

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2018-12-07

Deposited version:

Post-print

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Schippling, A. (2017). Investigator triangulation in the data interpretation process. An almost untouched research area. *La Critica Sociologica*. 51 (203), 87-100

Further information on publisher's website:

[10.19272/201701203007](https://doi.org/10.19272/201701203007)

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Schippling, A. (2017). Investigator triangulation in the data interpretation process. An almost untouched research area. *La Critica Sociologica*. 51 (203), 87-100, which has been published in final form at <https://dx.doi.org/10.19272/201701203007>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

INVESTIGATOR TRIANGULATION IN THE DATA INTERPRETATION PROCESS – AN ALMOST UNTOUCHED RESEARCH AREA

ANNE SCHIPPLING*

ABSTRACT

In actual discussions and especially in the context of improving the quality of qualitative research, investigator-triangulation is understood as one strategy to obtain a more complex and profound understanding of the research object.

Although investigator-triangulation is mentioned in methodological debates, there is very little scientific reflection and research about its practice and implications for the research process, especially for data analysis. Everyday practice of interpretation groups composed of social sciences researchers, who interpret qualitative data, is still an almost untouched research area.

This contribution proposes a methodological reflection on investigator triangulation in interpretation groups in social sciences, inspired by the empirical experience of group interpretation of data gathered for an ongoing research project about international schools in Greater Lisbon in the context of a German research workshop. Based on a concrete example of joint interpreting interviews, we will not only discuss the methodological implications, challenges and potentials of investigator triangulation and the generation of knowledge within interpretation groups, but also shed a light on research perspectives within this context.

Key words: investigator triangulation, group interpretation, quality of qualitative research, knowledge generation

* CIES-IUL, ISCTE, MLU Halle-Wittenberg, FernUni Hagen, funded by FCT, Lisbon. Anne.Schippling@iscte.pt.

INTRODUCTION – INVESTIGATOR TRIANGULATION AS A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH

An initial question that arises in connection with qualitative social research is whether it is possible to have uniform qualitative criteria or standards equivalent to the criteria of reliability, validity and objectivity used in quantitative research.¹ Although attempts have been made to formulate criteria and standards for qualitative research², they are often unsatisfactory. Lüders considers the discussion of quality criteria in qualitative research to be «a challenging and in essence controversial issue on which it is virtually impossible to identify anything resembling a basis consensus»³.

For some authors, the multiplicity of methods and schools within qualitative social research raises the question of whether uniform criteria and standards are appropriate; others doubt whether it is possible to capture the quality of qualitative research by means of uniform criteria.⁴

It does at least seem to be agreed upon that the classical criteria of quantitative research cannot be transferred to qualitative research as they are, because the two orientations differ in their understanding of reality.⁵

An alternative to the formulation of standards or criteria is the development of strategies for improving the quality of qualitative research in which the research process is examined as a whole. One such strategy is triangulation, which in qualitative social research involves considering the research object from (at least) two points.⁶

¹ See ANNA MADILL, ABBIE JORDAN, CAROLINE SHIRLEY, *Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies*, «British Journal of Psychology», 91, 1, 2000, pp. 1-20.

² See YVONNA S. LINCOLN, EGON G. GUBA, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, London and New Delhi, Sage, 1985; INES STEINKE, *Kriterien qualitativer Forschung. Ansätze zur Bewertung qualitativ-empirischer Sozialforschung*, Weinheim and München, Juventa, 1999; CLIVE SEALE, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 1999; HEINZ-HERMANN KRÜGER, *Stichwort: Qualitative Forschung in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, «Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft», 3, 3, 2000, pp. 323-343; RALF BOHNSACK, *Standards nicht-standardisierter Forschung in den Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaften*, «Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft», 8, 4, 2005, pp. 65-83.

³ CHRISTIAN LÜDERS, *Gütekriterien*, in *Hauptbegriffe qualitativer Sozialforschung*, edited by Ralf Bohnsack, Winfried Marotzki, Michael Meuser, Opladen, Leske + Budrich, 2003, p. 80; All translations from German into English were carried out by Armored Young.

⁴ See UWE FLICK, *Standards, Kriterien, Strategien – Zur Diskussion über Qualität qualitativer Sozialforschung*, «Zeitschrift für qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung», 6, 2, 2005, pp. 203-204.

⁵ See UWE FLICK, *Gütekriterien qualitativer Forschung*, in *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie*, edited by Günter Mey, Katja Mruck, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010, p. 397.

⁶ See UWE FLICK, *Triangulation in Qualitative Research*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, Ines Steinke, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 2004, p. 178.

Denzin in his original concept regards triangulation as a form of validation and identifies four different forms of triangulation, which are: (a) within-method and between-method triangulation, (b) data triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) investigator triangulation.¹ As the idea was developed, Denzin's original understanding of triangulation as reciprocal validation of results was criticised.² Denzin took this criticism on board and now considers triangulation to be a strategy for obtaining a deeper understanding of the object of research.³ Flick also adopts this view of triangulation as an extension of the «insight opportunities of qualitative research through additional perspectives»⁴.

Investigator triangulation, which can be regarded as a «collaborative strategy»⁵ involving collaboration between researchers, can take place both at the data acquisition level and at the data analysis level. At the data acquisition level, different researchers participate in a method of data collection in the research field (e.g. participant observation, interview, focus group); in the case of data analysis, investigator triangulation involves joint interpretation of data in analysis groups or research workshops. Steinke describes group interpretation as «a discursive way of producing inter-subjectivity and comprehensibility by dealing explicitly with data and their interpretation»⁶. The creation of intersubjective transparency in the research process, e.g. through joint work on empirical material in research workshops in the form of investigator triangulation, can be regarded as a strategy for improving the quality of qualitative social research.

INVESTIGATOR TRIANGULATION IN INTERPRETATION GROUPS – A STILL LARGELY UNEXPLORED AREA OF RESEARCH

¹ See NORMAN K. DENZIN, *The Research Act. A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1978, pp. 297-313.

² See e.g. DAVID SILVERMAN, *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology: describing the social world*, Aldershot, Gower, 1985; NIGEL G. FIELDING, JANE L. FIELDING, *Linking Data*, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1986.

³ See e.g. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks and London, Sage, 1994.

⁴ UWE FLICK, *Gütekriterien qualitativer Forschung*, cit., p. 205; see also UWE FLICK, *Managing the Quality of Qualitative Research*, London, Thousand Oaks and CA/ Delhi, Sage, 2007.

⁵ MANDY M. ARCHIBALD, *Investigator triangulation: a collaborative strategy with potential for mixed method research*, «Journal of Mixed Methods Research», 10, 3, 2016, pp. 228-250.

⁶ INES STEINKE, *Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, cit., p. 187.

Archibald points out that the concept of investigator triangulation «has been conceptualized diversely and [...] itself appears underdeveloped»¹. Investigator triangulation, which is used in the data analysis process, in interpretation groups and in research workshops, has been an everyday practice in qualitative social research for many years – especially in Germany, where the first interpretation groups emerged in the late 1970s in Bielefeld, Frankfurt am Main and Konstanz. The Bielefeld group headed by Fritz Schütze, Werner Kallmeyer and Gerhard Riemann based its approach on the method of research-oriented learning used in the research workshops of Anselm Strauss in San Francisco.² The tradition of these workshops goes back to the research-oriented learning of the Chicago School in the 1930s³ and continues until this day, on one the hand, with the interpretation groups organized by the former colleagues of Anselm Strauss.⁴ On the other hand, many researchers from European countries and especially from Japan attended the research colloquia of Anselm Strauss, such as Gerhard Riemann and Fritz Schütze (Germany). They were inspired by the work of Strauss who influenced their methodological conception of «collaborative analysis»⁵ regarding data analysis.

The tradition of the Frankfurt interpretation group led by Alfred Lorenzer, Ulrich Oevermann and Lothar Krappmann is shaped partly by the principles of transcendental philosophy and pragmatics and partly by aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis. By contrast, the key influences on the interpretation group in Konstanz that is headed by Thomas Luckmann and Jörg Bergmann are the American ethnomethodological conversation analysis and the tradition of phenomenological theory. Since the early 1980s, interpretation groups, which had been influenced in various ways by these traditions, have sprung up all over the world, especially in German speaking countries, where they became an official practice in

¹ MANDY M. ARCHIBALD, *Investigator triangulation: a collaborative strategy with potential for mixed method research*, cit., p. 237; see also TERESA DUARTE, *A possibilidade da investigação a 3: reflexões sobre triangulação (metodológica)*, «CIES e-Working Papers», 60, 2009, [URL http://cies.iscte-iul.pt/destaques/documents/CIES-WP60_Duarte_002.pdf] (accessed on February 27, 2017), pp. 1-24.

² ANSELM L. STRAUSS, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

³ See GERHARD RIEMANN, *Ethnographies of practice – practising ethnography: resources for self-reflective social work*, «Journal of Social Work Practice», 19, 1, 2005, pp. 98.

⁴ See e.g. CAROLYN WIENER, *Making Teams Work in Conducting Grounded Theory*, in *Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*, edited by Antony Bryant, Kathy Charmaz, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2007, pp. 293–311; ADELE E. CLARKE, *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005.

⁵ ANSELM L. STRAUSS, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, cit., pp. 138-139.

universities teaching and researching, especially in Sociology, Social Work, Educational Sciences and Political Sciences.¹

Group interpretations are «communicative constructions of reality – just in a scientific context»². Interpretation groups are normally composed of four to ten (early-stage) social scientists, who work together on empirical data from research projects. They are usually coordinated by a moderator. In most cases, the group is formed casually. There are no special admission procedures for participating in the group.³ The social constructions of knowledge that emerge from these interpretation groups are not immune to scientific analysis because they are part of scientific practice: on the contrary, the requirements of reflexivity in sciences⁴ mean that knowledge generation in interpretation groups on the basis of the investigator triangulation can and must be subjected to scientific analysis. There are two levels of reflexivity. At a first level, investigator triangulation in data interpretation breaks up and opens up the perspective of a single interpreter, which is historically and socially conditioned. At a second level, investigator triangulation can and should be object of reflexivity in order to improve the quality of research in Social Sciences. These reflexivity levels contribute to ensuring intersubjective transparency in the interpretation process, which is a key quality criterion in qualitative social research.⁵

In the light of this, it is surprising that only very rarely has the social practice in these interpretation groups been an object of research. There have occasionally been studies that have explored the work of interpretation groups and research workshops from various theoretical and methodological perspectives,⁶ but there is little systematic investigation of issues such as the interpretation process and the communicative generation of social scientific knowledge within these interpretation groups.

¹ QUALITATIVE FORSCHUNG, *Übersicht zu qualitativ-methodischen Forschungswerkstätten deutschsprachiger Raum*, [URL <http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/information/forschungswerkstaetten/Forschungswerkstaetten.pdf>] (accessed on February 27, 2017).

² JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2013, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁴ PIERRE BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, Paris, Raisons d'Agir, 2001.

⁵ INES STEINKE, *Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, cit., p. 187.

⁶ See e.g. ANSELM L. STRAUSS, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, cit.; FRITZ SCHÜTZE, *Eine sehr persönlich generalisierte Sicht auf qualitative Sozialforschung*, «Zeitschrift für qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung», 6, 2, 2005, pp. 211-248; BRITT HOFFMANN, GERLINDE POKLADEK, *Das spezielle Arbeitsbündnis in qualitativen Forschungswerkstätten. Merkmale und Schwierigkeiten aus der Perspektive der TeilnehmerInnen*, «Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung», 11, 2, 2010, pp. 197-217; GERHARD RIEMANN, «Grounded theorizing» als Gespräch – Anmerkungen zu Anselm Strauss, der frühen Chicagoer Soziologie und der Arbeit in Forschungswerkstätten, in *Grounded Theory Reader*, edited by Günter Mey, Katja Mruck, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2011, pp. 405-426; JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit.

THE GENERATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN INTERPRETATION GROUPS – AN ATTEMPT AT A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH

Theoretical approach

Reichertz defines interpretation groups as «specific media/means or social techniques of knowledge generation, or more precisely: the communicative generation of social scientific knowledge of the social world, in other words the communicative construction of reality»¹.

How can the «knowledge of the social world» be characterised more precisely? For Bohnsack and Krüger, these knowledge constructions are characterised primarily by a specific relationship to the research object. They are «constructions of common-sense constructions or experiences of common-sense experiences»² or «second-order constructions»³. They therefore imply a distancing or break from the assumptions of common sense, which implies an attitudinal shift of the analysis from ‘what’ the social reality is in the actors’ perspective to ‘how’ it is created in practice. With Luhmann, one can speak of a shift from «first-order observation» to «second-order observation»⁴.

This social scientific knowledge can be generated by a single interpreter or by an interpretation group. The work on the data material in interpretation groups is for various reasons regarded as a means of improving the quality of research regarding the construction of social scientific knowledge.⁵ Work in interpretation groups is helpful in enabling the data to be understood in the first place; at the same time, investigator triangulation in data interpretation produces multiple perspectives on the data material. This can break up the restricted perspective of one interpreter and make new interpretations possible. Investigator

¹ JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit., p. 13; see also *Kommunikativer Konstruktivismus*, edited by Reiner Keller, Hubert Knoblauch, Jo Reichertz, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2012.

² RALF BOHNSACK, HEINZ-HERMANN KRÜGER, *Qualität qualitativer Forschung. Einführung in den Themenschwerpunkt*, «Zeitschrift für qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung», 6, 2, 2005, p. 186.

³ ALFRED SCHÜTZ, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*, Den Haag, Springer, 1962, pp. 3-47.

⁴ NIKLAS LUHMANN, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995, pp. 92-164.

⁵ INES STEINKE, *Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research*, cit.; JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit.

triangulation thus facilitates a process of «actively engaging multiple ways of seeing and knowing»¹. Kurt describes this form of joint interpretation of the data material as follows:

One can be absolutely confident that the group members will lever each other out of their tracks – something that they would have great difficulty in doing without the help of their co-interpreters, because each person has a tendency to settle on a favourite interpretation far too quickly. In the spontaneous to-and-fro of thinking, the group develops interpretations that nobody thought of at the start of the interpretation.²

As a result, the interpretation group systematically generates an alienation of one's own perspective³ that makes participants aware of the socially and culturally conditioned nature of their own perspective – a fundamental prerequisite for a reflexive scientific approach.

An ideal-type differentiation of interpretation groups with regard to the generation of social scientific knowledge is based on different understandings of interpretation. While some interpretation groups aim to develop a variety of perspectives and multi-faceted interpretations through their work in order to arrive at a more complex and nuanced approach to the object of study; other groups – such as those in the Frankfurt tradition – assume that there is in principle one valid and objective interpretation. Here the aim of the process of group interpretation is to successively reduce the subjective diversity of individual perspectives in order to generate valid statements about the case.⁴

The next section analyses an excerpt from a group interpretation that took place during a research colloquium at a German university: the aim is to provide an insight into the practice of the interpretation process within a group and to reflect on the social scientific knowledge thereby generated.

Empirical approach

Nine persons from various levels within the university – PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and professors – took part in the group interpretation on 6 June 2016. All of them had experience in group interpretation.

¹ MANDY M. ARCHIBALD, *Investigator triangulation: a collaborative strategy with potential for mixed method research*, cit., p. 244; see also ABBAS THASHAKKORI, CHARLES TEDDLIE, *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 2010, 2nd edition.

² RONALD KURT, *Improvisation als Grundbegriff, Gegenstand und Methode der Soziologie*, in *Kreativität und Improvisation*, edited by Udo Göttlich, Ronald Kurt, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2012, pp. 165-186.

³ See *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur*, edited by Stefan Hirschauer, Klaus Amann, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1997.

⁴ JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit., pp. 53-54.

The interpretation process that is considered here relates to text sequences from an expert interview with the director of an international school.¹ The 63-minute interview was recorded as part of a research project on the institutional and organisational identity of international schools in the Greater Lisbon area.² The study is based on a qualitative empirical *design* which primarily aims at reconstructing the knowledge of the school members regarding the identity of the schools. We carry out a combination of expert interviews with the school board, focus groups with students and teachers, participant observation of school culture-related events and the analysis of self-representation documents published by these entities (printed documents, websites). The present analysis refers to the analysis of an interview with a school director. A total of 15 interviews with the school board were conducted.

The excerpt from the expert interview deals with the director's response to the preliminary topic in which he was asked to describe his school.

[...] er, I am very clear that I describe us as an inclusive school, so that we will provide an education to anyone that we believe we have the resources to support, and who will benefit from the education that we provide. That is different from a selective school (.) er, which essentially on-, will only take the students that they believe will get high examination results (.) OK?³

We shall now look in more detail at a section of the group interpretation⁴ that relates to this extract from the interview. We focus in particular on how this interpretation generates knowledge and also on the nature of this knowledge. At the time of the interpretation the participants in the group interpretation had some general contextual information about the project of which this interview was part; however, care was taken not to include this contextual knowledge in the interpretation prematurely, but instead to come at the material with an open mind.

As a first step, the participants attempt to arrive at a general understanding of the sequence. In their discussion, they use some social science terminology:

¹ The analysis of the sequences regarding the interpretation of the interview with the school director is meant to be an empirical example for the way knowledge is generated in interpretation groups. It is not meant to be an in-depth analysis of the interview.

² The postdoctoral research project is entitled «The internationalisation of elite education in Portugal. A qualitative study on international schools in Greater Lisbon» [Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (CIES-IUL, ISCTE); Institut für Pädagogik, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg (MLU); FernUniversität in Hagen (FUH)] and it is funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) (project start: 01/01/2016).

³ SCHOOL DIRECTOR, *Expert interview*, 22.04.2016, unpublished material.

⁴ This group interpretation was held in German. The transcription of the segment of the group interpretation is a draft transcription, in which the overlapping contributions, pauses and fillers etc were neglected. The translation of the excerpts was carried out by Armored Young.

Participant 1: Well, it's about participation in lessons, that is, about learning in school and not about social participation so to speak ...

Participant 2: Hm.

Participant 3: Yes.

Participant 4: So you mean that those who are at school can participate in the learning process, do you?

Participant 1: Precisely.¹

Here there is mutual confirmation by the participants, who agree on their understanding of the extract at this point.

Next they attempt to reconstruct *how* the director portrays the school and what semantic dimensions are associated with this. The discussion takes an argumentative course and attempts to achieve a social scientific abstraction of the construction of knowledge in the interview – i.e. the generation of «second-order constructions»² – which is very clear in this segment:

Participant 5: Well, but that would then be a justification for selection, wouldn't it? So we can't, we don't have the resources to support you to the extent that you need or in what you need or something like that, don't you think? So at a level of legitimation like that, that is an argument for selection.

Participant 2: Precisely.

Participant 3: Well, but it sort of says here in the passage that it is about the fact that they have the resources to support him, that person, what you have just said, that person can benefit too, or, precisely ...

Participant 1: Hmm.

Participant 7: Yes, and on the counterhorizon there are ...

Participant 3: ... from the education that they as it were offer there, in other words ...

Participant 7: there are schools that only select on the basis of intellectual giftedness, aren't there? So they aren't selective and ...

Participant 4: Exactly, they don't relate selectivity to perfor..., that is they don't do performance tests in order to get in ...

Participant 7: Precisely.

¹ INTERPRETATION GROUP, *Section 1 of interpretation*, 06.06.2016, unpublished material.

² ALFRED SCHÜTZ, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*. cit., pp. 3-47.

Participant 4: In a manner of speaking [...] yes, if you base selectivity on that, that's not what they are, they don't do that.

Participant 8: Yes, so that is a clever way, so to speak, of presenting your school as inclusive and open that at the end of the day sort of [reduces] the selective thing to one aspect, namely that so to speak, of let's say top performance, intellectual giftedness etc, but sort of completely leaves out the whole social dimension, that is just not mentioned here at all, so social selection in that sense isn't taking place here, but the distance is distance from selection purely on the basis of performance.

Participant 7: They're not that.

Participant 8: They're not that. They're not that.

Participant 3: But that doesn't mean that they aren't selective.

Participant 8: And that's why the school can of course say that it's inclusive.

Participant 3: Hm.

Participant 7: Yes.¹

In this section, we first see an elaboration of two possibilities of interpretation related to the director's discursive construction of the persons «that we believe we have the resources to support», which introduces this in connection with his view of the school as an «inclusive school». The meaning of the discursive construction of a «selective school» is then discussed using social scientific abstraction and methodological terminology («counterhorizon»). Finally, a conclusion is reached in the form of an elaboration about the school's self-representation that is made in a theory-forming way.

The discursive construction of knowledge in this part of the group interpretation shows clearly that the participants have distanced themselves from everyday common-sense constructions. With regard to social scientific concepts, elements of a theory about the school's self-representation strategies are elaborated in the course of the discussion. Following Fritz Schütze, one could regard this as a «pragmatic refraction» of the perspective, which shifts from «literal surface representations» to «consideration and analytical observation of social processes in their generative activities»². The communicatively constructed knowledge in the extract from the group interpretation, in this case concerning the school's self-representation, does not restrict itself to reconstructing the content of the director's discourse but focuses on analysing the way the director's discourse is constructed and the levels of meaning associated with it. The main aim is to work out how the director

¹ INTERPRETATION GROUP, *Section 2 of interpretation*, 06.06.2016, unpublished material.

² FRITZ SCHÜTZE, *Eine sehr persönlich generalisierte Sicht auf qualitative Sozialforschung*, cit., pp. 217-218.

portrays his school discursively and what implicit knowledge underlies this portrayal. This provides an analytical basis for some theorising that is foreshadowed in this sequence in the reflection on the discursive interplay of the concepts of «inclusion» and «selection». The conceptualising and theorising that take place in the group interpretation also indicate a «mental ‘leap’ into the unknown»: «Together and with the aid of the data one must break away from the data and construct an interpretation that fits the data and makes the data (more) comprehensible, also from a more abstract point of view, but without losing the connection to the data»¹.

This extract illustrates the communicative construction of knowledge – partly aimed at social scientific theorising – via a process of investigator triangulation that involves researchers opening up a space for constructing different interpretations and exploring the various contributions to the discussion.

«Breaking away from the data» can be strengthened with interpreters from different social and cultural backgrounds. In this way, space for a larger variety of perspectives is created, and these will enrich the interpretation.

This can be seen in the following sequence of the group interpretation, where the group of German researchers analyses empirical data regarding an international school in Portugal. This sequence of the group interpretation focuses on the utterances of the director about the different nationalities that attend his school:

I prefer to say that we provide an international education (.) to students of many nationalities. The dominant nationality is Portuguese, the second largest ethnic group language group is Mandarin Chinese, the third is Angolan, and then Spanish.²

The German researchers discussed this excerpt in the following way:

Participant 7: What is surprising is that on the top three there are not English speaking students.

Participant 2: Hm.

Participant 7: So, it's different from international schools in Germany

Participant 3: Yes, that's right.

Participant 7: which were predominantly created to teach Anglo-American kids.

¹ JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit., p. 82.

² SCHOOL DIRECTOR, *Expert interview*, 22.04.2016, unpublished material.

Participant 1: But English is the language at school.

Participant 2: English, hm.

Participant 1: That's funny, yes.

Participant 7: They are Portuguese, then Chinese, then Angolan and then Spanish.

Participant 1: Yes, that's funny.

Participant 7: That's funny, yes.¹

In this sequence, this German group of interpreters reflects about the composition of an international school in Portugal in terms of nationality. The reference point of this German interpretation group is the international schools in Germany. In this context, the fact that the school is mostly populated by Portuguese students and students from other nationalities, non-Anglo-American, and that they all speak English in class strikes the interpreters as «surprising» and «funny». The feeling of surprise translates an alienation of the perspective of the group participants, which is the basis for reflexivity in the interpretation process.

THE POTENTIALS OF INVESTIGATOR TRIANGULATION IN INTERPRETATION GROUPS, AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

As the extract from the group interpretation makes it clear, investigator triangulation can not only enlarge the diversity of perspectives on the empirical material and yield new interpretations, but it can also open up space for joint interpretation work in which institutionally induced hierarchical differences between researchers fade into the background. In this context, Bettina Dausien comments with regard to her own work in research workshops: «Thirdly – and this was very forceful for me and still governs my work today – I have found that institutional hierarchies fade very much into the background when you work in this way.»²

At the same time, however, one must be aware that hierarchical differences in the composition of an interpretation group involving people from different academic populations

¹ INTERPRETATION GROUP, *Section 3 of interpretation*, 06.06.2016, unpublished material.

² TILMANN ALLERT, BETTINA DAUSIEN, GÜNTER MEY, JO REICHERTZ, GERHARD RIEMANN, *Forschungswerkstätten – Programme, Potenziale, Probleme, Perspektiven*, in *Qualitative Forschung. Analysen und Diskussionen – 10 Jahre Berliner Methodentreffen*, edited by Günter Mey, Katja Mruck, Springer, Wiesbaden, 2014, p. 293.

can certainly have an influence on the structure of the interaction and on the interpretation; this has been shown to be a problematic dimension of group interpretation.¹ The influence of the institutionally induced hierarchy on group interpretation is particularly apparent when the group leader is also the supervisor of a research study whose empirical material is the object of group interpretation.² Gerhard Riemann, whose work was strongly influenced by the experience he obtained in Anselm Strauss's research workshop, describes the ambivalent role of the workshop leader: the leader's illustrative presentation of the interpretation can place him in a metaposition that may reduce the creativity of the interpretations put forward by other participants. According to Riemann:

While illustrative presentation of this sort is frequently necessary, one must be careful to ensure that it does not discourage initiative within the workshop group and strangle the group's creativity. When I interviewed Anselm Strauss he warned of this risk but also indicated that it is difficult to find the right balance.³

As well as enlarging the range of perspectives on the object of research, investigator triangulation in interpretation groups carried out as part of the data analysis process helps to create intersubjectivity, transparency and reflexivity in the interpretation process and thus contributes to handling ethically the object of research.⁴ In research workshops the subjective nature of individual interpretations can be reflexively tackled by investigator triangulation; these workshops can thus become places where scientific reflexivity is practised. In this context, investigator triangulation in the interpretation of data is a means of improving the quality of qualitative social research, because it opens up an opportunity for (self-)reflexivity on the part of the researchers that according to Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke is «an essential part of the discovery and not a source of disturbance that needs to be monitored or eliminated»⁵.

In the light of the practical work on empirical material in interpretation groups that is carried out in many places and the identified potential of investigator triangulation for the data

¹ See JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit., pp. 28-32.

² See FRANZ BREUER, *Reflexive Grounded Theory*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag, 2009, p. 135.

³ GERHARD RIEMANN, *Zur Bedeutung von Forschungswerkstätten in der Tradition von Anselm Strauss, Mittagsvorlesung auf dem 1. Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung, Freie Universität Berlin, 24. und 25. Juni 2005*, [URL http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/methodentreffen/archiv/texte/texte_2005/riemann.pdf] (accessed on February 27, 2017), p. 7.

⁴ See HELLA VON UNGER, *Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung: Grundsätze, Debatten und offene Fragen*, in *Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung*, edited by Hella von Unger, Petra Narimani, Rosaline M'Bayo, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2014, pp. 15-39.

⁵ UWE FLICK, ERNST VON KARDORFF, INES STEINKE, *What is Qualitative Research? An Introduction to the Field*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, cit., p. 8.

interpretation process, it is surprising that interpretation group work itself has only very rarely been the object of scientific reflexion. This gives rise to a number of possible research perspectives, for example the generation of social scientific knowledge based on investigator triangulation. By way of example, four such research perspectives are described in more detail below:

(1) There has been very little study of the prevalence of research workshops and interpretation groups in European countries and in other countries worldwide. The methods and methodologies used by interpretation groups are also unclear. There are opportunities for research in this area.

(2) Another area of research in connection with the analysis of interpretation groups might, for example, relate to the structure of interaction in the group and the contextual conditions for this structure. How are the participants' verbal contributions distributed and how do they relate to each other? Are all participants given the same space for verbal contributions, or do certain members have more communication power, e.g. as a result of a hierarchy of participants on the basis of their different academic positions? What goals are the participants pursuing with their verbal contributions? Who decides whether or not an interpretation seems appropriate? In the sequences analysed, where persons with different academic backgrounds and positions participated, the verbal contributions were well-balanced and all the participants had the opportunity to express themselves in an open way. Nevertheless, one conclusion, which is usually more abstract and theoretical, was done by a university professor (participant 8), so it might happen that a certain participant stands out.

(3) Closely connected to the question about the structure of the interaction and the contextual conditions of that structure is the question about the type of knowledge generated during the interpretation and the type of knowledge with which participants contribute. The joint interpretation gives rise to a new quality of knowledge that is usually linked to a distance from the common-sense constructions of the persons whose contributions are analysed. This distance draws on social scientific concepts, as the sample extracts from the interpretation of the interview with the school director make clear. A joint «translation» of the elaborations based on the empirical material takes place. However, the exact nature of this knowledge that is generated in group interpretations has not yet been explored. Also unexplored are the questions of whether participants in the interpretation draw on their everyday knowledge, the extent to which expert knowledge is incorporated into the interpretations and whether this

expert knowledge is necessary for appropriate interpretation.¹

(4) Another aspect of interpretation groups that would be a suitable subject for research is the influence of participants' cultural background on the communicative generation of interpretative knowledge. What are the implications for an interpretation if an interpretation group from a particular cultural background analyses an empirical document in a different language and from a different cultural background? In this example, this issue is of particular interest, as the interview with the director of an international school took place in English, but the school is located in Portugal and the interpretation group was composed of German participants. How would it be like, if the interpreters came from different cultural backgrounds? Do groups in which this occurs have greater potential for «overcoming the divides between embedded everyday viewpoints and also their stereotypes and prejudices»², as Schütze demonstrates by using trilingual workshops as an example? Can intercultural investigator triangulation in research workshops help reflect on and overcome cultural borders within the interpretation process and promote a «cross-cultural research»?³

REFERENCES

ALLERT, TILMANN, DAUSIEN, BETTINA, MEY, GÜNTER, REICHERTZ, JO, RIEMANN, GERHARD, *Forschungswerkstätten – Programme, Potenziale, Probleme, Perspektiven*, in *Qualitative Forschung. Analysen und Diskussionen – 10 Jahre Berliner Methodentreffen*, edited by Günter Mey, Katja Mruck, Springer, Wiesbaden, 2014, pp. 291-316.

ARCHIBALD, MANDY M., *Investigator triangulation: a collaborative strategy with potential for mixed method research*, «Journal of Mixed Methods Research», 10, 3, 2016, pp. 228-250.

BOHNSACK, RALF, *Standards nicht-standardisierter Forschung in den Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaften*, «Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft», 8, 4, 2005, pp. 65-83.

¹ See also JO REICHERTZ, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, cit., pp. 55-56.

² FRITZ SCHÜTZE, *Eine sehr persönlich generalisierte Sicht auf qualitative Sozialforschung*, cit., p. 240.

³ NICOLLE PFAFF, RALF BOHNSACK, WIVIAN WELLER, *Reconstructive Research and the Documentary Method in Brazilian and German Educational Science – An Introduction*, in *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*, edited by Ralf Bohnsack, Nicolle Pfaff, Wivian Weller, Opladen, Farmington Hills, 2010, pp. 18-20.

BOHNSACK, RALF, KRÜGER, HEINZ-HERMANN, *Qualität qualitativer Forschung. Einführung in den Themenschwerpunkt*, «Zeitschrift für qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung», 6, 2, 2005, pp. 185-190.

BOURDIEU, PIERRE, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, Paris, Raisons d'Agir, 2001.

BREUER, FRANZ, *Reflexive Grounded Theory*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag, 2009.

CLARKE, ADELE E., *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005.

DENZIN, NORMAN K., *The Research Act. A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1978.

DENZIN, Norman K., LINCOLN, Yvonna S., eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks and London, Sage, 1994.

DUARTE, TERESA, *A possibilidade da investigação a 3: reflexões sobre triangulação (metodológica)*, «CIES e-Working Papers», 60, 2009, [URL http://cies.iscte-iul.pt/destaques/documents/CIES-WP60_Duarte_002.pdf] (accessed on February 27, 2017), pp. 1-24.

FIELDING, NIGEL G., FIELDING, JANE L., *Linking Data*, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1986.

FLICK, UWE, *Gütekriterien qualitativer Forschung*, in *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie*, edited by Günter Mey, Katja Mruck, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010, pp. 395-407.

FLICK, UWE, *Managing the Quality of Qualitative Research*, London, Thousand Oaks and CA/ Delhi, Sage, 2007.

FLICK, UWE, *Standards, Kriterien, Strategien – Zur Diskussion über Qualität qualitativer Sozialforschung*, «Zeitschrift für qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung», 6, 2, 2005, pp. 191-210.

FLICK, UWE, *Triangulation in Qualitative Research*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, Ines Steinke, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 2004, pp. 178-183.

FLICK, UWE, VON KARDORFF, ERNST, STEINKE, INES, *What is Qualitative Research? An Introduction to the Field*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, Ines Steinke, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 2004, pp. 3-11.

HIRSCHAUER, STEFAN, AMANN, KLAUS, eds., *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1997.

HOFFMANN, BRITT, POKLADEK, GERLINDE, *Das spezielle Arbeitsbündnis in qualitativen Forschungswerkstätten. Merkmale und Schwierigkeiten aus der Perspektive der TeilnehmerInnen*, «Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung», 11, 2, 2010, pp. 197-217.

INTERPRETATION GROUP, *Section 1 of interpretation*, 06.06.2016, unpublished material.

INTERPRETATION GROUP, *Section 2 of interpretation*, 06.06.2016, unpublished material.

INTERPRETATION GROUP, *Section 3 of interpretation*, 06.06.2016, unpublished material.

KELLER, Reiner, KNOBLAUCH, Hubert, REICHERTZ, Jo, eds., *Kommunikativer Konstruktivismus*, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2012.

KRÜGER, HEINZ-HERMANN, *Stichwort: Qualitative Forschung in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, «Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft», 3, 3, 2000, pp. 323-343.

KURT, RONALD, *Improvisation als Grundbegriff, Gegenstand und Methode der Soziologie*, in *Kreativität und Improvisation*, edited by Udo Göttlich, Ronald Kurt, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2012, pp. 165-186.

LINCOLN, YVONNA S., GUBA, EGON G., *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, London and New Delhi, Sage, 1985.

LÜDERS, CHRISTIAN, *Gütekriterien*, in *Hauptbegriffe qualitativer Sozialforschung*, edited by Ralf Bohnsack, Winfried Marotzki, Michael Meuser, Opladen, Leske + Budrich, 2003, pp. 80-83.

LUHMANN, NIKLAS, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995.

MADILL, ANNA, JORDAN, ABBIE, SHIRLEY, CAROLINE, *Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies*, «British Journal of Psychology», 91, 1, 2000, pp. 1-20.

PFÄFF, NICOLLE, BOHNSACK, RALF, WELLER, WIVIAN, *Reconstructive Research and the Documentary Method in Brazilian and German Educational Science – An Introduction*, in *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*, edited by Ralf Bohnsack, Nicolle Pfaff, Wivian Weller, Opladen, Farmington Hills, 2010, pp. 7-38.

QUALITATIVE FORSCHUNG, *Übersicht zu qualitativ-methodischen Forschungswerkstätten deutschsprachiger Raum*, [URL <http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/information/forschungswerkstaetten/Forschungswerkstaetten.pdf>] (accessed on February 27, 2017).

REICHERTZ, JO, *Gemeinsam interpretieren. Die Gruppeninterpretation als kommunikativer Prozess*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2013.

RIEMANN, GERHARD, «Grounded theorizing» als Gespräch – Anmerkungen zu Anselm Strauss, der frühen Chicagoer Soziologie und der Arbeit in Forschungswerkstätten, in

Grounded Theory Reader, edited by Günter Mey, Katja Mruck, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2011, pp. 405-426.

RIEMANN, GERHARD, *Ethnographies of practice – practising ethnography: resources for self-reflective social work*, «Jornal of Social Work Practice», 19, 1, 2005, pp. 87-101.

RIEMANN, GERHARD, *Zur Bedeutung von Forschungswerkstätten in der Tradition von Anselm Strauss, Mittagsvorlesung auf dem 1. Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung, Freie Universität Berlin, 24. und 25. Juni 2005*, [URL http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/methodentreffen/archiv/texte/texte_2005/riemann.pdf] (accessed on February 27, 2017), pp. 1-10.

SCHOOL DIRECTOR, *Expert interview*, 22.04.2016, unpublished material.

SCHÜTZ, ALFRED, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*, Den Haag, Springer, 1962.

SCHÜTZE, FRITZ, *Eine sehr persönlich generalisierte Sicht auf qualitative Sozialforschung*, «Zeitschrift für qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung», 6, 2, 2005, pp. 211-248.

SEALE, CLIVE, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 1999.

SILVERMAN, DAVID, *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology: describing the social world*, Aldershot, Gower, 1985.

STEINKE, INES, *Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research*, in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, Ines Steinke, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 2004, pp. 184-190.

STEINKE, INES, *Kriterien qualitativer Forschung. Ansätze zur Bewertung qualitativ-empirischer Sozialforschung*, Weinheim and München, Juventa, 1999.

STRAUSS, ANSELM L., *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

THASHAKKORI, ABBAS, TEDDLIE, CHARLES, eds., *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 2010, 2nd edition.

VON UNGER, HELLA, *Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung: Grundsätze, Debatten und offene Fragen*, in *Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung*, edited by Hella von Unger, Petra Narimani, Rosaline M'Bayo, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2014, pp. 15-39.

WIENER, CAROLYN, *Making Teams Work in Conducting Grounded Theory*, in *Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*, edited by Antony Bryant, Kathy Charmaz, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2007, pp. 293–311.