

nals make poor informants for the novice ethnographer. Even the experienced interviewer must take special precautions such as using frequent "native language questions."

One student, a junior majoring in psychology, decided to study the culture of clinical psychologists. He approached someone who agreed to serve as an informant. But soon he discovered it was almost impossible for his informant to talk in his native language, the way he would talk to *other psychologists*. Instead, he constantly interpreted, analyzed, and explained to the student what psychologists are supposed to do.

Informants who are sophisticated in the social sciences can learn to respond to questions in a nonanalytic fashion. In studying cocktail waitresses, I collaborated with Brenda Mann who worked as a waitress during the study and served as a primary informant. She managed to set aside her social science background and respond from the perspective of Brady's Bar. In general, the beginning ethnographer will do well to locate informants who do not analyze their own culture from an outsider's perspective.

These criteria do not exhaust the ones that will make a good informant. However, if these criteria are met, the beginning ethnographer will eliminate some of the most vexing problems of learning to conduct ethnographic interviews. Having identified these general characteristics, we are now ready to undertake those tasks that will result in locating a good informant.

## Tasks

- 1.1. Make a list of potential informants (or cultural scenes). (A beginning ethnographer seeking a scene to study should list 40-50 possibilities.)
- 1.2. Identify five or six of the most likely informants (or cultural scenes).
- 1.3. Compare this list of potential informants on the five minimal requirements for a good informant. Place the selections in rank order.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the basic elements in the ethnographic interview.
2. To formulate and use several kinds of ethnographic explanations.
3. To conduct a practice interview.

An ethnographic interview is a particular kind of *speech event*.<sup>1</sup> Every culture has many social occasions identified primarily by the kind of talking that takes place; I refer to these as speech events. In our society most of us quickly recognize when someone gives us a *sales pitch* for a used car or a set of encyclopedias. We recognize Johnny Carson's *monologue* on the Tonight Show. We can easily tell the difference between a *lecture*, a *job interview*, or a *friendly conversation*. Many of the cues to distinguish among these speech events remain outside our awareness, but we use them nonetheless. All speech events have cultural rules for beginning, ending, taking turns, asking questions, pausing, and even how close to stand to other people. In order to clarify the ethnographic interview, I want to compare it with a more familiar speech event, the friendly conversation.

## THE FRIENDLY CONVERSATION

Let's consider a brief example of a friendly conversation between two businessmen. Then we can identify some of the features of this speech event. Fred and Bob have known each other since college days; they live in the same city and see each other occasionally at the Rotary Club. It has been several months since they have talked. This conversation takes place in a large department store where they have by chance encountered one another.

BOB: "Hi Fred! How are you?" (Bob extends his hand while Fred hurriedly shifts a package to his left hand so he can respond.)

FRED: "Fine. It's good to see you." (A firm handshake is now underway, one that goes on for several seconds as they continue to talk.)

BOB: "How's the family? I haven't seen you since March. Did you have a good summer?"

FRED: "They're all doing fine. Jean just left for college a few weeks ago."

- BOB: "That's right! How does it feel to have your oldest gone? Hardly seems possible. Billy's talking about the University of North Carolina for next year."
- FRED: "Did you have a good summer?"
- BOB: "Well things were pretty hectic at the office. We did get away for a couple weeks to the Smokies. Then Barbara and I had a long weekend up in D.C."
- FRED: "The Smokies? That sounds great. We've never been to that part of the country."
- BOB: "It was beautiful. But hot in August. We camped out for part of the time. If we go again I think we'd try to make it in September, maybe even after the leaves have started to turn. How about you? Did you get away?"
- FRED: "Yes, we spent three weeks in July up in Wisconsin."
- BOB: "Really! Where did you stay?"
- FRED: "Rented a cabin up in the northwest corner of the state. Did a lot of fishing. Best time was canoeing on the Brule River—nice rapids, but not too much for the kids. Had to rent two canoes, but we spent several days doing that river."
- BOB: "What kind of fish did you get?"
- FRED: "Bass, mostly, and panfish. John caught a musky and I think I had a northern pike on my line but he got away."
- BOB: "Say, how are things at the company?"
- FRED: "In May Al was transferred to Fort Lauderdale and that took a lot of pressure off. And since then sales have been up, too. Had a really productive week in early June—all the field men came in and I think that helped. How about you, still thinking of a transfer?"
- BOB: "Well, they keep talking about it. I've told them I'd rather wait till Danny finishes high school, but I don't think I could turn down a regional if it came along."
- FRED: "Look, I've got to meet Joan up the street in a few minutes; I'd better be off. It was really good to see you."
- BOB: "Yeah, let's get together sometime. I know Barbara would love to see Joan."
- FRED: "O.K. Sounds good. Take it easy now."
- BOB: "You too. Have a good day."

It is not difficult to recognize this exchange between Fred and Bob as a friendly conversation rather than a lecture, a sales presentation, or an interview for employment. The greeting, the casual nature of the encounter, the speech acts they used, and certain cultural rules they followed, all clearly define this speech event as a friendly conversation. In this example we can see at least the following elements:

1. *Greetings*. "Hi" and "It's good to see you," as well as the questions, serve as verbal markers to start the conversation. Physical contact expresses their friendship. When such people meet, they almost never begin talking without some form of greeting, usually both verbal and nonverbal. Some physical contact frequently emphasizes the closeness of their relationship.
2. *Lack of explicit purpose*. People engaging in friendly conversations don't have an agenda to cover, at least not an explicit one. They almost never say, "Let's talk about the vacations we each took this summer," or "I

want to ask you some questions about your work." They don't care who they are going in the talk as long as they *get somewhere*. Either person brings up a wide range of topics; either person can signal they want to change the subject; either person can end the conversation. Both parties know rules that make for this kind of purposelessness and flexibility.

3. *Avoiding repetition*. One of the clearest rules in friendly conversation is to avoid repetition. Friends will often say things like "Did I tell you a Al Sanders?" or "Have I told you about our summer?" This allows other person to save us from the embarrassment of repeating course without knowing it. Both friends assume that once something has been said or stated, repetition becomes unnecessary. Repetition in the same conversation is especially avoided. We don't say, "Could you clarify what you by going over it again?" This assumption, that it is good to avoid repetition is not part of the informant interview.

4. *Asking questions*. Both Bob and Fred made inquiries about the other person. "How's the family?" "Did you have a good summer?" These questions allow them each to talk about personal matters; they also make appropriate for the other person to ask similar kinds of questions in return. None of the questions required a lengthy answer, though some did call for descriptions of their experiences.

5. *Expressing interest*. The questions themselves indicated interest in the other person. But both went beyond this to make statements like "That sounds great" and "Really!" Undoubtedly, friendly conversations are most always filled with expressions of nonverbal interest. Frequent smiling, listening with eye contact, and various body postures all say, "I find you're talking about very interesting, keep talking."

6. *Expressing ignorance*. People who repeat things we already know considered bores. One way to protect friends from boring us or repeating themselves is to give messages that say, "Go on, I'm not bored, you're telling me something I already know." These messages function in the same way as asking questions and expressing interest. "We've never been to that part of the country" is an expression of ignorance and an important means to encourage the other person to go on talking.

7. *Taking turns*. An implicit cultural rule for friendly conversations, taking turns helps keep the encounter balanced. We all have experienced violations of this rule and know how it leads to a sense of uneasiness or anger. In other speech events, such as a sales presentation or interview, people do not take turns in the same way. Turn taking in friendly conversations allows people to ask each other the same kind of questions, such as "What did you do this summer?"

8. *Abbreviating*. Friendly conversations are filled with references to hints at things or only give partial information. It is as if both parties seeking an economy of words; they avoid filling in all the details on assumption that the other person will fill them in. This assumption leads

abbreviated talk that is extremely difficult for outsiders to understand. Long-time friends have come to share a vast number of experiences and can fill in much of what is left unstated. They find it unnecessary to make explicit many of their meanings; the other person understands. Al Sanders refers to the name of Fred's boss. The "trouble" occurred when Al threatened to fire Fred from his job as sales manager if he didn't increase each salesman's quota, something an outsider would not know. Bob does not need to say, "You really mean that Al, the Vice President for sales, had called you in four times to talk about quotas and was putting pressure on you to put pressure on the sales force, something you were reluctant to do." A chief characteristic of this kind of conversation, then, is leaving out details that you think the other person will know without further explanation.

9. *Pausing*. Another element is the brief periods of silence when neither person feels it necessary to talk. The length of the silence depends on many personal factors. Pauses may function to indicate the parties wish to discontinue talking; they may be thinking in order to answer a question; they may wish to change the topic of conversation.

10. *Leave taking*. Friendly conversations never stop without some verbal ritual that says "The end." The parties must account for what they intend to do—stop talking. They must give some socially acceptable reason for ending. Such rituals are never direct except with very close friends. For example, we don't usually say, "I don't want to talk any more." Leave taking often occurs just before actual physical separation when the parties will not be able to talk further. However, sometimes they do remain together, as when friends ride the same bus; then the verbal leave taking might be "I'm going to catch 40 winks" or "I think I'll read a little."

There are other features of friendly conversations we could examine in this example. However, for understanding the ethnographic interview, these are sufficient to make the comparison.

## THE ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW

When we examine the ethnographic interview as a speech event, we see that it shares many features with the friendly conversation. In fact, skilled ethnographers often gather most of their data through participant observation and many casual, friendly conversations. They may interview people without their awareness, merely carrying on a friendly conversation while introducing a few ethnographic questions.

It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants. Exclusive use of these new *ethnographic elements*, or introducing them too quickly, will make interviews become like a formal interrogation. Rapport will evaporate, and in-

formants may discontinue their cooperation. At any time during an interview it is possible to shift back to a friendly conversation. A few minutes of easygoing talk interspersed here and there throughout the interview will pay enormous dividends in rapport.

The three most important ethnographic elements are its *explicit purpose ethnographic explanations*, and *ethnographic questions*.

1. *Explicit purpose*. When an ethnographer and informant meet together for an interview, both realize that the talking is supposed to go somewhere. The informant only has a hazy idea about this purpose; the ethnographer must make it clear. Each time they meet it is necessary to remind the informant where the interview is to go. Because ethnographic interview involve purpose and direction, they will tend to be more formal than friendly conversations. Without being authoritarian, the ethnographer gradually takes more control of the talking, directing it in those channels that lead to discovering the cultural knowledge of the informant.

2. *Ethnographic explanations*. From the first encounter until the last interview, the ethnographer must repeatedly offer explanations to the informant. While learning an informant's culture, the informant also learns something—to become a teacher. Explanations facilitate this process. There are five types of explanations used repeatedly.

a. *Project explanations*. These include the most general statements about what the project is all about. The ethnographer must translate the goal of doing ethnography and eliciting an informant's cultural knowledge in terms the informant will understand. "I am interested in your occupational terms; the informant will understand. "I am interested in your occupational terms like to talk to you about what beauticians do." Later one might be more specific: "I want to know how beauticians talk about what they do, how they see their work, their customers, themselves. I want to study beauticians from your point of view."

b. *Recording explanations*. These include all statements about writing things down and reasons for tape recording the interviews. "I'd like to write some of this down," or "I'd like to tape record our interview so I can over it later; would that be OK?"

c. *Native language explanations*. Since the goal of ethnography is to describe a culture in its own terms, the ethnographer seeks to encourage informants to speak in the same way they would talk to others in the *cultural scene*. These explanations remind informants not to use their translation competence. They take several forms and must be repeated frequently throughout the entire project. A typical native language explanation might be: "If you were talking to a customer, what would you say?"

d. *Interview explanations*. Slowly, over the weeks of interviewing, informants become expert at providing the ethnographer with cultural information. One can then depart more and more from the friendly conversation model until finally it is possible to ask informants to perform tasks such as drawing a map or sorting terms written on cards. At those times

becomes necessary to offer an explanation for the type of interview that will take place. "Today I'd like to ask you some different kinds of questions. I've written some terms on cards and I'd like to have you tell me which ones are alike or different. After that we can do the same for other terms." This kind of interview explanation helps informants know what to expect and to accept a greater formality in the interview.

e. *Question explanations.* The ethnographer's main tools for discovering another person's cultural knowledge is the ethnographic question. Since there are many different kinds, it is important to explain them as they are used. "I want to ask you a different type of question," may suffice in some cases. At other times it is necessary to provide a more detailed explanation of what is going on.

3. *Ethnographic questions.* Throughout this book I have identified more than thirty kinds of ethnographic questions (Appendix A). They will be introduced by stages; it is not necessary to learn all of them at once. The design of this book allows a person to master one form of ethnographic question and make it a part of their interviews; then the next form will be presented and explained. For now, I only want to identify the three main types and explain their function.

a. *Descriptive questions.* This type enables a person to collect an ongoing sample of an informant's language. Descriptive questions are the easiest to ask and they are used in all interviews. Here's an example: "Could you tell me what you do at the office?" or "Could you describe the conference you attended?"

b. *Structural questions.* These questions enable the ethnographer to discover information about *domains*, the basic units in an informant's cultural knowledge. They allow us to find out *how* informants have organized their knowledge. Examples of structural questions are: "What are all the different kinds of fish you caught on vacation?" and "What are all the stages in getting transferred in your company?" Structural questions are often repeated, so that if an informant identified six types of activities, the ethnographer might ask, "Can you think of any other kind of activities you would do as a beautician?"

c. *Contrast questions.* The ethnographer wants to find out what an informant *means* by the various terms used in his native language. Later I will discuss how meaning emerges from the contrasts implicit in any language. Contrast questions enable the ethnographer to discover the dimensions of meaning which informants employ to distinguish the objects and events in their world. A typical contrast question would be, "What's the difference between a *bass* and a *northern pike*?"

Let's turn now to an example of an ethnographic interview based on my own research on the culture of cocktail waitresses in a college bar. This example gives an overview of all three types of questions to be discussed in

later steps where I begin with descriptive questions, then move structural questions, and finally contrast questions.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW

ETHNOGRAPHER: Hi, Pam. How are you?

PAM: Good. How are things with you?

ETHNOGRAPHER: Fine. How's school going?

PAM: Pretty slow; things are just getting started in most classes.

ETHNOGRAPHER: I'm really glad you could talk to me today.

PAM: Well, I'm not sure if I can help you. I just don't know what you want to know.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, as I told you on the phone, I'm interested in understanding your work as a cocktail waitress. You've had quite a bit of experience, haven't you?

PAM: Oh, yes! (laughs) But I don't know if that qualifies me to tell you very much.

ETHNOGRAPHER: How did you get the job at Brady's Bar?

PAM: Well, it was July, a couple years ago. I didn't have any waitress experience before. It was really a fluke that I got the job at all. I went to Brady's one night with some friends and they bet me I couldn't get a job so I just walked up to the bartender and asked for it and I got it! Started the very next week. I've only worked part time during school but full time during the summer.

ETHNOGRAPHER: You know, Pam, I've seen waitresses working in bars and restaurants, but as a customer, I'm sure my impressions of what they do is far different from the way that waitresses see the same things. Don't you think that's true?

PAM: Oh, yes! Very different. I found that out when I started.

#### ANALYSIS

*Greetings.* This exchange of que and words like "Hi," is a bit more formal than what might occur between close friends.

*Giving ethnographic explanation.* This begins here in recognizing the going to "talk." Pam expresses concern about her ability; she is unsure of the purpose of the interview.

*Asking friendly question.* This strictly an ethnographic question one that might be asked in a first conversation. It does provide information and helps relax the informant.

*Expressing cultural ignorance.* can be done in many ways. The ethnographer places himself in the position of seeing waitresses but knowing what their work is like paves the way for an ethnographic explanation. The ethnographer asks the informant to agree that the ethnographer is truly ignorant.

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ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, let me explain what I'm interested in. I would like to find out what it's like to work as a waitress. I guess what I want to know is if I got a job at Brady's Bar and worked there for a year or two, how would I see things? What would I have to know to do a good job and survive and make sense out of what goes on? I'd like to know what you do each night, the problems you have, just everything that goes into being a cocktail waitress.

PAM: Well, I could tell you some things, but I'm not sure I can answer all your questions.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, let me begin with a simple question. I've never been to Brady's Bar and I don't know what takes place there on a typical night. Even when I've been to other bars, it's usually for an hour or so, never an entire evening as a waitress would spend. Could you start at the beginning of an evening, say a typical night at Brady's Bar, and describe to me what goes on? Like, what do you do when you first arrive, then what do you do next? What are some of the things you would have to do on most nights, and then go on through the evening right up until you walk out the door and leave the bar?

PAM: Well, first I should say that there's no typical night at Brady's.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, that's fine, just go through any night and tell me what you think might usually happen.

Pam: It depends if I go on at 7 or 9 o'clock. I usually start at 9, at least lately.

ETHNOGRAPHER: O.K. Why don't you tell me what you would usually do, from the beginning of the evening at 9 o'clock when you come in, until the end when you go home.

*Giving ethnographic explanations.* He conveys the nature of the project without using technical terms like culture, ethnography, science, or cultural knowledge. It is put in everyday language that the informant will understand. Another important ethnographic element here is *repeating*. In several different ways the project explanation is repeated.

*Asking ethnographic questions.* Before asking, he states that he is going to ask one, thus preparing the informant. Then, *repeating* occurs in which the ethnographer asks the question in several different ways.

*Expressing cultural ignorance* prefaces the repetition of questions. *Asking descriptive questions.* This is a special kind of descriptive question called a "grand tour question." It is asked, not in a simple statement, but with repeated phrases, expanding on the basic question. Expanding allows the informant time to think, to prepare her answer.

Pam's response gives the ethnographer an opportunity to *repeat* the grand tour question, thus giving Pam more time to think.

Pam's short answer gives the ethnographer another chance for repeating the descriptive question.

PAM: I usually get there at about 8:45.

I'll go to the kitchen and hang up my coat or sweater, then go back to the bar and sit for a while. I might ask for a coke and then pass the time joking with the bartender or some regular who is sitting nearby. If it's real busy, I'll punch in and go right to work. Anyway, by 9 o'clock I punch in and go to my waitress station and set up my tray. I'll take either the upper section or the lower depending on what the other waitress wants. Depending on what bartenders are working I might say, "Bob's on tonight, can I have the upper section?" But she has first choice since she came in at 7. The upper section is smaller and you get different types of people than in the lower section. You get more dates. My section was really popular last night. It was jammed. I couldn't even take my tray with me by the end of the evening.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Really! That must make it difficult.

PAM: (Nods her head)

ETHNOGRAPHER: You said that you would go to your waitress station and set up your tray. Could you describe for me what you do when you set up your tray?

PAM: Sure. You have a little round tray, like a pizza tray, two ash trays on it, one on top and one on the bottom. My tips go in the bottom and my loose change goes in the top ash tray. And the bills go under the ash tray, with the big bills on the bottom and the ones on top so you don't make the mistake of handing out a five or a ten.

Pam now begins to answer the grand tour question, easily describing the things she does at the bar each night. Some informants will talk for fifteen twenty minutes without stopping; others pause to be sure they are doing the right thing. *Pausing* provides the ethnographer with a chance for *expressing interest*.

*Expressing interest.* In long responses to grand tour questions it is important to watch for every opportunity to bally express interest.

*Restating.* The ethnographer begins use Pam's words, this tells her it is important for her to use them.

*Incorporating.* As soon as possible ethnographer wants to move questions that use his words to that incorporate native terms. Restating and incorporating are two of the most important elements and they occur together in this way.

*Mini-tour question.* The phrase "your tray" was incorporated in your mini-tour question. This is a descriptive question that asks the informant to describe some smaller unit of an activity. Mini-tour questions are asked almost any time, even before a grand tour question has been fully answered.

throughout the bar telling me each place we were standing or you were looking at, what would it be like?

PAM: Well, when we first came in the front door, you'd be standing in front of a large horseshoe bar. On the left of the bar are a row of stools and behind the stools is a wall. On the right side of the bar are other stools and along that side are the two waitress stations. Then, on the right side of the bar, at the front is the lower section, to the back is the upper section. On the far side, against the wall, are the two restrooms and the door to the kitchen. And that's about it.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, that's great. I've really learned a lot today, but it also makes me aware that you know a great deal more. We didn't get to discuss the details of taking orders or any of the different kinds of drinks. I'm sure there are a lot of other things. I'd like to go over my notes and I'm sure I'll think of other questions. It's really an interesting place and a lot more goes on there than meets the eye.

PAM: Yes, it's more complex than most people realize. In fact, I didn't realize there was so much that went on! (laughs)

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, could we meet again next week at this time?

PAM: Sure, that would be fine.

ETHNOGRAPHER: O.K. Thanks for coming today. This has really been interesting and I'm looking forward to learning a great deal more.

PAM: Well I enjoyed talking about it.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, I'll see you next week, then. Bye.

PAM: Fine. Bye.

This brief ethnographic interview illustrates most of the elements that make up this kind of speech event. However, in order to include them in a

#### *Mini-tour question.*

*Creating a hypothetical situation.* This element is used frequently to place the informant in the scene and help her to use terms and phrases from her own language.

*Expressing ignorance.* This is a prelude to taking leave.

*Taking leave.* This element is very different from the friendly conversation. After expressing interest and that there is much more to learn, the ethnographer identifies topics he doesn't know about, things he wants to find out in the future. This helps the informant realize she knows more than she may think she knows, that she can teach the ethnographer a great deal more.

#### *Expressing interest.*

short space, the example distorts the normal course of such interview particular, it appears that the ethnographer is jumping around from one to another, rather than allowing the informant to continue talking about she does, about the difference between taking orders and serving or about the spatial dimensions of the bar. In most ethnographic interviews informant would go on at much greater length on most topics ethnographer would not ask so many questions in such a short space. More important for those learning to interview by following the this book, the example includes many elements one would not use in several interviews. So, rather than introducing descriptive question tural questions, and contrast questions into the first interview, each slowly introduced over a number of interviews. This example had a purpose: to give an overview of the elements in an ethnographic interview. Later we will come back to the most important elements and explain more fully. In Figure 2.1 I have summarized the basic elements.

In contrast to a friendly conversation, some striking alterations are added to an explicit purpose, the use of ethnographic explanations and the use of ethnographic questions, we can identify the following elements:

1. *Turn taking is less balanced.* Although the informant and ethnographer take turns, they do not take turns asking the same kinds of questions reporting on their experience. The relationship is asymmetrical: the ethnographer asks almost all the questions; the informant talks about her experience.
2. *Repeating replaces the normal rule of avoiding repetition.* 1

FIGURE 2.1 Elements in the Ethnographic Interview

1. Greetings
2. Giving ethnographic explanations
  - 2.1 Giving project explanations
  - 2.2 Giving question explanations
  - 2.3 Giving recording explanations
  - 2.4 Giving native language explanations
  - 2.5 Giving interview explanations
3. Asking ethnographic questions
  - 3.1 Asking descriptive questions
  - 3.2 Asking structural questions
  - 3.3 Asking contrast questions
4. Asymmetrical turn taking
5. Expressing interest
6. Expressing cultural ignorance
7. Repeating
8. Restating informant's terms
9. Incorporating informant's terms
10. Creating hypothetical situations
11. Asking friendly questions
12. Taking leave

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does the ethnographer repeat things the informant has said, restating them in her language, but questions are repeated. In a more lengthy interview, the ethnographer would ask similar questions over and over, such as, "Can you think of any other things you do on a typical night?"

3. *Expressing interest and ignorance occur more often but only on the part of the ethnographer.* Again, this aspect of the relationship is more asymmetrical than in friendly conversations. Especially at first, most informants lack assurance that they know enough, that the ethnographer is really interested, and these two elements become very important. Each can occur nonverbally as well as verbally.

4. *Finally, in place of the normal practice of abbreviating, the ethnographer encourages expanding on what each person says.* His questions are phrased and rephrased, expanding into paragraph length. And these very questions encourage the informant to tell more, not less, to go into more detail, not less. It takes many reminders for some informants to overcome the long-established practice of abbreviating.

In this chapter I have identified the major elements of the ethnographic interview. Because it involves a complex speech event, ethnographic interviewing requires practice to acquire the necessary skills. Practice also reduces the anxiety which all ethnographers experience when they begin interviewing a new informant. The tasks which follow are designed to reduce anxiety by making careful preparation and conducting a practice interview.

## Tasks

- 2.1 Conduct a practice ethnographic interview. (If you are in a group with others, interview a beginning ethnographer, then act as informant for that person.)
- 2.2 Identify in writing the skills you managed well and those that need improvement.
- 2.3 Write out several different project explanations to be used with one of the potential informants identified earlier. These explanations can reflect (1) a first contact, (2) beginning of the first interview, and (3) beginning of the second interview.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the nature of an ethnographic record.
2. To set up a field-work notebook.
3. To contact an informant and arrange for the first interview.

The next step in the Developmental Research Sequence is to begin compiling a record of research. Even before contacting an informant, the ethnographer will have impressions, observations, and decisions to record. When undertaking research in a foreign community, many weeks or months may pass before systematic interviews with informants occur. When studying a cultural scene within our own society, the ethnographer has at least made a selection and has probably visited the scene; recording these first impressions will prove of great value later. Certainly the first contact with an informant deserves documentation. In this step we will examine the nature of an ethnographic record and discuss practical steps for making it the most useful for analysis and writing.

## LANGUAGE AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORD

An ethnographic record consists of field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artifacts, and anything else which documents the cultural scene under study. As Frake has pointed out, "A description of a culture, an *ethnography*, is produced from an *ethnographic record* of the events of a society within a given period of time, including, of course, informants' responses to the ethnographer and his queries, tests, and apparatus" (1964b:111).

In my study of skid row men, many different things went into the ethnographic record. During the first week I wrote down what took place in the Seattle Criminal Court on the seventh floor of the Public Safety Building. I copied off the name of the court, names of judges, and room numbers from the large wall directory on the first floor. I described the physical layout of the courtroom as I saw it. I counted the number of visitors who came to watch the court proceedings. Each morning in the courtroom an average of sixty-five men were arraigned for public drunkenness. The city attorney read aloud part of each man's arrest record and I wrote it down. These arrest records were used by the judge to determine the length of a man's sentence. Later I acquired the

# Step Four

## ASKING DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

### OBJECTIVES

1. To conduct the first ethnographic interview.
2. To understand the process of developing rapport with an informant.
3. To collect a sample of an informant's speech by asking descriptive questions.

Ethnographic interviewing involves two distinct but complementary processes: *developing rapport* and *eliciting information*. Rapport encourages informants to talk about their culture. Eliciting information fosters the development of rapport. In this step we will examine rapport and discuss the nature of ethnographic questions, particularly descriptive questions.

### THE RAPPORT PROCESS

Rapport refers to a harmonious relationship between ethnographer and informant. It means that a basic sense of trust has developed that allows for the free flow of information. Both the ethnographer and the informant have positive feelings about the interviews, perhaps even enjoy them. However, rapport does not necessarily mean deep friendship or profound intimacy between two people. Just as respect can develop between two people who do not particularly like one another, rapport can exist in the absence of fondness and affection.

It is impossible to identify universal qualities that build rapport because harmonious relationships are culturally defined in every society. And so the ethnographer must pay particular attention to friendly relationships in each cultural scene to learn local, culture-bound features that build rapport. For example, when I interviewed Kwakiutl informants in British Columbia, I observed that friends and kinsmen sat together in long periods of silence. Although difficult, I learned to sit in silence and to converse more slowly. The rapport I gained through adopting these local patterns of interaction contributed to successful interviews. What follows regarding rapport must be taken as general suggestions. Some will work well within our own society in many cultural scenes; other suggestions must be modified to fit local cultural situations as well as the peculiarities of individual informants.

### ASKING DESCRIPTIVE

Probably the only universal characteristic of rapport is that it fluctuates over time. On first encounter a potential informant is eager and cooperative. During the first interview this same informant appears uncomfortable, anxious, and even defensive. A different after several interviews conducted in a harmonious fashion, becomes pious and bored, even discontinuing further contact. Laura Bacher's classic anthropological novel, *Return to Laughter*, graphically illustrates the fluctuating rapport she experienced with her informants. Yaman who showed initial antagonism, became the first informant to secrets of witchcraft. Kako, the chief, took the anthropologist home instead and expressed willingness to help from the start. Circumstances changed and he soon refused to talk of anything influencing others to ignore the anthropologist. Finally, this relationship passed and Kako again became a willing and helpful informant.

Although sometimes unpredictable, rapport frequently does develop in a patterned way. I want to suggest a model of the *rapport process*, ethnographic interviewing. This model will provide the beginning ethnographer with a kind of compass for recognizing when rapport is developing when it has wandered off course. It can provide a basis for identifying and correcting problems that arise in the ethnographer-informant relationship.

The rapport process, in cases where it develops successfully, proceeds through the following stages:

APPREHENSION → EXPLORATION → COOPERATION → PARTNERSHIP

I want to discuss these stages by focusing on the interaction that occurs during interviews. In doing this, however, we should not lose sight of the wider context of field work. Most ethnographers will conduct their observations at the same time, thus encountering key informants who are working, visiting friends, enjoying leisure time, and carrying out other activities. These encounters contribute to rapport as much as, or more than, the encounters during actual interviews. Under such conditions, rapport may move more quickly to full cooperation. However, rapport goes through a sequence of stages. Many times an ethnographer may conduct interviews with people not encountered during participation observation; rapport can still develop in a positive manner.

### Apprehension

Ethnographic interviews always begin with a sense of uncertainty and a feeling of *apprehension*. This is true for both experienced ethnographers and the beginner. Every time I contacted a tramp and asked if we could talk, I felt apprehensive and sensed that each potential informant had similar feelings. Sometimes apprehension is slight; at other times informants express anxiety and suspicion. I recall one tramp who seemed overly anxious.



explained my purpose and began asking questions but received only brief, curt replies. I felt increasing discomfort and made further attempts to put my informant at ease. "Are you with the F.B.I.?" he finally blurted out. I assured him I was a professor at the nearby medical school and had no connection with the F.B.I. or the local police department. He made me promise that I would not divulge his name to anyone, that all his statements could only be used anonymously.

Such extreme apprehension is rare, but some degree of uncertainty starting with the first contact through one or two interviews is common. The informant doesn't know what to expect, doesn't really understand the purposes and motives of the ethnographer. Both researcher and informant are unsure how the other person will evaluate responses. Informants may fear that they will not meet the expectations of the ethnographer. They may comment: "I don't know if I know enough," or "I'm not sure I can really help you, maybe you ought to talk to someone else about this."

The realization that ethnographic interviews begin with some uncertainty in the relationship can help the beginning ethnographer relax and accept this fact. At the same time, several things can help move the interviews through the stage of apprehension. The most important thing is to get informants talking. As we shall see later in this step, *descriptive questions* are especially useful to start the conversation and keep an informant freely talking. It does not usually matter what a person talks about; it does matter that the informant does most of the talking during the first couple of interviews. When an informant talks, the ethnographer has an opportunity to listen, to show interest, and to respond in a nonjudgmental fashion. These kinds of responses represent the most effective way to reduce an informant's apprehension. They communicate acceptance and engender trust. One of the most important principles, then, for the first interviews is to *keep informants talking*.

### Exploration

Apprehension usually gives way quickly to *exploration*. In this stage of the rapport process, both ethnographer and informant begin trying out the new relationship. Together they seek to discover what the other person is like, what the other person really wants from the relationship. Exploration is a time of listening, observing, and testing. What does he want me to say? Can she be trusted? Is she going to be able to answer my questions? What does she really want from these interviews? Am I answering questions as I should? Does he really want to know what I know? These questions often go unspoken but exist nonetheless.

Apprehension, the first stage, arises in part from simple unfamiliarity with the terrain of ethnographic interviews. Exploration is the natural process of becoming familiar with this new landscape. Although each party begins exploring immediately, there comes a point where they leave behind the

feelings of uncertainty and anxiety to enter the fullblown stage of exploration. It may occur when each laughs at something said, when the informant seems to go off on an interesting tangent, or when the ethnographer mentally sets aside prepared questions to talk about something. When a sense of sharing occurs, a moment of relaxation comes. Both can then begin to explore the territory with greater freedom.

Informants need the opportunity to move through the stage of exploration without the pressure to fully cooperate. It takes time to grasp the nature of ethnographic interviews. It takes time to see if the ethnographer's action will match the explanation offered during the first interview. Valuable data can be collected during this stage if the ethnographer is willing to wait for full cooperation. During this stage a certain tenseness exists and both parties may find the interviews exhausting.

Three important principles facilitate the rapport-building process during this stage. First, *make repeated explanations*. A simple statement may suffice: "As I said earlier, I'm interested in finding out how you talk about things, how you see things. I want to understand things from your point of view." One dare not assume that informants appreciate the nature of ethnographic interviews based only on the first explanation. Repetition before each interview, during interviews, and at the end of each will pay great dividends.

Second, *restate what informants say*. Using this principle, the ethnographer selects key phrases and terms used by an informant and restates them. Restating in this fashion reinforces what has been said by way of explanation. Restating demonstrates an interest in learning the informant's language and culture. Here are three examples of restatements typical of my interviews with tramps:

1. "Then you would say, 'I made the bucket in Seattle.'"
2. "So, if a man was a trustee, he'd do easy time."
3. "Then I might hear another tramp saying, 'He's a bindle stiff.' Is that right?"

Restating embodies the nonjudgmental attitude which contributes directly to rapport. When the ethnographer restates what an informant says, a powerful, unstated message is communicated—"I understand what you're saying; I am learning; it is valuable to me." Restatement must be distinguished from reinterpreting, a process in which the interviewer states in *different words* what the other person said. Reinterpreting prompts informants to translate; restating prompts them to speak in their own ordinary, everyday language.

The third principle states, *don't ask for meaning, ask for use*. Beginning ethnographers often become overconcerned with meanings and motives. They tend to press informants with questions like, "What do you mean by

that?" and "Why would you do that?" These questions contain a hidden judgmental component. Louder than words, they seem to shout, "You haven't been clear; you haven't explained adequately; you are hiding the true reasons for what you told me." Ethnographic interviewing differs from most other approaches by the absence of probing "why" and "what do you mean" questions.

Let me contrast the use of *why* questions and *meaning* questions with the strategy of asking informants how they use their ordinary language. An unfamiliar term emerged in my interviews with tramps; it was called "days hanging." I heard an informant say, "I had twenty days hanging so I pled guilty and asked the judge for the alcoholism treatment center." Another recalled, "Well, I left town because I had a lot of days hanging." Tramps could respond to direct questions and at first I asked things like, "Why did you have twenty days hanging?" "Why did you leave town?" and "What do you mean you had twenty days hanging?" However, this kind of questioning led directly to translations for my benefit. "Well, I had twenty days hanging because I'd made the bucket four times in a row." "I left town 'cause I knew I'd do hard time." And such translations required still more probing "why" questions—"Why did you have twenty days?" "What do you mean, did hard time?" Such questions communicated to my informants that they had not been clear. In a subtle, unspoken way, these questions pressured informants to use their translation competence.

As time went on I learned that instead of asking for meaning, it worked best to ask for use. Cultural meaning emerges from understanding how people *use* their ordinary language. With tramps, I would restate, then ask how the phrase was used. For example, I would say, "You had twenty days hanging. Could you tell me what you would say to the judge if you had ten or thirty or sixty days hanging?" Or I might ask for the way others used this phrase: "Would tramps generally talk about the days they had hanging before they went into the courtroom? What kinds of things would I hear them saying?" I might be more direct: "What are some other ways you could talk about days hanging?" or "Would someone ever say, 'I had twenty days hanging so I pled not guilty?'" Asking for use is a guiding principle that underlies all ethnographic interviewing. When combined with restating and making repeated explanations, ethnographic interviews usually move quickly through the stage of exploration.

### Cooperation

In time, the rapport process moves into the next stage—cooperation. Informants often cooperate from the start of the first interview, but this stage involves more complete cooperation based on mutual trust. Instead of uncertainty, the ethnographer and informant know what to expect of one another. They no longer worry about offending each other or making mis-

takes in asking or answering questions. More and more, both persons find satisfaction in meeting together to talk. Informants may offer personal information and feel free to ask the ethnographer questions. Most important both share in the definition of the interview; they both know the goal is to discover the culture of the informant in the language of the informant. No informants may spontaneously correct the ethnographer: "No, I would say 'the police arrested me,' but that 'a bull pinched me.'"

### Participation

The final stage in the rapport process is *participation*. After many weeks of working closely with an informant, sometimes a new dimension is added to the relationship, one in which the informant recognizes and accepts the role of teaching the ethnographer. When this happens there is a heightened sense of cooperation and full participation in the research. Informants begin to take a more assertive role. They bring new information to the attention of the ethnographer and help in discovering patterns in their culture. They begin to *analyze* their culture, but always from their own frame of reference. Between interviews they are on the lookout for information relevant to the ethnographic goals. Not all informants progress to this last stage of participation. If they do, they increasingly become participant observers in their own cultural scene. The ethnographer's role is then to help informant/participant-observers record what they know.

Building rapport is a complex process, one that every ethnographer monitors when doing field work. In conducting ethnographic interviews, the process is facilitated by following certain principles: keep informants talking; make repeated explanations; restate what informants say; and don't ask for meaning, ask for use. When combined with asking ethnographic questions, rapport will usually develop in a smooth way from apprehensions through cooperation and even into the stage of participation.

### ETHNOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

In most forms of interviewing, questions are distinct from answers. The interviewer asks the questions, someone else responds with answers. The separation often means that questions and answers come from two different cultural meaning systems. Investigators from one cultural scene draw from a different cultural scene and draw on another frame of reference to provide answers. This kind of interviewing assumes that questions and answers are separate elements in human thinking. In the study of cultures it frequently leads to distortions.

Ethnographic interviewing, on the other hand, begins with the assumption

that the question-answer sequence is a single element in human thinking. Questions always imply answers. Statements of any kind always imply questions. This is true even when the questions and answers remain unstated. In ethnographic interviewing, *both questions and answers must be discovered from informants*. Mary Black and Duane Metzger have summarized this point of view:

It is basic to communications theory that you don't start getting any information from an utterance or event until you know what it is in response to—you must know what question is being answered. It could be said of ethnography that until you know the question that someone in the culture is responding to you can't know many things about the responses. Yet the ethnographer is greeted, in the field, with an array of *responses*. He needs to know what question people are *answering* in their every act. He needs to know which questions are being taken for granted because they are what "everybody knows" without thinking. . . . Thus the task of the ethnographer is to discover questions that seek the relationship among entities that are conceptually meaningful to the people under investigation (1965:144).

There are three main ways to discover questions when studying another culture. First, the ethnographer can record the questions people ask in the course of everyday life. An ethnographer on a university campus in the United States might hear students asking the following questions about motion pictures: "Who stars in that one?" or "Is it rated R?" Other questions would probably be asked about particular courses such as: "Is that a fluff course?" or "When does it meet?" Some settings offer unique opportunities for discovering questions, as Frake has pointed out:

The ethnographer can listen for queries in use in the cultural scenes he observes, giving special attention to query-rich settings, e.g., children querying parents, medical specialists querying patients, legal authorities querying witnesses, priests querying the gods (1964a:143).

Second, the ethnographer can inquire directly about questions used by participants in a cultural scene. Black and Metzger have suggested three strategies:

1. To ask the informant, "What is an interesting question about \_\_\_\_\_?"
2. To ask the informant, "What is a question to which the answer is \_\_\_\_\_?"
3. To ask the informant to write a text in question-and-answer form on some topic of interest to the investigator (1965:146).

In my ethnographic research with tramps and cocktail waitresses I found it useful to create a hypothetical situation and then ask for questions. For example, I would ask a waitress-informant, "If I listened to waitresses

talking among themselves at the beginning of an evening, what quest would I hear them ask each other?" To which they might answer, "Which other bartender tonight?" or "Which section would you like to work about a particular cultural scene. This approach uses general *descriptive questions* that are less likely to reflect the ethnographer's culture. Answers can be used to discover other culturally relevant questions. This approach like offering informants a frame and canvas and asking them to paint a word-picture of their experience. "Could you tell me what the jail is like and "Could you describe a typical evening at Brady's Bar?" are examples of *descriptive questions*. A variation on this approach developed by (1969) in his study of heroin addicts in prison, is to ask two or more informants to role-play typical interactions from the cultural scene under consideration. As informants talk to each other, the ethnographer can record questions and answers. In the rest of this chapter I want to discuss in detail several kinds of descriptive questions.

### DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

Descriptive questions take "advantage of the power of language to (re)create settings" (Frake 1964a:143). The ethnographer does need to know at least one setting in which the informant carries out routine activities. For example, I needed to know my informant spent much of their time in jail to be able to ask, "Could you tell me what the jail is like?" I needed to know that cocktail waitresses worked evenings in Brady's Bar to be able to ask: "Could you describe a typical evening at Brady's Bar?" Because ethnographers almost always know *who* an informant is, they almost always know at least one appropriate setting to be used in a descriptive question. If on studying air-traffic controllers, it is easy to ask, "What do you do as an air-traffic controller?" If one is studying the culture of housewives, it is easy to ask an informant, "Could you describe a typical day? What do you do as a housewife?"

There are five major types of descriptive questions and several subtypes (Figure 4.1). Their precise form will depend on the cultural scene selected for investigation. Descriptive questions aim to elicit a large sample of utterances in the informant's native language. They are intended to encourage informants to talk about a particular cultural scene. Sometimes a simple descriptive question can keep an informant talking for more than an hour.

One key principle in asking descriptive questions is that *expanding length of the question tends to expand the length of the response*. Although a question like, "Could you tell me what the jail is like?" qualifies as a descriptive question, it needs expansion. Instead of this brief form, I might say, "I've never been inside the jail before, so I don't have much of an idea

FIGURE 4.1 Kinds of Descriptive Questions

1. Grand Tour Questions
  - 1.1. Typical Grand Tour Questions
  - 1.2. Specific Grand Tour Questions
  - 1.3. Guided Grand Tour Questions
  - 1.4. Task-Related Grand Tour Questions
2. Mini-Tour Questions
  - 2.1. Typical Mini-Tour Questions
  - 2.2. Specific Mini-Tour Questions
  - 2.3. Guided Mini-Tour Questions
  - 2.4. Task-Related Mini-Tour Questions
3. Example Questions
4. Experience Questions
5. Native-Language Questions
  - 5.1. Direct Language Questions
  - 5.2. Hypothetical-Interaction Questions
  - 5.3. Typical-Sentence Questions

what it's like. Could you kind of take me through the jail and tell me what it's like, what I would see if I went into the jail and walked all around? Could you tell me what it's like?" Expanding descriptive questions not only gives informants time to think, but it says, "Tell me as much as you can, in great detail."

### 1. Grand Tour Questions

A grand tour question simulates an experience many ethnographers have when they first begin to study a cultural scene. I arrived at the alcoholism treatment center and the director asked, "Would you like a grand tour of the place?" As we walked from building to building, he named the places and objects we saw, introduced me to people, and explained the activities in progress. I could not ask tramps to give me a grand tour of the Seattle City Jail, so I simply asked a grand tour question: "Could you describe the inside of the jail for me?" In both situations, I easily collected a large sample of native terms about these cultural scenes.

A grand tour usually takes place in a particular locale: a jail, a college campus, a home, a factory, a city, a fishing boat, etc. Grand tour questions about a locale almost always make sense to informants. We can now expand the idea of "grand tour" to include many other aspects of experience. In addition to *space*, informants can give us a grand tour through some *time* period: "Could you describe the main things that happen during the school year, beginning in September and going through May or June?" They can take an ethnographer through a sequence of *events*: "Can you tell me all the things that happen when you get arrested for being drunk, from the first moment you encounter the police, through going to court and being sentenced, until you finally get out of jail?" An informant can give the ethnographer a grand tour through some group of *people*: "Can you tell me names of all your relatives and what each one is like?" Some large ceremonies are made up of *activities* that can become the basis of a grand tour question: "What are all the things that you do during the initiation ceremony for new members who join the fraternity?" Even a grand tour offers an opportunity for a grand tour: "Could you describe different tools and other equipment you use in farming?" Which ethnographer uses *space, time, events, people, activities, or objects*, the result is the same: a verbal description of significant features of the scene. Grand tour questions encourage informants to ramble on as they see fit. There are four different types which vary the way such questions are asked.

*1.1. Typical Grand Tour Questions.* In this form, the ethnographer asks for a description of how things usually are. "Could you describe a typical day at Brady's Bar?" One might ask a secretary informant: "Could you describe a typical day at the office?" In studying Kwakwaka'wakw salmon fishing, I asked, "Could you tell me how you usually make a set?" Typical grand tour questions ask the informant to generalize, to talk about a pattern of events.

*1.2. Specific Grand Tour Questions.* A specific question takes the form of a description of how things usually are. "Could you describe the most recent day, the most recent series of events, or the locale best known to you?" "Could you describe what happened at Brady's Bar last week?" "Could you describe what happened at Brady's Bar last month?" "Could you describe what happened at Brady's Bar last year?" "Could you describe what happened at Brady's Bar last week from the moment you arrived until you left?" An ethnographer might ask a secretary, "Tell me what you did yesterday, from the time you got to work until you left?" "Tell me about the last time you made a set, fisher informant." Some informants find it difficult to generalize to the typical but easily describe a recent situation.

*1.3. Guided Grand Tour Questions.* This form asks the informant to describe an actual grand tour. A secretary might be asked: "Could you show me around the office?" The ethnographer might ask a Kwakwaka'wakw fisherman, "Next time you make a set, can I come along and could you explain to me what you are doing?" Some subjects, such as a typical year or month, do not lend themselves to a guided tour.

*1.4. Task-Related Grand Tour Questions.* These questions ask the informant to perform some simple task that aids in the description. For example, I frequently asked tramps, "Could you draw a map of the inside of Seattle City Jail and explain to me what it's like?" While performing a task, they added a great deal of verbal description. The map helped informants to remember and gave me a better understanding of the jail as they saw it. In studying the cultural scene of backgammon players, I asked, "Could you play a game of backgammon and explain what you are doing?" When informants perform tasks in the context of grand tour questions

ethnographer can ask numerous questions along the way, such as, "What is this?" and "What are you doing now?"

## 2. Mini-Tour Questions

Responses to grand tour questions offer almost unlimited opportunities for investigating smaller aspects of experience. Because grand tour questions lead to such rich descriptions, it is easy to overlook these new opportunities. One ethnographer, investigating the culture of directory assistance operators working for Bell Telephone Co., began with a grand tour question: "Could you describe a typical day in your work as a directory assistance operator?" After a lengthy description, she discovered that one recurrent activity was "taking calls." Each call lasted an average of 37 seconds. This led to a mini-tour question: "Could you describe what goes on in taking a call?" The informant was able to break down that brief period of time into more than a dozen activities, ones that were far more complex than the ethnographer realized when she asked the question.<sup>1</sup>

Mini-tour questions are identical to grand tour questions except they deal with a much smaller unit of experience. "Could you describe what you do when you take a break at Brady's Bar?" "Could you draw me a map of the trusty tank in the Seattle City Jail?" "Could you describe to me how you take phone calls in your work as a secretary?" The four kinds of mini-tour questions (typical, specific, guided, task-related) use the same approaches as their counterparts do with grand tour questions.

## 3. Example Questions

Example questions are still more specific, in most cases. They take some single act or event identified by the informant and ask for an example. A tramp, in responding to a grand tour question, says, "I was arrested while pooling," and so I would ask, "Can you give me an example of pooling?" A waitress states, "There was a table of guys who really gave me a hard time last night." An example question: "Could you give me an example of someone giving you a hard time?" This type of question can be woven throughout almost any ethnographic interview. It often leads to the most interesting stories of actual happenings which an ethnographer will discover.

## 4. Experience Questions

This type merely asks informants for any experiences they have had in some particular setting. "You've probably had some interesting experiences in jail; can you recall any of them?" "Could you tell me about some experiences you have had working as a directory assistance operator?" These questions are so open ended that informants sometimes have

difficulty answering them. They also tend to elicit atypical events rather than recurrent, routine ones. They are best used after asking numerous grand and mini-tour questions.

## 5. Native-Language Questions

Native-language questions are designed to minimize the influence of informants' translation competence. Because descriptive questions are a step to discovering more culturally relevant questions, they sometimes contain words and phrases seldom used by informants. This encourages informants to translate. Native-language questions ask informants to use terms and phrases most commonly used in the cultural scene.

When I first began studying tramps, I only knew they were often incarcerated in the Seattle City Jail. "Could you describe the jail?" was a grand tour question, but I still was not sure that "jail" was a commonly used term. And so I asked a native-language question: "How would you refer to the jail?" When informants uniformly said, "Oh, most guys would call it *bucker*," I was able to use this term in future questions. "How would you talk about getting arrested?" led to the term "made the bucket." Only in detail what happens from beginning to end when you make the bucket. Native-language questions serve to remind informants that the ethnographer wants to learn their language. They can be used whenever suspects an informant is translating for the ethnographer's benefit. This should be employed frequently in early interviews until an informant begins to state voluntarily, "The way we would say it is \_\_\_\_\_," or "Our term that is \_\_\_\_\_." Every ethnographer can develop ways to insert native language queries into each interview. I want to identify three useful strategies.

5.1. *Direct-Language Questions.* This type of native-language question simply asks "How would you refer to it?" when an informant uses a term. Sometimes it may take the form "Is that the way most people would refer to it?" For example, tramps often spoke of trying to find a place to sleep at night, so I would ask: "Would you say, 'I was trying to find a place to sleep?'" "No," they responded. "Probably I would say I was trying to *make a flop*." An ethnographer studying the culture of secretaries might use the following native-language question:

SECRETARY: When I type letters I have to watch out for mistakes.

ETHNOGRAPHER: How would you refer to mistakes?

SECRETARY: Oh, I would call them *typos*.

The more familiar the informant and ethnographer are with each other

cultures, the more important native-language questions become. I asked many direct-language questions of cocktail waitresses for this reason. An informant would say, "These two customers were really hassling me," and I would ask, "How would you refer to them, as *customers*?" To which she would reply: "I'd probably say those two *obnoxios*."

**5.2. Hypothetical-Interaction Questions.** Speaking takes place between people with particular identities. When an informant is talking to an ethnographer, it may be difficult to recall ways to talk to other people. The ethnographer can help in this recall by creating a hypothetical interaction. For example, an ethnographer could ask, "If you were talking to another directory assistance operator, would you say it that way?" Tramps not only interact among themselves but with policemen, or *bulls*. I often phrased hypothetical-interaction questions to discover how tramps talked to bulls as well as to other tramps.

Hypothetical-interaction questions can be used to generate many native-language utterances. I have interviewed children about school who could easily recall native usages when placed in situations such as the following: "If I were to sit in the back of your classroom, what kinds of things would I hear kids saying to each other?" "If a friend called on the phone to ask if you were going to bring your lunch, what would that person say?" It is even possible to construct the situation in more detail, as in the following question to a waitress: "Imagine yourself at a table of four male customers. You haven't said anything yet, and you don't know any of them. What kinds of things would they likely say to you when you first walked up to their table?" By being placed in a typical situation and having the identities of speaker and listener specified, most informants overcome any tendency to translate and recall many phrases used in ordinary talk.

**5.3. Typical-Sentence Questions.** A closely related kind of native-language question, this one asks for typical sentences that contain a word or phrase. "What are some sentences I would hear that include the phrase *making the bucket*," or "What are some sentences that use the term *flop*?" are two examples. The typical-sentence question provides an informant with one or more native terms and then asks that informant to use them in typical ways.

Descriptive questions form the basis of all ethnographic interviewing. They lead directly to a large sample of utterances that are expressed in the language used by informants in the cultural scene under investigation.

All ethnographic questions can be phrased in both personal and cultural terms. When phrasing questions *personally*, the ethnographer asks, "Can you describe a typical evening you would have at Brady's Bar?" or "How would you refer to the jail?" This tells the informant to present his own point

of view or her own particular language usage. When phrasing questions *culturally*, the ethnographer asks, "Can you describe a typical evening most cocktail waitresses at Brady's Bar?" or "How would most tramps refer to the jail?" An informant is someone who can tell about patterns of behavior in a particular scene, not merely his or her own actions. I recall a novice ethnographer who asked a letter carrier about lunch. "I don't lunch" was the reply. The ethnographer later rephrased the question cultural terms: "What do letter carriers do at lunch time?" This question brought a long response which included those who didn't eat lunch, those who brought lunches and ate together, those who ate at restaurants, and several other variations. The various things letter carriers did at lunch turned out to be important cultural information. But eliciting this information depended on phrasing the question in cultural terms.

In this chapter we have examined the rapport process and some of principles that will facilitate the development of rapport. In addition, we have examined the nature of ethnographic questions and descriptive questions in particular. Descriptive questions form the backbone of all ethnographic interviews. They will make up most of the questions asked in the field interview and their use will continue throughout all subsequent interviews. With practice, a beginning ethnographer can easily gain skill in asking a type of ethnographic question.

## TASKS

- 4.1. Review the examples given of the various kinds of descriptive questions and prepare several of each type for informants in the cultural scene you are studying.
- 4.2. Conduct and record an ethnographic interview with an informant, using descriptive questions.
- 4.3. Transcribe the recorded interview (or expand the condensed notes taken during the interview).

# Step Seven

## ASKING STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS

### OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the various kinds of structural questions.
2. To learn how to use structural questions in ethnographic interviews.
3. To test hypothesized domains and discover additional included terms for those domains by asking structural questions.

Let us review briefly where the Developmental Research Sequence has brought us. We began with three preparatory steps: (1) Locating an informant; (2) Interviewing an informant; and (3) Making an ethnographic record. With Step Four the actual ethnographic interviews began by (4) Asking descriptive questions. Using the sample of language collected from this interview, we went on to the next step, which introduced strategies for (5) Analyzing ethnographic interviews. This was followed by (6) Making a domain analysis, following the steps outlined in the last chapter. This analysis resulted in structural questions which will be employed in future interviews. By following the steps thus far, you have selected an informant, conducted three ethnographic interviews, and undertaken an in-depth analysis to discover the folk categories into which the culture is divided. We are now ready to test these hypothesized folk categories (domains) and discover additional included terms. In the last interview with an informant you introduced several structural questions. In this chapter I want to examine several important interviewing principles the ethnographer should follow in asking this type of question. Then I will present all the different types of structural questions.

### PRINCIPLES FOR ASKING STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS

Structural questions need to be adapted to each individual informant, meshed with other kinds of questions, and skillfully repeated over and over again. Each of the following principles will serve as guides for using structural questions.

#### Concurrent Principle

Ask structural questions *concurrently* with descriptive questions. They complement rather than replace descriptive

### ASKING STRUCTURAL

questions. Although the Developmental Research Sequence goes descriptive questions to structural questions to contrast questions, the researcher never proceeds from descriptive to structural to contrast. Descriptive questions will make up part of every interview. From on, structural questions will also find their way into every interview. Indeed, with Step Nine, contrast questions will become part of every interview. Experienced ethnographers will make use of all types of ethnographic questions almost from the start.

The concurrent principle means that it is best to *alternate* types of questions in each interview. For example, the following shows how this might occur:<sup>1</sup>

ETHNOGRAPHER: You mentioned that the deaf use different ways to communicate. What are some of these? (Structural question)

INFORMANT: Yes, they can use writing, lipreading, sign language like ASL English, and pantomiming. (Included terms)

ETHNOGRAPHER: Can you give me an example of signed English? (Included question)

INFORMANT: Oh, yes. Like you might sign, I will go to the store, using the words in English and also indicating the future tense, will go.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Can you tell me more about signed English: when people who are deaf feel about it, and maybe your experience using it? (Descriptive question)

INFORMANT: Well, most really deaf people learn ASL and some have to learn Signed English. Most times you can tell when it's a hearing person because they use Signed English. That's what they always used when they were in school with hearing kids, but at home we used ASL.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Let's go back to the other ways to communicate. You said that signed English, writing, lipreading, and pantomiming were all ways to communicate. Can you think of any other ways the deaf use to communicate? (Included question)

INFORMANT: Oh, yes. There's speaking. Some deaf use that, and then there's speech, that's something developed by a professor at Gallaudet College. (Included terms)

Alternating questions is different from simply including each type of question in an interview; they are thoroughly mixed together in an random fashion. This will not only keep an informant from becoming bored but it relieves any anxiety created by the test-like-effect of structural contrast questions. Take a question like "Can you tell me all the different kinds of cars?" Most of us would immediately feel overwhelmed if this question. However, by asking, "What are some of the different kinds of cars?" and by interspersing answers with descriptive questions about cars one has owned, the cars owned by friends, and the cars one would

to own, the task becomes easier. The concurrent principle is a guide to making interviews as much like friendly conversations as possible.

### Explanation Principle

Structural questions often require an explanation. Although ordinary conversation is sprinkled with structural questions in one form or another (What kind of car did you buy? What kinds of cars have you thought about buying?), they are not as common as descriptive questions. In a sense, the ethnographer moves further away from the friendly conversation when introducing structural questions. Unless informants understand this, a structural question may take them off guard and limit their response. Consider two examples drawn from a study of ballet culture; each example uses the same structural question, but one does not include an explanation.<sup>2</sup>

1. What are all the different kinds of exercises you do in ballet class?
2. We've been talking about your ballet classes and you've mentioned some of the different exercises you do in class. Now, I want to ask you a slightly different kind of question. I'm interested in getting a list of *all* the different kinds of exercises done in class or at least all the ones you have done since you started taking ballet. This might take a little time, but I'd like to know all the different types, what you would call them.

The second example will assist informants to respond far more than the first one. Sometimes an ethnographer can go further and explain the purpose of gathering a long list of included terms. Consider the following example from a study of Collier's Encyclopedia salespeople:<sup>3</sup>

ETHNOGRAPHER: I've learned from other salespeople that certain phrases or sayings are used pretty often, like "Hooray for Colliers!" Would you use that phrase?

INFORMANT: Oh, yes, all the time.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, if I'm going to understand the meaning of phrases like this what they mean to you and other salespeople, I need to go into this whole area in depth. First, I'd like to know all the different phrases that are used frequently when you're with other salespeople. After we get a list of all the different ones we can go back over them and find out how each kind is different from the others. O.K., let's begin. Can you tell me some different phrases I would hear from Colliers salespeople when they are together?

INFORMANT: Well, there is "Hooray for Colliers," "Rock 'em and sock 'em," "Fantastic," "I'm enthused," and "Are we oysters or are we eagles?"

Native-language explanations are especially important when asking structural questions (see Step Two). The ethnographer merely prefaces the structural questions with a reminder like "I'm interested in the way you and other ballet dancers refer to exercises, what you would call them in class."

Or, in asking about exercises, one might include the word *name*, the names you would use for all the different kinds of exercises need continual reminders that the ethnographer wants to their ordinary language.

Explaining the nature of structural questions will often take examples. For instance, the ethnographer can take some familiarly possibly one shared with the informant, and use that as an example clear the nature of a structural question. In a study of a large costume shop, a structural question could be introduced in this way:<sup>4</sup>

I'm interested in all the different kinds of masquerade wear (folk term for that you rent to customers. Now, if I asked you, are there different kinds you could probably think of some, like pine tree, an oak, and a birch. could list a lot of trees. But you have learned to recognize many different masquerade wear, and I've never heard of most of them. In fact, I'd probably mention them all *costumes*. Can you list as many different kinds of masquerade wear as you can think of?

Another type of example, one used almost all the time, repeated terms already discovered. I make it a rule never to ask a question without repeating at least some of the included terms (them) for the informant. This serves to make clear what I want to it jogs the memory of the informant. Here are two typical structural questions which include this repetition of included terms:

1. I'm interested in knowing all the different ways the deaf use to communicate. You mentioned *ASL*, *signed English*, *pantomiming*, *speech*, *Speech*, and *writing*. Can you think of any other ways the deaf communicate?
2. We've talked about your classroom and all the things you do there school. Now, I'd like to ask you a different kind of question about parts of the room, so I can get them clear. You said there *doorway*, where you come in; and there's the *blackboard*, that's the room. And the *reading center*, and the *bulletin board*. Can you tell me any other parts of the classroom?

By listing several known included terms in this manner, most informants immediately recall additional terms. One such example speaks more than several explanations.

### Repetition Principle

Structural questions must be repeated many times to elicit all the terms of a folk domain. Take the example of kinds of flops. The



domain was explored by the question "What are all the different kinds of flops?" Never once did an informant volunteer all the more than one hundred different types in answer to this single question. For one thing, most informants did not believe I could possibly want to know all the types. More important, they couldn't recall them all. By repeating the question many times during an interview ("Can you think of any other flops?") and during many different interviews, I was able to assist informants to remember the entire list.

In his study of plants (folk botany) among the Haunoo in the Philippines, Harold Conklin found that informants knew nearly 1400 types of plants. To elicit all the names in this folk domain required great ingenuity to think of ways to vary the question and to repeat it under many different circumstances (Conklin 1954).

One reason for asking structural questions concurrently with descriptive questions is to reduce the boredom and tediousness that come with constant repetition. The goal in all this repetition is to exhaustively elicit the folk terms in a domain, to discover all the included terms known to informants. Only then can the ethnographer proceed to find the differences and similarities among the domain members.

### Context principle

When asking structural questions, provide the informant with contextual information. This places the informant in the setting where the domain is relevant. For example, a brief structural question like "Can you think of any other kinds of flops?" was effective for someone whom I had previously asked numerous structural questions about flops. However, it was not effective for a new informant. When a structural question of this sort is first introduced, the following kind of contextual information is required.

ETHNOGRAPHER: I've learned from other tramps that one thing tramps do when they travel is make a flop. Is that right? Is making a flop something common among tramps?

INFORMANT: Yes, they're always lookin' for a flop, especially when you're on the road.

ETHNOGRAPHER: I suppose that as you travel from one town to another you have come across a lot of different kinds of flops?

INFORMANT: Sure have. One time in Chattanooga, I made a flop in a mortar box in an old filling station. And some guys make a flop in a hotel lobby or the toilet of an old hotel.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, I'm interested in finding out about all the different kinds of flops that tramps make use of. Not only the ones you have used, but those used by tramps you have talked to. Do tramps ever talk about the flops they make?

INFORMANT: Yes, they talk about that a lot, 'cause making a flop is one of the most important things to a tramp. You often see a guy on the skid and you know he's

either trying to make a jing or trying to make a flop. He might be panhandling something but he's trying to make a flop.

ETHNOGRAPHER: O.K., now let's go back to my earlier question and I'd like to go down as many kinds of flops as you can tell me about. What are all the different kinds of flops that you know about? I realize there may be a lot and if you think of them all now, that is O.K. We can come back to it later, but why don't start with the ones you can think of?

Consider another example which recreates the contexts in which an informant would normally use the information desired.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Colliers salespeople often work together and you attend a lot of meetings with other salespeople, right?

INFORMANT: Oh, yes. We're together almost every day, either on the road or training classes or meetings.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, from what others have said and from what you have told me when salespeople are together, they often use short phrases, things that might be used by people ready to sell or keep them going even when times are tough. Like "Ho Colliers!"

INFORMANT: (Laughs) Sure, you hear things like that all the time.

ETHNOGRAPHER: Well, if I went out selling with a group and we were all together in the car, say just arriving at a place where we would sell, what kinds of saying phrases that people repeat a lot would I hear? If you can't think of them all, if that's all right, we can come back to it later, but why don't you tell me the ones you can think of.

Adding contextual information expands a structural question. It is greatly in recall and will avoid the problem of making an informant feel he is being tested with a series of short questions. The series of structural questions generated from a domain analysis are not the same as a question that lists a series of questions. They are not even the same as a set of questions one might prepare for an interview guide, questions to be asked one after the other. Rather, structural questions must be seen as tools, each to be adapted to particular informants, each used over and over to extensively explore a folk domain. Providing contextual information is merely a way to better adapt an extremely useful tool to the interview situation.

### Cultural Framework Principle

The ethnographer must phrase structural questions in cultural as well as personal terms.<sup>5</sup> In a previous example the question was asked in both ways.

*Personal:* What are all the different kinds of flops that you know about?  
*Cultural:* I'm interested in finding out about all the different kinds of flops that tramps make use of.

It is often easier for an informant to begin responding to questions about his or her own personal experience. "What are the kinds of masquerade wear that you have rented to customers?" "What are all the kinds of drinks you have served at Brady's Bar?" But before exhausting the information known to an informant, it is important to rephrase questions in cultural terms. "What are all the drinks served at Brady's?" "What are all the kinds of masquerade wear a person could possibly rent at the store?" Sometimes an informant needs to be reminded that they know about the experiences of others: "You have heard from other waitresses about the hassles they have, I'm sure. I'd like to know, not only the ones you know about from personal experience, but all the ways that waitresses might get hassled, all the ways you can recall from what others have told you or what you have seen."

As we now discuss the different kinds of structural questions, keep in mind that their exact form will change as you follow the concurrent principle, the explanation principle, the repetition principle, the context principle, and the cultural framework principle.

## KINDS OF STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS

There are five major types of structural questions and several subtypes (Figure 7.1). Although some serve different functions, most represent alternative ways to verify the existence of a folk domain or to elicit folk terms included in a folk domain. With some informants I have used all five types of questions; with others, a particular structural question works better than others. The ethnographer must be sensitive to individual responses to each type of question, using those best suited to each informant.

### 1. Verification Questions

Verification questions ask an informant to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses about a folk domain. They provide the informant with information and a request for a yes or no answer. Let's say I have hypothesized that a *hotel*

FIGURE 7.1 Kinds of Structural Questions

1. Verification Questions
  - 1.1. Domain Verification Questions
  - 1.2. Included Term Verification Questions
  - 1.3. Semantic Relationship Verification Questions
  - 1.4. Native-Language Verification Questions
2. Cover Term Questions
3. Included Term Questions
4. Substitution Frame Questions
5. Card Sorting Structural Questions

*lobby* and an *alley* are both kinds of flops. I can confirm or disconfirm my hypothesis by asking, "Is a hotel lobby a kind of flop? Is an alley a flop?" In addition to asking verification questions about terms directly during domain analysis, the ethnographer also seeks to verify those directly from informants. If an informant gives a long list of item response to a question during one interview, it is important to begin interview with a verification question. For example, one might say, "Our last talk you told me many of the different kinds of masquerade like to go over the ones you told me, just to quickly see if I have correct. You would say that *animals* are one kind of masquerade *Grown things? Eastern costumes? Thirties-type stock? Tiger suit? Superman?*" After each question informants should respond to indicate whether the terms belong to the domain.

**1.1 Domain Verification Questions.** This type of question seeks to verify the existence of a domain for which the ethnographer has hypothesized a cover term. It takes the following form: "Are there different kinds of (X is a cover term.)"

In her study of midwest junior high school teachers, Gregory hypothesized the cover term *kinds of groups*. Her informant confirmed her hypothesis by an affirmative answer to the verification question: "A different kind of groups here at Midwest Junior High?" It is also possible to confirm domains by examining interview data or other field notes. Informants make direct reference to the existence of different kinds of one can move on to other kinds of structural questions. For example, participant observation Starr knew that people recognized different groups in Lebanon (1978). He merely started asking, "What kinds of are there in Lebanon?" People responded to this query with folk terms *Moslems, Alawi, Kurds, Japanese, and foreigners*. This confirmed the domain and also led to included terms.

**1.2 Included Term Verification Questions.** This type of question seeks to verify whether one or more terms are included in a domain. It takes the form "Is X a kind of flop?" or "Is X a way to hassle waitresses?" On verification, the ethnographer asks, "Are Moslems a kind of group in Lebanon?" This type of structural question assumes both a cover term and one or more included terms are known to the ethnographer.

**1.3 Semantic Relationship Verification Questions.** The ethnographer hypothesizes a domain on the basis of some universal semantic relationship which informants find awkward. For this reason it is often necessary to test the appropriateness of the way a semantic relation is expressed. For example, although *kinds of groups* might be the best way to express

relationship for people at Midwest Junior High, this can be tested. You could ask, "How would most teachers say it, that administrators are a kind of group? Or that administrators are one group?" You can ask directly in many cases: "Would tramps ever say, 'a hotel lobby is a kind of flop?'" Some semantic relationships require testing more than others. For example, in studying a school classroom one might hypothesize that there are different parts of a classroom. "Would you say, 'different parts of a class?'" This might lead to the response, "No, there are different places in a class." I might search for several possible semantic relations which would express a domain, then ask, "Would it be better to say that a bulletin board is part of the classroom or a place in the classroom?" Sometimes an informant will say, "Either one is OK," suggesting two closely related domains or two ways to express the same relationship. By emphasizing the semantic relationship, the ethnographer can quickly gain the help of an informant to identify the most appropriate phrase.

**1.4. Native-Language Verification Questions.** No matter how long one has interviewed an informant, the tendency to translate never disappears. For this reason it is necessary to continually verify whether a particular term is a folk term rather than a translation created for the benefit of the ethnographer. Native-language verification questions take the form "Is this a term you would use?" or "Would most tramps usually say \_\_\_\_\_ when talking with other tramps?" Consider the following example of how a native-language verification question might be used to discover if the phrase *places to sleep* is a translation of a native folk term:

- ETHNOGRAPHER: Tramps have a lot of different places they can make a flop, is that right?"
- INFORMANT: Yes. You can sleep in a box car or at the Sally or in a flophouse.
- ETHNOGRAPHER: Are there any other places?"
- INFORMANT: Yes, you can sleep in a hotel lobby, a window well, there must be dozens of other places to sleep.
- ETHNOGRAPHER: What would you call all these places?"
- INFORMANT: Well, they're just all places to sleep?"
- ETHNOGRAPHER: Would tramps ever call them *flops*?"
- INFORMANT: Oh yes! That's the term we would always use. I'm trying to make a flop, or I had a good flop last night.

It may seem an unimportant distinction made between *places to sleep* and a *flop*. However, our assumption is that people code and store information about their experience by using highly salient folk terms. Certainly one attribute of *flop* is that it is a place to sleep, but that is not synonymous with *flop*. If you ask, "What are all the places a tramp can sleep?" you will not elicit all the terms in a folk domain about flops. Even if the two terms were synonymous, it is our assumption that recall will be much more exhaustive

by using folk terms most familiar to the informant. Native-language verification questions about domains will be interspersed throughout interview, for they allow the ethnographer to check on the tendency informants to translate.

## 2. Cover Term Questions

This type of structural question is the one most frequently used. asked whenever you have a cover term. Here is a list of example

- |                        |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Kinds of bulls         | Are there different kinds of t  |
| Kinds of groups        | Are there different kinds of g  |
| Ways to get tips       | Are there different ways t      |
| Steps in making a sale | tips?                           |
|                        | What are all the different site |
|                        | making a sale of encycloper     |

When your informant answers such questions affirmatively, it is continue asking, "Could you tell me what some of them are?" or "think of any others?" If your informant answers in the negative indicate that you do not have a cover term or that it is an area your informants' knowledge.

## 3. Included Term Questions

Every folk domain has two or more included terms. Sometime surface before you have discovered the cover term for the domain exists). For example, a clerk at the costume shop might say, "I re many things today—Peter Pan, Robin Hood, Raggedy Andy, Little Fauntleroy, and a bunch of others." You could then ask the fo questions:

- ETHNOGRAPHER: Are Peter Pan, Robin Hood, Raggedy Andy, and Little Fauntleroy all the same kind of thing?"
- INFORMANT: Yes, they're all kinds of miscellaneous character costumes.
- ETHNOGRAPHER: Are there any other kinds of miscellaneous character co

Included term questions are often awkward to ask. If you only ha term, they may confuse your informant: "Is rainy weather a rea something? Is panhandling a way to something?" For this reason probably best to reserve these questions for times when you have cc several terms, which by their use you are sure belong in the same do

#### 4. Substitution Frame Questions

Substitution frames are a way to ask structural questions. They are constructed from a normal statement used by an informant. One term is removed from the sentence and an informant is asked to *substitute* other meaningful terms. Here is a sample substitution frame:

1. Original statement: You find bulls in the bucket.
2. Substitution frame: You find \_\_\_\_\_ in the bucket.
3. Substitution frame question: Can you think of any other terms that might go in that sentence?
4. Responses: (a) You find *drunks* in the bucket.  
(b) You find *turnkeys* in the bucket.  
(c) You find *musites* in the bucket.

Obviously, these three kinds of people could have been discovered by asking a cover term question: What are all the different kinds of people in the bucket. However, under some conditions, substitution frames are more effective. Because they do not alter the original utterance, they may be easier for informants to use. At one point in my research with tramps I became interested in knowing about relationships between bulls and tramps. I began with a single informant sentence: "Sometimes a bull will hit a tramp for no reason at all." This led to two substitution frames. (1) Sometimes a bull will \_\_\_\_\_ a tramp for no reason at all, and (2) Sometimes a bull will hit a tramp \_\_\_\_\_ . The first frame elicited things like, *take shoes to, bust, pinch, break a bottle over*, etc. The second frame elicited things like *because he's down on you, because he thinks you're going to fight, because he's had a hard day*.

When using substitution frames the same sentence has numerous possibilities, but it is best to make the sentences short and simple, with a single term removed for substitution. One of the best strategies for asking substitution frame questions is to write the original sentence out on a piece of paper. Then, write it again just below the first one, but insert a blank for the words you have removed. This visual representation makes it easy for an informant to fill in the blank with appropriate terms.

#### 5. Card Sorting Structural Questions<sup>5</sup>

Structural questions almost always elicit a list of folk terms. A particular list may begin quite small but often it grows, making it difficult for informants. Writing terms on cards helps to elicit, verify, and discuss a domain. For example, I wrote all the different kinds of tramps on cards. Then I placed these cards in front of an informant and asked, "Are these all kinds of tramps?" This verification question was made easier by the use of cards.

Card sorting can occur in several ways. After I had collected a list of different things that bulls could do to tramps, I wrote the terms. Then I gave the pack of cards to an informant (nearly fifty cards) a "Which of these would a *turnkey* (one kind of bull) do?" "Which would a *ragpicker* (another kind of bull) do?" If you have a number of terms that appear to go in the same domain, writing them out and asking informants to sort out the ones which are all the same thing quickly leads to finding the boundary of a folk domain.

I have found it useful to write cover terms on a card of one color, terms on cards of another color. As new included terms are discovered during an interview, they can be written on a separate card beneath the cover term. This gives informants a visual sense of the ships among the folk terms you are investigating and enables cooperate more fully.

Structural questions all function to explore the organization of informant's cultural knowledge. They lead the ethnographer to discover and verify the presence of folk domains, cover terms for these domains, included terms. By using structural questions, the ethnographer need to impose analytic categories to organize the data from informant participant observation. Ethnography is more than finding out what we know; it also involves discovering how people have organized that edge.

## Tasks

- 7.1 Prepare, in writing, structural questions of each type for several different things.
- 7.2 Prepare explanations for these questions.
- 7.2 Conduct an ethnographic interview using structural questions to elicit, verify, and discuss a domain. (All terms already collected and to collect terms for new domains. (All with descriptive questions.)
- 7.3 Prepare a list of all verified domains with cover terms and included terms.