Lecture (5)
Ethnography and Recording Interaction
OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the meaning of ethnographic research
2. To understand the different terminologies related with ethnography
3. To describe the different procedures involved in ethnographic research
4. To discover the advantages and disadvantages of the ethnographic research
WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY

- Derived from the Greek word εθνος (ethnos) meaning - a company/people/folk --graphy – field of study; (thus the meaning)

- Ethnography: describing and understanding another way of life from the native point of view

- Ethnography was developed by Gerhard Friedrich Muller (a professor of History and Geography). He was working in the second Kamachatka Expedition in 1743-44.
WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY

- It is described as a scientific description of the customs and cultures of specific individuals.
- It is used to explore communities/people by observing their society.
- Involves living with the group for an extended period of time.
- It was pioneered from anthropology but has become popular in social sciences.
The systematic study and documentation of human activity without imposing a *prior interpretation* on it via *immersion* in the environment of it and observation of the *routine* tasks that comprise it.

“Make the implicit explicit”

**Defined as:**

a method of observing human interactions in social settings and activities (Burke & Kirk, 2001) as the observation of people in their ‘cultural context’ the study and systematic recording of human cultures; *also*: a descriptive work produced from such research (Merriam-Webster Online)

Rather than *studying* people from the outside, you *learn from* people from the inside
Bronislaw Malinowski in 1915

- known as the father of ethnography
- Spent three years on the Trobriand Islands (New Guinea)
- Invented the modern form of fieldwork and ethnography as its analytic component
“I consider that only such ethnography sources are of unquestionable scientific value, in which we can clearly draw the line between, on the one hand, the results of direct observations and of native statements and interpretations, and on the other hand, the inferences of the author, based on his common sense and psychological insight” (Malinowski, 1992)
It focuses on the predictable patterns of specific groups through their behavior.

Gives a detailed description of habits, routines, rituals and customs of the particular groups being studied. (Exploring rather than testing)

Data analysis is the interpretation of the what is being observed
Usage of Ethnography

- Work that cannot be defined by quantitative analysis – example: majority vs minority groups interaction in political/social/religious discussions.

- Studies relating to a specific group – example: Attitude toward a language

- Studies of natural and unnatural behavior – example the interaction of students on a field trip as oppose to them being in a classroom setting
The *Linguistic Ethnography Forum* characterises the relationship between linguistics and ethnography as ‘tying ethnography down’ and ‘opening linguistics up’ (2004: 4) so that the value of discourse analysis in ethnography is fore-grounded (Creese, 2007) and over-analysis and interpretation is avoided (Roberts, 2008).
‘Ethnography can be seen as humanising language study, preventing linguistics from being reductive or shallow by embedding it in rich descriptions of how the users of a given variety adapt their language to different situational purposes and contexts.’ (Rampton, 2007: 10).
Holism
-
Focuses on relations among activities and not on single tasks or single isolated individuals
-Everything connected to everything else

Inductive
-
started without a single hypothesis

Study people in their native habitats
-e.g. home, office, school, library, hospital, community.
• Natives’ point(s) of view
  – how people see their own worlds
  – opportunity to engage with customers
Anthropology: Study of cultures, relationships, humans and their environment

Anthropologists live within a community for an extended period of time: interacting, studying, participating, researching.

Emic – inside (how people think, perceive, categorize the world; what has meaning in their world—the natives point of view)

Etic – outside (shift focus from the native's point of view to that of the anthropologist)

Key informant (KI)/Key actor – person to whom closely relates to the ethnographer

Culture – the group’s behavior, beliefs and values

Gatekeepers (brokers): people normally have a certain degree of authority in a community, and are thus able to encourage community members to participate in the ethnographic research.
CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNOGRAPHY RESEARCH

- **Contextual**: The research is carried out in the context in which the subjects normally live and work.

- **Unobtrusive**: The research avoids manipulating the phenomena under investigation.

- **Longitudinal**: The research is relatively long.

- **Collaborative**: The research involves the participation of stakeholders other than the researcher.
CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNOGRAPHY RESEARCH

- **Interpretative:** The researcher carries out interpretative analyses of the data.

- **Organic:** There is interaction between questions/hypotheses and data collection/interpretation.
ETHNOGRAPHY OUTLINE

1. Topic and Preparation

2. Fieldwork

3. Methodology and Analysis

4. Reporting
1. PREPARATION

- Familiarize yourself with:
  - Community laws and policies
  - Community culture
  - values & history

- Identify the Focus of the study
  - Set initial *goals* and prepare questions.
  - Can be *guided* by designer goals

- Gain access and permission

- Friend-of-a-friend and gate-keepers
2. FIELDWORK

- Establish **rapport** with gatekeepers and locals.
- Record **everything**:
  - your visits, observations, impressions, feelings, hunches, emerging questions, etc.
- ASAP for accuracy
- Be meticulous!!!
- Field notes, audio, or video recording.
- Follow any leads
3. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

- Compile data into databases:
  - Numerical
  - Textual
  - Multimedia
- Quantify data and compile statistics.
- Reduce and interpret data.
- Code data
- Review and redevelop ideas.
4. REPORTING

- Consider multiple audiences and respective goals.
- Prepare a report and present the findings.
- Have debriefing meetings.
TYPES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

- **Realist**
  - Objective, Unbiased account of written in third person
  - Interpretations are based on notes collected
  - Report not overshadowed with political influences

- **Case Study**
  - Study an individual
  - Intrinsic – have merit
  - Instrumental – illuminates a case
  - Collective – multiple cases studied then compared

- **Critical**
  - Advocates for marginalized groups
  - Studies inequality, repression, dominance
ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Field Work

- Participant Observer
  - Complete-observer (covert/overt)
  - Observer as participant
- Interviews
  - Formal/informal
  - Structured/semi-structured
- Historical Analysis
  - Primary sources
  - Secondary sources
- Films, Videos, and Photographs
- Review of Documents (content analysis)
- Note Recording
DOS & DON’TS

Don’t
- Ask simple Yes/No questions
- Use unfamiliar jargon
- Lead/guide the ‘user’

Do
- Ask open-ended questions
- Speak their language
- Let user notice things on his/her own
Type of knowledge – *intersubjective*

A self consciousness about the impact on the data produced in the context of doing fieldwork and writing culture

how the anthropologist affects the thoughts, actions of informants

Fieldwork is **dialectic**

*dialectic because neither the subject nor the object remain static*
ADVANTAGES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

- ‘Real-world’ data
- Provides in-depth understanding of people in an organization.
- Discovery
- Can be economical (if you ‘do it yourself’).
ADVANTAGES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

- Richer comprehensive prospective – in-depth understanding of the culture amongst group of interest

- Gives importance to a specific group – provides understanding to outsiders

- Accounts for interpretation that goes far beyond quantitative research
DISADVANTAGES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

- Context too specific
- ‘Going native’
- Must negotiate access
- Time & Money
- Data is messy and often unstructured.
- How do you assess significance?
DISADVANTAGES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

- Time consuming and can be expensive

- Variables and relationships are hard to define – research usually begins without the researcher having a specific hypothesis

- Dependent on researcher’s observations and interpretations.

- Possibility that researcher is changing the natural way a culture behaves by being present.

Not really able to generalize findings
Anthropological researchers, teachers and practitioners are members of many different communities, each with its own moral rules or codes of ethics.

In both proposing and carrying out research, anthropological researchers must be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with funders, colleagues, persons studied or providing information, and with relevant parties affected by the research.
Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work:

- avoid harm or wrong
- respect the well-being
- consult actively with the affected individuals or group(s)
Anthropological researchers should obtain in advance the informed consent of persons being studied, providing information, owning or controlling access to material being studied, or otherwise identified as having interests which might be impacted by the research.
We will watch the following short videos (from YouTube):

1. IU anthropologist using video, citizen engagement to boost endangered language

2. The Linguists - African Nu language

3. The Poet's Salary
REFERENCES

- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture