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Objective Hermeneutics – Key Principles and Procedures¹

Abstracts

EN

This article provides an overview of the objective-hermeneutic sequence analysis, as a reconstructive analysis method and as a “Kunstlehre” (theory of art). In addition to the theoretical assumptions and key principles, the interpretative procedure based on the 5 principles of Wernet is described. A short excursus on the question and challenge of methodically controlled analysis and understanding of foreign cultural, but also foreign language data, as encountered by the authors in the context of transcultural and comparative teaching research, rounds off this article.

DE

Der vorliegende Artikel gibt einen Überblick über die objektiv-hermeneutische Sequenzanalyse, als rekonstruktive Auswertungsmethode und “Kunstlehre”. Neben den theoretischen Annahmen und Grundprinzipien wird das interpretative Vorgehen anhand der fünf Prinzipien nach Wernet beschrieben. Ein kleiner Exkurs über die Frage und Herausforderung des methodisch kontrollierten Analysierens und Verstehens von fremdkulturellen aber auch fremdsprachlichen Daten, wie es der Autorin und dem Autor im Kontext der transkulturellen und vergleichenden Unterrichtsforschung begegnet, rundet diesen Beitrag ab.

PT

Este artigo apresenta uma visão geral da análise sequencial hermenêutica objetiva como método de avaliação reconstrutiva e “teoria da arte”. Para além dos pressupostos teóricos e dos princípios básicos, o procedimento interpretativo é descrito com base nos cinco princípios de Wernet. Um breve excursus sobre a questão e o desafio da análise e compreensão de dados

1 Thanks to Annika Scholz and Dr. Lara-Stephanie Krause-Alzaidi for translating the text.

culturais e linguísticos estrangeiros, metodicamente controlada, tal como encontrado pelos autores no contexto da investigação do ensino transcultural e comparada, completa este artigo.

JA

本稿では、再構成をおこなう分析方法と「技の理論」として、客観的解釈学のシーケンス分析を概観する。理論的基盤と基本原則にくわえ、ヴェアネットが提唱した5つの原則にもとづいて解釈手順を叙述する。また、異なる文化や外国語のデータを方法的制御のもとに分析し理解する際の問いや課題についても言及する。その際、書き手であるわたしたちがトランスカルチュラルな比較授業研究にどのように向き合ったのかを示し、論考をまとめる。

1 Theoretical assumptions

The method of objective hermeneutics was developed in the 1970s by Ulrich Oevermann and colleagues who were looking at the relationship between social class, forms of language and social interaction (Oevermann et al. 1979). The method is situated in the empirical, case based and qualitative reconstructive research tradition and is utilised in the social sciences, the humanities, in cultural studies as well as in the empirical field of school and teaching research (Combe & Helsper 1994; Schelle 2003).

The method of objective hermeneutics is concerned with tracing the general structural characteristics, i.e., the case structure of a specific life practice (Oevermann 2000: 117) and finding out how the concrete case represents a specific position, a particular response, a specific variant (Wernet 2012: 184). The focus is not put on the subjective intentional meaning of a life practice (hence it does not focus on what somebody could have intended), but instead it relies upon the reconstruction of the latent, objective meaning structures of the analysed material (forms of expression) (Oevermann 2013). According to Bourdieu (1979) “every individual, whether they may be aware of it or not, may want it or not, is a producer and reproducer of objective sense”² (ibid.: 178). In objective hermeneutics all protocols of natural interactions are taken into consideration, meaning everything “that can be objectified and leaves recordable traces” (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr 2014: 251) in any form of text. Cases in point are for example protocols of interaction, school textbooks or photographs. On the premise that every social life practice is constituted by “rule generated” as well as “rule guided” action (Oevermann 2000: 64), the intention of the method of objective hermeneutics is orientated towards the

2 All citations are translated.

idea that there actually are regularities which exist beyond subjective feeling and meaning that determine the actions of each individual (Schelle 2003). The aim of reconstructing latent structures is to formulate the structure of a case. This can be regarded as a kind of pattern rendered recognisable by repeating everything “that is expressed in a statement as ‘objective meaning’” (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr 2014: 253). In order to achieve this aim, the methodical approach needs to adhere to certain steps in the process of interpretation.

2 Method and principal steps of interpretation

Andreas Wernet proposes five principles regarding the objective hermeneutical analysis process, which have become firmly established: “*Kontextfreiheit*” (context-free interpretation), “*Wörtlichkeit*” (literal meaning), “*Sequentialität*” (sequentiality), “*Extensivität*” (extensiveness) and “*Sparsamkeit*” (parsimony) (cf. Wernet 2009: 6).

“*Kontextfreiheit*” (context-free interpretation)

The objective hermeneutical reconstruction begins with a thought experiment in order to find answers to the following question: “Who could have said that in which situation and under which circumstances?” (Franzmann 2016: 27). By comparing various imaginable fields of contexts, the objective hermeneutical approach consciously and methodically neglects the actual context to capture the specific connotation of an expression (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr 2014: 257). Therefore, this approach tries to formulate “narratives that show a maximum of diverse and contrasting situations [...] that consistently match the generated statement and pragmatically fulfil their conditions of validity” (Oevermann 1983: 236). In terms of dealing with context knowledge, or rather previous knowledge of data that is to be interpreted, establishing a “methodically controlled artificial naivety” enables one to observe the familiar from a distance instead of describing it from an inside perspective of practice that precisely is the object of analysis (Oevermann 1993: 264).

“*Sequentialität*” (sequentiality)

With the principle of sequentiality, objective hermeneutics expresses the inner structure of the content being analysed. During the course of interpretation, the empirical material is analysed step by step. After the complete reconstruction of a sequence (when dealing with large data sets like a lesson in class), it is helpful to scan the data in search of “usable” sequences that are in turn interpreted according to the rules of the sequence analysis (Wernet 2009: 31).

“Wörtlichkeit” (literal meaning)

Applying the principle of literal meaning is to look at data material as an “expression of reality” (Wernet 2009: 23). Each text element is “put on the gold scale” and examined precisely with regard to its structure and meaning (Wernet 2009: 24). From a systematic point of view, the principle of literal meaning indicates that one must leave the level of paraphrasing the content and focus on the structure of the text (Wernet 2009).

“Extensivität” (extensiveness)

The principle of extensiveness requests that even every minor and inconspicuous detail needs to be included into the sequential analysis and needs to be defined as purposefully motivated (Oevermann 2000: 100). This implies that an extensive sequential analysis initially requires numerous versions of interpretation. As “the struggle for the text” (Oevermann et al. 1979: 393) underlines, more and more interpretations are gradually left behind until the structure of the case is revealed.

“Sparsamkeit” (parsimony)

This principle puts an end to an extensive, detailed and precise analysis. Instead of “an aimless and endless search for meaning” (Wernet 2009: 35), it only introduces interpretations of “‘normal’ situations and contexts which are necessary for the overall understanding of the text” (Leber 1994: 228). The principle of parsimony functions as a kind of “handrail” for a context free and extensive sequential analysis (Mbaye 2018: 130).

The educationalist Rumpf very poignantly described the objective hermeneutical reconstruction of class sequences as a form of “detective work” to avoid hasty judgments (Rumpf 1991; Schelle 2003). The practical procedure of objective hermeneutics does not differ logically from the procedures of everyday knowledge production. It literally tries to explore its object as a form of “*Kunstlehre*” (theory of art) by aiming to differentiate the logic of professional forms of practices (Oevermann 2013). However, the empirical method of objective hermeneutics can be considered as a meticulous and time-consuming approach. This is why Oevermann himself describes the methodical proceedings as “a laboratory situation for scientists” (Oevermann 2014: 38).

The steps of interpretation outlined here will be illustrated in following article in this volume (Schelle & Mbaye) with the aid of protocols of foreign language classes, in which different forms of addressing and the subject of teaching play

a significant role. The reconstruction of foreign cultural or foreign language data can be seen as a particular challenge for the interpreters.

3 Dealing with foreign cultural data

The study of comparative research confronts scientists with the challenges of a methodically controlled analysis and understanding of foreign cultural, but also foreign language data (Mbaye 2018; Schelle 2013). Reconstructive methods, like in particular objective hermeneutics, are sensitive towards differences and therefore allow:

- to relativise “the impregnation of one’s own view” (Hollstein, Schelle & Meister 2012),
- to reflect one’s own “habits of seeing and thinking” (ibid.) and therefore avoid risks of ethnocentrism.

Mixed teams of interpreters (autochthonous and allochthonous) in particular (Schelle 2013) enable us to engage in the “language of the case” (Cappai 2010: 129) and to empathise with “cultural ‘underlying structures’ of the society that is the focus of investigation” (Cappai 2010: 151).

A further challenge lies in handling translations that often correlate with shifts of meaning or loss of significance of particular elements. Following the principles of literal meaning and sequentiality, the interpretation of the case should be as close to the source text as possible. This explains why in our German-Senegalese projects, all protocols of classroom interaction are left in their respective original language (Mbaye 2018; Schelle 2013; Schelle & Mbaye in this volume). Since its emergence within the framework of the project “Childhood home and school” (Oevermann et al. 1979), the method of objective hermeneutics has evolved further. It has influenced various disciplines and working contexts (Franzmann 2016), including our German-Senegalese projects.

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