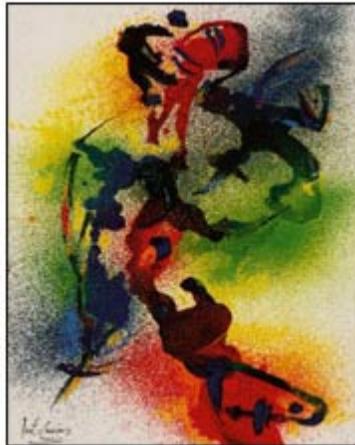


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RESEARCH NETWORKS 16
Qualitative Methods



*Right tools for the job – analysing media
preferences with qsr nvivo software*

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**RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB – ANALYSING MEDIA PREFERENCES WITH QSR NVIVO
SOFTWARE**

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INTRODUCTION – THE MEDIA AND EVERYDAY LIFE RESEARCH PROJECT

This presentation deals with qualitative analysis I have carried out in a research project “Media and everyday life”. In the project media and communication technologies are studied as a part of the fabric of every day activities. The data consists of over 60 qualitative interviews that have been carried out during the last few years in Finland. Altogether over 80 people have participated in the interviews. The average length of the interviews is around an hour and a half, which yields a rather large amount of text to be analysed in the project.

The analytic approach that I have adopted in the project might best be labelled as discourse analysis. In this presentation I will discuss the process in which I have combined content analytic and discursive approaches in the course of coding data and growing understanding of the data.

The presentation begins with a brief introduction to the central notions of social constructionism and discourse analysis. I then describe the structure of the NVivo project and illustrate the process of coding and constructing as well as defining discourses. The project is still underway and currently I’m unable to propose any matured ideas on how to facilitate discourse analysis with the latest software products. Instead I will describe some of the solutions I have come up with so far.

The title of this presentation implies the challenge of finding the appropriate practises and functions – the tools – inside the software products. After all it is up to the researcher to find the best tools that facilitate his or her specific research interests

and the methodological approach that has been adopted in the research (Luomanen & Räsänen 2002). In my case I have used NVivo but the questions and themes may be relevant to some other products also. Thus, I have not focused on the technical issues only. Instead the methodological issues are given priority.

Theoretical background for the analysis

Discourse analysis is associated with social constructivism which (at least in this presentation) is actually not a “method” but rather a theoretical frame of reference regarding social reality. On the other hand, discourse analysis is in many ways intertwined with other research methods such as semiotic analysis, rhetoric analysis and ethnography (Jokinen 1999, 37-41, Sulkunen 1997, 14-17).

Social constructionism has had a significant impact on social sciences and humanities during the last few decades. Numerous new approaches to research have emerged, such as post structuralism, discourse analysis, critical psychology, deconstruction and others. While there are differences between them, they share many principles regarding the notion of socially constructed knowledge. Social constructionism draws its origin from a number of disciplines and it is difficult to pinpoint it's origin to any one discipline or research tradition (Burr 1995, 1-5, 9, 14).

According to Burr (1995, 2-5) social constructionism has four central assumptions. First, researcher should always remain critical and challenge all the taken-for-granted ways of perceiving the world. Secondly, researcher must take into account the historical and cultural context in which he makes interpretations from the data and in which the data has been collected. Thirdly, Burr stresses the fact that in social constructionist understanding of the world, knowledge and world views are generated and maintained in social interaction of everyday life. Fourth assumption is that knowledge and world views correspond with patterns of social action: if peoples' understanding regarding a certain phenomenon changes, also the social actions related to it may change.

On the other hand it has been pointed out (Heiskala 2000, 197-198) that it is not possible for people to simply imagine any sort of reality they wish. There still are societal realities that constrain people and their activities. He also notes that people are not conscious of all the constructions that exist in the society and social interaction. According to Heiskala the various streams and traditions of social

constructionism differ from each other in the way they recognize these unconscious constructions and constraints set by the “real world”, the society.

Discourse analysis has its roots in the tradition of social constructivism. It is a methodology which seeks to take into account the key assumptions of social constructivism and their implications. In discourse analysis verbal processes and their outcomes are in the focus of attention. On the other hand it is not within the scope of discourse analysis to discover mental processes (separate from the verbal outcomes), causal relationships or “objective” facts (Jokinen 1999, 40-41). Instead, Jokinen (ibid.) notes that the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research is also constructive. Not only does the researcher seek to describe the subject of research – the reality – but he also constructs it by taking part into verbal processes in which social phenomena are constantly defined and reformulated. Reflecting this line of thought Vivien Burr notes regarding her own book *An Introduction to social constructivism* that “In writing this book, then, I am contributing to what might be called ‘the social construction of social constructionism’” (Burr 1995, 10).

METHODOLOGY

A great variation exists within qualitative approaches that are labelled as discourse analysis. Potter and Wetherell (1987, 6-8) note that as discourse analysis has been developed and carried out by so many disciplines with a large number of various theoretical perspectives, the name discourse analysis has been connected to “virtually all research concerned with language in its social and cognitive context”.

Discourse analysis allows the researcher to explore text as such, not as a description or representation of reality, but as a part of social interaction where world views, attitudes and identities even are constructed. I have analyzed the interviews from this perspective and constructed interpretative repertoires that seem to be useful in conceptualizing people’s media choices and preferences. The idea of “interpretative repertoires” originates from Ferdinand de Saussure who studied language as a set of definitions where words gain their meanings in relation to each other. In discourse analysis this idea is broadened so that a great number of complex socially constructed and continuously reformulated repertoires exist. These repertoires have various functions and contextuality as well as great plurality and in discourse analysis they are often referred to as discourses. (Jokinen & Juhila 1999, 67).

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987, 149) Interpretative repertoires are systems of language that are being used recurrently to describe various social and other phenomena. Within these language systems things and actions are evaluated and characterized and through their recurrent use, they renew, reformulate and maintain meanings regarding things and actions of the socially constructed world. Ian Parker (1992, 5) provides a working definition for discourses: "definition of a discourse should be that it is a system of statements which constructs an object". He also has outlined several criteria according to which discourses may be distinguished (ibid. 6-22).

In my research project I pursue to construct interpretative repertoires that are relevant in understanding people's media related behaviour: choices, preferences and action in the context of every day life. To take these kinds of repertoires a bit further I have also explored the identities and positions constructed in the interviews regarding information and communication technologies. In my research I do not make great differences between the concepts of interpretative repertoires and discourses. The terms are used somewhat synonymously, although with the word discourse I point mainly to a specific language system while the term interpretative repertoire also points to the theoretical background of such systems.

THE ANALYSIS

As was noted earlier, we have carried out over sixty interviews in which over eighty people have participated. Some people have been interviewed twice. Due to this, I have constructed separate attribute systems for the documents as well as for the individuals (cases) that have participated in the interviews. In the node attribute table I have 50 variables from a questionnaire that all the interviewees have been asked to fill out prior to interviews. Multiplied with the number of interviewees, there is currently over 4000 cells in the node attributes table, which enables some modest quantitative exploration also. This, however, is obviously not the focus of our research project.

I have begun to code the data according to the key media that we are studying. I have not simply coded every mobile phone related issue into a single node, but instead have sub nodes which code the various dimensions related to each medium. These vary in their level of abstractness but for the time being they are nesting under the parent nodes for each key medium. At the same time I have developed separate node structures to record some more abstract issues such as attitudes towards developing technology in general.

This categorization is not only the basis for later recoding, but doing it also makes the researcher read the data very carefully and further familiarises him with the notions that are attached to different media. At the same time ideas and hypotheses are constructed regarding the relevant discourses and these may be stored in memos in or outside of the dedicated qualitative analysis software. Also additional nodes coding text regarding a specific discourse may of course be added to the coding structure. Thus, the node tree then consists of content analytic categorisations regarding the key medias but also nodes which code specifically the text which has raised ideas regarding relevant discourses. There may naturally be significant overlap between these types of nodes. Naming various nodes in a descriptive way and keeping track of their contents is a challenge though. I have typed in definitions for most of the nodes via the node's properties dialog. The coding that I have done typically progresses in micro level cycles of reading the data and developing the content analytic node structures and then instantly re-reading it and giving more thought to the hypotheses regarding relevant language systems where people construct the roles of media in their daily lives.

How then to address the specific needs of discourse analytic approach? How to facilitate the process where "language systems that construct an object" (see above) are defined and formulated by the researcher? So far I have two solutions that have helped me in creating a better understanding of these language systems. I have memos about various discourses that I'm interested in developing. Thus, the conceptual ideas are stored and developed as the coding progresses. At the same time the NVivo project allows me to retrieve materials that are coded under the specific key media nodes, illustrating various dimensions that have emerged from the data regarding any particular media.

As the discourses get better formulated, I will likely maintain the original coding structure but also recode a parallel node structure where the specific discourses will be the parent nodes and under them various – possibly media specific at least to some extent – dimensions will exist as sub nodes. This exploration may also be stored in a separate NVivo project but that still remains an open issue. However, it will be very convenient to be able to retrieve media specific excerpts from the data using the first coding structure even when the discourses are already developed elsewhere in the project or even in a completely separate NVivo project. Reflecting the developing discourses against those bodies of text will hopefully allow for new ideas to emerge and help to define the "borders" and various dimensions inside the

discourses. Doing these rounds of coding and recoding systematically is a great challenge and will require a lot of work though.

Coding, memoing and recoding are the central phases in which I have tried to facilitate my own analysis. The role of modelling is also intriguing as it can be used to graphically represent for example some of the relationships between parallel coding structures in my project. Thus, it could provide another means to keep track of the analytical process and the conceptual dimensions represented in the overall coding structure and memos.

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