

I have deliberately not published much of my data in order to protect myself. I have learned from villagers who have informed on “their own” that they suffer ostracism and perhaps even banishment, as well as arson. For me, to publish might be literally to perish.

My neighbors have occasionally challenged my published remarks. My worst error was publishing in a regional dictionary the phrase “fishing for stamps,” meaning that the crew focused on gaining maximum unemployment credits rather than maximum fish. Friends with whom I had crewed in their trapboat did not like this. Despite my apology and explanations, they felt betrayed.

In my opinion, Jerry’s explanation was correct: some Newfoundlanders do “fish for stamps,” and given their desperate need to collect some unemployment insurance during the winter, I can appreciate why they do it. But even if the fishermen agreed with Jerry, they wouldn’t want the practice publicized.

Problems such as Jerry’s will sometimes arise when we grant our informants a voice and we care about their opinions of us and our work. Jerry’s case is extreme, because he lives with his informants, who are also his kinsmen. His limitations are not uncommon for those who “study their own kind,” as you saw in Chapter 9. The rest of us cultural travelers—the outside observer, the student, the tourist, the aid worker—are usually granted more autonomy by our hosts, which permits us to find a middle ground as translator or reporter between their culture and ours. So for moral and scientific reasons, we should accept the costs and the risks of the dialogue. The alternatives, to retain all the power and the voice, or not to inquire or report at all, are worse.

You are now in a position to approach culture with the full anthropological tool kit. In the afterword I suggest how you might practice that.



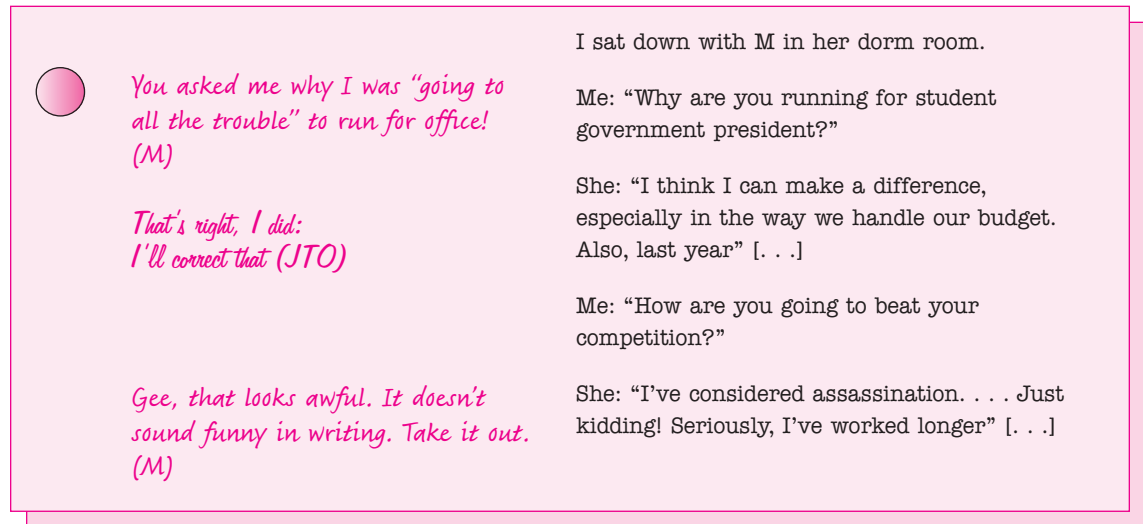
## Chapter 11



### EXERCISES

#### Exercise 1: Identifying the Dialogic Question

If you are reading an ethnography to accompany this text, then in class discussion or in an essay composed out of class, answer these questions: Is there any evidence of the dialogic question in the ethnography? That is, to what degree does the ethnographer follow any of the six dialogic procedures suggested above? Does the ethnographer do something else that you consider dialogic? What parts of the ethnography would you like to see handled dialogically?



**Figure 11.9** Sample Report of Interview

## Exercise 2: Sharing Control

In this exercise you will share control of your cultural inquiry and subsequent report with your informants. You will be giving them a voice in your product. Interview an acquaintance who practices something you either don't understand or don't approve of. Examples include smoking cigarettes, hunting deer, eating a vegetarian diet, and supporting an organization such as the Green Party or following a religion such as Christian Science. A short dialogue of fifteen minutes is sufficient if there is a productive exchange of views. Taping and transcribing your conversation is an excellent procedure but very time consuming. Careful note taking will suffice. Soon after writing your notes, while your memories are fresh, reconstruct and type a draft of your dialogue. Type the document double spaced with a wide left-hand margin. Then you and your informant both read the report or transcript—together, preferably—and write comments in that wide margin, as shown in Figure 11.9. Your informant may want to alter or add to what she/he said, or to comment further on what you said, or to comment on the dialogue itself. You respond to the informant. You and the informant initial your comments to distinguish them.

Submit your interview report with marginal comments, attaching answers to the following questions:

- How has sharing control with the informant changed the ethnographer's report?
- Is the shared report more accurate or truer than a report the ethnographer, working alone, would have written? Explain.

### Exercise 3: Event with Dialogue

In this exercise you will emulate the dialogical procedure 3 described in the chapter. You and your informant attend an event in which the informant is a participant. Examples are a soccer game, wedding, court hearing, dinner with roommates at the apartment, or a visit to the dentist.

1. Compose a 300-word description of the event.
2. Prepare for and record a fifteen-minute interview with the informant about the event.
3. Transcribe that dialogue as Kevin Dwyer presented his talk with Faqir Muhammad.
4. Distinguish your prepared questions (in **bold**) from your impromptu questions (in *italics*) in your report, as Dwyer did. Append this transcript to your report of the event.
5. After the transcript, comment on what the dialogue has added to your understanding of the event.

Your product for this exercise is the description, the transcript, and the comments.

### Exercise 4: Reading over Your Informant's Shoulder

In this exercise you will emulate Tedlock's work with Don André in the dialogical procedure 4 described in this chapter.

1. Ask your informant to show you a copy of a favorite poem, cartoon, inspirational text, scriptural passage, photograph, artwork, or song lyric. Encourage the informant to read it to you and/or explain it. What does the informant think the text or image means? Why does this one text or image stand out for the informant? The text/image must be in front of you during the talk.
2. Record and transcribe, or at least carefully paraphrase, your informant's interaction with the text and any contribution that you make to the talk. For format, you could emulate Tedlock's report of listening to Don André, which intersperses the text and the commentary.
3. Submit a transcript or paraphrase of your talk around the text or image you discussed. Conclude with some answers to the holistic question: What is the larger context of this text/image in the informant's culture? If the text is a song lyric, for example, you might connect it to the lyricist's complete work, the musical style of which it is a part, or other aspects of the lifestyle of the informant. If the image is a religious one, you might connect it to the informant's religious beliefs and activities or to the other images with which it is associated.