

Part I

Methodologies

Field Methods

In an early discussion of linguistic methodology, William Labov classified the different subfields of linguistics according to whether their practitioners were primarily to be found working in “the library, the bush, the closet, the laboratory . . . [or] the street” (Labov 1972: 99). The library was the provenance of the historical linguist, the remote and sparsely populated bush the venue of the anthropological linguist, the laboratory the home of the psycholinguist, and the closet the circumscribed space of theoretical linguists speculating about their own linguistic usages. Sociolinguists, on the other hand, boldly stepped beyond the bounds of their research institutions out into the street, to gather data on language as the people around them actually used it in everyday life. The heavily populated city street was, and continues to be, especially important to variationist sociolinguists, since their concern has always been with uncovering and seeking to explicate patterns of variation and change – patterns that emerge only when sufficient quantities of data have been obtained from a substantial number of speakers.

It seems fitting that the first section of this *Handbook* opens with a chapter on how to get out into the street in the first place. In “Entering the Community: Fieldwork,” Crawford Feagin provides a practical, hands-on guide to planning and executing the type of community study that has been at the heart of variation analysis since its inception. Students new to sociolinguistic research will benefit from Feagin’s discussion of such potentially daunting matters as selecting informants, choosing recording equipment, and designing and conducting the sociolinguistic interview, while novices and experts alike will appreciate her discussion of such persistent issues as how to gain acceptance into the community, how to compensate subjects, and whether it is ethical to downplay one’s research interests in the service of obtaining unselfconscious speech. Feagin’s liberal use of anecdotes from her own and others’ field efforts, including cases where things went awry, lends an empathetic tone that will be appreciated by all who have ever felt the self-doubt that arises when you try to match your clear-cut fieldwork goals with the messy realities of working with real people with goals of their own.

Despite the importance of naturalistic data on language in daily use, they sometimes need to be supplemented with data on what people think about

their own and others' language uses. In "Language with an Attitude," Dennis R. Preston discusses sociolinguistic investigations of non-linguists' attitudes toward various languages, language varieties, and specific features of these varieties. Understanding language attitudes is important for both scientific and humanistic reasons: not only does such understanding provide insight into such central linguistic issues as the relationship between perception and production and the role of saliency in language variation and change, but it also allows for fuller understanding of how and why people's attitudes toward language varieties are often translated into attitudes toward, and discrimination against, speakers who use particular varieties. So far, linguists have had little success in changing the folk attitudes that underlie accent discrimination (for example, the belief that nonstandard varieties are "bad" or "sloppy" or "lazy"); perhaps we will have better luck when we have a greater understanding of the belief systems we are seeking to replace – in other words, when we have developed a full-fledged "folk theory of language" to supplement our linguistic understandings.

Given their interest in language change, variationists also often have to supplement taped records of spoken language with written records from previous time periods. In "Investigating Variation and Change in Written Documents," Edgar W. Schneider discusses the numerous troublesome issues that arise when the researcher must rely on written evidence as reflective of once-spoken language. Most important is validity – that is, the extent to which the written document represents the variety it supposedly depicts. Schneider points out that some text types tend to be more faithful to spoken forms than others. For example, transcripts of interviews (whether tape-recorded or not) tend to be more faithful to spoken language than literary works, whose authors tend to overuse stereotypical features and reduce variability. It is necessary to assess the validity of any text type by evaluating the conditions under which the document was produced (such as whether it was written during or after the event it depicts), checking it for internal consistency, and comparing one's results with those of other studies. The issues that arise in working with written documents are by no means unique to this type of data. As Schneider points out, tape recordings and transcriptions are also removed from the "reality" of speech performance, albeit to a lesser degree than most written historical records. With careful handling, written records can indeed serve as a valuable source of data in the quantitative investigation of language variation and change.

In the final chapter in this section, "Inferring Variation and Change from Public Corpora," Laurie Bauer discusses another type of data sample that is not usually gathered directly by the linguistic investigator – the public corpus. Although the term "corpus" technically may be used to refer to any body of data, recent decades have seen the compilation of several large collections of naturally occurring (or naturalistic) language data that have been made available to the scientific community and the general public. Often, these collections are computerized and computer-searchable, rendering them even more accessible and useful. They are especially useful for variationists, since they are usually

quite large in size, and since there exist samples of various regional and national varieties, as well as samples from different time periods. However, caution must be exercised in comparing corpora to infer variation and change, since different collections may be comprised of slightly different types of data (e.g. data from a different range of registers). In addition, public corpora are limited in that not all of them provide social information on speakers (or writers). Despite these difficulties, public corpora have proven to be a valuable source of data for variationists, and technological advances promise to make them even more so in the near future. Hence, variationists are now supplementing their work in the street, the laboratory and the library with research in a new location, only vaguely anticipated in the early 1960s – cyberspace.

REFERENCE

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NATALIE SCHILLING-ESTES

1 Entering the Community: Fieldwork

CRAWFORD FEAGIN

While the ultimate goal of sociolinguistic research is to resolve questions of linguistic importance, such as how language change comes about, nothing of that sort can be accomplished without first entering a community in order to collect data which will help provide the basis for any such answers. The central problem in collecting sociolinguistic data has been described by Labov as the Observer's Paradox: "our goal is to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed" (1972a: 61). Sociolinguistic fieldwork of all kinds, whether tape-recorded interviews, participant observations or street-corner quizzes, must be geared to overcome this problem. In this chapter, I consider several well-established methods. I begin with a section on "Planning the Project", dealing with preliminary considerations for a survey. The heart of the chapter, as indeed of field research, is the second section on the "Sociolinguistic Interview", the Labovian protocol for selecting informants and eliciting different styles of speech. I then consider some other elicitation methods used in sociolinguistics: participant observation, rapid and anonymous observations, and telephone surveys.

1 Planning the Project

Although the methods involved are presented here as if they were sequential, in practice the various phases of fieldwork and other aspects of research are cyclical, or perhaps spiral. Investigation in one area will influence what can be done in another. An interview might provide insights about the community that can be incorporated into the protocol and produce a much better interview with subsequent informants. For instance, in my work in Anniston, Alabama (Feagin 1979), one teenager mentioned a recent snowstorm, an unexpected and exciting phenomenon in that part of the world, so in later interviews I asked the rest of the teenagers about it. As a result, I came away with excited

accounts of sledding on garbage-can tops and cookie sheets, wearing improvised boots made from plastic bags, and skidding dangerously over slippery roads. My interview protocol for the older people already included questions about a tornado that had hit Anniston 20 years before; the snowstorm provided similarly dramatic stories from an incident in the living memories of the teenagers.

Similarly, sometimes in the course of an interview, investigators might discover an unexpected grammatical form or phonological realization. They must be attentive and flexible in order to pursue the newly discovered linguistic feature for that community.

As an aid to planning, a small-scale pilot project along the general lines of the main research will indicate more precisely what might be feasible goals and procedures. A larger consideration is that collecting data is only an intermediate goal. The ultimate goal is linguistic.

The hypothesis that motivates the project will influence how to go about collecting the data. Again, I can illustrate this from my field research in Anniston. I hypothesized that over the three-and-a-half centuries of close contact, African-American speech would have influenced European-American grammar in the South. I therefore set out to elicit data from the white community that was parallel to Labov's African-American data from Harlem (Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972b). Even though it turned out in large part that my hypothesis was not correct, nonetheless it was important to try to get parallel data so that a comparison would be possible.

An important guideline for fieldworkers at the planning stage is that a close analysis of a small amount of data is better than an unfinished grandiose project. With that in mind, I concentrated on the extreme generations (teenagers and grandparents) and extreme social classes (local working class and upper class), and the older rural working class (with no younger counterpart). More than that I could not handle, though ideally I would have liked to include the middle class and the middle aged, not to mention the local African-American community. However, examining only the two urban classes plus the older rural working class, using adolescents and grandparents in the city and elderly people from the country, keeping the genders even, I was able to see change progressing through the community.

A rule of thumb in disciplines that require fieldwork is that one third of the project time will be spent in fieldwork, one third in analysis, and the final third in writing up the work. Though far from scientific, this rule provides an effective reminder of the point that time required for analysis and writing increases in a ratio of about 2:1 for each hour of data elicitation.

Competent fieldworkers have included a wide range of personality types. Because fieldwork requires face-to-face interaction, it is usually assumed that gregarious persons do best, and it seems likely that they would have an advantage, at least in getting started. Shy people might find this sort of work excruciating, especially in the beginning. However, shy people have sometimes proven highly successful in conducting interviews and obtaining data, for the simple reason that people often open up when talking to quiet people,

perhaps because they find them unthreatening and perhaps because the lack of interruptions encourages them to speak at length. Also, in certain types of communities, reserved people, who build social relations slowly, might be more accepted than gregarious people who rush in too quickly (Schilling-Estes, personal communication).

1.1 *Library research*

Once the community has been selected for research, the next step is to get a perspective on the community itself – linguistic, demographic, and historical. Information on local speech, major industries, labor, religious institutions, communications, movement of peoples, and the historical development of the area can aid in understanding local society.

A survey of previous linguistic work must be carried out, both on the linguistic aspects you intend to study and on any previous research concerning the local language variety. Earlier work on the local variety, regardless of its quality, can be useful for time depth or for pinpointing interesting problems.

First-hand accounts of fieldwork can be found in Labov (1966), Feagin (1979), Milroy (1980), Dayton (1996), and Eckert (2000) for linguistics, and in Whyte (1955; 1984) and Liebow (1967) for ethnography. Such personal accounts are rarely published, but dissertations often include them in a chapter on methodology. More general discussions may be found in Labov (1972a, 1984), Wolfram and Fasold (1974), Milroy (1987), Romaine (1980) and Baugh (1993). For sociolinguistic fieldwork in non-Western societies where the investigator is clearly an outsider, see Albó (1970), Harvey (1992), and Wald (1973). Obviously, a different set of problems arises when the fieldworker is a foreigner, of different ethnicity, and not a native speaker of the language. While addressed to researchers doing basic linguistic fieldwork (rather than sociolinguistic research) in non-Western languages (frequently in remote areas), Samarin (1967) provides an overview of linguistic fieldwork, though now somewhat dated.

1.2 *Ethnography*

Along with gathering linguistic data, it is important to study the community itself in situ. While material collected from library research must not be overlooked if it is available, the researcher in the field must begin by observing the physical layout of the place, who lives where, who associates with whom, and in what situations particular people associate with each other. While this type of research can be seen in Fischer (1958) and more elaborately in Labov (1963), subsequent studies have become more sophisticated and more detailed, culminating in Eckert's intricate study of a suburban Detroit high school (Eckert 2000). It is through an understanding of both the structure and dynamics of the local community that the structure and dynamics of the speech community

can be understood. While some linguists have criticized sociocultural investigations as outside the competence of linguists who are not specialists in sociology or anthropology (C.-J. Bailey 1996), the only way some aspects of language behavior can be understood and analyzed is through such an undertaking. This type of study will guide the selection of speakers as well as contributing to the analysis of the resulting data. See Mendoza-Denton, Hazen, Meyerhoff, Milroy, and Patrick, in this volume, for discussion of topics related to this issue.

It was through such a study that Labov was able to show that younger people on the island of Martha's Vineyard who had decided to remain on the island after their high school years were picking up the fishermen's pronunciation of (ay) and (aw), regardless of their social class, while those who had decided to leave the island for further education and employment were shifting toward mainland speech norms (Labov 1963). Similarly, Eckert (2000) was able to show that the social division between "jocks" (middle class) and "burnouts" (working class) in suburban high schools played a role in transmitting urban Detroit features into suburban teenage speech. See Eckert (2000: chapter 3) for a valuable account of the process of studying the ethnography of a community.

1.3 Linguistic variables

In a quantitative study of linguistic variation, acquaintance with previous work and perhaps a pilot study should help to narrow the focus of the project. In practical terms, however, this does not always take place right at the beginning. What needs to be isolated before analysis can begin, and preferably before data-gathering begins, is a selection of linguistic variables to be studied.

The linguistic variable, a concept originating with Labov (1963, 1966), is a linguistic entity which varies according to social parameters (age, sex, social class, ethnicity), stylistic parameters (casual, careful, formal), and/or linguistic parameters (segmental, suprasegmental). Usually the social and stylistic variation will be coordinated in some way, so that the casual speech of an accountant will be similar to the formal speech of a plumber – though that remains to be seen in the course of the investigation.

The linguistic variable can be found at all linguistic levels: most common are phonological, such as, for example, (r) might be realized as [ɹ] or as Ø in a community which has been r-less and is becoming r-ful; morphophonological as in (ing), the English present participle marker which has two common pronunciations, standard [ɪŋ] and casual [ən]; morphological as in the realization of the past tense form of *dive* either as *dived* or as *dove*; syntactic as in the realization of negated *be* variously as *ain't*, *isn't*, *'s not*, *is not*; or lexical as in the use of either *hero* or *grinder* as the word to designate a particular kind of sandwich. The most frequently studied variables are phonological and morphological.

The main criterion for determining the set of variants of a single variable is that the referential meaning must be unchanged regardless of which variant occurs. (This can present a problem when dealing with grammar, as pointed

out by Lavandera (1978) and Romaine (1981).) The selection of one variant from the set will generally be motivated by either social or stylistic considerations. See Wolfram (1993) and Guy (1993) for discussions of some of the problems connected to settling on the variable(s) to be investigated.

1.4 *Equipment*

To name particular types of equipment would not be useful, because technology changes so rapidly. However, some types of equipment have abiding advantages. The lavalier microphone improves the quality of the sound and minimizes the speaker's attention to the recording mechanism. Fieldworkers have been known to develop fixations on the equipment in their kit after long and reliable use in numerous settings. In years past, it was not unheard of for a fieldworker to use the same piece of equipment for 30 years, and Samarin (1967) even recommended that fieldworkers should learn how to repair their machinery themselves. With technology changing as rapidly as it has in the decades since Samarin wrote, it seems unlikely that anyone will want to stick to equipment more than a decade old, and the development of solid-state technology makes recording equipment much more durable (and, incidentally, less repairable). Solid-state technology also makes equipment much lighter, a great blessing for fieldworkers. Thirty years ago, most fieldworkers used Uher reel-to-reel tape recorders. They weighed about 22 pounds, but every fieldworker who ever carried one knew that their weight seemed to increase dramatically every 500 meters or so.

The main point is to get the best equipment possible given the practical constraint of expense. Recording fidelity is the primary consideration, and after that come ease of use, flexibility, weight, and other factors. Field recordings can be useful for many years, for purposes unplanned. In my case, tape recordings intended only for a study of grammar have since been used for work on phonology, both using impressionistic phonetic transcription and computer-assisted vowel analysis.

1.5 *Self-presentation of the fieldworker*

Having selected the community and investigated the locale, culture, and speech, the investigator finally has to actually go there and find people to talk to. This is a rather stressful position to be in, from all accounts. Eckert (2000) describes the nightmares she had before beginning her work in the Detroit suburbs. Entering any community carries with it certain responsibilities for respecting the privacy and customs of local people. Most often, this is not a great problem because researchers tend to investigate cultures with which they have some personal familiarity. It is a much greater problem, obviously, in a culture and language that is not native to the investigator. In these situations, Samarin

(1967: 19) recommends that the researcher undertake meticulous planning to deal with the pressures, being aware of the problems that might arise and arranging for breaks in order to get away from the locale from time to time.

Often, cultural alienation is not a factor. My own fieldwork, for instance, took place in my home town, where I had lived until I was 15, and where both my mother and grandfather had grown up. My role there, while conducting fieldwork between 1969 and 1973 and again in 1990 and 1991, was both as a visitor in the town, staying with my grandparents, and as a researcher working on my dissertation, carrying out interviews. On my side of town I was known to the people I interviewed as a friend's granddaughter or cousin, but on the other side of town I was a complete stranger doing research. I told people that I was working on a book on growing up in the town, and how it was changing over time, especially for the teenagers. I said I wanted to record speech in the interests of accuracy, so I would get the dialog right. As a former resident with kinship ties in the town, I attended church with my family, visited friends, and took my grandmother to her club meetings. I also attended revival meetings and visited a church on the other side of town, which helped me learn about the life and culture outside of my own experience and to meet older people who were members of the church I visited.

I was careful to dress suitably according to local custom, always wearing a skirt and stockings to interview older people and to attend classes at the high school, but sometimes wearing blue jeans and sitting on the floor when interviewing teenagers, explaining that I needed to watch the level on the tape recorder while we were talking. In this way I was showing respect to my elders and solidarity with the younger group. With teenagers, I generally took along sodas and chips, which helped make the recording less formal, though the crunch of potato chips sometimes is noticeable on the tape.

In reporting on his research in a small town in North Carolina, Hazen (2000a) explains that before beginning his fieldwork he had married a woman from the community, which gave him *entree*. However, as a native of suburban Detroit, he was not as well-acquainted with the culture as he might have liked, though this also allowed him to assume the role of a student of that culture and ask questions that only an outsider could ask.

Albó (1970) describes in detail his entry into rural communities in Andean Bolivia where his identity as a priest proved advantageous. He was sometimes asked to bless houses, which gave him an opportunity to observe the living standards of the families. This contributed to his understanding of the degree of modernization of the household, giving insight into the relationship between the borrowing of linguistic forms and of material culture. It also gave him opportunities to line up interviews. Similarly, Harvey (1992), whose research was in Southern Peru after it became a dangerous area for outsiders, was considered the adopted daughter of a local family, which gave her a place in the community, allowing her to observe both language and culture.

Both Whyte (1955) and Liebow (1967) emphasize that it is never possible to completely fit in, nor is it necessary or even advisable. As white middle-class

men carrying out ethnographic research among working-class men, one group white and the other black, they report that they were able to lower the barriers between their subjects and themselves but not to remove them. Liebow uses the image of the chain-link fence: you can see through it, but it remains a barrier. The researcher can become a friend, and even find a role in the community, but skin color, class affiliation, speech, or education may all set the investigator apart, which can also serve as a protection in some situations.

While I fit in on my own side of town in Anniston to a certain degree, I often heard expressions of polite amazement from the more traditional citizens that I had driven from Washington to Alabama “all by myself,” and there was some not-so-polite gossip that I had left my husband, which accounted for my long visits to my grandparents.

2 The Sociolinguistic Interview

The classic method of sociolinguistic research is the one-on-one tape-recorded conversational interview (Labov 1972a, 1984; Wolfram and Fasold 1974). Tape-recording has the obvious advantage of permanency, so that it is possible to return to the recording again and again, either for clarification or for further research. A second major advantage is that the tape-recording permits the researcher to fulfill the Principle of Accountability (Labov 1972c: 72), so that all occurrences as well as non-occurrences of the variable can be identified and accounted for. In this way statistical manipulations of the data can show whether the occurrence of a variable is happenstance or patterned, and, if patterned, to what degree in contrast to the occurrence in the speech of others of varying social characteristics – age, sex, social class, ethnicity. This, then, is the primary method of quantitative sociolinguistics.

Variations on this approach include interviewing two or more speakers together (Feagin 1979). Labov used group interviews in his work with Harlem street gangs (Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972b), with one lavalier microphone per person, and a multitrack recorder. These variations on the one-on-one interview are intended to reduce the formality of the interview, turning it into a more natural social event.

However, the sociolinguistic interview – regardless of the variations on it – does carry some disadvantages. The interview as a speech event is a special genre (Wolfson 1976), so the naturalness and certainly the informality of the recorded speech can be called into question, regardless of efforts to make the speaker feel comfortable with the situation. The use of lavalier microphones may remove the microphone from view, but the tape recorder is always there.

The interview method works best for frequently occurring variables, especially phonological and morphological, and certain syntactic forms, such as negation. But many syntactic structures, including interrogatives, double modals, and special auxiliaries such as perfective *done*, do not occur frequently

enough in interviews to provide sufficient data for analysis. Moreover, the interview is problematical for discourse studies and ethnomethodology (Briggs 1986).

2.1 *Selecting speakers*

The earliest community-based research in sociolinguistics, Labov's work in Martha's Vineyard (1963), used a judgment sample, selecting subjects to fill pre-selected social categories, all locally born and raised adults and teenagers. His categories crisscrossed geographic area, profession, and ethnicity. It is interesting that in this early study gender was not considered a separate social variable, though only men were used for acoustic analysis. In his New York study a few years later, Labov was able to base his subject selection on a previous random survey by the Mobilization for Youth, a project of the School of Social Work at Columbia University, which had conducted a random-sample survey of the Lower East Side. Labov used their demographic data to select natives of the area or people who had arrived by age five. This was, then, a stratified random sample in that it selected a stratified sample from what had originally been a random sample. In his third major project (Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972b), Labov worked with teenage boys who were members of street gangs. This represents an early – possibly the earliest – study of language variation through social networks.

Trudgill (1974: 20–30), who followed soon after with a study of Norwich, England, relied on a quasi-random sample taken from four ward voter registration lists. The names from the voter lists were chosen randomly, but the wards were not random but were selected “so that they had, between them, social and economic characteristics that were, on average, the same as those of the city as a whole” (1974: 22).

My own work in Anniston, Alabama, was based on a judgment sample, filling pre-selected cells on a number of criteria. First, speakers were chosen because they were native-born or had arrived by age five. Second, preference was given to those whose parents were from the area. Though I did not know of the literature on networks at the time, I often selected subjects who were “a friend of a friend,” using the resources of my family and their acquaintances for contacts. I began with friends of a younger cousin, then moved on to friends of my grandparents. Later, when I wanted to work in another section of town, I began with a home economics teacher who turned out to be an acquaintance and an admirer of my grandfather. She welcomed me into her classes where I was able to observe, and in some cases (with permission) to record the students and make appointments with them for interviews. Twenty years later, in 1990, I followed the same procedures to find teenaged subjects on both sides of town. Luckily enough, the new home economics teacher said that if the earlier one, who had been her own teacher, had let me visit her class, it was all right with her. The now-retired home economics teacher was

still in touch with the students I had interviewed 20 years before, and through her I was able to find those students again, most of whom still lived in the area.

When the Milroys were selecting informants in Belfast (1980), they were forced to rely on the "friend of a friend" method for contacts because of the sectarian problems in the city, and especially in the working-class neighborhoods where they intended to work. Their methods auspiciously introduced the concept of the network to sociolinguists. (See Milroy in this volume, on social networks.)

Generally, researchers must use common sense to select subjects not by some pre-ordained "social-science" formula but according to the prevailing conditions of the setting they are working in. Thus a recent study of speech on the Outer Banks, a group of islands in the Atlantic off the coast of North Carolina, selected ancestral islanders because the purpose of the study was to recover, as far as possible, traditional speech (Wolfram et al. 1999). Eckert (2000) selected high school students of opposing ideologies and styles, known as Burnouts and Jocks, basically working-class and upper-middle-class adolescents, because she was studying the dynamics of adolescent speech and culture in the school setting.

One danger with selecting informants by pre-selected categories is that the result can be self-fulfilling or circular. For a more general community study, Horvath (1985) gathered speech data from a stratified judgment sample in Sydney, Australia, and analyzed it using principal components analysis so that the analysis incorporated no assumptions about class membership or sex. The principal components analysis put speakers into clusters according to their linguistic similarities, and in that way revealed what the sociolinguistic groupings of Sydney were, based entirely on speech.

Except for studies that take a special interest in the language of children (as Roberts in this volume), it is better to avoid speakers younger than adolescents, since there is the possibility of confounding phonological or grammatical development with local variation.

The two genders must be kept fairly even numerically in order to prevent a confounding of gender differences with the other distinctions. Many studies have demonstrated gender differences in language, beginning with Fischer's (1958) study of (ing) which showed that boys in a small New England town were more likely to use the [ən] variant than girls.

Attention must be given to social class in regard to informants (as in Ash, this volume). The older members of any class usually have the most conservative phonology; teenage working-class boys and girls are often the leaders in innovation, with certain items being more characteristic of one gender than the other. Eckert (2000) elaborates a striking example of highly innovative teenagers with gender differentiation in that innovation. In regard to grammar, the higher classes will use a local variety of the standard; the older members of the working class will maintain older forms which have become nonstandard and which may be obsolete in other places, while the younger speakers may still use those forms, but may also show innovative forms. For

example, an older working-class woman in Anniston used *clim* as the past participle of *climb*, a form which existed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English but which since has become obsolete.

Ethnicity often provides a striking correlate with linguistic variation. Wolfram et al. (1999) and Rickford (1985) have shown that African-Americans and European-Americans living together on isolated islands, of the same socioeconomic background, education and age, show consistent differences in their speech, both in phonology (on the Outer Banks) and in grammar (Sea Islands and Outer Banks).

2.2 *Sample size*

The next question to be resolved is how many speakers are needed. The question depends most directly on the number of independent variables. If you are interested in comparing the speech of working-class men and women of the same age, say, 30 years old, then you have subjects in only two cells: 30-year-old women and 30-year-old men. If you expand the study to include men and women of 60 as well, the number of cells doubles to four. If you expand to include both working-class and middle-class subjects, it doubles again to eight cells. Obviously, each cell must be filled with enough subjects to provide confident generalizations about the social group.

How many subjects should fill each cell? The simple answer is: the more the better. In practice, sociolinguistic analysis requires isolating and classifying dozens and sometimes hundreds of tokens from each subject. It bears no resemblance to the sampling carried out in many kinds of social sciences for the purposes of opinion polls or voter preferences. As a rule of thumb, five persons per cell is often adequate, assuming the cells are well-defined in terms of local social categories (Guy 1980). I followed this rule in my Anniston study, where cells consisted of the independent variables of age/sex/social class/locale (urban/rural); so, for instance, I had to locate and interview at least five older rural working-class male informants.

2.3 *Interview protocols and questionnaires*

There are two main types of sociolinguistic interviews. The most influential one, modeled on Labov's work, uses a set of questions to elicit as much free conversation as possible, with some reading tasks designed to elicit a range of styles. Another way of going about it is simply to let the conversation flow (Briggs 1986, Hazen 2000a). This more open-ended type of interviewing is intended to reduce the distance between interviewer and subject, making the interaction more natural.

For the more structured interview, protocols may be found in appendices of several reports (Labov 1966, Feagin 1979, Labov 1984, Horvath 1985, Wolfram

et al. 1999, to name a few). The goal is to sample a range of styles, from formal to casual. Some researchers, however, have considered the conceptualization of style as a unidimensional “formal–informal” continuum to be problematic (see Schilling-Estes, this volume).

These interviews usually begin by asking subjects about themselves – year and place of birth, parents’ birthplace, schooling (speaker’s and parents’), occupation (their own or their parents or spouse). Questions like these elicit a relatively formal or selfconscious speaking style, known as Interview Style, as will discussion of school or the workplace (see Sankoff and Laberge 1978). Such questions invite selfconscious responses by asking the subjects to reflect on their histories and their accomplishments. Under other circumstances, asking about school activities may elicit informal and spontaneous speech, if directed to subjects deeply and personally involved in those activities. Thus Eckert’s teen-aged subjects become very animated when talking about activities, groups, and characters in their school, as did mine (Eckert 2000, Feagin 1979). This distinction is crucial in planning the interview protocol. The least selfconscious speech comes from topics in which the subjects are intimately involved, and the most selfconscious speech comes from asking people to talk about their credentials.

In the opening section on demographics, asking the subjects to list the houses they have lived in can lead to a discussion of the neighborhood where the speakers grew up, and that can lead to discussing childhood friends and describing rules for various games, jump-rope rhymes, and so on. Here the speaker will probably switch to a less formal, more conversational style. It is difficult to monitor one’s speech when recalling and reciting such rhymes as “Fatty, fatty two-by-four, can’t get through the bathroom door.”

Asking the subjects about their first dates or how they met their spouses sometimes elicits a flood of speech, at least in the European-American context. Labov’s best known question has to do with the danger of death: “Have you ever been in a situation where you nearly lost your life? Where you thought This is *it!*” While sometimes this elicits an outstanding narrative, it seems to work better in New York City than anywhere else. My speakers in Alabama, asked the same question, generally responded, after a pause, “No.” In a sociolinguistic survey in Toronto, Chambers (1980) originally included Labov’s famous question in his interview protocol, but soon deleted it after one older man replied, with furrowed brow, that he had attended a funeral a couple of weeks before. Trudgill (1974) also had no success with the “danger of death” question in Norwich, England. Milroy (1980) found that in Belfast, where danger of death is quite common, it did not trigger emotional narratives.

In Anniston, after the danger-of-death question proved unsuccessful, I discovered that the question “Have you ever heard of anybody seeing a ghost around here?” often elicited long elaborate narratives of local mayhem and murder from older working-class speakers. Similarly, with his Canadian subjects in Toronto, Chambers discovered he could elicit passionate speech by saying, “People keep saying we’re getting more and more American. Do you think that’s true?”

The interview, obviously, must be adjusted for local conditions. Familiarity with local customs helps develop questions such as “When did you get your first gun?” in the Southern United States, or “What you were doing when that tornado hit back in 1954?” There is no simple formula for eliciting relatively unmonitored, casual styles. The best advice is for researchers to know their regions, especially the tensions in the community, when planning the interview protocol.

2.4 *More formal styles: Reading passages, word lists, minimal pairs*

The use of written materials in the interview protocol depends on the focus of the research. Presenting subjects with a reading passage, word list, and minimal pair list can certainly be useful for research oriented toward phonology, because the researcher can ensure that the same words, involving phonological contrasts or variables, are recorded for every subject. In studying syntax, having the speaker read sentences while being recorded can produce valuable results, if they are used to elicit judgments on grammaticality or acceptability. The speakers can be asked who would use such a sentence, even if they themselves would not. If reading is a problem, as it often is for the oldest rural subjects either through poor eyesight or through illiteracy, having subjects repeat sentences read by the interviewer can also be a source of information. Wolfram and Fasold (1974) discuss repetition tasks and some of the information they can yield. In my own work, I started out using word lists and sentences, but dropped them, since I was concentrating on grammar alone. However, judgments on sentences proved to be useful, as ancillary evidence. Now that I am using the same tapes to work on phonology, I am very much aware that it would have been helpful to have kept the word list to observe style shifting, and to get an idea of what might be considered more selfconscious speech.

Word lists and reading passages that have been used successfully may be found in the appendix to Labov (1966), Trudgill (1974), and elsewhere. See also Labov (1984) for a description of various field experiments and references to their use. Each community and each set of variables requires its own materials, but looking at previous models can be helpful.

2.5 *During the interview*

Keeping the attention and interest of the speaker during the interview is obviously important, and that makes it hard for the researcher to limit back-channelling. It is natural to respond to what the speaker says, to offer your own opinions and to bring up parallel experiences. As Milroy (1987) notes, the interview is an exchange in which the interviewer has to contribute to get quality conversation back. Breaking my self-imposed silence in a second interview

with one of my subjects, comparing notes with the speaker on some experiences we shared, I discovered that the speaker's phonology and grammar altered at that point, with more local vowels – more breaking and shifting – and nonstandard grammar where there had been little or none before.

Still, it is important not to waste time and not to tape record one's own voice. Perhaps the most embarrassing moment for novice fieldworkers is the discovery, on listening to interviews they have made, that their own contributions limited what the subject might have offered by interjecting friendly asides or interrupting the flow of the subject's conversation. The interview tapes sometimes preserve hard evidence of misguided sociability.

While controlling the inclination to take the floor, the interviewer nevertheless must maintain eye contact (if appropriate in the culture) and all the other outward signs of involvement, at the same time keeping a watchful eye on the recording equipment and a dutiful ear on the production of the desired variables.

2.6 *After the interview*

Whether or not to pay informants is subject to debate (as in Whyte 1984: 361–5). While I have never paid speakers for interviews, others have and do. This may be a community-specific issue. Researchers are often graduate students working on doctoral dissertations – unpaid or poorly paid themselves, so what most of them rely on is an exchange of services, such as giving rides, if the researcher has a car, or helping with schoolwork, or writing letters, as did Dayton (1996). As Whyte points out (1984) paying speakers can change the nature of the enterprise, even compromising the possibility of further research by making it much too expensive for others following after.

Before leaving the speaker, an important legal matter must still be addressed: the person interviewed must sign a release to allow the interview to be used for scholarly purposes. The wording should be in conformity with university or funding agency rules.

2.7 *Ethics*

Surreptitious recordings, made by planting a recording device where it will capture ambient conversations without the knowledge or consent of the participants, are considered unethical, illegal, and pointless. In their favor, of course, is the elimination of the Observer's Paradox, but in purely practical terms, apart from ethics, sound quality is usually so poor that it is a waste of time, and discovery by the community can lead to serious repercussions. However, the legal aspects of surreptitious tapings have been discussed and defended by Larmouth et al. (1992). They review state and federal laws of the United States, and illustrate their points with examples of real or possible situations and their legal outcomes.

Harvey (1992) made covert recordings of drunken speech because it was central to her research, and she states that, while she found it distasteful, she would do it again (1992: 80). She considers surreptitious recordings as no more culpable than researchers not being entirely open about their research agenda with speakers, as in my telling speakers that I was interested in what it was like growing up in Anniston, Alabama, rather than saying outright that I was interested in their grammar.

Most researchers consider that surreptitious taping violates the privacy of the subjects. Even in open recording, it is usually necessary to respect the privacy of subjects by disguising their identities. Some researchers use alphanumeric codes for speakers, but a better system is to use pseudonyms that preserve their ethnicity and other essential traits, so that someone with a German name would be given a German pseudonym, and the same style of naming. This results in a much more readable text. Taped discussions of illegal activities or private matters should be treated as confidential, regardless of the informant's attitude toward such things at the time.

3 Participant Observation

Because the effect of recording on the interview can never be completely eradicated and because interviews are entirely unsuitable for obtaining certain kinds of data, participant observation has come into being as a complementary method of data collection. This entails living and participating in the community in some function other than as a linguist, but observing and noting particular types of linguistic data. Such observations are frequently used to supplement material collected from interviews, as by Labov et al. (1968) and Feagin (1979), but they can also be used as the primary source of data, as in Rickford (1975), Mishoe and Montgomery (1994), and Dayton (1996).

Participant observation is especially useful for studying infrequent grammatical items such as questions, modals, and particles, where tape-recorded interviews will not capture these forms. Either the discourse constraints are such that the question/answer format or the extended narrative of the interview do not allow the forms, or the forms are too rare to make an interview worthwhile. For such variables, participant observation becomes necessary. The researcher must become a member of the community.

The best discussion of the rationale for using participant observation as well as the most complete description of this method is found in Dayton (1996: chapter 2). Here Dayton relates how she, a white woman, became a member of an African-American working-class community in Philadelphia. She first lived in that neighborhood for two years simply as a graduate student, not participating in the life there. Then she lived as a participant observer for four and half more years, becoming a block chairman, organizing clean-ups, volleyball games, and generally entering into the local African-American life in that block.

The participant observer, instead of tape-recording data, writes it down as soon as possible. Dayton managed to write down most of the data for her study within an hour of hearing it. She seldom attempted to store and remember more than three items at a time. Mishoe and Montgomery (1994) who collected their corpus of double modals through participant observation, report that they wrote items down within a minute of hearing them.

This technique has certain advantages over the tape-recorded interview in that the researcher becomes an insider, and can in this way overcome the Observer's Paradox. In order to do this the researcher must reach the point of understanding the communicative and interactional norms of the speech community and participating in the informal social ties and exchange relationships that hold the community together (Dayton 1996: 71).

In the course of her study, Dayton collected 3,610 tokens of African-American tense/mood/aspect markers (Dayton 1996: 55), probably the largest corpus of these grammatical forms. Her observations also included the more general social context as well as the linguistic context of the use of these markers.

The drawback of participant observation is that researchers cannot write down all the tokens of the variable they might hear. There is an inevitable selectivity in the linguistic record. The selectivity means that the data cannot be quantified, so that it is impossible to provide information on the relative frequency of the variable. In addition, there is no permanent record of the speakers, so that it is not possible to return to the evidence. Here the question of accuracy and reliability naturally arises. Counterbalancing that, it permits the study of rare forms, otherwise undocumentable. And the perceptual saliency of the items can abet the accuracy of the observations. In another context, Wolfram suggests that socially marked items are the most transparent differences, and as such they rank high on a "continuum of linguistic trustworthiness" (Wolfram 1990: 125; similarly Dayton 1996: 68–80).

4 Rapid and Anonymous Observations

While participant observation is a very time-consuming and labor-intensive way to overcome the Observer's Paradox, another, faster technique is "rapid and anonymous observation," first described by Labov (1966, 1972c). By this method, the variable under study is embedded in the answer to a question that can be posed to strangers. Labov, in a famous example, asked sales clerks in department stores, "Where can I find Women's shoes?" The respondents replied, "The fourth floor." What Labov was interested in was the pronunciation of (r) in the words *fourth* and *floor*. Labov selected a range of stores, from luxury (Saks Fifth Avenue) to bargain basement (Kleins), and was able to confirm that sales clerks tend to speak in a manner that reflect the clientele. The clerks at Saks were r-ful as are upper-middle-class New Yorkers, while

those at Kleins were r-less, like working-class New Yorkers. Labov was able to capture 528 tokens of *fourth floor* from 264 subjects in approximately 6.5 hours.

The simplicity of this study has encouraged replications of it in New York and many other places, either studying (r) or other variables. For example, in some communities, the question “Excuse me. Could you tell me what time it is?” (at the right time of day) will produce many tokens of *five* or *four*. This type of study obviously sacrifices knowledge of the background of the speaker in favor of the naturalness of the speech.

5 Telephone Surveys

In addition to the sociolinguistic interview and participant observation, a third method of obtaining data is over the telephone. Labov included telephone interviews in his survey of the Lower East Side (1966: 118–20), when he called people who had refused to be interviewed, or could not be interviewed because of schedule conflicts or the like. The purpose was to get information on their phonology in order to ascertain whether it was similar to those who were interviewed. The first part of the telephone conversation was designed to elicit the variables being studied, and the second part was to elicit natural conversational speech (Labov 1966: 457–8). Later, as part of his Philadelphia study, Labov incorporated a random sample telephone survey to supplement the neighborhood studies (Labov 1984).

The obvious advantage of the telephone is its efficiency in covering a large territory. As part of a study of low back vowel merger in Pennsylvania, Herold (1990) carried out a state-wide telephone survey. She describes in detail how she selected the locale and the individual by searching for uncommon names in the telephone book with multiple entries (ten or more) on the assumption that those families would be well-established in the area. Father and son entries allowed the inference that the son had probably grown up in the town. By these means, Herold located a sample that was local, defined as someone “who had lived within a 30-mile radius of the county seat (or largest city) from the age of three or younger, until the age of 16” (1990: 23). The interviews were recorded (with permission), using a questionnaire designed to elicit near-minimal pairs (1990: Appendix).

Bailey and Bernstein devised the Phonological Survey of Texas as one component of a random sample tape-recorded survey of the entire state of Texas (Bailey and Bernstein 1989, Bailey and Dyer 1992). They carried it out by “piggybacking” on the Texas Poll of January and November 1989, a large-scale service sponsored by Texas A&M University that conducts quarterly telephone surveys of 1,000 adult Texans selected by random sampling. The Poll mounts surveys for business, public policy agencies, and academic researchers. The January poll included questions to elicit data on phonological features undergoing change in Texas, and the November poll included questions designed to

elicit lexical, grammatical, and language policy data. Both polls provided some longer passages of discourse as well as a wide range of phonological variables. The results provided a broad-based and almost instantaneous picture of the spread of linguistic changes in Texas.

Labov's Telsur project (Telephone Survey of North America) is completely telephone-based, independent of any other survey, and his sole data source for the *Atlas of North American English* (Labov 2000, Labov et al. forthcoming). Labov became convinced of the feasibility of a large-scale telephone survey when he made a pilot survey in the late 1960s (Labov 1991: 31–2, 42). That survey elicited certain key words from long-distance operators across the United States in order to check contrasts in the low back vowels (*cot/caught*). From that start, Labov and his team have carried out a broader telephone survey of the United States and English-speaking Canada.

The sample consists of almost 700 speakers, selected to represent all urban areas. Interviews have been undertaken with speakers from 161 urbanized areas, most with a population of over 200,000, but including a few smaller cities in sparsely populated areas (Ash 2000). The speakers were chosen to represent the dominant national ancestry groups of each area, with names selected from telephone books based on national ancestry figures from the 1990 census.

The telephone interview itself is carefully scripted to elicit phonological contrasts or vowel shifts, resulting in up to an hour of recorded speech. The subject then receives a word list by mail, and reads the list in a follow-up telephone call. All interviews are impressionistically coded for all variables elicited on mergers and near-mergers, as well as syntactic and lexical variables. The resulting phonological data are then analyzed acoustically and plotted on feature maps. The grid is broad, usually with only two speakers in each city, but the methodology provides an efficient phonological overview of a vast region.

6 Life after Fieldwork

Whatever methods the researcher uses, when the fieldwork is finally completed, any sense of relief evaporates rapidly as the reality of analysis of all that data dawns. Analysis, of course, moves the sociolinguist onto an entirely different level, with its own problems and its own rewards (as the following chapters make clear). The crucial first step, the fieldwork, becomes subordinated to finding, expressing and disseminating the substantive results of the project. It is undoubtedly true that the more successful the fieldwork, the less noticeable it is in the final analysis. Fieldwork draws attention to itself mainly when the researcher has to concede that there are gaps in the data or flawed elicitations or results that require caution in the interpretation. It is inconspicuous when it has yielded a well-formed database for making generalizations and testing hypotheses. The sociolinguist's prowess as fieldworker is often a private source

of professional pride that only occasionally seeps into the public domain when sociolinguists gather informally at conferences and meetings. Inconspicuous it may be, but it is the bedrock of the sociolinguistic enterprise.

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