Abstract

Whereas social work has a broad range of methods and an abundance of literature, which is at the students' disposal nowadays, the literature on technical evaluation of qualitative data can only described as "fragmentary" at best.

It is true that the strength of qualitative research is the "thick description", i.e. the intense, touching and vivid description of the research subjects, but the problem of methodically controlled evaluation of the text data cannot be avoided. Just like quantitative research, qualitative research obeys rules which follow specifically controlled systematics. And although the statement that socio-scientifically substantiated evaluation methods have been applied can be found in the empirical part of research papers, in many cases it is untraceable which method has actually been used. The analysis process remains therefore opaque for outsiders, and in the worst case, all they can do is simply "believe" one of the cores of a research paper.

The computer programs for the analysis of qualitative data, which were developed in the last decade, not only permit an increased traceability of the analysis process, but can also be, if applied correctly, a big help in the systematisation and the organisation of this data, even if the interpretation of this text is still carried out by a human.

The present article tries to give a short survey of techniques and instruments used for evaluating qualitatively collected text material, and at the same time it presents the data processing options of QDA (Qualitative Data Analysis) software. Concrete guidelines, due to pragmatic reasons above all for the QDA program "Maxqda", conclude the article.

The present attempt to offer newcomers a manual for the analysis of qualitative data is limited in its possibilities, since a tutorial on how to find new ideas, how to develop core categories or how to generate theories creatively can only be inadequate.

Mojca Urek

Narrative Methods in Social Work Research

Introduction

Social workers are increasingly recognizing the significance of the narrative as a core construct in human understanding. They are beginning to comprehend the potential contributions which humanistic and interpretative human science perspectives can make to the development of social work in theory, research and practice (Borden, 1992: 136). In this chapter, I will outline some of the possibilities that the theories and methods of narrative and storytelling have to offer to the social work research.

The narrative turn in social work

The study of narration has a long tradition (dating back to Aristotle), and today, almost all the social sciences and professions recognize some form of narrative method within their individual frameworks. Each has its own approach and develops different ideas of what a story is and how it should be investigated and used in practical work. Consequently, one of the most common claims we find in the literature of the 1990s is that the social sciences have experienced a "narrative turn" (also called a "biographical turn"), which is currently shaping the agenda of research and its applications across social science and other professional disciplines. Narrative approaches represent an expansion of "the interpretative turn" in social sciences. In general, this may also be characterized as the "subjective" turn in which personal and social meanings as bases of action take on greater prominence.

Conceptions of scientific method based on "objectivity" have dominated social scientific inquiry until recently and had an impact also on social work theory and practice. Conventional approaches saw social work in terms of rational decision-making, evidence-based practice and positivist methods, which work with the idea of the "objective nature" of the data. In contrast, narrative approaches emphasize the social construction of accounts actors give in social work practice. Within narrative theory, an account becomes a framework for the interpretation of experience, rather than the surface expression of real underlying entities. Social construction-

ism deals with the study of interaction: social reality is something that people construct together, they negotiate it and construct interpretation of it through language and storytelling. From a narrative constructivist standpoint, the main question is not whether the story is true, but rather in what way the story makes sense and whether and in what way it is helpful to the teller. Within the narrative turn, social work accounts become unstable, changeable, temporal meaning-making structures, socially constructed, interpretative, and interactional, their meaning depending on the public they are addressing (Riessman, 1993, 1994; Burr and Butt, 1996; Hall, 1997; Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000). But it should be noted that some approaches to narrative or story have little consideration of the underpinnings associated with social constructivism or linguistic theory. A story within their framework is approached from a common sense point of view as an everyday and easily recognizable communicative form, and the main interest of the analysis is the content of the story rather than its structure, form or performance (Hall: 2001: 195).

The significance of storytelling

Telling stories is a large part of human activity that helps create human society. Stories appear in many forms and perform many functions. They entertain, inform and moralize (McCall, 1989; Hall, 2001). Through storytelling, we can place the world's complexities in some form of order and, through storytelling, people can listen, respond and negotiate meaning (Hall, 2001). Constructing a story of one self is important component of everyday work on one's identity (Nastran Ule, 2000). As Currie commented, it does not seem at all exaggerated to view humans as narrative animals, as 'homo fabulans' – the tellers and interpreters of the narrative (1998:2).

Storytelling is, in fact, a basic method people use to create, sustain and transmit meaning in their lives. It is one kind of interaction through which people develop shared understandings (McCall, 1989). Narrative structures allow us to express ourselves and to place the great number of fragmented experiences, which form the basis of our lives, into a sensible order (Plummer, 2001). They serve to link the particular events of human experience and give them a sense of meaning. Epston and White point out that stories enable people to link aspects of their experience through the dimension of time: In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them (1990:10).

In fact, there does not appear to be any other mechanism for the structuring of experience that can adequately represent the sense of lived time (Ricoeur, 2003). The success of "storying" an experience provides people with a sense of continuity and meaning for their lives. The interpretation of current events is as relevant to the future as it is determined by the past. How we see (or construct) ourselves has great impact on what our future looks like. Not only do experiences influence the course of a story, but the contrary applies too – the story we tell about ourselves has a significant influence on the direction we will take in life. Our lives are shaped through the very process of interpretation within the context of the story we enter into (Bruner 1987: 15–31).

In its simple sense, stories are the account of a series of events that have occurred. They are usually related in chronological order and aim to display a point or moral. There is often a sense of three interrelated parts – beginning, middle and end – but the link between the parts creates a tension. This is sometimes explained in terms of creating a critical situation, outlining a complication which is eventually resolved, or a move from one state of affairs to another (Hall, 2001: 192). A story tells what happened. But the story is not just information, it is also an interpretation, a way of explaining to the listeners the meaning of what happened. All storytellers impose a shape on events by using conventional storytelling techniques: narration, description, characterization, points of view, etc. (McCall, 1989:40).

Locating narrative in social research

As narratives of personal experience are ubiquitous in every day life, it is not difficult to locate them for analysis, notes Riessman (1993:2). History of qualitative research shows that narrative (i. e. informants' personal accounts of their lives, early ethnographers' diaries etc.) is its vital part from beginnings. The telling of personal narratives is common in research interviews. Respondents – if not interrupted with standardized questions – will often organize replies into long stories. Traditional approaches to qualitative analysis suppressed narrative accounts; they were typically coded "asides", seen as irrelevant. In traditional qualitative interviews, typically most of the talk is not narrative but question-and-answer exchanges, arguments, and other forms of discourse.

But the primary way of individuals to make sense of the experience is by casting it in narrative form. Narrators create plots from disordered experience. This should

be a reason strong enough to pay greater attention to respondents' story structures. As Riessman put it:

> "And precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents' way of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished" (ibid.: 4).

The common characteristics of life and personal narratives are inconsistency, disorder and ambiguity. The development and improvement of narrative technics in qualitative research was accompanied by the reflection focused on how to embrace these characteristics with an appropriate method which would not forcibly seek for consistency, order and precision where there is none. In contrast to description and argumentation, narration entails detailed information about the context and situation in which an event has taken place, details which would not be well-remembered if the interviewees were not permitted to develop the story.

Narrative research: brief historical view

The idea of telling an informant story is not new to qualitative social scientists. Social research using different types of personal documents (also human documents or documents of life, as Plummer named them[1]) is dating back to the beginning of the last century when an early anthropological ethnographers have been writing, aside from "objective" observations, personal diaries from their field work, and used some other personal material as informants' stories to describe the life of strange "others" "out there" (see Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:14; Poštrak, 2001).

Biographical method – as method of writing a history of a person's life – was exemplified classically and – as Plummer puts it – almost 'canonically' in the 300–page 'life story' of Wladek, a Polish peasant arriving in Chicago from Poland, and written in Thomas and Znaniecki's The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (Plummer, 2001:2). After this epochal work of a Chicago school in 1920s, biographical research has gradually lost ground. Only in Symbolic Interactionism, and especially in the study of 'deviant' careers, has it kept its place (Kohli, 1981; Plummer, 2001).

In 1970s and early 1980s, the method experienced a renaissance, accompanied

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1   See Plumer, 2001.

by high expectations: to get access to social life as comprehensively as possible, 'from within', i.e. in its meaning and subjective aspects, and in its historical dimension. As Kohli reports, all expectations are raised in opposition to the objectivist tendencies of the major traditions in theory and methodology (1981:63).[2] Biographical methods in the 1980s have been enriched by a number of interrelated influences as feminism and turn to reflexivity. Feminist historians from 1970s on drew from oral and biographical sources to substantiate arguments about marginalized histories inaccessible through conventional documentary sources. Their biographical work opened up to research scrutiny such as everyday domestic life, women's industrial labour, maternity and sexuality (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000; Stanley, 1992; Rener, 1993, 1996).[3] Feminist research contributed also to the second influence to biographical work – turn to reflexivity – which is well seen in the work of Liz Stanley (1992), Feminist sociologist who criticizes the "false", unreflective and apolitical distinction between biography and autobiography.[4] Tracing reflexivity in the process of interviewing and being interviewed has resulted in one side, in greater political (class, gender, race) awareness, and in other, in exposure of often quite raw emotions, misconceptions and even traumatic remembering, bringing oral history and biographical work close to identification with therapeutic processes, far distant from their originating antecedents (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000:6).

Representation of "other" remained also the main preoccupation of 1990s auto/biographical research (as well as of all 1990s qualitative social research). New epistemologies from previously silenced groups emerged to offer solutions to this problem. Life stories have been seen as constructed and negotiated in social interactions

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2   Actually, since its beginning, the biographical method has been tied to theoretical approaches emphasizing the importance of subjectivity in social processes. The place of its first appearance in the history of sociology is also one of the important points of departure of Social Interactionism (Kohli, 1981:63).

3   In fact, biographical method in scientific inquiry (in sociology of everyday life, anthropology, social psychology, social history, social work etc.) enabled all sorts of historically ignored and silenced subjects to speak of themselves. In general, auto/biographies of marginal groups in seventies took over political and therapeutic functions, and they became a voice of different liberation movements (i. e. women'-, black people-, psychiatry users'- movement and others) (Rener, 1996).

4   Stanley understands the contribution of feminist theory to biography particularly as the persistence in reflection as the basic methodological principle of research – giving point to the necessity of focusing on the processes, which regardless of data including the auto/biographical data, become valuation, interpretation and inference. She wants to introduce the use of the notion "auto/biography": the biographical and autobiographical "I" cover each other, which means that every researcher should analitically ground his/her intellectual products by studying the material origin of his/her own process. As Stanley says, the use of the notion "I" explicitly acknowledges that knowledge is contextual and systematically differs regarding the positioning of individual actor of knowledge (sexual, racial, class etc.) (Stanley, 1992, 1996).

driven by a different kind of power relationships.[5] More action-, activist – oriented research and social critique came to the fore, and the search for the grand narratives has been replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:22; Plummer, 1995; Rener, 1996). Such climate have been favourable for growing terrain of all kind of narrative researches, these are researches working with some sort of personal oral or written accounts, which were known under different names (auto/biographical- or narrative- research, oral history, oral testimony, life history etc.). But in 1990s, stories are not seen as realistic description of the world as first ethnographies understood them[6]; they do not mirror a world "out there", but they are constructed, interpretative and rhetorical. If the language used to be viewed once as a transparent medium, unambiguously reflecting stable, singular meanings, it is understood now as deeply constitutive of reality (Riessman, 1993: 4–5).

The varieties of life documents

There are many different typologies of narrative material to emerge in social research either as resource or topic.

Plummer uses a term human documents or documents of life. The term contains a broad range of documents, which on one or the other way, witnesses about life in certain time and place: life history, diaries, letters, photographs, film, literature etc. At the heart of personal document research is the life story – an account of person's life in his or her own words. Life stories come through many blurred sources: biographies, autobiographies, personal documents, letters, journals, interviews, obituaries etc. They can be accounted by a person as their own life story (autobiography), they can be the story coaxed out of them by another, or their own story told by someone else (biography). They can be denoted by plethora of terms: life stories, life histories, life narratives, self stories, auto/biographies, oral histories, personal testaments, life

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5   As Plummer – researching repressed sexual stories of women, gays and lesbians, transsexuals and other sexually repressed groups, put it: "Power is the process that weaves its way through embodied, passionate social life and everything in its wake. Sexual stories live in the flow of this power. To power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is a part of political system" (1995:26).

6   First pioneers, as Thomas and Znaniecki, wrote that "by presenting individual life histories, the biographical method is meant to give access to the reality of life of social aggregates (strata, classes, cultures etc.) (cit. in Kohli, 1981:63).

documents etc. (Plummer, 2001:18–19). Also for Riessman, the most important narrative form is the personal narrative, which refers to a special kind of text organized around sequential events in the life of the storyteller (1994:67). Atkinson defines life story as "the story which person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible" (1998:8). He tells also that the interviewer and narrator are collaborators, constructing the story the teller can be pleased with. Bertaux defines life story as a type of personal account which is the result of an interaction between two persons (i. e. in contrast with autobiography which has only one author[7]) (1981a:8).

A simple typology of life stories as research material is distinction between long and short life stories. Long life stories are full-length book accounts of person's life in his or her own words. By contrast, short life stories take much less time (half an hour to three hours or so), tend to be more focused, and usually published as one in a series (Plummer, 2001: 19–20). Long life stories usually get a form of life histories which are considered superior to life stories; official records, social worker's reports, letters, interviews with relatives, and friends etc. make it possible to complement a life story, and to check its truthfulness. But neither the life history nor the life story need cover the entire life-span and all its aspects (Bertaux, 1981a:8).

Another useful way of distinguishing life documents – suggested by Plummer – is to focus on whether it was purporting to grasp the comprehensive life (the totality of person's life from birth to current moment), or to grasp a particular topic (a particular issue). And in each, it could be edited or not. The comprehensive life document has no sharp focus, but tries to capture the essence of development of human being, while a topical life document usually has the task of throwing a light on highly focused area of life. An edited life document does not leave the story quite so clearly in the subject's voice. Rather, here, the author speaks and edits his subjects into his or her account – they are often used more for illustration (2001:27).

Plummer sees the next key distinction between naturalistic and researched stories. Gerasimova expressed this distinction in terms of "non-stimulated" and "stimulated" narratives. Naturalistic, non-stimulated life stories naturally occur, people tell

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7   This definition does not correspond to newer theoretical approaches which claim that *every* talk and writing is interactional and performative, this is, it is addressed to someone (even if this addressee is a fictional person in our the most intimate diaries). We already mentioned Stanley's proposition of the concept of sociological auto/biography which overcomes old, unreflective distinctions on me/others and public/private and assumes an interconnection between both traditionally distinctive genres (1992, see also the last subchapter, footnote 4).

them as part of their life. Fieldworkers can hear them in every day settings (in teen-agers chatting on the phone, in job interview, in rumours, in confessions, in popular publications, in talk shows etc.). By contrast, life stories that are researched are specifically gathered by researches with a wider goal. Oral history, sociological life history, case studies, literal biographies etc. – all of these can bring life stories into being that would not otherwise have happened in everyday life (Plummer, 2001:28; Gerasimova, 2000).

One of the most commonly used 'stimulated' life stories is that of the oral history or testament. Oral history became a movement after post-war period. The range of research now covered by oral historians is vast: from amateurs to the proliferating professionals – all of whom capture the rich, vivid voices of subjects of history who might otherwise have been lost.[8] Sometimes life stories are collected as a part of a much broader, even collective project, and therefore, we call them collective autobiographies or collective stories. I. e., there have been attempts to collect large numbers of holocaust survivors narratives, victims of sexual abuse narratives, gay and lesbian coming out narratives etc. As they are often dealing with traumatic memories a concept of "historization of memory" – meaning personal stories enter into the public space and make them part of a public discourse – can be applied to both types of life stories. Such collective projects of gathering life stories can stimulate that experiences that were considered private and personal are recognized to be the experiences of many. This realization can contribute to empowering the community of survivors (Zaviršek, 2001:121).[9]

Robert Miller describes a "collecting family histories method". As he writes, the collection of family histories promotes a view in which the family, rather than the individual, becomes the central unit of analysis. Families are important avenues for the transmission of capital – material, social and cultural. Important topics of social research, such as migration and social mobility appear different – he notes – when one realizes that mobility is not scattered randomly but rather often clusters in families. The family history approach leads one to concentrate upon questions such as; family strategies; the unequal allocation of resources within the families; authority;

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8   Good example of employing oral history approach is Diane Gittings's research; she captured the life stories of both staff and their patients living and working in large mental hospitals through the twentieh century (1998).

9   Regarding the position of the listener, there are some parallels to collective advocacy as a method in social work. A listener in this process becomes a witness, an advocate of traumatic memories. In this context, storytelling could be a social-political and therapeutic action at the same time.

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the control and passing on of wealth and status etc. (2000:x). Bertaux designed a method called 'social genealogies' with which he connects an individual life to the wider family across both time and space, establishing patterns of relationships (1981b).

Types of life stories presented above mostly referred to life stories which were used in research as a "resource", but life stories may also be seen as topics to be investigated in their own right. Here the life story itself comes under scrutiny. We need to look upon the stories from the point of view of their "producers" (storytellers), their "coaxers" (those who provoke stories from people in different contexts) and their readers. All of these actors are engaged in assembling what Plummer calls life story action. The most important elements of this action are story text, contexts and interpretative communities. The meaning of story text shifts and sways in the contexts to which they are linked. Different communities of readers (structured through age, class, race, gender) interpret the story in certain ways and may produce their own 'memories' (1995:19–31; 2001:43).

Narrative approaches

We can find several typologies of narrative approaches in the literature. While Miller identifies three narrative approaches to the biographical perspective: realist, neo-positivist and narrative approach (2000:10), Riessman speaks about four models of narrative analysis particularly suited to oral narratives of personal experiences, these are thematic, structural, interactional and performative narrative analysis (2005:1–7). Hall among theories which drive narrative research emphasizes structuralism, postmodernism and social interactionism (2001). All three authors stress that these theoretical and methodological approaches are rarely applied in their pure forms but rather in combination with each other. I will present here some of their emphasis.

The core of *realist approach* to biographical work is induction: information collected through taking life histories is used to construct general principles concerning phenomena. The viewpoints of actors do represent an aspect of an objective reality – albeit these viewpoints may be partially misconstrued at the level of single individuals. Multiple cases should reveal the same patterns if they are to be accepted as solution for generalization (for example, Beratux, 1981b). In common with the realist, the neo-positivist approach also posits the existence of an objective reality. Here,

the hermeneutic interplay between subjective perception and objective social structure would be emphasized. According to Miller, in contrast with the previous approaches, the narrative approaches to life stories are based fundamentally upon the ongoing development of the respondent's viewpoint during the telling of life story. Understanding the individual's unique and changing perspective as it mediated by context takes precedence over the questions of fact. In the narrative perspective, 'context' includes both positioning in social structure and time, and the social context of interview itself. The interplay between the interviewee and interviewer is at the core of this approach. This interplay – the tensions, negotiations, agreements, accommodations, and so on – provides insight into the only available social reality, the one that is ongoing at that time (Miller, 2000:12).

Thematic analysis emphasizes the content of a text; "'what' is said more than 'how' it is said, the 'told' rather then the 'telling'", says Riessman. The realist approach, mentioned above, corresponds to the characteristics of this type of analysis. As grounded theorists do, investigators collect many stories and inductively create conceptual groupings of data. A typology of narratives organized by theme is the typical representational strategy, with case studies or vignettes providing illustration. The approach is useful for theorizing across a number of cases – finding common thematic elements across research participants and events they report. Language is seen as a direct and unambiguous route to the meaning. Narrative is seen as a resource, not a topic of investigation. The contexts of an utterance – in the interview, in wider institutional and cultural discourses – are not usually studied (Riessman, 2005:2).

Structural analysis shifts emphasis to the telling, the way a story is told, that is how a teller by selecting particular narrative devices makes a story persuasive. A story is analysed in terms of its form not its content. Its meaning is located within the components of the text and their relation to the underlying structures on which the story is based. Complex forms of narrative analysis developed out of structuralism concerned with identifying the underlying structures of stories (Hall, 2001: 192).10 Riessman writes that there is a danger that interview excerpts in structural research become unreadable for those unfamiliar with socio-linguistic. Like the thematic approach, strict application of the structural approach can decontextualise narratives by ignoring historical, interactional and institutional factors (2005:4).

Interactional approach to narrative is to look at everyday stories, whether they appear in conversations (Sacks 1992), institutional talk (Bazerman and Paradis 1991) or as a part of life story interviews (Lieblich et al 1998). Such approaches are based on traditions of micro-sociological analysis, social construction theory or sociolinguistics and not necessarily linked to postmodernism's 'little stories'. The orientation is to the local production of stories in talk and how such narrative performances are managed in interaction (Hall, 2001194). Narratives of experience are occasioned in particular settings, such as medical, social service, and court situations, where storyteller and questioner jointly participate in conversation. Interest shifts to storytelling as a process of co-construction, where teller and listener create meaning collaboratively. In the performative analysis, which are an extension of interactional approach, storytelling is seen as performance. As Hall maintains, the main orientation of such an approach is to the local production of stories and how such narrative performances are managed in interaction. An interest in performance would direct the analysis towards the elements of audience and how the text is received, for example, what devices are used to persuade the reader of the importance of a particular state of affairs. If the understanding of narrative is not to be located in the text per se, but in its performance, then the meaning is located not in the document, but in how it is read. The reader concretizes a potential text by making interpretations and brings the text into existence. Such an approach has similarities in literary theory with reader response or reception theory (Iser 1974). Fish (1980) has developed the notion of interpretative communities to denote the way that interpreting a text is based not on the text itself but on the communities of readers, which establish the legitimate ways of reading (cit. in Hall, 2001:194).

There is a growing body of research in the last few years, who use narrative theory to study social work, and approach social work as constructed through the interactional and textual work of storytelling. They are locating social work in everyday written and spoken documents of professional activity, which are treated as text, interaction and performance (see Hall, 1997; Karvinen, Pösö and Satka, 1999; Hall, Juhila, Parton, Pösö, 2003; Hall, Slembrouck, Sarangi, forthcoming, and others).11

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10 Labov and his colleagues developed structural approach to examine first person accounts by the basic components of a narrative structure: abstract (summary or point of the story), orientation (to time, place, characters), complicating action (crisis, plot, turning point), evaluation (actors comment on meaning and communicate emotions), resolution (the outcome of the plot and a coda (end of the story). (Riessman, 2005:3)

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11   In their everyday interactions, social workers and their clients inevitably perform stories for various audiences. Social workers in their reports and explanations attend to a range of rhetorical and interactional concerns through which they are able to demonstrate that their work is in line with responsible, justifiable and defensible professional activity. Like all professional or unprofessional storytellers, social workers use

For social work to benefit from narrative approaches offers exciting possibilities but also serious reconfigurations. Thus Hall wrote:

> "At a time when social work has just started to justify its scientific credentials in terms of 'evidence-based practice', narrative theories undermine such aspirations and turn back our gaze to uncertainty. The preoccupation of care management with assessment, intervention and measuring success cannot cope with such indeterminacy. In fact, the traditions of social work for being non judgmental, promoting self awareness, locating in a developing relationship and as an art have much in common with features of a narrative approach" (Hall, 2001: 203).

Research interview as narrative and discourse

Interview – as a research technique – is by no means a fixed form: it changes reciprocally according to the enlargement of the concepts of knowledge and research within the social sciences. Namely, the Postmodern approach that firmly guides the research in today's social sciences emphasizes the social construction of reality and hermeneutic interpretation of textual notions. The qualitative interview that follows this approach emphasizes the the constructed nature of knowledge created in the interaction of partners in interview conversation. So, according to Steiner Kvale, the interview seems to be a conversation, a dialogue between partners and negotiation about the meaning of the world that we live in. The constructed nature of knowledge reflects in question-making, transcribing and analysis of the researches interview. The interview takes place in interpersonal context, the meanings of statements therefore always depend on the context. Interview is literally an inter-view – the mutual exchange of the participants' views in conversation on a mutually shared topic (1996: 10). As we already mentioned above, the traditional approaches to qualitative analysis often fracture informants' replies in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking bits and pieces, snippets of a response edited out of context. They eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts (Riessman, 1993, Mishler, 1986).

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authorial devices such as characterization, expressing a point of view, a plot and many others through which they try to make their representation persuasive for various publics. In effect, a social work report does not exist when it is in the file cabinet. Only when it is read at the case conference or in the duty room it can be said that it is brought into being in its performance.

Questions

Rosenthal's view on biographical analysis fits to these observations. She states that social researchers are often destructive from the very beginning of data gathering if they are sure to know what the biographer should narrate, what is important for their topic and if they are ask respective questions. By means of these questions, they set up the structure or the "*gestalt*" of respondent's presentation, and by this they spoil the possibility to obtain the life-story in its own "*gestalt*" (1990).

In her description of biographical-interpretative method, she suggested the openness as the main principle of the narrative interview. The interview and questions are not determined by theoretically deduced hypothesis constructed in advance, but depend, rather, on the themes and the way they are presented by the interviewee. Her idea of narrative interview is that it operates with the notion that the relevant patterns and interconnections in the field under investigation will emerge in the course of research. Therefore, the narrative interview begins with a general 'initial question' about the topic that is connected to the interviewee's biography. Uninterrupted by further questions, it allows the interviewees to develop their own relevance around the topic and to relate it to their own biographical experiences. Such an open interview method assumes that every story has a *gestalt* that condenses the latent as well as manifest perspectives and meanings in which a situation, an event or life phase has been experienced, recollected and accounted for. From this *gestalt*, we can reconstruct the way in which the past and present meanings, as well as the future expectations related to an event or topic, are interconnected. In the second part of interview, after the interviewee has signalled that she or he has finished the narration, the 'internal narrative questioning' then explores previously mentioned experiences, events and life phases and spheres in greater detail, evoking further narrations. Stories which emerge in such narrative interview provide evidence about the flow of events because they entail a meaningful development. Narration starts at certain time, at a certain constellation of people and circumstances involved and during the events recounted and connected. Through the narrative stream, a change occurs and is made plausible for the storyteller as well as for the listener. In this way, meaning is created in a very basic sense by integrating different events in a temporal and thematic order (Rosenthal, 1990; Breckner and Rupp, 2002: 294).

If Rosenthal in her biographical research, tends to reconstruct the case and searches for hermeneutic interpretations in it, Mishler investigates possibilities of

working on interviews as narratives, more specifically as speech events.[12] Such an understanding of interviews marks the contrast between the standard anti-linguistic, stimulus-response model and an alternative approach to interviewing as discourse between speakers.

Discourse of the interview is jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent. Both questions and responses are developed through and shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents. Consequently, adequate understanding of interviews depends on recognising how interviewers reformulate questions and how respondents frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understanding of meanings emerge during the course of interview. The usual way an interview develops is through mutual reformulation and specification of questions, by which they take on particular and context-bound shades of meaning.[13] As Mishler put it:

> "Rather then serving as a stimulus having a predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intended to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as a part of circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other" (1986:53–54).

In a standard interview, the interviewer's definition appears to be dominant. But even in these instances, it is important to recognize that acquiescence by respondents represents active participation on their part in the construction of the meaning of the questions. That is, respondents learn from how interviewers respond to their answers what particular meanings are intended by questions and wanted in their answers. Agreement by respondents to cooperate with interviewers and do what they asked to do is often seen as the essential but only requirement for adequate participation. Stubborn disobedient respondents – those who refuse to learn and

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12 With such definitions he intends to emphasize that interviewing implies certain expectancies about thematic progression, turn taking rules, form, and outcome of interaction as well as constraints on context. His idea partly refers to Labov and Walestsky narrative approach (see to Labov and Walestsky, 1967).

13 This process is illustrated in the next example of interview development: respondent in the research about family life specifies the meaning of the interviewer's general question about important events in her family and marriage by proposing her own question, "You mean that – that hurt or happy?" The interviewer appears to accept this specific formulation by asking the respondent to continue, "Well what happened." The respondent replies, "The hurt was since my father died." Understanding the meaning of this respondent "answer" depends on our recognizing it as an answer to her own specification of the question rather than to the original question (Mishler, 1986: 53).

follow the rules, may produce "answers" that are uncodable and therefore likely to be discarded in later analysis.[14]

Transcription

If an analysis of speech is central to the use of interviews as research data, then an accurate record is needed of the questions that interviewers ask and responses that interviewees give. The practice in the mainstream approach is that the question is adequately represented by its formal statement in the text of an interview, and the answer by an interviewer's highly selective version of what a respondent said, usually in the form of on-the-spot written notes. Because of the nature of the interviews as discourse, these procedures cannot produce valid description of questions and responses and are misleading guides to interpretation. Speech in interview has to be taken seriously (1986: 36).

Taking speech seriously requires investigators to pay close attention to linguistic and paralinguistic features that appear in naturally occurring talk, but are routinely omitted from standard written texts. So, the transcripts have to include certain details of speech, such as pauses, non-lexical expressions and speakers interruptions and overlaps. Some features of speech, such as rapid changes in pitch, stress, volume, and rate, seem almost impossible to represent adequately. Non-linguistic features of speech situation such as gestures, facial expression or body movements that are not captured on audiotape recordings are difficult to describe. Mishler takes the task of transcribing speech into written text as rather complex, tedious work that demands careful listening and re-listening (ibid.: 47–48).

Mishler states that repeated listenings and revisions of transcriptions sometimes lead to significant changes in meaning. Material "filtered out" by typists of interviews often turns out to be of special significance for understanding respondents' experiences. The value of succeeding stages of a study – coding, analysis and interpretation – depends on the adequacy of the description, and in interview research, this means a carefully prepared transcript. This recommendation is neither an easy

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14 The pattern of interviewer dominance is well documented in medical interviews where asymmetry in power is specially clear. As well as in standard research interview, interviewers/doctors through a series of questions attempt to elicit "relevant" information from respondents/patients. Mishler's example shows how the doctor – in the course of the examination – succeeded to restrict the patient's accounts to simply "yes" and "no" in the end (*ibid.*:55)

nor an economical one to follow, Mishler said, but it is necessary for valid study based on interviews (ibid.: 50).

However, what we have to be aware is: firstly, that transcription is only a partial representation of speech, and secondly, that each representation means transformation, this is each transcript includes some and excludes other features of speech and rearranges the flow of the speech into lines of text within the limits of a page. But first, there is no true representation of spoken language at all. As Riessman states, even in photography, which supposedly "pictures reality", the form of representation just reflects the artist's views and conceptions – values about what is important. Transcribing interview is an interpretative practice. Decision about how to describe, like a decision about telling and listening, are theory driven and rhetorical. Different transcription conventions lead to and support different interpretations and ideological positions (Riessman, 1993:13).

Narrative analysis

As the detailed presentation of narrative analysis is beyond the aim of this text, let us outline just a few general ideas on narrative analysis. We showed in previous text that the apparent absence of narratives in reports of interview studies is rather an artefact of standard procedures for conducting, describing, and analysing interviews: interviews interrupt respondents' answers and thereby suppress expression of their stories; when they appear, stories go unrecorded because they are viewed as irrelevant to the specific aims of specific questions; and finally, stories that make it through these barriers are discarded at stages of coding and analysing as irrelevant digressions (Mishler, 1986:74).

As Riessman notes, analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription. Repeated listenings of what is happening, coupled with methodical transcribing, often leads to insights that shape representations of interview narrative. To avoid the tendency to read a narrative either simply for content or as evidence for a prior theory, she recommends beginning an analysis with the structure of the narrative, i. e., how is it organized:

> "… I start from inside, from the meanings encoded in the form of the talk, and expand outward, identifying, for example, underlying propositions that make talk sensible, including what is taken for granted by speaker and listener " (Riessman, 1993:61).

The features of an informant's narrative account an investigator chooses to write about are linked mostly to the theoretical/epistemological positions the investigator values. For some investigators the central question is whether there exist typical and perhaps universal story structures, that is, standard set of story units organized in systematic ways irrespective of content. Others are interested in the "structure" of content, that is, how talk about different topics develops over the course of an account so that separate episodes are linked together into a coherent and meaningful story.[15] Still others are interested how the construction of the story is affected by the interactional setting in which it is produced (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1986).

Conclusion

In this paper I outlined some main characteristics of narrative research in its variety in the present moment. Firstly, I located narratives in social research and gave some historical view on the topic. Secondly, I presented different typologies of "life documents" that emerge in narrative (or biographical) social research, with special stress on life stories. After that I discussed different narrative approaches to narrative theory and analysis which drive narrative research. In the end, I examined "doing narrative research", the emphasis on research interview through the phases of setting questions, transcribing narrative material and narrative analysis.

As Plummer put it, the greatest value of life documents lies in their ability to reveal common, indefinite personal notions of everyday life and show the information that seems unimportant, obvious and usually hidden to the researcher's eye. He thinks that life histories can be real "catharsis of understanding" to the researchers and audience. They bring the social science back to the "living experience of real people" in "real situations" (2001). And yet the value of personal narratives for

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15 Well-designed method of analysis of biographical interviews was created by German sociologists (Schütze, Fisher, Fisher-Rosenthal, Rosenthal). They come from assumption that every biography should be divided into two levels: Lived life (real life course that could be reconstructed from the interview) and narrated life. The first level includes events and their meanings for narrator in the past. The biographical data are extracted from all sources and organised in chronological order. The second level is self-presentation giving us the meanings of the past events and experiences from present perspective of the narrator. These analysis results in a general comparison between the lived and the told life, which aims to summarise the way in which the life history and the life story are connected. For the application of this methodology in analysis of a concrete biography see Breckner and Rupp, 2002; Rosenthal, 1990).

social science remains arguable. Their disadvantages are considered to be unreliability and selectivity of human memory, reconstruction from the present day point of view, subjectivity of an individual narrator, pressure of the story-telling structure, thematic limitations. On the other hand, narratives are seen with their subjective meanings, contexts, details, individual style of speech as a kind of opposition to "high discourse" of power.

Narratives are interpretative and therefore require interpretation. And as Riessman stressed, "they do not speak for themselves" or "provide direct access to other times, places or cultures". We have to concern narrative analytical interpretations as partial, alternative truths with aim for enlargement of understanding (1993:22). In this paper, we explored some ideas how to approach and use narratives in the research, and provided some ideas of how narrative theory and methods can enrich social work theory and extend the repertoire of qualitative research methods.

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Abstract

Der Artikel liefert einige Ideen, wie narrative Theorie und Methoden die Sozialarbeitstheorie bereichern können und das Repertoire der qualitativen Forschungsmethoden der Sozialarbeit erweitern können. Die Geschichte der qualitativen Forschung zeigt, dass Erzählungen (z.B. persönliche Lebensberichte von KlientInnen) von Anfang an zu ihren wichtigsten Bestandteilen gehörten. Das Erzählen einer persönlichen Geschichte ist in Forschungsinterviews weit verbreitet. Die Befragten – sofern sie nicht laufend von standardisierten Fragen unterbrochen werden – antworten häufig in langen Erzählungen. Traditionelle Ansätze zur qualitativen Analyse versuchten, narrative Berichte zu unterdrücken, typischerweise wurden sie als „nebenbei erwähnt" eingestuft und als irrelevant betrachtet. In traditionellen qualitativen Interviews bestehen die meisten Gespräche typischerweise nicht aus einer Erzählung, sondern aus Frage-Antwort-Sequenzen, Diskussionen und anderen Formen des Diskurses. Die Autorin bespricht einige Haupteigenschaften der vielfältigen Strömungen der derzeitigen narrativen Forschung. Zunächst lokalisiert sie Erzählungen in der sozialen Forschung und präsentiert einige historische Sichtweisen dieses Themas. Anschließend beschreibt sie verschiedene Typologien von „Lebensdokumenten", wie sie in der narrativen (oder biografischen) Sozialforschung auftreten, mit spezieller Betonung auf Lebensgeschichten. Im Anschluss daran diskutiert sie unterschiedliche narrative Ansätze zur narrativen Theorie und Analyse, die die narrative Forschung steuern. Letztendlich beschreibt sie die einzelnen Phasen eines Forschungsinterviews, z.B. das Festlegen der Fragen, das Transkribieren des narrativen Materials und die narrativen Analyse.