

EDITING PROCEDURES IN STUDS TERKEL'S ORAL HISTORIES

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Abstract

The paper is concerned with the work of Studs Terkel (1912-2008), a Chicago-based radio interviewer and popular oral historian. During his long life, he personally interviewed thousands of people from all over the USA, and he published his interviews in the form of written narratives in his oral history books. The paper focuses on Terkel's approach to editing the words of his interviewees and identifies four different editing procedures applied by Terkel. As illustrated on several examples from *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, these procedures significantly altered the form of the original utterances of the interviewees, which prompts the question of who the author of the texts really is.

Key words

Studs Terkel, oral history, interview, interview transcript, editing

1 Introduction

This paper aims at drawing attention to the unique character of the texts produced by Studs Terkel (1912-2008), an oral historian and Pulitzer-Prize winner who “helped establish oral history as a serious genre” (Grimes 2008). The texts to be found in his oral history books are the final products of the process in which spoken dialogues (oral interviews) were transformed into written monologues. This process deserves special attention not only because of the pitfalls connected with any attempt to record speech in written and, more importantly, readable form, but also because of the changes related to the creation of a monologue out of a dialogue by eliminating one speaker (Terkel's questions) without breaking the cohesive ties and weakening the coherence of the text. When editing the interview transcripts for publication, Terkel went beyond the alterations necessitated by the spoken-to-written language and monologue-to-dialogue transfers. The comparison of the original interview transcripts and their edited versions reveals that the interviewees' utterances were at places altered to such an extent that it becomes questionable who the author of the utterances really is. Terkel always insisted that his interviewees were in fact the authors of his books since their words had been used, but this paper intends to demonstrate four types of editing procedures applied by Terkel that changed not only the

original sequence, form and size of the interviewees' utterances but their content as well.

The main contribution of linguistics to the field of oral history so far lies predominantly in transcription. If a work of oral history is to be published in a written form, transcribing the recorded material is undeniably an inherent step in the way towards the final product. However, editing the transcript into a readable form intended for the general audience is just as essential.

Being aware of the necessity to edit and, more importantly, of the significant impact editing has on the final form and content of an oral history transcript, oral historians have been trying to grasp the process of editing from the very beginning. Willa K. Baum, the author of the earliest works on oral history methodology, opens the discussion of editing in *Transcribing and Editing in Oral History* (1977) by stating that "it is a rare conversation that is worth preserving without some editing" (Baum 1977: 38). She then proceeds to present seven general principles of editing which instruct other oral historians to take into consideration the purpose of their project, to preserve the transcript as complete and accurate as possible regarding the form and the content, to cooperate with the interviewee so that the result is a joint effort of the oral historian and the interviewee, and to be sensitive when it comes to the personal and social impact the interviewee's narration might have (ibid.: 40-41).

While Baum was the advocate of as little editing as possible, not only to "preserve the flavor of the interview" (ibid.: 40) but to save the editor's time, another strong voice in the field of oral history, Michael Frisch, Professor and Senior Research Scholar at The State University of New York, is convinced that "the integrity of a transcript is best protected, in documentary use, by an aggressive editorial approach that does not shrink from substantial manipulation of the text" (Frisch 1990: 84). To demonstrate his point, Frisch published samples of his own editorial work, which other oral historians have done as well. However radical or liberal their attitude to editing is, they view the editing process as something that "cannot be dismissed simply as a tool and a skill in oral history practice" (Jones 2004), and they unveil the procedures they applied to their own work in hope of making the process more transparent.

This paper wishes to contribute to the effort to describe the editing process in oral history by presenting an analysis of the work of the publicly best-known oral historian Studs Terkel. In order to understand the motivation behind the changes that he made to the original interview texts, it is important to consider who Studs Terkel was, why he devoted the last 40 years of his life to oral history and how he approached the task of editing. Therefore, all these questions will be addressed first.

2 Who was Studs Terkel

“No one has done more to expand the American library of voices than Studs Terkel. He has quite literally defined the art of the oral history, bringing the stories of ordinary people to life in his unique style, and letting the everyday experiences that deepen our history speak for themselves.” (*White House Press Release* 1997)

With these words President Bill Clinton presented the National Medal of Humanities award to Louis “Studs” Terkel in 1997. Terkel was 85 years old, and by that time he had published twelve books of oral history, which included hundreds of interviews with ordinary Americans. Through the testimonies of people who “made the wheels go round but never made our traditional history books” (Interview 2002), the books recorded important periods of the history of the USA (*Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* [1970], *The Good War”: An Oral History of World War Two* [1984]), various phenomena of the American culture (*American Dreams: Lost and Found* [1983], *Race: What Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession* [1992], etc.), and one of the books was Terkel’s own memoir, which, however, offered not only the story of his own life, but the stories of the numerous people he had met and who had in one way or another left an impression on him. He continued to write six more books, the last being *P.S. Further Thoughts From a Lifetime of Listening* (2008), before he died at the age of 96.

Although Studs Terkel did not consider himself more than a disc jockey with a tape recorder due to the fact that he spent most of his career as a radio presenter and interviewer on his own WMFT Chicago radio show, he is widely acknowledged as “the preeminent oral historian of 20th-century America” (Barnes 2008). He is not only appreciated for having let the voices of numerous “etceteras” (Terkel 2007: XV) be heard, but also for his talent to make people open up and talk about things they had never talked about or feelings they never knew they felt. What is more, he was able to capture the same atmosphere he created during the interviews in his books.

3 Studs Terkel’s approach to oral history

Although he is perceived as the icon of oral history, Studs Terkel was not a historian. He may have “defined the art of the oral history” (*White House Press Release* 1997), but the emphasis is on the word “art” rather than “history”. He explains in his memoir *Touch and Go* (2007) that his motivation behind writing oral histories is more than anything else his interest in talking to people. He

contrasts himself with historians by stating that “We think of historians as scholars who research in great scope and detail. What I do in great scope and detail is converse” (Terkel 2007: 171).

It was a New York-based publisher, André Schiffrin, who first suggested to Terkel that he should write an oral history book. Terkel had been interviewing people on his radio programme for some time when Schiffrin heard about him and came up with the idea for *Division Street: America* (1967), a portrait of Chicago undergoing the social changes of the 1960s viewed through the eyes of its citizens. Terkel’s work on the two books oriented towards specific historical events, the Great American Depression (*Hard Times*) and the Second World War (*The Good War*), was also initiated by Schiffrin.

Although the actual idea of compiling oral histories did not come from Terkel, the shape and contents of the books were entirely the result of his interviewing skills, his choice of interviewees, and his approach to editing. As far as interviewing itself was concerned, Terkel saw his strength in being able to really listen. He was convinced that “[people recognize] that you respect them because you’re listening. Because you’re listening, they feel good about talking to you” (Terkel 2007: 176). When selecting those that he would interview, he did not restrict himself to people he personally encountered, but he also followed the recommendations of his friends, acquaintances, or even those he had already interviewed. What he was looking for in his interviewees was the ability to “talk about how they see their lives and the world around them. Who can explain how and why they became one way or another” (ibid.: 174). Having gathered such interviews, he would proceed to edit them for publication.

4 Studs Terkel’s approach to editing

In an interview published in *Envelopes of Sound* (1985) by Ronald Grele, the director emeritus of The Columbia University Oral History Research Office, Terkel compares his editing work to “the prospector digging for gold” (Grele 1985: 32):

“You’re talking, you’re probing; something comes out. And there it is: the ore! And someone, (...), transcribes it. And I get sixty pages. Now then, I sift. This is the water, this is the dust. Out of the sixty pages – the essence: five-six pages, whatever. You get the truth and cut out the fact. I’m like a prospector, I’m cutting out whatever they cut out. They cut out the dust, or crap, or the coal, whatever it was, or the rock, you know.” (Grele 1985: 32-33)

The essence of an interview, which Studs Terkel was looking for, is difficult to specify beyond the general definition of what the word *essence* means, i.e. “the most important quality or feature of something, that makes it what it is” (Hornby 2000). What is by one person considered important may not be important to another, and that is what causes Terkel’s editing to be highly subjective. The fact that he himself experienced the social and historical phenomena and events he interviewed and wrote about undoubtedly contributed to his view of what was essential about them, and which sections of his interviews articulated that essence best. Especially when it comes to *Hard Times*, the way Terkel was affected by the Great Depression is bound to have played a role in his approach to editing the interviews for the book:

If ever there was an experience that altered my life, not simply in a political way, but in every aspect, it was the Great American Depression. I was there watching what hard times did to decent people. (Terkel 2007: 139)

Just as he felt the impact of the Depression on his own life, he searched for accounts of similarly strong effects the events had on his interviewees. He comments on that search in *Envelopes of Sound* “How a person, how a human is affected, to me is an important thing” (Grele 1985: 14). He further explains that he regards a person’s experience and memories as their truth, which may or may not agree with what is generally perceived as fact. “Fact is not always the truth. Truth is something else” says Terkel (Grele 1985: 13) and adds, “now is what they’re telling true or not? [...], it’s their truth. So if it’s their truth it’s going to be my truth, it’s their experience. [...]; the memory is true” (Grele 1985: 14). In other words, what Studs Terkel wanted for his books to contain were not factual historical accounts but accounts of human experience that would capture the essence of a certain historical period or social phenomenon. It is the search for the essence, the truth, that makes Terkel’s editing intuitive and from the linguistic point of view intriguing.

5 Corpus

The corpus used for the analysis presented in this paper consists of four interviews from *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970). Courtesy of Chicago History Museum, the complete material for each interview is available for analysis. It consists of the recordings of the interviews, their verbatim transcripts done by Studs Terkel’s transcribers, and two edited versions

of the transcript typed by Terkel himself. Each piece of this material represents a step in the process of the text transformation from a spoken dialogue to a written monologue. Table 1 shows the five steps of the process and the people responsible for each step:

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
recording	unedited transcript	1st edited transcript	2nd edited transcript	book
Studs Terkel	transcriber	Studs Terkel	Studs Terkel	Studs Terkel

Table 1: Five steps of the editing process

At the beginning, the analyzed text was in the form of a spoken dialogue between an interviewee and the interviewer, Studs Terkel. As such it was recorded (Step 1) and later transcribed (Step 2) by one of the transcribers Terkel worked with over the years. The transcribers were given the instruction to leave nothing out as “every word, even a pause, can be revealing” (Mitgang 1988). The verbatim transcript was then re-typed by Terkel into an edited form (Step 3), and it was at this point that the most significant alterations were made to the text. Steps 4 and 5 represent further revisions of the edited text, but the amount of editing is comparably smaller than in Step 3. It is, therefore, mainly the comparison of the unedited transcript (UT) and its first edited version (ET) that offers an insight into how Terkel proceeded when sifting for the essence, and only these two types of text were used for the purpose of this paper.

Four interviews from *Hard Times* were chosen for the analysis, and the parameters of each of them are given in Table 2:

Name	Age	Sex	Social status	Unedited (no. of words)	Edited (no. of words)
Jim Sheridan	63	male	bonus marcher, convalescing from nervous breakdown	8,628	2,450
Dorothe Bernstein	47	female	waitress	8,718	834
Tony Soma	mid 70s	male	owner of a speakeasy, immigrant from Italy	5,192	1,184
Frank and Rome Hentges	mid 80s mid 70s	male	clothing merchants	1,469	593

Table 2: The interviews used for the analysis

The interview with Jim Sheridan is the very first one in the book. Jim was 63 years old at the time the interview was conducted. He talked about the bonus march on Washington that took place in 1932, and which was initiated by WWI veterans, who were out of work and demanded that the government give them a bonus they had been promised. Jim was one of the bonus marchers and shared with Terkel the details of how the march was organized, how the marchers were able to survive on the long trip, and how the negotiations in Washington turned into a riot.

Dorothe Bernstein is a 47-year-old waitress and a single mother of three daughters. She is younger than Jim and much more talkative, which shows in the way she needs fewer questions from Studs Terkel to say almost as much as Jim. The UTs of both interviewees are of a comparable length (about 8,700 words), but Jim is asked 70 questions while Dorothy only 35. She talks generally about the hard times of the Depression, which in her case were even harder due to the fact that she was brought up in an orphanage.

Tony Soma differs from the previous two interviewees in being a non-native American. When he was young, he emigrated from Italy and ran a speakeasy in New York. (A speakeasy was a place where alcohol was served during the period of Prohibition.) Tony has a thick Italian accent which was difficult even for the transcriber to understand, and the result of that are many gaps in the transcript. He was mainly asked about the speakeasy and the Prohibition.

Frank and Rome Hentges are brothers, and their interview is one of the few which were done with more than one interviewee, and which still remained in the form of a dialogue after they had been edited. The brothers are clothing merchants and talk mostly about their business and Farmer's Holidays, an event during which farmers in Iowa almost hanged a judge in protest against foreclosures.

The unedited and edited transcripts of these four interviews were analyzed to see what alterations were made to the texts on the way to their final versions in the book.

6 Studs Terkel's editing procedures

What first comes out of an interview are tons of ore; you have to get that gold dust in your hands. That's just the beginning. Now, how does it become a necklace or a ring or a gold watch? You have to get the form; you have to mold the gold dust. First you're the prospector, now you become the sculptor. (Terkel 2007: 178)

This quotation from *Touch and Go* again brings us a little closer to understanding how Studs Terkel approached his editing. Apart from separating the essential gold dust from the unimportant rock, he further felt the need to give the remaining text a certain form. The comparison of the UTs and ETs showed four different ways in which he shaped the original text into its new form – cutting, relocating, substituting and adding. All these editing procedures will now be separately examined in detail.

6.1 Cutting

Cuts within the text are the most conspicuous alteration. Table 2 shows the number of words in each UT and ET, and it becomes apparent that there was no unified size for all texts. Although the interviews with Jim Sheridan and Dorothe Bernstein were originally of approximately the same length, the numbers of words in their ETs are considerably different. Similarly, no standard ratio of the UT wordcount to the ET wordcount was kept. The biggest difference can be seen between Dorothe's interview, which was shortened almost 10.5 times, and the interview with Frank and Rome Hentges, where the UT is only 2.5 times shorter than the ET. The inconsistencies in cutting further support the idea that Terkel treated each interview individually in assessing which parts of the text would be included in the book. In all cases, the portion of the cut-out text is larger than the amount of the text preserved, which again brings to mind the analogy Terkel drew between his editing and gold digging. From this perspective, it is not surprising to find out that there is less *gold* and more *rock*.

The size of the cut-out segments of text ranges from individual words to whole sequences of turns. Starting with the larger segments, Terkel's wish to publish the texts in the form of written monologues automatically means that his turns (questions) were cut out. Table 3 gives the numbers of questions in each interview and also the numbers of words they contain. In Jim Sheridan's interview, the questions represent almost 1/9 of the whole UT, and it is 1/5 and 1/3 in the case of the Tony Soma and Frank and Rome Hentges interviews respectively. This indicates that the mere elimination of Terkel's voice without any further adjustments led to a significant shortening of the texts.

Interviewee	No. of words in UT	No. of words in ET	No. of ST's questions in UT (words)	No. of ST's questions in ET (words)
Jim Sheridan	8,628	2,450	70 (975)	0
Dorothe Bernstein	8,718	834	35 (519)	0
Tony Soma	5,192	1,184	75 (1026)	9 (50)
F. & R. Hentges	1,469	593	27 (496)	10 (62)

Table 3: Studs Terkel's questions in UTs and ETs

It should be mentioned at this point, however, that Terkel occasionally preserved some of his questions within the text. He discussed this issue in an interview with Michael Lenehan for the Chicago Reader, and to Lenehan's inquiry about what Terkel's rules were when it came to cutting out questions he replied that he "[kept] the question in when it's necessary, as a transition moment, or when a humorous or whimsical aspect can be revealed in an exchange" (Lenehan 2008). Among the four interviews analyzed in this paper, in two of the ETs several questions were preserved, as shown in Table 3.

Proceeding to cuts within the interviewees' utterances, it is very often the case that whole turns and even sequences of turns are removed. These cuts frequently seem to be thematically oriented as the eliminated turns tend to relate to the same topic, and by cutting them out Terkel excludes the topic from the text. For instance, seven successive turns from the Jim Sheridan interview UT are cut out, and since they all contain Jim Sheridan's memories of the Bughouse Square in Chicago and the events connected with the place, the cuts suggest that Terkel decided not to include the topic in the narrative.

Apart from such extensive eliminations of whole thematic sections, there are also more subtle cuts to be found in the transcripts. These cuts occur within individual turns of the interviewees, and the cut-out segment might be a sentence, a phrase or a single word. Example (1) is one turn from the UT of the Dorothe Bernstein interview, and the comparison with the same text segment from the ET demonstrates the possible cuts within a single turn:

(1)

UT:

DB26 *Oh, well, I don't know when you say depression whether you mean the real real bad time, or when things began to get a little better. I remember boys going to some kind of a work camp. F imagine it came around the Roosevelt time. They were taught a trade, or they worked*

in forests or ... you know, it's been so long since I thought about it, but now that you mention these things, it doesn't seem like it was a lifetime ago. It's quite vivid. They went ... I think jobs began to ease up. I don't know. If you ask me strictly to history, I can't say because I don't ...

ET:

When you say the Depression, you mean the real bad time. When things began to get a little better, boys were going to some kind of work camp. It came around the Roosevelt time.

Such cuts obviously influenced not only the way the speaker seems to express herself (less hesitation and uncertainty, shorter sentences), but example (1) also indicates possible shifts in meaning caused by syntactic alterations (elimination of conjunctions, changes in punctuation), not to mention the fact that in certain cases the cuts led to the removal of the text segment from its original context.

6.2 Relocating

Context is also changed as a result of the second type of alteration – relocating. Various text segments are found incorporated within a new context in the ETs. Again, these text segments are of various size, which means that their relocations occur on the textual as well as syntactic level.

On the textual level, just as thematically related turns might sometimes be cut out, some turns are newly sequenced to create a passage of text devoted to one topic. Such relocations of the interviewees' turns typically occur in cases where the main topic was diverted from and then resumed later in the course of the interview.

As regards text segments smaller than a turn, two types of relocating can be observed. Sentences, clauses, phrases, or words were either relocated within a single turn, or they were extracted from the turn in which they had originally been uttered, and they were embedded within a different turn. Example (2) shows relocation of a phrase and a clause within one of Jim Sheridan's turns. In this case, these two text segments switched their positions:

(2)

UT:

JS40 *[...] When we got to Washington, there was quite a few ex-servicemen there before us. And there was no arrangements for housing. Most of the men that had wives and children were living in what they called*

Hooverville at that time. This was what was known as Anacostia Flats, across the Potomac River. And they had set up housing there, made of cardboard and of all kinds. Whether the relief organization is Washington there as helping these people out or not, I don't know. I don't know how they managed to get their food. [...]

ET:

When we got to Washington, there was quite a few ex-servicemen there before us. There was no arrangements for housing. Most of the men that had wives and children were living in Hooverville. This was across the Potomac River.... what was known as Anacostia Flats. They had set up housing there, made of cardboard and of all kinds. I don't know how they managed to get their food.

Example (3) demonstrates the relocation of a phrase from one turn to another. In this case, the phrase was not only uttered in a different turn than in which it appears in the ET, but it was in fact inserted within a turn of a different person. The example is an extract from the UT of the Frank and Rome Hentges interview, and it shows the phrase *About '33*. uttered by Frank Hentges in his 25th turn. In the ET, however, the phrase is located within the turn RH17 (17th turn by Rome Hentges). The new location is indicated in the extract in bold:

(3)

UT:

RH16 *We had several stores around in different towns, clothing stores, in Yankton and Watertown, South Dakota. And Mason City, Iowa. Caroll, Iowa.*

ST16 *Well, what happened in that period?*

RH17 *Well, we just closed up the stores. About '33.*

[...]

ST20 *So what have you done since the closing of the stores? You didn't reopen any of the stores? Then what have you done, say, since*

RH24 *Sit around (laughs).*

ST21 *You mean both of you, as I'm talking now ... you had a group of stores and they all closed down, 32, 33, around there?*

FH25 *About '33.*

These two examples as well as numerous other examples to be found in the transcripts suggest that the readers, apart from not receiving the whole text due to the previously mentioned cuts, also obtain a text in which any given passage might have been reorganized or re-sequenced in a way entirely dependent on Studs Terkel's idea of the form that the text should have.

6.3 Substituting

So far, the editing procedures influenced the number and the sequence of the words originally uttered by the speakers. The next two procedures, substituting and adding, had a more significant impact on the texts in terms of their authorship as these alterations led to the incorporation of new words into the original texts.

Starting with substituting, it occurs on the lexical and grammatical levels, where lexical expressions, grammatical words and grammatical forms are replaced. In example (4), an extract from the Jim Sheridan interview, lexical substitution of *proprietors* for *operators*, and grammatical substitution of determiners can be observed.

(4)

UT:

JS70 *Yeah. Oh, I'll tell you a racket that was going on during the Depression, too, Studs. See, these rooming house proprietors. The roomers would move out because they couldn't pay their rent, and they'd duck out. At night, and take their stuff with them. Here would be this rooming house proprietor, he had his rent to pay, he probably had a mortgage on his furniture. And he probably want to put it on the market for sale, but he couldn't take a prospective customer around and show him empty rooms. So he'd go down to Skid Row and they'd pick up these bums on skid row and load up their rooming houses with them. And when the prospective customer would come along, here he had his list of roomers and the amount of money that they were allegedly paying. And he'd unload this ... It was sort of a con game. That he'd unload his bankrupt rooming house on some guy that was greedy to make a fortune.*

ET:

I'll tell you about a racket going on during the Depression. With these rooming house operators. The roomers would move out because they couldn't pay their rent, and they'd duck out and take their stuff. Here would be this proprietor, he couldn't take a prospective customer around

and show him empty rooms. So he'd go down to skid row and they'd pick up these bums and load up their rooming houses with 'em. When a customer would come along, here he had his list of roomers. It was sort of a con game. He'd unload this bankrupt rooming house on some guy that was greedy to make a fortune.

Such alterations touch the issue of whether grammar should be corrected by the editor in cases where the speakers express themselves ungrammatically, or whether the editor should correct the cases in which the speakers evidently chose the wrong word. As example (4) demonstrates, however, Studs Terkel makes changes even in cases where no correction was necessary, which again suggests that it was Terkel's subjective viewpoint of a writer, an artist, that motivated him to edit the lexical expressions and grammatical means that his interviewees had chosen.

6.4 Adding

Example (4) also includes an instance of the fourth type of alteration present in Studs Terkel's texts as the preposition *about* was evidently inserted in the first sentence in the ET. Adding frequently occurs at places where the original spoken form of the interviews caused the presence of incomplete sentences and fragments in the UTs. If such passages were to be preserved in a readable form, they needed to be added to and completed.

Apart from these inevitable corrections, there are often adverbials added which mainly anchor the speaker's utterance in time or place. Even in cases where the speakers do refer to the time and place of the given event themselves, addition might be needed due to the extensive cuts of context on Terkel's part.

Occasionally, more complex phrases are added, and these in combination with further editing tend to lead to more significant alterations of the text. Example (5) demonstrates how the combination of adding, cutting, and relocating changed one of the statements made by Tony Soma. In his sixth and seventh turn in the UT, he expresses his view of money and the Great Depression and the role of politics in it. By adding *I know* and removing *wanted to*, Terkel turned Tony Soma's view into a strong conviction, and his talking about the politicians' intentions into talking about their actions:

(5)

UT:

TS6 *They didn't went broke. They went crazy. They didn't go broke. They were still rich (laughs). Americans never been broke. It's a questions of figures. Now a million dollars today, at that time it was two hundred thousand. So they didn't go broke, but the figure changed. Except they got frightened. Coolidge and Hoover, the silent man and engineer, scientist man was not good for politics. Harding of course was negligent. So they prepared the depression, of course, and they wanted to keep the depression going.*

ST7 *Who wanted to keep the depression going?*

TS7 *The conservative elements. The property classes. Cause I am a capitalist myself, but I think money rules too many human beings. Because money should be ruled by human beings, not human beings ruled by money. Which we are still fighting today. Money still ruling human beings.*

ET:

I am a capitalist myself, but I think money rules too many human beings. No, I am not enlightened, I'm just a capitalist. After all this is a capitalist country and I am entitled to live like a capitalist. But I know the propertied classes, the conservative element kept the Depression going.

Stripped off the original context, re-sequenced, and added to, the statement acquired implications that it previously did not have and that may not have been intended by the speaker. Such impact of Terkel's editing on the texts, which influences the content as well as the form, doubtless deserves to be further analyzed and discussed, and it will be the focus of the author's further research.

7 Conclusion

This paper presented four different types of editing procedures applied by Studs Terkel during the process of preparing his interviews for publication. Several examples were used to illustrate how the words of the interviewees were edited. Since Terkel's books are generally regarded as containing the voices of hundreds of Americans, the paper aimed at drawing attention to the fact that the interviewees' utterances underwent considerable alterations which were motivated by Terkel's attempt to offer something very specific to his readership.

Terkel's approach to editing was that of a person who looked for the essence in each interview, the identification of which depended entirely on his personal judgment, and so he sifted the texts in search for the words that captured the

essence best. In addition to that, he further rewrote the words and added to them to get the essence across. He was not trying to stay true to the original form of the interviewees' narratives as much as he wished to stay true to the message that he believed the texts should contain.

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