

**DOING FIELD RESEARCH IN JOURNALISM AND ETHNOGRAPHY.  
RELATIONSHIP WITH SOURCES OF DOCUMENTATION**

**Ionuț Suci**

**Assoc. Prof., PhD, West University of Timișoara**

*Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyze the common aspects as well as the elements that differentiate field work in journalism and ethnography, applied to the way in which the relationship with information sources is being made. The starting point is the theory developed by the cultural anthropologist Henri H. Stahl, according to which the most difficult part of the monographic work is the contact with the informants. It does not depend on the application of some rules or on a working technique, but rather on the talent and common sense of each researcher. The paper approaches the difficulties of direct contact with the sources of documentation for both domains, given that the informants are reticent at first with both the journalist and the ethnologist, while accepting the dialogue is not a guarantee of success as the problem of changing their behavior may arise. On the other hand, one can reach the other extreme either when a close relationship with a source is created or if the informant has an interest in the information that he offers to be published. In journalism, these cases can lead to atypical situations if the source is incriminated in a problem, and there is the risk that the resulting material is not entirely objective. Theoreticians in both areas emphasize that the duty of the field man (whether working in ethnography or journalism) is to get the informant to talk and lead him to his field of interest. But it is not enough for him to open conversations, because the man, left to his will, will speak all that is of interest to him at the time. However, there are also major differences in the approach of the sources by the specialists in the two areas. For example, ethnographic documentation allows both consecutive interviewing of the same informant by several different scholars, as well as the existence of a collective interview, aspects used in journalism only in very rare cases. Another difference concerns the processing of data collected by ethnographers and journalists. In the first case, tables or graphs are used, maps are compiled and statistics are compiled. Here, the researcher includes all possible cases; while in journalism, even when drawing charts and tables, the reader is given only the examples considered most relevant. The differences can be explained by the dissimilar focus of the two specializations, but also by the different working conditions, starting from the deadline that the journalist has to respect, which generates time limits for the documentation. As a direct consequence, the perishable of the finished product will be directly proportional to the time it takes to achieve it.*

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Direct contact with sources of documentation may raise difficulties in both journalism and ethnography, depending on how the researcher or the journalist is perceived by the individual or community. As both are regarded with reserve at first, it is up to one's flair to be able to persuade the interlocutor to provide him with the information he desires. That is why theorists recommend field exploration and contacting people before making the proper documentation. In many cases, journalists resort to the authorities in the area (more familiar with the press and perhaps even willing to appear in it) to get into contact with the desired sources. But even when they accept the dialogue, the problem of change of behavior may occur. In an eagerness, the informant could change his speech, even his accent, which, under ethnolinguistic research, could affect the results of the study. But the reactions can continue and the informant can omit or add new elements to habits, due to the desire to impress.

Fieldwork experience proves that there are essential stylistic differences between the variant of a story told in front of the tape recorder, only in the presence of the researcher and the stories narrated in the natural environment. In these cases, the ethnologist can return to the same informant until he becomes familiar with him. Instead, the journalist does not, due to reasons that refer to time and delivery deadlines. However, he also uses the phone to reach his sources. Although this method of communication eliminates the emotions of dialogue with an unknown, it can increase the reticence of the informant.

In fact, Henri H. Stahl admitted that the most difficult part of the monographic work is the contact with the informants. It does not depend on the application of rules or a working technique, but rather on the talent and common sense of each researcher. "You can be a wonderful theorist and not have the gift of talking to someone else, you can not distinguish whether you have a man who is lying to you or who is sincere" (Stahl, 1934, p. 9). However, Stahl offers a recommendation for ethnologists, which can also be taken up by journalists: not only to work with informants who welcome you from the beginning, but also with those who have made them a non-hospital reception. These will not be few, because the practical necessity obliges the researcher, when coming to a village, to contact the officials and leaders, which will in turn attract a further refusal from the village's dissatisfied. But there is also a reversal of the medal, because, according to their own experience, once they are convinced to cooperate, they become the best informants.

Documentary film director Stefan Fischer explains that when interviewing, he first tries to understand the world of the interviewee and find the right tone for addressing. He recounts that in 1999, when he made a film about Azerbaijan's oil reserves, he had interviewed the country's president, a very controversial figure, as Western press had presented him as a dictator in whose country human rights were not respected. "His cabinet chief, who had got the interview for me, was shaking behind me, he knew that, in case of an inconvenient question, the dictator he could kill him. I tried to translate into the President's skin, who did a lot of bad things, but also a lot of good things, and I thought how I can make him give me an interesting answer, not just political phrases. And then I asked him: 'Mr President, only 11% of the earth's population lives in a Western-style democracy. Do you think that Azerbaijan needs Western democracy?' "The President liked and gave me a worthy response for a great politician" (Fischer, in Ionică, 2013, p.116).

So, the duty of the field man (whether working in ethnography or journalism) is to get the informant to talk and lead him to his field of interest. But it is not enough for him to bind conversations, because the man, left to his will, will speak all that is of interest to him at the time. In fact, the journalism textbooks even contain clear suggestions about this issue: "Master the gossip and make the taciturn speak!" (Mihai Coman, 2001, p. 90). Journalists have the task of bringing the interlocutors back on the way they want, to the intended plan, except for moments in which information received outside the subject can generate new press materials, which also applies to the ethnologist.

### **Initiating the dialogue**

Regarding how to initiate dialogue with the source of documentation, both ethnologists and journalists recommend, by sharing their own experience, a gradual approach to the problem. The interlocutor must feel at ease when the interview takes place, and for this, the reporter or ethnologist must find common subjects of conversation with him. "If meetings take place in his home or office, the journalist can use photographs, paintings, ornaments or souvenirs. Otherwise, he has to consider whether the manifestations of friendship, flattering words, jokes, or serious tones might attract the interviewee to his side" (Randall, 2007, p. 124). Henri H. Stahl applies in the ethnography the same

theory of psychology: "conversation must always start from the things that interest him, from the material objects that are around you, from his household, from his work, from to his immediate need. Only after the conversation is started you can deviate, without him being aware of it, to the issue you are interested in. "(Stahl, p.12) Jock Lauterer explains that in the case of the first-time interviewees the transition from the informal conversation to writing the collected information must be done gradually: "Do not rush the interview. When you no longer have the patience, grab the notebook while you're chatting, but do not just get notes" (Lauterer, 2010, p.190). However, for the television journalist there is a hindrance now that he will have to convince the interlocutor to provide an interview and film it, without changing his attitude or behavior.

In both areas, the formal dialogue takes the form of an interview. Its preparation involves extensive documentation, but also a plan containing a set of issues to be addressed. The interlocutor should be familiar with them so that he can be prepared to provide relevant answers. Unlike the ethnologist, the journalist can also conduct documentary interviews by phone. However, there are also differences in the type of questions addressed to the interlocutors, as well as their formulation. In ethnography, general questions are recommended, leaving room for complete descriptions. The interlocutor is encouraged to narrate, to express opinions, even draw conclusions, without being interrupted, except for the cases when he deviates too much from the subject. Instead, the journalistic interview is characterized by specific, direct questions to the subject. Details are requested and the interlocutor is permanently directed to the desired thread, unless it provides important information about another topic. Even in journalism, it is not recommended to abruptly interrupt the interrogated person.

In journalism, the approach of an interview needs to be adapted to the subject and to the interviewer. Sabina Pop, director of documentary films at the Sahia Studio and the Romanian Television, offers another approach to the interlocutors who are inhibited by the presence of the cameras: "We have always found the camera to inhibit, especially at delicate moments, so I record the interviews on the tape recorder. In my films, I use at most one synchronous head, and the rest are offsets, illustrated with other activities of that character or other realities of the place" (Pop, in Ionica, p. 199). The reporter must also document conflicts (of any kind) and he must state the most likely attitude that the interviewee might have with him or the subject. What's his role in the event? Which part of the barricade is he? (Zimmerman, in Mencher, 1981, p. 289). Depending on this data, the journalist sets out an activity approach that matches the interviewee's probable attitude and which faces the possible defensive. Unlike journalism, there are no such barricades in the ethnography, and informants are not interviewed as part of a conflict.

Another difference lies in the expectations that representatives of the two areas must have from the answers they will receive from their interlocutors. Cornelius Ryan considers that it is not good to interview someone if you are not sure that you can anticipate at least sixty percent of the answers, trying to emphasize the importance of good documentation (Ryan, in Vlad, 1997, p.52). However, the suggestion is not applicable in ethnography, where the informant can give the field man new information that he had no way to know or anticipate.

Research campaigns conducted in teams of several specialists allow ethnographic documentation to be carried out also by consecutive interviewing of the same informant by several researchers specialized in different fields. In this way, specific details can be collected for each part of a ritual, whether we are talking about music, dance or mimics, for example. Also in ethnography the collective interview method is used, especially when the subject is related to a ceremony attended by several people. None of those methods are used in journalism, except for rare exceptions. In relation to the total number of interviews published in printed press, the collective

ones appear in an extremely low proportion, while on television or radio, a variation of it can be considered the talk-show.

### **Preparing questions for interviews**

A feature of ethnographic documentation is the use of the questionnaire. It is made up of specific questions, centered on the desired subject. The method offers benefits but also risks. The researcher can easily make a worksheet based on the responses received, and the possibility for the informant to deviate from the subject is much less. Instead, it may feel like an interrogation because of a series of questions, and an uncomfortable situation can lead to poor results. In addition, the method constrains the source to provide only the strict information that is required. Therefore, it is recommended that the questionnaire method should be merged with free discussion. The questionnaire method is not used in journalism. Reporters are preparing sets of questions, but they can modify or exclude them, depending on the answers they receive. Naturality, spontaneity and rapid response capacity are extremely important in journalism, because an interview can take a completely different course than the one prepared depending on the answers provided by the source.

Transcription of the observations made in the form of conclusions is considered a mistake especially encountered in novice ethnographers. The information should be selected on a case-by-case basis and the scoring should be done on separate tabs, which can be arranged, ranked, so that new information can be interleaved at any time between two cards, depending on where they are assigned. Each fiche must contain a series of information necessary for its understanding: the name of the informant, age, intellectual level, social position, the date of the information being collected, and the name of the author. On a case-by-case basis, the fiche may also contain details that can help to understand the place one occupies in the social group to which he/she belongs. If the author has comments, he will note them separately from the text of the card, or on a new one. (Stahl, p.19) Attached to the card may also be photographs, sketches, maps or other auxiliary materials.

Journalists do not use worksheets, but the agenda is used. Especially in recent years, the customs has changed, as developing technology and reducing the size and weight of laptops has permitted the journalists to take them on the field. Laptops facilitate providing faster information to the editorial staff, both text and at photo, and even recorded video image. Moreover, with an internet connection, reporters come to provide real-time information to the public right from the place of documentation. There is another difference between the two domains, as in ethnography it is recommended that "the texting work, the writing of the texts should never be done in the spotlight and even less directly" (Laplantine, 2000, p.77). There are exceptions too in this case, these being determined by the relationship between the two sides, the researcher and the source of documentation: "If you managed to get in touch with the villager you consider the most valuable informant, it is recommended to seek this friendship, as you will get to ask him precisely what exactly you want to find out from him. In this situation, the notation at leisure and in front of him can be done. Sometimes the informant remembers over the day something that he knows you will be interested in and you will mention in the evening or at dawn that he comes to you and says: 'But you forgot to write this; listen to me!' (Stahl, p. 45). Similar situations take place in journalism, either when creating a close relationship with a source, or if one has an interest in the information he provides to be published. However, there are also atypical situations, because there may be cases when the source is incriminated in a matter, and then the journalist is in a position to overcome his friendship relationship with him. Depending on the deontological degree of the journalist, there is also the risk that the resulting material is not entirely objective.

In terms of material organization, journalists and ethnographers use files marked with keywords in order to make it easier to find; but also electronic agendas where they have noted the main scheduled events; or dated archives of their own material or documentation.

Another element specific to only one of the two areas is the gathering and organizing collections of objects specific to the studied area, practiced only by the ethnologist. He will also set up an inventory, and each item will be assigned a descriptive file. It will be accompanied by several attachments, including photographs and, if possible, video recordings or drawings showing the manipulation of the object, a movement of the hand or foot. These collections are relevant because they help to improve the knowledge of the land's economy, but also because the presence of objects can characterize a certain type of civilization (Mauss, 2003, p. 32).

Data collected from interviews and questionnaires must be processed. In ethnography, tables or graphs are used, maps and statistics are compiled and the researcher includes here all possible cases. Information must be complete, as completeness is a feature of ethnography. Marcel Mauss said that the ethnologist must possess the attitude of being "exact and complete, he must know the meaning of the facts and the relations between them, the sense of proportions and joints" (Mauss, p. 23), while François Laplantine points out that, Franz Boas's works on the Kwakiutl and Chinook populations in Canada show that "everything must be recorded on the ground: starting from the materials from which the houses are built, to the notes of the songs played by the Eskimos, all in the slightest detail" (Laplantine, p.96). The situation is different in journalism, where, even if drawings and charts are drawn up, the reader is given only the examples considered most relevant, because, on the one hand, the limited space in the press does not allow the detailed presentation of all cases, and on the other, things that appear to be common to the reporter or the public are considered meaningless and, as a result, only extremes are kept.

Another distinction between the domains is that in journalism censuses of the communities in which the documentation is conducted are not being done. As about statistics, in journalism they are made up either by reporters or by other people in the editorial office (in large editorial offices there are departments dealing with this aspect), or statistics received from the National Statistics Institute or other institutions are being used. In these cases, the presentation focuses on extremes: who is the first and who is the last in these statistics, who has fallen the most or who has grown the most. Very rare are the cases when statistics are presented in full. The explanation is given primarily by the limited space in the written press or by the limited time of radio or television. There are, however, exceptions: websites build their materials according to the theory of the reversed pyramid (the information is placed in the order in which the editor considers it important to the reader), and for those interested in a particular topic, there is also the option of deepening, either in the same page where the entire statistic can be attached to the end of the material, or by an active link link to another page where data and documents are attached, including the statistics.

### **Collecting data from speakers of other languages**

A problem that both ethnologists and journalists can face is that of communicating with peoples speaking other languages. In ethnography, knowing the local language is considered a prerequisite for field documentation to be optimal. The communication between the two sides must be natural, without often interruptions in order to request for explanations. The linguistic study involves the creation of a complete collection that includes all the texts heard, including vulgar ones, and in the case of verbal inflections or tonalities, music will also be recorded. "The philological record must be done word by word, the French word placed under the indigenous word,

without any violation of the indigenous syntax, without any bloom in translation", states Marcel Mauss, who appreciates that a good means of to learn the language of native populations was the use of bibles published in the area of missionaries (Mauss, p.34). On the other hand, Bronislaw Malinowski insists on the idea that not all the words of a language are translatable into another, in which case they must be placed in certain contexts. As far as possible, the words of the informants will be phonetically transcribed, H.H.Stahl appreciates: "Of course not a scholarly transcript, as the member of the monograph team that studies the language in particular, but an easier notation." (Stahl, p. 50) Such a notation contains primarily information, but also provides authenticity to the text.

In journalism, words are not translated phonetically because the operation would make it difficult for the public to comprehend a text (especially if it is scattered with new terms), and reporters are increasingly appealing to translators or international languages, while knowledge of the local language is not mandatory. This is also because, unlike ethnologist, the journalist does not need some linguistic peculiarities in his demersal, but only the proper information. As about translating terms without a direct correspondent into the reporter's language, he will use explanations and interpretations, but only on key terms in the subject. In this case, he will explain the key terms by including them in the context. From this point of view, this equivalence can be likened to that of ethnography.

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