

# DOBES (DOKumentation der BEDrohten Sprachen) Consortium<sup>1</sup>

## Metadata Description Recommendations: Content

[Draft 15.03.01]

### DOBES Technical Report 6b.2

Arienne Dwyer (Mainz) and Ulrike Mosel (Kiel)

#### Summary

This document comprises recommendations for metadata *content* descriptions of spoken-language data within the scope of the International Metadata Initiative (IMDI), a subgroup of ISLE (International Standards for Language Engineering, (<http://www.mpi.nl/ISLE>)).<sup>2</sup> This, together with DOBES Technical Report 6a.1, replaces DOBES Technical Report 6.0.<sup>3</sup>

Human communication within the scope of IMDI is classified into three types: spoken, written, and gestural. This document deals only with spoken communication. DOBES partners recommend distinguishing elements of *participant interaction* in the speech event from the *discourse content* of the event; for the former we have proposed the category COMMUNICATION CONTEXT<sup>4</sup>, for the latter, COMMUNICATION GENRE (CONTENT).<sup>5</sup>

The aim is to develop a generic hierarchy of spoken human communication with queryable controlled vocabularies of elements and sub-elements. Below this level, metadata recordists would be free to contextualize these terms and define new sub-sub-elements. This has the advantage of maximum flexibility at the lowest level, avoiding reductionism, while allowing controlled searching on the upper levels of the hierarchy.

## 1. Content

### 1.1. COMMUNICATION TYPE

Spoken language, along with written and gestural (kinetic) communication, are for metadata purposes the three types of human communication. It may also be useful for the purpose of documenting endangered languages to include this proposed IMDI element, COMMUNICATION TYPE, within the DOBES metadata form.

<i>element</i>	<i>sub-elements (closed list)</i>
COMMUNICATION TYPE	spoken written gesture

<sup>1</sup> The DOBES consortium („Documentation of Endangered Languages”) is sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation. See <http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/>.

<sup>2</sup> Written and computer-mediated communication will also be addressed in later versions of ISLE/IMDI. Under the proposed IMDI framework, both spoken and written communication would be subsumed under a higher-order distinction: „natural“ vs. computer-mediated/generated communication. The former, as the default, would be unmarked.

<sup>3</sup> DOBES TR 6.0 also included recommendations for all other sections of the proposed MD description. Since these recommendations address two separate but overlapping interest groups, the latter recommendations now appear in DOBES TR 6a.1, available from [dwyer@mail.uni-mainz.de](mailto:dwyer@mail.uni-mainz.de).

<sup>4</sup> Replaces SESSION TYPE.

<sup>5</sup> Replaces GENRE.

## 1.2. COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

The structuredness ( $\pm$ spontaneity) of a speech event and the degree of interaction between participants results in different types speech data. Since each type of speech data is associated with particular linguistic features, the metadescription category COMMUNICATION CONTEXT is proposed here. It will enable searching for a particular type of material, such as discourse particles in spontaneous speech, or suprasegmentals in elicited data; it will also allow researchers to call up data in which the effects of the Observer’s Paradox is minimized.

The CONTEXT, as a bundle of participant and setting features, are distinct from the GENRE (CONTENT) of communication, which is composed specific discourse types. Taking oral poetry as an example, the GENRE (CONTENT) comprises the form of the poetry – the stylistic features and prior texts associated with that type of poetry – whereas the CONTEXT is concerned with how and where the poetry is performed, and for whom.

Selection of one of the three parameters below allows the characterization of any event (for searching purposes only). Each parameters represents a different aspect (axis) of the event: (1) the degree of interactivity between all participants (consultants and researchers alike); (2) characterizes the consultant’s axis; and (3) the researcher’s.

<i>element</i>	<i>Parameters (sub-elements)</i>
COMMUNICATION CONTEXT	Interactivity
	Consultant
	Researcher

Within each parameter, the following closed list of features (sub-sub-elements) are to be specified:

### Parameter 1: [Participant Interactivity]

#### (1) INTERACTIVE

Definition: Speech event consists of verbal interaction between at least two participants. May or may not include an investigator.

Examples: many types of narrative; conversation; marriage ceremony.

#### (2) NON-INTERACTIVE

Definition: Speech/song produced without expecting extended verbal responses from hearer(s); corresponds often to monologue.

Examples: many types of oratory and song; some narrativizing. Procedural texts.

#### (3) SEMI-INTERACTIVE

Definition: Primarily monologic speech punctuated by repeated interjections from the hearer(s).

Examples: An elderly woman tells a myth, and is prompted repeatedly by her granddaughters. Or: While a speaker is telling a story, a child comes in and is told to be quiet.

### Parameter 2: [Consultant communication structuredness/degree of planning]

#### (1) SPONTANEOUS

Definition: Unprompted speech/song; topic not determined from context or observers.

Examples: conversation, chatting, joke-telling, singing while harvesting.

(2) SEMI-SPONTANEOUS

Definition: Prompted speech/song; topic directed in some way by an investigator or community member, but participants speak/sing freely within this context.

Examples: Interview; Queries (Investigator asks, “Tell me about the history of your village”, or: “Show me how to make Baked Alaska.”); Retellings (investigator asks speaker to read or look at something and then re-tell a story, or describe a task in his/her own words); Promptings (children in a local school answer a teacher’s question, or read aloud for him/her.)

(3) PLANNED (Consultant/Performer-Planned)

Definition: The speaker/singer prepares in detail the structure and content of his/her “performance”<sup>6</sup> in advance. This differs from ELICITATION below, where the performer/consultant is given a framework but does not necessary plan his/her answer.

Examples: Political and ritual speech, poem recitation, ceremonies. Courtroom interactions would be an example of PLANNED *and* ELICITED speech.

### Parameter 3: [Researcher involvement]

Note that (1) and (2) below imply the presence of an outside observer/researcher (including native speaker-researchers from other communities) during the speech event.

(1) ELICITED

Definition: Investigator asks speaker(s) to produce isolated phonemes/words/utterances/grammatical structures.<sup>7</sup>

Examples: Speakers asked to pronounce phonemes in different (phonological) environments; responses to morphological or lexical questionnaires. It may also be possible to *elicit* Semi-Spontaneous speech (parameter 2 above) if the consultant is asked to respond “as fast as possible without thinking”.

(2) NON-ELICITED

Definition: The researcher does not interfere verbally with the speech event (other than the researcher’s mere presence).

(3) NO OBSERVER (observer absent)

Definition: No outside observer is present.

Example: A tape recorder runs continuously in room while people talk (having been for example set there a half an hour earlier by the investigator, with permission of course).

### Using these Parameters to Characterize a Speech Event

These parameters would appear as sub-elements of COMMUNICATION TYPE (spoken, written, gesture) in a Metadata description; the metadata recordist would select only the appropriate parameters. Definitions and examples would be hyperlinked to each sub-element for reference. For example:

---

<sup>6</sup> Performance is here meant simply to encompass vocalized and kinesthetic acts.

<sup>7</sup> Gibbon, Moore, & Winski [eds. (1997, *Handbook of Standards and Resources for Spoken Language Systems* I: 99-102] define these separately; this appears unnecessary for our purposes.

The speech event “an academic meeting” (i.e. a discussion on a predetermined topic), might be described as: CONTEXTTYPE.Elicited, Semi-Spontaneous, Interactive

The speech event “drunkard singing at the moon on castle wall high above Marburg” might be described as: CONTEXTTYPE.Spontaneous, Noninteractive

If the researcher elicits interaction by telling two people to formally greet each other: CONTEXTTYPE.Elicited, Planned, Interactive

This is not intended as simplistic reduction of culturally-specific linguistic phenomenon; rather, it should allow the documenter the opportunity to characterize the session type with only a few keystrokes, and later sort out sessions according to the above discourse features. Documenters would also be free to refine distinctions (e.g. Native-speaker Investigators vs. Investigators from Distant Places) and add indigenous distinctions as they saw fit. We recommend that the Metadata element COMMUNICATION CONTEXT allow both for the above abbreviations *and* commentary, where investigators can elaborate on categories specific to the group.

We understand the limitations of such a categorization. Since participants co-create events it can be seen as reductive to categorize speech events from the point of view of just one type of participant; furthermore, one value of a speech event parameter as defined here may be tententially associated with a value of a second parameter. For example, highly interactive situations tend to be low in planning/structuredness; cf. 1(1) INTERACTIVE and 2(3) PLANNED. The purpose here, however, is not analysis but rather querying.

During one session, the communication context may vary (as in the case of an interrupted myth-telling), and two labels would have to be supplied. Researchers may prefer to characterize the overall setting and/or the *intended* communication situation and account for atypical interruptions in commentary.

**Summary: Context**

<i>element</i>	<i>Parameters (sub-elements)</i>	<i>controlled vocabulary (closed list)</i>
COMMUNICATION CONTEXT	Interactivity	Interactive, Noninteractive, Semi-Interactive
	Consultant	Spontaneous, Semi- Spontaneous, Planned
	Researcher	Elicited, Non-elicited, No Observer present

1.3. COMMUNICATION GENRE (CONTENT)

Operating from a working definition of a GENRE (CONTENT) as a *conventionalized discourse type*, we recommend defining a thematically-broad list of values. Despite the substantial difficulties in comparing genre across cultures, these are intended to be quasi-generic, “universal” genre types, though not all categories will be appropriate for a given language/culture.

The following terms, as for the Communication Context, comprise a closed class of sub-sub-elements. The recordist would use only those terms appropriate to that situation.

It is the responsibility of the metadata recordist to contextualize a given genre in the particular ethnolinguistic group. Elsewhere in the metadata description, the recordist would detail the scope of a particular genre within that culture, e.g. “Verbal contests consist of poetic duels known as ...”, or “The category of Narrative does not exist as such within xx culture; consultants instead characterize the recounting of fictional events under the following local typology...”.

Genre is classified into three broad types: Verbal Exchange, Discursive, and Performance. The central feature of Verbal-Exchange genres is a give-and-take; Discursive genres are state-

ments and explanations, and Performance genres specify an explicit audience. When considering all aspects of an event, these three genre categories can be seen to overlap (e.g. performance (3) often includes verbal exchange (1)); yet as a minimal characterization to facilitate searching, such a distinction is useful.

### 1.3.1. Genres of verbal exchange<sup>8</sup> (give-and-take is *the* central feature of the event)

- .1. Conversation
- .2. Verbal contests (including debate)
- .3. Interview
- .4. Meeting (gathering)
- .5. Riddles/riddling  
Definition: A witty question to a respondent who is obligated to reply.
- .6. Consultation  
Example: visit to shaman; doctor visit.
- .7. Greetings and Leavetakings
- .8. Humor

### 1.3.2. Discursive genres (description and explanation are the central features)

- .1. Procedure  
A directive description of the procedures involved in the preparation or production of something.  
Examples: How to make tortillas, how to make a whip.
- .2. Explanation: practical, theoretical, or historical reality statements.  
Cf. *Aussage, besprochene Welt*.  
Example: How the monkey got its tail.

### 1.3.2. Performance genres (an explicit audience is the central feature)

Note: No truth-value claims are being made.
---------------------------------------------

- .1. Oratory Using speech effectively in a conventionalized format to address an audience within political, legal, ceremonial, or religious settings.
- .2. Rites-of-passage ceremony E.g. birth, puberty, marriage, funeral.
- .3. Oral history An account of firsthand experience, recalled retrospectively and communicated to an interviewer for historical purposes.
- .4. Historical narrative An secondhand account of the experience of historical figures and events which may be partly or wholly fictional, communicated to both locals and outsiders for both historical purposes and entertainment, cf. *erzählte Welt* (Weinrich 1964).
- .5. Narrative A recounting of one or more fictional events by one or more narrators to an audience of at least one.
- .6. Oral Poetry Spoken or sung or mixed, relatively structured form (in prosody and syntax), often with distinctive language. (incl. oral

---

<sup>8</sup> We prefer *Interactional* to the EAGLES term *Dialogue*, since *Interactional* is neutral with respect to the number of participants. Excluded here are categories inapplicable to endangered-language contexts, such as chat shows.

- epics, narrative poetry, ballads (shorter, lyrical narratives), and panegyric odes).
- .7. Song                                    A tune with recognizably-structured lyrics. Incl. popular and love songs, lullabies, etc.
  - .8. Proverb                                A summary of the wisdom of collective experience, often one line long; formulaic.
  - .9. Lament
  - .10. Insults:                                An insolent verbal act creating animosity.

Possible other short-listed genres:

- ?Play
- ?Broadcast: radio, film, television

### Flexibility

- Though it should be possible to use one label to characterize a communicative event, it would be appropriate to occasionally use two terms when e.g. song and storytelling are mixed in one session.
- Metadata recordists have the option of developing a list of labels (sub-sub-elements) specific to that culture/language.  
     Examples:  
     Bride-crying (singing with fixed text)  
     Samoan Fagogo (narrative containing songs)

## 2. Summary: Proposed Metadata Description Content elements

<i>communication type</i>	<i>element</i>	<i>parameter (=sub-element)</i>	<i>controlled vocabulary (=closed list)</i>
<b>Spoken</b> (verbalized)	<b>context</b>	<b><i>Intactivity</i></b>	Interactive Non-Interactive Semi-Interactive
		<b><i>Consultant</i></b>	Spontaneous Semi-Spontaneous Planned
		<b><i>Researcher</i></b>	Elicited Non-elicited No Observer present
	<b>content</b> („genre”)	<b><i>Verbal Exchange</i></b>	Conversation Contest/Debate Interview Meeting Riddle Consultation Greetings/ Leavetakings Humor Conversation
		<b><i>Discursive</i></b>	Procedure Explanation
		<b><i>Performance</i></b>	Oratory Rites-of-passage ceremony Oral history

			Historical narrative Narrative Oral poetry Song Proverb Lament Insult
<b>Written</b>		(not yet available)	
<b>Gesture</b>		(not yet available; would include hand/body gesture, eye tracking, facial expressions)	

### 3. Future Directions/Tasks

Develop a controlled vocabulary for an optional subset (extended list) of genre sub-element terms. As with the elements themselves, definitions or links to definitions must be present. Specific projects would be able to extend these definitions in a culturally-specific context

A first start at such a list could be like the following:

#### Extended list of Genre sub-sub-elements

	Narrative	Tale: a fictional narrative (+...?)
		Legend: a traditional narrative purporting to be true;
		Myth: “a traditional narrative [believed to be true]... that justifies an exemplary aspect of the way things are“ (G.Prince (1991). <i>Dictionary of Narratology</i> . Lincoln & London: U. of Nebraska Press: 56).
		?Monologic/Polyphonic <sup>9</sup>
		Dream narrative
	Historical narrative	
		Epic narrative
	Song	Lullaby
		Love song
		Wedding song
		Pop song
		Labo(u)ring song
		War song
		Drinking song
		Lament
		Street chant
	Oratory	Wedding oratory
		Rite-of-Passage oratory
		Political oratory
		Divination oratory
		Hortatory speech
		Prayer
		Sermon
	Healing	

<sup>9</sup> This might better be viewed as a text type distinction.

	Humor	
		Joke
		Pun
		Ridicule

#### 4. Alternative proposals

We have attempted to integrate independently-made proposals and feedback into the current recommendations. In addition, we have referred to the EAGLES spoken-language typology (<http://www.ilc.pi.cnr.it/EAGLES96/texttyp/node38.html>). These include:

1. Lev Michael, workshop „Web-Based Language Documentation and Description”, 12.00.

Both Dwyer’s and Michael’s proposals draw on Ethnography of Communication-type speech event descriptions (based on Roman Jakobson’s speech event model and Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING<sup>10</sup>). The two proposals compared:

	L. Michael	DOBES
Modality	---	Communication Type
Genre	list of elements	three elements, each with sub-elements
Speech register	Register/Style	event-specific sub-subelements of Genre*
Code-switching	Register/Style	excluded†
Situation	Event	Communication type (formerly Session type)
	Channel	excluded‡

\*Generally several *Speech registers* (e.g. honorific, deprecative, baby talk) are found in any one event. We therefore recommend marking register shifts within the event on a separate annotation tier. If one register is an inherent feature of a particular Genre (e.g. a particular ritual oratory is always delivered in honorific language), this information is to be specified in the Event Description.

†*Code switching* is a feature of multilingualism, not register, and can occur at any level of formality with any speech type

‡*Channel*, i.e. the physical/acoustic properties of the speech signal (whispering, chanting, falsetto, etc.) is a matter of speech production. DOBES recommends marking this information on a separate annotation tier.

#### 2. Further feedback

We would welcome any and all comments on this proposal; we thank individuals at the University of Lund for their comments.

Dr. Arienne M. Dwyer

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität  
Seminar für Orientkunde  
55099 Mainz Germany  
dwyer@mail.uni-mainz.de

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Mosel

Erziehungswissenschaftliche Fakultät  
der Christian-Albrechts Universität zu Kiel  
Olshausenstraße 75  
24118 Kiel Germany  
umosele@email.uni-kiel.de

<sup>10</sup> Jakobson, Roman. (1960). Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics. In T. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Dell Hymes (1972), Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life. In J.J. Gumperz and D. Hymes, (eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Wilson..