

Research Article

Analytical Coding of In-Depth Interviews for Studying the Identities of Karelian and Pomor Women

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Abstract. This article presents an example of in-depth interview analysis using software tools for analytical text coding. The study was based on a joint interview with a Karelian woman and a Pomor woman recorded during a 2021 summer expedition to Knyazhaya Guba Village (Murmansk Region, Russia). The villagers belonged to different ethnic groups, which have been in the area for a long time. It was of interest to study the self-identity of the Karelians and Pomors and the ethnic and cultural boundaries they draw. The article analyzes the constituent elements of the Karelian and Pomor identity highlighted by the informants, including ethnic markers, symbolic appropriation of the space, and perception of the surrounding landscape. We preliminarily conclude that the regional identity prevails. Regional identity in this sense is more of a figurative and emotional category, not only the administrative-unit affiliation. Both groups have adapted to the peculiar northern lifestyle, while preserving their distinctive markers – the language and place of birth for Karelians, and the value frame of reference among Pomors, which is associated with a focus on fishing and cooperative labor.

Keywords: ethnicity, qualitative data analysis, analytical coding, Karelians, Pomors

1. Introduction

It is for a reason that the part of the White Sea coast from Kem to Kandalaksha is called the 'Karelian coast'. A strong mixing of Pomors with the local Karelian population in coastal settlements and frequent marital and family ties between Pomors and Karelians was noted by early 20th century researchers L.L. Kapitsa [1] and V.V. Nikolsky [2]. One of the objectives of the multidisciplinary expedition of the Institute of Linguistics, Literature and History of KarRC RAS to settlements in the Kandalaksha District of the Murmansk Region (The expedition took place in July 2021) was to study the ethnic identity of the local Karelian and Pomor population.

During the expedition we collected 17 in-depth interviews with Karelians and Pomors. One of the main goals was to identify ethnic and cultural markers significant for the interviewees in the stories they told about their life. At some point during the interviews we asked to specify some issues related to ethnic and linguistic biography. Topics of

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self-identity and preservation of elements of the traditional culture in everyday practices and holidays were covered during the interviews.

2. Methods and Equipment

The tasks were approached using questionnaires and biographical interviews, as well as the method of participant observation.

The problem of proper sampling in qualitative research is controversial. In this article, we proceed from a principle that can be called analytic induction. The researcher does not begin with a statistically designed sample, but starts with an individual case, which is carefully analyzed. Using the model that emerges from the analysis of the first case the researcher looks for other cases that are similar to the first interview or differ as much as possible. Thus, the theory develops as a search process and it is sensitive to the specifics of the scientific field [3].

There are some limitations while working with semi-structured interviews. First, there is a difficulty in summarizing qualitative data statistically. The second group of factors is weak formalization of analytical procedures, descriptiveness in data analysis, intensive use of citations in the article. The results of a study represent a selective reproduction of narratives from the speech of the interviewees and the comments of the researcher. Finally, one should also keep in mind the specific nature of biographical interviews as a narrative. Recollections of the past are based on personal experiences while simultaneously reflecting the historical context. Thus, personal experience is mediated by public discourse.

The collected material was analyzed through sequential selection of the text fragments containing a certain semantic unit - a code, or concept. Codes with related meanings were combined into categories. Further, the frequency of the codes was analyzed to identify the topics most important for the informants. The computer-aided coding techniques used in sociological research are presented in the article as a specific tool for the researcher to align the data received from informants. Text encoding is considered as a key analytical procedure for the entire analysis of qualitative data [4].

The collected materials were processed with two programs for the analysis of qualitative data: ATLAS.ti and Quirkos. ATLAS.ti provides tools that allow a researcher to find, encode and annotate concepts, or codes, in interview transcripts, and then evaluate their importance, frequency of mentions, group them by meaning into categories, and construct logical connections. The main goal of this toolkit is to identify phenomena that are important for the informant, which are hidden in the unstructured primary dataset.

This allows research through inductive data analysis to 'derive' a theory of the reviewed phenomenon and 'ground' it to the source data. Quirkos is similar in functionality to ATLAS.ti, but the program developers more focused on the visual component without compromising analytical capabilities. Working in Quirkos showed advantages in the selection parameters for the final report created after coding and categorization. The functionality of both programs allows a researcher to form a list of quotes for one or more selected codes. Having analyzed the list of concepts and the frequency of their occurrence, we can see which topics are encountered more often, what topics respondents are more willing to talk about, and which ones need to be clarified.

The difficulties associated with the use of such programs are due to the conceptualization of the data obtained: identification of semantic units, grouping of these units into a category, and finally, description of the relationship between these categories. In addition, difficulties are due to the variability of the categories and their interpretations by different researchers, or even by the same researcher at different times [5].

3. Results

The article presents preliminary results obtained from processing field materials using the software described above. We focus on a joint interview with a Pomor woman, born in 1935, and a Karelian woman, born in 1937, from the village of Knyazhaya Guba [6]; the analyzed categories are ethnic relations, Karelian and Pomor identity and autostereotypes.

Our informants did not draw clear boundaries between Pomors and Karelians from Knyazha Guba, they spoke of the absence of strong differences: *"but they Karelians are Pomors, too", "if they [Karelians] were here along the [White Sea] coast, then they lived and worked together, like all the others"* (Hereinafter, all direct quotes are from interview [6]). Our question about the appearance of a group of Udmurts in Knyazhaya Guba, who differed from local inhabitants anthropologically, culturally and linguistically, triggered a discussion on the topic of ethnic relations and ethnic identity. The Udmurts were evacuated to Knyazhaya Guba in 1943 to work in collective farms. Other interviewees also mentioned Udmurts as a new cultural and linguistic group in the area. By considering the images of 'us/them', we tried to move on to discussing the characteristic features and differences of the host society as perceived personally by our informants.

Our interviewees were unanimous in saying that the Udmurts *"somehow got accustomed very much"*. The Udmurts arrived *"all poor, sick with trachoma"*; *"they wore*

homespun clothes, tree-bark shoes – nobody has ever seen tree-bark shoes here before". The informants attributed such a good adaptation to the local community by the fact that the Udmurts were hardworking, quick-witted, sociable, knew how to adjust to the changing circumstances (for example, they began to fish and exchange the catch for potatoes from locals). A good example of adaptation was marriages between the Udmurts and the locals. Another factor of interaction, which was noted as positive, was the exchange of cultural practices. Udmurt women taught local Pomor and Karelian women their songs, introduced the practice of collecting and eating russulas in the destitute war and post-war times. According to our informants, this type of mushrooms was not traditionally included in the diet of the inhabitants around Knyazhaya Guba. Thus, the characteristics that helped the Udmurts to integrate into the local community were hard work, wit, and adaptability. However, our interviewees several times mentioned that at first the Udmurts had "different concept of tidiness," while Karelians "*are a very tidy people. And Pomors are not inferior to them [in tidiness]*".

Tidiness has been repeatedly mentioned as a common auto-stereotype in other interviews in the Kandalaksha area and in Karelia, too. Diligence and hard work were also noted as an inherent trait of both Karelians and Pomors.

During the interviews, we were able to distinguish the ethnic markers that were significant for the self-perception of our informants. Thus, 'Karelianness' was closely associated with the language of childhood, communication in the family, the native language of the mother and/or both parents. In our example, the informant's father was Finnish, and her mother was Karelian. "*I identify myself as a Karelian because I'm like my mother ... I used to know the Karelian language but I forgot it. And I didn't know Finnish at all, so ...*". As to the Pomor identity, our interviewees agreed that Pomors are "*people who made their life along seashores*", "*survived together*". One of them, the Pomor woman by origin ('Pomorka'), called the Pomor identity 'a lifestyle', because work at sea and cooperative labor required special qualities – community spirit, honesty, dignity, courage:

"A man [the Pomor] went to work not to his land lot, but into a boat, which, perhaps, he had even made by himself. <...> This is artel work [cooperative labor]. So they had to work together to survive. If a quarrelsome, scandalous, thieving person joined [the artel] once, he'd never be invited again. <...> And, and then - work on the water. It's extreme. So many Pomors were carried away on ice floes when hunting, so many perished in sea storms. They left - and even the family didn't know whether or not he would return from this fishing season. <...> Plus you must have dignity. You had to be

brave too, by all means, because no one will let a coward come along next time either” [6].

4. Discussion

In general, we can see a certain manner in the way the interviewees presented information – from the indistinguishability of markers of ‘Karelianness’ and ‘Pomorness’ to clarifying the categorization of specific differences. Due to the coding procedure, it is possible to identify and systematize such statements. These, according to our preliminary data, include the language and place of birth for Karelians, and more often the value frame of reference among Pomors, which our respondent and other Pomors associated with the specific life ‘by the sea’.

These differences are flexible. The flexibility of ethnic boundaries is illustrated by the following example from the interview where our respondents talked about the spread of ‘Pomor’ features to the local Karelian population. Karelians of Knyazhaya Guba could also be considered as Pomors under certain circumstances: they were local ‘indigenous Karelians’, who had lived on the coast for a long time and also worked at sea. Our Karelian respondent was born in the Olanga Village (Republic of Karelia), but she grew up in Knyazhaya Guba since she was four. She does not identify herself as a Pomor: *“If I was born in Karelia, then what kind of Pomor I am? I’m not a Pomor”*. At the same time, her Karelian mother, who was born in Knyazhaya Guba, is recognized as both Karelian and Pomor at the same time. When we talked about linguistic competence, our interlocutor emphasized the Karelian origin - her own and her mother’s. However, when the conversation concerned the place of birth and the length of residence ‘by the sea’, the mother’s characteristic as a Pomor was actualized: *“Was your mom a Pomor? – Yes, my mother was a Pomor”* (Karelian woman, born in 1937). A similar composite identity was noted by F. Barth. He wrote that the cultural characteristics defining the border can change, and in the same way the cultural characteristics of an ethnic group members can also be transformed [7].

The symbolic appropriation of the space and the perception of the surrounding landscape is reflected in both ‘Pomorness’ and ‘Karelianness’ in their specific ways. The Pomor identity is traditionally marked with a craving for seacoasts; Karelians, in the opinion of our informants, generally settled near water bodies in the woods. It is curious that when speaking on this topic, the Pomor woman mentioned in passing the fear of lakes (*“and we were very afraid of lake water, of forest lakelets, because we got used to*

the sea”), which strengthened the borderline between Pomors and Karelians, making it somewhat more material.

5. Conclusions

Software for coding qualitative data in the analysis of in-depth interview materials is seen as a convenient and suitable tool for the research issues concerned. In this article we review several related categories – ethnic relations and identity. Other large and intersecting categories that were often mentioned by our respondents in the interviews were the traditional lifestyles, livelihoods, language (among Karelians), self-perception and identity, distinctive ethnic features, ethnocultural activities, World War II, construction of a hydroelectric power station in Knyazhaya Guba, and changes in the habitual environment. In general, preliminary data support the predominance of the regional identity in the interview groups. Regional identity in this sense is more of a figurative and emotional category, not only the administrative-unit affiliation. Both Karelians and Pomors have adapted to the peculiar northern lifestyle, yet preserving their distinctive markers – the language and place of birth for Karelians, and the value frame of reference among Pomors, which is associated with the focus on fishing and cooperative labor. At the same time, these differences are flexible. The next stage in the analysis of the interviews relates to selective coding and involves the work on establishing links between categories and defining their hierarchy.

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8. Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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