



## The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork

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### CHAPTER

## 5 Sociolinguistic Fieldwork

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### Abstract

Sociolinguistic fieldwork is at the core of this article. It is challenging to provide an account of methods associated with sociolinguistic fieldwork, as the field of sociolinguistics is extremely heterogeneous. Researchers who identify as sociolinguists may be asking questions about the relationship between language and power. They may equally be interested in the functions of and structural constraints on switches between different languages or dialects in a polylectal speech community. Sociolinguists have always been heavily influenced by anthropology, not least in their methods, and this means that a lot of sociolinguistic research reports qualitative results, in addition to the quantitative results of the Labovian social dialect survey. This article reviews two of the dominant approaches in sociolinguistic fieldwork: the sociolinguistic interview and participant observation. This dichotomy is an idealization, but it is a useful heuristic around which to structure the article. Since many of the methodological issues that sociolinguists have to deal with in their fieldwork overlap with those of any other linguist, some of the technical and procedural aspects of sociolinguistic fieldwork are explained in the article. This article extensively explores 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.

**Keywords:** [sociolinguistic fieldwork](#), [polylectal speech community](#), [Labovian social dialect survey](#), [dichotomy](#), [ethnographic traditions](#)

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