Conducting field work online with speakers of a minor unwritten language of Dagestan

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Supplement to a talk[URL] on animacy agreement in non-verbal predication in Botlikh.

Version:

In this supplement I detail how I conducted an online survey with speakers of Botlikh (a minor unwritten language of Dagestan) in order to get more or less quantitative data on a grammatical topic. I decided to document my experiences trying to use different platforms and to exercise some kind of control over who fills out my survey because I thought it might be useful for other researchers. The ongoing epidemiological situation has made it more difficult for linguists to carry out field work, and as a result, many of us have started to experiment with collecting data remotely. Online methods have some obvious drawbacks: it is more difficult

1. Setup of the survey

The aim of the survey I conducted was to verify some trends in agreement patterns observed during qualitative elicitation with a small number of speakers (e.g. human referents more consistently agree with animate than other animates).

The survey consisted of 89 simple sentences in Botlikh: 10 different nominals in singular and plural were combined with different negative copula forms (see slide \* from my talk in more detail). Speakers were asked to rate each sentence on a 5-point scale, where 1 = incorrect (неправильно) and 5 = excellent (отлично). All of the questions were obligatory, so speakers did not have the option to opt out or make a special indication in case they did not know how to answer, for example because they did not know a certain word or were not certain of the correctness of an example.

The sentences were presented in a randomized order and there were no fillers. I chose not to add fillers because the task itself was very straightforward and there were enough different variables not to prime speakers in favor of certain patterns. Additionally, the survey was already quite long and I did not want to exhaust my participants.

Instructions were in Russian.

Several preliminary questions were aimed at getting an idea of who filled out my survey:

Sex { M | F | do not disclose }

Age group {}

Options shaded grey were not selected by any of the participants

Are you from Botlikh? (in Botlikh)

In order to deter non-speakers from participating.

How do you say ‘butterfly’ in Botlikh?

While working in the field I got the impression that younger and less proficient speakers often do not know the word for ‘butterfly’ in Botlikh, so I came up with this question as a kind of proxy for proficiency. The word ‘butterfly’ also appears in the survey, so I figured it was good to know who knew the word well enough to produce the translation before having seen the questions (assuming that they did not ask anyone else while filling out the survey).

Instagram username or other contact information

I asked participants to *optionally* provide their Instagram username or another way of contacting them so that I could send them compensation for filling out the survey. This also helped me to get an idea of which subscribers ended up taking part in the survey.

At the end of the survey I provided the possibility to leave comments about the survey. 2 people commented that they did not know what *sasak’u* (‘butterfly’) was.

2. Survey platform

2.1 Toloka

2.2 Google form

3. Distribution

4. Compensation

5. Overall experience