

Qualitative and quantitative approaches in linguistics: some examples from research on multilingualism

Part I: Qualitative approaches Language biographies in South Tyrol

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The project “Language biographies in South Tyrol”: goals, tools and approaches

■ Goals:

- to explore the ways (mono-, by- and plurilingual) speakers in South Tyrol experience languages during the life-span

■ Corpus:

- 40-50 language biographies (10 speakers with Italian as L1, 10 with German as L1, 10 with Ladin as L1, of Italian nationality, and 10 speakers with different L1 and nationality)

■ Tools and approaches:

- narrative interviews
- conversation analysis, discourse analysis



Studies on language biographies

- **interest for language biographies:** second language acquisition studies, sociolinguistics, foreign language teaching (diary studies, Portfolio), studies on bilingual communities

- **previous studies on language biographies:**
 - Fix (1997), Fix/Barth (2000); Meng (2001), Franceschini (2001)

 - Adamzik/Roos (2002), ***Biografie linguistische***
 - theoretical contributions, literary examples and linguistic researches: bilingual speakers in France (Deprez); 2nd generation Italians in Switzerland (Werlen); language biography as applied in Swiss and German school contexts (Perregaux, Krumm); multilingualism in Biel (Conrad)

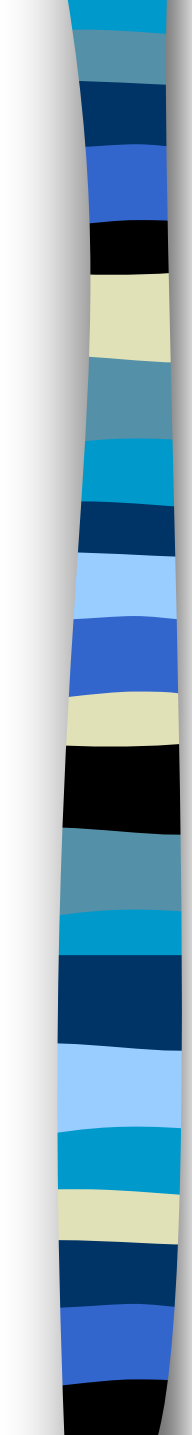
 - Franceschini/Mieckznikowski (2004), ***Leben mit mehreren Sprachen***
 - bi- and multilingual speakers: China, Wales, East Germany, “Russlanddeutsche”, Filipino immigrant in Paris, “Basel-Prag-Projekt” (50 interviews: data on speakers in Switzerland, German and Hungarian minorities in Czech Republic)

- **Further studies to draw upon:**
 - identity and belonging: Meinhof/Galasinski (2005), Meinhof (2002, 2003)
 - “folk beliefs”: *Folk Linguistics* (Preston/Niedzielski 2003)
 - narratives: *The Sociolinguistics of Narrative* (Thornborrow/Coaes 2005)



Language biographies in South Tyrol: goals

- To investigate on the way mono-, bi- and multilingual speakers experience languages, focussing on:
 - forms of language learning
 - representations, beliefs, attitudes (of and towards languages and language varieties, language groups, inter-group communication)
 - communicative practices
 - language learning at school
 - language learning outside school; language usage
 - family
 - friends
 - journeys
 - higher education; professional sphere; ...
 - textual-discursive aspects:
 - interplay between argumenting, narrating, describing, evaluating...
 - structural elements of language biography (“the helper”, see Propp’s *Morphology of Folktale*, 1928/1968)



Language biographies and narrative interviews: which speech genre?

- Participants: two (interviewer and interviewee)
- Communication channel: face-to-face, spoken interaction (audiorecorded)
- Focus: interview is centered on interviewee:
 - “discursive interview” (“Intervista discorsiva”, “Diskursivinterview”)
 - “narrative interview” (biographical interview)
- Some methodological choices:
 - free vs. guided interview
 - degree of familiarity between interlocutors
 - degree of interviewer’s intervention

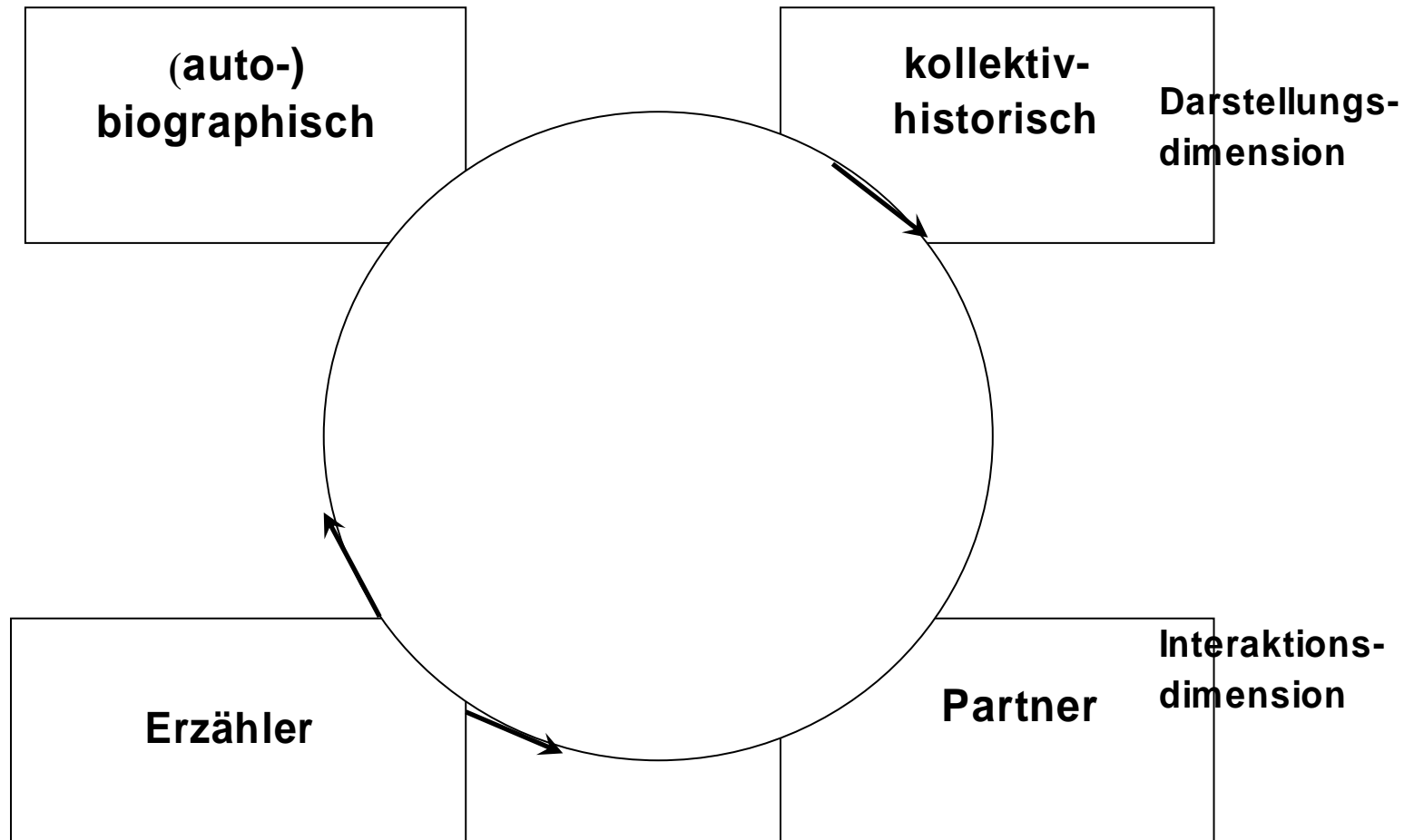


Narrative interview and language biography

- “L’intervista discorsiva consegna al ricercatore non solo un insieme di informazioni sull’intervistato, sul suo profilo sociodemografico, sulle credenze, sugli atteggiamenti che lo contraddistinguono (...): l’intervista discorsiva consegna un *discorso*. Le credenze, gli atteggiamenti, i valori, le rappresentazioni delle traiettorie biografiche sono espressi con una specifica coloritura emotiva, sono iscritti all’interno di una struttura argomentativa che ne determina la sequenza, che ne mostra le connessioni. (...).” (Cardano 2003, 74)
- “Bei narrativen Interviews (Schütze 1984, 1987) handelt es sich um Erzählungen von Lebenserfahrungen, wobei die Akteure sinnstiftend gegenüber einem Interviewpartner wirken (...).“ (Franceschini 2001, 227-228)
- “Language biography“ as language reconstruction of experienced events (see Tophinke 2002, 1-14)

The four poles of biographical narrative

biographisches Erzählen: eine rückgekoppelte Hervorbringung
(Franceschini 2001)





Language biographies in South Tyrol

■ **Primary corpus:**

- 40-50 interviews: 10 L1 Italian speakers (*3 collected*); 10 L1 German speakers, 10 Ladins, 10 with different L1 and nationalities (various ages across life-span)

■ **previous corpus:**

- 32 interviews (L1 Italian, L1 German, Ladin, bilingual Italian-German, L1 English; age: 24-35, *8 analysed*)
 - ***a first analysis of 4 South Tyrolean Italian and 4 German speakers:***
 - L2 learning from childhood to adult age
 - representations, beliefs, attitudes (languages and inter-group communication)
 - communicative practices (inter-group communication)



L2 learning paths

Italian and German speakers

(Ma, Ls, S, Lo / P, Kl, He, Mk¹)

- rarity of contacts with other language group before and during the school period
- L2 learning at school seen as a duty (“obbligo”, “Zwang”)
- importance of the role of: L2 teacher and teaching methodologies
- lack of institutional “mixed” contexts for the leisure time
- L2 learning (improvement) during/after school period: takes place outside South Tyrol (the “journey out of the province”)
- higher education outside South Tyrol: opportunity to meet and make friendship with the other group (S, Mk)
- profession, private life: more stable contacts with other language group, friendships, love relationships



Representations, beliefs, attitudes (shared by the 8 interviewed speakers)

■ **Language groups and L2 competence**

- Italian speaking group is believed to have a lower competence in German L2 than viceversa and to have learning difficulties
- German speaking group is believed to prefer using South Tyrolean dialect to Hochdeutsch
 - these two factors are believed to explain the use of Italian as default language in inter-group communication

■ **Arguments mentioned by speakers:**

- intrinsic properties of languages (Italian is said to be easier to learn than German)
- ‘psychological’, personality and behavioural properties of language groups (Italian speakers are said to be lazy, afraid of mistakes but more tolerant towards others’ mistakes; German speakers are said to be more willing to learn and speak foreign languages)
- sociolinguistic situation (double learning load for Italian speakers: Hochdeutsch/dialect)
- learning at school (old-fashioned teaching methods)
- social, political, institutional context (separation of the two language groups)



Language use and inter-group communication: the issue of politeness

- the rite of “politeness“: what does it mean to be polite?
- Brown & Levinson (1987):
 - “negative face“ (connected with territory and individual freedom),
 - “positive face“ (connected to social recognition and belonging to the group)
- *German speakers*: code switching or alternation as a strategy to respect interlocutor’s negative face?
- *Italian speakers*: code switching or alternation perceived as “imposed“ and as a violation of one’s own positive face?



Studies on language biographies: what for?

- **Studies on language biographies can give impulses to:**
- **foreign language teaching**, by showing individual, personal ways of learning languages (self-study), focussed and unfocussed learning
- **language planning**, by showing the ways people experience and perceive language policies
- **discourse analysis**, by analysing the arguments that speakers bring to make their life narratives plausible; by giving insights on the interaction between narration, argumentation, evaluation and on language use in discourse
- **quantitative sociolinguistics**, by representing a perspective on individual aspects of language use and thereby giving qualitative insights on motivations and attitudes

Notes and Literature (1)

■ Notes

- 1. Due to privacy issues, excerpts of interviews can not be presented for extended public reference at this point.

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