

MY410: Seminar Week 3

Chao-Yo Cheng

Pre-seminar checks

- ▶ How are things going?
- ▶ How are the lecture videos?
- ▶ Any questions/issues/things to flag up?

WK2 seminar refresher

- ▶ Mason's categories provide a useful starting point, but they are not mutually exclusive. Certainly it is not the only typology available out there.

WK2 seminar refresher

- ▶ Mason's categories provide a useful starting point, but they are not mutually exclusive. Certainly it is not the only typology available out there.
- ▶ A research project can address one or more of the following questions – for instance,
 - How and why does X happen? Under what conditions will we see X?
 - Do these conditions “cause” X?
 - How and why do these different conditions lead to X?
 - Why does X happen in some places but not others? Why does X happen in some years but not others?
- ▶ Note that we never intend to match these RQs to any specific methods.

WK3 lecture takeaway

- ▶ There is not one “best” method – yes, but why?
- ▶ There should always be clear **congruence** between theory, question, and method.
- ▶ Evaluating this fit is a fundamental part of being a **critical reader**.
- ▶ Ensuring that your work has such fit is essential to producing **valuable and valid** social science.

Warm-up: Sumner & Tribe (2004)

- ▶ Let's break into pairs to review different sections of the article.
- ▶ Focus on the following tasks/questions:
 - What is epistemology? According to the authors, how many epistemological positions are common in international development studies?
 - What are the “problems” in development?
 - The authors discuss descriptive, interpretative, explanatory research – what does each of them do?
 - What do the authors mean by “rigor?” Why is it in scare-quotes?

Epistemology in intl development studies

| | <i>A positivist approach</i> | <i>A constructivist approach</i> |
|--|--|---|
| What is 'reality'? | A definable 'reality' or 'truth' exists and is observable | There is no 'reality' or 'truth' beyond our experiences |
| What is the goal of academic enquiry? | Acquisition of the 'truth' | A more informed construction of the world |
| How are the researcher and the 'researched' related? | The researcher is independent of the 'researched' | The researcher is not independent of the 'researched' |
| What should be the role for values? | None - objectivity sought | Part of 'reality' - subjectivity celebrated |
| What kind of approach? | Predominantly based on observability or measurability and with the aim of seeking 'evidence' | Predominantly based on discourse and meaning with the aim of seeking a more informed understanding of the world |
| What kind of data is preferred? | Predominantly quantitative | Traditionally associated with a predominantly qualitative approach |
| Examples of such studies in Development Studies | Dollar and Kraay (2002) <i>Growth is Good for the Poor</i> | Narayan <i>et al.</i> , (2002) <i>Voices of the Poor</i> |

Epistemology in intl development studies

Lack of income and assets

If you have a job at all now, you're overworked and underpaid.

—Young woman from Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

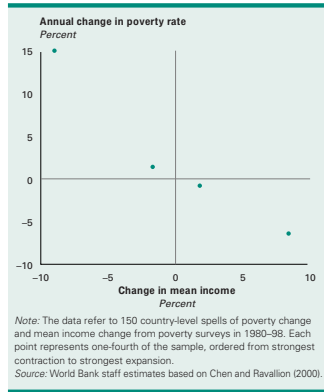
Some have land, but they can't buy fertilizer; if some work as weavers, they aren't well paid; if some work for daily wages, they aren't paid a just wage.

—Cackchiquel Indian, Guatemala

Poor people consistently emphasize the centrality of work to improving their lives. A country's overall wealth is an important influence on this: as countries grow richer, so on average do poor people in those countries,

Figure 2.1

Poverty shows a strong link with economic contractions and expansions



Epistemology in intl development studies

“Is development studies an objective, natural science-like search for one ‘truth’ or is it a subjective, constructivist search for many ‘truths’, or is it perhaps both?” (Sumner & Tribe, 2004)

Epistemology in intl development studies

“Is development studies an objective, natural science-like search for one ‘truth’ or is it a subjective, constructivist search for many ‘truths’, or is it perhaps both?” (Sumner & Tribe, 2004)

And yet, given that the authors say that “*across every conceivable fault-line the two approaches (i.e., positivism and constructivism) sit diametrically opposed,*” how can the answer possibly be *both*?

Epistemology in intl development studies

| | Economics | Politics | Sociology | Social Anthropology |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| What is reality? | One reality exists; reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts; what is observable is real | One reality exists. Reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts | One reality exists; Reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts, but much of reality is unobservable | There are <i>different</i> realities associated with different standpoints and cultures |
| Goal of enquiry? | Acquisition of a <i>single</i> truth -- a universal, general law | We can establish truths or <i>generalizations</i> about human beings | Truth needs to be understood in terms of <i>practical adequacy</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> of local meanings; there is <i>no universal truth</i> |
| How are the researcher (you) and the "researched" related? | The researcher is <i>objective</i> and is <i>independent</i> of the "researched" | The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched" | The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched" | The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched" |



Sumner, A, and M Tribe. 2008. *International Development Studies*. London: Sage, p.72.

Exercise: RQ and Design

- ▶ Let's break into small groups and/or pairs again.
- ▶ Take a problem in development (e.g., poverty, inequality, corruption, violence/conflict, etc.).
- ▶ Come up with a research question.
 - Mason (2002): Developmental, mechanical, causal/predictive, and/or comparative?
 - Sumner & Tribe (2004): Descriptive, explanatory, and/or interpretative? Causes of effects and/or effects of causes? Positivist and/or constructivist?
- ▶ Given your question, what will be the associated design? And what is a possible misaligned design?

Exercise: RQ and Design

- ▶ What are the “question” words you are using (e.g, what? why? how? does?)
- ▶ Additional issues associated with various questions and designs. Limitations? Trade-offs? Feasibility?
- ▶ How do you ensure **rigor** in your project?

Exercise: RQ and Design

- ▶ What are the “question” words you are using (e.g, what? why? how? does?)
- ▶ Additional issues associated with various questions and designs. Limitations? Trade-offs? Feasibility?
- ▶ How do you ensure **rigor** in your project? Clarity, alignment, and a thoughtful reflection on any potential sources of bias.