arranged to tell a story—irregular camera movement can be either edited out or is simply overlooked because of the composite nature of the final production. But for many, if not most, linguistic data samples, long unedited recordings with video matched to audio are the norm, since the point is primarily to capture a speech event. For such recordings, the inevitable camera shake from a handheld recording of an essentially static scene is likely to be very noticeable and distracting. Either way, it is good practice (often suggested by documentary film-makers) that the camera should appear to run as much as possible, particularly at the beginning of a shoot, simply to help people accept the camera as normal.

Typical fieldwork may encompass a range of filming scenarios: some recordings will be static set pieces, others on-the-fly recordings of things that just happen (it may simply be impractical to lug a tripod around while following a speaker who has agreed to demonstrate e.g. traditional gardening or fishing methods). In other words, a decent tripod and good handheld technique can both be recommended.

If you do succeed—by whichever method, fixed camera or handheld—in putting your subjects at ease, do remember that the more likely speakers are to forget that they are being recorded, the more important it is that they can later veto parts of the recording they do not want to have made public.

p. 37

If one opts for a fixed camera, even a very small, lightweight tripod or propping the camera up on a table is better than nothing. But if the budget allows, a professional camera should be complemented by a sturdy tripod. Such a tripod need not be heavy (though it will be relatively bulky); carbon-fibre models are comparatively light. Apart from the fact that a professional camera tends to be bigger and needs more support than a consumer one, a good tripod with a good head will allow much smoother camera movements. Before filming, the tripod should be leveled (most tripod heads include a bubble level).

If the camera is to be handheld, one should choose the steady-shot option, which compensates to some extent for jerky movements. A hand-grip (of the sort sold for still cameras, e.g. ‘Hama’ brand) can be very effective for steadying a video camera. The grip can also be used for mounting a microphone away from the camera itself, so reducing its susceptibility to mechanical noise. If most of the recording will be done on the hoof, a small sized ‘stabilizer’ might be justified: these devices assist a walking camera operator to create smooth footage (e.g. ‘Steadicam’, ‘Glidecam’, and ‘Blackbird’ brands).

(ii) Zooming, panning, and composition

Elaborate camera work is rarely necessary or desirable for decent language recordings. If speakers are stationary, there is little reason to use zooming and panning at all. As tempting as they are, it is good to avoid these manoeuvres; they make recordings look chaotic and unprofessional. Overly active camera work can also cause loss of visual data, such as gestures. When zooming in on the speaker's face or panning to capture other aspects of the recording situation, there is no record of the speaker's hand gestures for that segment (see Seyfeddinipur, Chapter 6 below).

The zoom function should therefore generally be used merely as a tool for composition: frame the speakers intelligently and then stop. Likewise for the camera direction and position: if you do choose to use so called ‘developing shots’ (i.e. when you zoom or pan during a shot), a good rule of thumb is to keep the image still for at least ten seconds before and after the movement. Also, make all such adjustments slowly (‘slow’ here means about three times slower than you might think during filming). Zooming and panning typically appears too fast and hectic when reviewing the recording. Remember that most camera movement should be motivated by the subject, not the camera operator, and so in general camera movement should only be required to follow someone and keep them in frame.

Recordings that take place in confined spaces can be very hard to frame—one simply cannot zoom out far enough. The solution is a wide-angle lens. Such a lens is often available for professional cameras, and simply fits over the standard lens. We found this a very worthwhile accessory.