

Qualitative Research in Sociology in Germany and the US —State of the Art, Differences and Developments

Uwe Flick

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Abstract: The background of this article is the observation that the methodological discussions about qualitative research in sociology in German-speaking and Anglo-Saxon contexts are quite different. The article gives an overview of the state of the art of qualitative research in terms of its methodological development and its establishment in the broader field of social research. After some brief remarks about the history of the field, the major research perspectives and schools of qualitative research—grounded theory, ethnomethodology, narrative analysis, objective hermeneutic, life-world analysis, ethnography, cultural and gender studies—are outlined against the background of recent developments. The establishment of qualitative research is discussed with reference to the examples of the German and International Sociological Associations (DGS and ISA), to developments in the area of textbooks, handbooks, and to the founding of specialised journals. Methodological trends such as the turn to visual and electronic data, triangulation of methods and the hybridisation of qualitative procedures, are discussed. In conclusion, some perspectives are outlined which are expected to become more important in the future of qualitative research or which are seen as demands for further clarification. Besides the use of computers and the further clarification on linking qualitative and quantitative research, and of the limits and problems of such linkage, further suggestions concerning the ways of presenting appropriate and at the same time compulsory criteria for qualitative research are mentioned. Trends in building schools and developing research pragmatics, on the one hand, and a tendency towards elucidation and mystification of methodological procedures, on the other hand, are identified as tensional fields in methodological discussions in qualitative research. Finally, a stronger internationalisation in different directions and answering the question of indication are discussed as needs for the future of qualitative research.

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1. Introduction

The label "qualitative research" is used as an umbrella term for a series of approaches to research in the social sciences. These are also known as hermeneutic, reconstructive or interpretative approaches (see DENZIN & LINCOLN 1994/2000a/2005; FLICK 2006; FLICK, KARDORFF & STEINKE 2004; HITZLER 2002 for recent overviews). Under this label, these approaches, methods and the results obtained by using them are attracting increasing attention not only in sociology, but also in education (e.g. FRIEBERTSHÄUSER & PRENGEL 2003), psychology (RICHARDSON 1996) and health sciences (e.g. MURRAY & CHAMBERLAIN 1999; SCHAEFFER & MÜLLER-MUNDT 2002). Hardly any handbook is published today that does not have a chapter on

qualitative research methods (in rehabilitation, nursing science or public health, for instance). In sociology, the interest in qualitative research can be traced back to different theoretical traditions—from Max WEBER's *verstehende* sociology, to actor theories, symbolic interactionism and structuralist approaches. Major fields of research—like health and illness—focus on the analysis of biographies, of everyday and institutional communications, of organisations and open fields. Qualitative research has always had strong links to applied fields in its research questions and approaches. In the scientific associations of sociology for example, it is anchored in different divisions and areas (for example in the sociology of language and knowledge, in biographical research, medical and family sociology, to name just a few). It would be going beyond the scope of this article to discuss the results of qualitative research in these fields in greater detail. Instead the state of the developments in qualitative research methodology will be the focus of what follows. [1]

2. A Brief History of Qualitative Research

Here, only a brief and rather cursory overview of the history of qualitative research can be given. The use of qualitative methods has long traditions in psychology as well as in social sciences. In psychology, Wilhelm WUNDT (1928) used methods of description and *verstehen* in his folk psychology alongside the experimental methods of his general psychology. Roughly at the same time, an argument between a more monographic conception of science, which was oriented towards induction and case studies, and an empirical and statistical approach began in German sociology. In American sociology, biographical methods, case studies, and descriptive methods were central for a long time (until the 1940s). This can be demonstrated by the importance of THOMAS and ZNANIECKI's study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-20) and more generally with the influence of the Chicago School of sociology. [2]

During the further establishment of both sciences, however, increasingly "hard", experimental, standardising and quantifying approaches have asserted themselves against "soft", understanding, open and qualitative-descriptive strategies. It was not until the 1960s that in American sociology the critique of standardised, quantifying social research became relevant again (CICOUREL 1964; GLASER & STRAUSS 1967). This critique was taken up in the 1970s in German discussions. Finally, this led to a renaissance of qualitative research in the social sciences and also (with some delay) in psychology (BANISTER, BURMAN, PARKER, TAYLOR & TINDALL 1994). The developments and discussions in the USA and in Germany not only took place at different times but also are marked by differing phases. [3]

2.1 Developments in German-speaking areas

In Germany, Jürgen HABERMAS (1967) first recognised that a "different" tradition and discussion of research was developing in American sociology, related to names like GOFFMAN, GARFINKEL and CICOUREL. After the translation of CICOUREL's (1964) methodological critique, a series of anthologies

imported contributions from the American discussions. This has made basic texts on ethnomethodology or symbolic interactionism available for German discussions. From the same period, the model of the research process created by GLASER and STRAUSS (1967) has attracted a lot of attention. Discussions are motivated by the aim to do more justice to the objects of research than is possible in quantitative research, as HOFFMANN-RIEM's (1980) claim for the "principle of openness" demonstrates. KLEINING (1982, p.233) has argued that it is necessary to regard the understanding of the object of research as preliminary until the end of the research, because the object "will present itself in its true colours only at the end". Also the discussions about a "naturalistic sociology" (SCHATZMAN & STRAUSS 1973) and about appropriate methods are determined by a similar, initially implicit and later also explicit assumption. To apply the principle of openness and the rules that KLEINING suggests (e.g. to postpone a theoretical formulation of the research object) enables the researcher to avoid constituting the object by the very methods used for studying it. Rather it becomes possible "to take everyday life first and always again in the way it presents itself in each case" (GRATHOFF 1978; quoted in HOFFMANN-RIEM 1980, p.362, who ends her article with this quotation). [4]

At the end of the 1970s, a broader and more original discussion began in Germany, which no longer relied exclusively on the translation of American literature. This discussion deals with interviews, how to apply and how to analyse them and with methodological questions and has stimulated extensive research (see FLICK, KARDORFF & STEINKE 2004 for a recent overview). The main question for this period was whether these developments should be seen as a fashion, a trend or a new beginning. [5]

Crucial for this developmental push at the beginning of the 1980s was that two original methods appeared and were widely discussed: the *narrative interview* by SCHÜTZE (1977; ROSENTHAL & FISCHER-ROSENTHAL 2004) and *objective hermeneutics* by OEVERTMANN et al. (1979, see also REICHERTZ 2004). Both methods were no longer just an import of American developments as was the case in applying participant observation or interviews with an interview guide oriented towards the focused interview. Both methods have stimulated extensive research practice (mainly in biographical research: for overviews see e.g.: ROSENTHAL 2004). But the influence of these methodologies on the general discussion of qualitative methods is at least as crucial as the results obtained from them. [6]

In the middle of the 1980s, problems of validity and the generalisability of findings obtained with qualitative methods attracted broader attention. Related questions of presentation and the transparency of results have been discussed. The quantity and above all the unstructured nature of the data require the use of computers in qualitative research too (KELLE 2004). Finally, the first textbooks or introductions have been published on the background of the discussions in the German-speaking area. [7]

2.2 Discussions in the United States

In this overview, the main point of reference for the presenting the Discussions in the United States are that part of qualitative research, which is represented by Norman DENZIN, Yvonna LINCOLN and the authors and developments included in their publications (see also KUSENBACH 2005). DENZIN and LINCOLN (2000b, pp.12-18) refer to phases different from those just described for the German-speaking area. They see "seven moments of qualitative research", as follows. [8]

The *traditional period* ranges from the early twentieth century to World War II. It is related to the research of MALINOWSKI in ethnography and the Chicago School in sociology. During this period, qualitative research was interested in the other, the foreign or the strange, and in its more or less objective description and interpretation. Foreign cultures were the issue in ethnography, and outsiders within one's own society in sociology. [9]

The *modernist phase* lasts until the 1970s and is marked by attempts to formalise qualitative research. For this purpose, more and more textbooks were published in the USA. The attitude of this kind of research is still alive in the tradition of GLASER and STRAUSS (1967). [10]

Blurred genres (GEERTZ 1983) characterise the developments up to the mid-1980s. Various theoretical models and understandings of the objects and methods stand side by side, from which researchers can choose and which they can weigh up against each other or combine: symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, semiotics or feminism are some of these "alternative paradigms" (see also GUBA 1990). [11]

In the mid 1980s, the *crisis of representation* discussed up to then in artificial intelligence and ethnography (CLIFFORD & MARCUS 1986) impacts upon qualitative research as a whole. This makes the process of displaying knowledge and findings a substantial part of the research process. And this process of displaying knowledge and findings as a part of the findings *per se* attracts more attention. Qualitative research becomes a continuous process of constructing versions of reality. The version, people present in an interview does not necessarily correspond to the version they would have formulated at the moment when the reported event happened. It does not necessarily correspond to the version they would have given to a different researcher with a different research question. Researchers, who interpret this interview and present it as part of their findings, produce a new version of the whole. Different readers of the book, article or report interpret the researchers' version differently. This means that further versions of the event emerge. Specific interests brought to the reading in each case play a central part. In this context, the evaluation of research and findings becomes a central topic in methodological discussions. This is connected with the question of whether traditional criteria are valid any more and, if not, which other standards should be applied for assessing qualitative research.

Germany	United States
Early studies (end of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries)	Traditional period (1900 to 1945)
Phase of import (early 1970s)	Modernist phase (1945 to the 1970s)
Beginning of original discussions (late 1970s)	Blurred genres (until the mid 1980s)
Developing original methods (1970s and 1980s)	Crisis of representation (since the mid 1980s)
Consolidation and procedural questions (late 1980s and 1990s)	Fifth moment (the 1990s)
Research practice	Sixth moment (post-experimental writing)
	Seventh moment (the future)

Table 1: Phases in the history of qualitative research [12]

The situation in the 1990s is seen by DENZIN and LINCOLN as the *fifth moment*: narratives have replaced theories, or theories are read as narratives. But here we learn about the end of grand narratives—as in postmodernism in general. The accent is shifted towards theories and narratives that fit specific, delimited, local, historical situations and problems. The next stage (*sixth moment*) is characterised by post-experimental writing, linking issues of qualitative research to democratic policies and the *seventh moment* is the future of qualitative research. [13]

If we compare the two lines of development (Table 1), in Germany, we find increasing methodological consolidation complemented by a concentration on procedural questions in a growing research practice. In the United States, on the other hand, recent developments are characterised by a trend to question further or once again, the apparent certainties provided by methods. The role of presentation in the research process, the crisis of representation, and the relativity of what is presented have been stressed, and this has made the attempts to formalise and canonise methods rather secondary. The "correct" application of procedures of interviewing or interpretation counts less than the "practices and politics of interpretation" (DENZIN 2000). Qualitative research therefore becomes—or is linked still more strongly with—a specific attitude based on the researcher's openness and reflexivity. [14]

3. The State of the Disciplinary Development of Qualitative Research

Currently some activities can be registered which indicate that the field of qualitative research has become established to a certain extent in sociology and education. First, there are several divisions within the German association of sociology (DGS), or in the International Sociological Association (ISA), in which research is characterised mainly or at least partly by the use of specific qualitative methods. In the DGS, the "Biographical Research" division or the "Sociology of

Language" division, which has been renamed "Sociology of Knowledge" some years ago can be mentioned, but also a number of regularly-meeting Ad-hoc-groups or working groups. After qualitative methods having played hardly any role in the discussions and conferences of the "Methods of Empirical Research" division in Germany for a long time, the DGS council decided in 1997 to establish a "working group" devoted to "Methods of Qualitative Research". Since then, a series of (sometimes well-attended) conferences have been organised by the working group. Some of the topics discussed have been "subjectivity in qualitative research", "ethnography", "archives", "generalisation in qualitative research", "applied qualitative research", "qualitative evaluation research", "qualitative research and sociological theory building" and—in co-operation with the "Methods of Empirical Research" division—"validity in qualitative research". At the same time, a stronger interest has arisen, in the "Methods of Empirical Research" division, for qualitative research and especially for the question of validation in qualitative research. On this issue, a series of conferences have already been held. The working group pursues its aim of advancing the discussion on qualitative research and the methodological consolidation of methodological procedures and giving qualitative methods more room in the methodological training provided by the sociological institutes. A subgroup has just developed curricular suggestions for an integrative formation in research methods. In 2003, the temporary working group was established as a formal division "Methods of Qualitative Research" in the DGS. [15]

In the RC 33 (Research Committee "Logic and Methodology") of the International Sociological Association, qualitative methods are part of the conference programs. However, here as well, there is a strong interest in questions of the validity of qualitative research, as the program of the last conferences in 2000 and 2004 demonstrated. [16]

Second, several journals have been founded in the last years. They either focus on a specific approach (*Sozialer Sinn. Zeitschrift für hermeneutische Sozialforschung*—in English: "Social Meaning. Journal for Hermeneutical Research"). Or they address a given field of research from the standpoint of qualitative research. Examples are *Psychotherapie und Sozialwissenschaft. Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung* (in English: "Psychotherapy and Social Science. Journal for Qualitative Research") or *ZBBS. Zeitschrift für Qualitative Bildungs-, Beratungs- und Sozialforschung* (in English: "Journal for Qualitative Research in Education, Counselling and Social Research"). Finally, the online journal "*FQS—Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*" started originally in this context. This trend is much stronger in the Anglo-Saxon area (*Qualitative Inquiry; Qualitative Research; Qualitative Health Research*), demonstrating a growing interest in qualitative research as well as the fact that more materials and research reports can be published, which leads to establishing discussion circles and publishing outlets. [17]

Third, the number of published textbooks and handbooks on qualitative research is constantly growing. Beside those which go beyond a specific approach, discipline or method (DENZIN & LINCOLN 1994, 2000, 2005; FLICK 1998, 2002,

2006; FLICK, KARDORFF & STEINKE 2000, 2004; SEALE, GOBO, GUBRIUM & SILVERMAN 2004), an increasing number of more specific books are available. Their focus is on a selection of methods (BOHNSACK 1999; SILVERMAN 2005), single strategies or methods, or the application of qualitative methods from a disciplinary angle (FRIEBERTSHÄUSER & PRENGEL [2003] for education or RICHARDSON [1996] for psychology). Finally, more and more book series on qualitative research are available or in the planning. [18]

These trends show that interest in qualitative research, its methods and its result has grown remarkably in the last years. [19]

4. Qualitative Research at the Beginning of the 21st Century—State of the Art

What have these developments led to? The following section will give you a first orientation on the variety of qualitative research and on the different schools of research in it. The recent development of qualitative research proceeded in different areas, each of them characterised by specific theoretical backgrounds, specific concepts of reality and their own methodological programs. One example is ethnomethodology as a theoretical program, which first led to the development of conversation analysis (e.g. BERGMANN 2004a) and differentiated in new approaches like genre analysis (KNOBLAUCH & LUCKMANN 2004) and discourse analysis (POTTER & WEATHERELL 1998). A number of such fields and approaches in qualitative research have developed, which unfold in their own ways with little connections to the discussions and research in other fields of qualitative research. Other examples are objective hermeneutics, narrative based biographical research or, more recently, ethnography or cultural studies. This diversification in qualitative research is intensified by the fact that for example German and Anglo-American discussions are engaged in very different topics and methods and that there is only limited exchange among both. [20]

4.1 Research perspectives in qualitative research

Although the various approaches in qualitative research differ in their theoretical assumptions, in their understanding of issues and in their methodological focus, they can be summarised in three major perspectives: Theoretical points of reference are drawn, first, from traditions of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. A second main line is anchored theoretically in ethnomethodology and constructionism and interested in routines of everyday life and in the making of social reality. Structuralist or psychoanalytic positions, which assume unconscious psychological structures and mechanism and latent social configurations, are the third point of reference. These three major perspectives differ in objectives of research and in the methods they employ. Authors like LÜDERS and REICHERTZ (1986) juxtapose first approaches highlighting the "viewpoint of the subject" and a second group aiming at describing the processes in the production of existing (mundane, institutional or more general: social) situations, milieus and social order (e.g. in ethnomethodological analyses of language). The third approach is characterised by a (mostly hermeneutical)

reconstruction of "deep structures generating action and meaning" in the sense of psychoanalytic or objective-hermeneutic conceptions. [21]

The available range of methods for collecting and analysing data can be allocated to these research perspectives as follows: In the first perspective, semi-structured or narrative interviews and procedures of coding and content analysing are dominant. In the second research perspective, data are rather collected in focus groups, ethnography or (participant) observation and by recording interactions on audio or videotape. These data then are analysed by using discourse or conversation analyses. From the angle of the third perspective, data are mainly collected by recording interactions and using visual material (photos or films) which then undergo one of the different versions of hermeneutic analysis (HITZLER & EBERLE 2004; HONER 2004). [22]

Table 2 summarises these allocations and complements them with some exemplary fields of research characterising each of the three perspectives.

	Approaches to subjective viewpoints	Description of the making of social situations	Hermeneutic analysis of underlying structures
Theoretical positions	symbolic interactionism phenomenology	ethnomethodology constructivism	psychoanalysis genetic structuralism
Methods of data collection	semi-structured interviews narrative interviews	focus groups ethnography participant observation recording interactions collecting documents	recording interactions photography film
Methods of interpretation	theoretical coding content analysis narrative analysis hermeneutic methods	conversation analysis discourse analysis genre analysis analysis of documents	objective hermeneutics deep hermeneutics
Fields of application	biographical research analysis of everyday knowledge	analysis of life worlds and organisations evaluation cultural studies	family research biographical research, generation research gender research

Table 2: Research perspectives in qualitative research [23]

4.2 Most important schools of research and recent developments

All in all, qualitative research in its theoretical and methodological developments and its research practice is characterised by a more or less explicit building of schools, which differ in their influence on the general debates. [24]

4.2.1 Grounded Theory

Research in the tradition of GLASER and STRAUSS (1967) and their approach of building empirically grounded theories continues to be very attractive for qualitative researchers. The idea of theory development is taken up as a general goal for qualitative research. Some concepts like theoretical sampling (to select cases and material on the background of the state of the empirical analyses in the project) or the different methods of—open, axial and selective—coding are employed. A bigger part of the qualitative research refers to one or the other part

of the program of STRAUSS and his colleagues (e.g. CHAMBERLAIN 1999). The approach has also left its traces in the development of biographical research or is linked to other research programmes. [25]

4.2.2 Ethnomethodology, conversation, discourse and genre analysis

Starting point of the second school is ethnomethodology introduced by Harold GARFINKEL (1967). It focuses on the empirical study of mundane practices, through which interactive order is produced in and outside of institutions. For a long time, conversation analysis (SACKS 1992) was the dominant way of making the theoretical project of ethnomethodology empirically work. Conversation analysts study, which methods are employed to practically organise talk as processes which unfold in a regular way and, beyond this, how specific forms of interaction—conversations at dinner table, gossip, counselling and assessments—are organised. In the meantime, conversation analysis has developed as an independent area out of ethnomethodology. Studies of work, which were designed by ethnomethodologists like GARFINKEL as a second field of research (BERGMANN 2004b) have remained less influential. Works extending conversation analytic research questions and analytical principles to bigger entities in genre analysis (KNOBLAUCH & LUCKMANN 2004) have attracted more attention. Finally, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have been patrons for formulating (at least major parts of the heterogeneous research field) of discourse analysis (see POTTER & WETHERELL 1998). Data collection in all these fields is characterised by the attempt to collect natural data (like recording everyday conversations) without using explicit, reconstructing methods like interviews. [26]

4.2.3 Narrative analysis and biographical research

Biographical research in German language areas is essentially determined by a specific method used for collecting data and by the diffusion of this method. Here, mainly the narrative interview stands in the foreground. This is linked to the approach of making biographical processes and experiences in the history of one's life accessible and to collect them via narratives. This is applied in several areas of sociology and in recent years increasingly in education. Through analysing narratives, bigger topics and contexts are studied—for example, how people cope with unemployment, experiences of migration, processes of illness or experiences in families linked to the holocaust. Data are interpreted in narrative analyses (ROSENTHAL & FISCHER-ROSENTHAL 2004). In recent years, an extension of the narrative situation and a turn to group narratives or to analysing narratives of several generations in a family can be noted (BUDE 2004). [27]

4.2.4 Objective hermeneutics and hermeneutic sociology of knowledge

In the German-language discussion, the objective-hermeneutics approach plays an important role. It was created by OEVERMANN (see REICHERTZ 2004) and offers elaborate instruments for analysing cases and their underlying structures. The starting point is the textual quality of the world (the world as text) and of the

material to be analysed. The theoretical framework of the multiple studies is often informed by OEVERMANN's theory of professionalisation, by assumptions about socialisation and by structuralist ideas. The case structure is reconstructed through a multi-step procedure of interpreting the material. Falsification and abduction (PEIRCE 1931-1935) are used as modes of inferring and testing hypotheses. In recent years, this approach has been linked with other approaches, like SOEFFNER's social-science hermeneutic (2004) when the hermeneutic sociology of knowledge was created (HITZLER, REICHERTZ & SCHRÖER 1999), with LUHMANN's constructivist systems theory, or with grounded theory. [28]

4.2.5 Phenomenology and analysing small life-worlds

In the traditions of HUSSERL, SCHÜTZ and LUCKMANN approaches to a phenomenology of the life-world have been developed. They focus on how meanings are jointly constructed in natural contexts and how processes of understanding develop. Here the subjective interpretations involved in understanding and meaning making are seen as central—the question of what subjective interpretations are held by the actors under study and what characterises them. This is studied in analysing "small life-worlds" and how meaning systems are produced which are shared by the members in these life-worlds (see HITZLER 2002; HITZLER & EBERLE 2004). This approach is useful, for example, in studying fitness centres and *bricoleurs* in do-it-yourself-groups as well as also expert knowledge and techno cultures. [29]

4.2.6 Ethnography

Since the early 1980s, an increase of ethnographic research can be noted. Ethnography has replaced studies using participant observation. It aims less at understanding social events or processes from reports about these events (e.g. in an interview) but at understanding social processes of making these events from the inside by participating along the processes' developments. Research here is characterised by an extended participation (instead of one spot interviews or observations) and by the flexible use of different methods (including more or less formalised interviews or analyses of documents). Of central interest since the middle of the 1980s is the part of writing about the observed events. More generally, this interest highlights the relation of the presentation and of what is presented. Especially in the United States, a tendency to replace the label "qualitative research" (in all its facets) by the label "ethnography" can be found. [30]

4.2.7 Cultural studies

Another trend which is currently expanding mainly in media studies, but also in sociology (WINTER 2004) is running under the labels of cultural studies. So far, the degree of commitment to elaborate methodology and methodological principles is rather low. The approach is defined by its object "cultures", their analysis across cultural practices (like media) and its orientation on

(disadvantaged) subcultures and on existing relations of power in concrete contexts. [31]

4.2.8 Gender studies

Essential impulses on the development of qualitative research questions and methodologies came and come from feminist research and gender studies. Here, the processes of constructing and differentiating gender and of the inequalities linked to that are studied. Phenomena like transsexuality are taken as an empirical starting point to demonstrate the social construction of "typical" images of gender. Table 3 summarises the schools of qualitative research briefly mentioned here.

1.	Grounded theory
2.	Ethnomethodology, conversation, discourse and genre analysis
3.	Narrative analysis and biographical research
4.	Objective hermeneutics and hermeneutic sociology of knowledge
5.	Phenomenology and analysing small life-worlds
6.	Ethnography
7.	Cultural studies
8.	Gender studies

Table 3: Schools of qualitative research [32]

5. Methodological Developments and Trends

What are the current methodological trends in qualitative research? [33]

5.1 Visual and electronic data

In the realm of the data that are used, beyond the traditional forms of data for qualitative research collected in interviews, focus groups or participant observation, visual data have now become more important. Analysing video and film becomes is applied not only in media studies but also in sociology (see DENZIN 2004a & HARPER 2004). Using them raises questions like how to edit these data appropriately and whether methods originally created to analyse texts can be applied to these sorts of data. Chapters on visual data can be found in handbooks and texts more and more often. Which new forms of data are available for studying the Internet and electronic communication (like e-mail) and which data have to be collected in order to analyse the processes of construction and communication that are involved? These are topics worth to be further

discussed in this context (see BERGMANN & MEIER 2004, see also FLICK 2006, Part 5). [34]

5.2 Qualitative online research

Several of the existing qualitative methods have been transferred and adapted to research using the Internet as a tool, resource, and issue of research. So, we find versions of interviewing per email, online focus groups and virtual ethnography as current trends, which ask for new issues of research ethics, raise new practical problems and questions and, of course, provide some new options to do research (see FLICK 2006, Ch. 20). [35]

5.3 Triangulation

The idea of triangulation is widely discussed. Linking different qualitative or qualitative and quantitative methods will become essential in the study of complex fields of investigation. The special appeal of triangulation is that it allows going beyond the limitations of a single method by combining several methods and giving them an equal relevance. It is becoming more fruitful, if different theoretical approaches are combined or taken into account in combining methods (see for more details FLICK 1992, 2004a, b). [36]

5.4 Hybridisation

In several of the research perspectives and schools discussed above, trends towards a hybridisation of methodological procedures (KNOBLAUCH 2004) can be noted. For example, research in ethnography and in cultural studies, but also in the development of grounded theories is not restricted to specific methods of data collection. Rather researchers here select methodological approaches in a field according to research pragmatic and combine most different methods if useful. This pragmatic use of methodological principles and avoidance of a restricting subscription to a specific methodological discourse have been labelled as hybridisation. [37]

Furthermore, some topics can be identified that will become more important in the future of qualitative research or need further clarification. [38]

5.5 Using computers

The development of computer programs for supporting qualitative research is a trend, which is either taken up very optimistically, or regarded sceptically (e.g. KNOBLAUCH 2004), or is more or less ignored—as many qualitative researchers still do. The most developed area here is the use of computers for analysing texts. Several more or less comprehensive, user friendly and comfortable programs with varying functions and features are available (ATLAS/ti, NUDIST, MAXQDA) which are sold and distributed commercially. Are these programs in the end just different ways to a quite similar use and usability? Will they have a sustainable impact on the ways qualitative data are used and analysed and what

are the relation of technical investments and efforts to the resulting facilitation of routines and procedures will be in the long run? These issues still have to be observed. These programs support the handling and administration of data material (e.g. matching codes and sources in the text, jointly displaying them and tracing back categorisations to the single passage in the text they refer to). Whether the development of software to identify voice and spoken language sometime will lead to computer supported transcription of interviews and whether this will be wishful progress or not has to be awaited. [39]

5.6 Linking qualitative and quantitative research

Referring to this issue, several positions can be identified in the literature. Especially in hermeneutic or phenomenological research—hardly any need is seen for linking with quantitative research and its approaches. This argument is based on the incompatibilities of the two research traditions, epistemologies, and their procedures. At the same time, models and strategies are developed to link qualitative and quantitative research. Finally, in the everyday life of research practice beyond methodological discussions, a link of both approaches often is necessary and useful for pragmatic reasons. Therefore especially the question should be further discussed, how to conceptualise such a triangulation in a way which takes both approaches, their theoretical and methodological peculiarities into a serious account without any premature subordination of one approach under the other. [40]

5.7 Writing qualitative research

In the 1980s and 1990s, the discussion about the appropriate ways of presenting qualitative procedures and results had a strong impact especially in the United States (CLIFFORD & MARCUS 1986). Beyond comparing different strategies of reporting qualitative research, main topics in this discussion still are: How can qualitative researchers in their writing do justice to the life worlds they studied and to the subjective perspectives they met there? What is the impact of the way of presentation on what is presented—research itself? How does the way of writing influence how research itself is conceptualised? What is the role of writing in assessing and for the assessability of qualitative research? The stress is laid in different ways. Ethnography sees the act of writing about what was studied at least as important as collecting and analysing data. In other fields, writing is seen in a rather instrumental way—how do I make my procedures in the field and the founding of my results transparent and plausible to recipients (other scientists, readers, the general public etc.). All in all the interest in the discussion about writing has decreased, because of insights like: "Apart from a growth in self-reflection these debates yielded little in the way of tangible or useful results for research practice" (LÜDERS 2004a, p.228). [41]

5.8 Quality of qualitative research

The topic of appropriate criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research still attracts a lot of attention. Several books approach this topic from different angles

(e.g. SEALE 1999). The basic alternatives, however, are still determining the discussion: Should traditional criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity be applied to qualitative research as well and how? Or should new, method-appropriate criteria be developed for qualitative research? Which are these and how can they exactly be "operationalised" for assessing the quality of qualitative research? A fundamental scepticism against using criteria in general is mainly found in US discussions. To answer the question of appropriate criteria to distinguish good and bad research in qualitative research is an internal problem. At the same time, it is a need with regards to the attractiveness and the feasibility of qualitative research on the markets and arenas of teaching, research grants and of policy impact of social sciences. [42]

5.9 Qualitative research between establishing schools of research and research pragmatics

Another tension in qualitative research is that of methodological purism and research pragmatics. Pure textbook versions of hermeneutic methods for example have been more and more elaborated. Such an elaboration leads to increasing needs for time, personal, and other resources when these methods are applied. This raises the question of how to use such approaches in a research carried out for a ministry or company or aiming at consulting politicians in a pragmatic way so that the number of the analysed cases can be big enough to make results accountable (see GASKELL & BAUER 2000). This leads to the question of what are pragmatic but nevertheless methodologically acceptable short-cut-strategies in collecting, transcribing, and analysing qualitative data (LÜDERS 2004b) and in designing qualitative research. [43]

5.10 Internationalisation

So far, there have been limited attempts to publish the methodological procedures that determine the German speaking discussion, literature and research practice in English language publications. Accordingly, the resonance of German language qualitative research in the English language discussion is rather modest. An internationalisation of qualitative research is needed in several directions. Not only should German language qualitative research pay more attention to what is currently discussed in Anglo-Saxon—or French—literature and take it up in its own discourse. Also it should invest much more in publishing "home grown" approaches in international, English language journals and at international conferences. And finally, Anglo-Saxon discussion needs to open more towards what is going on in other countries' qualitative research. [44]

5.11 Indication

Not only in the field of qualitative research, but also in empirical research in general, textbooks of methodology hardly give any help with deciding when to select a specific method for a study. Most books treat the single method or research design separately and describe their features and problems. In most cases, they do not arrive at a comparative presentation of the different

methodological alternatives or at giving starting points for how to select a specific method (and not a different one) for a research issue. Thus, one's need for qualitative research is to further clarify the question of indication. In medicine or psychotherapy, the appropriateness of a certain treatment for specific problems and groups of people is checked. This is named as indication. The answer to this question is whether or not a specific treatment is appropriate (indicated) for a specific problem in a specific case. If this is transferred to qualitative research, the relevant questions are, when are which qualitative methods appropriate—for which issue? Which research question? Which group of people (population) or fields to be studied? and so on. When are quantitative methods or a combination of both indicated? (See Table 4.)

Psychotherapy and medicine			Qualitative research		
Which		which	Which		which
disease,		treatment	issue,		method
symptoms,	indicate	or	population,	indicate	or
diagnosis,		therapy?	research question,		methods?
population			knowledge of issue and population		
1. When is which method appropriate and indicated?					
2. How to make a rational decision for or against certain methods?					

Table 4: Indication of qualitative research methods [45]

Table 5 summarises the trends and developments briefly mentioned here.

1.	Visual and electronic data
2.	Qualitative online research
3.	Triangulation
4.	Hybridisation
5.	Using computers
6.	Linking qualitative and quantitative research
7.	Quality of qualitative research
8.	Writing qualitative research
9.	Qualitative research between establishing schools of research and research pragmatics
10.	Internationalisation
11.	Indication

Table 5: Trends and developments [46]

6. Conclusion

The developments and trends outlined in this paper can be observed in qualitative research in general. We see at the same time developments, which are more specific for certain areas: Hermeneutic approaches and genre analysis for example have a stronger impact in the German discussion and research practices. Qualitative online research or cultural studies are more prominent in Anglo-Saxon areas and discussions. In Germany, qualitative research is still struggling in establishing itself in terms of institutionalisation, funding and its role in the regular methods training in sociology departments. In other countries, in the UK for example, this is different. As the contributions to this special issue demonstrate, qualitative research is establishing in different ways in most of the countries. Anglo Saxon developments (and publications) are representing one version of qualitative research, local traditions and developments may give a different impression of what qualitative research is about and how it has defined its role and space in the discipline(s). [47]

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Author

Uwe FLICK is Professor of Qualitative Research in Nursing, Social Work and Social Gerontology at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin. He is Chair of the Division "Methoden der Qualitativen Sozialforschung" (Methods of Qualitative Research) in the German Sociological Association. His main research interests are health concepts and behaviours in different social groups, the theory of social representation and the methodology of qualitative research.

Recent publications include: Uwe FLICK, An Introduction to Qualitative Research (third edition). London, Thousand Oaks: Sage 2006 (German ed.: 2002 – Rowohlt; Spanish ed. 2004 – Morata; Portuguese ed.: 2005 – Monitor; Brazilian ed.: 2004 – Artmed/Longman; Japanese ed. 2002: – Shunju-Sha; Farsi ed: 2004 – Samae Ghalam Publisher; Chinese ed: 2006; Korean ed.: 2006). Uwe FLICK, Ernst von KARDORFF & Ines STEINKE (Eds.) *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage. 2004 (German ed.: 2000 – Rowohlt). Uwe FLICK (Ed.) *The Qualitative Research Kit* (8 vol.). London: Sage 2006 (forthcoming). Uwe FLICK, *Triangulation – eine Einführung* (Triangulation – an Introduction). Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2004.

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Uwe Flick

Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences
Alice-Salomon-Platz 5
D-12627 Berlin, Germany

Tel.: 0049-30-99245411

Fax: 0049-30-8112187

E-mail: Flick@ASFH-Berlin.de

URL: <http://www.asfh-berlin.de/hsl/flick/>

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