

Introduction to Qualitative Methods and The Interview

Dr Paula Duffy

GG2508: Skills and Techniques in Geoscience

2nd February 2021

Dr Paula Duffy - Lecture Schedule

- ▶ Introduction to Qualitative Methods and The Interview
 - ▶ Lecture 3: Tuesday 2nd February (live on collaborate)
- ▶ Reading The Landscape: Visual methods and observation
 - ▶ Lecture 5: Tuesday 9th February (live on collaborate)
- ▶ Reading The Digital Landscape: Online research and digital methods
 - ▶ Lecture 9: Tuesday 23rd February (tbc)
- ▶ Introduction to Survey Research Methods
 - ▶ Lecture 10: Thursday 25th February (tbc)

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What is Qualitative Research

- ▶ Different methods/techniques available
 - ▶ Oral/Textual/Participative
- ▶ Many disciplines/traditions use it across the social sciences
- ▶ Unifying theme is its non-numerical nature (compared to quantitative research)
 - ▶ E.g. spoken word, behaviour, interactions, underlying discourses
- ▶ Not one legitimate way to do qualitative research
- ▶ Based on particular ontology/epistemology
 - ▶ Ontology=theory of the way the world is
 - ▶ Epistemology=theory of how best to understand the world (e.g. nature knowledge)

Importance of Epistemology :

“An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline. A particularly central issue is the question of whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences”

(Bryman 2008: 13)

Any piece of geographical research is based on philosophical assumptions:

“... for claims about the world to constitute knowledge, they need to be justified in some way or another and this justification will always move beyond the empirical evidence [...] if you claim to know something, you must be able to justify that claim when it comes under attack”

(Graham 2005: 9).

Qualitative Epistemologies

- ▶ Emphasises actors' subjective perspectives on their own worlds (e.g. personal narratives, life stories, their language & interaction)
- ▶ Rejects values of objectivity and neutrality
- ▶ Interactive research process between researcher & social actors (e.g. objectivity not possible, reflexivity, positionality)
- ▶ Often small sample, but data deep & rich
- ▶ Sensitive to people and context studied
- ▶ Focuses on real, located practice
- ▶ Generalizations made by theoretical inferences

Ethical Issues

- ▶ In brief:
 - ▶ Informed consent (voluntary, implications, consent)
 - ▶ Do no harm (to participants, the field)
 - ▶ Privacy & confidentiality (can promises be kept)
- ▶ Ethics an on-going process; new issues may emerge

Sampling and Rigour

- ▶ Illustrative not representative samples
 - ▶ Chosen as help answer your RQs
 - ▶ Theory to make links beyond the case
- ▶ Purposive, Theoretical or Snowball sampling
 - ▶ More convenient/opportunistic whilst still providing characteristics you're interested in
- ▶ 'Size is not important'
 - ▶ Rich data is key, as is reflexivity of researcher
 - ▶ Link between method, theory & data key
- ▶ Multiplicity, reject simplistic meta-narratives

Why do Qualitative Research?

- ▶ Epistemology
 - ▶ Research is a social process; interested in subjectivity in research; experience same events and places differently
- ▶ Scientific reasons
 - ▶ Inductive approach e.g. observe data in natural state, allow key issues to emerge
 - ▶ High quality data e.g. rich, nuanced, insightful - tease out meaning and causation
 - ▶ Availability of data e.g. everything potentially data
- ▶ Political/ethical reasons
 - ▶ Give voice, PAR, marginalised groups

The Interview

Interviews - Key Characteristics

► “a face-to-face verbal exchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons”

(Maccoby and Maccoby 1954: 499, cited in Dunn 2010: 101)



Why use Interviews?

- ✓ Collect data inaccessible by observation / questionnaire
- ✓ Beyond surface level comparisons:
 - ✓ changing conditions, explaining processes,
 - ✓ construction, negotiation & re-construction of meanings & identities
- ✓ **Appropriate for the research questions/aims**

The Interview is...

Most popular method; values personal language as 'data'; interactive and generative process



Much more than 'having a chat' (Dunn 2010); 'conversation with a purpose' (Webb 1932)



Captures diversity of meaning, opinion & experience; give voice to marginalised

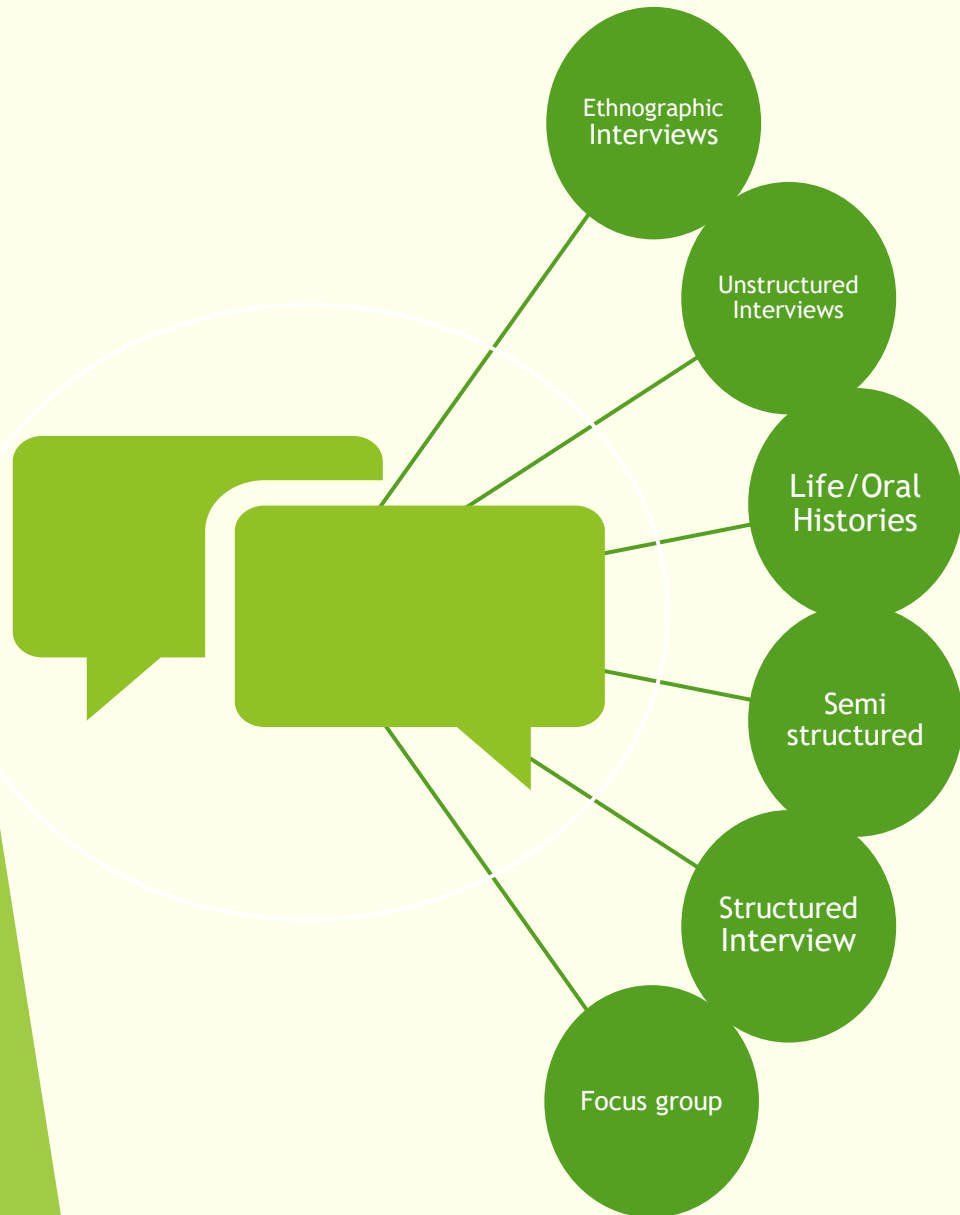


Careful planning & preparation; not an easy option if done well



Relational aspect important; need to build trust & rapport for it to work

Spectrum of Approaches



► Differences in terms of:

- Structure & length
- Purpose/direction
- Sampling
- Analytical method
- Role of interviewer

- **Tip:** Get respondents involved ASAP: arrange in advance if possible

Semi/Un-structured Interview



Both emphasise interviewee's point of view & their life-world



Both flexible & responsive to direction interviewees take



Both emphasise rich, detailed, in-depth answers



BUT vary in their structure & flexibility

▶ Semi structured

- ▶ More regulated - standardised questions
- ▶ More directed by research - detailed aide memoire
- ▶ Often shorter - larger sample - more interviewers

▶ Unstructured

- ▶ Respondent leads - more conversational - informal
- ▶ Key themes/topics on a post-it
- ▶ Often longer - smaller sample - single researcher
- ▶ Can suit certain 'populations' & sensitive topics

Role of Researcher

Kvale (1996: 3-4)



Researcher as ‘miner’

‘knowledge understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal’



Researcher as ‘traveller’

‘traveller asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world’

Preparing an Interview Guide

List of the general issues & specific questions to be covered



Facilitate insights into how participants view their social world



Organisation & flow of questions key:

Order of questions builds rapport

Language should be understandable & relevant

Avoid leading questions

Record factsheet information

Questions (see Bryman 2015)

▶ Warm - up questions

- ▶ Introduce yourself, the project, consent procedure
- ▶ Relax the respondent, build rapport

▶ Primary & secondary (probing) questions

- ▶ First the (empirical) issue at hand
- ▶ Ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future: this is good interview structure
- ▶ Probe - for follow on, or to illicit detail, inconsistent
- ▶ “How do you mean?”, “for example?”, “could you say more?”, “please example”, or even just “go on”
- ▶ Non-verbal cues (lean-in, nodding)
- ▶ Silence (give them a chance to pause & elaborate)

Questions cont... (see Bryman 2015)

- ▶ Descriptive questions (What”, “When”, “Where” - “tell me about X”
- ▶ Direct questions (Are you happy about X?)
- ▶ Indirect questions (What do most people your age think about X?)
- ▶ Interpreting questions (Is it fair to say you like where you live?)
- ▶ Comparative questions (Is becoming a grandparent the same as becoming a parent?)

Interview Skills...

The art of Listening

- ▶ Questions are important but listening is a key skill in interviewing

Must be active:

- ▶ Show your interest, care & empathy
- ▶ You interpret as you listen
- ▶ Formulate probes & follow-up
- ▶ Think on your feet for new lines of questioning
- ▶ Tease out new emergent issues

The Interviewer...



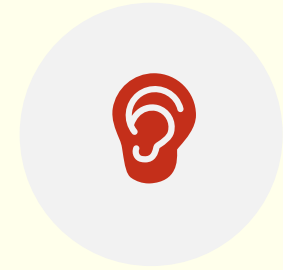
NEED CLEAR, LOGICAL
MIND - THINK QUICKLY TO
DISTIL KEY INFO &
DECIDE HOW TO PROCEED



GOOD MEMORY HELPS -
MENTAL NOTES TO HELP
NAVIGATE THROUGH
TOPIC GUIDE



ENQUIRING MIND-
SHOULD WANT TO KNOW
MORE



EMPATHY - INTEREST &
RESPECT FOR PEOPLE AS
INDIVIDUALS; NOT FOR
PEOPLE WHO LIKE SOUND
OWN VOICE



RAPPORT CRITICAL: ALL
WALKS OF LIFE; INTEREST
& RESPECT



ESTABLISH THEIR
CREDIBILITY BY ASKING
RELEVANT QUESTIONS



FACILITATOR - TALK
THROUGH THEIR
THOUGHTS ETC

Using Stimuli - more than questions



Vignette/scenario questions

Ground accounts in particular situations
Understand how context influences behaviour



Photo elicitation (cartoon, poster, photos)

May be provided or taken by interviewee
Provide meaningful context for discussion
Think about everyday situations in different way
May stimulate forgotten memories



Walking/going along interviews

Alternatives to face-to-face

Face-to-face the classic approach

Venue: home/workplace of interviewer, interviewee, on street, other neutral ground
But distance, time/costs, subject matter, position of the interviewer can make this difficult



Alternative formats:

Telephone interviews

Online interviews (via email or online chat)



Not always appropriate or straightforward



Discussion Points:

- ▶ What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of interviewing at a distance (i.e. by phone, online)
- ▶ Describe a list of rapport strategies you could use if you were to conduct a face-to-face interview with an older person not known to you.

Recording & Transcribing

- ▶ Advantages of recording & transcribing interviews:
 - ▶ Allows more thorough examination
 - ▶ Avoids reliance on memory
 - ▶ Permits repeated examination of responses
 - ▶ Opens up data to scrutiny by other researchers
 - ▶ Counter accusations of bias
 - ▶ Allows data to be reused in other ways
- ▶ Advise you to transcribe as you go!

Recording...

- ▶ **Notes** - Keep written notes as back up; recorders can fail
- ▶ **Film, Audio recording:** allows transcription, but you must seek permission
- ▶ Know your machine; practice makes perfect (keep spare batteries)
- ▶ Location of interview & background noise; may impact on quality of sound recording
- ▶ What impact will context have on recording; might have to compromise on privacy & quiet

Transcription Conventions

- ▶ Important text reproduces exactly what interviewee said (??? = missing word/phrase)
- ▶ Debate as to whether to edit out verbal tics & colloquial language
- ▶ Use quotation marks for direct quotes & attribute the quote to correct person
- ▶ Little point transcribing irrelevant material; but may be important later on

- ▶ **Deductive coding** (most common with primary data collection such as interviews)
 - ▶ Codebook as a reference to guide you
 - ▶ The codebook will be developed before your data collection starts, usually in the process of researching the existing field - literature.
 - ▶ The codebook changes as you code your data; new codes will be added and categories re-organized.
 - ▶ In the end, your codebook should reflect the structure of your data.
- ▶ **Inductive coding** (more common life/ oral histories, secondary qualitative data)
 - ▶ method is used when you know little about the research subject
 - ▶ conducting heuristic or exploratory research.
 - ▶ In this case, you don't have a codebook, you're building on from scratch based on your data.
 - ▶ Data-driven sometimes, linked to grounded theory.

Interpreting data: Coding

Getting started with coding....

- ▶ Although it will vary by approach, and interview type, purpose.
- ▶ Beginners guide to coding :
 - ▶ Step 1: Read Through - make notes- broad code names
 - ▶ Step 2: Line-by-Line coding - code everything (or nearly everything) - detailed codes - descriptive
 - ▶ Step 3: Categorise - similar codes into the same categories and move them around in order to find out a way that reflects your analysis the best. - analytic +/- axial
 - ▶ Step 4: Themes: detect consistent and overarching themes. The bigger categories are the overarching themes while the sub-categories supporting themes.
 - ▶ Step 5: Integrate and Refine: do your codes help answer your research questions? are they analytically useful?

1 Interview 1

2 What is your current year in college and area of study?

3 Answer: First year graduate student. I am studying to be a physician.

4 Describe any previous experience you have using augmented 3D holograms.

5 Answer: None

6 Describe the steps you took to study using the zSpace system and augmented 3D holograms, step by step.

7 Answer: I set aside time to study for the anatomy exam. I had a text book with me and went to the library to use the zSpace system.

8 Describe, in detail, your experience using the zSpace system and augmented 3D holograms.

9 Answer: I liked having the 3d hologram. What was most advantageous was that the 3D hologram was labeled. The zSpace system had some glitches, because it was new so it was a little hard to use. I am sure that once the glitches get worked out it will be a greater learning tool.

10 Explain the meaningfulness of your experience with the zSpace system and augmented 3D holograms.

11 Answer: I think it is a good experience to have and that it is useful to learn how to use 3D holograms, because they are already being used in the medical field. I am sure that I will be able to use the experience in the future as this type of technology evolves in the field.

12 How do you think your experience with the zSpace system and augmented 3D holograms has affected your ability in relation to entering the work force?

13 Answer: I'm sorry you cut out for a second. Can you repeat the question? It's hard to say. (pause) I don't know everything about the job I will be entering into yet. I am learning about it every day. I think the zSpace system and the experience gained through the use of

Other coding considerations..

(See Cope and Kurtz, 2016 or Kitchin and Tate 2000)

- ▶ How do we assign importance to codes? - frequency, distribution, emphasis etc
- ▶ Structure - Connections and relationships :
 - ▶ Relationships and associations between different categories?
 - ▶ Are there recurring patterns?
 - ▶ How do the codes interact? - proximity, opposites
 - ▶ Are they hierarchical versions of same codes? sub-codes ? Details v big picture?
- ▶ Narrative Analysis
- ▶ Discourse Analysis

Conclusion

- ▶ Interviews bring people into the research process
- ▶ Spectrum of different approaches available
- ▶ Important to be well informed & prepared for your interview
- ▶ Interviewing is a skill that will develop with practice, but there are 'good practice' tips
- ▶ Good transcription important for analysis; take time to do it well
- ▶ Coding is an important and rigorous part of Interview data (+ any qualitative analysis).

Key Readings

- ▶ Bryman, A. (2015) *Social Research Methods*. London: Sage
- ▶ Cope, M. and Kurtz, H. (2016) Organizing, Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data. In Clifford, N. and Valentine, G. *Key Methods in Geography* (London: Sage)
- ▶ Dunn, K. (2010) Interviewing. In Hay, I. (ed.) (2010) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography 3rd Edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 99-137
- ▶ Kitchin, R. & Tate, N. J. (2000) *Conducting research in human geography : theory, methodology and practice* . Harlow: Prentice Hall (chapter 8: Analysing and Interpreting qualitative data)
- ▶ Longhurst, R. (2016) Semi-structured interviewing and Focus groups. In Clifford, N. and Valentine, G. *Key Methods in Geography* (London: Sage)