more than making a fence. Similarly, without the words that tell the origin myth of the Ankave drum, or the words that describe the parts of the drum (notably its middle, or 'throat', that swallows the spirits of the recent dead), I have would have had no clue to the complexity of what is going on when people make or beat drums.

13.6 Collecting Linguistic Data on Techniques

The collection and analysis of the vocabulary is of crucial importance here: its signification and connotations may reveal links between the technical domain and other domains, as clues to the way the processes in question are represented. As Lefébure (1983) warned, this does not mean that the linguistic structure of the speech about a technique may reveal a concealed technical structure of sorts. But the words in question may reveal how a technical action, its elements, and its social context are represented.

The words to be recorded in the field are those used to qualify the elements of the operational sequences: the matter being transformed, the names of its different states, and particularities of these states according to the actors; the tools and their components, the parts which are named and those which are not; the gestures; the energies; the actors, including the invisible powers at hand—if any. Operations might have their own names, as also might the different steps in a given operation. For example, by noting the phonetic proximity between the name for 'blood clot' and that for a given state of the liquid paste in question, Bonnemère's (1998: 116) study of the preparation of red pandanus fruit's juice is a clue to the fundamental equation made by the Ankave-Anga between that culinary preparation and human blood. There may be also local names for 'know-how', 'skills', 'specialists', etc.

At first, one is overwhelmed by what has to be observed, understood, and recorded with the greatest detail possible in order to be able to understand and explain what is going on in a particular technique observed in a given place at a certain time. In other words, the anthropologist must find some way to be able to see and record which are the gestures, tools, and material put together during each step of an operational sequence. What is the energy used? Who are the actors (and the bystanders)? Are there any comments? What is the duration of each operation? Are these operations named? This is the only way to be able to discover and

understand what are the local characteristics of a technique in a particular society. ↳ The more precise the description, the better. Fortunately, modern technologies are of great help to record most of these data.

As explained elsewhere (Lemonnier 1992: 27–30), technical actions are often repetitive, which gives the observer some chance to grasp the characteristics of a given operational sequence. Video recording is an easy way to document technical actions, as long as the researcher remains extremely attentive to what is going on. Back home, it will be too late to ask questions about the action that has been filmed. A good description entails some ability to manipulate simultaneously a pencil, two cameras (photo and video), a stopwatch, and a tape recorder. With some training, this is quite easy. Exhausting, but easy. (See also Margetts and Margetts, Chapter 1 above.)

If possible, one should consider that one description of a given technical sequence is not enough, for the good reason that most of the questions that come to the observer's mind result from differences s/he has noticed between seemingly similar operations. Documenting all sorts of variants is essential here. From one day to another, the same agent may work differently. Two actors may have their own way of doing things, and so on. Observing the same series of technical actions (house-building, basket-making, cooking food, and tens of other mundane or less mundane technical actions), between two neighbouring groups—whatever 'group' means in a given situation—is quite rewarding.

Participant observation deserves a special mention here, for it is not only a way to share people's life and activities; it is also a way to grasp aspects of a technical process that would otherwise escape the