Reviewer's report

Title: Did we describe what you meant? Findings and methodological discussion of an empirical validation study for a systematic review of reasons

Version: 2
Date: 6 August 2014

Reviewer: Simon Jenkins

Reviewer's report:

- Minor essential revision:

1) Spelling mistake: Line 95 (methods section, second line) – ‘were’ should be ‘where’?

- Discretionary Revisions

1) The discussion still does not make enough of the distinction between the a) findings of the study with regard to the study’s actual results, and b) the findings of the study with regard to the limitations of the methodology used. Lines 217-218 state that the discussion questions are ‘relevant not only to the particular review of reasons assess in this study, but also for further comparable studies’. This is the distinction I refer to, and I think the difference between these two things should be explicitly clear throughout the discussion. Unfortunately, however, the four discussion points are not split into these two points. Point 1 seems clearly relevant to the first, point 2) to both, and points 3) and 4) to the second. I think the whole discussion should be cleaved in two to make this very clear. You could even add more signposting at the beginning of the paper to make abundantly clear that the paper reports largely on limitations of the methodology. I think this is one of the driving structural issues with the paper, and a key issue in what makes it a somewhat confusing read. This suggestion is discretionary rather than essential because while the paper is unclear in this regard, the information is present, and so a careful reader can glean what is meant. I think, however, that making the change would be more charitable to the reader, and would greatly help with understanding what the paper aims to present.

2) The section on epistemological authority/interpretation is a good addition and this discussion/problem is worth acknowledging, but it probably needs its own subsection to really mark it out. It may be worth having this discussion upfront in the background section, so that it’s clear to the reader that the focus of this paper isn’t on this wider epistemological problem - I worry that it may be distracting if it’s presented in the discussion section like this, as it doesn’t constitute a major part of the discussion.

3) Regarding this discussion, could you detail what would constitute an ‘outlandish’ interpretation of a coding, so that your method would be a bit more accountable/tractable?
4) Related to point 1) above, the paper would generally benefit from further use of subheadings and signposting. There are one or two very long paragraphs where a lot of information is being presented at once, making it hard to follow without some meta-discussion about what the paper is doing at any given point.

5) The sentence ‘…worked out what their papers actually say’ is a bit unusual as it suggests that the authors don’t know what their papers say. You might want to change it to ‘and re-familiarise themselves with what their papers actually say’.

6) Minor issues not for publication –

   Line 281 – subheading ‘validness of the analysed SSR’ – should be “validity”, not “validness”?

   line 247 (section: Reasons for a coding to be deemed incorrect) – the tenses in this sentence don’t quite match. This could probably be sorted out by changing ‘worked’ to ‘work’ (but see point 4 above for another suggested change to this sentence)

   Line 266 – (same subheading as before) – ‘best one can pragmatically do is trying’ should be ‘try’.

   Line 279 (just before subheading ‘validness of the analysed SRR’) – ‘the question if’ should be ‘the question of whether’

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.