ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

THE "UNFINISHED SENTENCES" TECHNIQUE IN STUDYING LONELINESS PHENOMENON

Zh.V. Puzanova

Sociology Chair
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
Miklukho-Maklaya str., 10/2, Moscow, Russia, 117198

The article deals with the unfinished sentences technique as a soft, the qualitative way to collect and analyze sociological data. The article represents an attempt to describe the main features of qualitative approach to designing, conducting and analyzing the semi-structured data of sociological research based on the unfinished sentences technique and aimed at studying the problem of loneliness. The article also proposes a scheme to apply typological analysis principles to the data obtained through the unfinished sentences technique.

Key words: unfinished sentences technique, semi-structured data, sociological research, loneliness, typological analysis, qualitative approach.

The problem of loneliness has been studied across various disciplines: philosophy, culturology, psychology, sociology, pedagogics, anthropology, etc. Although a certain philosophical approach to the understanding of loneliness has been established, it was not until the seventies of the XX century that the quest for possible methods and techniques of the analysis as well as opportunities for the empirical study of this phenomenon began in sociology and psychology. Most of the techniques applied by the researchers (for example, the UCLA test) provide only the determination of the "*level of loneliness*": high — average — low. In addition, the inherent implication of the analyzed phenomenon remains obscure due to the fact that each individual experiences loneliness in his own way. Moreover, such techniques cannot provide relevant information either on human understanding of loneliness or on similar states such as alienation, isolation, seclusion, loss.

The research study aimed at the reconstruction of structural elements of loneliness phenomenon on the basis of revealing personal implications, evaluation of emotional attitude to this phenomenon and insight into causal explanations of loneliness state was conducted. We proceeded from the assumption of two-level structure of lo-

neliness: the emotional (affective) level and the reflexive (cognitive) level, namely the "*perception*" and the "*awareness*", being aware of the impossibility of distinguishing a lonely person from a person who is not alone judging from external behaviour.

We conducted a survey of 107 first-year students of different areas of concentration of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, i.e., those who changed social environment. The sample included both Muscovites and residents of the Moscow Region who gained university entrance and found themselves in a new environment as well as people from other cities and towns of Russia for whom the change of social environment entailed a profound change of life conditions (earlier we conducted a similar survey with the application of the given technique in 2002).

The research framework comprised unfinished sentences which offered an opportunity to allay respondents' anxiety resulting from the necessity to provide answers to sensitive questions about themselves as well as access to the information relevant for the researcher. Our task was to obtain data on categories employed by individuals to describe their personal experience, to focus on personal implications as well as to specify the meanings ascribed by the respondents to the "loneliness" phenomenon. In the course of the preliminary research with the assistance of the experts constituting a part of the sampling population the following "adequate stimuli (beginnings of sentences)" were selected:

Loneliness is the result of...
Loneliness comes when...
Loneliness is bad because...
Loneliness is good because...
For me loneliness is...
A person is lonely because...

The research framework also included unfinished sentences which rendered it possible for the respondents to describe the emotional state of a lonely person:

A lonely person experiences...
It's typical of a lonely person to...
When a person is lonely, he...
Loneliness is experienced by...

The stage of analysis involved the identification of the peculiar features of loneliness experience at the emotional (affective) and reflexive (cognitive) levels, i.e., the unfinished sentences technique data analysis which has been well established in model development and image structures recognition. First of all, elementary explanations were identified to reconstruct the structural elements of loneliness phenomenon. Afterwards the elementary explanations were grouped into 10 elements: *communication, social environment, external circumstances, negative emotions, personality characteristics, behaviour, seclusion, loneliness experience assessment, loneliness, natural state*. These elements were grouped into 5 components: *social environment, negative emotions, personality characteristics, behavioural reaction, assessment* (Table 1).

The Reconstruction of Structural Elements of Loneliness Phenomenon

Components	Elements	Elementary explanations
Social environment	Communication	communication
		understanding
		reticence
	Social environment	needlessness
		loss of the close ones, psychic trauma
		absence of beloved/friend
		social ban
		rejection of society
	External circumstances	external circumstances
Negative emotions	Negative emotions	stress, depression
		sadness, melancholy
		absence of self-confidence, uneasiness, discomfort
		aggression, anger
Personality characteristics	Personality characteristics	character traits, shortcomings
		age
		oddities
		intelligent, experienced
		losers, stupid
Reaction (behavioural)	Behaviour	mistakes
		behaviour
		concentration on business
		an attempt to change the situation
		tranquility
		alcoholism
	Seclusion	reflections
		rest
		to devote time to oneself
		personal wish
		creative work, ideas
Assessment	Assessment	indifference
		good
		bad
		negative consequences
	Loneliness	loneliness
	Natural state	natural state
		anyone can feel lonely

An index was introduced to assess the significance of the element and the component in the course of the analysis. For this purpose each elementary explanation (EE) was assigned a weight number: 1 — if it was the only conclusion of the sentence; 0,5 — if it was followed by another explanation; 0,33, if there were three or more elementary explanations. The total weight of all EEs came to 997,83. Each element (component) was also assigned its own weight coefficient which characterized its significance according to its share in the total weigh (Table 2).

The Weight of Elements and Components in "Loneliness" Structure

Elements	Weight	Percentage %	Components	Weight	Percentage, %
Communication	183,80	18,42	Social Environment	324,45	32,52
Social Environment	122,82	12,31			
External Circumstances	17,83	1,79			
Negative Emotions	190,44	19,09	Negative Emotions	190,44	19,09
Personality characteristics	94,16	9,44	Personality characteristics	94,16	9,44
Behaviour	59,82	6,00	Behavioural reaction	186,63	18,70
Seclusion	126,81	12,71			
Assessment	73,65	7,38	Assessment	158,15	15,85
Loneliness	39,00	3,91			
Natural State	45,50	4,56			
No answer	44,00	4,41	No answer	44,00	4,41
Total	997,83	100,00	Total	997,83	100,00

The most frequent responses were the following: *"needs communication", "a person becomes unsociable", "alienation", "cannot come to an understanding with other people", "you are not understood", "there is nobody to share one's feelings", "has got no friends", "does not love and isn't loved", "inability to assimilate into society", "nobody needs him" and even "he needs nobody".* Therefore, according to many respondents, the main cause and effect of loneliness is the absence (loss) of social ties or communication problems. The feeling of loneliness is mostly associated with negative emotions or communication problems, absence of close ones, personal tragedy.

The range of feelings associated with loneliness is broad enough. For example, the respondents mentioned sadness, boredom, suffering, discomfort, shyness, existential disappointment, depression, low spirits, and even cruelty and rudeness as explanations of the sentence "*Loneliness is bad because...*". The weight of the "behavioural reaction" component is somewhat less. The respondents believe that loneliness is in many cases a personal wish of an individual, or a way either "*to escape problems*" or "*to devote time to oneself*" and "*to get insight into oneself*". Some respondents describe loneliness as seclusion ("*to stay at home all the time*", "*spending time at home*"), as a way "*to take some rest*", "*to get away from the vanities of the world*", as an opportunity "*to go about one's business*", "*a way to develop one's own potential*". There were also respondents who considered loneliness to be the consequence of the mistakes made, alcoholism or separation from the close ones.

The "assessment" component included statements which described loneliness as an experience. As it was expected, loneliness is more frequently perceived as a negative feeling. For example, the weight of the EE "*bad*" is 46, while the weight of the EE "*good*" is 18,82. However, the first one comprises distinctly negative characteristics: "*it is a failure*", "*suicide*", "*death*", "*catastrophe*", "*the most terrible feeling of a man*". The elementary explanation "*good*" often included such answers as "*it is not as bad*", "*sometimes it is useful*", "*there are lots of advantages*". At the same time the component "*assessment*" incorporates assumptions that loneliness is an inherent feature of all people, that loneliness is a natural state ("*that's life*", "*common state*").

Such qualities as high self-esteem, pessimism, ill humour, reserve, self-sufficiency were often attributed to personality characteristics of lonely people. According to the respondents, loneliness is characteristic of both intelligent people ("*people who know a lot about life*"), and the stupid ones, losers ("*nerds*", "*unattractive*", "*losers*"). The category of "*odd people*" was singled out — "*behave in an odd way*", "*odd people*", "*prone to madness*". There were assumptions that loneliness is typical of a certain age, first of all, of elderly people and teenagers.

Summing it up, at the given stage of the analysis some trends of loneliness perception and understanding by young people can be outlined. The majority of them treat it in a negative way whereas positive characteristics are ascribed to loneliness in case it provides an opportunity to get away from the vanities of the world and devote time to oneself (i.e., seclusion). Some respondents found it difficult to answer arguing that the feeling is not familiar to them. It may be precisely for this reason that lonely people seemed to them strange, standing out from the crowd.

On the whole, the results of the unfinished sentences technique are in agreement with various theoretical approaches to the study of this phenomenon: the emergence of loneliness is conditioned by the society, social environment, personality characteristics of the individual, and the ontological implication of loneliness as it was outlined above. Besides, the technique has demonstrated the "integrity" of the understanding of the concepts "loneliness", "seclusion", "isolation", "alienation", the causes and consequences of loneliness, which is especially vividly revealed in the EE of the "communication" element. Here one can clearly see that communication problems emerge as one of the main causal explanations of loneliness. However, at the personality level different respondents highlight different key points: "*cannot come to an understanding with other people*", "*you are not understood*". One can speak about the "multilevel" loneliness perception and awareness: the cognitive level (the attempts to understand the causes of loneliness and its nature), the affective level (the attempts to describe the emotions emerging in the course of loneliness explanation), and to some extent the behavioural level (the attempts to imagine the behaviour of people experiencing loneliness).

REFERENCES

[1] *DiTommaso E., Brannan-McNulty C., Ross L., Burgess M.* Attachment Styles, Social Skills and Loneliness in Young Adults // Personality and Individual Differences. — 2003. — No. 35. — P. 303—312.

[2] Loneliness. A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy / Ed. by L.A. Peplau, D. Perlman. — N.Y., 1982.

[3] *McGuire S.C.* Genetic and Environmental Contributions to Loneliness in Children // Psychological Science. — November 2000. — Vol. 11. — Issue 6.

[4] *Riesman D.* The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (With N. Glazer, R. Danney). — N.Y., 1950.

[5] *Rokach A.* Loneliness Then and Now: Reflections on Social and Emotional Alienation in Everyday Life // Current Psychology. — 2004. — Vol. 23. — No. 1. — P. 24—40.

[6] *Russel D., Peplau L.A., Cutrona C.E.* The revised UCLA loneliness scale: Concurrent and discriminate validity evidence // Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. — 1980. — № 3 (39). — P. 472—480.

[7] *Russell D.* UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, Validity and Factor Structure // Journal of Personality Assessment. — 1996. — No 66 (1). — P. 20—40.

[8] *Slater P.E.* The Pursuit of Loneliness. — Boston, 1976.

[9] *Uruk A.C., Demir A.* The Role of Peers and Families in Predicting the Loneliness Level of Adolescents // Journal of Psychology. — March 2003. — Vol. 137. — Issue 2.

[10] *Weiss R.S.* Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation. — MIT Press, London, 1973.

[11] *Burlov A.V., Tatarova G.G.* Metod neoconchennych predlozenij v izuchenii obraza "Culturnij chelovek" // Sociologija: metodologija, metody, matematicheskije modeli. — 1997. № 9. — S. 5—31.

[12] *Climova S. G.* Opyt ispolzovanija metodiki neoconchennych predlozenij v sociologochescom issledovanii // Sociologija: metodologija, metody, matematicheskije modeli. — 1995. № 5. — 6. S. 49—64.

[13] *Puzanova Z.V.* "Odinochetstvo" kak predmet empirichescogo analiza // Sociologija: metodologija, metody, matematicheskije modeli. — 2009. — № 29. — C. 132—154.

[14] *Tatarova G.G.* Tipologocheskij analiz v socioilogi. — M., 2007.

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ МЕТОДА НЕОКОНЧЕННЫХ ПРЕДЛОЖЕНИЙ В СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКОМ ИССЛЕДОВАНИИ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ОДИНОЧЕСТВА

Ж.В. Пузанова

Кафедра социологии
Российский университет дружбы народов
ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 10/2, Москва, Россия, 117198

В статье рассматривается использование методики неоконченных предложений как мягкого метода сбора и анализа социологических данных. Статья представляет попытку описать главные особенности качественного подхода к построению, проведению и анализу полуструктурированных данных социологического исследования, основанного на методе неоконченных предложений с целью изучение проблемы одиночества. Также предлагается схема применения типологических принципов анализа данным, полученных методом неоконченных предложений.

Ключевые слова: метод неоконченных предложений, полуструктурированные данные, социологическое исследование, одиночество, типологический анализ, качественный подход.