Reviewer's report

Title: Qualitative data in Mandarin: six principles to ensure rigorous analysis

Version: 1 Date: 14 November 2007

Reviewer: Wai-Tong Chien

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an interesting and important topic for those who conduct qualitative research and work in collaboration with team members speaking in a different language and do not familiar with the culture in the study setting or sample. However, there have been a number of studies or discussion papers on this area of interest. The paper reviewed here has only covered some the issues highlighted in the previous literature. Some specific comments related to this and some other major concerns are listed at below:

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Major Compulsory Revisions
a. There may be a great variety of literature or research about the reliability and validity or methodological issues in cross-cultural qualitative research. I suggest to perform a comprehensive literature review in order to understand the major issues identified in the past and discuss how the research experiences and the issues discussed can echo to the previous literature and what new knowledge is found.

b. The paper focused on the issues regarding the collaborative research in Chinese population and it is not clear to what extent the proposed principles can be applied in different cultures. Please clarify.

c. The description of the functions of the Framework analysis and MAXqda software in data management and analysis are limited. Please elaborate on them.

d. In ‘Problems with data collection’, the paper highlighted the difficulties in getting rich data from Chinese informants using qualitative interviews. However, it is unclear that the short and superficial responses from the informants are due to Chinese culture or the inadequate interviewing skills and the sensitivity of the informant to the topic for discussion as mentioned on p.4. The examples on p. 4 and the use of student interviewer described on p.8 reflected the later as the relative more important issue.

e. In “Problems with data recording and language”, the paper described that the use of interpreters advocated by some literature for conducting interviews. It is unclear how the use of interpreters relates in data recording (rather than in data collection by interviews). What do you meant by data recording? In addition, the use of interpreters should not be the best option for data collection. However, the
use of bilingual researchers in the research team appears to be more common and a better choice. In the same section, the limitations of using computer software for qualitative data analysis should also be described because any of the software programs should not be universal and perfect.

f. The discussion section is not strong and focusing on the key issues about the six principles suggested.

g. Lastly, when I read the problems and six principles suggested in the paper, the content had aroused a lot of questions about the significance of the cited problems because many of them might be cited and discussed in previous literature and some of them can be managed by more than one method. Therefore, some of the principles suggested might not be necessary or already known. For example, the suggested principle – ‘Data should be collected and record in local language to retain the original meaning of the data’, should be a already known principle and process of qualitative data collection. Hence, as mentioned in point (a), we need to know the previous literature and discussion about the methodological issues before we can judge whether these problems and principles are newly identified or echoed the previous findings.

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Minor Essential Revisions

a. The recent development of the software for data management can also be briefly described on p.9 or p.3.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

a. For the first principle suggested, I would rather consider to expand the principle to: ‘ensure accurate simultaneous translation of research instruments, codes, major verbatim data, and themes’.

b. For the fourth principle suggested, the use of specific software may not be always better than manual methods. The limitation of software function on the analysis of data in different languages, e.g. Chinese languages, should be highlighted. In addition, the use of software in data management can only solved part of the problem, the collaborated team members still could not read the verbatim in Mandarin. They still have to depend on the translated data for interpretation and discussion of the themes and categories. Limitations can be raised along with this principle, as well as with the other five suggested.

What next?: Reject because too small an advance to publish

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.