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Another scenario is where researchers already have access to older good-quality technology such as DAT or the Sony 'Walkman Professional' compact cassette recorders. There is an economic rationale for this (good equipment at no cost), but even so we do not recommend using such machines as primary recorders ↵ because the data need to be digitized or transferred to disk. (Likewise, existing data on such tapes will need to be converted while this is still possible, i.e. before the equipment disappears altogether.) The cost of this time-consuming and exacting work rather cancels out the savings on the hardware.

Another application for lower-quality recording equipment is its use for hand transcription of recorded data in the field. This is not ideal because, as mentioned, the transcription and the text–audio linkage will become two separate steps in the workflow and this means more work (much more). We recommend this scenario only in cases where the basic transcription cannot be made directly into the computer. We have had good experience both with analog players and with an MP3 player/recorder in situations where there was limited power and the speakers who did the transcriptions had no experience with computers. The MP3 machine even allowed the transcribers to select a chunk of text, which was then replayed as a loop until the section was transcribed. To make this work we transferred compressed versions of the original audio files from the PC.

In another situation, because of limited solar power supply during the rainy season, a colleague created analog tape recordings just for the purpose of transcription by using a battery-run analog cassette tape recorder in parallel to her master recording equipment (which was digital video). This meant she did not have to capture or convert the recordings in the field and speakers could transcribe directly from the tape. She chose analog equipment because speakers were familiar with this technology.

MP3 and MiniDisc (MD) recorders are small, relatively inexpensive, and handy but they record in compressed and sometimes proprietary formats. Moreover, the MiniDisc system, despite being digital, only allows analog transfer to computers (unless one uses specialist equipment). The later Hi-MD recorders can record in lossless PCM, but early models were plagued by encryption and transfer policies (imposed by the manufacturer, Sony) that made it hard to transfer digital recordings to the computer. Although these restrictions have since been eased, Hi-MD technology has effectively been superseded by the solid-state machines discussed above.

A further problem with all MiniDisc models is the possibility of including machine noise (from the disk spinning up intermittently) in recordings if the microphone placement is unfortunate. A similar risk exists with all mechanical recorders (digital video, compact cassette, etc.) as opposed to solid-state flash memory devices. The additional danger with MiniDiscs lies in the fact that because the noise is not constant it might not even be registered as an acoustic hazard before it is too late. MiniDisc recorders, although small, cannot be as miniaturized as some MP3 recorders because of the physical dimensions of the disk itself.

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Digital Audio Tape (DAT) recorders record non-compressed data in excellent quality but they have essentially been superseded by solid-state recorders. As with ↵ all digital tape formats, DAT recordings need to be transferred to disk in real time before the sessions can be fed into the normal workflow (and note that this is not as straightforward for DAT as for DV tapes).

While the recording quality of high-end analog machines can be very good, the tapes require digitizing. The problem is that this is not easy to do oneself without sacrificing quality. Archiving bureaus use specialized tape decks and computer interfaces to do the best possible job. It can be tempting to create a 'rough' digital copy (so that analysis can begin) using a regular cassette deck and the line-in jack of a PC, either in the field or while waiting for the high-quality version to be processed by a bureau. If you do this, the two different versions, the home-made and the professional one, will differ in their time code. So there is no point in creating text–audio linkage with your home-digitized data. When using analog recorders it is essential to