



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI
SCIENZE SOCIALI E POLITICHE



The 'inter-vey'

Towards the Conversational Survey

Giampietro.Gobo@unimi.it

Università degli studi Milano

List of contents



- The paper presents a new technique/method for collecting data in survey
- I call this new technique “inter-vey”
(a mix of *in-depth* & *survey* interview or *unstructured* & *structured* interview)
- “Inter-vey” is based on the idea of a “conversational survey”
(against standardization + overt fixed response alternatives)
- The “inter-vey” fits with the Mixed Methods approach...
- however MM are **multiple** methods used in a single research
- unlike MM, the “inter-vey” is a unic, **one** method (only) that has internally the advantages of (two or more) different methods

The origins of 'inter-vey'



1. The US psychologist Rensis **Likert** (1903-1981)
2. The Norwegian sociologist Johan **Galtung** (1930-

Later both abandoned methodology... 😊

Likert: *fixed question/free answers*



- In survey research (**1940s**) Likert preferred **open-ended questions...**
- the **interviewers** who worked for Likert were instructed first to transcribe the interviewee's comments and **then** (on conclusion of the interview) **to choose the fixed response alternative** which they considered to be the closest match with the interviewee's comment.
- This procedure nevertheless made possible **to avoid numerous distortions** that might arise during the interview, which according to Likert should as closely as possible resemble a **conversation**.
- Likert called this technique: ***fixed question/free answers***.
- The researchers at the *Division of Program Surveys* also paid close attention to the **procedures for codifying the narrative materials** collected by open-ended questions. But they soon discovered the long-drawn-out and laborious nature of these procedures.
- Obviously, the criterion adopted by Likert required **more time and money**.

Galtung: open question/closed answer



- A few decades later, Galtung (1967, 120) reprised Likert's ideas and devised a variant of his procedure which he called "open question/closed answer":
 1. **Open question** for the interviewee, but...
 2. **Closed/fixed answers** for the interviewer.
- "The question is open, but *the interviewer may have closed the answers by a precoding in his schedule. This, however, is only known to him and not to the respondent*, and hence serves only administrative purposes like facilitation of coding. It does not structure the mind of the respondent" (Galtung 1967, 120, *emphasis added*).
- A technique therefore more agile, faster and *less expensive* than Likert's one.

What is the «inter-vey»?



The “inter-vey” applies both procedures, which were guided by the same principles:

1. make the interview into a conversation
2. let the interviewee answer freely in his/her own words
3. release him/her from the researcher's schemes
4. making a “interviewee-centered” survey

Together with others...



- These principles were shared also by other several scholars:
- **survey methodologists** (among others, in historical order, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Johan Galtung, William J. Goode and Paul K. Hatt, Robert L. Kahn and Charles F. Cannell, Robert J. Moore, Jean Morton-Williams, Howard Schuman, Stanley Presser, Alberto Marradi, Ray Pawson, Elliot G. Mishler, Johannes van der Zouwen)
- **cognitivists** (among others, in alphabetical order, Paul Beatty, Norman M. Bradburn, Frederick Conrad, Robert M. Groves, Hans-J. Hippler, Nora Cate Schaeffer, Michael F. Schober, Norbert Schwarz, Seymour Sudman, Judith M. Tanur)
- **ethnomethodologists, sociolinguistic and conversation analysts** (among others, Charles L. Briggs, Aaron Cicourel, Douglas Maynard, Hugh Mehan, Hanneke Houtkoop-Seenstra)



- **Theoretical standpoints and assumptions:**

1. Cognitive turn
2. Interactional turn
3. Pragmatic turn
4. ecc.

- **Proposals:**

1. flexible interviewing
2. no standardization
3. conversationalizing survey
4. ecc.

An example of «inter-vey»

414 telephone interviews

- **Fall 2000:** *survey*
- **98 student-interviewers** (my course on Social Research Methods)
- **Telephone interviews**
- **Representative sample: 427** students (6% of sampling frame: 7.115 st.)
- **The questionnaire crafted by the student-interviewers** (who crafted the **fixed response alternatives** and
- **tested** 4 times the questionnaire - 4 editions of it).
- So the student-interviewers **knew very well the response alternatives;**
- **Rare situation:**
 - 1) interviewers construct the questionnaire;
 - 2) interviewers share the **same status, and cultural and communicative code** of the respondents,
 - 3) all (INT. and RES.) belonging to Political Sciences faculty
- **Following Galtung's procedure**, many questions were administrated in open-ended format, and then the interviewer (**during the interview**) selected what s/he considered the most appropriate response alternative according to the answer.

Example



Question 5:

- “What were the main reasons for your decision to enrol at the Faculty of Political Science”?

Instruction for interviewer:

- *FREE ANSWER, BUT MARK THREE REASONS AT MOST*

5) Quali sono i motivi principali per cui ti sei iscritto alla facoltà di Scienze Politiche? (*RISPOSTA LIBERA, MA SEGNARE AL MASSIMO TRE MOTIVI, QUELLI PRINCIPALI*)

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. | Assenza del test di ingresso | 0 |
| 2. | E' una facoltà poco impegnativa | 0 |
| 3. | La frequenza è facoltativa | 0 |
| 4. | Compatibilità con il lavoro. Consente di lavorare e studiare contemporaneamente | 0 |
| 5. | Non l'hanno presa/o nella facoltà prescelta | 0 |
| 6. | Non ci sono materie troppo tecniche; è una laurea non specialistica | 0 |
| 7. | E' vicina a dove abita | 0 |
| 8. | Voleva fare l'università ma non sapeva a cosa iscriversi (per esclusione) | 0 |
| 9. | Offre una preparazione multidisciplinare | 0 |
| 10. | Per meglio affrontare le problematiche politiche, sociali e culturali | 0 |
| 11. | Perché gli piaceva | 0 |
| 12. | Per le materie insegnate | 0 |
| 13. | Il buon nome della facoltà | 0 |
| 14. | Il prestigio di alcuni docenti | 0 |
| 15. | E' utile alla professione che sta svolgendo | 0 |
| 16. | Per le prospettive di lavoro | 0 |
| 17. | Per trovare un clima culturalmente stimolante | 0 |
| 18. | Perché si sono iscritti alcuni suoi amici/che | 0 |
| 19. | Spinto dai genitori | 0 |
| 20. | Altro | 0 |
| 98. | Non sa/non ricorda | 0 |

Handling a long list of items



- Question no. 5, like other questions, has a long list of items, too long for the interviewer to handle straightforwardly.
- To help the interviewer, **the motives were then divided into three areas** matching the researcher's classification:
- **instrumental** motives (items 1-8)
- **vocational** motives (items 9-17)
- **social influence** (items 18-19)
- The interviewers were thus helped in their task.
- Then, if they were not immediately able to locate the interviewee's answer in the range of the pre-established items, **they continued to talk to the interviewee until they understood** which pre-coded item best matched his/her case.
- If there was still no matching item, they marked '**Other**', noting down key words from the reply.
- They then wrote a more developed comment (2-3 lines) upon completion of the interview.
- These three categories has also been used as recode, in order to deal with the problem of statistical significance.

Advantages of «inter-vey»



- The “inter-vey” **prevents** numerous **biases** well known in the literature. These main **respondent-effect errors** are:
 1. *misunderstanding of the response alternatives* by the respondents
 2. *multiple word meanings of response alternatives*
 3. *the invented opinions (or lies) phenomenon*
 4. *primacy and recency effects*
 5. *the influence of the response alternatives* on formation of the judgement
 6. *social desirability effects*
 7. *the yea-saying (acquiescence) and response set phenomena*

Main disadvantage of «inter-vey»...



- Interviewer-effect errors

The negligible importance of interviewer-related errors/1



1. **Bradburn 1983: 291:** the characteristics of the tasks of the questionnaire are “**the major source of response effects** and are, in general, much larger than effects due to interviewer or respondent characteristics”;
2. so interviewer-related errors are far smaller than respondent’s errors (Gobo 2006: 286-7, tab. 2)

table

The negligible importance of interviewer-related errors/2

- deviation from standardized procedure **doesn't always** lead to response error.
- **Hence it is not** interviewers' non-standardised behaviour itself that leads to response errors, but **only some of their incorrect moves** in altering question meaning (such as 1) introducing ambiguous terms attempting to clarify a question, 2) rapid reading of questions, 3) neglecting to use the card required with the question and so on).

The negligible importance of interviewer-related errors/3

- interviewer-related errors **do not have notable effects** on data quality (Bradburn and Sudman 1979: 50 and 171-2),
- following Rugg's (1941) lesson: “small changes in the wording can alter the meaning fundamentally, while **extensive changes in wording may alter it only slightly**” (Sudman, Bradburn and Schwarz 1996: 10)
- the likelihood that “the variability introduced by the interviewer **may be less serious and harmful** than the variability introduced by faulty interpretation by the interviewee” (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996:53).
- biases introduced by questionnaire tasks, misunderstanding of questions, social desirability, forgetting and so on, are **more dangerous than the interviewer's behaviour** (Sudman and Bradburn 1974: 138; Bradburn and Sudman 1979, Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1988)

The negligible importance of interviewer-related errors/4



- **the influence of the interviewer's** socio-demographic variables is significant only when
- the questions concern **sensitive issues** strongly connected to certain social characteristics of the interviewers.
- For example, it has been shown that “the **interviewer's race** has an effect, but only **if racial policies** form the questionnaire topic” (van der Zouwen 2002: 52; see also Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1982).
- Indeed, the original questions presented by Hyman and his colleagues (1942) were of this type.

***The paradox:** interviewer-related deviations can improve data quality*

- **Example: “partial questioning”:** interviewer changes the wording of a question when the interviewee is unable to grasp the meaning
- “surprisingly, **the proportion of inadequate answers was small**, suggesting that the interviewers have done their very best to eventually obtain adequate answers” (van der Zouwen, Smit and Draisma 2010: 71; also Dohrenwend and Richardson 1956; Peneff 1988)
- **flexible interviewing style can also reduce memory errors** (Schaeffer (1995: 83).
- **the recall of events** may be improved by procedures that do not fit neatly within the linear structure of the standardized interview (Means, Swan, Jobe and Esposito 1992),
- **a less formal style of standardized interviewing may be more motivating** (Dijkstra 1987)

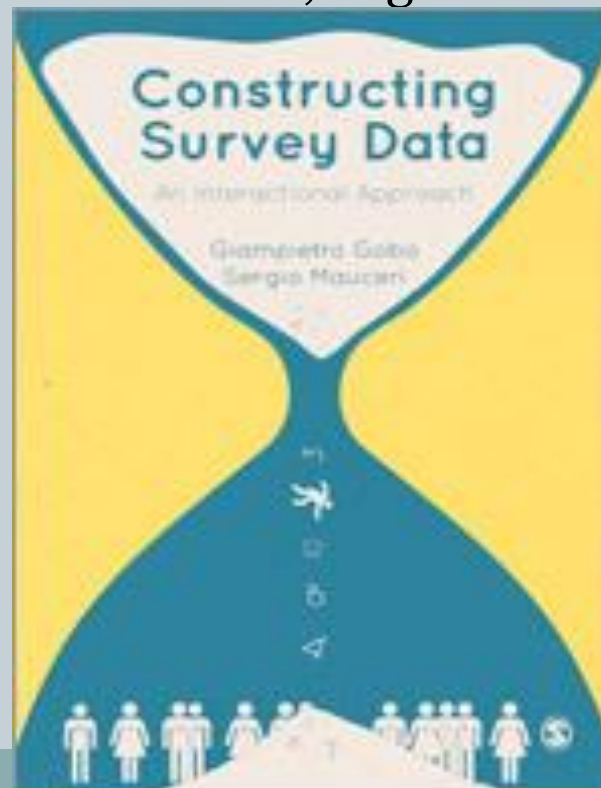
what kind of errors do we prefer to minimize?

- The “**inter-vey**”, which broadens the interviewers’ tasks (with the aim of reducing respondent errors) will lead to an increase in interviewer error
- However, the problem is to choose what kind of errors we prefer to minimize?
 1. (far smaller) interviewer-related errors or
 2. (much larger) respondent-and-questionnaire tasks-related errors?

More in...



Gobo, G. and Mauceri, S. (2014)
Constructing Survey Data.
An Interactional Approach
London, Sage.





conclusion



- combining qual. & quant. inquiry through the separate use of different methodologies (within the same research project) appears to be **costly and time-consuming**.
- An alternative is combining qual. & quant. in a **single method**
- along with ‘Delphi method’, ‘mystery shopper’...
- The “inter-vey, within a “conversational survey” approach, is a viable alternative.

Are mixed methods a novelty?



- MM are not a recent innovation
- e.g. the ancient roots of European **survey research** are MM:
 1. Frédéric Le Play in the **1840s**
 2. Charles Booth in **1889**
 3. B. Seebohm Rowntree in **1899**
 4. Max Weber in **1907**
 5. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel in the **1930s**
- **Outside survey:** Chicago School in the **1920s**

Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882)



- Le Play was a mining engineer and later sociologist
- probably the inventor , **in the late 1840s**, of the first prototype of the **questionnaire**.
- In his research he collected information about family budgets in a **diary** of earnings and expenditures which expressed the family's life in figures
- Le Play was the first to use the 'monographic' method (or **case study**), the detailed study of 'typical' cases consisting of groups of working-class families...
- He was also the first to use the methodology of **participant observation**: the researcher lived with the family under study for the time required to collect the necessary documentation
- Le Play also pioneered the idea that researchers should **collect information directly from the subjects studied**.

Charles Booth (1840-1916) and B. Seebohm Rowntree (1871-1954)



- At the end of the 1800s the industrialist and philanthropist **Charles Booth** conducted his **survey on poverty in London ...**
- Booth's work is based principally on three instruments: **interviews** with school inspectors, **secondary analysis of existing statistics**, and **participant observation**.
- The author in fact lived in rented rooms in the homes of relatively poor Londoners. Booth and his staff spent endless hours interviewing school inspectors from the different neighbourhoods of London. Since they had not been trained as observers, however, their accounts were extremely diverse.
- In **1899** to be precise, **B. Seebohm Rowntree** collected information *directly* from families, in part using interviewers for the purpose and in part gathering data on numerous aspects of the **daily lives of the poor**: he weighed and measured the heights of working-class children; he stationed interviewers outside churches to count the number of worshippers at Sunday services: he entered the pubs of York (using what he called a 'drink map'), where he counted the number of men, women and children present throughout the day from dawn to dusk
- As Le Play had done, Rowntree asked thirty-five working-class families to keep **budgets of their earnings and expenditures and to record their daily food consumption**.

Max Weber (1864 – 1920)



- Max Weber conducted surveys for a surprisingly long period of his life.
- He embarked **in 1907** with his brother Alfred Weber in a survey based on mixed methods, including **secondary analysis of available data, participant observation** on the part of his assistants (with the aspects under observation organized in a highly detailed grid), and **questionnaire interviews** with the workers.

Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel



- Even the ‘surveyors’ of the 1940s mainly relied other techniques. For example, ***Arbeitslöser in Marienthal (1933)***, the study conducted by Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his pupils Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel, was not (strictly speaking) a survey but a **community study**.
- It was **participant-observation research** conducted in the community and teems with data of different kinds and sizes: **government statistics**, newly created data from **personal interviewing**, family files (for 478 families), family **diaries**, **life histories** (of 62 individuals), **time budgets** (for 80 persons), **meal records** (kept by 40 families for one week) records of **observations** and ‘eavesdropping’ in public bars, and so on (Converse, 1987: 134).
- **Lazarsfeld continued to combine qualitative and quantitative techniques**
- as did American political scientists working at the University of Chicago, notably **Merriam and Gosnell (1924)**, **Gosnell (1927 and 1937)** and **Leonard D. White (1929; 1932)**.

The abandonment of MM



*the abandonment of
MM*

*in survey research
happened in the 1940s*

The resurgence of MM



- In the 1990s we assist to a resurgence of MM
- However MM are:
 - time-consuming
 - very expensive
 - need multiple expertise (qual/quant)