

Interviewers' and Respondents' Joint Production of Response Quality in Open-ended Questions

A Multilevel Negative-binomial Regression Approach

Dr. Alice Barth, Bonn University

PD Dr. Andreas Schmitz, Bonn University

ESRA 2021

Paper in methods, data, analyses (mda) Vol. 15(1) 2021

Motivation

- Open-ended questions (OEQs) in standardized surveys can compensate blind spots of closed-ended questions
- Factors influencing response quality in OEQs
 - Respondent characteristics
 - Survey characteristics
 - Interviewer characteristics

Motivation

- Open-ended questions (OEQs) in standardized surveys can compensate blind spots of closed-ended questions

- Factors influencing response quality in OEQs
 - Respondent characteristics
 - Survey characteristics
 - Interviewer characteristics
 - Interaction of these characteristics

- Interaction(s) of respondent and interviewer in producing response quality

Factors affecting response quality

- Respondent level
 - Motivation / topic interest
 - Cognitive ability / education
 - Social desirability
- Interviewer level
 - Experience
 - Characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity
 - *Context factors (e.g. workload, payment scheme)*
 - *Question type*

Factors affecting response quality

- Respondent level
 - Motivation / topic interest
 - Cognitive ability / education
 - Social desirability
- Interviewer level
 - Experience
 - Characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity
 - *Context factors (e.g. workload, payment scheme)*
 - *Question type*
- Interactions between respondent and interviewer
 - Interview as social situation → activation of social rules
 - Interaction of interviewers' and respondents' characteristics and question topic

Analytical strategy (I) & data

Assessment of the effects of

- respondent-level characteristics
- interviewer-level characteristics
- respondent-interviewer interaction

on number of words (two-level negative-binomial regression)

Data:

“When you think of foreigners living in Germany, which groups do you think of?” (ALLBUS 2016, 3271 respondents, 171 interviewers)

Results (I)

Variance partitioning coefficient: 0.36

Longer responses are provided by respondents who

- Are highly educated (Abitur), female, young
- Have a positive attitude towards foreigners, contact to foreigners, high political interest
- Were easily convinced to take part in the interview, were highly willing to respond to questions

Interviewer-respondent interactions

- Interaction of interviewer gender and respondent migration background
- Interaction of respondents' education and interviewers' experience
- Three-way interaction of interviewer gender, respondent gender and interviewer age

Analytical strategy (II)

How do interviewers affect the meaning – in the sense of substantive variability – of responses?

→ Regression of qualitative variation (information entropy measure H) on interviewer characteristics

Analytical strategy (II)

How do interviewers affect the meaning – in the sense of substantive variability – of responses?

→ Regression of qualitative variation (information entropy measure H) on interviewer characteristics

Are there coherent interviewer practices, i.e. is variability in the OEQ linked to other indicators of survey data quality?

→ Correlation of qualitative variation in open-ended questions and global indicators of survey quality

Results (II)

Variability is higher in female interviewers; no effect of age, education, experience

Modest relationship between qualitative variation in OEQ and survey data quality indicators:

- Lower number of item missings related to higher variability
- Frequent use of the category „other, please specify“ related to higher variability
- Interview length and standard deviation in item batteries not related to qualitative variation

→ (some) evidence of consistent interviewer behavior across survey

Discussion

- Respondent and interviewer characteristics and respondent-interviewer interactions influence response quality in OEQs
 - Education, motivation and topic salience in respondents predict longer responses
 - No direct effects of interviewer characteristics on response length, but interaction effects
 - Interviewer characteristics influence qualitative variation (information entropy)
 - Qualitative variation in OEQs is related to overall survey data quality
- Interplay between respondents' and interviewers traits and dispositions in survey as a social interaction
- Joint production of substantive meaning and methodical quality of responses
- Coherent interviewer practices throughout the survey impact on data quality

Further research

- Systematic evaluation of interplay of respondent and interviewer characteristics and question topic in generating response quality
- Control for possible selection effects
- More information on interviewers (e.g. class / ethnic background)
- Assessment of relations between different indicators of OEQ response quality
- Further tests of the usability of qualitative variation as an indicator for response quality on the interviewer level
- In-depth analysis (e.g. conversational analysis / observational studies) of interaction in the survey interview

Thank you for your attention!

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.12758/mda.2020.08>