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

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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.

More examples coming up next…
Annelies Kusters
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 Haueland
Multisited/multispatial 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?