

5.5.3.3 Audio/video recordings

Group recordings can be conducted with either audio or video recorders. The most beneficial method will depend on what kind of sociolinguistic questions you have. Video recordings can help overcome some of the problems associated with an absent researcher, as video may clarify who is talking to whom (it can't solve all such problems unless you have multiple cameras focused in different directions to capture everyone's gaze). Non-verbal cues may also provide information that's useful in analysing the give and take of conversational interaction. However, audio (at present) is still easier to use if a speaker is undertaking day long free-style recordings.

5.6 Conclusion

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In this chapter, we have reviewed some of the basic issues associated with undertaking sociolinguistic fieldwork. We started with an overview of some key terms in sociolinguistics (including 'speech community', 'sociolinguistic variable', and 'sociolinguistics' itself), and we discussed how these notions influence the methods of sociolinguists. We examined in detail the methods of the classic (Labovian) sociolinguistic interview, the rationale behind its structure and methods, and indicated some of its advantages and disadvantages depending on (a) the nature of the linguistic phenomenon being investigated, (b) the kinds of research questions being asked about the relationship between society and language use. We considered also the techniques employed in search of vernacular speech, within the context of an interview and variations on the one-to-one interview format, including group recordings. We explored the intersection between sociolinguistic fieldwork and ethnographic traditions in anthropology and sociology, especially the shared interests in documenting everyday and unmonitored speech as a window on speakers' ideologies about and attitudes to language, society, and their interlocutors.

5.7 Appendix 1. Technical Tips for Successful Group Recordings

These apply to all recording contexts, but are essential for successful group recordings (see also Margetts and Margetts, Chapter 1 above).

Checklist

1. What kind(s) of device(s) are most suitable for your research (what microphone, what recording devices)?
You might want to use small and unobtrusive recording devices to set participants at ease. If you are asking people to carry around a recording device, you will want a light but sturdy one.
2. Does the equipment work?
Check all your equipment prior to a recording session to see if it is all working. Do a test recording and check the sound quality in a similar setting to the one where you are going to record.
3. Was the recording session successful?
Check the quality of every recording soon after every session.
Label the file carefully and clearly.
4. Did the recording work? Save your sound or video files, and make a backup (or two) straightaway. Never underestimate the importance of backups. Ensure you have a safe copy of important information about each sound file, e.g. who it involves, where they were, when they were having the conversation.

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