Linguistic Data Collection: A Field Observation

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Abstract

Linguistic research can contribute data toward the understanding of language universals. There is a direct relation between field work and language description. The more field work, the more information we will have about the variability of language. The study is an attempt to describe the the different types of data collection with special reference to linguistic field work.

Key words: Data, Field, Informant.

1. Introduction

The field is the main treasure-trove of the data of the linguists, because field linguistics has played an important part in the collection of the data of the languages. Samarin, J. William. (1967) has mentioned that 'A field is primarily a way of obtaining linguistic data and studying linguistic phenomena it involves two particular participants, the speaker of a language and the linguistic researcher'. So fieldwork is indispensable for the collection of data in linguistic field. . Field research involves observing and recording real spoken language/s as used by various members of a society in various contexts and times, and then analyzing the data according to some specific linguistic methodology. It is a general fact that the field researcher has to rely completely upon the community whose language s/he undertakes to study.

1.1. Data Collection

As there is no eliciting some concomitant analysis, there is no analysis without collection of data. Data is the collection of facts, figures and statistics that can be processed to produce meaningful information. It is constituted letters, numbers or graphic symbols. In other words, data are collection of elementary facts which constitute our knowledge according to their relation and our interest. A linguist starts the task of data collection after a research problem has been

defined. Kothari (2004) mentioned that the data are of two types: (i) Primary data and (ii) Secondary data. The primary can be either collected through observation or direct communication or interview.

The primary methods can be further sub-divided into three methods i.e., (i) Observation method: Under the observation method, information is sought by way of direct observation of the field investigator without asking from the respondent. (ii) Interview method: This method is further subdivided into two i.e., (i) Direct Personal Interview and (ii) Indirect Personal Interview.

In the direct personal investigation, the field investigator has to be in the spot from which data has to be collected. In the other method, the interviewer has to cross examine others native speakers of the same variety. In the second method the researcher observed the individual's speech style, his communication with others. Moreover, in this method the society has a whole is observed. More data and information can be collected because of direct contract with the informants. Personal information can be easily obtained under this method. The field investigator can easily identify which person is more active than other. His is not possible in questionnaire method. It is very expensive when especially largely and widely spread geographical sample is taken. There remains the possibility of bias of field investigator as well as that of the respondent.

Abbi (2001) has mentioned that the interview method is the most reliable methods of data collection. A field linguist follows some basic steps of data collection. Primary data collection is done in various stages, beginning from isolated to small phrases to long and complex sentence followed by discourse pieces (see below) .Text collection of narrative may be done at any stage after two; however linguists vary on this chronology. Many linguists prefer to start with texts after stage one and then translate each and vary word to extract phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of the language concerned. All the stage of primary data elicitation are in feeding order as explained below by the diagram to acquire sociolinguistic information one can elicit data after stage 3 but this is independent of stage 4 an and 5. The result of analyzing each phase is given in below.

Stages of Data Recording

Abbi (2001) has mentioned there are different stages of data recording for the linguist before analyzing a text.

Stage 1 Basic word list basic sound

Stage 2 400 words list   Phonological structure

Stage 3 short phrases   Morphological paradigms

Stage 4 simple sentences   Syntactic structure I, i.e. word order, agreement)

Stage 5 complex sentences   Syntactic structure II)

The last method is questionnaire method**:** This method of data collection is quite popular, particularly in case of big enquires. It is being adopted by private individuals, research workers, private and public organizations and even by governments. If an informant is far from a linguist, then this questionaries' are used for procuring data. There is law cost even when the universe is large and is widely spread geographically. It is free from the bias of interviews. But this method is likely to be the slowest of all. It is hard to know for the linguist whether eager respondents are really spokesperson.

1.2. Secondary Data

The secondary data, on the other hand, are those which have already been collected by someone else (linguist) and which have already been passed through the statistical process. There are three factors which can influence the secondary collection of data.

1.2.1. Reliability of Data

The reliability can be tested by a linguist by finding out such things about the said date: (a) who collected the data? (b) What were the sources of data? (c) Were they collected by using proper method? (d) At what time were they collected? (e) Was there any bias of the compiler? (f) What level of accuracy was desired? Was it achieved?

1.2.2. Suitability of Data

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The data that are suitable for a linguist for one enquiry may not necessarily be found suitable in another enquiry. Hence, if the available data are found to be unsuitable, they should not be used by the researcher.

1.2.3. Adequacy of Data

If the level of accuracy achieved in data is found in adequate for the purpose of the present enquiry, they will be considered as inadequate and should not be used by the linguists.

Thus data collection is done by the field linguists in various stages. Having reached the field and identified informant, key informants or interpreters as the case may be, one is confronted with the real task, the elicitation of linguistic data. It is true that in order to describe the endangered languages of Northeast and other sates of India, the primary source of information is more reliable for the linguists. This source gives more clear and vibrant information on language study. Secondary source of data is more important for the literature study but for the linguistics and language researchers primary source is more authentic source of information.

Field work can also bring a great deal of personal enrichment associated with visiting exotic locations meeting new and unusual people documenting an unsuited language also in stills and satisfaction of creating something new, and adding knowledge to the world. Ideally one's field works 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 for their research on their own. There are also a number of reasons for theoretical linguists to carry out field work. Field work is obviously required for syntacticians and phoneticians for making different primers, grammar book, text book etc.

Moreover 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 which help a linguist to

analysis the text further. Field linguistics also comes close to the traditional domain of applied linguistics pedagogy and the newest and perhaps not even independent discipline the theory of child speech.

Hopefully the discovery of the unique and the universal human mechanism for learning the language that one hears spoken around one as a child and for learning it with analyzing speed and without any planned course of instructing will help to optimize the learning of a language in field conditions However this area of linguistics is presently for behind the demands of field work. Crowley (2007) starts with our responsibility as linguists to document languages to prevent the human loss that the loss of languages entails, so that even when a language dies, at least it is still recorded somewhere. Crowley's account of fieldwork is warm and entertaining, a cheerful anecdotal romp through the vagaries and vicissitudes of fieldwork.

1.3. Basic Stages of Field Work

A.E. Kibrikin in his book *The Methodology of Field Investigation in Linguistics* has described some significant features for field linguists. The first step he mentioned is discussed below:

1.3.1. Ultimate Aim

One's aim significantly predetermines the means which are used to optimize the study, the specification of the concerns problems which are to be solved in the process of the investigation, as well as the amount of time needed for it. The investigation of the target language without a clearly formulated aim can hardly be effective .Thus the first thing the language investigator must do is visualize the ultimate aim of the wok. This aim (which may consist of one or of several problems) should first of all be sufficiently universal so as not to be irrelevant to the study of the target language (for example, studying the case system of nouns in language of the English type), secondly it should be substantial enough to occupy the entire period of field work, and to the investigator for its solution.

1.3.2. First Encounter with a Language

If we are dealing with an unwritten language the first stage of the investigation, naturally, should be devoted to phonetics, regardless of the ultimate aim of the investigation. We can examine the question of fixing spoken sound in writing: the universal phonetic transcription. However, it is clear that knowledge of a system of references does not guarantee the ability to interpret the unusual sound of a target language in terms of these references. This ability is developed by a general phonetic training which every field linguist must undergo.

1.3.3. Discovery of Basic Grammatical Categories

Immediately on completion of the first stage of the investigation of the unfamiliar language (3-5 days) one can shift to the systematic study of grammatical categories. The morphological questionnaires of the ''zero cycle'' should help in this study. He further mentioned that a linguist must collect grammatical categories like Noun, Pronoun, Adjectives, Verbs, Adverbs, Prepositions, etc to sketch the morphological structure of a language.

Some linguists consider that field work, which is conducted as a rule under strict times, limits, requires a limitation in the number of stages for collecting and generalizing materials. It seems to us that such a rigid limitation is undesirable and may actually lengthen rather than shorten the length of time spent in the field. The collection of data cannot be regarded as a mechanical process, since what is important is not the quantity, but the quality of the material.

Field linguistics is an experimental method of descriptive linguistics, where the linguist is separated from the object of his study (the target language) and the means through which it manifests itself (the data) by a person (the informant) with whose help he elicits all the information about the object of his interest .It is difficult to overrate the fundamental importance of this fact.

The only material the linguist has to begin with are the informant's grammatical utterances in the target language pronounced arbitrarily in a natural or assigned communicative situation or stimulated artificially by the investigator . The ultimate aim of field work is to discover the grammar of the target language; the specific condition for accomplishing this aim is that an informant stands between the language and the linguist.

1.4. Problems Encountered by Field Linguists

1.4. 1.

It is very ease for the linguists to explore their field work in the hilly track of Northeastern states of India. But at the same time it bears risk of insurgency in some places. As a result it becomes one of the problematic issues for them to overcome.

1.4. 2.

In most of the Northeast Indian states, many preliterate languages are spoken and these have unique features and customs of their languages. But such communities are not open for the outsiders to make an entry to the threshold of their rituals.

1.4. 3.

In spite of having huge resources most of the field linguists in India do not have ready access to good scientific works because of poor infrastructure. Lack of adequate exposure to scientific methods and techniques in linguistics and adjacent sciences is a great hurdle for the researchers in our country.

1.4. 4.

Library arrangement and functioning is not satisfactory at many places and much of the time and energy of linguists are spent in tracing out the books, journals, reports, etc.

Conclusion

Finally, field linguistics is closely related to various branches of linguistics. Field linguistics is the experimental polygon for various linguistic theories the supplies of new and needed material for linguistics about languages and their properties and the potential customers for the solutions to numerous problems still being worked on by theoretical linguistics. Data the same time, field linguistics is an independent applied branch of linguistics with a complicated complex of problems and methods and depends on modern accomplishments in the theory of language for its theoretical foundations. Field research involves observing and recording real spoken language as used by various members of a society in various contents and times, and then analyzing the data according to same specific linguistic methodology. It is revealing that almost

all the linguistic disciplines which shares similar methods with filed linguistic were given scientific status only quite recently.

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