

The Fabrication of Meaning: Ethnomethodology in Multicultural Research Interaction

Karla Sessin-Dilascio ^{1*} Charles Borges-Rossi ²

1. Environmental Science Program, University of Sao Paulo, Avenida Professor Luciano Gualberto, 1289, Brazil
2. Environmental Science Program, Univeristy of Acre, Ramal Canela Fina, 69980-000, Brazil China

* E-mail of the corresponding author: karla.dilascio@usp.br

Abstract

Empirical research in multicultural and socially distant settings depends not only on the design of research instruments, but also on the situated interaction through which questions become meaningful to participants. In community-based research, especially in traditional Amazonian communities, the application of closed-ended questionnaires raises important methodological questions about how researchers and interviewees negotiate meanings in practice. Carrying out empirical research using surveys or questionnaires is challenging, particularly when significant social and cultural distances exist between researchers and participants. This article examines the interview situation in closed-ended questionnaire application. Through the ethnomethodological documentary method of interpretation, we analyze interview transcriptions from fieldwork within an Amazon protected area. The article presents evidence that interview participants actively constructed their own interpretive concepts using the documentary method. It demonstrates the analytical importance of the interview situation in aligning empirical data with social reality.

Keywords: ethnomethodology, empirical research, research methods, structured questionnaires.

DOI: 10.7176/RHSS/16-2-06

Publication date: September 28th 2026

1. Introduction

It is common for community-based research to prioritize methodological approaches supported by qualitative methods over quantitative methods, under the justification that the control demanded by the latter eliminates context elements that are essential for a better understanding of the local reality (Brodsky et al., 2016). If there is a broad understanding of the dimension of the construction of scientific facts, leading some to believe that factuality is fiction, there is also the need to clarify the method, the contingencies of the data collection process, and the analysis process (Babbie, 2003a; Becker, 1993a; Seale, 1999). Literature reinforces the importance of the researcher's critical analysis during the process of method construction and data collection, as opposed to "blindly" following the methodological rules, on which the quality of the research depends (Levitt et al., 2022; Probst, 2014; Probst & Berenson, 2014).

The moment of defining the questionnaires and collecting empirical information is essential and challenging. Social scientists have been poring over the questionnaire design process for years, especially those dedicated to quantitative research or, as he points out: "*interview-data-as-resource: the interview data collected is seen as (more or less) reflecting the interviewees' reality outside the interview*" (Rapley, 2012) (p. 16). Among the technical specificities that guide these discussions about the construction of questionnaires is the need to create better artifacts to operationalize concepts, transmit and order questions (e.g. "question wording") avoiding possible distortions in understanding (Houglan, 1990).

The level of education of the interviewee, his social and cultural background are also the object of analysis and discussion. In the process of applying the questionnaire, the researcher's posture towards the interviewee and the context are relevant points discussed in the literature. These analyses even infer that the environment created by the researcher at the time of the interview can interfere in the result, even reaching details such as the language of approach, the accent, or even the researcher's clothing. Accordingly, "*language and cultural meanings can be viewed as problems in the sociology of knowledge, which set the conditions for literal measurement in sociology*".

The constructivist-interpretive tradition starts with the understanding that reality is constructed in social interaction. In this tradition, the information that emerges from the interviews describes not a piece of data, but rather the result of the social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and for this reason it is necessary to pay analytical attention to the moment of interaction, as a joint production of reports. Reality is not

suppressed from the context, but rather constructed, the researcher does not collect data but creates it. Therefore, the researcher should not be excessively concerned with the technical elements of the design and application of questionnaires, his attention should be focused on the moment of interaction and incorporate contextual elements valuing (Combessie, 2004; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Jason & Glenwick, 2016) *ad hoc* solutions required to solve concrete problems at the time of the interview. Ethnomethodology can contribute to the understanding of interacting members in the application of research questionnaires, and to data analysis, since it focuses on the contextual, circumstantial analysis of the work of producing facts and meaning in the elaboration of evidence, directing the pain's gaze to the documentary method of interpretation of the interacting members (researcher and interviewee) (Becker, 1993; Garfinkel, 2018a; Rapley & Seale, 2004).

This article uses the theoretical framework to analyze the situation of the interview (audio) and the transcribed answers of the structured questionnaires (Cicourel, 1964) applied by a researcher to the extractive community of Periquito, in the Extractive Reserve (RESEX) of Riozinho da Liberdade, in the Juruá Valley, state of Acre. Among the objectives of applying the questionnaire was the need to calibrate the questions, identifying the terms that were close to the interest of the research and that would be recognized by the interviewees. The analysis of the interview situation will be done in the light of ethnomethodology and seeks to understand how the members of the research situation work together to produce meaning between what is said and what is meant, what he called the documentary method of interpretation, the importance of indexical expressions and context for the understanding of the terms described in the questionnaire and the work of the members in producing relatability, will also be considered (Garfinkel, 2018a; Heritage, 1985).

The results point to the importance of context for the creation of meaning from the documentary method of interpretation, the constitutive nature of the time of the "question about which one speaks", as a developing and developed event, product and process. The need for the researcher to rely on 'what everyone knows' about the categories of interest in order to arrive at a specific meaning, and the constant need to provide the context so that meaning could be "found". The analysis points to the fluid meaning of the expressions in the context of research, the researcher's work in presuming information about the biography, the speaker's purpose or the circumstances of the speech. Finally, this article intends to contribute to the reflection on the process of data collection via questionnaires with closed questions in multicultural contexts. (Gago & Magalhães, 2011; Wieder, 1974)

2. The Fabrication of Meaning in the Documentary Method of Interpretation

"Traditionally, quantitative research seeks to remedy the contingent dimension of data collection, by distancing the researcher from the "object of research", or from the interviewee, often considered ordinary people devoid of scientific knowledge or even method. At the time of the analysis, the sociologist would try to remedy the contextual dimension, the indexicalities (e.g. expressions indicative of context, contingent result of social actions and practices, as attributed by Garfinkel & Sacks (2012), in order to produce real, intelligible knowledge of the "objective", rational reality of social facts (Garfinkel, 2018a).

Parsons point out that the knowledge of social agents is successful when it approaches rational accuracy, obtained through the application of the logical empiricist principles of scientific investigations. The social subject who distances himself from objective rationality would act under the circumstances of social norms as a mere puppet, an individual of "doped judgment". The argument is that there is a standardization of human actions (sedated judgment of a cultural and psychological type), a stable nature of the human condition that marginalizes the social agent from his own action (Garfinkel, 2002, 2018b; Heritage, 1999).

Garfinkel, like Goffman, leaves the sphere of "voluntarist theory" and integrates the "theory of practical action", sustaining the capacity and knowledge of the members in interaction (GIDDENS, 1981; HERITAGE, 1999). Garfinkel's ethnomethodology places at the center of the investigation "the social facts themselves and the empirical conditions (or methods) of their realization", accepting the cooperative character that constitutes order and sign. For Garfinkel (2018, 12p.) "there is no epistemic individual or object", the interacting members use judgments to build a commonsense rationality, which is carried out cooperatively in the interaction process. The systematic study of practical reasoning and practical action are at the heart of ethnomethodology. Garfinkel (2018) *apud* Heritage (1999) the "objective reality of social facts as a continuous realization of concerted activities of daily life, as ordinary and ingenious forms of this realization".

The work of the members in producing accountable actions, that is, recognizable by other members, in a continuous reflective process for the construction of commonsense, was defined by Garfinkel as a documentary method of interpretation being:

The method consists of treating an actual appearance as "the document", as "pointing to", as "representing" an underlying assumed pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from your individual documentary evidence, but the individual documentary evidence, in turn, is interpreted based on "what is known" about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other (Wieder, 1974)

The notion of sedated judgment is misleading and stems from a bias of the researchers, of a theoretical-methodological option based on stable structures that try to adjust a daily scene to a "common culture as imposed rules of action". Garfinkel points to the importance of the work of judging members. In situations of changes in ordinary events, incongruities are judged by the members, referring to their common-sense knowledge of social structures, to solve practical problems. The non-action of a member of the interaction may also be a result of the member's judgment about the action, who tries to identify "what is behind" the unexpected change in the interaction. (Garfinkel, 2018b)

Common understandings do not consist of a set amount of shared agreement. The comprehension of a sentence does not pass through the literal comprehension of each referent and its sign, like a code to be deciphered, on the contrary, the meaning is something procedural. It is the job of the interacting members to establish the correspondence between the observed and the intended occurrence. Comprehension requires the composition of several contextual, indexical, constitutive elements (time, the biography of the members, the place of interaction) and sanctioned property of the discourse; Together they form individual documentary evidence that is mobilized by the reflective and comparative method, from judging the members to the production of meaning (Garfinkel, 2018a; Garfinkel & Sacks, 2012).

Interactions between researcher and interviewer are, like everyday situations, interactions of meaning-making, through the documentary method of interpretation. This article dives into understanding the procedures and knowledge that members in an interview situation use to "test, manage, and transmit" understanding the terms of an interview. The "work by which decisions of meaning and fact are managed"(Garfinkel, 2018b).

3. Data collection and analysis method

The data presented in this article are the result of one of the research projects carried out by the research group Regenerative Frontiers of the Amazon at the Federal University of Acre – Campus Floresta (GPFRAM), the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) and researchers from the University of São Paulo. The purpose of the research project was to provide moments of learning through active practice and direct contact with the community, like another research that took place in the same region (Martini, 2019).

The research is based on the analysis of audio recorded in a situation carried out in the community of Periquito in the Riozinho da Liberdade RESEX. This community is made up of 32 families whose residences are distributed on the banks of the Liberdade River. The community is formed by a group of relatives and is on average 4 hours away by motorboat upstream of the Liberdade River departing from BR-364. Access is restricted only to the river, in the summer the low level of the river increases the time needed to reach the community, intensifying the isolation of residents in relation to access to goods, services and the flow of agroextractive production. It is important to emphasize that most of the interviewees either did not know how to read and write or had only attended primary school (5th grade) in the community school.

The interviews were conducted by *household*, prioritizing the head of the family. Among the 32 houses in the Periquito community, 28 participated in the survey (87.5%). The exploratory questionnaire contained 40 questions starting with: name, age, marital status, place of birth and community in which they live. In this article, only the first question of the structured questionnaire was transcribed and analyzed, elaborated according to the Table 1. In addition to marking the answers directly on the questionnaire, the moment of the interview was recorded and later transcribed. In total, the first 10 interviews applied by the researcher were transcribed, since after these questions the questionnaire and the research situation were adjusted to improve the interviewee's understanding of the concepts asked. The transcriptions were reviewed and rearranged in fragments with indications of the statements of the researcher (P) and the community member (C), keeping the indexical expressions and the indication of moments of silence. All information regarding the identification of the interviewee or the researcher was omitted.

Table 1. First conceptual question of the questionnaire: How do you relate the social groups below and their economic position? The researcher should check the option presented by the interviewee.

Social group	Rich	Poor	Progressing	Decadent
Rubber tapper				
Settlers				
Settlers				
Cattle ranchers				
Indigenous				

Source: based on Hoelle (2015).

The qualitative analysis software Nvivo was used to identify the formulations elaborated from each interview. The analysis sought to understand how the members of the research situation work together to produce meaning between what is said and what is meant, which he called the documentary method of interpretation and, in particular, the importance of the retrospective-prospective sense for the creation of the context and the meaning of the terms.

The transcriptions were named according to the temporality of the application of the questionnaires, using a specific code following the numerical sequence from 1 to 10 (e.g. questionnaire 1 is Q-1, questionnaire 2 is Q-2 and so on). The transcripts were organized in line with the answers and complete questions generated at the time of interaction, indicating the statements of the researcher (P) and the interviewed community member (C) and the numerical sequence respecting the temporality of the interview. In the article, only the transcribed lines of interest for the analysis were inserted, the complete transcreation of the interviews can be consulted in Appendix I. The code of the questionnaire, the line and the person responsible for the speech (e.g. Q-1-19C). The code indicates the fragment of speech that the ethnomethodological analysis refers to.

It is important to emphasize that during the application of the questionnaires, the researcher learns a set of common-sense concepts or "what everyone knows", which helps him in the documentary creation of the meanings of the terms of the interview for that community. The time of interaction in the face-to-face meeting between the members became a constitutive element of the comprehension process, since the interview was based on documentary evidence of meaning generated at the time of interaction, in addition to the concepts of the terms identified by the questionnaire. In addition, during the interactions of the members in the interview, the polysemic understandings of the terms of interest were documented, generating a framework of meanings of the terms for the community.

In the first moment ($n=7$ – Q-1 to Q-7), it was indicated by the researcher who applied the questionnaire that, if the interviewees did not know the term, they could explain it and, in general, it would be possible to interact with the interviewees according to the need established in the interaction to clarify the questions, allowing interaction with the context of the interaction and its indexicalities. In a second moment ($n=3$ – Q-8 to Q-10), it was suggested that the researcher should not make any *ad hoc* changes, strictly following the questions of the questionnaire, with the possibility of making only minor changes regarding the terms used for the "social groups", by replacing the initial term with another one learned during the application of the first questionnaires. The researcher should also try to remedy any circumstantial production, indexicalities, avoiding dialogues of clarification about the defined terms.

By limiting the possibilities of presentation of what Garfinkle calls "the essential elements of common understanding" understood as "a definite amount of agreement shared among people on certain topics" 116), limiting the possibility of production of retrospective-prospective meaning by the researcher (case Q8-10), and thus limiting the linguistic event from being treated as a document. The change in the premise of the questionnaire application altered the dynamics of the possible answers, since the indication to "not explain the terms" restricts the possibilities of formulation by the researcher and the interviewee, among other changes identified throughout the article.

4. Fabrication of meaning in the interaction between researcher and interviewee

A functional structure made up of holons is called holarchy. The holons, in coordination with the local environment, function as autonomous holes in supra-ordination to their parts, while as dependent parts in subordination to their higher-level controllers. When setting up WOZIP, holonic attributes such as autonomy and cooperation must have been integrated into its relevant components. The computational scheme for WOZIP is novel as it makes use of several manufacturing parameters: utilization, disturbance, and idleness. These variables

were at first separately forecasted by means of exponential smoothing, and then conjointly formulated with two constant parameters, namely the number of machines and their maximum utilization. As validated through mock-up data analysis, the practicability of WOZIP is encouraging and promising.

It is interesting to note the evidence of the work of the members and the realization of the documentary method of interpretation for the understanding of what is being said at the time of the interaction. The verb tense used by the researcher to refer to an event is a point of reservation.

For the community, the researcher's questions were vague and opened to a fringe of determinations based on the interaction of the moment of the research, with other events such as past experiences accumulated by each member before the moment of the conversation. The interviewee, in view of the vagueness of the references given by the researcher at the beginning of the interview, and the small contextual elements presented during the first questions of the questionnaire, relied on the indexical expressions expressed in the questions as documentary evidence to construct the context, as presented by the extracts below (Q-1 and Q-7).

Q-1 Extract

-
- 13 P *And the settlers? Which are those people who... They came here to Acre at the end*
14 *of the second rubber cycle, you know, who came from the south, from the southeast, you*
15 *Do you think these people, are they rich or poor?*
16 C *Boy, I think I was poor, right, because I came here to cut rubber.*
17 P *Do you think they are progressing or so decadent?*
18 C *like this, they are decadent indeed right*
19 P *decadent?*
20 C *Yes, wasn't it?*

Q-7 Extract

-
- 42 P *That these were the people who came here without land, to this region, right.*
43 C *é.. They are considered the people who came and didn't have well, it's nothing, right...*
44 *There was no place to live, there was no place for people to give land to them, to them*
45 *can settle down and try to produce something*
46 P *Yes, do you think these people are rich or poor?*
47 C *poor*
48 P *Do you think they are progressing or decaying?*
49 C *so progressing, because those who came, who sat down, I think*
50 *Now they have something, right. It has its own land, now it has plantations,*
51 *they no longer depend on how they did it in the past. Host for them*
52 *to be able to take possession of it in order to produce something.*

At all times, the interviewee tries to ensure that he agrees with the researcher on the contextual evidence presented by him, in a retrospective-prospective effort of the occurrence presented, who waits for something later to understand what was said before. The interviewee tries to combine a set of alternatives, methods of testing and verification on the factual character of the information given by the researcher, the use of the same verb tense as the researcher is evidenced, as presented in the extracts of Q-1 ("vieram"/"vinhero" lines 13C, 14C, 16P) and Q-7 ("vieram"/"vinham", lines 42P, 43C). These contextual aspects were "*used as resources to maintain a coherent sense of the central events of the exchanges*"³⁴¹ apud GARFINKLE, 1984c, 42p). In both fragments, the interviewee's answer to the question "seems to derive from the deduction made in the interaction" between researcher and interviewee through the documentary analysis of interpretation, rather than from knowledge or reflection acquired prior to the interaction (HERITAGE, 1999)

In some fragments, the interviewee recognized the referent, but there was no sign or category of definition used by him to determine the social group. This is the case of the relationship between the sign "settled" and the geographical location of this group in relation to the community, "*it reminds us of those settlement projects that are there on the branch*" (Q-2-28P) and "there is no branch there, on the other side it is all settlement projects, right, those people who live there" (Q-5 - 49-50P). The formulation by geographical location was sufficient for

the understanding of the sign. In the case of the sign "extractivist",¹ its referent is associated with the activity performed *"the extractivists... It's us here, right? it is the one that takes products from the forest"* (Q-2-12C-13P) and *"extractivist is the one who takes the products from nature, right, açaí, patoá, copaíba, andiroba... everything that survives on things of nature, right"* (Q-6-13-14P). In both cases, the members worked to formulate the precise meaning of the terms at the time of the interview, using devices such as geographical recognition or practical activity, making it possible to approximate the interviewee's perception in relation to the social group by asking, for all practical purposes.

Q-2 Extract

-
- 11 P *And the extractivists, do you think they are rich or poor?*
12 C *the extractivists... It's us here, right?*
13 P *é... it is the ones that take products from the forest*
14 C *Poor, right?*
26 P *And the settlers, from the settlement projects, are they poor or rich?*
27 C *if they are poor or if they are rich? I think that... I don't even know how to answer him.*
28 P *It reminds me of those settlement projects that are there on the branch.*
29 C *I know what it's like, but the ones who do it or the ones who live there?*
30 P *those who live.*
31 C *I think they are poor, right?*

Q-5 Extract

-
- 46 P *And the settlers? those who live in the settlement projects,*
47 *Do you think they are rich or poor?*
48 *of the project like this, like the INCRA project?*
49 *eh... there is no branch there, on the other side it's all a settlement project, right,*
50 *those people who live there,*
51 *Do you think they are rich or poor?*
52 C *I don't think so, I think they're not rich*

Q-6 Extract

-
- 7 P *And the extractivist, do you think he is rich or poor?*
8 C *I think he's rich*
9 P *the extractivist?*
10 C *I think it is, I don't understand much what it is, but*
11 P *Do you understand what extractivism is?*
12 C *No*
13 P *extractivist is the one who takes the products from nature, right, açaí, patoá, copaíba,*
14 *andiroba... everything that survives from things of nature, right.*
15 *Do you think that the extractivist is rich or poor?*
16 C *I don't think it's not even there, right, because I don't think it's not even rich.*
17 P *Do you think that the extractivist is progressing, improving, or is he declining?*
18 C *Always improving*

It is noted that in the excerpts presented above, there is constant interpretative work by the members to establish the correspondence between the observed occurrence and the one intended, both by the researcher and by the community, between what is said and what is meant. The content written in the questionnaire changes meaning when the researcher transforms them into speech. Its meaning changes again when the community member hears what the researcher said. The unfolding of the questions clearly points to the notion that the process of understanding, of understanding the meaning of what is being said, involves establishing the connection between what was said and the context in which it is being said (retrospective-prospective individual documentary interpretation, in Garfinkel's sense). Understanding the questions posed involves interpreting the situation in which this question occurs. This interpretative documentary process was incorporated by the researcher by linking to the questionnaire and in the dialogue of the questions the signs "afregelado" or "paulista", presented by

1 Not all residents of the RESEX know the term, although when the term is connected to their activity, the recognition is direct, since these are activities performed daily by the community members (information acquired by participant observation).

the interviewees, formulated as synonyms of the term "settler" (Q-5-28C; Q-5-26P).

Q-5 Extract

-
- 22 P *Here there is a term settlers, you don't know what settler is, or do you?*
23 C *No, I may know, but for now...*
24 P *settlers are those people who came from the South, from the Southeast, when rubber began*
25 *to decay and INCRA began to donate land, right, in RO, in AC,*
26 *for these people to come here, to have cattle heads, to return*
27 *this productive land*
28 C *Yes, here it was called, as it was?... refers, as it is, frail. the person who came from outside, the*
29 *People called it afragelado*
30 P *What is it like? Weakened? I'll even note here that it's the first person*
31 *That tells me this name for settler, right?*
32 C *Because that's how it is, the people who gave them this name, right.*
33 P *The people here, from Acre itself, right*
34 C *Yes, people gave it that name of afragelado, because they had nowhere to live and came here.*
35 *For them it lives, right?*
36 P *Do you think that these settlers, right, the frail ones, are they rich or poor?*
-

Q-6 Extract

-
- 25 P *When the rubber was falling, you know, the rubber was running out, a lot of people came from outside*
26 *here, because the government donated land, right. And then some people called it afragelado.*
27 *People came from the northeast, from Rio Grande do Sul... Then the government donated land so that*
28 *the*
29 *people raising cattle. Oh these people, do you think*
30 *Are they rich or poor?*
30 C *boy, a bit bad strength got rich, right?*
-

In some interactions, the term was understood, but in a different way from what the researcher expected, since there was no unicity between sign and referent, as an underlying pattern of dialogue. The repertoire of the researcher's individual documentary evidence increased proportionally with the number of people interviewed. An example of the emergence of the terms "aflagellated"/"paulista" as a substitute for "settler" is the geographical understanding of the term "settled" ("it reminds us of those settlement projects that are there in the branch" - Q-2-28C; "there is no branch there, on the other side it's all a settlement project, right, those people who live there" - Q-5-49-50P) and the recognition of the practice of the term "extractivist" ("the extractivists... It's us here, right? is the one that takes products from the forest" - Q-2-12C-13P; "Extractivist is who takes products from nature, you know, açaí, patoá, copaiba, andiroba... everything that survives from things of nature, right" - Q-6-13-14P). The evidence for these underlying patterns derived from the stream of individual documentary evidence acquired by the researcher over the course of the interview experiences, treated by the researcher as " 'a document', as 'pointed to', as 'favouring an 'underlying standard assumption'". (HERITAGE, 1999)

Q-3 Extract

-
- 28 P *And the farmer, do you think the farmer is rich or poor?*
29 C *Then that one comes in... that part, because there are rich farmers. There are farmers who work with*
30 *machine, no need*
31 *To work like us, on a machete, cutting weeds there. é... As they say... oh my god I forgot*
32 P *So do you think there are two types of farmers?*
33 C *yes, it does... because in our reality, we are small farmers, right?*
34 P *And you, as a small farmer, do you think you are rich or poor?*
35 C *Poor*
77 P *And the cattle ranchers? Do you think they are rich or poor?*
78 C *What is this?*
79 P *livestock is who has cattle*
80 C *Oh yes?*
81 P *There's pasture, raise cattle, right?*
82 C *It's because there's that part, right, there are some that raise cattle but that can't even be done... as they*
-

- say, neither
83 for consumption, right, because many times the person kills an animal a year,
84 He will kill the other one the next year. and there are others that kill everything. Day, right, and I don't miss it
85 P So there are people who have few cattle and there are people who have a lot of cattle, right?
86 C é...
87 P But if you were to say, do you think that cattle ranchers are rich or poor?
88 C Most of them are rich, right...

Q-5 Extract

- 57 P eh... And the cattle ranchers, do you think they are rich or poor?
58 C I don't understand
59 P cattle ranchers are those who have cattle, right, who have ... those who raise cattle, for fattening or
60 to sell calf
61 C So who raises cattle to make, how let's say, beef cattle,
62 For me all of these are rich, right
63 P So is there one more type of cattle rancher? I don't understand, can you tell me
64 How do you see this group,
65 cattle rancher?
66 C No... How... That's how it is, it's my thought, right, why the farmer, that he
67 raise cattle for meat and milk, they
68 all are rich. But there are other types of people who... No... There are those who create
69 just to keep your... Your family
70 right, there are others that he also raises for a livelihood, a beast of burden,
71 Something like that, right, to survive. You are driving me crazy with this question
72 P But if you analyze these people who are small cattle ranchers, right,
73 who creates to survive,
74 Do you think they are rich or poor?
75 C No, no, the little ones ain't rich
76 P And the big one?
77 C The big ones are rich

The definition of social groups, for the researcher, derived from literature. The "social groups", for the community members, were linked to their daily practices. When explaining the referent of the term to the interviewees, its recognition was based on the practical activities that the members of the community experienced in their daily interactions, as in the case of the "cattle ranchers" and "farmers" groups. The distinction of these terms was possible thanks to the ad hoc arrangements for understanding the questionnaire, as in the excerpts: "so do you think you have two types of farmers?" (Q-3-32P) and "so there are people who have few cattle and there are people who have a lot of cattle, right?" (Q-3-85P).

The main economic and social practice in the community of Periquito is precisely agriculture, the planting of cassava "swidden" and the production of cassava flour. Some community members raise cattle, but they are not considered cattle ranchers, but cattle breeders. There is a differentiation between the recognition of the "cattle rancher", as a large meat producer, and the community that "it's because there is that part, you know, there are some that raise cattle, but that can't even ... as they say, not even for consumption, right" (Q-3-82-83C).

The understanding of "farmer" and "rancher" was incorporated into subsequent questionnaires (Q-6-10 to 41, Q-7-7 to 62). The incorporation of this formulation, the result of the work of the interacting members, generated subsequent gains in relation to participant observation and the interpretation of the answers given by the interviewee, enabling a better approximation between the occurrence intended by the researcher and the one observed by the community. This learning was also incorporated into the research for the analysis of the questionnaires that were applied prior to this discovery, ensuring greater reliability in the interpretation of the data. Analysis of the interaction of the members in the research context showed the demand for indexical contextualization to understand the precise meaning of the categories, something constructed at the time of the interaction between the members of the research.

The orientation for the researcher to stimulate interaction at the time of the interview, and his availability in the interaction for *ad hoc changes* and careful look at indexical expressions of context, was fundamental to broadening the group's understanding of the data collected. Many of the decisions made during the research were based on the understanding that there was no defined amount of shared agreement for the terms and that the

questionnaires would help to understand signs and referents progressively throughout the conversations, whose "documentary" process is created by the retrospective-prospective relatability of the "terms" in interaction, and therefore "time" is a constitutive element of the "question about which one speaks".

Q-6 Extract

-
- 19 P *And the farmer? But not the farmer like the people here, the farmer who has a lot of*
20 *plantation, do you think he is rich or poor?*
21 C *I think... Rich also can't be, if I were rich, I wouldn't plant much, right.*
39 P *And the cattle ranchers? the large cattle ranchers, who have many heads of cattle, do you think*
40 *Are they rich or poor?*
41 C *are rich*

Q-7 Extract

-
- 7 P *Do you think that the farmer is rich or poor?*
8 C *poor*
9 P *But you're thinking about the farmer...*
10 C *in the producer*
11 P *Small or large?*
12 C *small*
13 P *It is, and if it is the big farmer, the one who has vast plantations, soybean plantations.*
14 C *it's more developed, right, there's more, right...*
15 P *then this one you think is rich or poor?*
16 C *In this case neither rich nor poor. but it's more is, as they say, it's in better*
60 P *and the cattle ranchers, the big cattle ranchers, right, those who have a lot of cattle.*
61 *Do you think he is rich or poor?*
62 C *but compared to the poor he is rich*

The questionnaires in which the researcher was deprived of the process of presenting the referent of the term used for "social group" (Q-8-13 Q 30, Q-9 to 27 to 46, Q-10-18 to 41), and of any *ad hoc* or indexical alteration, rigorously suppressed the interaction and the production of meanings between the interacting members. This fact even hindered the obtaining of more reliable answers to the interviewee's perception of the social group questioned. Reciprocity between people who are in interaction is necessary for meaning to be produced, generating constitutive orders of meaning production. By suppressing the "indexical expressions", the researcher lost the "clues" presented by the interviewee that made it possible to clarify the elements of the context, which was another investigative possibility of expanding the context and understanding the terms researched.

Q-8 Extract

-
- 13 P *Do you know the term settlers?*
14 C *No ma'am*
15 P *Have you ever heard of Afragelado?*
16 C *No*
17 P *Paulistas?*
18 C *Paulistas already*
19 P *What is Paulista for you?*
20 C *for me it's the ones who live there in São Paulo*
21 P *Yes, do you know the term settlers? of settlement?*
22 C *I don't have much knowledge no*
23 P *Do you know the term cattle rancher? livestock?*
24 C *I know*
25 P *Do you think the cattle rancher is rich or poor?*
26 C *Most of them are rich, right?*
27 P *Do you think that cattle ranchers are progressing or declining?*
28 C *They are progressing, right, more and more, right*
29 P *What do you understand by cattle rancher?*
30 C *Cattle rancher is the owners of large farms, right, the big farmers*

Q-9 Extract

-
- 27 P *And do you know the term settlers?*
28 C *No*

- 29 P Do you know the term “afragelado”?
- 30 C Neither
- 31 P Paulista? Neither is it.
- 32 Do you know the term “assentado” or “assentamento”?
- 33 C I've heard of it, but I don't know this one. but we are seated right that we are
- 34 Sitting like that, in a position, you know, I think that's it.
- 35 P Do you think that the settlers are rich or poor?
- 36 C Poor, right?
- 37 P Do you think it is progressing or declining?
- 38 C Decadent
- 39 P And the cattle ranchers, do you know this term, livestock, cattle rancher?
- 40 C I've heard of it, but no...
- 41 P Do you know what it is?
- 42 C No... I think it's the ones who raise cattle
- 43 P Do you think that cattle ranchers are rich or poor?
- 44 C Regular, right? It's neither rich nor poor
- 45 P Do you think that cattle ranchers are progressing or declining?
- 46 C The cattle breeder is always progressing, right?

Q-10 Extract

- 18 P And the extractivist, do you think he is rich or poor?
- 19 C The extractivist is the... the reserve? What are you saying... You... I don't understand
- 20 P Have you ever heard of this term, extractivist?
- 21 C No
- 22 P No? It's the first time you hear him, right?
- 23 Have you never heard of it then?
- 24 C No
- 25 P Do you know settlers? This word settler?
- 26 eh... Have you ever heard of “afragelado”?
- 27 C boy... No
- 28 P And the settlers? Do you think they are rich or poor?
- 29 C But, give me a hint there...
- 30 P I can't give it. You know “settlers”, what do you think it is?
- 31 C I don't know
- 32 P It's just that I also have to know if these words make sense here or not
- 33 C hum hum... I'm understanding... It's just that I'm like this...
- 34 P No, but if you don't know it, you can talk...
- 35 C Ahum
- 36 P eh... Cattle rancher, do you know these words, cattle rancher?
- 37 C No.
- 38 P And the indigenous people, do you know it?
- 39 C the word I know, and I don't know that well, right,
- 40 Because I didn't live with him, you know.
- 41 But I know how to know.

By trying to remedy the circumstantial, indexical production, avoiding clarification dialogues about the terms defined in the questionnaire, or those reassessed by the researcher in the first questionnaires (Q-1 to Q-7), or even other *ad hoc* needs that arise in the process, the interviewees' answers were abruptly distanced from what would be the interest of the research. The diversity of possible information was limited by the search for the literal meaning of the words (Q-8 – Line 13-30; Q-9 – Line 37-46), such as “19P what is Paulista for you? / 20C for me is those who live there in São Paulo” (Q-8). Another effect of restricting interaction to the content of the questionnaire was the limitation of interaction between members, causing discomfort on both sides.

For the interviewee, the dynamics of the answers were close to a “quiz”, a method that referred to the need for “right” answers, changing the dynamics of the interaction from an informal, circumstantial conversation into a “test” dynamic, generating discomfort for both (Q-10 – Line 18-41).

In the course of the interviews in this small community, the researcher, also a teacher at the rural school, had created a friendly and relaxed context of conversation, which was commented on by the entire community. The

change in the orientation of the questionnaire application modified the previously created context, generating discomfort.

In the other questionnaires, although the diversity of the answers presented can be interpreted as an element of difficult systematization, the extracts presented showed the opposite, the incorporation of *ad hoc arrangements* and indexability in the analysis facilitated the understanding of the context and the analysis of the data, allowing formulations that brought the sign closer to the referent, creating a more consistent space for interaction between the members, as well as analysis and more plausible results in relation to the context studied.

The time series of locutions, performed by the interacting members, constituted documentary evidence of the conversation. The issues were only understood within and through the flow of attempts at understanding that consisted of treating an actual linguistic event as a document of, as pointed to, as representing an underlying pattern. Not only was the underlying pattern derived from a stream of individual documentary evidence, but the documentary evidence, in turn, was interpreted based on what was known and knowable in advance about the underlying patterns. By treating the utterances as events in the conversation, each member made references to the biography and perspectives of current interaction that each used and attributed to the other as a common scheme of interpretation and expression.

The recognition of the importance given to the moment of interaction, the incorporation of indexical expressions and formulations in the questionnaire, by the retrospective-prospective "documentary" process mediated by time, as a constitutive element of the research, was fundamental for the understanding of the approximate reality of the perception of the Periquito community about the social groups studied.

5. Conclusion

The elaboration and application of closed questionnaires is a challenge for empirical research. It is even greater when the questionnaires are directed to groups far from the sociocultural context of the researcher. Often the lack of knowledge about the research environment, social practices, and contexts of coexistence leads the researcher to conclusions that are far from the local reality. Scientific practice requires the researcher to make contingency adjustments beyond the theoretical and empirical aspects brought by the scientific literature.

Agreeing with Garfinkel, this article presents how the situation of interaction between researchers and interviewees can be challenging, especially when it is necessary to deal with rigorous and abstract methods far from research situations. The way out for the researcher is to establish *ad hoc arrangements*, operate indexicalities, provision formulations, in a constant retrospective-prospective process.

In research directed to traditional communities in the Amazon, the researcher's disposition in the interaction situation at the time of the interview is essential. The excerpts presented in the article point to a greater approximation of the understanding of the community's perception of the terms under study when the researcher conducted the interview in the model of daily conversation, compared to the application of a questionnaire that restricted the space of interaction to the objectivity of the question. The formulations were used as an essential instrument for the understanding of signs and referents between researcher and interviewee. Among the formulations are the indications of geographical location and approximation of the practical tasks of the daily life of the community members. It is remarkable the constant fabrication of meaning of the interaction situation and how the documentary method of interpretation is used by both the researcher and the community for all practical purposes.

The production and recognition of reasonable, realistic and analyzable actions is not the monopoly of philosophers and professional sociologists. Members of a society are necessarily interested in these issues, both as characteristics of their everyday activities and as part of their socially managed production. The study of common-sense knowledge and common-sense activities consists of treating as problematic phenomena the real methods through which the members of society, whether doing sociology, lay or professional, make the social structures of everyday activities observable.

Further research could explore how training researchers to recognize indexical expressions and interactional cues affects the quality of data collected through structured questionnaires. This would help assess whether greater attention to the interview situation can improve both the reliability of empirical data and the ethical adequacy of research in multicultural contexts.

References

- Babbie, E. (2003). Métodos de pesquisa de survey. 2. reimpressão. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.
- Becker, H. S. (1993). Métodos de pesquisa em ciências sociais. Hucitec São Paulo.
- Brodsky, A. E., Buckingham, S. L., Scheibler, J. E., & Mannarini, T. (2016). Introduction to qualitative approaches. *Handbook of Methodological Approaches to Community-Based Research: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*, 13–22.
- Combessie, J.-C. (2004). Método em sociologia. Edições Loyola.
- Da Silva, F. A. B., Sessin-Dilascio, K., Souza, T. S., & Miranda, V. M. (2021). A voz do liberdade (1º). Instituto Fronteiras.
- Dennis, A. (2025). The documentary method of interpretation, reflexivity, and indexicality. In A. P. Carlin, A. Dennis, K. N. Jenkins, O. Lindwall, & M. Mair (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of ethnomethodology* (pp. 124–131). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429323904-12>
- de Almeida, F. F. (2016). Etnometodologia e Análise da Conversa. *Teoria e Cultura*, 11(1).
- de Avila Saldo, P. (2015). Mapeamento Estratégico da Resex Liberdade com vistas à elaboração do seu Plano de Manejo.
- Einola, K., & Alvesson, M. (2021). Behind the numbers: Questioning questionnaires. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 30(1), 102–114.
- Gago, P. C., & Magalhães, R. F. (2011). GARFINKEL, H. Estudos dos fundamentos rotineiros das atividades cotidianas. *Teoria e Cultura*, 6(1 E 2).
- Garfinkel, H. (2002). *Ethnomethodology's program: Working out Durkheim's aphorism*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Garfinkel, H. (2018a). Estudos de etnometodologia. Editora Vozes Limitada.
- Garfinkel, H. (2018b). Estudos de etnometodologia. Editora Vozes Limitada.
- Garfinkel, H., & Sacks, H. (2012). Sobre estruturas formais de ações práticas. *Veredas-Revista de Estudos Linguísticos*, 224–257.
- Heritage, J. (1985). Analyzing news interviews: Aspects of the production of talk for an 'overhearing' audience. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Vol. III: Discourse and Dialogue*.
- HERITAGE, J. C. E. (1999). In GIDDENS, Anthony e TURNER, Jonathan (org.). *Teoria Social Hoje*. Tradução Gilson César Cardoso de Sousa. 1a Reimpressão, São Paulo: UNESP.
- Hoelle, J. (2015). Rainforest cowboys : the rise of ranching and cattle culture in western Amazonia.
- HOUGLAND JR, J. G. (1990). GIVING VOICE TO THE PUBLIC: SURVEY RESEARCH, APPLIED SOCIOLOGY, AND PUBLIC POLICY. *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 1–9.
- Jason, L., & Glenwick, D. (2016). *Handbook of methodological approaches to community-based research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, K. N. (2025). Editorial: On the editorial practices of (re-)presenting and curating ethnomethodological studies. In A. P. Carlin, A. Dennis, K. N. Jenkins, O. Lindwall, & M. Mair (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Ethnomethodology* (pp. 323–334). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429323904-32>
- Levitt, H. M., Surace, F. I., Wu, M. B., Chapin, B., Hargrove, J. G., Herbitter, C., ... & Hochman, A. L. (2022). The meaning of scientific objectivity and subjectivity: From the perspective of methodologists. *Psychological methods*, 27(4), 589.
- Luke, K. K. (2025). Conversation analysis. In A. P. Carlin, A. Dennis, K. N. Jenkins, O. Lindwall, & M. Mair (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of ethnomethodology* (pp. 42–50). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429323904-4>
- Martini, A. (2019). Tecendo limites no Alto Rio Juruá. <http://deposita.ibict.br/handle/deposita/91>
- Probst, B., & Berenson, L. (2014). The double arrow: How qualitative social work researchers use reflexivity. *Qualitative social work*, 13(6), 813–827.
- Probst, B. (2015). The eye regards itself: Benefits and challenges of reflexivity in qualitative social work research. *Social work research*, 39(1), 37–48.
- Rapley, T. (2012). The (extra) ordinary practices of qualitative interviewing. *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, 541–554.
- Rapley, T., & Seale, C. (2004). Qualitative research practice. *Qualitative Research Practice*, 16–34.
- Seale, C. (1999). Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(4), 465–478.
- Wieder, D. L. (1974). Telling the code. *Ethnomethodology*, 144–172.