General Interviewing Techniques

Developing Evidence-Based Interviewing Techniques for the Standardized Interview

Interviewers and Their Effects from a Total Survey Error Perspective Workshop
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
26-28 February 2019
General Interviewing Techniques: Developing Evidence-Based Practices for Standardized Interviewing

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Why revisit interviewing techniques?

- Recordings now available
- Interaction coding has labeled actions and features of actions
- Influence of response format (aka question form)
- Advances in analytic capabilities
Goals

• General goals
  • Balance traditional needs of standardization against other goals
  • Make reasons for decisions explicit
• Incorporate research
  • Influence of question form
  • Interviewing “style”
  • Conversational practices
• Fill gaps for interviewers and quality control monitors
  • Requires new vocabulary to clarify distinctions
  • Crystallizes specific issues (e.g., importance of instrument conventions)
Criteria considered in revising interviewing techniques

- Criteria
  - Need
  - Ease of training
  - Criteria for quality control and monitoring
  - Rapport and motivation
  - Efficient progress and reducing burden
  - Training the respondent
  - Instrument support
  - Reliability
  - Validity
- Research is uneven for these criteria
- Weighting of criteria varies across decisions
Evidence-Based Training:

Key Structuring Concepts

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Evidence-based training: Key structuring concepts

• Question-answer sequence
Question-answer sequence

Turn 1: Interviewer

Turn 2: Respondent

Turn 3: Interviewer

Question

Codable Answer

Uncodable Answer

[Acknowledgment]

Follow Up
Outline of training in interviewing techniques

Part 1. Introduction
Lesson 1 Introduction
Lesson 2 The Science of Survey Research

Part 2. The Question-Answer Sequence
Lesson 3 Question Reading
Lesson 4 Question Form
Lesson 5 How to Recognize a Codable Answer
Lesson 6 Acknowledgments

Part 3. Advanced Techniques
Lesson 7 Follow-up: Basic Techniques
Lesson 8 Follow-up: Advanced Techniques
Lesson 9 The Respondent Says “Don’t Know” or Refuses
Lesson 10 The Respondent Asks a Question: Requests for Repetition and Clarification
Lesson 11 Training the Respondent

Part 4. Special Topics
Lesson 12 Choice Lists, Open Questions, and Field Coding
Lesson 13 Interviewer Instructions
Lesson 14 Groups of Questions: Filter-follow-up, Yes-No Checklists, Batteries, and Rosters
Key structuring concepts

- Question-answer sequence
- Response format (question form)
  - The type of answer projected by the question
Do you feel you have ever been treated unfairly because of your race or ethnicity?

<1> YES
<2> NO

In general, would you say that your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

<1> EXCELLENT
<2> VERY GOOD
<3> GOOD
<4> FAIR
<5> POOR

Selection: Ordered Categories

During the past week, on about how many days did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage such as beer, wine, a malt beverage, or liquor?

___ NUMBER OF DAYS (0-7) 

Discrete Value
Response format: Selection with ordered categories

Do you feel you have ever been treated unfairly because of your race or ethnicity?

<1> YES  
<2> NO  

In general, would you say that your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

<1> EXCELLENT  
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<5> POOR

During the past week, on about how many days did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage such as beer, wine, a malt beverage, or liquor?

___ NUMBER OF DAYS (0-7)

Discrete Value
Response format: Discrete value

Do you feel you have ever been treated unfairly because of your race or ethnicity?

<1> YES
<2> NO

Yes-No Response Format

In general, would you say that your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

<1> EXCELLENT
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<3> GOOD
<4> FAIR
<5> POOR

Selection: Ordered Categories

During the past week, on about how many days did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage such as beer, wine, a malt beverage, or liquor?

___ NUMBER OF DAYS (0-7)

Discrete Value Response Format
Common forms of survey questions: Selection with choice list

- Yes-no questions
- Selection questions
  - Ordered categories
  - Choice list
- Discrete-value questions

New vocabulary to use in training
Can also be used with clients and researchers

Which of these is the most important problem facing this country at present: Food and energy shortages, crime and violence, inflation, unemployment, or decreased trust in government?

<1> FOOD AND ENERGY SHORTAGES
<2> CRIME AND VIOLENCE
<3> INFLATION
<4> UNEMPLOYMENT
<5> DECREASED TRUST IN GOVERNMENT
Key structuring concepts

- Question-answer sequence
- Response format (question form)
- Codable and uncodable answers
Turn 2:
Codable and Uncodable Answers

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Question-answer sequence

Turn 1: Interviewer

Turn 2: Respondent

Codable Answer

Uncodable Answer

Turn 3: Interviewer

[Acknowledgment]

Follow Up
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversational Element</th>
<th>Response Format/Question Form</th>
<th>Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes-No</td>
<td>Ordered Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Delay or other particles or tokens</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;yes&quot; or &quot;no&quot; [19, 36]</td>
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<td>&quot;um no&quot; [26.1]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of exact match (or synonym)</td>
<td>&quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
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<td>Confirming or negating token</td>
<td>&quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;no, i haven't had that problem, no&quot; [54]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;yes I did&quot; [43]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of part of question</td>
<td>&quot;yes yes i would say yes&quot; [55]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;no no&quot; [56],</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;yeah yeah&quot; [160]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Certainty</td>
<td>&quot;oh yes definitely&quot; [161]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational Element</td>
<td>Yes-No</td>
<td>Selection Ordered Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>[None]</td>
<td>&quot;yes&quot; or &quot;no&quot; [19, 36]</td>
<td>&quot;not very willing&quot; [59]. &quot;stop&quot; [12]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay or other particles or tokens</td>
<td>&quot;um no&quot; [26.1] &quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42]</td>
<td>&quot;oh I would favor it somewhat&quot; [35]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming or negating token</td>
<td>&quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
<td>&quot;right I agree&quot; [160]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of part of question</td>
<td>&quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42], &quot;no, i haven't had that problem, no&quot; [54], &quot;yes I did&quot; [43], &quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Certainty</td>
<td>&quot;oh yes definitely&quot; [161]</td>
<td>&quot;absolutely stop&quot; [162]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A codable answer

- Occurs after respondent has heard the question
- Answers the survey question
- Matches the response format of the question
  - One of the response categories
  - The format on the screen
Defining a codable answer

- Occurs after respondent has heard the question
- Answers the survey question
- Matches the response format of the question
  - One of the response categories
  - The format on the screen
- Disregards most conversational elements
  - Tokens
  - Repetitions of the answer
  - Certainty and uncertainty expressions (e.g., “about fifty”)
  - Elaborations that do not contradict the codable answer
Codable answer: Depends on response format

- Yes-no questions
  - “Yes,” “no,” specific synonyms for “yes” or “no”

- Selection questions
  - One of the response categories read to the respondent
  - Unique portion of a response category

- Discrete-value questions
  - A specific, single number
### Codable answers and conversational practices: Selection questions

People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>STRONGLY AGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>DISAGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>STRONGLY DISAGREE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hmm, I guess neither.
People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

<1> STRONGLY AGREE
<2> AGREE
<3> NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
<4> DISAGREE
<5> STRONGLY DISAGREE
People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

<1> STRONGLY AGREE
<2> AGREE
<3> NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
<4> DISAGREE
<5> STRONGLY DISAGREE

Um, well, I could have more say if I wanted to, so I guess I disagree with that statement.
Turn 3:
Acknowledgements

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What “okay” is used for

- Psychological view
- Conversational view
FIGURE 7.1. A REMINDER TO STOP SAYING "OK" BETWEEN QUESTIONS.
Acknowledgments

1  FR   Well, I think give them an eight.

2  IV   **Okay. All right. And** please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of these statements. The first statement is: People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Would you agree or disagree with that?

3  FR   I agree, but, right, on the other hand I’m not intelligent enough to make all those decisions.

4  IV   Oh.

5  FR   And I've got enough about me to know that I don't want to do it. I don't that responsibility.

6  IV   **Okay. All right. And,** how about this one: Government agencies usually try to do what is best for the people.
Simple acknowledgment: “Thank you”

Now think about the last 12 months. Did you receive personal care for a period of one month or more from a family member or friend because of a health condition, illness, or disability?

<1> YES
<5> NO

Hmm ... 12 months is a long time ... Let me think ... Yes.

Thank you.
Most common simple acknowledgments

Thank you
Okay
Repeating the respondent’s codable answer

Mmhmm
Uhhuh
I see
Most common response-specific acknowledgments

Thank you for giving a single number
Thank you for selecting one of our answer categories
Thank you for giving an exact number
Thank you for thinking carefully about that
Thank you for thinking that through
Thank you for taking time to remember
I’m glad to hear that
I’m sorry to hear that
Turn 3:
Following Up an Uncodable Answer
Question-answer sequence

Turn 1: Interviewer

Turn 2: Respondent

Turn 3: Interviewer

Question

Codable Answer

Uncodable Answer

[Acknowledgment]

Follow Up
Follow-up after an uncodable answer: Alternatives

- Repeating entire question
  - [+ response categories]
- Selection
  - Repeating all response categories
  - Ordered categories: Responsive follow-up or “Tuning”
    
    So would you say somewhat happy, very happy, or extremely happy?

- Yes-no questions
  - Balanced follow-up (= offering all response categories)
    
    So would you say ‘yes’ or ‘no’?
  - Responsive follow-up with confirmation
    
    So you would say ‘yes,’ is that correct?

- Discrete value
  - Offering metric
    
    So how many days would you say?

- Immediate coding
### Elements in List Joined by...  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“or”</th>
<th>“and”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Has a doctor ever told you that you have...] How about a heart attack, coronary heart disease, angina, congestive heart failure, or other heart problems?</td>
<td>Example: Have you been able to bend, lift, jump, and run without difficulty and without help or equipment of any kind?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Form of answer</strong></th>
<th><strong>Kernel + single element</strong></th>
<th><strong>Single positive element</strong></th>
<th><strong>Single negative element</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Answer: “Yes, two heart attacks.”</td>
<td>Answer: “Two heart attacks.”</td>
<td>Answer: “Well, I haven’t had a heart attack.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action:</td>
<td>Immediate coding of kernel</td>
<td>Possible actions: Immediate coding, responsive confirmation follow-up, balanced follow-up, or reread question?</td>
<td>Possible actions: Reread question or balanced follow-up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Answer: “I can jump.”</td>
<td>Answer: “I can’t jump”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possible actions:</td>
<td>Possible actions: Immediate coding, responsive confirmation follow-up, balanced follow-up or reread question?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selection questions with ordered categories: Tuning

**Q:** How well does this person understand your preferences and plans for future medical treatment? Extremely well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all?

1. And how well does this person understand your preferences and plans for future medical treatment: Extremely well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all?

2. Well
Selection questions with ordered categories: Tuning

Q: How well does this person understand your preferences and plans for future medical treatment? Extremely well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all?

I 1 And how well does this person understand your preferences and plans for future medical treatment: Extremely well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all?

R 2 Well
Selection questions with ordered categories: Tuning

Q: How well does this person understand your preferences and plans for future medical treatment? Extremely well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all?

I  1 And how well does this person understand your preferences and plans for future medical treatment: Extremely well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all?

R  2 Well

I  3 Would you say extremely well or somewhat well?

R  4 hm extremely well
Discussion
Discussion

• Challenges
  • Require transcripts
  • Collections of transcripts vary in populations, training and monitoring regimes, question forms, and topics
• Gaps in knowledge are apparent
  • Almost no controlled experiments
  • Descriptive results better than none!
• Issues relevant in all types of research interviewing
Developed by:

UWSC
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SURVEY CENTER

Made available through:

AASRO
ASSOCIATION OF ACADEMIC SURVEY RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS