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## Structured Interviewing I: Questionnaires

This is the first of two chapters about **structured interviews**. In a structured interview, each informant or respondent is exposed to the same stimuli. The stimuli are often questions, but they may also be carefully constructed vignettes, lists of words or photos, clips of music or video, a table full of physical artifacts, or a garden full of plants. The idea in structured interviewing is always the same: to control the input that triggers people's responses so that their output can be reliably compared.

I'll cover two broad categories of methods for structured interviewing: **questionnaires** and a range of methods used in **cultural domain analysis**. We begin in this chapter with questionnaires and survey research. I review some of the important lessons concerning the wording of questions, the format of questionnaires, the management of survey projects, and the maximizing of response rates. (Refer to chapter 9 again for more discussion of response effects.)

At the end of this chapter, I'll introduce you to some of the interesting and unusual methods that people are using to get at complex and/or touchy topics. In chapter 11, I'll introduce you to the structured data-gathering methods for cultural domain analysis.

### Questionnaires and Survey Research

Survey research goes back over 200 years (take a look at John Howard's monumental 1973 [1792] survey of British prisons), but it really took off in

the mid-1930s when quota sampling was first applied to voting behavior studies and to helping advertisers target consumer messages. Over the years, government agencies in all the industrialized countries have developed an insatiable appetite for information about various “target populations” (poor people, users of public housing, users of private health care, etc.). Japan developed an indigenous survey research industry soon after World War II, and India, South Korea, Jamaica, Greece, Mexico, and many other countries have since developed their own survey research capabilities.

Anthropologists are finding more and more that good survey technique can add a lot of value to ethnography. In the 1970s, Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole studied literacy among the Vai of Liberia. Some Vai are literate in English, others are literate in Arabic, and some adult Vai men use an indigenous script for writing letters. As part of their project, Scribner and Cole ran a survey with 650 respondents. Michael Smith, the cultural anthropologist on their team, was skeptical about using this method with the Vai. He wrote the project leaders about his experience in administering the survey there:

I was surprised when I first saw how long it [the questionnaire] was. I didn't think that anyone would sit down for long enough to answer it, or, if they did, that they would answer it seriously. . . . Well, I was wrong—and it fascinates me why the Vai should, in the busiest season of the year—during two of the worst farming years one could have picked . . . spend a lot of time answering questions which had little to do with the essential business at hand. . . . Not only did the majority of people eventually come, but when they got there they answered with great deliberation. How many times does one remember someone saying, “I don't know, but I'll come back and tell you when I've checked with so-and-so.” (Scribner and Cole 1981:47)

A lot has changed in the last 30 years. Today, most anthropologists use questionnaires as one of their research tools.

### **The Computer Revolution in Survey Research**

There are three methods for collecting survey questionnaire data: (1) personal, **face-to-face** interviews, (2) **self-administered** questionnaires, and (3) **telephone** interviews. All three of these methods can be either assisted by, or fully automated with, computers.

The computer revolution in survey research began in the 1970s with the development of software for CATI, or “computer-assisted telephone interviewing.” By 1980, CATI software had transformed the telephone survey industry (Fink 1983). With CATI software, you program a set of survey ques-