

Theatre for informants: a tool for obtaining proper data

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Some dialects of Peninsular Spanish and Portuguese seem to definitely have levelled their plural polite pronouns (3PL) to the second person plural allocutive. However, their clitics and verb inflections disagree in person and vary between 2PL and 3PL, depending on the geographical area and the syntactic feature to be agreed with. Sociolinguistic fieldwork, such as the sociolinguistic interview or the spontaneous conversation with informants (of any age, academic background, gender and locality), should allow for the expression of all syntactic elements to be analysed. Unfortunately, however, in the fieldwork for the above study, it did not provide us with the required sample language. In fact, 2PL features were, statistically, the ones that were least produced. As a result, a new method of data collection had to be devised.

Sitcoms or soap operas can allow informants to identify with characters or, simply, encourage them to take part in something they know quite well. Thus, selecting the right scenes and writing a dialogue description that the informant has to perform as if he/she was the actual actor/actress gave him/her the opportunity to produce the person agreements we wished to study.

In this presentation, I would like to introduce you to an innovative method, in which audiovisual content allows us to prompt the informant to produce the type of language we want to analyse. The input the informant receives is key for the success of our research and this method has proven successful in my PhD dissertation, when trying to obtain the data about the syntactic elements intervening in the allocutive agreements.