

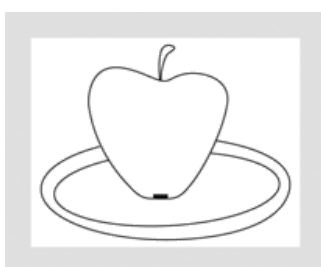
2.4 Collecting data

2.4.1 I have my stimuli, now what?

p. 66 Construction of a stimulus set is the first phase, but thinking about how you are going to use your stimuli is just as important. When presented with a pictorial or video stimulus, a person may focus on many different aspects of the materials, and not necessarily the one that is critical for the researcher (Du Bois 1980). Unfamiliar objects and settings may call for commentary, joking, and curious speculations. Field researchers have reported more than once that consultants viewing videos of a woman with short hair were drawn to comment on her gender. Perhaps even more extreme, Segall and colleagues working in the 1960s on the cross-cultural perception of visual illusions reported various indigenous groups commenting more on the white band around the edge of a photograph than the picture depicted therein (Segall, Campbell, and Herskovits 1966). Such descriptions may be interesting in their own right, but more often they are tangential to the aspects of interest. Build into your elicitation task a period of familiarization. Cross-cultural research on the perception of pictorial materials suggests that a brief period of familiarization is sufficient to achieve a coherent interpretation of pictures (Miller 1973).

It is important to ensure that participants are familiarized with pictorial materials so that they can identify objects, especially as objects of a particular type. For example, in the Topological Relations Picture Series (also known as the 'bowped' pictures: Bowerman and Pederson 1992), which has been used to investigate spatial notions such as 'on' and 'in', spatial descriptions can vary either because the indigenous semantic categories are indeed different, or because the consultants misinterpreted the depicted objects and had a different construal of the scene. For example, in Fig. 2.3, if the ground is correctly interpreted as a ring, then a consultant might describe the apple as being 'in', but if they did not recognize the ground and instead interpreted it as a plate, then they might describe it as an 'on' relation instead. A casual inspection of the distribution of responses may lead a researcher to conclude that spatial relations are encoded differently in language X, because Fig. 2.3 was described as 'in' in all other languages but as 'on' within language X. But this would be a wrong conclusion. We simply do not know what speakers in language X would have said had they the appropriate construal in mind. So it is of utmost importance that the researcher reflect before beginning data collection: what am I trying to establish with this data session and how can I ensure that the speakers are oriented towards the relevant contrasts, i.e. those the stimuli are intended to depict?

Figure 2.3.



Taken from Bowerman and Pederson (1992).

p. 67 The specific protocol being used in the elicitation also requires a phase of familiarization. If you are focusing on free spontaneous descriptions, then do not begin with the target stimulus materials straight away. Always include in your set two or three stimulus items that are not designed to test anything in particular, but are there to familiarize the participant with the task and the nature of the materials. Ask consultants to describe these first. Items should share general properties with the task materials (i.e. they are also videos