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STRUCTURED INTERVIEW IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH: A DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Abstract

The text presents the procedures and techniques of the research method aimed at "evoking the historical source", which is understood as the researcher's prepared and implemented scientifically rigorous participation in the creation by a witness of history of such a reminiscence material that could be a carrier of information and would be subjected to rudimentary historical analysis. The text presents the defined assumptions and subsequent stages of the research procedure.

Keywords: research method, autobiographic memory as historical source, oral history, structured interview

Describing two equal epistemological positions functioning in contemporary social sciences and humanities, in which an interview technique is used, Steinar Kvale used the following metaphors: "researcher-miner" and "researcher-traveler". The "miner" collects knowledge extracting it from empirical material in the form of objective facts or authentic, though subjective, meanings. The "traveler" consciously participates in the process of constructing knowledge,

which takes place mainly in the field of language, so stories and discourses themselves become the subject of their scientific interest.[1]

History is a welcoming land in which both the "miner" and the "traveler" feel at home. With researchers identifying with the latter epistemological position in mind, we have attempted to develop an interview procedure that belongs to the group of structured interviews. When designing the method, we took into account a specific concept of knowledge obtained during research, but we do not claim that it is a universal or the best interview method for every historian. We propose research procedures aimed at "evoking a historical source". By this we mean participation, which is prepared and implemented in an academically rigorous way, of a researcher in the creation by a respondent (a witness to history) of such recollective material that might be a carrier of information and might be subject to rudimentary historical analysis, i.e. comparison and/or verification against information from other sources.

Although the procedures presented in this text[2] mainly describe the preparation of an interview, they do not only concern its technique. They are a method in the sense that they presume certain epistemic goals, a defined methodological rigor that is required to achieve them and the type of analysis envisaged in a research project. We do not discuss the latter as it is an issue that requires a separate, lengthy article.[3] We also do not insist that in the case of this method only a basic historical analysis is possible or advisable.

In the first part of the article, we present the scientific findings in the field of psychology which we used to devise the method. In the main part, we define the basic assumptions and procedures and present in the form of a table the mechanics of converting them into a questionnaire and communication strategies during an interview. We provide, as an attachment to the article, communication instructions used when making a research contract, which, with obvious adaptations to a given project, may be a universal tool.

We consider the presented method to be open to additions and modifications. We especially welcome comments from practicing historians who would like to test it and discuss their experiences[4].

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1   Steinar Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2010), 53–54.
2   The article presents the results of a research project financed by the National Science Center, contract no. 2015/19 / B / HS3 / 01761, carried out at the Institute of History of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. The text in Polish appeared under the title Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, Emilia Soroko, Marcin Stasiak "Wywiad historyczny. Propozycja metody badawczej," *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej 10* (2020): 8–36, https://doi.org/10.26774/wrhm.269.
3   The procedures were modified several times after the subsequent batches of tests by members of the research team and students. Our volunteers — students from the Institute of History of the Jagiellonian University, provided us invaluable help at the testing stage, for which we thank them very much. We would like to thank in particular the following students for their efforts: Karolina Domańska, Marek Woźniak and Sonia Knapczyk.
4   We would like to thank our colleagues from the "Remembrance and Future" Centre and Joanna Wojdon and Łukasz Kamiński from the University of Wrocław for an inspiring and

GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

A research interview in its general form is "a conversation whose structure and purpose are determined by one of the parties — the interviewer. It is a professional interaction that […] involves carefully asking questions and listening to answers in order to gain well proven knowledge ".[5]

Therefore, the interview method proposed here is defined as the procedures by which a conversation about past events proceeds. The procedures were developed on the basis of the latest achievements of world psychology regarding the functioning of autobiographical and episodic memory as well as the knowledge about the principles of conducting in-depth, partially structured interviews, which assume the dynamics of interpersonal contact and basic communication skills. The subject of an interview, which may be a specific event (events), time range or social group, etc., each time requires substantive preparation on the part of the researcher, so that each time, depending on the subject matter, it is possible to create a detailed structure of an interview.

During an interview, the researcher's goal is to obtain information defined as objective facts or authentic, albeit subjective, meanings by enabling the respondent (witness, informant)[6] to the extent that rapport[7] during the study and personal boundaries and needs allow it:

a. bringing up events in which they were an active participant or observer
b. recounting them from their perspective[8]

As a result, the researcher receives information about the past along with the respondent's personal frame of reference. It is a reflection of knowledge, beliefs and experiences that create the respondent's personal and socio-cultural identity and a professional relationship with the researcher that allows (more or less) to reveal this personal perspective.

Not only a past event or time itself, but also past experiences reproduced today by the respondent reflect what an event or period was for them. Thus, they contribute to a better understanding of these events.

Mainly because of concerns regarding m e m o r y   f a i l u r e and the related to it c r e d i b i l i t y of a source, many historians are wary about not only oral recollec-

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important discussion during a seminar organized by the Center in November 2020. Under the influence of questions, comments and suggestions from oral history practitioners and historians of recent history, we improved a few things and clarified some important topics.

[5] Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów*, 37.

[6] We do not use the terms "interlocutor" or "narrator" because these terms are in the cognitive domain of "researchers-travelers".

[7] Rapport — the term refers to the quality of a research relationship, which is based on trust and respect in a safe and comfortable environment, allowing the sharing of personal experiences and attitudes. See David L. Morgan, Heather Guevara, "Rapport," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. by Lisa M. Given (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008), 728–729.

[8] Due to the fact that narrative is a social form of constructing autobiographical memories, this perspective should also take into account the language of developing events and experiences available in the domain of discourse.

tions, but also e v o k e d   s o u r c e s in general. Credibility, however, is not a psycho-logical concept and does not apply to recollections. Accounts of witnesses to history — like those of witnesses in a court trial — should be assessed when deciding whether they a r e   b a s e d   o n   p e r s o n a l   m e m o r y   t r a c e s.[9] The prob-ability that the information contained in an account reflects actual events (whether memories are accurate or not) is determined by the historian's assessment made in the course of an analysis, i.e. after an interview. The historian performs it with the use of various tools available in their discipline, such as compiling data from various sources, confronting sources and in-depth data analysis.

Memory is both the individual ability of a subject, the endowment of an individual (we tend to say that someone has a 'good memory') and cognitive process. In the second sense, memory w o r k s by processing information in the coding, storage and reproduction phases. These phases involve many different cognitive processes and lead from perception and coding of information, through storage and recoding on the basis of new, incoming information, to searching for information in long-term memory (reproducing) and decisions regarding, for example, what and how to tell something during an interview. When looking for an answer to the question of how to talk about the past, one should therefore refer in particular to scientific knowledge about event memory (i.e. episodic memory), autobiographical memory and the processes of searching and extracting information from long-term memory.[10]

Episodic memory is the memory of events that have a specific temporal and spatial location. It does not represent facts, concepts and relations between them (this is the property of the so-called semantic memory), but time ordered events, often related to the personal past of a storyteller. Episodic memory is conscious and arbitrary, and sometimes it takes effort to extract information from it. Moreover, it is autonoetic, i.e. a person has a subjective feeling that recollections are their own experience.[11] Autobiographical memory, generally speaking, is a record of life history or personal life experience to date.[12] It includes facts from a person's past and their memories of events from both the actor's and observer's perspective. It contains references to semantic memory (e.g. knowl-edge of a place in Italy where you have been on vacation) and episodic memory (e.g. of a vacation in that town in Italy), and sometimes is also considered to contain procedural information (e.g. how to set up a tent). What makes it specific are direct references to the concept of the self and to the identity of a subject.[13] Self-related information is always better remembered than unrelated

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9   Bartosz Wojciech Wojciechowski, *Analiza i ocena zeznań świadków* (Sopot: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2015), 43.
10 *Cf.* e.g. T o m a s z   M a r u s z e w s k i, "Pamięć autobiograficzna – nowe dane," *Neuropsychiatria i Neuropsychologia* 5, nr 3–4 (2010): 122–129; M a r i a   J a g o d z i ń s k a, *Psychologia pamięci. Badania, teorie, zastosowania* (Gliwice: Sensus, 2008).
11 E n d e l   T u l v i n g, "Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain," *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (2002): 1–25.
12 See Jagodzińska, *Psychologia pamięci*; M a r u s z e w s k i, *Pamięć autobiograficzna*.
13 *Cf.* A s a f   G i l b o a, S h a y n a   R o s e n b a u m, A v i   M e n d e l s o h n, "Autobiographical memory: from experiences to brain representations," *Neuropsychologia* 110 (2018): 1–6; S t a n l e y   B.

information, and personal goals play a special role here. A person's goal hierarchy acts as a set of cognitive control processes and is a determinant of coding and accessing knowledge from long-term memory, as well as creating memories.[14] Therefore, people often talk about events from their perspective, which additionally means being inspired by their own motives rather than unbiased reporting of a course of events.

It can be very generally indicated that autobiographical memory is the subject of interest of "researchers-travelers", while "miners" focus their attention on what is in episodic memory.

As researchers, we can ensure that an interview, while respecting the laws of memory, provides the best possible historical material. Due to the properties of episodic and autobiographical memory (of which episodic memory is an important aspect), it is worth distinguishing two phenomena that may affect the quality of the obtained material[15]:

I. memory is partially reconstructive, i.e. it stores details specific to events, so we can expect a certain accuracy of eyewitness reports

II. memory is partially reconstructive and this creative aspect is present:

a) at the perception stage (when memory data is, at first, created via the senses)

b) at the stage of incorporating observations into existing patterns (e.g. what does a stay in a restaurant usually look like, or what vision of the social world, e.g. "people are unfriendly", someone has and how (and to what extent) new experiences can change it)

c) at the stage of changing memory contents in the course of participation in subsequent events (recoding)

d) at the stage of recreating events (when recalling, writing down or telling stories)

If past events are complex or ambiguous, it is the schemas that influence recall, sometimes even leading to vivid but false memories. As a result, we detect in accounts material consistent with the schemas.[16] The ease of remembering is influenced by many factors, but among individual ones there is the level of emotional arousal at the time of an event (strong agitation narrows the field of attention — a person perceives less of what is happening around them; moderate agitation, being an element of the orientation reaction, helps to remember more details) and the degree of compliance with cognitive schemas (it is easier to remember information compliant with schema, because it allows one to interpret perceptual data).[17]

Klein, "Self, memory, and the self-reference effect: an examination of conceptual and methodological issues," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16 (2012): 283–300.

[14] See Gilboa, Rosenbaum, Mendelsohn, *Autobiographical memory.*

[15] See Agnieszka Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń w pamięci zdarzeń* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2004).

[16] Cf. Chris R. Brewin, Bernice Andrews, Laura Mickes, "Regaining Consensus on the Reliability of Memory," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 29, 2 (2020): 121–125.

[17] See Maruszewski, *Pamięć autobiograficzna.*

PROCEDURES

In practical terms, the proposed method is specified by the role of the researcher and the person participating in the study (respondent, witness), as well as their relationship based on the professionalism of the researcher.

The scientific quality, i.e. the research usefulness of the material obtained through an interview, is determined by: making a research c o n t r a c t in a skillful way and the researcher's communication skills.

1. A RESEARCH CONTRACT

The interview contract is an agreement with the respondent as to the terms of the conversation for which the researcher, who initiates and conducts the negotiations, is responsible. In this agreement (recorded and possibly written so that each party might refer to the arrangements), the researcher:

a. presents a professional attitude, which means that they do not go beyond their role, and an ethical one, which means that the rapport during the interview is based on trust

b. obtains the respondent's informed consent to conduct research and record and use the material in a scholarly publication

c. proposes rules and possibilities of anonymizing and/or authorizing as well as storing and sharing the material obtained from the respondent

d. explains any doubts of the respondent related to the study

c. expresses their readiness to enter into negotiations in regard to the contents of the contract within the limits acceptable for a given research project, or to give up on the interview if further negotiations are not possible

The contract is crucial to the interview method as it professionalizes the relationship between the historian and the respondent. By verbalizing their roles in the study, both parties protect themselves against undesirable situations, the most frequent of which in an interview situation is the emergence of a quasi-therapeutic relationship or 'false friendship', or the researcher's manifestation of their worldview (authentic or adopted under the influence of the witness).

Moreover, at the stage of concluding the research contract, the historian reveals to the respondent the way of linking the interview with the research goals, and, in particular, fundamental for the research, intertwining of personal[18] and objective chronology (which will translate into specific questions in the interview). In turn, the precise formulation of the historian's expectations helps the respondent to focus attention and, assuming the position of the protagonist of the situation, recall experiences from the past.

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[18] *Cf.* Glen H. E l d e r, *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Boulder–Oxford: Westview Press., 1999).

Making the contract consists of three steps:

I. initial interview (informal and non-binding; before recording)

II. introduction (before recording)

III. proper contract (recording of findings of people participating in the interview)Photography

The table below summarizes the main goals of the stages of making the contract, how to achieve them, and examples of tested statements.

Table 1. Objectives, ways of achieving them and suggestions of statements at the three stages of making the research contract.

Phase	Objectives	Ways of achieving the objectives	Tested statements
· **PRELIMINA-RY INTER-VIEW (e.g. by phone)**	· Building a professional relationship between the researcher (historian) and their interlocutor · Linking the specificity of the interview and the reconstruction of the past with the help of memory and the objectives of historical research	· Self-presentation of the researcher: providing affiliation and specifying the research area of the study · Description of the subject and purpose of the research · Information about the intention to record the interview	Although the interview is informal, it requires precise terms, e.g.: · "I am a historian, an employee of the institution X" · "I am carrying out a research project called ..., the aim of which is ..."
· **INTRODUC-TION TO THE PROPER CONTRACT (in person, before recording)**	· Making the respondent comfortable · Building an atmosphere of trust between the interlocutors · Emphasizing the idea of the interlocutor's agency	· Follow up on the arrangements made during the preliminary interview · Introduction to the contract (in one, maximum two sentences) · Providing only the most important information necessary for the further course of the conversation	· "Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. · Have you changed your mind? · Before starting, I would like to take a few moments to explain why I asked for this interview and what it will, more or less, look like. And above all, establish the rules for its use."
		· Emphasizing the interlocutor's right to negotiate or question the proposed solutions	· "Please let me know if you have any questions or doubts."
		· Moving on to the recording phase: asking for permission to turn on the voice recorder	(a) "I would also like to turn the voice recorder on now, so that my explanation and the agreed rules of use are also recorded. Do you have anything against it?"

Phase	Objectives	Ways of achieving the objectives	Tested statements
(a) **MAKING THE INTER-VIEW CON-TRACT (after recording has started)**	Building a professio-nal relationship bet-ween the researcher (historian) and their interlocutor Establishing clear and understandable rules for the inter-view and the use of the recorded material Linking the interview with the historian's research goals Linking personal chronology with ob-jective chronology in an open and under-standable way for the interlocutor Emphasizing the idea of the interlocutor's agency Creating conditions that will allow the respondent to under-stand the objectives of the research Facilitating a situa-tion of mental "im-mersion" in a given period in the past	Description of the nature of the study and its goals Explanation of the rela-tionship between a spe-cific interview and the study itself (why we contacted this person) Efficient creation of a link between the chronology of the inter-locutor's life and the subject of the study. This particularly important activity takes place in 3 steps: 1) reference to the stage in the interlocutor's life, significant as a part of life cycle, which can be placed in an external, objective chronology (within the dates of the events that are confirmed in documents, e.g. education, marriage, military service, etc.) 2) reference to more general issues, a process / phenomenon which is relevant for the research 3) summary: combining the two steps outlined earlier	An example of an inter-view with a former his-tory student (born in 1971), currently a re-searcher at the Jagiello-nian University: "I asked for this inter-view because I know that, 1) you started your studies at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. 2) I am a historian and the study I am currently conduct-ing looks at the genera-tion of people who entered adulthood at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the next decade. 3) We are parti-cularly interested in the very moment of entering adulthood, which corre-sponds to the period of studies."
		Outlining the nature of the interview, as well as expectations towards the respondent Indicating the relation-ship of the questions with the study "Immersion" in the past through an initial stimulus	· "The interview may at times feel like a casual conversation, it is not conducted according to a detailed questionnaire. · At the same time, I would like to ask a number of questions that are important to me from the point of view of my study. This does not mean that the interview will be an interrogation. · First of all, I want you to try to think how you

Phase	Objectives	Ways of achieving the objectives	Tested statements
			felt during that time; I am also open to your opinions and observations. What's more — it is very likely that the questions and assumptions I have prepared will change because of your input".
		Establishing the duration of the interview: a single session should not last longer than 1/1.5 hours. (see Point 2. Communication skills)	· "The conversation will last about an hour, certainly not longer than 1.5 hours."
		Adopting an attitude of respect towards the respondent's boundaries: emphasizing that they have the right to refuse to answer and they may also ask for a change of topic	· "It may also happen that I ask questions that you do not want to answer. In that case, please exercise your right to refuse to answer. We can also just change the subject then. · If something important comes to your mind during the course of the interview, and I don't ask you about it, please let me know, okay?"
		After the interviewer has provided all the necessary information, it is imperative to make sure that the interviewee understands it. This question also serves as a pause before moving on to the question of using the recorded material. Making sure that we are well understood and gaining the interviewee's approval for the following steps proposed by the researcher is important throughout the interview, and it plays a special role at the stage of making the contract (see Appendix 1)	· "Is everything clear so far?"

Phase	Objectives	Ways of achieving the objectives	Tested statements
		Joint determination of the rules for using the recorded interview The person recording the interview indicates ways the recording can be used Drawing the interviewee's attention to the issue of personal data contained in the interview: the scope of data necessary from the point of view of the research project should be precisely defined	· "Since our recorded conversation is used for scientific research, I would like to be sure that we will be able to work with the recorded material. Therefore, I would like to make sure that: o Do you want to take part in this study? o Do you agree to be audio-recorded? o Will the people participating in the project be able to quote your statements?" "Your statements may be anonymous "or:" Your statements may require authorization" (we can return to this issue after the end of the recording). "I would just like to reserve the right to disclose the region and city you come from and where you live, as well as your age and gender. This information is important for carrying out the study. However, I may later on not use any names or surnames that are not the names of public figures. Do you agree to this arrangement?" "The obtained information will be used / posted / published on/in ..."
		· Overview of the storage and access rules	"And there is also the issue of access and storage of the recordings and materials: They will be stored in ... They will be available to ... Do you accept this arrangement?"

Phase	Objectives	Ways of achieving the objectives	Tested statements
		Starting the questions phase (step 1): making sure that the information provided is understood; making a reference to the interlocutor's agency during the interview	· "Before we move on to the conversation itself, I would like to ask if you have any comments or doubts? Is everything clear so far? Is everything fine?"
		Starting the question phase (step 2): listing the rights of the interviewee during the interview	"Now I will start asking questions. Please remember that you can stop the interview at any time, end it or ask me to turn off the voice recorder for a while. You can also reserve the right during the conversation to remove later a given fragment from the recording."

2. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

During the interview, the researcher moves between adopting the attitude of a passive listener of a freewheeling story about an event and asking specific questions that result from the research topic and the research problem that is being solved. The rule of every partially structured interview is that the facilitator remains open to the respondent's answers, is able to change the order of questions or frame new ones, but still controls the course of the conversation.

It should be emphasized that in the proposed method, the researcher's communication skills are used to encourage recalling memories, i.e. gaining access to the respondent's memory and creating an ethical interpersonal relationship. The latter is also conducive to recall.

Taking into account the previously mentioned findings of psychologists, we divided the communication part of the interview into three main phases:
- Initial stimulus — question / sequence of questions opening the interview
- Conducting the interview — maintaining communication
- Exiting the research situation

As in the case of making the research contract, it is good to repeat — but not more than once — the phrase "I am a historian" at the beginning of the interview. It is a signal for the interlocutor that we are interested in knowledge and authenticity of memories. However, it is worth adding that we are aware that memory is sometimes unreliable. Such a conversation about memory defines an

interpersonal relationship, places us in the role of researchers collecting data (and not, for example, therapists), and at the same time we do not hold excessive expectations as to the functioning of the respondent's memory (which could overwhelm them).[19]

PHASE I. INITIAL STIMULUS – QUESTION / SEQUENCE OF QUESTIONS OPENING THE INTERVIEW.

The initial stimulus is the opening question (questions), crucial for the entire conversation, because it marks the path of the entire questionnaire and communication in the interview. It uses a procedure that was already signaled to the interlocutor at the stage of making the interview contract: at the stage of questions, the interview will link the chronology of an individual's life cycle with the chronology of phenomena, events and processes of a supra-individual nature.

    In the proposed model, two conditions must be met:

    • the opening question cannot be a question about a person's entire life (e.g. "Please tell me about your life")

    • the interview cannot commence with a question about a specific event / phenomenon which is very widespread or functions in the discourse as historically significant (e.g. "How do you remember the changes of 1989?")
Paradoxically, it may be difficult for the interlocutor to locate the above-mentioned events / phenomena in their memory and begin self-narrative starting with them, and what is obvious for the historian may not be for the respondent. If they are additionally instructed that we are interested in their personal fate and memories, they may not know how to start in the context of a 'great historical date'. Such a question may also be perceived as an expression of the researcher's expectation of some general opinion of the interviewee about a given event / phenomenon. It is also not about a direct question concerning first-hand experience of a historical phenomenon — then we enter the field of autobiographical memory and it will be difficult to withdraw from it during the conversation.

    At the opening of the interview, we recommend a question relating to the stage in the respondent's life as close as possible to the issues of interest to the researcher (of supra-individual significance), but always prior to them. When testing the method in a study on a generation of adolescents from the period of the political transformation in Poland, those who started their studies at that time were first asked about the moment of starting secondary school education. Here is how the opening sequence looked:

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[19] The researcher clearly says that they want to hear authentic memories, but knows that memory is unreliable, and the interlocutor receives a signal that the researcher does not want to listen to everything that the interlocutor knows about a given topic (semantic memory), but only to what the memory trace has been created at a certain time. Knowing that the researcher accepts memory failure, it will be easier for the interlocutor to say "I don't remember."

Interviewer: *I'll go straight to the period I'm interested in… I'll start with high school, okay? Was high school a conscious choice? How did it happen?*

This procedure helps to precisely correlate the beginning of the interview with the respondent's personal timeline and makes it easier for them to engage in self-narrative as comfortable as possible. It is also understandable for the interlocutor, because the time distance between the events mentioned in the first question and the research goals presented above is short. Moreover, it helps the researcher to determine the absolute chronology of the story, or dates (more on that below).

PHASE II. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW — MAINTAINING COMMUNICATION

In the later part of the interview, the researcher's two skills are of fundamental importance: 1) transforming research questions into interview questions and 2) supporting the recall of memories by the respondent. The first point is a continuation of the procedure used with the opening question, i.e. linking the interlocutor's personal experiences with the wider context.

As we have already mentioned it, the episodic memory which the researcher relies on here is characterized by the fact that sometimes it takes a lot of effort to recall a specific event. The role of the researcher is to help the interlocutor evoke a memory via the method of successive approximations, a matter of one thing leading to another. In such a situation, the task of the researcher supporting the respondent's recreation of events will be to gain access to the so-called conceptual framework.[20] We do it, for example, by outlining the circumstances of an event / phenomenon and thus placing the respondent in the situation they are to recall.[21] We inform the respondent that the memory may be difficult to recall and that we want to recall it accurately[22], but we try not to put

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[20] Martin A. Conway, "Episodic memories," *Neuropsychologia* 47, 11 (2009): 2305–2313.

[21] The following situation in the study whose purpose was to recall memories of the period of the political transformation in Poland can serve as an example of such memory support. Knowing the age of the respondent, the researcher asked about her way to primary school: what means of transport did she use to get to it? Since the answer was that on foot, the researcher asked if the respondent could reconstruct that path step by step, encouraging her to "transport" to that time and space. The respondent's memory effort was supported by small questions, e.g. whether her friends were walking with her, whether it was necessary to cross a busy street, whether there were lights next to it, or if there were propaganda slogans on the squares. At some point, the respondent remembered not only the space and a propaganda slogan, but also an event that she set in the second half of June 1989 – the slogan was splashed with paint.

[22] The researcher can check the accuracy of the recall with subsequent questions, after which the interlocutor corrects themself and is aware that the memory/image begins to be made up of more details, the sources of which they can provide or explain (e.g. a party slogan was visible on their way to kindergarten in the winter of a given year, but it was gone the following year. The interlocutor remembers it because they used to go to the kindergarten in winter shoes that did slide on the slide next to this slogan, and they certainly received those shoes for Christmas that year, as can be seen in this photo, etc.)

too much emphasis on this aspect, because we risk receiving a limited amount of information.[23]

In order to support a better recollection of an event, it is worth directing the respondent's attention to memorized thoughts (e.g. "what did you think?") and feelings (e.g. "what did you feel?"), the physical location of the event (e.g. "where was it?"), time (e.g. "what time of day was it?"), episode sequences (e.g. "what happened before this event?", "what happened after this event ").[24] These details and circumstances can stimulate further recall. A good indicator of the fact that the interlocutor managed to empathize with the situation and activate the memory traces represented in the image code (e.g. memories of people's appearance and smell) is the feeling of 'immersion' in the event, about which the respondent can tell of their own volition or we can ask about it after each discussed topic.

Asking questions and asking for details are the elements of the communication phase that directly support the recreation of memory traces (in fact, every question written in the questionnaire requires such inquiry). Too many variables (such as the specificity of the research topic, personalities and communication skills of interviewees, and unforeseeable situations arising during the interview) make it impossible to present a detailed set of instructions here, but knowledge of how memory operates allows for the identification of certain principles, the application of which will favor the use of traces in episodic memory. Martin A. Conway's concept (Self-Memory System)[25] is an important theoretical approach here, according to which memory is organized hierarchically in such a way that knowledge about specific events (e.g. marriage proposal) is part of the knowledge about general events (e.g. Friday evenings), and this in turn is part of knowledge about periods of life (e.g. period of studies), while at each of these

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[23] See Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń*. Research suggests that if we add that we care about accurate memories, we will, in fact, probably get more facts, but inhibit the spontaneity of recreating, empathizing and sharing one's world (see Morris Goldsmith, Asher Koriat, "The strategic regulation of memory accuracy and informativeness," *Psychology of Learning and Motivation* 48 (2007): 1–60, in Maruszewski, *Pamięć autobiograficzna*). This does not mean, in our opinion, that we are doomed to — as historians (researchers-miners)— to a cognitive situation with only two outcomes (i.e. we get either facts or a personal narrative). See Tomasz Rakowski, "Historia mówiona i źródła etnograficzne jako "wiedza pewna". Przypadek potransformacyjnej historii Torgutów w zachodniej Mongolii oraz historii wsi Broniów w centralnej Polsce," *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 5 (2015): 59–90; Piotr Filipkowski, "Historia mówiona jako historia faktyczna albo jak «odantropologizować» opowieści o przeszłości?," *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 5 (2015): 91–108; Marcin Stasiak, "«Czy więc byliśmy i jesteśmy naiwni…?» Jeszcze jeden głos w debacie nad wykorzystaniem relacji ustnych w badaniach najnowszej historii Polski," *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*" 8 (2018): 29–61; Piotr Filipkowski, Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, Tomasz Rakowski, Marcin Stasiak, "Reanimacje i rewitalizacje – relacje ustne jako czynnik innowacji w badaniach historycznych. Głosy w dyskusji," *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 12 (2019): 311–320.

[24] See Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń.*

[25] Martin A. Conway, Catherine Loveday, "Remembering, imagining, false memories & personal meanings," *Consciousness and Cognition* 33 (2015): 574–581.

levels knowledge is organized thematically.[26] While recalling events, a person reaches a given level from which they can move up or down the hierarchy.

We recommend therefore preparing a questionnaire that:

• goes back to the respondent's memory of experiences related to the periods of their life (individual but specific external factors, i.e. they appear in the chronology that can be relatively easily verified in other sources, e.g. school, marriage, etc.). The interview does not cover somebody's entire life. Thus, knowing the respondent's approximate age and having general knowledge about their life, as well as having acquired adequate historical knowledge, we prepare a questionnaire that will allow the respondent to immerse themself e.g. in their education in high school;

• as for periods of life, it contains questions related to specific places / space, objects, people and ideas (this list is not exhaustive and only indicates the direction of the researcher's work on the questionnaire).

A questionnaire in the form of a visual mind map would be optimal here, as it would allow one to link research questions with these fields (space, objects, people and ideas) and reformulate them into specific questions for use in the conversation. Due to its (potentially large) physical size, such a visual map might be unwieldy during an interview, therefore you can limit yourself to a list of grouped questions.

We strongly recommend having a full and detailed questionnaire (with fully formed questions) with you during interviews for two main reasons:

• interviews conducted according to the proposed model, like any structured interviews, require great alertness and control on the part of the researcher, therefore the risk of errors and omissions that may arise during the session should be minimized;

• the scientific rigor of interviews should make it possible to obtain materials for a comparative historical analysis, and asking the same (formulated in the same way) questions to different interlocutors increases the chances of this.

The researcher's communication skills, which in the proposed method support the recreation of memories, include, in addition to the previously mentioned ability to question and interrogate, passive and active listening.[27] Passive listening means allowing the respondent to speak, but also understanding and tolerating silence, as well as showing non-verbal interest. However, this is not tantamount to giving up control over the interview, and therefore it is so important to use a written questionnaire during the interview, which contains questions that should be asked within the time specified in the contract. The length of a single conversation, as previously mentioned, should not exceed 90 minutes, which is confirmed both by our own experience while testing this method and the general practice of psychologists, diagnosticians and therapists. The study requires intense concentration and mental effort, which after the

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[26] Jagodzińska, *Psychologia pamięci.*
[27] Cf. *Swobodne techniki diagnostyczne. Wywiad i obserwacja*, ed. by Teresa Szustrowa (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1991).

recommended time of 90 minutes causes excessive fatigue in both parties and negatively affects the quality of the obtained material.

Active listening techniques that are particularly useful in an interview include: paraphrasing, clarifying and reflecting, as well as summarizing individual interview sessions. A paraphrase, i.e. an utterance identical to the respondent's utterance, but formulated in different words, gives the interlocutor proof that we are attentive listeners and it allows to verify that the researcher correctly understood the utterance they have heard (e.g. "I understand that it was then that your colleagues hung this banner on the fence, but you did not participate in it"). Clarification, thanks to focusing on the main topic or fragment of the statement important for the research, allows to clarify inaccuracies and organize the data, especially when an account is chaotic (e.g. "I'm not sure what came first: did you hear shots first or did the car come first", "Is it that ...?"). Reflection, on the other hand, is a technique that helps when the respondent experiences difficult feelings, which is usually distressing for the researcher. The purpose of reflection is to focus on the emotions contained in a statement or accompanying speaking and verbalizing what you hear. In this way, we show the respondent that we do not ignore this sphere (e.g. "I hear that you are moved by the memory of this event"), and thanks to such 'looking in the mirror', the respondent does not delve into experiencing feelings over which they could lose control in the presence of the researcher, and later regret it. Each of these three techniques should be practiced before interviews, e.g. with a research team, but also individually (e.g. while reading any press interview, prepare a set of your paraphrasing, clarifying and reflecting statements).

Scientific research shows that over time it is more likely that an event will be recalled in less detail or incorrectly. This is due to, on the one hand, the process of blurring memory traces, and on the other — the increasing probability of contact with other, non-episodic information about an event (e.g. from other witnesses) that may affect a person's memory.[28] After a few days, such additional information merges with the memory of a personally important and intense event.[29] Tomasz Maruszewski points out that information from many different sources, including the media, is added to individual memory traces.[30] Research also indicates that people lose information about the source of information over time (the source monitoring effect[31]) and, consequently, during recollection, they may no longer distinguish whether they know a fact from a person or from a message (e.g. it was fake news, an overheard joke or perhaps an eyewitness account). Conscious recall of the source of a message may allow one to control this natural process to some extent. It is worth remembering that this effect

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[28] Lorraine Hope, Fiona Gabbert, Ronald P. Fisher, "From laboratory to the street: Capturing witness memory using the Self-Administered Interview," *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 16, 2 (2011): 211–226.

[29] See Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń.*

[30] Maruszewski, *Pamięć autobiograficzna.*

[31] Marcia K. Johnson, Shahin Hashtroudi, D. Stephen Lindsay, "Source monitoring," *Psychological Bulletin* 114 (1993): 3–28, http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033- 2909.114.1.3 (accessed: 15.12.2020).

particularly affects the elderly.[32] Thus, memory can be treated less individually and more emphasis can be put on the co-construction and overlapping of various information. A direct question about the source of a given information is the tool that the researcher can employ to control this phenomenon (e.g. was the person an eyewitness / participant of the event, or did they read about it or hear about it later on and included it in their image of the event?).[33]

Research also proves that constant repetition of information stored in semantic memory facilitates its subsequent successful recall. The opposite is true with episodic memory — the more times an event is recounted (e.g. by witnesses and participants of important historical events), the greater memory distortions may appear.[34] This strengthens the need for the researcher to be well prepared for an interview, i.e. in addition to historical knowledge about the events or the period covered by the interview, one should obtain information about the interlocutor, and in particular, find out whether they have not already written down their memories (maybe even published?), or whether they have given interviews. Therefore, it is worth knowing in advance the interviewee's track record.

In addition, repeated participation in similar events is also important for the reconstruction of a single event. The details of an event that is part of multiple experiences are rarely remembered as this would be a cognitively demanding task.[35] If we are interested in a certain type of events in which the interlocutor participated many times (e.g. they went to sea many times and we ask about the course of the initial stage of a particular voyage), we can expect that they recount something like a 'compilation' of facts and personal opinions (it is the so-called mistake of the overuse of the schema).[36]

Generalizations of individual events and turning them into a specific type of event are often found in older people, who may have difficulties accessing particular episodic data, and this deficit can be automatically compensated by the use of semantic memory.[37] The researcher may facilitate the recall of events with the respondent's semantic autobiographical knowledge. For example, when the respondent talks about their way to school, one can ask how old they were then and what proves that it was then. Sometimes it helps to distinguish between "I know" and "I remember"[38], which expresses the acceptance of two separate sources of information and knowledge. This applies, for example, to a situation in which the respondent, recalling an event from

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[32] Jane Dywan, Larry Jacoby, "Effects of aging on source monitoring: Differences in susceptibility to false fame," *Psychology and Aging* 5(3) (1990): 379.

[33] See Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń*.

[34] E.g. Marigold Linton, "Ways of searching and the contents of memory. Autobiographical memory, [in:] Autobiographical memory," ed. by David C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 50–67.

[35] See Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń*.

[36] Cf. Maruszewski, *Pamięć autobiograficzna*.

[37] Cf. Brian Levine, Eva Svoboda, Janine F. Hay, Gordon Winocur, "Aging and autobiographical memory: dissociating episodic from semantic retrieval," *Psychology and Aging* 17, 4 (2002): 677; Maruszewski, *Pamięć autobiograficzna*.

[38] See Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń*.

their childhood, may use semantic memory to describe fragments of reality which — due to their age and social role at that time — they could not have experienced. With close collaboration on an interview task, the respondent learns to participate in it more effectively, because they understand our goals as researchers.

It is known from research that asking direct questions, including additional information and exerting any pressure on the interlocutor (e.g. time or moral) may result in providing inaccurate data. In the proposed interview method, we are therefore, as researchers, obliged to become aware of our own motivations, and then to eliminate the covert and overt pressure.[39] Accepting the answers "I do not know" and "I do not remember" as natural only proves that we are aware of the fact that the interlocutor may not remember something because the main function of memory is forgetting, but it also allows one to avoid unnecessary tension, a feeling of inadequacy or underestimating the respondent's self-esteem. A good interview atmosphere that expresses mutual respect, equality and a sense of understanding can encourage the interviewee to make an effort to recall what they may actually remember and share it openly with the researcher.

In the literature on biographical memory, much attention has been paid to the phenomenon of false memories and debates on the possibility of implanting someone else's memories, which somebody did not have, into someone's brain (e.g. by suggesting them).[40] Currently, most researchers believe that 'false memories' arise in specific circumstances: they concern the distant past and interlocutors with a personality prone to the so-called dissociation. For example, the way of presenting a photograph and suggesting that the interlocutor should know the photograph facilitate their emergence.[41] Therefore, if one wants to use a photograph or other documents during an interview, it is worth considering one's comments so as not to suggest anything of the sort.

The researcher's temperament may also have an unintended impact on the respondent and their story, especially if an extrovert interviews a withdrawn person, e.g. an introvert.[42] The resulting social pressure may be difficult for both parties to consciously grasp and to react to it overtly, especially since each party will probably want to do their best to fulfill their tasks. It seems that the only way for the researcher to prevent such a situation from happening is to make an attempt to monitor themselves and the respondent in terms of possible social

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[39] Elizabeth F. Loftus, "Planting misinformation in the human mind: A 30-year investigation of the malleability of memory," *Learning & Memory* 12, 4 (2005): 361–366, in: Julia Shaw, Stephen Porter, "Constructing rich false memories of committing crime," *Psychological Science* 26, 3 (2015): 291–301.

[40] E.g. Shaw, Porter, *Constructing rich false memories.*

[41] Niedźwieńska, *Poznawcze mechanizmy zniekształceń*, based on D. Stephen Lindsay, Lisa Hagen, J. Don Read, Kimberley A. Wade, Maryanne Garry, "True photographs and false memories," *Psychological Science* 15, 3 (2004): 149–154.

[42] Based on Stephen Porter, Angela Birt, Darrin R. Lehman, "Negotiating False Memories: Interviewer and Rememberer Characteristics Relate to Memory Distortion," *Psychological Science* 11, 6 (2000): 507–510.

pressure and make every effort to weaken its influence on the obtained data. When interviewing seniors, it is worth remembering that, according to research, they are more susceptible to questions suggesting an answer (or its direction) than young adults.[43] Accurate memories are also harder to obtain from people who feel that their memory is poor — such interlocutors are particularly sensitive to feedback and can easily accept the interviewer's suggestions.[44]

To sum up, in the communication phase of the interview, the role of a well--prepared researcher is to:

- accept answers such as "I don't know" and "I don't remember"
- distinguish between "I know" and "I remember"

• inquire directly
• explore with the respondent the scene of 'themselves at that time', in which they mentally immerse themselves in the thoughts, feelings, space, time and episode sequences
• limit potential suggestions that could shape false memories
• be aware of the influence of one's own temperament on the course of the interview and show continued commitment to an ethical attitude during the interview.

PHASE III. EXITING THE RESEARCH SITUATION

The last phase of the interview is to summarize the interview and check whether any ambiguous information has been understood in accordance with the respondent's intention. After the information part, it is possible to return to the terms of the contract and discuss any changes that the respondent would like to introduce in the rules, e.g. in regard to sharing. As it often happens that the respondent wants to add something or correct the provided information after the recording device is turned off, we recommend writing down a note (if corrections are minor) or arranging another session (when it comes to longer explanations). If, on the other hand, the interlocutor insists on more visits, despite prior agreement at the beginning of the meeting that this is the last session, we recommend that you firmly break off the relationship. The last stage of the interview should end with determining the details of providing the respondent with a possible publication.

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[43] See Katrin Mueller-Johnson, Stephen J. Ceci, "Memory and suggestibility in older adults: Live event participation and repeated interview," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 18, 8 (2004): 1109–1127.

[44] Hazel McMurtrie, James S. Baxter, Marc C. Obonsawin, Simon C. Hunter, "The relationship between memory beliefs, compliance and response change within a simulated forensic interview," *Personality and Individual Differences* 52, 5 (2012): 591–595.

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The interview procedures presented here are aimed at creating conditions of communication during an interview that — with the simultaneous empowerment of the respondent — will allow the creation of information materials that can be compared and verified via a basic historical analysis. The element that distinguishes the proposed method from other structured interviews, including factual interviews, is the emphasis on evoking the effect of 'immersion' of a witness in a past experience. Preparation of the researcher for this type of interview requires, of course, the prior implementation of earlier, typical for each research project, stages, such as the formulation of a research problem and more detailed research questions, as well as a detailed consideration of a topic, including learning about the biographical information, available in other sources, about the person with whom we will talk (if, of course, it is feasible). Part of the preparation for an interview itself is also the — most creative, difficult and often not fully completed — stage of creating a questionnaire and training communication skills. Solid preparation for an interview and conducting it in according to the proposed model will facilitate an analysis of the historical source thus evoked. On the other hand, a greater number of interviews conducted in one procedure gives a corpus of sources that are comparable. An interview itself, as a meeting with a witness to history, should be treated as a unique cognitive opportunity that a historian cannot waste. Although we have focused on the cognitive objectives of the method in this text, we would like to emphasize that ethical issues are of paramount importance. Therefore, the procedures we propose include the assumption that a study should be abandoned if the witness wishes to refuse or terminate the interview.

APPENDIX 1. MAKING AN INTERVIEW CONTRACT

The following guidelines contain questions and statements that should be included in the order presented here when making a contract interview. The text should be rehearsed by the researcher (read aloud several times) before a session. During the contracting phase, it can be read in full, but it is important that it is done slowly and while maintaining visual contact with the respondent. The respondent should be sure that the researcher is attentively waiting for their answers, is open to any questions and ready to provide explanations.

Making an interview contract takes place between adult people who are in full mental capacity and make their own decisions. It should be remembered that the respondent has the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

INTRODUCTION − BEFORE TURNING THE VOICE RECORDED ON:

- Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview.
- Have you changed your mind?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- I am very glad[45].
- Before starting the interview, I would like to take a few moments to explain why I selected you for this interview and what it will look like more or less. And most of all — establish the rules for its use.
- Please let me know if you have any questions or doubts.

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- I would also like to turn on the voice recorder now, so that my explanation and the jointly agreed rules of use are also recorded.
- Do you mind if I turn on this device? [SHOW THE VOICE RECORDER]

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

[TURNING ON THE VOICE RECORDER[46]]

CONTRACT [AFTER TURNING ON THE VOICE RECORDER]

EXPLANATION
- Once again, thank you very much for agreeing to this interview.

[PAUSE]

- I asked for this interview because as I know ...[47].
- I am a historian, and the research I am currently conducting is about ...[48].
- I am especially interested in ...[49].

[PAUSE]

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[45] If the interlocutor strongly refuses, we thank them and end the meeting. If, on the other hand, they express further doubts, we go to Point 4 for further explanation.

[46] If the interlocutor expresses further doubts as to the terms of the conversation, dispel them until consent is given to turn the voice recorder on.

[47] E.g. I asked for this interview because, as I know, you started your studies at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

[48] E.g. I am a historian, and in my current research I am looking at the generation of people who entered adulthood in the late 1980s and the beginning of the next decade. I am particularly interested in the very moment of entering adulthood, which we associate with the period of studies.

[49] E.g. I am particularly interested in the very moment of entering adulthood, which we associate with the period of studies.

- The interview may, at times, feel like a casual conversation; it is not conducted according to a detailed questionnaire.

[PAUSE]

- At the same time, I would like to ask a number of questions that are important to me from the point of view of my research. This does not mean that the interview will be an interrogation. But if the way of asking questions becomes uncomfortable for you, let me know, okay?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- First of all, I want you to try to think how you felt at that time; I am also open to your opinions and observations. What's more — it is very likely that the questions and assumptions I have prepared will change because of your input.
- If something important comes to you during the course of the interview, and I don't ask you about it, please let me know about it, okay?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- The conversation will last about an hour, and certainly not longer than 1.5 hours.
- Do you have that much time?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- I may ask you questions that you may not want to answer. Please remember that you can always exercise your right to refuse to answer. We can also just change the subject then.
- You also have the right to end the conversation at any time.
- Is everything clear so far?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

FORMAL PART
[READ SLOWLY, AVOID LISTING THINGS]:

Since our recorded conversation is used for scientific research, I would like to be sure that we will be able to work with the recorded material. Therefore, I would like to make sure that:

- Do you want to take part in this study?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- Do you agree to the recording of the conversation?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- Will other researchers participating in the project be able to quote your statements?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- Your statements may remain anonymous. We can return to this issue after the end of the recording.

[PAUSE]

- I would just like to reserve the right to disclose the region and city you come from and where you live, as well as your age and gender. This information is important for carrying out the study. However, we may later on not use any names or surnames that are not the names of public figures.
- Do you agree to this arrangement?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- [If we know anything about it:] The recorded report will / may be used / posted / published in ...
- Do you consent to it?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- And there is also the issue of access to and storage of recordings and materials.
- They will be stored during the duration of the project in ...[50] [and later on, after the end of the project ...[51]].

[PAUSE]

- They will be available to ...[52].
- Any possible changes to the method of sharing will only be made with your knowledge and consent.
- Do you agree to this arrangement?

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER]

- Before we move on to the conversation itself, I would like to ask if you have any comments or doubts? Is everything clear so far? Is everything fine?[53]

[TIME FOR AN ANSWER – DO NOT RUSH, MAKE VISUAL CONTACT, DO NOT LOOK AT THE SHEET OF PAPER]

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[50] E.g. a closed cabinet in a room that is accessible only to the members of the research team.
[51] If possible, it is worth specifying in which archive.
[52] E.g. ... the members of the research team.
[53] It is a question about how the interlocutor is feeling, not about understanding the terms of the contract.

- Now let's move on to asking questions. Please remember that you can interrupt and end the interview, or ask for the voice recorder to be turned off for a while. During the conversation, you can also to reserve the right to remove a given fragment.

[WAIT FOR REACTION, MAKE VISUAL CONTACT]

Translation Paweł Hamera

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