

Getting more out of interviews. Understanding interviewees' accounts in relation to their frames of orientation

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Abstract

This paper contributes to an ongoing debate about the validity of interview data and the ways in which they are interpreted in the 'interview society'. We understand the need for an extensive reliance on interviews and, at the same time, recognise the serious limitations that exist regarding access to the interviewee's worldview, their motivations and orientations. A crucial problem in this regard and the main concern of our paper is how to interpret subjective accounts, such as arguments or everyday theories, interviewees hold about themselves. While ethnomethodologists suggest that the complete authorship for meaning depends on the interview setting, we argue that the interviewee's practices of generating interview content are quite stable across various sequences that allows for a reconstruction of their agency dispositions based on interview transcripts. Taking Mannheim's and Bourdieu's idea of a formative or generative principle as a point of departure, we introduce the most recent variant of the documentary method of interpretation (DMI) that aims at the reconstruction of this principle's manifestation (as an individual's frame of orientation) and helps us then to understand everyday theories, subjective explanations and justifications presented by interviewees.

Keywords

Documentary method of interpretation, frame of orientation, interview data, interview society, qualitative data analysis

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Introduction

Interviewing is a common data-gathering instrument used by social scientists to expand their understanding of how humans perceive their social worlds and how they act within them. Nonetheless, the interpretation of interviews is seen as problematic if researchers only present selected instances of interview passages as insights about a research participant's ways of thinking and experiencing sociality. Some scholars (most recently Atkinson, 2015; Holstein and Gubrium, 2016; Silverman, 2017) argue that this approach ignores the fact that informant-researcher interactions generate communicated meanings within interview settings. They therefore primarily focus on these interactional contexts and study how interviewees and interviewers co-construct meanings.

We agree with this criticism of interviewees' statements being taken at 'face value' as direct accounts of their experiences and their ways of thinking. However, we do not go as far as to attribute the *entire* origin of meanings captured in interviews to interactional settings. Without any doubt, interviewees create meanings in interactions with interviewers who, as a consequence, are to be seen as co-constructors of these meanings (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2016). But we argue that meanings constructed in interviews are also shaped by the interviewee's 'frame of orientation' (Bohnsack, 2010, 2014) brought 'from outside' into an interview situation. Drawing on Mannheim's (1952) concept of a theoretical (i.e. practical and often tacit) knowledge we suggest that a frame of orientation remains quite stable across different situations and interactions including social-scientific interviews. This idea opens an additional analytical option for interview data by pointing to the 'documentary method of interpretation' (DMI) initially described by Mannheim (1952), later referred to by Garfinkel (1967) mainly as an everyday practice of 'lay and professional fact finding' and finally elaborated by Bohnsack (2010, 2014) for analytical purposes. This interpretation procedure not only examines how interactions and framings in interview situations constitute meanings but also reconstructs regularities by identifying reoccurring discursive practices within interviews. In addition, when studying how interviewees construct their accounts, we take into consideration that different interviewees respond differently to very similar questions – including the use of different 'communicative schemes' (Schütze, 2014). On the one hand, interviewees recapitulate in narrated stories and descriptions how they lived through different biographic events and processes; on the other hand, they often make argumentative or evaluative statements which offer their own interpretations of narrative passages. The latter communicative schemes are more directly affected by the interview situation because they aim at convincing interviewers, while narrated stories and descriptions provide a less 'distorted' access to an interviewee's frame of orientation. Finally, by making allowance for different communicative schemes we are not only able to reconstruct the interviewee's own self-presentation in the context of an interview but also the formative principle which is constitutive for the interview content resulting from the interviewee's own expressive selectivity. By the latter, we mean the interviewee's specific choices (expressed content, grammatical constructs, style of speaking) as seen against the background of other possibilities to express similar content in the language of the given interview. Crucial for our argument is that identifying the formative principle offers an interpretational framework for understanding interviewee's accounts beyond the impact of the interview situation.

We begin by taking a closer look at different ways of interpreting interviews ranging from qualitative content analysis to sequential analysis that reconstructs how the content of the interview emerges. In this context, we discuss sequential analysis as being performed towards different ends. On the one hand, ethnomethodology concentrates on the production of joint meaning in interactional settings such as interviews. On the other hand, DMI, which also proceeds in sequential manner, reconstructs the interviewee's frame of orientation in different passages of an interview as the manifestation of a case-specific formative principle. We rely on a modified version of DMI that, in the domain of interview analysis, accounts for different communicative schemes (see Nohl, 2010). Finally, we use interview examples to demonstrate how to reconstruct an interviewee's frame of orientation, focusing on different communicative schemes. We will show how this reconstructed framing pattern provides for an in-depth understanding of explanatory or justificatory accounts.

Interpreting interviews

Qualitative interviews – ranging from unstructured to open-ended and to provocative – are methodologically well-established tools of social-scientific data gathering (see i.e. Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Roulston, 2010). They are very common in social sciences when it comes to studying the perspectives, experiences, explanations and justifications of individuals. However, there are also serious limitations of using such 'elicited data' (Charmaz, 2006) when it comes to accessing the interviewee's worldview, motivations and orientations. If the interpretation of such material relies solely on intended meanings captured in interview transcripts, researchers either restrict their findings to subjective explanations and justifications and to common sense meanings or they take narrated experiences as real. By so doing, researchers have to deal, among other objections with a major doubt regarding the understanding of action based on actor's utterances: theories that participants hold about themselves are fundamentally unreliable due to their supposed inability to access their own motivations and orientations (already mentioned in Weber, 1978) and due to social-desirability effects (Edwards, 1957). Thus, the question arises: how to interpret subjective expressions such as arguments or theories that research participants hold about themselves? In other words: how do we overcome limitations in interpreting such subjective accounts?

Ethnomethodologists (Holstein and Gubrium, 2016; Silverman, 2017) suggest not only to describe *what* is told in an interview but also *how* social realities are (co-)constructed. They would therefore concentrate on the interaction between researchers and informants and on how this context renders meaning. They reject single-utterance instances as valid findings and they argue solely for an analysis of interactive sequences between interviewers and interviewees in order to understand how meaning is co-constructed in interactions of this particular kind. Silverman (2017) even goes so far as to deny that there is any value in meaning-centred interpretation beyond the interactional setting. In this context, we share Hammersley's critique that points out the pitfalls of an excessive and direct reliance on interview content. Researchers should rather pay attention 'to what people are doing in and through their responses to interview questions, and to the discourse conventions on which they rely' (Hammersley, 2017: 180). Silverman

would agree that we should pay attention to what people are doing in interviews but Hammersley also points out that interview material is informative beyond what was constructed in the interview setting. This point is particularly important from our perspective. Narratives in particular (in the narrow sociolinguistic sense; see: Labov and Waletzky, 1967) reveal individual relevancies that shape the way informants report their experiences. ‘Unstructured’ (narrative) interviews are therefore particularly helpful because they provide a high degree of leeway in how interviewees formulate their answer. In doing so they are selective in what they say and how they do it; they construct a specific representation of their experiences. According to Hammersley (2017), this kind of expressive selectivity, as we would call it, is closely related to the informants’ perspectives on specific topics and thus provides an important lead in understanding their interpretative frames.

Drawing on this argument, we go a step further and propose that interviewees are not selective due to interview settings alone. The theoretical and methodological implications of Mannheim’s work suggest that an interpretation of practices allows us to reconstruct ‘formative principles’ (Mannheim, 1982: 251) which shape the ways in which social actors habitually see their social world and how they tend to act within it. Implicit ‘incorporated’ knowledge – based on experiences individuals make in their social milieu and broader societal contexts – serves as an orientation in various situations; it results in a homologous and recurrent pattern of expressive selectivity in non-standardised interview situations. Bourdieu (1984: 86) denotes it as the working ‘principle of selection’ or the ‘modus operandi’ that allows for an ‘unconscious deciphering of the countless signs which at every moment say what is to be loved and what is not, what is or is not to be seen’. Bohnsack uses the term ‘frame of orientation’¹ as a synonym for this habitual practical disposition of social actors. It is the manifestation of a modus operandi based on implicit knowledge. Thus, it is the reconstructive examination of an interviewee’s specific expressive selectivity (as it is documented in interviews) that opens up access to aspects of his or her formative principle; it also provides a methodologically-sound basis for interpretations of his or her explanatory and justificatory accounts.

Reconstructing frames of orientation

In this section, we will focus on Bohnsack’s (2014) elaborated version of DMI which is inspired by the ethnomethodological tradition but moves away from Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodological programme.

The basic idea of DMI goes back to Mannheim’s (1952) work on the interpretation of ‘Weltanschauung’ and two earlier manuscripts published in the 1980s (Mannheim, 1982). However, it was Bohnsack (2010, 2014) who developed Mannheim’s ideas about the documentary method as a common practice into a rigorous set of interpretative steps.² This methodology is based on the fundamental ‘distinction between two different sorts or levels of knowledge: the reflexive or theoretical knowledge on the one hand, and the practical or incorporated knowledge on the other’ (Bohnsack, 2010: 100). The first type of knowledge is well organised in the mind of an individual and can be easily communicated in the form of subjective everyday theories which constitute the major focus of studies embedded in the socio-phenomenological tradition following Schütz

(1967). It does not, however, necessarily play the guiding role in forming an individual's real actions; often it merely provides ex-post rationalisations. By contrast, 'it is the latter kind of knowledge which gives orientation to action. This is implicit knowledge. Mannheim also called it "atheoretical knowledge"' (Bohnsack, 2010: 100). From this perspective, the main goal of interpretive social research is the reconstruction of 'general patterns or frames of orientations' (Bohnsack, 2010: 104) based on actor's 'atheoretical knowledge'.

The DMI idea was introduced to English language social sciences by Garfinkel (1967) although he mainly looked at how it operated in 'lay and professional fact finding'. Bohnsack (2017: 36–48) noticed a crucial discrepancy between Garfinkel's explicit theory of action and his empirical studies. According to this interpretation, the ethnomethodological approach to action remains embedded in the 'rationalistic' Weberian-Schützian tradition of phenomenological sociology: human action is seen by Garfinkel as grounded in 'basic norms' and guided by more specific social norms constructed in contextually embedded interactions. However, empirical ethnomethodological studies by Garfinkel (1967a) himself, on admission practices in mental hospitals and by Cicourel (1968), on police officers dealing with juvenile crime, de facto transgress this paradigmatic boundary and approximate the crucial Mannheimian distinction between the official norm-centred knowledge ('communicative knowledge') and the implicit practical knowledge ('conjunctive knowledge'): the focus of these studies is on tacitly knowing how to do 'the right thing' and on coping with daily-life challenges.

The analytical procedure of DMI as developed by Bohnsack (2010, 2014) and advanced further by Nohl (2010) provides a different methodological systematisation. It proceeds in two major steps. The first one is the 'formulating interpretation' which results in a topical summary of the interpreted data segment. It is followed by the 'reflecting interpretation' of the same data segment as the analytical focus shifts from *what* was said to *how* it was said. We will concentrate on these interpretive steps including comparative sequential analysis and less on empirically-grounded identification of different orientation types. We will particularly emphasise the reflecting interpretation in order to demonstrate how to reconstruct an interviewee's frame of orientation that facilitates an in-depth understanding of his or her explanatory and justificatory statements.

The formulating interpretation of textual data starts with reviewing each segment sequentially and finding changes of topic. After identifying principal topics and subtopics, a summary of these topics is written in the researchers' own words. While the formulating interpretation aims at paraphrasing and summarising the interview content, the reflecting interpretation is concerned with formal aspects: how is a topic elaborated and what key categories are used to verbally present this topic? 'The question of the style or modus operandi in which a topic is developed refers equally to the formal and semantic aspects of interviews. The semantics of the text cannot be disassociated from its formal structure, the documentary interpretation of interviews takes account of this' (Nohl, 2010: 204–205).

In line with Atkinson's (2015) plea for taking the forms and functions of language seriously, Nohl (2010) combines the DMI with narrative interviewing techniques and their methodological underpinning. He takes Schütze's (2014) threefold typology of different communicative schemes in narrative interviews as a point of departure

and distinguishes between narratives, descriptions and argumentations; he also adds evaluations as the fourth communicative scheme. A (genuine) narrative is an interviewee's report about specific experiences or events that have a beginning and an end as well as a chronological sequence – a story-telling (see also Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Descriptions are, by contrast, accounts of recurring activities (e.g. regular professional-client interactions) or established facts (e.g. of a picture or machine). Argumentations present motives, reasons and conditions behind the interviewee's own, or someone else's, actions based on a common sense theory. In evaluative passages, as the term indicates, reported events, situations or behavioural patterns are evaluated, i.e. put in relation to some normative ideas. Argumentations and evaluations are often tightly intertwined.

Nohl (2010) proposes then that narrative and descriptive passages offer the best insights into the interviewees' implicit (a theoretical) knowledge. People tend to tell stories or to describe recurrent situations when they do not have ready-made rationalisations but the way they tell these stories and the categories they use in this process indicate how they frame the reported situations. Consequently, the reflecting interpretation seeks to analyse in narrative and descriptive passages 'the implicit regularity of experiences and reconstructing the documentary meaning embedded in this regularity, i.e. the frame of orientation of these experiences, this involves identifying continuities across a series of action sequences or narrative sequences about such actions' (Nohl, 2010: 207–208). Comparing sequences from a particular transcript with sequences from other transcripts (cases) is another main tool for reconstructing *different types* of orientation frames because this procedure allows for a data-grounded explication of case similarities and/or case specificities.

Although the DMI procedure was initially developed for the analysis of group discussions (Bohnsack, 2010; 2014), it also works for other types of data such as images and interviews (Bohnsack et al., 2010) or visual interpretation of written text (Philipps, 2012). When dealing with interviews, one has to take into account that although an interviewee's formative principle does also shape his or her arguments and common understandings, often it is not directly accessible through these communicative schemes due to ideological, social-expectational and situational influences. Therefore, interview data should be, according to Bohnsack (2014), compared with other sorts of data for a more profound and methodologically-controlled interpretation. To identify different frames of orientation one might employ a comparative sequential analysis including different narratives or group discussions. For DMI based on interview data, Nohl (2010) recommends a systematic comparison of different transcript segments within a single interview and between different interviews. Homologous framing patterns identified in narrative or descriptive passages within the same interview serve as indicators for a specific frame of orientation shaping the interviewee's worldview and the ways he or she tends to act.

In the next section, we will demonstrate how to reconstruct an interviewee's frame of orientation and how this result contributes to an understanding of the interviewee's explicit justification regarding his action.

Interpretation of an exemplary interview passage

The data segments selected for interpretation were extracted from a sample of semi-structured interviews conducted for a study about nutritional habits and the health-related

behaviour of ethnic German migrants from post-Soviet countries.³ For the limited purpose of demonstrating how the DMI works in practice, we will focus on a particular interview passage regarding the organisation of household tasks. In this regard we provide an interpretation of a subjective expression made by a male informant (Pm: age 31, married to Af, two children, working as supermarket salesman) that seems to offer a logical explanation of why his wife is in charge of doing the daily groceries shopping. He justifies this distribution of responsibilities by an unequal availability of time. According to Pm's words, he was 'at work the whole time' but his wife and children were free to arrange their action: 'when they need something they just go out and buy it'⁴.

At first glance, his justification regarding different time budgets seems to be plausible. This apparent understanding is an important reason why such meanings are presented as main findings in many qualitative studies. These kinds of 'ready-made' statements seem to offer unobstructed and accessible accounts revealing the interviewee's experiences and views. However, as discussed above, various scholars have pointed to different problems of validity if researchers rely solely on such accounts. This kind of interpretation leaves co-construction of meaning out of the picture and moreover it ignores, as we argue, the fact that interviewees' frames of orientation shape their explicit statements. We therefore propose additional interpretative steps to account for the dynamic in the interview setting and reconstruct the formative principles shaping the interview content. In so doing, we will demonstrate that Pm's account of the distribution of household responsibilities is only sufficiently understood when related to his frame of orientation.

The reconstruction of the interviewee's frame of orientation proceeds in several stages. For the purposes of demonstration, we interpret different passages in Pm's interview concerned with shopping and food preparation. The interviewee was asked different thematic questions; this interviewing technique at least offered leeway in how he formulated his answers. This is important for reflecting interpretation because in this analytical step one looks at two formal aspects of how the interview content was constructed. Firstly, one examines the interactions between interviewers and interviewees and how this influences their shared understanding. Secondly, one interprets how the interviewee constructed his or her narrations and description. The latter kind of interpretation, however, is feasible if the interview material not only includes subjective evaluations, explanations and justifications ('argumentations' according to Schütze's typology) but also genuine storytelling about experienced incidents or, at least, descriptions of daily routines. Only the latter offers access to practices of expressive selectivity (based on an interviewee's a theoretical knowledge) through close examination of reported practices and how the interviewee elaborates the described situations or courses of action. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish between different communicative schemes. Our reconstruction of Pm's frame of orientation thus begins with his opening descriptive passage. Most of the interviews started with a question about the typical way of shopping for groceries:

- I: To start off, I would like to know how you do your shopping when it's your turn to do the shopping (.) how do you go about it?
- Pm: ((Laughs)) I just go do it ((shakes head)) to be honest I hardly ever do the shopping really Af⁵ does it (.) if I happen to be at home if I do the shopping I

just get little things but ((shakes head)) I just go out and buy whatever I feel like but there's no special system or anything.

I: With a shopping list or totally spontaneous (.) tell me how it is (2) ahh.

Pm: Usually spontaneously sometimes with a list if I have to buy things that Af needs if I don't have to then spontaneously I grab whatever I see that's it (.) or whatever I feel like.

At the beginning the interviewer ('I:') indicates her interest in Pm's course of action regarding shopping. She does not ask him to report about a particular event. She is interested rather in a more general description of this activity. One should note that such a beginning already indicates the extraordinariness of the interview situation. In contrast to everyday conversations, including chats about specific shopping experiences, the interviewer asked for an abstract (generalising) description of the shopping process. In this particular case, the researcher already implies that the method of shopping is usually uniform (i.e. frequently following the same pattern). She also takes for granted that responsibilities regarding shopping are divided among family members. Consequently, Pm is encouraged to speak only about those shopping occasions for which he is responsible.

His answer to this question is full of presuppositions in the modus of description accompanied by laughter. This laughter and his head shaking may indicate his attitude towards this kind of question. It seems there is nothing special about it when he says 'I just go do it'. Furthermore, in his opening statement he does not consider the assumed sharing of responsibility. Pm does not begin by describing various activities for which he is responsible or for which he is not. Rather, he speaks about shopping as a spontaneous and seemingly undirected course of action.

Apart from the framing initiated by the particular kind of question and Pm's self-presentation as someone who is not concerned with such mundane things, this opening passage allows for some preliminary assumptions about his frame of orientation. If we take into consideration that, from his perspective, he has the freedom to do simple shopping, he might take for granted that he is freed from any planning and responsibility regarding that activity. This might include the implicit idea that someone else is in charge of systematic shopping. However, in contrast, his opening sequence might also document a well-informed shopper. There is perhaps no particular structured course of action regarding shopping. One could imagine Pm just goes shopping whenever it is needed and buys those products that are missing because he always is aware of the inventory at home (see for example Sf's depiction of doing shopping below).

The latter interpretation becomes less likely in the light of the follow-up sequence. In addition to the opening clause, he says about his shopping behaviour: 'to be honest I hardly ever do the shopping really Af does it'. Thus, Pm describes himself as someone who is largely discharged from shopping duties. According to his words it is his wife who usually does all the shopping. In practice, he not only seems to be freed from planning and organising shopping he rather seems entirely relieved of this household task. Taking this into account, we can advance our preliminary hypothesis regarding his frame of orientation: he takes for granted that his wife is responsible for shopping because this is the well-established task distribution within his family.

This framing is also evident in his additional descriptive accounts. For example, based on his clarification about his wife and her shopping behaviour, he gives more details on his unplanned course of shopping. We learn that there are circumstances, such as when he is at home, that he goes and buys ‘little things’ for himself. Thus, these seem to be the kind of conditions in which he does unplanned and spontaneous shopping. In this particular case, his choice of items is reported to be fully guided by ‘whatever I feel like’. Moreover, he distinguishes between this kind of shopping and shopping for the family. The latter is conducted by his wife who usually seems to deliver a list of needed items. He seems to distinguish between two kinds of shopping: he presents himself as someone who does spontaneous shopping whereas his wife is depicted as someone who prepares for and does the systematic shopping for their entire family.

A central feature of the DMI is comparative sequential analysis focused on how informants elaborate a topic. Proponents of this method compare data segments on similar topics in different interviews and specify for each case what is peculiar in their narrative or descriptive formation. For this reason, we put the Pm interview passage in relation to another description provided by the female informant Sf. Comparing different interviews with each other in the DMI context usually aims at reconstructing several distinct types of orientation frames. However, in this paper we will demonstrate how to identify one particular frame of orientation. We therefore restrict this comparison to only two interviews and their opening passages.

In the following interview passage Sf provides a slightly different answer to a quite similar stimulus:

- I: How do you typically go about a shopping trip?
 Sf: Sometimes I know (.) well sometimes I make a list and then I don’t even look at it and I think about it ahead of time and sometimes it’s just spontaneous and then (.) I try to (.) usually I know what we need at home and what we don’t need and yeah I start off with the drinks then after drinks are (.) snacks, bread, cold cuts, meat or yeah all the way to vegetables or fruit so I make my way around and try to remember what we need or (.) or maybe I feel like something special and I grab that which I hadn’t even thought about before.

We will spare a full interpretation of this interview passage and concentrate on the comparison with Pm’s shopping account. Hereafter, we will use the other interview passage to specify Pm’s frame of orientation.

Sf also speaks about spontaneous shopping. However, it happens on the sidelines of planned shopping – her main shopping activity. There are some situations when she prepares a shopping list of needed items. She might not refer to this list all the time but we learn that shopping is associated with a process of mental preparation. On the other hand, there are situations of spontaneous and seemingly unplanned shopping. Nonetheless, Sf highlights that even such rather spontaneous shopping occasions are not without any system (in contrast to Pm). In fact, she describes a rather systematic way of shopping. According to Sf, she uses her memories and an orderly procedure (from beverages to fruits) to buy products that are missing at home. Fancy products, in contrast, are purchased after she finishes shopping for the essentials. At this point, we do not assume that

Sf's depiction represents a specific, possibly gendered form of doing shopping. We rather use her account to demonstrate that, in contrast to Pm, she, herself, explicitly draws a distinction between well-organised shopping for needed goods and spontaneous shopping. Such a differentiation does not occur in Pm's report on his shopping behaviour. He mainly speaks of spontaneous shopping and relates other forms of shopping to his wife. This cross-case comparison of shopping accounts by two different interviewees allows us to explicate different framings of this social activity in a data-grounded manner: there are different orientations of shoppers presumably induced by their respective role within their households.

We therefore return to the Pm transcript. In the next interview passages, he is asked to describe his shopping behaviour through the eyes of his wife. Against this background, he portrays himself as a 'very bad buyer [. . .] because doing the shopping I am also very slow'. Moreover, he describes himself as almost incapable of doing well-ordered shopping. According to him, even with a list of needed products, he roams through the shelves in a store looking for the items. In these accounts he again depicts his unsystematic way of shopping against the more ordered course of action associated with his wife (i.e. doing the shopping for the family, providing lists of needed items). This data segment also suggests that Pm is unfamiliar with the setup of supermarkets (whereas Sf uses her practical knowledge of such departmental setups as a supportive mind map).

Later Pm was asked to explain why his wife is responsible for doing all the necessary shopping:

- I: And is there a reason why Af is mainly responsible for the shopping?
 Pm: Yeah because I'm at work the whole time ((shrugs shoulders)) well most of the time I'm at work and so when they need something they just go out and buy it and (.) ((shrugs shoulders)) yeah I don't usually go with them.

Pm's account comes without delay and explains the unevenly-distributed responsibility by different degrees of availability. From his perspective, he has no time for shopping because he is usually 'at work' whereas his wife and children are able to freely arrange their daily activities. However, if we account for the fact that he uses the phrase 'being at work' then he also informs us about his status in the relationship. Being at work is usually associated with doing waged labour. Thus, it seems he is not only busy with work; he rather seems to be the one in charge of earning the income for the family (the 'breadwinner' role). Consequently, it seems likely that, from his point of view, if he spent all his days working for the family, others (especially his wife), who, as being exempted from it, should be responsible for the 'homemaking' (including shopping). Thus, in his explanation the uneven distribution of shopping responsibilities seems to be a consequence of real-world circumstances.

However, we will see that Pm's accounts are shaped by a gender-centred frame of orientation and thus a different reading of his justification is required. Apart from other equally suitable passages for conducting a similar reconstruction we will concentrate on another sequence later in the interview to complete our interpretation. This interview passage is part of the topic regarding the choice of diet and food preparation. It is about convenience food in particular. We start with the question and the answer concerning his attitude towards such industrially pre-prepared products:

- I: Okay (.) okay (.) and how do you feel about pre-cooked products (3) hmm?
 Pm: I don't have anything against them but we usually don't buy them (.) for a while I had like a phase when we sometimes bought them like just to try them out how they like actually taste since it always goes really quick but it didn't work out (.) Af is always at home anyway she's always cooking something ((frowns)).

After three seconds of silence Pm makes clear that he is open to consuming convenience food but then he declares that in his family ('we') the spouse does not share his preference. Interestingly, he uses the frame of different degrees of availability again. Convenience food might be easily and quickly prepared but these advantages are irrelevant because his wife has time to prepare food. According to him, she 'always' cooks. Against this background, Pm again refers to his wife as the person who is responsible for all 'homemaking'. She seems to do the daily shopping as well as preparing the meals for the family because she is free to do so. This asymmetric distribution of household responsibilities is also emphasised by the interviewee's switches between his individual activities (indicated by 'I'-based grammatical constructions) and spouse-driven familial practices (indicated by 'we'-based grammatical constructions).

The dominance of this specific way to arrange his answers (a manifestation of his frame of orientation) becomes obvious in the following interview passage. In the course of additional questions by the interviewer, Pm is forced to break with his earlier depiction and explanation. It is not the kind of questions that lead to Pm's inconsistent explanation of unevenly-divided responsibilities between Pm and his wife but a conflict between Pm's earlier descriptions and new information:

- I: And what would be a typical pre-cooked product for you?
 Pm: Pizza (.) frozen pizza that would be (.) mostly something like that (.) if we really do something it's pizza.
 I: Do you have any pre-cooked products or partially pre-cooked products?
 Pm: At home hmm.
 I: Yes.
 Pm: Yeah pizza but that's just for emergencies you know in case (.) at times might be (.) in her job if she ever gets back late from work just makes something quick so yeah but otherwise not that I know of no (.) ((scratches wrist)) I don't think so.
 [. . .]
 I: Okay who in your family is responsible for preparing the food?
 Pm: Af.
 I: And.
 Pm: If ((nods head)) I'm at home on Thursday and Af is working then I will sometimes do it but those are like (.) something that goes quick 'cause I'm not much of a cook ((laughs and rubs hands)).

Pm's answers reveal that, on rare occasions, he and his family consume frozen pizza. It seems to be the only convenience food product they buy. However, Pm descriptions become less fluent and clear as he provides more details on such circumstances. There

are situations when his spouse (not explicitly mentioned at this point) is ‘in her job’ and if ‘she’ comes home late there is someone who swiftly puts a pizza into the oven. As we see, Pm seems to be having problems continuing his presentation. He needs several attempts to specify what ‘emergencies’ mean. The ‘narrative drive’ (‘*Zugzwänge des Erzählens*’ in Schütze, 2014: 229) to go into detail propels Pm to explicate that his wife is not only responsible for cooking but also for earning an income (in contrast to earlier utterances of Pm). Nonetheless, it took an additional question for Pm to specify ‘she’ and to openly connect his wife (‘Af’) with being at work.

At this point in the interview it becomes obvious that his wife is also doing waged labour (she is a ‘breadwinner’ too) and thus is not free to arrange the daily shopping. It is also remarkable that Pm works in fact as a supermarket salesman – as we learn from the standardised part of the interview. As a consequence, earlier accounts by Pm appear in a different light: him being ‘at work all the time’ does not seem to constitute a particular obstacle to obtaining groceries etc. Nonetheless, his clarification in the latter interview passage does not contradict his reconstructed frame of orientation regarding distinct gendered spheres of inner-familial division of labour. Within this frame of orientation, women are still responsible for ‘homemaking’ including cooking and shopping whereas men are exempted from this but in charge of working and earning money (the ‘breadwinner’ role). Drawing on the interpretation of the entire interview, we assume that this recurrent way of structuring topics also dominates his way of seeing the world and, presumably, acting within it.⁶ It shapes his answers, and especially his explanation, regarding different degrees of availability until he is propelled by the course of the interview to provide more details on his own and his spouse’s activities. At this point, one could either argue he was deliberately lying in the interview or that a particular formative principle was at work by selectively shaping his accounts. Of course, one should be cautious but, according to Hammersley (2017: 183), ‘a blanket suspicion that informants are lying or mistaken, or that what they present is misleading because constructed is not a wise policy’. He therefore gives the advice that we should ‘operate on the assumption that the information provided by others will be broadly accurate and sufficiently complete’ (Hammersley, 2017: 183) in everyday life and in the context of research. In addition, we would argue individuals have different sets of relevancies and experiences that ‘crystallise’ as their frames of orientation and in turn render the way research participants generate content in interviews. One should therefore control interpretations of subjective accounts by reconstructing recurrent framing patterns and their impact on meanings contained in interview transcripts.

Conclusion

We took up the critique on insufficient interpretation techniques of interview data, especially if interviewee’s statements are presented as direct accounts of their experiences and thinking. In an ongoing debate about using interview material in research, ethnomethodologists point to the fact that meaning is co-constructed in interview interactions and therefore interpretation of interview data should focus on processes of jointly generating meanings. However, we challenged the underlying assumption that the *entire*

authorship of meaning is exclusively attributable to the interactive system emerging between the interviewee(s) and the interviewer(s). In contrast we argued that the interviewee's frame of orientation has a significant impact on the content of the interview – especially when the selected interviewing technique allocates sufficient narrative leeway to the interviewee. Taking the frame of orientation as a manifestation of a formative principle, its reconstruction helps us to understand how interview content is produced. It is also a crucial step towards a more adequate understanding of subjective explanations and justifications expressed by interviewees.

The elaborated present-day form of DMI was initially developed to reconstruct collective and milieu-specific frames of orientation using focus-group discussions (Bohnsack, 2010, 2014). However, this approach also proves very fruitful when analysing pictures, video, observation protocols and, in particular, narrative interviews (e.g., Bohnsack et al., 2010). In this paper we therefore demonstrated that understanding the meanings of individual-interview accounts remains seriously constrained without examining the process of content generation in the interview setting and over the course of the interview. A close examination of how the content is constructed not only offers access to its meaning but also to the interviewee's frame of orientation. Such a reconstructed frame enables researchers to interpret interview accounts in relation to the interviewee's implicit knowledge. Relying here on common sense knowledge alone is insufficient because it underestimates the relevance of implicit knowledge in guiding action. Researchers who systematically use the DMI therefore not only focus on communicated common sense knowledge. They also reconstruct implicit knowledge that is documented in the process of generating interview content. So far, DMI is predominantly used in the field of educational research in Germany for reconstructing milieu-specific frames of orientation. We have shown in this paper that DMI provides an analytical procedure for methodically controlled interpretations of interview accounts in all domains of qualitative social research because it also allows to re-interpret interviewees' everyday theories and justifications presented in interviews against the background of their 'a theoretical' practical knowledge 'crystallised' as their frames of orientation.

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Notes

1. This term displays some similarities to the concept of ‘attitude’ as it is widely used in social psychology – especially when implicit and tacit aspects of the latter are highlighted (see Bohner and Dickel, 2011). A ‘frame of orientation’ is, however, less focused on particular ‘attitude objects’ and more comprehensive. Hence, it could be understood as an entire system or network of different implicit attitudes, much closer to Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’. It is at the same time distinct from ‘explicit attitudes’, which are predominately targeted by standardised questionnaire-based research in social psychology and social science.
2. As a matter of principle, qualitative data analysis is based on interpretative techniques that are not fundamentally different from what every member of a society does when understanding social reality. However, QDA methods systematise these techniques and add prescriptions of rigorous interpretative conduct (e.g. sequential analysis), which then sometimes cause in the lay public the impression of certain redundancy. Lay individuals tend to use interpretative shortcuts instead of trying to elaborate all possible alternative interpretations. Their inclinations for specific ways of ‘shortcutting’ can be made empirically visible through systematic explorations of alternative interpretations by means of thought experiments or by cross-case comparisons (as proposed by DMI).
3. We express our gratitude to Nelli Betke for allowing us to use this data. The interviewer is a trained nutritionist with the same migration background as the interviewee. She also migrated to Germany with her family from the same country of origin.
4. For the original German interview text see Appendix A and for a description of transcription rules see Appendix B.
5. ‘Af’ is a placeholder for the originally named person (Pm’s wife) while ‘f’ stands for female and ‘m’ for male.
6. Of course, with our interpretation of this relatively small amount of data we only can provide a preliminary suggestion regarding this interviewee’s frame of orientation. A more empirically grounded reconstruction would include analogous interpretations of other thematic passages from the same interview, from other interviews (for the purpose of cross-case comparisons), and of additional data (e.g. observation notes, pictures, videos) if these were available. However, the presented interpretation is grounded in passages from different topical sections of the semi-structured interview initiated by different questions coming from the interviewer. This fact demonstrates, at least in a nascent form, the stability of the frame across different interactive constellations.

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Appendix A

Interview Pm (German)

- I: Zunächst einmal würde mich interessieren wie so ein Einkauf bei Dir abläuft wenn du mal für den Einkauf zuständig bist (.) wie gehst du vor?
- Pm: ((Lacht)) Ich geh einfach drauf los ((Kopfschütteln)) ganz ehrlich ich gehe selten einkaufen das macht eigentlich Af (.) wenn ich mal zu Hause bin dann wenn ich mal gehe dann sind das so Kleinigkeiten aber ((Kopfschütteln)) ich geh dann einfach los und kauf das wozu ich Lust hab aber das die hat kein bestimmtes System oder sonstiges.
- I: Mit Einkaufsliste oder ganz spontan (.) wie kann ich mir das vorstellen (2) ahh.
- Pm: Meistens spontan ab und zu mal=ne Liste wenn ich Sachen besorgen muss die Af braucht wenn ich das nicht machen muss dann spontan das was ich seh nehme ich mit fertig (.) oder wozu ich Lust hab.
[. . .]
- I: Und gibt es einen Grund dass Af für den Haupteinkauf verantwortlich ist?
- Pm: Ja weil ich die ganze Zeit auf Arbeit ((Schulterzucken)) also die meiste Zeit bin ich auf Arbeit und dann wenn sie was brauchen dann fahren sie los und kaufen sich das und (.) ((Schulterzucken)) ja da bin ich halt meistens nicht dabei.
[. . .]
- I: Okay (.) okay (.) und wie stehst Du zu Fertigprodukten (3) mhm.
- Pm: Ich hab nix gegen die aber wir kaufen die selten (.) ne Zeit lang hatte ich da so eine Phase die hab=n mal gekauft mal zum Durchprobieren wie das tatsächlich schmeckt und so geht ja auch immer schnell aber das wurde dann doch nichts (.) Af ist sowieso zu Hause die kocht die ganze Zeit ((verzieht Mundwinkel)).
- I: Und was wäre so ein typisches Fertigprodukt für dich?
- Pm: Pizza (.) tiefgekühlte Pizza das wäre (.) so was dann auch am meisten (.) wenn mal tatsächlich was gemacht wird dann ist es die Pizza.
- I: Gibt es irgendwelche Fertigprodukte bei euch oder Halbfertigprodukte?
- Pm: Zu Hause mhm.
- I: Ja.
- Pm: Ja Pizza ist aber dann auch so notfalls nee falls mal ne (.) ist ja auch teilweise (.) Arbeiten sollte sie mal später von der Arbeit kommen schnell mal was fertig machen so ja aber sonst wüsste ich nichts nein (.) ((kratzt sich am Handgelenk)) ich glaube nicht.
[. . .]

- I: Okay wer ist denn bei euch in der Familie für die Essenszubereitung zuständig?
- Pm: Af.
- I: Und.
- Pm: Wenn ((Kopfnicken)) ich Donnerstag zu Hause bin und Af ist arbeiten dann mach ich das auch mal aber das sind dann auch so (.) was was schnell geht da bin ich nicht so der Koch ((lacht und reibt sich die Hände)).

Interview Sf (German)

- I: Wie läuft denn so ein typischer Einkauf ab?
- Sf: Manchmal weiß ich (.) also manchmal schreib ich mir einen Zettel auf den ich dann gar nicht drauf guck und mach mir vorher Gedanken und manchmal ist das halt spontan und dann (.) versuch ich mich (.) meistens weiß ich was zu Hause fehlt oder was nicht und ja dann geht's los mit den Getränken dann werden Getränke (.) Naschkram Brot Aufschnitt Fleisch oder ja bis hin zum Gemüse oder Obst so geh ich dann noch mal die Runde und versuch mich zu erinnern was fehlt oder (.) oder vielleicht hab ich auf was Bestimmtes Lust und nimm das dann noch mit was gar nicht so im Kopf war vorher.

Appendix B

Transcription rules

- (.) pause for less than a second
- (2) pause for two seconds
- loud rising and accentuated voice
- mal=ne contraction of words
- ((nods)) gestures and non-verbal action