

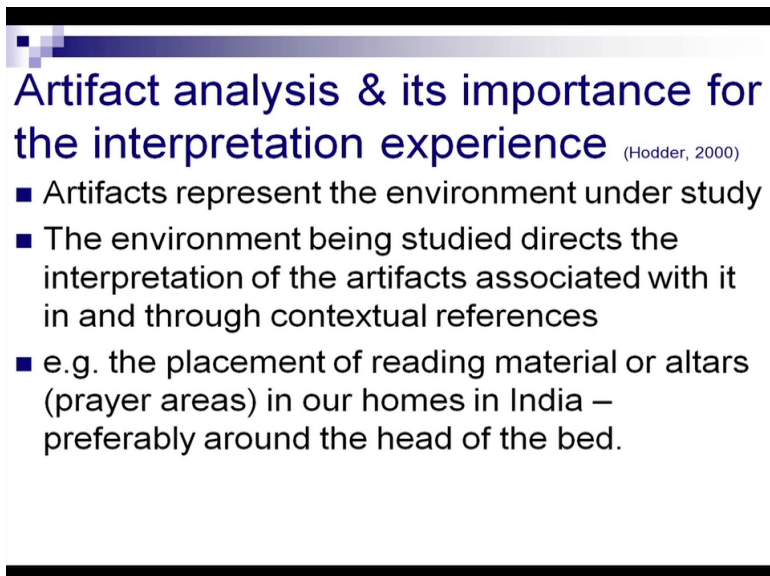
Qualitative Research Methods
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Lecture 32
Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture.

Welcome back to the NOC course title qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course and we have been discussing a whole bunch of things related to qualitative research. Now today we are going to, in this lecture we will discuss the interpretation of documents and material culture. So this is a way of interpreting the qualitative data that we get, so let's move on with this.

This is a again from the same book, handbook of qualitative research methods edited by Denzin and Lincoln and there's a paper by Hodder, in this book and that is the paper I am referring to okay.

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Artifact analysis & its importance for the interpretation experience (Hodder, 2000)

- Artifacts represent the environment under study
- The environment being studied directs the interpretation of the artifacts associated with it in and through contextual references
- e.g. the placement of reading material or altars (prayer areas) in our homes in India – preferably around the head of the bed.

Now artifacts and its importance for the interpretation experience, when we talk about material culture, we are talking about artifacts, what are artifacts? Artifacts are things that we have in our environment, things physical material, things that we use in our environment, these pair of glasses these are artifacts, the clothes that I am wearing these are artifacts, the pens that I am using these are artifacts.

What do I use to exhibit or to demonstrate or to represent the culture, I am coming from so these are artifacts, these are the physical things that we use in a day to day lives are called artifacts. And material culture is the culture represented through material objects. So for example, sitting in India this Dupatta, the scarf that women wear around their necks, is called as a Dupatta or Chunni.

Nw something like this, this is brightly colored is called golden specs on it, in the Indian culture in a typical winter, on a typical winter day a brightly colored scarf around women's necks does not really represents any festivity or anything out of the ordinary, it is something that we women in India normally do, we wear the scarf's. You know when we wear a pants and suit which is known as Kurta Paijama or Kurta Salwar then we use this scarf.

And in the winter's we use we wear bright colors, it's not this recording is happening on 8th January afternoon and so it's cold. So it's not something out of the ordinary, where as in another culture, in other cultural setting the bright pink color could be representative of or festivities, of happiness, of something that is not so professional or related to the work environment of a person.

So we represent, I don't have to tell you that it's normal, we all except this is normal when I look around you know in my physical environment in IIT Kharagpur, everybody is wearing these colors. It's not something totally out of the ordinary, it's a normal working day, we are all tired, it's the end of a working day and we always bright colors, so there's nothing exceptional about it.

So this is the way we represent our culture through material objects, what I use, what kind of physical things I use, now talking about typical professional men, who used the brand and the model of cell phone that they use. is representative of the status, they think they have, or the status they want to portray to their colleagues. These are material objects that represent the cultural that we are coming from and they represent what we are thinking about ourselves.

And how we want to perceived in the community, so I am giving you this different examples. Again you know this is how culture is expressed by people through the objects that we use in our day to day lives. Artifacts represent the environment under study. We pick specific

physical objects, tangible things that we can touch and feel and measure and see and hear and we take these as representatives of the environment that we are studying.

The environment being studied directs the interpretation of the artifacts associated with it in and through contextual references. Now the artifacts represent the environment and the any study of the environment, revolves around, it is the artifacts direct the study and the artifacts are interpreted within the context that they are found in. For example this is a scarf, we call it chunni, it serves shows multiple purposes, one it is a part of our dress winter, summer, we women wear it.

In Winter it doubles up as a regular scarf that prevents you know that protects our necks from cold, so I mean it is not only a protection for our necks, it is also a part of the normal clothing that we wear, so looking at it contextually, the bright color does nothing, to how we use this scarf, but the bright color is representative of the culture that we are in and you could you could interpret in both ways, is part of the dress.

And it's also a covering for the neck, the way I have draped it around today shows that it's winter and I may be trying to protect my neck in order to, in addition to at least trying to look professional. So we interpret these material object within a context, they also represent the context that is be interpreted. For example the placement of reading material or altars in our homes in India.

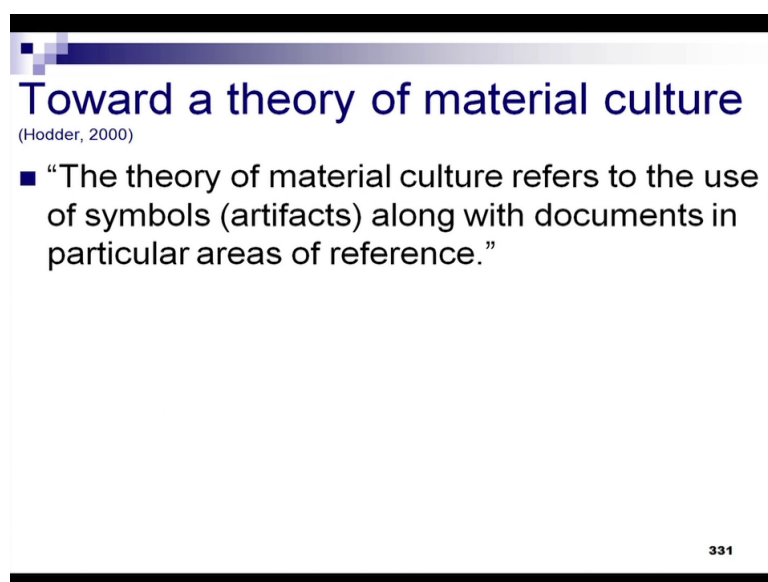
There's an another example in India, we are taught that books are taught are books represent knowledge and knowledge is sacred, any reading material that we have is preferably not placed at the foot of the bed, we keep books in our bedrooms, but we try to not keep these books at the foot of the bed.

We don't have book racks where the soles are or facing the soles of our feet. We have book racks either next our heads or on the sidewall. Similarly with altars, prayer areas that we have on which we can you put a prayer material, it is typically kept at level that is above the persons head and on the head of at least one of the people because it has to be reachable and it is never placed at the foot of the bed, so that is one thing that is, I mean it shows how we treat this is material objects, especially with books.

I remember having discussion with some American friends when I was studying in the US about not being able to jump over books or you know not putting my books and shoes in the same compartment of a bag, I would feel very uncomfortable if books and shoes were in the same bag one and I could never, I still cannot put books and shoes in the same compartment of the bag, you know if I am forced to do it then there will be wraps, will be other things between the two, this is the way we are trained.

I am not saying the people who do it are being disrespectful maybe they are much more respect for knowledge than I have, but this is representative of the way we, of the way the treatment of material objects in our culture, informs observers about our culture, so this is the analysis of artifacts and the way this artifacts are treated and artifacts physical positions that we have okay.

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Toward a theory of material culture, “the theory of material culture refers to the use of symbols or artifacts along with documents in particular areas of reference.” So how the symbols or artifacts I used along with the documents within the particular areas of references is the theory of material culture.

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Significance of material culture (Hodder, 2000)

- “Some material culture is designed specifically to be communicative and representational”, as in the case of written texts or overtly explicit symbols like uniforms, badges, emblems, and the like.

The author feels that, “... the development of complex symboling systems allows more information to be processed more efficiently.”

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How is material culture expressed? “Some material culture is designed specifically to be communicative and representational”, for example in the case of written texts or overtly explicit symbols like uniforms, badges, emblems and the like. So material culture, things that we use are very expressive, they speak for themselves, they don't need very much interpretation.

They are they communicate the message they are supposed to communicate, they are representative of the behavior they need to represent. For example uniforms in school, we have badges, we have emblems, we have insignia, and we have crests, etcetera. These are communicative and representational elements of material culture.

And the author in this paper feels that “the development of complex symboling systems allows more information to be processed more efficiently.” The more complex the symboling systems are, the more the information there is in these systems. The complexity adds to the richness of the information that is present in these symbols, that are complex, okay.

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Significance of material culture (Contd.)

(Hodder, 2000)

- "... the ideological component of symbols is identified within relations of power & domination & increasingly power & systems of value & prestige are seen as multiple & dialectical."

A significant implication of this is "... the inability to produce dictionaries of material culture" as different people interpret different things differently in time & space.

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The other significance here is "the ideological component of symbols is identified within relations of power and domination and increasingly power and systems of value and prestige are seen as multiple and dialectical." So this means that the relations of power and dominance are also represented by the way these material objects are treated.

A significant implication of this is "the inability to produce dictionaries of material culture" as different people interpret different things differently in time and space. Something that may be representative of a power and authority today may not be representative of power and authority tomorrow. Something that represents a hierarchy in the system of things today, and it is seen as a system of as a something that is representative of hierarchy today, may not be representative of the same hierarchy tomorrow.

For example and again this is an example that you know I take I draw, upon from personal experience, when we were growing up single color clothing, plain color clothing in the context that we were it, was representative of a superior position, pastel shades, single colored sweaters, single colored pants, were representative of class and authority, black especially black, black is a universal color, everybody likes to use it.

But anyone wearing black was perceived to be more authoritative or in a position of power over those not wearing black. Grey and brown and blue came next, but black was supposed to be the most superior, most authoritative color. Now a days that is not the case the context is changed, the times have changed even in the same setting, everybody is wearing black,

people are wearing black jacket, black shoes were representative of formality that is no longer the case.

So you know we are becoming more culturally expressive, my guess is that that was a fall out of the British influence that was there on India. So you know we grew up in that kind of setting that this is very, very formal now the definitions of formality have changed, so colors' the way we use our kind of clothing, we wear, the way we talk, English for example, English speaking was considered to be more professional.

Anybody who spoke English was, in India was at one point of time considered to be in a position of higher authority than or in the professional circles, that an again and classifying this information. English was supposed to be or treated as the more professional way of communication, that is no longer the case, it's more about utility English yes, it is a medium of international communication.

However people who use the local language are not treated very much differently than people who speak English in a certain way, so you know those things are changing. The way culture express themselves and that is again indicative of how material culture, what we say, how we do things, what we do, what we do, not do is indicative of our culture and how culture is integrated.

And these things interpretations changed dramatically over space and time and by you know in an through context, so I am referring to specific context at that point also maybe these things were not so common in another context, but these definitions have changed, even within the context that I am referring to.

You must have seen overtime anybody who is above thirty years of age will have experienced this, you know the way things have changed in the past 20,25,30 years is tremendous, okay.

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Material meanings in time (Hodder, 2000)

- Different symbols assume different meanings at different points in time.
- Contexts vary with time

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Material meanings in time, different symbols assume different meanings at different points in time and the context vary with time. Representatives of material culture mean different things at different points in time, what we think used to be important, what we thought was important a long time ago, is no longer so important, when I was growing up, when I was in college laptops with not so common, I mean they just started coming to India.

And you know it was it was considered a matter of prestige to even own a laptop, and it was considered a matter of prestige even to own a desktop in your house, so at that time you know it was so uncommon cell phones we have big huge cellular phones, something brand new and that happened with any new technology. These days it's so commonly, its freely available everybody seen carrying a laptop, similarly travelling abroad was not so common, these were all expressions of our ability to do things that we wanted to do.

And this traveling abroad is no longer considered to be a very prestigious event, in India most people in middle class families have passports that they have used, so you know these things because of the ease of international communication, again it's not only an expression a change in the expression material culture, it's also the ability to do certain things that were not really so common, for various reasons.

People have people can afford it, they have more opportunities, so it's a complex phenomenon, however these expressions have cultural implications also, okay. Contexts vary with time okay.

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Method (Hodder, 2000)

- The three areas which can be used to evaluate the quality of interpretation of material artifacts are:
 - The researcher should identify the context within which things had a similar meaning. “The boundaries of the text are never ‘given’, they have to be interpreted.”

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The method for of interpreting material culture, three areas which can be used to evaluate the quality of interpretation of material artifacts are one: the researcher should identify the context within which the things had a similar meaning. “The boundaries of the contacts that are never given they have to be interpreted.” So things with similar meanings have to be interpreted and with the similarity of meanings have to be interpreted.

These boundaries are a not defined, these boundaries emerge as a result of expression of interpretation of different material objects within the same culture and we say okay, these interpretations looks similar, so they must be within the same boundary, they must be connected to each purpose.

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Method – three areas used for evaluation (Contd.) (Hodder, 2000)

- The second area of evaluation deals with the recognition of similarities & differences. In a context, people respond to similar situations, within specific boundaries, but it is very difficult to define boundaries.

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The second area of evaluation deals with the recognition of similarities and differences. In a context, people respond to similar situations, within specific boundaries, but it is very, very difficult to define boundaries, that's exactly what I am saying. Boundaries emerge, similarities and differences emerge, the researcher must be equipped to identify these similarities and differences, okay.

The researcher must be vigilant, must be perceptive, must be alert to the environment, that the researcher is trying to interpret or observing to see what can be classified as a similarity and what is a difference, where can these material objects be clubbed and where they need to be put into different categories, because the similarities and differences emerge from the way material culture is interpreted.

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Method – three areas used for evaluation (Contd.) (Hodder, 2000)

- The third criterion deals with the relevance of general & specific historical theories to the data in hand.

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The third criterion deals with the relevance of general and specific historical theories to the data in hand. Now the data that is collected for any type of qualitative research is collected over a period of time and this is very, very important. The context in which the data was collected changes and with the change in context, the relevance of the data so collected may also come into question.

So the historical background and the relevance of specific historical theories becomes very important, one must be aware of the historical context in which the data was collected, related to which the data is going to be interpreted and its relevance with the current state of the same historical context and that is very, very important. How has the context evolved to its present state and how will this material this interpretation that held or the way material culture was interpreted in the context from which it was collected, will fair today.

In todays historical, today's stage of the same historical context and that is extremely important here, the researcher has to be aware of the shift in the context as well as the interpretation okay.

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Confirmation (Hodder, 2000)

- The interpretation of documents & material culture may be carried out through coherence & correspondence.
 - Coherence is seen "... if the parts of the argument do not contradict each other & the conclusions follow from premises." Coherence may be both internal and external.
 - Correspondence "... embeds the fit of data & theory within coherence.[...] Data are made to cohere by being linked within theoretical arguments."

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Confirmation, confirmation is the interpretation of documents and material culture which may be carried out through coherence and correspondence. So there are two ways in which the researcher can confirm whether the interpretations hold good or not. These two ways of doing that are one is coherence: Coherence is seen "if the parts of the argument do not contradict each other and the conclusions follow from the premises."

So the argument that is drawn to interpret culture, the be specific material culture needs to be sound, the parts of the argument needs to be connected with each other and the premises on which the argument is being drawn must lead to the conclusions and coherence maybe both internal and external.

Correspondence "embeds the fit of data and theory with coherence, so data are made to cohere by being linked with theoretical arguments." Correspondence means that the data and theory fit together within coherently with each other, so this is what I have found out and this is what theory says about it and this is how these two are connected, this is how I found out and this is how it fits into or extends the theory and that is called correspondence.

The data correspondence to the theory it either fits into the existing theory or it exists sorry extends the theory in such a way that, it logically extends the theory that it is connected to or coming out or earth links to, etc., this is called correspondence.

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Elements pointing towards the success of the interpretation of data (Hodder, 2000)

■ Fruitfulness:

- benefits produced by interpreting the data
- number and kinds of new directions & new perspectives opened up at the end of the study

■ “Peer review (formally & informally in journals) & on the no. of people who believe, cite & build on them.”

■ “Trustworthiness, professional credentials, & status of the author, & supporters of an interpretation.”

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Now elements pointing towards the success of the interpretation of data. Some elements that tell us that the data, that the way the data has been interpreted is successful, first element is fruitfulness: fruitfulness refers to the benefits produced by interpreting the data, what are we got out of it, we are working so hard, we are collecting all this information, we are interpreting it, what is the ultimate result. So you know what is the benefit, what am I gaining out of it.

The second is number and kinds of new directions and new perspectives opened up at the end of the study, what I have gained in the current context and how will it lead to further understanding, further addition of knowledge, so that is fruitfulness. Why should I spend time, why have I spend time and interpreting something, why have I spend so much of time an effort and possibly money and other resources also, what is the ultimate benefit, what is the fruitfulness.

The second is peer review, publications at the end of the day that is really the the acid test of what we have found. Whether of the or whether whatever we have done is relevant and useful or not, so peer review formally and informally in journals and on the number of people who believe, cite and build on our work.” You can do a piece of research, you don't send it for publication, it's not going to work okay.

We do a piece of research and we send it for publication, but nobody reads it, we send it for publication in a I wouldn't say obscure journal, in a lesser known journal, no use. We need to send it for publication in a journal that is reputed or we need to send it for publication and

then share the publication with others, who are going to use it so that the journal that is not known well earlier become is well known, because our publication is so useful that is another way of doing it.

So if it gets published in a lesser known, but very good quality journal then the responsibility is shared by the author also, for making that information known to others who can use it and if through our efforts, people start citing it, they start using it, and the journal gains out it, win-win situation for both. Trustworthiness, so people need to believe, when we talk about peer review, people need to believe, they need to be able to cite what we are saying and they need to be able to build on whatever we are saying, they believe, they cite and they build on.

They extent whatever knowledge we have created and use that to do something different based on what we have done, not only on that but on several similar studies, so this is the acid test. “Trustworthiness, professional credentials and status of the author and supporters of an interpretation.”

How many people believe it, how many people supported, how many people believe the author, these elements point towards the success of the interpretation of data and that is all we have time for in this lecture, we will continue with some more inputs on qualitative research methods in the next lecture, thank you very much for listening.