

Initial observations

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Once the data have been classed, each interview is examined without seeking to give a meaning beyond what is said, without seeking implied or hidden meanings. At this stage, the following elements need to be identified:

- **recurrences**: elements that reappear in several themes (actor, event...)
- **logical links** articulated between phenomena or facts
- **incoherencies**: contradictions between different themes or within the same fragment
- **hiatus**: distance between two abstract things, holes in logic
- **blanks**: absence of remarks about a deed, social actor, theme
- **complementarities**
- and, in a more global manner, the **congruence** of remarks (quality of being suitable and coherent with other things) is estimated.

Congruence is a term used by Carl Rogers to indicate an exact correspondence between an experience and awareness (Rogers, 1979). Here, congruence is understood as the coincidence, the match between what is stated to be the perceptions, analyses, actions and objectives of the interviewee.

These observations allow the quality of the data to be described, and to identify the difficulties that could arise in their interpretation and to reduce **misinterpretations**: errors of interpretation (of understanding), in other words, errors in the meaning given to a statement or fragment of speech. These errors of interpretation may be the result of using an interpreter for surveys conducted in a foreign language context, but they also may occur in a social context that is unfamiliar to a researcher or person in charge of the study, when cultural references are different.

At this stage, prudence, with an attitude that is temporarily and voluntarily under-interpretive (Bergman and Coxon, 2005) is required to avoid **over-interpretation**: an excess of meaning accorded to collected data by the researcher.

Software can help in this work when the **corpus of data** is large.

Using thematic classification of data software:

The decision to use computerized tools should be taken at the beginning of the survey processing. Not using computerized tools for data processing limits to a few dozen the number of interviews that can be processed manually -this strongly influences the progressive construction of the sample.¹

"A data analysis software program is a data base manager that has an interface dedicated and adapted to the needs of qualitative research. Open software allows everyone, rich and poor, to access quality programs" (Miron and Dragon, 2007).

The software programs are especially useful in the data processing stage when there is a large amount of data, but all of the interviews have to be transcribed into digital form. Some programs make it possible to progressively constitute the classification themes. "The operations in which qualitative analysis software excel are related to the segmentation of data, their classification, and the rapidity of their manipulation. However, the researcher who wishes to conduct an in-depth analysis of data must work both with the segmented data and the non-segmented data, for example, on the entire interview just as it took place. In the case of research based on interviews, it therefore is useful to regroup all of the transcriptions and to class them in such a way that one can move quickly from one interview to another and from one part of a single interview to another." (Miron and Dragon, 2007). This is the computerized equivalent of reading a manually constructed matrix horizontally and vertically.² See also (Weitzman, 2000).

Nonetheless, however efficient a program may be, software cannot replace the task of interpreting data: "There is no software program that is the best compared to others, some are only more suitable than others given the research questions and objectives. When one does not have much data, recourse to software can be avoided. However, while the advantage of the programs is that they speed up the work of the researcher, none can improve the validity of a study. The value of an analysis is determined by the value of the steps that came before... Programs are only tools that can be used in one or several steps of the research process but no program can interpret data, this task is reserved for the researcher (Bourdon, 2000)." (Wanlin, 2007). See also (Garfinkel, 1984).

"Sometimes remarks like these are heard: 'If you do not use a good qualitative analysis software program, your research may not be considered credible'. From an epistemological perspective, this remark is completely aberrant, but it reflects the construction of a concept where scientificity goes hand in hand with specialized tools, where instrumentation and scientificity is confused. The use of specialized tools in the construction of knowledge does not ensure the quality of the knowledge produced (Savoie-Zajc, 2000)." (Miron and Dragon, 2007).

¹ See the module on « Choosing the survey method and preparing the semi-structured interview ».

² See the videos on the matrix - from its elaboration to data analysis - in this training module.

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