Practical Considerations in Collaborative Crosslinguistic Research

Kearsy Cormier
Deafness, Cognition & Language Research Centre, University College London, UK

David Quinto-Pozos
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Amanda Holzrichter
Universidad de las Americas, Puebla, Mexico

Who we are

- Kearsy Cormier
  - Has worked on American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL)
  - Currently in the UK

- David Quinto-Pozos
  - Has worked on American Sign Language (ASL) and Mexican Sign Language (LSM)
  - Currently in the USA

- Amanda (Mandy) Holzrichter
  - Has worked on American Sign Language (ASL) and Mexican Sign Language (LSM)
  - Currently in Mexico

Common thread: All received PhD from University of Texas at Austin (AH in 2000; KC & DQP in 2002)

Overview

13:30-14:30 Constructed action project: Methods and procedures we have used in our crosslinguistic project
14:30-15:00 Coffee/tea break
15:00-15:30 Top tips: our list of recommendations about what to do (and what not to do) in crosslinguistic projects
15:30-16:00 Comments/questions: Feedback from others about our experiences
16:00-16:30 Discussion about best practices; development of recommendations about crosslinguistic research

Background

- How the project arose
- DQP project on constructed action in ASL
  - Constructed action (also known as role shift, referential shift, body classifiers, point-of-view predicate, and so on and so on...)
  - When constructed action must be used, when it is optional
  - Curious about constructed action in British Sign Language (BSL) and Mexican Sign Language (LSM)
  - Especially LSM, a very under-researched sign language
  - Possibility of collaborative project looking at constructed action in ASL, BSL, and LSM??
  - Funding possibilities?

Funding possibilities

- We considered possible sources
  - Mexico?
    - Not many resources available for research funding
  - UK?
    - Plenty of funding resources for large projects (government, charities), but these would take time
  - USA?
    - University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) offered small grants for small-scale research projects (e.g., pilot/exploratory studies)

- 3 of us agreed to look at constructed action in ASL, BSL, and LSM through a collaborative project
  - To investigate when constructed action must be used, when it is optional, within each language
  - To compare constructed action across 3 sign languages, one unrelated to the other two (BSL not related to ASL or LSM), and one very under-researched (LSM)

Cormier: For contact info see http://kearsy.com
Quinto-Pozos: davidqp@uiuc.edu
Holzrichter: amanda@mail.udlap.mx
Planning

Next step: What will we need?
- Materials
  - Videos shown to signers to elicit constructed action, which showed people & objects moving in various ways
  - We had stimuli videos from DQP’s study on ASL
  - Wanted to choose a wider variety of stimuli videos
- Participants
  - Deaf signers of ASL, BSL, LSM

Planning (2)

How will we get what we need?
- Materials
  - We decided to use video clips publicly available for free
  - Needed time & collaboration/discussion
- Participants
  - Needed time to recruit, but more importantly funds to pay signers
  - Funding only for paying participants, no extra costs (equipment, secretarial or technical staff)

Costing the project

- 3 different countries, 3 different currencies ($, £, pesos)
- US university -> all costs determined in US dollars ($)
- First tried deciding on US dollar rate, then converting that amount to UK pounds (£) and Mexican pesos
- But realised that this amount was not enough for UK (compared to normal rate there) and was too much in Mexico (compared to normal rate there)
- Cost of living in each country very different
- So we adjusted funds accordingly - asked for US$1500 total for US, US$1500 for UK, and US$1500 for Mexico, but then adjusted for cost of living ($1500 for US, $1900 for UK, and $1400 for Mexico)

Adjustment for cost of living

ASL+BSL+LSM = $4500

Ethical approval

- Because applying for funding in US, had to also apply for ethical approval through Institutional Review Board (IRB) in USA
- Required when working with ‘human subjects’ - when people are involved in the research, e.g. in interviews or surveys, especially if people are video recorded for the research

Ethical approval (2)

- IRB approval can be long and complex process (lots of paperwork justifying every aspect of the project)
- The IRB at University of Illinois requested formal ethical approval from our universities in UK and in Mexico
- No IRB in UK or in Mexico
- We gained approval from directors of research in our departments in UK and Mexico to gain approval (they wrote letters on our behalf)
Approval & funding granted

- Funding application successful! (Dec 2004)
- Approx. $20,000. Funding period: Jan - Dec 2005
- IRB approval successful! (May 2005)
- Dispersion of funds
  - UIUC sent one large cheque to DQP in US dollars
  - AH and KC both still had US bank accounts
  - DQP wrote cheques to KC and AH to our personal US accounts
  - KC and AH each transferred funds separately as needed

Dispersion of funds

University of Illinois (UIUC)

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Conducting the study

- Preparing video materials
- Data collection
- Analysis
- Key factor in all: COMMUNICATION

Communication

- Email: very important
- But some real-time communication (meetings) needed
  - Instant messaging, ‘chat’ software (AIM, MSN, Yahoo IM, etc)
    - Text chat
    - Video chat
  - Multiple video chat now available on iChat (Mac OS 10.4)
  - Some technical difficulties, but when it works, it works great!

Real time around the world

- Three different countries, two different time zones

Sharing video data

- Most info (Word, Excel documents etc) can be sent via email… video data more problematic
- Digital video = Large file sizes!
- We have each edited our video data to separate smaller chunks, highly compressed (currently using Quicktime MP4, H264 compression)
- We post data on password protected server - we use iDisk available with .mac account. Can be accessed anywhere by someone who knows the password which you set.

Cormier: For contact info see http://kearsy.com
Quinto-Pozos: davidqp@uiuc.edu
Holzrichter: amanda@mail.udlap.mx
Coffee/tea break! Return at 15:00

Our top tips

1. Think carefully about what languages to include in your project
   - What can be gained from looking at the languages you have chosen? What might you expect to find and why?
   - Think practically - do you know people who work with (or can you find other researchers who know and/or work with) users of this language?
   - Include under-researched sign languages whenever possible
   - Consider funding. If you need funds, try to get them from somewhere, anywhere. (You may need to be creative.)

2. Consider possible funding sources for your project

3. Make sure you consider all ethical rules/guidelines in all the countries involved

4. When collaborating long distance, take advantage of technology for communication

5. Keep in mind... Collaborating long distance takes time and effort.

What languages to include

Our top tips

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Funding/costing

Our top tips

2. Do you need funding for your project? (you might not)
   - If you do, consider the scale - large or small?
   - Large scale studies can often be funded from government grants (e.g. National Science Foundation or National Institutes of Health in US, Economic Social Research Council or Arts and Humanities Research Council in UK) or from larger charities
   - Small scale studies can be funded from universities, departments, smaller charities
   - Consider all different possible sources, from each country
   - When costing, consider varying costs of living in different countries
   - If funds will need to be dispersed into different currencies, make sure to build in any transfer fees into the budget
   - Funding body may subtract their own fees from your budget as well

Ethical guidelines/approval

Our top tips

3. Make sure you consider all ethical rules/guidelines in all the countries involved
   - Gain ethical approval wherever necessary. In many cases you must gain ethical approval whether you request funding or not. Make sure you find out, well in advance.
   - Allow time for ethical approval - it always takes longer than you think to fill in the forms and to actually get the approval.
   - Follow the guidelines of the country that are the most strict.

Communication & technology

Our top tips

4. When collaborating long distance, take advantage of technology for communication
   - Use email
   - Use text/video chat software
   - Use videophones if available
   - Meet in person whenever possible (take advantage of holidays, travel to locations close to where your collaborators are)
   - Use secure servers for sharing video data

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Difficult but rewarding

5. Keep in mind… Collaborating long distance takes time and effort.
   - Emails aren’t instantaneous, and there are inevitably problems with video chat (and even sometimes text chat). It’s not like collaborating with someone you see all the time.
   - But can be extremely rewarding! :-) 

Feedback/comments/questions?

- Info about funding sources in other countries?
- Info about ethical approval in other countries?
- Other recommendations for communication?

Best practices

- Recommendations for collaborative, crosslinguistic projects
  - What should these recommendations be?
  - How best to disseminate these recommendations?

Working group recommendations

- ‘Our top tips’? Should we remove/change/add any?

Dissemination of recommendations?

- Possibly through Sign Language Linguistics Society web site?
  - http://www.let.kun.nl/sign-lang/site/
- Other?