

## **ANALYZING SPOKEN WORDS: REFLECTIONS ON USING KIT**

*Jan P. Warhuus, Southern Denmark Business School, Center for Small Business Studies.*

*Lisa M. Warhuus, Aarhus University, Institute of Psychology.*

No one who has done a qualitative interview study would disagree with the statement that the quality and effectiveness of the “tools” one uses has a fundamental impact in reducing the “mean number of headaches” one has per week throughout the course of the study. In fact, the quality and effectiveness of our tools will influence the quality of our results. A reliable tape recorder, an excellent microphone and tapes of decent quality are invaluable (those of us who have inadvertently produced a bad recording learned the hard way!). Also important are the tools we use in analyzing our data. We no longer live in a world that limits us to the single option of cutting and pasting. Numerous papers have been published illustrating the uses of interview analysis programs for qualitative research. Most of these programs provide software which allows the researcher some degree of flexibility in organizing the interview material. Not many programs supplement their focus on software with considerations of the dynamic features of hardware. Yet the Kit interview analysis program (designed by Carl Verner Skou, Center for Qualitative Research) takes into consideration the positive functions of both software and hardware. In this article, which merely offers our own reflections, we first describe the Kit program in brief (more specific and elaborate information can be obtained by contacting the Center for Qualitative Research) and then share our views on the utility of the program. These views reflect our own experiences with Kit in analyzing the interview material generated in our Ph.D. projects.

The beauty of Kit is that this application for Windows allows you to analyze and categorize (or categorize and analyze, whichever order you prefer) your interview material while *bypassing* the tedious process of transcription or the endless rearranging of notes. Just how Kit does this is as follows. Kit provides you with the software to tape interview recordings to the hard disk of your computer. You can then transfer them to CD-ROM to save hard disk space (audio recordings are voluminous). If you wish to categorize the interview material in initiating the process of analysis, you can type in the categories for analysis. Each interview can then be subsequently categorized by way of time slots indicating moments where a particular category was discussed. For example, if one of your categories relates to the subject of “favorite foods”, you can have the program mark that from (for example) 9 minutes 14 seconds to 10 minutes 21 seconds into a particular interview, the subject of "favorite foods" was discussed. In other words, you can listen to the entire interview and mark all of the places where each relevant category is discussed. If you are taking a “grounded theory” approach and do not wish to categorize at the beginning of the analysis process, the program has an ample notepad and a pad for transcriptions. You can then mark the times during the interview to which the note or transcription refers and you have the option of categorizing or summarizing later. After organizing your interview material (through categorization or note taking) the program can play back the marked time slots of particular categories or notes. Referring to the example

above, you could have the program play back all of the time slots which represent the category of “favorite foods”.

The point is that rather than transcribing each interview in its entirety and working with pages and markings, you have direct access to the raw material (sound) and work with time. What a wonderful idea! But what’s it like to work with the program on a daily basis?

In initiating our analysis experience with Kit, we were both concerned that it may prove to be too weird to work with voices and time, when so much of our academic lives are bound to paper and pens (or at least keyboards). After some degree of consideration as to whether we would prefer to work with spoken words or written words, we switched our focus to consider why people transcribe interviews in the first place. We decided that one crucial reason is that it is difficult to work with voices on tape. For example, it takes a considerable amount of time to rewind and fast-forward tapes to different parts of an interview, and between the different taped recordings obtained in the course of a study. Further, one generally needs to listen to different statements over and over throughout the process of analysis. A situation with a researcher focusing solely on the “raw data” (recordings) while conducting an intensive qualitative interview study seems inconceivable (especially if we are talking about projects with deadlines)! The “in-between” process of transcription saves time and allows the researcher to organize the material in a productive manner.

Yet, now that we have the CD-ROM storage media it makes sense to reconsider the option of working directly with the voices of the interview. First of all, depending on the audio quality desired, it is possible to have approximately 15 hours of interview material on one CD-ROM disk (which means of course that numerous interviews can be placed on one disk). Second, one can flip between the different expressions of different interviews in the time frame of about one second. Third, one easily finds exactly that part of the interview one wants to hear. And fourth, because Kit keeps track of all “counter points” through files stored on the computer’s hard disk, it is possible to organize and/or categorize the different expressions of the interview, such that the information that has been generated is organized, well accounted for and, if you like, structured. With these considerations in mind, we both decided to purchase Kit.

With regard to having decided to work with spoken words, we found that it was very easy to get used to working with voices and time. In this process we also found out that when working with Kit one is obliged to listen more carefully to one’s interviews and over an increased number of times. This too is a positive aspect of using Kit. When working with transcribed interviews, one generally “sticks to the paper” once the interview has been transcribed. In so doing one becomes “distanced” from the original material such that it is easy to lose a sense of the sound and level of the interviewees voice, the tone of voice, and the overall “feeling” of being in the room. Much of this is maintained when using the Kit. Further, it is easier to keep track of your interviews when they are on one or two CD ROM disks than if they are transcribed on to hundreds of pages of paper. (If one sticks to the general assumption that a direct transcription of a one hour interview is about 20 pages, than it is easy to see that in a single qualitative investigation one can easily come to work with 500 pages or more).

Kit has some basic system requirements and it is important that your own system meets these requirements. As for the level of computer knowledge required of the researcher, one of us (the one who by no means is a computer whiz) was concerned that just figuring out how Kit worked would take up too much time and energy, This was by no means the case. The program is very easy to install and anyone who is familiar with the functioning of Windows can operate Kit. The program also comes with a manual. However, it is important that either the user, or someone who can help the user (such as a representative from a computer department) knows something about working with sound files (which are large) and burning CD-ROM disks.

The program is, however not without some minor quirks and there is a bug report through which one can relate any problems one comes across to the program developer. The program developer is interested and responsive to potential errors. As is true of most functional computer programs these days, the program is under continuous development, and the purchaser receives a specified amount of free updates after the time of purchase.

The quirks that we found were related to the recording function of Kit. We had some difficulty in working with the portion of the recorder that allows the researcher to “cut” those parts of the interview which aren’t meaningful (such as interruptions). Depending again on the user’s computer, this function of Kit seems to be slightly unreliable and to effect the program’s ability to recognize the sound file. Apparently this quirk is related more to the soundcard and driver in the user’s computer than to the program itself, the result being that while some users have experienced this quirk, others have not. We did, which is why we have mentioned it here. Our solution has been to refrain from using this function when working on our own computers.

There is also a function which allows the researcher to stop Kit’s recording of a tape after a specified amount of time. What we found was that once the recording has started, although it is possible to click on one of the specified time periods, the program does not “obey the order”. It would make more sense if one could see that this function was disabled once recording has started (for example by displaying a lighter color and not accepting the click with the mouse, as with Microsoft Windows programs). Another possibility could be an “auto-stop” system, where the recorder automatically shuts off when it only detects background noise.

These two issues with the recorder are of minor significance to the analysis process once one gets around them.

Once the interviews are safely placed on a CD-ROM, Kit is an excellent value for the money. Compared to other analysis programs, and in light of all of Kit’s functions, the price of 1,250 Danish Kroner (excluding Danish sales tax VAT ) is more than reasonable. Upon purchase, Kit is licensed directly to the person, rather to the institution, which could cause problems for those who hope to receive reimbursement from the institutions they represent. Perhaps this potential problem could be solved by selling the program in the form of licenses to the computer departments of specific institutions.

Potential users should also be aware that although Kit definitely saves some time and headaches with regard to the transcription process, we are still living in a scripted world with regard to reporting. This means that there is still some degree of transcription and summarizing of the interview material. What is nice is that you can report upon carefully listened to and thoroughly analyzed interviews, without having been through the lengthy, tedious process of word for word transcription, or the continuous process of organizing and reorganizing notes. We are very pleased with our decision to use Kit and recommend it to others who are considering which analytical tools to employ in carrying out their interview studies.