

ON SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC METHODS OF
TEXT ANALYSIS

Before we embark on the critical and comparative presentation of individual methods (see Part 2), it seems both necessary and wise to clarify, from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, certain basic concepts that relate to our theme of methods of text analysis. Even the simple question of what a text is permits no easy answer, but leads us immediately into the highly varied theoretical approaches of text linguistics and discourse analysis where even the concepts of *text* and *discourse* are used in a multiplicity of ways and where they are anchored in very different research traditions. A similar situation is found with the term *method*, and with our understanding of what social scientists actually do when they analyse texts: what procedures, rules and instruments do they use for this task? The two introductory chapters should be seen as a basis for all the expositions that follow; they are intended as an illustration of the interdisciplinary nature of our project.

Methods are not isolated in space, but are either explicitly or implicitly related to theoretical assumptions and structures. Quite often methods are applied without due reflection and without taking account of such theoretical roots. Our map of theories and methods aims to assist in a reflective approach by creating an awareness of the interconnection of traditions and the proximity or distance between the individual methods. It may be seen what theoretical preconditions are associated with the application of a particular method. The final part of the book is devoted to a bibliometric comparison of methods, and a comparison of the frequencies of citation and reference in various literature databases. We are of course aware that this kind of comparison cannot pass judgement on the quality of a particular method. It merely reflects the extent of its diffusion within the 'scientific community': to what degree a method has gained acceptance, has been adopted and applied. Together with our comparison and the criteria to be discussed, the frequency of citation provides an additional perspective which may also be significant for the selection of a particular method.

1.1 WAYS OF ACCESSING DATA

The term 'method'¹ normally denotes research pathways: from the researcher's own standpoint or from point A (theoretical assumptions), another point B

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(observation) is reached by choosing a pathway which permits observations and facilitates the collection of experiences. If one proceeds systematically wrong turnings are avoidable. Methodical procedure can, like Ariadne's thread, guarantee the researcher a safe route back. By giving them experience along the way, methodical procedure may also assist those investigators who look over their shoulders and see their starting point differently, even deciding not to go back but to find other more interesting starting points. No matter how the investigative journey may turn out, methodical procedure will make it easier to record findings and to compile reports of experience.

In so-called empirical social research a distinction is made between elicitation and evaluation methods: between ways of collecting data (in the laboratory or by fieldwork) and procedures that have been developed for the analysis of collected data. Methodical procedures for the collection of data organize observation; evaluation methods regulate the transformation of data into information and further restrict the opportunities for inference and interpretation.² In the context of some empirical research, fieldwork implies those stages in a task that permit the collection of data *in situ*. In most cases this requires a direct discussion between the researchers and the carriers or representatives of the patterns and structures that are sought or being investigated.

Almost all of the methods that are brought together in this book may be ascribed to the area of social research³ in so far as their results are obtained from tangible reality and this reality is acknowledged as a test case of their (theoretical) conclusions. None of these methods is a field-research method in the sense of observing actual behaviour of participants in a meeting which one wishes to analyse, since text analyses can begin only after the material has been collected. Although text analyses may precede fieldwork – if for instance answers from interviews are being analysed – they may also take place without this preparatory work, for example if generally accessible texts are being investigated and no special phase of field data collection is required.

The routes to be followed in empirical research will be decided initially by the general research questions – and these are, to a certain extent, determined by the theoretical approach one has decided to follow. If one believes it is vital to investigate attitudes, then questioning will seem more suitable than observation. If concrete non-verbal modes of behaviour are being examined, then observation is indispensable. If one wishes to study behaviour from some period of time in the past, one must make use of texts already elicited or documented in writing. If everyday behaviour is of primary interest, laboratory conditions are excluded. These simple examples should demonstrate that the initial framework is determined by the research questions to the extent that, while certain basic limitations derive from them, on the other hand they help in the selection of economic ways of clarifying the basic research problem. Not every mode of procedure is equally suited to handling every question. Data do not always need to be collected: use can often be made of materials that are already available.

Every piece of research begins with theoretical assumptions: 'The field worker cannot begin to describe any social event without some specification of his scientific theory, i.e. his theory of objects, his model of the actor, or the kind of social order presupposed' (Cicourel 1964: 51).

Using these models the research question can be clarified and from this can be derived a particular 'research strategy'. This term incorporates those decisions that need to be taken when planning a piece of research before the concrete stages of empirical work can be derived.⁴

First, at a fundamental level it depends on what the research aims to discover: (a) does one wish to explore and find explanations for the facts to be investigated; (b) are theoretical concepts or hypotheses to be tested; or (c) is it a matter of finding a description of a particular field or defined population?

Investigative processes (as referred to in (a) above) require heuristic or interpretative procedures, and have as their goal the clarification of ideas or concepts (consider the numerous investigations on the theme of 'politeness') and/or the development of theoretical assumptions (such as action-determining structures or historically and socially conditioned patterns of meaning). Such undertakings are often organized in the form of individual case studies. One example of this is the study by Bensman & Gerver (1973), in which deviant behaviour in a production department is investigated and interpreted, on the basis of observer participation, as an important element in the maintenance of the social system. Exploratory studies – in the traditional view⁵ – are predominantly for the purpose of preparing research that tests hypotheses. If theoretical assumptions are to be tested (as suggested in point (b) above), then experimental or quasi-experimental research designs are required,⁶ that is to say, research instruments which can be used to vary systematically independent variables in order to assess their possible influence on dependent variables (see in this connection Kleining's (1994) suggestions for experiments with texts). For the purpose of description (see point (c) above), it is, on the one hand, typical to use the types of study which in extreme cases may be conducted by counting distinctive features in a sampling and estimating procedure. Examples of this are public opinion surveys and – with reference to linguistic analysis – the assembly and evaluation of a 'Wendekorpus' ('corpus of change') to investigate the lexicon of the German language in the years 1989–90. On the other hand, description may have additional hidden aims and seek to describe the behaviour of actors in particular social fields. Such investigations do not aim to account for quantifiable distributions but rather to document spheres of existence, and sometimes also to go beyond description and explain the rules which determine them.

Secondly, at the level of the connection between the research process and the affected or possible consumers, one must enquire about the form of the contact between investigators and those who will provide the necessary data (responses, documents, etc.). The various possible positions in this respect may be located between the two extremes of greatest possible involvement and total withdrawal of the investigators. Typical of the first approach would be projects that feel obliged to use action-research, while the second approach is seen in non-reactive methods, experimental designs and all standardized procedures.

In connection with this, thirdly, some commitment must be made about the approach of the investigators. If they approach their field of research 'openly', this implies dispensing with standardized instruments or predetermined categories. It also implies a willingness to distance themselves from any prior

understanding and thereby to change the mode of procedure in the course of the investigation. In contrast, the epistemological approach would require the setting up and testing of hypotheses, since procedural changes in the course of research can only lead to results that are difficult to verify.⁷

Fourthly and finally, under decisions concerning research strategy, there is the question whether the piece of research should provide a snapshot (generalizable over time) or whether it should investigate changes. The first type is considerably more frequent and implies data collection at a particular point in time or during a particular phase of the investigation. In the second case, the investigator must opt for one of the various types of sequential or 'panel' procedures⁸ and either collect data on a number of occasions or analyse material from different periods.

The preliminary decisions outlined here narrow the spectrum of usable procedures but perhaps force a combination of particular modes of research. It may therefore seem necessary – or at least wise – to examine the content of texts first and then to enquire about their effect on recipients. Whatever the case, such questions should always be clarified before a decision is reached about the method which will actually be used in a particular project. An empirical method should be understood as a set of procedural rules which has available a set of principles governing how investigators should gather experiences and how they should organize their observations if they wish to proceed scientifically. Proceeding scientifically, in this respect, is understood as systematic, rule-governed work. Adhering to schematized modes of procedure makes it possible for investigators to remain uninvolved. It enables them to maintain the required distance from the phenomena (action-field, behavioural structures) that are being studied and, again despite appropriate sensitivity towards the field of research, to adopt the role of a neutral (as opposed to partisan) observer. Only in this way can scientists maintain their own 'meaning and relevance structures', which they use first to inform themselves about the object of study and to observe it, and then to interpret and classify.⁹

Among the methods of data collection most frequently used we find questioning, observation¹⁰ or sociometry. The more highly elaborated a method is, the more differentiated are the various procedures with which data collection can be carried out. Distinctions can therefore be made between written/oral, individual/group questioning, participant or non-participant, and overt and covert observation. (Most of these procedures or fieldwork techniques may be applied in more standardized or less standardized variants.) Data for the analysis of group structures can be collected by means of sociometric questioning or with the help of a living sociogram. In objective hermeneutics (see Chapter 14), designated by its creator Oevermann et al. (1979) as a synthetic approach, there are also different procedures (such as sequential and detailed analysis, that is to say interpretative procedures) that can be applied according to the research goal.

Methods are therefore families of related procedures whose relationship is determined by one or more common features: by a common theoretical base (as in the case of objective hermeneutics), by their relationship to the object of study (sociometry is used in the analysis of group relations, content analysis for

investigating the contents of communication), by their efficiency and limitations. For instance, observation techniques may also be used to approach non-verbal behaviour, but only behaviour that is currently observable or recorded on film. Questioning can be used to collect data on attitudes and intentions, 'internal' behaviour, or past activities. In many cases the individual methods make use of differently standardized procedures. Through a predetermined structuring of the collection process an attempt is made to minimize the interpersonal influences of those collecting the data: interviewers have predetermined questionnaires, observers have a standardized framework for classifying observations, content analysts use a system of categories to classify textual elements as uniformly as possible. In addition, highly structured modes of data collection have economic advantages in that they simplify the subsequent evaluation procedures. Whether standardized procedures can be used, however, depends to a considerable extent on prior knowledge, on the subject area and on the research goal. Any predetermination of categories presupposes knowledge of events that may possibly occur (for example, textual contents) or of reactions (such as answers to questions). The field of investigation and the subject area (such as daily rituals in spontaneously occurring face-to-face interactions¹¹) can render pointless standardized modes of procedure. The development of a framework of answers, observations or categories requires clear theoretical assumptions. For this reason alone exploratory investigations (see above) have little or no structure.

For each of the procedures mentioned there is a range of more or less widely accepted *rules* that researchers are obliged to follow. If they do not follow the rules they may be accused of not operating 'cleanly'. In interviews, for example, the interviewees should not be over-questioned (in content or style of questions), the ordering of the questions should avoid 'halo effects', and so on. In sociometric questioning the questions selected should be positively formulated and not ask for negation, and so on. As a final example, in content analysis procedures the categories should be so clearly defined that different coders can achieve the same results. 'This means that the categories must be specifiable by a body of theory and by a set of coding rules which are invariant to the user's interpretation' (Cicourel 1964: 148, emphasis added). In the majority of the procedures described in this book, however, one will look in vain for concrete rules. If these are missing, one might suppose that very reliable results are not to be expected from such procedures, since the reliability (reproducibility or replicability of the findings) will decrease in inverse proportion to the text analyser's freedom of movement.¹²

Quite often there are particular *instruments* that belong to individual methods and their concrete procedures: written questioning is not possible without questionnaires and interviewers need at least guideline questions when they are conducting semi-standardized or unstandardized interviews. The results of observations are recorded in corresponding observational schemata or, in the case of covert participant observation, in subsequent reports. The rules to be followed within the framework of particular methods and procedures are (normally) learned in the context of research assignments during social science education. In universities *research techniques* are learned: that is, how to behave

appropriately as an investigator in particular situations, how to construct and use research instruments. In this way, of course, a particular approach is acquired – a set of attitudes and observational frameworks that the training personnel regard as the appropriate research behaviour.

However, in order to implement particular procedures or develop and apply data collection instruments, a corresponding superstructure is needed: some theoretical approach to which researchers feel themselves to be committed and which, together with their common sense, influences their thinking. Using the selected approach, the main preliminary decisions are taken about possible routes that the researcher can, or wants to, follow to arrive at results. Traditional content analysis procedures, therefore, presuppose that the meaning which can be recovered from particular content corresponds to the meanings that the speakers or writers intended in their texts and to those that the receivers hear or read (see Chapter 5). These are preconditional assumptions, since a sender–receiver model is presumed to underlie communication.¹³ It is postulated, moreover, that there exists a common set of meanings between participants. Only with these theoretical assumptions, however, can the investigator concentrate exclusively on analysing the manifest level of texts.

Figure 1.1 presents the stages in empirical research described above, from the theoretical approach down to rules or instruments, in the form of a hierarchical sequence.

This representation, of course, gives a simplified picture and in no way corresponds to the practices that regularly have to be employed in normal research. This is indicated by the dotted connecting lines: there are, for instance, research strategies that are not bound to particular methods and have no well-defined procedures, but which provide only concrete rules. As an example of this we

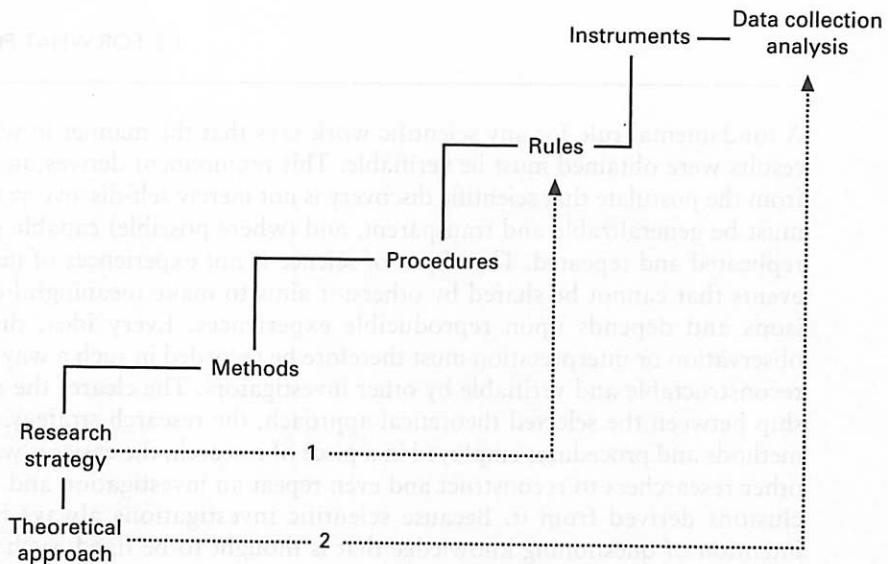


FIGURE 1.1 From the theory to the instruments of empirical research

may cite the coding rules of grounded theory (see Chapter 6). Membership categorization device analysis (cf. Chapter 8, 4.1) may be viewed as a theory-supported research method that pursues a limited set of questions and provides no concrete procedures and only a number of rules. The authors of distinction theory text analysis (presented in Chapter 13 of this book) stress that their approach depends on very precise theoretical assumptions and comprises clear analytical rules. In the different versions of distinction theory text *analysis* common theoretical assumptions can be identified, but the approach has no agreements as to method. Researchers involved in discourse analysis not only proceed in very different ways but even reject any binding methods (see dotted line 2). At the other end of a hypothetical continuum there are very refined instruments whose implementation is strictly rule-governed and procedures that are closely identified with a family of methods, requiring or presupposing a fixed research strategy. This does not mean, however, that they must be bound to a particular theoretical approach. There is no immediate link between questioning and any theoretical construct but at least interpretative approaches, for example, agree in most cases on the exclusion of standardized interviews.

There are, however, some instances where the given hierarchy is adhered to, such as SYMLOG (see Chapter 10). The following are the minimum pre-conditions for a stringent derivation of procedures from some method, the implementation of which may yield theoretically useful results: a limited or limitable set of questions, a fully developed theoretical basis, many years of empirical research in this area, and publication of the modes of procedure and the results, that is, some critical debate.

1.2 FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

A fundamental rule for any scientific work says that the manner in which the results were obtained must be verifiable. This requirement derives, in essence, from the postulate that scientific discovery is not merely self-discovery: research must be generalizable and transparent, and (where possible) capable of being replicated and repeated. The object of science is not experiences of individual events that cannot be shared by others; it aims to make meaningful comparisons and depends upon reproducible experiences. Every idea, discovery, observation or interpretation must therefore be recorded in such a way as to be reconstructable and verifiable by other investigators. The clearer the relationship between the selected theoretical approach, the research strategy, and the methods and procedures employed in a piece of research, the easier it will be for other researchers to reconstruct and even repeat an investigation and the conclusions derived from it. Because scientific investigations always have the intention of questioning knowledge that is thought to be fixed, such projects must themselves be particularly safeguarded.¹⁴

This last argument, however, may lead to the false assumption that the

whole of the elaborate apparatus we sketched above is for the sole purpose of legitimizing or protecting research results. The requirement for a 'clean' procedure may be more thoroughly justified by means of the following four claims.

- (a) Every purposeful observation presupposes a *decision about what one wishes to observe*. This assertion immediately distinguishes scientific investigations from chance discoveries. Ideas that someone has in bed, in the bath or on a bicycle¹⁵ may lead to sensible research questions but need to be followed up by some desk-work: reading and thinking that lead to a more concrete formulation and delimitation of the research questions, the setting up of hypotheses, and so on. One may also say quite simply, however, that every observation (including, of course, every scientific observation) requires particular observational frameworks or categories. Scientists become accustomed to these in the course of their education and learn how to look at things and what to concentrate on when they are observing.
- (b) A prerequisite of this is that the scientist has *some idea as to why it is sensible to investigate a particular phenomenon*, rather than some other phenomenon or in a different way. This focuses on the motivation for the research: traditionally a distinction is made between a commission, a theoretical interest and a social problem as possible starting points for a research project. But whatever the motivation that leads to a particular undertaking, if it is to be considered scientific, it must be based on previous investigations, must take account of results in this area and build on them, and distinguish itself from previous investigations on the chosen topic. The scientist's own assumptions require a foundation that is derived from previously published studies.
- (c) *From this formulation of goals it must be possible to derive what procedures will be used to observe* what one wishes to investigate. Here the question arises what methods are most suitable and/or economical for the particular research question.
- (d) The particular *procedure should make it possible to check what one wishes to observe* (that is, compare and distinguish). The decision concerning the procedure to be applied in the empirical investigation presupposes that phases (a) to (c) have been carried out. How else would one know the aspects according to which a text is to be coded, how the questions in an interview should be formulated, or what should be recorded during observation?

A simple example will serve to clarify these four steps: we may wish to examine the value orientations of young people. This decision is taken in step (a). In principle there are two routes that may be followed: questioning or the analysis of representative texts. Under (c) we decide on questioning; for economic reasons (extra-scientific criterion) this will be in written form. Let us assume that, in our example of the investigation of value orientation, we had decided under point (b) to use a concept that defines values as 'ideas of what is socially desirable'. We must now take account of this definition in our questionnaires (which we

compile under point (d)). This may be more precisely viewed as an important step in the process of *operationalization*: the translation of the theoretical concept (in Clyde Kluckhohn's definition of values) into concrete modes of procedures. One of the questions that we put to the selected young people could therefore be: 'What division of housework between married couples is desirable, in your opinion?'. We will not consider, for the moment, what the concrete guidelines for responding might look like, neither will we consider under what part of our overall concept the question might be asked. Quite simply, this question is wrong. It is unsuitable because it does not follow the concept adopted under point (b). It asks about the ideas of individuals, not about what is socially desirable.¹⁶ The investigation (or at any rate this question) would not be valid: it would not yield the data that we actually claim to be investigating.

In summary, the following may therefore be claimed:

In order to be able to make particular observations, particular procedures are needed which, for their part, can only be justified with reference to particular theoretical approaches. Conversely this also means, however, that theoretical approaches whose adherents do not take the trouble to develop not only their own methodology of justification but also a methodology of observation, operationalization and hypothesis-formation, are still rooted in philosophy. They cannot engage in any research that could be of (direct) relevance to individual scientific disciplines. (Kreutz 1988: XXVIf.)

When a method is being selected, therefore, it must also be known what the theoretical research programme is. One must also refer to the method used if it is a matter of establishing whether the theoretical assumptions have been maintained or not and what other assumptions might replace them.

For many people this will appear to be too much like deductive, hypothesis-testing research, which – unlike hypothesis-generating research – it is often claimed yields nothing new. Here we are not speaking of a kind of research that follows a tradition of critical rationalism.¹⁷ We are pleading, rather, for empirical studies to be planned (if one really wishes to undertake them) and, in that sense, to be conducted in an 'orderly' manner, so that explicit assumptions (not necessarily derived from major theories) form the starting point for all data-collection and that they can be transformed into transparent research operations. Innovations arise by combining or modifying elements of already existing theories. If one seeks to make new assumptions (discoveries) on the basis of observations, then that presupposes that there are assumptions.¹⁸

In general it is true to say that the quality of research results can be no better than the theoretical considerations that underlie the data collection and the methods derived from the theoretical approach. Theories define the framework for methods, methods determine conditions for concrete research operations. Admittedly the selection of a particular method does not determine everything and many decisions that need to be taken in the course of a research project still remain open.¹⁹ For instance, the commitment to particular methods or procedures often fails to deal with a range of important questions: where or from whom should the data be collected and how? (For example, shall we use texts that we obtain in interviews or published self-descriptions? Do we include

the news on the notice board and the graffiti in the toilets? Are texts sufficient for our purposes or should we also carry out observations?) Equally undecided is the matter of how the data collection is to be organized. (For example, do we generate our texts in group interviews or individual interviews? In what order shall we do the interviews?) The question of how the material is to be stored also remains open. (For example, will audio recordings be sufficient or do we need video recordings? What rules of transcription shall we apply?)

These brief remarks are intended to draw attention to the fact that the selection of a mode of procedure can also lead to changes in the research questions: if one does not make use of videotapes, or if one conducts only text-generating interviews, then statements about non-verbal behaviour are ruled out. A further example would be that if one is investigating communication structures in a hospital, one might decide to analyse the linguistic texts that will be produced in interviews. The manner in which the interviewees are found and assembled has certain consequences, since conversations with a number of people only permit statements to be made about group communication if groups really have been interviewed. This consideration, of course, presupposes theoretical assumptions about groups and how they differ from interaction systems (= a number of people distinguished from others by their simultaneous presence). If the main focus is on interviews with teams (for example, nurses, doctors and other hospital staff who work together) an additional question can arise about whether, and by means of what communicative strategies, groups mark themselves off from the overall organization. But this requires another interviewing technique, since different questions can or should be put to groups, compared to individuals who only come together in this formation because of an interview.

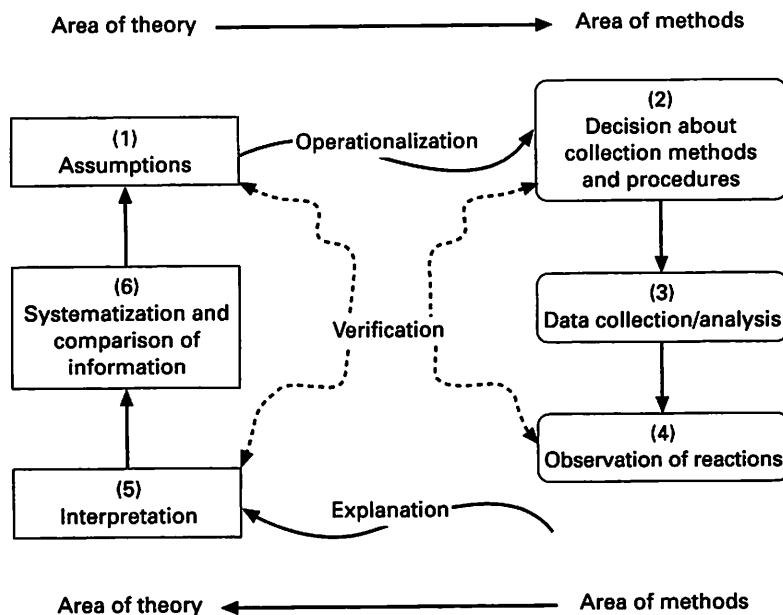


FIGURE 1.2 Theoretical and methodological research operations

In view of these considerations the presentation given above of the relationship between theoretical assumptions, concrete procedures, rules and instruments may be refined as shown in Figure 1.2. This representation follows the schema of Krohn & Küppers (1989: 58). In addition to what has been described so far, to ensure clarity: Hypotheses/assumptions (1) form the basis for any scientific investigation and have to be operationalized. This is done by means of the decision on empirical methods and procedures (2), through which researchers organize their observations and construct their views concerning the object of investigation. The reactive data collection, or (if there is no fieldwork) the analysis, produces effects (3) in those who are being observed and (also in non-reactive collection) in those who appear as investigating observers. These reactions (4) are characterized as data and interpreted (5) in the process of explanation. By means of systematization, categorization and comparison with other results the data become information (6), with the help of which the initial assumptions (1) can be corrected or supported. The interpretation of the data (5) permits verification of the assumptions (1), and these form the framework for the conclusions. The observation of reactions (4) gives indications about the results of the operationalization (2), the methods used, on the other hand, are the criterion for checking the results of the data collection (4).

The relationship between theoretical and methodological research operations sketched in Figure 1.2 should be imagined as a circle that is completed a number of times in the course of an empirical investigation. The following steps are performed: setting up of hypotheses, selection of method of data collection, collection and observation of reactions. Interpretation (5) of the first results (4) of an analysis of texts can lead to the conclusion that the hypotheses (1) need to be refined and that, using the same (or some additional) procedure, a supplementary analysis (3) needs to be carried out. This has implications for the systematization of the conclusions (6) and a reactive effect on the hypotheses (1).

The requirement to view this process as a circle goes against both the idea that research must operate 'from the bottom up', and the postulate that it should operate in the reverse direction – that is, select a one-way route from the theoretical assumptions to the data. It is a matter of moving between these two levels in a targeted way. Only the completeness of this process gives empirical research the right either to claim that it is finding assumptions that have hitherto not been proposed and that they are (under these particular research conditions) empirically appropriate or, alternatively, to question well-tested hypotheses in the light of new results.²⁰ The steps presented here should only be taken if researchers believe they can approach it without formulating any prior assumptions. (How can we know, in interpreting data, what they are looking at if they had no previous idea about it? How can they be surprised under such circumstances?) From the opposing perspective it might be asked how it is possible to make a discovery or increase one's problem-solving ability if one does not concern oneself with the ability to make connections, and if one does not consider previous studies – at the very latest before publishing one's own empirical work – and distance oneself from them. But at that stage it is already too late.

What, then, is the purpose? 'Methods have no other goal than to bring about a decision between what is true and what is untrue' (Luhmann 1990a: 415).²¹ Is the claim true that women, more often than men, attribute their careers to accidents in a proportion which is beyond chance, whereas men attribute their success to their own achievements? This question can be decided if the appropriate investigation corresponds to the conditions outlined above.²²

Is there a possibility that female investigators in this kind of research who rely, for instance, on the analysis given in published texts, come to different results than male investigators? This can, of course, also be investigated (but only if the studies are comparable, that is reproducible in their methodology).

The use of methods and procedures of empirical social research, however, should not serve the ultimate purpose of avoiding effects of this sort. Methods and procedures guide the observational process and therefore have the function of rendering the investigator's own observations observable: texts may be coded according to the basic rules of grounded theory, and memos are produced that record how each of the categories was arrived at. In a second phase this systematization is checked, which puts the investigator in a position of self-observation and of enquiring how he or she arrived at a particular categorization of certain sentence components. If there are no explicit indications, the ensuing check becomes a study in its own right, since the observational categories that the researcher wishes to use to observe the preceding observation must be developed after the event. Methods permit and 'require a shift of the process of observation to the level of a second order self-observation, to the level of observing one's own observations' (Luhmann 1990a: 413).

There is a shorter version of this: 'Methods are instructions for second order observation, the observation of the observers' (Luhmann 1990a: 579), which may be illustrated with an example. If one wishes to analyse a narrative text, the method of Greimas (see Chapter 9) is available for this. The starting point for this method is that one views the text to be investigated as the product of a narrator who is reporting events. The narrator is therefore a (first order) observer who is observed by other observers (the investigators who are examining the text). These (second order) observers, thanks to the work of Greimas (1983), can rely on concrete instructions, such as 'identify in the text those *actants* who determine the story, i.e. the *subject*, the *object*, the inhibiting power (*traitor*)', and so on.

In terms of the graphic representation given in Figure 1.2 (above), we have opted (in step 2) for Greimas's narrative semiotics; we are applying (step 3) his schema of six actants; and are able (step 4) to observe particular effects, to identify particular roles – in short, to collect data.

This not only sounds very extravagant, it is very extravagant. But science is carried out in order to augment the making of discoveries and to increase the complexity of science. Extravagance is time-consuming. And methods both need and provide time – as Luhmann (1990a) observes: for example, the period of time that is needed to translate and operationalize ideas ('attribution') and the theoretical concepts that lie behind them. In oral questioning, the thread of ideas that has already been developed has – as one of its purposes – the function

of gaining the time needed for reflecting on the next question. Learning the underlying theoretical principles of objective hermeneutics and its instructions for concrete application demands time, as does the process of analysis. In the text analysis itself, however, these proposals and rules are helpful and supportive: they provide the framework that is indispensable for distancing oneself from the text.

Researchers can distance themselves, and develop detachment from their own assumptions and modes of procedure by giving themselves a chance for reflection, by taking a short break, by transferring their activities to some other level. The more researchers are involved in a topic, and the more they are (or become) affected by their own project, the more important this distancing becomes. Methods and theories, as has often been stressed, are also anchors that can prevent drifting and smooth the path from prejudice to sound judgement.

Chris Argyris (1995) offers an idea that draws attention to further hidden depths. He makes a distinction between 'espoused theories' and 'theories-in-use'. The former are familiar and can be articulated. They are those theory-components that have to do with content and method that investigators formulate and use in responding to questions about their project. Investigators often pursue the other type of theory ('theory-in-use') quite unconsciously at times when situations become threatening for them: when time is short, when results do not turn out as expected, when subjects do not react in the expected way, when data do not fit together, and so on. Changes creep in – almost unnoticed – in the mode of questioning, procedure, coding or interpretation. What is to be done? Nothing, if it goes unnoticed. How can one reduce the probability that other discrepancies will emerge? Only precise notes about the research process can make it possible to determine deviation or agreement between '(1) explicit or implicit design, (2) theory and methodology and (3) changing positions over time' (Cicourel 1964: 69).²³

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- 1 See the criticism of this use of the term in Kriz & Lisch (1988: 176). These writers find 'model' a more appropriate term, since conventional methods actually depict information structures.
 - 2 This equation of data collection and observation or evaluation and interpretation does not apply if the collection phase takes on a greater degree of significance, as, for example, with open interviews that are not recorded on tape or observations that leave the coders a great deal of freedom of movement.
 - 3 Critical discourse analysis and functional pragmatics are exceptions. We are aware that this claim is by no means accepted by all linguists.
 - 4 Another way of putting it is to call these decisions 'macro-questions'. See also the construction of five research directions given in Reichertz & Schröer (1994: 58f.), according to which, in our opinion, 'most empirical social science research work currently being conducted in Germany' can be classified.

- 5 A more recent and comprehensive presentation of social–scientific research methods from the viewpoint of critical rationalism may be found in the manual by Börtz & Döring (1995).
- 6 The basic significance of experiments derives from the following quotation from the physicist Ernst Mach (1968: 183): ‘Humans collect experiences by observing changes in their environment. The changes that are most interesting and informative for them are, however, those that they may influence by their intervention and voluntary actions. In face of these humans do not need simply to remain passive but can rather adapt them to their needs. They also have the greatest economical, practical and intellectual importance. The value of an experiment is based on this.’
- 7 With his description the current distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is formulated differently, since qualitative social research in no way implies dispensing with quantification or statistical analyses (see also Hopf 1979: 14f.).
- 8 Sequential and panel investigations are intended to determine changes in the characteristics of the population studied over a defined time-scale. Such longitudinal studies presuppose at least the following: data is collected on three distinct occasions; the situations where data are collected are as similar as possible; and there is a constant set of variables. Panel investigations use the same sample on every occasion.
- 9 This aspect is more precisely described in Cicourel (1964: 49ff.). The concepts in quotes refer to the theoretical basis of the ethnomethodologists – the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schütz. See Chapter 8, Theoretical origins, for further discussion. Cf. also note 21.
- 10 The term observation is used in at least three different ways: first – as here – as the designation of a particular method in which current action (social action in particular situations) is systematically observed and analysed. Secondly, the term is equated with methodically informed perception, irrespective of the method within which this is undertaken. (This use of the term opens a door to constructivist perspectives and emphasizes the role of scientists as observers (second order) who observe other observers (interviewees, members of discussion group being studied, etc.).) Thirdly, observation (e.g. Kleinig 1994) is used as a characterization for all empirical modes of investigation that are conducted in a non-experimental fashion.
- 11 The reader is directed to the works of Goffman: ‘My perspective is situational, meaning here a concern for what one individual can be alive to at a particular moment, this often involving a few other particular individuals and not necessarily restricted to the mutually monitored arena of a face-to-face gathering. I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: “What is it that’s going on here?”’ (Goffman 1974: 8). With this observation, which he then classifies, Goffmann defines his programme of ‘frame analysis’. A review of Goffman’s method can be found in the article by Willems (1996).
- 12 This topic is dealt with under the sub-heading ‘Quality criteria’ in the presentation of individual methods
- 13 This matter is also dealt with under the sub-heading ‘Quality criteria’ in the presentation of individual methods.
- 14 This is particularly true of research programmes that already convey their critical claim in their title, as, for example, in ‘critical discourse analysis’. Safeguarding may be attempted by means of an immunization strategy. An

example of this is found in *Objective Hermeneutics*, which Oevermann described as a 'synthetic study' (see Reichertz 1994: 128, for discussion).

- 15 This is an allusion to the situations, referred to in Anglo-American research, where researchers have their best ideas: the three Bs of Bed, Bathroom, Bicycle.
- 16 This example is presented in more detail in Maag (1989).
- 17 This view is even found among ethnographers who, in general, can hardly be accused of obsessive application of method: 'Theory is a guide to practice; no study, ethnographic or otherwise, can be conducted without an underlying theory or model. Whether it is an explicit anthropological theory or an implicit personal model about how things work, the researcher's theoretical approach helps define the problem and how to tackle it' (Fetterman 1989: 15). On the matter of explicit/implicit theories, see note 23.
- 18 In linguistics the argument is frequently advanced against this view that empirical studies only serve the purpose of using results to illustrate theoretical assumptions. In such cases one cannot speak of empirical research: results have the status of elaborate analogies or inconclusive examples with no heuristic value. Tannen (1986) provides one example among many.
- 19 Here this approach is quite distinct from ideas from 'qualitative social research' which view methods as follows and quite understandably reject this self-constructed distortion: 'it names all the actions to be undertaken and describes them precisely. Methods are prescriptions for precise actions that can be written down, acquired even by distance-learning, and learned and applied by all adherents' (Reichertz 1994: 127).
- 20 See also Kelle's (1994: 351ff.) demands of methodology and methods of 'empirically well founded theory construction in qualitative social research', and the discussion of this topic in Meinefeld (1997), who examines Kelle's arguments.
- 21 In this quotation it should be noted that Luhmann uses the pair of antonyms *true* and *untrue* in a very specific sense, namely as observers' categories.
- 22 This example is, of course, greatly simplified but is nonetheless representative of questions that yield simple descriptions rather than contributions to theoretical work. The ability to make connections for theoretical work requires, among other things, the consideration of a broader context. In this respect, questions from questionnaire research display a certain similarity to the analysis of 'conversational fragments'.
- 23 This distinction between espoused theory and theory-in-use may also be used for a further explanation. If theoretical assumptions are rejected as a starting point for empirical research, the investigator is ignoring the distinction and proceeding solely on the basis of his/her own 'theories-in-use'. She or he will then, in all probability, have to present these subsequently as 'espoused theories'. Apart from this scientists have no choice but to distinguish their ideas appropriately, in their cognitive apparatus, from the everyday 'theories-in-use' that they wish to investigate. An attempt is made to achieve the essential distinction by means of theoretical categories and the implementation of methods. At the same time these two types of programme ought to facilitate the required approximation to the everyday categories being investigated.