Competence and Praxis: Sequential Analysis in German Sociology

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Abstract: In German social research nowadays most qualitative methodologies employ sequential analysis. This article explores the similarities and differences in conceptualising and practising this method. First, the working consensus, conceived as a shared set of methodological assumptions, is explicated. Second, with regard to three major paradigms of qualitative research in Germany— conversation analysis, objective hermeneutics, and hermeneutic sociology of knowledge—the different ways of doing sequential analysis are investigated to locate the points of departure from a working consensus. It is argued that differences arise from different case-perspectives and, relative to that, from different modes of introducing general knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is not specific for the analysed case, into the interpretation. An important notion to emerge from the comparison is the distinction between competence and praxis.

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1. Introduction

Despite the heterogeneity of qualitative methodologies that still prevails in German social research, recent years have seen the development of a common ground on the level of data analysis. It is now generally held that, concerning the interpretation of primary data (esp. interaction transcripts), most contemporary methodologies employ a "sequential analysis" (BOHNSACK, MAROTZKI & MEUSER 2003, p.147; HITZLER & HONER 1997, p.24). Indeed, for several researchers it is nowadays a matter of course to spend a considerable amount of time and energy analysing rather short parts of texts, following the sequentiality of the social practice displayed in them. And judging from practical experience, e.g., in research groups, conferences and workshops, there is a high degree of agreement on how to interpret the data and to develop or criticise hypotheses on the basis of this interpretation. This working consensus cuts across the various methodologies adhered to by the participants. Yet research experience also

shows that there are limits to it, and there are points where communication starts to become difficult. [1]

Although sequential analysis is regarded as a methodical device common to most methodologies, by now no attempt has been made to delineate the similarities and differences that exist across them. Comparisons are mostly confined to a theoretical level. The impact of differences in this respect on research practice and especially on the practice of sequential analysis remains an open question. In what follows I wish to focus on this question. I attempt, first, to describe the shared background-assumptions, explicit or implicit, of different types of sequential analyses. After outlining a simple conceptual frame of reference I will go into more detail and try to mark the differences in research practice to find out where the points of departure from this background are. For the sake of simplicity I will concentrate on three major paradigms that "fit" the criteria explicated in the first part: conversation analysis, objective hermeneutics, and hermeneutical sociology of knowledge. I will argue that the differences to be described arise from different "case-perspectives" on the social phenomena in question and, relative to that, from different modes of introducing general knowledge, i.e. knowledge not specific for the analysed case, into the interpretation. Finally I will take up and discuss a central notion that emerges in the comparison: the distinction between "competence" and "praxis". [2]

2. The Common Background

For many German social scientists it has become an important part of their work to scrutinise detailed interaction transcripts or interviews, following the course of interaction displayed in these texts. And they are not only, say, "privately" working on these data to arrive at hypotheses that ought to be tested in later "real", i.e. quantitative research, but ground their research basically on such data and analyses. Moreover, topics are sometimes not confined to what conventionally is conceived as micro-phenomena, but also extend to the meso- and macro-level of social research. What these scientists share is an attitude that such a micro-socio-logical analysis can yield insights of general sociological relevance. Of course, this attitude is not shared by everyone in the qualitative field. For some colleagues it still appears to be a bewildering and sometimes amusing endeavour. Thus the question arises as to what the background of this attitude consists in. I regard the common background as a shared set of assumptions and regulative maxims that eventually can serve as a kind of "currency" in discussions, i.e., you can refer to them, and it "counts". I will try, without making in claim to completeness, to outline some of these assumptions and maxims that seem to be of central importance.

- On a very general level sequential analysis implies that the locus of social structures is in interaction. This means that interaction is regarded as the place where social structures take shape and are reproduced or transformed. Social structures are not conceived as, in principle, unidentifiable forces that produce the regularities observed in "hard" statistical data. Rather, in order to have an impact on social life they should be identified on the level of interaction processes, and in order to get an adequate conception of them,

their role in these processes must be reconstructed. So the "hard data" are, in this conception, not statistical but interactional data.

- Furthermore, social structures are conceived as being essentially structures of meaning. Social research should, in the first place, take seriously the problem of understanding in interaction, and, henceforth, of interpretation on the side of the researchers.

- These structures of meaning are conceived to arise in the interplay of actions. Social research should consider this aspect and be a "reconstruction" (a term widely used in German qualitative methodology): The task is to "re-build" meaning structures following the sequential course of interactions. [3]

These general assumptions account for a specific micro-sociological endeavour:

- This means, first of all, focussing on single cases: before procedures of comparison or generalisation can take place the concrete interactions of concrete actors ought to be analysed.

- This entails a detailed analysis, a close look on the interactions. Meaning structures will usually not be identified at a glance.

- The points of reference of analyses are records of interactions, or "texts".

- Furthermore there is a preference for "natural data", i.e. records that allow for methodically controlled access to the factual interaction processes. Data are preferred in which the selective influence of the researcher is lowest, as is especially the case with detailed transcripts of audio- or video- recordings. Also of interest are data that can be regarded as the result of the social practice itself that is investigated (e.g. photographs in a family album, statute laws, or autobiographies). [4]

Perhaps more important than these general assumptions and orientations are some *regulative maxims*.[1] It is especially with reference to these maxims that you can judge a certain methical proceeding to be a sequential analysis or not.

- There is, first of all, the maxim that meaning structures should be discovered following the line of the actual interaction process. This means not only proceeding "line-by-line", to use a phrase well-known from grounded theory— i.e. following only the temporal structure of interactions—but to discover the way the actions and reactions are selectively "linked together".

- By means of this procedure you can arrive at a *cumulative* development of hypotheses on the interaction structure.

- In order to accomplish this task the data should not be processed beforehand (i.e. paraphrased, arranged, classified etc.).

- Then there is the maxim that the interpretation should be, to a large extent, an immanent interpretation. [5]

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1 Regulative maxims are not only expressions of an attitude or theoretical orientation, but function as a guideline, e.g. to deciding between competing interpretations.

Further maxims are connected with this one:

- First, that the data are not to be subsumed under preconceived theories about the interaction process considered.
- Second, there is emphasis on "artificial naivety" (OEVERMANN 1993a, pp.126f.) or "artificial stupidity" (HITZLER & HONER 1997b, p.27), which means that knowledge about the context in which the interaction takes place should, at least in the initial phases of the interpretation, not be introduced into the interpretation.
- Third, that interaction sequences should not be interpreted with recourse to sequences occurring later in the text.
- Finally, that no part of the data base should be considered as accidental and, in this sense, irrelevant. [6]

With regard to these assumptions and regulative maxims of sequential analysis, the promises of this method for qualitative methodology are obvious: it allows for a grounded, cumulative, and intersubjectively testable development of hypotheses on social structures. And it is, perhaps, these promises that account for the method becoming widespread in German qualitative social research. But despite this common background, as mentioned, cooperation between researchers adhering to different methodological paradigms is limited. The reasons are difficult to assess, and so I want to go into more detail and attempt to explicate how sequential analysis is actually done according to three leading paradigms of qualitative methodology in social research in Germany. [7]

3. What is a "Case"?

In order to structure a comparison like this it is useful to have a conceptual frame of reference. As mentioned above, a prominent aspect of the common background is that it implies *case analyses*. Dealing with "cases" is, of course, not confined to sequential analyses or qualitative social research. In fact, it is a feature that is characteristic of the social sciences in general, and, over and above, for those professions that have a clinical focus, such as the medical and legal professions. It is because of this general relevance of the concept of the "case" that it may be useful to highlight some formal aspects of it in order to compare specific methodological paradigms. Our purely heuristic purposes here permit us to sidestep a discussion of the relevant literature[2] and to cut this part of the presentation short by simply offering a definition. That goes as follows: speaking of a "case" involves a relation between three elements: "actor", "text", and "theory". [8]

In methodological discourse the first of these elements usually stands in the foreground, so much so that for some colleagues it is identical with the concept of "case" itself: a case, for them, *is* a person. This is inaccurate. First, we have to

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2   It should be noted that publications on the concept of "case" itself are rare (cf. RAGIN & BECKER 1992; FLICK 2000, p.180). In German methodological literature questions of "case *reconstruction*" usually stand in the foreground (KRAIMER 2000). In this context it is taken for granted what a "case" is.

generalise the concept so that not only individual but also collective actors (e.g. organisations or nation states) and interactions (as encounters) are included. Second, it is not the actors themselves that make for cases. Instructive in this respect is the irritation you may feel reading in case studies sentences like "at the age of 25 the case married the daughter of a salesman" or "between the age of 19 and 24 the case studied law at a famous law school". For, of course, cases do not marry, study, eat or sleep; only people do that and people as such are not "cases", not even for the medical profession. So some things must be added in order to speak of cases. [9]

One is that it is not the actor as such that is under consideration, but—generally speaking—the practices of that actor. In order to perform a methodically controlled interpretation of those practices we need "data", i.e. things that can be regarded as "objectivisations" of those practices. This is what the second element "text" refers to. "Text", in this sense, does not only include written language, e.g., in the form of transcripts of audio-recorded interactions or "produced" text such as statute laws or autobiographies, but also video-recordings, photographs in a family-album, or artefacts like paintings, buildings, technical devices, etc. In short, it includes everything that can be regarded as the outcome of some social practice. Just as for the "actor" element, some colleagues regard the "text" as the distinctive feature of the concept of "case", claiming that a case *is* a text. But, except for some neo-structuralist methodology, the text does not stand for itself and is of interest only in relation to the practice of an actor we find recorded in it. [10]

There is still something missing if we wish to speak of a case. We are not only interested in the individuality of the actor's practices represented in texts but in something general that both elements "stand for". In fact, we need something general in order to determine the individuality of a case. A case must, in the end, be a case of something, say, a "case of X", and this "X" is what the term "theory" refers to. This term, again, is broadly defined: it means the assertion of some general correlation, such as that between concepts, types, or theories (provisional or elaborated), and—on the object-level—the social rules and structures they refer to. The task for social scientists, then, is to render this relation between actor, text, and theory for each case plausible, that is, to make sure that it indeed can be inferred from this specific text (or set of texts) that the practice of this specific actor can be said to be a case of this specific theory. What complicates this task is that, at least when you are engaged in "grounded" or "material" theory-building, as all the methodological paradigms considered here are, the relation between the three elements is a dynamic relation. You always start with a more or less vague idea of what the "X" could be like, but the definite conception of it will be the result of the case analyses. To put it another way: our task in the interpretation process is to give the actor's recorded practices the greatest chance to reformulate conceptions of what they stand for. [11]

4. Three Types of Sequential Analysis

The following presentations of how sequential analysis is practised according to conversation analysis, objective hermeneutics, and hermeneutic sociology of knowledge, and how these different methodical operations relate to different methodological backgrounds, do not claim to be introductions to these paradigms of social research. In the present context the intention is, rather, to give an overview of the basic similarities and differences. This must be emphasised with respect to the short examples of case-analyses that will be given, too. They are not summaries of the detailed interpretations to which they refer, but function to highlight their basic features. [12]

4.1 Conversation analysis

It is appropriate to begin with conversation analysis (CA) because it is probably the most "international" of the paradigms to be compared[3] (and therefore the most widely known), and because it is the methodology that first introduced several of the maxims and assumptions that now belong to the common background of sequential analysis. The famous works of conversation analysts by Harvey SACKS, Emanuel SCHEGLOFF and others on, e.g., the openings and closings of conversation, or turn-taking procedures, showed that everyday-communication is a minutely structured enterprise, in which actors are employing and modifying rules locally; rules that the actors themselves would often not have the slightest idea that they were employing. CA was thus elaborating and making methodically accessible the idea of sequential order, which means that each "turn" in interaction implies a selection between possible alternatives and opens itself a space of possible expected reactions. Social structure, then, arises in the "linking-together" of the subsequent turns in interaction. Most important, the meaning of each turn can now be seen to be constituted by its position within the sequence. [13]

Originally, CA research was primarily about how everyday-communication "works". It was about the general and formal structures of communication, and about the principles to which the actors are oriented. With regard to the case-elements, one can say that the focus here is on the "X"- or "theory"-element, conceived as a case-unspecific pattern of communication generated by the participants in conversation. Comparatively little attention was paid to the concrete persons who are interacting, to the specific thematical context, and to the specific relationship of the actors. The praxis as displayed in the data, rather, was restricted to dealing with basic communicative problems by way of employing a communicative competence the actors have as members of a society or milieu. So, the single case is, in this sense, considered from the start as exemplary for a general correlation. Nevertheless, CA is aware of the problem of explicating for each case whether it actually represents a general pattern or a specific deviance or modification. The relevance of "deviant case analyses" can be seen in this context. [14]

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3   For this reason I will not only refer to German-speaking authors.

Again, what CA is primarily about is showing that the processes by which the actors make interaction an ordered and intelligible thing are phenomena of communicative competence. But conversation analyses are not confined to such basic problems of everyday communication. In German sociology in recent years much attention has been paid to—if I might say so—more "sociological" subjects. Just to mention two major fields of research: First, emphasis has been laid on the analysis of so-called "communicative genres", such as joke, sermon, or gossip (BERGMANN 1987, pp.35ff.; KNOBLAUCH & LUCKMANN 2000, pp.538ff.). These genres can be understood as serving to solve communicative problems on a societal level, e.g. in endowing society's members with communicative forms of reconstructing social events. A second field of research is communication in institutional settings, especially legal and other forms of conflict management (WOLFF & MÜLLER 1995, 1997). Extension also took place with respect to data: It is not only recordings and transcripts of "natural" interactions (BERGMANN 1985), i.e. technical recordings of interactions taking place not influenced by the observer, that are of interest, but also "produced" texts such as files or expert opinions, and, at least for some researchers, even interviews of a specific kind are analysed (KNAUTH & WOLFF 1991; WOLFF 1995). [15]

It should be mentioned that the reference to specific action problems, connected with specific contexts, that relate to more than merely everyday problems of communication does not lead to an altered case-perspective. The task is still to reconstruct general patterns of communication or competence. The analysis aims to reconstruct the actions of professionals in a certain setting as expressions of their competence. But this inclusion of specific practical problems has an impact on method at which I will only hint here. If these practical problems to which institutional settings refer are conceived as "pre-structuring" interaction, sequential analysis cannot proceed in being, in this sense, "context-free". Although conversation analysts rightly insist that the relevance of context should be identified on the level of interaction, as far as I know they do not claim to arrive at a concept of the relevant practical problems by immanent analysis only. So the questions are, how else you arrive at it in a methodically controlled manner and how you introduce it in sequential analysis? This are still open questions for CA. In empirical studies there is, it seems, a tendency towards a somewhat "cautious" introduction of assumptions in this respect, e.g. by way of sketching the historical development of the institutional setting or recursing on legal requirements. But this cautiousness has as a consequence that you can hardly relate to the concepts in detailed analyses of interactions. The concrete actions cannot be regarded as one possible way of coping with the requirements of the institutional setting, but tend to be *per se* an expression of the way the actors act as, e.g., members of a profession. A second methical problem arises from a certain lack of generality. With this cautiousness you are, in a way, "fixed" in the current institutional arrangements. These institutions themselves cannot be regarded as one possible way, among others, of coping with the practical problem. I will come to this point again when describing objective hermeneutics. [16]

What are, now, the basic features of the sequential-analytic proceeding? How does CA methodically arrive at the general patterns of communication? Because

in the CA literature methodological reflections are rare and not in every respect unanimous, this is, at least for "outsiders", not easy to assess. I think it is crucial for the understanding of the CA way of doing sequential analysis to see that it is, first of all, an *analysis of sequences*. This is not a tautology. "Sequence" here means more than just a part of a chain of actions and reactions, more than just a part of a transcript ranging from line A to line Z. Rather, it refers to a segment that has in itself a—if I might use the German term—"Gestalt". A sequence here is a meaningful, relatively "isolated" unit of an interaction. This can be, e.g., an opening, an introduction, a question/answer turn, or a hearing of witnesses in judicial proceedings. So, given a certain set of data, the first step is to identify sequences of this kind that are of interest relative to the research questions pursued (TEN HAVE 1999, pp.102ff.). [17]

Once these are identified CA proceeds, it seems, by going through the material in several "rounds" (TEN HAVE 1999, p.104). In these successive "rounds" different aspects are concerned, ranging from linguistic descriptions, descriptions of turn-taking arrangements, repair organisations, organisations of opening and closing of the sequence, to more "contextual" aspects (DEPPERMANN 1999, p.53). What is most important is to arrive at a reconstruction of what is called the "inner context" of the sequence. And this is done, basically, in three steps. The first is to reconstruct the selectivity of each utterance by answering such questions as: How does it relate to preceding turns? What implications were made by it? What possible options were not chosen? The second step is to reconstruct the future expectations connected with the utterance, i.e. the action space opened by the utterance. The question here is: What are the possible options for the speaker to continue or the recipient to react? The third step is to reconstruct the interactional consequences, i.e. the selective way the recipient reacts to the utterance. By sequentially proceeding with these operations CA reconstructs the way the turns are linked together that is characteristic of the communicative pattern in question. [18]

The way this analysis in "rounds" is done depends on the data and the questions pursued. But there is, in my point of view, something common to conversation analyses that is important in the present comparative context. What I am referring to is a certain tendency to focus more on the overall structure of the pattern than on the properties of the single (focal) utterance. This can be related to the attention on more formal aspects of a sequence ("Gestalt"). Yet, the preference for the "diachronic" interpretation compared to the "synchronic" interpretation, has another source. It concerns the conception of the role rule-competence plays in interaction and, in turn, in interpretation. What is its methodological status? To what extent is the rule-competence of the researchers—in this sense a second type of case-unspecific knowledge—used as a resource for interpretation? That it is used seems to go unquestioned. How else as with reference to a competence-based intuitive judgement could a relatively reliable selection of a relevant sequence take place? And how else would it be possible to explicate, e.g., expectations connected with an utterance? [19]

But how and to what extent it is used depends, I think, to the extent the individual CA researcher subscribes to a "constructivist" concept associated especially with

ethnomethodology. I mean the assumption that meaning structures are, so to speak, "completely" constituted by the actors participating in interaction. They are, as such, a negotiable affair. As a consequence, the actors are conceived to be able to dissociate themselves from the rules employed. The rules are only devices or tools that can be used one way or another. To put it in a different way: with this assumption complete authorship for meaning structures is conceded to the participants in interaction. The influence on sequential analysis is indicated by the tendency of the researchers to speak of "rules", "rights" and "obligations"[4] or not, and to rely more on "objective" properties of a focal utterance or on the recipient's reactions to the utterance to reconstruct its meaning.[5] Put as a hypothesis, this constructivist idea may account for a further "cautiousness": cautiousness in recursing to rule-knowledge, to communicative competence shared by actors and researchers. In this respect, objective hermeneutics (OH), to which I will turn now, takes a different stance. [20]

4.2 Objective hermeneutics

Ulrich OEVERMANN and colleagues developed this methodology, which in the context of qualitative methodologies has a somewhat provocative name, some 25 years ago. It originally grew out of research on an interactive conception of socialisation (OEVERMANN, ALLERT, KONAU & KRAMBECK 1979). Over the years it was further developed and the fields of research extended to cover almost the whole range of sociological topics: family, law, religion, professions, organisations, art, etc. (cf. WERNET 2000, p.97) In fact, OH explicitly claims to be a general paradigm for social research, i.e. a methodology in principle suitable for all fields of research, research questions and types of data. The "core" of OH is its sequential analysis. Although it, just like CA, considers the transmission of methodical knowledge primarily as a guided learning-by-doing ("Kunstlehre"), it does not in the same way refrain from outlining general steps and maxims of methodical proceeding (OEVERMANN 1981, 1993b, 1999, 2000; WERNET 2000). Perhaps this quality contributes to its current prominence in German qualitative research. Over the years more and more researchers have claimed to be, at least, "oriented to" using OH. [21]

Just like CA, OH regards meaning structures as the outcome of interaction, but it distinguishes between different planes of meaning in interaction. Considering a certain utterance there is, first, the meaning it has irrespective of the specific context of its production, second, the meaning it has with regard to that context, i.e. the meaning it has within that specific chain of interactions, and third, the meaning it has for the actor himself (MAIWALD 1999). The first two planes are of crucial importance for sequential analysis, the relevance of the latter depends more on the topics pursued (e.g. biographical research). The idea leading to this

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4   This is, e.g., quite characteristic for Harvey SACKS' "Lectures" (SACKS 1996).

5   SCHEGLOFF (1996, p.173) refers to this problem in an instructive note in which he points out "... the misunderstanding embodied in some 'interpretivist' and 'constructionist' treatments, according to which a recipient's understanding of some utterance is definitive of its import and the utterance itself has no 'objective' import. This view (and its attribution to conversation analysis) is mistaken on many counts, not least of which is its total subversion of the possibility of analytically specifiable misunderstanding ...".

differentiation is—from a structuralist point of view—that there are general meaning structures that analytically precede each concrete interaction. Interacting happens by selectively relating to these "objectively" given meaning structures. So we have here a conception that does not concede complete authorship of meaning structures to the participants in interaction. In this conception, what is "negotiable" is the sequentially developing selectivity characteristic of an interaction structure, and not, in this sense, the preceding meaning structures to which this selectivity relates. This relates to their status of being constitutive rules.[6] [22]

To put it more generally: in order to reconstruct the sequential structure of interaction as a "case-structure" analysis should take into account two parameters (OEVERMANN 1991, pp.283f.; 2000, pp.64f.). "Parameter I" encompasses all the meaning-generating rules that for each position within a sequence open a certain action space. Most important are phonetic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic rules of which the tacit knowledge is acquired in sociali-sation. This knowledge or rule-competence is conceived of as shared by society's members. It operates in practice/interaction, and it is used in the process of sequential analyses. It thus can be said to bridge the gap between actor and researcher. "Parameter II" refers to the selectivity of the actor's decisions that at each sequential position fill the opened action space. The actors are not necessarily aware of making these decisions—as is usually the case in situations of crisis—but to a large extent they take place unnoticed in speaking and interacting. It is further assumed that the way the actors act selectively is not contingent. Rather, it follows a specific, reconstructable pattern that can be conceived as a generative structure. Further, this structure is not a result of a purely individual activity, say, an "invention" of the actors. In contrast, it refers to a whole set of dispositions (e.g., class habitus, societal norms, values) that are, in a sense, "melted" in the actors' decisions. With regard to the reproduction of the selective pattern OH speaks of "law of the case-structure" ("Fallstrukturgesetzlichkeit"). This does not mean that the actors are bound to reproduction: there is always a chance for transformation, and each sequential case-reconstruction should, in principle, outline the possible scope of transformation. [23]

These methodological assumptions already indicate that the case-perspective of OH differs from that of CA. With regard to the case-elements one can say that here more emphasis is laid on the actor element. What it is primarily about are the actors' selective practices as displayed in the data. But it is not only the structure of the single case, conceived in this way, that is of interest for the OH (cf. for this view BERGMANN 1985; WILLEMS 1996). For OH, too, the "X" or "theory" the case stands for is a pattern that transcends it, but it is of a different type. What it is trying to reconstruct are general patterns of social practice, conceived as ways of coping with general action problems. It is, e.g., not only the way certain parents interact with their children that is of interest, but also how this interaction structure is informative in relation to the general structures of family

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6   As constitutive rules (SEARLE 1971) they are not conceived as "devices" or "tools" because, analytically, they are constitutive of the problems they, at the same time, regulate.

interaction. It is not only about reconstructing the way a certain medical doctor interacts with his patients, but also about reconstructing the general structures of professional therapeutic action. The case-reconstructions are conceived as "exemplary" in this respect. [24]

In OH this endeavour raises, just as it does for CA, methodological questions as to how and when concepts of action-problems are introduced. I will come to that problem later. Let me first consider the basic operations of OH's sequential analysis. Given a certain interaction transcript, to stay with this type of data, for the analysis to begin one should choose an utterance as the starting point, preferably the beginning of the interaction. The first step, then, is to explicate the so-called "objective meaning structure" of the utterance, i.e. the meaning the utterance has irrespective of the specific context. So, especially in the beginning, you operate as if you do not know anything about the actual context of the utterances. The idea is that general pragmatic rules link utterances to certain contexts. Using the rule-competence the actors and observers have as "native speakers", it is possible to design the variety of situational contexts that possibly "fit" the utterance in question. Its meaning can be said to consist in the structural features of those contexts that make for the utterances being "well-formed". Although utterances can be used in a large variety of contexts, the number of types of these contexts is limited. Their explication is, again, done in several steps. [25]

You start by collecting short "stories" in which the utterance takes place. The stories should be as concrete as possible. Take, e.g., you have in a transcript the question "Where have you been?"[7] You now invent stories that look like this: a school class is visiting a museum. The teacher asks one member of the class joining the group from another room "Where have you been?" According to the competence-based intuitive judgement of a native speaker the utterance is in this context well formed or grammatical. In order to cover the whole realm of contexts, the collection should include stories that diverge as much as possible, i.e. it ought to include also those that seem at a first glance unlikely to happen, but that nevertheless are well formed. The next step is to find out what general types of contexts the collection represents, and in doing so gradually develop the structural features of these types that are relevant for the interaction (e.g. concerning the relationship between speaker and recipient). Just as in CA, there is close examination of the implications of the utterances. With regard to "Where have you been?" you might, e.g., happen to see that it implies that the recipient should have been there or at least the speaker should have known that the recipient was not where he should have been, and, in general, that the speaker claims to have a right to know. And you might happen to see that this right is based on a cooperation arrangement that can be rather specific (as for colleagues, teachers and children) or diffuse (as for members of a family). [26]

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7   The following short sequence can be found in SCHNEIDER 1995.

These objective features so far do not contain any case-specific information.[8] This can change with the next step: the contrast with the actual situational context. The operation can be more or less instructive. In our example, the information that it was a wife asking her husband who came home late in the evening is not very instructive, because it conforms with a type of context (family) explicated. The analysis, then, proceeds by explicating the possible options for further interaction turns within the situational context. In our example the husband could give an explanation or an excuse, or say that he already told her this morning where he would go. The analysis proceeds, again, by contrasting with the actually chosen turn, which is, in our example "This is not of your regard, you're a woman". Here we have now a deviation from the expected reactions: the husband denies the claim implicit in the question in an interestingly fundamental way, which indicates a grave conflict in the relationship. I will not go into further detail of the interpretation here. The task is, now, to develop a first hypothesis about the interaction structure, which is, in our example, a hypotheses about the structure of this conflict. And this hypothesis is to be elaborated by proceeding, in principle, with the same operations: explicating the action space opened by the objective meaning-structures, and contrasting it with the actually chosen options. The difference is that in following the course of interaction you gradually take into account the actual situational context and, just as for CA, the "inner context" of the sequence so far analysed. In doing so you cumulatively work out a hypothesis about the selective pattern that is characteristic for the interaction structure. [27]

The process is in several respects much like CA, but there are differences. The interpretation minutely follows the course of interaction, too, but, in principle, in a single operation. Of course, in the actual research process you think through the interpretation over and over again to make sure it is correct, but in OH there is no procedure of going through the material in "rounds" and focussing on different aspects. Another difference is that OH is, so to speak, deliberately using rule-competence as a resource from the start. And in doing so, it is not cautious in developing hypotheses about the interaction structure. On the contrary, there is emphasis on strong hypotheses from the outset of the analysis, hypotheses that can be tested, modified, or even refused, in the course of sequential analysis. [28]

Finally, there is a difference with regard to the introduction of concepts of the action problems, the second type of non-case-specific knowledge. Unlike some other qualitative methodologies, OH does not refrain from working out an elaborated research question.[9] Into this elaboration usually enter general assumptions about the action problems concerned. These concepts serve as a

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8   But note that as a by-product of the explication of the objective meaning-structure you may get information about the general context of interaction. In our example this takes the form of a structural feature of family relations that you might not have known before the explication: a reciprocal claim on the time of the other.

9   In qualitative research there is a tendency to recommend a rather vague research question in order to escape the risk of subsuming the data to pre-conceived theoretical concepts (DEPPERMANN 1999, p.20; FROSCHAUER & LUEGER 2003, p.22). But, as a consequence, this orientation renders it more difficult to relate the case-reconstruction to existing theoretical concepts and to contribute to a cumulative theoretical development. In contrast, OH prefers to rely on the methodical devices described to further develop theoretical conceptions in case-reconstructions.

heuristic for the sequential interpretation. Sometimes even full-fledged theories, e.g., on professionalisation (cf. MAIWALD 1997, 2004; WERNET 1997, 2003; HARRACH, LOER & SCHMIDTKE 2000), if at hand, are used to highlight features sequentially reconstructed. The heuristic function is important especially with respect to reconstructing both the individual ("Besondere") and the general ("Allgemeine) a case represents. In this respect you not only take into account the concrete situational context of an utterance but also more general aspects of this context. You not only recur on the circumstance that it is a doctor-/ patient-interaction in which the utterance was made but also on what the general action-problems of this relationship are or could be. In doing so you have, first, the chance to analyse the interaction as a specific way of dealing with general problems of professional action, and, second, the chance to analyse the given institutional setting as one possible arrangement among others. This is not a subsumption as long as you use theoretical concepts in a heuristic way[10] and as long as you first explicate the structural features of the utterance/interaction in a context-free way. Despite this major role in research practice, OH has, like CA, up to now not outlined methodological rules for developing such concepts, to introduce it into, and to further develop it by, sequential analysis.[11] Perhaps this contributes to some of the criticism that case analyses in OH only serve to illustrate pre-conceived abstract theories. [29]

4.3 Hermeneutic sociology of knowledge

I will now come to hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (HSK). There is no need to refer to the theoretical background and the long tradition of sociology of knowledge. Peculiar to the situation in Germany is that we have, furthered by Hans-Georg SOEFFNER, Ronald HITZLER and other researchers, seen over ten years a development towards a decisively hermeneutic self-conception. HSK is now practised in a broad range of sociological fields, with a certain focus on cultural topics (SCHRÖER 1994; HITZLER & HONER 1997; HITZLER, REICHERTZ & SCHRÖER 1999; SOEFFNER 2004). A critique of OH is playing an important role in this development. In fact, the preface of an important publication (SCHRÖER 1994) characterises the HSK enterprise explicitly with reference to OH (cf. REICHERTZ 2000, too). There are several aspects HSK shares with or takes from OH, e.g. the importance of sequential analysis and several of its maxims, the claim on "objectivity" (at least in the sense that interpretations are intersubjectively testable), the recursing to objectively effective rules of interaction, or the focus on latent meaning-structures that are to be reconstructed. [30]

Generally, what HSK seems to emphasise against OH, is a certain "wholeness" or "unity" of the process of understanding ("Verstehen") in everyday interaction. There are several aspects of this "wholeness". With regard to the methodological status of data, HSK emphasises that the original "layer of meaning", which is the point of reference of the interpretation, gets lost in the process of textual

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10 That not all sociological theories have such a "heuristic force" is a different issue.

11 A proposal to this effect was given in MAIWALD 2004.

production. What is lost is the wholeness of perceptions, sentiments, and experiences of the actors, the factual reciprocally supposed subjectivity and intentionality, the factual milieu and the perspectives of the actors. On the side of the actor the wholeness of his perceptions, sentiments, and experiences are transformed into linguistic forms, individual experiences into collective semantic types. This unity of meaning that somehow was present in the original scene of interaction is, in principle, not present in interaction transcripts. According to HSK we thus have to face an—in principle—unbridgeable gap between reconstruction and reconstructed (cf. SOEFFNER & HITZLER 1994). [31]

Nevertheless, as the original scene is the point of reference for social research, the methodical interpretation should, as much as possible, come close to it. As a consequence, in several respects unity, as a methodical maxim, is characteristic of HSK. There is, e.g., unity with regard to actors' and researchers' interpretations. Although there is a difference between the two that arises, first of all, from the researcher being "suspended from action" ("handlungsentlastet"), there is, as a maxim, a unity of understanding and interpretation (both conceived as "Deutung"). In other words the interpretation should, as much as possible, take into account and follow the structures of the process of understanding in everyday practice. There is also unity with regard to interactions and their wider context. The interaction sequences represent a coherence of actions, in which the individual utterance always relates to the action frame as a whole. The interpreter, the interpretation, and the objects of interpretation are embedded in milieus, history, and communities of interpretation. Thus analyses should take into account, and reconstruct, the symbolic "whole" of human forms of action, orientation, and knowledge. [32]

How can we characterise the case-perspective of HSK with regard to the case-elements introduced in Chapter 3? First, just as for OH the actor-element plays an important role. Here, though, it is not (only) the actor's selective practical actions that are analysed, but, first, his or her intentionality, his or her actions as something meaningful designed. This intentionality can only approximately be formulated, using the processes of idealisation and typification described by SCHÜTZ. The actor's practice is to a large extent conceived as a practice of interpretation, of "setting of meaning" ("Sinnsetzung"). Action problems enter into the analysis as a part of the reciprocally supposed definition of the situation. As the "subjective meaning" is conceived to be embedded in and to be reconstructable only with recourse to a wider context, what a case "stands for" is at the same time the individual practice/practice of interpretation and the "whole" in which it is embedded, and to which especially the concepts of "milieu" and "life-world" refer. Therefore, the "theory"-element refers at the same time to the individual practice/ practice of interpretation and to the "whole" in which it is embedded (life-world, milieu). [33]

The import of this methodological background for sequential analysis is not easy to assess. Detailed outlines of the proceeding and detailed presentations of it in empirical studies are rare. But one should presume that the "holistic" perspective poses problems for sequential analysis, being a methodical attempt at de- and re-

construction. It seems to me that, furthermore, the recourse to the subjective perspective, a Schützian view on rule-competence which keeps the gap between everyday interactions and its reconstruction open, the embedding milieu decisively conceptualised as something non-textual and therefore not subject to sequential analysis, are not favourable for this proceeding. Perhaps that is why several researchers affiliated with HSK prefer a more ethnographic approach (HITZLER & EBERLE 2000; HONER 2000). Nevertheless, sequential analysis is regarded as its basic method (REICHERTZ 2004, para.26), not only with regard to written texts (KNOBLAUCH 2004). In order to illustrate how it is practised I will refer to a proposal by SOEFFNER (2004; cf. SOEFFNER & HITZLER 1994 for the methodological concept) which is perhaps the most elaborated and detailed. [34]

The data base of this exemplary analysis (exemplary primarily in methodological respects) is a ten-line sequence drawn from a biographical interview with a young mother of some 60 pages. In this sequence she speaks of her ideas about family life, the expectations she had, and her assessment of her factual situation. The sequence was chosen partly because it was supposed to display a central leitmotif of the interview, and partly because of the inconsistencies in it that called for interpretation (SOEFFNER 2004, p.217). SOEFFNER remarks beforehand that refraining from analysing the inner context of the sequence, including the interviewer's question to which it is the reply, is done for purely "economic" reasons. [35]

Straight away you notice the first difference from OH: the interpretation proceeds not within a single operation; rather, the sequence is analysed explicitly in three rounds. Each round considers an analytically distinct perspective on interaction. The idea is that in these rounds the interpretation follows distinct aspects of everyday interpretation corresponding to those features: attribution of meaning ("Sinnzumessung"), review of meaning ("Sinnüberprüfung"), and conclusion of meaning ("Sinnschließung"). The cumulative development of the interpretation is not so much in sequential analysis but in applying these different perspectives to the sequence. [36]

The first round is concerned with the "subjective perspective" of the actor/interviewee, which is conceived to be not the actual, but the "idealised" perspective. The interpretation process attempts, by applying an attitude of "everyday hermeneutic" ("Alltagshermeneutik"), at reconstructing the consistent pattern of self-concept displayed in the text. The interpreter relies on a competence he himself uses for self-presentation and -interpretation in everyday interactions. [37]

The Schützian in-order-to- and because-motives are important here because it is by them that consistent patterns of self-interpretation are generated. The interpretation begins with the sequential explication of the semantic implications of the utterances, thereby formulating the speaker's "statements". These statements are not identical with what she has actually said, but are explicated versions of what she could have said, judging from the text. After that, by paraphrasing, the relevant in-order-to- and because-motives are stated. The first

round of this detailed interpretation ("Feinanalyse") ends with a conception of how these motives are connected. The unity of meaning of the subjective perspective is represented in a short, coherent statement that is compatible with the text: "Family, and family life, in which I was looking for the space for self-realisation, have in fact left me crushed and constrained and helpless." ("Die Familie, das Familienleben, innerhalb derer ich den Freiraum für meine Selbstverwirklichung gesucht habe, hat mich in Wirklichkeit eingezwängt und unfrei und hilflos gemacht.") [38]

The second round focuses on the interaction-perspective. The utterances are now considered as something that is to be interpreted by the partners in interaction, which means, first of all, making them consistent. In everyday interaction, if inconsistencies appear the partners can fall back on an interaction repertoire (questions, interpretation proposals, etc.) for the repair or restatement of what is missing. The researcher, of course, does not have this opportunity, but virtually takes this perspective—not in "ironing out" inconsistencies, as is often the case in everyday interaction, but in taking them as virtual "interaction offers" ("Interaktionsangebote") and interpreting them. The structural features of these inconsistencies are elaborated by recursing to what is conceived as the objective, i.e. intersubjective, meaning of the utterances. In the present analysis, first, two structural features specific to the overall sequence-"Gestalt" are stated: a specific temporal structure of the narrative and the movement from "I" to "one". These features are, second, linked to the topics "interaction" and "identity", and are further elaborated to lead to the hypothesis: family life is for the speaker not the interaction sphere of several individuals but primarily the context for an individual "standing the test" ("Bewährung"). [39]

The third round, finally, applies an interaction-theoretical perspective. The task here is to arrive at a "unity" of meaning on an interactional level that binds the participants together in interaction. Methodologically, this means a reconstruction of the typification of the situation and interaction that all participants latently suppose as shared, and the intersubjective latent meaning of this typification. What is actually done in the present analysis is to find an explanatory hypothesis that integrates the findings of the previous rounds of interpretation, both the "subjective meaning" and the inconsistencies and structural features associated with them. It reads, in short: the woman's suffering in reality is in fact a suffering from a compulsive retention of her idealised conceptions. The interpretation then withdraws successively from the concrete sequence by developing hypotheses concerning the wider biographical context, hypotheses that are further elaborated with recourse to information from other passages from the interview. [40]

With regard to this exemplary analysis, a major difference to both CA and OH can be identified, one which is especially relevant in the first round of interpretation. It concerns the problem of "transforming" the practical operation of taking the perspective of the speaker into a methodically controlled operation. Despite the constitutive gap between "original scene" and transcript, the intentionality of the actor, it is stated, can be found in linguistic expressions that "one way or another obtrude on the interpreter" (SOEFFNER & HITZLER 1994, p.44). But how does

one make the successive steps of constructing a coherent "statement" inter-subjectively testable? What I mean is not so much the obvious difference that taking the subjective perspective is, as here, not only an important step, but the first and basic step of the interpretation. Probably more important is that, judging from this proposal, a reconstruction of the "subjective perspective" seems to operate under the condition of confining the interpretation to semantic and logical features of the text only. At least in this round of analysis, there is no pragmatic interpretation; there are no reconstructions of the structural properties of an utterance with respect to the possible contexts of using it. [41]

5. Conclusion

The comparison of three major paradigms of qualitative research in Germany should highlight differences in sequential analysis that can be associated with different case-perspectives, which, again, refer to different theoretical back-grounds. These differences are schematically summarised in the table below.

	conversation analysis	objective hermeneutic	hermeneutic sociology of knowledge
sequence	sequence-"Gestalt" (meaningful unit of interaction)	stream of interactions	stream of interactions (unity of meaning)
proceeding	different "rounds" / different aspects	one (sequential) operation	three "rounds" (monothetic, polythetic, interaction-theoretical)
actor-orientation	low	middle	high
action primarily conceived as	coping with communicative problems	coping with action problems	coping with interpretation problems
meaning structures	interactional	objective / interactional	holistic
recourse to rule-competence	"cautious"	"deliberate"	"cautious" (semantic?)
"theory"	general structures of communication	case structures / general structures of praxis	case structures / milieu
conceptualisations of action problems (integration into sequential analysis)	low (no methodology)	high (no methodology)	middle (part of definition of situation; no methodology)

Table 1. Overview of differences in sequential analysis [42]

What stands out as a crucial notion on a theoretical level are different conceptions of what one could term the difference between "competence" and "praxis". Conceptions of what the actors generally "bring along" in interactions and what the specific "contribution" or "performance" of the actors in interaction is, and, in turn, what the "outcome" of the interaction is, vary according to the different theoretical backgrounds. There is certainly a need for further discussion of these "deep" theoretical questions, but theoretical discourse alone runs the risk of stressing the differences and withdrawing to basic theoretical "decisions". Judging from the considerations of this article it seems to be more fruitful to focus on methodical aspects and to appeal to what was termed the working consensus of sequential analysis. Sequential analysis, then, would be the point of reference

for the discussion. In this light, the supposed dividing theoretical problems are something the paradigms share: as shared methical problems to overcome. [43]

In the context of sequential analysis, "competence" and "praxis" refer to non-case-specific aspects that are needed in case-reconstructions.[12] It has been argued that recursing to competence-based intuitive judgements of adequacy is a necessary and—one way or another—always-practised means to determine the meaning structure of an utterance/action. The same is true of recursing to general models of those action problems that are relevant in interaction. At least when you are engaged in analysing interaction in institutional settings like, e.g., professional action, it is necessary to have a general concept of what these action problems (illness, law, specific conflicts, etc.) are in order to determine the selective way a case copes with these problems. [44]

The methical problems associated with competence are indicated by questions to be answered, such as: to what extent can we, as researchers, rely on competences we assumedly share (e.g. as "native speakers") with the actors whose actions we analyse? Or, in other words, to what extent can shared competences bridge the gap between actor and researcher? How can we explicate what is implicit in those judgements? When should we employ those explications in sequential analysis, and by what procedures? What kind of knowledge can be regarded as competence phenomena—implicit rule-knowledge, knowledge of norms, every-day knowledge or more? What if we do not share (all of) the competences with the actors whose actions we analyse? What can, in those cases, be a methical substitute (e.g. milieu- or life-world-analysis), and how can we arrive at it and employ it without sacrificing the achievements and potential of sequential analysis? To most of these questions there are more or less implicit answers to be found in the paradigms mentioned. The future task is, in my point of view, to pose the questions more explicitly and to bind them more closely to the concrete procedure in case-analyses. [45]

The notion of praxis, conceived as coping with general action problems, is perhaps more urgent, because up to now none of the paradigms has developed even an implicit methodology in this respect. Questions to be answered are: how do we arrive at general models for action problems? Is it simply a matter of adopting theoretical proposals we find in literature, or should it be conceived as a specific step or phase of analysis? How can we make sure the model can serve a heuristic function, i.e. to ensure work fruitful in case-reconstructions is at the same time open for further development? How is such a model to be integrated in sequential analysis? What is its methodological status? If such models, in terms of OH, neither belong to the domain of "parameter I" nor that of "parameter II", how else can their import for the structuring of social praxis be conceived? It is the pursuit of questions like these that offers the most potential for a further

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12 To speak of "non-case-specific" aspects or knowledge is misleading, because these aspects assumedly play a role in concrete interactions and, thus, the single case represents them, too. But from a methical point of view, they are not the focus of attention but are used as devices in data analysis that are assumed not to be peculiar to the concrete interaction.

development of sequential analysis and a broadening of the working consensus between different paradigms. [46]

Acknowledgement

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