ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Grounded Theory in Applied Linguistics Research

A practical guide

Gregory Hadley

ROUTLEDGE

Grounded Theory in Applied Linguistics Research

This volume demystifies the procedures and practical uses of grounded theory, a well-established research methodology used around the world today by social scientists, teachers, and qualitative researchers. Intended for graduate students, supervisors, and researchers, it provides readers with the tools for understanding, justifying, and disseminating new theoretical insights for the applied linguistics community and beyond.

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Part I

Understanding grounded theory

Introduction

The emergence of grounded theory

In the world of the social sciences, there was once a time when 'research' was seen primarily in terms of following methodological practices heavily associated with the 'harder' sciences. Researchers devised studies that could be confirmed either by statistical analysis or by quasi-experimental designs (Grotjahn 1987) and often sought to validate the 'grand theories' of revered intellectuals in their discipline or academic community (Mills 1959/2000, pp. 48–49, Turner 1988, p. 111). With the exception of the nonconformist 'Chicago School' of ethnography (Charmaz 2006, pp. 4–5), where researchers constructed their contributions from field observations, interviews, and other 'soft' linguistic data, most at this time sought to investigate the human condition through quantitative forms of research (Wartofsky 1968, p. 390, Hunt 1991, p. 41, White 2005, pp. 56–57). The prevailing attitude towards qualitative, theory-generating research was that it was unscientific, subjective, and biased (Denzin and Lincoln 1998b, p. 7). Such views were still dominant during the early 1960s, when applied linguistics (AL) entered the world as a fledgling discipline.

However, by the late 1960s, academic voices of dissent began to swell against the established orthodoxy. Eschewing simple number-crunching, scholars from various fields began devising more flexible ways of studying what was happening with people in social groups (Mills 1959/2000, Kuhn 1962/1996, Kelly 1963). Among these, sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss wrote their landmark book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999). In it, they urged researchers to break their overdependence on the 'great man' theories of sociologists such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and to create fresh theories and new perspectives generated bottom up from empirical field data (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, pp. 1, 2 & 7).

At the time of its publication, Glaser and Strauss's polemic was revolutionary. *Discovery* had an immediate appeal among a generation of young researchers who, as Eisner (2001, p. 137) explains, became 'attracted to the idea of getting close to practice, [and] to getting a first-hand sense of what actually goes on in classrooms, schools, hospitals and communities'. For Glaser and Strauss, 'grounded' meant that findings were rooted in first-hand

evidence – the problems, actions, symbols, and aspirations of the people being studied, and 'theory' referred to an explanatory model that 'fits empirical situations . . . [one that] should be understandable to sociologists and laymen alike. Most important it works – provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications' (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 1).

Glaser and Strauss provided a set of recursive practices that could be adopted by large numbers of researchers, and which could be externally evaluated by the academy for its potential value (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 14). As a method of inquiry, the goal of grounded theory (GT) was to

> encourage researchers to use their intellectual imagination and creativity to develop theories relating to their areas of inquiry; to suggest methods for doing so; to offer criteria to evaluate the worth of discovered theory; and to propose an alternative rhetoric, that of generation, to balance out the rhetoric of justification featured in journal articles and monographs.
>
> (Locke 2005, p. 33)

Even by the turn of the century, Denzin and Lincoln (1998a, p. xviii) observed that, since its inception, GT had become 'the most widely employed interpretive strategy in the social sciences today'. That growth has continued unabated, with the methodology seeing extensive use in fields such as psychology, education, and other 'helping professions' (e.g. Conrad 1978, Conrad 1982, Pajak and Blaise 1984). In the field of nursing alone, over 4,000 articles have been published under the GT title (Mills et al. 2006, p. 2). One exhaustive bibliometric survey found that, at the time of its publication, nearly two-thirds of the qualitative research projects in the social sciences had employed either full or partial forms of the grounded theory methodology (Titscher et al. 2000, pp. 74, 218–220).

Unlocking the potential of grounded theory in applied linguistics

In contrast to the spread of grounded theory in other fields of the applied social sciences, within applied linguistics, it has experienced marginalization and mistrust.

In terms of marginalization, while a few papers in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) claiming to use a grounded theory methodology (GTM) are scattered throughout the literature (Watt et al. 1996, Orland-Barak 2001, Gan et al. 2004, Kung 2004, Mynard and Almarzouqi 2006), these have typically drawn upon only isolated aspects of the methodology. GTM is underrepresented in the methodological textbooks for graduate students in applied linguistics, where it typically receives only cursory mention (Holliday 2002, Richards 2003, Dornyei 2007). There are books that have utilized grounded theory within the context of applied

linguistics, such as Senior (2006), who presents an insightful grounded theory on the behavior and symbolic actions of TESOL teachers in communicative classrooms, and my recent work (Hadley 2015) which highlights social processes taking place within English for Academic Purpose (EAP) units at neoliberal universities. In general, however, the focus of the applied linguistics community has centered on issues such as curriculum design, second language acquisition theories, corpus development, and materials design, but has unwittingly overlooked one of the most widely used research methodologies in today's world.

The mistrust of some in applied linguistics about the potential of grounded theory stems from two undercurrents, one that is situated within the dominant academic conventions of applied linguistics and the other that comes from new challenges from the recent cohorts of graduate students around the world. Within the upper echelons of the applied linguistics academic community, the tendency is to privilege the philosophical worldviews and methodological practices dominant during the early 1960s. Therefore, to use gendered metaphors, while qualitative data of the type often used in grounded theory is undeniably 'sexy' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 1), what we find in many prestigious publications, university departments, and funding organizations for applied linguistics is a testosterone-fueled world (Gherardi and Turner 2002) that views 'hard' data from controlled quantitative studies as 'the pinnacle of scientific perfection' (Walsh-Bowers 2002, p. 166). In such environments, the sex appeal of qualitative research data analysis ends up being treated more as an 'attractive nuisance' (Miles 1979) and in extreme cases as a conceptual femme fatale – a methodological siren whose songs of theoretical discovery lead seasoned researchers and graduate students alike to an untimely end on the jagged stones of scholarly rejection.

Evidence for this can be found in the low acceptance rates of qualitative research in high-impact journals. Lazaraton's (2000) analysis of the top-four journals in applied linguistics found that, in the ten years of journal articles surveyed, only 10 per cent featured some form of qualitative or mixed methods research. Richards's (2009, pp. 151–152) analysis of 10 years of papers from 15 of the foremost international journals in applied linguistics found nearly identical results, and Hashemi's (2012) more recent investigation came to similar conclusions. Statistical analysis and hypothesis testing with an empirical focus continue to be the 'gold standard' (Pierre and Roulston 2006, p. 674) in the field, and prestigious journals continue to support this focus, which then shapes the way that knowledge is produced. This has led Borg (2004, p. 6) to state,

> It seems unhelpful that, within a professional teaching organization such as TESOL, the notion of research which is often asserted (e.g. hypothesis-testing, objective inquiry) is one which excludes the kinds of inquiries which are most relevant, feasible and accessible to a majority of members. An insistence on hypotheses and objectivity becomes even more problematic when the phenomena being researched – language

> teaching and learning – are dynamic, process-oriented, unpredictable and indelibly shaped by human interactions and values. In such contexts, broader views of what counts as research are required.

There is little question that quantitative research has great worth in areas such as language testing or in the validation of a preexisting theory. However, I would suggest that the neglect of qualitative research in favor of a constant focus on 'how much' and 'how many', something that is all too common in AL, risks channeling the creative energies of teacher-researchers into supporting 'the myth that the assiduous application of rigorous method will yield sound fact – as if empirical methodology were some form of meat grinder from which truth could be turned out like so many sausages' (Gergen 1985, p. 273). While it is certainly true that the semiotics of sausages, especially with relation to research and education, is evocative of social critiques stretching from the writings of Marx to the discourse of modern anti-globalization movements, as linguists and language teachers located in countries around the world, we who encounter humanity in all its diversity on a daily basis, grinding the lives of our students into preset, bite-sized data packages designed for easy consumption by an aging scholarly elite does not strike me as representing our best contribution, either to today's world or for future practice. Qualitative research of the type that can be found in the methodology of grounded theory, while admittedly more difficult to carry out than the 'fast-food' approach taken by some, has the potential to balance the grinding measurements of 'how many times' or 'how much', with a greater appreciation of the 'why' and 'how' (Chism and Banta 2007) of human experience.

Attitudes are changing in some quarters with the opening of publishing venues such as the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* or *Qualitative Inquiry*, but these developments are not taking place quickly enough or in large enough quantities to accommodate the growing number of graduate students currently entering applied linguistics programs who, similar to graduate students in other fields of the social sciences, have shown a considerable amount of interest in qualitative research approaches (Belcher and Hirvela 2005, Tellez and Waxman 2006). And yet the pursuit of a qualitative approach on the graduate level often faces many challenges, and it can be likened to navigating a ship through perilous waters. The concern of some supervisors, many of whom have witnessed the failures of past students, is in seeing yet another student becoming lost on the ambiguous seas of subjectivity – wandering aimlessly towards places on the academic map marked 'here be dragons'. Graduate students risk being stigmatized as conducting shallow research, and philosophically and/or politically motivated university Institutional Research Boards (IRBs) may exercise their authority either to reject or radically alter the course of their projects (Lincoln and Tierney 2004, Kiley and Mullins 2005, Lee 2008, Silverman 2013, p. 192). Even at the end of their long journey, there is always the probability of finding that they have weighed anchor in an unfriendly harbor, where

there awaits a hostile oral defense committee that has very different philosophical views concerning the quality, nature, and potential contribution of research projects not derived from quantitative methods.

Within this situation, many misconceptions exist among students and supervisors about the practices of grounded theory. Some have heard that it does not require any reading of the scholarly literature and that the methodology entails the simple task of going out into the field in order to discover common themes happening among a particular group of people. Others with whom I have spoken at seminars equate any form of qualitative research as grounded theory. Misunderstandings such as these are embodied in the words of one graduate student who, when after learning of the degree to which his research proposal differed from grounded theory methodology, told me, 'I guess it's not the same. But, *I'm* calling it grounded theory'. What then happens later is that students begin collecting mountains of qualitative data only to find that, somehow, either theory creation eludes them, or they end up writing something that sounds suspiciously like what they believed before starting the project.

Naturally, PhD supervisors want their students to complete a solid thesis or dissertation and to move as smoothly as possible through a graduate program. A number that I have met during conferences and workshops have admitted to me that their difficult and disappointing experiences with graduate students claiming to have taken a grounded theory approach have led them to avoid taking on further students interested in grounded theory, or to strongly discourage its use. Their difficulties stemmed partly from not knowing how to advise students on how to carry out GTM, partly because they have never carried out a grounded theory study on their own, and partly because they are unfamiliar with the philosophical assumptions, actual research practices, and practical outcomes of the methodology. With the growing number of graduate students entering universities today, supervisors are even more pressed for time, and it is easier to supervise a project using the tried-and-true quantitative method than to have to learn about a method that might be 'high maintenance'. Since grounded theory research tends to be open-ended and focused more on exploration, discovery, and insight than on established practices aimed at theory verification, there is the additional worry that the university's ethics committee may stifle the proposal. In addition, without understanding the procedures of grounded theory, some supervisors might view the manner in which a student has taken large amounts of qualitative data, metaphorically disappeared behind the veil, and with the tinkling of a bell emerge with a theory as a form of methodological transubstantiation. The underlying concern here is that others on the oral defense committee might think the same.

These notions, unfounded as they are, still have just enough truth in them to make them believable. If left unchecked, however, such characterizations will only serve to strengthen the bias already seen in applied linguistics, thus making our field an even more unwelcoming place for qualitative inquiry and theorization. The sad consequence would be the reification of even

better forms of sausage making and an overemphasis of privileged forms of research inquiry that would result in the intellectual impoverishment of our discipline (Mende 2005).

None of what I have discussed so far has capped the groundswell of interest among graduate students in applied linguistics for grounded theory. While numbers are hard to come by, over the past few years in workshops and seminars that I have given at universities in Europe, the United States, and Japan, there are increasing numbers of students who are either deeply interested in the potential of grounded theory, or who are actively trying to use the methodology, often with limited supervisory support. Excellent methodological books exist, with new works as well as new editions of older contributions appearing almost every year (Clarke 2005, Goulding 2005, Locke 2005, Charmaz 2006, Bryant and Charmaz 2007b, Stern and Porr 2011, Birks and Mills 2012, Urquhart 2013, Gibson and Hartman 2014, Birks and Mills 2015, Corbin and Strauss 2015). However, these are spread over many domains. Depending on where one lives in the world, some of the earliest texts can be hard to track down. Even when located, purchasing a collection of books detailing how to do grounded theory can quickly become an expensive option for teachers and student researchers, especially if they are just starting out or simply interested in exploring the methodology before making a commitment. The current books on GTM, as generalist works, do not address the perspective of applied linguistics, and as with other research methodologies, the major works in grounded theory differ significantly with regard to the finer points of carrying out a study. Sifting through the debate and learning the nomenclature while also deciding on the best course of action from books written outside the concerns of applied linguistics have led some to conclude with Silva (2005, p. 4), that GT requires 'a whole lot of effort for very little gain'.

The need for this book

As this book will show, there is much to gain through the methodology of grounded theory. The misconceptions held by Silva and others persist, mainly because there has never been a book on grounded theory that has been created specifically for applied linguists. This in itself is remarkable, especially given the fact of its prominence in other applied social sciences for over half a century. For this point alone, a resource text is needed – one that will dispel many of the myths and misunderstandings about grounded theory, demystify its methodological processes, and provide applied linguists with the necessary tools for understanding, justifying, and promulgating their theoretical insights to a wider audience.

In order to meet this need, this book will show you how to use grounded theory in your next research project. Because this could be either for a graduate thesis or for something that has piqued your interest in the classroom, the concerns of graduate students, supervisors, and field practitioners are all addressed. For graduate students, those at the master's level will learn

important philosophical and methodological knowledge that, when used in conjunction with a research methods course, should equip you to better understand and assess qualitative research. The emphasis for MA students will be on an academic understanding of grounded theory, since most MA programs in applied linguistics run for an average of two years in total, and this time frame is usually too short for a first-time practitioner to develop a solid grounded theory. A short-term case study or an action research project might be the better option for those at the MA level. PhD students, on the other hand, will be expected to have more experience with conducting research at the onset. PhD programs take longer to finish, and students must write larger pieces of work. Such conditions are far more amenable to the demands of grounded theory. However, you should also take a moment now and complete the readiness inventory (Appendix) in order to determine right away if grounded theory is right for you (and it will also give you a chance to skim through later chapters as well). If you find that you have the support, resources, and temperament for doing grounded theory, this book should help you design, carry out, and disseminate a grounded theory within the context and concerns of your graduate studies.

Supervisors who are unfamiliar with GT will find this book to be a helpful resource when advising, directing, and assessing their students' work. GT is an advanced methodology that not only takes time and stamina but also requires previous knowledge about issues in one's discipline and experience with conducting field research. Supervisors have such knowledge and experience. This book seeks to add to that insight and to serve as a springboard for discussions with your students as you make decisions together about the differing approaches, ethical considerations, and the potential contributions of grounded theory.

While recognizing with Glaser (1999) that the majority who embark on a grounded theory journey will most likely be engaged in graduate-level study, there are also many teachers of TESOL, academics, and other practitioners in the field of applied linguistics who would like to explore the potential of grounded theory for studying their areas of research interest. Large numbers of teacher-researchers live abroad, and many seek to better understand the behavior of their learners as well as to gain insight into other issues that emerge when teaching educational cultures different from their own (Allwright 1983, Alptekin and Alptekin 1984, Cohen 1984, Richards 1987, Gorsuch 2000, Dogancay-Aktuna 2005). This book is also for you. Grounded theory is ideally suited for such investigations (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 22), and this volume is intended to help you in your search, with the hope that later on your theories will offer new insights and fresh perspectives to students and colleagues.

Content overview

Divided into two parts, the first half of this work ushers you into the world of research as seen through the eyes of grounded theorists. It will help you

to understand grounded theory's location within a spectrum of philosophical, historical, and methodological perspectives. Chapter One discusses the paradigmatic understandings that underpin qualitative research such as grounded theory, with special attention to the issues of ontology and epistemology. This is a necessary step, because such beliefs shape every aspect of a person's research approach. They guide the way in which they judge both their work and the work of others. Many (but not all) grounded theorists work from perspectives that are distinct from beliefs driving large swathes of applied linguistics, and because their focus centers on concerns that are often interpretive, constructivist, or critical in nature, a deeper understanding of these alternative philosophical viewpoints will help you reflect on their perspectives and assumptions, and to understand the beliefs and potential reservations of others within the academic community. Chapter Two presents the early background and procedures of what is known today as classic grounded theory. We will take a tour through the early controversies, critiques, and philosophical differences that have contributed to grounded theory's current state as a 'family of methods' (Bryant and Charmaz 2007a, p. 11).

This will lead us to survey the different forms of grounded theory methodology that are available to you. In Chapter Three, I will show how, based on the philosophical foundations of the first chapter, all of the different versions of contemporary grounded theory are helpful and necessary for a fuller understanding of what is taking place in our areas of research interest. Other forms of qualitative research more commonly used in applied linguistics will be compared and contrasted with grounded theory. This will allow you to gain a better appreciation for purposes of the GT methodology.

The second half of this book focuses on doing grounded theory, with attention given to preparations, procedures, pitfalls, and practices. Chapter Four considers key methodological and institutional issues that should be addressed before committing to a grounded theory approach. This includes understanding the vagaries of IRBs, appreciating ethical considerations, and dealing with the problem of *ethicism* in many higher educational institutions. Other issues discussed are those of gaining access to research sites, working with interview transcripts, and deciding whether to use computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in support of your project. Chapter Five explains techniques for the first stages of the grounded theory methodology. This includes early practices in reflexivity, open sampling, working with observational data, using repertory grids, interviews, memos, and temporarily avoiding the research literature so that you can engage in other activities that will enhance your theoretical sensitivity. Instructions for taking your research to the next level are provided in Chapter Six, where the transition from descriptive analysis to theoretical development is described. Creating categories and finding a central concern, engaging in theoretical sampling, and reaching theoretical sufficiency (Dey 1999), as opposed to that of theoretical saturation are all discussed. Chapter Seven presents

ideas about how to write or present your theory and prepares you to justify your theory in the face of the healthy skepticism you will encounter during academic conferences or in front of viva examiners. Recommendations for how PhD supervisors, journal referees, and the readers of academic journals might want to assess a grounded theory study will be provided. The final chapter reviews what you will have learned from reading this book, suggests possible developments for the future of the methodology, reports potential contributions of grounded theory to various domains of applied linguistics research, and concludes with a consideration of the importance of theory in our field.

On style and substance

You may have noticed a certain level of informality so far in my writing style. This is intentional, because I believe the abstracted airs often taken in applied linguistics journals and books create an unnecessary distance between the writer, the readers, and the subject matter. My aim is to serve as what the Japanese would call a *senpai*, literally, one who goes ahead. I hope to assist you as one who has already 'been there'. Picture us, if you will, spreading out a large methodological map on a table while we consider the dispositions, practices, and procedures that will help you on your quest. As with any journey, the unexpected is bound to happen. Bridges of understanding get washed out, the traffic of data can suddenly get jammed, and bureaucratic gatekeepers can delay you in getting out there to explore what is going on. Pragmatic flexibility is needed for the duration, and you should also see the methodological discussions in this book less as hard-and-fast rules and more as tools that you should adapt for the needs of your particular grounded theory project. In the process, know that there will be highs and lows along the way, but realize as well that the qualitative journey you are about to take will not only change your life but also make a difference in the lives of others, and in time, you may be able to make helpful contributions to our field.

In terms of nomenclature, my use of the term 'applied linguistics' (AL) is inclusive, in that I see AL as a multidisciplinary field drawing from numerous outside sources, such as psychology, education, and sociology, and which embraces myriads of interrelated groups, ranging from TESOL, corpus linguistics, second language acquisition, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), to the sociology of English language teaching. These and other subspecialties have their particular interests, but I have placed them under the aegis of AL with the understanding that some might find this to be a contentious choice. However, my tendency is towards consolidation and interconnectedness, as well as the interplay taking place within the multidimensional concerns of the second-language learning experience. A quality shared by all sub-disciplines in AL, according to Brumfit (1997, p. 93), is their 'theoretical and empirical investigation[s] of real-world problems in which language is a central issue'. This intersects nicely with concerns of

grounded theory, and later we will see how this form of theorization, developed through a systematic study of human discourse and action, can in fact address the real-world problems of students, teachers, and issues occurring within educational institutions. I find that to be an exciting prospect, and with this in mind, let us now begin our adventure of discovery.

1 Establishing common ground

Paradigms in perspective

Towards deeper levels of insight

'Can you replicate your study?' 'What have you done to validate your findings?' 'How can you prove that your theory is not based on data you have cherry-picked in order to support your preexisting biases?' Questions such as these are sometimes raised during research conferences or when defending a doctoral thesis. Behind these concerns are beliefs about the nature of existence (*ontology*) or about what can be known in the world around us (*epistemology*). Even for colleagues who are unaware of their assumptions, these beliefs about what is useful, truthful, and knowable continue to operate quietly in the background, shaping both thought and action:

> We all invoke implicit philosophies of science when we conduct studies, interpret results, criticize others' work, or decide between competing theories. Epistemological issues can be viewed as primary because they underwrite all of the knowledge claims of a discipline.
>
> (Anderson 1986, p. 158)

Applied linguists, as with many others in the applied social sciences, tend to devote their thoughts and energies towards the concrete tasks of 'designing studies, generating data and analyzing results' (Anderson 1986, p. 158); however, a consideration of philosophical issues is vital, especially if one is preparing to embark on the methodological journey of grounded theory. Unless and until we raise awareness of the beliefs driving our research activities, we leave the door open for more misunderstanding and conflict. Such dramas are played out daily, where researchers or graduate students and their supervisors discover that while they had been speaking the same language, they had been operating from very different perspectives. Today's scholarly world is marked by multidimensional understandings, and it is important for applied linguists to not only be better aware of their own sets of beliefs but also to have an informed understanding about what shapes the viewpoints and research strategies of others.

Therefore, anchoring this book to a discussion of research paradigms is necessary for establishing common ground. Only then will it be possible

to begin one's methodological quest, which will entail numerous decisions, debates, and points of divergence. In this chapter, I will encourage you to reflect upon your deep-seated beliefs about research and, more specifically, to think about what it is you hope to accomplish through the methodology of grounded theory.

To those ends, in the spirit of a philosophical 'bricoleur' (Levi-Strauss 1966, Hatton 1989), I will first arrange the materials and tools that will be used to build the framework of this chapter, starting with conceptual metaphors of the type that are commonly used for describing the theoretical nature of research paradigms (e.g. Burrell and Morgan 1979/2005). This will be followed by a consideration of autopoietic theory (Maturana and Varela 1980), which will be used as a way of both organizing the plethora of paradigms, ontologies, epistemologies, research methodologies, and methods that are found in research literature today, and for explaining the interactive nature of what some see as incompatible worldviews, or what in the philosophy of science is called the problem of incommensurability. I will suggest that interplay, rather than incommensurability, might provide a better philosophical base for the multidimensional, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches already adopted by many teacher-researchers in AL, and by those outside of applied linguistics who currently use the methodology of grounded theory.

Paradigms and conceptual metaphors

The concept of paradigm and its influence to shape the nature of research inquiry became a household word through Thomas Kuhn's, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1962/1996). Kuhn's work, while groundbreaking, was also ambiguous to the point that vigorous debate erupted around how to more clearly define the term (Masterman 1970, Eckberg and Hill 1979, Gage 1989, Berkenkotter 1991, Goles and Hirschheim 2000). In the aftermath, Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 200) successfully crystalized Kuhn's thoughts by explaining research paradigms as

> a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with the ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do.

This invariably leads to the use of religious or cosmological metaphors (Bowie 1993, pp. 5–9, Guba and Lincoln 1998, Richards 2003, p. 33). Morgan (1983, p. 602) explains that this happens because, at a conceptual level, 'metaphor makes meaning in a primal way; its role is not just embellishment'. Metaphorical language is theoretical. It stimulates analytical and creative possibilities. While the tension between the analytic and the creative does present the potential for difficulties, especially since the creative aspects

of metaphor 'can also become distortions, as the way of seeing though a metaphor becomes a way of *not* seeing' (Morgan 1997b, p. 5), so long as the potential for misrepresentation is kept in mind and the intent of the writer is understood, metaphors serve as the power tools of theoretical framework construction (Wood 2002, p. 11).

My conceptual metaphor for explaining the quiet gravitas of research paradigms is found in the cosmological phenomenon of a protostar (Figure 1.1). Protostars are swirling masses of dust and gas that emit a faint glow as growing gravitational forces cause hydrogen to coalesce and burn. Because it is still in the process of development, the protostar gives off more light than heat. Its greatest power at this time is in the unseen gravitational force exerted over the bands of gas and particulate matter spiraling around at different speeds in relation to their distance from the center (Clark 1999, Klessen 2001). The symbolism here is evocative of Kuhn's description of paradigms as being ethereal, while at the same time providing, when viewed from a distance, a discernible form to the research of social scientists (Kuhn 1962/1996, pp. 107–110).

Closest to the gravimetric center of paradigm is the band of ontology – the region most directly influenced by paradigms where the very nature of reality is defined. Ontological discussions are given meaning based on the common paradigm around which they orbit; even though proponents of a particular ontology may use different words to give linguistic form to

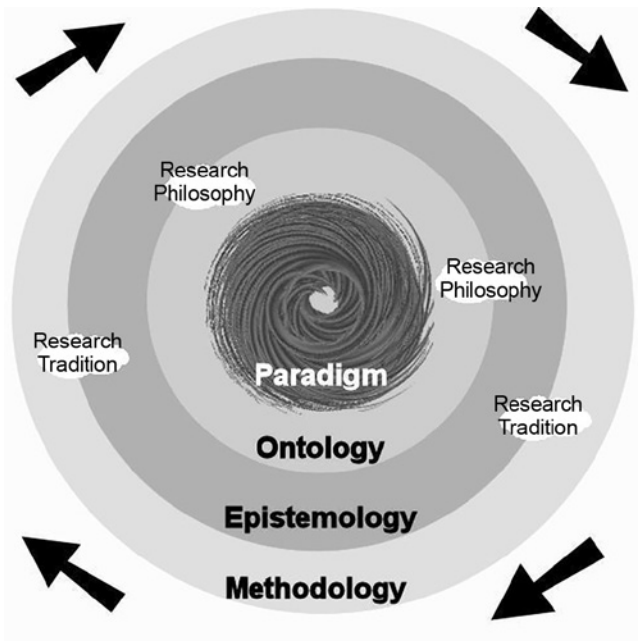


Figure 1.1 Metaphor of a Paradigmatic System of Thought

their thoughts, commonly held assumptions about the nature of what is real are fundamental to the creation of their research philosophies. Mostly within this band are found research philosophies, which, like the denser dust clouds circling a protostar, dissipate after time or grow after absorbing smaller clouds around them. This can be seen in the social sciences, where once influential research philosophies, such as that of symbolic interactionism, disappear after its main tenets have been absorbed by other, similar systems for construing reality (Fine 1993). Research philosophies put most of their emphasis on ontology, but also touch on issues related to epistemology as they seek to explain the relationship between the two (Gingell 1999, p. 172). Ontological beliefs exert a discreet pull on what research philosophies treat as useful knowledge.

Further away from the paradigmatic center is the band of epistemology. The intellectual material here orbits at a different speed, thus symbolizing my belief and those expressed by other philosophers of science (Bhaskar 1989, Cupchik 2001) that ontology and epistemology, while certainly held together by the power of paradigm, do not necessarily correspond exactly to one another, thus resulting in research philosophies sharing similar ontological beliefs, but disagreeing on what can be known about this reality. When researchers are open to this realization, points of overlap with other paradigmatic 'systems' along the ontological level are formed. It is at this key point of intersection that we begin to understand possible reasons for the diversity that is observed in social science research.

Out of these articulated beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge emerge research traditions. Burrell and Morgan (1979/2005, p. ix) use similar metaphorical language to mine by describing these as 'rival perspectives within the same paradigm or outside its bounds appear[ing] as satellites defining alternative points of view'. Richards (2003, p. 12) notes that they are 'a historically situated approach to research covering generally recognized territory and employing a generally accepted set of research methods'. Laudan (1977, p. 81) adds that research traditions contain 'a set of general assumptions about the entities and processes in a domain of study, and about the appropriate methods to be used for investigating the problems and constructing the theories in that domain'. While research philosophies focus more on ontology than epistemology, I maintain with Herne and Setälä (2004, p. 72), who summarized Laudan's (1996) continued development of the term, that a research tradition focuses more on epistemology and methodology, and less on ontology. Action research, case studies, or grounded theory are examples of qualitative research traditions, and are used in order to explore the epistemological concerns of a particular academic community (Berg 2004, pp. 306–307, Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 18).

This is distinct from the additional band, which I have labeled more generally as 'methodology'. Like epistemologies, methodologies associated with certain research traditions can become diffused and mixed with other research traditions later on (Figure 1.2). This is why some research

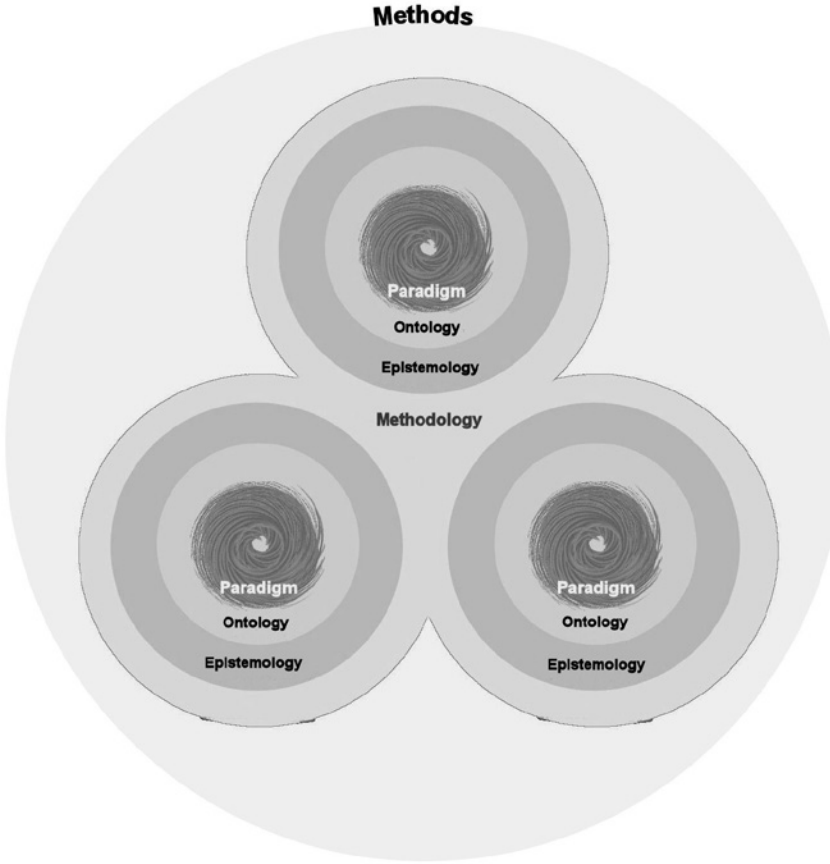


Figure 1.2 Interplay of Methodologies and Methods in Research Paradigm Clusters

traditions inspired by different epistemologies may employ virtually identical methodologies (Richards 2003, pp. 13–14), albeit for very different purposes. And, again, using my cosmological metaphor, methods act very much like the material found on the far reaches of a stellar system or cluster of protostars. Methods can be drawn into the service of other methodologies and research traditions. This eclecticism can be seen, for example, where coding methods often associated with grounded theory are used with other traditions such as case studies, action research, or ethnography (Heath et al. 2008). Therefore, academic discourse, methodologies, methods, thought experiments, and research investigations exist in systems of paradigmatic belief that are marked by continuous interaction. Symbolically, like the particulate matter in orbit around a protostar, new ideas, practices, and insights are constantly colliding and interacting with each other to form new knowledge.

The issue of incommensurability

This perspective differs from those who believe that some methods and approaches are incompatible with certain research paradigms (Burrell and Morgan 1979/2005, Hughes 1990, Lincoln and Guba 2000). According to this view, methodologies as well as methods should be faithful to their paradigmatic heritage. Hughes (1990, p. 11) and Connell, Connell, Lynch, and Waring (2001) are among those who argue that paradigms run hierarchically, starting from the level of paradigm and working down to the level of method. This line of thinking supposes that research methods and methodologies are structured by one's epistemology and ontology. Research methods are treated as preset packages that should not be used unless one understands and accepts the original metaphysical beliefs used to create them (Clarke 2005, p. xxxiii). Attempts at mixing methods is disparaged as 'slurring' (Cutcliffe 2000), because their association with different paradigms result in the generation of fundamentally incompatible bodies of data (Brannen 1992, pp. 15–16).

However, even Kuhn, who himself was also a strong proponent of incommensurability, believed in periods of overlap, where one paradigm slowly fades as another becomes ascendant (Kuhn 1962/1996, p. 85). Schultz and Hatch (1996) have built on this notion, calling for paradigm interplay, which allows for shared meanings to emerge from the interchange between paradigm models. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 5) have also suggested similar ideas, concluding that 'multiple overlaps' exist within the paradigms that inform the methodologies of social inquiry (cf. Angen 2000, p. 379). My metaphorical framework also implies that interplay is possible, but that it is necessary in order for us to develop a broader understanding of what is happening around us. This is made more apparent when viewed through the perspective of autopoietic theory.

The autopoiesis of research paradigms

During the 1970s, philosophers of biology Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela proposed a theory describing the self-producing and self-constructing nature of living things (Maturana 1975, Maturana and Varela 1987, Cuff et al. 2006, p. 108). 'Autopoiesis' is Greek for 'self-generation', and Maturana defined an autopoietic system as

> a composite unity whose organization can be described as a closed network of productions of components that through their interactions constitute the network of productions that produce them, and specify its extension by constituting its boundaries in their domain of existence.
>
> (Maturana 1987, p. 349, in Mingers 2002, p. 294)

As a philosophical concept, autopoiesis has been proposed as a way to understand processes taking place within human cognition and social interaction

(Maturana and Varela 1980). Maturana and Varela's theory was then modified by the physicist and systems theorist Frijof Capra, who created the notion of *autopoietic networks* (Capra 1996, pp. 162–168). Capra theorized that the notions of structure, pattern, and process operated in constant interaction within a dynamic framework, which in turn generates and maintains biological life. Capra (1996, p. 172) believed autopoietic networks could be applied metaphorically to describe the nature of human cognition and the development of differing systems of philosophical thought. This point was been taken up by various theorists on social interaction, discourse, and communication (Brans and Rossbach 1997, Arnoldi 2001, Luhmann 2001, Cuff et al. 2006, p. 107) whose work has influenced some in AL (Crookes 1997, Morgan 1997a).

It was at this point that researchers Sid Lowe at Kingston University, London, and Adrian Carr from the University of Western Sydney (Lowe and Carr 2003, Lowe et al. 2004) proposed that the interrelationship between research paradigms could be illustrated through the autopoietic functions of structure, pattern, and process. This was a stroke of brilliance, as organizing research paradigms in this way helps to summarize the massive corpus of competing paradigmatic models that emerged during the heated 'Paradigm Wars' of the late twentieth century (Gage 1989, Berkenkotter 1991). Let us now look at research paradigms through this lens before applying these concepts to our philosophical framework.

Paradigms of structure

There are many labels for paradigms of structure in the literature, with the most common being positivism. The ontology associated with this paradigm cluster is realism, which in its most basic form is known as naive or empirical realism. This states that a separate natural and social world exists 'out there' independent of us or our ability to perceive it. Through the right methods, reality can be discovered (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 165, Gall et al. 2003, p. 14).

The epistemology of the paradigms of structure is objectivist, meaning that truth exists and that knowledge of the truth can be discovered empirically. The role of the researcher is to transmit knowledge of the truth free of any value statements (Hutchinson 1988, p. 124). The thinking here is deductive, and research is designed either to prove or disprove hypotheses, thereby validating the development of truthful theories.

The methodology of social research traditionally associated with the paradigms of structure is usually quantitative in nature. Interviews or observational data are considered unquantifiable and unreliable, unless the data can be placed in a replicable matrix where discreet items can be counted or otherwise validated (Babbie 2004, p. 396). In the words of one adherent to this paradigm, 'There's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 40). Hard data emerges from removing variables through structured sets of widely accepted methods,

such as statistical studies or cross-sectional surveys. Truth is found in quantity, and for that reason, discovering overall trends in large populations is seen as more valid than what can be learned from studies with smaller samples (Bryman 2001, pp. 284–285, Leedy and Ormrod 2001, pp. 193–194, Cohen et al. 2003, pp. 169–171).

Paradigms of pattern

This paradigm cluster studies the emergence of repeated activities and discourse within a socially constructed world. Human behavior is believed to emanate from a dynamic reality formed from multiple perspectives. Potter's (1996, p. 14) review identifies ten terms that are synonymous with this paradigm, some of them being interpretivism, qualitative paradigm, naturalism, phenomenology, humanism, hermeneutic, and post-positivism. Regardless of the label, Sciarra (1999, pp. 40–41) states that they share strikingly similar features.

The ontology of these paradigms tends towards idealism, which states that an external reality, apart from a mind to perceive it, does not exist. The world is 'in there' – that is, in the mind of the one who sees and thinks about what is happening. The mind is not the only source of reality construction: there is something 'out there', but ultimately, it cannot be perceived by observation alone (Guelke 1976, p. 170). Shared reality takes place through the creation of socially constructed symbols. Locke explains that social reality

> is not a given. It is built up over time through shared history, experience and communication so that what is taken for 'reality' is what is shared and taken for granted as to the way the world is to be perceived and understood.
>
> (2005, p. 9)

Despite gradations of the finer details, the belief in reality as a mental construct is an important tenet common to all of these ontologies.

Epistemologically, this paradigm is interpretivist in nature. Knowledge is believed to be shaped by the values and worldviews of like-minded groups of individuals (Moore 1989, p. 880, Michell 2003, p. 17). Knowledge is intersubjective and created through an ever-evolving consensus between the participants and researcher (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 165). Researchers operating from this paradigm are required to be critically self-aware – a practice known as reflexivity. Instead of deductively testing preexisting theories, interpretivist researchers reflexively induce new theoretical concepts that occur out of their interaction with the data. They attempt to reconstruct new understandings into a narrative discussing the possible 'whys' and 'hows' of the phenomenon being studied (Ritchie 2004, pp. 28–29).

Research methodologies in this paradigm are as much an art as a science, since social reality is viewed as fluid and emergent (Bryman 2001). This

results in the flexible use of multiple methodologies. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3) describe the researcher as one who tinkers about and 'uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials as are at hand'. The focus of the research project is less predetermined in the beginning, but over time, researchers explore various avenues of inquiry and abandon others as dead ends. Mixed methods are used to investigate social phenomena, and the researcher can change directions if serendipitous events uncover issues that go to the heart of understanding the study. Methodologies, as explained by Potter (1996), are usually qualitative in nature. There is a preference for unstructured interviews, reflective journaling, and observational techniques.

Paradigms of process

Process paradigms emphasize the chaos of human interaction and focus on the immediacy of the present without interpreting underlying meanings. Paradigms clustering under this heading call into question the theories, findings, or insights generated from those operating from the paradigms of structure and pattern:

> The world is characterized by uncertain dynamic process rather than such certain structures. Process does not involve certainty or foundations and discourse is characterized by paradox, contradiction and indeterminate meaning. Language, as the principle vehicle of the cultural process, is uncertain and indeterminate because it is a process that reflexively contains its own antithesis and upon which meaning is politically imposed. The 'active' world is thus a chameleonic process without structure or certainty.
>
> (Lowe 2001, p. 326)

Adherents of process advocate deconstructionism, transgression of traditional academic conventions, anti-establishmentarianism, and call for plurality in critical discourse in order to extricate themselves from what they see as the domination of academic and socioeconomic hegemonies. This paradigmatic position is associated with the postmodernist work of Derrida, Baudrillard, and Foucault, as well as post-structuralism, orientalism, literary theory, and critical social theory (CST).

Ontological questions of reality as neither 'in there' nor 'out there', but instead *nowhere*, until it is created by a particular group, and even this is historically inconclusive, highly contextualized, and culturally limited (Grenz 1996, p. 7, Scheurich 2001, p. 33). Multiple realities are layered one on top of another, each with something important to add. Researchers uphold epistemological relativism, which in relation to social inquiry, does not refer to cultural, moral, or ethical relativism. Instead, it relates to multiple ways of knowing and doing. These manifold ways do not entail, as opponents claim, that wild fantasy, illogicality, sophistry, nihilism, or unbridled eclecticism are

acceptable (Guba 1992, pp. 18–20). Richardson (2000, p. 928) states that a relativist epistemology simply allows researchers

> to know 'something' without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing. In some ways, 'knowing' is easier, however, because postmodernism recognizes the situational limitations of the knower.

There is an emphasis on *theorizing* as an active process rather than *theory* as a product. This deepens the sense of immediacy and highlights restive, chaotic dynamics constantly at work within the socio-historical milieu. Attention is paid to the 'variables' ignored by those dedicated to the paradigms of structure (Clarke 2005, pp. 28–32, Charmaz 2006, p. 128). While those informed by this paradigm avoid the creation of grand, overarching theories, localized theories are possible so long as the process of how the theory was created is understood, and it is recognized that they 'are not concerned about the 'truth' of their research but rather the pragmatic applicability of their results' (Annells 1996, p. 391). This 'pragmatic applicability' of process-based theorizing focuses on text, that 'worded world' (Richardson 2000, p. 923) as it appears in a moment in time, before it is once again reworded. Methodological practices employ semiotics and can work to advocate for the social or political liberation of the research participants. Kilduff and Mehra (1997) note that in most cases, researchers guided by a process perspective use the same methodologies associated with the paradigms of pattern, especially ethnographic or phenomenological methods. Researchers of process avoid quantitative methods, though some state that nothing prevents their use (Guba 1992, p. 18, Reinharz 1992, pp. 92–94). The difference is in purposes for why they are implemented. While structure-based researchers seek the verification and/or falsification of theories, and researchers from the paradigms of pattern focus on understanding the social experience of informants in the construction of theories, researchers from the process paradigm both deconstruct and reconstruct in order to encourage a greater awareness of alternative perspectives. By emphasizing the local and the non-generalizable, they question generalized conceptions of truth and problematize language that betrays the bias of scientific, modernist thinking. A summary of the features of structure, pattern, and process paradigms, together with some of their manifestations in AL, is presented in the Table that follows (Table 1.1).

Mapping paradigmatic perspectives

In collaboration with Michael Thomas of the University of Strathclyde, Lowe and Carr developed a technique for 'paradigmapping' the philosophical positions of research papers in their field (cf. Lowe et al. 2004). This

Table 1.1 Research Paradigms and Their Implications for TESOL and EAP

	Structure	*Pattern*	*Process*
Ontology	*Realist*: What is 'out there' truly exists.	*Idealist*: Existence is 'in there' – i.e. created in the mind.	*Ontological Relativism*: Multiple realities exist, but might interact via discourse.
Epistemology	*Objectivism*: Truth is 'out there' and can be discovered.	*Subjectivism*: Truth depends on values and personal constructs that are shared by the community.	*Epistemological Relativism*: Many standards for locally legitimate knowledge exist, which are based on ephemeral discourse manifested in a historical moment.
Theoretical Stance	*Deductive*: Theory, hypothesis, observation, and confirmation.	*Inductive*: Observation, discovery of patterns, hypotheses and theory.	*Pragmatic*: Outcomes are deemed acceptable by a particular discourse group.
Methodology	Discovering structures for prediction and control.	Understanding emergent patterns for greater insight.	Focusing on immediate processes for deconstruction and reconstruction.
Outcomes in EAP/TESOL Education and Research	Grammar-translation, data-driven learning, task-based learning, statistical testing.	Humanistic learning, cooperative development, ethnography, action research.	Critical discourse analysis (CDA), deconstruction of the 'native speaker', validation of 'World Englishes'.

heuristic device, aptly named 'Capra's Triad' (Capra 1996, Lowe and Carr 2003, Lowe et al. 2004) (Figure 1.3), was a significant development in autopoietic theory.

However, Lowe and Carr's (2003) map of paradigmatic positions is static in that it appears to overlook the potential for dynamic interaction. Therefore, as the final part of the philosophical framework that we have been building, I have modified Capra's Triad to show paradigmatic positions as restive systems of discourse, which share points of epistemological and methodological overlap with other paradigms. I have combined this with the autopoietic flow of structure to patterning, patterning to process, and process back to structure (Figure 1.3). Instead of viewing different paradigms,

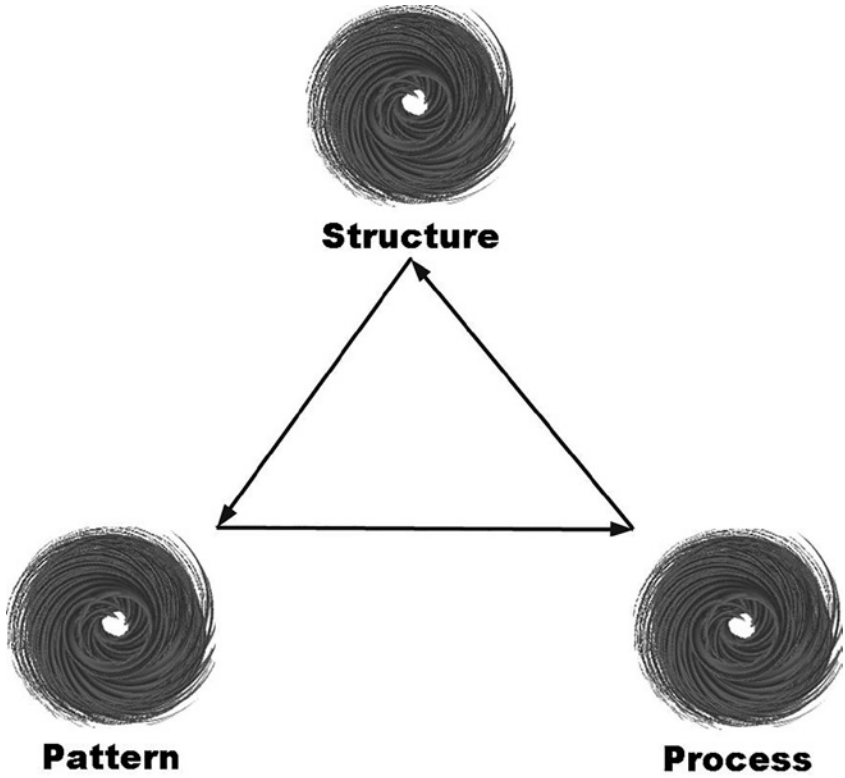


Figure 1.3 Capra's Triad (Modified from Lowe, Carr, and Thomas 2004)

methodologies, and methods as self-enclosed and incommensurable, in this view, paradigms flow cyclically in and out of one another in constant autopoietic interaction. According to this view, different paradigms, with their respective ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies, are not at odds with each other. Neither are they to be seen, as Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 725) have claimed, like separate religions in competition for new converts. Rather, paradigms of structure, pattern, and process operate as an autopoietic network, each with vital functions contributing to a fuller understanding of a complex, multilayered social reality. Lowe et al. (2005, p. 189) argue,

> Structure . . . is merely a manifestation of the 'process' of embodiment of the 'pattern' of organization of a system. As a result, 'structure' is not ontologically 'real' as such, because it is always a reification of process and pattern.

It is through this constant that the existence of the other is both generated and maintained.

Implications and applications

Far from being some magical mystery tour of mixed metaphors, this framework has important uses for individual researchers, for creating greater balance within scholarly communities, and for understanding the developments taking place concurrently across many disciplines.

On a personal level, the philosophical framework proposed here can help you to map out your personal philosophical position and gain a better idea about issues that would be of interest to you. For graduate students, an autopoietic perspective will also help you to understand more quickly the perspective of your supervisor, of those sitting on ethics committees, and the underlying assumptions that are usually only implied during the oral defense. Teacher-researchers will be able to understand the concerns hiding behind the questions raised at conferences or in feedback on journal submissions.

Within specific academic communities, autopoieticity fosters a space for greater methodological flexibility and openness to other perspectives, and creates the possibility for greater cooperation. With regard to the use of mixed methods, there is little doubt that many teacher-researchers opt for such an approach, but an autopoietic understanding provides a philosophical justification for why it is both possible and helpful. Putting people into different epistemological or methodological boxes and then rejecting those who differ from each other's standards may make for great sport, but it generates more heat than light and creates an imbalance in the overall flow of research inquiry. Instead, Bryman (1992, p. 60) states,

> Quantitative research is especially efficient at getting to the 'structural' features of social life, while qualitative studies are usually stronger in terms of 'processual' aspects. These strengths can be brought together in a single study.

Reinterpreting the discussion at the beginning of this chapter autopoietically, the AL community, which has tended to overemphasize the paradigm of structure, has not fully realized that greater openness to and cooperation with researchers of other paradigmatic worldviews represents a fuller expression of the shared search for insight into what is taking place in our classrooms and educational institutions.

To provide an example of how Capra's Triad can be used to understand the wider currents affecting research across disciplines, an early version of Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) seminal paper describes six periods in the history of qualitative research. During what Denzin and Lincoln call the 'traditional period' (1900–1945), qualitative researchers followed a positivist and objectivist point of view that used the language of hard empiricism. During the modernist phase (1945–1970), social scientists shifted from purely objective and deductive qualitative accounts towards more interpretive methods of study, albeit still couched within the language of structural

paradigms and with concerns fixed on creating rigorous methodologies for making qualitative research appear more reliable and valid in the eyes of academia. By the 1970s, many had settled for the uneasy détente of tolerating multiple ways of construing social reality, which was the beginning of the next period, the time of blurred genres, which ran until 1986. The crisis of representation and postmodern period from 1986 to 2000 describes how even as they had gained greater acceptance in the academy, qualitative researchers had already started to question not only the values of validity, generalizability, and reliability, which were crucial to positivist researchers, but also the subjective constructions of interpretivist researchers. Their own value-laden assumptions of ethics, rigor, and reflexivity were increasingly problematized. With the criteria of earlier movements being discarded, and new varietals of textual genres being included in sociological studies, the resultant deconstructive movement was distinguished by a struggle for coherence that was surpassed only by the desire of sociologists to stimulate positive change in society. The post-experimental movement that Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 17) state began at the turn of the century sought even further 'to connect their writings to the needs of a free democratic society'. Later versions of Denzin and Lincoln's history of qualitative research have expanded to eight periods of development (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 40), but these changes added little to the original paper. Two of the 'eras' described as being between the years 2000 to 2005 seem to be essentially the same inasmuch as the crisis of postmodernism was part deconstruction and part a search for new meaning. Their eighth era, labeled 'the future', by definition, cannot be evaluated.

Placing Denzin and Lincoln's history within Capra's Triad (Figure 1.4), one can see the movement from structure towards pattern and then onwards to deconstructive processing. It not only aids in understanding the reasons for earlier debates within the academic community but also makes sense of current issues while suggesting future developments. For example, since the writing of Denzin and Lincoln's historical treatment of qualitative research, a more recent paper by Denzin (2009) discusses the current effects of an 'audit culture', which is emerging in universities around the world, which are being transformed to emulate neoliberal economic values. Denzin describes how qualitative researchers are now being forced to engage in 'evidence-based' research following protocols that support statistically driven experiments. I have interpreted these developments to suggest that the qualitative research community has entered an era that is defined by the paradigms of structure. Our current era is one of neo-empiricism – one where policymakers outside of university systems are seeking to link qualitative research, of which grounded theory is a part, to the standards, values, and worldview found in the paradigms of structure. Time will tell whether this is a healthy flow towards later insights, as the research community begins to once again study and interpret patterns of behavior, or if it is symptomatic of an 'autoimmune syndrome' within the community – one where the fixation on one paradigm causes the academic community

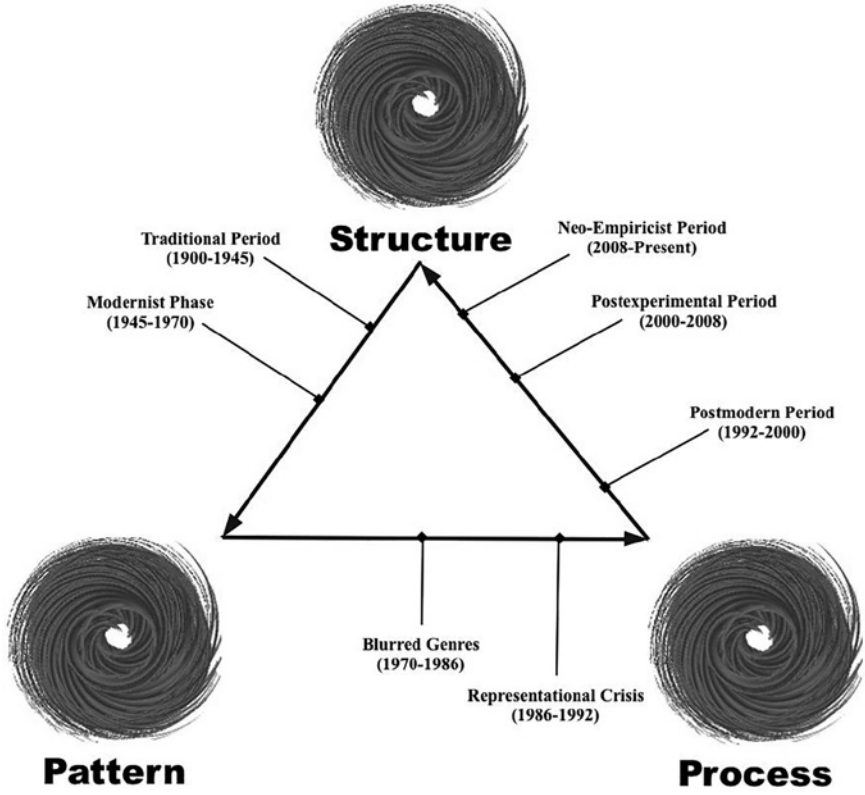


Figure 1.4 Autopoietic Movement within the History of Qualitative Research

to begin attacking itself, as it did during the years of the Paradigm Wars. Structure is necessary for the maintenance of both living organisms and philosophical perspectives within academic disciplines, but when paradigmatic systems of thought are over-structured and over-focused on replication, then efforts at verification and the quantification of truth runs the risk of becoming hardened, inflexible, and petrified. Multiple perspectives are necessary for studying issues related to second language learning. Fine (1993, p. 65) argues that 'diversity produces intellectual ferment' and this will be a point that will underwrite this book.

Grounding methodological practices with philosophical insights

Many in the applied linguistics community draw sustenance from the paradigms of structure. Therefore, those interested in pursuing a qualitative and mixed-methods line of inquiry, or who are drawn to interpretive theorization of the type found in the grounded theory methodology, must be

prepared to work far harder to make their case to colleagues who may mistrust alternative forms of research. Taking the road less traveled requires one having to

> entertain complex philosophical debates about what constitutes reality, argue against relativistic concerns, [and] debate epistemological questions about the relationship between the knower and what can be known, before even getting to methodological issues.
>
> (Goulding 2005, p. 17)

Greater awareness is needed with regard to these issues, for as Burrell and Morgan state, this will give you a firm grounding and better understanding as to where you fit within the flux and flow of research activity going on around you. It will open your eyes to the potential contribution of your work and that of your colleagues:

> It is important that a theorist be fully aware of the assumptions upon which his own perspective is based. Such an appreciation takes him outside the realm of his own familiar domain. It requires that he become familiar with paradigms which are not his own. Only then can he look back and appreciate the precise nature of his starting point.
>
> (Burrell and Morgan 1979/2005, p. ix)

It is for these reasons that I have used both metaphorical language and autopoietic theory to create a philosophical framework for understanding research paradigms, and for justifying interplay between paradigms, methodologies, and methods. An awareness of these concepts will empower the decisions you will make later during data collection, interpretation, and justification. This will also be apparent in the next chapter, where we will shift our attention to understanding the early development of the grounded theory methodology.

2 The origins of grounded theory

This chapter provides you with a necessary understanding of grounded theory's nascent beginnings. We examine the procedures of what is often called 'classic' grounded theory (Annells 1997, Hallberg 2006) and then review the early growing pains that grounded theory underwent before it branched off into various methodological styles. Knowing about these issues will help you to make informed decisions later on when you use grounded theory in your own study, and further prepare you to justify your approach to those with different research perspectives.

Early philosophical and methodological development

Grounded theory (Figure 2.1) is an offshoot of the qualitative methodology known as Symbolic Interactionism. Although largely disused today, (Fine 1993), during the middle of the twentieth century, symbolic interactionists in the Chicago School studied the meanings that people affixed to symbols in their society (Blumer 1969/1998, p. 3). Symbolic interactionists viewed the social world in terms of flux and interplay, as well as multiple ways of knowing. This of course is in line with the perspective discussed in the last chapter, and is inspired by the American pragmatist philosophy of Pierce, Dewey, and Mead. These philosophers were important influences on Anselm Strauss during his doctoral studies in sociology at the University of Chicago (Annells 1997, p. 121, Locke 2005, p. 28). Glaser was trained at Columbia University under the tutelage of sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton. He approached the social world as an emergent process that could be formalized through both structured quantitative routines and through a technique of rigorous qualitative interpretation known as *explication de texte*, which he learned during a year of overseas study at the University of Paris (Merton 1957, p. 117, Lazarsfeld 1962, p. 767, Merton 1967, pp. 39, in Bryman 2001, p. 2006, Glaser 1998, pp. 29–30, Eaves 2001, p. 655).

Strauss took a post at the University of California in San Francisco, where he taught medical sociology in the Department of Nursing. He recruited a number of scholars to join him and among them was Barney Glaser. In the course of working with Glaser, Strauss discovered that they were both caring for terminally ill elderly parents in hospitals. They decided to team up

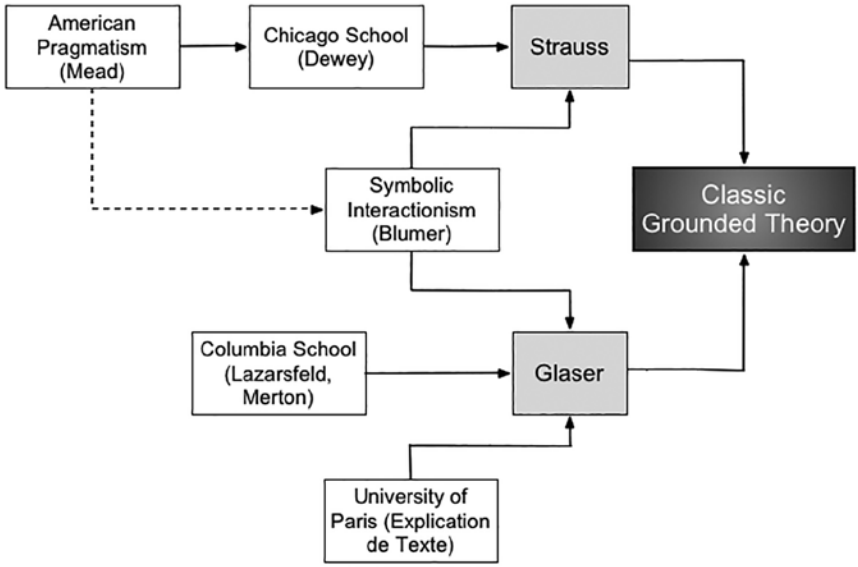


Figure 2.1 Philosophical and Methodological Roots of Classic Grounded Theory

as participant insiders to study sociological issues related to what happens when a hospital patient begins the trajectory towards eventual death (Stern 2013, Olshansky 2015). Strauss first considered symbolic interactionism as an approach, but both realized early on that more was needed for a better understanding of what was taking place. The result was the construction of an interpretive methodology that, while flexible, was rigorous and systematic:

> [T]he identification of social processes and the exploration of the complexity of social life mainly originates from Strauss and that the strict, line by line reading of codes, the systematic division into categories and the determination of properties arise from Glaser.
>
> (Hallberg 2006, p. 142)

Their ensuing work, *Awareness of Dying* (Glaser and Strauss 1965/2007), presented a grounded theory of terminally ill patients, as medical professionals, family, and friends struggle to provide care while avoiding any mention of impending death. Their book is still one of the seminal works in this area. Two year later, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* was published. In it, they wrote primarily to other sociologists in an attempt to explain as well as justify the methodological decisions behind the making of *Awareness*.

An overview of classic grounded theory

Discovery was never intended to serve as a 'how to' book for new researchers, and there are places in Glaser and Strauss's original text that feature ambiguities and terminological confusion. In my attempt to demystify Glaser and Strauss's original approach, I have consulted Glaser (1978), which was written as a methodological guide for unpacking *Discovery*, and Strauss and Corbin (1998) for further clarification. Dey's (1999) treatment of this subject observes that classic grounded theory follows the trajectory of research initiation, data selection and collection, analysis of data, and research conclusion. I will use Dey's template, but it should be noted that the methodology of classic grounded theory operates in a cyclical rather than in a linear manner. To further illustrate and contextualize this description of classic GT, I will occasionally provide examples using a hypothetical teacher-researcher in AL undertaking a grounded theory project.

Research initiation

The methodology of grounded theory, as with most qualitative research, begins in an open-ended, exploratory manner. It becomes more specific as the research progresses. A grounded theorist starts with a broad issue of professional interest. For a teacher-researcher in AL, this could naturally be within the context of a class or a language department. Through observations and informal conversations, the researcher becomes intrigued by certain problems that people seem to be having, or habitual activities that they find puzzling. Specific issues, however, are not decided before going into the field. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, pp. 45–46), this issue 'emerges' as the researcher inductively begins to either notice regularly occurring problems and patterns of behavior, or hear certain similar words or phrases repeated by many different informants. The basic attitude at this point is one of inquisitiveness as theorists constantly ask themselves, 'What is going on here?'

Those whose research beliefs are more in tune with the paradigms of pattern will be quick to point out at this juncture that no one asks questions in a vacuum. Glaser and Strauss accept this point and ask researchers to strive for a meta-awareness of their perspectives so that they can both assess and accept their limitations. All researchers have varying measures of *theoretical sensitivity*, which as Glaser explains, consists of 'the social psychology of the analyst; that is, his skill, fatigue, maturity, cycling of motivation, lifecycle interest, insights into an ideation of data' (Glaser 1978, p. 2). The researcher's theoretical sensitivity is enhanced by recognizing the influence of their experiences and by their depth of knowledge of the literature in their field (Corbin and Strauss 1990, p. 180). However, even though grounded theorists should have within their mind-hoard a wealth of academic knowledge tempered by life experiences, it is crucial for them to keep all of this in

escrow during the beginning of the research process. The goal at the onset is 'entering the research setting with as few pre-determined ideas as possible'. (Glaser 1978, pp. 2–3), which also requires that, during the early stages of research, they avoid consulting any of the scholarly literature that addresses what they think might be the emergent problem or process (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 37). Grounded theorists will record their ideas and hypotheses in a notebook as memos. If these initial musings are backed up by what one learns later on from the informants, the notions can be further scrutinized. Otherwise, they will have to be discarded. The purpose here is for the theorist to avoid developing a confirmation bias based on either her own ideas or from the perspective of earlier studies, and 'to remain open to what is actually happening' (Glaser 1978, p. 3).

In the case of our imaginary AL researcher, she might deduce that the university students in a small Japanese institution are demotivated, or that perhaps they are uncertain about communication strategies in English. At this stage in classic grounded theory, the researcher writes these thoughts down in a notebook intended for memos, but again, she does not begin a literature search on student motivation or Japanese communication strategies. Her first flush of ideas, while not to be rejected, are treated as working hypotheses that will stand or fall, depending on what is learned later on from more informants in the field.

Data selection and collection

Glaser and Strauss describe grounded theory as a mixed-methods approach, in that it is capable of utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods for theorization. This is true, but most grounded theory studies have employed only qualitative methods (something suggested in the subtitle of their book: '*Strategies for Qualitative Research*'). Data usually consists of open-ended interviews, participant observation, and study of field materials (Benoliel 1996, p. 407, Backman and Kyngas 1999, p. 149). Interviews are often unstructured in the beginning, but shift later to more focused exchanges as the research progresses. Documents from the field, such as photos, correspondence, video, and fliers are collected. Anything that seems to communicate a certain message, or which is evocative of some significant symbolic meaning, is considered potential data. Like interviews, the analysis of these items will be unstructured and exploratory at first, but will become more focused later on specific issues.

In research aimed at confirming or falsifying a deductive theory, a problem, hypothesis, and subjects are chosen before the investigation. In grounded theory, however, the informants are not chosen until the initial research begins. It is only after the emergence of potential problems, themes, or processes from the researcher's first interviews or other forms of investigation that she begins to purposely search for other people, documents, and data that might shed further light on the issues at hand. This investigative practice is called *theoretical sampling*, which Glaser and Strauss

defined as 'the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find it, in order to develop his theory as it emerges' (1967/1999, p. 45). Theoretical sampling continues throughout the grounded theory research project. New leads and new potential informants will be sought as the data becomes more focused and nuanced, because as Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, p. 45) state, 'This process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory'.

Data analysis

Data selection and analysis are undertaken at the same time. The theorist writes a summary of each interview as soon as possible after the event. This summary is then coded. Coding in grounded theory derives from Glaser's knowledge of *explication de texte* (Glaser 1998, p. 29). Unfortunately for new researchers, however, *Discovery* did not describe the coding process in any detail. We will return to coding in later chapters, but at this juncture, my reading of Glaser and Strauss suggests that 'coding' refers to what a researcher finds significant in sections of discourse or in other data (pictures, posters, archival material, etc.). These summaries are written as gerunds or as pithy, descriptive phrases. When one reads very old works of European literature, it is common to find phrases written in the margins next to large blocks of text, which represent the attempt of a later commentator at summarizing and highlighting the most important takeaway message to be found within that particular section. Grounded theory coding is similarly interpretive, since it is the grounded theorist who operates as the central processor of data. Predetermined coding inventories are never used, because Glaser states that they are unlikely to be related to what is going on in the data or what is taking place in the field (Glaser 1978, p. 58). All of the codes in grounded theory are created out of the interaction between theorists and their informants and collected data.

Because Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, pp. 36–37) were inconsistent in their early nomenclature, they also referred to higher level codes as 'categories'. The substantive codes (or categories) created from the beginning interviews will be used to interpret the data from successive interviews. When the data does not fit these codes, new codes are created (Corbin and Holt 2004, p. 53). Later, researchers may find that they need to go back and change the earlier codes to fit more accurately what seems to be going on in the growing body of collected data. Exceptions that contradict the more regularly observed patterns of behavior are important, since these define the limitations of the code, and lead to a richer comprehension of what may be going on among the people they are studying. Glaser and Strauss called this back-and-forth process of analysis the *constant comparative method* (1967/1999, p. 102).

Returning to our imaginary grounded theorist in applied linguistics, after interviewing her first student, she would write a summary of the event, and

if she has recorded the interview, she would also transcribe the data. She then begins coding the data, line by line, incident by incident, and asking all the while, 'What seems to be happening in the data?' 'What is this data a study of?' (Glaser 1978, p. 57). After writing these codes in the margins of the transcripts and making memos of any good ideas or hunches that come to mind, in a mental process known as *abduction*, she begins to wonder if her students are more interested in talking about the personality traits of language teachers than in any discussion concerning student motivation or communication strategies. She interviews another student, codes the data, writes memos, and then moves on to interview another student and repeats the process. Gradually, categories such as 'being kind' and 'working hard for students' or 'encouraging students to try' are among the common themes mentioned by students about what they wished they could receive from their language teachers. The researcher then compares these frequent categories while continuing to code from different data sources and informants. She asks herself, 'How are the incidents described in the interviews similar or different?' These questions give rise to various properties that further describe the emerging categories. The researcher's description of the similar and negative cases of the categories and their properties are all written down as *theoretical memos* (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 108) – that is, memos about her emerging ideas and not necessarily just descriptive reflections on the empirical data. Additional contradictory cases help to form exceptions to the developing theoretical rule by revealing the limits of the categories (Corbin and Holt 2004, p. 51). The grounded researcher is encouraged to create diagrammatic representations of what seems to be happening in the data. The earlier level of writing memos continues; any idea that comes to the researcher's mind while coding or thinking about the data is written down as a memo and becomes part of the theory-building process.

Constantly writing memos about what was said, done, or written by the informants and recording the analyst's theoretical thinking about the data are vital methodological practice. Grounded theorists should not dissipate their creative energy by simply talking about their ideas, but instead, they should write them down immediately before they are forever lost (Glaser 1978, p. 8). This is because Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, pp. 28–29) and Glaser (1978, p. 10) learned from experience how one can lose focus by talking too much, especially if one gets bogged down in debating with well-meaning colleagues who either do not understand GTM or are committed to structured data verification. Those with relatively fewer good intentions may simply try to debunk the emerging grounded theory either by pointing out peripheral issues only hinted at within the data or by attempting to foist their own 'pet theory' on the theorist's tentative interpretations. Glaser warns grounded theorists to beware of 'theoretical capitalists' who will try to impose their views on others. Especially if the theorist is a graduate student, one must avoid having his or her research co-opted and becoming a 'proletariat tester' of someone else's ungrounded theoretical perspective (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, pp. 10–11, 260–262). Others will want to

suggest new categories that do not fit with the collected data, or put down the researcher's coded interpretation of the data as fallacious though suggesting hypothetical exceptions to the categories. Glaser responds,

> The grounded theorist need only remember that the most parsimonious theory of the greatest scope uses only those categories that emerge as working the emergent problems. If a so-called category were relevant, it would emerge on its own and integrate into the theory. To be sure it can always be forced on the data, but that still does not make it relevant or work unless it earns its way into the theory in the first place.
>
> (1978, p. 10)

The intent, however, is not to justify a closed attitude towards one's colleagues even as one is striving to be open to the informants. If an analyst, after writing memos and spending many hours theorizing about the data, still has the time and energy to speak with colleagues who are uninformed about GTM, anything they note which is grounded in the collected data, and which can suggest more descriptive properties for the emerging categories, will contribute to the pragmatic worth and explanatory power of the grounded theory.

Continuing with theoretical sampling, theorists begin to search for other informants and venues where they can discover more about the developing categories and properties. It is at this time that they will start accessing the scholarly literature, but only that which deals specifically with the issues or problems as discussed by the informants. The writers of these books and research papers are to be employed less as unquestioned authorities and more as another body of informants who can provide additional detail and depth to the researchers' growing understanding (Glaser 1978, pp. 31–33).

To offer an example of how this might work, returning to our grounded theorist in AL, after comparing the views of college students within the category of language teachers who are 'being kind', she might notice that some of the properties were practices such as 'giving small treats to students', 'playing with students after school', and 'giving parental advice to students'. She looks for another venue where such 'good teacher' practices are visible to outside observers. Eventually, she gains access to a local kindergarten. There she speaks with teachers about the reasons for such practices and learns more about the properties of this category. Reading the literature on Japanese parenting practices also helps her further understand ideals to which the students had referred. Had the researcher accessed the literature on motivation in language learning, she might have missed the importance of parental care among her learners. Now, however, she has something new to add to the scholarly discourse regarding second language education in Japanese universities.

At this stage, the grounded theorist is focused less on individual people and places, and more on studying the beliefs, problems, solutions, regular patterns of behavior that transcend specific personalities and venues (Glaser

1978, p. 69). This methodology goes through multiple loops of data collection, coding, and memoing until the researcher finds that very little new information or additional properties are forthcoming. When this takes place, the categories have reached a state of 'theoretical saturation'. In puzzle-like fashion, the researcher then begins to create theoretical connections between the major categories. This is theoretical coding, and it is intended to describe the relevance and interconnectedness of the categories. Eventually, the researcher selects a core index, what Glaser later refined to include either a core category or a basic social process (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, pp. 191–193, Glaser 1978, pp. 94–97). The core category is the central theme that links together the most frequent categories that have been uncovered.

In highly bureaucratized organizations, the word 'process' is as ubiquitous as it is abstract, so it is necessary here to unpack what process means in grounded theory. A basic social process represents the stages of social interaction within a core category. Basic social processes are at the core of many other supporting social processes that will have been observed repeatedly in empirical field data. Social processes have beginnings, climaxes, challenges, contingencies, and consequences. There are strategies and sometimes other transactions that take place in tandem with the main focus of activity. For example, 'collecting tests' would be a social process that has a trajectory with incumbent problems and workaround solutions. 'Grading papers' would be another process. This might be affected by simultaneously occurring processes such as attending faculty meetings, giving open day lessons, and writing research papers. All of these interrelated processes might end up becoming part of a larger conceptual category labeled as end-term madness. Structuring data and activities along the lines of process is the way that grounded theorists lift meaning out of what may have seemed before to have been mundane or even chaotic human behavior (Eaves 2001, p. 659). While process and movement are at the heart of grounded theory, the theory does not attempt to explain everything about every category discovered, or to provide an all-encompassing, ethnographic portrait. A cogent grounded theory will emphasize the categories that contain the largest amount of supporting data, memos, properties, and social interactions – and those that help to understand the nature of the basic social process or main issue.

Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, pp. 114–115) state that the grounded theory should then be raised from its specific context of study to a more formal level so that it can be applied to other social settings. If in our imaginary AL study, the basic social process was interpreted as 'the search for parental intimacy' among Japanese college students, would this theory also offer insight into what was happening at orphanages, or in a prison, or perhaps in a facility for people suffering from certain addictions? Such inquiry could lead to further avenues of insightful research.

Research conclusion

The grounded theorist will have ample material for a doctoral thesis, book, or a significant number of scholarly journal papers. As in other qualitative

research traditions, grounded theory research can be written in several ways. One is an analytical style that explains the conceptual categories, their theoretical connectedness, and then funnels down to the core category or basic social process. Another approach is to start with the core category and to write a narrative that fills out the interconnected categories and their properties before again returning to the core issue or issues (Creswell 1998, pp. 178–181, Glaser 1998, pp. 193–195, Strauss and Corbin 1998, pp. 259–263). Grounded theory does not feature 'thick description' (Geertz 1973, p. 8), but rather, engages in *thick theorization*. It fits the data gathered from the informants and offers a rational framework for understanding their sometimes perplexing social behavior. It is important to remember here that Glaser and Strauss put 'a high emphasis on *theory as process* – that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not a perfected product' (1967/1999, p. 32). These social processes are continuous and regularly reconstructed. In addition, they saw a good grounded theory not only as flexible enough to grow over time but also one that could be applied to people in other settings outside that of the original study.

Drift and divergence

As Glaser and Strauss resumed their teaching careers, the success of their book stimulated considerable interest among students in their classes and among the swelling ranks of qualitative researchers around the world. In the ensuing years, however, Glaser and Strauss quietly drifted apart until the 1990s, when their previously unstated philosophical differences erupted into a bitter public debate on methodology.

Glaser and Strauss's *Discovery* was thin in details about how one should go about discovering a grounded theory, and with some sections of their book described as bordering on the mystic (Melia 1996, p. 377), students began pressing them for more specific methodological advice. In the beginning, both struggled to articulate the methodology, partly because they had created classic grounded theory while in the process of conducting their research (Morse et al. 1994, p. 211). Later, when attempting to explain the procedures and philosophical rationale for doing grounded theory, it became obvious to students attending their separate seminars that Glaser and Strauss seemed blithely unaware that they viewed grounded theory from radically different perspectives (Charmaz, personal communication).

Other events exacerbated the gradual drift that took place between the two. A clash of departmental politics and unfulfilled expectations resulted in Glaser being passed over for tenure (Stern 1994, p. 219, Gilgun 2010). Glaser left, started his own publishing company (Sociology Press), and created his own private grounded theory institute. From this venue, he was able to attract students on his own terms and apply his genius to further promulgating his vision for grounded theory. Strauss continued his academic career at USCF and began tinkering with GTM to make it more accessible to graduate students and to bring it in line with the paradigmatic shifts that were taking place within the qualitative research community.

Further afield, qualitative researchers inspired by their reading of *Discovery* were beginning to use grounded theory with greater degrees of eclecticism (Stern 1994, pp. 218–219, May 1996, Wilson and Hutchinson 1996, p. 123, Eaves 2001, p. 662). Even within the field of nursing science, Benoliel's survey (1996, p. 412) lamented that only a small number of researchers were using the full repertoire of methodological practices recommended by Glaser and Strauss. She also observed that many researchers were mixing aspects of grounded theory with phenomenological practices, or were neglecting key practices in GTM, such as keeping memos, engaging in constant comparison, conducting theoretical sampling, and using theoretical coding. Even more papers were claiming to use the methodology of grounded theory, but besides a cursory in-text citation to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) work, there was little evidence that GTM had been followed at all (Benoliel 1996, p. 412).

Strauss was deeply concerned with this trend. He expressed doubt that researchers could do grounded theory without expert guidance (Strauss 1987, pp. 28–30, 38). Glaser also viewed the issue of 'minus-mentorees' as one of the greatest challenges facing GT (Glaser 1999, p. 842). In order to keep enthusiastic and well-meaning researchers from further eroding the basic tenets of GTM, Glaser and Strauss set out, each on his own, to write guidebooks that they hoped would return grounded theory to the firm footing it deserved.

Glaserian grounded theory

Glaser's *Theoretical Sensitivity*, published in 1978, represents the first practical handbook for doing grounded theory, and it soon became a primary source text for budding grounded theorists during the 1980s. This is called Glaserian grounded theory by many (Stern 1994, Cutcliffe 2000, Campbell 2002, Heath and Cowley 2004), though Glaser has always preferred the term classic grounded theory (Glaser and Holton 2004).

At its core, Glaserian grounded theory is a more detailed exposition of classic grounded theory. Glaser is firm about researchers avoiding the literature that seems to pertain to an area of research interest before entering in the field and during the early stages of analysis. He insists on the avoidance of purposeful sampling in order that researchers can gain a broader sense of what might be taking place in the field. After frequent problems and patterns begin to emerge from early interviews, the grounded theorist will investigate these patterns using theoretical sampling. Although he relies mostly on interview data, Glaser states that collecting historical documents or other written materials can be part of the research process.

Coding for Glaser is defined as 'conceptualizing data by constant comparison of incident with incident, and incident with concept' (Glaser 1992, p. 38). He expands on this notion by suggesting several stages of analysis. First, the theorist reads his or her written summaries of interviews or other documents, and through the practice of open coding, (also called *substantive*

coding), the researcher goes line by line through the data or unit of idea by unit of idea and assigns them interpretive titles. Sometimes the informants use key terms or phrases that seem to be significant to the generation of the theory. These words can be used verbatim as codes as well, and they are called *in vivo codes*.

As with the original grounded theory methodology, sets of substantive codes that seem to have some thread of commonality are collapsed together into slightly more encompassing code labels. Glaser (1978, p. 71) suggests that 10 to 15 codes are sufficient for creating a good grounded theory. The analyst then moves to selective coding, in which s/he only looks for examples of these labels. The theorist carefully studies conditions and contradictions, as well as any other social dynamics that make these patterns significant. To do this, the researcher uses theoretical coding, which seeks to link the selective codes together into an interpretive, heuristic framework. Glaser (1978, pp. 74–82, 1999) provides 18 theoretical coding 'families' that could be used, from a study of the 'six Cs' (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions) to process staging. Throughout this process, the theorist is writing memos of good ideas or inductive musings that in the short term define the next steps of the investigation and later on might find their way into the theory. After the analysis of the data becomes rich in conceptual detail, and the researcher has compared the similar incidents, codes, properties, and memos, s/he will create larger categories, which will encompass large sections of the empirical data and inductive analysis (Glaser 1978, p. 70). The types of labels assigned to the constructs will be more abstract than the data used to create them (e.g. 'soft mobbing' or 'decoy problems'). Additional theoretical sampling may be necessary to learn more about the properties of these categories. After more constant comparison and considerable inductive thinking, a basic social process, or a core category, emerges from the data.

Glaser puts more emphasis on theory generation than theory verification. He argues that if the researcher has truly been open to the data and has constantly searched for negative cases in order to challenge earlier notions within the developing theory, verification will take place during the process of coding (Glaser 1978, p. 60). A grounded theory for Glaser results in a network of interpretive constructs that have multiple links around a basic social process or problem. A good grounded theory fits with what is happening in the data. It is able to pragmatically 'explain what happened, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening in an area of substantive or formal inquiry' (Glaser 1978, p. 4). The ability to predict what will happen gives the theory relevance for those seeking an element of control over their environment. As we saw earlier in classic grounded theory, Glaser states that a good grounded theory should be modifiable, permeable to new information, and flexible enough to fit new conditions.

Grounded theories as written by Glaser and his students are succinct in their explanations. Usually the main tenets of the theory and the basic social process are stated up front. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the

categories and the many conditions and/or processes that affect them in the social realm under study. Glaserian grounded theories have a terse clinical air about them and are often replete with innovative, if not quirky, technical terms.

Straussian grounded theory

Strauss wrote *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Strauss 1987), which presented his perspective on how to undertake the grounded theory methodology. Many of his ideas were virtually identical to Glaser, and he even obtained permission from Glaser to use large excerpts of *Theoretical Sensitivity* in the second half of the book (Strauss 1987, p. xiv). However, Straussian GT (Campbell 2002, p. 37) also contained additional coding strategies and ways of interpreting qualitative data that were distinct. Strauss had been teaching these coding methods to help graduate students, such as Juliet Corbin, who later became his assistant and research collaborator for the book *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In their work, they presented what they felt to be a more fluid and flexible methodology (Corbin and Strauss 1990, p. 4). A second edition was published posthumously by Corbin in honor of Strauss after he died in 1996 (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory is similar to Glaser's in that both rely on constant comparison, theoretical sampling, fracturing data into codes, and reconstructing data within an explanatory framework. Methodologically, however, it was a significant departure from GTM as it was described in *Discovery*.

In Straussian GT, the researcher is encouraged to access theoretical literature before going into the field or very early in the research process. They believe this *heightens* theoretical sensitivity and strengthens the potential of generating new ideas and insights. Also, in the search for informants, a modicum of purposeful sampling is allowable. They argue,

> The ideal form of theoretical sampling might be difficult to carry out if the researcher does not have unlimited access to persons or sites or does not know where to go to maximize similarities and differences. Realistically, the researcher might have to sample on the basis of what is available.
>
> (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 210)

Strauss and Corbin believe that the sampling of informants (as with coding) should have different routines for each stage of the process. Therefore, in the beginning, researchers should participate in *open sampling*, in which the researcher speaks with anyone at the chosen research site. Once the grounded theorist starts perceiving certain patterns and themes in the coded data he will shift to *relational and variational sampling*, in which the researcher begins to investigate 'incidents that demonstrate dimensional

range or variation of a concept or the relationship among concepts' (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 210). After further coding, the researcher then proceeds to *discriminate sampling*, where 'a researcher chooses the sites, persons and documents that will maximize opportunities for comparative analysis' (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 211). All of this is intended to aid the researcher either to validate the theory or, if after encountering new information that contradicts it, modify the theory so that it better reflects what is happening in the data.

Strauss and Corbin's deceptively simple definition of coding is 'the process of analyzing data' (1990, p. 61), but their style of coding is far more demanding than Glaser's. Glaser prefers summaries of interviews rather than full transcripts and encourages the coding of incidents or units of meaning that can include sizable blocks of text. Strauss and Corbin, on the other hand, insist on researchers looking at each line of transcribed interviews, or other written data, and sometimes studying each word. As with sampling, they feel that the process of constant comparison should be different for each level within their coding methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 62). Open coding for Strauss and Corbin means studying the data word by word and line by line, and constantly asking the question, 'What is this about?' Instead of bracketing one's viewpoint and letting the data speak for itself, as in Glaser's approach, Straussian GT suggests that researchers should employ the full range of their background knowledge to interpret the data both deductively and dimensionally (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 101). Taking their inspiration from the earlier work of Chicago School sociologist Everett Hughes (1958, pp. 88–89), they devote an entire chapter that offers a number of imaginative 'flip-flop', 'far-out' and 'close-in' methods for making comparisons in data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, Strauss and Corbin 1998). As an example, if we were to consider a code such as 'accessing the system' (in terms of an international student trying to gain access to bureaucratic services in an Anglophone university), a far-out comparison would require the grounded theorist to ask him or herself the question, 'How is an international student trying to access the system viewed by some in the university administration as tantamount to robbing a bank?' The researchers write these musings as memos. However, while analysts are free to use their ideas, they are instructed never to *impose* their notions on the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 94).

Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) add another form of coding in tandem with this stage called axial coding. This requires the analyst to compare each of the open codes with the causal conditions, intervening conditions, context, action strategies, and consequences. If the researcher does not know about these factors, then s/he will return to the field to find out by conducting relational and variational sampling. The grounded theorist writes conceptual labels in a matrix around axial codes, resulting very quickly in a large amount of interpretive data and hundreds of code labels, though in the second edition of the book, Strauss and Corbin allow for researchers to stop coding once clear patterns have become apparent (Strauss

and Corbin 1998, p. 70). Locke summarizes the underlying intent of Strauss and Corbin by explaining that, in contrast to Glaser's 'six Cs', axial coding in Straussian GT seeks to highlight action, strategies, and symbolic interactions (Locke 2005, p. 77). After the codes have been reduced into categories, the Straussian version then proceeds to selective coding.

While there is no counterpart in Glaser to Strauss and Corbin's axial coding, what Strauss and Corbin call selective coding corresponds to Glaser's theoretical coding. Selective coding is concerned with 'integrating and refining the theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 143). In this stage, the analyst identifies a core category that has emerged from the earlier coding processes, and then proceeds to connect the other categories to it 'in terms of their properties, dimensions and relationships' (Walker and Myrick 2006, p. 556).

Strauss and Corbin then introduce what they call the conditional/consequential matrix (Strauss and Corbin 1998). When used correctly, they claim that it will help to further open up the data and encourage the researcher to constantly compare the various circles of familial, group-based, institutional, local, regional, and wider influences on the phenomenon under study. The conditional matrix requires the analyst to find out the conditions/consequences and actions/interactions within each of the categories, starting from the level of very individual issues all the way to major sociological processes. Any insights gained from this exercise are expressed as conceptual labels that, while highly abstract, are linked to the data via the open, axial, and selective codes.

Everything is finally reconstructed into an 'explanatory theoretical framework' which is often accompanied by a diagrammatic representation of the trajectory of causes, consequences and changes taking place in the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 22). This is a key difference between Straussian and Glaserian GT, in that Strauss and Corbin are more interested in explaining the symbolic interactions surrounding a specific *phenomenon* than they are in a basic social process that emerges because of a significant *problem*.

Straussian GT produces a theory similar to Glaser's, in that it seeks to be empirically grounded and modifiable once new data is introduced (Strauss and Corbin 1998, pp. 24, 34). However, they are less concerned about prediction and control as they are about creating a theory that is creative, pragmatic, and which has been validated (1998, pp. 99, 161). 'Our purpose', they state, 'is to develop [a] valid and grounded theory that speaks to the issues and concerns of those we study' (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 265). To demonstrate validity, they suggest eight criteria starting from whether the concepts have been generated from the data and are interrelated and have many linkages between each other, to reporting findings that seem significant to the academic community and which are flexible enough to stand the test of time (Strauss and Corbin 1998, pp. 270–272).

Strauss and Corbin write their grounded theories in a narrative form. The accounts are similar to the accessible reading style found in Chicago School

sociological works and are replete with quotes from the informants that serve both to enhance the richness of description and demonstrate that the concepts have been generated from the data. They state, however, that there is no one correct way to write up a grounded theory paper and leave it up to the style and preferences of each individual writer (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 145).

Conflict and recriminations

A considerable body of literature has documented the very public falling out that took place in the wake of Strauss's works (e.g. Stern 1994, Melia 1996, Rennie 1998, p. 102, Allan 2003, p. 2, Boychuk-Duchscher and Morgan 2004). Leading up to the publication of Strauss and Corbin's *Basics in Qualitative Research*, Glaser, who had seen a draft of the manuscript, wrote a number of passionate and then scathing letters in an attempt to induce Strauss either to pull the book from publication or to sit down and rewrite the entire work with him as the second author. Strauss declined and went on with his planned collaboration with Corbin.

Using his publishing company as a platform, in 1992 Glaser gave full vent to his feelings of betrayal through *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*. In what should be required reading for anyone who doubts the rationale of peer review, *Basics of Grounded Theory* was a passionate piece characterized by immoderate language and personal attack. Glaser begins by denouncing Strauss as 'immoral' (1992, p. 2), and by the final chapter, he plaintively proclaims his love for Strauss while heaping abuse on Juliet Corbin for somehow leading Strauss astray (1992, p. 126). Glaser concludes by declaring himself a guardian of grounded theory: 'I am not a neutral third party just writing a critique. I am one of the originators, with the right to keep my product on course for its users . . . My intellectual product's life was at stake' (1992, pp. 121–122).

The patently unpleasant aspects of *Basics* aside, Glaser's main argument was that Strauss and Corbin's methodology was not true grounded theory, but instead 'full conceptual description' (Glaser 1992, pp. 2–3). Rather than allowing the theory to emerge from the data, Glaser argued that Strauss and Corbin had created overly complex coding schemes that forced the data into preconceived categories. He criticized their use of background knowledge and deductive reasoning in theory construction. In particular, he questioned their calls for the verification of a grounded theory:

> Gone in Strauss' method was our initial clear approach in Discovery of Grounded Theory to the systematic generation of theory from data! Strauss' techniques are fractured, detailed, cumbersome and overself-conscious. They interfere with the emergence and discovery, which comes from the constant comparative method of coding and analysis.
>
> (Glaser 1992, p. 60)

Strauss never publicly responded to Glaser. The closest he came was in quoting Dewey in the foreword of his book with Corbin, stating calmly, 'If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his mind' (Dewey 1934, p. 50, in Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. vii).

In addition, to counter the claim that their version represents an erosion of GTM (Stern 1994), Strauss and Corbin pointed out that their approach should be seen more as an evolution of the original version; their techniques were only a sample of many possible approaches (Strauss and Corbin 1994, p. 273). The notion of grounded theory methodology as being in a state of constant evolution was something that Glaser himself had once acknowledged. 'By its very nature grounded theory produces ever opening and evolving theory on a subject . . . This nature also applies to the method itself and its methodology' (Glaser 1978, p. ix).

A subplot of the human drama underpinning this conflict is a struggle over how much 'parental control' should be maintained in the development of grounded theory. Glaser seems to have wanted to continue to claim his patriarchal authority over GT even after it had, so to speak, left home and gone into the world on its own, while Strauss and Corbin had a more permissive style of methodological parenting:

> No inventor has permanent possession of the invention – certainly not even of its name – and furthermore we would not wish to do so. No doubt we will always prefer the later versions of grounded theory that are closest to or elaborate on our own, but a child once launched is very much subject to a combination of its origins and the evolving contingencies of life. Can it be otherwise with a methodology?
>
> (Strauss and Corbin 1994, p. 283)

Gibson and Hartman (2014, p. 17) have noted that the split between Glaser and Strauss took place also because neither took the time to understand each other's different paradigmatic views. Glaser was especially resistant to focusing on the philosophical, opting instead to simply get on with it and to just doing grounded theory. Therefore, instead of combining their relative strengths as they had done in 1967, they became increasingly isolated from each other.

Following the publication of *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*, the grounded theory community rapidly split into Straussians and Glaserians. Just as when siblings take the side of one parent over the other, or perhaps, as Dey describes, in 'the way exponents of various cults bicker over the right interpretation of a religion' (Dey 1999, p. 2), a large body of literature soon followed, each accusing the other of debasing the methodology (Stern 1994, May 1996). The ubiquitous use of 'partial' forms of GT was regarded as illegitimate (Becker 1993, Parry 1998, p. 90). Each faction accused the other of selectively rewriting GT, a form of heresy known as 'methodological transgressions' (Goulding 2005, pp. 161–163).

External critiques of grounded theory

Observers outside of the grounded theory community also began raising questions about GTM. Most of these critiques centered on terminological confusion (Melia 1996, p. 377, Backman and Kyngas 1999, p. 152, Bell 2005, p. 20), overcomplicated methods (Backman and Kyngas 1999, Allan 2003, Boychuk-Duchscher and Morgan 2004, Greckhamer and Koro-Ljungberg 2005), an aversion to recognizing the authority of established theoretical literature, and an overemphasis on inductive reasoning (Altrichter and Posch 1989, McCann and Clark 2003, Harry et al. 2005, Schenk et al. 2007).

Grounded theorists responded by noting that most of the critics represented those who have never personally used GTM, who have only cursorily read *Discovery*, and who are unaware, as we will soon see, of the growth and evolution experienced by GT over the past 50 years (Charmaz 2006, p. 134). Strauss and Corbin (1994, p. 277) add that most do not realize that both Glaser and Strauss sought to clarify and moderate many of the earlier claims and enthusiastic statements made about GTM in the 1960s. A number of books on GTM available outside of AL have done a better job at deciphering the terminology, thus making the GTM more accessible today than it has ever been (Charmaz 2006, Corbin and Strauss 2008). The impression of grounded theory as overly reliant on induction stems in part from Glaserian polemics (Glaser 1992, Glaser 1998, Glaser 2001, Glaser 2002, Glaser 2003, Glaser and Holton 2004), but this has been balanced by later grounded theorists who work from the concept of *abductive inference*, a form of logical thinking proposed by the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce (1955, p. 150, in Richardson & Kramer 2006, p. 499). Abduction allows only those theoretical explanations that researchers know are *actually possible*, based on their background knowledge and experience. Indeed, this notion has resided *in potentia* within GTM since the very beginning:

> No sociologist can probably erase from his mind all the theory he knows before he begins his research. Indeed the trick is to line up what one takes as theoretically possible with what one is finding in the field. Such existing sources of insight are to be cultivated though not at the expense of insights generated by the qualitative research, which are still closer to the data. A combination of both is definitely desirable.
>
> (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 253)

If someone, for example, steps out of their house some bright summer morning and notices that the grass in the front lawn is wet, the person will *abduct* that either it has rained, there was dew overnight, or that someone has watered the grass (Baghat et al. 2000). Instead of induction, grounded theorists use abductive inference to guide their analysis (Kools et al. 1996, Hutchinson and Wilson 2001, Heath and Cowley 2004).

A more serious criticism, however, focuses on the tendency of both Glaserian and Straussian GTM to let the data speak for itself. Burawoy (1991, p. 282) argues, 'In focusing on variables that can be manipulated within the immediate situation, [grounded theory] represses the broader macro forces that both limit change and create domination in the micro sphere'. To offer a purely hypothetical example to illustrate Burawoy's contention, suppose that during the Second World War, a grounded theorist, who was a member of the Nazi Party, sought to discover the basic social process of the transportation office under the administration of Adolf Eichmann. It would be very likely that, based on the interview data and observations of daily issues in the office, the main problems and processes to emerge from the informants would be notions such as 'keeping the trains on time' and 'negotiating transportation stoppages'. This would completely miss the broader issue – that of millions of Jews being carted off to be exterminated in concentration camps. Layder (1993, pp. 59–60) identifies the lack of critical awareness as a major methodological flaw and calls for grounded theorists to give greater consideration to those oppressive and otherwise destructive influences that have a bearing on the empirical study.

The question of whether grounded theory implicitly oppresses the powerless by maintaining the status quo echoes similar criticisms once raised against symbolic interactionism several decades ago (Fine 1993). Charmaz (2006, pp. 134–135) concedes that earlier grounded theorists had little interest in issues related to power and inequality, but this, she argues, was a shortcoming of the *theorists*, not of the *methodology*. In another paper (Charmaz 2005), she has stated that grounded theorists can and should start considering issues of power, inequality, and social justice. This point will be revisited in the next chapter.

Towards equilibrium and methodological tolerance

In the years leading up to his death, Anselm Strauss had come to terms with the ways in which researchers were reworking his and Glaser's guidelines for GTM (Strauss and Corbin 1994, p. 276). And while Glaser continued to disapprove of those who remodeled GTM without his approval, accusing them of having 'coopted, corrupted, mauled and mugged GT for their own purposes' (Glaser 2003, p. 200), the GT community has developed to the point where it can tolerate diversity of practice. There is more space for informed researchers to balance the prescriptions of the past with the pragmatic needs of today:

> Both Glaser and Strauss have made significant contributions. We see this divergence in emphasis as a 'both-and' issue, not an 'either-or'. In other words, we believe there is both room for researcher creativity (as Glaser claims) and rigorous coding procedures (as Strauss claimed), rather than excluding either view of Grounded Theory. How to interpret and utilize specific procedures as suggested by their differing perspectives, is best left up to the researcher and his or her research questions.
>
> (Echevarria-Doan and Tubbs 2005, p. 45)

In retrospect, what happened in the early days of grounded theory was very similar to the experience of other qualitative research traditions, such as symbolic interactionism or phenomenology (Stryker 1987, Denscombe 2003). By studying the background, early practices, debates, and critiques surrounding the methodology of grounded theory, we can see that while this important period in the development of grounded theory was admittedly messy, it was necessary. 'Differences in approach to grounded theory', write McCann and Clark (2003, p. 27), 'indicate maturation and further development of the methodology rather than its demise'. What has emerged today is something far more flexible, durable, and far more mature than what many would have first imagined. In the next chapter, we will consider this diversity of methodological practice, which is now a major feature of modern grounded theory.

3 Contemporary grounded theory

A maturing family of methodologies

Our review of classic grounded theory was in some respects something of an academic exercise. Apart from Glaser and Strauss, little evidence exists of anyone undertaking the methodology as described in *Discovery* (Bryman 1988, p. 85). This should be kept in mind when encountering papers breezily claiming to be based on grounded theory, citing Glaser and Strauss's original work, and slipping into theoretical discussions without methodological explanations. Even without this problem, 'grounded theory', explain Corbin and Holt (2004, p. 50), 'is a method in flux and a method that has different meanings to different people', Out of the crucible of restive discourse, several versions of GTM have emerged, which Bryant and Charmaz (2007, pp. 11–12) describe as acting more like a 'family of methods'. In addition to the Glaserian and Straussian styles, there is the lesser-known but surprisingly influential form of GTM known as dimensional analysis, a very popular constructivist version, and postmodern as well as critical forms of the methodology. Each of these will be surveyed autopoietically in order to reveal grounded theory's potential for addressing multiple perspectives and research purposes. We will then make a perceptible shift to juxtapose GTM with other qualitative research methodologies that are more frequently used in applied linguistics research. By gaining a better understanding of the different forms of grounded theory methodology, we can learn how they complement and contrast with each other, as well as how they are distinct from better-known methodologies in AL. After reading this chapter, you will be able to make informed methodological decisions that will complement your stated paradigmatic beliefs and specific research interests.

Dimensional analysis

Years before controversy erupted between Glaser and Strauss, a former student and colleague of Strauss, Leonard Schatzman (Schatzman and Strauss 1973), was already quietly teaching his version of grounded theory, which he called dimensional analysis. Conceptually, he felt his methodology was more faithful to symbolic interactionism and in practical terms, it was

easier to use than what was being advocated by either Glaser or Strauss (Schatzman 1991, Kools et al. 1996).

Schatzman had studied the literature produced by Glaser and Strauss, and while acknowledging that GTM offered a revolutionary way of working with qualitative data, he was concerned with their obsession over the mechanics of coding. In the case of Strauss, coding was becoming so complex that he felt it short-circuited the natural instincts that people have for studying sociological problems. Schatzman's perspective has much in common with George Kelly's personal construct theory (Kelly 1955/1991), which describes people as incipient scientists testing out their theories of the world through personal empirical experiences (Butt 1998). Straussian and Glaserian GTM were, in his opinion, constricting theory construction at the moment when researchers needed broad mental spaces for natural analysis and theorization (Schatzman 1991, p. 305, Kools et al. 1996, p. 313, Goulding 2005, p. 79). Schatzman also questioned Glaser's insistence of going into the field with a mind open to all possibilities. Consciously suspending one's background knowledge, he argued, might very well lead to discovery, but it could also end up causing a researcher to flail about, drift back and forth, and ignore the obvious aspects of a specific phenomenon. Glaser's polemic, which emphasized induction over deduction, was another of Schatzman's concerns, which was anticipated later critics who were to argue that induction alone is an unreliable form of theoretical reasoning (Schatzman 1991, pp. 306–307).

Schatzman called on researchers to avoid a preoccupation with *ways of doing* GTM and to devote more energy towards *ways of understanding* the data (Schatzman 1991, Robrecht 1995, Kools et al. 1996). Therefore, instead of the complicated coding strategies proposed by Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin, he focused on the *dimensionality* of social phenomenon. A dimension is defined as 'merely one of several attributes or abstract aspects of a constructible reality – for example, the color, size, weight of a physical object; the durability, history, 'openness' of a relationship; or the simplicity, value, popularity of an idea' (Schatzman 1991, p. 310). Researchers enter the field and constantly frame their analysis in terms of 'what all is involved here?' (Schatzman 1991, p. 310). By learning about the most common dimensions of a phenomenon, possible reconstructions can be put forth with explanatory complexity and power: 'The aim of analysis is to discover the meanings of these interactions as they create the observed situation, rather than discover the basic social process' (Robrecht 1995, p. 173).

Schatzman explained dimensionalization as roughly equivalent to what Glaser and Strauss called open coding, except that in his method, 'all codes [are] formed as dimensions of experience without regard, initially, to whether they first 'appear' as structures or processes, contexts or conditions' (1991, p. 310). Using traditional qualitative data sources, such as interviews and field observations, researchers would dimensionalize any common occurrences, events, or symbolic actions in the form of field notes and memos.

Dimensional analysis then shifts from empirical description to abstract theory. The differing perspectives of many informants about a certain

phenomenon are sought out, and these multiple voices are constantly compared until they combine into interesting patterns identified by the researcher. When these dimensions reach 'critical mass' – that is, when the most common attributes of the phenomenon become readily apparent to the researcher (Schatzman 1991, p. 310), s/he studies the dimensions using theoretical sampling (Kools et al. 1996, p. 319). During this stage, the researcher explores the *context* and *conditions* in which the phenomenon happens, the *processes* or *actions* in which people use to deal with certain issues, and finally the *consequences* of what happens. Schatzman created an explanatory matrix that would provide a coherent structure for reporting the grounded theory for a wider audience (Robrecht 1995, p. 174, Kools et al. 1996, p. 320). In the later writing up stage, grounded theories constructed through dimensional analysis begin with a detailed explanation of the research process, and the subsequent theory is then usually written as a narrative (Robrecht 1995, pp. 175–176).

Schatzman taught dimensional analysis at the University of California for nearly 30 years without calling attention to himself or participating in the GT methodological debate. From the classroom, he influenced a large number of students, and his early critique of grounded theory cogently anticipated those who would come to question certain features of Glaserian and Straussian GTM. It is regrettable that he waited until 1991 to publicly introduce dimensional analysis (Kools et al. 1996, p. 313), but his reformulation of grounded theory nevertheless has generated a modest number of papers and theses (e.g. Kools 1997, Velsor 2004, Bowers et al. 2009). Today dimensional analysis is appreciated for providing an example of how abductive inference can ameliorate Glaser's inductive excesses (e.g. Clarke 2005, Goulding 2005, Charmaz 2006) and for stimulating the development of later constructivist and postmodern versions of GTM.

Constructivist grounded theory

Kathy Charmaz, a student of both Glaser and Strauss, was inspired by Strauss's belief in levels of interplay existing between the worldviews of the researcher and informants. For Strauss, the interaction of researchers' unique personal constructs with the data is an integral part of grounded theory generation:

> This interplay, by its very nature, is not entirely objective as some researchers might wish us to believe. Interplay . . . means that a researcher is actively reacting to and working with data. We believe that although a researcher can try to be as objective as possible, in a practical sense, this is not entirely possible.
>
> (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 58)

This perspective was very influential on Charmaz's development of constructivist grounded theory. She contrasts her approach to Glaserian and

Straussian forms of GT, which she has labeled as objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006, pp. 131–132), and sought to modify some aspects of GTM while maintaining the heart of what she sees as the best of Glaser, Strauss, and Schatzman. For example, while she rejects Glaser's earlier emphasis on one core category or process, she emphasizes the notion of 'basic social processes' (Charmaz 2006, p. 20). She stands with Strauss in the belief about multiple worlds and ways of knowing, and with Schatzman, she seeks to avoid bondage to sets of complicated methodological rules that force analysts into generating theory as a product:

> My preference for theorizing – and it is for theorizing, not theory – is unabashedly interpretive. Theorizing is a *practice*. It entails the practical activity of engaging the world and of constructing abstract understandings about and within it. The fundamental contribution of grounded theory methods resides in offering a guide to interpretive theoretical practice not in providing a blueprint for theoretical products.
>
> (Charmaz 2006, pp. 128–129)

Coding in constructivist GTM is similar to that of Glaser's, in that Charmaz has an open coding stage (initial coding), a secondary coding stage that collapses similar codes into more encompassing labels (focused coding), and theoretical coding. She uses memos, theoretical sampling, and constant comparison. While Charmaz does not use axial coding she does not reject its theoretical potential for some situations (Charmaz 2006, pp. 46–66). Charmaz attends to actions and processes within the data in order to avoid imposing her mental constructs on the words of the informants. To do this, she advocates a coding technique learned from Glaser (1978, p. 97), in which the words and actions of informants are written in gerund form. This places the initial focus more on processes than the researcher's interpretation of those events. The goal is to achieve a fair balance between the worldview of the informants and the theorist.

In time, an explanatory grounded theory is *constructed* around a certain area of sociological interest. It is this notion of construction that sets Charmaz apart from Glaser and Strauss, in that she believes that emergence takes place in the mind of the researcher, not from an external reality:

> Neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* grounded theories through our past and present interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices.
>
> (Charmaz 2006, p. 10)

Researchers are also treated as informants, because their entry in the field changes the empirical dynamics of the social arena being studied. Any memos, musings, or observations made by researchers, therefore, are treated as important data.

Presently the use of constructivist GT by scholars from many disciplines is widespread (West 2001, Piantanida et al. 2004, Hellstrom et al. 2005, LaRossa 2005, Mills et al. 2006). In addition, Corbin has come out in support of a constructivist approach to GTM (Corbin and Holt 2004).

Situational analysis

Adele Clarke, another student of Strauss, has sought to 'push grounded theory more fully around the postmodern turn' (2005, p. xxi). Inspired by Strauss's framework of social worlds/arenas/negotiations, a precursor to his conditional matrix (Strauss 1987, pp. 146, 231–245), and repelled in equal measure by what she saw as the oppressive nature of Glaser's basic social process, Clarke has sought to take, in the spirit of Schatzman, grounded theory back to its symbolic interactionist roots, and to highlight the concept of situated knowledge – something which was an important aspect of Mead's philosophy of pragmatism. Stating that 'we are all, like it or not, constantly awash in seas of discourses that are constitutive of life itself' (Clarke 2005, p. xxx), Clarke weaves these threads together with an underpinning of poststructuralist Foucauldian thought to engage in what she has called situational analysis.

Situational analysis rejects the idea of framing data into basic social processes. She seeks to raise awareness to the chaos within our imagined order. Situational analysis brings to the fore as many factors, discourse features and participants as possible, and lays these out in the form of conceptual maps. These maps emphasize the tentative, contradictory and continuous discourse that goes into making an explanatory theory (Clarke 2005, pp. 25, 33), and provide a means for 'thick analyses' couched within a relativist epistemology (Clarke 2005, p. xxiii). Situational maps start out messy and chaotic, but using her situational matrix, which is a combination of the ideas guiding Schatzman's and Strauss's matrices, researchers represent, in an orderly fashion, what they interpret as the most significant factors among many possible choices, including political, non-human elements, organizational, and sociocultural dimensions. Grounded theorists using situational analysis will be careful to explain in the write up stage that the theory presented is only a snapshot of the de-centered maelstrom of multiple perspectives (Clarke 2005, pp. 88–90). A postmodern, relativist grounded theory for Clarke, similar to Charmaz, highlights the process of *theorizing* over theory as a product. Situational analysis uses only open coding techniques in order to engage in 'deconstructive analysis' – that is, analysis that calls attention to both the human and non-human informants that have a bearing on the social phenomenon under study (Clarke 2005, pp. 7–8).

According to Clarke, situational analysis and her matrix can be used as a standalone research methodology, or as an additional technique for other versions of grounded theory (2005, pp. xxxi, 79, 141, 266). Used in this manner, situational analysis can stimulate a realization on the part of the researcher to additional processes and perspectives, which could in turn suggest new avenues for theoretical sampling.

Critical grounded theory

It will be remembered from the last chapter that Charmaz (2005) called for grounded theories that address issues related to power, inequality, gender, and justice. Other grounded theorists have also expressed the need for critical version of GTM (MacDonald 2001, Kushner and Morrow 2003, Gibson 2007, Olesen 2007). Papers have proposed a feminist version of GTM (Wuest 1995, Wuest 2000), criticality in music education (Abrahams 2009), and linking GTM to the paradigmatic views of critical realism (Kempster and Parry 2011, Oliver 2012). To date, the fullest expression of this intellectual ferment came in 2015 with the publication of *English for Academic Purposes in Neoliberal Universities: A Critical Grounded Theory* (Hadley 2015). I present a grounded theory that addresses problems of domination, inequality, exploitation, and professional colonization within the domain of university EAP units in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Critical grounded theory links the concerns of CST with issues that have been discussed so far in this and earlier chapters (Figure 3.1)

Philosophically, I take a critical realist perspective (Bhaskar 1989, Bhaskar 1998, Corson 1997), which views the ontology of social contexts as having multidimensional realisms and an epistemology that allows for multiple ways of knowing. This resonates with Strauss, Corbin, and Charmaz. CST

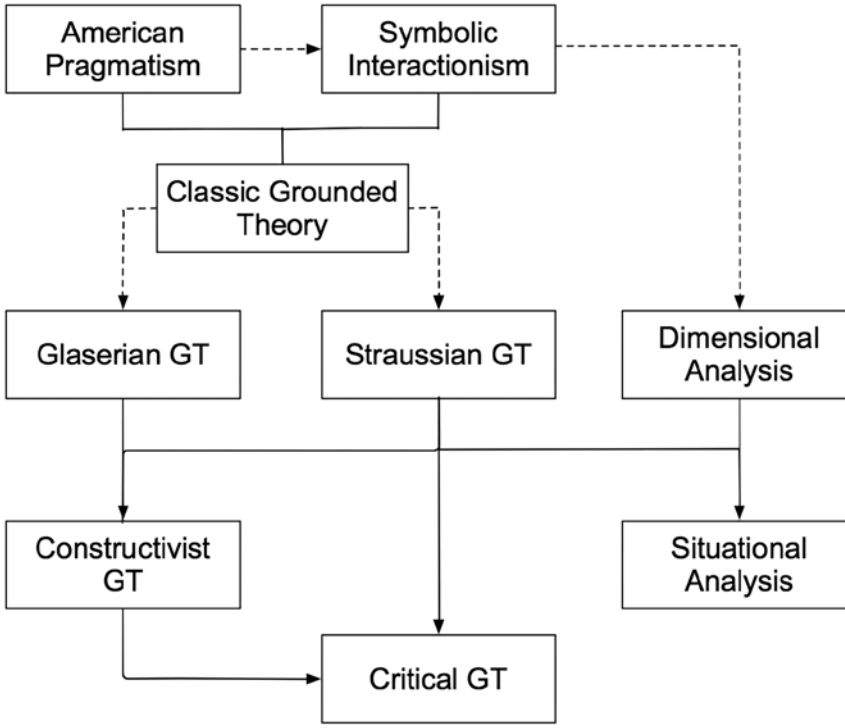


Figure 3.1 A Family Tree of Grounded Theory Methodologies

also draws much of its sustenance from American pragmatism (Lincoln 1998, Ulrich 2007, Bohman 2008), as does GTM. Through the shared heritage of American pragmatism, both GT and CST seek practical outcomes for people in specific situations, and to create theories 'embodied in cognition, speech and action' (Habermas 1984, p. 10). There are versions of CST that focus on reflexive thinking resulting in transformational awareness, (Ulrich 2007, p. 1109).

This element is a major feature of critical and constructivist versions of GTM. Kushner and Morrow (2003, pp. 33–34) also suggest that CST, like modern versions of GTM, relies on abductive inference for theory generation. Sociological inquiry is treated as moving within the flux and flow of paradoxical human discourse, which is also a major feature of American pragmatism. In order to understand these restive dynamics and make provisional sense out of the chaos requires, as with Strauss, structured methodological approaches that can contextualize the theory within its wider historic and cultural milieu. Locating the grounded theory within its historical, political, social, economic, or national context is an important concern that critical grounded theory shares with Strauss.

Similar to Glaser and Charmaz, critical grounded theory features simultaneous data collection and analysis, with open, focused, and theoretical coding stages. After a period of open exploration, more focused investigation follows and then progresses to theory generation. The line of questioning and exploration during open coding and early stages of focused coding is also the same as Glaserian and constructivist grounded theory. In addition to asking oneself, 'What is going on here?', in critical grounded theory, one also asks, 'Why is this going on?' Later, if it seems that issues related to the abuse of power, inequality, gender, class stratification, or related critical concerns are significant features in the data, the following questions, drawn from my reading of CST (Horkheimer 1972/1992, Geuss 1981, Ingram 1990, Agger 1991, Cruickshank 2002, Agger 2006, Bohman 2008), are some of those which are used to guide substantive and theoretical coding:

- How would you describe the way dominance is being maintained here?
- What strategy is being used to privilege one group's narrative over another?
- How are things of value being gained here?
- How could one encapsulate the way in which things of value are being lost here?
- How can you summarize the tactics used to gain an advantage over others?
- How would you describe the activities that led some to be marginalized?
- In what way is the disadvantaged/disenfranchised resisting?
- How might gender/age/class be affecting the dynamics discussed here?
- Who are the 'invisible ones' excluded from the established narrative, and what activities are they engaging in while the dominant group is carrying out their plans?
- What are the problems that arise from the social processes of dominant and disenfranchised groups?

Questions such as these have much in common with Flyvbjerg's (2001, 2004) 'phronetic planning research', which employs four key questions:

- Where are we going?
- Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
- Is the development desirable?
- What, if anything, should we do about it?

This line of inquiry is also used to enhance later substantive and theoretical coding stages, as they help to shed light on the role that power played in human interaction.

After reaching a 'critical mass' – that is, after an understanding of the social processes becomes increasingly apparent along the lines of Schatzman's dimensional analysis – coding can cease in order for the theorist to step back and study the dimensions, conditions, strategies, contingencies and consequences revealed in the data. At this stage, the developing theory can be expanded by and constantly compared to relevant scholarly literature (Glaserian GT). Critical GTM is framed in terms of 'theory as process' or 'grounded theorizing' rather than as a set of formalized practices that seek to codify the grounded theory into a static product. The process of critical GTM, while containing stages, is nevertheless recursive in nature (Figure 3.2).

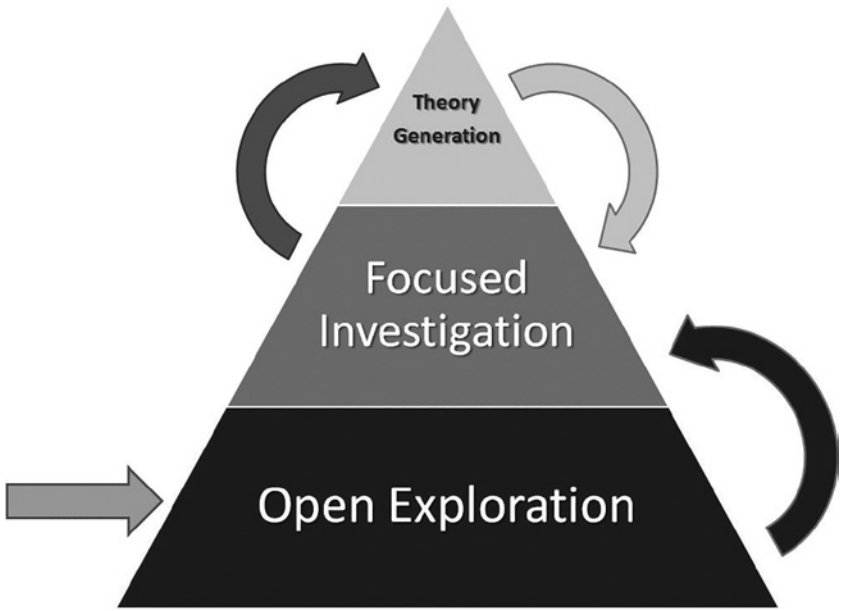


Figure 3.2 Recursive Methodological Moves in Critical GTM

The writing up stage of critical GT is derived from the bank of memos that have been written throughout the research project. The memos are used to help further explain the theory. Categories formed from focused and theoretical coding also become the structure of chapters. Scholarly literature, accessed later in the focused investigation and theoretical generation stages, becomes the basis for a literature review that explains any social, historical, economic, educational, and political issues that can contextualize the theory. The style of writing in critical GT emulates the style of Chicago School sociologists in that it is written in narrative form and is interwoven with quotations of research informants as well as other examples of empirical data collected from the field.

Undeniably, those from a Glaserian persuasion will have deep reservations about critical GTM. Social processes in Glaserian grounded theories seek to transcend specific times and social space, which is why Glaser (1992, p. 98), in response to calls to situate grounded theories within a historical context, states, 'It just depends on what emerges; it just does!' However, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000, p. 284) explain that simple linguistic descriptions, such as those found in Glaserian grounded theories, 'are not simply about the world but serve to construct it . . . language in the form of discourses serves as a form of regulation and domination'. Decontextualizing a grounded theory from its wider dynamics in order to focus only on localized sociological processes runs the risk of falling into the gravity well of those with the most influence to shape its interpretation. Gibson (2007) came to a similar conclusion in his consideration of Theodor Adorno's critique of sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, who readers will remember was a mentor of Glaser and, arguably, the progenitor of Glaser's primary theoretical focus. Adorno denounced Lazarfeld's preference for simply describing life as it is, instead of how it *should* be, as nothing more than 'a bourgeois sociology reinforcing the domination inherent in society' (Gibson 2007, p. 438). This of course brings us full circle to our discussion in the last chapter, where Layder (1993) and Burawoy (1991) argued that when grounded theorists ignore wider issues in order to focus on symbolic interactions, they may unwittingly work in support of an oppressive status quo. Critical grounded theory addresses these concerns.

Other reasons for apprehension may stem from the portrayal of critical theorists as either viewing every issue as political and economic, or advocating in favor of the informants, such as in the manner of Kincheloe and McLaren, when they explain, 'Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guard rail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world' (2000, p. 291). Admittedly, such advocacy research emulates the manner in which special interest groups and political action groups manipulate data in order to influence policymakers and to shape public opinion (Willower and Uline 2001, Laitsch et al. 2002, Shaker and Heilman 2004), and from a Glaserian perspective, viewing issues as primarily related to power, money, and taking the side of the disenfranchised, risks forcing the data into preconceived notions or categories (Glaser

1978, 1992). The concern here is of critical grounded theorists becoming little more than scholarly spin doctors.

However, a distinction needs be made between critical theory and 'cynical theory', one in which an economic or power-dominant cause is assigned to virtually every issue studied, and which furthers the helplessness of the informants by continuing to define their status as oppressed victims. Critical social theory, like grounded theory, is not a monolith, and the version of CST that I support draws sustenance from later critical theorists, such as Habermas, who avoided the rhetoric that emanates from an ideological belief that the cure for ills plaguing humanity for millennia can only be found in political or economic solutions (Habermas 1984, Ingram 1990, pp. 174–176). Also, I reject the purposeful creation of prejudiced pieces of advocacy research. Critical grounded theory emphasizes constant comparison, which would also entail comparisons between the 'oppressors' and 'oppressed', should those categories arise. By viewing the area of study from the perspective of both the powerful and powerless, it is possible to see how 'exploiter' and 'exploited' may share certain similarities. Social processes of 'victims' may be oppressive to others, and such issues cannot be ignored if they emerge during data collection. Critical grounded theorists should be allowed to give a voice to the voiceless, but only in a manner that is reflexively critical both of themselves and of their informants. The point is not to become over-obsessed with power and economic disparity. Wuest (2000), in her defense of a feminist form of GTM, emphasizes the continual need for 'fit' when using a perspective in interpreting and coding data. Charmaz wrote much the same in her call for grounded theories of social justice:

> Any extant concept must earn its way into the analysis. Thus, we cannot import a set of concepts such as hegemony and domination and paste them on the realities of the field. Instead, we can treat them as sensitizing concepts, to be explored in the field settings.
>
> (2005, p. 512)

This is the position that I encourage in critical GTM. It complements the original position of Glaser and Strauss when they stated that grounded theory allows researchers to approach the field from their theoretical perspective, so long as they are not doctrinaire in their interpretation of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 253). What this means in practical terms is that critical theory adds to the explanatory power of a grounded theory, but only when it is clear that issues of power, inequality, economic domination, and forms of exploitation are problems that are manifested within the data.

In a world where the rationality of free-market capitalism is being used to guide policies for welfare, education, health care, and interpretation of human rights, it is high time for more expressions of critical grounded theory, but with the following caveat: If the perspective fits, use it. Otherwise, keep looking. Other problems and processes are equally as pressing, and a

grounded theorist should try to be open to as many different perspectives as possible.

The interconnected nature of grounded theory methodologies

We can see that there is a considerable amount of variety in today's versions of grounded theory. How then can they be understood as a family of methods? Part of the answer lies in understanding that simply following methodological procedures is not the same as theorizing. Strauss and Corbin explain that different methodologies exist simply as tools for grounded theory construction:

> Individual researchers invent different specific procedures. Almost always too, in handling the difficult problem of conceptual integration, they learn that the advice given in the methodological writings and/or the grounded theory seminar requires adaptation to the circumstances of their own thought processes.
>
> (1994, p. 276)

Bryant and Charmaz's (2007, pp. 11–12) description of grounded theory as a family draws on the philosophical insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who describes a 'family' of things as a group that, while diverse in perspective and practice, shares a sense of underlying commonality within the group that indicate a unique connection. Despite procedural differences, the traits in Table 3.1 are found within all versions of GTM. So long as grounded theorists embrace theoretical sampling, constant comparison through memos, generating theory from the data, and the theoretical coding of the concepts, Strauss and Corbin (1994, pp. 280–283) believe that innovative forms of the methodology informed by distinct perspectives would be a natural feature of grounded theory's ongoing evolution.

If we step back and look at GTM from a broader standpoint, Mills et al. (2006) observe that grounded theory's evolution into distinct versions makes perfect sense within the qualitative research movements by Denzin and Lincoln (1998). They explain,

> If we envisage Grounded Theory methodology as a spiral that starts with the traditional form, we can see that such adaptations are reflective of the various moments of philosophical thought that have guided qualitative research and that it is the researcher's ontological and epistemological position that determines the form of grounded theory they undertake.
>
> (Mills et al. 2006, p. 9)

Charting this spiral autopoietically (Figure 3.3), we see that the methodology of grounded theory started moving away from the paradigms of structure (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, Glaser 1978). While in the early years

Table 3.1 Core Methodological Characteristics of GTMs

Reflexivity	Grounded theorists are open to the informants, the flow of the academic community and to their own unique research talents, cultural background and philosophical research standpoint.
Coding	The data is fractured and reinterpreted so that the grounded theorist can begin to work with it in a meaningful way. Coding and data collection take place simultaneously.
Constant Comparison	Codes and their interpretations are constantly reflected on in memos and compared with new data as it becomes available.
Theoretical Sampling	The investigation follows the theoretical implications of the data as it has been interpreted by the grounded theorist.
Theoretical Coding	The theoretical concepts are reconstructed and then linked into a framework that will be meaningful to a comprehending discourse community.
Grounded Theory	The theory will be useful. It studies the concerns of a particular group of people and the ways in which they deal with these issues. The theory results in heightened awareness, understanding, ability to predict, and/or a greater sense of control, first for the group that was studied but then later potentially for people in other situations, but who are experiencing similar problems or concerns.

it still held too many of the ontological and epistemological beliefs of this paradigm, GTM has been progressively evolving through the paradigms of pattern, process, and back again towards structure. Viewed from this perspective, some of the underlying reasons for the Glaser-Strauss debate on methodology can be better understood. Far more than Strauss, Glaser's writings reveal beliefs of one closer to the paradigms of structure, with a realist ontology and epistemology (Charmaz 2000). This had implications for the early views on coding. Coding is intimately connected to ontology and epistemology. One cannot code something that is not there, because coding crystallizes that which can be known. I feel Glaser and Strauss focused on the methodology of coding to the point of obsession because at some level they sensed that important paradigmatic issues were at stake. For example, if one ascribes to a realist ontology, such as in the case of Glaser, it follows that researchers should be rigorously trained in techniques that will make them more objective and detached, so that whatever is going on 'out there' can be discovered and reported accurately.

Strauss publicly began to shift towards a less fixed position in the late 1980s (Strauss 1987) and clearly towards the paradigms of pattern by the 1990s (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Schatzman (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, Schatzman 1991) worked from an interpretive perspective and saw rigid methodologies as a barrier to the natural human ability to construct theoretical insight. He anticipated the next turn that took place in GT, which was to

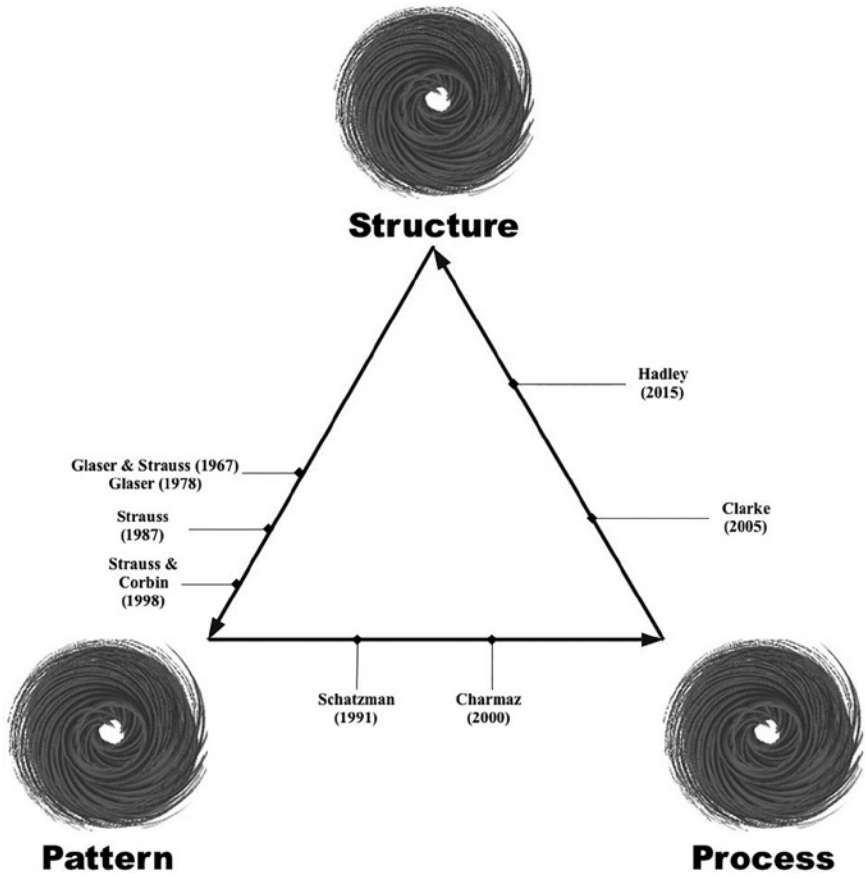


Figure 3.3 Development of Grounded Theory within Capra's Triad

understand social reality as more elastic. In the case of Charmaz, the social reality and knowing represent a co-construction between the researcher and the informants, so coding is less a question of scientific technique and more of an intuitive art developed according to the researcher's individual talents and temperament. For Clarke, definitions about what is real are in a constant state of flux, and the methodology will reflect this chaos. Coding is deconstructive and similar to postmodern art, in that it is constantly being transformed and reinterpreted by each individual. In critical grounded theory, I do not deny a social reality as constructions out of chaos, but there is a corollary of commonality (Kelly 1955/1991, pp. 63–65) that transcends and connects our dimly perceived human conceptions of existence. Multiple ways of understanding are necessary, and theorization takes place from not only those people and groups who, so to speak, have the power to keep the light on their own narratives but also among those who have been relegated

to obscurity. Coding is omnivorous in choice, rigorous in practice, but not onerous in the sense of stifling theoretical thinking. Critical grounded theory deconstructs oppressive power structures and questions reified social processes, in light of their trajectories and implications. The hope is to reconstruct more humane solutions to social problems and to challenge those who will listen to consider new ways of pragmatic action.

This diversity of practice within GTM means that researchers of different perspectives can choose a methodology that fits their concerns, and provide them with a series of practices that best fit their own preferences as they theorize about issues affecting students, teachers, and educational institutions. Each form of GTM flows into the other dynamically. Each energizes the other along the lines of autopoiesis. All share the same genetic code. The value of such diversity in GTM is that theorists have greater freedom in determining which procedures have the best fit for their paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological perspective.

Comparing grounded theory with other qualitative research methodologies

Within the applied linguistics community, it is common to find grounded theory mistakenly equated with ethnography (Nunan 1992, p. 57, Harklau 2005, p. 183), or construed as some form of action research (Burns 1999, p. 25). The phrase 'grounded theory' is sometimes linked to discourse analysis or corpus linguistics, since these also favor real-life data over armchair theories on grammar and discourse (see Derewianka 2000, p. 262, Sunderland 2002). More unfortunate has been the use of the term 'grounded theory' by some as more a trendy catchphrase than a means of inquiry (Canagarajah 1999, p. 5). Therefore, it would be helpful to consider briefly some of the ways in which grounded theory complements and contrasts with some of the more popular qualitative research methodologies used in AL.

In Table 3.2, it can be seen that grounded theory shares multiple overlaps with case studies, action research, phenomenology, and ethnography. From the onset one can see that, with the exception perhaps of the classic forms of ethnography, all use interviews and participant observation as a means of gathering data. Grounded theory also shares much with case studies and action research, especially in their use of mixed methods for qualitative, interpretive aims. Because of the influence and popularity of grounded theory, action researchers and those using case studies are also starting to use coding techniques of the type found in older versions of GTM. With action research, there is a tendency within grounded theory to take the research out of the hands of experts, and treat the 'great men' of sociological thinking as equal partners in the process of discovery. This is not surprising, since both action research and grounded theory were created in the late 1950s and early 1960s, during the modernist phase of qualitative research (Annells 1997). Grounded theory also shares similar interests with that of action research in the study of potential problems.

Table 3.2 Comparing GTM with other Qualitative Research Methodologies in AL

	Case Studies	*Action Research*	*Ethnography*	*Phenomenology*	*Grounded Theory*
Methods	✧ Interviews ✧ Non-participant Observation ✧ Purposeful Sampling ✧ Mixed Methods ✧ Coded Study of Documents, Photos, Newspaper Clippings, Internal Papers	✧ Interviews ✧ Participant Observation ✧ Purposeful Sampling ✧ Mixed Methods ✧ Coded Analysis of Transcripts and Documents	✧ Non-Intrusive Observation ✧ Field Notes ✧ Coding Inventories ✧ Purposeful Sampling ✧ Study of Cultural Artifacts & Symbols	✧ Intensive Interviewing ✧ Purposeful Sampling ✧ Coding Transcribed Data ✧ Identification of Themes & Concepts	✧ Interviews ✧ Participant or Non-Intrusive Observation ✧ Theoretical Sampling ✧ Mixed Methods ✧ Theoretical Memos ✧ Field Notes ✧ Coding Transcribed and other Written Data
Focus	✧ Bonded Systems ✧ In-Depth Study of Events affecting a Specific Group or 'Case'	✧ Problems within Small Groups such as a Class or Language Department	✧ An Entire Social or Cultural Group	✧ The Emotional Aspects of a Social Phenomenon	✧ Social Processes, Problems or Restive Sociological Issues
Purposes	✧ Verify or Clarify Aspects on an Existing Theory	✧ Solve Problems or Promote Change in a Specific Venue	✧ Present a Cultural Portrait through 'Thick Description'	✧ Describe the Essence, Meaning and Experiences of those involved in a Social Phenomenon	✧ Pragmatic Theorization about a Substantive Area of Study

With case studies, though a substantive area of research in GT might take a researcher to numerous venues, this practice could arguably be seen as sociological 'bonded systems' centering on certain events, which would make it somewhat similar to a multi-site case study (Locke 2005, p. 18). Bracketing one's biases in order to better understand how the social world is being seen through the eyes of the informants, of studying symbolic interactions, and of coding data as a means of gaining insight into the issues at hand, gives grounded theory points of commonality with ethnography and phenomenology.

GT is distinct, however, in its rigorous procedures for theoretical sampling, writing theoretical memos, and creating codes from the data. Keith Richards suggests that GT was first among the qualitative research traditions to make such practices clear, adding that GT 'offers a systematic way of analyzing and interpreting the data, normally a messy and frustrating process that is seen as something of a mystery . . . so the practical guidelines offered in this tradition are reassuring' (Richards 2003). GT seeks to create theories about problems, processes, and issues that have been expressed by the informants. GT's interest generating midrange sociological theory is distinct from the other methodologies surveyed here. Since grounded theory's inception, in addition to attempting to generate theories, ethnographers, action researchers, and others, have sought to emulate GT's process of simultaneous data collection, analysis, and, especially, coding of transcribed interviews (e.g. Heath et al. 2008). There is nothing wrong with this. The point I want to make is that the end product (or process of constant theorization, depending on one's philosophical beliefs), is different. GT is not as intensive as ethnography in terms of the time required for researchers to be in the field, yet it still is powerful for raising our awareness of the many processes that support (or thwart) our efforts in second language education. The results of a well-researched GT study may even transcend or at least outlast many of the fleeting changes endemic within our young discipline. One of the purposes of GT, especially in the forms closer to the paradigms of structure, is to generate pragmatic, flexible, and durable theories about what is happening in the field. Much of the AL enterprise hinges on prediction and control, so developing such theories grounded in the second language teaching experience would be a helpful contribution to the working lives of teachers and, more broadly, to those outside our field as well.

Towards pragmatic action

From the historic context of struggle, critique, and growth from classic GT, new GTMs have appeared. We have reviewed these in detail, placed them within an interconnected autopoietic network, and juxtaposed GTM with better-known qualitative research methodologies. We have seen that the various forms of grounded theory all seek to transcend the simple description of various themes. Through the lens of your worldview, grounded theory enables you to study systematically the words and actions of groups

of people, and to create a conceptual framework that provides theoretical explanations of why and how people act in certain situations. The goal is not about generating grounded facts but putting forth grounded *theories*. This should not be seen as subordinate to the discovery of 'findings': grounded theories are developed from a study of what actually took place within your area of study rather than that of validating the ideas of a famous scholar writing from somewhere far, far away.

To conclude the first half of this book, Glaser (1998) observes that while there are many who *write* about grounded theory, there are relatively fewer who actually *do* it. Buchanan et al. (1988, p. 54) agree, noting, 'Doing research is a different kind of enterprise from thinking and writing about research'. It is in this spirit that we will now shift from informed thought to pragmatic action. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Part II

Doing grounded theory

4 Preliminary decisions

Our survey so far has been vital, because attempting to do grounded theory without knowing about the philosophical and methodological debates surrounding the methodology leaves one vulnerable to blindly blundering into serious problems later on. Now you will be able to avoid some of these pitfalls. Because of your new awareness concerning what you believe and what you prefer in terms methodology, you can better justify your decisions for collecting, coding, and generating theoretical concepts from your data. Your new insights will also underwrite many of the decisions that you will need to make before entering the field, such as how to handle ethical review, what you will need to do in order to gain access to research informants and venues, choosing technological options, and how you will work with interview transcriptions.

Ethics, ethical review, and ethicism

The subject of ethical review, as it relates to doing grounded theory in university systems, has become a complex fabric woven from divergent social and political threads. Only a few can be considered in this chapter, but to begin, my use of 'ethics' refers to

> the consideration of the moral implications of social science inquiry. Ethics is a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others, in such a way that human beings who are being studied by social scientists are treated as ends rather than means.
>
> (Bulmer 1987, p. 19)

At its core, principled sensitivity relates to doing no harm to informants. Christians states this consists of four precepts: informed consent, avoidance of deception, protection of privacy/confidentiality, and accuracy of reporting (Christians 2000, pp. 138–140). Informed consent respects the informants' freedom to choose and honors their decision to withdraw at any time without coercion or fear of negative consequences. It requires that informants are told about the overall purpose of the research, the approximate length of time in which the research will be conducted, and any risks

inherent in participating. Avoidance of deception means not conducting research under false pretenses and being as forthright as possible about your research intentions. In terms of privacy and confidentiality, Sieber (1992) makes helpful distinctions between privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, which are often used interchangeably elsewhere in the literature. She states that privacy relates to people and their ability to protect themselves from unwelcome research scrutiny. Confidentiality relates to data about the informants and the manner in which this material is used by the researcher. Anonymity, accordingly, ensures that information that could be used to identify informants or venues is purged from the data (Sieber 1992, pp. 44–45). For grounded theorists, accuracy of reporting means being faithful to what was reported by informants, being fair to the multiple perspectives portrayed, and insuring that the theory is a plausible explanation for what is taking place in the research domain.

In the past, with the exception of medical and psychological research, most researchers in the applied social sciences were free to pursue their research interests without first having to receive permission from an institutional body. Today, however, in many universities around the world, imposing bureaucratic superstructures exist within higher educational institutions (HEIs) that both promulgate and enforce ethical codes of conduct. Many papers and books have resulted, describing the 'creep' of research ethics boards (Haggerty 2004) into determining the possible risks of any research involving 'human subjects'. In fields as wide ranging as genetics to folklore studies, researchers and graduate students may need to submit their work for committee approval before conducting their research. Applied linguistics has not been immune to these developments, and ethical review has recently become a subject of growing interest in our field as well (Thomas 2009, Kono 2012, Kubanyiova 2012).

The scholarly discourse surrounding ethical review, especially the ethical review of qualitative research such as grounded theory, has been especially heated within the United States, the country where broad-based ethical review originated. The debate, however, is spreading throughout the Anglophone world, many countries in Europe, and in parts of Asia. In recent years, controversial new managerial centers and government organizations have appeared, and have started to use ethical codes as a way of regulating research practices. In some cases, qualitative researchers have been prevented from entering the field because of the difficulty they have had in conforming their methodology to institutional processes. This problem is a feature of what Hammersley (2009, p. 211) has called 'ethicism', and it is of particular concern to those wishing to engage in qualitative forms of research such as grounded theory. To stimulate your thoughts as you prepare to face ethical review in this age of ethicism, let us consider some of the social currents that have brought us to the present situation. After discussing some concerns, I will offer a few suggestions that I hope will help you to navigate the often narrow straits of ethical review.

Ethical research protocols first appeared in the field of medicine after the public disclosure of atrocities committed by researchers in Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and the United States during the middle of the twentieth century (Hammersley and Traianou 2012, pp. 2–3). Later in the 1960s, these biomedical ethical codes became the template for American researchers in fields such as psychiatry and clinical counseling. Even so, a few studies at this time attained international notoriety. Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (Milgram 1977, Soble 1978, Zimbardo et al. 2000), in which it took less than a week for student volunteers in a mock jail to create degrading and psychologically damaging conditions, is probably the most well known (Zimbardo 2008). Another was that of Laud Humphreys, an ethnographer who posed undercover as a 'watch queen' at a public toilet frequented by homosexual men (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 292). While the men were otherwise engaged, Humphreys would sneak out to copy the license plate numbers on the men's cars. He then found their home addresses and visited the men one year later disguised as a city worker conducting a health survey (Humphreys 1970). The third was Stanley Milgram's experiment on obedience to authority, in which uninformed subjects were induced by an authoritative figure (who was actually an actor) to repeatedly give what subjects believed to be near-fatal electric shocks to another actor strapped to a chair and screaming for mercy (Milgram 1974, pp. 2–5). It was especially the 'sins of Milgram' (Punch 1998, p. 168) that became instrumental in later calls to regulate all university research, but there were other influences as well, some of which were from unexpected origins.

One came from the consumer rights movement, which reached its apex in the United States during the 1960s. The Kennedy administration implemented a consumer's bill of rights that later became the basis for policies guiding both private manufacturing companies and state-funded organizations. These guidelines were based on principles such as consumers having the right to receive accurate information about products (clarity), the right to receive risk-free products (safety), the right to select among products with a variety of specifications (choice), the right to ask questions, receive timely answers from producers, and the ability to provide input into the development of products (empowerment) (Tiemstra 1992, Larsen and Lawson 2013). Class action lawsuits against corporations subsequently skyrocketed until the Reagan administration effectively quashed the movement. However, artifacts of the movement remained in government regulations for federal funding, and from this time as well, corporations almost universally kept large law firms on retainer to protect themselves from the risk of possible lawsuits (Hamburger 2004, Hamburger 2007).

Until the mid-1980s, Schrag (2009, p. 27) notes that the scandals of Milgram, Zimbardo, and Humphreys (all of which had received university approval and government funding) were treated as aberrations, and subsequently, tighter regulation of university research did not take hold. Ethical codes quietly resided within government policy guidelines, with assurances

that these would be applied primarily to biomedical and clinical researchers (Schrag 2010, pp. 51–53). Similarly, even though professional ethical codes for applied linguists began to appear in the early 1980s (Tarone and St. Martin 1980), they were presented simply as helpful suggestions. Because the work of applied linguists did not broach clinical, psychological, or medical domains, it was seen as posing few, if any, risks to research participants (Thomas 2009, pp. 493–494). Tarone and St. Martin added, somewhat prophetically, that 'if an outside agency were to try to enforce such guidelines or act as a watchdog on every bit of research done, this would multiply bureaucracy, paperwork and senseless delays in the work we do' (1980, p. 386).

The tide began to turn in the late 1980s, when new rules for federally funded research and education began to be drafted. This was a time when higher education began to be seen less as a scholarly practice and more as a knowledge product. University teachers and researchers were increasingly recast as knowledge producers, and students were being treated as knowledge consumers. The organizational culture and practices of American universities steadily began to emulate service and manufacturing industries, albeit imperfectly, but also maintained bureaucratic processes imposed earlier by governmental agencies (Steck 2003, McKenzie and Scheurich 2004, Washburn 2005, Donoghue 2008, Tuchman 2009). The result was that many universities became corporatized teaching organizations seeking to apply Chicago School neoliberal doctrines to all aspects of the institution. Achieving quality and excellence, and maximizing income streams within an environment of predictability and certainty were combined with key principles in the consumer rights movement so that educational and research services could be 'delivered' to end users and stakeholders. Entrepreneurs from the business world were hired as university administrators, and they began to replace professors as the nexus of authority on most university campuses (Readings 1996, p. 3). The ensuring clash of corporate and communitarian worldviews created environments in which trust gradually eroded between university researchers, HEIs, government, and society, which in turn stimulated calls for increased oversight, protocols, and codes.

The subject of ethical codes and good research practices became inextricably intertwined with these efforts to corporatize HEIs in the United States. Conservative groups of scholars and administrators soon sought greater control over the work product of university researchers (Crookes 2003, pp. 47, 85–86), and in what Van den Hoonaard (2001) describes as a case of manufactured panic, the scandalous specters of Milgram, Humphreys, and Zimbardo were summoned once more. Using these incidents to justify their desire for greater control over the research activities of the academic communities in their universities (Heimer and Petty 2010, p. 604), they constructed a narrative which created the perception that, behind closed doors, social researchers might be regularly harming innocent research participants (Kelman 1996, pp. xii–xv). The following example from applied linguistics

is a typical example of how such claims were crafted in order to portray researchers as ethically ignorant and potentially dangerous:

> Little attention given to ethics in the TESOL research literature is not due to a lack of need for such discussion but rather to a lack of awareness that we have this need . . . If ethical issues such as these are not explored, TESOL researchers are less likely to be aware of potential ethical problems resulting from their methods of collecting or reporting data, thereby increasing the risk of causing harm to their subjects.
>
> (Dufon 1993, pp. 158–159)

Similar to the recommendations of ethicists in other fields of the applied social sciences, DuFon proposed the use of biomedical codes from the American Psychological Association (APA) and called for applied linguistics research to be more carefully reviewed by funding organizations, colleagues and the government agencies of any country where the research might be conducted (Dufon 1993, p. 159).

The US federal government then took the next step of what Schrag called 'bureaucratic turf grabbing' (Schrag 2009, p. 29) by requiring ethical review for any research involving 'human subjects'. A prerequisite for universities to receive federal funding was for them to have an IRB that would review, approve, and regulate research so that it followed federal guidelines (Heimer and Petty 2010, pp. 604–605). Regardless of whether a research project was directly funded by the federal government or conducted privately at the researcher's expense, American IRBs were empowered to vet the research proposals of all academics, graduate students, and later undergraduate students (Hamburger 2004, 2007). In the ensuing years, graduate students and researchers at many institutions began to notice that the plethora of new protocols and practices, which were often biomedical in style, tended to privilege quantitative forms of research and limited the ability of those wanting to conduct open-ended qualitative inquiry, because of the steady imbrication of new requirements calling for increased surveillance and accountability (Van den Hoonaard 2001, Ortega 2005). Bledsoe et al. describes academic life in such universities:

> The IRB institution that most of U.S. academia has come to know is an archetypal 'iron cage'. It attempts to control each step of a research protocol, it constantly expands rather than contracts its mission, and it deals uneasily with novelty. It places enormous emphasis on the notion of compliance, which it casts in absolutist terms: there is either compliance or noncompliance, with little between. Not only is IRB structure monolithic; the IRB, because of its implicit claim as the arbiter of university research ethics, faces few challenges. The pressures the IRB faces to ramp up its bureaucracy and rules may displace not only its own stated goal of promoting ethics, but also the university's goal of advancing research. Ultimately, in trying to create the appearance of following

> its own IRB rules to avoid catastrophic lawsuits or loss of federal funding, a university may displace both goals.
>
> (Bledsoe et al. 2007, p. 608)

I should hasten to add that, at least in my experience, not all IRBs are this oppressive, but the whole direction of the ethical review enterprise moves nevertheless towards that of increased oversight and greater control. The maintenance of bureaucratized ethical codes has morphed into a 'growth industry' (Heimer and Petty 2010, p. 616), and similar to corporations after the heyday of the consumer rights movement, universities now keep law firms on retainer and maintain large bureaucracies that are deeply invested in both maintaining and expanding ethicist concerns into all areas of university life.

In the United States, there have been legal challenges to these developments. Hamburger (2004) and Kerr (2006) discuss legal briefs arguing that requirements for researchers to submit their work for approval before entering the field constitutes censorship. While other countries have ostensibly fewer legal protections in this regard, in the American context, such censorship would represent a violation of researchers' constitutional civil rights. The US Supreme Court has not agreed, however, and has sided instead with university administrators, who insist that research is a privilege, not a right, and furthermore, that research is a privilege granted by those in charge of the institution where an academic or graduate student is embedded. Others have argued that IRBs represent a significant challenge to the academic freedom of those in the humanities and social sciences, noting that IRBs risk returning academic life in the United States and other countries to conditions mirroring the nineteenth century (Lincoln and Tierney 2004, Tierney and Corwin 2007). Outside of academia, however, the public has shown little interest in these concerns.

The result has been that among the more authoritarian of university administrations in the United States and other countries of the Anglophone world, disturbing reports are beginning to emerge. In Canada, for example, one graduate student engaged in a qualitative research project was instructed by her IRB that, in the case of observing crowds, she was only allowed to watch people who would sign a written consent form. For those who suddenly entered the scene and who were unaware of her status as a researcher, she was to cover her eyes immediately (Van den Hoonaard 2002, p. 11). A professor at an American university was denied permission from her departmental IRB to publish her own autoethnography (Rambo 2007), and again in Canada, Tony Turner, an environmental scientist who performed a satirical song on YouTube to protest the conservative Harper government's policies for research on climate change, was suspended from his post and took early retirement after being told that his actions were in violation of his funding agency's ethics codes ("Civil Servant Who Wrote Anti-Harper Song 'Harperman' Retires from Environment Canada" 2015).

Some of the issues I have with this rising tide of ethicism relate to how, at some universities, these bureaucratized codes are being used to serve institutional interests over those of either the researchers or research participants:

> IRBs protect universities, not researchers, not the subjects or informants whom social scientists observe and interview. At my own university, I can think of graduate-student projects that (I believe) the IRB killed, because the research would have made the university look bad. Ultimately, in an accountability regime, bureaucracies protect themselves and document that they have done so.
>
> (Tuchman 2011, p. 618)

Ethicism risks deskilling new researchers by replacing the hard work of thinking ethically with that of following bureaucratic procedures. Ethical review then becomes an institutional fetish reduced to technological practice and uniform conformity (Bauman 1993, Harper and Jimenez 2005). The biomedical nature of these codes and practices are often methodologically incompatible with qualitative research of the type represented by grounded theory. For example, some IRBs require every research participant to sign a written consent form before being observed or interviewed. This is an understood practice within a doctor-patient relationship, where a medical procedure could result in unintended side effects. Such practices, however, can create problems for qualitative researchers seeking to talk to people about an area of interest, especially those working in other cultures where such legal-looking forms can seed mistrust at the very moment when rapport building between the researcher and participant needs to begin (Van den Hoonaard 2002). Ethicism creates an environment in which some researchers resort to questionable means to get around committees, such as in the United States, where some declare their research as *art* in an attempt to hide behind the numerous court decisions protecting art from censorship (Becker 2004). The bureaucratization of ethics has led other researchers either to self-censor or to search for research methodologies of the type they feel will be more easily accepted by their ethics committee, which is often research based on a statistical analysis of quantitative data. The result is a lack of diversity, an absence of different research perspectives, and a decline in research of the type that might, in disrupting the status quo, stimulate fresh discoveries. Worse still, it enables the development of ideologically driven regimes within universities that can brand people or research methodologies as 'unethical', not because of any moral shortcomings, but because they do not conform to the institution's predetermined processes of control.

Despite my critical interpretation of the ethical review industry, and of its spread within the academic life of corporatized universities around the world, my rejection of ethicism does not imply an advocacy of an unethical, laissez-faire approach. I believe that graduate programs should devote considerable

time, if they have not already, to the consideration of research ethics, which is necessary for good practice. Students preparing to do grounded theory or other forms of qualitative research should be exposed to cautionary tales from the field so that they can begin to think about the challenges faced by well-meaning researchers in the field who are trying to do their work with a clean conscience. 'Fieldwork', Punch (1998, p. 159) explains, 'is definitely not a soft option, but, rather, represents a *demanding* craft that involves both coping with multiple negotiations and continually dealing with ethical dilemmas'. Avoiding fieldwork is not an option for grounded theorists, and there needs to be a greater appreciation of the fact that field conditions are more variable and 'ethically unsanitary' than controlled laboratory environments attended by research teams following strict protocols. For those no longer in graduate programs, there are many good books on the subject (Hammersley and Traianou 2012, Miller et al. 2012, Farrimond 2013), and studying these beforehand will help give grounded theorists greater sensitivity to many of the challenges they may face in the field, such as maintaining privacy in the twenty-first century, discerning between 'harm' as opposed to 'offense', and considering how to avoid either exploiting, or being exploited by, research participants.

Nevertheless, until policies and precedents change in the face of sustained protest, the potential for facing difficulty from ethical review boards when wanting to do grounded theory, or any other form of qualitative research for that matter, is unlikely to change for quite some time. What is a researcher or graduate student interested in grounded theory to do in the meantime?

Going *mano a mano* with a university or a research grant organization would be a mistake. In most cases, this may not even be necessary, given that the treatment of qualitative research varies widely depending on the institution. At some universities, your research may be seen as a minimal risk, and ethical review may be a simple formality. Other organizations will require you to explain your research intentions in greater detail, but will help to work out an equitable proposal that will balance the concerns of the institution with your research needs. Still other organizations may require untenable research practices and bureaucratic procedures. At institutions such as these, qualitative research of the type represented by grounded theory may be treated as a potential threat to the wellbeing of the institution. This is because, in contrast to hypothesis testing, grounded theory is exploratory and unpredictable. Only general aims can be stated. Specific questions and research participants cannot be identified beforehand. Theory emerges from an analysis of discourse and from observations in the field. Those engaging in such an approach might want to protest, arguing that predetermined administrative procedures and hypothesis-testing methodological practices are incompatible with grounded theory research, but engaging in a twilight struggle against an IRB in this type of institution rarely succeeds, and you risk being branded as an institutional deviant who is in need of even greater scrutiny for the good of the university. Again, it will

depend on the people, politics, and processes of where you are, and you will need to find out how much freedom you have to pursue a grounded theory approach in your university or department.

For graduate students, it is important to consult with your supervisor beforehand in order to gauge the social dynamics and politics of your departmental research ethics board. What sorts of requirements do they have for qualitative researchers? Have they had any problems in the past with exploratory research where someone has been harmed? How adaptable are they to the methodological practices of grounded theory? If you plan to conduct a lot of interviews in other countries, do they allow for culturally sensitive alternatives to written consent forms? Do they require a list of predetermined interview questions, or are general themes acceptable?

With a flexible IRB, there are many workaround solutions. For example, qualitative researchers have proposed fair and principled alternatives that satisfy institutional needs for accountability and uphold good research practices. Joan Sieber (1992), in her seminal book on designing ethically responsible qualitative research projects, states that even in the United States, oral consent is allowable when it is the more ethical option. In cases where written consent forms are viewed as intrusive, distressful, or inconvenient to informants, or if they change the natural behavior of the informants in the field, sending a cover letter explaining the project and orally laying out the issues of the project is a sensible and humane option. Lipson (1994, p. 343) explains that procedures such as these have been accepted in the past by IRBs, and Van den Hoonaard (2001, p. 33) adds that the written transcripts, although anonymized, can also be treated as documentary evidence of oral consent.

If lists of specific questions are an absolute necessity for your department ethics committee, you could begin to read some of the literature on the subject, treat each document as a research informant, and code each paper at one time in order to build up a list of possible questions based on readings. From here you could compare the insights of the scholarly literature with field informants. This approach would fly in the face of Glaser's style of grounded theory, and while it would not be the approach that I would prefer to take, it is something that is supported by other grounded theorists with many years of experience teaching and supervising in established universities (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Birks and Mills 2012). For those with concerns of any potential risk or harm posed by your research, you can raise the point that, during over 50 years of the applied linguistics research that has been conducted in virtually every country around the world, there has never been a case even remotely close to the scandals of Milgram, Zimbardo, or Humphreys, which is why applied linguistics research has historically been of minimal risk to students or other informants. This point is not only pertinent to applied linguistics, but also to many other fields, as noted by Heimer and Petty in a recent paper in the *Annual Review of Law and*

Social Science, who, after an extensive historical study of the development of IRBs in the United States, concluded,

> There is little evidence that human subjects research actually harms subjects in any case and that IRBs provide scant evidence of having prevented harm.
>
> (Heimer and Petty 2010, p. 609)

Depending on the university, the ethical review of a research or PhD proposal is simply one more way for the institution to determine whether you have a clear idea about what you want to do. The perception among some that I have encountered is that 'grounded theory' evokes images of someone who wants research money or a PhD, but who lacks any clear idea about what s/he wants to study or why, and who wants permission to go fishing about until some sort of idea can be hauled up from the murky depths of empirical investigation. To assuage those fears and misconceptions, Stern and Porr (2011, p. 52) state that it is perfectly acceptable for ground theorists to propose and write about what they anticipate they will study, and to offer an educated guess as to who and how many people they will want to interview, as well as where they might be located. Reasonable academics are well aware that a qualitative research project changes over the course of its trajectory, and if your IRB demonstrates that sort of flexibility, you can always go back to your supervisor or committee to inform them of any changes or new developments. In such cases, the IRB process can be a way to help refine your initial ideas and to develop social as well as professional ties with others in the university.

In sum, you should determine from the onset the degree to which you can work with your IRB before attempting to use grounded theory as the methodology for your research project. In many, if not most cases, it will be possible. However, if you find to your chagrin that your university department is rife with political entanglements that spill over into bureaucratic procedures, or is overstocked with faculty who are doctrinaire in terms of the 'right way' to do research, or if you discover that your university has an administrative regime that maintains tight control over research processes – where speech codes, protocols of practice, and other cognitive management strategies are enforced, or if you learn that the ethical review board represents a group of people passionately devoted to paradigms and practices that are at odds with the exploratory nature of grounded theory, so that your proposal is treated with suspicion regardless of your assurances regarding minimal risk, your heightened sensitivity to privacy, doing no harm, and your commitment to professional conduct, then you will be faced with some difficult decisions. One might be to find another research methodology and to do what you need to do to get your graduate-level credentials. This is the decision that most students will have to make, and universities bank on this. It is the easiest and most non-confrontational choice. Another possibility is to transfer to another program with greater freedom of research practice.

I have only encountered a few cases where this has happened, but it made a statement that was far louder and was remembered far longer than faculty protest, since it represented the loss of tens of thousands of dollars to the universities in question. It is unknown, however, whether the decision of these graduate students to leave had any effect on changing inflexible IRB policies at those universities. Options will be more limited for faculty and post-grads, and should you be misfortunate enough to be in a university or department that makes doing grounded theory untenable, then it is OK to put this book down now. Realize that you can always come back later if and when circumstances change and you have more academic freedom.

Opportunities for gaining access

Intertwined with our discussion of ethics and ethical review are issues related to making contact with people and being able to enter certain organizational or social spaces. Van Maanen and Kolb (1982, p. 14) note that 'gaining access to most organizational settings is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work, and dumb luck'. Educational organizations have an especially 'bounded nature' (Bryman 1989, p. 2) that is particularly resistant to the unknown analyst appearing on their doorstep with a clipboard, recording device, and from their perspective, armed with prying questions. The literature is replete with stories of qualitative researchers being denied access at the last moment by apprehensive gatekeepers (Beynon 1988, pp. 23–26), and I have seen some of my graduate students experience massive delays because they persisted in trying to gain access to organizations as an outsider.

My suggestion for gaining access is to use the strategy advocated by other researchers (Buchanan et al. 1988, p. 53, Bryman 1989, pp. 161–162) and take what is sometimes known as an 'opportunistic approach'. 'Opportunistic' here should not be interpreted to be what Glaser and Strauss once suggested:

> Another time-consuming aspect of data collection is establishing rapport with the people who are to be interviewed and observed. To establish rapport quickly is, of course, sometimes difficult . . . though establishing rapport is often not necessary. In later stages of the research, when sampling many comparative groups quickly for data on a few categories, the sociologist may obtain his data in a few minutes or half a day without the people he talks with, overhears or observes recognizing his purpose. He may obtain his data before being shooed off the premises for interfering with current activities; and he may obtain his data clandestinely in order to get it quickly, without explanations, and to be allowed to get it at all.
>
> (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 75)

Dey (1999, p. 119) calls this the 'smash and grab' method of access management. Infiltrating organizations without permission for the express purpose

of spying on people raises ethical concerns. By opportunistic I mean gaining permission to research where one already has existing personal or professional connections. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 370) and Richards (2003, pp. 249–250) state that an opportunistic approach readily complements contemporary GT strategies. In many countries, it is almost impossible to gain access to a particular institution without either working there or having a colleague who can facilitate entry, and so an opportunistic approach may be your only option.

All the same, Bryman (1989, p. 3) warns that getting into an organization does not ensure that people will talk. Gaining access to people will be a continuously mediated experience. Success with informants, whether if accessing an outside organization or one where you can act as a participant researcher, will depend on whether potential informants see any benefit in working with you. Similarly, failure in convincing people to open up is often related to any risks they see in talking to you (Beynon 1988, p. 21, Van Maanen 1988, pp. 4–5, Fielding 2001, pp. 150–151). Securing steady and stable contact with student informants can also be challenging in that many can become either evasive or passive in their interactions. Thorne (1980, p. 292) explains that such behavior is common among 'captive populations', of which students are considered to be a representative group, and where passivity may be the only way for people in such groups to protect themselves from the invasiveness of potential interviewers. Eder and Fingerson (2001) add that differences in age, experience, and expertise between older researchers and adolescents, or older informants and younger researcher, create unequal power relations that discourage the success of one-to-one interviews.

This invariably takes us back to the issue of written consent forms. In the context of approaching people for the first time, written consent forms can form unhelpful barriers that can prevent qualitative researchers from conducting their studies (Lykes 1989, Punch 1998, Fine et al. 2000). Informants who perceive themselves as having relatively less power than the researcher often sign consent forms without question (Thorne 1980, p. 293), but then only provide information in a manner similar to an interrogation. Informants who feel they have more power than the researcher have been known to use informed consent as a pretext for avoiding scrutiny and accountability (Beynon 1988, pp. 30–31), especially if they fail to recognize the direct benefits of participating. Worse still are the cases in which elite informants refuse to give their written consent until convinced that they will be pleased with the findings of the researcher (Goode 1996, Ferdinand et al. 2007).

Therefore, although it is unlikely in the context of applied linguistics, depending on the evolving line of questioning of your area of interest and within the unknown aspects of the research with people who hardly know you, written consent forms may tip the scale on whether important informants will participate (Herdman 2000). The danger here is that you may end up working with students who may feel they do not have a choice but to work with you and who may try to ascertain what they think you want to

hear so that they can get you out of their lives as quickly as possible. Equally problematic is to find yourself with a small pool of informants who, either through friendship, social status, or worldview, share strong affinities with you. This too can skew your grounded theory, since your work might lack adequate levels of constant comparison. To avoid this, persuasion, rapport building, and image management will be necessary skills for gaining, maintaining, and expanding access both to people and places after getting your foot in the door. Even when you have done this though, be prepared for a wide range of variability in the quality of availability to informants. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 210), who had similar experiences, tell new grounded theorists that such challenges are the norm rather than the exception and that they should be prepared to 'make the most out of what is available to him or her'.

Interview transcripts

It is likely that much of your data will consist of interviews. Before carrying out interviews, however, you should decide about what to do with transcription. If you opt for a strictly Glaserian approach, this will be less of an issue, since he advocates written summaries of interviews over transcripts. The use of recorded interview transcripts, in his opinion, wastes time and drowns the researcher in too much data (Glaser 1998, pp. 107–113). I can fully appreciate Glaser's insight here, because not only is transcription a difficult and time-consuming task, the use of recording devices during interviews can cause some informants to become more reserved or fearful, thus changing the entire tenor of the conversation.

Nevertheless, even a cursory reading of the literature reveals that almost every grounded theorist uses interview transcripts these days. And for PhD students, Fernandez (2004, p. 56) warns that they would be especially ill-advised to take Glaser's counsel, since most need transcripts as documentary evidence of their research. It is also often suggested that theorists should transcribe their data, as this encourages closer attention to the words of informants and aids in highlighting potential avenues of exploration missed during the interview (Rubin and Rubin 2005, pp. 204–205, Charmaz 2008, pp. 91–92). In addition, making your own transcripts helps you to pace yourself and avoid the methodological mistake of conducting several interviews before coding them in succession.

Yet despite the advantages of doing one's own transcription, there may be pressing deadlines or physical factors such as metacarpal tunnel syndrome that could make transcription a very difficult and painful experience. Even without these concerns, transcription requires quite a bit of skill, and those new to transcription can find it to be quite difficult. When I first started transcribing data, it sometimes took me up to ten hours to transcribe a one-hour interview. Therefore, while I strongly encourage you to persevere in transcribing interviews, especially during the early exploratory stages of doing grounded theory, if time limitations or other issues make transcription more

of a barrier than an aid in doing grounded theory, you should consider hiring a transcriptionist.

Finding a transcriptionist adds an additional layer of time and effort to your project. Sometimes you might be able to find a transcriptionist through a recommendation from a colleague or supervisor, but more often you will need to search through the many sites available online dedicated to helping researchers find transcriptionists. As you begin your search, my advice is that you should locate three possible candidates. You may need to convert a sound file of an interview to an MP3 file. Send an email message to each of the three candidates with a five to ten-minute excerpt of a recorded interview file. You should also send a Word file of the template that you will use for all interview transcripts. Include instructions on how you would like the transcripts to be formatted and any transcription conventions for noting parts of speech, pauses, unintelligible speech, background noise, and microphone static.

Make note of how long it takes for each of the candidates to finish and return the transcripts. Compare the accuracy of their transcripts to the interview, as this allows you to assess the precision of their work. You may need to repeat this process a couple of times, but in the end, try to secure at least two transcriptionists, because you should not risk having your research hampered by delays caused by the transcriptionist working on other projects or if a transcriptionist has a crisis or illness that requires a leave of absence. Having more than one transcriptionist will allow you to keep a steady stream of transcripts coming back to you.

Working with transcriptionists can be an expensive option, especially if you conduct a lot of interviews, but good transcriptionists are worth their weight in gold and can quickly become integral to your project. As such, you should not cut corners in paying for a quality transcriptionist, because economical transcriptionists tend to be less experienced and might skip sections of discourse from international students or informants with non-native accents, deeming them to be unintelligible. By going back through the recorded interview you should, of course, have little problem filling in those gaps, unless you had static caused by moving the recording device or unavoidably had a lot of background noise. In those cases, more experienced transcriptionists can often work miracles with bad recordings, and many will be able to understand a wide variety of accents.

You should also communicate all ethical guidelines to your transcriptionists in order to protect the privacy of the informants and to preserve the security of the interview data files. Most reliable transcriptionists are well versed in ethical codes and often have their own codes of conduct that will complement any procedures that you must follow.

Finding suitable transcriptionists, communicating your expectations, and ensuring that you get good quality transcripts are only the beginning of the process. Poland (2001, p. 635) has noted that the whole concept of 'transcript' has become problematized. Much of the debate is rooted in the paradigmatic issues discussed earlier in this book, with arguments

going back and forth as to whether words on a page represent an accurate transmission of reality, a constructed interpretation of an empirical event, or the shackles of methodological reification (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999, p. 71). This has resulted in a wide range of transcription conventions as well as a lack of consensus on what constitutes proper form (McLellan et al. 2003, p. 64). For example, if one sees the transcript as an accurate reflection of an empirical reality, the theorist will tend towards a verbatim representation that contains every pause, inflection, and false start. Within applied linguistics, many analysts of conversation and discourse have tended towards such concerns, and often use modified versions of what is found in Jefferson (2004), which call attention to features such as pitch, speed, length of pauses, overlaps of simultaneous speech, and other aspects of spoken discourse. Transcription conventions for discourse analysis are designed to study various elements in speech and focus as much on the mechanics of discourse as they do on the content – or to put it another way, the underlying assumption seems to be that the structure of discourse significantly shapes the nature of the communicated message. Other approaches avoid detailed conventions in transcription to represent language in a form similar to what one might see in a movie script. These often feature dashes, ellipses, and other emotions, body language, or gestures noted during the interview.

Instead of a strictly verbatim representation, a style known as 'intelligent verbatim' is often used. Intelligent verbatim removes the false starts and other features of spoken discourse to focus on the conveyed message (Table 4.1). It is used widely as a viable alternative to the discourse analysis of large amounts of transcribed interviews – something that would be rather exhausting for both the researcher and the transcriptionists:

> There is a limit to the degree of painstaking attention to detail that can be demanded of a transcriber in applying an elaborate system of codes . . . In studies with large samples (60–100+ interviews), when analysis may be more superficial and limited to the cataloguing of opinions or experiences, close attention to conversational dynamics may be unnecessary.
>
> (Poland 2001, pp. 639–640)

Table 4.1 Example of Verbatim and Intelligent Verbatim (Hickley 2007)

Verbatim	Erm . . . well, I dunno really, know what I mean? I mean, you know, when I asked them what Mary's, er, um, condish, condit, condition was, they said like erm 'I'm afraid we can't, erm, tell you that, Mrs. Smith, 'cause you ain't a relative'.
Intelligent Verbatim	Well, I dunno really. I mean when I asked them what Mary's condition was they said 'I'm afraid we can't tell you that, Mrs. Smith, 'cause you ain't a relative'.

Intelligent verbatim fulfills Mergenthaler and Stinson's stipulation for the morphologic and structural naturalness of transcription to be maintained, though admittedly it runs counter to their belief that it should be an 'exact reproduction' (Mergenthaler and Stinson 1992, p. 129). It is easy for transcriptionists to follow, as it requires only 'everyday language competence', is 'understandable and applicable by secretaries', and the rules are 'limited in number, simple, and easy to learn' (Mergenthaler and Stinson 1992, pp. 129–130). Intelligent verbatim represents sanitized discourse and risks losing important segments of linguistic meaning, but again, the needs of researchers working with large numbers of transcripts must be considered:

> We do not need the full clutter of a transcript designed for conversation analysis. We need an account that accurately represents and effectively communicates the statements of the interviewee. Sanitization involves minor alterations to assist that representation and communication, and does not in our view corrupt the data.
>
> (Buchanan et al. 1988, p. 62)

The decisions you make on how to present your transcripts will be an important indicator of your beliefs about what a transcript represents, and this may need to be made explicit later on to those who will assess your work. If the focus of your grounded theory is on social processes within language, you will probably opt for a verbatim transcription with detailed conventions. If you take a more traditional approach to study the processes taking place among people, intelligent verbatim with minimal conventions should suffice. Your choice will also affect the speed and, if you use a transcriptionist, the cost of creating transcriptions. As already indicated, a verbatim transcript with a detailed set of discourse analysis-based conventions will take far longer to create than an intelligent verbatim transcript with simple protocols. This is because detailed conventions are often difficult for transcriptionists to learn, and the added burden will entail a higher fee.

There is also a theoretical aspect to transcription conventions, especially if you are looking at the conventions used by discourse analysts for highlighting various speech acts and strategies. Important questions need to be asked. For example, to what degree do the more detailed conventions predetermine the way in which the discourse is studied and delineated? Are there other interpretive functions that presuppose dynamics of power or exploitation, such as what is commonly seen in political discourse analysis (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012)? Predetermined categories for the analysis of discourse are similar in function to using pre-packaged codes, which is incompatible with grounded theory. If you wish to focus on language, you will need to make your own conventions to serve as 'metacodes' in the development of your grounded theory of some aspect of discourse. This would, of course, be a mammoth task, but one that would represent a major contribution to discourse analysis using the methodology of

grounded theory. Those who focus on the processes taking place between students and teachers will face fewer challenges to transcription, as intelligent verbatim will often suffice.

In the end, Silverman's (2001, pp. 249–250) advice is to remember that 'there cannot be a *perfect* transcript of a tape recording. Everything depends on what you are trying to do in the analysis, as well as on practical considerations involving time and resources'. Poland (2001, pp. 635–636) and McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig (2003) agree here and state that it is entirely acceptable for you to design your own system transcription conventions. This is something that can be seen in other areas of applied linguistics (Paltridge 2008, Hyland and Paltridge 2011). You should feel free to do the same, so long as you are clear about the purpose of your transcriptions and consistent in the use of your conventions.

Using specialist software

Another decision centers on whether you choose to use Computer Assisted Qualitative Data AnalysiS, or CAQDAS. These programs store transcripts, notes, memos, video clips, and photos in a storage file known as a heuristic unit (HU). All of the codes, notes, and theoretical connections are stored here as well. With CAQDAS, researchers can link codes to this data. Later, when one clicks on a particular code, theorists can view all of the excerpts from interviews, as well as any other pictures, videos or PDFs that have been connected to the same code. As seen in Figure 4.1, causal and conditional links to other codes can also be shown. There are several software packages that have been specifically designed for this purpose, but the two most

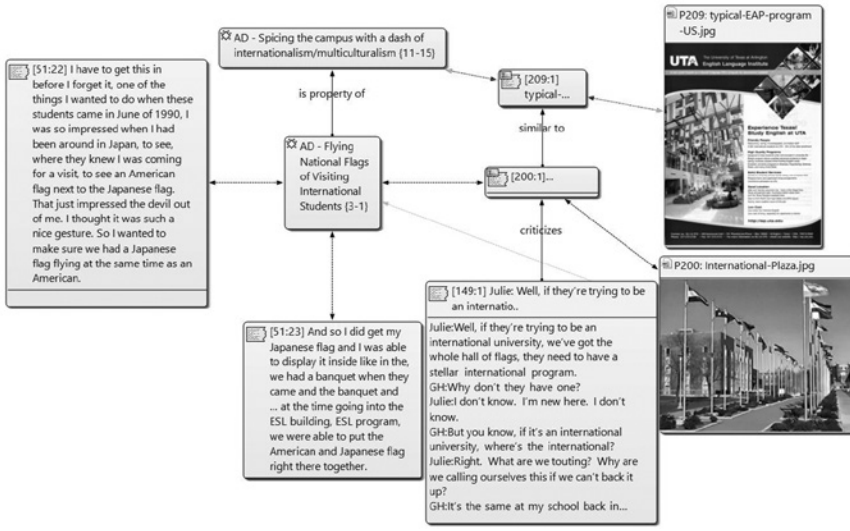


Figure 4.1 Networked Links to Qualitative Data in ATLAS.ti

popular platforms are NVivo ("NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software 8.0" 2008) and ATLAS.ti (Muhr 2009). Both are excellent programs and handle a wide variety of digital data.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using CAQDAS. The obvious advantage is in storing all or most of your data electronically. This makes it both portable and searchable. Not only can ideas, connections, and coding be preserved but also protected from the dangers of tabletop analysis, where a gust of wind through the window or the sudden upending of your workspace from a curious child or needy pet can send papers, notes, and codes flying to all four corners of the room. CAQDAS programs also allow you to work with videos and sound files in a way that is not possible with pen and paper methods.

The disadvantages to CAQDAS are in their complexity, since they must accommodate a wide variety of needs and datasets. This means that one will need to study how to use the software before using it in the research process. Books have been written for training researchers in how to ATLAS.ti and NVivo (Lewins and Silver 2007, Friese 2012), and some universities have training sessions on how to use such software. However, the major packages are expensive, even though student or institutional discounts might help to mitigate costs for some. Open source programs are appearing on the Internet as affordable alternatives to ATLAS.ti and NVivo, but the lack of technical support makes these a risky option. In addition, the convenience of having everything in one HU is fine until, for some reason, it becomes corrupted, lost, or erased. Without frequent backups and saving to multiple sources, months of work can be lost in a few seconds.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Glaser (2003) is against the use of CAQDAS, stating that the architecture of computer programs limit the development of any grounded theory. This has not been the experience of other grounded theorists (Bringer et al. 2006, Peters and Wester 2007), and while it would be easy to dismiss Glaser's rejection of CAQDAS as more generational than academic, since his formative years as a researcher took place when the apex of technology was the vacuum tube, my experience with using CAQDAS suggests that long periods of working with the data from a computer screen can become confining and at times limiting to one's creativity.

Nevertheless, deciding whether or not to use CAQDAS need not be a zero-sum game. I have found these programs to be very helpful for allowing me to store, sort, and code data. Whenever I felt limited by the program, or if I grew tired of theorizing through the computer screen, there was nothing to stop me from printing out material, spreading it out on my dinner table, and physically working with the data. Often, this helped to broaden my view and stimulate new ideas.

As Charmaz (2000, p. 520) states, CAQDAS programs do not replace the grounded theorist in terms of analyzing the data. Neither can one get away with stating that they have used CAQDAS as a way to validate the study. To put it another way, software cannot be used to create the impression of truth or an exaggerated picture of precision. CAQDAS provides

a matrix for organizing data, especially if you have video or sound files. However, they are not indispensable, and you can still do grounded theory 'old school' – that is, by working on a desk or table and by keeping a log of digital photos of the data in the different stages of organization. Nevertheless, take time to reflect on your preferences and analytical style so that you can decide as soon as possible whether you will use CAQDAS, because changing your mind or putting off a decision on the subject can seriously disrupt the flow of your analysis.

Packed for the journey

While not exhaustive, this chapter has sought to prepare you for some of the decisions you may need to make before entering the field and starting your journey with grounded theory. Attending to issues related to ethics and ethical codes within your specific institution, making pragmatic choices with regard to accessing people and places, deciding on what you will do in the area of transcription, and determining the degree to which you will use CAQDAS will free you to focus more fully on the immediate task of open exploration, which is the topic of the next chapter.

5 Breaking new ground through open exploration

We have all had times in our educational institutions when certain displays of student behavior or unexpected institutional practices have elicited our surprise and bewilderment. It is within these moments of raised eyebrows and internal questions of 'Hm?' or 'What's *that*?' that the path of open exploration begins. In this chapter, we will revisit some of the procedures first introduced in Chapter Two, and study some of the techniques and data collection methods that will help you to carry out the first stage of doing grounded theory. Advice with regard to coding during open exploration, as well as some of the pitfalls that you should avoid, will also be discussed.

Wonder, introspection, and sensitivity

You have noticed something in your class that has made you curious, something that has caused you to ask yourself, 'What is happening here?' or 'What is going on here?' You would like to know more, but at the same time, you have probably already started to form an opinion about what you think might be going on. The methodology of grounded theory is similar to phenomenology in this regard; at this stage, you should fight the urge to jump to conclusions or to consult the scholarly literature in order to validate your first flush of hypothetical thinking. To use an example from Zen Buddhism, open exploration is a practice in *shōshin*, the mind of the beginner – emptying yourself of expertise, approaching the social environment around you with wonder, and being open to new perspectives as they are presented to you. Part of the process of self-emptying will be, paradoxically, to develop a deeper understanding about what it is that you think you know. In order to be more open to learning something new about others, you will need to externalize your own thoughts and beliefs. Otherwise, unbeknownst to you, they will be hiding in the background, pulling the strings of your interpretations, and quietly filling in the gaps of what is unknown.

One simple technique for raising your self-awareness is to sit down and write an essay that sets out everything you know (or think you know) about what is going on in your new area of research interest. For those who have the creative energy, writing out a transcript of an interview with yourself can further enhance the potential of this exercise. After you have put out

all of your thoughts and opinions, go back and make note of any topics or themes in your essay or self-interview, but do not search for any scholarly literature on these topics. The purpose of this exercise is to help you to become more reflexive towards your own perspective and to symbolically empty yourself of preconceived notions by putting them on paper and keeping them in a safe place. During the trajectory of doing grounded theory, you will want to come back and look at this essay, partly to make sure that you are not imposing your ideas on the informants or data analysis, but also to compare your perspective with what others have told you.

Of course, even though you have sought to empty yourself of expertise and to externalize your perspective, you will still be steeped in the background knowledge that has come from reading many seminal works in applied linguistics. Dealing with the literature seems at first to be paradoxical, and as mentioned earlier, it is one of the most controversial and misunderstood aspects of grounded theory.

The reason why Glaser and Strauss could inveigh against consulting the scholarly literature during open exploration was because they already had a deep reading of sociology. They were writing to peers who were also experienced researchers. As we saw in Chapter Two in our discussion on abduction, having a perspective is vital so long as it is kept in balance with what is happening in the field. In fact, without knowledge and experience gained from years of study, grounded theory will cause you to go around in circles until you have reinvented the wheel. Your theory might represent a good example of methodological practice and a validation of the earlier work of others, but you may also find it to be as difficult to convince your supervisors, external examiners, reviewers, or colleagues of its value, as it would be were you a baker trying to convince a customer to buy that loaf of day-old bread.

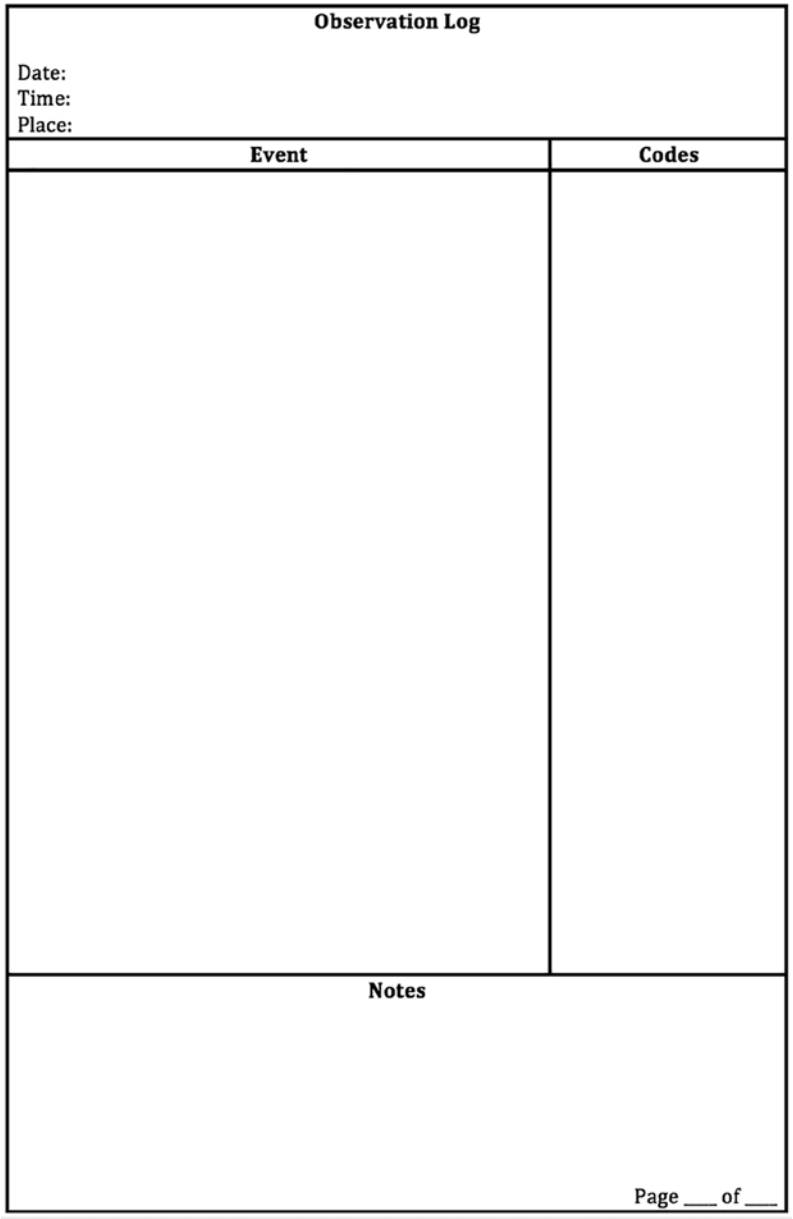
Generally, grounded theory methodology is better suited for PhD candidates or experienced researchers in academia, rather than most master's or undergraduate students, who have been known to fixate on the enduring myth that one can produce a thesis, book, or major work through grounded theory without any background knowledge or without ever having to consult scholarly literature. The issue of academic writings and their place in developing a grounded theory will be taken up in the next chapter. For now, however, it is important that you maintain an awareness of your background perspective, yet avoid substantiating it any further by using the scholarly literature as the filter through which you see, hear, and understand what research participants want to convey. Instead, you will need to raise your theoretical sensitivity to the human condition and communicative discourse. This is done through reading novels, ethnographies, and sociological accounts, and through studying other people-centered works. Apart from the personal enrichment that springs from exposing yourself to such material, by attending to the regularly occurring themes, problems encountered, strategies attempted, and trajectories of beginnings, climaxes, and resolutions, your proficiency in theorizing about life as it is played out in front of you will become better enhanced.

Observation, note-taking, and early coding

After spending time in personal reflection and engaging in activities intended to raise your theoretical sensitivity, you should then begin observation. Avoid conducting interviews for the moment. Even though you may have spent quite some time in your social settings, be they educational institutions, classrooms, or other environments of interest, reception instead of collection should be your focus. Purposeful observation helps raise your awareness to issues taking place around you, many of which may have gone on unnoticed earlier. Make a notebook of pages formatted with a template similar to Figure 5.1 and take it with you as you watch what is going on within your social environment. Focus only on what is externally observable. Make no interpretations about what people are thinking or feeling. Note any environmental features, such as the conditions of the room, temperature, lighting, and postings or notices on the walls. If any hunches or good ideas come up during the process of writing your observations, footnote these and write them at the bottom of the observation sheet in the notes section. After you have conducted your first observation, *stop*. Do not collect any other data for the moment. At this point, you will need to code your observations.

Coding is a multifaceted topic, and we will return to it many times in both this and later chapters. While it may be challenging later when the body of data becomes richer and more complex, I have found coding early observation logs to be far easier. Coding at this stage serves not only to provide an accessible starting point for those new to the methodology of grounded theory but also simple, descriptive summaries of observable behavior and actions will be important for progressively building your theory. During open exploration, coding is more about description than it is about theorization. Both Glaser (1978, p. 97) and Charmaz (2006, pp. 46–66) suggest creating codes in gerund form. This is useful because gerunds help you to describe observable actions taking place in your social environment. Read through the observation log that you have written, making note of any actions, words, or other conditions that could have been seen, heard, or experienced by someone else, had they been with you in the room. An example of a useful code here would be, 'Student texting during the reading activity' rather than the more interpretive, 'Student becoming demotivated in class'. During the process of coding your observation log, questions or hunches may pop in your mind. These can be written down as notes and should be linked to specific incidents or codes. For this stage of doing grounded theory, is important that you do not move prematurely towards interpretive analysis or force events to fit with what you have read or experienced in the past. You have already written down what you believe and still have that stored for safekeeping. The goal now is to be open to what you are observing, to bracket your assumptions, and to allow yourself to see things in other possible ways (Figure 5.2).

Repeat this process of observation for at least a few more times. After each observation session, stop again, write a summary, and code it. Use



Observation Log

Date:
Time:
Place:

Event	Codes

Notes

Page ___ of ___

Figure 5.1 Observation Log Template

codes from earlier observations if they seem to fit. If something new occurs, create a new code to describe the activity. Do not use codes from other theoretical papers or perspectives. Create your own codes throughout. Continue to write memos of your thoughts, questions, and working hypotheses.

Observation Log

Date: June 16, 2015
Time: 12:55–14:25
Place: Epsilon University (Room B350)

Event	Codes
I took the class role (1) and then passed out a warm up discussion activity (2) to give students a chance to discuss what they had written in their book reports with two or three others in class (3). Students had a list of questions and needed to add two more of their own, and to write down the names and responses of those they spoke to during the activity. It took a lot longer than expected for the students to finish writing two original questions (4). Some looked at me with what I thought were forlorn expressions, as after ten minutes, they had only written one question (5). I suggested some questions to a few of the students, and they wrote these down (6). Most, however, finished by this time (7), though, and I set them to the task of speaking with each other (8). At this time, the students became very animated (9). They were laughing (10), speaking in English (11), and doing the activity (12). After about fifteen minutes of this activity, I asked the students to choose Graded Readers from the resource box, if they had not brought any with them, and to take time for silent sustained reading (13). I told them to be sure to write down any words they did not know in their Vocabulary Logs (14). I observed some of the students who were reading deeply, and they appeared to be very focused during this time (15). None of the students were writing new words in their Vocabulary Logs (16). One of the French exchange students was texting in class (17), and I asked her to stay on task (18). She did for a while, but returned to texting (19). I didn't want to disrupt the class and so I did not confront her (20). Near the end of class, I checked student portfolios to see if any had worked with corpus-based exercises (21). Only three students had work with the materials (22), but none of them finished the worksheets (23). I reminded them to continue with this study (24). At the end of the class, we did one Speed Reading activity (25), checked the answers (26), recorded them in their portfolios (27), and finished the class.	1. Taking the class role 2. Setting up class activity 3. Giving Ss opportunity for Language expansion 4. Ss taking long time to prepare for task. 5. Ss quietly looking to Tt for help. 6. Tt offering help to Ss 7. Ss finishing preparation for activity.* 8. Setting up class activity 9. Ss becoming animated. 10. Ss laughing 11. Ss speaking in English 12. Ss doing the class activity.** 13. Setting up class activity 14. Reminding Ss to do Vocabulary Logs 15. Ss engrossed in reading 16. Ss not doing Vocabulary Logs*** 17. S texting in class 18. Tt asking S get back on task 19. S texting in class**** 20. T choosing not to discipline S. 21. Checking Ss portfolios 22. Most Ss not doing DDL activities 23. None of Ss finishing DDL materials 24. Reminding Ss to do DDL activities*** 25. Doing Speed Reading 26. Checking answers***** 27. Maintaining portfolios

Notes

* I wonder what is the difference between the students who could write two sentences on the worksheet and those who struggled to do this even after ten minutes of class time.
** The students were observably different at this time in the class, and it looked as if they were truly enjoying this activity. This is in stark contrast to the Vocabulary Logs and the Data-Driven Learning (DDL) activities. Why?
*** What is the connection between these activities, and why, I wonder, are the Ss still not doing them after being reminded?
**** What is going on here? The other French student in class also texts a lot (see Log June 12, June 5).

Figure 5.2 Example of Observation Log with Codes and Notes

Repertory grids

Even after a few observations sessions, you will be surprised at the amount of analytical data that you will have created in a relatively short period of time. If you have made memos while coding, you will have many questions that you will want to ask during interviews.

Before doing so, however, you still need to consider the issue of asking questions that originate from your own system of mental constructs – the lens by which you see the world. As an example of what I mean, during the late 1980s, I remember how one reporter presented a story on life in Japan, which at that time was at its peak economic dominance in the world. Part of the story focused on the high cost of beef and dairy products in Tokyo, the takeaway message being that life in Japan was rather difficult and expensive. The problem, of course, was that at the time, Japanese consumed more fish and vegetables than they did steak and cheese. The reporter had gotten truthful answers to his questions, yet missed the point entirely about life and issues from the perspective of the Japanese people. Such problems are an important reason why some treat qualitative research with suspicion. And while we all have perspectives that give us insight even as they limit our awareness to other aspects the social reality, it is important that we try to understand how people in the domain under study are seeing issues, dealing with problems, and structuring their lives. One way that I advocate for gaining insight into the constructs of research informants is through a research tool known as the repertory grid.

Repertory grids, or 'rep grids', were developed over 50 years ago by George Kelly, the founder of personal construct psychology (PCP) (Kelly 1955, Kelly 1963). Kelly's concepts preceded many later and better-known constructivists/constructionists, such as Berger and Luckmann (1967), and aspects of PCP still influence the academic discourse of psychology, management, logic, and artificial intelligence (Shaw and Gaines 1992). Fundamental to PCP are the notions of *elements, constructs*, and *bipolar constructs*. Elements are the empirical 'people, events, objects, ideas, institutions and so on' (Cohen et al. 2003, p. 338), which are 'well-known and personally meaningful' to research informants (Shaw 1980, p. 10). Easterby-Smith (1981, p. 11) explains that it is helpful 'to think of *elements* as being the objects of people's thoughts, and *constructs* as the qualities that people attribute to these objects'. Kelly believed the bipolar nature of constructs complemented the philosophical concept of constructive alternativism in that a mental construct operates somewhere between the dichotomy of what it is and what it is *not*. The manner in which a person understands value-laden constructs such as *sincere*, *cheerful*, or *refined* will remain ambiguous to others until an analyst learns something about the contrasting limits within which these values are framed (Kelly 1963, pp. 105–108).

Kelly originally designed repertory grids to 'investigate the role relationships between patients and their families, friends, etc., and for assessing the relationships between a patient's constructs about people' (Pope and Keen 1981, p. 36). Since then, there have been numerous modifications to Kelly's technique (Beail 1985), but all share the common goal of studying how

individuals and groups see the world around them (Bannister and Fransella 1986, p. 143). Today, psychologists, educators, management specialists, social scientists, nurses, and some in applied linguistics use repertory grids (Rowsell 1992, Roberts 1999, Marsden and Littler 2000, Hadley and Evans 2001, Herbig et al. 2001, Tan and Hunter 2002).

The most straightforward routine for administering repertory grids can be found in a combination of the procedures of Shaw and McKnight (1981) and Jankowicz (2004). Meet informants in a prearranged, informal setting and give each individual or task group a repertory grid large enough for five to eight elements and bipolar constructs. Each informant starts with a pen and five to eight blank index cards (Figure 5.3).

If, for example, you were curious about what is taking place in your language class, after telling the informants that you would like them to share their feelings and opinions about activities in the class, you would ask them to write elements across the top of the grid, such as *Role Play in Class, Writing Book Reports, Using a Corpus to Study Grammar, Keeping a Vocabulary Log*, and *Grammar Practice Lessons*. The informants must write down observable phenomena, not feelings or value statements. If, for example, the informant wanted to write, 'The teacher is kind to me', encourage them to write some specific activity that the person finds to be kind, such as 'The teacher takes time out of class to explain to me things I didn't understand'. The informant then writes numbers on one side of the cards, each of which corresponds with the same elements at the top of the grid (Figure 5.4). When the informant is finished with this stage, the cards are turned face down, shuffled, and three are drawn at random (Figure 5.5).

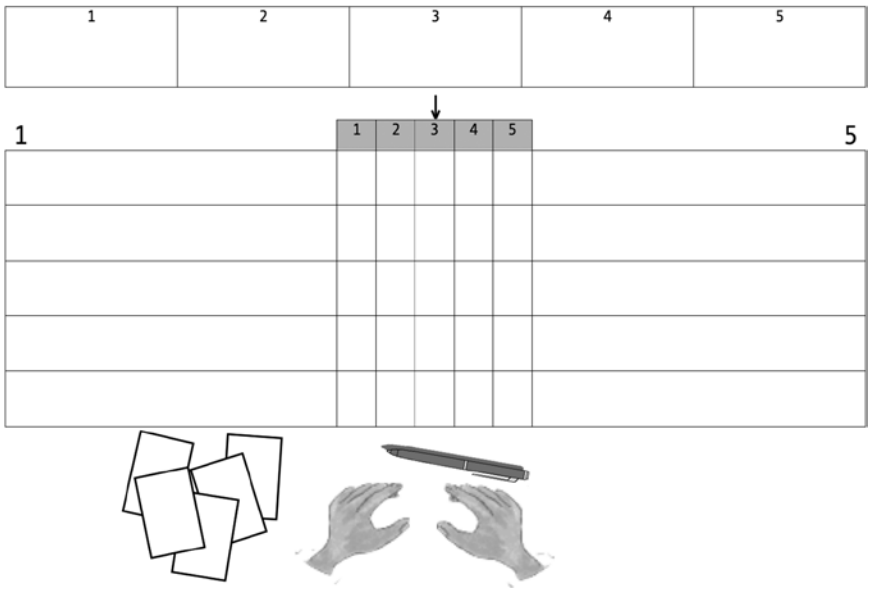


Figure 5.3 Materials for the Repertory Grid Technique

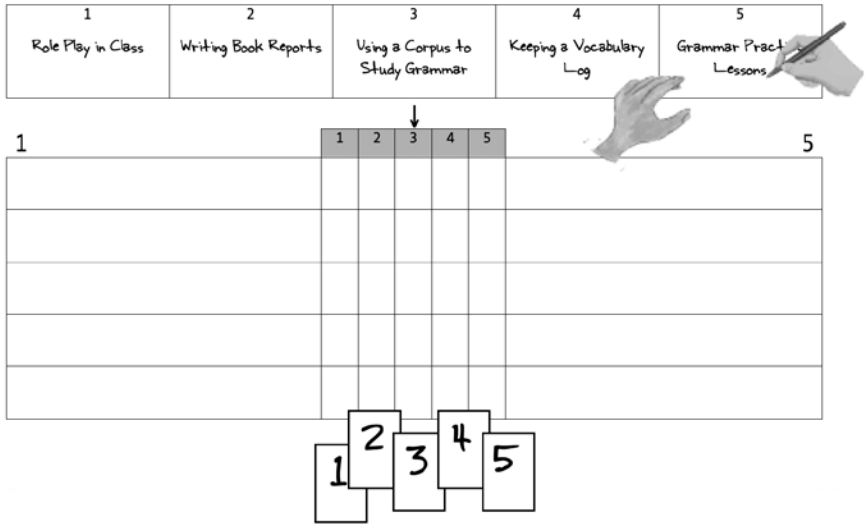


Figure 5.4 Providing Descriptive Elements for the Repertory Grid

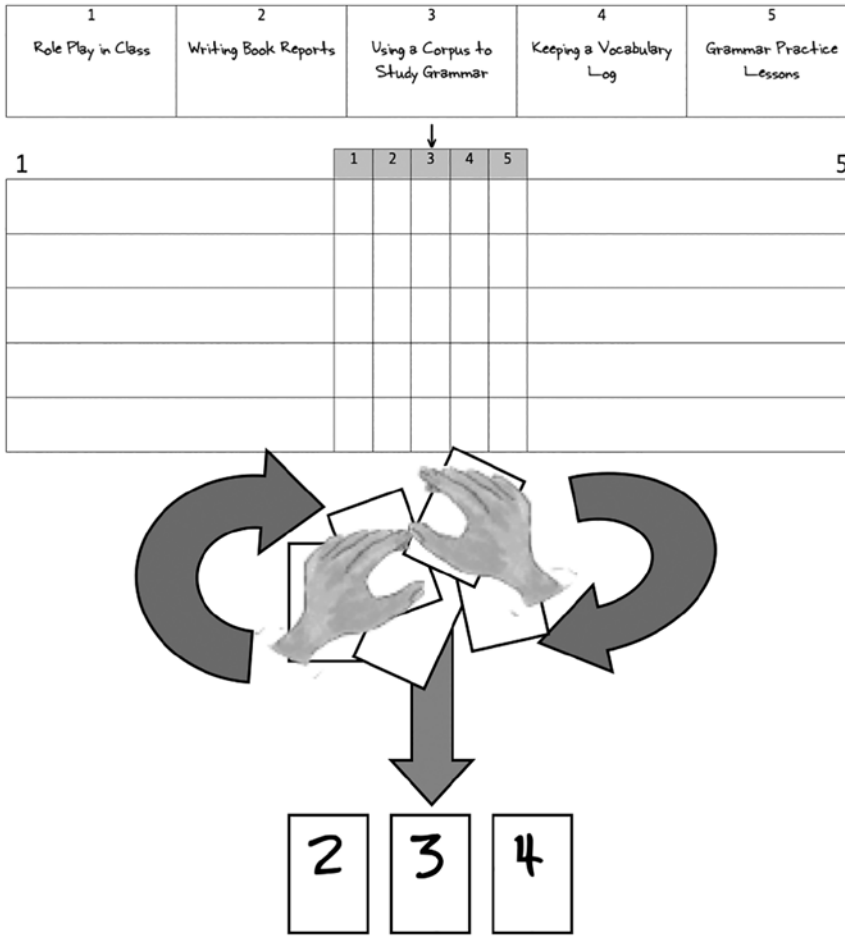


Figure 5.5 Choosing Elements at Random

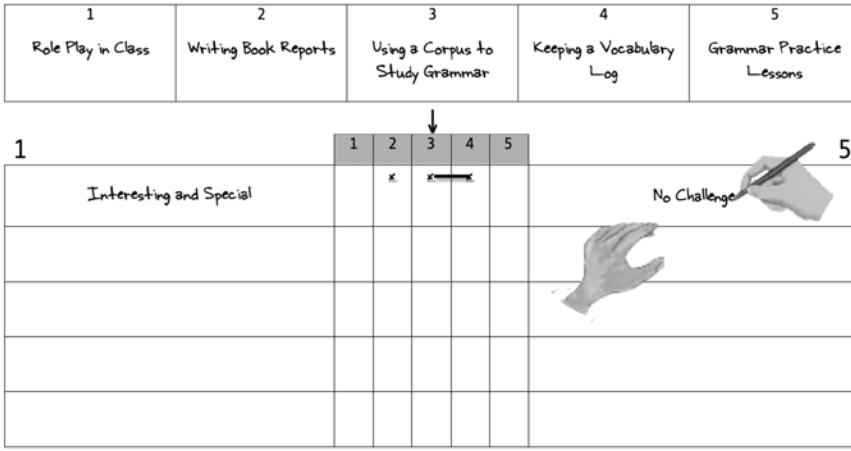


Figure 5.6 Eliciting Bipolar Constructs

The informant marks on the grid the three elements that were drawn by putting with an 'X' beside each on the grid. The informant then decides the following: 'Out of the three elements chosen, which two seem to have something more in common with each other?' These two elements are connected with a line. Always on the left side of the grid, the informant will describe what aspect the two elements share. On the right side, the informant will express *what makes the third element different from the other two*. If this is too difficult, the informant is allowed to write something h/she believes to be the opposite of the left-hand construct (Figure 5.6). The constructs, which are written down the far left and right columns of the grid, are then rated to each of the earlier elements in rows provided between each bipolar construct. The elements are rated to each of the constructs on a scale of 1 to 5, with the left construct always representing '1' and the right construct as '5'. Using the example shown in Figure 5.7, on a scale of 1 to 5, with '1' being most like 'Interesting and Special' and 5 as 'No Challenge', we see that the informant rated the element, 'Role Play in Class' as more like the left construct, with a rating of '2' (Figure 5.7).

The element, 'Grammar Practice Lessons' was, in the mind of the informant, more like the right construct, with a rating of '5'. 'Keeping a Vocabulary Log' was seen as strongly identified with the construct on the left side, with a rating of '1', and so on. Once the first row has been rated, the individual or group turn the three cards over, shuffle them, and begin the process all over again. They may reshuffle in the case of drawing the same three-card combination as before (Figure 5.8).

The repertory grid technique not only provides insight into the informants' perception of reality but also has the added benefit of freeing them

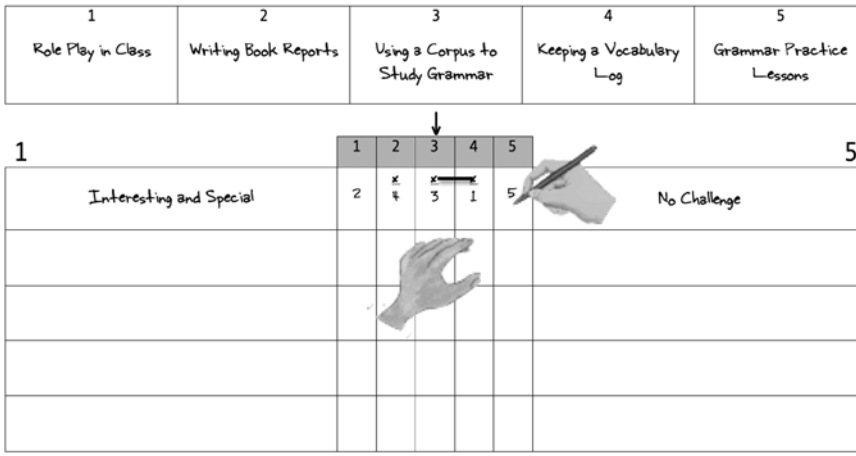


Figure 5.7 Rating Constructs

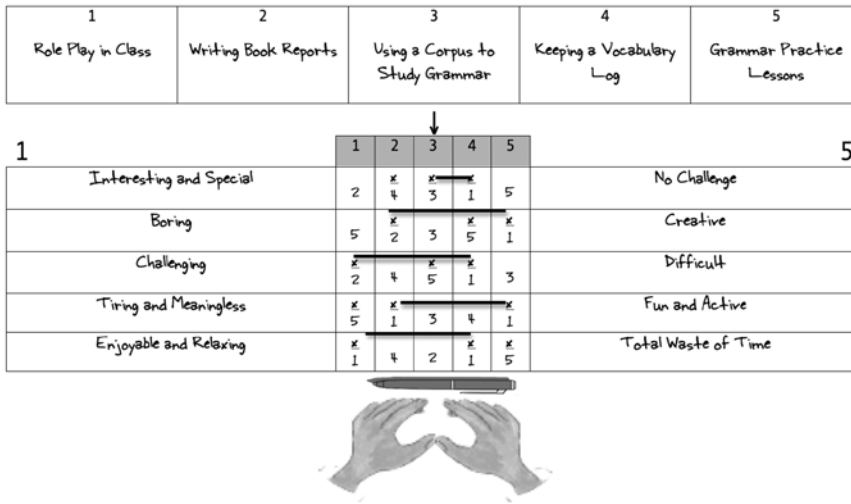


Figure 5.8 Completed Repertory Grid

from the intrusion of questions derived from the researchers' worldview. Through this method, informants use their own words to express what they feel is important in an area of research interest, and this self-generated data is rated using their own system of personal values (McCoy 1983, p. 175). Essentially, the technique enables informants to provide a physical record of an interview they have had with themselves. When used correctly, repertory grids are ideal for scouting out unknown cultural terrain (Langan-Fox

and Tan 1997, Hunter and Beck 2000, Scheer 2004). In addition, because grids have numerical ratings, recurring patterns can be interpreted either quantitatively or qualitatively. The results can be presented in a format that is often meaningful to the informant and to larger audiences.

Repertory grids can always be analyzed using 'eyeball analysis' (Jankowicz 2004, p. 80) – that is, by simply looking at what is written. One way to take full advantage of the repertory grid rating system, however, is to use software designed to analyze grid data. A number of programs are available for this purpose. Two of the most popular are *REP V 1.04* (Shaw and Gaines 2010) and *GridSuite 4* (Fromm and Bacher 2014). As with CAQDAS, these programs are expensive, but the statistical analyses provided by these packages are worth their weight in gold. One that I find to be particularly useful is the graphical display made from a multivariate analysis of constructs and elements. Elements and constructs more closely related to each other, as rated by the informant, are clustered into four quadrants. This facilitates the mapping of their beliefs and worldview around a particular subject and leads to better interviews, especially in the beginning.

To provide an example of what I mean, in one project, I was investigating a new language program innovation in an EAP unit at an American university. My observations suggested that social turmoil was taking place in an atmosphere of transition and uncertainty, but to better understand how people in this program were seeing the situation, I used repertory grids and asked them to think about 'good' and 'bad' schools, teachers, students, and administors from their past experiences. The names of people and places were written on the element cards, but in order to maintain anonymity, only their actions and activities were written on the grids. These elements were placed alongside the current EAP program where all the informants were working, as it was believed that past experiences might reveal how their present work environment was being interpreted.

Working with grids can be a messy experience for research participants who often find that trying to express why two of three elements are the same and why the third is different is both engrossing and exhausting. Also, the architecture of software programs usually requires that the construct labels are shortened, so the original grids need to be preserved (Figure 5.9). This grid was analyzed using the multivariate analysis function in *REP V 1.04*, and I wrote reflective field notes immediately after studying each graph (Table 5.1). This enabled me to have interviews that were more focused and in-depth from the onset. The following is an excerpt from my first interview with the informant codenamed Bluenose:

GH: (refers to repertory grid) Ok, well let me ask you clearly, uh, just so I can make sure I know, uh, what, what these are on the top. Um, the teacher that showed, let's see, clear focus on student attitude and learning – can you give me a, if if you were . . . if that, if that teacher was here in the room doing something . . . what, what would he or she be doing that would we would both be looking at, you could point at? What would that . . . how would they . . . do that?

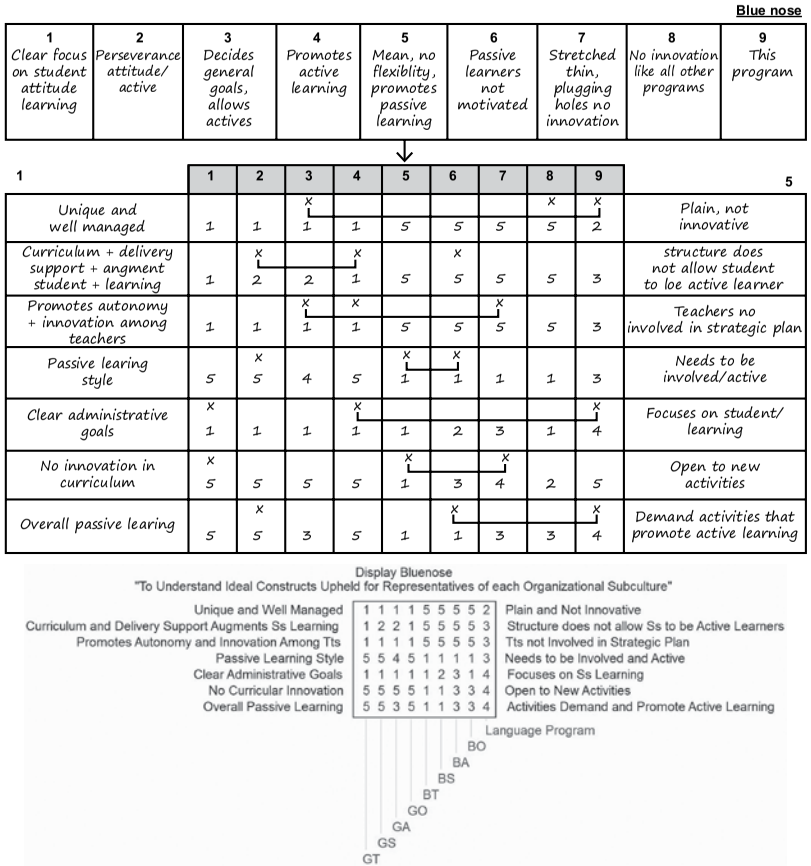
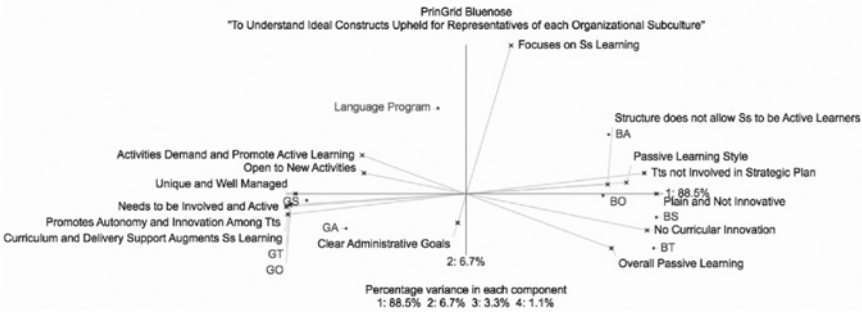


Figure 5.9 Example of Repertory Grid Display Using REP V 1.04.

Table 5.1 Analysis and Field Notes from Repertory Grid



Key: GA – Good Administrator, BA – Bad Administrator, GT – Good Teacher, BA – Bad Teacher, GS – Good Student, BA – Bad Student, GO – Good Organization, BO – Bad Organization

It seems that Bluenose sees innovative and active as positive traits for language learning, while that which is passive is construed as highly negative. It tends to line up a lot with ideas of being not innovative, demotivating and somewhat detached or uninvolved. For good teachers, he feels they should have a clear focus on students' attitudes and learning. A good organization (that is, a language program) promotes active learning, and the students are also active in terms of perseverance. The curriculum and delivery support are things that will augment the students' learning. About the Language Program, it seems that he feels that it is nominally well managed and unique, as opposed to being like other programs that lack innovation. The program is one that demands active learning and a sense of newness.

I am wondering if he feels that he is not a very good administrator, since he mentioned in an earlier conversation about feeling 'stretched thin' and being constantly engaged 'plugging holes'. He has not been able to restructure of the language program and has not been able to include the language teachers in his strategic plans. I hypothesize that he seems to find the regular international students as unmotivated and passive . . . probably he is referring to the Asian students that he has mentioned in passing. It is certain that, based upon my earlier interviews with him, that the teachers who are mean, inflexible and promoting passive learning are those in his department. Ideally, he seems to indicate that he would like to be a good administrator that has the power to decide goals and to give autonomy to co-workers he can trust.

BN: (chuckles) Um . . . I think it'd be evident . . . It'd be evident in the lesson plan –

GH: Mm-hm.

BN: . . . um . . . it would be . . . um . . . it would be something that you couldn't observe I don't think in a ten-minute time frame.

GH: Right.

BN: – you'd have to go and do . . . you know, a few visits to see. But . . . I think that what they would be doing would . . . they would be . . .

involving the students . . . to . . . get up and discover and explore the content, which is the language. That they're trying to understand it . . . and, *learn*.

GH: Mm-hm.

BN: . . . and, I think you would see it in, an active classroom. You ask what that classroom would look like . . . it would be a classroom where the teacher speaks less than the students. That's an active learning classroom, I feel. Where it's noisy and loud, and it's tough . . . to have those classrooms because (begins striking desk to punctuate each word) it's easy to just go up and awabuaawua . . . I, I know, because I still do it in TOEIC class and I wish I had more time to . . . (takes deep breath), be more like that, but I try to get them in groups and report out and pair and share . . . and all those things where . . . you let them . . . decide how they're going to tackle . . . this exercise, whatever it would be. So that . . . that would be a focus on the students because I feel that truly is some, students aren't brought up a lot of times . . . you know, a lot of Asian students that would be comfortable . . . sitting there, heads down, pretending to write notes or, sleeping . . . one of the two, and not doing anything, so, for me, a clear focus on students would be wha . . . would be . . . a teacher that truly is, involved in –

GH: Mm-hm.

BN: – planning activities, (begins hitting desk again to punctuate words) that would allow them to discover and explore . . . the language.

(Interview 28 November, 2005)

Many interesting issues came to the fore in the very first interview. Similarly, enlightening first interviews were had with other informants in this study as well.

Repertory grids are admittedly complicated to use, especially for the first time. Even without factoring in the time needed to explain how to fill out a repertory grid, it can often take an informant as much as 45 minutes to complete one. However, the dividends from such efforts are that research participants essentially provide, through their elicited constructs, coded data. The interviews that follow help to unpack those codes. Repertory grids are untenable during later stages of doing grounded theory, but with open exploration, they can give you a better start than simply starting out with exploratory interviews, which can feel like a furtive fumble in the dark as you struggle to discover issues that are important to informants, and which may be distinct from your worldview.

Conducting and coding qualitative interviews

While simpler than repertory grids, interviewing informants nevertheless requires flexibility and foresight. Qualitative Interviewing, which is distinct

from the harder, more confrontational interview styles seeking to extract the truth from 'subjects' (Collins 1998, Dey 1999), is more appropriate when using a grounded theory approach. Kvale (1996, p. 14) explains that 'the qualitative interview is a construction site for knowledge. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest'. Qualitative interviewing has more potential for shedding light on the 'lived world' of the informants, and can help you to learn more about the multiple perspectives operating within your area of research interest (Kvale 1996, p. 105). In addition, Charmaz (2001) supports in-depth qualitative interviewing in her constructivist form of GTM, stating that such data adds richness and complexity to the grounded theory.

Qualitative interviewing procedures vary, and your own style will develop over time as it becomes refined with practice. If your informant consents to being recorded, take some time to let the interviewee look at the recording device. Invite discussion about its size, ease of use, or other qualities. Many people, even after consenting to a recorded interview, find recording devices intimidating. Talking together about the device before the interview helps to create common ground and to bring the device into the interview, where it will often soon be forgotten. Try to find a quiet setting. Public places such as coffee shops and restaurants tend to be very noisy. There are few things as disappointing as having an excellent interview that is forever lost because of the din of the room.

Interviews during this stage of grounded theory are unstructured and exploratory. Within the context of the substantive area, where the informants function as social actors, invite them to share personal accounts about a 'good day' and a 'bad day'. You should not try to shoehorn the informant into a preexisting theoretical perspective. For example, asking something along the lines of, 'Attribution Theory suggests that people feel more successful when operating in their locus of personal control. In your class, when do you most feel in control?' would be forcing the informant to discuss something that may not be a pressing concern. Instead, asking informants to reflect on regularly occurring problems in their work and what strategies they have taken to deal with those challenges are better places to begin (Charmaz 2006, pp. 30–33). Listen to when informants express value statements, because here you can ask slightly more probing questions so that they can further explain what they mean. If informants discuss things in very general terms, you should ask for more specifics as to what they think, such as if they have had any personal experiences that could further illustrate the point. It is very useful to encourage the informants to tell stories about their lives and experiences. Ask informants to talk about any milestones, memorable successes, enduring failures, or major crises that they have experienced (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 50). Generally, it is also better to avoid yes or no questions, but if something needs

to be clarified, do so, but sparingly. It should be an interview, not an interrogation. Allow the informant time to think. Moments of silence, when used appropriately, allow informants time and space for organizing their thoughts.

As with observations, stop after each interview and do not proceed until it has been completely coded. Use any applicable codes from earlier observation notes and repertory grids as you create new codes from your interview data. Coding your interviews will be more challenging than the coding of your observation notes, mainly because of the tangled complexities inherent within human discourse. During the open exploration phase, you should try not to summarize any implied meanings with open codes. Instead, attend to your informant's words and summarize them as succinctly and descriptively as possible. I accomplish this through adapting a Rogerian active listening technique often used in counseling, where the statements of clients are summarized by the therapist in a non-judgemental manner. The technique stimulates clients to reflect on their words and opens the way for important self-discoveries. In applying this to open coding, go through your transcript or written summary and reflect on what the informant has told you using short descriptive gerunds or phrases. If you do not use CAQDAS, you will need to have a system for cataloguing and tracking your individual codes. I use numbers (Figure 5.10), but you could use letters, colors, or whatever else will help you keep your data organized and easily retrievable. Any brief questions, provocations, or inferences that come to mind should be jotted down as notes. These can be expanded later as memos, a topic that will be addressed shortly. For now, keep your codes focused on summarizing your informants' concerns, strategies, and contingencies. These conscious efforts to focus on the informants' understanding of their situation will enhance a greater understanding of your own perceptions and will continue to raise your theoretical sensitivity to the informants' perspectives.

It is here, however, where paradigmatic beliefs come into play. We have already seen how coding has been at the core of various controversies which had ontological and epistemological implications. While you must strive to suspend judgement or jumping to conclusions, you also need to accept that your descriptive codes are still shaped by your personal constructs. Some, after reading the extract in Figure 5.10, would have coded the discussion differently, perhaps by focusing on notions related to Taiwan, to the 'we' language used by the informant, or to the formal language of authorization and remittance. These too could have been acceptable codes. In his seminal book on coding, Saldaña explains,

> Did you agree with the codes? Did other words or phrases run through your mind as you read the data? It's all right if your choices differed from mine. Coding is not a precise science, it's an interpretive act.
>
> (Saldaña 2011, p. 4)

Interview Transcript

Date: March 11, 2015
Informants: ('1', '2', and '3')
Place: Isengard University

Transcript	*Codes*
GH: So how is it different? For example, are you getting more and more people from Japan particularly asking if they can find ways to get people from Isengard to go to their university, than other countries? Or do you see it in China or Taiwan?	
I1: *Well, we see it really wherever we go, but there's a slight problem that we've had*, (25) because let's say we go in Taiwan, when we visit Taiwan we go to the universities, *pretty much nine out of ten of those universities will say to us, 'Oh, and we'd also like to arrange student exchanges or exchanges for professors'* (26) and *that's something we can't . . . we're not authorized to make the decisions on*, (27) or *it's something that the college doesn't do or within Isengard University they don't do that either*, (28) so *it's always a bit tricky for us because we are actually, when we go to let's say (redacted) University, we're actually going because they're our partners and we go to promote the program and do the study abroad fair and hopefully recruit quite a large group of students*, (29) but *beyond that we don't have much of a remit to do anything else*, (30) *because even as a college, can't accept 20 professors from there, we just simply can't, and Isengard University doesn't do it or we don't have exchange students either*, (31)* so *we're quite limited as to what we can reciprocate*. (32)**	25) Experiencing a recurring problem 26) Client universities wanting to have exchange programs a problem 27) Lacking authority to negotiate exchange 28) Elite university not doing exchange programs 29) Recruiting students for study abroad program main purpose 30) Only allowed to recruit students 31) Elite university not doing exchange programs 32) Lacking authority to negotiate exchange

Notes

* This is the same explanation as from other informants (see interview summary March 8, 2014) – 'Isengard simply doesn't do exchange programs'. With so many universities around the world working to set up exchange programs, why is Isengard, one of the top universities in the world, not doing exchange?

** Not sure I like this code yet. There is an element of being prevented from doing anything but recruiting. Who is defining their roles? Who has limited them to nothing but recruitment? Why not anything more than this?

Figure 5.10 Open Coding of Interview Transcript

Now we return to our earlier analogy for understanding GTM coding – that of summaries written in the margins of an ancient manuscript. Imagine if you were the first person tasked with writing commentary on such a manuscript and were asked to divide the manuscript into titled subsections, sections, and chapter titles, and to tie the interpretation of the manuscript's structure together with a table of contents. Now imagine if the task of interpreting the structure of the ancient manuscript was given not only to you but also to two other people working independently of each other. It is likely that even though the organization of the manuscript would contain some parallels, there would also be significant differences, though none of the ways in which the people had interpreted and organized the manuscript could be judged as particularly wrong but rather as representing different perspectives.

Grounded theory is not grounded fact. Coding will always be idiosyncratic. It reveals as much about your ontological and epistemological beliefs as it does about the material being coded. The tension between description and interpretation sits well with those who view coding as situated within restive human dynamics open to multiple interpretations, but it will distress those who feel that codes should be seen as either correct or incorrect, depending on their ability to accurately reflect the social reality. Readers will have different stances on this epistemological issue, but this brief aside is intended to remind you that open coding of the informants' perspective represents a Janusian paradox: Even with your deliberate efforts to both externalize and suspend your beliefs, at the end of the day, coding in grounded theory will still be an interpretive practice. And yet, after acknowledging this, during open exploration you should still strive to make your codes as descriptive and non-judgmental as possible.

Memos

Seeking to represent the informants' concerns through open coding creates the space for theorization to begin. This takes place through the writing of memos. Essentially reflective research notes about your codes, data, and personal thoughts, memos are intended to help you shift from the description of open coding to conceptualization of the type that will lead to creating a grounded theory. I like the acronym of MEMO from Birks et al. (2008, p. 70) that effectively encapsulates the purposes of memos: 'Mapping research activities; Extracting meaning from the data; Maintaining momentum; Opening communication'. Writing memos, or 'memoing' as it is often called in qualitative research circles, provides you with a platform for brainstorming about the implications and theoretical possibilities within your coded data, and for graduate students, Birks and Mills (2012, p. 41) explain that memos are part of the paper trail that documents your ideas, methodological decisions, and the reasons behind your codes. Memos provide a bridge for communication between you and your supervisors, or between you and others in a graduate research seminar. You will write memos from

the beginning to the end of your project, and much of what is written will find its way later into your paper, book, or thesis. This section addresses some of the 'what, when, and how' of memoing, and suggests techniques for helping you to start looking for concepts within your data, as well as further ideas for unpacking special types of codes.

In terms of what to write in a memo, if you have used any of the suggested techniques introduced so far in this chapter, such as externalizing your preconceptions in writing and jotting notes about ideas or questions that arose when conducting observations, or if you wrote your reflections on the potential meanings and questions that came to your mind when using repertory grids, then you have already started writing memos of a sort. I have sections for quick notes in my templates so that I can lay an 'empirical anchor' in observation logs or interview transcripts and remember the place where ideas occurred and so that they can be cross-referenced (Figure 5.11).

This is because memos are written on separate sheets of paper and kept in a loose-leaf binder for organization. However, if you are using CAQDAS, your memos will be linked and stored to any data that you have loaded into your HU.

Memos during the early stages of open exploration will often focus on what informants had hinted at in interviews, your thoughts about what was *not* said, and your tentative answers to the overarching question of 'what is going on here?' Make note of any noticeable display of emotions or interesting interactions between people in the field. Are there beliefs that are treated as a given by the informants, but not by you or other outsiders? In interviews, do the informants use any metaphors for discussing aspects of the phenomenon? If so, think about these, because metaphors can suggest higher level concepts and possible paths for theorization. Drawing from the sociologist Erving Goffman's idea of social arenas as the stage for dramaturgical performances (Goffman 1959/2005), if the situation you observed or the interview you conducted were a play or TV program, what title would it have? Charmaz (2014, p. 169) states that thinking along these lines when writing memos will be helpful for later when you begin to make categories for conceptualizing the data in later stages of GTM. Take time to think about any regularly occurring patterns, words, or routines. Write about how they begin, who is involved, how they end, and with what sorts of consequences. Be certain to start looking for exceptions to these emerging patterns, for it is in these occurrences that you will discover the limitations of your theory.

In order to map out what seems to be going on within these routines, you may want to include diagrams, flowcharts, pictures – anything that helps to encapsulate the social actions you see being played out in front of you. If you see any other activities that are somehow linked, or which seem to happen simultaneously while something else is going on, think about these in your memos. In the economy of social interaction, people often try to accomplish more than one thing at the same time. Keep asking yourself

Memo

Title: 'Getting things started'
Date: May 5, 2015

Something that I am starting to notice is how much time I and other teachers that I have observed (see Observation Log April 23rd & Interview on April 27th) are spending in 'getting things started'. Other things that teachers say with regard to this are statements like 'gearing them up', 'revving them up', and 'kick-starting the class'. There are so many things here. One is that the teachers are all the prime 'starters' – and within that, in the classes that I have observed so far, the students are often chatting among themselves, in their own social spaces, and in all of the cases viewed so far, the teacher enters, disrupts their space, and 'gets' them started. I remember a conference once where a presenter spoke of lessening 'teacher push' and enabling 'student pull' for making a class go. It sounded like a great idea, but I have yet to see 'student pull' in the classes . . . only teacher push. Are we pushing our agendas and pushing what we think should be taught, rather than finding out if there is anything that the students really want which would pull them into the lesson? Even these thoughts, though, seem to be tied to the forceful language from the code and from other teachers' statements, those of 'getting' (making them do something), 'gearing', 'revving' . . . 'kick-starting'. Then there is the patently mechanistic language. It is as if teachers so far talk of starting up machines within which the people are depersonalized ('things', 'them', 'the class'). This is an interesting aspect of what I once read about as 'otherization' – where a dominant group tends to ostracize another group as alien and inferior. The teachers that I have spoken with so far are native English speakers who have been in Japan for a long time. I wonder if this sort of language and viewpoints are prevalent among Japanese teachers of English here?

What is going on here? Really not sure yet, but if I were to tell it as a story, it would probably have Rashomon-like aspects. If it started as 'Once upon a time, there was a native English teacher in Japan', I am thinking right now that there might be concepts of being in a machine, pulling levers, getting things started, and producing things, but of being incredibly isolated.

Future Action

* I need to find some incidents where teachers were not 'getting things started', but that class engagement was still taking place. Maybe university seminar classes would be a better place to explore this?
* Check tomorrow in the common room to see if any Japanese teachers of English would let me watch their classes, and have a follow-up interview.
* I need to track down a few students as well to see what they think of these ideas, but first to find out what sorts of main concerns they have for their English classes . . . or should I just keep that open to 'classes' in general. Need to think about this some more.

Figure 5.11 Example of an Early Memo during Open Exploration

what seem to be going on in your area of study. What issues keep coming to the fore? A greater awareness to these overarching concerns may help you discover some of the reasons why informants engage in certain activities or use certain strategies.

Memos are also the place for you to think about 'in vivo' codes and concepts (Glaser 1978). In vivo codes are unique words or phrases used by

the informants, and which seems to encapsulate some important issue. After you have coded several transcripts of different research participants, if you are using CAQDAS, most programs have a function where you can search for words or phrases across all of the data in your HU. However, a point that I will make again near the end of this book, I find that concordance software for the study of corpora, such as WordSmith Tools (Scott 2005) or AntConc (Anthony 2014) to be far superior, in that they are capable of generating keyword lists, and can reveal other aspects of the language used, such as collocations and lexical clusters. Keywords are indicative of conceptual thought, and interesting insights can be gleaned from such analysis, which can be expanded in memos. If you are willing to take this route, after your second interview, make word lists for both the first and the second interview transcripts. In both AntConc and WordSmith Tools, there are functions where you will be able to create and then compare two separate word lists. The most common words (lemmas) are almost always the same (i.e. *the*, *be*, *and*, and so on), but continue to go down the lists until you start to encounter meaningful lemmas. Check the frequencies. Are there lemmas which are more common in one interview than the other? Is this significant? Collect what you feel to be a suitable amount of meaningful lemmas from wordlist of the first interview. Reflect on this and write a memo that briefly reconstructs a story based on this analysis. In the spirit of constant comparison, do the same with the second interview transcript and compare it with the first interview. What is similar? What is different? Write more memos about this.

You will be able to continue through this sort of process throughout the later stages of doing grounded theory. While a comparison of lexical items from wordlists will not serve as a magical workaround for the hard graft of coding, it will reap dividends. For example, using WordSmith Tools, I studied the transcripts of interviews with university English for Academic Purpose teachers, 'blended' teacher-managers placed in charge of the programs, and senior university administrators. Constant comparison of the interview wordlists revealed that the higher a person moved up the organizational ladder of universities that had adapted modern business practices for restructuring the organization as a whole, the more that international students recruited for EAP programs were referred to as 'the numbers'. For those in the organizational positions, the EAP teachers, such lexical markers were never used. Learners were referred to as 'the students', especially when EAP teachers wished to use them as a pretext for resisting proposed managerial initiatives that would either drastically change the nature of their daily work or reshape the way they viewed their vocation. The use, or the lack thereof, of 'the numbers' among those blended teacher-managers in the middle was one significant indicator of whether they were on an upwardly mobile or sinking trajectory (Hadley 2015). Concordance software can also be used to analyse your own memos and codes in order to see if there are any recurring concepts of which you were previously unaware.

You should also make other memos that document the people you want to interview next and why. Because you have been asking questions in your

memos on aspects of what is going on in the data, questions in future interviews, the people you seek as informants, and things you will be watching for in observations, will become increasingly specific. It is around this time that your enthusiasm may start to quicken, because within the cloud of ambiguity that enshrouds the early stages of open exploration, you will start to see that there is something out there taking shape in the distance.

Shifting our attention to when you should write memos, Glaser (1978, p. 90) advises to write memos when coding. This entails a seesaw-like mental process where you first focus on creating open codes that describe what seems to be going on, and then shifting to writing a memo whenever a question, flash of inspiration, or working hypothesis comes to mind. After deciding on any further actions for following up on the memo, return to coding, and so on.

You also need to be prepared to write memos at other times. Your mind will continue to unconsciously ponder over the data, codes, and ideas that you have been having. In the course of your daily life, when you least expect it, flashes of inspiration will come, so you should keep a notepad or collection of memo templates with you through the day. It is important to write down these ideas as soon as possible. Remembering that you had a good idea but that it is now gone can be very discouraging. I have learned the hard way of how telling myself, 'I will get to that memo later' usually results in my losing the idea altogether. I have intentionally emphasized the need to write these memos, because there is something about dictating ideas into a smartphone or talking about it with a friend that derails the thought process and dissipates the formation of new insights.

Most grounded theorists develop their own system for how they organize and retrieve their memos. For example, Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 218) separate memos into those which discuss codes, those which are theoretical in nature, and those which are operational, in that they discuss the rationale behind your methodological choices. Regardless of how you organize your memos, they need to be dated and contain a title. The reasons why I suggest that memos be kept in a loose-leaf binder is because, later on, they will be taken out and sorted to fit with developing categories and processes in your grounded theory. They need to be kept separate from the data and saved as an ever-growing archive (Glaser 1978, p. 83, Charmaz 2014, p. 165). Some of your memos will continue to develop over time as 'feeder memos' (Clarke 2005, p. 103) that spur new ideas while also changing over time, so your system of retrieval needs to be organized enough to find what you need, even as you are adapting to your growing insights.

Finally, when considering these and other issues related to memos, Glaser (1978, p. 85) and Charmaz (2014, p. 181) argue that no one should be allowed to judge, traduce, or censor your memos. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or proper form. The only real mistake that you can make with memos is not to write them. Grounded Theorists may differ on the finer points of how to make and maintain memos, but they all agree that memoing is the lifeblood of grounded theory. Those I have met who

were struggling with grounded theory almost always had either skipped or skimped on writing memos. As your memos go, so goes your theory, so strive to move the ideas out of your head and onto paper. In doing so, you can get on with the process of developing your grounded theory.

An integrated cycle of exploration

In this chapter, we have considered techniques and procedures that you should carry out during the open exploration stage of the grounded theory methodology (Figure 5.12). Although each were dealt with separately, it bears repeating that you will be carrying out these activities in tandem, meaning that coding and memoing take place after each data collection event, be it an observation, repertory grid, interview, or study of field documents such as wall posters, email messages, newsletters, and the like.

As can be seen in Figure 5.12, with you acting as the core processor of the qualitative data, the subsequent reflections that you will have about the open codes and memos will lead to the who, what, where, and why of your next data collection event. New codes will be added to any which have been reused from the early events of data collection, and back channeled if you find that they have a better fit with the data. Slowly, but soon with greater speed, a growing body of codes, memos, and data will be at your disposal. You begin to sense, based on your deliberate and methodical study, that there are recurring, interconnected patterns in the data. Something is coming into focus. Certain concepts, problems, and regular concerns are coming to the fore. It is time to go to the next stage.

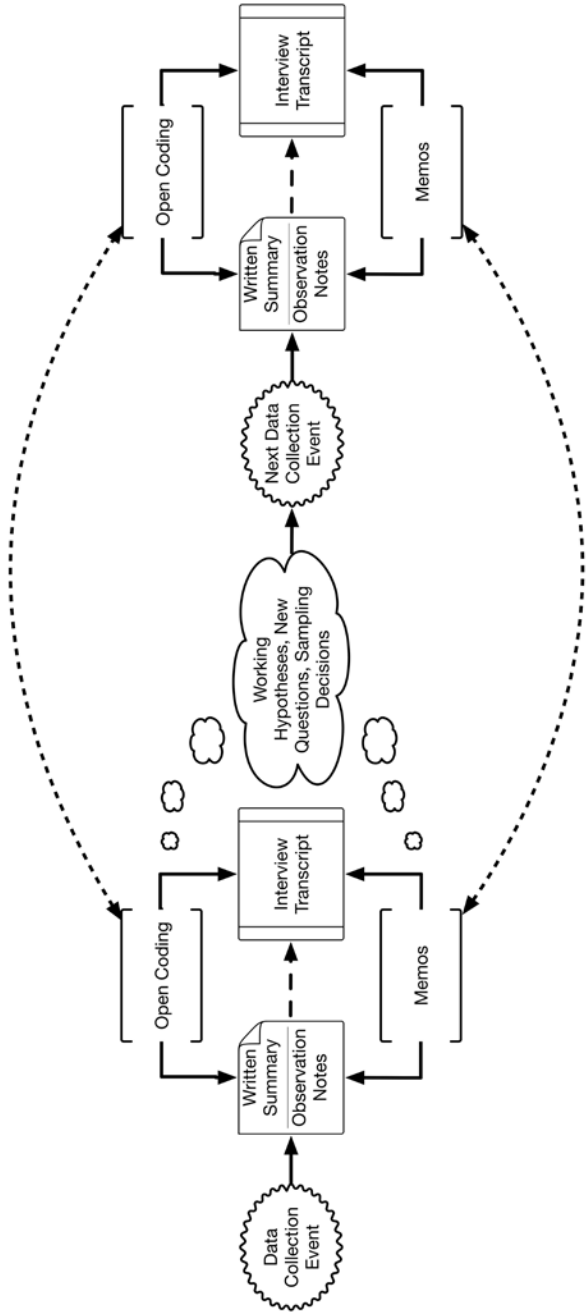


Figure 5.12 Concurrent Practices of Open Exploration

6 Taking it to the next level
From description to theorization

By focusing on preconceptions and potential biases, the last chapter helped you to externalize these concerns so that you could attend more fully to the social actions taking place in your area of study. You fractured the data into manageable pieces through descriptive open coding, and through memoing, you began to interpret possible issues in your data as you searched for informants who could further your investigation. Now you are ready to take the next steps in doing grounded theory – those of focused coding, the creation of conceptual categories, theoretical coding, and the selection of a core category or main phenomenon. Along the way, we will consider how memoing and diagrams help to integrate your theory, and then we will discuss the notion of theoretical sufficiency.

Focused coding

By now, you will have become proficient in the techniques and practices of open exploration. The skills of memoing, observation logging, interviewing, and coding with an eye to social problems, solutions, and interactions will enable you to carry out the focused investigation of your data. A danger at this juncture is in becoming so comfortable with open exploration that you stay at this level. Doing so will result in your creating scores of descriptive open codes that will begin to look suspiciously similar to each other. Coding during open exploration is a necessary scaffold upon which you will construct your grounded theory, but open codes still lack the 'grab' (Glaser 1998, p. 62) necessary for your grounded theory to make a salient impact. Creating too many open codes also causes what Clarke (2005, p. 84) has aptly called 'analytic paralysis' – a situation just as debilitating as if you had collected large amounts of data at the beginning of your project and then tried to code all of it later on. If you begin to feel like you are overwhelmed with so many pieces of data, feel that you are further than ever from getting a handle on what is taking place in the data, or if you are suddenly struggling to move beyond description, these may be early indications of analytic paralysis. To avoid this, you need to shift to focused coding. This chapter will help you move from description to interpretation by explaining the procedures, challenges, and pitfalls surrounding focused coding. The issue of axial

coding and accessing the scholarly literature, which are important parts of the focused investigation stage, will also be discussed.

Focused coding techniques

Focused coding entails grouping similar open codes together (Figure 6.1). You will create new gerunds that highlight a certain quality or action that are shared among each grouping of open codes. While CAQDAS are particularly helpful for carrying this out, what follows is my method for doing this without the use of software.

First, you will need the notebook you have used to keep an index of open codes, a package of envelopes, and a printout of all your codes. Cut the codes individually into strips and spread them out on a table. Start grouping together any open codes that, based on your interaction with the data up to this point, seem to have something in common. On the outside of an envelope, write an action-based gerund that encapsulates the quality that is shared by this group of open codes. Put the codes in the labeled envelope.

A variation of this technique that I have created from emulating the method used to elicit repertory grid constructs can also be helpful for stimulating constant comparison while generating focused codes. For this method, with your stack of envelopes and open codes spread out on a table, choose three to five codes that seem to have something in common, and place them together. On an envelope, write a label or title that expresses what you think these codes seem to have in common. Ask yourself questions such as, 'What is it that these open codes share? If these codes were a story, what would be the title?' After writing down these ideas, look for other codes that seem to contrast in some way from your newly created focused code. The rationale guiding this technique is the belief that some open codes might derive their commonality from being able to define the boundaries of other processes taking place in the data. Select around three but no more than five of these open codes, assign a label on an envelope, and repeat the process, making sure to pause and write memos about any relationships or interesting interactions you see emerging.

If you are using CAQDAS, it will be easier to both see and keep track of these open codes, because they are linked hierarchically to their parent focused codes, and automatically applied to the data that you have stored in your HU. Without software, you will have to update your record of open codes manually to note which ones have been used to create your new focused codes. After recording the groupings of open codes to the new focused code in your notebook, repeat this process to create more focused codes.

Working through analytical decisions, challenges, and tensions

As you progress, it is likely that you will encounter a few open codes that stand on their own. Often these have occurred much more frequently than

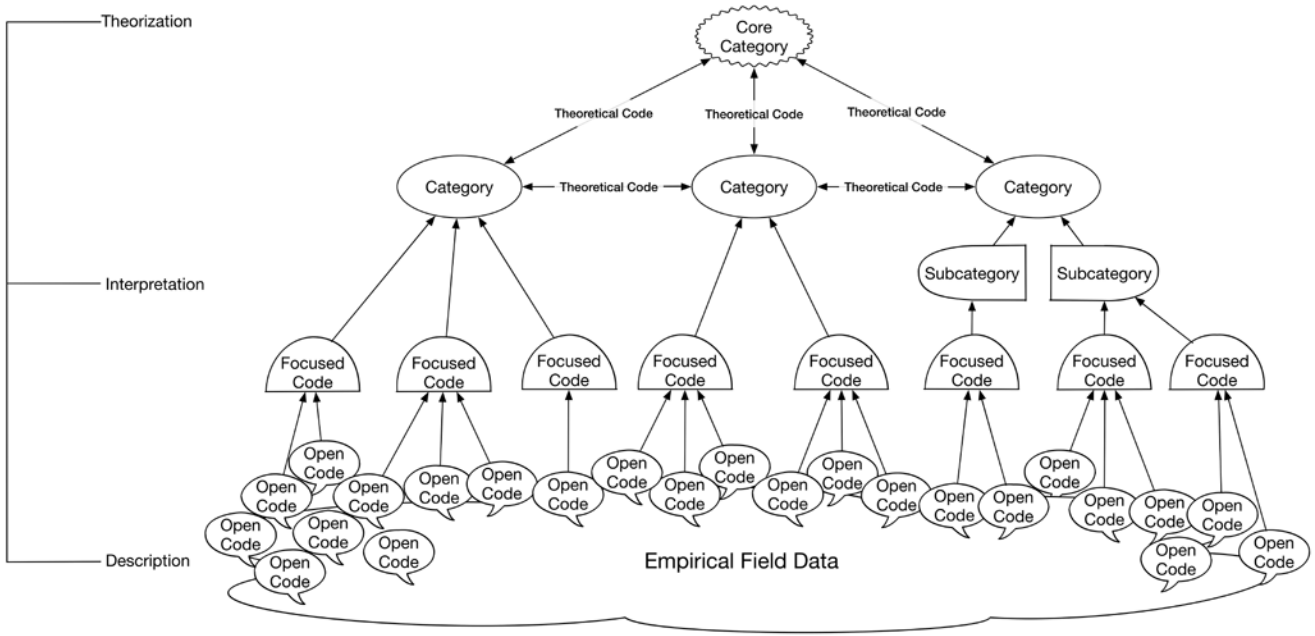


Figure 6.1 Successive Coding Procedures for Constructing a Grounded Theory

others. While you cannot ensure the quality of your analysis through the quantity of code frequency, it is possible that such codes are pointing to something important. However, be cautious here, because the prominence of such codes could also suggest that you have unintentionally focused on one aspect of the social phenomenon to the exclusion of others. Review your memos on these high-frequency codes and determine whether you have practiced constant comparison by searching out opposite cases or other deviations. If you have, then such open codes may have enough gravitas to become a focused code.

Conversely, you may also find that an open code occurs less frequently than others yet still has compelling support and sheer explanatory power to become a focused code. In my experience, this often occurs with in vivo codes. The most powerful in vivo codes tend to emerge during interviews where informants, after telling their stories, summarize the core message of their narrative with a pithy saying or memorable phrase. For example, when I was conducting research on blended professionals in EAP programs in neoliberal universities, some informants used the phrase 'carving out time' to describe a problem they had in continuing to do the things they felt really mattered in their jobs. This was nearly always a result of new administrative work and initiatives that, as others sometimes described, were 'coming down from on high' – that is, from unseen centers of administrative power within the university that were steadily reshaping the nature of their work and their professional identity as language teachers (Hadley 2015). Such in vivo codes can become focused codes, where their importance can become a prominent thread in the fabric of your theory.

After creating a handful of focused codes, stop for a while and go back to your memos. Check to see if the 'storyline' between the memos, open codes, and focused code makes sense. Take your time in doing this, because if the focused codes are immaterial, it can put you on a path towards creating concepts that do not help to explain the larger things taking place in your area of study (Glaser 1978, p. 61). Next, apply the focused codes to places where you had previously assigned open codes to see if the relevance carries over with the interview or observational data.

In the process of doing this, two seemingly paradoxical tensions will arise. The first is that you will discover some open codes that you used to make a certain focused code are actually more peripheral than you had previously thought. Remove any that sit ill at ease. Focused coding should never be forced coding. However, while you might remove (or add) an open code, avoid making any changes to the wording of your focused code while looking at the empirical data, otherwise, you might be tempted to rewrite it in a manner descriptive of the data you are currently viewing, or essentially, to create another open code. Go back to the memos made from the open codes, and see if you can find a main idea or recurring theme. Use these ideas to adjust the wording of your focused code.

Even after you are satisfied that you have expressed a common quality or action shared by a group of open codes, another tension arises in seeing how the focused code encapsulates some situations in the data quite well, but not so well with others. This actually represents progress, because it is in these places that you start to identify the limits of your focused codes and the borders of social processes residing in your data. Write about these places where your focused codes do not seem to fit as well in subsequent memos. These observations help you to continue the practice of constant comparison during the focused investigation stage of your analysis.

Underlying these tensions, I believe, is the concern of something meaningful being lost during the transition to focused coding. Rest assured that your open codes are still there as the first level of strata upon which you are building your theory. Continue to explain in your memos how the shared aspects of open codes are expressed in each focused code, but in order to move from the descriptive to the interpretive, you will need to accept focused codes as more encompassing and less empirically specific than open codes, because they have been created from open codes instead of the direct empirical data.

Creating a focused code list

Continue going back and forth between focused coding and checking their ability to plausibly encapsulate your previously collected data. Make a list of the focused codes that you find to be most representative of your data so far. There are no hard-and-fast rules here, but my suggestion is that you should limit yourself to around 20 focused codes and then put aside the rest. Depending on the richness of the data that you have collected so far, this process of letting go may be painful, but it is necessary. PhD students may have less choice in the matter, as supervisors may want you to have a larger list of focused codes, thinking this will result in a fuller picture of the phenomenon. Such advice might be appropriate for ethnography or phenomenology, but the longer the list of focused codes, the longer it will take to develop categories. I learned from my own graduate study experience that working with a list of over 30 focused codes results in numerous subcategories before one is finally able to consolidate the data enough to create full-fledged categories (see Figure 6.1 again). Glaser (1978, p. 71) agrees and explains that working with a larger list of codes can yield interesting details, but these often tend to be only minor variations, and usually do not significantly contribute to the overall development of a parsimonious theory. It is more likely that you will end up with a proliferation of catchy phrases and closely related notions. Like finding your way through a hall of mirrors, these can delay you from the task of discovering the significant processes and issues that will give greater meaning to your theory.

From now on, use your list of focused codes in future observations and interviews. Avoid the urge to continue coding everything. Of course, if and when something vitally new presents itself, and you believe it is key to

understanding the social processes in your area of study, shift back to open coding, add the new codes and then either bring as much of this together as new focused codes or integrate what you have found into existing focused codes. However, do this as sparingly as possible. Your journey is not towards the creation of a unified theory of everything. Out of the many possibilities and multidimensional interpretations that may be out there, you are constructing a theory about a specific core category, a main phenomenon, or a basic social process in the social environment that you have been studying. Treat your focused codes as an important step towards reaching this goal.

As you direct your attention to the data that fits with the focused codes, identify the stages of trajectories, social interactions, and symbolic actions that add greater depth to understanding the significance these codes have for your developing theory. In your memos, you should start making diagrams that express how these social movements and exchanges seem to work. We will address the notion of diagramming more fully later on, but start now, because creating such diagrams is part of the process of theorization. Your first attempts will likely be a bit simplistic and clumsy, but even at this stage, making diagrams of human interaction will highlight any inconsistencies in your ideas and any contradictions taking place in the field (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 213).

Axial coding and focused codes

While focused codes are more interpretive in nature, they should still center on social interaction. As you conduct further interviews, code material, write memos, and create tentative diagrams, your questions should center on why people are engaging in certain activities, how these actions and activities start, when they change or finish, and in what way are they affected or influenced by other issues coded in your data.

It is at this stage that Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) have proposed axial coding as a means of structuring the process of analyzing focused codes. The most current iterations for carrying out axial coding can be found in the works of Corbin and Strauss (2015), and an excellent example of what can be produced through axial coding for context of applied linguistics can be seen in Senior (2006). I want to discuss this form of coding in brief, partly because its use is widespread, but also because it has been a point of contention among grounded theorists stretching back to Glaser and Strauss.

Strauss's original intent for creating axial coding, which itself draws deeply from his background in symbolic interactionism and American pragmatism, was to provide students with a procedure that would help them to transcend simple description and to start thinking theoretically (Kendall 1999, p. 745). The process is somewhat complicated in that it requires analyzing each focused code for the background conditions that have caused the code, any changes that could take place surrounding these causes (intervening conditions), the context within which the code takes place, consequences, and any reactions or strategies that arise from the consequences.

Not surprisingly, opinions differ widely regarding the usefulness of axial coding. Some see it as fundamental for creating a good grounded theory (Creswell 2012), while others feel that axial coding overcomplicates and limits the analytical process (Robrecht 1995). Valid points can be found on both sides of this argument, and while I do not use axial coding during the focused investigation stage, as a teacher, I understand Strauss's desire to help beginning grounded theorists make progress in their research. Charmaz's (2006, p. 61) advice is that if you find that axial coding helps stimulate the interpretive process, then by all means use it. I would agree with this, but I think it is equally important to treat axial coding as similar to 'training wheels' – that is, helpful but limiting if used for too long. I believe the more appropriate place for some form of axial coding is when one begins coding for conceptual categories, something to which we will return shortly. Regardless of whether you choose to use Corbin & Strauss's axial coding at this point, you should nevertheless start looking for scholarly books and papers that will contribute to the development of your grounded theory.

Accessing academic literature

From an interpretive analysis of further field observations and interviews guided by your list of focused codes, and through the practice of writing memos, creating diagrams, and engaging in constant comparison, you will now be at a stage where you have a much stronger sense about the topics, themes, and main concerns taking place in your study. Armed with this insight, begin searching for published academic material pertinent to your research focus. One way to begin is to conduct an online search of your themes and concerns using an academic search engine, such as Scopus or Google Scholar. Many CAQDAS programs have such search functions built in for accessing the Internet to investigate links with literature using keywords from one's collected qualitative data. Essentially the same approach can be taken at your academic library, where you can peruse the indexes of books there to see if any information pertaining to your developing theory can be found there. The success of this approach depends on whether the words and themes in your data match the keywords in online journals, or if you successfully hit on synonymous terms. Depending on the level of collegiality on campus, graduate students will be able to discuss some of the issues and concerns in their data with their supervisors and other scholars in their university, and get important leads on what literature to access. Striking up conversations with scholars at conferences will also yield serendipitous finds.

The search for scholarly sources often yields surprises, and sometimes the most pertinent studies for informing your theory will be found outside the field of applied linguistics. When I was researching EAP programs at neoliberal universities, many of the focused codes and reflections from subsequent memos about teacher interviews and observations indicated problems arising from exhaustion, burnout, disillusionment, and oppressive

administrative managers who unsympathetically reshaped their professional identities into something akin to utility personnel. Faced with facilitating new initiatives aimed at bringing more money and prestige to the institution, informants often discussed feelings of isolation as they tried both to teach the international students in their care, and to protect them from what they saw as the predatory practices of university administrators and the complications caused on campus by outsourced third-party suppliers. While some applied linguistics books and papers concentrating on such concerns could be found (Johnston 1997, Johnston 2003, Varghese et al. 2005), many more academic works, written by nurses and other caregiving professionals, discussed problems and processes similar to those raised by teachers in my study (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Halford et al. 1997, Brown and Brooks 2002, Taylor and Barling 2004). Grounded theory is inherently interdisciplinary and encourages you to go wherever you need to find scholars who are discussing the issues that pertain to your investigation.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that regardless of what you uncover in the scholarly literature, you should not treate the material as a validation of your earlier findings from the field. Research literature and the perspective of your informants have equal footing. Scholarly writings should neither be placed in a priviledged position, nor should it be allowed to traduce the insights of your informants. Treat each paper or book as you would a research informant. Study it as you studied the opinions of your other research participants, and be certain to use your focused codes and memoing to analyze your readings.

There is no set time for how long you should continue to use your focused codes to analyze the data, but remember that, like open coding before, focused investigation is not your final destination. If you persist in doing it for too long, there is again the risk of collecting too much data and falling into analytic paralysis. When you have gained a strong sense of what is going on in your area of study through focused coding, it is time to shift to the stage of theoretical generation, which begins with the development of conceptual categories.

Conceptual categories

Categories 'explicate ideas, events or processes in your data – and do so in telling words. A category may subsume common themes and patterns in several codes' (Charmaz 2008, p. 98). They are conceptual in nature because they encapsulate the most significant actions and interactions taking place around you. They move you towards the theoretical because they are imaginative. They transcend specific circumstances, and 'look at action as related to meaning' (Charmaz 2008, p. 90). Even though conceptual categories are another step removed from the empirical data, Gibson and Hartman (2014, p. 79) explain that they should still '"fit" and "work"'. They are supposed to explain how phenomena vary and also be directly related to the phenomena under investigation'. Categories integrate your theory of social process

so that it makes sense to others and offers useful insights into how people act in certain situations. The theoretical frameworks eventually developed from conceptual categories help to explain the past, understand the present, predict the future, influence future action. Conceptual categories provide a way of structuring and understanding the unexpected (Handy 1993, p. 16).

Constructing categories

The most straightforward way to make conceptual categories is similar to how you grouped open codes together to create focused codes. With your list of focused codes, together with any field notes, and indexed memos describing processes taking place in the data, group focused codes together and assign to each group a title or label describing their commonality. The types of labels elicited for conceptual categories are usually as evocative as they are theoretical. Examples that I have generated in the past are those such as 'flow management', 'bunker busting', 'resource leeching', or 'commando assessment' (Hadley 2015).

Finding pithy expressions that aptly summarize groups of focused codes takes time. While the words for certain categories will come to your mind quickly, especially if you have supporting material from memos, at other times, the right words will evade you. Take a notepad with you wherever you go, because just as in the last chapter, where we saw how ideas and hunches for memos can unexpectedly pop into your head, often a good idea for describing a category will present itself at the most inopportune moment. It is important to write down these flashes of inspiration before they fade away. In addition, during those dry spells when nothing comes to mind, do not succumb to self-doubt. Take solace in the fact that, after all that you have done to analyze the words of your informants through memos and coding, ideas will eventually blossom and you will be able to bring together many of your focused codes in ways that will be both creative and insightful. Let your mind have some time to process things. It will continue working in the background for you during your regular day and when you sleep in the evening. The longer you fret, the longer it will take to get the creative juices flowing.

Again, as with the earlier stages of your research, not everything that you have collected and coded will fit within the conceptual categories. It is common to end up with a few frustrating piles of hard-won codes, memos, and other qualitative materials, all of which seem important, but whose place within the wider picture of your investigation seems unclear. If you are convinced that you have data with conceptual promise and many supporting memos, return to the level of focused investigation and find out if any of this data points to social processes that you have not yet discerned. Collect more data, apply codes, and write memos. In time you should fill in enough gaps either to create an appropriate category, to place the data hierarchically under a category as subcategories, or to confirm that the focused codes and supporting data relate to issues peripheral to the main concerns of your study.

Listing conceptual categories

Put aside any outlying codes and other materials. Focus your attention on the categories that have the most supporting data. Look for those with the most impact in terms of revealing important social processes taking place in your area of study. A good rule of thumb from my experience is to choose about five of the most significant and representative conceptual categories. These, together with the accompanying notes, memos, and other data that you have collected so far, should be more than enough for continuing to the next stages of your journey. Depending on how you have organized your data, choosing more than five categories might make your grounded theory too long and overcomplicated, just as using fewer categories might risk creating a theory that is too shallow – unless of course these categories are supported by several subcategories.

Once you have identified the conceptual categories that seem to be most important for your study, apply them to the data that you have collected, keep track of the connections in your index, and sort your memos again to see if they continue to serve as material that will give meaning to the categories in a logical manner. Use these categories as the basis for interpreting any future data that you collect from this point.

Theoretical coding

In my interactions with graduate students and language teachers trying to do grounded theory in isolation and with few published resources, most stop after creating categories and begin to disseminate these as a grounded theory. However, without further theoretical coding of the categories, what one has at this stage might be better described as a qualitative data analysis of themes, which have been derived through using the methodology inspired by grounded theory (Glaser 2001). These descriptions and interpretations will be of great interest and value, but they still do not yet form a grounded theory. You must now begin the theoretical coding of your conceptual categories. As a term, 'theoretical coding' is something of a misnomer, because in contrast to open and focused coding, theoretical coding encompasses several forms of analysis. This includes sorting the supporting data that you have collected, analyzing the categories for their dimensions, identifying their properties, and making interactive links between the categories. These practices will extend your theory beyond descriptive anecdotes and observations, and will shape it into something that highlights social processes and issues affecting many people in a variety of circumstances.

Sorting the supporting data

The first step in developing this theoretical potential lies in reordering the focused codes used to create the categories. Social processes have a

beginning, middle, and end. Start with studying the focused codes and supporting data to see if you can discern a trajectory of social action. Do some of the processes happen before others? Are there any that disrupt or change the situation? Do others happen after certain conditions have been met? Write a memo that treats each focused code as a 'chapter' in the overall 'story' of each particular conceptual category.

Sorting your supporting data is not always easy to carry out, but you will often be surprised by the new insights and ideas stimulated by this technique. However, even though this practice is a good start, data sorting alone will be insufficient. To provide a fuller, more nuanced picture of your conceptual categories, you will need to engage in dimensionalization.

Discovering dimensions

Over the years, there has been considerable confusion about the nature of dimensions in grounded theory. Schatzman's (1991, p. 309) explanation is typical of the ambiguity among early grounded theorists, who described dimensions as the 'parts, attributes, interconnections, context . . . and implications' of conceptual categories. Dey (1999, pp. 49–56) has done more than most to clarify the nomenclature of grounded theory, and describes dimensions as relating to those aspects of a category that imply measurement, for example, long, short, hot, cold, fast, or slow. Of course, such measurements are metaphorical in nature. No one studies a conceptual category with a physical slide rule.

Taking Dey's ideas as a lead, dimensions can be understood as static entities, in that they constrain, direct, or change the social processes in some way. They relate to the basic structures that shape social interaction. It can help to view them in terms of bipolar constructs, such as high versus low, hard or soft, public or private, internal as opposed to external, and so on. The way you discover the dimensions of categories requires that you move further away from mechanical forms of coding, use abductive inference, and liberate your theoretical imagination.

To start this process, visualize the conceptual category as if it were an empirical object. This could be a machine, a plant, an animal, or a dynamic aspect of nature such as snow, airflow, or a planet – anything that moves and interacts with the social environment. What does the conceptual category look like in your mind? How does it act? Consider its shape, size, capacity, texture, temperature, speed, and other such features. How long does the category operate? Are there any variations in the way that it functions, such as deep versus shallow, internal versus external, loud versus quiet, and so on? Is there something that constrains or further facilitates the social movement of the category? Write down any ideas in your memos.

Another visualization exercise is to imagine people that you have observed or interviewed engaged in doing the conceptual category. Are there different levels of intensity or speed? Is the category mediated by social stratification?

For example, does the category function top down, bottom up, in a linear manner, or running parallel to someone or something else?

Exercises such as these should not be seen as flights of fancy. Your theorization on dimensions will be shaped by the discipline that you have undergone through coding, memoing, constantly comparing similar and conflicting cases, and interpretively linking much of this material to each other in order to move from description to higher levels of abstraction (Henwood and Pidgeon 1992). In addition, your abductive search for dimensions will further refine your theoretical sampling, because after such visualization exercises, you will naturally return to the data that you have already collected to see if there is any merit to your musings. Theoretical sampling to explore the dimensions of conceptual categories will also shape the questions you ask in future interviews, as well as direct the focus of subsequent observations and hone your search for scholarly publications.

If dimensions relate to what a conceptual category *is*, properties reveal what a category *does*. Properties in grounded theory uncover the actions explaining the 'who, what, when, where, and how' of the category. It is to that subject that we will now turn our attention.

Searching for properties

Coding conceptual categories for the discovery of properties is arguably the most challenging stage of theoretical generation. As with dimensions, many have struggled over the confusing and sometimes contradictory statements made about the nature of properties in *Discovery* (Glaser & Strauss 1967/1999). After Glaser and Strauss ended their collaboration to work separately, their advice on how to code for properties continued to baffle. Strauss and Corbin (1998) proposed a number of techniques and matrices, some of which were helpful, and others which were somewhat constraining in nature. As noted earlier in this book, Glaser (1978, 1992) proposed 18 coding families. Full lists can be found in other published works (Böhm 2004, Stern and Porr 2011) and on several Internet websites. However, from the sample provided in Table 6.1, while the terms connected to these families are tantalizing, Glaser gave little in the way of concrete instruction about how to use the terms for discovering properties. What has resulted are mutually inadequate ways for creating a portrait of the conceptual category through theoretical coding. The many unique strategies proposed by Strauss and Corbin are reminiscent of a watercolor template where numbers have been written in the outlined spaces to tell painters which colors should be used. One may end up with a theoretical work that is quite nice, but it is not going to win any prizes, and it may be a struggle to get your work published later. Glaser's method, on the other hand, is more the way of an accomplished artist. He provides you with paints and a palette. But when it comes to painting the theoretical picture, you are on your own,

Table 6.1 Selected Theoretical Coding Families

Coding Family	*The Six Cs*	*Interactive*	*Strategy*	*Process*
Code Terms	Causes, Context, Contingencies, Consequences, Covariances, Conditions	Mutual Reciprocity, Mutual Effects, Mutual Trajectory, Interdependence, Face-to-Face Interaction, Delayed Interactions	Tactics, Mechanisms, Manipulations, Maneuvers, Movements, Posturing, Dominating, Managing	Staging, Phases, Progression, Passage, Transitions, Chains, Sequencing, Ordering, Cycles, Ranks, Steps, Trajectories

Source: Adapted from Glasser 1978, 1992)

and you will rise or fall based on your degree of training, experience, and creativity. Given these variables, Glaser's method is the riskier option for new theorists.

The twentieth century witnessed many great artistic duos who, after a period that could only be described as magical, eventually split up and faded into, if not mediocrity, then at least a curious sense of normalcy. In a similar manner, it seems clear from their later work that Glaser and Strauss were better together than apart when it came to theoretical coding. However, what follows is a reconstruction of what I see as the best of Glaser and Strauss in this area. Carrying this out requires a return to our earlier discussion of axial coding.

Kelle (2007, p. 140) has portrayed axial coding as a stripped down version of Glaser's theoretical coding that is limited only to the six Cs family. This is essentially accurate, and reunifying the structural dynamics of axial coding with the evocative power of Glaser's theoretical codes has potential for making the ambiguous task of coding conceptual categories for properties far easier to carry out. In the matrix provided (Figure 6.2), a conceptual category or subcategory is placed in the center. Space for five different elements, which I find to be the right number of items for this form of theorization, are placed around the center, with arrows suggesting connected interaction. Strauss and Corbin's axial coding elements of casual conditions, intervening conditions, context, contingencies, and context, based as they are on Glaser's six Cs, are almost always useful as a starting point. These constitute what Glaser (1978, p. 73) has called the 'bread and butter' questions of sociological studies. Many of the properties discovered from these questions will be in the data that you have already collected. In the instance of not knowing enough about one of these elements, along the lines of theoretical sampling, you will go back into the field to learn more.

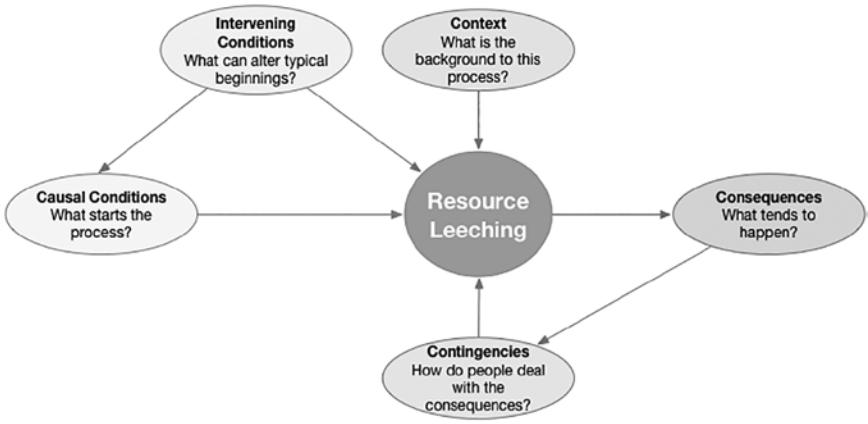


Figure 6.2 Axial Coding Conceptual Categories for Action-Based Properties

Adding Straussian structure to Glaserian codes allows for the use of theoretical codes from any of the other coding families provided by Glaser, or any that you have created. You are not limited to using codes from only one family; mix different theoretical codes to tease out new properties of your categories. An example of this is in Figure 6.3, where a selection of theoretical codes drawn from different families has been placed around the concept. When choosing codes, you will need to write at least one question that both clarifies the code and seeks to further unlock some action-based property of the category. Naturally, not every choice or combination yields new insights, but this structured procedure will help you explore new possibilities in your data, which will in turn lead to more focused theoretical sampling and higher levels of conceptualization.

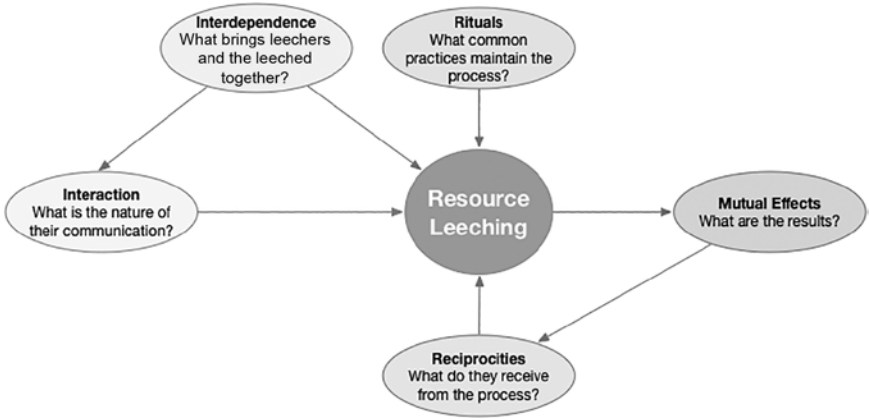


Figure 6.3 Glaserian Theoretical Codes within the Architecture of Axial Coding

Linking categories and creating diagrams

Because grounded theory focuses on social process and human interaction, you should highlight the type of activity that connects or which creates a flow from one category to another. Categories will normally have several links between each other, but identify those that are the most prominent. Otherwise, you will start to see 'shadow links' between every category and make so many connections that later attempts at diagramming will result in a visual representation that is both confusing and unclear.

Integrating your categories is one of the tasks in which CAQDAS excel: most have a function designed for linking categories and for describing the nature of the connection. However, analogue methods with notecards on a table will work just as well, if not better, especially if you are a person who finds a computer screen too confining.

Write out the names of your conceptual categories on notecards and place them on a table. In puzzle-like fashion, place the categories that have, based on your research so far, some sort of relationship with each other, or influence on the other. Ask yourself to describe the interactive association between these categories. What is the nature of their interaction? Which category affects the other and in what manner? Is the influence bidirectional, meaning that the categories orbit around each other, creating social tides that manifest themselves by periodic changes? On another card, draw an arrow indicating the direction of the interaction or influence; place it between the two categories to connect them, and write your description of this dynamic. You should represent this interaction using verbs or action oriented phrases, such as 'stimulates', 'acts as a contingency for', 'enables the transition to', and so on. Glaser's theoretical codes will stimulate further ideas about how to describe the interaction between categories.

Transfer these ideas to your computer in diagrammatic form. Diagrams are an important part of the theorization process. They render vast amounts of your data and thinking on the subject into a succinct package that transcends simple description. Corbin and Strauss (2015, pp. 127–128) explain:

> Diagrams are visual representations of the relationships between concepts. The purpose of diagrams is to facilitate, not hinder, the analytic process. They, too, evolve and become more complex as the research progresses. Some persons are more adept at doing diagrams than other persons. There is no need for concern if one has difficulty in doing diagrams; just do your best. Some persons are just not visual.

They add that grounded theorists get better ideas once they begin to relax and let go of the futile search for a monolithic 'right way' of representing the data. Flexibility and openness will stimulate your creativity. Diagrams are both internal and external representations. Internally, they represent your mental processes as you mull over the data. Externally, they represent

models of social action – that is, dynamic systems of human interaction that have been derived from qualitative data. As you try different arrangements of your concepts and their connections, study earlier diagrams from your memos to see if aspects of these ideas can be incorporated into the evolving visual representation of your theory. There are no established rules for how diagrams should look, but Glaser (1978, p. 81) and Schatzman (1991, pp. 312–313) have observed that diagrams created using grounded theory often take on aspects suggestive of molecular or atomic models.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, visualizing your interpretations of the data through diagramming help to reveal the places where your theorization is working well, and other places where it is still tenuous. Make note of where your theory is thin and return to the field. Along the lines of theoretical sampling, seek answers to fill in the empty spaces and to probe for any other necessary information. This will further adjust your theory to what seems to be happening, this time on a conceptual level, in the social environments that you have been studying.

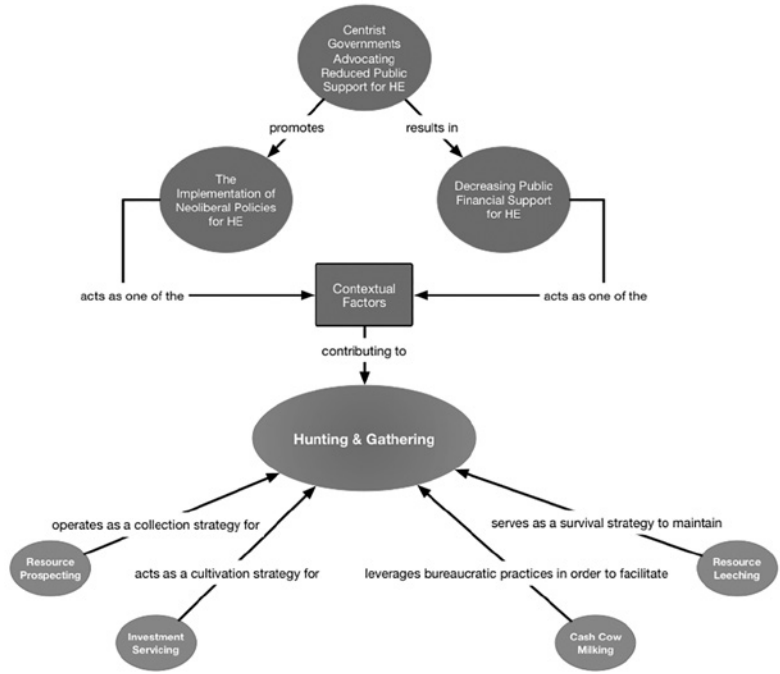
The diagrams you have created are then integrated with theoretical coding in your memos. An example of such a memo can be seen in Figure 6.4, which contains the first page of a memo that was written during the later stages of theoretical generation. At this juncture, Strauss (1987, p. 24) explains that your memos 'are likely to become increasingly elaborate, summarizing previous ones; or focussed closely on closing gaps in the theory'. They will also contain multiple links to earlier memos and to scholarly sources from books and journals. You should start regrouping your memos under their pertinent conceptual categories. Sort them and any accompanying diagrams in chronological order so that you can follow the steady development of your theory and the unique story that underpins each category. You will gain a greater understanding of how these conceptual categories are converging on a central point that helps to explain previously unseen social aspects of your empirical study. We will return to this point shortly. 'Conceptual categories', explain Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, p. 36), 'have a life apart from the evidence that gave rise to them'. This will become apparent as we move to the next stage of theoretical generation, which involves searching for the vital essence of your theory.

Getting to the core

You have spent considerable time linking categories with theoretical coding techniques, highlighting the actions and dynamic relationships between them, ordering your memos to glean the stories behind each of the categories, and visualizing their interactivity as a group of integrated social processes. What now remains is to identify a central concern that will tie all of your conceptual categories together into a meaningful framework. From a Glaserian perspective (Glaser 1978), this would be seen as a core category, basic social process, or central issue.

Memo

Title: 'Hunting & Gathering'
Date: July 15, 2016



Hunting and Gathering arises out of neoliberal policies implemented by centrist and fiscally conservative governments that reduce public support for Higher Education and encourage the implementation of neoliberal policies for governance and curricular praxis. Hunting and Gathering is defined as the constant search for and acquisition of resources that are deemed valuable to the neoliberal university. For EAP, this equates to recruiting large numbers of international students, but Hunting and Gathering can also include gaining prestigious awards or accreditation (Memo, April 12, 2015), free PR for the university, creating low-cost multicultural opportunities for domestic students (Observation Log, June 3, 2015), securing valuable relationships that provide tangible benefits either to the EAP program or university at large, and generating sources of free labor for achieving the ambitious plans of powerful university stakeholders (see memos on Resource Leeching). The main supporting subcategories are Resource Prospecting, which are activities related to program manager's search for long-term international students, and which entails strategies for bypassing the TOEIC and IELTs, Investment Servicing, which relates to creating unofficial networks and cultivating important relationships that can secure future resources. Success in Investment Services brings prestige to the EAP Unit, and stimulates opportunities for career advancement later on if the manager wants to escape the constant pressures of the EAP program (Interview August 8, 2015). Another more controversial process, Milking Cash Cows, started as an in vivo code. It refers the efforts of third party service providers who require (Page 1 of 9)

Figure 6.4 Example of Later Memo with Diagram and Links to Supporting Data

Corbin and Strauss (2015), as well as Charmaz (2014), prefer searching for phenomena that contextualize human interactions within the social environment. As a critical realist, I see advantages in both of these positions. A core category (or main concern), if identified, could serve as the conceptual fulcrum for moving the rest of the theory. Correspondingly, finding phenomena that drive human action offers the potential for new insights. Combining the notion of a core concept within an overarching main phenomenon would be a fruitful area of exploration, depending on your data and your ability to extend the theoretical boundaries of your work. Stay open to various possibilities and permutations as you begin this stage of theorization.

There are many ways to find a main concern or phenomenon in your grounded theory. One is to study your diagram of linked conceptual categories. Is there a category that has more links which seem to be more influential than the others? Sometimes you will get lucky and find the main category. More often than not, you will have to work harder to find the core concern. Look for a cluster of conceptual categories that have more links and 'outward flow' than others. Similar to techniques described earlier in this book, summarize what it is that is shared within this cluster of conceptual categories.

Another method, after re-sorting the memos in chronological order under their most relevant conceptual categories, is to look at each of the categories as if they were chapters in a book. Theorize what sort of 'title' would best fit as a description of the sum total of the chapters. Related to this method is for you to use your theoretical imagination and to think about the implied, unspoken issues standing behind the conceptual categories. It may be a problem, phenomenon, or social condition that your informants, as a consequence of being so deeply embedded in their social environments, are mostly unaware. However, due to your positional distance, you are better able to perceive such issues. These unseen social dynamics and symbolic interactions help in understanding the trajectories, strategies, and other actions taking place in your data. Finding the words to describe this invisible influence affecting the domain of your informants will take time, but it is worth the effort, as it can often effectively crystallize your theory into multifaceted and meaningful ways. Be patient with yourself; after all that you have done, the words will come.

When they do, it will be a 'eureka' moment – the instance where in a sudden flash, after all your hard work and effort, you are finally able to express a main concern within your theory. People describing the moment of reaching critical mass in their qualitative research have told me that it borders on what one might expect after having a deeply mystical or intensely religious experience. It is a mountaintop encounter with your data, and is often accompanied by an overwhelming sense of euphoria and clarity: The theory works; the connections between categories make sense. And yet, if not

approached objectively, this apparent moment of victory will become your point of greatest peril.

Scientists studying these eureka moments (Knoblich and Oellinger 2006, Kraft 2006) conclude that they represent a culmination of your brain creating new neural pathways. You have undergone the experience of your mind making new constructs for seeing the social world. The rush of euphoria is a combination of relief from the painful process of thinking hard about issues from various new perspectives, and a reward from your brain to you to continue to see things in this new way. This helps your brain to save energy by not having to think constantly about other possibilities, and it helps you to focus on a new set of constructs to the exclusion of others (Kelly 1955/1991).

The point is that, when left unchecked, reaching critical mass in your grounded theory research risks making you come across as arrogant or closed-minded to those who either do not see things as you do or who do not yet understand your theory. To mitigate against this, in seminars I use a visual metaphor (Figure 6.5) to help those experiencing grounded theory for the first time to step back and think about other possibilities.

Picture the empirical social world as a vast net, one that is tied together by ropes and strings of different colors, lengths, and thicknesses. Within this messy interconnected logic that makes up human social interaction, your newly discovered core concept, chief concern, or main phenomenon is as if you have gathered a clump of this social net in your hand and raised it up for all to study. It is interesting and it makes a contribution to the academic community. However, another theorist studying the same general area of interest might settle on grasping a clump of the net from a slightly different place. There will certainly be connections to what you have been studying, but the perspective is different. This does not invalidate either theory; it should, however, remind you that your theory is still a mental construction, though one which has been generated through a rigorous methodology aimed at challenging your biases and urging you to be fair and open to new perspectives. In addition, having different perspectives on the empirical study does not mean that there are not 'things' out there to discover. Martin (2003) skillfully demonstrates this in his paper on two separate educational studies of two socialist states, one in Salvador Allende's Chile and another in Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Both researchers were separated by geography, had different ontological beliefs, and different research methodologies, but they came to strikingly similar conclusions about social processes and causes. To me, this suggests that, regardless of differing ontological beliefs and perspectives, grounded theorists can still touch on areas of commonality as they study the empirical social reality around them, but they must do so with caution and with humility. As Anderson (1986, p. 157) states, 'There is no guarantee that our current evaluative criteria will not appear similarly quaint some 300 years hence'.

Once you have reminded yourself of these important issues, in diagrammatic form, raise the core concept or main phenomenon to a position

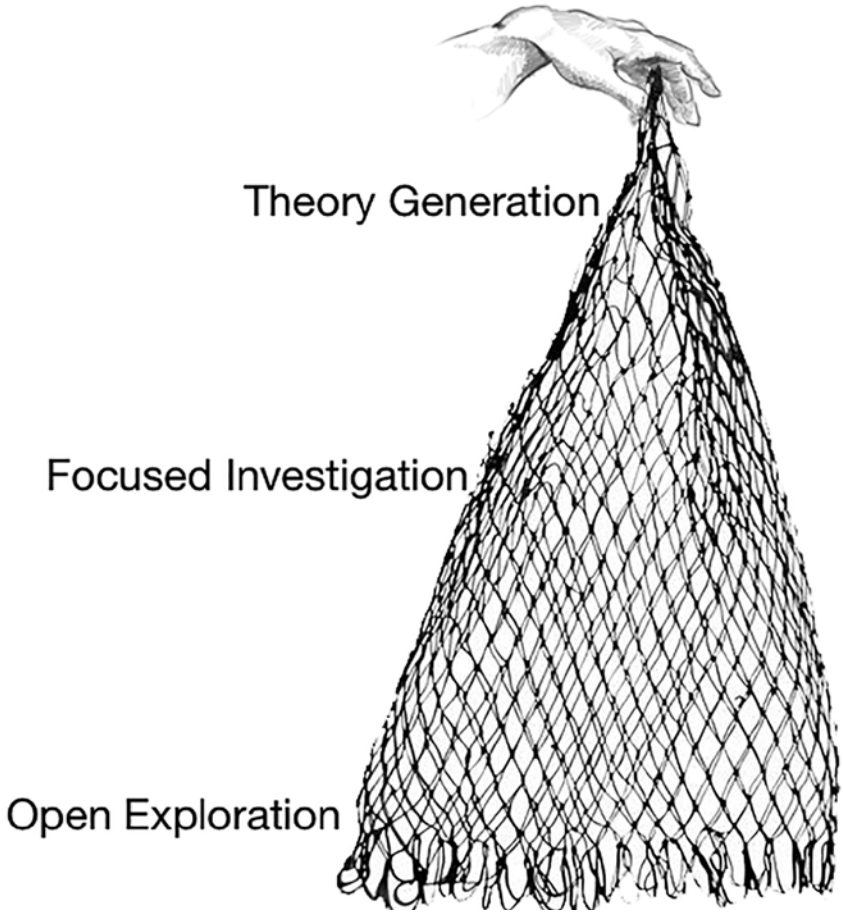


Figure 6.5 Visual Metaphor for Locating the Main Concern of a Grounded Theory

distinct from the other conceptual categories, use the procedures for theoretical coding described in this chapter, write further memos explaining its vital importance to the theory, go out into the field to find more examples, and search for scholarly literature that touches upon various aspects of what you have discovered.

Theoretical sufficiency

Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999, pp. 61–62) taught that there would come a time in the research process when a theorist would encounter less new information for generating grounded theory categories, a condition they called *theoretical saturation*. Strauss and Corbin (1998, pp. 292–293) explain that

theoretical saturation also takes place when researchers run out of time, money or other resources necessary for refining the conceptual categories within the theory. Dey (1999) questions the idea of 'saturation' because it suggests that a complete understanding of sociological settings is attainable. He has suggested *theoretical sufficiency* as an alternative. Theoretical sufficiency allows researchers to find enough material for categories 'to cope adequately with new data without requiring continual extensions and modifications . . . the real concern here is not with the amount of data being collected, so much as its quality' (Dey 1999, pp. 117–118). Kvale (1996, pp. 101–104) makes a similar point, stating that one usually cannot improve the quality of research simply by increasing the amount of interviews. My experience in the field has also taught me that more is not necessarily better when it comes to interviews and other field data. In the past, I have interviewed close to 100 research participants in an effort to make sure I had not missed anything. In retrospect, I realize that I had virtually everything needed to complete my grounded theory after about 40 interviews. Stern and Porr (2011, p. 52) agree, writing that 30 to 40 interviews, in conjunction with all of the memos, observations, diagramming, and other analysis, should be more than enough for you to create conceptual categories and identify a main concern. Essentially, if you come to a place in your research where you find that you are spending large amounts of time to find interesting yet incidental details, it is probable that you have gone as far as you can with your study, and what you have will be sufficient for developing a working grounded theory.

Summary

'Constructing a grounded theory', state Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 77), 'is like building a pyramid with each level of concepts standing on top of the others'. This has been apparent during this and the earlier chapters (Figure 6.6). We have seen how, starting with open sampling, exploratory interviews, and though other techniques such as repertory grids and field observations, open coding is applied to the collected data until patterns emerge. Constant comparison helps to study these patterns critically, and theoretical sampling will be your guide as you explore emerging issues. The data is coded in a more focused manner, and pertinent scholarly literature is sought to add further insight and perspectives to the growing dataset. In time, from a list of the focused codes that appear to represent the most useful and salient features of the interviews and observations, conceptual categories are created. These categories are coded theoretically for their properties, dimensions, and are linked to each other using active verbs and verb phrases describing the social interaction that is taking place between them. A core category, main concern, or overarching phenomenon that has the most influence over the interplay between the categories, is then raised up as the touchstone for the entire theory. The result is something that has been abducted, not induced, from what you know to be the most plausible explanation for what is going on within the social arena being

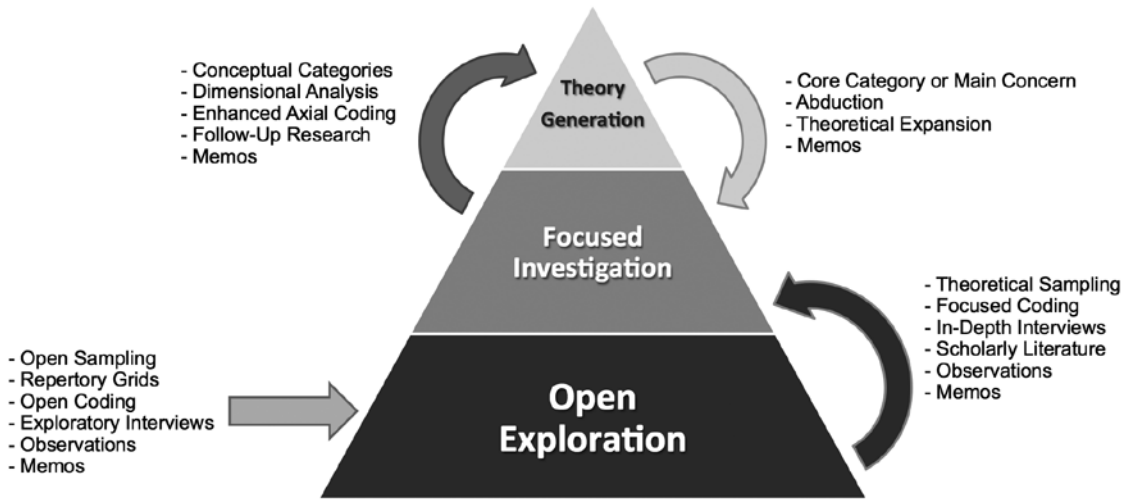


Figure 6.6 Summary of Techniques Used in GTM

studied. Expansion of this main concern through further investigation of its properties and dimensions, as well as follow-up field studies, continue until you are either satisfied that what has been constructed is sufficient, or until the time allotted for conducting research has expired. Throughout the various stages of investigation, memo writing is the methodological lifeblood of successfully constructing a useful grounded theory.

What now remains is for you to begin sharing the fruits of your labors with others through dissertations, books, articles, and conference presentations. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

7 Spreading the word
Theory dissemination

Without dissemination, your theory will never achieve its full potential. Grounded theories are made in order to propagate new insights and to make an impact on both your academic field and on the society at large. This chapter addresses the task of taking your theory to the wider world. It focuses on two main concerns. The first discusses the written presentation of your theory, while the second centers on oral presentations. Special attention is given to some of the typical questions asked at academic conferences and during the oral defense of your thesis. We will consider issues such as academic writing conventions and the standards by which one might judge the relative quality of a grounded theory.

Writing up your grounded theory

Much of what grounded theorists have already written about how to present one's theory differs little from the standard advice in general books on academic writing. Readers are urged to explain their theory in a clear, concise, and convincing manner. They should craft their writing to match the questions and critical concerns of their audience. It is important to send your work to journals that have demonstrated either an openness to grounded theory publications, or which have provided a venue for considering the subject matter related to your theory (Charmaz 2008, pp. 106–107, Stern and Porr 2011, pp. 93–96, Corbin and Strauss 2015).

All of this is excellent advice. In addition, there are other issues equally pertinent as to how you craft the written record of your grounded theory – be it as a doctoral thesis, monograph, book chapter, or journal article. These relate to presentation, organization, and style.

Presentation

Each form of academic writing has its own 'conceptual capacity load', meaning that there is only so much that a particular piece can accommodate. Naturally, doctoral theses and monographs have more space for the presentation of your grounded theory, but even here, your readers will only see a fraction of the data, as indicated in Figure 7.1.

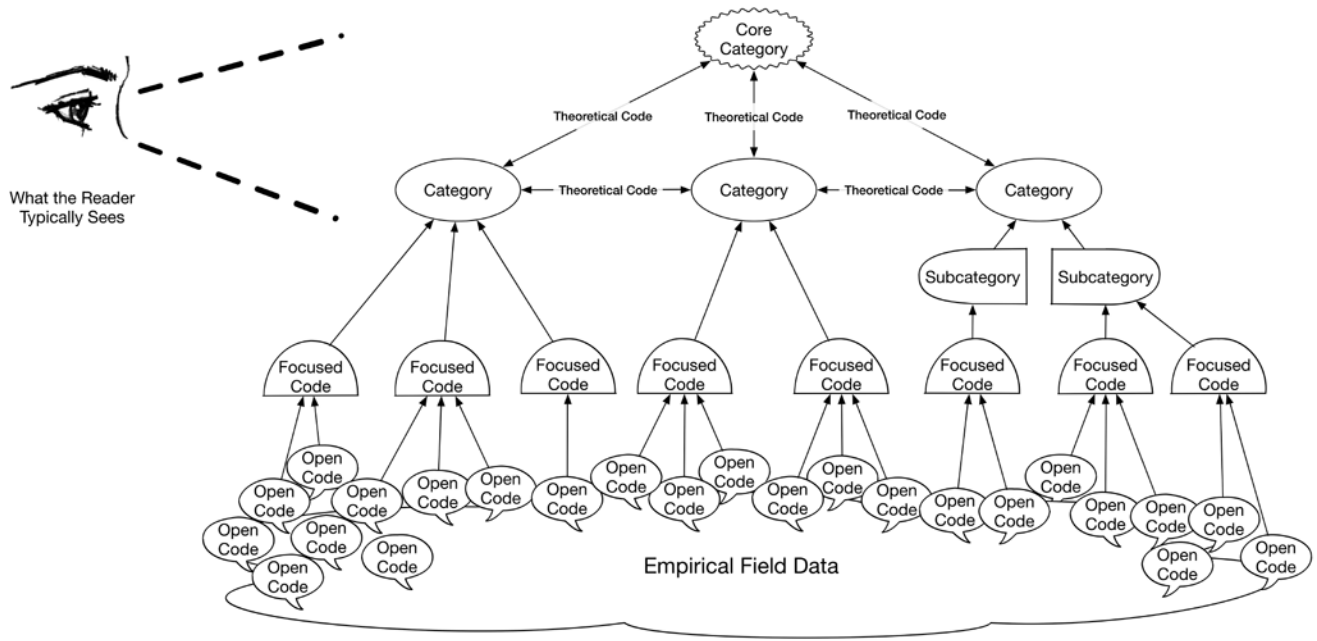


Figure 7.1 Typical Range of Readers' View in Grounded Theory Reportage

For a doctoral thesis, you should focus on the core category or main concern, the theoretical codes, the most conceptually dense categories, and the most convincing slices of supporting empirical data that will make an impact on your readers. Some groups of focused codes represented as social processes can also be introduced.

When writing an edited book chapter or a journal article, it is virtually impossible to present all of your theory convincingly. My advice here mirrors that of Corbin and Strauss (2015, pp. 315–317) when they write that you should offer a very brief overview of your theory and then focus on one or two categories that you believe will be of the greatest interest to your target audience. It is important to discuss not only conceptual issues, but to also highlight the practical implications and 'take-home message'. This will make it more likely that your target audience will retain and apply parts of your grounded theory to their lives.

The methodology, and how you carried it out, should also be clearly presented in your written work. Locke (2005, pp. 124–127) explains the importance of writing enough about the methodology to indicate that you understand GTM and that you have followed standard procedures associated with the approach. It is important to be transparent about your procedural decisions, sampling, problems, and theoretical perspective. This of course will be a requirement for the doctoral thesis, and if you have some leeway when writing a book, do not hesitate to include a discussion of your methodology.

Some editors and reviewers of scholarly journals may want you to limit any methodological discussions as a way to reduce the word count and to focus on what they see as the meat of your work. Patient negotiation may be necessary, but try to get as much as you can in the paper. The tendency in applied linguistics towards parsimony when discussing methodology has resulted in what was discussed earlier in this book: papers claiming to be based on a grounded theory approach, yet apart from a salutatory citation of Glaser and Strauss, they leave readers both misinformed about what went into the study, and confused about what a grounded theory approach actually means.

One last issue related to presentation concerns the role of verbatim data from interviews, correspondence, and other field materials. Grounded theorists have yet to reach a consensus on this point. For example, Charmaz (2008, p. 106) states,

> Grounded theorists generally provide enough verbatim material to demonstrate the connection between the data and the analysis, but give more weight to the concepts derived from the data . . . Compared to those qualitative studies that primarily synthesize description, theory studies are substantially more analytic and conceptual.

However, Locke (2005, pp. 116–117) represents those who advocate the notion of 'showing and telling' – that is, of weaving a significant amount

of verbatim excerpts in and around the discussion of theoretical concepts. She believes this enhances the authenticity of the work, and demonstrates to readers that theorists have not only sought to understand the social world of the research participants from their point of view but also that they have attempted to provide evidence that the perspectives of the research participants have been the foundation of your theoretical framework.

From my experience of trying both of these approaches, I found that neither will completely convince referees or readers negatively predisposed to grounded theory. Emphasizing conceptual writing will elicit either the criticism of insufficient evidence from informants or a paucity of citations from supporting studies. This often betrays a fundamental misunderstanding about how conceptual material represents a new contribution. Fulsome use of verbatim data, on the other hand, opens one up to the charge that the study is too anecdotal and descriptive. Other readers or reviewers may state that they cannot see the connection between the verbatim excerpts and the conceptual concepts. You will not be able to please everyone, and I will return to some of these issues later in this chapter. For the moment, however, decide upon the degree to which you will use verbatim excerpts in your written report, and explain your position to readers. As you do, keep in mind the advice of Birks and Mills (2012, p. 140), who state,

> Often new grounded theorists find it hard to use only sustained and strong fragments of data to support their argument . . . Lengthy quotations can often detract from the researcher's analysis, which should always be the main focus of the manuscript.

While this advice is especially important when writing journal papers and book chapters, it is equally appropriate for a doctoral thesis or monograph.

Organization

With all of your sorted memos, your study of the scholarly literature, diagrams, and with the steady hierarchical structuring of conceptual categories, subcategories, and focused codes, you will have more than enough material for a doctoral thesis or book, and enough for several chapters in edited books or journal articles. However, restructuring and argumentation are necessary to give your work greater clarity.

The way in which one organizes a larger piece of writing for graduation is usually very different from that of writing for publication (Stern and Porr 2011, p. 93). A doctoral thesis typically follows a preset structure where you are permitted to demonstrate various aspects of your expertise, knowledge, and academic prowess (see Table 7.1). Some graduate programs allow greater latitude with structuring your dissertation, but work closely with your supervisor to find out the expectations of the committee that will assess your work. It is also helpful to study some of the other successful theses from your department in order to find out what has worked well in the

past. Organization is the foundation of coherence, which suggests in part why confused assessors can quickly become annoyed assessors. A thesis that deviates too far from organizational expectations can start you on a downward spiral of the type that you should endeavor to avoid.

When writing a thesis, your introduction should lay out the reasons why you have chosen your specific area of study, and why your topic is of importance to the academic community. Some discussion about the theoretical nature of your study and the structure of your thesis, which are the topics of your upcoming chapters, also need to be highlighted. (See Table 7.1 as an example.)

The literature review will draw upon the published works you found during focused and theoretical coding. Any background information regarding the contexts and causes of the main concern should also be presented. You will need to clearly state your philosophical position and methodology, as well as any issues you encountered in the field. This is because you should try to establish the 'ground rules' by which you want examiners to judge your work. Some may prefer to lay out the philosophy and methodology after the introduction and then follow this with the literature review. A degree of variation is always possible. As you write and organize these sections, remember that you need to satisfy the concerns of your supervisors and examiners, which will affect the length or depth to which you will need to go in any particular section. Your work is likely to be interdisciplinary, so you will also need to devote more space to unpacking the literature accessed during the creation of your theory by explaining what it means and why it is pertinent to your theory. Also, if your supervisors or examiners are unacquainted with grounded theory, you may need to devote a significant amount of space to discuss the background and rationale of GT before describing the methodological decisions taken in the field.

Table 7.1 Suggested Structure for a Grounded Theory Thesis

Chapter	*Subject*	*Focus*
1	Introduction	Motivations for Research and Thesis Overview
2	Literature Review	Published Sources and Background Context
3	Philosophical Stance and Methodology	Paradigmatic Position, GTM Explanation, Sampling, Venues, Field Decisions
4	Core Category or Main Phenomenon	Overview of the Theory and Discussion of Theoretical Codes
5	Conceptual Category 1	Sufficient Use of Memos and Field Data to Support Arguments for the Impact, Relevance, and Applications of Theoretical Concepts
6	Conceptual Category 2	
7	Conceptual Category 3	
8	Conclusion	Overall Importance of Theory, Contributions, Limitations, Further Applications, and Recommendations

For PhDs written in applied linguistics, I advise organizing the theory similar to the way grounded theories were presented during 1960s and early 1970s. This is where one begins with the main phenomenon and drills down through as many of the conceptual categories as permitted by the word limits of your particular university (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 31, Glaser 1978). My reading of the literature suggests that the structure, style, and discourse conventions of applied linguistics have changed little since the 1960s. This is not meant to disparage our community; there are plenty of disciplines with an even greater propensity for conservatism when it comes to academic writing conventions. It is simply a statement of pragmatic advice, derived from my experience, that organizing your grounded theory along the lines of its classic style will complement the current conventions of scholarly writing in applied linguistics.

In these sections of your thesis, start with a discussion of your core concept, main phenomenon, or chief concern as a chapter. Highlight the problems, social interactions, conditions, properties, and dimensions. Subsequent chapters should discuss the most prominent conceptual categories. The number of categories you can discuss will depend on how much space you need to explain the methodology and other philosophical concerns. Even if you only have enough room to discuss the core issue and three supporting categories, be sure to use material taken from your memos to fill out your discussion. Trajectories, as indicated by the focused codes, can be illustrated through your diagrams. Supported by interview extracts and other scholarly citations, these will add clarity and persuasive power to your argument.

By argument, I mean that it is important for you to present a compelling case for your theoretical ideas. Because of your earlier experience of 'critical mass' in understanding your theory, the concepts, trajectories, and properties will seem patently obvious to you. Remember, though, that your ideas may not appear to be as clear-cut to others. They will need to be convinced. Simply stating the theory and citing some interview extracts may not be enough. Gibson and Hartman (2014, p. 192) note how 'it is a very high risk strategy to assume that the contribution to knowledge is self-evident and often your examiners will challenge you if it is not clear'. They urge theorists to enhance their arguments by highlighting what the category adds to the research field, why the category was chosen, how it was developed from the data, why it is justified, and the implications for practice or policy, the degree to which the category addresses a certain social problem or public controversy, and finally, how the category answers questions about something in the social world that was previously hidden from most people (Gibson and Hartman 2014, p. 193). Keeping these questions in mind while you are writing will help you later to discuss the significance, relevance, and contributions of your theory. Your concluding chapter will also emphasize these points, but here you should also discuss the limitations, potential applications, and recommendations for future research.

Organizing journal articles or chapters for edited books will be somewhat similar to the structure of a doctoral thesis, though naturally far shorter. Because of the word limits, you will have to forgo a long discussion regarding your paradigmatic position, but you still need to mention your philosophical stance, especially because of the assumptions that underpin the style and conventions of the particular journal – a topic that we will consider momentarily.

The introduction will focus mainly on a gap or problem that is affecting a wide number of potential readers. It is useful to introduce aspects of the one or two categories as rhetorical questions, thereby giving momentum to your paper. Your literature review will need to pertain specifically to the conceptual categories that you will discuss, and as mentioned earlier, your methodology needs to be explained to the degree permitted by the editor. Supplement your categories with scholarly citations and excerpts from your data, but be brief. The conclusion needs to highlight the practical implications and applications of the categories. How can one's life – professional, pedagogical, or otherwise – be either improved or empowered by your theoretical insights?

If you are writing a book, depending on the contract and expectations of the editor, you may have more freedom with organization than in theses, journal articles, and edited book chapters. You will not normally devote as much space to your philosophy or methodology – these are usually in the foreword or introduction – but you should give as much attention as possible to the background, main concern, and two more conceptual categories than what is normally possible for a thesis. You may also have far more freedom to express your ideas in your own style. Let us now consider that issue.

Style

Organization and style are so closely interrelated that sometimes they are difficult to separate, especially when immersed in the task of academic writing. By style, I am focusing less here on matters such as the differences in citation rules, and more on how expectations within the applied linguistics community shape our written discourse, language choices, and practices such as academic hedging or referring to oneself in the third person. Deeper issues that underwrite conventions and writing styles can significantly affect the assumptions and impressions of readers about your grounded theory.

In applied linguistics, most graduate schools and journals, as well as guidelines for collected chapters in edited books, require submissions to be written in a style that conforms to (or closely emulates) that set out by the American Psychological Association. With the exception of those few graduate schools and publishing venues that allow for variance in style, by and large, APA is the template for most forms of academic writing in applied linguistics. The advantages of having a set style and structure, are that common ground and coherence are maintained among a diverse body of

readers from around the world. However, the clinical style of APA, while appropriate perhaps for psychological reports, often gives the impression that one is objectively reporting hard facts. Whether deliberate or not, Madigan et al. (1995) have noted that with its focus on passive verb forms, a hedged style of communication, avoidance of personal attack, and use of language as a neutral medium for the transition of findings, APA acts as a tool which implicitly socializes new academics into thinking along empirically observable, objectivist lines. In extreme cases, APA serves as an academic fetish, and for some influential scholars and leaders in applied linguistics, research is not entirely satisfying until consummated with APA. This can be problematic when reporting a theory, since the scientific style of APA and its variants not only complement positivist assumptions but also subconsciously raise expectations for the theory to be treated as a work of empirical proof.

Therefore, when writing for journals and other pieces bound by the conventions of APA, you should periodically remind readers that the main thrust of your work is that of theory, not fact: it is a theory grounded and developed from empirical datasets for sure, but nevertheless, it should be treated as a plausible explanation for what is going on, not proof.

You will usually have the greatest freedom to find your own voice and to develop your own style when writing monographs. Instead of discussing your theory as an interconnected set of concepts for explaining human problems, solutions, and social interactions, some grounded theorists (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 148, Birks and Mills 2012, pp. 119–123) suggest a narrative style of reporting reminiscent of the 'Chicago School' of sociological studies. This style allows readers to become more aware of you and others engaged in the everyday issues being reported. A narrative approach gives a greater sense of the social textures caused by people as they experience the conceptual categories and deal with the main concerns of your theory. Processes, concepts, negative cases, and other features of your data are still the main 'actors who create the analysis of action in the scene' of your narrative (Charmaz 2006, p. 151), but they are now clothed in the flesh of real people – people who are very likely living in social environments and encountering issues similar to those affecting your readers.

My approach has been to combine the clinical style associated with Glaserian grounded theory with the narrative style often associated with Strauss. This entails a narrative in the beginning to situate the theory, a discussion of concepts spiced with a modicum of theoretical terms, and then supported by interview extracts, photos from the field, and diagrams created during the process of constructing the theory. As with any style, my approach has been found by some to be engaging, while others have told me that they would have preferred something that appears far more objective and scientific. Everyone has his or her own style, but you should still consider the way in which your style might potentially either draw in or alienate your intended audience.

One key area where this can happen is with the amount of theoretical terms you have included in your work. 'However you choose to write about your grounded theory study', write Birks and Mills (2012, p. 135), 'the one thing you do not want to do is to unintentionally mask your findings with impenetrable terminology'. Using too many new theoretical terms will not only overload most readers, who are already endeavoring to recast their understanding of the social world through the lens of your theory, but it also risks making you appear as a crank with a penchant for jargon.

Finally, as you write, take heart and be confident. As Charmaz states, 'you are now the expert; the theory is yours. Let the voices of teachers and earlier researchers grow faint while you compose your manuscript. Once you have drafted your core ideas, bring these voices back' (Charmaz 2008, p. 176). An ideal venue for hearing such voices is during presentations at academic conferences.

Presenting your theory in public

The style and organization of oral presentations are quite similar to the expectations for journal articles, which of course is why they are sometimes described as 'delivering a paper'. The time allotted for presentations at conferences, however, continues to shrink. These days, it is rare to find a conference where one is allotted more than 40 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for questions from the audience. It is more common now to have only 20 minutes (and in some cases, even less) for presenting your work. Given such constraints, you will have only enough time to mention the methodology, show a diagram of your overall theory, quickly discuss one category (or perhaps a subcategory), and just enough time to point out a few insights, implications, or applications before fielding a couple of questions.

Nevertheless, giving oral presentations at conferences is a great way to discover if your theory communicates and contributes to others. If your logic, argumentation, and presented materials elicit interest and enthusiasm, you can have greater confidence that your theory is on its way towards becoming either a successful oral defense or a publication. By crowd sourcing the expertise of conference participants, who will key in on logical fallacies, holes in your framework, and other places that are still unclear, you can construct an even better grounded theory.

In addition to being quizzed about the specifics of your grounded theory, it is possible that you will also encounter those who will call into question the quality of your methodology and the nature of your theory. The remainder of this chapter will consider a sample of some of the questions that I and other grounded theorists have encountered during conferences and oral defenses of doctoral theses. We will also consider some possible responses in an attempt to begin the process of preparing you to defend yourself on the 'mean streets' of academia.

'Haven't you done things backwards?'

People will sometimes question the creation of theory from field data, preferring instead an approach where one first develops a theory or hypothesis, and then goes out to test it in the field. Behind this concern is a teleological argument stating that a theory created from a study of present conditions may not accurately reflect original causes.

It is true that grounded theory works from a different starting point. As Denscombe (2003, p. 110) states, the approach

> directly challenges the value of theorizing at a high level of abstraction and then, subsequently, doing some empirical work to see if the theory actually works. It is much better to develop the theories on the basis of empirical research and gradually build up general theories that emerge from the data.

Denscombe's description of GTM being 'much better' needs to be understood in terms of 'much better for studying little understood social interactions amongst people', because certainly in the more philosophical and hard sciences, the top-down method is one of the best ways of interrogating the 'stuff' of our universe. I am certainly not against a well-designed, top-down quantitative study of some aspect related to student language acquisition. Such research is important, and there is little danger of applied linguistics witnessing a decline in this form of inquiry. Bottom-up forms of inquiry are just as necessary as top-down inquiries, and because applied linguistics is in the business of teaching people and in studying the nature of language acquisition, I stand with Glaser, who explains that grounded theory is helpful in unlocking 'what is going on . . . how to account for the participants main concerns, and reveals access variables that allow for incremental change. Grounded theory is about *what is*, not what should, could, or ought to be' (Glaser 1999, p. 840). And while some grounded theorists might balk at Glaser's strong realist assertions, all would agree that a process of theorization centered in present social interaction represents a flexible form of investigation that can address some of the deeper issues affecting students and teachers.

'How can we be certain that your data hasn't been 'cherry-picked'?'

It will be necessary to discern the intent of the person asking this question. The more uncharitable of inquirers may be accusing you of academic dishonesty, and wanting proof that your theory has been created from data they would judge as a fair, balanced, and representative collection. As we saw earlier in this book, it is not possible to show all of the data and to go through one or two years of analysis in the space of a few minutes. To these people, I respond first by saying that no methodology is immune to purposeful attempts at fraud, and that much of what we do in academia relies on

trust. How can we be certain, for example, that the statistical findings from a t-test of 700 students are, in fact, not manufactured numbers? Here as well, a researcher would have to produce all of the test papers and let the skeptic re-create the study. So if the assertion is of you purposefully cherry-picking the data, in the short amount of time that you have at the end of a presentation, there is usually little that can be done to sway a person holding this belief.

Others listening in the audience will have their interest piqued by the question, though, and there will be also those who may have asked the question out of sincere curiosity, in that they are wanting assurance as to how you have avoided *inadvertently* choosing some data over other data as a result of the limitations of your worldview or your personal constructs. Related to this is often a concern that your informants themselves may have provided you with skewed information, as typified in the words of Miles (1979, p. 591): 'How can we be sure that an "earthy," "undeniable," "serendipitous" finding is not, in fact, *wrong?*'

In response, it does to Birks and Mills (2015, p. 174) contend 'that grounded theory methods are self-correcting – if you are precise in their use. Any concept that is relevant will persist, and any that will not will self-extinguish'. This is to say that when grounded theorists engage in constant comparison, both in the coding and sampling of their data, privileging a pet theory poses less of a problem. If you have, at every juncture, challenged yourself the moment you saw a pattern or had a good idea, and if you actually looked for exceptions and opposite cases to what, over time, emerged as representative social processes, then you can speak with greater confidence that you have, to the best of your abilities, not been overly biased in the development of your theory. Urquhart picks up on the theme carried by Birks and Mills, and responds accordingly:

> For every concept that comes from the data, there are dozens of incidents, thanks to the practices of constant comparison and theoretical saturation. This means that grounded theory studies can avoid the charges that are sometimes leveled at qualitative research – namely, that qualitative researchers are selective about the data they use to back up certain findings. Because of the emphasis on theoretical saturation, the researcher can be sure that the findings are representative – that is, not just detected once or twice.
>
> (Urquhart 2013, p. 159)

Even so, answering the question of inadvertent cherry-picking will be more convincing and engaging if softened with academic humility. Like people, all methods and methodologies have their flaws. The risk of error and self-deception are ever-present dangers; one cannot defend qualitative research simply by appealing to the procedures, quantity of datasets, or the length

of time engaged in the research. Emphasize that your work represents a grounded *theory*, not 'grounded fact', at least in the way that 'fact' might be understood by those ascribing to positivist beliefs. Theory does not magically emerge from the methodology; it proceeds from the grounded theorist as the 'core processor' of the collected data. The grounded theorist uses GTM to interrogate the data, but it is nevertheless mediated through the theorist's constructs, experience, discipline, endurance, skill as a researcher, and sensitivity to others. Answering the question in this way, however, is only effective if you have gathered a sufficient amount of data and used constant comparison to keep yourself from bias. Otherwise, the accusations of cherry-picking will stick.

'Your interview excerpts are unrelated to your theoretical concepts'.

This question was mentioned earlier in this chapter. You should first determine if you have adequately discussed the processes, conditions, contexts, and other properties that stand behind your data extracts, and which also support the theoretical interpretations of your material. It may be that the inquirer is helping to clarify your theory. However, if many others have found your theory to be clear, cogent, and if you feel confident that your explanation is theoretically sufficient, then two points can be given in response.

The first is that grounded theory does not seek to give a descriptive account of what people say or do. Grounded theory has as its goal a theoretical account of human interaction. This entails getting behind the metaphorical curtain of daily dramaturgical performances in the social world (Blumer 1969/1998), and finding out about how the props and lighting are used, how the ropes are pulled, and how the makeup is applied. Simply describing what has been said is blindingly obvious. Finding out what is less apparent is perceptibly theoretical, and it is the theoretical which has greater potential for offering broader insights and practical applications.

The second point is one that has been made throughout this book: theories on social interaction are multilayered and colored by one's worldview. Multiple interpretations are possible, so long as they are grounded in the constant comparison of similar and conflicting cases. Therefore, it may very well be that the questioner is seeing something from a different set of constructs and assumptions. It may also be the case that the lack of understanding stems from the questioner not being a representative of the social world that you studied.

'What about (such and such) as an exception to your theory?'

Glaser and Strauss often encountered this type of question during the early years of grounded theory. 'Theories based on data', they explain, and by data they mean empirical field data, 'usually cannot be refuted by more data or another theory' (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 4). They argue

that finding one exception, if it is actually grounded in the social context that you have been studying, does not destroy your theory – it only helps to improve it (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999, p. 28). They continue by stating,

> Instead of satisfying his urge to 'put down' a colleague, he would realize that he has merely posed another comparative datum for generating another theoretical property or category . . . Nothing is disproved or debunked.
>
> (Glaser and Strauss 1967/1999)

If you determine that the person is basing his or her exception on one experience, you can explain that individual exceptions are always possible; your theory cannot predict with any certainty the actions of individuals, who are always capable of overwriting the general tendencies of an organization or group situated within a certain social environment (Handy 1993, p. 13). Individual variables will always exist. Your theory does, however, provide insight or predictive power (depending on your paradigm) regarding a certain social phenomena or core concern affecting a significant number of people.

'Can you replicate your study?'

This type of question emerges from beliefs rooted in the paradigms of structure, which uses replication as an indication of an objective reality and measurable truth. Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 15) respond to this question, perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek:

> Given the same theoretical perspective of the original researcher and following the same general rules for data gathering and analysis, plus a similar set of conditions, and the investigator should come up with the same general scheme.

Grounded theories are not replicable in the sense of a controlled experiment. We have already seen earlier that, as a critical realist, I can see the possibility of two researchers studying similar social phenomena and finding many aspects and processes that are similar. Practicality and utility, however, are more pertinent to grounded theories than replicability. This will be explained more fully as we consider the next question.

'What have you done to validate your study?'

Grounded theorists have come down on different sides in response to this question. The Straussian school (Corbin and Strauss 1990, Strauss and Corbin 1998) proposes numerous standards and verification procedures for ensuring the quality of a grounded theory. Glaserians (Glaser 1992) see verification as taking place throughout the process of constant comparison.

Additional measures designed to convince skeptical colleagues devoted to quantitative research standards, Glaser argues, is an unreasonable imposition on the methodology. I tend to agree with Glaser on this point. GTM was constructed for theorization, not verification in the positivist sense of the word. The way that scholars in applied linguistics tend to work has been to receive the theory, study it, and later on, engage in a wide range of verification studies. In other words, verification is distinct from theorization.

A deeper issue, however, relates to how such questions of reliability and validity have plagued qualitative researchers for decades. Most books dealing with the subject of qualitative research (e.g. Creswell 1998, Richards 2003, Denzin and Lincoln 2005) present lists of alternative standards one can use for judging its relative quality. The best criteria that I have encountered for evaluating a grounded theory is found in Charmaz (2006, pp. 182–183). She draws deeply from the well of American pragmatism, which, as we saw earlier, is one of the philosophical pillars in the construction of grounded theory. American pragmatism places less emphasis on abstract ultimate questions, and focuses instead on practical issues centered within the locus of one's social arena. Utility is the basis for that which is true. Something is true because it is useful; it is useful because it is true. Things that fail or cause even more problems are not useful, because they are based on something that is untrue. Along these lines, Charmaz argues for evaluating a grounded theory within the confluence of four pragmatic standards (Figure 7.2).

Cast in this light, grounded theory evaluation challenges the traditional power structures in academia, because the end users of the theory – that is,

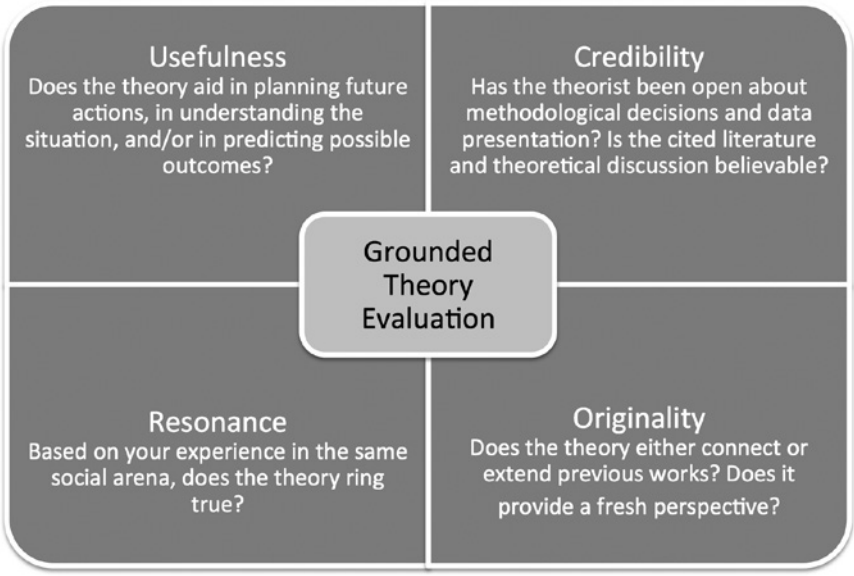


Figure 7.2 Matrix for Grounded Theory Evaluation (Adapted from Charmaz 2008)

those from whom the theory was constructed and for whom the theory was made – are the final arbiters of its quality:

> Grounded theory acknowledges its pragmatist philosophical heritage in insisting that a good theory is one that will be practically useful in the course of daily events, not only to the social scientists, but also to laymen. In a sense, a test of a good theory is whether or not it works 'on the ground'.
>
> (Locke 2005, p. 59)

This naturally has implications for the academic community, since GT can be seen as decentering the authority of established scholars as the gatekeepers of useful knowledge.

'Your theory sounds like common sense to me. Doesn't everybody know this?'

If the person asking this type of question is a player in the researched social arena, then they may be unwittingly validating your theory. The fact of the matter is that everyone may *not* know what seems so obvious to both you and the questioner. Charmaz (2008, p. 153) adds, 'If you offer a fresher deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon, you can make an original contribution'. This leads us to another common question.

'Your theory is so specific. What is its wider contribution?'

This question appeals to the notion that 'real theories' are grand, overarching creations such as the theory of relativity, or something that is transferrable across domains, such as game theory. Through its focus on human interaction, your grounded theory will be transferrable, but it will be up to you to make this clear to others. Action implies both specificity and change. The social worlds we inhabit are replete with transformative interactions. GT is one way to theorize about these ongoing concerns.

Not long before his death, and after decades of studying people in various circumstances, Strauss concluded that the quest to create some unified theory of human interaction was untenable:

> Social scientists, I reason, do not have to solve the unsolvable – is the world changing rapidly or is it not, in which parts of it, etc.? Rather, our main issue is to study how specific institutions, organizations, social worlds and other collectivities answer such key questions.
>
> (Strauss 1993, p. 259)

The study of actions and mutability as they take place in particular social circumstances, Strauss explained, is the best that we can do, given the limitations. We would do well to remember his words. But the answers that

various groups create in response to key questions, and problems to which Strauss alludes, have applications far beyond the borders of their particular social arenas. Glaser and Strauss's theoretical concept of status passage (Glaser and Strauss 1971/2010), and their analysis of the processes surrounding the ways in which our social positions and identities change throughout life, have broad applications. Their work is still in print and it is the theoretical basis for numerous studies in a wide range of fields (e.g. Bradby 1990, Cockerham 1973, Larsson et al. 2003). My study of vocational disarticulation (Hadley 2015), while centered first within the arena of EAP programs, mirrors the problems and social processes that are experienced by those in other professions where people, once respected as experts or skilled artisans in their own right, are replaced by new technologies or organizational systems, thereby relegated to a lower social status and a forcibly redefined professional identity. Campion (2016, p. 67) concurs, stating that even though the theory of vocational disarticulation begins within the realm of blended EAP professionals, the theory also 'makes a substantial and unique contribution to helping all of us who work in the field become more aware of the nature of the forces which are currently shaping our professional lives and impacting upon our behaviours and identities'.

Preparing for future challenges

I have avoided providing specific advice on presentations using PowerPoint or Keynote. One point that I think is helpful when dealing with audience questions is to create slides after the final slide of the presentation that address each of the questions that we have considered. I also create additional slides later when I encounter a new question that warrants a clear and thoughtful answer. It can be very persuasive and impressive if you can produce material to answer your questioners, because it creates a common bond with the audience. It shows that you too have been thinking deeply about the same things as they, and that you have taken time to craft and answer to their concerns. At this point, you will have gained the respect of some that you are an authority on the subject, and this is an excellent way of finishing your presentation.

And yet, while these and related responses should be sufficient for those asking questions out of genuine curiosity, you will need to steel yourself against those who, based on previous negative experiences with a student or colleague claiming to have used grounded theory, or from concerns that the methodology poses challenges to controls imposed by university administrative policies that have privileged the paradigms of structure, or because of a passionate devotion to a set of beliefs about what constitutes 'real' research, will remain unconvinced regardless of your response. Some may become annoyed or even threatened by grounded theory's appeal to the end users as the ultimate measure of a particular theory's quality and pragmatic usefulness, as this may challenge their academic reputation, which may be based on a different theory or crafted from competing claims.

Public scholarly debate fueled in part by unseen personal agendas has long been a feature of academic life. And while encountering someone who is generally opposed to your theory (and possibly you in particular) can be annoying at conferences, it can be deadly during oral defenses.

One of the great advantages of operating from the paradigms of structure is that everyone works from a similar set of ground rules regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology. All researchers are, in effect, equal before these laws. Enter the realm of pattern or process, however, and these rules cease to apply. Instead, one relies more on faith in the goodness of human nature, which manifests itself in the tendency to trust that researchers are sincerely and reflexively striving to create a quality piece of research. The propensity is towards seeing diversity of thought as something that is not only helpful, but something that should be celebrated. In the absence of this trust and mutual appreciation, the situation quickly descends into one where the person having the most power can dominate discourse to the point that their paradigms, interpretations, and evaluations, all reign supreme. In effect, if bereft of humanity, pattern and process yield to tyranny – either from without or from within any particular scholarly discourse community.

Many PhD programs allow candidates to have a say in who sits on the thesis examination committee. Do your homework and strive to find someone who understands qualitative research. More important than the relative fame or status of the examiner is whether they have experience in your area of inquiry and whether they share a complementary paradigmatic perspective. Find out about their openness to new ideas and interdisciplinary approaches. The task of finding potential examiners should be treated like recruiting the right candidate for an important job – which in this case, is the job of deciding whether or not you will be awarded a doctoral degree. This will make the difference between a stimulating oral defense where, at the end of the day, you feel as if you have grown, and a bruising experience where you feel misunderstood, and find yourself struggling to keep your thesis from being tossed on a scholarly scrap heap.

A question that graduate students often ask is how long can they expect doing the whole process of GTM to take? It is difficult to give an exact number, since each student will have unique strengths, shortcomings, and issues that can either expedite or impede the process. However, the timeline in Figure 7.3 gives an idea about how you should pace yourself for a five-year, part-time PhD program. The timeline is predicated on the notion that most of the people I have encountered over the past ten years who were doing PhDs in applied linguistics were enrolled in part-time programs that allowed them to keep their jobs, pay for their PhDs, and fulfill residency requirements during times when their own classes were out of session. It is certain that some students will be doing a PhD full time and therefore would be expected to finish in approximately three years. A three-year grounded theory project is certainly possible, but the

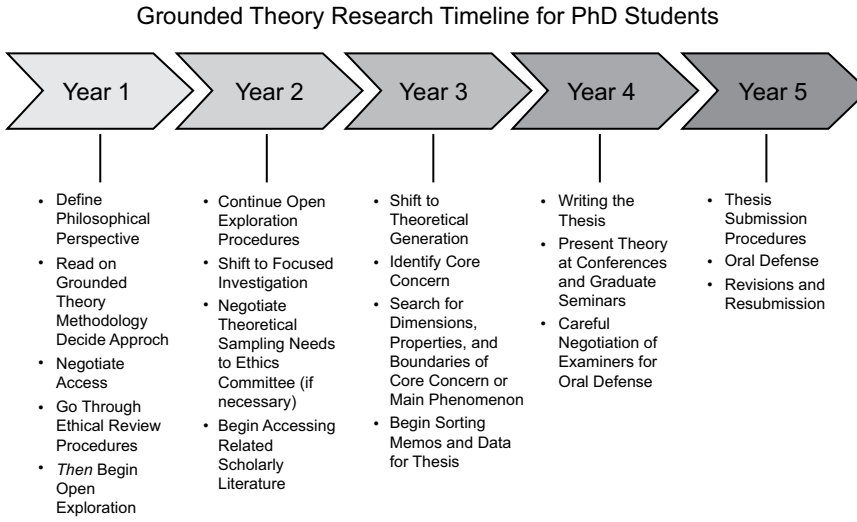


Figure 7.3 Action Timeline for Graduate-Level Grounded Theory Research

experience will be far more intense. There is also the risk of the final product being shallow or only tenuously integrated, because it takes time for people to truly absorb concepts, to get the hang of carrying out procedures, to cogitate on what is going on in their research, and then write up a coherent thesis.

Summary

Without a doubt, grounded theory engages you in the task of writing about your work from the beginning. This is especially good news for PhD candidates. Reorganization and brevity will serve you greatly as you consider how to write your thesis and as you create other forms of academic writing. Later, when you seek publication, do not be discouraged by rejection. Not everyone will be understood in the so-called marketplace of ideas. Today all academics must struggle to get their ideas to a place where they can be debated and shared. Endurance is the key. Publishing in applied linguistics is as much about persistence as it is about intelligence.

Presenting aspects of your grounded theory will help to clarify your work even further and help you discover for yourself the degree to which others find your theory to be useful, credible, resonant, and original. If you have followed the procedures laid out for constructing a good grounded theory, rest assured that some will be convinced. Others will be curious.

Some will always be skeptical, and few will be, if not hostile, then certainly dismissive. This is the nature of grounded theory. It stimulates. It disrupts. It challenges assumptions. Successful grounded theories are rarely forgotten because they contribute to the lives of people and become the groundswell of new insights, as well as pragmatic solutions.

8 Final thoughts

As we approach the end of this book, the best is yet to come in your continuing journey of grounded theory. At this juncture, it is appropriate to pause and reflect on how much you have learned before pressing forward. We will then consider some of the possible applications of grounded theory in AL and conclude with a few final thoughts.

Taking stock of what we have learned

Looking once more at what you have studied, you will again remember that, early on, you developed a clearer understanding of your philosophical stance and a greater appreciation for the interconnected nature of research methodologies in AL. You learned about the emergent development of the grounded theory methodology. Starting with its classic form, and continuing up to the different styles available to you today, you have now gained a sufficient amount of background knowledge to carry on an intelligent and informed conversation with other grounded theorists. In the future, if you should wish to explore some of the other excellent books on how to do grounded theory, you now have the ability to assess the methodological advice in an informed manner and to recognize whether a book leans more towards the perspectives of Glaser, Strauss, Charmaz, a combination of these, or other influential twentieth-century methodologists. You have learned about the contribution of past methodologies to grounded theory, such as symbolic interactionism, and supporting philosophies, such as American pragmatism, and of the attempt of many grounded theorists to strike a balance between these concerns in their methodological guides. As you read further works on grounded theory, your newly attained knowledge will enable you to assess the possible challenges and outcomes.

If you had not considered it earlier, you will now know about the importance of determining in advance the degree to which you might possibly carry out a grounded theory project to its successful completion. Especially for graduate students, the inventory provided in the appendix serves as a platform for finding out the level of institutional support that you can expect to receive. You have prepared yourself for the task of assessing the degree of access that you can expect with venues and informants. You should have a

better idea about your propensity for carrying out a project, which includes a consideration of the potential costs and benefits of taking a grounded theory approach. This also includes making clear decisions about whether you should invest in CAQDAS, hire a transcriptionist, and opt for either verbatim or intelligent verbatim transcriptions of your interviews.

As you think back to when you studied the basics of GTM, by now you will have unlocked the mysteries of coding. You should now be able to see it as a process beginning in an open, descriptive manner, but which steadily moves in tandem with memo writing, taking observation notes, and with constantly challenging your hunches and assumptions through constant comparison, in order to take you to levels of informed, focused interpretation, and then onward to theorization. Dwelling in the realm of thick description is not the true home of grounded theorists. You have decoded the process by which you can continue your journey up until the point where you have not only achieved a plausible theoretical conceptualization of your collected data but also one that has been integrated into a theory of social process. In addition, you understand why the portrayal of grounded theory as a methodology that does not require the use of scholarly literature is a myth – and perhaps even a pernicious one at that. The scholarly literature, like later research informants, are sought out theoretically, and are accessed after certain key problems and concerns become apparent through your interaction with the data.

By this time, you will have also understood why a grounded theory is not a collection of descriptive themes, but instead an interconnected set of social processes, each related interactively, around a main concern or overarching phenomenon. Because of the depth of detail that you have within your collected data, memos, and other materials, generated as they have been from the rigors of GTM, you have developed an awareness as to how to present your theory so that it can complement the limitations and concerns of books, theses, journal papers, edited book chapters, and speaking venues such as conference presentations or the oral defense of one's thesis. All of what you have learned in this book will help you to respond to the curious, deal with the doctrinaire, and create a space for disseminating your grounded theory.

Scanning the horizon ahead

You will become even more proficient in these new skills and acquired insights once you have applied GTM to your area of specific research interest. However, what are some ideal places for the use of GTM? Where could grounded theory take root were it to experience greater adoption within the AL community? The following are but a few of the possible applications.

Most certainly, through the discoveries afforded to us by an informed use of grounded theory, our understanding of language learning processes and classroom dynamics would become far more nuanced and multilayered. Grounded theory could contribute to qualitative studies in corpus linguistics. Groom (2005), for example, has called for more research that would

look beyond the quantitative study of patterns in corpus data, and to begin searching for qualitative ways to interrogate the deeper meanings of texts across genres and disciplines. GTM would provide researchers with a rigorous methodology for doing this, first by coding and interrogating corpus data and then by extending its theoretical potential beyond the limitations of empirical description. There are attempts to achieve a synthesis of corpus linguistics with the qualitative tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Baker et al. 2008, Mautner 2009, Flowerdew 2012). However, a shortcoming I see within the current configuration is that CDA, as with other forms of analysis derived from CST, places few checks placed on interpretive bias. Baker concurs, finding that even though critical discourse analysts are using corpora with increasing frequency, 'the interpretation and evaluation of quantitative patterns are still very much likely to be subject to human bias' (Baker 2012, p. 255). This problem is a long-standing one in both CDA and CST, which has led Harvey to conclude, "In sum, critical theory has no choice but to develop its own inner potential by establishing a symbiotic relationship with other theories and perspectives" (1990, p. 7). Grounded theory, and in particular for the concerns of CDA, critical grounded theory, would not only enhance the potential already being explored between corpus linguistics and CDA but also the practices of constant comparison, memoing, and careful coding would strengthen its rigor and credibility within the academy.

The increased use of GTM in AL would also mean that insights and expertise emerging from the applied linguistics community would make useful contributions to the methodology. For example, concordance software in AL, in my opinion, far exceeds word search functions found in CAQDAS. The insight into language analysis coming from AL would contribute towards improving the approach of grounded theorists in other fields, thereby improving the future of the methodology.

With a speculative eye towards the future of GTM, there is little doubt that it will continue and grow throughout this century. Grounded theory will, of course, not live up to the Glaserian vision of permanence, but very much like the prime objects that it studies (Kubler 1962/2008), grounded theory operates as a dynamic process. It is, in autopoietic terms, continuously being structured, contextualized, and redefined. That said, many of the underlying dispositions found within grounded theory have their roots stretching as far back as Herodotus and Aristotle. As their ideas and practices have survived, so too will grounded theory.

Towards a greater contribution

I will conclude now with a question that I have kept until the end: What good is 'theory' anyway? This question is not uncommon, for there are many, such as McCarthy (2001, p. 4), who portray AL as 'essentially a problem-driven discipline, rather than a theory-driven one'. Others will add their concern that the proliferation of theories might create more confusion

than clarity. The field of education has scores of learning theories. Psychology as well has multiple theories on subjects ranging from thought to behavior. Would not grounded theory expose AL to similarly tangled strands of intellectual chaos?

My response to this is 'no', for three reasons. The first is because the proliferation of theories represents, in my mind at least, a state of dynamism rather than one of chaos. Drawing from my earlier metaphor of the protostar, different theories dealing with similar areas of interest will, in time, collide and then coalesce, thereby creating even better theories. The second reason stems from my pragmatic standpoint, which states, that which is not useful will eventually be jettisoned into the great beyond. When a theory, or aspects of otherwise useful theories, lack the ability to explain what is going on, these will fade quickly from the dialectic of academic discourse. Heated discourse on the relative usefulness of multiple theories insures that greater insight can eventually be achieved. I would further add that many, if not most of the theories generated within education and psychology (both of which arguably serve as important intellectual 'feeders' for AL) are not *grounded theories*. Instead, they are top-down theories that have been handed down by brilliant scholars, but which have nevertheless been derived from thought experiments, and are in need of 'real-world' validation. Such work is important for the progress of science, but so too is grounded theory, which starts within the social arena and works its way up.

The third reason why I believe that applied linguists need to engage in theoretical thinking is that if we do not theorize about what is going on in our classrooms, schools, and society, then someone else will theorize for us. We have become, I believe, theoretically impoverished as a discipline because we rely too heavily on the intellectual aid airlifted in from outside disciplines. This has implicitly fostered an attitude that has become far too parochial, so that as McCarthy implies, we see ourselves as linguistic technicians who solve problems and fix broken language, but who have little in the way of contributing to the world beyond the confines of language education and analysis.

I think this sells AL short. Part of the motivation for writing this book stems from my belief that applied linguists can and should make more contributions to our colleagues in other fields. Far more than in some other disciplines, applied linguists have deep insights into language. We understand how language can equip people to name concepts, to see ideas, and in doing so, to be enabled to work within and to adapt to social environments. Language is empowering. It opens the door for change. In the hands of applied linguists, grounded theory can be an important tool for revealing to others what has always been there, but which has remained unseen because until then, people lacked the words. Once we can, in theoretical terms, name something that is taking place in our educational environments, we can then do something about it.

We as applied linguists have unique talents and experiences. We are multilingual and multicultural. We live or have lived in places around the world.

In the process, we have gained powerful cross-cultural insights and communication skills. We have access to people and places that are the envy of colleagues in other disciplines. We have something to say and something to contribute. The methodology of grounded theory is one way of making that happen. And on that note, this book will end – even as your journey is just beginning.

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Appendix

Grounded theory readiness assessment inventory

Instructions: Read each question carefully. Circle the number that best corresponds to what you know or believe about your current situation in your role as a graduate student.

		Highly Skeptical	**Little**				**A Lot**
External Resources	□ **Supervisory Support** To what degree does your PhD Supervisor encourage or agree with taking a Grounded Theory approach?	0	1	2	3	4	5
	□ **Institutional Support** How open are other faculty and members of the Ethics Board to a Grounded Theory Approach?	**Resistant** 0	**Little** 1	2	3	4	**A Lot** 5
Internal Resources	□ **Contacts and Connections** How much long-term access do you have with people and places that are vital for doing your research?	**Outsider** 0	**Little** 1	2	3	4	**A Lot** 5

(*Continued*)

(Continued)

	□ **Time Constraints** How much time do you have before you have before your graduate program ends?	**One Year** 0	**Two Years** 1	2	3	4	**Six Years** 5
	□ **Budget** Purchasing specialist software, hiring transcriptionists, and traveling to research sites can easily exceed a thousand US Dollars. How affordable are such additional costs?	**Unsustainable** 0	**Burdensome** 1	2	3	4	**Affordable** 5
Personal Traits	□ **Expertise** How much experience do you have in carrying out and publishing qualitative research?	**None** 0	**Very Little** 1	2	3	4	**A Lot** 5
	□ **Temperament** To what degree have you been able to finish long-term research projects in the past? Can you tolerate long periods of ambiguity? How flexible are you to sudden changes?	**Never Tested** 0	**Low** 1	2	3	4	**A Lot** 5

	□ **Reflexivity** How willing are you to view yourself critically, that is, to externalize your assumptions, to examine your perspectives, as well as assess your relative strengths and weaknesses as a researcher? How much resistance do you put up when someone questions your beliefs?	**No Experience** 0	**Very Little** 1	 2	 3	 4	**A Lot** 5
Key	Add up the numbers you recorded from all of the questions. The sum is your Readiness Score for a Graduate Level Grounded Theory Project. *Interpretation* ■ 31 to 40: High Level of Readiness ■ 24 to 30: Adequate Level of Readiness ■ 20 to 23: Borderline Level of Readiness - Consider Another Approach ■ 0 to 22: Currently Not Ready for Grounded Theory Approach ■ Note: Zero ratings for any of the individual External or Internal Resource Questions indicate a high level of risk in conducting a Grounded Theory project in your current circumstances. Consider another approach for your graduate research project.						

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