



Atlas of the Languages of Iran (ALI)

Collecting linguistic data: Video and audio recording of oral texts

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This document provides a guide to help prepare you for video and audio recording of oral texts in the framework of *Atlas of the Languages of Iran (ALI)*.

It's important to have prior training and experience in video and audio recording as part of your language documentation training. Good training courses are offered from time to time by ELDP (Endangered Language Documentation Program) in the UK, and occasionally elsewhere. Some important readings include the articles in Bower (2008), Austin & Sallabank (2011) and Chelliah & de Reuse (2011).

Here, we bring together some helpful tips to keep in mind for recording. These relate to:

- the equipment needed for fieldwork
- choosing speakers to record texts with
- different text types
- preparing for recording
- set-up and recording
- things to take care of after recording

Note that the instructions here are specifically intended for the purpose of linguistic data collection for ALI. This is not a comprehensive document on video and audio recordings for all types of language documentation fieldwork.

1. Equipment:

- 1 full HD or 4K video camera
- 1 external microphone for optimal audio quality along with the video recording (e.g., Beyer shotgun microphone)
- 1 high-quality cable (about 3 meters long) to connect external microphone to camera
- 1 high-quality sound recorder (e.g., Olympus LS-14)
- 1 phone capable of high-quality sound recording
- 3 tripods: 1 for camera, 1 for microphone, 1 for sound recorder or phone
- At least 3 spare USB flash drives with 64G free storage each
- A high capacity external hard drive
- Spare rechargeable batteries for camera
- Spare AAA (or other relevant) size for sound recorder and microphone
- 1 multi-function power bar (“multiplug A”) for recharging several devices at once
- 1 laptop computer to transfer the data to after every recording session

2. Choosing speakers

- In each community the situation is unique, but over the course of your research you should make an effort to record both women and men
- Speakers with mastery of the language form that you are looking for: generally, the language of older speakers is less influenced by Persian, and this is good for studying typological diversity
- Able to speak both clearly (with teeth) and audibly (loud enough for recording)
- Comfortable sitting in front of a video camera
- Be sensitive to cultural and personal hesitations with being video-recorded

3. Text Types

Collect video from at least one of each of the following text genres:

- Folktales and legends
- Songs and poetry (e.g., wedding songs; funeral songs; work songs, such as songs sung while fishing or churning butter; love poetry; lullabies; religious songs in local language; etc.)
- Procedural texts (e.g.: how to make a carpet; how to make yoghurt, or bread; etc.)
- You can collect texts of other genres as well

4. Before the recording

- Spend as much time as it takes to find a quiet place for recording
- There should be no noise from people or mechanical sources (e.g., refrigerator, air conditioner, traffic) in the surrounding environment: the microphone is sensitive and will capture all of these distracting sounds

- Avoid places with echo: large, empty rooms at universities and workplaces are not suitable
- Make sure all batteries are fully charged for all devices, and ensure easy access to the additional fully-charged batteries in case the camera runs out of charge
- Be aware of the time period your battery will last
- Make sure the external microphone is in the right jack in the camera
- Make sure your external microphone power switch is on
- Make sure the microphone battery has enough power
- When you are video recording, it is sufficient to use one sound recorder in addition to the video recording, as long as the audio for the video recording is of good quality
- Make sure you have an ample hard drive space on your laptop and external hard drive – high quality videos take a lot of storage space
- Be ready to give the speaker a bit of time before recording to become comfortable and confident with (for example) a small chat, drinking a cup of tea or coffee, or eating a small piece of fruit
- Test the quality of the video and audio recording before each session, with extra care if there is background noise: record a short clip of about 30 seconds and listen to it with headphones before making the full recordings

5. Set-up and recording

It is essential to aim for the best possible video quality. However, the conditions for recordings are never perfect. Therefore, you should always seek to make the most of any opportunity. Here are some things to consider during set-up:

- There should be enough light in the room
- Camera should be 2 to 3 meters from the speaker, depending on how they fit the frame
- The sound recorder should be set up in front of the speaker, 50 cm from the mouth of the speaker
- Make sure the external microphone is in the right jack in the camera
- Make sure the external microphone power switch is on
- Positioning of the external microphone, 1.5 to 2 meters from the speaker, is important!
- The camera should focus on the face of the speaker, with mouth and lips clearly visible; the speaker should be in the middle of the frame with room to show the speaker's hands when they are describing something; if possible, try not to include the microphone or the sound recorder within the frame
- Try not to use digital zoom option, since it will decrease quality
- It is usually best to record an individual speaker; however, you can record several speakers if they are all clearly visible in the frame, and audible
- As with audio recordings, all video recordings should start with the metadata: date and time, researcher name, research location, speaker name (if they have asked you to include it) and language
- Again, keep in mind that texts shared by speakers who are less influenced by Persian are good for studying typological diversity

- A remote control of the camera is highly recommended to avoid distracting the speaker during narrative talks
- If you have not done this during the questionnaire interview sections, be absolutely certain to read the permission text document on the recording, and receive the speaker's permission on the recording, before you record any oral texts

6. After the recording

- Transfer the data immediately to two different places after each session: one on the laptop, and the other on an external USB flash drive as a backup
- Make sure the camera and the auxiliary devices are turned off so you won't waste the battery
- Re-pack all things in the same order each time
- Re-charge the batteries, if needed