Recording Verbal Art Performances with Handheld Equipment

The Preparatory Phase in Africa

Presentation by Henri Aalders for the World Oral Literature Project, Cambridge, 11 December 2010
This is about hand held equipment

The experience obtained by the Voices of Africa

Advantages and disadvantages

How does it affect your project
The voices of Africa Media Foundation has three years experience with the use of mobile phones and pocket video cameras in citizen journalism:

• Much less intrusive than big video camera’s
• Sufficient quality for internet and HD available
• Standard data format (MOV, MP4)
• Sufficient data storage (Two hours or more)
Mobile phones are less intrusive
Present day HD pocket cameras

Pocket video Camera
Quality: HD 1080p video
Time: 10 hours of HD video
Card: SD/SDHC card slot
Storage: Up to 32 GB
Audio: Build in microphone
Extra microphone jack
Storage: Standard formats
Size: Mobile phone
look: Mobile like
Quality dramatically improved
• A mobile telephone is inconspicuous; everybody has a mobile.
• Pocket video cameras should therefore preferably look like a mobile phone.
• The larger the technical equipment, the larger the disturbance.
• Smaller equipment gives small disturbances.
The recording of a Verbal Art Performance

• Video registers a performance in full
• Video registers the kinesics of the performer
• Video can be highly intrusive

• Words are the carrier of content
• Gestures and kinetics complete the message
• Without sound, a verbal art recording is useless.
The different requirements of different objectives

A verbal art recording
• The full and complete recording of a verbal art performance
• Sufficient quality for full scientific analysis

A documentary:
• Studio/theatre quality
• Images carry messages on different levels
• No full registration necessary
The Impact of Filming on the event

A request for special conditions (décor, lighting etc) will influence the negotiations in several ways:

• The setting of the performance is changed (location, audience)
• The character (image) of the event is changed
• The financial compensation goes up
• Music and dancing are can be included in the performance (at a price)
You want to record Verbal art!
This is not a verbal art performance
The effects of the pocket camera

- A less staged performance
- Performer and audience are not dressed up.
- No overacted interactions with the performer

The smaller the intrusion, the more chance that the performance reflects what should be a performance of verbal art without filming

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Factors that affect your project

The local conditions

The consultant, his skills, his reliability

Religion, culture and customs

Your budget

The power structure within the clan

The competition

The storytellers

Political situation

Objectives of the research

The authorities

How to store and where

Guidelines of your sponsor

What to analyze?

What do you want to record?
Managing the uncertainties: The basic steps of the project

The powerstructure within the clan
The authorities
The consultant, skills, reliability
The storytellers

Your budget
The local conditions
Religion, culture and customs

The competition

Preparations → Fieldwork → Analysis → Storage and publication

Political situation
What kind of Verbal art do you want to record?

Guidelines of your sponsor
Objectives of the research
What to analyze?

How to store and where
The inter-relations in the preparatory phase

Objectives

Project objectives:
- Documentary
- Verbal art recording
- Training material

Means:
- Recording devices

People:
- Negotiating party
- Chief
- Language consultant

Local conditions
- Local authorities

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The importance of early decisions

- Project design (extra costs)
  The authorities
  The consultant, skills, reliability

- Operational (basic)
  Your budget
  The local conditions
  Religion, culture and customs

- Operational (time constrained)
  The reward of the efforts
  Outcome
  • Unexpected results
  • New insights
  • Unwanted side effects
  • Useless results

Preparations → Fieldwork → Analysis

The storytellers
Political situation
What kind of Verbal art do you want to record?

Guidelines of your sponsor
Objectives of the research
What to analyze?
Handheld equipment

- LCD screen quality images
- Price (Euro 250-500)
- Easy to edit
- Unobtrusive
- Computer screen size
- Need of Microphone
- One man show

HD Film camera

- Top quality images
- Shown on large screen
- Highly Light sensitive
- Intrusive
- Bulky
- professional editing
- Expensive (Euro 10.000)
- Need of additional technicians
Conclusions

- The preparatory phase is a key success factor
- The preparatory phase is neglected too often
- Do not mix verbal art recording with documentary making
- Verbal art recording requires minimal intrusion - Use mini equipment when possible
- Sound is the most important carrier of verbal art

Outcome for Verbal art recording
- Useless results
- Unwanted side effects
- Unexpected results
- New insights
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