

ETHNO-SCIENCE AND ETHNO-METHODOLOGY AS QUALITY RESEARCH
METHODS IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

WILSON MUMEYA FIDELIS

Department of Theatre Arts, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama

Email:mumeski2016@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper is set forth to explore two broad concepts of research methodology which are; Ethno-science and Ethno-methodology. The application of these methods will enhance quality and good research results. This paper highlights the relationship between the two concepts in research and draw a distinction between them and show why each is very essential in research method. The paper further identifies the usefulness of these methods in the Liberal arts with the view of exploring the culture and environment of the people differently. The paper concludes by identifying the various strengths of these methods and emphasizing the people perception and knowledge as well as the people's methods.

INTRODUCTION

In as much as man is still in the process of learning and getting to know what he has not known, research becomes an essential instrument to humanity; It should be understood that the eagerness to ascertain an unknown subject in whatever area and whatever medium is one step towards research.

Research is a game or an activity that is so paramount to man and, man will continue to play that game because it does not have an end. It only ends to individuals, perhaps if the researcher dies but even at that, his works do not exit with him or her. They become valuable materials to other researchers. The very essence of research is to solve either a general or a particular problem affecting life or society. The question of research is one that needs critical attention. There are theorists of various research methods who are up till

date, in the business of updating their knowledge in order to affect generations. Research is not meant for all and sundry but, it's exclusively for those fellows who are not yet satisfied with their state of knowledge. They are engaged in conducting research because generational and global challenges emerging and the only way to get them solved, is when his/her knowledge has been updated in the years ahead.

This paper seeks to solve both general and particular problems.

What is Ethno-science and Ethnomethodology in Research?

A topic of this nature to some extent will demand a comparative measure to give a distinction of the two concepts.

What is Ethno-science?

Understanding the native culture and how it is related to the surrounding environment forms the basis of Ethno-science. That it is necessary to view the natives as they view themselves and their environment. Only in this manner can the outside observer comprehend how the perception of native concerning their environment affects their cultural and social habits. Ethno-science approach goes beyond mere observation and recording. It is an attempt towards understanding the actual indigenous culture. The belief of the Ethno-science is that, only the people that constitute their environment can best describe it in such a way that an observer can understand.

Ethno-science is the sum of all the ways a culture makes its own sense of its milieu. It is not the general study of some aspect of an "ethnic group", but a study done from that group's point of view. How the natives think, can be deduced from the way people perceive relationships among different aspect of their environment. A balanced study of culture approaches its subject from both angles, explaining native categories in terms that non-natives can comprehend, yet retaining the essence of the principles that led the natives to form their categories in the first place.

Ethno-science specifically looks at the way natives view their environment in ways that determine or alter their behavior towards utilizing their environment. It therefore means that, the only way to enter a culture intimately enough is to observe the mental processes of its people through an understanding of their *myths* (folklore) and

their practices (ethnography). With both an internal and external understanding (via ethno-science), a true picture of the culture can be developed. Ethno-science according to Marlene Albert-Liorca (1972) is:

"The notion of ethno-science, like that of nature of Knowledge, is all neutral. It presupposes that there is no divide between indigenous knowledge and science of nature or rather western natural history". (241)

From the above quotation, it means that Ethno-science has some indispensable relationship with knowledge of nature, thus, there would be no reason whatsoever for separating the two from forming a body of knowledge. He further justifies that, Ethno-science serves two different purposes to human knowledge; utilitarian and speculative on one hand, and the universality of knowledge of nature. One cannot divide or separate indigenous knowledge from science of nature.

Ethno-science focuses on the discovering and description of folk system. Its analysis has thus far concentrated on system of classification with such cultural and linguistic domain as colors, plants and medicine. According to Oswald Werner (1966);

"Ethno-science is solely concerned with classificatory principles as they are expressed by native speakers of the language, not as they are determined through anthropological observation"

It therefore means that, Ethno-scientists are interested in the speaker's knowledge of the various domains within his culture, not his actual behavior in those domains. The point is that, Ethno-science is essentially on linguistic utterances, which reveals the speaker's knowledge of his culture rather than his ability to perform in that culture. These two domains of cultural knowledge and cultural know-how are not independent. At least for analytical purposes, know-how presupposes cultural knowledge. Bentley (2001) says; Ethno-science is the study of perceptions, knowledge, and classification of the world as reflected in their use of language" (2)

From the above, one can categorically say, Bentley and Marlene are almost in the same track. They both emphasized the knowledge and perception one has about his culture and environment as it is clearly shown in their various languages. But in Bentley's opinion, he stresses the classification of the world as reflected in the people's language. It therefore means that, to some extent, Ethno-science has to do with how one perceives and develops knowledge of his environment and makes a classification of the environment within, via the use of language.

ETHNOSCIENCE AS A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

In analyzing Ethno-science as a Diagnostic tool, Rodriquez (2001) opined thus: "Ethno-science is an organized examination of thought across cultures, modeled after principles of linguistics, specifically phonemic analysis" (2)

One can infer from the above definition that, Rodriquez is not far from the ideas of the other theorists of Ethno-science. It is a fact that thoughts and perceptions of people about their cultures are crossed examined, as well as the principles of linguistics, that is, the revelation of the speaker's knowledge of his cultures. You will agree with me that, the other theorists to some extent established this same idea.

Importance of Ethno-science

1. It enables the researcher to uncover very vital information of his environment
2. It broadens his knowledge of his culture and language

Challenges

Cultural constraints include language, beliefs and custom of the people. As a searcher using the ethno-science method, you are left with the challenge of devoting more time to learn the language of the people or consulting an interpreter for free flow communication, (b) You will need to observe every aspect of the people's culture and tradition. The truth is, some of their beliefs and customs will somehow be against your belief, but as a researcher who wants to get good information from the natives of that community, one will undoubtedly have to compromise.

Ethno-science as a research method is as important as every other research method because:

- i. It enriches you with information and fact about that culture.
- ii. It exposes you to the knowledge of nature and science of nature
- iii. It cross-examines the thoughts and perceptions of various people about their culture and environment.
- iv. It also exposes you into the speculative and universality of knowledge.

The Question now comes, what is Ethnomethodology?

The term's ethnomethodology can be broken down into its three constituent parts:

Ethno- Method - (O) Logy, for the purpose of explanation.

Ethno means a particular socio-cultural group.

Method means the methods and practices this group employs in its everyday activities.

Logy means the systematic description of these methods and practices.

Ethno-methodology literarily means the study of people's method, which focuses on the way people make sense of their world and display understanding of it. As humans, the society is entirely dependent on those methods of achieving and displaying understanding. Ethno-methodology simply means the study of the ways in which people make sense of their social world.

Harold Garfinkel in (1967), first coined the term Ethno-methodology to roughly mean a study of the methods used by people (or members) to construct, account for and give meaning to their social world.

DEFINITION OF ETHNO-METHODOLOGY

Ethno-methodology is an exciting approach to problem solving based on describing the routine, everyday activities of ordinary members or folk. Rather than treating folks as dummies and telling them what to do, what to know, and how to do what they do as most social scientists and organization researchers do, Ethno-methodology reveals the method ordinary folks use to approach, to understand and to be in their world.(Russell. Kelly, 1983).

John Heritage defines Ethno methodology as:

"the study of particular subject matter: the body of common use knowledge and the range of procedures and consideration by means of which ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstance in which they find themselves "
(4).

The above definition justifies Garfinkel's definition of ethno-methodology which stresses the aspect of ordinary members of society making sense of the very world they live. Garfinkel (1967) says, the people display the understanding of their own world, while, Heritage justifies it by saying that, the people only act on the circumstance in which they see themselves. This is the only area of divergence in their theories. But to a large extent, Heritage gives a more concrete definition of the term "Ethno methodology". He opines that Ethno methodology has to do with a particular

subject matter, which is the body of common use of knowledge, through which folks make sense of their society or the world they live in.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Ethno methodology as a theory was developed by Harold Garfinkel (1967), based on his artful analysis of traditional sociological theory. This theory emerged as a distinctive perspective with sociology during the 1960s. It is associated with a variety of perspectives (existential sociology, creative sociology, interactionism and most recently constructionism). Ethnomethodology is a part of the phenomenological sociology established through the work of Alfred Schutz (1962).

Main Ideas

Ethno-methodology has its peculiar ideas that are different from the main sociological ideas. While sociology seeks to provide account of society which compete with those offered by other members, Ethnomethodology focuses on how the accounts are organized in the ongoing moment to moment maintenance of social order. Ethno-methodologists have used research method in the past that "breach or break" the everyday way of interaction in order to reveal the work that goes on to maintaining the normal flow of life e.g, pretending to be a stranger in one's own home. These interactions have demonstrated the creativity with which ordinary members of society are able to interpret and maintain their social order. It stresses the idea that humans, as members of society, use and depend on

corpus of practical knowledge which they assume is shared in part with others.

For Ethnomethodology, common sense practices are the topic of study, but those practices are also, unavoidably, used as a resource for any study one tries to make. Without the use of common sense, its object of study would be unavailable, because, it is established by the application of common sense method. It therefore means that, commonsense practices are the topics we study, but that, those topics we study also serve as materials or resources for anyone who wants to make a further study.

Main Contributors to Ethno-methodology

Richard Hilbert (1992) sees Ethnomethodology as a fundamentally descriptive discipline which does not engage in the explanation or evaluation of the particular social order undertaken as a subject of study. He propounded a very essential idea about Ethnomethodology.

1. Ethnomethodological ideas have no option for Ethnomethodologists but to be compelling in the same way that other ideas are compelling. This means that Ethnomethodological fact is a motivated fact and not detached as it seems to claim it must be.

George Psathas sees ethnomethodology as a social order that is produced through social interaction that generally seeks to provide an alternative mainstream sociological approach. It poses a challenge to the social science as a whole

Types of Ethnomethodological studies identified by George Psathas are; According to Gorge Psathas, five types of

**ethnomethodology can be identified
(Psathas: 139-155)**

- The organization of practical action and practical reasoning
- The organization of talk-in-interaction, known as conversation analysis.
- Talk-in-interaction within institutional or organizational settings, (usually using tape recording of telephone conversation)
- The study of work: that is any social activity. The interest is how that work is accomplished within the setting in which the work is performed.
- The haecceity of work. That is, what makes an activity what it is.

Technique of Ethnomethodology

A favored technique among Ethnomethodologists is to disrupt temporarily the world which people take for granted and see how they react. It could be said that the human capacity to produce order out of chaos is the only worthwhile capacity in the eyes of the Ethnomethodologists. For them, other human capacities, such as moral judgment, would be seen as subjective only, and therefore perhaps containing no real truth. In Smart's observation (1977), he says:

"Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology is potentially a method of destroying the taken- for- granted aspect of social reality, a way of stripping the shared cultural base of its cloak of invisibility"

What Smart is trying to say here is that, Garfinkel actually used his theory of Ethnomethodology to destroy the taken-for-granted aspect of human life, away of removing the shared cultural base. That there are aspects of our social life that we sometimes take for granted, but Garfinkel has been able to destroy that aspect with his theory: Ethnomethodology. Garfinkel suggested. In his method of Ethnomethodology that, we are constantly making use of a documentary method in our daily lives to create a taken-for-granted world which we feel we "know" and can be "at home". We perceive our world through series of pattern. We are built up for making sense of and coping with the variety of situations that we encounter every day. Sometimes we know (or think we know) something so well that we do notice when it changes. Then taken-for-granted what we all inhabit is to some extent necessary, in order to avoid confusion which would be experienced if we saw everything as if it were the first time.

Strength of Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology is a move from the mainstream sociology. It has influenced the sociology of scientific knowledge by providing a research strategy that precisely describe the methods its research subjects without the necessity of evaluating their validity. It has had an impact on linguistic and particularly on pragmatics, producing or creating a new discipline of conversation analysis. Ethnomethodology's studies of work have played a significant role in the field of human computer interaction.

Conclusion

The study of Ethno-science and Ethnomethodology help in approaching our society and social order differently. Though, they are not too far from each other, the combination of these concepts of research will advance the researcher's conceptualization of the people's culture and the environment in which they live. Ethno-science is the study of people's perception, knowledge and the classification of the world as reflected in their use of language, and Ethnomethodology is the study of people's method. The combination of these two will make a valid research work. Social order appears orderly to members of the society only because members actively engage in making sense of social life.

These two methods of research are not in any way limited to the sociologists, but even we in the humanities can as well use it to arrive at a validating answer in problem solving exercise.

REFERENCES

- Bentley JW, *Handout for Ethnoscience Course*. Thailand: Suphan,Rice IPM Network (1999)
- Durkheim, E. *Sociology and Philosophy*, New York: Free Press .(1974)
- Garfinkel Harold. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice- Hall (1967)
- Gouldner. A. W. '*Marxism and social theory*', *theory and society*, vol.1. No. 1 (1974)
- Oswald Werner, *the basic assumption of Ethnoscience*. Volume 1. (1969).
- Oswald Werner et al; *Navaho Systems of Classification: Some Implications for Ethnoscience, Northwestern University Press* (1966)
- Schutz, A. *Structures of the Life World*, Evanston: Northwestern University press (1973).
- Smart, B. *Sociology, Phenomenology and Marxian Analysis- A critical Discussion of the Theory and Practice of a Science of Society*. London: Routledge of Kegain Paul, 1977)
- Weber, M. *The Theory of Economics and Social Organization*, free press, New York (1947)
- Zimmerman, D. *The Everyday World as a Phenomenon*. London: Routledge and Kegain, (1971).