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Background

The field manuals were originally intended as working documents for internal use only. They were supplemented by verbal instructions and additional guidelines in many cases. If you have questions about using the materials, or comments on the viability in various field situations, feel free to get in touch with the authors.

Contact

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**Locally-anchored spatial gestures, version 2⁷:
Historical description of the local environment as a gesture elicitation task**

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(with David Wilkins, Mandana Seyfeddinipur, Nick Enfield, and Stephen Levinson)

Relevant projects: Gesture Project, Space Project (Demonstrative sub-project)

Priority within Gesture Project: High

Nature of the task: semi-structured interview or discussion

Background

The goal of this task is to elicit locally anchored spatial gestures across different cultures. "Locally-anchored spatial gestures" are roughly oriented to the geographical direction of the referents (mostly invisible from the location of the speech event). Such gestures may point to a location or a thing, trace the shape of a path, or indicate the direction of a particular area.

Purpose of elicitation

The primary reason for having a uniform elicitation procedure is that we hope to undertake extensive cross-cultural gestural comparisons (along the lines of de Ruiter and Wilkins' Arrernte-Dutch comparison, in preparation). Some of the ideas we have for cross-cultural comparison concern:

- gesture-speech synchronization
- shape features of gestures
- co-ordination of demonstrative terms and gestures
- speech dysfluency and gesture
- +• distribution of various types of gestures in various discourse contexts

Note that the analysis stage (especially coding of video recording) of gesture research is very labor-intensive. To carry out the analysis through to the publication stage requires a certain level of commitment of research time. But, the material to be collected here could also be used for other purposes such as investigation of demonstratives.

Data already collected

The following data has already been collected (based on the 1999 manual procedure), and are available for comparative purposes:

Already collected data from the following languages offer possibilities for comparison:

⁷ This document is a revised version of the following:

Sotaro Kita (1999). "Locally-anchored spatial gestures": Historical description of the local environment as a gesture elicitation task. In David Wilkins, (ed.), "Manual" for the 1999 field season, version 1.0, (pp. 45-47). Nijmegen: Language and Cognition Group. Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.

The sections and bullet points that are revised in the version 2 are indicated by "*" at the beginning of the section heading or in front of the bullet point. Similarly, a newly added section and bullet point are indicated by "+". The most important change is the recommendation that the "interviewer" should be a native speaker (or somebody with very high proficiency in the language).

Japanese (Tokyo suburbs), Lao (various locations, Laos), Dutch (Millingen, a small village near Nijmegen), Italian (Milano suburbs), Tiriyó (Brazil). There are also comparable locally-anchored narrative from Tzeltal (Mexico) and Guugu Yimithirr (Australia).

***Elicitation procedure**

The elicitation is done in an interview format, in which a less knowledgeable person asks questions about the history of the local area to a more knowledgeable person(s). An alternative format is for the interviewer to play the role of a “moderator” of a discussion about the local area by a group (two or three) of consultants.

If the interview format does not suit your field site (e.g., you work in a very small community, in which everybody knows everything about the community), you can also collect comparable locally anchored gestures by another task in this manual, “Locally anchored narrative”.

The basic theme of the ‘interview’ concerns the area in which the consultant has lived for a long time. The interview should touch on topics such as what the area is like in terms of physical and social *layout*, how it has changed within the consultant’s lifetime, important events that have affected the area and/or legends and stories relating directly to places and movements between places in the area. It is important to make it clear to your consultant what we are after is “space” (i.e. you should focus the interview around gaining spatial information). If you just ask what things were like in the past, people can talk about all sorts of things that have nothing to do with space (e.g., how they liked or did not like the teachers at school).

*** The length**

15 minutes of interaction full of gestures would be sufficient (of course, you can go on beyond 15 minutes). It often takes several minutes for interaction to warm-up. Thus, this task should take minimally 25 to 30 minutes to administer.

*** The consultants:**

If you are the interviewer (see the section on “interviewer”), you need one consultant at a time. If not, you need two at a time. However, one can also get very interesting data by having two interviewees at a time since they may engage in a discussion.

Ideally, the task should be repeated at least four times with different consultants. The consultants must know (and, preferably, have continuously lived in) the area to be described over many years (e.g., 20 years or longer). Older members of the community are preferred (i.e. people who would be considered knowledgeable elders of the community). The following information about the participants would be useful to have:

- age
- handedness
- how long they have been living in the area
- the relationship between the consultants, especially some sense of how well they know each other and how much shared knowledge of the community they have.

+ The interviewer

The interviewer should be a native speaker (or somebody - including the fieldworker - with high proficiency in the language). The danger of a second-language interviewer is that interviewees may try to accommodate their speech to the proficiency of the interviewer.

When you use a second-language interviewer, you have to be confident that interviewees will talk with the interviewer in the way they normally talk.

In order to make the interview setting plausible, the interviewer should be less "knowledgeable" than the consultants. Other good candidates for an interviewer include younger members of the community, or a visitor from a neighboring community.

The area to be talked about

The area is one in which consultants have frequently navigated in their daily life (on foot, by bicycle, or by car), both for work and/or school related activities and for social and cultural events. Areas traveled only by public transportation (e.g., bus, subway, train) can be talked about, but should not be the focus of the interview. Make sure to get or make a map of the area, and do additional ethnography to locate where the referents are on the map and to understand their significance. It may be useful to go over the recording with the consultant himself/herself.

The location of the speech event:

The interview takes place within the area to be talked about. Most of the potential referents are not visible (preferably due to distance rather than merely because the elicitation takes place within a room).

*** Example questions**

The questions will vary from field site to field site. The idea is to get spatial description of the local area by asking how things were before and how things are now, and getting people to talk about places and stories relating to the area. Prompts such as "where exactly is it?" are often effective for drawing out gestures. The following are example questions used in the interviews conducted in Millingen (the Netherlands), and Tokyo (Japan), Milano (Italy), and different places in Laos.

Residence and work

- Where have you lived in the area (if the person moved within the local area)?
- Where are the places you have worked?
- Via which route did you commute to work?
- Where do you plant certain crops? Where do you go fishing? Where do you collect certain wild herbs?

How did X look in the past?

- How did the village look before the war (Millingen, NL) or before the revolution (Laos)?

Which parts of X have changed?

- What has changed since you've moved here?
- Which woods have become houses? (Tokyo suburbs, Vientiane suburbs)
- Which rice shop (supermarket, and etc.) did you go to 20 years ago? Where was it? Where do you buy rice now? (Tokyo suburbs)
- Are there any new roads/streets? Where does they run?

Family

- Did you get married in this area?
- Where and how did the wedding happen?
- Where do your children live (especially if the children live in the area)?
- Which schools did your children go to (are your grandchildren going to)?
- Where are the local elementary, secondary, and high schools?

Special events

- Were you in Millingen during the war, or did you evacuate? Where did you go? How did you go?
- What were the most special events here? (Where? What routes? E.g. What routes do parades take during Carnival (Millingen, NL)?)

Recording

Please consult the section, “Recording recommendations for gesture studies”.