

3. Interview techniques vis-à-vis native metacommunicative repertoires; or, on the analysis of communicative blunders

As noted in Chapter 2, *Mexicanos* draw on a wide range of accepted speech forms, and they know intuitively which types of expressions are appropriate for which social contexts. Growing up in a given speech community presents the language learner with innumerable opportunities to discover the rules that relate form, context, and meaning. When a researcher leaves her or his own native speech community and establishes contact with another group of human beings, however, no such common body of experience is available to smooth the initial encounters. The same problem arises when investigators work with a different social class or ethnic group within their own society. In filling this gap, researchers commonly draw on the communicative device their speech community views as the best means of obtaining large bodies of information in the least amount of time – the interview. The implicit reasoning seems to be that interviews allow the researcher to assume control of the type and quantity of information being conveyed. This enables him or her to circumvent the usual constraints on the transmission of knowledge (e.g., kinship, age, degree of intimacy, gender, initiation, etc.)

I will argue that this process is really not quite as smooth and successful as we seem to imagine. Our ability to banish the native communicative norms that operate in other environments is far from complete, and the natives' own discourse rules have an odd way of infiltrating the interview. Unfortunately, researchers are seldom adequately aware of this process; most are hampered by their failure to learn how such features operate in the speech repertoire as a whole. This results in a communicative impasse – the researcher thinks she or he is engaged in an interview, whereas the "interviewees" believe themselves to be involved in a very different type of speech event. This hiatus greatly impedes the communicative process, disrupting interviews and rendering the analysis of the data a most precarious enterprise. Since the resultant errors are systematic rather than random, they are not "canceled out" through the standardization of questionnaires and the application of sampling techniques.

The data are drawn from interviews I conducted in Córdoba. I am thus primarily concerned with informal, open-ended interviews, since most of my interviewing in northern New Mexico has been of this type. I will address the bearing of these findings on survey-based research that the investigator conducts in her or his own community in Chapters 5 and 6.

Speech events are multifaceted phenomena; interviews are certainly no exception. Given the complexity of the interview process, it is necessary to break down the task of examining the problems that can arise in interviews into conceptually manageable parts. A useful segmentation is provided by Jakobson's (1960) analysis of the components of the communicative event, which was subsequently expanded by Hymes (1964, 1972). I have couched the following analysis in its terms in order to pinpoint the sources of different types of communicative difficulties encountered in interviews. Because it is not tied to any specific language or speech event type, it can serve as a heuristic device for use by other fieldworkers in keeping in mind the sorts of factors that are crucial in planning, conducting, and analyzing interviews. This chapter draws on the model as a means of analyzing interview data; it can also serve as a means of obtaining information on native metacommunicative repertoires for use in devising a research plan (a subject discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

A model for the analysis of interviews

A schematic representation of some of the principal components of the interview is given in Figure 2. The primary participants are termed the INTERVIEWER and the RESPONDENT(s). The MESSAGE FORM consists of the signals, both auditory and visual, that serve as sign vehicles in interviewer-respondent(s) communication. The REFERENT roughly corresponds to Peirce's (1932:2.230-1) "Object" and Saussure's (1959) *signifié*, the "something else" that is represented by the sign vehicle. Because the cognitive or referential function of transmitting information is dominant in interviewing, much of my analysis will be devoted to difficulties in establishing and maintaining reference. Communication also depends on opening one or more CHANNELS, physical (generally, visual and acoustic) and psychological circuits between participants. As in all forms of communication, a number of CODES, both linguistic and nonverbal (proxemic, gestural, etc.) must be shared by interviewer and respondents in order to permit the encoding and interpretation of messages.

Some components relate to two or more of the preceding factors.

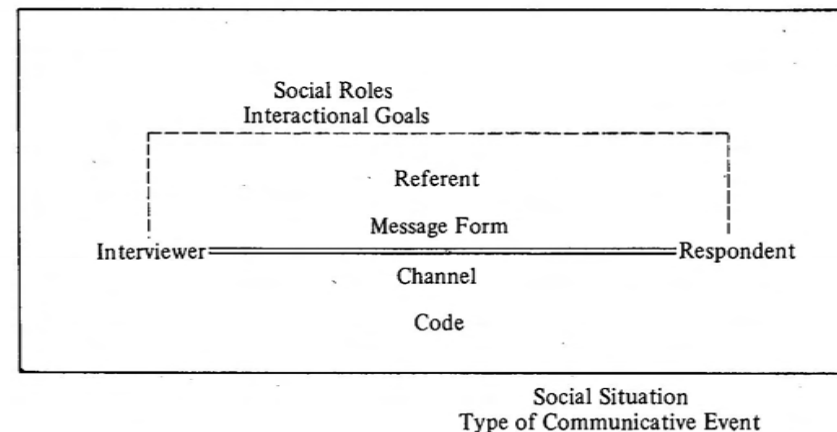


Figure 2. Components of the interview situation

The SOCIAL ROLES assumed by interviewer and respondent(s) prove to be of special importance to the success of the interview. INTERACTIONAL GOALS, the motivation of each of the participants for engaging in the interview, are frequently divergent in interviews. SOCIAL SITUATION refers to the context in which the interaction takes place, including the time (of the day, of the week, in terms of seasonal cycles, etc.) and location in which the interview transpires. These considerations may be crucial, because an interview will proceed differently if it is the central activity and other participants are excluded or if it takes place while planting, attending a ceremony, or the like.

Likewise, the interview itself will be placed within one or more of the society's categories of TYPES OF COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS, such as making a few bucks or imparting an esoteric tradition. The importance of the particular social roles, the overall social situation, and the type of communicative event that pertain to a given interview are revealed in their joint role in defining norms of interaction. Such norms determine who can participate, what sorts of information can be conveyed, how much can be said, what linguistic forms can be used, and so forth.

As Jakobson (1960:353) has noted, any of the basic components can play a dominant role in characterizing the verbal structure of a message and in defining the major communicative function of the event. Jakobson also argues that the subordinate factors still play vital roles in conveying the meaning of an utterance. It is especially important to keep some sort of inventory of such factors in mind in analyzing communicative problems, because such failures may result from the "mal-

Some procedural problems affect all conversational situations. Inadequate competence in the language is a code consideration that can limit the fieldworker's ability to collect data in all speech situations. Similarly, a lapse in the acoustical and/or psychological engagement of the interviewer and the respondent can disrupt the transmission of any message. But I am particularly interested in procedural problems that pose special difficulties for the interview.

Channel

The classical interview presupposes the suitability of explicit, referentially rich, verbal transmissions for learning about a given topic. Nevertheless, communicative groups differ widely in the norms that prescribe which messages are to be transmitted through primarily verbal means and which are not. One is reminded of the importance of drum-signaling in certain parts of Africa (Herzog 1945), the curled-lip gesture among the Kuna of Panama (Sherzer 1973), and the use of hand gestures to convey aggressive, obscene expressions in our own society. Some messages can only be transmitted nonverbally, whereas others may combine a minimally essential nonverbal component with verbal elaboration. In either of these cases, repeated attempts to delve into these areas through speech alone will fail repeatedly.

This problem is illustrated by my initial difficulties in interviewing Silvianita and George López. The Lópezes were quite interested in my research project, and we had developed a strong friendship by the time I began the formal research. Nevertheless, my initial attempts to elicit exegesis on the local carvers and on the carving process were almost complete failures. The problem only resolved itself once I began carving with the couple, thus receiving comments on my work and on the wood-carving art as a whole.

This example illustrates the problem of referential restrictions in general. The carvers were not simply examples of the "inarticulate artist" stereotype; given the proper circumstances, they were quite able to explicate their work. The problem is rather that such artistic metacommunication was encompassed by a more comprehensive semiotic. Certain technical and stylistic features were elucidated primarily through visual signs—demonstration by the master on the student's carving. It was possible to obtain verbal exegesis in most cases. Decontextualized questions were, however, quite ineffective in eliciting this material. The relevant metacommunicative information was provided in response either to purely visual signs (the appearance of a problem on the student's piece) or by verbal indexes of visual signs (e.g., 'How

do you do this?'). In similar contexts, efforts to obtain explicit verbal exegesis on such topics will meet with failure or will fail to reveal the semiotic richness and complexity of how people actually deal with such situations.

Social situation

Some sense of when questions are appropriate is a common concern among fieldworkers, even if violations of such norms of comportment may be equally widespread. Interviewees are particularly sensitive to the social and political implications of providing the desired information, because the interview process brings the referential or cognitive function of language to the fore. The posing of questions is entirely interdicted in some settings (cf. Goody 1978:21), while others simply place restrictions on the range of lexical items that may be used or the topics that can appropriately be raised. The fieldworker may, for example, have to place herself or himself in special circumstances in order to be able to broach lewd or sensitive areas with impunity. Communication is likewise impeded in certain cases by the proximity of would-be eavesdroppers. Some fieldworkers circumvent this restriction by transporting their consultants to another location for interviews (see, for example, Cancian 1965:197–8).

Such observations are commonsensical. But three components of this problem may be less obvious. First, normative associations of social settings and appropriate modes of verbal interaction are culture specific, and they generally vary between social classes or subgroups as well (cf. Grimshaw 1969, 1969–70; Strauss and Schatzman 1955).⁴ Sensitive and effective interviewing thus presupposes awareness of the society's categories of speech acts and social situations and the rules for relating them (cf. Frake 1972).

Second, this information is not only requisite to avoiding egregious faux pas. The context in which a question is posed often affects the respondent's interpretation of the query and the nature of his or her response. Resultant variations in the received data thus range from the interviewee's intentional omission or falsification of material to subtle differences in pragmatic or indexical meanings. These problems are particularly important in the case of research that deals specifically with pragmatic issues.

Third, even though the referential or cognitive function is generally dominant in interviews, this does not, as Jakobson (1960:353) has noted, mean that other communicative functions are of no importance. As Austin (1962) pointed out, language does not simply provide us

Taken literally, the notion is absurd. The researcher can, of course, go back to the interviewee and ask if the interpretation is correct. This can produce interesting data on native textual analysis or literary criticism, but it hardly solves the problem. Human introspective capacities do not necessarily extend to recalling exactly what one was intending to say at some point in the past. Likewise, most metacommunicative features are not fully conscious, and speakers are unlikely to have perceived them at all (cf. Gumperz 1982:131-2; Silverstein, 1979, 1981a). In any case, taking a tape or transcript back to the interviewee(s) creates *another* speech event, and its contextual elements will shape the consultant's remarks along other lines. What is needed is some means of rechecking one's perceptions against those of the participants at the time.

One can do precisely that, if in a slightly roundabout manner, while analyzing the conversation. Participants are constantly exchanging implicit messages as to how they perceive the speech event and how they want their utterances to be interpreted. They are also continually checking to see if their perceptions are shared by the other participants. This process has been captured by Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1976) under the aegis of "contextualization." They argue that communicative contexts are not dictated by the environment but are *created by the participants in the course of the interaction*. Similarly, contexts are not conditions that are fixed at the beginning of an interaction, remaining stable until its termination.

Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz suggest it is accordingly necessary for speakers to provide contextualization cues to signal which features of the social and linguistic setting provide frameworks for interpreting their remarks. Participants monitor each other's words and actions in order to see how their interlocutors perceive the context, and this is particularly useful to researchers in their efforts to assess the validity of their own interpretations.

A variety of types of signals are used by co-conversationalists in ascertaining whether or not their perceptions of the communicative event are shared. Some of these are explicit, such as when we ask, "Are you being sarcastic?" "Is that a joke?" "Do you really mean that?" and the like. Although such queries generally present themselves as responses to the ambiguity of the preceding utterance, this is not always the case. As I noted above, *Mexicano* elders continually interject interrogatives such as *¿ves?* 'do you see?' *¿sabes cómo?* 'do you know what I mean?', *¿no?* 'no?' or 'really?' in the course of pedagogical dialogues to assess the comprehension of their pupils. Conversational uses of proverbs and other genres feature an elicitation

of the listener's comprehension of and agreement with the speaker's point as a central component of the performance (Briggs 1985a).

It is, however, far more common to use implicit messages, features that hide, so to speak, behind the referential context of what is said, in contextualizing utterances. Specialists in nonverbal communication have conducted a great deal of research on the way speakers use visual signs in providing interpretive frames for verbal messages (cf. Bird-whistell 1970; Hall 1959, 1966, 1977; Kendon 1972, 1973, 1977, 1978; Kendon, Harris, and Key 1976; Scheflen 1965, 1966). Interlocutors use visual contact to provide a near-constant means of monitoring the contextual cues of their fellow participants. Speakers draw on a wide range of signals, including extending one's hands with cupped, up-turned palms, shrugging the shoulders, and lifting the head and/or eyebrows, to elicit indications of comprehension and agreement. They shape their utterances from moment to moment in keeping with both solicited and impromptu responses from their listeners. A look of boredom may prompt a reassessment of the relevance of one's remarks, while a visual sign that the hearer is confused often elicits an elaboration of material that had been presupposed, together with a repetition of the utterance. The value of the visual track as a means of assessing the meaning speakers attach to their words provides a strong incentive for videotaping at least some interviews.

The conversational analysis group has identified a host of devices that enable co-conversationalists to coordinate their turns at talk (cf. Duncan 1973, 1974; Duncan and Niederehe 1974; Jefferson 1972; Sacks 1967; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). "Huh?", "right?", "yes?", "okay?", "you know?", "see?", and so forth have traditionally been viewed as mere fillers, phatic signals used to keep the channel open until we think of something to say. Research has shown, however, that they provide the person who dominates the floor with a great deal of feedback with respect to the manner in which her or his interpretations of the interaction are shared by the other participants.

This process is requisite to adequate comprehension in dialogue. As Gumperz (1982a, 1982b) and others have shown, interpretive frames are often divergent, leading co-conversationalists to misjudge their interlocutors' intents. Gumperz (1982a) has shown that such miscommunication frequently occurs in interactions between members of different classes and/or ethnic groups within a single society, and interviewers are hardly exempt from this process. Researchers similarly encounter difficulties in communicating with members of another society or a different group within their own society using a pattern of interaction possibly unfamiliar to the latter. Discerning such malcomprehension is impor-

with a vehicle for *describing* nonlinguistic events. Speech also possesses a *performative* capacity, meaning that words are also means of *creating* or *transforming* a given state of affairs. The performative force of an utterance may include a transformation of the relationship between interviewer and respondent(s) or between the respondent(s) and other persons who are present.

I found it nearly impossible, for instance, to collect data on forthcoming events that involved some of my closest friends in Córdoba. I eventually learned that members of semicollective groups of cooperating households never announce the imminence of such occasions to each other, let alone issue direct invitations. An explicit request for the pleasure of a person's company at a baptismal celebration or the butchering of a pig carries a covert message: Come, but as a stranger (cf. Briggs 1981:158–72). My consultants' desire to incorporate me into their group prevented them from responding directly to questions regarding such events. This provides another example of the importance of attending to the strategic dimensions of communicative processes in this society. Indirection appears to be operative in an analogous semiotic system—the regulation of participation in Warm Springs (Native American) ceremonials (Philips 1974).

Key and genre

As I noted, the use of interview techniques presupposes a model of social interaction. The interviewer specifies the issues to be covered, while the respondent supplies the information. The focus of the participants is on conveying the needed information as efficiently, explicitly, completely, and accurately as possible. Of course, the consultants' speech repertoire may not include an analogous category, or the setting for such an event may not be at all the same. Even insofar as the respondent can be convinced to play this particular game, however, she or he is likely to break frame, to use Goffman's expression.

Two ways in which this frequently occurs are through changes of key and genre. The term "key" refers to "the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done" (Hymes 1972:62). The point is that the same words, possessing the same semantic content, may be spoken for an entirely different effect, such as humor, sarcasm, or equivocation. The fact that such an utterance is not to be taken at face value is often signaled extremely subtly, and exclusive use of nonverbal markers (changes of expression, posture, and/or distance between participants, etc.) is common (cf. Kendall 1981:246). Given cultural differences in the contextual parameters of such changes of key and in the nature of

the signals, the fieldworker can easily record the face value of statements that were designed to be taken otherwise. This problem is compounded by his or her expectation that the interviewee will respond in a straightforward, "serious," discursive manner.

The latter bias similarly handicaps the interviewer's ability to discern changes of genres. My early field recordings reveal numerous proverbs, jokes, scriptural allusions, and so forth. Because the formal and contextual clues that permit the hearer to identify an utterance as a token of one of these genres are quite complex and subtle, I frequently failed to distinguish them from unmarked ("ordinary") speech.⁵

The fieldworker's failure to discern a shift in genre presents two important problems for the research. First, she or he is accordingly unaware that special norms apply to the interpretation of that utterance. A literal reading of the referential content of the words generally yields interpretive errors, as is the case with our own literary genres. Second, overemphasis on the explicit, discursive, unmarked speech fostered by the interview situation makes it much more difficult to see that an important native metacommunicative event has just taken place. As I argue in Chapter 4, *Mexicano* scriptural allusions, oral history, political rhetoric, repetition elicitation formulas, and other routines simultaneously invoke the force of traditional values and comment on features of the ongoing interaction. Such utterances link the normative and contingent, the general and the specific, thus providing valuable exegesis on both spheres. If fieldworkers are not sensitive to the signals that mark such performances, however, such insights will be lost.

Interactional goals

It is clear that the meanings of utterances emerge from their location within a particular context. This is especially true of responses—"second pair parts" whose relevance is conditioned by a preceding "first pair part" (in Sacks's 1967 terms). However, as Goffman (1981:40–8) has argued, responses may address all or part of the first pair part and/or some other element of the context. In the case of interviews, the respondent's orientation toward the interaction as a whole may inform his or her responses. This is only remarkable in that the interviewer and interviewee's motivations for participation in the interaction are likely to be dissimilar. If the fieldworker simply posits an identity between her or his goals in the interview—especially that of the transmission of information—and those of the respondent, he or she may fail to discern the central role of the latter's orientation in determining the meaning of the responses (cf. Herzfeld 1980).

An example of this sort of difficulty emerges from an interview with an elderly Córdovan couple, Aurelio and Costancia Trujillo, regarding the history of social inequality within the community. The Trujillos and I had established a quasi kin relationship soon after I entered Córdova; they addressed me as *hijo* 'son', and I generally used the terms *mamá* 'mother' and *papá* 'father' in addressing them. They accordingly took it upon themselves to teach me how to behave in accordance with *Mexicano* norms. Mr. Trujillo, who was highly religious, was especially interested in imparting to me the basic tenets of *Mexicano* "folk" Catholicism. He responded to what I deemed a particularly important question—'Were there any *ricos* ['very wealthy individuals'] here in bygone days?'—by noting that 'No, they were all poor, but they helped one another, they performed acts of charity. Now there is no one who would help another. And, if they help you, they say, "pay me." Everything comes to an end, and it has all ended.' His response thus focused on the religiosity of prior generations and effects of this faith in promoting harmony within the community.

Nevertheless, statements that had previously been made by Mr. Trujillo and by other consultants asserted that Córdova had boasted *ricos* in the past. I was thus forced to deal with this apparent contradiction in my analysis of the interview. After numerous auditions of the tape, I was able to see that the couple's orientation to the interview contrasted sharply with my own. Whereas I sought to gain information on the theological basis of social inequality and on the rise of a particular *rico*, they were using the interview to try and convince me of the prevalence of religiously motivated cooperation in 'bygone days' and of the superiority of this *Weltanschauung* over secular individualism. Mr. Trujillo thus interpreted my 'Were there any *ricos* here in bygone days?' as pertaining to a basic contrast between the "impoverished but united past" versus the "wealthier but divided" present. His response appeared inconsistent only in the context of my goals for the interview (and thus my interpretation of the question).

Type of communicative event

The preceding example brings up a related problem. If the category of "interview" is not shared by the respondent or if the latter does not utilize this frame in defining such interactions, then he or she may apply norms of interaction and canons of interpretation that differ from those of the interviewer. In other words, the data obtained in interviews are affected by societal differences in the interactional goals of the participants. Even though fieldworkers may define the situation

as a focus on the explicit transmission of data, respondents may see the process as entertainment, pedagogy, obtaining cash income, protecting her or his neighbors from outside scrutiny, and so forth.

The implications are threefold. First, the interviewee's categorization of the interaction will profoundly influence what subjects may be addressed, how much information can be given, how many personal or collective "secrets" to reveal, what speech forms may be used, and the like. As was the case with the interactional norms, the frame that the respondent provides for the event will significantly affect his or her interpretation of the questions and thus the nature of the responses. If the type of speech event invoked by the interviewee does not emphasize the referential function, this will affect the reliability of the referential content of the responses as an index of their meaning. Therefore, a minimally adequate analysis of interview data entails awareness on the part of the fieldworker of (1) the society's (or subgroup's) categories of communicative events and (2) the signals that enable participants to discern the category (or categories) being applied to any given situation by those involved in the exchange.

Second, research on conversation has shown that interlocutors must process more than just the semantic content of discourse in order to grasp its meaning. Grice (1975) advances the notion of *conversational implicature*. He argues that utterances are shaped by the need to reflect "maxims of conversation" that constrain speakers to render their contributions relevant, factually grounded, perspicuous, and the like. Addressees draw on these maxims in trying to discern the manner in which the words they hear make sense in terms of the ongoing interaction. Cicourel (1974a, 1974c, 1982a) and Garfinkel (1967) emphasize the "common sense knowledge of social structures," the participants' background knowledge that guides their interpretation of the discourse. Cicourel in particular stresses the ethnographic or organizational information regarding persons, institutions, events, processes, and the like that become relevant in the course of an interaction.

The point is that different sorts of both conversational implicature and commonsense knowledge become relevant in contrastive communicative settings. A shift from one type of speech event to another thus prompts participants to draw on a new set of assumptions. This is illustrated by Cicourel's recent work on medical discourse (1982; personal communication, 1985). As the same case is represented in an interview with the patient, in the initial write-up, in informal consultation between physicians, and in the final report, the nature of the assumptions that inform interpretation of what are ostensibly the same facts changes radically.

Let us return to the problem of contrastive classifications of inter-

view discourse. If participants do not share a common frame for the interaction, their interpretations of the meaning of what is said will be based on divergent sets of assumptions. Since these processes are largely tacit, the failure to recognize this divergence in classification will produce differences in interpretation that are similarly likely to go undetected. This issue is hardly of relevance to open-ended interviews conducted in another society alone. Few practitioners who conduct surveys concern themselves with the nature of the unstated assumptions that shape the respondents' interpretation of questions and the way they respond. The researchers' assumption seems to be either that acceptable questions are semantically transparent or that the respondents' assumptions will match those of the practitioner. Cicourel (1974c), in one of the few investigations of the problem, shows that such beliefs are mistaken. (See also Cicourel 1986.)

Third, conversational maxims are context sensitive. Insensitivity to the respondent's definition of the situation may accordingly lead the researcher to violate the speech norms evoked by the respondent's categorization. Such norms will, of course, restrict the range of interactional strategies that can be utilized in obtaining data as well as the variety of topics that can be addressed. Nevertheless, disregarding these "inconveniences" is quite detrimental to establishing rapport; a number of cases have even been reported in which such faux pas have brought research projects to a premature termination.

Reference

The procedural problems I have examined thus far relate primarily to the indexical or context-sensitive functions of speech. Both interviewer and respondent may share a common interpretation of the referential meaning of what is said and yet may differ widely on their interpretations of indexical meanings. This can create severe problems for researchers who have mastered the semantics and syntax of another language without gaining sufficient competence in subtle indexical functions. The consequences can be just as great, however, for researchers working in their own society who mistake a common syntax and lexicon for shared communicative competence.

I now wish to show, however, that reference is really not quite as simple and transparent as this discussion may have suggested. Even if the interviewee can identify the semantic content of the words contained in a given question, he or she may be unable to discern its referent(s). Similarly, the fact that a given reply follows a particular question does not necessarily mean that it constitutes an answer to that

question. The interviewee may have misunderstood the referent provided by the question or may be purposely shifting the frame of reference. In either case, the danger is that the researcher will overlook this referential hiatus and thus misinterpret the response. The business of establishing and maintaining reference in interviews is accordingly no less in need of critical analysis.

Procedural problems of this type are sometimes corrected through the operation of such devices as "side sequences" (cf. Jefferson 1972):

Int.: What was your grandfather's name?

Resp.: Which one?

Int.: Your mother's father.

Resp.: His name was José Rafael Aragón.

The interviewer and/or respondent are not always aware, however, that the latter has failed to identify the referent. Such a response will prove misleading if it is interpreted as a reply to the question. If the researcher is repeatedly unable to establish a frame of reference that is intelligible to respondents, this may seriously undermine the interviewing process itself. Given the importance of the referential function to the interview, it is worthwhile to examine the business of establishing and maintaining reference in some detail.

Establishing a referential frame. Reference is both a creative and a powerful act, since it provides an intersubjective link between speaker and hearer. One or more entities, processes, imaginative constructions, and so on are selected by the speaker from an infinitude of referential possibilities and are re-created in the mind of the hearer. As Garfinkel (1967) has noted, vagueness is never entirely absent from an utterance, and this re-creation is always more or less approximate. Nevertheless, a useful answer is obtained only through the presentation of a question (of whatever form) that possesses sufficient specificity to permit the potential respondent to discern what the speaker is asking.

Identification of the proper referent is, however, only the first step. If I was asked, "Tell me about your mother," I would find it quite difficult to respond. Answering a question presupposes awareness not only of the referent but of the type and quantity of information about the referent that is being requested. This is particularly crucial in the interview setting, where a broad range of types of information and degrees of detail may be sought. An appropriate response to the preceding question might thus be "What do you mean? Who is she, what does she do for a living, how did we relate when I was a child, or what sort of person is she?" In other words, the question must not only

provide a referent but situate that referent within its larger conversational context—if procedural problems are to be avoided.

It is obviously impossible to reduce the complexity of the processes that underlie successful acts of reference to a single rule. Nevertheless, the countless examples of both referentially adequate and inadequate questions that appear in the tape recordings of my Córdovan interviews do reveal one critical feature. Each object, place, person, event, and so forth that figures in Córdovans' referential universe can be designated with a variety of lexemes and/or larger units. One of these expressions is, however, nearly always used in shifting the topic of discourse from a previous referent to the desired one, especially in the case of phenomena that pertain to the community's past. In other words, any one of these referentially equivalent lexemes or constructions can be utilized in posing a question about some aspect of the *current* topic. If the presentation of a question is to function simultaneously as a signal for a topic change, however, the conversationally marked designation must be included in the form of the question.

An example is provided by my research on Pedro Córdova, an extremely wealthy and influential Córdovan (the pun is illustrative of his position) of the nineteenth century. In initially broaching the subject with me, my consultants used such expressions as 'the great-grandfather of' X, *él que hizo la campana ahí en la capilla* 'the one who made the bell there in the chapel', or even 'there used to be a very, very wealthy man here; he was like a king. He was very rich; his name was Pedro Córdova'. The use of these forms in this context was motivated by the elders' belief that I had not heard of Pedro Córdova; some background information was thus deemed necessary. Subsequent attempts on my part to accomplish a change of topic to traditions regarding Pedro Córdova through the use of these expressions was ineffective. Such questions simply induced reruns, calls for reiteration of the question—*¿quién?* 'who?' By reiterating some of the material on the man that I had collected in previous interviews, I was eventually able to clarify my referent. But this did not provide a clear referential frame for the question, and my consultants were still confused as to what sort of information about Pedro Córdova was being solicited.

Perplexed, I listened to the manner in which my consultants brought up the subject. I found that they generally introduced the topic in conversations with persons who already knew the legends by beginning their utterances with *el difunto Pedro* . . . 'the late Pedro' . . . This phrase not only specified the referent but signaled that a discussion of the man, the extent of his opulence, the fate of his treasure, and even that period of Córdovan history as a whole was imminent. I was thus able to elicit a great deal of exegesis in succeeding interviews by asking

questions such as *¿Tenía mucho tesoro el difunto Pedro?* 'Did the late Pedro have a lot of treasure?'

In other cases, however, the referential frame for a topical shift is provided not by the referring expression itself but by an adjacent lexeme or phrase. Locative and temporal expressions are common. For example, one of my consultants noted that *antes había muchos animales pa' 'cá* 'in bygone days there used to be lots of livestock here'. He announced his intention to open a discussion of Córdova's economy during the late nineteenth century by using the term *antes*. *Antes* is used in its unmarked or general sense to refer to any event that took place before the time of the utterance. In oral historical discussions, however, it is used to indicate that a given referent is associated with *lo de antes* 'things of bygone days', the era that ended in the first decades of this century. It is also used in a more highly marked sense to place the referent within the latest of three periods of the community's history, the epoch that extended from the time in which the present elders' grandparents were children until the time of the latters' death. It contrasts with *mucho más antes*, the first era of the community's history, and *más antes*, the intermediate period. The syntactic juxtaposition of a locative and a referring expression with *antes*, *más antes*, or *mucho más antes* thus signals the speaker's shift to a discussion of this general feature of existence (e.g., pastoralism and, more generally, a thriving subsistence economy) in the general area (here Córdova and environs) during that entire period.

Such designations possess a threefold role in discourse, and I will accordingly refer to them, extending a concept of Jakobson's (1957), as *triplex signs*. An initial function of such expressions is simply to index a given referent. They are equivalent at this level to other designations for the same entity. They contrast with referentially equivalent signs, however, with respect to a second function, that of indexing the entire referential frame in which they are included.⁶ *El difunto Pedro* thus indexes the entire set of oral traditions that deal with the man, his legacy, and that period of Córdova's history.

Finally, such signs also constitute, in Jakobson's (1957:131) terms, messages that refer to the code. The code in this case is conversational structure, the demarcation of turns, topics, openings, closings, and so on and their combination in higher-level units. Triplex signs are conversational metatags, indexing the status of the referent as the predominant topic of discourse at that point. Triplex signs are thus essential, powerful, and creative tools for structuring conversations in general and interviews in particular.

The role of triplex signs in providing a referential frame for discourse provides another clue in deciphering the factors that underlie the difficul-

ties encountered in interviewing. Fieldworkers generally gain initial insights into a given society's referential universe by observing its members. Nevertheless, researchers are only able to initiate discussions of specific referents once they have learned the relevant designations and can identify the terms that function as conversational metasigns. The status of these signs as topical indexes is cryptotypic in Whorf's (1956:69-70) terms—there is generally no overt formal marker of their metacommunicative function. This can be learned only through analysis (conscious or unconscious) of the way that the various referring expressions operate in the speech of one's consultants. Because the effectiveness of interview questions is contingent on inclusion of conversational metasigns,⁷ interviews will necessarily flounder until fieldworkers have become competent in this respect.

Specifying the scope of the response. Responses can address a given subject from many different points of view and provide more or less detail. The provision of a referential frame by the question (or in the preceding discourse) assists the respondent in assessing the quantity and the type of information being sought. For example, *¿Antes había muchos animales pa' 'cá?* 'Was there much livestock here *antes*?' would, if addressed by a younger person to an elder, constitute a request for a lengthy description of the pastoral economy of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Córdoba. This question is referentially equivalent to *¿Tenía muchos animales la gente de aquí antes de la primera guerra mundial?* 'Did the people here have much livestock before World War I?' The latter question would not, nevertheless, signal the respondent that the researcher was looking for a substantial description of the economy of Córdoba at this time. The interviewee would have to call for a rerun, clarifying the status of the question as a request for a general oral historical account, the names of the principal sheep owners, the approximate percentages of goats, sheep, and cattle, or something else again.

The establishment of a referential frame also constrains the type and quantity of information that can be elicited by further questions on the topic. Detailed descriptions and chronological assessments constitute central features of accounts of recent events—for example, 'In what year did you dig your well?' or 'What towns did you used to pass through on your way to the mine?' Events that are preserved in the community's oral traditions are reckoned, however, in terms of *antes*, *más antes*, and *mucho más antes* periods and, within each, with respect to culturally significant events (e.g., 'around the time of the big flood' or 'soon after they cast the bell' [for the local chapel]). Dates are thus irrelevant in determining temporal relationships between events which

transpired in 'bygone days,' and such questions as 'In what year did X take place' will elicit a *¿quién sabe?*

The basis for judging a 'good' answer (in my consultants' terms) similarly varies in accordance with the referential frame. It is the sheer quantity of detail as well as the accuracy of the description that is sought in characterizations of contemporary affairs. Wealth of detail is also valued in descriptions of persons, places, and events that relate to the 'outside'—the world beyond Córdoba and surrounding communities. In statements about the past, however, it is one's ability to capture the *meaning* of events—by placing them within the broad scheme of *Mexicano* moral values and by contrasting them with the present—that is respected.

Evidence of invalid presuppositions. An otherwise well-formed question may present substantial procedural problems if it is based, in the eyes of the respondent, on one or more false premises. The classic example of such queries is "When did you stop beating your wife?" Such invalid presuppositions may appear on a variety of levels. Some cases, such as the following, involve a semantic error:

- CB: What jobs did your father have? He was a *carpintero* ['carpenter']. . . .
 SL: Oh, he made some window frames, door frames. (Looks at GL.)
 Right?
 GL: That's right, he wasn't really a *carpintero*. No, he just made. . . . He used to make window frames and door frames, and then he would put in the window.

I had not realized at this point that *carpintero* possessed a more restricted semantic range in New Mexican Spanish than in English or Standard Spanish. José Dolores López, George López's father, made window and door frames, railings, and a wide range of furniture (Briggs 1980:31). To be designated a *carpintero* at the time, however, a person had to be skilled in installing pitched galvanized-steel roofs (with wooden frames) on top of the usual beam, stick, and mud roofs.

Invalid presuppositions can reflect simple factual errors. If the question presupposes an ontological assumption that contrasts sharply with native cultural premises, the situation will be rather more complex. I once asked Mr. López, for instance:

- CB: How did [the wealthiest local family] make its money?
 GL: There have always been wealthy persons all over.
 CB: But how did the X's get so rich when everyone else was poor?
 GL: *¿Quién sabe?* ['Who knows?']

My question presupposed the common Anglo-American premise that a person becomes wealthy through a combination of will, hard work,

and fortuitous circumstances. The query thus confused my consultants, because they believe that God bestows material blessings on persons who supplement very hard work with a spirit of cooperation and generosity and who act in accordance with His will rather than their own desires. Evidence of such grossly invalid presuppositions generally induced my consultants to (1) provide a response that seemed unrelated to the question, (2) request a rerun, or (3) signal the unsuitability of the question by responding with *¿quién sabe?* 'who knows'. The emergence of invalid presuppositions thus precludes the generation of an adequate referential frame by the question and often elicits a comment on the researcher's presuppositions rather than a response to the question (cf. Hobbs and Robinson 1979).

Social roles

As noted above, the structure of interviews generally dictates a number of components of the relationship between the participants. The typical interview situation grants the interviewer principal rights to topical selection by virtue of her or his provision of the questions. He or she further determines whether a response counts as an answer by choosing whether or not to reiterate the question during his or her next turn. The utterance of a new question releases the interviewee from the task of answering the previous one; the interviewer thus signals the respondent as to the adequacy of the "answer" by presenting or withholding a new question (among other means). It is similarly the researcher who creates the successive textual representations of the fruits of the interview. In sum, the interviewer maintains a great deal of control over the interaction; the respondent's principal means of subverting this power lies in breaking the frame of the interview.

Playing by the rules prompts the subordination of other components of the interaction to the mutual goal of the conscious transmission of interesting, accurate, and abundant information. When the system is working properly, the participants accept the roles assigned to them by the structure of the interview. Interviewers provide clear and interesting questions that enable respondents to exhibit their knowledge. These roles preempt the criteria that normally define these individuals' roles in society (age, gender, occupation, etc.). The latter factors come to the fore in interviews only when one or more of the participants fail to conform to the requirements of the interview situation.

A number of researchers have commented on the inclusion of the interview in the repertoire of speech events of middle-class speakers of American English (Grimshaw 1969, 1969-70; Strauss and Schatzman

1955; Wolfson 1976). When consultants are not accustomed to playing this particular game, however, they are unlikely to accept this suppression of normal social criteria. An understanding of the participants' social personas and the norms that inform interactions between such persons thus becomes crucial. Likewise, I have noted in preceding paragraphs that the respondent may frame the "interview" as another type of communicative event. This possibility must be considered, because other categories of events have their own structures of social roles. This new set of roles may in turn invoke distinct interactional norms and canons for the generation and interpretation of signs. Differences between the interviewer and the interviewees' perceptions of the roles they are assuming in the encounter will thus profoundly affect the sort of text that is produced and how it is to be read.

An example should bring out the importance of these considerations and illustrate the intimacy of the connection between social roles and types of communicative events. Having entered Córdoba unmarried and only nineteen years of age, I was not seen as being fully adult. I was similarly ignorant of *Mexicano* culture and of local norms of comportment. Although I spoke Spanish, I was only beginning to learn the local dialect, and I had little grasp of New Mexican Spanish discourse structure. Quite properly (and most fortunately), the Lópezes and other Córdovans took it upon themselves to teach me to behave in accordance with basic *Mexicano* values. Given the community's distrust of Anglo-Americans, these individuals took this goal quite seriously. Conversational etiquette is obviously a central feature of proper comportment, especially in a society that places great emphasis on rhetorical ability.

In view of the fact that I had not yet reached even the status of *muchacho* (literally 'boy', meaning 'young man'), the culturally appropriate response to the situation would have been to spend a great deal of time around the elders, pay close attention to everything that was said, and to speak, by and large, only when a response was elicited from me. As I acquired more competence both socially and linguistically, it became appropriate as well to ask questions that related directly to statements that one of these individuals made in the course of his or her pedagogy. The generation of questions that did not directly spring from my seniors' discourse counted, however, as original utterances. The right to produce original questions or statements had to be earned, in this speech community, by demonstrating rhetorical competence. Although I achieved this level in time, this did not happen until I had aged a few years, spent a certain amount of time in the community, and acquired most of the features of the dialect.

Therefore, most of the utterances that were addressed to me, espe-

cially by the elders, were pedagogical in nature. The Lópezes regarded our conversations about Córdoba and its carvers as expectable and necessary pedagogical sessions. They deemed it appropriate to convey the subjects of their own choosing through a combination of their own metacommunicative routines—primarily nonverbal lessons in wood carving and highly articulate performances of personal narratives, oral traditions, scriptural allusions, proverbs, jokes, and so forth.

I classified the communicative events as falling under the aegis of "interview," however, not as pedagogy. I accordingly made repeated attempts to convey to my consultants the nature of my involvement in the community as anthropological research. Conforming to my own definition of the situation, I posed basic questions about the carved images of the saints, the carving process, the earliest carvers in the community, and so on. The couple's responses consisted largely of *Ooo, pos, ¿quién sabe!* 'Oh, well, who knows!' and of one-sentence "answers" followed by 'that's it' or 'now you've got your story'. I eventually realized that the Lópezes were implicitly telling me that they could not accept my attempted reversal of the appropriate social roles. If the elders had allowed me to lure them into traditional interviews, they would have accepted a subordinate role in a conversation with a rhetorical incompetent.

Given the society's emphasis on maintaining patterns of respect for one's elders and of demonstrating rhetorical competence, the carvers had to preserve their control over topical selection and interactional strategy. Toleration of a reversal of social roles would have similarly undermined their position as my primary pedagogues in the community, in addition to being highly self-effacing. The political implications of allowing a younger person who was much less versed in the community's history and traditions to dominate the conversation were hardly lost on the Lópezes and their contemporaries.

The effects of my attempts to impose my own metacommunicative strategies on my consultants also made it quite difficult for me to see that they were presenting me with extremely valuable material. The nature of their resistance to my research strategy not only revealed a great deal of information about themselves and their art, but it articulated the location of this enterprise within a broader semiotic framework. Their pedagogy embodied the complex interpenetration of visual and verbal modes of constructing and transmitting artistic messages. The derivation of their pedagogical tools from their own metacommunicative strategies provides a striking illustration of the process of acquiring competence in this semiotic system. My epistemological preconceptions suggested to me, however, that exegesis was properly obtained by asking questions and obtaining explicit answers.

Fortunately my interest in gaining sociolinguistic competence facilitated my acquisition of conversational norms. I was thus learning other metacommunicative strategies, even though I still attempted to elicit exegesis through interviews. This permitted me to utilize a broader range of metacommunicative devices in my research (see Chapter 4) once I finally accepted the limitations on the usefulness of interviewing in this speech community.

From hindsight to foresight

This chapter has surveyed a number of different types of communicative problems that threaten the success of interviews and the interpretation of interview data. As an initial means of addressing this complex nexus of methodological issues, I focused on a number of basic components of the communicative event. I attempted to demonstrate how a lack of agreement between interviewer and respondent on the nature and role of any one of these components can jeopardize the interviewing process. This chapter did not, nevertheless, address two of the most basic questions.

First, my analysis was primarily directed at the problems that can be identified in a given corpus of interviews. Researchers should find it useful as a retrospective tool, for example, in sharpening their analysis of interview data. A thorough proposal for methodological advancement must also provide a means of *foreseeing* where interview techniques will conflict with native metacommunicative repertoires. This will assist fieldworkers in avoiding communicative blunders in the first place.

Second, the preceding discussion has focused on a description and analysis of common types of interviewing problems. I would like to suggest, however, that significant methodological headway can only emerge once a clear understanding of the roots of methodological problems has been gained. Given the close interrelation of methodological and theoretical issues, part of the task is to ferret out the problematic theoretical assumptions that have become embedded in methodological principles. I will devote myself to this problem in Chapter 6.

With respect to research in a particular society, discovery of the provenance of interviewing problems can only proceed from awareness of the norms that shape the way people talk about communication. My communicative blunders did not simply result from a lack of agreement between myself and my consultants with respect to individual speech-event components. *Mexicanos*, like the members of any speech commu-

nity, have a repertoire of native metacommunicative routines that are used in teaching members how to describe, evaluate, and interpret communicative events. An adequate understanding of the source of interviewing problems must emerge from a comparison of interviews and native metacommunicative routines as wholes and of their role in the acquisition of social-cultural and linguistic competence. I accordingly move to an analysis of *Mexicano* metacommunication in Chapter 4.

5. Listen before you leap: toward methodological sophistication

I must admit to having painted a critical picture of the state of interviewing in the social sciences and linguistics. I initiated the discussion by pointing to a number of serious flaws in the literature on interviewing and by relating the persistence of crucial theoretical problems to a lack of methodological sophistication. Chapter 3 pointed to some of the procedural problems that can impede interviewing and can create serious problems in analyzing the data. I argued in Chapter 4 that native metacommunicative routines can inform the use of interview techniques in a given culture as well as provide precisely the types of data that are crucial for many problems in social scientific research.

It would thus be far from surprising if the reader were to have gained the impression that I am attempting to convince researchers to stop interviewing altogether. Indeed I am not. Interviews are highly useful tools for exploring a host of problems. As noted in Chapter 1, the theoretical and methodological insights that have emerged from such fields as the ethnography of communication, conversational analysis, language acquisition research, and other fields have provided us with the skills necessary for conducting and analyzing interviews in a more appropriate fashion.

Similarly, I am not arguing that greater methodological sophistication can only be gained through becoming a sociolinguist or at least developing more interest in the communicative dimensions of the interview than in the problems under study. This is hardly an all-or-nothing affair. It would be unrealistic to expect survey researchers who work with large populations to fully investigate the communicative norms of all potential respondents. Such a proposal would be seriously counterproductive, because it would lead most practitioners to dismiss these criticisms on the grounds that they could never satisfy them. It would also serve to widen the gap between researchers who lack interest in the ethnographic and linguistic communicative knowledge that underlies their data-collection techniques and practitioners who study communicative processes but lack interest in broader social issues.

substantial geographic area. It would be hard in any case to convince most funding agencies that a large amount of money should be allocated for research that is preliminary to an exploration of the ostensive goals of the study.

There are a number of ways in which researchers can, however, gain greater awareness of communicative patterns in the population in question within the temporal and monetary constraints faced by most survey projects. First, sociolinguists have now conducted studies in urban environments; these range from microanalyses of small groups or specific situations to macro studies of the relationship between linguistic and social-cultural features of large populations. Labov, for example, has explored speech patterns in New York City from the level of narrative construction by members of specific youth gangs to broad correlations of phonological and syntactic features with such variables as class, ethnicity, education, and so on (1966, 1972a, 1972b). Fishman (1964, 1966; Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta 1968) has analyzed sociolinguistic patterns on an even larger scale. Some dimensions of communication in modern society, particularly in educational settings, have formed the subject of fairly extensive ethnographies of communication. Obviously, not every problem and community have been studied, but the literature can be most useful in giving researchers a sense of the range of sociolinguistic variation they are likely to encounter once the interviewing has begun.

Researchers are also well advised to conduct a limited amount of sociolinguistic fieldwork on the native metacommunicative routines that relate to the focus of the survey. The idea here is to interact with members of the population in a variety of situations, particularly those in which the relevant matters are likely to be broached. It might be possible, for example, to tape-record a public meeting where pertinent issues are raised. A careful analysis of the transcript will reveal some of the ways in which such topics are appropriately introduced in formal settings.

An example of how a modicum of research on metacommunicative routines can improve interview techniques is provided by research I conducted with Sherolyn Smith in Gallup, New Mexico (Smith and Briggs 1972). Our task was to provide the City of Gallup with data that would enable planners to gauge how a neighborhood facility center then under construction could best meet the needs of area residents. A survey instrument was administered to a 10 percent random sample.

The instrument had been pretested and revised. No effort was made, however, to conduct preliminary research on the ways in which residents would discuss such topics in other contexts. The situation was complicated by the fact that the population of Gallup is ethnically quite

complex, consisting primarily of Zuni and Navajo (Native American), Mexican-American, Black, and Anglo-American residents.

One question was designed to elicit information on the range of services in the facilities center that the respondent and her or his family would use, if available. In conducting the interviews, I noted that the numbers were much lower for Navajo respondents than for members of the other groups. These data seemed to lend themselves to the interpretation that Navajo residents were less interested in using the services than were the other residents.

Fortunately, I began conducting informal ethnographic research with Navajo and Mexican-American residents. After spending a minimal amount of time with Navajo families, I learned it was deemed highly inappropriate to speculate on the behavior or beliefs of others. The danger here is that such talk might be seen as a usurpation of the individual's own decision-making power, which would be construed as an attack on the person's integrity (cf. Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946: 302, 309-10). Speculating on the preferences of one's spouse and children would accordingly be deemed extremely rude. Rather than do so, Navajo respondents would estimate which services they themselves were likely to use. The use of a probe to obtain data on other family members generally yielded statements such as "No, I don't think so." The data thus reflected a gap between the presuppositions of the questions and the conversational maxims of native speakers of Navajo rather than a lack of interest in these services.

Simply using the question in a pretest did not expose the problem, because the pretest did not provide information on Navajo metacommunicative norms. The lack of such insight introduced a clear source of bias into the data, and it placed Navajo respondents in an uncomfortable position. The point is that the investment of a minimal amount of time in discovering these communicative patterns *before* designing the instrument would have circumvented the problem.

Phase 2: designing an appropriate methodology

Most practitioners have at least some idea as to the problem they plan to investigate and the research methods and methodology they will use before inaugurating their research. It is nearly always necessary to modify both to some degree in the course of the research. Freilich (1970) recommends to anthropologists that the "active" phase of research, that which is focused on the fieldworker's own interests, be preceded by a period of passive research. The passive phase serves as a guide for reformulating plans for the active. Such changes are, however, generally

undertaken on an ad hoc basis. The difficulty here seems to be that modifications of research methods have heretofore been seen as responses to specific obstacles. As Freilich (1970:25) puts it:

For example, a strict sampling may not be possible if local customs prohibit [the anthropologist] from interviewing particular people or groups; if the subject matter central to the project's goals is too sensitive to be researched, due to the internal problems of the system being studied; or if important informants do not cooperate with the researcher because of his nationality, race, sex, or religious affiliation.

Such specific circumstances do need to be borne in mind. But this stopgap approach falls far short of an adequate adaptation to local social-cultural and communicative norms.

I suggest that systematic data collection should be guided by systematic examination of the best methods for conducting research on the chosen problem in the society in question. I see two considerations as being particularly important here.

First, the results of Phase 1 should inform an in-depth investigation of the points of compatibility and incompatibility between interview techniques and the local metacommunicative repertoire. This will suggest which topics can be explored in the course of interviews and which social situations are appropriate for interviewing. Again, the negative results are equally important—what issues will have to be explored by other means. This examination will also assist the researcher in selecting the most suitable interview techniques and in modifying them in order to increase their compatibility with local communicative practices. As was suggested in Chapter 3, such an exercise will help the researcher avoid the procedural problems that threaten rapport, disrupt interviews, and greatly confound the analysis of interview data.

Second, as I argue in Chapter 6, interview techniques rely primarily on the referential or descriptive function of language and on knowledge that lies within, in Silverstein's (1981a) terms, the limits of awareness of speakers. This means that interviews will be totally ineffectual in dealing with some topics, and they certainly will exclude important facets of those subjects that can be treated in interviews. It is thus crucial to design a methodological plan in such a way that interview data are systematically supplemented with other types of information whenever possible.

I pointed out in Chapter 4 that a close analysis of native metacommunicative routines can provide rich data on problems of interest to social scientists. These routines, rooted in the society's communicative patterns and closely tied to the social context of the interaction, are less likely to be idealized or decontextualized than are responses to

interview questions. Accordingly, they are less subject to the imposition of the researcher's own categories and presuppositions on the data. This recommendation is hardly unprecedented, because writers who focus on methodology often note that interviews should be supplemented by observation (Johnson 1975; Langness and Frank 1981:50; Pelto and Pelto 1978:74; Riley and Nelson 1974; Spradley 1979:32; Webb et al. 1966; Whyte 1943:29–30; Williams 1967:28).

My recommendation goes beyond this basic principle. I am rather proposing a *systematic* integration of a wide range of metacommunicative routines into research methodological guidelines. I would also like to suggest that the process of selecting these routines and determining their role in the research be based on a preceding analysis of the society's communicative patterns.

One methodological concern that is generally seen as relatively minor weighs quite heavily in this type of analysis. The abbreviatory nature of notes taken during or after interviews or other interactions may preserve a good deal of the *referential content* of the utterances, but the *form* will prove elusive. On the other hand, tape-recording interviews and other events is quite important. This enables the researcher to conduct a detailed study of the form of the discourse in these events. One of the most important issues I have raised is that formal features, from the smallest details to the largest structural units, index the metacommunicative properties of the speech. The sensitive researcher may be able to discern some of the metacommunicative features; such properties are, however, extremely subtle, and most are not consciously accessible in the course of an event. Tape recordings, on the other hand, can be reviewed time after time, transcribed closely, and can be presented to one's consultants for comment.

Tape recordings are also interpretively open-ended, like any text in the native language. As the researcher's social-cultural and linguistic competence grows, new dimensions become apparent. New theoretical understandings can similarly be applied to the original recordings to see if they can resolve persistent problems. Notes are frozen at the level of competence possessed by the researcher at the time of their writing, and they are much less useful in exploring new theoretical orientations.

The situation with videotaping is less clear, in my opinion. I have used it, and quite successfully, I think, during my two most recent field stays. I formerly based my hypotheses about the nonverbal correlates of speech events on my memory of the most salient gestures, body postures, and so on. The videotapes show the nonverbal components in detail, and this has greatly added to my understanding of the contextualization of the verbal forms. I have also had much better results in

eliciting commentary from participants with video rather than audio recordings. Consultants greatly enjoy seeing themselves on their own television sets, and they often become quite voluble. One elder became nearly ecstatic while viewing the tape of the conversation we had just completed, and commented in detail on the historical and cultural bases of his statements. After the tape was over, he noted 'This is a very important day for me, Carlos. I had never even heard the sound of my own voice before now.'

On the other hand, video equipment is vastly more intrusive than a small cassette tape recorder with built-in condenser microphone. I find that the presence of the video camera often gives me, as the researcher, much more control over the interaction. Although awareness of the recording equipment decreases over time, the participants do not become oblivious, as witnessed by references to the presence of the camera. This enhanced self-consciousness can lead to a shaping of one's behavior in accordance with the image one wishes to project. Speakers thus focus more on monitoring the referential content of their words; this frequently inhibits the use of very context-sensitive forms, such as proverbs.

This process of accommodating interactional patterns to the presence of the camera does not render the data invalid or useless. The point is not to attempt to eliminate the effects of the researcher's own presence, a fruitless and theoretically unsound goal. The impact of the video equipment on the speech event can provide fascinating insights with regard to which facets of communication lie within the limits of awareness and the conscious control of natives. Nevertheless, videotaping should be carefully complemented by audiotaping and observation. As is the case with tape-recording, awareness of local communicative norms will help the researcher gauge when it will be appropriate to record and how taping is likely to affect the interaction.

Phase 3: reflexivity in the interviewing process

Once the interviewing has begun, this sketch of the local communicative economy should inform periodic checks on the effectiveness of one's interviews. A good means of undertaking such an evaluation is to analyze a selected interview in detail; a tape-recorded example is a far more reliable source for this task than a reconstruction. Some revision of the Jakobson-Hymes model of the communicative event, such as the one I presented in Figure 2, provides a good starting point for initiating such evaluations. Each of the components—interviewer, respondent, audience, message form, reference, channel, code, social

roles, interactional goals, social situation, and type of communicative event (along with key, genre, and other factors that prove to be important to one's own situation)—should be examined in terms of their role in shaping the meaning of what is said by both parties.

This analysis of the manner in which the researcher's and the consultants' conversational norms are juxtaposed in the interview will increase the former's awareness of the conversational loci of procedural problems. It will enable the investigator to discern where she or he has misconstrued the meaning of the responses, thus heading off possible errors in the interpretation of the data. Likewise, periodic evaluations will enable the researcher to progressively reduce the scope of the difficulties that procedural problems pose for the success of the research. This awareness can permit researchers to avoid the faux pas that reduce the coherence of the discourse and render their interviewees less willing and able to respond.

Going over selected interviews with consultants can be quite useful. Such assistance can be obtained by soliciting aid in transcribing and/or interpreting the interview. I have learned a great deal by turning on a tape recorder while I replay a videotape of an interview or other speech event with the participants. They frequently go into great detail with respect to why they made a given statement, why it is true, how others would disagree, and so on. My experience suggests, however, that the interviewees themselves are less likely to point out the ways in which the researcher has violated the norms of the speech situation or misconstrued the meaning of an utterance than are persons who did not participate in the initial interview.

Microanalyses of interviews will in turn provide a new source of comparison with data from other communicative events. Paying attention to the different ways in which topics are addressed in different social situations will help round out, so to speak, impressions derived from a given means of data acquisition. Once again, such comparisons will enable the researcher to see more clearly where interviews will produce gaps in the data. Analysis of the interviews and their juxtaposition with metacommunicative material from other events will permit ongoing revisions in research plans. It may be necessary to explore a wider range of speech events or to change one's mode of participation in them in order to obtain information on certain topics. It might, for example, be wise to ask a native or a co-researcher of the opposite sex to record a given event if one's presence is precluding certain types of discussion. I also think it is particularly important to look over as many of the research results as possible about three months before completing the study. This will minimize the possibility that major hiatus will plague the interpretation and write-up of the materials.

Phase 4: analyzing interviews

If I were to try to put my finger on the single most serious shortcoming relating to the use of interviews in the social sciences, it would certainly be the commonsensical, unreflexive manner in which most analyses of interview data are conducted. As Cicourel (1974c:22) has put it, "questions and answers are presumed to possess 'obvious' significance." It is simply assumed that different responses to roughly the same question are comparable. The usual practice thus consists of extracting statements that pertain to a given theme, event, symbol, or what have you from field notes or transcriptions. These responses are then juxtaposed, yielding a composite picture of things that seem to go together in the eyes of the researcher on the basis of referential, decontextualized content.

With respect to anthropological fieldwork, this technique used to serve as a starting point for analysis when ethnographers were urged to file their field notes directly into categories provided by Murdock et al.'s *Outline of Cultural Materials* (1950) or the Royal Anthropological Institute's *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (1951). Some researchers now index their field notes and/or transcriptions in terms of major dates, events, names, and the like; they then feed this information into a computer. At the push of a button, the machine accomplishes their decontextualization for them automatically.¹

The development of a more sophisticated approach to the analysis of interview data is imperative. The communicative blunders described in Chapter 3 point to the complexity of the interview process and to the many factors that can give rise to procedural problems. Yet the goal of analysis cannot simply be to control for or eliminate such problems. This approach would preserve the fallacy that underlies the "bias" research on the interview I critiqued in the first chapter. Interviews are cooperative products of interactions between two or more persons who assume different roles and who frequently come from contrasting social, cultural, and/or linguistic backgrounds. A mode of analysis that envisions interview data as, even ideally, a direct outpouring of the interviewees' thoughts or attitudes obscures the nature of the interview as a social interaction and a communicative event. Such a perspective also misses the point that the interview situation itself is a rich source of data if it is viewed as an object of analysis as well as a research tool.

One of the major findings that emerged from an analysis of my own communicative blunders is that *the communicative structure of the en-*

tire interview affects the meaning of each utterance. To cite one instance: My initial interviews with Silvanita and George López were strained and relatively unproductive, and it was many years before I was able to appreciate why this had been the case. I had never considered the possibility that the Lópezes might not accept my definition of our interactions as interviews. The Lópezes viewed these sessions as pedagogical encounters between two elders and a young person with little knowledge of the community, *Mexicano* culture, or New Mexican Spanish. Even after I published a volume on the Lópezes and other carvers (1980), the couple told their visitors that I had come to learn how to carve. (They noted that I had indeed become a proficient carver but then, for some reason, had given up the work.)

My initial questions met with responses that seemed superficial or irrelevant or with a strident 'Who knows!' Overlooking their perception of our relationship would lead me to believe that they were fairly ignorant of the history of their family and its carving. What they were really trying to get across, in fact, was that I had to learn to respect them as elders as well as to discover which questions were relevant to them and the basic cultural assumptions that underlie the answers.

A different sort of example is provided by my misinterpreting statements when I did not take the speaker's interactional goals into account. For instance, my question, 'Were there any *ricos* here in bygone days?' emerged from my desire to collect data on the history of social inequality in the community. Mr. Trujillo was willing to help me satisfy my need for such information. But his answer also addressed his own desire to induce me to internalize basic *Mexicano* values of religiosity and corporatism. This anecdote exposes a very general phenomenon. The unifunctional utterance, one that accomplishes only one communicative function, is rare, at least in conversation. Statements nearly always relate to two or more features of the communicative situation, such as distinct interactional goals, at the same time. If one considers each "answer" only in the context of the preceding question, then a great deal of meaning will be lost.

What is needed is a means of interpreting interview data that will assess the manner in which each statement fits into this communicative web and will thus have the best chance of yielding an adequate interpretation of its meaning. I thus propose a two-step process, one that begins with the structure of each interview as an interactional whole and then proceeds to the identification of the metacommunicative properties of the individual utterances.

The structure of the interview

I will draw on the Jakobson-Hymes model of the communicative event (see Figure 2) in framing my remarks on the structure of the interview as a whole. The model simply serves as a heuristic device in assessing the range of elements that *might* be of importance in a given interview. Researchers will certainly have discovered by this point, however, that some of the Jakobson-Hymes components may play a relatively insignificant role in any particular interaction or perhaps in a given speech community as a whole. Similarly, elements that do not figure in the analytic model may prove crucial. Researchers should have developed a good working sense of each major type of speech situation regarding the range of components that should be checked and of the range of communicative functions they can convey.

Perhaps the most basic maxim to be followed is that the interview must be analyzed as a whole before any of its component utterances are interpreted. This process can proceed much more quickly and adequately if the researcher takes relatively detailed notes on each interview. Once the interview is over (and generally after returning to one's residence), the investigator should note important facts that will not appear on the record of the interview itself, be it a tape recording or a video recording or a set of notes. Detailed notes on the setting, participants, time of day, ongoing social or ritual events, and so forth should be complemented by the researcher's perceptions of the interaction. This procedure may be impractical when the project focuses on quantitative analysis of data from a large survey. The inclusion of even minimal contextual information at the end of the schedule would, however, greatly facilitate interpretation of the statistical patterns.

In beginning the analysis, compare such notes with the transcript (if available). What major themes were stressed in each participant's statements? How was each reacting to the interview and to the other participants? As argued in Chapter 3, it is particularly important to look for possible divergences in interactional goals, perceptions of the nature and purpose of the interaction, and the like. If these cues are missed, they are likely to lead the researcher to misconstrue his or her consultants' remarks.

A second step is to map out the linear structure of the interview. Many interviews proceed from informal conversation to introductory statements and/or questions, to broad questions, to more detailed questions, and then return to informal dialogue before the participants shift to other activities or the researcher leaves. Significant interactional units may also be segmented by the arrival or departure of

participants, movements from one topical focus to another, activities (such as cooking, eating, or working) occurring simultaneously, and the like. This sketch should indicate major changes in key, tone, or genre.

The initial stage of the analysis thus consists of identifying the components of the interview and interpreting their communicative functions. It may be useful to plot the most important features on a series of sheets of paper. A visual representation is helpful in discerning the outlines of the communicative forest from amid its many trees. However one may approach it, a synthesis of the components and functions is the next step. As Jakobson (1960), Mukařovský (1977a, 1977b), and others have argued, the meaning of an utterance or other sign is tied to the *interaction* of its constituent components and their functions. Even if a response appears to be oriented toward the referential function—providing information on the topic specified in the question—its meaning is dependent as well on the coexisting communicative functions. The interview is a gestalt produced by the interaction of all these parts. In assessing the role each element plays in this process, consider the manner in which the functioning of each component is affected by the roles of the others. For example, code-switching between Spanish and English is affected by the competence of the participants in each language, the social relationship between them, the topics under discussion, the social situation (e.g., formal vs. informal, ritual vs. everyday), the genre and key of the discourse, and so on.

Interpreting individual utterances

We are now in a position to be able to address the needs of the researcher who is really not interested in the interview *qua* speech event, but in the bearing of a series of responses on the topic at hand. The proposed mode of analysis provides both a head start and some insurance for the interpretation of individual statements. Having identified the utterances that address the subject in question, the analyst can focus on ascertaining how the specific utterances fit into the broad communicative outlines that have been sketched for the interview as a whole. As Agar and Hobbs (1982) have shown, the meaning of a response may emerge from its relation to utterances at any point in the preceding discourse. A few hours of auditing tapes, reading notes and transcripts, and thinking about the interview places one in the best position for discerning the broader significance of the responses. This greatly decreases the danger of coming up with narrow or erroneous interpretations.

Metacommunicative features. Two concepts, metacommunication and contextualization, provide excellent keys to the interpretation of individual statements. In studying the metacommunicative properties of utterances, we are examining their capacity for simultaneously commenting on communicative processes (including the interaction itself) and indicating a referent.² This task has been stimulated in recent years by the advent of ethnopoetics. Hymes (1981) in particular has shown how a close analysis of the *form* of oral literature provides a sounder basis for interpretation than deductions based on content alone.

This leads me to the proposition that speech, whether contained in interviews, myths, or "natural" conversations, provides an ongoing interpretation of its own significance. This interpretation is conveyed mainly in stylistic terms. Thus, if the analyst pays close attention to how a statement is made, he or she will find clues to the interpretation the speaker wishes to attach, so to speak, to the words. These stylistic cues can be (and usually are) embedded in any part of the message form, including its visual (gesture, gaze, proxemics, etc.), prosodic (intonation, loudness, stress, vowel length, phrasing, pitch, etc.), and verbal dimensions. Lexical selection, pronominalization, verb tense and aspect, the operation of optional syntactic transformations, and the like enable speakers to choose between referentially equivalent forms that will convey entirely different messages about the topic in question.

Both the range of stylistic devices within individual languages and the variation between languages preclude offering any simple formulas for discerning the interpretations embedded in texts. But the researcher will already have two useful tools for interpreting utterances. First, the researcher can draw on her or his analysis of the overall structure of the interview. This should provide a good sense of the range of factors that shape specific statements. Here the exceptions prove the rule: The key to the meaning of individual utterances often lies in their *departure* from the communicative norms of the conversation as a whole. Sudden changes in prosodic features, lexical range, or other stylistic elements frequently point to the presence of a new interpretive frame, such as sarcasm or joking. Likewise, many metacommunicative devices function similarly to the conversational metasigns described in Chapter 3 in that they serve to articulate the relationship between individual utterances and the overall structure of the discourse. Having this broader frame in mind is the best insurance against overlooking the presence of these forms and the ways in which they shape the meaning of responses.

A second tool for discerning the metacommunicative properties of interview responses will already be in the researcher's hands at this

point. The findings from Phase 1 of the research will have attuned the investigator to a wide range of metacommunicative forms and functions used in that speech community. The analysis of native metacommunicative routines is particularly useful in this regard. Our ability to interpret the role of metacommunication in interviews is frustrated by the nature of the interview as a communicative event. Interviews are attractive in that they present the possibility of gathering a mass of data on topics selected by the researcher in a short amount of time. Researcher and interviewee implicitly agree to foreground the referential function of language and to suppress most of the stylistic and social constraints that normally impinge on transmission of information on these topics (i.e., as they are conveyed in ritual, production, etc.).

This does not engender a total dearth of metacommunicative elements; it does, however, greatly reduce the degree to which they rise into consciousness, particularly that of the interviewer. When it comes to native metacommunicative routines, however, this bias toward the referential coding and the decontextualization of forms is generally absent. In transferring awareness of the role of metacommunicative elements from the latter realm to the former, we increase our chances of perceiving the role of these processes.

Contextualization. I have argued that discourse contains features that signal (generally implicitly) how messages are to be read. This led me to suggest ways of enhancing our ability to read the interpretation embedded in the text. These procedures are designed to reduce our tendency to propound interpretations that have little basis in the text itself. This does not mean, however, that "reading" texts, be they interviews or anything else, is a mechanical process that draws on the interpreter's consciousness as a mere scanning instrument. The basic task is still the same: trying to figure out what the devil that person was trying to get across. The procedure is similarly analogous—examining the myriad details of what is said and done in order to connect them in such a way that the interpreter feels relatively confident that she or he has made sense of the discourse.

Looking for metacommunicative elements enables the researcher to base his or her interpretation on what the speaker is saying not only about "the world out there" but also about the researcher's own words and the manner in which the utterances as a whole relate to the circumstances of their production. This does not, however, guarantee that the interpreter will have identified all of the metacommunicative features and grasped their communicative functions. Is there no way of rechecking one's perceptions against the text, that is, asking the speakers if we have understood them?

tant for two reasons. First, it is important that the researcher does not simply preserve the misunderstandings of the interview, both his or her own and those of the interviewees, in the course of the analysis. If the respondent did not understand the question and the analyst does not realize this, the meaning of her or his "answer" will be distorted.

The second reason involves the value of these "errors" as sources of data. As scholars have long noted with respect to metaphor and ambiguity (cf. Fernandez 1972, 1974, 1977; Ricoeur 1977; Sapir and Crocker 1977), disentangling cases in which interpretive frameworks are not fully specified or are shared only in part can provide powerful insights into the nature of social-cultural and communicative norms. Some of the most interesting situations emerge when the participants realize that something has gone awry. This usually invokes procedures for renegotiating a common frame. (See Jefferson [1972] on "side sequences" and Churchill [1978] on mechanisms for repairing procedural problems.)

These moments provide particularly fruitful means of comprehending interpretive frames: Calling the contextualization process into question brings it much closer to the surface of consciousness. Both referential and other communicative functions are brought to bear reflexively on the task of interpretation. Researchers may thus profit from paying close attention to the way their consultants check to see if they share a common interpretation of the meaning of what is being said and how they deal with situations in which this is not the case.³

Studying the manner in which participants in interviews monitor each other's interpretive frames still does not guarantee the analyst that his or her account is correct and/or exhaustive. It and the other steps outlined in this chapter do, however, enable researchers to base their interpretations as much as possible on those of the respondents. The technique leads the analyst away from literal, narrowly referential meanings and toward grasping the broader pragmatic significance of what is said. The procedure helps the investigator avoid the errors in interpretation that result from differences in communicative as well as basic social-cultural norms between researcher and consultants. The preceding discussion of malcomprehension points to the way in which greater methodological sophistication can turn interviewing pitfalls into important sources of data. In a word, developing interview techniques that fit the metacommunicative norms of the society in question provides a basis for overcoming a number of the problems that have diminished the depth and the accuracy of social-scientific research.

Presuming that the researcher has now grasped the significance of the interview data, the question then becomes one of the best way to

present these findings. Obviously, this process follows from the proclivities and the research interests of the individual. I would like to argue, however, for the importance of describing not only the content of respondent statements but their interpretive framework as well. Since the metacommunicative dimensions inform the investigator's analysis, readers must be provided with at least a sketch of such features if they are to be in a position to judge the interpretation competently.

One way to answer this challenge is to provide substantial excerpts from the transcripts, either in the text or in appendixes. It is important to resist standard editorial policies and the urgings of many manuals⁴ that prescribe deletion of both the interviewer's questions and all back channel cues from the transcripts. As the reader will certainly have gathered from the preceding pages, this method does expose the role of the researcher, including his or her ungrammatical sentences, faux pas, and general naiveté. Now that arguments for the obligation of the practitioner to account for her or his own contribution to the data-collection process are becoming more prevalent and more forceful,⁵ however, the mask of "scientific objectivity" no longer provides such an effective means of avoiding this kind of exposure.