CHAPTER ONE

THE ETHNOGRAPHY
OF INTERPRETER-MEDIATED
COMMUNICATION:
METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES
IN FIELDWORK

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1. Introduction

In this chapter I concentrate on fieldwork activities in Interpreting
Research (IR) and discuss the implications of our position as researchers
collecting data from a variety of communities of practice. When doing
fieldwork, interaction is not only the object of our investigations, it is
indeed also one of the main tools which determine to what extent access to
target populations can be successfully gained and whether a representation
of interpreter-mediated situations can be provided effectively, as "the
significance of the findings must be grounded in an explicit description of
what the enquiry takes to be its object" (Halverson 1998: 595). Such
interaction is part of the researcher's observational stance on which
fieldwork is based and that, as discussed below, is also likely to imply
some form of participation.

Fieldwork as a research method has been used extensively in social
sciences, e.g. in (linguistic) anthropology, sociology and sociolinguistics,
and it has been receiving increased attention on the part of translation and
interpreting (TI) scholars following what has been termed as a 'social' or
'sociological' turn of TI Studies (Angelelli 2007; Pöchhacker 2006, 2009;
Wolf and Fukari 2007). Interestingly, anthropologists and TI scholars have
mutually acknowledged the existence of some shared ground, as they have
looked at "the ethnographer as a cultural mediator" (Duranti 1997: 91; see
also Göhring as quoted in Bahadir 2004: 808), the interpreter as ethnographer

and the interpreting-researcher as anthropologist (Bahadir 2004), or even "the ethnographer and the translator as interpreters of experience" (Valero Garcés 1995: 556). There are now numerous examples of investigations in which ethnographic and sociological methods have been adopted to analyze interpreter-mediated situations and to address questions such as the interpreter's role, identity, and power relations (for an overview see Chesterman 2006, Torresi 2009). But rather than focusing on how these models are used in analysis, I concentrate on fieldwork activities undertaken by researchers in the pre-analysis stage, i.e. during data collection, with a particular focus on a notion first introduced by Gile (1994) as he referred to 'practisearchers', i.e. practising interpreters who are also involved in academic research and, in many cases, in interpreter training and education.

The next section (§2) provides a brief overview of ethnographic methods as discussed by anthropologists throughout the development of their discipline and the shifts in their position as fieldwork observers or participants. Then (§3), the TI scholars' perspective will be discussed, highlighting how a similar but reversed trend from participation to observation can be appreciated. Finally (§4), the methodological challenges and proposals resulting from my own fieldwork experience in conference interpreting will be presented together with another experience in sign language community interpreting (Metzger and Roy 2011). To conclude (§5), I will point out the crucial role of practisearchers in defining their stance not only within their research endeavours but also within the community from which data are collected through fieldwork, i.e. an "interactive environment" (Fabietti 1999: 13, my translation) whose members may be willing to give (research data) but are also ready to receive (research results). In other words, as fieldworkers we should not only ask target populations to provide us with (their) information, but ensure that the results extrapolated from such information are somehow meaningful to both the researcher and the researched.

2. Ethnography and fieldwork:
From observation to participation

The two terms 'ethnography' and 'fieldwork' are mutually related. In disciplines such as anthropology and sociology they are generally referenced to the final product in the form of a written account (ethnography) of a period of empirical observation *in situ* (fieldwork). "Ideally, then, we should distinguish between two rather different practices: interacting with people and writing about them" (Moeran 2007:

3), though the distinction between ethnography and fieldwork is not always so clear-cut even among experts (Fabietti 1999: 12–20). Leaving aside this formal aspect, which goes beyond the scope of the present chapter, let us consider the following definition proposed by Duranti (1997: 85) from the perspective of linguistic anthropology:

> Ethnography is the written description of the social organization, social activities, symbolic and material resources, and interpretive practices characteristic of a particular group of people. Such a description is typically produced by prolonged and direct participation in the social life of a community.

The researcher's participation and the fact of establishing some kind of rapport with the members of the community to be analyzed are instrumental in collecting relevant data (by means of different strategies, e.g. recordings, notes, interviews, etc.) as these are observed and/or experienced by researchers themselves in what is known as fieldwork. Fieldwork was introduced in modern anthropology with Malinowski's work in 1922 (Matera 2005: 40–42; Shaffir and Stebbins 1991: 8–12) and used to be considered an initiation or rite of passage for young anthropologists, especially at a time when this specifically meant leaving for unexplored, exotic, and remote destinations (Fabietti 1999: 10–12)[1].

Considering how anthropologists have approached the field and collected their data throughout time, radical changes have occurred, especially in the role and position (or even footing in the Goffmanian sense) of researchers within the target population being observed. Initial work was carried out by amateur observers, whose accounts were not usually the result of pre-established academic pursuits. These were followed by the so-called armchair anthropologists, who had no direct contact whatsoever with the research subjects but mostly based their observations on documents and reports obtained from indirect sources. Then, professional ethnographers paved the way to fieldwork as defined above with increasing efforts made by anthropologists to identify with the 'other' as much as possible, so as to become 'gone native' fieldworkers (Tedlock 1991). The idea behind this process of identification with and assimilation into the 'other' community was that it could grant better access (and understanding) to the socio-cultural and communicative

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[1] Anthropologists have also turned their attention to settings that are closer to their everyday life experience, as is the case with urban anthropology (see e.g. Pardo and Prato 2012), as well as business, science, family, and organizational environments (see e.g. Gellner and Hirsch 2001).

practices under investigation. This enabled researchers to collect "data through fieldwork and participant observation [...], ending up with descriptive accounts of cultures in an analytical, rather detached language. Their aim was to work out typologies of cultural patterns and to wipe out any trace of [*sic*] investigator's personality" (Bahadir 2004: 810).

Despite this attempt to make ethnographic accounts sound 'impersonal', thus more scientific, all of them are largely based on an individual's observation and, above all, interaction with the surrounding environment (Fabietti 1999: 15–16). Interaction emerges as a distinguishing feature of field research due to the presence of multiple relations to be managed in each and every stage of any field experience (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991: 7):

> a) entering the field setting; b) learning how to play one's role while there, whether it be that of researcher or someone else; c) maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge; and d) leaving the setting. Though analytically separable, these stages merge and interweave at various points of the research because the investigator is required to perform concurrently different tasks associated with each stage.

Indeed, the very act of gaining access "is based on different sets of relationships between the researcher and the researched established throughout a project" (Burgess 1991: 43–44). The subjects involved, other than the researcher, may play multiple roles, such as sponsors (of a research project), gatekeepers (of the information to be obtained), members of the target population to be 'observed', and may even become friends, with implications typical of a social process that continues throughout the whole duration of one's investigation (*ibid.*).

Even if a distinction between participant and non-participant field research can be made, in both cases different forms of participation, or at least interaction, are entailed. According to Douglas (1976: 15) participant field research would range from overt research actions to covert ones, investigative reporting, detective work and depth-probe field research. On the other hand, non-participant field research would include discussion and interviews with a more or less structured or flexible design. In fact, the different degrees of participation can be appreciated here only in a narrower sense, i.e. whether the fieldworker is within the target situation or practice as it unfolds, or is 'talking about it' in a separate setting.

Due to the interactive nature of the field, the very notion of 'participant observation' has been called into question. Some scholars pointed out that it is actually a paradox (Duranti 1997: 118) or an infelicitous phrase classed as an oxymoron in rhetorical terms (Favret-Saada 2012: 438): how

can one be both a participant and an observer at the same time in a given situation? On the other hand, would it be possible to perform a totally neutral and objective observation? (see Tedlock 1991)[2].

According to Duranti (1997), different modes of participant observation can be applied, from passive participation to complete participation, i.e. "being able to interact competently in the native language and even perform the verbal genres one is studying." (*ibid*.: 100). Full involvement in the communicative situation that such participation entails, Duranti admits, makes it challenging for researchers to oversee all their fieldwork activities while gaining access to data that would be otherwise unreachable by means of traditional strategies.

> Complete participation, when possible and ethically appropriate, gives researchers a great opportunity to directly *experience* the very processes they are trying to document. Though it is by no means equivalent to entering the mind and body of a native speaker, *performing* gives a researcher important insights into what it means to be a participant in a given situation and suggests hypotheses and further questions. (*ibid*.) (my emphasis)

Indeed, Duranti cautions against the use of this practice as it can be "very absorbing" and "extremely distracting". Alternatively, what he also recommends is "to assume the strange status of accepted by-standers or professional overhearers" or even "to get as close as possible to what it is like to be a marginal participant" (*ibid*.: 101–102), though the latter formulations seem to reinforce even more the controversial nature of participant observation[3].

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[2] When narrowed down to sociolinguistics, a similar controversy was raised by Labov in what he referred to as the observer's paradox, i.e. "to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed" (Labov 1972: 61). As emerges from the present discussion, although the observer's paradox is unavoidable to a certain extent, there are ways to make it less 'disturbing' or even take advantage of it. In fact, this paradox seems to recall more a positivist stance grounded on realism, whereas if one accepts the idea that the reality under examination is co-constructed by the observer too, who cannot avoid being a participant, thus measures can be devised to minimize, control or take advantage of such influence on the mediated reality.

[3] For general guidelines on participant observation as a methodological tool in different settings see deWalt and deWalt (2011), though it stands to reason that "the so-called rules and canons of fieldwork frequently are bent and twisted to accommodate the particular demands and requirements of the fieldwork situation and the personal characteristics of the researcher" (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991: 22).

Similarly, Bruyn (1966) proposes the following forms of participant observation: complete observer; observer as participant; participant as observer (still with a certain degree of disclosure of one's research aim); and complete participant. The essential feature of participant observation is that it is based on the individual's inner perspective, *vis-à-vis* the outer perspective typically assumed in traditional empiricism. "It is through a process of symbolic interpretation of the 'experienced culture' that the observer works with his data and discovers meanings in them" (*ibid.*: 12). Notwithstanding this emphasis on the individual's experience, such an individual is still foregrounded as an 'observer' thus giving greater prominence to the academic self over or, at least, preserving it on a par with, the other 'participating' self.

Another, perhaps more radical, approach emerges from some scholars who set out to go beyond the participant observation stances mentioned so far and personally experience the field by repositioning their 'selves' within it and reducing, if not closing completely, the gap between 'them' and the 'others'.

One step in this direction was made by Reinharz (1995, 2010) in what she calls experiential analysis. This sociologist addresses the main pitfalls of 'traditional' sociological research methods after she exploited them in three different investigations, i.e. survey empiricism, participant observation, and team fieldwork. Her main reflections revolve around the role, position and self-presentation of the researcher while interacting with the data before, during and after their collection and analysis. It is especially in the third study, i.e. team fieldwork in an Israeli town, that the researcher had the chance to reflect on her own coping strategies, behaviour, and reactions in the field, e.g. during rocket shelling, together with her team members' and the community members' reactions and behaviours, thus generating "personal knowledge [that] is completely compelling and becomes the means of structuring future observations" (*ibid.*: 339). This approach becomes wider in scope as "one can extend participant observation to employ an intentionally introspective perspective" (*ibid.*: 363), thus leading to "a form of praxis for the self and the society" (*ibid.*: 368). In other words, experiential analysis is a way to include not only the problem and the method, but also the person, i.e. the scholar, as a constituting element of a research project, without considering "the researcher-as-person as irrelevant or as a potential source of bias" (*ibid.*: 370)[4]. Indeed, it is undeniable that researchers may be precluded from having access to certain settings or would experience the same field in

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[4] For a critical review of this approach see Arango (1984–85).

different ways because of their identity attributes (e.g. age, ethnicity, gender or physical characteristics). "All situations are suitable for experiential analysis. [...] Experiential analysis can even be performed on situations the researcher did not choose to experience, such as parenthood or incarceration" (*ibid.*: 364).

   Incarceration is at the centre of another fieldwork experience (Kaminski 2004) in which a similar approach was adopted but with fundamentally different assumptions. At the age of 22, this Polish "[h]alf revolutionist, half scholar in the making" (*ibid.*: 2) was arrested because of his affiliation with the underground Solidarity resistance network in Poland; at that time, he was also a student of social anthropology and was in search of a topic for his final dissertation. His initial dilemma over writing a thesis about the resistance network, which would have put him and his colleagues at risk before the communist secret police, was solved when he was given jail sentence. His twofold background certainly contributed to push his participation and observation status one step forward compared to any other researcher entering the same field (i.e. prison) as an outsider granted permission to carry out a study. Besides having become a full-fledged member of the population he wanted to analyze, his academic education provided him with the necessary methodological tools to "conduct an extensive and uncompromising research project", which "turned out to be an excellent survival strategy" (*ibid.*: 3). As a result of this 'unusual' approach to the field, Kaminski (*ibid.*: 7) singles out two specific conditions to define the role of what he calls an observing participant (OP) in contrast to that of a participant observer:

   a) OP enters a community from a similar social process as its other members and is subject to similar rules;
   b) undertakes field research as if he or she was a researcher. An ideal OP lives through his/her social role, impassively registers randomly generated personal experience, and applies available data gathering techniques.

Another example of an anthropologist who 'happened' to turn into an observing participant is Brian Moeran (2007, 2009) in his fieldwork study of a Japanese advertising agency within the framework of organizational ethnography. The crucial shift from participant observation to observing (also called observant) participation actually occurred a while after Moeran had gained access to the field and had started his fieldwork activities as a participant observer. Indeed, already at this preliminary stage, his reflections on the factors enabling him to enter the field of a private organization and be free to 'move around' successfully are highly

valuable as they can be applied to many other settings. In particular, he mentions the critical role of connections, the ability to present one's research activities in a compelling way before the organization's decision-makers (also highlighting what they would get in return), maintaining an appropriate attitude with all informants, constantly aiming at higher stakes and "somehow engineer[ing] a lucky break and turn[ing] it into a golden opportunity" (Moeran 2007: 7). The golden opportunity mentioned here is the moment when his participation status changed into that of an observing participant due to his involvement in a business problem which was solved thanks to his contribution. From then on, he was addressed not just as an external researcher but as a peer or colleague, thus widening the scope and 'quality' of information he got exposed to: "for the first time, informants came voluntarily to the fieldworker, rather than have the fieldworker come to them" (*ibid.*: 19). Most importantly, he was given the opportunity

> to see beyond the social front that informants present to strangers in their everyday lives, to know that there is a difference between what Erving Goffman (1990) refers to as 'front stage' and 'back stage' behaviour, and to have ready access to that back stage. (*ibid.*: 14)

Other scholars managed to gain insight into the 'backstage' of particular communities, otherwise inaccessible, following the conditions and principles mentioned above but with a fundamental difference, i.e. having *decided* to be an observing participant, thus designing their research endeavour in advance with the specific aim of turning into (and not just performing) a full member of the target population[5]. For example, this is the case of Favret-Sadaa (1980) and her study on séances and bewitching/unwitching practices, for which she pushed herself to the limit of "being caught in witchcraft: a condition [she] was forced to submit in order to access events relating to it", thus presenting the "wider methodological and theoretical usefulness of the notion of 'being affected'" (*ibid.*: 437) in contrast with other notions, such as participant observation and even empathy.

Similarly, a black neighbourhood in Chicago was studied by Wacquant (2004), i.e. a white French sociologist, who gained access to the ghetto by

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[5] Some of the examples of observing participation reported in the present discussion can be included in what are considered "more penetrating or 'investigative' procedures that permit access to [...] private spheres of life" (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991: 15 referring to Douglas 1976). Nevertheless, in all the cases taken into account the fieldworker had to become acquainted with new and very often unfamiliar practices.

becoming member of the Woodlawn Gym. There he was an apprentice boxer for over three years and took part in the Golden Gloves tournament while producing hundreds of pages of field notes.

> There is no doubt that I would never have been able to gain the trust and to benefit from the collaboration of the Woodlawn regulars if I had joined the gym with the explicit and avowed aim of studying it, for that very intention would have irrevocably modified my status and role within the social and symbolic system under consideration. (*ibid.*: 9)

A final, perhaps even more extreme example I would like to mention concerns a secluded environment whose population does not normally have any contact with the external world, namely enclosed religious orders. Sbardella (2015) carried out her research inside two cloistered convents in France, entering as a postulant and living the life of a nun according to the liturgy of the hours. This Italian anthropologist spent approximately a month in each convent as she was the only postulant at that time. Subsequently, she also had the opportunity to pay several further visits for a short time. This form of fieldwork allowed her to document practices and processes (e.g. silence management, group and community identity-building, mastering control of body movements) from within, while perceiving the field not only intellectually (as a 'front stage' observer) but also physically, having to adjust to the (group) identity and cope with the norms imposed by the field itself without the possibility of shifting back to an overt status of anthropologist before the other members (Sbardella 2014, 2013).

Observant participation can thus be said to be based on the assumption that a researcher's status and identity contribute to determine the field, both in terms of access to (or lack thereof) data sources and their 'quality'. Indeed certain settings may be (in)accessible simply depending on the researcher's gender and professional status (see e.g. Donner 2012, Gurney 1991). It is therefore essential to reflect upon the role played by researchers not only in pursuing their research objectives but in the society as a whole[6].

As is clear from the field experiences illustrated above, the role of an observing participant has different facets and may be assumed involuntarily, accidentally, fortuitously, or even designed deliberately and

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[6] For an interesting discussion on the researcher's role shifting between being an observer and a participant, including the ethical and even legal implications therein, see O'Neill (2001) in his investigation into emergency aid hospital services.

constructed *ad hoc*. Could this role be linked to, if not fully match, the researcher's background? This is often found in IR, where many researchers are also practitioners and trainers. In the next section I examine how ethnographic methods have been discussed and used by TI scholars, and what kind of observation or participation they have adopted in their fieldwork activities.

3. Interpreting Research and fieldwork: From participation to observation

Fieldwork activities in Interpreting Research (IR) have generally been framed as a "research strategy" adopted with the aim of "collecting data on people or occurrences in their real-life context" (Pöchhacker 2004: 63)[7]. The essential importance of context is also mentioned by Hale and Napier (2013: 85) in presenting the main features of ethnographic research applied to Interpreting within the general framework of qualitative and phenomenological research.

> If you see Interpreting as occurring within the social context in which it occurs, and believe that the processes and products of Interpreting are influenced by linguistic and cultural factors in context, then ethnography may be the appropriate methodology for your research project.

Particular emphasis is put on the fact that ethnographic research implies establishing and maintaining some sort of relationship with members of the community or population under analysis, that may range from interpreter practitioners and students to educators, clients and other stakeholders. Various data collection techniques are mentioned, such as interviews, focus group discussions, observations via field notes, and fieldwork. All of these entail a varying degree of in/direct involvement on the part of the researcher. Fieldwork, in particular, is linked to two different types of observation, i.e. non-participant (distanced) or participant (immersed) observation, a distinction that reflects to some extent the variation in the researcher's position and status discussed above (§2). Regardless of how distanced or immersed this observation might be, fieldwork figures as a common methodological strategy across all research paradigms in IR, from interpretive theory to cognitive processing, from the target-text-oriented translation-theoretical approach

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[7] It is worth specifying that there is no clear-cut boundary between this and other strategies (e.g. surveys and experimental research) that may indeed influence and complement each other (*ibid.*).

to the dialogic discourse-based interaction paradigm, excluding only the neurophysiological/neurolinguistic approach which is based on experiments (see Pöchhacker 2004: 83)[8].

Looking at interpreting as a professional and situated communicative activity, Hale and Napier (*ibid.*) also quote Sarangi (2005) to specify that "informal ethnography should involve a process of 'thick participation', whereby there is an ongoing commitment to observe and/or interact with a community over a period of time" (Hale and Napier 2013: 91)[9]. Indeed, the majority of the studies they present as examples of investigations drawing on ethnographic methods were carried out by scholars who have also played (and in some cases still play) an active role in the practicing interpreting community. This is not surprising, as testified by the use of the term 'practisearchers' (i.e. practitioner *cum* researcher) to refer to members of the IR (and teaching) community since the dawn of Interpreting Studies as an academic discipline (Gile 1994), though not always deemed entirely scientific as such (Gile 1990). According to Gile's (1994) overview of IR, initial steps were made in the fifties by few prominent figures in the professional interpreting market but mostly on the basis of their personal experience and intuition, with a particular focus on training and without adopting any acknowledged methodological approach. Then, a period of experimental studies on the interpreting process (above all the simultaneous mode) followed with the contribution of researchers from other areas, such as psychology and psycholinguistics, albeit without propelling interpreting scholars towards truly interdisciplinary research and closer collaboration. Between the end of the sixties and the first half of the eighties, many more practisearchers appeared on the IR scene, yet their works were still more theoretical than empirical (either experimental or observational) and isolated (i.e. with little interaction among researchers). The subsequent period is called "the Renaissance" as a result of the increasing number of empirical studies conducted by a second generation of (mostly) practisearchers, featuring more communication and an open-

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[8] In fact experiments, too, may be based on fieldwork-related activities as in preliminary and design steps (see previous footnote, and Liu in this volume).
[9] Thick participation is derived from the idea of thick description introduced by Geertz (1973, see Rapport and Overing 2000: 349–352). Sarangi extends the notion of 'thick participation' to the post-analysis stage when results are disseminated, thus maintaining participation alive through "the provision of feedback and the facilitation of conditions for potential uptake of discourse analytic findings" (2005: 377).

minded attitude[10]. It can be hypothesized that a similar trend has been continuing ever since, fostered by the creation and spread of postgraduate and doctoral programmes in Translation and Interpreting throughout Europe and also in emerging countries[11].

Returning to the ethnographic tools applied to IR, the last method illustrated by Napier and Hale (2013: 114) is that of "interpreters [who] engage in *action research* on their own practice" and analyze case studies, i.e. a sort of "blend of autobiography and ethnography" (*ibid.*). The two authors provide several examples from sign language interpreting, but certainly this practice has been common among many other practitioners working in different interpreting modes and settings (see Shlesinger 2009), and I am no exception.

The salient features of my fieldwork experience are described in the next section, but first I would like to comment on the role and evolving status of practisearchers engaged in IR and contrast these with the shifts in the participation and observation stances of ethnographers and anthropologists presented earlier. Practisearchers have always been the protagonists of IR irrespective of the paradigm and approach under consideration. Interestingly, if we consider the ways anthropologists and ethnographers have approached the field (see above), a similar story can be told of interpreting scholars but in a somewhat reversed order. Indeed, what may be perceived as an 'extreme' position assumed by the former (i.e. total immersion in the situations under analysis via observing participation) is exactly the same position from which IR started in the very beginning of its development (i.e. with practisearchers theorizing from their own experience). Though a clear distinction between practisearchers from different periods of time is in order (see e.g. Gile 1995), with the first pioneers more in line with experiential analysis and only the following generations engaged in observing participation proper, it is also true that potential criticism of practisearchers' self-analysis might be reconsidered and lead to a more positive evaluation of such engagement, especially in the light of the academization process of interpreter education (Pöchhacker 2010) and, most importantly, researcher education (Liu 2011: 104). Of course methodological rigour is paramount and should not be sidestepped in favour of more 'personal', anecdote-based approaches. However, it is

[10] A bibliometric analysis by Pöchhacker (1995: 52) shows that between 1989 and 1994 "all but two of the top [most prolific] 25 authors [...] have been and mostly continue to be active as professional conference interpreters or court interpreters, many of them being members of AIIC".
[11] On the importance of investing in research training to foster the development of Interpreting Studies as a scientific discipline see Moser-Mercer (2011).

undeniable that as practisearcher one can have privileged access to data and 'interpretation' thereof, thus taking advantage of the 'backstage behaviour' discussed earlier which, together with one's personal professional experience can be a fruitful source of inspiration and self-reflection[12]. As testified by Wadensjö (2011: 14) "[k]nowing the field from the inside, I had a number of questions and a strong motivation. Also, I had a large network of colleagues and other stakeholders who were willing to share experiences and information".

The observing participation conditions put forward by Kaminski (2004, see above) thus apply well to practisearchers involved in IR, especially in the 'post-renaissance period'. Still, it must be acknowledged that when on duty as researchers, interpreters as such contribute directly to the object of enquiry, i.e. mediated communication. Nevertheless, practisearchers should be well aware of their obligations as providers of a professional service whose objectives must prevail over those of one's research interests. What indeed seems to be more problematic here is finding the right balance between attending the needs of clients, which is a priority, and the (practical) requirements of fieldwork activities, for which specific training and well designed procedures would be necessary (see e.g. DeWalt and DeWalt 2011).

The evident advantages in terms of access to relevant data have already been touched upon earlier: practisearchers are ingroup members of at least one of the populations under analysis (i.e. interpreters, but they may also be educators and play further roles in their community), and they are already familiar with many of the backstage activities that might not be understood or observed by analysts from other communities of practice. In this respect, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana's investigation on child language brokering is particularly revealing (Orellana 2010). Her project actually started out as an ethnographic study among children of immigrants, "deploy[ing] a multi-layered, mixed-methods program of research […], using a variety of conceptual frames and methodological tools" (*ibid.*: 47). Indeed, she conducted surveys, acted as a participant observer and also as an observing participant in that she was a practisearcher too, but rather than being involved in the field as interpreter, her participation was "centered in the community around the school in which [she] had worked as a bilingual classroom teacher" (*ibid.*: 48). After deploying a variety of fieldwork strategies, ranging from survey research to observations and

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[12] This is not to corroborate the idea whereby "one does not need to be an academic to be a researcher. Any practitioner who has an interesting question about their work can be a researcher" (Napier 2011:129). 'Practi-searchers' as such must be proficient in both areas, i.e. interpreting practice and research.

even action research (involving children and their families directly in documenting the phenomena being studied), she provides the research community with insightful methodological assessments and these are clear evidence of the constant interaction and co-construction of field participants' roles and identities, including the researcher's:

> My own bilingual skills, and those of other fieldworkers, were important for some aspects of the work, and especially for analyses; but they could also prove an impediment to the witnessing of language brokering events, because families would more naturally look to the adult bilinguals than their own children when the need for translation arose, and because it felt unnatural and uncomfortable for us to stand by as witness when we could be helping out with the task at hand. (Orellana 2010:5 4)

Clearly, this is a limitation which may profoundly affect the nature of a study, or even the ecological validity itself of data collected through fieldwork, but one needs to deploy strategies to deal with it effectively. Although even having the research subjects directly involved in the research and data collection activities (e.g. children and their families keeping personal diaries as in the study mentioned above) may not provide the desired response rate, as a general strategy "much is to be gained epistemologically from tapping the 'self' in interpreting studies" (Monacelli 2000: 194). Self-reports, reflection and, in a word, collaboration with subjects in every stage of one's investigation (e.g. with briefing and de-briefing sessions) form a sort of "dynamic involvement" (*ibid.*) in which the point of view of the observed is made almost to overlap with the point of view of the observer. Once again, interaction emerges as not only the object of our observation but also one of the ways such observation is performed. Despite the fact that a wealth of interesting data can be obtained with this method, a number of challenges remain to be tackled, especially as a result of the great "variety of possible labels being used to describe phenomena" (*ibid.*: 211). Yet, as discussed elsewhere (Bendazzoli 2010b, 2012b), the ethnographic approach itself can provide the tools to arrive at a comprehensive taxonomy of the object under study, including "the setting, the participants and what they do and say" (Hale and Napier 2013: 89).

Returning to the involvement of all stakeholders in a (collaborative) study, Turner and Harrington (2000: 254) take it to a higher level by framing it as an "*empowering* approach" with

the use of interactive or dialogic research methods which attach appropriate significance to informants' own agendas and to the sharing of research-driven 'knowledge'. (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original)

Their twofold background, i.e. being practisearchers in the field of sign language interpreting, leads the two scholars to reflect upon their research stance and the resulting general challenges. To this end, they provide a description of the target community and discuss the methods they use to garner information (i.e. videotaping to observe its members, and obtaining permission from them), reaching the conclusion that "our work should be 'on, for and with' all stakeholders, including interpreters" (*ibid.*: 257). The approach to fieldwork illustrated in this last example is well in line with the view expounded by Ingold (2011: 243) in sociology. Since mere observation itself is, in any case, a form of participation which can hardly be avoided, as field researchers (and even more so as practisearchers) we shall be engaging our studies "not in the armchair but in the world" thus stressing the importance of "our observational engagements with the world and in our collaborations with its inhabitants". As Douglas (1976: 25) put it,

> [...] it makes no sense to believe that it is possible to ever totally separate the subject from the object. Rather than trying to eliminate the subjective effects, the goal must be to try to understand how they are interdependent, how different forms of subjective interaction with the people we are studying affect our conclusions about them [...].

In the next section I present the challenges and (possible) solutions that emerged from two fieldwork experiences involving different modalities and types of interpreting, namely spoken and sign language interpreting in conference (Bendazzoli 2012b) and community (Metzger and Roy 2011) settings respectively.

4. Collecting data through fieldwork in IR: Challenges and proposals

Among the many activities involved in the initial stages of an empirical study, and in data collection in particular, the following challenges can be considered: making contact and establishing a rapport with relevant participants (i.e. 'informants' in anthropological terms) in order to gain access to settings and relevant data; establishing 'the rules of the game' with such participants and with future ones who may be exposed or have access to the data (i.e. designing an informed consent form); recording the

data and storing them; transcribing recorded data; classifying the data in a way that is instrumental not only to the analysis at hand, but possibly to a broader view of the research question and future replications of the analysis on the same or other similar data sets. I now consider some of these challenges and discuss how they have been faced in dealing with two different types of interpreting: simultaneous conference interpreting between spoken Italian and spoken English (Bendazzoli 2010a, 2012b) and community interpreting between spoken English and American Sign Language (Metzger and Roy 2011). By contrasting the two situations, a number of fundamental features emerge as decidedly orienting many methodological choices at the base of fieldwork: the degree of confidentiality in the information exchanged and the degree of monologic vs. dialogic interaction at stake.

Drawing on my fieldwork experience in conference interpreting, two kinds of data access during the collection stage can be identified, namely external (i.e. indirect, as was the case with the European Parliament Interpreting Corpus project, see Monti et al. 2005, Russo et al. 2012) and internal (i.e. direct, as in the Directionality in Simultaneous Interpreting Corpus project, see Bendazzoli 2012a, 2012b). Researchers may be granted external access to a data source when they do not need to be physically present in the mediated event. For example, it is possible to download data from the Internet. Indeed, there is increasing availability of recordings posted online, not only from EU institutional settings, as is the case with European Parliament plenary sittings, but also other events such as festivals (e.g. see Bani in this volume) and press conferences (see the growing number of studies from China: Hu and Tao 2013; Wang 2012a, 2012b). Alternatively, it is also possible to take advantage of ready-made corpora and data sets; these may be obtained from *ad hoc* institutions, such as the LDC/ELRA[13] or made available by other researchers, who should preserve a copy of the transcribed materials with as little annotation as possible but, at the same time, be ready to provide thorough contextual information. On the other hand, internal access means that the researcher is present *in situ* and that data collection is the result of fieldwork, with clear advantages at the analysis stage as "data analysis performed on recorded data after a researcher's on-site observation can provide many more insights and revelations than an analysis just done on recorded data" (Liu 2011: 89). In the case of direct access, the researcher may even be

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[13] Linguistic Data Consortium / European Language Resources Association (http://www.elra.info/). Even in case of indirect data access, it might be necessary to obtain consent from the 'administrators' or 'owners' of the data and abide by specific terms of use.

personally involved in the interpreting assignment or, more generally, in the communicative situation[14], thus generating maximum interaction with the data since s/he would be a practisearcher on duty on all fronts. The latter case can be considered both the best but also the most delicate form of data access. It is the best in that practisearchers are already in touch with all the main stakeholders, they are fully aware of many of the setting's backstage features, and one's professionalism in the TI industry is likely to be transferred to the appropriateness of one's research, thus easing all the necessary procedures to obtain permission and so on. However, this form of full immersion may also become a double edged sword in that any incident would have an impact on both the professional and the academic dimensions. I was involved as on duty practisearcher in 13 out of the 14 conferences I recorded between 2006 and 2009, and in many cases I had been 'sponsored' by my booth-mate who, at that time, was already a senior and well-established member of the TI community. This sponsor, in turn, could take advantage of their connections in certain settings, and these came to play the role of ambassadors or "inside champions" (as referred to by Pöchhacker, personal communication). Such subjects become crucial in establishing and maintaining contact with the members of the target populations under study[15], thus utmost care must be paid in order to protect them and avoid over-exposure to their peers, as some of them may not be totally happy with the idea of being recorded and analyzed in their daily communicative practices. Even at this stage, and as confirmed multiple times in Meztger and Roy's paper (*ibid.*), the investment in time, staff and resources must be proportionate to the scope of the study.

   Another critical factor concerns the degree of confidentiality of the information exchanged by participants, as these may be more or less willing to share with other communities at large what could be very personal and sensitive matters (there could even be limitations for legal reasons). All the conferences I recorded in my fieldwork were open to the public and the only subjects I needed to anonymize were the interpreters.

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[14] Consider, for instance, educational settings in which practisearchers may decide to carry out a study involving their trainees. For some examples see Pöchhacker (2010); in this volume see Kellet Bidoli (chapter six) and §4.5 in Martin (chapter nine). The benefits of doing "classroom research" are also mentioned by Napier (2011: 140).

[15] These include both interpreters and non-interpreters. As suggested by Biber (1993: 224), after defining the target populations it is possible to make a sampling frame, i.e. "an itemized listing of population members from which representative samples can be chosen".

Consent forms used in other situations were compared, but the lessons learnt directly from the field in this respect are many: first, the description of one's research aims should be as incisive and broad as possible, including teaching purposes (not only research, in order not to limit future opportunities to utilize the data). To make it more compelling, it is essential to focus on what can be given in return to the community from which data are taken, thus showing that research results can be applied in a fruitful way. Secondly, besides assuring anonymity to the interpreters and the non-commercial nature of the study, I was required to specify that the transcripts produced for the study would not be used to produce the conference proceedings. This is to protect both the organizers, who would not be pleased to find a book about their conference published by somebody else, and the interpreters, who would not be happy to have their target text production used for purposes other than immediate communication. Thirdly, but this may be valid only in case of public events, the responsibility of informing all the participants can be shared with the event organizers, as they can surely cover a wider spectrum of participants than a fieldworker can, even when being present *in situ*. In any case, higher degrees of confidentiality pose greater limitations. In contrast to what I have suggested above, having to obtain a green light from the Institutional Review Board of their university, Metzger and Roy had to detail a great number of items, some referring to legal provisions, in the text of the consent form. The resulting text ended up engendering concerns that would not even be conceived of by participants willing to contribute to IR.

> While the protections in consent forms are necessary, they are also cumbersome and, at some level, forbidding. With the warning language of the consent form, and the options involved in the video release form, it becomes remarkable that anyone gives consent and allows themselves to be videotaped, particularly while at work. (Metzger and Roy 2011: 65)

In order to recruit participants, they made contact not only with a local interpreting agency where the project could also be presented to prospective informants (i.e. interpreters) but also with the deaf community so as to increase the awareness of both populations. Despite initial positive response beyond expectations, it was difficult to manage the whole process of obtaining informed consent, and this was also attributed to the lack of time and human resources devoted to this particular aspect of fieldwork.

As regards filming, video recording is inevitable in sign language interpreting research but it poses enormous challenges to the issue of

participants' anonymity. Moreover, audio recording seems to go more unnoticed than video (also due to the presence of a camera operator). Alternatives must thus be found using smaller, less obtrusive devices (e.g. webcams or compact cameras) that do not need to be monitored during the communicative situation and can be operated remotely, thus avoiding problems due to space limitations. In conference settings, taking advantage of the room audio/video system and the technical staff on duty is tempting and can definitely be very helpful. Yet it is advisable to try and be independent of third parties in the recording process, or have them as a back-up strategy only, as it may in fact prove extremely difficult and time-consuming to obtain the recordings from third parties for whom IR is not a priority, however collaborative they might be. More often than not technicians are under great pressure and may not be readily available to meet the requirements of fieldworkers interfering with their busy life. One counter strategy for the fieldworker is to be fully equipped with a wide range of devices (e.g. adaptors, extension cables, jacks, plugs) that might prove useful and foster collaboration. Small digital recorders can be placed in the booth, and laptop computers can be connected to digital receivers to acquire multiple audio channels. In sum, a technological investment must be added to the other investments mentioned earlier.

The need for participants to be anonymized becomes particularly challenging in case of video recordings from highly confidential settings. While audio recordings can be edited quite easily to delete explicit references to names or other items, this is more demanding with video data and even more so with sign language interpreting data. In addition, multiple cameras for multiple camera angles would be necessary to ensure that all the participants' signs and facial expressions are captured on video during a dialogic interaction.

Due to space limitations, transcription and coding will not be discussed in detail here. However, the choice of transcription conventions indeed mirrors the analyst's theoretical platform. What should be mentioned here is that while collecting data in the field, these need to be classified and archived in such a way that they can be retrieved easily. The meta-data annotation used for this purpose has a direct impact on subsequent coding and analysis, as well as on the overall understanding of the communicative situation under consideration. Developing a comprehensive 'taxonomy' of the data obtained from a certain communicative situation is not an easy task. Most importantly, it should be done in a way so as to capture fundamental features for the sample to become a corpus that has been "put together in a principled way" (Zanettin 2000: 107).

Considering the models and methods adopted from a variety of other disciplines, such as Hyme's SPEAKING ethnographic model (Hymes 1974), which was applied for example by Angelelli (2000, 2004) to community interpreting and by Mack (2002) to TV interpreting, Pierre Bourdieu's main sociological theories of field, *habitus* and capital (Valero Garcés 2012), Conversation Analysis, (Critical) Discourse Analysis (see Diriker 2004, Eraslan Gerçek 2009[16], as well as Bani or Boyd in this volume) and so on, what emerge as fundamental constituents of any communicative situation include its structure (main phases or sections), its participants (and the communicative roles), and the speech events which in our case are the object of interpreting activities (Bendazzoli 2012b). These can be taken as basic elements, while accounting for the broader notion of context which, as mentioned earlier, stands at the core of fieldwork as a socially constructed space where identities are constantly redefined. It seems that the ethnographic approach itself can provide the tools to arrive at a comprehensive taxonomy of the object under study.

> The ethnographic account creates an image of the culture or group being described and interpreted. It is therefore important that an ethnographic report describes the setting, the participants and what they do and say effectively. (Hale and Napier 2013: 89)

In my research, taking the constitutive elements of a communicative situation mentioned above as a starting point, the data collected through fieldwork were combined with existing relevant input from the scientific literature to classify the data. Among the fieldwork materials taken into account are the conference programmes and the PowerPoint presentations used by participants, field notes, the recordings, and their transcripts. It is worth specifying that this is not a linear process, as one needs to start applying a provisional taxonomy to organize the data collected in some way before transcribing them, but it is only after producing a number of transcripts that it is possible to establish a coding system and identify, for example, the different kinds of sessions and speech events produced by participants.

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[16] In this study the researcher was an observing participant as she was one of the interpreters on duty. Even the research question originated from her field experience as practitioner: "What I was interested in was how interpreters are actively involved in the interaction. In fact, this was a reality that I had experienced myself as an interpreter while interpreting, and it is the reason that I decided to explore the interpreter's role in the first place" (Eraslan Gerçek, personal communication).

5. Conclusions

Fieldwork is a fundamental research strategy at the basis of most approaches and paradigms in interpreting research. It relies on the observation, whether direct or indirect, of target populations, including interpreters and users of interpreting services. Recently, it has received increasing attention on the part of TI scholars as a result of the social turn of Interpreting Studies. The 'field' as such is a particularly 'interactive' environment, as in many cases the fieldworker is required to establish and maintain some sort of relation with the members of the communities being analyzed. Analysts are indeed faced with the fundamental dilemma of defining their status and position with respect to the other elements in the field, thus shifting between being participant observers and observing participants.

In this chapter I addressed this dilemma from different disciplinary perspectives, namely social sciences, such as anthropology and sociology on the one hand, and TI studies on the other. By joining the two perspectives it is clear that mere observation in fieldwork is a sort of illusion and that forms of participation and interaction are unavoidable. To the extent the interpreter lacks neutrality and invisibility, fieldworkers, too, are also visible and present, as they stand in greater or lesser proximity to the members of the target populations and, in the case of interpreting research, they may even play an active role as service providers. Indeed practisearchers are key figures in the IR landscape, and their membership in both worlds (i.e. academic and professional ones) grants them several advantages when it comes to data collection in real settings and also a number of challenges.

Two ethnographic experiences were taken into account to illustrate how some of the main challenges encountered in fieldwork can be tackled. These were found in conference and community interpreting, more specifically in conferences open to the general public and interpreted simultaneously between two spoken languages, and in a doctor-patient situation with sign language interpreting. In addition to common methodological obstacles, more specific and varied issues arise depending not only on the language modality and interpreting mode, but also on the degree of confidentiality and on the kind of interaction at stake (monologues vs. dialogues). All these features call for targeted actions on the part of fieldworkers, who are ultimately in a position to do research "'on, for and with' all stakeholders, including interpreters" (Turner and Harrington 2000: 257). This position is all the more relevant if we consider that many TI scholars are also practitioners and trainers,

sometimes collecting data from their own interpreting/training assignments, thus forming a community that is to an extent both the subject and object of their research. This implies that if such a community is willing to provide TI scholars with data, it is surely open to receiving and deserves to receive the potential benefits, or at least some feedback, generating from research results.

In reviewing a number of case studies and other projects in interpreting research, Liu (2011: 89) found that methodological details of the kind of observation adopted, as well as how access to a certain setting and permission to study it were obtained, are very often overlooked by scholars in their reports. Hopefully, this chapter may contribute to raising awareness in relation to the fact that practisearchers, whether on duty or not as interpreters while doing research, contribute to determining the field, and that fieldwork as such is inevitably a human experience that requires us to focus upon the problem, the method *and* the researcher.

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