Ethnography of 'Talk' in Wollo

Hassen R[*]

Department of Applied Linguistics, Wollo University, Dessie, Ethiopia

[*]**Corresponding author:** Hassen R, Department of Applied Linguistics, Wollo University, Dessie, Ethiopia, Tel: 0333115204; E-mail: rukyahassens@gmail.com

Abstract

This is a study on ethnography of talk in Wollo. Talk plays a significant role in the lives of most of the Ethiopian community, especially of the Wollo, the study group of this particular research. A large body of data was collected from live talk of casual and non-casual speech events. These talks range from marked and more serious formal talks to casual and carefree non-marked talks collected from real language used by the community in question. Talk appears as a 'chunk' or in a form of discourse. Hence different discourses of casual and non-casual live talks were collected for the purpose of this study. The particular places for data collection were Kutaber, Kombolcha, Wogdi, Haik, Woldiya, and Dessie. Large corpuses of live talks were collected from 2012 to 2014. The data were recorded, transcribed, coded and used for the purpose of this study. The result of the study revealed that talk plays significant roles for this speech group. It is used as a means and end of social practice on its own right. 'Talk' of people uncovers thought, action and knowledge expressed through language. Through the casual talk of people, their thought, action, language and knowledge is revealed, produced, and reproduced. Access to real life talk of people gives information about what they think, do, use their language for and their knowledge to sustain their life. Access to talk of people gives almost everything there is to know about the people. Talk produces people's thought, action, knowledge and language and people's thoughts, actions, knowledge and language, in turn, reproduce talk.

Background of the Study

Talk or speech is mainly exploited as a major means of communication in many societies. The role talk plays in the Kung society of South West Africa. The Kung is characterized as the most talkative people who use talk extensively to extend their cooperation, sustain their relationship and stay alive. Contrary to Kung, Western Apache uses silence to communicate a great deal [1]. According to Basso, new comers from local origin or foreign land are greeted with silence. Silence communicates sympathy when a person dies. When ambiguity arises silence communicates a lot. Silence for Western Apache communicates respect, comfort, support, disagreement, uncertainty and many more that talk can hardly communicate.

Talk as a Phenomenon

Phenomenological study describes a phenomenon of a real life experience [2]. Talk is a phenomenon. "… talk itself is also used to sustain reality and is itself part of that reality. We can, therefore, look at talk as a phenomenon in its own right. Ethnomethodology is that branch of sociology which is concerned, among other things, with talk viewed in this way" [3].

Talks are rarely described by linguists. However, explanation about them by linguists could be of great help to understand and describe how language is used by a certain speech group. As Tracy [4] further claims, "Talk is not just a phenomenon to be scientifically described and explained, it is moral and practical action taken by one person toward others. Talk not only can be evaluated, but should be."

Talk as Data

Talk is data. Natural conversations or talks generate huge data about human behavior. Talk is viewed in this study as discourse. Johnstone [5] says discourse is 'language in use'. The Wollo community value talk. Access to their talk gave the data needed for the study.

Talk as a Study Tool

Not only is talk a data but also a means of obtaining it. Talk is a natural tool to extract people's thoughts, perception, feelings, attitude and other attributes.

Talk as a natural tool

We are looking for talk. Human behavior is extracted from a human subject through talk. When we interview them, we are getting them talk. When we have them fill a questionnaire, we are getting them talk. The restriction to 'talk their mind' differs based on the nature of the question being structured/unstructured or open/closed. The more the questions are less controlled, the more it becomes invitation to 'talk their mind'.

Fouls sidestepped by talk tool

When we use all the conventional data collection methods such as questionnaire, observation and interview, we try to extract talk. When we use artificial methods to extract talk, the 'data' could also be artificial.

Almost any issue can be raised in casual socio-cultural events like coffee talk. The researcher raises the issue and probes to extract information in such informal talk events. The researcher has taken advantage of the different cultural settings as a natural situation to talk over the research topic in depth. The researcher collected significant

amount of data through in-depth interview. There were different arrangements for casual and routine talks. The researcher makes use of such arrangements to extract data on the issues of the study. The researcher resorted to such casual talk sessions because the prearranged formal interviews failed to yield relevant data because the people were not comfortable with formal interviews. In fact, they led them to reservations and suspicions. This happens because the topic is too sensitive. The informants suspected that it would lead to political problems with the government. Some said 'I do not want to fight with the government at the end of my life'. Informal talk makes things easy for both the researcher and the participants.

When people do talking, they are doing what they naturally do. This natural method helps sidestep fouls caused by conventional data collection methods as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

Observation

In observation, the researcher makes an excess intrusion in the lives of the study group, it runs the risk of falling foul of the observer's paradox (that the presence of the researcher alters the natural context) [6]. This is known as observer's paradox. The Observer's Paradox is a theory proposed by William Labov [6,7], the father of variation sociolinguist [8]. Labov assumes that the style and register of a subject's speech is determined by the amount of attention the subject paid to their manner of speech. It refers to the difficulty of extracting natural speech from informants. Since informants are aware that what they say is being recorded, they adapt their speech trying to make it right by using a formal register. The paradox lies in the fact that there needs to be a linguist recording the speech but the presence of one aggravates the incorrect type of speech. In sociolinguistics various methods were devised to minimize or evade the effects of the observer's paradox [7].

Labove proposed such methods as whenever possible, the fieldworker should be of in-group status, a friend possibly [8]. Reducing the formality of the setting, using self-selected and favoured option of interviewing, matching the researcher and the informants gender, ethnicity, age, using family or group of friends who have already established a certain way of talking and so on were proposed. Labove suggested having the informants narrate tales of personal experience, a story that could provoke emotion of the speaker which could make him forget his being recorded and talk naturally without checking and correcting his language [7]. We employ these methods to evade the artificial talk and invite the natural one that represents the actual data.

Hence, as a technique to sidestep the Observer's Paradox, talk can be used as a study tool in a relaxed and informal cultural setting with mostly non-casual speech events. Since talk is natural, the subjects would bring their real behavior to the research arena.

Interview

Although observation can help us identify a phenomenon, it cannot provide information why the phenomenon happened [9]. Observation and participation are supplemented with other methods: such as interview, documentation, recordings and so on [10]. Observation is often followed by interviews so that the researcher confirms conclusions drawn from his/her observation.

Interview is important to collect verbal reports of behavior, meanings, attitudes and feelings that can hardly be directly observed [11]. It provides ample information about people's thoughts, feelings,

and behavior on certain issues. When it is unstructured, it allows the interviewer to extend the talk about an issue. Researchers use it to elicit information in order to yield a holistic understanding of the participants' point of view.

Interviews in qualitative research need to generate talk by probing issues in depth. They allow subjects to put across their views at length. Subjects are required to state real events rather than generalizations. This can reveal more about beliefs, attitudes and behavior. The researcher may be able to obtain information that is more detailed from each subject.

The more interviews are undertaken in a natural way, the more it becomes talk. Besides, in ethnographic study, the researcher can conduct interview with the presence or absence of other audience [12]. Hence, the presence of others would generate a natural talk.

The researcher conducted the interview with the presence of others or otherwise. Almost any issue can be raised in casual social events like coffee talk. The researcher raises the issue and probes to extract information in such informal talk events. The researcher has taken advantage of the different cultural settings as a natural situation to talk over the research topic in depth. The researcher collected significant amount of data through in-depth interview. There were different arrangements for casual and routine talks. The researcher makes use of such arrangements to extract data on the issues of the study. The researcher resorted to such casual talk sessions because the prearranged formal interviews failed to yield relevant data because the people were not comfortable with formal interviews. In fact, the direct questions led them to reservations and suspicions. This becomes worse when the topic is sensitive. The informants suspected that it would lead to political problems with the government. Some said 'I do not want to fight with the government at the end of my life'. Informal talk makes things easy for both the researcher and the participants.

Methodology

Ethnography

The methodology used in this study is ethnography. Many researchers have used Ethnography of Communication to systematically study talk. Ethnographers of communication views talk as a skilled-act, a phenomena and subject of systematic investigation to understand human behavior.

Talk in this study is what is referred as discourse. Discourse analysis focuses on talk and texts as social practices [13]. "For communication researchers, then, discourse analysis is the close study of talk (or text) in context" [5].

A large body of data was collected from live talk of casual and non-casual speech events. These talks range from marked and more serious formal talks to casual and carefree non-marked talks collected from real language used by the community in question. Talk appears as a 'chunk' or in a form of discourse. Hence different discourses of casual and non-casual live talks were collected for the purpose of this study. The particular places for data collection were Kutaber, Kombolcha, Wogdi, Haik, Woldiya, and Dessie. A corpus of live talks were recorded, transcribed, coded and used for the purpose of this study.

Discourse "refers to socially shared habits of thought, perception, and behavior reflected in numerous texts belonging to different genres" [14]. Thought and talk mold each other. "social power abuse,

dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" [15].

Critical discourse analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) emphasizes on the analysis of the internal cognition of a society's practice as expressed through their language. It focuses on talk and texts as social practices [13]. According to Potter [16], DA has an analytic commitment to studying discourse as texts and talk in social practice. That is, the focus is not on language as an abstract entity such as a lexicon and set of grammatical rules (in linguistics), a system of differences (in structuralism), or a set of rules for transforming statements. Instead, it is the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do.

To Potter [16], therefore, discourse analysis is more than the analysis of the linguistic repertoire of a given language. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is more involved in the inner psychology of people. Van Dijk [15] defined CDA as below paragraph.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context with such dissident research, critical discourse analysis take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.

CDA views `language as a social practice', and takes consideration of the context of language use as an important aspect [4]. Researchers who use CDA as a method can describe, interpret, and explain relationships among languages and other social factors [17].

Through the talk of people the whole package of the behavior of human beings uncovers. "For communication researchers, then, discourse analysis is the close study of talk (or text) in context" [5]. We can address all aspects of human communication habit through talk. CDA is an important methodological partner to ethnographic method in order to study talk. "Also crucial in the enactment or exercise of group power is control not only over content, but over the structures of text and talk" [15].

Talk as a Means of Social Practice

Talk is a major social practice that helps sustain reality. In Wollo, talk is used as a means of social practice. Talk is what people do when they interact with each other. This is true of any society.

Talks are formal and informal by nature. When people are gathered to talk about a certain issue with serious purpose, it becomes formal and what they say and how they say it is predefined. There are many such types of talks[1]. The other types of talks are those which do not have such serious purposes but the talk itself is viewed as an end rather than as a means of serving a certain purpose. One very common purpose for such type of talk is 'to pass time'.

Born to Talk

Humans are born to talk. Talk is a meaningful activity for humans who are social animals highly dependent on each other. People are ready-made to talk. It plays many significant roles in the lives of human communication. Much of the interaction takes place through talk.

The Role of Talk in Wollo

In Wollo, talk plays a significant role in the lives of people. There is a common saying, "Wolloyye lost their land while drinking coffee." The coffee ceremony is the time of talking to one another. People arrange occasions, events and situations just to talk. Often times, people are stand-by to do talking; any time, they are ready. Such kinds of talks include coffee-tea, water (alcohol), casual everyday talk, general talk, arranged talk and so on. These talks are known as 'wäg' in the local language, Amharic.

A large body of data was collected from live talk of casual and non-casual speech events. These talks range from marked and more serious formal talks to casual and carefree non-marked talks collected from real language used by the community in question.

The following is an extract taken from a live talk of a visitor and a sick woman in her house. The visitor and the sick woman had a whole day talk.

Visitor: How are you doing?

Sick woman: Thanks to God, no one saw this. I am above the dead.

Sick woman: The wound is ok but my heart hurts. I reached here.

Visitor: You are amazing, you are amazing!

The visitor asked a question about the well-being of the woman. The woman replied with long talk. The question could have been satisfied with one statement. The reply of the woman was long which indicated the emphasis on talk. Let us analyze this talk using the study tool which is the focus of this article.

Thought-The woman's thought about her life is revealed in this talk. She said I am above the dead indicating that she is not as well as the living and as worse as the dead. However, she is better than the dead. She thanks her God for the status she is in now. This worldview is revealed through the talk.

Action-The action this talk performs is that it lets the visitor know the physical and mental status of the sick woman. The action performed by the visitor when engaged in this talk is that he did show his care about the wellbeing of the woman. Even though we cannot tell about his real intent, the act of his care to ask, talk about and listen to whatever the sick woman has to say, on the surface, is an act of care.

Language-The major vehicle for talk is language. The major agenda is to do talking using language. However, other non-verbal means of communication are also used along with the verbal language. There is a saying in this community, "talk gets-in (to the mind) through eye".

Knowledge-Knowledge about anything is transmitted through talk. The woman's thought is revealed through the talk. The visitor receives it. In any talking, knowledge is being transmitted from the speaker to the listener and vice versa when they exchange roles.

Hence, 'Talk' is an Act of Thinking and Knowing through Language. Talking refers to the actions of doing thought and production as well as reception of knowledge being performed through language.

Talk as an End of Cultural Performance

In Wollo, talk is performed for its own sake. Talk is an accepted mode of cultural activity. Beliefs and values of the speech community

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1   č'at session talk, mediation, hearing trial, gossip, and other particular purpose for which a talk is a way out

are revealed through different cultural practices. These cultural practices contain rituals, sayings and all kinds of talks that are determined by the speech situation and event. The events could be weddings, mourning, č'at [2] sessions, wädağa [3] and other episodes.

In ethnographic study, talk is seen as a means to access participants' realities and it is also as an end as a social phenomenon or social practice in its own right [18].

Silence as talk

Sociolinguists in recent times recognize silence as an aspect of human communication [19]. Here the focus is not 'silence as an absence of speech' as in communicating nothing but as an aspect with communicative meaning. It is used to communicate a great deal in different situations. There is a time when it is appropriate to say nothing and conduct the appropriate communication. Different people use silence to mean different things as determined by context.

Basso [1] who brought silence as an aspect of communication in research says, "Although the form of silence is always the same, the function of a specific act of silence varies from culture to culture… the knowledge of when not to speak may be as basic to the production of culturally acceptable behavior as a knowledge of what to say."

Silence is used to show humility, respect and honor in the target speech group. For example, the target community pays great respect to 'č'at' through silence. In the following extract, one informant narrates how they show respect to 'č'at' through silence.

We used to show our respect to 'č'at' with silence. When we are sent to exchange 'č'at' for grain… in our time, there was no money so we exchange things … when we are sent to get 'č'at', we are told to say nothing no matter what. So, one day, I was sent to exchange č'at for grain. As I walk to the č'at place, I saw a wild animal known as 'Shikrit' on the way. It is said that 'Once shikrit catches you, it would not let go until your uncle's donkey brays'. I was so afraid… but I could not go back… I said to myself 'The sheikhs sent me I am not after you.' He just kept going and passed me. I safely went. Still I did not talk…. I finally reached the 'č'at' place. I pointed to the 'č'at' tree to show the farmer what I wanted. He knew that I wasn't supposed to talk and he did not expect me to…. He saw the grain. He took the grain and he gave me the equivalent 'č'at' in the sack I took with me…. Still we were not talking. I changed the road so that I would not meet the animal again. I got back and gave the 'č'at'.… still not talking. Such was the manner we show respect to 'č'at'… but now…

Such is how the members of the target group show respect to 'č'at', a substance which represents prayer. Silence is used as a sign of respect. Through the silence, communication takes place [20].

Conceptual Model: 'Talk'

- Talk is a social reality.
- Discourse is produced by talk.
- We study talk, we study the people.
- We understand talk, we understand the people.
- Talk sustains life.

- Talk cannot occur in a vacuum. It is embeded in social practices or cultural performances.
- Talk produces people's realities.
- People's realities are thought, action, language and knwledge.
- People live by these realities.
- They are in a dialectical relationship. Each influences the other.

The framework shows how talk is a skilled social practice.

'Talk' produces:

T: thought

A: action

L: language

K: knowledge and

Thought, Action, Language and Knowledge produce Talk.

Through the casual talk of people, their thought, action, language and knowledge is revealed, produced, and reproduced. Access to real life talk of people gives information about what they think, do, use their language for and their knowledge to sustain their life. Access to talk of people gives almost everything there is to know about the people.

Thought: Thought is revealed through talk. Real life talk carries thought of people. Talk carries shared way of thinking. Conventional thinking is legitimized, resisted, agreed, reconstructed, challenged, refuted, consumed, owned, and produced through talk.

Act: Talk does not occur in a vacuum. Action is the natural partner of talk. People's practice and social performance are agencies of talk. Talk also shapes and reshapes the act itself.

Language: Language is the vehicle for talk. It modifies the form, meaning and function of talk. Through talk, the form and function of language get modified.

Knowledge: Thought, language and actions makes up knowledge. Talk carries the knowledge; influences thought; influences action; influences talk again.

The assumption for this framework is the use of talk as a study tool. Talk maintains reality and is itself a reality [3]. Discourse is produced by talk. We study talk, we study the people. We understand talk, we understand the people. Talk cannot occur in a vacuum. It is embedded in social practices or cultural performances. Talk produces people's realities. People's realities are their thought, act, language and knowledge. People live by these realities. They are in a dialectical relationship. Each influences the other.

Conceptual base

Hyems used 'Speaking' as model in his study of the communication behavior of a group. The analysis is supposed to focus on a set of 'Speaking' grid developed by Dell Hymes. Dell Hymes uses the word 'Speaking' [4] as an acronym for convenience [3]. He developed the model to support the analysis of discourse as a speech event of a

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2 č'at is a local substance chewed during prayer in the study area.
3 An aggregate prayer with chat.
4 'Speaking' is the acronym given by Dell Hymes for the analysis of ethnography of communication. It is used by many who have pursued his approach.

particular speech group. Dell Hymes stated that each component calls for the following questions about a communication practice.

S: What are the setting and scene (physical and Psychological) of the communication practice?

P: Who are the participants in this practice?

E: What are the ends of this practice?

A: What act sequence is involved in this practice?

K: How is the practice being keyed? What is the emotional pitch, feeling, or spirit of the communication practice?

I: What is the instrument or channel being used in this communication practice? Should the practice be conducted orally, in print or via face-to-face channel, through song or chanting?

N: What norms operate when communication is practiced in this community?

G: Is there a genre of communication of which this practice is an instance?

The use of this framework is to aid the ethnographic study.

This model and the ideas of Dell Hymes are the main input for the researcher to frame this study. Following Dell Hymes, the researcher has come up with a TALK-model. T (thought), A (action), L (language) and K (knowledge) is found to be produced in the everyday talk of people. Attending to the talk of people gives everything there is to know about them including their communication behavior. The thought, belief and value systems are reflected in their action which employs language. The thoughts, beliefs and values are their knowledge that shapes their action and thought.

Conclusions

In Wollo, talk is a major social practice. Talk is performed for its own sake. Talk is an accepted mode of cultural activity. Beliefs and values of the speech community are revealed through different cultural practices. Many things are accomplished by talk and people value it for its own sake. Talk is the means and the end of many cultural performances and rituals in this community. It is the most natural means of data collection from the natural setting of the people being investigated. The use of it can aid ethnographic study a great deal. While the means of data extraction is talk itself, through it, people's thoughts, knowledge and action is uncovered.

Talk itself is a very important action on its own right. It is an expression of revealing the mind, a means of communication in which is embedded the knowledge and thought of the people engaged in doing the 'Talk'. Hence, this article discussed the role talk plays as a means of data collection and doing much more than that by becoming the data itself. The acronym 'Talk' is referred in this study as thought, action and knowledge exposed through language. This taxonomy could help to analyze communicative events that are believed essential in the study of communication behavior of different speech groups.

Through the casual talk of people, their thought, action, language and knowledge is revealed, produced, and reproduced. Access to real life talk of people gives information about what they think, do, use their language for and their knowledge to sustain their life. Access to talk of people gives almost everything there is to know about the people. Talk produces people's thought, action, knowledge and language and people's thoughts, actions, knowledge and language, in turn, reproduce talk.

A further investigation about the role and kinds of talk in this and other communities could yield significant results about the culture and communication behavior of the different speech communities' communication behavior.

Appendix

Transcription	Translation
25 August 21st, 2013. In Alasha.	25 August 21st, 2013. In Alasha.
1 käto ˈänčsa ˈänčw?	1 How are you doing?
hämdi näw man ˈäyäbät. tämotu ˈäfaf ˈmayäl yäne nägär.	Thanks to God, no one saw this. I am above the dead.
qusluko mn ˈälaläñm lben näwy.	The wound is ok but my heart hurts. I reached here.
5 ˈəzh däräsku yhwlš ˈänčwy.	You are amazing, you are amazing!
gud yaläšw gud yaläšw!	Aha!
ˈäjäb!	We have troubled you my dear.
ˈänčnm ˈäsčägärnš ˈəntoyt.	I will untie the cattle, let me go.
käbt lfäta näw bägze lhd.	Ok father, we will go.
10 märhäba ˈənhädalän ˈäyaya.	The time is not good now.
ˈägägul näw ˈähun wäqtu	We haven't found her yet..... they said give us one person from us too.....
qärmo mäy tägäñäč ˈə ş..... täñam ˈänd säw sťän ˈälu....	.... Wait now I am having talk. Ok ...
15 ˈ... qoy ˈähun wäg yžalähu. däg....	Ok say... I was talking to you... yes
ˈəh bäy... ˈəyawägahuš näbär... ˈäwod	Yes... then
ˈäwod... tayalš	Yes don't interrupt my talk...
ˈəko wäreyän ˈätaqorfğ...	Oh you, it is not good.
ˈäğäb yaläšw ˈəndäw dägm ˈädäl.	... please stop... then... eh what did I say? Oh yes...
20 ... täyko... ˈädalš.... ˈə mn ˈälkuš	......
ˈəmamäy? ˈəklš...	The pills should be taken on time. It is a must to celebrate Mewlid. The Shekhs also said so if they say there is no Mewlid, greeting and alms, if they hate the Prophet who is the lawyer of the people, let alone talking about them, it is not lawful to listen to them.
.....	
käninaw ˈəndayqwarät'. gr bägd näw mäbl	
mäwlidm ˈärgi. šähočum ˈəndih bläwal	
25 mäwlid yäläm talu zyära sädäqa	Though it is not unlawful to try hard for death, it is good to go sooner.
näbin tät'äwačäw yählqun t'äbäqa	God holds us good still.
ˈənkwa n mawratna mäsmatm ˈäybäqa.	We need to pray for mercy.
lämotu mät'ar klkl bayhon tolo mähed	......
29 näbär dägu.	Then...
ˈälah dähna yzonal tänäyhum.	It is good we talked. Come other time.
räkaten sägdo du'ä maräg yašal.	May we meet again in peace my child...
.....	
33 tadalš...	
däg ˈäwägan. lela qänm zläqi.	
bäkäyr ˈəngänañ lğä....	

Table: Sample casual talk.

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