

# **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

## **Guidelines**

(Adapted from Labov 1973)

Revised, January 2010

This interview schedule is adapted from the original (Labov 1973) but has been subject to a series of revisions subsequent (Poplack 1989, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, Tagliamonte 1997, Tagliamonte 1999, 2005).

The modules are ordered more or less in the order of a typical interview; however, modules are suggestive rather than obligatory. Wherever possible the questions have been worded with ethnic, gender and other sensitivities in mind and the wording is somewhat generic so as to be modifiable for the relevant age group and neighborhood. It is important to mention that cultures and settings differ dramatically from one another. The analyst must be supremely sensitive to the selection and wording of interview questions.

Double starred questions are those that have a history of being particularly good for eliciting narratives of personal experience, stories about a person's life.

## **1. DEMOGRAPHICS**

Note: Although this module comes first in the Interview Schedule, I have found that these questions are best interwoven into the interview situation rather than asked at the outset. Once the interview is drawing to completion, use this module to fill in information that has not been elicited naturally in the course of conversation.

Your name is?

And your address is?

How long have you lived at that address?

Where were you born?

Where else have you lived?

Where were your parents born and raised?

Your grandparents?

Your spouse?

Are you working now? Where?

What did/do your parents do?

Your husband/wife?

How many years of school did you have a chance to finish?

What was the first job you had when you left school?

If you are not at the informant's home:

Can you tell me about your home/apartment?

What kind of place is it?

How is it laid out?

Do you speak any languages besides English?

## 2. NEIGHBOURHOOD

This is such a nice/interesting/colorful neighborhood! How long have you lived here?

What kind of people live on your street? In this area?

What made your parents [you] move here?

Because of work?

Is it far from where your father [mother] works?

Because of community roots?

Close to members of same ethnic group?

How has your neighborhood changed in your lifetime?

Do you feel that your neighborhood is as safe as it was when you were growing up?

Why or why not?

Is this the kind of neighborhood where people talk to each other?

Do you know any of your neighbors?

What are they like?

Some people say that nowadays everybody's just too busy to just stop by to chat.

What do you think?

Why do you think that has changed?

Is there anyone around here you know well enough, just to walk in?

Who would invite you in for coffee, just talk?

Do people from around here drop by to visit?

Is there any neighborhood place where people get together?

Where they can go for a cold drink or tea/coffee in the afternoon? Evening?

Is there a local pub/bar that you go to a lot?

Where do people get together outside their houses?

Are there people you'd like to spend more time with but can't?

Why don't you see them so much anymore?

Do you think the neighborhood/community could be closer together?

How?

What do you like best about your neighborhood?

What are the things that make you feel good/bad about your neighborhood?

### 3. COMMUNITY EVENTS:

A lot of people say that the community used to be closer together and more co-operative than it is today, what do you think?

In some communities, they had organizations that did community work.

Do you remember any groups like that?

[If so] What did they do?

Are there organizations like that here now?

Did anything really big ever happen around here that you remember?

Like a big fire? Or a house burned down? Or a murder?

Where? Did you see it?

Did people in the neighborhood help out? With food, clothes, place to stay?

What about accidents or police investigations?

\*\*Do you remember when ... \_\_\_\_\_?

Where were you when \_\_\_\_\_ happened?

What did you do when \_\_\_\_\_ happened?

How did it effect you and your family? Your neighborhood?

[Choose a community event that effected all people]

*e.g. Hurricane Hazel hit Toronto in 1954*

*e.g. the aphid invasion in 2001*

*e.g. Toronto's blackout in the summer of 2003*

Note: It is very important to be aware of local and supra-local community because referring to them and asking people where they were at the time often elicit excellent narratives of personal experience.

### 4. PARENTS AND FAMILY

Do you have any idea how long your family has been living in this country [city/neighborhood]?

Where did they come here from?

\*\*Do you remember coming to this country/city/neighborhood? Tell me about it.

What kind of upbringing did you have?

What kind of kid were you when you were growing up?

Were you a troublemaker?

What kinds of things did you do to get into trouble?

How were you punished? By who?

Where were you ever grounded?

Did you ever get blamed for something you didn't do?

Did you have any rules about when you had to be in at night?

What happened when you stayed out late?

Did you ever get caught sneaking out? Why?

If you got into trouble from your parents could you talk to them?

Which parent would you choose to talk to? Why?

Were your parents really strict?

What sort of person is your father?

What is your mother like?

Did your parents have any ideas about what they wanted you to be?

How far did they want you to go in school?

How far did you get a chance to complete?

Did you get an allowance?

How much was it?

What could you buy with that amount of money then?

Do you have siblings? How many?

How did being the youngest/oldest/in the middle effect how you were treated?

Do you feel that your siblings got away with things that you never did or did you get away with things that they didn't?

What kinds of things?

Were you close to your siblings growing up or did you fight a lot?

How about now?

Did you/Do you spend much time with your \_\_\_\_\_?

Grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins etc

Why or why not?

Did you ever go on vacations as a family?

Where would you go? How would you get there?

Did you get along while you were on vacation?

\*\*Have you ever been really embarrassed by something your parents/siblings said or did?

What happened?

How did you react?

What can you say from hindsight?

## **5. SOCIAL PRACTICES**

Are there people around here you spend a lot of time with outside your family?

Do they live nearby? Whereabouts?

What do you do together?

Is there anyone around here you get together with socially?

*e.g. Play cards?*

*Bowling?*

*Go to games?*

*Get together on holidays?*

Did you ever go to dances?

What kind of entertainment did they have?

Whereabouts was the hall?

Did you dance?

What kind of dancing did you do?

What would people wear?

## **6. NEIGHBOURHOOD ISSUES**

Did your neighborhood have delivery people who brought you items to your house?

*e.g. milkman, ice man, knife sharpener, ice cream truck*

What do you remember about them?

What are your neighbors like?

Is there anyone around here who's a real snoop?

Someone who knows everybody else's business?

Someone who causes trouble?

Someone who plays loud music?

Is there anything that prevents you from getting together with people around here more often?

Is there anybody around here that didn't talk to each other for a while?

What kind of thing was it about?

## **7. HELPING OUT IN THE COMMUNITY**

Do you have anyone you can go to for help around here? If you need help, who do you go to?

Do you have anyone who you help around here? What do you do?

Do you ever get fruit or vegetables from your neighbors? Do you ever give fruit or vegetables to your neighbors?

If you're sick who can you ask to look after the family?

Do you have to ask or do people just offer?

Have your kids ever stayed with anyone else in the community?

If you needed milk/eggs could you ask a neighbor?

If you needed a ride in an emergency, who would you ask?  
Do you lend your car to others?

Who shovels the snow in the winter in your neighborhood?

Do you hire local kids to help out with yard work?  
*e.g. Baby sitting? Snow shoveling? Dog walking?*

## **8. WORK LIFE**

What was your very first job?

How old were you when you started to work?

Can you remember how much you earned?

Do you remember what you were excited to spend your hard-earned money on?

What did your parents do to earn a living?

How did they cope during the depression [if applicable]?

Do young people feel the same way about working that they did in your day?

What did your parents want you to do for a living?

What do you do?

What would you like to do?

## **9. FAMILY MEALS/CRAFTS**

A lot of people have their best meal on Sunday, what was it like in your family

What kinds of things do you remember eating?

A lot of people remember their mom/dad making special foods? What do you remember about the foods your mom/dad used to make?

What did your mother/father, grandmother/grandfather like to eat?

Do you like cooking? Baking? What kinds of things do you like to bake/cook?

A lot of traditional recipes aren't written down, can you tell me how to make \_\_\_\_?  
[name a traditional food that you know is part of interviewee's culture...]

Is food different from when you were younger? Why do you think that's true?

What kinds of crafts did people used to do, in the old days?

*e.g. needlework, sewing, basket weaving etc.*

Who taught you how?

What kinds of things would you make?

Would you make things just for your family or for selling too?

## **10. FOLK REMEDIES**

Did people go to doctors in the olden days? Do you go to the doctor when you're sick?

I've heard people say that in the olden days, people relied on traditional medicines and natural remedies, do you remember that?

What kinds of remedies do you remember?

*e.g. bark of cherry, dogwood trees, aspergilla bush, teaberry leaves*

A lot of people talk about \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in traditional cure of culture] what was that?

How was it made?

What kinds of things did it cure?

*e.g. colds, aches, pains, constipation*

I can remember my mom/dad/grandmother /grandfather taking \_\_\_\_\_ Have you ever heard of that?

*e.g. garlic, hot rum toddies, Vitamin C, Echinacea etc.*

What do you do to prevent colds/flu? What do you do when you get sick?

## **11. COMMON SENSE**

People talk a lot about common sense. What is common sense in your opinion?

Did you ever meet anybody that had a lot of common sense?

Did you ever meet anybody that had no common sense?

Do you think you get more common sense as you get older?

## **12. SCHOOL DAYS**

Did you go to one of the schools in this neighborhood?

How far is it from your house?

How did you get to school?

What was the school house like when you used to go to school?

Was it a segregated school or an integrated school?

How many students used to go?

What subjects did you take?

What was your favorite subject? Least favorite subject? Why?

How did they keep the school warm in the winter?

*e.g. Pot-belly stove*

Do you remember going to school on cold mornings?

Did they ever close the school for a snow storm? What did you do?

What were teachers like when you were at school?

Were they very strict?

Were the teachers then better than the teachers today?

Can you remember any trouble-makers at school? What did they do?

How about you, were you a trouble-maker in school?

What kinds of things did you do?

How were trouble-makers disciplined?

Did you wear a uniform for school?

If yes, what did it look like? What did the boys/girls wear?

If no, what did you wear? How does that compare to how kids dress for school now?

Did you ever pass notes in school?

What kinds of things did you pass notes about?

Did a teacher ever catch you passing notes?

What happened?

Did you have any teachers that are really tough?

Did you ever have a teacher that was a really weird? A real creep? Crazy?

Did you ever have a teacher that was really fair? That you liked?

What makes teachers really mad?

What would a teacher yell at a kid for?

What was the worst thing you ever saw a teacher do to a kid?

Or a kid do to a teacher?

\*\*Did you ever get blamed for something you didn't do?

### **13. TEEN LIFE**

Do you have lots of homework?

In what subjects?

How much time do you usually spend doing homework?

Are there cliques/gangs in your school?

What are the different cliques called and who would be in them?

*e.g. jocks, nerds goths, thugs, gangstas, band geeks etc*

How can you tell if someone's in a clique/gang/group?

What kinds of things do people in the various groups wear?

Can members of different cliques hang out? Date?

How do members of the cliques dress?

Does ethnicity play a role in clique membership?

Do you have a curfew?

How do you feel about it?

Have you ever broken curfew?

Have you ever snuck in after curfew? Were you caught?

Do you spend a lot of time 'surfing the web'?

Do you have your own website?

Are you better at using the internet/email/MSN than your parents?

Why do you think that is?

Do you like to chat with your friends on MSN?

How much time do you spend on MSN?

Do your parents let you chat as long as you like?

\*\*Did you ever have an argument with someone on MSN? What happened?

Do you like to play video games?

How do your parents feel about it?

What's your favorite game? How do you play it? What was your highest score?

What kind of music do you like? What kind of music are you listening to these days?

Have you ever been to a concert to see one of your favorite groups?

How was it?

What's the best concert you were ever at?

Who's your favorite artist? How come?

What is your favorite movie?

What was it about?

Do you go to dances at school?

Do you take a date or do you go with friends as a group?

How do you get to the dances? Does a parent drive you?

Do friends sometimes get into arguments at the dances?

Who asks who to dance?  
How is the music played?  
*e.g. live band, DJ, CDs etc*

#### **14. KIDS/PARENTS THESE DAYS**

A lot of people say that the children today aren't like they used to be when they were growing up, do you think so?

What's the difference?

Why?

Can you compare what you did for fun when you were young with what kids do now?

A lot of people say that the parents today are a lot stricter than they used to be? What do you think?

What do you hate most about your mother/father? Sister/brother?  
Why?

Do your parents/sister/brother do things that bug you? What?

\*\*Do you ever play tricks on your sister/brother?

What's the worst thing you ever did? Funniest thing you ever did?

#### **15. GAMES**

Going back to the time when you were a kid, ten, twelve years old, what were some of the games you used to play?

What did you do after school to keep yourself occupied?

Did you play sports?

Were you on any sports teams?

Did you play any games where everybody hides and you have to go out and find them?

How do you play that here? What are the rules?

*e.g. hide-and-peek, kick-the-can, ghosts, man hunt, capture the flag*

Is there a game where everybody lines up and runs past one guy and that guy tries to catch them?

What did you call that? How did you play?

*e.g. Red Rover, British Bulldog*

What about tag?

*e.g. freeze tag, TV tag*

How do you decide who's IT?

Are there any games you used to play at night?

Did boys and girls play different types of games?

How about adults, did they ever play any games?

*e.g. whisk, poker, bridge*

Did you ever play chicken with bikes?

What happened?

Did you ever smash up a bike?

Did you ever play a game where somebody stands on a hill and you have to rush up and push them off?

Was there a rhyme you used to sing?

*e.g. I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal*

Did/Do you jump rope?

Did you do double dutch?

Red hot peppers?

What rhymes did you use? Do you remember any?

*e.g. tinker, tailor...all in together...*

Did you have any rhymes you used with a bouncing ball?

Did you play any clapping games?

What rhymes did you use?

Did you play hopscotch?

How did you play it?

How was it laid out? Can you draw it for me?

Did you play jacks?

How did that go?

Did you play marbles?

Did you ever have marbles that were special in some way?

*e. g. beauties*

Do you have a favorite toy?

Who gave it to you?

What was the occasion?

## **16. GAMES (Ball games)**

Is there any game you played with a ball on the streets, or in a yard, not regular baseball?

*e.g. Stickball, punch ball, dodge ball*

How did you play?

How many guys on a side, usually?

What about throwing a ball against the steps?

How did that go?

Did you ever make a bat out of a broomstick?

Did you wrap tape around it?

What kind of ball did you use?

Did you ever play a game where two guys throw a ball back and forth, and someone in the middle tries to get it?

What else do you call that?

Did you ever play hockey in the streets?

What happened when a car came?

## **17. HOBBIES/CAMPING**

Do you have any hobbies? What?

How did you get into that?

Did you ever go into competitions? Win a competition? What happened?

Were you ever in Scouts or Guides?

Go to Scout/Guide camp?

Have any adventures at camp?

Did you ever go on a camping trip overnight? In the winter?

\*\*Did you ever have any problems with a bear? What happened?

Did you ever go to day-camp? What kind of camp did you go to? What did you like about it?

What was the most fun you ever had at camp?

Did you ever go on a school trip? Where did you go? Did anything interesting ever happen?

## 18. BIRTHDAYS

When is your birthday?

Are there any down sides to having your birthday when it is?

*e.g. too close to Christmas, school is out for summer*

\*\*What is the best birthday party you ever had?

What is the best birthday party you ever went to?

Has anyone ever held a surprise birthday party for you?

Who did it?

Were you really surprised or did you pretend?

Has anyone ever forgotten your birthday?

Did you ever have sleep-over parties?

Did you get in trouble for talking all night?

What did your parents do when you wouldn't go to sleep?

\*\*What's the most fun you ever had at a sleep over?

## 19. PEER GROUP

What do kids do around here?

After school? At night? On weekends?

Is there a bunch of kids you hang around with, that you see almost every day?

Where do you hang out?

Who do you hang out with? [Get names and ages]

Do any of your friends have a car?

Where do you go? What do you do?

Have you ever been pulled over? What for?

Have you ever been in a car accident? What happened?

If a new kid moves into the neighborhood, how does he get to hang out with you?

Like who was the last one that moved in?

Is there any kid around here who's a real \_\_\_\_\_?

*e.g. jerk/nerd/loser/weirdo?*

Do you ever stay overnight at each other's place?

What do you do?

Do you play board games/cards/truth-or-dare [for older people] Ouija board?

Have you ever had a séance? Tell ghost stories?

Do you have pillow fights?

Have you ever pulled an 'all-nighter'?

Why did you do it?

Did you make it through the night?

Did you get through the next day?

What do you do on Halloween? Do you dress up?

What was your best Halloween costume ever?

Do you ever play tricks on Halloween?

*e.g. fire cracker, egging, TP-ing*

Do you ever have parties?

Do the parents usually know about the parties?

Have the police ever come to a party that you were at?

Do people drink at these parties?

If so, how do you get alcohol if you are underage?

Do your parent know that you go to parties?

If not, where do you tell them you go?

Did you ever wake up and not know where you were? Not remember what you'd done the night before?

What was the dumbest/silliest thing you ever did when you were drinking?

Do you ever go to clubs?

What kind of music do they play?

What is your favorite song/artist to dance to?

What do girls wear to clubs like that? Guys?

\*\*Has anything interesting/funny happened at a club you were at? What happened?

## **20. FIGHTS/ARGUMENTS**

Have you ever witnessed a fight?

Where was it?

What was it about?

Do you ever have fights around here?

How do they start?

Do girls fight around here?  
Did you ever get into a fight with a girl/guy?

Do you remember getting into an argument with someone?  
Who was it with?  
What was it about?  
How did you resolve your differences? How did it all turn out?

## **21. TRAVEL**

Have you had the opportunity to travel?  
Where did you go? How long? Anything interesting happen?

Many people experience problems when they are at airports, has this ever happened to you?  
*e.g. missing bags, delays/cancellations, missing a flight, communication problems etc*

Has a communication barrier created any funny moments in any of your travels?  
Did you ever lose your luggage? Miss a plane? Get stranded?

Where would you like to go that you've never been?  
Why?

**\*\*What's the funniest/scariest thing that ever happened to you when you were travelling?**

## **22. DATING PRACTICES**

Do you remember going out on dates? Do you go out on dates? Have you ever gone on a date with a boy/girl?

When did you (or your friends) start dating?  
How did your parents react?  
How long did you date?

Did you ever have a boyfriend/girlfriend that your parents/friends didn't like?  
What kinds of problems did that cause?

Where do kids go on dates around here?  
How do you get around? Do you drive? Bus? Parents?

If you were going out with someone, would it make you jealous if he asked someone else to dance at a party?  
Is there anything else that would make you jealous?



How do you get rid of a guy/girl that you don't like anymore?

\*\*Have you ever been dumped? What happened?

\*\*Have you ever dumped anyone? Why?

Are there any guys your parents wouldn't let you go out with?

Was it because of age? Race? Religion?

What kind of guy/girl do you like?

What kind of guy/girl do you want to marry?

Do you care if he/she goes to college?

Do you think there's such a thing as a "generation gap"?

Can you talk to your parents?

To your mother? Your father?

What are things you can't talk to your parents about?

About sex? About boyfriends/girlfriends?

## **23. TRADITIONS**

What kinds of traditions can you remember growing up with in your family?

Do you (plan to) keep these traditions alive with your own family?

How did you celebrate \_\_\_\_\_ ? [insert appropriate cultural celebration and questions]

What was Christmas like in your family?

Who picked out the tree? Who decorated it?

Did you write to Santa Claus? Did he bring what you wanted?

When did you open your presents? How did you open your presents? Did you have to go in order?

At whose house did you celebrate?

What did you eat at Christmas?

What's your favorite memory of Christmas?

What was your best Christmas?

What do you usually do on New Year's Eve?

How about Valentine's Day? Easter? Mid summer's Eve? [insert appropriate cultural days]

## **24. MARRIAGE/PARTNERS**

How did you meet your wife/husband/partner?

Why did you decide to get married?

How did the marriage proposal happen?

Can you remember what you said?

Can you remember how your wife/husband reacted?

There must have been a time when you didn't know you were going to get married, and then a time when you did? How did that happen?

What was your wedding like? Did anything funny/interesting happen?

Did her [his] parents approve of you? [If so] Why? [If not] Why not?

Did you ever live with your in-laws after you got married?

How did that work out?

Tell me about your first house together?

Who picked it out?

Where was it?

Were you excited?

How long did you live there?

## **25. MISCELLANEOUS**

Have you ever met/seen someone famous?

Who was it? Where was it?

Did you talk to them?

Do you/have you done any volunteer work?

Do you play any musical instruments?

If yes, which ones? For how long?

What made you start? *e.g. school, parents*

If no, is there an instrument you would like to learn to play? Why?

Did your family have any pets?

What do you remember about them?

Did you ever have a pet run away? What happened?

Do you have any pets now?

Sometimes people who have pets teach them tricks ... what are your pets like? Can [name the pet] do any tricks?

Have you ever thought about what you'd like to do in the future? What kinds of things would you like to do that you've never done?

Where do you see yourself in twenty years?

Do you have a dream? What is it?

## **26. UNCOMMON EXPERIENCES**

When people think back on their lives, there's always something that sticks out as being really unusual ... did you ever have anything like that happen to you?

Have you ever witnessed a terrible accident or tragic event?

What happened?

Did you try to help?

Have you ever been in the hospital?

How long? What for?

Sometimes in families there's someone who gets a feeling that something is going to happen, and it does happen.

Is there anybody like that in your family?

Do you remember anything like that that came true?

What was the longest streak of luck you ever had?

What about bad luck?

Do you ever do anything to ensure that you'll have good luck?

What?

Are you lucky at cards?

Are you lucky with women/men?

Have you ever been somewhere new and know that you've been there before?

Have you ever had a 'near death' experience?

What happened?

Did it change you?

Do you ever remember a time that you were really afraid?

When was that? What happened?

How did you feel about it afterwards?

Did you ever know somebody that wasn't afraid of anything? What kind of person was he?

Or is it just that some people can't admit it when they are afraid?

Was there ever anything that happened when you were growing up that you couldn't explain?

Were there any spooky places you wouldn't go at night?

Does it bother you when people talk about ghosts?

\*\*Do you know anyone who has seen a ghost?

## **27. DREAMS**

Do you ever have trouble going to sleep at night?

What do you do if you can't?

Do you sleepwalk? Do you talk in your sleep?

Where did you go? What did you say?

If no, do you know someone who sleep walks/talk in their sleep?

Do you ever think about your dreams? Do you remember them?

Do you dream in color?

Did you ever have a dream that came true?

Do you ever tell people about your dreams? Some people say if you do, the dreams will come true.

Can you wake up if you don't like a dream?

Or keep on dreaming, if you like it?

Was there ever a dream like that, where you just didn't want to wake up?

Do you ever actually know you're dreaming, and say to yourself, "hey this is a dream"? And realize you can do whatever you want?

Did you ever have a dream that really scared you?

What happened?

Do you think dreams can mean anything?

\*\*Did you ever have a dream that you thought meant something?

## **28. IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS**

\*\*Where were you when you heard that \_\_\_\_\_? What did you do?

How did \_\_\_\_\_ effect you and your family?

*e.g. World War II ended*

*JFK was assassinated*

*Jimmy Hendrix died*

*Janice Joplin died*

*John Lennon was assassinated*

9/11

## 29. LANGUAGE

Have noticed any interesting things about the way people speak English around here? [insert appropriate language]

A lot of people think that English has changed a lot/is changing a lot, do you think so?

Have you noticed any changes in the way people talk and sound around here?

Can you tell by the way people talk around here that they come from here? Do people in this neighborhood sound different?

How about the difference between old and young speakers? Do you sound the same as your parents? Do your parents sound the same as you? Do your kids?

Do you think that your ethnic background plays a role in how people sound? How? Why?

Do you speak the same way as your friends? What kinds of differences to you notice?

Has anyone ever told you, you sound different? Why?

Do you sound different from your parents? Why? What kinds of words do you use that other people don't use?

Have you ever tried to change the way you talk? Why? What did you do?

Has anyone ever given you a hard time about the way you talk? What did they say? What did you think about that? What did you do about it?

Do you think that how you sound plays a role in how others perceive you?  
Do you think that you try to change how you sound when you are in certain environments? Which ones? Why?

What do you think about the way that youth today sound?  
What has changed? What hasn't?