LARA

LEARNING AND RESIDENCE ABROAD

UNIT NINE

Ethnographic Conversations

CONTENTS

SECTION ONE

1. Introduction

> Don't interview the mayor as he stumbles out of the brothel. (Kempt and Ellen)

> Language permeates our encounters with informants, and the final ethnography takes shape in language. Whatever approach the ethnographer uses – participant observation, ethnographic interviews, collecting life histories, or a mixture of strategies – language enters into every phase of the research process. (Spradley 1979:17)

This unit looks at methods that build on and extend participant observation. When students start their ethnographic study, they may only have a 'foreshadowed' problem but as they undertake their PO they will need to clarify and make much more focused their specific research question. So, this unit is a good place to help students to start thinking about how they could move from a general topic or hunch to a more specific question. One way of collecting further and rather different data to answer that question is through talking to informants about their lives.

So in this unit students are introduced to the basic methods for what we call 'ethnographic conversations'. We use this term, rather than 'interviewing', to disturb the usual notions of formality and clipboards associated with most social science research interviews. Inevitably, however, since students are introduced to ethnographic conversations in the class, they appear a more formal and bounded activity than they are likely to be out in the field. But students may also wish to undertake somewhat more formal ethnographic interviewing and so this unit and Unit 10 aim to develop skills which may be used in a range of situations from following up a casual comment made by a potential informant to arranging a time to tape-record an informant in a setting where they will not be disturbed.

Ethnographic conversations and interviews add an additional data source to that collected by field-notes while doing participant observation. So this unit also takes further the notion of triangulating different data sources introduced in Unit 8.

Ethnographic conversations and interviews require relatively less preparation than traditional structured interviews, but more skills in carrying them out. One of the most difficult aspects is not treating what is elicited as unproblematic facts, as if there were some truth or reality out there which informants can simply pass on to the ethnographer. So, this unit also helps students think about the way in which the data they collect is *socially constructed.*

Finally, an ethnographic conversation depends upon locating a good informant and so this forms an important part of this unit.

2. Links with other units

This Unit links back to Units 2 and 4 and to the immediately preceding unit – Unit 8. Other issues related to the collection and analysis of interview-type data are taken up in Units 10, 11 and 12.

3 Background notes

Some possible limitations to hanging around

PO provides an opportunity to understand the context of the group studied, both physical and social, and will enable students to collect much of their data for a 'thick description'. Participant observation can capture the detail of social interaction and, if carefully documented, provides evidence of how social and cultural knowledge enter into the moment-by-moment decision-making of speakers and actors. For example, how people manage social space in a queue, how they know what department to ask for in a large bureaucratic institution, how a group prepare for the local carnival or how they know what is an appropriate greeting, can all be observed. There is evidence, out in the open so to speak, of the knowledge and practical reasoning required to manage social life. PO, therefore, carried out with sufficient reflexivity, illuminates the way in which people live their routine, everyday lives. Its great strength is that it allows ethnographers to document routine activities and conversations as they happen without constructing informants as self-conscious individuals. But, however much of a 'participant' students can become, the process of interpreting meaning from an insider's perspective will require more than PO unless the ethnographer has years to gradually be socialised into the new community.

The participant observers who only have a few months in which to undertake their ethnographic study can usually only gain partial access to the meanings experienced by the actors studied. The ethnographers can make interpretations but they may still be based on their own cultural frames. In other words, they may still be seeing things from an 'etic', outsider, rather than an 'emic', insider, perspective. Given that much behaviour proceeds smoothly and disruptions, or what the conversation analysts call 'trouble', are routinely displayed in interactions themselves, it could be argued that the interpretation of events is observable from the way they are carried out. For example, work on taking turns in conversation suggests that, in the standard variety of English, a pause of much more than a second will be interpreted as 'trouble'. When there is a pause after one speaker has finished their turn, they often will interpret this as a difficulty. The first speaker may then attempt to 'repair' the 'trouble' in some way. Observers of such behaviour may draw conclusions about culturally-specific interactional knowledge, i.e. that in 'this culture' long pauses are not acceptable. However, it is only by asking the interactants to reflect on what has happened that the ethnographer can begin to establish whether the speakers agree with the observer's 'etic' interpretation. The wink or blink phenomenon discussed in Unit 4 is another example. Extended PO may help you to decide whether someone winked or blinked but you may also need an informant's 'folk knowledge' to help you make en 'emic' interpretation. For this reason, the ethnographer needs to develop

skills in asking questions and listening in ways that help them to build up a picture of the cultural practices of the group they are studying.

Triangulation

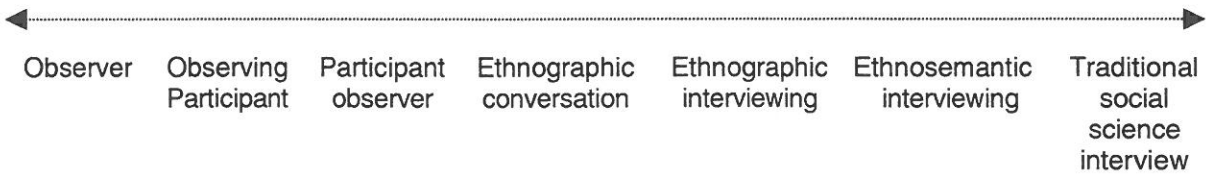
Cultural interpretation which, with thick description, gives ethnography its distinctive quality is the result of understanding a group or a set of activities from multiple perspectives. And this entails multiple data-sources for which PO and ethnographic conversations (and interviews) are the key data-collection techniques. These multiple data-sources then have to be 'triangulated'. This notion is derived from geography where the height of mountains and hills can be calculated on the basis of taking a number of measurements and 'figuring out' the height from combining these measurements, i.e. 'triangulating' them. In the same way, cultural interpretations evolve as different perspectives and information around the same theme resonate together. For example, in a study of how young adults related to their vocational education programme, a key element was the relationships between individual teachers and students. In order to understand teacher/student social relationships, the following data was collected: videos of classrooms, conversations with teachers and students and video feedback sessions. One teacher used a recurring set of metaphors to talk about the students: it was a 'growing', 'plant', 'oxygen' set of metaphors suggesting both freedom and protectiveness. It was important to find out whether her classroom interactions and the students' perceptions fed into this theory of learning or challenged it. And this could only be done by videoing classrooms and talking to students. The data collected in these different ways could then be compared and the different data-sources used to confirm or disconfirm the ethnographer's hunches and emergent interpretations. It would have been misleading to assert that the teacher was 'caring' or 'student-centred' just on the basis of her comments in interviews. It was important to see if her behaviour in the classroom supported her comments and whether the students perceived her as allowing them space but being supportive as well. Triangulating data sources is also a way of resisting the temptation to report what you have seen or heard as 'facts'. Triangulation helps ethnographers to understand there are different versions of 'reality' constructed by different people, including themselves!

Ethnographic Conversations

Most students have preconceptions about what an interview is. They have seen or heard plenty of media interviews which, ever since the BBC journalist Robin Day became an influence, have been designed to be combative and controversial. They may have experienced market-research interviews and will probably have a stereotype of the social science interview, where set questions are asked and answers written down. Consistency and avoiding bias, together with simplicity in collecting information from large numbers, are what drive such interviews. The ethnographic conversation/interview, by contrast, is about letting the informant talk about *their* world in *their* terms. Wengraf (1992:17) calls it a way of finding out someone's 'unique personal culture' – that is, their beliefs, feelings, values and 'styles of response'. And this can be achieved by giving the informant control: "the general idea distinguishing formal from informal interviews is the idea of control. In the informal, everything is negotiable. The informants can criticise a question, correct it, point out that it is sensitive or answer in any way that they want to" (Agar

1980). Issues such as bias and consistency are not part of the ethnographer's concerns. This does not, of course, mean that anything goes and that ethnographic interviews are unstructured, unprepared encounters with nothing but a blurred impression for the ethnographer to pick over, vainly, afterwards. Quite the contrary. But notions of 'structure' and 'preparation' have different meanings in an ethnographic context.

Ethnographic interviews are not structured in the sense that there is an interview schedule with fixed questions in a fixed order. But they are structured in several ways: firstly, they are shaped by the informant in the sense that he or she will, in their responses, be setting up topics for the interviewer to pick up later. Secondly, they are structured over time so that early interviews will range widely over many areas and later interviews will be more focused. Thirdly, in more formal interviews used by more cognitively orientated ethnographers, informants may be asked a series of questions around particular concepts which have emerged as salient, e.g. for tramps 'making a flop', for Sevillanos the notion of 'allegria'. The more formal interview is at one end of the spectrum. At the other end is what we call 'ethnographic conversations'. Experience with former students suggests that this is the kind of "interviewing" that is most possible and most comfortable for them. Using this term also helps students to shrug off the old connotations of interviewing which they bring with them. An ethnographic conversation may arise quite easily out of 'hanging around'. It may lead to more formal interviewing later or students may collect all the data they need in the time available through conversations. Students may find the following spectrum helpful.



They may move up and down along the spectrum but are likely to spend most of their time in the middle.

William Whyte in *Learning from the Field*, (1984:99-100) has categorised different types of interview questions and these relate in many respects to the different types of conversation/interview:

1. "uh huh" or head-nodding which simply encourage informants to carry on;
2. reflection: when the interviewer repeats back the informant's words with a rising intonation;
3. probe: questions are asked about the last statement;
4. probe: an idea. It may not be the informant's last remark but something else they said earlier in the utterance;
5. probe: an idea from the earlier part of the interview;
6. introduction of a new topic.

Scale 6 is the technique used in most survey-type interviews, with the interviewer moving on to the next topic after the interviewee's initial response. In an ethnographic conversation, all six scales will be used, from the least directive (Scale 1) to the most directive (6) but the conversation will be guided more by the lower scales than the higher ones.

Spradley in *The Ethnographic Interview* (1979) provides a step-by-step guide to interviewing (see Handout 3). His guide has been designed for ethnography students in cultural anthropology. The focus is on the way in which the language of informants reflects and constructs their cultural knowledge. In addition to the techniques of low directiveness that Whyte describes, this approach concentrates on trying to uncover the meanings of particular words and utterances and how they are conceptually related or contrasted in the world-view of the group being studied. For example, Spradley's work on tramps in the United States elicited the notion 'making a flop' Through ethnographic interviewing, he learnt to make sense of what the term meant to the tramps.

This approach requires a somewhat more formal questioning technique than that used in ethnographic conversation. It is presented in this unit with examples, so that students have a repertoire of questioning techniques which they can try out for themselves. This is developed further in the unit on Ethnographic Interviewing and the section on ethnosemantics (Units 10 and 11). Spradley's work is focused on because of his interest in informants' *language* which modern language students should find relevant and motivating.

Problems with interviews

There are a number of problems with interviewing, both ethical and technical and to do with technique. The ethical and technical problems are dealt with in Unit 10 on Ethnographic Interviewing. The problems of technique have to be gradually solved by students through constant practising and reflection on practice. There are more deep seated problems raised by Charles Brigg in *Learning How to Ask:*

> If I were to put my finger on the single most serious shortcoming relating to the use of interviews in the social sciences, it would certainly be the commonsensical, unreflexive manner in which most analyses of interview data are conducted. As Cicourel (1974 c:22) has put it "questions and answers are presumed to possess 'obvious' significance". (Briggs 1986: 102)

Briggs argues that the methodology used by sociologists and anthropologists acts like a hidden filter and blocks our ability to 'hear'. His main criticisms are:

(i) the assumption that data from interviewing is a set of objective facts. In fact, whatever information is elicited is jointly produced by both sides. For example, if an informant is asked about their 'achievements' and replies to this question, then they are constructed as having achieved certain things although they may have never conceived of these things as achievements or used that word. The ethnographer has fed them a term or concept which they

would not have used themselves and then uses it to interpret what they said. When interviewing in a foreign language, this is particularly problematic since it is all too easy to incorporate a concept into a question which has a different set of associations for the informant. This includes the obvious 'false friends' well known to students but there may also be many other terms which have a particular significance to the group studied which students will not be familiar with. Finally, Briggs also suggests that the meaning of answers is only in relation to that Q/A sequence and must be interpreted within that sequence.

(ii) that the data from interviews lacks what Cicourel has called 'ecological validity'. In other words, the data has not been elicited in its 'natural surroundings' but has in some way been manufactured by the ethnographer. There is a danger of what Briggs calls 'communicative hegemony' in which the interviewer, in effect, imposes the discourse of the research interview on informants for whom it means little. They may have different perceptions of what the 'interview' is and of what the questions mean. For example, the ethnographer may ask what may seem like a series of reasonable questions but these may be interpreted as an interrogation by the informant. Her or his answers will be in response to the 'interrogation' and the ethnographer may draw conclusions about what it is allowable to say in this community from the cautious and defensive answers of the informant. The ethnographer may never realise that each side was interpreting the event differently and that the data must therefore be analysed as responses to an interrogation and not a friendly conversation. Similarly, the ethnographer might collect what he or she assumes are folk narratives, only to find out that they are 'stories' presented because he or she is a stranger and is interested in stories. In the life of the community, these 'stories' might have no significance at all or have quite a different function.

(iii) interviews themselves are de-contextualised and the data from them tends to be used in terms of its surface forms and referential meaning only. For example, the ethnographer may take at face value statements about people's identity and characteristics without uncovering the networks of situated meaning within which these statements resonate. (See also the notes on Cohen's *Belonging* in Unit 13 on National Identity). For example, a child could tell a school ethnographer that another child is their enemy when in fact they were part of a long-standing friendship network and had only temporarily fallen out.

To sum up, participant observation and ethnosemantic conversations and interviews allow different kinds of data to be collected. PO records how people behave, their actions and reactions in naturally occurring settings. Conversations and interviews elicit data on facts, perceptions and attitudes, how people make sense of and narrate their own lives. But one is not a substitute for the other: ethnographic interviews need to be done in association with PO and PO can be enriched by ethnographic conversations. And just as the two methods will lead to different types of data, so they also raise different theoretical, practical and ethical problems.

Locating good informants

In order for your ethnographic conversations to be worthwhile, it is important to select 'good' informants. They may not necessarily be the people who offer themselves as willing to give you information (see Shirley Jordan's ethnography and Handout 1: *Locating Good Informants*) but they need to be people who are clearly part of the group you are studying and who can give you the time. They need to be reasonably thoughtful and reflective people but preferably not people who are steeped in social science categories because they will not give you the folk or 'emic' categories you need. There is a lot of literature about how to select informants and how they are typical and so the research valid. For the purposes of student ethnographic projects, these are not important concerns. In many ways, every member of the group studied is an informant. But the student is likely to find a few people who become key informants and these will probably be chosen because of their accessibility and for the reasons given above. But it is also important for students to be aware of the social positioning of the informant:

> It is not enough to assess the reliability of an informant simply in terms of the personality and character of the individual. We need also to recognize how the individual's position in the social structure is likely to shape his or her perceptions, recollections and descriptions.
>
> (Whyte 1984:127)

Gary's experience in Seville quite early on in his project illustrates a number of the issues raised here. These issues were raised when he talked to his lecturer, Ana, when she came to visit the students on their year abroad. After getting to know quite a few people and finding a key informant, his landlord, who put him in touch with a number of people including the ex-Mayor of Seville, Gary had decided to do his project on Sevillano identity and how Sevillanos differentiated themselves from others. One of his informants was a friend JL. He had not told JL what he was doing and one night he had been to a popular Flamenco bar where JL ended up singing. During the evening, Gary asked Ana to help him elicit more information from JL about his barriada, how he had felt about Seville while he was in Cadiz and why he had felt more Sevillano than his sisters in Jerez where they had spent their teenage years. The three started talking about accents and Gary asked JL a lot of questions. JL called him 'cabezon' (stubborn, pigheaded) for pretending to be rather dumb.

Later, Gary and Ana discussed the pros and cons of telling JL something of what he was doing. They decided that Gary would say to JL that he had just had a brilliant idea to do his project on what makes Sevillanos so special as a result of talking to him. He did not want to say that he had been studying him all along as they had become quite good friends over the previous three months. Gary also agreed that he needed to change his approach a little from 'playing stupid' which he found difficult after a while. Instead, Ana suggested that he stopped asking 'why?' questions or 'what does that mean?' and instead would try simple listening responses such as 'uh huh' or repeating back JL's words to him as a way of eliciting more. Gary reported back that he found this much more productive.

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SECTION TWO

1. Outline of a session

1. Introduction: the limitations of hanging around. What is an ethnographic conversation?
2. Assignment Feedback: Locating 'good informants'
3. Ethnographic conversations:
3.1 Relationship between ethnographic conversations and PO
3.2 Different types of conversation and interview
4. Techniques for ethnographic conversations and interviews
5. Difficulties and Problems
6. Practising Ethnographic Conversations:
6.1 Work in small groups on how to do the ethnographic conversation
6.2 Carry out for 15 minutes
6.3 Feedback from each group
7. Analysis of an ethnographic interview: Adult Literacy Student

2. Description of a session

2.1 Introduction

The limitations of hanging around
What is an ethnographic conversation?

Limitations

Ask students to think back over the participant observation exercises and think about their strengths and limitations.

Elicit some of the following ideas:

- You cannot be sure whether you are interpreting behaviour in the way that those you are observing are (viz. the notion of a 'hidden agenda'.)
- PO does not always give you an opportunity to find out in depth what a particular activity means to the participants, or necessarily, how they feel about it.
- PO does not always allow you to take a particular theme or area of interest and pursue it further.
- PO may not allow you to establish good trusting relationships with informants.
- A great deal of the cultural world you are studying may simply not be available as surface behaviour or would require far longer time 'hanging around' than you have.

What is an ethnographic conversation?

Introduce the need for interviewing and explain why the term 'conversation' is being used (see background notes).

An ethnographic conversation could be defined as informal talk with heightened perception. Everything informants say may be interesting and relevant and your attention needs to be totally focused on them. Although the setting is likely to be quite informal and the informant relaxed and comfortable in the conversation, the ethnographer's antennae are fully extended to pick up and log, as far as possible, everything that is said.

2.2 Assignment feedback: Locating 'good informants'

Find out from students what different areas they chose to think about. Ask them to form groups based on common areas (where possible). Within groups, they should share experiences and see if they can come up with an answer to the question: 'what makes a good informant?' Then give them the handout with the Spradley criteria (if they don't have it already) and 'Locating Good Informants: The Story of E' by Shirley Jordan (Handout 1) and compare them with the students' own findings. If they have already been given the criteria to help them select an informant, then they should think about the extent to which the conversation they had with her or him led them to believe that this would be a good informant according to Spradley's criteria.

2.3 Ethnographic Conversations

Relationship between ethnographic conversations and participant observation.

Elicit from the students:

- When they might want to start ethnographic conversations.
- What information they may already have.
- What more information they might need.

They should be aware of:

- the need to have done some PO and have some 'feel' for the contexts they want to discover more about;
- the need to locate 'good informants';
- the limitations of their observations and the extent to which they have started to make interpretations already based on their own taken-for-granted knowledge and assumptions;
- the need to blend PO and ethnographic conversations;
- the idea that ethnographic conversations and more formal interviews yield different kinds of data from PO.

Then introduce the notion of 'Triangulation' (see background notes) with some examples, e.g. Ana Barro's work with caretakers in a language department was concerned, among other things, with their notion of what made work worthwhile. She observed them interacting with staff and students, she also had numerous ethnographic conversations with them, saw cards that students had sent them and read their job descriptions. These are all different data sources which, read and re-read together, led Ana to form an interpretation of the working lives of these caretakers.

Different types of Ethnographic Conversations and interviews.

Introduce the notions of formality/informality and directiveness/non-directiveness (see background notes). Explain that students should be aware of the full range of PO and interviewing types and that they will need to select and adapt according to context. Raise the issue of who controls the interview.

Introduce the idea that ethnographic conversations-interviews will become increasingly focused over time as they get to know informants better and want to home in on specific aspects, concepts, etc. This focusing is the result of the moving backwards and forwards between data collection and analysis (see Units 10 & 11). Students might find it helpful to think of a series of conversations/interviews as a funnel with each encounter becoming more focused.

The analysis of the data for one conversation gives you ideas for the next one and increasingly specific questions can be asked. This process of data collection and analysis and increasingly focused "interviews" assumes that students will meet their informants on many occasions and may interview them, more formally, between three and six times or more. Of course, in some cases, they may see their informants everyday in which case, after several months, they will have a real insight into that person's 'unique personal culture'.

2.4 Techniques for ethnographic conversations and interviews.

Talk through Handout 2: *Ethnographic interviewing*

Make the point that this is the more formal end of what we have called ethnographic conversations but the techniques can be used in a range of encounters from the most casual meeting to a more formal interview. It is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of NOT making this encounter a set of questions. Students should think much more about the kind of conversation they might have with an acquaintance who is telling them about, for example, their stay overseas. Questions would arise out of the conversation as a result of listening and attending to the tales being told. This kind of interaction is much closer to ethnographic data-collection than the standard social science or media interview.

2.5 Difficulties and Problems

Students may raise any or all of the following:

- Access – how do you reach a stage when you can ask people if you can talk to them about their work, aspects of their life, etc.? Remind them, here, of their assignment and of the need to get to know people a little before you involve them in more intensive work. In some situations, provided that people know that you are doing a study, you may not need to ask them formally, but can use their routine contacts with them to gradually learn more of their world.
- How to 'capture' the information? It is possible to: tape-record, take notes or listen and remember and take notes. All three have advantages and disadvantages which will be learnt experientially as students practise conversations/interviewing. Under no circumstances should students tape-record clandestinely (see Unit 10: *Ethnographic Interviewing*).
- How to cope with non-native-speaker fluency?

Students may worry that their language competence may not be adequate for the task: "I'm worried people will get fed up with my clumsy German". Stress here that the most important skill in ethnographic conversations/interviews is listening. A good ethnographic conversation will involve the student in very little talking. It can also be an advantage to be a non-native speaker, since informants may assume some degree of ignorance and be willing to 'spell things out' in a way they would not for a native-speaker. Remind them that, anyway, ethnography is a good opportunity for improving language since they will have to listen to and understand so many in-depth conversations.

2.6 Practising Ethnographic Conversations

This is a first attempt to try out some of the approaches and techniques presented. Students should have the opportunity to experiment a little among themselves without lecturers being present. At least 45 minutes are needed for this exercise. Give out Handout 3: Practising Ethnographic Conversations, and divide the class into groups of three to five. Where possible, they should do the exercise in different rooms.

Some of the most common difficulties at the first attempt are:

1. Difficulty in getting started – either the preamble is too long, or the questioning is too vague or too direct. Remind students to start very briefly with why they are having this conversation and to ask a general descriptive-type question at the beginning.
2. Closed or leading or over-direct questions, e.g. Are you doing French Commerce? Where do you want to go in Spain? Does it not give you a bit of a buzz if your horoscope says you are going to ....? Do you get more money .....? Are you going to get married? This can lead to the informant feeling interrogated.
3. Questions which are not obviously leading questions but where assumptions are built into the question by the 'ethnographer', e.g. a mature student had described how marriage had been 'a way out' for her as she did not really want to study biology at University. After her children had grown up she took a degree. The 'ethnographer' asked, 'What did you achieve in doing your

degree?' assuming that it was an achievement for the mature student. A better question would have been: 'Looking back, how did you feel when you had finished the degree?'

4. A tendency to start a new topic of conversation once the informant has given one response. This makes the encounter more like a standard survey-type interview and less like an ethnographic conversation. For example, the same informant mentioned in 3 (above) talked about 'a nagging feeling I ought to get a degree'. The 'ethnographer', instead of taking the idea further, started asking practical questions about what made it possible.

5. A tendency to ask direct questions rather than find other ways of eliciting, e.g. silence, nods, uh-huhs, may be enough to get the informant going again or one of the most useful techniques is simply to repeat back one of the informant's words or phrases, e.g. the same informant again, as in 3, talked about having to 'pretend not to study' when she was taking her degree. The 'ethnographer' could have fed these words back to her, to explore what she meant; for example, that at home she had to be wife and mother rather than student.

6. A tendency not to record the actual words but an interpretive summary of them, e.g. the 'ethnographer' talking to this same student, after the interview, discussed what she had learnt in terms of the student's 'personal development', her desire for 'social mobility', 'her values', but the informant had not used any of these words.

7. An inability to recall not just key words but the kind of discourse used by the informant, e.g. one informant, talking about preparing to go to Australia to work, talked about her preparation in metaphors and idioms that were very concrete: 'parcel', 'package', 'lock, stock and barrel' as if she made a very neat and orderly exit but by contrast when she talked about leaving her family she talked about it as 'a wake' and she used the 'wake' metaphor several times. There was an interesting contrast here that could have been explored. Remind students here of Goffman's notion of metacommunication – that there is a message but also a metamessage that they need to listen out for.

2.7 Analysis of an ethnographic interview: Adult Literacy Student

This is an interview between Celia Roberts and a mature student of South Asian origin on a pre-vocational basic skills course. The interview was undertaken as part of an evaluation of such courses. For this reason, it is quite a lot more formal than most of the interviews that students will want to set up. Nevertheless, because ethnographic techniques are used, it yielded a great deal of data (over one hour of taped material) which could then be partly analysed and this analysis then used for further more focused interviews.

Pick out some key comments where Celia, the interviewer (I), felt the questioning was appropriate or not. If time, or for a task at home, students could be asked to put in their own comments on the last five pages of transcript.

Discuss the checklist of topics to be covered and make the point that this is no more than a general aide-memoire and should not be written as questions and may be abandoned altogether if the conversation takes a different direction.

3. Advice and Comments

Students usually enjoy the session as it encourages participation from everyone and is perceived as being practical and relevant. Some students may feel anxious about the intrusion into other people's lives and working through the unit is a good time to raise some ethical issues in ethnography: "I feel a certain amount of guilt because curiosity has a sort of superficial connotation". A further discussion of some ethical issues is described in the next unit: Unit 10.

Students' first attempts at interviewing may be very weak and usually far too directive and interrogatory. After constructive criticisms, remind them that they will have more opportunities to try out ethnographic conversations and interviews.

Student comments

> We first concentrated on last week's assignment and the feedback of how to locate good informants. Informants involved were the owner of a launderette, a taxi driver and a landlady who were all very eager to speak, open to answering questions and free from any suspicion or doubts. The conversations were carried out in a rather informal 'social chat' which helped the informants to open up and increased their willingness to talk about themselves. We concluded that, in order to obtain useful data, it is necessary to pursue a 'systematic conversation', that is, to ask as few questions as possible to prevent an analytic interrogation, but to concentrate on certain topics one wants to cover and get informed about.
>
> It was interesting to see from the interviews our mistakes. In particular, points put forward by the interviewers were not fully pursued, instead we seem to jump from one foregoing pre-arranged question to another.
>
> By analysing the interviews, I began to understand what ethnographic studies aim for: not a reflected opinion, generalised ideas and analytic observations but actual evidence, personal experiences and examples that make the informant come to that conclusion.
>
> By looking at the data, I began to realise the importance of referring the informants' statements back to their cultural background and also to consider my subjective interpretations of the data given. The responses therefore are always to be interpreted as comparisons with another

cultural context or with differences between certain personal expectations and the experienced reality.

SECTION THREE

1. Assignment

Locating 'Good Informants'

No matter how skilled you become in eliciting information, unless you have 'good informants' you are likely to be frustrated in your ethnographic research.

During the week, think about one or two areas where you could possibly do an ethnographic project. Do not choose an area that involves your family or your immediate circle of friends. You might choose, for example, possible topics related to: students from a different year, your landlady or people working in services who you regularly encounter, e.g. in a coffee shop, at the launderette, in the pub.

Once you have thought of one or two possible topics, see if you can have conversations with a number of people who could be informants if you were to do an ethnographic study in their area.

Do not set them up as informants, but allow conversations to develop naturally. Begin as the conversation proceeds to check whether they seem willing to talk, whether they can tell stories, give examples, etc. If they seem surprised or discomforted by your interest in them, explain about the ethnographic project and that you are looking for an area to do your 'home ethnography' on. Note their reactions. Immediately, after your conversations, write down everything you can remember about what they told you and also assess whether you think they would be 'good informants'.

HANDOUT 1 – criteria for a good informant

(either to go with the assignment or be handed out in class)

1. Thorough enculturation, i.e. thoroughly immersed in the particular cultural practice you are studying.
2. Current involvement, i.e. actually doing the work or being part of the group that is being studied.
3. Unfamiliar cultural scene, i.e. not an informant who is too close to you or part of your immediate cultural world (although you may get to know them quite well).
4. Adequate time, i.e. someone who is willing to spend many hours with you. (If your original informant turns out not to have enough time, they may be able to pass you on to another member of the group).
5. Non-analytic, i.e. not informants who are steeped in social science and will give you the externally defined categories such as class, race, etc. You want informants who will give you folk categories. But you do want someone who is thoughtful and reflective.
6. Someone who is part of the group and not an outsider. (You will need to take account of their social structure within the group).

(Partly based on Spradley (1979) *Ethnographic Interviewing*, pp 45-53)

UNIT 9 – Ethnographic Conversations 1

HANDOUT 2 – locating good informants: the story of E

What makes somebody a good informant? This is likely to depend on what kind of ethnography you are doing, with what kind of group and what kind of information-gathering methods. The latter, of course, may well depend on what your informants are prepared to do. Not everyone would be happy to be taped, for example, or to allow the ethnographer to take notes during conversations. You may therefore have to abandon some of your plans as you 'negotiate' a way forward with your informants. This was certainly true in my case.

What I learned about locating good informants was the following:

- It is better to wait for a good informant to emerge rather than trying to create one.
- Other people's ideas about who would make a good informant ("you *must* speak to X...") are not always reliable.
- A good informant is not necessarily one who tells you what you want to hear.
- A good informant may not be aware that he or she is an informant at all.

My own ethnography was carried out with a small group of women cleaners who were initially puzzled at my presence, and slightly hostile. My position was strange and new to me, and my first instinct was to look for an 'approachable' individual who would make me feel more comfortable. X began to fill this role. She was motherly and chatty, but I soon felt her attentions were preventing me from observing the rest of the group and I had to try to detach myself.

It was suggested to me that P and J would be rich sources of information, but approaching them proved unfruitful, particularly since they were not members of my chosen group but were rather opposed to it. This resulted in my position becoming politically awkward, as each group wanted to know what was said about them by the other group. I had only one conversation with P and J, and left it at that.

My best informant within my chosen group turned out to be E. Not that E was particularly interested in me or in what I was doing! She was naturally talkative, a *raconteuse* and a lady of strong opinions on just about everything. The group revolved around and responded to E, and so did I. E was in control. She was not going to allow me to direct events or interrupt group rituals, and she did nothing for my benefit. I was there on her terms, which was frustrating at first, but which turned out to be of tremendous benefit.

When E was there, I felt I was not disturbing the environment; I was in her shadow and free to observe. In her absence, other informants came forward and highlighted my presence as an 'outsider'. I became more noticeable and conversation shifted as self-appointed informants such as M began to tell me their life story, assuming that was what I wanted to hear and waiting eagerly for me to take notes (the group

appeared to hold their work as cleaners in low esteem and, assuming it could not be of interest to me, had invented their own notion that I was writing a book on their private lives). Whereas E either ignored or tolerated me, others, in her absence, would try too hard to give me what *they thought* I wanted. They attempted to make themselves interesting as individuals, whereas I was interested in the functioning of the group as a whole.

It was E who made me put my notebook aside and play bingo with everyone (during which I learned a great deal). It was E who shrugged off many of my initial questions and made my ethnography change shape by unwittingly suggesting new ones. It was also E who served as a catalyst, often provoking the group to discuss issues in which I was interested (although certainly not doing so for my benefit). On one occasion I had been excluded from a sensitive meeting, and ventured to ask "So, was your meeting interesting yesterday?" The question was obviously an attempt to pump E for information. As such it was ignored and E kept her nose firmly buried in her newspaper but she and the others gave me the full benefit of their opinions on the meeting in subsequent conversations, initiated by E. It was therefore thanks to E that I emerged with an authentic and rounded view of the group – a view which, I felt, belonged to the group itself rather than being 'invented' by me.

E, then, much to my surprise, turned out to be my chief informant and my chief aid, although if you were to ask E about it she would probably deny it. After all, she didn't even speak to me very much.

HANDOUT 3 – techniques for ethnographic conversations and interviews

The techniques described below are based largely on James P. Spradley's *The Ethnographic Interview*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1979). This type of interviewing is particularly 'kind' to interviewees, respects their rights and attempts to see the world as they see it.

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWING

Some General Assumptions

The aim of the interview is to get the informant to respond as fully and as freely as possible. Let them do the talking so that you can learn from them, through their language, about their concepts and experiences. This means:

1. starting from ignorance, i.e. not going in with any assumptions about informants and how they see their lives. This is difficult if you clearly share knowledge, background, and experience (although in other ways, this is obviously an advantage). Resist the temptation to want to appear knowledgeable.
2. starting without hypotheses, i.e. not going in with a set of questions for which you want the answers. Social Science descriptions tend to do this, e.g. if a study was being conducted of tramps, it is dangerous to get statistics on the 'income' and 'employment' of tramps. These terms would not be used by the tramps themselves to define their status.
3. focusing on description rather than evaluation, i.e. resist the temptation to ask a number of questions, particularly at the beginning, of the kind 'What do you think of ..... ?' Instead ask them to describe and narrate.
4. learning by building up a picture through the language of your informants, i.e. try not to let them 'translate' into the kind of language that they think you want to hear or which you would tend to use, e.g. analytical categories, majority value-judgement terms. Try to find the 'tacit relationships and patterns that exist in their utterances'. Tape or report as much as you can verbatim.
5. asking as few questions as possible and letting them control the interview. Often a comment, a repeating back of a word, even silence can encourage the other to go on talking.

Skills in explaining and eliciting

The interviewer has to be able to initiate the interview and ask appropriate questions.

- **Stating explicit purpose**.

Throughout the interview and particularly in subsequent interviews the informant may need to be reminded of the purpose of the interview.

- **Explaining**

  Very often the informant will be more responsive if he/she fully appreciates what the interviewer is doing at each stage of the conversation. There are two basic types of explanation:

  a) explaining the project, why you want to record, why you are asking certain questions, etc.

  b) explaining the importance of eliciting the actual language people would use, e.g. 'If you were talking to X about Y, what would you say? It's useful for me to know exactly what you would say.'

- **Questioning**

  Always avoid questions with 'Yes', 'No' answers or which have assumptions built into them, e.g. 'Is it difficult to get a job in X factory?' Use instead the following kinds of questions: in this instance the ethnographer wants to find out what it is like to be a worker in a particular factory:

- Descriptive, e.g. 'Can you tell me what you do when you first come into the factory?'
- Structural, e.g. 'What are all the different stages of the discipline procedure?'
- Contrast, e.g. 'What's the difference between the induction here and the induction at X Ltd?'
- Hypothetical, e.g. 'If you thought you'd been taxed too much what would you do?'
- Questions about questions, e.g. 'When you clock on what questions do you ask each other or the supervisor?'

Listening and Responding in Interviewing

The interviewer has an even more important function – to respond. These skills will include the following:

1. **Listening**

   The best way of listening is ensure that the interview is not routine and predictable. (Start from ignorance). If the informant is given autonomy, he/she is bound to tell you things that are new, unfamiliar, expressed in a different way, etc. Creative listening is a constant process of picking up and building on what the speaker says.

2. **Giving feedback**

   To encourage the informant to continue and give a friendly atmosphere, the interviewers need to:

- show interest – with phatic gestures, agreement, etc. or by making comments
- express ignorance, e.g. 'I don't know anything about ....'

- not be afraid of pauses, as long as they obviously seem interested.

3. Encouraging expansion and extension

- repeat back the informant's words to them
- restate what the informant has said using her/his own words, e.g. 'So you feel English people "don't know what's inside your head".'
- incorporate the informant's words when formulating your own questions, e.g. 'You say you have to 'trim and flash', how often do you have to do this?'
- if an informant uses an unfamiliar term or an unusual expression, try to find out how he/she is using the term, i.e. don't ask "What do you mean by ..... ?", ask "What would you do/how would you feel if someone said ..... to you?"

HANDOUT 4 – practising ethnographic conversations

1. Get into small groups of between 3 to 6 (preferably 4). Each group will try one ethnographic conversation which will be monitored by the others in the group. The groups will then reconvene for feedback and discussion.

2. Each member of the group should select a role for herself from one of the following:
ethnographer
informant
monitor for questions and/or eliciting responses
monitor for responses

3. Spend 10 minutes discussing what aspects of the informant's world to focus on, e.g. a job they have had: what is it like to be a dispatch-rider, waitress, shop assistant, etc.? Or an aspect of their experience, e.g. what is it like to be a northerner living in the south, a mature student, one of a large family, etc.? Put together a core checklist of some of the areas you might cover. Do not write down actual questions. Remember to let the informant and their language control the interview.

4. Carry out the ethnographic conversation for 15 minutes. The two (or more) monitors should note down what they can on OHTs.

5. Group Feedback:

   You should be ready to comment on the following:

   - How did the informant feel about the exercise; relaxed, surprised, angry, etc.?
   - How did the 'ethnographer' feel about the exercise: nervous, in control, exhausted by the difficulty, etc.?
   - How did the 'ethnographer' elicit information from the informant? Was it an interrogation, an interview or a conversation? How did the informant respond: with long responses, with interesting concepts/language, with embarrassment etc.?

HANDOUT 5 – adult literacy interview

The Interview
S = Informant
I = Interviewer
R = Course Tutor
Mr M = TSU Advisor

Counter No.			Comments
00	I:	I'll explain why I wanted to talk to you. I'm trying to find out what people think about these courses	Statement of explicit purpose.
009		The first thing I'd like to do, is if you can give me some idea, describe a typical day here at Pathway. Can you tell me what you do when you first come in?	Descriptive question but it misfired because I later discovered S thought 'typical' = difficult. But her answer, although not the expected answer, gave useful insights into her anxieties so I followed up her comments, using <u>her</u> language i.e. 'better'.
014	S:	When, I first came over here, you know, I thought – all peoples are better than me, you know, I must be care .. or I shall speak wrong English – this sort of things – when I found – I feel so easier – I can ... confidence – I can talk to someone new.	
023	I:	Uh huh. Why did you think they would be better than you?	'Giving reasons' question. Probably too early and could have appeared threatening.
	S:	Because I had no idea what they are going to teach us. .... (Description of steps she went through	

		to get on the course) .... another ladies they had B.A. or more qualifications, - so I don't know how I will be able to manage with them, but I found some of the ladies they are worse than me – then – I could … its all right – then I can manage	
069	I:	Did you ask any questions about the course before you started it?	Asking questions about questions to find out her preoccupations in her language. This was her most urgent question and showed her motivation for coming on the course. 'He chose me' suggests her reliance on the tutor/ TSD decision.
072	S:	Yes, it was my second week when I asked R. or Mr M – I asked them are you sure – there will be – get accounts course after that? ..... He gave us a test. I really pretty good marks. Now, he chose me for my accounts course – or even I can go some, another course as well – he said	
	I:	Uh huh. If you weren't sure what was going to be on this course …	
091	S:	… That's why I'm asking R.	
091	I:	Mm.	
092	S:	So – well, tell me is this courses good	
099	I:	Mm.	
099	S:	For ten, fifteen years, you know even more than that – because I'm not that old – you know – so ..	
103	I:	What sort of things do you think are useful for the future?	Structural question, picking up on her language – 'the future'.

104	S:	People are used to do Secretary course but now they are cutting off that one as well – typing, this sort of things. They've got computer, I don't know what – that machine And – er accounts – they've got calculator but still they need people, I think.	
	I:	Uh huh.	
113	S:	First, I thought it is very useful for me – account, book-keeping and later on then I can do accountancy – work hard. Today he said there are no vacancies for me in September. You can get in February – I'm worrying I'll be out of touch – you know when you go to work. You come back home, you can't study. You feel so tired – you got to give attention to your family as well.	
125	I:	Uh huh. Have you ever tried to study – er – in the evening?	Guiding her back to her opportunities for learning English.
128	S:	No. I didn't	
	I:	Do you know anybody who has tried?	
130	S:	I never had a chance to see anybody, - you know. (She explains how demanding her job was)	She failed to understand the question, so it was put again, a different way …
137	I:	Quite a lot of people don't speak very good English. Speak much less good English than you. Why is it, do you think, that their English doesn't improve?	Getting reasons question, softened by prefacing comment.
	S:	(She explains about women depending on their husbands & how her husband encouraged her) …… (She says how important it is to speak English for the sake of the children) ……	

	I:	So why do you think these women don't learn to speak?	
194	S:	I don't know pause Er – like my sister she said – is no necessary for me now – because I've got a family and they'll speak for me – they do whatever I want so why I should go over there – "I'm all right as I am". For me, I think its most important if I learn.	Encouraging her to continue by not filling the pause.
201	I:	Mm. Yeah. Well, you obviously decided you wanted to get on – um – and you went to the job centre and they told you about the Preparatory Course …	Guiding her back to her comments on the course by re-capping on what she has said. A comment rather than a question was enough to encourage her to take up the story.
206	S:	Yes, they said you're not ready to go to the TOPS course because your speed is not enough. So, then OK, I must learn something.	
	I:	Yeah.	Only the minimum of phatic was needed just to show she was being listened to.
210	S:	And I've come to this country I should do something for this country as well.	
	I:	Mm.	
212	S:	Because we're living here – we don't think we're immigrant – whatever we think – its our house and wherever you live, you have to look after – isn't it? ……	
233	I:	If there was no preparatory course, what else would you have done, do you think?	

	S:	Well, nothing. Just seeking for a job – see if I couldn't get anything. It was – hard.	
238	I:	Why was it so hard, do you think?	Getting reasons question. A 'why' question but it did not seem threatening at this stage of the interview. Picking up on her language to find out how she is using the word 'hard'.
239	S:	Sometimes is problem for – they look at your face and straight away say there is no job even though they got a job. And sometime the people they know your ability and they take you. Mostly people they just look at your race – your Indian or Asian – straightaway they say there is no vacancies.	
	I:	Mm.	
246	S:	Yes, it's happened to me two or three time.	
	I:	Even before you speak?	
	S:	Yeah – you know the employment exchange, they sent me – there was factory. Aero electrics which is – you know – closed now – it was in Southall – and I want there first myself, you know, I read it in the paper and they said 'Oh sorry, there is no vacancies'. And then I went to the job centre, you know, my husband was studying that time, and they said – Oh yes, there is vacancies in Southall, and you can go and try. I said 'give me' – you know. They give me that chit to shown to them and when I go over there again that lady said "I told you before, there is no vacancy – Why you come over here? Silly woman" – I said "You got vacancies. The employment exchange gave you a ring before I came over	

		here. Right? Now you've got a job". And she went inside – you know. That man – he came – he was Personnel Manager? I don't know what was he and he accept me. He gave me a form to fill and that lady she said, "Oh my God – You accept her?" He said 'No – why?' She said "I sent her back twice and she came back again" And he said "Did I? I made a mistake"	
		And he said "Did I? I made a mistake" And he took me to interview. He asked me to read that book and even it was assembly job. Anyway, I know how to read and how to write.	
	I:	Mm.	
276	S:	And he said – er – read this thing and assemble these things. "You understand English?" And I said "Of course – I did it there". He appreciated it and he accept me and give me a job. (Then she tells another story of a receptionist turning her away)	Again the minimum of intervention by the interview.
298	S:	... Seven years I was working there, no complain about it.	
300	I:	Mm mm. Did you use your English very much in your job?	Guiding her back to English use – a structural type question, i.e. what were the different situations in which you used English?
302	S:	Yes. We had to write faults and if something is missing we have to write missing .... (She describes some of the ways she used English. Then turns to English outside work).	
314	I:	On what sort of occasion did you use your English?	Structural question.
315	S:	I watch television a lot – and even at	

		home. Not these days, when kids were small, so I used to talk to them in English because if they go to school – nursery – it won't be problem for them to understand their teachers.	
	I:	Mm.	
321	S:	So, now I don't talk to them in English much because I know they can speak and understand so I want to teach them my own language as well – a little bit – because otherwise my parents and my husband's parents they don't understand English at all – so I talk with them in Hindi at home.	
326	I:	Do you use English now very much when you're outside the college?	Structural question but not very well phrased as it elicited only a 'yes' answer.
328	S:	Yes I do	
329	I:	Who do you use English with?	An example-type question.
330	S:	If I talk to strange man – don't know them – then I always try to speak to them in English ..... (She describes how some friends laugh at her for using English so much)	
342	I:	Can you give me some examples of when you've used English recently outside the college?	Example question.
345	S:	What sort of example?	BEWARE! The question is rephrased rather than the interviewer giving S an example.
346	I:	Any time at all that you can remember, say in the last week, when you've been using English.	
347	S:	Yes. Yesterday I went to the Dominion Picture hall and there were two or	

		three Indian girls but I didn't know them – that they are Indian or Pakistani – whatever they are because everybody doesn't speak Hindi, you know	
364	I:	Have you had to speak to any English people recently?	Another example-type question
	S:	Yes. My next-door, she is English	
		and I told her about this course and she said "Ah, that's good"	
369	I:	What did you tell her about the course?	An obvious follow-up question and one that should elicit comments about the course which are not teacher-directed.
	S:	I telling her (laughs) – you know – I mix up with, you know, another friends – usually I use – too shy.	
	I:	Mm.	
	S:	And- er – first I had no idea how to look at the dictionary or directory. I knew it but – I – confidence – Just I am talking to you now – I had no confidence – I couldn't talk before.	
376	I:	Really? Well, now you talk very fluently indeed. That's interesting – you said you wouldn't look things up in a dictionary or a directory	Encouraging comments: Re-cap to elicit a more specific response.
	S:	Because I thought I had no need but now I feel – you know so many words they've got a different – same meaning – you know ... (S. explains how useful the dictionary is and how she writes to her cousins in India in English. She also gives an example of how difficult it was to explain to R. about a proposed arranged marriage when she was 13).	
437	I:	I'm interested – you've said very often confidence has been the most	A getting reasons question but softened

		important thing for you and I'd like to know, really, why you think confidence is so important.	with a re-statement.
	S:	Yes ..... (She explains that it is her embarrass-ment in not being able to speak English to her educated relatives that concerns her)	An unexpected response but it was important to be able to follow it up. Unfortunately, the question was phrased to get a 'yes'/'no' response.
453	I:	Do you think many Indian families are like yours – people wanting to speak English together but feeling, like you, rather shy because some are more educated than others?	
	S:	Yes – many people.	
	I:	Mm mm. Interesting. (She describes what she tells her husband about the course. Her description is in terms of new vocabulary and grammar – but she does mention confidence again, and later, describes the different types of useful letters she can write: to the Home Office, the solicitor or about the gas bill.)	
501	I:	If a friend of yours – er – wanted a job like accounts but perhaps had some difficulties with English – and – wanted to know about this course, what would you tell them?	
504	S:	I would tell her – encourage her to come over here and it is good chance – you know – you can learn. Instead of working in the factory or washing dishes, it is a good thing if you can improve yourself.	
	I:	And if she asks you – "it's a year, it's a long time – what will I learn on the course?" What would you say to her?	

512	S:	I would tell her – general things. You need it at home even if doesn't matter you can't go to work ..... (She describes situations such as buying a house, travelling, action if you have a fire etc. which she has learnt about; (She describes the organisation of the course and the fact that they are a mixed group of Asian and West Indian)	
589	I:	When you're learning together, do you find that – er – you have different problems from them?	
	S:	Yes, written wise they're not good – only spoken wise ..... all our Indian girls are cleverer than them	
596	I:	You say 'cleverer', you think Indian girls	
	S:	Not cleverer – I mean to say – because they didn't go to school – even – I would be the same if I didn't go to school	
608	I:	We were talking before about Mr M. and the teachers – what's the difference – if you have a talk with R and if you have a talk with Mr M?	
	S:	I don't get nervous at all now ..... (Then a long digression about the need to know the specific names of these .	
646	I:	Well, Mr M. comes to see you quite often but obviously most of the time you spend with the teachers and you must know some of them quite well. If somebody was talking about teachers or suppose you were looking for a teacher to teach you some more, what sort of questions would you want to ask, say a friend who knew the teacher?	

	S:	First thing, he should have patience … he should be very friendly and he should tell your mistakes and he shouldn't let you down all the time, he should give you courage.	
	I:	Uh huh.	
	S:	"Oh yes you can do it – you can do it" – that sort of thing – He should(n't)? be expensive if I have to pay from my own pocket (Laughs)	
		(She describes and contrasts teachers in India with teachers here).	
681	I:	Right, when you finish here – um – you've had a lot of help from the teachers and they've been very encouraging – but when you leave you'll have to go for interviews for courses with people who will not know you and will have to be very fair and can't be encouraging. What's the most difficult thing, do you think, about attending an interview?	
	S:	You must be active, you know, smart and first, when you try to talk to that boss – and – er – if he – you can .. little bit, you can't tell – exactly what nature he got it – what habits he got it but little bit you can judge from the starting.	
	I:	Uh huh.	
691	S:	And even you can't judge – my husband says "There are so many things don't know but still, you know, from starting you can see a little bit what sort of man he is.	
	I:	And how will that make you behave in the interview?	
	S:	Well, you go for interview, you must be sensible, you shouldn't talk much – even just to the point you should talk	

		to that person.	
706	I: S: I:	Will you be different in interviews after the course – different from the way you were at interviews before the course? I don't know. I never frightened before .... I don't think so. Perhaps I learn more – I can improve my English, I can speak a little bit right – but way will be same. Unless I don't know the people, how could I friendly with them straight away? How could I tell them my problems straight way? Yeah. (She explains how she was able to negotiate flexible working hours at one interview. The tape ran out when she was talking about less good experience with 'fussy' supervisors.)	

Checklist of topics to be covered

The following points were noted down as a checklist. The interviewer occasionally glanced at the list to make sure all the points were at least partially covered. The order of the points is not significant. A number of ideas and opinions were elicited which were not included in the list.

1. Motivation for coming on the course.
2. Steps that led up to coming on the course.
3. Background: ethnic, family etc.
4. Employment status and jobs held before this course.
5. Idea of the course before it began and now (midcourse)
6. Level of English before the course.
7. How they assess level of English now.
8. Course content.
9. Course organisation.

10. Attitudes and expectations re – Teachers, TSD officials etc.
11. Expectations after the course.
12. Use of English: in the college and outside.
13. Comparison between own use of English and English of their friends, family and neighbours.
14. Examples of difficulties experienced before the course re - getting a job, in the job.

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elicited