5. LECTURE FIVE – Data collection tools: Second language data elicitation

Second language data elicitation refers to the process of gathering information about learners' use of the target language and explicit and implicit knowledge about its structure. The methods used to collect such data are dictated by the research question and the aspects of language being studied.

5.1. Explicit vs. implicit second/ foreign language knowledge

I.   **Explicit language knowledge** refers to the conscious awareness of linguistic structures and rules that the language learner access through controlled cognitive processing.

Example: Actively remembering regular and irregular verbs when using past tense.

Data collection tools that tap into learners' explicit knowledge include:

- **Introspection**: the examination of learners' mental processes through the use of verbal reports (oral, written) where learners are asked to explain a linguistic structure.
- **Think aloud activities** where learners are asked to justify the use of particular linguistic structures when they use them (conscious processes during language use).
- **Stimulated recalls** where a linguistic structure is used and learners are then asked to identify it.

II.   **Implicit language knowledge** refers to the intuitive awareness of linguistic structures and rules that the language learner can access unconsciously during fluent/ accurate language use in communication.

Example: Using past tense without conscious awareness of regular and irregular verbs.

Acceptability judgment tasks, also called acceptability rating tasks, are a common method in empirical linguistics to gather data about learners' implicit knowledge of language structure. Such activities often consist of a list of sentences presented to learners who indicate the extent to which they are _correct/ acceptable_ or _incorrect/ inacceptable_.

Example: Indicate whether the following sentences are correct or incorrect.

	Implicit knowledge		Explicit knowledge
SENTENCE	CORRECT	INCORRECT	_Rule_
1. Every girl must bring their own lunch.		✓	_Pronoun error (her)_
2. Its a cold day for October.		✓	_Apostrophe Usage_

N.B. _When collecting data about both implicit and explicit knowledge, the researcher can add a section eliciting learners' conscious knowledge about the linguistic structure or rule._

5.2. Types of elicited second language production

When eliciting second language data, researchers need to take into consideration two types of production, namely: 1) _spontaneous production_ and 2) _controlled production_.

I.   **Eliciting spontaneous second language production**

Spontaneous second language production refers to output that takes place naturally without preparation. This type of production is often elicited when assessing learners' communicative competence (learners' ability to convey a message), level of vocabulary (vocabulary inventory), or grammatical accuracy (the use of grammar). To elicit spontaneous production, the researcher should stimulate language learners through:

a) Responses to questions (E.g. tell me what you did yesterday/ why did you choose to study English?).
b) Describing a sequence of pictures.
c) Narrating a silent film.
d) Storytelling.

II.   Eliciting controlled second language production

Controlled second language production is output that is already prepared (either by the participant or the researcher). In second language speech research, this type of production is often elicited to assess learners' reading fluency, phonological accuracy, and pronunciation comprehensibility. To elicit controlled speech, researchers mainly use **read-aloud** or **listen and repeat** activities. As for writing, researchers can use **dictation**. This technique can be used to assess participants' translation skills, spelling, punctuation … etc.

5.3. Psycholinguistic research techniques

Psycholinguistics researches how language is represented and processed in the brain. "Second language psycholinguistic research seeks to identify and understand learners' mental processes in real time during their use (production or comprehension) of a second language." (Gass & Mackey, 2007, p. 16). To do that, Psycholinguists use some of the following research techniques:

1. Elicited imitation (EI) is a testing method that usually requires participants to listen to a series of stimulus sentences (or phrases, words, sounds) and then repeat the sentences verbatim (Underhill, 1987). **Elicited imitation** of target language input (orally or via video/ audiotapes) can help the researcher understand how learners process L2 speech and the extent to which they associate it with their L1.

2. Self-paced reading is a task where participants read a passage word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase, pressing a button to get the next word or phrase displayed. The time taken to press the button gives an indication of the processing difficulty at each stage. In reading research, **self-paced reading activities** provide information about the amount of time used to process various parts of a reading text.

3. Eye tracking allows researchers to study the movements of a participant's eyes during a range of activities**. Eye tracking** can be used to investigate the processes involved in reading like speed and comprehension difficulties.

In vocabulary research**, 4. word association (priming experiments)** can help researchers understand the semantic networks that learners have and how those networks come to be when they think about or use different words. In these activities, participants are presented with a word and are asked to provide the first word that comes to mind. For example, if the stimulus word is *Forest*, the associated words can be: trees, wood, green, birds …etc.

5.4. Pragmatics-based research

Second language research in pragmatics deals with both the acquisition and use of L2 knowledge in context. Pragmatics research techniques are used to elicit how learners convey meanings, and what meanings are conveyed, in particular contexts. For example, the researcher can focus on language learners' use of apologies, compliments, refusals, requests and other often culture-dependent functions. Examples of pragmatic research techniques include (and are not limited to):

- Discourse completion tasks.
- Simulated situations in which context can affect the language used (e.g. role plays).
- Interpretation of language by the use of written discourse or videos.

Reference

Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (2007). *Data elicitation for second and foreign language research. Psychology Press*.