It is important to realize that, although the typical standard-definition video cameras (i.e. MiniDV) create uncompressed linear PCM audio, current high-definition (HD) cameras typically do not. Instead, they record audio in compressed forms (e.g. MPEG1 layer 2, AAC/MPEG4 or Dolby Digital/AC3). This rather speaks against most HD cameras for our purposes if they are intended to also be the main audio recording device.

1.3.1.2 Filming techniques

Filming introduces a whole new range of things to get wrong. It is not usually possible, on your own or as a two-person team, to attend to everything, and audio settings should always take priority. But even if the camera has to be on auto-everything, there are a few things one can try to always remember that will improve the results. Ideally no one would go into the field without some basic training in the use of video equipment, preferably given by a film-maker rather than a shop assistant. At the very least you should experiment vigorously before you go.

As with still photography, a flat horizon such as the sea should be a level line. It is easy to overlook this in the heat of the moment and record with the horizon at an angle. Unlike with still photography, it is a major hassle to rotate and crop the result; normally one has to live with the shame.

Even with perfect exposure it is very easy to mar a shot by omitting to use a lens hood of some kind. (Maybe it was not a problem at the start of the session, but then the sun came out…) Amazingly, consumer/prosumer models rarely include a dedicated hood. Perhaps the smaller lenses they use need less shading, or perhaps the manufacturers calculate that most people would rather have a sleeker machine than a clearer image. Professional models always seem to include a hood. If you have one, do use it to keep lens flare[30] and the consequent loss of detail and contrast at bay. If necessary, consider making one out of cardboard; at the very least be aware of the problem.

Lens filters are also invaluable. They are inexpensive and protect against damage to the lens besides filtering out problematic light. The basic type is the UV filter which screens out ultraviolet rays, thus reducing haze effects. Also useful is the polarizing filter. This is adjustable and functions to darken the sky and also to reduce reflections, for example from a water or glass surface (meaning that objects behind the surface can be seen).

p. 36 Most video cameras have an external indication that they are recording, typically a red light near the lens. This can be helpful when one is using the remote control to operate the camera, for example, if the researcher has to be in the picture together with the speaker for an elicitation task. However, the red light can also have the drawback of alerting people that the camera is recording and may cause them to modify their behaviour. The camera is likely to have the option of turning the red light off.

(i) Tripods vs. handheld filming

We believe that in most fieldwork settings it should be standard practice to use a tripod for filming. There are several good reasons for this. A handheld camera invariably moves and shakes and this makes for bad recordings. Holding the camera for any length of time is exhausting. Speakers are more likely to relax and forget about the camera if there is not someone constantly behind it.

There is a different school of thought which advocates filming without a tripod. The idea is that people actually relax more with a handheld camera than with a tripod, because after a while they are more aware of the person than of the camera to the extent of not even noticing it any more. From this point of view, one is therefore better off learning to hold a camera steady and level rather than fussing with a tripod.

We think that this approach is probably more appropriate for documentary film-making than for the type of linguistic data collection generally under discussion here. Films are composed of a number of small scenes