

Some remarks on the storyboard task*

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Abstract: I use the opportunity provided by this special issue to address some issues that I faced with the *storyboard* task, and discuss what factors may have contributed to this and how such issues might be avoided. The paper first briefly discusses what my fieldwork situation and topic of research was, and then discusses the pros and cons of the storyboard task in comparison with oral semantic judgment tasks without visual aids. The paper ends with some suggestions for incorporating a storyboard task as part of one's semantic elicitation.

Keywords: fieldwork methodology, semantic elicitation, judgment tasks, storyboards, information structure

1 Introduction

In this paper, I will first briefly introduce my fieldwork situation, including a brief discussion of my research topics and the field methods I usually use. Then I will discuss the storyboard task and the way I implemented it, and will discuss the issues that arose with this particular implementation, and possible ways, in hindsight, that these issues could be resolved. In the final section, I will summarize these thoughts in the form of suggestions for fieldworkers interested in eliciting data using a storyboard task.

1.1 My fieldwork situation

I conducted fieldwork on several languages of the Yobe State region in North-East Nigeria in Yobe, Borno and Gombe State in the winters of 2009 and 2010/2011, and in Abuja in 2013 and 2014/2015. Most of my fieldwork was on the West-Chadic language Ngamo, spoken by 60,000 speakers according to Lewis (2009). There had been previous linguistic research on this language by Russell G. Schuh, Alhaji Maina Gimba and colleagues as part of the Yobe State Languages Research Project¹, leading to a variety of resources, including a dictionary, a corpus of stories, and papers on the verbal morphology and tone, but to the best of my knowledge there had been no previous semantic fieldwork on the language. Russell G. Schuh and Alhaji Maina Gimba put me into contact with speakers of the Gudi dialect. There were two speakers I predominantly worked with for elicitation sessions (one of them had previously been a language consultant for the Yobe State Languages Research Project), and six further speakers were consulted for subtasks. On my third and fourth field trips, it was not possible for me to travel to Yobe State, due to the Boko Haram uprising; for this reason I met with my two main language consultants in the capital of Nigeria, Abuja.

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¹ <http://aflang.humanities.ucla.edu/language-materials/chadic-languages/yobe/>

et al. 2012; Buring and Križ 2013, i.a.)?

A third strand of my research concerned the question whether the same kind of realization assumed to mark the focus/background distinction in examples like (1)–(4) can be used to distinguish (i) given vs. new material, and (ii) material emphasized because of noteworthiness or surprise from non-controversial material in the sentence. For example, Skopeteas and Fanselow (2011) found for German, Spanish, and Greek that marked word orders can be licensed by a particular noteworthiness of the moved constituent. For example, the results of Skopeteas and Fanselow (2011) suggest that in the German example (5), the direct object *Serviette* ('napkin') can be emphasized by fronting it, without giving rise to the exhaustive interpretation typical for focus (in contrast to the fronting of non-noteworthy alternative *Tomate* ('tomato'), which does give rise to an exhaustive interpretation).

(5) Granny is eating lunch with the family. On the table, there are carrots, tomatoes, artichokes, eggplants and of course cutlery and napkins. Uncle Robin says:

Eine Serviette/Tomate hat Oma gegessen.
a napkin/tomato has Granny eaten
'Granny ate a napkin/tomato.'

This suggests that noteworthiness of a constituent can be another, focus-independent reason for a marked realization.

Focus-sensitive particles are expressions like *only*, *even* and *also*, which *associate* with focus. This means that their interpretation depends on the location of focus. For example, (6) and (7) differ in interpretation even though the only difference between them is the position of the focus.

(6) Kule only built a house.
→ he didn't do anything else with it.

(7) Kule only built a house.
→ he didn't build anything else.

I was interested in whether the corresponding Ngamo expressions have the same meanings as their English counterparts, and how they interact with the focus realization patterns found in Ngamo.

In a nutshell, the main focus/background realization patterns that were found were: (i) no marking (not even prosodic, see Genzel and Grubic 2011), (ii) morphological marking using the so-called 'background marker' =*i/ye*, (iii) morphological marking and syntactic reordering, so that the focus is clause-final (Grubic 2015). These realization patterns were found to all merely give rise to an exhaustivity implicature, and to be possible in contrastive as well as non-contrastive contexts (Grubic 2015). However, there was a subject/non-subject asymmetry, with a strong preference for focused subjects to move from their canonical pre-verbal position to a clause-final position rather than stay in-situ,³ and a weaker preference for objects to stay in situ. Surprise or noteworthiness was not found to license non-canonical word order/morphological marking. The focus particle corresponding to *only* in English can associate with focus in all realization patterns (though association with subjects in their canonical preverbal position appears not to be possible). In contrast, the additive(-scalar) particles corresponding to *also* and *even* cannot associate with focus in =*i/ye* constructions (Grubic 2015; Grubic and Zimmermann 2011).

³ There was some variation between judgments (even of the same speakers): sometimes subject focus movement was judged obligatory, sometimes just as the preferred option.

1.3 Elicitation methods

This section introduces the *semantic judgment* task which I mainly used for fieldwork, and the *storyboard* task, as well as previous comparisons of the two tasks from the literature.

1.3.1 Semantic judgments

The main bulk of my fieldwork consisted of semantic acceptability judgment tasks (Matthewson 2004, 2011). In this task, the language consultant is asked to judge the truth and/or felicity of a sentence in a particular context. The sentence is in the target language (in this case Ngamo); the context may be in the contact language (in this case English).⁴ In my case, since I was often working with simple dialogues, the context was often in Ngamo, too.

Semantic judgment tasks involve minimal pairs or groups, varying with respect to the test sentence, the context, or both (see e.g., Matthewson 2004, 2011 for detailed discussion). For example, to confirm that the VOS word order — with the subject moved to clause-final position — is acceptable with subject focus but not object focus I could test the examples in (8)–(11), and I would expect (10) to be rejected.⁵

(8) Who built a house?
Salko bano=i Kule.
build.pfv house=bm Kule
'Kule built a house.'

(9) Who built a house?
Kule salko bano.
Kule build.pfv house
'Kule built a house.'

(10) What did Kule build?
Salko bano=i Kule.
build.pfv house=bm Kule
'Kule built a house.'

(11) What did Kule build?
Kule salko bano.
Kule build.pfv house
'Kule built a house.'

The best practice is to not present examples like (8) and (10) — differing in context type — immediately after each other, but at different times, if possible even in different elicitation sessions. In contrast, examples like (8) and (9) — differing in sentence type — can be discussed together. Such a task typically contains several context/sentence pairs of the same type, e.g. the test in (8) would be repeated using a different sentence (e.g. 'Hawwa bought a car'). These context/sentence pairs are presented (often orally) to language consultants and then discussed. All comments by the language consultants are written down.

These comments, besides providing valuable information on the phenomenon under consideration, can also help assess whether the task is clear. In my experience, it is hard for language consultants new to this task to know how strict or lenient to be, e.g. that they can ignore potential errors in the English context (due to me not being a native speaker of English) or my less than perfect pronunciation of the Ngamo test sentence, but that they do need to pay close attention to the form and

⁴ See AnderBois and Henderson (2015) on considerations about when the contact language or the target language is best for contexts.

⁵ Glosses: 1/2/3 = first, second, third person; bm = background marker; def = definite; det = determiner; f = feminine; m = masculine; pfv = perfective; quot = quotative; sg = singular

content of the test sentence. Discussing the judgment (independently of whether the judgment was expected or unexpected, so as not to bias the speakers) also helps to check whether the test sentence and context were understood correctly (see Bohnermeyer 2015), and whether perhaps further information not explicitly stated in the context was accommodated in order to make the context/sentence pair acceptable.

For each session, I would usually prepare for discussion of a couple of different phenomena, and change the topic if I had the feeling the language consultants were bored, tired or stuck. I would also mix in translation tasks as a preparation for the next sessions. When there were conflicting judgments or highly unexpected judgments or comments, I would mark them in order to elicit these (or similar) items again at a later time. The two kinds of tasks I used (acceptability judgments of sentences in contexts and translations of sentences in contexts) were different enough that I didn't feel the need to explicitly distinguish them during the elicitation session.

Acceptability judgment tasks have the great advantage that they are quick to create and adjust. Often if something interesting or puzzling arose during elicitation I would create further context/sentence pairs on the spot, relating to the language consultant's comments. Sometimes the language consultants would propose contexts in which an unacceptable sentence becomes acceptable, and I would try to create further such contexts. For my fieldwork on information structure, where the contexts were usually very simple, acceptability judgments were thus ideal.

1.4 Storyboard tasks

In 2013, I elicited data with the help of six storyboards. Three of them were taken from the Totem Field Storyboards collection (Littell 2010b; TFS Working Group 2011a,b), and three were created by myself. The stories were recorded in a meeting room in my hostel. Both of my primary consultants were present during the whole task. They discussed the stories before the recordings, and were there during the other speaker's recording to correct him if necessary.

1.4.1 What is a storyboard?

A storyboard is a series of pictures which help to tell a story created by the researcher. The story is usually very short, containing only 10-20 sentences, and for every sentence there is a picture depicting the content of the sentence. It is often created in such a way that it contains the relevant item or construction that the researcher is interested in several times, sometimes in different contexts. For example, the storyboard 'Bake-Off' (TFS Working Group 2011a) contains two different sentence types for particles like 'even' (see the second and fourth picture in Figure 1) one where it occurs in a positive sentence, and one where it occurs under negation. 'Even' requires that a certain presupposition is satisfied, which is done in the respective preceding sentence/picture pair (the first and third picture in Figure 1).

Later in the story, this kind of sequence is repeated, so that each test sentence (*even* in positive sentences vs. *even* in negative sentences) occurs twice in the story; see Figure 2.

Using the storyboard, the story is told to the language consultants in the contact language until they remember it well, and then they are asked to re-tell it in the target language. This story is recorded and transcribed.

Later, the story is used for semantic judgments: the language consultants are asked whether a different sentence could also have been uttered at a certain part of the story. This is used to elicit the relevant constructions if they were not provided in the story, and to collect negative evidence. For

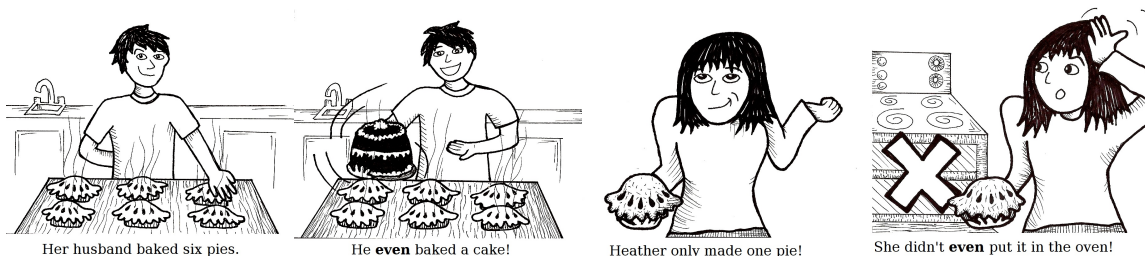


Figure 1: Part of the storyboard ‘Bake-Off’ containing the first ‘even’ sentences.

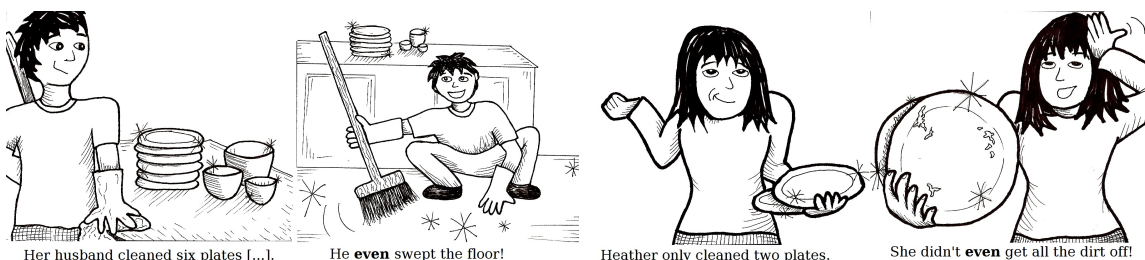


Figure 2: Part of the storyboard ‘Bake-Off’ containing the further ‘even’ sentences.

example, if the Bake-Off storyboard revealed that two different expressions for ‘even’ are used in positive and negative contexts, it would be possible to test them in the respective other context.

1.5 Previous literature: Pros and cons of each method

The semantic judgment task is arguably the bread and butter of formal semantic fieldwork, and the storyboard task, since it involves systematic post-hoc judgments, is in a sense a picture-aided variant of it. Nevertheless, some pros and cons of each method have been discussed in the previous literature, and will be briefly reported here.

Both tasks involve targeted data elicitation, i.e., the researcher elicits data on a particular phenomenon or topic. The advantages of this are that, first, enough data on the expression or construction under consideration can be elicited, and second, negative evidence can be found (with storyboards, this is done during the post-hoc semantic judgment task) (Matthewson 2004:376). Both kinds of tasks can be shared with the linguistic community in order to allow for cross-linguistic comparison by sharing a questionnaire or storyboard (see Bochnak and Matthewson 2020 for discussion), but for storyboards I get the impression that this is more commonly done (e.g., as part of the Totem Field Storyboards collection).

There are two differences between the two tasks: first, the presentation of the context (visual vs. verbal), and, second, whether the context/test sentence pairs are presented alone or within a narrative.⁶

The main advantage of the classic semantic judgment task is that it is faster to create (Matthewson 2004:379; Louie 2015), to adapt if necessary, and to analyse. In addition, some concepts may be inherently hard to draw (Matthewson 2004:379), potentially making some phenomena less suitable

⁶ It is also possible to elicit judgments on single test sentences with a visual context (Bochnak and Matthewson 2020), or use narratives without images for targeted elicitation (Louie 2015).

for a storyboard task. Finally, Bochnak and Matthewson (2020:271) mention that storyboard tasks may be hard to use if consultants are not used to the idea of understanding a sequence of pictures as telling a coherent story.

One big advantage of the storyboard task is that — in the first, story-telling part at least — it involves natural or close to natural speech (Burton and Matthewson 2015). In addition, storyboards — like all visual aids — minimize potential problems with how the context is presented, e.g. any influence from the contact language (Matthewson 2011; see also AnderBois and Henderson 2015 for a discussion of potential problems with the oral presentation of the context). In addition, very complicated contexts may be easier to understand and remember with the aid of a storyboard than in oral elicitation sessions. For example, Burton and Matthewson (2015) describe a context where the imagined speaker for the target utterance first had some evidence that something was the case, then found out that it is false. These contexts are very long and potentially hard to remember. Bochnak and Matthewson (2020) argue that, generally, storyboards are particularly well-suited to investigate phenomena where it is necessary to refer to individual’s belief states in the context.

Concerning the use of a narrative rather than single judgments, Louie (2015) notes that single judgments are too transparent: language consultants can easily figure out which expression or construction the fieldworker is interested in, and can form their own hypotheses about it, which may interfere with their judgments. Louie (2015) also argues that single judgment tasks can be very boring and repetitive for the language consultants. According to Louie, this may lead to a lack of attention to details, or an attempt by the language consultant to steer the conversation towards something different, and in the worst case may lead the language consultant to want to stop working with the linguist.

2 My own experience with the storyboard task

My fieldwork experience using storyboards did not prove entirely successful, causing me to discontinue the task before it was completed. Some of the issues were linguistic, causing the results of the storyboard to be less informative than I previously thought. Other issues were social: my language consultants were not entirely comfortable with the task. I will discuss these issues in this section, with some suggestions on what I could have done in order to improve this experience.

2.1 What to take into account when creating the storyboards

2.1.1 Creating the narrative

I would first like to discuss potential pitfalls that have to do with the underlying narrative (independent of the visualization). The first thing that I didn’t consider, at the time of creating the storyboards, was the issue of eliciting **exact minimal pairs**. The task is ideal for (post hoc) elicitation of minimally different test sentences in the same context. If one however wants to test the same sentence in two minimally different contexts, this has to be taken into account when creating the storyboard. One example where this is possible is the storyboard “On the Lam” (Fig. 3, TFS Working Group 2011b). The story involves a couple hiding from two police officers. First the couple discusses where they could hide (images 1-2 in Figure 3), then, some images later, the police officers discuss where they could be hiding (images 3-4 in Figure 3). The context shown in the first two images thus elicits root modality, and the one shown in the latter two images elicits epistemic modality. Apart from that, the test sentences are almost identical.

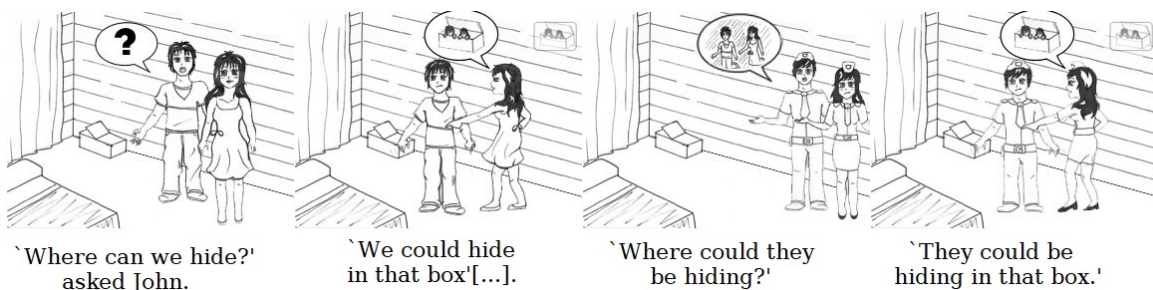


Figure 3: Parts of the storyboard 'On the Lam' showing minimally different contexts.

In my own stories, I failed to create such minimally different contexts. I did, for example, take care to include contexts eliciting focus on various constituents in the clause, but the test sentences elicited in this way are very different. For example, the images in Figure 4 from my storyboard 'The Generous Friend' (see associated file) elicit answers to *wh*-questions involving focus on an adverbial. As can be seen, they are very different, so if differences are found, further research will have to be conducted to uncover whether it is in fact the location of focus which is responsible for these differences, or some other properties of the sentences.

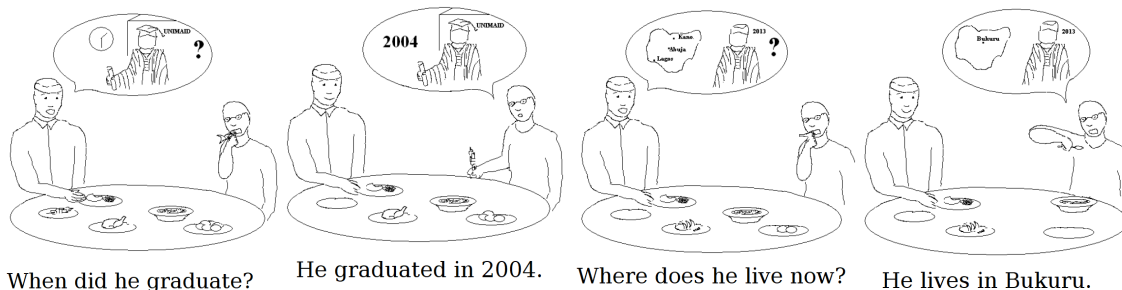


Figure 4: Parts of the storyboard 'The Generous Friend' showing substantially different contexts.

A possible way to elicit minimal pairs without making the respective stories too long or repetitive are scramble storyboards, for example 'Animal Party' and 'Thank-You Notes' by Patrick Littell (Littell 2010a,b). Each storyboard has two versions, one eliciting sentences with agent focus and the other eliciting the same sentences with theme focus. An example is shown in Figure 5.

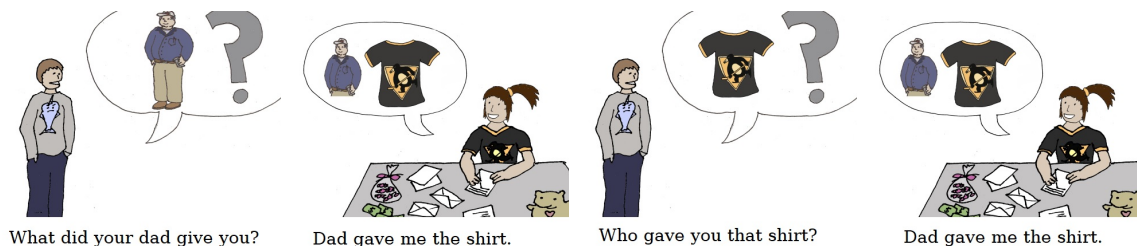


Figure 5: Parts of two variants of the storyboard 'Thank-You Notes' showing minimally different contexts.

A second linguistic problem that may come up is that there may be **properties of a particular test sentence** that do not make it ideal for the storyboard task. This happens with verbally presented contexts, too, but can be quickly resolved there by simply changing the context/sentence pair. Some examples of issues with particular test sentences that I had were (i) test sentences that made it hard to distinguish whether a particular morpheme preceding the focused constituent is the so-called background marker or whether it is the homophonous definite determiner, and (ii) test sentences which caused some discomfort for my language consultants because they were hard to express in Ngamo, e.g. because there is no word for a particular concept in that language. An example of the first kind of issue arose in the ‘Thank-You Notes’ context shown in Figure 5 (Littell 2010b). As shown in (12b), since the masculine definite determiner and the background marker are homophonous and *suba* is masculine, it is not immediately obvious whether the =*i* morpheme following it is a definite determiner or the background marker. In oral elicitation, the object could simply be changed to something feminine, but this is not as easily done when the drawings are already completed.

- (12) a. Her husband said: who gave you that shirt?
 b. Te ta: ono=*i* ... ono suba=*i* ... **bono**.
 3sg.f quot give.1sg=dm give.1sg shirt=dm?/def.det? father.1.sg
 ‘She said: [gave me] ... my father gave me the shirt.’

An example of the second kind of issue was the question of which expression to use for ‘birthday’ (in ‘Thank-You Notes’, Littell 2010b). My language consultants discussed it at length, and in the end they decided to use the paraphrase ‘the day of remembering my birth’. I suspect that in completely natural speech they would have resorted to code-switching and would just have used the English expression, but that they wanted to use ‘proper’ Ngamo expressions in the storyboard. Note that nothing in the story requires that the presents have to be birthday presents, so this particular issue could have been changed without altering the images, but I didn’t think of it at the time.

Both kinds of issues suggest that creating a storyboard or using a pre-existing storyboard should ideally involve a pre-test where potentially problematic parts can be identified and changed. Even after that, the storyboard which is taken to the field should not be seen as finished and unalterable, but as something that might be subject to change.⁷

2.1.2 Creating the images

Other problems may arise with the images. The storyboards did not prove to be as helpful as I thought they would be; in fact, the language consultants ultimately learned the story independently of the pictures because they considered the images difficult to understand. One issue may be that storyboards require a certain comic book literacy (e.g., understanding speech and thought bubbles, see also Bochnak and Matthewson 2020:271 for discussion). Another issue may be that we as linguists usually aren’t taught any techniques for how to make our storyboard drawings more understandable. A third issue might lie in the length and complexity of the stories. For example, in the storyboards

⁷ The option of changing other people’s storyboards depends on how they are licensed. The storyboards I used which were not my own were licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Canada License, meaning that I would have been free to change the images and the storyline, as long as I make clear what the original source is.

involving focus elicitation, researchers often take care to already introduce a set of focus alternatives in the images, as in the images in Figure 6 from ‘Thank-You Notes’ (Littell 2010b) and ‘The Generous Friend’. These different individuals and/or objects are potentially hard to identify when they come up later in the story, since there are many of them.

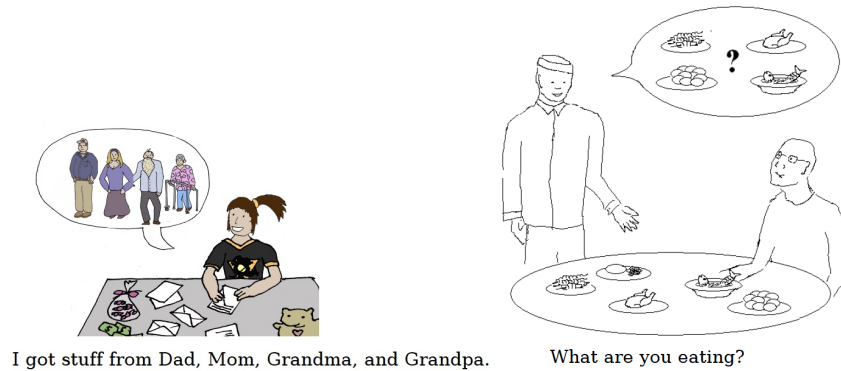


Figure 6: Images from ‘Thank-You Notes’ (left) and ‘The Generous Friend’ (right)

Another context where this issue arose was with the storyboard ‘On the Lam’ (TFS Working Group 2011b). As can be seen in the images in Figure 7, the couple and the police officers — and therefore crucially the interpretation of the modal as root vs. epistemic — are essentially distinguished only by the difference in clothing. For this reason, one of my language consultants had a hard time differentiating between them.

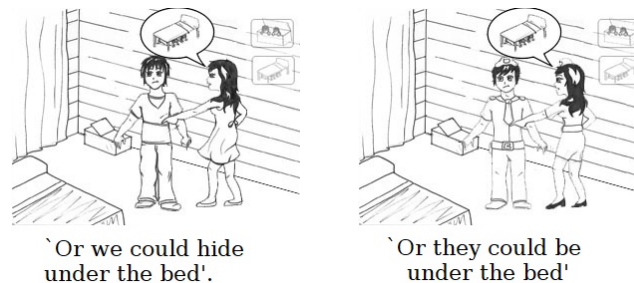


Figure 7: Images from the storyboard ‘On the Lam’

One thing that one can already consider when drawing the images is to make all relevant individuals and objects occurring in the story as different as possible, especially if they are introduced in a group, as in the images in Figure 6. For example, adding different colours and/or patterns to my storyboard ‘The Generous Friend’ would have potentially helped to keep individuals and items apart and remember them better.

A final question which worried me, though my language consultants did not express any discomfort about this, was whether the stories may be deemed inappropriate, e.g. short clothing (‘On the Lam’), or a wife tricking her lazy husband into cooking and cleaning (‘Bake-Off’).⁸ Again this

⁸ See also Bochnak and Matthewson (2020:271), who discuss ethnicity, clothing, objects, flora and fauna as possible things to consider changing in a storyboard, and Empson et al. (2021) for an example of fieldwork using two culturally appropriate variants of the same storyboard in two different fieldwork situations.

is something that I could have considered and changed beforehand.

2.2 What to take into account during elicitation

As already noted above, the storyboard task is assumed to involve three stages: the first stage where the language consultants get acquainted with the story (usually by hearing it several times in the contact language), the second one where they are recorded telling their version of the story, and the third stage involving post-hoc elicitation of different variants of the test sentences. I believe now that one very important source of the issues I had is that I underestimated the importance of the first stage.

I elicited the six stories on several days, discussing and recording about two stories each afternoon. I had planned for both language consultants to be present for the initial part where they get acquainted with the story, but not necessarily during the recording of the respective other person's story. Finding the task difficult, they asked, however, to be present during each other's recording session. After hearing my English version several times, they went through the storyboard by themselves and discussed how they would tell the story in Ngamo, occasionally asking me questions about the story. One speaker was quicker to learn the stories than the other, and usually recorded his story first, and then helped and corrected the other speaker during his recording(s). The fact that — in contrast to the usual elicitation sessions — the two speakers were both present was beneficial because it made them feel more at ease with the task and ensured that, even though the circumstances were not ideal, as discussed above, my language consultants understood the stories well.

2.2.1 Have a meta-discussion

Some of the issues discussed above (e.g., with recognizing the items or people in the image, and with finding the right words to express a foreign concept) were raised by my language consultants. However, I believe that as linguists we should deliberately address these issues ourselves and make time for them in our elicitation plan. Before recording, it is common practice to discuss the story so that every aspect of it is clear to the language consultants. This session could also be used to explicitly discuss with the language consultants whether there is anything in the story or the images which should be changed in order to (i) make them more culturally appropriate and (ii) easier to remember and re-tell. This involves asking the language consultants to already think about how they would tell the story to see whether there are any translation issues. In my case, it would have been a good idea to explicitly point out that it does not matter for my purposes if the story contains words borrowed from other languages / code-switching. Discussing possible translations (perhaps with only one speaker) might also help the linguist determine whether there are any confounding issues with the relevant test sentences. Perhaps the plan should already involve doing the recording on another day, so that it is even clearer that the feedback is valuable and should not be rushed, and so that the linguist has time to change the storyboard.

This session should also involve a preparatory discussion about how the recordings will take place, and the linguist should make abundantly clear to the language consultants that they are free to discontinue the recording or propose changes if they feel uncomfortable.

2.2.2 Do not prescribe anything

One big mistake that I made when telling the stories and listening to the language consultants' discussion of the stories is that I reminded them, on two occasions, to keep closer to the English original. In the stories involving *wh*-questions and answers, I asked them whether they could provide full sentences as answers — just like in the original story — instead of the more natural short answers. For example, in the exchange shown in Figure 8, it would be more natural to simply answer “my dad”, but the original story contains the full answer “Dad gave me the shirt”.

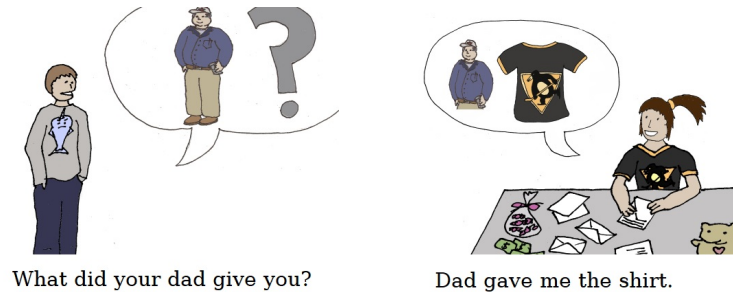


Figure 8: Part of the storyboard ‘Thank-you Notes’

This is probably also the reason why the speaker corrected himself in (12), repeated here as (13): it seems as though he was about to drop the direct object, but then remembered to form a full sentence.

- (13) a. Her husband said: who gave you that shirt?
 b. Te ta: ono=i ... ono sufa=i ... **bono.**
 3sg.f quot give.1sg=bm give.1sg shirt=bm?/def.det? father.1.sg
 ‘She said: [gave me] ... my father gave me the shirt.’

The second occasion concerned a test sentence in my storyboard ‘Lakka and the Ghosts’ (Grubic 2014). Part of this story was created to test whether surprise/noteworthiness can lead to an emphasis similar to focus/background marking (other parts tested for focus in corrections and *verum focus*). In the story, a girl called Lakka keeps seeing ghosts, and reports this to her father, see e.g. Figure 9. Importantly, the contexts are so-called ‘wide-focus’ contexts, i.e. focus on the whole sentence is expected, but a part of the sentence (the subject, direct object, and indirect object, respectively, in the three test sentences) is surprising. This storyboard was particularly interesting to me from a methodological point of view, because I hypothesized that storyboards might be better suited to elicit phenomena that are — in a sense — linked to emotions that the speaker has, such as Lakka’s anxiety in ‘Lakka and the Ghosts’. However, the first of these test sentences, shown in the first image of Figure 9, was always changed from ‘A ghost is hiding behind the tree’ to ‘There is a ghost behind the tree’. This was the second occasion where I interfered in order to correct the story.

Both of these corrections were of course entirely unnecessary because the test sentences that I wanted to learn about could have easily been elicited during a post-hoc elicitation session. In addition, I believe that these corrections were especially harmful because they caused a pressure to generally stick close to the original story, which made the task more stressful and caused the language consultants to tell very similar stories with not much inter-speaker variation, and — in my opinion — not entirely natural speech.

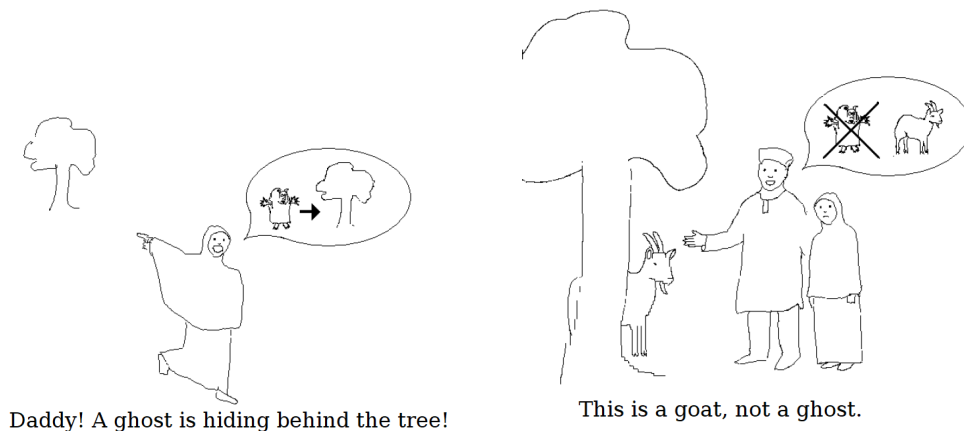


Figure 9: Part of the storyboard ‘Lakka and the Ghosts’

2.2.3 Include a training phase

I believe that more training and getting used to the task would have been helpful here, for myself as well as for the speakers.

Essentially every linguistic task involves, on the part of the language consultant, the question I already mentioned above: how strict and how lenient to be with certain aspects of the task. I wasn’t very helpful with this question because I myself didn’t have a very clear idea what the hard and soft constraints of this task are. In particular, it wasn’t clear to me how much the Ngamo variant of the story can differ from the English original (answer: almost everything can be changed, if necessary!), and how much the sentences relevant for my fieldwork goals (the “test sentences”) produced in the story can differ from what my range of expectations for these sentences were (answer: the form can differ, but the context and content should be relatively close). It should have been communicated to the language consultants that changes can be made until they feel comfortable with the story, and that it doesn’t matter if they tell a slightly different version during the recording. I believe that more influence over the content of the story would have helped my language consultants to feel better about the task. In fact, after I decided to stop recording, they offered their own story to record (‘The Hunter and the Farmer’)⁹, which we then recorded in a recording session that was markedly more fun than the previous recording sessions.

2.3 Concluding thoughts: storyboards vs. verbally presented contexts

I do not believe that the storyboard task is generally preferable to semantic judgments of single sentences with a verbally described context. I do agree that there are phenomena where storyboards are preferable, and perhaps, as I said above, topics like contrast and surprise/noteworthiness may best be elicited using storyboards. However, almost all of the data that I was interested in involved very simple contexts, where semantic judgments worked really well. I also perceived the semantic judgment task to be faster to create, since no additional narratives and images needed to be created. Most importantly, I would like to stress again that the flexibility and adaptability of the semantic

⁹ This story was not targeted towards eliciting the kind of contexts I was after, though it does contain a question/answer sequence.

judgment task was really beneficial to my work. The option of just creating new context/sentence pairs on the spot in order to explore a new hypothesis or in reaction to a consultant’s comment was very enlightening for me, and — I believe — also interesting for my language consultants. The storyboard task, in contrast, does not seem to be as flexible, even if the considerations discussed in this paper are taken into account.

In addition, I don’t agree with Louie (2015) that using narratives necessarily prevents repetitiveness and makes the research topic less transparent to the language consultants. Unfortunately, my research topic was inherently very repetitive. Even if I had managed, using a targeted storyboard or narrative, to elicit several repetitions of an expression under consideration, I would have had to ask for judgments on very many variants of this test sentence in the post-hoc elicitation session. To illustrate: some of my elicitation on focus-sensitive particles involved checking which constituents these particles can associate with from which position. For example, (14) involved checking ten minimally different test sentences in the same context, for each position and variant (*yak* vs. *yak’i*) of the exclusive particle (here, only the acceptable variants are listed).¹⁰ In addition, the different possible positions for *yak(’i)* were tested for two further ways to express the focus/background distinction (with morphological marking vs. morphological marking and movement).

- (14) (Kule wanted to build a house and a granary last year, but he didn’t.)
 (Yak) Kule (yak) salko (yak) **bano** (yak’i) mano (yak’i).
 only Kule only build.pfv only house only last.year only
 ‘Kule only built a house last year.’

This was repeated for all possible associates of *yak(’i)*: subject focus, verb focus, vP focus and adjunct focus. Even if I had managed to elicit one or two variants for each associate using a storyboard, the subsequent elicitation session to check all thirty or so variants would have been very repetitive. For my research topic, it seems to me that the only way to reduce the repetitiveness and make the research question less transparent to the language consultants is to split this up into different elicitation sessions, with other material in between.

3 Summary/Recommendations

In this paper I have discussed my fieldwork experience with acceptability judgments of single sentences in a verbally presented context (“semantic acceptability judgment tasks”) and the picture-aided elicitation of targeted narratives (“storyboard tasks”). I described what these elicitation sessions typically looked like, and discussed some problems I faced with the storyboard task, mainly in the form of recommendations.

The questions I have proposed to keep in mind when creating or adapting a storyboard are: (i) is the story short and simple? (ii) does the storyboard allow for elicitation of minimal pairs with the (exact) same test sentence but minimally differing contexts (if desired)? (iii) do the test sentences potentially contain material that may lead to the data not being as helpful as previously thought? (iv)

¹⁰ Whereas *yak* and *yak’i* are listed as different lexemes with slightly different meanings in the Ngamo dictionary (Schuh et al. 2009), the results of my elicitation suggest that they are acceptable in the same contexts, but *yak’i* is the form used when the particle follows its associate, whereas *yak* is used when the particle precedes its associate.

are all aspects of the story, the images, and the visual storytelling culturally appropriate? (v) are the individuals and objects depicted as clearly differentiable as possible?

Concerning questions (i)–(ii), the idea of a ‘scramble storyboard’ (e.g. Patrick Littell’s ‘Animal Party’ and ‘Thank-You Notes’, Littell 2010a,b), where several short variants of a story are used to elicit minimal pairs, seems very promising.

Concerning questions (iii)–(v), I suggested that the linguist should ideally already know how the test sentences are likely to be translated (perhaps with the help of a native speaker assistant), and additionally plan to have some time during the elicitation sessions to change the storyboard to incorporate the comments of the language consultants.

The proposals concerning how to implement the task in fieldwork settings were, first, that the task should be spread out over several sessions, e.g. (i) a pre-session to discuss the stories in order to figure out whether there may be a problem, (ii) a session for telling and recording the story, and (iii) post-hoc elicitation session(s). At every stage there should (as always) also be discussion about the task per se, and whether there is anything that should be changed in order to make the language consultants more comfortable. Second, I suggested that a form of training would be helpful, and that one should try to communicate with the speakers about how close to the original story their variant of the story should be.

Last but not least — and I failed to take this into consideration in my own storyboards — ideally storyboards should be created with re-usability in mind. There should be more exchange about what factors make a story and storyboard easy to re-use, cross-linguistically.

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