

Field Methods (LING404): Workflow

Most of our work this semester will follow a regular pattern of ‘elicitation – transcription – dictionary editing’. This document lays out how, in detail, our work-week will proceed.

1. Broad Overview of Workflow

1.1 Class Sessions

Each class session is a collective interview with our language consultant, which I record. The content of the interview is set by an ‘agenda’ that we work out at the end of the preceding class.

- Review class agenda set by preceding class
- Interview language consultant [expanded below]
- End interview at 12:00
- Set agenda for next time
- Confirm the session’s transcribers

1.1.1 Interview of Language Consultant

While we interview the language consultant, the following will also be taking place:

- I keep track of data on the blackboard
- Students in class keep track of data in their notebooks
(Buy a notebook specifically for this class)

It’s very important for everyone to keep track of the data in their notebooks, especially those students who will be transcribing the recordings. If anything is unclear at all on the recordings, your notes can be a vital reference!

1.2 Post-Class Period

Immediately following the end of the class, the following will take place:

- I will divide the recording of the class session into four approximately equal portions
- I will post each of those portions on the class wiki
The URL:
http://web.linguist.umass.edu/~cable/2009/ling404/wiki/index.php/Recordings_and_Transcriptions_of_Class_Sessions
- I will send out an e-mail to everyone in the class letting them know the recordings (in WAV format) are available.

1.3 Transcription

- The appointed transcribers will download their assigned WAV file from the wiki
- They will then transcribe the WAV file, using the *XML template* available on the class wiki (described below)
- Following their transcription, they update the class dictionary, by adding any new vocabulary and editing any older entries that need it (described below)
- Transcribers then e-mail their transcription to me, by the end of the following day.
- I post the transcriptions on the class wiki, alongside the original WAV files.

2. Transcription, in Detail

In a class of this sort, it's best to follow a set convention regarding the transcription of elicitation sessions. The system that we'll use in class may take some getting used to at first, but it won't be long before it's familiar enough to be automatic.

For many, the most difficult part at first may be that we will be using *XML* to encode our transcriptions.

A Brief Aside about XML

What is XML?

Long story short: XML is a way of representing data.

More precisely, it's a system that let's you *design your own personal way* to represent data. (We'll see a concrete instance of it shortly)

Why are we using XML?

XML does two things for us:

- (i) It sets up (or, more properly, allows *me* to set up) some fairly **rigid guidelines for the representation of elicitation data** in our transcriptions.
- (ii) It's **open source**, which means *nobody owns it*. This means that, by representing our class data in this fashion (as opposed to, say, using WORD files), our data has a good shot of 'lasting the test of time'.

But, more about XML later... First let's go step-by-step through the transcription process...

The Three Major Steps to the Transcription Process:

- Download the WAV file
- Open the WAV file (in Praat)
- Fill out the XML template as you listen

2.1 Downloading the WAV File

The first thing you need to do is download the WAV file you've been assigned from the course wiki.

- Go to the class website (<http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING404-SP09>)
- Click on "Language Page"
- Enter your password (password sent to you by e-mail)
- Click on "Recordings and Transcriptions of Class Sessions"
- Click on the date of the class session
- Right-click (PC) or control-click (Mac) on the portion you are assigned to transcribe
- Download the file to your computer (desktop, if you like)

2.2 Open the WAV File

You can open and listen to the WAV file in whatever program you like (e.g. iTunes). However, for the purposes of transcribing, it's very helpful to view the sound file in *Praat*.

2.2.1 On Praat

Praat is free software, designed by linguists, that can do all sorts of linguistically interesting stuff (create spectrograms, do formant analysis, create synthesized speech sounds, do stochastic OT learning, *etc.*, *etc.*)

You can download it here (a link also appears on the course wiki, under "Class Resources"), and it works with both PC and Mac: <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>

Once you have Praat downloaded, open it. Now, do the following:

- On the "Praat Objects" screen, click "Read"
- Select "Read from file"
- Select the WAV file; the title of the WAV file should now appear in the "objects list"
- Click on the name of the WAV file in the "objects list"
- Click "Edit"
- A window pops up with a spectral analysis of the sound file (or rather, the part of the sound file that appears in the window)
- You can play the entire 'visible' selection by pressing the button marked 'visible part'
- You can also highlight a particular sub-portion, and play just that part by pressing the button that appears below it (refer to Praat help menu for more details)
- To replay a selection of the file over-and-over, just keep hitting the button!
- To view more of the sound-file, either hit "out" (which 'zooms out'), or scroll to the right using the scroll bar at the bottom of the window.

2.3 Filling Out the XML Template

As mentioned above, we will be sticking to certain set conventions regarding the content and form of our transcriptions of class interview sessions. These conventions are encoded in the ‘XML template’ that we will be using throughout the class to write up our transcriptions.

First, you will need to download the XML template:

- Go to the class website (<http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING404-SP09>)
- Click on “Language Page”
- Enter your password (password sent to you by e-mail)
- Click on “Class Resources”
- Under “Resources for Classwork”, click on “XML Template for Transcription...”

Once you have the XML template, open it using either Notepad (PC) or TextEdit (Mac).

The template itself contains the instructions for how it is to be filled out.

2.3.1 Transcribing in IPA

As noted on the template itself, one of the fields that you can fill in is a representation of the utterance in IPA.

At first, as we are learning the ‘practical orthography’ for the language, it will be very useful (and important) to transcribe the language data using IPA. Following this, you can then transliterate your IPA representation into the practical orthography.

As we get comfortable with the practical orthography, however, such dual representation (in both IPA and the practical orthography) will be needless, and you can (if you like) dispense with the IPA representations. [I’ll let you know when we can do this.]

At first, however, you will need to represent some of your type-written data in IPA. This means you will need to do the following:

Download a Unicode IPA Font:

- On the course wiki, click under “Class Resources”
- Under “Resources for Transcription in IPA”, click on either “Unicode IPA Font (Doulos)” or “Unicode IPA Font (Charis)” [I recommend the latter.]
- Instructions for downloading and installation appear there.

Download an IPA Keyboard Layout:

- Under “Resources for Transcription in IPA”, click on “IPA Keyboard Layout”
- Instructions for downloading and installation appear there.

Once you have the IPA Keyboard Layout, simply use the relevant Unicode IPA font while entering data in the “IPA” field of the XML template.

3. Dictionary Editing

After you have transcribed the WAV file using the XML template, and have sent the transcription to me, it's time to do your part in editing the class dictionary.

- Go to the class website (<http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING404-SP09>)
- Click on "Expandable Dictionary"
- Enter your password (password sent to you by e-mail)
- Add entries for any new vocabulary encountered *in your part* of the session (Instructions for adding entries appear on the dictionary page itself)
- If information gained *during your part* of the session indicates that older, existing dictionary entries need to be edited/updated, do this as well. (Instructions for editing entries appear on the dictionary page itself)

That's it! There's a lot of work at the very beginning – downloading and getting used to new software – but once that's done, things settle into a rather predictable pattern..