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Beyond oral history: The application of semi-structured interviews to research in the overlapping fields of history, sociology, and political science

SUMMARY Semi-structured interviews are widely used in the social sciences and, though less common, have also found a place in the humanities, particularly in oral history methodology. At the intersection of disciplines, this technique serves not only to uncover new historical facts and deepen existing knowledge but also to offer insights into subjective interpretations. This approach is particularly valuable in studies involving communities and collectivities whose perceptions of facts or "truth" may differ from the mainstream narrative – such as populations on opposing sides of active or past conflicts. These differing perspectives can shape political narratives, often making the "objective" truth less relevant to those directly involved. Researchers, in turn, access only a fragment of history, as told through the participants' knowledge and memories. This text examines contexts in which semi-structured interviews may prove useful for research, drawing from current and representative literature, as well as the author's own journalistic and professional experience. It also addresses important ethical considerations in interview-based research, such as the security of interviewee data, researcher biases, the risk of invoking psychological trauma, and the need for informed consent. By citing examples of studies that have successfully employed this method, this article provides a methodological framework that can guide researchers in applying this technique to social science research with a historical focus. Ultimately, the article advocates for the broader use of semi-structured interviews in research, emphasizing that the technique can provide valuable insights and should not be dismissed as unsuitable for the humanities.

KEYWORDS oral history, semi-structured interview, ethics, social sciences, interdisciplinary research

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Introduction to the use of interviews in history research

The goal of this article is to provide a methodological framework for using semi-structured interviews in research that spans the humanities and social sciences, with a particular focus on oral history and work involving vulnerable groups. Its key aspects include defining oral history, outlining essential criteria and requirements for semi-structured interviews, and addressing ethical considerations that may arise in such research. The central research problem for this text is how semi-structured interviews can be effectively applied in interdisciplinary studies with significant historical dimensions, while also taking into account the specific research topic. Additionally, it is crucial to identify potential risks associated with the misuse of this technique, including the potential for deliberate or unintentional distortion of historical facts.

The article draws on a wide body of literature on the subject, but its added value lies in the author's personal experience gained from years of conducting journalistic interviews, which have been published in Polish media and podcasts. This experience contributes to a deeper understanding of the ethical complexities involved in conducting interviews in a respectful manner, paying close attention to both the emotions and memories of the interviewee and the rapport established by the interviewer. These factors are critical not only in research but also in other forms of interview-based work. Furthermore, the article highlights the importance of understanding that which is left unsaid during interviews, as this unspoken information can serve as a filter for interpreting the data collected.

It is also important to recognize that a semi-structured interview is just one technique or tool. This paper argues that it is most effective when combined with other methods, such as case studies or comparative analyses (or others that may be more in line with a specific research topic and/or area). However, the technique does have its limitations, as it does not produce numerical data typical of quantitative methods, such as surveys, which can be conducted on large populations. Instead, the primary value of a semi-structured interview lies in the contextual understanding of what is shared (or left unsaid) during testimonies, offering a more nuanced interpretation of the data.

Research purpose

The purpose of historical research is often viewed as gaining a clearer understanding of the past and uncovering the truth about events. This argument holds weight when considering history on a global scale or in its entirety. However, it is essential to acknowledge that perceptions of truth are frequently shaped by personal interpretation, influenced by individual experiences or stories passed down through generations. This becomes especially evident when examining narratives of people affected by conflicts involving two or more sides, whereby past events (or their perceived versions) actively shape present realities. These perceptions influence the attitudes of entire communities and often the policies enacted by governments and local authorities.

Modern examples, such as the contrasting collective narratives of Jews and Arabs in the Middle East in 1948, illustrate how historical events can be perceived through vastly different lenses. These differences are evident not only in broader political and historical discourse but also in the personal stories of those who live in the area. When interpreting what happened after the Declaration of Independence of Israel and the ensuing war, the Jewish accounts often describe a defense against a numerically superior enemy, driven by a hostile religion and a desire to claim the land of ancient Jewish kingdoms. In contrast, many Arab residents, for example from villages like Lifta – now an abandoned part of Jerusalem popular with squatters and hikers – would recount al-Nakba, or "the Catastrophe", which they view as an act of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Jews in order to create a homogenous national state.

A more recent example of differing historical narratives is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which escalated after 24 February 2022. Both sides provide contrasting interpretations of the events, as reflected not only in the statements of politicians but also in the voices of ordinary citizens. These individuals, often vocal on social media, willfully (and sometimes zealously) share their perspectives, accusing the other side of aggression.

In the ongoing discourse regarding the Gaza Strip events after October 7, 2023, we also see differing interpretations of events. In the eyes of many Israelis, their country is merely defending itself after a barbaric attack conducted by Hamas militants on unsuspecting civilians. In contrast, the Palestinians may see October 7 as an act of resistance against occupation, colonialism, and genocide.

The paragraphs above do not suggest symmetry between different actors engaged in conflict but rather highlight the differences in interpreting historical and political events, as well as personal perceptions of truth. For an external observer, it may be helpful to take a broad view and consider the range of decisions and actions that led to a clash between opposing sides. Of course, this perspective may hold little relevance to those directly involved, who experience and interpret the situation through their own personal experiences and limited knowledge.

Nonetheless, researchers should not dismiss personal and subjective accounts, as they offer valid and valuable insights. To capture these subjective thoughts and experiences, oral history methods – such as recording testimonies – may be used and analyzed through various research techniques. This approach can deepen our understanding of events and sociopolitical climates, shedding light on the motivations of political actors, as well as societies, minority groups, and individuals affected by these events.

Oral history is usually gathered through testimonies or interviews which are recorded or written down for future research. It is crucial to approach such interviews with dignity and empathy, recognizing that an interviewee is a human being sharing their life stories, not merely a research subject. Attention should be paid not only to what is shared but also how it is told or what might be left out, for various reasons. The structure of the testimony is nearly as important as the content itself (Greenspan, 2019).

Interviews are not only useful for historical research but can also provide insights into contemporary narratives, where journalistic experience may come in handy. This technique can be applied to explore modern political affairs, international relations, or personal views and identity, be it sexual, national, or religious. These opinions may be influenced by historical events or subjective interpretations of them. For example, the current relations between Poland and Ukraine on a personal level may be shaped by memories, passed down through generations, of the massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1943, potentially leading to hostile attitudes toward Ukrainian asylum seekers in Poland.

Semi-structured interviews are vital for my own interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences, as well as for work with various media outlets aimed at providing insights to researchers, students, and the general public interested in global affairs. Interviews conducted with members of the Jewish community in Poland, for instance, can illuminate personal stories and provide insight into generational differences, international politics, perceptions of Israel and Poland, Jewish national identity, religious identity, and other personal

opinions. Such research extends beyond oral history methods but draws from them to produce a portrait of Polish Jewry living in the country at the present moment. It explores their relationship with history, their families' memories of the past, their hopes for the future, and their connections with other Jewish communities worldwide, especially in Israel. Personal accounts of historical experiences are essential for research, but equally important are the personal understandings of the surrounding social and political processes.

Defining oral history

For years, historical research has primarily relied on the analysis of documents, archive records, and written accounts. However, the advent of modern technologies, particularly the ability to record audio & video, has expanded researchers' tools, enabling them to capture not only the objective facts but also subjective interpretations of those facts. Oral history, in particular, offers a more human-centered approach to understanding how society perceives past events. As Piotr Filipkowski notes, oral history challenges the anonymity often found in traditional historiography, striving to bring individual voices to the forefront. "Oral history wants to change that – and is changing it on the scale available to it. This has always, almost from the beginning, been its strong justification" (Filipkowski, 2018).

The "more personal" or "bottom-up" approach to history should not be viewed solely as an advantage but also a potential risk, if the research is not conducted properly or without thorough preparation, both in terms of soft skills as well as hard knowledge.

Beyond its use in enriching historical narratives, oral history has notable applications in education. Institutions and museums can incorporate meetings with witnesses to history, offering deeper insights to those interested in specific periods or events. This is exemplified by Jewish institutions in Poland and their mission to actively collect testimonies from the Righteous Among the Nations or Holocaust survivors; as well as by numerous schools which organize meetings with World War II veterans or members of the anti-communist opposition. One such example is the "Wirtualny Sztetl" program run by POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which collected over 1,000 interviews with Polish Jews or other witnesses to history, accessible through a website.

In the case of the war in Ukraine, new media platforms are being used to collect interviews and testimonies documenting personal accounts of war experiences. These accounts are made available online with open access, ensuring widespread

availability. As Oksana Hudoshnyk (2023) notes: "Not losing the voice of fellow citizens is the goal of history, media, and science alike."

This approach also carries risks, as such meetings could be curated in such a way as to not broaden knowledge but to advance a political agenda. In these cases, oral history could be used as a tool for political activism or propaganda, whether benevolently or malevolently, depending on the motivation of those involved. This could occur even unbeknownst to the witness providing their testimony making them more objects than subjects.

Oral history accounts can be a vital source of information in instances when researchers lack sufficient written material, such as testimonies, news articles, or archival documents. In such cases, direct witness accounts may not only provide valuable insights but also serve as a primary basis for understanding events. An example is the research on the Nakba conducted by Kobi Peled (2014) through oral history interviews. K. Peled argues that "Palestinian memory, especially the local one, is susceptible to what Ted Swedenburg referred to as a 'double jeopardy' of erasure, encouraged by Israeli as well as other elements who struggle with Palestinian nationalism on one hand and incorporation into the hegemonic national discourse on the other." Furthermore, K. Peled suggests that oral history, as recounted by interviewees in his research, offers a view of Palestinian life that is vibrant and dynamic, rather than stereotypical. This principle extends beyond Palestinians, as other nations, ethnic groups, and minorities, could also be portrayed in a more nuanced way when allowed to voice their own experiences.

Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey (2014) similarly note that oral history has gained popularity within the feminist movement as a "way to understand and bring out the history of women in culture, which was customarily a subject of male interpretation."

As O. Hudoshnyk (2023) argues: "Oral history is becoming more than just a public story about oneself ('self-documentation'); digital storytelling has become a new social, cultural, economic, and intellectual phenomenon, a widespread practice and a means of shaping individual and collective memory." This, however, also implies that oral history may not always have a positive impact. The "shaping" of memory is a broad concept, which can involve broadening of knowledge but may also open the door to manipulation.

What constitutes oral history is the central role of an individual, a witness or a participant of an event, one who is not merely being questioned but rather given an opportunity to express their own emotions and experiences in a way that others can understand. As Cláudia Divino (2023) explains: "An

event or a situation experienced by an interviewee cannot be relayed to others without being narrated. This means that it is constituted at the very moment of the interview. By telling their experiences, the interviewee transforms what was experienced into language, selecting and organizing the events according to a certain meaning." It is through this process of recollection that others can begin to understand – or attempt to understand – an individual's emotions, decisions, thoughts, and experiences.

The aspect of participation in research is also underlined by Marta Kopiniak (2021). While activities such as source processing, archiving, sharing, and presentation are not inherently participatory, this changes when a witness actively engages in these processes, whether for research or projects such as the aforementioned "Wirtualny Sztetl." M. Kopiniak draws parallels between the oral history and the purpose of a museum, stating that: "Indeed, one of the characteristics of participatory museum action – like oral history – is to seek change (within or outside the institution), to democratize the narrative and make it polyphonic, to empower individuals or groups and give them agency or help them regain it." (Kopiniak, 2021)

Democratization and shift in focus of historical research made possible by oral history is also highlighted by Michał Kierzkowski (2017), who observes that history, traditionally recorded through written sources, has largely been centered around politics and war. More importantly, the history of wars had often been written by the victors, shaped by their own political and moral perspectives. Kierzkowski notes, "What defines oral history in this context is the possibility of shifting the center to the defeated, the underdog, and the rank-and-file soldiers. This adds an extra dimension to history. It becomes useful for ordinary people who want to understand the do-overs and violent upheavals in their lives." (*ibid.*)

As oral history accounts can be collected in a variety of ways, mainly through testimonies and interviews, it is crucial for the purposes of this text to focus on the latter, as interviews constitute the basis of the author's own research methods.

What is a semi-structured interview?

In semi-structured interviews, sometimes referred to as qualitative interviews, the researcher prepares a list of questions or topics that outline the agenda of the interview. However, there is a fundamental difference between this method

and structured interviews. While the researcher creates a question list or research tool, these questions can (and often will) be adapted during the interview. The interviewer takes an active role, engaging with the interviewee in what may resemble a regular conversation on a pre-determined topic (Babbie, 2003).

Data gathered through semi-structured interviews form the foundation for further research and require thorough analysis. It could be argued that oral history interviews should be viewed as biographical interviews (Vrzgulova, 2019), as their goal is to capture the interviewee's personal account of history, shaped by subjective experiences rather than through the lens of broader historical context gathered from studies of political and/or historical situations. However, this is not always the case, as some semi-structured interviews are designed to elicit expert opinions or professional experience, as will be discussed later in this article, using an example from a study by Sunday Oludare Ogunlana (2019).

Researchers are not restricted to the examples provided, as semi-structured interviews have a range of applications that extend beyond the humanities and social sciences, and can even support research in multiple fields simultaneously.

Semi-structured interviews are particularly suited for capturing oral history and exploring subjective information provided by interviewees, as they differ significantly from structured interviews. As noted by A. Fontana & J.H. Frey (2014), structured interviews present all participants with the same series of pre-prepared questions, along with a "limited set of response categories." This format discourages improvisation, making it more appropriate for surveys. However, in some cases, the style of asking questions may need to be adjusted, as not every situation can be anticipated. This may make interpreting such questionnaires more difficult, as one of the main reasons for using structured interviews is the research replicability, which allows for conducting research with the same or largely similar series of questions even over the course of years and among other research groups.

Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, allow for greater improvisation, which can often be essential in specific research or interview contexts, such as when an interviewee responds to more than one question at a time or when new opportunities emerge during the conversation. This is particularly common in political interviews involving politicians, diplomats, or experts, who may offer fresh leads of perspectives that an interviewer needs to follow up on during the course of the discussion.

A variety of goals can be established for conducting interviews, depending on the specific research context. The interviews can be exploratory, aimed at deepening the researcher's understanding of a subject they are already familiar

with. They can also be revelatory, whereby the researcher has only a surface-level knowledge of the topic. Such situations do not indicate a flaw on the researcher's part, but rather an opportunity for discovery.

The most common goals, however, are ethnographic or biographical, whereby the researcher focuses on the lives or personal experiences of individuals or groups.

Ethical ramifications

When conducting research among vulnerable groups, especially through interviews, a range of ethical issues may arise. One such key concern is the potential power imbalance between the researcher and the interviewee, especially when working with ethnic, national, religious, sexual, and otherwise minority groups. Additionally, certain questions may prompt the resurfacing of past and present trauma. For example, when interviewing the members of Jewish minorities, questions about the Holocaust or systemic antisemitism may evoke painful memories, and researchers or research teams must handle such topics with care, ensuring that they approach these sensitive areas responsibly and ethically.

Traumatic memories may understandably cause an interviewee to withdraw from participating in the research. Furthermore, when interviewing elderly individuals or those in poor health, special attention must be paid to their mental and physical well-being. Prolonged interviews may cause agitation, resurfacing of trauma, or trigger a range of emotions, all of which must be accounted for when planning the interview. It is crucial that interviewees fully understand that their participation is voluntary and they should not feel pressured to cooperate. Ensuring the interviewee's well-being must remain a priority throughout the process.

The importance of informed consent and anonymity

It should be the ethical standard that interviewees are assured at all times of their right to postpone or withdraw from research at any stage, even after the interview or interviews have been recorded. This may impact the research process, particularly if the researcher is conducting a comparative analysis or a case study of a chosen interview, potentially requiring previously completed steps to be redone.

Furthermore, when researching vulnerable or taboo topics and groups, participants must be able to trust the researcher or the research team to protect their data. This can be accomplished through secure data storage, such as

encrypted drives, but more importantly, through anonymization of the collected data. A reader of the research or an audience at a conference should not be able to identify the interviewees, especially when the research involves small populations or public figures.

There are numerous risks that need to be taken into account. Firstly, names, addresses, places of residence, ages, employment, and educational details are the most basic identifiers and should always be coded or omitted in interviews. Ideally, when preparing the research tool, interviewers should avoid asking questions that require disclosure of sensitive data. If such information is shared by the interviewee, even if provided willingly and in good faith, it is important to recognize that research on minority groups in any country has the potential to incite hate crimes or other negative consequences. Therefore, any identifying information should be carefully removed from interview transcripts and final reports to protect the safety and privacy of the participants.

The names of interviewees should also be coded, even when public figures are involved. The codes should minimize the risk of identification by assigning a number or letter to the interviewee. Good examples could be "R1," "R2," "Interviewee 3," or "Interviewee 4." The coding system can be creatively designed by the researcher, but it must always remain respectful of the interviewee's culture, religion, sexual identity, and other relevant factors.

A poor example of coding names (though not from research using semi-structured interviews, but relevant for illustration) can be found in Jacek Bartosiak's (2023) journalistic memoir *Najlepsze miejsce na ziemi* [*The Best Place in the World*]. Discussing Poland's political landscape and international relations, J. Bartosiak's think tank, and his personal experiences, the book's author uses Greek letters such as "alpha" or "beta" to encrypt the names of public figures. While this approach could be effective, J. Bartosiak includes enough details about these individuals that anyone vaguely familiar with Poland's contemporary political landscape could easily identify them – for instance, by referring to a politician as the leader of the ruling party during the period in question. This renders the anonymization more of a stylistic choice than a practical one (*ibid.*, pp. 17–19).

In a popular book aimed at sparking a national debate, this may be acceptable, but such a method in studies involving vulnerable groups would severely compromise the anonymity of interviewees, potentially jeopardizing the integrity of the research and harming the future career of the researcher.

One good example of participant anonymity comes from a recently published research article in *PLOS ONE*, which examines communication preferences

of transgender and gender-diverse individuals, conducted on an $N = 10$ group recruited online (von der Warth et al., 2023). The authors included excerpts from interview transcripts, which, in some cases, could pose a liability. Given that research on sexuality and gender identity can lead to breaches of privacy and may be deemed controversial, it is crucial to prevent any chance of re-identification. In the study, the interviews were coded as "Interview 1," "Interview 2," etc., and the transcripts do not allow identification of respondents, effectively safeguarding their anonymity.

Another example of an effort to secure interviewee data, although still with some risk of re-identification, comes from Agnieszka Krawczyk (2023), who used a free interview technique, which is even less structured than the one discussed here but ethical concerns regarding interviewee anonymity remain as important. A. Krawczyk examined the experiences of young Jewish adults living in Poland – a small community whose members recounted, among other things, their relationships with the country's dominant ethno-national majority. She coded her "key cases" under identifiers such as N1, N4, N5, and N9, and she refrained from disclosing personal information. However, the inclusion of tables detailing the "life course" of each subject carries the risk of re-identification, especially for public figures or those who may be recognizable due to their public activities. While this presents a genuine risk, including information such as subjects' occupations and public roles may sometimes be necessary when such details are critical for fully understanding the study's results. However, in order to re-identify the anonymized respondents, it is necessary to have a significant amount of inside knowledge regarding the environment in question.

Provision of anonymity, along with the rapport established between the researcher and interviewees, can lead to more honest and detailed responses, which are critical to the success of the research.

Another important consideration is the language used in the interviews. Depending on the research topic and the backgrounds of both the researcher and participants, they may not share the same native language. For example, Juyoung Song (2019) explored the socialization of Saudi Arabian female students in mixed-gender interpersonal relations. The interviews with 10 participants, each lasting 60 to 90 minutes, were conducted in English, a second language for both the researcher and the participants. The use of a second language can influence how participants respond and perceive the interview. As J. Song notes, "Learning to use a second language (L2) changes how learners perceive themselves in a new sociocultural environment. L2 learners' gender identity is

a significant dimension of their social identity, and interactions with others and encounters with new cultural and linguistic norms and ideologies in the L2 may challenge and modify their understanding of gender norms and gender identity" (*ibid.*). Because research participation is a form of social interaction, language barriers should be carefully considered. Some participants may hesitate to give comprehensive answers if they feel unable to fully express themselves in a second language. Researchers must be prepared to paraphrase and clarify research goals, and ensure that participants understand the questions and the overall process when language limitations arise.

Interviewer bias

Another important ethical issue that may arise in the course of the interviews is the researcher bias, which may be important especially in the case of unexperienced researchers (as well as experienced journalists who decide to add their value to academia). In case of structured interviews it may play some role in the process of preparing the questionnaires, where interviewers may (maybe even subconsciously) build questions in such a manner that suggests specific answers. However, it may be even more crucial to take into the consideration when preparing for semistructured interviews, where in specific cases questions from outside the questionnaire are asked if the conversation with thew interviewee requires so.

Such a situation may arise if the interviewee stops for a while to think, or if they provide an example from their personal story, that the interviewer believes could be important to explore. In some cases the responses provided by the interviewee may not be in line with the researchers personal ethics or beliefs – could be considered morally dubious, or the interviewee could provide opinion on one's religious and/or political beliefs.

At all times the researcher needs to understand, that the goal of the research is to understand better the interviewee, their story and motivation, and not to influence change in their actions or meditations. This is especially crucial for researchers that may also have experience working in media, or even consume news media as a regular viewer or listener. Journalists can seem confrontational when interviewing politicians or experts, as this is their inherent role, and is required by their organizations as well as audience. It is not the role of the researcher to confront the interviewee, but, as discussed previously, to give them their own voice and unique opportunity to share own experience.

Including interview transcripts

Conducting interviews should be considered only the first step in the research process. Since the researchers using semi-structured interviews are not working with closed-answer questionnaires but rather with longer, more detailed responses, transcription becomes a crucial next step. As M. Kierzkowski (2017) points out, the purpose of the oral history method is not only to generate sources but also to present the research findings. Without the transcription, analyzing the gathered data would be difficult, if not impossible, while presenting the results without quoting responses would be equally challenging.

Transcription can be aided by computer systems, but it is essential for the researcher to proofread the transcriptions to ensure their accuracy. Written transcripts are crucial for conducting analyses using language-based computer tools such as MaxQDA, as well as for searching for keywords using text editors commonly available on most computer platforms.

Transcripts do not always need to be published in the final report. However, they can add value, particularly when the research group is not too large and the interviews are not too extensive, making them accessible for those readers interested in the details. Portions of the transcripts may be included to illustrate specific points or highlight trends that are significant within part or all of the researched population. These excerpts can be quoted directly or summarized, as seen in Krawczyk's work (2023).

However, it must be understood that including transcripts may jeopardize anonymity, as interviewees might be identified through specific details that researchers may have overlooked, particularly when public figures or individuals known within their local, professional, or personal circles are involved.

Therefore, the decision to include transcripts, whether in full or in part, should be made with careful consideration. The value added by their inclusion must be weighed against the potential risks to the anonymity and well-being of the interviewees, as well as the rapport established between the researcher and participants.

Towards practical application of semi-structured interviews in interdisciplinary research

When conducting semi-structured interviews in interdisciplinary research, it is crucial to balance the aforementioned ethical considerations with a clear focus on the research goals and questions. After all, the purpose of interviews in research is not merely to gather data but to test hypotheses and offer insights into specific contexts. Additionally, interviews can play a vital role in amplifying the voices of marginalized groups (or those who perceive themselves as such). However, the application of interviews is far broader.

Interviews can also be employed as supplementary methods when necessary. For example, in S.O. Ogunlana's (2019) study on propaganda tactics used by radical Islamist terrorist groups in cyberspace, the research primarily relied on data collected online and from peer-reviewed publications. Apart from that, the author also interviewed fifteen security experts in Nigeria, who shared their perspectives and experiences in countering the cyber-propaganda of terrorist groups. In this context, the insights provided by the interviewees enhanced the researcher's understanding of not only the methods that the law enforcement and groups use to combat propaganda, but also the effectiveness of these methods and how their success can be measured.

When combined with methods such as case studies, the research projects utilizing semi-structured interviews can produce valuable insights that cannot be captured through more "objective" approaches, such as document analysis or a study of historical artifacts. As Monika Vrzgulova (2019) notes, "the oral history method is a challenging way to obtain interesting subjective data and recollections which are closely connected with the identity and memory of the narrator as well as the listener." However, not everything can be explicitly communicated. As Henry Greenspan (2014) observes, certain "silent pauses" may emerge during interviews, requiring researchers to interpret something that the interviewees say "between the lines." It is crucial not to misinterpret these or impose one's own understanding when the meaning is unclear. Researchers must remain aware of their own biases to avoid distorting the data and interpretation thereof.

Although semi-structured interviews are commonly used in the social sciences, their application extends beyond this field and can be valuable in the humanities, medicine, and many other disciplines. The technique can enrich research

or even serve as its foundation when researchers seek to explore the subjective experiences of individuals or their relationship with memory.

In historical research, as discussed in this article, interviews are seen as particularly valuable when individual interpretations of historical events differ significantly from those derived from artifacts or documents. This is especially true when living witnesses or participants can share their personal experiences and perspectives. Providing these individuals with a platform to participate in research and translate their internal experiences and emotions into words that others can understand is part of the social responsibility of researchers. This practice also helps researchers stay connected with the world outside academia. A personal view of history may not align with the version commonly taught or accepted; it may deviate from objective assumptions. However, exploring these perspectives is crucial if the research aims not only to uncover new facts but also to investigate the motivations and lived experiences of the people being studied.

Semi-structured interviews, while perhaps less commonly used in the humanities, should not be overlooked as a research tool, especially when living witnesses can provide valuable perspectives. These interviews should not be regarded merely as an "added value." Rather, data or sources gathered from archival research and interviews can complement one other, enriching the research as a whole. Importantly, to achieve this, researchers must be prepared to confront their conscious or unconscious biases and be open to expanding their skill set by applying new techniques.

Conclusion

The above paper discussed the application of semi-structured interviews in research projects within the intersecting fields of the humanities and social sciences, focusing on the ethical and technical aspects of this method. Returning to the main issue – how a technique typically associated with social sciences, particularly sociology, can be applied in historical research – it was demonstrated that for the scholars studying recent historical events still within living memory, semi-structured interviews can be highly beneficial. This technique not only generates valuable sources for analysis but also democratizes research by inviting marginalized groups to share their unique perspectives, opinions, and memories, which may challenge the prevailing understanding of political, social, or historical events.

Researchers undertaking such work must remain attuned to the ethical considerations necessary to achieve their research objectives and the technical aspects required to effectively share their findings with a broader audience. Such an interdisciplinary approach helps bridge the gap between academic disciplines, particularly between the humanities and social sciences, and offers broader implications for methodologies extending beyond oral history.

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Poza historią mówioną. Zastosowanie wywiadów częściowo ustrukturyzowanych do badań w nakładających się dziedzinach historii, socjologii i nauk politycznych

STRESZCZENIE   Wywiady częściowo ustrukturyzowane są narzędziem wykorzystywanym z powodzeniem w naukach społecznych, a także rzadziej w humanistyce, gdzie znalazły swoje zastosowanie w metodologii historii mówionej. Na przecięciu dyscyplin tę technikę można jednak wykorzystać do badań, których celem jest nie tylko odkrycie nowych faktów historycznych i pogłębienie stanu wiedzy, ale także przyjrzenie się subiektywnym interpretacjom. Zwłaszcza badania prowadzone w społecznościach i zbiorowościach, które mogą mieć odbiegającą od przyjętego kanonu wiedzy percepcję faktów czy też „prawdy", czego dobrym przykładem mogą być populacje znajdujące się po przeciwnych stronach aktywnych czy wygasłych konfliktów. Ich spojrzenie na fakty historyczne może być wykorzystywane do sterowania politycznymi narracjami, a także sama „obiektywna" prawda może mieć niewielkie znaczenie dla bezpośrednich uczestników wydarzeń, do których wiedzy i wspomnień sięgną badacze, którzy poznają mniejszy wycinek historii. Poniższy tekst przygląda się sytuacjom, w których wywiady częściowo ustrukturyzowane mogą okazać się przydatne dla badań, na podstawie dostępnej aktualnej i reprezentatywnej literatury poruszającej omawiane zagadnienie, jak również czerpiąc z własnych doświadczeń dziennikarskich i zawodowych autora. Tekst omawia także istotne problemy etyczne związane z przeprowadzaniem opartych na wywiadach badań, dotyczące bezpieczeństwa danych rozmówców, osobistych uprzedzeń badacza, przywoływania możliwych traum psychologicznych czy też konieczności uzyskania świadomej zgody. Artykuł przytacza przykłady badań wykorzystujących tę technikę, by pomóc w dostarczeniu czytelnikowi ram metodologicznych, które ułatwią stosowanie techniki w badaniach z zakresu nauk społecznych z istotnym komponentem historycznym.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE   historia mówiona, wywiad półustrukturyzowany, etyka, nauki społeczne, badania interdyscyplinarne