

Generalization

- Generalization, statistically understood
 - an intuitive example
 - ways to handle the problem
 - classic statistical inference
 - complications
 - calculating confidence intervals
 - ...but note: statistical generalization is based on strong assumptions...
 - ...and is inductive in nature

- In generalization, qualitative methods clearly are inferior to statistics
 - problems: assumes simple causality (only few variables), no interactions, measurement errors
- Does this weakness decrease the value of qualitative research?

- Qualitative responses
 - qualitative research typically aims to produce “thick descriptions” from a small number of cases
 - the price of an additional case is high
 - often we are interested in uniqueness
 - (you cannot understand Finnish econ policy between 1965-1990 without studying the former president Mauno Koivisto)

- in small countries in particular, the number of cases may be too small for statistical analysis
 - even in big countries, this is the case in many industries

- critical aims:
 - in studying the third world, UN and OECD statistics are a typical source
 - but is “nation” a good unit to understand, say, Sub-Saharan Africa?

- diagnostically important cases
 - “America’s Working Man”

- generalizing to theory not to population (Robert Yin)

- learning from comparative methods
 - mimicking experimental research -- or comparing dissimilar cases
- comparison to other qualitative and case studies (Randy Hodson’s work in sociology of work)

- to sum up...
 - in generalization, qualitative methods are weaker than quantitative methods
 - but there are many valid methods to handle this problem
 - still, as a rule of thumb...
 - be careful: if statisticians say that your generalization is wrong, there is a high likelihood that you are wrong

- the problem is often at a hidden, unwitting generalizations rather than at an explicit level
 - you generalize through terminology, words, etc., and write sentences not carefully enough
 - finally, there are “creeping generalizations” in all sciences

Quantification and Sampling

Statistics in Qualitative Research

- In some situations, it makes sense to quantify at least a part of data
 - analyzing covariance without statistics is risky, so in principle... but...
 - when it is typically difficult to quantify qualitative data on an interval scale, and
 - when N is small
 - only simple analyses and weak statistics are possible
 - is quantification worth all trouble?

– when to quantify?

- When N is sufficiently large
- When there is a consistent unit of analysis
- of course, tabulations and “correlations” can help to get a snapshot of data without coefficients
 - (remember the Miles & Huberman methodology!)

Sampling

- Classical sampling...
 - ...aims to guarantee that each case has a similar likelihood of being included in the sample
- In qualitative research, the “sample” is almost always *purposive*
 - we select the “best laboratory animal” for our study: a case that gives us a good access to our topic of interest

Three sampling “methods”

- Snowball sampling
 - asking each subject suggestions for other people to interview, observe, etc.
- Targeted sampling
 - studying “hidden” populations
 - using all possible knowledge to find these populations and get close to them

- “Theoretical sampling”
 - when field work progresses, new questions and interpretations arise.
 - sampling is determined by these new concepts, not by snowballs or by targeting specific populations

Saturation

- When to stop?
 - There is no mathematics to tell..!
 - The only sensible answer is “saturation”:
 - you analyze data as you go along in field work
 - continue studying each question or hypothesis as long as new variation comes along
 - stop when new cases always fall into the existing interpretation, and negative cases are accounted for

questions?

Argumentation

- The final phase in constructing an interpretation is “argumentation”:
 - tying the results to scientific literature
 - and showing its contribution in literature
 - without this phase, the study has little effect in the research community
 - to get published in good journals or conferences, any article often needs an argument

- Note that in qualitative research...
 - argumentation is placed differently from quantitative, theory-driven analysis
 - in theory-driven analysis, the very study is designed to be an argument
 - in qualitative research, the argument is typically *found* in the course of the study
 - argumentation begins at the advanced stages of the study
 - **reserve and budget time for writing!**

- In getting published, the key concepts are “contribution” and “believability”
 - to show contribution, the writer has to show that the study tells something new, or tells something better than previous literature
 - the only way to show this is to go through literature and show what has been written & what is wrong with existing literature
 - in evaluating believability, readers go back to concepts like validity and reliability

- Some philosophy
 - A good interpretation typically has a few clear and distinct concepts that are related to each other in a systematic fashion.
 - Such interpretation translates knowledge of the user into understanding – that is, it picks up what is essential from fuzzy intuition

- What the reader gets is an economic snapshot picture of the subject and her world
- This picture may not be correct in all details, but this is not the point.
 - What is truly important is that this picture communicates the subject well to the audience

- Effective communication requires that the picture is informative
- 100 bare details are not informative
 - they are, if there is a framework that explains how they are related

questions?

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