SESSION: Interviewing Techniques and Audio Digitization

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DATE: Monday, 9/14, 11:00am-5:00pm

Audio Digitization - Morning
- We are mostly going to be working with born digital files for now, but will look at some analog materials and digitization later
- All the analog, legacy materials in your collections are probably going to be in the digital domain (ie: digitized) later
- Most workshop participants are dealing with some analog materials, and most do in-house digitization (and have one or two staff)

Planning and preparing for oral history projects
- Oral histories are interestingly often produced through libraries and library centers
- There is a recent trend where cultural and informational repositories are becoming content creators (or at least supporters of content creation)

Tips and Techniques for Oral Histories
- These are general guidelines that will need to be tailored for your use, not a one-size-fits-all solution
- Each community will have its own unique cultural protocols that may affect whom you can interview about what topics
  - Important to be aware of this in your community
- 3 vital guidelines: Preparation, Preparation, Preparation
  - Research your topic and participants
  - Check your equipment
  - Prepare your topics for interviewing
- Oral history interviews are not about seeking answers to questions, but listening to people and learning about and from them and their stories
- Always seeking to find out Who, What, Where, When, How
• Mostly after stories, narratives about people’s experiences, not so much fact checking
• Especially for language revitalization, don’t interrupt the flow of the narrative, you want to capture the story and content and context
  o If the answer seems off-topic, wait. Your informer may be telling you a story with a specific purpose…
  o Can consider gentle techniques to ‘nudge’ back on topic
• As documenters, we also need to think about how to make the recordings accessible
  o What are the aesthetics of a “good” recording?
    ▪ Clear, good volume, minimal background noise, etc
• What’s a soundbite?
  o Short, pithy excerpt that captures some tidbit of knowledge
• Generally, when first contacting a potential informer, identify yourself, the project, and the purpose of the project
• Clarity and transparency of purpose is paramount
  o Let them know what will happen with that recording, intended future uses
  o Never obscure the purposes of your work
• When recording, don’t pretend to know more or less than you do
  o Acting dumb or faking knowledge is bad practice, and disingenuous to your informers
  o Don’t seek to ask questions that will just confirm your thoughts
• Never record secrets
  o Many historical archives contain material that we now know to be recorded unethically, especially sacred Native cultural materials
  o Often recorded because some researcher felt they were too valuable to not record
  o As a documenter, be careful about making promises about confidentiality
• You are ethically bound, to the people you’re recording, but also to allow and support future researchers and documenters

Technical Setup

• Finding a location, people often want to record in-situ
  o Eg: pow-wow, dance, singing event
  o Fine for ethnographic work,
  o But terrible for sustainable oral history or documentary recordings
  o Often any interviews from events will not be useable
  o Sometimes you have to do interviews in the field, but try not to

• At the start of the recording collect some metadata
  o State date and place of interview
  o State people present (including observers in the room), and what you’re doing
  o State possible interview topics, and expected length
  o Can also request a statement of permission of interviewees
  o One easy way to embed metadata into your audio files!
• Avoid starting and stopping your recordings
  o It’s annoying to work with later
  o You might forget to restart it
  o Turn off your equipment only when someone asks you explicitly turn it off
  o If you suspect the interview is covering restricted ground, either redirect interview, or pause the interview to clarify and inform the informer - they may choose to continue or not

• Listen carefully
  o Keep your questions short, avoid multi-part questions
  o Avoid unclear and leading questions
  o You will get complicated, multi-part answers, but don’t encourage them with your question formatting

• Best case is when you can get follow-up interviews to expand on, but that is very hard
  o Older folks with poor health
  o You have limited resources and time

• Avoid yes/no questions
  o There is no story there!
  o Kills the interviewing mood
  o But they can be effective if used to survey, collect factual data, confirm information

• Avoid leading questions that suggest you want a specific answer

• Don’t interrupt your informants
  o Especially with elders
  o May get good stories and information that you had no idea existed
  o You’re giving questions designed to encourage reflection, let them go with it

• How to get more information if someone seems reluctant?
  o Follow-up questions
    ▪ Can you tell me more about that?
    ▪ What do you call that?
    ▪ Is there a term for that?
    ▪ How do you do that?
    ▪ Are there different ways of doing/naming that?
  o Try to extrapolate to identify what might be interesting
Consider your listening audience
  o Try to give clues so you can situate the answers
    ▪ eg: “I caught a fish that big!” “You mean... like 24”?
    ▪ eg: “The widget was this high.” “That looks like 3 feet?”
  o If using physical prompts (eg: photos, maps), describe them while showing

Length
  o 1-2 hrs is usually comfortable for most interviewees
  o But try to identify an acceptable time commitment in your pre-interview discussions
  o Partly to be polite, partly to reduce interruptions, noise, etc…
    ▪ eg: if you know they have kids, maybe don’t schedule at 4pm

Release form
  o In pre-interview discussion, always mention the purpose and access expectations, and tell them that you will need their permission
  o What are your community protocols?
  o Consider signing consent forms after the recording, since you might not know what you’re going to talk about ahead of time
    ▪ But be careful, don’t forget to do it
    ▪ You can always redact interviews later, and manually edit a consent form if needed.

At the AFC, the goal is to make a better, more diverse, public record
  o The AFC avoids making restricted, sensitive recordings that contain a lot of personally identifiable information

Some circumstances may be more likely to imply consent
  o eg: being interviewed for on-air radio broadcast

Post-interview
  o Review the recording, ideally the same day you recorded
  o Call in and seek follow-up as needed

Hands-on Digital Recording Session - Afternoon

  Stable microphone mount is important
  External microphone is better than one built into the recording
    o You don’t want to have to physically hold it in someone’s face
    o Lets you set up a comfortable position for your informer, don’t have to stand too close to them
    o Many recorders have their controls right on the recorder, nice to keep that close to you
• Find power button and turn on device (kind of hard to find on the Tascams)

• Expect to run off battery power in the field!
  o There is usually a charger included, but you might not have access to power
  o A power cord also restricts you to one location
  o Bring backup batteries

• These devices record on flash/SD cards (these are 16 GB)
  o Can either use an external card reader, or the built-in output via USB cable to move to your computer

• Settings
  o Optimal format: wav
  o Optimal settings: 96khz, 24bit
    ▪ Menu > Record Setting
  o Today, using one mic, set recording to mono
    ▪ Will be recorded on one channel, that is then played back through all outputs
    ▪ Menu > Input Setting

• Connect microphone output into left/mono port on recorder
  o Set input toggle setting on front to XLR

• Hit Record once to enter standby mode (red button will flash), and you can then monitor incoming audio for levels
  o Hit Record again to record (red button will be solid)

• Levels
  o Test levels, adjust as needed
  o Ideal dB levels maybe -20/24 dB, but this varies quite a bit
  o Minimize spikes, peaks, pops
  o Can adjust microphone placement and orientation, or adjust incoming levels directly on the recorder

Activity
• Take 5 minutes interviewing each other about “first day on the job”, we’ll look at the results later

Importing audio files into Audacity
• Plug recorder in via included USB cable
• Copy file to desktop
  ▪ Displayed size and filetype are basic technical metadata
  ▪ Copy file to desktop because we don’t want to work on the original (potential master) at this point
- Eject recorder and shut off/put away
- Audacity, File > Open (then find your wav file)
  - (Ignore standard warning)
- Now your files appear in Audacity!
  - Should be able to play back and listen, and select start of playback

**Working more in Audacity**
- Can use mouse cursor to select start of playback point in file
- File > Export Audio
  - Export as a standard wav file
  - Can rename the file here, using your established naming system….
  - Lets you edit metadata again before export
- Lots of editing options…
  - SAVE A LOT, and don’t edit your original file!
  - You can undo mistakes

Ask Doug Boyd is a great resource [http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/about/authors/boyd/](http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/about/authors/boyd/)

**Cassette Digitization**
- We’re doing digitization for access, very pragmatic, useful files, but not necessarily best archival practice
- All about getting materials back in use, back to the community
- Need to know the content of your materials to do a proper inventory
- BUT, some cassettes may just be too fragile to digitize safely without damaging, or you may only get one shot to digitize

**Today**
- Marantz tape deck, older iMac
- RCA out through stereo via ¼” adaptor to computer and Audacity
  - But other, newer iMac has no stereo line in, and most computers don’t
- Normally need an Analog to Digital (A/D) converter
  - today using the built-in hardware on the mac
  - But probably not as reliable and not as good quality for preservation
- Pre-roll record time in Audacity, get some silence at the start
- Always going to have some degree of tape noise, just the way it is
- End with a bit more silence after the tape runs out
- Using a mixer in between deck and computer may introduce some additional noise
- Try out devices before using, check with local departments with media studies, use your professional relations, maybe local radio/TV stations
- Minimize all interference
  - Maybe have a non-networked computer to digitize on
  - Try to have a digitization-dedicated computer, don’t mix with editing, photo work, office work, etc…. 
BWF MetaEdit
- Lets you embed metadata right in the file for transportation
- Lets you embed an MD5 hash check which helps confirms the integrity of a file
- Sidenote: Sourceforge is a great resource

http://audacityteam.org/
http://bwfmetaedit.sourceforge.net/

DATE: Tuesday, 9/15, 11:00am-5:00pm

2 things today - how to generate collections, conduct oral histories
More than just repositories - hub of cultural activities, language revitalization
How can Guha and John help manage your collection - from general to technical questions

Introductions
Recordings from elders, oral histories - training interviewers, u-matic, stories, building new cultural center with elder documentation

Time, personnel, equipment
-with AV materials, you don’t have time to wait

Audio Technology
Recording equipment
- Get a sturdy case
  o Keep protected from environmental conditions
In the kit:
- Microphone
- Headphones
- AC adapter
- plug for DL to computer
- Recorder
- Tascam recorders - instruction paper
  o Use headphone - make sure you are getting the audio onto the recorder, pick up extra noise
    ▪ Best recording equipment are your ears/brain - need to hear what the mic is picking up
External Microphone - optional, but needed for high quality!
- Most important thing in toolkit
- Flexibility, can get closer to your subject
- Pick up less extra noise
- Ideal - 1 for interviewer, 1 for interviewee
  - Priority is to record the interviewee - make them the main area of focus

Another option Supernote
- mp3
- $10

You are the ears for people in the room, listening to your recording

Preservation vs. Access
- Preservation
  - 96 kilohertz
  - 24 bit file
  - broadcast wav
  - aiff
- Access
  - Below the above standards
  - mp3
  - Think about cross-platform functionality
- Grant funding - require sustainable formats

Recorder

Step A
- Turn on

Step B
- Check settings
- Bring up menu to check
  - input setting - set to mono (or stereo if you have 2)
  - record setting (bit depth and sample rate) - files you will be recording make sure it is 96kh, 24bit file
  - 2gb size of file (will chunk into files of 2gb each)
- Be consistent with these settings/recordings
- Make sure input is in the right position
Step C

**Think about what your end use will be - using preservation quality material will let you do more things**

Mono vs stereo
depends on situation, when you are able to isolate and have cleaner audio, it can be better

Think about scale for a/v - in terms of standards and storage - must know where materials will be.

What is your relationship with your IT department?

What about cloud storage?
  - Can work
  - 3 sets of backup, could be 3rd
  - Terms of Service - must be conscious of what you are dealing with

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/

Interviewing:
- keep external noise to a minimum
- handling noise - loud!
- separate mic is useful

Volume control for input - on side
  - Two channels

Interview each other about “first day on the job”
- stories, narrative, long passages of answers
- can have a script, but ask follow up questions

Audacity:
- Use to edit your audio files
- Audacity can open most formats

Steps:
Open your recorder storage
Copy to desktop
Eject storage

Open the file in Audacity
Can zoom into and out of your track to see better, more detail
Can splice two tracks together

Almost like a word document, can copy and paste

Interviewing
- Interviewer - Assent without saying “mmhmm”, “yeah”
- Careful listening
- Ask questions about topics
- Can have reluctant interviewees
- Make people comfortable - lapel mic, mic on recorder

Recording
- Difference in volume level - microphone placing, levels
- Noise rustle on microphone
- Never record secretly
- Try to control the situation as best you can
- Do a visit before the actual interview - to say hello and prep everyone, but also to scope out the situation.
- Think about length of recording - make sure you are respectful
- Make sure you carve out 1 or 2 hours
- Do multi-interviews, more than one part in a series
  - If you do, make an appointment, follow up!
- End of the interview - say thank you!
- Add metadata, who what where when - have your little pre-interview introduction and conclusion - be consistent
- Make sure interviewee knows your intent
- Could send questions or topics beforehand - gather stories, not exactly perfect answers
- Be respectful to your interviewees and organization
- Make sure to draw out a fuller story

Export Preservation Master
Save as type>other uncompressed files
Select WAV
Select unsigned 24bit WAV
How to save as a 24bit WAV

Access Copy
Change sample rate from 96000
To 44100
Export wav (choose 16bit option)
File>export

Can add in descriptive metadata
**BWF Meta Edit**
Designed by FADGI
Works with BWF Wav file
Exports out to XML schema, or CSV - which you can put in your cataloging system

Jon enters metadata in Audacity - a few descriptive fields

Open in BWF MetaEdit
Shows technical, descriptive metadata
-usually don’t show all the information in catalog, more for managers

Core and Tech
Can mouse over fields and see definition
Useful in Quality Assurance - student work, back from vendor

Can fill in fields from BWF MetaEdit

PBCore - schema for describing A/V materials

Can save as BWF (embedded metadata), or export as CSV or XML

**Good, Better, Best of Audio capture**
- Good (ish) - Directly
- Better - Good quality sound card in your computer with a plugin
- Best - USB Pre, Edirol

Or, outsource!

**Digitizing audio in Audacity**
Don’t want to plug it in straight into your machine, it will work, but will be a low quality file
Make sure recording levels are right - don’t let the sound level spike too loud or get too quiet

Start recording (press the record button)
Then press the play button
Leave a little blank end time
Then press stop

Save your file - export at WAV, 96kh, 24bit

Try to get best quality first, then make derivatives

**Resource** - Doug Boyd’s Oral History in the Digital Age
“Ask Doug”
Questions to get you the equipment that is the right one for you (cost, quality)
Question on creating access copies
- can batch convert files
- think about storage space, digital preservation
- who will be using the material - should you digitize all at once, on demand?

VHS and DVDs (around 350)
- DVDs not archival - optical media carrier
- format not usable
- make disc image, then transform