

“Exploring insider/outsider perspectives and positions as Deaf ethnographers”

Rezenet Moges, MA
Annelies Kusters, Ph.D.
Hilde Haualand, Ph.D.

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Program of this Workshop

- ▶ Brief presentation by Rezenet, Annelies and Hilde
- ▶ Group discussion
- ▶ Any inquiries thereafter.



Aims of this Workshop

- ▶ Discuss the particularities, benefits and limitations of being “insider” and “outsider,”
- ▶ Problematize this distinction and explore connected ethical and methodological issues
- ▶ Foster a conversation about our roles as researchers/ethnographers and our (research) positions in various d/Deaf communities and groups of d/Deaf people.



Insider, outsider or both?

- ▶ Deaf ethnographers in deaf communities/groups;
 - ▶ Insiders in being deaf; outsiders for example in respect of nationality, ethnicity, education, language and more
- ▶ Access to and collection of different sets of data/information, social processes and mechanisms are related to or depends on
 - ▶ The research questions
 - ▶ The researchers' theoretical positions
 - ▶ The researchers' personal positions and roles
- ▶ All positions pose particular methodological limitations and challenges





Rezenet Moges



Past fieldwork with Deaf masculine women

Benefits as an insider gained me a convenient access:

- ▶ networking,
- ▶ getting approval quicker,
- ▶ solidarity,
- ▶ privileged me some knowledge of some nuances, which inevitably caused some uncontrollable giggles during interviews, (which consequently appeared much more natural conversations than other professional meetings)

Challenges faced:

- ▶ My outsider position illuminated as our education and class differed, affecting the normal dynamics between us.
- ▶ “You know!” Their assumption based on my shared identity to answer for them.
- ▶ Frequent requests for blunt honesty when she was worried to offend me—viewed as another member of the focal group.



Concluding points so far...

- ▶ Subjective perspectives allow myself to conduct my research ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ this group, which would contrast with outsider-research perspectives
 - ▶ Researching in the Deaf community indicates that the insider-outsider perspective cannot be divided rigidly by objectivity or subjectivity when the (multiple) shared identities of both researcher and the study group overlap.
 - ▶ Thus, being “insider” or “outsider” seem to be fluid concepts and we will experience combinations of both positions.
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- ▶ More examples coming up next...
 - ▶



Annelies Kusters



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- ▶ Movie on Adamorobe (1 minute)



Research in Adamorobe, Ghana

- ▶ PhD research in 2008-2009 (9 months)
- ▶ 43 deaf people, 2500 hearing people in 2008
- ▶ Adamorobe Sign Language (age 200 years)
- ▶ Methods: participant observation, informal conversations, ethnographic interviews
- ▶ Role of DEAF-SAME: “We are both deaf, you are white, but do I push you away? No! We are friends, both deaf”.
- BUT differences were important too:
 - White vs black
 - Guest-status vs residents
 - Formally educated vs traditionally educated
 - Experience with oralism / hearing aids etc
 - Access to financial resources
 - Differences in expectations (requests for gifts and support – business projects failed)



Researcher's effects

Less arguments and insults between deaf people, and more conversations

- *Is this because they want to behave better when outsiders are there?*
- *Was my presence a refreshing new experience or distraction?*
- *Or did they feel more united as deaf group when a (deaf) researcher investigated their deaf experiences?*

=> Researcher is part of the research, “objective” situation is impossible



Hearing people

- ▶ Hearing people also “behaved better” when I’m around (deaf complained about discrimination but I did not observe this)
- ▶ Deaf did not ‘allow’ me to interact with hearing in-depth - I was “their” guest, mistrust of hearing people’s intentions towards me
- ▶ How to investigate hearing people’s perspectives on, and experiences with, Adamorobe’s deaf population?
=> hearing local research assistant





Hilde Haualand



Multisited/multispacial fieldwork

- ▶ Repeated visits of various lengths to USA, Sweden and Norway in 2005-2010
- ▶ Fieldwork/data collection included
 - ▶ interviews with deaf and hearing people (in person and via video/skype/phone calls, in several signed and spoken languages),
 - ▶ participant observation at meetings, workshops, conferences
 - ▶ database searches
 - ▶ Internet browsing
 - ▶ printed and online commercial/informational material
- ▶ Fluid roles and positions in the field(s) and vis-a-vis other researchers and colleagues



Epistemology and ontology intertwined

- ▶ From mental and intellectual devastation to multiplicity and emancipation
- ▶ Knowledges are situated (Haraway, 1991)
 - ▶ Positioning
 - ▶ Vision
 - ▶ Responsibility





Group discussions



Group discussions

- ▶ Divide into 3 discussion groups (Discuss over 3 questions at next slide)
- ▶ Pick one “foreman” and share the highlights from your group
- ▶ Any inquiries thereafter.



Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Have you experienced any **benefits and/or limitations/challenges** as an **insider or as an outsider** of a group you choose to study?
- 2) Do you think the insider/outsider **distinction** works?
- 3) How did/do you adapt your **methodology and ethics** in response to the position(s) you had/have in the communities you research?

