

Methods in Social Research

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Week 5 – November 10

Qualitative interviews

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- When and how to interview
- The interview
- Reflection and discussion on mini-interview
- Validity & interview questions
- Validity & interviewer positionality
- Analysing interview data (if enough time)

When to interview?

Topics

- Factual (descriptive)
 - What happened?
 - What did you do?
- Interpretative (meaning)
 - Why didhappen?
 - Why did you?
 - How did you feel about...?

Role of theory:

- Inductive (theory generating)
 - most common
- Deductive (theory testing)

When to interview?

Research questions such as

- How are people's migration aspirations shaped by information coming from migrants in their network?
- How do children of immigrants balance their multiple identities?
- How do differences in citizenship regimes affect naturalisation decisions?

When to interview?

Strengths:

- In-depth answers
- Respondents' interpretation of events and behaviour
- Longitudinal view
- Flexibility
- Less intrusive than observation
- Unveiling mechanisms?
- Do not need large numbers of respondents

Weaknesses:

- Reported behaviour rather than actual behaviour
- What respondents perceive as the drivers of their behaviour might not be the (only) drivers
- Often difficult to make statistical generalisations

When to interview?

When is it ethical to do interviews?

“...research into others’ suffering can only be justified if alleviating that suffering is an explicit objective (Turton, 1996: 96).” (cited in Jacobsen and Landau, 2003: 186)

The interests of the researchers and the researched often differ.

- Respondents agree to the interview expecting to receive help or advice
- Different views of what the story to be told is

When to interview?

The researcher should:

- Be open about the goal of the study
- Be respectful of the respondents
 - “humanity is key here. To tell stories and conduct research, one would do well to remember that refugees deserve our sensitivity when dealing with their hardships.” (Nayer, 2013)*
- Limit the interviewing burden on the respondent
- Think about support for after the interview
- Take care when reporting information that might hurt the respondent or their group

- **Unstructured**
 - Loosely defined topics
 - Conversational style
 - Often multiple interviews
 - Can take a life or oral history approach (see Thompson, 2000)
- **Semi-structured**
 - Interview guide but order and exact phrasing flexible
 - Can be multiple but usually one-off
 - Can take a life or oral history approach

“the interviewer defines the focus, respondent determines the content” (Bernard 2011:161)

Interview guide

- Record basic demographics (gender, age, generation,..)
- Record interview details (date, location, presence of others)
- Order topics to create a good flow
- Start off with less sensitive topics
- Ensure your topics help you answer your research question
- Prepare an opening question for each topic

Before the interview:

- Location
- Dress
- Safety

Starting the interview

- Seating
- Presence of others
- Introduction
- Confidentiality and use of information
- Informed consent
 - Gate keepers
- Recording?

The interview: recording

Why (not)?

- Consequences for interview
 - Decreases disclosure?
- Consequences for analysis
 - Not just what people say, but how they say it (Bryman, 2012)
 - Non-verbal cues (hesitation, laughter, crying)
 - Checking translation
 - Allows discovering and verifying new insights
- Ethics
 - Recordings might be summoned or stolen

Recording is never a substitute for taking notes! (Bernard, 2011)

Starting the interview

- Seating
- Presence of others
- Introduction
- Confidentiality and use of information
- Informed consent
- Recording
- **Establish roles**

The interview: role

An interview is not a conversation (but see Ghorashi , 2005)

In your role as researcher, how to respond to

- Requests for assistance
- Information on (serious) crimes
- Questions about your own views/background

Interview questions

Kinds of questions:

- Introducing (Tell me about..)
- Follow-up (Can you tell me more about...)
 - Echoing ((So) you....)
- Silence & humming
- Specifying (What happened next?)
- Probing (But what if... / Earlier you said...)
- Structuring (Let's move on to)
- Interpreting (Do you mean that....)
- Photo elicitation, drawings (see eg Findlay et al 2013)

See also Bryman (2012, pp477-478)

Interview questions: validity

During the interview respondents will present a certain version of themselves, perform a role , they may not want to disclose certain bits of information

Strategies for encouraging disclosure:

- Know the research context
- Clarify your role (e.g. not selecting refugees for resettlement)
- Encourage to talk more: humming & silence
- Repeating questions later in the interview
- Observation
- Indirect questions (e.g coca use for animals)
- Leading questions and ‘baiting’ (e.g. massage parlour)

The interview: ending an interview

Ending the interview:

- End on a positive note
- Come out of interview mode
- Say thank you
 - Gifts or payment?

BOX 8.1**PAYING INFORMANTS**

Should anthropologists pay their informants? If so, how much? I'm a firm believer in paying for people's time, but there are exceptions. If you are studying people who are worth millions of dollars, paying them is inappropriate. You can't possibly pay them enough to compensate them financially for their time. It's better to make a donation to a charity that they support. This will vary from case to case, but the general rule, for me at least, is that if you want to interview people formally—sit down with them, voice recorder on the table and/or notebook in hand—they should be paid at least the local rate for their time. With key informants, the rule for me is that there's always a culturally appropriate way—money, job training, buying cement for a new school—to compensate people for their contribution to your career.

Bernard (2011:157)

The interview: ending an interview

Ending the interview:

- End on a positive note
- Come out of interview mode
- Say thank you
 - Gifts or payment?
- Reaffirm what interview will be used for
- Follow up or support?
- Write reflexive notes

Validity & positionality

Positionality *“the fact that a researcher’s characteristics affect both substantive and practical aspects of the research process—from the nature of questions that are asked, through data collection, analysis and writing, to how findings are received”* (Carling et al 2013:2)

Insider, outsider or third position?

- What is an insider?
 - Role of differences in ethnicity, class, gender, religion
 - Selective disclosure (Carling et al 2013)
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of insider interviewers?
 - Trust of insider (eg Bilger & Van Liempt, 2009)
 - Trust of outsiders (eg Van Bergen, 2009)
 - Insider take certain claims for granted (eg Bilger & Van Liempt, 2009)

Validity & language

How to study a group if you are not proficient in the group's language?

- Learn the language
- Do the interviews in another language (Holmes: Spanish instead of Triqui)
- Hire research assistants
- Have translators at the interview (see Edward, 1998)

Should be reported and reflected upon

Analysing interview data

- Transcripts or summaries
 - Full verbatim transcripts? (including all 'ehm' etc)
- With or without CAQDAS programme (eg Nvivo)
- Analyse topics, relations, discourses, frequencies, patterns, types

Suggested readings

- Bergin, M. (2011) NVivo 8 and consistency in data analysis: reflecting on the use of a qualitative data analysis program. *Nurse researcher*, 18(3):6-1
- Bazeley, P. (2007) *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo*. Los Angeles/London: SAGE
- Gibbs, G.R. (2002) *Qualitative Data Analysis: Exploration with NVivo*. Buckingham: Open University
- Saldaña, J. (2013) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Los Angeles/London: Sage

Take-home messages

- Qualitative interviews can be used in both inductive and deductive studies
- It matters whether analysis is based on notes or (full) transcripts
- Style of questioning may affect answers and therewith conclusions: better to include prompts when presenting quotes
- A range of factors in the interview setting (location, presence of others, positionality, language) may influence what is told and should be reported
- Depending on the sampling strategy and sample size, qualitative interviews can be used for analytic and (limited) statistical generalisation.
- There are different approaches to analysing interview data

References

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- Van Bergen, Diana D. (2009) [*Suicidal Behaviour of Young Migrant Women in the Netherlands. A Comparative Study of Minority and Majority Women*](#). PhD thesis Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit.