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Sequence Analysis
in Linguistics and Social Theory

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Sequence Analysis in Linguistics and Social Theory Introduction to the Thematic Issue

Andrea Ploder / James McElvenny¹

1. Introduction

This thematic issue is built around the idea that human social interaction is organized sequentially. In its most basic form, that means that we accomplish interaction in time, step-by-step, one action after the other. The consequences of this 'sequential organization of interaction' go far beyond the concrete everyday encounters themselves. Every time we interact with others, we establish, maintain, and modify social order. Every step is oriented towards the last, and even though our expectations of future steps play a decisive role in this process, we can never escape the directness of time. We live, act, and interact on an irreversible chain of present moments and so do the people around us. Together, we generate cooperative trajectories that feed into larger structures governing social worlds and societies as a whole. Following this perspective, it is not an exaggeration to say that the sequential organization of human interaction is one of the foundations of all things social.

The contributions to this thematic issue approach this idea from different angles: Some focus on its methodological and empirical consequences (Günthner, Mondada, Franzmann, and Wagener), others on its theoretical foundations (Knoblauch, Meyer, and Loenhoff).

As a theoretical concept, sequentiality is a part of many social and linguistic theories. Among others, it is central to the pragmatist focus on processuality (see e.g. Mead 1938) and to Max Weber's theory of action (see Knoblauch in this issue) – both of which had a considerable impact on social theory and research methodologies over the last 120 years (see e.g. Deppermann/Günthner 2015). The idea of social order as a cooperative, step-by-step accomplishment is also central to Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, which is an important point of reference for many traditions of sequence analysis (see Mondada, Loenhoff, Meyer, and Wagener in this issue). Garfinkel's work was a major inspiration to the founders of modern Conversational Analysis – Harvey Sacks, Gail Jefferson, and Emmanuel Schegloff (see Schegloff 1992), but also for Ralf Bohnsack's Documentary Method and other approaches. Essentially, the concept of sequentiality acknowledges the relevance of time and temporality to human encounters. It is also central to a number of philosophical approaches that have influenced both theories and methodologies in the social sciences. Among the most influential of these are phenomenology and gestalt theory (see Christian Meyer in this issue).

¹ This thematic issue was edited in the research project 'Media of Praxeology II: History of audiovisual sequence analysis as a methodology', which is part of the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) *Media of Cooperation*, based at the University of Siegen. The PIs of *Media of Praxeology II* are Erhard Schüttpelz (University of Siegen) and Christian Meyer (Konstanz University). At the beginning of the editing process, the editors were both postdocs in the project. As part of the CRC, this issue was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) – project ID 262513311 – CRC 1187 *Media of Cooperation*. We are very grateful to Lorenza Mondada and Benjamin Wagener for their valuable comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this introduction. All remaining shortcomings are – of course – our own.

Methodologically, the observation that social interaction is driven by its sequential organization has inspired a number of interpretive research traditions. In this issue, we present papers referring to (Multimodal) Conversation Analysis (discussed by Mondada, Günthner, and Loenhoff in this issue), Objective Hermeneutics (discussed by Franzmann in this issue; see also Wernet 2013), and Documentary Method (discussed by Wagener in this issue). There are many more approaches to sequence analysis in interpretive research, developed mostly in sociology and/or linguistics. Here are some examples from the German speaking countries, where sequence analysis is particularly popular: Genre Analysis (*Gattungsanalyse*; Günthner/Knoblauch 1995), Videography (Knoblauch/Tuma/Schnettler 2014), Hermeneutic Sociology of Knowledge (Soeffner 2007), Narration Analysis (Schütze 1983), and Biographical Case Reconstructions (Rosenthal 1995, 2004). These traditions have different methodological frameworks, follow different research goals, and pursue different strategies in analyzing data, but they all call their endeavour *sequence analysis* or *sequential analysis*.²

While the basic idea of sequentiality is central to many theoretical and methodological traditions, the conceptual details and terminology associated with it are quite diverse. As a result, it is almost impossible to describe sequentiality in terms that work for all the traditions represented in this thematic issue, beyond the very basic account we have given above. In this introduction, we are trying to honor the terminological and conceptual specificities of all three approaches, but – inevitably – representatives from every tradition will find sections that sound terminologically dissonant to them.

The origin of this thematic issue is an international conference held on October 29-30, 2020. The conference was organized mainly by the editors of this issue, as part of the research project P02 – 'Media of Praxeology II: History of audio-visual sequence analysis as a methodology'. The project is embedded in the DFG-supported Collaborative Research Center (CRC) *Media of Co-operation*, based at the University of Siegen. In the preparation of this conference, we collaborated with two other projects in the CRC: B06 – 'Un-/desired Observation in Interaction: "Intelligent Personal Assistants" (IPA)', which examines how Intelligent Personal Assistants are integrated in everyday practices, and P01 – 'Media of Praxeology I: The "Discovery Procedures" of Science and Technology Studies', which develops a digital praxeology based on the work of Harold Garfinkel.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, we held the entire conference online. The topic attracted an audience of several dozen colleagues from a number of countries, time zones, and disciplines, who engaged in a lively conversation and developed new ideas and networks.³ Over the course of two days, we heard seven theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions from various traditions, with long time slots for discussion in between. This arrangement enabled a discussion of major principles and fine details of sequence analysis, complementing abstract terminological debates with detailed empirical examples.

² There is also a line of quantitative sequence analysis (Abbott 1983, 2001; Raab/Struffolino 2022) which focuses on longitudinal data such as life course directories. Outside the social sciences, sequence analysis (of a very different kind) is also popular in the life sciences. One of the most common contexts is the analysis of human DNA.

³ For a more detailed review of the conference, including an overview of the program, see Hrnal/Hector (2022).

Several conference participants expressed their enthusiasm about the exchange between linguistics and sociology. This dialogue was built into our research project from the start, because the history of sequence analysis is a history of interdisciplinary collaboration.⁴ The dialogue between sociologists and linguists was particularly lively throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, but over the last 40 years, it has mostly fallen silent. Conversation Analysis is one of the few fields where the exchange between linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and communication researchers has continued since the 1960s. In this conference, we brought researchers from sociology and linguistics together, to talk about the past, present, and future of their fields. We discovered that many of the participants had a substantial interest in continuing the conversation and engaging in future collaboration.

In this introduction, we will compare the different forms of sequence analysis presented in the thematic issue. The conference and the process of producing this thematic issue helped us to advance our understanding of what holds the field together and why there is so much room for productive discussion among the different traditions. Sharing some of these insights here should provide a useful background for readers of the issue and others who are interested in the various forms of sequence analysis. We will start with a brief sketch of the history of sequence analysis (2) and proceed with the methodological commonalities (3), and differences (4) of the three approaches represented in this issue. At the end, we will give an overview of the contributions (5), and an outlook on possible questions for the future (6).

2. History of Sequence Analysis

Historically, sequence analysis first became possible with the advent of audio and visual recording technology – the phonograph, photography and film – towards the end of the nineteenth century (see e.g. Erikson 2011; McElvenny/Ploder 2021). Several pioneers in the social sciences and humanities recognized the methodological potential of this technology and used it to analyze human action and interaction. A common goal of these analyses was to reconstruct linguistic and cultural dynamics in everyday phenomena, an endeavour that can be placed in an intellectual lineage extending back to such figures as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt and the notion of *inner linguistic form* (in German: *innere Sprachform*). The work of pioneers in sequence analysis brought forth numerous theoretical and methodological insights and inspired the creation of various artifacts, technologies, and transdisciplinary networks.

Many traditions of sequence analysis in the social sciences (and all of the ones represented in this thematic issue) have their origins in pioneering projects throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. The first of these projects was particularly fruitful and has inspired several traditions of research in multiple disciplines: The *Natural History of an Interview* was an interdisciplinary project initiated in Palo Alto in 1955 that continued until 1968 at the various home institutions of its members. This project was crucial for the development of many traditions of sequence analysis (for

⁴ The project members were recruited from both disciplines, both on the PI and Postdoc level. The work packages were designed to have a focus on one of the disciplinary histories, but with many opportunities for exchange and fruitful discussion.

details, see McElvenny/Ploder 2021). Another pioneering project analyzed telephone calls to a suicide prevention centre in Los Angeles in the 1960s and led to the development of Conversation Analysis by Harvey Sacks, Gail Jefferson, and Emanuel Schegloff (Pomerantz/Fehr 2011). It was strongly influenced by the work of Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman. The development of Objective Hermeneutics started in a project on *parents and school* (*Elternhaus und Schule*) in Frankfurt am Main in the late 1960s (for details see Franzmann in this issue). The Documentary Method was developed by Ralf Bohnsack in Erlangen/Nürnberg starting in the 1970s based on the analysis of counseling sessions in youth drug counseling centers (for details see Wagener in this issue). The traditions developed in Germany (like Objective Hermeneutics and Documentary Method, but also Hermeneutic Sociology of Knowledge, Narration Analysis, and Genre Analysis, to name just a few) were all part of a larger network that evolved in the early 1970s (see Ploder 2018). Its members met on a regular basis and had a number of shared theoretical interests. One of the key organizations of this network was the section *Sociology of Language* in the German Sociological Association (GSA), founded in 1977.⁵ Today, sequence analysis is a central component of numerous methodological approaches in the social sciences. In the German-speaking countries, it has become so ubiquitous that some researchers use the terms interpretive social research and sequence analysis as synonyms (e.g. Kleemann et al. 2013).

3. What do the traditions have in common?

On a practical and methodological level, the three traditions of sequence analysis presented in this issue have a lot in common.⁶ In the following, we will point out some shared characteristics, many of them also apply to other approaches mentioned above:

Sequence analysis looks at details and requires certain types of data.

Because of its analytic focus on micro-dynamics of social life, sequence analysis is always based on very detailed data and works through the details in extensive data sessions. It does not exclude any kind of data in principle, but the analysis will only yield insights into practices that the data is a *document of*. Therefore, sequence analysts often use recordings of interactions between research participants. If they do use interview data, then it is typically because they are interested in a practice documented in the interview itself – for example, the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Wernet 2009:57f.), or the habitus of the interviewee as it is documented in the interview (see Wagener in this issue). The data is often produced with technical assistance (typically audio or video recordings), because the analysis focuses on details below the threshold of what we can see, hear, and document without technology. Before analysis, the recordings are usually transcribed according to

⁵ In 2000, the name of the section was changed to *Sociology of Knowledge*. It is currently the section with the highest number of members in the GSA.

⁶ A different selection of commonalities and differences between Conversation Analysis, Narration Analysis, Objective Hermeneutics, and Documentary Method is discussed in Kleemann et al. (2013:198ff).

a strict transcription protocol. In data analysis, some approaches will only use the transcripts while others will use both recordings and transcripts.

Sequence analysis makes strong generalizations.

All three approaches discussed in this issue make comparatively strong generalizations based on the analysis of individual cases. The approaches have developed different strategies to connect the in-depth analysis of individual cases to more general claims about broader social phenomena, which will be discussed in section 4 of the introduction.

Sequence analysis is based on steady procedures.

Compared to other, more flexible qualitative approaches in the social sciences (like Grounded Theory, for example), sequence analyses tend to be based on rather steady procedures. These procedures can be modified with respect to specific research interests or data qualities, which enables a constant development of the approaches. But, as Kleemann et al (2013:202, translation by AP/JMc) put it, "the methods grow around a methodologically stringent core". The technical support of data production, detailed transcription, steady procedures in data analysis, and use of research groups serves the goal of maximizing confirmability and improving the validity of the interpretation. These goals are closely connected to the strong epistemological claims mentioned above.⁷

Sequence analysis is often practiced in groups.

Sequence analysis is typically practiced in a trained and skilled research group, often mixing more junior and more senior researchers. Acquiring proficiency in this type of data analysis requires several years of training, which supports the building of strong research communities – another remarkable feature of many traditions of sequence analysis. One important task of the group is to enhance the pool of perspectives on the data and produce a greater range of ideas on how to interpret it. Another is to question the interpretations of the other members of the group and make sure that only well-founded readings make their way into the research report.⁸ Historically, group data sessions were one of the foundational locations in the NHI project, and many other pioneering projects on sequence analysis. In German-

⁷ Michael Lempert (2019) has pointed out that the mechanical recording, fine-grained transcription, and highly standardized protocol, which are typical for most traditions of sequence analysis, can be read as an example of mechanical objectivity, an epistemic aspiration dating back to the mid-nineteenth century (see Daston/Galison 2007:115f.).

⁸ In his analysis of data sessions in Conversation Analysis, Objective Hermeneutics, Documentary Method, and Narration Analysis, Berli (2021) shows that one important strategy in group interpretation is the 'call to order'. Calls to order are "observable if one member of the interpretation group addresses another or several members, questioning not primarily the meaning of an interpretive proposition, but its *Gestalt* or the process of its formulation. These interventions more or less explicitly enact the criteria and principles of qualitative research in general or a specific methodology in particular in the interpretation process" (Berli 2021:778). According to Berli, they "help to stay within the boundaries of the conventions of the respective method of analysis, (... help) sharpening each other's arguments (...), and) immunize readings and interpretations against possible critiques" (Berli 2021:780).

speaking interpretive research, interpreting in groups is almost ubiquitous.⁹ But while it seems to be a source of inspiration and mutual support in many approaches, it has a more epistemologically vital status within sequence analysis. In Objective Hermeneutics, for example, the *collective* creation and elimination of potential readings (*Lesarten*) is indispensable, because it secures the validity of the analysis (see Franzmann in this issue). Groups working in sequence analysis often have a very clear framework for the organization of data sessions, and new members have to learn the 'tricks of the trade' before becoming a full member of the group. The central role of group interpretation makes sequence analysis a prime example of cooperative research on cooperative processes (Schüttpelz/Gießmann 2015; Ploder 2017). As a result, the history of sequence analysis is also a history of cooperative interpretation practices in the social and cultural sciences.

Sequence analysis is interested in practices.

It is striking that many approaches to sequence analysis use the term 'practice' in one way or another. In Conversation Analysis, the term comes from the strong methodological connection to Garfinkel's praxeology. In Documentary Method we find influences from both Garfinkel and Bourdieu, who developed a different, but no less influential theory of practice (see Bourdieu 1977). Less obviously, we also find the term also in Objective Hermeneutics (see Oevermann 2016; Franzmann in this issue). This shared interest in practices is closely connected to the shared focus on the 'how' instead of the 'what' of social interaction. Focusing on the sequential organization of interaction means focusing on the ways a type of interaction is accomplished, rather than the actual (inter)actions themselves.

Sequence analysts often seek to improve the phenomena they study.

Many sequence analysis projects combine their basic academic goals with the goal to improve the structures they study. In Conversation Analysis, this idea has deep historical roots, both in Garfinkel's *hybrid studies of work* (Garfinkel 2002) and in the pioneering project on recorded phone calls from a suicide prevention center (Pomerantz/Fehr 2011). Up to the present day, Conversation Analysis is frequently used for the improvement of communication structures, in companies or welfare contexts (for a collection of recent examples see Stokoe 2018). Both the Documentary Method and Objective Hermeneutics are used (among many other fields) to improve teaching and social work.

⁹ For the analysis of group interpretation in different research communities see, e.g., Olzewski et al. (2006); Reichertz (2013); Meier zu Verl/Tuma (2021); and Berli (2021). In his 2013 book on group interpretation, Jo Reichertz compared several research traditions on a practical and methodological level and arrived at several interesting insights. First of all, interpreting in groups is a good opportunity for building and maintaining methodological schools. Recurring data sessions provide an opportunity to train new members of the school, develop a certain local 'style' of analysis, and test the abilities of new members (on the "production of 'good' interpreters" see also Berli 2021:781). Being a member of the same interpretation group also fosters a sense of academic identity (Reichertz 2013:50ff.). Apart from these social factors, interpreting in groups also has important epistemological benefits. It is an opportunity to develop new perspectives on the data and generate ideas that can only grow in a communicative environment. Moreover, interpreting in groups provides the opportunity to strengthen or weaken existing interpretations. Every group member can challenge the interpretation of each of the other members. If the whole group agrees on a certain interpretation, it seems more likely to be valid (Reichertz 2013:53f.).

Sequence analysis follows the step-by-step logic of the data.

All types of sequence analysis honour the temporal succession of events in the data they work with (see also Kleemann et al. 2013:20ff). They are based on the conviction that social interaction is organized sequentially and mimic this dynamic in their research strategy. Just like the protagonists they study, researchers go through their data step-by-step and avoid the anticipation of events documented later in the data. The idea to mimic strategies from the field in social research is supported by a number of methodological foundations of interpretive research. One important source is Alfred Schutz (1953), who introduced the distinction between constructs of the first degree ("constructs of common-sense thought", Schutz 1953:3) and constructs of the second degree, "namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene whose behavior the social scientist observes and tries to explain" (Schutz 1953:3). In his widely-read paper on 'common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action', Schutz underlines the differences between common-sense actors and social scientists: Most importantly, they approach the social world with different attitudes and systems of relevances (in German *Relevanzsysteme*, see Schutz 1953:31). Common-sense actors and social researchers also have a lot in common: As human actors, social researchers rely on the same basic strategies of interpretation and construction as the people they study. They also have to follow the principle of adequacy, which requires that "a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that [...it] would be understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellow-men in terms of common-sense interpretation of everyday life" (Schutz 1953:34). Following Schutz, it is only consistent (or even required) that we mimic field strategies in social research as long as we maintain the specific benefits of the scientific attitude and system of relevances (see also Schutz 1954; Soeffner 2003:40f.; and Ploder 2014:54ff.).¹⁰ But the idea of following field strategies is not only prevalent in social phenomenology. It echoes in Garfinkel's concept of unique adequacy (see, e.g., Garfinkel/Wieder 1992:182ff.), and runs through his complete oeuvre as a recurrent theme. A similar idea is prevalent in many schools of hermeneutics, from Wilhelm Dilthey to Hans Georg Gadamer and beyond: Every attempt at academic hermeneutics (regardless of whether we interpret literature, legal texts, religious texts, or social interaction) must be based on a detailed analysis of hermeneutic procedures in everyday life. This hermeneutic tradition, especially the work of Gadamer, is an important point of reference for social research hermeneutics and many other traditions of sequence analysis in the German-speaking countries.

Sequence analysis shows an interest in reflexive methodology.

In recent years, several approaches to sequence analysis have established a focus in studying their own research practice empirically. Their goals are often twofold: improving the method(ologie)s applied in the project, and making an empirical contribution to the social studies of the social sciences at the same time. Hubert Knoblauch (2021) calls this approach *reflexive methodology*, Ralf Bohnsack calls it *praxeological epistemology* (Bohnsack 2020:63, Wagener in this issue), Christian

¹⁰ In his discussion of Luckmann's project 'Daten über Daten', Meier zu Verl (2018b) makes a similar argument.

Meier zu Verl calls it *doing social research* (Meier zu Verl 2018a:2).¹¹ Although this current boom is noteworthy, and can be read as a result of a broader 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences (Kuehner/Ploder/Langer 2016), this idea is not entirely new. We find several examples of *reflexive methodology*¹² in the work of Garfinkel (for an overview see Ploder/Thielmann 2021:216-219) which stimulated similar projects in Science and Technology Studies (see Garfinkel 2022). In the last few decades, a number of research groups in the German speaking countries have recorded and analyzed their own data sessions (for some examples see Berli 2021:785). And there are even earlier historical predecessors in Germany in the 1970s, especially the project 'data on data' (in German: *Daten über Daten*) by a team around Thomas Luckmann at the University of Konstanz (for details see Meier zu Verl 2018b). It almost seems as if there is a reflexive moment built into sequence analysis from the start. In his discussion of the project 'data on data', Meier zu Verl traces it back to Schutz' discussion of constructs of the first and second degree, which we considered above.

4. What sets the traditions apart?

Apart from these shared features, the approaches to sequence analysis presented in this issue also differ from one other in various respects:

Strategies of generalization.

As mentioned above, all three approaches have developed strategies to generate general claims about social phenomena from individual case studies (see, e.g. Sammet/Erhard 2018:45ff.). In Conversation Analysis, generalization is based on the in-depth-analysis and subsequent comparison of different cases, typically fragments of interaction. The cases are taken from a collection composed according to research interest (Schegloff 1996). In Objective Hermeneutics, generalization is based on the idea that concrete cases always document much more than the individual social context they come from (Oevermann 1981, 1991). Every case is special and general at the same time, and the reconstructive procedure of Objective Hermeneutics is supposed to uncover the general structures documented in the individual case (see Wernet 2009:19ff.). Therefore, generalization in Objective Hermeneutics is sometimes based on a single case. The Documentary Method uses types in the tradition of Max Weber to generalize from a medium number of case studies (for details see Bohnsack/Hoffmann/Nentwig-Gesemann 2018).¹³

¹¹ These are examples from the field of sequence analysis. Within the broader reflexive turn in the social sciences, we find much more work in this direction. An interesting example of 'ethnography of ethnography' comes from Stephanie Bethmann and Debora Niermann (2015), who call it 'empirical reflexivity'. For a recent collection of ethnographies of ethnography, see Ploder/Hamann (2021).

¹² The term is used here in the sense described above. In ethnomethodology, the term 'reflexivity' has an entirely different meaning. For an inventory of meanings and a concise account of ethnomethodological reflexivity, see Lynch (2000).

¹³ Another reference for generalizations in sequence analysis is Kurt Lewin, who is often quoted in publications on narration analysis and biographical case reconstruction. Lewin argued that valuable scientific generalizations are not the result of abstraction and quantification from a large

The number of cases analyzed in each project.

None of the approaches discussed in this issue employs quantitative sampling strategies. The validity of a study is always tied to the strength of the analysis and never to the absolute number of cases. Still, it is noteworthy that the typical case numbers differ widely in the different traditions. While Conversation Analysis tend to work with larger case numbers, sometimes hundreds of cases,¹⁴ Objective Hermeneutics focuses on a small number of cases, sometimes only one or two. The Documentary Method often works with ten or more cases, but still does not come close to the number of cases used in Conversation Analysis.

The use of context in interpretation.

Whether the empirical context of an action or utterance (e.g. the situation it occurs in) should inform its analysis or not is probably one of the most important and most heavily discussed disagreements between sequence analysts of different traditions. Representatives of Conversation Analysis and Bohnsack's Documentary Method will say: yes, of course we need to use context knowledge (see, e.g., Schegloff 1987; Wagener in this issue). In contrast, in Objective Hermeneutics, *refraining* from context is a central methodological rule (see Wernet 2009; Franzmann in this issue).¹⁵ This rule has led to a lot of misunderstandings, because a complete ignorance of context seems to contradict the goals of interpretive analysis. In fact, knowledge accumulated *during the analysis of previous data segments* can always be used in Objective Hermeneutics. Moreover, the exclusion of context knowledge is only temporal. The interpretation *starts* without the use of knowledge about the concrete empirical case, in order to reconstruct the potential meaning of an utterance in a variety of *potential* contexts. But at a later point in the analysis, context knowledge about the case is taken into account (see Wernet 2009:21ff.).

Methodological justification.

The different traditions of sequence analysis are anchored in a surprising variety of methodological foundations, which leads to another point of long lasting and heartfelt disagreement. The most significant divide is between ethnomethodology and hermeneutics. While Conversation Analysis is deeply rooted in ethnomethodology, Objective Hermeneutics rejects ethnomethodology and draws on Critical Theory, Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action and hermeneutics instead. The Documentary Method is based on a number of methodological foundations, such as ethnomethodology, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge (for details, see Wagener in this issue). Both Conversation Analysis and Objective Hermeneutics refer to linguistic theories. The contributions to this issue give an idea of how broad the area of references is.

number of cases, but require a detailed and context-sensitive analysis of concrete, individual cases and situations (Lewin 1930/31:455-456; Rosenthal 1995:210; Ploder 2021:65).

¹⁴ Many CA studies are based on smaller case numbers.

¹⁵ According to Berli (2021:778f.) 'ignoring contextual knowledge' is an important 'call to order' in data sessions on Objective Hermeneutics.

Who owns it?

Today, sequence analysts in all camps tend to use the term 'sequence analysis' as a cover term for the particular approach they represent. Although every approach includes more than one step in its methodical workflow, sequence analysis is often presented as the central step, central enough to identify the whole approach with it, *pars pro toto*. Between the groups, there is no agreement on which approach was the first fully developed sequence analytical methodology, although the founders of these approaches have known one another since the 1970s. Apart from being an interesting case of boundary work (from a sociology of science point of view), this controversy makes clear that sequence analysis has a central function in all of these approaches.

5. Contributions to this Thematic Issue

There is a significant overlap between the speakers at this conference and the contributors to this thematic issue (for an overview of the conference program see Hrnca/Hector 2022). Antonia Krummheuer (Aalborg) presented a very interesting paper titled 'The analysis of artificial/hybrid sequences? How analysing human-computer interaction challenged and innovated the field of conversation analysis', which will hopefully be published in another outlet soon. Unfortunately, different timelines prevented it from being included in this thematic issue. The paper by Christian Meyer was not presented at the conference, but added as an original contribution to the thematic issue.

Unlike the sequential order of time in social interaction, the sequential arrangement of the contributions in this issue is not inevitable. The papers approach the topic in very different ways and we decided to arrange them accordingly. The papers by Lorenza Mondada and Susanne Günthner present very strong empirical analyses, which yield a number of interesting insights into the nature of sequentiality. They are prime examples of using fine-grained empirical work to answer highly complex theoretical questions and advance social and linguistic theory on empirical grounds. The papers by Hubert Knoblauch, Christian Meyer, and Jens Loenhoff are mostly theoretical and shed a new light on reception processes, shortcomings, and potentials of the existing body of theories on sequentiality. They do not present or interpret empirical data, but give a number of important impulses for the debate around empirical sequence analysis. While the first five papers of the issue focus on the ethnomethodological and phenomenological tradition of sequence analysis, the last two have a different focus: the papers by Andreas Franzmann (on Objective Hermeneutics) and Benjamin Wagener (on the Documentary Method) introduce two types of sequence analysis that have developed at a similar time but with different theoretical references and methodological procedures than Conversation Analysis. Both papers elaborate on the historical development, methodological foundations, and practical steps of their approach, and give an empirical example at the end. In the following, we will briefly introduce each of the papers of the issue.

Lorenza Mondada opens the thematic issue with a paper on the emergence of sequentiality in public space. What happens *before* interaction can unfold its sequential character? How do people prepare the opening of an interaction, and how do they support, adjust, or refuse the step-by-step-trajectory of interaction? Based on a multimodal Conversation Analysis of video data of emerging encounters, Mondada unpacks the sequential structure of the very beginning of public social interaction: the moments that "precede or merge with the emergent contact between parties who are not yet fully interacting" (Mondada in this issue:36). Her empirical analysis is embedded in a theoretical discussion about the nature of sequentiality, to which the paper makes several important contributions.

Susanne Günthner presents a study of how sequentiality shapes practices of person reference in dialogue. Using corpora of Chinese and German SMS, WhatsApp and WeChat exchanges, Günthner examines how nominal forms of reference to self and other are used in preference to more conventional deictic pronouns in order to convey a sense of togetherness as a family or couple. The sequential aspect of this alternative form of reference arises through the way in which its use creates the expectation that co-participants will partake in the same nominal reference practices in the following turns. In addition, Günthner's analysis illustrates that it is not only communicative actions that depend on sequential order, but also practices of person reference and the associated interactional modalities and stances.

Hubert Knoblauch focuses on the foundations of sequence analysis in social theory. He looks at the work of three theorists (Weber, Luhmann, and Habermas) and compares their approaches to sequentiality. He points out a number of gaps and shortcomings in these theories, which set the agenda for the second part of his paper. In the second part, he shows how communicative constructivism – an approach developed by him and other German sociologists over the last decades (Knoblauch 2020; Keller/Knoblauch/Reichertz 2012) – addresses some of these gaps. Knoblauch's contribution lays the foundation for building a bridge between theoretical reflection and empirical reconstruction of sequentiality. Towards the end of his paper, Knoblauch points out the relevance of *spatiality* and *simultaneity* for communicative action, which also play a role in the papers by Mondada, Meyer, and Wagener. This adds an important dimension to the arguments on temporality and sequentiality which are – so far – dominant in the discussion of sequence analysis.

Christian Meyer investigates the influence of Aron Gurwitsch's Gestalt phenomenology on the work of Harold Garfinkel. Based on a number of unpublished papers from the Harold Garfinkel Archive, Meyer shows that Garfinkel extensively used (and intentionally misread) Gurwitsch's work (see also Garfinkel 2021). Most importantly, he shows that Garfinkel's own ideas on sequentiality and indexicality were heavily inspired by this reading. The paper reconstructs this complex reception process and makes some interesting suggestions regarding its methodological and theoretical consequences for contemporary ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis.

Jens Loenhoff embarks on a provocative theoretical discussion of the role of notions of objective and prior structure in Conversational Analysis. He begins with an exposition of Conversation Analysts' standard critique of attempts to invoke 'transsubjective' and 'transsituational' forms of order in analyses of language and interaction as a way of guaranteeing stability in meaning and group orientation across concrete instances of interaction. Approaches in Conversation Analysis, he points out, range from unbounded contextualism to acknowledging the adaptation and re-use of structural moments and formal precedents that occurred in earlier interactions. This latter position, argues Loenhoff, amounts to an implicit concession to the existence of some kind of structure beyond the immediate interactional situation.

Andreas Franzmann introduces the historical origins, methodological foundations, and steps in the research process of Objective Hermeneutics, a highly influential methodology in the German-speaking countries. He shows that this type of sequence analysis follows a different logic from Conversation Analysis. Here, the term 'sequence' "refers to meaning-bearing elements in a protocol" (Franzmann in this issue:176) and the analysis follows the "requirement of not adding contextual information for interpretation unless this is absolutely necessary" (Franzmann in this issue:178). The paper ends with an empirical example, the interpretation of a letter. At several points throughout the paper, Franzmann compares Objective Hermeneutics to Conversation Analysis and prepares the ground for a dialogue that may prove fruitful for the future of both methodological approaches.

Benjamin Wagener closes the issue with a paper on the Documentary Method and its uses for both text and audiovisual data. He gives an overview of the past and present of the approach, and illustrates it with an empirical example of classroom interaction. In his discussion of the Documentary Method for the analysis of images and video data, Wagener shows that sequentiality has an important complement, namely simultaneity. In analyzing data on interaction, the Documentary Method focuses on sequentiality. In analyzing pictures, it focuses on simultaneity. When it comes to video data, "sequentiality and simultaneity are interwoven" (Wagener in this issue:191; see also Bohnsack 2011). Therefore, the Documentary Method of films and videographs integrates both sequence analysis and simultaneity analysis. Throughout the paper, Wagener compares the specific goals and methodological foundations of sequence analysis in the Documentary Method to sequence analysis in both Objective Hermeneutics and Conversation Analysis, which makes it the perfect conclusion for the issue.

6. Outlook

Both the conference and the thematic issue have highlighted a number of topics for future discussion. At the end of this introduction, we want to point out three of them:

The practice of sequence analysis

One of the goals of the conference was to examine the interdependence of ideas, practices, and infrastructures in the history and current application of sequence analysis in linguistics and sociology. In line with the focus of the CRC on practices, we wanted to highlight the practical sources out of which the different methodological approaches have developed historically, as well as the transformation of methodological practice in each approach over time, as they have been confronted with new phenomena but also with the changing fortunes of different theoretical positions in each academic field. We were also interested in questions of how the practice of sequence analysis differs in the various traditions. We wanted to know: What does it mean to *do* sequence analysis? What *practices* – of documentation, datafication, transcription, sequencing, or analysis – play a role? What data are suited to this task and how are they generated, transformed, and processed through analysis? How is sequence analysis practiced in groups, what rules have become established, and what group dynamics are particularly relevant from an epistemic perspective? What methodological reflection regarding the sequential organisation of interpretative practice do research groups engage in and how does this reflection feed back into research practices? Although the conference as well as the contributions to this issue turned out to focus on other matters, we want to mark these as relevant questions for the future. The abovementioned 'reflexive turn' in sequence analysis goes along with a growing number of projects studying the practices of sequence analysis empirically (e.g. Berli 2021, Meier zu Verl/Tuma 2021). Bringing these efforts into conversation could be the next topic for an interesting interdisciplinary conference.

The relationship of sequentiality and simultaneity

Three of the papers in this issue (Mondada, Knoblauch, and Wagener) point out the relevance of spatiality and simultaneity for social interaction. Not everything that is relevant to interaction happens step-by-step; some things actually happen at the same time. And that goes far beyond the most obvious case, overlaps of verbal utterances in conversation. The relevance of simultaneity becomes particularly obvious in video data, and video analysts have found different ways to deal with it (e.g. Mondada and Wagener in this issue). Is this where we reach the limits of sequence analysis? Not necessarily. Mondada, Knoblauch, and Wagener suggest looking at sequentiality and simultaneity not as competitors for empirical attention, but as two aspects which are deeply connected to each other. Looking at this connection in more detail is another interesting topic for future conversation. There is certainly existing work on simultaneity and sequentiality (e.g. Bohnsack 2011:47f.; for a recent example, see Deppermann/Mondada/Doehler 2021), but there is still more work to do. The contributions to this issue suggest that the topic would benefit from a collaborative investigation across research communities. Comparing the different solutions found in different traditions of sequence analysis could be highly relevant for theoretical, methodological, and empirical work around sequentiality.

The bridge between theoretical foundation and empirical research

Talking about sequence analysis means talking about the nexus of theory, method, methodology, and research practice. This nexus is central to understanding the sequential organization of interaction, but also to understanding the historical development of sequence analysis. Social theory and methodology are a necessary foundation for empirical research that examines the sequential organisation of interaction, conversation, communication, or narrative. Conversely, such research generates empirical and theoretical results that highlight the moment of sequentiality. This thematic issue explores these interactions in various traditions, where they meet and diverge, and what is brought into focus or ignored. The contributions approached the topic from all three angles (empirical, theoretical, and methodological) and showed how fruitful this kind of conversation can be. Strengthening the ties between theory and research in sequence analysis is a task that needs more attention in the future, and it seems to benefit from conversation across disciplines and methodological traditions.

The last word is a word of thanks. As editors, we want to thank all authors for their exciting papers and their patience in the publication process, the reviewers for their time and important remarks, and the editors of the journal *Gesprächsforschung* for their diligence and good communication throughout the publication process. We hope that this thematic issue will spark more interesting conversations and collaboration between sequence analysts in all camps.

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