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Comparative Qualitative Research in Cultural Psychology

Challenges and Potentials

Vergleichende qualitative Forschung in der Kulturpsychologie

Herausforderungen und Potentiale

Zusammenfassung:
Dieser Beitrag stellt ein methodisches Vorgehen vor, das auf die Untersuchung des Zusammenspiels von Kultur und menschlicher Psyche in einem komparativen Design abzielt. Wir geben zunächst einem kurzen Überblick darüber, wie Qualitative Forschung, Kultur und hier insbesondere vergleichende Studien in der Psychologie diskutiert werden und argumentieren, dass eine vergleichende kulturpsychologische Forschung möglich ist, wenn die zu untersuchende Forschungseinheit soziale Interaktion darstellt. Wir werden dann wir für einen integrativen Ansatz plädieren, der es erlaubt, soziale Interaktion sowohl mikro- als auch makroanalytisch zu untersuchen, indem eine diskursanalytische Analyse situierter sozialer Interaktion mit ethnographischen Verfahren kombiniert wird, die es erlauben, deren soziokulturelle Einbettung systematisch in die Analyse miteinzubeziehen. Um einen solchen Ansatz zu veranschaulichen, stellen wir beispielhaft eine komparative Studie mit Mittelschichtsfamilien in Rom und Los Angeles vor. Abschließend werden Gütekriterien, die spezifisch in der vergleichenden Kulturpsychologie von Relevanz sind.

Schlagworte: Kulturpsychologie, vergleichende Forschung, Diskursanalyse, situierte soziale Interaktion, Ethnologie

Abstract:
The present paper aims to provide an approach that allows to study the interplay of culture and psychological human functioning in comparative study designs. Starting out with a brief overview of how qualitative, cultural, and comparative research is addressed in the field of psychology we will take a Cultural Psychology approach to suggest that the unit of analysis for comparative research needs to be situated social interaction. We will then suggest an integrative approach that allows us to study social interaction both on a micro- and on a macro-level by combining discourse analysis of situated social interaction with ethnographic procedures that address the sociocultural embeddedness of these interactional practices. We illustrate this approach by examining analyses drawn on a comparative study program conducted on middle class families in Los Angeles and Rome. Finally, we will discuss some criteria of validity that particularly apply to the field of comparative research in Cultural Psychology.

Keywords: Cultural Psychology, comparative research, discourse analysis, situated social interaction

1. Introduction

Addressing comparative qualitative research in cultural psychology puts together a set of terms which are dense of theoretical and methodological implications built in the history of the discipline; thus, it requires the consideration of: first, the role of *qualitative* research in psychology, second, the interpretation and role assigned to *culture* in psychology; third, the meaning and use of *comparative* studies in psychology. How the human mind is related to culture has been addressed in various ways in the past, which has crucial implications on how the topic of comparative studies is addressed. Since there has been an intensive scholarly debate on this topic published elsewhere (e.g., Valsiner 2001, 2007, 2012; Ratner 2002; Straub et. al. 2006) and for reasons linked to the aims of the paper and the limited space we will limit ourselves in the first section of what follows to give a brief overview of how these issues have been addressed in the field in the past. We will then move on to present what we conceive of as a fruitful approach to cultural comparative studies in psychology. In so doing we draw on an approach that is heavily informed by Cultural and Discursive Psychology and a dialogical understanding of self, culture and mind as we will outline in the following. We will also discuss the methodological challenges that cultural comparative psychological studies are faced with and the potentials that we see in this approach.

1.1. Qualitative research in psychology

The field of psychology has long been dominated by a strong orientation towards the natural sciences and nomothetic quantitative methodology. The dominance of quantitative research in psychology can be related, on one hand, to specific epistemological and ontological underpinnings that can be seen as modern versions of behaviorism; on the other hand, it is also (and maybe primarily) grounded in political decisions in the field that support the hegemony of North American positivism in university departments, journals, and grant agencies (Ratner 2008; Breuer 2010). There has been an extensive discussion about the suitability of experimental designs and statistical procedures to study human psychological functioning, however (e.g., Breuer 2010; Toomela 2003; Toomela/ Valsiner 2010). While there has meanwhile been an increasing acknowledgement of qualitative methods as demonstrated by the increasing number of handbooks on qualitative methods in psychology within the recent years (Forrester 2010; Mey/Mruck 2010; Smith 2008; Lyons/Coyle 2007; Camic/Rhodes/ Yardley 2003; Willig 2008) they are unfortunately still not part of academic curricula. Presently, the field of psychology experiences a strong orientation towards neurobiological models of human functioning. Interestingly, however, we also see a "socio-cultural turn" in psychology (Kirschner/Martin 2010) that acknowledges the crucial role of culture and social interaction for human psychological functioning and stresses the use of qualitative methods.

1.2.   Culture and comparative studies in Psychology

The role of culture has long been neglected in mainstream psychology, whose main efforts have always been devoted to provide "models" of (supposedly) universal human functioning. For decades, human functioning has been studied in terms of an isolated individual mind that interacts with other isolated individual minds and the fact that such ontological understanding might underlie a bias rooted in 'Western' individualistic thinking was largely ignored. In the following we will give a short overview of various branches within the field of psychology that explicitly do address the role of culture for human psychological functioning.

1.2.1.   Cross-Cultural Psychology

The field of *Cross-Cultural Psychology* by definition is comparative and has traditionally addressed culture in terms of ethnic or national belonging. It aims at examining differences and similarities in the set of beliefs, attitudes, values, cognitive abilities, and personality traits that members of a particular 'culture' are assumed to share (Kim/Park/Park 2000; Berry et al. 2011). In this approach, culture is conceived of as outside of the individual, and as bounded entity that can be treated as a an antecedent or independent variable. Methodologically, research mostly follows a nomothetic, (neo-)positivistic paradigm that attempts to identify general laws and causal explanations following the model of natural science. Accordingly, standard quantitative research methods such as questionnaires and experimental designs are most common. To a lesser extend standardized interviews and standardized behavioral coding are used. While this line of research acknowledges the central role of culture for human psychological functioning, it has been heavily criticized for its reductionist understanding of culture that assumes deep psychological structures to be universal yet culturally shaped, and along with it for its inadequate methodological approach and causal view of human functioning (Boesch/Straub 2006; Cole 1996; Helfrich-Hoelter 2006; Ratner/Hui 2003; Straub/Chakkarath 2010; Toomela/Valsiner 2010; Valsiner, 2001). It should be stated here that within recent years, efforts have been made to adjust and tailor instruments and procedures of data collections to the specifics of a cultural group. Similarly, more fine tuned statistical procedures have been developed that aim at identifying different patterns and configurations of a phenomenon. The underlying nomothetic assumptions of psychological 'constructs' that can be studied and compared across groups, however, remains. Interestingly, there has been an increasing recognition of the need for more qualitative research in Cross-Cultural Psychology in recent years (e.g., Karasz/Singelis 2009; van de Vijver/Chasiotis 2010) and there has also been an opening towards Cultural Psychology (Keller 2012). So far, however, the distinct methodological and epistemological principles underlying qualitative research are not yet well advanced. Qualitative methods sometimes still tend to be misunderstood as merely different technical procedures without sufficient reflection of their epistemological underpinnings. Accordingly, they are often used as explorative 'open procedures' within a nomothetic logic. Solid qualitative research following established procedures and specific criteria of validity developed within the qualitative paradigm are increasingly accepted but overall still scarce (but see Lewis/Ozaki 2009; Roer-Strier/Ben Ezra 2006).

It should be mentioned here that recently, there has been a group of researchers mainly located in North-America who try to establish a Cultural Psychology that explicitly works comparatively and uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. Examples of this are the Handbook of Cultural Psychology (Kitayama/Cohen 2007) or the recently established Oxford University Press book series "Advances in Culture and Psychology" (not to be confounded with the book series "Advances in Cultural Psychology" by Information Age Publishing). Critical voices, however, argue that this kind of 'Cultural Psychology' addresses the relationship between culture and psychology within a particular paradigm emerging from authors who have roots in mainstream or Cross-Cultural Psychology and draw on epistemological assumptions that are generally positivist in nature (Cresswell et. al. 2011). According to our understanding, this line of research therefore can be considered as one variant of Cross-Cultural Psychology.

In contrast to this line of research, the fields of *Indigenous Psychology* and *Cultural Psychology* provide us with a very different approach to culture and its relation to human psychological functioning as we will outline in the following.

1.2.2. Indigenous Psychology

Indigenous Psychology tries to understand phenomena from 'within' the reference frame of a specific ethnic group (Kim/Berry 1993; Kim/Yang/Hwang 2006; see also Chakkarath 2012; Straub/Chakkarath 2010 for a discussion). Studies in this field have widely dealt with the local, cultural embeddedness of emotional experience, conception of soul and cure, explanation of personality (among other topics), and stressed the need to consider the plurality of cultural meanings attached to psychological constructs, by studying them from within the cultural group that uses them. Such an ontological stance stresses the uniqueness of a cultural group and the human psychological functioning within this group and is not interested, then, in comparing, but rather, in the examination of the "indigenous" nature of even established systems of knowledge such as, "western" psychology (Pickren 2009). As Kim and Berry (1993, p.2) state, Indigenous Psychology is „the scientific study of human behavior that is native, that is not transported from other regions, and that is designed for its people". Accordingly, it takes a critical stance towards methodological procedures that have been developed in Western mainstream psychology (and particularly for research with highly educated middle class families) and strives for developing alternative procedures from an emic perspective (Denzin/Lincoln/Smith 2008; Straub/Chakkarath 2010).

1.2.3. Cultural Psychology

Cultural Psychology is in itself a very heterogeneous field that has developed from a variety of different theoretical traditions such as culture-historical school of psychology (Cole 1996; Ratner 2006; Valsiner 2000; 2007; Vygotsky 1962/1934) and Bakhtinian theorizing (Wertsch 1998), symbolic action theory (Boesch 1991), narrative psychology (Bruner 1990; Brockmeier/Carbaugh 2001; Bamberg 2011) and social constructionism (Gergen 1985), psychological anthropology (Shweder 1990), dialogical self theory (Hermans/Kempen 1993), evolutionary theory (LeVine 1982, 1990), and ethno-psychoanalysis (Devereux 1972;

Erdheim 1988). Although developing on their own terms, these approaches have in common, that they share a constructivist view on human psychological functioning, which they conceive as dialogically intertwined with meaning-making processes that occur in social interactions and everyday contexts. 'Culture' is seen as the human ability to draw on interpretative procedures (Geertz 1973) to make sense of one's experience in social interaction, which in turn is embedded in a specific structure of social organization of the society one lives in. Culture is a multifaceted, dynamic, and *local* phenomenon. The concept of culture does not identify with ethnic belongings, nor with other permanent membership; culture develops dynamically as people orient to shared meanings and resources which make themselves understood in the different contexts they engage. Subjectivity and personhood, culture and social interaction are conceived of as inseparably intertwined. Hence, the goal is to identify meaning-making processes and their relation to the social world and the prevailing societal structure. Accordingly, qualitative methods are widely used, albeit in very diverse ways (see e.g., Ratner 2008 for an overview).

The approach advocated in the present paper is rooted in Social constructionism and can be located in the field of *Discursive Psychology* that has developed from this theoretical background (e.g., Potter/Wetherell 1987; Potter 2003; 2007; Bamberg 2011; Shotter 1993, 2010; Harré/Gillett 1994). Mostly relying on the definition of culture within the perspective of Cultural Psychology, we advocate the integration of different methodological approaches that are rooted in this field and that we consider a promising avenue for studying human functioning in comparative perspective.

2. Comparative Research in Cultural Psychology

Although most approaches in Cultural Psychology are non-comparative in nature based on their conception of culture, we suggest that meaning making processes in social interaction become more evident when contrasted to some "horizons of comparison". In fact, comparison is "a necessary basis for any science – as any phenomena under investigation becomes intelligible to the researcher only if viewed against some background" (Valsiner 2001, p. 17-18). Comparison thus constitutes a fundamental methodological and epistemological instrument for knowledge production. The central question is *what* or *whom* we are actually comparing and whether what or whom we are comparing is actually *comparable*. In mainstream and traditional, experimental Cross-Cultural Psychology, comparison is made between a specific population ('culture') and either a control group or another population ('culture'), by controlling for any influencing variables and comparing averages (see Valsiner 2001; Ratner/Hui 2003 for a critical discussion). In Cultural Psychology such an approach does obviously not make sense. Based on an understanding of human psychological functioning as being culturally constituted – i.e., interrelated with the use of cultural means and meaning systems that are local, dynamic and constantly negotiated – the question arises how it is possible to carry on any comparison, on objects that are mutable, and anchored to specific, local contexts. More specifically, if culture is un-

derstood as a "complex of psychological means that emerge in interaction between people" and therefore becomes "the central organizing means of all personal conduct" (Valsiner 2001, p. 11), how is comparison possible and how can generalized knowledge be derived from there? We suggest that this is possible if the unit of analysis that serves as a basis for comparison is *situated social interaction*. We will develop this idea in more detail in the following.

2.1. Starting-point for comparative research in Cultural Psychology: situated social interaction

A central claim in Cultural Psychology is that meaning-making takes place in *social, everyday interaction* and that these meaning making processes constitute the mind. In social interactions, individuals deploy a set of procedures or a web of interpretations (Geertz 1974) that are made visible (in discursive practices) to their interactional partners. Social interaction figures as the site where intersubjective understanding (what, ultimately, constitutes "mind") develops. We therefore take social interaction as the starting point by which we can gain an understanding of differences and similarities of meaning –making procedures [in diverse contexts and among diverse participants]. An approach that is oriented to examine social interaction as the site in which psychological processes traditionally conceived as developing "inside the mind" emerge is *Discursive Psychology* (Potter/Whetherell 1987; Potter 2007; Edwards/Potter 1992; Harré/Gillett 1994; Bamberg 2011). It stresses the "primacy of discourse as a medium for action. It ceases to be sensible to separate a study of language from a study of behavior as traditional social psychologists might" (Potter 2003, p. 785). Human psychological functioning is conceived of as developing in words, in the way we report and account for events: mind is argumentation; in discourse we build visions of the world (Billig 1991, 1996) as well as the persons who we are (Antaki/Widdicombe 1998; Bamberg 2011). Self, language and culture are hence dialogically and inseparably intertwined. As Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin (2011) put it: „Phenomena that traditionally have been typically considered as internal (e.g., knowledge, intentions, agency, emotions, identity) or external (varying widely from more obvious constructions such as marriage, money, and society to less obvious ones such as location, event, and continuity) have their reality in an intersubjectively reached agreement that is historically and culturally negotiated." (p. 177). Discourse as public text available to others' interpretations has replaced the idea of an isolated mind in (more or less controlled) ownership of an individual. What distinguishes Discursive Psychology from mainstream psychology is that language is not perceived as *referential* i.e., as means to refer to some hidden 'entities' in the mind (attitudes, traits etc.) but as *constitutive* of social reality and of the mind. In interpersonal communication, for example, people not only convey messages but always make implicit or explicit claims about who we are relative to one another and the nature of our relationships, i.e., people afford ‚subject positions' to one another (Harré/van Langenhove 1999). The focus lies on the *action orientation* of discourse, that is, on *situated* discursive *practices* rather than on language.

2.2.   Two levels of social interaction

Social interaction is locally situated on two levels: on a *macro level*, it is located in a specific historical time and socio-cultural and institutional setting. The "sociocultural situatedness of mediated action" (i.e., meaning making processes) provides the essential link between the cultural, historical and institutional setting on the one hand and the mental functioning of the individual on the other (Wertsch 1991, p.49). At this level, studying situated social interaction would mean to inscribe discursive practices in a web of historically built material and social artifacts (such as, pencils and papers in a classroom interaction) as well as in institutional framework which, for instance, provide participants with norms and constraints on how to get things done (such as timetables in a hospital, explicit and implicit cues of expert practice etc).

On a *micro level*, social interaction is locally situated in the sense that actions are constantly adjusted to the situation rather than preplanned or predetermined; *any* coherence in action is achieved moment by moment, as a local, collaborative, sequential accomplishment (Suchman 1987, p. 94). In a situated view of social interaction, it is assumed that "interactions are reflexively structured, i.e., conduct adapts to its context" (Mondada 2006, p. 5). Viewed as such, social interaction is the place where it is possible to see culture and mind (meant as the range of psychological processes such as cognition, affect, morality) in action. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996; 2000), for instance could show how cognition and emotion unfold as situated social interaction; stance and affect are made publicly available and co-constructed among participants in the sequential accomplishment of turns, using not only language but overall multimodal displays including actions, prosody, gestures, facial displays, and their use of objects and space.

It is this combination of mind and social interaction to which Wetherell refers when she speaks of 'psychosocial practices' (Wetherell 2008 quoted in Bamberg/de Fina/Schiffrin, 2011), i.e., "recognizable, conventional, collective and social procedures through which character, self, identity, the psychological, the emotional, motives, intentions and beliefs are performed, formulated and constituted" (p. 79). Studying these interactional practices allows to deepen our understanding of how cultural meaning is constituted, reproduced, adapted, negotiated and eventually to understand the interplay between culture and self (Linell 2009, Shotter 2010; Cresswell/Teucher 2010; Demuth 2011a).

From our argumentation so far, it becomes clear that cultural comparative psychology as advocated here requires a methodological approach that allows to integrate both the micro level as well as the macro level of situated social interaction. Given the complexity of the manifold dimensions of social interaction, we need a methodology which allows, on one hand, to follow in detail the structure and the organization of social interaction and, on the other hand, to account for the indexical relationships that the specific structure or shape of that social interaction has with the broader cultural context of a certain community. In the remaining part of this paper, we will therefore lay out the methodological procedures that we deem fruitful to a Cultural Discursive Psychology as a basis to study *the interrelatedness* of situated social interaction, culture, and mind.

2.2.1. Micro level analysis of social interaction: Conversation Analysis

The methodological approach par excellence to study in detail the structure and the organization of social interaction has been *Conversation Analysis* (henceforth CA). Germinating from the epistemological tradition of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and Goffmanian conceptualization of the interaction order, CA is interested in the regular, orderly structures (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974) that sustain mutual intelligibility of actions among interlocutors, in all the different contexts they engage. The achievement of intersubjectivity, conceived both as the ability to read the other's mind (e.g., Fogel 1993; Tomasello 1999) and as the members' consensus on a collective set of symbols and practices, is at the heart of the CA enterprise. Although, neither mind, nor culture, is ever explicitly mentioned or formulated in CA studies: rather, they both are incorporated in the way participants at talk display their understanding of the unfolding actions, by means of their relevant orientation to certain formal features of conversation such as, pauses, hesitations, intonation and overall prosody in interaction, overlaps and other aspects of the sequencing of actions (Psathas 1995; Hutchby/Wooffit 2008).

The specific strength of CA is that a) it addresses strictly naturalistic data material, b) it applies the principles by which interaction is constituted (e.g., complementarily in question-answer sequence) as the very same methodological tools for the analysis (Deppermann 2000b); that is, according to the ethnomethodological interest in the analysis of "members' methods", CA affords to document the participants' orientation to meaning using the same "relevant" categories they use to understand each other and make themselves understood. A question, then, is described as such only insofar as participants demonstrably orient to it by providing a "relevant next turn", such as, an answer to a question (Schegloff/Sacks 1973).

The application of CA could be shown to be valid for the analysis of data from various cultural communities and languages (Schegloff 2002, 2006; Sidnell 2007b; Zimmermann, 1999). However*,* as Sidnell (2007a) correctly points out "it is clear that conversation involves the mobilization of the local resources of particular languages (i.e., grammar, intonation, vocabulary), social formations (categories of persons, for instance), and that conversational practices may be constrained or shaped by culture-specific phenomena such as taboos, which prevent the use of certain words or names, impose restrictions on gaze, etc." (p. 230; see also Besnier 1989 on the cultural embeddedness of repair sequences).

Although recent works in Conversation Analysis addressed comparative analysis of conversational structures in informal, naturally occurring conversation, such as turn-taking (Stivers et al 2009), CA has not delved into the broader framework of cultural (and historical) repository of meanings (e.g., ideologies and values) that certain particular designs of conversation may *index* (Silverstein 1976, 2003).

Discursive Psychology draws on the analytical procedures of CA and applies them to psychological research and refers to them as Discourse Analysis (DA). The focus of analysis lies on the *action orientation* and rhetoric force of discourse, i.e., the ways in which accounts are constructed and on the functions that they perform (e.g., Potter 2007). Originally, Discursive Psychology aimed at examining shared patterns of constructing social reality, i.e., discursive re-

sources that speakers may share. Potter and Wetherell (1987; Potter 1996) refer to this as shared *'interpretative repertoires'*: "Interpretative repertoires are systematically related sets of terms that are often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence and often organized around one or more central metaphors" (Potter 1996, p. 131). The aim of the analysis then is to collect "a corpus of examples of when and how people use certain expressions and examine what kinds of work such expressions perform, what kind of contingencies they handle, what kinds of contrasts they occur in, and so on" (Antaki et al. 2003).

While the concept of "interpretative repertoires" has meanwhile gradually been abandoned in favor of CA-based analytical proceedings, it provides a fruitful contribution to the study of social interaction in a cultural (and here, comparative) psychological perspective in that it describes cultural patterns of how people build accounts of their experiences and images of the self, in light of discursive resources available in a specific socio-cultural setting.

2.2.2. The need for integrating a macro level analysis of social interaction: the relevance of ethnographic knowledge

Deppermann (2000b) has identified some central shortcomings of CA with regard to context that are of importance for our approach of comparative Cultural Psychology. Referring to Sacks and colleagues (Sacks/Scheglhoff/Jefferson 1974, pp. 728f.) he argues that the "*display* concept" which postulates that meaning and order are constituted in interaction in such a way that they are recognizable as such by others[1], underlies an ethnocentric bias (Deppermann, 2000, p. :99). More specifically, he argues that meaning and order cannot be directly inferred from what is spoken but always requires interpretation by drawing on contextual knowledge. Similar critique has been formulated by Blommaert (2001) and Wetherell (1998). Social interaction is constituted by means of interpretation and hence requires interpretation on the part of the researcher in the analysis (see also Zucchermaglio et al. in press). This becomes obvious, for example, when we try to apply CA to conversations in a foreign language, in which interlocutors talk about things that the researcher does not understand or in which the interlocutors follow implicit rules that we are not familiar with. The following example from a study on mother-infant interactions of farming Nso in the North-Western grassfields of Cameroon (Demuth 2008) serves as illustration here. Previous to this sequence, there was a child in the background shouting the name of the local lineage head. The mother looks up briefly and listens, then laughs and turns again to her baby:

Excerpt 1: Nso24_t12

Mother:	Have you heard that Aaron called the Tsenla lineage head?
	((talks to others))
	dji:ji:ji:
	Shall you ever be calling the Ngamanse lineage head?
	Shall you ever be calling?
	Shall you ever be calling?

In order to be able to understand what is going on in this sequence, we need to know that the Nso society is highly hierarchically structured and characterized by the centrality of chieftaincy and an emphasis on title and rank as significant political attributes. Titles and offices are important as symbolic capital. Most important titles are hereditary and obtained according to lineage. The lineage head ("faay") is the economic, political, and spiritual leader of a large lineage. Social interaction is therefore structured by highly institutionalized modes of behavior according to age, gender and social title. These include terms and forms of address as well as behavioral signs of respect such as bending down, averting one's eyes, talking through one's hands (Goheen 1996). Given the finely tuned system of deference by which titleholders are given public recognition, it is crucial in everyday life that people know what individuals belong to which ranks. The lineage head is hence a person of high respect and it is socially entirely inappropriate to call his name in public (Yovsi, personal communication). Moreover, the child who was shouting the name of the lineage head is mentally disabled. Only with this background knowledge it is possible to appropriately interpret this interaction:

The mother draws the baby's attention to what the disabled child was doing. By using the form of a rhetoric question starting with the words "have you heard" (line 1) she conveys that the other child's behavior is unconventional and surprising. She further elaborates on the topic by addressing and repeating a rhetoric question to the infant (line 5-6). Underlying to this rhetoric question is a social expectation ("I hope you will never do such thing"). The mother hence conveys a social norm of what is appropriate behavior, as well as the expectation of respectful behavior towards the head of a compound. The misbehavior of the older child is, however, not negatively sanctioned despite the fact that it is socially inappropriate. This points to an interpretation that this misbehavior is excused by the mental disability of the child.

2.3. Towards an integrative methodology for comparative research in Cultural Psychology

From what we have outlined so far, we suggest a methodological approach to the study of situated social interaction from a discursive Cultural Psychology perspective that integrates the procedures of Conversation Analysis and Ethnography within a comparative design. We believe such an approach promises to be a fruitful avenue to enhance our understanding of the dialogical constitution of culture and human psychological functioning.

We follow Deppermann's suggestion (2000b) who argues for an approach he calls "ethnographic discourse analysis" (*Ethnographische Gesprächsanalyse*) which draws on the methodological procedures of CA and can be applied to discursive Cultural Psychology. He makes clear that ethnographic knowledge is a prerequisite for reconstructing the participant's perspective and to make claims that go beyond purely structural aspects of social interaction. He suggests considering CA and ethnography as complementary (rather than merely two methods that are applied separably). Drawing on ethnography of communication (Duranti 1997; Hangs 1990; Saville-Troike 1989; Hymes, 1972) he suggests using a variety of data sources (interviews, informal talk, written and visual

documents) and above all participant observation in order to gain insights into the many facets and situations of a social field. While the central focus is still on talk-in-interaction, ethnographic knowledge allows for research questions regarding the *content* of what has been said (hence the term 'ethnographic discourse analysis' rather than 'ethnographic conversation analysis'). Deppermann identifies seven areas of applying ethnographic knowledge within this approach:

1. sensitization for a phenomenon (identifying a phenomenon from the very beginning, not only the analysis of it requires specific contextual knowledge)
2. filling missing interpretations (e.g., what places, individuals or happenings an utterance is referring to will often remain unclear without specific ethnographic knowledge)
3. preventing misinterpretations caused by ethnocentrism of one's resources of analysis (a possible misinterpretation of social interaction might in fact remain undiscovered until reflected on by someone who is ethnographically informed)
4. deepening of interpretation (e.g., implicit hints to a person's particularity, evaluations with regard to local norms, reference to genres or earlier social interactions, prosodic contextualization of evaluations and emotions)
5. deciding between various possibilities of interpretation (CA requires that interpretations are to be checked in light of the responses of the interlocutors. Sometimes such reaction will, however, not be displayed because participants share mutual knowledge that makes such a reaction superfluous or because cultural norms or local contingencies prevent participants to produce complementary actions to prior moves
6. generalization of interpretations (to what extent the identified practices are 'typical' or 'representative' requires broader knowledge about the social practices of a community)
7. validation (of typicality)

The special potential of CA and Discursive Psychology lies in the data driven analysis – applying ethnographic knowledge as sole source for interpretation of social interaction risks to prematurely explain participants' discursive actions. Ethnographic knowledge therefore needs to be systematically integrated in the analytical process of reconstructing participant's interactional moves. This means that the researcher has to make clear how ethnographic knowledge does not merely provide general context information about the field but is consistently displayed in the way an interaction proceeds ('procedural consequentiality', Schegloff 1991). The interpretation of any string of sequences must deal and take into account the specific norms that not only attain to verbal speech but also to adjustment of the bodies, use of objects, arrangements of space and temporal constraints etc: any of these dimension help shape the meaning of the social (*and*) interactional event in which the members of a particular community participate. One possibility of combining both perspectives within one research team is the joint analysis by both a trained conversation analyst and a trained field researcher.

We therefore consider an ethnographic approach to CA/Discursive Psychology as context-enriching tool that allows us to tap into processes of recontextualization and thus dialogically providing valuable insights into natural histories of social interaction.

2.4. Comparative procedures in studying social interaction

We have argued throughout the paper for a comparative approach to the study of social interaction. Conversation Analysis is in fact inherently comparative in its procedure (Drew 2012): it aims at identifying common interactional features in a collection of instances of a specific phenomenon through systematic comparison of theses instances. While in traditional CA work this is usually done within a data corpus of one socio-cultural group, we suggest that this principle can also be fruitfully applied to comparative Cultural Psychology and the systematic analysis of interactional patterns in different socio-cultural groups. Members of different sociocultural groups will deploy different conversational resources and thus orient to different rules and recurrences (that is how forms and sequences of actions are routinely organized in everyday interactions).

At the same time, comparing social interaction allows to analyze the different interpretative repertoires as collective cultural voice. Comparative CA/Discursive Psychology approach therefore offers a valuable avenue to Cultural Psychology by identifying diverse interactional patterns that point to specific cultural ways of meaning making.

There have, in fact, been a number of studies from linguistic anthropology and, particularly, within the Language Socialization approach (e.g., Ochs 1988; Schieffelin/Ochs 1986; Duranti/Ochs/Schieffelin 2012) that draw on ethnography on the one hand, and Discourse/Conversation analysis on the other, to understand the nature and the development of cultural practices within certain local communities. Within this approach, it is assumed that language to which children and novices are exposed and which they use in several domains of socialization conveys not only communicative meanings but also sociocultural knowledge: engaging in discursive practices means for children to enter sociocultural realms. This line of research has for instance examined how the particular forms of discursive practices socialize children and novices to forms of social demeanor that are meaningful in a certain community, such as, eating (Ochs/ Pontecorvo/Fasulo 1996; Aronsson/Gottzen 2011), playing (Aronsson 2011; Fatigante/Liberati/ Pontecorvo 2010), cleaning (Fasulo/Loyd/Padiglione 2007), reading (Moore 2008; Sterponi 2007, 2008), negotiating activity contracts (Aronsson/Ceikate 2011; Goodwin M.H. 2006), expressing affect and affiliation (Goodwin M.H. 1998, 2006; Ochs/Schieffelin 1989; Goodwin/Goodwin 2000), performing self and morality (Goodwin M.H. 1999; Ochs/Kremer-Sadlik 2007; Sterponi 2003, 2004). The ethnography of the context (including, interviews with members, ethnographic observations of local practices in formal and informal contexts, analysis of space and artifacts) in which the communicative, socializing practices are *situated* is essential to understand the preferences and ideologies that underlie the language use on the one hand, and the interpretation of the societal structure and members' social roles on the other (see excerpt on Cameroon Nso provided above).

Insofar as discursive practices all over the world have an *indexical* property[2] individuals participating in diverse discursive practices will orient to different norms, preferences and expectations regulating their conduct in their everyday social life.

3. The potential of comparative research in Cultural Psychology: examples from an ethnography of family everyday life

As an example of a research combining ethnography, Conversation Analytic methodology applied to the analysis of the social interaction, and the identification of interpretative repertoires of the members' accounts with regards their values, beliefs, ideologies, and overall experience we discuss the comparative methodology applied in several works of one of the authors, within a comparative research project carried out with middle class families in Rome and Los Angeles. The study we refer to was directed by Elinor Ochs (2003-2008)[3]. Following a well-established tradition in (particularly, Linguistic) Anthropology for conducting ethnographic research with the aid of video recorded interaction, the methodology of the study included video recording sessions of family routines in weekdays, and a number of other research tools for studying participants' habits, practices and interpretations, such as interviews, self-report charts, questionnaires, ethnographic observations, home and video tours shot by members themselves. The overall aim of the research was to examine how families in different sites manage family and work demands. Comparisons were made (and some are still ongoing) on several different topics such as cleaning practices, homework, extracurricular activities, time management at home, and relevant differences in the way parents and children in similar households (middle-class, 4 members, children about the same age) carried on their routine tasks were documented.

The opportunity offered by the methodology of the study to enter – by means of video recording and transcription of conversation – the details of the social interaction made it possible to select similar domains of practices developing in the family context in the different sites, and look at the emerging patterns of interaction.

Comparative analysis could rely on a range of different ethnographic data that were cross-examined and discussed together by researchers of the different sites. The shared and recursive analysis of the data by all the researchers was essential and we will resume it in the last part of the paragraph.

Studying social interaction in terms of specific family practices (e.g., looking at how parents in different sites arrange their time, space and artifacts and engage in different discursive practices with their children provided), was a first level of comparison, a level in which the researcher-analyst could identify the different ways of *doing families* (Aronsson 2006), meant as distinctive 'everyday hermeneutics' (ibid) by which families cope with their routine demands. The analysis of social interactions was paired with the analysis of the preferences expressed by parents in semi-structured *interviews*, in order to gain insights into what we might identify as the *ethnotheories* (Harkness/Super 1996) that participants had with regards to different matters of their family life (such as, attitudes toward health, children's homework and extracurricular activities, family time etc); Analyses included the interpretation of parents' accounts as they were worded and argued in front of the researcher, which helped illuminating the analyses obtained by the examination of parent-child interaction *as it developed* in the context of the particular activity in which they engaged. The ethnographic

analysis also included the examination of family descriptions emerging from self-reported charts (such as, the LA families' frequent reference to "family time" in dedicated hours of the family weekly agenda; Kremer-Sadlik/Paugh 2007; Kremer-Sadlik/Fatigante/Fasulo 2008) or, also, "voiced" in the way in which family members talked about themselves and their family as a whole, while video-taping their home spaces and objects (Giorgi/Padiglione/Pontecorvo 2007). All these data provided a road to the way families conceived themselves and build the set of norms, values and cultural identities which they reproduced – and exhibited to the researchers in situated ways- in the particular context in which they lived.

To provide a detailed picture of how comparative analysis in this framework was conducted here we point specifically to a study on the children's engagement in extracurricular activities, done on the corpus mentioned above (Kremer-Sadlik et al 2010). The study was carried out integrating data obtained from the 32 families participating in the LA study, and the 8 families participating in the Roman study. Comparative analysis was applied to three different data sets: 1) self-report weekly charts (i.e., charts divided into seven weekdays and each day into morning, afternoon, and evening) which each member of the family was asked to complete listing – at their own choice[4] – the activities that took place in a typical week; 2) semi-structured interviews – audio and video recorded – about the family's daily routines and their beliefs, goals, and practices related to education and health. The interviews provided numerous opportunities for parents to discuss their children's extracurricular activities and for the researchers to learn about the meaning parents attached to activities and their reasoning for signing up their children for the different activities. 3) video recordings of parent – child interactions during extra- curricular activities. The shared and recursive analyses of these episodes provided further ethnographic knowledge that the researchers could draw on and systematically integrate in the general analysis.

Analyses revealed similarities in the way families allocated and scheduled the amount and type of activities in which the children engaged after school such as, music lessons or sports, highlighted strong similarities between the families of the two sites. Also, interviews revealed similarities in the repertoires used to account for their choices (e.g., parents in both sites stressed the importance of children's engagement in the extracurricular practices as a means for the children to develop motivational strength and self-discipline). Though relevant, nuanced differences emerged when examining more closely both the parents' argumentations in interviews and the patterns of interactional episodes in which parents structured, monitored, led or solicited the children's practice in extracurricular activities in the different contexts. For instance, a certain cautiousness emerged in Roman parents' interviews when they talked about competitive sports:

Excerpt 12a – (Rome Family)

1. Father   I am really happy that she does swimming.
2.   I'm fine if she competes just for fun, and plays with other children.
3.   But if she competes getting stressed that she has to win, getting anxious
4.   that she cannot lose, crying if she doesn't qualify, or if she doesn't
5.   win a medal, then I think it's damaging and that at seven years of age,
6.   one should avoid it.

(Kremer-Sadlik/Izquierdo/Fatigante 2010, p. 47)

This pattern did not appear in LA parents' interviews. Furthermore, comparative analysis of episodes of social interaction related to parents and children's engagement in extracurricular activities revealed varying degree of pressure that parents put upon their children's performances, which might be related to certain cultural interpretation of what is expected from the parent, as well as, of what can be pushed out from the child.

In one of the LA recordings, a mother is driving her 8-year old daughter, Hailey, to her swimming practice. The mother asked Hailey "How are you going to swim today?" and then continued:

Excerpt 9 (L.A. Family)

1. Mother   You need to really focus on what you're doing. I don't want to see you
2.   putting yourself in the last lanes; those are for brand new swimmers.
3.   You shouldn't swim in four or five, Hailey… You really need to be
4.   putting your mind and focus and trying to build yourself up to two and
5.   one… So I really expect to see you swimming in lane three and lane two,
6.   not in lanes four and five.

(Kremer-Sadlik/Izquierdo/Fatigante 2010, p. 45)

The very same idea of competitiveness, self-discipline, motivational effort, can, then, translate into different practices. Ethnography alerts that practices can only be understood adhering to participants' meanings: the analysis of participants' interpretative repertoires in interviews helped provide an understanding of the cultural interpretation that parents in the different contexts applied to similar domains of practices. Though, as the authors in the paper state (p. 38) "Most importantly, the richness of analysis would have not been possible without the authors' ethnographic knowledge. We were part of the team that conducted the video- recorded naturalistic observations of families' daily routines and interactions inside and outside the home over one week from the moment the family members woke up until the children went to bed at night. At times these observations captured parent–researcher and parent–child spontaneous conversations about extracurricular activities. We also analyzed these incidents, which offered further opportunity to learn about parents' attitudes toward these practices."

As becomes clear from this account, an ethnographic- discourse analysis carried out in comparative perspective also requires that researchers in each site engage in similar practices of analyses, accounting for the role they played in soliciting or, simply, displaying themselves as active listeners with regards to the participants' narratives and self- descriptions. Yet, to look at the *situatedness* of the everyday social interactions means also to ground the analysis of the local accomplishments of actions onto the *broader institutional, social and historical*

framework which, for instance, make sports in the US something that is credited for the learning curriculum and access to college, contrary to what happens in Italy, where gymnastics in schools frequently takes place randomly, with no appropriate, or large enough space to be designed for it. Ethnography hence allows to examine the analysis of the situated interactions in light of the broader societal orientations and constraints which frame on economic, political, juridical level the members' practices and which possibly constitute "contrastive themes" in their argumentations displayed in interviews. Most of what can be still considered as ethnographic knowledge of this sort was gathered across the numerous exchanges that researchers had throughout the course of the research, which were occasioned by the specific aim of conducting the extracurricular study (and writing the paper!) as well as by other meetings (presentations, workshops, informal conversations) in which the data and other observations and insights were discussed. A comparative Cultural Psychology approach, then, needs also include the living context in which the researchers make and share their interpretations; that is, as we will discuss in the last part of the paper, it needs to acknowledge the situated character of the "scholar" interpretations made on the "data", as a tool to enhance their plausibility and their adherence to the cultural context in which they were produced.

4. Methodological challenges of comparative research in Cultural Psychology

In the final section, we will briefly discuss some criteria to ensure of validity and methodological rigor in comparative Cultural Psychology research. Place does not allow to discuss these criteria in the necessary detail here. The reader is referred existing literature for a discussion of general criteria of good practice in qualitative research (e.g., Flick 2008; Guba/Lincoln 1982; Lincoln/Guba 1985; Patton 2002; Richardson 1996; Seale/Silverman 1997; Silverman 2001, 2005; Steinke 2004; Stiles 1993; Yardley 2008) as well as criteria that have been particularly developed for Discursive Psychology (e.g., Potter 2007; Taylor 2001). We will concentrate here on criteria that seem of specific relevance in comparative Cultural Psychology research and the study of social interaction. The criteria, as will become clear, are closely related to one another.

4.1. Situatedness (of research methodology)

We have referred to *situatedness* as the property of social interactions in which members engage to be distributed in the range of the different semiotic resources locally available to them on the one hand, and their being located within societal and institutional constraints, on the other hand. We need, however, also to consider how "situatedness" refers to the particular way in which the research arrangement makes the events under study available to observation and analysis. As a matter of fact, the methodological, social setting that surrounds and frames the members' representations is relevant and needs to be taken into ac-

count when doing comparison. What we actually compare are systems of practices reflexively *configured* (Mondada 2006) by the research procedures (in that, they can only be described as those practices that are captured by e.g., video recording, interviews, ethnographic observation) and within a certain research agreement established between the researcher and the participants (Padiglione/ Fatigante 2009). The process of knowledge construction is a relational one (Doucet/Mauthner 2002), and comparative knowledge about events and practices experienced by members of different communities can also result from the analysis of the relationship and the *situated social interactions* that the members established with the researchers themselves. In the ethnographic study on families mentioned above, differences in the interpretation of cultural categories such as *intimacy* and *politeness* emerged as relevant in the way family members in the two contexts (LA and Rome) interacted with the researchers. These differences possibly mirroring aspects to which the members oriented as relevant also in their own interactions.

Finally, situatedness also applies to the moment and the setting in which analyses are developed: as Fasulo, Loyd, Padiglione (2006) declare, relevant patterns are visible not in the social interactions *per se*, but in the eyes of the ones who examine them, either the ones who get impressed as hit by something strange, as well as the ones who affiliate and find the practice/event familiar.

Coherence in methodology across sites, the intense engagement with one's own data and with data examined by the "cross-site" colleagues, and finally a reflexive analysis of the "data", (i.e., their examination as products co-built by the researcher and the participants), can then lay the ground for an adequate comparative inquiry.

4.2.   Explicating the tertium comparationis

A central aspect of comparison is that it requires a "*tertium comparationis*" – a higher level point of reference that allows for comparison. When comparing two phenomena it first remains empirically unclear what the basis for the comparison is. It requires a second level of observation to be made explicit (Bohnsack 2001). That is, rather than comparing two cases directly to each other, the researcher asks what is the topic that both cases have in common and that might be treated either in a similar or different way. This procedure aims at minimizing the bias to take one case or one pattern as normative (most likely the one the researcher is familiar with) and the other as 'deviant'. So to defer what the point of reference is that allows for comparison will only develop in the course of analysis (a similar logic is found in the method of constant comparison within grounded theory methodology). While a researcher may start by comparing for instance a specific form of social interaction (e.g., cleaning practices, homework, dinner interactions) in two groups of participants defined by specific socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., middle-class families who live in town X and Y), what it is that is different – or similar – will only develop through systematic comparison in the process of analysis (as mentioned in paragraph above).

4.3. Reflexivity

We already referred to reflexivity as implying the consideration of the interplay dynamics between the participants' and the researcher and overall meant as a mutual collaboration in the production of data (Finlay 2003). Besides the examination of the influence that the researcher's social identity and cultural background, as well as his her/his procedures, assumptions, personal profile and biography had on the production of the "data", reflexivity in qualitative research, and particularly in ethnography and ethnographic interviewing, refers also to the consideration that the researcher pays to her/his own personal reflections, irritations, feelings etc. in the analysis of the data. In a perspective of mediated, interpreted realism (Reed 2008), we know that the world is only knowledgeable by means of the categories we use to "read" it. These categories may also change in the course of the analysis, due the reflexive examination of their usefulness and relevance with regards the objects under study. Changes and negotiations in the interpretation of meanings assigned to cultural practices are very frequent when examined by researchers of different contexts working on comparative enterprise; adequately documenting and accounting for the procedures used in the analysis and for the changes that they underwent (e.g., how the researcher's way of thinking and hence the interpretation changed in traversing the 'hermeneutic circle') is a warranty against essentialization and allow document how earlier inaccuracies in the interpretation were corrected (e.g., Mruck/Breuer 2003, Stiles 1993).

An additional meaning of reflexivity in comparative qualitative research has finally to deal with the extent to which analyses are able to reflect and document how language and communication issues were addressed throughout the entire research process. This includes strategies employed to seek understanding from data that originated in a second language, the role of translation and, if applicable, the role of language assistants and their influence on data assessment and data interpretation, their fluency in both languages and familiarity with local dialects and regional language practices, as well as with the cultural backgrounds of the researchers (Hennink 2008; Temple 2002; Temple/Edwards 2002). This is particularly important in studies drawing on discourse and conversation analysis since this kind of analysis requires a significant amount of knowledge about language use and about implicit cultural beliefs and normative values that goes beyond the essential content of what participants say. Analyzing "the *way* [emphasis in original] in which language is used, for example, through phrasing, proverbs, irony, humour or with body language" (Hennink 2008, p. 26-27) needs to be correctly interpreted and made understandable to the research team. As Deppermann (20010a) has pointed out, the "relevance" and members' orientation toward "relevant" phenomena is in fact nothing that displays automatically but requires interpretation. It is therefore crucial that the researcher lays open how ethnographic knowledge has contributed to the interpretation of a sequence.

Finally, translation as well as transcription are never mere technical tasks but always involve interpretation and meaning construction and therefore these processes need to be layed open and critically reflected in the documentation of the research project (see Hennink 2008, Nikander 2008; Temple/Young 2004 for further discussion).

5. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to present an approach to study psychological phenomena from a cultural and comparative perspective. Rooting our approach within Cultural Psychology and Discursive Psychology, we have argued that human psychological functioning needs to be understood as dialogically intertwined and embedded in meaning making processes of social interaction. We have further outlined that such an epistemological and ontological understanding requires a methodological approach that allows to study social interaction as situated practice. We discussed the potentials and shortcomings of Conversation Analysis and suggested to draw on a systematic integration of ethnography. While cultural psychologists are sometimes reluctant to engage in comparative research we have argued that comparative designs provide valuable contributions to knowledge production if the unit of analysis is defined as systems of social interaction. By drawing on examples from our own research we hope to have been able to show the fruitfulness of such an approach. Finally, we discussed several aspects of ensuring rigor and validity that apply specifically to cultural comparative research of social interaction. The systematic integration of the presented procedures largely corresponds to the conception of triangulation within qualitative social science (Flick 2011a,b), i.e., as combination of *different perspectives* on the investigated phenomenon (such as, by means of integrating and combining different sets of data from one single corpus or a set of coherent corpora). This differs from triangulation approaches which are concerned with the mutual validation of findings (Denzin 1989), or with cross-validation as it is found in many mixed-methods studies that are more oriented towards a quantitative paradigm. Rather, we refer to a triangulation as a way to provide a thicker description of the phenomenon, accounting, via multilayered analyses, for the very same complexity of the events which members of a culture partake in their everyday social interaction (see also Demuth 2011b).

While there are obviously other qualitative procedures that can be fruitfully applied to Cultural Psychology, we have focused here on a Discursive Psychology approach that is rooted in Social Constructionism. We suggest that a Conversation Analysis/Discursive Psychology approach that systematically integrates ethnographic knowledge has great potential to advance not only the field of comparative Cultural Psychology but also to lay open the social and cultural constitution of psychological inquiry in general.

Notes

1   Quoting Sacks and Schegloff (1973, p. 290) „We have proceeded under the assumption (an assumption borne out by our research) that in so far as the materials we worked with exhibited orderliness, they did so not only to us, indeed not in the first place for us, but for the co-participants who had produced them. If the materials (records of natural conversation) were orderly, they were so because they had been methodically produced by members of the society for one another, and it was a feature of the conversations we treated as data that they were produced so asto allow the display by the co-participants to each other of their orderliness, and to allow the participants to display to each other their analysis, appreciation and use of the orderliness."

2   i.e., they provide different tools for pointing at local relevant meanings such as, for instance, affect
     terms for affiliation and sympathy, or terms of address for different hierarchical relationship (Ochs
     1990).
3   The research was funded by the Alfred Sloan Foundation Grant on Work and Families and resulted
     in the creation of the CELF (Center on Everyday Lives of Families) in three sites, respectively, the
     coordinating Center at UCLA, the Italian Center in Rome and the Swedish Center in Linkoping.
     The methodologies and protocols used in this research were designed by CELF and adopted by the
     Italian research group, directed by Clotilde Pontecorvo, and the Swedish research group, directed
     by Karin Aronsson.
4   Consequently, the categories of activities were not arbitrarily created, but emerged from the charts
     themselves.

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