"Any time I came across something puzzling or problematic, I wrote about it, and that helped me to think about interviews theoretically"

Kathryn Roulston in conversation with Judith Eckert and Georgios Coussios[1]

Biographical Note

Kathryn Roulston is Professor in the Qualitative Research Program at the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy of the University of Georgia, Athens. In addition, she serves as head of the aforementioned department. Trained in music education and inspired by Carolyn Baker who proposed the ethnomethodological studies of interviews, Kathryn Roulston has become a leading voice in qualitative research methodology and interactional studies of interview talk. For her research, she uses, amongst others, ethnomethodological (EM) and conversation analytic (CA) approaches. Roulston has published extensively on qualitative methods. In 2010, she published her book *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice* whose reworked edition *Interviewing: A guide to theory and practice* appeared in 2022. Her edited volume *Interactional studies of qualitative research interviews* (Roulston 2019) has been one of the major works in the empirical study of qualitative interviews during the past years. Her edited volume on interviewing*, Quests for questioners: Inventive approaches to qualitative interviews* (Roulston 2023) adds to the repertoire of approaches to interviewing by examining other ways to theorize interviews and conduct them through additional elicitation strategies.

Start of Methodological Research on Interviewing

Judith Eckert (JE) and Georgios Coussios (GC): Thank you, Kathy, for taking the time to talk about interview research with us. This interview will be about your research biography and your research and perspective on interviewing. Perhaps we can start by going back to where it all began. You completed a Bachelor's and Master's degree in music education. We know from your publications that you conducted a qualitative interview study during your Master's program for which you used thematic analysis. Later on, you re-examined these interviews from an EM/CA perspective (Roulston 2001) which characterizes your work until today. Can you tell us what had happened back then and how your in-depth involvement with interviews came about? What fascinated you about qualitative interviews?

Kathryn Roulston (KR): Thank you for inviting me to talk about interviewing today. Thinking about my own biography as a researcher takes me back! I first conducted interviews in 1991 for my master's thesis. I recruited teachers and music advisors in two different provinces in Canada. I also had the opportunity to interview experts in the teaching of singing at an international conference that took place at the University of

Calgary that year. I had taken one course on research methods at that time, and did not have any training in qualitative interviewing. It is no surprise then that I used my everyday understandings of interviewing to conduct those interviews. The whole research process – including conducting literature reviews and learning from others through interviewing and observation fascinated me. This opened a new way for me to understand the world.

JE/GC: What fascinated you about the EM/CA approach? Which insights or experiences led you to favoring an interactional perspective on interviews?

KR: I began my doctoral studies in the mid-1990s and worked with Dr. Carolyn Baker who used ethnomethodology. It was she who introduced me to ethnomethodology and the work of Harvey Sacks. At that time, I did not know what to make of it. Reading Carolyn's work on ethnomethodological understandings of interviewing, and the work of Harvey Sacks in *Lectures on Conversation* which was published in 1992 led me to rethink a puzzling encounter during my master's thesis research. That led to the 2001 article which re-analyzed a sequence of interview interaction that I had analyzed thematically. This helped me understand some of the challenges in analyzing and representing interview data – that of attending to the researcher's work in the generation of data. I found Harvey Sacks' observations about everyday conversation and his explorations of the conversational resources we use to accomplish social actions fascinating. I still do.

JE/GC: Can you give us an example of the new insights that the EM/CA perspective helped you to gain concerning the challenges concerning data analysis and data representation?

KR: Taking an EM/CA perspective to examine interview transcripts enables the analyst to consider the "social actions" that are accomplished by speakers in interviews. For example, when people provide descriptions in response to questions ("answers") they might also be accomplishing other sorts of actions – for example, "praising", "complaining", "justifying", "resisting", "disagreeing" and so forth. These are all types of social actions that people accomplish as they answer questions.

JE/GC: If you were to introduce novices to Carolyn Baker's approach: How can one characterize it in a few sentences? What are analytical questions or heuristics that she recommended for studying interviews?

KR: Carolyn Baker, in her 2002 chapter in the *Handbook of interview research*, provides 5 keys to examine interviews ethnomethodologically. These are (1) to examine the interaction as a conversational sequence using the tools of conversation analysis; (2) treat data as accounts in which members of groups speak as members of specific populations to which they have been assigned by the researcher; (3) examine the membership categorization work used by speakers to do descriptions; (4) investigate the identities produced in talk and (5) examine the "versions of worlds" talked about by speakers (Baker 2001: 778).