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

A Multilevel Negative-binomial Regression Approach

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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
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▪ 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
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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!

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