Empirische Religionsforschung

1. Introduction + Design

Jörg Stolz

Content

1. Course organisation
2. Reader + Bibliography
3. Religion and religiosity
4. Fundamental questions: theory, ontology, epistemology
5. Research paradigms
6. Quantitative and qualitative strategies
7. Research design

Course description
Goals

Programm - Basel

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<th>Text</th>
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<td>22.9. Intro, Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.10. Sampling, Validity</td>
<td>Goldthorpe</td>
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<td>27.10. Ethnography</td>
<td>Palmer</td>
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<td>10.11. Interview I + II</td>
<td>Maxwell</td>
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<td>24.11. Analysis I : sequential</td>
<td>Ramji/Ghazal</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.12. Writing up</td>
<td>Stolz</td>
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Reading assignments


Validation

Small test in last session; on slides and texts seen during the course
2. Reader + Bibliography


Literature (2)

Literature (3)
3. Religion and religiosity

A definition of religiosity

I define religiosity as individual preferences, emotions, beliefs, and actions that refer to an existing (or self-made) religion.

Bibliography on the website:
www.unil.ch/issrc

Semesterapparat

Bibliothek, theol. Fakultät der Universität Basel.
Susanne Schaub
A definition of religion

*Religion* denotes the whole of cultural symbol-systems that respond to problems of meaning and contingency by alluding to a transcendent reality.

*Symbols* are objects, actions or elements of communication that refer to something other than themselves. They consist of a "signifiant" and a "signifié".

*Problems of meaning and contingency* are situations individuals or groups find themselves in, in which things are not how they should be or how they normally are (success, disappointment, catastrophe, positive or negative surprises, malady, death of a near one), thus leading to the question of "why" things have happened in this way.

A *transcendent reality* is a superempirical (or "higher" or "ultimately real") plane which cannot be directly controlled by humans but which is thought to be influencing the lives of men in some way or other. The transcendent reality may be seen as anthropomorphic (including spirits, gods) or not (superempirical laws or states of beings).

*Religious symbol systems* normally comprise mythological, ritual and ethical elements which may be combined in order to offer various salvation ends and means.

Questions fondamentales: théorie, ontologie, épistémologie

- Theory: deductive vs. inductive
- Ontology: social reality « out there » vs. constructed
- Epistemology: natural sciences as model vs. not

Definition: Theory

- By "theory", I mean simply a set of concepts and the proposed relationships among these, a structure that is intended to represent or model something about the world.
  
  Maxwell, Joseph A., Qualitative research design..., 2005, 42

- "Theory = A set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena."
  
  Strauss / Corbin, Basics of qualitative research, S. 15
Deductive theory

1. Theory

2. Hypotheses

3. Data collection

4. Findings

5. Hypotheses confirmed or rejected

6. Revision of theory

Inductive theory

1. Observations/findings

2. Hypotheses

3. New observations/findings

4. Revision of hypotheses

5. New observations/findings

6. .......

7. Saturation of hypotheses = new theory

Deductive theory

• The « deductive model » encloses an inductive element

• Concrete research uses this model as a general research orientation more than as a « law ». In practice, there are countless deviations from the principle to be observed.

• Example: Explaining religiosity

Inductive theory

• The inductive model includes deductive elements

• Again, concrete research uses this model as a general research orientation more than as a « law ». In practice, there are countless deviations from the principle to be observed.

• Very often, qualitative researchers begin with some theoretical background knowledge. It is almost impossible to start without theoretical preconceptions whatsoever.
Ontology

- Ontology = Science of « the nature » and the attributes of real « things » or « objects »

- Question: What is the « nature » and what are the attributes of « social objects »?
  - Objectivism: social phenomena are « objects » on the outside of the individual (and the researcher).
  - Constructivism (ontological): social phenomena are continuously constructed, reconstructed and renegotiated by individuals (and the researcher).

Epistemology

- Epistemology = « Science of knowledge » (What can we know? « Erkenntnistheorie »)

- Positivist epistemology: Natural sciences as a model; the researcher is outside of his object; one objective reality exists.

- Interpretivist/hermeneutic epistemologies: new epistemological model for the social sciences; the researcher is a part of his object; s/he is influenced by his/her object; s/he influences his/her object; multiple realities exist.

5. Research paradigms

« Questions of social ontology are concerned with the nature of social entities. The central point of orientation here is the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. »

« These positions are frequently referred to respectively as objectivism and constructionism. »

- Bryman, Alan, Social research methods, 2004, S. 16
Paradigmes de recherche: définition

« Paradigms may be defined as the worldviews or belief systems that guide researchers. »
(Tashakkori/Teddli)

Religiosity

Paradigms are « bundles » of assumptions concerning
- the type of theory to be used
- the « ontology » (the nature of reality)
- the « epistemology » (the relation between the observer and the observed)
- the axiology (the role values play in the research)
- possibilities of generalizing
- causality
- the « logic » of research (e.g. inductive or deductive)

Religiosity

Positivism

1. Deductive theory: Theory precedes research, leads to hypotheses which are tested
2. Ontology (nature of reality): naïve realism, there is a single reality, « real » reality apprehendable, social reality external to individuals
3. Epistemology (the relationship of the knower to the known): the knower and the known are independent, findings are true, natural sciences as model
4. Axiology (role of values in inquiry): inquiry is value-free
5. Generalizations: time- and context-free generalizations are possible.
6. Causal linkages: there are real causes that are temporally precedent to or simultaneous with effects; causal explanation possible

Religiosity

Constructivism / Interpretivism

« Constructionism is an ontological position (often also referred to as constructivism) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.

In recent years, the term has come also to include the notion that researchers’ own accounts of the social world are constructions. In other words, the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive. »

Bryman , Alan , Social research methods , 2004 , S. 17
Constructivism / Interpretivism

1. **Inductive theory**: Research is done without theory; hypotheses are produced, tested and changed during research, theory as end-product of research
2. **Ontology**: relativism, multiple, local, constructed realities; social reality not external to individuals but constructed by individuals
3. **Epistemology**: created findings, knower and the known are inseparable, natural sciences epistemology is rejected; social science epistemology has to interpret sense actors give to their world
4. **Axiology**: inquiry is value-bound
5. **Generalizations**: time- and context-free generalizations are not possible.
6. **Causal linkages**: It is impossible to distinguish causes from effects; causal explanation impossible

Tashakkori / Teddlie, Mixed Methodology. Combining Qualitative and Quantitative ..., S. 9

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Constructivism / Interpretivism

« To interpretive constructionist researchers, how people view an object or event and the meaning that they attribute to it is what is important. It matters less whether a chair is 36 inches high and 47 years old than that one person perceives it as an antique and another views it as junk." Constructionists expect people to see somewhat different things, examine them through distinct lenses, and come to somewhat different conclusions. In this sense, multiple and even conflicting versions of the same event or object can be true at the same time. The person who calls a wooden chair an antique is no more correct than the person who views it as junk; he or she just comes to the chair with different experiences, knowledge, and opinions, resulting in a different interpretation.

Rubin / Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing, 2005, S. 27

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Postpositivism / critical realism

1. **Deductive theory**: There is an emphasis on arguing from the general to the particular, or an emphasis on a priori hypotheses (or theory).
2. **Ontology**: our understanding of reality is constructed; real reality out there, but only apprehendable in constructed form, social reality external to individuals and constructed by individuals
3. **Epistemology**: theory-ladenness of facts: Research is influenced by the theory or hypotheses or framework that an investigator uses, findings probably true (can only be falsified); natural sciences only partly model
4. **Axiology**: value ladenness of inquiry: Research is influenced by the values of investigators
5. **Generalizations**: time- and context-free generalizations are possible.
6. **Causal linkages**: there are real causes that are temporally precentent to or simultaneous with effects; at least some of these cause-effect-relationships are stable and apprehendable; causal explanation possible

Hammersley / Atkinson, Ethnography, S. 17

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Postpositivism / critical realism

"However, we do not draw the same conclusions from the reflexivity of social research as many of the critics of naturalism. For us, recognition of reflexivity implies that there are elements of positivism and naturalism which must be abandoned; but it does not require rejection of all of the ideas associated with those two lines of thinking. Thus, we do not see reflexivity as undermining researchers' commitment to realism. In our view it only undermines naive forms of realism which assume that knowledge must be based on some absolutely secure foundation. Similarly, we do not believe that reflexivity implies that research is necessarily political, or that it should be political, in the sense of serving particular political causes or practical ends. (...) It is true that we cannot avoid relying on "common-sense" knowledge nor, often, can we avoid having an effect on the social phenomena we study. (...) Fortunately, though, this is not necessary even from a realist point of view. (...) But we can work with what "knowledge" we have, while recognizing that it may be erroneous and engaging in systematic inquiry where doubt seems justified; and in so doing we can still make the reasonable assumption that we are trying to describe phenomena as they are, and not merely how we perceive them or how we would like them to be."
Postpositivism / critical realism

"Human relationships and societies have peculiarities that make a realist approach to understanding them more complex - but not impossible. Unlike researchers in physics, we must contend with institutions, structures, practices, and conventions that people reproduce and transform.

"Human meanings and intentions are worked out within the frameworks of these social structures - structures that are invisible but nonetheless real."

"In other words, social phenomena, such as language, decisions, conflicts, and hierarchies, exist objectively in the world and exert strong influences over human activities because people construe them in common ways. Things that are believed become real and can be inquired into."

Miles / Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, S. 4

Paradigm wars

"Early in our careers we used whatever data-gathering method seemed to fit the research problem. After a number of years, however, we found we were relying nearly exclusively on observations and depth interviews because we got fuller and more creative results. Over time, many other researchers in sociology, political science, public administration, education, and health have also found that qualitative methods are what to use when studying a complex and nuanced world.

In this chapter, we contrast two different philosophies of research, a positivist and an interpretive constructionist approach that reflect major intellectual disagreements about the kind of information that researchers should be looking for and how they should go about obtaining it. The positivist philosophy underlies experiments, surveys, and other statistical studies and imitates the ways in which those in the natural sciences go about their work.

Rubin / Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing, 2005, S. 19
Religiosity

Qualitative methods: Definition

« Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. »
Creswell, John W, 1998, Qualitative inquiry and research design, S. 15

« By the term "qualitative research", we mean any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. »
Strauss / Corbin, Basics of qualitative research, S. 10

Qualitative methods: Attributes

• intense and/or prolonged contact with a "field" or life situation.
• goal: gain a "holistic" (...) overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules.
• goal: capture data on the perceptions of local actors "from the inside", through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding (Verstehen), and of suspending or "bracketing" preconceptions about the topics under discussion.
• explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations. Individualize
• Relatively little standardized instrumentation is used at the outset. The researcher is essentially the main "measurement device" in the study.
• Most analysis is done with words. The words can be assembled, subclustered, broken into semiotic segments. They can be organized to permit the researcher to contrast, compare, analyze, and bestow patterns upon them. »
adapted from: Miles / Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, S. 6

Qualitative methods: Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Malinowski, Radcliff-Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td>Glaser, Strauss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>Luckmann (?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Yin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversation analysis</td>
<td>Sacks, Schegloff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective Hermeneutics</td>
<td>Oevermann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Lacla, VanDijk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quantitative methods: Definition

Methods are quantitative if they measure the attributes of their research objects in order to correlate the resulting variables.

To measure means: to transpose an empirical into a numerical relative.
### Differences between Qual and Quan (I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qual</th>
<th>Quan</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Constructivism</td>
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(Bryman, 2004, p. 20)

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### Differences between Qual and Quan (II)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qual</th>
<th>Quan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field contact long, diffuse</td>
<td>Field contact short, specific</td>
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<tr>
<td>holisic picture of context describe with words</td>
<td>Strip of all unnecessary context reduce to numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holisic picture of meaning describe with words</td>
<td>Strip of all unnecessary meaning reduce to numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain how specific/typ. actors act</td>
<td>Explain how typical actors act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little standardization</td>
<td>Great deal of standardization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher as instrument</td>
<td>Researcher influence minimized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret</td>
<td>Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link meanings</td>
<td>Correlate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze words</td>
<td>Analyze numbers</td>
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</tbody>
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### Differences between Qual and Quan

- Concrete methods are normally not completely quan or completely qual, but can be located on a continuum between quan and qual.
- It is often possible to combine qual and quan.
- One should not choose methods (quan or qual or mixed) because one « likes » a certain paradigm, but as a result of the research question.

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### Research paradigms: Authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoreticians</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Postpositivism/ Critical realism</th>
<th>Construct/Interpretivism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auguste Comte</td>
<td>Karl Popper</td>
<td>Norwood R. Hanson</td>
<td>Edmund Husserl</td>
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<td>Rudolf Carnap</td>
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<td>Roy Bhaskar</td>
<td>Berger/Luckmann</td>
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<td>Heinz von Foerster</td>
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<td>Niklas Luhmann</td>
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<tr>
<th>Qualitative researchers</th>
<th>Joseph A. Maxwell</th>
<th>Miles/Huberman</th>
<th>Jörg Stolz</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bron. Malinowski</td>
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<th>Emilie Durkheim</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Sonya Hartmut Esser</td>
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7. Research design

The two meanings of „research design“

- General: Research question + goals + conceptual framework + methods + validity criteria
- Specific: Experimental design
  - Cross-sectional design
  - Longitudinal design
  - Case study design
  - Comparative design

General "research design":

- Goal
- Conceptual framework
  - Research question
- Methods
  - Validity criteria

Research design and Qual/Quan

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<td>Longitudinal</td>
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<td>Case study</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Bryman 2004, 56, adapted