Chapter 9
Participation and Ethical Reasoning in Text–Based Research:
Crossing the Great Subject–Object Divide From Interpretation to Meaning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the challenges to meaning objectivity faced by text-based researchers. It considers how the subject-object divide interferes with the validity and reliability of research claims. With a mixed methods approach, the chapter shows that subjectivity has a significant impact on the meaning and interpretation of text, and that external influences on subjectivity can be, but are not enough, to stabilise meaning. It argues that researchers working with words should, as part of the fundamental research, establish a base line of meaning among their participants. Taking this approach would enhance research axiology. Accordingly, this chapter proposes a signification grammatology, the SOPHIC (Subject-Object Participation in

Hermeneutical Interpretation and Conceptualisation) framework, for the instantiation of participation and ethical reasoning in text-based research. This framework aims to provoke and stimulate evaluation and legitimation of text-based research claims.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The problem of contradictory findings from apparently similar research questions is evident in several disciplines. In science and medicine, for example, resolving this problem is urgent as findings often impact on how diseases are treated or on how often patients are tested. Within biomedical research, Rosemblat et al (2019) highlight successes that were later contradicted, e.g., studies claiming that Vitamin E had positive effects on patients with coronary disease, or that aspirin reduces the risk of heart attacks. In both cases, other studies investigating the *same phenomenon using the same research questions* arrived at contradictory (opposite) results.

Implying that the problem arises from semantical and conceptual differences, Alamri and Sevenson (2016, p8) point out that contradictions obscure understanding of the current state of knowledge about specific research questions and 'present a challenge to evidence-based evaluation into the effectiveness of approaches.' Ioanndis (2005) had, before them, highlighted bias and ambiguity in 'designs, *definitions* [added emphasis], outcomes, and analytical modes' as key reasons for contradictory or false claims. However, Kannan and Gowri (2014) suggested that intentionality of consciousness was the real culprit as researchers, knowing what they are after, influence the findings or publish only the results supporting their hypothesis.

These possible causes (Ioanndis, 2005; Kannan & Gowri, 2014; Alamri & Sevenson, 2016) are not unique or exclusive to science and medicine. They are endemic to research in general. More specifically to the intersubjective contexts that research takes place in; and when research and rationality are needed to establish agreement in understanding of the appearance of an object to distinct conscious minds. In this process, researchers of every discipline, including the social sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, business management, etc.), must be clear on which object they are speaking of whenever they present it to either those they question (in focus groups, semi-structured interviews, survey questionnaires, etc.) or to those they want to impact with their findings. This clarity is, however, elusive: and it is so because, as Kannan and Gowri (2014) have insinuated, the intentionality of consciousness is such an influential driver of perception, action and meaning (cf. Searle, 2002) that in the face of mounting pressure to establish reputations on publications, there is a higher chance that findings support researchers' hypothesis or agendas. Not because researchers wilfully falsify or mislead those who access their work, but because

without an overtly participatory and ethically rational stance, a person's intentions (no matter how well-meaning) can blind them to alterity or difference.

Indeed, this phenomenon – the subconscious tendency for readers (or listeners) to make the meaning they find agreeable or to project themselves into the text they read (or the words they hear) - has long been explored outside of empirical research. In empirical research, language is still seen as an instrument for communicating information (Taylor, 2016); a process of thought by which knowledge is anchored in reality (cf. Frege, 1993, cited in Moore, 1993). However, in the more theoretical fields, e.g., poststructuralism (Harland, 1987), deconstruction (Culler, 2008; Derrida in McQuillan, 2018), and reader-response criticism (Tompkins, 1981), the resounding position is that the subjectivity of language-users can hardly, if ever, be separated from the meaning they draw out of language-based communications.

In these fields, language is an interplay of presences and absences in consciousness and words. Knowledge, explicitly meaning and interpretation, is at best an arbitration between experience (subject) and reality (object) (Benson, 2014). Indeed, thinkers in these fields (e.g., Culler, 2008) view the textual contexts that researchers work in (e.g., literature reviews, surveys, interview guides, transcriptions of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, written materials, emails, social media posts, etc.) as generative of performative and constructed meaning. On their long-standing debates, researchers, their audiences and the disciplines that assume that truth, knowledge and/or meaning are discoverable, are merely deluding themselves. According to Sarup (1993, p3) poststructuralism, deconstruction and reader-response criticism, are 'highly critical of the unity of the stable sign' and the connection between signifier and signified; they take a 'perpetual detour' from a 'truth that has any status or finality,' and claim that 'the human subject does not have a unified consciousness but is structured by language.'

Against this background, this chapter offers a cohered evaluation of these arguments and proposes an analytical tool for text-based researchers wishing to operate with greater transparency, ethicality, and within 'objective' contexts. Utilising empirical data on the impact of subjectivity on meaning, the chapter offers an exemplative instantiation of subject-object participation in hermeneutic interpretation and conceptualisation (SOPHIC) that facilitates an ethical and reflexive design of research methodology and evaluation of findings.

To this end, the research questions guiding this chapter are:

1. How does subjectivity influence the interpretation and meaning of words and what impact could such influence have on text-based research claims?
2. How do text-based researchers address the problem of subjectivity in meaning and interpretation in their methodologies?

3. What signification grammatology could help researchers moderate (and explain) the influence of subjectivity on meaning and interpretation in their text-based research?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore these areas, this section reviews literature on subject-object interaction with particular emphasis on the import of that interaction on the meaning and interpretation of words (concepts, phrases, etc.) used in text-based research.

Subject-Object Debates: Reality vs Appearances

Philosophical debates concerning distinctions between reality and appearances have a long tradition from Plato to Kant. In the context of text-based research, such debates take on practical dimensions. Text-based researchers must decide to treat their object of study as either an entity in the world or as an interpreted mind-dependent construction. Indeed, the question all researchers should begin with is how to access a supposed stable reality when the *instruments of investigation* – language, concepts, interpretations to create research objectives, questionnaires, interview questions, etc. – are intrinsically subjective?

Researchers' and participants' subjectivity, often set in tension with the exigences of neutrality and objectivity, asks a central question to contemporary epistemology in the human and social sciences: can we truly access a "pure" meaning? One without any trace of the knowing subject? This interrogation calls for a radical reflexion on the very nature of knowledge, its production, its conditions of possibility, and especially its elusive character in a world saturated with interpretations.

Indeed, the ideology of objectivity, inherited from 19th-century positivism, has long dominated the scientific imagination. It assumes a clear separation between the subject (researcher) and the object (phenomena studied) that allows for a neutral, descriptive, and cumulative apprehension of the real (Come, 1848). To guarantee objectivity, positivist traditions prioritised methods that discounted the researcher's subjectivity and gave access to universality through generalisable results (Rockwell, 2011). However, the uncritical use of the processes and measures from this tradition received intense scrutiny particularly from critics working in hermeneutics, phenomenology and poststructuralist disciplines. Soon, different epistemological and theoretical perspectives from sociology and anthropology required the integration of subjectivity as a fundamental component of the research process (Devereux, 1977). Thereafter, the social science researcher was regularly interrogated at theorical and epistemological levels.

A key concern was how could such researchers continue to operate with conceptions of science and scientifical knowledge that were assumed to be rooted in objectivity and understood as synonymous with neutrality (Cruz et al., 2012). Because in mistaking appearance for reality, subjectivity - defined as feelings, emotions, and intuitions shaped by persons' social contexts and interactions, the media they access, their culture and beliefs, and their social locations such as race, age, gender, etc. (Fisher et al., 2016; Schiffer, 2019; Sharp, 2020) - absolutizes acts of consciousness. Therefore, it raises the ethical questions of how much of the subject's intervention is in the research claims and if it is even possible for a researcher to be detached from them. Indeed, reality does not easily give itself. It is often reconstructed from a methodological invention. Subjects (individuals, actors, agents) elaborate versions of reality for themselves and for others in a process whose consequences change according to the discursive mechanisms that intervene between them and their interlocutors. This process permits projections and memories that make dialogue, a key aspect in qualitative research, possible (Cesca, 2013).

As Denzin and Lincoln (2012) note, subjectivity is generally acknowledged in qualitive research, particularly its impact on the interpretation of significations. Qualitative researchers are transparent about the codes, categories and themes they apply when interpreting text. Even when utilising software packages like NVivo, they take pains to set out the same as they move through transcripts and the like. As an epistemological position and a methodological orientation, qualitative research implies that knowledge construction can be realized from careful study of singularity and not through identification of regularities. Singularity refers to both the person interviewed and a singular researcher whose subjectivity participates in the construction of the object, e.g., the reality they speak of. This intertwined relationship between the subject and object of research is called implication. According to Derrida (1967), researchers can never situate themselves "outside" of their object. They are *implicated*, affected, and often blinded by their (socially, culturally, and temporal) learned conceptual schemes and semantic systems and these make ambiguity and nuance inescapable: hence the qualitative researcher's approach to coding, categorising and drawing themes out of the data they work with. In this space, knowledge, far from being transparent, emerges from power relationships and historical contradictions that determine what can be said, thought, and known.

However, subjectivity has also been a problematical theme often associated with two poles: either a Cartesian vision of the rational thinking subject or the idea that the subject is without epistemological value because it conspires against the objectivity of knowledge. Here, it is good to differentiate between subjectivity and the more extreme subjectivism. The former is a development of the human mind (feelings, emotions, beliefs, opinions) within cultural conditions. But the latter, akin to solipsism, is the position that knowledge objectivity is impossible; that there can only be

a *mind-dependent* truth and appearances that cannot be abstracted from lifeworld. Thus, for subjectivists, knowledge can never be independent of the human senses, and researchers' subjectivity *is* the meaning of their research (González Rey, 2017).

But recognising the challenge of determining a static meaning is not the same thing as claiming (as per subjectivists or solipsists) that research is impossible or without value. Rather, that it requires a more modest and reflexive epistemological posture. This posture, the "epistemology of doubt" if imbued with scepticism (Stengers, 1997) or "reflexive research" (cf. Bourdieu et al., 1921), invites researchers to perceive research as a space of questioning not of certitude. Researchers' and participants' subjectivity then become heuristic resources obliging researchers to explain the limits of knowledge in their research, i.e., to make visible their blind spots.

While making visible blind-spots does not equate to objectivity (that which is exterior and *mind-independent)*, it is a move *towards* it because it is an acknowledgment of the limitations of what becomes known through the research. Thus, it calls other researchers to investigate what was left uncovered and to go beyond their own subjectivities. Even when objectivity is described as situated 'between myth, exigence and ideal,' (Ouattara, 2017) or as 'discursive construction' (Barthes, 2004), it is understood or examined as such because of the shared nature of language and lexicons. The words, punctuations, grammatical rules etc. that have been agreed upon and communicated intersubjectively, and that make lexicographical clarity in research both possible and essential. Analytical norms (lexicographic, psychological, structural) are codes based on preexisting models, and objectivity itself is a model operating between appearance and reality because of the role of conceptual schemes and semantic systems in researchers' process *towards* knowledge.

Subject-Object and the Role of Conceptual Schemes and Semantic Systems in Interpretation

Conceptual schemes are cognitive structures through which people organize and interpret information. Graham (2018) suggests that these schemes form our hypotheses, and consequently, the way we approach research objects. Semantic systems, for their part, constitute mental networks of connected words, concepts and significations. Together, these elements profoundly influence how researchers and their participants build significations, and ultimately, their results. They are responsible for divergences of interpretation between participating individuals.

Indeed, linguistic interpretation is based on conceptual (or cognitive) schemes and semantic systems. They actively shape the signification of words. For Kant (2006), schemes serve as mediators between the categories of understanding and sensible intuitions; they allow the subject to organize and structure experience into recognizable forms. A *conceptual* scheme is therefore an abstract mental structure

that organizes knowledge around a theme or experience. For instance, the scheme of the concept 'conflict' can structure how a political debate or a tense social interaction is perceived. Therefore, when interpreting 'political debate' or 'tense social interaction' the concept 'conflict' is activated (perhaps in conjunction with other conceptual schemes, e.g., 'argument' 'resolution' etc.) in response to a perceived stimulus, *depending on the interpreter's cultural, cognitive or affective contexts* (Fillmore, 1982).

According to Johnson (1987), conceptual schemes are not merely linguistic. They emerge from our experience. For example, when researchers use the metaphor 'path' in relation to a career ('career path') or to a project ('the path of that project'), their corporeal experience of moving comes into play. Put simply, language mobilizes preconceptual structures to generate meaning, while conceptual schemes organize their cognition and semantic systems and frames how significations circulate within their given cultural universe.

By definition, a semantic system is a coherent and often normative set of significant relations that determine what can be said, thought or imagined within the user's culture (Eco, 1976). Indeed, language gives access to reality as it is perceived, processed and understood. Whereas linguistic meaning is a signification of an interlocutor's conceptual structure; the mental representations formed about reality. The conceptual structure emerges from corporeal experience of the world. Thus, semantic cognition arises from the relations between our corporal experience, our social experience and language.

In linguistic structuralism, particularly in Saussure (1971)'s work where a sign has value only from its difference from other signs in a language system, interpretation depends not on the intrinsic meaning of words, but on their position within a network of differential relations. Likewise with Greimas's (1966) framework which sees semantic analysis as based on deep structures such as binary oppositions organizing narratives, values and norms. These underlying semiotic structures guide interpretation, often unconsciously. Meaning is not automatically given, but rather produced through oppositional dynamics such as life/death, active/passive, sacred/profane, etc. Therefore, interpretation is a mediating act between internal (often subjective) cognitive schemes and shared (broadly objective) semantic systems. Interpretation is the use of mental structures to read cultural configurations. As Barthes (1970) or Ricoeur (1986) have shown, it is never neutral. Rather, it is embedded in relations of power, ideologies and social positioning. This thinking appears in contemporary cognitive sciences, for example, in Fauconnier and Turner (2002) who argue that meaning emerges from 'conceptual blending:' mental spaces fused by the mind (subjective) to generate new signification via normed language contexts (objective).

In sum, interpretation is based on mental structures (conceptual schemes) and sociohistorical signification networks (semantic systems). Interpretation is therefore

always situated, personified and mediated between subjectivity and objectivity. Defining interpretation as a simple decoding operation is ignoring the cognitive and cultural depth that renders meaning both intelligible and dynamic. Recognizing the complexity of meaning is an epistemological position that demands the type of reflexive hermeneutic being proposed in this chapter.

Impact of Subjectivity on Validity and Reliability in Text-Based Research: Poststructuralism, Reader-Response Criticism, and Deconstruction

Poststructuralism rejects the idea of a unique, stable and objectively accessible meaning in texts. Reader-response criticism and deconstruction go even further. Thinkers in these fields assert that the reader plays as active a role as the author in constructing meaning. If so, researchers' validation or reproduction of results becomes problematic. As the reader of the research instrument and the reader of a researcher's results are as active as the researcher in producing specific research claims. That is, for thinkers operating in the stated fields, there is an impossibility to analytic neutrality, to positivists' definitions of reliability and validity. Indeed, in text-based research, found in social and human sciences, literature, history, linguistics etc., the notions of validity and reliability are called into question from the moment the subjectivity of the researcher, the reader or the interpretant is recognized as irreducible.

Poststructuralists like Foucault (1971) and Derrida (1967) are radically removed from classical epistemologies that ground validity in semantic stability or reliability in reproducibility. For them, text, any text, does not contain intrinsic, stable and objectifiable meaning. Derrida's (1967) notion of language is marked by a differential play in which meaning is never totally given: it is always deferred and produced *in* difference. Thus, every reading is a rewriting and any claim of the validity of a textual truth is impossible. His infamous statement, 'there is nothing outside the text' (p. 227) indicates that interpretation never emerges from a neutral outside. It is, for Derrida, always a situated subjectivity. Textual validity is no longer the verification of a contained meaning. It is the critical *pertinence* of a reading: its capacity to open new perspectives and to enable its reader to see differently. In turn, reliability no longer refers to repeatability. Rather, it is argumentative coherence and the reflexive consciousness of one's assumptions.

In reader-response approaches, there is again emphasis on the active role of the reader in meaning. Fish (1980), for example, states that 'signification of a text is never independent of its readers, but is constituted by the interpretative strategies they mobilize,' (p. 2). Similarly, Jauss (1978) argues that each reader deploys a horizon of expectation formed by contexts, norms, and reading habits. Therefore,

text is no simple product. It is society's production. It rallies social, ethical and esthetical values and contributes to transforming and perpetuating society as it is.

In qualitive text-based research, the standards of validity and reliability cannot be transposed directly from experimental sciences. To this end, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose an alternative paradigm. A "naturalistic" method in which they offer alternative notions aligned to customary interpretative paradigms: i) credibility is the qualitative equivalent of internal validity and based on the *plausibility* of interpretations in light of context and data; ii) transferability is the possibility to apply the results to other similar contexts; iii) confirmability is the transparency in interpretative choices and recognition of bias; and iv) reliability is the stability of the methodological *process*, and not the results. Thus, researchers' and participants' subjectivity are epistemic resources recognized, documented and framed by a rigorous reflexive posture (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

In text-based research, subjectivity is neither a default nor an obstacle, but a foundational component of the interpretative process. Deconstructionist, hermeneutic and poststructuralist frameworks offer a fecund rereading of the notions of validity and reliability. These redefine themselves as pertinence, argumentative coherence, reflexivity, and critical impact. In this context, the researcher is no longer a neutral observer, but a producer of meaning that is situated, responsible and conscious of interpretative frameworks.

Possibility of Objectivity in Text-Based Research: Participation, Reason, and Ethics

Simply put, a certain form of objectivity can be achieved through the conscious participation of the research subject in the interpretative process. This participation entails an ethical and reflexive effort that recognizes the inherent biases it seeks to either limit, control, or make explicit. Reason becomes a framework for such participation and a means of subordinating interpretations to a discursive, transparent and shareable logic. Indeed, in social and human sciences, researcher objectivity is a tension between critical reason which ensures scientific rigor, and of interpretative ethics which recognizes the plurality of worlds and the responsibility of the interpreter. To reconcile true knowledge based on rational criteria, with a reflexive consciousness of interpretative limits and the power effects embedded in scientifical speech, it is useful to consider the ethical and epistemological conditions under which a researcher may arrive at a form of objectivity. This form is not absolute neutrality: it is rigor, reflexivity and responsibility in the production of meaning.

This view of objectivity differs from the rationalist tradition inherited from Descartes and extended to positivism. Rationalism and positivism conceive reason as the foundation of scientific objectivity. Bachelard (1938), for instance, has the

researcher overcome 'epistemological obstacles' to rationally *construct* experience. Reflection on the direct observation of an empirical fact leads to abstraction and the mathematisation of physical phenomenon; and this enables avoidance of the biases inherent in human nature. Objectivity, in this framework, is understood as methodological distancing based on experimentation, verification, and formal logic. However, as Dilthey (1942) argued, there is still a hermeneutics of meaning: an interpretation of actions, discourses, and representations, that are themselves bearers of significations. Thus, the object of recognition is already and intrinsically charged with subjectivity.

In Haraway (1988) the so-called neutrality of science masks power relationships and the model of pure objectivity is one that has been imposed by dominant groups, historically white men without marginalised experiences. She therefore reconceives objectivity as 'situated knowledge:' no longer an absolute omniscient view but a partial perspective consciously aware of its own position. More usefully, Weber (1992) proposes an objectivity based not on axiological neutrality, but on methodological clarity, argumentative coherence and explicit recognition of presuppositions. Researchers make visible their theoretical choices and interpretative categories and rationally justify them. Similarly, Bourdieu (2006) describes a 'participant objectivation' where the researcher faces the object by living in or among the experiences which the researcher intends to understand. Rockwell (2011) proposes an attitude of 'emotional control and consideration of unconscious effects' in the subject-object relationship, especially in ethnographical experience. Therefore participation – a concept with a philosophical history extending to Plato wherein particulars (e.g., a circle) *participate* in universals (e.g., the form of circle), or imperfect material objects *participate* in perfect immaterial forms – remains the interaction between the immaterial subjective and the experienced or observed object in the world which, in the case of persons, would also have an immaterial aspect. (Hence the interaction becomes intersubjective).

In all research involving human subjects, researchers exercise a power of nomination and interpretation. They attribute meaning, select, hierarchize, reformulate, etc. This invests them with ethical responsibility, not only towards the persons involved, but also towards the meaning they contribute to. Thus, interpretation must engage in an ethics of recognition (Ricoeur, 1990), because recognizing the other as a subject, is to admit that all meaning is partial, situated and revisable. The researcher must construct a provisional meaning that is argued for and then opened to discussion. Objectivity takes the form of this type of dialogical commitment. It is respect of sources, methodological transparency and listening to others. Derrida (1990) adds to this ethical posture the notion of 'hermeneutical justice' according to which all interpretation must answer for its effects. Thus, objectivity becomes an ethical vigilance on the power to interpret and the consciousness of exclusions.

Objectivity, then, is not given. It is a Kantian regulator ideal that guides the researcher's practice but is never completely reached. It requires a double posture of methodological rationality and hermeneutical responsibility and as Bourdieu (2001) insists, it emerges from the necessity of epistemological reflexivity. Only then can knowledge claim legitimacy. Not as absolute truth, but as responsible and rigorous research of meaning within a plural interpretative world. Objectivity therefore becomes an ethical and critical path at the heart of research.

Signification as Ethical Reasoning and Participation: Cohered Characteristics

Signification (meaning), therefore, is not the product of passive reading. Signification is an act of ethical and reflexive participation in which researchers are not external to their objects but are actively implicated in its construction. The SOPHIC model (Subject-Object Participation in Hermeneutical Interpretation and Conceptualisation) illustrates this implication and is a framework for integrating rigor, transparency and responsibility into text-based research.

From this optic, researchers' signification is a shared experience situated within an intersubjective framework and guided by an ethical aim. It is not merely the correspondence between signs and objects but a dialogical process and ethical commitment to right interpretation. It is codified, decontextualized, and analysable in relation to its uses. Indeed, pragmatic philosophy (Peirce, Dewey), phenomenology and hermeneutics (Heidegger, Gadamer) and interactional language sciences (Austin, Searle) have redefined meaning as a relational event. Hence why Heidegger's (1986) notion of subjectivity as being-in-the-world emphasises external influences while also arguing that to understand the meaning of a phenomenon is to be involved in it through the shared world of Dasein. Rather than an abstraction, signification is an action embedded within a horizon of comprehension. Thus, it is fundamentally participative and constituted by an open chain of interpretations wherein a sign signifies a *communal process* of interpretation.

In Bakhtine's (1977) dialogism and Benveniste's, (1974) theories of enunciation, each act of language is addressed to someone and is therefore a form of responsibility. Signification becomes what is said, understood, received, *and* reformulated in a space of ethical negotiation; and ethical reasoning is the capacity to consider the other as a co-interpreter by assessing the word-meanings against interpretations in relation to the ethicality (rightness) of research claims. This consideration of the other follows Levinas' (1990) position that 'language is the establishment of a relation with alterity, not merely the transmission of information' (p. 202). Therefore, to signify is to respond to a context, a responsibility. Words engage positions and place value on researchers' assumptions about the other and knowledge.

In sum, then, the cohered characteristics of signification as ethical reasoning and participation are as follows:

Table 1. Characteristics of Signification

Characteristic	Explanation
Contextuality	All signification is situated, dependent on enunciative context and on relationships between subject and object (Bakhtine, 1977; Austin, 1962).
Intersubjectivity	Meaning is co-built, produced through interpretative interaction (Gadamer, 1996).
Dialogical Responsibility	Understanding is answering the other, opening-up to the other's world (Levinas, 1990).
Undecidability	Meaning is always in process, never totally closed (Derrida, 1967).
Ethicality	Every act of signification is a manner of being in the world, a posture towards the other (Levinas, 1967, Merton, 1942).

Together, these characteristics may be described as a signification grammatology and an analytical tool for research that facilitates evaluation of the logical coherence or methodological work; its openness to alterity, its reflexivity and its capacity to articulate significations in the face of ethical challenges. By replacing signification with dynamic participation and ethical reasoning, classical epistemologies have been subordinated to more relational, dialogical and situated conceptions. This transformation invites researchers to reinterrogate the foundations of their interpretative methods and to conceive signification and knowledge as a co-elaboration imbued with responsibility. In this way, they become levers for more reflexive, open and ethically grounded 'objective' practices.

METHODOLOGY: INSTANTIATION OF SOPHIC MODEL

This chapter is predicated on small-scale exploratory research into if subjectivity impacts on meaning in the ways the above literature indicates, and if so, how any identified impacts can be mitigated with a more participatory, reflexive, and therefore ethical approach to research design, implementation and discussion. It took the form of mixed methods research addressing matters from the contexts of both respondents and researchers. The first, with a quantitative study (n=61 usable responses) that aimed to discover something 'objective' about the problem investigated. The second, with a bibliometric keyword study that sought to gain some basic insight into how authors of journal articles (n=5 because of the specificity of the exclusion and inclusion criteria) on text-based research acknowledge subjectivity

and 'the other' in their interrogations of their interpretative foundations, signification (meaning) and knowledge.

The discussion here is guided by the SOPHIC model, depicted below as circularity because each aspect of the research design informs and impacts the other as follows:

Figure 1. Subject-Object Participation for Hermeneutical Interpretation and Conceptualization (SOPHIC)
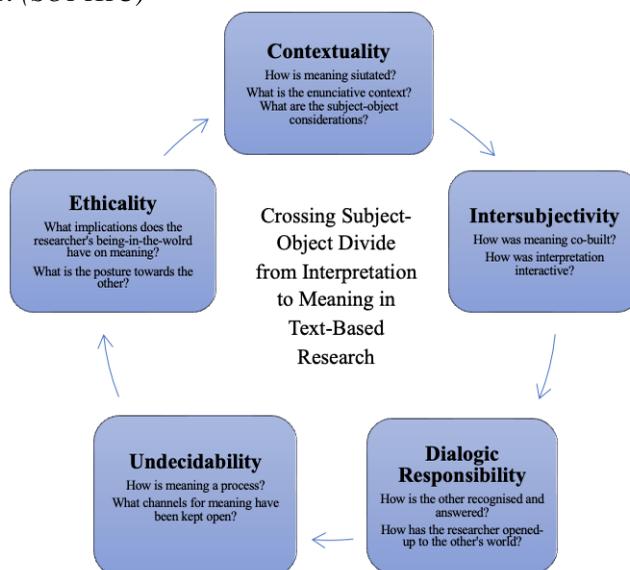
Contextuality

As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2004) and Clark (2019) have argued, mixed methods research enriches and reinforces interpretation as it allows the researcher to investigate the same phenomena from different angles. Citing Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), they confirm that the mixed-methods approach helps researchers to extend the breadth and depth of their investigation. This type of extension was the aim of the mixed methods used for this chapter: and appropriately so, as the mixed methods provided access into the objective sphere (of respondents to the quantitative survey) and the subjective (of respondents' conceptual and semantical differences in the survey based on subjectivity filters): while, with the instantiated exemplification of SOPHIC model, prompting reflections on:

■　　Signification (how meaning is situated)

- ■   Enunciative context (how the researchers' perspectival influence during the production of the research tools and collection of data is controlled)
- ■   Relevant subject-object considerations.

Signification is situated and grounded in a questionnaire survey and bibliometric keyword study. These are customary in business management and in social science research (Gougherty & Puentes, 2025). They are appropriate signification tools because their enunciative context and subject-object considerations are relevant. For example, a quantitative questionnaire survey was used to explore the 'objective' and real-world basis for the claims evaluated in the literature review about the inextricability of the subject from its object. To enable this, the questionnaire was designed to identify any link between words and the external influences on subjectivity highlighted by Fisher et al. (2016), Schiffer (2019), and Sharp (2020). Hence it is situated in the subject-object debate by design.

It was administered initially with a purposive sampling method and then with snowballing sampling. As the survey consisted of questions about specific words, concepts and phrases - 'sustainability,' 'fake news and disinformation,' 'freedom of speech,' 'globalisation,' 'poverty,' and 'children's rights,' - the researchers had to ensure that respondents were those likely to have utilised them in myriad and potentially complex contexts. Therefore, instead of placing the survey onto online platforms like Prolific or SurveyCircle where there would be more chance of reaching respondents with limited conceptual praxis, the researchers distributed the questionnaire among those actively involved with higher education institutions (students, professional staff, and academics) and in research, or professionally active across more than one country (business leaders and owners). They were asked to share the questionnaire with another person in their professional network. As Balter and Brunet (2012) note, used in the stated way, snowballing sampling offsets the selection bias associated with purposive sampling, and increases geographical breadth, giving access to those in otherwise 'hard to reach' areas. These considerations initiated an apropos subject-object participation.

Intersubjectivity

Here, the discussion pertains to how meaning was co-built, how it was produced through interpretative interaction. Aligning with Heidegger's (1986) concept of subjectivity as being-in-the-world, the first part of the survey asked about respondents' social location (gender, age, sexuality, occupation, education, neurodivergences), culture (books read, awareness of Western intellectual influences, media accessed), social contexts (family and friends), and beliefs (religion and politics), collectively

the "external influences" on subjectivity mentioned above. These were presented as multiple-choice questions to encourage faster response times.

Making room for and wishing to identify conceptual and semantical differences, the second part asked respondents to interpret well-known quotes from Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein who Carlson (2024) of *Academic Influence* ('a team of academics and data scientists working to provide an objective, non-gameable, influence-based ranking for the people, schools, and disciplinary programs that make up higher education') listed as among the most influential philosophers of all time. The quotes and philosophers used were interpretative choices but more important was for respondents to have (any) set of words to expound and so validate or not subject-object discourses on text meaning. Those used were chosen for their brevity (to limit response burden and time) and depth (to make room for variations in interpretations and so "open-up" the other). These aspects provide the conditions for the co-creation of meaning and deepen the enunciative context.

Dialogical Responsibility

The survey was administered online with a link to the questionnaire. To open-up both the researchers *and* the respondents to 'the other' (i.e., to encourage understanding of the issue being investigated) the survey's part 2 comprised semantic differential questions with a six-point rating scale (1 most closely matching respondent's understanding and 6 least closely matching respondent's understanding), i.e. with the neutral option removed so respondents make positive or negative decisions on their understanding of the options provided. As closed-ended semantic differential questions interpretative freedoms were reduced.

The options were the individual words, concepts and phrases, mentioned in 3.1. above. They appear in the United Nations' (2025) and the World Economic Forum's (2024) lists of key global issues. The definitions offered at each point in the scale were chosen from a range of popular and/or academic papers championing or critiquing the issues. While the definitions used were selected by the researchers so not without bias, the issues and definitions offered in the questionnaire all emerged from publications available in the global public domain and are appropriately mind-independent and with some 'objective' content. Indeed, drawing from published sources, both those supportive and critical, seems to align well with Ricoeur's (1990) notion of objectivity as dialogical commitment and Bourdieu's (2001) epistemological reflexivity as objectivating the researcher's analytical categories. Overall, the aim was to examine if and where agreement among respondents with similar external influences took place, or if any convergence between respondents was hopelessly arbitrary.

Processual Meaning

Within a mixed-methods approach, a (broadly) bibliometric keyword study was used to expand understanding of the topic from a researcher's perspective, as indeed the pursuit of meaning had to be opened to other researchers and with a view to value-checking the core argument of this chapter that the subject-object divide is insufficiently addressed by text-based researchers. As researchers work on complex issues with tight restrictions on word count and time, they often rely on readers to discern the nuance and implicitness of their arguments. To explicate their signification grammatology (e.g., SOPHIC-framework) may seem a low priority. But the argument in this chapter is that doing so is essential for the validity and axiology of text-based research. Thus, to verify that signification constitutes a potential axiological gap in text-based researchers' papers – and axiology in this context refers to the extent to which the researcher has achieved an objective exploration and interpretation in view of how participatory they have been in the research process, how reflexively they have prevented their own values and beliefs from affecting their interpretations; how and to what extent marginalised or disempowered voices have been considered; and how embedded the researcher has been in the discourses of their participants (to understand the role of power in participants' circumstances) - an 'objective' search of the ProQuest database (holding a variety of easily accessible high impact peer-reviewed articles on 'text-based research') took place. The process is depicted in the following PRISMA (adapted from Page et al., 2021).

Figure 2. Results of Bibliometric Search
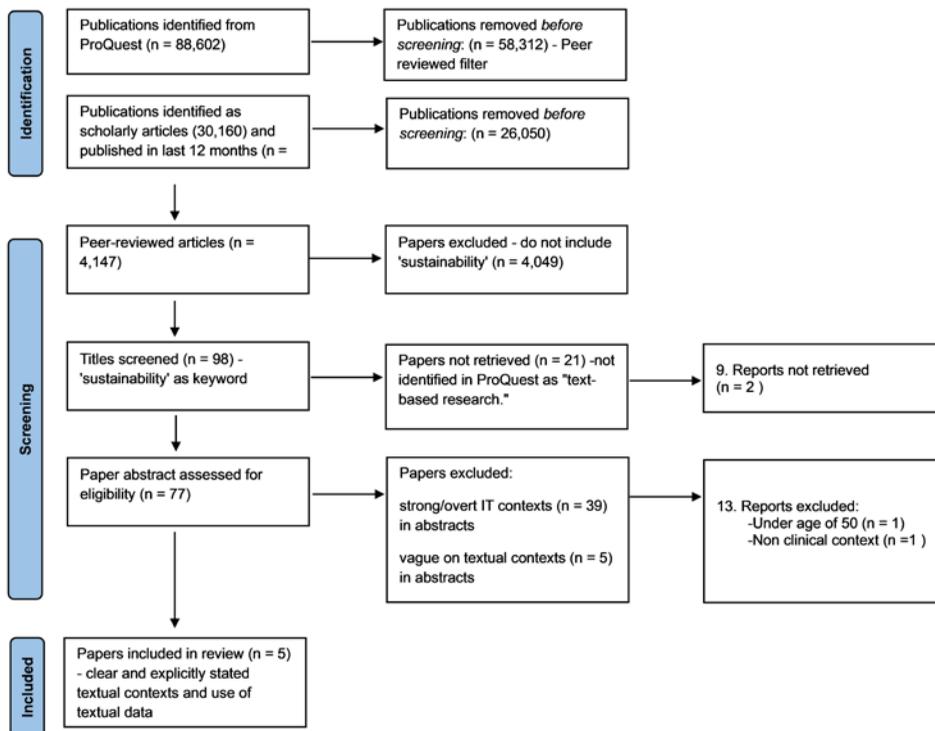
The specificity of the keyword 'sustainability' and of the 'text-based research' context, plus the requirement that this textual context be openly communicated within abstracts (so that readers are left without doubt over researchers' intention to interpret and derive meaning, understanding or insights, from printed/written words), explain the low number of included articles (see Table 2). This stated keyword limitation does not impede the value of the analysis as its aim is simply to offer a snapshot of the approaches used by the selected text-based researchers. Indeed, the long-standing argument against objectivity is that no matter how large a sample researchers may use, they will never have the complete picture; because they cannot realistically access every relevant individual or resource. Similarly, even if the following table included 30 or 200 papers, would still need to be an acknowledgement that the picture about text-based research drawn from them will be incomplete. In view of this fundamental limitation, the papers used for this chapter are as follows:

Table 2. Papers Emerging from Text-Based Research

Name of Article	Author/s and Date
1. Evaluation of China's ESG Policy Texts Based on the "Instrument-Theme-Subject" Framework.	Liu and Ma (2025)
2. ESG Reporting in the Digital Era: Unveiling Public Sentiment and Engagement on YouTube.	Erokhin (2025)
3. Enablers and Policy Framework for Construction Waste Minimization Under Circular Economy: Stakeholder Perspectives.	Shahid and Ali (2025)
4. Remote Worker Communication Technology Use Related to Role Clarity, Coworker Support, and Work Overload.	Shin et al. (2025)
5. Environmental Education Through Eco-Literacy: Integrating Sustainability into English Language Teaching.	Kazazoglu (2025)

To reiterate, these resources are merely *indicative* of the approach to meaning in text-based research. They are not representative of all text-based research. Therefore, in terms of this chapter's claims, meaning as processual is acknowledged.

Ethicality

The questionnaire was piloted and subsequently adapted. Survey participants responded anonymously, and their responses were treated confidentially and with gratitude. Similarly, with the articles, a respectful stance towards the authors was adopted. The aim was not to criticise their approach, but to highlight the utility of the SOPHIC model which has emerged from an analysis of subject-object debates.

For space reasons, a basic descriptive analysis was applied to the surveys with this focused on the majority and on outliers, and what their differences signify. Contrastingly, a keyword analysis was applied to the articles (i.e., characteristics of the SOPHIC-framework). Subjective interpretation was moderated by careful reflexivity regarding the reception of the pertinence of the SOPHIC as a coordinated grammar of signification.

Limitations

There remains some dependence on Eurocentric notions of ethics in relation to the applied hermeneutics. While survey participants were located in different parts of the world, neither research findings nor the SOPHIC-framework should be perceived as a one-size fits all response to the subject-object problem. On the contrary, the framework is proposed as a heuristic device that, when mobilised, guides researchers' reflexivity on method and interpretative lens to validate meaning claims. In short, even with the SOPHIC-framework cultural nuances and, given the

complexities of human subjectivity, other individual differences remain potential destabilisers – as indeed, researchers are always limited by publishers' word counts and readers' patience with article lengths. But with its application, the scope for meaning and the value of the text-based research are clearer.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, the findings from the mixed-methods research are presented and evaluated in relation to the three research questions posed in the chapter's introduction.

RQ1: How does subjectivity influence the interpretation and meaning of words and what impact could such influence have on text-based research claims?

The literature has already made a strong case for an inevitable variability of interpretation and meaning in text-based contexts but noted that meaning objectivity occurs through participation and ethical reasoning. The survey - exploratory, small-scale (usable n=61) and short-term - confirms this on two levels. First, that synergies of understanding are possible even when interpretative freedoms are encouraged and liberally given. Second, that meaning is indeed processual even for research participants.

In the first instance, where respondents were required to offer their own interpretations of brief quotes, their responses were varied but thematically consistent. For example, Kierkegaard's quote that 'life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards,' elicited many comments on how past affects future and the importance of reflecting on life experiences. But the reasons provided differed according to participants' lifeworld. Respondents demonstrating active hermeneutical participation (i.e., considering the ideas presented in the quote in terms of their life experiences, using their particular social contexts to understand and co-create meaning with the author) were those who found common ground with other respondents.

Therefore, the open questions were heuristic devices that confirmed that subjectivity influences and shapes meaning (González Rey, 2017). For example, a conservative atheist interpreted Kierkegaard as meaning that 'the choices we make and the actions we take continuously shape who we are and affect the course of our lives.' By contrast, a religious non-conformist interpreted him as, 'the driving force to life is projecting ourselves into the future — that is, to live with hope.' Both understood the connotation of 'future' in Kierkegaard's 'lived forwards' but the religious, in anticipated form, marks that future with hope.

This type of utilisation of subjectivity (what Derrida, 1967, would call a rewriting) was evident across all responses. A respondent with an international background read the Wittgensteinian quote that 'the limits of my language means the limits of my world,' as 'being able to speak more languages or having a wider vocabulary

means that we are more knowledgeable and wiser, and can both express as well as understand life much better;' presumably because of personal experience of muddling through an unfamiliar language in a new country. In this way Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) point that researchers' and participants' subjectivity are epistemic resources remains true and demands the reflexivity imbued in the SOPHIC-framework.

However, and in the second instance, where meaning prompts were provided, there was evident consistency and consonance. Indeed, the questionnaire gathered such rich data that explicating it would require another chapter and publication: hence why meaning is referred to as processual and incomplete. As the following chart shows respondents were mainly male (63%) and/or over 36 years of age (40% 36-45 with 40% being 46 years and over).

Figure 3. Respondents' Gender
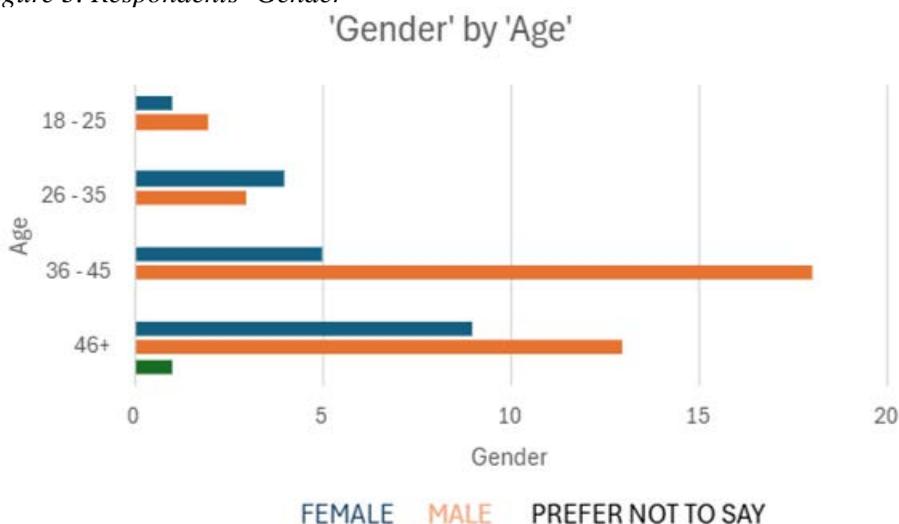
Most respondents were educated to postgraduate level, holding Masters' degrees (39%) or doctorates (42%) so it is reasonable to assume that some are active re-searchers. Therefore, their responses have the dual purpose of providing a snapshot of differences or consensus in meaning in general, and *among researchers leading their own investigations*. Regarding impediments to meaning, very few reported neu-rodivergent differences (5% equally with dyslexia or ADHD and 2% with Autism). Curiously, as the next chart shows, the majority considered themselves religious (74%) but without any or with 'other' specific political leanings (39%).

Figure 4. Respondents' Political Stances
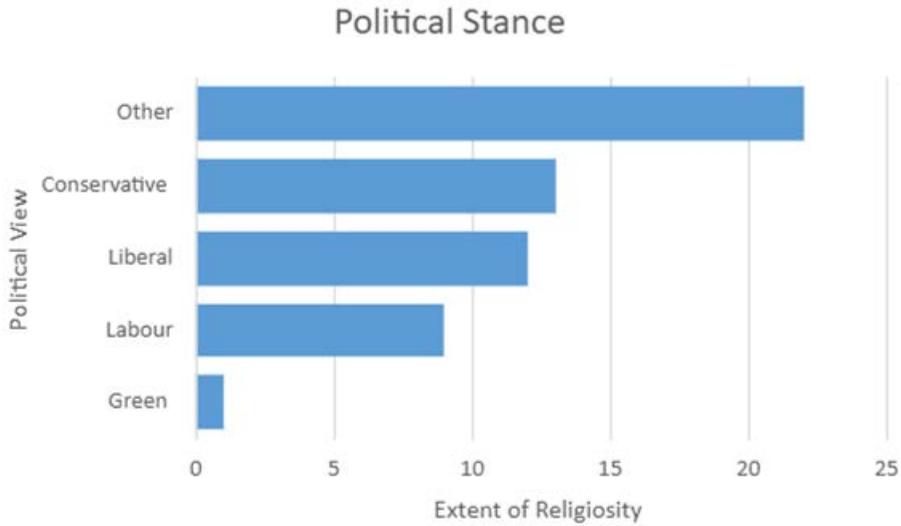
Indeed, the more religious respondents appeared, the least political they were - except for those identifying as conservative (23%) as they also self-identified as religious.

Many (24%), especially those connected to the UK, had cosmopolitan experiences, being born in one country and subsequently living and/or working in one or more other country including Vietnam, Hong Kong, Nepal, Switzerland, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands, Pakistan, Mauritius and Ivory Coast. However, as the diagram below shows, most participants had international backgrounds and/or were internationally located (i.e., not only based in the UK).

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Figure 5. International Respondents

Respondents' Countries

Nevertheless, when asked to name the "intellectual giant" of all time there was a curious congruence. Despite the explicit instruction that the named person could be from any culture or time, and contrary to Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledge, those offered were primarily white male philosophers (Plato, Augustine, Kant, Aristotle, Aquinas), scientists (Einstein, Newton, Hawking), writers (Dostoyevsky, Dante, Voltaire and Marcel), and De Vinci, the artist. Many of these correspond to the thinkers mentioned in the previous question where participants were asked to indicate if they had read the works of some key thinkers or were familiar with their names/works.

The correspondence highlights the reality of the phenomenon of suggestiveness, especially within this context of intellectual knowledge. This finding emphasises the importance of researchers' stance of reflexive epistemology (Stengers, 1997) especially when designing research instruments: an important, though not new, reminder. Interestingly, however, God, Jesus, and the Prophet Muhammed were mentioned by those with international backgrounds who self-identified as religious. The implication is that travelling and, contrary to populist notions, religion encourages freedom of thought. The latter instance is confirmed by the only two respondents (from UK and Ivory Coast/Burkina Faso) identifying as religious, who offered "left-field" names - Ava DuVernay (US filmmaker and the only female mentioned) and Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Burkinabé historian and politician).

Among UK respondents, where there was agreement on a question (and agreement was evident in two sets, representing 30% and 40% of UK respondents) that

agreement could follow through to other questions around 72% of the time (56% among the first group). Recall that for each question, respondents had six opportunities to align given words to their concept, so there were thirty-six opportunities for inconsistencies to be revealed. Therefore, the identified agreements are significant. More because they correspond with their reading and viewing material (e.g., news stories, gossip magazines, etc.), the frequency with which they were accessed, and agreement (60%) on their religiosity (agnostic), rather than with the respondents' education, gender, or familial contexts.

This finding ostensibly confirms Graham's (2018) insistence on the import of conceptual schemes on meaning and Johnson's (1987) on how experience forms those schemes and semantic systems. The finding also suggests uniformity in the thinking of (UK) agnostics. Surprisingly, there was no discernible consensus amongst those aged 18-25.

Those of international contexts in agreement, who identified as religious and had similar familial contexts, tended to have more diversity in their reading and viewing choices. Yet they generally agreed on the primary senses of the notions they were questioned on. This conformity to a concept's core or dictionary definition suggests that this group is literal or uncritical. But not always, as conceptual stabilisers differed across their cultures and/or the countries lived and/or worked in. By contrast, respondents from Burkina Faso were consistent on word senses, but their consistency did not always follow across from sense to sense, i.e. those agreeing on primary senses were not the same set agreeing on secondary or other senses.

Predictably, education is a stabiliser of meaning. For example, the question on sustainability asked respondents to indicate their agreement with the offered senses (taken from papers and general definitions on sustainability) by ordering their relevance 1 (most) to 6 (least). As the following diagram shows, doctorate holders agreed on a conception of sustainability that deviates from the literal, i.e., as 'eliminating poverty.' This agreement reduced with the lowering of education levels and thus confirms education as the meaning stabiliser, *in this particular instance*, especially insofar as those responding have access to the concepts.

Figure 6. Evidence of Stability

**Stability with 'Eliminating Global Poverty'**
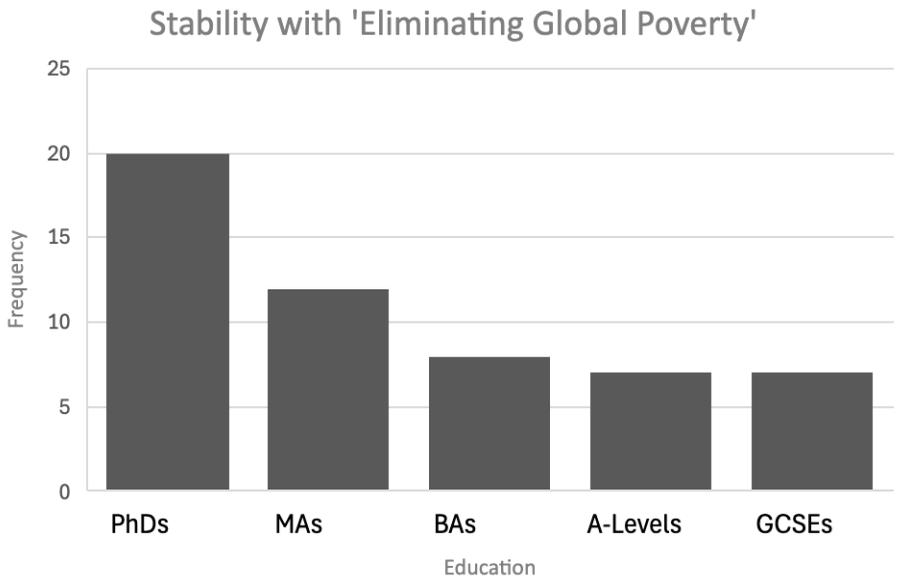
Those who agreed on the *primary and secondary* sense of 'sustainability' (53%) did not always converge on the primary senses of other concepts. They were from differing genders, religious and political views, and with ages ranging from 18 to over 46. However, the majority were educated to postgraduate level (88%) and as the chart below shows, there was commonality on their reading.

Figure 7. Reading Materials of Male Respondents

Preferred Reading Material: Males
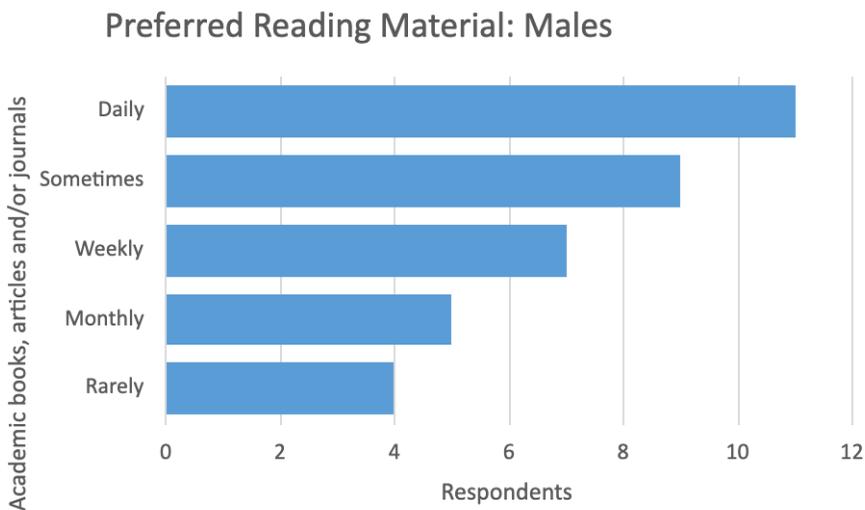
Among these avid readers, there is more agreement with the primary sense of 'globalisation' than with the more abstract 'poverty,' 'freedom of speech' or 'children's rights.' Therefore, again, reading and education explain the group's identified stability/instability, with higher levels of education implying that respondents hold complex conceptual schemes and have more awareness of academic notions. Indeed, the concepts prevalent within academia ('globalisation,' 'sustainability') stabilised meaning more than other characteristics.

By contrast, and as depicted in the chart below, females' daily reading materials are newspapers and articles (whereas the one respondent who opted out of identifying as male, female, or non-binary read 'sometimes'). This group were less likely to agree across all concepts and senses. They were also more diverse in age, friendship and familial relations, mixing with educated and uneducated, wealthy and not.

Figure 8. Reading Material of Female Respondents
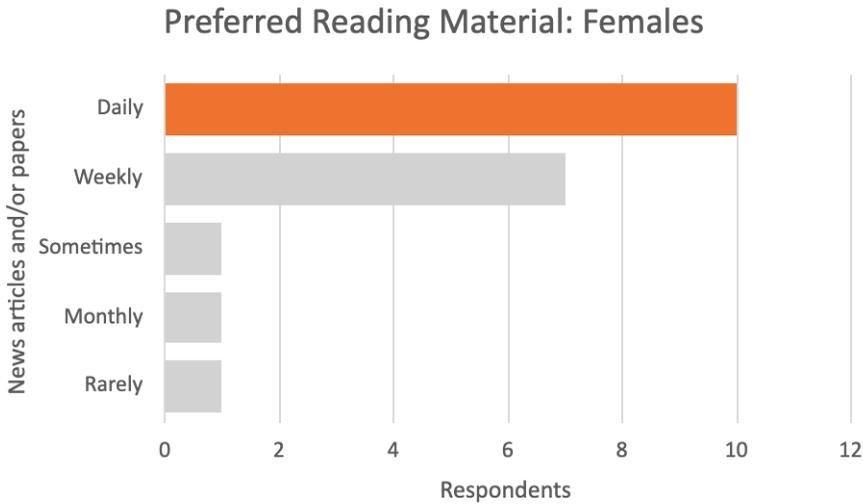
Despite the above examples of congruences, the disparities among respondents on the meaning of quite familiar terms cannot be overlooked. More so when the deeper senses (indicative of semantic systems) come into play. Crucially, this depth, and what would reveal more about a person's consciousness in relation to semantic processing (meaning-making) is what text-based researchers should be more interested in. For instance, the question 'how involved are you in sustainability efforts' could receive a 'very involved' response, however 19% defined sustainability as 'eliminating global poverty' whereas 28% defined it as 'maintained at a certain level.' Clearly, then 'very involved' is likely to be profoundly misleading. Likewise with the secondary sense of 'globalisation' with 18% defining globalisation as 'global prosperity' and 12% as 'exploitation by the West.'

Similarly, 28% put the *third* sense of 'freedom of speech' as 'truth' but another 28% had the third sense as 'hate filled rhetoric.' But they appeared *to agree* that it was necessary for democracy and for a collective search for knowledge and truth. This contradiction would be difficult to isolate in a standard questionnaire (or dialogic qualitative interview) asking if there should be freedom of speech as both groups would say yes; but by one set's conception that is yes also to hate filled rhetoric. So here there is evidence that the researcher working with words, especially those conceptually rooted, will without appropriate measures, elicit appearances of congruence and consistency, rather than objective reality as it is.

These findings, recurring across all questions, reiterates an understanding of research meaning as processual even for participants (and recalling that many of the participants in this study are likely to be researchers). Following Cruz et al (2012),

quantitative researchers operating with a concept of objectivity as neutrality, must demonstrate epistemological reflexivity more so than mixed-methods researchers who are likely to broaden their understanding of the issue they investigate, e.g., from a questionnaire through to exploratory semi-structured interviews. As reality does not easily give itself, the onus is on the researcher making claims about it, to identify where and how to engage with respondents in a less subjective sphere, e.g., through definition of terms for lexicon and lexicogrammatical stability and with a determination of a signification baseline.

RQ2: How do text-based researchers address the problem of subjectivity in meaning and interpretation in their methodologies?

This research question seeks an understanding of the attention given to the subject-object divide in text-based research. The papers (n=5) used for this analysis were identified through a relatively 'objective' and transparent approach that resulted in a small but, given space considerations, manageable sample. The table shows the key areas that the papers were analysed on. The analysis was thematic: and the themes were aligned to the categories offered earlier in section 2 as the cohered characteristics of signification. The codes (keywords), categories, and themes applied are as follows:

Table 3. Approach to Analysis of Text-Based Research Papers

Area	Key Questions	Codes	Categories (Signification Grammar)	Themes
A	Has the researcher addressed the subject-object divide regarding meaning and interpretation?	Subject-object divide Subjectivity Objectivity	**SOPHIC-1**	**Contextuality**
B	Is there context on how meaning is stabilised through the research process and how understanding and meaning is shared between the researcher and respondent?	Meaning stability Meaning discovery	**SOPHIC-2**	**Intersubjectivity**
C	Is the other's difference recognised and addressed for its effect on meaning stability and regarding axiology?	Meaning instability Meaning making	**SOPHIC-3**	**Dialogic Responsibility**
D	Is meaning stability demarcated and is meaning acknowledged as processual?	Processual meaning	**SOPHIC-4**	**Undecidability**
E	Is the researcher's being-in-the-text responsibly addressed, and in relation to any impacts on meaning stability? What is the overall value of the research given the researchers' approach and the ethical principles in play?	Researcher reflexivity Researcher co-construction	**SOPHIC-5**	**Ethicality**

The analysis focused on *only* the methodologies and methods outlined in the papers, with the rationale being that methodological sections or discussions hold, or should hold, justifications for the approach taken and indications, therefore, of the reliability, validity and overall value of the research. Admittedly, the above codes are not the only way to speak about the obfuscatory role that subjectivity has for meaning and knowledge in textual contexts. Therefore, the accompanying questions, categories and themes (all emerging from literature) facilitate a more considered and focused audit of the identified papers, especially with regards to if the subject-object issues pertinent to the meaning and interpretation of data have been explicitly acknowledged and an approach to them, legitimised. The outcome of this audit is summarised in the following table:

Table 4. Initial Findings from Papers

Area	1 Liu and Ma (2025)	2 Erokhin (2025)	3 Shahid and Ali (2025)	4 Shin et al. (2025)	5 Kazazoglu (2025)
A	States that 'qualitative-based analysis methods in policy research' do not have the same rigour as their own 'multidimensional' approach. No explicit mention of the stated codes/themes. Context (Environment, Society, Governance (ESG) in China) is provided but not its bearing on meaning and interpretation.	Acknowledges and reflects on seven biases (see below) but commentary accompanying this reflection makes no, or limited, implicit or overt references to the above codes or themes beyond the obvious outline of the research context; a must in any research paper. Context is set out clearly.	No reflection in this area. No clear or implied references to the stated codes or themes. Brief consideration of methodology and methods. Context is sufficiently outlined but without indications of bearing on meaning and interpretation.	No reflection on meaning. Full emphasis on how the online survey was approached and how analysed with only brief mention of the inclusion of open-ended questions thus confirming this as text-based. Context is clearly outlined but not in relation to meaning and interpretation.	Context is clearly set out but not in relation to meaning or interpretation.
B	Content analysis (for specific phenomena), Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) for semantic analysis, and social network analysis (for characteristics of social networks) for multidimensional, quantitative investigation into policy texts – described as rigorous and systematic. No appearance of the above codes or themes, i.e., these are not addressed/validated by the rigour set-out. Meaning as discovered is presented, it seems, as self-evident.	Digital tools and statistical methods in use for the transcription, extraction and analysis of the data. Also, use of OpenAI's GPT-4o-mini model which is described as natural language processing tool used to assess the text to include 'sentiment analysis' but no discourse on AI's inability to speak to human emotion, empathy, etc. distorting or affecting meaning and interpretation. Statistical analyses and correlations applied to 5060 individual comments described as 'raw text.'	Saunders' et al. (2019, cited in Shahid and Ali, 2025) research onion is relied on to communicate research coherence. Clear effort to ensure the right people are spoken to - even if identified through purposive and snowballing sampling.	Mention of safeguards put in place to ensure data validity (e.g. blocking multiple attempts from the same IP address, requiring a 90% MTurk approval rating, screening questions, and use of open questions and attention checks). Appears to take the world, reality and meaning as discoverable.	Uses a pre-test and post-test design; uses SPSS for quantitative data and puts emphasis on the systematicity of the analysis of the qualitative (textual) data.

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Table 4. Continued

Area	1 Liu and Ma (2025)	2 Erokhin (2025)	3 Shahid and Ali (2025)	4 Shin et al. (2025)	5 Kazazoglu (2025)
C	'The other' is implied through the mention and analysis of social networks. No appearance of the above codes or themes.	No mention of alterity or of meaning instability. Nonetheless, there is stated awareness that the OpenAI model relied on may overlook linguistic nuances, cultural references, humour and/or emotional cues. However, no consideration of how this possibility is mitigated against.	Despite taking an interpretivist and abductive approach, and utilising non-probabilistic sampling methods, biases are brushed aside and there is no clear consideration of meaning instability or meaning making.	No clear mention or acknowledgement of the relevant codes and themes.	No overt mention of the above codes or themes although very heavily text-based and highly dependent on conceptualisations and their interpretations. No discourse on assumptions about reality, knowledge, meaning, etc. or how differences impact on perceptions.
D	NVivo, inductive logic, and grounded theory in use and these are processual by nature. But that they are so, is not stated.	Limited evidence of the stated codes and themes in this domain.	Limited evidence of the stated codes and themes in this domain.	Limited evidence of the stated codes and themes in this domain.	Limited evidence of the stated codes and themes in this domain.
E	Researcher's being-in-the-text is not explained or justified in relation to ethics or posture towards the other. Mention of 'inductive logic' but this mention is brushed aside by an emphasis on rigor, systematicity, the LDA and NVivo applications, and the formulas applied.	Acknowledgement and reflection on a range of biases but none are attributed directly to the researcher or to the ethical principles guiding the analysis or posture towards the other. Mention of keyword and query limitations imply the researcher's bias (as the owner of the keywords and query term).	Limited (as in implied) if any acknowledgement of the researchers' being-in-the-text, or to the ethical principles guiding their analysis or posture towards the other.	Limited (as in implied) if any acknowledgement of the researchers' being-in-the-text, or to the ethical principles guiding their analysis or posture towards the other.	Limited (as in implied) if any acknowledgement of the researcher's being-in-the-text, or to the ethical principles guiding the analysis or posture towards the other.

The findings in the above table are not intended as a critique. Rather, they are an acknowledgement that while text-based research is vital to the exploration of reality and discovery of new knowledge, its complexities are underappreciated: and to the extent that textual data is treated in the same way as any other type of data. As shown above, more emphasis is put on the statistical methods and software used – e.g., NVivo is utilised in Liu and Ma's (2025) paper and Erokhin (2025) uses OpenAI and reflects on biases – and on the objectification of findings that

these tools allow. However, the authors of these papers overlook the inherent cultural, gender, and racial biases in AI-powered (and this can include NVivo) tools and the fact that they tend to be very much Western and/or Anglo-American and/or Eurocentric in their interpretations (UNESCO, 2024; Hardesty, 2018) because they are 'trained' by employees in these contexts. Nonetheless, these papers (1&2) do show some movement toward the other and like the remaining papers, there is clear effort to be open to participants' worlds and experiences. However, there is limited consideration of how/why that world or those experiences may be closed to the researchers because of their text-based approaches.

The possibility of the instability of their findings (because of the subject-object divide) is only insinuated by their mention of 'bias,' 'inductive logic,' 'interpretivists' etc. Indeed, there is little evidence in all texts that conceptual blending, participants' and researchers' differences, or following Saussure (1971), how the variances between individual participants' adherence to grammatical rule (*langue*) in formal contexts and their informal language use (*parole*), could restrict epistemological success and/or the validity of any claimed stability or objectivity. By contrast, there is strong evidence that all the authors of the above papers assume that reality and meaning are given.

These papers are peer-reviewed scholarly discussions and the omissions highlighted above have emerged from, and are recurrences in, the research practices of their respective fields. Their positivistic approaches to data analysis (even while seeing themselves working in an interpretivist paradigm) and the significance they place on methods of data analysis, give the impression of objectivity and therefore relevance. However, because of the textual contexts that they are rooted in, the analysed papers should give more space to the role that language plays in limiting (or granting) access to the reality that they want to reveal. Put simply, in view of the literature, when researchers work primarily or fundamentally in textuality, their methodologies must be legitimated by their capacities to overcome the subject-object divide.

RQ3: What signification grammatology could help researchers moderate (and explain) the influence of subjectivity on meaning and interpretation in their text-based research?

The review of literature recommended the elements collated and presented as the SOPHIC model. Empirical research findings reveal that meaning stability can occur amongst those of the same gender, political stance, religion, culture, education, etc., *and* that any identified stability is fragile. Additionally, the bibliometric study has shown that researchers working in textual contexts are not (in methodologies) sufficiently attentive to the subject-object divide and/or communicative about how its capacity to destabilise the validity and reliability of the research has been moderated. Together, these three layers of analysis confirm that having a structured

model of signification could prompt researchers working with text to incorporate subject-object participation into their research design and methodologies.

Accordingly, the SOPHIC-model is proposed as a useful tool for ensuring that subject-object participation is considered when designing, explaining and justifying text-based research. Earlier, this model was depicted as circular because it had a bearing on all parts of the research and was fluid, start to finish to start again. However, following the analyses above, it is clear that the model is better depicted as processual, with each aspect having its own axiological value determined *by the extent to which a baseline of conceptual scheme and semantic network among participants* and *researchers has been determined*. The type of rating approach employed for this chapter can be recommended (see section 3) for this, and text-based researchers are encouraged to establish and communicate conceptualisations and semantic networks by utilising the following:

- Pre-interview questionnaires before semi-structured interviews to establish participants' conceptual schemes and semantic networks, mapped and appended.
- Conceptual and semantic checks in questionnaire surveys and appended mapping document.
- Researchers' conceptions and semantic networks as relevant to their analysis of other textual materials (journals, quotes, feedback cards, etc.) mapped and appended.

This type of rationalisation of meaning as it applies to interpretation in research should facilitate data analyses produced through SPSS, NVivo and the like. As indicated above, these tools do not devalue the relevance of the SOPHIC framework because the framework is not focused on the tools used for data analysis. On the contrary, it is concerned with the explication and justification of methodological and *analytical choices*, especially how the said choices control and limit bias in interpretation. Ultimately, the SOPHIC-model will permit more responsible and authentic subject-object dialogue and thus promote signification. Text-based researchers putting together the written document about their research and its findings should consider the following practical steps:

Table 5. Practical Application of the SOPHIC-Model as Signification Grammatology

Step	Theme	Stage of Research Design and/or Section of Research Paper	Questions to Answer
1	Contextuality	Context and Introduction	What are the dimensions of the subject-object issue? What are researchers' assumptions or positions about the subject-object divide and how visible will they be in the research design? What is the role and extent of subject-object participation in the research and how can any participation conform meaning?
2	Intersubjectivity	Selection and design of research instruments Methodology	How is meaning stabilised in the text-based research and was meaning instability among participants or between participants and researchers identified and managed? What process was used to establish a baseline of meaning? What is the position on meaning in the research - is meaning co-created, processual, discovered? What interpretative controls were used in research instruments and in data collection?
3	Dialogic Responsibility	Selection of hermeneutic lens and data analysis tools Data Analysis	How are data analysis methods illustrative of dialogic responsibility and the extent of researcher reflexivity? What communicative significance is given to the various voices in the data to be presented? How are communicative significances addressed though any AI-powered data analysis software used, especially in relation to discernment of human aspects such as empathy, creativity, judgment, humour, collaboration; or cultural, gender or racial biases?
4	Undecidability	Findings	How stable and pertinent are findings and why are they so? How and why coherent?
5	Ethicality	Conclusions	In relation to researcher responsibility, ethical principles and approach to meaning (as co-created, processual or discovered), where in the research is value situated? How much of that value is predicated on the data obtained through text-based methods, tools, materials. Why does the identified value apply to the overall contribution of the research?

Evaluation of Findings

The above findings show that because text-based research is predicated on participants' concepts, there is a significant possibility that unrecognised or unac-knowledged interpretative differences among participants and between them and researchers devalue research claims; especially when insufficient attention has been given to the subject-object divide problematising signification and meaning stabil-ity in the methodology. Chapter findings confirm this as they show areas of both meaning agreement and disagreement and text-based researchers' inattentiveness to the subject-object divide when justifying their methodologies. By Lincoln and

Guba's (1985) naturalistic (imitative of real life) paradigm they are credible because they are internally coherent and based on the *plausibility* of interpretations. They are also reliable because of the stability of the methodological *process.* Following Derrida's notion of implication, because the discussion is pertinent, it is also valid. Moreover, its alignment with an international body of literature ensures its reliability. More because of the reflexive stance in its research design and its visible attempt to consider alterity, to listen to 'the other.'

CONCLUSION

The trajectory of this chapter has progressively justified its relevance. The "gap" between subject and object, long inherited from a positivist tradition, has proven to be less of an impassable abyss, more a dynamic space of negotiation where participation and ethical reasoning play a central role. The research findings show that the transition "from interpretation to meaning" cannot be achieved without acknowledging the subjectivity of all involved. The title of the chapter therefore finds its full legitimacy: this passage is not linear, but constitutes a crossing that demands a reflexive, critical and dialogical posture that is supported by the pragmatics of establishing a baseline meaning among and between researchers and research participants.

In this process, the proposed SOPHIC-framework is a decisive contribution. Its value resides in its capacity to articulate participation, subjectivity and an ethical dimension within a unified conceptual structure. By integrating hermeneutical, critical and practical dimensions, it offers an analytical grid that transcends the habitual divide between the social sciences and the humanities. Concretely, the model is relevant because it promotes not only the comprehension of interpretive processes, but also their transformation into actions or practical orientations. It makes visible the situated, contextual and dialogical character of knowledge production, and can thus be mobilized as follows:

- A training tool for novice text-based researchers.
- A methodological reference in the elaboration of doctoral theses.
- A theoretical framework for large-scale text-based projects.

The scope of the model nevertheless calls for a certain exigence in scientific production. Rather than limiting themselves to fragmentary contributions or short articles, it is important to invest in substantial research: e.g., doctoral theses that explore the robustness of the model in various empirical contexts, in-depth monographs, or articles published in peer-reviewed international journals that can foster sustained academic dialogue. Such contributions are necessary to consolidate the

external validity of the model and to show its fertility beyond a single disciplinary field.

However, its limitations must be recognized. The SOPHIC-framework, in its ambitions to integrate ethicality into hermeneutical dimensions, remains dependent on the cultural contexts in which it is applied. It does not offer a universal solution to the subject-object relationship but rather proposes a heuristic orientation. Moreover, the mobilisation of the model requires a high degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher; one that is not easy to cultivate or institutionalize. Lastly, the risk of interpretive circularity remains. While assumed subjectivity may strengthen the meaning produced, it may also fragilize the pretention to generalisable validity.

Nonetheless, overall, this chapter is strongly poietic. It does not merely describe or critique but seeks to "bring forth" new ways of thinking and practicing text-based research. Whereas other chapters focus on exposing the state of the art or refining theories, this one creates an unprecedented space at the intersection of interpretation, meaning and ethics. *Poiesis* manifests here as an openness: the elaboration of the SOPHIC-framework, the call for more exigent and interdisciplinary research practices, and the recognition of limits that stimulate rather than hinder reflection. Crossing the "great divide" between subject and object thus becomes a creative, generative enterprise, which invites reformulations to the role of the researcher and the very purpose of knowledge itself.

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