

4.2. Interviews

4.2.1. What is a research interview?

Research interviews are a ‘conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives’ (Cannell and Kahn, 1986). Research interviews can take 1) a *one-to-one format* where one researcher interviews one interviewee, 2) a *one-to-many format* where the researcher interviews a group of participants (Focus group), 3) or *group interview* where one or more researchers interviews one or more participants (Group interviews).

4.2.2. Why use an interview in research? (purposes of interview in research)

- An exploratory device, especially for a new and under-researched line of enquiry.
- To follow up unexpected results generated from observations or questionnaires.
- To cross-check and validate other research methods – referred to as **triangulation**.

4.2.3. Types of research interviews

- a) **Structured interviews** are a type of interviews in which the interviewer asks a particular set of *predetermined questions* (i.e. questions are planned and created in advance). In structured interviews, *questions are asked in the same order* to all interviewees. In this type of research interviews, the *questions are closed-ended* (e.g. multiple choice, rating scales ...etc).

Example Q: Do you use **implicit** or **explicit** feedback in your English-speaking class?

- b) **Semi-structured interviews** are a less rigid type of interviews, “in which the researcher uses a written list of questions as a guide while still having the freedom to digress and probe for more information” (Mackey & Gass, 2015, p. 225). The questions asked in this type of interviews are *predetermined* (planned ahead of the interview) but are asked in a *flexible order*. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher asks *open ended-questions* without limiting the answers of the interviewee.

Example Q: What type of feedback do you use in your English-speaking class? And why?

- c) **Unstructured interviews** “are more similar to natural conversations, and the outcomes are not limited by the researcher’s preconceived ideas about the area of interest.” (Mackey & Gass, 2015, p. 225). This is the most flexible type of interviews because the researcher is not limited by number of pre-determined questions, a particular order of questions, or the type of questions. Instead, the interview questions can be predetermined or arise during the interview, asked in any order, and contain open-ended or closed ended questions.

Example: Let’s talk about feedback.

Types of interview	Advantages	Disadvantages
Structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Quantifiable •Comparable across participants •Analysis is quick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Little room for unanticipated responses •Participants can feel constrained
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Produce rich data •Comparable across participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Analysis is time-consuming
Unstructured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Produce rich data •Permits a deeper analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Analysis is very time-consuming •Data is not comparable across participants

4.2.4. Prompts and probes

- a) **Probes** are conversational techniques used by the interviewer to get the interviewee to expand on their answers and delve deeper in a discussion about a particular topic.

Examples: “Would you like to add anything?”, “Could you say more about that?”, “Give me examples?”, “Why?”.

- b) **Prompts** suggest to the interviewee the range of possible answers that the interviewer expects. It is used when the interviewer can see that the interviewee does not understand the question.

Example: Question: How do you compare the flexibility of online vs. the face-to-face teaching? – **Prompts** “do you feel restricted by time and place in online teaching compared to face-to-face teaching?”, “is face-to-face teaching more rigid when it comes to timing and location than online teaching?”

N.B. The interviewer should avoid bias when using prompts and probes.

4.2.5. Piloting an interview

Before collecting data using the designed interview, the researcher must conduct a pilot interview to 1) test the *clarity of the questions*, 2) explore the type and richness of the *answers received*, and 3) the extent to which *the data collected* will help in answering the main research question of the study.

4.2.6. Dos and Don'ts of research interviews

a) <i>Dos</i>	b) <i>Don'ts</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record the interview (audio/ video) • Listen and pay attention • Try to avoid putting across your own opinion and be aware of your own biases • Use probes and prompts to get rich and useful data • Use eye contact and stay engaged with the interviewee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't ask leading or biased questions • Don't use technical complicated language • Don't ask long and confusing questions • Don't use many closed-ended questions where answer is only 'yes' or 'no' • Don't speak too much or interrupt the interviewee

4.2.7. Transcribing and analyzing interview data

Interview transcription refers to the process of writing down an interview that was recorded using audio-video recording tools. This process can also take place during the interview through real-time transcription. Based on these written accounts, the researcher can *analyze the interviews* deducing unites of meaning, themes, and the frequencies of occurrence of particular ideas. When presenting results, the researcher can quote excerpts and segments of the interview to illustrate claims and back arguments.