

## Mapping the Landscape of Qualitative Research on Intercultural Communication. A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Methodological Galaxy

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**Abstract:** An exploration of the interdisciplinary field of intercultural communication reveals both very inspiring thoughts and instruments to analyze culture in human interaction, and a confusing diversity of methods and arguments to deal with. In this article a "conceptual metaphor" (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980) of exploring unknown territories and spaces is proposed for establishing a heuristic frame to maneuver through a rapidly expanding "galaxy" of research on intercultural communication. The aim is to provide a general framework to assess the methodological coherence of empirical studies on intercultural communication, as well as their relative position in the wider field of qualitative social research methodologies. Three dimensions will be discussed: 1) The theoretical question of the underlying cultural concept of a research project, 2) the methodical question of the basic research design and modes of analysis, and 3) the question of generalizations drawn from the empirical findings. These dimensions constitute what we call a methodological galaxy in which current trends and developments of the field of intercultural communication can be located and traced. The suggested framework may serve as a guiding "compass," using a set of "etic" parameters for navigation while respecting the "emic" nature of qualitative approaches.

### Table of Contents

- [1. Lost in Space? An Introduction](#)
- [2. The Construction of a Compass to Navigate the Research Galaxy](#)
  - [2.1 The conceptual challenge: Underlying concepts of culture and intercultural communication](#)
  - [2.2 The methodical challenge: Empirical research design and modes of analysis](#)
    - [2.2.1 Modes of analysis in intercultural communication research](#)
    - [2.2.2 Accessing cultural meaning: Structuration vs. construction](#)
  - [2.3 Challenges of generalization: Conclusions drawn from empirical findings](#)
    - [2.3.1 Assumptions of spatial generalization](#)
    - [2.3.2 Assumptions of temporal generalization](#)
    - [2.3.3 Assumptions of socio-cultural generalization](#)
- [3. A Dimensional Model to Navigate the Methodological Galaxy](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[References](#)

[Authors](#)

[Citation](#)

## 1. Lost in Space? An Introduction

Several recent publications outline the great plurality of disciplinary traditions, approaches, concepts and methods that may be used to analyze intercultural aspects, intercultural discourses and interactions, and more generally: phenomena of cultural differences as being "somehow" meaningful for the communication process (ASANTE, YOSHITAKE & YIN, 2008a; GUDYKUNST & MODY, 2002; KOTTHOFF & SPENCER-OATEY, 2007; LÜSEBRINK, 2004; MOOSMÜLLER, 2007a). [1]

Definitions of the central term culture and its derivatives seem as manifold as the repetitive lament about the difficulties of agreeing upon a common understanding of culture in social interaction. There are two common approaches to characterize or construe culture, either as an implicit feature of social life or as an explicit product of human action (WUTHNOW & WITTEN, 1988). However, this separation is not necessarily helpful, as it is purely theoretical. Nearly all empirical data could be analyzed with respect to both views. All definitional exercises of culture on a very general level—if they are to be clear-cut—either would exclude a number of epistemic aspects about culture, or they would not reach far beyond the provisional interpretive assertion that culture and interculturality are basically procedural and emergent social constructions. However, it is obvious that a theory-driven terminological decision about the ontological essence of culture and communication, or at least its semantic disseminations in social interaction and human sense-making, has important implications for empirical investigations. We will come back to this point later. [2]

In our paper we adopt a metaphorical approach using the "conceptual metaphor" (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980) of exploring unknown territories and spaces to maneuver through a rapidly expanding field (the "galaxy") of research on—and in the mode of—intercultural communication. We consider this metaphor as intellectually inspiring and suitable to visualize some of the hidden and dim features as well as conceptual preconditions of doing and reading qualitative research on intercultural communication. However, we do not want to install a new "cosmology" of cultural theory and intercultural communication. Rather, our aim is less grand, but nevertheless important: To better understand what already exists. By inviting readers to a guided tour of this galaxy, we hope to contribute to the efforts to de-centralize and expand the view on our current status as "remote" modern cultural beings in a wider cosmologic perspective—expressed very fundamentally and figurative in the book *Cosmic Society: Towards a Sociology of the Universe* by Peter DICKENS and James ORMROD (2007). [3]

The analysis of intercultural communication is neither restricted to comparative perspectives nor to quantitative measurement. In fact, methodological concerns about a purely positivistic-contrastive view on cultural variation or even primordial theoretical concepts of culture have been expressed by many scholars in the social sciences (for an overview see e.g. MOON, 2008). If DAHL bemoans a

"severe lack of quantitative data" (DAHL, 2006, p.9)<sup>1</sup> to ground intercultural theories, it must be countered that a nomological expansion of research may generate more data but not necessarily more meaningful new insights, unless the constructive and interpretive character of intercultural communication is taken into account with the same sincerity (STRAUB & WEIDEMANN, 2006). Partly in a manner of critical response to the ethnocentric stance of traditional cultural anthropology, and partly inspired by the various theoretical "turns" and methodological "debates" in recent cultural theory, the view on how to conduct research *on* intercultural communication, as well as communicating intercultural (or even being intercultural competent) *while doing* research has widened its scope considerably (see also [OTTEN et al.](#) [2009] in the editorial of the special issue). [4]

Returning to our conceptual metaphor, the galaxy of intercultural communication seems to be expanding in its theoretical and social dissemination and scope. At the same time, this galaxy seems to cluster around some specific perspectives that have constituted temporary, paradigmatic and overlapping methodological "*Milky Ways*" during recent decades. Some of these perspectives have had a decisive and cross-disciplinary impact on intercultural research and many of them will be outlined further in the various articles of this special issue. Fully aware of incompleteness, a selected few are listed below (including names of some of their main internationally acclaimed protagonists):

- psychological and cognitive anthropology (D'ANDRADE, 1995; HOLLAND & QUINN, 1987; TYLER, 1969),
- symbolic and interpretive anthropology (GEERTZ, 1973; TURNER, 1967),
- sociolinguistics and ethnography of communication (GUMPERTZ, 1982; GUMPERTZ & HYMES, 1972; HYMES, 1974),
- cultural and intercultural discourse analysis (CARBAUGH, 2005, 2007; GUMPERTZ, 1982; SCOLLON & SCOLLON, 2002),
- post-colonial theory and critical cultural studies (BHABHA, 1994; SPIVAK, 1999), and
- social practice theory (BOURDIEU, 1977; RECKWITZ, 2000, 2002; SWIDLER, 2001a, b). [5]

The ever growing amount of comparative, interpretive, ethnographical and hermeneutical research on the blurred phenomena of intercultural communication, as well as the extensive methodological debates raise questions as to how this area can be defined and understood. The plurality of theoretical conceptualizations of culture as well as numerous methodological approaches used to grasp hidden aspects of "the intercultural" may evoke somewhat agoraphobic feelings. The field of intercultural research is wide and deep (and

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1 It is interesting to note that DAHL's *State of the Knowledge*-paper (2006) as well as the reconstruction of *Fifty Years of Intercultural Studies* by ROGERS and TAN (2008) only mention some popular comparative quantitative studies that are randomly cited in nearly all intercultural communication publications. Other qualitative approaches as well as the methodological critique against quantitative value studies are seemingly not really part of the authors' current state of knowledge.

this is important for living, dynamic science). A little promenade into the academic field might turn into a serious hiking trip with winding, steep theoretical routes, slippery and sometimes muddy methodological paths, and suspicious intellectual taverns, offering temporary cognitive (and emotional) accommodation and some "food for thought." This is not only true for students and newcomers in the academic field, attempting their first empirical research project, but also for anyone who leaves the comfort-zone of the own disciplinary research conventions, confronting the "strangeness" of other disciplines and methods. Following ASANTE, YOSHITAKE and YIN (2008b, p.2), we stress that practitioners in the field of intercultural communication need to be reflexive and continually on guard against substantive, theoretical or methodological "ethnocentricity." [6]

It would be difficult to present all possible combinations of approaches and disciplines in this article. Even the outline of basic trans-disciplinary intersections and methodological convergences in the field of intercultural communication that we provide below is only rudimentary. In recent years, we have observed an increase in methodological reflexivity, as well as for continuous conceptual inspiration in the field of research on intercultural communication. This has been nurtured by the gradual acceptance and widespread use of qualitative methods in social research throughout the past decades in many countries and regions (CISNEROS PUEBLA, DOMÍNGUEZ FIGAREDO, FAUX, KÖLBL & PACKER, 2006; HITZLER, 2007; KNOBLAUCH, FLICK & MAEDER, 2005).

"The growth in qualitative methods has continued: methodological reflection and writing have flourished in recent years. Qualitative research, in a variety of forms, has been advocated and discussed in an ever-increasing number of publications. From its bases in such disciplines as anthropology and sociology, qualitative research has become prominent in many disciplinary contexts" (ATKINSON, 2005, par.1). [7]

Academic fields usually shape their domains of interest on the basis of specific theories, methodologies, subsequent methods, and discourses that establish internal exchange and more or less clearly define external boundaries (MOON, 2008; STRAUB, 2007). As intercultural communication can be considered as a specific sub-area of the cultural and social sciences, we assert the methodological concerns of the cultural-turn and other current theoretical debates should impact the ways in which intercultural issues are studied. [8]

It has to be noted that scientific analysis of intercultural communication is a rather young and comparably small field of social research (for a brief outline of the history see: MOON, 2008; ROGERS & TAN, 2008). Due to the niche-character of this field, there is a lack of clear parameters that could guide the way through the methodological and conceptual roots of this academic and intellectual galaxy. The field and much of the current empirical research are inspired by the insights (and aberrations) of cultural anthropology, cross-cultural and cultural psychology, socio-linguistics, ethnomethodology, cultural sociology and several applied disciplines such as pedagogy, management, foreign language teaching and various others (GUDYKUNST & MODY, 2002; KOTTHOFF & SPENCER-OATEY,

2007). Doing and understanding (qualitative) empirical research on intercultural communication therefore is tricky as the researched "objects" are phenomena in flux, explored via various disciplinary—and sometimes interdisciplinary—approaches. Often the sets of assumptions associated with competing traditions influence each other and mold the way researchers construct their view of intercultural communication and how they re-construct the field itself (ASANTE et al., 2008b). [9]

Alongside the idealistic pursuit of new knowledge, compulsive turf wars among the different academic "schools" or their associated disciplines are powerful forces to possess the claims of discourse on intercultural communication. While some authors declare the leading role of their own discipline as *primus inter pares* for the empirical study and practical interventions of interculturality (e.g. KÖNIG [2004] for anthropology), others have criticized their own discipline for underestimating methodological impacts of the cultural turn in the social sciences (for psychology e.g. RATNER, STRAUB & VALSINER, 2001; STRAUB & WEIDEMANN, 2006). The ongoing constitution process as an academic field and the permanent infusion with theoretical and methodological developments from various neighbors may explain to some extent the prevalent fuzziness as well as the intellectual attraction of qualitative (and quantitative) research on intercultural communication. [10]

Our paper articulates the need for *researching the research* on intercultural communication, and here especially qualitative attempts. For this purpose we present a tool of analysis, hopefully providing orientation for a more systematic view on qualitative methodology in intercultural communication research. This tool—a sort of "hitchhiker's guide to the methodological galaxy of intercultural communication research"—is the product of a research project at the Department of Intercultural Education at the University of Koblenz-Landau which is aiming at a systematic methodological review of a selected number of current qualitative empirical studies published in German language (for details see also GEPPERT, 2008).<sup>2</sup> [11]

The suggested framework may be used as a compass, using a set of "etic" methodological parameters for comparison. In doing so, we fully respect the "emic" nature of qualitative approaches. We hope—and anticipate—many signs of life from other academic planets that we have not yet discovered. [12]

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2 Due to this limitation of scope research landscapes in other languages and other world regions are not covered sufficiently. Already the question whether to take an emic or etic approach (HEADLAND, PIKE & HARRIS, 1990) to map the various researcher's tribes and territories is difficult to answer and depends on conceptual premises and pragmatic concern. Nevertheless we believe that our approach can provide a first set of general conceptual parameters which may help to systematize the wide-spread field of empirical investigations on intercultural communication.

## 2. The Construction of a Compass to Navigate the Research Galaxy

How to gain a deeper and a more systematic understanding of the expanding field of intercultural communication and the different "academic tribes and territories" (BECHER & TROWLER, 2001) that inhabit this galaxy? In our own research project we have tried to systematize methodological and conceptual developments which are currently shaping the field. At the beginning of the project we were dimly aware of the complexity and the varying perspectives towards the issue. As we launched to explore and travel the "galaxy of intercultural research approaches" we constantly encountered "rising and dying stars," "changing gravities", and sometimes "black holes." While some cultural concepts and empirical approaches obviously attract gravitational attention of many authors over several decades, others seem to flash and fade across the night sky like "shooting stars." [13]

In what follows, we elaborate a framework of three meta-criteria that may help to assess the methodological coherence of a given empirical study on intercultural communication as well as its relative conceptual position in the wider sphere of qualitative social research methodologies. Three navigating dimensions<sup>3</sup> constitute the framework:

1. the conceptual challenge: Underlying concepts of culture and intercultural communication,
2. the methodical challenge: Empirical research design, modes of analysis, and the reflexivity of research,
3. challenge of generalization: Generalizations drawn from the empirical findings. [14]

### 2.1 The conceptual challenge: Underlying concepts of culture and intercultural communication

Many authors refer to Edward T. HALL's books *The Silent Language* (1959) and *The Hidden Dimension* (1969) as the first attempts to conceptualize intercultural communication from a cultural anthropologist's perspective explicitly for academic purposes (DAHL, 2006, p.9; MARTIN & NAKAYAMA, 1996, p.22; MOON, 2008; MOOSMÜLLER, 2007b, p.45; ROGERS, HART & MIIKE, 2002). HALL's idea of universal dyadic cultural dimensions such as high vs. low context communication, monochronic vs. polychronic time concepts, or private vs. public space orientation were ground-breaking. On the one hand, such dimensions are of immense descriptive and comparative value (which may be seen more critically today than 30 or 40 years ago), and on the other hand, they provided an analytical direction for identifying cultural distinctions on the everyday-life level which then might be aggregated on a more conceptual level. In fact, recapitulating the rather young history of intercultural communication it would be difficult to overlook the impact of

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3 The analysis within our project comprises a fourth dimension addressing the *practical implications* of research projects on intercultural communication, e.g. the evaluation of intercultural programs or the development of psychological and education interventions. In this paper we do not elaborate this fourth dimension.

this strand of classic cultural anthropology and the literal imprint of a "HALL-mark" for comparative, cross-cultural and intercultural communication that has guided many researchers as a conceptual fixed-star for almost 50 years.<sup>4</sup> [15]

HALL's basic idea of cultural determination of human communication and behavior, as well as the variant distribution of cultural values among nations and ethnic groups has set a conceptual benchmark and was then adopted in many other seminal empirical works, e.g. by Geert HOFSTEDE (1980), Fons TROMPENAARS and Charles HAMPDEN-TURNER (1994), and Shalom SCHWARTZ (1992), to name just a few. It is important to note, that the comparative conceptual perspective is not only used by quantitative researchers but also by many who operate with qualitative methods—and to some extent this might be useful. Nevertheless, reflections on the conceptual and methodological foundations of intercultural communication research are thus slanted towards standards of classical quantitative research designs which are inadequate to most qualitative investigations (JOHNSON & TUTTLE, 1989; LEVINE, PARK & KIM, 2007; ROGERS & TAN, 2008). [16]

Any interpretive social research that aims to generate genuine knowledge about social relations and communicative processes needs to reflect on its theoretical premises, the scientific perspective of research, and the general underlying subjective (cultural) knowledge of the researchers involved (MEINEFELD, 2000, p.267). This holds true for any kind of research and "the attempt to avoid the errors of ethnocentric or nostrocetric thought constitutes a shared central objective of both approaches" (STRAUB & WEIDEMANN, 2006, p.12). However, the reflexivity of cultural theories becomes a specific obligation of qualitative and interpretive research approaches as they claim to be *more* sensitive and *more* rigorous about the unraveling of "unquestioned" conceptual prepositions embedded in theories of culture, and consequently in the conduct of the empirical investigation. Some critical intercultural theorists' point even more drastically to the paradoxical momentum of shaded power structures on intercultural communication when they state: "The dominated culture legitimizes its own domination by participating in the word view of the dominating culture" (ASANTE et al., 2008b, p.4). This raises significant ethical problems for research on the cultural life worlds of "dominated" groups. Therefore, it is essential to reflect on implicit cognitions influencing the choice of qualitative methods and the way they are applied to collect and analyze empirical data. This is because they shape the point of view from which the research of cultures is constructed (BREUER & ROTH, 2003). [17]

The study on intercultural communication is challenging as the two core concepts—culture and communication—as well as their relational linkages need further explication (HALL, 1992; WISEMAN, 1983). Due to the numerous definitions of both terms and the continuous rephrasing of terminology, categorical lists of definitions of culture and communication hardly provide help for identifying the theoretical co-ordinates of current research. Further, a diachronic reconstruction

4 The paper of [Elisabeth SCHILLING and Alexander KOZIN](#) (2009) in this special issue presents an example of using HALL's ideas as a starting point for comparative, cross-cultural analysis.

of major steps of the transformation of cultural theories, as suggested by the impressive work of Andreas RECKWITZ (2000), does not fully speak to the underlying problem, because intercultural communication is not based on a single canonical scientific system that would allow anyone to "trace" theory without friction, neither comparatively nor from an evolutionary perspective. [18]

Theoretical concepts of intercultural communication can be categorized with different parameters and intentions. For example, if one is interested in tracing the disciplinary origin of a given concept we would have to sort the major concepts along main academic disciplines that have contributed to the field with significant supplementation (and not just in recitation and emulation!) Some recent publications adopt a disciplinary-based approach to systematize the theoretical landscape (LÜSEBRINK, 2004; STRAUB, WEIDEMANN & WEIDEMANN, 2007; THOMAS, 1996). The result, however, appears somewhat "eclectic" and sooner or later it becomes obvious that many authors—in the end—claim a status of leadership for their own discipline. [19]

A multidisciplinary approach of systematization, as suggested by KOTTHOFF and SPENCER-OATEY (2007) or presented in the theory- and research-based *Handbook of Intercultural Training* (LANDIS, BENNETT & BENNETT, 2006) seeks to overcome the problems of disciplinary distinction by addressing core themes or subjects of the intercultural field, e.g. discourses, emotion, adjustment, lingua-franca communication, or conflict resolution. This approach has the advantage that the landscape can be mapped according to major "thematic landmarks" which emerge throughout the evolution of a scientific field. In other and more metaphorical words: we gain orientation by looking at the "geological and topographical" maps of intercultural communication research instead of looking at the "political map" of constructed and imagined disciplinary territories.<sup>5</sup> [20]

### 2.1.1 Form, function and locus of culture in communication

To capture the central role of the cultural concept and its close relation to a methodological strategy, it is helpful to use some meta-criteria that are applicable to any kind of empirical study in any discipline. Bradford J. HALL (1992) analyzes the conceptual notion of culture (as well as the term communication) with regard to the form, function and locus that culture is bearing within a given study. [21]

According to B.J. HALL, one has to look at the *form of culture* that is represented with different weights in the major theoretical perspectives of intercultural communication<sup>6</sup>: a) Culture as community, b) culture as conversation and c)

5 We actually refer here to Benedict ANDERSON (1983) and his metaphor of "imagined communities and nations" to constitute an analogy of "imagined disciplines." They are nothing else but social constructs as well, serving academic groups to claim and distribute the scientific territories of interest among them, in our case it is the territory of intercultural communication.

6 Besides these three meta-criteria HALL characterizes three main groups of theory perspectives on culture and communication: the "*traditional*" perspective, the *co-ordinated management of meaning* (CMM) perspective, and the *ethnography of communication* perspective. The classification of these three perspectives is not really satisfying, as several other current conceptual perspectives (e.g. system theory, practice theory, semiotic approaches, as well as post-modern concepts) are not covered and included. Also the term "traditional" is rather vague

culture as code. "Form is used to call attention to what counts as culture from a given perspective and how culture is typically operationalized by researchers working within that perspective" (HALL, 1992, p.51). Secondly, HALL refers to the *functions of culture*: a) the identity function which is associated with the community form, b) the grammar function which ties in with the conversation form, and c) the sign function, that obviously is linked to the code form. The third criterion, the *locus of culture*, must be taken as metaphorical: Here, the question is where the idea of cultural belonging and cultural determination resides, and thus where culture has to be operationalized: a) in the expression of identity of group members, b) in the individual's head and mind, as well as mediated in their practices and conventions, or c) in the inter-subjective discourses, symbols and signs that transmit social meaning.

Theoretical perspective	Form	Function	Locus
"Traditional"	Culture as Community—based on a shared group membership	Identity function: Culture serves as a [normative] performance script for the individual's life	In the visible and implicit expressions of identity and belonging
Co-ordinated management of meaning (CMM)	Culture as conversation—a shared set of social values and norms	Grammar function: Culture helps to organize and interpret social interaction and communication	In the individual's head and mind and in "objectivations" of social meaning
Ethnography of communication	Culture as code—an inter-subjective resource for meaning-making	Sign function: Culture integrates and transforms subjective and objective meaning	In the inter-subjective discourses, symbols and signs that transmit social meaning via communication

Table 1: Perspectives on intercultural communication as a theoretical construct (cf. HALL, 1992) [22]

The three analytical meta-criteria are not separated but interwoven tightly. A specific notion of the cultural form emphasizes a specific function and it also refers to a specific locus of culture. For example: If a study on intercultural communication operates with a strong community concept (e.g. nation, territory,

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to characterize a methodological research perspective beyond the suspicion that this perspective is somehow dated. Milton BENNETT's introduction to the *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication* (1998) might be a good place to start for those who want to recapitulate what the traditional perspective has to offer. However, the three meta-criteria—form, function and locus—can help to identify and compare underlying theoretical assumptions.

ethnicity etc.) which draws sharp distinction between cultural in-groups and out-groups, it does make sense to anticipate group-based norms and scripts as potentially meaningful for communication. Furthermore, the communicative and symbolic expressions of group identity then can be a useful indicator to explain intercultural interaction.<sup>7</sup> The example demonstrates the premise of internal coherence of a cultural concept when it is applied to empirical research (although, coherence does not yet imply judgments about the theoretical quality and viability of the concept or the empirical findings). [23]

Thus, in order to help readers of an empirical study to locate the authors' conceptual starting point that later informs the empirical methods and strategies, a theory section of a research publication on intercultural communication should not only drop names and authorities<sup>8</sup> in the field, but it should ideally provide information about all three criteria. [24]

### 2.1.2 *Being culture vs. doing culture?*

As mentioned above, we find some evidence for a paradigmatic shift or at least an expansion from a mainly nomologically dominated positivistic research tradition towards a polyvalent methodological research landscape. Even if we take into account that certain disciplines such as psychology or sociology have a strong quantitative tradition while others like linguistics or anthropology—by and large—are traditionally more familiar with interpretive approaches, it could be said that all disciplines in the field of intercultural communication are challenged by the arguments of the cultural turn (BACHMANN-MEDICK, 2007), and thus need to answer questions about the deeply rooted interpretive and constructive nature of social action. "Traditional" theoretical concepts of distinct cultural belonging and stable social patterns are counterbalanced or outweighed by interpretive concepts which emphasize practices of interactive construction and de-construction of cultural meaning and cultural differences.<sup>9</sup> Cultural research that refers to any of the "big four" of interpretive theories—phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, social constructivism and ethnomethodology—would not consider culture as fixed to territory, nation, ethnicity or language. It would rather take it as a result of continuous meaning-making of acting individuals with a certain viability of their social constructs (CAPPALÀ, 2008, p.16). In this sense Donal CARBAUGH emphasizes the pragmatic centrality of the "interpretive mode" of cultural discourse analysis over other accompanying modes (theoretical, descriptive, comparative and evaluative):

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7 The study of [HILLER](#) (2009) presented in this thematic issue is a concrete example that follows this conception of culture.

8 In our own study at the University of Landau we found many publications that refer to the seminal authors in the field simultaneously, e.g. Geert HOFSTEDE (1980, 1991, 2001) or Edward T. HALL (1959, 1969, 1976) on cultural dimensions, John W. BERRY (1995, 2006) on acculturation, Milton J. BENNETT (1993, 2001) on intercultural competence, or even Clifford GEERTZ (1973) on interpretative cultural anthropology. This kind of "randomized citation" easily ignores that these scholars in fact represent different ontological positions and different research methodologies.

9 See also the article of [Dominic BUSCH](#) (2009) in this special issue and his reconstruction of SCHONDELMAYER's (2008) argument.

"Whatever the particular phenomena of concern, the inquiry explores what people in particular places make of communication when practiced on their own way, when understood through their own terms, through their own explanations. How is communication conducted, conceived and evaluated in this place among these people? Investigation designed to respond to these questions help us understand the local shapes of forms of communication ..." (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.168). [25]

The development of intercultural communication theory results in the establishment of two opposite fundamentals of culture in interaction: The "traditional" notion can be labeled as "being culture," whereas the second conceptual notion can be characterized as "doing culture" (REUTER & HÖRNING, 2004). [26]

The *being culture perspective* emphasizes the embeddedness of all social actions in genuine traditions, norms, values of a given social world respectively, a culture. According to this perspective, human action is directly rooted in *one* antecedent cultural knowledge system. The whole idea of social and cultural representations derives from this notion (MOSCOVICI, 1984). Problems related to this theoretical notion arise if one takes into account the overlapping plurality of social worlds (SOEFFNER & ZIFONUN, 2008) and the permanent increase of "asymmetries of knowledge" (GÜNTNER & LUCKMANN, 1995). Together with additional arguments prompted by the phenomena of transmigration and transcultural communities (FRIEDMAN, 1998; MILHOUSE, ASANTE & NWOSU, 2001), and the postcolonial critique against fixed cultural belongings as a symptom of hegemonic and patronizing ethnification<sup>10</sup>, a shift towards a different notion becomes dominant. [27]

The *doing culture perspective* seeks to suspend pre-existing belongings and pre-defined cultural distinctions of incommensurable semantic worlds for theoretical reasons and for analytical purposes. Based on practice theory "doing culture" is characterized as following: "Doing culture sees culture as it reveals in practical action. It describes a [scientific] program that addresses the practical use of culture instead of predefined cognitive meaning structures. It thus focuses the pragmatic of culture" (REUTER & HÖRNING, 2004, p.10; our translation).<sup>11</sup> [28]

For the purpose of our paper we call this notion a "doing culture" perspective, despite the fact that underlying practice theories by no means constitute a homogeneous theoretical position (WESTERMAYER, 2005). Practice theory refers heavily to the embodied and material derivatives of cultural meaning. Therefore the artificial distinction of implicit and explicit dimensions of culture cannot be analyzed separately (see above).

"Practices are the routines of individual actors inscribed in the way they use their bodies, in their habits, in their taken-for-granted sense of space, dress, food, and

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10 For a more detailed outline of this view see also the paper of [PLODER](#) (2009) in this special issue.

11 A noteworthy review of the book *Doing Culture* edited by REUTER and HÖRNING has been published by Till WESTERMAYER (2005).

taste—in the social routines they know so well as to be able to improvise spontaneously without a second thought (...). Practices can also be trans-personal imbedded in the routines organisations use to process people and things, in the taken-for-granted criteria that separate one category of people or event from another" (SWIDLER, 2001b, p.74). [29]

Practice theory assumes continuity and persistence of social practice through routines but not through determining scripts and structures. Routines are by definition uniform, but they also anticipate interruption and irritation, which then cause changes and negotiation on social order (NADAI & MAEDER, 2007; STRAUSS, 1978). [30]

*Summary of this sub-section:* The first dimension of our navigating tool addressed the problem of theorizing culture and intercultural in preparation of further empirical investigations. Instead of conceptualizing social action as expressions of "being culture," we have argued that many major approaches applying qualitative methods take a performative view on intercultural communication. Although "doing culture" is a rather vague, ambiguous and preliminary description of this epistemological trend we see it as a powerful theory-driven trend in current qualitative research on intercultural communication. [31]

## **2.2 The methodical challenge: Empirical research design and modes of analysis**

The definition of culture used in a qualitative research project influences researchers in their choice of methods for collecting and analyzing data. The second dimension of our navigation tool therefore covers—in a logical linkage to the first dimension—the description of the qualitative approach and methods used in research projects. With the second meta-criterion we reflect on how qualitative analysis is discussed, adopted, modified and modeled for a specific research purpose. To avoid misunderstandings and disappointment for our readers, we would like to emphasize that our paper does not intend to present an "anthology" of "good-practice collection" of qualitative methods for data gathering and data analysis. Further, we cannot provide detailed comments about the feasibility of specific methods of data collection (e.g. biographical interviewing, participating observation, critical incident interviews), and of data analysis and interpretation (e.g. objective hermeneutics or critical discourse analysis) to study intercultural communication. [32]

On the one hand, it is obvious and trivial that some qualitative methods are predestined for the field, while, on the other hand, there is no such thing as a specialized qualitative tool-box for intercultural communication. Most papers in this special issue demonstrate clearly that intercultural research adopts methods, instruments and techniques that have been proven helpful and robust in other contexts and settings (not necessarily intercultural ones) as well. In many cases they are modified to meet theoretical, methodological, ethical or practical necessities more adequately. [33]

Intercultural communication is not something that happens "out there" in the "foreign world" or that is somehow attached to "the other." It is rather to be seen as a special mode of social interaction that increases semantic and knowledge asymmetries among the interacting individuals. And it happens—potentially—anywhere and anytime (though we are not always aware of it). The choice of specific research methods is justified to a lesser degree with the *object* of interest itself ("the intercultural") but rather with a certain *perspective* and attitude that researchers have to obtain in their research process. Needless to say, the application of methods and the practice of doing qualitative research on intercultural communication have to meet common credibility criteria of qualitative research (BERGMAN & COXON, 2005; CAPPAL, 2008; STEINKE, 2000).<sup>12</sup> [34]

### 2.2.1 Modes of analysis in intercultural communication research

Given that qualitative social research never provides a completely defined and standardized tool-kit of how to design and conduct the research process, any attempt to specify designs for intercultural communication or even to list and comment on the feasibility of methods on a general level would fail the demands of situational and contextual adequacy. CAPPAL (2008, p.21), like many researchers, justifies a preference for qualitative approaches for intercultural phenomena with the openness of qualitative methods for the constitution of the empirical case(s). A predefined design would thwart this feature that is paramount for non-essentialistic research on culture. Instead of commenting in detail on single qualitative methods—almost an indefinite twinkling firmament of the intercultural research galaxy (metaphorically speaking)—, some of the basic "elements" necessary for the evolution of a viable "star" of empirical study are sketched briefly in the following. [35]

Donal CARBAUGH (2007) has recently published an article in the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* (36/3) to explain five different modes of inquiry and analysis of communicative practice. These modes provide a good orientation for sequencing and balancing the analysis in any type of qualitative research that is based on the interpretive assumptions about intercultural communication outlined above.

"A mode of inquiry is a particular stance an analyst takes in order to accomplish an integral part of a research project. (...) Each [mode] has its own grammar and logic, each enables the analyst to make specific kinds of claims that are important ingredients in cultural research (such as conceptualizing the phenomena of interest, describing instances of it, interpreting the meaningfulness of those phenomena to participants, examining the phenomena in comparative perspective and evaluating the phenomena)" (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.170f.). [36]

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12 See also various papers in the FQS section on [Quality of Qualitative Research](#).

### The theoretical mode

This mode has already been described in our own words in Section 2.1 of this paper, so it does not need much more explication here. CARBAUGH (2007, p.171) states that this mode defines "how one hears cultures in discourse," e.g. as an expression of cultural group membership, as a realization of communicative genres in conversation or as a coding of symbols and meanings (see also Table 1 above). [37]

### The descriptive mode

"After entering the field site, the analyst explores specific communicative acts, events, or styles which can be, and subsequently are, recorded. Here the analyst is taking great care to ground the study in actual strips of real world phenomena, empirically available, creating descriptive corpus of multiple instances [e.g. audio transcript, video, media product, observation protocol]" (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.171).

It has to be recalled, that "recorded strips of the real world" are academic artifacts. The writing-culture debate (CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986) has radically done away with the naïve self-perception of anthropologists as the innocent *rapporteurs* of the cultural "other." Each description of the world turns into interpreted reality in the very moment it is uttered and recorded.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the term "formulating interpretation" that is used in the documentary method (NOHL, 2006, p.46) might be the more suitable one, to indicate what the analyst actually is doing: She or he creates, selects and arranges data into an assembly of cultural significations. Whether they are of relevance for further and deeper analysis or not is still open and a matter of further interpretive analysis. [38]

### The interpretive mode

The interpretive mode is the central element of CARBAUGH's analytical concept. This mode refers to the basic assumption of qualitative social research "(...) that reality is created interactively and becomes meaningful subjectively, and that it is transmitted and becomes effective by collective and individual instances of interpretation" (FLICK, von KARDORFF & STEINKE, 2004, p.7). Culturally defined groups and communities of communication are then considered as the main collective instances in the scope of intercultural communication. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to clarify the size and border of a given cultural communicative community empirically. Also, the membership-ties that enable researchers to attribute a certain communicative behavior of an individual to be representative for her or his community are difficult to define. CARBAUGH (2007, p.174) suggests that researchers should concentrate on the interpretive analysis on "radiants of cultural meanings" that are active in any communicative practice, that is to say, communicative accounts that indicate meaning about personhood, relationships, action, emotion and dwelling. Such cultural radiants can further be combined into statements—cultural propositions—which capture participants'

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion about the problem of linguistic representation see also [BARINAGA](#) (2009) in this thematic issue.

definitions, concepts, premises, beliefs or values (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.177). The analysts' (re)-interpretation of cultural propositions initiates an analytical transformation of the observed communicative practice into "cultural premises." "Formulating premises explicitly thus puts the taken-for-granted into a domain of 'discursive scrutability', freeing it for analysts' and participants' reflections" (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.178). [39]

#### The comparative mode

"The comparative mode asks: How is this communication practice like and unlike similar other in other cultural discourses or in other speech communities?" (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.172) The comparative perspective (see also below in the discussion of emic and etic perspective) is not the only reason for research on intercultural communication but it has to be included somehow and somewhere in the course of a research process to discern the *genuine inter-cultural* quality of that communication from all other *intra-cultural* communication, whatever the token of cultural difference might be. [40]

#### The critical mode

The critical mode is important as a corrective helping to unravel subtle participatory imbalances in the communicative process. Basically, the analyst asks at this stage: "does this practice advantage some [people] more than others? What is the relative worth of this practice among participants?" (CARBAUGH, 2007, p.172). This mode is expressed prominently in many studies committed to post-colonial theory and other "critical" intercultural theories (YOUNG, 1996)<sup>14</sup>, but it is of course relevant to any study. In other publications one of the authors of this paper has argued that research projects on intercultural communication—especially those that evolve in the realm of practical intercultural interventions—often imply a normative preconception of cultural constructs as they seek to foster the conditions of intercultural understanding (OTTEN, 2007, 2009). Due to such "good intentions" studies may fail to recognize that the intercultural relations and entire settings in which communication takes place occur in webs of pre-existing power-structures. In these structures, some of the interacting individuals may be in unfavorable conditions, while others may continue to use their privileged communication status. This asymmetry obstructs the whole communication. [41]

Although CARBAUGH speaks of discourses and openly reveals his primary theoretical affiliation with discourse analysis, his description of the interpretive procedure is more general, and instructive for many similar analytical approaches of qualitative research on intercultural communication.<sup>15</sup> [42]

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14 A very instructive and updated collection of critical approaches to intercultural communication is presented in *The Global Intercultural Communication Reader* (ASANTE et al., 2008a). For an earlier brief overview also see MARTIN and NAKAYAMA (1996, pp.26-35).

15 The analytical modes presented by CARBAUGH are similar to other basic qualitative procedures, for example that of the documentary method (BOHNSACK, 2008; BOHNSACK, NENTWIG-GESEMANN & NOHL, 2001; BOHNSACK & NOHL, 2001; NOHL, 2006, 2008). [EVERS](#) (2009) presents a good example of adopting the documentary method to intercultural

### 2.2.2 Accessing cultural meaning: Structuration vs. construction

We have emphasized in Section 2.1 that the overall focus of "being" or "doing culture" implies different assumptions on how to access cultural meaning. A general classification of qualitative research perspectives by Uwe FLICK, Ernst von KARDORFF and Ines STEINKE (2004, p.6) seems particularly helpful to underline this notion further. FLICK et al. discern between three modes: a) the "modes of access to subjective viewpoints," b) the "description of processes of creation of social situations," and c) "hermeneutic analysis of underlying structures." The three meta-perspectives vary in the way, they either process the "view of the subject" in the foreground, or rather the essence of social structures to which subjects refer to when they act and communicate. Simply put, it could be said, that an essentialist's concept of intercultural communication often ends up in accounts of encountering (colliding) cultural meaning structures. In contrast, an interactionist's concept instead focuses on the emergent nature of social situations that eventually "breed" an intercultural relation where communicative expressions of culturally divergent viewpoints and social worlds become crucial for communication. In other words: Some strategies of qualitative research are concerned with the identification of the patterns of structuring cultural essence while others are more focused on the observation of emergent cultural processes. [43]

Another binary constellation of intercultural communication—also in several papers of this FQS special issue<sup>16</sup>—is the difference between an *emic* and an *etic perspective* on culture (BERRY, 1980; GUDYKUNST, 1997). Generally speaking, the emic perspective takes a certain cultural phenomenon as inextricably rooted in a specific cultural system, thus it cannot be understood and interpreted from the outside of the cultural system using external parameters. The etic perspective assumes certain cultural phenomena as universal, existing and relevant with slight variations within any cultural system, thus cross-cultural comparison is possible—or even desirable. [44]

The emic vs. etic debate—first introduced by linguists Marvin HARRIS and Kenneth PIKE independently—is also known as the "insider-outsider-debate" (HEADLAND et al., 1990). This, however, seems to cause misunderstandings from time to time among many researchers who simply associate emic with qualitative research and etic with quantitative research. Instead of this misleading opposition, we assert that it is far more useful to refer to emic and etic as two *complementary* analytical perspectives on intercultural communication. The emic perspective normally would be given priority for a contextualized reconstructing of social meaning and cultural practices and this is a prime claim of qualitative social research. Whenever social meanings and cultural practices start to "travel" and have to be "translated" among social worlds, or when they evolve as inter- and transcultural intersection of a social encounter, the etic perspective comes

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education research in this special issue too. A forthcoming publication will address the use of the documentary method in educational research in depth as well (BOHNSACK, PFAFF & WELLER, 2009).

16 See also the articles of [BUSCH](#) (2009), [MAHADEVAN](#) (2009) and [SCHWEGLER](#) (2009) in this special issue.

inevitably into play as well. The question then is how the universal relevance of an etic phenomenon can be justified both, theoretically and empirically. [45]

*Summary of this sub-section:* The second dimension of our navigating tool has highlighted some methodical challenges to be taken into account for any empirical investigation. We have discussed several classic "oppositions" in intercultural communication theory (structure vs. process, essentialism vs. interactionism, emic vs. etic). Finally, we take the liberty to fuse the discussion of these oppositions into a synthesizing dimension that results in two fundamentally different reconstructive research strategies: The *comparison of structuring cultural essence* vs. the *reconstruction of emergent cultural processes*. [46]

### **2.3 Challenges of generalization: Conclusions drawn from empirical findings**

The third meta-criterion of our navigation system comes to the fore when thinking about how the results of research projects are presented. We believe that a deeper look at qualitative methodologies and methods necessarily implicates re-thinking the scope, depths and lasting of results drawn. Cultural meanings—emerging as structures and/or as processes of the social world—are everything but static and self-evident. In the flow of constant interactions they undergo dynamic changes. On the one hand, results of qualitative research can only claim validity within clear conceptual and theoretical boundaries as well as those of scope. On the other hand, researchers intend to systematically reveal generalized conclusions. As MAYRING (2007, par.18) clearly argues: "Here the necessity of generalization is evident, because the single case itself is not of interest, only the conclusions and transfers we can draw from this material." Solutions to this typical problem for qualitative intercultural research may be found in using theoretical sampling and obtaining a longitudinal case structure. [47]

The contextuality of the researched processes and "objects" as well as the actions of the researching "subjects" is prevalent in many respects: Spatial, temporal and socio-cultural. All these contextualizations imply theoretical and methodological limitations for the potential generalization of empirical findings. However, this is no reason to escape into scientific fatalism or cynicism, as some authors seem to denote: "The only generalization is that there is no generalization" (LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985, p.110). In this paper we do not argue for one particular way of conducting empirical qualitative research on intercultural communication. Readers will find a number of good examples in this issue that bear most practical recommendations. What we would like to do though is to cast the issue of generalizations and conclusions *beyond* the prevalent concerns about emic and etic comparatives. [48]

#### *2.3.1 Assumptions of spatial generalization*

*Spatial generalizations* are deeply rooted in the comparative tradition of research on intercultural communication. Since the academic field of intercultural communication (with this wording!) originated in the practical motivation to

prepare people for international assignments (MARTIN & NAKAYAMA, 1996; ROGERS et al., 2002) and tasks "to be done abroad," many empirical efforts have been directed to study communication, values and social practices of "those people over there"—and "over there" traditionally was and still is another nation or country. Consequently, many researchers assume an international imperative for intercultural research (LUSTIG & KOESTER, 2005). For those who regard communicative practice as bound to a certain territory, a region, a country, or an organization it does make sense to imagine this territory as the "natural site" of cultural meaning. Those who live at this "site" for a longer period of time are seen as the "natural representatives" and carriers of cultural practices. [49]

Not only theoretical objections but also the social fact of rapidly changing patterns of global mobility and the emergence of transnational/transcultural spaces (among many others e.g. PRIES, 2007; TOMAS, 1997) challenges the spatial view on culture dramatically. Besides regional and geographic cultural spaces current intercultural communication is more and more concerned with de-territorialized cultural spaces of highly ephemeral transcultural communities. The article of [Andreas HEPP](#) (2009) in this special issue features a "transcultural perspective on media communication", and his prototypical argumentation portrays both growing conceptual skepticism about traditional territorialized culture and the exploration of creative ways to search for alternative *loci*—HEPP speaks of "locales"—of cultural practices. [50]

### 2.3.2 Assumptions of temporal generalization

The aim of "lasting" generalizations is confounded by at least two main challenges: The transitory nature of cultural identities (RENN & STRAUB, 2002) and the problem of fast changing institutions and habits that make it difficult to specify typifications of cultural practices over time. There are few longitudinal studies in the field of intercultural communication that cover several years to see how certain practices, learning processes, and intercultural identities change and stabilize themselves over time (BACHNER & ZEUTSCHEL, 2009; THOMAS et al., 2006). The complexity of cultural identity and the different conceptual layers to be considered for intercultural communication are summarized by Young Yun KIM (2007). She underlines five important themes to be included in intercultural identity research: The adaptive and evolving individual, the flexible and negotiable individual, discrete social categories and individual choice, discrete social categories and a non-negotiable group rights, and distinct and communal systems of communicative practice. An exhaustive analysis of the temporal morphology between cultural identity and intercultural communication that adequately accounts for these themes exceeds "one-stop and one-shot studies." [51]

There are several methods of the qualitative research arsenal—e.g. biographical interviewing and/or life-course analysis—that have a good potential to grasp the developmental effects of intercultural communication. But that requires an intense long-term cooperation of a research consortium—ideally in an international setting (LAMNEK, 2002). Thus, there are severe limitations to the empirical studies to follow-up theoretically stated long-term effects—the *durée*

*interculturelle* so to speak—mainly because of methodological and, more often, practical (usually financial) constraints. Since most of the research in the field of intercultural communication is small-scale investigation of the size of "one-woman" and "one-man endeavors," it is more realistic to anticipate a rather limited temporal validity for these studies. [52]

### 2.3.3 Assumptions of socio-cultural generalization

A study can range from claiming "universal laws" at the one extreme to "generalizable procedures" (not results!) on the other extreme. In between there are several "downward" interstages: statistical laws, rules, context specific statements, observations of similarities and differences, descriptive, and, explorative generalizations (MAYRING 2007, par. 14). Empirical findings of qualitative intercultural studies usually do not strive for statistical representation but for theoretical representation (METCALFE, 2004; SCHNEIDER, 2002). Nevertheless, social generalizations are difficult because many empirical studies focus on small groups—often relocated "experts" acting in highly specific life-worlds—participants often come from one social stratum (e.g. international students, highly skilled immigrants, engineers abroad, refugees in a certain country) or represent a particular asymmetric social constellation of interaction (e.g. immigrant patients and host doctors in a hospital (DREISSIG, 2005). There is nothing wrong with such case selections but if they are made, they need to be legitimated theoretically at the first place and not statistically or pragmatically (BREUER & REICHERTZ, 2001, par.9). As much as a qualitative investigation becomes aware of the emic particularities of a given intercultural context and its social singularities due to the richness of interdependencies, it also increases the awareness of the complexity and methodical challenges of an etic option. Further, this is not only the case for the foreground option of inter-cultural comparability (in the sense of inter-national, inter-lingual, inter-ethnic, etc.) but equally true for the background-scenario of intra-cultural comparability (e.g. among different socio-economic levels, within different sub-cultures etc.). [53]

As we said before: We cannot discuss in detail the various challenges that are associated with the question of generalization in qualitative research, which range from sampling strategies, real types and ideal types, presentation of results, and ethical concerns about confidentiality. All of these are relevant to qualitative research on intercultural communication. Every researcher in this field should be familiar with the substantive methodological arguments for legitimizing the relevance of his or her study as being more than "just another case study" without getting trapped in misleading epistemological vocabulary grounded in a positivistic tradition (for an overview of the ongoing debate see among other: BREUER & REICHERTZ, 2001). [54]

A good qualitative case study or a sound life-world exploration of intercultural communication in a specific context should be "dressed" with a decent humility, avoiding the classic aberrations of—implicit or explicit—over-interpretation of contingent cultural significations. Some of these aberrations to be avoided are:

- mixing of the categorizations of culture (nationality, ethnicity, language, ...),
- mixing the levels of analytical aggregation (individuals, groups/organizations, societies),
- ignoring or even blunt negation of an alternative (critical) frame of interpretation (strategic cultural bias, hegemonic theorizing, normative "monocularity" for either the advantages or the problems of intercultural communication),
- indulging theoretical and empirical aesthetics for its own sake. [55]

*Summary of this sub-section:* As a third dimension we have discussed several challenges for the validity of generalizations drawn from a qualitative study. These challenges are best met by a very clear and transparent theoretical foundation. In the early decades of intercultural communication, theories, methods, concepts, and research findings have been prone to stereotyping generalizations in terms of (statistical) mean values of relatively stable cultural patterns ("being culture") with a nation-wide dissemination. And to some extent, this idea is still prevalent. With the growing scientific recognition of qualitative studies, sensitivity to the contextual and situational traits of an intercultural interaction has come to the fore as well. An ongoing trend resulting from this shift seems that more and more researchers anticipate intercultural phenomena rather as *contextualized situated practices* instead of *bounded static patterns*. [56]

### **3. A Dimensional Model to Navigate the Methodological Galaxy**

The intention of our article is to give some basic orientations that help locate a research project, a specific theoretical stance or a certain methodological approach in the field that we term a methodological galaxy. We took this metaphor not just because of the catchy title but because of the illustrative richness and the resulting strengths. As any metaphor, our attempt seeks to illustrate and rephrase aspects that could be said and put differently. The approach invites further reflection and "playing around" with the metaphor. [57]

Figure 1 (below) summarizes our most important ideas visually. It contains the three dimensions discussed above: a) The question of the cultural concept that guides a research project, b) the question of the methodical approach and its analytical perspective, and c) the question of possible generalizations that may be drawn from the findings of a study. As these three dimensions have to be addressed in every research project, they can be regarded as coordinates. Depending on the position on these coordinates every project can be "localized" methodologically within a three-dimensional space. As many research projects follow a certain popular theory or a certain method proven to be useful, they sooner or later form clusters in this space. Such clusters would then indicate methodological "hot spots," or places that—for a certain time—constitute a bright area or stream of the intercultural research discourse ("Milky Way") while other regions of the galaxy stay in the darkness ("dying stars" and "imploding planets").

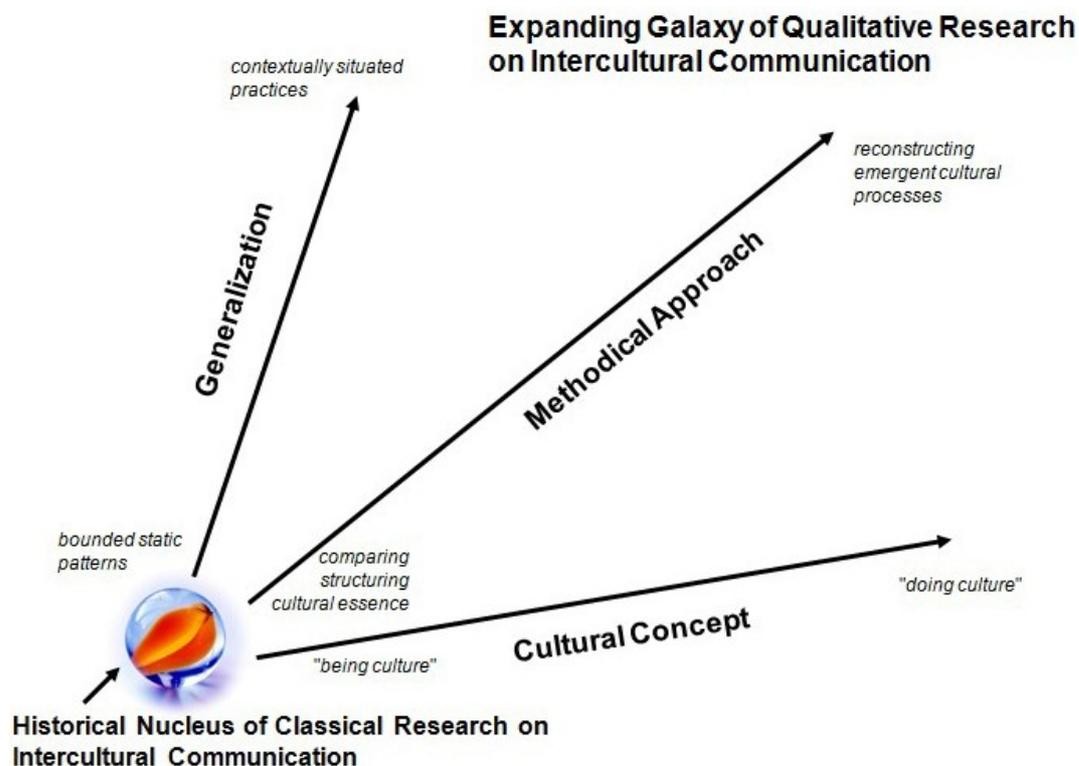


Figure 1: The expansion of the "methodological galaxy" of research on intercultural communication [58]

We argue that the research field of intercultural communication cannot be defined as it constantly evolves and perpetuates. The late 1950's were a starting point for the analysis of intercultural communication (at least in its modern meaning) and the early works of Edward T. HALL (and others) can be taken as a historical nucleus. It might be something of an exaggeration to compare HALL with a "big bang" yet still: Ideas and concepts of how to analyze intercultural communication thereafter have expanded with great speed in all three directions (MOON, 2008). It should be noted that the expansion is not necessarily unidirectional. MOON (2008, p.14) states, for example, that research in the 1980's conceived culture almost entirely in terms of boundaries of "nation-states" and thus relapsed behind the level of theoretical reflection that was reached already in the late 1970's. [59]

The idea of an expansion of theories, methods and contexts does not imply judgments about the overall quality of earlier/"traditional" and later/"innovative" approaches. In other words, it does not favor a special positionality in the methodological galaxy over the others. As we employ the metaphor of a virtual methodological galaxy we create a "thirdspace" (BHABHA, 1994) of discourse. "Thirdspace offers a way of engaging critically with theoretical issues, while simultaneously being that space where the debate occurs. It is a place of enunciation, where new identities can be forged and marginalised voices can speak" (MOLES, 2008, par.3.1). [60]

What we observe though, is a current tendency on all three dimensions towards the "outer methodological spheres" of the galaxy. Research projects following these tendencies have the potential to reach new intellectual grounds and hidden insights (which might become the "center of the universe" in the near future),—on the other hand—they may fade away, lost in an academic orbit. But the same can happen to projects that stay (too) close to the established claims of classic research paradigms, which may lose their intellectual gravity one day. [61]

Intercultural communication is an almost endless field of theorizing and analyzing on how human interaction is shaped by culture and vice versa. Theories and methods are permanently in flux. Instead of bemoaning this situation it seems more appropriate to remember what intercultural communication, in its very practical and existential sense, is all about: Specifically, a matter of curiosity, ambiguity, surprise, enrichment, and—occasionally—irritation. [62]

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