Ethnological Methods in Cultural-Historical Psycholinguistics

Participant Observation in Two German Kindergartens

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Acknowledging the complexities of normal life, this article explores the benefits of ethnological methods for cultural-historical psycholinguistic research in the area of children's language development. Within the framework of the cultural-historical tradition methods which strengthen the importance of context and dialogue between a researcher and her field appear to be interesting. Using the example of own fieldwork done with children in two German kindergartens, a reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of ethnological methods is proposed. The focus will be on participant observation, narrative interview and the influence of the researcher on the field in general.

1. Introduction

It seems commonplace, but it is crucial to find adequate methods for the aimed research question within a theoretical framework. By relating cultural-historical psycholinguistics with ethnology[1] our question is whether the use of ethnological methods could be fruitful in the area of children's language development. Are the methods in accordance with the theoretical position? Cultural-historical psycholinguistics and modern ethnology have more in common than the obvious fact that both of them refer to the concept of culture – ethnology through its traditional object of research, the cultural-historical tradition through the notion of social mediatedness of higher psychological functions. One important point here is that

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[1] In this article we will use the terms ethnology, ethnological etc. instead of the English anthropology, anthropological, etc. as they have the same meaning and the former are commonly used within the German scientific discourse.

both share a similar view of humans: being not only a product of culture, but constructing it and playing an active role in their own development.

At the intersection of cultural-historical psycholinguistics and ethnology our interest lies in the language and speaking of culturally embedded individuals, especially in the language development of children within multicultural societies. Children develop through interaction with other members of their society and they cannot be understood if they are regarded as "entities separate from cultural processes, existing independently of their cultural communities" (Rogoff 2003, p. 41). Following the cultural-historical paradigm individual development should not be regarded as "being influenced by (and influencing) culture. [...] [Instead] people develop as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities that themselves develop with the involvement of people in successive generations" (Rogoff 2003, p. 52). Since individual development and cultural or social development are interwoven, human development should always be considered and examined as part of its culture and societal-historical determination (Lompscher 2004, p. 33). Thus, the traditional experimental setting which does not take the context into account but only observes individuals becomes dissatisfying. Hedegaard (2008b, p. 185) gets to the heart of it: the "paradigm of the traditional experiment […] cannot be used when trying to understand the development of a child within the complexities of a normal life pattern". The discomfort with traditional experimental methods and approaches is quite widespread within the social sciences. There is a growing conviction that dissecting life into variables does not help in any case to explain human behavior and the testing of a hypothesis "can only support or reject what the theory outlines" and is therefore restricted (Hedegaard 2008a, p. 34). Qualitative research methods promise a way out, and ethnological methods – which are qualitative in nature – seem to be quite promising in reaching this holistic approach. Thus, the ethnological methods have been used in a multitude of disciplines during the last years, including pedagogy (e.g. Heinzel et al. 2010), sociology (e.g. Christmann 1996), and psychology (e.g. Spindler 1978; Hedegaard 2008).

As part of a current research project (Epping, in prep.) we conducted a fieldwork in two German kindergartens[2] using ethnological methods as they might offer an

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[2]   In Germany the kindergarten is for children from age 3 (2) to 6 (7).

appropriate access to the understanding of children's language development which is in accordance with the insights of the cultural-historical tradition. The aim of the present article is to reflect on the two ethnological methods which have been proven fruitful in the course of our research: participant observation and narrative interview. Additionally, the influence of the researcher is discussed – a kind of reflection which is quite common within ethnology and which should also be important for empirical studies in cultural-historical psycholinguistics.

Beforehand, the theoretical frame of the research project is introduced and reasons for the choice of methods are given.

2. Framing of the Research Project

Within modern multicultural societies people from different backgrounds and with a multitude of languages live together. Thus, not only the individuals, but also the societal institutions face new challenges. Among those is the language situation for preschool children. In German kindergartens the children's groups are not linguistically homogeneous anymore: children of different mother tongues and with different experiences with the German language meet and mix. A lot of studies about language acquisition (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) are conducted in this context, but the majority sees these children as deficient and does not see their potentials and achievements. Our study aims at applying a holistic approach to language development within a multicultural society. The chosen setting is the kindergarten with its interactions and shared activities. In this setting we examine how understanding is mediated. The research question is how children of different language backgrounds create a basis for shared activities and which means and forms they use for this purpose. These means and forms are manifold – language and speech, gestures, mimics, etc. as well as touching, singing together and laughing.

Language development is understood, following cultural-historical theory, not as an acquisition of an abstract system of grammar and vocabulary, but as a socially developed activity and a dynamical process. A cultural-historical understanding of language (e.g. Bertau, 2011; Werani, 2011) has some implications on the methods. As a basic principle the context has to be included, that is, not as an additional variable, but as an essential constituent of the language development. Viewing

language as social and dialogical implies the observation of interactions instead of isolated individuals. With Hedegaard (2008a, p. 30) we agree that research "that is culturally and historically framed takes into account all of these multidimensional elements of children's participation in everyday life". It includes the children's activities as well as the societal conditions which influence "the way they [the adults within communities] can be parents, caregivers and educators" (Hedegaard, 2008a, p. 30). Thus, "childhood research should be explicitly anchored in historical settings", if it is to be regarded as cultural-historical (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 4).

Following Hedegaard, in cultural-historical research it is important to "see the child as a participant in a societal collective interacting with others in different settings. A child develops as an individual with unique distinctiveness, and as a member of a society where different institutional practices are evident" (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 10). These institutional practices and the children's development as well are "connected to a conception of what constitutes a 'good life' and these vary within the different types of institution and even among those who participate in the practices found within these institutions" (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 11). Accordingly, methods have to observe not only the behavior of the children, but also the specific practice traditions of the institutions, in this case those of the kindergartens. Another important point is to pay attention to "children's appropriation and display of motives and competencies through entering activity settings and sharing activities with other people within a particular cultural practice tradition" and the demands, norms and values which are connected with these activities (Hedegaard 2008a, pp. 2728). Thus, an all-embracing picture would be necessary to fully understand children's language development, but it is not realistic to gain it with one study. Rogoff (2003, pp. 52-62) illustrates how the focus of a research can be set in a way that the important information is included. For this kind of study she proposes an interpersonal focus of analysis, which includes "background understanding of community processes […] and attention to personal processes" (Rogoff 2003, p. 58). Rogoff stresses that the "observers or researchers construct the focus of analysis" as they decide which aspects they want to foreground and examine, but "the distinctions between what is in the foreground and what is in the background […] are not assumed to be separate entities in reality" (Rogoff 2003, p. 58).

Consequently, we were searching for methods which could fulfill these require-ments and are adequate for our research question addressing the forms and means children use to create a common basis in shared activities. As ethnological methods are context sensitive, holistic and adjustable to the conditions of re-search, they seem appropriate. Two ethnological methods were chosen (partici-pant observation and narrative interview), and conducted in two German kinder-gartens – one in a large city in Bavaria, the other one in a smaller town in North Rhine-Westphalia. In the following sections our aim is to reflect whether these two methods prove to be useful within this special research design: Can they lead to meaningful results? How can they contribute to answer the research question?

3. Reflections on the Methods Used

3.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation seems to be the ethnological method par excellence. After Malinowski's research on the Trobriand Islands (1922) at the beginning of the 20th century most of the researchers in ethnology and anthropology have relied on this method. It involves being there, going to the "field", taking part in the natives' lives as a good means to get full inside into their culture. Within the classic area of ethnological studies, spending at least a year in the researched culture is still the most used method even if "researched culture" does not necessarily imply "uncivi-lized" tribes anymore. The use of participant observation and other ethnographic methods increasingly takes place within the own culture of the ethnographer and in focused settings (Oester 2008, p. 233). "Ethnographers value the idea of 'walk-ing a mile in the shoes' of others and attempt to gain insight by being in the same social space as the subjects of their research" (Madden 2010, p. 1). The aim is to find the insider's, the 'natives'' point of view. It is an attempt to see the world – the objects, actions and events – with the eyes of the acting people and with the same meaning they attribute to it. While these meanings might be obvious and expressed in language, the bigger part stays unconscious and taken for granted. However, "in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live" (Spradley 1980, p. 5). Trying to understand these meaning systems one important point of the participant obser-

vation as a research strategy is its strong focus on exploration of social phenomena instead of the testing of hypotheses (Flick, 2010, p. 297). Consequently, the participant observer has two roles simultaneously: take part in the action and observe it. The taking part role is important for the researcher to get a feeling for the situation. Otherwise, he is not only a participant, but also an observer. Spradley (1980, pp. 5458) makes the difference obvious and describes six major differences: (1) the participant observer always follows the dual purpose of engaging and observing, he exercises himself in (2) explicit awareness and (3) tries to use a "wide-angle lens" by "taking in a much broader spectrum of information" (Spradley 1980, p. 56) which includes characteristics of the situation which seem to be irrelevant to the normal participant. During participant observation the researcher (4) makes simultaneously the insider/outsider experience and is constantly oscillating between the two roles. Unlike normal participants he is reflecting a lot on the experience and the situation and uses (5) introspection as a means of understanding. "Introspection may not seem 'objective', but it is a tool all of us use to understand new situations and to gain skill at following cultural rules" (Spradley 1980, p. 57). In this way the body of the participant researcher becomes one of his most important tools. Finally, possibly the most obvious difference: (6) the observer uses record keeping and writes about the situations. These fieldnotes and records form the base for analysis and interpretation.

Going a step further Hedegaard and her colleagues formulate a dialective-interactive approach which uses, amongst others, the strengths of participant observation to research social situations of children. Hedegaard states that being a participant in the child's social situation is crucial, but "the researcher is not a full participant in the everyday activities, because the researcher's social situation is also a research situation" (Hedegaard 2008, p. 28). Between these two situations there is a constant tension; the researcher has to find a balance between taking part, being close to the other participants on one side, and concentrating on her research aims and keeping the necessary distance on the other side.

In the case of the two German kindergartens we studied, the participant observation method was used to get insight into the life of the children and caretakers at the institutions. It was possible to get some distance through sitting at a table and getting busy writing. Usually, the children consider it as normal when adults are in

the same room even without engaging actively with them. When the adult is busy, they feel unobserved and continue their activities. In this way, it is possible to observe authentic interaction between children. Sitting and writing at a table in the kindergarten in M., I could observe – unnoticed – two little girls (4 and 5 years old) playing with a doll's house at the next table. Both of them were completely absorbed in their game – changing their voices for the different characters and acting in complex social situations. Just as a kindergarten teacher made a comment to me about their game they got aware of the fact that they are observed, and started to feel uncomfortable and changed their behavior. After a while they stopped their game and came over to ask me what I am doing there.

The participation in the children's situation and the playing with them offers a great opportunity to interact and talk to them. Thus, different insights are possible. Especially for research in the area of language development these situations are rich, because they offer speech data about the topic of interest, i.e. natural interactions between children and between child and teacher. The disadvantage is that it is most of the time not possible to record these spontaneous events and the notes have to be learned by heart, risking that important details get lost.

Two examples show the benefits of participant observation as a research method. The first episode takes place in the kindergarten in A., November 2010: I am playing a board game with L. and J. J. has great difficulties with counting and putting her token to the right place. In the meantime, I ask her: "Do you speak in German at home as well?" She shakes her head. "In which language do you talk? (short break) Russian?" – "Yes" – "Can you count in Russian?" And as she is nodding I ask her if she wants to count in Russian and she starts in German: „Eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs…" I could observe that her parents talk to her in Russian when they bring her. Thus, she possibly can count in Russian, but in this situation (which is supposed to be a German speaking one) she cannot (or does not want to?) switch to the other language and count. What was meant to help her with the game, seemed to confuse her even more. Or can it be that she does not have a conception of the different languages yet?

While the girl was reluctant to change languages, two boys in the kindergarten in M., both of them about half a year older than the girl in the previous example, deliberately play and count with the different languages. While putting on their

clothes to go out to the garden one of the boys, with Dutch as mother tongue, was teaching the other one (and later me) how to count in Dutch: Een, twee …. And how to say: I am 27 years old. Apparently they have a lot of fun and enjoy playing with the languages. But they stick to German and Dutch – even if the other one has Italian as a mother tongue (I unfortunately learned about that just afterwards).

These two situations show a different handling of somehow similar settings (somehow it is about counting) and can therefore reveal something about the use of different languages in kindergarten. This was only possible by participating in the daily life and situations of the children within the institution. As Malinowski put it at the beginning of the last century: there "is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality" (Malinowski 1922, p. 1). Especially concerning the use of language this is important.

The traditional participant observation usually requires a longer period of engagement in the researched culture (often more than a year). In our case, the fieldwork is similar to focused ethnography and involves spending a restricted amount of time in the field with a special question in mind. This approach is used and described for example by Oester (2008) and Knoblauch (2005). As it is difficult to get comparable and analyzable data by observation alone – especially if not too much time is spent in the field – the use of video cameras and other recording tools is common within focused ethnography. The intensity of data generated via audiovisual recordings compensates for the comparatively short time of research (Knoblauch 2005, p. 16).

During the participant observation and after discussing with the kindergarten teachers, we realized that these methods were not bringing enough insight regarding the aim of our research. For example, the cooperation between children of different language background did not occur too often within the researcher's sight, and we could not decide whether the observed behavior was only typical for the specific child in that particular situation or whether it was something typical for all children in this situation. Thus, we decided to insert another method into the research design. Groups of two or three children got some playing materials (tracks, a station, puppets, animals and a small train) and were filmed during their play situation. As a researcher I was introducing the material to them and then

moved back behind the camera. Sometimes the children involved me into their conversation – what I did not refuse, but not search for neither. But, most of the time the play developed among them and, thus, this setting allowed for natural interactions between the involved children. The outcome was a set of videos of 16 children playing with the same toys, interacting and cooperating. The aim was to generate similar situations to observe and see whether the insights we got during participant observation can be confirmed in this way. Are there detectable structures? Patterns of behavior? These interactions can be studied in detail using the video files observing not only speech, but also gestures, mimics, proxemics, etc.

All in all, participant observation seemed to be a good method to get diverse impressions and insights about the 'field' and to get to know the acting persons (the children and the teachers). While stressing on the positive fact that field research "allows researchers to gain different perspectives and to interact with participants in the research study" (Hedegaard 2008, p. 6), Hedegaard criticizes that "a non-theoretical participant observation approach is (...) unproductive. Without a theoretical frame empirical research results only in a collection of 'objective' facts" (2008a, p. 34). That is why it is so important to leave the field for interpretation (Hedegaard 2008a, p. 45) and, if possible and necessary, not only rely on observation alone but use other methods as well. This is called triangulation (cf. Flick 2010). Within our research project the method of participant observation is combined with the videos and their analysis as well as with narrative interviews. The method of narrative interviewing will be discussed in the following section.

3.2 Narrative Interview

Children's language development as understood within the cultural-historical tradition is not the achievement of individual children, but a social process. Children "learn the skills and practices of their community by engaging with others who may contribute to structuring the process to be learned, provide guidance during joint activity, and help adjust participation according to proficiency" (Rogoff 2003, p. 69). Thus, values, attitudes, and practices of the community in which the children grow up play an important role. One way of trying to understand them is talking to a kind of experts: the people involved in the raising of children. Parents, families, kindergarten staff, etc. are active partners of the children. Trying to get a more complete picture of the context involves getting their views. In this fieldwork

we chose to talk intensively to the kindergarten teachers to understand better the setting 'kindergarten' in which some of the children spend eight or even more hours per day.

Interviewing is an established and long known technique in getting information about people and their views. In the context of quantitative research the focus of interviews is to have standardized questions and a choice of pre-given answers. This method enables the researcher to ask a lot of persons in a relatively short amount of time and interpret the data with the help of statistical programs. Within the qualitative research paradigm the amount of persons interviewed is of less importance than the in-depth results from few, but carefully chosen interviews. In these interviews the questions tend to be more open and the answers are not pre-given. The technique of qualitative interviewing is not an exclusively ethnological method, but it evolves from the conditions and requirements of the fieldwork and it is widely used and discussed within ethnological research. Hopf (2009, p. 350) points out that the importance of qualitative interviews within ethnographical research projects lies in generating expert knowledge as well as in getting the subjective view or biography of the participants. In addition to that, Madden (2010, p. 73) states that a "good ethnographic interview will give the ethnographer insight into how a participant sees the world in analytical, typological, and relational ways, and such information helps to create an insight into the participant's worldview". These insights might be learned at "the least likely points in a conversation [...]. To get to this point sometimes requires ethnographers to relax their sense of control over an exchange and 'go with the flow'" (Madden 2010, p. 75) which might not be easy at all.

Narrative interviewing generally focuses on the narration of the interviewee and not on the questions of the interviewer. Trying to establish a normal and comfortable atmosphere for conversation, the researcher requires the interview partner to feel free to tell everything he regards as relevant to the question. In most cases, the involved persons see aspects differently from the researcher or even different aspects. Those aspects might not come up, if the researcher focuses on his own questions too early and solely. This kind of interview makes it possible for the participant to develop his story about the topic, and thus, set connections, stress important aspects and put actions and events into perspective. In doing so, the con-

text becomes more vivid and understandable for the researcher which is an important goal within the cultural-historical traditions.

Apart from the occasional talking during our fieldwork, the narrative interviews within the research project opened up a space for asking more and getting more detailed answers about the daily routine in the institutions and the work with the children while also getting to know the teachers and their views better. The method chosen for these interviews was the episodic interview which is a form of narrative interviewing. Flick (2010, pp. 238239) who developed the episodic interview is convinced that the knowledge about special areas is stored in the memory in two forms: narrative-episodical knowledge which is related to situations and experiences and semantical knowledge – more abstract and general in nature. The first form is remembered in situations within special contexts, the second form as concepts and their relation to each other. The episodic interview helps reveal this knowledge by asking different types of questions. One type refers to situations or episodes which are related to the question and topic of research while the other focus on the concepts within that area. In the context of my research topic, this implied questions about special situations (e.g. "When – during the last week – did a not German speaking child handle a communicative situation well? How?") and about concepts like language development and the fostering of it.

Watching the children act and interact with each other, the interviewing kindergarten teachers provided me with useful insights into everyday life as well as special problems they face. The narrative interview gave a special frame and setting which enabled the teachers to reflect and talk. In addition to the information which can be collected via questionnaires as well (e.g., their work experience, their education, their focus etc.) this form gave the teachers space to unfold their views and bring up their own topics as well. They displayed themselves as professionals: we do it like this, because we learned it this way, this is the way it should be. Additionally they opened themselves and admitted difficulties and problems. They mentioned wanting to do more but not being able to, and doubting whether everything they do is good, and whether they meet the needs and challenges of each single child. In an interview one of the teachers made it quite explicit: "It's a child who has to go to school next year. A girl who has extreme difficulties to acclimatize, because of her unsteadiness and second motherlanguage. (…) Both of us

reach our limits here linguistically. (…) According to her age she should be on a different level and I do not know what is the reason. Is it because of her poor language skills? Or also a cognitive problem? (…) What's right or wrong in this case? Due to the impossibility to communicate, I cannot estimate it."[3]

The interviews have shown to be a successful means for a better understanding of the people and the institution. The teachers explained the structure of their institution and unveiled conflicts between the teachers as well – differences in their methods and goals also caused by age differences and other things they learned during their professional education, financial reasons, practical obstacles. In one interview a young teacher told about her experiences with older colleagues who do not accept that the younger one has an own opinion and might see the difficulties of a child, where the older one cannot. "I have got four years of professional experience. But, what is that against someone who has 30 years? Yes, you need good self-confidence for telling him that. (…) Yes, I think, if you don't dare that, you don't have any chance. And I think, in this case a lot of children don't have a chance neither".[4] As everybody sets different priorities and sees different things, good teamwork and a cooperative atmosphere within the kindergarten is required for good work. However, not only the teachers influence the work, but also the children and their abilities. The same teacher observed that in this kindergarten, that a lot of children with poor German skills attend, her practical work is changing. She explained for example that she likes to embed language training into the sport hours and starts with ambitious projects which relate the current topic of the group activities (e.g. autumn and apples) to physical activities. As most of the children do not understand her explanations, she has to reduce her aims step by

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[3] "Das ist ein Kind, was nächstes Jahr in die Schule kommt. Ein Mädchen, die durch ihre Unregelmäßigkeiten hier und durch die zweite Muttersprache extreme Probleme hat, sich hier einzufinden. (…) sprachlich stoße ich ständig an meine Grenzen und sie selber auch (…) Eigentlich müsste sie von ihrem Alter her auf einem ganz anderen Stand sein und ich weiß nicht, woran das liegt. Liegt es an den mangelnden Sprachkenntnissen? Oder ist es auch ein kognitives Problem? (…) Also, was da jetzt richtig oder falsch ist, da fehlt es dann an der Kommunikation, weil ich das eben nicht mehr einschätzen kann."

[4] "Ich hab' jetzt vier Jahre Berufserfahrung, was ist das gegen einen, der 30 hat? Aber ja, da brauchst du auch ein gutes Selbstbewusstsein, um das demjenigen auch sagen zu können. (…) Ja, ich glaube, wenn du dich das nicht traust, hast du auch keine Chance so. Und ich glaube, dann haben auch viele Kinder keine Chance."

step. From complex activities with different roles (some children being mice which try to steal apples) to simply playing all together with parachute and balls symbolizing the wind playing with the apples. The observation alone would not have provided these insights in such a short time.

Another important aspect of the interviews with the involved teachers was the evaluation of the development (especially regarding language) of some children. As a temporary visitor, it was not easy for me to see whether a special behavior was typical for a child or temporary due to abnormal situations. The kindergarten teacher interacting with the children on a daily base has a better knowledge of the characteristics of every child. In the interviews our different point of views caused new insights and reflections for me and the teacher.

Within developmental psycholinguistics, narrative interviews are not widely used as they are thought to be irrelevant to the core interests of most of the research. But Rogoff states that "interpersonal and cultural-institutional information is necessary to understand what this child is doing, although it does not need to be attended to in the same detail as the child's efforts" (2003, p. 56). Interviews can add this kind of information to the research. Although, as an isolated method interviewing the teachers cannot be sufficient to understand aspects of children's language development, as one approach among others it provides interesting and valuable information and explicates important aspects of the cultural context in which the development takes place.

3.3 Influence of and on the researcher

Research and its results are inevitably influenced by the researcher and her motives and backgrounds, for example when formulating the questions and hypotheses, as well as during the interpretation and analysis (Flick, 2010, p. 25). While most of the quantitative research tries to minimize these influences (e.g. by using computers, double-blind-examinations, the concept of interrater reliability), ethnological work tries to take into account these influences and unfold and reflect them. Especially since the writing culture debate started in the late 1970s, the role of the researcher has been controversially discussed within ethnology. These discussions led to new ways of representation and description. One solution was the orientation towards more dialogical and polyphonic methods of representation and the explicit reflection on the role and impact of the researcher. Contrasting

the "Self" of the researcher with the 'Other' who used to be regarded as the object of research, Dwyer (1979, p. 219) postulated "that the initial step [...] must be to seek forms of social action which do not silence the Other's full "voice" at the outset, which do not abstract it from its context, and which allow it to be heard in a critical address to the Self". The so called 'dialogical ethnography' is highly contested for its disregard of the inevitable asymmetrical power structure of the research situation for example (Schupp 1997, p. 69 et seqq.). However, the requested reflection of the researcher and her influence and role became standard in modern ethnology. What is the role of the researcher in the field? How does she influence it? And how does – the other way round – the field influence the researcher? Does it change her opinions and attitudes? Will it perhaps change the research questions and aims?

The discussed ethnological methods try to capture complex situations in which it is not possible to identify clear variables. For that, they use different approaches: the observation of natural situations, discussing with the participants and listening to their views. The various methods focus on different aspects of the same general situation and each offers a valuable contribution to its understanding which could not be provided by one method alone. As a result the researcher will get some kind of insider's view into the research area and its constitution.

Nevertheless, the outsider's view which the researcher brings to the field originally helps to unfold the particularities in the situations, bringing along some new perspectives and questions for everyone involved. The difficulties the researcher faces during the first phase of research (getting 'in' the field) enable a new perspective to and understanding of the research area which is different from the insider's view (cf. Schoneville 2010: 97). Thus, it offers a possibility to get aware of actions and motives as the members of the community "often have difficulty noticing their own practices because they take their own ways for granted, like the fish not being aware of the water"(Rogoff 2003, p. 24). Hence, Rogoff highlights the importance of the communication between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of the community (Rogoff 2003, p. 24). This communication between researcher and the community members is not a confounding factor, but an explicit part of the research process. Flick (2010, p.29) clarifies: "The subjectivity of both of the researched and the researcher becomes part of the researchprocess. The researcher's reflections about his

activities and observations in the field, his impressions, irritations, influences, emotions, etc. become data and part of the interpretation"[5](translation: C.E.). In this light, the researcher is not so much of an expert, but asker, seeker, and not-yet-knower.

4. Conclusion

Following Miller (1993, p. 344), one important feature of cultural-historical oriented research is the active child in its context as a unit of research. This involves attention not only to the child, but also to the behavior and activity of surrounding people, factors of culture and situation. Ethnological methods, especially participant observation, are eminently context-sensitive. They prompt the researcher not to neglect situation, context and culture. But, they are also suited to examine the active child. James argues that "it is the use of ethnography as a research methodology which has enabled children to be recognized as people who can be studied in their own right within the social sciences. (…) For what ethnography permits is a view of children as competent interpreters of the social world. This involves a shift from seeing children as simply the raw and uninitiated recruits of the social world to seeing them as making a contribution to it" (James 2010, p. 246). Also within our fieldwork these methods allowed for special insights into the daily life and activities of children. Taking into consideration the context and the conditions of the institution, it was possible to see the children interacting in a meaningful way. Despite, their language use might seem to be defective and deficient on a first glance, most of the children find ways to express their needs, feelings and wishes and establish stable social relationships.

A strength of ethnological methods is that they enable for direct and straight observation. For the detailed analysis of speech data which is important for a lot of research questions in this area ethnological methods have to be modified according to the research question – for example by using recording devices. Hedegaard criticizes that these "new anthropological approaches [...] have not yet solved the

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[5] -"Die Subjektivität von Untersuchten und Untersuchern wird zum Bestandteil des Forschungsprozesses. Die Reflexionen des Forschers über seine Handlungen und Beobachtungen im Feld, seine Eindrücke, Irritationen, Einflüsse, Gefühle etc. werden zu Daten, die in die Interpretation einfließen [...]".

problem of the relations between the specific situation and the general conceptions of their thematic studies" (Hedegaard 2008a, p. 36). Consequently, it does not seem to be appropriate to rely solely on them. But, depending on the research question, it can be definitely fruitful for cultural-historical psycholinguistics to take them into consideration.

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Keywords	Name index
child development,	Hedegaard, M.;
ethnology,	Knoblauch, H.
language development,	Malinowski, B.;
methodology,	Rogoff, B.;
narrative interview	
participant observation,	
psycholinguistics,	