Course title
Interpretive interviewing (WC101)

Instructor details
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Short bio
I am an assistant professor in political science at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. I also widely lecture qualitative methodology in other contexts (University of Geneva, Graduate Institute Geneva, Essex Summer School, Concordia Workshops in Social Science Research Methods, Montreal etc.). My main research interests are in gender and politics (gender quotas, citizenship), interpretive methodologies (discourse analysis, qualitative interviewing) and social policy (dementia policy).

Prerequisite knowledge
Note from the Academic Convenors to prospective participants: by registering to this course, you certify that you possess the prerequisite knowledge that is requested to be able to follow this course. The instructor will not teach again these prerequisite items. If you doubt whether you possess that knowledge to a sufficient extent, we suggest you contact the instructor before you proceed to your registration.

This is an intermediate-level course for participants who have some familiarity with qualitative research: prospective participants in this course should at least:

- have attended a Master's level introductory course to qualitative research in general (or equivalent)
- have a basic knowledge of and a some practical experience with qualitative interviewing (in whatever form: semi-structured interviewing, expert interview, life-history interviewing, etc.)
- have a good basic knowledge of qualitative data analysis (for example basic thematic analysis) and ideally also some experience with interpretive qualitative data analysis (discourse or narrative analysis of some form).
- Have a solid oral and written command of English (be able to grasp nuances, articulate fine-tuned questions etc.)

Disclaimer: the information contained in this course description form may be subject to subsequent adaptations (e.g. taking into account new developments in the field, specific participant demands, group size etc.). Registered participants will be informed in due time in case of adaptations.
The course will briefly review the basic general principles of qualitative interviewing and of interpretive research, but we will then quickly move on to more specific issues. This course is not appropriate for participants who simply wish to receive a general introductory training to interviewing.

**Short course outline**

In-depth interviewing is a widely used method for data collection in the social and human sciences. This course is devoted to a specific type of in-depth interviews, e.g. interviews intended to yield data rich and deep enough to grasp *constructions of meaning* and *discourses* (that typically manifest themselves in the form of more or less implicit categorisations, demarcations, framings, particular types of wording, etc.). This kind of interviews is of interest to researchers who aim to understand how people make sense of their life and the world surrounding them, how they position themselves as individuals and social actors, and how they participate in wider social and political discourses that both constrain and enable them as social actors.

This course looks into the logic and practicalities of interpretive interviewing, e.g. elements such as the architecture of the topic guide, question formulation and order, appropriate interviewing techniques and transcription. It is meant mainly for researchers who plan to carry out qualitative interviews with the aim of doing discourse or narrative analysis.

**Long course outline**

In-depth interviewing is a widely used method for data collection in the social and human sciences. It is the method of choice for research projects that aim to explore people's experiences, motives, opinions and perspectives in their depth and richness and without constraining the respondents' answers by a priori categories or pre-set reply options. Although structured by a pre-set topic guides, in-depth interviews allow for flexibility and openness throughout the interview interaction and are generally based on open and non-leading questions that are designed to get the interviewee to talk freely and at length, and to explore the width and depth of his or her views (see for example Ritchie et al. 2013, Kvale/Brinkman 2008 or Hermanowicz 2002).

*Interpretive* interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing, i.e. intending to yield data rich and deep enough to grasp *constructions of meaning, discourses and narratives*. These typically manifest themselves in the form of more or less implicit categorisations, demarcations, framings, types of wording, metaphors, or significant silences. Two examples: PhD students speaking of what it is to them to be PhD students often draw on implicit understandings of "work" to situate their research (as constituting or not constituting "proper" work) - and themselves - in a moral and social space; similarly, policy-makers, when speaking of their views of the role of social policy, deploy latent understandings of what a "proper" citizen and a "deserving" welfare state beneficiary is in their understanding.

While the general principles of in-depth interviewing are helpful in making the play of categorisations emerge, they are often insufficient: indeed the 'interpretive interviewer' needs to develop an even sharper sense for how to tap into systems of meaning (without ever pushing the interviewee in a particular direction) and for detecting clues signalling the presence of more implicit or latent layers of meaning underneath the respondents' explicit statements.

This course aims to develop the participants' capacity to design and carry out such interviews successfully. We will start with a general introduction and some practical exercises designed to raise the participants' awareness of the existence of multiple layers of meaning in interview data, and of the difficulty of capturing them in an interview situation. We will then go through the key stages of an interview study and discuss the specificities of interpretive interviewing by contrast to and in extension of general in-depth interviewing.
Firstly, the elaboration of a topic guide which needs to be designed in such a way as to avoid any imposition of pre-set categorisations or framings, and to allow for a dynamic exploration of the width and depth of the respondents views on subject area of the interview. A key issue to be discussed in this context is the inevitable tension between the necessity of setting some conceptual boundaries to the topic under inquiry without imposing a priori categorisations on the respondent.

Secondly, we will test and discuss issues related to the interview interaction: namely the importance of adequate probing – not just probing in general, but probing into relevant (latent) categorisations or other value-laden elements of discourse (such as silence, metaphors, particular framings or connotations etc.). In this context, we will first look at the general principles of good interpretive interviewing, and then at the particular difficulties that may arise with specific types of respondents (such as reluctant, shy, evasive or very talkative respondents) and in particular types of power constellations (the powerful or powerless researcher, the sympathetic or unsympathetic researcher etc.). We may also discuss the limits of interpretive interviewing in particular situations (interviewing in a foreign language, cross-cultural interviewing, interviewing with an interpreter, skype interviewing etc.).

Thirdly, we will look at transcription practices and their implications for a research based on interviewing (types of transcriptions suitable for interpretive analyses, delegating transcription, limits of written transcripts etc.).

Finally, we will also make some incursions into interpretive analysis and, in the process, discuss issues of validity and reliability of this kind of data and research. Throughout the week, we will also repeatedly raise the question of how to best stage the research process when working with interpretive interviewing.

Theoretically, this course is grounded generally speaking in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist traditions of qualitative research.

By the end of the course, the participants will have acquired an understanding of the specificities and requirements of interpretive interviewing and how to apply this knowledge to their own research object. They may not yet master all the intricacies of interpretive interviewing – which requires many more hours of practice than this course can offer – but they should know what they need to pay attention to when designing and carrying out a research based (entirely or partly) on in-depth interviews and on interpretive types of analysis.

For the sake of a meaningful common discussion during class hours, we will all work on a common mini-project during the winter school. However, as far as the winter school schedule allows, the instructor will be available for individual consultations on the participants' own research projects.

The participants in this course should please bring with them a digital recording device with download function (such as: digital recorder, mp3, iPhone or iPad etc.). If they intend to work on their own laptop, they can also usefully install a transcription assistance software (such as ExpressScribe, F4/F5, or similar).

They should be prepared to put in some hours of daily work for readings and practical exercises (interviewing, transcribing etc.), in addition to the daily class meetings. Daily assignments will be given at the end of each class meeting, for the next day.
**Day-to-day schedule (Monday 16 February to Friday 20 February)**

The day-to-day schedule is provisional and will be adjusted depending on the progress of the group. Overall about half of the available class time will be devoted to practical work and the other half to (interactive) lectures, but not always necessarily in the same order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Details [NB : incl. timing of lecture v/s lab or fieldwork etc. hours]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>The nature of interpretive interviewing</td>
<td>Introductory lecture:</td>
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<td>- In-depth interviewing in general and interpretive interviewing.</td>
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<td>- The logic of interpretive data analysis</td>
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<td>- Theoretical models underlying interpretive interviewing</td>
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<td>- Listening from multiple angles: introduction to discourse analytical perspectives on data analysis (1)</td>
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<td>Exercises:</td>
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<td>- Sensitising exercises in data analysis and interview &quot;diagnosing&quot;</td>
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<td>Assignment: additional sensitising exercises.</td>
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<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Elaborating topic guides for interpretive interviewing</td>
<td>Lecture:</td>
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<td>- The architecture of the interpretive interview topic guide: conceptual and communicative</td>
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<td>- How to ask questions without imposing a priori categorisations – working with sensitising concepts</td>
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<td>- Question breakdown, wording, sequencing</td>
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<td>Exercise:</td>
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<td>- Elaboration of a topic guide (to be continued for day 3) and pre-test</td>
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<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Interview techniques for interpretive interviewing (1)</td>
<td>Lecture:</td>
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<td>Transcription for interpretive analysis</td>
<td>- &quot;Hearing data&quot; (1): Listening for constructions of meaning – demarcations, vocabulary metaphors</td>
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<td>- levels of interpretation – individual, cultural</td>
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<td>- Interview techniques for interpretive interviewing: open questions, the use of probes and prompts, the use of silence, content mapping and content mining questions</td>
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<td>Exercises</td>
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<td>- Evaluating topic guides</td>
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<td>- Interview exercises</td>
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<td>Assignment : revise topic guide, then do a pilot interview; listen through the interview and transcribe</td>
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### Day 4

**Interview techniques (2)**  
**Data analysis (1)**

**Lecture:**
- "Hearing data": listening for the discursive construction of subjects positions (2)
- Interviewing and "the truth"
- Handling "difficult" interviewees
- Trust and rapport in different power constellations ("ordinary" people, elites, vulnerable people, etc.)
- From interviews to data analysis

**Exercise:**
- "Diagnosing" interviews
- Interview exercises

**Assignment**: revise topic guide, do another interview, transcribe some sections

### Day 5

**Data analysis (2); Interview "diagnosing"**

**Lecture**
- The limits to interpretive interviewing
- Typical difficulties in the analysis of interpretive interviews (contradictions, multiple possible interpretations, the 'truth', etc.)
- Validity and reliability in interpretive research
- Interpretive interviewing and the research process

**Exercises:**
- To be defined.

**Final questions and discussion**

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**Day-to-day reading list**

Provisional reading list – some changes may be made by February 2015.  
The readings for Day 1 should please be done ahead of the first class meeting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Readings (please read at least the compulsory reading for the scheduled day)</th>
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</table>
Yeo, Alice et al. (2013). "In-Depth Interviews", in Ritchie, Jane, Lewis, Jane, |

**Recommended:**

### Day 2

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

### Day 3

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

### Day 4

**Required:**
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<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Required:</th>
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<td>Recommended:</td>
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<td>Recommended:</td>
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**Software and hardware requirements**

**Software programme**
For this workshop we need a transcription software such as Express Scribe (full version), for PC and Mac. [http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/de/](http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/de/), or F4/F5.

**Hardware requirements**
The participants need a digital recording device that allows for data downloading (digital recorder, iPhone, mp3, etc.).

Participants who bring their own laptop might want to install a transcription software such as ExpressScribe or F4/F5.
Literature

Remedial readings (for participants who might need to refresh their knowledge about interviewing and/or interpretive analysis):


Further literature.


Reference Books:


**Lecture room requirement**
Two rooms (one horseshoe-shaped for the lectures, if possible an additional – and adjacent - one with flexible seating for interview exercises).

**Preferred time slots**
Morning.

**Other recommended courses (before or after this course)**
The following other ECPR Methods School courses could be useful in combination with this one in a ‘training track’. NB this is an indicative list.

**Before this course:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course title</th>
<th>Summer School</th>
<th>Winter School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
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<td>2 Introduction to Qualitative Interpretive Methods</td>
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**After this course:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course title</th>
<th>Summer School</th>
<th>Winter School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Discourse Analysis I+II</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Introduction to Qualitative Data Analysis with Atlas.ti (short course)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Writing Ethnographic and Other Qualitative-Interpretive Research: Learning Inductively</td>
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