

# Conceptual Context

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Data Processing Workshop

April 2025



# Why do we need research questions?

Sunderland, Jane (2010). Research questions in Linguistics. In *Research Methods in Linguistics*. Lia Litosseliti (Ed). pp 9--28.

- Research questions are the **key** to any **empirical** research project.
- It will guide you in terms of data needed, data collection methods and data analysis.
- While hypotheses and research questions are related, hypotheses tend to be more precise
- Natural sciences vs. Social sciences.



# Empirical research

- Assumptions must be addressed with data
  - What am I trying to find out in my research project?
  - What data do I need?
  - How do I analyze it?
- **RQ** will guide you to answer and, accordingly, to proceed with the following phases

# Important



The RQ should be formulated in ways which allow the **identification and investigation of further issues** that only doing the research can bring to light



The RQ should not be too general, vague or multidimensional

# Where do research questions come from?



You may come across a **suggestion** for an (unanswered) research question; however, do check that it has not, in fact, been addressed, and, indeed, that as a question it is both worthy of investigation (is it still interesting and original?) and **operationalizable**



You may decide to **replicate** someone else's work, perhaps to challenge it, perhaps within a **different** or particularly interesting context, or perhaps to use a different form of **analysis** on the **same or related data**



You may identify a '**niche**' in the research literature, that is, something related to your topic has been asked, but something else has not.

# The importance of the literature (documentarse)

The RQ will be well grounded in existing research (assuming the literature review is a good one); there will be a coherence between the literature review and the rest of the thesis

The answer is 'a pre-existing topic' (which then drives the literature review)

A third possible source of a research question, more controversially, is that it comes out of your own findings. Your data may suggest answers to research questions that you didn't ask

# Types of research questions

- You need to consider carefully **what you want to ask** (often more than one question), and the **sequence**.
- For example, in many research projects, there are descriptive questions, explanatory questions, evaluative questions, etc.



# How to question?

- Note that these research questions are formulated as interrogatives: Do, What, How, Why.
- Other research questions might start with Is/Are, When, Where, Who or To what extent?
- These interrogatives suggest different sorts of research questions:
  - How, When, Where, What, Is/Are, Do/Does and To what extent may be **descriptive**,
  - Why is clearly **explanatory**.







# Typology

- Primary/secondary
- Main/ contributory
- Overarching/subordinate
- Empirical/methodological/theoretical
- Researcher-generated/participant-generated
- Empirical/speculative

To operationalize your RQ, you will need to know exactly what each word is to mean as far as your research project is concerned (a ‘working definition’, that is, ‘for the purpose of this dissertation/thesis’)



# How many RQs?

- The issue is not the number of research questions, but what is needed (in terms of data, analysis, time and effort) to answer a given RQ
- You will need to focus to ensure that you are designing a manageable project



# Operationalizing research questions

- There must be a way of addressing the RQ, in terms of **data**:
  - identifying the appropriate type and source of data
  - collecting
  - analyzing
- Also important in operationalization is defining key terms and a working definition

# Impact on your methodology



How to collect our data?



What kind of phenomenon describes such data?

**What are you asking/ eliciting /retrieving?**

**How are you asking/ eliciting /retrieving?**

# Documenting your decisions (documentar)



It is most important to document all your decisions



Documenting your decisions around your RQ however goes beyond justifying their operationalization through associated data, data collection methods and analytical framework

# Your turn

	Research Question	Data needed	Data collection	Data analysis
1				
2				
3				