

REFLECTIVE INTERVIEWING

a Guide to Theory & Practice

Kathryn Roulston



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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to assist newcomers to qualitative research methods to think about the variety of ways that qualitative interviews have been used by researchers working from different theoretical approaches, and how these might be applied in their own research studies. Interviews are a format to which we are so accustomed in contemporary society that it is difficult to imagine a world without them. Excerpts from interviews published in newspapers and magazines provide evidence for claims about what happens in our world. At work we interview others in order to gain information about their professional capabilities. Children conduct interviews in order to find information to present in school projects; journalists interview politicians; nightly news anchors interview journalists; parents interview teachers; and physicians interview their patients. We participate as witnesses to others' interviews, as well as take part in interviews as interviewers and interviewees. There are few places, it seems, where we are immune from the questions and answers that characterize the interview as a particular kind of social interaction. By making visible the assumptions underlying the different ways in which qualitative interviews have been theorized in social research, in this book I aim to assist researchers using interviews for the first time to consider the connections between theory and practice and to examine critically the use of interview data for research purposes.

The approach that I outline in this book entails the researcher's consideration of three interrelated issues:

- the researcher's theoretical conception of the research interview;
- the researcher's subject positions in relation to the project and participants; and
- methodological examinations of interview interaction to inform research design.

I argue that reflection on each of these issues will contribute to advancing the practice of both qualitative interviewing and qualitative inquiry. Through developing sophisticated understandings of qualitative interview practice, qualitative researchers are better positioned to design and conduct quality research projects that provide researchers and communities with significant findings concerning social problems.

Background

In academic work, the interview has been used extensively by social researchers as a method for generating data concerning research problems

(for a selective history of the interview see Platt [2002]). For social researchers, there is a wide range of methodological literature that provides guidance on how to design and conduct all kinds of interviews – from standardized structured protocols conducted by telephone, to open-ended conversations. Yet, our everyday exposure to the ‘Interview Society’ in which the interview is central to the construction of the modern individual obscures the complexity of conducting interviews for research purposes (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). It is easy to see the research interview as simply a series of questions followed by responses – all we need to do as researchers is to ask the right questions of willing interviewees and we will extract the information we need to answer our research questions. This perspective of interviewing has been seriously questioned in the methodological literature and there are longstanding critiques of social researchers’ use of the interview method.

Critics of qualitative interviews maintain that research interviewers who contribute their personal perspectives in interview interaction *bias* data and produce studies that lack *validity*. Some researchers argue that human subjects cannot be relied upon to provide *accurate* or *truthful* accounts. This view is supported by studies that have found mismatches between what people say in interviews and what they do in everyday life. Methodologists have also critiqued the quality of research in which interview data has been insufficiently analyzed and under-theorized (see for example, Atkinson and Coffey, 2002). Radical critiques of interviewing (see Potter and Hepburn, 2005, for an example, and Hammersley, 2003 for a review) criticize reports from qualitative interview studies on epistemological and methodological grounds. These critiques of interviewing reject the notion that peoples’ talk accurately represents what they are thinking (that is, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions), are skeptical that interview accounts can actually reflect either what is *inside* people’s heads, or what actually happens out there in a *real* world, and posit that interviews are not satisfactory substitutes for direct observation and are heavily context-dependent, making them unreliable sources of evidence (Hammersley and Gomm, 2008). Finally, postmodern critiques of qualitative interview studies and methodological writing question the modernist assumptions of the human subject embedded in theorizations of interviewing, and analyses and interpretations of interview data (Scheurich, 1995).

Should researchers give up on the qualitative interview? David Silverman (2005: 238–40, 2007), for example, calls on qualitative researchers to take care to justify their use of interviews as the preferred method for gaining access to people’s experiences and, like Jonathan Potter and Alexa Hepburn (2005), makes the case for the use of naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2005: 119–21). Martyn Hammersley (2003: 124) suggests that it would be ill advised to either uncritically adopt radical critiques of interviewing, or to ignore the problematic methodological issues inherent in the use of qualitative interviews. Yet, given the proliferation of methodological advice concerning qualitative interviews, how might beginning researchers proceed? This book

provides novices to qualitative research methods with some starting points by offering a theoretically informed guide to interview practice that will assist researchers to develop as reflective interviewers, and showing how the design of research projects might be approached to ensure quality work.

A Proposal for Advancing the Practice of Qualitative Interviewing

The theoretical assumptions of the researcher – whether explicit or not – inform the design of interview studies and interview questions, as well as the analysis and representation of data. Researchers need to consider various theorizations of the interview as they design their studies in order to grasp the implications of their theoretical assumptions for the generation, interpretation, and representation of data. Thinking about these issues during data analysis may be too late. The danger of overlooking the important links between theory and practice in the planning and conduct of interviews is that resulting research reports can be – as critics have pointed out – under-theorized and of poor quality. It is crucial for qualitative researchers to have an understanding of and an ability to theorize the application of qualitative interviews to investigate research problems in social science research, and the researcher-relationships inherent in each research study. But what does it mean to ‘theorize,’ and how might a researcher go about doing that? Figure I.1 illustrates one model of the necessary components for researchers to accomplish this task.

Theories are simply statements that explain connections between concepts, and tell us something about the way things work and how things happen (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 118). Theorizing, then, is the process by which we go about constructing these statements in relation to what is already known about an issue. In relation to the issues concerning interviewing listed above, to ‘theorize’ means to consider relevant issues and implications for research design related to what interview data can tell us about a specific topic; how interview data are generated; who the interviewer is in relation to the research topic and the study’s participants; how the theoretical assumptions underlying the research design relate to data analysis, interpretation, and representation; and finally, how the quality of the final report will be judged within a particular field of inquiry.

Theory and Interviewing

There is no shortage of literature discussing the theory and methods of qualitative research. Novice researchers, however, may have difficulty in synthesizing and applying what may be learned from the rapidly growing literature on theory and methods to their interview practice. Too much emphasis on theory may

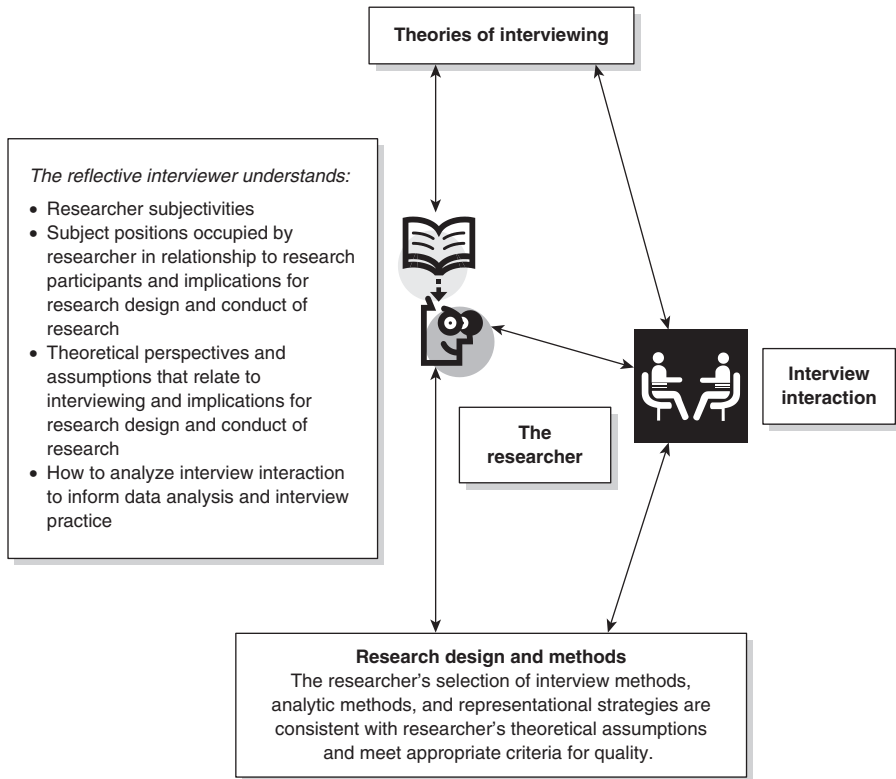


Figure 1.1 The reflective researcher

result in beginning researchers experiencing paralysis in the creative process, through striving to first know everything of relevance concerning theory in relation to their prospective studies. The problem here is one of difficulties in getting to the practicalities of doing research. For students with little interest in engaging in academic discourses on theory, too little theory may result in simplistic interview studies in which an unreflective researcher produces naïve analyses of data. Seeing interviews as merely a sequence of questions followed by answers – a transparent stimulus–response medium for gathering facts, opinions, and beliefs – and failing to understand the complex nature of interview interaction between interviewers and interviewees, the researcher who does not consider theory may generate data that does not inform his or her research questions. Yet, other beginning researchers, in attempting to follow innumerable prescriptions concerning what to do in order to generate rich descriptions, become entangled in agonized reflective dialogues about what happened in their interviews, their relationships with their participants, and the ethical issues of doing qualitative research with human subjects. Thinking about the possible theorizations of qualitative interviewing will assist beginning

researchers to contextualize their use of interviews within the broader array of social theory that qualitative researchers use to inform research design. Another key step is to consider the place of the researcher in relation to the research project.

Theorizing the Researcher

Researchers bring different conversational styles to their research interviews with unique individual participants on diverse topics, and researchers approach their work from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Any guidelines for ‘good’ interview practice, therefore, must be taken up with respect to each researcher’s particular context and his or her subject positions (that is, race, class, gender, culture, language, status in relation to each interviewee; and prior experiences and relationships with the participant among other social locations). This is not news – indeed Lewis Dexter wrote many years ago that ‘What may be suicidal or impractical for one interviewer or in one situation may be feasible or even the best way to proceed for another interviewer or in another situation’ (1970: 24). In this book, I offer suggestions for how researchers can become more mindful of what they bring to their research project, and how that intersects with particular participants in the process of conducting interview research.

Examining Interview Interaction Methodologically

A next step in learning about interviewing is for researchers to reflect critically on their interaction with others within the research setting through close examination of their interview transcripts. Qualitative methodologists have frequently used models and transcripts of both exemplary and problematic interviews in teaching beginning researchers the skills of interviewing. In this book I argue not only for the continued usefulness of data sets that exemplify common problems faced by novice interviewers, but that researchers themselves be encouraged to look at problematic moments in their own interviews to unpack them. Rather than discarding this kind of data as worthless, in this book I outline an approach to developing an interview practice that researchers might use to think about research interviews methodologically and theoretically. Problematic interactions and difficult data provide rich materials for examination and further development of one’s own interview practice through asking questions concerning *how* data are collaboratively generated by speakers. Researchers can reflect on the answers to these questions and inform decision-making concerning research design and methods, the formulation of interview questions, and appropriate ways to analyze and represent interview data.

Learning about Qualitative Interviewing

A common approach to introducing qualitative interviewing to novice researchers is that of providing advice based on the researcher's personal experience as an interviewer. This is so whether the researcher is based in anthropology (McCracken, 1988), education (Seidman, 2006), educational anthropology (Wolcott, 1995), psychology (Kvale, 1996; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Moustakas, 1994), social psychology (Mishler, 1986), sociolinguistics (Briggs, 1986), or sociology (Douglas, 1985; Weiss, 1994; Wengraf, 2001). It is clear from these accounts that qualitative interviewers and social researchers learn by doing, and reflection on doing. Newcomers to research are no different to their more experienced qualitative colleagues. Thus any program for developing research skills must involve novice researchers in conducting authentic interviews, and reflecting on those experiences. To assist with this task, throughout the book I include suggested practical activities that can be used in coursework, or, alternatively, by individual researchers. In short, this book recommends that researchers ask questions – of their theoretical assumptions about interviews, of themselves, and of what happens in their interview interaction with others.

Outline of the Book

Chapter 1 reviews the question–answer sequence as the basic unit of interviews, as well as different approaches to thinking about individual interviews. This includes the 'structure' of the interview, as well as the approaches to asking questions that have developed in ethnographic, phenomenological, feminist, oral and life history, and dialogic traditions.

Chapter 2 provides a series of considerations for researchers who would like to use group interviews or focus groups in their studies. The chapter draws distinctions between group interviews and focus groups and reviews focus groups in more detail. Excerpts of talk from focus groups to illustrate various issues that arise in the facilitation of group interaction are included.

Chapter 3 discusses various theoretical assumptions that underlie different conceptions of interviewing. I include examples of research demonstrating six conceptions of the research interview: neo-positivist; romantic; constructionist; postmodern; transformative; and decolonizing. I discuss how each conception of the research interview relates to different theoretical assumptions about human subjects and interview data, the implications for data analysis and representation of findings, and provide examples of research exemplifying different approaches.

Chapter 4 reviews steps entailed in the research design process, including identifying research topics, formulating research questions, and selecting and sampling populations. Given that researchers must consider how judgments

concerning the value, or quality of research are made, this issue is discussed in relation to the conceptions of interviews outlined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 discusses some of the procedural issues to do with conducting interview research. Before interviewing, researchers must gain consent for the study, and follow appropriate procedures for conducting ethical research. Recruitment of participants, preparation for interviews, and issues arising in conducting interviews are discussed. Recording options, transcription practice, and considerations concerning the use of translated data are reviewed. Suggestions for further reading concerning interviewing specific populations are included.

In Chapter 6, I explore methods that individual researchers might use to examine themselves as researchers. Here I consider reflection as an integral feature of well-designed research, and provide a number of different strategies that researchers can use to develop a reflexive research practice. These include examining subject positions as researchers through writing subjectivity statements, keeping researcher journals, being interviewed as a researcher, and analyzing the interviewer's 'work' in interviews. The chapter provides further reading concerning reflexive practices in social science research.

Chapter 7 outlines an approach that interviewers can use to develop an increased awareness of what they do and say in interaction through inspecting both problematic and effective moments in interview transcripts. A series of interview excerpts are used to show how interviewers can use methods drawn from conversation analysis to examine their interview practice. I argue that this approach assists interviewers to see possibilities for how they formulate and ask questions in future research interviews, as well as to think about research design and the use of interview data.

Chapter 8 provides an overview of different approaches to the analysis of interview data. I provide brief reviews of a selection of approaches to the analysis, interpretation, and representation of interview data. These include thematic analysis, grounded theory analysis, ethnographic analysis, phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis, and ethnomethodological and conversation analysis. I conclude the chapter by reviewing resources one might turn to in order to learn more about poststructural and postmodern approaches to the analysis of data, as well as the use of arts-based approaches to representation.

Chapter 9 concludes the book with accounts of interviewing practice from experienced researchers, as well as advice for beginning interviewers.

The aim of this book is to provide guidance to researchers about how they might develop interview skills in keeping with their theoretical assumptions. Throughout the book, readers will find multiple data excerpts that illustrate the different kinds of events that occur in research interviews, reflections on interviewing from qualitative researchers who use interviews, and suggestions for further reading.

I have employed two approaches to transcribing interview excerpts. When the focal point of attention is *how* the talk-in-interaction was generated, paralinguistic features of talk such as pauses, hesitations, and slips are notated using transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Psathas and Anderson, 1990; see Appendix 1). Where these features of talk are not relevant to the discussion, they are not included. Activities that might be either incorporated into course work on qualitative research methodology or used by individual researchers are included at the conclusion of each chapter to assist readers with developing their interview practice.

ONE

Asking Questions and Individual Interviews

This chapter introduces:

- Question and answer sequences: *closed* and *open* questions and follow-up questions or *probes*.
- *Structure* in interviews.
- Forms of interviewing, including *phenomenological*, *ethnographic*, *feminist*, *oral* and *life history*, and *dialogic* interviewing.

In the film *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam*, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) purposefully upsets our assumptions about interviewing by juxtaposing English-language interviews of Vietnamese women that at first *look* to be real, against interviews conducted in Vietnamese with English subtitles of – we find out as the film unfolds – authentic interviews of people who have acted the parts of the interviews we have seen earlier in the film. In a further twist, we find out that Trinh has translated transcriptions of interviews from a Vietnamese book to form the basis of the scripts for interviews of the Vietnamese women who introduce the film with their touching, evocative, and sometimes heart-rending narratives. In but one of the themes explored in this film, Trinh cleverly asks questions of both the interview as method, and how researchers translate the voices of others into visual, oral, and written texts.

In this chapter, I begin my exploration of the interview as a research method by first examining ‘questions’ and ‘answers’ as a basic conversational sequence. Second, I discuss different structures for interviewing, including structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Third, I review a variety of approaches to individual interviewing practice used by qualitative researchers. In contemporary qualitative research practice, there are numerous forms for conducting individual interviews as well as labels to characterize them. These include semi-structured, unstructured, and structured interviews; formal and informal interviews; long, creative, open-ended, depth, and in-depth interviews; life history, oral history, and biographic interviews; feminist interviews; ethnographic interviews; phenomenological interviews; and dialogical, conversational, and epistemic interviews. And this is by no means an exhaustive list! The purpose of reviewing a variety of approaches to interviewing is to assist researchers to make sense of the labels used

in the methodological literature. Researchers may then select the kind of interview structure and form that is both consistent with their theoretical assumptions, and appropriate to generate data to answer research questions.

An Introduction to Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews may be conducted individually or in groups; face-to-face, via telephone, or online via synchronous or asynchronous computer mediated interaction. In this book, I focus on qualitative interviews in which an interviewer generates talk with an interviewee or interviewees for the purposes of eliciting spoken, rather than written data to examine research problems (for those interested in learning about synchronous and asynchronous online interviews, see Beck, 2005; Davis et al., 2004; Egan et al., 2006; Hamilton and Bowers, 2006; James, 2007; James and Busher, 2006).

Information concerning the design and conduct of structured interviews or standardized surveys is not the focus of this book, since the purpose of these interviews – often administered via telephone – is to generate responses that may be coded to a fixed set of categories, and analyzed quantitatively. Much research has investigated the standardized survey methodologically (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Maynard et al., 2002; Schaeffer and Maynard, 2002; Suchman and Jordan, 1990); and advice is also plentiful with respect to construction and administering of surveys and questionnaires (see for example, Brenner, 1985; Foddy, 1993; Genovese, 2004). Interestingly, many suggestions for conducting an effective survey interview are reiterated in recommendations for conducting ‘good’ qualitative interviews.

The term *interviews* is used to encompass many forms of talk – including professional interviews such as counseling and therapeutic interviews, job interviews, journalistic interviews, and so forth. What all of these forms of talk have in common is that parties are engaged in asking and answering questions. Whatever the structure or format of an interview, or medium used for an interview (such as telephone, face-to-face, or computer-mediated), the basic unit of interaction is the question–answer sequence. Given that researchers pose questions to participants with the aim of eliciting answers, it is useful to examine in more detail how ‘closed’ and ‘open’ questions work, and how they can generate different kinds of responses.

Questions and Answers

Questions are particular kinds of statements that request a reply – although posing a question does not necessarily mean an answer will be forthcoming, or that the answer will relate to the particular question posed. In his analysis of conversation, sociologist Harvey Sacks (1992) located a class of utterances that he labeled ‘adjacency pairs’ (see Appendix 2 for a glossary of terms used in conversation analysis). In an adjacency pair, when a first-pair part (in this case, question) has been uttered, it sets up the expectancy that a second-pair part (an answer) will be forthcoming.

Interviews are built on the assumption that questions asked by the interviewer will be followed by answers provided by the interviewee. Two kinds of questions that are routinely used in interviews are closed and open questions.

Closed Questions

Understanding questions is simple – isn't it? Maybe not. Although we immediately recognize or understand when a question has been posed in interaction, how to ask interview questions that are comprehended by others and answered in ways that generate relevant data is more complex than initially apparent. Some question structures have been found to have a certain kind of *preference* for the response. That is, response types might be marked or unmarked for certain kinds of adjacency pairs. For example, invitations *prefer* acceptances, and declinations are typically followed by accounts, or are 'marked.' Self-deprecations *prefer* disagreements, whereas agreements present an interactional difficulty to be negotiated by speakers. The question beginning this section is posed as an assertion with a tag, 'isn't it?' This question formulation implies a particular kind of response, which, in this case is confirmation ('yes'). The response that follows the statement above is the 'dispreferred' response, or disagreement. Researchers have found that dispreferred responses (such as when an invitation is declined) are usually followed by accounts, or explanations (as demonstrated in this paragraph). Although this closed question is formulated as an assertion that implies confirmation, the response generated is neither yes nor no! Thus, we can express something about the format of this particular question–answer sequence as shown in Figure 1.1 below. Note that that dotted arrow from the dispreferred response to the account or explanation indicates that a speaker *may* provide an explanation, although this does not always occur.

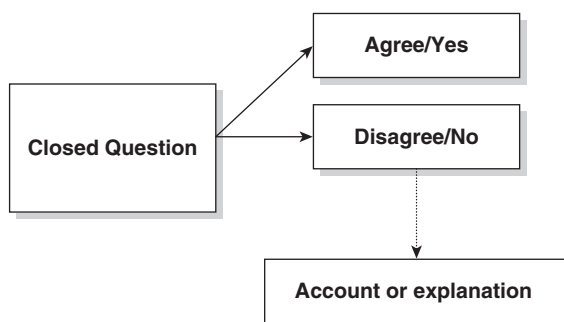


Figure 1.1 A closed question and possible ways of responding

Many methodological texts advise qualitative interviewers to ask *open*, rather than *closed* questions because closed questions have the possibility of generating short one-word answers corresponding with yes/no or factual information implied by the question (for example, What time is it? One fifteen). Thus, closed questions are those in which the implied response is restricted in some way. For example, the closed question I posed below is answered by a single-word affirmation from the participant:

Excerpt 1.1¹

Interviewer (IR) And, do you have choruses at school yourself?
Interviewee (IE) Uh-huh.

Interviewees may respond to closed questions as if they were open by providing further description. For example, in response to the following probe that I posed as a closed question, the interviewee in Excerpt 1.2 provided further explanation, rather than supplying a one-word affirmation such as ‘yes.’

Excerpt 1.2

IR Now you mentioned that you started taking private lessons yourself. Had you had formal music training prior to that?
IE At a very early age, my father had enrolled me in a piano class. And I begged him to let me drop out. And he said, ‘Well the only way I’ll let you drop out is if you play a sport.’ So I started playing soccer, so that I would not have to play the piano.
IR: Huh.
IE: That was probably the dumbest decision that either one of us ever made.

In Excerpt 1.2, we see that even closed questions can generate significant explanation, rather than simple yes/no responses. Thus, while closed questions may imply yes/no responses – they are not always taken up in that way. Yet, it is a wise move for novice interviewers seeking to generate in-depth descriptions of people’s perceptions and experiences to learn how to pose open, rather than closed questions. This should not be taken to mean that there is no place for closed questions in a qualitative interview. In Excerpt 1.2, a closed question is used as a follow up question to clarify an aspect of a preceding narrative that was not central to the research topic. Therefore, closed questions can also be used judiciously by qualitative interviewers to clarify their understanding of details provided by interviewees.

Open Questions

Open questions are those that provide broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer. Questions beginning ‘Tell me about ...’ invite interviewees to tell a story, and can generate detailed descriptions about topics of interest to the interviewer. These descriptions can be further explored when the interviewer follows up on what has already been said by asking further open-ended follow up questions, or ‘probes’ that incorporate the interviewee’s words. For example, I have used the following kinds of questions in interviewing to clarify topics, and elicit further description:

You mentioned that you had ____; could you tell me more about that.
You mentioned when you were doing ____, ____ happened. Could you give me a specific example of that?

¹Unless otherwise noted, all interview extracts included in the text are drawn from studies in which the author was principal investigator, and for which informed consent from interviewees was obtained.

Thinking back to that time, what was that like for you?

You mentioned earlier that you _____. Could you describe in detail what happened?

Probes frequently *use the participant's own words* to generate questions that elicit further description. This is an important point, because in everyday conversation, we regularly use 'formulations' of what others have said to us to clarify our understanding of prior interactions. There is a distinct difference between using formulations to sum up our understanding of others' talk and using the participants' words to generate questions. In the former, interviewers use their own terms to sum up what they have heard (through a process of preserving, deleting, and transforming aspects of what has already been said, see Heritage and Watson [1979] and Appendix 2 for further information). By formulating talk, interviewers are likely to introduce words into the conversation that the participants themselves may not use. Just as in everyday conversation, interviewees may take up the researcher's terms at a later point in the talk – in effect recycling what the interviewer has said rather than selecting their own words. This is avoided when interviewers use the participants' words to generate probes. In Excerpt 1.3, we see in an interview that I conducted how I formulated talk in a way that my research participant commented on.

Excerpt 1.3

IR Yeah, so the, like the identification of the vocal timbre.

IE Right.

IR Gets identified with sexual orientation.

IE Exactly.

IR Yeah.

IE Look at you. Putting that into big words, you know.

In this example, I formulated the interviewee's previous talk concerning how she had overheard comments from fifth-grade boys that boys who sang sounded gay as 'the identification of the vocal timbre gets identified with sexual orientation.' In this instance, the interviewee commented on how this formulation had transformed her comments into 'big words.' Here I elicited agreement to my formulation from the interviewee; however, another way of approaching this talk could have been to generate more detail concerning the interviewee's response. There are many probes using the participant's words that could have been used, however, perhaps the simplest probe is: tell me more about that.

When asking open ended questions, interviewers need to be sure that the topic is sufficiently specific so that the interviewee will be able to respond. If topics have not been explained, or are unclear to interviewees, they may have difficulty in answering broad open-ended questions. When interviewees and interviewers both feel comfortable talking to one another, it can take as few as four or five key interview questions with appropriate probes to generate talk of an hour or more. A possible sequence of open questions can be illustrated diagrammatically (see Figure 1.2).

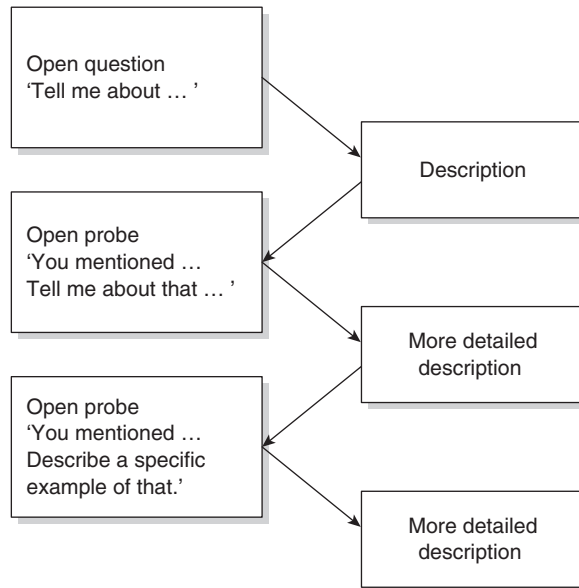


Figure 1.2 An open question and possible ways of responding

‘Structure’ and Interview Talk

Broadly speaking, research interviews for the purposes of social research range across a spectrum from structured, tightly scripted interviews in which interviewers pose closed questions worded in particular ways in specific sequences, to open-ended, loosely guided interviews that have little or no pre-planned structure in terms of what questions and topics are discussed (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Range of interviews

<i>Structured interviews</i> ↔	<i>Semi-structured interviews</i> ↔	<i>Unstructured interviews</i>
The interviewer follows scripted questions in a particular sequence	Interview protocol is used as a ‘guide’ and questions may not always be asked in the same order; the interviewer initiates questions and poses follow up ‘probes’ in response to the interviewee’s descriptions and accounts	Both interviewer and interviewee initiate questions and discuss topics
The interviewee chooses responses from a range of fixed options that are coded quantitatively; responses are provided by interviewer	The interviewee selects own terms to formulate answers to questions; responses are guided by the interviewer’s questions	The interviewee selects own terms to participate in free-flowing conversation
Asymmetrical structure	Asymmetrical structure	Possibly less asymmetrical structure

Table 1.1 (Continued)

<i>Structured interviews</i> ↔	<i>Semi-structured interviews</i> ↔	<i>Unstructured interviews</i>
Data analyzed via deductive analysis for hypothesis testing in multivariate studies ^a	Data analyzed via inductive analytic methods for descriptions and interpretations in interpretive studies	

Note: ^aAlford (1998: 38) explains that multivariate arguments attempt to measure factors that explain a 'particular social phenomenon', while 'interpretive' arguments are those that 'combine an empirical focus on the language and gestures of human interactions with a theoretical concern with their symbolic meanings and how the ongoing social order is negotiated and maintained' (1998: 42). Interpretive arguments may also 'focus on ideologies, discourses, cultural frameworks' (1998: 42).

Respondents of *structured interviews* are called upon to select their answer from those listed by the interviewer (see Foddy [1993] and Fontana and Prokos [2007] for more detail on structured interviews). Interview researchers using a standardized format of interview are advised not to deviate from the script, although conversation analytic studies of talk generated in standardized survey interviews suggest that this is technically very difficult to do, given that interviewees may not understand questions, and speakers may demonstrate a variety of other interactional difficulties in the administration of survey instruments (see, for example, Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki, 1997; Suchman and Jordan, 1990).

Another point on the spectrum of structured to unstructured interviews is that of *semi-structured interviews*. In these kinds of interviews, interviewers refer to a prepared interview guide that includes a number of questions. These questions are usually open-ended, and after posing each question to the research participant, the interviewer follows up with probes seeking further detail and description about what has been said. Although the interview guide provides the same starting point for each semi-structured interview given that it assumes a common set of discussable topics – each interview will vary according to what was said by individual interviewees, and how each interviewer used follow up questions to elicit further description. Similarly to other interview structures, interviewers using semi-structured interviews must have highly developed listening skills to be able to both ascertain whether the research topics have been addressed by the interviewee, and when and how it is appropriate to follow up on the accounts given.

Unstructured interviews, in contrast, are those in which interviewers proceed with no formal interview guides. Questions are posed in relation to both ongoing ethnographic field work (i.e. participant observation) as well as the talk that takes place in spontaneous conversations, rather than from pre-specified topics outlined in an interview guide. Nevertheless, interviewers using unstructured interviews have research topics in mind, and are likely to steer conversations towards topics of interest to them. The talk generated from unstructured interviews resembles conversation, and the interviewees are freer to ask questions of the interviewers, who may divulge personal details and opinions of their own. Like conversation, unstructured interview talk may appear to be less asymmetrical than structured and semi-structured forms of talk in which the interviewer has greater rights to ask pre-designated questions. In that conversations can