

Долаючи кордони: усна історія на перехрестях дослідницьких практик

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MISSION IMPOSSIBLE? ORAL HISTORIAN AND THE BLOG

We usually consider oral history as a knowledge based on informants' spoken memories—not on literary sources, although we often study the informants' speech through transcripts. Oral history is translated in Finnish as *muistitieto* (memory based data) instead of *suullinen historia* (spoken memories, oral history). Finnish oral history tradition highlights the nature of remembering instead of the way the memories are produced or edited.

When a researcher's purpose is to find out people's thoughts and the meanings they give to things, interviewing has traditionally been his/her main method. The interviewer usually records the interviews in one way or another and also very often transliterates them. If not always using the practical paper-and-pencil (P&P) method, he/she will exploit some computer-aided system and text processing software for turning the oral data to textual format. I view oral history as a method of historical documentation, which uses interviews and other methods with living "survivors" of the time under investigation. It is worth considering the possibilities the current technology provides.¹

Whether we like it or not, computer-mediated methods are no doubt becoming more and more a part of a researcher's toolbox. Can ICT tools provide additional help to a researcher? Is it worth it to use the Internet, instead of interviews, when collecting oral history data? What kind of communication is possible in a blog and how can it be used for research purposes? Does the data obtained from such methods differ from traditional methods—and if so, how?

My PhD study suggests the ways to use a blog for collecting the so-called baby boomers' oral history. Internet blogs—defined here as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence—have been an increasingly popular form of communication in the World Wide Web. The first present-day format appeared in 1996, and the term "blog" was first applied in 1997². In a blog the author (blogger) writes something and publishes it for others to read. A conversation becomes possible when readers are allowed to comment on the written entries. The more public a blog, the more

important is the rhythm of the news the blogger posts. Using a blog is quite a new method for collecting oral history research material. The literature of the subject is wide, but it seems to concentrate on giving advice to bloggers on technical and content matters, not for research purposes.

Blogs are a form of CMC (computer-mediated-communication), which means that communication through blogs comes with certain changes compared to face-to-face (FTF) communication. In some ways communication will be poorer and in others it will be enhanced. Through a textual conversation people will have a different experience than when the same people have a face-to-face conversation. On the other hand, when using the Internet it is possible to communicate in a simple and inexpensive way with people on the other side of the world.³ In my research I found a blog to be the best way to get in contact with my target group, now middle-aged and spread out, working and living all over the world.

My blog was built as a forum to discuss and share memories in public. I launched it in 2006 and ran it for 45 weeks. In addition to the fact that the people were able to share memories (by reading and writing about them), they could participate and follow the progress of the research. Everyone had equal access to the blog community, because there were no passwords. I introduced a new subject every week according to my research question, so there were 45 themes to discuss. I see different themes very important, when you want to build a real conversation in a blog and try to collect data with it. One theme suits her, the other him.

It is very important to have a real conversation in a blog, especially when you try to collect data with it. The writers really built up a living on-line community in my blog. In almost all occasions they knew each other from the 1960s—1970s and continued the conversation which was interrupted nearly 40 years ago. The blog made it possible for people to join the community once again.

For me as a researcher the blog was a very interesting and stimulating way to collect oral history data from certain themes. As a matter of fact, we can consider the process as one kind of interview, in which the writers answered my questions consequentially and where the questions were absolutely the same for everyone. On the other hand, to be honest, the blog proved to be very demanding as a research tool. Running it took much more time and effort than I could have ever imagined. While it took almost all my leisure time for one year, I started to feel sympathy for the bloggers, who were suffering from burnout. Nevertheless, the highlight for a blogger is when you find out that you are not writing a monologue in a dark space.

What was my blog's meaning? From a research point of view, the results are very remarkable, but from a subjective point of view they are very embarrassing. At first it was a way to collect memories for research purposes, but it soon became something else, too. It offered the people a forum to share memories, make contact with old and new friends, get rid of depression, and develop love affairs. The data is still plentiful: the blog covers 4,698 comments, more than 100 photographs, and plenty of other contemporary material and documents from the 1960s and 1970s. There were many regular writers who wrote almost every

day: 12.5 % of the visitors produced all the research data. The blog was read on all continents and in more than 80 countries. It had over 50,000 visitors altogether, 74–636 per day.

It is important to remember ethical principles, especially in the world of ICT, where knowledge can be reached freely by anyone. Arja Kuula reminds us that a researcher always has to respect the respondents' self-determination and give them a chance to decide whether to take part in the research or not⁴. Chris Mann and Fiona Stewart add that one way for researchers to dispel respondents' feelings of caution and to increase trust is to be as open as possible about the purposes and processes of the research. They want to know if the faceless researcher is trustworthy. It is also important to note that the more individuals know each other in a virtual community, the more likely it is that trust, satisfaction, and a sense of being in a safe communication environment will ensue.⁵ In a blog, this requirement is extremely important to understand, to make and keep it a living forum. In virtual reality all those requirements mentioned are highlighted because of the lack of physical contact.

A researcher needs ICT skills, but also interactive skills when launching a blog. Good relationships are important. Otherwise the researcher suddenly discovers that she/he is the only writer in the blog, the writers disappear, or they do not bother to answer your questions at all. A blog conversation requires that a blogger continually keeps her/his eye on the page and tirelessly follows the discussion. Mann and Stewart put it this way: human relationships have the same kind of variability and rules on-line as they do in real life. Rapport on-line is possible — it comes from being very up front with what you are doing and responding as you would with anyone.⁶

A virtual environment is text-based, which is also a challenge. The primary ways for the writer to express him/herself are the choice of the words, verbal descriptions of feelings, and the structure of the text. The "interviewer" cannot be seen face-to-face, but the respondent can use emoticons, big letters and punctuation to show his/her feelings.⁷ Nevertheless, misunderstandings on the Internet are embarrassing but possible, when the expression given is different from the expression received.⁸

The researcher's feedback is emphasised in a virtual world. Participants may need regular confirmation to make sure that they are communicating in an appropriate way and that their contributions are valued. Participants may experience a blogger's pause to "listen" as absence. Cues that she/he is listening reassure participants of continuing interest. Mann and Stewart give an e-researcher some advice on how to show listening in a virtual world. A researcher may express listening with interest by responding promptly to questions, overtly expressing interest in a particular point made, asking follow-up questions, or perhaps enthusiastically sharing similar experiences as those described by the respondent. Because of the possibility of misunderstandings, it is also worth informing the interviewees when you are absent due to travelling, illness etc.⁹

Can a researcher be certain that the writers' identity is real? Although this was not problem in my blog, the fact is that the blogger can never absolutely know for sure who is behind the answers. It is possible for the participants to create whole new identities for themselves

in a virtual world. For example one of the regular writers in my blog used eight different nicknames or appeared nameless.

If there comes a posting which is written at 3:10 a.m. on Saturday, what does it tell about the person writing? Blog writers can choose the right time and place for them to write. The e-researcher must pay attention to this point. We must also remember that only those with enough technical abilities can write in the blogs. Due to this, e-research only works with certain types of respondents and the voice is muted of those whose voice is normally low. A writer states in my blog: "I think that people who write here have things in order. Those people who have a pc at home, laptop in their summer cottage or a screen open on the desk. What would those people write who don't have that equipment?" If the target group of the research is not just *the Bold and the Beautiful*, it is the researcher's task to take care of the research data triangulation. In addition to the blog I made 39 traditional interviews to reach as many voices as possible.

When a researcher is using a blog method for data collection, she/he has to step into the public with unfinished research, which is unpleasant and even frightening. According to Erving Goffman, we preferably like to show just the result when presenting our products to the public. So we make sure that we are being evaluated only on the finished, refined, and packed performance.¹⁰ It is typical for the blog that the research goes forward in cooperation with the public. On the other hand that can also be one of the method's benefits.

Lastly I want to discuss the quality of the oral history data produced by e-research. Is the result different that of traditional methods? Is there a difference between the data produced by speaking or by writing? Tiittula, Rastas, and Ruusuvuori¹¹ have, for example, paid attention to this. They point out that the language has a tendency to adapt to the tool. Often — but not always — the writers' language is more explicit, considered, straight, and systematic. A blog allows more time for writers to choose their words. For example, one writer in my blog sketched out his texts for days, checked the facts and dates before posting. On the other hand, there can also be certain streams of consciousness without checking spelling. As we know, language is developing and also reveals something about its time.

The researcher has to decide how to ensure the storage of the blog and other e-research data. The material should be filed in its original context. When e-research methods develop and the usage of the method increases, this will be a big challenge for archives in the future.¹²

Conclusion

From an oral history point of view, I see many possibilities in using a blog as a research method. For example, it is hard to imagine another method which has been so comprehensively reached among people as the blog. As I have pointed out, in addition to its many benefits, the new technology has also some potential risks. Those risks should be taken into consideration in advance.

Whichever method is used, of course the most important thing is to remember to try to save the voice of the past as authentic as possible. Still several difficulties may occur;

for example, it is not simple for the blog writer to direct his/her text. I mean, it is impossible to know all the readers on the Internet. What should one say about his/her youth experiences to the whole world? The need for the conversation is private and human; but, on the other hand, when you satisfy it openly, it is full of risks. As a form of media, for some people the blogs can be too public.

"When there is trust among people, relationship flourish; without it, they wither", writes Jenny Preece³³. The quality and quantity of the blog data depends on the researcher's and the respondents' interaction. After all, the researcher must be trustworthy. When a researcher assimilates the ethical principles, he/she respects the respondents' autonomy, treats them equitably and attempts to avoid any harm for them or for example their family. The blog comments tell, just like diaries, about remarkable things, feelings, and memories for the writer, but also about his/her close relationships.

Although my main purpose was to collect oral history data, on the blog people also reconnected with old friends they thought they had lost. It was a place where people met new friends, networked, reminisced and shared memories, fell in love, yearned for someone, suffered from sleepless nights, got frustrated, shared words of sympathy, and relieved depression. In the other words, the blog writers opened up to each other like they were used to do almost 40 years ago.

Reminiscing through a blog is not much different from recalling the past in some other ways. I see that it is possible to combine oral history research and the blog, but understanding the internet as a dangerous place, and social networking sites as places of socially unacceptable behaviour, hinders the use of this technology. A researcher has to respect the respondents' self-determination and give them a chance to decide whether to take part in the research or not. One way for researchers to dispel respondents' feelings of caution and to increase trust is to be as open as possible about the purposes and processes of the research. It is also important to note that the more individuals know about each other in a virtual community like the blog, the more likely it is that trust, satisfaction, and a sense of being in a safe communication environment will ensue.

Whatever the method, the most important thing is to make sure that it does not weaken the quality of the data. My methodological objectives were to create and develop new ways in using ICT tools for oral history research. The blog made it possible for my target group to join the on-line community whenever they wanted. For me it offered an information channel to make my study transparent and public in collecting oral history material.

Above all the people found that the public discussion in the blog made them remember old things better and clearer. Photos, links, and drawings published in the blog helped stimulate memories. The possibility to read one's own thoughts on a screen encourages reflecting on them and also activates long term memory processing. The memories become shared, diversified, multiplied, and accumulated. I find the blog method very encouraging from an oral history and cultural history point of view. As a researcher you need just three things: time, time, and time.

¹ See Avelin L. Oral history & e-research. Collecting memories of the 1960s and 1970s youth culture//Oral History. The challenges of dialogue/Ed. by M. Kurkowska-Budzan and K. Zamorski. Amsterdam, 2009.

² University of Carolina website: Herring S. C., Scheidt L. A., Bonus S., Wright E. Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Blogs. School of Library and Information Science, <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~jpd/classes/ics234.cwo4/herring.pdf> (2004; accessed June 12, 2007).

³ Wijnia E. Understanding Blogs: A Communicative Perspective, http://elmine.wijnia.com/blog/archives/wijnia_understandingblogs.pdf (accessed August 30, 2007).

⁴ Kuula A. Tutkimuseitikka. Aineistojen hankinta, käyttö ja säilytys. Tampere, 2006. S. 59.

⁵ Mann C., Stewart F. Internet Interviewing//Handbook of Interview Research. Context and Method/Ed. by J. F. Gabrium, J. A. Holstein. Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, 2002. S. 616–617.

⁶ Mann C., Stewart F. Internet Interviewing... S. 613, 617.

⁷ Tiittula L., Rastas A., Ruusuvoori J. Kasvokkaisesta vuorovaikutuksesta tietokonevälitteiseen viestintään//Haastattelu. Tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus/Ed. by J. Ruusuvoori, L. Tiittula. Tampere, 2005. S. 264, 271.

⁸ Goffman E. Arkielämän roolit [The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life]/Translated by E. Puranen. Porvoo, 1971. S. 39–40.

⁹ Mann C., Stewart F. Internet Interviewing... S. 617–618.

¹⁰ Goffman E. Arkielämän roolit... S. 56.

¹¹ Tiittula L., Rastas A., Ruusuvoori J. Kasvokkaisesta vuorovaikutuksesta tietokonevälitteiseen viestintään. In Haastattelu. Tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus/Ed. by J. Ruusuvoori, L. Tiittula. Tampere, 2005. S. 268–269.

¹² See more at <http://www.fsd.uta.fi/tietoarkistolehti/english/25/avelin.html>.

¹³ Preece J. Online Communities. Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability. Chichester, 2000. S. 191.

Ліза АВЕЛІН

МІСІЯ НЕЗДІЙСНЕННА? УСНИЙ ІСТОРИК І БЛОГ

Зазвичай ми вважаємо усну історію знанням, що засновується на розказаних спогадах інформанта — не на писемних джерелах, хоча ми часто досліджуємо розповіді інформантів за допомогою транскриптів. «Усна історія» перекладається фінською як *muistitieto* (дані, узяті з пам'яті), а не *suullinen historia* (розказані спогади, усна історія). Фінська усноісторична традиція наголошує природу пам'ятання, а не спосіб продукування чи видання спогадів. Я розглядаю усну історію як метод історичного документування із використанням інтерв'ю, але також інших методів дослідження досвіду живих очевидців. Не слід забувати переваги, що їх надають дослідникові інформаційно-комунікативні технології.

Це дослідження пропонує способи використання блогу для збирання усних історій представників покоління повоєнного бейбі-буму (baby boomers).

Представники цієї групи мали можливість ділитися спогадами, брати участь у дослідженні та стежити за його ходом.

Згадування за допомогою блогу не надто відрізняється від пригадування минулого іншими способами. У цій статті представлено ідею веб-блогу, його структуру та методологічні цілі, а також роздуми про подальше вдосконалення методу. Можна поєднувати усноісторичне дослідження із блогом, але слід розуміти небезпеки інтернету та соціальних мереж як місць, де можлива соціально неприйнятна поведінка. З іншого боку, для деякого блог є занадто публічним способом спілкування. Дослідник має поважати самовираження респондента і надавати можливість вирішувати, чи брати участь у дослідженні, чи ні. Для подолання ніяковості респондента та зростання його довіри слід бути максимально відкритим у висвітленні мети та ходу дослідження. Важливо зазначити також, що чим більше учасники блогу дізнаються один про одного, тим більшою є довіра, задоволення, почуття безпеки у комунікативному середовищі.

Олександра БРІЦИНА

XX СТОРІЧЧЯ В УСНІЙ ІСТОРІЇ УКРАЇНЦІВ (НОТАТКИ ДО ПИТАННЯ ПРО ІСТОРИЗМ ФОЛЬКЛОРУ)

Усні оповіді, що визначаються як «усна історія», поки не привернули належної уваги українських фольклористів, які найчастіше вважають її цариною інтересів істориків. Тож фольклористи, на відміну від істориків та етнологів¹, поки не часто звертаються до розгляду цього матеріалу в методологічному аспекті, хоча самі тексти такого типу завжди були в полі зору науки, навіть коли отримували інші жанрові визначення². Однак вирішення поставленого питання для фольклористики має не лише практичний, а й теоретичний сенс. Адже саме історизм фольклору тривалий час був однією із найдискусійніших проблем радянської фольклористики³. Значною мірою цьому сприяло панування марксистсько-ленінської методології, одним із наріжних каменів якої була концепція історизму та поняття «конкретного історизму». Звільнення науки від панування єдиної ідеологічної концепції відсунуло дискусії з цього питання на другий план, проте за мовчазної згоди більшості науковців панівним залишилося досить спрощене уявлення про стосунки фольклору й історії.

Зазвичай науковці розшукують у фольклорних джерелах інформацію про ті чи інші історичні факти, вважаючи, що реальні події стають джерелом фольклорних творів, проте з плином часу їх зміст дедалі віддаляється від історичних прототипів, «фольклоризується», підкоряючись законам традиції. Тому наукові розвідки рясніють гіпотезами про те, які історичні реалії стали джерелом того чи іншого сюжету думи, билини, історичної пісні, переказу, чи легенди, а часом навіть і казки⁴. Часом таке розуміння видається певною схематизацією стосунків між історичним буттям та виявами усної традиції, однак на пострадянському просторі воно й досі залишається не спростованим.

У випадку усної історії питання видається ще складнішим, адже оповідачі зазвичай вербалізують свій власний досвід, спираючись на особисті спогади. Тому питома вага реальних подій в оповідях значна, а участь творчої уяви видається мінімальною. Через це побутові меморати зазвичай розглядаються як показання свідків, а не як явища усної традиції з властивими їй закономірностями відтворення явищ дійсності.

На противагу такому розумінню взаємин усної історії з історичною реальністю існує й інша думка, суть якої полягає в тому, що фольклорний твір відбиває не стільки правду фактів, як історію свідомості народу. Тому індивідуальне сприйняття подій власного