11 Beginning Data Analysis

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Recognize the problem of 'drowning in data'.
- Understand the uses of secondary data.
- Employ methods to kick-start your data analysis.
- Recognize the major issues involved in early analysis of different kinds of qualitative data.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

After their first year of research, people have varying degrees of certainty about the future. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) put it, the end of year 1 sees two kinds of researcher. The uncertain one feels she is drowning in data and asks: 'I've collected all this data, now what should I do?' The other, more confident, researcher states: 'I've collected all my data, now I'm going to analyse it and write it up'.

The temptation might be to find merit in both positions. After all, self-questioning and self-confidence both seem to be worthy qualities in a researcher. In fact, *neither* position is satisfactory and both reflect a more or less wasted first year of research:

> Both positions imply a woeful lack of appreciation of what is and can be meant by analysis ... . [Such analysis] is a *pervasive* activity throughout the life of a research project. Analysis is not simply one of the later stages of research, to be followed by an equally separate phase of 'writing up results'. (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 10–11, my emphasis)

Research designs which devote the first year solely to a literature review and/or data gathering may look excellent on paper. Indeed, they may be just the thing in

quantitative studies more concerned with implementing pre-designed 'measures' rather than employing a theoretical imagination. But in most qualitative research, unless you are *analysing* data more or less from day 1 you will always have to play 'catch up'.

All very well, you might respond, but where on earth am I going to get my data from on day 1? Surely, most of my first year is going to be spent on getting access to some research site or set of respondents and then, if successful, gathering my data. How is it going to be possible to start data analysis so quickly?

In the rest of this chapter, I show you how to kick-start your data analysis very early on. I then discuss ways to begin data analysis on many different kinds of qualitative data: interviews, field notes, texts, visual data and transcripts of conversation.

11.2 KICK-STARTING DATA ANALYSIS

As already noted, you might well ask: where am I going to get my data on day 1? There are five very practical, complementary solutions to this puzzle:

- analyse data already in the public sphere
- beg or borrow other people's data
- seek advice from your supervisor
- analyse your own data as you gather it
- ask key questions about your data.

I briefly discuss each strategy below.

11.2.1 *Analyse data already in the public sphere*

Some types of naturally occurring materials are already waiting for you. For instance, when undergraduate students doing a dissertation at my London college used to approach me with their concerns about gathering and analysing data in, say, a three-month time-slot, I usually gave the following advice. Hop on a train to Colindale in North London. Turn right out of the station and you will come to a big building marked British Museum Newspaper Library. Now select a few newspapers which covered a particular story (e.g. Princess Diana's death, the O.J. Simpson trial or the trial of the British nanny, Louise Woodward). Of course, you still lack a research problem and a method of analysis and you will need to think long and hard about both. But you have your data, so go to it!

Needless to say, the public sphere contains much more than newspapers. There are all the other kinds of written texts from novels to the contents of different web sites on the Internet. There are the products of the broadcast media, radio and TV programmes, from phone-ins to soap operas and news broadcasts. Then there are those rare qualitative studies which reproduce large portions of data, making them

available for your own reanalysis perhaps following up different questions from those originally asked.

Even if you intend, in due course, to gather your own data, these materials are immediately available. As such, they provide a marvellous opportunity to refine your methods and to get a feel of the joys (and torments) of 'hands-on' data analysis.

11.2.2 *Beg or borrow other people's data*

Perhaps your research interests cannot be accommodated by data in the public sphere. If so, it is always worth making enquiries in your department about relevant data that other people may be willing to share with you.

Your supervisor is an obvious person to turn to. Having agreed to supervise you and thereby acknowledged a common research interest, it is probable that your supervisor will have already gathered data that may be relevant to your project. Don't be shy to ask if you might have access to it. This was exactly the strategy that my student Vicki Taylor followed. I was delighted to pass on my data to her so she could explore a research problem which was different to mine.

Of course, there may be ethical or other reasons why such access is not always possible. But most supervisors will be delighted, perhaps even flattered, if you are interested in their own data. After all, your research may lead to new ideas which will help them in their own work.

If your supervisor cannot deliver the goods, explore your various peer groups. Fellow research students in your department, perhaps two or three years into their research, may, like your supervisor, welcome passing on some of their own data. Or perhaps you can turn to members of study groups in your area or even to visiting speakers talking on a relevant topic.

Above all, you must remember that, in most disciplines, no 'brownie points' are usually given for having your own data. It is the quality of your data *analysis* that will matter, not whether you can show how clever you were to access your data. Perhaps only in anthropology may the display of how, in pursuit of your 'tribe', you have travelled thousands of miles, learnt a foreign language and endured endless hardships count for something – but not much I suspect.

Even if you feel happier to have your own data, remember that this does not exclude the first two strategies. In the early stages, analysis of other people's data or public data may still give you the impetus you need for research 'lift-off' when you are ready to analyse your own materials.

You should now attempt Exercise 11.1.

11.2.3 *Seek advice from your supervisor*

As an undergraduate, your main face-to-face contact with a faculty member may have been when you submitted a term-paper or, occasionally, when you got some

feedback after such a submission. However, this model of a student-staff relationship is totally inappropriate when you are doing your own research.

Supervisors are there to offer support when you most need it (see Chapter 18). If you feel that you are 'drowning in data', that is a prime time to ask for help.

One way they can help you gain focus is to suggest a small and hence achievable task. Two examples of such tasks from Becker and Wolcott are given below:

- Offering a snap characterization of what seems to be happening in your data and asking you to respond to it. It really doesn't matter how wide of the mark this idea is if it can get you to start working with your data (Becker, 1998).
- Asking you to take 'some manageable *unit of one* as a focus' (Wolcott, 1990: 69, discussed at greater length in Chapter 5). In this way, instead of confronting your data as one large, threatening mass, you can narrow down and achieve a focus on one topic, one activity or one day (or one minute).

These kinds of tasks should help you overcome the kind of mental blocks we all too readily erect for ourselves when first confronting data. If we are set a small task, we are more likely to succeed and to gain confidence. Moreover, through such small tasks, we can start to see subtleties in our data which may be hidden if we ask big questions at the outset. As Becker (1998) reminds us, don't over-theorize early on in data analysis. Instead, begin from a situation or a piece of data and then build theories out of this limited material.

11.2.4 Analyse your own data as you gather it

Data analysis should not only happen after all your data has been safely gathered. If you only have one interview or recording or set of field notes, go to it! Where appropriate, start transcribing. In all cases, start reviewing your data in the light of your research questions.

Now is the time to test out methods, findings and concepts. Here are some good questions to ask yourself:

- Do I feel comfortable with my preferred method of data analysis (e.g. **grounded theory, narrative, conversation** or **discourse analysis**)?
- Is my data-analysis method suggesting interesting questions?
- Is it giving me a strong grip on my data that looks like it might generate interesting generalizations?
- Do previous research findings seem to apply to my data? If not, why not? If so, how can I use my data to develop these findings?
- How do particular concepts from my preferred model of social research apply to my data? Which concepts work best and hence look likely to be most productive?

None of these questions can be properly answered from the armchair or drawing board. No matter how elegant your original research proposal, its application to your first batch of data is always salutary. In most qualitative research, sticking with your original research design can be a sign of inadequate data analysis rather than demonstrating a welcome consistency.

None of this will you know until you begin analysing your data. Of course, this will mean committing yourself to writing up your analysis at a very early stage. As Wolcott (1990: 20) argues: 'You cannot begin writing early enough.' Even a 200-word shot at data analysis will give your supervisor something to go on. And even if your understandable initial hesitancy means that you are not 'off and running', at least you will have started.

You should now attempt Exercise 11.2.

11.2.5 Ask key questions about your data

Of course, what is a 'key' question will depend upon your research topic and your preferred model of qualitative research. Although this means that there are few if any 'free-floating' key questions, the following list has worked with my own students and is worth posing about your own research:

- What are the main units in your data and how do they relate to one another? Remember, that no meaning resides in a single unit and so everything depends on how your units fit together. This is an issue of *articulation*.
- Which categories are actually used by the people you are studying? Remember that, unlike quantitative researchers, we do not want to begin with our own categories at the outset. This is an issue of *definition*.
- What are the contexts and consequences of your subjects' use of categories? Remember that it is rarely right to ask 'why?' questions before you have identified the local phenomena involved. This is an issue of *hows?* and *whats?*.
- How do your difficulties in the field over, say, access and how you are defined by your research subjects provide you with further research topics? Remember that the beauty of qualitative research is that it offers the potential for us to topicalize such difficulties rather than just treat them as methodological constraints. This is an issue of the creative use of *troubles*.

So far I have been discussing ways to 'kick-start' your data analysis. However, my attempt to offer useful tips for any kind of study has meant that I have had to talk about qualitative research in general. I now want to move to a lower level of generality and to examine how you may begin to analyse different kinds of qualitative data. I will consider five different kinds of data:

- interviews
- field notes

- texts
- visual data
- transcripts.

For each data source, I will offer an example of how, in a particular study, data analysis took off.

11.3 INTERVIEWS

In Chapter 4, I examined the various ways that researchers can read sense into answers that respondents give to open-ended interviews. The most popular approach is to treat respondents' answers as describing some external reality (e.g. facts, events) or internal experience (e.g. feelings, meanings). Following this approach, it is appropriate to build into the research design various devices to ensure the accuracy of your interpretation, so you can check the accuracy of what your respondents tell you by other observations (see Chapter 14 on the method of **triangulation**). And you can treat such measures as inter-coder agreement (see Chapter 14) and computer-assisted qualitative data programmes (see Chapter 13) as a means of securing a fit between your interpretations and some external reality. Let us call this a realist approach to interview data.

As Clive Seale has pointed out (personal correspondence), realism is here used in the sense of the literary genre whose aim is to describe the 'gritty' reality of people's lives. In this approach, typical of tabloid journalism, 'confessional' stories are gathered and presented to the reader as new 'facts' about personalities. This form of realism has had much influence on qualitative research (see Atkinson and Silverman, 1997).

An alternative approach treats interview data as accessing various stories or narratives through which people describe their world (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). This approach claims that, by abandoning the attempt to treat respondents' accounts as potentially 'true' pictures of 'reality', we open up for analysis the culturally rich methods through which interviewers and interviewees, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world. Although this second approach may use similar measures to achieve 'quality control' (e.g. group data sessions to ensure agreement about the researchers' reading of a transcript), these measures are used in pursuit of a different, 'narrated' reality in which the 'situated', or locally produced, nature of accounts is to the fore.

I am aware that many readers of this volume will favour the former approach. At the same time, I do not want to neglect the latter, **narrative** approach – particularly as it is closer to my own theoretical orientation. Fortunately, there are examples available which show how you can kick-start a piece of interview research using both these approaches.

Miller and Glassner (2004) describe a study involving in-depth, open-ended interviews with young women (aged 13 to 18) who claim affiliation with youth gangs in their communities (Miller, 1996). These interviews follow the completion of a survey interview administered by the same researcher.

Here is how the authors describe the purposes of each form of data:

> While the survey interview gathers information about a wide range of topics, including the individual, her school, friends, family, neighborhood, delinquent involvement, arrest history, sexual history, and victimization, in addition to information about the gang, the in-depth interview is concerned exclusively with the roles and activities of young women in youth gangs, and the meanings they describe as emerging from their gang affiliation. (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 131)

Let us focus on the data that Miller obtained from her in-depth interviews. This is one example:

> Describing why she joined her gang, one young woman told Miller, "well, I didn't get any respect at home. I wanted to get some love and respect from somebody somewhere else". (Miller and Glassner, 1997: 107)

Here is another respondent's explanation of why she joined a gang: 'I didn't have no family ... I had nothin' else' (1997: 107).

Another young woman, when asked to speculate on why young people join gangs, suggested:

> Some of 'em are like me, don't have, don't really have a basic home or steady home to go to, you know, and they don't have as much love and respect in the home so they want to get it elsewhere. And, and, like we get, have family members in gangs or that were in gangs, stuff like that. (1997: 107)

Let us assume that you have gathered this data and now want to begin analysis. Put at its starkest, what are you to do with it?

In line with the realist approach, using software programs such as ETHNOGRAPH or NUD•IST (see Chapter 13), you may start by coding respondents' answers into the different sets of reasons that they give for participation in gangs. From this data, two reasons seem to predominate: 'push' factors (unsupportive families) and 'pull' factors (supportive gangs).

Moreover, given the availability of survey data on the same respondents, you are now in a position to correlate each factor with various background characteristics that they have. This seems to set up your research in good shape. Not only can you search for the 'subjective' meanings of adolescent gangs, but also you can relate these meanings to 'objective' **social structures**.

The 'realist' approach thus has a high degree of plausibility to social scientists who theorize about the world in terms of the impact of (objective) social structures

upon (subjective) dispositions. Moreover, the kind of research outputs that it seeks to deliver are precisely those demanded by 'users' in the community, seeking immediate practical payoffs from social science research.

However, say we are not entirely satisfied by the apparent plausibility of realism? How can the narrative approach kick-start data analysis?

Miller and Glassner (2004: 134–5) suggest that one way to begin is to think about how respondents are using culturally available resources in order to construct their stories. They refer to Richardson's suggestion that:

> Participation in a culture includes participation in the narratives of that culture, a general understanding of the stock of meanings and their relationships to each other. (Richardson, 1990: 24)

How, then, can the data above be read in these terms? The idea is to see respondents' answers as *cultural stories*. This means examining the rhetorical force of what interviewees say as:

> interviewees deploy these narratives to make their actions explainable and understandable to those who otherwise may not understand. (Miller and Glassner, 1997: 107)

In the data already presented, Miller and Glassner note that respondents make their actions understandable in two ways. First, they do not attempt to challenge public views of gangs as bad. But, second, they do challenge the notion that the interviewee herself is bad.

However, Miller and Glassner note that not all their respondents glibly recycle conventional cultural stories. As they put it:

> Some of the young women go farther and describe their gang involvement in ways that directly challenge prevailing stereotypes about gangs as groups that are inherently bad or antisocial and about females roles within gangs. (1997: 108)

This is some of the respondents' accounts that they have in mind:

> It was really, it was just normal life, the only difference was, is, that we had meetings.
>
> [We] play cards, smoke bud, play dominoes, play video games. That's basically all we do is play. You would be surprised. This is a bunch of big kids. It's a bunch of big old kids in my set. (1997: 109)

In accounts like these, Miller and Glassner argue that there is an explicit challenge to what the interviewees know to be popular beliefs about youth gangs. Instead of accepting the conventional definition of their behaviour as 'deviant', the girls attempt to convey the normalcy of their activities.

These narratives directly challenge stereotypical cultural stories of the gang. Following Richardson, Miller and Glassner refer to such accounts as 'collective

stories' which: 'resist the cultural narratives about groups of people and tell alternative stories' (Richardson, 1990: 25).

Miller's research on adolescent gang culture follows an earlier study of American adolescents' perception and use of illegal drugs. In this study, Glassner and Loughlin (1987) treat interview responses as *both* culturally defined narratives and as possibly factually correct statements. So, for instance, when someone says she uses marijuana because her friends do, Glassner and Loughlin (1987: 35) take this to suggest *two* findings:

> She has made use of a culturally prevalent way of understanding and talking about these topics [identifying a narrative].
>
> We now have evidence that marijuana smoking is part of peer gatherings [the realist version].

Glassner and Loughlin argue that narrative analysis works through examining the nature and sources of the 'frame of explanation' used by the interviewee. However, the character of what the interviewee is saying can also be treated, through a realist approach, as a factual statement and validated by observation (e.g. of the series of interactions through which her friends' use comes to affect her own).

If we treat interviewees' responses as factual statements, then it becomes crucial to ask: 'Can we believe the kids?' Clearly, the authors take this to be a serious question, arguing that, indeed, we should trust (their report of) what the kids are saying. They base this assertion on a set of claims about how 'rapport' was established with subjects: interviewers were accepted as peer-group members, showed 'genuine interest' in understanding the interviewee's experiences and guaranteed confidentiality (1987: 35).

Calling their approach a 'methodology for listening', Glassner and Loughlin are thus centrally concerned with 'seeing the world from the perspective of our subjects' (1987: 37). In this respect, they share the same assumptions about the 'authenticity' of 'experience' as do other realists and **emotionalists**. However, their sensitive address of the narrative forms from which perspectives arise suggests an alternative path for interview analysis (for a more developed version of the narrative approach, see Gubrium and Holstein, 1997).

11.4 FIELD NOTES

Tape-recorded interviews, like texts and tapes of **naturally occurring** interaction, allow you to return to your data in its original form as often as you wish. The problem with field notes is that you are stuck with the form in which you made them at the time and that your readers will only have access to how you recorded events.

There are two partial solutions to this problem: following strict conventions in writing field notes and adhering to a consistent theoretical orientation. The

issue of field note conventions will be discussed in Chapter 12. In this chapter, I discuss an observational research study which began from a well-defined theory.

In the early 1980s, I obtained access to a number of clinics treating cancer patients in a British National Health Service (NHS) hospital. Following Strong's (1979) account of the 'ceremonial order of the clinic', I was interested in how doctors and patients presented themselves to each other. For instance, Strong had noted that NHS doctors would adhere to the rule 'politeness is all' and rarely criticize patients to their faces.

While at the hospital, I noticed that one of the doctors regularly seem to 'go missing' after his morning clinics. My curiosity aroused, I made enquiries. I discovered that most afternoons he was conducting his 'private' practice at consulting rooms in a salubrious area of London's West End. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, so I tried asking this doctor if I could 'sit in' on his private practice. To my great surprise, he consented on condition that I did not tape record. I happily agreed, even though this meant that my data was reduced to (what I saw as) relatively unreliable field notes.

Obviously, in making field notes, one is not simply recording data but also analysing it. The categories you use will inevitably be theoretically saturated – whether or not you realize it! Given my interest in Strong's use of Goffman's (1974) concept of frames, I tried to note down the activities through which the participants managed their identities. For instance, I noted how long the doctor and patient spent on social 'small talk' and how subsequent appointments were arranged.

However, if the researcher is physically present, two different kinds of issues should never be neglected:

- what you can see (as well as hear)
- how you are behaving/being treated.

11.4.1 What you can see

Both NHS clinics were held in functional rooms, with unadorned white walls, no carpets, simple furniture (a small desk, one substantial chair for the doctor and a number of stacking chairs for patients, families and students). Like most NHS hospitals, heating pipes and radiators were very obtrusive.

To enter the consulting rooms of the private clinic is to enter a different world. The main room has the air of an elegant study, perhaps not unlike the kind of room in a private house where a wealthy patient might have been visited by an eighteenth-century doctor. The walls are tastefully painted and adorned with prints and paintings. The floor has a fine carpet. The furniture is reproduction antique and includes a large, leather-topped desk, several comfortable armchairs, a sofa, a low table covered with coffee table books and magazines, and a bookcase which holds ivory figures as well as medical texts. Plants are placed on several surfaces

and the room is lit by an elegant central light and a table lamp. To add an executive touch, there are three phones on the desk, as well as a pen in a holder.

This room establishes an air of privacy as well as luxury. At the NHS clinics, patients are nearly always examined in curtained-off areas. Here, however, the examination couch is in a separate room which can only be entered through the consulting room. Although more functional than the latter, it is nonetheless carpeted and kept at a high temperature to keep patients warm. Even the doctor himself may knock before entering this examination room while the patient is dressing or undressing.

11.4.2 How you are being treated

The emphasis on privacy in British 'private' medicine creates a special problem for the researcher. While at the NHS clinics I sheltered happily behind a name-tag, at the private clinic my presence was always explained, if ambiguously ('Dr. Silverman is sitting in with me today if that's alright?'). Although identified and accepted by the patient, I remained uncomfortable in my role in this setting. Its air of quiet seclusion made me feel like an intruder.

Like the doctor, I found myself dressing formally and would always stand up and shake hands with the patient. I could no longer merge into the background as at the NHS clinics. I regularly experienced a sense of intruding on some private ceremony.

My impression was that the private clinic encouraged a more 'personalized' service and allowed patients to orchestrate their care, control the agenda, and obtain some 'territorial' control of the setting. In my discussion of the data, like Strong, I cite extracts from consultations to support these points, while referring to deviant cases and to the continuum of forms found in the NHS clinics.

My interest in how observers are treated in medical settings is nicely demonstrated in Peräkylä's (1989) study of a hospital ward for terminally ill people. Peräkylä shows how staff use a 'psychological' frame to define themselves as objective surveyors of the emotional reactions of such patients. The psychological frame is a powerful means of resolving the identity disturbances found in other frames – when a patient resists practical or medical framing, staff can explain this in terms of the patient's psychological state.

However, the psychological frame also turns out to be highly relevant to understand staff's response to Peräkylä himself. By seeing him as a researcher principally interested in patients' feelings, the staff had a ready-made explanation of his presence to give to patients and also were able to guess which of their own activities might need explaining to him.

Like Peräkylä, by examining my own involvement in the 'framing' of the interaction, and using my eyes as well as my ears, I had kick-started my analysis. However, were there other ways in which I could systematically compare the two NHS clinics with the private clinic? In Chapter 12, I discuss some simple quantitative measures I used in order to respond to this problem.

11.5 TEXTS

Quantitative researchers try to analyse written material in a way which will produce reliable evidence about a large sample. Their favoured method is content analysis in which the researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category. The crucial requirement is that the categories are sufficiently precise to enable different coders to arrive at the same results when the same body of material (e.g. newspaper headlines) is examined (see Berelson, 1952).

In qualitative research, small numbers of texts and documents may be analysed for a very different purpose. The aim is to understand the participants' categories and to see how these are used in concrete activities like telling stories (Propp, 1968; Sacks, 1974), assembling files (Cicourel, 1968; Gubrium and Buckholdt, 1982) or describing 'family life' (Gubrium, 1992).

The constructionist orientation of many qualitative researchers thus means that they are more concerned with the processes through which texts depict 'reality' rather than with whether such texts contain true or false statements. As Atkinson and Coffey put it:

> In paying due attention to such materials, however, one must be quite clear about what they can and cannot be used for. They are 'social facts', in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways. They are not, however, transparent representations of organizational routines, decision-making processes, or professional diagnoses. They construct particular kinds of representations with their own conventions. (2004: 58)

The implications of this are clear:

> Documentary sources are not surrogates for other kinds of data. We cannot, for instance, learn through written records how an organization actually operates day-by-day. Equally, we cannot treat records – however 'official' – as firm evidence of what they report … . This recognition on reservation does not mean that we should ignore or downgrade documentary data. On the contrary, our recognition of their existence as social facts (on constructions) alerts us to the necessity to treat them very seriously indeed. We have to approach documents for what they are and what they are used to accomplish. (2004: 58)

What does it mean to approach texts 'for what they are'? Let us take a concrete example. In two of Sacks's lectures, he refers to a *New York Times* story about an interview with a navy pilot about his missions in the Vietnam War (Sacks, 1992, Vol. 1: 205–22, 306–11). Sacks is specially interested in the story's report of the navy pilot's reported answer to a question in the extract below.

11.5.1 The navy pilot story

> How did he feel about knowing that even with all the care he took in aiming only at military targets someone was probably being killed by his bombs?
>
> 'I certainly don't like the idea that I might be killing anybody,' he replied. 'But I don't lose any sleep over it. You have to be impersonal in this business. Over North Vietnam I condition myself to think that I'm a military man being shot at by another military man like myself.' (Sacks, 1992, Vol. 1: 205)

Sacks invites us to see how the pilot's immediate reply ('I certainly don't like the idea…') shows his commitment to the evaluational scheme offered by the journalist's question. For instance, if the pilot had instead said 'Why do you ask?', he would have shown that he did not necessarily subscribe to the same moral universe as the reporter (and, by implication, the readers of the article).

Having accepted this moral schema, Sacks shows how the pilot now builds an answer which helps us to see him in a favourable light. The category 'military man' works to defend his bombing as a category-bound activity which reminds us that this is, after all, what military pilots do. The effect of this is magnified by the pilot's identification of his co-participant as 'another military man like myself'. In this way, the pilot creates a pair (military man/military man) with recognizable mutual obligations (bombing/shooting at the other). In terms of this pair, the other party cannot properly complain or, as Sacks puts it:

> there are no complaints to be offered on their part about the error of his ways, except if he happens to violate the norms that, given the device used, are operative. (1992, Vol. 1: 206)

Notice also that the pilot suggests 'you have to be impersonal in this business'. Note how the category 'this business' sets up the terrain on which the specific pair of military men will shortly be used. So this account could be offered by either pair-part.

However, as Sacks argues, the implication is that 'this business' is one of many where impersonality is required. For:

> if it were the case that, that you had to be impersonal in this business held only for this business, then it might be that doing this business would be wrong in the first instance. (1992, Vol. 1: 206)

Moreover, the impersonality involved is of a special sort. Sacks points out that we hear the pilot as saying not that it is unfortunate that he cannot kill 'personally' but rather that being involved in this 'business' means that one must not consider that one is killing persons (1992, Vol. 1: 209).

However, the pilot is only *proposing* a pair of military man–military man. In that sense, he is inviting the North Vietnamese to 'play the game' in the same way as a child might say to another 'I'll be third base'. However, as Sacks notes, in children's baseball, such proposals can be rejected:

> if you say 'I'll be third base', unless someone else says 'and I'll be …' another position, and the others say they'll be the other positions, then you're not that thing. You can't play. (1992, Vol. 1: 307)

Of course, the North Vietnamese indeed did reject the pilot's proposal. Instead, they proposed the identification of the pilot as a 'criminal' and defined themselves as 'doing police action'.

As Sacks notes, these competing definitions had implications which went beyond mere propaganda. For instance, if the navy pilot were shot down then the Geneva Conventions about his subsequent treatment would only properly be applied if he indeed were a 'military man' rather than a 'criminal' (1992, Vol. 1: 307).

Sacks's analysis derives from his particular way of treating texts (like Atkinson and Coffey) as representations. Like Garfinkel (1967), Sacks wanted to avoid treating people as 'cultural dopes', representing the world in ways that some culture demanded. Instead, Sacks approached **culture** as an 'inference-making machine': a descriptive apparatus, administered and used in specific contexts. The issue for Sacks was not to second-guess societal members but to try to work out:

> how it is that people can produce sets of actions that provide that others can see such things … [as] persons doing intimacy … persons lying, etc. (1992, Vol. 1: 119)

Given that many categories can be used to describe the same person or act, Sacks's task was:

> to find out how they [members] go about choosing among the available sets of categories for grasping some event. (1992, Vol. 1: 41)

So Sacks does not mean to imply that 'society' determines which category one chooses. Instead, he wants to show the active interpretive work involved in rendering any description and the local implications of choosing any particular category. Whether or not we choose to use Sacks's precise method, he offers an inspiring way to begin to analyse the productivities of any text.

11.6 VISUAL DATA

Visual data is a very broad category which can encompass anything from videos to photographs to naturally occurring observational data like that discussed in

Section 11.4 above and to such aspects of our environment like street signs and advertisements (see Emmison and Smith, 2000).

The analysis of visual data can be very complicated and, in some hands, can be so over-theorized that one feels that the theoretical tail is wagging the empirical dog! To simplify matters for the beginning researcher, I will use as an example a relatively straightforward study and illustrate how data analysis took off.

Sharples et al. (2003) had the interesting idea of studying the kinds of photographs made by children. A total of 180 children of three different ages (7, 11 and 15) were given single-use cameras and asked to use them in any way they pleased over a weekend. Over 4300 photographs were generated by this means.

Data analysis took off through using a form of **content analysis** which produced a kind of 'radar screen … a two-dimensional scatterplot showing the principal axes of variability' (Sharples et al.: 311). This data was set up in this way in order to answer some early, key research questions:

- What is the content of each photograph?
- Are the people or objects shown posed?
- Who are the people shown?
- How do each of these features vary by the age of the photographer?

The analysis showed significant variation by the age of the child. For instance 7-year-old children were more likely to take photographs of toys and other possessions. They also took more photographs of their home and family. By contrast, the 11-year-olds concentrated on outdoor and/or animal photographs (usually their pets), while the 15-year-olds mainly took photographs of their friends, usually of the same sex and often in 'informal and striking poses' (316–17).

This study shows that an apparently simple count of such apparently basic features can raise a number of interesting issues. In this case, the researchers sought to pursue these issues by qualitative interviews with their child photographers.

Following Section 11.2.5 above, this study took off by beginning with descriptive questions of 'what?' and 'how?'. This generated 'why?' questions which they later sought to answer through interviews with subjects. The interviews also allowed the comparison of the categories that the researchers used with those used by the children themselves.

11.7 TRANSCRIPTS

Like any kind of data, the analysis of tapes and transcripts depends upon the generation of some research problem out of a particular theoretical orientation. As with the writing of field notes, the preparation of a transcript from an audio- or videotape is a theoretically saturated activity. Where there is more than one researcher, debate about what you are seeing and hearing is never just about

collating data – it is data *analysis*. But how do you push the analysis beyond an agreed transcript?

The temptation is to start at line 1 of your transcript and to work your way down the page making observations as you go. However, the danger of proceeding in this way is that your observations are likely to be *ad hoc* and commonsensical. Moreover, if you are committed to an approach (like CA or DA) which looks at how the participants co-produce some meaning, then beginning with a single utterance gets you off on the wrong foot. How else can you proceed?

In Chapter 6, we came across Mason's (1996) idea of formulating a research topic in terms of different kinds of puzzles. Identifying a puzzle can also be the way to kick-start the analysis of a transcript. Once you have found your puzzle, the best method is often to *work back and forth* through your transcript to see how the puzzle arises and is resolved.

As in the other sections, let me take a concrete example. I was working on some transcripts of parent–teacher interviews gathered in Australian schools by Carolyn Baker and Jayne Keogh. The following examples involve a student, Donna (S), her parents (F and M) and her teacher (T). In Extracts 11.1 and 11.2 there are no audible responses from Donna or Donna's parents to a piece of advice from the teacher (> indicates turn-slots where receipts are absent):

Extract 11.1

T: that's the only way I can really (1.0) really help at the moment and (.) for Donna herself to um do a little bit more in class and not chat so much down the back with Nicky and (.) Joanne?
> (1.0)
T: um(2.0)

Extract 11.2

T: Or we maybe, if- our next unit of work, Donna? if it's (.) another group do you think you- you'd perform better not working with the same girls?
> (1.0)
T: work with a different, with someone different in the class?
> (2.0)
T: you'd prefer to work with the same girls

In Extract 11.3 below, Donna's father eventually responds after a pause in a turn-slot in which Donna might have spoken:

Extract 11.3

T: I- don't- know it's really the three of you got to pull up your socks sort of thing or (.) or you sit somewhere different but
> (2.0)
T: [( )
F: [I think you should sit somewhere different

Finally, in Extract 11.4, Donna does not respond to her father's advice:

Extract 11.4

F: I think you should sit somewhere different
M: Mm?
F: well think of your marks it's just (4.0) it's pretty rubbishy

The absence of (spoken) responses by students to their teacher's or parents' advice in Extracts 11.1–11.4 gave us the puzzle which kick-started our analysis (Silverman et al., 1997). Such silence is a puzzle because it does not appear to fit with what we know about conversation where the absence of a response by someone selected for next turn is remarkable and accountable (Sacks et al., 1974).

To try to solve this puzzle, we searched other data for comparable findings. In over sixty advice sequences in pre-HIV-test counselling, I have only one example of such a silent response to advice (Silverman, 1997). This is shown below [C = counsellor, P = patient]:

Extract 11.5 [Silverman, 1997: 118]

1 C: this is why we say hh if you don't know the person that
2 you're with (0.6) and you're going to have sex with them hh
3 it's important that you tell them to (0.3) use a condom
4 > (0.8)
5 C: or to practice safe sex that's what using a condom means.
6 > (1.5)
7 C: okay?
8 (0.3)
9 P: uhum
10 (0.4)
11 C: has your partner ever used a condom with you?

Notice the 1.5 second pause at the second >. Since this follows a possible turn-completion point as C concludes her advice, the pause can be heard as P's pause. Moreover, C demonstrates that she monitors it this way by using 'okay' to go in pursuit of some utterance to indicate that at least P is listening. When, after a further pause, she obtains 'uhum', C can now continue.

However, it is also worth noting C's explanation (or gloss) which follows 'use a condom'. Since that phrase could also have been heard as terminating C's advice, she seems to have inspected the 0.8 second pause that follows as representing an absent **continuer** and, therefore, a possible lack of understanding. So she provides her gloss in order, unsuccessfully as it turns out, to create a stronger environment in which to get a continuer.

Extract 11.5 shares one further similarity with the teacher–pupil advice sequences. Here the patient is a 16-year-old person, by far the youngest of all the clients in our HIV counselling extracts.

On a non-analytic level, what we seem to be dealing with here is the social problem well known to both professionals and parents: that is, the common non-response of adolescents when told what to do by adults (or even when asked questions). This social problem is seen massively in hospital clinics run for adolescents and evokes continual, unsuccessful attempts to get the child to speak (see Silverman, 1987). In Extracts 11.6–11.8 below, taken from such clinics, we also find non-response to advice [D = doctor, P = patient and M = mother]:

Extract 11.6 [Diabetic clinic 1 (NH:17.7)]

D: What should we do about your diabetes? Because you've not been doing your testing (untimed pause)
D: I know at the moment your feeling sod all this altogether
P: Don't know
D: Would it help if we got off your back?
(untimed pause)

Extract 11.7 [Diabetic clinic 2 (S:12.2)]

D: The blood sugar is really too high
(untimed pause) [P is looking miserable]
M: We have to fight this all the way
D: One or two units, does this really upset you?
(untimed pause) [P is looking down and fiddling with her coat]

Extract 11.8 [Cleft-palate clinic (14.32-3)]

D: Um (2.0) but you're satisfied with your lip, are you, we don't want anything done to that?
M: She doesn't (1.0) it doesn't seem to worry her
D: Heh heh don't want anything done about any[thing?
M: [heh heh
D: Not your nose?
(3.0)

Throughout Extracts 11.5–11.8, adolescents fail to respond in the second-turn position to advice and questions. In Extracts 11.5 and 11.6, they eventually offer a minimal response after a second prompt. By contrast, in Extracts 11.7 and 11.8, when these young patients fail to take a turn when nominated as next speaker, their mothers speak for them, offering a commentary on their child's behaviour or feelings. Finally, in Extract 11.8, when D once more renominates the patient as next speaker, nothing is heard.

However, if we had stopped at the observation of a congruence between professional–client encounters involving young people in both medical and educational settings, we would only be restating a social problem well known to parents and professionals dealing with young people. I work on the assumption that the

skills of social scientists arise precisely in their ability to look at the world afresh and hence hold out the possibility of offering insights to practitioners. The question is, then, how can we move from our commonplace observation to a social science analysis?

Earlier in this book I suggested that qualitative research is at its strongest in answering questions like 'how?' and 'what?' rather than 'why?'. So our initial response was to shift the focus away from *explaining* our observation towards locating its interactional *achievement*. Thus we asked: how is questioning and advice giving interactionally managed, turn by turn, where the ostensible answerer or advice recipient is apparently non-responsive?

In multi-party professional–client settings, the recipient of a particular turn is not given by some institutional rule but is actively 'worked at' by the participants. Extract 11.8 is a very nice example of this and is given here again:

Extract 11.8 [Cleft-palate clinic (14.32-3)]

D: Um (2.0) but you're satisfied with your lip, are you, we don't want anything done to that?
M: She doesn't (1.0) it doesn't seem to worry her
D: Heh heh don't want anything done about any[thing?
M: [heh heh
D: Not your nose?
(3.0)

As I have already remarked, in line 1, D appears to nominate as next speaker someone who might appropriately make an assessment about their 'lip'. However, although next speaker orients to this nomination (talking about 'she' and 'her' rather than 'I' and 'me' in line 3), she is not the next speaker so nominated. Moreover, when D appears to renominate M's daughter as next speaker (lines 4 and 6), although she is silent, M claims recipiency via her laughter at line 5.

Extract 11.8 shows that recipiency is constructed on a turn-by-turn basis. Moreover, even within a single turn, the recipient may be redefined. Notice, for instance, how D switches from the voice of 'you' to 'we' within line 1.

Such a switch is interactionally ambiguous. First, 'we' may be heard as no more than the patronizing way of referring to organizational clients quite common in England (and, sometimes, the object of a sarcastic response, e.g. 'me and who else?'). Second, in this local context, it creates the possibility that D's question about 'lip-satisfaction' is addressed to both or either mother and daughter. Indeed, it may be this very possibility that allows a parent to respond without a pause (in line 3) in a slot in which the child might have been expected to answer a question.

Extract 11.8, from a cleft-palate clinic, shows how the parties play with the ambiguity about who is the recipient of a particular question. Rather than treating ambiguity as a communication *problem*, the analysis has begun to show how the interactants can use ambiguity as a *resource*.

The same interpretation may be attached to the child's silence. Instead of treating this silence as indicating some *deficiency* on the part of the child, we argue that, faced with the ambivalence built into such questions and comments by teachers (and parents), silence can be treated as a display of interactional *competence*. Finally moving on to the 'why?' question, we can speculate that this is because silence (or at least lack of verbal response) allows children to avoid implication in the collaboratively accomplished adult moral universe and, thus, enables them to resist the way in which an institutional discourse serves to frame and constrain their social competencies.

11.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have shown how, using the four main kinds of qualitative data, you can begin data analysis. By generating a puzzle by early inspection of some data, whether your own or borrowed, you can kick-start any research project. In Chapter 12, we examine how data analysis can be developed after these first stages.

KEY POINTS

Avoid spending the first period of your research without analysing any data. There are several ways to kick-start data analysis:

- analyse data already in the public sphere
- beg or borrow other people's data
- seek advice from your supervisor
- analyse your own data as you gather it
- ask key questions about your data

When analysing different kinds of qualitative data, the following issues arise:

Interviews: is your aim to describe the 'gritty' reality of people's lives (realism) or to access the stories or narratives through which people describe their worlds (constructionism)?

Field notes: you need to note what you can see (as well as hear) as well as how you are behaving and being treated.

Texts and visual material: is your goal precise content analysis in which you establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category? Or is your aim to understand the participants' categories and to see how these are used in concrete activities like telling stories, assembling files or taking photographs?

Transcripts: the preparation of a transcript from an audio- or videotape is a theoretically saturated activity. Where there is more than one researcher, sorting out what you are seeing and hearing is never just about collating data – it is data *analysis*.

Further reading

Harry Wolcott's little book, *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (Sage Qualitative Research Methods Series, Number 20,1990), especially Chapter 2, is a helpful, informal guide to beginning data analysis. Other relevant sources are: Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson's *Making Sense of Qualitative Data* (Sage, 1996), Chapter Two, and Jennifer Mason's *Qualitative Researching* (2nd edn, Sage, 2002). For further details of the case studies discussed in this chapter, see: Jody Miller and Barry Glassner's 'The inside and the outside: finding realities in interviews', in my edited collection *Qualitative Research* (2nd edn, Sage, 2004); my two monographs *Communication in the Clinic* (Sage, 1987); and *Discourses of Counselling* (Sage, 1997); and Harvey Sacks's *Lectures on Conversation* (Vol. 1, Blackwell, 1992), 205–22 and 306–11. If you are interested in using Internet data, consult Annette Markham's chapter 'Internet communication as a tool for qualitative research' in my book *Qualitative Research* (2004).

Exercise 11.1

This gives you the opportunity to think about relevant data sets to which you may have early access.

1 Review relevant data already in the public sphere, for instance on the media (from newspapers to television and radio to the Internet). Select a data set and begin to analyse it.

2 Ask your supervisor and/or fellow students about any relevant data that they might have which you could borrow either as a preliminary exercise or possibly to develop long-term collaboration. Do a brief analysis of some of it.