

Psychological Studies and Linguistic Analysis

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Abstract

Psychologists mainly use language as a tool to study human behavior and cognitive functioning. In fact, there is no psychological measure where language is not used, from the instructions and the tests itself to analysis and interpretation we find language everywhere. Since 1970s 'turn to language' movement there has been many developments in the methods where language is the only tool whereby one can plunge deep in the human mind. Discourse analysis, text analysis and analysis of narratives are some of the forms of methods which can be very useful for psychologists. Present paper is focused on the analytical methods when linguistic data is collected through interviews, diaries, literary writings and narrations; how the data can be stratified and put to meaningful structure for the researchers' purpose and to keep the human aspect in the data intact. The Example discussed in the paper is thematic analysis.

Key Words: Language, Qualitative methods, Schizophrenia, Stratification of text, Thematic Analysis

Language: A Bridge between Science and Art

Psychology is all about understanding minds – our own mind and that of others. This understanding should be aimed at the formation of better societies, better organizations, a better life and should add to the seamless ocean of knowledge. Observation and communication are basic processes with which understanding starts. Intuition and contemplation complement these primary processes. Psychological research since beginning has been more preoccupied with scientific measures which degraded artistic efforts as unscientific. Researchers hardly give their minds freedom from the scientific systematicity and due to the adherence to this systematicity

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many dimensions of human mind are left hidden behind the screen of numbers and generalizations. Science overpowered art and reason took over intuition. But a good science is lifeless without art. It is the time that psychologists should rethink over the contribution of their tools and techniques, integrating art with science and train the interpreters of mind as artists well versed in the science of behaviour.

Language is a fundamental tool in all types of psychological research. Linguistic analysis requires the insight of an artist to unravel the meaning behind the symbols. It also requires scientific systematicity; moreover, it requires the combination of both. Psychologists often think in the dichotomies of qualitative and quantitative methods and the research that is based on linguistic analysis is classified as qualitative research. The paradigm of qualitative research was motivated by the *turn to language* movement which resulted from the crisis during early 1970s which calls for the *meaning* in positivist research. The reason for this shift was the old experimental paradigm in which human behavior was reduced to the interplay of independent variable, dependent variable and statistical analysis. The act of interpretation was discarded in favour of objectivity and quantification and in the last step of generalization and abstraction context used to be totally washed out.

Qualitative research emphasized the elements of context and subjectivity *i.e.* knowledge being mediated by the perspective of the observer and the time and place of the event. Qualitative research is generally understood as a method where the researcher avoids quantification. But it is not necessarily so, 'it would be wrong to assume that a qualitative researcher will refuse to summarize data numerically or...always disregard material that has been gathered through rigorous sampling techniques or represented in statistical form....a qualitative researcher will be focusing on the context and integrity of the material and will never build her account directly, or only from quantitative data' (Banister et al, 1994:1). Integration in qualitative research is achieved by the use of interpretation; and it is the interpretation where language emerges as a powerful medium.

Language is not only the form which we see and hear - the code. It is the meaning that lies behind the sign. Meaning is symbolized by the visual and auditory signs. If meaning is everything then what is the purpose of the written and auditory forms. Form does have its own importance. Structure is not language, true, but the structural constituents and the way they are ordered show the way we perceive world. Words reveal our thinking to an extent, if not complete in all aspects. There are certain properties of human languages that can be found universally and these universal elements show the way human beings perceive and categorize their world.

In psychological research, language can be taken for analysis from a literary piece of writing (poetry, story, newspaper articles), text of interviews, diaries, letters and the text of those procedures where verbal responses are required (e.g. stories obtained in TAT). The questionnaires used in the testing procedures are also a form of language. Language in questionnaires is profoundly affected by the test maker's assumptions, definition of the concept and by the permissibility of a certain type of language that is socially, technically and mutually accepted in the documents like psychological tests. Here, one might ask, what is the difference between the analysis when the same piece of text is taken for analysis by a linguist, a literary analyst and a psychologist? The difference lies mainly in the purpose (whether it is language or mind or society that is studied) and the perspective. But the analysis where such distinctions are blurred, where disciplinary boundaries are secondary and the exploration of language and mind are primary contribute significantly to the knowledge of human mind.

The *call for meaning* in psychological research is not totally new. It is the reincarnation of the old ways of doing psychology that can be found in the writings of Freud, Wundt, Bartlett and James. Symbols and their meaning have been discussed in plenty in psychological writings. Bartlett's work on reconstructive process in memory, Ebbinghaus' work on memory using nonsense syllables, and Freud's dream analysis and free association are some of the pioneering works where language was used creatively. Freud's writings are full of symbols, writes Arrivé, 'Everything that happens in psychoanalysis happens in and through language. It is enough to open the works of Freud at almost any page and to observe the almost unbelievable luxuriance of comparisons in which elements of language appear.....from the individual letter to

discourse....also the poetic, literary, mythical, and folk-loric texts which have such a central position in all Freud's writings' (Arrivé, M. 1992: 2).

Wundt's work on psychology of language is not known widely. 'The foundation of Wundt's lab, its national date of 1879, is well known. Less well known that there was a thriving tradition of experimental work on the psychology of language, particularly in Wundt's lab. Wundt himself published a book on 'Die Sprache' in 1890, which appeared in an enlarged two volume edition in 1912-1913' (Garnham et al 2006: 3). George Miller, one of the founder of cognitive psychology, is credited with popularizing psycholinguistic work on Chomskyan theory of transformational grammar. There is one more dimension of the relation of language and psychology, between the literature and psychological phenomenon of all kinds. It is said that if one wants to understand schizophrenia one should start with the reading of Gogol's *Diary of the Madman* (Buyanov 1989). We may add the name of Lu-Xun's story *Madman's Diary* (1918) to it. The writers were the first to describe schizophrenia with the details touching various aspects of a madman's life even before psychiatry was able to recognize, define and describe it systematically.

Our present discussion is focused on the analysis of the data (sometimes huge amount) that is collected through interviews, narratives and other linguistic document apart from the standardized tests. Initial step in this process is determining the purpose of the data collection. Analytical patterns and procedures differ for different groups and purposes, whether one is working on children or on adults for career counseling or on psychopathology.

Stratification of Text

Charles J Fillmore (1977) suggests that there are four main questions which one should try to answer when interpreting what someone has said or written:

1. What did the person say?
2. What was he talking about?
3. Why did he bother to say it?
4. Why did he say it in the way that he said?

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Answering above questions includes recognizing the symbols, understanding the theme, the reason behind the content, intentions and the functions. Linguistic data can be stratified at different levels. Rosenbaum and Sonne (1986:15) characterize text as containing four levels: theme, narrative, enunciation, and discourse. These levels are assumed to be interdependent and correspond to different phases of a text. Both the written and spoken texts can be stratified in accordance with these levels:

1. Each text is about something i.e. it presents some matter or deals with an object or human beings and their relations. It is referred as theme.
2. As the text progresses it moves from one topic to another. This progression can be looked at in two ways: as a movement in time and as a logical sequence. It is referred as narrative.
3. The text presents relationship between the speaker and the other to whom the text is addressed. It is referred as enunciation.
4. Presentation of reality in a text with intertextual relations is referred as discourse.

On the basis of these four levels, Rosenbaum and Sonne (1986) have presented four levels of textual analysis. These are:

1. **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis investigates the themes of a text.
2. **Narrative Analysis:** Narrative analysis investigates themes sequentially and logically distributed.
3. **Enunciation Analysis:** Enunciation Analysis investigates relationship between the speaker and the other in a text.
4. **Discourse Analysis:** Discourse Analysis investigates text as a total expression of the speaker's conception of reality because the text as a whole is related to other texts and is a part of a wide reality.

These four levels can be discussed with the following example (Rosenbaum & Sonne 1986: 16):

The burning question of today is the proposal put by the conspirators which is about removing all things living and dead between Heaven and Earth. In this way they think that they will be able to make room for something new and better, which is supposed to come out of the rays of the sun. However, I shall apply for permission to form an exception.

Rosenbaum and Sonne have interpreted the above text with reference to the four levels. The text expresses two themes ‘*the end of the world and the wish to escape from it if it comes*’ (pp.17). The entire text has one or more main themes and sub themes. These themes are expressed by semantic units. ‘In the schizophrenic text quoted above, the relations among semantic units such as life, death, old, new, known, unknown and their semantic relation and coherence are considered’ (ibid). In the text quoted above, the discourses are: religious and literary (all things living and dead between Heaven and Earth), partly political discourse (the burning question of today, the conspirators, permission to form an exception), and ‘the textually produced reality is at the same time global or universal and local and particular’ (pp.19).

The level chosen for analysis depends upon the topic and relevance. Content analysis and narrative analysis have been more practiced in psychology. Discourse analysis has emerged as a method which has theoretical affiliation with post-structuralist traditions. Enunciation analysis is also a form of discourse analysis where the main focus is on the relation between the speaker and the other. The term textual analysis can be used to avoid any theoretical constraint.

Thematic Analysis: An Example from Schizophrenia

Linguistic analysis can be highly useful in the case of understanding thought disorder, where it is often claimed that the language of these patients is difficult to be understood, incoherent, word salad and gibberish. If closely analyzed the meaning of schizophrenic patients’ incoherent language can be uncovered. The way the language is ordered gives us the glimpse of the entire world of the person on which the therapy can be planned. Quoting Lacan, Rosenbaum & Sonne (1986: 6) write that ‘the treatment and, indeed, the whole conception of psychosis must of necessity take its point of departure from the way language is used.’

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Here we will discuss thematic analysis with some examples of texts from schizophrenic's language. The text given below is taken from the conversation with a schizophrenic patient (The examples discussed hereafter are from Bhagwanti 2010):

Human life's ingredients are written in psychology....no, not the ingredients, it is about mind...senses beyond body, mind beyond senses, intellect beyond mind, soul beyond intellect; soul is in the heart of every living being. My mother used to say that the soul is equal to a thumb. What is in the heaven, human beings worship, no hunger, no thirst, in the heaven he is free from everything. That day when I came I saw, I felt it slightly that my mother has told me that there are worships in the heaven. It is also like heaven here because no one fights with others. My health is improved here.

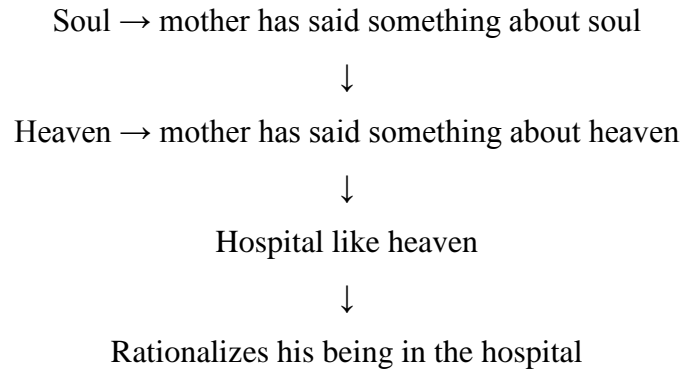
The first step in the analytical process is to identify what the patient is speaking about. The themes on which the patient is speaking are: psychology, soul, heaven, rationalizes his being in the hospital. The second step is to identify the relations between these elements. How a theme gives way to the next theme. The relations by which themes are interrelated can be realized through meaning relations, logical relations and contextual relations.

- **Meaning Relations** – Themes may be from the same or similar semantic category. The relation here is semantic.
- **Logical Relations** – The events in the text logically follow the preceding event. One theme has logical relation to the other theme.
- **Contextual Relations** – The relatedness of themes is also determined by the relations of themes to the external and internal context of the speaker. The themes a speaker talks about and the way he relates themes are assumed to be guided by both the contexts.

The themes in the text quoted above can be schematically represented in the following manner:

Psychology → a study of human being's → life → mind → soul





The next step is to ascertain the relations between themes, how a certain theme follows the preceding theme. In the above example the change of themes can be noted. One theme led the patient to the second and from the second he moves to the third. After picking up the new theme he leaves the initial theme he was speaking on. But the patient is not moving randomly. The themes are associated. The associations have clear meaning relations for the patient. From *psychology* he moves to *soul* and from *soul* to *mother* who is no more now, from *mother* he jumps to *heaven* and from *heaven* to the *hospital*. A common practice by psychologists is to conclude that the themes are incoherent or do not go together. Instead of being called incoherent, it can be observed that the themes are changing rapidly, but it can also be seen that the change is not totally random. The initial themes *psychology*, *soul*, *mind* show both the semantic and contextual relations. The relations in the text are semantic as *psychology* is the thought to be the study of *mind* and *soul*; and contextual as the patient has taken up these topics on being questioned by a psychologist in a mental hospital. The context here is external. The theme of *mother* shows the contextual relation but context here is internal. The content of the speech is switching back and forth to internal and external context.

Look at another example:

Life has become a story what stories to read? (I) have read only one story, Haar Ki Jeetrobber Kharag Singh ...took perhaps a horse of a mahatma...returned at 12'o clock night....highschool in 73 then Intermediate, then CPMT, I would be at doctor's place...Sonia

Gandhi is in Delhi at 10 Janpath, will be enjoying sun, may have switched off the heater, Atalji would be writing poetry

I am brahm, I am brahm, I am brahm... I am brahm, I am brahm, soul is brahm, soul, god, society, India's philosophy, soul, god, Vedas, Stitha Pragya, becomes silent, Peace, soul, god...peace, a line in ECG, a straight line, ECT consciousness is lost...for two three hours no feeling of hunger, no sleep, no sense of bitterness, ECT is punishment.

Doctor would come to know everything whatever I am speaking, there are vibrations, there are waves in the universe, why there are waves this side but not this side. Who is speaking there? Coloured T.V. (smiles sarcastically)! Why don't they show Ramayan, Geeta on television. This is the reality. Mental patients, thought block, Priyanka, prime minister of India. He is the great doctor (pointing up for God), good doctors are rare, good people very few, some doctors, some...some in acting.

In the text quoted above, the patient starts with the story narration, but he has the story of his life to tell so he turned from the fiction to his own life but after the short self-reference, he moves to political leaders. In the next paragraph it is the spiritual content that the patient has started with. From the word 'peace' he is led to ECG and from the ECG to ECT. The third text has two main themes: mental patients and politics. The themes of the text are:

Para 1: Story → self reference → political personalities

Para 2: Spiritual content → peace → ECG → ECT

Para 3: Mental patients, thought block, Priyanka, good doctors → good people

1

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What are the relations in the themes in the above text? A hearer feels confused at once hearing such text. We can say there is no relation, but it is impossible for someone to speak continuously without any relation between the constituents of speech. Language by definition is relation, between the world and the mind, between the symbols and the objects and between the constituents at various levels. The text quoted above appears incoherent at the outset but on closer analysis relations between constituents can be discerned. The patient speaks on the topics

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in a usual manner. These are (outlined above) some themes on which the patient continuously speaks. In other words, the world of the patient is fixated on certain themes. There is no addition with the passage of time. The lack of complete sentences can also be noticed. The reason for speech with incomplete sentences is the assumption by the patient that the things he is talking about are known to everyone. But the patient does not realize this assumption consciously. For him this is the usual way of speaking. The relation between various themes is contextual and the context here is internal.

The psychologists have to find out the roots of the observed relations and the lack of such relations. The things thought disordered people talk about may be incomprehensible initially but once we know about their life and have regular conversation with them it is not difficult to understand what they are talking about. Apart from the content, the ways themes are connected reflect particular style of thinking of a patient. The text can reveal more than that, as we have already said- the entire world of the person, the things that he may not be consciously aware of.

Here is one more example from a schizophrenic patient:

In the story, the beard, do not let me go home, there are boys

Abusing

And the rice is in the milk.

In the psychiatric terminology, above text is an example of the poverty of speech and is highly incoherent. But how to explain it thematically and why does the patient has said the above lines. The language in the above text is an example of the state when no relation exists between different elements (here themes). The themes here are beard, desire to go home, boys who are abusing, and the rice in the milk. The themes can also be understood as the images. These images can be procedural (boys-abusing) and static image (rice in the milk). Images without relation are an extreme state that results from isolation and being away from the world. Being away from reality gradually gives way to mental atrophy which clearly appears in the language one speaks. The person who has no life, or no active life, who is living an isolated life can not be imagined to

speak a language that is full of life. We have language because we have a social and intellectual life. We speak because we relate things socially, personally and intellectually. In the life where there is no relation left: social, personal or intellectual, language gradually dies. But still we can not conclude that the themes in the above are not related. There is a relation and the relation is governed by the inner life of the person. The themes are the images that are there in the mind of the patient and which he could relate to and speak at the moment.

The concept of contextual relations emerged an important concept in the analysis of schizophrenic language. Implication of such analysis for psychiatrists lies in understanding patients as human beings and planning therapy for them. The procedure can be equally useful in various other settings. Linguistic analysis can give us complete picture of a person's inner life. Art of careful listening together with the skill of stratification of language are most important skills for psychologists. The coming generations of psychologists should be trained in all the dimensions of communication and in the art of how to read mind with words. Interdisciplinary approach to the study of human behavior will help in fulfilling this objective.

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