

Interview in Scientific Research: From Epistemology Construction to Applied Procedures

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1- Introduction

Interviews are one of the most common data collection practices in scientific research. Researchers widely use them because they allow for the collection of rich, direct data in a timely manner to achieve the required degree of flexibility, as well as to discover errors and work to fix and improve them (Chevalier & Meyer, 2018, p. 108). The research interview is a method for gathering information. This method allows for the collection and analysis of a variety of elements, including opinion. A research interview, as opposed to a questionnaire, establishes a special relationship between the researcher and the respondent, which is used to validate hypotheses and generate new ones (Claude, 2019).

In this scientific paper, we will try to answer two central question: what is a research interview? How do you contribute to building scientific research?

2- Theoretical background

An interview is neither a friendly conversation, a discussion, an interrogation, a press interview, nor an acknowledgement. An interview is a method of data collection and is part of a pre-prepared process embedded in a research plan. The purpose of a “good conversation” is to understand what is happening to the other person, and aims to combine the appropriate manner of discourse, its timing, and material, to understand the mental and social representations and the practices of individuals within the system investigated during the research (Chevalier & Meyer, 109). The method chosen is part of the problem presented for the study, and it leads to the practice and selection of techniques adapted to the research objectives. The use of a qualitative methodology leads to a preference for data collection using the two main techniques of the qualitative method, namely observation and interview. According to Popart (1993), the latter is a

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“normal conversation that occurs as a form of artificial social interaction, the effects of which on the data produced are uncontrollable; and, to a lesser extent, the respondent; it is built on balancing the relationship between their social class's preferred language and the artificial relationship demanded of them" (Pierret, 2004, p. 199).

3- The Interview in Qualitative Research: The Study Of Representations:

In his 1996 book *Sociology and Interview*, E. C Hughes stated, "The interview is more than a tool and object of study; it is the art of social communication, the game we play to savour the smallest details" (Sifer-Rivière, 2016). On the one hand, collective ideological and cultural phenomena and systems, such as representations, ideologies, beliefs, values, and social knowledge. In a nutshell, everything related to the collective connotations of social life, and on the other hand, social practices, facts from life experiences, life stories, and living practices, the analysis of which allows translating individual behaviour into collective issues and giving collective issues an individual dimension. Direct observation is the preferred method of studying practices and their informal dimensions, while the interview adds to its cognitive value. The interview, as a tool for exploring facts, allows the possibility of producing speech-based data, taking into account the representative's point of view and experience, his life, knowledge, as well as his beliefs, without being linked to discourses of value judgment or normative assessment of its quality or level; therefore, According to Olivier de Sardin (1995), the interview oscillates "between two poles: the counsellor and the author of the story." Non-writable parts are given meaning(Sifer-Rivière, 2016).

In the scientific sense, an interview is a method of investigation and inquiry in which the investigator seeks information about one or more people in the community's attitudes, behaviours,

and representations. The interview, according to Quivy and L. Van Campenhoudt, allows analysis of the meaning that actors give to their practices and to the events they encounter: their value systems, normative reference points, conflict interpretations, attitudes, and readings of their own experiences(T, 2017).

4- The Interview and Scientific Proof

In a context dominated by the trend of statistical proof using large surveys, sampling, and controlling bias using statistical tests, Claude Fougeron devoted his scientific discourses to qualitative methodology in the 1970s, at the heart of the French sociological current, making the in-depth interview a real investigative tool, and before that, Moscovici's (1961) resumption of Durkheim's conception of social representations saw a surge in the 1960s, resulting in research in a variety of fields (social representations of scientific theory, psychoanalysis, as a means of knowledge and action, the social role of women, suburban housing, disease). The analysis of social representations is based on " the identification of value systems, concepts and practices that allow individuals to construct social reality and orient themselves in it. in using the concept of representations while promoting the development of a qualitative methodology (Pierret, 2004, pp. 200–201).

Deepening the relationship between ideology and representations on the one hand and the appropriate method of analysis on the other is at the heart of Claude Fougeron's work on deviance in 1975, which established broad discussions about ideology/social representations/qualitative methodology/non-directive interview or in-depth interview at the time. In his response to Michelet (1975), Maitre (1975) insisted on two main points that require linking and complementarity: the epistemological framework associated with the concept of ideology and research strategy. For him, ideology contributes to the formation of individuals in their subjectivity and in their social practices: "Ideology lies precisely at the interface of the

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two cognitive fields that they are constituted by the science of individual social and subjective practices (Pierret, 2004, pp. 200–201).

Claude Fogeron (1978) was involved in systematic discussions and ideas about the systematic use of the interview in sociology as a procedure of investigation rather than a simple exploration, and developed his use of this tool in the field of social representations of delinquency, criminal justice, the seriousness of crimes, and rape, "by collecting opinions or simple answers the questions developed by the researcher in advance, expressed in the language of the participants" in addition to contributing to discussions about the methodology and principles to be followed when conducting this type of interview in the context of social research (Pierret, 2004, pp. 200–201).

5- Types of Interviews

The interview is as simple and complex as any other exercise, relying not only on a learnable theoretical framework but also on the skills one has honed over time, as well as knowledge of professional limitations, which can limit the availability required to perform time-consuming tasks such as transcription or even duplicating interviews. For qualitative research, theoretical saturation is required (Chevalier & Meyer, 2018, pp. 108–125). The tools are chosen based on the research problems presented in the context, the researcher's intellectual and cognitive premises, as well as the limitations and obstacles that allow choosing a tool over another, or a specific type, or a specific method for the same tool, as is the case when selecting the interview as a research tool. The research necessitates interview selection, and within the interview, the researcher can choose between alternatives in the type of interview based on the objective conditions of the research and the field of research, the type of sample, as well as time and spatial limits, and other conditions that determine what to choose. The researcher can choose between the following types of interview (Thompson, 2016):

5-1- Structured or Formal (Guided) Interviews

It is one in which the interviewer asks the same questions to multiple respondents in much the same way, usually by reading pre-written structured questionnaire questions in a systematic manner, consisting of very specific, generally closed questions carefully prepared by the researcher and posed in a specific order, in order to collect responses. Respond accurately to quickly defined questions in a hypothetical, inferential framework to describe or explain specific situations and behaviours.

5-2- Unstructured or Informal (Unguided) Interviews:

Exploratory interviews, also known as guided conversations, are similar to guided conversations in that the interviewer has complete freedom to change questions from one respondent to another in order to follow whatever lines of inquiry he thinks are the most appropriate, depending on the responses given by each respondent, and require "Unconditional positive interest" and strong sympathy from the researcher during the interview.

5-3- Semi-Structured (Semi-Guided) Interviews

Interviews in which respondents have a list of questions but are free to ask more differentiated questions based on the feedback provided. It is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research and is based on a series of pre-prepared themes and questions, not with the aim of obtaining answers accurate to the closed questions stated by the interviewees but, rather, intended to understand individuals' practices, behaviours, and perceptions. For example, observation allows us to see what people are doing directly, but it does not always allow us to access their emotions or mental world. Similarly, questionnaires enable us to obtain specific answers to specific questions; however, they are predicated on the assumption that individuals have an accurate and transparent knowledge of their actions and behaviours. The semi-directive interview is based on the

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idea that the researcher's (observation) or the individuals' (questionnaires) access to the reality of individuals can only be obtained through a dynamic interaction between the researcher and his interlocutors.

These interviews address various objectives and cognitive models. Closed questions in directive interviews yield accurate information and fit well with the hypothetical inferential framework. Non-directive interviews allow for the collection of words and meanings that respondents use to perceive their reality and are particularly relevant to the approach. Inductive knowledge construction is derived from the field, whereas semi-structured interviews are a compromise based on an integrative model, which is based on an ongoing dialogue between fieldwork and theory.

Table 1: Characteristics Of The Three Main Types Of Interviews

| | Guided Interview | Unguided Interview | Semi-structured interview |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| Main Features | Rapid collection of answers to specific questions, with the aim of ensuring the reliability or measurement of key information | A free conversation that requires a great deal of empathy and aims to collect raw words and stories | A set of rich answers aimed at understanding the practices and/or perceptions of individuals related to the research question |

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|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | and concepts | | |
| Questions | Prepared in advance and placed in a specific order | not prepared in advance | Pre-made flexible frame |
| Epstimological Paradigm | deductive | inductive | probabilistic |

Source: Chevalier, F., & Meyer, V. (2018). Les entretiens. In *Les méthodes de recherche du DBA* (pp. 108–125). Collection : Business Science Institute -EMS Editions.<https://www-cairn-info.snd11.arn.dz/les-methodes-de-recherche-du-dba--9782376871798.htm>, p 112.

And we can categorize the interviews based on the number of respondents interviewed at the same time, where interviews can be conducted one-on-one (individual interviews) or in a group, as the interviewer interviews two or more respondents at the same time, and group interviews are distinguished with advantages that enable it to be the best tool for specific topics.

6- Interview Guide

The researcher must be familiar with the basic terms in order to apply them in the field, control them systematically, and benefit from the amount of raw information obtained from the field through them for the scientific practice of the interview tool to be successful. Among these terms is the interview guide, which is a list of questions or subject areas that the interviewer would like to ask or cover during the interview; the more structured the interview, the more strict the interview schedule. Even if the researcher conducts "unstructured interviews," he will have some sort of interview schedule, even if it is just a list of general topic areas for discussion or an opening question.

7- Building an Interview Guide

To conduct an interview, the researcher requires an interview guide tool, which serves as a "reminder" or a guide for the researcher. Throughout the research, the interview guide is subject to various developments and changes. According to Jean-Claude Compisi (2007):

the guide evolves from the first exploratory interviews, and the researcher incorporates new aspects and develops a guide. More precise and detailed. He will have to take the matter finally at some point, and a sense of repetition can determine the moment when recent interviews confirm the validity and completeness of the evidence, without suggesting new directions or questions (Sauvayre, 2013, p. 18).

The "stable" or final interview guide is ideally placed in the stages of conducting the research after building the problem in reality, and the initial question leads to the exploration of the chosen field that refers to a research problem. The selection of the theoretical framework, the most appropriate methods, and the development of hypotheses, then transforming these hypotheses into clear and neutral questions that all respondents can understand, regardless of their social origin or level of education. So, according to Blanchett and Guttman (2007), the interview guide is "a first step in translating research hypotheses into concrete indicators and reformulating research questions (for the individual interviewed) into investigative questions (Sauvayre, 2013, p. 18). Which, according to Morgan et al., should not have value judgments or points of view (Morange et al., 2016).

In addition to the scientific and methodological conditions in constructing the interview, Rogers 1968/2018 believes that the interviewer's position is necessary and critical to its success as a research tool, and it must follow some rules that he has established (Chevalier & Meyer, 2018, p. 118):

- Welcoming the interviewee (not his initiating the research questions)
- Focus on the subject's experience (not on the facts)
- Focus on the person (not on the problem)
- Facilitating communication with the respondent (not the practice of disclosing and investigating information)
- Respect the topic (and not use the interview as an opportunity to show the interviewer's insight)

8- Determine The Appropriate Sample For The Interview

When it comes to selecting the appropriate sample for the research, the question of how many interviews should be conducted arises. Because the primary goal of qualitative research is to generate new theories or enrich existing theories, theoretical saturation is the best answer. In practice, determining the theoretical saturation moment is not always straightforward (Chevalier & Meyer, 2018, p. 118).

9- Content Analysis Stages

When the interviews are finished, the researcher has a large amount of raw data, and the researcher can only deal with this data through a critical process called content analysis, which can be presented in sequential and integrated stages as follows (Vernette, 2017):

- **Recording and Documenting:** This is the process of recording information on paper from audio or video recordings of interviews. Every silence, repetition, or slip is meticulously

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documented because manual labour is time-consuming, researchers use technical tools and modern technology to expedite this stage.

- **Classification:** Following a quick read of two or three interviews, the research officer identifies the most frequently occurring topics, sub-topics, and keywords. These elements comprise the primary and secondary categories of content analysis.

- **Building the Analysis Network:** The researcher builds the analysis network by going through the different categories, reviewing each interview, then dividing the discourse units (words, sentences, topics) between these categories for simplification, and then grouping features or synonyms that are adjacent in meaning together in the same category.

- **Calculating the Weights:** The researcher computes the frequency of appearance of the various groups in the interviews. Analyses are classified into two types:

- Horizontal Analysis:** which is done by calculating the frequencies for the sub-categories of all respondents

- Vertical Analysis:** It seeks the same goal but works within the limits of the same interview. Some programs automatically analyze text (Alceste, InVivo, SPAD T and Sphinx Lexica),) that is, it allows automated speech processing and instant calculation of many textual statistics:

- Frequency of appearance of categories or subcategories;
- Frequency of element association: words that are often associated before or after each element;
- Vocabulary index: the number of different words used by the respondent / the total number of words in the interview;
- average number of words per sentence;

- Index of repetition of words.

Synthesis (Study Report):

The researcher provides a general summary of the results and records it in a brief report, and the analysis network categories can serve as a framework for the structure of the report, but the latter should not be regarded as absolute, and it must be remembered that these results cannot be generalized, because the sample is generally subject to statistical constraints, and any research ends with circumstantial presumptive endings within the limits of what has been studied.

10- Ethical Structure of the Interview

A good researcher works on developing his academic and scientific knowledge, as much as he works on developing his research ethics, and practising them in a socially acceptable way in the research environment. Neutrality, attentive listening, dialogue of conscience, curiosity for others, respectful empathy, self-denial, etc., are principles that reinforce and add to the methodological conditions.

These principles specify how the interviewer should behave, regardless of the characteristics of the respondents, and one of the general rules that the specialist in scientific research must follow is to create and perfect an interactive investigative framework that is ethically acceptable to the other party and within the ethical standards. What is moral from the researcher's perspective in his environment might not be moral in the respondent's environment. In the case of the interview, this condition is translated into an "initial contact contract" and a position of understanding, in which the researcher is committed to the issue of keeping the respondent in the privacy of his home and allowing him to develop his point of view, facilitating its expression, and convincing him that his point of view is correct (Demazière, 2012, pp. 30–31). In addition to respecting social boundaries and standards, the interview of a woman, for example by a male researcher, may

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impose a kind of reservation and rethinking the place of the interview, openness to the idea of the presence of a woman's companion during the interview, and accepting rephrasing, deleting or replacing questions, since some questions are not appropriate in terms of the moral or religious dimension.

The social distance between the researcher and the respondent in various dimensions determines where the two ends of the investigative research relationship will typically occupy in the social space (such as gender, age, race, and class). According to Bourdieu, 1993, this social distance is difficult to establish through an interview and is a source of symbolic violence (Demazière, 2012, pp. 30–31).

Conclusion

In the end, it can be noted that the use of the interview must follow methodological, cognitive and epistemological standards, to achieve the scientific purpose of the tool and to avoid expanding its use to generalize it to the largest possible sample, which causes the researcher to lose control. Thus, becoming obsessed with achieving quantity. Many Researchers produce data and explanations for what JC Basiron calls "shameful quantity" (Beaud, 1996, pp. 232–233).

So-called "qualitative" surveys are frequently carried out by conducting a large number of interviews, conducted under various circumstances and at various times, with individuals chosen at random. The interview stages are not related to one another by a common theme or a broad context; rather, the only shared rule is the "text" of the questions, to the point where the dimensions and meanings of words and questions may disappear due to a long time passing between interviews or moving from one area to another. The continual dispersal and isolation of data forces the sociologist to consider "everything else being equal" to neutralize the effects of the context. The danger of this type of practice is in the production of

artefacts by basing the explanatory work on largely subjective data, which may change the meaning and thus may change the responses of the participants.

The various organizations that oversee research contracts tend to make the "numbers" criterion more or less dominant in the field of qualitative surveys, as evidenced for example by the fact that researchers frequently feel as though they have been forced to conduct twice as many interviews for their studies to be "acceptable" and as though they need to "make numbers" for the study to be scientific assuming it is statistical. In this regard, we must not overlook the role that (Beaud, 1996, pp. 232–233).

The problem of impartiality is a further issue with the interview as a scientific tool. Nothing allows for the understanding of the entire social system, according to Bourdieu et al. in 1968, who claimed that "the impartiality of techniques does not exist, each one has its limits and biases" (Pierret, 2004, p. 199). Within the framework of an understanding between the two parties that neither party has anything to fear from an exchange, the respondent has a significant role in understanding the social system (Fournier & Cesaro, 2020). The meaning and significance of silence in the interview must never be overlooked by the researcher (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 2020, p. 1) to which studies must be directed with sufficient care to capture the meanings that the interview explores through the interviewee's voice or silence.

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