Spradley's Approach to Interpretation

The remainder of this chapter will be spent looking closely at the process Spradley recommends because it is fairly comprehensive and also relatively easy to understand. The reader is cautioned though against thinking that all qualitative inquiry should use Spradley's processes. They simply provide a useful place to start in discovering ways to "read" stories people are telling by their lived experiences.

Spradley identifies several analytic steps, which follow a particular sequence but should be repeated many times during the course of a study. These steps are discussed and illustrated from Rob's study in the remainder of this chapter:

1. Making domain analyses
2. Making focused inquiries
3. Making taxonomic analyses
4. Making selected inquiries
5. Making componential analyses

Overview. Domain analysis is a process for reviewing field notes containing the inquirer's summary of observations, interviews, document reviews, and inquirer thinking to discover the domains of meaning associated with the lives of people being studied and specific details of those lives categorized within those domains (included terms). Focused observations are subsequent visits to the field notes and/or to the field of inquiry itself to expand the list of details or included terms associated with domains selected for further scrutiny. Taxonomic analysis is a search for ways included terms within selected domains may be organized. Selected observations are subsequent visits to the field notes and/or to the field of inquiry to expand and verify the taxonomic analsis. Componential analysis is a search for ways of distinguishing among the included terms in each selected domain, as a means of understanding why participants distinguish among the terms. The rest of the discussion of Spradley's analysis process will use examples from Rob's dissertation excerpt in Appendix G.

Domain analysis. Domains are made up of three elements (examples are taken from an analysis of the story beginning on page 75 of Rob's study):

a. a **cover term** or name for the domain (e.g., student roles, Dave's role, see page 76)
b. several **included terms** or names for all the smaller categories inside the domain (e.g., summarizer, predictor, clarifier, queestion-asker, connector, language appreciator, and teacher are all included under the cover term "student roles", see page 76), and
c. a **semantic relationship** linking the cover and included terms (e.g., "is a kind of" is the semantic relationship that links the cover term "student roles" with the included terms listed above).

There are six steps in making a domain analysis, which will be followed to illustrate the generation of the example presented above.

a. **Step one:** *Select a single semantic relationship* to start with. There are nine "universal semantic relationships" which Spradley has found useful in a wide variety of studies. He suggests the first and seventh in the list below may be the best for beginners. But all of them should be useful in most studies. You should probably try to find at least one example of each kind in your field notes. X stands for the included terms and Y stands for the cover terms in each form:

Semantic

Relationship Form Examples from Rob's study (page #'s)

1. Strict inclusion - X is a kind of Y - A summarizer (is a kind of) student role (76)
2. Spatial - X is a place in Y - Dave's office (is a place in) the school (79) X is a part of Y Dave's room (is a part of) the school (90)
3. Cause-effect - X is a result of Y - Dave's change to whole language teaching (is a result of) his reflections on teaching (87)
4. Rationale - X is a reason for doing Y - Not feeling he is meeting his goals of helping readers (is a reason for) Dave to search for a better way to teach (89)
5. Location-for-action - X is a place for doing Y - Dave's room (is a place for) eating lunch (90)
6. Function - X is used for Y - A loud, forceful voice (is used for) helping students hear while Dave reads and add drama to pull in students who don't like to read and are not used to listening (82)
7. Means-end - X is a way to do Y - Retelling a story (is a way to) be a Summarizer (77)
8. Sequence - X is a step (stage) in Y - Reading passages aloud (is a stage in) studying a piece of literature as a class (77)
9. Attribution - X is an attribute of Y - One semester in length (is an attribute of) (characteristic) of Dave's reading classes (79)

b. **Step two:** *Prepare a domain analysis worksheet* like the one below for each cover term. Although you may prefer to use the margins of your field notes for the domain analysis activities to follow, using the worksheet while first learning to identify domains is helpful. It is simply a way to visually summarize the semantic relationship you selected in step one along with all the included and cover terms you are going to find for that relationship in your field notes.