

Analysis of Interview Transcripts

A Discussion Paper

I have closely read and marked up **two** transcripts: those of the interviews with Margaret Young/Mollie Stevenson (Glasgow) and Fred Curnick and Gwen Curnick (Harrow). My comments are based largely on my reading of these transcripts, but also to some extent on my less close familiarity with the contents of other interviews and my overall sense of what the interviews as a whole contain, and their 'structure of feeling'.

It seems to me that analysis of the interview material will be guided to some, as yet unspecifiable, degree by the sorts of questions we want to ask of the raw data: what sorts of things do we want to get from it? However, with qualitative analysis, there is quite properly always some degree of open-ended exploration involved. In some areas at least, we will be working in a creatively analytic way with the data, and would thus be wise to avoid preconceptions and to remain open to what the material offers us.

It seems to me that there are at least three **levels** at which qualitative data may be explored and analysed. In increasing order of openness and 'exploratoriness', these are

1. base coding
2. overt data level
3. discursive or subtextual level

Base coding

This is the area VB calls 'descriptive categories' in her discussion paper: they are the variables upon which we shall want to make comparisons between responses. On what grounds do we want to explore differences between responses? Do men talk about their cinemagoing in different ways than women? Do people in different areas or with different social backgrounds have different preferences for stars or types of film? These categories are probably best kept simple, with perhaps even fewer than those suggested by VB, for example:

- Age/date of birth
- Gender
- Location
- Education
- Social class
- Ethnicity[?]

We shall need to make coding frames for some of these: liaise with questionnaire coder to establish consistency.

Overt data level

This is more or less coterminous with the headings VB calls 'thematic categories', and refers to conscious, explicit, overt or factual responses: 'factual' or descriptive information about cinema buildings and personnel, for example, preferences as to films and stars, or types of 'fannish' behaviour, other leisure pursuits, and so on. Significantly, these are exactly the sorts of areas explored in the questionnaire, and all lend themselves to a straightforward content analysis type of reading and coding. There is scope at this level for amalgamating and/or comparing interview and questionnaire responses, and it would be as well to bear this in mind when making decisions as to the coding the both sets of data.

For NUD-IST, the question of 'trees' and 'nodes' will immediately arise at this level: how this is dealt with will depend on what we are likely to ask of the data (though one of the beauties of NUD-IST is that it's possible to develop your thinking or change your mind about this as you go along). However, it is likely that we will be interested in preferences for Hollywood as against British stars, and male against female, and the STARS 'tree' can be constructed accordingly.

Areas/topics for coding at this level could include

- age/year of first attendance
- age(s) of most frequent cinemagoing
- frequency of cinemagoing
- favourite cinema(s)
- choice of film
- went to cinema with...
- home, work or school in geographical relation to cinema
- mode of transport to cinema
- favourite films
- favourite stars
- 'fan' behaviour
- alternative entertainments

Arguably, more impressionistic, though still consciously articulated, items also belong at this level, for example:

- explicit reasons given for going to/enjoying the pictures;
- explicitly articulated feelings about the pictures
- courtship and the pictures; sex.

There is likely to be an area of overlap between this more qualitative end of the overt data level and the beginning of the next, deeper, level of analysis.

Discursive or subtextual level

This level of analysis calls for a particularly exploratory and open approach to the material, and for sensitivity to clues that go below or beyond the written or indeed the spoken word. Most of my annotations on the transcripts I read relate to this level, at

which I see emerging in particular issues relating to space, time and the narrativisation of memory.

There are different levels of analysis also within this category, beginning perhaps with

emotion or feeling tone--sometimes this comes through in the transcript, sometimes only on tape; but in either case it is an important clue to the respondent's feelings about what is being said.

Moving on from this, the analyst might attend to:

changes in voice, tone or accent in relation to what is being said items--turns of phrase, anecdotes, etc--that are repeated slips of the tongue.

Other qualities in the account are also revealing:

going 'off the point'
self-contradictory statements.

Beyond this, the analyst can move into various forms of 'symptomatic' reading; always respecting the data. One might wish, for example, to follow up a 'hunch' that emerges from what one knows about the respondents and how they speak. For example, there is something that comes up in many interviews about the ways in which people remember their outings to the pictures--the detailed accounts of local topography, for example, or of companions and activities surrounding actual picturegoing.

At another level, and central to the rationale of the project, as a whole, is the question of memory, of how people construct memories or turn their memories into stories. For example, I already note a difference between what might be called 'repetitive' memory ('we always...', 'we used to...') and singular memory (the recounting of one-off events, often anecdotes well-polished through many retellings); between memories in which the speaker involves herself in the telling, commonly collectively ('we used to..') and more impersonal remembering ('there used to be...').

Another 'symptom' relates to the ways in which people talk about time: an important form of memory narrativisation seems to be a 'then/now' motif, which carries across different contents of memory, and varies in value accorded to each term (the Curnicks are more positive about 'then', for instance, Young and Stevenson about 'now').

Conclusion

These various levels of analysis would seem to call for different forms of attention to the data, reading/analytic skills, and so on. Without having sufficient experience with NUD-IST to assess how feasible this is, it would seem on the face of it sensible to perform each level of analysis separately.

For example, it would seem good sense--and indeed NUD-IST provides for this--to go through and base code all transcripts before beginning analysis proper. Moving then to the overt data level, the researchers can perform relatively straightforward

indexing/coding procedures and at the same time get used to working with the software. It would perhaps make sense to engage with the discursive level later on in the project, and/or when particular sorts of 'deep' questions are being asked of the data, for example: 'how do our interviewees talk about the past as against the present, and how does this relate to their memories of going to the pictures?'

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