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Linguistic Fieldwork amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: How Social-Distancing is Affecting Data Collection

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Abstract

Linguistic fieldwork can be defined as the examination of language through the collection of primary data. This systematic investigation commonly involves observing/interviewing the speakers of the language examined in close proximity. However, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing and social restrictions abruptly halted the traditional face-to-face fieldwork. The practice of social distancing encourages the use of online communication and thus traditional data collection has also switched to virtual fieldwork. This paper firstly reviews the role of linguistic fieldworkers before the current pandemic; secondly, it discusses the main challenges and benefits of gathering online linguistic data, taking into account online research ethics, and it reviews the use of tools which can be currently employed for online participant recruitment. We suggest that despite the challenges of carrying out virtual fieldwork (e.g. participant recruitment itself, computer-related issues, minimising the Observer's Paradox, recording quality, etc.) using online data collection can help researchers gather larger sample sizes, and that the use of emerging technologies (e.g. MTurk, Prolific, Gorilla.sc, the Twitter API package, etc.) provides high-quality online data collection, which remain in line with the standards for high-quality research.

Keywords

linguistic fieldwork, COVID-19 pandemic, data collection