

Field methods: How to use a recorder

slides by Elisabeth J. Kerr

Why make recordings?



Why make recordings?

- ▶ Advantages of being able to listen back
 - ▶ Check whether your transcription is accurate
 - ▶ Notice things you didn't notice before
- ▶ Available to other linguists
- ▶ Available to community members
- ▶ Able to back up scientific claims with evidence

Possible dangers

▶ Ethics

- ▶ Do I have informed consent?
- ▶ Should I anonymise the data?
- ▶ Who has intellectual property?

▶ Practical challenges

- ▶ What to do if the battery runs out?
- ▶ Do I have enough memory card space?
- ▶ What if the recording is not good quality?

Possible dangers

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What's informed consent?

Consultants need to consent to being recorded, meaning they need to know that they're being recorded, and why (what it will be used for, who will have the recordings; "informed consent". They should be given the option to refuse (before it happens, or after); "free informed consent".

Consent can be in written form, but also can be done orally if recorded to prove this (e.g. if you are working with someone who cannot read/write).

Exercise 1: Informed consent

- ▶ Adapt the example informed consent form for your project

(you can use this as a draft for your own consent forms for next week onwards)

A nightmare fieldwork experience...

Or: learning from other people's mistakes



1. A student meets a speaker of a language and decides to do some fieldwork...

2. They take a Tascam DR-05 recorder...

3. They click REC to make a recording...

4. They finish the session with the consultant...

5. They go to transfer the files to the computer...

6. ...but there are no files!

Problem 1: No files

- ▶ On some recorders, you need to click REC **twice** in order to start the recording
 - ▶ Before clicking: No light next to the REC button; no recording
 - ▶ Click 1: REC **red light flashes**; recorder ready
 - ▶ Click 2: REC **red light stable**; recording in progress

Problem 1: No files

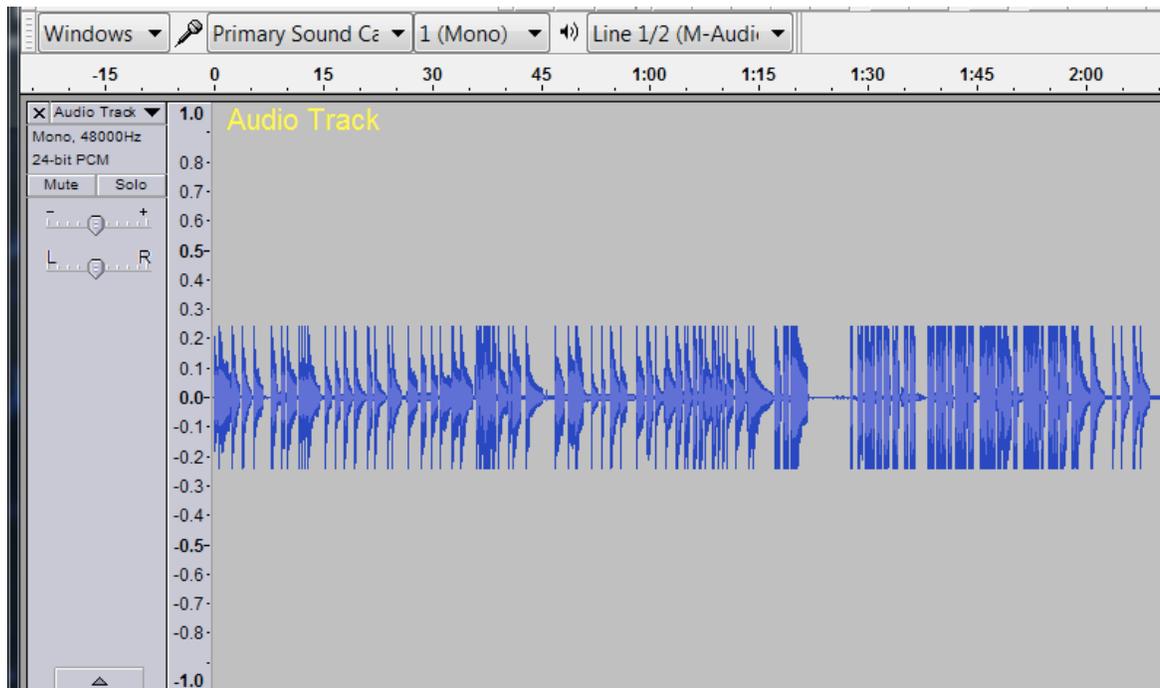
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 - ▶ Before clicking: No light next to the REC button; no recording
 - ▶ Click 1: REC **red light flashes**; recorder ready
 - ▶ Click 2: REC **red light stable**; recording in progress

- ▶ **Solution to the problem:** Make sure you are recording!
Check the manual for your recorder.

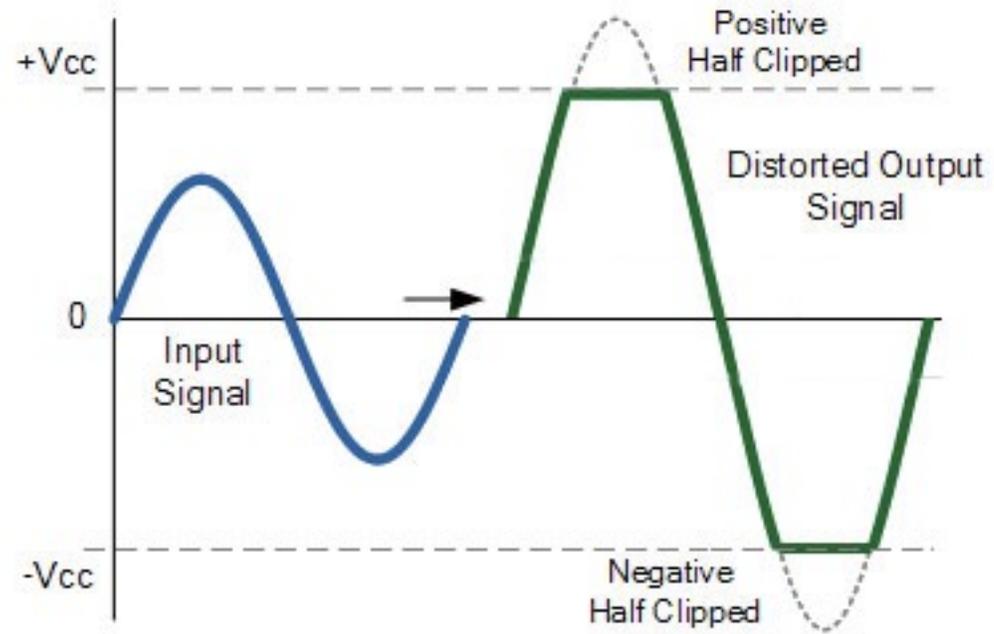
7. The student repeats the exercise and transfers their recording to the computer...

8. They open up Audacity to check the recording...

9. The recording is bad quality!



Problem 2: Clipped recording



Clipping: How to avoid it

Problem 2: Clipped recording

→ Solution to the problem:

- ▶ Move the recorder further away from the speaker so it is not overloaded
- ▶ Alternative for some models (e.g. Zoom H5): decrease the levels
- ▶ Use headphones/earphones during the session and after to check audio quality
- ▶ Remember what set-up works well and repeat in future sessions, while monitoring

10. The student makes progress...

11. They are 2 weeks into the project, and have several files with valuable data...

12. ...but then they overwrite a file
by accident, and lose all the data!

Problem 3: Overwriting a file by accident, and losing all the data!

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→ Solution to the problem:

- ▶ Make regular back-ups
- ▶ Back up in multiple places
- ▶ Come up with a clear **filenaming system**

13. A year passes...

14. The student wants to check something,
but can't find the recordings!

Problem 4: Can't find the recordings 1
year on

Problem 4: Can't find the recordings 1 year on

→ Solution to the problem:

- ▶ Come up with a data management plan
- ▶ How will you store your recordings in a future-proof way?

FAIR data



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FAIR Principles

FAIR data

FAIR data

- ▶ Findable
- ▶ Accessible
- ▶ Interoperable
- ▶ Reusable

FAIR data

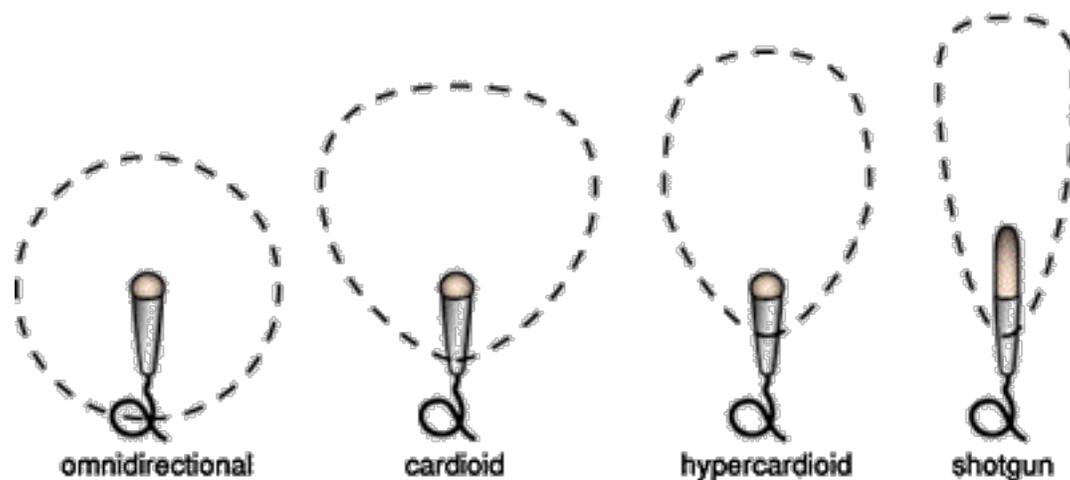
FAIR data

- ▶ Findable - You can find the data if asked/others can find it (good metadata)
- ▶ Accessible - The data/metadata can be accessed
- ▶ Interoperable - The data can be understood by other people/machines (metadocumentation e.g. Filenaming, appropriate file extension)
- ▶ Reusable - The data can be used again

A good fieldwork experience

Top tips for using an audio recorder

- ▶ Modify placement to get better sound quality and avoid clipping
 - ▶ Monitor the sound quality with headphones
- ▶ Find a place with low levels of background noise
- ▶ If you have to work in a noisy environment, place the microphone facing away from it
 - ▶ **Pick-up** of a microphone: the spatial range a microphone is most sensitive to



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Top tips for using a video recorder

- ▶ Tripod for stabilization
- ▶ Monitor battery life!
- ▶ Use big enough memory card and back up data

Top tips for file naming

- ▶ Name files systematically

Bad: `kjhf78e6r783jkfkfhjeyru3yuifq3n.wav`

Good: `kiitharaka-PK-20200107-greetings.wav`

Top tips for filenaming

- ▶ Name files systematically

Bad: `kjh78e6r783jfkfhjeyru3yuifq3n.wav`

Good: `kiitharaka-PK-20200107-greetings.wav`

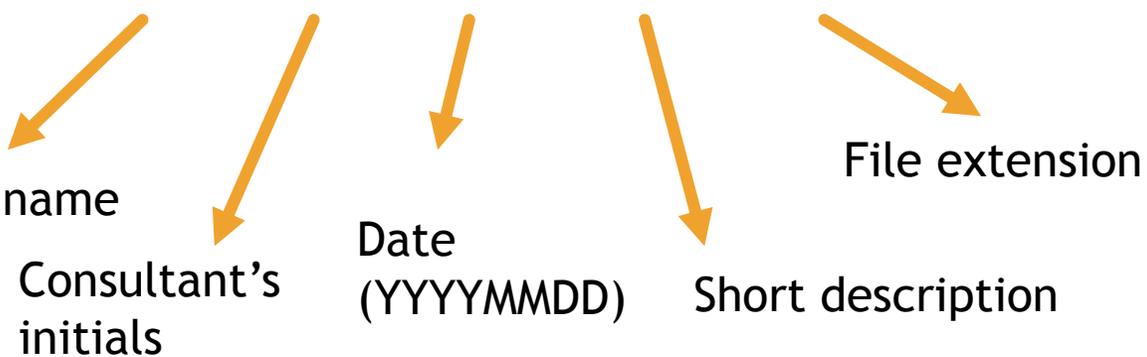
Language name

Consultant's
initials

Date
(YYYYMMDD)

Short description

File extension



Top tips for data management

- ▶ Use a clear folder structure
e.g. 2020 > LIKE > Data
- ▶ Back up every day!
- ▶ Back up in multiple places
- ▶ Consider long-term as well as short-term - what if you want to find these files in 2 year's time? Have you described things like the filenaming system to make it interoperable?
 - ▶ Even if the data will be used by yourself and not other people, the you in 2 years time will benefit from some metadocumentation

Exercise 2

- ▶ Pair up (I will assign you into pairs)
- ▶ Take an audio equipment set (video camera optional)
- ▶ Find a quiet spot on campus and:
 1. Pick one of your native languages to work with for this test
 2. Come up with a filenaming strategy for the recordings
 3. Record a short story in one of your native languages
 4. Repeat varying microphone/recorder placement, inside vs outside etc.
 5. Transfer the recordings to your computer, name them, and listen back to check quality
 6. Back up the data

Bonus exercise

If you have finished the rest of the exercise, start to **transcribe, gloss, and translate** the recording using pen and paper

Reflection on exercise 2

- ▶ What went well?
- ▶ What didn't go so well?
- ▶ What did you learn?

Exercise 3

- ▶ In the next 2 weeks, you will be conducting your own fieldwork research projects...
- ▶ Think about what you learned in this class and come up with a small **data management plan** for your LIKE project. This should include:
 1. What type of recordings you will make
 2. The equipment you will use
 3. What filenaming system you can use
 4. Backing up: How often? Where?

Summary

- ▶ Making recordings is useful for you and other people as well
- ▶ You should be aware of **ethics** (collecting **informed consent** to record consultants) and consider **practical challenges** like memory card capacity
 - ▶ Make sure you know how to use the equipment e.g. checking it's recording!
- ▶ Use headphones/earphones to monitor recording quality, and check when you transfer the files to the computer
- ▶ Back up regularly and in multiple places

Further resources

- ▶ Recommended software for checking audio recordings quality:

Audacity (available for free online)

<https://www.audacityteam.org/>

Find tutorials here:

<https://manual.audacityteam.org/man/tutorials.html>



- ▶ More information on FAIR data: [here](#)
- ▶ Learn from the experience of the people in this room!