

Research Dimensions

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ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

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Emergence of Ethnography of Communication:

The ethnography of communication is a branch of linguistics. The word ‘*ethnography*’ is derived from the Greek word ‘Ethnos’ means ‘nation’ or ‘people’ and ‘graphia’ means ‘writing’. Derivatively, ‘ethnography’ means the ‘writing’ about ‘nation’ or ‘people’. In fact, the term ethnography refers to the empirical and descriptive study of humanity, in such large groups as communities. The well-known linguist Dell Hymes coined the phrase “*the Ethnography of Communication*” in his paper in 1962. However, it was redefined in his 1964’s paper, “Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication” to accommodate for the non-vocal and non-verbal characteristics of communication. Though most Ethnography of Communication researcher still tends to focus upon speaking as it is generally considered “to be a prominent-even primordial-means of communication”. In short, the term ethnography came into use in the second quarter of the 19th century.

The Oxford English Dictionary’s first citation of the term is from the 1834: Penny Cyclopaedia (II, 97) adopted it from German:

“The term ethnography (nation-description) is sometimes used by German writers in the sense which we have given to anthropology.”

Anthropology included the study of ethnography in the past. Moreover, anthropology has association with sociolinguistics.

Characteristics of Ethnography of Communication:

The ethnography of communication has some characteristics. It is an adequate approach to the problems of language. It engages anthropologists to have an adequate approach. Such an approach can’t simply take separate results from linguistics, psychology, sociology, ethnology as given, and seek to correlate them. It must call attention to the need for fresh data. It needed to investigate the use of language. Such an approach can’t take linguistic form, a given as a frame of reference. It must take as context as community to

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investigate its communicative habits as a whole. It is not that the linguistic doesn't have a vital role. Well-analyzed linguistic materials are indispensable.

The logic of linguistic methodology is principle influence in the ethnographic perspective. It is rather that it is not linguistics but ethnography. It is not language but the communication which provides the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described. Hymes describes the boundaries of the community. The communication is possible within the community. He further describes the boundaries of the situations within which communication occurs. It has the means and purposes and patterns of selection. It is their structure and hierarchy that constitute the communicative economy of a group.

The beliefs, social forms and institutions, roles and personalities must be examined in the relation to the communicative events and patterns as a focus of study.

Hymes states:

“To project the ethnography of communication in such a way is tantamount to the belief that there awaits constitution a second descriptive science comprising language, beside that of present linguistics proper, towards which current trends and lines of such those represented in this volume converge and contribute.” (1964: 3)

Definition of Ethnography of Communication:

Ethnographers have been defined ‘Ethnography’ and ‘Ethnography of Communication in different ways. Some of the selected definitions have been given below.

Mario Pei claims that

“Ethnography is the science of and study of the races of mankind, their character, history, cultures, customs and institutions.” (68)

Ethnography and Ethno methodology:

Ethnography is a field which is concerned primarily with the description and analysis of culture. However, ethnography of speaking is an approach to the study of discourse. It focuses on particular ways of seeing and experiencing the world and resultantly how these are reflected in particular ways of speaking. Ethnographers observe various patterns of communication. They also observe the symbols and meanings, premises, and rules applied to speaking within specific groups of people.

Ethno methodology is a branch of sociology. It is concerned with talk. Ethno methodologists are interested in the processes and techniques that people use to interpret the

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world. They are interested in trying to discover the categories and systems that people use in making sense of the world. The aim of the ethno methodology is to study the processes of sense making. The members of society use to construct the social world and its factual properties. Ethno methodologists investigate the production and interpretation of everyday action. It is skilled accomplishment of social factors. They are interested in conversation as one particular pervasive instance of skilled social action.

Ethnography as a Method of Discourse Analysis:

Ethnography of communication is a method of discourse analysis in linguistics. It draws attention on the anthropological field of ethnography. The communication scholars Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor state:

“Ethnography of communication conceptualizes communication as a continuous flow of information, rather than as a segmented exchange of messages.” (44)

According to Deborah Cameron, Ethnography of communication can be thought as the application of ethnographic methods to the communication patterns of a group. According to Dell Hymes, cultures communicate in different ways. But all forms of communication require a shared code. Hymes explained that the communicators who know and use the code, a channel, a message form, a topic, and an event created by transmission of the message.

Ethnography of communication can be used to study the interactions among members of a specific speech community. Speech communities create and establish their own speaking codes. The community has its own cultural values about speaking. These values are linked to judgments of situational appropriateness. The meaning and understanding of the presence or absence of speech within different communities will be different. The local cultural patterns and norms must be understood for analysis and interpretation of the appropriateness of speech acts.

Aim of Ethnography of Communication:

The aim for the ethnographies of communication must be not so to divide the communicative event, divorcing message-form (sign type) and context of use from one another. The aim must be to keep the multiple hierarchies of relations among messages and contexts in view. It should study the means that serve them. They are as little to the purpose as studies of communicative means. The ethnography of communication is indebted to the methodological gains from studies of linguistic form for its own sake.

Hymes states:

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“One way to state the need is to remark that there are anthropological, sociological and psychological studies of many kinds, but of whole ethnographies focused on communicative behavior, and of comparative behavior, and of comparative ethnological and social anthropological studies based upon them, there are none. Even studies of the manifold individual kinds of phenomena of interest to ethnography of communication are few and far between, if one unites their concern to study communicative form and function integrally”. (1964:9)

Relation Between Ethnography and Linguistics:

There are the close ties between ethnography and descriptive linguistics. There are close ties between ethnography and the various perspectives of ethnology and social anthropology. The practice of participants’ observation and the values place on the specifics of cultural life and the view point of the other participants in the communication that is ethnography-such traits tend to ensure two distinguishing characteristics.

Ethnography is conceived in reference to various efforts. The structural analysis of cultural behavior is generally viewed as development of theories adequate to concrete cases. Ethnographic objectivity is inter-subjective objectivity, but the inter-subjectivity in question is that the participants in the culture. An adequate ethnography is considered here to include the culturally significant arrangement of productive statements about relevant relationships obtaining among locally defined categories and contexts within the interpretation, evaluation and selection of alternative statements about a particular set of cultural activities within a genre of cultural relations and ethno-theoretical models

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