The Cognitive Ecology of Time Keeping

A sample of everyday representations of time

Clock

Digital Clock

Wristwatch

Calendar/Schedule

Paper Calendar
“Best Before” date

Time stamped receipts

Postmark

Kitchen Timer

Microwave Oven

Tea Timer
Egg Timers

Clothes Dryer control

VCR Clock

Coffee Maker

Furnace Control

Interview Technique

Lesson One
Writing Interview Questions

1. Determine what you want to learn.
   What questions do you want to be able to answer?
2. Draft a question.
3. Anticipate the sorts of answers an informant might give.
4. Would those sorts of answers provide useful information about what you want to learn?
5. Go to step 2 and continue until you are sure you have questions that will produce useful data.

What we want to know

- What representations of time exist in the cognitive ecology of time keeping and time management?
- What cognitive processes and cultural practices are required to:
  - Interact with a temporal representation productively (e.g., read a clock or a schedule; make inferences based on that reading)
  - Set up the representation so that the information is useful (e.g., constructing a day planner, setting your VCR clock)
- What cognitive activities do these representations support? Planning, decision making, inference, etc.
  - Do I have time to…?
  - When should I do X?
  - Should I eat this?

What are some good questions that will produce useful answers?

- An exercise for you.

Conducting an interview

- Prepare your questions in advance.
- Use them to organize your activity.
- Make it easy for your informant to tell you what you want to know.
- Be ready to abandon some of your questions if they are shown to be irrelevant.
- Be ready to discover new questions – listen carefully to your informant.

Taking field notes

- Who, what, where, when, how?
- Your description of what you observed.
- Doing two things at once
  - Conducting an interview
  - Recording it in field notes

Writing up your field notes

- Review
  - Re-read and use your memory to fill in details that you did not have time to record.
- Synthesize
  - How do the parts fit together?
- Reflect
  - What did you learn? What can you say now about the cognitive ecology of time keeping that you could not say before?
- Critique
  - How well did your questions work?
  - If you could do the project over again, what would you do differently to produce a better result?
What to turn in on Tuesday Jan 12

1. Your original questions
2. Rough notes that you took during the interview you conducted in class
3. 1-2 page observation about the cognitive ecology of time keeping of the person you interviewed based on the data you collected
4. One paragraph reflection on method: what would have made the interview procedure more effective?

Let’s do interviews about timekeeping

Project 1 in-class activity
January 7, 2010

Main Steps

1. In class today
   1. Get ready
   2. Obtain informed consent
   3. Conduct the interview
2. Between now and next Tuesday
   1. Write up your field notes
   2. Assemble the project materials for turn in

Get ready
• Find a partner
• Roles: Interviewer and Informant
  – Not experimenter and subject
• The correct interviewer mind-set
  – Listen and understand
  – Do not tell your informant what you think/know
  – Do not try to impress your informant with how clever you are
  – Do keep your eye on the ball, Make it easy for the informant to tell you what you need to know.

Obtain informed consent
• “As part of an assignment for a class I am taking, I would like to conduct an interview with you about your keys. I will treat everything you say in confidence, but just to be safe, please do not discuss sensitive topics. I will take notes on our discussion. I will then analyze parts of the interview for the class project. You will not be identified by name in the write up of the project. Do you agree to participate in the study?”
• It is OK to decline the interview.
• It is OK to say, “I would rather not discuss this key.”

Conduct the interview (in 12 minutes)
• Do not record the informant’s name.
• Do record the date, time, and place.
• If your informant is carrying time keeping technology, have your informant describe it without looking at it. Ask for detail.
• Have your informant get the time keeping technology and look at it.
• Consult your list of questions.
• Take notes, make sketches, ..
• Be sure to include in your notes the questions you asked.
**Write up your field notes (soon after doing the interview)**

- Review your notes on the interview.
- Fill in remembered details.
- Add reflections, insights, new issues and ideas.
  - I noticed a new aspect of the ecology, and the informant made a discovery about a device.
  - How does the interview data relate to the original set of issues you identified?

**Obtain informed consent**

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