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'Talk' as a Research Data Collection Tool

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Abstract

This is a study on talk as an instrument of data collection for qualitative research. Talk plays a significant role in the lives of most of the people in the world. The study group of this particular research also use talk as s noteworthy aspect of their life. 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 large corpus of live talks was collected from 2012 to 2015. The data were recorded, transcribed, coded and used for the purpose of this study. Both the means and the end appeared to be 'Talk'. 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. Hence, 'Talk' was proved to be an important data collection tool for qualitative research.

Keywords: Talk; Research; Instrument of data collection; Tool

Introduction

In this study talk is considered both the means and the end of social practice. The argument this study develops is that talk is a natural data collection instrument where people provide data without being intimidated with artificial and formal data collection instruments such as interview.

This study takes the community of Wollo as a point of departure. The people of Wollo use talk as a major means of social practice.

Talk or speech is mainly exploited as a major means of communication in many societies. Marshall studied 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 [1].

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' to the People of 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 'wag' 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.

Talk

Talks are rarely described by linguists. However, explanation about them could be of great help to understand and describe how language is used by a certain speech group. As Tracy [2] 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". Through accessing talk, we can access the full range of human behavior, thought, perception, culture and social practice as it naturally appears.

Humans are born to 'Talk'

Humans are born to talk. They are conditioned to talk. Talk is a meaningful activity. People are ready-made to talk. Talk plays a significant role for communication dependent social animals known as humans. This is true in many societies. The researcher takes the speech

community of Wollo in Ethiopian as a point of departure. In Wollo, 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. These cultural practices contain rituals, sayings and all kinds of talks that are determined by the speech situation and event. 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 [3]. An invitation from someone to 'have a coffee or tea together' is translated as to 'have a talk'. These talks are known as 'wag' in the local language Amharic. The investigation about the communication behavior of this community yield interesting result about the role of talk in the society. 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" [1]. We can address all aspects of human communication habit through talk.

Talk as a phenomenon

Phenomenological study describes a phenomenon of a real life experience [4]. 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" [5].

Talk as 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. Talk or speech is mainly exploited as a major means of communication in many societies. Marshall studied 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 [1].

Talk as data

Talk is data. Natural conversations or talks generate huge data about human behavior. Talk is viewed in this study as discourse. John stone [6] says discourse is 'language in use'.

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 is 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'.

Conceptual model

The framework shows how talk is a skilled social practice (Tables 1 and 2).

Assumptions
The assumption for this framework is the use of talk as a study tool
1. Talk sustains reality [5]
2. Discourse is produced by talk.
3. We study talk, we study the people.
4. We understand talk, we understand the people.
5. Talk sustains life.
6. Talk cannot occur in a vacuum. It is embedded in social practices or cultural performances.
7. Talk produces people's realities.
8. People's realities are their thought, act, language and knowledge.
9. People live by these realities.
10. They are in a dialectical relationship. Each influences each other.

Table 1: Assumption for the talk model.

Talk
Talk produces: T: Thought
A: Action
L: Language
K: Knowledge
Thought, Action, Language and Knowledge produce Talk.

Table 2: The acronym 'Talk'.

Hymes used 'Speaking' as a model in his study of the communication behavior of a group. 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 (Table 3).

'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.

Thought: The thought, belief and value systems are reflected in people's talking-action.
Action: Talking is perfoming action. It is an action which employs language.
Language: In our speech, we use language to reflect our understanding of what we think and know.
Knowledge: we talk about what we think and do with language. This constitutes our knowledge.
The thoughts, beliefs and values are our knowledge that shapes our action and thought. Hence, Talk is the vehicle for thought, and knowledge through language. Not only is talk a medium of knowledge transmission but also it is an action. When we talk, we are doing something of socially important to continue to live as humans.

Table 3: 'Talk' model.

The researcher has designed this model based on the aforementioned assumptions, existing concepts of previous researches in the field, and the data of the study.

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 everything 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. And, talk is itself an act.

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.

Talk maintains reality and is itself a reality [5]. 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.

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.

Talk and Other Qualitative Research Data Collection Instruments

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) [7]. This is known as observer's paradox. The Observer's Paradox is a theory proposed by William Labov [7,8], the father of variation sociolinguist [9]. 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 [7,8].

Labove proposed such methods as whenever possible, the fieldworker should be of in-group status, a friend possibly [9]. Reducing the formality of the setting, using self-selected and favored 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 [8]. 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 [10]. Observation and participation are supplemented with other methods: such as interview, documentation, recordings and so on [11]. 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 [12]. 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 [13]. 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 [14-16].

There are three types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are kinds of interviews which are verbally administered questionnaires, in which a list of predetermined questions is asked, with little or no variation and with no scope for follow-up questions to responses that requires explanation. These kinds of interviews are quick and easy to administer. Hence, as feature, they only allow for limited participant responses that couldn't allow in-depth analysis.

Contrary to structured interview, unstructured interviews do not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and are performed with little or no organization. Such an interview may simply start with an opening question and will progress based, primarily, upon the initial response. Unstructured interviews are usually very time-consuming and can be difficult to manage. They are useful for depth analysis [17].

Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail. The flexibility of this approach allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants.

Talk is similar with unstructured interview. The difference could be attributed to the following points.

- In Talk, the researcher allows the participants to speak their mind. Whereas an interview is scheduled to ask questions that are likely to yield as much information about the study phenomenon as possible and also be able to address the aims and objectives of the research.
- The researcher participates in talk for the conversation to have a natural flow. Both gives and takes. Whereas in an interview, the informant gives and the researcher receives.
- In an interview, good questions should be open-ended (i.e. require more than a yes/no answer), neutral, sensitive and understandable. In talk, questions might be of any kind. The researcher as well as the participant may pose questions.

These features of talk make the conversation between the researcher and the participant a natural dialogue. The artificial and formal nature of interview is removed in talk [18-20].

Conclusion

In the study groups around Wollo, talk is a major social practice which 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 was used as a major data collection tool in this study. Data were extracted using casual and non-casual talk through different social events. 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.

'Talk' is an important research tool which we can use to extract data for qualitative research. Talk is the most natural data collection instrument. While talking, participants forgot the artificial situation of being interviewed. Hence, they provide information which is closer to the truth.

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