Chapter 40

Leveraging Two Computer–Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software Packages to Support Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) packages, such as ATLAS.ti or Transana, can be used to support the transcription and data analysis process of large interactional data sets – specifically data analyzed from a discourse analysis perspective. Drawing from a larger ethnographic study, in this chapter the author illustrates how carrying out the transcription and analysis process within a CAQDAS package (in this case, Transana and ATLAS.ti) allows for an increase in transparency within the transcription and data analysis process, while also meeting the particular needs of the discourse analyst. By using one particular case/research study, the author demonstrates how CAQDAS packages might function to support a researcher in generating a more systematic and transparent analytical process, specifically during the early stages of the analysis process. The author gives particular attention to interactional data (i.e., 300 hours of video and audio recordings of therapy sessions) collected in a larger study and demonstrates the potential benefits of working across two CAQDAS packages, specifically Transana and ATLAS.ti, to support both the nuanced transcription process and the larger data analysis process.

INTRODUCTION

The transcription process is central to the work of many discourse analysts, often being positioned as one of the first steps of the analysis process (Rapley, 2007). Discourse analysts typically position transcription as "a constructive and conventional activity" that is a critical component of the analysis process (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 166). Historically, the literature base related to discourse analysis, particularly conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992), has given relatively little

attention to the potential uses of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). There are exceptions (e.g., King, 2010; Ten Have, 1991, 1998), however, in which conversation analysts have examined whether and illustrated how such tools may or may not be compatible with the methodological tasks that discourse analysts pursue. MacMillan (2005) suggested that when researchers are conducting a discourse analysis, CAQDAS packages are only useful for practical tasks, such as searching for data segments. She argued that such packages offer only limited support to analysts who engage in more than "rudimentary coding", and thereby may simply "…be more time consuming than useful…" (p. 15). In contrast to this cautionary tale, in this chapter, I illustrate how CAQDAS packages, such as Transana and/or ATLAS.ti, are useful for discourse analysts throughout the data analysis process, particularly during the early stages of analysis (e.g., Jeffersonian transcription).

More specifically, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how CAQDAS programs, in this case Transana and ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2004), can be used to support the early analysis and transcription of large interactional data sets – specifically data analyzed from a discourse analysis perspective (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Drawing from a larger ethnographic study (Lester, 2012; Lester & Paulus, 2012, 2014), in this chapter, I illustrate how carrying out the transcription process within a CAQDAS program allowed for me to stay close to the data set, while increasing the transparency of the data analysis process (Paulus, Lester, & Dempster, 2014).

By using a particular case/research project, I demonstrate from the very first steps of the analysis process how I worked across two CAQDAS packages (Transana and ATLAS.ti), to support a systematic and transparent analytical process. Within the research study example of focus, data included:

1. Approximately 300 hours of video and audio recordings of therapy sessions, social group sessions, office conversations, and waiting room conversations;
2. Interviews with therapists and parents of children with autism labels;
3. Approximately 200 hours of participant-observations; and
4. Interviews with state disability advocates.

In this chapter, I focus on the interactional data (i.e., 300 hours of video and audio recordings of therapy sessions), which was collected over a two-year period. Through this focus, I demonstrate how Transana was used to support the transcription process and allow for a nuanced conversation or discourse analysis of the data (Sacks, 1984), while ATLAS.ti supported my emergent understandings of the transcribed data.

Further, while I do not share step-by-step procedures for transcribing or annotating data with a particular CAQDAS package, I do offer key points to consider when engaging in the analysis process, while pointing to the affordances of the software packages. I conclude the chapter by offering suggestions for researchers working with large interactional data sets. In doing so, I demonstrate the pragmatic and technical aspects of engaging in the transcription process within the context of two CAQDAS packages.

To begin, I consider the role of CAQDAS packages in qualitative research more generally, while more specifically examining how CAQDAS might relate to the work of researchers focused on the analysis of everyday talk.

BACKGROUND

During the 1980s, qualitative researchers began developing software to support the data analysis process. Ethnograph and Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising

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