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Chapter Two

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES

Abdalla Uba Adamu

Introduction

Research in the humanities radically differs from research in other disciplines, principally because humanities researchers deal with forces that are changing and not necessarily repeatable – and consequently, unpredictable and 'un-generalisable'. The fundamental essence of research methodology in the humanities disciplines is on understanding profiles – of either individuals, clusters, groups or other entities. There is no deliberate desire to be “scientific” in order to prove a particular argument; the 'scientificity' of any subject of research is determined simply by the fact of its existence.

The predominant research tradition in the humanities is qualitative research, which is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic

moments and meaning in individuals' lives. The tandem term to qualitative research is 'quantitative research;' and although in the humanities the main method used is qualitative, nevertheless a brief definition of quantitative research should highlight the differences between the two, and when they can complement each other.

Quantitative research is concerned with counting and measuring things, producing in particular estimates of averages and differences between groups (e.g. the blood pressure of patients treated with two different drugs). Quantitative researchers work with a few variables and many cases whereas qualitative researchers rely on a few cases and many variables.

Qualitative research requires a strong commitment to study a problem and demands time and resources. It shares good company with the most rigorous quantitative research and it should not be viewed as an easy substitute for a "statistical" or quantitative study. Qualitative inquiry is for the researcher who is willing to do the following:

- Commit extensive time in the field. The investigator spends many hours in the field, collects extensive data and labours over field issues of trying to gain access, rapport and an "insider" perspective.
- Engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis—the ambitious task of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories. For a multi-disciplinary team of qualitative researchers, this task can be shared;

for most researchers, it is a lonely, isolated time of struggling with the data. The task is challenging, especially because the database consists of complex texts and images.

- Write long passages, because the evidence must substantiate claims and the writer needs to show multiple perspectives. The incorporation of quotes to provide participants' perspectives also lengthens the study.
- Participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving and changing constantly. This complicates telling others how somebody plans to conduct a study and how others might judge it when the study is done.

With a general understanding of the intent and rationale for conducting qualitative research, the investigator designs a study. In many ways, the format for the design of this study follows the traditional research approach of presenting a problem, asking a question, collecting data to answer the question, analysing the data and answering the question. However, the qualitative approach to design contains several unique features.

First, the researcher plans a general approach to a study; a detailed plan would not suffice given emerging issues that develop in a field study. Second, some issues are problematic for the qualitative researcher—such as how much literature should be included in the front

of the study, how much theory should guide the study and whether one needs to verify or report on the accuracy of his or her account. How one addresses these issues shapes the form of the qualitative narrative differently from traditional social and human science research. Third, the actual format for a qualitative study varies considerably from the traditional format of research. A qualitative dissertation, for example, may contain eight chapters rather than the standard five, and an author may write a journal article in a flexible style opening and closing with vignettes, as in qualitative case study research, rather than the traditional introduction, literature review, methods, results and conclusions.

With this introduction and understanding of the broad sketches of engaging in humanistic research, I want to present a sort of “manual” of the various main methodologies that describe research in the humanities, giving examples with broad areas in each category.

A Medley of Methodologies/Strategies

Biography/Autobiography

This approach to the study of the social world focuses on trajectories or life patterns of individuals operating within social and historical contexts. Autobiographical data are collected during the course of lengthy semi-structured interviews and through the analysis of documents. The key themes of this mode of research are that:

- The life has a recursive nature; biographical events in the past are conceptualised in the present and take on a new form. This is not

just because memory fades, but also because the person is re-positioned in narratives that are presently constituted and did not exist in this particular form in the past. The life is transformed by reflective work and time and, equally, the narrative discourses in which past and present events are embedded also change over time. For the biographer each text then has this recursive dimension to it, a bending-back on itself, even if always presently constituted.

- The account of the life involves an interweaving of the meaning structures of the individual and the person writing the account *and* the discursive structures through which both of them operate. These discursive structures are sometimes described as narratives and individuals construct their lives in terms of them. Equally, the biographer locates the life of the individual that they are giving expression to in these narratives, which stretch back and forward through time.
- Constructing a biographical account involves making interpretations from fragments of data provided by the individual. Alternative biographical accounts, therefore, are likely to differ in the emphasis they place on events and influences in the life of the person. This is because the data they collect from that person

represent a conceptualising of the life. An account is never static, but involves a new interpretation of events and activities that took place in the past. This is one form of the double hermeneutic.

- The public and the private in autobiographical and biographical accounts can never be disentangled. This is so for two reasons. The first is that narrative structures are public, and both biographers and autobiographers frame their understandings within these public forms of discourse. The second is that human beings live their lives within society and, therefore, their meaning-making activities are public affairs.
- The life is always fragmentary, comprising parts as opposed to wholes, narratives that never quite come to fruition and yet exert a powerful structuring influence, disconnected traces, sudden endings and new beginnings. The biographer in turn has to work with these fragmentary data and, indeed, describe a life that is never fully formed.

Some researchers specialise in life history or biographical accounts, and the emphasis in their work is always on the individual as opposed to the collective. This does not mean that they subscribe to a form of methodological individualism, but understand the individual as part of the society in which they live or lived.

Live Example

The Fiction of Barry Hannah. Jackson, Andrew Curtis, Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990

Abstract

This dissertation examines the current body of fiction by the contemporary Southern author Barry Hannah. Because there has been no sustained critical examination of Hannah's work, this study serves as both an introduction and the first full length consideration of Hannah and his fiction. ***The focus is primarily upon the autobiographical nature of the fiction*** and relies upon interviews, Hannah's own non-fiction pieces and the parallels within the fiction itself for its conclusions. By examining the autobiographical elements in the fiction, the dissertation reveals a consistent vision from work to work and establishes the narrator as typically the spokesman for Hannah's own views

Archival Methods

Archival research method is rooted in the historical research tradition. In querying archival data, the researcher seeks to reconstruct past events in relation to a particular theme or focus — leading actually to the emergence of Historical Sociology as a technique, as well as a sub-discipline. Such archival sources are extremely diverse.

In working with archival data, the investigator seeks to maximise the fit between the research question and the data. In one version of this

process, life-record data are sought to fit a particular question, then modified or *recast* in some way to achieve a better fit. An improved fit may also be achieved by modifying the research question and its analytical model. In other cases, the question is put aside to enable the study of a researchable problem that has relevant data at hand. Most uses of archival data involve a mix of such changes in a sequential process that eventually produces an acceptable goodness of fit.

Variations on this methodology have been applied for many decades by historians and social scientists that use archival data to address their research questions. As a rule, however, these investigators did not develop their procedures in written form as the logic of inquiry or methodology. The pressures of research seldom leave time for self-conscious thought about procedures of this kind. In lieu of formal guidance, research assistants simply learned about the approach through apprenticeships on projects. In this manner, procedures eventually became part of the oral tradition of research on a particular project or in a university institute, passed down across generations of new students.

This informal and idiosyncratic approach to a vital operation in research is no longer sufficient for the task at hand. A revolution in life-course studies and their craft has occurred since the 1960s, and fast-moving developments since then have magnified the need for a systematic account of procedures in working with archival data, with emphasis on the fitting of questions and data.

Live Example

The Process of Detecting, Prosecuting, and Sentencing Health Care Malfeasance: An In-Depth Analysis of Fraud Reports. Payne, Brian Kieth, Ph.D., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1993

Abstract

This dissertation examines the process of detecting, investigating, prosecuting, and sentencing health care malfeasance. A central focus is given to the actions of actors in Medicaid Fraud Control Units throughout the United States. Particular attention is given to who the actors are, the normative standards guiding their actions, and the goals of the units. ***Both an archival method and a survey are used to address these concerns.***

Visual Methods: Video-Recording (and Video Analysis)

This is the use of video to record social life. Researchers who use video are not just concerned with the activities and interactions of human bodies but also with how subjects interact with physical artefacts. Researchers may use the recorded images and sound either as a resource for analysis or for the documentation and representation of those actions to other audience.

Video-recording as a method of data collection and means of data analysis has allowed significant methodological improvements to the study of non-verbal behaviour. As with **audio-recordings**, video-recording is seen to be more reliable than real-time observation and note-taking, as it allows for repeated examination of the data and, consequently, the data are not limited by the problems of selective attention or recollection, or similar issues.

The use of video as a research method has received much attention within anthropology, but even here it has tended to be used as a form of representation rather than as a resource for analysis. Psychologists have also been among the first to use video within experimental research designs, usually for the purpose of observing behaviours, such as compliance. Interest in using video as a method of data collection and analysis is linked with the techniques of **ethno-methodology** and **conversation analysis**, which are concerned with the social organization of face-to-face interactions within organisational settings. In particular, analysis has focused on how subjects produce actions and respond to the actions of others through facial gestures, gaze, bodily posture and artefacts, as well as through talk (Heath, 1997).

Thus, video analysis has demonstrated how any single utterance may be accompanied by a gesture that influences co-participation within the conversation and allows researchers to take the visual, as well as the vocal, aspects of the interaction seriously.

Just as the minidisc and later the digital voice recorder have replaced cassette tapes in audio-recording, so too has the video been superseded by digital cameras and recorders. Despite technological advances, video-recorders remain simple enough for amateurs to record and edit data. Video analysis progresses through a process of **indexing**, in much the same way as a researcher might analyse audio data that have been transcribed. The simplest method of indexing is through the use of mechanical counters that are built into the equipment. Themes or codes are assigned to sections of data a bit like numbering pages in a

transcribed text. Computer-compatible time coding is more sophisticated. The computer plays back the recorded actions (either in real time or slow or fast motion) and the observer allocates appropriate codes for the data while the computer registers the corresponding videotape time-code.

There are some clear advantages of video-recording research participants. Its principal advantage is perhaps that the technology records actual behaviour rather than reported behaviour. It enables the collection of minute details of social life that would not be possible by unaided human observation. Furthermore, it enables other researchers to analyse data once the researcher collecting the data has left the field. Despite these advantages, video data has not been used extensively in sociological research. One suggestion for this is the practical, ethical and theoretical difficulties associated with using videos in natural settings (Lomax and Casey, 1998).

As with audio-recording, people may not act naturally in the presence of a video-recorder, casting doubt on the authenticity and spontaneity of supposedly naturally occurring data. Strategies to validate it have included using a **covert** approach (such as hiding the video-recorder behind a screen), the application of **multiple methods** or member validation techniques. A further **ethical** problem is that maintaining participants' anonymity proves even more difficult with video than with audio-recordings. Researchers must always ensure that they have secured permission to reproduce images of their research subjects within any representations of the research data.

Live Example

Visualising Identity: Feminism, The Body and the Politics of Representation.

Kunkel, Charlotte A., Ph.D., University of Colorado
at Boulder, 1995

Abstract

I use a photo-elicitation interview methodology to examine presentations of self of self-identified feminists. Feminism is the focus of investigation because of the importance of body politics and control over women's bodies in the women's movement. The body as a social text is increasingly significant in the late twentieth century study of self. This is the age of visual dominance, as well as a time replete with technological advances and competition for resources. Visual presentation is increasingly valued in this fast paced complex world as the signifier of identity. Identity is visualised.

Oral History

This is the collection and analysis of accounts of past events from eyewitness participants for the purposes of historical reconstruction. Oral history is spoken history and, as well as interviews with participants, includes the collection of stories and ballads concerned with historical events that have been handed down from generation to generation in a continuing oral tradition.

The collection of oral history materials from social and political elites can be a valuable supplement to documentary evidence in historical research. But the main thrust of oral history work has been to interview persons whose perspectives on events would otherwise be lost to

posterity, those who have been 'hidden from history' (Rowbotham, 1973) – women and workers, indigenous peoples and oppressed minorities. In some cases, oral history materials have been able to document clandestine events that were otherwise unrecorded. For example, the reminiscence of the days when coalminers could only receive compensation from the courts for 'Miners Lung' (pneumoconiosis) if they could prove contact with silica dust as well as coal dust – South Wales miners would, therefore, sometimes 'doctor the evidence' of silica dust before a mine was visited by an expert witness: 'The boys got very artful about this. Knowing that the geologist would be coming about next week, some of the boys would be in there spreading about silica.' (Harold Finch, South Wales Miners Library, Aud 336 – quoted in Bloor, 2000: 133).

Nonetheless, for the most part, it is not the event itself that is rescued for posterity, but the particular partisan perspectives of those who lived through it. Reed (1980) has summarised well the nature of these partisan perspectives in his analysis of the 'Border Ballads', songs that were handed down through the oral tradition for hundreds of years in the English-Scottish Border region until they were collected in the 1800s: 'They [the ballads] are a commemoration, emotionally generated, of family and regional loyalties within the events the narratives portray. They look upon joy and disaster alike with the eye and mind of the participant' (Reed, 1980:18).

Historians familiar only with documentary materials have not developed new techniques for sampling and recruiting interviewees, framing questions, recording and transcribing interviews, and analysing transcripts. Instead, they have wisely borrowed from other disciplines – notably sociology, anthropology and linguistics – that are more familiar with these methods. What has been distinctive in the

approach of some oral historians has been the representation of the interview materials. Some authors, Studs Terkel being the best known in the US and Ronald Blythe being representative of those in the UK, have sought to represent their oral history materials by the minimisation of their own mediating presence as historians: the transcripts of their interviewees are presented to the reader without commentary, like a photo archive, to speak for themselves.

Other authors (for example, Jung Chang's 1992 history of herself, her mother and her grandmother in the upheavals of twentieth-century China) have reported their interviewees' stories within a dramatic and consciously literary style, mingling memories of the suicide of a classmate with memories of the smell of jasmine blossoms. Further, alongside these realist and literary approaches to oral history, there is also a postmodern approach: that of life histories or 'life stories'. Representation in life stories is a consciously joint accomplishment: life stories are joint actions assembled through social contexts into texts by authors and readers

It is well known that modern research has confirmed the claims in the Icelandic sagas (which existed as oral stories for 200 years or more before being written down) that Vikings were the first Europeans to settle in North America. But oral historians are rarely concerned to establish the truth status of oral reportage. Rather, oral accounts are valued not for their accurate (or otherwise) depiction of events, but for their reportage of the narrator's viewpoint of events and for the access they offer to the participants' perspectives.

However, these participants' perspectives are not transparent and self evidential. Certainly, they may have other virtues: the collection of oral historical accounts can be empowering for both the narrator and collector; hence, the popularity of oral history classes and groups among many local communities world-wide. Nevertheless, there is legitimate critical concern over the representation of oral history as if the accounts spoke for themselves: oral history is not 'the Voice of the People that have not spoken yet'. All published historical accounts, whether or not they include explicit analysis of the narratives, are selected and edited accounts: in effect, they are joint accomplishments between interviewee and interviewer.

Live Example

A Comparative Oral History Study of the Learning Experiences of World War II and Afghan War Survivors.

Dicum, Julia, Ph.D., University of Toronto (Canada), 2008

Abstract

This dissertation presents the findings of ***a comparative oral history study of twenty-seven learner experiences*** of education in two complex emergencies--World War II and post-1979 Afghanistan. Built around an oral history methodology, the study contributes to the developing research practice on education in emergency situations.

Ethnography

Many definitions of ethnography have emerged in recent years and the term has been used almost synonymously with qualitative approaches

to research, primarily observation but also case study and life history and, occasionally, even to represent qualitative research itself. Brewer (2000) refers to the dichotomy between ethnography as a method and as a methodology: in the former to refer to ethnography as a collection of methods and in the latter to signal a specific theoretical and epistemological orientation to research. As Pole and Morrison (2003: 2) point out, to make matters more complex, ethnography is used as a noun and a verb, in that it is discussed as the product of a specific kind of research as well as the activity of doing ethnography.

While its origins lie in the work of nineteenth-century anthropologists who journeyed primarily to observe different and 'other' cultures, in the last 30 years humanities settings have been fertile grounds for ethnography. In response to some of the ambiguities and complexities concerning ethnography, Silverman (2001: 45) posits 'a common terminological solution', which is to say that what humanities researchers do with their observations is 'something extra'. He continues:

Ethnography puts together two different words: 'ethno' meaning folks, while 'graph' derives from 'writing'. Ethnography refers, then, to social scientific writing about particular folks (ibid, his emphasis).

What then are the characteristics of ethnography or the 'something extra' that researchers in the humanities do with their data? Following Pole and Morrison (2003: 3), the principal common characteristics of ethnography are:

- A focus on a discrete location, event(s) or setting.
- A concern with the full range of social behaviour in that location, event(s) or setting.

- The use of a range of different research methods which may combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, but where the emphasis is upon understanding social behaviour from inside the discrete location, event or setting in order to produce what is often described as 'thick' or 'rich' data (Geertz, 1973).
- An emphasis on data and analysis which moves from detailed description to the identification of concepts and theories grounded in the data collected within the location, event or setting.
- An emphasis upon rigorous or thorough research, where the complexities of the singular are of greater significance than overarching trends or generalities.

It may be the case that such features are also aspects of other kinds of research. This suggests that further detail about what ethnographers expect to achieve by doing ethnography and producing ethnographies is needed. Brewer's (2000) description of ethnography as a method and as a methodology is helpful. Methods refer to the tools used by ethnographers to gather data and Pole and Morrison (2003) provide and describe an extensive array of methods derived from both first-hand experience (observation and participant observation, interviewing, life history, focus groups, drama and fiction) and secondary sources of data (surveys, official statistics, diaries, photographs, art and artefacts).

Methods are selected in relation to fitness for ethnographic purpose and act to limit and delimit the data collection process, how ethnography can be done and the procedural rules to be followed. Brewer (2000: 2) also describes the methodology that constitutes ethnography in terms of

'the broad theoretical and philosophical framework into which these procedural rules fit'. In a general sense, ethnographers are interested in everyday events and situations with an emphasis upon insiders' accounts. In such ways, their interests lie primarily in the subjective realities that constitute individuals' experiences. Primacy is given to the importance of situated meaning and contextualized experience.

The concern with contextualised meaning ensures that the structures which shape, limit and, in some cases, define social action are central to the understanding of that action... The common theme to emerge is that ethnography is located within the approach of naturalism (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 5). This locates the approach within the tradition of *Verstehen* and interpretative analysis. While naturalism is concerned with the setting and location in which social action is created and experienced, ethnography draws upon the sociological and philosophical approaches of social interactionism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, linguistic philosophy and ethno-methodology. The intention to collect data from 'real-life' situations enhances the sense in which ethnography draws upon observation. Recently, technological advances have widened the scope of the ethnographer's observations to include photography, video and other visual media. Developing still is a range of virtual approaches to ethnography in which the Internet and other forms of information technology may be used (Hine, 2000).

In privileging the insider's view as ethnography's *raison d'être*, Pole and Morrison (2003: 8) argue a case 'for pluralism of methods rather than methodological pluralism' when they write about 'inclusive

ethnography'; in order to arrive at a position where methods more commonly associated with positivist approaches to research *can* be usefully deployed, 'as long as the quantitative methods adhere to the epistemological principles of naturalism, in seeking to gather data with as little disturbance to the everyday rhythms of the location as possible'; and where quantitative data might be used to provide 'a picture of the wider context in which the specific location and the social action therein takes place' (ibid:8-9).

In response to the issue of whether there is a *distinctive* ethnographic method, Pole and Morrison also draw on Brewer's (2000) descriptions of 'big ethnography' and 'little ethnography', in which 'big' refers to the whole enterprise that includes methodology and method, and 'little' refers to the discrete locations, events and settings upon which ethnography finds focus. They also distinguish between 'field work' and 'field research' as key components of ethnography, in which 'field work' refers to the immersion of self into the ethnographic inquiry and 'field research' is designated as 'a less specific approach based on a discrete location, but not exclusively inside it' (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 10). In which case, it is argued, quantitative method can contribute to 'little ethnography' but its 'lack of engagement with the interior world of actors within the specific location does not qualify [it] as "big ethnography"' (ibid., 10). The key point at issue is not that ethnography is based on a philosophy of 'anything goes' but that ethnography is a distinct approach 'in which there is no meaningful method [qualitative or quantitative] without methodology' (ibid.).

Ethnography is not without its critics and challenges. Not all topics for research in the humanities lend themselves to this approach. More fundamentally, ethnography has been challenged on the grounds of its imprecision, and its emphasis upon rich description which, to critics, signals a lack of rigor and/or subjectivity. Moreover, the ethnographer's interest in the singular and in the specific interpretations of social actions has also led to accusations of anecdotalism and an inability to generalize in ways that might contribute to the wider interpretation of humanistic issues and/or to practical application, being bounded by both time and space.

At one level, such challenges are difficult to counter; at another level, they are not. To challenge ethnography on the technical grounds that it fails to match the characteristics more generally associated with quantitative and positivist approaches to humanities research might be considered to miss the point. Ethnography does not set out to produce precise, objective and generalisable findings. This does not mean that ethnographic data are not systematically and rigorously grounded, but the emphasis is upon clearly enunciated organisational frameworks for its data collection and analysis of discrete social action. Such concerns link ethnography directly to the importance of *reflexivity* in research. Again, following Brewer (2000: 108) the emphasis is upon the:

- relationships developed in the field;
- The characteristics of the researcher and how these relate to the people in the field;

- The time and circumstances in which the research was carried out;
- The methodological and fieldwork practices used;
- The broader educational, socio-economic and political contexts in which the research took place.

Ethnography is notable for applying the essences of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to analyses. While it cannot apply the same procedures to determine reliability and validity as other research, concentrating instead on issues of authenticity, meaning, plausibility and credibility (Hammersley, 1992), it remains essential that its analytical procedures and audit trails of evidence are transparent, systematic and open to public scrutiny.

For its proponents, ethnography is both a process and a product. Its strength lies in its capacity to offer the conceptual and theoretical accounts of social action. While the argument is not made that it produces generalizable findings, this is not the same as arguing that it cannot engage with issues that go beyond the discrete. This it does with confidence, and: in such a way that there is a connection with wider social behavior, social processes, and broader structural issues. Ethnography enables us to view the humanities not in isolation but as part of the wider social and economic context of which it is a part, whilst at the same time holding on to the detail of the specific location, event or setting (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 160).

For some writers, like Scott (2000: 74), its strength is also its Achilles

heel for while 'it is accepted in the academy where 'its organs of dissemination are now well enough established to sustain it as a serious activity', it may be 'less acceptable within wider policy-making forums'. In which case, ethnographers may be 'weakened by their inability to participate in macro-political processes'. Such concerns may need to be reconsidered in relation to recent and changing forms of ethnography that are variously described by Eisenhart (2001), Pink (2001) and Hine (2000), who, in combination, link recent conceptualizations to changing technological forms and globalization issues. In such ways, novel forms of representation present exciting prospects for ethnography to capture vicarious humanistic experience.

Live Example

Being Closer: Children and Caregiving in the Time of TB and HIV in Lusaka, Zambia. Hunleth, Jean M., Ph.D., Northwestern University, 2011 , 340 pages; AAT 3456571

Abstract

Children are not simply victims of the rise in HIV-related illnesses and premature deaths among adults in Zambia. They are actively engaged in social practices and productive activities that shape the care they give to and receive from adults. I focus specifically on children's roles in managing tuberculosis (TB). Because of the biosocial construction of TB, its infectious nature, and the universalized strategies to treat TB, children's roles in managing the disease are frequently ignored, desired, contested and necessary.

Within such a context, I argue that children develop practices of care that hinge on proximity and interdependence.

My research was set in the Lusaka-based residential area of George, one of the most heavily HIV and TB-affected settlements in Zambia. *I carried out one year of ethnographic research with twenty-five households and 38 children* (ages 8 to 12). To prioritize children's input and experiences, I used methods such as drawing, role-plays, tape-recorded storytelling and focus group discussions. I also examined children's roles and responsibilities through a survey of 200 households in George.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a theoretical approach to studying the role of language in society that originated within linguistics but has found widespread application across the social sciences. The term is also sometimes used to refer only to the methodological framework of CDA that centres on the qualitative linguistic analysis of spoken or written texts.

CDA describes a wide range of research in the humanities that is focused upon the analysis of language (commonly used in interviews or in conversations), as well as written texts from documents. Central to the use of the term 'critical' is the notion that the ideas and knowledge that form the content of such texts reflect a form of power which may be

used by one group to control (an)other group(s). Unlike conversation analysis, CDA is eclectic in the sense that the texts and talk that are researched do not *have* to be naturally occurring.

There are three key elements of CDA. First, CDA is anti-realist in the sense of denying that there is ever one 'true' description of reality. Second, a key interest of CDA is in the ways in which research participants 'construct' realities. Third, CDA is concerned with the way in which talk and texts construct coherence, sometimes through telling convincing stories to constitute an 'objective, out-there reality' (Potter, 1997: 179).

In the CDA of documents, for example, texts are also seen as vehicles for ideologies which present society from the viewpoint of particular social groupings; the discourses contained within official documents can thus be seen as an attempt by the state to maintain the status quo (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 163). CDA may take a number of forms, as it investigates the structures and rules of discourse which, as Pole and Lampard point out, both shape and are shaped by socio-cultural contexts (ibid.) in which different discourses may be conflicting (Wetherell and Potter, 1994). One form is where semiotics focuses on the relationship between the *signifier*, such as word, picture or object, and the *signified*, which is the mental image or meaning associated with that thing. The signifier and the signified together constitute a *sign*... and a collection of signs can convey a complex system of communication (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 163, their emphases). Another form is derived from feminist literary criticism, for example, in

which the ideology is 'seen as inscribed in the discourse, and produced and reproduced within literature specifically and in cultural practice generally' (ibid.).

According to Kress (1990: 84), what binds an otherwise eclectic range of theories drawn from linguistics and from social and critical theory is its 'overtly political agenda' and purposive intentions to bring about social change, predominantly of the emancipatory kind. Elsewhere, Luke (1995: 13) describes 'CDA as a political act in itself in its attempt to interrupt and deconstruct 'everyday common sense' features in talk and texts'. A number of concepts feature strongly in CDA. Silverman (2001), for example, discusses 'interpretive repertoires' like 'science' and 'motherhood' as ways in which talk and texts enable their producers to define their identities and moral status. 'Stake' and 'scripts' are other focal points of CDA in examining ways in which talkers and writers 'attend to the normative character of their actions' (ibid.: 179-80).

Eclecticism in approach, as well as underpinning theories, has brought a number of criticisms. These range from the methodological (Hammersley, 1997) to the theoretical, and from a critique that highlights conceptual confusion and/or incoherence. Pennycook (1994) questions whether CDA is fundamentally about 'unmasking' ideology in order to reveal an underpinning 'truth'. If this is the case, he argues, there is a basic contradiction between this position and recourse to Foucault, for whom 'revelations' of an 'external' truth or discourse would have been an anathema. For Pennycook and others (like Poynton, 2000), perhaps the most serious intellectual problem

confronting CDA lies in trying to marry the orientations of linguistics with social and critical theory, an endpoint similarly shared by MacLure (2003: 190-1) who concludes that 'whilst connections remain between the fine grain of language and action ("what people say and do")', an 'integrated discourse theory' to 'seamlessly accommodate linguistics and post structuralism would... appear impossible.'

Live Example

An analysis of Urdu and English editorial coverage of the 2007 Emergency from Pakistani newspapers by
Shoeb, Nadia Farrah, M.A., Georgetown University, 2008.

Abstract

This thesis is a case study of Urdu and English Pakistani newspapers during the 2007 Emergency in Pakistan. Specifically, it looks at editorial discussion of former president Pervez Musharraf and his government. ***To analyze the editorials, I use an approach within sociolinguistics called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).*** CDA posits that text and context mirror each other. A society's socio-economic, political hierarchy, religion, values, and ideology will be apparent in the text through grammar, tone, lexicon and style.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology

for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are and of how they fit into the world in which they live. Textual analysis is useful for researchers working in cultural studies, media studies, in mass communication and perhaps even in sociology and philosophy.

When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text. We interpret texts (films, television programs, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti and so on) in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them. And, importantly, by seeing the variety of ways in which it is possible to interpret reality, we also understand our own cultures better because we can start to see the limitations and advantages of our own sense-making practices.

What is a text?

If textual analysis involves analyzing texts, then – what exactly is a text? Answer: whenever we produce an interpretation of something's meaning – a book, television program, film, magazine, T-shirt or kilt, piece of furniture or ornament – we treat it as a text. A text is something that we make meaning from. So why not just say 'book' or 'film' or whatever? We use the word 'text' because it has particular implications. There are no two exact synonyms in the English language – words always have slightly different meanings and connotations. The word

'text' has post-structuralist implications for thinking about the production of meaning.

Further, different cultures make sense of the world in very different ways. Times Books International publishes a series of books to help travellers visiting other countries. The series is called 'Culture Shock' (Craig, 1979; Hur and Hur, 1993; Roces and Roces, 1985). The books are not just tourist guides: they are attempts to help the visitor – as their title suggests – overcome 'culture shock': the experience of visiting another culture that's different not only in language, but in its whole way of making sense of the world.

Depending on what approach you take to judging different cultures' sense-making practices ± the different ways they make sense of the world – you analyse texts in different ways. From a *realist* perspective, you look for the single text that you think represents reality most accurately and judge all other texts against that one. From a *structuralist* perspective, you look for the deep structures that aren't actually apparent in the text, but that you can and by specialised training. From a *post-structuralist* perspective, you look for the differences between texts without claiming that one of them is the only correct one.

Performing textual analysis, then, is an attempt to gather information about sense-making practices – not only in cultures radically different from our own, but also within our own nations. It allows us to see how

similar or different the sense-making practices that different people use can be. And it is also possible that this can allow us to better understand the sense-making cultures in which we ourselves live by seeing their limitations, and possible alternatives to them.

Live Example

The girls of MySpace: New media as gendered literacy practice and identity construction. Almjeld, Jennifer Marie, Ph.D., Bowling Green State University, 2008

Abstract

This pilot study focuses on a sampling of profiles (the material "text" for MySpace) composed by females age 16-18 to interrogate the intersection of technology, gender performativity and identity construction in this cyberspace. ***Utilizing textual analysis, narrative and some quantitative measures***, the study considers rhetorical choices involving text, image and design, as well as ways such new media texts are influential in community building and performing modern feminine adolescence.

Interviewing

Interviewing seems a deceptively simple way to find out what interviewees think, say and do, and how researchers interpret the telling. The most common of all methods used in humanities research, interviews yield different kinds of data, depending on the purposes for which they are being used and the kinds of interview most amenable to those purposes. As a starting point, all interviews focus upon a verbal

stimulus to elicit a verbal response (Silverman, 2001) but purposes will determine different approaches to the collection, management and analysis of such 'responses' as data that involves different approaches to explication and justification.

At a general level, interviews sit in various positions upon a continuum of qualitative-quantitative approaches to research. At one 'standardised' end are highly structured interview surveys that pay close attention to the task of collecting large amounts of data, in as focused a way as possible, through the use of 'proforma-like' ringing codes, the use of numerical values, tick boxes and so on. Here, as May (1993: 93) puts it, the interviewer attempts to control and 'teach' interviewees to 'reply in accordance with interview schedules'. At the other end, there are semi and unstructured interviews that encourage the response of the interviewees to be open-ended and everyone 'to answer a question in his or her own terms' (ibid.). Interviews vary, then, in relation to the degree of structure, interview purposes and length, depth and range, relationships between interviewer and interviewee and the locations in which interviews take place. More importantly, however, interviews vary in accordance with the philosophical starting points that underpin them. This means that a reading of the epistemological and methodological bases of interviews and interviewing is a necessary prerequisite in research designs that involve them, and include the inferences that might be most appropriately drawn from the analysis of such data.

Structured interviews are usually survey-based and designed to explore certain predetermined areas using questions that are designed in advance, and are prepared in accordance with one or more specifically stated research hypotheses or questions considered in a descending 'ladder' of abstraction from broad hypotheses to specific questions. They are standardized to the extent that the question, its wording and sequence in the interview are fixed and identical for every interviewee who is usually referred to as the respondent. Using a relatively large sample of the total population and drawing upon statistical techniques in order to draw inferences that might be applied to the whole population, the use of the term 'respondent' is not, therefore, accidental since a core issue is to effect a design that transfers large amounts of data for analysis with minimum 'contamination' of the data by the interviewer and involves a more 'passive' role for the interviewee, thus ensuring the application of reliability and validity instruments most closely aligned to the 'scientific' method. This makes probing and clarification more problematic and though not impossible; usually in terms of a pre-designed code or value that can be assigned to the probed-for responses. Philosophically, the core underpinning is positivist, and the endpoints of such approaches are to 'supply' facts about the social world that are, in combination, reliable, valid and independent of the settings in which the interviewer(s) collected the data.

Towards the other end of the interview continuum, while qualitative researchers might differ about the extent to which they apply

'standardized' interview techniques, the core issue for researchers who use interviews in qualitative research is to seek in-depth understandings about the experiences of individuals and groups, commonly drawing from a small sample of people, frequently selected purposively and with a de-emphasis rather than a necessarily whole-scale rejection of generalisability. The terms usually applied to such interview forms are 'unstructured' and 'semi-structured', although, as Pole and Morrison (2003: 30) argue, such terms are something of a misnomer, in the sense that 'unstructured' interviews *are* structured in accordance with a systematic research design, and '“semi-structured” has become a kind of “catch-all” half-way house between structured and unstructured interviewing that commonly allows the interviewer greater flexibility to introduce “probes” for expanding, developing and clarifying informants' responses'. The key issue and purposes for such interviews are requirements for the interviewer to define the interviewee as a person who is actively constructing his/her own world, and to draw upon the interview text to develop insights into such worlds. Again, the use of the term 'informant' rather than 'respondent' is not accidental, since it signals a specific kind of relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, in which there is awareness by the interviewer of the ways his/her orientations and experiences will affect the collection and interpretation of data, and that the relatively 'open' framework for information gathering will result in new themes and issues emerging in the course of data collection. The sense here is of emerging themes that are grounded in the data collected from interviewees, rather than predetermined prior to data collection.

The use of a continuum to refer to kinds of interview almost inevitably disguises the subtle differences in understandings about different kinds of interviewing, including those which relate to its key purposes. For example, qualitative approaches to interviewing may draw on a range of perspectives. Following Silverman (2001: 87), we might draw on two perspectives, namely those of emotionalism and constructionism, to identify subtleties in purpose and scope. Hence, from the perspective of emotionalism, informants are:

experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds. The primary purpose is to generate data which can give an authentic insight into other people's experiences. The main ways to achieve this are unstructured open-ended interviews usually based upon prior, in-depth participant observation, (ibid.)

This telling-it-as-it-is mode contrasts with the perspectives derived from constructionism in which interviewers and interviewees are always engaged in constructing meaning. Rather than treat this as standing in the way of accurate descriptions of 'facts' or experiences, how meaning is constructed becomes part of the researcher's topic... A particular focus is upon how interviewees construct narratives of events... and people and turn-by-turn construction of meaning (ibid.).

That many adjectives have been used to describe different kinds of interview reflects their multiple and diverse purposes.

- 'Structured' and 'formal' are usually applied to survey interviews.
- 'Ethnographic' is frequently applied to qualitative versions of semi-

and unstructured interviews, notwithstanding debates about the need and/or the interviewer's capacity to capture the informant's 'voice', and in a range of formats in which, for example, 'conversations' can sometimes overlap with interviews (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 163).

- 'Directive and 'non-directive' are also used to denote maximum or minimum interviewer control over the interview, its direction and its content.
- 'Life history' interviews provide opportunities for in-depth understandings about individuals, usually achieved through sequenced interviews and the development of constructed narratives of events, episodes and lives.
- 'Diary' interviews are increasingly used to supplement the 'mute' evidence provided by diaries, either in the form of pre- or post-diary interviews in order to reinforce purpose and access and retrospective analysis, respectively (Morrison, 2002a).
- 'Group' interviews are often used interchangeably with focus groups. The distinctive nature of the latter, however, lies in the sense in which its key rather than supplementary purpose lies in the importance and nature of the interaction between group members, rather than the cumulative effect of a range of individual perspectives that might be encouraged either through the presence of others or to enable sensitive issues to be aired in a group rather than on an individual basis. The term 'enriched' is sometimes applied to individual or group interviews when interviewees are presented with specific material as a spur to reflection and engagement with the key purposes of the interview.

Whichever prefix is applied, the analysis of interview data will also reflect the epistemological and methodological purposes of the research, in order to arrive at conceptual and theoretical coherence. For large-scale survey interview analysts, the emphasis will be upon an initial exploration of the data to check for data or sampling errors, followed by detailed statistical analysis to inform the inferences that might be drawn from the data to a wider population. For small-scale unstructured interview analysts, the emphasis will be upon an iterative and reflexive engagement with the data through all phases that are also subject to systematic audit. Watling (2002: 272) describes this as 'formative analysis' to 'reflect the epistemological and ontological aspects of qualitative research projects which seek to provide understandings and actively shape the types of data collection that will go on'.

In qualitative interviewing, initial analysis begins when detailed data is summarized by the use of a descriptor, most often described as a code. Codes develop from being descriptive and/or literal data to interpretative and then explanatory and abstract data, moving towards a conceptual analysis which owes much to a discovery or grounded approach to research. From a quantitative perspective, survey interview analysis similarly reflects its epistemological purposes in which, in order to arrive at a satisfactory predetermined question, piloting is crucial. Surveyists frequently prepare coding books in advance of an interview survey, code data twice to increase reliability and prepare coding frames that are transposed onto the interview schedule, commonly known also as the interview questionnaire. There is an

emphasis upon the application of measurement and a number of tests are applied in order to establish relationships between independent and dependent variables (that are addressed by responses to interview questions), measure the strength of such relationships, compare means, establish a correlation between variables, measure that relationship through regression analysis, and so on (Pell and Fogelman, 2002).

Increasingly, the contrasts provided by a continuum between quantitative and qualitative interviewing are not as clear-cut as might be inferred from above. Interviews will continue to play an important part in the humanistic and education researchers' toolkits, as long as their strengths and limitations are appreciated:

Interviews focus on what people say they say, write, and do rather than what they [necessarily] do say, write and do... meanwhile, interviews demand much of the researcher in terms of sensitivity and ethical awareness. (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 35, their emphasis)

Different kinds of interview make a range of demands and over varied timescales. It is, therefore, essential that, in combination, all of the above are considered carefully before selecting interviewing rather than other kinds of research activity.

Live Example

Transitions: A qualitative study of broadcast journalists in a changing media landscape. Landesberg, Richard, Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005

Abstract

Media change. Although television never replaced radio and the Internet has not replaced television, those media have evolved in the face of a new and richer medium. And as media change broadcast journalists need to change. This research takes a qualitative look at how broadcast journalists adapt to a new medium. *It uses the long interview methodology* to determine how these pioneers made the transition to a new medium and why they elected to do so.

Concluding with the Problems of Qualitative Research in Humanities

The downside of qualitative research is that, invariably, only small numbers of subjects can be studied because data collection methods are so labor intensive. It is also often criticized for: being subject to researcher bias; the difficulties in analyzing qualitative data rigorously; the lack of reproducibility and generalizability of the findings (i.e. findings may not be applicable to other subjects or settings). Proponents of qualitative research would, however, argue that there are strategies available to the qualitative researcher to protect against these potential biases and to enhance the rigor of the findings. Nicholas and Pope (1995) wrote an article in the BMJ specifically addressing techniques for improving the rigor of qualitative research findings. The methodological checklist below was developed by the same authors to help readers of qualitative projects to assess the quality of published research, but they also provide a useful checklist for researchers to consider when designing their own qualitative research.

Check list for the appraisal of qualitative research

- Was the research question clearly identified?
- Was the setting in which the research took place clearly described?
- If sampling was undertaken, were the sampling methods described?
- Did the research worker address the issues of subjectivity and data collection?
- Were methods to test the validity of the results of the research used?
- Were any steps taken to increase the reliability of the information collected, for example, by repeating the information collection with another research worker?
- Were the results of the research kept separate from the conclusions drawn by the research workers?
- If quantitative methods were appropriate as a supplement to the qualitative methods, were they used?

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