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Ethnographic Methods in the Analysis of Oral Communication

Some Suggestions for Linguists*

1. Introduction

Many books and articles have been written on ethnographic methods in sociology and on field work in linguistic anthropology; any claim to summarize and evaluate the results of these publications in one small handbook article would be presumptuous. Instead, I will restrict myself to discussing methods of data constitution/collection for those fields of investigation with which I am well familiar, i. e. oral language in modern, literate, industrial societies. A number of issues which are doubtlessly pertinent to ethnographic methodology will remain untouched: I will not talk about the theoretical underpinning of ethnographic methods in those currents and traditions of sociology that are usually called "qualitative",[1] although it must be clear that any kind of data collection implies a theoretically (explicitly or naively) informed transformation of "reality" (this is why the term "data constitution" is far more appropriate than that of "data collection") and is therefore intrinsically and irrevocably linked to such a theory; I will have nothing to say about the very different methodological and practical problems encountered by the ethnographer in traditional, non-industrialized, partly or wholly non-literate societies such as they have been the main focus of linguistic anthropology (see Scollon & Scollon, this volume; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, this volume) and the ethnography of communication; theoretical and practical aspects of transcription (see Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, this volume) will only be touched shortly, and methods for the *analysis* of data will be largely neglected for the sake of a discussion of methods of data *constitution*,[2] although both are in a reflexive relationship and are theoretically and practically (even temporally) intertwined. Given the little space available, I must also omit references to the many published works in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology which are good examples for how practical linguistic ethnography can be done.

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[1] The reader is referred to the excellent volume by Schwartz & Jacobs (1979.

[2] Some suggestions with regard to ethnography in general may be found in Erickson (1988).

If the title of this chapter particularly mentions linguists (by which I mean to include as well those non-linguists who are interested in language), there is a reason. Research in a more traditionally sociological or anthropological, non-linguistic vein addresses problems of societal structure, partly using tools that involve language – most obviously, of course, interviewing. In this case, linguistic materials are only made use of at the content level, as a way to reconstruct the sociological object proper, which is (said to be) independent of (the linguistic form of) these materials.[3] The particularities of linguistic ethnography, which make it distinct from ethnography in general and which are little understood in the published work on ethnographic methodology, are those that follow from the double status of the linguistic materials in this field: linguistic materials here figure both as the *object* of linguistic analysis, and, at the same time, as a source for reconstructing members' *"accounts"* of this object. (Not seldom, it is even the same data that have this double status, e. g., when interviews are both used as materials for the analysis of linguistic structure and as information on these structures and the explanation of their usage.) Linguistic ethnography therefore relies on somewhat different methods than ethnography in general, and these will be of particular interest in the following discussion.

2. The scope of linguistic ethnography

Linguistic ethnography includes a wide variety of topics. One way of structuring this field is to think of four dimensions the interplay of which characterizes the individual problems that fall within its domain. One of these dimensions is that of *speech activity vs. institution vs. community orientation*. By this I mean that the initial interest of the linguistic ethnographer may be either the investigation of a particular speech activity (such as, e. g., gossip, cf. Bergmann & Luckmann, this volume) or of a social institution (such as, e. g., a teaching hospital, cf. Cicourel, this volume) or of a social (speech) community (such as, e. g., the Tlingit community in Alaska, cf. Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, this volume). The three orientations are in a nested relationship: communities usually have institutions, institutions and communities have characteristic speech activities.

The community orientation is the most comprehensive and also the prototypical cases for ethnography. Imagine, to construe an example, a bilingual migrant community in an urban context, for instance, the Italian community in Toronto. It may be of some interest to investigate (Italian) language maintenance and

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[3] Other, phenomenologically inclined traditions of sociological/anthropological thinking have developed a deeper interest in verbal interaction, which they see as the primary locus where social reality is construed. Among these is conversation analysis (see Heritage, this volume), the initial interest of which in language was to discover the ethnomethods by which interactants co-produce sense in (verbal) interaction. Consequently, naturally occurring linguistic interaction has moved into the focus of attention.

language loss over the generations of exposure to another language (English) in this community. The aim is an overall picture, including changes in linguistic structure ("grammar", incl. phonology/phonetics and pragmatics) as well as language usage (language choice, code-switching). One of the main problems in doing ethnography of this type is the definition of the community. The ethnographer is usually not a part of the social aggregate s/he wants to study, but starts with an external definition of it (for instance: everybody in Toronto who was born in Italy). It may turn out in the course of the investigation that this external definition has no counterpart from the point of view of those investigated; for instance, it may turn out that the individuals grouped together by some kind of external criterion do not look upon themselves as forming a community, or that they do not interact with each other regularly.[4] Or, that in order to be part of the community, quite different criteria are relevant than an Italian birthplace. Thus, although the investigation starts by positing and, indeed, presupposing a community of some kind, the question of whether this community is ethnographically valid will be of constant concern. (It should be added that it may be a legitimate ethnographic end to analyze a group of people for which it turns out – or is even likely from the very start – that they do not form a (speech) community in the usual sense (i. e., rely on common norms and interact regularly with each other), as long as they share some kind of social background. There is some interest in knowing, for instance, which type of migration leads to the formation of a bilingual and bicultural community abroad and which type doesn't. Thus, while Italians in Toronto can most probably be said to form a community, the migration of, say, East Germans into West Germany during and after the process of unification in 1990 has not led so far to the formation of East German communities in West Germany. Nevertheless, linguistic ethnography might be interested in finding out why this is not the case.)

An alternative, more narrowly defined point of departure is the focus on social institutions, either in one group or community, or from a comparative perspective. For instance, instead of looking at the Italian community in Toronto at large, we might restrict ourselves to aspects of bilingual schooling. It may also be useful to select for analysis so-called "gate-keeping" episodes which are particularly important for a person's social career in a society (for instance, job interviews, or school counseling).[5] The advantage for the ethnographer is that it is relatively easy to reconstruct the "official" goals of those acting within the realm of an institution with allocated "roles" (such as "teacher", "pupil"). However, there are usually "hidden", non-official standards and norms according to which participants behave in an institution as well. Finding out about these hidden standards (e. g., according to which pupils are evaluated in addition to their scholastic achievement) is essential and as difficult as any community-

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[4] Cf. the discussion of the "speech community" in Gumperz (1968).

[5] Cf. Erickson & Shultz (1982).

oriented ethnography. Also, a strict separation of institutional and everyday language is impossible. Defining the field under such a more restricted focus will therefore be easier, but not without problems either. And of course, a social community (or "group") cannot be reduced to its institutions.

Frequently, speech activities are chosen for such analysis which have particular relevance and are invested with high social status in the community; they may be highly formalized or even ritualized and may involve specific roles not accessible to any member of the community. (This is the approach chosen in the "ethnography of communication" and more recent "performance studies".) But speech activities may also be of a more mundane kind. For instance, it happens in our culture as well as in others that people tell others that they are in love with them. They do this on certain occasions and with certain social and sequential implications. An ethnographer of the activity-centered type might be interested in analyzing the structure and social impact of "declarations of love" in a culture. Such a starting-point implies that something the ethnographer calls a "declaration of love" exists in this culture's "speech economy". This presupposition may turn out to be right or wrong in the course of the investigation. One way of making sure that the externally defined speech activity in question corresponds to a members' concept is to ask if there is a native label for it.[6] But while the success of this strategy does in fact give some kind of grounding to the category used, its failure reveals nothing: there are many speech activities for which we have no native expression and which are nevertheless very much real and frequent in communicative encounters. Also, even if we know that there is a word for "declarations of love", the mere existence of this folk label does not tell us how to apply it correctly to empirical instances of declarations of love. Is it justified, for instance, to subsume a routine *I love you, darling* in the closing section of a telephone conversation, under the same label as a first avowel of love? It must be concluded that the problem of how to make external and internal categories meet is not restricted to the community-oriented approach. For every kind of ethnography it remains as task to reconstruct from the "members' point of view" (see also Heritage, this volume) the categories selected as a starting point for doing research.

In addition to this first dimension of activity- vs. institution- vs. community-orientation, the field of linguistic ethnography can be characterized by a second dimension, that of *iso- vs. heteroculturality*. While a community-oriented investigation will usually (necessarily?) imply some difference between the culture analyzed and that of the ethnographer him/herself and the readers of his/her report (the amount may vary), activity- and institution-centered investigations may deal with the "same" culture of which the ethnographer and the readers are also a part. It is certainly of some interest, to return to our example, to investigate declarations of love in "our" culture. (Yet, as the quotation marks around

"same" and "our" indicate, it will quickly turn out in such an endeavour that "our" culture is not a monolithic concept. Complete isoculturality is theoretically impossible to attain.) Linguistic ethnography may also be heterocultural and activity-centered, of course. Topics are not difficult to find: for instance, large and/or formal dinners in the Caucasian republic of Georgia (see Kotthoff, this volume) require someone to fulfill the role of the "head of the table", the *tamada*. This role implies making a type of elaborate ritual toast, the sadřegrželo; its linguistic form and social role in Georgian society is an exquisite object for ethnographic linguistic enquiry.

The problem of how to enter a foreign culture, of how to reconstruct its norms and values, and how to bring them across to the reader is the core of ethnography. These problems are aggravated the further we move away from our own culture, and require different methods.[7] Every heterocultural ethnography implies some kind of comparative thinking, moving to and fro between what is foreign to the ethnographer (and his/her readers) and what they are acquainted with; and of course, this comparative thinking will also become more explicit in ethnographic studies which compare two or more cultures. Nevertheless, it must be clear that hetero- and isoculturality cannot be understood as dichotomous, to the same degree that "cultures" are not monolithic and incommensurable wholes. If (speech) communities are taken as representing an internally structured body of overlapping cultural configurations, it follows that members of such communities are never full participants with omniscient cultural knowledge, but "investigators" in their own culture, be they professional ethnographers or just lay participants. On the one hand, no "stranger" who enters a heterocultural community (ethnographer or lay person) is forced to abandon the whole of his or her cultural background knowledge: the common ground s/he shares with those in this community is always more solid than a radically relativistic notion of ethnography would have it. To put it plainly: the difficulties in understanding correctly your uncle's toast at his daughter's wedding are not in principle but only by degrees different from those in understanding correctly a Georgian *tamada's* speech.[8]

The heterocultural ethnographer enters into a kind of intercultural communication with his or her "informants". With the increasing diversification and the multiplications of (sub-)cultures within our modern lifeworlds, this is not an unusual experience for lay persons either. "Intercultural communication" has therefore become a topic of its own in linguistic ethnography.

A third dimension within the field of linguistic ethnography is created by the distinction between *majority and minority cultures*. This dimension is particularly relevant for the community-centered approach. As ethnographers are (unfortu-

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[6] This is the strategy followed in what has become known as ethnosemantics. Cf. the critical evaluation in Eglin (1980).

[7] This can be seen by comparing Goffman's methods in his largely isocultural analyses with extremely heterocultural analyses, e. g. those in the tradition of the "ethnography of communication".

[8] Cf. Sharrock & Anderson (1980).

nately) often members of the majority culture (community), investigation of minority cultures is often coupled with heteroculturality to some degree.

Investigating minority cultures is for the linguist often part of an interest in minority languages. From this field of research it is well known that the very notion of a "minority" (language, culture or community) implies the existence of a "majority" to which it is oriented in some way or other, while the opposite does not hold. "Minorities" conceive of themselves as dependent on the "majority", while the majority does not even need the term "majority" to talk about itself. In linguistic terms: the "majority" will make itself felt through the impact it has on the minority's language and its usage (e. g. the impact of English on the structure and usage of Italian in the Italian community in Toronto), while the majority language is (by and large) free of influence from the minority. The "minoritarian consciousness" makes it necessary to adapt ethnographic methods to it; for instance, the ethnographer will have to rely less on public and more on concealed/private (linguistic) behaviour when investigating the minority than when working in the majority culture. (The majority culture may even deny the existence of the very objects of linguistic ethnography within the minority culture; for instance, Georgian verbal genres (see Kotthoff, this volume) such as funeral lamentos were officially declared extinct by the Soviet state.)

A fourth dimension which is often forgotten but seems particularly relevant to linguistic ethnography is that of a *synchronic vs. diachronic* interest. The community-, the institution- and the activity-centered type of investigation may each take on a historical dimension. Our hypothetical ethnography of the Italian community in Toronto would certainly profit from knowing how the Italian community has developed over the years since the first immigration around the turning of the century. For instance, it may turn out that the general prestige of the community has increased (together with its economic and political status) considerably over the last 40 years. It may also turn out that the linguistic repercussions of language contact on the speech of the first generation of migrants is quite different from that on the speech of the second and third generation. The same applies to an investigation of verbal behaviour of Italian schoolchildren in Canada and to the political conditions of first-language teaching in this country. An activity-centered investigation of e. g. declarations of love seems to call for a historical analysis even more: it would reveal that modern declarations of love, which should come in (adjacency) pairs, are part and parcel of European bourgeois culture, and quite distinct from their courtly predecessors. On the other hand, the example also shows that the ways in which we use language today are endowed with a history of usages which are sedimented in our historical memory of what declarations of love are, were, and could be, and that every "new" declaration of love is linked back to this diachronic thread by differences and similarities to prior onces, through the mechanisms of our cultural memory. "Big events" such as declarations of love are caught in a web of such diachronic threads and thereby take on a semiotic complexity which to disentangle is no small challenge for the linguistic ethnographer.

While short-term historical developments such as in the Toronto Italian community are relatively easily accessible, either because they can be reconstructed from differences of behaviour and opinions found in the present-day age groups (cf. Labov's "uniformitarian principle"), or because older records or even ethnographies are available, the pragmatics of declarations of love in the 18th century are but one example of the general methodological dilemma of any historical ethnography of this type: for the historical reconstruction of oral language in earlier centuries, we are forced to rely entirely on written documents. Indirect access is possible, however, through various sources. In our case, normative treatises on verbal behaviour (such as booklets giving instructions on how to declare one's love, as they were quite frequent at the time) would be an important source of information, as well as novels and other fictional writings. It should be kept in mind that historical ethnography necessarily entails heteroculturality: the difference between the European courtly culture of the 19th century and that of the present-day ethnographer will very likely be greater than the difference between the culture of the Italian community in Toronto and that of the northern or middle European ethnographer.

3.   General characteristics of the ethnographic method

3.1.   Selection of linguistic observables

It is the aim of all linguistic ethnography to isolate and analyze socially salient linguistic phenomena and to reconstruct (explicate) the knowledge members must dispose of in order to produce and interpret these phenomena. This implies that not any linguistic phenomenon (or group/cluster of such phenomena) will be a relevant object for linguistic ethnography). The beginning of an ethnographic study is therefore a game with many unknowns: in order to reconstruct the social interpretation of linguistic phenomena, we need to identify these phenomena, but doing so already presupposes knowledge of their social interpretation.

The problem is particularly grave for a community-centered approach. We know from sociolinguistic research that the members of social groups may use very delicate linguistic means to display group membership, that socially notable language change (see Kotthoff, this volume; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, this volume) may affect a small subset of possible parameters, etc. As it is impossible to decide which linguistic parameters may be relevant, we have to start by considering as many of them as possible, including not only the lexicon, phonetics, phonology (see Gibbon, this volume), syntax (see Goodwin, this volume) and morphology, but also code-switching between varieties (see Hartmann, this volume), prosody (above all intonation, tempo and rhythm (see Gibbon, this volume)), and particularly, the community's "speech ecology"[9], i. e. the speech activities, genres, etc. it disposes of (see Bergmann & Luckmann, this volume).

[9] Luckmann (1988), Hymes (1972).

Institution- and activity-centered approaches avoid some of these problems, implying that the social situation or speech activity selected is one of social relevance. Nevertheless, the danger of starting with too narrow a conception of the linguistic phenomenon in question remains. For instance, in the case of declarations of love, it may not only be the wording that is important for their (social) interpretation, but also concomitant prosodic and paralinguistic phenomena (such as reduced loudness, rallentando, lowered voice register, hushed voice, code-switching into another language or dialect). Including such considerations may reveal, for instance, that declarations of love may be made ironic by switching into a different grammatical or prosodic system.

3.2. Social explanation

In addition to defining the linguistic phenomena that are salient for his or her goal, the ethnographer needs to reconstruct the ways in which these structures are related to their situational and social contexts, i. e., how they take on social meaning. This social explanation of the role of salient linguistic structures will have to be in terms of the "culture" investigated. Much of the business of ethography thus can be said to consist of the ethnographer aiming to make his or her external conzeptualization of "what goes on" compatible with that of the members. Yet, difficult as it is, this process of "going native" still isn't enough: it is essential that the native perspective must be translated back into terms that make sense for the readers of the ethnographic report, i. e. in terms of some theoretical framework shared (to some degree) by the scientific community. "Doing ethnography" therefore consists of a permanent shifting between three perspectives: that of the ethnographer as a lay person and member of his/her own culture, that of the culture to be investigated, and that of the scientific "discourse" s/he is part of. (The tension between one's own everyday cultural presuppositions and the newly encountered culture seems to be so essential for ethnographic methodology that the best way of doing ethnography on one's own culture is to artificially disrupt its mundane givenness. In a way, ethnography in one's own culture implies seeing a segment of it with the eyes of a stranger.)

3.3. Naturalness/authenticity

It is an inherent problem of all social sciences that their object is not immune to the ways in which scientists approach it methodologically. Caught in an insoluble dilemma between conserving this object (social life) as it is at the cost of losing generalizability across situations (contexts), and eliciting data under controlled conditions at the cost of distorting or destroying its very nature, ethnography, when compared to other traditions of thinking about social problems, is surely characterized by a marked tendency to opt for the first alternative. Since all socially meaningful behaviour is inextricably bound to its context, ethnographers feel that neglecting these bonds would be tantamount to mutilating the object

of analysis. For this reason, ethnographic data constitution aims at preserving as many features of the segment of social reality it wants to capture as possible, knowing, however, that any kind of data are more or less transformations of reality, and that many of the methods or the ways in which ethnographers approach that segment are not without impact on these transformations (as we shall see in the following section). Usually, analyzing few occurrences of the phenomenon in question in some depth and attempting to do justice to the particularities of their local occurrence in a specific situation, is preferred to dealing with vast arrays of data which are treated in a non-contextualized fashion. Unobtrusiveness of data constitution is valued highly, even if it can never be achieved completely. The ethnographic approach is therefore naturalistic in the sense of not (intentionally) affecting to ongoing social-linguistic event under investigation by the process of data constitution; it strives for authentic data in the sense of keeping the necessary transformations implied by any process of data constitution to a minimum.

3.4. Eclecticism

The practical methods of data constitution in ethnography are eclectic by principle. Ethnographers get what they can; their striving for natural documents of all sorts forces them to become into gourmands, while the gourmet taste for impeccable (seemingly contextually controlled) data is left to laboratory phoneticians or experimental social psychologists. With the availability of technical recording equipment, and given the natural electronification of the social world which abounds with TV and computer screens, tapes and discs (without the intervention of the ethnographer), the pad-and-pencil ethnographer is no longer prototypical. Other, more technical methods which allow minute records of social interactions have become part and parcel of ethnographic practice.

Eclecticism implies the incorporation of conversation analytic methods of data constitution and data analysis (see Heritage, this volume). Thus, the skepticism expressed by conversation analysts regarding ethnographic methodology in general has no counterpart in an ethnographic skepticism regarding conversation analytic methods today.[10] Potential methodological divergences concern the autonomy of context-independent conversational extracts (which would be denied by most ethnographers) and the necessity of bringing external knowledge

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[10] Despite occasional claims to the contrary, conversation analytic studies have not always restricted themselves to what can be read and made plausible from the transcription reproduced in them. A classic example is H. Sacks' analysis of the role of a joke's telling for the socialization of small girls and male youngsters (Lectures, Fall 1971, IX, X, XI and Sacks, 1978). In general, Sack's lectures are brillant examples for a (at the time spectacular combination) of an ethnographic interest in his own culture and detailed and technical analyses of small-scale phenomena. By restricting his interest to his own culture he was able to do without data sources other than transcriptions and rely on his and his listeners' background knowledge which he activated through skillful discussion – a method deeply indepted to Goffman's.

to bear on their interpretation (which they would assert).[11] More important, it seems, are differences in the object of investigation. By looking at data through the magnifying glass conversation analysis has taught us that the social world extends well into the micro details of interaction hitherto unavailable to investigation; this has considerably enlarged ethnographic methods and opened up new possibilities for research. On the other hand, the (self-)restriction of conversation analysis in the orthodox sense to one type of data, i. e., meticulous transcriptions of audio records[12] implies a restriction of the range of objects that can be reached: only a small slice of the social world is accessible via audio- or even videotaped materials, despite today's advanced technologies.

3.5. Two main types of data

All data, it was said above, are transformations (reconstructions) of social reality. Two important types of such transformation may be distinguished. In the first case, it is the ethnographer who observes and/or records naturally occurring verbal interactions. The transformation of these happenings into documents for analysis (the construction of data) is therefore his/hers. Here, the ethnographer uses what might be called *primary data*. In the second case, the ethnographer uses materials which are themselves transformations of interactions which were made by the members of the culture or group under investigation. Such *secondary data* are again of two different types. They may be a consequence of the ethnographer's intervention and therefore "made for him" (elicited secondary data); or they may be due to the contingencies of social life that are independent of the ethnographer (non-elicited secondary data). Trivial to note: secondary data give access to how participants conceptualize everyday verbal behaviour, i. e., about norms and knowledge that is conscious (stereotypes, attitudes) or can be made conscious. Never are they to be taken for adequate descriptions of that behaviour.

4. Practicalities

Given the eclectic nature of the ethnographic method the list of practical possibilities is long; and given the ethnographic taste for natural data, one of the criteria for evaluating these possibilities will be whether or to what degree they are unobtrusive. However, we also need to keep in mind the double function

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[11] Ethnographers will certainly have to take it seriously when conversation analysts criticize them for lack of control of the external knowledge they use in interpreting conversational extracts. Good ethnography will not use knowledge taken from other sources in an unrestrained fashion, but precisely to fill those *Leerstellen* (indexicals) which coparticipants themselves construe as links to their background knowledge.

[12] This is the Schegloffian sense of CA, as outlined, e. g., in his anti-Goffman article (Schegloff 1988, cf. the discussion in Auer 1991 b).

of data in linguistic ethnography: as materials for linguistic analysis, data have to live up to certain qualitative standards (e. g., phonetic transcription or acoustic analysis (see Gibbon, this volume) presupposes certain noise levels, amplitude, etc.) which may be difficult to reach under completely natural conditions.

4.1.   Primary data

4.1.1. Unobtrusive techniques

Unobtrusive techniques are those that can be used by the ethnographer without affecting the linguistic behaviour to be observed and analyzed by his or her presence. Only public verbal behaviour can be made into primary data of this type. Nevertheless, there are a number of possibilities.

A first possibility is the use of **written materials** (such as inscriptions, advertisements, leaflets). Written documents are of course only indirectly pertinent to the investigation of orality. However, the kind of orality a particular society exhibits is after all visible from the ways and structures in which written language is used.

A German/Turkish sign such as the following forbidding ball games on a playground in Kreuzberg/Berlin some years ago, is an important cue to the role of Turkish in the city (including the orthographic mistake in the Turkish part):

Ball spielen verboten
top oynamak yasaktir
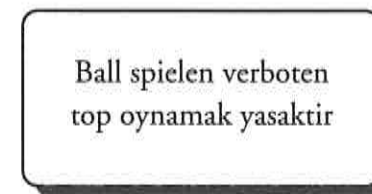
Figure 1

In a similar vein, the ethnographer interested in the structure and social status of the Italian language in Toronto may walk around the Italian areas of the city and collect street names, small (e. g. lost-and-found) announcements in shop windows and restaurants, and business names; or, s/he may read the advertisements in the local Italian newspaper.

Just like any other data, written documents are also bound to their context, particularly their situation-of-usage. Photographs can be a convenient way not to lose track of this; when written documents are simply copied or taken along, there must be a note in the ethnographer's notebook which locates them in time and space (social and geographical).

Another group of verbal documents that can be gathered in an unobtrusive way are **recordings of public events**, often staged with the possibility of their electronic recording (by the media or private persons) in mind from the very start. Political demonstrations, religious gatherings, inauguration speeches, public panel discussions, pop concerts are of this kind, but also market street venders,

sales promoters, publicity campaigners, announcers of fair attractions are easy to record in a completely unobtrusive manner, even on video-tape. Particularly interesting for a community-oriented approach are public hearings on low-level administrative measures (e. g., by the city council on upcoming construction projects) where members of the community can be observed in public who are not professional speakers. Sometimes, the meetings of political institutions (city council, parliaments) are also public, and recording is permitted. In court sessions, unfortunately, recording is almost always forbidden. (In some states of the U. S. A., however, criminal interrogations are routinely recorded on video and can be inspected upon respect by citizens.) What is important for the ethnographer to keep in mind in all these cases is that the event is not what goes on on stage, but what goes on between the stage and the audience. For technical reasons, it is not always easy to keep track of this interaction.

Note that the more the community under investigation is a social minority, the less public and accessible to non-community members the salient linguistic social events will be. On the one hand, this is due to a lack of institutionalized structure in minority groups as a result of the attempts made by the majority and its political and social institutions to force adaptation and integration; on the other hand, it is due to the minority culture's lack of prestige in the majority culture, which will largely make it disappear from public life. This is true not only for ethnic but also for religious and sub-cultural minorities.

While the collection of written data only implies a minimal transformation (i. e., not of the materials themselves, but of the context of occurrence from which they are isolated), and while video/audio recording implies the familiar processes dictated by the transformation of natural events into electronic data, a third group of nonobtrusive techniques for data collection presupposes a much more active role of the ethnographer: those of **(non-participant) observation**, together with participant observation (cf. below) the classic ethnographic method. The disadavantages and problems of these techniques are obvious: they largely depend on the individual ethnographer's ability and experience in capturing whole interactive exchanges and their context all at once, without the possibility of playback, and in interpreting them correctly, i. e., without bringing his or her own cultural prejudice into play; and the enormous amount of interpretive work on the part of the ethnographer which enters into this type of data constitution remains uncontrolled by the reader of the ethnography who has no access to any other materials than those (necessarily edited) "field notes" that are reproduced in the final publication. Nonetheless, observation remains an indispensable ethnographic method. In many public places, non-participant observation is unproblematic, whereas audio or video recording would be impossible for moral, social, technical or legal reasons. Not all "behaviour in public" is "staged" and therefore "recordable" by means of electronic equipment; for instance, bars, restaurants and cafés offer an exquisite social arena in which many verbal and non-verbal interactions can be legitimately observed which are of high relevance to community, institution and activity-oriented ethnography.

Observation and "eavesdropping", but not recording, is possible in subways and other means of public transportation. The ethnographer's curiosity may also lead him or her to queue and wait in many shops and offices in order to eavesdrop on business and burocratic transactions of many kinds. The borderline between nonparticipant and participant observation is nonetheless difficult to draw.

Non-participant observation is only possible if the ethnographer can make believe that s/he is a "legitimate" person in the public sphere in which s/he is present, and if this public sphere allows for bystanders of the category to which s/he is assigned by outer appearance. Thus, it may not be easy for a white person to do non-participant observation in a black neighbourhood, and in some countries a male ethnographer observing children playing games in a playground may be reported to the police. In many non-western societies, the ethnographer's gender will preclude any possibility of doing observation (and often ethnography in general) in the opposite sex' subculture (see Kotthoff, this volume).

4.1.2. Obtrusive methods

Linguistic ethnographers often depend on recordings of reasonably good quality to do their job. The limits of entirely unobtrusive methods for gathering primary data are therefore reached quite soon. Also, in many cases, public verbal behaviour is not sufficient for carrying out the ethnographic task. In the case of "declarations of love", for instance, unobtrusive methods will be of little use. Finally, as mentioned above, nonobtrusive methods fail in the case of (more or less) "hidden" (particularly minority) (sub-)cultures which are only accessible to members. Obtrusive methods are therefore indispensible, if only in a complementary fashion. Usually, the ethnographer will try to keep their obtrusiveness to a minimum.

One of the standard techniques for collecting primary (and secondary) data in linguistic ethnography fares particularly poorly in this respect: **Interviewing** of the usual kind is one of the most obtrusive methods. "Of the usual kind" here means that the "role" or "membership category" (to use H. Sacks' term) of the "interviewer" is that of the external scientist who introduces himself or herself as such; the complementary "role"/"membership category" of the "interviewee" as the object of scientific enquiry is automatically evoked. The interview, in this sense, is a single interactive episode between strangers. Interviewing has become a relatively well-established genre in industrialized societies. Therefore, it has specific, widely shared category-bound activities attached to both membership categories.[13] Given the mundaneness of the genre, data collected through it are not necessarily "unnatural"; yet, they are interview data, orienting to the specific conditions of their social production.

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13 Cf. Uhmann (1989).

For this reason, interview data strictly speaking only reveal language usage in this genre, and nothing else. Nevertheless, there is some reason to believe that data of this kind are often and in many respects similar to and can therefore be taken as representative of out-network language in general, i. e., of the kind of language used in interactions with strangers who are not part of the local networks of the community. There may be a legitimate interest in collecting and analyzing data of this sort. For instance, it may be important to know how second and third generation Italian migrants fare in their parents' or grandparents' language (e. g., Italian) when confronted with an adult stranger using the standard variety of this language as his/her mother tongue, as this situation is one of those that the children will encounter in their country of origin (Italy).

Good interviewing means making informants talk. First of all, this requires an attentive interviewer who listens to the interviewer's answer (even if s/he knows that everything is on the recorder, and even if s/he already has the next question to be asked in mind). Only by listening closely is it possible to know if further details can be elicited by asking additional questions and by requesting elaborations; small cues such as hesitations, reformulations (see Gülich & Kotschi, this volume), cliché phrases, the small triviae that surround the answer "proper" reveal its status and need to be attended to.

If formal interviewing is to be avoided and a more conversational style is to be achieved, a number of techniques are available. First, it may be useful to enlarge the participant constellation by interviewing two or three members of the community together who are well known to each other. The natural dynamism of such multi-party interaction is often enough to reduce the "formality" of interviewing considerably. There will always be some degree of interaction going on between the interviewees, which is of interest not only from the linguistic point of view (it may involve a marked switch of "style" or "register") but also an important resource for judging the reliability and sharedness of the statements made by the single interviewee in the community or network.

A second way of reducing the formality of interviewing consists in avoiding the category-bound activities of the 'interviewer' that are associated with that genre for the sake of more conversational behaviour. Thus, the interviewer may relinquish his or her allocated rights to select and change topics, s/he may digress from the usual schema of question/answer sequences and may loosen control over turn-taking. However, interviewees sometimes respond with some estrangement to such a "breaking" of the interviewer's "role" and feel at a loss as to how to behave in an "unstructured interview". It seems that those who consent to be interviewed also have some expectations in mind which are proper to the "usual" genre of interview, not to some kind of informal conversation. The ethnographer may even risk his or her reputation as a serious scientist unless s/he includes at least some sections of "traditional" interviewing or data elicitation (questionnaire), particularly at the beginning of the encounter.

A third and very important way of getting more "natural" data out of interviews is to avoid anonymous interviewing, i. e. with "informants" completely unknown to the researcher. The ethnographer should have contacted his or her informants beforehand, s/he should have talked to them informally one or more times while introducing her/his aims and research interests. These preparatory interactions make it possible to ask the "right" questions, specifically tailored to the background of that informant. Interviewing should therefore only start after a considerable time of ethnography in the community, and after having been introduced to many of its members. The better the ethnographer's knowledge about his/her interviewees, the better s/he will ask questions, and the better the answers s/he receives will be.

Finally, it has been suggested by some sociolinguists that more informal data can be elicited by introducing topics related to controversial[14] or personally exciting[15] topics. While the first is useful in some contexts (as long as ethnographers manage to stay out of the conflict themselves), the later strategy may yield results somewhat different from what is intended. For instance, stories about adventures involving a risk to one's own life may allow the recording of "good" (elaborate) narratives in some cultures, but these narratives will be well rehearsed: in all likelihood, the teller will have told them a hundred times before. Thus, instead of representing personal, emotional ad hoc speech, stories about spectacular adventures lived through by the informant will tend to be 'ritualized'.

The very situation of interviewing is created by the researcher and is therefore a higly obtrusive way of collecting data. Often, recording of informal conversations that would as well have taken place without the ethnographer is to be preferred. The recording of such mundane interactional events must be embedded in **participant observation**. In participant observation, the ethnographer enters some social field (group, community, institution, etc.) as an active participant who becomes engaged in interaction with its members. While entering the field and after having become an accepted interactant, s/he observes interaction with him/her and around him/her (see, e. g., Kotthoff, this volume) Contrary to non-participant observation, the ethnographer is under double pressure: s/he has to cope with the exigencies of social life (conducting interaction just like any other participant), and, at the same time, analyze and keep in memory what goes on in a comprehensive and unbiased way.

In order to "enter the field", the researcher must account for his or her presence in some way. If s/he lays open the research interests more or less completely (e. g., to investigate the structure and social impact of Italian in Toronto), his or her "role" is just that of the "ethnographer", which is an honest but not always unproblematic one: for a long while, the members of the community will put on their linguistic Sunday garments in talking to her/him (for instance, they will try to use Italian standard), and not everybody may be

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[14] Schütze (1977, MS).

[15] Labov, as is well known, resorted to personal narratives about "danger to one's own life". In German dialectology (see Hartmann, this volume), war narratives have been used for similar purposes.

convinced that an ethnography of the community is to his or her interest. In some cases, only "undercover" ethnography is possible (and advisable) from the very start. (For instance, ethnography in any kind of religious sect will only be possible when the researcher assumes the role of a novice to be initiated – all the more as this role is very close to that of the ethnographer.)

There are then enormous advantages if the ethnographer can take on other "roles", or even enter the "field" via a different role. But typically, it will be difficult for any hetero- and many isocultural ethnographies to evade the categorization as a "stranger" with all its implications. The first step into the "field" then often implies another role: that of the "guest". In many cultures, this role is well defined, and a particularly formal, even ritualized one. It may not be suited to observe (or even record) informal behaviour in the community under investigation, but is a necessary first step. To get further access into the community, it should be kept in mind that all social interaction is in some way transactional: it is a *quid pro quo* exchange of goods of some sort, for the benefit of both parties involved. Becoming the object of an ethnographic investigation is rewarding enough for some people to benefit from cooperation with the researcher; for others, it is completely useless and even disturbing. The ethnographer should then have something to offer in exchange for the member's willingness to cooperate. This may be friendship with all its implications, help in handling the institutions of the majority culture of which the ethnographer is a part, or material goods. Any ethnographer should be aware of the fact that what s/he gets out of the "informants" in terms of "information" is not without a price. By entering the field and getting into contact with them, the ethnographer establishes social relationships which have a life of their own and which cannot necessarily be cut off as soon as "field work" is over.

The whole process of entering the field, of acquiring new "roles" in addition to that of the "guest" and of becoming a part of the community must be retraceable in time from the ethnographer's fieldnotes. Entering the field basically consists of a series of intercultural encounters; these are not only interesting for where they succeed but also for where they fail. When do interactions run smoothly, when are they difficult? Avoiding the lay stereotypes and the person-bound interpretations lay interactants have for such difficulties in intercultural encounters, the linguistic ethnographer will try to isolate the factors that can be responsible for such failure. In particular, s/he will try to find differences in linguistic "contextualization conventions" which go unnoticed by the non-professional analyst.[16] The ethnographer may even turn his or her social field of intercultural encounters into a testing ground for hypotheses concerning differences relating to contextualization conventions in particular or cultural knowledge in general, by intentionally behaving in disregard of the putative norms

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[16] The notions of "contextualization" and "contextualization conventions" were introduced by John Gumperz for the analysis of intercultural communication (cf. Gumperz 1982 and Auer 1992).

and expectations of the social group investigated. Disruptive consequences of such **breaking** are positive evidence for the hypothesis. However, whether some behaviour by the ethnographer is perceived as "impolite" behaviour by lay interactants cannot always be judged from their immediately subsequent responses. In cultures which disallow such immediate responses it is methodologically difficult to pinpoint the impact of breaking on intercultural communication. Thus, while the benefits of breaking may not be enormous, it can have disastrous long-term consequences for the ethnographer and his/her role and should be handled with care.

The technicalities of **recording** (which can start as soon as the ethnographer is sufficiently sure that his or her presence only minimally affects the verbal behaviour of the others) are not the issue here.[17] While recordings are sometimes made in order to facilitate note-taking and only require minimal standards in such a case, the above mentioned double status of data in linguistic ethnography usually necessitates high quality recording. The prerequisites for such quality (such as: little or no background noise, i. e. windows closed, etc., easy identification of voices, i. e. not too many participants and/or stereo or video recording) sound very mundane, but they do have obvious social consequences. (The problems one faces in many (sub-)cultures when trying to get the TV set switched off are just one example, meriting a detailed ethnographic investigation of media usage of its own.)

One solution to the problem of how to reduce the risk of data being biased by the presence of the ethnographer is to have (audio-)recordings made by members of the community themselves. The solution is a good one as long as those who make the recording for the ethnographer are sufficiently informed about his/her aims and about the type and quality of recordings required, and as long as they are available for the transcription and interpretation of the data as well.[18]

Audio- and video recordings usually undergo a further process of transformation when transcriptions are made, which is necessary if only for the publication of records. The process of transcribing is an important step in analysis, generating hypotheses by work on small-scale details. Every transcription reduces its object (which is already a transformation of social reality) in considerable ways, depending on the aims of the ethnography. It is therefore often essential not to lose sight of the recordings entirely, since new questions may arise in the course of an ethnographic investigation which cannot be answered on the basis of the details contained in the original transcriptions that were made with different problems in mind.[19]

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[17] For technical aspects of video-recording, cf. Erickson (1982).

[18] Strictly speaking, these are secondary data. This type of "delegated" recordings presupposes that the transformations implied by the process of data constitution by the members only minimally diverge from those of the fully immersed ethnographer him/herself, however, and are therefore listed under "primary data".

[19] Some practical suggestions for transcription can be found in Gumperz & Berenz (1991).

4.2. Secondary data

Primary data are only sufficient for doing ethnography in an iso-cultural context. In all hetero-cultural ethnographies understanding of how co-participants make sense depends on these or other members' accounts of verbal interaction.

4.2.1. Unobtrusive methods

Unobtrusive methods for the constitution of secondary data are those in which members of the community reconstruct their own or other members' verbal behaviour without orienting towards the needs and interests of the ethnographer, i. e. this reconstruction is done for reasons other than ethnographic data collection.

Among these, the use of **media transmissions** must be included. Radio and TV programmes (Gutenberg, this volume; Holly, this volume) are publicy available materials, and it is particularly tempting to use them as data. Conveniently enough, these materials present themselves as quasi natural, primary sources for the linguistic ethnographer. Of particular interest are those programmes in which lay members of the community take part actively, such as radio phone-in shows. (Local radio stations are especially rewarding.) Here, we will even find a rich field for the investigation of "declarations of love".

However, it is clear that the voyeuristic access to people's private lives which these transmissions seem to present to the ethnographer directly and ready for machine recording, is nothing but an artful product of an institution which sells exactly this voyeurism as its product (see Gutenberg, this volume). This is not to say that radio or tv programmes should not be used as data for linguistic ethnography. However, they provide us with secondary data only, put on stage in ways that are beyond the control of those who watch and listen.

Other, more obvious secondary data of the unobtrusive kind are oral and written reconstructions of verbal encounters by members of the culture. They may be private (such as private **letters, diaries**), or public. Among the latter, debates about the verbal (mis)behaviour of "important" persons (e. g. politicians) are of interest. For instance, the (then: West) German president of parliament, Philipp Jenninger, had to resign in 1988 as a consequence of a speech he gave in order to commemorate the beginning of the Jewish holocaust in the *Reichskristallnacht*, 50 years before. The public debate around this speech centered around linguistic issues; in particular, Jenninger was accused of not making a clear distinction reported speech (he quoted various Nazi sources) and his own opinion when using the free indirect speech as a stylistic device. The latter was judged to be inappropriate for the occasion. The newspaper and media commentaries on this linguistic "misbehaviour" constitute important secondary data for an ethnography of political speech culture in Germany.

4.2.2. Obtrusive methods

More important to linguistic ethnography are obtrusively gathered secondary data, i. e. those in which informants are asked by the ethnographer about their

own or other member's linguistic behaviour. Particularly good informants for such a purpose are members of the community who are themselves (for professional or personal reasons) intercultural mediators, i. e., acquainted with both cultures/communities in question. The most important tool for gathering such data is **interviewing**. Some comments on this way of data constitution have been given above. Clearly, what members say about their own or other members' social behaviour in interviews reflects their or the generally hold opinions, norms, attitudes about such behaviour, and are never to be taken for uninterested descriptions. For instance, Georgians describe the *sadregrželo* as an original and creative genre, while in reality, Georgian toasts are often full of clichés and stereotypes.

Diaries may be used for eliciting members' accounts of their own linguistic behaviour as well. In research on bilingualism they have been successfully employed in order to reconstruct patterns of language usage, from the point of view of the bilingual participants.

Finally, **confrontations with recordings of actual conversations** should be mentioned as a somewhat difficult (and occasionally misused) type of secondary data. In self-reflexive confrontations members are asked to comment on their own speech activities, which are played back to them from tape; in other-reflexive confrontations, they are asked to comment on other members' linguistic behaviour (see Cicourel, this volume). (As a variant, members may be asked to stop the tape when X occurs, e. g. when the situation becomes strained or embarrassing.).

Confrontative techniques of this kind are a way to activate members' interpretive knowledge about speech activities in their culture. The classic predecessors are informal interviews about members' own or co-members' linguistic behaviour in general or on specific occasions, which are still indispensable for ethnography. As a consequence of the availability of more modern technologies such as tape and video recorders, a feasible alternative is to confront members directly with their behaviour. The advantage is that language happenings that could not be re-invoked by memory can be subjected to members' judgements.

Both in the classic and in the modern way, secondary data of this type are sometimes employed and their results evaluated as if they could give direct access to participants' intentions and interpretations. Such an interpretive shortcut is, of course, highly problematic. As a matter of fact, confrontations are social situations of a semiotically particularly complex type, which require a high degree of methodological sophistication on the part of the ethnographer; they have to be treated and analyzed as social encounters in their own right. Instead of making interpretation of the original verbal activities easier, auto-confrontation makes it more complex. Whatever is said in that situation about the original one, needs to be tape-recorded and interpreted itself, and is potentially as problematic to interpret as anything in the first interaction. In fact, the meta-discursive interview could be subjected to members' comments in a third-order interview, and so on.

Furthermore, there are two aspects of the self- and other-reflexive situation one must be aware of, since they can cause problems. The first is that it is one of information-giving, the second that it is one of (self- or other-)evaluation. Both aspects will become relevant in ways that are specific to the culture under investigation and that cannot be assessed correctly without having a good deal of knowledge about that culture beforehand. Thus, a quest for information is, in many cultures, a social activity that cannot be declined. Consequently, giving a wrong piece of information will be preferred to giving no information at all. The ethnographer in an auto-reflexive interview may not be aware of the fact that his or her informant has no idea about what s/he intended in the original situation, or how s/he interpreted what was said, as s/he pretends to know under the social pressure of having to answer the quest for information.

Evaluations of one's own or other's speech behaviour are necessarily subject to considerations of tact and politeness. Talking about any one of the participants of the original situation who is also present in the confrontative interview (ethnographer or informant), or known to one of the participants in that interview, necessarily touches on questions of face. They will usually be the dominant factor when compared to such "principles" as "saying the truth" and will clearly influence what is said. To conclude: it can be useful to use reflexive (confrontative) techniques, but only if informants' metalinguistic activities are treated with the same care as those in the original situation on the tape.

5. Conclusion

Linguistic ethnography is certainly one of the areas of linguistic research in which "learning by doing" is more valuable than reading methodological introductions. And, another truism: every ethnographic problem requires its own methodological solution. If this "conclusion" sounds unsatisfactory, I should add that what it recommends is nevertheless rewarding: *allez-y donc!*[20]

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[20] Most of the topics for linguistic ethnography mentioned in this article have been investigated already. Details on the Italian community in Toronto may be found in Auer (1991 a), on "declarations of love" in Auer (1988), and on the *tamada* in Georgia in Kotthoff (1991, 1992). The Turkish/German sign has been analyzed at length in Hinnenkamp (1988).

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DAFYDD GIBBON

Empirical and Semiotic Foundations for Prosodic Analysis

1. *Goals and assumptions*

In plain terms, prosody is about speech melodies and rhythms, cohesion and breaks, focussing and blurring, dominance and submission, excitement and boredom. Prosody is a source of delight and a means of control. Prosody is not considered weighty enough in our society to be systematically codified or to figure explicitly in the upbringing of our children. Prosody is held to be hard and obscure by many linguists, yet at the same time it is often seen as a spring of eternal hope for understanding speakers' intentions and resolving the ambiguities imposed on hearers.

More technically, prosodic or non-segmental features are properties of speech sounds whose temporal extent is longer than individual consonants and vowels. They have various functions, in particular the compositional function of marking the lexico-syntactic structure and cohesiveness of utterances (syllables, words, phrases, prosodic "paragraphs"), or of signalling discourse functions (speech act types such as question/answer, turn-taking patterns, social superiority relationships, emotion). The function of prosodic features as signs varies in use over at least the following dimensions:

- Language, dialect, social class variation.
- Speech style (formal, informal).
- Speech register (e. g. reading numbers, reading texts, public speech types, face-to-face dialogue).
- Stereotypic speech (e. g. "call contours", "sing-song") vs. free expression (narration, explanation, etc.).
- Speech act, sentence type, mood (final-nonfinal, question-answer).
- Information delimination and cohesion marking (sentence, phrase and word division, focussing by accentuation).

These functions are assigned to prosodic groups and their components, and to sequences of prosodic groups. The category of "prosodic group" is elementary, like the notion of "sentence" in grammar or "turn" in discourse description. The main categories of form which are assigned to prosodic groups and thus, indirectly, to their functions in languages like English and German are the following: