The Application of Colaizzi’s Method in Conducting Research Across Two Language

Suryani S¹, Welch A², Cox L³

¹Department of Mental Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Padjajaran University, West Java, Indonesia
²Central Queensland University, Australia
³Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Abstract

Many nursing research has applied Colaizzi approach in analyzing data. However, only few studies reported how the method was implemented. The purpose of this article is to provide an alternative practical guidance for international student and new researcher from non english speaker in applying Colaizzi’s approach to analysis data. The researcher’s personal experience in implementing step by step of data analysis as suggested by Colaizzi along with the experience of maintaining rigour and trustworthiness is discussed. This paper will benefit the researcher from non english speaker background who eager to do phenomenological study in interpreting the data and reporting the research findings in english.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Colaizzi, Data Analysis, Non English Speaker

Introduction

Colaizzi’s method¹ is frequently utilized in phenomenological studies including nursing². The CHINAL database searched by this researcher in November 2012, yielded 111 research reports using Colaizzi’s method. However, only a few studies discussed how the phenomenological method was applied³. An article by Welch⁴ presented his journey into a phenomenological research process. The author discussed how he found the focus of his study, how he decided on phenomenology as a method for inquiry and how he applied the method. Sanders⁵ presented her personal experiences in applying Colaizzi’s approach. She discussed the application of Colaizzi’s seven steps of data analysis and how to present an auditable decision trail in her study. She also discussed the issues of rigour and trustworthiness. The two reports however did not present the application of Colaizzi’s method in conducting research across two language.

This study reported my experience in applying Colaizzi’s approach in analysing data from Indonesia language to english. In this paper I focus on the reasons for choosing Colaizzi’s phenomenological method, some difficulties faced during the application of the method and how to
address them. The aim of my study was to explore the lived world of Indonesians diagnosed with schizophrenia who experienced auditory hallucinations. Purposeful sampling was used for the recruitment of the participants who have undergone the experience and were willing to share their experiences. 13 participants were interviewed in depth to gain a rich data about the phenomenon of auditory hallucinations.

A brief overview about Husserlian phenomenology

The specific approach to phenomenological inquiry chosen for my study is that of transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology. The purpose of descriptive phenomenology is to gain an understanding of the subjective meaning of everyday lived experience in the participant’s language. There are two reasons why descriptive phenomenology is suited to my study. Firstly, descriptive phenomenological studies are concerned with the life-world of actual people who have undergone a specific experience such as auditory hallucinations. Secondly, because this is the first time this phenomenon has been researched in Indonesia, a descriptive methodology is most suitable.

Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology emerged out of his reflections on how objects and events appeared to consciousness. For Husserl in Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 283 “There is no consciousness without the world, nor is there a world without consciousness.” Consciousness determines the being of anything in the world. Husserl argued that all consciousness is intentional. Such a notion was derived from Brentano’s concept of intentionality and was developed further by Husserl. According to Husserl, in Giorgi, 1997, p. 238, intentionality is “an act of consciousness is always directed to an object that transcends it”. The object can be facts, concepts, dream-images to name a few. Objects suggest Langdridge have no meaning without people’s consciousness. All human actions therefore, will only have meaning if the actions come from intentionality of consciousness.

Husserl’s phenomenology involved the study of essences. As Cohen and Omery (1994, p 138) posit: “His [Husserl’s] eidetic, or descriptive phenomenology sought universal essences, their structure and relations.” The phenomenology of essences seeks insight into what is experienced. An essence is the truth or the essential meaning about something that can be captured by ‘going back to the things themselves’. In other words, in order to explicate the essence of an object, the object needs to be seen in its original or primordial form, without interpretation or prejudice from the individual who experiences it. In my study, I sought to explore the essence of auditory hallucinations.

Along with the concepts of consciousness, intentionality, and essences, intuiting and phenomenological reduction are also of central concern to Husserlian descriptive phenomenology. According to Streubert & Carpenter, 2007, p. 79, intuiting (Anschauung) is “an eidetic comprehension, or accurate interpretation of what is meant in the description of the phenomenon under investigation.” Intuiting is required for understanding phenomena (Spiegelberg, 1982). Through intuiting the researcher can make an accurate interpretation of the participant’s description of their experience.

Phenomenological reduction involves a return to original awareness regarding the phenomenon under investigation.
Engaging in the process of phenomenological reduction in which researcher bias is critically examined provides a clearing in which the lived world of participants can be explored in explicating the fundamental structure of the phenomenon under investigation. In the process of phenomenological reduction, firstly, the researcher must identify any preconceptions or prejudices about the phenomenon, and attempt to hold in awareness and put aside personal values and perceptions that have the potential to interfere with explicating the phenomenon.

Phenomenological reduction was employed in my analysis process in order to understand the experiences of the participants as they truly were. According to Husserl, phenomenological reduction or bracketing is important in preparation for deriving new knowledge. In order to achieve this, the researcher should be prepared to enter the world of the individual with an open mind, free of preconceptions. People can control their preconceptions or prejudices about something and Husserl insisted that with intensive work and commitment to the process, bracketing is possible.

My experience in applying Colaizzi’s method of analysis
Colaizzi’s method to analysis was applied in my study in exploring the phenomenon of auditory hallucinations as described by Indonesian diagnosed with schizophrenia. The synthesis of personal reflection and the use of a plurality of subjects are what underpin Colaizzi’s approach to inquiry (data collection and analysis). Such an approach is consistent with Husserlian thought, and the approach of my study. In considering the consistency of Husserlian phenomenological thought and Colaizzi’s work, Colaizzi’s approach to analysis was applied.

However, authors such as Crotty, Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom and Mcleod critique the work of Colaizzi. The main critique of Crotty and Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom to the work of Colaizzi was that the work of Colaizzi was not in line with Husserlian phenomenology because Colaizzi explored phenomena from the subjective experience of others who experience the phenomenon. According to Crotty, phenomenology is an exploration of a person’s experience by themself, not by others because “… no one can take that step ‘back to the thing themselves’ on our behalf...” This critique was countered by Giorgi who asked “ does one have to be schizophrenic to understand schizophrenia? if not, does phenomenology become irrelevant to this project?” To answer the question, Giorgi proposed that there was a difference between philosophical phenomenology and scientific phenomenology. As a philosophy, phenomenology seeks to understand the universal structure of phenomena as experienced by oneself while as a scientific approach, phenomenology aims to describe phenomena as experienced by others. He then argued that scientific phenomenology is the most suitable one for research because it is consistent with the scientific norm in the research process and is in line with the philosophy of phenomenology.

Colaizzi’s method of phenomenological inquiry comprises seven steps. McLeod criticised Colaizzi’s step by step approach in exploring a phenomenon. According to McLeod, it is not easy to apply the central concepts of Husserlian phenomenology by simply following the step by step procedure suggested by Colaizzi which he posits is not
essentially a linear process but a backward and forward movement between the various steps in the process of explicating the phenomenon being studied. Other authors such as Welch, Caelli, Corben, Giorgi, and Hycner argue that such an approach described by Colaizzi is an appropriate methodology for exploring phenomena as long as the researcher has a strong background concerning the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenological thought and the processes of phenomenological inquiry. The determination of using Colaizzi’s approach to data collection and analysis was based on my evaluation of competing arguments after which I considered Colaizzi’s approach appropriate for analyzing the phenomenon being studied. Although the steps are listed in a sequential manner, they can be used randomly to allow an ease and flexibility of analysis.

Details of my experience in applying these steps in exploring the phenomenon of auditory hallucinations as described by Indonesian diagnosed with schizophrenia are discussed below:

**Transcribing and translation of interviews**

Transcribing and translating the transcripts of interview were challenging tasks because these steps determine the trustworthiness of the results of the study. The interviews which were conducted in Indonesian were transcribed by my self. This process was an exacting and time consuming activity requiring strict attention to detail to ensure accuracy of transcription. Colaizzi suggests that the researcher should read each participant’s transcription several times to obtain a sense of the participant experience. In keeping with the suggestion of Colaizzi I read and re-read the transcripts while listening to the interview tapes. During this process I experienced moments of deep sadness. Such emotions were not only triggered by the participants’ stories but also from having a cousin with schizophrenia. At the completion of the transcription exercise I took time out to reflect on my response to both the interview and the transcription processes which made me realize that I would need to be vigilant when coming to the analysis process not to include ‘my story’ as part of the findings of the study.

After transcribing each interview in Indonesian, I sent the transcripts to a professional translator to be translated from Indonesian to English as suggested by Tsai et al. and Birbili. Achieving accuracy in translation is pivotal to the credibility of a study. Birbili supports such a stance in suggesting that “collecting data in one language and presenting the findings in another involves the researcher taking translation-related decisions that have a direct impact on the validity of the research and its report”. Error in translation has the potential to distort and misrepresent the actual experience of participants.

Therefore, according to Birbili those involved in the process of translation of material should be competent in both languages. In keeping with Birbili’s recommendation, I selected an Indonesian professional translator who had been an English teacher for 10 years. The translator often translates papers or proof reads theses for international students conducting studies in English.

At one level I was happy that I had access to a professional translator who was competent in both Indonesian and English, however, at another level I was apprehensive about capturing the meaning or intent of the participants when some Indonesian words had no English equivalent. As a nurse who completed my Master of Nursing degree in Australia and was now completing my doctoral studies in the same country, I have
become increasingly aware of such difficulties.

In order to ensure accuracy of translation, I reviewed the translated transcripts together with the translator, identifying words and sentences that did not have equivalent meanings in English and sifting through the different possible meanings to identify the most accurate translations. This approach proved effective in reducing the potential for misinterpretation and therefore, distortion of meaning. Such an approach is supported by Brislin and Yu, Lee, and Woo who suggest that the researcher should pay attention to the differences of grammatical and syntactical styles and cultural differences in word usage between the source language and the target language.

Two examples have been taken from participants 9 and 10 in my study as a demonstration of the process used in attempting to decipher the most accurate translation. In describing their feelings when experiencing auditory hallucinations participant 9 referred to the word “pusing” as in Saat itu saya pusing dan emosional, meaning “at the time, I was dizzy and so emotional”. The term was also used by participant 10 within a different sentence structure as follows: karena itu saya sering pusing jika memikirkannya, meaning “because of that I am often dizzy if I think about it”. The word pusing cannot be translated as dizzy because the term is contextually and culturally more than being physically “dizzy”. It also includes feelings of anger, uncertainty, being ignored, and confused. To solve this problem, the translator and me translated the word of pusing as dizzy. However, I noted this difficulty in my diary for future reference during the analysis of information.

When the translations of the transcripts were completed, I sent the transcripts to my supervisors, who are English or native speaker, for comment. When I received feedback from my supervisors, the translation of the transcript was returned to the professional translator to back translate the transcripts from English to Indonesian in order to determine the accuracy of the initial translation. The process of translation was repeated for all transcripts. Once this process had been completed, the transcripts were returned to the participants for validation.

All of the participants were invited to add or delete any statements that did not reflect their experience. Most of the participants agreed with their transcript, however some participants commented and added additional information about their experiences. For example, Participant 4 provided further information about the contradictory nature of the voices as he stated: Well... the voices instructed me to not only do good things but also bad things. The bad things like ... instructing me to take a shower in the ditch, to suicide and the good things like...instructed me to salat (a ritualistic prayer which is performed five times each day: at dawn (al-fajr), midday (al-zuhr), afternoon (al-'asr), sunset (al-maghrib) and night (al-'isha), help my father and not to hit my mum. Once finalisation of the transcripts was completed the process of extracting significant statements was commenced.

Extracting significant statements
Once the revised transcripts of interview were completed I read through each again to refresh my knowledge of their respective content after which I began to identify significant statements. This process involved identifying sentences and phrases that directly related to the phenomenon under investigation. The sentences and
phrases were then copied and pasted onto another page and sequentially numbered (1, 2, 3...). This process was repeated for all transcripts of interviews. During the process of identifying significant statement I found the need to go back to the transcript in Indonesian because some words were not have appropriate translation to english. The significant statements were proof read by a professional translator to ensure the statements linguistically reflected the participant’s expression. In addition, I provide note for some significant statement that contain some difficult words to be translated from Indonesia to english. Such an approach assisted me in getting in touch with the significant statements in the further step of analysis.

**Formulating meanings from significant statements**

In this step, I reviewed each of the participants’ significant statements and assigned meaning to each. This required to consider both the explicit and implicit meanings inherent in each statement. This involved two fundamental processes: intuiting (eidetic comprehension or accurate interpretation) and reflexivity (moving back and forward between the participants’ statements to the initial formulated meanings developed) until I was satisfied that the formulated meanings were an accurate reflection of the intended meanings of the participants. During this process the formulated meanings were reconfigured several times. On completion of the process of generating formulated meanings all significant statements and associated meanings were reviewed and validated by my supervisors.

As bracketing is an important aspect of descriptive phenomenological inquiry, strenuous attempts I made to adhere to this process to ensure validity and rigour of my research. The requirement to set aside my existing knowledge about the phenomenon along with my preconceptions and presuppositions was not an easy task as this was my first journey into the realm of phenomenological research. In principle the act of bracketing seemed to be an easy activity – all one has to do is acknowledge one’s biases and prejudices and simply put them aside and make sure they do not compromise the explication of the participants’ stories. When I looks back my level of naivety was embarrassing.

Throughout the study I found myself struggling with this whole notion of compartmentalizing my preconceived ideas and evolving thoughts as the study progressed. At times my thoughts were like small waves on the beach which cannot be contained but simply move across the sand with the rhythm of the tide. However, in order to stem the flow of introducing my pre-suppositional thoughts from intruding into the process of analysis, I periodically reminded myself that I had to put aside my understandings, preconceptions and presuppositions about auditory hallucinations whenever I engaged with the research material. For example, in the process of developing the formulating meanings, prior to reading the participant’s significant statements, I took time to consider my assumptions about the experience of auditory hallucinations based on my knowledge and experience as a mental health nurse and a cousin of a relative who lives with schizophrenia and the presence of auditory hallucinations. The assumptions I held at this time were that auditory hallucinations are intrusive and therefore, disturbing to the individual, that they are dangerous to the welfare of the person, and that their presence is a result of stress experienced by the individual. I recorded these assumptions in my research
diary for future reflection as the analysis process progressed. Such an approach assisted me in being cognisant of my assumptions and their potential to influence the process of analysis.

In a later review of the completed findings I took time to ensure that the explicated significant statements and formulated meanings could be accurately traced back to the participants’ transcripts of interview and were clearly representative of what the participants were describing as their experiences.

Throughout this process I often found myself struggling to find the appropriate English word that unambiguously reflected the participants’ experiences because there was no exact translation from Indonesian to English. In order to counter-balance this situation my principal supervisor first reviewed the English version of the transcripts of interview and the significant statements which I had already explicated from the participants’ stories. Then I met with my principal supervisor and thoroughly explored each significant statement as to its accuracy. This process involved my principal supervisor asking me to describe the meaning of each statement and to provide a context in which it was shared by participants.

Once agreement between my principal supervisor and I had been reached about the meaning of the statements, I was requested to revisit the transcripts and review the statements. This sometimes meant that words in the statements needed to be substituted or the sentence re-configured to capture what the participants were actually saying.

**Organizing the aggregate formalized meanings into theme clusters**

In this step, I carefully organised the formulated meanings into theme clusters. According to Colaizzi, the formulated meanings can be organized into groups of similar experience types and the theme clusters can be organised into emergent themes. The most important aspect in this step was to ensure that there was confluence between the formulated meanings and the theme clusters. This involved the researcher reviewing the sequence of the participants’ statements, formulated meanings and the identified theme clusters for consistency across each stage of the analysis process. Throughout this process my progress was monitored by my supervisors and he provided guidance when required.

This process of explicating common themes was also a challenge. Moving from the language of the participants to the language of abstract thought which is required in thematic analysis was extremely difficult as I attempted to ensure that the meaning conveyed in English was consistent with the meaning of the Indonesian participants. However, working in the world of two languages was also an enlightening experience providing significant insight into the difficulties involved when engaging in research across two or more languages.

**Writing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon**

According to Colaizzi, in writing an exhaustive description of a phenomenon, the researcher should integrate all related information of the phenomenon under study. In keeping with Colaizzi’s suggestion I revisited the formulated meanings and theme clusters to identify the dimensions of the participants’ experiences in the process of generating a comprehensive account of the experience of
auditory hallucinations. After completing this task I developed a comprehensive description of the phenomenon through aggregating the participants’ formulated meanings and theme clusters.

Identifying the fundamental structure
After achieving an exhaustive description, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was constructed. This process involved reviewing the exhaustive description to identify key elements or core concepts that were then transposed into a definition of the phenomenon that is reflective of the participants’ descriptions of their experience. In this instance the experience of auditory hallucinations.

Validating the exhaustive description with each participant
The exhaustive description was validated with each of the participants. This was achieved by providing the participants with the exhaustive description for comment and validation in their native language, Indonesian. Majority of the participants confirmed that the exhaustive description reflect their experience of auditory hallucinations.

Conclusion
From my experience in applying Colaizzi phenomenological method across two language, I found two important aspects that can be of value to future international students and novice researchers. The first is the importance of English competency and the second is mastery over the methodology.

English competency is a key for the success of international students undertaking doctoral studies in which they must work independently. Without English competency the student will not be able to write his/her thesis well, especially if his/her thesis is qualitative in nature and involves translation of participant transcripts.

Having an in-depth understanding of the methodology informing the study is essential before commencement of the actual inquiry. Failure to do so has the potential to compromise the credibility of the study. In my experience during the research journey, gaining a deep understanding of the methodology was very important in providing me with not only the appropriate philosophical disposition but the essential strategies for undertaking the study especially in the areas of data collection and data analysis.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank the Indonesia Directorate General of Higher Education that provided scholarship for my PhD study.

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**Corresponding Author**
Suryani Suryani
Department of Mental Health Nursing,
Faculty of Nursing, Padjajaran University
West Java, Indonesia

**Email:** suryani@unpad.ac.id