



Methods of Analysis
Thematic and Schematic Analysis

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At base, thematic and schematic analyses refer to working with themes and schemes, or schemas and schematics. This raises basic questions: What is a theme? What is a scheme? What is a schematic? What is a schema? Thematic analysis generally refers to methods within literary studies to identify and give themes dimension and refers to research methods used for deriving and making sense of themes through data. Fugard and Potts (2015) describe thematic analysis as “a qualitative method for uncovering a collection of themes, ‘some level of patterned response or meaning’ within a data-set. It goes beyond word or phrase counting to analyses involving ‘identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas’” (p. 669). On various levels and scales, a theme is abstracted from and empirically connected to data. Within research methodology, themes can be defined as “meaningful entities that are constructed from codes that unify disparate data, and capture the essence of some degree of recurrent meaning across a data-set” (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 740). Themes are not *found* in data. As Braun and Clarke note, the “idea of discovery is deeply problematic to many qualitative scholars, who rather view themes as actively crafted by the researcher, reflecting their interpretative choices, instead of pre-existing the analysis” (p. 740).

Schematic analysis is typically stereotyped as a dry, passive, rough outline of content or text (i.e., creating a schematic)—a simplification. For instance, (Dixon, 1967, p. 60), an analyst of literary studies advised: “The dryness of schematic analysis of imagery, symbols, myth, structural relations *et al.* should be avoided passionately at school and often at college. It is literature, not literary criticism, which is the subject” (Dixon, 1967, p. 60).

However, this first mode of schematic analysis—outlining, summarizing, and schematizing text—has tremendous power. Clearly, in social media the trend is toward schematic expression. Similarly, a schematic in a form of an image or figure (i.e., visual representation [art or nonart] of data) is effective in various ways. The representation of data, experience, or text has a long history traced through the Greek *σχῆμα* and Latin *figura* and *schemata*. In the 16th and 17th centuries visual *schemata* were depicted as a logical division and subdivision of topics. Hence, a second mode of schematic analysis creates and renders meaningful figures and images (i.e., representation and analysis of visual culture and data). The third mode of schematic analysis refers to an identification and criticism or interpretation of schemas. More than anyone, Piaget elaborated on schemas and schematic analysis in the 1920s and 1930s. Schemas of reasoning, Piaget (1928/1951) said, “constitute certain unconscious tendencies which live their own life but are submitted to no general systematization and consequently lead to no logical exactitude. To put it in another way, they form a logic of action but not yet a logic of thought” (p. 56). Schematic analysis is a method for identifying and disaggregating schemas into component forms and parts and exploring their implications. The challenge is working with data or phenomena that are pre-analytical and on which a participant or subject is quite inarticulate. A nagging question is to what extent data, objects, and words, or animate, inanimate, and spiritual beings and things have schema and lend themselves to schematic analysis?

1. Thematic Analysis

- a. Owen (1984, p. 274): an attempt to identify and interpret 'the discourse participants use in conceptualising their current, ongoing relational episodes'. Thematic analysis can be used to understand people's interpretations of any sort of phenomena.
- b. Fugard and Potts (2015, p. 699): Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for uncovering a collection of themes, 'some level of patterned response or meaning' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82) within a data-set. It goes beyond word or phrase counting to analyses involving 'identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas' (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 10). Themes tend to emerge when answering the question, 'What is this expression an example of?'
 - i. Braun and Clarke (2016, p. 740): For Fugard and Potts' model to work, a very particular idea of what a theme is, and how it can be identified, is required. Essentially, the model has to conceptualise themes as ontologically real, discrete things, out there in the world (or the data), identifiable by researchers – like diamonds scattered in the sand, waiting to be plucked-up by a lucky passer-by (though within their paper, there are varied definitions of 'a theme'; Emmel, 2015). That Fugard and Potts implicitly (as well as explicitly) regard analysis as a process of theme-discovery is evidenced in the language used: 'to have a chance of *capturing* themes' (p. 7; our emphasis); 'in order to aid the *recognition* of a theme' (p. 9; our emphasis); 'if a theme only has a 50% chance of being expressed by the participant and *noticed* by the researcher' (p. 10; our emphasis). This idea of discovery is deeply problematic to many qualitative scholars, who rather view themes as actively crafted by the researcher, reflecting their interpretative choices, instead of pre-existing the analysis. They are offered to the reader as a compelling and coherent reading of data, rather than (more or less) accurate identification of a decontextualized or pre existing truth.
- c. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 740): A method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data.
- d. Phenomenology Online: process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text.
<http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/methods-procedures/reflective-methods/thematic-reflection/>

2. Theme

- a. Etymology
 - i. *θέμα, Thema*
 1. proposition
 2. *τιθέναι, themata*, to put, set, place, lay down
- b. Definition
 - i. Fugard and Potts (2015, p. 699): some level of patterned response or meaning.
 - ii. Braun and Clarke (2016, p. 740): meaningful entities that are constructed from codes that unify disparate data, and capture the essence of some degree of recurrent meaning across a data-set.

- iii. Zholkovskys and Shcheglovs (1987, pp. 27, 40): Theme is the ‘common message of all the levels, images, fragments and other components of the text’ [or] ‘the invariant of which everything in the text is an expressive variation.’
- iv. abstraction from evidence brought into relation with concepts.
- v. minimal definition is "what the text is talking about"
- vi.

3. Schematic Analysis

- a. a method for identifying and disaggregating schemas into component forms and parts and exploring their implications. .
- b. Dixon (1967, p. 60): The dryness of schematic analysis of imagery, symbols, myth, structural relations *et al.* should be avoided passionately at school and often at college. It is literature, not literary criticism, which is the subject. It is vividly plain that it is much easier to teach literary criticism than to teach literature, just as it is much easier to teach children to write from abstract models of correctness than it is to teach them to use their own voices. The essential talk that springs from literature is talk about experience.

c.

4. Schema & Schemata

- a. Etymology
 - i. *σχῆμα, schema, figura*
 - 1. form, figure
- b. Definition
 - i. Piaget, *Judgment and Reasoning in the Child* (1928/1951, p. 56): schemas [of reasoning] are the functional equivalents of general propositions, but since the child is not conscious of these schemas before discussion and a desire for proof have laid them bare and at the same time changed their character, they cannot be said to constitute implicit general propositions. They simply constitute certain unconscious tendencies which live their own life but are submitted to no general systematization and consequently lead to no logical exactitude. To put it in another way, they form a logic of action but not yet a logic of thought.
 - ii. Kagan (1970, p. 299): an abstraction of a sensory event that preserves the spatial or temporal pattern of the distinctive elements of the event. A schema is to be regarded as a functional property of mind that permits an organism to recognize and retrieve information. The schema does not necessarily involve a motor response. It is neither a detailed copy of the event nor synonymous with the language label for the event.
 - iii. Weick (1979): an abridged, generalized, corrigible organization of experience that serves as an initial frame of reference for action and perception"
 - iv. chunks of categorized experience are assumed to be the fundamental building blocks of human cognitive structures known as schemas (e.g., Taylor & Crocker, 1981) and scripts (e.g., Abelson, 1976). [Schemas] reduce the complexity of an otherwise hopelessly complicated world of perceptual stimuli (e.g., Cantor & Mischel, 1979).

- v. pattern in certain elements of the string
- vi. organizes information according to the manner in which it will be dealt with
- vii. a network of interrelated elements that defines a concept for some individual