Ethnographic Data Analysis Software

Discussion thread on EASA Media Anthropology Mailing List

August 2-4, 2007

Hakan Ergul (Anadolu University, Turkey)
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Dear Medianthro members,

I'm about to start a long-term project (family ethnography) and have been looking for a software package(s) – except "The Ethnograph" and "Anthropac" – that might help me out during (e.g. interviews, field notes, classification of data, coding segments, etc.) and after the fieldwork (e.g. content analysis of field notes, coding, etc.).

Any recommendations? Any info that you think may be helpful would be big help.

Thanks in advance,

Hakan Ergul

Francisco Osorio (University of Manchester, UK)
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Hello Hakan

In my view, three important software to look for are: Maxqda 2007, Atlas.ti 5.2.10 and NVivo 7.

http://www.maxqda.com
http://www.atlasti.com

http://www.qsrinternational.com

The journal FQS can give the whole picture:
http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-eng.htm

For a particular example about their problems to use them, see my essay:

The Effects of Computer Assisted Research on Chilean Academics. Volume
7, No. 4, Art. 35 – September 2006
http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/4-06/06-4-35-e.htm

Cheers,

Francisco Osorio

**Maurizio Teli (Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of
Trento, Italy)**
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Hello Hakan,

I suggest you also Weft-QDA, a free software project. It less structured then others (like
NVivo), but I found it very useful. I know the team is working to a version 2.0, with big
improvements, so if anyone wants to try it and give feedback, the community of ethnographer
can benefit of a free software.

http://www.pressure.to/qda/

Gavin Rees (Bournemouth University, UK)
gavin_rees@mac.com

Dear Hakan,

You are probably PC based and so this might not be relevant for you. One of the most
interesting tools out there which can be adapted for QDA and all kinds of note-keeping is a
mac-only product called Tinderbox.

You can read about it here:

http://www.eastgate.com/Tinderbox/

Visually it is a bit of a mess, but don't let that fool you, it is a very powerful. Essentially you
programme notes, individual ones, or groups to perform certain behaviours, such as running
specific searches, changing colour when a certain time condition is exceeded, adding up data
values in other notes, even exporting to websites and composing emails.

The advantage over other QDA products is that it is far more customisable, the disadvantage
with it is that its learning curve is steep. And by that I mean precipitously cliff-like. You have

to understand html and be willing to learn to write in a simple programming language called Boost regex before you can use if for sophisticated QDA stuff. It is relatively easy, though, to create html links between notes, or the text in them.

It was about three months before I could get it to do anything beyond simple note keeping, now I use it for all my data analysis and project planning tasks. It is great at keeping track of stuff you have to do.

They are planning at some stage to release a windows version, but you know....

Best,

Gavin

www.emotionsandjournalism.org

Debra Spitulnik (Department of Anthropology, Emory University, USA)
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Dear Hakan,

I'm using MAXQda. At my university, the social sciences departments have chosen it as our supported qualitative data management software (over Atlas.t). I'm mid-stream in a project, doing coding right now. I like it a lot...It's easy to learn and use. But I haven't completed the analysis yet, so can't yet say how helpful the program is for the end stages. I'm not sure if it has multimedia capacities (i.e. supporting audio and video data as well); you could check their website.

For simple transcription of recorded discourse or broadcast media, I use a free software package called ExpressScribe. You can go to their website and download it directly. It's a platform for listening to audio, slowing down the stream, and typing. There are hotkeys for rewind, fastforward, etc. You load your audio files into it, and do your typing into a Word-compatible document. You can also create templates for your transcripts.

Best wishes,

Debra

Christian Voigt (University of South Australia)
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Dear Hakan and Medianthro community,

I am using ELAN to annotate video and audio data from virtual meeting rooms (my research is CSCL related). The tool is for free. Product descriptions and downloads can be found on

http://www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan/
<https://my.unisa.edu.au/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan/>

It's surely not THE software package that does everything, but depending on your special requirements you might have to combine a number of tools.

For example, I have windows media files (wmf) to work with, and at the time (a year ago) when I was looking for a tool, NVivo did not offer any video annotation functionality (except that you could reference an entire file with a link).

I am quite happy with ELAN but would be interested in alternative, easy to use annotation tools that would support WMF files. Any experiences out there?

Thanks Christian

Jens Kjaerulff (Simon Fraser University, Canada)
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Hakan, I spent a considerable amount of time trying to sort my use of such software out (various packages) during the time I worked on my PhD. Here are a couple of tips I would pass on:

- There is a mailing list that specifically takes such software as a
focus for discussion, subscribe at:
http://jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/QUAL-SOFTWARE.html
You might want to consult with this list too.

- Of the packages I tried, I ended up sticking with QSR Nvivo. The one thing I found really set this package apart was the extensive and expedient support offered both by QSR tech-support, and by the many users of QSR products subscribed to their user mailing list, which is very active. I found that competency in using such software is not achieved overnight, it sort of grows on you as your project (and your specific usage of the software in it) develops, and here ongoing exchanges with other users and tech-support can be really helpful.

- My last advise is perhaps redundant in your case, but for good measure: it is important to realize that such software clearly has limitations, no matter which package you settle with. It does not do the thinking or writing for you. The time you put into working with the software should be in proportion to this. I found I spend a lot time working through technicalities, which ended up being of no significance to my analysis. The experience made me more aware however, of the various other "techniques" I was deploying in developing my thinking and make it materialize as a dissertation (as such, I think QDA software is of broader interest from the perspective of media anthropology, but that is perhaps a different discussion). As a result, I ended up using Nvivo in the spirit of a Swiss army knife towards my ends as need arose, rather than strictly in terms of what its features were designed for. In other words, I gradually learnt to just use it as a tool that occasionally came in handy among other tools, and "ride the horse, rather than let it ride with me". Once liberated in this way, I found it quite handy. I can recommend that you stay aware of this principle in approaching any such software. Good luck!

Jens

Daniel Taghioff (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK)
danieltaghioff@yahoo.com

In the spirit of Jen's Swiss Army knife, here are a couple of tools I have found useful, some for Mac users only.

There is anthracite, which is a very good graphically based data mining program, that can be used for some complex document processing whilst being relatively intuitive. It is designed for web mining, but actually works for any textual data.

http://www.metafy.com/

There is also Transcriva. This is a mac based transcription program that I found very useful.

http://www.bartastechnologies.com/products/transcriva/

There is a free mac program called Journler, which gives you a free research journal, which will handle PDFs and media files (you can index your material here it has a good tag and search system).

http://journler.com/

There is a another free program, concordancer pro, which is useful for corpus analysis: It will give you a list of where words occur and the contexts.

http://homepage.mac.com/fahrenba/programs/concorderPro/concorderPro.html

Finally there is wiretap pro, which allows you, when combined with skype, to record phone calls or conference calls directly onto your machine, making distance interviewing easier. (You need to inform your respondents of course!)

http://www.ambrosiasw.com/utilities/wiretap/

There is a nice comparison of Atlas.ti and Nvivo here

https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/blewis/www/Lewis%20-%20Atlasti%20and%20NVivo.pdf

I chose atlas.ti, because it was simpler to learn and intuitive. If I ever get into a really complicated text analysis project I may need to go over to Nvivo, I have heard it has more features for larger projects.

Finally, on the hardware side, when I looked (2 years ago), iRiver were producing good cheap digital recorders with a line in for a mic, that output decent MP3's for about £100.

Perhaps nowadays you can do it on an iPod.

Regards

Daniel

Hakan Ergul (Anadolu University, Turkey)
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Dear All,

Thanks millions for taking the time to share the useful recommendations, advices, user comments, and the guidance... was extremely helpful!

Jens!... No, I was not aware of the web site. Seems like an excellent source for the (qualitative) software issue. Thanks a lot for the link info.

Best,

Hakan