Chapter 4
Elicitation Strategies: Planning and Conducting Interviews

ABSTRACT

The subject of this chapter, elicitation strategies, is defined as the combination of selected canonical genres and their associated textual strategies applied to the planning of interview protocols, and also the enactment of interviews while also encouraging reflection on the interviewing performance. Developing an interview protocol now requires the selection of relevant canonical genres suitable for each question. Genre retrieval networks are used to select the most appropriate canonical genre for each question. Along with the genre retrieval networks, a generic question template has been developed that provides interviewers with the ability to facilitate eliciting responses that are in a format that allows interviewers to determine if responses are complete, or to issue sensible follow-up or clarifying questions. Some novel features of interviews are identified. A terminology and approach for discussing interviewing practices is also developed. A sustainable approach to interviewing practice that involves learning and reflection is also advocated.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the previous chapter was to: (1) select appropriate canonical genres relevant to interviewing, (2) demonstrate their potential for interviewing, and (3) apply this generic knowledge in a real-world application of maintenance deferral (after Savage, 2018). The purpose of the chapter is to (1) reflect on

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6344-0.ch004
the utility of this approach in order to see how these ideas work as applied, (2) to develop methods that utilize genre-based thinking in the development of interview protocols, (3) apply genre-based thinking to support the interview process, and (4) package these ideas into useful and sustainable practices called Elicitation Strategies. The term “elicitation strategy” is a received one in linguistics referring to any method that is used to obtain reliable discourse from interviewees. It is also suggestive of techniques that elicit or obtain this discourse from informants in a way which is not necessarily noticed by them (Crystal, 1985). The canonical genre-based practices for the elicitation strategies that are the subject of this book considerably assist elicitation, due to the fact that these are shared cultural patterns of communication. These are so fundamental to all enculturated social subjects that they usually do pass unnoticed by those engaged in communicating.

Several sections of the chapter are dedicated to showing the role canonical genre can play in the planning of the interview protocol and the enactment of the interview itself. While not exemplified using the maintenance deferral corpus (Savage, 2018), the development of previous interview protocols is used to demonstrate how genres can be used to support interview planning. Developing interview protocol questions requires determining the specific canonical genre that is most suited to probing the interviewee for an appropriately structured response.

An aid to selecting an appropriate genre is a classification of Factual and Narrative genres called genre retrieval networks (one per canonical genre family). Genre retrieval networks were developed in order to assist in showing the key differences between individual canonical genres that constitute these families (Martin, 1992). Here they are applied for choosing a suitable genre for each planned interview question. How canonical genres fit into this interview protocol planning is also discussed. The focus then moves to the use of canonical genre during the interview. Interviews comprise many serially arranged genres to form a composite called a syntagmatic macrogenre.

In the previous chapter, the use of canonical genres to understand responses in interviews was tested against a real-world corpus about maintenance deferral (Savage, 2018). The interviewer did not apply any of these ideas concerning the use of canonical genre theory for interviewing. This meant that the corpus was not biased in any way. What emerged were a number of unexpected results. Some of these results may well have been a consequence of a semi-structured interview rather than a highly structured one. These results are nonetheless exemplified, discussed, and concepts were developed that could be formalized into the elicitation strategies to account for them. There are
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