Fieldworker or Foreigner? Ethnographic Interviewing in Nonnative Languages

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Ethnographers working in research areas devoted to understanding culture through language (e.g., ethnoscience, linguistic semantics, ethnography of communication) must often conduct fieldwork in societies and languages foreign to them. Although the ethnographic interview plays a significant role in this kind of linguistic-oriented research, there is little discussion in the methods literature about the special strategies and techniques needed in the foreign-language interview. The author takes an interactional approach to analyzing the ethnographic interview conducted in the researcher's nonnative language. She focuses on the possible misunderstandings that can arise between researcher and participants when the researcher's lexical knowledge of the foreign language does not suffice. Data stem from three interview situations in which the researcher (a native English speaker fluent in German) is unable to understand the particular words and expressions used by the native German participants. The author argues that communicative misunderstandings during the ethnographic interview are possible tools that can ultimately result in the attainment of richer ethnographic data.

Keywords: *ethnography; foreign language; interviewing; misunderstandings; research methods*

More than fifty years ago, Edward Sapir (1949) wrote that language is a "symbolic guide to culture" (p. 162). This insight provides the backbone of much of the cultural research conducted in fields such as anthropology, linguistics, and communication, the primary goal of which is to discover cultural meaning through the study of a group's language structure or use. These issues have been discussed in the literature of ethnoscience (Sturtevant 1964), componential analysis (Goodenough 1956), semantic analysis (Wierzbicka 1972), and ethnography of communication (Hymes 1962), to name a few. A central claim here is that we can discover much about

Research for this article was funded by a grant from Der Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst.

Field Methods, Vol. 18, No. 1, February 2006 83–97
DOI: 10.1177/1525822X05279902

a culture through the ways people speak and the native terms and categories that they use. Although each of the above-mentioned areas have different aims (e.g., discovering native terms for various cultural systems in ethnoscience versus discovering culturally specific ways of speaking in ethnography of communication), the ethnographer working in any of these areas must often turn to the interview as a central method for obtaining the linguistic data needed.

Ethnographers have long grappled with the issues of conducting interviews in foreign languages. The practice of the ethnographer spending time within the foreign culture, learning about its people as well as their language, is a time-honored tradition. The classic lessons learned by those who have not put in the time and effort to attain linguistic competence are now well known (e.g., Freeman's [1983] critique of Mead's work in Samoa centers on this issue). Indeed, for many ethnographers conducting fieldwork in foreign societies, the ethnographic interview becomes a central method, with two distinct paths available. The ethnographer can either allow native interpreters to conduct the interviews, or the ethnographer can personally conduct the interviews in the foreign language of the group under study.

Clearly, either choice calls for special care to be taken when interviewing native respondents. For example, conducting interviews with interpreters can warrant unique interviewing techniques (see Werner and Fenton 1973). Naroll (1962), in his study of bias in ethnographic reports, found that ethnographers who knew little of the source language (hence relying on interpreters) either downplayed the importance of or missed certain themes entirely. Levy and Hollan (1998) concluded that using interpreters is a "shortcut" that "will systematically affect and distort the respondent's behavior in often obscure ways" (p. 337). It seems evident that the ethnographer who can master the foreign language well enough to personally conduct the interviews may be at an advantage, but what special circumstances does the foreign language interview then pose?

Any ethnographer seeking advice on fieldwork methods will find a variety of books on the topic (Spradley 1979; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Lofland and Lofland 1995; Wolcott 1995, 1999; Bernard 1998, 2000; Fetterman 1998). However, the ethnographer seeking discussions of special strategies and techniques for the foreign-language interview will be hard pressed to locate much literature.[1] Although ethnographic research continues to be conducted in societies and languages foreign to many researchers, this is still a taken-for-granted issue, with little or no attention given to the topic in the ethnographic methods literature. It seems rather ironic that ethnography, whose beginnings hearken back to the days of lone, mostly English-speaking fieldworkers studying "primitive" tribes in far-off places (the members of which most certainly did not speak English), appears to ignore the problematic issue of conducting research in a nonnative language.

Briggs (1986), in his book *Learning How to Ask*, provides an important exception. Based on his research in Cordova, New Mexico, with Spanish-speaking Mexicanos, Briggs challenges his readers to reexamine the cultural premises that underlie the interview as a speech event. Despite Briggs's brilliant analysis of his own cultural assumptions of the interview event and how they conflicted with those of his interviewees, he does not examine how his own linguistic command of Spanish constrained the particular interviewing strategies he used and/or constrained his ability to understand his interviewees.

The aim of the present study is to contribute to our understanding of the ethnographic interview conducted in a nonnative language. If a person has embarked on an ethnographic investigation of a particular cultural group, we can most likely assume that he or she has an advanced level of knowledge in both subject and method; however, this knowledge may or may not be on par with his or her linguistic command of the foreign language. Although this may first appear to be a risky situation and one that only undermines what the ethnographer can accomplish in the field, the above-mentioned discrepancy can, in fact, be used as a potential ethnographic tool.

This study focuses on the possible misunderstandings that can arise between ethnographer and respondents in a foreign-language interview.[2] Specifically, I focus on those moments when the researcher's lexical knowledge of the foreign language does not suffice. I analyze three interview situations in which the researcher, unable to understand the particular words/expressions used by the participant, uses three different repair strategies (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). Despite the possible risk and/or humiliation for the ethnographer, I argue that such communicative misunderstandings, if dealt with openly, have the potential of becoming methodological gems.

METHOD

I conducted ethnographic research on German speakers' pronoun use for a ten-month period (from September 1995 to August 1996), primarily in the town of Landau. Landau has a population of approximately forty thousand and is located in the southwest region of Germany in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz). The town is approximately twenty-five miles east of the French border and lies between the town of Neustadt in the north and the city of Karlsruhe in the south. I conducted fifty in-depth, semistructured interviews with fifty native German speakers of varying ages, genders, occupations, and classes. I also took field notes from participant observations in both public (restaurants, stores, university classrooms, etc.) and private settings throughout the ten months.

I conducted interviews with single individuals, pairs, and groups, resulting in a total of twenty-four interviews conducted across fifty participants. The interviews ranged from twenty-five minutes to one hour fifty minutes each. The research was based in an ethnography of communication perspective (Hymes 1962; Philipsen 1992), with the goal of discovering German speakers' uses and meanings of the personal pronouns *du* and *Sie*, as well as any underlying speech codes at work (Winchatz 2001). After providing demographic information, I asked interviewees to talk about situations in which the decision to use *du* or *Sie* (the German informal and formal personal pronouns) was difficult for them. I also asked about situations in which the interviewees had been addressed by another interlocutor with a pronoun that they were not expecting. Once a participant began to recount these situations, I asked probing questions (see Bernard 2000) that ultimately guided interviewees to express the particular social meanings they attributed to the pronominal choices of themselves and others. I worded probing questions using only those terms actually spoken by the participants, as much as this is possible, so as not to force my own terms and meanings on them.

For the present study, fifteen interviews were coded for sequences of linguistic miscommunication between the participants and myself. A total of twenty-one instances were found consisting of two main types of miscommunication: (1) my inability to appropriately express a question due to linguistic problems and (2) my inability to understand the lexical choices of my participants. I examine the latter of these two types in the following analyses.

THREE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND THREE STRATEGIES

In the following, I examine three sequences from three different interviews, in which I, the researcher (**R**), in conversation with participants (**P**), have difficulty understanding their lexical choices. Each interview sequence is displayed with the original German on the left and the English line-by-line translation on the right.[3] I then provide a line-by-line analysis of the interview sequence, displaying three different strategies I use to conversationally negotiate the momentary misunderstanding. I argue that the third strategy, the most forthright and honest one, should be used by ethnographers experiencing similar linguistic breakdowns in foreign language interviews, as this strategy may ultimately allow for richer data to emerge.

Example 1 stems from an interview in which I question an engineer about his terms of address usage. Specifically, I inquire about a relatively new form of address in Germany: the formal *Sie* plus the first name. The formal *Sie* pronoun is usually coupled with a title (e.g., Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc.) and last name, and this newer, hybrid form is not used by all speakers, nor is it widely accepted as an appropriate form of address.

Example 1

1	**R**: Und was heißt diese Mischung	And what does this mixture mean
2	für Sie, weil diese Form relativ	to you, because this form is relatively
3	neu ist, würde ich sagen, also	new, I would say, that is
4	Sie plus Vorname—es war nicht	*Sie* plus the first name—it wasn't
5	immer so. Was bedeutet das für	always this way. What does it mean to
6	Sie, wenn Sie das hören? In was	you when you hear this? What
7	für ein Verhältnis stehen die	kind of relationship are the people
8	Leute zueinander dann?	in?
9	**P**: In einem Zwitterverhältnis.	In a hybrid relationship.
10	**R**: Ein was?	A what?
11	**P**: Ein ZWITTERverhältnis. Also	A HYBRID relationship. So
12	Ich halt' diese Reglung—	I think this arrangement—
13	aber das ist sehr, sehr subjektiv	but this is very, very subjective
14	von mir betrachtet, nicht für gut.	of me—isn't good.
15	**R**: Und warum?	And why?

In the above example, I attempt to discover the meaning of a particular linguistic form (*Sie* + FN) for a German speaker. As an ethnographer of communication, one way I might locate that meaning is by focusing on the participant's descriptors (such as "hybrid relationship") for this address form. However, if we look beyond the content of this excerpt and focus for a moment on the process of the interview itself, there is much to be discovered.

In lines 1 through 8, my question asks the participant to describe the type of relationship for two speakers who might address each other with the relatively contemporary address form (*Sie* + FN). The participant provides this description in line 9 by labeling this type of relationship "hybrid." In line 10, I locate a trouble source or "repairable" in the respondent's prior turn by uttering what Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) called a "partial repeat of the trouble source turn, plus a question word" (p. 368; e.g., "A what?"). One might interpret the source of this repair initiator as the listener's inability to hear the speaker's utterance or the listener's belief that he or she misheard the speaker. The participant then repeats his initial utterance in line 11, but this time says it louder by stressing the first part of the word. It seems that the participant may perceive my question in line 10 as a request for repetition of the repairable and not necessarily as a request for clarification of the word itself. This is apparent in lines 11 through 14, when the participant moves into a general explanation of his opinion about the address form, rather than providing an explanation for the trouble source in line 9. Finally, in line 15, I move the conversation forward by asking "And why?"

On its surface, this example may display a mere phonetic mishearing on the researcher's part, and a case can be made that this is the way the participant heard it. However, there is more to this example than meets the eye. In actuality, the word *Zwitterverhältnis* ("hybrid relationship") was unknown to me at the time of this interview. The participant most likely used this term to express the simultaneous dual nature (both formal and informal) of this *Sie* + FN. My lexical knowledge of German was insufficient at the time, and in my recognition of this, I chose to engage in a type of face-saving strategy. Although I initiate repair in line 10, it is stated in an ambiguous way that does not make my inability to understand this foreign term necessarily recognizable to the participant. In fact, this type of repair strategy (i.e., replacing the misunderstood word with "what") is rarely effective for discovering the meaning of particular linguistic terms, as it is often interpreted and treated by interlocutors as a problem with hearing, which seems to be the case here. The respondent's third turn is a louder repetition of the same word again in line 11, and without any qualifying information that may help me translate the term, I choose to move on with the conversation rather than problematize my momentary lack of lexical knowledge.

There is nothing unique about the conversational sequence in which one interlocutor does not understand what another interlocutor says. This is quite a common problem in daily interactions and the basis for what conversation analysts call "repair sequences." The situation becomes a bit more complicated, however, when the context is that of an interview. The interviewer is (most likely) the one asking the majority of the questions, and especially in the case of the ethnographic interview, the interviewee's responses are often fodder for further questioning by the interviewer. When both interlocutors are conducting the interview in their native tongue, the kinds of misunderstandings to occur are most likely those of mishearing the other or perhaps misunderstanding the intent of a particular question. It is a rarer occurrence (although not out of the question) that the general words used by one speaker would be unknown to the other speaker, unless specialized language and/or jargon is used (a point to which I return in a subsequent section).

Yet this type of problem occurs frequently when one of the interlocutors is conversing in a foreign language. Although it may be understandable for an ethnographer to wish to appear competent and knowledgeable in front of her or his respondents, the ethnographic interview may well be the perfect context to do the exact opposite, that is, to problematize one's lack of lexical knowledge and to use such instances of misunderstanding to attain richer linguistic descriptions from participants.

The following example comes closer to such an ideal, in that the point of misunderstanding is uncovered rather than hidden.

Example 2

1 **P**: Selbst dann ja, in dem Fall,	Yes, even then, in the case
2 in dem speziellen Fall mit	in the special case with
3 diesem Doktor Jakob—	this Doctor Jakob—
4 auch schon da einiges	even then there was some
5 wurde gemauschelt.	cheating (*gemauschelt*).
6 **R**: Gemault?	*Gemault*?
7 **P**: Kennen Sie den Ausdruck?	Do you know this term?
8 Es wurde getrickst, manipuliert.	It was fiddled with, manipulated.

In example 2, the participant refers to a case previously discussed during the interview concerning a Doctor Jakob (lines 1–5). In line 5, the participant uses the word *gemauschelt* to describe what he felt was going on in this context. In line 6, I initiate repair by uttering a "partial repeat of the trouble-source turn" (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977:368; i.e., I partially repeat the prefix *ge* but then add *mault* as an attempt to imitate the participant's utterance). The participant asks in line 7 if I am familiar with the word *gemauschelt* uttered in line 5 and then, in line 8, provides two synonyms for the word in question.

If one were to analyze this excerpt in terms of ethnographic interviewing strategies, the spontaneous probe (see Lofland and Lofland 1995) in line 6 could be viewed as a mirroring technique; that is, the researcher chooses a key term in the participant's talk to feed back or mirror to the participant (followed by a rising intonation), so that the participant will expand on the term's meaning. However, my probe in line 6 does much more than request further explanation from the participant; it simultaneously exhibits that I am completely unfamiliar with the foreign term used. Specifically, on hearing *gemauschelt* ("cheated"), I attempt to imitate its sound but instead utter another similar sounding word, *gemault* ("moaned"), with which I am familiar but that makes no sense in the context of the conversation. The participant does not treat my attempt to reiterate *gemauschelt* as a researcher's probe requesting further explanation of what this term means to him; rather, the participant recognizes that I have misunderstood him completely and instead attends to me as a nonnative speaker, whose German lexical knowledge temporarily does not suffice.

There is an explicit transition on the participant's part from conversing with me as fellow interlocutor/researcher to conversing with me as a teacher might to a foreign language student. In Spradley's (1979) terms, the participant engaged in a type of "translation competence" (p. 19). One could argue that the type of question uttered in line 7 is quite common in conversations between native speakers and second-language speakers, especially when the foreigner is still building his or her vocabulary. The question, "Do you know this term?" is much less likely to come up in a conversation between two native speakers, unless the word in question is slang or only used by a particular group (e.g., specialty jargon, regionalisms, etc.).[4] Although I never openly admit to not understanding the participant's word choice, in line 8 he chooses to translate it with two synonymous terms: "fiddled with" and "manipulated." This is an indication that the participant may have concluded I did not know the term *gemauschelt* and therefore needed definitions for the foreign word.

In example 1, I used a face-saving strategy by attempting to mask my insufficient lexical knowledge during the interview, which resulted in the participant's failing to provide any further explanation of the key term in question. Example 2 displays a slightly different strategy. When I initiated repair by attempting to reiterate the trouble source word, I failed this task by native standards. However, in my attempt to imitate the word, I also opened the possibility for the participant to take on the role of a language teacher, thus providing me with various meanings for the term in question. By disclosing my insufficient language skills, the roles of researcher and researched shifted, and my knowledge (or lack thereof) was called into question, however mildly.

In a sense, my lack of German lexical knowledge is uncovered and thematized by the participant rather than by my own doing. Even though the participant's interactional move results in a richer description of the linguistic term used, it is still far from an ideal situation. I experienced embarrassment during this conversational moment, for I had been "found out," and this repair strategy did not result in fully establishing the word's meaning. Ideally, the ethnographer who works in a foreign language can use these moments of uncertainty to delve deeper into the native meanings of particular words and phrases—a strategy that need not be hidden or cause embarrassment but rather one that can and should be conducted openly during the interview.

Example 3 displays this very kind of open strategy, that is, I, the researcher, thematize my own inability to understand a particular term used by the participant, which results in the participant's offering a rich description of its meaning as well as providing an example.

Example 3

1	**P**: Aber wir im Seminar zumindest,	But at least those of us in the seminar,
2	also von mir kann ich's	well, I can only say this for certain
3	ausdrücklich sagen, aber ich	for myself, but I
4	glaub' es geht vielen anderen so—	believe many others think the same way—
5	wir empfinden's nicht als unhöflich,	we didn't feel it was impolite,
6	aber als anmaßend irgendwo.	But it was somehow presumptuous.
7	**R**: Kannst du das erklären, was das	Can you explain what that
8	heißt—anmaßend—das	means—*anmaßend*—
9	verstehe ich nicht.	I don't understand that.
10	**P**: Ja, er erlaubt sich 'was, was sich	Yeah, he takes liberties that
11	andere Dozenten nicht erlauben.	other instructors don't take.
12	Also wenn ich sag' Herr Müller	So, if I say Mr. Müller
13	und Frau Mayer, ist es ja genau	and Ms. Mayer, it's exactly the same
14	eine Ebene. Aber ich könnt' ja nie	level. But I could never
15	zu ihm sagen, "Wilhelm, ich hab'	say to him, "Wilhelm, I still
16	ja noch eine Frage, könnten Sie mir	have a question, could you (*Sie*)
17	das und das beantworten?" Also,	answer this and that for me?" I mean,
18	das würd' er unmöglich finden,	he would think that's preposterous,
19	und das wäre ja auch unmöglich.	and it would be preposterous.

In lines 1 through 6, the participant describes her and others' reactions to a professor's choice to address the students with the formal *Sie* pronoun plus first name. Coincidentally, this is the same address form under discussion in example 1, although the participants are not the same. The participant comments that she (and to her knowledge, other students as well) found the professor's address form to be "presumptuous" (*anmaßend*). In lines 5 and 6, the participant contrasts the term *anmaßend* ("presumptuous") with the term *unhöflich* ("impolite"), thus marking an important semantic distinction. On hearing this distinction, my awareness as an interviewer is heightened; however, I am once again faced with the problem of not knowing a particular term (i.e., *anmaßend*) used by the participant. My knowledge of German vocabulary does not suffice, and I am faced with the choice of hiding this fact, so as to not appear incompetent or bringing my insufficient lexical knowledge to the participant's attention. Unlike examples 1 and 2, in which my insufficient knowledge of German vocabulary is either masked completely or uncovered by the participant, example 3 runs a different course. In lines 7 through 9, I choose to be more conversationally honest with the participant by specifically pointing to the trouble source in question, admitting openly that I have not understood the term, and asking the participant to describe the term's meaning to me. In using this strategy, I have implicitly placed the participant not only in the role of cultural expert (a role that seems to be implied in this type of interview) but also in the role of language expert and teacher (see Levy and Hollan 1998 for more on these distinctions).

Lines 10 through 19 appear to be the direct result of the open strategy used in lines 7 through 9. The participant first attempts to define what *anmaßend* means in lines 10 and 11 (i.e., when the professor "takes liberties that other instructors don't take"). She then expands on this definition by providing a "hypothetical interaction" example (Spradley 1979:90) in lines 12 through 19. Specifically, in lines 12 and 13, the participant explains that if the more common form, title plus last name (e.g., Mr. Müller or Ms. Mayer), is the address form used by both speakers, it places the interlocutors in a symmetrical relationship. In line 14, the participant refers to a specific example, albeit hypothetical, of what would happen if she were to use the address form *Sie* plus first name with the professor, Wilhelm, in a classroom situation. The participant's point is that the professor (Wilhelm) uses the formal pronoun *Sie* plus first name with his students, but if these students were to use *Sie* + FN with the professor, he would find such behavior unacceptable or "preposterous" (line 18). And indeed, in line 19, the participant herself deems such hypothetical behavior "preposterous" as well.

The interviewing strategy displayed in example 3 begins with the researcher recognizing the limitations of her lexical knowledge of the foreign language on hearing the participant utter an unknown term. The researcher then draws the participant's attention to the term by pointing it out, admits not understanding the term, and asks the participant to explain what the term means. To openly admit that one's lexical knowledge in the foreign language does not suffice is interpersonally tricky, in that the researcher's overall linguistic competence may also be called into question. However, such an open admittance of insufficient linguistic command may also move the participant to be more precise in any subsequent explanations of the term. The native speaker must metaphorically step back, throw common language assumptions shared by other natives aside (if only for a moment), and attempt to provide a rich description (e.g., semantic equivalents/contrasts, hypothetical examples) for the nonnative speaker. Such a task requires more of the participant, and, given the chance, most participants will try to provide whatever it is that may constitute that "more."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In response to the analyses presented here, one might argue that such conversational misunderstandings are not inherently different from those occurring in an interview between two native speakers. Doesn't the interviewer, speaking the same native language as the interviewee, sometimes fail to recognize particular lexical terms used by the interviewee? The answer is yes. Such lexical misunderstandings do occur between native speakers of the same language; however, I argue that such moments between native speakers are quite different in several ways.

When both interviewer and interviewee speak the same native language, if the interviewer does not recognize or understand a particular lexical term, the term would most likely fall into some specialized category (e.g., specialized language of a particular field, group-related slang, jargon, etc.). It would be rare for an interviewer, most likely a well-educated scholar, to be unable to understand a standard word used in everyday conversation. In a sense, the interviewer's subject and methods competence matches her or his linguistic competence, thus making it possible for the interviewer to recognize the misunderstood term as belonging to a category for which he or she is not responsible. For example, if I am interviewing a doctor about her or his profession, and the doctor uses a specialized term from the medical field, my linguistic competence and experience in English allows me to recognize that I am not responsible for knowing the term used. In a sense, I am let off the proverbial hook and may ask the doctor what the term means without risking embarrassment.

For the interviewer conducting an interview in a foreign language, however, it is a very different case. The nonnative-speaking interviewer's subject and methods competence may not necessarily match her or his linguistic competence, thus allowing the field for potential misunderstanding to broaden radically. The nonnative interviewer faces an interview situation in which any vocabulary used by the interviewee, whether specialized or standard, may not be understood. The researcher's linguistic command of the foreign language can fail him or her at any moment, and when it does, the choice to admit openly or to mask one's inability to understand the other is quite interpersonally loaded.

Naturally, this brings into question issues of power between the researcher and the researched. Many ethnographers highlight the ethnographic interview's "exploitive potential" (Ganguly 1992:65) and would agree with Mishler's (1986) description of the interviewer-interviewee relationship as "marked by a striking asymmetry of power" (p. 117). Present-day ethnographers would generally agree that we must heed the call to "empower respondents" (Mishler 1986:118). At the same time, however, there are those who urge ethnographers to remember that "research is always a collaboration in which the researcher is not all-powerful," and because of the power flow between interviewer and interviewee, there are times when the researcher is placed "in a position of relative powerlessness" (Adams 1999:332).

The present study also has important implications for methods literature dealing with foreign language issues in ethnographic interviews. Although few authors speak to these issues, those who do tend to send mixed messages. On one hand, the ethnographer is warned that it is "deeply distorting not to work primarily in the respondent's core language" (Levy and Hollan 1998: 338). On the other hand, the ethnographer is pushed to "work out the vocabulary and phrasing of questions and probes" in the foreign language, so "if things go wrong, it won't compromise essential studies" (p. 338).

Although practicing the foreign language interview for optimum preparedness is stressed in some methods literature (see also Bernard 2000: 202), there is something to be said for allowing for and embracing moments of misunderstanding as an ethnographic tool. If the ethnographer can learn to trust the nature of the participant's response to these moments of vulnerability, the power structures between both will more than likely come into balance. Some may argue that the researcher who calls attention to her or his own lack of linguistic command, rather than allowing the participant to bring it into question, is simply taking back any power that might be given up in the conversational moment. When the researcher metaphorically heads the participant off at the pass by not allowing her or him to recognize the misunderstanding, doesn't this once again result in a power imbalance? Again, I would argue that the focus should be not on tricking or manipulating one's participants during the research process but rather on the researcher's approaching the interview with an ethical honesty about her or his linguistic abilities during key interactional moments. The possibility of balancing these components is tricky at best; however, the methods literature could benefit from bringing in discussions that focus less on practice and preparedness and more on using linguistic difficulties as paths to collecting richer linguistic data in the ethnographic interview.

Obviously, there are inherent dangers for the researcher who embraces these moments of vulnerability, for they can be taken too far. The mediating factor appears to be what Ganguly (1992:65) called "trust." In general, future research on ethnographic studies conducted in foreign languages should perhaps call into question our notions of the researcher's linguistic competence. The ethnographer's ability to speak a foreign language is rarely problematized, even when her or his research process and findings are radically dependent on this ability. We expect academic ethnographers to display a particular level of education and training in both subject and research methods before launching into ethnographic fieldwork, yet we rarely question what criteria should be applied to issues of language training and levels of foreign-language fluency of these same researchers. It is not enough to assume that if the ethnographer has taken on the task of conducting research in a foreign language that she or he is linguistically equipped to do so. The ethnographer working in a foreign language has the same academic and ethical responsibilities as any other who engages in these "darker arts" (Wolcott 1995). And although there is always a certain degree of risk present for all parties involved, I believe Wolcott's (1999:284) words are an appropriate final destination for this study: "The risks can be minimized, the benefits or potential benefits maximized, guided by practices of openness and disclosure."

NOTES

1. Although literature in this area is sparse, there are several studies that provide some limited discussion of issues within the foreign-language interview. These include Bernard (2000), Levy and Hollan (1998), Metzger and Williams (1966), Spradley (1979), and, most notably, Briggs (1986).

2. When using the terms *misunderstanding* or *miscommunication*, I am referring to the conversation analytic work of Schegloff and associates on conversational trouble sources and repair initiations (e.g., Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977; Schegloff 1987).

3. I have formally studied the German language for nine years in the United States and six years in Germany. I have completed a translation certification program from Rutgers University in New Jersey. I am responsible for all translations in the present study. I have attempted to correspond the length of the translated English lines to the German original, whenever grammar and syntax of the English language permitted. I approached the interview style as colloquial and selected those English equivalents of lexical terms that would match the presumed usage in a similar interview context. I attempted to take into account other stylistic considerations (e.g., idiomatic expressions were not literalized, but rather corresponding English idiomatic expressions were provided whenever possible).

4. Drew (1997) cited the exception of adult-child interaction, in which certain repair initiations are regularly used to correct a child's talk.

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