On Ethnography of Speaking: A Review Article

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article tends to put light on Linguistics Ethnography (LE) and express a, rather, simple and tangible definition on LE for those who might find themselves fond of linguistic ethnography. At first, a brief history of ethnography has been provided; then the key concepts and basic terms have been described; also the methodology of ethnographical work has been added. At the end of the article, the results and finding have been attended to.

2. HISTORY

The term ethnography goes back to the 19th and 20th century western anthropology where it was a descriptive account of culture or community, typically, located outside the west (Hammersley, 2007). Ethnography begins and develops first in the British colonialism and then North America. The former is tied to the need of the British Empire to understand other cultures that it was seeking to rule; the latter, also, lies in the work of the Chicago School in Sociology (Brewer, 2000). The Chicago School was concerned with documentation of various patterns of life to be found in the city, and how these formed by developing urban ecology.

This, rather, complex history is one of the reasons why there does not stand one specific and well-defined meaning of ethnography. Over the course of time, the notion has been reinterpreted and recontextualized in a variety of ways, in order to deal with different circumstances (Hammersley, 2007). However, I would like to draw on Brewer's (2000) definition on ethnography that, to some extent, foregrounds an outlook on ethnography:

> *"Ethnography is the study of people in natural settings through methods that would reflect their social meanings and ordinary activities. The researcher is also directly involved within the setting or activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner."*

3. BASIC TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

First and foremost, culture is a fundamental notion in ethnographical work. Fetterman (1998) describes culture from two different perspectives; a materialist aspect, and an ideational aspect. The former indicates the observable patterns of behavior, and way of life. (cf. Harris 1968). The latter is best defined through a cognitive scope proposing that culture includes the ideas, beliefs and knowledge that personify a particular group of people.

Another notion that is essential in order to gain an ethnographical outlook is a holistic perspective. It is an ethnographer's job to picture the entire social group and see what beyond a cultural scene or event e.g. a classroom or a city street. (Fetterman, 1998)

There are also two other different perspectives that are known as 'etic' and 'emic' perspectives. An emic perspective is the insider's or native's perspective of reality (Fetterman, 1998). An ethnographer tends to find meaningful categories that are understandable to the members of a community under study (Savill-Troike, 2002). Whereas, and 'etic' perspective is an external reality; meaning, an ethnographer takes advantage of this perspective to make comparisons (Saville-Troike, 2002).

Apart from that, there is also the idea of 'structure' and 'function'. Fetterman (1998) declares these two terms as traditional guidelines in social organization. He describes 'structure' as the

social structure or configuration of the group; and defines 'function' as social relations among the members of the group.

4. ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING

The term 'ethnography of speaking' was introduced for the first time by Dell Hymes in 1962. Its major inquiry is what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community (Savill-Troike, 2002).

The first key term in Linguistic Ethnography (LE) is 'speech community'. A speech community is a community based on language (Hudson, 1996).

Another concept is 'communicative competence' that plays a, rather, essential part in LE. Communicative competence, according to Saville- Troike's definition, not only involves knowing the language, but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in various situations.

Unit of analysis is another notion that is considered when analyzing communication. Based on Hymes' (1972) definition; units of analysis are: 1) Situation; it is the context in which communication takes place. 2) Event; it is a unified set of components that means to maintain the same general topic from the beginning, up to end of a conversation. 3) Act; it deals with the function of language, whether it be a statement, a request, or a command (Saville-Troike, 2002).

Also, it is significant to consider 'varieties of language' when we are discussing LE. Hudson (1996) beautifully draws on the term 'variety of language': "One might take 'music' as a general phenomenon and then distinguish different variety of music. The term 'variety of language' is a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution."

5. METHODOLOGY

In this part, I would discuss the types of data collected by researchers, and then I describe how data analysis takes place in ethnographical research. I should also mention that this part has been adapted from Saville-Troike's book, An Introduction to Ethnography of Communication (2002).

The following types of data show the essential considerations for conducting an ethnographical work. The first one is 'background information'. It means that before starting any study on any given community, it is important to have background knowledge such as settlement history, sources of population and etc. The next one is 'artistic data'; meaning that having knowledge about the literary sources of the community under study. Another type of data is 'common knowledge', which means the facts that necessarily do not have evidence; such as "As they say…" or "Everyone knows that…" It is also important to consider the beliefs about language use in a speech community. It is essential to consider how the speech community pays attention to taboos and euphemisms.

Now I would like to attend to data analysis in ethnographical research. First and foremost is 'participant observation'. It is a key component of conducting research in ethnography. The researcher observes, listens to, and sometimes talks with the subjects in a natural and free atmosphere. The strength of this kind of study is that the observation takes place in a natural setting, free from constraints of conventional research procedures. (Best, 2006). Apart from that, 'observation' without participation is seldom adequate. There are times that a communicative event is better not be interrupted, therefore 'observation' through one-way mirrors can help the ethnographer observe the event taking place. As ethnography is a qualitative research area, 'interviews' can give the ethnographer an enormous amount of information on culture, the type of narrative, kinships, and etc.

6. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The articles on which I would draw, have been chosen from the Journal of Sociolinguistics Special Edition on Linguistic Ethnography (LE) in 2007.'LE' tends to have a multidisciplinary flavor for all scholars in social sciences (Tusting and Maybin, 2007). The multidisciplinarity of LE causes to turn up a set of various perspectives that might lead to ambiguity of what LE is in essence. Also, the tension that appears to have been brought up in the Special Edition of Journal of Sociolinguistics, does not only clarify the identity of LE, but also, makes it more blurred, to some extent. I tend to put light on the articles from two aspects; first, the essence of LE as a

multidisciplinary approach; second, elaborating on the tension between realist and constructionist perspective. Hammersley, and Blommaert reflect on the discussions, and I intend to take advantage from them in order to better elaborate on my analysis.

6.1. The Essence of LE as a Multidisciplinary Approach

Blommaert addresses linguistic ethnography as an experimental platform- not a school; a platform that addresses complexity. It rather tends to define and analyze the complexity of social events comprehensively (Blommaert, 2007). Also, Rampton claims that LE is not a paradigm or a cohesive 'school'; but it is a site of encounter of established lines of research that interact (Rampton, 2007). Rampton goes on by drawing on Bernstein's concept of 'regions' and 'singulars'; and he identifies LE as a region dealing with the issues of interdisciplinarity. As they address LE as an interdisciplinary 'initiative', Tusting and Maybin (2007) provide a, rather, historical outlook on sociolinguistics arguing that sociolinguistics has an interdisciplinary impulse. Also, in the recent years, the researchers interested in conducting research in language variation, language change, code-switching and etc. combined their studies with ethnographical fieldwork. Hence, this combination has made the branches of sociolinguistics more blurred throughout the recent years.

Also, Wetherell (2007) implies that LE takes language as its object of approach and ethnography complements culture. She, metaphorically, uses the word 'marriage' to put forward her claim saying that the 'marriage' of the two approaches brings up linguistic ethnography (LE). Wetherell levels up her argument by proposing a new aspect to LE expressing that LE needs to 'open up' to a further partner psychology. In fact, she does not see culture and language sufficient, therefore; adds another notion suggesting that psychological presuppositions and assumptions cannot be denied when studying the language production in use. She offers that ethnography needs to engage further with the psychological. Wetherell supports her claim on the grounds that LE needs to build upon the traditional interactional sociolinguistics; those of Neo-Vygotskian topics such as 'learning', 'thought', 'development', and 'identity'. Wetherell calls her introduced concept 'discursive psychology' (DP) due to focus of the notion on language use and discourse.

DP offers a new aspect to linguistic ethnography. This means that LE does not stand as an interdisciplinary approach but Wetherell's notion emphasizes LE's multidisciplinarity. This multidisciplinarity, as mentioned earlier, does not truly identify LE but that it makes it even more blurred. Hammersley (2007) expresses that Rampton's label on LE as a 'region' gives LE legitimacy and Hammersley raises concerns that whether, maybe, LE is a symbolic move that tends to bring about resources and gain face. He, furthermore, continues by expressing that any sorts of social forms can be no more than discursive constructions.

6.2. LE in Realist and Constructionist Perspective

This section, rather, re-echoes Hammersley's call on tackling the problem between realism and constructionism. The realist approach sees the social world as an independent entity different from our definitions of language, structure and agency of it. From a realist perspective, the focus of inquiry is on objects within the dimension of the social world; whereas, a social constructionist outlook offers that human reality is created in the sense-makings and the practices of everyday life (Sealey 2007, Rampton 2007, Hammersley 2007).

Scollon & Scollon take a realistic approach by their concept of 'nexus analysis'. Also, Tsitsipis sets up his argument on the basis of realism by defining relationality in LE and focusing on positivist research. Sealey, announces the title of her article as 'LE in realist perspective'. But Wetherell declares a rather constructionist approach by focusing on the issue of identity and introducing the concept of 'Discursive Psychology'. Hammersley claims that Wetherell appears, to some extent, ambiguous in conveying her concept of DP, and her constructionist perspective. He explains that social phenomena do not come to existence by the individual; and we do not create our surroundings by making sense of them.

On the whole, constructionism holds, a rather, extreme approach by the ideas that it offers, and the conflict between the approaches still remains.

7. CONCLUSION

Having drawn on the methodological approaches and the view-points of the Special Edition of Journal of Sociolinguistics, I would now put forward my own argument.

A significant gap that is felt in the world of LE is the real work of it. That is to say, all the discussion in this Special Edition revolves around the notion of LE and what it has to offer, but what seems to me lacks is the articles that have practiced real ethnographical work. It is, absolutely, essential to clarify the path and update the methodology that is being used; however, it is equally significant to start working and giving articles in this sense in order to realize the flaws and the mistakes. This, indeed, helps to better realize what linguistic ethnography, in nature, is. Ethnography, all by itself, is an approach that requires fieldwork; meaning that the researcher takes part within the target community of his study, and engages in the social actions, rituals and whatever that helps the researcher convey his study. LE is also on the same page with those of anthropological ethnographies, but only with a slight different in their perspective. Anthropological ethnographers focus on everyday actions; whereas linguistic ethnographers focus on the functions of speech.

In my view, the problem between realism and constructionism is a theoretical issue, of sorts, and this conflict ought not to prevent the scholars and all those who take interest in LE from doing research in this area. It should also be noted that even those of methodological problems that concern the researchers, would not tackle the issue unless there is an 'actual' work of linguistic ethnography.

Also, there lacks a resource in which ethnographical works could be collected. We can take the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography as an example that publishes the articles in ethnography. This, I am assuming, helps LE to narrow down and be more specified so that there could be seen some real works of ethnography.

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