

Interviewing

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1. Why interview?
2. Speech genres
3. A terrible interview
4. Practical advice



Why interview?

- + Quick collection of relevant data
- + More flexibility than an impersonal questionnaire

Some drawbacks:

- + Short-term interaction increases likelihood of misunderstanding
- + Context often disappears in presentation of data

- **Make sure it's an effective technique for the stage of research you're at.**



http://images.wildmadagascar.org/pictures/mosy_mangabe/rhett_rfi_interview180.jpg, accessed 30 July 2007

Unstructured: open-ended questions on general topics

Structured: ask everyone the same specific questions

The interview is a *speech genre*:

- 1) people who are familiar with it expect it to follow a pattern;
- 2) some may not be comfortable with the pattern or expectations;
- 3) expectations can be very different, and not always easy to recognise.

Two examples:

Mexicanos (New Mexico, USA) don't announce upcoming events to close friends/kin; when one anthropologist asked about them, he found it "nearly impossible" to learn about them—because he was treated as a close friend! (Briggs 1986: 46)

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Two examples:

When I asked one Fijian woman a question about traditional practices, she said, 'We can talk about this in the church compound.'

X *Subjects' goals may not be the same as yours!*

A terrible interview



He has no interest in what she's trying to say

...which is also counterproductive to *his own goals!*

He keeps interrupting her

http://www.escapefromcubienation.com/photos/unca_tegorized/doctor.jpg, accessed 6 August 2007



http://www2.ru.ac.za/gallery/albums/environmentalscience/Interview_Kelly_Madzana.sized.jpg, accessed 30 July 2007

Some practical advice:

1. Give people the background of your interest and your project
2. Silence is your friend!
3. Beware of leading questions—
“Weren't you surprised?”
“Did she attack you?”
4. Consider interviewing in a relaxed space, or a group
5. Ask if there's anything they want to mention that you haven't asked about