

Tools and Technologies of Language Documentation
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Lecture-14

Lecture 14 : How to collect Ethnolinguistic Data?

Hello everyone! This is Dripta. You are attending the SWAYAM NPTEL course, Tools and Technologies of Language Documentation and this is the 14th lecture of Module 3, Tools and Techniques of Data Collection. The title of today's lecture is "How to Collect Ethnolinguistic Oral Literature Data." So today we will discuss different types of ethnolinguistic data. When we collect ethno-linguistic data, what kind of data do we collect? And I am sure you have already learnt about them while learning about different domains of data collection. Then I will talk about data collection on traditional performance; primarily, discuss about music vitality and language vitality.

And finally, I will discuss certain backgrounds and points that we remember while collecting such data. So when we say that we are going to collect some ethno-linguistic data, what kind of data do we collect? So initially, I will give you an overview of different kinds of ethno-linguistic data that we collect and then I will specifically talk about data on music. So in ethno-linguistics, we collect data on kinship terms, different terms that are used for different languages. And at times we find that there are certain kinship terms, which are not used in that language currently, and instead, speech communities adopt kinship terms from other languages.

We collect colour terms when we collect ethno-linguistic data, you already learnt about some of them. So we collect basic colour terms, derived colour terms, something like sky blue from blue, borrowed colour terms whether the community is borrowing certain colour terms from other languages, and also, if there is any variation in colour terms data. And along with this, we also figure out if there are culturally significant colour terms. For example, black for morning, etcetera. We collect data on settlement of housing system, like overview of the whole settlement, what kind of direction and position do the people

have in each hut, the spatial arrangements, also the internal and external arrangement of house, storage system like different kind of storage systems for grains, liquids, etcetera.

And these may have different words, this can also have different narratives right. For attire and adornment, we talk about traditional dress for men and women, what are the different words that are associated with different dress, occasion-specific dress, tattoo, changing dressing patterns, etcetera. So in ethno-linguistic data, we talk about food culture, like traditional food and drinks, names of area-specific or culture-specific food and drinks, preparation and cultural significance. So in this part along with word, you also talk about the narration. So you collect narrative and words, both.

Also occasion-specific food, storage and preservation of food and at times also, you talk about recipes. We collect data on traditional occupation like role of individual and community in different occupation, what are the strategies that people adopt for traditional occupation and also, if the community observes major changes in occupation. There are of course, life cycle and related terms and practices. You can collect data on different ceremonies like birth, wedding, death, rituals related to the ceremonies and words associated with the ceremonies as well as the description of different ceremonies. We collect words on worship and rituals.

For example, belief system of communities, structure of idol, place, method of worship. Again, you can focus on both words and narratives. Along with that, in ethno-linguistic data, we consider ethno-medicine as a major part like common diseases in a community, healing practices, preparation of medicine, whether there are medicine man in a community and what kind of native knowledge are associated with the traditional medicines. At times, we also find that there are some traditional terms for measurements. So, what are the traditional terms that people use, using the ancestral language and if these are being replaced by other languages, etcetera.

There are some traditional games as well; at times we find that some games are played by men and some games are specifically for women. So what kind of differences are there, what are the words associated with them and how they are played? And for traditional transports, we talk about changes in pattern, if the older transports are not being used now, if the community is now adopting different kind of transports, etcetera. For arts and artefacts, we do take into account the painting styles of the community, the words associated with painting. Again you can bring colors here, different decorative elements, handicrafts, and if the community specialized in any handicrafts, the names for them, how do they made them, and again words and methods. For entertainment, we often talk about musical instruments, if the community has some specific instruments which are basically the marker of the community, musical patterns, songs, format of

dance, other performing arts like puppet show, etcetera.

So as I told you, we will be focusing on traditional performance for ethno-linguistic data. I will not go into all the details of the areas that I have mentioned. So I will be focusing on traditional performance, specifically to songs and also discuss a framework which is now being used to analyze the vitality questions that you have already discussed. So when we talk about oral traditions, it is not only song right, it is so many different things. For example, there can be storytelling.

At times storytelling is associated with songs, maybe storytelling is again linked with some lullabies, which are traditional songs of communities. But there are some storytellings for different purposes and maybe it is used as a part of teaching some traditional knowledge to children, etcetera. So we consider storytelling as a part of oral tradition. So when we collect ethno-linguistic data, we also focus on storytelling. And then there are different kind of performing arts like music, there are drama performances and dance.

So, when we document these performances, at times we focus on certain rituals, what are the performances which are associated with the rituals and again, there are some performances which are associated with festive events. So at times these are different, and at times we also observe that different kind of languages are used for these two. Maybe, one community has adopted dominant cultural practices for festive events, the songs for festive events, but they have not adopted the dominant cultural traits or languages for the performances related to rituals. So usually, as you have learnt from your lessons of language vitality previously, the languages of rituals are less likely to change. So we need to pay attention to all these issues whether it is different languages for rituals and festive events.

So I have two questions for you at this point, which you can ask yourself. The first one is will you consider the sustainability questions? For example, when we talk about the sustainable development goals for cultural practices, we do think about different kind of questions. So are you going to ask them? And also, will you consider revitalization? So for example, if you find that.. if you are working in your own community, you have kind of figured out that some major change is taking place for the songs of your performance, your community's performance, so will you just document it or you will also account for revitalization? So these are the questions that you should ask yourself at this point.

So I will talk about the recordings of different songs. Now, when we consider recording songs from a community of course, we try to record songs from different age groups. So maybe we will find that senior community members are using one pattern or one kind of

language used in the traditional songs, where the younger people are not doing it. May be there is kind of language mixing, you have already learnt about shift. So some certain patterns of shift are more likely to occur in the songs of younger generation.

So when we record songs from different age groups, I mean individual recordings, we also pay attention to the differences. And along with that, we also record community festival songs or ritual songs which are often group songs. So there are some songs which are individual for certain festivals, but in most of the communities we find that the songs of festival or ritual are group songs. So, how do we account for them? So we have to keep in mind that both individual and group songs we need to document. At times these performances, these songs are gender-specific, like songs of marriage, rituals associated with marriage are often performed by women.

And at times we have occupation-specific song, like farming songs. Again you can have different layers in farming songs, like describing different stages of farming and there are different songs for different communities. There is a very interesting fact that there are some song-men in certain communities. So these song-men are basically traditional knowledge bearer. So you may find certain song-men in a community and if you try to look at the responsibility of the song-men, you will find that this particular person will be responsible for passing the community knowledge from one generation to another generation.

And song-men will be selected members only. So what we found from our work among the Toto community members, I have already given example of this community, because we worked with the community members. So the song-men will learn the traditional songs. And all the members will not have access to these songs. So the song-man will learn it from a particular person and they will pass on this song to the other persons, who are again selected members of the community.

And through these songs, the community knowledge will be passed. So you may or may not have access to these songs as an outsider and if you are a community member again, you may have access or may not have access, but it is important for us to figure out whether there is a song-man in the community and what kind of knowledge is being passed to the other generation through the song, and along with the consideration of the language of the songs. So at this point, I will be introducing the idea of music vitality, which is an associated idea with language vitality, and I will also introduce a framework at this point, which will be useful for you to consider. So if we consider the intangible cultural heritage, that has been announced by UNESCO in 2003, it includes both language and music. So when we talk about vitality of language and vitality of music, we will see that these are somehow related.

So we talk about music vitality and what are the major factors of music vitality. So this vitality depends on social, cultural and technological changes. So the question is how to account for the data. If you understand that there are certain changes which are taking place in the community songs, so how do you account for the data? So you need data from different layers, you need data to address different parameters, otherwise your data will be incomplete. For example, you can ask these questions.

Do the traditional songs and new songs differ in tunes, beats and languages? So this is a very important question that we tried to find through our work on Toto songs. We actually found that the old songs and new songs are different in terms of tunes, beats to some extent and of course, languages. So dominant languages may affect the newer songs and if the community is working on the reversal of language shift, then you may have retention of the traditional language in the newer songs. So this is important for you to figure out. And we also ask this question, what kind of influences of the dominant communities are there? So if there are influence of dominant communities, you can also figure out that dominant languages are there in the newer songs.

So if you figure out that the community has a prominent language shift, maybe we can also observe a shift in musical traditions, because it is a part of this entire game. So it is not that language shift is happening in other domains, but not in musical traditions. I hope you remember whatever we discussed while discussing language shift and vitality and we did mention the musical practices, briefly. Now we are talking about it in detail. So music vitality endangerment framework is a new framework which was introduced by Grant in 2004 and it is a framework which is which can be super useful for us at this point.

So, what does this framework do? It tries to give a framework to understand music endangerment through language endangerment. So we will try to understand, we will try to use the same kind of parameters that we used. I am saying same, but there are certain modifications that we will see. And these parameters for language shift can be helpful for us in order to understand the changes or endangerment issues in music. And when we will be collecting musical data as a part of ethno--linguistic data for documentation, we can use this framework which is useful.

So, we can say that language maintenance is acting as a tool to understand music endangerment. So if you have some kind of idea of language endangerment in a community, we can use that, use our knowledge of language endangerment to understand the kind of music endangerment that is taking place. So music vitality and endangerment framework, MVEF, we can understand it through language vitality. This is something that we have already discussed. You know what is language vitality by now.

So now I will discuss these different points, which have been mentioned as a part of this framework. And if you pay attention, you will notice that these are directly related to the framework of language vitality. If you remember Fishman scale, if you remember the UNESCO's parameters, so all these will be coming back to your mind again when you will look at these points. So the first point that has been mentioned in MVEF is intergenerational transmission. This is very similar to the language vitality.

So the question is do the community members pass on the musical traditions? So if you see that the community members, the newer members are not passing on the musical traditions to the next generation, then of course, you are having a hunch that the musical tradition is endangered, it is not being passed, but again it is associated with the language vitality. So, if you introduce the language, the children will learn about the traditional language of a community. If you do not do that, then the doors are closed for them. The second point is change in the number of proficient musicians.

So proficient is also very important. You can say change in the number of musicians; maybe they are not very proficient in the traditional musical forms. So, there are new musicians who are non-proficient in the community's language. Maybe you can figure out that there are new musicians coming up in a community, who are preferring to sing in the dominant language of the area. So it is related to language shift again and music endangerment too, because they are adopting a different language, so they are blocking the transmission of the traditional musical practices in the community. The third point is change in the number of people engaged with the genre.

So maybe traditional musicians are now moving to other professions because the spaces of traditional music are not valued that much or there can be other reasons. So if you have a change in the number of musicians in a community, I mean the traditional musicians again, it will affect the music vitality of that community and again it is associated with the language use. The next point is a change in the music and music practices. So at times we find that yes, there are community-specific musical practices, but traditional musical practices do not exist; all the songs that are being performed by the community members are new songs. And again, the new songs are not using the traditional languages.

Maybe it is using some part of traditional language and adopting a new language along with that, maybe the dominant language of that area or a language which is more popular for popular platforms, but the traditional musical practices are not there. Next is the change in performance context and functions. So at times, when we I talked about the song-men, I should also tell you that song-men had access to some ceremonies in many communities and where the common people did not have access. So now, it is becoming

very different for certain communities. May be access to ceremonies has been given to other community members and maybe the kind of songs that being performed in the ceremonies are changing too.

So these things will be definitely affecting the performance as a whole and again, the choice of language is an important question. So the context is changing. Response to mass media and music industry is another important factor. So when I am saying mass media, I am sure you can consider the popular platforms like YouTube, where community members are creating new channels, but at times, these songs that they are trying to post are not the traditional songs. So this is something, I will come to this point later and elaborate it in a different way, when I will talk about the methods, but we have also found that traditional songs are being replaced by the popular music, the tunes of popular music from other dominant cultural groups.

So this is something which is important and it also has a direct relationship with the music industry. So if it has more takers, then the community will move to these kind of popular musical traits. We also try to look at the kind of infrastructure and resources that are available for the musical practices. We find that there are fellowships available to musicians of particular communities, which are fellowships by governmental organizations as well as non-governmental organizations. So if there are fellowships available for traditional musical practices, there is some kind of encouragement which is there in the community and the traditional musicians are also keen to teach their traditional songs to the next generation.

So these are interrelated. So if you have the infrastructure and resources, the endangerment will also be affected. At times, the knowledge and skill for musical practices is also considered. Number of people who know the traditional songs, as I have mentioned before, is important, whether they are equipped with the traditional knowledge and also the skill. So the government policies affecting music practices, which is again related to number 7, but along with fellowships, governments also sponsor festivals. So there are community-specific festivals and also common festival, where different communities participate together.

So for all these festivals, if government policies acknowledge the community participation, then certain music practices will be retained and again through the musical practices, the language will be retained as well. At times we find that there are negative attitudes of the community members towards particular genre, maybe the traditional music, if it is quite different or maybe not related to the everyday experience of the newer community members, they resist and also posit a negative attitude towards traditional music, which will affect the practice and performance of the traditional music; we have to

keep in mind. And, there are relevant outsiders' opinions towards the genre, may be for at times, we see that for the government policies, it is not the community members, but the members of dominant communities who are selecting the performers or selecting musicians for different festivals. So, it may have a negative impact and negative attitude on the performances. Amount and quality of documentation is important, maybe you are documenting your musical traditions for the first time, but maybe you already have access to some kind of corpus, maybe the lyrics are preserved, maybe the tunes are not, maybe the tunes are preserved, lyrics are not.

Maybe there are audio recordings or no video recordings, maybe there is both audio and video, but no written documentation. So all these possibilities are found for different communities, but if there is some kind of documentation, we think that we can access them and also try to look at the present day practices and compare them in order to get some idea of the vitality questions. So when we collect data on musical practices of different communities as a part of, which is of course, a part of ethno-linguistic data, so we have to keep certain ideas in mind. The first one is, we have to keep in mind the diversity and vitality issues. Before you go for recording, you should have an overall understanding of the community's linguistic background and also the background of musical practices and then you go for the recording, otherwise you may miss out certain points.

So, if you try to get some idea of the diversity, maybe there are different forms of a same song in different geographical area for example, or different styles of singing based on different areas, so you should get some idea of diversity beforehand and also vitality issues that we have already discussed following the framework by Grant. So please keep these in mind. And we also get all the details before we start the recordings. And we get some information from the community members as well as neighboring community members about the musical practices. So what do we perform in different festivals for example, you also get information from the neighboring communities.

So have you seen your neighboring communities singing these songs for example, and give an example. So all these questions we ask. When we do individual recording, group recording in a created setup, along with that it is highly recommended that you observe the community festivals or group singings when they are actually done during the time which is meant for these festivals. So you can create a setup and do your own recording, but it is advised that you participate in the community festivals and do the recordings at that point of time.

You can also find some differences, minute differences maybe. So after we collect the data, we try to assess the vitality of the songs, we listen to the language, we transcribe

them and also try to see what kind of language shift is operating and get an overall idea of the vitality. We try to assess the language vitality after assessing the music vitality. But there are some problems that you should also keep in mind. Like when we record songs from a community, as I already told you, we need to separately record old and new songs. So if you are planning to collect data from your own community, it is not the case that you will only record old songs and not record new songs, because it will not give you an idea of the direction of language shift, which is happening through the songs.

And if you record only the new songs, you will not get the pattern of the older songs in terms of tunes, language and also, beats. So you need to have an overall idea of it. And there are new songs which may have influence of dominant culture, as I have already mentioned. So you have to keep in mind constantly, because if you record some new songs and if you find that it is very similar to the dominant culture, you cannot generalize that it is very similar to other dominant communities. Maybe you are missing out something, maybe you did not collect the data from the older traditional songs.

And recording of the new songs will not give us the data on traditional music, as I have already told you, and new music often perform popular songs and not ceremonial songs. So what kind of song you are recording is something that you have to keep in mind. If you are recording a popular song, at times you also find the propaganda-based small songs, like maybe environmental consciousness, health consciousness, for school going children there are messages, etcetera, which are promoted through the community languages, by external agencies. So you have to pay attention whether these languages of the songs are using the traditional language, or it is like a mixture of the dominant language and the community language. So we also collect these data when we collect songs, the newer songs which are used for different campaigns.

So we also need some additional data, like apart from recording from the community individual and community-based both, observing from festivals, etcetera. We need to look at the data from social media, as I have already told you. So we do ask some very important questions in this regard, like do the popular songs use a shared language? So I will give an example of Sadri or Nagpuri, which is used by the Kurukh speakers in Jharkhand, but at times we see that the same songs are being shared by Mundari community members, Kurmali community members and it is a shared language, Kurukh. So, of course, these communities have their own language like Mundari and Kurukh. but at times in terms of some festivals you have shared languages, like Kurukh speakers in Jharkhand.

So you have festivals like Karam, where these songs in shared languages are used. So there are other kind of layers if you want to explore the shared songs, but I will not talk

about them. You can figure out how these are similar in terms of practices. So, another question that I would like to address now is, do we have ceremonial songs in social media too? It is rare. So, you will mostly find festival songs and also popular songs, news songs, campaign songs, but it is very rare to find ceremonial songs in social media.

Because, these are not shared in public domains and these are kept for the community-specific use, but you need to search if there are such recordings available in the public domain. At times, we also collect data from archives, you will find some archival data like various ethno-musicological archives which are kept in public domain. But we also find through government archives, archiver recording like All India Radio- Doordarshan recordings, which are now shared through YouTube. So once upon a time, they were recordings owned by governmental agencies, but now they are being shared through YouTube, which is a public platform.

So you can access them before doing the work and the community. And at times, we also have community-based archives which is not common for all the speech communities in our country, but at times there are community-based archives, which the community members have built, maybe you will find some online archives and if field workers have already created some repository of songs beforehand, you can access them before collecting your data. So we also get recordings of festivals like government-sponsored festivals, community-organized festivals and patronized by external agencies, there are some festivals. So if you have recordings of those festivals, it will be useful for us as well. So when we record the traditional songs, we try to understand whether the community also associate it with some additional or associated practices, when they perform the songs for example, dance, maybe puppet show, etcetera. And we also pay attention to the fact if a community is using multiple languages to sing a song.

If the community is multilingual explicitly, I mean all communities are multilingual we know, but if we have use of multiple languages to traditional songs, this is something which we need to figure out. I have given you example of Sadri. So maybe you can explore more. And if the community shares ceremonial songs with other community, this is the Karam songs that I was mentioning. So, Karam is a festival which is celebrated by different community members in East Central India and that is why ceremonial songs are shared by different community members.

We also have community songs by different occupational groups and if they are differing in language and also based on geographical area and different layers of the occupational group. So coming to the conclusion, today in the class, we discussed different types of ethno-linguistic data, which is based on domain, which is already known by you. And then we talked about the traditional performances, we talked about different types of

recordings and the song-man, and I introduced the idea of music vitality and associated with language vitality. Basically, to give this idea that by understanding the maintenance of songs, we can also understand the vitality of languages. And I finally, talked about some points that we need to remember while collecting data on music, both traditional and new songs. So, these are the references. Thank you!