

Chapter 11

Face-To-Face Interviews

Geert Loosveldt

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

The starting point of this chapter is the general objective of an interview: obtaining high quality data from a large number of persons. It is argued that the realization of this objective is a shared responsibility of the researcher, interviewer and respondent.

The task of the interviewer is situated in the context of two essential characteristics of a face-to-face interview. The first characteristic is the complexity of the interviewer respondent interaction. Results from interaction analysis make clear that an interview is more than asking and answering questions. The second characteristic is the similarity of an interview with a conversation. Although an interview is not a normal conversation, the respondent uses the principles and the assumptions of an everyday conversation.

Basic task rules and interviewing techniques must guarantee that an interview becomes a conversation with a purpose and that the objective of an interview is realized. The respondent's roles must be clarified with an introductory letter, a general and specific instruction, appropriate reinforcement and feedback. Rules concerning collecting information are: reading questions as worded in the questionnaire, clarifying questions in a neutral way, adequate probing after an inadequate answer and accurately recording the respondent's answers.

The last section discusses the interviewer as a source of measurement error. An interviewer can create bias (systematic error) and additional variance (variable error). Interviewer bias results from systematic effects of the interviewers on the obtained answers. Interviewer variability or variance refers to differences between the interviewers in their systematic effects. The interviewer variance can be considered as the proportion of the total variance of a variable due to the interviewer.

GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

Bias. The difference between the survey estimate of the population parameter and the true value in the population.

Interviewer bias. Bias caused by interviewers due to systematic interviewer effects (error).

Interviewer variability or variance. Differences between interviewers in their systematic effects. The intra class coefficient, ρ_{int} (rho-int), can be used to measure the amount of variability in a response variable that can be accounted for by the interviewers.

Interviewer-related error. Systematic or variable measurement errors for which interviewers are responsible.

Interviewer design effect ($Deff_{int}$). The extent to which the variance of a sample mean of a simple random sample is increased due to interviewer variance.

Interviewer respondent interaction analysis. Description of the successive utterances of the interviewer and the respondent during a question answer sequence.

General instruction for the respondent. General instructions clarify the purpose of the interview and the respondent's actions involved in achieving the goals of the interview.

Specific instructions for the respondent. Specific instructions for a particular question or task clarify what is expected of the respondent and what he has to do to meet those expectations.

Grounded utterances in a conversation. Utterance in a conversation for which the participants in the conversation accept that they understand the meaning of the utterance.

Probing. Asking additional questions with the purpose of getting more and adequate information.

Reinforcement and feedback. Reactions of an interviewer which inform the respondent about how well (or badly) he/she is performing his or her role.

Standardized interviewing. Interviewers use a questionnaire in which the wording and the order of the questions are fixed and they ask the all the questions in the same way so that the respondent's interpretation of the questions is the same.