

Introduction: Methodological tools for linguistic description and typology

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This thematic issue is an outcome of a collaborative multi-year research project on Questionnaires for linguistic description and typology.¹ For the purposes of the project, we use Questionnaire (with a capital Q) as a general term to cover any kind of methodological tool designed to elicit linguistic expressions, including word lists, visual stimuli, descriptive templates, field manuals, and the like. This volume thus brings together articles about written questionnaires and visual stimuli, which due to their epistemological differences are rarely considered together, and treats them as sub-types of the large category of methodological tools that help linguists carry out descriptive and comparative work.

Most descriptive linguists of the Western tradition are likely familiar with at least some methodological tools of this type: the historically significant (despite cultural and linguistic biases) Swadesh wordlists, which served as catalysts for research in areal semantics and lexical typology; or early exemplars of visual stimuli, namely the Pear Story (Chafe 1980) and the Frog story (Mayer 1969), and the various studies based on them (see for example Berman & Slobin (1994); or the Eurotyp project's poster-child questionnaires that are Dahl's (2000) TAM questionnaires (described as 'scenario' questionnaires in Mosel (2014: 80)).

Questionnaires and other tools have been making headway as research products worthy of serious study, at an ever-increasing pace since Himmelmann (1998), thanks to articles such as Hellwig (2006), Lüpke (2009), Majid (2012), books like Bochnak &

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Matthewson (2015) and Dollinger (2015), and the growing genre of field methods manuals, from forerunners Samarin (1967) and Bouquiaux & Thomas (1976) to the more recent Vaux & Cooper (2003), Crowley (2007), Bowern (2008), Chelliah & de Reuse (2011), Aikhenvald (2015), Meakins, Green & Turpin (2018), the genre developing quickly enough to warrant a ‘guide to the guides’ (Mosel 2014).

Of the seven contributions collected here, six were originally presented at a November 2017 international workshop on Questionnaires held in Paris.²

Birgit Hellwig’s article, ‘Linguistic diversity, language documentation and psycholinguistics: The role of stimuli’, highlights points of intersection between the fields of psycholinguistics and language documentation, and suggests that a tighter collaboration, focusing on the strengths of both, can result in empirical data that is more representative of actual language diversity. There is an urgency to this task, given the state of endangerment of many languages, and members of both fields will need to adapt their methods, but the pay-off will be data that can be used for language comparison and could result in significant advances in our understanding of human language.

One of the goals of our collaborative research program on Questionnaires was the production of a centralized open archive for Questionnaires,³ a project which is described in the article by **Aimée Lahaussois**, ‘The TULQuest linguistic questionnaire archive’. The archive aims, through its structure, to reflect the dynamic nature of Questionnaires, which are regularly adapted to new situations by users, and to place methodological tools in the historical and epistemic context in which they were developed. In this sense, they are not only tools for synchronic use, but testaments to changes in linguistic theory and methodology over time.

The contribution by **Denis Paperno** and **Daria Ryzhova**, ‘Automatic construction of lexical typological Questionnaires’, beautifully illustrates how well-endowed languages like Russian can contribute to the systematic investigation of the semantic scope of adjectives in other languages, using a computational approach. Their method is transferable to any language for which there are electronic dictionaries and corpora, and represents a significant contribution to work on lexical typology.

Jozina Vander Klok & **Tom Connors**, in their article on ‘Using questionnaires as a tool for comparative linguistic field research: Two case studies on Javanese’, present two Questionnaires developed for their research on Javanese dialectology. Based on their experiences using these methodological tools, they propose a list of best practices that apply to dialectological work, and which are equally relevant for any type of field research.

In a contribution by **Marine Vuillermet** and **Anetta Kopecka** entitled ‘*Trajectoire*: A methodological tool for eliciting Path of motion’, the authors present a tool they

² Alexandre François’s contribution had been presented during an earlier project work session.

³ <http://tulquest.huma-num.fr/>

developed, in collaboration with a diverse group of descriptive linguists, to study the expression of Path. The article describes the theoretical background which influenced the design of their stimulus set, but also discusses the practical considerations that were taking into account in order to make the toolkit adaptable in a large number of different field settings. They also provide data collected using the stimulus set, including data in related semantic domains that they had not anticipated, and end with a discussion of issues of dissemination of tools such as theirs.

In their article 'Video elicitation of negative directives in Alaskan Dene languages: Reflections on methodology', **Olga Lovick** and **Siri Tuttle** discuss the development of a series of videos designed to elicit negative directives, which were rare in their narrative and conversational corpora. After presenting the domain of negative directives in Koyukon and Upper Tanana languages, they describe the videos, which depict the violation of cultural taboos for the groups they study, and the very different types of data which were generated when their consultants viewed and commented on the videos. Their methodology is an excellent example of a targeted tool which results in the collection of data very different from that anticipated but equally rich and telling, and covering numerous underrepresented categories in their languages.

In the final article in our collection, 'A proposal for conversational questionnaires', **Alexandre François** describes a situational elicitation handbook which he successfully used to collect semi-spontaneous conversational data for closely-related Oceanic languages. He provides many insightful hints about how to adapt his conversational questionnaires, and details how through the seemingly everyday conversation samples he is able to collect extensive lexical and grammatical data. He shows how these dialogues can be used to rapidly assimilate vocabulary and grammatical constructions in a new language, enabling culturally appropriate interaction with community members. An added benefit of his method is illustrated through the comparable corpus he is able to assemble from the collected data.

Our volume intends, through these contributions, to remind fellow linguists of the wide range of existing Questionnaires, ensuring that the colossal individual or collective enterprise of creating these tools is acknowledged and can benefit other researchers. Even in cases where a specific Questionnaire is not adapted to the investigation at hand with regard to the domain it was designed to study, some part of it (the protocol, the medium, the visual style) may still inspire others, and be adapted to new and different needs. Each contribution herein suggests valuable guidelines in the creation of new Questionnaires, discussing their approaches at various levels (design, test, readjustment/development, diffusion, etc). Particularly relevant to fieldworkers, this concentration of best practices may help avoid some of the faux-pas that investigators have faced with particularly vulnerable peoples or communities.

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