General Instructions for Eliciting and Recording Language Samples

1. Prepare the room and check all equipment ahead of time. You may use any audio or video equipment to record the sample. In general, digital is better than analog because it offers more options for controlling the transcription playback and has improved sound quality. If using tapes, mono is preferable over stereo, and short tapes are usually denser than long play tapes.

2. Prepare the client prior to turning on the recorder. Children may be uncomfortable talking with adults one to one, and speakers of all ages may be uncomfortable talking into a recorder. Provide the speaker with information about the process and why you are going to collect the language sample. Explain who will listen to the recording and what will happen to it when you are finished. For elementary or preschool children, spend time talking about the equipment and how it works. Explain why you are using a recorder (so I can remember when you are gone; because I can't write as fast as you can talk; I want to listen to you and I can't write when I listen carefully).

3. Turn on the recorder. State the current date, client’s name or identifier, other necessary and important demographic information (e.g., gender, birth date), location, and the sampling context. Play it back right away to check the recording.

4. When the client is ready to begin, turn on the recorder and repeat the verbal instructions.

5. If eliciting multiple samples, turn off the recorder after each sample, prepare the client for the next sample, and turn the recorder on when the client is ready.

If you suspect that the language sample will be difficult to later transcribe due to the client’s speech patterns or frequent movements away from the microphone, try to “gloss” the client’s speech. Glossing is the exact and immediate repetition, by the examiner, of the client’s speech.

The length of the language sample depends on the speaker and the sampling context. For example, if you are eliciting a narrative where the client retells a specific story, the language sample ends when the client finishes retelling the story. When eliciting an open-ended language sample, e.g., conversation, you should decide, in advance, the amount of time you will spend. Use a watch, clock, or timer to guide you. Generally speaking, younger typical children will produce approximately 50 utterances during a 5-minute conversation. Older typical children will produce about 70 utterances during the same about of time. Children with language production problems will usually require more time.

For optimal performance, provide instructions to the client using the same language and dialect that you want the client to use for the elicitation. When collecting a language sample from a client speaking Spanish, for example, give all instructions in Spanish. However, if your goal is to obtain a language sample of the client’s standard English production, then instruct the client using standard English.