APPROACHING THE FIELD: a goffmanian perspective of researcher-interviewees interaction in Communication Research

CHEGANDO AO CAMPO: uma perspectiva goffmaniana da interação entre pesquisador e entrevistados em um estudo de Comunicação
LlEGANDO EN EL CAMPO: una perspectiva goffmaniana de la interacción entre investigador e los entrevistados en una investigación en Communicación

Helena M. Schröter
Graduated in Journalism from Faculdade Cásper Líbero.
 helena97msch@gmail.com.

0009-0008-9739-1365

Luis Mauro Sá Martino
PhD in Social Sciences from PUC-SP. Master in Social Sciences from PUC-SP. Graduated in Journalism from Faculdade Cásper Líbero. Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Communication at Faculdade Cásper Líbero. PQ2 Productivity Scholarship at CNPq. lmsamartino@gmail.com.

0000-0002-5099-1741

Mailing address: Faculdade Cásper Líbero. Pós-Graduação. Avenida Paulista, 900, 5º Andar. São Paulo – SP, CEP 01310-940, Brasil.

ABSTRACT:
This article outlines some methodological issues raised during an undergraduate research in Communication on gossip in the school environment conducted at a private institution in São Paulo. The focus, grounded on Goffman's micro-analysis, is the initial interaction between the researcher and the classroom where the interview was conducted. Three moments are highlighted: (1) the research backstage and the subjective preparation for the field; (2) the arrival and mutual presentation between the subjects - researcher and the participants and (3) the establishment of a situation of acceptance and familiarity from which the research itself was carried out. These elements are discussed against the background of the methodological issues of the Communication.

KEYWORDS: Communication; Methodology; Field Research; Subjectivity; Undergraduate Research.

Introduction

During a conference in 1974 at the Sociology Association of the Pacific (Associação de Sociologia do Pacífico) about field work, the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1989, p. 130) highlighted the moment when researcher approaches the field, highlighting that "the first day you'll see more than you'll ever see again". Goffman seems to be dedicated to methodological questions with the same perspective in both micro and macro scale to what he focuses his study objects. He worries about the details of the experience and, especially, with the condition of the interaction between subject-researcher and the participants. In that conference, in particular, the author mentions the following crucial moment during the research experience: the initial interaction on field work.

"Field", here, is understood in a broad meaning, as procedures or use of techniques that are opposed to the research indoors or documental. Given that interviews, focal

groups and, above all, observation implicate a contact of the researcher with external situation, those constitute a technic related to the field.

According to Martino e Marques (2018), the act of encountering an alterity, in which exists the perspective of creating an knowledge related to the research, presents itself as a methodological and subjective challenge as it mobilizes not only the knowledge of the technics, but also triggers an affective dimension. This article focuses on a group interview with 5th grade students of a private school in São Paulo

Since it is a challenge even for experienced researches when arriving the field, the first approach of a graduate student on the field is full of expectations, uneasiness and hesitation. Therefore, that is also an opportunity to reflect about the academic practice on at least two levels: on one side, the formative aspect of "going to the field" experience; on the other, an epistemological dimension is situated in questions not only related to "obtaining data", but also to its value and to the perspective of the researcher in relation to the field.

As prepared as the researcher may be, the initial approach to the field seems to always have a surprise element, a thunderbolt or even a disorder and disorganisation that rarely goes according to the readings and studies made before – the reality appears to dismantle the epistemological order learned before the field work.

This article explores some methodological questions raised during a graduation research in Communication about gossip and rumours on the school environment on a privet institution in São Paulo by one of the authors of the present article (Schröter, 2019). On the perspective of Goffman's micro-analyses, the center of the present research is the initial interaction between subject-researcher and the students with whom the interview was conducted. The objective of this article is to observe the questions of the first interactional situation, in other words, the arrival of the researcher on the field – the school – and the encounter with interviewee – the students.

This initial moment of interaction proved to be indicative of some of the questions involving the elaboration of answers by the interviewed children, especially in two main lines of interaction - horizontally, between them, and vertically, with the researcher. Three aspects of this interaction are highlighted: (1) backstage of the research and subjective preparation for the field; (2) arrival and mutual presentation between subject-researcher and participants; and (3) the establishment of an accepting and familiar situation upon which the research was conducted.

In a study on the educational context, Ashley George (2013) notes the transformations resulting from the presence of the "research situation" during interactions between participants in the context with research subjects. As highlights

Camila Castro (2012, p. 205), "on occasions in which the individual presents himself before others, his behaviour tends to incorporate and exemplify values officially recognized by society[1]"

Based on the group interview, it was sought to observe situational and meta-communicational aspects that seemed to rule the different aspects of the conversation, and to influence on the result obtained with the answers of the closure moment.

It was opted, as a methodological resource, to problematize this operation and think of it as communication – there remains the necessity of comprehending the research situation based in a communication point of view, not as a meta-theatrical game, but as a way to pay attention to the different elements presented in the research.

As summarises Laura Rosenberg (2017, p. 88):

> We researchers are often forced to retrace our steps, to rethink our paths and even to bend the course of the research. This is not just a matter of completing biographies and field diaries; on the contrary, making known the difficulties and decisions made during the work also allows us to understand the network of strategies implemented in the process, as well as the analysis of the information gathered[2].

The choice for the theoretical contribution of Goffman was made during the referrals related to the field research's realization. The trigger was, especially, to define a way to look at scenery presented, since the beginning, in a small scale. The conditions to execute this study – a single one hour meeting with the students – seamed to demand a theoretical reference that highlighted the importance of details, the observation of small gestures, the interaction and behaviours as an indication of the communicational relations established.

Therefore, during the execution of the interview, it was intended to observe verbal and non-verbal parallel interactions responsible for the characterisation of one "moment", concept used by Goffman (2014) to define an interaction situation delimitated by more or less ritualized practices. More than that, the methodological postures contributed on field to indicate the necessity of the researcher's special attention regarding a micro-scale

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[1] "em ocasiões nas quais o indivíduo se apresenta diante de outros, seu comportamento tende a incorporar e exemplificar valores oficialmente reconhecidos pela sociedade" (Unless otherwise mentioned, all English versions were made by the authors).

[2] "En numerosas ocasiones los investigadores nos vemos obligados a volver sobre nuestros pasos, a replantearnos los caminos e incluso a torcer el rumbo de la investigación. No se trata de reminiscencias que se restringen a completar biografías y diarios de campo; por el contrario, dar a conocer las dificultades y las decisiones que se toman durante el trabajo también permite comprender el entramado de estrategias que se implementan en el proceso, así como el análisis de la información recopilada".

interaction situation. Therefore, the objective here is not only the theoretical aspects of Goffman's sociology, but also to think of its practical operationalization during the research - in order to have a theoretical discussion, the studies of Leeds-Hurwitz (2004), Winkin e Leeds-Hurwitz (2013), Carvalho (2011) ou Gastaldo (2008) are used as references.

The following is divided in three parts: (1) the backstage used to prepare criteria and contacts definitions for the field; (2) the initial moments of interaction, the introduction of the researcher and interviewees in the institutional space; and (3) the progressive build of a familiarity that allows to unleash the research itself.

Before the field: the subjective definition of the research

The transformation of researching the field moment into an object to analyse can be thought in an investigation path developed in earlier works such as Martino e Marques (2017; 2018a; 2018b) in which the concern is to think of this particular interaction as a particularly fruitful moment both in methodological and communicational terms. Discussing the research itself is a way to know the epistemological potentialities and limits of the study, bringing to the firs level of consideration questions that tend to stay implied during the result presentation; as highlight Bourdieu (1983, p. 186), "one does not enter in the science's kitchen"[3].

In this aspect, it is also necessary to understand the field research not only as a space ideally objective to obtain data in order to outline or to answer a predetermined investigational question, but also as a communicational moment during the encounter between two or more subjective people, according to Caiafa (2019). If, in social sciences and especially in Anthropology, these problems are discussed as one of the fundamental parts of the activity, the discussion about intersubjective relations during the practice in Communication seems to not have the same standout.

This situation asserts itself in particular as a condition for practicing the research especially in the sense of thinking it, in communicational terms, as a privileged moment of encountering the alterity that can be, based on dialog, the origin of a specific knowledge about the theme researched. But, at the same time, in a wider sense, this moment of encountering the alterity can also be the origin of knowledge about interactional practices within Communication. Likewise, reflections about the research practice in graduate course based on students experience have still a relatively small space in Communication studies, and it's possible to indicate Becker's (2006), Guterres's (2006) Miranda's and Malcher's (2011) propositions.

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[3] "Não se entra na cozinha das ciências".

That doesn't mean an indiscriminate use of the subjective in which the description itself would occupy a privilege space in the narrative by being available on firs hand: treating the research moment in the field as a communicational situation is different from playing a metalinguistic game. But, recalling Bourdieu's (1983) warning, by trying to find the lines of social forces that permeate particular practices, moving not in the direction of an abstraction at any cost or even of a universalization of situations, but in the discussion of particular situations in contrast to the tensional regularities present in social practices

Questions related to the researcher's subjective don't usually encounter much space in methodological research about the investigation, at least in Communication research. This option can be credited to disciplinary derivations and ramifications at the origin of this area's research, caudataries of previous formulations from other Areas. Practical aspects of the investigation seem to be thought more in terms of the techniques to obtain and analyse data than of the questions related to the condition of academic practice or of the aspects of the researcher's subjective.

Therefore, if there was a main communicational situation established previously – the conduction of interviews with the children to obtain information about gossip dissemination in school environment – and directed to what could be called an "objective" part of the research, it could be perceived at the same time a type of meta-communication during the interaction of the children between themselves and of the children with the researcher that was present during the whole research and that seemed to have a direct influence on answers elaboration and its manifestation in the environment.

Immediately, however, it opens a risk to transform the discussion of the subjective on the field into a biographic extrapolation or into immediate affective impressions as indications of a practice, therefore eliminating from the personal a dimension that intends to be particular as well as it is demanded a value above the possibilities and pretensions. This reservation was made to evident from the beginning the limits of the methodological discussion in the present text.

The familiar strangeness with the field

In chronological terms, the field research tends to precede a series of providences in order to encounter the conditions of its own fulfillment. Interpersonal and institutional network are used to obtain eventual indications and openings in order to approach the field – there is a whole plot involved in outlining the moment of field research and its specific conditions. In this particular study, it was added the necessary precautions in ethical and normative terms due to the fact that the research took place in a school environment, as highlights André (2013).

At the same time, the institutional aspect presented itself as one of the main points of interest, especially in dialog with Goffman. In a certain sense, the field delimitation was created in physical and sociological terms since it happened in a previously determinate classroom. Therefore, there was a frontier between an "inside", space in which the research happened, and an "outside", the scholar environment. The traffic between these two places happened in two levels – the researcher, coming from an almost total exteriority appease only by her ex-student condition, and one of the institution's director that presented her to the classroom.

In an everyday school life, the presence of administration agents usually indicates a change in the "situation definition", as Goffman (1974) denominates, in terms of "framework": The interruption of a normal scholar situation due to the arrival of a stranger accompanied by an institutional presence tend to put in question the ordinary framework of the situation "class" and to bring forth the question "what is going on?". To Goffman, this question is responsible for the group and individual definition of a situation as well as immediate indication to act in relation to it.

The visual impression indicates, immediately, the researcher's exterior condition. There is an immediate evaluation between the subjects involved in the process based on a familiarity degree that begins with the relationship between students and teacher, then between students and school principle and, finally, between students and researcher.

All subjects present during the communicational interaction of the field research influence on its definition. The fact that the researcher is not part of the studied group, in other words, not one of the students, modifies the way those students act. The personal "apperence" of the researcher, considering that it revels, in many ways, that she is not part of the group, interferes with the interaction. According to Goffman, those characteristics are interpreted during the interaction and modify the way every subject communicates with one another.

The moment of initial approach is marked by a mutual genteelness that, in its planned and expected artificiality, demonstrates the establishment of a formality that contrasts with the routine, but that is provoked, and understood, by the presence of strange people in the group – as recall Blivitch (2013), the fundamental moment during the mutual construction of representation.

This new person's introduction to the scene can be made by a mediator whose position can interfere in the researcher's definition before the group. During the study, researcher was introduced as the "director's former student". Upon learning this fact, some students averted their eyes, exchanged glances with their pairs and a few others showed admiration. As pointed out by one of the directors, the group was at an age when

independence is desired and, therefore, adult mediation is avoided. The fact that the researcher was presented by an authority figure could be a reason for a withdrawing that most likely influenced the communication between subjects and the research result.

The initial moment of reciprocal ignorance is based on a previous inequality of information: although researcher, teacher, and director knew about the research, for the students these presences only broke the expected framework of the class which introduced an element of curiosity in face of the possibilities created by the presence of a stranger. This relationship of proximity and, at the same time, of strangeness, is also highlighted by Miranda and Malcher (2011, p. 5) in a reflection about scientific initiation in Communication in which they affirm that "one of the inherent characteristics of scientific production in Social Sciences is that the researcher experiences a participant observation, in other words, the researcher, as a social subject, appropriates the knowledge acquired when interacting with a given context"[4].

This first moment seems to be marked facial expressions from side to side, in a dynamic interaction between all those involved. This may have been one of the reasons that led some students to look at the researcher waiting to be chosen to speak and, after they finished, look again, possibly to read her reaction in an apparent search for the approval of the person they were likely to become. The oscillation of glances suggests the expectation that the inferred abnormality of the situation would become understandable from an explanation: the opacity of the initial situation demands, from the participants, any clue's support to increase the readability of the scene and ultimately make it understandable and eventually familiar.

The creation and preservation of the initial representation, the "face", as Goffman calls it, is described by Mesquita e Costa (2018) as something that "translates into constant vigilance in relation to the events in which one participates, so as to ensure the individual's order of expression", insofar as "the maintenance of representation is one of the interaction's conditions"[5].

The strangeness is diminished at the next stage, the moment of verbal introduction, when expectations can be both broken and reinforced. There is, in the introduction made, a possibility of approaching. The researcher is a former student of the school, and is

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[4] "uma das características inerentes à produção científica das Ciências Sociais é que o pesquisador vivencia uma observação participante, ou seja, este, como sujeito social, se apropria do conhecimento adquirido ao interagir com um dado contexto".
[5] "se traduz em vigilância constante em relação aos eventos aos quais se participam, de modo a assegurar a ordem expressiva do indivíduo", na medida em que "a manutenção da representação é uma das condições da interação".

therefore the future condition of the students. There is, therefore, a possibility of identification.

Moreover, the theme, "gossip", is a constitutive part of the social interaction's universe and therefore is recognized by its proximity. This was most likely a facilitating factor in the conversation, because, with the exception of five people, students were involved in the discussion with opinions, theories and personal experiences. As indicated by the mentor, they were at an age when one wishes to be independent and therefore the mediation of adults is avoided. Thus, the fact that the researcher was presented by a figure who is not completely part of the group, the introduction had a detached character. Thus, because she was in front of the class, older and presented, not by a student, but by one of the directors, the researcher generated a distancing reaction in the classroom which was evidenced by averted eyes and exchanges of glances after the introduction.

After the introductions, it is common, in the first moments of research, to have a careful and gradual revelation (Goffman, 2013). If the research subjects do not know the researcher, as in this case, it is possible that a quick and complete opening won't take place. First there will be an observation of the interlocutor and, little by little, opinions, feelings and experiences can be revealed. This characteristic was evidenced in the research by the fact that only three students shared personal stories to support some of their theories and this only occurred in the second half of the conversation. The field has therefore highlighted the gradual familiarization needed in all conversation, and especially in academic research where it is generally desired to understand the subjects of the research.

A challenge for the researcher is to explore the universe of particular experiences without losing sight of the uniqueness of each situation, while seeking proximity points using similar experiences without an academic pretension. It is, strictly speaking, a tensional articulation between subjective and social dimensions of similar experiences without being identical. The refusal to self-evidence of the research's practice is based, at the same time, on these practice's problematization in the sense of finding in them elements common to those developed within a field of research responsible for the formation of what could, also, be described as a type of researcher's habitus, as indicated by Nogueira and Canaan (2009, p. 67).

Understanding the research situation as an opportunity to reflect involves remembering the context of interaction, its institutional and professional motivations, as well as the social and political implications of the choices made by the researcher with interest in a particular issue or group.

Engagement and production of familiarity during field interaction

The characteristics of the place in which the field research is carried out usually generate expectations regarding the behavior of both the researcher and the subjects. There are expectations, at these times, of the existence of a "social order", to use Goffman's (1982) words related to interaction. At the beginning of the field research (Author, 2019), when asking the first question, the students placed the researcher in a kind of position of authority by raising her hands and waiting for her to give speech permission. This suggests that the interaction and the results can be modified based on the practices already known by the subjects.

Strauss (1989, p. 129) recalls that this type of "intervention", as he calls it, within the scope of group practices, is aimed at understanding existing positions, taking into account factors such as "authority relationships, consensus regarding positions and its borders, degree of involvement and conflict, formal and informal realities and the degree to which group relations facilitate or hinder the achievement of objectives".

With this in mind, it can be useful to know in advance the expectations of standards like this, helping to understand the universe of meanings - and actions - of the research subjects. Thus, all roles are interpreted in the way considered correct within the group and the researcher will understand their role. According to Goffman (2013, p. 22), this "operational consensus" will be understood:

> The participants, together, contribute to a single general definition of the situation which implies not so much a real agreement on what exists, but rather a real agreement as to which person's claims regarding which issues will be temporarily accepted. There will also be a real agreement on the desirability of avoiding an open conflict of definitions of the situation.

Following these standards can both facilitate interaction, but it is not a guarantee of success in the field - on the contrary, it can create a distance from the preconceptions of those in the situation. When the researcher accepts the role assigned by the research subjects, he may not be considered an equal. This makes interaction difficult - in this case, in the expectation of students' speech. In this way, knowing the group's standards can be beneficial for the researcher to think about whether or not they will follow them according to their research interest.

These interaction expectations, its follow-up or break, are present not only in the relationship between researcher and research subjects, but also in the interaction of the subjects with each other. The establishment of dialogue, as Sanders (2012) argues, represents a further development in the reflexive construction of the identities

participating in the research. It is no longer a question of the initial assessment of verbal and bodily gestures of politeness, but of the attention to the speeches given by both parties that, from that moment on, become the focus of interactions. Marta Dynel (2011) also highlights the importance of verbal engagement in conducting interactions within a group situation in order to form what she calls "participation network" in a conversation.

During any social performance, the individual must, according to Goffman (2013, p. 54), represent a character and hide the patterns that do not fit. In the survey, for example, one of the students assumed that any comment about talking about him having a diary would be gossip - but, immediately, he stressed that he 'doesn't have one'. The emphasis highlights the importance of maintaining a facade before colleagues and indicates how the research results are modified by the relationship between the subjects themselves. Relativizing this aspect of the research requires understanding the values of that group.

This regulation of the internal behavior of the researched group can also occur directly, because, many times, the deviation is expected. For that, there may be an authority figure present in the scene to reorganize it. This is called by Goffman (2013, p. 111) the "scene director", who "may have a specific obligation to bring any member of the team whose representation becomes inconvenient" back to the adopted line. This figure, in the research, was the educational advisor. When the students got up from their seats, laughed loudly and talked, the authority figure quickly managed to restore silence and avoid further deviations by moving students. As much as the errors were not planned, the presence of the advisor before the deviations indicates that the team already expected these.

Field research has several interactional elements that maintain a standardized line of action, which can appear both subtly in the conversation with the research subjects and directly in the interaction with possible regulating agents of the scene.

Final remarks

Problematizing the methodological practices is a way to evidence errors, hesitations, doubts, questionings and self-examinations present in the research practices, but that sometimes are left aside before the result presentation. As much as the necessary methodological discussion for the continues elaboration of the area's practices, it seems necessary to bring up implicated subjective aspects in the research's practices that, if are not visible, certainly seem to converge in its progress and conclusions, as discussed by Corazza (1996) or Negrão (2014).

Developing the necessary bonds to execute the research is not simple, especially when the situation is faced for the first time. Because of that, this text has brought forward

some of the points that compose the initial moments on the field: the presentation, the first comparisons with the bibliography, the identification of separation and approximation points, the examination of the group's and researcher's position in this new environment, the reaction of the research's subjects before the new person presented – in sum, the numerous information that the researcher tries to read while learns to do the research.

This generates a tension beyond the habitual uneasiness of the interactions in which an unknown person is present. This initial moment is, therefore, characterized by a tension both in relation to the research's subjects that are dealing with a person that does not belong in the usual scene, and in relation to this individual, the researcher, that not only is in the process of understanding the situation just like the others, but is also learning what is the field research.

Although doubts and hesitations may find place in all levels of academic research, the option of problematizing a graduation project is a result from the possibility of comprehending a formative process's step in which the encounter with the field's situations, due to the novelty of the practice, presents itself particularly as a place of experimental groping, present in the singularity of each investigation.

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RESUMO:
Este artigo delineia algumas questões metodológicas levantadas durante a realização de uma pesquisa de graduação em Comunicação sobre fofocas no ambiente escolar realizada em uma instituição particular de São Paulo. O foco do texto, na perspectiva da micro-análise de Goffman, é o momento inicial de interação entre o sujeito-pesquisador e a turma de alunos da entrevista. São destacados três aspectos: (1) os bastidores da pesquisa e a preparação para o campo; (2) a chegada e a apresentação mútua entre sujeito-pesquisador e os participantes e (3) o estabelecimento de uma situação de aceitação e familiaridade. Esses elementos são discutidos contra o pano de fundo das questões teóricas e metodológicas da Comunicação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Comunicação; Metodologia; Pesquisa de Campo; Subjetividade; Pesquisa em graduação.

RESUMEN:
Este artículo describe algunas cuestiones metodológicas planteadas durante una investigación de pregrado en Comunicación sobre chismes en el entorno escolar realizada en una institución privada en São Paulo. El enfoque del texto, en la perspectiva del microanálisis de Goffman, es el momento inicial de interacción entre el sujeto investigador y la clase de estudiantes de la entrevista. Se destacan tres momentos: (1) detrás de escena de la investigación y la preparación subjetiva para el campo; (2) la llegada y presentación mutua entre el sujeto investigador y los participantes y (3) el establecimiento de una situación de aceptación y familiaridad a partir de la cual se llevó a cabo la investigación. Estos elementos se discuten en el contexto de los problemas metodológicos de la Comunicación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comunicación; Metodologia; Pesquisa de Campo; Subjetividad; Pesquisa em graduación.