

Qualitative Research Methods
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Lecture 30
Interviewing

Welcome back to the NOC course titled qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course and we been discussing various things, we discussed what qualitative research is, we discussed the strategies of inquiry, now in the previous lectures we started talking about, how we can go about collecting data, so we started with observation. Today, we will talk about interviews, you know the art of interviewing and what interviewing entails and how many know what do we do when we interview respondents for collecting data.


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So the interview, now this is again the information is from this book by Denzin and Lincoln. What is an interview? And “interview is a conversation; it's the art of asking questions and also listening.” Listening forms of very, very important part of the interview process, listening refers to receptivity, listening refers to interpretation, listening refers to be open to the communication, the information coming from the respondents, recording that information in as objective manner as possible and then representing it based on what one has heard, so or what one has listened to.

So listening is selective hearing, so when we talk about listening, listening is such an important part of the interview, one part of the interview is asking questions, one part the interview is establishing a rapport with the respondent, the other part of the interview is and the most critical path of the interview is receiving the responses, that the respondents give us and that is dependent upon our listening. How well we listen? How open we are? What we take in? What we filter out? Etcetera.

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What does an interview produce?

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)

- “An interview produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes.”

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So what does an interview produce? “An interview produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes.” Understanding, that is contextual, an interview gives us an understanding of the information exchanged within an interactional episode, within the interaction between the interviewer and respondent.

So the interview and the respondent exchange, information they exchange, the interviewer asks questions the respondent responds to those questions and those questions, the responses to the questions asked by the interviewer are interpreted within a specific context. So the information is situated within a specific context, okay.

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Perspectives on interviewing (Schwandt,

1997)

- "... a set of techniques for generating & analyzing data from structured, group, & unstructured interviews with respondents, participants, & key informants."

- Concerns:

- "Logistics & mechanics of arranging & conducting interviews."
- "Costs & benefits of various interview strategies."

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Perspectives on interviewing, various perspectives are, one is that interviewing involved "a set of techniques for generating and analyzing data from structured, group, and unstructured interviews with respondents, participants, and key informants." So interview is the interview is perceived as a set of techniques for getting the data from the respondents within different settings, we will talk about these three types of interviews.

The concerns in this are logistics, the first concern is "logistics and mechanics of arranging and conducting interviews," which is you know how do you get people together? How do you conduct interview? What kind of questions you ask? What is the recording, the mechanism of recording the responses? Etcetera.

And "costs and benefits of various interview strategies," are also a concern for the interviewer, so how much do you spend? What information or how much information to get out of it?

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Perspectives on interviewing (Contd.)

(Schwandt, 1997)

- "... particular kind of human encounter in the field" that facilitates inquiry into sensitive information

- Concerns:

- "Obtaining informed consent"
- "Dealing with sensitive information"
- "Anonymity"
- "Confidentiality"

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The other perspective is that is a "particular kind of human encounter in the field" that facilitates inquiry into sensitive information. Now we may conduct interviews with people, who are dealing with trauma, with people who are dealing with different kinds of issues, so you know when we when we talk about interviewing respondents, who are vulnerable, when we talked about getting information from the vulnerable populations, we talked about obtaining you know we need to let them know what you are talking about.

So we need to obtain informed consent, we need them to understand, what we are getting at, why we are talking about, what you are talking about and we need them to agree to being interviewed and that is what we talk about when we were referred to obtaining informed consent, they need to know what is going on and they need to be agree to being interviewed, despite their vulnerability or within their vulnerability.

We need information about the vulnerability, so they needs to agree to being interviewed within that vulnerability, knowing fully well that these questions are going to tap into something that they are feeling hurt about, something that they are sensitive about, so that is one of the concerns that we need to obtain informed consent, the respondents need to understand what is it that is going on and why we need that information from them and we may be able to help them, we may not be, in most cases researchers are not able to provide any direct benefits to the respondents.

We just take information, we write our papers and we move on with our lives. The respondents are, you know left hanging dealing with whatever it is, that they are dealing with. So that is but many people still agree to participate in the research, so that is what we mean.

The second is dealing with sensitive information people, may provide us with very, very sensitive information, with information that can hurt us, with information that can make them even more vulnerable, so when we talk about dealing with sensitive information, we need to know if it is you know me and we move will come to the next point.

Which is anonymity, these things that are connected, how do we treat that information, how much of the sensitive information do we record, what to be filtered out, what to we remember, but do not record, many times the respondents will say, that if you take this information and if you do not record it, I will give it to you provided you don't write it down or you don't audio recorded.

So when such a situation arises that is when we you know, we need to know how to deal with this kind of a request from the respondent. Then anonymity, many times the respondents may give us some information that they want comfortably, they want treated very differently, so they do not want to be named as the providers of that specific information. So anonymity is what we are going to be talking about that that is something we need to be sensitive to and that is one big concern.

Then the next is confidentiality, how do we maintain confidentiality, how do we maintain the, how do we sanitize the data, how do we keep the confidence of a respondents, how do we make sure that the that we get the information we need, but we do not make the respondents even more vulnerable because of the information that we are seeking from them.

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Perspectives on interviewing (Contd.)

(Schwandt, 1997)

- "... a linguistic event unfolding in particular sociopolitical contexts."

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So perspectives on interviewing, the interview is "a linguistic event unfolding in particular sociopolitical contexts." The interview is an event that takes place specifically with the use of language, and language is what governs the effectiveness of the interview. So in within a specific contexts, okay.

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Assumptions for interviews for research

(Mishler, 1986, in Schwandt, 1997)

- "the interview is a behavioral event; it is spoken of as a 'verbal behavior', a 'verbal exchange', or a 'pattern of verbal interaction'."
- "the interview process is framed within the context of stimulus-response (question & answer);
- "the interview situation is isolated from cultural & situational norms & frameworks of meaning."

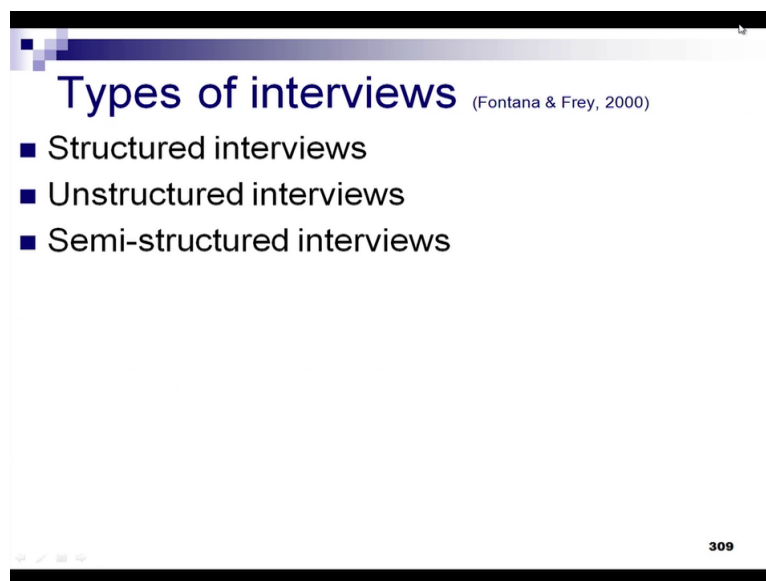
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Some assumptions of interviews for research, "the interview is a behavioral event; it is spoken of as a verbal behavior, a verbal exchange or a pattern of verbal interaction." The interview is you know it's behavior and words are what the one this behavior. Then "the interview process is framed within the context of stimulus-response question and answer; type of situation."

The interview process is you know it takes place with one person asking questions, the other person responding, so that is what an interview is all about. Then “the interview situation is isolated from cultural and situational norms and frameworks of meaning.” The interview is, it is situated within the context, but it is also a different from the meaning that we draw from different context, from the way we normally behave.

These are specific questions that are asked of the respondents and the specific responses that the respondents give to the interviewer. So it's not like a normal conversation, it's a focus conversation, in which information is exchanged between the interviewer and the responded.

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Some types of interviews that we will talk about here and these types of interviews are the ones that we will discuss here are structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi structured interviews. So when we talked about in the different kinds of interviews, we will not be discussing, semi structured interviews. We will talk about structured and unstructured interviews in this series of lectures. And we will go through them one by one; different types of interviews have different purposes okay.

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Structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2000)

- Questions framed to facilitate arrival at predetermined categories
- Questions pre-established with limited responses & little or no flexibility
- Questions use very standard explanations
- No deviation from introduction of the study, sequence of wording of questions

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In structured interviews the questions are framed to facilitate arrival at predetermined categories. There is a strict, there is very clear set of questions and these questions are framed with the explicit intention of arriving at different categories, at the categories that have already been decided. Now you say when we talk about qualitative research has a exploratory research, we don't know what is outside, we are trying to find out, what is out there.

So we are trying to get information about what is what we do not know and so how is structured interviews factor into this, so you know that is one big concern when you talk about predetermined categories, we decide what you want to arrive it at and we give the respondents a choice between various categories that we've already arrived at. So limited numbers of answers are there and that is the questions are framed according to that.

The questions of pre-establish with limited responses and little or no flexibility, the questions are you know the answers are already predicted, it could be answer 1,2,3,4,5,6, whatever, but we know that beyond these four or five or six choices there will be no different answer, so we know already how we are going to process the data that comes in. So there is little or usually more flexibility in structured interviews.

The questions use very standard explanation, the questions are easy to understand and there is no deviation from the introduction of the study, sequence of wording of questions etcetera, because the interviews you know its a straight at a new design a question you ask all the respondents the same questions and the same kind of responses are expected from a variety of respondents.

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Structured interviews (Contd.) (Fontana & Frey, 2000)

- Interviewer abstains from interpretations & presents the questions as they have been presented in the interview
- Interviewer does not try to improvise. There is a balanced rapport between the interviewer & respondent. Neutral attitude of the respondent & 'interested listening' facilitate easy participation by respondent
- Nothing is left to chance in the process or procedure, everything is tried out & tested before administering the interview

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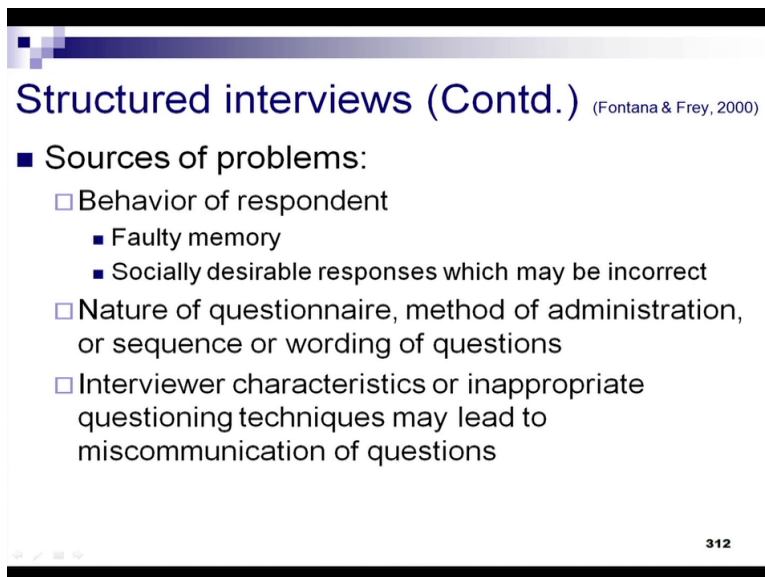
Then the interviewer abstains from interpretations and presents the questions as they have been presented in the interview. The interviewer does not explain the questions to the interviewed, the interviewer goes through the motions of the questions that are there in the interview schedule, so they ask the questions as they are presented in the interview schedule and they do not try to improvise, they do not try to change.

They do not try to provide explanations for the questions that are there. The interviewer does not try to improvise; the interviewer does not try to add to the meaning of the questions that are being asked. There is a balanced rapport between the interviewer and the respondents. Neutral attitude of the respondent and interested listening facilitate easy participation by respondent.

So a rapport is established between the interviewer and interviewee and there is no real change, the interested you know that the respondent seems to be or needs to be interested, the interviewer needs to be interested and they both sort of taken and give out whatever there is so that is there.

Nothing is left to chance in the process of procedure, everything is tried out and tested before administering the interview, and things are tried out, there is you know we test whatever it is that we are asking people and then we you know we present it and we get the information, so nothing is left to chance everything is order, pre decided you know what you are expecting in a structured interview.

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Structured interviews (Contd.) (Fontana & Frey, 2000)

- Sources of problems:
 - Behavior of respondent
 - Faulty memory
 - Socially desirable responses which may be incorrect
 - Nature of questionnaire, method of administration, or sequence or wording of questions
 - Interviewer characteristics or inappropriate questioning techniques may lead to miscommunication of questions

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Then the sources of problems here are, the first one is the faulty memory of the respondent, the respondent may not remember, what it is that they are being asked, respondent may not remember what it is that they are, they may not know what response to give you, they may not remember how to respond to you. Then the respondents may also want to give you socially desirable responses which may be incorrect.

So you ask the respondent, for example you say okay, when you are angry in the workplace, how do you react, do you shout at your colleagues, do you stop out of your colleagues office, do you just lock yourself up in your office or do you just smile and walk away? Now the most desirable response in this category of four responses that I just talked to you about, would be I just smile and walk away from the most difficult situation I counter or from a situation that angers me. Anger is a normal human emotion.

That may not really be the case, but if a respondent says I shout at my colleague or I give it back to them you know to say, that will be perceived as an outburst, an emotional outburst, so nobody even if they do that and realize they will not want others to know, they will not even want to acknowledge it to themselves. Why? Because the society desires that we do not participate in angry exchanges of emotions, especially in the workplace.

So what they are doing is different from what they are reporting, so they may just say okay, I just smile away from a difficult situations, that may not be what happens in real life, so that is

what you mean by socially desirable responses, which may not really reflect the real situation.

The second here is the nature of the questionnaire, method of administration or sequence of wording of questions. This is absolutely critical, since all this is previously decided, since all of this is you know we decide what you want to ask, how many answers we want, what do we want the respondents to say, so how we asked questions is absolutely critical, the words that is used to design the questions will determine the kind of responses we get from these questions.

And if we do not use the right words, we will not get the responses that can get us the answers; we are seeking through our research project okay, so we need to ask the right questions, in order for us to get the right answer from the situation. So the questionnaire, the way the questionnaire is designed, now there are the various types of structured questionnaire, we don't have time for all that in this series of lectures.

But in a various types of questions are there you could have multiple choice questions, you could have the question on liker scale, so least two most of a parameter etc, but these are all closed ended questions, a structured questionnaire is there, so how do you administer the questionnaire, how do you talk to the respondent, how do you get the respondents, what do you say to them, how do you start the conversation, all of these things could be there or sequence of wording of questions could also be a concern.

The interviewer characteristics or inappropriate questioning techniques may lead to miscommunication of questions, that's another characteristics. The characteristic of the interviewer, what the interviewer is like? What the interviewer looks like? the gender of the interviewer will discuss this in the next lecture to a great extent, I mean all of these things have an impact on the interviewee.

We have discussed this time and again in this series of lectures in qualitative research, that mere presence of a an interviewer, mere presence of somebody going into it a social situation with the intention of getting information from that social situation, leads to the social situation changing itself or the social situation or the behavior of another person being a lot to

the fact that he or she or the situation is being observed and knowing that you are being observed, will change the way you behave in situations.

It's normal human social tendency to change, when we know we are being observed, the other thing here is, that try as hard as we might, but the you know physical characteristics of the interviewer, the physical characteristics of the situation, the situation that the interviewer brings with him or her, the biases of the interviewed as reflected in the presence of the interviewer in a situation, will affect how the respondents respond to that interviewer, will affect how the situation around treats, being observed, even if it's an observer.

So we have you know that there is enough evidence in literature, in our, in the life's that will lead around us, regarding the characteristics of the interviewer affecting the interviewed or the person or the observed. So this is another concerned, that you know we need to be, as we need to be very, very careful while interviewing, the respondents in order to get the correct responses from them, okay, that is all we have time for in this lecture, we will continue with some more information about interviewing in the next lecture, thank you very much for listening.