

ORAL HISTORY TOWARDS LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Žodinė istorija kalbos ir kultūros studijose

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the relationship between oral history and linguistic and cultural studies. The author begins by presenting various definitions and approaches to oral history within these fields of knowledge. He focuses on the definitional and methodological proposals put forward by, among others, Jerzy Bartmiński, Linda Watts, Gary Okihiro, Dawid Dunaway, Donald Ritchie, Richard Dorson, Alessandro Portelli, Katja Roller, Natalie Braber, Diane Davies, Anisa Puri, Matthew F. Simmons, and David Carr. He then explores the intersection of various research methods, situating linguistic and cultural studies within an anthropological approach to oral history. He identifies key themes connecting oral history with these disciplines: textuality, narrativity, subjectivity, relationship with memory, and performativity.

KEYWORDS: oral history, linguistics, cultural studies, narrative, orality, textuality, subjectivity.

ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje aptariamas žodinės (sakinės) istorijos ir lingvistinių bei kultūrinių studijų ryšys. Pradžioje autorius pristato įvairias žodinės istorijos apibrėžtis ir požiūrius į jas įvairiose žinių srityse. Daugiausia dėmesio skiriama apibrėžčių ir metodologiniams siūlymams, kuriuos pateikė, be kita ko, Jerzy Bartmiński, Linda Watts, Gary Okihiro, Dawidas Dunaway, Donaldas Ritchie, Richardas Dorsonas, Alessandro Portelli, Katja Roller, Natalie Braber, Diane Davies, Anisa Puri, Matthew F. Simmonsas ir Davidas Carras. Toliau antropologiniu požiūriu ir žodinės istorijos kontekste nagrinėjama įvairių tyrimo metodų sankirta bei lingvistiniai ir kultūros tyrimai. Išskiriamos pagrindinės temos, jungiančios žodinę istoriją su šiomis disciplinomis: tekstualumu, naratyvumu, subjektyvumu, santykiu su atmintimi, performatyvumu.

ESMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: žodinė istorija, lingvistika, kultūros studijos, pasakojimas, sakytinė kalba, tekstualumas, subjektyvumas.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is devoted to a reflection on the relationship between oral history and the study of language and culture as theoretical work. This relationship has been hotly debated in oral history studies (cf. Portelli 2003; Dunaway 1996; Danielson 1996). The forerunners of research on oral texts among linguists and cultural scholars can be traced back to the earliest collectors of oral texts, particularly from so-called common folk (cf. Burke 2004). Dialectology has made a particular contribution to this field (cf. Pelcowa 2014), therefore

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linguistic and anthropological fieldwork has often been seen as a precursor to oral history (Jerzy Bartmiński even called oral history "a new name for the old practices of dialectologists and folklorists [...] of recording spoken texts from so-called simple people" (Bartmiński 2008a: 9). However, it would be an exaggeration to assume that oral history can be considered only a variety of linguistic and cultural research. Undoubtedly, techniques for recording oral texts existed before formalised oral history. Still, it is difficult to speak of it as a separate trend before the creation of sound recorders – oral history is inextricably linked to audio or video recording (cf. Portelli 2003; Roller 2015) and audio/video recording archives (cf. Roller 2015; Braber and Davies 2016; Simmons et al. 2025). It is the latter place that is particularly important for identifying similarities between oral history and linguistic and cultural studies. An example of this approach in the formative period of oral history is Benjamin Botkin's work *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Botkin ed. 1945). The researcher worked on a collection of former slave accounts (recorded as part of the Federal Writers' Project in the USA in the 1930s). He therefore used collections typical of oral history to reconstruct the vision of the world and the language of a specific excluded social group. His work was consequently interesting from a sociolinguistic perspective. We can speak of institutionalised oral history since the 1940s (I discuss this in more detail in Gocół 2023). However, an apparent rapprochement with linguistic and cultural studies has been visible since the 1960s (see Dorson 1996). The contemporary development of corpus research has led to increased interest in oral history archives, especially in dialectology and sociolinguistics (Roller 2025; Braber and Davies 2016; Simmons et al. 2025). In this article, based on early and recent literature on research at the intersection of language and culture, I will attempt to identify the most important points of contact, themes connecting oral history with linguistic and cultural studies.

I will begin my review of the state of research on oral history within linguistic and cultural studies by examining how the term is understood by representatives of these disciplines. This will allow me to determine, according to researchers, the relationship between them. Next, by analysing the common research themes, I will identify individual research fields derived from these fields of knowledge and used in oral history, and I will determine whether the definitions developed within linguistic and cultural studies reflect the actual state of research. Since joint research has a long tradition, the article is of a theoretical-summary nature and, as such, aims to provide the reader with a synthetic picture of the key points connecting linguistic and cultural studies with oral history.

2. DEFINITION OF ORAL HISTORY AND ITS METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

American folklorist Linda S. Watts described oral history as a fieldwork technique or method. This method involves recording interviews that capture informants' memories. This allows the folklorist to gain broader access to descriptions of old traditions, rituals, crafts, and activities. Interviews often contain data that was transmitted only orally – particularly in societies that did not produce written documents themselves. Among such "historyless" groups, Watts listed enslaved people, sharecroppers, mill workers, and homemakers. Thanks to the recordings, knowledge about their past could be supplemented with new information not recorded in writing and with a new point of view (Watts 2007: 293–294).

Ethnohistorian Gary Y. Okihiro wrote about oral history somewhat differently than Watts. In his works, he referred to oral history interchangeably as a method or a theory. By categorising oral history as a method, he meant the entire research process, which includes:

conceiving the program/choosing the linguistic community ¹, interviewing, transcribing/editing, final editing ², using documents, and end-product derivation. Regarding the relationship between history and folkloristics, ethnolinguistics, or dialectology, Okihiro emphasised the need to uncover certain meanings that were present in the consciousness of specific groups but had not become the subject of research reconstruction due to their absence in written sources. In his view, this situation primarily applies to communities that did not produce such documents at all or had only a negligible role in their creation, such as women, members of the working class, ethnic and racial minorities, and preliterate communities. They were presented solely from the perspective of other communities, external to them, and were intended to fit them into their own worldview. For this reason, events within their cultural sphere were often overlooked, considered irrelevant or marginal, and these groups were negatively valued. Therefore, Okihiro saw great potential in studying their oral histories of the past. Research techniques drawn from ethnography and related disciplines play a crucial role in the oral history research process. According to Okihiro, describing oral accounts of the past should focus on capturing social changes, and on how the social consciousness of the groups studied was formed (Okihiro 1981: 43).

In the literature, we also find definitions focused more on the form of communication. In one of his articles, Alessandro Portelli analysed oral history as a specific genre of discourse, essentially a cluster of different speech genres. Interestingly, the author did not treat the genre category abstractly, but rather in close connection with the communicative situation. According to him, the essence of oral history is determined by what is said, to whom, through what channel, and with what effect. Defining oral history here is closely linked to the situation of the conversation initiated by the researcher, embedded in a social and cultural context and within a community of specific communication and knowledge about the world (Portelli 1997).

In contemporary sociolinguistic and dialectological reflection, oral history is often conceptualised as a standalone research discipline. Simmons and others argue that it shares with linguistics the ability to reconstruct knowledge about human communities, a common goal of oral history and linguistics. The starting point for this reconstruction is the study of geographical, historical, social, and linguistic similarities reflected in language and text. For this reason, oral history archives take on particular significance in linguistic and cultural reconstructions (Simmons et al. 2025: 273–275).

According to Katja Roller, the text of oral history itself, especially in large corpora serving as research material, is crucial for both the linguist and the cultural researcher (since culture cannot be reconstructed without language and vice versa). These corpora allow for the identification of local, geographic, and historical variations in language and their cultural implications (Roller 2015).

Natalie Braber and Diane Davies noted that oral history archives can be reused by sociolinguists. Big data: "welcome the opportunity that archival oral history gives us to map changes in dialect through time by comparing older and younger voices from the same areas, [...] given the centrality of spoken language and the influence of speech styles within the oral history field, a focus on dialect can be of benefit to oral historians as well as linguists" (Braber and Davies 2016: 98).

¹ The term *linguistic community* was used by the researcher to refer to "those who share linguistic symbols and patterns of articulation, and a common world view and experiences" (Okihiro 1981: 35).

² Okihiro clearly distinguished between editing and final editing. The former is limited to creating a transcription, which is a verbatim record of the interlocutor's utterances – considering errors, pauses, gestures accompanying speech, etc. During final editing, this "raw" version of the transcription is subjected to editorial processing, resulting in an entirely new document – standardized and closer to the written language (cf. Okihiro 1981: 40–41).

Jerzy Bartmiński initially defined oral history as "an interdisciplinary activity of a scientific and, more broadly, social nature" (Bartmiński 2008a: 11). The term "activity" was too general, so the definition was refined over time. According to Bartmiński, oral history is "an organized activity of a scientific, social, and cultural nature, which involves recording, collecting, and editing personal statements (accounts) – by researchers, documentarians, journalists, regionalists, etc. – and, in sequence, making them available to a wider circle of interested parties" (2014: 10). Bartmiński, like Okihiro, recognized the processual nature of oral history (recording, archiving, editing).

In his 2014 article, however, the Lublin-based scholar introduced a new distinction that had not previously appeared in his work. He argued that we can speak of two different understandings of oral history. The first is captured by the definition cited above. In this approach, Bartmiński called it organised oral history. Alongside it, there is spontaneous oral history. According to the researcher, it is a spontaneous practice of storytelling that leads to the creation of a community's memory of its history (Bartmiński 2014: 10–11). These two terms, coined by Bartmiński, refer to completely different concepts. There is no common denominator between them; the researcher did not assign them to any common category. This is a previously unheard-of approach – oral history had not previously functioned as a name for spontaneous human utterances, but as a name for the practice of collecting and analysing them. The question remains whether Bartmiński's distinction of its spontaneous variety can be justified. In my opinion, this is multiplying entities beyond necessity. Assuming the existence of spontaneous oral history, we would have to consider it a natural human cognitive ability and extend its emergence even to the beginnings of humanity. Meanwhile, many disciplines have long used terms that can successfully replace spontaneous oral history – understood as both the practice of storytelling and a cognitive skill – e.g., narrative (for more on the use of this term in oral history, see Gocół 2013; 2014). Furthermore, there is a danger that, by using both definitions simultaneously, we will refer to the research material and its analysis in the same way.

The identity of oral history is primarily determined by its specific research material: oral texts about the past, which are studied by representatives of very diverse backgrounds. For this reason, it should be defined broadly – as research, social, and cultural trends based on recording, archiving, and analysing or processing oral texts about the past (cf. Gocół 2016; 2023).

3. HISTORICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Bartmiński (2014) also emphasised the interdisciplinary nature of oral history. In describing this aspect, he relied primarily on earlier studies by David Dunaway (1996), Richard Dorson (1996), and Donald Ritchie (2003). Ritchie emphasised that memory is the core of oral history³ (2003: 19), while Dunaway and Dorson emphasised the orality of transmission as a link between various research approaches (Dunaway 1996: 9–10; Dorson 1996: 287). The third scholar, in particular, as a folklorist, devoted considerable attention to orality and its role in interpreting accounts of the past. He emphasised that the first contact between folkloristics and oral history occurred only in the 1960s (Dorson 1996: 287).

³ It's worth noting that Ritchie explicitly avoided a clear categorization of oral history. He believed that the research process was complex, and the research methods used were clearly dependent on the research goals of a given discipline. Therefore, Ritchie explicitly stated that, in his opinion, no definition of oral history would truly capture what oral history actually is. Its connection to memory was important to the researcher, as he believed that a system of meanings could be extracted from texts. For him, oral history accounts were therefore material enabling the reconstruction of the conceptual sphere (Ritchie 2003: 19).

According to Dunaway, oral history gained its contemporary interdisciplinary form very slowly – a process completed only in the 1990s (Dunaway 1996: 10).

Writing about the development of oral history, Dorson (1996) highlighted several significant problems that arose from the greater than before interpenetration of the concepts of collecting, archiving, and analysing oral accounts of the past with various research disciplines, particularly folkloristics. He noted that in the sixties, oral history was viewed primarily through the lens of history and related disciplines. However, folkloristics employed different research methods and pursued goals distinct from those of historiography. Therefore, the scholar distinguished between two research approaches. The first approach, oral elitist history, is based on methods derived from traditionally understood history. Researchers choosing this approach focus primarily on analysing the content of the message, seeking confirmation of historical facts, from which they reconstruct a narrative about the past. Oral elitist history tended toward "elite" history and grand narratives, thus aligning with the most traditionalist trend in oral history (Dorson 1996: 287–291). We can now call this approach historical, as its goal is a relatively objective reconstruction of historical facts (cf. Gocół 2016; 2023). In fact, it is today typical not only of positivist-oriented historiography but also, among others, of journalists striving to fill in the "blank spots" of history (cf. Borowik 2008).

The second approach, oral folk history, tended toward small narratives, stories about local history and tradition. Its focus was the accounts of the "people". Adopting this approach, oralists tend to analyse the structure and language of the message, as well as the accompanying gestures and emotions (Dorson 1996: 287–291). Larry Danielson (1996) presented a similar perspective on oral history, with a particular focus on local history. This approach can be called anthropological, because it does not place historical facts in the center of interest, but the human being, the cognizant subject, and the goal of oral history activities is not the objective reconstruction of the past, but the reconstruction of memory, ways of remembering and talking about one's own memory and that of one's own social group (cf. Gocół 2016). This approach is closer to contemporary methods of linguistics and cultural sciences, especially ethnolinguistics and linguistic memory studies (cf. Niderla 2010; Wójcicka 2014a; Czachur 2017).

In Poland, Piotr Filipkowski (2010) drew on Dorson's division. Dunaway, Dorson and Danielson emphasised the interdisciplinarity of oral history, while Bartmiński pointed out that some oral history projects are situated around trans- or multidisciplinary, but he did not develop this idea (Bartmiński 2014: 11).

Contemporary dialectological and sociolinguistic research based on large data sets has a distinct anthropological slant. Their focus is always on the human community, whose unique characteristics can be reconstructed through the study of its language and culture, as reflected in oral histories. Well-described text corpora, accompanied by linguistically relevant metadata, allow for the reconstruction of the regional and temporal diversity of a community, on the one hand, and the worldview of that community, on the other. Such datasets of diverse native speakers of dialectal and regional forms are important in pedagogy and the popularisation of knowledge, as well as in the internal communication of various social groups, differentiated by factors such as age, place of residence, origin, language, social status, gender, and so on (Roller 2015: 81–82). Due to temporal changes in linguistic and cultural data, datasets developed by linguists may serve as better secondary source for understanding history (cf. Braber and Davies 2016: 106, cf. Puri 2025: 122–123). In their descriptions, sociolinguists pay more attention to what the interlocutor says, as well as how he or she says it. This difference in approach makes oral history sources interesting for sociolinguistics, but a text developed by a sociolinguist may become a new quality historical source (Braber and Davies 2016: 106). A new goal combining these two approaches may be the reconstruction not only of history but, above all, of the memory itself reflected in

linguistic and textual data (Braber 2025). This means that the focus of both disciplines is not so much on history, but on man and the human community.

The question remains: what was their prior relationship like, and what did oral history draw from folkloristics, ethnolinguistics, and dialectology?

The researchers' observations have led to several points of intersection with linguistic and cultural studies. I list the most important of these below.

4. TEXTUALITY

The research material of an oralist is an oral text about the past, which has many specific features. Many of these were described in the texts of Bartmiński (2008) and the Italian cultural studies scholar Alessandro Portelli (cf. 1997; 2003; 2005). Researchers emphasised, among others, the audibility, gesturality, situationality, dialogicity, variability, and transience of such texts.

Oral texts always arise in the process of interaction. Oral communication is adapted to the dialogic situation. We always speak to someone – in dialogue, an I-YOU relationship is formed. For this reason, the roles of the sender and receiver alternate in oral texts. Although the utterance may take the form of a monologue (as oral history texts often do), it is always addressed to someone (Bartmiński 2008b: 15).

The dialogic nature of oral history texts was also emphasised by Portelli. He noted that one of the relationships formed within an oral history interview is the dialogue between the informant and the researcher. Portelli, however, did not stop emphasising the role of interpersonal communication in constructing oral history texts. He also drew attention to other relationships that influence the final form of the statement. This includes intrapersonal communication (I-I) and social communication (I-THEM). The final form of the text is therefore influenced not only by dialogue with the researcher but also by memory and the socio-cultural context (Portelli 2003: 72–73; 2005: 2–6).

For this reason, oral history texts can be subjected to conversational analysis (I-YOU relationship) but also serve to reconstruct the subjective perspective of the individual (I-I) and the collective (I-THEM) (cf. Wójcicka 2016).

These textual markers are also reflected in large text corpora and allow for the reconstruction of linguistic and mental characteristics of communities (Roller 2015; Braber 2025). This is revealed in the meta-description of texts and in the reconstruction of community features reflected in language (Braber and Davies 2016: 99), sometimes with the help of artificial intelligence models (Simmons et al. 2025: 274). Text, therefore, remains the focus of new research.

5. NARRATIVITY

Narrative is one of the most frequently used terms in contemporary humanities studies. I omit a review of its definitions in the field of individual disciplines, which I have already conducted in another work (Gocół 2013: 10–18; see also Filar 2014: 13–34), assuming that narrative is a closed whole in the form of a meaningful descriptive sequence, organized in terms of plot and time, capable of fulfilling a cognitive function and reaching into cognitive schemas and scripts in which the subject is revealed (Gocół 2016: 17–18, cf. Barker 2005: 32–33). This understanding of this term is the result of many years of analysis in the fields of linguistics, literary studies, philosophy, sociology, and psychology.

Alessandro Portelli (2003), Marzena Marczewska (2014), and Anna Niderla (2010) identified narrative as one of the most important features of oral history texts. Historian David Carr (1991) focused not only on narrative patterns but, above all, on the cognitive and social function of stories. This led to historical research turning into linguistics in two

areas. First, not only the content but also the structure of texts was examined. Consequently, historical analyses began to draw on the findings of stylistics, textology, and linguistics. Second, history ceased to be understood solely as the study of the past, and the emphasis shifted to textual analysis. Historians, in addition to reconstructing the order of actual past events, became interested in reconstructing the conceptual sphere, the concept sphere of narrators, whose transformations proved equally interesting from a historiographical perspective (cf. Carr 1991). This brought historical research closer to linguistic analyses (and an anthropological approach to oral history), focused on reconstructing elements of the conceptual sphere based on texts, for example, examining the linguistic worldview.

Anisa Puri noted that sociolinguistic research does not focus solely on text; rather, through the analysis of textual data, it strives to reconstruct the personal experience of the individual and the community. The descriptive category that connects text with the life course is precisely narrative, which allows for the temporal organisation of knowledge about life through linguistic forms (Puri 2025: 113). According to Katja Roller, citing, among others, the previously mentioned research by Botkin, narrative research allows for the reconstruction not only of the linguistic means used by a specific community but also of its experience, which this specific language was used to express. As a result, oral history narratives are a valuable source of knowledge for sociolinguistics, and when developed by a dialectologist or sociolinguist, they can also become a tool for social education (Roller 2015: 74, 78). According to Braber and Davies, the relationship between reminiscence, narrative, and identity is crucial for contemporary researchers of language and culture. The narrativity of sources is, in this approach, the key to reconstructing the memory and subjective experience of an individual and the broader social experience of groups using common varieties of the environmental language and common speech patterns, developed in a historical context, reflected in memory (Braber and Davies 2016: 99, cf. Braber 2025).

6. SUBJECTIVITY

Bartmiński (2008), Portelli (2003), Niderla (2010), and Marczevska (2014) emphasised the subjectivity of oral history texts. A natural consequence of recognising the narrative nature of historical sources and studies was the exposition of the subject as a superior category, organising the narrative while simultaneously transcending the text and language itself.

Carr (1991) considered the subject who shaped their own narrative of past events to be the decisive factor in determining the specificity of sources about the past. This subject has its own intentions and assigns desired functions to narrative elements. They function within a specific time and social environment, which contributes to the context of their narrative, determining their point of view and the system of values presented in the text. Their statements are shaped by the narrative patterns they select and modify. Moreover, historical narrative was treated as predefined to a certain extent by the empirical experience of the subject (Carr 1991). This view of historical narrative is close to the linguistic-cultural and anthropological approach.

The subject, understood either as *homo narrans* or *homo loquens*, or as a category transcending language, became the central category in ethnolinguistics – as indeed in the entire humanities. It is the subject who conveys a certain worldview (of a linguistic or linguistic-cultural nature), and based on the text created by it, the conceptual sphere is reconstructed (Filar 2013: 95–104; Bartmiński 2008b: 168; for the linguistic-cultural approach, see Anusiewicz *et al.* 2000).

Both in the sciences of language and culture and in historiography, the constructivist approach prevailed. According to it, the subject not only constructs a narrative about the past, but also its own identity (sometimes called identity narrative) or, more broadly, subjectivity. The very understanding of the subject has also changed in linguistics with the

so-called second cognitive revolution. The vision of the representational subject (a symbolic system, subject-mind) is being replaced by an ecological-phenomenal approach, the term "subject" also encompassing the environment that these subjects experience and in which they operate (Muszyński 2008: 80–84). According to Chris Barker, linguistic-cultural research on the subject focuses on how we become who we are, how we create a vision of ourselves as a subject, how we identify (and emotionally bond) with the description of ourselves as a representative of a given group or category (gender, race, age group) (Barker 2005: 11–12). In this approach, the subject is not an isolated category, but a member of a group that creates its narrative about life within a broader discourse or discourses. Similarly to Carr's concept, there is a reflexive relationship between an individual who creates a narrative about themselves and the group, and the group from whose discourse and identity they draw, and which they co-create.

7. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH MEMORY

Linguistic and cultural analyses of oral history texts increasingly overlap with the development of linguistic memory studies (cf. Chlebda 2019; Wójcicka 2014a; Czachur 2017). Since narratives are inherently subjective and arise within social discourse, it has become crucial to determine their relationship to individual and collective memory.

Marta Wójcicka divided these approaches into disintegrating and integrating ones. The first approach assumes that memory and history are separate categories, having nothing in common. This view was gradually displaced by integrating positions, advocated by, among others, representatives of the "new history". Proponents of this approach opposed treating memory and history as a single category or as separate. Instead, they assumed that memory and history are linked by complex, multidimensional relationships (Wójcicka 2014a: 89–96; 2014b: 24–33, cf. Woźniak 2008).

According to Katja Roller, the goal of research from a linguist's perspective is not to reconstruct historical events, but rather to reconstruct individual and community memory – a point reflected in the Millennium Memory Bank corpus she examined (Roller 2015: 78). According to Braber and Davies, memory is reflected in the narrative style and genre elements, such as the saturation of the text with anecdotes, and the shared knowledge and language of the sender and recipient. This allows for the reconstruction of individual and collective memory (Braber and Davies 2016: 100, 103).

Because memory is not directly accessible to us, its analysis is reduced to examining texts created based on memories. This opens another area for joint research between linguistics and oral history.

8. PERFORMATIVITY

Given the narrative's contextual and subjective nature, it became necessary to pay attention to its execution. Historians ceased to study the message's content; the way it was shaped also became important. The most dynamic development in research in this area was associated with the emancipation of oral sources, in which the need arose to describe the nonverbal elements of the communicative situation and their impact on the narrative, necessitating the use of linguistic studies (cf. Morrissey 2003; Roller 2015; Marczevska 2014).

9. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As can be easily seen, a certain range of topics related to oral history has emerged, interesting from the perspective of linguistic and cultural studies, which can be analysed

through textological, ethnolinguistic, narrative, conversational, conceptual, or memory studies. All these topics are more closely connected to the characteristics of oral texts about the past than they are to any precisely defined framework of oral history. One could hypothesise that what truly unites these various approaches is the research material itself—a much more thoroughly characterized field than oral history itself.

Cultural studies aim for an objective description of a given community's culture, while linguistic studies aim for a multifaceted description of language. They are internally differentiated by their various perspectives. Their common interest lies in the mental sphere, reflecting the shared knowledge of the world among members of a linguistic community. Linguistic and textual data allow for its reconstruction. This is where the interest of these disciplines overlaps with oral history. Their first and fundamental link is the text itself. All definitions of oral history focus on oral text—its creation, recording, and processing. This unique research material is a source of linguistic data that allows the reconstruction of a given community's worldview. Subdisciplines particularly focused on this feature include textology (the study of texts from a linguistic perspective), followed by those that reconstruct a specific worldview and the characteristics of a given community from texts. Narrativity organises linguistic and textual data, connects them to a temporal order, and provides them with a historical context. It is therefore key to reconstructing shared knowledge and group identity. For this reason, subdisciplines that reconstruct specific group characteristics will draw on it: social (sociolinguistics), regional (dialectology), or group (folkloristics). At the centre of interest in the sciences of language and culture is the subject, both individual (a speaking person) and collective (a group sharing characteristics). Their image can be reconstructed based on linguistic and textual data, which is of particular interest to anthropology, both linguistically and culturally. Based on oral history texts, the memories of individuals and groups are reconstructed. This may be important not only for memory studies but also for the subdiscipline at the intersection of linguistic and cultural studies, namely ethnolinguistics, which aims to reconstruct a group's worldview. All these disciplines are interested in performance and the specific communicative situation in which an oral text is created. Performance completes the set of characteristics typical of oral history, as the dialogue produces the text itself, which serves as research material. Performance is related to specific fieldwork techniques typical of linguistic and cultural studies. The key themes connecting oral history with these disciplines and their subdisciplines are shown in the diagram.

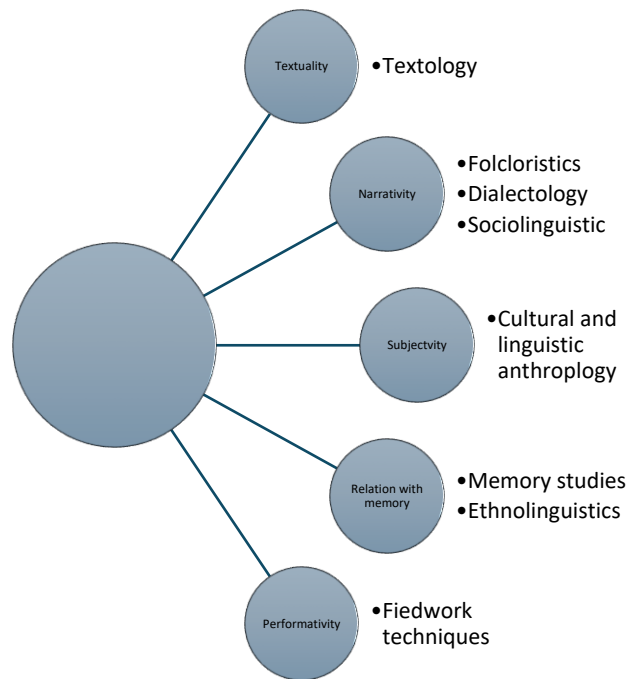


Diagram. The themes related to oral history and the sub-disciplines of linguistic and cultural studies

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ORAL HISTORY TOWARDS LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Summary

I will begin my review of the state of oral history research within linguistics and cultural studies by examining how the term is understood by representatives of linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and folklore studies.

In this paper, I will focus on the definitional and methodological proposals put forward by, among others, Jerzy Bartmiński, Linda Watts, Gary Okihiro, Dawid Dunaway, Donald Ritchie, Richard Dorson, Alessandro Portelli, Katja Roller, Natalie Braber, Diane Davies, Anisa Puri, Matthew F. Simmons, and David Carr. This will allow me to determine the relationship between these disciplines and oral history. Next, by analyzing specific methods derived from these fields of knowledge and applied to oral history, I will determine whether the definitions developed within linguistics and cultural studies reflect the actual state of research and which linguistic methods are applicable in the field of oral history.

A certain range of themes related to oral history is emerging, interesting from the perspective of linguistic and cultural studies, such as textuality, narrativity, subjectivity, the relationship with memory, performativity. However, all these themes are more clearly linked to the characteristics of oral texts about the past than to any precisely defined framework of oral history. One could hypothesize that what truly unites the various approaches is the research material itself – a much more thoroughly characterized one than oral history itself.