ABSTRACT

MARY-KATHERINE HEDRICK. How Private Research Firms Conceptualize Qualitative Linguistic Methodologies. (Under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Reaser.)

In the United States, the private market research industry now commonly employs a variety of qualitative methodologies to analyze verbal data. Few linguists in academia, however, have engaged with market researchers to understand how these commercial methods align with their own discursive approaches. As a result, there is currently little consensus in scholarly circles on how commercial researchers may differ in their approaches to linguistic methodologies. This paper addresses the communicative disconnect between the private market researchers and linguists in academia. Through a content analysis of market research firms’ websites, I outline how these firms conceptualize qualitative methods associated with linguistics and how they are subsequently communicated to potential clients. Three key themes emerged from the content analysis: positioning methods away from academia, the extension of ethnographic methods, and the narrative framing of verbal data. To assess how these trends are understood by their practitioners, follow-up interviews with three senior qualitative analysts were conducted.

Key words: Market research, linguistic methodology, qualitative methodology, ethnography of communication, brand positioning