

A practical guide for learning the craft of qualitative interviewing

BRINKMAN, S; KVALE, S.: *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage, 2015, ISBN: 978-0761925422
(book review)

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Interview is one of the important methods of social science researches. It forms the basis of investigation method together with questionnaires and plays an important role in the research of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, anthropology and other disciplines. Because it is more time-consuming, using the interview method to collect research data often has to pay a higher cost, this method has not been favored by researchers in the times of pursuing quantitative indicators. With the rise of qualitative researches, the importance of interview is increasingly revealed.

Two authors of *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interview*, Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, have deep attainments in qualitative research interviews. Qualitative interviews are just relying on their own advantages to increasingly become a method used by social researchers in the study. the method of interview is not only a basic skill for the researchers, but also a successful way to study social phenomena. In the book, interview is seen not only as a technique, but also as a social practice; through such a practice, it can make researchers understand and grasp the researched issues better. As an interview method which is very different from the structured interviews used in the social survey and research, the qualitative interviews described in the book (sometimes it is also referred to as “in-depth interviews”, “no-structure interviews”, “free interviews”, etc.) is a method which has more flexibility, more requirements for interviewers, and involves more techniques, strategies, methods as well as issues. In this method, the interviewer (researcher) is just a tool of the research; in the interview process that seems very close to the oral communication between people in the daily social life, the researchers put forward all kinds of questions around the target in their hearts, listen to the interviewees, and deepen the understanding of the objects step by step. The direction guide and content control in the interview process both should be in depth and expanded step

by step, smoothly, without being perceived by the respondents and with the help of interview skills of the interviewers.

The book consists of two parts, the first part is concepts and basic theories. In this part, the authors adopted four chapters to introduce the concepts related to qualitative research interviews, not only distinguishing the differences between research interviews and philosophical conversations as well as therapeutic interviews, but also making the further analysis of related concepts from the aspects of epistemology and ethics. This part can be seen as the basis of qualitative research interviews. The second part is the focus of this book, the authors adopted twelve chapters to introduce in detail the specific steps and technical details of qualitative research interviews, and they made all the detailed descriptions from determining the theme to the whole process of the official interviews, as well as the construction and handling of interview contents, the conversational language, etc.. The book also has a major feature taking a specific interview study for example, and introduces step by step the conceptualization of interview surveys, interview design, interview situation and a variety of interview forms, making interactive oral interviews translated into written text data, a variety of tools used for analyzing the interview text data, the validation of interview results, the writing of interview research reports and many other aspects of contents, which cover the entire process of interview researches. This approach provides the novices engaged in interview researches with a good and practical guide on “how to do” an interview research, and it is very easy for the novices to learn and use. In addition, the book not only lists a large number of living examples to introduce all kinds of interview techniques and skills in detail, but also especially discusses the epistemology and methodology of interview researches, ethical issues of interview researches, etc.. The authors adopted a simple, concise way to present the complex academic information, guided the readers to understand the interrogative interview techniques used in social researches and provided a clear, incremental guide for the researchers who try to be familiar with the field. The papers and research report cases which are provided in the book show the readers a systematic process of the qualitative research from fragmentary thought sparks to finally forming a masterwork.

When describing detailed techniques and skills, meantime, the authors also put forward a question that all those who do qualitative researches may encounter ---- How can qualitative researchers make an appropriate, effective understanding and explanation of research phenomena? In the qualitative interviews, the authors put forward an understandable paradox which is reflected in: How can interviewers really “understand” interviewees? Interviewers have their own research questions, and the reason why the interviewers put forward the questions is that they have their own pre-views, or at least they have their own concern contents on the questions, and they think that such questions are very important. During the conversation with

the interviewees, he / she must keep balanced between listening to the other (local concepts, naming ways and life worlds) and keeping in mind their research questions as well as research purposes. Whether pausing, repeating or questioning closely, he / she are consciously guiding the other to the ways that his/ her own interest is in. The reasons why the interviewees accept interviews are that they usually have their own agendas and hopes. Mostly they have their own stories needing to be poured out, they hope to be heard, understood, and expressed. While, often, they have different languages, different meaning systems, different cultural customs and different social realities from the interviewers. The gap between main bodies is torn by different factors, seeming to make the exchanges and interviews become impossible.

According to the introduction of the authors of this book, in the postmodern epistemology, the object of cognition is not an independent island, but a “structure of relationship”. The core of knowledge is the relationship, not the individual. Knowledge does not exist in the individual, nor is it independent of the world, but it exists in the relationship between persons as well as the relationship between it and the world. The authors of this book uses two vivid metaphors to refer to the role of qualitative researchers in understanding and interpreting: miners and travelers. They both hope to know and understand the social realities, and also hope to pursue the truths. But, in contrast, the former is a knowledge explorer, and knowledge is considered to be objective existence, similar to the rich mineral deposits, waiting for the “miners” to dig; while the latter is a knowledge constructor, similar to the traveler, forming his own knowledge and insight then by constantly talking and inquiring with others during the journey. From the research paradigm, the miners can be considered as a post-positivist, hoping to dig the precious “gold” that has long been “there” through the rigorous, systematic procedures and methods; while the traveler is a constructivist, forming the new knowledge in a particular, social and historical situation, as well as in the relationship with people. So the authors stress that the two must be combined.

From that the authors of this book adopt many chapters to introduce the knowledge view of post-modernism, it is clear that they are more interested in the role of qualitative researchers as travelers. However, it is not stereotyped to teach “philosophism” and “research method”, but to make the theories, steps and techniques related to qualitative interview researches that seem difficult introduced systematically in popular, simple and concrete language, and it has a good inspiration. In the structure, the whole book first makes an overview of the entire interview research, and makes a brief and comprehensive discussion of qualitative researches. It can not only help the readers understand the qualitative research method, but also help to open up perspectives, understanding various possibilities in the survey method.

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