker and the informant. Scholars of delicate gastronomical inclination can sometimes

avoid offending their hosts by announcing their dietary restrictions in advance, so that is does not appear later on that vegetarianism for example has been trotted out as an excuse for not eating something that is perceived as cheap or poorly prepared. Unfortunately, though, this strategy often does not work. The problem is that people assume the set of foods and drinks that they like corresponds exactly to the set of foods and drinks that are Good in absolute terms; therefore, *everyone* should like these items, if they just try them. In this philosophy, vegetarians are just picky; if they were to try boiled lamb chunks, they would like them.

Unfortunately, most individuals in the world subscribe to this philosophy, and it is therefore difficult to avoid some awkward moments during the course of one's field work. The best that the field worker can do in situations like this is to come prepared; it is useful to know if working with Ethiopians, for example, that in Ethiopia hosts are allowed to force-feed guests who they feel have not eaten enough. You should also expect to have to broaden (or at least suspend) your tastes somewhat in these situations; it may not be possible to keep kosher in the field, for example.

One should also avoid condemning foreign cuisine too hastily. I once heard from a colleague that he had thrown out something fermented in the communal refrigerator in his dormitory, only to find out later that it was actually a Korean delicacy, and its owner was outraged that some gourmet thief had spirited away his special treat!

Another touchy topic is that of payment: should the field worker pay the informant, or not? The obvious answer would seem to be yes; however, this is not always correct. In many cultures, it is considered offensive to offer someone money for what they feel to be a favor for a friend. Furthermore, accepting payment can be interpreted as a sign of being poor or greedy, which many members of non-Western cultures would prefer to avoid. For these reasons, almost all of the informants I have worked with have refused payment. However, it is a good idea to try to pay your informants nonetheless, since they are sacrificing their time and energy to help you. I have found that one way to convince my informants to accept payment is to indicate that the money is being provided by my university. Since the university is an abstract entity rather than a concrete person, many informants are willing to accept payment when it is offered in this way. Another way of getting around the payment problem is to offer your informants appropriate gifts, such as dictionaries of their language. Treating them to lunch or dinner—or, even better, having them over to your place for a meal—can be helpful as well.

Finally, beware of publishing the results of your field research. Informants, like all people, are easily offended by what you say about them. There are three principal reasons for this:

- Informants invariably know more about themselves than you do, so they will easily identify any mistakes or oversights that you have committed when describing them and their language.

- People rarely like hearing themselves on tape, watching themselves on television, and so on. If you aren't careful, they can interpret what they perceive to be flaws in the presentation of themselves as the result of negligence or inaccuracy on your part. My grandfather, for example, was apparently resented by the Indian tribe about which he wrote a book, because (despite the fact that all of his research was rigorously documented) in their minds he had not represented them fairly, had revealed too many personal facts, and so on.

- As we mentioned earlier, people can be very sensitive about their own language and ethnicity. My Homshetsi informant, for example, became very worried and agitated when he saw the name of himself and his village in an article I was preparing. 'He was concerned (perhaps rightly) that the Turkish government would hear about the article and crack down on his village.

For these and many other reasons, it is wise to be as discreet as possible in preparing publications based on one's field work. It is always a good idea to go over all such material with the informant(s) before putting it in print.

3.1.1. The Parrot Syndrome
One unfortunate problem that has been fueled by the advent of generative linguistics and the decline of field methods in linguistics and anthropology curricula is that all too many linguists now treat informants as grammars rather than people. This problem, which I call the "Parrot Syndrome", surfaces in a variety of subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

In case study number one, a noted anthropologist initiated a study of the sex lives of Parsi women in India. An observer, noting that her stream of personal questions was making the women uncomfortable, suggested that the anthropologist relate something about her own sex life to the group. "I can't—I'm an anthropologist!" she replied. Field workers should try to avoid developing this notion that they are somehow superior to the informants, like a biologist studying flies through a microscope or a zoologist collecting butterflies.

Case study number two involves a linguist who worked with a speaker of an endangered language for two years. The work, in which the informant collaborated for free, was geared towards preparing a proposal for a government grant of several hundred thousand dollars to support the creation of a grammar of the informant's language. Upon successfully obtaining the grant, however, the linguist promptly ceased speaking with the informant, who thereafter had no input on the book and received no windfall from the grant. This sort of behavior is again all too common—scholars feel that their informants play no part in the creative process, and can be picked up or discarded as needed. Having spoken with several individuals who were treated in this way by wayward linguists and anthropologists, I can attest that they did not share these scholars' assessment of the working relationship. (It was in fact the unfortunate informant just mentioned who inspired the phrase "parrot syndrome", after he complained to me that all of the linguists he had previously worked with—including the newly wealthy linguist—treated him like a parrot, expecting him to squawk out phrases on their command. It took several months' worth of meetings to convince him that not all linguists behaved that way.)

Our final case study involves a student behavior pattern that teachers must nip in the bud. Since the teacher generally runs the class, students in Field Methods courses tend to develop a certain dependency on him or her. Every year I have taught Field Methods, this has led to the students directing their questions towards me, rather than towards the informant. As one might imagine, this can be intensely annoying to the informant, who is made to feel unimportant, excluded, and inferior to the teacher. Students should therefore make an extra effort to look at the informant when asking questions, and to tailor the content of their questions for the informant as well—questions like "what would she say for snail?" are to be avoided at all cost. Teachers may also want to consider minimizing their role in the elicitation process as much as possible.

The best way to avoid succumbing to the Parrot Syndrome is to treat your informants as friends, rather than objects of curiosity or sources of information. If you interact with informants in the same way that you would with any other friend, you are much more likely to establish a good working relationship conducive to collecting the information you want

efficiently and painlessly. If, on the other hand, you simply pump your informants with obscure linguistic questions, anything could happen.

A good lesson for potential field workers can be found in the story of Frau Holle, as told by the brothers Grimm. A woman had two daughters, an evil one whom she loved, and a good one whom she despised. She sent off the good daughter to earn some money to support the evil daughter. The good daughter wandered off, and ended up coming across Frau Holle, who offered to pay her for performing certain chores around the house. The chores were extremely difficult, but the good daughter performed them without complaint. At the end of her time Frau Holle sent the girl off to her family. On her way home the daughter passed under an archway, and when she did so gold showered down upon her. She brought the gold home to her mother and sister, who grabbed it and demanded to know where she had obtained so much money. Upon finding out, the mother sent her favorite daughter to work for Frau Holle. Work for Frau Holle she did, but in an insolent and sloppy manner. Before she had even finished her chores, she demanded gold from Frau Holle. She was told to return home, passing underneath the same arch as her sister had earlier. When the evil sister passed underneath the arch, however, she was showered not with gold, but with coal. The moral of the story is of course that the field worker should treat the informant like the good daughter treated Frau Holle; one gets no rewards if one fails to treat the informant with civility.

3.1.2. When the informant is not (yet) interested
As amply demonstrated by the recent rash of eliminations of linguistics departments in the United States, not everyone finds the study of language as fascinating and important as linguists do. Ideally, fieldworkers can dissuade a recalcitrant informant from such skepticism by means of their erudition. Few things impress and engage informants more than a linguist who can accurately mimic their pronunciation; it is also effective to begin speaking whole sentences in the target language as soon as possible. If this is not possible, however, and in fact even if it is, it is important to take all possible steps to insure that the informant is not bored to tears by your linguistic attentions. Many a human will not be amused at being asked ten times to repeat the word for 'nit'.

I once met a man who mentioned that his wife spoke a dialect of Armenian that I and other Armenologists had assumed to be dead. Needless to say, I was very eager to meet and work with the man's wife. He was very supportive of this plan, and soon introduced me to his wife. Upon hearing of my interest, though, she insisted with a somewhat distressed look that she spoke only Standard Armenian. I was still inclined to believe her husband at this point, because it was highly unlikely that he would have fabricated the fact that his wife spoke an obscure dialect of Armenian. Suspecting that she denied speaking the dialect because she considered it provincial or uneducated, my challenge was then to find some way of convincing her to help me with the dialect without embarrassing her. I decided in this case to mention offhand some wacky idioms in the dialect, and see how she reacted. Sure enough, her eyes lit up and she let loose a stream of comments on their meaning, not suspecting that speakers of Standard Armenian would not be able to make head or tail of these idioms, much less comment on subtleties of their usage.

On a similar occasion I heard rumors that a speaker of an obscure Armenian dialect of Abkhazia was working at a coffee shop in a nearby mall. This presented a major challenge, since I knew this particular dialect to be extremely interesting but I had no friends who knew the man. Furthermore, the direct approach did not work, because he was never at work when I went to the coffee shop. I was forced to resort to telephoning him, which presents many difficulties due to the impersonal nature of the medium. When I finally reached him, I asked if he belonged to the group who spoke the dialect in question. He responded, as I suspected

and feared, that he had never heard of such a group. Needless to say, he also became very suspicious about this unknown man calling out of the blue to ask him obscure questions. Fortunately, the tried and true method I had used earlier worked again. When I mentioned some phrases in the dialect, the man suddenly became friendly, admitted that he did belong to the group in question, and asked how I happened to know those phrases. From that point it was easy to develop a conversation and ultimately meet for dinner and collect some useful data.

When this linguistic strategy is not enough, I have sometimes found it useful to bring along a friend who is able to interact with the informants about their culture, history, and so on. Having along such a person, who clearly is not using the informant as a language parrot, can help convince the informant of the sincerity of the field worker's intentions.

Even after you have convinced the desired individual to act as your informant, it remains a constant challenge to maintain his or her interest. One technique that can be useful is to mention to informants the prospect of publishing the results of their joint efforts with the field worker. This is a double-edged sword, though, because it commits field workers to actually publishing their results!

3.1.3. *When the informant is too interested*

Sometimes the informant is *too* interested in the field worker. Cases like this call for a different set of strategies. What does one do when the informant starts asking too many questions or being too affectionate?

3.1.3.1. *Sexual Interest*

The most problematic scenario arises when the informant conceives a sexual interest in the field worker. Sadly, this happens more often than one might expect. Typical manifestations include asking the field worker if she[2] is married, squeezing more than just her arm, observing that she is pretty one time too many, making suggestive comments, and so on. Problems of this type are of course best avoided by choosing informants who are not interested in the sexual category to which the field worker belongs. This is easier said than done, though. A Field Methods class, for example, normally contains students of both male and female genders, one or more of which the informant is sure to be interested in. Furthermore, it is not always possible to ascertain discreetly the sexual preferences of a potential informant in advance.

Some readers may find it strange and disconcerting to discuss speculation on the sexual preferences of informants. This is certainly a valid concern, since individuals are free to be of whatever sexual inclination they choose. However, in the context of field work such discussion is justified, since it is imperative to protect both field workers and informants from the trauma of sexual harassment and accusations thereof.

If a sexual problem does arise, it is normally possible for the field worker to simply withdraw from the situation, either by steering clear of the informant (if in a classroom situation) or by leaving the village (if in a field situation). If these steps aren't possible, it can be very effective to bring a friend along to every session. If the oppressed field worker is a student in a classroom situation, he or she should make sure that the teacher is made aware of the problem; it is sometimes possible for the teacher to speak with the informant and make him aware that he is not allowed to make advances towards students.

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[2] We use the paradigm of a male informant and a female field worker here, because all cases we have observed have been of this type.

3.1.3.2. *Nonsexual Interest*

There is another inconvenient kind of interest that an informant can take in a field worker, and this does not involve sexual attraction. In many field situations, the field worker is at least as exotic to the informants as they are to the field worker; therefore it is quite possible that they will be more interested in asking the field worker questions than vice versa. This can be quite unnerving, and disruptive to the data collection process. For example, a colleague studying the Yezidis of eastern Anatolia once encountered a Yezidi sheikh who cryptically answered every question with "yes", quickly followed by a pointed question about the scholar's own activities. Situations like this can be very difficult, because one does not want to have a one-sided relationship with the informant where only the field worker asks questions and receives information, yet at the same time one doesn't want the relationship to be lopsided in the other direction. If matters get to the point where the informant is clearly expressing too much interest, several maneuvers can be employed. The simplest is to ride out the questions, providing equitable but not overzealous or hostile responses. Oftentimes this strategy will bring the informant down to a more manageable level of interest. Another effective trick is to raise a topic that one already knows to be of interest to the informant. Most people enjoy talking about themselves; switching to a topic concerning the informant's activities is therefore likely to be successful.

3.2. *Interacting with the Informant on a Linguistic Level*

Now that we have dispensed with the touchy personal issues, we can move on to some less controversial linguistic concerns. The basic problem is how to engage the informant's interest in a way that will elicit the maximum possible amount of reliable data in the minimum amount of time. There is no simple solution to this problem, though, because different informants respond to different techniques: some will work well with word lists, some will prefer conversation, and so on. It is a good idea to try several methods of interaction and elicitation with the informant to see which works best. Beware, though, that a given technique may not always work equally well. I have often found that an informant is in the mood for storytelling one day, but on another day prefers to work with a word list or translate a text, and so on. Varying strategies in this way not only accommodates fluctuations in the informant's mood, but also can help relieve the informant's potential boredom.

No matter which strategy you use, it is essential to know how to frame the questions you pose to the informant. Question asking is a complicated and subtle art, but there are a few general guidelines that should help.

• Don't ask leading questions. All too often I have heard students ask an informant "this means __, doesn't it?" Informants are already inclined to answer "yes" to any question you might ask, partly out of desire to give you the answer you want, and partly from desire to finish the question session as quickly as possible. Leading questions, particularly those which contain the answer within the question, only push informants further along the road to becoming linguistic yes men. This must be avoided at all costs, since the data gathered from yes men are obviously useless. However, it is sometimes necessary to employ leading questions, such as when the informant will not otherwise be able to think of the appropriate word, construction, etc. Resort to this strategy only when it is absolutely necessary to get the information that you need. It can also be dangerous to give informants too much of an idea of what you are working on or what sort of findings you are looking for; information of this type can influence their responses. You also need to be careful not to go too far in the other direction by intentionally keeping the informant

in the dark about the goals of your linguistic activities. (For further discussion of leading and how to avoid it in interviews, see Labov 1972b.)

- Try to infuse your questions with interesting semantic content; this is an effective way of maintaining the informant's interest. Employing quirky vocabulary items, amusing scenarios, and local personal and place names collected from the informant is generally successful.

- Avoid using too much linguistic terminology with and in front of the informant. It can give the field worker a satisfying feeling of power and superiority to casually drop fancy terms like "quantifier raising", "hypercorrection", and other linguistic concepts the informant is not likely to be familiar with, but this in no way enhances the quality of the data collected, and almost certainly cows or irks the informant. On top of these negative side effects, you never know what the informant may do with your highfalooting phrases. The first time that I taught a Field Methods course, for example, the informant decided that *schwa*, which she heard me use frequently in my side discussions with the class, meant "reduplication".

- Don't overload the informant. If you present informants with too much data or too many tasks at once, they may be put off. The key, as with writing a thesis, is to break your tasks into tiny, manageable chunks. For example, don't announce to your informant one day that you are going to begin collecting all of the items in a 5000-word list. It is much more effective to break the list into thematically related smaller groups, like body parts, animals, and so on.

- Beware of priming effects. It is well known among syntacticians that informants can become highly unreliable in their judgements after they have been presented with too many examples of the same type of sentence. Typically they begin at this point to find all sentences of a given type acceptable, even if, when presented with one of the sentences out of the blue on a separate occasion, they might find it unacceptable.

Finally, when working with informants we recommend that you attempt whenever possible to train them to carry out their own work on the language. This makes the informants feel like they are integral parts of the field work process, helps them appreciate the work you are doing, and enables them to work on their language after you are gone. It is not always possible to train one's informants as linguists, of course, but field workers should at least try to teach their informants the transcription scheme they are using. This allows the informants to follow what is being written on the board in class or in the notebook in field sessions, and to correct your transcriptions when necessary.

3.3. *What to Believe*

If all has gone well so far, you will now be collecting data from your informants. Your data will not necessarily correspond to the set of correct facts about the language, however. One of the more important lessons in life is that you cannot believe everything a person says. This is not to say that informants intentionally lie about the data they provide; rather, various factors discussed below can lead them to unwittingly provide inaccurate or unreliable data.

Most people believe—incorrectly—that language consists of a set of *consciously* memorized words and grammatical rules. By this reasoning, it should in theory be possible for informants to recall with perfect accuracy all of the words and rules that constitute their language. However, individuals' knowledge of their language actually consists of a set of

unconsciously learned lexical items, rules, principles, and assorted other linguistic structures. Since this knowledge is in the main acquired unconsciously, it is to be expected that speakers will not necessarily be able to verbalize it. However, certain steps can be taken by the field worker to facilitate this process for the informant.

Two factors that can lead the informant to provide inaccurate information are the leading and priming that we discussed earlier. If you lead informants to believe that you are looking for a particular answer, they may well provide it. Similarly, if you ask them for acceptability judgements for ten sentences of similar structure and then ask about an eleventh sentence that appears to be of the same type (but actually is not), they may well give the same judgement as for the previous sentences.

If they are feeling impatient, informants sometimes give the quickest answer, even if it is not correct. A student of mine once conducted a study of color foci with an informant who was fairly uninterested in the project, due to the student's gender. The informant played along at first, thinking for a while before he identified the focus of each color. After a while, though, he became bored and began to simply point to the middle exemplum of each color zone, without considering the others. All of the data he provided after this point were therefore unreliable. Field workers must learn to recognize when informants have passed over the threshold of boredom; this is best accomplished by getting to know their behavior patterns and keeping an eagle eye on them at all times. Informants can be kept clear of the boredom threshold if the field worker follows the suggestions given earlier, such as employing entertaining example sentences, breaking up tasks into small portions, and so on.

Informants can also be led to error on the basis of what they learned about their language in school, which is usually linguistically inaccurate. If your informant is literate, then, you must constantly be on the lookout for grammar book answers. These are normally betrayed by their prescriptive bent, such as "you can't say ___", "the noun always comes before the verb", "sentences can't end in a preposition", and so on.

Some informants come into the field process with wacky personal linguistic analyses of their own. One should generally avoid working with informants of this type, but this is not always possible. Sometimes one can demonstrate to these informants that they should think twice before forming linguistic generalizations. For example, I once had an informant who insisted that all words in his language stressed a particular vowel when it was present. Beginning field workers must be very careful about generalizations of this type, which are all too easy to accept at face value. In this particular case, I knew independently that the informant's generalization was incorrect, and was able to produce some forms that demonstrated this fact to him. This had the desired effect, as he was more careful about making linguistic generalizations from then on.

How can novice field workers smoke out falsehoods like this, though? A good strategy is to note down all claims made by the informant, and then to test all of them against one's corpus of data. If the relevant data have not already been collected, it is often possible to test the informant's hypothesis on the spot with a few well-chosen questions. The same informant was fond of detailing the linguistic origin of each word he provided: "this word is Persian" or "this is from Turkish", he would say. In cases like this, one can easily check the informant's claims in a dictionary or similar reference tool.

Another source of unreliability in informants' responses is register (cf. chapter 14). Informants typically provide answers in what we can loosely call "careful speech register". This is of course a natural consequence of the field work context, unless spontaneous dialog is being collected. Careful speech register is just as interesting and linguistically valid as other more casual registers, and has the added advantage of mirroring more closely the speaker's linguistic competence, being less influenced by pragmatic and other performance factors.

However, the field worker must be careful not to come to the conclusion that what the informant produces in careful speech is all that the language contains. When informants are accessing their careful speech register, they will typically ignore or deny the existence of fast speech phenomena and allophonic rules. English speakers, for example, are typically unaware of (and if asked would deny) the existence of low-level rules such as *s*-retroflexion (*street* → [ʃtrit]) and obstruent aspiration (*pat* → [pʰæt]). Similarly, though a hefty percentage of Americans pronounce *else* as [elts], very few of them admit that they do this, even when it is pointed out to them.

One should also be careful of informants leaping to conclusions. A Spanish speaker once produced the form *rendí* 'I subdued', prompting a friend of mine to inquire whether the infinitive of this verb was *render* or *rendir*. The informant replied that it had to be from *rendir* because of the *i*, forgetting for the moment that *i* in verbal forms can also come from -*er* verbs in Spanish. In this case the friend knew from her Spanish education that the informant's reasoning was faulty, but field workers will not always have access to this kind of independent knowledge. For this reason, it is very important to take everything that your informant says with a grain of salt, and verify it whenever possible.

Despite the warnings we have issued so far in this section, the data you collect from an informant will by and large contain trustworthy linguistic intuitions. Don't shrug off these intuitions—they almost always contain at least a grain of truth, and are often more correct than the intuitions of the field worker. When I was developing a spelling system for the Homshetsik, for example, I decided for orthographic convenience to render the palatal affricate [ts] as <ts>. The informant jumped on this decision, observing that it was a single sound, not a combination of [t] and [s]. In this he was quite right, though he had no linguistic training to tell him so, only his intuitions as a native speaker of the language. The same speaker systematically failed to distinguish between two other phonemes in his language (χ and ʁ), though, demonstrating that field workers must always be on their toes, even with reliable informants.

One would think that in a language with no writing system, the speakers, free from the shackles of a rigid orthography, would render exactly the sounds of their language once provided with the necessary transcription symbols. This is not always the case, though: another speaker of Homshetsma whom I have worked with writes all voiced and voiceless stops as voiceless, even though the two are phonemically distinct in both Homshetsma and Turkish, the two languages she speaks. We can conclude from our discussion, then, that field workers must draw on both their own intuitions and those of the informant. Combining these with the tips given so far should enable the field worker to obtain fairly reliable data.

3.4. *How to Get the Most Out of a Data Gathering Session*
The field worker's next challenge is to run the data gathering session efficiently, collecting as many data as possible within the time allotted without alienating the informant. The key to success in this arena is to prepare the informant properly. The techniques already discussed in this section will help towards this end; we add here a few additional tips and warnings.

Be aware that some days are better than others for the informant. One of my informants, for example, can't remember anything useful on some days, but on others he knows all of the words I ask him, and furthermore volunteers stories, sayings, recipes, and so on. For this reason, you should not despair when your first few meetings with informants do not go well. Give them some time to warm up and get in the right mood, and give yourself some time to try out the different techniques outlined earlier.

When informants finally get on a roll, I've found it useful to let them go off on whatever tangents strike their fancy; interesting things often pop up, such as stories that you can later ask them to narrate for transcription. If you are too quick to nip their tangents in the

bud, informants are likely to become resentful and feel that you do not care about them except for their linguistic knowledge.

Some informants do have to be kept in check, though, if you want to be able to collect any linguistic data at all. It should be fairly clear when you are dealing with a person like the one I just mentioned, whose tangents are useful, and when you are dealing with a person who will ramble on about politics, his version of history, and so on for as long as you give him the bully pulpit.

4. Collecting and Organizing the Data
The next step in the process of collecting data during a field session is deciding how one should put the data in a permanent and manageable format. This process should normally consist of two components: recording the session in real time on audio and/or videotape, and transcribing the linguistically relevant portions of the session in a field notebook.

4.1. *Recording*
I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of *recording all of your field sessions* if humanly possible. There are all sorts of obstacles to doing this: it can be difficult to lug recording equipment to every session, and one can easily forget to bring it on any given day; procuring tapes and recording equipment can be very expensive; one feels at the time that nothing worth recording is coming out of a given session. Experience dictates, though, that at a later date you will wish for recordings of your sessions—your informant may die or move away, you may suddenly need to check some of the data that you transcribed in your notebook, you may want to make acoustic studies of their pronunciation, and so on. Making recordings of each session gives the field worker the additional advantage of being able to review and analyze the session later at a more leisurely pace, without having to worry about entertaining the informant. Field sessions are generally very hectic, and one often misses some of the things that the informant says. All too often I have paid the penalty for not recording a session, when my informant proceeded to reel off a string of interesting stories which I was unable to transcribe on the spot. Somehow it always seems that informants save their best material for the times you do not bring your recorder along! Remember also that your informants may be offended or distracted if you scribble away furiously, your nose buried in your notebook, as they try to interact with you. Recording your sessions leaves you free to maintain eye contact with your informants (if that is valued in their culture), nod, respond, and ask questions at appropriate times, and generally behave as if you were having a normal conversation rather than studying a lab animal.

If possible, you should use an unobtrusive DAT (digital audio tape) or CD recorder, together with a good microphone, in a soundproof room. It is important to make the equipment as unobtrusive as possible, because informants often tense up when they see that they're being recorded. Every step you take to make them less aware that they are being recorded will make it more likely that they will be able to produce good data. As for the microphone, remember that you get what you pay for, or less. It is advisable to get the best microphone that falls within your budgetary constraints. Of course, it is not always possible to follow all of the suggestions made here, but try to follow as many of them as you can. (For further information on the type of recording setup to use, see chapter 6 and Ladefoged 1997.)

Remember that it is also possible to make fairly good recordings over the telephone if necessary; most of the frequencies necessary for basic speech analysis can be conveyed over phone lines. If you are affiliated with a university, it is a good idea to check with the campus radio station, which is likely to have high quality equipment for recording phone conversations.

Once you have made your recordings, be sure to label all of your tapes immediately, and cross-reference these labels with the entries in your field notebooks. Beware of the unlabelled photograph syndrome: it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you remember all of the relevant information about the session, but even a few weeks later you may find it impossible to remember the exact day on which you met, what each tape contains, and even the name of the informant you met with. Furthermore, each day that you put off labelling your tapes makes it less likely that you will ever do it, and before you know it you will be dead, and the person in charge of your *Nachlass* will have no idea of the significance of the unlabelled tapes in your office, and throw them out.

4.2. Transcription

When transcribing the data you obtain in a field session, several points should be borne in mind. It is important to get into the habit of using notebooks designated specifically for the purpose of transcribing your field notes. Don't write on old pieces of paper or any other medium used for other purposes, such as a notebook from another class, empty pages of a grammar of the language you are working on, etc. Arbitrary materials of this kind are far too easily misfiled, lost, or forgotten. Make sure that the paper in the notebooks you use will last, and that the ink you write with is legible and won't smear or fade. Don't use pencil, because it is too tempting to erase things that you have written. One often needs to correct earlier transcriptions, but it is better to cross them out with a single line, so that they can be read later but it is clear that they are no longer correct. The reason to leave all of your transcriptions in legible form is that you may later realize that something you wrote earlier is in fact correct, or at least useful in some way.

Make sure that you label all of your notebooks, and clearly indicate where each session begins and ends. Try to avoid going back to earlier sessions to add or modify entries, as this can make unclear what was collected when. If you must make modifications of this sort, be sure to mark them in some way, and indicate the significance of this marking in the margin, including information such as when the modifications were made and (if different) when they were collected. Always include in your notebook the time, date, and location for each session, and indicate who was present at the meeting. The latter bit of information not only serves as an index of who is speaking at any given point during a session (both on tapes and in your field notes), but can also be useful later in identifying external factors that may have exerted an influence on the responses of the informants. If, for example, you find out at a later date that a different register is used with males than with females, it may be useful to know whether only males were present at an earlier session, in order to classify the data from that session according to register.

Write down as much as possible of what the informants say during the session. This includes not only hard linguistic data such as vocabulary items and sentences, but also any metacomments the informant might make, such as "I've heard that form, but I would never use it myself". One never knows when seemingly less significant information like this may turn out to be of vital importance, so it is a good idea to note down everything that you can. When this is not possible, you should augment your notes later with material garnered from the recordings of the session.

The way in which you write down your notes is also very important. Don't take the significance of seemingly obvious symbols for granted; for example, a question mark "?" can have a wide variety of interpretations, such as:

- Informant doesn't understand the question.
- Informant doesn't know the meaning of the word he was asked.
- Informant doesn't know any word in his language for the word he was asked.

- Informant can't remember the word in his language (but knows it).
- The field worker skipped this word for some reason.
- (If copying from another set of notes) The writing or recording was unclear.

These distinctions may seem obvious now, but in the heat of a session it is easy use an ambiguous symbol like "?" without realizing how difficult it will be to reconstruct its significance later.

Finally, make sure to use a set of symbols that you have explicitly defined in your notebooks (we propose a sample set in the next chapter). If you do not do so, it will be difficult for you and other linguists to interpret your notes at a later date.

5. Introductory Procedures

With these preliminaries in mind, we now turn to the question that occupies most of the remainder of this book, namely what to ask the informant. During your first meetings, it is a good idea to collect basic background information about each informant, such as:

- Gender.
- Date and place of birth (also indicate how old the informants are at the time of your session).
- All of the places they have lived in, and when and how long they lived in each.
- What languages they speak or have been exposed to, and which languages they are able to read and write.
- Their profession(s), both past and present.
- The social class to which they belong, both in their own assessment (if they are willing to answer such a question) and in your assessment.

Some readers may wonder why we have included in this list seemingly nonlinguistic factors such as social class. We have done so because sociolinguistic factors of this type have been shown to exercise significant influence on linguistic performance (cf. chapter 14), and therefore must be taken into consideration when evaluating data collected from a given informant.

You should try to collect the information in the list above for the informant's parents as well, either from the parents themselves, or from the informant if they are not available. It is important to do so, because the speech of the parents normally has a significant impact on that of the children.

When you begin eliciting actual linguistic data, bear in mind the following points:

- Prepare for your sessions as much as possible. This includes preparing specific questions for the informant, and learning as much as you can about the language in advance. You will often have to modify your questions or come up with new ones on the spot, but it is much better to come into a session with a good idea of what you are going to ask than it is to come in cold and have to make up everything on the spot. In the heat of the moment, it is all too easy to forget topics that you had wanted to cover.

- Elicit sentences rather than words as soon as possible. This is generally not feasible at first, since it is too difficult to keep track of what the informant is saying. Once you are sufficiently proficient to process them, however, sentences provide much more information per unit of time and also are more likely to maintain the informant's interest.

- Remember that it is almost as important to know what *can't* be said as it is to know what the *best* way of saying something is. When possible, try to elicit all of the possible ways of saying the desired word or phrase, together with an assessment of their relative acceptability.

- Try to double check your data blindly whenever possible. If you have collected a word for 'dog', for example, try eliciting that word again later in a different context (asking the informant to repeat a word right after you have elicited it does not quite count). Also, check your transcriptions with the informant if possible.

As we mentioned earlier, there are various techniques to choose from when eliciting data from an informant. Word lists, conversations between the informant and the interviewer or another native speaker, collection of grammaticality judgements, reading of a prepared text, and recitation or performance of songs, stories, jokes, and so on each have their own place in the set of useful elicitation strategies. Some of these will work for certain kinds of linguists, and others will not; few people other than linguists would be interested in collecting grammaticality judgements of sentences for example (and conversely, theoretical syntacticians are generally uninterested in any of the strategies other than grammaticality judgements). Each strategy is designed to collect certain sorts of information, and you should choose the ones you employ according to your needs. Stories and other forms of connected speech, for example, are much more likely to contain phenomena associated with more casual speech registers. A good illustration comes from the Homshetsma language mentioned earlier, where the verb *gasa* 'he says' is inserted in narratives with astonishing frequency; in isolated sentences it is not used in this way.

　　　Some of the strategies will work with some informants, and others will not. For example, many of my informants are not interested in singing, but with one of my other informants I collect only songs. She enjoys singing, and the only material she knows in the dialect I am interested in is contained in songs she learned from her mother as a child, so this is what we work on when we meet.

　　　In addition to the strategies suggested here, you will probably want to come up with some of your own that are tailored to the particular circumstances of your field situation. It is important to maintain a certain degree of spontaneity and adaptability in your approach. However, don't make this an excuse for not preparing!

The suggestions and warnings presented in this chapter are designed to serve as general guides for field work conducted in all areas of linguistics. In the remaining chapters of this book, we turn to the details of data collection in each of the main subfields.

Suggestions for further reading
- Chapter 7 of Nida, Eugene. 1946. *Morphology: The Descriptive Analysis of Words*, second edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Nida, Eugene. 1947. Field Techniques in Descriptive Linguistics. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 13.3:138-46.
- The Introduction to Samarin, W. 1967. *Field Linguistics: A Guide to Linguistic Field Work*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Labov, William. 1975. Empirical Foundations of Linguistic Theory. *The Scope of American Linguistics*, ed. by Robert Austerlitz, 77-134. Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press.
- Hale, Ken. forthcoming. Ulwa (southern Sumu): The beginnings of a language research Project. In *Linguistic Fieldwork*, Paul Newman and Martha Ratliff, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).
- Schütze, Carson. 1996. *The Empirical Base of Linguistics: Grammaticality Judgments and Linguistic Methodology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Exercises
1. You need to find a speaker of Akan for your field research.
- Outline how you might go about ascertaining if there are any informants in your area (or if there are none, think about how to contact Akan speakers elsewhere, and discuss how you might conduct field research with them), how to meet with them, and what questions to ask them at your first meeting.
- How do you get around the problem of calling them out of the blue?
- How do you research their culture and language beforehand?
- Where is the best place to meet?
- How do you bring up the issue of payment?

2. You desperately need certain data from Karaim for an important paper you are writing, but there are only two Karaim speakers in your area, and you don't get along with either one of them. What do you do?

3. Ask your informant to produce a sentence. Have the entire class transcribe the utterance. Compare and discuss everyone's renditions of the sentence vis a vis the correct version.

4. The only available speaker of the language you are interested in is female, and you are male. Unfortunately, it is not acceptable in her culture for women to speak with foreign males. How might you get around this problem without seriously violating her cultural mores?