Unit 24

Field Research – I

Contents

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after reading Unit 24, you will be able to

- Trace the history of field research
- Discuss the meaning of the term "ethnography"
- Select theme of the research and design its plan
- Learn the ways to enter the field and find those willing to and capable of giving information
- Practice the art of observation as a participant.

24.1 Introduction

In this unit, we are concerned with the subject of field research and how it is carried out. Research carried out through fieldwork has a specific connotation in the social sciences. By fieldwork is meant interacting with people in their natural habitats, observing them and collecting socially relevant facts about their lives over a lengthy period of time.

This notion of fieldwork should be distinguished from the work of journalists, who also go to the field (in situ) to collect information and prepare news reports. Fieldwork is also different from the work that market organisations carry out, sending their investigators to collect data on the responses of users (and prospective buyers) of particular products or brands. By comparison to this, fieldwork is an intensive data collection on a given subject over a prolonged period of time by staying with the members of a community (may be a village, urban slum, or an association etc.).

24.2 History of Field Research

The classical meaning of fieldwork has been derived from the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (1922a). He laid the foundation of the method of participant observation for anthropological fieldwork. Prior to the early 1900s, most ethnographic information was collected by what Malinowski

called the amateurs (missionaries, colonial administrators, and travellers) and survey work of sorts had been carried out measuring skulls and describing physical traits (O'Reilly 2005: 7).

Malinowski maintained that an ethnographer© needed to carry out fieldwork for not less than one year in a given community by staying there, learning their language and recording the behaviour of people. In this context, the notion of fieldwork meant going "out there", or, in the words of John Beattie (1964), to study the "other culture". Within the Western tradition, an anthropologist was required to take up the study of another society, the ways of which were unfamiliar to her or him, observing, describing, and analysing it in the form of a monograph©. This was primarily a response to the fact that small-scale, tribal cultures were fast disappearing and their cultures, customs and practices were urgently required to be recorded. Fieldwork thus emerged as a "scientific method" for collecting primary information from people.

The importance of fieldwork was also realised in the early twentieth century when sociologists at Chicago University started working through what was then called the "case study method". This method also necessitated the collection of extensive case studies from smaller communities, like urban slums within large cities like Chicago and New York. Through this method, the sociologists posed a major challenge to the then influential "scientific statistical method". The Chicago sociologists not only studied face-to-face interactions in everyday settings, they also produced narratives of the social world, thus yielding the method of life history and the use of documents, such as diaries and letters. The mention of British and American traditions of field research does not imply that there are no other important traditions with their own styles of generating data from the field. For example, the German tradition of field research includes the collection of museum specimens along with other information and uses the field material to build regional hypotheses. The French tradition is much influenced by Durkheimian sociology, while the Dutch tradition focuses on the academic training of administrators in anthropology, language and literature. Madge (1963), Easthope (1974) and Wax (1971) have discussed the development of field methods in sociology.

Malinowski's (1922) emphasis on understanding the "native point of view" through intensive fieldwork required that the anthropologist collected data on the *imponderabilia*© *of actual life and of typical behaviour*, i.e., every aspect of culture in order to have a full understanding of how a culture was organised and how it functioned. In addition to Malinowski, Franz Boas (1920) also popularised fieldwork as an important part of the training of anthropologists. Boas's influence was tremendous as he insisted on the collection of data from "primitive societies", not only in terms of their social and cultural aspects, but also physical, linguistic, psychological and geographical dimensions. Therefore, from the early twentieth century, fieldwork became an essential aspect

of social research, and every researcher of the social world was expected to be initiated into it.

The focus on studying a single community through the use of participant observation came to be characterised as ethnographic work. The term "ethnography" owes its importance to the notion of observation and description of social behaviour in a single community. In India most anthropologists focused on the village for intensive study. For instance, Srinivas's (1976) study of Rampura is a good example of field based research work.

Over time, the definition and character of fieldwork has undergone tremendous change keeping in line with the changing socio-political context and the theoretical advances in the field. The idea of field has moved away from studying another culture to studying one's own culture, from a very small-scale unit to a larger social unit. Though the notion of "going to the field" is still popular among social scientists, it does not evoke the image of a bounded community. Today, we find social scientists not only studying villages, castes, tribes, but also co-operatives, NGOs, cinema, markets, the homeless, children and even literature. Social scientists today carry out multi-sited field research, producing monographs that are sensitive to contesting perspectives on reality (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

24.3 Ethnography

The word 'ethnography' is used to refer to 'empirical accounts of the culture and social organisation of particular human populations' (Ellen 1984: 7). Ethnography is, on the other hand, understood as a way of doing research, which studies people according to certain procedures and rules in their natural settings or fields to capture the social meanings of their everyday life. This indicates the intensive, field-based and qualitative research of human groups through "participant observation". Ethnography may also refer to an academic discipline that involves the comparative study of ethnic groups. Often a distinction is made between micro and macro ethnography (sometimes referred to as general ethnography). See Box 24.1 on differences between macro and micro ethnography.

Box 24.1 Differences between Macro and Micro Ethnography

Macro ethnography attempts to describe the entire way of life of a group in contrast to micro ethnography that focuses on particular aspects at particular points in the larger setting, group or institution. Typically these points are selected as they represent in some manner salient elements in the lives of participants and in turn, in the life of the larger group.

A second fundamental difference between the two is that the former analytically focuses more upon the face-to-face interactions of the members of the group or institution under investigation. Despite these differences they both share the overarching concern for everyday community life from the perspectives of participants (Berg 2001: 136). Often both complement each other.

O'Reilly (2005: 3) recommends a minimum definition of ethnography in the following words.

> It is an iterative-inductive research© that evolves through the study. It draws on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives. The field worker watches what happens, listens to what is said, asks questions, and produces a richly written account. This accounts the irreducibility of human experience, acknowledging the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role. Ethnography views humans as part-object and part-subject.

Despite the existence of a plural methodological position on the representation of the field and its analysis, the methods of fieldwork have not changed much. In other words there are certain standard methods and techniques of carrying out fieldwork. Many researchers recommend maintaining a value-neutral position, neither imposing their own views nor taking any stand on social or political issues. However, a number of social researchers have argued against this façade of value neutrality. Feminists have worked out a research orientation comfortable to both the researcher and the subjects (see Box 24.4). The researchers listen more and talk less. The orientation has humanised the research process, insisting that the researchers become both involved with their subjects and be reflexive about their thoughts.

Box 24.2 Accessing Domains of Feminist Discourse

Ursula Sharma (1981: 37) says,

> In many areas male and female experiences do not diverge and there is no specifically male/ female model.

But also a little further she contends

> So it is not just sensitivity to the presence of women, which is required of the ethnographer, but also sensitivity to the difference between different kinds of situations, and the correspondingly different ideas and experiences which will be expressed within them.

Shirley Ardener (1984) adds to the above and notes

> This accords with the stress, which has been laid on the significance of identifying the relevant universe or domain of discourse for an understanding of "muting".

24.4 Theme Selection

Although there is a lot of flexibility in the ethnographic process, unlike the survey, field research still needs to be planned, co-ordinated and systematised. Prior to visiting the field, the researcher carefully prepares a research design, outlining the issues involved, such as the theme of the research, the questions to be asked, data collection techniques to be used, the use of triangulation, the techniques of data analysis and the ethical practices to be taken care of.

The popular notion in the social sciences has been that field research should not be preceded by well-formulated hypotheses, as the field itself

was expected to throw up questions. The anthropologists were expected to start their fieldwork *tabula rasa*©, like a blank slate, for s/he did not want to be ensnared by any prejudices, stereotypes and preferences. However, the newer understanding suggests that the research design is critical for ethnographers as it guides the plan of the project. This design is made to allow flexibility and impromptu decision-making in the field, i.e., it permits unanticipated changes in the plan as the problem arises.

A piece of research is seldom undertaken with a neutral reason. The selection of a research topic typically derives from some researcher-oriented position. Furthermore, all wo/men are the products of social groups, where values, moral attitudes and beliefs orient people in a particular manner.

The use of personal biography or deep familiarity with a subject has become more common and accepted by ethnographers. Maintaining the façade of neutrality prevents a researcher from ever examining her/ his own cultural assumptions or personal experiences, while subjective disclosures by researchers allows the reader to better understand why a research area has been selected, how it was studied, and by whom. For example, if a nurse studies cancer patients and explains that her/ his selection of this topic resulted after one of his family members contracted the disease, this does not diminish the quality of the research. It does, however, offer a keener insight about who is doing the research and why. It will provide the reader with a greater understanding about why certain types of questions were investigated, while others were not. Today many researchers choose to work on problems relating to development issues, gender, environment and human rights, which reflect instrumental concerns in terms of the availability of funds and job possibilities.

Presenting subjective disclosures or giving voice to the researcher provides insights into the world of research. Everyday realities are heavily influenced by human feelings and presentation of these feelings is legitimate.

Besides the personal or theoretical interest in the topic, the feasibility of field research should also be considered. For instance, in north-eastern states of India, field research may not be easy owing to insurgency. Similarly, in some districts of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, it may be difficult to carry out fieldwork because of the rise of the Naxalite movement.

Reflection and Action 24.1

Read chapter 7 on Ethnography and Product by Gerald D. Berreman (2004: 157-190) in V. K. Srivastava's edited book, *Methodology and Fieldwork*. Write a short note on "Ethnographers' Craft" and on the basis of your reading and note, make a tentative selection of a theme of your research. Give reasons for selecting the theme and explain both its theoretical and practical aspects in about 500 words.

24.5 Designing Research

Brewer (2000: 58) discusses the general plan for ethnographic research design outlining the major features of the topic, including the aims and objectives of research (see Box 24.2).

Box 24.3 General Plan for Ethnographic Research Design

- The choice of research site/field and the forms of sampling employed to select the field and the informants.
- The resources available for research including money and time.
- The sampling of time and events to be experienced in the field, i.e., what events the ethnographer wants to cover and a general sense of time management.
- Methods/techniques of data collection to be used in the field.
- Entering the field through whom, how negotiating rapport and trust.
- Nature of likely adoption of roles, depending on one's age, gender, status and class.
- Forms of analysis to be used specially for both quantitative and qualitative details.
- Withdrawal from the field and the forms of dissemination that will be used to report the results.

Ethnographic research is not a particular method of data collection, but a style of research, that is, distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the meanings and activities of people in a given field (or setting) and an approach which involves close association with, often participation in, this setting (Brewer 2000: 59). Field researchers, to begin with a general notion of the problems or issues that interest them, have a sense for the settings that will be relevant for examining these problems or issues. Some formulate tentative hypotheses, while research questions are rarely pre-formulated in great detail. Research questions and theoretical issues emerge as the setting is explored. Thus, field setting must be designated and access to the setting obtained. There arises the question of gaining entry into the research setting. The decision has to be made whether to enter the field openly as researchers or to conduct research covertly without revealing the actual purpose of being in the setting. The ethics of covert research are continually debated among field researchers (Denzin 1970 and 1978). Access to research settings also relate to issues of "reactive" effects, i.e. researchers' presence leading to changes in the settings.

This form of social research uses several methods of data collection such as participant observation, in depth interviewing, the use of personal documents and discourse analysis. Since this research combines many methods, it employs triangulation, a term coined by Denzin (1970). Researchers must decide on the roles they will occupy in the setting - complete observer, observer as participants, participant as observer, or complete participant. Data collection involves carefully watching, listening and recording the details of everyday activity in the setting under study. Further, the process would involve translating these observations into systematically organised data.

NGOs and development agencies have popularised a variant of fieldwork, which owes much to the classical notion of studying people in their natural setting and taking the people's point of view. Their fieldwork practices, however, differ considerably in methodology as well as in strategies. Fieldwork carried out by NGO workers often is project-driven, to be completed in a short span of time. They, therefore, have devised short cut, quick data collection techniques, ignoring the nuanced detailed meanings of ordinary activities of people. Here the concern is more with data collection of a special kind and its description. This kind of exercise has been termed by various concepts like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), etc. We will return to a discussion of these techniques later in the unit. An important point which needs to be noted here is that these strategies are shaped and suited for certain specific goals and not driven in search of knowledge as ethnography aims at.

24.6 Gaining Entry in the Field

The researcher has to enter the field carefully. Entering the field is often dependent on factors like the nature of the field and the social background of the researcher. In earlier days, anthropologists/ sociologists (as white men and women) entered tribal colonies as masters, administrators, missionaries or travellers. In developing countries like India the field researcher is often a middle class urban educated person. Race, caste, ethnicity, age and gender are other important factors in determining the course of successful entry into the field. Leela Dube (1975) describes how in three different phases of fieldwork in her career, gender, marital status, age and social status were crucial in making a rapport with the respondents.

Mistakes in entry may endanger a fieldworker's success. Proper entry facilitates rapport. Important persons located at entry points to the field are called "gatekeepers". To gain entry one has to make use of formal and informal contacts. Previous acquaintances and introductory letters from research institutions or sponsoring agencies are helpful in gaining entry. The reputation of sponsors and support of gatekeepers helps in establishing authenticity. On the other hand, the researcher must keep in mind that one's behaviour affects one's reputation. Entering the field by not seeking permission from gatekeepers can cause problems for researchers. Also as a researcher enters a field through gatekeepers, s/he leaves it after informing them.

In studying the whole community, the most open points of entry are among those who share one's social class background. But not all contacts at a given level are of equal value. At an early stage, the researcher tries to identify those in leadership positions in the hope that they will provide useful contacts and even informal sponsorship. After gaining the

acceptance of some key people, the researcher then attempts to participate in ways that establish an acceptable personal identity, making it possible to move beyond the limits of the initial sponsorship.

In the early stages of the project, when the researcher is still consolidating a social base, it is not advisable to formalise one's methodology. When one is successful in establishing a social base one can get information without even asking questions. The first contact with potential participants needs to set the right tone by taking away fears, inspiring the potential participants with trust and making them interested in taking part in the research project. If one establishes contact through one's kith and kin, it is easier to get accepted. However, to associate oneself with a particular family might restrict one's freedom of movement.

The first thing people do is to locate the researcher in a particular position. The place where one is located must be acceptable to those who want to be studied. For example, one cannot identify with high caste or low caste only. One has to divide equally to have a comprehensive study of the situation. But at the same time it is impossible to claim to know everyone on an equal footing. One makes a good impression on people and wins their acceptance when one is honest and truthful about one's family background when local people enquire about it. A researcher takes on the role of a friendly stranger in the field. On entering the field, one ought to feel at ease and make others feel at home. The first day in the field is important as the researcher tells the people about her/ himself and what brings her/ him in their midst. Great care is taken not to evoke apprehensions in the people's minds. A researcher establishes contact with individuals in the field and starts becoming familiar with them. S/he has to avoid taking sides, causing offence to anybody, or interfering with their way of life. A researcher is neither a revolutionary nor a missionary. S/he observes them without trying to reform or convert them and participates with a view to observing, experiencing, and analysing a life different from her/ his life.

In order to perform one's role well a researcher has to establish good rapport with the people one is studying. To establish rapport one may reside with the subjects and familiarise oneself with the surroundings. It is essential to establish one's bonafides and reputation as a good person. A researcher's acceptance as such would facilitate unguarded natural responses. For gaining insights, the observer develops empathy with her/ his subjects. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in the other's position and imaginatively experience their thoughts and actions. A researcher is not indiscreet, does not carry tales from one person to another and does not let her/ his subject(s) feel threatened. Without competing with them for status and interacting with them wherever and whenever available, a researcher is not in a hurry and works out personal equations with some persons and through them with others. For this purpose one has to develop skills in establishing contact with the people. A researcher enjoys meeting people and talking to them and

does not feel irritated or annoyed with them. Handling situations tactfully and gathering information without becoming controversial in the field, a researcher does not accept all their statements at face value and corroborates the same with others, checks them up, and draws one's own conclusions.

Even though a researcher establishes close relations with those who are friendly, too much of familiarity and intimacy is avoided since that impedes objectivity. A researcher is aware of one's own limits and withdraws from relations before they become embarrassing. Initially concentrating on one or two key informants a researcher gradually approaches others. A few people may wish to keep themselves away from the researcher while s/he may also have to keep his distance from some in order to establish rapport with others. Those who are reticent initially may not be so later.

24.7 Key Informants

Not all contacts are of equal value. At an early stage, the researcher tries to identify those in leadership positions in the hope that they will provide useful contacts and even informal sponsorship. To handle initial relationships, one locates a guide or a key informant. Guides are indigenous persons found among the group and in the setting to be studied. They need to be convinced that the ethnographers are the ones they claim to be and that the study is worthwhile. The worth of the study must be understood and be meaningful to the guides and their group. The key informant must be convinced that no harm will befall them or other members of the group as a result of the researcher's presence. The guide (or key respondent) can reassure others in the community that the researchers are safe to have around.

One is advised not to take the leader of the organisation or community as the key informant, for the leader may be misinformed or not aware of certain things happening among the commoners. Sometimes persons who are willing to be guides or informants turn out to be restricted to their groups. Some may dissent from the group or may be disliked by others; the field workers are advised not to choose such persons to be their guides or key informants. Ideally, the chosen guides or key informants should be well trusted and liked by others in the group. Consequently the "snowballing"● of guides and informants may assist ethnographers in their manoeuvrability while in the field. Snowballing refers to using people whom the original informant introduces as persons who can also vouch for the legitimacy and safety of the researcher. The larger the ethnographers' network of reliable guides and informants, the greater their access and ability to gain further co-operation. Eventually, the need for specific guides decreases as the network of respondents grows in size and the researchers are able to begin casual acquaintanceship by virtue of their generally accepted presence on the scene.

Reflection and Action 24.2

Continuing with the theme you selected in Reflection and Action 24.1, after reading sections 24.5 to 24.7, prepare a research design based on the theme of your research and decide how you would like to gain an entry in the field and approach the people there with a view to identifying key informants. Write a short note and include the following details in it.

*Design of my research
*How I will gain an entry in the field
*How I will identify key informants

24. 8 Participant Observation

Everyday seeing has to be distinguished from observation; the latter being more focused with a purpose and is done to understand the phenomena. Social research gives a special place to observation as it is considered to be one of the fundamental tools to study people's behaviour, exemplified very well in its origin in classical British social anthropology and Chicago School in sociology. Positivist tradition places a good deal of importance in this method of data collection as it is assumed that social behaviour is observable and amenable to sensory perception. (The other method through which researchers collect data is interview.)

Observation allows the researcher to understand people and their behaviour through direct focused non-verbal observing in their natural settings, whereas in an interview the focus moves to verbal communication. Observation is used as one of the primary techniques of data collection in sociological fieldwork, which can be both intrusive, i.e., as a participant (see Box 24.3), and non-intrusive, i.e,. as a non-participant. Those researchers whose subject of enquiry does not necessarily involve mixing up with people employ the non-participant type of observation. For instance, a researcher can observe student-teacher interaction over a period of time without interfering in this type of interaction. The prerequisite of such an observation is working with an observation schedule where a list of topics is mentioned guiding the researcher to specifically observe certain types of behaviour. Non-participant observation has been found to be more useful in complex social situations. Another term, quasi-participant observation, is also used in literature to imply partial situational participation of the observer in the social life of people.

Box 24.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation entails data gathering through participation in the daily life of informants in their natural settings. A social researcher watches, observes and talks to people in order to understand their interpretations, social meanings and activities. The classical notion behind such practices is to discover the gap between what people think, do and say. The researcher adds to this the dimension of her/ his personal experiences of sharing the everyday life of those under study.

The method of participant observation, as enunciated by Malinowski,

required the researcher to detach oneself from the people and interpret their behaviour. Today, however, subjectivist positions, of which Clifford Geertz is the pioneer, maintain that the main instrument of data collection in participant observation is the researcher (see Burgess 1982: 45). Malinowski saw observation as separated from description, while Geertz insisted on interpretative understanding as the link between observation and description. Malinowski, representing the positivist tradition emphasised the need to have a detached view of things and of the social life of natives, whereas for Geertz (1973a, 1988), the ethnographic exercise is an exercise in "thick description" trying to interpret meanings in terms of what people understand, think about and how they describe their behaviour. Here the understanding is essentially intersubjective as the observer is immersed in the social life and participates in actual terms.

The ethnographer is required to develop certain special personal qualities to maintain a balance between the insider and the outsider. Burgess (1982: 45) identifies other "personal abilities" to be able to share in the lives and activities of other people, to learn their language and meanings, to remember action and speech, to interact with the range of individuals in different social situations.

Brewer (2000: 60) writes that there are two ways in which the social sciences use participant observation to understand the world as it is seen by acting within it, and to reveal the taken for granted common sense nature of that everyday world itself. The former is the traditional usage in the social sciences, where social groups or specific fields are studied from inside. However, the development in the 1960s of ethnomethodology in sociology and some new forms of interactionism led to an interest in the common sense methods and procedures by which routine activities are accomplished. Such researchers are among many things studying the organisation of conversation decision making in an organisational setting, even walking and sleeping.

In some cases the participant observes those fields of which s/he is already a part. The requirements and problems of using participant observation as a method are very different from those for whom the settings are unfamiliar as in the traditional case. Sometimes an existent role is utilised to explore the dimensions of a new setting/ field in which the role naturally locates the observer. A good example is Cohen and Taylor's (1978) use of their role as part-time teachers to study prisoners and prison life. The strategy of observation in most roles can be covert or overt and the researcher needs to have special skills in order to be successful. In new roles, for instance, the observer has to win the confidence of people, resocialise into the practices and values of the group and spend a long time in the field to have a full experience of the activities and events. If the role is covert, the observer should be dedicated, tenacious and maintain the pretence of an insider. Depending

upon the field situation, the researcher often has to make a decision about the nature of participation required. Situations condition whether or not to participate, and to what extent. In such contexts, researchers, instead of getting totally absorbed in the field situation, choose to selectively participate. Such actions have been construed as quasi-participation in social science fieldwork. Participant observation involves not only observation but the researcher uses triangulation, i.e. using a number of techniques like observation, genealogies, interviews, questionnaires, schedules, life histories, case studies, oral histories, and today even participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and rapid rural appraisal (RRA) to collect both primary and secondary sources from the field. Although relying more on qualitative research, quantitative details are also used to substantiate arguments and construct case studies.

Participant observation therefore is an arduous and tough process of data gathering and cannot be replaced by smash and grab ethnographies. At the heart of this method is involvement and detachment. On the positive side, the access to social meaning, shared beliefs and values and nuances of everyday activity that one gets through this method, is difficult to get through any other technique. The scope and limits of participant observation are however constrained by the physical limits of the role and location of the researchers. Since this method is most useful in a micro setting the generalisations arrived at reflect a partial picture. The reflexive researchers recognise the value of their views as significant specially in articulating the linkages between the micro and the macro.

Reflection and Action 24.3

Read section 24.8 of the Unit and play the role of participant observer for a period of one month only at your Study Centre in order to generate information on the level of interaction between IGNOU students and the Centre. Based on your experience as a participant observer, write an essay of five hundred words on "the art of participant observation". Exchange your essay with the essays of other MSO 002 learners at your Study Centre and discuss each other's experience of participant observation as a means of gathering information for understanding the social reality around you.

24.9 Conclusion

Unit 24 has introduced you to the vast theme of field research, which is the mainstay of generating new information about the social world that sociologists and anthropologists try to understand and explain. It has traced, in brief the history of field research and discussed the subject of ethnography. Further, it has elaborated on the issues of selecting the research theme, designing the research plan and gaining entry to the field. Talking about the main sources of deriving information in the field, Unit 24 has explained what it is to be a participant observer and subsequent use of this experience at the time of analysing one's field data.

This detailed introduction to field research has paved the way for a discussion of field research methods in Unit 25 to which we will now turn.

Further Reading

Ellen, R. F. 1984. *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*. Academic Press: London (chapters 3 and 4, pp.13-62)

Srivastava, V. K. 2004. *Methodology and Fieldwork*. Oxford University Press: Oxford (Introduction pp.1-50 and pp. 149-156)

Unit 25

Field Research – II

Contents

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after reading Unit 25, you would be able to

- Discuss the field methods described in Unit 25
- Subsequently select and use some of them in your mini research project.

25.1 Introduction

Unit 25 deals with some of the techniques, and methods, which qualitative researchers use in their pursuit of data collection. Undoubtedly, field research has always been conducted as a matter of personal style. Clammer (1984: 70) had once pointed out that many Indian anthropologists widely practiced the drawing up of inventories of customs in response to lists of queries of the kind given in Notes and Queries but such encyclopaedism has now almost universally disappeared and Clammer (1984: 69) mentioned four basic sources to styles in the practice of field-based research, namely,

- The individual and idiosyncratic characteristics of individual fieldworker
- Ideological and philosophical assumptions
- The general conception of method
- The nature of problem being studied

You will not find all researchers using all the methods and techniques discussed in Unit 25. Depending on the source(s) of the personal style, a particular researcher may or may not use a method or technique. It is a good idea for you to get familiar with most common methods and techniques of qualitative research. With this notion in mind, we are going to discuss such methods and techniques as genealogy, interview, case study, life history, oral history and PRA/ RRA techniques. We begin the discussion with genealogical method.

25.2 Genealogy

One specialised method to study kinship, family and marriage is by the use of genealogies, which are prepared using the techniques of observation and interview.

W. H. R. Rivers (1900) showed the importance of genealogy in social and cultural studies and delineated the procedure of drawing up genealogical data (see Box 25.1 on the early realisation of the importance of genealogical method in social research). Malinowski (1922:14-15) defined genealogy as a "synoptic chart of a number of connected relations of kinship". The investigator traces the genealogical chart of the respondent (called ego) by making enquiries from him. However he may not place all his relatives in the right birth order or his memory of them may be faulty. Thus the fieldworker completes the genealogy seeking information from other respondents. The genealogical chart, however, may not be complete because people may not remember their ancestors, their names and other details about them beyond a certain number of generations. The problem of remembering is bound to multiply in societies where descent is traced from both sides.

Box 25.1 Relevance of Genealogical Method for Social Research

In 1904 Haddon suggested that a new approach to field research should involve:

Exhaustive studies of limited groups of people, tracing all the ramifications of their genealogies in the comprehensive method adopted by Dr Rivers for the Torres Straits Islanders and for the Todas (1905: 478).

Rivers' work among the Toda (1901-1902, published 1906) had pioneered this approach and his example was followed by C. G. and B. Z. Seligman among the Vedda (1907-1908, published 1911) and A. R. [Radcliffe-] Brown in the Andamans (1906-1908, published 1922).

The above excerpt is a quotation from Urry's article on *A History of Field Methods* (1984: 47) and it shows a clear bias to intensive fieldwork in single communities.

Not only do fieldworkers prepare genealogies but also the people whose charts they prepare may also keep an account of their kin and affinal relatives. The kinship chart therefore is an analytical tool as well as an ensemble of rules according to which the actors are expected to behave (Barnes 1947). In societies where writing technology has made inroads, kinship charts that hitherto existed as part of the oral tradition are now being written down (Srivastava 2004: 32). Some societies have specialised groups of genealogists who derive their livelihood by charging their clients for keeping their kinship and marriage records.

The facts of kinship and marriage that are of relevance to the researcher may not hold the same importance for the people, thus the charts that people prepare for their purposes are different from those that fieldworkers prepare after sustained interviewing and observation. According to Fortes (1949), the kinship chart that the actors prepare

may be called pedigree whilst the one the fieldworker prepares as part of his data depending upon his research interests may be known as genealogy. Genealogical data are used for a variety of purposes apart from that of studies of kinship. Demographers© use genealogical statements. Migratory histories of peoples can also be studied through this method. Genealogy also facilitates the process of rapport establishment with people.

Reflection and Action 25.1

Read Unit of ESO 12 of IGNOU's B. A. Sociology programme to learn how to make genealogical diagrams. Then, prepare a genealogical chart of your own family with a generation depth of at least three generations before you and a horizontal spread of all relationships arising out of marriages. In preparing the chart, note the name, sex, occupation and dwelling place of the person whose details you are noting down. Next, find out as accurately as possible when and where the person was born and where the person has lived. Note the names of each of the person's spouses, whether or not the marriage is still alive, and record in each case where the marriage began and where and when it ended if it is not still extant. Note down the spouse's date and place of birth and where the spouse lives now, or date and place of spouse's death. Information on births, marriages and deaths is likely to be more precise. Distinguish between social filiation at birth from filiation acquired by adoption or fosterage. The very process of making this chart is going to provide you a learning experience. After completing the chart you may study it in order to find out about the pattern of territorial spread of your family, its occupational pattern and types of marital unions, average age at marriage, the pattern of male and female longevity and so on. It would be interesting for you to compare your chart and findings on its basis with similar documents prepared by fellow learners of MSO 002 at your Study Centre.

25.3 Interview, its Types and Process

Interview is usually defined as a conversation with the purpose of gathering information. There is, however, a difference between "everyday conversation" and "interview", the latter being an unequal situation in which usually the researcher decides and controls the talk either directly or indirectly (Srivastava 2004: 29). Interview is based on the assumption that the respondent's verbal descriptions are a reliable indicator of behaviour, meanings, attitudes and feelings and that the stimuli (the questions) are a reliable indicator of the subject of the study. It is a two-way process in which both the interviewer and the respondent have a mutual view of each other, engage in an interactive situation, communicate ideas and an incipient relationship emerges between the two. Interview is an effective method of collecting information for certain types of assumptions, particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events. In such situations, interviewing provides a useful means of access. Unlike observation, it is less time consuming and one can collect data pertaining to intangible things. Interview is also a flexible tool that can be used to gather additional information on the spot that has not been

predetermined. One can catch lies and contradictions easily by watching gestures and cues. Taking interviews is preceded by preparing a list of questions on the topics relating to the research problem. This list is known as interview guide. It is used as a ready reference by the interviewer to cover as many issues as possible in a limited period of time.

It is fine to have a ready reckoner with you for an interview but this may in some ways restrict the flow of information. For this reason many researchers like to use different types of interview schedules. We may discuss types of interview on the basis of a number of criteria (see Box 25.2 on criteria of types of interview).

Box 25.2 Criteria of Types of Interview

The first criterion is the degree of pre-determination in the questions asked (this includes formal questionnaires through a standard agenda and checklists to questions cropping up in the middle of interview.)

A second criterion is the degree of directiveness (this includes the direction of questions from neutral to the most specific questions on particular subjects.)

The third criterion is linked to the second. It is the degree of openness or closedness of questions asked (for example, "How are you?" versus "Are you not going to school today?")

The fourth criterion is the length of interview (that is a brief encounter versus in-depth inquiry)

A fifth criterion is of prior arrangement (fixing an interview by appointment)

A sixth criterion is the interview setting (group versus two persons, subject's residence, ethnographer's house, neutral location, and so on)

The above excerpt is based on Kemp and Ellen (1984: 231).

After looking at different criteria, let us now discuss types of interview.

Types of interview

Interviews are generally classified into three types, namely,

- Structured interview
- Unstructured interview
- Semi-structured interview

We will now deal in some detail with each type of interview.

Structured interview

This type of interview uses a formally structured schedule of interview questions. The rationale is to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so that responses to the questions ideally are comparable. They are designed to elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subject's thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about certain issues depending on the study.

Unstructured interview

There is no formal question schedule in this type of interview. Interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what the

necessary questions are. They also assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like-worded questions. The interviewers must develop, adapt and generate questions and follow up probes appropriate to the given situation and the central purpose of the investigation. Unstructured interviews allow researchers to gain additional information about various phenomena they observe by asking questions.

Semi-structured interview

This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions or only predetermined topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order but the interviewers are allowed the freedom to digress to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardised questions.

To determine which type of interview format to use you must consider the kind of questions you want to ask and the sort of answers you expect to receive. The nature of the question (direct or indirect, open or close ended, long or short) will depend on the nature of the study.

Interview process

It is also relevant to understand about the interview process. Interviews frequently begin with "open ended" questions (such as demographic questions, general questions) that may be essential for developing rapport between interviewers and subjects. Questions concerning the central focus of the study may be placed together or scattered throughout the schedule. Extra questions, i.e. those questions equivalent to certain essential ones but worded slightly differently, are asked in order to check the reliability of responses. Probing questions provide a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects. Probes frequently ask subjects to elaborate on what they have already answered in response to a given question.

The investigator must convince the subjects about the importance of the survey. One must convince subjects what they have to say is important. A list of questions may help the flow of interview and come in handy when conversations grind to a halt. One should cultivate appropriate conversation styles, sitting positions and eye movements. During the interview if conversation touches the low ebb, it should be rekindled by indicating that you know something; you offer opinion or provide a calculatedly wrong assertion so that the respondent is motivated to air his views and opinions. In case of a stagnating conversation, you should push with an appropriate probe. Probing is an art which has to be cultivated. One should not interrupt the respondent accidentally, but if it must be done it should be done gracefully. Questions should be clarified by the use of non-verbal stimuli such as artefacts, show cards, pictures or even photographs. A certain focus is required to control the situation in all stages of the interview. See Box 25.3 for some tips that can help during the interview:

Box 25.3 Helpful Tips For Conducting an Interview

- Begin an interview with small talk to establish a rapport.
- Be dressed appropriately and present a natural front.
- Interview in a comfortable place.
- Be aware, appreciative, respectful and cordial to the respondent.
- Do not be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.
- Never forget the purpose of your interview.

In many interview situations, one-to-one interviewing is often not possible especially in villages, in teashops or slums where interactions are held in public view. Often the researcher finds the individual interviewing turning into a group interview where others surround the two, interject and supplement answers. Group interviews are advantageous especially if one is seeking public information, for instance on water crisis or sanitation in a slum, etc.

25.4 Feminist and Postmodernist Perspectives on Interviewing

We are here adding two different perspectives on interviewing for your use as and when you may find either or both useful for your mini research project.

The feminist perspective on interviewing

Feminist methodology rejects the assumption that maintaining a strict separation between the researcher and the researched produces a more valid, objective account. One way in which feminists avoid treating their subjects as mere objects of knowledge is to allow the respondent to talk back to the investigator. It aims at building more from the sharing between the researcher and his respondents. In order to do this the researchers need to interview in ways that allow the exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of women's experiences. Ann Oakley's (1981) feminist paradigm for interviewing seeks to minimise objectification of the subject as data by viewing the interview as an interactional exchange. In her framework, answering the questions of interviewees personalises and humanises the researcher and places the interaction on a more equal footing. The meaning of the interview to both the interviewer and the interviewee and the quality of interaction between the two participants are all salient issues when a feminist interviews women. Oakley also points out that interactive interviewing is an approach that documents women's own accounts of their experiences and allows the sociologist to garner knowledge not simply for the sake of knowledge but for the women who are providing information.

Traditionally, qualitative researchers have conducted interviews that are "open-ended" and "intensive", seeking to avoid structuring the interaction in terms of the researcher's perspective. But eliciting useful accounts is much more than encouraging women to talk. Most members of a society

learn to interpret their experiences in terms of the dominant language and meaning and women have trouble talking about their experiences. What researchers can do is to take responsibility for recognising how the concepts we have learned as sociologists may distort women's accounts. We can return to activities conducted in specific settings as the source for our studies, and ground our interviewing in accounts of everyday activity - in accounts of how particular women actually spend their time at home, for example, rather than a previously defined concept of "housework". Since words available do not fit, women learn to "translate" when they talk about their experiences. As they do so, parts of their lives "disappear" because they are not included in the language of the account. In order to "recover" these parts of women's lives, researchers must develop methods for listening around and beyond words.

The postmodernist perspective on interviewing

Postmodernist interview involves the sharing of personal and social experiences of both respondents and researchers, who tell their story in the context of a developing relationship. In this process, the distinction between the "researcher" and the "subject" gets blurred. We also view researchers' disclosures as more than tactics to encourage respondents to open up. The feelings, insights, and stories that researchers bring to the interactive encounter are as important as are those of respondents. Thus, our work focuses on the interview process, the stories and feelings that both respondents and researchers share in the interview and the understanding that emerges during interaction.

Interactive interviewing requires considerable time, multiple interview sessions, and attention to communication and emotions. It also may involve participating in shared activities outside the formal interview situation. Our approach is flexible and continually guided by the ongoing interaction within the interview context.

Participants engaged in this kind of research must be open to vulnerability and emotional investment while working through the intricacies of sensitive issues. Interactive interviewing reflects the way relationships develop in real life; as conversations where one person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another's plight led to a greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experiences offer new insights into both lives. This inter-subjective process provides a contextual basis for a level of understanding and interpretation that is not present in traditional hierarchical interview situations - where interviewers reveal little about themselves, aloofly ask questions in one or two brief sessions, and have little or no relationship with respondents.

Feminists have called for researchers to acknowledge their interests and

sympathies. They have also questioned the separation of the researcher and the respondent and viewed research as properly ascribing to the goals of empowerment, consciousness-raising and improvement of life circumstances. Moving away from a traditional research model, interpretivists encourage self-disclosures on the part of the researcher. Researcher involvement both helps respondents feel more comfortable sharing information and closes the hierarchical gap between researchers and respondents that traditional research encourages. Interviewees become narrators who improvise stories in response to researcher's questions, probes and stories.

Reflection and Action 25.2

Make a team of three fellow learners of MSO 002 at your Study Centre and each member of the team needs to select one of the three types of interview methods for interviewing a teacher of her/ his choice on the subject of reforms in the examination system at open and distance learning institutions. Each team member is to prepare a short note of about five hundred words on the basis of her/ his findings. Each member is to then explain in an oral presentation before other learners of MSO 002 at one of the counselling sessions of this course the differences in findings due to the difference in the way interview was conducted in each case.

25.5 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis seeks to analyse narratives (events, viewpoints) of subjects. Das (1999) has discussed contemporary methods used in narrative analysis (see Box 25.4 on different techniques of collecting verbal data).

Box 25.4 Three Techniques to Collect Verbal Data used in Narrative Analysis

In her article on narrative analysis, Das (1999: 48-50) has mentioned three techniques to collect data.

1) Narrative technique: It facilitates an exploration of variations in the life histories of people in similar social settings. Here the narrative is 'linear and oriented' and the focus is on a single event or a sequence of events that occurred in a person's life.

2) Amplificatory technique: In this technique the person narrating the life history gets the opportunity to present the story of her or his life around the events which are most important in the eyes of that person.

3) Elicitory interview: this technique is used for testing a hypothesis and with this purpose the researcher focuses on eliciting information.

Narratives collected through interaction with subjects are not always enough and have to be supplemented by additional data. In analysing narratives one should be able to read between the lines and also investigate the various situations that made a subject respond to a certain question in a certain way. It is subject positioning that constitutes the type of response one elicits from them. For example, a war widow

might vent her anger at the government for not caring for her needs because she is economically unable to support herself while another from an established background might dismiss such aids as unnecessary. When subjects refuse to respond it does not mean that they do not have an opinion. At the same time one should also take into account the fact that opinions might be formed at the spot when the subject had never thought about any before. In such cases the response would be influenced by the nature of the ongoing situation. Data collected should not only amount to the words that are spoken, but also should be the summing up of observations, attitudes, various records and respondents' viewpoints. The production of truth is questionable (Visweswaran 1996) as there are specific kinds of truth produced by a specific kind of epistemology. Even silences also have their own narratives and one should be aware of the response made to fulfil certain subject functions.

25.6 Interpretation

Interpretation requires more care than asking questions. The respondent's answer is to be situated relationally. Meanings reside in the cultural context. Certain answers may be offered as a matter of mere courtesy and may not have anything to do with accuracy (see Jones 1964), some answers may be given due to impatience, others still due to political, moral and other social constraints. As Kemp and Ellen (1984: 234-235) have said, "one way of approaching the problems of interpretation is systematically envisage all possible questions or interpretations of questions that might have elicited the actual answers you get".

Interpretation also involves the understanding of the power dynamics that structured the interaction between the interviewer and the subject. One should be aware of the various kinds of circumstances and situations that elicit a certain type of response. Silence and subject refusal have their own interpretations and should be read as meaningful data, for it is not only spoken words that have meanings but also gestures, attitudes, cues and silence or denial.

25.7 Case Study and its Types

Case study method involves systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions. Case study is not actually a data gathering technique, but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data gathering measures. The approach of case studies ranges significantly from general field studies to the interview of a single individual or group. Case studies may focus on an individual, a group, or an entire community and may utilise a number of data technologies such as life histories, documents, oral histories, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

Case studies can be rather pointed in their focus, or can approach a broad view of life and society. For example, an investigator may confine his examination to a single aspect of an individual's life such as studying a medical student's actions and behaviours in medical school.

One must determine the area of social life to be studied according to the nature of the problem. When examining an individual case study, a similar type of assessment must be undertaken. A single lengthy interview may be sufficient or several interviews may be required to be supplemented with field notes during observation, copies of journal or diary entries from the subject, or other forms of documentation. Several reasons may make it necessary for a broader and more sweeping investigation on all aspects of an individual's social life as they are interconnected and one cannot be adequately understood without a consideration of the others.

Types of case study

According to Yin (1994) and Winston (1990) there are three types of case studies.

1) **Exploratory**: In exploratory case studies, fieldwork (and data collection) may be undertaken before defining a research question. This type of study may be seen as a prelude to a large social scientific study.

2) **Explanatory**: This type of study seeks to explain certain phenomena and is useful when conducting studies particularly in the complex studies of organisations or communities.

3) **Descriptive**: This type of study requires the investigator to present a descriptive theory, which establishes the overall framework for the investigator to follow throughout the study. Before beginning research the investigator must determine exactly what the unit of analysis in the study will be.

What distinguishes case studies from more general ethnographic reportage is the detail and particularity of the account. Each case study is a description of specific configuration events in which a particular set of actors have been involved in some defined situation at a particular point of time. In setting out a case study the analyst must decide in advance at what point to enter the ongoing flow of events and at what point to withdraw from it. It should emphasise on the theoretical connection between the events rather than on the events themselves. Any technique can be used for the collection of data and it is preferable to operate with "social fields" (Gluckman 1961) since data beyond what is strictly germane to this purpose are redundant.

While on his notion of social fields, let us also mention Gluckman's (1961) concept of extended-case method, which van Velsen (1964: xxv) calls "situational analysis". The extended-case method refers to the researcher's collection of detailed material of a particular sort. It also entails the specific use to which such field material is put while the

ethnographer analyses the same. Mostly, sociologists and anthropologists have used extended-case method or situational analysis to discuss conflict as a normal aspect of social change. See Box 25.5 for van Velsen's (1967: 148-149) views on the use of the extended-case method/ situational analysis.

Box 25.5 J.van Velsen on The Extended-case Method and Situational Analysis

... ... I have outlined methods of analysis and fieldwork from the comparison of haphazardly collected customs, through the more modest but sociologically more fruitful structural method with its emphasis on social morphology, to a method that aims at analysing the interrelation of structural ('universal') regularities, on the one hand, and the actual ('unique') behaviour of individuals, on the other.

Although I am of the opinion that the fieldworker's theoretical approach is of primary importance with regard to the type of material he seeks, and although I think that fieldwork methods can be prescribed only in general terms, I have made some suggestions regarding the collection of the type of material that is most likely to satisfy the demands of some of the present theories. These demands are of a synchronic analysis of general structural principles that is closely interwoven with a diachronic analysis of the operation of these principles by specific actors in specified situations.

Case study method is not a new style of data gathering and analytic technique. The fields of medicine and psychology, for example, by their very nature require physicians and psychologists to examine patients case by case. Case studies are commonly used in business and law curricula to help students bridge the gap between foundational studies and practice. The use of diaries and biographies, a popular method used by some feminist and other social scientists, approximate the case study method. *The Professional Thief* by Edward Sutherland (1937), *The Jack Roller* by Clifford R. Shaw (1930) and *Being Different: The Autobiography of Jane Fry* by Bogdan (1974) are some examples of classic case studies.

Reflection and Action 25.3

While explaining the application of case method in the field of law, Epstein (1967: 229) 'treated law as a complex social phenomenon concerned with a series of problems with which all human groups would appear to be confronted, and for which solutions must be devised' and showed 'how the case method, employed both as a field technique and as a tool of analysis, and applied in different ways, may serve to illuminate these problems. The discussion has concentrated on law as a body of rules, as a set of procedures of inquiry and adjudication, and as an instrument of social control.' Epstein makes a further point about law that it 'may also be regarded as embodying a system of values; moreover, as a social institution it is itself subject to evaluation. We are concerned here with the basic assumptions or postulates that underlie the social life of a community, and the ways in which the task and purpose of law may be perceived.'

In the light of what Epstein has said above, provide a case in the field of law, culled from any source of sociological inquiry (or any case described in a newspaper report) and explain how that particular case exhibits the features of case method as explained by Epstein.

25.8 Life Histories

The life history approach to social research and theory subsumes several methodological techniques and types of data. These include case studies, interviews and use of documents, including letters, diaries, archival records, oral histories and various kinds of narratives. It was used extensively in the 1920s and 1930s and was identified with the Chicago School. But later, an increased use of quantitative techniques coupled with survey data collection led to a relative decrease in the life history approach. In the 1970s however, there began a resurgence of interest in life history research not only in the USA but also in Europe. The main assumptions of this approach are that the actions of the individual and groups are simultaneously emergent and structured and that the individual and group perspectives must be used for analysis. Thus, any materials that served those perspectives can and should be regarded as essential to the empirical study of social life.

The first such study was Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. In this five-volume 2200-page book they presented almost 800 pages of life history data in support of their conclusions and generalisations. Those data included newspaper articles, letters to family members, records from courts and social work agencies, and a 300-page biography of one person as a representative case. This approach was used in research on race relations, delinquency, mass media, migration, occupation and other issues centred primarily in the veers of ethnic and urban studies. Current uses of life history research display considerable variation as well as more precise conceptual distinctions. Terms such as "life story", "bibliography", "discourse", "history", "oral history", "personal experience narratives", "collective narratives", and "sagas" are now distinguished from one another and frameworks for linking types of verbal accounts to types of generalisations have been developed.

It is now common to regard life histories as a legitimate form of data. Through the propositions contained in narrative theory, some researchers have developed what is called the narrative interview. This approach focuses on establishing event sequences across the life course on the basis of interview data. Bertam (1981) has long been an advocate of the life-history approach. The collaborative research on social movements (1990) used life-history data from the members of student's movements in the USA, England, Ireland, Italy, West Germany, and France. He shows the application of this method in large-scale comparative research projects.

Dolby-Stahl (1989), a folklorist©, has developed a variation of the life history approach she calls "literary folklorist" which focuses on personal narrative data. She uses the reader response theory to develop an interpretive method for studying the interdependence of personal narratives (stories) and collective narratives (ethnic group folklore). The

assumption of this approach is that personal and collective narratives are inherently connected and thus a personal story has a collective dimension. "Interpretive Biography" is designed to study the turning points or problematic situations people find themselves in during transition periods. The basic question he asks concerns how people live and give meaning to their lives and capture those meanings in written narrative and oral forms.

In the Indian context, Dalit sociology is making use of the life histories of selected Untouchables. The scheduled castes have constructed through writings of untouchables – be it poem, short story, biography or autobiography - lives that have the essential element of social and economic liberation. The life history of Muli, a Dalit, written by Freeman (1978) provides an insight into the nature of caste oppression in Indian society. According to the author many incident in his life show striking similarities with events in other cultures and his case stands as an indictment of stratified systems like caste and others.

25.9 Oral History

Most contemporary social scientists make use of written and oral sources for documentation and substantiation in social research. Diaries, letters, written documents, personal papers, autobiographies and biographies, archival material and today even films, advertisements, news, fiction, creative art forms like dance, music and paintings etc., are used as texts. The latter forms of texts are constructed by fieldworkers based on often first hand information collected in field research by interviews, asking people to write down about themselves or collecting life histories. Anthropologists have long adopted this method of elicitation especially in societies where no written records existed.

Oral histories are less focused on whole life and more focused on a topic or a part of a life. Besides contributing significantly to historical data previously collected, this method can be used to give voice to minority groups, to pay attention to the minds of great individuals or to permit inclusion of usually silenced groups in a population like D*alits*, women, tribals, the disabled etc. And it has even been used as a form of therapy (O'Reilly, 2005).

Historians today are making use of oral histories to supplement historical understandings. Feminists especially insisted on using oral histories of women to recast histories. Subaltern school historians have used this method in reconstructing histories of peasant movements and protests.

25.10 PRA and RRA Techniques

Organisations, which adhere to participatory paradigm (very often NGOs), have developed a number of techniques for effective interaction with

communities. Two of them are Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). PRA and RRA were developed in response to disappointments and criticism of the assumptions upon which earlier developmental work was based.

RRA and PRA are two closely related families of approaches. They emphasise a re-orientation in the relationship between the outsider and subjects of developmental activities and research. Thus, a reciprocal learning process in the relationship has replaced the one-way "transfer of know how" idea.

The term PRA describes a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. PRA flows from and owes much to the activist. Participatory research, agro-ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems and rapid rural appraisal in RRA information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders; in PRA it is more shared and owned by local people. The one most important principle is "use your own best judgment at all times" which implies improvisation.

The distinction between RRA and PRA has been described by Robert Chambers (1992). RRA leads to learning by outsiders in a cost effective way. PRA, on the other hand, enables rural people to unravel and analyse their own situation in ways they do not normally do, and in optimal cases to plan and act on their own premises.

Both RRA and PRA have been referred to as data economising or data optimising approaches. The experience gained with RRA during the first years of application in 1980s showed that it was susceptible to the criticism that it had levelled at "quick and dirty" development work and "development tourism".

Participatory assessment and activities are methods for creating a dialogue and for collecting information. They are characterised by ingenuity and flexibility, and the methods to be applied depend on the specific context. PRA techniques have proved to be of much use in diagnosing specific problems and highlighting possible solutions. Here is a catalogue of selected PRA methods, techniques and tools.

1) Review of secondary resources
2) Direct observation
3) Key indicators
4) Semi-structured interview
5) Ranking and scoring
6) Construction and analysis of maps, models and diagrams
7) Diagramming
8) Case studies and stories
9) Drama, games and role-plays
10) Possible future and scenario workshops
11) Triangulation

12) Continuous analysis and reporting
13) Participatory planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and self-surveys
14) Do-it-yourself

A PRA technique essentially complements more formal methods. More often than not these techniques are preliminary exercises. They generally serve the purpose of dialogue with the people, information generation, analysis in some cases and mobilisation of people around certain issues like land rights, water, public distribution system, etc. Since the NGOs involve multidisciplinary teams, the PRA exercises take a multidisciplinary perspective.

The practitioners themselves have recognised three major dangers, weaknesses and challenges of using PRA.

- ❖ Rate of spread
- ❖ Practitioner aptitude, and
- ❖ Backsliding.

The speed of spread must not exceed the capacity for individual institutions to conduct social and organisational experiments to discover what is most appropriate for them. The practitioner's personal attitudes are difficult to control.

The problem of not reaching all interest groups persists, especially among women, the landless, ethnic minorities, the poorest, etc. Higher-level planning targets disrupt bottom-up demands and desires.

PRA does not produce the final answers. It is a process that contributes to a better understanding of the situation.

Reflection and Action 25.4

Read carefully the following excerpt from Schönhuth (2002:152-153) and discuss the merits and demerits of PRA/ RRA approach to field research. Explore the possibility of carrying out a one-day experience of applying the method to gain a quick understanding of access to school education by girl children of your neighbourhood. If not on this topic, you may select some other topic to carry out a one-day PRA exercise in order to get a feel of this method.

The Excerpt

Here is the excerpt from Michael Schönhuth's article on Negotiating with Knowledge at Development Interfaces: Anthropology and the Quest for Participation.

> From my experience, if used in a culturally suitable way, visualising tools can be extraordinarily useful for the outsider as a means of gaining a quick picture of the local situation and people. Far from being objective, these pictures provide an excellent basis and act as a catalyst for elucidating discussions on local features, local knowledge and local views of reality within homogeneous groups, and between different groups. On a methodological level, anthropology could profit from making more use of visual cues to focus group discussions and to elicit cultural maps of reality. Research results, which are normally analysed at home by the anthropologist after fieldwork, could be discussed and corrected in the field with the local people.

25.11 Conclusion

Unit 25 discussed some of the common methods which sociologists/ anthropologists use during their field researches. You may need to use one or the other of these methods in your mini research project assignment of MSO 002. Our suggestion is that you need to include in the discussion of methodology of your project report the method(s) you have used and also provide the reasons why you have opted to use the same. Do select from Further Reading and read more about the methods you decide to use.

Further Reading

Barnes, J. A. 1961. *Physical and Social Kinship. Philosophy of Science* 28: 296-299 (about genealogical method)

Das, Veena 1999. *Contemporary Methods in Narrative Analysis.* IN R. L. Kapur (ed.) Qualitative Methods in Mental Health Research. National Institute of Advanced Study: Bangalore (for narrative analysis method)

Du Boulay Juliet and Rory Williams 1984. Collecting Life Histories. IN R. F. Ellen (ed.) Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct. Academic Press: London, pp. 247-257 (for life histories method)

Jain, Shobhita 1999. *1.Participatory Approaches; 2. Types of Participation; 3. Constraints and Problems of Participation; 4 The Rhetoric of Participation; 5. Leveling the Playing Fields: Recognizing Local Know-How;* IN Participatory Forest Management, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi (for PRA/ RRA techniques)

Jain, Shobhita and Neeti Bhargava 2001.*1.Participation: Philosophy, Nature and Approach; 2.Operationalisation of Participatory Processes; 3. Data Collection Techniques for Mobilising Participation; 4. Techniques of Data Analysis and Modes of Analysis, Units in MRR 02 of Participatory Management of Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation*, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi (for PRA/ RRA techniques)

Kvale, Steiner 1996. *Inter Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing.* Sage: London (for interview method, especially pp. 1-10)

Mukherjee, N. 1993. *Participatory Rural Appraisal—Methodology and Applications.* Concept: New Delhi (for PRA AND RRA techniques)

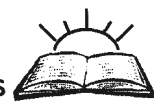
Van Velsen 1967. *The Extended-case Method and Situational Analysis.* IN A. L. Epstein (ed.) The Craft of Social Anthropology. Social Science Paperbacks: London (for case studies method)

Unit 26

Reliability, Validity and Triangulation

Contents

Learning Objectives



It is expected that after reading Unit 26, you would be able to ensure that

- Data you have collected are reliable in terms of their consistency, precision and repeatability
- While being reliable, data collected are at the same time valid in the sense of giving a true description/ measurement of "social reality"
- Application of triangulation technique/ methodological pluralism/ multiple methods has enabled you to make an accurate measurement/description of the social reality.
- As a researcher you keep in mind ethical considerations to protect the subject of your research from physical/psychological harm, breach of privacy and confidentiality of the subject and acquire the informed consent of the subject for carrying out field research.

26.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we are concerned with the issues of reliability, validity and triangulation[¥]. In other words, we study the criteria for evaluating qualitative research that has been conducted by an investigator. We will examine various techniques that enable the researcher and the reader to evaluate the extent to which the data gathered and analysed represent the ground reality. We will also introduce you to certain method-specific criteria for evaluating qualitative research that have gained popularity in recent years. We will discuss the technique of triangulation to further ensure accuracy of the data collected and then conclude by examining some key ethical issues that need to be kept in mind while embarking upon a qualitative study. Basically moral and ethical questions come up at all stages of research, from selecting the topic, area of study, source of funding, to publication of research findings.

26.2 Concepts of Reliability and Validity

The aim of qualitative research is to bring to light facts about the phenomena. In that sense, it is "objective". According to Kirk and Miller (1986: 12-13),

It is our view that qualitative research can be performed as a social science. Understanding the workings of a scientific endeavour, whether it is of the natural or social variety, entails an appreciation of its objectivity. By this convention, the objectivity of a piece of qualitative research is evaluated in terms of the reliability and validity of its observations.

By reliability is meant the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out. Validity is the extent to which it gives the correct answer. Kirk and Miller give an example from the physical world. Suppose a thermometer shows the same reading of 82°C every time it is plunged in boiling water. It is obviously a reliable thermometer. But a thermometer that gives different readings near about 100°C each time it is placed in boiling water may not be reliable, but it is certainly quite valid. In other words, validity refers to the truth-value of a finding. For a piece of research to be judged as "objective", it has to be both reliable and valid. Let us fully grasp one by one each of the two concepts.

Reliability: You can clearly state that reliability is about consistency. Your research would be reliable if, when repeated, using the same methods, it brings the same results. Sociologists need to establish the usefulness of the data they gather to ensure answers of the following questions.

- How accurate a profile of social life one is able to get
- Whether the conclusions reached are representative enough to be applicable to everyone
- Is it possible to repeat the research if others want to carry it out and will there be similar results if they did?

We can ensure the above kind of usefulness by using the two concepts of reliability and validity. Reliability of the data is our main concern because if we do not have reliable data, the conclusions reached on their basis will be quite useless.

Box 26. 1 What is Data Reliability Concerned With?

The following ideas figure in making data reliable.

Consistency: It is important to obtain consistently similar responses to the same questions in similar circumstances.

Precision: One has to know how systematic is the form of data that is based on asking people questions about things that they know little about.

Repeatability: If others want to carry out the same research as you have completed, would they get similar results? If the answer is "yes",

then your research has repeatability of the data collection method.

As per the formulations of Kirk and Miller (1986), there are three types of reliability. Basing on Kirk and Miller, we will discuss each type in the following section.

26.3 Three Types of "Reliability"

Kirk and Miller discuss three kinds of reliability. Understanding the difference between them will help you to figure out whether the data you have gathered in your qualitative study is reliable.

i) **"Quixotic"© reliability**: This refers to the circumstances in which a single method of observation yields the same measurement over and over again. In an ethnographic study, this kind of "reliability" of data indicates that the investigator has managed to elicit "rehearsed" or "politically correct" information. For example, a study is conducted on gender discrimination, and the subjects are asked the question "Do you believe in the equality of men and women?" Unfailingly, the answer obtained is "Yes". However, the reality observed around us is actually quite different. We may then conclude that the finding has only "quixotic reliability", because people are giving the answer they think is "correct", because they do not wish to offend anyone. So, it is probably a good idea to ask a different kind of question, like, "Do you think that women professionals are as competent as their male colleagues?" Perhaps the answers to this question will be more varied and reflect reality better.

ii) **"Diachronic"© reliability**: This refers to the stability of an observation over time. Some examples include the "test-retest" paradigms of experimental psychology and survey research, in which surveys are conducted afresh after a gap of time to see if the results are the same. However, in the context of socio-cultural phenomena in which the rate of change is rapid, obtaining similar results over a period of time is unlikely. Continuing the example of gender discrimination, it is seen that over the past few years, women's participation in the work force has changed, they are no longer ignored for selection for certain kinds of jobs, and in fact are given preference over males in areas of telemarketing and the hospitality services industry.

iii) **"Synchronic"© reliability**: This refers to the similarity of observations within the same time period, which can be evaluated by comparisons of the same data by different methods. Unlike quixotic reliability, synchronic reliability involves observations that are consistent in nature. However, Kirk and Miller sensitise us to a very interesting paradox; synchronic reliability is often more useful if it is absent. In other words, if different methods or approaches to a problem throw up different results, it may alert the qualitative research to certain aspects of the problem that he had not considered before.

26.4 Working towards Reliability

How can a qualitative researcher go about increasing the reliability of his data and their interpretations? A key factor is the quality of recording and documenting data. The field notes taken by the researcher must be documented in such a way that they can be compared and shared with other fieldworkers and colleagues. Berreman (1966) recommends "extensive, explicit and perceptive field notes, self-analytical reporting of research procedures and research contexts, documentation of sources, documentation of the bases for inferences and documentation of the ethnographer's theories of society and his biases". To make your field notes accessible to others, certain guidelines must be followed that enable others to separate the concepts of the observed from those of the observers.

Flick (1998) has adapted a format for conventionalisation of field-notes which is given in the table below:

Table 26.1 Format for Conventionalisation of Field Notes

Sign	Convention	Use
" "	Double quotation marks	Verbation quotes
' '	Single quotation marks	Paraphrases
( )	Parenthes	Contextual data or fieldworker's interpretation
< >	Angled brackets	Emic concepts (of the member)
/ /	Slash	Etic concepts (of the researcher)
____	Solid line	Beginning or end of a segment

Reliability for interview data can be increased by training the interviewers and by checking interview guides in test interviews or after the first interview.

In the case of observation, training before entering the field and regularly evaluating what has been observed can promote the reliability of findings.

In a nutshell, reliability in qualitative research demands that the data are presented in such a way that the reader can clearly differentiate the voice of the subject from the interpretations of the researcher. It also demands that the procedures used by the researcher constantly be re-checked and tuned so that the data obtained may be considered dependable.

Reflection and Action 26.1

Suppose a fellow learner of MSO 002 at your Study Centre wants to study the status of education in a State and draw conclusions after interviewing at a school function whoever s/he could find willing to talk. What would you advise her for making the data reliable as an indicator of what is going in the education? Write your answer in 300 words.

After completing Reflection and Action 26.1, let us move on to the criterion of validity. Validity as mentioned earlier, refers to the "truth value". In the context of qualitative research, validity refers to the extent to which the data reflect the thoughts, views, actions and experiences of the subjects in an accurate manner.

26.5 Procedural Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy of the data generated by the research instrument, whether it is an interview or questionnaire or some other means of research. If we ask the questions: Have the methods that I used colour the results of my research? Were there other factors that came in the way?

Answers to such questions refer to the internal validity of a research.

Validity of a research is also about answering the questions: How valid is one's conception of the situation? How generalisable are one's results?

Answers to these questions refer to the external validity of your research.

Face validity means statistical measure of validity. For example, Type I error will require rejection of the hypothesis when it is true. Type II error will require acceptance of the hypothesis when it is false.

A qualitative research is more likely to be valid than quantitative research. As long as there is adequate sampling and precision of observation, and subtle changes in environment and people are observed carefully, it is not difficult to establish the validity of one's data collection method. You can safely say that the concept of validity refers to the extent to which your data provide a true measurement of social reality. Take an example of shortage of power supply. You may be quite sure of the statistics about power shortage, week by week. You also have to be sure how valid or accurate a picture of power shortage in the whole town or the state your statistics represent. If you were to compare your figures with those collected by a government agency, its figures may be reliable but the government's definition of power shortage may not be the same as is used in your research. If this is the case, then the two sets of statistics are not valid for the purpose of comparison because the comparison is not between two things alike and therefore not valid. How do we achieve validity in our research? Let us look at procedural validity.

Guidelines to Procedural Validity

To bring about validity in the research process, Wolcott (1990a) has suggested the following guidelines.

i) Refrain from talking. When you are in the field, listen as much as possible.

ii) Produce field-notes that are as exact as possible.

iii) Begin to write early, so that you will not forget the little detail that separate good research from the ordinary.

iv) Write in such a way that your readers can see for themselves the points you are trying to bring out. In other words, provide enough data to enable readers to draw out their own inferences and follow the ones you are making.

v) Your report should be as complete as possible.

vi) It should be as candid as possible.

vii) Seek feedback on your findings and presentations from your colleagues.

viii) Your presentation should be characterised by a balance between the various aspects you have studied rather than leaning too heavily on one or the other aspect.

ix) Your presentation should display accuracy in writing.

How can you use field research as a means of checking the validity of your research? For answering this question go to the next section.

26.6 Field Research as a Validity Check

The very nature of fieldwork is its flexibility and openness, which will enable you to study your data in a variety of ways. In a field situation, routine contact with people on a day-to-day basis over an extended period of time will help you to test your emerging hypotheses. This method is very sensitive to discrepancies between meanings presumed by investigations and those understood by the target population.

The field is a zone controlled by those investigated rather than the investigator; the researcher is at the mercy of his subjects and not vice versa as in a controlled experiment. The more disciplined your engagement with the field and the greater your receptivity to the different, sometimes contradictory, inputs you receive, the greater are the chances of your data having validity.

The process of communicative validation process involves taking the subjects/actors into confidence and involving them in the research process, so that you are able to ensure that what you have understood is actually what they meant. By showing your interviewees the transcriptions of your first interview with them, you can ask them to judge whether you have accurately reported what they said or felt. The danger is, of course, that they may later deny saying things, which they may perceive as showing them in a "bad" light. Your ability as a researcher is then called into play; you have to separate the "real" response from the "released" one.

26.7 Method Appropriate Criteria

Are the criteria of "reliability" and "validity" adequate or appropriate to evaluate qualitative data? A number of social scientists have opined that these criteria, if applied alone, fail to understand the basic nature of

qualitative research. They have attempted to evolve more "method appropriate" criteria that enable a researcher to look critically at his data. We shall briefly present the formulations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who have included in their scheme such criteria as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. Let us discuss only the first two criteria, namely, trustworthiness and credibility as these two are most crucial in Lincoln and Guba's scheme. They suggest the following measures to increase credibility.

i) **Prolonged engagement and persistent observation**: Prolonged engagement refers to the amount of time spent by the researcher in the field. It enables the researcher to learn about the culture of a social setting over an extended period of time and to build a relationship of trust and establish rapport with respondents.

If the investigator spends a very limited time in the field, then distortions are likely to come. If research is being conducted in a residential school setting, the fieldworker will find the month before the summer break a very atypical one, as students and teachers are under tremendous pressure due to examinations, evaluation and declaration of results. By observing just this one-month in the life of the school, the researcher would get a very distorted picture. However, if he does not observe the activities of this month, then he would not understand the totality of this social setting.

Other distortions include those brought in by the researcher's own "biases", e. g., s/he may only listen to the views of those teachers whose views match her/ his own world view; some respondents may deliberately want to please the investigator or even to confuse or deceive her/ him. Prolonged engagement helps the researcher to sift fact from "fiction" (see Box 26.2 on persistent observation).

Box 26.2 Persistent Observation

Persistent observation refers to detailed observation that provides depth to research, helping to sort out relevancies from irrelevancies. Persistent observation involves looking out for any odd incidents or atypical behaviours that may shed light on the problem. To continue the example of the school, a researcher may observe behaviour patterns of the childern in the residential school and draw a hypothesis that childern who have spent a longer time in the school display greater levels of confidence and independence. However, while accompanying the students on a school trip to another town, the researcher observes that one of the "old" students who he had judged as "confident" and "independent", clings to the hand of the teacher. This rather "atypical" response may lead the sensitive researcher to explore the possibility that the "confidence" and "independence" of these children is displayed in familiar settings of their school, and outside that familiar setting they are as vulnerable as any other child who may have joined school very recently.

As a further measure, Lincoln and Guba recommend "triangulation" of different methods, researchers and data (see Section 26.8).

ii) **Peer debriefing**: This refers to regular meetings with other

people who are not involved in the research, in order to discuss findings, hypotheses and results and gain their insights as well.

It is important that the debriefer should be a peer and not an authority figure (eg. a professor in one's department) in order to prevent views being "imposed". Friends and colleagues are ideal debriefers. The researcher studying the residential school may have as a debriefer a friend who also is a parent of a schoolgoing child. The debriefer would then be able to understand, challenge and contribute to the findings of the researcher by introducing a parent's perspective.

iii) **Member checking**: According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this technique is the most important in establishing credibility. It refers to the process by which members of stakeholding groups are allowed to test the categories, interpretations and conclusions. They thus have a chance to recognise whether the investigator has imposed his constructions upon them or whether their views have been adequately expressed. Member checking is basically communicative validation referred to in the previous section on "validity".

iv) **Maintaining a reflexive journal**: According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a reflexive journal is a kind of diary in which the investigator records information about herself/ himself on a regular basis. It provides information about the researcher's schedule, methods and insights, and provides a valuable guide to understanding the direction the research process takes.

v) **Analysis of negative cases in the sense of analytic induction** : Analytic induction refers to the process by which a hypothesis formulated to understand a phenomenon is applied to a specific case. If it does not fit the case, then it is reformulated and applied again. Each individual negative case helps to further refine the hypothesis. Further cases are studied until the stage arrives when a universal relationship is established. Hence each negative case calls for re-definition or reformulation of the problem, thereby enhancing credibility.

To check the dependability of the research, the concept of "auditing" is used, based on the procedure of audits in the field of finance. Briefly, the auditing trail that has to be checked includes:

- the raw data, their collection and recording;
- data reduction, i.e. summaries, short descriptions of cases, memos, etc.;
- the reconstruction of data into themes, definitions and relationship and the findings inferred from them;
- process notes, and decisions regarding methods;
- personal notes about one's intentions, one's ideas about research and expectations of the participants; and
- the pilot study and preliminary plans of the research.

The auditing trail helps to account for the manner in which the research was conducted and its outcome.

As said previously, qualitative research includes the subjectivity of the researcher. And yet, it is ultimately judged in terms of its 'objectivity' (i.e. its ability to bring to the forefront the lives, experiences and relationship of people).

Unlike other scientists, qualitative researchers do not report on studied objects, rather they report on their **interaction** with the objects they study, namely, cultures. That is why objectivity is difficult and yet essential, according to Kirk and Miller (1986). In this context, the views of Harvey Sacks (1992) may be cited. Sacks believes that serious work includes paying attention to details, and if something matters, it should be observable. For Sacks, "observations study" meant observing the activities that members of a society did, rather than speculating about their motives and inner thoughts.

We will now look at the use of multiple methods in sociology. It is also referred as triangulation/ methodological pluralism. But we will go to the topic of triangulation after completing Reflection and Action 26.2.

Reflection and Action 26.2

Take an example of your friend studying the problem of unemployment in your State. She collects unemployment statistics from the Employment Exchange. We may take the statistics to be quite reliable, recorded year by year. She considers her sample of figures pertaining to one decade to be adequate to perceive a trend. But you find that in a period of one decade, there were several changes in definitions of what constitutes unemployment. In such a situation, what sort of problems do you find in her research method? Write a note to help your friend to see the problem with her research and suggest how she can get, in terms of research method, a more accurate picture of unemployment in your state.

26.8 Triangulation

You would have by now realised that various methods of gathering data have different advantages and disadvantages. Apparently as a researcher you would like to use methods with more advantages than disadvantages. You would also like to avoid a weakness in one method and use a second method, which is strong in the sphere in which the first is weak. Take the example of interview method. You can say that the interview method has a weakness in the sense that we are not always sure that the interviewee is telling the truth. In order to avoid this weakness of the interview method, you may decide to cross-check the information you have gathered by using the method of observing the everyday life of the interviewee to find out what the person actually does and what she/he tells.

The use of multiple methods for assessing the validity of your research data may be more specifically called between-method or cross-

method triangulation.

In this fashion you are able to combine different methods and obtain a better picture of the subject of your research. Generally surveyors use the technique of triangulation in their work. The theory behind the concept of triangulation is quite simple. The aim of triangulation is to obtain accuracy in measurement between two points for which you require a way of measuring that is reliable. You can obtain reliability by replication, but repeating the same procedure does not ensure complete reliability. Here mathematics helps us. If we take three different measurements between three points, we can ensure that the measurement of the distance between point A and point B is absolutely correct by using the mathematical principle that each angle of an equilateral triangle is always 60 degrees. So we just triangulate our measurement by taking three different measurements. The theory of triangulation provides us in social research some degree of control over the accuracy of the data we gather.

There are two types of triangulation, namely, methodological triangulation and theoretical triangulation.

- ❖ Methodological triangulation refers to the way we use different methods in the research process.
- ❖ Theoretical triangulation is the way we use various theoretical perspectives in our research.

Let us briefly discuss each type.

Methodological triangulation

In *Doing Sociology: A Practical Introduction*, Harvey and MacDonald (1993) describe the following three types of methodological triangulation.

- ❖ One researcher uses two or more research techniques.
- ❖ Two or more researchers use the same research technique.
- ❖ Two or more researchers use two or more research techniques.

You may use methodological triangulation for the following purposes.

- ❖ To gather different types of information, for example qualitative and quantitative
- ❖ Two or more researchers use the same method and then compare their results to find out if they agree that they have similar findings
- ❖ To check that material collected in one form is both reliable and valid.

Theoretical triangulation

This form of triangulation is not popular among sociologists. It is of course possible to study a social group from theoretical perspectives of a structuralist and an interactionist. The structuralist perspective would require you to look at institutional relationships that exist in a social

group, for example "the family". From an interactionist perspective you would look at family life from the point of view of individual members of different families or of particular family groups.

Generally, sociologists working from the point of one perspective would not be inclined to look at the subject of their researches from another theoretical perspective. This is why we find that theoretical triangulation is quite uncommon.

Clearly, by using multiple methods or more than one method, you can enjoy the benefit of each method and the different types of data they generate, for example both statistical and oral accounts. The advantages of one method help to overcome the limitations of another method.

Let us now examine some of the key ethical considerations that a qualitative researcher must keep in mind. Before going on to the next section, complete Reflection and Action 26.3.

Reflection and Action 26.3

Consider if it is feasible always to combine various methods in one research. State what kinds of problems you are likely to face as a researcher when you attempt to combine quantitative and qualitative methods?

26.9 Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research

Field work is one of the key methodological tools employed in qualitative research Fieldwork raises some unique ethical issues because the researcher is participating in the lives of the people under study. It often becomes difficult to draw the line between the researcher's role as a "participant" and as on "observer". Some social scientists believe that the researcher should make it clear to her/ his subjects what s/he is doing and under no circumstances should the subject withhold her/ his true intentions. In other words, s/he should make it clear that s/he is conducting a research inquiry.

However, in reality this is easier said than done. Suppose a researcher is attending a wedding in the community s/he is studying. This is an excellent opportunity to interact with several members of the community and elicit information. If the researcher announces her/ his intentions on such an occasion, she/he is likely to alienate members or cause a lot of discomfort to them. Shils (1959) tries to draw a distinction between the "observations of everyday life" and the "observations of field" research. The former refer to observations that result from the social relationships that arise out of intentions other than observations. The observer has not created the relationship merely for the purpose of doing research. What happens, however, when observations from daily life, where there is no intention of "doing research", later acquire significance for research? Kidder and

Judd (1986) cite the instance of a researcher working as a volunteer with rape victims in a hospital emergency ward. Her work as a volunteer helped her gain insights in the victims' methods of coping that appeared to contradict the current psychological theories of coping and taking control. Could she use her findings? The women she had talked to had not been informed that she was doing research, because at the time she was working with them she was not in fact conducting research but doing voluntary work (see BOx 26.3 for another example).

Box 26.3 Example of Ethical Concern in Research

Another example quoted by Kidder and Judd (1986) pertains to a white American woman researcher who participated extensively in the lives of black women she studied in an economically poor neighbourhood. Since the researcher had a car, she was often asked to run errands by the black women (e.g. taking sick children to the clinic, collecting provisions, laundry etc.) She also developed genuine friendship with many women there. Did her friendships and the help she gave these women make her observations more ethically correct or less so? It takes a great deal of maturity on the part of the investigator to avoid misusing information gathered and not treating all kinds of sensitive and personal information as "data".

Erlandson et al (1993) identify the following ethical considerations that a researcher must bear in mind:

i) Protecting the subject from physical or psychological harm;
ii) Protecting the subject's privacy and confidentiality;
iii) Protecting the subject against unjustifiable deception; and
iv) Acquiring the informed consent of the subject.

The above points are interrelated. For example, in order to protect the subject from physical/psychological harm the researcher must also protect his privacy and not deceive him. Erlandson et al (1993) quote the example of a researcher studying a prison system. Because some staff and inmates were in highly sensitive situations, revealing their identities could seriously harm their personal safety and career. The same apples to research pertaining to homosexuals, sex workers etc., who are stigmatised in our society. The researcher should take into account the potential risks the participants face if they are identified. The prison researcher decided to use pseudonyms and omitted information that was potentially damaging. He also made the decision not to disguise his own role or the reason why he was in the organisation. The issue of "deception" (or concealing one's identity) is a very tricky one. It is argued that sometimes, a researcher can gain access to society's "darker side" by gaining entry into it and becoming "one of the group". One reads of journalistic "coups" in which writers "pretend" to be prisoners and live in a prison in order to gain the "inside information", or pretend to be potential clients of sex workers, or massage parlours operating as "sex shops" in order to write about their sensational exposes. However, serious social science is not journalism. Erlandson et al (1993) opine that deception is subversive to

the research effort and counterproductive to the search for multiple social constructions that individuals hold.

To obtain the "informed consent" of the participants, the researcher must explain to them clearly the goals of her/ his research and allay their natural fears. Suppose a researcher is studying inter-religious marriages, and is trying to obtain the consent of couples that have had such marriages. Some of the natural fears the potential participants might have could include the following: Is the researcher working on behalf of some politico-religious organisation that wishes to "identify" and "expose" them? Will their privacy be guarded? Will their families be subject to social embarrassment or censure? Will parents have problems in arranging the marriage of a younger sister or brother if it is known that the older sister married into another religion against her parents' wishes?

By discussing these issues frankly and clarifying the strategies by which their privacy and confidentiality can be protected, the researcher may be able to obtain their "informed consent", and thus accord them due respect and safeguard their dignity and human rights. In order to further appreciate the point of ethical concerns of ethnographers, complete Reflection and Action 26.4.

Reflection and Action 26.4

Beteille (1975) opted to identify himself with the resident Brahmins of the village where he carried out his field research in Tamil Nadu. He had access to their homes and temples. When his Harijan informants came to visit him, the Brahmin neighbours and also his host objected and Beteille then changed the mode of his contact with them. In this example you may be able to find the evidence of the problem of conforming to the value-system of the people one is studying. Find at least two more examples of respect for the interests of the citizens one is studying. You would be able to find examples in Betelille and Madan (1975).

26.10 Conclusion

The issues of validity and reliability are problematic ones in qualitative research precisely because qualitative methods demand a lot of personal engagement from the researcher. The risk of the researcher "going native", i.e. identifying herself/ himself so completely with the people under study that s/he then becomes a spokesperson for their issues and interests is also significant. The researcher must at one and the same time be both a participant and an observer, doing research and yet interacting with subjects in their own territory, on their own terms. Several techniques have been identified by which the researcher keeps a scrupulous and detailed record of the work done, separating the views of the actors from one's own. This includes the technique of triangulation. Interwoven with these methodological considerations is the moral imperative that the need to recognise and respect the fact that

the "subjects" of research are human beings who must be treated with respect and accorded the dignity that every human being deserves.

Further Reading

Foster, J. 2003. *Qualitative Research*. Sociology Review 12(4):

Hobson, A. 2000. *Multiple Methods in Social Research*. Sociology Review 10(2):

Shaw, M. and R. Widdowfield 2003. *Ethics and Doing Health Research*. Sociology Review 12(4):

Unit 27

Qualitative Data Formatting and Processing

Contents

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after reading Unit 27, you would be able to proceed with data formatting and processing of the field material gathered by you on the topic of your mini research project in terms of the Circular Process of Qualitative Analysis as formulated by Ian Dey (1993).

27.1 Introduction

The previous units of this block have familiarised you with some of the key methods of gathering data employed by qualitative researchers. The process of discovery and learning embarked upon whilst gathering data is no doubt an exciting and memorable one. However, there comes a point when field notes and interview pages gathered by you must be formatted, processed and analysed. Some of the questions that confront the researcher at this point are: how can I make sense of all this material? How can I organise it to make it meaningful to others and myself? How do I put it all together so as to present a concise and thoughtful formulation of the topic under study?

Hardly any researcher would initiate the process of investigation without a at least a mental checklist of the type of material that is to be gathered. A systematic listing of the topics to be covered is always very useful. Ellen (1984: 275) has mentioned the following three forms of checklists.

- Checklists encoded in questionnaire forms
- Checklists employed in the context of semi-informal interviews
- Background checklists for occasional reference and to provide guidelines for research in general

The idea of mentioning these checklists in the introduction of Unit 27 is to remind you that in order to format and process your field material you need to refer to these checklists to find out if you have actually

completed what you had set out to find out. Only after this initial exercise are you to proceed with qualitative data processing and analysis.

27.2 Qualitative Data Processing and Analysis

The key word that this process entails is analysis. Qualitative analysis requires dialectic between ideas and qualitative data. You may ask: What are qualitative data? For an answer to this question see Box 27.1.

Box 27.1 Definition of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data are materials gathered using field research methods already discussed in Unit 26. Openness and inclusiveness characterise these methods. A researcher applies such methods with the objective of capturing people's lived experiences of the world and the meanings they attach to these experiences from their own worldviews. More often than not collection of qualitative data entails a variety of methods and techniques rather than a single one. The result is that data types include in-depth or unstructured interviews, field notes, unstructured field diaries, personal documents, photographs and so on. Qualitative research in its initial stages means producing a large mass of data even though a researcher may have used a relatively small sample size.

We cannot analyse our qualitative data without ideas, but our ideas must be shaped and tested by the data we are analysing. You cannot make an omelette without breaking and then beating together eggs. Analysis also involves breaking down data into bits and then beating the bits together, so that the data is resolved into its components, and its characteristic elements are revealed. In this sense you can say that we split data processing into two activities, namely,

- Checking and converting the data (breaking eggs) and
- Generating metadata (beating together).

The first activity comprises a) checking out the completeness and quality of data, the relationship between data (for example interviews, field notes, audio/ visual recordings etc) and anonymisation and b) converting data or transferring data to a format that is appropriate for dissemination. At this time apart from checking out the completeness and quality (in terms of its physical condition, readability/ audibility, re-usability) a researcher needs to bring to light any problems relating to confidentiality/ anonymity, re-using, suitability for digitisation, etc.

We have mentioned above the term anonymisation. Let us explain what this term means. It refers to maintaining the confidentiality of the respondent or any other person or entity. It is important to discuss the level of anonymisation you arrive at in your research. In some cases, it is not easy to disguise the identity of the subjects of research without bringing about an unacceptable distortion to the data. This implies that the particular data can hardly be re-used for any purpose. The level of anonymisation you use for a dataset depends on the nature of the study and each case has its own unique set of concerns. Here come in issues of

an ethical and legal nature with respect of maintaining confidentiality where requested. In practical terms, all this means that you remove all identifiers and replace them with pseudonyms where appropriate. Care should be taken to use the same pseudonyms throughout. It is strongly advised to delete from the data any slanderous or libellous comments.

The second processing activity of generating metadata refers to the contextual information that a researcher obtains during processing, for example you may create lists of data giving biographical inputs that would make it easier to identify transcripts or make sure that interviewee and interviewer names and questions/ topic guide headers are put in place. The main function of this exercise is to make it easier for the researcher to locate transcripts or particular items in a data set (see below Section 27.6 on theoretical coding). You will find a definition of metadata® types in Box 27.2. Further, please note that about digitisation of data you will read in detail in the units of Block 8 and we will not include this factor in the scope of Unit 27.

Box 27.2 Definition of Metadata types

The researcher has to wade through the sea of raw data. In order to make the process of wading easier, it is better to prepare i) a data list and ii) a catalogue of records. In addition, one may also prepare iii) a user guide so that anyone can use the data. These three types of data are called metadata. It is always a good research practice to document one's research and the material produced during field research from its beginning and throughout analysis. The data list provides the key characteristics of the data. It helps the researcher to identify specific types of interviews or transcripts. For example, in the case of data which are based on a sample of interviews with individuals, metadata listing would include their date of birth, gender, employment, geographical location and any other key feature that the researcher has defined for sampling.

How do we carry out the above two processes without getting into a mechanical mode of processing? We need to proceed to analysing our data. The aim of analysis is not just description, but interpretation, explanation, understanding, and possibly, prediction. Description provides the basis for analysis, which then lays the base for further description. We break down our data in order to draw concepts from it, which we then use to classify the data. We draw connections between different concepts and these connections form the basis of further description. Ian Dey (1993) presents the following diagram, which succinctly represents the circular processes involved in qualitative analysis.

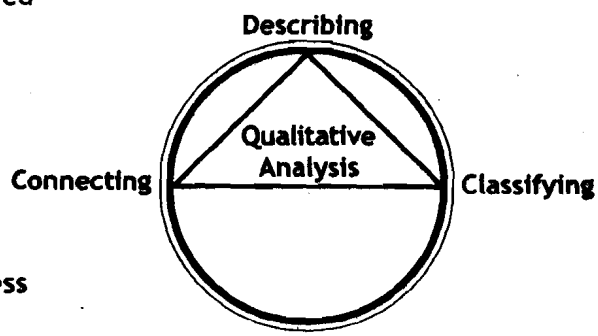


Figure 27.1 Circular Process of Qualitative Analysis

Let us briefly consider each of the processes mentioned on the previous page.

27.3 Description

The first step in qualitative analysis is to develop comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Geertz (1973b) coined the term "thick description". Unlike "thin description", which merely states facts, thick description includes information about a) the context of an act, b) intentions and meaning attributed by the actor to the action and c) the process in which the action is embedded.

Let us briefly dwell on these points.

❖ **Context:** By "context" we mean situating the action within the social, cultural and historical backdrop against which it takes place. Contexts are a key to meaning since meaning is conveyed "correctly" only if the context is also understood.

❖ **Intentions:** In qualitative analysis there is a strong emphasis in understanding the subjective meanings imbued by actors to the way in which action is organised.

❖ **Process:** The idea of process is linked to that of change. In focusing on process, we shift our attention from context and intentions to the consequences of the action. For example, you are probably familiar with the policy of "perestroika"© unleashed by Mikhael Gorbachev in the erstwhile Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. The context was growing disenchantment with and ineffectiveness of the state controls on economy and society. The intentions of Gorbachev were probably the creation of a more just, liberal order. But the consequences were the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the movement towards a unipolar world order governed by the U.S.A.

27.4 Classification

This involves sorting out our mass of data into "classes" based on certain characteristics, which will then aid us in the development of a conceptual framework through which actions and events can be rendered intelligible. You have surely done jigsaw puzzles. Consider your data as hundreds of little bits of the jigsaw, which must be carefully put together so that the resultant picture gives an accurate representation of the social reality you have studied. How do you assemble the picture? By grouping the bits into like classes. Perhaps all the "blue bits" together will form the sky, the "green bits" the forest, and the brown ones the earth. Organising the data into groups based on certain characteristics is essentially the process of categorisation. At the stage of writing up your study the same categories may take the form of index of your book (for indexing see Box 27.3). Categories are the organising tools, which help us to sort out the heap of bits of the jigsaw puzzle according to relevant

characteristics. Classification and categorisations should always be guided by the research objectives. The points mentioned above will be taken up in greater detail when we talk about "coding".

Box 27.3 Indexing

There are three elements found in an index, i) mnemonics, ii) reference and iii) structure. Mnemonics are short forms for information. References show where you are to find the information and the structure is the arrangement for organising mnemonics. Most often you may find that categories in mnemonics overlap. In such a situation ideally you would need to put the overlapping pieces of information in both categories. With regard to references you would require a fair degree of precision for identifying the location of information. You may take recourse to modern information technology (see the units in Block 8). The structure of mnemonics is usually in alphabetical order with substructures. Many categories mention cross-references to take care of overlapping information. Making such indexes complete in the above three respects is of course useful at the stage of data analysis and of writing up the research material. It is also useful if you or someone else was to re-study the same topic in the same region.

Let us now discuss briefly about making connections, the third process of Ian Dey's diagram (Figure 27.1).

27.5 Making Connections

Describing and classifying are not ends in themselves but serve a more important purpose, namely, to produce an account of our analysis. The concepts we develop are like building blocks, which must be connected together with the mortar of ideas. We have to look for associations between different variables and try to see the patterns within the data, so that we can discern regularities and also variation and exceptions.

We can now discuss the subject of "coding". But before proceeding to this discussion let us first complete Reflection and Action 27.1.

Reflection and Action 27.1

Read the following excerpt and work out what kinds of data does one require to understand the rituals in their social context and to grasp their significance for the practitioners of those rituals?

> Religious behaviour does not exclusively depend on religious contexts but it is generally a human form of behaviour which is realised under the stimulus not of transcendental objects but of their motivations... . Even in its autonomy, religious life contains elements that are not specifically religious but social... only when (these elements) are isolated by means of the sociological method, will they show what within the whole complex of religious behaviour may legitimately be considered purely religious, that is, independent of anything social (Simmel 1950: 15).

You can take help of Victor Turner's (1967: 181-204) article on "Aspects of Saora Ritual and Shamanism" for answering the questions raised above. Here, Turner has shown the kind of data required and the connections that need to be made in order to understand and explain the "phenomena of mysticism, asceticism, conversion and holy mendicancy in the higher religions".

27.6 Theoretical Coding

In order to analyse our data, we have to read it in an interactive way, and constantly ask the questions "Who"? "What"? "When"? "Where"? and "Why"? This will open up our data for us and help us think about it in a creative way. The processing of field material, once it has been gathered, invariably implies hard work for researchers who are inexperienced in handling field data. Many information and communication technology aids are now available for them and we have discussed them in Block 8. Here we will be mainly concerned with the theoretical coding of field material.

The key function of this exercise is to convert the material on the schedules into suitable code form. Coding is considered a tedious and demanding job. Further, this is an area where methods of analysis of quantitative and qualitative data complement and supplement each other. For example, Turner (1957 and 1961) has used the quantitative material about village composition in his description of Ndembu® social structure.

Let us now look at some techniques and procedures, which will help make sense of qualitative data. The first procedure discussed is "theoretical coding" in order to develop a "grounded theory"®. This procedure was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and further elaborated by Glaser (1978), Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Coding represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways. A grounded theory is, "a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 57). Analysis in grounded theory comprises three major kinds of coding, viz.

- ❖ Open coding
- ❖ Axial coding and
- ❖ Selective coding.

Let us briefly review each of them. But before you get into details of coding in grounded theory, it is a good idea to read in Box 27.4 a bit more about grounded theory.

Box 27.4 Grounded Theory According to Glaser

The following is a discussion on Grounded Theory (GT) according to Glaser (for more details on GT see glossary that is placed at the end of Book 3 of MSO 002).

Goals of grounded theory

The goal of a GT is to formulate hypotheses based on conceptual ideas that others may try to verify. The hypotheses are generated by constantly comparing conceptualised data on different levels of abstraction, and these comparisons contain deductive steps. GT does not aim for the "truth" but to conceptualise "what's going on" using empirical data. GT is thus a systematic generation of theory from data that contains both inductive and deductive thinking. In a way GT resembles what many researchers do when retrospectively formulating new hypotheses to fit data. However, in GT the researcher does not pretend to have

formulated the hypotheses in advance since preformed hypotheses are prohibited (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

In most research endeavors persons or patients are units of analysis, whereas in GT the unit of analysis is the incident (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The number often amounts to several hundred in a GT study since every participant normally reports many incidents. When comparing many incidents in a certain area, the emerging concepts and their relationships are in reality probability statements. Consequently, GT is not a qualitative method but a general method that can use any kind of data, according to Glaser (2001). However, although working with probabilities, most GT studies are considered as qualitative since statistical methods are not used, and figures not presented. The results of GT is hence not reporting of facts but probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser 1998). Validity in its traditional sense is consequently not an issue in GT, which instead should be judged by fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, Glaser 1998).

Fit has to do with how closely concepts fit with the incidents they are representing, and this is related to how thoroughly the constant comparison of incidents to concepts was done.

Relevance. A relevant study deals with the real concern of participants, evokes "grab" (captures the attention) and is not only of academic interest.

Workability. The theory works when it explains how the problem is being solved with much variation.

Modifiability. A modifiable theory can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data. A GT is never right or wrong, it just has more or less fit, relevance, workability and modifiability, and readers of Paper V are asked to judge its quality according to these principles.

The goal of a GT is to discover the participants' main concern and how they continually try to resolve it. The questions you keep on asking in GT are "What's going on?" and "What is the main problem of the participants and how are they trying to solve it?" These questions will be answered by the core variable and its sub-cores and properties in due course. If your research goal is accurate description then another method should be chosen since GT is not a descriptive method. Instead it has the goal of generating concepts that explain people's actions regardless of time and place. The descriptive parts of a GT are there mainly to illustrate the concepts.

We can now go back to our discussion of the three kinds of coding in grounded theory.

❖ Open coding

Open coding refers to close examination of the data so that phenomena may be named and categorised. An observation, a sentence, a paragraph from an interview transcript is taken apart and given a name which stands for or represents the phenomenon. We ask questions, like "What is this?" "What does it represent?" On the way, we make comparisons so that similar phenomena may be given the same name. Suppose, you are doing a study of how children play together. You see one child pulling away a toy from another and you label it as "grabbing". You may then observe another child "hiding" her toy, a third "avoiding" interacting

with the others in order to protect his toy. Now you can go on endlessly labelling, but this will get you nowhere. You have to start grouping your concepts together as categories. You may ask yourself what the "grabbing", "hiding" and "avoiding" represent, and come to the conclusion that these are all "strategies to avoid sharing a toy". After generating categories, Strauss and Corbin (1990: 70) recommend that their properties be identified and then dimensionalised, i.e. located along a continuum in order to define the content more precisely. Let us look at the category of "colour". Its properties include shade, intensity, hue and so forth. Each of these properties can be dimensionalised; that is, they vary along the continuum. This colour can vary in intensity from high to low; in hue from darker to lighter; and so forth.

There are various ways of doing open coding. Strauss and Corbin recommend analysing the first interview, line-by-line, so that concepts and categories are freely generated. Subsequently, this can be done paragraph-wise or in terms of an entire document or case. It is important not to lose touch with the aims of coding, namely, breaking down and understanding a text in order to generate categories, which can be used for comparing. The result of open coding should be a list of codes and categories written alongside the text itself, along with "code notes" that explain the content of the codes. "Memos" which contain observations on the material and your thoughts about it also go a long way in developing grounded theory.

❖ **Axial coding**

The next step is to refine and differentiate the categories generated in open coding. Those categorises are selected which hold out promise for further development. Strauss and Corbin (1990: .99) suggest a coding paradigm, which is given in the figure below:

A	Causal Condition
	↓
B	Phenomenon
	↓
C	Context
	↓
D	Intervening Condition
	↓
E	Action/Interaction Strategies
	↓
F	Consequences

Figure 27.2 Coding Paradigm as per Strauss and Corbin (1999: 99)

In axial coding, categories are developed in terms of the causal conditions that give rise to the phenomenon, location of the phenomenon in terms of its properties, the context, the action/ interactional strategies used to handle, manage, respond to the phenomenon with regard to the context and the consequences of any action/ interaction that is taken.

In axial coding, the categories that are most relevant to the research question are selected from the developed codes and the related code notes. Many different passages in the text are then sought as evidence of these relevant codes.

❖ Selective coding

The third step, selective coding, continues the axial coding at a higher level of abstraction. It aims at laying bare the core category around which the other categories can be arranged. In other words, it reveals the "story of the case". The story of the case is to be set down briefly, before developing the story line (see Box 27.5 on identifying a story). You will note that the coding approach is essentially an inductive one. From studying the content and meaning of the text, the researcher uses his/her interpretative abilities to formulate code and categories, takes them to a higher level of abstraction and then constructs a story or an account, which is applicable to the whole data. The researcher is able to say, "under these conditions, this is what occurs" (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 131).

Box 27.5 Identifying the Story (from Strauss & Corbin 1990: 119-120)

The following example has been taken from Strauss and Corbin (1990), using data collected by Corbin. Corbin studied how 20 women with chronic illnesses managed their pregnancies. The women she studied had illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease and lupus erythematosus. Whilst interviewing these women, Corbin came to realise what an active role they played in managing their high-risk pregnancies. The "story" she identified is as follows.

"The main story seems to be about how women with pregnancies complicated by chronic illness manage the risks they perceive to be associated with their pregnancies. Each pregnancy/ illness can be said to be on-course, indicating that the risks are being managed, or off-course, indicating that they are not. Women are managing the perceived risks in order to have a healthy baby. This desired outcome seems to be the primary force motivating them to do whatever is necessary to minimise the risks. However, they are not passive recipients of care but play a very important role in the management process. They not only are responsible for monitoring their illnesses and pregnancies at home, but also make very active decisions about the regimens they are told to follow. In the latter case they consider the harm that might come to the baby from procedures like amniocentesis or from taking high doses of certain medications while pregnant. They carefully weigh the risks and make judgments about the right thing to do. If they think the doctor is wrong, then they do what they (the women) think should be done."

Let us now move on to another technique of formatting and processing data, namely, qualitative content analysis. Before reading about qualitative content analysis let us complete Reflection and Action 27.2.

Reflection and Action 27.2

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory supports a generalist approach to social research and does not like any preconceptions about theoretical formulation of research. Such an approach has a clear process of coding. You need to read Section 27.6 carefully and provide examples of the three types of coding from your own mini research project.

27.7 Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is one of the classical procedures for analysing textual

material, be it interviews or media products. It differs from coding in the sense that rather than generating categories from the data themselves, it uses categories brought from the outside and "fits" the empirical material against them, of course, modifying the categories wherever necessary. The aim of qualitative content analysis is to reduce the material so as to make it manageable. The following material drawn from Clive Flick's (1998) description of the techniques of qualitative content analysis is based on the work of Peter Mayring (1983) on the experience of teachers regarding teaching.

- **Summarising content analysis**: Here, the material is paraphrased, that is, omitting less relevant passages or those having the same meaning reduces it (first reduction). Similar paraphrases are summarised together (second reduction). Thus the material becomes more coherent, economical and manageable. It is a kind of editing of the material in order to draw out its essence.
- **Explicative content analysis**: This works in the opposite way. Here, statements which are puzzling, contradictory or unclear, are explained or clarified by keeping in mind their context, or by looking for clues in other parts of the text that would help make their meaning clear.
- **Structuring content analysis**: Here, the researcher looks for types or formal structures in the material by applying categories that emerged at the stage of formulating the research question itself, and organising the material accordingly. Thus, qualitative content analysis helps the researcher to reduce to manageable level large masses of text, using a uniform scheme of categories, which also helps in the comparison of different cases to which it is applied throughout.

See Box 27.6 for examples of qualitative analysis.

Box 27.6 Examples of Qualitative Content Analysis (from Flick 1998: 194)

The following examples are quoted in Flick (1998) and pertain to data gathered by Peter Mayring (1983) on the experiences of teachers regarding teaching practice.

Example: Summarising content analysis

From an interview with an unemployed teacher, the statement 'and actually, quite the reverse, I was well very-very keen on finally teaching for the first time' (Mayring 1983: 104) is paraphrased as 'quite the reverse, very keen on practice' and generalised as 'rather looking forward to practice' (1983: 59). The statement 'therefore, I have already waited for it, to go to the seminar school, until I finally could teach there for the first time' (1983: 104) is paraphrased as 'waited to teach finally' and generalised as 'looking forward to practice'. Owing to the similarity of the two generalisations, the second one then is skipped and reduced with the other statement to 'practice not experienced as shock but as big fun' (1983: 59). Thus, skipping those statements that overlap at the levels of the generalisation reduces the source text.

Example: Explicative content analysis

In an interview, a teacher expresses her difficulties in teaching by stating that

she – unlike successful colleagues.—.was 'no' entertainer type (1983: 109). In order to find out what she wishes to express by using this concept, first the varied definitions of 'entertainer' are assembled from two dictionaries. Then the features of the teacher who fit this description are sought from statements made by the teacher in the interview. Further passage is consulted. Based on the description of such colleagues in included in these passage, an 'explicating paraphrase can be formulated: an entertainer type is somebody who play the part of an extroverted, spirited, sparkling and self-assured human being' (1983: 74). This explication is assessed again by applying it to the direct context in which the concept was used.

Before we end Unit 27, we need to complete the last Reflection and Action exercise in order to check if you have fully grasped the idea of content analysis.

Reflection and Action 27.3

According to Sarantakos (1998: 280-81), content analysis entails similar steps as any other method of research. This means that it includes selecting the area of research, designing the research, gathering data and analysing them. The content of each step separates content analysis from other methods of research. Content analysis analyses the content (it may be qualitative or quantitative) of documents, books, journals, and other kinds of written text. The content in such an analysis may be explicit or implicit. An example of content analysis is the study of television serials to find out why certain categories of people continue to watch particular shows without missing a single episode. Can you give at least five more examples of studies which can use the method of content analysis to discover attitudes, motives and values of subjects of research?

27.8 Conclusion

Unit 27 has sought to acquaint you with some important techniques of analysing and interpreting your data. However rich and interesting your data, they will make sense only if they are rigorously analysed and cogently presented. The approach of Strauss and Corbian exemplifies how we can proceed step by step to integrating masses of data into a tightly woven grounded theory which will help to explain and predict reality. Qualitative content analysis demonstrates how pre-existing categories can be imposed upon data in order to select and edit what seems irrelevant and unnecessary so that the key research questions may be addressed and understood.

Further Reading

Silverman, David. 1993. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. Sage Publications: New Delhi (for various dimensions and logic of qualitative research and for techniques of analysis of texts and interview data)

Singleton, Royce A. and Bruce C. Straits 1999. *Approaches to Social Research*. Oxford University Press: New York (about the set of questions a researcher has the interest in finding answers of)

Unit 28

Writing Up Qualitative Data

Contents

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after reading Unit 28, you will be able to grasp the following crucial inputs for the purpose of writing your own research findings.

- An understanding of the kinds of problems you are likely to face at the time of starting to write up your research results.
- It is always better to first understand what you have in mind and then try to express the same in writing.
- Do not delay the task of writing.
- Appreciate the different styles of writing.
- What you write the first time is always a draft only.

28.1 Introduction

Unit 28 is principally written for research students and the neophytes in sociological and social anthropological research. Such research writing happens to be largely qualitative in nature. With skilled, well-known writers and authors, it shares the issues of writing up qualitative research, handling the world of words, an area of apprenticeship on which not many people have written. This unit reflects upon the modus operandi© of creating a text, a piece of writing which is a product of field research.

28.2 Problems of Writing Up

How important is the issue of "writing up qualitative research" in a text of or a seminar on research methods? Perhaps not much, as can be gathered from a cursory glance at the contents of most books in research methods or from courses prescribed for pre- and post-fieldwork levels. These books and articles intuitively believe that writing is not a problematic area. One knowledgeable about language in which the text is to be written, with a good control over the technical vocabulary, can write

provided he has the relevant facts at his disposal and a satisfactory understanding of the theoretical apparatus. In this line of thinking, writing is not a problem; what is of concern is how to collect and analyse data. This is indeed a subject of serious study. Now we know why the overall emphasis of books on research methods is on techniques and tools of data collection, the procedures of analysis, and the presentation of data.

But have a look at the "quieter" side - I call it "quieter" because researchers, writers, and authors generally do not speak about it, at least in public. If writing were such an easy endeavour, then why is it that the open-ended questions in a questionnaire are left unanswered by literate respondents, or are often answered in two words, often written obliquely, "not applicable"? Survey researchers are frustrated on seeing this response to their questions. To combat the low response rate, they either often plan to increase the size of their sample assuming that some respondents would definitely answer all questions, or replace open-ended questions with close-ended thinking that the latter are answered with greater facility. Or else, as happens invariably, the questionnaire is administered as a schedule, in which the investigator reads the questions before the respondent and notes down his replies verbatim. Researchers who have worked with questionnaires and schedules have pointed out time and again that respondents find writing difficult, as some kind of an onerous burden. However, they take delight in talking about the topics on which the researcher needs information provided those areas are not considered taboo in their cultures. The observation that open-ended questions remain unanswered, or are callously answered, does not imply that the respondent does not want to answer them, or is less serious about answering them, but that s/he finds writing stressful, burdensome, difficult, or one which exposes her/ his level of education. Or, s/he may be afraid of writing the facts, because against the background of the legal value of "written records", writing is proof whilst speech may not be. But this is a separate issue, not to be broached here.

Writing can equally be a phase of trial and tribulation for researchers (see Box 28.1).

Box 28.1 Writing, a Phase of Trial and Tribulation

Srivastava describes the process in the following words.

"Although aware of it from the time (1977) I read for an M.Phil. Degree in Chinese studies, I became acutely aware of the problems of writing up qualitative research and the pangs through which the researchers pass while working on a doctoral dissertation (in 1988) in social anthropology at Cambridge. For those who had returned from fieldwork, the Cambridge social anthropology department those days had a seminar titled "Writing-up Seminar", in which the doctoral students presented their fieldwork experiences and the chapters of their dissertations they had written. As members of the teaching faculty often attended these seminars, the presenters of these papers were exceptionally nervous, but knew full well that academic interventions of senior scholars would profit them greatly. The informal conversation between the students this seminar group used to pivot on "how the writing was coming up". I avidly listened to their experiences

of writing up, and like fieldworkers, queried them on the "writing difficulties" they were facing. Was it vocabulary, the battery of technical terms? Or, the correct grammar? Or, the theory? Or, some other inhibition? In so far as the ethnographic facts were concerned, the researchers seemed to me confident, having stayed with people long enough to know them reasonably well. In fact, the Cambridge supervisors insisted on a long field stay, not less than one year, and the examples of students who stayed with the communities they had studied for longer duration - two years or more - were always given in pre-fieldwork seminars."

Surely, the students from China, Japan, Korea, Bangladesh, Spain, Russia, some African countries, and Iran lacked good command over English, thus failing to express their arguments well. Sometimes, they also registered their incompetence in handling and writing abstract pieces in English. They were also known for writing up their dissertations slowly. Because they could easily afford expensive education, quite a few of them went for private tuitions in English and engaged the services of professional editors. Thus, apparently, the problem of non-English speaking students lay in their inadequate command over English, the language in which they were expected to write their dissertations. In order to explore if the problem rested in their lack of ability over a foreign language or in some other factor, I often asked them how they would fare if they were to write their research works in their native languages. Most of them said that they could write letters in their mother tongues but not dissertations. One might think here that the native speakers of English would not suffer from "writing blocks", but that was not true. Like the others, I learnt from my interviews with them, they also described writing as a difficult process, be in their own language or foreign languages.

A conclusion one may draw from this is that although command over language in which the text would be written plays a significant role, its lack is not the only impediment to writing up qualitative research. Because people face genuine problems in writing, that could be one of the reasons why many of them resort to plagiarism. Perhaps, the researchers dealing with quantitative facts do not encounter the same problems of writing up as do qualitative researchers, a point to which I shall return later. It has been observed that certain set formats - thumbnail designs - are available for quantitative researches, which guide each piece of research. This is, however, not the case with qualitative research because the format, the chapters, and sections and subsections will emerge from the type of data the investigator has at his command. As each fieldwork is unique, so is each piece of ethnography.

Complete Reflection and Action 28.1 and discover the kind of problems you as a researcher are likely to face.

Reflection and Action 28.1

Write four pages on Field Research. After finishing the text, recount the problems you faced. Explain briefly the nature of each problem you encountered.

28.3 Grasp and Then Render

Clifford Geertz, in his famous article that advocated the idea of "thick description" (1973), says that the fieldworker first of all grasps, and then renders. Grasping is done using a set of techniques and methods, the tool-kit of anthropologists. In his standard textbook on anthropological methods, Pelto (1970) writes that the fieldworker does not have at his disposal a fixed assemblage of techniques, arrayed in a particular manner. What he knows are the generic types of fieldwork techniques and methods that he has acquired as a part of his theoretical training. But he also knows, as we have said earlier, that each fieldwork is not only unique; it is also an experiment with the basic fieldwork techniques and methods. Whether a specific technique or method is useful in a particular fieldwork situation will depend upon the conditions prevailing in the community under study at that point of time. Depending upon the context of study, the fieldworker will combine various techniques and methods. He may also improvise new techniques and methods or make a significant contribution to the already existing tool-kit. An important part of sociological writings is an account of one's experiences of handling the repertoire of techniques and methods in a fieldwork (see Béteille and Madan, ed., 1975; Srivastava, 1991; Thapan, ed., 1998; Srinivas *et al.*, ed., 2002).

"Rendering" is what we give to the world of academics, to the public, and to all those concerned. We can render through a broad range of activities, such as, we may write academic reports, articles, monographs; we may deliver lectures and make seminar presentations on our studies; we may show slides, pictures, films, videos that we have prepared on the people of our study; we may narrate stories about the people or recite poems we wrote on them or during the fieldwork; we may exhibit local material cultural artifacts and give their descriptions; we may appear on a T.V. talk show and talk about our field studies; we may write for newspapers and popular journals, or write a script for an ethnographic play or fiction; or just chat about our studies and the people of those studies in pubs. In other words, all these options are viable and fieldworkers often resort to them.

But of these, the most important, and also academically uplifting, is the realm of publications, which includes books, articles and monographs, the pieces of serious research. In the world of academics, no substitute exists for publications. There was a time when writing was the only thinkable way to present the results of one's fieldwork. Now, other ways have come into existence, and in recent years we also write for certain web sites, write e-books. Earlier, we wrote long hand or on the typewriter. Now, the technology of writing has changed - we write on the computer or use a Dictaphone, the taped text being transcribed later. We also tape our lectures, then transcribe, edit, and publish them. We create our "renderings of fieldwork" in classes and lecture theatres, and let

others jot them down for our benefit.

Films and photographs are valued, for they augment a standard ethnography, but they are not supposed to replace the latter. A picture may be highly expressive, worth a million words; but words come first and pictures are optional (Wolcott 1995). A coffee-table book, with dozens of pictures and their captions, is not counted as ethnography or a monograph on the people of one's study (see Box 28.2 on the place of pictures in the written up text for publication).

Box 28.2 Words come first and Pictures are Optional

Srivastava says that,

> One of the differences I have noted between anthropology textbooks done by British and American scholars is that the former are virtually without pictures whereas the latter carry a number of them. One may refer, for example, to the standard British texts such as John Beattie's (1964) *Other Cultures* or Lucy Mair's (1965) *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. Pictures constitute the appendix, so do the material objects, which go to the museum. Doing visual anthropology is not taken seriously. I remember if a speaker in a Cambridge seminar relied greatly on showing slides, or films, or playing an audio, the audience thought that he had not "written up", or was shy of sharing his words with them. I am told in many universities there exists a word limit on the number of pictures one may include in one's dissertation. In some others, each picture is supposed to be equivalent to a certain number of words (say, three hundred). If the dissertation is not to exceed the word limit, then its author has to be really judicious about the selection of pictures, for they eat away the words. Moreover, the writer does not get any credit for the pictures, howsoever evocative they may be. The student gets a degree for words and not pictures. One may remember here an oft-quoted statement from Clifford (1990: 2): "No longer a marginal, or occulted, dimension, writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter."

It is abundantly clear from the above that the issues of writing up are as important and significant as are the issues of fieldwork, of rapport establishment and handling the methods and techniques of data collection. While a lot exists on how fieldwork was carried out, there is hardly anything available on one's experiences of writing up, on one's problems and crises pertaining to what has come to be known as "deskwork". Becker (1986) notes that teachers do not tell the students how the textbooks and monographs they read are actually written. Most students, he says, never have an opportunity to actually see their teachers, or professional writers and authors, or researchers at deskwork, and also, the authors and writers do not write on their "writing experiences" of producing a text.

However, in the last two decades, some authors have seriously attended to this topic. They clearly state that the aspects of writing up need to be discussed as explicitly as possible. Undoubtedly, some researchers are far more creative than others and have a flair for writing, but one can examine the matter of writing up objectively, suggesting useful points that one must bear in mind, notwithstanding one's level of creativity in

writing. That writing regularly can increase one's creative potential has time and again been emphasized in many of these works. In this connection, one is advised to consult the following two texts: Howard Becker's *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish your Thesis, Book, or Article* (1986) and Harry Wolcott's *Writing up Qualitative Research* (1990). Wolcott's *The Art of Fieldwork* (1995) also has a chapter on writing up, which is highly recommended, and so is Laurel Richardson's paper (1994) titled "Writing: A Method of Inquiry".

Let us complete Reflection and Action 28.2 for discovering the actual process of transforming knowledge into communication.

Reflection and Action 28.2

You write or communicate what you know. The two are related in the sense that you can write only what you know. You would like to organize your material in order to transform knowledge into communication. As you are registered at a study center of IGNOU, you are likely to know about the IGNOU system of open and distance learning. In order to communicate to your family about your knowledge of the IGNOU system you need to organize what you know about it. Just carry out this exercise of organizing your knowledge and then transform it into communication. Describe the process in five hundred words.

28.4 "Writing Down" and "Writing Up"

Writing up is the *process* whereby the *world is transformed into words*. By the "world" is understood the ethnographic landscape where the investigator spends a lengthy period of time, generally not less than an annual cycle, observing and interviewing people in their natural habitat. During this period of fieldwork, the investigator sees, feels, hears, smells, and tastes the "other", the object of study. S/he also "imagines" many things about the "other", chances upon the tentative explanations of various phenomena, tests certain well-known theories on the facts at her/ his disposal, and records in the mind as well as on the paper her/ his experiences of collecting data. S/he also sends out from the field letters, and now e-mails, to supervisors, project directors, kinspersons, and friends. They all constitute a part of the data, a first-hand account of experiences of knowing the "other" (see Box 28.3 for the meaning of the term the "other"). Murray Wax (1980) says that writing is not simply an "adjunct" to fieldwork but is its "critical component".

Box 28.3 Meaning of the Word "Other"

A brief clarification is required here about the meaning of the word "other": the "other" refers to the object, externally situated, which is the focus of study. It could be one's own people, rather than those belonging to a different culture. The idea here is that one's own community can be studied with the same spirit of detachment that is employed in the study of, what anthropologists call, the "other cultures". The point to be made here is that writing begins the moment the fieldworker (or, the ethnographer) plunges into the study of the "other". It commences with the preparation of the research design or proposal.

But this writing is "writing down the notes, the observations, excerpts from interviews"; it is the pre-text stage. It is like collecting, gathering, and accumulating the ingredients, and transforming them into a "cuisine", if one takes an analogy from the culinary art. Researchers know that the "collection of data" and the "ethnographic writings" are not only analytically separable but also, can be distinguished into a number of ways. However, it is on the first (i.e., data) that the second (i.e., ethnography) is built up. We "write down" - the common expression is "note down" - the facts in our notebooks and field diaries, which constitute our data. In addition to the factual details that we have written down, a lot exists in our minds, in our memories, for which Simon Ottenberg (quoted by Sanjek, 1996) has used the term "head notes". The pieces of information embedded in our heads surface when we are in the process of writing. Our "head notes" help us in interpreting and understanding the facts that we have collected. That is why, when a sociologist "reads other ethnographers" notes he finds it difficult to understand them because he lacks the head notes that facilitate understanding" (Srivastava 2004: 34). When we are in the process of writing up a text, we realize that what we have collected in our notes and diaries is not really complete, for much exists in our memories and can always be called for at relevant places and times.

We "write down" field notes but we "write up" the ethnographic texts. Let us have a look at the distinction between "write down" and "write up". According to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1986), "write down" is "to set down in writing, record, note". Its other meaning is "to direct one's efforts in writings to a lower level, as to a less intelligent reader or audience"; the example given here is: "He writes down to the public". "Write up" is "to put into writing, especially in full detail"; the example appended is, "to write up a report" (p. 1520). Thinking in terms of these meanings, we can say that the facts are recorded; they are written down, scribbled, and scratched. In her writings, Margaret Mead discusses the pressure on the fieldworkers to prepare field notes from "scratch notes", and also the danger of the scratch notes turning "cold" and "uninteresting" when the process of writing them down is delayed, even by a day. She also notices the satisfaction that a fieldworker gets on catching up with the writing down of scratch and head notes (Sanjek, 1996; Srivastava, 2001; Srivastava 2004: 33-5). From the written down notes and the unwritten memories from the field, the investigator writes up the qualitative account, the piece of ethnography.

This distinction between "write down" and "write up" is clear from what Geertz has to say in one of his interviews (see Olson 1991):

> I've spent a lot of time in the field - almost a dozen years in Southeast Asia and North Africa - where I don't do any writing at all. I can't write in the field. I write a lot of field notes, but I can't compose anything...You do two or two and a half years" fieldwork in Java in which all you do is live with the people, write down

> everything, and try to figure out what the hell is going on; then you come back and write-out of the notes, out of our memories, and out of whatever is going on the field. So, for me at least, it's a fairly divided life. I don't write in the field; I write after I return. Mostly, *here* I write and *there* research.

"Write down" to "write up" is also a transition from fieldwork to deskwork, from the hurly-burly field to a quiet workroom (Geertz 1988). Through writing up, the first-hand field experiences are transformed into a text, a report, a monograph, or an article. At this juncture, we may ask a question: Is the transition from "write down" to "write up" as smooth as it appears? Furthermore, pursuing the analogy of a kitchen, as different cooks prepare different cuisines from the same raw ingredients, in the same way, different fieldworkers produce different ethnographies from the same reservoir of facts. It should also be remembered here that the social facts collected by two different fieldworkers from the same ethnographic situation are never the same, for different theoretical perspectives colour each one's vision (find out the same by completing Reflection and Action 28.3).

Reflection and Action 28.3

Form a team of four members from among the learners of MSO 002 at your study center. Each member of the team is to collect data about "learner participation in activities of your study centre" and write only a one-page note on the topic on the basis of the data collected. Compare the notes for similarities and differences and prepare a short note of two hundred words to list the same.

28.5 Write Early

Words come first. And, linking them up to form a cogent and a meaningful whole is a demanding task, often frustrating. I remember myself sitting at the desk placed in a corner of my room, with field notes, diaries, photocopies of relevant articles, books with markers on important pages, spread all around me, with a pencil in my hand, often striking it at the paper, waiting for the formation of proper sentences, cutting and erasing them, moving to the kitchen to prepare a cup of tea, or going out for a smoke, all to focus my concentration on my work. Some days, the scenario remained unchanged for hours, as I struggled with writing, a proper and correct expression of my ideas. At this point of time, many of us rush to the library to read more, or rush to the field area, if it happens to be situated nearby, thinking that we have not read enough or we do not have enough information to write up our accounts. Thus, we keep on postponing writing; we keep on accumulating readings, more and more references. Like the snowball process, one book or article leads to another, and so on; it is a ceaseless process.

Because we do not start writing up, besides suffering from tremendous stress, we are unable to discipline our thoughts. Lots and lots of readings, polemical viewpoints, confound us. The writing problems are so real and genuine that a cross-section of researchers in my sample, both young

and experienced, admitted to having passed through the crippling effects of not writing or "not writing well". I remember my own days as a research student: for hours together, I would not be able to write, or what I was able to write was of so poor quality that I would not like to share it with others. These failings would make me depressed and low, forcing me to look for more reading or discussion with fellow researchers, but I was able to cut the "glacier"© of not writing by remaining glued to my chair, attempting to write again, attempting to express the same idea again, and then, gradually, sentences would begin forming, ideas would begin flowing, and some kind of a first-draft of my work would start emerging. And, once I have a draft of my work before me, not only do I feel confident of my abilities ("I can do it"), but also, I think through my first draft, give it to the others to read and comment, edit it, make additions and deletions, sharpen the arguments, refer to other works, and add what is known as the "scholarly apparatus" (epigrams, quotations, footnotes, bibliography). In this context, one is reminded of Wolcott (1995: 216), who writes:

Simply stated, the only antidote for not writing is to write. You can always improve what you have written, editing the good stuff and tossing the rest. Until you have words in front of you to edit, thoughts can jump around forever in your head in so abstract a form that they can neither be communicated to others nor sharpened to your satisfaction.

The period of trial, tribulation, and ennui prevails when nothing significant seems to be coming out of our pen (or the keyboard), and this period is to be sustained, with a positive and optimistic outlook, for this is the transitional stage.

Further, writing is like any other workmanship or art that we must practice regularly in case we wish to excel in it in course of time. You may try to follow the general principles of preferring to write in the active to the passive voice and write as "I" and "you" in place of "we" and "one". Similarly, try and vary the length of your sentences. Connect sentences with "for", "since", and "nevertheless". Avoid the use of "It is" or "There is" to begin a sentence.

In the context of qualitative research, the sooner we begin with writing the better it is. It was said earlier that the writing of a "text" begins the moment we begin to write the research proposal. Throughout our fieldwork, we write notes and diaries; we transcribe audiotapes in case tape recorders are used. Research students are advised not to treat writing as the last phase of their research, an activity that comes after data have been collected. Richardson (1994) writes that writing should not be understood as a "mopping-up activity" at the end of a research project. Rather, it should be seen as a "way of knowing" - a "method of discovery and analysis". Similarly, Wolcott notes that writing should be "joined to research"; it is wrong to consider it as the "final step after everything is finished" (see Box 28.4 for writing early).

Box 28.4 Advantages of Writing Early

There are distinct advantages of writing "early". We write to discover what we have to say about what we are experiencing and how we are going to say it. We should consider writing before beginning with a field study and after the research proposal has been finalized. It is well known that we are advised to start our study without any preconceptions, prejudices, or stereotypes, but we do carry with us several theoretical ideas to the field. If we write about these ideas, we will be able to ferret out our biases.

Early writing should not be seen as influencing (or biasing) our train of thoughts, but as one that brings us face to face with our preferences and preconceived ideas. As a result, we are able to deal with them far more effectively than is the case otherwise. In disciplines like sociology and social anthropology, one has to deal with higher levels of empathy, which materialize principally because of a long-term stay (often, not less than one year or so) of the ethnographer with the people of his study. We treat our "subjects of study" as "fellow beings" in comparison to the other social sciences for which the subjects of study are the "objects" with whom any sort of a passionate relationship, a relationship of comradeship, is largely ruled out. Because of the special conditions obtaining in sociological and social anthropological work, the likelihood of our getting biased is far more than what may be the situation in other social sciences. Against this background, writing helps in a big way to make oneself aware of one's likes and dislikes, one's subjectivity, involvement with people, and the paradoxes of participant observation.

28.6 Writing Styles

One of the principal expectations from the fieldworker is not only that he would write up the ethnographic account, but would also write it well. Wolcott (1995: 209) writes that readers are "twice-blessed"[◎] when an ethnography is not only insightful and of substance, but is also well written. Needless to say, well written and well composed works are read, and the more they are read, the more popular they become. Our biggest defeat is when our fieldwork accounts remain unread, notwithstanding our erudition, because they fail to captivate the attention of readers. My M.Phil. dissertation supervisor, Professor Krishna Prakash Gupta, taught me that a writer must not forget the reader, and while in the process of producing the text, the writer should critically read whichever chunks he has written by taking up the role of the reader. Whatever an idiosyncratic poet may say about his compositions (sometimes patchy, incomprehensible, and obscure), which he thinks he has written for himself, for his own aesthetic fulfillment, cannot be said about fieldwork accounts. The latter are meant for others, to be read, understood, and appreciated. We may say that the first draft we write may be for ourselves, but all the subsequent drafts are for our readers.

It has been observed that several young students try to emulate the style

of writing of some well-known authors. Being an admirer of the writings of a scholar and imitating his or her style of writing are two different things. I have come across many admirers of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Margaret Mead, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Clifford Geertz, and among sociologists, Talcott Parsons, Robert K. Merton, M.N. Srinivas, André Béteille, and Anthony Giddens. Of these admirers, several have tried to emulate the styles of their favourite scholars, but in the end, they have not succeeded. As each actor's role performance is different from the others occupying the same position (or "status" as it is technically called), in the same way, each author or writer develops his or her own style, which is a product of hard work of several decades and also of several other highly individualistic factors, such as the type and quality of schooling, hobbies, flair for reading and writing, etc. Therefore, my submission is that we should try to develop our own style, keeping in mind that we would be known not for being a "copycat"© but for our own manner and style of handling the world of words. All the same you can study the writings of other sociologists/ anthropologists to find out about main characteristics of their writing styles. You can critically examine them for their capacity to communicate (see Reflection and Action 28.4).

Once I was sharing my ideas on writing skills with a group of students, when one of them asked me: "But, what to write?" Yes, for this we need to have a writing task at hand: a dissertation, book, article, comment, project report, review, field notes and diaries, etc. Before we begin with writing, we need to develop a proposed outline or table of contents. We should also have in mind the basic story we are going to tell. Also, we should keep in mind the number of pages in which we will be able to tell the story.

Fieldworkers know that in a fieldwork carried out for one year, a lot of data is collected, including on those areas that were not originally chosen for investigation. This is one of the main differences between survey research and intensive fieldwork. In the former, data come only on those topics that are part of the survey, but the latter yields so much of data that the investigator may bring out of that not one but several texts over a period of time. In the context of a book, or article, which in any case will have a focus, the most important thing is to get rid of as much of extraneous data as possible so that the corpus of data with which we actually deal is manageable, to the point, and illustrates an argument satisfactorily. Whichever data have been kept out of one text can be used in another. That is why we need to keep in mind the approximate length of each chapter, section, or subsection. We should also remember that the space available in a text for the description of ethnographic details is necessarily limited, because we have also to include in it sections on methods, theory, the review of literature, analysis, interpretation, recommendations and implications, references cited, and bibliography (or sometimes, annotated bibliography).

An important piece of advice that the texts mentioned earlier on writing up qualitative research give is: "one should try to write everyday". On this suggestion, in one of the lectures that I delivered on writing up in a psychology seminar, the comment of a female participant was that it would be difficult for many married women with children, and several household chores demanding their urgent attention, to keep a particular time reserved for writing everyday; also, in many cases, they may not be able to write everyday. In this context, Wolcott's suggestion (1990) may be considered: we should try to "sandwich" writing in our busy work schedules or earmark "writing days". The point is that we should try to maintain some kind of regularity with respect to writing. In one of the issues of the *Reader's Digest* (1998: 16), a contributor with the name Jeremy Daniel had the following to say:

Writing a 300-page book is a formidable task; spinning out two pages daily is easy enough. Repeat this process 150 times and you have a book. This principle can be applied to any task.

If I write five hundred words everyday, by the end of the year I shall have a book to my credit. In one of his interviews mentioned earlier, Geertz said that he usually wrote a paragraph a day, but he never left a sentence or paragraph until he was satisfied with it (see Olson 1991). I was told that Edmund Leach used to come to his department in the late morning hours after having finished his quota of writing of that day. Wolcott (1990) writes that when he busied himself writing, his answering machine had the following taped message: "Sorry, Harry is writing; he can't speak to you now." An asceticism of this type is essential for maintaining writing schedules. If we do not spread out our writing over several days or weeks, then the pressure of finishing it would start mounting up when the deadlines draw closer. To my mind, this is the most critical time, for we may be tempted to plagiarize in order to meet the deadline, or produce a work of abysmally inferior quality.

Reflection and Action 28.4

Read the following excerpts from the writings of expert fieldworkers and show the advantages and disadvantages of each type of giving a description of a particular event. This exercise will give you an idea of how to present your descriptive data.

The first act is ... the driving into the ground of a tethering peg and the tethering of the animal to it. ... Sometimes, after the victim has been staked, a libation of milk, beer or water is poured over, or at the foot of, the peg (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 208).

In the late afternoon another ceremony was performed - the *kava* of the canoe. Food from a large oven was brought into the chief's house, a series of libations poured, and offerings made to the gods of the vessel and of the chief. About a dozen men were present inside, but the expert and some of the workers refused an invitation to come in (Firth 1939: 123).

One of the excerpts has the indirect style of writing while the other one has the direct style. First examine which of the two excerpts you followed better and then work out why you grasped one better than the other one. After doing this preliminary work, write down advantages and disadvantages of writing in direct and indirect styles.

28.7 First Draft

So, the initial hurdle is to overcome the state of inertia, when nothing is being written down, and get something written without being discouraged by the quality of writing. Here, we should always remember that the quality of our writing would improve, as we shall work over the draft against the background of our own comments and the observations of others whom we have requested to read our works. Here, I remember the words of one of my teachers: "You should not be shy of showing your rough work to others, because what we produce in the beginning and what is published in the end are two qualitatively different drafts and each draft improves with one's own reading of it and the others" comments" (see Box 28.5 on different patterns of writing).

Box 28.5 Should you always Write First Draft?

However, we should not assume that all writers and authors follow this pattern, producing several drafts of the same text. Geertz, for example, says that he does not write drafts (see Olson 1991):

Sivastava says, "I write from the beginning to the end, and when it's finished, it's done. And I write very slowly...and except for a few touch-ups at the end, I write essentially one draft...Once in a while people ask me for early drafts, but these drafts just don't exist...I have an outline, especially if it's a book, but I hardly pay attention to it. I just build it up in a sort of craft-like way of going through it carefully, and when it is done it's done. The process is very slow.

I also know about Professor André Béteille whose first draft is his final draft, and invariably, he does not change a word, because he writes very carefully, stretching the writing of a text over several days and weeks. But these are individual styles that take a long time with sustained effort to develop. But the point here is that one should exercise great care in writing and handling "words like precious stones" (Srinivas 1973: ix)".

Once I have a completed draft in hand, I know where it is going. From then on, I start "playing with the text", which means, I start editing and revising it. The comments of fellow-scholars and supervisors, if any, start pouring in. I examine all these comments with unexceptional judiciousness and make changes in my draft. My language also improves; common mistakes are corrected. Remember, from the state of "not a single word written down", I have a manuscript, ready for submission. I discovered it during the course of writing up my doctoral work, and later I read about it in Wolcott's book (1995), that one is able to discover ambiguities in one's work when one reads one's sentences loudly, to hear what they are. I was able to eliminate several sentences that appeared to me superfluous and replace many words with more suitable ones.

Thus, unless we have a draft before us, our thoughts may jump around in abstract forms. Neither can they be communicated to others convincingly nor their relationship with other thoughts explored. Wolcott (1995: 216) writes:

I mull things over before I write, and I constantly jot down ideas, phrases, and questions as they pop into my head. But my best "mullings", like my best scanning for related ideas and relevant citations in the literature, seem to come after I start to capture my thoughts on paper, not before.

During the process of writing, we chance upon many new ideas about which we had not thought of earlier. I remember in 1992 as a doctoral candidate, about to submit my dissertation, the pre-fieldwork seminar group asked me to speak on an aspect of ethics in fieldwork. The moment this offer came, I told the organizer of the seminar group that I would speak on the role of payments to respondents in fieldwork. That time, I really did not know what I would say, what would be the line of my argument, except that I would introspect my fieldwork experiences. It was in the course of writing up this paper (1992) that I chanced upon many new ideas that I developed in detail. I am here reminded of Howard Becker (1986) who says: Writing is thinking.

It was observed earlier that quantitative researchers do not face the problems of writing up that qualitative researchers face, because for them, some kind of, relatively speaking, fixed designs of writing are available. For instance, a typical article in physical anthropology will have the following sections: introduction, the review of literature, materials and methods, results and discussion, and summary and recommendations. This may also be the list of contents of a dissertation. Although it may be true to some extent, it should not be forgotten that numbers and the correlations obtaining between them by themselves mean nothing. They need to be interpreted, for which imagination is required. The interpretations are expressed in qualitative terms, for which the same sort of writing that is central to typical qualitative research is expected. The difference between qualitative and quantitative research with respect to writing is one of degree, and not of kind.

However, an important difference between the texts that are overwhelmingly quantitative and those that are overwhelmingly qualitative may be noted here. In the former, the findings (the "conclusions") are of crucial significance and what is unimportant in these texts is the way in which they have been written down and the style they have adopted. They are largely "author-nascent" texts, by comparison to the ethnographies and pieces of qualitative research that sociologists and social anthropologists produce, which are "author-saturated". One cannot fully understand these texts until the reader knows who the fieldworker was; what were his or her prominent social characteristics; and how did he or she carry out his or her fieldwork. The diaries of the fieldworker are extremely important for having an idea about why the ethnography is of a particular tenor and type. At the end of our discussion it is a good idea to complete just one more Reflection and Action exercise.

Reflection and Action 28.5

Write four pages on Comparative Method and next day read what you have written. Do you feel the need to change the text? Do you feel that shifting around words and sentences the text may read better? Do you find that adding a bit more or deleting a word here and there or modifying certain expressions would communicate better what you intend to express? You may go ahead and make changes and give the draft to you friends/ fellow learners of MSO 002 at your study center. After getting the feedback from them, you may want to make further changes in your text. Oh, you are writing up!

28.8 Conclusion

Finally, let me submit that in this chapter I have not discussed the role of theory in writing up dissertations, because that can be fruitfully discussed in the section on the analysis of data. But, it may be noted that the technical terms an author would use more frequently in his text flow from the theory to which he subscribes. My main submission here is that writing is central to the art of fieldwork. Our field notes are the "bricks" of our ethnographic texts; the leaves from our diaries are reproduced in our monographs. One of our main obligations to the people whom we study and the scientific community of which we are a part is to write up the fieldwork accounts as early as possible and as meticulously as possible. This needs to be emphasised because a common observation is that many field studies remain unwritten and unreported (Wolcott 1995:226; Srinivas 1996:194).

Further Reading

Galtung, J. 1967. *Theory and Methods of Social Research*. George Allen and Unwin: London (deals with all aspects of analyzing data for writing up)

Mills, C. Wright 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford University Press: Oxford (for its classic statement on social inquiries and the presentation of results)

Sellitz, C., M. Jahoda, and S. W. Cook 1966. *Research Methods in Social Relations*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York (especially the section on the writing of research reports)