

Verbal Protocols

Day One

11.00 – 15.30



Qualitative Methods

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Part I: Background

- Defining verbal protocols
- Research using verbal protocols
 - Item or test design and moderation
 - Test-taking processes
 - Assessment processes



Definition (1)

- Green (1997)
 - Talk aloud – speaking thoughts aloud
 - Think aloud – also includes information that is not already in a verbal form (e.g. physical movement)
 - Concurrent/retrospective
 - Mediated/non-mediated (asking for explanations of utterances or not)



Definition (2)

- Cohen (1984)
 - Think aloud – immediate verbalisation
 - Introspection – 10-20 second time delay between thought and verbalisation
 - Immediate retrospection – time delay of a minute or so e.g. complete an item and then explain how you have done it
 - Delayed retrospection – time delays of an hour or more



- It is important to note that these definitions do not 'map' tidily onto one another.
- This emphasises the importance of always defining what you mean by the terms you use (e.g. introspection, verbal protocol).



Key Parameters

- The type of data collected (thoughts only or physical movements also)
- The time between action/thought and verbalisation
- The nature of the intervention (if any)



Examples of research

- Item or test design and moderation
 - Alderson (1990a)

Looked at the question of whether test constructors/language teaching and testing experts can agree on what an item is testing.



- Test-taking processes

- Cohen (1984)

- Investigated the processes actually used by test-takers taking reading tests and considered the implications for test-taking and test construction.

- Nevo (1989)

- Compared test-takers' use of test-taking strategies in completing reading tasks in their first and foreign language.



- Test-taking processes (cont..)

- Alderson (1990b)

Explored the processes that test-takers use when doing a reading test and compared these to expert judgements of the processes involved in doing the items.

- Buck (1994)

Asked the question: what ‘knowledges, skills and abilities’ do test-takers use to do listening tasks and how does this compare to their performance on those tasks?



- Test-taking processes (cont..)
 - Wu (1998)

Investigated how test-takers used both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge to complete listening comprehension tasks. She was particularly interested in the effect of the multiple-choice format upon test-taker performance.



– Wagner (2008)

Studied the ways in which test-takers used the non-verbal cues provided by video input texts to finish listening comprehension tasks. He wanted to better understand how the visual input affected listening processes.



- **Assessment processes**

- Cohen (1994)

- Investigated the taking and rating of summary tasks

- Cushing Weigle (1994)

- Looked at the effect of rater-training on rating processes.

- Milanovic & Saville (1994)

- Investigated the effect of raters' strategies on rater consistency.



- **Assessment processes (cont...)**

- Orr (2002)

Investigated speaking raters' interpretation of the assessment criteria and the evidence in test-takers' performances that they attended to.

- Lumley (2002)

Looked at how writing raters negotiate their understanding of the rating scale and the test script to arrive at a judgement of the performance.



- It is important to note that research has been done primarily in the areas of reading and writing.
- Relatively little research has looked at listening processes.
- The little published work using verbal protocols in speaking has focused on the assessment process.



Part II: Collecting Data

- Training your respondents
- Examples of practice opportunities
- Practical Task



Training your respondents

- It is important to give your respondents an opportunity to practice giving a verbal report.
- This gives you the opportunity to give them feedback about the verbal report they are providing e.g. prompt them for more details etc.



Practice opportunities

- Examples:
 - Draw your family tree
 - Write a short note in which you describe to a visitor how to get to your home.



Task

- Sort CEFR descriptors
- Work in pairs
- Take turns as informant and mediator



Part III: Developing a framework for analysis

- Principles of developing a framework for qualitative data analysis
 - Nature and format of the data
 - Inductive vs deductive processes
 - Developing and refining codes
 - Record-keeping
 - Ethical considerations
- Practical task



Steps prior to the development of an analytical framework

- Collecting the data
 - Participants
 - Strategy and instruments for data collection
- Transcription of data
 - Detail of transcription scheme



The process of qualitative data analysis

- Primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns among those categories
- Most categories and patterns emerge from the data, they are not imposed on the data (see grounded theory)
- Systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting to provide explanation of the phenomenon of interest



Inductive v. deductive analysis

- Inductive analysis: based on raw data, leads to a hypothesis and eventually, generalization
- Deductive analysis: based on existing theory, a valid conclusion can be deduced from general to the particular
- Combination of both analyses
- No matter which analysis is chosen, researchers go through similar processes



Inductive analysis is not linear

- Typical steps involve
 - Establish an initial understanding of data
 - Create initial, unrefined set of categories
 - Move to finer levels of analysis
 - Return to initial categories to double-check
- Potential issue: making sense of the data without reference to existing theory



Predetermined categories

- Deductive coding is usually based on predetermined categories
- Possible sources
 - Research questions
 - Research instrument
 - Personal experience
 - Relevant literature
- Potential issue: imposing categories on the data



Coding

- The segmenting of data into categories and topics
- Inductive and/or deductive approaches
- Avoid duplication
- Try out preliminary coding scheme
- Refine coding scheme
- Pattern-seeking



Pattern seeking

- Examine relationships among categories in as many ways as possible
- Topics → Categories → Patterns
- Triangulation: examine recurrence of pattern
- Negative evidence that refutes the pattern
- Constructing visual representations of patterns



Data management

- Data filing system: identify and retrieve field notes and transcripts
 - Manual data management
 - cut-and-file technique
 - file card technique
 - Computer programs
 - general software programs
 - specialized qualitative analysis software programs
- Check for reliability of coding



Narrative structure

- Audience
- Context and procedures
- Quotations of participants' language
- Reference to the literature
- Visual representation



Ethical issues

- Participants' understanding of the research aims
- Participants' consent to use the data they provide
- Protection of participants' identity and personal information
- Participants' access to the data



Task

RQ1:	Do the participants interpret key words in the descriptors in the same way?
RQ2:	When sorting descriptors into the six CEFR levels, is the wording of the descriptors the main factor influencing the participants' decisions?

