ATLAS.ti 5.5: A Qualitative Data Analysis Tool

Part I: Terminology of ATLAS.ti

As you work with the program, these somewhat arbitrary terms take on greater meaning.

**Hermeneutic Unit (HU):**
This is the skeletal structure of your project. Hermeneutics is defined as the science of interpreting text empirically.

**Primary Documents (PDs):**
Your data – usually textual – but can also be video and images. Sometimes Atlas.ti refers to PDs as PTs (primary text); they are the same. PDs may include transcribed interviews, field notes, observations, etc. A PD is not the same as your actual data; it is called a PD once it is linked to your project.

**Quotation:**
These are the pieces of data (text, video, etc.), of any length, that are selected for analysis. Think of it as the text you might highlight on paper.

**Codes:**
Terms of analysis or interpretation you assign to your data (text). Think of codes as the notations you make in the margins of your documents.

**Objects:**
Items created in your HU (codes, memos, families, etc.).

**Memos:**
Developing ideas or notes as you analyze and code your data. Memos can be “free” or attached to specific PDs or codes. Some people use memos to keep a diary of their thoughts throughout the research process, eventually using it as a draft for a publication.

**Comments:**
Comments are similar to memos, but they really act more like screen notes. They cannot be exported from Atlas.ti like memos and other objects.

**Families:**
If you have many PDs, families can help you group or categorize them. For instance, a family could be all of your interviews or field notes.

**Networks:**
At the highest level of analysis and interpretation are networks. Here you can define conceptual relationships between your objects (codes, quotations, etc.). For instance, you may find a relationship between one code “motivation” is responsible for growth in “reading ability.”