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Limits of Interpretation or Interpretation at the Limits: Perspectives From Hermeneutics on the Re-Figuration of Space and Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract: In this article, I discuss how social scientists can interpret *intercultural* data in a scientific manner. I argue that, when applying methods of social research, the interpretation of intercultural data does *not differ fundamentally*, but only *slightly* from the interpretation of intracultural data. However, it is important to include co-interpreters who are familiar with the culture under investigation into the process of interpreting intercultural data. In addition, I explain that hermeneutics has also come under pressure when faced with the interpretation of *intracultural* data: In hermeneutics, the premise of the unity of culture of the investigated and the investigators presupposes that cultures are delimitable and that they essentially are not further subdivided. If such a unity of culture ever existed, this unity has undoubtedly been eroded by international developments in recent decades and the concomitant need for contact. Based on these reflections, I conclude by presenting and discussing possibilities for as well as limits on inter- and intracultural interpretation.

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1. Intercultural Interpretation as a Challenge for the Social Sciences

"What use am I investigating another drug murder in a fucking squatter-camp she been? I'm a middle-class white guy; I understand white crime" (MENDELSON, 2014, p.7).

Not even a century ago, men all over Europe dueled with other men (often fatally) who they thought had violated their *honor*. For such a defamation, it was enough to publicly belittle the other man. Even today, some men in Europe kill their sister or daughter in so-called "honor killings" because they believe that said sister or daughter has *dishonored the family* with her behavior (OBERWITTER & KASSEL, 2011). Young Germans have recently given men and women on whom they can rely the title of *Ehrenmann* [man of honor]. This title is very popular among young people—which is why it was chosen as the German "Youth Word of the Year 2018"¹ (TAGESSPIEGEL, 2018). In all these three contexts, honor plays a very important role in the actions of those who use the same word but, regardless, do not have the same notion of honor. What honor means in the respective lifeworlds can vary considerably—however, it is decided that honor is significant in these different lifeworlds and that the actions of all those involved are aligned with this meaning. However, this statement does not just apply to the word "honor." It also holds true for words such as "love," "hatred," "sense," and "meaning," in addition to terms like "prime number," "engine," "university," and "CO₂." Moreover, it applies to words like "today," "we," "me," and "you" just as it does to "table," "bed," and "blanket." The statement applies to all words and actions of a group of people who interact and communicate with each other regularly over an extended period of time. They have communicatively created a common world of meanings (KELLER, KNOBLAUCH & REICHERTZ, 2013—or as BERGER and KELLNER (1981) described:

"All human beings have meaning and seek to live in a meaningful world. In principle, every human meaning is accessible to others. Indeed, this mutual accessibility is a decisive premise for the belief that there is something like a shared humanity. But, of course, some meanings are more accessible than others" (p.17). [1]

These are the assertions and, on closer inspection, the hopes of two recently deceased great scholars of sociology of knowledge. However, it has long since been known that meanings in our own *Lebenswelt* [lifeworld] are much more accessible to us than meanings outside our own lifeworld or than meanings derived from other cultures (SMELSER, 1976). Note that in this article, *Kultur* [culture] is understood in a broad sense, namely as the (social) air that people need to breathe, to live, and to work. Thus, culture is more and something different than language—or as SOEFFNER (1988) put it:

"Culture is the frame of meaning that makes events, things, actions, motives, institutions and social processes accessible, comprehensible, describable and representable to comprehension. Culture as the horizon of meaning that surrounds

1 All translations from German texts are mine.

our perception, our interpretation and our action is not only omnipresent in our expressions of life, but it is also – in each specific framing – the context of order which we consider, maintain and which we construct again and again, and which delimits the ordered and meaningful from the merely coincidental and meaningless" (p.12). [2]

In short: A culture consists not only of common values, goals, and problems, but above all any practices and support provided to overcome those problems (SWIDLER, 1986) This is why the members of a culture know what honor is (returning to the example above) and how to attack, preserve, or recover it in practice. [3]

The *universe of meanings within cultures*, however, is very complex and the knowledge about it is usually not evenly distributed. Even within our own lifeworld, there are some very familiar and some other unfamiliar areas of which we surmise more than we know for certain about them. Therefore, we can observe a difference not only between knowledge of meaning and ignorance of meaning—between black and white. Inside our own lifeworld there is also the gray: hunches, vague ideas, and vague knowledge. However, we are at least *aware* of this gray knowledge, about which we only have a vague notion, and should we wish to act based on this vague information, we act accordingly (WEHLING, 2015). We are only certain about our knowledge to the extent that there is much we do not know. The greatest challenge in this context it is that we do not know *what* we do not know. [4]

This becomes all the more complicated in *intercultural interpretation*, and it has long since been known in the social sciences that the scientific and everyday translation of units of meaning ("data"), which *originate from different linguistic and/or cultural regions*, regularly leads to various different types of *methodological problems*. First of all, anyone who says something about intercultural interpretation quickly enters rough water and, almost inevitably, ends up caught between a rock and a hard place. Both monsters represent an enormous danger to one's own ship and there is no apparent escape: [5]

If one takes the position that there are *fundamental differences* between the interpretation of *intracultural* and the interpretation of *intercultural* data (for example, that the interpretation of Korean texts has to be fundamentally different from that of German texts), then one is quickly confronted with the counterargument that the difference cannot be so fundamental (regarding advanced globalization)—at most there may only be *slight* differences between intracultural and intercultural interpretation. Thus, there could be only slight differences between intra- and intercultural interpretation. Everything else would create or even essentialize differences—which should be avoided in any case. [6]

If one takes the position that there are *no fundamental differences* between the interpretation of intracultural and intercultural data, then one is quickly confronted with the counterargument that even Hanseatic people live in a different world of meaning than Bavarians; young people in one apart from old people; and bankers

live in a different one than rockers. Anyone who does not take this into account would not do justice to the reality of differences between cultures, would ignore the peculiarities of cultures, and in doing so would endanger them—something that should be avoided at all costs. I am sure it is entirely inappropriate to pretend that there are no differences between cultures. Even if cultures intermingle again and again and perhaps ever more often, it is still true that cultures differ from each other, sometimes even vehemently insisting that they differ. It is crucial that cultures experience each other as different and act as if they were different. I thus follow the classic formulation of HUGHES (1971), one of the founding fathers of the Chicago School:

"An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the ins and the outs talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group" (pp.153-154). [7]

Bearing this assessment in mind, and in spite of all the dangers mentioned above, I would like to show that *in ordinary social science research practice, cultural differences of meaning can be assumed without immediately exaggerating these differences as essential*. Furthermore, I will attempt to demonstrate that in empirical research, it is useful to assume that, despite all the differences, there is also *a certain and sufficient measure of unity of cultures*. This attempt is based not only on knowledge of the basic literature, but also on my own empirical research—to which I will refer again and again with examples (see below). [8]

When confronted with the problem of interpreting intercultural data, it is helpful to first look more closely at *hermeneutics* in general (GADAMER, 1975 [1960]; HABERMAS, 1971; HITZLER, REICHERTZ & SCHRÖER, 1999; SOEFFNER, 2004 [1989]), in addition to different approaches to intercultural hermeneutics (DREHER & STEGMAIER, 2007; MÜLLER & ZIFONUN 2010; SOEFFNER & BOLDT, 2014; YOUSEFI & FISCHER, 2013), *postcolonial studies* (BHABHA, 2004 [1994]; CASTRO VARELA, DHAWAN & RANDEIRA, 2016; PLODER, 2009; SAID, 1994 [1978]; SPIVAK, 1992, 1994, 1999; WARNKE & SCHMIDT-BRÜCKEN, 2016), *inter- and transcultural communication* (BETTMANN & ROSLON, 2013; HEPP & LÖFFELHOLZ, 2002; HERINGER, 2017; LÜSEBRINK, 2005; MALETZKE, 1996; OTTEN et al., 2009; YOUSEFI, 2018), literature on *translation science* (ESCHER & SPIKERMANN, 2018; ZYBATOW, 2010), the (ethnological) debate on the *"translation" of texts and artefacts* (CAPPAL, SHIMADA & STRAUB, 2010; LARKIN, DIERCHX DE CASTERLÉ & SCHOTSMANS, 2007; MACHT, 2018; RENN, SHIMADA & STRAUB, 2002; ROTH, 2013, 2018), and the debate on the *crisis of representation* (BERG & FUCHS, 1993; CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986; GEERTZ, 1973, 1988, 2000; GOTTOWIK, 1997; VAN MAANEN, 1988). [9]

In this article, I do not strive to describe these very fruitful debates in detail, but rather my intention is to report on the experiences and mistakes that we have made in the projects mentioned further below. Hopefully, these mistakes, as well

as the experiences we have made, will prove helpful in interpreting intercultural data in the future. To do this, I will first touch on the basics of hermeneutical interpretation and then describe current practices of interpreting intercultural data. Then, I will go into more detail on content analysis and hermeneutics (Section 2) to discuss what interpretations are possible and what their scope is (Section 3). The examination of the current practice of interpreting intercultural data and its principal weaknesses (Section 4) will provide the foundation for my proposal to consider interpretations in general as extensions of the horizon of understanding (Section 5). [10]

2. The Fundamentals of Interpreting

When interpreting data, social scientists basically assume that any communicative action of people—that is, both actions free of symbols as well as actions that are bound to symbols—is meaningful (CASSIRER, 1996 [1944]). *This meaning is usually constituted by specific practices, habits, and both explicit and implicit rules for producing meaning*, which are the expression of (written and practical) phonetics, grammar, semantics, and, above all, the pragmatics of a *language* and interaction community. These include the *tone* of communicative actions (aggressive, friendly, sarcastic, etc.), the *style* of communicative actions (elaborated, laconic, puristic, overloaded, etc.), the *attitude* and *clothing* of the communicating bodies, their *semiotics*, and their *situational embedding*. [11]

Thus, the meaning of a communicative action (which is of interest here) cannot be determined *only* by means of *semantics* ("what do words mean?"). Rather, it is essentially constituted by the social consequences of communicative action, that is, by *pragmatics*. In other words: Because people know or even think they know what an act of speech leads to in a certain community of interaction, they act in a certain way. The overall effects that words or, more precisely, certain communicative actions trigger in certain situations create a specific *culture of meaning*. Note that, even though in this article I mainly focus on collecting and interpreting communicative actions, my considerations also apply to the analysis of artifacts and field protocols, since they are also communicative actions (LUEGER & FROSCHAUER, 2018; REICHERTZ, 2015). [12]

Communication, which always operates with a culture of meaning, constantly creates a world in which those who live in it seek to find their place, a world that has an order, that has forms, and that gives meaning to action and life. Thus, each language is much more than vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and semantics—*each language is an expression of its own culture of meaning, which is cannot be understood without the knowledge of the entire culture* (EVERETT, 2010 [2008]). Each language is a communicative construction that includes its own unique worldview (CASSIRER, 1996 [1944]; SCHÜTZ, 2004 [1932]). [13]

Cultures of meaning have emerged historically, meaning that each culture has its own worldview. But since any culture always includes a culture of encounters, cultures of meaning always contains large or small intersections to a certain extent. Cultures of meaning cannot be derived from other cultures of meaning or

from an "original language" from which all other languages originated. However, the more coercively a type of *contact brings different cultures* of meaning together, the more *intersections of common meaning* develop, thus generating more understanding for each other. This is also a *good (and necessary) prerequisite for the scientific interpretation of intercultural data*. [14]

2.1 Methods and practices of interpretation

From the perspective of sociology of knowledge, *scientific interpretation* is based on the premise that it is only possible to reconstruct meaning successfully if the interpreter participates *sufficiently* in the culture producing the meaning. Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER (1977 [1838]) pointed out that every act of understanding is the inversion of the act of speech in that it is necessary to comprehend the thought behind the speech. It is only because the interpreters themselves have the procedures and rules of meaning production at their disposal, and because they are able to access them and judge the appropriateness of meaning productions, that they can recognize and write down their social significance. Therefore, the basis of any scientific interpretation is the assumption of a partial or a complete *unity of culture* in terms of the interpreters and those being interpreted. From this point of view, interpretation competence results from a *sufficient unity of culture for the researchers and those being researched*—a unity (and this is what historians, ethnologists, cultural scientists, and, last but not least, sociologists of knowledge teach us) that is quite questionable—not just within a single culture such as the "German culture." [15]

Incidentally, the difficulty in interpreting with regard to cultural unity is currently changing considerably: In the current wave of *globalization*, different cultures are converging and mixing at a high pace and *new hybrid cultures are emerging*. The communicatively constructed reality (KNOBLAUCH 2017; REICHERTZ, 2019) of a certain culture receives impulses for further development not only from the inside but also more and more from the outside—from strangers of all kinds. This is not new—this has been happening since people first met. However, due to the coercion of contact that results from the current wave of globalization (SOEFFNER & BOLDT, 2014; SOEFFNER & ZIFONUN, 2010), the nature and extent of contact with foreign cultures has changed in quantitative and qualitative terms: there is *more* contact and there is a *more intense* contact. Or as BOLDT and SOEFFNER put it: "On the whole, the opinion has prevailed that under the conditions of globalization, (ever-increasing) transnational mobility and digital medialization, cultures can neither be defined as territorially bound nor as homogeneous" (p.9). A "new transnational practice of permanent and continuous communication across several locations" (LOEW, 2018, p.51) is developing (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017). Spaces are also increasingly connected to each other in a stable way by the new media (COULDRY & HEPP, 2016; KNOBLAUCH, 2017). [16]

This also applies to science: More and more scientists are interested in foreign cultures. Without any doubt, this is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1920s, survey data have been an important data source for analyzing (inter)action and

distribution within space, as well as relations and movements between spaces (SCHEUCH, 1993 [1989]). All the methodological problems of intercultural research that we are facing today were already known back then. However, survey research has not been able to resolve those problems despite all efforts (BAUR, 2014), and there is a huge critical debate in postcolonial and historical sociology on how and why this does not work. Interestingly, while quantitative research has produced libraries of books on this topics, qualitative research is only starting to discover this now, which is ironic in a way.² [17]

Scientists interested in foreign cultures produce *intercultural data* with their investigative practices and they analyze them with methods that were intended primarily for the collection and reconstruction of processes of giving meaning in their own culture. But it is questionable whether intercultural data can or should be interpreted using these methods. I use the term "intercultural data" rather than "foreign-language data" because these data are not simply *linguistic* data, and because I want to emphasize that intercultural data are the result of concrete intercultural *communication*. [18]

While I am neither an expert in intercultural communication nor in the evaluation of intercultural data, in recent years, especially in three projects, I have had plenty of experience with the problem of interpreting data from other cultures:

1. in *voice recordings* of police interrogations with defendants of Turkish descent (REICHERTZ, 1991; SCHRÖER, 2002);
2. in *interviews* with *Indian* cabin crew members in a project I conducted with Ronald KURT and Norbert SCHRÖER (BETTMANN, 2016);
3. last but not least, in numerous *conversations* and *documents* (resulting from a social outreach research project) with teenagers of Arab and Turkish descent who were enthusiastic about Islamism (REICHERTZ & AMIR-MOAZAMI, 2014). [19]

In all these projects, there were many texts and artifacts from many different cultures that had to be interpreted—as well as a large number of field protocols from the respective cultural spaces and the associated problem of having to interpret the behavior of the observed people, which sometimes appeared strange to the observer. Furthermore, I had some experience in interpreting very specific intercultural data: Thanks to various guest professorships in Vienna (Austria) and St. Gallen (Switzerland), for many years I have had the opportunity to work with students and lecturers from *Austria* and *Switzerland* on interpreting hermeneutically different data types (texts, artefacts, pictures). Sometimes, these data were interpreted extensively beforehand or afterwards with my students in *Germany*, too, using the same hermeneutic methods. All interpretation sessions were conducted in groups and in German. [20]

In these sessions, it became very clear (which is not particularly surprising) that German words in Austria often mean something different than in Switzerland or in

² Thanks to Nina BAUR for this hint.

Germany, and that in Austria there are different pronunciations, words, and phrases than in Switzerland and in Germany. Again, this is not really surprising. The Austrian and Swiss culture obviously have different cultures of meaning than the German culture. Same words mean different things. This statement indicates that there is *no* real unity in the culture of meaning within the German language and that cultures of meaning within a language do not stop at borders or could be limited by them. [21]

Nevertheless, in the cases mentioned above, all parties were able to recognize these differences and explain them to or translate them for each other very quickly. This happened so quickly and successfully because, despite all the differences, there was also a large intersection of common meaning to which one could refer. On this basis, one could explain different meanings. Through this intersection, one could easily recognize the differences in the conversation and also bridge the differences through a conversation. Although Austrian and Swiss are not dialects in a strict sense (PFADENHAUER, 2015), this finding indicates that *dialectal* variants of a language do not represent a principle obstacle of understanding, but that understanding can be achieved easily by speaking and acting together. [22]

2.2 Everyday communication and social science analysis of communication

In the discussion about the problems of *intercultural* communication (SCHRÖER, 2009, STEGMAIER 2013), *two cases* must be distinguished from one another:

1. the *everyday intercultural communication in real-life contexts* (tourism, migration, cultural exchange, economy, media, etc.);
2. the *scientific utilization and analysis of intercultural communication*. [23]

The intercultural communication that is integrated into life practice represents the (almost) everyday case: In the context of their profession or their personal everyday life, members of different cultures interlink parts of their lives and, thereby, different culturally developed systems of meaning. This form of *everyday intercultural communication* has a very long tradition. Since the dawn of humanity, people of different cultures have met at their respective borders and have tried to communicate, which was ultimately more or less successful. Thus, intercultural communication has existed throughout human existence. In the course of history, various *practices of access to the respective meaning* have developed.

1. These practices of intercultural communication are essentially based on the fact that people usually started by connecting (simple) actions experimentally and carefully while at the same time underscoring those actions with vocal and/or gestural signs.
2. In the second step, people guessed the meaning of the other's signs.
3. In the third step, they experimented carefully in an attempt to produce these signs without an action and waited to see what would happen. The correct interpretation of the meaning of these signs was validated above all by a

successful coordination of action. If people achieved their goal, then the interpretation of meaning was largely correct—even if sometimes it ended up in profound misunderstandings as in Captain Cook (COLLINGRIDGE, 2002; SAHLINS, 1992 [1985]). However, the decisive evaluation factor has always been the ability to reconstruct the meaning in the respective action. [24]

At first glance, the situation in the *qualitative analysis of intercultural data* seems completely different (BETTMANN & ROSLON, 2013; KRUSE, 2009; KOTTHOFF & SPENCER-OATEY, 2007; OTTEN et al., 2009; SCHITTENHELM, 2017). There, data have first been collected, then fixed and transformed using specific practices. Subsequently, the data were prepared for scientific interpretation. However, the data are not interpreted in the original framework of action, which would make it possible to prove the respective meaning. Instead, scientists reconstruct, largely independently of any action, the meaning of the recorded utterances in a wholly different place and in a completely different context. By this means, it is not possible to *evaluate the reconstructed meaning through direct feedback in the context of further actions*. Therefore, at first glance, there are no practical criteria to determine the quality of the reconstructed meaning and interpretation. The interpretive evaluation of intercultural data is thus a special and particularly *restricted* case of intercultural communication, for which special rules should apply. [25]

2.3 Content analysis and hermeneutics

Another problem arises from the fact that scientific interpretation is more than and different from the practice-related *translation* of utterances in a specific context of action. In this case, various meanings are played through and different approaches are tried out that fit the situation. This is often a rapprochement process. In contrast, *social scientists* use paraphrases, codes, content analysis, or even a hermeneutic interpretation to *analyze data*. Essentially, paraphrasing, encoding, and content analysis are geared toward the *manifest* content of utterances/texts/data. Translations may still work here, because the words are taken for what they say on the surface. But the result is completely different if one also wishes to capture and reconstruct the non-apparent aspects of texts/data, in explicit reference to a hermeneutic (or reconstructive) paradigm (HITZLER et al., 1999; OEVERMANN, 1993; SOEFFNER, 2004; WERNET, 2009). [26]

Depending on their alignment, researchers who use hermeneutics either attempt an interpretation—inferring the deep structures that determine the actions of subjects (objective hermeneutics)—or they try to determine how people react to certain references of meaning, that is to say, how subjects born into a historically and socially pre-interpreted world permanently interpret that world and thus change it (hermeneutics of sociology of knowledge, discourse analysis, reconstructive social research). For all hermeneutic interpretations, it is essential to analyze not only *the content* of the narrated, but above all *the actions* that are directly expressed in the data and that are documented by them. These include, for example:

1. the act of *narration* (How is the narrative constructed?);
2. the act of *interpreting* (How does the narrator interpret?);
3. the *interaction* with the interviewer (How do the interviewees react to the interviewer?). [27]

A scientific interpretation of data that is based on content analysis and hermeneutic methods does not aim for a situational understanding but rather strives to find the *social* meaning of actions (REICHERTZ, 2016). The term "social" arises from the fact that this meaning is generated by an action within a certain community (of interaction) (MEAD, 1973 [1934]). No social scientist can and (as far as I can see) no social scientist seriously wants to determine the individual grammar, semantics, and pragmatics of a particular person. Such a concept of meaning is completely detached from the intention of the actor, that is to say, from the actor's subjective meaning. [28]

Without a doubt, every simple *translation is always an interpretation* aiming for understanding (REICHERTZ, 2016). Thus, every translation is (strictly speaking) a special form of qualitative social research. *Interpreting* the translation additionally in a hermeneutical manner is another and a more demanding form of understanding, which needs to not only rely on semantics, but also always has to know and use the pragmatics of a cultural community. Interpreting, consequently, does not mean translating an utterance analogously into a theoretical language. Interpreting means *reconstructing* the meaning of a communicative utterance, meaning its position in the pragmatics of a language and interaction community. Although interpretation starts at the apparent content of meaning, it is always aimed at the social structures of knowledge behind it (SOEFFNER, 2004). Interpreting does not duplicate what has been said, but rather attempts to render what has been said understandable and explainable. But how could this be possible? Or more fundamentally: Is this even possible? [29]

3. Is Intercultural Interpretation Possible?

There are essentially *four positions* on the question of whether and how understanding intercultural communication—which is the general case of intercultural data interpretation (MOOSMÜLLER, 2007; SRUBAR, RENN & WENZEL, 2005, STRAUB, WEIDEMANN & WEIDEMANN, 2007)—is possible:

1. The first states that in any culture, principally *everything* is expressible (SEARLE, 1979 [1969]) and, therefore, *everything* can be translated into any culture, where it can be understood well enough (NOVALIS, 1965). Thus, languages can be translated.
2. The second position implies that the foreign can only be understood by what is already known from one's own culture. Thus, translation processes are accompanied by the *integration* of the unknown into the own, and in the foreign, one can only find the familiar (KURT, 2007).
3. The third position assumes that cultures are principally *not* translatable into other cultures, so that intercultural understanding is impossible, foreignness

cannot be completely eliminated (SRUBAR, 2007), and difference is to be accepted (SOEFFNER, 2007).

4. The fourth position is based on the premise that, due to the contact that has always existed between cultures, the boundaries between them are blurred and *cultural intersections* have emerged. Thus, in the foreign, one can always find the own, and in the own, one can always find the foreign. As a consequence—if one tries—, other cultures can be understood well enough (WALDENFELS, 1990). [30]

Any theoretical consideration of translating intercultural data must also deal (at some point) with the question of whether there is something like a *universal language*—whether there is a pancultural, neutral language in which everything that is "reality" can be expressed correctly, or whether there is (in the words of BENJAMIN, 1977 [1955], p.51) a "language of God." Such a language would be capable of naming the essence of things in their authenticity and making them shine (EILENBERGER, 2018). According to BENJAMIN (1977 [1955]), only God can find the right words for all things, since he has unobstructed access to everything. However, if one is skeptical about this idea—which I am—then every culture of meaning is a part and expression of the respective general culture, and thus it is included in that culture. Consequently, a real translation would not be possible: therefore, cultural difference is not really surmountable (DREHER & STEGMAIER, 2007). [31]

However, if one renounces the essentials and relies on history and empiricism, then an opening and assimilation of the different cultures of meaning is not only expectable, but *inevitable*, because of the permanent contact and the obligation to contact. In the long run, and possibly after a very long time, this ultimately results in the gradual formation of a global culture of meaning. This idea can essentially be found in MEAD (1973 [1934]). Though, as long as such a global culture of meaning has not been established, social research, especially qualitative or interpretive, has to deal with the problem that there is no real translation capable of transforming a particular unit of meaning from one culture into a synonymous unit in another culture. A real translation cannot exist, first and foremost because the pragmatics of the culture of meaning cannot be summed up in one word. Rather, the pragmatics of an utterance always refer to networks of meaning at the meso-level and the macro-level. In that sense, a translation can only be an approximation. Below, I would like to add a fifth possibility to the thesis of cultural intersections (which I share), namely:

5. In translation processes, the foreign can be experienced and thus the own can be extended [32]

Each translation is at the same time part of the confrontation with and the consideration of the respective other culture of meaning and thus a step towards a global culture of meaning. The language of such a global culture of meaning would be a language in which the perspectives of the languages from which it emerged are "lifted" in a threefold sense: They are at a *higher level*, but they are

still *present* and at the same time *rebalanced*. Whether or not such a global language will ever be developed is a matter of opinion, depending on one's disposition. It seems to me that history has shown that one is on the safe side with a kind of healthy pessimism. Translation processes, and this is the important point here, are always enlargement processes, too—as long as one listens and creates for others the possibilities of free and self-determined expression. In addition, it must be ensured in the process of interpretation that the worldview of the others is taken into account, that the others are significantly involved in the reconstruction of meaning, and that it is acceptable to get irritated by the interpretation (SHIMADA, 1994). [33]

4. The Practice of Data Interpretation

Against the background of these considerations, how might a specific practice of data interpretation be defined? In principle, researchers can only approach the foreign culture with their own cultural preconceptions, and what is more important: the foreign culture always presents itself to them—whatever the context—in a specific, fragmentary, and above all reactive way (SCHRÖER, 2013). Hence, qualitative social research is confronted with massive problems in the study of foreign cultures and their practices. In my opinion, therefore, *all phases of scientific analysis need to be extended or changed* from the current practice. In the following section, I will briefly mention a few points. I will focus on linguistic data and their problems, because in intercultural qualitative social research, linguistic data (including interviews) are one of the most commonly used types of data. [34]

4.1 Field access and data collection

Scientific research, and in particular the scientific practice of data collection, is a special form of communication and action, which has become well known in Western cultures and which can now be controlled and used by all participants much better than 50 years ago. The word "participants" refers not only to scientists but also to the people being examined. For example, the people examined have learned to use the examination situation to pursue their own objectives, which is why their behavior is more and more strategic (REICHERTZ, 2012). Furthermore, on the same note, the current normal form of interviewing no longer corresponds to scientific interviews but instead is more similar to the normal form of television interviews with politicians or guests on talk shows. In short, there is no one "normal" form of interviewing, but rather there are many different forms (depending on the culture and time), which are constantly changing. Undoubtedly, one can assume that in other cultures, either there is no corresponding genus, or there are other normal forms of talking about one's own life to strangers who are not part of the same lifeworld and who use these narratives in other contexts, which are by and large unknown to the interviewee (MATTHES, 1985). [35]

Interviews and procedures for group discussions are either unknown or entirely different in other cultures: not only in terms of who can ask what to whom, how,

and in which situation and who can tell what to whom, when, where, and in which situation. This can vary considerably between cultures. Even the socially accepted embedding of systematic questions about life and the practice or the interpretation of one's own life differs massively from one culture to another. Do you first meet for food or drink and then start a conversation, is that only possible in a private home, or only outdoors? Among the peculiarities to be considered are the distribution and length of silence (BASSO, 1970), smiling, and looking at someone and how to deal with answers or questions that are incomprehensible or irritating (KÖNIG, 2017; LEONTIY, 2017). In short, you already have to know a lot about the other culture in order to *create a good situation* in which questions are legitimate and answers are allowed. In this context, it is crucial that a relationship be established between the researcher and the researched person. [36]

Additionally, if you want to work with interviews—in other words, the targeted questioning of a third person—you should assume that the *questions* of an interviewer need to be interpreted not only as questions but also as actions within a much larger social drama. In my view, it is generally more effective to create situations that allow everyone to become involved (i.e., both the researcher and the people being researched) in order to talk about practices or topics as one would in real life—that is to say, to have a real *conversation* with a communicative give and take. [37]

Despite complicating and significantly slowing down the research process, the data should be collected in the *original language* (MEYER, 2018)—which is not always easy to decide when multiple languages are spoken in one country. It is worth mentioning the (much wider) claim of Harold GARFINKEL (2002), who demanded as a quality criterion for good social research that researchers themselves be able to perform the studied field practices and that a description of these practices meet the requirements of a precise instruction of action (REICHERTZ, 2018a; WACQUANT, 2010 [2001]). If possible, project staff should have learned the language of the studied culture sufficiently well and work with that language in the field. For generations of ethnologists, it was a matter of course to learn the language of the researched persons sufficiently well before and during the field stay. Obviously, many social researchers who are conducting research in foreign countries have forgotten this tradition. Instead, they hope for quick understanding through the *lingua franca*, namely *English*. Instead of taking a closer look and listening carefully, they ask standardized questions or even questions without standards to apparent cultural experts. Thus, they are looking for a quick answer that is already focused on the research question. And they trust that the respondents are able and willing to respond readily and competently. Rather than acquiring the knowledge on their own, they rely on studying the information provided by the designated experts. [38]

Another common practice is having local translators *translate* the utterances in the original language. However, extreme caution should be exercised when external translators or even translators from the studied location are included, because there is a considerable danger that these translators will act strategically against the backdrop of shared lifeworlds, reinterpreting and reformulating the

questions or using the interview and the translations for their own purposes (DONK, 1996). The warning results from my own experience: In a project in which police interrogations of migrants of Turkish origin were investigated with the help of Turkish interpreters, we had the translations of the official interpreters retranslated by a translator of confidence. The result was that almost everyone did the translation work very idiosyncratically and not 1:1. Some wanted to help the accused and encouraged the accused to say or not to say certain things, while others wanted to help the police and put massive pressure on the accused, and still others used the translation work to better position themselves in the field of Turkish migrants. [39]

Only in urgent cases should data be collected in a language that is a learned, second language for both the subjects and the investigators, such as English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, or Spanish, because in these cases, the researchers and researched people all communicate in a foreign language. Later on in the interpretation situation (especially when it comes to the pragmatic meaning of utterances), this can lead to a series of virtually insurmountable difficulties. Other problems arise when the language used is an official language of a country that is the language of the elites and/or the former colonialists. Still other problems arise in cultures where French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, German, and English displaced the indigenous languages, creating either creole languages or giving rise to independent phonetics, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics that seem very similar to the original languages at first glance, but sometimes deviate significantly from the original languages on closer inspection. Solely on the basis of these insights, it would seem advisable to pay much more attention to recordings (sound recordings or audiovisual recordings) of an ongoing interaction, or to interpret objects and artifacts when collecting data. A very good example of how this can be done can be found in (MEYER, 2018). [40]

4.2 Data recording and preparation

Any data should be recorded by tape or camera and then transcribed carefully *in the source language*. Care should be taken not to use an external transcription office—*the transcription work has to be done by project staff* because transcription is never the automatic written fixation of what is spoken, but rather every transcription is always an interpretation of what is spoken against the backdrop of the context. Thus, for example, the audio track of the German *der gefangene floh*³ can on the one hand refer to a successful escape attempt by a human being, or on the other hand to the regrettable fact that a flea is being held captive. More important is the fact that decisions have to be made again and again when transcribing, whether something can be transcribed at all and if so how. Moreover, it has to be decided whether something was emphasized or not, whether it was ironized or not, whether people laughed and how they laughed and what that means, and so on. In the transcription, the *basis for the later interpretation* is laid and if it is incomplete or skewed, then the interpretation will

3 In the audio track "der gefangene floh" it is not clear which word is written in upper or lower case. This causes great differences in meaning in German: "der Gefangene floh" means "The prisoner escaped (from prison)," but "der gefangene Floh" means "The captured flea."

also be incomplete or skewed. Even worse: since you do not know what was important to the external transcribers, you cannot estimate the quality of the transcription—you operate with data of an unknown quality. [41]

The same applies to translations: The translation of the original data should not be done by a professional translation agency, but rather by culturally familiar translators who collaborate on the project, because translation is not "a magical act, thanks to which the work written in one language is suddenly created in another" (ORTEGA y GASSET, 1977 [1937], p.65)—even if some translation programs would lead us to believe so. Strictly speaking, a translation is not the work to be translated, "but a way to the work [...] an aid, an instrument that brings us closer to the work" (ibid.). Therefore, several translations are always possible, depending on the aspect that is important to you. It is never possible to consider all relevant aspects in a translation. Therefore, every translation should contain a giant *annotation apparatus* that repeatedly refers to variants of meaning that are not contained in the translation. Instead of making the translation fluid and thus easy to read, a translation is good when it is bulky, when it resists fast reading, when it seeks new linguistic formulations that allow one to penetrate the foreign language with one's own language. [42]

Translating is, and this insight is trivial but important, always a form of interpretation, even more so than transcribing—therefore, the task of translating must always remain in the project group. Moreover, it is usually very useful to transcribe this joint work of translation very accurately. In my opinion, the translation problem cannot be solved by making the respective original the basis of the analysis (for example, all members of the interpretation group interpret the English data, perhaps even in English). If this is done, the translation problem only shifts and often is lost from sight and thus becomes uncontrollable. *For interpretation sessions, you should have both versions available as a transcript, the original and the translation.* [43]

4.3 Interpretation

In a hermeneutical analysis, data should in principle be interpreted together—that is, in a group of four to ten people. An *interpretation group*—also called *interpretation communities* or *researcher/interpretation workshops*—is defined as a more or less fixed group of researchers (and/or students), integrated into the university system who interpret data together in the context of qualitative social research (REICHERTZ, 2018b). This always refers to a group of sociologically trained interpreters in specific employment and educational contexts who interpret data together in order to arrive at concepts or theories about the nature of the social world. When interpreting intercultural data, the group should include at least *one culturally familiar interpreter who, if possible, is bilingual* and thus able to articulate the pragmatic meaning of utterances in the common interpretation. In the procedure proposed here, the others who are studied, or more precisely: others who belong to the studied culture or who belonged to it in the past and have now been living in German culture for some years are used as co-

interpreters who attempt a *representative self-interpretation*. In this way, it is possible to enter into a dialogue with the other culture to some extent. [44]

In *choosing the co-interpreter for intercultural data*, it is important to ensure not only that co-interpreters are rooted deeply enough in their culture of origin, but also that they are *trained in the theories that are used in the interpretation group*, in its scientific method, and its practical, methodical procedure. Interpreting and, in particular, methodically guided interpreting along the elaborated hermeneutics is undoubtedly a cultural technique developed in the Western cultural sphere, which ultimately is rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions and also in ancient philosophy. A hermeneutic interpretive attitude does not arise in and of itself, but rather it is a product of scientific training and thus of Western socialization. A case from one of my own interpretation groups serves as a vivid example. We had some long debates with a co-interpreter of Arabic origin about the appropriateness of interpretations from the Koran. He was quite sure that the semantics and pragmatics of Arabic had not changed since the Koran's writing in the seventh century, and that in all regions where Arabic is spoken, the words of the Koran had the same meaning—in every sense. And he was convinced that only a theological study of Islam would entitle one to interpret the Koran and its instructions. In this case, the co-interpreter did not share the attitude of the other members of the interpretation group, nor the associated background theories about the historical development of the semantics and pragmatics of a language. Furthermore, he also doubted the legitimacy and competence of secular interpreters to interpret the basic script of Islam. [45]

Another essential point, and this is a second important condition, is that the culturally familiar co-interpreter is trained in the *process of interpretation*, and that he/she knows the *question* and the *theoretical background* of the analysis. Only in this way is it possible to bring together different interpretations and discuss them successfully in a common interpretation. Since, however, one can only *approximate* the meaning of the respective utterances under these conditions, in my opinion, detailed analyses and sequence analyses (REICHERTZ, 2016) are not suitable. Instead, the *propositional content* of an utterance or the type of action should be interpreted, not the specific form of the action (type not token). Further down toward the end of the chapter, I will explain this with an example. [46]

An interpretation situation is not about the meaning that an expression has in our own culture; instead, it is always about the meaning that the communicative actions have in the original culture, that is the culture being studied. Therefore, during the interpretation, one should have no inhibitions to *use the common-sense knowledge of the interpretation group about the studied culture*, and sometimes also the knowledge that is available on the *Internet* even during the session. This means that it is quite fruitful to research online about the cultural peculiarities of the investigated group and to take this into account in the interpretation in the event of controversial questions within the group of interpreters. By the way, this procedure does not violate the widespread requirement in qualitative research of interpreting data without previous knowledge, hence an *artificially stupid* interpretation (HITZLER, 1991). In his

much-praised article, HITZLER (p.295) spoke explicitly of an "artificial", not of an actual stupidity. Artificial stupidity implies a great deal of knowledge, because researchers have previously informed themselves comprehensively of what they want to study and how. However, they exclude the validity of their knowledge and thus remains open to the old and the new (REICHERTZ, 2013a). Artificial stupidity also implies knowledge of the *latest developments* with regard to the object, method, and methodology. With this systematic extension of one's own knowledge *before* conducting research, one also enlarges the available space of good reasons to do something. This is very helpful in interpreting and also later in theorizing. If you do not inform yourself before you work, you will not find anything except your own pre-conceptions, and you run the risk of reinventing the cuckoo clock (as a German proverb says). [47]

It is not easy to formulate an example of the problem described above and its solution—which is not because there are so few examples. On the contrary, examples can be found everywhere in the data material. Instead, the problem is that they are so difficult to translate. Nevertheless, I will try to give you a particularly clear example. It is perhaps a little exaggerated, but I believe that is justified because I am only trying to illustrate the problem and the procedure. As part of a research project on the use of living space in a foreign land, someone could say in an interview (or focus group or normal conversation): "And then he said to me, 'Clean up your room now!'" But the sentence could also be: "Damn it, clean up your room already!" Or: "Please clean up your room." Or: "Be nice for once and clean up your room." Or: "Do me a favor and clean up your room." Or: "Do yourself and me a favor and clean up your room." Or: "I'm asking you for the last time, please clean up your room." Or: "You could yield a little and clean up your room." Or: "Do you feel like cleaning up your room?" Or: "Might I ask you to tidy your room?" Or: "If you tidy up your room, I'll owe you one." And so on and so forth. [48]

All these sentences contain a request to someone to tidy up his/her room. Sometimes this statement is dressed as a harsh order, sometimes as a polite request, sometimes as a threat, sometimes as a trade, and sometimes as a submission. Each of these forms of expression contains a request for a certain idea of who may say something to whom, who has power, what the relationship is between the speaker and the person being addressed, and what identity is claimed or attributed in each case. But each of these statements also contains implicit knowledge about who can and must have their own room in which social formation, in which countries and in which income conditions, what obligations and rights this entails, and who at what age can tell whom that he/she must clean up his/her room. And the request also contains a normative idea of who can be told such a thing by whom and for how long. Can and may men say this to women, or women to men? Up to what age may they say such a thing and in what social setting (family, company, clique, roommates, etc.)? These statements also contain ideas about how to deal with adults and adolescents in a society, which educational concepts are currently in demand, and how these educational concepts can be expressed linguistically and communicatively. [49]

In short, all of these statements contain a very specific historical world view, which is the expression of a specific and historically developed society and thus linked to it: a culture of communication. The more you as a researcher are familiar with this culture of communication, the more detailed you can be and the more precisely you can interpret such statements (e.g., with the help of a hermeneutic sequence analysis). The less one knows about this culture, the more one has to hold back with assumptions about the normality and values of the other culture; otherwise, one runs the risk of projecting only one's own ideas of normality onto the world of others. Anyone who does not know very much about the culture of meaning of the subjects can only interpret based on the content that was said in the interview that someone had ordered someone else to tidy up a room and that this room is in some way ascribed to the person addressed as a kind of "property" underlying a certain obligation to act. The first instance allows for a *thick description*, while the second only permits a *thin description* (GEERTZ, 1973). [50]

4.3.1 Data fixation and data analysis in English

Some research groups are trying to avoid the translation problem by having all data translated into English (see above) and then interpreting the data in English with a group of scientists from different countries of origin. All this on the grounds that the scientific cultures of the individual countries had already become very uniform. It may well be the case that there are more cultural similarities between German scientists and their American, British, Italian, and Austrian colleagues than between German scientists and German street sweepers or German farmers. But this assertion is only half correct, because even within the scientific cultures, there are not only serious differences between the disciplines, but also between the cultures in Germany, the US, the UK, Italy, and Austria. As a rule, those involved are well aware of these peculiarities regarding the respective cultures and are often the subject of jokes and anecdotes (see the quotation from HUGHES above). The actual "family resemblance" between some (not all) Western scientific cultures cannot, however, be used as a justification for transforming all data into English without good reason and then interpreting the data in English as a team. For even if all data are available in English and everyone speaks English, this does not mean that all participating scientists use the pragmatics of British and/or American English. Instead, they are likely to mostly use the pragmatics of their own mother tongue, but often without noticing. [51]

If research groups work together over extended periods of time, they soon develop their own local pragmatics of using the English language. However, this does not eliminate the translation problem, but only makes it invisible to those involved. Translating all data into English and communicating about it with all researchers in the English language is without doubt a practical solution to the translation problem. However, this approach creates strange constructs in the truest sense of the word. On the one hand, they often differ significantly from the original data because of the different transformation processes (transcription, translation), while on the other hand, the analysis of the data follows a process of intercultural production of meaning, which is epistemologically completely

unexplained. In my opinion, it is very risky to regard the results of such communicative processes as valid. [52]

4.3.2 Consensus or conflict?

The group interpretation is supported by the usually not thematized faith or hope that it is in principle possible to reach a consensus within a group on the meaning of data—even if only in the long run. However, this is by no means self-evident. One could also claim with good reason that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reach a consensus on the meaning of data; the interpretation horizons of the participants are in principle irreconcilable (especially when it comes to interdisciplinary research). Regardless, in my view, interdisciplinary research in an international research team can be very fruitful—different points of relevance and perspectives meet here. *If there is no consensus on an interpretation of the data, different interpretations can exist side by side and be constructive*—after all, they show different aspects of data evaluation. How the evaluation process proceeds in concrete terms and what result is agreed on or not depends on the concrete communicative cooperation and opposition in the research group. [53]

How this communication proceeds in detail depends on which standards, norms, types, and rules are applied in the group, which ultimately go back to the methods used and the corresponding specialist discourses. *Methods* (for example, interpretation according to grounded theory or a variation of hermeneutics) and expert discussions are to be understood as more or less codified pathways for actions and behaviors in the respective scientific reference group. These pathways are created as a result of:

1. the implicit and explicit rules, which specify what may be done, what is to be done and how with the data, and when;
2. the theoretical and pre-theoretical assumptions of what data "are," or what they represent in each case;
3. practices that indicate what the participants have to do when interpreting the chosen method, what is allowed to be communicated, and what is not. [54]

These pathways are filled with life and dynamism by the implicit and explicit assumptions and rules that have evolved historically in the respective interpretation group, which result from the common communication practice and which indicate: what may be communicated to whom in which tone; how one recognizes where the discussion is at the moment and when the discussion is over; who has more power of communication (REICHERTZ, 2009) and whose word has little weight; how conflicts are handled, etc. The interpretation group is also able to determine what is to be communicated to whom and in which tone. [55]

Although joint communicative action in interpretation groups is initiated within a certain framework by social communication orders, the chosen methods, and the history of interaction and communication, the course of communication and thus of interpretation is nevertheless not determined by these, but rather it is

systematically open. Communicating in groups very rarely follows a script, a "plan," or even a "strategy." Much more important for the course and form of action are the respective situation (REICHERTZ, 2013b, 2018a) and the responding action of the counterpart. A communicative action, once begun, unfolds a dynamic that carries even the actor to points where he/she did not want to land. As a rule, communicative action always reacts to answers, develops from the dynamics of interaction, and is therefore fluid; communicative action also reacts permanently to its own course, repeatedly develops ad-hoc strategies, and is therefore only predictable and controllable to a limited extent. A consensus on the assessment of the appropriateness of interpretations is not reached by itself, it does not simply occur (or only very rarely), but rather it is the product of certain communicative practices. Thus, similar readings are found by communicative, processual, and (socially) distributed means. A "decision" for or against an interpretation is thus anchored in the practice of communication and in sociality, thereby guaranteeing it—regardless of whether the group is committed to finding an all-inclusive reading or to working out different readings existing side by side. [56]

4.3.3 Using countertransference processes for analysis

Methodologically, it is often useful and fruitful to make the *countertransference processes* in the interpretation group the subject of a later interpretation (BONZ, EISCH-ANGUS, HAMM & SÜLZLE, 2017; REICHERTZ, 2018a). Therefore, as a rule, *two* interpretation runs must be planned: First, the *common interpretation*, which focuses on the reconstruction of the social significance of the respective communicative actions in the *foreign culture*; second, the *mutual contouring of the own and the foreign*, by interpreting the irritations, resistances, and contradictions within the interpretation group. Thus, in the second run, the interpretation group should work out how the foreign alienated and irritated the own. This makes it possible to develop not only a better understanding of the actions in the foreign culture, but also a better understanding of the actions in one's own culture. [57]

4.4 Presentation of data

Once the interpretation group has settled on a specific interpretation variant of the intercultural data, the question arises of how to adequately present the entire translation process. This is not only a question of *adequacy*, as in whether this process has been described *precisely enough*, but also a question of how one can present this translation process in a *convincing* way to the readers. In this context, it is important for the presentation to always be designed in such a way that, based on the research report, the readers are not just familiarized with the peculiarities of the other culture. The readers and thus the colleagues need to be enabled by the research report to judge and criticize the translation and appropriation processes. [58]

Incidentally, this translation problem cannot be solved by denying it. It is almost adventurous to see how, for example, DERSCH and OEVERMANN (1994) analyzed a text using objective hermeneutics and especially a sequence analysis

that was put together in the following way: As part of a research project, an adult Tunisian educator interviewed an ordinary Tunisian peasant woman in her home environment with a semi-structured interview. The peasant woman spoke a Tunisian-Arabic dialect. The questions, which were discussed with the head of research, an employee of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ) [German Society for Technical Cooperation], were translated by the Tunisian interviewer into the language of the peasant woman. The interview was recorded on tape and later translated by an externally commissioned person directly into French (ibid.). On the basis of this transcription, or more precisely, on the basis of data that were contaminated several times (= the interview on the one hand and, if you add the German interpreters, at least *six* translation processes on the other hand), DERSCH and OEVERMANN reconstructed the life practice, attitudes, habits, and interpretive patterns of a Tunisian peasant woman (ibid.). [59]

In my opinion, such a procedure cannot be justified, even if cultural universals, such as cross-cultural meanings, are postulated (incidentally, without any convincing reasons)—as OEVERMANN (2001) did. Once engaging in such a thesis, these cultural universals (OEVERMANN cited examples of incest taboo, language, and myths) would be of such a great generality that no one would be able to say anything specific about the case anymore because of their interpretation. Moreover, these universals are something completely different from the rules of a specific construction of meaning, and that alone would be a real argument, since sequence analysis works in an effort to reconstruct meaning, explicitly only with the rules of meaning constitution. For qualitative social research and its survival, it will be crucial to solve the problem of dealing with intercultural data. From my point of view, this will only succeed if one leaves the individual interpretation behind and turns in general to *group interpretation* (REICHERTZ, 2013b, 2018a) and seriously incorporates members of the culture studied into the joint interpretation. However, this integration can only succeed if these members have been socialized in the respective way of interpreting *before* the actual interpretation, because joint interpreting is not self-explanatory and needs to be learned. [60]

5. Interpretation Means Expansion

Basically, there is nothing fundamental and general to say about the analysis of intercultural data. *The decisive factor is always the situation on the ground.* Only by knowing the cultural and linguistic peculiarity of the examined persons, one can decide on how to proceed in detail with the collection and the interpretation of data. Of course, the question, the method(s) that researchers plan to use, and the overall goal of the project play an important role when it comes to making methodological choices. And of course, it is always crucial to assess whether a lengthy preparation and training of interpreters is even possible under the given economic conditions of the project. In some cases, however, co-interpreters who are familiar with the foreign culture as well as with their own culture will not be available, making it necessary to find pragmatic alternative solutions. [61]

Moreover, it is a mistake to think that you are off the hook regarding the translation problem just because your own research is not about actors' sense-making, but about certain *social practices or actions*. For example, it is not enough only to pick out the information from the report of the production of a particular object or the course of a particular institutional order. Even instrumental action and its representation are always embedded in the respective culture of the sayable and the unspeakable: as soon as it is linguistically presented or paraphrased, the semantics, grammar, and pragmatics of the respective language and interaction community are used. This means that these representations, too, are significantly influenced by the respective culture of meaning constitution. Hence, the interpretation of intercultural data does not differ *fundamentally* from the interpretation of intracultural data. It is always about the reconstruction of meaning, which is why the same structural problems exist in the interpretation of intracultural and intercultural data. However, the interpretation of intercultural data actually differs in individual cases and empirically very much so and significantly from the interpretation of intracultural data. This is because the interpretation of intercultural data requires additional help, which can usually be acquired by interpreting intracultural data, since the interpretation group itself mostly knows enough about the culture of meaning and also has it practically at hand. [62]

However, a distinction must also be made here: It is not possible to separate intracultural data from intercultural data. Instead, due to the interpenetration of cultures that I mentioned before, there are almost always intersections of common meaning that facilitate access to the reconstruction of meaning. In general, it could be said that fewer intersections of common meaning between the culture studied and the researchers' culture mean that it is all the more necessary to involve co-interpreters *and* other sources of knowledge. However, those who suspect that there are no differences at all between the interpretation of intracultural and intercultural data are wrong. Through thought experiments one may consider how far they come in analyzing indigenous everyday communication from Dubai, Denmark, or Germany, from Abu Dhabi, Aarhus, or Aachen. The interpretive task may be the same in structure, because it has to be *translated* (RENN, 2006). In fact, however, a group of interpreters consisting only of German native speakers *will not be able* to interpret the communicative actions from Abu Dhabi adequately without having expanded systematically their horizons about its culture of meaning. It will be easier to interpret actions from Aarhus, because Danish partially overlaps with German tonally, but even there you will not get far without the help of cultural experts. And it will be much easier with the data from Aachen—even if we are dealing with dialectal speakers who belong to the local carnival scene. But it would certainly make the work easier if you include cultural co-interpreters here, too. [63]

In the end, however, the experiences with intercultural communication and intercultural data show very clearly how much the premise of hermeneutics has come under pressure, which postulates a necessary unit of culture between researchers and those who are researched. This is because, essentially, it presupposes that cultures can be delimited and that they are not further

subdivided. If such a unity of culture ever existed, it has undoubtedly thinned out over recent decades due to international developments. Even if you only have intracultural data or, more precisely, data in which all participants speak fluently and without accents in the language of the interpreters, you can no longer really assume that all of them use the same rules to constitute meaning. Inside the lifeworld of rockers, different rules apply than in the lifeworld of politicians, and in banks you find different pragmatics than in kindergartens. In addition, there are increasingly multiple cultural affiliations due to migration movements, which (because of ongoing migration) often remain in a permanent state of flux and development themselves. [64]

In short, due to the experience with *intercultural* data, it would be worth re-considering whether the practice of collecting and evaluating *intracultural* data should be modified accordingly. This also means considering whether here, too, culturally familiar co-interpreters should be systematically included in the analysis. Certainly, this systematic use of knowledge from the studied lifeworlds would quickly expose itself to the accusation of having previously learned too much about the studied world. Accordingly, it would be in danger of only subsuming in the process of data analysis instead of interpreting only the data itself without prejudice. In my view, this is actually not a structural problem, but rather a problem of how to deal with this knowledge. Someone who knows a lot can offer many interpretation variants, while someone who knows very little about the studied field is permanently in danger of requiring more effort just to find something any field expert could say within two minutes. Again: *The only thing that matters is how to deal with this knowledge*. If researchers regard their own knowledge as binding, then without a doubt there is a danger of subsumption. If they, on the other hand, regard this knowledge only as *one* possibility of many others, they systematically enlarge the space of creating different interpretation variants, which makes interpretations more effective and richer. [65]

In my opinion, scientific understanding and, above all, scientific interpretation essentially are an attitude—an *attitude* of a general skepticism towards one's own knowledge (REICHERTZ, 2018b). People who are certain of having already understood communicative actions correctly, just because they are sure about it and take it for granted, will (at most) find their way in their own everyday lives. For the scientific everyday life of interpreting (alone or in groups), *caution* and *temporariness* apply. This is especially important when dealing with meaningful utterances of others from other cultural environments. In dealing with such utterances, it makes a lot of sense to assume that not everything is self-explanatory, but rather that meaning must be interpreted actively (ECO, 1987, 1990). In such cases, one has to be open to reconstructing and to finding suitable meanings, possibly by using mental leaps and then trying them out. This also means playing for some time with several meanings in parallel and testing their validity as long as they work. Sometimes, these mental leaps take the logical form of qualitative *induction* (the found is already known), and other times, the form of an *abduction* (the discovered is completely new—REICHERTZ, 2013a). [66]

At the same time, one's own knowledge of the world expands. For interpreting always means looking at the social world from the point of view of the person being examined, and it means having to relate oneself to sociality and to others. Each interpretation expands one's own horizon, or as BERGER and KELLNER (1981) put it: "I cannot interpret another's meaning without changing, albeit minimally, my own meaning system" (p.24). Therefore, interpreting is never just the recognition of a social meaning in an utterance of a person being examined. Rather, interpreting is always a communicative construction, which relates the people being examined, the respective social world, and oneself. [67]

Basically, it is RICOEUR (2005 [1990]) who inspired the idea that foreign cultures open one's eyes to the own culture. On the one hand, this is because confronting the foreign reveals what is special about one's own culture and thus, at the same time, the own becomes unfamiliar. On the other hand, when trying to translate the foreign into the own, in the sense of making it completely understandable, an *untranslatable remainder* is always left over. This remainder challenges the foreign and the own, and at the same time, it sets in motion a process of trying somehow to completely translate the untranslatable and thus making it understandable. However, this process usually does not come to a definite end. As a result, every attempt to translate the untranslatable constantly creates something new, because it initiates and advances a discourse and a further practice. [68]

Whether the resulting interpretation of meaning is correct will be proven by the later use of this knowledge. Whether reconstructions of meaning are valid, or more precisely, whether they have the power to explain a fact or process completely or partially, does not depend on a methodically clean creation. Rather, it depends on if they help to deal practically with the facts and processes being studied, and if they help to influence them. Hence, it is not methodology that determines the validity of interpretations, but, in the spirit of GADAMER (1975 [1960]), it is *history*. Or to take it one step further: the daily, that is to say, the present and the future practice of social cooperation and opposition. Proving itself in action is ultimately the touchstone for a valid interpretation, not epistemology or good conscience. Following this point of view, the research report with its individual results is not the end but the beginning of a discourse on these results, their evaluation, and their appropriateness. [69]

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