ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD:
THE ANTHROPOLOGIST’S STRATEGY
IN THE FIELD
RESEARCH IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Assistant Professor Dr. YAS AL-ABBASI
Anthropology and sociology department
college of arts
Mustansiriyah University
yassoo2oo7@yahoo.com
Abstract:

The concept of ethnography (in general) refers to the model of describing a human culture – its values, traditions, norms, institutions, interpersonal behaviors, material productions, and beliefs- by many of tools or methods such as interviewing, participant observation, and personal documents. The aim of research to explain the scope of ethnography in human sciences (one of them anthropology) and the importance is explain the steps which be used from researcher especially anthropologist when he inter the filed or fieldwork.
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Assistant Professor Dr. 
YAS AL-ABBASI 
Anthropology and sociology department 
college of arts 
Mustansiriyah University 
yassoo2007@yahoo.com

Introduction:

Ethnography can not be judged to be the specific method of collecting data, but rather it is a strategy with specific tasks that is based on understanding the social and cultural meanings and activities of people in a given field or environment and which are closely related to the research community through participation observation as a basic tool. According to that theme which refers to the central aim of human sciences is to understand people's actions and experiences in the world, and the ways in which their actions stimulate and reflect on these experiences.

Once this is the central aim, knowledge of the social world is acquired from intimate familiarity with it, and ethnography is central as a method because it involves this intimate familiarity with day-to-day practice and the meanings of social action. To access social meanings, observe behavior and work closely with informants and perhaps participate in the field with them, several methods of data collection tend to be used in ethnography, such as in-depth interviewing, participant observation, personal documents and discourse analyses of natural language.

We can say, Boas’s strategy is salvage ethnography (or anthropology), by recording of indigenous culture (American Indians) and all the data about them, while Malinowski’s strategy, more actively entered the scenes of daily life and made the speech in action, he heard and recorded there the basis of his ethnography, Moreover, he maintained detailed fieldnotes that analyzed topically while still in the field, and constantly reread to plan further research activities, his fieldnotes could be analyzed ethnographically from several of these institutional perspectives, the aim of research to explain the scope of ethnography in human sciences
them anthropology) and the importance is explain the steps which be used from researcher especially anthropologist.

Definition

Many researchers have tried to define ethnography according to their theoretical orientations and the disciplines they belong to because the field of ethnography can enter into many disciplines, especially anthropology, in book (Ethnography: Principles in practice) the ethnography refers primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer, participating overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research(Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007 :p4). Agar define ethnography as a research method that emphasizes encountering alien worlds and making sense of them. Ethnographers examine the social action of individuals which requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, a make do style to meet situations not of the researchers making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes(Agar, 1986 : p12). Ethnography is ‘the systematic description of a single contemporary culture, often through ethnographic fieldwork’ (Wood 1997: p157), and ethnography (in Reflexive Ethnography) is a research process based on fieldwork using a variety of research techniques (observation, interview, collection of objects & artefacts) which includes engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time. The eventual written product – an ethnography – draws its data primarily from this fieldwork experience and usually emphasises descriptive detail as a result(Davies, 1999: pp4-5).

The main task of ethnography was the study of primitive societies, such as Malinowski studies of the Argonauts of the Western Pacific, Brown's study of the Andaman community, and Margaret Meade's studies of the peoples of South America. With the development of ethnography in the last decades of the twentieth century, many scientific paths have been adopted, used by subdisciplines in many research methods, and are no longer limited to the study of primitive culture, but rather to the study of cultures in industrial and developed environments, such as sociology and education, and feminist's studies, as well as new disciplines such as critical ethnography, organizational ethnography and virtual ethnography.

The field setting of ethnography

The social setting refers to the different characteristics of the scene that can be observed or to be studied. For example, an ethnographic scene
can be a street corner, or an organizational location such as a church, school or workplace description, playground, sports arena, barbershop, dance hall, courtroom, cafeteria, swimming pool, etc.

In order to provide descriptive characteristics of the setting, it should be determined precisely in terms of location and structural characteristics, the area used by the bulk, how it organized, and so forth. Ethnography is concerned with the specific behavioral actions carried out in the places or the social setting, and that the activities of that setting are collections of work related to it.

Spradley identifies the following categories of phenomena that occur in any setting of human interaction:

1. The actors in the setting.
2. The behaviors that are being carried out by these actors in terms of acts (smallest units of behavior), activities (a set of related acts), and events (a set of related events—more discussion on these will be provided later)
3. The space occupied by these actors, and how these actors are situated in the space.
4. The objects in that space, and how these objects are situated or arranged.
5. The time of observations (hours of the day, days of week, specific months or seasons of the year).
6. Whether there seems to be any goals associated with the behavior of the actors?
7. Do behaviors seem to be carried out with any level of emotions, or feelings? (Spradley 1980: pp73-74)

Behavioral patterns may be planned or unplanned. For example, putting the bridegroom's ring on the bride's finger is a blueprint, for a planned activity (wedding rite) and there are unplanned behaviors at the same wedding.

L. Whitehead add four other categories to those of suggested by Spradley, they are (Whitehead 2005: P12)
8. The language used by the actors in the setting.
9. The interactive patterns between the actors in the setting.
10. Discourse Content that appears to influence the actors in the setting.
11. The presence of Actor Groups in the setting, or persons that can be differentiated by some shared similarity, such as by sex, age, kinship, vocational or some other type of affiliation (such as persons in a
hospital setting differentiated by administration, doctors, nurses, non-
medical staff, patients, etc).

The strengths of ethnography:
There is almost a consensus to return the beginning of ethnography and
evolution and practical applications to anthropology. They have been used
by anthropologists as a way of identifying other cultures, especially
traditional cultures, and thus ethnography has derived its rules of
organization and foundations from anthropology. Some scholars believe
that the very purpose of ethnography is to look at culture in particular. The
question is: What is the culture of these people? Are they supposed to have
a particular culture of their own? What are the implications of this culture
on the formation of their behavior, their life practices, and their perception
of the social and cultural reality in which they live? We explain below the
strengths or attributes of ethnography according to (L. Whitehead 2002.
P5):
1. Ethnography includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, and
both classical and non-classical ethnographic approaches.
2. Ethnography is more than simply methods, but has ontological and
epistemological properties.
3. Ethnography is a holistic approach to the study of cultural systems.
4. Ethnography is the study of the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and
meanings within cultural systems.
5. Ethnography is the study of cultural systems from both emic and etic
perspectives.
6. Ethnography is greatly dependent on fieldwork.
7. Ethnography is a process of discovery, making inferences, and
continuing inquiries in an attempt to achieve emic validity.
8. Ethnography is an iterative process of learning episodes.
9. Ethnography is an open-ended emergent learning process, and not a
rigid investigator-controlled experiment.
10. Ethnography is a highly flexible and creative process.
11. Ethnography is an interpretive, reflexive, and constructivist process.
12. Ethnography requires the daily and continuous recording of fieldnotes.
13. Ethnography may be carried out by individual investigators, or by teams
of investigators.
14. Ethnography presents the world of its host population in human contexts
of thickly described case studies.
Then, ethnography is the method and tool that is used to understand the models of society - or a group - and its daily activities, through the knowledge of the ideas of the members and beliefs, values and behavior, and what they do and how things are dealt with, by participation observation the in the living situation of the researcher.

**The ethnographer and fieldwork**

Ethnographic work is usually characterized by a set of features that making the ethnographer to seeks for reveal and to explain these hidden or latent issues of human behavior when studying the phenomenon, by immersing or interacting with people, and engaging with them to express their ideas and beliefs based on their participation in the studied society, especially with use participation observation, and an open interview in-depth. In order to understand, explore, and explain the models of human behavior of human societies and most of these features are (Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007:p3):

1. People’s actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher – such as in experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. In other words, research takes place ‘in the field’.

2. Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

3. Data collection is, for the most part, relatively ‘unstructured’, in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis.

4. The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.

5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most.
Ethnographer assumes that human behavior is highly influenced by the environment, in which it occurs, therefore a real understanding of behavior requires us to understand that environment or context in an integrated manner, and therefore the collection of data and information must take place in their natural locations and contexts. Where the interpretation of the data is done within the same context.

**Perspective of ethnographic method**

The ethnographic method is flexible. There is no unified mechanism for collecting and analyzing information, but it provides us with a general methodological framework from which the researcher can start. In addition, he can innovate and add a range of models through his creative vision and through his ability to gather as much information. Within the framework of the flexibility offered by the ethnographic method of the researcher, it is possible to change the plan and design of the study, and to change the method according to what he sees during his fieldwork, perhaps through participant, he has new or different research models and sees more important than when he entered in the field.

Wolcott stated that ethnographic research procedures require three things (Wolcott, 1999: pp7-8).

1. A detailed description of the culture-sharing group being studied.
2. An analysis of this group in terms of perceived themes or perspectives.
3. Some interpretation of the group by the researcher as to meanings and generalization about the social life of human beings, in general.

Three components of the ethnographic research method
The process of collecting and analyzing information in an ethnographic method is different from traditional research. They usually pass through four overlapping and indistinguishable stages, in an integrative and overlapping method, where information is collected in the first stage, information is organized and classed in the second stage, and then the third stage, in which the information is presented, summarized and presented in the form of matrices and pivotal ideas, stage Final related to the process of drawing conclusions.

Summary:

Most studies and research related to ethnography have agreed to indicate a group of principles or points that are related to and distinguish the research or ethnographic method as follows:

1. Ethnography is a type of qualitative research method employed by anthropologists to study human society and culture.
2. The term „ethnography“ means “portrait of a people” which involves a description of people and culture.
3. Culture has many definitions but essentially it refers to the beliefs, values and attitudes that influence the behaviour patterns of a specific group of people.
4. Ethnographic research has a particular strength that makes it especially appealing to many researchers. It can reveal nuances and subtleties that other methodologies miss.
5. In ethnographic research and qualitative research in general, the issue of sample size is not that easily determined.
6. Whatever the sampling methods ethnographers employ, they have to ensure that they gain access to as wide a range of individuals relevant to the research questions as possible.
7. Having research questions or at least guiding questions in ethnography is a good idea because it gives you some way to focus your attention especially if you do not have the luxury of time and resources.
8. Being participant observer, the researcher assumes two roles – an observer and as a participant.
9. Gaining access requires the researcher to draw on his or her interpersonal resources and strategies and to be aware of the obstacles to access and effective means of overcoming them by understanding the social setting.
10. Note-taking is the main method of recording data and in most cases it is handwritten taken either at the time, or immediately afterwards.
11. Interviews provide a chance to learn how people reflect on their behaviour, events and other things.
12. The ideal reason to leave the field work when there is enough data to describe the culture or problem convincingly which is known as ethnographic saturation.
13. Ethnographic saturation can be identified when the same specific pattern of behaviour emerges over and over again and when the general picture reaffirms itself over and over again.

References