the U.S. Forest Service, a job that involved extensive interaction with English speakers. Mr. Córdova often reads English-language newspapers. Interestingly, Lina Ortiz de Córdova, Federico Córdova's wife, who is monolingual, responded to my questions in the same fashion as the Lópezes.

Mr. Córdova had not only acquired the phonological, syntactic, and semantic systems of American English, but he had mastered its conversational structure as well. He had such a sophisticated idea of the interviewing process that he even thought to make sure that the tape recorder had been turned on before beginning his account. (The one stipulation he imposed in helping me was that I was to give him a copy of the final publication.) Why, then, was the latter interview so painless and so "successful"? Even though Mr. Córdova and I spoke in Spanish, the interview was bilingual, since the frame of reference and the conversational structure we used did not emerge from conversational patterns that related Córdovan youths and elders. Fortunately, this is not true of the sections of the interactions in which Mr. Córdova "wandered off the point," i.e., gained control of topical selection. Here the tape recordings reveal the same richness of metacommunicative routines and rhetorical structure that characterize the pedagogical dialogues with the Lópezes.

My research methods thus dictated the imposition of my own conversational norms on my consultants. The gap between American English discourse structure (especially interview techniques) and patterns that are characteristic of speakers of New Mexican Spanish is sufficiently wide that my initial position of communicative hegemony was successful only with a bilingual consultant. Fortunately, the Lópezes and other elders were so consistent in their refusal to allow me to structure our pedagogical interactions in keeping with my own "instincts" that I was forced to develop an alternative methodology. In Chapter 5, I systematize this process and attempt to show how it can be applied to interviewing in general.

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.

This chapter is designed to forestall this conclusion by presenting some practical proposals for incorporating the study of native metacommunicative routines into interview-based research. I will propose a four-phase approach to conducting interviews and interpreting the results. My thesis is that any type of interviewing will be plagued by serious procedural problems if it is not based on sensitivity to the relationship between the communicative norms that are presupposed by the interview and those that are more broadly characteristic of the population under study. This need cannot be addressed in the same fashion, however, by the fieldworker who works by herself or himself in a small community as the research team studying a large and diverse sample. I will accordingly provide some sense as to how my suggestions can be taken up in large-scale survey research.

Phase 1: learning how to ask

Adequate applications of interviewing techniques presuppose a basic understanding of the communicative norms of the society in question. Obtaining this awareness should accordingly constitute the first item on researchers' agenda. In the case of fieldwork, the first weeks or months of a researcher's field stay are generally devoted to gaining an initial acquaintance with the native community and, in some cases, to learning the language. This is an ideal time in which to observe such simple facts as who talks to whom, who listens to whom, when people talk and when they remain silent, what entities are referred to directly and which are referred to indirectly or signaled nonverbally, and the like. An essential question is: What are the different ways in which people communicate? Hymes (1972) and others have outlined the possible types of variation, and a number of descriptions of local verbal repertoires are available (e.g., Abrahams 1983; Albert 1972; Gossen 1974; Sherzer 1983). Sherzer and Darnell's (1972) "Outline Guide for the Ethnographic Study of Speech Use" sketches the issues that might be raised. This is not to say that one must be a sociolinguist to conduct interview-based research. As I argued in Chapter 1, sociolinguistics itself is hardly free from methodological naiveté. The point is rather that overcoming procedural problems is predicated on developing a broader understanding of communicative processes.

The goal at this stage is to gain a sense of the range of social situations in relation to the types of speech events that can take place in each. Learning the rules that relate the two is crucial. One way to facilitate this undertaking is to conduct an intensive analysis of selected

speech events, as was illustrated in Chapter 4. For each major segment of the life cycle, select a frequently observed speech event. It is useful to take some events that are of special importance to native speakers and others that are unremarkable. It may also be necessary to take gender, social class or caste, and other factors into account in choosing examples for intensive analysis. Each event type should be observed a number of times; I strongly recommend the tape-recording of at least one instance.

These examples should be analyzed with two objects in mind. First, the fieldworker should ascertain the meaning of the event for the participants. Particularly if one's linguistic competence is still incomplete, help can be sought in transcribing, translating, and interpreting the episode. Such exegesis should hardly be confined to obtaining literal, referential meanings. The point is to discover the linguistic and social–cultural knowledge that underlies the ability to participate in and interpret such events. Second, once an array of such events has been analyzed, the data can be compared, attempting to discern the basic norms that underlie specific communicative patterns.

Several issues merit special attention. Metacommunicative features provide particularly important clues for the fieldworker. As I argued in Chapter 4, certain linguistic forms point to the speaker's view of basic social–cultural processes and of the ongoing speech event. As Silverstein (1985) has argued for quotation-framing devices, metacommunicative features often index the interpretation that the speaker ascribes to the utterance. Developing an ability to read such metamessages provides the analyst with the ability to base his or her interpretation on the participants' ongoing process of sorting out the meaning of what they are saying and hearing.

It is also important to learn how speakers frame queries. What are the proper linguistic forms for different types of questions? How do noninterrogative forms serve as questions in some contexts? Who can ask questions of whom? Obviously, it is terribly important for the fieldworker to discover the negative cases – what types of questions are inappropriate in what circumstances? It is also crucial to study the acquisition process, for example, the appropriate means of learning these rules. In order to become a good interviewer, the researcher will have to develop some degree of *competence* in these sociolinguistic patterns.

Applying this component of the methodology to large-scale survey research presents a real challenge. It would be difficult to document the sociolinguistic repertoire of potential respondents in a large sample that is stratified along the lines of class and ethnicity and that covers a

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 entire interview affects the meaning of each utterance.* To cite one instance: My initial interviews with Silvianita 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?

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. Birdwhistell 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, upturned 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-

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 manuals[4] 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.