

Methods Clinic #4 – Interviewing – April 16, 2021

Resource sheet

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Note: a couple of addenda to previous resource sheets/Methods Clinic discussions follow at the end.

“I think my colleague at the time [of our joint research project] viewed [what the textbooks call ‘unstructured interviews’] as a subset of ‘interviews’; I regarded it as a subset of ‘talking to people’.”
—Chapman (2001, 23), quoted in
Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2014: 148)

Interviewing from an interpretivist perspective is different in important ways from interviewing informed by a realist-objectivist (i.e., positivist philosophical) perspective. For one, it means something other than administering a survey or otherwise following a list of questions that the researcher feels s/he/they must cover in their entirety lest the interview be deemed a failure.

Chapman (above) “captures the differences in spirit underlying these practices in describing, above, the reactions of his research partner, an economist trained in survey research, and himself, trained as an anthropologist, as they set out to talk to people in an organizational setting. Chapman finds himself completely enthralled with what he is learning from their field research—interviews that last half a day, observations of meetings—while his colleague’s attention wanders and he sees little coming out of such “nondirected” research” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014: 148).

Much of the literature on interviewing treats it in an “extractive” manner. This is at odds with the approach taken by such interpretive scholars as Lee Ann Fujii, Fred Schaffer, and Joe Soss (citations below), which is why their work is so central to our thinking and that of other interpretive researchers. Fujii makes the ethical part of this especially clear in the last chapter of her book, entitled “The ethos of relational interviewing.”

The methods literature on interviewing is vast, and it is not our intention to replicate it here. An internet search should produce the best sellers in that area. Our purpose here is to direct attention to those works that either engage interpretive methodological approaches to interviewing or which report on research “findings” based on interpretive-style interviewing.

Chapman, Malcolm. 2001. “Social anthropology and business studies: Some

considerations of method.” In *Inside Organizations: Anthropologists at Work*, ed. David N. Gellner and Eric Hirsch, 19–33. Oxford: Berg.

Note: Much of what little literature in political science on interviewing exists focuses on elite interviews, what might be called “interviewing up” (borrowing from anthropologist Laura Nader’s notion of studying up [“Up the anthropologist,” 1972]). We certainly don’t want to dismiss the significance of interviewing Congresspeople, NGO Executive Directors, and so forth, but political scientists also interview “down” and “across,” from social movement actors to sex workers (Majic 2014, *Sex Work Politics: From Protest to Service Provision*, U Penn Press). Be careful, though: Like any dichotomy, the up/down distinction can sometimes be limiting or even misleading. “Elite” is a context-dependent, not a fixed, category (see Glas 2021).

Selected methodological works

Brown, Nadia E. 2018. Negotiating the insider/outsider status: Black feminist ethnography and legislative studies. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 3 (Fall): 19-34.

Dragomir, Cristina-Ioana. 2019. Gendered practices as rituals of knowledge. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21:2, 326-33. DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2019.1599296

Feldman, Martha S., Bell, Jeannie, and Berger, Michelle Tracy. 2012. *Gaining Access: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Qualitative Researchers*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

- Chapter 6 Gaining Access to Individuals
- Chapter 7 Gaining Access for Interviews

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2018. *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. New York: Routledge.

Note from Nick Cheesman:

“The latest episode in the New Books in Interpretive Political & Social Science series on the New Books Network is now online, available on the website or via all good podcasting apps (on the New Books in Political Science channel): Jessica Soedirgo and Aarie Glas speaking on Lee Ann Fujii’s *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*
<https://newbooksnetwork.com/interviewing-in-social-science-research>”

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2010. Shades of truth and lies: Interpreting testimonies of war and violence. *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2): 231-41.

Gawlewicz, Anna. 2016. Language and translation strategies in researching migrant experience of difference from the position of migrant researcher. *Qualitative Research* 16 (1): 27–42.

Glas, Aarie. 2021. Power, positionality, and positions of power: Reflexivity in elite

interviewing. *PS: Political Science and Politics*. FirstView:
doi:10.1017/S1049096520002048.

Herzog, Hanna. 2005. On home turf: Interview location and its social meaning. *Qualitative Sociology* 28 (1): 25-47.

MacKenzie, Catrina A. 2016. Filtered meaning: Appreciating linguistic skill, social position and subjectivity of interpreters in cross-language research. *Qualitative Research* 16 (2): 167–82.

Schaffer, Frederic C. 2014. Ordinary language interviewing. In Dvora Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and method*, 183-93. Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe.

Soss, Joe. 2014. Talking our way to meaningful explanations: A practice-centered view of interviewing for interpretive research. In Dvora Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and method*, 161-82. Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe.

Selected political science works reporting interview-based research

Brown, Nadia E. 2014. *Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making*. New York: Oxford University Press. [life history and other kinds of interviews]

Curry, James. M. 2015. *Legislating in the dark: Information and power in the house of representatives*. University of Chicago Press.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2008. The power of local ties: Popular participation in the Rwandan genocide. *Security Studies* 17: 569-597.

Harper, Robin A. and Zubida, Hani. 2017. Being seen: Visibility, families and dynamic remittance practices. *Migration and Development* 1: 1-21.

Harper, Robin A. and Zubida, Hani. 2017. Living on borrowed time: Borders, ticking clocks and timelessness among temporary labour migrants in Israel. In Hastings Donnan, Madeleine Hurd, and Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, eds., *Migrating Borders and Moving Times: Temporality and the Crossing of Borders in Europe*, 102-20. Manchester University Press.

Shesterinina, Anastasia. 2021. *Mobilizing in Uncertainty: Collective Identities and War in Abkhazia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Smith, Nicholas Rush. 2019. *Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weibe, Sarah M. 2016. *Everyday Exposure: Indigenous Mobilization and Environmental Justice in Canada's Chemical Valley*. University of British Columbia Press.

Weitzel, Michelle D. 2018. Audializing the migrant body: Sound and security at the border. *Security Dialogue* 49, 6: 421-37.

Working with translators?

Should you be doing interpretive research if you don't speak the language of your interlocutors?

We will, for the moment, remain agnostic on that point, but we do want to flag another one. Persistent in many treatments of translation is the notion that it entails a one-to-one equivalence between words in one language and words in another. Far more nuanced—and closer to interpretive methodological presuppositions—is the understanding that translating rests on finding a “culture”-to-“culture” equivalence.

Consider, for example, this quote from Merced Community Outreach Services psychologist Sukey Waller, in Anne Fadiman's 1997 *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux):

...someone who merely converted Hmong words into English, however accurately, would be of no help to me whatsoever. 'I don't call my staff interpreters,' she told me. 'I call them cultural brokers. They teach me. When I don't know what to do, I ask them. You should go find yourself a cultural broker. [p. 95]

That gets to the heart of the issue: translation reaches for the senses, the meanings, of words and concepts.

Translation has been, and still is, an issue in cross-cultural management studies, a sub-sub-field of organizational studies, along with similar practices. And it has the broader phenomenological and hermeneutic context of how we manage to make sense of one another even in our own language. Some of this is picked up in its treatment in science studies (a.k.a. the sociology of scientific knowledge) and in some of the following:

Selected works in political science, IR, public policy, and public administration
Clarke, John, Dave Bainton, Noémi Lendvai, and Paul Stubbs. 2015. *Making policy move: Towards a politics of translation and assemblage*. Chicago: Policy Press.

Freeman, Richard. 2009. What is 'translation'? *Evidence & Policy* 5, 4: 429-47.
10.1332/174426409X478770

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2013. Working with interpreters. In *Interview Research in Political Science*, edited by Layna Mosley, 144-58. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Komporozos-Athanasiou, Aris, Oborn, Eivor, Barrett, Michael, and Chan, Yolande E. 2011. Policy as a struggle for meaning: Disentangling knowledge translation across international health contexts. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* 9, 215-27.

Kurowska, Xymena. 2014. Practicality by judgement: Transnational interpreters of local ownership in the Polish-Ukrainian border reform encounter. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 17: 545–65.

Mukhtarov, Farhad. 2014. Rethinking the travel of ideas: Policy translation in the water sector. *Policy & Politics* 42 (1): 71–88.

Mukhtarov, Farhad. 2017. Policies on the move: Translation, assemblages and ethnography. Review essay. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 35 (1): 191–94.

Rutgers, Mark R. 2004. Comparative public administration: Navigating Scylla and Charybdis—Global comparison as a translation problem. *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 26: 2, 150-68. DOI: 10.1080/10841806.2004.11029435

Stone, Diane. 2012. Transfer and translation of policy. *Policy Studies* 33, 6: 483-99. DOI: 10.1080/01442872.2012.695933

Yanow, Dvora, ed. 2005. Public administration in ‘translation’: Non-Western and other administrative practices. Symposium, *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 27 (1): 81 ff.

Selected other references in re. translation/translating

Agar, Michael. 2011. Making sense of one other for another: Ethnography as translation. *Language & Communication* 31, 1: 38-47.

Calás, Marta B., Charlotte Holgersson, and Linda Smircich. 2009. Editorial: Diversity management? translation? travel? *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 25: 349-51.

Cassell, Catherine and Lee, Bill. 2017. Understanding translation work: The evolving interpretation of a trade union idea. *Organization Studies* 38/8: 1085-1106.

Frenkel, Michal. 2005. The politics of translation: How state-level political relations affect the cross-national travel of management ideas. *Organization* 12 (2): 275–301.

Temple, Bogusia and Edwards, Rosalind. 2002. Interpreters/translators and cross-language research: Reflexivity and border crossings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1 (2), Article 1.

<https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ijqm/index.php/IJQM/article/view/4602> (accessed 30 March 2021).

Yanow, Dvora. 2004. “Translating local knowledge at organizational peripheries.” *British Journal of Management* 15/S1, S9-S25.

For additional sources, see <https://wur.academia.edu/DvoraYanow/Talks> -- there are a handful of presentations from a 2016 translating workshop, with references.

ADDENDA

1. On the social impacts of social media (in re. Methods Clinic #2)

Sherry Turkle - Fresh Air interview

MIT professor and social scientist Sherry Turkle has long been concerned with the social impacts of technologies. Toward the end of this interview, she is asked about the impact of our increased use of social media since the COVID shutdown. Her reply is interesting for those who might be tempted to consider online interviewing, e.g., as a replacement for face-to-face interviewing and other, related matters.

Here it is on Apple Podcasts; it may be available otherwise:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/fresh-air/id214089682?i=1000512451764>

